



Web Accessibility



How the Technology Works

The accessibility of agency's website depends on:

- (1) Coding and applications used to create and display web pages, and,
- (2) Web browsers or devices that people use to view, navigate, and interact with the website.

A variety of technologies are available to ensure that the Internet is accessible for every person regardless of disability. For example, people who are blind or have low vision might use a screen reader that reads text aloud on a web page, and a person with a mobility or physical disability might use a program that allows them to speak commands instead of using a mouse or keyboard. To ensure that all assistive devices can fully access your website, agencies need to make their website design, content, and layout universally accessible.

How Are Agencies and Partnerships Using It?

Because 81% of websites don't meet most basic accessibility requirements, many agencies may want or need to take steps to improve the accessibility of their website. They may hire a consultant to do initial and follow-up accessibility audits of their website. They may also do their own testing using online web accessibility tools or screen readers to identify how their website would be navigated or sound with these tools. Once areas of improvement are identified, agencies might hire a consultant to make the improvements or have in-house staff make and maintain these improvements.

Agencies may benefit from partnering with local disability organizations and assistive technology centers for advice on website design and devices that will ensure accessibility. Even after a website is made more accessible, agencies should further test their website to identify remaining barriers to access. While agencies are encouraged to ask people with disabilities to test their website accessibility, the testers should be compensated for their time.

Benefits and Risks

- Many abusers may tamper with internet accessibility tools and devices to limit or prevent a victim's ability to search online for resources, contact services, or communicate with others. Abusers may change computer settings to shut off sound, decrease magnification, or remove other accessibility programs.
- If the computer and Internet is a victim's only method of communication, an abuser may use spyware software or hardware to monitor all computer and internet activity without the victim's knowledge. (*For more dangers about spyware, see the "Who's Spying on Your Computer: Spyware, Surveillance, and Safety for Survivors."*)
- Although email and instant messaging (IM) are not secure forms of communication for victims, for some people with disabilities, email or IM may be the easiest, most accessible way to communicate. Agencies need to plan for this possibility, know how to inform survivors of safety risks, and ensure that services are accessible.



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Things To Consider

An estimated 20% of the population has some kind of disability that limits their use of the internet. The United States has mandated specific standards for web accessibility under Section 508 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act. The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) has developed accessibility guidelines for complying with these standards. Agencies can use free web-based screen readers or website checkers to begin testing their website's accessibility issues.

- When developing or improving website accessibility to meet these standards, there are many things to keep in mind. Some website elements create barriers for screen readers and flashing images can be problematic for someone with epilepsy. Agencies should make it easy for a user to change font sizes and colors, access 'text only' views, and let screen readers "skip directly to content" past all header and navigation links. They should provide text descriptions for all images and videos and make sure the website is compatible with all web browser versions and assistive devices.
- Is the agency taking steps to ensure their website becomes fully accessible and remains that way in the future?
- Does the agency currently collaborate with local disability providers or plan to begin a partnership?
- Is the agency requesting funding for AT equipment? (*See also: the Assistive Technology tip sheet.*)
- Does the agency have policies and procedures addressing safety and privacy issues for web, email, and other online communication with victims?