BLUE SPRINGS
MISSOURI

Digital Accessibility Policy

Purpose

Accessibility is the practice of making information, environments, and technology meaningful and usable for as many people as possible. The ways in which people with disabilities interact with technology can vary greatly.

Digital accessibility is the practice of making websites, web applications, and digital content usable and accessible for people with disabilities. Beyond being a moral and ethical business responsibility, it's required by law. People with disabilities have the right to access information and communication technologies equally as those without disabilities.

The City of Blue Springs will be required by law to be compliant with the digital standards outlined in Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) by April 24, 2026. However, more than just meeting a legal requirement, it is also the City of Blue Springs' stated goal to foster an inclusive, and accessible environment for all its Staff and residents.

Accessibility Standards

The City of Blue Springs shall comply with the standards outlined in Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Title II of the ADA requires state and local governments to make sure that their services, programs, and activities are accessible to people with disabilities. Title II applies to all services, programs, or activities of state and local governments, from adoption services to zoning regulation. This includes the services, programs, and activities that state and local governments offer online and through mobile apps.

Why is this required?

State and local governments provide many of their services, programs, and activities through websites and mobile apps. When these websites, mobile apps, and digital content are not accessible, they can create barriers for people with disabilities.

- For example, individuals who are blind may use a screen reader to deliver visual information on a website or digital PDF as speech. A state or local government might post an image on its website that provides information to the public. If the website does not include text describing the image (sometimes called "alternative text" or "alt text"), individuals who are blind and who use screen readers may have no way of knowing what is in the image because a screen reader cannot "read" an image.

Websites, mobile apps, and PDFs that are not accessible can make it difficult or impossible for people with disabilities to access government services, like ordering mail-in ballots or getting tax information, that are quickly and easily available to other members of the public online. Sometimes, inaccessible websites and mobile apps can

keep people with disabilities from joining or fully participating in civic or other community events like town meetings.

This rule will help make sure people with disabilities have access to state and local governments' services, programs, and activities available on websites and mobile apps. This rule will also provide state and local governments with more clarity about what they have to do to comply with the ADA.

Accessibility Statement

The City of Blue Springs is committed to ensuring that its services are accessible to all members of the public. As part of this commitment, the City strives to provide an accessible website and digital contents compatible with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) version 2.1, AA, and commercial screen reading software. Features of the City's website and its digital content are created to allow individuals with vision and other impairments to understand and use the website to the same degree as someone without disabilities.

Website Management and Compliance Requirements

The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) Version 2.1, Level AA is the technical standard for state and local governments' web content and mobile apps. WCAG, the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, is a set of guidelines that say what is needed for web accessibility, such as requirements for captions for videos. WCAG is developed by the World Wide Web Consortium.

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 defines how to make web content more accessible to people with disabilities. Accessibility involves a wide range of

disabilities, including visual, auditory, physical, speech, cognitive, language, learning, and neurological disabilities. Although these guidelines cover a wide range of issues, they are not able to address the needs of people with all types, degrees, and combinations of disability. These guidelines also make web content more usable by older individuals with changing abilities due to aging and often improve usability for users in general.

Title II applies to web content that a state or local government provides or makes available. This includes when a state or local government has an arrangement with someone else who provides or makes available web content for them.

WCAG Principles

- Perceivable – Color Contrast, Captions
- Operable – keyboard navigation
- Understandable – reading order, link clarity
- Robust – compatible with assistive technology tools

Digital Content Compliance

All City Staff are required to adhere to accessibility best practices for digital content creation. This applies to all digital content created for internal and external use. This can include, but is not limited to: pdfs, emails, spreadsheets, newsletters, documents, social media, etc.

Liability

State and local governments must make sure that their web content and mobile apps meet WCAG 2.1, Level AA within two or three years of when the rule was published on April 24, 2024, depending on their population.

The City of Blue Springs will need to be compliant by April 24, 2026. All digital content (pdfs, emails, spreadsheets, newsletters, documents, social media, etc.) that is not compliant with Title II ADA standards has the potential to put the City at risk for litigation. Penalties for ADA non-compliance are not only financial, but also potentially reputational, affecting the City's perception to its residents. It is of the utmost importance that the City meets its designated compliance date (April 24, 2026) and maintains a commitment to accessibility and inclusion.

Title II ADA Compliance Date Table

State and local government size	Compliance date
0 to 49,999 persons	April 26, 2027
Special district governments	April 26, 2027
50,000 or more persons	**April 24, 2026**

Exceptions

Web content that meets **all four** of the following points would not need to meet WCAG 2.1, Level AA:

1. The content was created before the date the state or local government must comply with this rule, or reproduces paper documents or the contents of other physical media (audiotapes, film negatives, and CD-ROMs for example) that were created before the government must comply with this rule, **AND**

2. The content is kept only for reference, research, or recordkeeping, **AND**

3. The content is kept in a special area for archived content, **AND**

4. The content has not been changed since it was archived.

- **Example:** A water quality report from 1998 that a state has stored in an "archive" section of its website and has not updated would probably fall under the exception. The exception would also probably apply to handwritten research notes or photos that go with the 1998 water quality report that the state scans and posts to its website in the archive section.

- **Example:** City council meeting minutes created after the date the city must comply with this rule would **not** fall under the exception even if they are posted in the "archive" section of the city's website. The meeting minutes would probably have to comply with WCAG 2.1, Level AA, because this content was created after the time the city had to comply with this rule.

- **Example:** A PDF document that includes a current map of a county park that is based on data collected after the county was required to comply with this rule would probably not fall under the exception even if the document is posted in the "archive" section of the county's website. The PDF provides current information about the park. The exception would probably **not** apply, and the

PDF would probably have to comply with WCAG 2.1, Level AA, because the content is not kept only for reference, research, or recordkeeping.

Some state and local governments have a lot of old documents, like PDFs, on their website. It can sometimes be hard to make these documents meet WCAG 2.1, Level AA.

- Documents that meet **both** of the following points usually do not need to meet WCAG 2.1, Level AA, except in some situations:

    1. The documents are word processing, presentation, PDF, or spreadsheet files; **AND**

    2. They were available on the state or local government's website or mobile app **before** the date the state or local government must comply with this rule.

- **Example:** This exception would probably apply to a PDF flyer for a Thanksgiving Day parade posted on a town's website in 2018, or a Microsoft Word version of a sample ballot for a school board election posted on a school district's website in 2014.

- **Example:** After the date a city has to comply with the rule, it updates a Microsoft Word document that was first posted on its website in 2020 to include the city's new contact information. The updated document would **not** qualify for the exception anymore, and it would probably have to meet WCAG 2.1, Level AA.

When the exception does not apply: Documents that are currently being used to apply for, access, or participate in a state or local government's services, programs, or activities do not fall under the exception even if the documents were posted before the date the government has to comply with the rule.

- **Example:** A state posted a PDF version of a business license application on its website in 2020. Members of the public still use that PDF to apply for a business license after the date the state has to comply with the rule. The exception would **not** apply to the application and it would usually need to meet WCAG 2.1, Level AA.

Content Posted by a Third Party

Third parties sometimes post content on state and local governments' websites or mobile apps. Third parties are members of the public or others who are not controlled by or acting for state or local governments. The state or local government may not be able to change the content third parties post. Content that is posted by third parties on a state or local government's website or mobile app would not need to meet WCAG 2.1, Level AA.

However, This exception only applies to content posted by a third party. Content that is not posted by a third party usually needs to meet WCAG 2.1, Level AA. This Includes:

1. Third-party content posted by the state or local government.
    - **Example:** Many state or local governments post content on their websites that is developed by an outside technology company, like calendars, scheduling tools, maps, reservations systems, and payment systems. This content would **not** fall under the exception, and it would usually need to meet WCAG 2.1, Level AA, because it is posted by the state or local government.
2. Content posted by a state or local government's contractor or vendor.

- **Example:** If a state or local government uses a company to design, manage, or update its website, the content the company posts for the government would **not** fall under the exception, and it would usually need to meet WCAG 2.1, Level AA.

3. Tools and platforms that allow third parties to post content.

    - **Example:** If the state or local government has a message board platform on its website, that platform would **not** fall under the exception, and it would usually need to meet WCAG 2.1, Level AA, because the message board was added to the website by the state or local government. However, the exception would probably apply to posts by third parties on that platform.

Creating Accessible Documents in Microsoft Word

When we create documents that are accessible for all, we ensure a more inclusive experience for everyone. The Microsoft 365 Suit has a built in "Accessibility Checker" that can help guide users to make sure that their content is accessible. Common practices that City Staff will need to be aware of is Titling/Headings for documents and the inclusion of Alternative Text on images in documents. Ensuring that your content created in Microsoft 365 Applications is accessible will help with the transfer to PDF formatting.

Headers

"When proper heading structure is not added to a document or the document is not tagged at all, it's the equivalent of buying a newspaper at the newsstand and finding that

all of the text is in 12-point type with no headings at all, or worse, that the document is completely blank."

- Creating Accessible PDFs LinkedIn Learning Course

When creating your content, you'll want to provide an overview and context for the content you share. Headings and titles make text stand out, so people can understand how your document is organized, and screen readers can understand navigational structure.

People using screen readers and other assistive technologies may navigate your content by using keyboard shortcuts to move from heading to heading. A title is usually the first thing a screen reader will read as the highest-level heading, followed by subheadings for other sections or topics.

Headers in Microsoft Word To apply headings in Word, use the built-in Styles available in the Home tab of the ribbon. Depending on the hierarchy of your content, choose Heading 1, Heading 2, or Heading 3. Properly nesting the order of headings in your document is critical to informing screen reader users how to navigate. You can also modify the appearance of any heading by changing the font, size, color, or alignment.

Alternative Text

Alternative text, or alt text, is a brief description of an image that helps people who can't see the image understand its content and purpose. Screen readers and other assistive technologies read alt text. The alt text you write should convey the "why" of the image as it relates to the content of a document or webpage.

To add Alternative Text to images in Microsoft Word:

1. Right-click the image and select "View Alt Text."

2. Enter appropriate alt text.
3. If the image doe not convey meaningful information, indicate with “mark as decorative”
4. Consult WebAIM’s Alt Text Page for more information.

Lists

Use true numbered, bulleted, or multi-level lists to simplify a paragraph or sequence of steps. Do not manually enter symbols to create a list.

Columns

Always use true columns. Do not create columns with the Tab key. Select Layout > Columns and then choose number of columns.

Tables

Accessible tables need a clear table structure and table headers to help guide a screen reader user.

You must use the **Insert Table** option in Microsoft word and not use manual spaces. To add table headers to the first row of your table, highlight **only the first row** of your table, select Table Design > Header Row. Then, with **only the first row** of your table selected, select Table Tools > Table Properties > Repeat Header Rows. Always repeat the header row when a table spans more than one page. This ensures that column labels are read correctly by assistive technologies on every page.

Avoid splitting a single row between pages. This prevents loss of context for screen readers.

Avoid merged or split cells when possible. Keep columns and rows consistent to assistive technology reads data correctly.

Excel

Excel documents share the same accessible common requirements as other documents such as Microsoft Word and PowerPoint. There are also some best practices that you can incorporate to make your excel documents more accessible. Applying both the accessibility requirements and best practices will ensure that your Excel spreadsheet can be easily used and understood by all users.

Best Practices

- Start all worksheets in cell A1
- Do not span content over multiple rows or columns

How to test

Does each sheet have a visual and/or logical reading order, left to right then top to bottom.

If not, it is not WCAG compliant.

Can the sheet be navigated using the up, down, right or left arrow keys, and does it match the visual and logical reading order?

Excel Tables

To ensure accessibility, use simple tables structures, i.e. do not merge cells, or manipulat other table elements. Format tables with headers. This helps to provide context and assist with navigation of the tables contents.

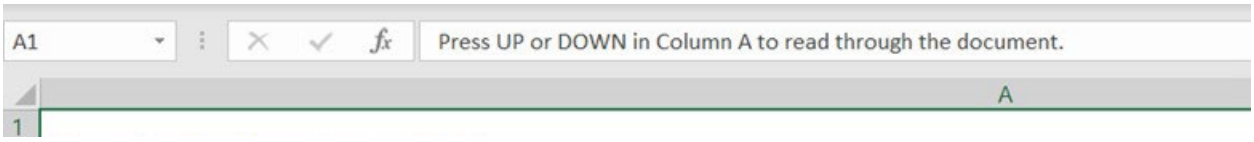
Sheet Tab Title

All sheet tabs need to have a unique, meaningful title. This allows the reader to know what information is on each tab, making it easier to navigate

Cell A1

When a person uses a screen reader in Excel, the starting point is always cell A1. The screen reader will read across and then down the worksheet announcing the contents of each cell.

Alternatively, help text can be added to the in the first cell — A1 — that describes how to navigate the worksheet. A small font size or a font colour that is the same as the background can be used, so the text doesn't show up visually but will still provide helpful context for screen reader users. For example, Press Up or Down in column A to read though the document.



Blank cells, rows, and columns

Avoid empty rows, columns, and cells as these might lead someone to believe there is nothing more in the worksheet. If any blank rows and columns are not necessary, simply

delete them. If blank rows and columns are being used to create white space, resize the rows and columns to give them spacing that makes them readable. A common mistake is leaving column A blank to look like a margin.

If the above options are not appropriate, enter text explaining that they are blank. Some examples of appropriate text are: “No data” or “Intentionally Blank”. Use a font colour that is the same as the background so the text doesn’t show up visually but will still provide helpful context for screen reader users.

Unused cells, rows, and columns

It can be helpful for screen reader users and people with cognitive disabilities to hide any unused cells, rows, and columns in a worksheet. This makes the worksheet less cluttered and helps readers to focus on important information. It also helps screen readers users as it lets them know that they are not missing any content.

To hide unused cells, rows, and columns:

1. Select the column/row beneath the sheet’s last used column/row.
2. To select every column, press Ctrl +Shift+ Right Arrow.
3. Right click and select hide.
4. To select every row, press Ctrl +Shift+ Down Arrow.
5. Right click and select hide.

Merged or Split cells

Merging or splitting cells can make navigating difficult for people using assistive technologies. Merged cells can be used in a title of a table but **should not** be used in the data part of table. Use a simple and straightforward structure for displaying content.

PDFs

Adobe Acrobat

Adobe Acrobat's PDF Accessibility checker is a great tool, however, it is a tool built to check a document's technical tags and structure, not true WCAG compliance and accessibility. It is checking for "mechanical compliance" and not "human usability." Adobe is designed to create and view PDFs, not to serve as a full-featured accessibility compliance tool.

The Accessibility checker will check for things like whether tags exist, whether images have alt text, whether reading order is defined, but will not check if the heading levels are logical, the alt text is meaningful, if the reading order of the document actually makes sense, or if the document can be navigated effectively. So, while your document may "pass" Adobe or even Microsoft Word's check, it can still fail WCAG standards.

True accessibility requires manual review, with tools such as screen readers, WCAG contrast tools, keyboard navigation checks, and logical reading order review. The Accessibility Checker can flag items like missing tags or missing alt-text for images, but it cannot verify many of the user-experience that require a manual inspection for WCAG compliance.

Adobe's Accessibility Checker (and Microsoft Word's Accessibility Viewer) are helpful starting tools, but do not guarantee full accessibility compliance. PDF documents that are **public facing** will require manual reviews and will need to pass accessibility checks in addition to Adobe and Microsoft's accessibility tools to ensure WCAG compliance.

How to know if a document is an image of text and not actual text – Open a PDF document and try to highlight any text area. If you cannot, it is a picture of text and needs to be converted to text.

Do not use print to pdf or any variation of that to save your pdf. This feature will save the PDF as an image and remove any of the tagging/metadata encoded into the document, rendering it inaccessible.

Metadata

There is certain metadata required in a PDF file in order to make a document accessible. Specifically, a document title is required, and that title is required to be displayed when a PDF file is open.

This metadata benefits all users in allowing users to quickly and easily identify whether the information contained in the web page is relevant to their needs.

To add a title to a PDF, choose **File > Properties** and then add a Title and the Author for the document. You can also access the document properties by tapping **Ctrl + D** on your keyboard.

Tags

A key part of making PDFs accessible is ensuring the document is “tagged.” A “tagged PDF” is a type of PDF that includes an underlying tag tree that defines the structure of the document.

PDFs are typically created from a source document such as Microsoft Word, Adobe InDesign, or Microsoft PowerPoint file, and then are exported into the Portable Document Format (PDF). Tags provide structured representation of the content within a

PDF. While there is more to an accessible PDF than just tags, they provide the foundation for reading order. Auto-tagging is inexact, but a good place to start.

PDF tags make it possible to identify content such as headings, paragraphs, lists, links, or tables, and to include alternative text for images and figures. Without tags, none of these accessibility features are possible.

To tag a PDF in Acrobat, select **All tools > Prepare for Accessibility > Check for Accessibility**. The checker will identify any accessibility passes, failure and it will also remind you to conduct manual or visual checks on items too. If you have a failure, you can right click on the item and you can get Adobe to fix your error or you can go to the link that will take you to the adobe website that further explains the problem.

Documents that Require Signatures

As a general rule, one should try to avoid scanning documents if at all possible. Always work from the original electronic version if you have it.

If you have a multi-page electronic document which required the user to print off and fill out/sign one or a few of the pages:

- Only OCR scan the hand-written pages.
- Convert the other pages to PDF like you normally would from the electronic version.
- Once the Document is scanned in, OCR the Document to Recognize Text.
- From there, correct any tagging issues. Make sure to tag any signatures as <Figure> with alternative text.

Recommended Document Workflow

To the best of one's ability, try to start everything with the original electronic source file as much as possible (Microsoft Word Document, Excel, originally generated PDF, etc.). Scanning and OCR'ing a paper version of a document typically creates a lot of accessibility issues to fix because the OCR/Scanning process is doing a lot of guesswork about the document's structure.

1. Author with accessibility in mind.
2. Run Microsoft's "Check Accessibility" feature and make adjustments as needed.
3. Convert to to tagged PDF and run Adobe Acrobat's Accessibility Checker.
4. Validate using PDF Accessibility Checker (PAC).
5. Manually test with keyboard navigation and/or a screen reader by either "walking the tags" of the pdf or running a program like NVDA.
6. Correct any issues; ensure reading order and alt text clarity.

Remediation

Before you begin the process of working on the accessibility of a document, ask yourself:

- "Purge, replace, or remediate?"
- Is this document still being used?
- Can it be replaced (web page, automated form, etc.)

If you determine that you do indeed still need the document, there are steps you can take to ensure it is accessible for all users.

Accessible Email and Email Newsletters

For Email (Microsoft Outlook) and Newsletters (Constant Contact) Checklist – here is a helpful set of questions and checks to ask yourself before sending out City communication:

- Was the automated accessibility checker or Outlook accessibility assistant used?
- Is there only one Heading 1 present?
- Are all headings in order and nested properly?
- Are the font choices clear, legible, and do they adhere to font size recommendations (12 pts minimum)?
- Do all images have meaningful and complete alt text?
- Are all tables simple with no merged, split, or empty cells or multiple header rows?
- Does the color contrast between text and background meet ADA/WCAG standards? Use WebAIM Color Contrast Checker to check.

Fundamentals / Best Practices

- Headings
    - Organizes content for all users
    - Establishes the flow of your document or page
    - Good headings = Good page layouts
- Use descriptive text for embedded links rather than “click here.”
- Remove the underline from any text that is not a link.
- List items should be made using a Numbered or Bulleted list type from the toolbar.

- Use left-aligned text. A consistent left margin makes reading easier for everyone, especially people with dyslexia. Justified or centered text can produce readability issues for people with dyslexia and other conditions that affect reading and comprehension.
- Line height for paragraphs (Normal text) should be 1.5 and double spaced between paragraphs.
- Images, figures, and logos
    - Use short and descriptive alternative text for ALL images.
- Tables & graphs
    - Use header rows and/ or columns

Revision History

Version	Date	Purpose of Revision
Original	11/26/2025	Base Document

Resources

General

- Accessibility fundamentals - Training | Microsoft Learn
- Alternative Text (WebAIM)
- How to Download and Install PDF Accessibility Checker (PAC)
- Digital Accessibility for the Modern Workplace

Assistive Technology Tools

- PDF Accessibility Checker (PAC)
- NVDA Screen Reader

Troubleshooting

- Tagged PDF
- The Accessibility Guy YouTube Channel

Word

- Making documents accessible | Microsoft 365
- Creating Accessible Word Documents

Tables

- Creating Accessible Tables
- How to Handle Blank Data Cells in Accessible Tables
- How to tag a table in Adobe Acrobat Pro
- How to tag Complex tables in Adobe Acrobat Pro
- How to make a table accessible – Word to PDF
- Tables Tutorial (W3)

Excel

- How to make an Excel sheet accessible video tutorial
- Accessibility Best Practices – Microsoft Word
- GSA Spreadsheets Training Videos
- Siteimprove – Accessibility for Excel

- Creating Accessible Excel Files
- Web-AIM Microsoft Excel

PDF

- Creating Accessible PDFs (LinkedIn Learning)
- Inaccessible PDF example read with screen reader
- Testing a PDF's accessibility with NVDA basics
- Creating accessible PDFs (Adobe)
- Creating Accessible PDF Files Using Adobe InDesign
- Exporting Accessible PDFs with InDesign (NYU)
- Advanced Accessible PDFs
- How to make a Table accessible Word to PDF
- How to tag a table in Adobe Acrobat Pro
- Accessible Forms in Acrobat
- Accessible Forms