

Vermont Systems - WCAG Policy and Guidelines

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Summary

The WCAG 2.1 guidelines as set forth by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) are a set of technical standards intended for web development audiences as a means to author web content in a way that is accessible to people with disabilities. These standards are relatively static but may be updated as governing bodies dictate; therefore, a periodic review of the latest guidelines should be conducted. There are various levels within the set of guidelines; level AA is the industry standard for assessing application accessibility.

Talking about Accessibility

At Vermont Systems, making Parks and Recreation Services accessible to communities through technology is at the heart of what we do. Vermont Systems strives to meet or exceed WCAG 2.1 AA standards in all core application features and processes. Note: While working to meet/exceed these standards, we recognize the subjective nature of referring to our applications as WCAG 2.1 AA compliant or conformant, due to guideline and available tooling result ambiguity as well as inconsistency across tooling in identifying and ‘measuring’ accessibility. To this end, Vermont Systems refers to its applications as accessible or not.

Tooling

There are several tools available for assessing the accessibility of web applications. Some of these tools are used by the disabled themselves and can be doubled to serve as testing tools. Others are purely used for identification and assessment. While there are options of tooling Vermont Systems can select from, Vermont Systems identifies a preferred subset that provides pragmatic levels of confidence in our applications’ levels of accessibility. These tools are categorized into three main groups: Operating System Tools, Application Software Tools, and Web Browser Tools.

Operating System Tools

When applicable and appropriate, secondary testing will be performed with accessibility tools provided at the operating system level. Microsoft Windows, Apple iOS, and Google Android each provide a suite of accessibility tools built into their operating systems.

Application Software Tools

NVDA

NVDA is the Vermont Systems preferred tooling for screen readers. It is open-source software and may be used personally and professionally at no cost. It is fast becoming the standard screen reader.

Web Browser Tools

WAVE

This is the Vermont Systems preferred tooling for accessibility assessment. WAVE may be used in two modes: as a Chrome browser plugin or as a web page tool. WAVE provides visual and contextual feedback of issues.

Axe

Axe is a self-contained open-source library and testing engine for accessibility. It can be customized to include specialized rules and to integrate with browsers and testing frameworks.

Accessibility Insights for Web

Accessibility Insights for Web is an extension for Chrome and Edge that helps find and fix accessibility issues in web apps and websites. The tool supports two primary solutions: a lightweight version and a more robust version.

Accessibility Developer Tools

Originally a Chrome extension; currently built into Dev tools under the Audits tab. This is particularly useful for generating a report for accessibility for mobile and desktop devices.

Guidelines and Standards

The W3C and WCAG provide a substantial and thorough set of resources to inform and sustain accessibility processes within an organization.

WCAG

WCAG 2.1 AA Guidelines reference accessibility standards across desktop and mobile web

applications. The tools referenced herein are one element of assessing accessibility. Other resources are available to further qualify accessibility. These resources include templates and tools to further formalize accessibility processes and report out findings.

Vermont Systems

Vermont Systems' guidelines mirror those of the WCAG 2.1 AA with the exception of specific exemption criteria.

Exemption Criteria

While Vermont Systems will make every attempt to ensure the accessibility of its web applications there are some instances where we may not be able to bring the desired level of accessibility into effect.

Customer Branding - In some instances a customer's functional requirements may not align with WCAG 2.1 AA guidelines. In these instances, Vermont Systems will provide this information to the customer, but the customer is responsible for making these decisions.

An example of this exemption may be a customer's branded color scheme does not provide enough contrast based upon the WCAG guidelines.

Secondary Paths - For legacy features that are not accessible, Vermont Systems may reserve the right to offer alternative workflows to accomplish tasks within its web applications where the feature is no longer being actively developed. For legacy products that are not accessible, Vermont Systems may reserve the right to offer upgrades to its current product versions as a means to satisfy accessibility concerns.

Cost and Complexity - While Vermont Systems will make every reasonable effort to provide for accessibility of its web applications, some efforts may prove prohibitive. In these instances, Vermont Systems may suggest secondary path options or request a feature be disabled until such a point that Vermont Systems is able to make accessible.

Third Party Content - Embedded third-party content or content not provided by Vermont Systems is exempt from the Vermont Systems WCAG Policy as Vermont Systems has no control over its construction and state of accessibility.

Process

The Vermont Systems accessibility processes will be governed by a small set of philosophical approaches.

Rules

Single Path - While exceptions may be made to create alternative views or paths to provide for accessibility within web applications, the default approach should be to have a single, primary path for a given feature or workflow that is accessible to disabled and non-disabled users alike.

Level of Priority - While Vermont Systems will make every reasonable effort to address web application accessibility concerns, High and Medium priority issues will be of primary focus. Some issues of low priority may be addressed but will not be considered required to resolve.

Screen Reading - As mentioned, NVDA is the Vermont Systems preferred screen reader. Assessing a screen reader's ability to navigate a web page and inform the user of proper context and direction is by default included in the Vermont Systems accessibility assessment process. Vermont Systems will make every reasonable effort to provide for accessibility across its web applications. But due to the nature of Vermont Systems products, there may be screen configurations not assessed prior to a customer's implementation. If accessibility concerns are discovered as outcomes of custom screen management, Vermont Systems will make every reasonable effort to address or suggest alternative screen designs.

Methods

In addition to the base set of tools described herein additional methods will be utilized in the areas of accessibility evaluation

Education and Static Code Analysis - To tactically address accessibility, Development and QA staff will conduct training and code reviews to help ensure develop efforts address accessibility guidelines. To further assist in identifying accessibility concerns, static code analysis tools will be evaluated for use within developing and testing processes.

Quarterly Review - To strategically and pragmatically address the broad set of accessibility guidelines, a comprehensive review of web application accessibility will be conducted quarterly to address any accessibility concerns that may have been missed within the iterative development process.

Development

Development processes will include cultivation of standards to proactively implement software solutions with accessibility in mind. These processes will also include audit mechanisms to 'catch' and address accessibility concerns ahead of the SDLC testing phase.

Testing

Standard testing processes will include use of tooling as specified herein for the purposes of assessing accessibility.

Defect Reporting and Remediation

A WCAG accessibility concern should be treated as any other typical defect within our development and testing processes.