

# WCAG, ADA, EAA:

Decoding the Alphabet Soup of Digital  
Accessibility Compliance in Higher Education

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# Presenter



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### Archetype Persona

The Sophisticated and Caring Patron

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- + 10+ years of web quality assurance and accessibility testing experience
- + Worked on dozens of successful higher education website launches

# A Note

- + I am not a lawyer, and this presentation should not be taken as legal advice. Please seek legal counsel if you have questions regarding a legal matter at your institution.

# Agenda

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- 1 Regulatory Compliance**

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- 2 A Framework for Addressing Accessibility**

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- 3 Ways Carnegie Can Help**

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# Regulatory Compliance

- + WCAG
- + ADA Title II
- + EAA



# *WCAG, ADA & EAA*

## Oh my!



# The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) are issued by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C).

- + WCAG version 2.1, Level AA is commonly cited by legal regulations as the accessibility standard that needs to be met.

# The P.O.U.R. Principles

The W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) define four principles.

- + **Perceivable** - information can be presented in different ways.
- + **Operable** - functionality can be used in different modalities.
- + **Understandable** - information and functionality is understandable.
- + **Robust** - content can be interpreted reliably by a wide variety of browsers, media players, and assistive technologies.

These principles are the underpinnings of the more specific requirements contained in WCAG. Developing an understanding of these principles will help you create accessible web content, even if you don't know all of the specific requirements of WCAG.

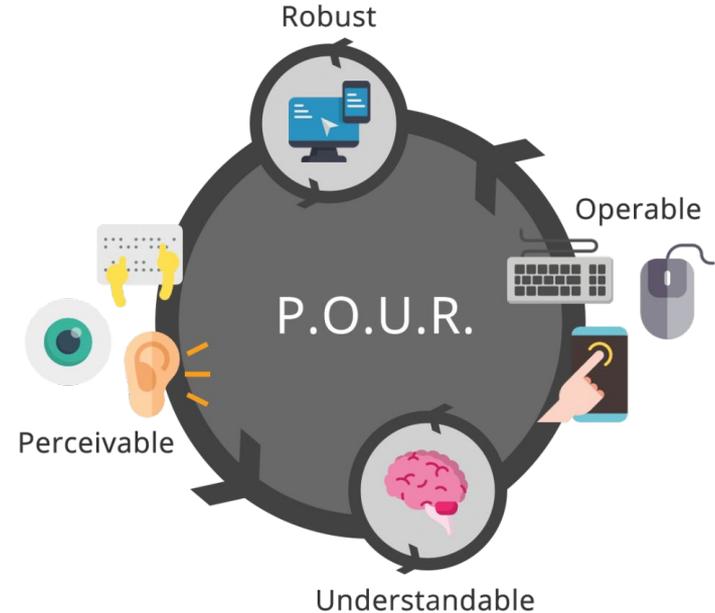


Image credit: Deque

# The Americans with Disabilities Acts (ADA) applies to state and local government entities, including public higher education institutions.

- + The latest rule update for Title II of the ADA sets specific requirements and deadlines for the digital accessibility of web content and mobile applications.

## The new Title II rule sets WCAG 2.1, Level AA as the standard to be met for digital accessibility compliance.

The deadline for meeting compliance is dependent on the size of the population of the government entity. For education institutions, this means the size of the government entity they are associated with (state, county, city, etc).

- + For population **greater than 50,000** the deadline is **April 24, 2026**.
- + For populations **49,999 or less** the deadline is **April 26, 2027**.



# Content Exceptions

**There are a handful of exceptions to the new Title II rule for certain types of content:**

- + Archived web content
- + Pre-existing conventional electronic documents
- + Content posted by a third party where the third party is not posting due to contractual, licensing, or other arrangement with a public entity
- + Individualized documents that are password-protected
- + Pre-existing social media posts

Source and additional information:

<https://www.ada.gov/resources/2024-03-08-web-rule/>

# The European Accessibility Act (EAA) applies to organizations operating within the European Union (EU) or selling products or services to EU Citizens

- + This could create legal requirements for U.S. universities with campus locations in Europe, or who offer online classes to students living in Europe.
- + The EAA uses EN 301 549 as its standard. For web properties this means meeting WCAG 2.1, Level AA. The deadline for compliance was June 28, 2025.

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# A Framework for Addressing Digital Accessibility

- + Make a commitment
- + Engage with experts
- + Educate stakeholders
- + Improve new and ongoing work
- + Review and improve legacy systems



## Make a commitment

**Digital accessibility starts with a commitment. Organize with key stakeholders across your institution and make a plan for continuous improvements in the area of accessibility.**

- + Ensure your website has an accessibility statement, this includes documenting the accessibility standards you are using.
- + Make a public commitment to providing accessible digital experiences.
- + Establish an accessibility audit schedule.
- + Create an internal governance policy to establish who will be responsible for the various aspects of caring for digital accessibility.



## Engage with experts

Digital accessibility is both a broad and deep area of expertise. Your institution's success in this realm depends on working with experts.

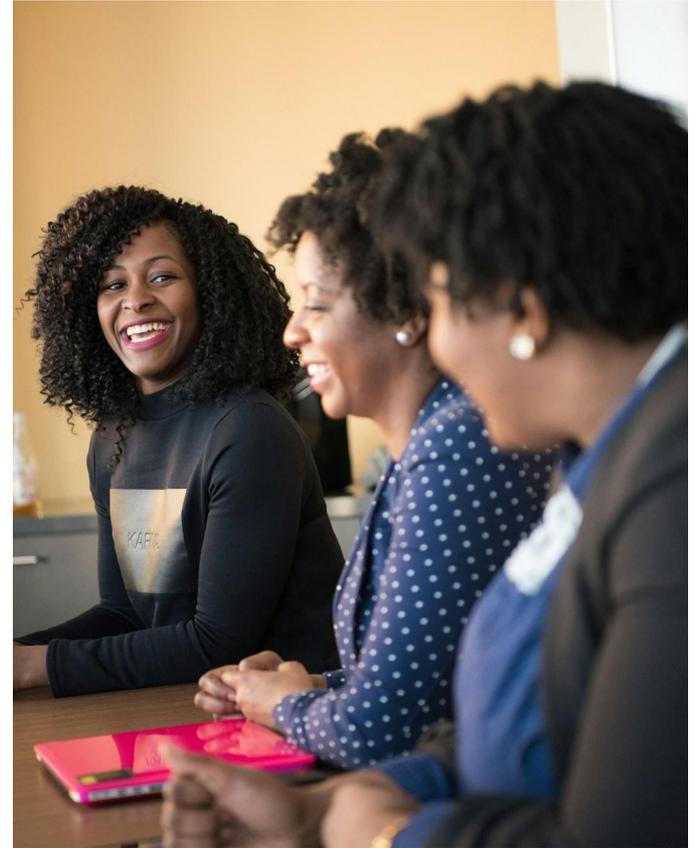
- + **Internal resources** - does your institution have staff with expertise in accessibility? If so, support them by providing opportunities for them to stay on top of the latest trends. If not, is it time to add accessibility expertise to your internal team(s)?
- + **External resources** - partnering with an agency or other external resource can provide a valuable set of skills and a fresh perspective. It is also beneficial to engage people with disabilities in testing your digital experiences.



## Educate stakeholders

**It is vital to provide training and education to your institution's stakeholders on the importance of digital accessibility. This will look different for every institution.**

- + When faculty, staff, and administrators all know about and understand the importance of digital accessibility, it is easier to maintain an accessibility program.
- + The W3C offers an excellent free course call ["Introduction to Web Accessibility."](#)
- + There are numerous conferences and webinars available every year.
- + Consider hiring an accessibility expert to come speak directly to your staff and administrators.





# Review and improve legacy systems

Older websites and digital systems are more likely to have accessibility issues that need to be addressed.

- + Conduct accessibility audits of existing websites, email templates, and other digital communications. Use a combination of automated and manual testing.
- + Make a plan to address critical accessibility issues. Start with the issues that have the broadest impact.
- + Determine whether fully remediating the issues or building something new to replace the older system is a better approach to meeting the needs of your audiences.



An example site used by the W3C to demonstrate accessibility issues.

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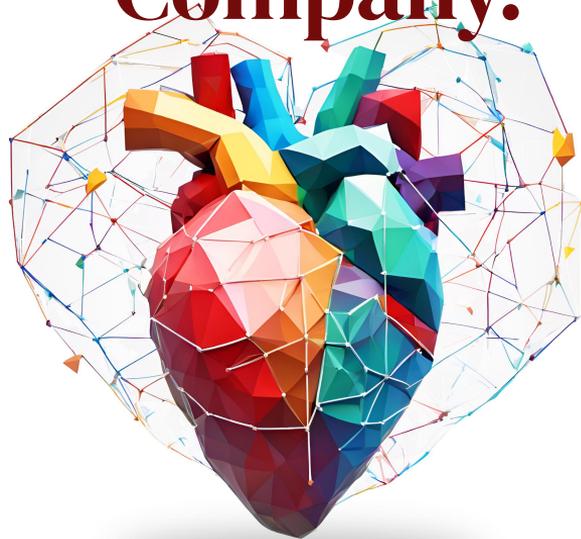
# Ways Carnegie Can Help



# Carnegie is the Human Connection Company.

Because people are the point

For 40 years, Carnegie has been connecting students with **right-fit colleges and universities**. This is the heart of the matter.



Connecting with people is not just something, it's absolutely everything.

Whether you're in marketing, enrollment, advancement, or student life—a volunteer or the president—success is predicated on reaching the right people and resonating with them. Connecting.

If you can do that, everything else falls into place.

# Our Website Services

## + WEBSITE REDESIGN

Comprehensive overhaul of an institution's or school's primary web presence on Cascade, Drupal, Omni, Squiz, TerminalFour, or WordPress

## + WEBSITE REFRESH

Targeted user experience improvements to marketing-critical areas of an institution's or school's primary web presence

## + MICROSITES

Small and standalone websites to meet a specific need, often as an interim solution or for a relatively short period of time

## + COPYWRITING AND SEO

Compelling and optimized academic program pages, admissions pages, and other top-level pages that drive traffic and inquiries

## + TECHNICAL SEO

Improvements to HTML structure, sitemaps, robots.txt, URL patterns and attributes, redirects, HTTP errors, and duplicate content

## + PERIPHERAL SEO SERVICES

Google Business Profile optimization, SEO competitor analysis, YouTube optimization, and program name analysis

## + ASSESSMENTS

Clear and actionable feedback on website health spanning user experience, CMS, accessibility, and content

## + STRATEGIC CONSULTING

Tailored services focused on user personas and journeys, user experience, CMS, content governance, and organizational structure

## + WORKSHOPS

Small-group in-person or virtual trainings focused on best practices across user experience, design, content, and technology

## + HOSTING AND MAINTENANCE

Enterprise-grade Drupal or WordPress hosting, CMS patches and updates

## + OPERATIONAL SUPPORT AND ENABLEMENT

Ongoing user support and assistance with technical issues, content updates, and website enhancements

## + QUALITY ASSURANCE AND STANDARDS COMPLIANCE

Periodic checks for quality assurance and accessibility including page load time, color contrast, broken links, and content readability

## Call in the Web Experts

**Consulting on all aspects of website accessibility—we're here to help!**

- + **Assessments** - Clear and actionable feedback on website health spanning user experience, CMS, SEO, accessibility, governance, and content.
- + **Website Refreshes** - Targeted user experience improvements to marketing-critical areas of an institution's or school's primary web presence.
- + **Website Redesigns** - Comprehensive overhaul of an institution's or school's primary web presence on Cascade, Drupal, Omni, Squiz, TerminalFour, or WordPress.
- + **Website Support** - Ongoing user support and assistance with technical issues, content updates, and website enhancements. Enterprise-grade Drupal or WordPress hosting.

# Resources

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## **Dive Deeper**

[Web Accessibility 101 for Higher Education](#)

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## **Learn More**

[Carnegie's Website Design & Development](#)

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## **Explore**

[Partner with Carnegie](#)



# Thank You!

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