The State of Digital Accessibility

The Education Sector

In collaboration with:
G3ict and IAAP
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The State of Accessibility Programs in the Education Sector

This report is designed to be read as a companion to the 2020 State of Digital Accessibility Report (SODAR), published by Level Access in collaboration with G3ict and IAAP.

Any survey questions that are not addressed in this sub-report were omitted due to a lack of sufficient responses among education organizations.

The survey found that the majority of accessibility programs in education were between 2 and 3 years old.
Educational organizations have small accessibility teams.

Only 11% of organizations have more than 10 members working primarily on accessibility.

How many people work primarily on accessibility in your organization?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of People</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1–3 people</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4–10 people</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;10 people</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When accessibility is centrally owned, it is by IT.

36% of educational organizations reported distributed responsibility for accessibility. They were also more likely to have accessibility owned by its own department (or as part of Diversity & Inclusion).

What business unit is responsible for digital accessibility?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distributed responsibility among multiple departments</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility / Diversity / Inclusion</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal / Compliance</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEO / President’s office</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operations</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
About the Survey Participants

The respondents of the survey who identified as being in education included education services (67%), colleges & universities (31%), and K-12 (2%). The majority (91%) were based in the United States.

Organization Size (Employees)

- <50: 7%
- 51-100: 4%
- 101-250: 10%
- 251-1000: 26%
- 1,001-5,000: 27%
- 5,001-50,000: 24%
- 50,000+: 2%

Roles of Survey Participants

- Executive: 6%
- Technology Executive: 8%
- Legal/Compliance/Finance: 5%
- Content Creation/Marketing/PR/Sales: 13%
- Product Owner or Project Manager: 8%
- 18% Development
- 16% Testing & QA
- 13% UX/Design
- Other*: 15%

*In education, those who selected Other were mostly faculty, instructional design, and student or technical support roles. In the 2021 survey, we will include these in our list of options.
Relationships with Accessibility Vendors

Partnering with a vendor provides expertise in a very specific technical skillset and access to people with experience building and maturing accessibility programs. In the education sector, 25% of survey participants reported a stable relationship with a digital accessibility vendor. Only 19% of organizations use a vendor on a case-by-case basis.

Do you have a relationship with a digital accessibility vendor?

- 10% Yes, we are in a multi-year contract
- 15% Yes, we are in a year-to-year contract
- 1% Yes, we are in a month-to-month contract
- 19% Yes, we do things on a case-by-case basis
- 33% No
- 22% I don’t know

Drivers, Goals, and Challenges

Survey participants were asked about the reasons why their organization has committed to digital accessibility, the goals they had for their programs, and the challenges those programs face.

Inclusion is the top driver for educational organizations in 2020.

The business drivers for accessibility continue to be a mix of risk reduction and the desire to do the right thing. Compared to all industries, educational organizations often found themselves looking to improve their accessibility after seeing competitors come under legal scrutiny.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Survey Says... Top Five Drivers for Digital Accessibility</th>
<th>Educational Organizations</th>
<th>All Industries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compelled to be inclusive of people with disabilities</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitors have been sued</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worry about the litigation trends</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protect brand image</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticipate likely legislative and regulatory evolution</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Top Accessibility Goals for Educational Organizations

1. Conforming to current or future digital accessibility standards 45%
2. Implementing a standard, organization-wide approach to accessibility 44%
3. Maturing an accessibility program 40%
4. Providing a usable experience of people with disabilities across our entire organization 38%
5. (TIE) Achieving conformance with a commonly used accessibility technical standard (e.g. WCAG) across our entire organization 35%
6. (TIE) Achieving conformance with a commonly used accessibility technical standard (e.g. WCAG) for multiple systems 35%

Maturing an Accessibility Program

The most interesting data came from digging into the topic of program maturity. The survey asked participants to identify markers of maturity and rate their organization’s implementation of mature practices.

The top five markers of a mature accessibility program and the percentage of educational organizations meeting those goals.

18% Established Accessibility engineering and testing gates or practices
31% Engagement with the disability community
32% Dedicated funding for accessibility
33% Accessibility engineering and testing practices
36% Established Accessibility design and authoring gates or practices

Among educational organizations, one maturity marker also had very low implementation:
• Training is required annually like any other compliance topic (24%)
Top Five Challenges for Accessibility Programs

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

1. **Too many content creators – can’t monitor everything (61%)**

Whether content creators are writing code or sharing documents, the never-ending stream of new content can be hard to manage from an accessibility standpoint. This especially rang true for those in higher education who have professors and teaching assistants uploading documents and videos for classes daily.

2. **Training (61%)**

Every role listed training in their top three challenges. When the clock is ticking—see #4—it can be hard to make time for professional development.

3. **Incorporating accessibility earlier in the development lifecycle (57%)**

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.

4. **Time (55%)**

Time to develop an accessible product — or remediate an inaccessible one — is a common challenge. Developing accessible digital properties can be done on a tight schedule, but only with the proper planning, training, and tools.

5. **Access to usability testers who have disabilities. (46%)**

While the majority of organizations agree that testing by people with disabilities is important, the majority don’t do it. Many participants commented that budget prevented them from expanding usability testing to include people with disabilities.
Website Development

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

**Accessibility is moving upstream.**

89% of development teams in educational organizations think about accessibility before building begins.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planning</th>
<th>Defining</th>
<th>Designing</th>
<th>Building</th>
<th>Testing</th>
<th>Deployment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>57%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Got Standards?**

Among educational organizations, 47% are seeking to conform to WCAG 2.1, 53% to WCAG 2.0, and 53% to Section 508. Respondents could choose multiple answers to this question and many also listed state-specific accessibility standards.

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**Top 5 Outsourced Tasks**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>% in Planning</th>
<th>% in Defining</th>
<th>% in Designing</th>
<th>% in Building</th>
<th>% in Testing</th>
<th>% in Deployment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Production of video &amp; audio captioning</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audits or other formal testing of systems once built</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training for our development team on accessibility requirements and techniques</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certification of production systems for accessibility</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training for our accessibility experts on advance accessibility topics</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 94% of education organizations agree that testing by people with disabilities is important, 64% of them are not doing it. Automated and manual testing can identify many accessibility barriers, but 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 the 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 the accessibility program was more of a predictor than the size of the program or its budget.

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**Do you think testing by people with disabilities is important?**

- Yes: 94%
- No: 3%
- I don’t know: 2%

**Do you do usability testing with people with disabilities?**

- Yes: 64%
- No: 31%
- I don’t know: 4%
Continuous Integration & Accessibility Testing

Continuous integration is the practice of merging all developers’ working copies to the shared mainline several times a day. The survey revealed that 17% of organizations tested for accessibility during the CI process.

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 in education (8%) compared with all industries (21%).

Testing Tools

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

Browser extensions and page testers

The majority of development teams (83%) reported using browser extensions and page testers.

Free 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. 75% of educational organizations use free tools, which is about equal with the average across all industries.

The Survey Says...

Top 5 Reasons Why Free Tools are Insufficient

1. Limited coverage
2. Limited reporting options
3. Limited results and information
4. Limited number of tests
5. Limited testing options
Overlay-based remediation tools

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. These tools were used by only 5% of development teams.

Plug-ins or widgets for users to alter UI

These tools generally provide assistive options (like text enlargement) that are already available via browser or operating system settings and fail to ensure an accessible experience. The survey found these were used by 44% of development teams.

Script-based web monitoring

Script-based monitoring was used by only 4% of educational organizations, compared to 10% across all industries.

SDKs or automated testing integrations for development

Across all industries, only 14% of development teams reported using SDKs or automated testing integrations. But this number dropped to 5% among educational organizations.

Site scan or web crawl software

Site scans and web crawlers were used by 43% of all development teams.

Auditing the Accessibility Audit Report

Many organizations complete digital accessibility audits on key properties. The survey asked those who have had an audit to rate the most important parts of the audit report.

The Survey Says...
Top 5 Audit Report Features

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

Training was listed in the top five challenges faced by accessibility programs of all sizes and across all industries. Only 24% of educational organizations have required annual training for digital accessibility.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall accessibility expertise of product team</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>All Industries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-existent</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Professional certifications communicate commitment to accessibility.

The survey results also highlighted the importance of professional certification. Accessibility knowledge, skill building, and transfer of expertise result in enhanced accessibility for products and services.

More than 29% of surveyed professionals stated that it was challenging to hire people with experience in digital accessibility. Commitment to digital accessibility at an individual level can be expressed by achieving certification with International Association of Accessibility Professionals (IAAP). When employees or contractors have a professional level credential (CPACC) or technical credential (WAS and CPWA), employers have a way of benchmarking accessibility knowledge.

Have you considered asking your employees or consultants to be IAAP (International Association of Accessibility Professionals) certified?

- 21% Yes
- 38% No
- 10% We already have IAAP certified employees or contractors
- 31% I’ve never heard of IAAP certification
61% of education organizations have prioritized buying a product or solution because of its accessibility.

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).

Buyers in educational organizations are seeking out accessible technology.

Compared with other industries, buyers in education are more concerned with the accessibility of their purchases. While 70% of organizations across all sectors hold their vendors accountable for accessibility, the number increases to 79% in education.

Do you hold your vendors accountable for digital accessibility?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>All Industries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Level Up Digital Accessibility Programs

- 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.

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.
“Accessibility is an outcome. Inclusive design is a process. If we don’t include people with disabilities in the process, we can’t call it inclusive design.”

– Derek Featherstone, CXO of Level Access