# Strategic Planning for Web AccessibilityGuidance for Developing a Plan for Your Organization or Project

A successful plan for web accessibility addresses many areas of your organization and projects, such as training, quality assurance, recruiting, purchasing, marketing, content development, visual design, and more. Accessibility is best approached as an integral and ongoing activity similar to other important aspects of website development.

**What is the purpose of this document?**

This document provides IT managers, project managers, small business owners, accessibility consultants, and others with guidance on what to consider in developing an effective web accessibility plan for your specific organization or project. When there is a need for more tactical guidance on fixing accessibility barriers for existing websites, please refer to [Improving the Accessibility of Your Website](http://w3c.github.io/wai-planning-and-implementation/improving).

Note that additional content regarding each **Key Action** can be revealed using the button beside the action. You can expand all such content using the following buttons:

**Determine Your Goal and Gather Support**

Strategic planning benefits from broad backing and support whether it is regarding a single project development or planning for broader organizational processes. Clear and realistic accessibility goals are easy to communicate, aid in overall planning, and are recognizable when successfully achieved.

**Key actions**

* Identify and document the project accessibility goals.

Define project accessibility goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-targeted. This helps to focus your team, clarifies what activities need to be planned, suggests how support can be best secured, and defines what deliverables are required. Goals may address the accessibility of a single website or online service, or may be more related to broader integration of accessibility into development processes and policies.

* Explore your organization's current approach, understanding, and view of accessibility.

Use how your organization currently understands and views accessibility to help refine what goals can be realistically achieved. Review any existing policies or process, and explore the issue with key members of staff. As well as helping refine your goals, this should also highlight what activities might be beneficial in promoting those goals and gathering internal support.

* Identify the key reasons for accessibility and, if needed, develop a business case.

Explore why accessibility has become important to help you prepare materials to persuade others and resolve resource prioritization clashes. Prepare a business case focused on key reasons to help in this process. Key reasons may also suggest additional necessary activities. For example, an executive directive to increase revenue by growing the website's reach to include people with disabilities, older people, and mobile web users will likely require more robust reporting of accessibility achievements and impact on revenue.

* Promote awareness within your organization, and seek interested peers.

Persuade other project teams with a stake or role in your organization's online presence of the value of accessibility. Individuals in these teams may also be able to take on some accessibility responsibility or be helpful in adding additional influence for the project goals.

* Secure commitment and backing, ideally from the executive and project management level.

Use your prepared business case to secure commitment to project goals, ideally by more senior management. This will simplify many issues down the line, especially when there are clashes in project or organizational priorities. Where you have limited influence within your organization, this backing will be invaluable.

**Related resources**

* [Developing a Web Accessibility Business Case](http://w3c.github.io/WAI/bcase/Overview.html) - Provides an outline of how incorporating accessibility can benefit your business or organization.

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**Establish Roles and Responsibilities**

Identify and appoint individuals who are responsible for accessibility to ensure that any accessibility related issues are not neglected and that everyone on the team knows where to take accessibility questions.

**Example responsibilities**

* **Marketing** - Ensure good accessibility practices within the brand or design guidelines.
* **Quality assurance** - Test for and track accessibility issues within the code.
* **Development** - Maintain code libraries with accessible components.
* **Purchasing** - Ensure that organizational accessibility policy is incorporated within procurement processes.
* **Acceptance testing** - Ensure that any agency-delivered website or component meets your desired level of accessibility.
* **Recruitment** - Incorporate accessibility skills within recruitment profiles.

**Key actions**

* Identify roles and assign responsibilities across different areas of the project.

Identifying key project team members who will have responsibility for leading accessibility initiatives is an important step towards ensuring proper representation from all aspects within the product line. In addition to these roles, assigning responsibilities that match the needs of the web project are an integral step.

Project areas such as design, content creation, development, and quality assurance all have an important relationship to implementing proper accessibility activities. Smaller teams will likely have as few as one person who will be responsible for accessibility. Roles that accept agency for the proper implementation of accessibility measures will help to ensure proper execution.

Identify key project team members who will have responsibility for leading accessibility activities within their area and to function as primary contacts for accessibility questions. Ensure there is representation from across all project areas such as design, content creation, development, and quality assurance. In smaller teams it is likely that one individual will have primary responsibility for accessibility.

* Assign responsibility to other organizational areas that impact on the provision of accessible websites.

For example, incorporating your accessibility policy into procurement processes reduces the risk that third-party supplied content or tools will introduce accessibility barriers. Consider other organizational areas such as information technology, human resources, marketing, organizational executive, and legal. Identify and appoint individuals to review policies and processes with accessibility in mind.

The success of implementing accessibility will likely include individuals with significant leverage in how methods are completed, such as senior management or an executive leadership. Where your website is subject to many different legislations, consider appointing a responsible party for each region. This role requires monitoring legislative change relating to accessibility and ensures that organizational policies are reviewed and updated appropriately.

* Communicate within the project and organization who the responsible parties are.

Responsibilities also include tracking and monitoring accessibility issues so that corrective action can be taken. Communicating how individuals outside the project can log accessibility issues will highlight an ongoing commitment to accessibility. For wider organizational communication aim to inform key members of management and teams involved in website development activities.

* Ensure all relevant stakeholders to the project, including third-party providers, vendors, or clients, are aware of the project’s accessibility requirements and expectations.

If you use an external company for the creation of part or all of your website then make them aware of your accessibility policy. The responsibility for the project’s accessibility will fall under the immediate role that is managing the project. However, responsibility means clear communication of what you expect in terms of accessibility and any additional accessibility acceptance testing.

**Related resources**

* [Accessibility Responsibility Breakdown](http://w3c.github.io/community/wai-engage/wiki/Accessibility_Responsibility_Breakdown) - Explores WCAG 2.0 success criteria by project role.

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**Develop and Implement Organizational Policy**

Establishing an organizational policy for web accessibility is a critical milestone in ensuring that web accessibility is understood as a strategic component of the organizational structure. Explicit policy statements document the commitment to accessibility and help to set expectations both internally and externally.

**Key actions**

* Identify any existing policies related to accessibility.

Review any existing policies and commitments relating to accessibility. They may provide a foundation for a more comprehensive policy. For example, there may be policies relating to work ethics, equal opportunities, diversity, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) that could be relevant. Reviewing existing policies will provide more insight on the organizational understanding and view of accessibility.

* Establish a policy stating your organization's commitment to web accessibility.

[Developing Organizational Policies on Web Accessibility](http://w3c.github.io/wai-planning-and-implementation/pol.html) provides details on how to develop your organizational policy.

* Communicate and promote the policy across relevant parts of the organization.

Acknowledge your intent by making internal and external audiences aware of your policy and commitments. Promote your policy internally to improve awareness for subsequent projects.

* Review related policies and procedures to incorporate the accessibility policy throughout.

Most organizations have policies governing both broad aspects of doing business as well as specific areas such as procurement or marketing. An effective accessibility strategy will develop statements that can be integrated into policies already in place. For example, your procurement processes would outline how externally purchased websites or elements will meet your accessibility policy and what acceptance criteria are acceptable.

* Announce your organizational commitments publicly for accountability.

Outline your organization's commitments in a public policy to help set expectations for your website visitors and reaffirm public accountability internally. This would be related to your organizational policy but in a format more suited to a non-technical, general audience.

**Related resources**

* [Developing Organizational Policies on Web Accessibility](http://w3c.github.io/wai-planning-and-implementation/pol.html) - Describes considerations when making simple or comprehensive policies for organizations.

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**Review Available Tools and Resources**

When planning a new website you will need to consider what standard organizational resources you are required to use and how accessible these are. Many organizations standardize IT operations using common development tools, design patterns, and code libraries. Review these resources and integrate accessibility improvements in order to efficiently achieve extensive change.

**Key actions**

* Identify and review web authoring tools.

Review how well authoring tools and processes support accessibility. In addition to considering how the tools help create accessible content, review how they might support content editing when used by individuals with disabilities. Content management systems (CMS) and templates have a fundamental impact on accessibility which may be difficult to change at a later iteration. Additionally, it is important to consider other processes involved in the production of other online content for your website, such as documents or video creation.

* Review organizational design and development resources.

Assess any organizational resources such as design or branding guidelines, content guidelines, standard coding libraries, or guidelines for online services. Aim to ensure that they are supportive of the organizational accessibility goals. Ensuring shared resources such as these are accessible will have a significant impact on any subsequent online projects using them.

* Research lessons learned from the development of other websites within the organization.

Identify and review any accessibility evaluations from similar previous projects. Aim to identify common good practices, and approaches that are known to cause problems. Seek out any accessibility resources used by previous project teams. For organizational change, evaluating existing websites will be an important early activity in understanding the extent of work required.

* Identify external sources of accessible information and examples.

Consider what accessibility information and advisory resources are available external to your organization. Websites, forums, mailing lists, and books are invaluable in exploring accessibility in general and creating accessible solutions. Build a library of these resources for project team members, ideally allowing for their contributions.

**Related resources**

* [Authoring Tool Accessibility Guidelines (ATAG) Overview](http://w3c.github.io/WAI/intro/atag.php) - Guidelines on assessing and creating accessible website authoring tools.
* [Accessibility Evaluation Resources](http://w3c.github.io/WAI/eval/Overview.html) - Resources and guidelines on assessing and reviewing website accessibility.
* [Web accessibility tutorials](http://w3c.github.io/WAI/tutorials/) - Guidance on how to create websites that meet WCAG.
* [Before and After Demonstration (BAD)](http://w3c.github.io/WAI/demos/bad/) - Shows an inaccessible website and a retrofitted accessible version of the same website.

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**Assess Skills and Deliver Training**

The ability to create an accessible website is largely dependent on the skills and expertise of the team of designers, developers, and content creators. A frequent cause of accessibility barriers is simply the lack of awareness of the subject. Aim to develop more understanding of the need and value of accessibility, as well as improving the skills of key personnel.

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**Example training sessions**

* **Benefits of accessible websites** for management.
* **Introduction to accessibility** for many departments, such as HR.
* **Visual design and accessibility** for designers and marketing.
* **Accessible web development** for programmers and developers.
* **Writing accessible content** for non-technical content authors.

**Key actions**

* Assess expertise and motivation of key project personnel.

Carry out an evaluation of technical, design, and content creation staff. Aim to identify what, if any, gaps in understanding and expertise exist. Also consider how motivated team members are to deliver accessible solutions. Use this information to create training solutions that respond to the needs of your team.Regularly identifying areas for improvement by team members can strengthen the website accessibility.

* Budget and plan general awareness raising and targeted skills building training for team members.

All team members, including peer project managers, will benefit from training that promotes general accessibility understanding and awareness. Depending on the size of your team and scope of your project, you may consider targeting training for a specific key group, individual or even all team members. For example, front-end developers receive training that differs from content creators. Consider on-going training at regular intervals to evolve the expertise and keep team knowledge up-to-date. Adopt developed training more broadly as part of your training offering.

* Consider the potential need to recruit personnel with specific accessibility expertise.

Target recruitment for personnel with particular accessibility expertise. Use new experienced staff to boost the overall skills already within the team. They can help develop or deliver training sessions, or act as mentors to help build the skills of key team members.

* Include accessibility requirements as standard criteria in the recruitment process.

As your organization develops, projects will benefit from accessibility recruitment requirements being incorporated into recruitment criteria. This helps build and maintain the overall skill level and capabilities across the organization.

**Related resources**

* [Developing Web Accessibility Presentations and Training](http://w3c.github.io/WAI/training/Overview.html) - Helps you develop presentations and training on web accessibility.
* [Web accessibility tutorials](http://w3c.github.io/WAI/tutorials/) - Guidance on how to create websites that meet WCAG.

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**Integrate into Project Life Cycle**

Regardless of your development methodology, integrate accessibility throughout the project from early planning to final deployment. This may be accomplished by comprehensive evaluations at key milestones, or more lightweight reviews following each sprint. Start early in the process to reduce the risk of being constrained by early design decisions that become expensive to change later in the project. Promote accessibility within the team as a positive challenge to encourage creative thinking of accessible solutions.

**Key actions**

* Start early and factor for iterative checks.

Start early to increase the positive impact for target audiences, reduce costs, and increase adoption of accessible design and coding features.

Run iterative checks to allow teams to explore different solutions for complex issues. The process of exploring solutions will develop more understanding of accessibility issues. Iterative evaluation will also reveal some barriers that only become apparent when other barriers have been removed.

* Evaluate all project design assets.

Review all design assets and resources like visual design and interaction concepts, wireframes, and prototypes. Identify barriers prior to beginning significant coding work. Consider reviewing resources such as personas, user stories, and storyboards. Incorporating the needs of users with disabilities into these assets at an early stage can help designers and developers better understand how people will interact with your website.

* Review accessibility solutions with key team members.

Have representatives from all relevant project teams review identified barriers. This helps create a shared understanding of solution constraints, such as organizational brand guidelines or authoring tool limitations. Where there are resource constraints, aim to prioritize the issues that have the greatest impact yet require fewer resources to address.

 and reviews. This will help to establish a baseline for creating a thorough examination and address areas for improvement prior to implementation that provides real-time solutions.

* Evaluate throughout the project and ensure a comprehensive evaluation on completed website.

Plan evaluations for key milestones or sprints throughout the development process. Key pages or processes and stand-alone components can be evaluated as they become available. Aim to ensure that what has been created meets the standards outlined in your organizational policy.

Encourage team members to attend testing sessions as this provides considerable insight into barriers and helps team members identify with the problems caused. Identified barriers should be reviewed by key team members to identify suitable solutions which should then be fed into the next development cycle.

* Plan for a reasonable gap between completion and go-live to address any final barriers.

Running an accessibility evaluation in the last stages of a project will increase the risk that barriers will be found when there is no time or budget to address them. Starting early and integrating the evaluations will reduce this risk. Even with an iterative evaluation approach it could be that barriers are only found when the complete site is tested. Plan for some final time before go-live to reduce this risk.

**Related resources**

* [Involving users with disabilities](http://w3c.github.io/WAI/users/involving) - Provides guidance on including users with disabilities in accessibility evaluations.

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**Share Knowledge and Outcomes**

Sharing what is learned as part of a project is key to ongoing improvements in accessibility. Keeping executives, stakeholders, key departments, and the broader organization informed increases organizational awareness and also ensures that there is practical knowledge available for subsequent projects.

**Key actions**

* Report to stakeholders the project accessibility successes and difficulties.

Keep stakeholders and management aware of accessibility progress made. Consider what information is most relevant to their needs and how frequently it is required. For example, if they are concerned with legal compliance issues then it is important to report on how well websites conform with your organizational policy. If their primary concern is corporate social responsibility then they may be interested in PR activities, publicity, and impact on brand.

* Report design and technical achievements and knowledge to other website teams.

Consider how successful approaches, techniques, and resources can be best communicated to other website teams. Sharing spreads best practice solutions and helps reduce the chance of the same problems occurring elsewhere. Use this as an opportunity to highlight the value of accessibility, with concrete examples, to help change attitudes towards accessibility. As knowledge of accessibility spreads through your organization, having a known platform for communicating this information can be invaluable as teams will come to see it as a go-to resource when developing websites.

* Create internal publicity for new website accessibility.

Share website accessibility achievements as part of general organization wide website communications. Aim to build awareness and highlight the organization's positive approach and the benefits it brings.

* Consider creating an organization wide accessibility monitoring and reporting framework.

Develop a standard reporting framework to help track and show accessibility improvements. When your organization has many websites, such a framework can be used to provide an overview of improvements and areas still in need of attention. For individual websites, having a standard reporting framework will help show progress.

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**Ensure Ongoing Monitoring and Maintenance**

Monitoring website accessibility is important to ensure that all the good work involved in creating the website is not undermined. For organizations with many websites and services an effective monitoring process is an important part of broader accessibility efforts.

**Key actions**

* Create a plan for regular checks and audits.

Updates to content and website maintenance work may introduce accessibility barriers so it is important to plan for regular monitoring. Create a plan for regular reviews of random sample content from the website. Ensure that clear responsibility is assigned for the checks and there are clear escalation paths for identified issues.

* Update publication process to include accessibility checks.

Aim to incorporate accessibility checks as part of your web content publishing workflow. This ensures that few errors are introduced and helps identify additional training needs.

* Implement a public feedback process for accessibility issues.

Feedback from your website users can be an invaluable resource in improving website accessibility. Plan for a clear and simple way to allow users to raise accessibility issues. Ensure that the process includes a suitable mechanism to respond to feedback. Ensure there is adequate infrastructure to deal with any queries and escalate to responsible parties for immediate resolution or inclusion in the next maintenance release.

* Schedule regular reviews and updates of policies and processes.

Following project completion conduct a review of organizational policies and procedures related to website development. Aim to update them based on how well they support the creation of accessible websites and in response to user feedback.

For example, your policy may say little regarding video transcripts and visitor feedback consistently highlights this as a problem. This could be addressed by improving your video creation guidelines and review process to include better instructions on transcripts.