



Commonwealth
Office of Digital Experience

07/31/2025

Digital Accessibility Program

Centralized Support for the Commonwealth

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Background



Definitions

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Title II (1990) – A federal law that requires state and local governments to ensure digital services, websites, and electronic communications are accessible to individuals with disabilities, ensuring equal access to programs and services.

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 (2018) – Industry-standard guidelines adopted to ensure conformance with digital accessibility best practices.

Department of Justice (DOJ) Digital Accessibility Rules (April 2024) – Federal regulations that implement Title II of the ADA, reinforce accessibility compliance, and emphasize the importance of inclusive digital experiences.



DOJ Rule Published April 2024

- **WCAG 2.1 as the Standard:** Adopted as the mandatory minimum accessibility standard for state and local governments, with limited exceptions.
- **April 24, 2026 Deadline:** The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (COPA) must work to ensure all web content and mobile apps meet WCAG 2.1 Level AA compliance, whether directly managed or through third-party vendors.
- **DOJ's Tailored Compliance Approach:** Recognizes that 100% compliance at all times is unrealistic, emphasizing practical, ongoing improvements over time.
- **Digital Accessibility Program Commitment:** Demonstrates COPA's long-term strategy to enhance accessibility, aligning closely with the recently proposed state legislation (HB 485 of 2025), with key considerations.

Why should we do this?

Inclusive Public Services

Ensures equitable access to government services, information, and resources for all residents, including those with disabilities.

Risk Reduction & Compliance

Strengthens adherence to federal accessibility laws, minimizing legal risks while reinforcing a commitment to equity and inclusion.

Operational Efficiency

Investing in accessibility from the start reduces the need for costly retrofits and future accommodations.

Leadership Opportunity

Positions us as national leaders in digital accessibility, demonstrating our commitment to continuous improvement.



Introducing Digital Accessibility

Accessibility should be “baked in”

Accessibility Baked Right In

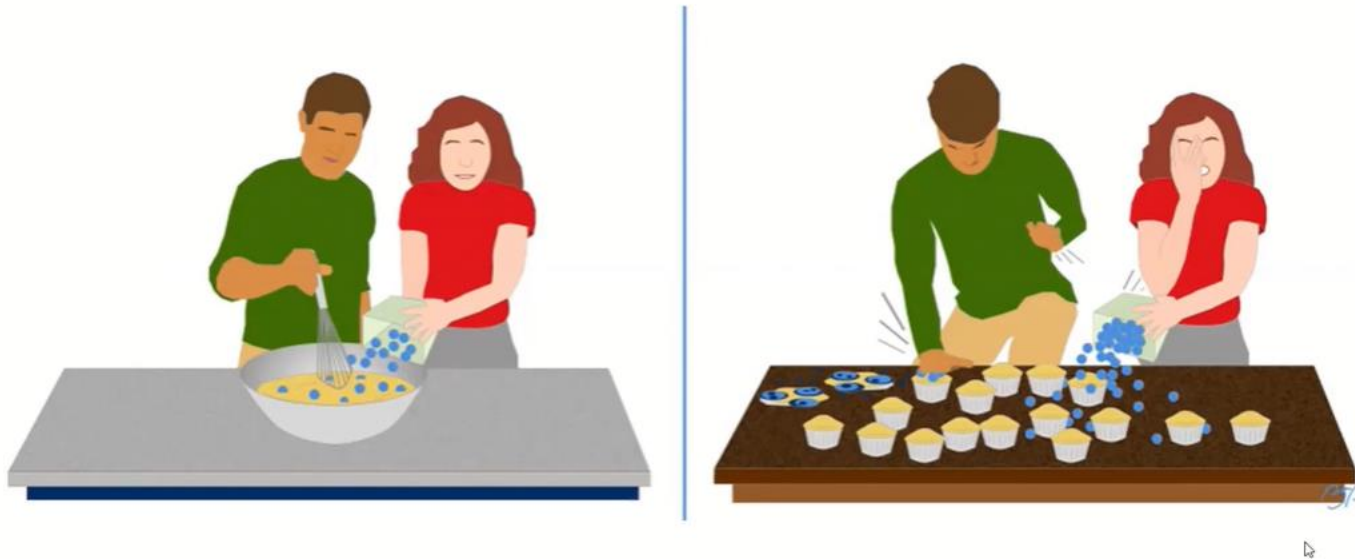


Illustration by Brian Parsons, UX Designer for Sony PlayStation.

<http://www.bpdesigns.net/> or <https://www.linkedin.com/in/brianjhparsons/>

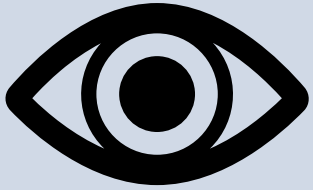
It's easier to address accessibility at the start of projects.

Everyone plays a part in making digital content accessible. Designers, developers and content folks all play an important part.



Principles of Digital Accessibility

P



Perceivable

O



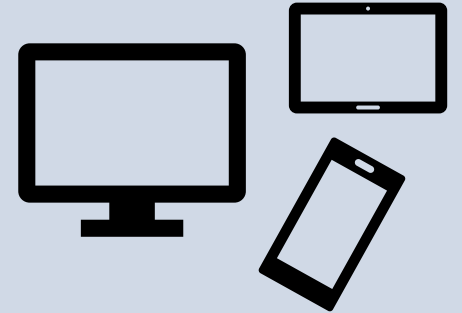
Operable

U



Understandable

R



Robust

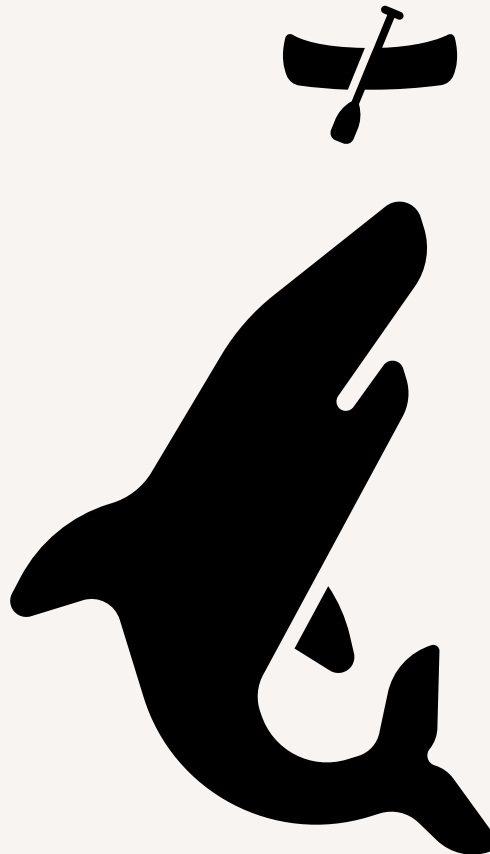
Bite Sized Pieces

An overview of your accessibility test might say 1,000 issues.

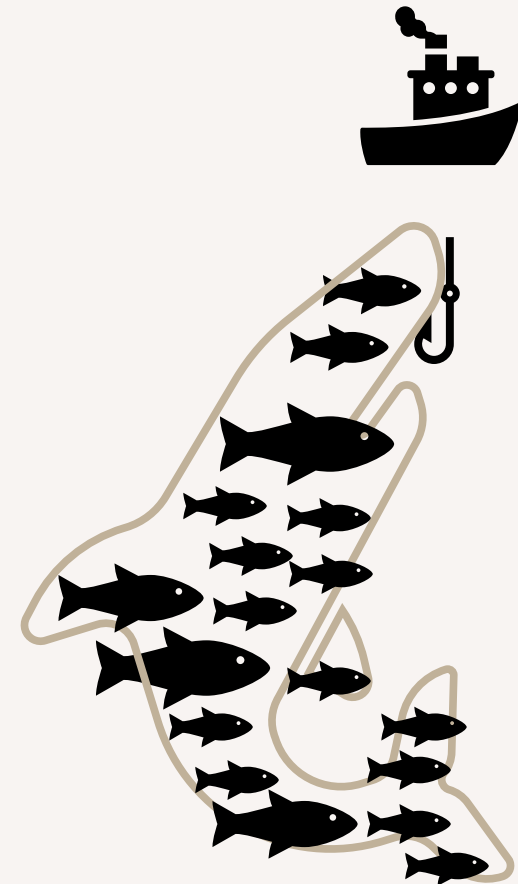
Chances are you have templates, re-used code and global components that can be changed once and impact many pages.

Often, some of the most impactful changes require very little work.

What it seems like



What it really is



Alternative text (alt text) for images

- Good: “Green northern lights from the aurora swirl in the sky while turning brighter near the horizon.”
- Not great: alt=“Night sky”
- Awful: alt=“pic04876.jpg”

Decorative images, like background images, that offer no information can be marked with alt=“”



Color Contrast

- Refers to how colors interact with each other.
- Ideally brand standards would make it easy to pair light colors and dark colors.
- Contrast is measured in terms of ratio XX:1. The higher the ratio, the better the color contrast.

Examples:

Good:

Dark blue text on a light blue background is a ratio of 8.6:1

OK:

Medium blue text on a light blue background is a ratio of 4.75:1

Failing:

Lighter blue text on a light blue background is a ratio of 3.54:1



Proper Heading Structure

- Headings go down in order of importance from <h1> to <h6>.
- Headings need to be both semantically correct and visually correct.

Page Title = <h1>

Section Heading = <h2>

Sub-section = <h3>

Paragraph text = <p>

Second Section Heading = <h2>

**Headings help
screen readers on
webpages like a
table of contents
for a book.**



What We've Built

Creating Partnerships

Business Relationship Management: Driving Accessibility Collaboration

- **Strategic Engagement** – Secured IT DC CIO and partner buy-in, ensuring alignment with accessibility initiatives.
- **Portfolio Manager Support** – Actively collaborating with IT DC Accessibility Teams, established regular touchpoints, and prioritizing work.
- **Impact-Driven Prioritization** – Focusing on High Impact Service Provider (HISP) applications and high-use services to maximize accessibility benefits.
- **Efficiency and Innovation** – Developing tools to accelerate testing and optimize resources.
- **Escalation & Issue Resolution** – Acting as a key escalation point to remove accessibility roadblocks.

Communities of Practice

Digital Content Creators

Collaborative space for employees involved in creating, managing, and improving digital content.

Audience

Graphic Designers
Artists/Illustrators
Editors
Digital Directors

IT Delivery Centers

Dedicated forum for employees focused on creating more digitally accessible applications.

Audience

Solutions Architects
Developers
Project Managers
QA Testers



Governance

Strategic Oversight & Accountability

Ensures transparency, strategic alignment, and risk management through defined leadership roles.

Decision-Making & Resource Allocation

Facilitates efficient decisions, secures funding, and prioritizes accessibility initiatives.

Compliance Monitoring & Continuous Improvement

Uses audits, testing, and reporting to drive ongoing accessibility advancements.



Roles and Responsibilities

Agencies

Accountable for their applications meeting standards based on the recommendations provided to them by IT DCs and OA / IT.

IT DCs

Responsible for application reviews, remediation planning, accessibility testing, and stakeholder collaboration to document compliance and recommend system improvements.

OA / IT

Ensures accessibility compliance through tools, training, governance, tracking, and reporting while assisting IT DCs with remediation workplans and removing roadblocks.



Risk Management

Transparent Reporting: Visibility into Accessibility Risk

- **Accessibility Maturity** – Established a baseline for each IT DC to track progress.
- **Ongoing Measurement** – Monitoring maturity growth and risk levels through application compliance scores.
- **Access to Reporting Tool** – Key stakeholders have risk visibility:
 - OA/IT CIO & CODE PA Executive Director
 - CODE PA Accessibility Program Team
 - IT DC CIOs and Accessibility Teams
 - Agency Partners (Coming Soon)



Lean Tools for Faster Testing and Better Results

- **Lean Testing:** Developed a streamlined manual testing methodology.
 - **Efficiency:** Aiming to cut manual testing time by 80% while detecting key issues.
 - **Adaptation:** Updated AMP Spot Check to align with new testing methods.
- **Enhanced Clarity:** Improved AMP testing results for easier understanding.
 - **Effective Fixes:** Delivers meaningful code corrections from automated testing.
 - **Better Planning:** Provides more accurate data for remediation efforts.



Where We are Going

Future Goals

Strategic Roadmap

Coordinating IT DC partners through a structured project roadmap.

Standardized Testing

Aligning baseline testing efforts for prioritized applications.

Sustainable Accessibility

Integrating accessibility into modernization, optimizing resources, and training IT teams.

Policy & Tools Optimization

Simplifying digital accessibility policy and improving tools based on user feedback.



Resources and Tools

Resources & Tools

Disclaimer: This presentation is intended to be informative only and that the grantees should consult their solicitors/lawyers regarding legal requirements and compliance. Any tools listed here are for informational purposes only and not endorsed by the Commonwealth, nor are these tools representative of the Commonwealth.

Learning about digital accessibility is an ongoing journey.

- Something for everyone - [Arizona State IT Accessibility site](#)
- [Teach Access Skills Hiring Toolkit](#)
- [Section 508 site on how to create digitally accessible products](#)
- [Official WCAG accessibility standards](#)
- [Department of Homeland Security's Trusted Tester program](#)
- [Color contrast checker](#)



Thank you! Questions?