

# **THE ACCESSIBILITY** **TREE**

A decorative laurel wreath in a light gray color, framing the title text on both sides.

A GUIDE TO MAKING YOUR  
**VIRTUAL EVENT ACCESSIBLE**

**matchbox**   
VIRTUAL MEDIA

The Matchbox logo features the word "matchbox" in a sans-serif font, with "match" in white and "box" in red. To the right of the text is a red icon consisting of three concentric curved lines, resembling a Wi-Fi signal or a stylized 'm'. Below the logo, the words "VIRTUAL MEDIA" are written in a smaller, white, all-caps sans-serif font.



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# Introduction to our Accessibility Tree Guide

Welcome to our Accessibility Guide! We wanted to share something with the community that would help each user better understand and implement measures for their virtual events to become more accessible. If your organization, company, or association values inclusivity and accessibility as strengths to better the world, then please enjoy this guide as a tool to support your future virtual events' successes.

As the brainstorming began, the resources were collected, and the conversations were held, we felt this project had the potential to take many shapes. We didn't want to produce a checklist, we didn't want to produce a report. We felt that there was no way to place certain accessibility measures above or below others, nor how to express how inclusivity fits into accessibility without placing it above or below. Our choice to shape our thoughts (and guide) along the shape of a tree helped us communicate the similarities, interconnectedness, and overall harmony of how accessibility can run through your virtual event production, beginning to end.

Before we dive in, we want you to take a short moment to gather your thoughts and reflect on what it means to create accessible virtual events for your community, your attendees, or your fellow people. With the diversity that exists around us, it's a journey to create something truly inclusive and accessible, and each step of that journey requires care and intention. Any effort you put and step you take is progress. More importantly, every time you open the channel for communication and actively **seek** the suggestions and feedback of those needing accessibility measures, you are becoming the host your attendees value! **Before, during, and after events, have an open line of communication to receive recommendations, requests, accessibility barriers, and feedback for further growth.**





# The Shining Sun

We found the paraphrased summary of [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.1](#) very helpful as we approached the topic of accessibility for virtual events. The following 4 categories put clearer words to larger concepts that must be kept in mind during all efforts to make your events accessible. With such wide variety of accommodations possible and considerations needed, the following guiding categories of questions helped us structure our research:

## Perceivable

- Are we offering text alternatives for non-text content?
- Are we offering captions and other alternatives for multimedia?
- Are we creating content that can be presented in different ways, including by assistive technologies, without losing meaning?
  - Although the term is broad, assistive technologies in relation to computing devices modify or replace things like keyboards, monitors, and computer mice to become more operable. Here are a few examples from [the Bureau of Internet Accessibility](#), and a deeper look by [the Web Accessibility Initiative](#).
- Are we making it easier for users to engage with content?

## Operable

- Are all functionalities available from a keyboard?
- Do users have enough time to read and use content?
- Are we avoiding content that causes seizures or physical reactions?
- Are we helping users navigate and find content?
- Are we making it easier to use inputs other than the keyboard?

## Understandable

- Is our text readable and understandable?
- Does our content appear and operate in predictable ways?
- Do we help users avoid and correct mistakes?

## Robust

- Do we maximize compatibility with current and future user tools?

If you reviewed these questions with your own site in mind, and answered many with something between “no” and “I don’t know”, then we invite you to visit <https://wave.webaim.org/> and have your site scanned and analyzed. You’ll see where improvement can be made based on specific categories, and learn about each error in enough detail to go forth and address it.

Let these motivating adjectives be your goals to guide your accessible event production:

- Perceivable
- Understandable
- Operable
- Robust

## The Tree Trunk

The tree trunk represents ideas and elements that are fundamental to all aspects of work, not only virtual event planning. Don't forget that many companies are prioritizing accessibility tools to help with users' every day needs. For example, Microsoft Office has an [accessibility checker](#) that can improve your day to day communications and tasks.

The aim is to be inclusive! Expand your audience while creating a safer, kinder, more open climat to those within it. Remember, disabilities/barriers experienced aren't always visible, but by being open to hearing what can be improved upon, we can continue learning. Having open channels of communication specifically for people to express their needs is a huge step forward. Once your event is set up to meet those needs, keep that channel staffed for any glitches or issues that arise!



Throughout your event production (and work in general), aim to ensure your:

- Website features are accessible by keyboard alone.
- Websites and content are compatible with a variety of assistive technologies.
- Content is distinguishable through appropriate spacing, font size, contrast, use of colour.
  - One great example of a customizable site is <https://www.mollywatt.com>, the website of Molly Watt, a keynote speaker, usability and accessibility consultant, specialising in assistive technology and design for those with sensory impairment.
- Text is readable by avoiding metaphors, spelling out acronyms, and avoiding jargon.
- Warnings are incorporated for both seizure triggers and content triggers when it contains potentially distressing material.





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# The Branches

The branches of your tree are the many elements, big and small, that contribute to your event's design and execution. They criss-cross and overlap, some may carry more weight than others, but we recommend you browse through them to get a clearer idea of how they work together!

## Pre-Event Planning

Pre-Event planning is where the action happens in order for the event day to be a success!

### For registration:

- Ensure your registration form, pre-event communication, and event page offer the opportunity for people to communicate their needs.
- Offer gender neutral options when pronouns and titles are needed.
- Consider early access for attendees to familiarize themselves with the layout and platform functions.
- Share your accessibility measures well in advance.
- Be honest and set realistic expectations for what attendees can expect.



### For session preparation:

- If your sessions are pre recorded:
  - Aim for the speaker's voice to be recorded directly through the computer system, (i.e. through the use of a microphone) to reduce echo and provide clearer sound.
  - To improve the experience for people reading lips, ensure your speakers are in a well-lit area so their faces are seen clearly.
- If your sessions are live:
  - Prepare to have a live sign language interpreter and live closed captions present
    - *Don't forget, sign language and closed captions serve different purposes to different communities and are not interchangeable. For example, people who are hard of hearing may not understand sign language, and closed captions are beneficial to people with a different mother tongue language. Better to have both to encompass a wider variety of people!*
  - For interactive sessions, offer easy methods for participants to opt in or opt out of the interactions; this ensures no one is ever put on the spot and asked to engage in a way that can not or do not want to.

### For the live event:

- Plan to have breaks at least once per hour
- Ensure attendees can modify their usernames
  - *This is more inclusive primarily since it permits attendees to remain anonymous but also allows them to use other chosen names that they are more comfortable with.*
- Consider time zones for virtual events since attendees are everywhere!
- Last minute changes and additional features
  - It may be easy to overlook the features that aren't central to the event, such as pop ups or post-event Happy Hours! Aim to take this into consideration when planning.
  - Speaking of popups, you want to ensure that any sponsorship integration is as accessible as possible. This includes your sponsors videos, graphics, or other content.

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## Promotion

Send out your message and reach as many people as possible through as many different media as possible! This includes written text, videos, audio, images, and anything else our varied senses can consume. By virtue, this means you will likely be encouraged to promote your event on a wider variety of platforms too!

In these promotions, feel free to include:

- A detailed agenda to help people structure their time.
- Any deadlines for specific accessibility requests (ex. Sign Language interpreters are in high demand and must be booked in advance).
- Any planned measures for the event to be made accessible.
- Any pre-event documents, readings, access to slides, etc.
  - Not everyone can listen, read, interact, and watch all the elements of an event unroll at the same speed. Offering documents beforehand allows people to prepare themselves, print things, and enter the event without feeling overwhelmed.
- The option for your live event username to be changed or remain anonymous.

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## Communication Accessibility

Set your attendees expectations around language by:

- Listing the languages in which the event will be made available.
- Communicating whether a sign language interpreter will be present.
- Informing whether captions or a transcript of the audio recording will be available. Captioned videos should be a default as they serve a variety of people. Providing both sign language interpretation and captioning is always best.

Set your attendees expectations around audio and video by:

- Providing captioning, subtitles or a transcript
- Ensuring audio transcription is available during and after the event; content on-demand should be equally accessible as its live component.
- Providing a recording of the event (with captions)

Maximize the impact of your speakers' presentations by:

- Sharing clear agendas
- Using plain language as much as possible for the audience and content
- Explaining or write out all acronyms and abbreviations
- Reducing the use of metaphors or idioms
  - *This makes your content easier to understand for certain neurodiverse people or those attending in a language that isn't their mother tongue.*
- Using contrast for clearer slides
- Reading what the slides say aloud so that content makes it into the captioning and transcript
- Sharing presentation slides before the event for those who may want to review or print them.

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## Day of Event Accessibility

The day has come and your attendees are logging in. Set them up for success by ensuring your event landing page details which browsers are best suited for the event platform. Additionally, detail whether or not the platform is accessible to assistive technologies. Here are some considerations for how attendees can interact in the best possible way with your event. There are still come considerations for how they will interact in the best possible way with your event.

**If your event is interactive, ensure attendees can:**

- Balance or modify the lighting and sound for the event to not overwhelm their senses and create unintended anxiety (ex. Muting, dimming, hiding video, hiding chat, etc.)
- Participate in a variety of ways (ex. Speaking, typing, polls, etc)
- Clearly indicate if they choose to not participate and not be called upon
- Change their username and profile pictures/avatar

**Virtual events require that you take into consideration if:**

- Your platform is suited for most devices, but be honest when recommending which devices will deliver the best experience!!
- The event is accessible to those with varied internet/download speeds
- Live support is available during the event.



## Financial accessibility

The social implications of how you treat finances during your event planning can be impactful. There are advantages to having financial accessibility as a means for more registrants to have a positive pre-event experience, right through to registration and payment completion.

**Aim for your event to be financially accessible by:**

- Accepting a variety of payment methods.
- For online payments, choose sites which are accessible.
- Offering a sliding scale, pay-what-you-can, free attendance for registrants.
- Compensate people's time by finding the balance between the revenue from an event, the cost to produce it, and the value of your speakers, interns, volunteers, and other contributors.
- Offer private ways of asking for assistance (ex. A specific contact email or phone number).



## Post-event feedback

Chances are that you already have a survey ready to send out after the event. You may have incorporated some photos from the event, some great questions, and all you have left to do is hit send. Not only is it important to ensure there are some feedback questions to assess how well you satisfied your attendees accessibility needs, but to ask for how they could be improved upon for future events.

For your surveys to reach as many people as possible, you can offer feedback collection by:

- Telephone
  - Speech to speech
  - Speech to speech relay service
  - TTY (this is a set of technology and devices that lets people who are deaf, hard of hearing, or speech-impaired use the telephone to communicate by allowing them to type text messages. A TTY is required at both ends of the conversation in order to communicate.)
- Writing
  - Through the post
  - Text message
  - Email
- In-person
  - Sign language interpretation
  - Communicating with an alternate support person
  - Using translation and live text options with electronic devices.





# The Ground Below

The Web Accessibility Initiative states that accessibility, usability, and inclusion are closely related and have overlapping goals, approaches, and guidelines for creating a web that works for everyone.

For a detailed look at how accessibility, usability, and inclusion are distinct, we invite you to read the [Accessibility, Usability, and Inclusion article from The W3C's Web Accessibility Initiative](#). What we wanted to emphasize is that all efforts work towards ensuring the greatest extent of involvement possible, from as many people as possible.

Contemplate for a moment, that elevators make spaces accessible for wheelchair users, but elevators also improve the situations of people with strollers or heavy bags of groceries. Many accessibility measures benefit everyone, regardless of their abilities. For example, creating sufficient contrast benefits people using the web on a mobile device in bright sunlight or in a dark room, and captions benefit people in noisy or in quiet environments.

With inclusion on your mind, you'll see that measures to help some people feel at ease will often result in a larger group benefiting as well. Some elements around inclusion that may seem periphery but can be impactful are:

- Ability - mental and/or physical
  - Providing breaks and control over sensory stimulation during your event will help everyone have the most peaceful and stressless time possible.
- Age
  - Providing printable resources for a less tech-familiar audience.
- Ethnicity
  - Being awareness of various backgrounds, surroundings, and guest appearances during video calls, confirming name pronunciation or the ability to change usernames for those who prefer it.
- Socio-economic background
  - Awareness of the equipment that event stakeholders have access to, or their personal surroundings.



- Race
  - Supporting speakers to create the best lighting for video recordings (this also helps with lip reading), awareness of existing microaggressions and world issues.
- Belief systems
  - Awareness of potential religious symbols during video recordings or the desire for the person to keep their video off, awareness of various holidays and calendar events.
- Gender
  - Providing genderless options during registration, awareness of pronouns, ability for users to choose their username.
- Sexual orientation
  - Respect for privacy if the person chooses to keep their camera off, awareness of assumptions regarding other people in their household.

# Resources Catalogue

The following resources are an amalgamation of sites and documents which helped us frame how accessibility can be approached virtually. Some guides were designed for in-person events but were influential in our understanding of what a holistic approach looks like! Basically, we wanted to put everything we explored (and found valuable) in one place for you!

## **The guiding body for web growth and standards.**

[The World Wide Web Consortium \(W3C\)](#) is an international community that develops open standards to ensure the long-term growth of accessibility on the Web.

## **An organized, brief overview of the larger web accessibility potential.**

[WCAG \(Web Content Accessibility Guidelines\) 2.1 at a Glance](#). This page provides a paraphrased summary of Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1.

## **The Americans with Disabilities Act.**

[The ADA Home Page](#) provides access to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations for businesses and State and local governments, and technical support.

## **Your starting point to assess how accessible your current websites are!**

[WAVE](#) is an automated testing tool that helps authors make their web content more accessible to individuals with disabilities. WAVE can identify many accessibility and Web Content Accessibility Guideline (WCAG) errors, but also facilitates human evaluation of web content. Our philosophy is to focus on issues that we know impact end users, facilitate human evaluation, and to educate about web accessibility.

## **Great reading for the inspired!**

If this guide has inspired you to learn about web accessibility and the professional opportunities that are related, we invite you to explore the [100 Days of Accessibility Blog](#) by one unique web designer detailing her journey to learn web accessibility in-depth.

## **A tool for Microsoft Office users:**

A tool for Adobe Acrobat Pro DC users:

If you're already using Adobe Acrobat Pro DC, then explore their [Make Accessible Action Wizard](#) to make sure any PDF handouts are also accessible.

### A great site with great resources:

One great example of a customizable site is [the website of Molly Watt](#). She's a keynote speaker, usability and accessibility consultant, specialising in assistive technology and design for those with sensory impairment.

### Virtual meeting options

The Partnership on Employment & Accessible Technology (PEAT) is funded by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) and assembled some quick links to compare platforms in an article titled [How to Pick an Accessible Virtual Meeting Platform](#).

### An example of a company's first attempt!

[Addressing Accessibility Concerns for Virtual Conferences - A Case Study](#) sheds light on how Bounteous prioritized accessibility in their virtual event and the tools they picked up along the way.

### Some examples to aspire to!

[A collection showcasing accessible user interfaces](#) and tools to show how varied, beautiful, and professional they can be!

## Additional Documents:

### The go-to for all your detailed questions.

What are the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines?

[The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#), often abbreviated to WCAG, are a series of guidelines for improving web accessibility. Produced by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) the WCAG are the best means of making your website useful to all of your users. Although they are not an all-inclusive list of issues facing web users with disabilities, they are internationally recognised and adopted standards. The guidelines explain how to solve many of the problems that your users with disabilities face.

[Accessibility Guidelines for Organizers and Facilitators](#) - This document was created in the spring of 2015 by members of Accessibilize Montreal as part of the "By and For Us: The Community at the Head of the Organization" project, organized by the Center for Community Organizations (COCO).

[The Beyond Compliance Coordinating Committee \(BCCC\) Guidelines for Accessibility](#) -

An effort to highlight the many ways in which event/conference planners and presenters can make events as accessible as possible. In order to capture the emotionality involved with access, stories of inaccessibility are intertwined with basic guidelines.

[A Guide to Planning Inclusive Events, Seminars, and Activities at Syracuse University](#)

- While the BCCC's guide (listed above) addresses accessibility for people with disabilities, the current guide incorporates this discussion and broadens it, to consider a wider array of audiences.

[Access Ability](#) - A practical handbook on accessible graphic design with the objective of not telling professional designers what to do, but rather to remind all of us how we could be doing better.

[Assistive Technology 101: What You Need to Know](#): With so many different assistive technologies, it can be hard to know where to start. This article will break down some of the different types of assistive technology based on the types of disabilities they may be most likely to help with.

## Questions, thoughts, suggestions?

Please send an email to [info@matchboxvirtual.com](mailto:info@matchboxvirtual.com) with "Accessibility" in the subject line.

