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Team Zoom Meetings for *Supporting Educators with AAPI Curriculum*: Accessibility Audit and Guide

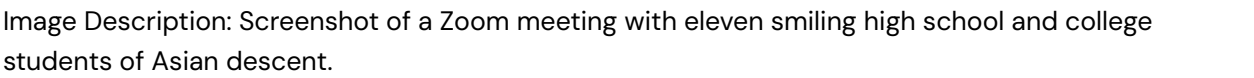

Image Description: Screenshot of a Zoom meeting with eleven smiling high school and college students of Asian descent.

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Introduction

Supporting Educators with Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) Curriculum, also known as SEAAPIC, is a Massachusetts based volunteer organization focused on promoting racial understanding and empathy through inclusive education. As the founder of SEAAPIC, I have made it a goal for the organization to constantly strive towards intersectional praxis and cross-movement solidarity, two pillars of the disability justice principles created by Sins Invalid (2019). While the organization has made moves to be accessible in some ways, such as ensuring Instagram posts are color-blind friendly and include image descriptions, no specific consideration has been paid to the open accessibility of the team meetings. Team meetings are generally attended by five to ten people and are hosted every other week on the video conferencing platform, Zoom. This access guide and audit consists of two parts: the first part is the guide, which is aimed at new volunteer team members who will be attending their first team meeting and the second part is the audit, which is a framework for how to increase the accessibility of this space in the future.

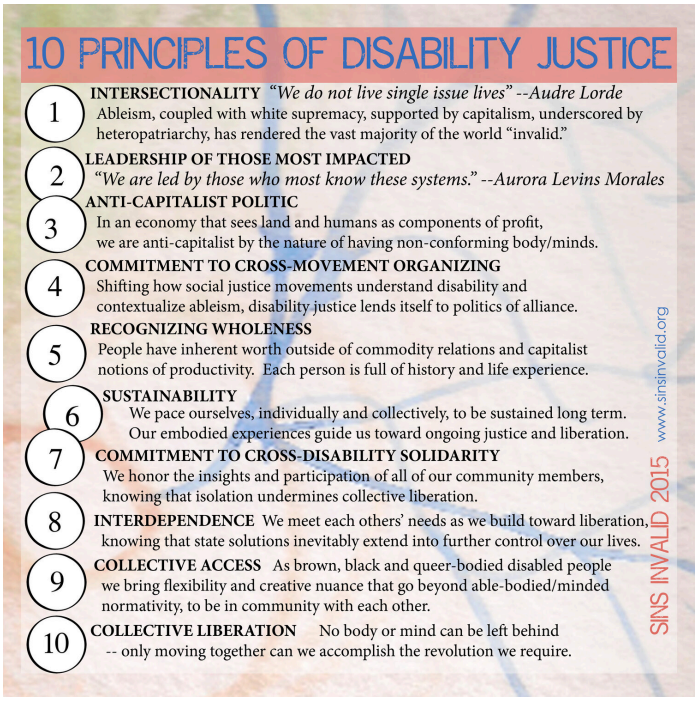

Image description: an infographic listing the 10 Principles of Disability Justice created by Sins Invalid. Each principle is accompanied by a short blurb to explain it and its connection to disability justice.

Land Acknowledgment

As a part of the intersectional commitment to dismantle settler colonialism and white supremacy in all its forms outlined by disability justice principles, I'd like to acknowledge this work is done on the unceded land of the Lenape, Massachusett, and Pawtucket people. I acknowledge Indigenous elders, past, present, and emerging for their wisdom, traditions, and care of this Land and Water. Learn more about the land you are settled on here.

Guide to Existing Accessibility Features

Virtual vs. Physical Space

This team meeting has always been hosted virtually because members of the team are spread across the United States/Turtle Island and therefore cannot consistently meet in-person. The accessibility considerations of a physical space versus a virtual space are usually different. Many physical space accommodations prioritize mobility and physical disabilities, focusing on features such as ramps and elevators, scent policies, and accessible parking (Smith, 2017). Meanwhile, virtual spaces often prioritize visual and auditory disabilities because virtual spaces alleviate many of the needs of those with physical or mobility disabilities. With the ability to call-in from a variety of locations, meeting participants have the freedom to situate, move, and/or support their body in ways that feel comfortable and familiar to them. Virtual spaces also alleviate any barriers that may surface in transit to an in-person meeting.

Accessibility Challenges Inherent to Virtual Spaces and Zoom

While virtual spaces offer many accessibility wins, they also present some unique limitations. For starters, screen fatigue, or the strain and exhaustion we feel from using screen devices, is a familiar feeling to many of us after our shift to largely virtual work during the COVID-19 pandemic. Blue light can contribute to screen fatigue or present its own challenges, particularly to people with light sensitivity or related disabilities. Additionally, SEAAPIC team members are all students who do the majority of their classwork on digital devices, so hosting meetings in an online-only format may exacerbate the screen fatigue they likely experience. Screen fatigue can also contribute to or worsen pre-existing cognitive fatigue. However, Zoom allows participants to call-in, meaning that anyone who is concerned about screen or cognitive fatigue or blue light, could choose to have limited engagement with a screen.

While calling in is an option, Zoom is a very video-centric platform. Compared to some other platforms or a simple phone call, Zoom emphasizes visuals and encourages (or pressures) people to be on camera. Due to its corporate/business inspiration, Zoom mirrors capitalist structures dependent on surveillance and control. If people turn their cameras on, they are conceding some level of disclosure. Their background may be visible, their face and body may be visible, their actions and behaviors may be visible. Not only does this create an environment of surveillance, where people feel like their every move is being watched and scrutinized, but it requires them to share their condition with the group (or be recognized as the person who didn't turn on their camera). While people in SEAAPIC meetings are gently encouraged to turn their cameras on during meetings (with the goal of building community in this virtual space/organization), there is no requirement to; this

attempts to accommodate people in a variety of situations and ease any feelings of surveillance. Situations like this, where there is a pressure to disclose something, may not always be avoidable, but they present opportunities for employing the disability masquerade (Siebers, 2004). When performed as such, the masquerade can communicate to others, both disabled and non-disabled, that an individual is disabled and is a form of self-preservation: "when not an act of private communication between people with disabilities, they may serve a variety of purposes. They may send a sign to authority figures, who have a habit of swooping down violently without first asking questions, that the object of their attention requires a different mode of address" (Siebers, 2004). SEAAPIC meetings always welcome team members to share access needs, whether prior to or during a meeting, hopefully mitigating the necessity of this form of disability masquerade.

Partly due to the platform's prioritization of video, Zoom requires a high-speed bandwidth connection. This means meeting participants must have fairly reliable access to quality wifi. While meeting participants with low connection or poor bandwidth can call-in and just use audio to engage in the meeting, there is no guarantee that team members can participate without a stable internet connection.

Evaluating Zoom's Built-In "Accessibility" Features

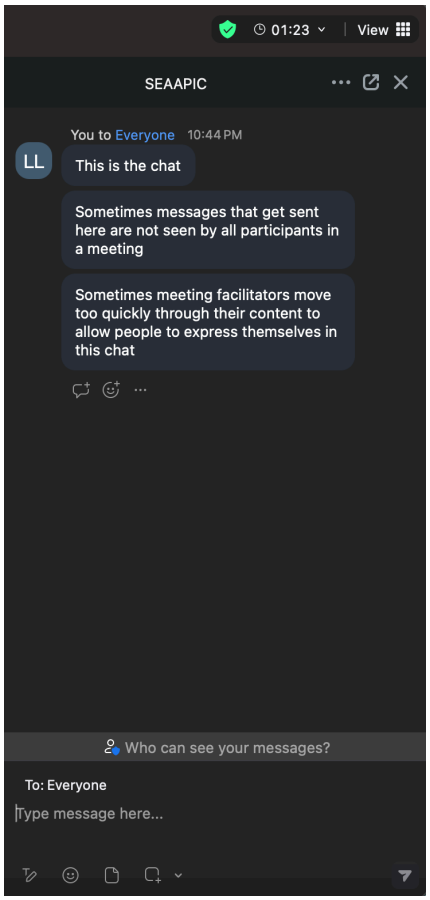

Image description: a screenshot of a Zoom chat with three sent messages.

For starters, the chat feature, which allows people to send text messages within the call, can be difficult to use while participating in the meeting, compared to other platforms such as Discord. It can be a useful function for cognitive and/or memory inhibited people and people who use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC), but again in practice, the feature is often relegated to the sidelines. Additionally, for the chat to be accessible for AAC users, adequate time to type or input text must be given. One positive feature of the chat is that the display size can be set to be larger or smaller.

Image description: A screenshot of a young person on Zoom, with a gray box at the bottom of the screen containing captions.

Image description: A screenshot of a Zoom transcript that notes who spoke, what they said, and at what time.

Zoom also has a closed captioning function that can either automatically generate captions or allow a designated person to transcribe captions during the meeting. While often better than no closed captioning, auto-generated captions are not reliable because technology is not always able to understand everything humans are expressing. Factors like background noise can impact the quality of auto-captions, but most notably, auto-captions are designed with the mythical norm in mind (Lorde, 1984). Centering white, nondisabled,

cisheterosexual men as normal creates a dichotomy that casts anybody that does not align with these identities as abnormal, "necessarily excluding the other or abnormal group" (Linton, 2006). One way we see this happen is when people with accents speak, the auto-generated captions may automatically convert into a different language because the software doesn't recognize accented English as (proper) English. This racist design flaw means that someone may be microaggressed by the technology itself, othering this team member from the community. This is particularly relevant to this space, as many members of the team speak languages other than English as their native language and may have an accent. A similar situation may occur with a disabled person whose disability affects their speech. Additionally, the caption transcript automatically scrolls as participants continue to talk. This makes it hard to follow the transcript, particularly if it is an individual's primary way of engaging in a meeting. An alternative to using the Zoom transcript could be a service like StreamText, that allows you to scroll through the transcript at one's leisure. One positive feature of the chat is the text color can be customized to whatever is best visible to the individual user.

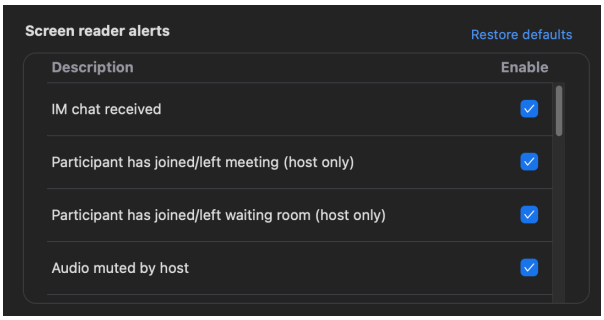

Image description: A checklist of screen reader alerts users can choose from.

Zoom offers many features that attempt to make the interface customizable to the specific needs of the user. To begin with, Zoom does support the use of screen readers, unlike some other video conferencing platforms. There are also ways for users to control which specific screen reader notifications they would like to receive throughout meetings, which allows people to limit what is instantly read aloud to them (possibly reducing overstimulation from unnecessary alerts). Secondly, Zoom allows users to spotlight or pin participants, which is a helpful feature to ensure ASL interpreters stay visible on-screen at all times. Thirdly, a meeting can be entirely managed through keyboard commands, cutting out the need for a mouse or touchpad. This may allow physically disabled people to participate in meetings with more ease. Fourthly, Zoom has a built-in language translation feature; however, similar to auto-generated captions, these auto-translations are not always reliable. Fifthly, Zoom gives users an option to reduce the brightness of detected flashing or visual patterns for photosensitive people. Lastly, users are able to utilize screen

magnification within certain Zoom features, such as when another participant shares their screen, however, this magnification feature is very finicky and is not available at all times.

Evaluating Zoom's Built-In Engagement Features

Zoom offers tools for meeting hosts to increase various forms of audience or participant engagement. While these tools can be fun or helpful, they have often been added without any explicit consideration of how disabled people will use them. For example, Zoom has recently introduced polling and whiteboard features that respectively allow participants to send direct feedback to the host or collaborative create on a shared screen. Neither of these features are accessible by screen reader. Zoom also has a participation feature that allows users to raise their hand to indicate they'd like to speak, which can be a helpful signal to other participants. However, there is no clear queue, so it is difficult to tell who first requested to speak and can create inequitable air time dynamics. Lastly, Zoom can be accessed without downloading and installing the platform. This can provide ease of access to the meeting space, however, if a user is not logged into their downloaded Zoom application, many of the accessibility features may not be available.

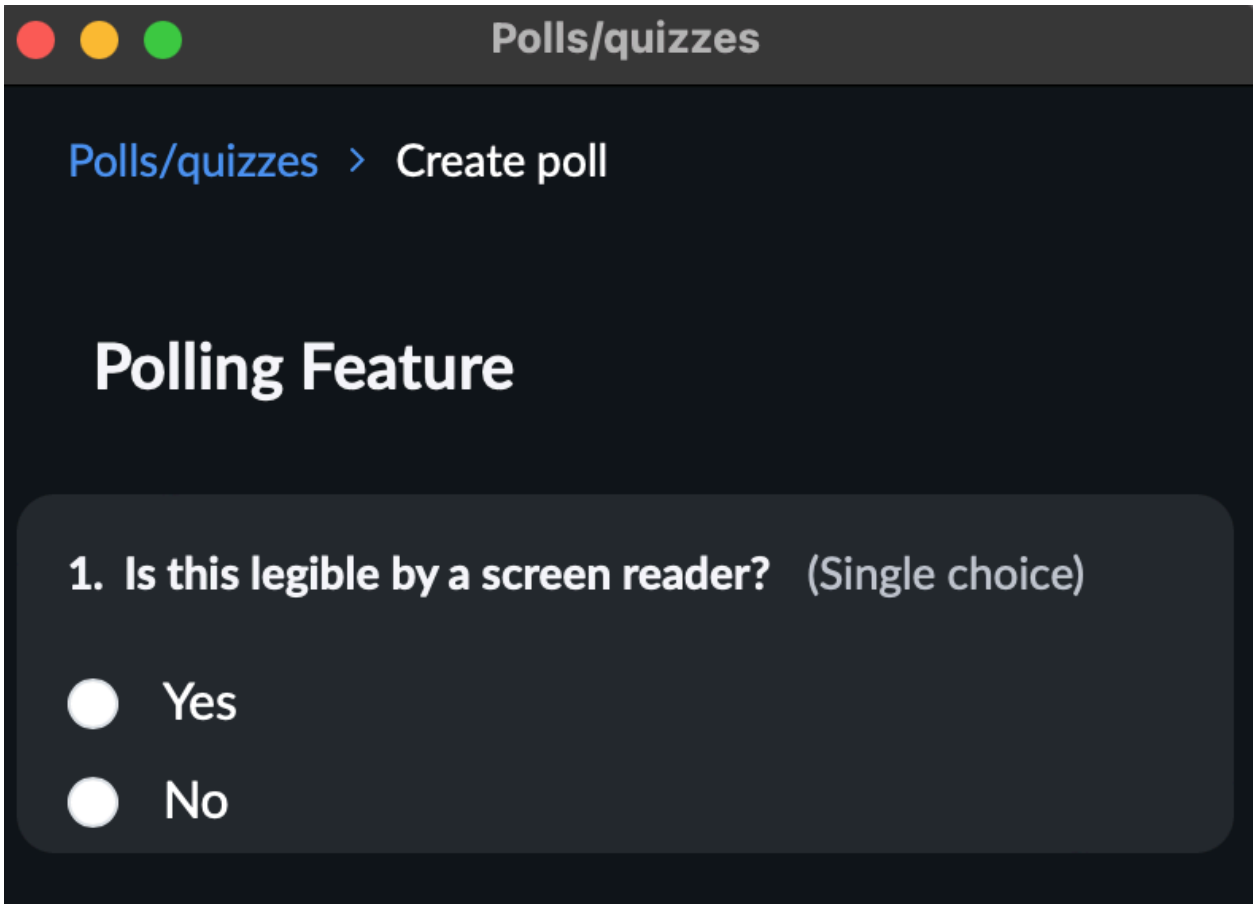

Image description: A Zoom pop-up tab that contains a poll question with two options.

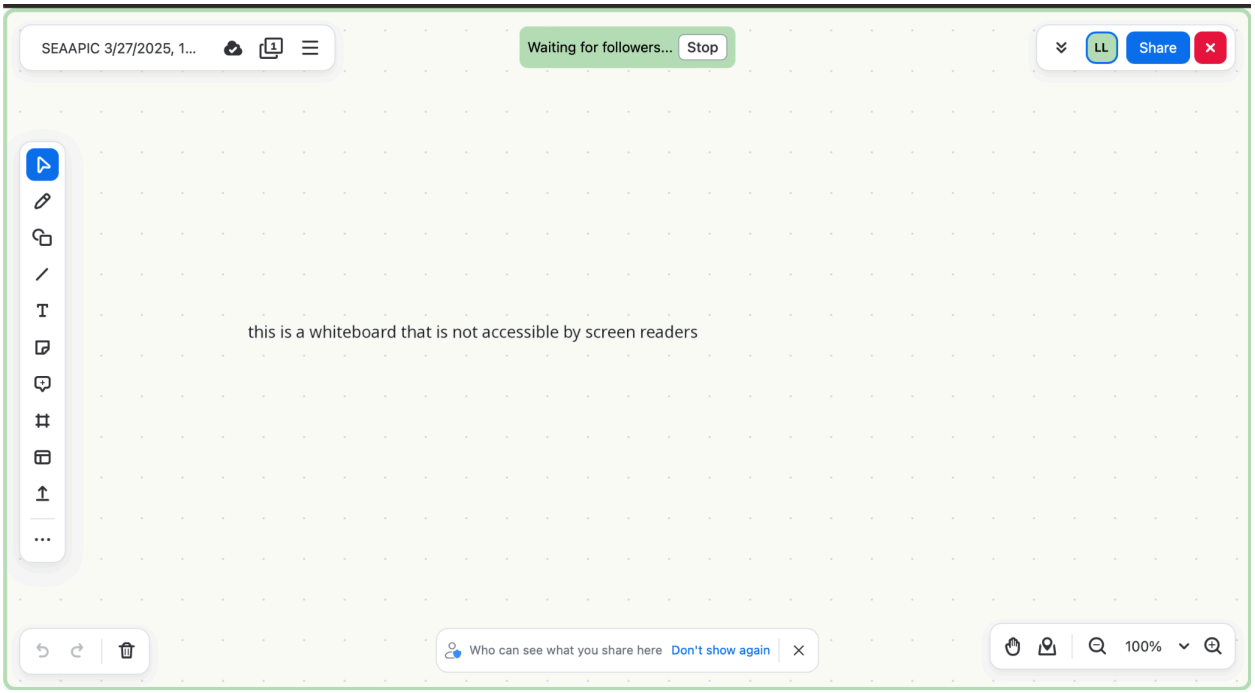

Image description: A screenshot of a Zoom whiteboard, which has various design tools.

Accessibility Limitations Specific to SEAAPIC Team Meetings

Some of the circumstances of the SEAAPIC team limits our ability to provide access at all times. For starters, SEAAPIC has no reliable budget meaning that all team members must be able to individually obtain the technological materials needed to engage with the group. This means that people who are lower income may not be able to reliably participate depending on their access to a personal laptop/computer/cellular device/tablet and related accessories, such as headphones. An individual's lack of access can also impact the rest of the team; for example, if someone cannot get headphones, but shares the space they call in from with other people, it may makes their voice inaccessible to hard of hearing people or possibly hard to understand for language processing and neurodivergent conditions. Services, such as Krisp, could be helpful in reducing any unavoidable background noise that may interfere with audio. Additionally, because SEAAPIC currently has no funding, we cannot afford CART or ASL services, meaning we must rely on free resources that are less accurate. Lastly, SEAAPIC members should try to limit background visuals to avoid overstimulation, however, this isn't always possible.

Accessibility Wins Specific to SEAAPIC Team Meetings

Presently, there are some steps SEAAPIC has taken that prioritize normalizing accessibility in our meetings. For starters, agenda items are explained using plain language and participants are always welcomed and encouraged to ask questions or for clarification/repetition. We also make sure to define any jargon and ensure the use of

gender neutral language. Secondly, at the start of each meeting, all attendees reintroduce themselves with their name and pronouns (at least) and are encouraged to have their name and pronouns visible in their Zoom nametag. Thirdly, meeting notes and agendas are available on Google Docs, which allows team members to download the document in whatever format is most compatible with their needs. Fourthly, the meeting is always hosted on the same link and the meeting is always open, meaning any team member can join whenever they are ready. While this is meant to provide a space for collaboration, it also allows team members to play around in the virtual space and set it up for their needs whenever they want to. Lastly, people are aware of the meeting agenda ahead of time because the meetings are generally formatted in the same way each time we meet. When the format of a meeting is changed, team members are alerted ahead of time about what to expect to allow any questions or comments in advance.

Audit: Suggestions for Increased Accessibility

SEAAPIC Culture

1. Include a "disability orientation" for all volunteers and staff that provides them important accessibility information (for example, the above "guide" section) and informs them on how they can help create an accessible environment as a team member.
2. Ask for feedback on accessibility and implement necessary changes or updates.
    a. Create channels that allow team members to submit this feedback anonymously. Ensure that power dynamics present within the group do not present barriers or repercussions to sharing feedback.

Meeting Preparation

1. Appoint a dedicated person to troubleshoot any technological issues that arise during a meeting and to answer any general questions regarding accessibility. Ensure this person is adequately prepared to answer these questions and address issues.
2. Be aware of any accessibility features available to participants and be prepared to present them and how to enable them at the start of a meeting.
3. Create a guide for how other people can support accessibility during team meetings.
4. Give notice about questions that participants might be asked to respond to, including icebreakers.
5. Always include a dial-in number along with the link to your virtual meeting.
6. Share info about the accessibility of the platform you are using with meeting participants and request that they share any additional accommodations outside of what is already provided to them.

7. Try to prevent “Zoombombing” and other security issues, perhaps by using built-in features such as the waiting room, as these incidents could be overstimulating or anxiety inducing.
8. Create a tip sheet with directions for any online platforms used, so team members feel comfortable and familiar with them.
9. Distribute documents or content that will be shared during the meeting to participants before the meeting, so people can request accessible versions if needed.

Throughout a Meeting

1. Start with an access check-in. Share accessibility features available to participants and establish how team members can engage during the meeting. Ensure folks feel comfortable requesting accommodations or asking questions.
2. Use plain language as much as possible. Avoid metaphors, acronyms, slangs or idioms.
3. Repeat any questions asked, whether verbally or sent via the chat, before answering.
4. When introducing yourself, share a brief visual description. You can include: general age, skin color, race or ethnicity, gender identity, hairstyle and color, eye color, clothing, and background descriptions.
5. Ask speakers to state their names before they speak, every time: “This is ___ speaking... and I think ....”
6. For breakout rooms, inform participants how long the breakout session will last and who will be in each group (including whether the presenter will be present). Share verbal and written instructions that can be accessed by all participants within breakout rooms. Inform participants on how to request assistance or attention during the breakout rooms. Ensure ASL interpreters or (human) transcribers are in the same breakout room as the people who need them (and don’t assume you know who does and doesn’t need them).

When Sharing Visuals and Presentations

1. Use a high-contrast color scheme (such as black and white). You can use this website to test color contrast. When possible, allow users to switch from dark-on-light to light-on-dark displays (this feature is built into Zoom).
2. Use large fonts. 44 point font is good for slide titles and 24-36 point font is good for information.
3. Use simple fonts. Sans serif fonts that are not italicized or decorative are often best because the flourishes on serif fonts can muddle letters for visually disabled people. Prioritize fonts that are easier for dyslexics to read and are legible by screen readers.
4. Include minimal information per slide and avoid clutter such as decorative fillers.

5. Use standard slide transitions that minimize visuals that could be triggering to photosensitive individuals.
6. When presenting, briefly describe all visuals & slides verbally. Try to avoid directional phrases like “as you can see here,” which don’t always apply to visually impaired people.
7. Use numbers instead of bullet points.
8. Alert participants ahead of time if a presentation includes sound.
9. Avoid all flashing/strobe animations.
10. When screen sharing, zoom in so the shared screen is actually easily visible and avoid scrolling too fast to track. Read aloud everything, as screen readers cannot be used.

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