

2021 State of Digital Accessibility



In collaboration with:



IAAP
International Association
of Accessibility Professionals

When it comes to being human, we have three simple needs: to earn, to learn, and to belong. If we can support ourselves, grow and develop our talents, and be a part of something bigger, we'll have a good base from which to build a fulfilling life. It's a simplistic view, but one I've always liked.

Last year, we lost physical access to many of our earning, learning, and belonging opportunities during the pandemic. Technology had to bridge the gap—immediately—whether organizations were ready or not. Paradigms typically take generations to shift, but the shift to virtual work happened over a weekend. At Level Access, we packed up our desks on Friday and started working from home on Monday. That was over a year ago.

Organizations are taking a real and deliberate look at digital access for their employees as well as their end users. While many people with disabilities had previously been told certain job duties couldn't be done remotely, the pandemic proved that wasn't the case. A sudden, forced change revealed how many jobs could be done from home. Our hope is it opens doors to earning opportunities for people with disabilities who cannot work in a traditional office environment.

One particular trend in the State of Digital Accessibility data is very encouraging to me. The survey asked why organizations were addressing accessibility and 78% said "we felt compelled to implement inclusion to be truly inclusive of people with disabilities." (This is up from 68% in 2020.) What's more interesting is that this year, the survey asked about personal drivers—why do you care about digital accessibility? Nine out of ten people selected inclusion as a driver and four out of five valued providing the best UX for all users. While the law does move organizations toward making the necessary changes to create accessible technology, what motivates individuals is making a positive impact on other people.

Now, as vaccinations rates are increasing and businesses and schools are re-opening, we're entering a new world. Hopefully it's a mix of the best parts of life before 2020 and life now—with technology as an empowering source of earning, learning, and belonging.

As accessibility advocates, our mission is to make sure that the "new normal" is one that is fair and inclusive of all. With fits and starts, awareness has risen on digital equality issues. Discrimination persists, but the arc of the moral universe is bending toward justice. We just need to keep fighting for a more inclusive tomorrow.



Timothy Stephen Springer,
CEO of Level Access

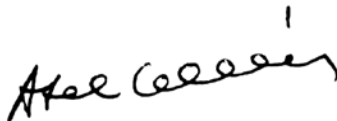
Foreword

This third edition of the State of Digital Accessibility Report could not be timelier. Amid all the challenges that everyone faced during the pandemic, the exponential growth of virtual activities has made digital inclusion a priority across all sectors of activities. This Report provides precise data on the increased levels of awareness and commitments of mainstream organizations in implementing digital accessibility—a positive trend for Persons with Disabilities, whose right to learn, work, transact, and participate in any aspect of society on an equal basis with others increasingly depends on digital access.

The 2021 Report shows that management processes and levels of accessibility expertise need improvements, but that progress is notable. This is encouraging for G3ict's division, the International Association of Accessibility Professionals (IAAP), whose mission is to promote the accessibility profession. IAAP's certification programs help define and build the required skill sets that are critical success factors in implementing digital accessibility: Certified Professional in Accessibility Core Competencies (CPACC), Web Accessibility Specialist (WAS) or Accessible Document Specialist (ADS). And looking forward, IAAP's members workgroups are also engaged in developing tools and methods to help organizations further improve their implementation of digital accessibility. Initiatives such as the Strategic Leaders in Accessibility or the Smart Business for All (SB4All) benchmarking tool are very promising. IAAP welcomes all interested professionals to join its membership and participate in the advancement of accessibility.

As in all situations, one can look at the glass as half full or half empty. Since G3ict's inception 15 years ago to promote the implementation of the digital accessibility provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), opportunities for a more accessible world have vastly expanded. In that regard, metrics are critical to monitor progress and help focus on areas of improvements. The 2021 State of Digital Accessibility Report is a great practical tool for organizations to assess where they stand in the global pursuit of a fully inclusive, accessible world.

Our sincere appreciation goes to the many accessibility professionals who responded to this survey and to our colleagues at Level Access for contributing their efforts to conducting it and making its results widely available to the benefit of all.



Axel Leblois,
President & CEO, G3ict/IAAP



Christopher M. Lee, PhD,
Managing Director, IAAP
Chief Learning Officer, G3ict

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Introduction

Welcome to the State of Digital Accessibility Report, presented by Level Access, G3ict, and IAAP. The 2021 Report draws on the data gathered in the State of Digital Accessibility Survey to provide insights into overall trends in the industry and the digital accessibility programs of organizations large and small.

The 2021 report will cover the following themes:

Benchmarking Data

Among the 1,087 participants in the survey were representatives of nearly every industry group and organization size. The report provides a set of tools to benchmark an accessibility program and understand where and how investments in digital accessibility can have their largest impact—on both the organization and people with disabilities.

Drivers, Goals, and Challenges

Every accessibility program has a story—a spark to get things started, goals to achieve, and obstacles along the way. The report tells these stories through data so organizations maturing an accessibility program will find they are in good company.

Program Maturity Markers

The 2020 State of Digital Accessibility Report was the first to start tracking program maturity by asking participants to identify markers of a mature accessibility program and noting whether their organization had achieved those goals. This year's survey delves deeper into the maturity question and begins to track the progress of each maturity marker.

Product Development, Design, and Testing

The majority of people who took the 2021 survey identified themselves as responsible for the design, development, and testing of websites, apps, and other digital assets. Insights about tools, training, user testing by people with disabilities, and more will be presented.

Content Creation

Digital accessibility is not limited to code. All content published digitally should be accessible to people with disabilities, including blog posts, documents, emails, webinars, videos, and social media. The report delves into all types of electronic content and the processes by which they are created, tested, and published.

Time to develop an accessible product — or remediate an inaccessible one — is a common challenge. It ranked as the #5 challenge in 2019, the #3 challenge in 2020, and climbed to the #1 challenge this year.



About the Survey Participants

A total of 1087 people took the 2021 State of Digital Accessibility Survey, which was open from January 7 – February 7, 2021.

Principal Industries Represented

Over 35 different industries are represented in the 2021 survey data. The top five industry groups are:



Education



Technology



Consumer Products & Services



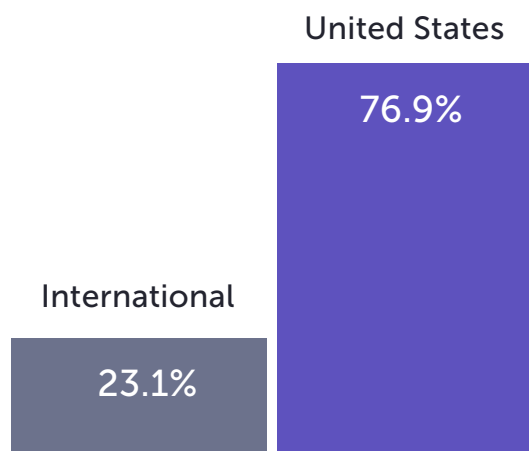
Financial Services



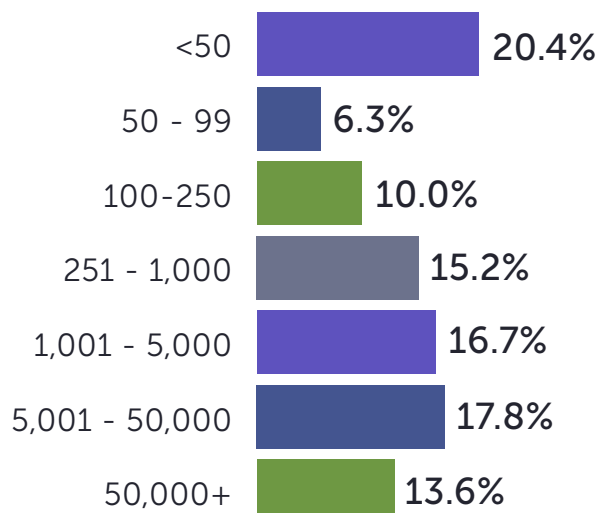
Public Sector

Location

Similar to the 2020 survey, about 3 out of 4 participants work for organizations headquartered in the United States.



Organization Size (by Employees)





Job Duties of Survey Participants

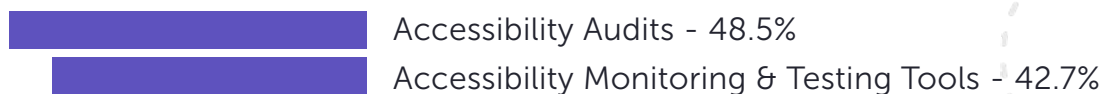
Participants were asked to select up to five duties that were part of their job or the jobs of people they manage. Their selections were used to customize the remaining questions on the survey.

Most Represented Job Duties

- 1 Accessibility Audits - 48.5%
- 2 Accessibility Monitoring & Testing Tools - 42.7%
- 3 Content Creation - 34.5%
- 4 QA / Testing - 31.8%
- 5 UX / Design - 29.3%

All Job Duties *(Participants could select up to five job duties.)*

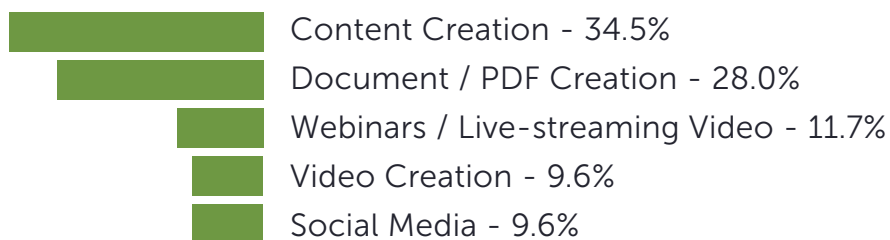
Accessibility



Website & Product Development



Marketing & Content Creation



Other Duties





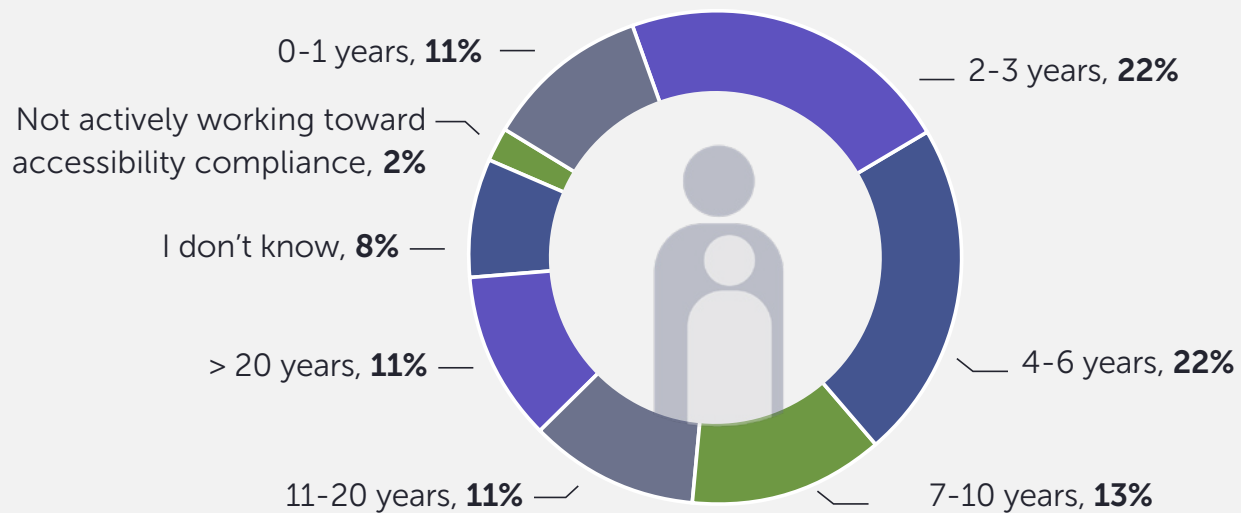
The State of Accessibility Programs

The 2021 survey found that the majority of accessibility programs are relatively young and have distributed responsibility and budgets. This was the case across all organization sizes and verticals.

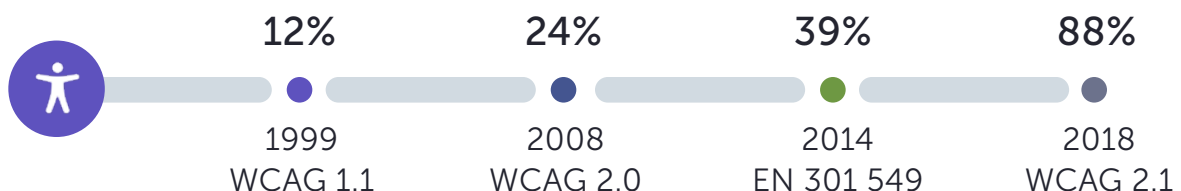
The majority of accessibility programs are under 7 years old.

Nearly a quarter of programs were born around the same time the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 (WCAG) were released in 2008.

How long has your organization been actively working toward accessibility compliance?



When was your accessibility program born?





Which industries have been addressing accessibility longest?

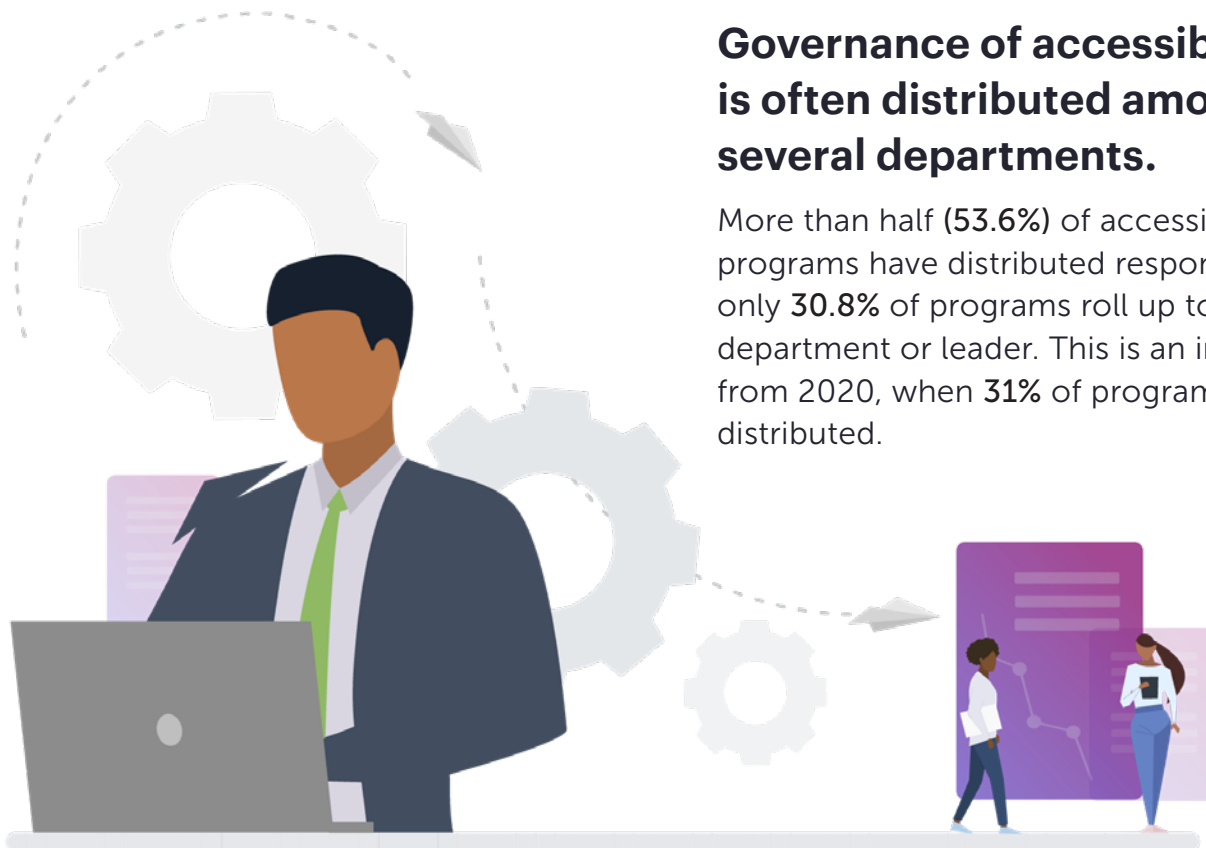
Public Sector organizations are the clear winners with 52% of accessibility programs that are over seven years old and 17% of programs that have been working toward inclusion for over 20 years. Education is a close second with 41% and 15%, respectively.

Overall Accessibility Program Maturity Rating for Policy & Commitment to Accessibility

Commitment is in the green! Over 36% of survey participants rated their organization's written policy and commitment to accessibility as "Proactive," the highest rating possible. Nearly 40% gave themselves a rating of "In Progress."



Average Maturity Rating – 2 out of 3



Governance of accessibility is often distributed among several departments.

More than half (53.6%) of accessibility programs have distributed responsibility; only 30.8% of programs roll up to one department or leader. This is an increase from 2020, when 31% of programs were distributed.



Where does accessibility live?

While other types of compliance have clear-cut departments where they live, accessibility has found a home in all sorts of departments from IT to UX to CX to HR. Even among organizations within the same industry, accessibility can live in very different places.

EDUCATION INDUSTRY



"Media & learning technology" | Educational Services

"Academic Affairs / Student Success" | Educational Services

"Web Accessibility Services" | Colleges

"Information Technology" | K-12

SOFTWARE INDUSTRY



"Accessibility Adoption" | Computer Software

"Product Team" | Computer Software

"Legal / Compliance" | Computer Software

"Product Operations" | Computer Software

WEB DESIGN INDUSTRY



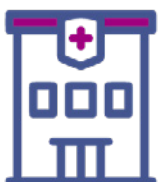
"Accessibility task force with a minimum of two people per department."
Web Design & Marketing Interactive

"Operations" | Web Design & Marketing Interactive

"Design" | Web Design & Marketing Interactive

"Director of IT" | Web Design & Marketing Interactive

HEALTHCARE INDUSTRY



"Digital Strategy & Web Services" | Hospitals & Healthcare Providers

"Accommodations" | Hospitals & Healthcare Providers

"Research & Development" | Hospitals & Healthcare Providers

"Enterprise Digital" | Hospitals & Healthcare Providers

CONSUMER GOODS & SERVICES INDUSTRY



"Working group pushing to spread awareness & interest company-wide"
Real Estate Development

"Digital User Experience" | Retail

"IT manager leads it & other departments help" | Retail

"Development" | Restaurants

FINANCIAL INDUSTRY



"Risk, Governance, & Controls" | Banking

"Consumer Compliance" | Financial Services

"Hub of Innovation and Inclusion" | Insurance

"For now a task force, but it may have a department" | Financial Services

Overall Accessibility Program Maturity Rating for Funding

Just over 34% of survey participants rated their organization's accessibility program funding as "In Progress." Over a quarter (27.5%) ranked their funding as "Proactive."



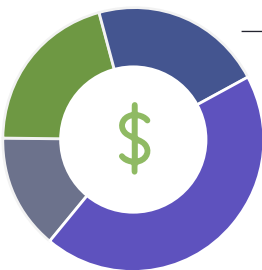
Accessibility budgets are also often distributed.

Most accessibility programs have their budget distributed among the departments responsible; only 21.4% have a centralized budget. Just over 20% of accessibility programs have no budget at all.

Management of Accessibility Program Budgets

There is no budget for accessibility - 20.6%

I don't know - 14.1%



Centralized - 21.4%

Distributed - 43.9%

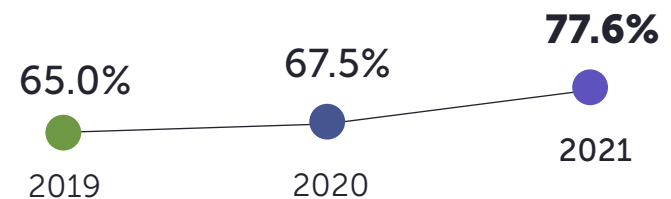
Business & Personal Drivers for Accessibility



All 1087 survey participants were asked about the reasons why their organization committed to digital accessibility.

The top reason was **including people with disabilities (77.6%)**. Every year, the number of participants that choose this answer climbs higher.

Organizations that value inclusion




Top 3 Reasons Why Organizations Address Accessibility

The business drivers for accessibility continue to be a mix of legal risk reduction and the desire to do the right thing. Inclusion and good user experience top the list in 2021, followed closely by complying with anti-discrimination laws like the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

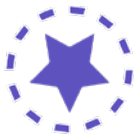
Choose the top 3 reasons why your organization is addressing accessibility.



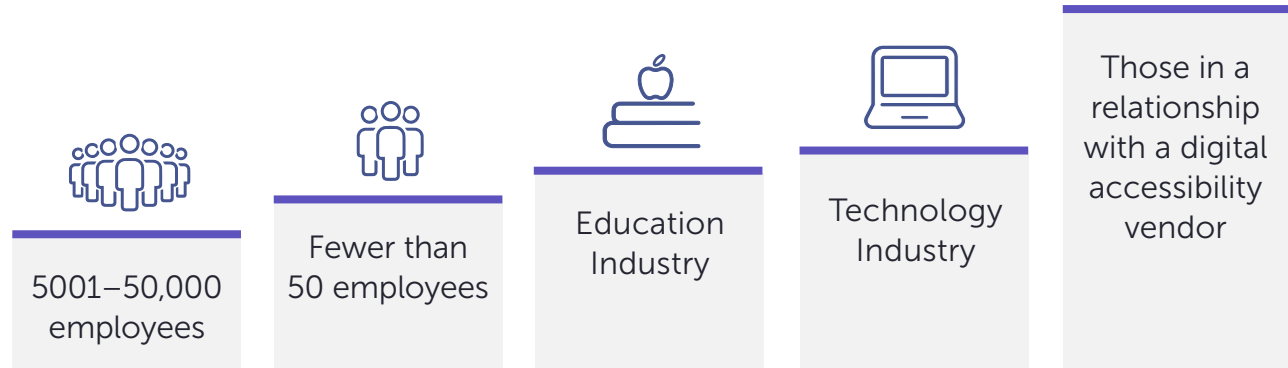


Individuals are far more concerned with inclusivity (92.5%) and user experience (81.5%) than their organizations.*

* See [page 15](#) for more on personal drivers.



Organizations Most Likely to List Inclusion in their Top 3 Drivers



Personal Motivations for Accessibility

Last year, several participants requested that the 2021 survey ask about personal motivations for addressing accessibility, since these often differ from business drivers. The data speaks clearly here! Individuals are far more concerned with inclusivity (92.5%) and user experience (81.5%) than their organizations.



What motivates you personally to address accessibility?



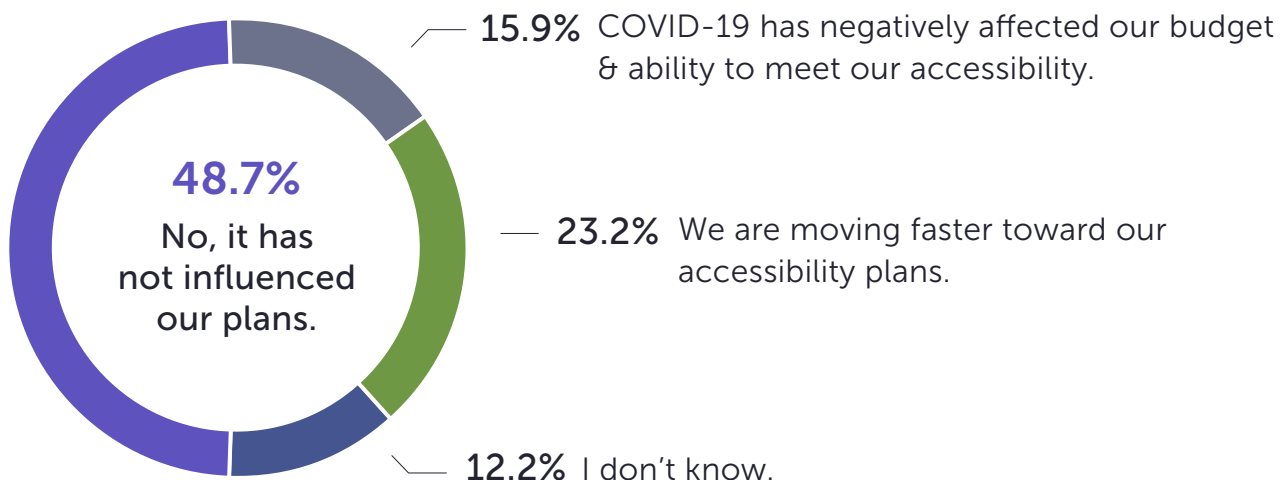


COVID-19 and Accessibility

The coronavirus pandemic was an unprecedented situation for many organizations. Plans to offer or improve online services were suddenly at the top of the priority list. Employees were working from home. Students were learning from home. And for some businesses, revenue dropped due to quarantine and shutdowns.

The majority of organizations (48.7%) said that COVID-19 had not influenced their accessibility plans. The numbers are roughly the same across all industry groups and organization sizes.

Has COVID-19 influenced your accessibility plans?





Goals for Accessibility Programs in 2021

All 1087 survey participants were asked about the accessibility goals their organization had for 2021.

Their top goal was improving usability for people with disabilities (64.9%).

Improved usability tops the list of program goals for 2021.

The top organizational goals for 2021 include improved usability for people with disabilities, standardizing the organization's approach to accessibility, maturing an accessibility program, and achieving conformance.

What are your accessibility goals for 2021? (Select all that apply.)

- 1 Improving usability for people with disabilities – **64.9%**
- 2 Implementing a standard, organization-wide approach to accessibility – **51.9%**
- 3 Maturing an accessibility program – **42.6%**
- 4 Achieving conformance across our entire organization – **41.3%**
- 5 Achieving conformance for multiple systems – **38.8%**
6. Making virtual work environment accessible
7. Expanding our accessibility initiative to include our mobile apps
8. Addressing accessibility issues brought to light by COVID-19
9. Achieving conformance for a specific system
10. Preventing, reducing or eliminating lawsuits filed against our organization
11. Maintaining the current level of accessibility
12. Launching an accessibility program
13. Other



Improving usability for people with disabilities.

Since inclusivity was a top driver for accessibility programs, it makes sense to see improving usability at the top of the list of 2021 goals, with nearly **65%** of organizations selecting it.

This was the top goal for all industries, organization sizes, and accessibility programs of all ages, both in the United States and worldwide. It jumped to **71.3%** of organizations with fewer than 50 employees and to **71.4%** of those with the oldest accessibility programs.

Implementing a standard, organization-wide approach to accessibility

Over half (**51.9%**) of organizations listed this as a goal for 2021. It is difficult to achieve and maintain accessibility without buy-in from the entire organization and policies and procedures that are followed by the entire organization.

This becomes even more difficult in industries where content velocity is high (e.g., retail, media) and organizations where each department maintains their own website or other digital assets (e.g., higher education).

Maturing an accessibility program

Growing an accessibility program from good to great is no easy task and **42.6%** of survey participants listed this as a top goal for 2021. For organizations with more than 50,000 employees, this grew to **60.3%**.

Maturity for one organization may mean investing in better monitoring and testing tools and adhering to a schedule for regular audits. For another organization, it may

mean engaging more with the disability community and hiring usability testers with more types of disabilities.

Achieving conformance across our entire organization

Conformance across the entire organization was a goal for **41.3%** of survey participants. This goal stayed roughly the same for organizations of all industries and sizes. However, it became more important to organizations with more established accessibility programs.

Accessibility program age

No A11y Program	15.8%
0 – 1 years	31.7%
2 – 3 years	37.7%
4 – 6 years	39.3%
7 – 10 years	43.0%
11 – 20 years	45.8%
More than 20 years	61.0%

Achieving conformance for multiple systems

Conformance for multiple systems rounded out the top five goals for 2021 with **38.8%** of organizations selecting it. This goal became more important as organizations grew in size.

Organization size

< 50 employees	25.6%
50-99 employees	34.4%
100-250 employees	27.3%
251-1000 employees	35.5%
1001-5000 employees	43.2%
5001-50,000 employees	52.0%
50,000 + employees	48.4%



Challenges for Accessibility Programs

A thriving accessibility program does not appear fully formed and perfected; every program has its challenges. Survey participants were asked to identify the challenges faced by their accessibility programs and five common threads were found.



Participants who selected that they did not have an accessibility program at all listed Time as their #2 challenge. Their top challenge? Getting buy-in from others and management.

IAAP CERTIFIED

Those with IAAP-certified employees or contractors ranked Training as #7 on their list of challenges.

1. Time (65.6%)

Time to develop an accessible product — or remediate an inaccessible one — is a common challenge. It ranked as the #5 challenge in 2019, the #3 challenge in 2020, and climbed to the #1 challenge this year. Developing accessible digital properties can be done on a tight schedule, but only with the proper planning, training, and tools.

Time was the #1 challenge for:

- Organizations of all size brackets up to 50,000 employees
- Financial Services organizations
- Education organizations
- Technology organizations
- Accessibility roles
- Development & Testing roles
- UX / Design roles
- Content Creation roles
- Accessibility programs of all ages

2. Training (53.3%)

Every role listed training in their top three challenges. When the clock is ticking—see #1—it can be hard to make time for professional development.



Training was the #1 challenge for Public Sector organizations

3. Incorporating accessibility earlier in the development lifecycle (53.2%)

For those involved in the creation of digital properties—Product, UX, Engineering, etc.— this challenge ranked high. When digital accessibility is only considered after a product is developed, remediation takes more time and energy. It is much more cost-effective to be thinking about inclusive design at the first stages of planning a new product or a new feature for an existing product.



This was the #1 challenge for organizations with more than 50,000 employees (but only by a margin of 2.5%)

4. Access to usability testers who have disabilities (46.6%)

While the majority of organizations agree that testing by people with disabilities is important, the majority don't do it.



For those organizations partnered with an accessibility vendor, this drops to #5 on the list of challenges. For those without access to accessibility experts, it rises to the #2 challenge.

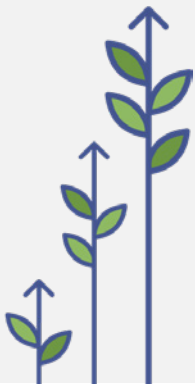
5. Budget (44.7%)

It can be difficult to achieve compliance with accessibility standards without access to up-to-date training resources and proper testing tools, both of which need to fit into the budget.



What's Going Well?

2021 survey participants reported that it was not difficult to hire people with experience in digital accessibility (only 35.4% said this was a challenge). Professional certifications are a quick way to assess a candidate's accessibility knowledge. Nearly 20% said they have IAAP certified employees or contractors on their staff.



Accessibility Program Maturity

In the 2020 State of Digital Accessibility Survey, participants identified the most important maturity markers of an accessibility program and then rated their organization's implementation of mature practices.

The 2021 survey asked where organizations are on their path to taking their accessibility programs from good to great.

The top five markers of a mature accessibility program*:

1. Training is required annually like any other compliance topic
2. Established accessibility design and authoring gates or practices
3. Dedicated funding for accessibility
4. Written organization-wide policy/commitment to accessibility
5. A plan or strategy for monitoring and measuring accessibility compliance

Maturing an accessibility program was a major goal for organizations in 2021.

Organizations across all sizes, verticals, and ages selected "Maturing an accessibility program" in their top five goals for 2021 (42.6%). This was roughly the same as the 44.0% in 2020.

Those who were *most likely* to choose program maturity as a goal:



Size

- 1001-5000 employees
- 5001-50,000 employees
- 50,000+ employees



Accessibility Program Age

- 4-6 years old
- 7-10 years old
- 20 years old+



Vertical

- Technology
- Financial Services



Partnerships

- IAAP-certified personnel
- Have an accessibility vendor

* Based on results of the 2020 State of Digital Accessibility Survey by Level Access, G3ict, and IAAP.

Maturity Markers

In the 2021 survey, participants were asked to select up to five job duties. Each section had a maturity rating question at the end that pertained to that particular job duty.

Participants were asked to rank their maturity based on the following scale:

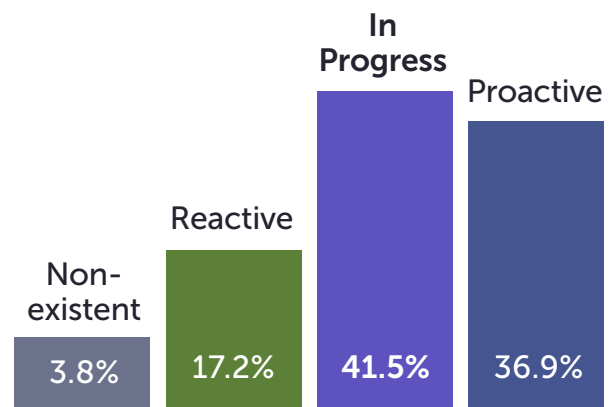


Ratings:	Non-existent	>	Reactive	>	In Progress	>	Proactive
Value:	0		1		2		3

Monitoring & Testing Tools (2.1/3.0 – In Progress)

In 2020, **52.7%** reported their organization had access to tools with built-in accessibility testing.

In 2021, accessibility testing professionals rated their access to accessibility testing tools as follows:



Fast Facts:



91.0% of organizations use free tools, with the most frequent being browser extensions.



There was a nearly even split when it came to the use of paid accessibility testing tools, with **51.2%** of those surveyed reporting that they use them.



The vast majority of those surveyed (**82.7%**) did not use overlay solutions for accessibility. This number has dipped from **93%** in 2020.



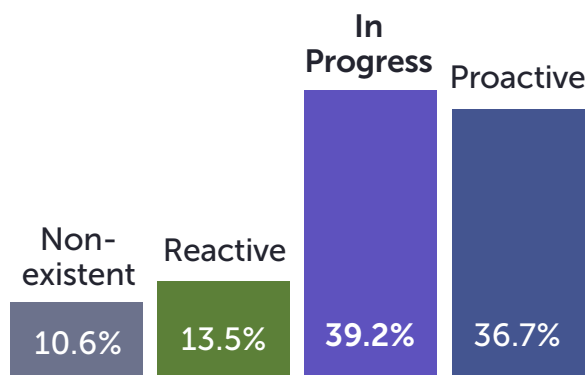
33.0% of organizations are using tools to monitor accessibility on live, public-facing systems.

Flip to [page 35](#) to read more on accessibility testing and monitoring tools.

Written Policy & Commitment (2.0/3 – In Progress)

In 2020, **46.3%** reported their organization had a written organization-wide policy/commitment to accessibility.

In 2021, survey respondents rated their organization's written policy/commitment as follows:

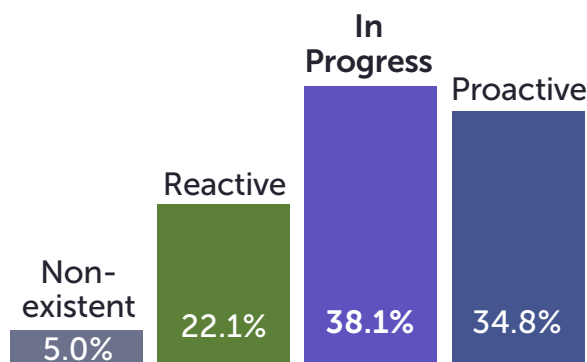


Flip to [page 9](#) to read more about accessibility programs.

Process to Resolve, Document, & Audit Accessibility Complaints (2.0/3.0 – In Progress)

In 2020, **52.4%** reported their organization had established channels for users/customers to report issues or barriers, but only **33.6%** had a documented and audited process for tracking these complaints.

In 2021, survey respondents rated their organization's process to resolve, document, and audit accessibility complaints as follows:



Fast Facts:



62.8% of organizations had a documented procedure for customer/user accessibility issues.



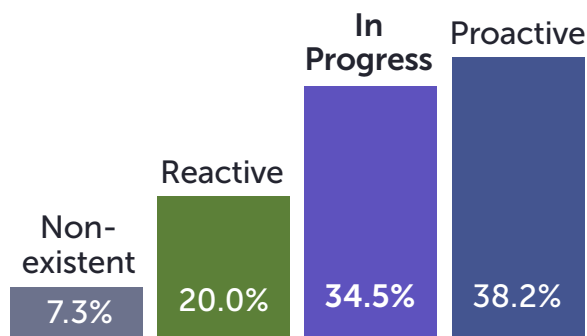
62.1% felt that accessibility complaints were resolved in a timely manner.

Flip to [page 56](#) to read more on resolving customer/user accessibility issues.

Engagement with Disability Community (2.0/3.0 – In Progress)

In 2020, **33.7%** reported their organization had engagement with the disability community.

In 2021, survey respondents rated their organization's engagement with the disability community as follows:



Fast Facts:



83.6% of organizations surveyed have a Diversity & Inclusion program or department.



71.2% of those D&I programs/departments include digital accessibility.



The vast majority of those surveyed (**82.7%**) did not use overlay solutions for accessibility. This number has dipped from **93%** in 2020.

While these are awesome statistics, it is important to understand the self-selecting nature of the survey pool. This does not reflect the job market at large.

Flip to [page 59](#) to read more on human resources, and diversity & inclusion programs.

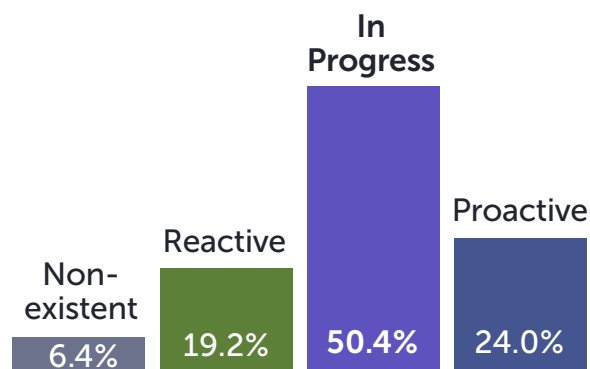
Little companies have big hearts! 71.3% of organizations with fewer than 50 employees selected inclusion as a top goal for 2021.*

* See [page 17](#) for more on 2021 goals.

Internal Accessibility Scorecard (1.9/3.0 – Reactive / In Progress)

In 2020, **28.8%** reported their organization had an internal accessibility scorecard.

In 2021, accessibility auditing professionals rated their internal accessibility scorecard as follows:



Fast Facts:



Over half of survey respondents with accessibility auditing duties (**57.8%**) have conducted a formal accessibility audit in the last six months.



73.5% have audited in the last year.



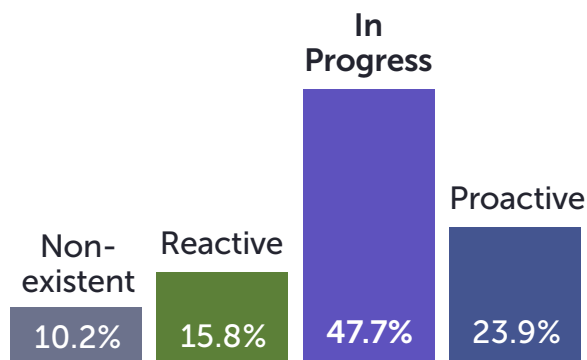
12.8% have never conducted a formal audit.

Flip to [page 41](#) to read more on accessibility audits.

Policies & Procedures for Procuring Accessible Software & Hardware (1.9/3.0 – Reactive / In Progress)

In 2020, **39.0%** reported their organization had accessibility criteria in contracts and purchase orders.

In 2021, those in procurement roles rated their accessibility policies and procedures as follows:



Fast Facts:



71.4% of organizations have prioritized buying a product or solution because of its accessibility. This is a big jump from **55%** in 2020.



52.9% required a VPAT or other conformance report before making a purchase.

...

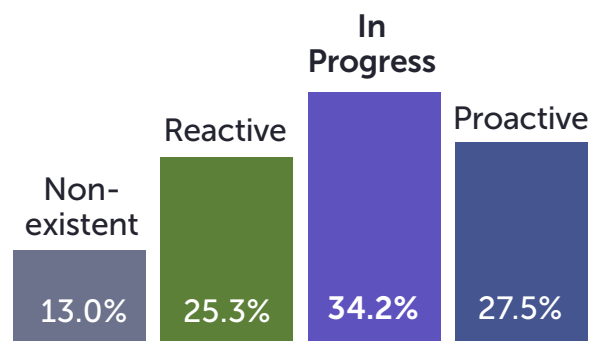
77.9% of those in sales roles said that they see their product's level of accessibility as a competitive advantage.

Flip to [page 61](#) to read more on buying and selling accessible products.

Funding for Accessibility (1.8/3.0 – Reactive / In Progress)

In 2020, **36.9%** reported their organization had dedicated funding for accessibility.

In 2021, survey respondents rated their organization's funding as follows:



Fast Facts:



Most accessibility programs have their budget distributed among the departments responsible; only **21.4%** have a centralized budget.



Just over **20%** of accessibility programs have no budget at all.



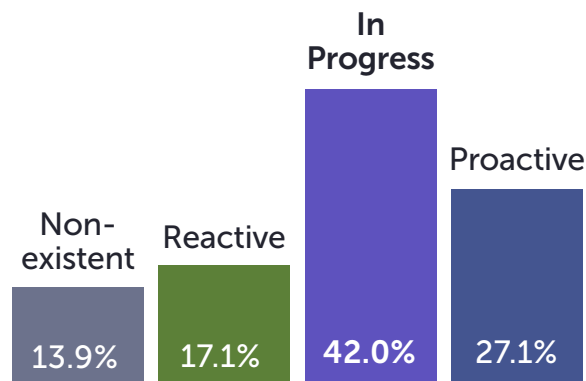
15.9% said COVID-19 negatively affected their budget and ability to meet accessibility goals.

Flip to [page 9](#) to read more about accessibility programs.

Training Programs & Policies (1.8/3.0 – Reactive / In Progress)

In 2020, **52.6%** reported their organization provided training on accessibility topics, but only **26.1%** said that training was required annually like other compliance topics.

In 2021, survey respondents rated accessibility training programs and policies as follows:



Fast Facts:



UX/Design teams were more likely to rate their accessibility skills as Intermediate or Advanced (**53%**) than Development/Engineering teams (**44%**).

IAAP certification has grown year-over-year, as has the number of organizations who are considering hiring IAAP-certified personnel.

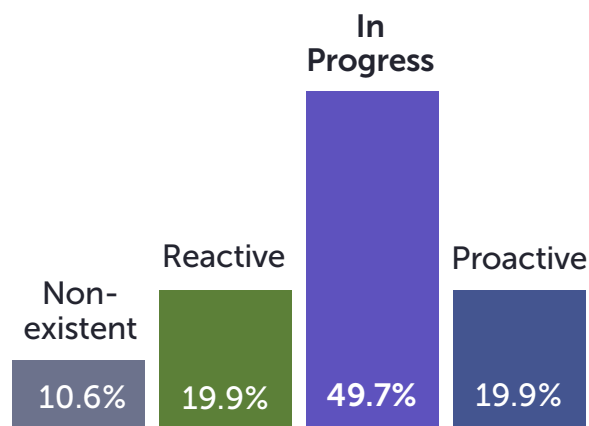
Organizations that partnered with an accessibility vendor or who had IAAP-certified personnel had overall higher self-assessments of their accessibility skills.

Flip to [page 64](#) to read more on training programs and policies.

Content Publishing Practices & Process (1.8/3.0 – Reactive / In Progress)

In 2020, **39.0%** reported their organization had established accessibility authoring gates or practices.

In 2021, those in content creation roles rated their accessibility authoring gates and practices as follows:



Fast Facts:



Over **41%** of survey participants stated they had accessibility challenges caused by “too many content creators.”



92.8% caption their video content, with **48.2%** of them choosing to outsource the task.



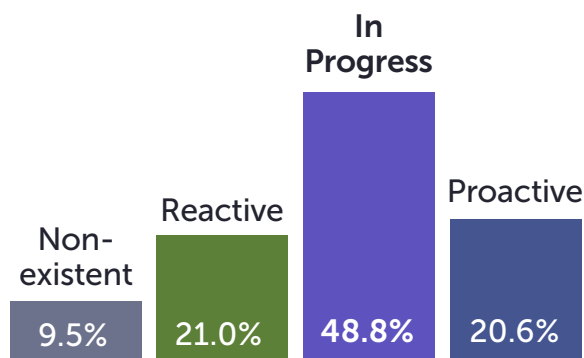
78.2% of content creators tag their PDFs for accessibility before publishing.

Flip to [page 48](#) to read more on publishing accessible content.

Testing Gates & Practices: 1.8/3.0 – Reactive / In Progress)

In 2020, **34.2%** reported their organization had established accessibility testing gates or practices.

In 2021, those in QA roles rated those accessibility testing gates and practices as follows:



Fast Facts:

A clear trend appeared in the relationship between age of accessibility program and inclusion of people with disabilities. The older the program, the more likely it was to be inclusive. In fact, the age of accessibility program was more of a predictor than the overall size of the organization.



While **95.9%** agree that testing by people with disabilities is important, **47.2%** of organizations are not doing it.



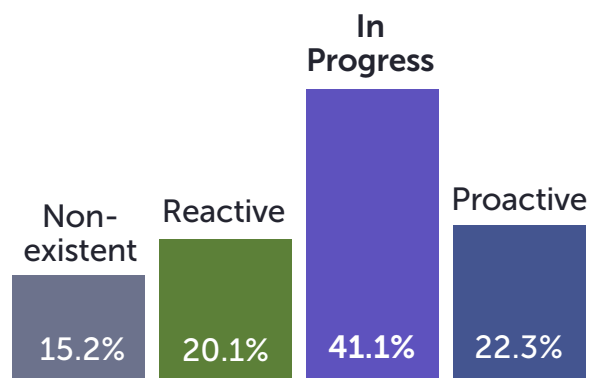
56% of organizations that practiced continuous integration tested for accessibility during the CI process.

Flip to [page 33](#) to read more on more on testing.

Design Gates & Practices: (1.7 / 3.0 – Reactive / In Progress)

In 2020, **39.0%** reported their organization had established accessibility design and authoring gates or practices.

In 2021, UX and design professionals rated those accessibility design gates and practices as follows:



Fast Facts:



86.5% of organizations partnered with an accessibility vendor have customized their UI framework to make components more accessible, compared to the average of **66.1%**.

73.2% of UX and design professionals reported that accessibility was included in design requirements for new projects.



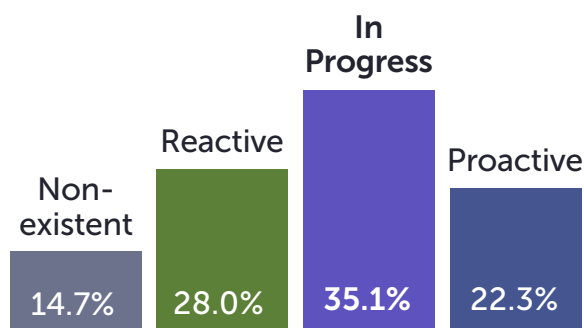
However, **36.7%** of teams did not have the knowledge to meet those requirements.

Flip to [page 44](#) to read more on UX and design.

Engineering Gates & Practices: (1.6/3.0 – Reactive)

In 2020, **34.2%** reported their organization had established accessibility engineering and testing gates or practices.

In 2021, development professionals rated those accessibility gates and practices as follows:



Fast Facts:



85.9% of development teams think about accessibility before building begins.



While **66%** reported that accessibility was part of the development requirements for their most recent project, **34.7%** of those teams did not understand how to meet those requirements.

WCAG 2.2 conformance is being pursued by **17.3%** of organizations. While WCAG 2.2 is not official yet, these organizations are already working to achieve a higher level of inclusion.

Flip to [page 29](#) to read more on product development.

Product Development

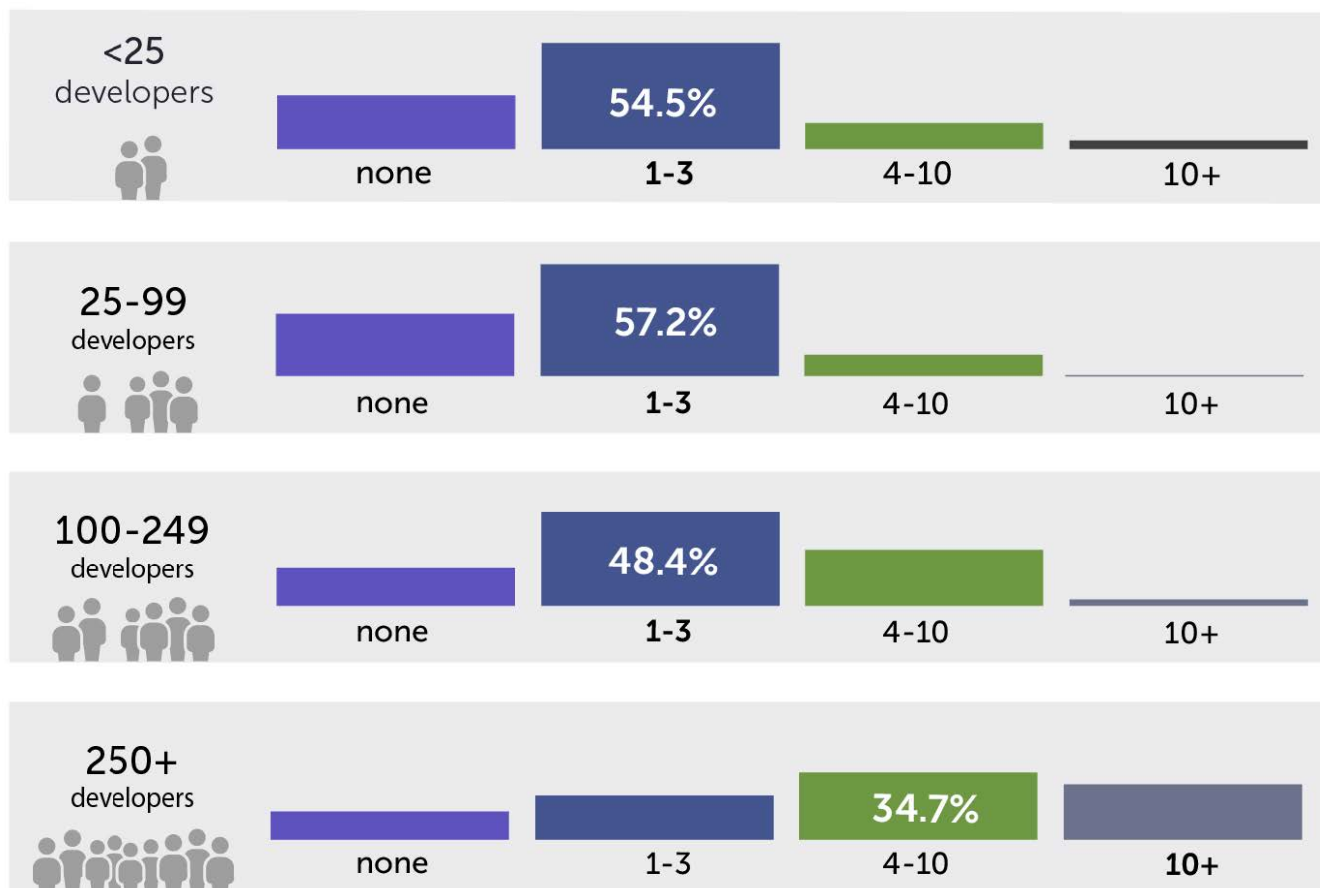
The longer an organization waits to incorporate accessibility, the greater the chance that the product will be inaccessible (and more expensive and time-consuming to retrofit). When a product team considers accessibility from the start, they can iterate, test, learn, and end up with a stronger product.

Accessibility teams scale alongside their development team.

Ideally, every developer should have been trained on and be responsible for accessibility. The reality, however, is quite different. In fact, **45.3%** of organizations have between one and three people who work primarily on accessibility.

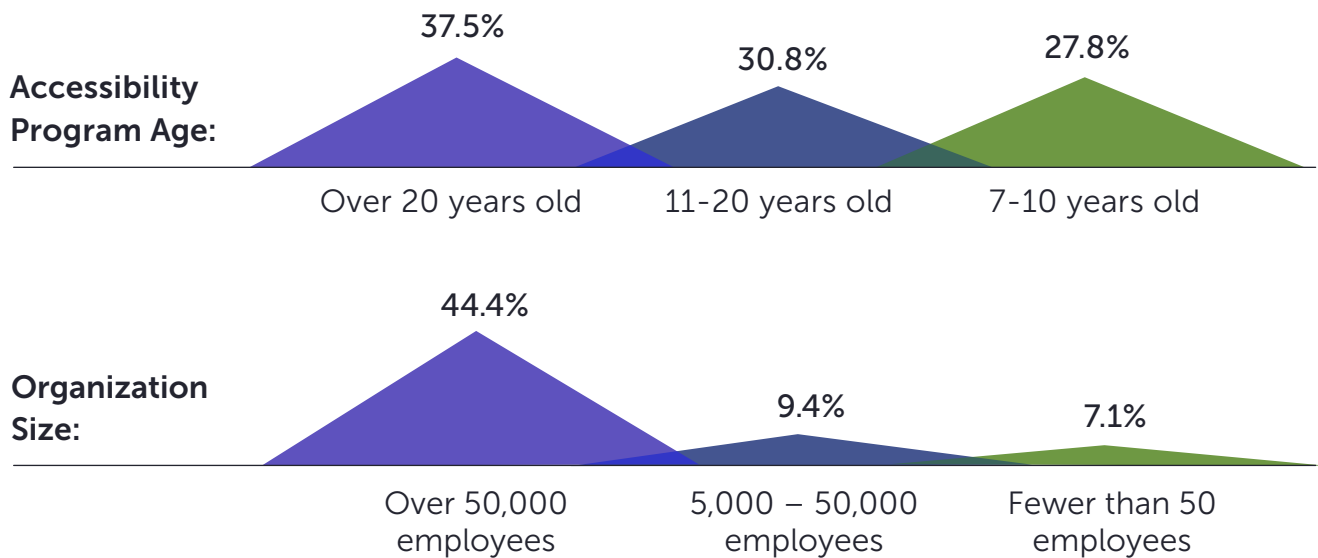
As product development teams grow, so do their accessibility teams. The 2021 survey numbers reported below can be used to justify increased budget for accessibility experts.

Organizations with fewer than 250 developers were most likely to have 1 to 3 people working primarily on accessibility.



What affects the size of accessibility teams?

The survey looked at the organizations with more than 10 people on their accessibility team and a few factors stood out:



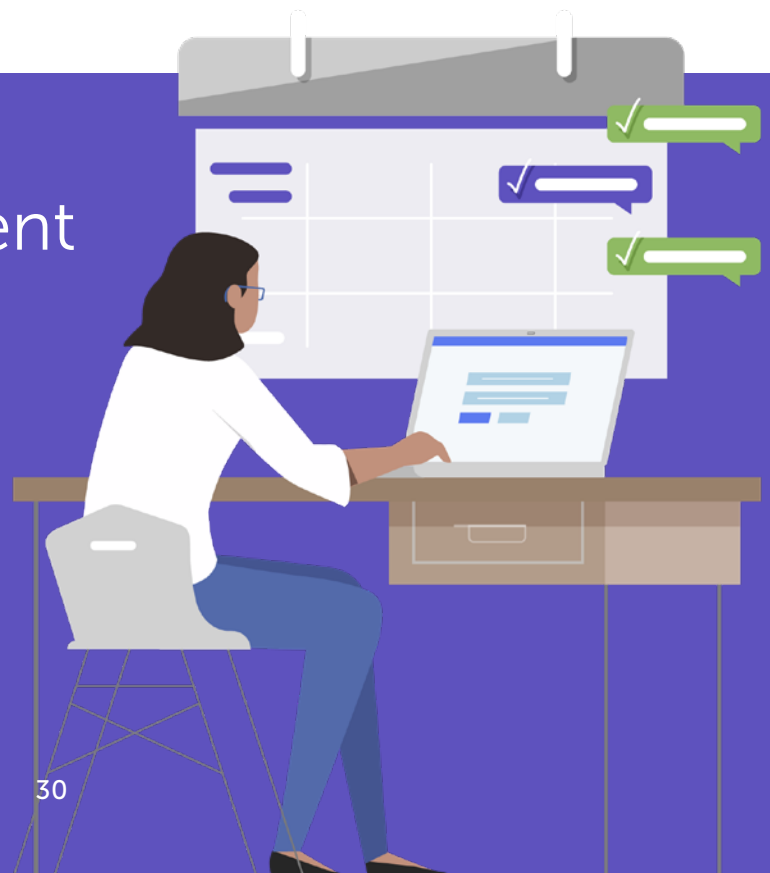
Access to Expertise:

- Those with IAAP-certified personnel (25.5% vs. 5.6% of those without)
- Those partnered with an accessibility vendor (13.4% vs. 5.6% of those without)

Industry:

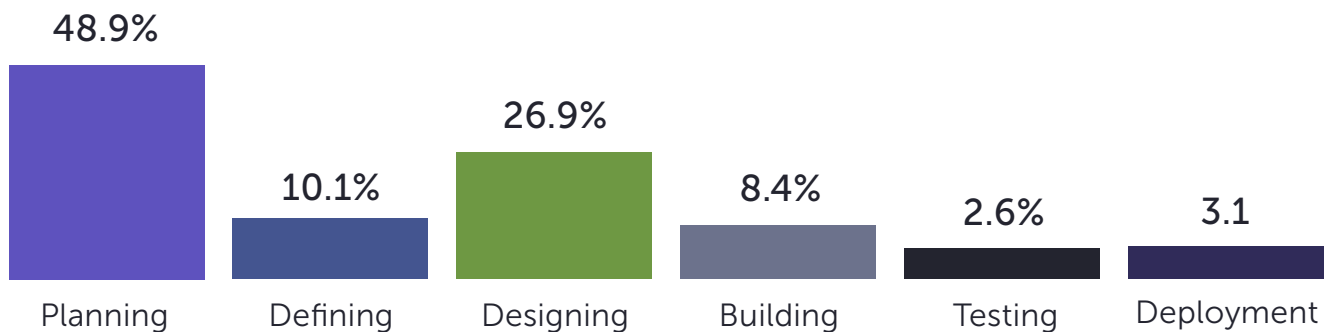
- Financial Services (16.7%)

85.9% of development teams think about accessibility before building begins.



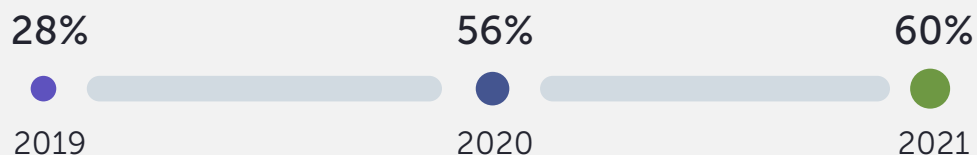
Accessibility is moving upstream.

What is the earliest time in the systems development life cycle that you start thinking about accessibility?



Got Standards?

The **Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1** was released in June of 2018. The percentage of organizations seeking to meet WCAG 2.1 requirements has grown each year of the State of Digital Accessibility survey.



WCAG 2.2 compliance is being pursued by **17.3%** of organizations. While WCAG 2.2 is not official yet, these organizations are already working to achieve a higher level of inclusion.

Section 508 was listed as the preferred standard for **45.6%** of organizations (Section 508 includes WCAG 2.0 A and AA.)

Finally, **8.5%** of organizations reported using their own accessibility standard. The majority of those respondents also checked off one or more versions of WCAG, so it is unclear if they truly have their own standard or if they are using a mix of WCAG 2.0, 2.1, and 2.2.

Accessibility and Product Requirements

The survey asked development professionals to think back on the last project they worked on and pick the statement that best described it:

A

The product requirements did not mention accessibility at all.

B

The product requirements included accessibility...
but our team did not understand how to meet those requirements.

C

The product requirements included accessibility...
and our team understood how to meet those requirements.



34.7%

our team did not understand how to meet the accessibility requirements



The good news: Accessibility is included in two-thirds of product requirements.

Over **66%** reported that accessibility was included in the product requirements. The survey did not delve deeper this year into the exact details of the accessibility requirements. This is an addition planned for the 2022 survey.

Nearly two-thirds (**65.3%**) reported that their development team understood how to meet the accessibility requirements.



The bad news: Some still report a lack of understanding and training on accessibility.

While **66%** reported that accessibility was part of the development requirements, **34.7%** of those people did not understand how to meet those requirements.

Over **49%** rated their development team's accessibility knowledge as Elementary. (More on training is on [page 64](#).)

Overall Accessibility Program Maturity Rating for Development

Those in development roles were most likely to rate their organization's accessibility engineering gates or practices as In Progress (35.1%). Only 22.3% rated their development gates and practices as Proactive.



As far as development goes, the survey seems to reveal that:

- › Merely adopting requirements isn't enough
- › Despite requirements, inaccessible content still gets published
- › More training is needed to ensure standards are met
- › Better gates are needed to prevent inaccessible content from being pushed into production

Testing Process

The survey asked those in technical roles about user testing by people with disabilities, accessibility testing in continuous integration, and code-level unit tests.

Most organizations are not testing their product with people with disabilities.

While 95.9% agree that testing by people with disabilities is important, 47.2% of organizations are not doing it. The latter number is down from 56% in the 2020 survey.

While automated and manual testing can identify many accessibility barriers, the best way to ensure an inclusive experience is to involve people with disabilities. Their experience is an invaluable part of the development process.



More established programs are more inclusive.

A clear trend appeared in the relationship between age of accessibility program and inclusion of people with disabilities. The older the program, the more likely it was to be inclusive. In fact, the age of accessibility program was more of a predictor than the overall size of the organization.

Includes People with Disabilities in Testing	20%	24.2%	26.1%	37.5%	56.7%	48.1%	79.2%
Accessibility Program Age	No a11y program	0-1 years	2-3 years	4-6 years	7-10 years	11-20 years	20+ years

Continuous Integration & Accessibility Testing

Continuous integration is the practice of merging all developers’ working copies to the shared mainline several times a day. Testing for accessibility as part of the CI process is an excellent way to flag issues early on and head off future bottlenecks from fixing. The survey revealed that **56%** of organizations that practiced continuous integration tested for accessibility during the CI process.

Those who were *most likely* to do accessibility testing as part of CI:



- Size**
- 50,000+ employees



- Accessibility Program Age**
- 7-10 years old
 - 11-20 years old
 - 20 years old+



- Vertical**
- Public Sector
 - Financial Services
 - Technology



- Partnerships**
- IAAP-certified personnel



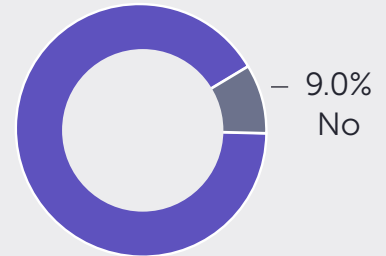
Accessibility Testing Tools

Preferences for testing tools can change as an accessibility program matures and acquires the knowledge and funding to operate efficiently and effectively.

Free Accessibility Testing Tools

The majority of organizations—across all sizes, verticals, and maturity—use free tools. There are many free tools available, and despite their limitations, they can prove useful.

Do you use free accessibility tools?



Browser extensions and page testers were the most frequently used free tools.

What type of FREE accessibility software or testing tools (non-Assistive Technology) do you use?

92.2% Browser extensions and page testers

46.5% Site scan or web crawl services

31.4% Plug-ins or widgets that offer end-user interfaces with accessibility options

20.2% Script-based web monitoring for pages

20.2% SDKs or automated testing integrations for development

12.3% Overlay-based remediation tools

8.1% Other

The Survey Says... Top 5 Reasons Why Free Tools are Insufficient



- 1 Limited reporting options
- 2 Limited coverage
- 3 Limited results and information
- 4 Limited testing options
- 5 Inadequate detail in results



Paid Accessibility Testing Tools

There was a nearly even split when it came to the use of paid accessibility testing tools, with **51.2%** of those surveyed reporting that they use them.

Paid testing tools were most often used by organizations with more than 1000 employees.

 % Using Paid Tools	33.3%	34.4%	56.3%	40.4%	64.2%	55.1%	62.1%
 Employees	<50	50-99	100-250	251-1000	1001-5000	5001-50k	Over 50k

Paid testing tools were most often used by programs between 4 – 10 years old.

 % Using Paid Tools	0%	28.6%	45.2%	60.4%	62.7%	53.3%	42.4%
 Accessibility Program Age	No accessibility program	0-1 years	2-3 years	4-6 years	7-10 years	11-20 years	Over 20 years

Reasons can vary as to why this is the case, but some mature organizations end up developing their own tools while others have robust processes in place that make many automated tools redundant.

If organizations employ lots of manual testing or test with screen readers consistently, they may focus on that exclusively and not see the need for licensing automated tools anymore.

Accessibility Overlay Solutions

These solutions apply fixes over a website or web app using JavaScript and without altering the code and are typically provided by a blend of automation and manual services. They require extensive maintenance to account for new content and because any changes to the underlying code can break existing fixes.

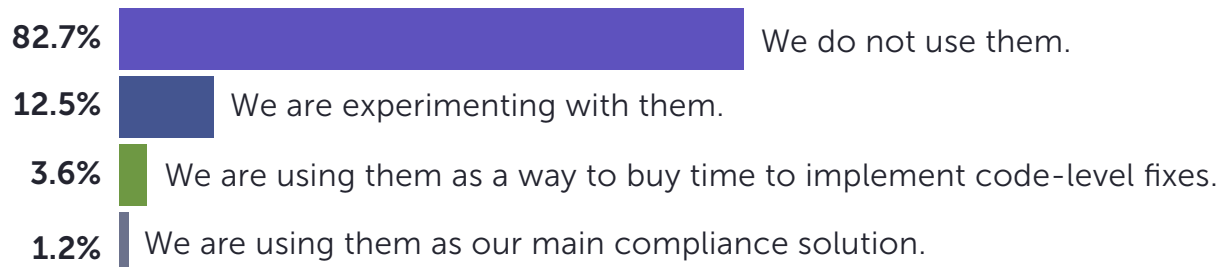


Overlays are not relied on by the majority of organizations.

The vast majority of those surveyed (**82.7%**) did not use overlay solutions for accessibility. This number has dipped from **93%** in 2020.

Of the **17.3%** who use overlays, only **1.2%** are using them as their main compliance solution. Those organizations using them as their main solution had younger accessibility programs (2 – 6 years old).

What best describes your organization's use of overlay solutions?



Overall Accessibility Program Maturity Rating for Monitoring & Testing Tools

Those in charge of accessibility monitoring and testing tools were fairly positive in their rating of their organization's access to tools, with only **3.8%** of those surveyed rating it as Non-existent.



Average Maturity Rating – 2.1 out of 3

Validating Accessibility in Unit Testing

The earlier accessibility issues can be found, the more cost-effective they are to fix. Running accessibility tests alongside standard unit tests is being adopted slowly. The survey revealed that only **22.8%** of organizations are validating accessibility requirements in unit testing. (Slightly up from **21%** in 2020) The number jumped to **36.4%** for those in a relationship with an accessibility vendor.



Assistive Technology for Testing

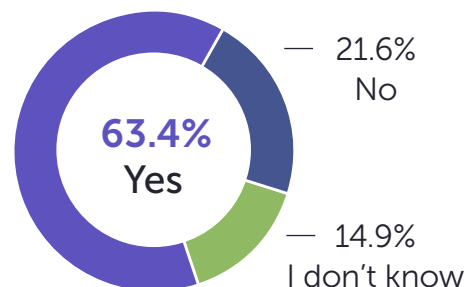
In order to ensure that a website or mobile app works with assistive technology, it should be tested with assistive technology. For more valuable insights, a person who uses AT on a daily basis should do the testing.

Most Frequently Used AT for Testing

1. NVDA (68.1%)
2. VoiceOver (66.2%)
3. JAWS (52.9%)
4. TalkBack (34.4%)
5. ZoomText/Fusion (20.2%)

Mobile apps are tested with AT and accessibility system settings.

63% of those in QA roles reported that they tested mobile apps with assistive technology or accessibility system settings such as high contrast mode, large text, and magnification.



Overall Accessibility Program Maturity Rating for Testing

Nearly half of those in QA roles rated their organization's accessibility testing gates or practices as In Progress (**48.8%**). Only **20.6%** rated their development gates and practices as Proactive.

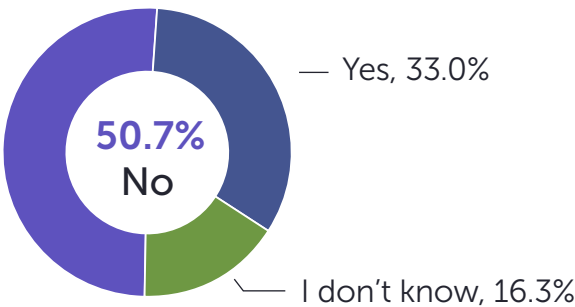


Accessibility Monitoring Tools

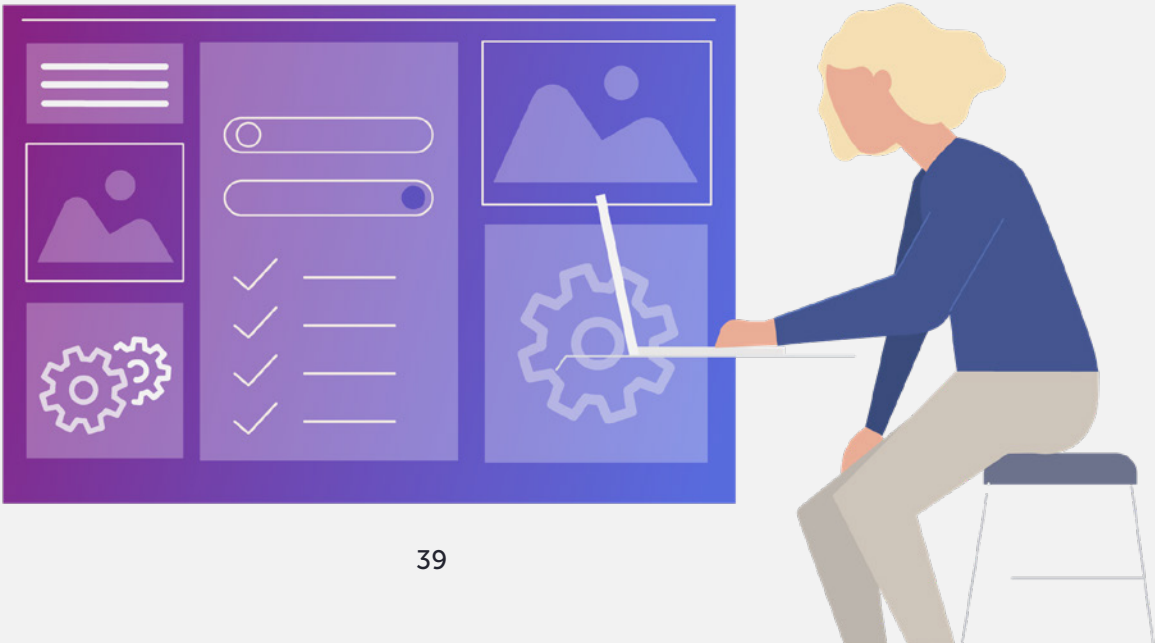
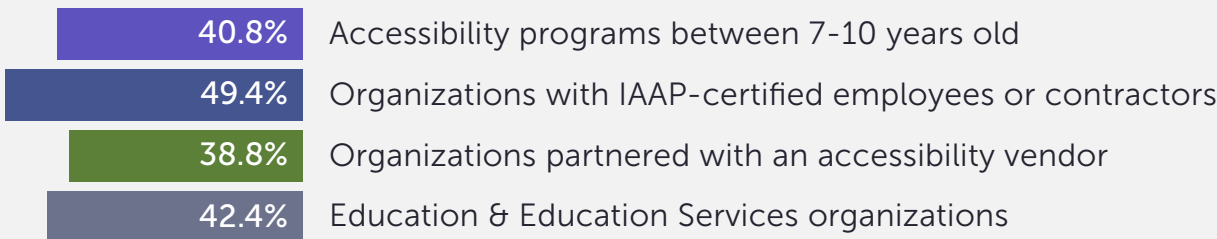
Testing accessibility before launch is important, but maintaining accessibility is equally vital for every organization. Static websites are a thing of the past. With many organizations updating their properties several times a day, inaccessible content can sneak into production. Monitoring tools ensure that these issues are found quickly—hopefully before they pose a problem for a user or customer with a disability.

About half of those surveyed do not use monitoring tools on live, public-facing systems.

Robust monitoring tools are needed to ensure that accessibility issues in production are flagged immediately and prioritized for remediation. Unfortunately, the survey revealed a weakness in this area for many organizations.



Those most likely to use a monitoring solution:



Top 5 Features in an Accessibility Monitoring Solution

Survey participants were asked to rate features of an accessibility monitoring solution on the following scale: **Not Important** (-1), **Interesting** (0), **Important** (1), or **Very Important** (2).

1 Level of detail in reporting (1.45)

One participant added a comment: “[It is] important to build so that results make sense to content owners, visual designers, developers, and leadership—all roles who play a critical role in a platform’s overall accessibility.”

2 Automated test coverage (1.44)

Over 55% of those surveyed agreed that automated test coverage is very important for a monitoring solution.

3 Ease of setup and use (1.38)

The most powerful software is useless if the end users have difficulty setting it up and using it.

4 Reports are shareable (1.32)

Survey participants noted that it was useful to share reports with key stakeholders. This is especially important in organizations where web properties are owned by several departments.

5 Content quality testing (1.11)

Over 40% of participants found testing for broken links, spell check, and other content quality issues to be very important. The older the accessibility program, the more likely it was that they ranked this as very important.



Features from Most Wanted to Least Important

1. Level of detail in reporting
2. Automated test coverage
3. Ease of setup and use
4. Reports are shareable
5. Content quality testing
6. High-level dashboard for leadership/stakeholders
7. Integration with dev tools
8. Proactive alerts
9. High frequency of tests
10. Live dashboards
11. Information security certification
12. Integration with bug tracking tools
13. Site usage analytics
14. Integration with team communication tools

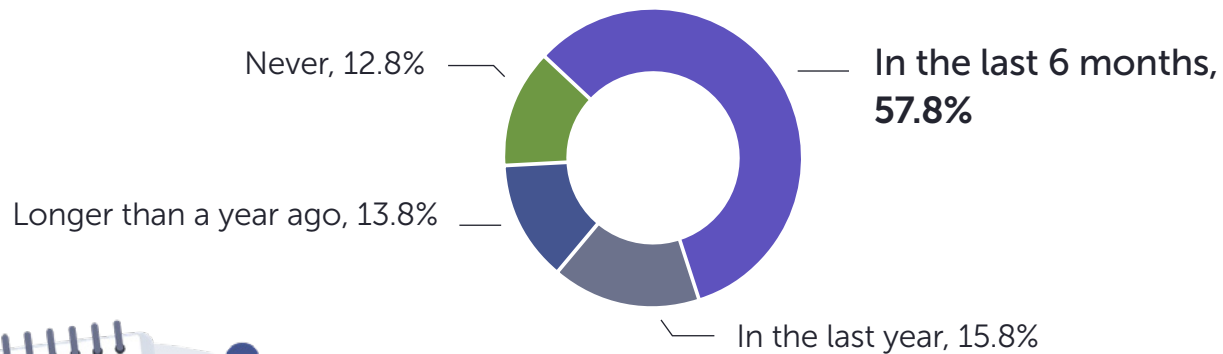


Auditing the Accessibility Audit

Many organizations complete digital accessibility audits on key properties. An audit gives an overview of the accessibility of the website or product. It includes automated testing, guided manual testing, and user testing. During this process, key user flows are checked to ensure that they are functional for people with disabilities.

Over half of survey respondents with accessibility auditing duties (57.8%) have conducted a formal accessibility audit in the last six months and a total of 73.5% have audited in the last year.

When was the last time your organization conducted a formal audit?



Most Likely to Have Audited in the Last 6 Months

- International organizations (66.7%)
- Those with IAAP-certified team members (67.7%)
- Tiny organizations (<50 employees) (71.0%)
- Enterprises (over 50k employees) (72.3%)
- Technology organizations (71.7%)

Audit Report Features Ranked

The survey asked those with experience in accessibility audits to rate each aspect of an audit report as **Very Important**, **Important**, **Interesting**, or **Not Important**.



Only **21.0%** chose “lowest cost for their solution” as a buying criterion.

Detailed data, expert analysis, and remediation guidance ranked most important.

- 1 Guidance or fixing issues
- 2 Detailed explanations of issues and their user impact
- 3 Prioritized, sortable list of individual issues
- 4 Aggregate data about locations of issues (*pages/components where they reside*)
- 5 A written summary analysis of the report from an expert

Predictions, overall scores, and code examples were lower on priority lists.

- 6 Compliant and non-compliant code examples
- 7 Aggregate data about types or classes of issues
- 8 Compliance prediction report (*i.e., “Fixing these 12 issues will results in the largest jump in accessibility”*)
- 9 A map of the distribution of issues across a site or app
- 10 A summary compliance score
- 11 Functional accessibility scorecards

Choosing an Accessibility Audit Vendor

When asked for their buying criteria for an accessibility audit vendor, survey participants prioritized the following:

Best support and high quality of service

53.1%

Best experts with the most experience in accessibility

51.5%

Most complete solution (best assurance of long-term success)

36.5%

Overall Accessibility Program Maturity Rating for Internal Accessibility Scorecard

Those in charge of audits were positive in their rating of their organization's internal accessibility score card, with half rating theirs as In Progress (50.4%) and (24.0%) rating it as Proactive.



Average Maturity Rating – 1.9 out of 3

While 95.9% agree that testing by people with disabilities is important, 47.2% of organizations are not doing it.*

* See [page 33](#) for more on testing.

User Experience & Inclusive Design

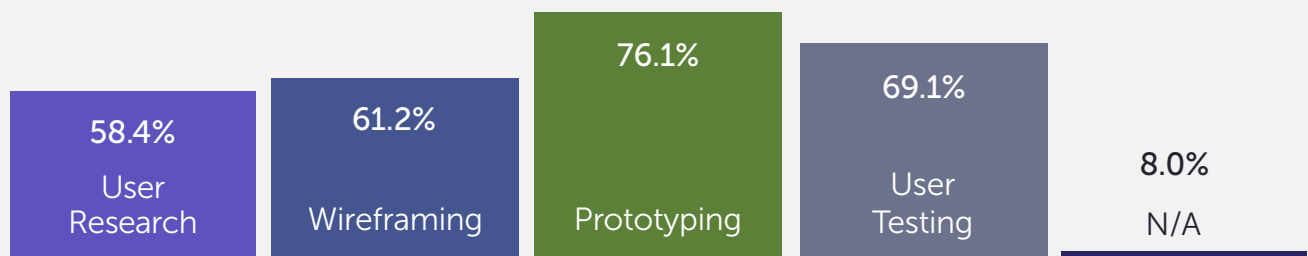
In an ideal world, organizations would get to make the design process more inclusive from the ground up. But widespread change like that can be challenging. Many teams do not have the luxury of waiting for the new process to start working on their product.

But the work of inclusion is important. Organizations are making progress by focusing on implementing smaller changes and building toward a more inclusive design process.

92% of UX & Design professionals are actively considering accessibility.

Best practice dictates that thinking about accessibility should start before the product exists—and the survey participants agreed. Only 8% of those surveyed said they do not consider accessibility at all when designing. Three out of four UX professionals reported thinking about accessibility in the prototyping stage.

In which stages of the process do you actively consider accessibility? (Check all that apply.)



Despite this, 46.8% do not get any feedback from people with disabilities.

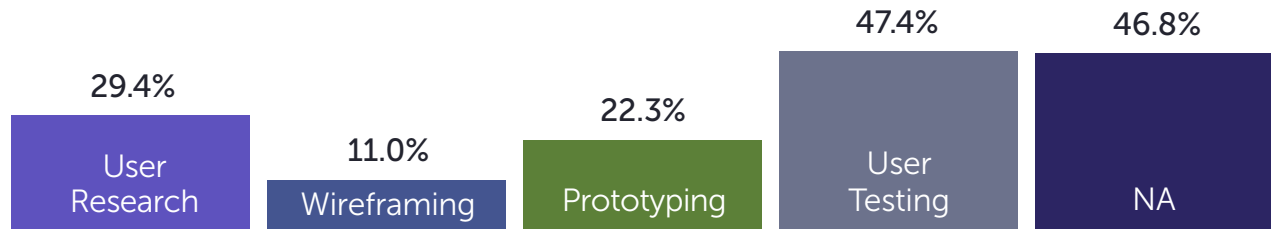
Many organizations make great efforts to include people with disabilities in their work. However, there is a lot of room to improve.

It is a huge win if there is any testing by a person who is a daily user of a screen reader. It is an even bigger win when seven people with different disabilities and who use different assistive technologies are included in a usability study.

Nearly 30% of UX/Design professionals surveyed said they include people with disabilities in the user research phase of a project.

It's common to see a summary usability study before a product launches or before a major release. In fact, **47.4%** of those surveyed reported that people with disabilities were involved in user testing. But the best results come when meaningful representation is in every phase of the process.

In which stages of the process do you get feedback from people with disabilities? (Check all that apply)



Accessibility and Design Requirements

The survey asked UX & Design professionals to think back on the last project they worked on and pick the statement that best described it:

- A** The design requirements did not mention accessibility at all.
- B** The design requirements included accessibility... but our team did not understand how to meet those requirements.
- C** The design requirements included accessibility... and our team understood how to meet those requirements.



The good news: Accessibility is included in most design requirements.

Over **73%** reported that accessibility was part of the design requirements. The survey did not delve deeper this year into the exact details of the accessibility requirements. This is an addition planned for the 2022 survey.

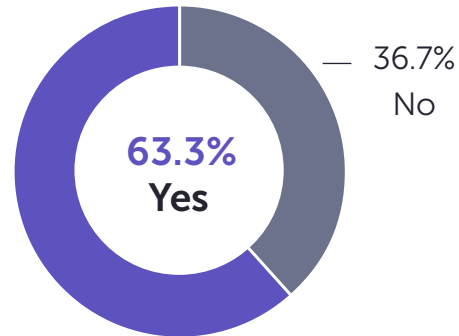
Nearly half (**46.3%**) reported that their team understood how to meet the accessibility requirements.

The bad news: Many still report a lack of understanding and training on accessibility.

While **73.2%** reported that accessibility was part of the design requirements, **36.7%** of those people **did not** understand how to meet those requirements.

Over **40%** rated their Design/UX team's accessibility knowledge as Elementary. (More on training is on [page 64.](#))

Did your team understand how to meet the accessibility requirements of the project?



Accessibility brings value to the final product and the organization.

Whether or not an organization uses agile methods, weaving accessibility into daily processes:

- ✓ Increases product usability and speeds up task flow completion.
- ✓ Opens the product up to a new market (people with disabilities).
- ✓ Increases organizational efficiency and decreases operational costs.
- ✓ Builds loyalty in customers.
- ✓ Future proofs work so it can provide more value later.



Partnering with an accessibility vendor results in a more accessible component library.

The survey showed that organizations that partnered with an accessibility vendor—even short term!—leveraged that relationship to develop a more accessible component library.

Organizations that have customized their UI framework to make components more accessible



Organizations with the most accessible UI components

- 81.0% Accessibility program over 20 years old
- 75.9% Those with IAAP-certified personnel
- 75.0% Financial Services industry

Overall Accessibility Program Maturity Rating for UX

Those in UX & Design roles were most likely to rate their organization’s accessibility design gates or practices as In Progress (41.1%).



Average Maturity Rating – 1.7 out of 3

Content Creation

Every organization creates content—whether it’s educational materials, marketing collateral, product sell sheets, or digital documents. Many organizations are also updating their web content on a daily basis, if not more often.

With content being published at this rate, accessibility can easily fall through the cracks. Inclusive content is not ensured unless best practices are baked into the content creation process.

The survey asked those in content creation roles about the accessibility of the content they produce and the content management platforms they use.

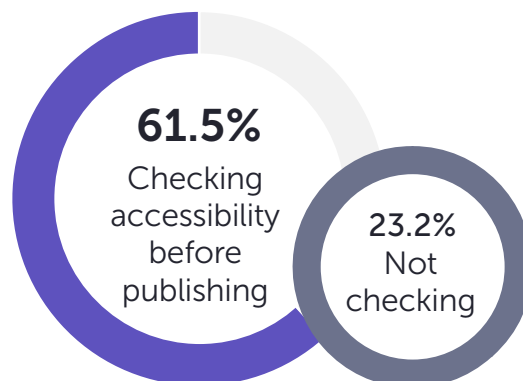
Overall Accessibility Program Maturity Rating for Content

The majority of content creators rated their organization’s practices and procedures for publishing accessible content as “In Progress.”



Average Maturity Rating – 1.8 out of 3

61.5% of organizations are verifying content accessibility before a new asset is published.



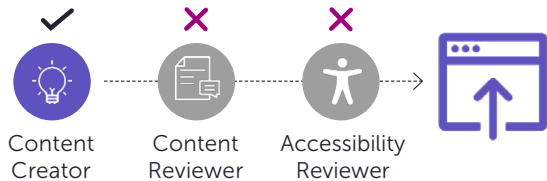
Content Publication Practices & Procedures

The survey provided a glimpse into the operating procedures of content creation teams. It found that while many organizations are thinking about accessibility, they haven’t always implemented appropriate practices and procedures.

Over 41% of survey participants stated they had accessibility challenges caused by “too many content creators.” This was especially true for those in education (32.8%) and technology (22.3%). Without proper training—which 53.3% of **all** participants also identified as a challenge—it is difficult to ensure that all published content is accessible.

An accessibility checklist helps content creators take ownership of compliance and provides a data-driven approach to assessing content accessibility. It can be especially valuable in larger organizations where there are many content creators publishing on a daily basis.

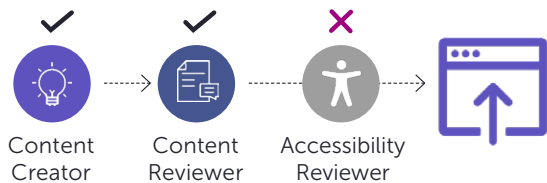
In an ideal world, the content creation process would flow from content creator to content review to accessibility review to publication. However, this is only the case in **34.3%** of organizations.



14.8% of content creators said that content is self-published by the author with no checks for content or accessibility.



27.2% of content creators self-check for accessibility before publishing.

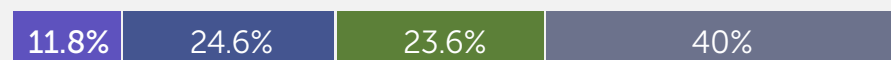


23.7% of content creators have someone else review the content before publishing, but do not check for accessibility.

Content accessibility checklists are either non-existent or not written procedure.

40% of content creators reported that they do not have a checklist that is applied to verify the accessibility of new content and **24.6%** said that they have a written checklist, but it is not used consistently.

Is there a checklist used to verify the accessibility of new content before it is published?



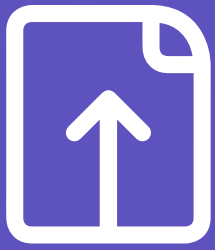
- Yes, it is a written procedure and gets used every time. – **11.8%**
- Yes, it is a written procedure and gets used sometimes. – **24.6%**
- Yes, but it's not written down. – **23.6%**
- No – **40%**

Q:

Which industry is most likely to have an accessibility checklist for content?

A:

Education
(**37.5%**)



14.8% of content creators said that content is self-published by the author with no checks for content or accessibility.

Top 5 Most Popular Electronic Document Types

- 1 PDF - 94.5%
- 2 MS Word - 85.5%
- 3 MS PowerPoint - 75.3%
- 4 MS Excel - 63.0%
- 5 Google Docs - 37.0%

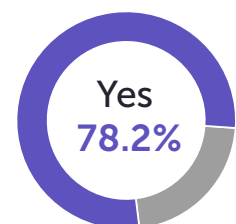
Electronic Documents

Beyond web content, electronic documents also need to be accessible to people with disabilities. Digital documents have their own set of best practices to ensure accessibility.

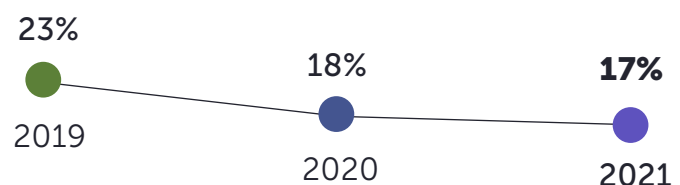
PDF accessibility continues to improve slowly.

PDFs can pose accessibility challenges, especially issues of reading order for screen reader users. 78.2% of content creators said they tag their PDFs to ensure accessibility.

Do you tag your PDFs for accessibility?



The number of organizations that do not tag their PDFs is decreasing year over year.



Social Media Accessibility

From Facebook to TikTok and LinkedIn to Instagram, accessible social media content is a must for any organization that values inclusion.

Social media accessibility continues to rise.

In 2021, the survey added additional questions for those who handle social media for their organization. Level Access, G3ict, and IAAP look forward to analyzing the trends in these numbers in the upcoming years.

Alt Text for Images – 75.5%

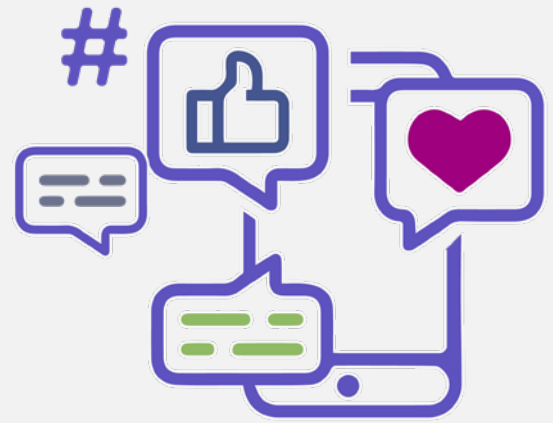
Images that convey information should have alternative text so that information is available to those who are blind, low vision, or process audio information better than visual information.

Captioning audio & video content – 62.2%






Captions provide equal access to those who are deaf, hard of hearing, or have difficulty processing information they hear. They are also handy for those who choose to mute their mobile devices.

Providing the same content on different channels – 50%

Duplicating content ensures that an organization's message is reaching as many of their users as possible, especially when accessibility of different applications is a concern.



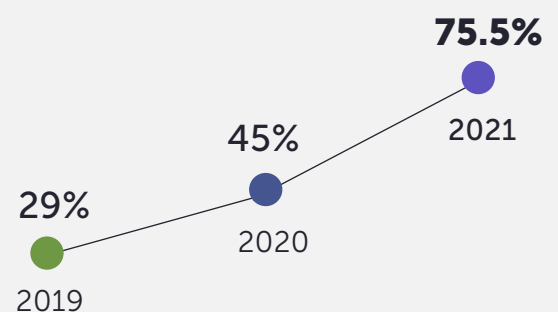
Top 5 Most Popular Platforms

-  1. Facebook - 87.5%
-  2. Twitter - 78.8%
-  3. LinkedIn - 68.8%
-  4. Instagram - 52.5%
-  5. Pinterest - 6.3%

51.9% reported that Facebook was the platform their organization used the most often.

65.8% reported that accessibility features did not influence their organization's decisions on where to publish content on social media.

Organizations that include alt text on social media images



WCAG-compliant color contrast for images with text – 43.9%

To meet WCAG 2.0 level A, there should be a contrast ratio of at least 4.5:1 for normal text and 3:1 for large text. To meet AAA guidelines, the ratios are 7:1 for normal text and 4.5:1 for large text.

CamelCase hashtags – 41.5%

To increase readability by people of all abilities, it is helpful to capitalize each word of a multi-word hashtag (e.g., #CamelCaseHashtags vs. #camelcasehashtags).

Providing the same content in different formats – 22.0%

This is a way to go “above and beyond” for users and give them a choice to consume content in a way that best works for them. An example would be having the same information available in a video and as an article on your website and linking to both options.

Noting media type for a URL – 14.6%

Another “above and beyond” feature is to help your users predict the outcome of clicking on a social media link. This can be as simple as adding [VIDEO] or [PDF] after the link.

Audio description for videos – 12.2%

Audio description is a secondary audio track where a narrator describes the action on screen so those who are blind or low vision can access the information more fully.

Verifying that shared or retweeted content is accessible – 12.2%

While most social media managers do their best to share accessible content, they often draw the line at verifying third-party created content.



Video Content, Webinars, and Live-Streams

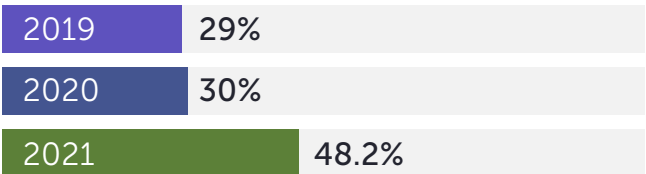
Everyone knows that captions are important for those who are deaf or hard of hearing, but they are also helpful to those with cognitive disabilities or English language learners. (That’s not even mentioning how many hearing people view videos with their device muted.) The survey found that **92.8%** caption their video content, with **48.2%** of them choosing to outsource the task.

Video captioning is widespread and often outsourced.

Captioning Video



Outsourcing Captioning



Level Access, G3ict, and IAAP highly recommend downloading [3PlayMedia’s State of Captioning Report](#) for in-depth data about captioning.

Webinars and live-streamed videos are becoming much more accessible.

Of the organizations who host webinars and live-streamed videos, only **7.5%** stated that their events were not accessible at all. This compares to **23%** in 2020 (however, the survey only asked about webinars, not about live streams).

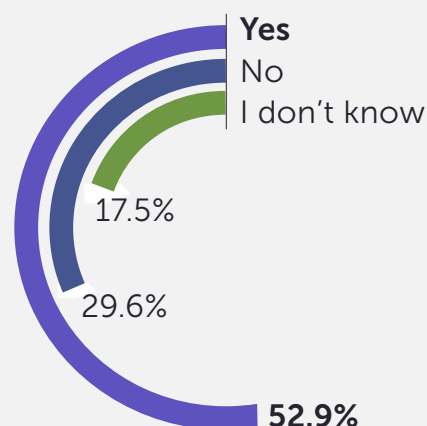
Inclusive Practice	2020	2021
Platform accessible to screen reader users	30.9%	52.7%
Live closed-captioning	29.4%	69.9%
Transcript following the event	29.4%	52.7%
Accessible to keyboard-only users	27.9%	38.7%
Webinar slides available in an accessible format	26.5%	57.0%

In addition, the 2021 survey asked how many live video events included a sign language interpreter. Having an interpreter ensures that the most accurate information is being conveyed to the Deaf community. This is especially true if your organization uses a Certified Deaf Interpreter (CDI). This year, **21.5%** of participants who manage webinar or live-streamed events reported that they use an interpreter.

Accessibility Training for Content Creators

About half of content creators said that there was training available for them to learn how to make their work accessible and check it.

For more on accessibility training, see [page 64](#).

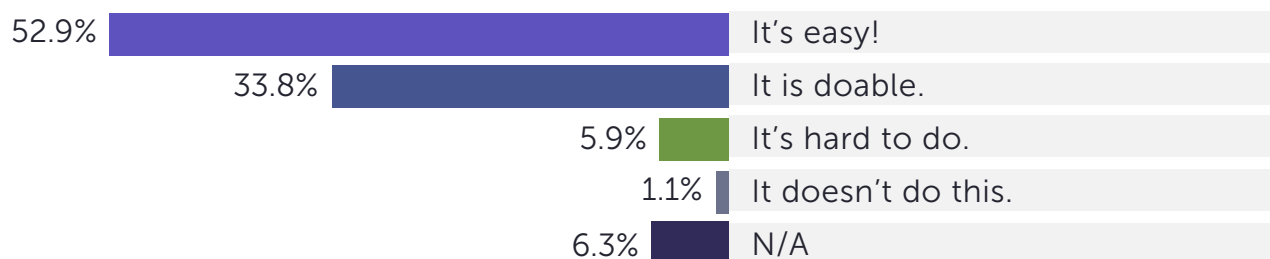


Accessibility of Content Management Platforms

WordPress was the most popular web content management platform with **34.8%** of content creators using it regularly. The survey asked content creators to rate the accessibility features in the most accessible platform they use.

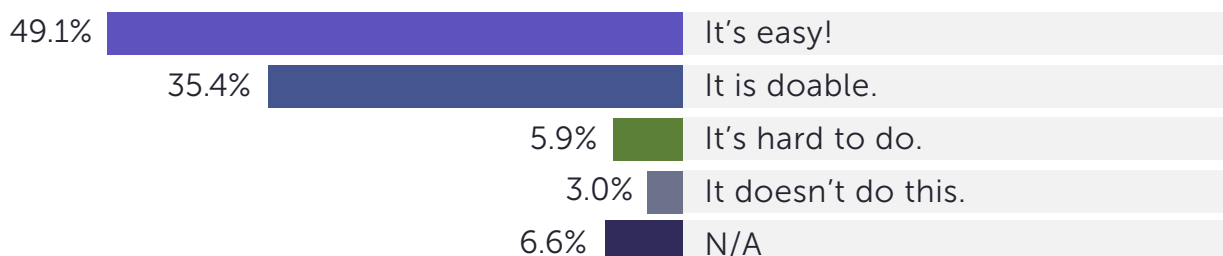
Alternative text features are easy to use.

Content creators reported that it was easy to add alternative text to images in their content management platform, with **only 7%** reporting that it was difficult or impossible to do.



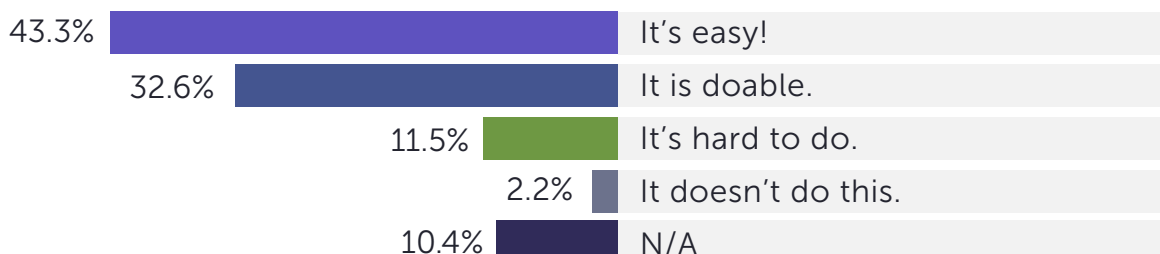
Adding image captions is also simple.

While adding captions to images is not required, it can be useful for those with visual disabilities who may not always use a screen reader.



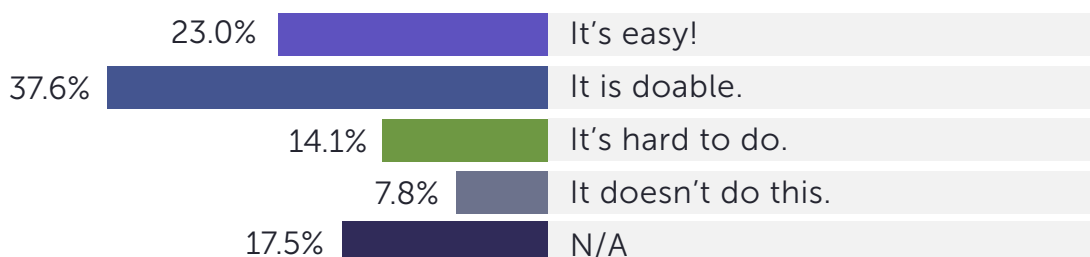
Using proper semantic markup is a bit more challenging.

Sighted users skim a page of content with their eyes; blind users skim by having their screen reader announce the headings on the page. If the heading tags are not used in order or are replaced by visual markup like larger font size or bold text, a screen reader user will not be able to skim the content to find the sections they want to read.



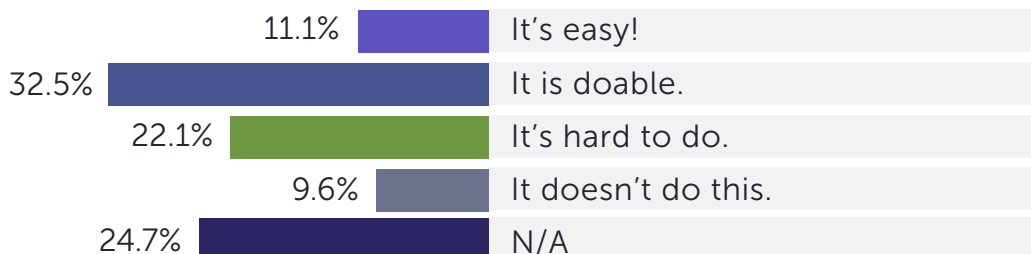
Adding pre-made accessible components/blocks can be difficult in some platforms.

An easy way to streamline the creation of inclusive content is to have a library of components (like the Gutenberg blocks in WordPress) that are already accessible. **23%** of content creators reported that this was easy to do in their most accessible platform.



Creating accessible interactive elements is the most difficult task.

Nearly a third of content creators reported that it was difficult or impossible to create accessible interactive elements such as quizzes, calculators, and interactive infographics, in their content management system.



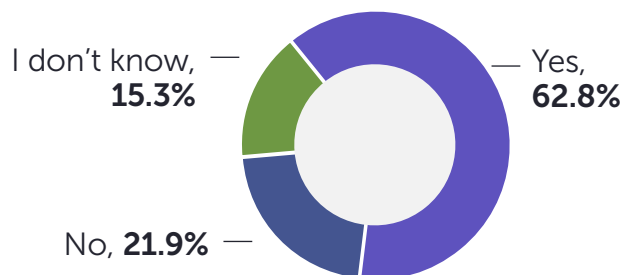
Customer Service & Accessibility Feedback

Passing accessibility tests is only part of the journey to an inclusive website or product. Having a documented process for handling and resolving accessibility complaints is just as important. It is critical that customer service representatives are trained on the basics of accessibility. That way, when a customer calls to say that a certain feature isn't working with JAWS, their reply isn't, "What's JAWS?"

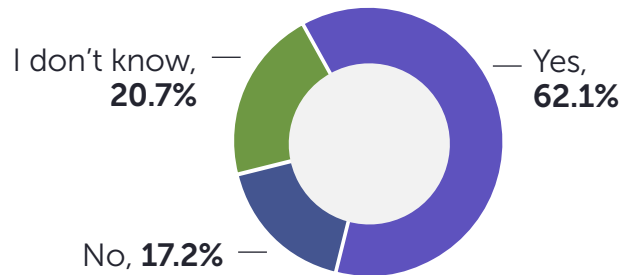
The majority of organizations are satisfied with their processes for dealing with accessibility complaints and feedback.

The survey found that 62.8% of organizations had a documented procedure and 62.1% felt that accessibility complaints are resolved in a timely manner.

Do you have a documented process for handling accessibility complaints & feedback?



Do you feel that accessibility complaints are resolved in a timely manner?



Overall Accessibility Program Maturity Rating for Accessibility Complaints

While 32% of organizations rated their process to resolve, document, and audit accessibility complaints as Proactive, that leaves 68% of them with incomplete—or worse, non-existent—procedures for helping people with disabilities use their product or website.



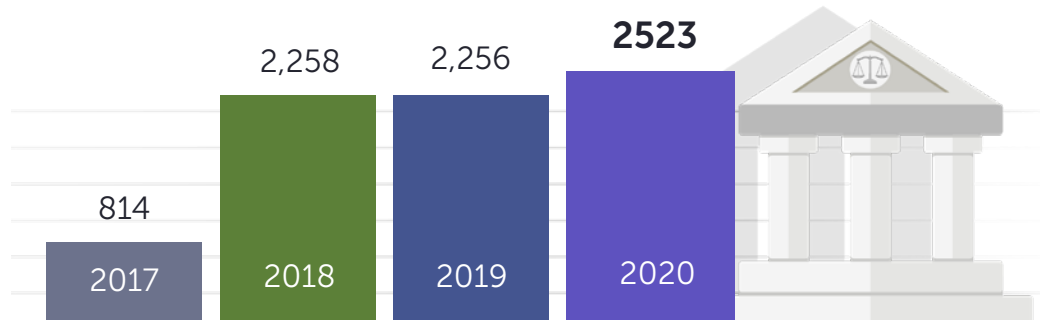
Average Maturity Rating – 2 out of 3

Lawsuits & Litigation

The COVID-19 pandemic initially saw a drop in lawsuits filed for digital accessibility barriers, but numbers have rebounded and are continuing to rise as they have in previous years.

ADA Title III Website Accessibility Lawsuits in Federal Court (2017-2020)

Source: [Seyfarth Shaw LLP](#)



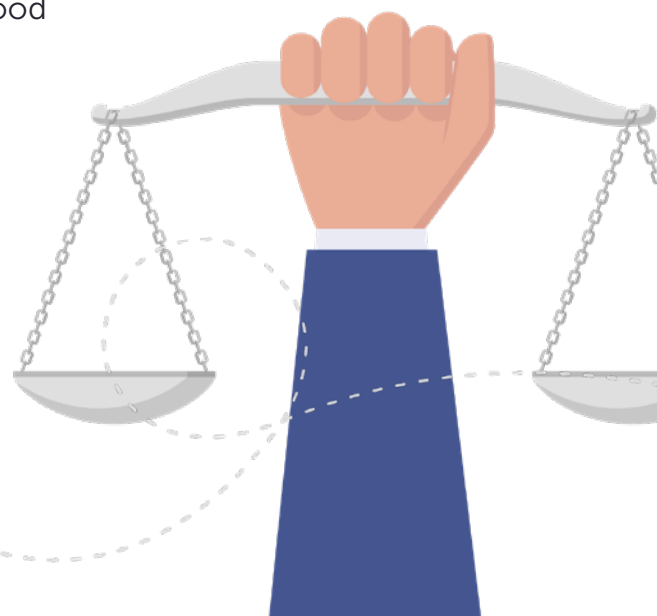
Half of organizations surveyed reported that litigation trends have motivated them to move faster to achieve accessibility compliance.

Legal risk is still a major driver for accessibility

Just over **18%** listed preventing, reducing, or eliminating lawsuits as an organizational goal for 2021. US-based organizations were much more likely to list this as a goal than international ones. (**21.6% vs. 8.7%**). (More on Goals on [page 17](#).)

The survey asked all participants to rank their organization's top three drivers for accessibility. While inclusion and good UX topped the list, legal drivers were still a concern for many organizations:

- Complying with laws - **61.3%**
- Avoiding lawsuits or complaints - **35.9%**
 - US organizations – **42.3%**
 - International organizations - **16.7%**
- Complying with a legal settlement - **7.0%**



Lawsuits motivate compliance – and **1 in 5 surveyed have been sued more than once.**



- Half of organizations surveyed reported that litigation trends have motivated them to move faster to achieve accessibility compliance
- 21% of organizations surveyed have been sued more than once over digital accessibility, compared to 10% in 2020



Legal counsel is key to a successful settlement.

If an organization receives a demand letter or is sued, the first step should be to secure counsel. If internal counsel does not have experience with ADA settlements, there are attorneys and firms that specialize in it.

“What did you do first?”

- 50% of organizations that came under legal scrutiny contacted their internal legal counsel
- Just over 35% ran tests to try to reproduce the barriers claimed by the plaintiff, and 12.5% chose to respond directly to the complaint

Prepare for significant expenses for legal counsel.

The majority of organizations who used external counsel spent over 40 hours with their attorney(s). Given the hourly rate of a quality attorney, this is no small line item!

$$\text{\$} \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{\$xxx – yyy} \times 40 = \text{\$zz,zzz} \\ \text{Hourly rate} \quad \text{hours} \quad \text{estimated cost} \end{array} \right\}$$



Internal expenses also add up quickly.

The majority of organizations also spent over 40 hours with internal teams, working to resolve the complaint and bring their properties into compliance.

The bottom line: Accessibility now is the budget-friendly choice.

The risk of a lawsuit is still very real, especially for consumer-facing companies, educational institutions, and public sector organizations. Putting accessibility as a must-have line item in the budget will mitigate some of the financial risk posed by lawsuits and demand letters.

Human Resources and Diversity & Inclusion Programs



According to the U.S. Department of Labor Disability Labor Force*, in the year 2020, 33.5% of people with disabilities participated in the labor force, compared to 76% of those without disabilities.

The 2021 State of Digital Accessibility survey was the first to ask questions about Human Resources. The survey did not delve deeply into this subject because [Disability:IN](https://disabilityin.org/resource/2020-disability-equality-index-report/) produces an excellent report on the topic*.

Survey participants employ people with disabilities at a higher rate.

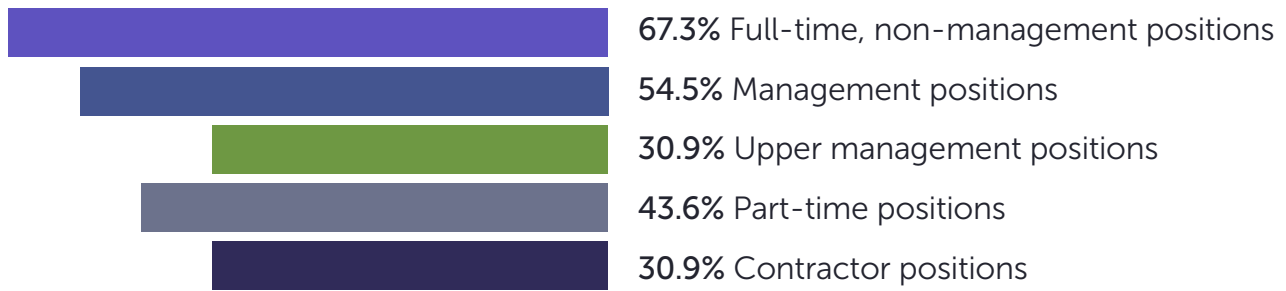
The survey found that only 7.3% of organizations did not have people with disabilities represented in their work force. While this is an awesome statistic, it is important to understand the self-selecting nature of the survey pool. This does not reflect the job market at large.



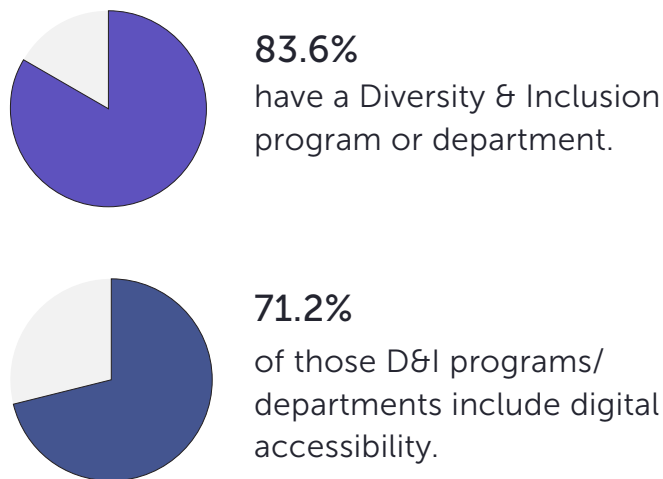
* <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/research/statistics>

* <https://disabilityin.org/resource/2020-disability-equality-index-report/>

Do people with disabilities work for your organization? (Select all that apply.)



Diversity & Inclusion Programs



Overall Accessibility Program Maturity Rating for Engagement with the Disability Community



Average Maturity Rating – 2 out of 3

Engaging with the disability community creates more inclusive organizations and more user-friendly products and services. Those with duties related to human resources or diversity & inclusion rated their organization's engagement with the disability community as "Proactive" (38.2%).



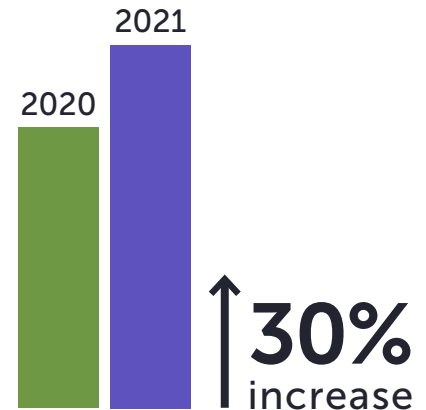
Buying & Selling Accessible Technology

The best way to find out if a piece of technology works for people with disabilities is to ask people with disabilities to test it. The next best thing is to look for documentation: a VPAT (or other accessibility conformance report), and the answers provided in a Request for Proposal (RFP).

The majority of buyers want accessible technology.

The 2021 survey expanded the section of questions about buying and selling of software and hardware. Participants who selected those job duties on the About You page of the survey were shown the relevant questions.

The survey found that **71.4%** of organizations have prioritized buying a product or solution because of its accessibility. This is a big jump from **55%** in 2020. Only **9.2%** do not ask vendors for any sort of proof of accessibility before purchasing a product or solution.



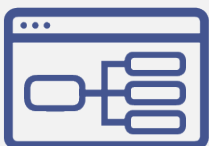
52.9% required a VPAT or other conformance report



48.3% asked questions about compliance with accessibility standards



14.9% requested a trial of the product by employees with disabilities



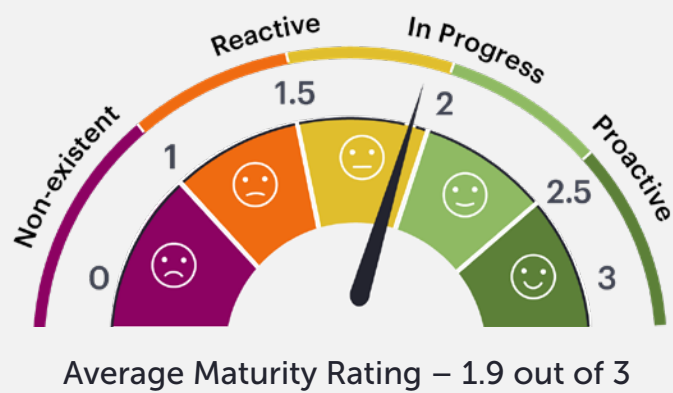
25.3% admitted not every department in their organization holds vendors accountable



23.0% said their procurement process is not formalized yet

Overall Accessibility Program Maturity Rating for Procurement

The majority of those with procurement duties rated their organization’s practices and procedures for procuring accessible technology as “In Progress.” Nearly a quarter (23.9%) ranked their procurement process as “Proactive.”



Requests for Proposal (RFPs) are asking about accessibility more often.

For organizations selling software and hardware, it is becoming more common to see questions about accessibility in RFPs. Those who reported seeing accessibility questions Frequently jumped from 27% in 2020 to 44% in 2021.

How often do RFPs ask about your product’s accessibility compliance?	2020	2021
Never	18%	12%
Infrequently	38%	30%
Frequently	27%	44%
Always	18%	14%

Those in sales roles are more confident answering accessibility questions.

It is important to note that many respondents to the State of Digital Accessibility survey are people with roles tied to accessibility. These numbers will be a bit higher than average.

How confident do you feel responding to RFP questions about your product’s accessibility?	2020	2021
Not at all confident	9%	11%
Slightly confident	20%	6%
Moderately confident	33%	36%
Highly confident	37%	47%

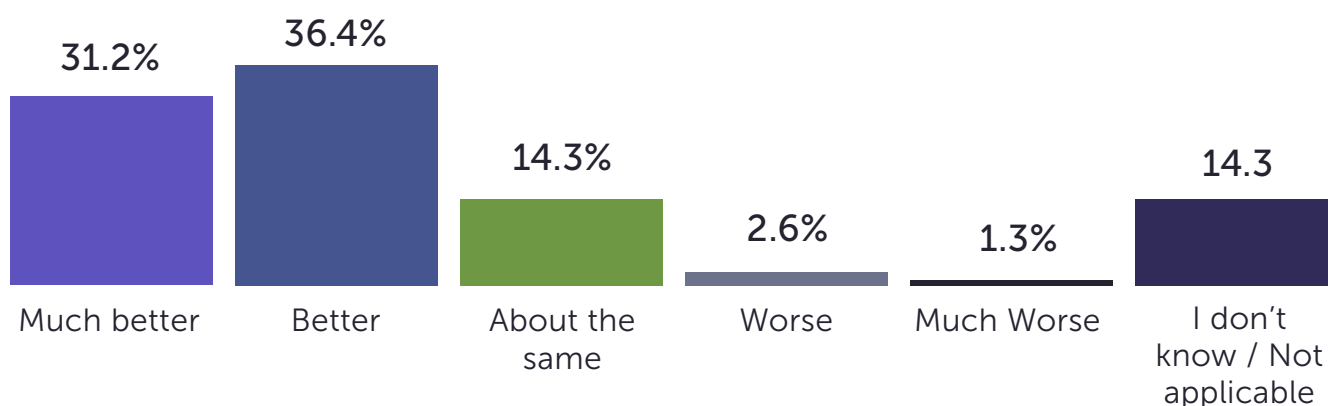


Accessibility is viewed as a competitive advantage.

With so many buyers looking for products that meet accessibility standards, it is not surprising that **77.9%** of those in sales roles said that they see their product's level of accessibility as a competitive advantage.

In fact, **67.6%** rated their product's accessibility as Better or Much Better than their competitors' products.

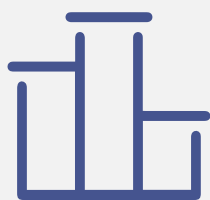
How does your product's accessibility compare to your competitors' products?



Accessibility is called out as a deciding factor nearly 40% of the time.

We already know accessible technology is absolutely essential for people with disabilities and that **71.4%** of organizations have prioritized buying a product or solution because of its accessibility.

But how often is it called out as the deciding factor? In the 2021 survey, **38.6%** reported that their product's level of accessibility was called out as a reason for purchase. This was a new question in 2021, so look for year over year data in the 2022 State of Digital Accessibility Report.



Lack of accessibility training has ranked in the top three challenges in every edition of the State of Digital Accessibility Report (2019, 2020, 2021).

Training, Education, and Certification

Lack of training is the single biggest obstacle among organizations seeking to improve their digital accessibility. It has ranked in the top three challenges in all previous editions of the State of Accessibility Report. The 2020 edition reported that while **94%** agreed that a mature accessibility program should have required annual training, only **26.1%** of organizations achieved that goal. This tracks with the training data collected in the 2021 survey.

Quality of training varies widely team to team.

While **75.4%** of all survey participants said they have had the training necessary to create accessible experiences for their users, when the survey drilled down into individual training and knowledge by department, the reality is not quite so positive.

Training Gaps in Development Teams

66% of developers reported that accessibility was part of the development requirements of their most recent project. However, **34.7%** of those people did not understand how to meet those requirements.

Over **49%** rated their development team's accessibility knowledge as Elementary.

Training Gaps in UX Teams

73.2% of UX professionals reported that accessibility was part of the design requirements on their last project. However, **36.7%** of those people did not understand how to meet those requirements.

Over **40%** rated their Design/UX team's accessibility knowledge as Elementary.

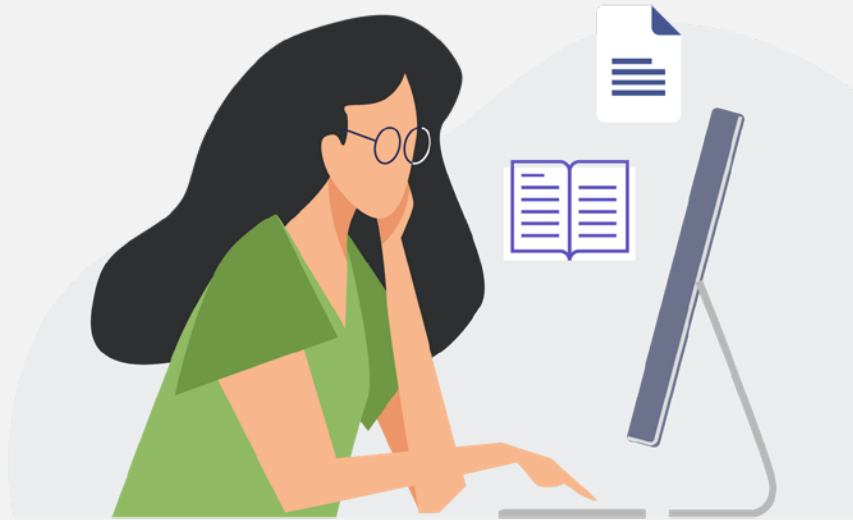
Where is the disconnect?

Training is available for:

- › 61.2% of those in development roles
- › 40.6% of those in digital content roles
- › 56.5% of those in testing roles
- › 63.6% of those in UX and design roles

But it is clear that training is either not having an impact or there is no learning management process in place to verify that training is effective.

In that regard, asking personnel to be certified by an independent professional organization such as IAAP helps maintain and expand the knowledge and skills set of those who are developing products.



Professional certifications communicate commitment to accessibility.

With more than 2,600 certified professionals, IAAP is establishing itself as the certification of reference for accessibility. The table below shows year-to-year progress in notoriety and actual adoption by organizations. With four exams covering specific accessibility job profiles with distinct Bodies of Knowledge, IAAP's certifications constitute a robust roadmap for building accessibility skills.

IAAP Certification	2020	2021
Have considered IAAP Certification	21.8%	24.5%
Have not considered IAAP Certification	36.0%	32.5%
Already have IAAP certified personnel	15.8%	19.9%
Have never heard of IAAP certification	26.4%	23.1%

The data showed benefits to having certified personnel.

Accessibility knowledge, skill building, and transfer of expertise result in enhanced accessibility for products and services.

- Those with IAAP-certified employees or contractors ranked Training as #7 on their list of challenges. (It is in the top 3 for all other sub-groups.)
- Organizations with IAAP-certified personnel were more likely than average to be focused on the goal of program maturity (55.0%), rather than establishing policy & procedures.
- While 57.8% of organizations reported completing an accessibility audit in the last 6 months, the number rose to 67.7% for organizations with IAAP-certified personnel.
- Those with IAAP-certified personnel were more likely to use an accessibility monitoring solution (49.4% vs. 33.0% on average).
- While 66.1% of all organizations have updated their UI component library to reflect accessibility best practices, those with IAAP-certified personnel were even more likely to have done so (75.9%).



The bodies of knowledge of the IAAP certifications, which are modeled after job profiles, can serve as a useful roadmap to develop consistent training plans to build skills across the organization.

Overall Accessibility Program Maturity Rating for Training

All survey respondents were asked to rate their organization's accessibility training programs and policies. Most rated training as In Progress (42.0%). Only 27.1% rated their training programs and policies as Proactive.



To Level Up your Digital Accessibility Program:

- Research new automated testing tools, especially those that can be used as part of continuous integration.
- Include people with disabilities in your user testing.
- Invest in training opportunities like those offered by organizations like Level Access, G3ict, and IAAP.
- Bring your marketing department and other content creators on board to create a fully accessible digital experience.

For more information about making your digital properties accessible to people with disabilities, please visit Level Access's Resources at [LevelAccess.com/resources](https://levelaccess.com/resources).

About Level Access

Level Access provides industry-leading and award-winning digital accessibility solutions to over 1000 corporations, government agencies, and educational institutions. Our mission is to achieve digital equality for all users by ensuring technology is accessible to people with disabilities and the growing aging population.

Why partner with Level Access?

- Over 20 years in digital accessibility and only digital accessibility – an unparalleled history in helping customers achieve and maintain compliance.
- A comprehensive suite of software, consulting services, and training solutions.
- Experienced testers, including many with disabilities who use assistive technologies.

Learn more about digital accessibility products and services at levelaccess.com or 800-889-9659.

About G3ict

G3ict's objectives and global outreach are aligned with the dispositions of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) on the accessibility of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) and Assistive Technologies.

What does G3ict do?

- Promote awareness of digital accessibility and of effective public policies, private sector initiatives, and accessibility standards;
- Support advocates and policy makers with capacity building programs, policy development tools and benchmarking;
- Facilitate and share good practices and innovation in accessible and assistive technologies;
- Foster harmonization and standardization to achieve lower costs and interoperability on a global scale;
- Define and promote the accessibility profession through networking, education and certification.

For more information, please visit www.g3ict.org.

About IAAP

The International Association of Accessibility Professionals (IAAP) is a not-for-profit association focused on advancing the accessibility profession globally through networking, education and certification in order to enable the creation of accessible products, content and services for persons with disabilities. **For more information, please visit www.accessibilityassociation.org.**

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