

Library Accessibility Toolkit

This toolkit was created in early 2020 by the [Library Accessibility Alliance](#) (LAA) and is intended to be a living document that provides libraries with resources related to library accessibility. All are welcome and encouraged to contribute and add relevant resources related to library accessibility to this toolkit. While we welcome non-US perspectives and resources, this toolkit currently focuses mostly on the US.

The LAA has created the following guidelines that summarize organization, formatting and moderation. Their goal is to provide a framework to both collaborate and encourage continued advocacy and research on accessibility in libraries.

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Guidelines for Contributors:

Organization

The toolkit is organized into the following sections:

- [General Library Accessibility](#) - In this section, provide links or citations to content discussing the broader topics of accessibility in libraries.
- [Library Physical Space Accessibility](#) - In this section, provide links or citations to content discussing the specific issues associated with the accessibility of library spaces.
- [Library E-Resource Accessibility](#) - In this section, provide links or citations to content discussing the specific issues associated with the accessibility of e-resources.
- [Accessible Library Instructional Design](#) - In this section, provide links or citations to content discussing the specific issues associated with accessible library instructional design.
- [Terminology](#) - In this section, provide links, citations, or content related to defining and connecting terms associated with library accessibility.
- [Tools](#) - In this section, provide links, citations, or content on tools that can be used to both evaluate the accessibility of resources and make resources more accessible through assistive technology.
- [Legal Considerations](#) - In this section, provide links, citations, or content related to the legal aspects of accessibility, including court cases/case law.

Format

Whenever possible use the formatting conventions that are in place for the document. This includes but is not limited to using the appropriate heading/text style level, bulleted/numbered list system, and including alternative text for image and link content.

Contributions

Before you add any content to the toolkit, be sure that you are set to **Suggesting mode** in the upper right-hand corner of the toolkit Google Doc. This will allow the toolkit moderators to receive notification when new material is added to the toolkit and to be able to easily see what has been added since they last reviewed the toolkit. You can also suggest new headings for areas of accessibility that are not covered by the existing structure.

Once the contribution is checked for organization, link and/or citation verification, and formatting, the suggestions will be resolved to include or not include the material in the toolkit. If the material is not included and the contributor has identified themselves, they will be notified as to why their contribution was not included. Possible reasons for not including contributions include:

- Out of scope
- Duplication
- Unable to link or locate the content provided

The toolkit moderators reserve the right to reorganize and remove contributed content as the toolkit grows and resources are no longer accessible or pertinent.

General Library Accessibility

- [Web Accessibility Resources for Libraries](#)
- Pionke, J. (2017). Beyond ADA compliance: The library as a place for all. *Urban Library Journal*, 23(1). <https://academicworks.cuny.edu/ulj/vol23/iss1/3>
- Vincent, J. (2014). *Making the library accessible for all: A practical guide for librarians*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

- [Association of Specialized Government and Cooperative Library Agencies \(ASGCLA\) Resources & Accessibility Toolkits](#)

Library Physical Space Accessibility

- [Academic Library Building Design: Resources for Planning: Accessibility / Universal Design](#) (ACRL)
ACRL and LLAMA provide a LibGuide of resources books articles and websites to use for planning library spaces for accessibility using universal design principles
- [Access to libraries for persons with disabilities Checklist](#) (IFLA)
The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions provides checklists with the goal of providing “access for all to every library.” This checklist is divided into sections including outside the library, getting into the library, access to materials and services, special media, computers, and training staff.
- [Accessible Meeting and Event Checklist](#) (Cornell University)
Cornell University provides a checklist specific to the accessibility needs surrounding meetings and special events. The checklist includes advice on asking attendees about their accessibility needs, conducting an assessment of the event site, and roles for staff during the event.
- [Accessibility Scavenger Hunt](#) (Stacie Williams, Chicago Public Library, developed for Archives Leadership Institute)
This training activity asks library workers to explore library spaces as functionally diverse individuals and provides discussion questions to help library workers to identify barriers and make plans to improve library accessibility.
- [ADA Checklist for Existing Facilities](#) (Institute for Human Centered Design & ADA National Network)
The New England ADA Center provides a guide for conducting an accessibility survey of an existing facility. The 89-page is divided into four priorities: approach & entrance, access to goods & services, toilet rooms, and additional access including phones and alarm systems.
- [ADA Compliance Checklist](#) (Kansas State Library)
The Kansas State Library has published their own ADA Compliance Checklist which includes 25 different areas of compliance. While the ADA is federal law, there may be compliance specifications that are specific to the state of Kansas.

Be sure to reconcile any information from this checklist with the laws in your own state.

- [ADA Library Accessibility Checklist](#) (Project ENABLE)
Syracuse University's Project ENABLE provides a checklist with technical requirements for library spaces including entrances and exits, alarms, interior accessible routes, signage, stairs, communication, and library specific features like study areas, seating, check-out areas, shelving, and security gates.
- [Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion](#) (Cornell University)
Cornell University's "Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN) is a free resource that helps employers tap the benefits of disability diversity by educating public- and private-sector organizations on ways to build inclusive workplace cultures." The resource includes a section on [Creating an Accessible and Welcoming Workplace](#) including specific guidance on [Physical Accessibility](#) that can benefit library workers and users.
- [Equal Access: Universal Design of Libraries](#) (University of Washington)
Sheryl Burgstahler, Ph.D., founder and director of the University of Washington's Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology (DO-IT) provides guidelines and examples in the areas of planning, policies, evaluations, physical environments & products, library staff, information resources & technology, events, and communication.
- [How to Design Visual Learning Resources for Neurodiverse Students](#) (Full Fabric Blog)
This blog post by Evan Brown provides a number of useful tips for designing both physical and electronic signage and instruction that can appeal to a neurodiverse population of users.
- [An Introduction to Accessibility and Inclusive Design](#) (University of Illinois)
This free Coursera course from the University of Illinois takes approximately 15 hours to complete and offers a certificate upon completion. The course introduces "the fundamental principles of accessibility and prepares learners for further study in accessibility and inclusive design."
- Gibson, A. (2019, May 23) "[Justice, Equity, or Charity? Ethics and Responsibility in Inclusive Library Design](#)" Equitable Access: Accessibility Driving Innovation in Libraries Conference: 2019 Big Ten Academic Alliance Library Conference.

- [Making Libraries Accessible: Adaptive Design and Assistive Technology](#) (ALA)
This 2012 Library Technology Report, edited by Char Booth includes a chapter on “key technologies and important considerations that libraries can use to incorporate assistive technologies into their spaces and services.”
- [Project ENABLE Training](#) (Project ENABLE)
Syracuse University’s Project ENABLE provides free training for public, academic or school library workers. Courses can be taken as an individual or as a group and participants can receive a certificate of completion. Modules include disability awareness, law & policy, creating an accessible library, planning inclusive programs & instruction, assistive technology in libraries and targeting autism in libraries.
- [The Usable and Accessible Library Space](#) (Amigos Library Services)
This four-hour class from Amigos Library Services is designed to help attendees “identify key barriers to a library’s usability through a customer service and accessibility lens.”

Temporary Events

- Planning Guide for Temporary Event Accessibility - <https://adata.org/guide/planning-guide-making-temporary-events-accessible-people-disabilities>
- Is Your Festival Accessible - <https://www.euansguide.com/news/is-your-festival-accessible/>

Library E-Resource Accessibility

- Library Accessibility Alliance (formerly Big Ten Academic Alliance Library E-Resource Group). This group was formed in 2015/16 by the Big Ten Academic Alliance and joined by the Association of Southeastern Research Libraries in 2019. It provides:
 - [Library E-Resource Accessibility Evaluations](#): library e-resource accessibility evaluations (along with vendor responses) that are publicly available.
 - [Model Accessibility License Language for Library E-Resources](#)

- Arlitsch, K. (2019). My user is a machine: Making information accessible to disabled users by structuring for machine intermediaries. *Journal of Library Administration*, 58(7), 728-738. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2018.1514834>
 - This article takes a very different approach towards explaining why e-resources need to be accessible. It's well thought out and is an excellent introduction to the topic.
- University of Washington began accessibility testing in 2019. Phase one focused on keyboard navigation testing. The testing results of UW's current database collection is complete and publicly available.
 - [UW Libraries E-Resource Accessibility Testing](#)

Accessible Library Instructional Design

- Moorefield-Lang, H. (2019). Accessibility in online course design. *Library Technology Reports*, 55(4), 14. <https://doi.org/10.5860/ltr.55n4>

Other Accessibility Resources

- WORD Accessibility Basics: In this video, Mark McCarthy, Senior Accessibility Engineer and AITS IT Accessibility Liaison at the University of Illinois, offers basic tips and tricks anyone can use to make your MS Word documents more accessible to people with disabilities. This can't teach you everything there is to Word (and Office's) accessibility features, but it will get you in a place to create some fantastically usable documents. See https://mediaspace.illinois.edu/media/t/1_1krhmawg

Terminology

Accessible

Accessible was defined in OCR resolutions with a couple of institutions to mean “a person with a disability is afforded the opportunity to acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same services as a person without a disability in a equally effective and equally integrated manner, with substantially

equivalent ease of use. The person with a disability must be able to obtain the information as fully, equally and independently as a person without a disability.”

a11y

a11y is an abbreviation for "accessibility" (since there are eleven letters removed from the middle) that is used often on social media and has the benefit of being more compact. [The A11y Project](#) is a website with resources and checklists to help make digital projects more accessible and inclusive.

Alt Text

Alt text (or alternative text) is descriptive text that describes the content of images, graphs and other media on a website. This text is read by screen readers, making the content and function of the media available to individuals with visual or cognitive disabilities. Although some websites like Facebook generate alt text using artificial intelligence, alt text should be entered manually to provide the most effective alternative for screen readers. Most modern website tools like Wordpress, Drupal, and SquareSpace, as well as social media platforms, provide an area to write alt text when an image is uploaded.

[Techniques for writing effective alt text](#)

Section 504

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 also includes [Section 504](#), which declares civil rights for individuals with disabilities, and grants protection from exclusion and discrimination based on ability. It requires all federal agencies to provide individuals with disabilities an equal opportunity to participate fully in programs and services. Agencies must provide auxiliary aids when necessary in order to ensure equal opportunities.

See the [U.S. Department of Labor's Section 504 page](#) for more information.

Section 508

Section 508 refers to [Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#) which requires all federal agencies to develop, procure, maintain and use information technology that is accessible to all people, regardless of whether they work for the federal government or not. The law was added to the Rehabilitation Act in 1998 and was revised in 2017. The current revision is commonly referred to as the Revised 508 Standards. Section 508 provides [definitions and requirements](#) for ensuring information technology is accessible.

In addition to all federal organizations, the law applies to any organization doing business with the federal government as well as any organization that accepts federal funds. This includes libraries and education institutions.

See the [U.S. General Services Administration's Section 508 website](#) for more information.

VPAT™ - Voluntary Product Accessibility Template

Vendors that offer software, hardware or electronic content can voluntarily provide a VPAT™ that discloses how they support accessibility guidelines. The VPAT™ outlines the Revised Section 508 Standards for accessibility, and allows vendors to indicate their conformance with each standard.

While VPATs™ can help identify vendors that support accessibility initiatives, **they do not guarantee that the vendor's service is Section 508 or ADA compliant.** If your institution requires vendors submit a VPAT™ as part of contract negotiation, make sure to review the document to see how compliant the vendor is.

[GSA Information on VPATs™](#)

W3C - World Wide Web Consortium

The W3C is an international community that develops web standards. These standards govern how the web works, and ensures consistent, shared web experiences for all users regardless of web browser or device. The W3C, specifically WAI (Web Accessibility Initiative), creates and maintains web accessibility standards and resources.

[W3C website](#)

WAI-ARIA - Web Accessibility Initiative - Accessible Rich Internet Applications

WAI-ARIA is a technical specification used by web developers to make website content and applications more accessible to people with disabilities. It is a supplement to standard HTML, and helps make interactions with complex websites and dynamic content available to individuals using assistive technology like screen readers. While ARIA provides a robust set of attributes to enhance HTML, some of its features are now part of HTML5. Where a native HTML solution exists, that should be favored over an ARIA solution in order to reduce complexity.

[ARIA overview and specifications](#)

WCAG - Web Content Accessibility Guidelines

WCAG (wee-kag) are guidelines and criteria produced by the W3C (World Wide Web Consortium) to ensure that websites and electronic content are accessible to all. They provide quantitative means of evaluating websites for accessibility, and should be used by both developers and content creators.

There are currently three versions of the standard in use: [WCAG 2.0](#) (published in 2008), [WCAG 2.1](#) (published in 2018), and [WCAG 2.2](#) (published in 2023). Each new version of WCAG builds upon and incorporates the requirements of previous versions. The criteria added to the newer versions address improved accessibility for people with low vision, people with cognitive disabilities, people with motor disabilities, and for people who use mobile devices. In addition to being a W3C standard [WCAG 2.2 is an international standard](#) under the ISO (International Organization for Standardization).

[WCAG website](#)

Tools

Accessibility Checkers

- [WebAim's WAVE Tool](#) (wave.webaim.org) provides a website and browser extension that will check the accessibility of a URL.
- [Axe](#) (<https://github.com/dequelabs/axe-core>) is “an accessibility testing engine for websites and other HTML-based user interfaces. It's fast, secure, lightweight, and was built to seamlessly integrate with any existing test environment so you can automate accessibility testing alongside your regular functional testing.” There are many Youtube videos like this [one](#) showing how to use Axe.
- [HTML Codesniffer](#) (https://squizlabs.github.io/HTML_CodeSniffer/) “is a script that checks HTML source code and detect violations of a defined coding standard.” HTML Codesniffer by default defines WCAG 2.1 but can be configured for other standards and can also be easily extended for custom “sniffs”.

- [Tota11y](https://khan.github.io/total11y)
(khan.github.io/total11y) is a simpler but more user-friendly tool for checking a page's accessibility.
- [RGBlind](http://rgblind.se)
(rgblind.se) will evaluate a URL for the most common types of color blindness. It also has a browser extension.
- [Coblis - Color Blindness Simulator](http://color-blindness.com/coblis-color-blindness-simulator)
(color-blindness.com/coblis-color-blindness-simulator) lets you upload an image and test it for different types of color blindness.
- [Colour Contrast Analyser](http://www.tpgi.com/color-contrast-checker/)
(www.tpgi.com/color-contrast-checker/) Free application, available for Windows and Mac. Check foreground & background color combinations using an eyedropper tool from anywhere on the screen, including non-web based applications.

Assistive Technologies

There are many screen-readers and other software you can install in your browser or try out as a demo. If you have an Apple product, there are a number of assistive tools available in System Settings under Accessibility.

Browser extensions

- [Silktide screen reader simulator](http://silktide.com/resources/toolbar)
(silktide.com/resources/toolbar) includes voice narration and navigation simulation. View the keyboard shortcuts to see some of the ways that users interact with their screen reader to navigate a webpage.

Screen Readers

1. [VoiceOver](#)
For Apple computers/devices – Macs have a built-in screen reader called VoiceOver. You can turn it on by pressing Command + F5. This blog post has some tips on [getting started with VoiceOver](#).
2. [Kurzweil 1000](http://kurzweiledu.com)
(kurzweiledu.com) Windows only, 30-day trial – scanner and screen reader

3. [NVDA](#)
(nvaccess.org) Windows only, open source screen reader
4. [ZoomText or Fusion \(ZoomText plus JAWS\)](#)
ZoomText is a reading program designed for low-vision users and provides magnification and visual enhancement functionality. JAWS adds screen reading functionality. Freedom Scientific's [comparison of ZoomText & Fusion can be found here](#).
5. [SuperNova](#)
Provides screen magnification and screen reading for the Windows platform

Legal Considerations*

In addition to good librarianship, providing equal access to resources is also mandated by federal law. Because colleges and universities almost universally receive some sort of federal funding and/or provide some type of public accommodation (even if privately owned), it is generally accepted that these laws apply to them under [Title II](#) and [Title III](#) of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

*** Interpretation of the laws below may differ by state, so it is important to consult with your institutions' office of accessibility or legal team.**

ADA - Americans with Disabilities Act

The ADA is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life including jobs, schools, transportation, and all public and private places that are open to the general public. It became law in 1990 and has been revised several times, with the latest revision taking effect in 2017.

[View the ADA regulations](#)

Title II of the ADA

Title II provides equal access for individuals with disabilities to “all services, programs, and activities provided or made available by public entities,” and covers state and local government services. [View Title II \(pdf\)](#)

Title III of the ADA

Title III prohibits any business identified as a “public accommodation” from discriminating on the basis of disability. The ADA currently defines 12 categories of public accommodations that can be owned by a private entity but are subject to the ADA. These include K-12 schools, undergraduate and graduate schools, museums, stores, restaurants, bars, service establishments, theaters, hotels, recreational facilities, doctors' and dentists' offices, shopping malls, and other businesses. [View Title III \(pdf\)](#)

Section 504 and Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 defines and protects the same individuals as the ADA, but it differs from the ADA in terms of scope. The main difference is that the Rehabilitation Act only covers instances of federal funding, regardless of whether an institution is public or private. Any program conducted or procured by a federal agency or receiving federal money must abide by the regulations in the Rehabilitation Act. The sections most frequently referred to are Section 504, which was part of the initial law, and Section 508, which was added in 1986 and most recently revised in 2017.

Section 504

Section 504 protects individuals from being excluded from, denied benefits of, or discriminated against by any program or service that is funded or offered by a federal agency. Agencies are responsible for providing accessible alternatives to their employees and patrons.

See the [U.S. Department of Labor's Section 504 page](#) for more information.

Section 508

Section 508 is directed specifically at the accessibility of electronic and information technology products and services that federal agencies buy, create and use. It mandates that individuals with disabilities have access to information and services that are comparable to the access and use available to non-disabled individuals. It also provides guidelines to follow to ensure electronic resources are accessible. This includes making websites and apps accessible to assistive technologies like screen readers, alternative mouse and keyboard devices like motion trackers, magnification software, and more.

See the [U.S. General Services Administration's Section 508 website](#) for more information.

How is a disability defined?

Section 504 defines an individual with a disability as “a person with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. Major life activities include caring for one’s self, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, working, performing manual tasks and learning.”

Prominent Court Cases

Payan v. Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD)

- [Full documentation of the case](#)
- [PDF of the final judgment](#)

In 2017, the National Federation of the Blind and two students enrolled in the Los Angeles Community College filed a disability discrimination lawsuit against the LAACD. The students and NFB won the lawsuit in 2019. The Federal District Court for the Central District of California found that the LACCD violated the students rights under Title II of the American with Disabilities Act, and Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. The findings included failure to provide the students with accessible documents and course materials and equal access to library resources, specifically Gale and JSTOR.

The ruling is one of the first specifically singling out library e-resources. It also provided stiff requirements and a timeline for compliance. Below is the specific requirement in the ruling for evaluating all library databases:

“2. Within one year of the date of this Order, LACCD shall evaluate LACC’s integrated library system website and all library databases available to students enrolled at LACC to determine whether the library resources are fully accessible to blind students. LACCD shall either (a) discontinue the use of any inaccessible library databases, inaccessible documents contained in library databases, or other inaccessible library resources available to students enrolled at LACC or (b) establish alternative means of providing access to the equivalent benefits of the inaccessible library resources to blind students in a timely manner, i.e., prior to or at the same time sighted students are provided access to those library resources, including outside of the classroom;”