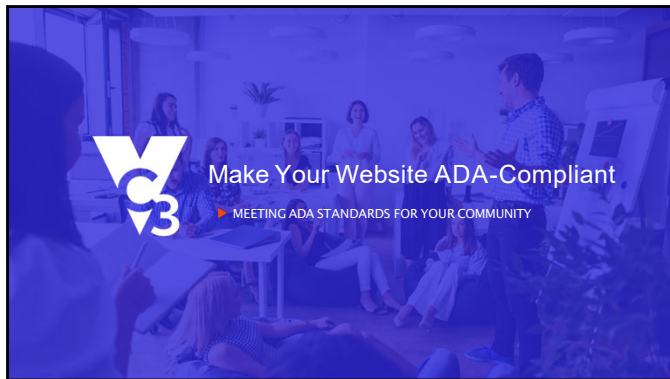


The information provided here is for informational and educational purposes and current as of the date of publication. The information is not a substitute for legal advice and does not necessarily reflect the opinion or policy position of the Municipal Association of South Carolina. Consult your attorney for advice concerning specific situations.



The Importance of ADA Compliance



What would it say about your municipality if a resident couldn't enter the town hall simply because they use a wheelchair?

NOW CONSIDER

What do you think the resident would do?



Did You Know?



MOBILITY
ROUGHLY

1

OUT OF EVERY 100 PEOPLE
rely on a wheelchair for mobility.



Did You Know?



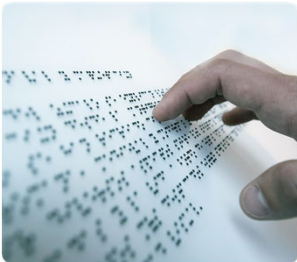
HEARING
ROUGHLY

5

OUT OF EVERY 100 PEOPLE
have moderate to severe hearing impairment.



Did You Know?



VISION
ROUGHLY

10

OUT OF EVERY 100 PEOPLE
have moderate to severe vision impairment.



Did You Know?



COLOR VISION
ROUGHLY

4

OUT OF EVERY 100 PEOPLE
are color blind.
[Demo](#)



Did You Know?



THE BIGGER PICTURE

1 in 4

OF THE U.S. POPULATION LIVES WITH A DISABILITY

Web accessibility directly dictates the digital access of over **85 million Americans.**



Agenda

OUR FOUR-STEP APPROACH TO ADA COMPLIANCE

1 Experience Put yourself in the shoes of an impacted person	2 Educate Understand the rules	3 Execute Address the issues	4 Endure Stay compliant
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1.Experience

Volunteer needed!





2. Educate

Understanding ADA Compliance



Web Content Accessibility Guidelines Walkthrough

The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines define what 'accessible' means in practice. The DOJ Title II rule adopts WCAG 2.1 AA as the legal standard.

The Four Principles: POUR

P	O	U	R
Perceivable	Operable	Understandable	Robust
Users can perceive the content through at least one of their senses.	Users can operate the interface — including with a keyboard alone.	Content and interface behavior are predictable and readable.	Content works with current and future assistive technologies.



PERCEIVABLE

Text Alternatives & Time-Based Media

1. Text Alternatives

1. *Non-text Content (A)*

Every image, icon, chart, and control needs a text alternative.

- Decorative images get alt="" (empty, not missing).
- Informative images describe the meaning, not the file.
- Functional images (icon buttons) describe the action.
- Complex images (charts) need short alt + long description.

2. Time-Based Media

1. *~ 1.2.5 (A and AA)*

- Captions on every pre-recorded video (1.2.2 AA).
- Audio description for visual-only info (1.2.5 AA).
- Transcripts for audio-only content (1.2.1 A).
- Live captions for council meetings & livestreams (1.2.4 AA).
- Auto-captions alone **do NOT** meet AA for recorded media — edit them.



PERCEIVABLE

Adaptable & Distinguishable

1.3 Adaptable

Information & structure preserved when assistive technology changes.

- Semantic headings (h1→h2→h3, no skipping).
- Lists use , , <dl> — not styled paragraphs.
- Form labels programmatically linked to inputs.
- Reading order matches visual order (no CSS reorder hacks).
- Don't rely on shape, size, or location alone (1.3.3).

1.4 Distinguishable

Make it easier to see and hear.

- Contrast: 4.5:1 for body, 3:1 for large text (1.4.3 AA).
- Resize text to 200% without loss of content (1.4.4 AA).
- Reflow at 320 CSS pixel width without horizontal scroll (1.4.10 AA).
- Non-text contrast 3:1 for UI components & icons (1.4.11 AA).
- Color is never the only indicator (1.4.1 A).



OPERABLE

Keyboard, Time, Navigation, Input

2.1 Keyboard Accessible

All functionality usable via keyboard. No traps. Visible focus.

2.1.1 Keyboard (A) - 2.1.2 No Keyboard Trap (A) - 2.1.4 Character Key Shortcuts (A)

2.2 Enough Time

Users can pause, extend, or turn off time limits.

2.2.1 Timing Adjustable (A) - 2.2.2 Pause, Stop, Hide (A)

2.4 Navigable

Help users find content and know where they are.

2.4.3 Focus Order (A) - 2.4.4 Link Purpose (A) - 2.4.6 Headings & Labels (AA) - 2.4.7 Focus Visible (AA)

2.5 Input Modalities

Make it easy beyond keyboard alone.

2.5.1 Pointer Gestures (A) - 2.5.3 Label in Name (A) - 2.5.4 Motion Actuation (A)



UNDERSTANDABLE & ROBUST

The Last Two Principles

3 · Understandable

1. Readable

- Page language declared (lang="en"). Mark language changes inline.

3.2 Predictable

- Components behave consistently. No surprise context changes on focus.

3.3 Input Assistance

- Identify errors in text. Suggest corrections. Confirm before submit.

4 · Robust

4.1.2 Name, Role, Value (A)

- Every UI control must expose name, role, state, value to assistive tech.

4.1.3 Status Messages (AA)

- Toast notifications, form errors, and live updates need live regions so screen readers announce them without moving focus.

Rule of thumb: prefer native HTML elements.



REALITY CHECK

Where Sites Most Often Fail

Based on WebAIM's annual analysis of 1M+ home pages: 95%+ have detectable WCAG failures. These six categories account for most of them.

Low contrast text	81%	Easiest to find. Hardest to retrofit retroactively.
Missing alt text	55%	Decorative vs informative is the team's #1 confusion. For example, Layout elements: Dividers, ornamental borders, shadows, etc.
Empty links / buttons	48%	Icon-only controls with no accessible name.
Missing form labels	44%	Placeholder ≠ label. Visible label required.
Empty form button	27%	Often submit buttons styled as icons.
Missing document language	17%	Single attribute on <html>. Trivial to fix.

Source: WebAIM Million 2024. Percentages = sites with at least one occurrence. The 2024 report on the accessibility of the top 1,000,000 home pages.



What Content Is Exempt?

CATEGORY 1 OF 4

Archived Web Content

Exempt if it meets all four criteria:

☒

Created before the compliance date

☒

Kept only for reference, research, or recordkeeping

☒

Stored in a designated archive section

☒

Has not been modified since archiving



What Content Is Exempt?

CATEGORY 2 OF 4

Pre-Existing Electronic Documents

PDFs, Word, PowerPoint, and spreadsheet files are exempt if they meet both criteria:

✓

Available on the website before the compliance date

✓

Not currently being used to apply for or access government services

What Content Is Exempt?

CATEGORY 3 OF 4

Third-Party Posted Content

Content posted by the public or outside parties not under contract with the government is exempt. However, the exception does not apply to:

✗

Content posted by contractors or vendors on the government's behalf

✗

Third-party tools and platforms added to the website by the government

What Content Is Exempt?

CATEGORY 4 OF 4

Individualized Password-Protected Documents

Documents are exempt if they meet all three criteria:

✓

Word processing, presentation, PDF, or spreadsheet format

✓

Specific to an individual person, property, or account

✓

Password-protected or otherwise secured



Population-Based Compliance Deadlines

WHO MUST COMPLY & BY WHEN

Know your compliance deadline

The rule covers all state and local government entities ("public entities") — cities, counties, agencies, public schools and universities, courts, libraries, and special districts. Your deadline depends on population.

POPULATION 50,000 + April 26, 2027 Larger cities, counties, and state agencies <i>Originally April 2026 — extended one year by DOJ's 2026 interim final rule.</i>	UNDER 50,000 · SPECIAL DISTRICTS April 26, 2028 Smaller municipalities and all special district governments <i>Originally April 2027 — also extended by one year.</i>
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Potential Consequences of Non-Compliance

Potential Consequences of Non-Compliance

LEGAL AND FINANCIAL RAMIFICATIONS



Enforcement Procedures

Enforcement includes investigations and settlement agreements to resolve compliance issues effectively.

Penalties for Non-Compliance

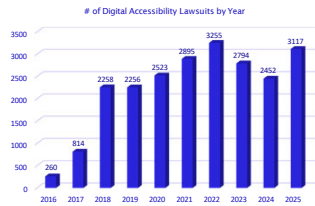
Non-compliance can lead to costly fines and legal actions impacting local governments.

Reputational Risks

Failure to comply risks reputational damage affecting trust and credibility of local authorities.

Potential Consequences of Non-Compliance

BY THE NUMBERS



Year	# of Digital Accessibility Lawsuits
2016	260
2017	814
2018	2258
2019	2256
2020	2523
2021	2885
2022	3255
2023	2794
2024	2452
2025	3117

FEDERAL ADA WEBSITE LAWSUITS

3,117
filed in federal courts in 2025

TYPICAL SETTLEMENT RANGE

\$5K - \$20K
per settlement, plus the cost of website compliance updates

Potential Consequences of Non-Compliance

Flagler County, Florida

COMPLAINT
Blind resident sued claiming the county website and PDFs were inaccessible to screen-reader users.

RESULT
County paid \$15,700 and agreed to remediate PDFs, improve accessibility, and hire an accessibility consultant.

Manatee County, Florida

COMPLAINT
Similar lawsuit by same plaintiff group alleging inaccessible online documents (PDFs).

RESULT
County paid about \$16,000; committed to web accessibility improvements and ongoing monitoring.

City of New York

COMPLAINT
The city's public LinkNYC kiosks and related online services were inaccessible to blind users.

RESULT
Agreement required accessibility upgrades to kiosks, appointment of an accessibility coordinator, and periodic compliance reporting — no major monetary fine disclosed.

9

Potential Consequences of Non-Compliance

New York State Board of Elections & DMV

COMPLAINT

ACLU, NFB, and Disability Rights Advocates sued, saying the state's online voter registration and DMV forms were inaccessible to blind users.

RESULT

Court-approved remediation plan mandating compliant voter registration and election websites, plus audits and reporting to ensure compliance.

Texas Counties

COMPLAINT

DOJ investigation found county election websites violated ADA Title II by being inaccessible to people with vision or manual disabilities.

RESULT

Counties agreed to fix websites, adopt accessibility policies, designate coordinators, and certify future compliance. No monetary penalty stated publicly.



3. Execute

How to address issues



Images (Demo)

NON-TEXT CONTENT · IMAGES OF TEXT

Write Meaningful Alt Text

Be concise and specific. Don't begin with "image of" or "picture of."

✗ alt="" (empty)

✓ alt="City council members signing the budget agreement"

Avoid Embedding Text Inside Images

Text baked into an image can't be resized, recolored, or read by screen readers. Common offenders: banners, flyers, and event announcements saved as image files.

Don't Rely on Images Alone to Convey Meaning

Always pair any visual meaning with an equivalent in text.

Long Descriptions for Complex Images

Charts, graphs, and infographics need more than short alt text — provide the data as real text on the page.

Don't Repeat Surrounding Text in Alt Text

If a caption or nearby text already conveys the image, don't duplicate it in the alt text.



Color & Contrast (Demo)

USE OF COLOR · CONTRAST · SENSORY CHARACTERISTICS

Ensure Sufficient Text Contrast	Normal text: minimum 4.5:1 contrast ratio. Large text (18pt, or 14pt bold): minimum 3:1.
Avoid Text Over Low-Contrast Images	Don't place text directly over photos unless there's a built-in design overlay behind it.
Don't Rely on Color Alone	✗ Required fields marked with a red border only ✓ Required fields marked with a red border AND labeled "Required"



Headings (Demo)

HEADINGS AND LABELS · INFO AND RELATIONSHIPS

Use Descriptive Headings	✗ "More information" → ✓ "Permit Application Requirements" Test: read only the headings — together they should outline the page on their own.
Use Headings for Structure, Not Styling	Don't just bold and enlarge plain text to fake a heading — screen readers won't recognize it.
Maintain Proper Heading Order	Page title = H1; start body content at Heading 2. Follow a logical order (H2 → H3 → H4) and don't skip levels.



Links (Demo)

LINK PURPOSE

Use Descriptive Link Text	✗ "Click here" → ✓ "View Building Permit Requirements"
Avoid Same Link Text for Different Destinations	✗ Three "Download Form" links ✓ "Download Variance Form" / "Download Site Plan Form"
No Raw URLs as Link Text	✗ https://www.example.com/finance/licensing_and_zoning.php ✓ "Licensing and Zoning Information"
Indicate File Types	✗ "Download the agenda" ✓ "Download the Council Meeting Agenda (PDF, 2MB)"
Warn Users About External Links or New Tabs	✓ "Georgia DOT (external site)" ✓ "Zoning Map (opens in new tab)"



Tables

HEADINGS AND LABELS · INFO AND RELATIONSHIPS

Use Tables Only for Data	Use tables for structured data such as meetings, schedules, rates and fees, and directories — never to control page layout.
Mark Table Headers Properly	Designate a true Header Row and/or Header Column rather than just bolding the first row to mimic headers.
Avoid Merged or Split Cells	Merged cells break the row-and-column relationships that screen readers depend on. When they seem unavoidable, split the content into two simpler tables or restructure it as a list.
Add a Caption or Introductory Text	Give each table a clear title placed directly beside it — for example, “2026 Building Permit Fee Schedule.”



Best Practices: Files & Documents

NON-TEXT CONTENT

Use Descriptive File Names	 final_v2_REvised.pdf  council-meeting-agenda-march-2026.pdf Use hyphens between words and rename before uploading — renaming after upload is harder and slow to update in search engines.
Publish Content on Pages When Possible	A webpage is always more accessible than a PDF — it resizes, reflows on mobile, and works with screen readers. If a PDF is unavoidable, it must be tagged, text-based, and include proper headings, alt text, and other accessibility essentials.



ADA Cheat Sheet

"Alt" text description on your images	  
Don't use images instead of text	
Post "readable" PDF files, not scans	   
Shorten long text	 
Use heading elements to convey logical structure of the content	  
Apply closed captioning to all videos	
Provide text transcripts for audio files	





4. Endure

How to remain compliant



Steps Toward Achieving Website ADA Compliance

HOW TO COMPLY?



Your website editors must be accountable for creating and maintaining accessible content.

- ✓ Accessible content training for creators and editors
- ✓ Internal policies that foster accessible content
- ✓ Regular compliance scanning and reporting



Steps Toward Achieving Website ADA Compliance

CONDUCTING ACCESSIBILITY AUDITS AND ASSESSMENTS



Accessibility Audits
Audits detect current accessibility issues through both automated tools and manual testing methods.

Accessibility Assessments
Assessments prioritize identified issues and develop a compliance roadmap for improvements.



Steps Toward Achieving Website ADA Compliance

ONGOING MAINTENANCE AND STAFF TRAINING



Continuous Monitoring
Regularly checking websites ensures ongoing accessibility compliance and identifies areas needing improvement quickly.

Timely Updates
Promptly applying updates and fixes helps maintain compliance with evolving accessibility standards and legal requirements.

Staff Training
Educating developers and content creators on best practices improves accessibility awareness and implementation.



Key Takeaways

- 1 Accessibility is not a one-time project — it is an ongoing practice.
- 2 Most issues are fixed in content, not code — you don't need to be a developer.
- 3 When in doubt: use plain text, descriptive labels, and proper structure.

Every piece of content you publish is a point of access for a resident.



Key Takeaways



WCAG 2.1 AA is the Standard
Both DOJ regulations and the Section 508 refresh now point to WCAG 2.1 Level AA. This is the benchmark courts and regulators use.

Litigation Risk is at an All-Time High
Over 5,000 lawsuits in 2025, with penalties exceeding \$118,000 for first violations. Accessibility overlays are not a defense.

Start Now, Not Later
Comprehensive remediation is the only strategy proven to reduce repeat litigation. Partial fixes increase long-term risk and cost.



Are You Compliant? 

-  WAVE Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool
wave.webaim.org
-  WebAIM Contrast Checker
webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker
-  Information & Education
webaim.org

Group Activity

Spot the issues!





Thank You!

Need help? Email info@vc3.com
