



CENTER FOR
TECH AND
CIVIC LIFE

Accessible Communication for Election Offices

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OVERVIEW

Accessible Communication for Election Offices is a professional development course on how to make important civic information more accessible for people with disabilities.

Learning principles of accessible communication benefits everyone in your community -- not just people with disabilities -- and learning to make civic information accessible can make you a more effective, thoughtful communicator and serve your community better.



Resources you'll need for this training

- A pen and paper to take notes and doodle



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Learn more about CTCL professional development courses at www.techandcivicliflife.org/courses.



INSTRUCTOR(S)



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OUTLINE

- Introduction to accessibility
- Making your content more accessible
- Introduction to a free website accessibility test
- Group discussion



OBJECTIVES

By completing this course, you will:

- Learn the principles of accessible communication and how they increase public trust
- Understand how people with disabilities experience information online
- Establish actionable guidelines for making your website more accessible



INTRODUCTION TO ACCESSIBILITY

What is accessibility? What does it mean for something to be accessible? Why is accessibility important? A brief review of research on the subject helps get us started.

Who are people with disabilities?

Who are we discussing when we are talking about “people with disabilities.”

Before we go any further, let’s take a moment to talk about who we mean when we use this phrase: “people with disabilities.” If you close your eyes and picture people with disabilities, you might imagine somebody in a wheelchair going down the street, someone with a service animal on a bus or subway, or somebody who’s blind and using a cane.

That makes sense, but of course, these are often the most visible, physical disabilities.

As we continue on today, it’s important to remember that people with disabilities aren’t a single, unified population. Instead, it’s a diverse group of people with different needs. Even among people with the same disability – blindness, for example – there is a wide range of effects and ability. Plus, many disabilities are invisible.

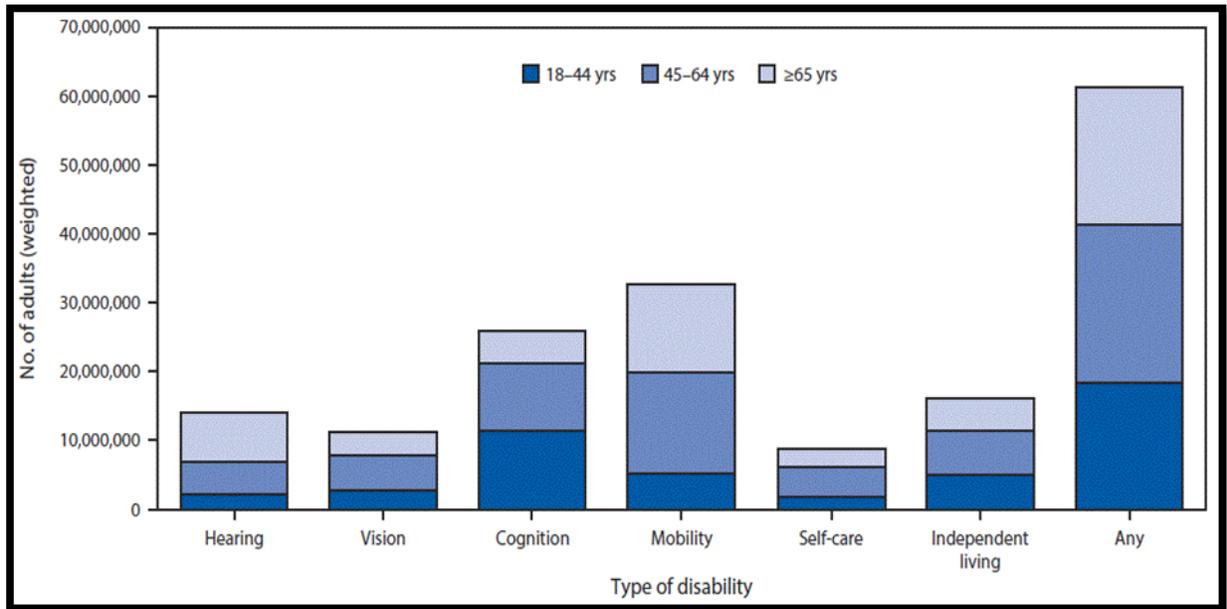
To determine if someone has a disability or not, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) uses six questions:

1. Are you deaf, or do you have serious difficulty hearing?
2. Are you blind, or do you have serious difficulty seeing, even when wearing glasses?
3. Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, do you have serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions? (5 years old or older)
4. Do you have serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs? (5 years old or older)
5. Do you have difficulty dressing or bathing? (5 years old or older)
6. Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, do you have difficulty doing errands alone such as visiting a doctor’s office or shopping? (15 years old or older)



Persons who responded “yes” to at least one question were identified as having a disability. Persons who responded “no” to all six questions were identified as having no disability.

According to the CDC report, it is estimated that 1 in 4 or 25% of Americans have some sort of disability. That’s over 61 million Americans.



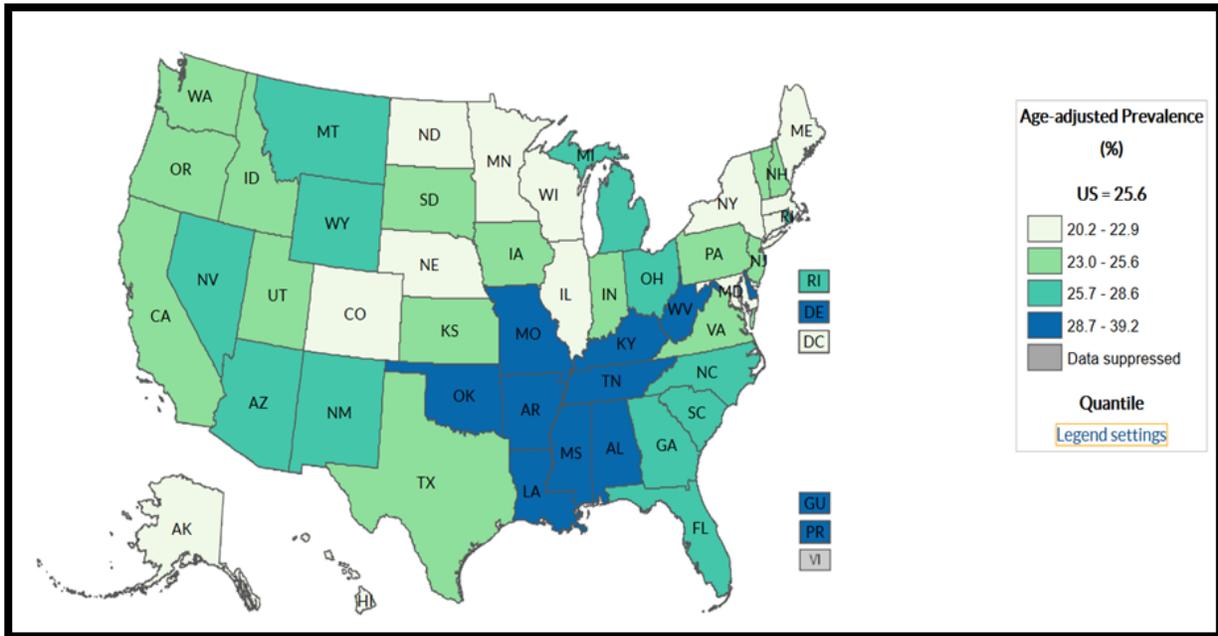
As you can see, mobility, at 13.7%, is the most prevalent disability type overall. This is followed by cognition at 10.8%.

While mobility may be the largest disability type overall, a large percent of that number comes from individuals who are 45 years old or older (and that may not be surprising as people age they are more likely to develop a disability). However, for individuals from the ages of 18-44 years old, cognition is the largest type of disability.

Again, no big surprise here, but many people with disabilities acquired them through the aging process. It’s worth noting, of course, that disabilities can be disproportionately concentrated among those who are especially old -- say 85 and older.



Another interesting facet of data from CDC is that geography can matter. This map shows the disability status among adults 18 years of age or older per state in 2017.



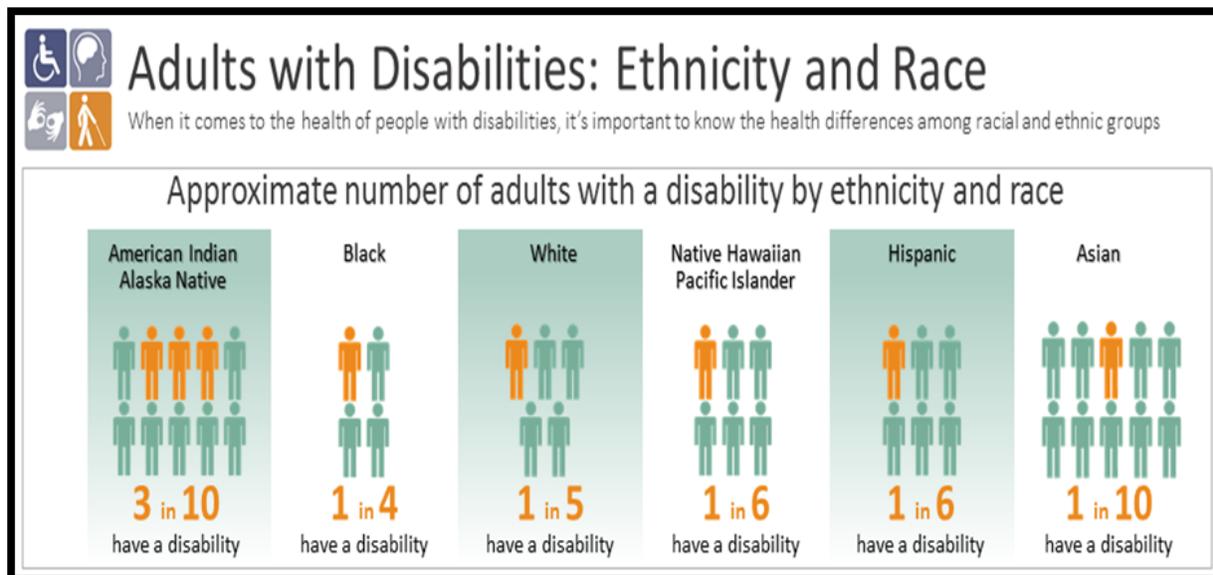
As the legend shows, the lightest green color is the lowest range (from 20.2% to 22.9%), while the blue is the highest (from 28.7% to 39.2%). You will notice that there are higher concentrations in states considered “the South or Appalachia”.

More so, in 2016 the American Journal of Preventative Medicine published a report that analyzed data from the 2016 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System study and overlaid that data onto a rural/urban classification schema from the National Center for Health Statistics.

The researchers found that adults in the “non-metropolitan counties” subgroup, which are counties with a population under 50,000, are 9% more likely to report having a disability and 24% more likely to report having three or more disabilities.



Moving from geographics to demographics. While the overall percentage of individuals with disabilities is 25%, that 25% is not spread evenly amongst all races and ethnicities.



Approximately 30% of American Indians and Alaska Natives have a disability, while only 10% of Asians have a disability.

How do people with disabilities vote?

Now that we know a little more about people with disabilities, we are going to take a closer look at their involvement and interactions with elections.

Utilizing data from the federal government's Current Population Voting Supplement in November 2018, Rutgers University published "Disability and Voter Turnout in the 2018 Elections."

Their data showed that in 2018, 54% of voting eligible citizens without disabilities voted, while only 49.3% of voting eligible citizens with disabilities voted. The researchers referred to this difference as the "disability gap".



The voting gap of 4.7% is in part due to lower voter registration among individuals with disabilities. Among people with disabilities, just under 66% were registered to vote, only 1.4 points lower than the rate for people without disabilities. Among those who were registered, 75% voted, which was 6 points lower than for registered people without disabilities.

	Disability	No Disability	Disability Gap
Registered to vote	65.7%	67.1%	-1.4%
Voted if registered	75.0%	80.6%	-5.6%
How registered to vote:			
At a department of motor vehicles	27.3%	35.6%	-8.4%
Went to a town hall or county/ government registration office	26.4%	18.1%	8.3%
Registered by mail	14.8%	14.1%	0.7%
Registered at polling place	7.7%	7.1%	0.7%
Filled out form at a registration drive	5.4%	4.4%	1.0%
At a school, hospital, or on campus	4.9%	6.1%	-1.3%
Registered using the Internet or online	4.1%	8.2%	-4.0%
At a public assistance agency	2.4%	1.1%	1.2%
Other	7.0%	5.3%	1.7%

They also found that eligible voters with disabilities registered differently than eligible voters without disabilities. Eligible voters with disabilities are more likely to have registered at a town hall/registration office, a public assistance office or registration drive, while they are less likely to have been registered at the department of motor vehicles or by using the internet.

This chart shows the data of why individuals were not registered to vote.



If not registered to vote, why not:	Disability	No Disability	Disability Gap
Not interested in the election or not involved in politics	35.5%	44.1%	-8.6%
Permanent illness or disability	25.7%	1.6%	24.1%
Not eligible to vote	6.1%	8.9%	-2.7%
Did not meet registration deadlines	6.1%	13.7%	-7.6%
My vote would not make a difference	3.4%	3.7%	-0.3%
Did not know where or how to register	2.9%	4.7%	-1.8%
Difficulty with English	2.2%	2.1%	0.0%
Did not meet residency requirements/did not live here long enough	1.8%	4.3%	-2.6%
Other reason	16.4%	16.9%	-0.5%

If we look at the reasons why an eligible voter was NOT registered to vote in 2018, we see that roughly 25% of people with disabilities did not register because of a “permanent illness or disability”.

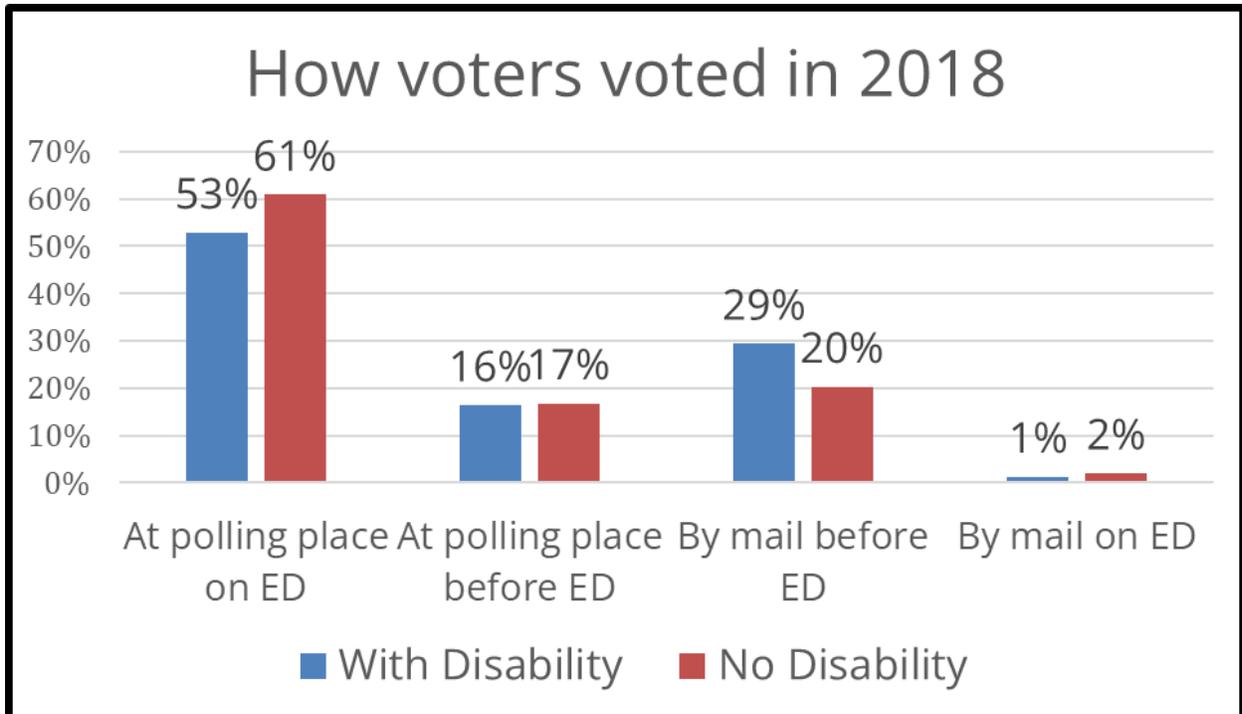
Not only can a permanent illness or disability impact getting registered to vote, it can impact a person’s ability to vote. About two-fifths (41%) of people with disabilities did not vote in 2018 because of an illness of disability. People with disabilities are also more likely to cite transportation problems as a reason for not voting.

In 2018, 14.3 million citizens with disabilities voted in the November 2018 election. This surpassed the number of Hispanic/Latino voters (11.7 million) and neared the number of African-American voters (15.2 million). Now, if we add that 14.3 million to the estimated 10.2 million voters who live with someone who has a disability, that’s a total of 24.5 million voters in “disability households” – equal to 20 percent of all voters in the 2018 midterms.



The Rutgers report also notes that if individuals with disabilities voted at the same rate as voters without disabilities, there would have been an additional 2.35 million ballots cast in the 2018 midterms.

In regard to how individuals with disabilities choose to vote, the data shows significant gaps in two methods of voting, at the polling place on election day and by mail before election day.



Among voters with disabilities in 2018, only 53% voted at the polling place on election day, compared to 61% of voters without disabilities. Voters with disabilities were instead more likely to vote by mail before election day (29% compared to 20%).

How can accessibility build trust?

How are accessibility and trust connected? Here I want you to think of accessibility as both for voters with disabilities, but also accessible for everyone.



There are three main areas where these two topics can overlap.

First, relationship building. You all are experts in your community. Through your work on drawing precincts and planning polling places, you probably know where voters live, work, and other areas of congregation. You continually work with candidates from every walk of life and with local political parties. You may have other duties that continually put you into contact with the people of your community. You are well adapted and well versed in building bridges and working with differing groups, whether it's a political group or individuals with disabilities. This can help create lines of communication that can build trust.

Second, accessible information. This is probably something that we encounter on a daily basis. When I start my work day, I do so by reading election related news. However, many news organizations have switched to a subscriber system and either offer nothing for free or limited access. Once I hit that limit, that article, that information is not accessible. So what do I do? I leave the website within seconds. I won't read the article, I won't share it, I won't interact with it or that news organization at all. I'm also less likely to go back there at a later time.

Accessible information is usable information and the more people use a source, the more likely they may be to trust that source.

Third, transparency. By making information accessible, whether it's for voters with disabilities or for everyone, you can help create transparency. Information that is public and accessible is reviewable by voters, by academics, by outside experts, anyone. They can look at that data and run their own assessments. Colorado has done this with their complete risk-limiting audit data to provide transparency and trust. There are no secrets.

As we delve into actions and steps you may be able to take to further improve accessibility, we hope you all continue to think of how accessibility and trust can support each other.



Principles of accessible communication

Obviously our focus here is on people with disabilities, accessibility doesn't just benefit them. W3, the World Wide Web Consortium, describes accessible communication as "essential for some, useful for all."

It's true that making things more accessible is better for literally everybody. To take one common, physical example, think of curb cuts.



These really benefit people with mobility challenges, but they're really nice for anybody to walk on, aren't they?

These principles we're covering come from the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines version 2.1, which are created by W3C, or the World Wide Web Consortium.



It's an international standard for making web content accessible. But even though these principles are about the web, we believe they apply to nearly all other communication, too.

The principles are:

- Perceivable
- Operable
- Understandable
- Robust

Why the focus on principles?

The reason is that even though accessibility is about people, it's easy to get distracted by technical aspects of it. Accessibility needs to be about more than just checking boxes. Shoot for usable accessibility rather than just technical accessibility.

Perceivable

What does it mean for content to be perceivable? Basically, it means you can use it with one of your senses.

For those of us who can see, we perceive a website by looking at it. If we can't see the website, we'll want to perceive it another way, so we'll use something like a screen reader, which will read the website to us. We'll perceive the site with our sense of hearing.

The ability to do what we just described came about through **transformability** – this is a hugely important concept. In order to make content as perceivable as possible, you need to make it as transformable as possible.

Information or content that's transformable can be perceived in multiple ways. So text could be read with the eyes, heard with the ears, or felt with a special braille display.

To make content more perceivable, here are a few top things you can do:



- Ensure transformability
- Make sure message doesn't depend on style
- Use semantic markup (<h1>, , etc.)
- Have alt text for images
- Have labels for forms
- Have captions for videos

Want more details on how to make content perceivable? Refer to WebAIM's great content on the topic: <http://webaim.org/standards/wcag/checklist#perceivable>.

Operable

Operability refers to all the things to do to operate a website and access content. One obvious example is interface tools, like a keyboard, a mouse, and so on, but navigation is also part of operability.

To make a website more operable, you need to make it so users can use the interface without any kind of interaction that a user can't perform.

To make content more operable, consider doing the following:

- Make your site usable by keyboard only
- Use a careful heading structure
- Include a "skip navigation" link
- Make page titles descriptive/specific
- Make link text descriptive (not "click here")

Want more on operability? Check this out:

<http://webaim.org/standards/wcag/checklist#operable>.

Understandable

True to its name, understandability is maybe the most clear of the POUR principles.



With understandability, you're asking if the information is easy to understand and if the way that you're supposed to use the website is easy to understand.

To make content more understandable, here are several steps you can take:

- Use plain language
- With complex content, include definitions or a glossary
- Make website functions predictable, obvious, consistent
- Help users avoid and fix errors (e.g., in forms and input)

For more details on understandability, refer to:

<https://webaim.org/standards/wcag/checklist#understandable>.

Robust

This is maybe the most technical accessibility principle. If a website is robust, that means that the content and web design is as compatible as possible with all users and all technologies, including assistive technologies like screen readers, and that compatibility should last into the future as the tech changes.

A lot of times this means having valid html in place that won't age badly.

To make content more robust, consider these recommendations – especially that final one:

- Avoid HTML validation and parsing errors
- Use markup to facilitate accessibility: forms, form labels, frame titles, etc.
- Speak with your website vendor

To learn more about robustness, refer to the WebAIM entry for it:

<http://webaim.org/standards/wcag/checklist#robust>.

It includes a helpful validator that you can use to test the robustness of your website:

<http://validator.w3.org/>.



Breakout: writing good ALT text

Let's put some of what we've learned about these principles into practice!

Alt text, or alternative text, is one of the most simple and important things you can do to make content perceivable.

Alt text, or alternative text, helps to make photos, images, and graphics perceivable for people who can't actually see them. Alt text helps people understand the purpose and function of the image.

What should your alt text say? Use these guidelines

1. Ask yourself "What information does this image add?"
2. If the image contains **text**, describe it. If it contains **visual information**, explain it. If it contains **sensory information**, describe it. If it contains **nothing new**, ignore it.
3. Avoid noise words ("photo of...", "this is a," "picture shows a")
4. Shoot for 5-15 words

Now, you practice with the 2 images below.



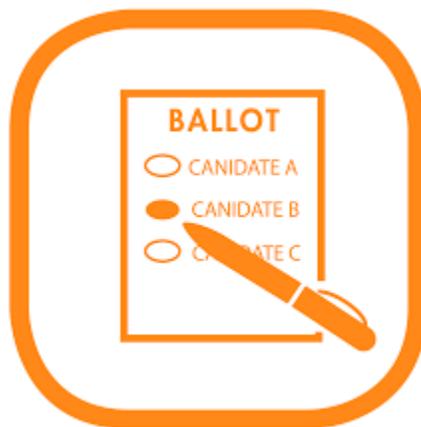
Image #1



Context: This image was pulled from a news story about Wisconsin's April election. The people in the photo are voters.

Alt="_____"

Image #2



Context: The context is that this graphic was included in a Tweet that informs voters that if they haven't received their ballot for the upcoming special election, they should reach out to the elections office.

Alt="_____"

Sources

Centers for Disease Control: "Disability and Health Data System"

https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/dhds/index.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fncbddd%2Fdisabilityandhealth%2Fdhs.html

Centers for Disease Control: "Disability Impacts All of Us"

https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/documents/disabilities_impacts_all_of_us.pdf

Centers for Disease Control: "Health Risk Behaviors Among People with Disabilities from Racial and Ethnic Groups"

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/features/kf-socioeconomic.html>

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<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/67/wr/pdfs/mm6732a3-H.pdf>

Digital Gov: "Benefits of Accessible Design"

www.digitalgov.gov/2017/05/09/benefits-of-accessible-design/

National Federation of the Blind: "Blindness and Low Vision"

<https://nfb.org/fact-sheet-blindness-and-low-vision>

Pew Research Center: "A Political Profile of Disabled Americans"

<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/09/22/a-political-profile-of-disabled-americans/>



Rutgers School of Management and labor relations: "Disability and Voter Turnout in the 2018 Elections"

<https://smlr.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/2018disabilityturnout.pdf>

Whitney Quesenbery: "Writing Great Alt Text"

<https://www.slideshare.net/whitneyq/writing-great-alt-text-38937551>

U.S. Census Bureau: "Older Americans with a Disability: 2008-2012"

<https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2014/acs/acs-29.html>

WebAIM: "Constructing a POUR Website"

<http://webaim.org/articles/pour/>



MAKING CONTENT MORE ACCESSIBLE

This section will provide an overview of how to make your content more accessible following accessibility principles.

Steps to boost accessibility

Set goals and expectations

This is an important first step as you consider making changes to improve your accessibility.

Perfect and everlasting accessibility isn't a reasonable goal. Instead, set goals and expectations based on your budget, your staff, and your technical constraints.

We think a lot of people in your position just get overwhelmed with the goal of accessibility, so instead of even making an effort, they shrug their shoulders. Make sure you don't do that.

Even if your materials still have some accessibility challenges when you're done, people with disabilities will probably be able to spot the fact that you made an effort to think of them.

Try assistive technologies

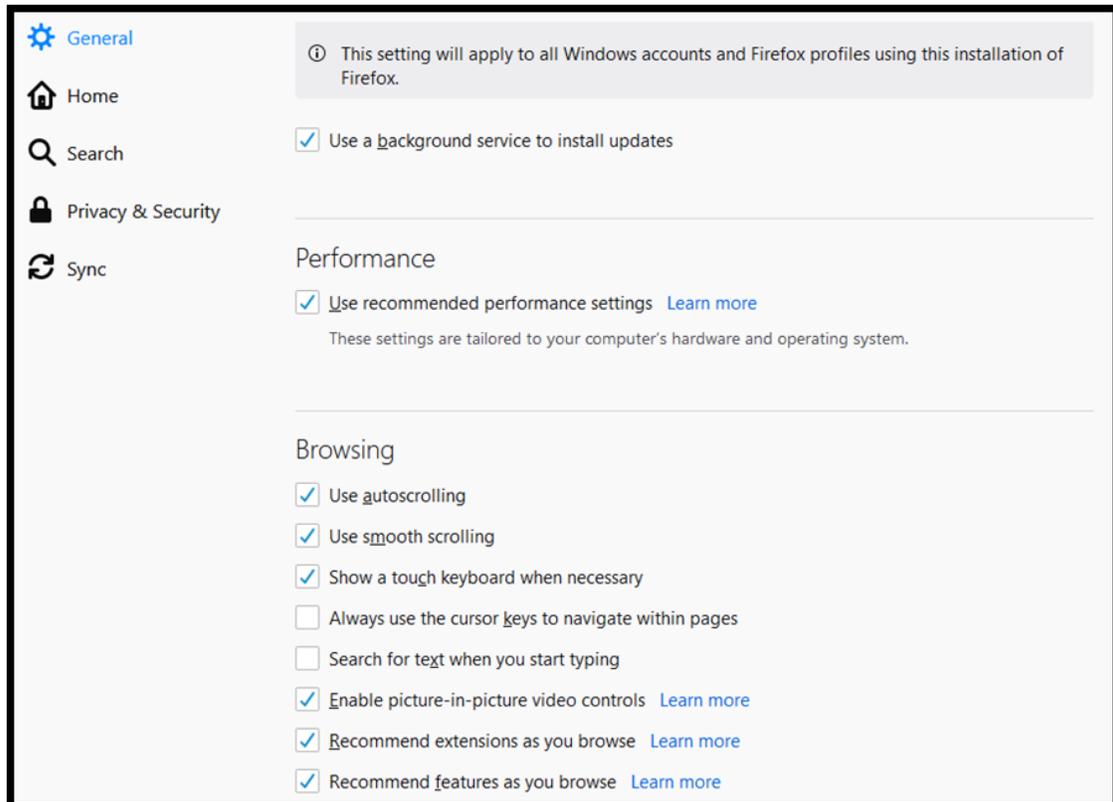
As an early step, practice empathy by experimenting with using assistive technologies to use your website or materials.

Of course, some assistive technologies are expensive and technical and might be out of your reach. But you can simulate the experience with common tools.



One way is to go to your home page and try navigating it using only your keyboard – not your mouse – and tabbing through. You may be surprised how the keyboard takes you on a different tour of your content than your eyes will.

Similarly, the Google Chrome browser has this speech function that you can use to get a feel for what navigating a website is like using a screen reader. Again, you might be surprised.



Power of RFPs

RFPs, or requests for proposals, are invitations to vendors or services to provide you with a product or service. In this case, it could be your website.

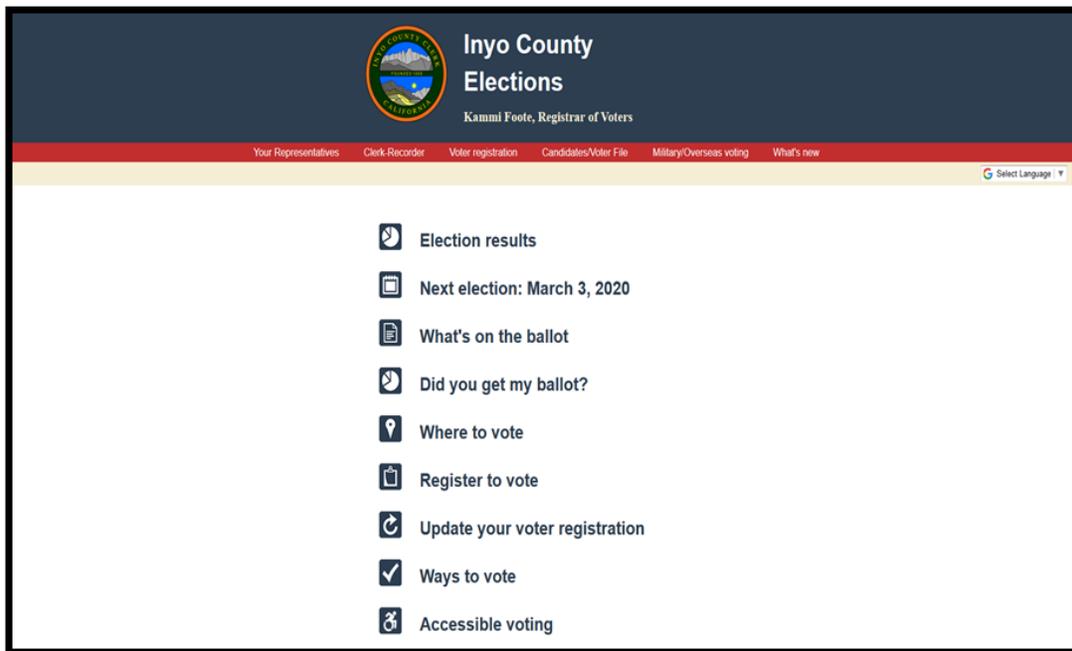


If you, or your city/county, are looking to design a new webpage, an accessibility feature or tool could be something that is included within your RFP. Include this in your system requirements & specifications page, where you provide details related to hardware and software requirements, state and federal certification, and compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. This can ensure that any bids you receive will include an accessibility component.

Use plain design

Avoid having an overly “busy” website. Use plain design principles to make your website easier to perceive and easier to use. Like all accessibility tweaks, this benefits every one of your audience members.

Below is an example of a website using plain design principles from Inyo County, California: <http://elections.inyocounty.us/>.



Use plain language

Similarly, use plain language to ensure that your communication adheres to the POUR principle of understandability.

Remember how the second most common disability identified by Pew is a collection of conditions related to cognition, understanding, and memory? Plain language is a powerful tool you can use to better serve this population as well as everybody else.

Want a little support with plain language? Check out the helpful and fun Hemingway Editor: <http://www.hemingwayapp.com/>.

Don't rely only on PDFs

We look at a lot of election websites, and something we often see is that they use PDFs to communicate important information, and those PDFs are the only way to get that content.

The problem is that PDFs are notoriously inaccessible to people who can't see. It's basically like a picture of text.

Instead or in addition to PDFs, use simple web pages, Word documents, Excel documents, or simple Text files. Try to provide options if you can.

Make links descriptive

Don't tell your readers to "click here"!

People navigating websites with assistive technologies often skip around, and links stand out as portals they can use to access new information. But for links to be effective for them, the links have to be descriptive. Make sure that your link text actually describes the thing that the link will take users to.

Instead, the links should be formatted something like this:



Fill out the online poll worker application form.

If you're interested in serving, apply to work as an election officer.

Check your contrast

Contrast is a simple way to make content easy to use and understand. Make sure text stands out clearly and boldly from backgrounds, and don't get carried away with too many colors.

The naked eye is a pretty reliable tool to check contrast, but you can also use contrast checkers like this one created by WebAIM: <http://webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker/>.

Add alt text to images

This one should be pretty familiar by now, but it's really important. Alt text makes it so that images, photos, and graphics are meaningful for everyone in your audience. It's worth the time!

Add captions to videos

Videos are a great way to communicate information, but they're tough for people who are blind or hard of hearing. You can do a lot to help, but one great starting point is just to add captions.

Recent changes in tech have made this easier than ever to do. Once you've got captions, your next step might be to create transcripts so that blind people or those with low vision can use the video.

Here are some more resources you may find valuable:

- DigitalGov's guidelines for [how to make videos compliant with Section 508](#)
- Deborah Edwards-Onoro's guidelines for [how to add captions and transcripts to videos](#)



- WebAIM's [discussion of captions, transcripts, and audio descriptions](#)
- Google's [tips for creating a transcript file](#)
- Facebook's guidelines for [how to make YouTube captions appear on Facebook](#)

Check font size

Font size is a really simple problem that's easy to overlook.

Don't use gigantic, flashing fonts, but use a font size that's immediately and easily readable.

Step back from your desk and take a look, or show your content to an older friend or family member, and see what the reaction is.

If you can add a function to your website that lets users bump up font sizes until they can see them well, that's great.

Publicize voting options

The emphasis of this course is on making information accessible, but we'd be negligent if we didn't make clear that there's special information you should make available to people with disabilities, and that's information about options they have for voting.

And don't just bury this information in other pages on voting by mail and so on; have a special page that can be a one-stop shop for readers.

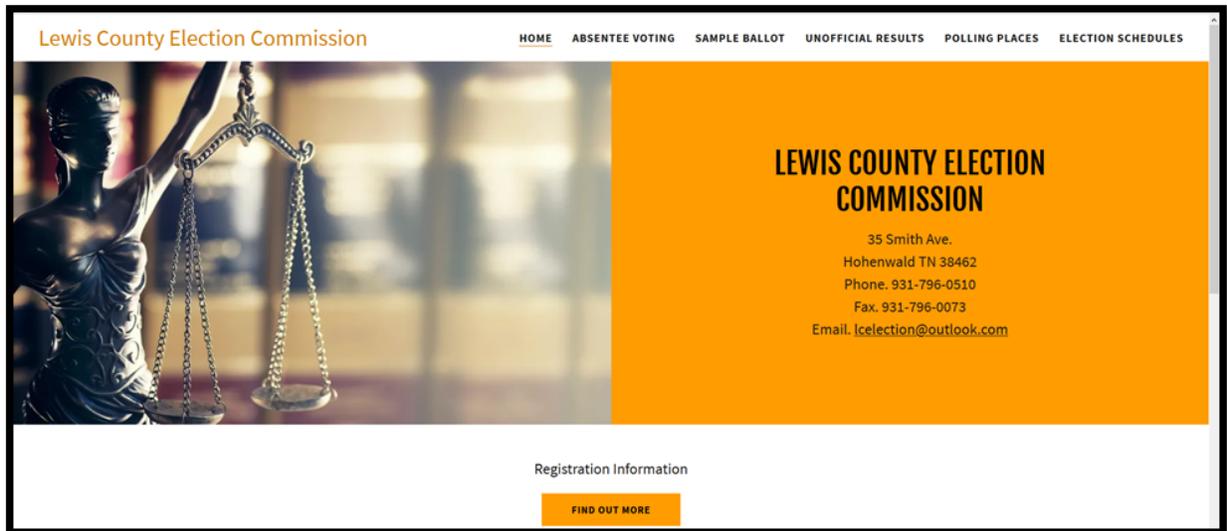
Make contact information prominent

People with disabilities appreciate being able to contact somebody instead of being forced to take the time and effort to use your website or other materials.

This is especially true for people who are a little older, who don't feel very comfortable with technology, or who don't have the latest and expensive assistive technologies to help them access content.



Don't hide your contact information at the very bottom of your page or at the end of a menu. Make it easy to find. Here is an example from Lewis County, Tennessee.



We understand your office probably isn't eager for more phone calls, but if you're able to answer an important question to help out somebody with a disability, you are going to feel awesome about it.

Test with users

Once you've made a change, test your change with real users. Of course, it's especially helpful if they are users with disabilities.

If you've never done usability testing, or if you've done it but would like a refresher, the Election Toolkit contains a great Usability Testing Kit with materials and guidelines to get started.



Usability testing kit

A collection of guidelines and templates to help you check the usability of election materials



Usability testing is a way to learn how easy or difficult it is for people to use something by observing them actually using it.

The resources provided in this kit can help you systematize the process, produce reliable findings, and generally expand your ability to test voting materials thoroughly with real users — before you launch them out into the world.

CATEGORIES

Communication tools
Community outreach
Polling places

WHAT'S REQUIRED

Technical skills



Time required



Resources



SHARE



www.electiontools.org/tool/usability-testing-kit

CASE STUDY: SACRAMENTO COUNTY, CA

VAAC Creation: As required under the California's Voters Choice Act, Sacramento County formed a Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee (VAAC). The purpose of this committee is to engage with Sacramento Counties to learn about barriers to voting and come up with solutions to enhance the voting experience and information.

Member Recruitment: We reached to our County Disability Compliance office, city agencies, Resources for Independent Living, Disability Rights California, Common Cause and also did a media release. Our committee includes individuals with mobility disabilities and people over 65. We are working to recruit members who are blind/low vision or deaf/hard of hearing, though we have had public participation that represent these groups.



VAAC Topics: The VAAC is designed to advise and assist in ensuring all voters in Sacramento County can vote independently and privately and discusses many different aspects of accessibility.

Physical Accessibility: This includes in-person voting locations, involving set-up, parking, and flow of traffic at vote centers. Also involved a review of the ADA checklist required for all locations and verifying that there is enough clear space and chairs for voters to ensure privacy and accessibility.

Voting Equipment: Involves providing an accessible option for voters to vote independently and privately through the use of audio, touchscreen, and braille keypad to navigate through the system.

Website Accessibility: We reviewed other counties' websites for ideas to update Sacramento County's. We decided to follow San Mateo's website per the member's preference.

Alternate Formats: Provide availability and form of large print voter information guides, audio MP3 and cd's, links to state info and county info in federally required languages

Accessible Vote by Mail and County Voter Information Guide: Made the document usable with a screen reader and other assistive devices

Outreach & demonstrations: We use plain language, graphics, and best practices from Center for Civic Design. We also reach out to different groups representing different needs. Our Election Administration Plan outlines events and practices.

Building Trust & Collaboration

Listen! Acknowledge comments made by the committee by repeating their comments to ensure points are understood. This also helps with meeting notes/minutes.



Be honest. Tell the committee what you can do and what is not feasible, be honest with expectations

Keep your word. This applies to due dates, sending out materials, follow-ups, everything.

Action Items. Keep a list of action items and follow-up with them at every meeting, this lets the committee know you are working on it

Transparency. Invite the committee members to work an election or to conduct logic & accuracy testing. Make them privy to your processes and procedures, as allowed by law.

Be a leader. If you are leading the meeting, don't be the note taker. Your job is to keep the conversation and ideas flowing and you need someone else to record the information.

Sources

Axure: "Accessibility and Prototyping: Axure in Conversation with Jennifer Sutton"

<https://www.axure.com/blog/accessibility-prototyping-axure-conversation-jennifer-sutton/>

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Center for Plain Language: "Five Steps to Plain Language"

<http://centerforplainlanguage.org/learning-training/five-steps-plain-language/>

Electiontools.org: "RFP How-to Guide for Election Officials"

<https://electiontools.org/tool/rfp-guide/>

Mashable: "9 Simple Steps for Making Your Website Disability Friendly"

<http://mashable.com/2014/04/22/website-disability-friendly/#QtLilgh38kqf>

Minnesota IT Services: Accessibility News



<https://mn.gov/mnit/media/blog/#/list/appld/1/filterType/Category/filterValue/Accessibility/page/1/sort/order/>

Sacramento County, CA: "Election Administration Plan"

<https://elections.saccounty.net/VoteCenters/Pages/Election-Administration-Plan.aspx>

Sacramento County, CA: "Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee"

<https://elections.saccounty.net/Pages/Voting-Accessibility-Advisory-Committee.aspx>

WebAIM: "Constructing a POUR Website"

<http://webaim.org/articles/pour/>

U.S. General Services Administration: Section 508 Portal including lists of tools and trading

<https://www.section508.gov/>



INTRODUCTION TO ACCESSIBILITY RESOURCES

This section will highlight accessibility resources that you can utilize.

Introduction to WebAIM

WebAIM is a nonprofit organization based at Utah State University at their Center for Persons with Disabilities. WebAIM is a support organization to promote accessible communication online. And WAVE is a tool they've created to test for common web accessibility problems.

WAVE is not a magic wand of accessibility. You can think of it a little like when you're writing a letter and you use spell check. It'll help you find some important things, but it's not a one-stop shop.

For instance, it won't tell you if you're using plain language, and it won't tell you if your alt text is helpful or unhelpful. So, by all means, use this tool, but take it with a grain of salt.

What we think is most helpful about WAVE is that it makes visible a lot of the markup code and infrastructural parts of your website that are normally invisible.

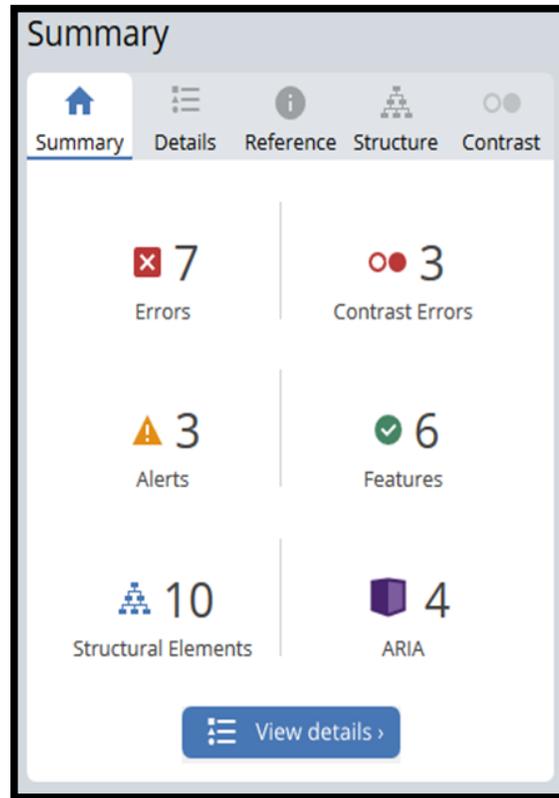
Using WebAIM

Start by going to <http://wave.webaim.org/> and enter the URL for the web page you'd like to test. Press enter or click the arrow to begin the test.

WAVE will then show you the results of the test. On the right is your web page with notations added. On the left is a toolbar that displays information about your accessibility report.

Take note of the color-coded results in the toolbar's summary section, and when you're ready to learn more, click the details tab for more information.





You'll see that WAVE lists a number of features in its report: errors, alerts, features, structural elements, and HTML5 and ARIA. These findings are not all "problems"; in fact, some are positive results.

- **Errors:** potential accessibility problems that may be significant
- **Contrast Errors:** potential accessibility problems that are less significant
- **Alerts:** potential accessibility problems that are less significant
- **Features:** accessibility elements that are present
- **Structural elements:** findings regarding headings and lists
- **HTML5 and ARIA:** elements of markup in your page

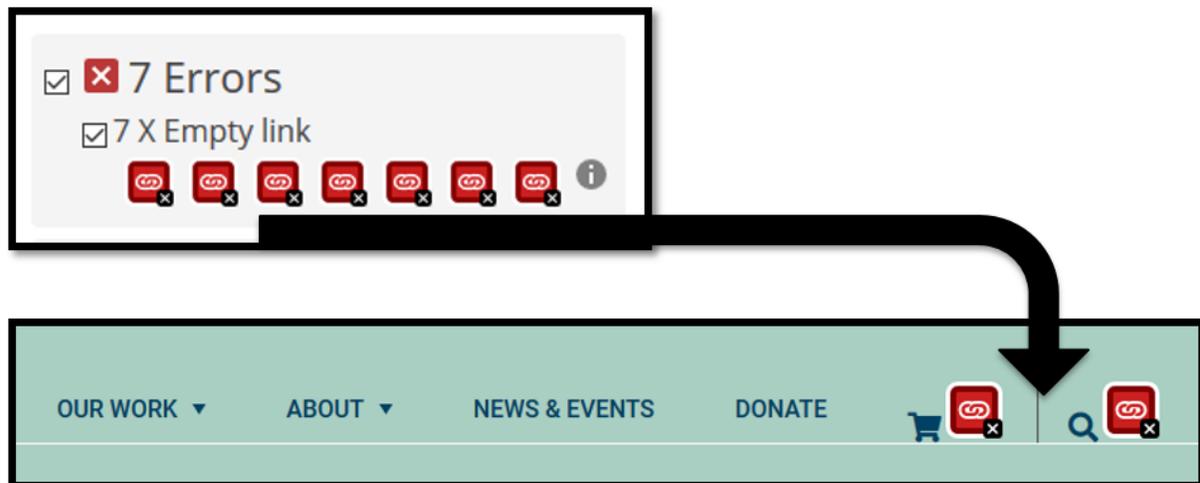


You'll notice immediately that the findings are expressed in technical language. Unless you're a coder or web developer, these terms will probably be unfamiliar. But don't worry: WAVE is built to help you understand the results even if you don't know the jargon.

When you see a finding that you want to know more about, there are 2 ways you can understand it better.

First, to see **the location of the element in your web page**, click the icon below the finding. When you do, WAVE will highlight that part of your page in the display on the right.

For instance, our first alerts in this example test is 2 "empty" links. When we clicked the label icon below the finding, WAVE showed us the links that are missing text.



In our case, they're links for our "cart" and "search". We can see that there are visual labels, but WAVE is telling us that the function and purpose of those links may be confusing. While the cart and magnifying glass may be visually understandable it may be confusing for individuals who use a keyboard for navigation or a screen reader.

The second way you can learn more about a finding is by **using WAVE's reference feature**. To find more information about the finding, we click the "i" icon to the right of the finding.



The documentation section opens, and WAVE displays straightforward information about what the finding means, why it matters, how to fix it, and so on.

Some of this content is still technical, but at least you'll have a growing understanding of WAVE's findings and their implications.



After you've taken a few minutes to review WAVE's results and read more about what they mean, what should you do next?

The answer is: it depends. Think about questions like these.



Is the finding a significant problem?

Not all of WAVE's findings are significant problems. In other words, WAVE may show findings that don't impede the use or comprehension of your website. If that's the case, you might not need to take any action.

Is the finding something you can resolve yourself?

Some issues are easier to address than others. WAVE didn't observe any missing alt text for our page, but if it did, that's something we could easily fix ourselves. You'll probably be in a similar situation.

With complex, technical issues, you may need to schedule a discussion with your IT manager, website vendor, or both. When you do, explain the results of the WAVE test and ask what, if anything, can be done to address the issues.

It's entirely possible that some of WAVE's findings will be beyond your ability to address. That's okay. Do what's possible, making a good-faith effort to make your content as accessible as you reasonably can.

Can you get a second opinion from a human being?

WAVE is just a computer program. To go from findings to feedback, consider doing usability testing with people in your community who have disabilities. If WAVE tells you something's a problem but a blind user says it's not, that should be an easy conclusion for you. Of course, keep in mind that people with disabilities can have dramatically different experiences with your content, so try to get feedback from several people if possible.

Additional resources

Cynthia Says is a similar web accessibility test. Although we prefer the features of WebAIM's WAVE program, Cynthia Says may have features or displays that you prefer.



Try both WAVE and Cynthia Says and see what you think!

<http://www.cynthiasays.com/>



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GROUP DISCUSSION

As the final part of our course, we want to hear your ideas for improving the accessibility of your materials. What resonated? What are your next steps? What questions do you have for us?

Have questions after the course is over? You can email us at courses@techandcivicle.org.

