

ADA (Read 1st) Compliance Best Practices

Creating an accessible and user-friendly website that also adheres to ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliance is crucial to ensure equal access and usability for everyone. Rural Water and Municipal Impact websites are user-friendly and compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) upon launch.

When a website subscriber adds to or updates their website content, it is the subscriber's responsibility to ensure the website remains ADA compliant and accessible to all users.

This tutorial does not cover all aspects of ADA compliance. Instead, it highlights several key points that we believe will be most helpful to our subscribers. A local government's failure to comply with ADA regulations may have legal consequences.

[Obtain more information on website accessibility and ADA compliance](#)

[Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.1](#)

Page and Content Headings

Proper hierarchical use of headings is important for accessibility compliance because it provides a clear content structure that assistive technologies like screen readers can easily interpret and navigate. This requirement comes from the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 Level AA, which is the technical standard that state and local governments are required to follow under ADA Title II.

Headings must be descriptive.

When you use a heading, it must accurately describe what that section is about.

Headings must be properly coded.

A heading that looks big and bold visually but is not coded as an actual heading (H1, H2, H3, etc.) fails WCAG 2.1. To help screen readers, use heading formats instead of just bold text.

Heading structure must make logical sense.

Headings must convey the correct relationships between sections of content so users can understand how the page is organized.

Best practice is to always use an H1 heading first, and to use only one H1 per page. While WCAG 2.1 does not technically prohibit more than one H1, using a single H1 per page is an accepted practice and a safe approach for accessibility compliance.

The Rural Water and Municipal Impact website automatically assigns the H1 style to the page title, so the choices for additional heading styles on a page start with H2. See below for examples of heading sizes in hierarchical order.

Header 2 - H2

Header 3 - H3

Header 4 - H4

Header 5 - H5

Header 6 - H6

Typically, the heading style choices are already bold. You do not need to add additional bold styling. Best practice is not to skip heading levels even if a smaller heading looks better. Assign headings by outline hierarchy, not by font size.

[Obtain more information on page structure and headings](#)

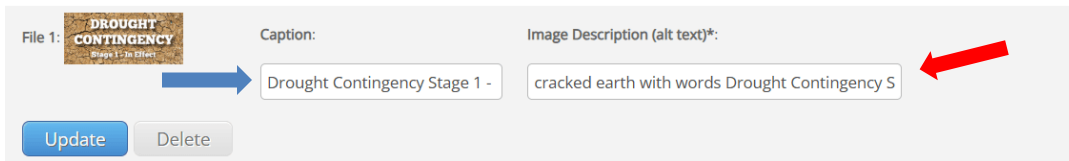
[Understanding Headers and Labels WCAG 2.1](#)

Images

Images must be uploaded as a JPG file and saved in My Images or My Slideshow. Every image in your website's My Slideshow and My Images must have an alt text image description. Use descriptive alternative text (alt text) for images and buttons to describe what is visible in the image, including any text included in the image. Alt Text is required for ADA compliance because it's used for assistive technologies such as screen readers for blind users.

For example, the **Image Description (alt text)*** (required) for a Drought Contingency slide might be "cracked earth with words Drought Contingency Stage 1 - In Effect" (see red arrow below).

The **Caption** (optional and not required for ADA compliance standards) of an image might be "Drought Contingency Stage 1 - In Effect" (see blue arrow below). Caption will display on the page of the website.



File 1:  Caption: Drought Contingency Stage 1 - Image Description (alt text)*: cracked earth with words Drought Contingency S

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Links

Hyperlinks or URLs must be self-explanatory - specific and descriptive, providing context to help users understand the purpose of each link.

For example, do not link the words "Click Here". Instead, link the words "Read July Council Agenda".

"Contact Us" and "Office Hours" Statements

A statement asking the viewer to contact the office must include a phone number and/or an email address.

A statement telling the viewer to come to the office during office hours must include those office hours.

Documents Published on Your Website

Documents published on a website must meet WCAG 2.1 Level AA accessibility standards regardless of their file format. This means PDF, Word, and other document formats are all acceptable — but the content inside them must be accessible. A scanned document saved as a PDF or image file does not meet WCAG 2.1 requirements because the text inside it cannot be read by screen readers or other assistive technology, which violates Success Criterion 1.1.1 (Non-text Content) and Success Criterion 1.4.5 (Images of Text).

To be accessible, a document must contain real, selectable text — not an image of text. When converting a Word document to PDF, use the application's built-in export or Save As PDF function rather than scanning a printed copy, so that the text remains readable by assistive technology.



When a document must be scanned (for example, a signed document is required for publishing on the website), the ILovePDF.com website has an OCR (optical character recognition) option to convert the scanned PDF to selectable text which can be read by assistive technology. OCR addresses the selectable-text problem, but OCR alone does not make a PDF fully WCAG 2.1 AA compliant. A compliant PDF also needs a proper tag structure, logical reading order, a defined document language, real heading tags, alt text for any images, and table markup.

Copy/Paste

Avoid copying and pasting pre-formatted content to your website. For example, do not copy and paste content from Microsoft Word documents to your website. Microsoft Word content contains hidden HTML code that will change or distort formatting when copied or published to your website.

If you paste text from another source (for example, from Word) into your text box, it's best to paste the text into the Windows Notepad or Mac Notes text editor first. You do not have to save it as a file, just paste it into a blank page in Notepad or Notes to remove all formatting code added by the source of the text. Highlight and copy the text you just pasted, then paste it into your text box.

Some text can be successfully pasted without formatting codes into a text box by pressing Ctrl-Shift-V (Windows) or Cmd-Opt-Shift-V (Mac), but the Notepad and Notes text editors work well consistently.

Video/Audio

Closed captioning or video transcriptions are required for videos with audio content. Many video services do this automatically. It is a good idea to check the quality of the closed captioning.

Obtain more information about Video/Audio using the links below.

[Read about YouTube closed captions](#)

[Read about YouTube transcripts](#)

[Read about Vimeo closed captions and subtitles here](#)

Accessibility Statement

Review your website's **My Policies** Accessibility Statement and make any necessary changes you need per your State and Federal Guidelines. We recommend that you and your staff read and share your website's **My Policies** with your legal team to ensure it covers everything you wish to convey to meet your state guidelines. If you wish to change that statement on your website, you can access it by logging into your Client Dashboard and clicking **My Policies** on the left side of your screen.

[Obtain more information regarding accessibility, usability, and inclusion](#)

If you have questions about this tutorial or need additional assistance with your website, please click the **CONTACT SUPPORT** button on the left side of your website's Client Dashboard. Complete the form to tell us how we can help, then click Submit. Or you may call us at (888) 551-4815. **We are here to help!**