

WCAG Conformance Survey Key Findings

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Summary

Objective: The primary goal was to determine how effective the structure of WCAG – particularly, conformance – helps meet needs of both people with disabilities and people that use the guidelines. A secondary goal was to understand the perceived effectiveness of the conformance model and claims of conformance were in meeting legal and regulatory objectives.

Data collection & Methodology: This survey included a mix of question types, with some opportunities to capture open ended responses. It was hosted on Survey Monkey. Invitations were distributed to a closed list obtained with permission from previous Silver CG events. Invitation was also sent via public channels such as the a11y Slack Team and Promote Web Accessibility Facebook Group. 49 participants completed the survey by 23 February 2018.

Data analysis: Raw data was parsed and viewed in graph and sorted table forms. Verbatim responses were read in the context of the question as well as the context of additional responses per participant. Interpretation was made by a select few Silver CG

members and composed as a draft. The draft then went through a comment process for validation and/or editions.

Sample Size: With fewer than 50 participants, the sample size is not indicative of the market. However, as the roles are well distributed across accessibility professionals, the responses directly support the primary goal.

What Was Learned: It is clear that among a professional audience that works with accessibility guidelines, there is an interest in changing conformance. These changes would include: simpler language; simpler criteria including examples; and explicit testing methods. More frequent updates would better support their needs. A method of claiming conformance that is more fluid to accommodate dynamic or regularly updated content and sites was also indicated.

Participation & Demographic Insights

Forty-nine (49) participants completed the survey. Eight (8) declined to report on demographic questions.

63.41% (26) claimed U.S. residence. Others are from: Australia (4); Canada (3); India (2); UK (2); France (1); Norway (1); Spain (1); Switzerland (1).

Twelve (12) identified as having a disability or impairment. Twenty-eight (28) did not.

90.24% (37) of respondents are employed full time. One (1) is retired. Three (3) are un- or underemployed.

Industry experience was broad and mixed, with the highest concentration in the following areas: Telecommunications, Technology, Internet, and Electronics; Education; Nonprofit; Government; Consulting/Agency; Advertising / Marketing; and “Other” digital and communication channels.

Similarly, roles are broad and mixed, with the highest concentration in: Accessibility specialist; Advocate; Influencer; Front-end developer; UX professional; Educator; QA specialist; and Information technology manager. And accessibility is a focus or the primary focus of 92.69% or thirty-eight (38) respondents. Twenty-five (25) have “Accessibility” in their job title.

Years of experience in accessibility appears well distributed over a year, as: (13) 1 to 5 years; (11) 6 to 10 years; (8) 11 to 15 years; (8) More than 15 years; (1) Less than a year.

Application Across Media Types

Effectiveness of WCAG for static websites:

Effective	59.18%	29
Somewhat effective	14.29%	7
Moderately effective	14.29%	7
Extremely effective	10.20%	5
Not very effective	2.04%	1
Not at all effective	0.00%	0

Effectiveness of WCAG for dynamic websites:

Somewhat effective	36.73%	18
Effective	26.53%	13
Moderately effective	24.49%	12
Not very effective	10.20%	5
Not at all effective	2.04%	1
Extremely effective	0.00%	0

Effectiveness of WCAG for native mobile apps:

Effective	26.67%	12
Not very effective	26.67%	12
Somewhat effective	24.44%	11
Moderately effective	17.78%	8
Not at all effective	4.44%	2
Extremely effective	0.00%	0

Effectiveness of WCAG for PDF documents:

Effective	31.11%	14
Somewhat effective	31.11%	14
Not very effective	22.22%	10
Moderately effective	11.11%	5
Not at all effective	4.44%	2
Extremely effective	0.00%	0

Effectiveness of WCAG for kiosk / public access terminal content:

Not very effective	33.33%	14
Somewhat effective	23.81%	10
Moderately effective	21.43%	9
Effective	16.67%	7
Not at all effective	4.76%	2
Extremely effective	0.00%	0

Understanding of Conformance Levels

100% of the respondents were aware of the conformance levels.

The level of conformance participants strive for:

AA	90.48%	38
AAA	4.76%	2
A	2.38%	1
<i>Other: Some AA & Some AAA</i>	2.38%	1

The confidence in project management team understanding:

Some ambiguity in requirements	38.10%	16
Don't understand the requirements	21.43%	9
Confident	14.29%	6
Not sure	11.90%	5
Very confident	9.52%	4
<i>Other: Never or Don't Care</i>	4.76%	2

Understanding of Full Pages

73% of the respondents were aware of the full pages requirement.

Yes	73.17%	30
No	26.83%	11

Belief that this requirement is still important in conforming to WCAG was mixed.

Very important	29.27%	12
Not sure	26.83%	11
Important	21.95%	9
Don't understand the requirements	9.76%	4
<i>Other: Not as important due to web application integrations, or 'it depends'.</i>	7.32%	3
Some ambiguity in requirements	4.88%	2

Understanding of Complete Processes

76% of respondents were aware of the Complete Process requirement.

Yes	76.19%	32
No	23.81%	10

An overwhelming majority believe that the Complete Process requirement is important to meet WCAG.

Very important	85.71%	36
Important	4.76%	2
Not sure	4.76%	2
Some ambiguity in requirements	0.00%	0
Don't understand the requirements	2.38%	1
<i>Other: Prioritized for impact</i>	2.38%	1

Understanding of Accessibility Supported

71% of respondents were aware of the Accessibility Supported conformance requirement.

Yes	71.43%	30
No	28.57%	12

Belief in effectiveness of the Accessibility Supported requirement was mixed:

Somewhat effective	30.77%	12
Effective	25.64%	10
Not very effective	12.82%	5
<i>Other: No experience, unsure, or overwhelmed by.</i>	12.82%	5
Not at all effective	7.69%	3
Extremely effective	5.13%	2
Moderately effective	5.13%	2

The perceived impact that the Accessibility Supported requirement has on conformance claims was mixed:

Some impact	38.10%	16
I don't know	35.71%	15
Little impact	16.67	7
Great impact	4.76%	2
No impact	4.76%	2

Understanding of Non-Interference

80% of respondents were aware of the Non-Interference requirement (content cannot block the ability of users to access the rest of the page).

Yes	80.95%	34
No	19.05%	8

The perceived impact the Non-Interference requirement has on conformance claims was mixed:

Some impact	35.71%	15
I don't know	33.33%	14
Little impact	14.29%	6
Great impact	11.90%	5
No impact	4.76%	2

Meeting Legal Obligations

Belief that WCAG is effective in helping meet legal obligations was mixed – including location considerations:

Effective	42.50%	17
Somewhat effective	25.00%	10
Extremely effective	17.50%	7
Not very effective	10.00%	4
Moderately effective	2.50%	1
Not at all effective	2.50%	1

Key Opportunities

It is clear that there are some challenges in learning, evaluating, meeting, and persisting conformance. However, even from the key audience experiencing these challenges, there is no clear or consistent indication or suggestion for possible remedies.

Claiming Conformance Reliably

Response:

Thirty-three (33) participants responded to the open question of “best way to declare conformance in a trusted way”. Of them, at least five (5) had no suggestion. Ten (10) suggested the VPAT or [VPAT 2](#). Seven (7) suggested third-party validation and certification. One (1) suggested a global single party validation and certification. One (1) suggested that badging and claims be directly tied to a global validation service. Four (4) suggested a private conformance statement or policy page with the ability to report issues. Two (2) suggested a proportional metric or rank, and one (1) of them suggested that rank be publicly evaluated and assigned by crowd-sourcing. And finally, two (2) provided simple comments on achieving versus claiming conformance.

Interpretation:

Among a professional audience with roles that support accessibility, many appear to find self-reported conformance claims to be reliable or trustworthy. Those that do, seem to favor third-party certification.

Managing Change When Claiming Conformance

Response:

Thirty-one (31) participants responded to the open question of “difficulty in managing change when claiming conformance”. Of them, five (5) had no opinion or do not currently claim conformance. Ten (10) expressed that it was very difficult, some of them citing specific challenges. Ten (10) expressed that it was somewhat difficult, most of them citing the dynamic nature of the web and frequency of change. Both categories of very and somewhat difficult also commented that managing change is resource intensive, and one (1) commented that there is a lack of accessibility skilled resources. Three (3) responded that conformance is not truly achievable based both on the fluidity of change in technology and in the requirements, and that it is more of a principle and goal than a destination. Three (3) thought it was not difficult, so long as it was expected.

Interpretation:

It is clear that even among specialists, managing change – which is perceived as a constant – is difficult. These responses are at least somewhat at odds with the previous response to claims being reliable and trusted. If a conformance claim is only valid at the time it is made and inherently subject to change, it is hard to see how that can be trusted.

Changes To Current Guidelines

Response:

Thirty-five (35) participants responded to the open question of “most important change” with broadly distributed suggestions. Seven (7) suggest simpler language. Six (6) suggest simpler criteria. Four (4) suggest providing more examples. Two (2) suggest increasing the depth and specificity of certain criteria. Two (2) suggest specific changes to criteria. Eight (8) suggest expanding the scope of the guidelines to more technologies and/or more disabilities. Two (2) would like the guidelines parsed by role or responsibility. Two (2) suggest that the guidelines include the tools to test against the success criteria, and one (1) added that the tools should be provided by and/or approved by the Office for Civil Rights (U.S.). One (1) thought the 2.1 update was sufficient. One (1) thought that the guidelines should simply be a best practice. One (1) response tied many of these themes together and recommended that the guidelines could also facilitate a connection between developers and people with disabilities.

Interpretation:

It seems most professionals currently working with the guidelines would like to see changes. They simply have differing priorities. By examining these last three questions combined, the most popular themes were simplicity – in language and criteria, and more frequent updates to stay current with technologies.

Other Conformance Models

Response:

Twenty-one (21) – nearly half – of the participants responded to the open question of “other examples of effective compliance models”. Of them, thirteen (13) could not; two (2) suggested more flexibility in the current model; one (1) advocated for checklists while one (1) advocated against them; two (2) conveyed current experience with no clear suggestion; and two (2) actually named other models.

One suggestion was the [Creative Commons](#) or open source approach – which does not contain a conformance model. Still, it offers a compelling contribution model once a standard is in “the commons”, where one could conceivably create derivative conformance criteria while citing source attribution. The other suggestion was also compelling – the [EFQM](#) (European Foundation for Quality Management), which focuses on what’s important to four key stakeholder groups (Business, Customer, People, Society).

Interpretation:

It seems that very few have given thought to the potential of other conformance models. Across all of the open questions, the most popular responses indicated that conformance is fluid and may be best managed by a global third-party certification.

Conclusion

This survey is a fair and adequate representation of the views of accessibility professionals working with the conformance model of WCAG. It is reasonable to conclude from the responses of this audience that change is necessary and desired. Popular themes emerged from interpreting the data and open responses, but there is no statistical majority on any recommended remediation.

This audience would like to see simpler language, directed at those that use the guidelines, with simpler criteria that clearly identify the benefit, and that each have examples and an explicit testing method or tool. They would like to see the guidelines be updated more frequently to keep pace with needs. They would also like to see a method of claiming conformance be more fluid to accommodate dynamic or regularly updated content and sites.