

2021 SIG on Access in SIGCHI

MEGAN HOFMANN and CYNTHIA BENNETT, Human Computer Interaction Institute, Carnegie Mellon University, USA

JINJUAN HEIDI FENG, Department of Computer and Information Sciences, Towson University, USA

DHRUV JAIN, RICHARD LADNER, and JENNIFER MANKOFF, Paul G. Allen School of Computer Science, University Of Washington, USA

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

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, 2, 4, 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 [3]. 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 be 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.

105 What authority should accessibility chairs have? What budgets are needed to ensure conferences are accessible? How
106 do new requirements for remote participation in response to the COVID-19 pandemic affect established practices?
107 Many of these questions remain unanswered and we hope this SIG will present an opportunity for organizers and
108 disabled community members to discuss these issues and come to consensus on steps to move forward.
109

110 **4 EXPECTED ATTENDEES**

111 We aim to include attendees from across the following groups:
112

- 113 • CHI attendees with disabilities
- 114 • SIGCHI organizers and volunteers
- 115 • Access SIGCHI volunteers
- 116 • AccessComputing partners
- 117 • CHI attendees engaged in accessibility research
- 118 • CHI attendees engaged in Social Justice issues

119 While we hope to include people from across these groups, particularly researchers with disabilities, the SIG is open
120 to all CHI attendees. Every community member plays a critical role in making SIGCHI an accessible and inclusive
121 community and we hope this venue is a useful tool for attendees.
122

123 **5 MEETING AGENDA**

124 The 75 minute SIG will consist, primarily, of two open discussions of the state of accessibility within in SIGCHI with the
125 goal of developing a directive for AccessSIGCHI to advocate for in the short term (1-2 years) and long term. Between
126 these discussions we will facilitate a quick break where attendees can rest, step away from the SIG, or enjoy networking
127 time with other attendees. We describe the SIG's meeting schedule of the next few subsections.
128

129 **5.1 Introduction (10 Minutes):**

130 The SIG will start with a brief introduction session where organizers from AccessSIGCHI will describe what Ac-
131 cessSIGCHI is, its current activities, and discuss the goals that were set at the last similar SIG [7] and through prior
132 AccessSIGCHI reports [5]. The introduction will ground the discussion to follow.
133

134 **5.2 Open Discussion of Community Needs and Priorities (20 Minutes):**

135 For the first half of the SIG we will support an open discussion of accessibility needs across SIGCHI. Attendees are
136 invited to share their experiences, perspectives, and opinions. Since CHI 2020 will be a virtual venue, we will reach
137 out to conference attendees through asynchronous channels and discussion points gathered before the event will be
138 included in the discussion. SIG organizers will take notes on the discussion in a publicly accessible format and these
139 notes will be used for activities in the later half of the SIG.
140

141 **5.3 Break and Networking Time (20 Minutes):**

142 Virtual events can be tiresome and cause attendees to loose focus. In an effort to increase the accessibility of the event
143 we will take a 20 minute break. For the first 15 minutes, attendees will have opportunities to join breakout rooms to
144 network in smaller group settings. We hope that this time will offer disabled attendees, particularly junior researchers,
145 opportunities to network with more senior mentors and organizers from across SIGCHI. This will also offer organizers
146
147
148
149
150
151
152
153
154
155
156

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

REFERENCES

- [1] Reuben Kirkham, John Vines, and Patrick Olivier. 2015. Being Reasonable: A Manifesto for Improving the Inclusion of Disabled People in SIGCHI Conferences. In *Proceedings of the 33rd Annual ACM Conference Extended Abstracts on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (Seoul, Republic of Korea) (*CHI EA '15*). Association for Computing Machinery, New York, NY, USA, 601–612. <https://doi.org/10.1145/2702613.2732497>
- [2] Jonathan Lazar, Elizabeth F. Churchill, Tovi Grossman, Gerrit van der Veer, Philippe Palanque, John "Scooter" Morris, and Jennifer Mankoff. 2017. Making the field of computing more inclusive. *Commun. ACM* 60, 3 (Feb 2017), 50–59. <https://doi.org/10.1145/2993420>
- [3] Jennifer Mankoff. [n.d.]. Accessibility and Inclusion, Thoughts.
- [4] Jennifer Mankoff. 2016. The wicked problem of making SIGCHI accessible. *interactions* 23, 3 (Apr 2016), 6–7. <https://doi.org/10.1145/2903528>
- [5] Jennifer Mankoff, Anne Spencer Ross, Cynthia Bennett, Katta Spiel, Megan Hofmann, and Jennifer Rode. 2020. 2019 Access SIGCHI report. *SIGACCESS Access. Comput.* (Mar 2020), 1. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3386280.3386287>
- [6] Helena Mentis. 2020. Towards a More Equitable, Accessible, and Responsive SIGCHI. <https://sigchi.org/2020/10/towards-a-more-equitable-accessible-and-responsive-sigchi>
- [7] Jennifer Rode, Erin Brady, Erin Buehler, Shaun K. Kane, Richard Ladner, Kathryn E. Ringland, and Jennifer Mankoff. 2016. SIG on the State of Accessibility at CHI. In *Proceedings of the 2016 CHI Conference Extended Abstracts on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (San Jose, California, USA) (*CHI EA '16*). Association for Computing Machinery, New York, NY, USA, 1100–1103. <https://doi.org/10.1145/2851581.2886437>
- [8] Katta Spiel, Kathrin Gerling, Cynthia L. Bennett, Emeline Brulé, Rua M. Williams, Jennifer Rode, and Jennifer Mankoff. 2020. Nothing About Us Without Us: Investigating the Role of Critical Disability Studies in HCI. In *Extended Abstracts of the 2020 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (Honolulu, HI, USA) (*CHI EA '20*). Association for Computing Machinery, New York, NY, USA, 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3334480.3375150>

- 209 [9] Anon Ymous, Katta Spiel, Os Keyes, Rua M. Williams, Judith Good, Eva Hornecker, and Cynthia L. Bennett. 2020. "I Am Just Terrified of My Future"
210 – Epistemic Violence in Disability Related Technology Research. In *Extended Abstracts of the 2020 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing*
211 *Systems* (Honolulu, HI, USA) (*CHI EA '20*). Association for Computing Machinery, New York, NY, USA, 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3334480.3381828>

212
213
214
215
216
217
218
219
220
221
222
223
224
225
226
227
228
229
230
231
232
233
234
235
236
237
238
239
240
241
242
243
244
245
246
247
248
249
250
251
252
253
254
255
256
257
258
259
260

261 7 TARGET COMMUNITY AND ATTENDEE BACKGROUND

262 We hope to reach to groups within SIGCHI: (1) disabled HCI scholars and (2) HCI organizers/volunteers. The purpose
 263 of AccessSIGCHI is to make SIGCHI more accessible. Our primary constituents are members of SIGCHI and other
 264 scholars with disabilities. These attendees should come from a range of academic and personal backgrounds and we will
 265 work diligently through connections, particularly through AccessComputing, to recruit these attendees. Our second
 266 target group of organizers are the key stakeholders and decision makers who effect the accessibility of SIGCHI. We will
 267 formally invite these organizers through calls on SIGCHI organizing and steering committee mailing lists as well as
 268 through the SIGCHI accessibility chairs mailing list which is managed by Access-SIGCHI members.
 269

272 8 ORGANIZATION APPROACH

273 The organizers approach issues of community and academic accessibility through education, advocacy and activism and
 274 active work across a variety of domains (e.g., accessibility chair positions, documentation of best practices, and protest).
 275 To do this effectively, we must continually check in with the wider community of disabled scholars. This serves two
 276 purposes. First, to recruit community members who are seeking opportunities to engage in this community building
 277 efforts. Second, to receive necessary feedback from community members effected by our actions but who cannot
 278 participate directly in volunteer efforts. We have designed this SIG to serve as a low-cost, minimal effort, opportunity
 279 for SIGCHI community members to inform themselves about our efforts, to provide feedback on them, and to learn
 280 about future opportunities to engage.
 281
 282
 283
 284

285 9 SIG SCHEDULE

- 286 • **Introduction (10 minutes):** Organizers will introduce themselves and provide a brief overview of Access-
 287 SIGCHI's current efforts, history, and an agenda for the SIG
- 288 • **Open Forum on Accessibility Concerns within SIGCHI (20 minutes):** This open discussion, moderated
 289 by organizers, will enable community members to raise concerns about accessibility within SIGCHI and ask
 290 detailed questions about current plans or activities being done to address them. An organizer will be assigned to
 291 note-taking and will collate these topics into a shared document for people outside the SIG to contribute too
 292 asynchronously.
 293
- 294 • **Break and Networking Time (20 minutes):** Recognizing that virtual events raise accessibility issues and
 295 challenges for people to focus we plan to take a mid-way break. For community members who wish to remain
 296 engaged, we will have a variety of breakout rooms with organizers and some private breakout rooms where
 297 attendees can connect amongst themselves. This will serve as a networking and mentoring space
- 298 • **Goal Setting (20 minutes):** Based on the earlier discussion, organizers will now lead a goal setting activity
 299 where attendees collaboratively set an agenda for SIGCHI based on the needs of community members.
 300
- 301 • **Closing (5 minutes):** The remainder of the time will be reserved to review the actions taken by the community
 302 during the discussion and to enable attendees to make final social connections.
 303
 304
 305

306 10 RECRUITMENT APPROACH

307 Access-SIGCHI, ACCESSComputing and SIGACCESS are volunteer organizations with representatives across the global
 308 HCI community. Upon acceptance to the conference, community representatives will use their networks to recruit
 309 attendees who are not already regular attendees to AccessSIGCHI meetings. In particular, we will reach out to junior
 310
 311
 312

313 community members (e.g., students, post-docs, and junior faculty) with disabilities who will benefit the most from
314 CHI. Since CHI will be a virtual event this year, many attendees who may not normally be able to attend CHI due
315 to disability and/ or lack of funds will have increased access to the conference. We hope to reach out to prospective
316 community members through our wide network and take this unique opportunity to have an inclusive discussion at
317 the CHI conference.
318
319

320 11 PRIMARY CONTACT

321 For further inquiries please contact the lead author, Megan Hofmann at meganh@andrew.cmu.edu.
322
323
324
325
326
327
328
329
330
331
332
333
334
335
336
337
338
339
340
341
342
343
344
345
346
347
348
349
350
351
352
353
354
355
356
357
358
359
360
361
362
363
364