Who's who in digital accessibility success?

Key functions in a sustainable enterprise accessibility program

Even at the largest organizations, digital accessibility often starts out small, with one individual or team championing inclusion and compliance. But bringing a complex portfolio of digital experiences into conformance with accessibility standards, and maintaining accessibility over time, is an organization-wide effort.

If accessibility remains siloed within one function, like development, it can be challenging for those championing accessibility to make a large-scale impact. Progress can be slow and inconsistent. In contrast, when responsibility for accessibility is distributed across functional teams—from product and user experience (UX) to marketing and legal counsel—organizations can reach their accessibility goals more quickly and sustain momentum.

Unsure how to involve the different functions within your organization in digital accessibility? This resource outlines some of the most impactful ways that distinct roles and teams can contribute to a successful, sustainable digital accessibility program.

Accessibility programs aren't one-size-fits-all

Not all organizations are structured the same way—and neither are all digital accessibility programs. Which specific functional teams are involved in accessibility, and how these teams contribute, can vary based on factors such as an organization's size, industry, and operating model. What's important is that the responsibility for digital accessibility is shared, not siloed. Keeping this in mind, use the information in this resource as a general guide, rather than a strict prescription.

# Distributed accessibility: Roles and responsibilities

Digital accessibility lead or champion

- Officially or unofficially coordinates efforts, raises awareness, and manages internal policies and strategy

- Manages implementation of role-specific accessibility training for employees

- Reviews results from accessibility evaluations and triages issues

- Monitors accessibility progress on an ongoing basis (either for their team or division, or for the entire organization)

Anyone can champion accessibility

At organizations that don't have a dedicated accessibility team, the accessibility champion may be a member of any functional team—most often, a product, technology, or UX team. For champions managing accessibility alongside other role-specific responsibilities, sharing responsibility is especially crucial for sustaining progress.
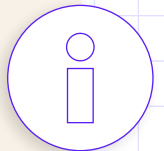
Executive sponsor

- Advocates for budget and resources to support accessibility

- Helps establish an organizational commitment to accessibility, including setting policies, and holds the executive team accountable for upholding this commitment

- Ensures the leadership team is aligned on the impact of accessibility on other organizational activities

- Promotes awareness of and communication about digital accessibility efforts across the organization

Executive support is essential

Executive support is critical for the long-term success of a digital accessibility program. Often, grassroots accessibility efforts fall victim to their own success when company leaders notice individual teams' work and believe these teams do not need executive backing. However, without an active investment from senior leadership, digital accessibility may be quickly de-prioritized amid other organizational demands.

Product team

- Sets the expectation that the organization will not release digital experiences unless they are accessible—for example, by embedding accessibility into the acceptance criteria for user stories (at an agile organization) or in project requirements

- Ensures that resources are allocated for addressing technical debt related to accessibility

- Actively strives to better understand the needs of users with disabilities and draws on this understanding when shaping product roadmaps and educating their team

UX team

- Creates and maintains an accessible design system

- Validates that all new designs are accessible

- Facilitates a smooth hand-off to development by proactively involving developers in conversations about design accessibility and annotating designs with accessibility considerations

- Includes people with disabilities in user experience research

Development / engineering team

- Ensures that built components are accessible, accounting for considerations like proper semantic structure and keyboard navigability
- Ensures that the usage of existing components in development supports accessibility
- Addresses critical accessibility barriers, including performing quality assurance for accessibility on newly built digital experiences

Marketing team

- Maintains an accessible public-facing website
- Authors accessible content, including web and social media content
- Produces accessible events
- Ensures that promotional imagery and messaging represents people with disabilities in an authentic way
- Enforces accessibility standards when working with design agencies

Procurement team

- Ensures that accessibility is a requirement when procuring digital technology or services
- Partners with the accessibility lead and legal team to monitor the ongoing accessibility of procured technology and services

Customer success team

- Responds to user complaints about accessibility thoughtfully, demonstrating an awareness of the needs of people with disabilities

- Communicates issues surfaced in user complaints to product teams

- Provides users with timelines for, and updates on, the resolution of accessibility issues they have identified in complaints

Legal / compliance team

- Evaluates and responds to any formal external complaints, including legal demands, related to digital accessibility digital accessibility

- Interprets regulatory requirements for digital accessibility

- Develops an internal digital accessibility policy (in partnership with the head of accessibility / accessibility champion)

- Reviews individual projects upon completion to ensure that appropriate procedures, outlined in the accessibility policy, were followed

- Communicates updates on accessibility progress to board members

- Partners with procurement to incorporate accessibility requirements into contracts with new and existing vendors

- May perform a final round of accessibility quality assurance on new digital experiences in production

Human resources team

- Ensures all aspects of the recruitment and hiring process are accessible and equitable for applicants and employees with disabilities, including removing requirements that may create barriers (such as providing proof of a driver's license or lifting a certain amount of weight) from roles unless absolutely necessary

- Ensures the accessibility of intranet systems, internal resources, and meetings

- Works with the head of accessibility or accessibility champion to implement accessibility training for employees

- Incorporates accessibility knowledge and skills into job descriptions and performance review processes for relevant roles

Managing accessibility as a mega-enterprise

In very large or matrixed organizations, multiple teams may perform the same function for different products, brands, or global markets. For example, an enterprise technology company might employ a separate team of developers for each of its software products—or each consumer brand within a conglomerate might have its own dedicated design team. Accessibility programs at these organizations may be structured differently from programs at smaller enterprises or at mid-market companies.

Many mega-enterprises with successful accessibility programs maintain a single center of accessibility excellence that oversees accessibility for the entire company. At the same time, they distribute responsibility, with separate accessibility leads for individual brands or divisions. Notably, the center of excellence typically serves primarily in a consultative, rather than authoritative, function: true ownership of accessibility processes and outcomes belongs to individual accessibility leads.

This approach ensures there's centralized accountability for accessibility, driving consistency, but work is shared throughout the organization rather than siloed.

Advance accessibility maturity with an expert partner

Even if you're the accessibility champion at your organization, you may still be learning. A knowledgeable third-party digital accessibility solution provider can equip you with the tools and support you need to navigate challenges as you mature and expand your accessibility practice.

With 25 years of experience, Level Access has supported champions at thousands of organizations of all sizes, from start-ups to Fortune 500 enterprises. Our unified platform provides a centralized hub for tracking and managing accessibility across your digital portfolio, so you can easily report on progress to key stakeholders. Meanwhile, we'll equip everyone involved in accessibility with the role-specific training and tooling they need to be successful.

Whether you're getting started or maturing an organization-wide program, our solution scales with your needs. And with our Digital Accessibility Maturity Model (DAMM), you can benchmark your progress, ensuring you stay on track to meet your goals at every stage of your journey.

To learn more about our solution, contact a member of our team today.

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