Editor's Draft – Protocols

Protocols and Assertions

Editor's Notes

- We should ensure protocols can't be gamed to pass a minimum on a site that isn't accessible

Introduction

JF has documented Protocols multiple times — what are we documenting now?

- Protocols provide guidance for subjective [WCAG] outcomes.

- Users will earn "points" to contribute towards their total "score" ("Bronze," "Silver," "Gold" — see previous JF tables) in order to meet minimum "conformance" with WCAG.

- In order to earn these points, users must "show their work" through a document itemizing their activities to use a protocol to evaluate subjective WCAG criteria.

- Users may use additional protocols beyond WCAG criteria to continue to improve the accessibility of their digital service, to meet minimum guidelines it must be limited to WCAG criteria. These additional protocols can be authored by 3rd-party contributors, but before a protocol is adopted it must be reviewed and approved by the working group.

What's a Point

- How do we define that without the scoring mechanism defined?
- Please open this link in Chrome, and Translate to your language: https://www.digitoegankelijk.nl/toegankelijkheidsverklaring/controle-door-logius
- The Dutch have created an Accessibility Statement Generator, of sorts. This documentation is a good example of what documenting Protocols effort could look like.
- The recommendation is that it is linked in the <head> of a web document (as an example, for HTML) using link rel.

Evaluating Procedures

Editor's Note

- Concern that organizations can write their own protocols

Introduction

In WCAG 3, we want to offer more flexibility to organizations and yet still serve the needs of people with a diverse array of disabilities. In order to meet both needs, some of the newer standards will be flexible. Protocols will help offer organizations the flexibility they need, but add some structure to new requirements so that everyone can rest assured that the needs of all users are addressed. We want to encourage organizations to see compliance as a floor and not the ceiling – encouraging them to develop their own processes for going beyond WCAG 2 compliance.

Definition

- Protocols provide evaluable procedures to meet Outcomes in WCAG 3 where the **outcomes are not necessarily measured**. We can measure qualitative tests without using protocols and those are defined as methods in WCAG 3. Where protocols are useful are in measuring and evaluating processes and outcomes that are difficult or unable to be measured with methods.
- A protocol is a document written by an organization who wishes to meet a WCAG 3 outcome that allows use of protocols. The protocol must meet specific outcome-level requirements, which will be outlined in WCAG 3 for each outcome that allows use of protocols. (To be decided: We expect that not all outcomes will allow use of protocols.)
- Protocols **describe inputs** such as documentation of steps, actions taken, date completed, conformance claims, etc. Where the outcome is less directly measured, the protocol must define a way to evaluate the quality of its implementation, which is expected to correlate to conformance with an accessibility outcome.
- W3C expects to document some protocols but expects wide use of public self-defined protocols. W3C sets requirements for protocols that are used as part of WCAG 3 conformance.

Requirements for protocols

- Protocols must provide actionable steps in service of an accessibility outcome.
- Protocols must reference or include accessibility Guidelines or Outcomes that the protocol supports, with evidence that the steps would meaningfully support that guidance.
- Describe requirements to follow protocol at minimal conformance level.
- Protocols supporting higher levels of conformance must provide evaluation procedures, which evaluate how well the steps of the protocol were followed.

- Protocols used to support conformance claims must be publicly documented.

What Gets Documented

- Identifying information about the protocol
- Accessibility guidance that the protocol is being used to support
- Information about how the protocol is being applied in the organization
- Results of evaluations done to evaluate success of the protocol

Examples

Style Guide for writing headings

The style guide references the accessibility requirements and states how the organization will implement it. The Protocol is the accessibility requirements and the style guide is the step the organization will take to implement it.

Headings and labels: "Headings and labels describe topic or purpose."

Protocol: Establish my team's way of determining that a heading or label describes the purpose (our method for doing so; how we assess the outcome).

- How we graded n 2021 - Center for Plain Language

Alt-Text Quality

Gold (or maybe Silver TBD) quality alt-text might be claimed if an organization followed an internally-developed process (a protocol) that:

- Outlines qualifications required for those who will author the alt-text
- Outlines editorial review process with experts in the subject matter that meets or exceeds the level of editorial review for other writing in that product
- Outlines a process that defines required:
  - User-testing the efficacy of this alt-text, where efficacy is based on what is important for the particular product (Since the efficacy needs to be specific to the product's goals, a W3C-written protocol might not be possible.)
  - Process of editing/refining the alt-text based on the results, if needed.

Plain Language

- Example: plainlanguage.gov mostly provides the guidance about how to achieve an accessibility outcome; Department of Labor site provides a protocol that references that guidance, specifies steps to make sure the guidance is followed, and measures how successfully those steps are being followed.
- For a simple blog written by one person on their mobile device daily, an appropriate protocol for plain language could be as simple as:
  - Text will be tested against the Gunning Fog Index: http://gunning-fog-index.com/

     ○   Blogger will rewrite based on the results until the text passes at a particular defined level.

User Testing

If we find that an outcome for a particular user group can't have clearly defined methods, a protocol might outline specific user testing processes to meet the needs of that user group.

Outstanding Questions

- What level of testing should be required for minimal conformance?
- Do protocols exist outside of conformance?
- Can they be used not for a claim of conformance, but an internal benchmark, for example?