WeCo -- Accessibility in the Age of COVID-19

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Lynn: When you work with us at WeCo, you get actual disability information because most of our employees have disabilities.   We hope we are able to give you some experiential knowledge from this.   I am just going to first give an overview of what the panel will address today.

In an increasingly disabled world, COVID-19 is unique.   Right now 15% of people in the world live with a disability.   In the United States, more than 20% live with a disability.   What is driving and increasing those numbers globally is an aging population and other factors that are referred to as underlying health conditions that are prevalent in even younger populations.

Those are things we know are increasing disability rates around the world.   When we think about the fact that COVID-19 is a global pandemic, we see residual effects and know it will impact rates of disability as well.   I think it's good to think about as we go into this topic.   For those of you who have been in the space of digital accessibility and have been working on it, you know it is an inevitable part of business.   For those of you who are new to it, it's important to remember it's not a temporary condition.   This digital accessibility is part of how we do business and educate people going forward.

Today we focus on five different aspects of COVID-19 and accessibility and where we are right now in time.   First of all, we will talk about legal ramifications.   We all know there are legal aspects and why we need to be digitally accessible.   But does this accessibility take vacation in a pandemic?   No, they don't go away because we are in a crisis.   But how we respond to those legal requirements does change.

It's important to note that the pandemic has emphasized inequality in ways we could not have anticipated.   Those inequalities seem even more magnified to those of us with a disability working in this field.

Also, we will include the ramped up inclusion needs.   We've seen a ramped up need or urgency to include.   But in some areas there has been a stepped down response.   We know that services to the vulnerable communities is exceptionally vital now.   We will talk about inaccessibility that has become apparent as well.

I think retooling is something our staff will be able to help you with a lot today.   Jobs we didn't think could be done virtually before are now being done virtually.   There are a number of us with disabilities who were told jobs could not be done virtually before, but now it's OK with somebody else doing them.   It's a good time now to step back as employers and think about whether we are hiring on how work should be done.   Allow yourself to think about qualifications and how your work is done and how you can engage people with disabilities in

employment.

Then meeting and working online.   The virtual office creates a lot of opportunities for us to include.   We developed a couple of small satellite offices as an afterthought just to give a little bit more opportunity to work together.   We had staff that wanted to have an in office experience. So for us we worked it backwards.

We know that virtual offices are great opportunities to include and that most of the roadblocks are attitudes.   We are going to challenge you today to consider making how instead of can't your default.   Then we will talk about promoting and educating virtually.   The digital world makes it far more possible for you to include people, be they customers, coworkers, etc.   We will talk about that today.

Without further ado, I would like to introduce our esteemed panelists.   We will start with someone who is a colleague that I have been close to for a number of years, Bruce Howell, accessibility Services Manager at the Carroll Center for the Blind.   He joined the center in 2012 and reached out to me to engage some of WeCo's testers in some of Carroll center's work.   For a while Bruce used to talk to me every couple of weeks.   He was kind of like my business psychiatrist.   He inspired me and gave me a lot of courage.   He is dear to me for that reason. He graduated from Colgate University and did work in banking before this.   He has experience in product development and other areas.   Bruce serves as the primary contact for clients for evaluating and testing products.   He facilitates interaction between the Carroll Center team and the client.   He is a proficient user of these technologies.   So we welcome Bruce to the panel.

Next we have Heather Thomas, the accessibility Services Associate for the Carroll Center for the Blind.   She was previously an assistive technology instructor.   She is proficient in using screen readers for IOS and Mac.   She has seen the impact of accessible and inaccessible digital content to support users.   She has a special interest in document accessibility and training.   Welcome, Heather.   We are really excited for this crew from Carroll Center.

The next panelist is somebody I shared an office space with.   This is Rosemary Ugboajah and her company worked alongside mine.   There was a lot of learning from each other in those days. It has been wonderful to watch what they do and work on projects with them.   Rosemary gained her experience from various advertising agencies where she worked with a number of brands like 3M, Cargill, Johnson & Johnson.   She also was a marketer for Target Corp.   Most recently, Rosemary has led several strategic and creative projects [reading quickly] and branding the workforce system for the State of Minnesota.   Her agency has won multiple awards and has been recognized for inclusion in the industry.   Rosemary studied in London and has a bachelor of arts in advertising from the University of Minnesota.   She is a cofounder of Art West and is on a number of committees.

Next is Kelli Ryan, director of operations for WeCo.   Her career involves a great deal of experience, including building a call center from the ground up for a well known national corporation.   Living with her own disability and raised by a strong mother with MS, she has a strong desire for inclusion.   In this past year, I can attest that Kelli has managed a steep learning curve and is helping to expand WeCo's mission.   She works from her home office in Minnesota

where she and her husband Jim are raising their children.

The final panelist is Linda Little, our certified test consultant coordinator.   She came to WeCo in 2017 and has a very eclectic background.   Her background is originally in landlord-tenant law.   She has always been interested in working with leveling the playing field for people with disabilities.   As CTC coordinator, Lynda helps WeCo locate talented professionals.   She also serves as WeCo's testers for professional support.   Lynda works from her home office in Modesto, California where she lives with her husband.

So welcome to everybody here.   We are going to launch right into the discussion.   I want everybody to know I have my large alarm clock on my desk so we can try to limit our discussion on each of the five points to about ten minutes.   That way we make sure to cover everything and leave some time for questions from the audience.   With that, we will launch into our first topic: legal ramifications.

Despite the urgency of all our businesses moving online so quickly due to this global pandemic, the legal requirements of accessibility won't go away.   I remember having our last staff meeting in early March when somebody asked if our business would not exist anymore because of the pandemic.   I said, it takes a lot to repeal those laws.   Yet, how people respond to the legal ramifications is changing.

Let's talk about the changes that we are witnessing among those of you on the panel and how we market, educate, employ people as the world does this involuntary hard shift to virtual offices, classrooms, and marketplaces.   Is there really room for digital accessibility in all of this chaos?

I would like to start by asking a question of Bruce from Carroll Center.   From your standpoint in a company that assists companies with digital accessibility, are you noticing any differences in how people are responding in the pandemic/ /

Bruce: Can you hear me?   First of all, let me thank you for inviting me to be a part of your event today.   I have enjoyed the time you and I have built our programs and learned from each other.   Yes, we have definitely seen some changes over the last months.   We have seen especially institutions of higher education, as well as the companies that support them through online learning systems or digital textbooks, change.   A lot of this is going online for the virtual environment.   A lot of schools were better prepared than others.   It's partially driven because the schools want to get things online.   Others are they don't want complaints from students not being able to access material.

There have also been disastrous results in many states because of severe problems and breakdowns in many websites.   That's been a big issue.

A third area involves many of the ecommerce sites like grocery stores which have seen huge increases in numbers of site visitors.   For people with disabilities, this has become a critical way to get food.   It's become difficult to go out and get food otherwise.   So when there are problems with these sites, it's a problem for many.

Lynn: Thank you for sharing that.   Rosemary, has the pandemic changed any of the requirements you are seeing in RFPs, for instance?   Are clients asking for more help or less help for requirements including vulnerable or disenfranchised groups on a higher level?   What are you seeing?

Rosemary: Thank you for including us on this.   We have not seen much of a change yet.   I think people are just getting over the shock.   I think we did notice people halting and slowing down. I think clients are in the position to recalibrate.   That said, we have government clients.   Even though accessibility is a core requirement for their deliverables, their RFPs are trying to shift to what they can do more digitally.   They need strategic direction on what they can do online.

On other types of businesses, I think they are still in shock and trying to figure out what to do. As an agency advancing inclusion, we don't wait for clients to request to become inclusive.   We see it as our job to move them that way.   They come to us with a problem to solve and it's up to us to build in that inclusion.   We are building in inclusion one brand at a time whether they like it or not.   [laughing]

Lynn: I think that's one of the most fascinating things while watching your business.   Thank you. I'm going to shift to Kelli, our operations director.   As somebody who handles recruitment and HR, what trends are you seeing for inclusion and disability inclusion since the pandemic?

Kelli: I think mostly I've seen a push or call to companies to require inclusion.   The companies that already had that as a core value had a much more successful shift to this digital world than companies that had a more rigid requirement.   There are some people who worked from home that now feel vindicated.   It's not hard and scary to manage.   Now everybody is doing it.   We want to make sure these businesses understand this is a core value to have in your culture. Getting recruiters and hiring managers on board to dive into a different candidate pool will help with the success of their business.

Lynn: That's an inspiring answer.

Let's move on to ramped up inclusion needs.   Why don't we take a look at how this is manifesting itself in real time for individuals and businesses?   I'd like to ask Heather about this. What are some examples of how the pandemic has made digital inclusion even more vital to your clients' needs?

Heather: Thank you, Lynn.   Many needs have changed as a result of the pandemic.   Bruce mentioned grocery stores and websites.   Some people may want to shop at the grocery but with fear of exposure these mobile apps and so on need to be tested.

Also, there are many people using these apps.   There are empty shelves.   This results in incomplete deliveries and delayed deliveries.   Changes to websites can cause problems as well. If sites add information to their sites, it is iimp that posted content be checked for accessibility so everyone can access it.   Transportation apps may add notes about washing your hands but it's important that it doesn't break the accessibility of the site.

Lynn: Yes, that's important.   We released a blog about an early day in the pandemic.   One staff member is blind and in a wheelchair and she and her husband had been relying on grocery delivery.   They had to then shop in a store when the pandemic first started.   We stepped in to help.   But many people depending on delivery services can't get them now because there are more people taking those delivery slots.

From our standpoint, we would add, is there some way stores can create a priority system for people who live with disabilities and need services like this?

Bruce, what do workplaces often overlook regarding inclusion for people living with disabilities? Including people you work with who are blind or visually impaired?

Bruce: One of the most important thing is for these people to be able to access the documents to do their jobs.   Often you are using Microsoft Word or Excel files.   If those files are not built with accessibility in mind, they can really struggle with that.   For someone who is blind or visually impaired, we use assistive technology where we type -- we can't see things like a mouse to click.   We rely on screen reader technology and it gives us feedback on what we might be typing.   But there are semantics that need to be built in to help people do things like scan the document and read things quickly like a sighted person might.   You can see often headings have a larger and bolded font to draw your attention to it.   A screen reader cannot do that unless there are built in features.   That's one of the most significant things.

The other related piece is this.   We are all in this virtual Zoom world now.   Often we are doing screen shares.   It's important for people who are visually impaired to have access to the slides ahead of time because PowerPoint files are showing images that my screen reader is not reading to me.   So it's important that I get these beforehand so I can go over them with my screen reader and get the things the presenter might not point out because sighted people could see them.

So those are the main things I would point out.

Lynn: Thank you.   We had a little exercise in that.   I am an accessibility document specialist.   I know how to structure an accessible PowerPoint.   We were sending the PowerPoint out to presenters this morning.   We are used to it so that when you have a document converted into PDF the accessibility characteristics carry with it.   It turned out that the native document was better than the PDF.   But that was learning for me, too.   Sometimes there are cases where you just need to ask.

Bruce: You handled it perfectly.   Thank you.

Lynn: Yes, it's not rocket science.   Ask the person.

I'd like to ask Lynda, as somebody who works exclusively with candidates with disabilities, what tools and platforms do you think work best when you reach out to candidates?   Lynda works with candidates with fine motor skill impairments, cognitive disabilities, hearing disabilities, etc. She has a lot of experience in this.

Lynda?

Lynda: Thank you.   We try to make everything fully accessible.   We have fully accessible descriptions.   We use accessible forms for all our applications.   We use the accessibility of a Zoom room because it is accessible to those with screen readers.   And we can close caption on it. We have posted to different advocacy groups on LinkedIn.   That gave us a good candidate pool.

But I think the best thing is using all the accessibility features in programs like Microsoft Word and so on.   We also do have different forms of interview processes.   We have nonverbal.   I've also done a chat based interview.   That was fun.   We do a regular and standard interview over the phone as well.

Lynn: So you really tailor that outreach and interview experience to the individual.   Can you see a lot of variation with individuals with the same type of disability in terms of how they prefer to be interviewed?

Lynda: Oh yes.   It varies person by person.   It is very person based.

Lynn: Great.   Rosemary, are the projects and client requests changing to be more or less inclusive in the face of the pandemic?   And is your company addressing digital inclusion more as a result?   I think you said there is a lot of on hold but this is more towards government clients.

Rosemary: We committed to inclusion over 8 years ago now.   You were right beside us.   We were in that space.   We did start as a brand firm.   We do extraordinary branding.   But a couple of years into that, we asked what our purpose was.   At that time we had been working on projects that had to do with marginalized communities and people who don't have a say.   So we decided to say, let's make this about what we do.   The moment we decided we were going to stand for inclusion, immediately we thought how?   It sounds good but how do you operationalize being an inclusive company?

Working beside Lynn and her team was so helpful.   We just asked a lot of questions.   We had to stretch to be inclusive.   We stretch every day.   We are very flexible.   You cannot be inclusive without being flexible.   You cannot be rigid.   We have been a semi-virtual operation.   To be semi-virtual meant that any tools we use have to be accessible.   It takes longer to find those tools maybe.   Or it might hinder your latest update.   One update can mess the whole thing up. These are things we've learned as we strive to maintain our stance on being inclusive.

When the pandemic hit, it stretched us again.   We have teammembers we can ask.   Does it work or not?   Right?   But we are brand builders.   We have fun, interactive workshops for insight to build brands.   But now that we can't meet in person, now we have to have our workshops digitally.   So we spent the first two weeks figuring these things out.   One of my first calls was to Lynn.   I said, OK, we are going to be doing things more digitally, especially conferencing. So we switched to Zoom.   Then we had to make sure it was truly accessible.   Lynn and her team was able to put together tips for us.

But then our workshops.   How do we have inclusive and accessible workshops?   We broke down workshops we would normally do in a longer period of time.   But with Zoom we can have breakout rooms.   Ahead of time we know who does not have access to the workshop tools. Then we can work with them one-on-one so they can still participate.   That has made us extend more.   That is how we as an organization have evolved.   We welcome that challenge of stretching.   We tend to be the ones to lead.

We rarely have a client come to us and say they want to be inclusive.   No.   They want to make more money.   They want to attract more people to work there.   And they want to retain people. So it's up to us to bring that lens to them and tell them that becoming inclusive develops those things.

A lot of our clients -- I think 72% of organizations strive to be inclusive.   But only 12% actually accomplish inclusion.   So we have a long way to go.   It's harder to do this.   It's much easier to not be inclusive.   It's easier to do things the way you have always done then.   But you will miss out on a lot of things that way.

Lynn: Right.   That is why I think Neka is such a great example.   They live it internally.   I will get back to Rosemary on that process of retooling team roles as well as helping others do it as well.   That's fascinating.

COVID-19 has forced many businesses and learning institutions to rethink how they do their work.   Let's talk about the potential opportunities for inclusion here while we address challenges. With that, I would like to shift to Kelli.   Kelli, based on your experience how does on boarding a candidate who is different abled differ from candidates who are not?   And how does this carry over to a virtual office?

Kelli: It really does follow the same rules.   There are documents and training to be done.   The only difference I have found is how we approach accommodations.   We start talking about accommodations really early on.   We talk about it in our request for an interview.   We are going to interview you through Zoom.   Will you need an additional accommodation to help with that? We send out a welcome packet on the first day of work that is all about accommodations requests. In our orientation training, we do that virtually through Zoom.   We've already talked about whether they need closed captioning or not.

At other places, accommodations never really got brought up.   This is how you do your on boarding and that is it.   You just need to ask.   How do you access technology?   The way we are doing this -- are you able to access things?   If not, what do you need?   What we find is that usually our staff has the tools they need like Dragon Naturally Speaking.   They will usually provide those things for themselves.   If what they need is above and beyond that, you can have the conversation because you have already laid the groundwork of pushing accommodations. We don't shy away from accommodations at all at WeCo.

Some things we do for accommodations at WeCo is try to offer multiple ways of getting information to people.   If somebody needs to fill out an I9 form, find the form they can fill out on their own instead of printing it.   We have different training methods for people who can't

learn by simply watching a video.   This is another reason we like to do live demonstrations for orientation.   It builds the employee-company relationship.   The biggest difference is asking.

Lynn: [Laughing] May I be so bold as to say it is about normalizing it.   I remember Kelli coming to me when she was first revamping things.   She said, we just need accommodations to be made an everyday thing.

Kelli: Yes, my old job was at a multimillion dollar organization and we never talked about it.   Pushing that out is important.   It draws that inclusion in.   It's better than having employees with disabilities that you don't even know about.

So ask.

Lynn: Great.   I have to get to the story because I think it's a great story about retooling.   When Rosemary's company and mine were working side by side, she told me she needed a project manager.   At that time we had an outside consultant looking for clerical work.   She was excellent but didn't have the capacity to hire her at that time.   I went to Rosemary and said I thought she should hire Nina because she was great at organization and keeping track of massive amounts of detail.   I said she's blind and Rosemary said it wouldn't work because of the tools they had.   But she interviewed her and within a couple of months she came back and said it was not as hard as she thought it would be.   And I realized we would not be able to wrench Nina back from Rosemary by the time we could afford to hire her.   So I think it's important to think of this story.   Rosemary and her crew did such a great job of talking to nina and finding out what devices and techniques she used.   Honestly, some of the things they learned from that interaction we adopted at WeCo, like a project management software we didn't know was accessible.

So I just wanted to ask Rosemary if she had any other insights to share about that process.   I think it was pretty magical.

Rosemary: Yes.   We are advertising, right?   It's a very visual industry.   Clients will give you feedback, scribble things down, and you make changes based on that.   So it took that step back to say, how do we make this work.   Nina explained about the sight readers.   We tested some tools.   I would say -- I think Nina is listening to this -- she has been an absolute asset on our team.   I will tell you one reason why.   What we lack, she has -- an ability to remember absolutely every detail.   Everyone on the team knows she is a great asset to us.   We not only stretch ourselves to make sure Nina does her best work, we train our clients.   So we have clients use a PDF tool and have instructions for them so everything is accessible.   We discourage written down notes because they are not accessible.   We just explain that to our clients and they get it.   Just learn how to do these things so everyone on the team can help you.

So the tools we use -- we run them through.   If it's not accessible, we don't use it.   It's not something we would put on.   Society has made us think that people with disabilities do not have as much to offer.   Very sadly, some people with disabilities can believe that is true.   There is nothing as great as providing opportunity and having people, for a change, be able to give to society what has been buried in them for so long and that people have not given them a chance to deliver.

There have been moments on this journey when people say they are thankful for being able to contribute to society.   It really doesn't take that much so we can retool to serve everyone.

Lynn: Thank you so much for sharing that.   It's a powerful story.   I would just piggyback on that.   One of the most moving moments I probably had was in the early days back in that collaborative office.   Chad Cook, our senior accounting specialist, was there.   I told him thank you for coming in today and that I really appreciated it.   He said, no, thank you Lynn.   He said, prior to working here, he just spent the day in front of the TV.   So I always think of that comment.   I'm not sure how we got to this point in history where the talents and skills of people with disabilities are so devalued.   It has to change.   It's a powerful thing when it does change.

Just to make sure we are moving along on topic here, I want to ask Rosemary one more question. It is about taking an office online.   Do you think it was a blessing or curse to do that?   How did it shake out for you?

Rosemary: We have always been semi virtual.   It's been a situation where people can work whenever they want to.   We don't have work hours.   You work around your life.   We do not have the rigidity of work hours.   But we had that office space that had a great environment.   We were semi virtual.   We wanted that flexibility.   Our office existed for people who wanted to come into the office, except for moments when we planned meetings there.

Think about it.   If you live with a disability, you have to rely on the transit system and it's unreliable.   Imagine the stress and strain of getting to a job on time.   So why do you have hours? So we got rid of it.

When we found our office space, accessibility was key.   We found the best space at the time that we could.   Where the Metro drops you off and whether you can walk to the building has played a part.   So we have always been semi virtual for all these reasons.   So now we are just at home and using these video conferencing tools for projects.

So we were one of the organizations where it was not a hard shift to make.   We were always thinking of flexibility.

Lynn: Great.   I want to turn to Heather now to wrap up this section.   She has just finished a book on how to make Zoom accessible for those with visual impairments.   So I was wondering if you might share tips on doing this.

Heather: Yes, spreading duties around will make a smoother meeting, rather than the speaker also having to admit people into the room or answer questions in chat.   It lets the speaker focus on getting their message out.   It lets things run more smoothly.   If it is muted at the beginning, then somebody can unmute people for questions.   If you are the speaker, alerts can be distracting. But if you do that, you don't know if somebody is raising their hand.   So having another person do that can really help out.

And then just letting that speaker focus on doing just one thing.   Then each person in the

meeting has a role they are focusing on.

Lynn: That's great.   It's things that visual users don't often think of.   Those are great tips.

Now let's talk about meeting and working online.   I would like to see what kind of wisdom we can glean from the panel on how they navigate working online, meeting online, in their inclusive environments.   I would like to start with Lynda.   What unique challenges do you face when working with a team of people that you never meet in person?   For most of the people Lynda manages, the entire relationship is virtual.   We'll start there.   I might have followups.

Lynda: The biggest challenge I face is fostering an office type of environment with them so they can come to me for help with anything.   We struggle with it.   We have biweekly communications with testers.   We have company happy hours.   We do our best to try to foster that environment but it is a struggle.

Lynn: I'm going to shift to Kelli next.   How do you help your employees manage an in home office?

Kelli: Communication is always key.   It's not the best to just bring someone and not provide guidance.   We have something called our guidebook that has an entire section on different ways a home office could look.   Like, maybe there is an office in a crate or a walk-in closet.   It's showing people ways that can work.

Then checking in with them.   Are things going well?   Do they need anything from us to make it a successful work environment?

Then kind of like what Rosemary talked about -- we offer to let people choose whether they want flex time or a rigid schedule.   Some people with a cognitive disability might need rigidity in how they do things while others need a more flexible situation.   Maybe they have PCAs coming in or doctors appointments, for example.   It allows them to pick the schedule that works best for them.

We have two people that start work at 5:00 AM because that is when they feel the most productive.   Then we have people who do not start until the afternoon because that's best for them.   So communication, support, and providing as many options as possible.   And trying to give them the chance to just do their jobs.   I've interviewed you.   I trust you.   You know the expectations.   I've given you the tools to get the jobs done.   And I think we have found that works well.

The project management tool we use lets us set deadlines and so on.   We are able to have clear communication on what we need.   We have accountability if deadlines are not met.   So we have this method of knowing when people are not working and so on.   I think it's important that you trust the people you hire.   Make sure they know it is a virtual office and that you trust they can do it.

Lynn: Yes.   I think at WeCo we have been a results only environment.   If you are not doing

your job, we will find out.   So we will trust that you are doing your job.

Kelli: WeCo is extremely process based.   It's important to look at your processes.   If they are not working, fix them.   If you find gaps in your process, empower your employees to fill those gaps.   Make sure they have the process and that they are using the process.

Lynn: Yes, that's a lot of what we talk about.

Andy: We had a quick question come in.   An attendee asked about your mention of an office in a crate.

Kelli: Sure.   Perhaps somebody doesn't have a large desk space.   So maybe you put all your work stuff into a crate.   When you start work, you take it all out and put it out on your kitchen table.   Then you start work.   It's a nice option for utilizing small spaces as well as time management.

Lynn: OK.   We will allow time for questions, I promise.   But Bruce, is it reasonable to expect that people who are blind and visually impaired to appear on video?   And how do you do it?

Bruce: Yes, but first thank you for explaining the office in a crate.   So great question.   I think there are three important considerations.   First, if you are using your video you have to understand you are presenting to a sighted world.   So they need to think about things like their own personal grooming.   What are they wearing?   Is their hair neat and clean?   Are you presenting yourself visually in the way you want people to see you?   And you may not be able to figure out exactly where your web camera is located and where it is focused on your face.   So you might have to ask people if they are seeing the right part of you.   Once you get that feedback, you know what angle you need your laptop screen set at or how to hold your phone to show what you want to show.   Related to that is what the background behind you is.   Today, I have a fireplace which is pretty neutral.   It's not showing things about my personal life that I don't want people to see.   If I'm blind and we are doing this at night I'm not going to have as many lights on as sighted people, so think about things like this that people will see.

But think about whether or not you want people to know some of this information.   When we talk about working with disabilities a big question is when and how you disclose your disability.   You need to think about what the video might reveal to others.   Also, there really is something to video taking extra bandwidth.   If you are really uncomfortable with video, you can always tell others you are leaving your video off for bandwidth issues.

Lynn: That's important.   I have a cognitive disability.   This winter I was in a severe depression.   I was in a meeting and the project manager kept insisting I go on camera.   I was in their virtual meeting room.   They kept turning on my camera and I kept blocking it.   This can affect people with all kinds of disabilities.   For me to be on my game and in the meeting was taking all of my energy.   I did not want to be on camera.   It was one of the oddest business situations to be in where they insisted I be on camera.   It is an etiquette piece that is part of digital inclusion in the workplace that is important.

I want to wrap up this panel section by saying, despite the unique pressures of the global pandemic, it's important [inaudible] Some of the organizations we have worked with at WeCo are well positioned and ready for this. But there are others being daunted by it. We want to assure the audience that these three organizations are here to help in any way we can.

We would love to open up for the rest of the time for questions from the audience. Andy and Debbie will moderate those. I can help direct questions as needed.

Andy: Thank you. We have had quite a few questions come in chat. The first one is, what are the common technological barriers being encountered due to changes in business operations due to the COVID-19 pandemic? Are there any new barriers experienced?

Lynn: Bruce or Heather, would you like to speak to that?

Bruce, you are muted.

Speaker: You are still muted, Bruce.

Lynn: There you go.

Bruce: Sorry. Can you hear me now?

Lynn: That's one of the barriers, there.

Bruce: Yeah, it's difficult sometimes to get back to the main meeting room. Andy, what was the question for us? I flustered myself.

Andy: What are the common technological barriers being encountered due to changes in business operations due to the COVID-19 pandemic? And are there any new barriers?

Bruce: I think public transportation is one issue. Here in the Massachusetts area at least things have been really shut down. That meant less frequent buses, trains, and subways. And the rules were always changing about where you enter the vehicles. I've been trained to get on at the front of a car. But it changed things dramatically. I use ride share services a lot and I knew they were undergoing changes. So just getting to work became a challenge.

But the whole telemedicine process is something everybody is touting right now. But not if the technology does not allow you to interact with your medical professional. If you have a disability, maybe you have trouble navigating those sites. Maybe you want to show an injury to your leg but you use a wheelchair and your tablet is strapped in place so you can't change the view.

I think we are seeing implications that none of us had dreamed of. These are the kind of things I hope we work through and give a lot of attention to as we go forward.

Lynn: This one came to attention at our last staff meeting. We have people on staff like me who

live with anxiety disorders and mental illness and others with attention deficit disorder.   Being in frequent Zoom meetings and up the ante for those of us with anxiety disorders.   Lynda and I are both anxiety people and were like, oh my gosh.   That's what we've been feeling.   If you have staff with cognitive disabilities, the frequent online meeting thing can be hard for them. They may need accommodations around that.

If you work in tech, you have people who live with cognitive disabilities on your team most likely.   If you don't know about it, know they are probably there.

Bruce: I think frequent Zoom meetings are creating anxiety in those of us how did not have anxiety diagnoses.   It's very real.

Lynn: Can we take another question?   Get a few more in.

Andy: The next question is about PowerPoint and how it can be made accessible.

Lynn: They absolutely can be.   My talk this morning was about something I had put together quickly for Bruce.   But Carroll Center and WeCo has workshops on accessible PowerPoint documents.   This is not rocket science.   You can learn it.   We require all of our staff to learn how to make Microsoft documents accessible.

Can we handle another?

Andy: Yes, let's keep it going.   If someone were to encounter a website with links buttons that are readable by technology, how could somebody tell the company?

Bruce: This question -- I'm not sure why the person is asking the question.   But if you're talking about actually letting the company know there is an issue, there is usually an accessibility link to contact for them.   If you do that, let them know the browser and the software you are using. Provide a description of what happened.   If you can be helpful and constructive in the information you provide, you are more likely to get a better response.   If they are asking how to [inaudible] There is something called ARIA which is a coding thing you can do to various form elements to change the labels for the screen readers so they can be read.

Heather: You want the spoken label to match the visual label so that people using speech recognition software would know the name of the button to click.

Bruce: Yes, and talk about speech recognition software.

Heather: One example is Dragon Naturally Speaking.

Bruce: So if somebody sees a button that says one thing but the label assigned through ARIA is different, the label they speak will not work because it doesn't match.

Andy: Wonderful.   Heather, could you let the audience know where they can access the guide you mentioned?

Heather: It's Getting Started in Zoom Meetings. It's available for the Carroll Center Store. It's carroll.org. There is a shop button that can be activated to go into the store.

Bruce: You could also email either of us.

Heather: Yes, I can send you the link.

Lynn: We can make that link available to you all with the recap as well. Should we squeeze in one more question?

Andy: How are facemask requirements affecting disability needs?

Lynn: That's a great question. I'm not sure who on the panel we should direct it to. Does anybody want to take it?

Lynda: I'll take it. Some people with disabilities cannot wear masks for various reasons. So some are not wearing masks. I think it's affecting people with different disabilities differently.

Kelli: That's why it is so hard to answer, I think. I have high anxiety and it's triggered by small spaces. Wearing a mask makes me feel claustrophobic. So I try to limit the amount of time I wear it. So I try to make my husband go out most of the time. That's just my experience.

Rosemary: I just want to point out the importance of empathy. There is so much we do not understand. If we approach things from empathy, we will probably get much further along. Right now, wearing the mask -- in some regions people are ridiculed for wearing a mask. In others they are ridiculed for not wearing one. There is no such thing as normal. Everybody has their own normal.

Lynn: I think giving people the benefit of the doubt is really important right now.

I think that is our event. We want to thank everybody on the panel. Thank you to Bruce and Heather, Rosemary, Kelli, and Lynda. I think this has been a lot of fun for me. It's been wonderful to get the insights of these people who I work with that are so smart and forward thinking.

With that, Andy, we will let you wrap up the program.

Andy: Thank you very much, Lynn. Thank you to everybody in attendance. Thank you to WeCo, the Carroll Center, etc. The recording of this will be available at the end. We will send it out to everybody registered for the event. If you do not receive it, or have questions, reach out to debbie@weco.com.

Thanks again. I hope you all have a great evening.

[End of Transcript]