



Accessibility for Content Administrators

Participant Guide

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Course Introduction

Course Description

Accessibility for Content Administrators is a two-hour, instructor-led training designed for government employees who have direct authority over public-facing digital content. Participants include website content administrators, social media managers, and department staff responsible for publishing or approving content to official Erie County web properties or social media channels.

This training is designed to establish a shared compliance baseline that includes common language, clear expectations, and practical skills that participants can apply to their work immediately. It is not designed to produce accessibility specialists; it is designed to produce informed, accountable content reviewers.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this training, participants will be able to:

1. Analyze and identify high-risk accessibility issues in web and document content such as non-descriptive links, missing or inappropriate alt text, improper headings, inaccessible PDFs, and layout-based errors prior to publication.
2. Evaluate link text, headings, lists, tables, and basic document structure to determine whether content is meaningful, navigable, and accessible to assistive technologies.
3. Apply basic accessibility checks and tools to assess whether content meets minimum accessibility standards before publication.

How to Use This Textbook

This participant textbook is a companion to the instructor-led training. It is designed to serve as a pre-reading companion for this training and a resource you can refer to afterward. Each module follows the structure of the training, with expanded explanations, practical examples, key terms, and quick-reference summaries. Throughout this textbook you will find the following recurring elements:

Key Concept

Highlighted definitions and foundational ideas that are essential to understanding the material that follows.

Important Note

Critical compliance information, legal requirements, or common errors that carry significant risk.

Practical Tip

Actionable guidance you can apply immediately in your content review workflow.

Glossary terms appear in **bold** throughout the text. A complete glossary is provided in Appendix A.

Key Terms

The following three terms used throughout this textbook are worth defining precisely.

Accessibility: In the digital context, accessibility means designing content so that people with disabilities and people using a wide range of assistive technologies can navigate, understand, and interact with it. This includes people who are blind or have low vision, people who are deaf or hard of hearing, people with motor impairments, and people with cognitive or neurological conditions.

Public-facing content: Any webpage, document, form, video, image, or social media post that is publicly accessible and represents Erie County programs, services, or official communications. If a member of the public can find and access it, it is public-facing content.

Compliance: Meeting the legal and organizational standards that govern how public-facing digital content is produced and published. Compliance is not optional and is not the sole responsibility of a central IT or communications office. It is shared by every person who has authority to publish content on behalf of their department or Erie County.

Module 1: Why Accessibility Matters

The human reality, legal framework, and organizational stakes of digital accessibility.

Learning Objectives

After completing this module, you will be able to:

- Explain why accessibility is a legal obligation for government agencies, not a best practice.
- Identify specific populations whose access to public services depends on accessible digital content.
- Describe the legal framework governing digital accessibility compliance.
- Explain the organizational and reputational consequences of persistent non-compliance.

Lesson 1.1 — The Human Case for Accessibility

Before discussing legal requirements and technical standards, it is important to understand the human reality that those requirements exist to address.

Inaccessible content does not merely inconvenience people. It excludes them from equal participation in public services. For a government agency, that is not an acceptable outcome.

Key Concept

Accessibility is about removing barriers between people and their right to access public information and services regardless of how they interact with technology.

Who Is Affected

The following are among the populations most directly affected by inaccessible digital content:

People with visual impairments: A person who is blind or has impaired vision navigates digital content entirely through audio using a screen reader. When images lack descriptive alt text, links say "click here," or documents are not structured with proper headings, the content is effectively invisible to them. Colorblindness, which affects approximately one in twelve men and one in two hundred women, creates barriers when color alone is used to convey information.

People who are deaf or hard of hearing: A person who is deaf or hard of hearing cannot access audio content such as videos, announcements, and recorded meetings without captions or transcripts. This is not a minor inconvenience. It means entire categories of content simply do not exist for them.

People with motor impairments: Some users cannot use a mouse and rely entirely on keyboard navigation. When websites and documents are not structured to support keyboard-only use, those users cannot access the content at all.

People with cognitive and neurological conditions: Plain language, consistent navigation, and predictable structure benefit users with dyslexia, ADHD, traumatic brain injury, and dementia. Rapidly flashing animations and GIFs can trigger seizures in people with photosensitive epilepsy.

Important Note

People with disabilities are disproportionately represented among those who need government services most. Inaccessible content creates the greatest barrier precisely for the people with the greatest need.

Key Concept: Accessibility ≠ Aesthetics

Accessible content is not defined by how it looks. It is defined by how it works for people using assistive technology. Structure, labels, reading order, and meaning matter more than visual design. Content that “looks fine” to a sighted user may still be impossible to navigate with a screen reader, keyboard, or captions. Before approving any piece of content, ask not just whether it looks correct — ask whether it will work for someone who cannot see it, cannot use a mouse, or cannot hear the audio.

Lesson 1.2 — The Legal Framework

Digital accessibility compliance for U.S. government agencies and federally funded organizations is not optional. It is governed by multiple overlapping legal requirements.

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act (29 U.S.C. § 794d) requires federal agencies and organizations receiving federal funding to ensure that their electronic and information technology is accessible to people with disabilities. Erie County receives federal funding across multiple program areas, which means Section 508 applies.

The 2017 refresh of Section 508 incorporated WCAG 2.0 Level AA as the technical standard for web content. This alignment means that for practical purposes, meeting WCAG 2.1 AA is the target standard for Erie County's public-facing digital content.

Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

Title II of the ADA (42 U.S.C. § 12131) prohibits discrimination by state and local government entities on the basis of disability. The Department of Justice has consistently interpreted Title II to include digital accessibility. A 2024 final rule from DOJ established clear requirements for state and local governments to make their websites and mobile apps accessible to people with disabilities, with WCAG 2.1 AA as the applicable standard.

For government entities serving populations of 50,000 or more residents, the compliance deadline for these requirements is April 24, 2026. Smaller entities have until April 26, 2027.

New York State Requirements

New York State has its own digital accessibility requirements for state agencies and local governments that supplement federal standards. Erie County's obligations under state law are in addition to, not instead of, federal requirements.

Important Note

There is a legal liability for digital accessibility non-compliance. Government agencies have faced formal complaints, Department of Justice investigations, and consent decrees requiring costly remediation. Proactive compliance is substantially less expensive than reactive remediation under legal pressure.

Lesson 1.3 — Why Content Administrators Matter

Accessibility compliance is not solely the responsibility of a central IT department like DISS. It is a shared responsibility that includes every person who has authority to create, edit, or approve public-facing content.

Content administrators sit at a critical point in the content lifecycle. What is approved and published through your queue is what the public sees and interacts with. A content administrator who understands accessibility requirements serves as a meaningful quality control point that is closer to the day-to-day content workflow than any centralized review function can be.

You do not need to be an accessibility expert. You need to know enough to:

- Identify the most common and highest-risk accessibility issues before content is published.
- Understand what to do when you find them.
- Know where to turn when something comes up that falls outside your expertise.

Practical Tip

Make it a habit: before approving any piece of content for publication, ask yourself the same three questions. Does every image have descriptive alt text? Does every link make sense out of context? Is the document structure navigable without a mouse? These three checks alone will catch the most common violations.

Module 2: Accessibility Fundamentals

The principles, standards, and specific errors that define accessible digital content.

Learning Objectives

After completing this module, you will be able to:

- Explain the four POUR principles and how they apply to content review.
- Describe what WCAG 2.1 AA conformance means for public-facing web content.
- Identify the most common accessibility errors in web pages, documents, images, and links.
- Recognize which errors carry the highest compliance risk.

Lesson 2.1 — The POUR Principles

The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) are organized around four foundational principles that define what accessible content must be. These principles are known collectively as POUR.

Perceivable

All content and interface components must be presentable to users in ways they can perceive. If information is only available in one format, such as visual, audio, or color-coded only, some users will be entirely unable to access it.

Practical examples:

- Every image that conveys information must have descriptive alt text.
- Videos must have synchronized captions.
- Text must have sufficient color contrast against its background.
- Information must never be conveyed by color alone.

Operable

All functionalities must be accessible via keyboard, in addition to mouse or touch. Users who cannot use a mouse whether due to motor impairment, injury, or assistive device must be able to navigate and interact with every part of the content.

Practical examples:

- Links, buttons, and form fields must be reachable and usable with the keyboard alone.
- Content that moves, flashes, or auto-updates must be able to be paused.
- Flashing content must not exceed three flashes per second.

Understandable

Content and navigation must be clear and predictable. Users must be able to understand both the information and how to interact with it.

Practical examples:

- Language must be identified in the document metadata.
- Navigation must be consistent across a site.
- Error messages in forms must clearly describe the problem and how to fix it.
- Abbreviations and unusual terms should be explained.

Robust

Content must be built to work reliably across a wide range of current and future user agents, including assistive technologies. A document or web page that works only in one browser or breaks when a screen reader is used is not robust.

Key Concept
 POUR is not a checklist. It is a framework for thinking about accessibility. When you encounter a piece of content you're not sure about, ask: Can every user perceive this? Can every user operate it? Can every user understand it? Will it work with their technology?

Lesson 2.2 — WCAG 2.1 and Conformance Levels

The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) are an internationally recognized set of technical standards for digital accessibility, developed and maintained by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). WCAG 2.1 is the current operative standard under both Section 508 and the ADA Title II final rule.

WCAG is organized into three conformance levels:

Level	What It Means
Level A	Minimum accessibility. These requirements address the most fundamental barriers. Failing Level A criteria means content is inaccessible to some users in ways that cannot be worked around.
Level AA	The legal standard for most government digital content under Section 508 and the ADA Title II final rule. This is the target compliance level for Erie County's public-facing content.
Level AAA	The highest level of accessibility, addressing the broadest range of users and use cases.

Level	What It Means
<p>Important Note</p> <p>When this training refers to "meeting accessibility standards," it means WCAG 2.1 Level AA conformance. This is not a best-practice goal; it is the required standard.</p>	

Lesson 2.3 — Common Errors in Web Content

The following are the most frequently identified accessibility errors in government web content. These are also the errors most likely to be flagged in a compliance review.

Missing or Poor Alt Text

What it is: Alt text (alternative text) is a written description of an image that is read aloud by screen readers. It allows people who cannot see an image to understand what the image conveys.

What goes wrong: Alt text is missing entirely, or it contains meaningless content like "image," "photo," "graphic," or the file name (e.g., "IMG_4821.jpg").

What good looks like: Alt text describes what the image shows and why it matters in context. For a photo accompanying an article about a county road project, good alt text might read: "Workers repaving County Route 5 near Orchard Park, with equipment and orange traffic cones visible."

Special case — decorative images: Images that are purely decorative (borders, dividers, background patterns with no informational value) should have empty alt text: alt="". This signals to a screen reader that the image can be skipped.

<p>Important Note</p> <p>Images that contain text such as infographics, charts, screenshots of text, or flyers with key information require alt text that captures the full text content of the image. An infographic that is not described in text elsewhere on the page excludes anyone who cannot see the graphic.</p>
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Non-Descriptive Link Text

What it is: Link text is the clickable, visible text of a hyperlink. Screen readers allow users to navigate a page by tabbing through links, and many users listen to links in isolation, so they are out of the context of the surrounding sentence.

What goes wrong: Link text that reads "click here," "read more," "here," or displays a raw URL provide no information about where the link goes or what it does when read in isolation.

What good looks like: Link text describes the destination or action: "Download the 2025 Income-Based Program Application (PDF)" or "View the Erie County Health Department COVID-19 Resources page."

Incorrect Heading Structure

What it is: Headings (H1, H2, H3, etc.) are not just visual formatting. They are structural elements that screen readers use to help users navigate documents and web pages. A user with a screen reader can

pull up a list of all headings on a page and jump directly to the section they need, much like a table of contents.

What goes wrong: Headings are applied inconsistently, skipped (jumping from H1 to H4), used purely for visual effect (making text look bold or large), or not used at all in long documents.

What good looks like: Every document and web page has a single H1 (the title or main topic). Major sections use H2. Subsections use H3. Headings are applied in logical order without skipping levels.

Inaccessible PDF Documents

What it is: PDFs are one of the most common formats for government documents and often include forms, reports, program descriptions, meeting agendas. These are one of the most frequently inaccessible formats.

What goes wrong: PDFs are scanned images of paper documents (completely inaccessible to screen readers), exported without accessibility features enabled, lack proper reading order tags, or contain forms that cannot be filled using a keyboard.

What good looks like: An accessible PDF is a tagged PDF. It has embedded structural information that allows screen readers to navigate it in reading order. Microsoft Word and Adobe Acrobat both have built-in accessibility checkers and can export tagged PDFs when configured correctly.

Low Color Contrast

What it is: Color contrast is the ratio of luminance between text and its background. WCAG 2.1 AA requires a contrast ratio of at least 4.5:1 for normal text and 3:1 for large text.

What goes wrong: Light gray text on white backgrounds, yellow text on white, dark green text on dark gray. These combinations look fine on a high-quality monitor in good lighting and may be completely unreadable for someone with low vision or colorblindness.

What good looks like: Black or very dark text on a white or very light background is always safe. Free tools such as the WebAIM Color Contrast Checker allow you to test any color combination before publication.

Practical Tip

The WebAIM Color Contrast Checker (webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker) is a free, browser-based tool. Enter the hex color codes for your text and background to instantly see whether the contrast ratio meets WCAG AA requirements.

Improperly Formatted Tables

What it is: Tables are often used to present data or organize information visually. When a screen reader encounters a table, it needs structural information, particularly header cells, to communicate to the user which column or row each data cell belongs to.

What goes wrong: Tables are created using tabs or spaces rather than actual table markup, header rows are not designated as headers, or tables are used purely for visual layout purposes (formatting text into columns that are not actually data).

What good looks like: Data tables have designated header rows and/or columns. Layout tables are marked as presentational, with no header cells.

Table Formatting: Dos and Don'ts

Do:

- Use tables to represent tabular data, not for visual layout purposes only.
- Define a header row using true formatting, not just bold text.
- Provide a title, caption, or other context to explain the table and its contents.
- Repeat header rows if a table breaks across multiple pages.
- Keep the design simple and easy to follow.

Don't:

- Merge or split cells, as this disrupts the row/column relationships screen readers rely on.
- Leave blank cells in header rows.
- Use unnecessary coloring and shading that may confuse readers.
- Rely on color alone to convey meaning.

Videos Without Captions

What it is: Videos that do not include synchronized captions are inaccessible to users who are deaf or hard of hearing. Captions also benefit users in sound-sensitive environments and those who process information more easily by reading along.

What goes wrong: Videos are published without any captions, or auto-generated captions are published without review. Auto-captions frequently mis-identify proper nouns, department names, program names, and technical terms. Publishing uncorrected auto-captions is a compliance failure, not a compliance solution.

What good looks like: All videos have reviewed and corrected captions before publication. For scripted content, an SRT caption file is created in advance and uploaded alongside the video. Video content on public websites and social media platforms includes an accurate transcript in the post description or as a linked document. See Module 3 for detailed guidance on video accessibility requirements.

Lesson 2.4 — Screen Reader Demonstration

As a content administrator, it is useful to understand what a screen reader does and how your content will be heard by someone using this technology. A screen reader is software that converts text and other digital content into speech or Braille output, allowing people who are blind or have low vision to access digital information without using visual display.

Common screen readers include:

- NVDA (NonVisual Desktop Access): free, open-source, Windows
- JAWS (Job Access with Speech): widely used professional screen reader, Windows
- VoiceOver: built into all Apple devices (iPhone, iPad, Mac)
- TalkBack: built into Android devices

When demonstrating a screen reader tool, pay attention to:

- How the screen reader announces images and how the difference between missing, generic, and descriptive alt text changes the user experience.
- How links are read in a list and how "click here" versus descriptive link text affects navigability.
- How headings allow the user to jump through a document and what happens when headings are missing or improperly applied.

Practical Tip

Using a screen reader tool, spend five minutes navigating a county webpage with your eyes closed and only the audio. What you hear is exactly what a blind user experiences every day.

Module 3: Social Media Accessibility

Platform-specific accessibility considerations for government social media accounts.

Learning Objectives

After completing this module, you will be able to:

- Explain why social media accessibility matters for government agencies.
- Identify accessibility requirements specific to images, GIFs, videos, and event content on social media.
- Apply accessibility practices to social media posts across major platforms.
- Use platform-native accessibility tools where available.

Lesson 3.1 — Why Social Media Accessibility Matters

Social media is not a supplementary communications channel for Erie County. It is often the primary way community members receive updates about programs, emergency information, and county services. For many residents, particularly younger adults and members of communities with limited access to traditional media, a county Facebook post or Instagram story may be the first and only way they encounter critical information.

Social media accessibility serves several overlapping purposes:

Connection: Social media creates a direct, responsive channel between government and the community. But that connection only functions if the content is perceivable and usable by all community members.

Immediacy: During emergencies, social media is often the fastest channel available. Inaccessible emergency information such as a video without captions or a graphic without a text description fails exactly the people who may have the most difficulty accessing alternative sources.

Simplicity: Social media does not require HTML or technical publishing skills. The accessibility requirements for social media content are learnable, repeatable, and can be built into a standard posting workflow.

Flexibility: Social media platforms support multiple content types including video, images, text, events, and stories each with distinct accessibility considerations.

Lesson 3.2 — Content Type Accessibility Requirements

The accessibility requirements for social media content vary by content type. The following sections cover the four most common types.

Images and GIFs

Alt text on social media: Most major social media platforms allow (and some require) content creators to add alt text to images before publishing. This alt text functions exactly as web alt text does: it provides a description of the image for users who cannot see it.

Best practices for social media image alt text:

- Write a clear, specific description of what the image shows.
- Include any text that appears in the image (don't assume the image text is readable).
- Keep it to two to three sentences; longer descriptions may be truncated by some platforms.
- Describe the context, not just the content, when context adds meaning.

GIFs and animated images: GIFs present two distinct accessibility concerns. First, they must have alt text or a descriptive caption, because the motion content is not accessible to users who cannot see it. Second, GIFs that flash more than three times per second can trigger seizures in people with photosensitive epilepsy. Government social media accounts should not post rapidly flashing GIFs.

Important Note

If important information is embedded in the text inside an image, such as dates, times, phone numbers, or program names, that text must be reproduced in the post caption, not just in the image. Many users cannot see the image text, and search engines cannot index it.

Video Content

Captions

Captions are time-coded text versions of the spoken audio in a video, including dialogue, narration, relevant sound effects, and music cues. Every video published to a government social media account or website must have accurate captions. Captions serve users who are deaf or hard of hearing, users in sound-sensitive environments, and users who process information more easily when they can read along.

Open vs. closed captions: Closed captions (CC) can be toggled on or off by the viewer. Most social media platforms use closed captions by default. Open captions are permanently embedded in the video file itself and are always visible, regardless of the viewer's settings or the platform's caption support. If you are unsure whether a platform will reliably display closed captions, open captions are the more reliable accessibility option.

Auto-captions are not sufficient on their own: Platforms including YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram offer auto-generated captions. These are useful starting points, but they frequently mis-identify proper nouns, technical terms, program names, and the names of county departments and officials. Auto-captions must be reviewed and corrected before the video is published. Publishing a video with known caption errors is a compliance failure, not a compliance solution.

SRT files: An SRT (SubRip Text) file is a plain text file that contains caption text synchronized with time codes. For videos where accuracy matters most such as public health announcements, emergency communications, or legal notices uploading a reviewed SRT caption file alongside the video is more

reliable than editing auto-captions after the fact. SRT files can be created in advance when a script exists or generated and corrected from auto-captions using free tools including YouTube Studio.

Practical Tip When reviewing a video before publication, watch at least 60 seconds of it with the sound off and only captions visible. If you can follow the content accurately, the captions are working. If names, numbers, or key terms are wrong, correct them before publishing.

Transcripts

A transcript is a written record of all audio content in a video or audio recording. Transcripts are required under WCAG 2.1 AA for pre-recorded audio content. They serve users who are deaf or hard of hearing, users who are deaf-blind (who can interact with transcripts via refreshable Braille devices), and users who prefer or need to read rather than watch. Publishing a transcript in the post caption, the video description, or as a linked document all satisfy the requirement.

Transcripts vs. captions: Captions are time-coded and synchronized with the video, while transcripts do not need to be time coded. A transcript can be a plain text or Word document that simply records, in order, everything that is spoken and any relevant non-speech audio. Because transcripts are regular files rather than SRT files, they are easier to produce and do not require specialized tools.

What a transcript should include: All spoken dialogue and narration, speaker identification where relevant (e.g., “[Commissioner Smith:]”), and descriptions of relevant non-speech audio (e.g., “[applause]” or “[emergency alert tone]”). If the video includes on-screen text that is not spoken aloud such as a phone number, website, or program name that text should also appear in the transcript.

Audio Descriptions

An audio description (AD) is a narration track that describes the visual content of a video for users who are blind or have low vision. Where captions make the audio accessible, audio descriptions make the visual track accessible. WCAG 2.1 AA requires audio descriptions for pre-recorded video content where visual information is not conveyed in the existing audio track.

When audio descriptions are required: A video that is fully narrated and describes what is happening on screen as part of its normal audio track does not require a separate audio description. A video that uses images, charts, or on-screen action as the primary vehicle for information without narrating those visuals does require one. For example: a narrated interview with a county official who describes their department’s work does not need AD. A video slideshow with background music and text overlays that are not spoken aloud does.

How to write an audio description: Audio descriptions should be objective and factual. Describe what a viewer can see: the people on screen, their actions and movements, on-screen text, settings, and any visual information essential to understanding the content. Do not interpret emotions or infer reasoning from what you observe. “A woman in a hard hat points at a road construction site” is correct. “An excited inspector surveys the project” is not.

Practical approaches: The most accessible approach is to build audio description into the original video by including descriptive narration in natural pauses during production. Where that is not possible, options include creating an alternate version of the video with a description track added or providing a

separate written text description that covers the visual content. A text description published alongside the video in the post caption or a linked document is often the most practical option for social media content.

Events and PDFs

Event posts and linked PDFs carry the same accessibility requirements as web content. Key reminders:

- Event descriptions should be in plain text within the post, not embedded in a graphic.
- Linked PDFs must be tagged and accessible, not just scanned images of printed flyers.
- If your event flyer is an image, reproduce the key information (date, time, location, contact) in the post caption.

Platform-Specific Accessibility Features

Most major social media platforms have native accessibility tools. Use them every time.

Platform	Accessibility Tools
Facebook / Meta	Add alt text to images before posting via the Edit Photo > Add Alt Text option. Edit auto-generated captions on video before publishing.
Instagram	Add alt text via Advanced Settings > Write Alt Text before posting. Auto-generated captions are available on Reels but must be reviewed.
X (Twitter)	Add image descriptions via the image attachment menu (the "alt" button). Platform max is 1,000 characters.
LinkedIn	Add alt text to images at upload. Edit auto-captions on native video.
YouTube	Edit auto-generated captions in YouTube Studio before publishing. Add a transcript in the video description or as a linked document.

Lesson 3.3 — Common Accessibility Concerns on Social Media

The following are the most frequently observed accessibility failures in government social media content:

Informational text in image files: Creating a graphic in Canva or a similar tool and posting it without any accompanying text caption. If a resident is using a screen reader, the post is empty.

Missing alt text: Posting images without using the platform's alt text field. This is one of the most common and most remediable failures in government social media.

Excessive or inaccessible emojis: Screen readers read emoji descriptions aloud. A line of five heart emojis becomes "red heart red heart red heart red heart red heart." Emoji strings in the middle of sentences interrupt the reading flow. Use emojis sparingly and purposefully, not decoratively.

Inaccessible hashtags: A hashtag written in all lowercase (#eriecountypublichealth) is read by screen readers as a single concatenated word. A hashtag in CamelCase (#ErieCountyPublicHealth) is read as separate, recognizable words. Always use CamelCase for multi-word hashtags.

Non-descriptive hyperlinks: Shortened URLs (bit.ly/xyz123) and raw URLs are not descriptive. Where possible, precede a link with a clear description of where it leads: "Learn more about the 2025 Community Health Needs Assessment: [URL]"

Practical Tip

Before posting any social media content, run through this five-point check: (1) Does every image have alt text? (2) Is text information in the post caption, not just in the graphic? (3) Are video captions accurate? (4) Are hashtags in CamelCase? (5) Does any GIF flash rapidly? If you can answer yes to the first four and no to the fifth, you're in good shape.

Lesson 3.4 — Additional Web Accessibility Topics

Keyboard Navigation

All functionality on county websites must be operable using the keyboard alone. This means links, buttons, form fields, dropdown menus, and any interactive element must be reachable by pressing the Tab key and activatable by pressing Enter or Space. The Escape key should exit or close dialog boxes. Functions that require use of a mouse like hover-only menus or drag-and-drop interfaces with no keyboard alternative are not accessible. Ensure there are no keyboard traps. These occur when a user can tab into an element, but they cannot tab out of it.

Multi-Lingual Content

Erie County serves a diverse population that includes speakers of many languages. Where feasible, content and services should be available in multiple languages. Embedding the Google Translate widget into county websites provides an automatic machine-translation option. While machine translation has limitations, it provides at least a baseline level of access for users who do not read English.

Dynamic Content

Pop-up windows, modal dialogs, tooltips, forms, and error messages must be screen-reader accessible. When dynamic content such as a form validation error appears on a page, screen readers need to be notified that something has changed. Tables, charts, and maps embedded in pages must include accessible text alternatives. All buttons, links and form controls inside pop-up dialog windows should be fully operable with keyboard commands alone, and the keyboard focus should return users to a logical location when a pop-up window is closed. Typically, this would be the same button or link that opened it.

Time-Limited Content

Wherever possible, do not impose time limits on content or functionality. Automatically updating content like carousels, news tickers, and live chat feeds must be able to be paused by the user. When time limits are technically necessary, users should be warned before the limit expires and given the option to extend it.

Module 4: Taking Action

Prioritization frameworks, remediation strategies, and a departmental action roadmap.

Learning Objectives

After completing this module, you will be able to:

- Apply a tiered prioritization framework to plan accessibility remediation for existing content.
- Describe action steps for building a sustainable accessibility workflow.
- Identify free tools available to assist with accessibility review and remediation.

Lesson 4.1 — Prioritizing Your Work

No department is expected to achieve full accessibility compliance across all content overnight. What is expected is a documented, systematic approach that starts with the highest-risk and highest-impact content and works outward from there.

The following four-tier framework provides a practical starting point for prioritizing remediation efforts.

Tier 1: High-Traffic, Essential Services Content

This is where you start. High-impact areas including homepages, program landing pages, service applications and forms, emergency information, health and safety content. These are the pages and documents that people use for the most important purposes. Accessibility failures in this tier carry the greatest risk to both community members and to the organization.

Tier 2: Frequently Used Documents and Critical Program Pages

This includes frequently visited documents and critical program pages such as senior program enrollment, budget forms, and park program registration. Because new content in this category is published regularly and reaches broad audiences, it is also where an accessible-first workflow has the highest immediate impact. Building accessibility into the creation process from the start prevents the accumulation of new violations.

Tier 3: Supporting Content and Archived Materials

Still important, but less urgent items include older program descriptions, historical reports, and past training materials. These still carry compliance obligations if they remain publicly accessible, but they represent a lower immediacy risk than Tiers 1 and 2. Resources permitting, work through this tier after Tiers 1 and 2 have been addressed.

Tier 4: Rarely Accessed or Soon-to-Be-Replaced Content

This is the final area to focus attention on and includes archived PDFs scheduled for replacement, inactive program pages, superseded policy documents. For much of this content, the most practical remediation is removal or replacement rather than editing. Retiring inaccessible content that has reached the end of its useful life is a legitimate remediation strategy.

Key Concept

Remediation is a backlog problem. New content accessibility is a workflow problem. These require different approaches on different timelines. Remediation must be prioritized and scheduled. New content accessibility must be built into the creation and review process before publication.

Lesson 4.2 — Content Remediation Practices

Use Accessibility Testing Tools

Free, automated accessibility screening is available for every major content platform Erie County uses. Please note that any testing or remediation tools that require you to download software or browser extensions are restricted and regulated by DISS. If you would like to download one of these tools, please submit an official service request before attempting to download anything.

- Websites: [WAVE](http://wave.webaim.org) (wave.webaim.org) scans any public URL and identifies accessibility errors, alerts, and structural features. Editor11y is the built-in accessibility checker available directly within the Erie County Drupal CMS — it flags issues such as missing alt text, non-descriptive links, and heading structure problems on live pages as you work, without requiring a separate tool.
- Microsoft Office documents (Word, PowerPoint, Excel): Use the built-in Accessibility Checker under Review > Check Accessibility.
- PDFs: Adobe Acrobat Pro licenses include an accessibility checker under Tools > Prepare for Accessibility. University at Buffalo also offers a helpful [PDF remediation checklist](#) which you can find in the Accessibility Team Site in SharePoint and in [Appendix C](#) of this document.
- Color contrast: [WebAIM Contrast Checker](http://webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker) (webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker) and the Contrast Checker bookmarklet for browser-based testing.

Important Note

Automated tools are not sufficient on their own. Testing by WAVE or the Accessibility Checker will catch a significant portion of common violations, but automated tools cannot evaluate alt text quality, assess whether link text is truly descriptive, or fully validate complex document structures. Automated screening is a first step, not a final review.

Manual Content Review

Before publishing any content, conduct a manual review using this checklist:

- Every informational image has descriptive alt text.
- Every link has descriptive link text that makes sense out of context.
- Heading levels are used correctly and in order.
- Color is not the only way information is conveyed.
- Text contrast meets WCAG AA standards.
- Tables have designated header rows or columns.
- PDFs are tagged and not scanned images.
- Videos have reviewed and corrected captions.

Test the Technology Yourself

The most effective way to develop accessibility intuition is personal experience. Recommended self-testing practices:

- Use a screen reader (such as VoiceOver on a Mac or iPhone or Narrator on Windows) to navigate a page with your eyes closed for five minutes.
- Turn on captions and skim video transcripts when reviewing video content.
- Try navigating a web page using only your keyboard (Tab to move forward, Shift+Tab to go back, Enter or Space to activate).
- Use a browser extension with a color filter to simulate colorblindness on content before publishing.
- If possible, ask someone who uses assistive technology to review content before major publications.

Lesson 4.3 — Advocate in Your Department

The following six action items represent a concrete roadmap from this training to departmental compliance. This section is about influence: what you can do to make accessibility a sustained practice in your department, not a one-time training outcome.

1. Share What You Learned Today

You do not need a formal presentation to share what you learned. A brief recap in your next team meeting, a forwarded resource, or a conversation with a colleague who creates content for your department is enough to start building awareness. The goal is not to train your entire team in one conversation; it is to plant a seed.

2. Review High-Traffic Pages and Materials

Identify your department's most-visited pages and most-downloaded documents and bring a prioritized list to your supervisor. Frame it as a plan, not a problem. Departments that document a remediation approach demonstrate good-faith effort, which matters in the event of a complaint or audit.

3. Propose an Accessible-First Workflow

Accessibility is easier to build in than to retrofit. Suggest adding an accessibility checklist to your department’s content review or approval process. Something as simple as a standing question before content is published: “Have we checked alt text, link text, and heading structure?” This kind of process change starts with one person asking the question consistently.

4. Ask Questions or Speak Up

When new content, tools, or platforms are being discussed in your department, raise accessibility as a consideration. Ask whether a vendor can provide a Voluntary Product Accessibility Template (VPAT). A VPAT is a standardized document describing how a product meets accessibility standards. Ask whether a new webpage or document has been reviewed for accessibility before it goes live. Small, consistent questions create culture change over time.

5. Champion Accessibility as an Ongoing Practice

Accessibility is not a project with an end date. It is a practice. Championing it means keeping the conversation going after today. It requires noting when something is done well, pointing out where improvements could be made, and normalizing accessibility as a standard part of how your department creates and publishes content. Section508.gov offers free training resources for content creators at every level that are worth bookmarking and sharing with staff who could not attend today.

6. Elevate Recurring Issues to Supervisors

If you notice patterns where the same types of accessibility issues appear repeatedly in your department’s content, or systemic gaps in training or process, document them and bring them to leadership with a suggested next step. You do not need to have all the answers. Surfacing a pattern with a concrete suggestion gives supervisors something to act on.

Key Concept

The goal is not perfection achieved overnight. The goal is a systematic, documented, good-faith effort that starts with the content the most people depend on and builds from there. Every improvement matters and new content getting it right from the start means the backlog stops growing.

Lesson 4.4 — Resources

The following are recommended free resources for accessibility review, testing, and training.

Resource	Description and URL
WAVE Web Accessibility Evaluator	wave.webaim.org

Resource	Description and URL
	Scans any public URL for accessibility errors and structural features.
WebAIM Color Contrast Checker	Webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker Tests color combinations for WCAG compliance.
Microsoft Accessibility Checker	Built into Word, PowerPoint, and Excel under Review > Check Accessibility.
Adobe Acrobat Accessibility Checker	Built into Adobe Acrobat under Tools > Prepare for Accessibility.
Section508.gov Training	Section508.gov/training Free training modules for content creators, developers, and procurement staff.
NYSED Accessible Hyperlinks Guide	guidance.nysed.gov Best practices for creating accessible hyperlinks.
GSA Accessibility Tools and Training	gsa.gov Comprehensive accessibility resources for government agencies.
WebFX Readability Test Tool	webfx.com/tools/read-able Tests content for plain language and readability.
SiteImprove Social Media Accessibility Guide	siteimprove.com Guidance on accessibility across major social media platforms.

Appendix A: Glossary

The following terms are used throughout this textbook and the Accessibility for Content Administrators training.

Accessibility	The design of digital content and technology so that people with disabilities, including those using assistive technologies, can perceive, understand, navigate, and interact with it.
Alt Text	A written text description of an image, embedded in the image's HTML or document markup, that is read aloud by screen readers. Alt text allows people who cannot see an image to understand its content and purpose.
Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)	A federal civil rights law (42 U.S.C. § 12101) prohibiting discrimination against people with disabilities. Title II applies to state and local government entities and has been interpreted to include digital accessibility requirements.
Assistive Technology	Hardware or software that helps people with disabilities access and interact with digital content. Common examples include screen readers, screen magnifiers, refreshable Braille displays, switch access devices, and voice recognition software.
Audio Description	A narration track added to video content that describes visual information not conveyed in the original audio, such as on-screen text, significant visual actions, and scene changes. Required for pre-recorded video content with visual information not conveyed in the audio.
Captions	Synchronized text versions of the spoken audio in a video, including dialogue, speaker identification, and relevant sound effects. Required for all pre-recorded video content. Auto-generated captions must be reviewed and corrected before publication.
CamelCase	A capitalization convention where each word in a compound phrase begins with a capital letter, with no spaces: #ErieCountyPublicHealth. CamelCase makes multi-word hashtags readable by screen readers.
Closed Captions (CC)	Captions that can be turned on or off by the viewer, as opposed to open captions which are permanently embedded in the video. Most social media platforms use closed captions.

Color Contrast Ratio	A numerical measure of the luminance difference between text and its background. WCAG 2.1 AA requires a minimum ratio of 4.5:1 for normal text and 3:1 for large text.
Compliance	Meeting the legal and organizational requirements that govern how public-facing digital content is produced and published. For Erie County, this primarily means WCAG 2.1 Level AA.
Decorative Image	An image that adds visual interest but conveys no informational content essential to understanding the page. Decorative images should have empty alt text (alt="") so screen readers skip them.
Heading Structure	The hierarchical organization of a document or web page using heading levels (H1, H2, H3, etc.). Proper heading structure allows screen reader users to navigate a document efficiently and understand its organization.
Keyboard Navigation	The ability to access and operate all website or document functionality using the keyboard alone, without a mouse. Required under WCAG 2.1 AA for all interactive content.
Link Text	The visible, clickable text of a hyperlink. Accessible link text should describe the destination or purpose of the link and be meaningful when read out of context.
POUR	An acronym for the four principles of WCAG: Perceivable, Operable, Understandable, and Robust. All WCAG success criteria fall under one of these four principles.
Public-Facing Content	Any digital content including webpages, documents, forms, videos, images, and social media posts that is publicly accessible and represents Erie County programs, services, or communications.
Screen Reader	Software that converts text and digital content into synthesized speech or Braille output, allowing people who are blind or have low vision to access digital information. Common screen readers include NVDA, JAWS, VoiceOver, and TalkBack.
Section 508	Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. § 794d), requiring federal agencies and federally funded organizations to make their electronic and information technology accessible to people with disabilities. The 2017 refresh adopted WCAG 2.0 AA as the technical standard.

Tagged PDF	A PDF document that includes embedded structural markup tags that describe the document's reading order, headings, lists, tables, and other structural elements. Tagged PDFs are readable by screen readers. Scanned image PDFs are not tagged and are not screen-reader accessible.
Time Coding	The process of adding specific, formatted time stamps to a text document, mapping the sounds and spoken word audio to the exact corresponding points in the audio or video file. It acts as an index for media, allowing users to quickly locate, verify, or sync text to specific moments. Time Coding requires frequent stamping, often every few seconds, whereas the general Timestamping you may find in a video transcript identifies much less frequent reference points (such as every 5 – 10 min).
Transcript	A text version of all audio content in a video or audio recording, including dialogue, speaker identification, and relevant non-speech audio. Required for pre-recorded audio content under WCAG 2.1 AA.
VPAT	Voluntary Product Accessibility Template. A standardized document in which software vendors describe how their product meets accessibility standards. Government agencies can and should request VPATs from vendors as part of technology procurement.
WAVE	Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool, developed by WebAIM. A free browser-based tool that analyzes web pages for accessibility errors, alerts, and structural features. Available at wave.webaim.org .
WCAG	Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. An internationally recognized set of technical standards for digital accessibility, developed by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). WCAG 2.1 Level AA is the operative standard for most U.S. government digital content.

Appendix B: Pre-Publication Accessibility Checklist

Use this checklist before publishing any public-facing content. A checkmark in every box does not guarantee full accessibility compliance, but it addresses the most common and highest-risk issues.

Web Content

- Every image has descriptive alt text (or empty alt text if purely decorative).
- Heading levels are used correctly and in sequence (H1 → H2 → H3, not skipped).
- Every hyperlink has descriptive link text that makes sense without surrounding context.
- No information is conveyed by color alone.
- Text color meets WCAG 2.1 AA contrast requirements (at minimum 4.5:1 for normal text).
- Data tables have designated header rows and/or columns.
- All functionality is accessible via keyboard (Tab, Enter, Space).

Video Content

- Video has accurate, reviewed captions (not uncorrected auto-captions).
- The open or closed captions are accurately synchronized with the video (known as “caption frames”), and they accurately reflect the spoken dialogue and other meaningful sounds.
- A transcript is available (in the post description, in the video description, or as a linked document).
- Audio description is provided if significant visual information is not conveyed in the audio track.
- Video does not contain rapidly flashing imagery (more than 3 flashes/second).

Social Media Posts

- Every image has alt text added via the platform's native alt text tool.
- Text information is in the post caption, not only in an image.
- Multi-word hashtags use CamelCase (#ErieCountyPublicHealth).
- Emojis are used sparingly and not in the middle of sentences.
- Any linked document is accessible.
- GIFs do not flash rapidly.

Quick Reference: Free Accessibility Tools

Tool	How to Access
WAVE	wave.webaim.org — Paste any URL to scan a webpage for accessibility errors.
WebAIM Contrast Checker	webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker — Test any two colors for WCAG contrast compliance.
Microsoft Accessibility Checker	Review tab in Word, PowerPoint, or Excel — built-in, no download needed.
Adobe Acrobat Checker	Tools > Prepare for Accessibility in Adobe Acrobat — checks tagged PDFs.
VoiceOver (Mac/iPhone)	Built-in screen reader. Settings > Accessibility > VoiceOver. No download needed.
Section508.gov Training	section508.gov/training — Free courses for all levels, no login required.

Appendix C: PDF Remediation Accessibility Checklist

Use this checklist when remediating existing PDFs for accessibility in Adobe Acrobat Pro. For best results, address accessibility in the source document (Word, PowerPoint) before converting to PDF.

Step 1: Prep

- Open in Acrobat Pro
- Run Accessibility Checker
- Check if tags exist

Step 2: Text Layer

- Run OCR if scanned
- Confirm text is selectable/searchable

Step 3: Structure

- Autotag, then fix manually
- Apply correct heading levels
- Tag paragraphs, lists, and tables properly

Step 4: Reading Order

- Use Reading Order Tool
- Ensure logical flow (L to R, top to bottom)
- Mark decorative elements as artifacts

Step 5: Images & Links	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Add alt text to meaningful images
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mark decorative images as artifacts
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure links are descriptive and tagged
Step 6: Forms (if applicable)	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Add tooltips/labels
<input type="checkbox"/>	Set tab order
Step 7: Metadata	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Set document language
<input type="checkbox"/>	Add descriptive title
<input type="checkbox"/>	Confirm security allows assistive tech
Step 8: Final Check	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Run Accessibility Checker again
<input type="checkbox"/>	Test with a screen reader

Source: University at Buffalo, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion — Office of the President. Learn how to create accessible content at accessibility.buffalo.edu.