# Notes from ‘Making Book Clubs Accessible for All’ Webinar

Presented by Jane Beaumont, Organizer Ottawa Chapter Canadian Council for the Blind Book Club November 24, 2020

## Accessible book club benefits

The benefits of having an accessible book club include:

* Inclusion and overcoming isolation
* Learning new things through discussion
* Peer support related to disability
* Community involvement, which can lead to interest in the Canadian Council of the Blind, the CNIB or other services

## Things to think about when starting a club

* Will the club be in person or virtual?
* Will members need tech and technical ability to attend? For example: if patrons will be asked to download books or attend virtual meetings, use of technology will be necessary.
* The time and frequency of the book club. For example, will the club meet in the daytime or after work?
* The number of members. The best discussions need a reasonable number of people.

## Running book club meetings

Each book club needs a chair to make sure everyone is heard and to moderate the chat. You can rotate the meeting chair responsibility or ask someone who recommended books to chair and lead the discussion. For variety, you can invite authors or other guests to speak at meetings.

It’s recommended to do roll call so people with vision loss know who is there. You can request that members announce they’re leaving if they want to exit during the meeting. When you make food and drink available at meetings, let people know where it is and guide them to the table.

If the meeting’s virtual, keep the following considerations in mind:

* Will you encourage members to use certain etiquette such as raising their hands and muting themselves? If people use Voiceover or JAWS, encourage them to mute. You can teach them how to use mute and the chat options.
* Some patrons may not have access to technology so discussion by phone can work as well

## Discussions

Some possible topics to get discussion started:

* What did you think of the quality of the transcription and narration?
* Who is your favourite character in the book?

Please keep in mind that people with vision loss have a different view of the description in the book.

### Resources

See the [CCB Accessible Book Club Handbook](https://ccbnational.net/shaggy/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ACCESSIBLE-BOOK-CLUBS-HANDBOOK-DEC-21-2020.docx.pdf) (in revision). CNIB also has information on [workplace accessibility](https://www.cnib.ca/en/sight-loss-info/blindness-work).

## Communications

It is useful to retain a members list and to keep track of attendance.

Each club may need to share the following:

* Meeting links and teleconference links
* Meeting notices

## Transportation and navigation

Volunteer drivers may be needed. For every 10 regular members, you might have 2 volunteers, a driver and coordinator, for example. It is recommended to have some sighted volunteers. Public transportation is also an option for travel.

When planning a meeting, keep the following considerations about location in mind:

* Is parking nearby?
* Will members have to go up steps?
* Where is the meeting room located? Note that background noise can be distracting
* If the meeting room is not on the main floor, are there elevators?
* Are accessible washrooms nearby?

Keep the following considerations about building navigation and room layout in mind:

* If there are navigation issues, having a door greeter can help
* Make sure that the layout of the room is easy to navigate. Avoid placing furniture in pathways to doors or seats, which prevents tripping hazards.
* People with low vision prefer to sit in a place where light is not glaring so arrange chairs so they can sit with their backs to the window
* Guide members into the room to be seated and let them know who they’re sitting next to. Please note that guide dogs will likely be there as well.

## Equipment: computers, players for audiobooks, braille displays

Many libraries loan accessible equipment that members can use to read books such as DAISY players. Some organizations fundraise for equipment, such as the CNIB. You can look into provincial adaptive technology programs funding if needed.

Often accessible book clubs need staff or members to train other members how to use equipment. Encourage new users not to give up and to get support and advice. [Get Together with Technology group (GTT)](https://ccbnational.net/shaggy/get-together-with-technology/) is a program providing training for and by people with vision loss. GTT teaches how to use Zoom. Members can also learn how to use navigation device to get a meeting.

## Book clubs patrons can join

### For adults:

* CNIB has many programs by teleconference or on Zoom, such as the [Unbound Book Club](https://cnib.ca/en/programs-and-services/learn/cnib-unbound-book-club).
* Karen Brophey hosts a club that brings braille readers together
* [Seniors’ Centre Without Walls](https://www.comeshare.ca/community-support--3/seniors-centre-without-walls) in Surrey has a weekly program with the local library where the librarian reads a short story aloud and facilitates discussion. Others join by Zoom using an access code. Please note members joining by phone may have to pay long distance charges.

### For kids:

* [TD Summer Reading C](https://www.tdsummerreadingclub.ca/staff/home)lub. Dyslexia Canada recommends that you avoid asking kids to read aloud in case they’re struggling readers.