

This guide aims to grow understanding of what digital equity is, why it is important, and identify best practices for ensuring equity when using digital platforms. The world's shift to a heavy reliance on virtual platforms to collaborate, exchange information, and conduct business in recent years requires that people have access to internet and utilize various digital mediums. It is important to be mindful of those who may face barriers including lack of access to specific software, limited experience with using digital tools, limited internet access or connectivity, or other issues due to geographic location. This guide provides tips and considerations for how to effectively address barriers that may be encountered when using digital platforms.

Digital Equity Defined

The [National Digital Inclusion Alliance](#) (NDIA), defines digital equity as “the condition in which individuals and communities have the information technology capacity that is needed for full participation in the society and economy.” Addressing the [digital divide](#) – the gap that exists between those who have reliable internet access and devices and those who have limited to no access – fosters inclusivity for all collaborators, regardless of location, and allows them to purposefully engage in virtual spaces.

Why is Digital Equity Important?

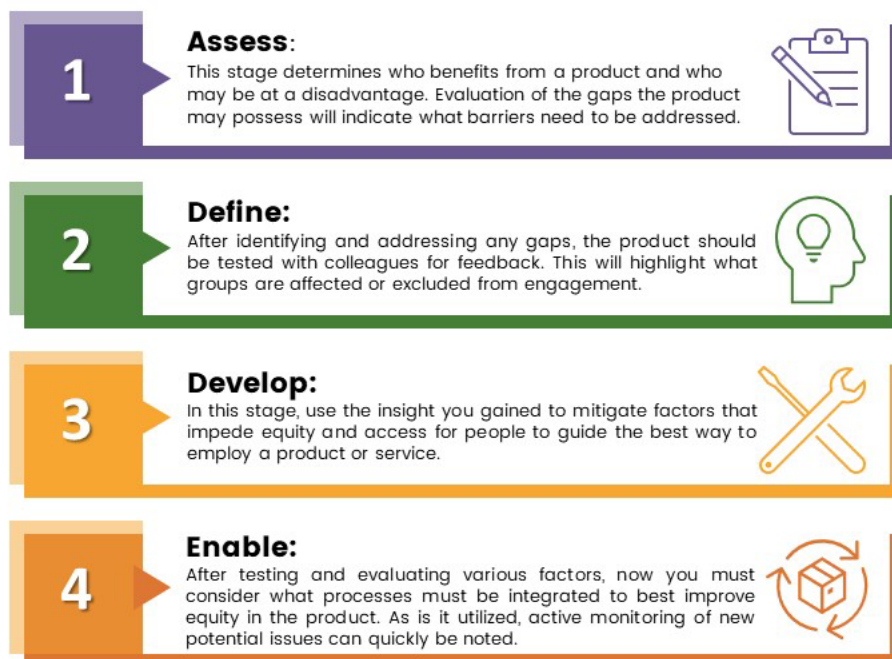
In today's world, everyone must be able to effectively use and engage in virtual spaces. [The Digital Equity Act of 2021](#), passed as an amendment to [the 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act](#), states that access to “broadband connection and digital literacy have become increasingly necessary for individuals to participate in society, the economy, and civic institutions.”

Digital tools must be equitable to ensure all individuals have the opportunity and ability to productively contribute within the virtual environment. In addition to accessibility, users must also have [background knowledge](#) that enables them to: interpret information with the technology, appropriately communicate and collaborate with colleagues, and actively participate within the digital space. Decreasing barriers to digital access maximizes the utility of content and products¹.

¹ Any digital content distributed for public consumption (e.g., webinar, website, guide, meeting)

Putting Digital Equity into Practice

A well-designed equitable digital environment, addresses the digital divide, provides guidance on use of software, and is navigable for service support. When developing a website, webinar, or other virtual engagement, [evaluating and ensuring equity throughout the design process](#) can be done through the following steps:



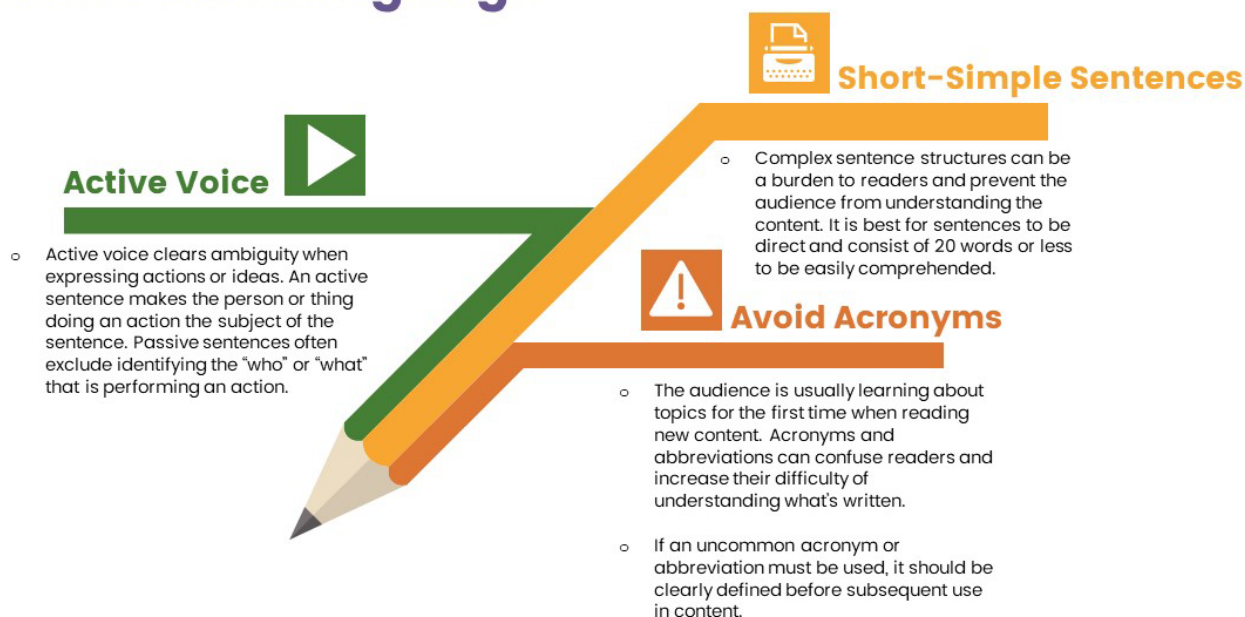
Tips for Ensuring Digital Equity


Taking a holistic approach to finding and using digitally equitable products eliminates biases that favor more technologically skilled/privileged users and improves reach of user engagement. These evaluations should also apply to messaging in digital content that is distributed. It is critical to be cognizant of use of language when addressing colleagues of all backgrounds. Certain terms carry biases that stigmatize diverse ethnic and health communities. Using biased language can damage trust from members of those communities, in turn weakening inclusivity.

Utilize Digital Design


Effectively using white space and color contrast in digital design assists users in reading text and engaging with content. White space, or negative space, is defined as the space that surrounds texts, graphics, charts, and other elements on a web page. Every item and group of text should be intentionally placed to enhance the overall experience for the audience. Color contrast is utilizing distinguishable hues of color for different page items such as text and background on a webpage. Using colors and hues that are high in contrast helps to ensure equitable access for people with [color insensitivity](#), [color blindness](#), or [an astigmatism](#) by helping them to better distinguish items. The overall design of digital content should be cohesive and visually complementary.

Tips on Plain Language




Active Voice 

- Active voice clears ambiguity when expressing actions or ideas. An active sentence makes the person or thing doing an action the subject of the sentence. Passive sentences often exclude identifying the “who” or “what” that is performing an action.

Short-Simple Sentences 

- Complex sentence structures can be a burden to readers and prevent the audience from understanding the content. It is best for sentences to be direct and consist of 20 words or less to be easily comprehended.

Avoid Acronyms 

- The audience is usually learning about topics for the first time when reading new content. Acronyms and abbreviations can confuse readers and increase their difficulty of understanding what’s written.
- If an uncommon acronym or abbreviation must be used, it should be clearly defined before subsequent use in content.

Use Plain Language

Using plain language promotes equity. [Plain language](#) is clear, concise, well-organized writing that follows best practices appropriate to topic area and intended audience. Technical language about a particular topic is often necessary, but it is best to use plain language to clearly define the meaning of terms and messaging in content. Avoiding obscure jargon allows content to be more readable and eliminates room for misinterpretation.

Foster Mobile Accessibility

Ensuring websites and applications have mobile capability assists in closing the gap for those who do not have broadband access. For example, more people have access to mobile devices such as smartphones than have access to laptops. Mobile devices can help alleviate the burden of having poor or no internet access; residing in a rural location; and not owning a PC/desktop. Additional resources for ensuring mobile accessibility and understanding its importance [can be found at Digital.gov](https://www.digitalequity.org/). Consistently implementing these practices throughout all modes of content distribution significantly increases opportunities for engagement and accessibility for all.

Build Equitable Video Conferencing

When preparing a digital event, whether a webinar or virtual meeting, consider a range of factors in how the technology will assist in closing the digital divide among participants. Here are a few methods to help create an equitable environment in virtual events:

- **Include live transcription/closed captioning:** Employing this feature is great for users who have a hearing impairment, individuals in a loud environment, or participants who are non-native speakers of the language being used. Platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Meet support this tool.
- **Have a tech support on standby:** Facilitating a virtual event with a large amount of people can produce certain challenges that cannot be easily addressed by the individual hosting the event. Participants could encounter connectivity issues, loss of visual, loss of sound, and various other technology issues. When conducting events with a large number of participants, it is best to have an individual tasked with tech support on standby to help people with troubleshooting and to address participant questions if they encounter problems. This approach allows participants who are not experiencing technology challenges to remain engaged in the content while counterparts who need support are simultaneously assisted.
- **Provide a dial-in number:** This can assist with better participation with people who do not have access to a computer or who are having difficulties with their microphone. Zoom and Microsoft Teams offer this feature.
- **Record events/meetings:** Recording allows those who were not able to participate or attend a live engagement to watch what they missed at a later date. It also enables

people that encountered difficulty, or those who wish to revisit the content, to re-watch for better understanding of discussed content.

Educate on Equitable Language

Equitable terms are vital when distributing content in any setting. Members of various communities may have trouble receiving an intended message of published content if appropriate language is not used. This is particularly important when referring to a certain group of people or a nuanced context. Some phrases and terms carry historical biases and use of them can stigmatize diverse populations and negatively impact the credibility of the information source. Being cognizant of using equitable language when providing content for various populations builds trust and inclusivity. This table provides examples, common terms, and preferred alternatives that enhance equity.

Preferred Equitable Terms

Common Term ²	Preferred Term	Reason
Minorities	Racial & ethnic minority groups (Political; linguistic; sexual; etc.)	There are a myriad of subpopulations, and the blanketed use or “minority” does not acknowledge that.
Stakeholder	Population of focus; allies; collaborators; partners	This word “stakeholder” has violent connotation with Native American/American Indian populations.
Differently abled; handicapped	People with disabilities	This helps eliminate stigmatized connotations about the community.
Homosexual; gay community	LGBTQ; LGBTQIA+	LGBTQ or LGBTQIA+ shows the diversity of people in the community and is more inclusive.
Poverty-stricken; the poor; low-income people	People with low incomes; households below the federal poverty level	Its dehumanizing to define someone by their condition or circumstance.
Alien; illegal immigrant	Undocumented immigrants; foreign-born person	These are demeaning and dehumanizing terms.

² “Health Equity Style Guide” CDC, August 2020, [Health_Equity_Style_Guide_CDC_Reducing_Stigma.pdf \(jhu.edu\)](https://www.cdc.gov/healthequity/docs/2020/08/Health-Equity-Style-Guide-CDC-Reducing-Stigma.pdf)

Digital Equity Checklist

There is a variety of factors to consider when utilizing digital platforms to engage with diverse audiences. The practices in this guide will ensure that all individuals will be equitably engaged in digital spaces regardless of barriers they may experience. This checklist provides a simplified recap of all the tips and practices to be mindful of when creating digital products.



✓ Foster Mobile Accessibility

Ensuring websites and applications have mobile capability assists in closing the gap for those who do not have broadband access. Make sure that all distributed digital content is functional and accessible through a mobile device.

✓ Use Plain-Language

Check to see if any sentences contain ambiguous terms, less widely known acronyms, or passive voice.

✓ Educate on Equitable Language

Stigmatizing language inhibits the conveyance of messages and harms source credibility. Make sure that equitable and inclusive terms are so audiences can be more receptive of content.

✓ Utilize Digital Design

Digital content design is important to ensure equitable access for all populations. Utilize best practices for graphics and color to ensure that developed products are accessible for a wide-ranging group of people, including those with visual impairments.

✓ Build Equitable Video Conferencing

Everyone possesses varying levels of experience with technology. It is important to provide assistance to participants who are experiencing challenges during virtual engagements.