



Accessibility Guide for Designers

Creating an accessible PDF

Accessible design helps people with different abilities and needs better understand your design. This includes people who have visual, auditory, cognitive, motor, or other impairments.

Accessible design considers the context, content, and audience. It is an integral part of the design process that should be considered from the start.

In Colorado, [HB21-1110](#) makes it a state civil rights violation for a government agency to exclude people with disabilities from receiving services or benefits because of lack of accessibility.

To make their websites compliant, government agencies must adhere to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines [WCAG 2.1 \(Level AA\)](#) . These international guidelines provide a set of rules for maintaining website accessibility, which include design and PDFs.

[View Boulder County's Branding Guidelines](#)

How to design accessible PDFs

Color Contrast

Use sufficient contrast between text and background colors to ensure readability. Use tools and resources that help you measure and adjust the contrast and color of your design, such as the [Contrast Checker](#). Avoid relying on color alone to convey meaning or information, and use other cues such as shapes, icons, labels, or patterns, if color is used, verify that enough contrast exists for ease of readability. Use color sparingly and strategically to convey meaning or emphasis.

WCAG 2.1 references:

[1.4.3 Contrast \(Minimum\)](#)

[1.4.1 Use of Color](#)

Typography

Pick typefaces that have clear and easily recognizable characters. Avoid overly ornamental, cursive or highly stylized typefaces. The more easily identifiable letters are, the easier they will be to read. Sans-Serif fonts are the most accessible and as part of our branding include Arial, Calibri, Myriad Pro, and Aptos. Serif fonts that are accessible and part of our branding are include Times New Roman and Georgia.

WCAG 2.1 reference:

[1.4.12 Text Spacing](#)

Layout (cognitive load)

Group pieces of content in a way that optimizes utility to the reader. Try chunking information into smaller sections with meaningful groups or headings. Avoid large, overwhelming blocks of content. Also utilize hierarchy, alignment, and white space to organize and structure your graphics.

WCAG 2.1 references:

[1.3.2 Meaningful Sequence](#)

[2.4.6 Headings and Labels](#)

Alternative Text for Images

Alternative text is a short description of the content and function of an image that can be read by screen readers or displayed when the image is not available. When writing alt-text descriptions keep it concise. There is no need to start with generic descriptors like “image of,” “picture of,” “video of,” etc. that should be self-evident in the structure.

WCAG 2.1 reference:

[1.1 Text Alternatives \(Guideline\)](#)

Images

Use icons, symbols, and illustrations that are simple, recognizable, and consistent. Be sure to give them alt text as stated above.

WCAG 2.1 references:

[1.1 Text Alternatives \(Guideline\)](#)

[1.1.1 Non-text Content](#)

[1.3.1 Info and Relationships](#)

[1.4.1 Use of Color](#)

Descriptive Links

For digital assets, do not show the URL. Instead use very descriptive words that link to a URL and tell the listener where the link will take them. Print assets will need to show the URL.

WCAG 2.1 references:

[2.4.4 Link Purpose \(In Context\)](#)

Headings

Headers must be used in numerical order. When using a screen reader, one can search by Headers and the size lets them know if it's a main topic or a subsection of a main topic.

Heading Levels

Use the H1 tag only once per page for the main title (same for all documents), followed by H2 for major sections (when you introduce a new topic), H3 for sub-sections of those major sections, and so on, progressing through the hierarchy as needed.

WCAG 2.1 references:

[2.4.6 Headings and Labels](#)

Tables

Tables should only be used to present data and not used for layout purposes.

WCAG 2.1 references:

[1.3.1 Info and Relationships](#)

[1.3.2 Meaningful Sequence](#)

[1.3.3 Sensory Characteristics](#)

Write in Plain Language

[Tips for Writing in Plain Language](#)

Check Final Document for Accessibility, Including the Reading Order

All final digital documents must be checked by an automated accessibility checker as well as manually checked. **It is expected that the final document will be delivered to us accessible and is provided with a compliance report.**

Resources

[LinkedIn](#)

[Accessibility for Teams](#)