

## 2021 SIG on Access in SIGCHI

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SIGACCESS, ACCESSCOMPUTING, and ACCESS-SIGCHI

Accessibility, diversity, and inclusion are key concerns for the CHI community. In 2019, Accessibility was one of the top keywords among conference publications. Despite the focus of research, many scholars with disabilities still struggle to access SIGCHI events and activities. At this SIG at CHI 2021, Access-SIGCHI, along with AccessComputing and SIGACCESS, will host an open discussion about the state of accessibility within SIGCHI and discuss opportunities for organizers and volunteers to improve accessibility. The event is open to all, but we are particularly excited to bring together people with disabilities and organizers from across SIGCHI to collaboratively develop a plan for increase access across all SIGCHI events.

Additional Key Words and Phrases: accessibility

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Over the years there have been countless calls and actions taken by SIGCHI community members to increase the accessibility of SIGCHI conferences, publications, and activities [1–3, 5, 7–9]. This SIG presents another opportunity to discuss the changes that have already been made in response to these efforts such as the recent appointment of Stacey Branham and Soraia Prietch as Accessibility representatives on the SIGCHI Executive Committee [6]. Further, this SIG aims to develop the next set of goals for Access-SIGCHI work. The SIG will be structured around an open discussion between community members with disabilities and SIGCHI organizers. From these constituents we will develop directives for accessibility work withing SIGCHI going forward.

## 2 OVERVIEW OF ORGANIZING GROUPS

### 2.1 AccessSIGCHI

AccessSIGCHI is a volunteer organization working to serve the SIGCHI community. AccessSIGCHI has been working for years to improve the access to our community, conferences, publications for people with disabilities. In our 2019 report we made four recommendations to: (1) achieve conference accessibility, (2) achieve content accessibility, (3) handle accessibility requests, and (4) increase representation of people with disabilities in SIGCHI [5]. AccessSIGCHI's primary activities aimed at meeting these recommendations are: documenting accessibility best practices for SIGCHI events, educating conference organizers about these practices, recruiting and supporting accessibility organizers on conferences and other SIGCHI committees, and supporting community members with disabilities through a wide

network of committed volunteers from across the field of HCI. When organizing and advocacy fail to address pressing issues, AccessSIGCHI has taken on activist roles. For example, AccessSIGCHI community members held a protest at CHI 2019 in Glasgow, UK. The protest was in response to many community members reaching a tipping point on a range of issues effecting conference accessibility [4]. These activist efforts demonstrate AccessSIGCHI's dual role as volunteer organizers and as advocates for systemic change outside of official SIGCHI leadership.

## 2.2 SIGACCESS

ACM SIGACCESS supports the international community of researchers and professionals applying computing and information technologies to empower individuals with disabilities and older adults. The SIG also promotes the professional interests of students and computing personnel with disabilities and strives to educate the public to support careers for people with disabilities. The diverse SIGACCESS membership is interested in the design, development, evaluation, and scientific investigations of technologies to support individuals with disabilities. SIGACCESS offers various awards and scholarships such as the Award for Outstanding Contribution to Computing and Accessibility to promote research in related fields. Through the newly established SIGACCESS Diversity and Inclusion Scholarship, SIGACCESS aims to reach out to diverse communities that are underrepresented in the accessibility research field, to encourage participation in the ASSETS conferences. SIGACCESS has also led the efforts to develop a rich set of resources about how to make written materials, publications, presentations, and conferences (both physical and virtual) accessible.

## 2.3 AccessComputing

AccessComputing is an National Science Foundation broadening participation alliance that was created in 2006 to address the need to increase diversity in computing fields by including more individuals with disabilities. In addition to direct interventions with more than 1,000 students with disabilities, it is active in helping create institutional change that will make computing departments and organizations more accessible and welcoming for people with disabilities. Among these efforts it has worked with the Center for Minorities and People with Disabilities in Information Technology (CMD-IT), Computing Research Association (CRA), ACM Speical Interest Group on Computer Science Education (SIGCSE), and other organizations to help make their conferences and workshops more accessible.

## 3 GOALS FOR SIG EVENT

Following on best practices when working to meet the needs of disabled people this SIG will focus on gathering the perspectives of disabled members of SIGCHI. We aim to foster open dialogues with the wider community and ensure we are addressing the most critical accessibility needs in a systematic and sustainable way. To this end, we have three goals for this SIG.

- (1) Connect with the wider SIGCHI community. We are particularly interested in connecting with diverse disabled members of SIGCHI.
- (2) Receive feedback on our current efforts and practices from constituents
- (3) Collect input on long term goals for SIGCHI accessibility.

We know that this will is only one of many steps to include disabled community members and we are working to create an open and accessible forum for community members to discuss their needs and contribute ideas. Disabled researchers have already reported on the harmful experience they face in the SIGCHI community, including and extending far past

simple accessibility barriers [8, 9]. These stories illustrate the depth of the challenges that AccessSIGCHI, SIGACCESS and AccessComputing should work to address. This SIG aims to lower the barrier for community members to express their needs and contribute to advocacy plans to resolve these challenges going forward.

In addition to disabled attendees, the SIG will focus on engaging SIGCHI organizers who have the most power to effect change across SIGCHI. As described in our 2019 report, there have been positive efforts across 79% of SIGCHI conferences to appoint accessibility chairs. However, many challenges remain for conference and community organizers. What authority should accessibility chairs have? What budgets are needed to ensure conferences are accessible? How do new requirements for remote participation in response to the COVID-19 pandemic affect established practices? Many of these questions remain unanswered and we hope this SIG will present an opportunity for organizers and disabled community members to discuss these issues and come to consensus on steps to move forward.

#### 4 EXPECTED ATTENDEES

We aim to include attendees from across the following groups:

- CHI attendees with disabilities
- SIGCHI organizers and volunteers
- Access SIGCHI volunteers
- AccessComputing partners
- CHI attendees engaged in accessibility research
- CHI attendees engaged in Social Justice issues

While we hope to include people from across these groups, particularly researchers with disabilities, the SIG is open to all CHI attendees. Every community member plays a critical role in making SIGCHI an accessible and inclusive community and we hope this venue is a useful tool for attendees.

#### 5 MEETING AGENDA

The 75 minute SIG will consist, primarily, of two open discussions of the state of accessibility within in SIGCHI with the goal of developing a directive for AccessSIGCHI to advocate for in the short term (1-2 years) and long term. Between these discussions we will facilitate a quick break where attendees can rest, step away from the SIG, or enjoy networking time with other attendees. We describe the SIG's meeting schedule of the next few subsections.

##### 5.1 Introduction (10 Minutes):

The SIG will start with a brief introduction session where organizers from AccessSIGCHI will describe what AccessSIGCHI is, its current activities, and discuss the goals that were set at the last similar SIG [7] and through prior AccessSIGCHI reports [5]. The introduction will ground the discussion to follow. Representatives from SIGACCESS and AccessComputing will similarly introduce their organizations.

##### 5.2 Open Discussion of Community Needs and Priorities (20 Minutes):

For the first half of the SIG we will support an open discussion of accessibility needs across SIGCHI. Attendees are invited to share their experiences, perspectives, and opinions. Since CHI 2020 will be a virtual venue, we will reach out to conference attendees through asynchronous channels and discussion points gathered before the event will be

included in the discussion. SIG organizers will take notes on the discussion in a publicly accessible format and these notes will be used for activities in the later half of the SIG.

### 5.3 Break and Networking Time (20 Minutes):

Virtual events can be tiresome and cause attendees to lose focus. In an effort to increase the accessibility of the event we will take a 20 minute break. For the first 15 minutes, attendees will have opportunities to join breakout rooms to network in smaller group settings. We hope that this time will offer disabled attendees, particularly junior researchers, opportunities to network with more senior mentors and organizers from across SIGCHI. This will also offer organizers an opportunity to check in on access needs from attendees and adjust the SIG events as needed to ensure access. We will announce a rest time for the final 5 minutes to ensure that all attendees are able to take at least a brief break.

### 5.4 Goal Setting Discussion (20 Minutes):

Following the break, we will ask attendees to return their attention to the larger group discussion. Based on the needs laid out earlier in the discussion, attendees will discuss goals, priorities, and potential solution spaces. The goal of this session is to develop a set of guidelines which AccessSIGCHI can use to later develop their community mandate going forward. AccessSIGCHI is committed to releasing a report every two years, and this data will enhance the upcoming report (to be released this summer). We will also release a summary of these discussed goals and priorities following the event.

### 5.5 Event Closure (5 Minutes):

Over the last few minutes of the events organizers will bring the event to a close and report out on the discussed goals and priorities. Any remaining discussion will be resolved here and attendees will be connected to resources to engage with the event sponsors going forward.

## 6 CONCLUSION

As always, accessibility within SIGCHI is critical and we face many challenges to increase accessibility for disabled researchers. This SIG event hosted by AccessSIGCHI and sponsors aims to develop a set of goals and priorities for moving SIGCHI's accessibility work forward in the near and long term. We will do this by eliciting feedback from the CHI community in an open forum broken up over two 20 minute segments. From these discussions we will develop a set of goals and report this to the larger community after the event. This SIG aims to work directly with members of the CHI community with disabilities, as they (we) have the most grounded understanding of the work that needs to be done.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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