

# How-to Guide to Digital Accessibility for the Enterprise

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Six steps to starting a sustainable enterprise accessibility program



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# Introduction



# Introduction

Amid tightening U.S. and international regulations, it's clearer than ever that digital accessibility is a business imperative for enterprise organizations. However, managing the accessibility of hundreds, or even thousands, of digital assets—across multiple brands and markets—can be complex. If you're new to digital accessibility, you may be unsure where to even begin.

In this practical guide, we'll outline a step-by-step roadmap for building an effective enterprise digital accessibility program, ensuring ongoing compliance and providing equitable experiences to all customers.

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The ‘secret’ to being an accessible organization? Just start. Level Access has taught us that once we start, we’ll make progress toward success.

**CARmax**  
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**Roberston Odom,**  
Principal Software Engineer,  
Horizon Design System, CarMax

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# Align on ownership and secure internal resources



# Align on ownership and secure internal resources

To lay the foundation for your program's success, establish clearly defined, centralized ownership for accessibility within your organization, and ensure that you have the right internal resources—including people and budget—in place.

## Centralizing ownership

Having a single individual, or team, who is centrally accountable for digital accessibility at your organization is key to ensuring consistency in the adoption of accessibility across different teams, brands, and divisions. While mature organizations may have an official Head of Accessibility, if your program is still taking shape, this role will likely be filled by an accessibility lead or champion—a member of any functional team, often a product or technology team, who is deeply passionate about accessibility and is spearheading your organization's accessibility efforts. (Since you've opened this guide, there's a chance you identify with this role.)



## Securing budget and buy-in

It's critical to obtain approval for budget earlier, rather than later, in your digital accessibility journey. Misalignment on budget once you've already put initiatives into motion may significantly stall progress and limit your program's impact. To secure budget, accessibility leaders should identify and engage an executive sponsor: a member of the senior management or executive team that is committed to helping make digital accessibility an organization-wide priority.

Beyond helping obtain budget and other resources for digital accessibility, this executive sponsor can advocate for the continued prioritization of accessibility to other business leaders.

To build the infrastructure for a sustainable program, accessibility leaders will also need buy-in from:



### Product and development leaders:

Decision makers on your product and development teams will be able to help ensure technical projects supporting accessibility are prioritized in your development roadmap.



### Legal / compliance leaders:

Legal and / or compliance professionals can help the accessibility champion advocate for budget and resources by clarifying your organization's compliance obligations related to accessibility, and help your organization stay on top of regulatory requirements.



### UX / design leaders:

UX professionals must work closely with product and development teams to address barriers in live experiences and ensure the accessibility of new ones.

Even more teams will contribute to digital accessibility as your program scales. For a complete list of roles and responsibilities in a successful enterprise accessibility program, access our info sheet, [“Who's Who in Digital Accessibility Success?”](#)

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“When you embed accessibility in team processes and share responsibility, you also embed those values at a team level.”

**CARmax**<sup>®</sup>  
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**Molly Covert,**  
Manager,  
Horizon Design System, CarMax

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## Working with agencies

**Many enterprise organizations engage external agencies to support the design and development of digital experiences.**

However, brands are still responsible for the accessibility of experiences created and maintained by their agencies, which means you may be held legally accountable for any accessibility barriers.

If you work with digital agencies, it's crucial to ensure that your agency partners understand your accessibility goals and are prepared to uphold them. As you implement training, technology, and other resources (which we'll explore in the next section), consider providing your partners with access to these resources.

When vetting new agencies, make sure to discuss accessibility with them prior to signing a contract. You can use [this list of questions](#) to facilitate an open, constructive conversation about their accessibility experience and where they may need support.



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## Implement tools, testing, and training



# Implement tools, testing, and training

Managing digital accessibility across an enterprise requires specialized technology and expertise that you may not have access to internally. Identify a reliable, third-party accessibility vendor who can help you implement:

## Monitoring tools:

Monitoring tools automatically scan your digital experiences for accessibility issues at regularly scheduled intervals, alerting you to any changes in accessibility health. Set up monitoring as early as possible to get a general, baseline understanding of your portfolio's accessibility, as this can help you begin to scope the amount of work ahead.

Later, once you've addressed existing accessibility barriers, you can use monitoring tools to quickly identify new issues—ensuring you maintain accessibility over time.

If your enterprise has multiple brands or divisions with distinct digital portfolios, take care that you take the same approach to monitoring for each of these brands / divisions. This will let you collect consistent data, which is crucial for accurate and actionable organization-wide reporting.

## Manual evaluations:

Because automated scans only detect the most common accessibility issues, you'll also want to obtain manual evaluations, also known as accessibility audits. For the most reliable results, these evaluations should be performed by accessibility experts, including people with disabilities, using multiple assistive technologies (AT).

During a manual evaluation, professionals will test a representative sample of the digital experiences in your portfolio, focusing on:

- **High-traffic pages**, such as website home pages and pages about your product(s)
- **Key user flows**, or the paths users take to complete an important task, such as logging in, making a purchase, or checking a bank account balance
- **Global templates** used across a website or other digital experience

If there are multiple brands within your organization, you may request that testers evaluate a representative sample from each brand (for example, evaluating each brand's website).

## Automated remediation:

Resolving the issues addressed in manual evaluations at the code level will take time—but you can still make immediate improvements to your portfolio's accessibility.

**Automated remediation tools** automatically catch and fix many of the most common accessibility barriers, allowing teams to rapidly implement broad enhancements to end users' experience.

By automatically fixing common issues, this technology also frees up development hours for focusing on rarer and more complex accessibility barriers, ultimately empowering development teams to make faster progress toward clearing their backlogs.

## Training:

Chances are, the team members that will be supporting digital accessibility at your organization aren't accessibility experts—in fact, many of them may have little to no familiarity with accessibility. Role-specific training for designers, developers, and other key functions involved in digital experience creation can help teams build the skills they need to more efficiently address accessibility issues and prevent new ones from emerging.

**For training to be effective**, courses should focus on both practical skill-building and foundational digital accessibility awareness. Additionally, learners must be held accountable for course completion. Accessibility champions can work with human resources professionals, as well as the heads of individual functions, to make accessibility training mandatory for relevant teams.

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“We make accessibility education and training an ongoing priority.”

**CARmax**<sup>®</sup>  
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**Roberston Odom,**

Principal Software Engineer,  
Horizon Design System, CarMax

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## Build an accessibility roadmap



## Build an accessibility roadmap

Now that you have the right tools and resources in place, it's time to lay out a practical plan for improving the accessibility of your digital portfolio. If you're the accessibility leader or champion, work with your executive sponsor and stakeholders on product and / or development teams to understand your organization's upcoming technical and organizational priorities and establish how digital accessibility will fit into—or be tackled alongside—these goals.

At first, many organizations are focused on remediating issues in live experiences, which can be resource-intensive for development teams. So it's particularly important to ensure that a sufficient number of development hours will be dedicated to digital accessibility, whether you manage development in-house or outsource it to an agency. If you've engaged a third-party digital accessibility solution provider for tooling and support, this partner should be able to help you estimate the scope of the work ahead of you, so you can allocate team members' hours accordingly.

Proactively planning for accessibility is crucial for ensuring this initiative doesn't get de-prioritized amid other organizational goals. Once your plan is in action, establish a regular cadence of touchpoints with other key stakeholders to maintain accountability for accessibility progress.



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“Selling to a global market, we had to learn about what level of evaluation and documentation was required for our wide variety of solutions. Level Access helped us quickly gain the clarity we needed to move forward.”



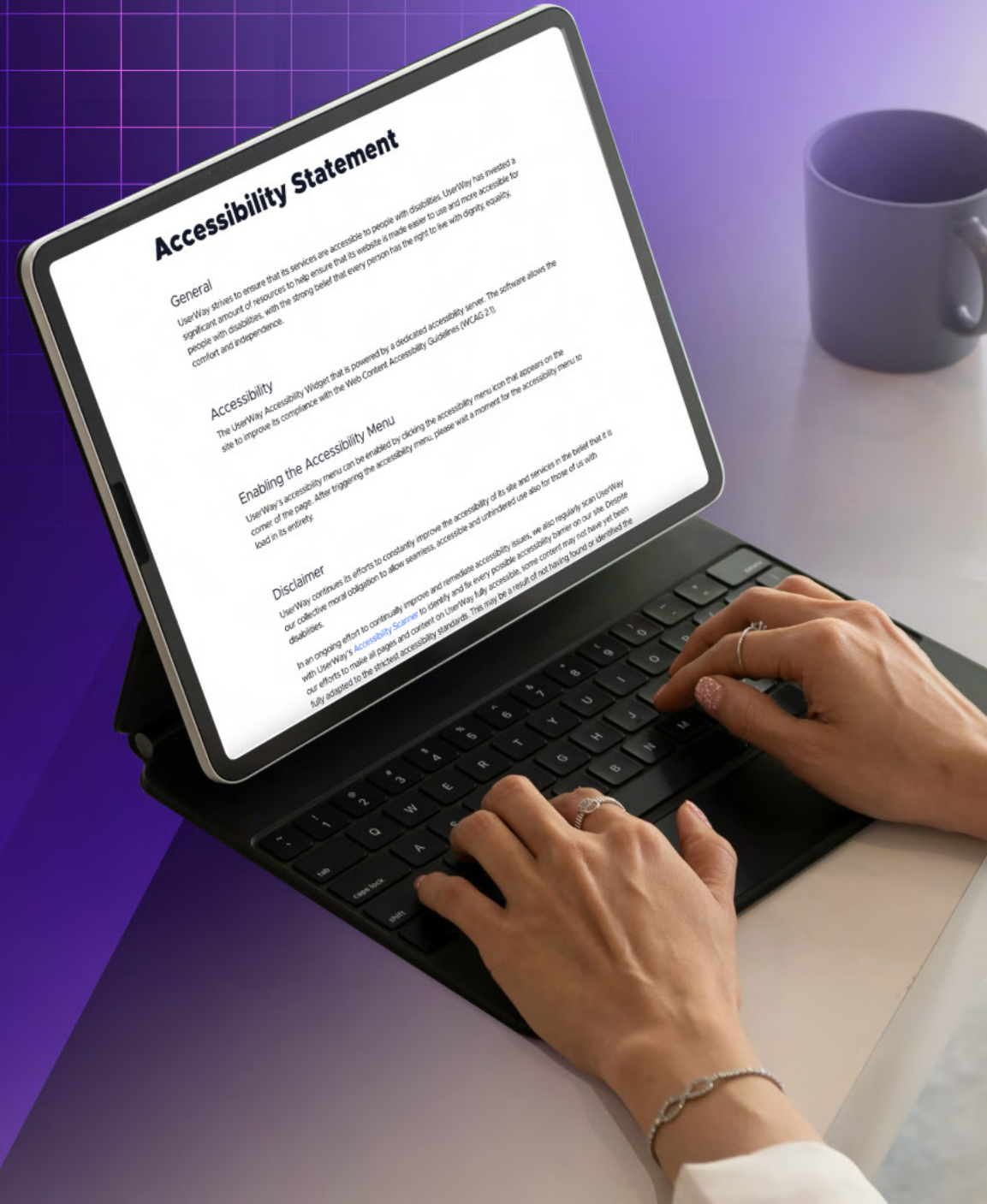
**Karl Frantz,**

Accessibility Lead,

Software Product Development and Release, Esri

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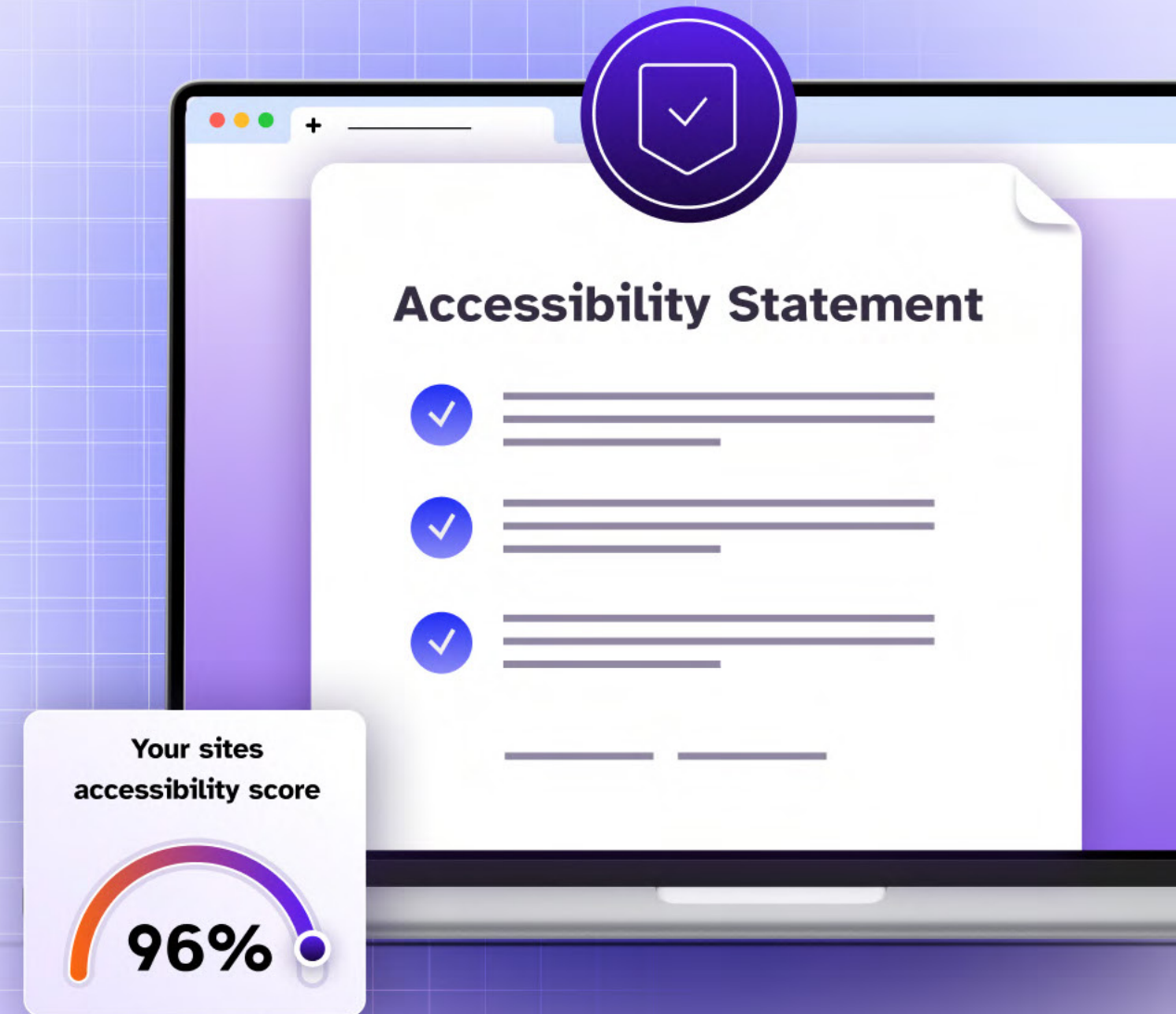
# Communicate your commitment to accessibility



# Communicate your commitment to accessibility

Once your accessibility work begins, it's time to let your customers, and the world, know about your commitment to providing equitable experiences. As soon as you've made an active investment in digital accessibility, you can publicly communicate the steps you're taking to provide equal access to users. Doing so will help mitigate legal risk, as plaintiffs are less likely to file a complaint against an organization that is already aware of, and working to resolve, accessibility issues. It may also help boost your organization's reputation.

To express your organization's commitment to digital accessibility, publish an [accessibility statement](#). An accessibility statement is a document, typically published to an organization's website, that expresses your commitment to digital accessibility and the specific actions you're taking to uphold this commitment. Importantly, this statement should include a reliable way for users to contact you if they encounter any accessibility barriers. If there are multiple brands within your enterprise, you may choose to create separate accessibility statements for each individual brand's site.



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## Take action to address accessibility issues



# Take action to address accessibility issues

You've assembled the team and tools to address accessibility and established a plan for completing this work. You've even communicated your goals externally. Now, it's time to take action.

Manual evaluations of your digital experiences likely yielded an extensive list of accessibility issues. To achieve an acceptable level of accessibility and compliance, you'll need to remediate any issues that constitute significant barriers to users' experience—otherwise known as critical issues. While this remediation work is often led by development teams, it's also important to involve designers. Many of the most common accessibility issues, including improper focus and insufficient color contrast, originate in design, and designers can help ensure these issues are resolved in a way that contributes to an intuitive user experience.

As your teams make progress remediating issues, try to understand the root causes of these issues, and support them with the additional tools and training necessary to prevent them in the future. For example, if many issues in your existing experiences are related to keyboard navigability, consider enrolling developers in mandatory training on ensuring experiences are accessible to keyboard-only users, and embedding checks for keyboard accessibility into your existing test automation process. We'll provide more tips for integrating accessibility into the creation of new experiences later in this guide.



H1 Heading isn't marked

Text contrast is insufficient

Missing alt text

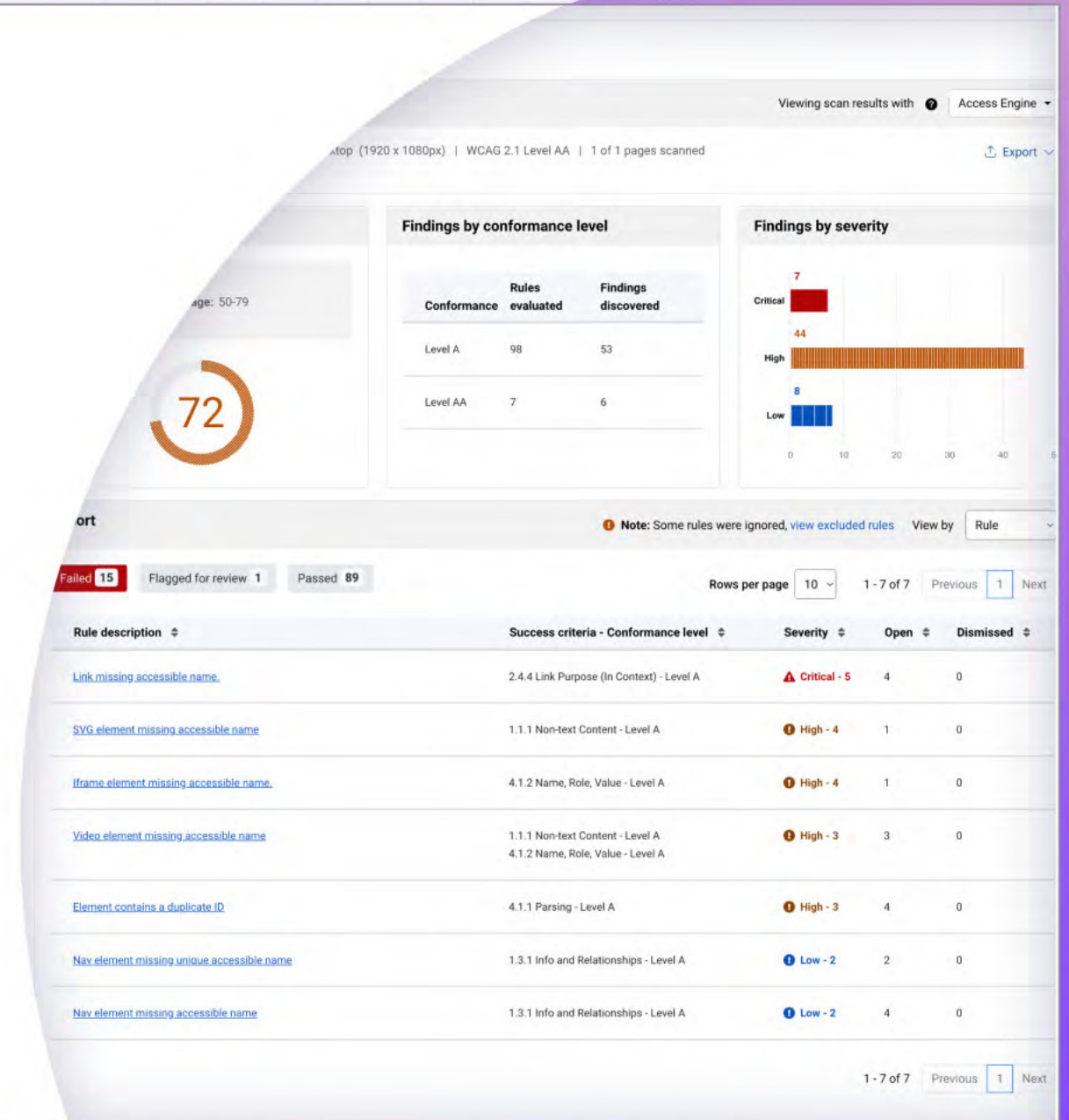
## Prioritizing issues

Depending on the size and complexity of your digital portfolio, the list of critical issues that evaluations surface may be lengthy. Prioritization will be key to keeping teams focused. One framework that may be helpful is weighing the impact an issue has on users against how resource-intensive it is to resolve. Tackle the easiest-to-address issues with the greatest impact on users first. You can also save time by grouping similar issues—such as all instances of missing alternative (alt) text on a specific website—together, so that team members can address these at once.

## Reporting on progress

Regularly reporting on your accessibility progress to key stakeholders—such as senior leaders—can help them understand the impact of your program and may be useful when advocating for additional budget and resources. Accurate reporting can also help you, and others within your organization, understand your state of compliance with digital accessibility laws, your level of legal risk, and your improvement over time.

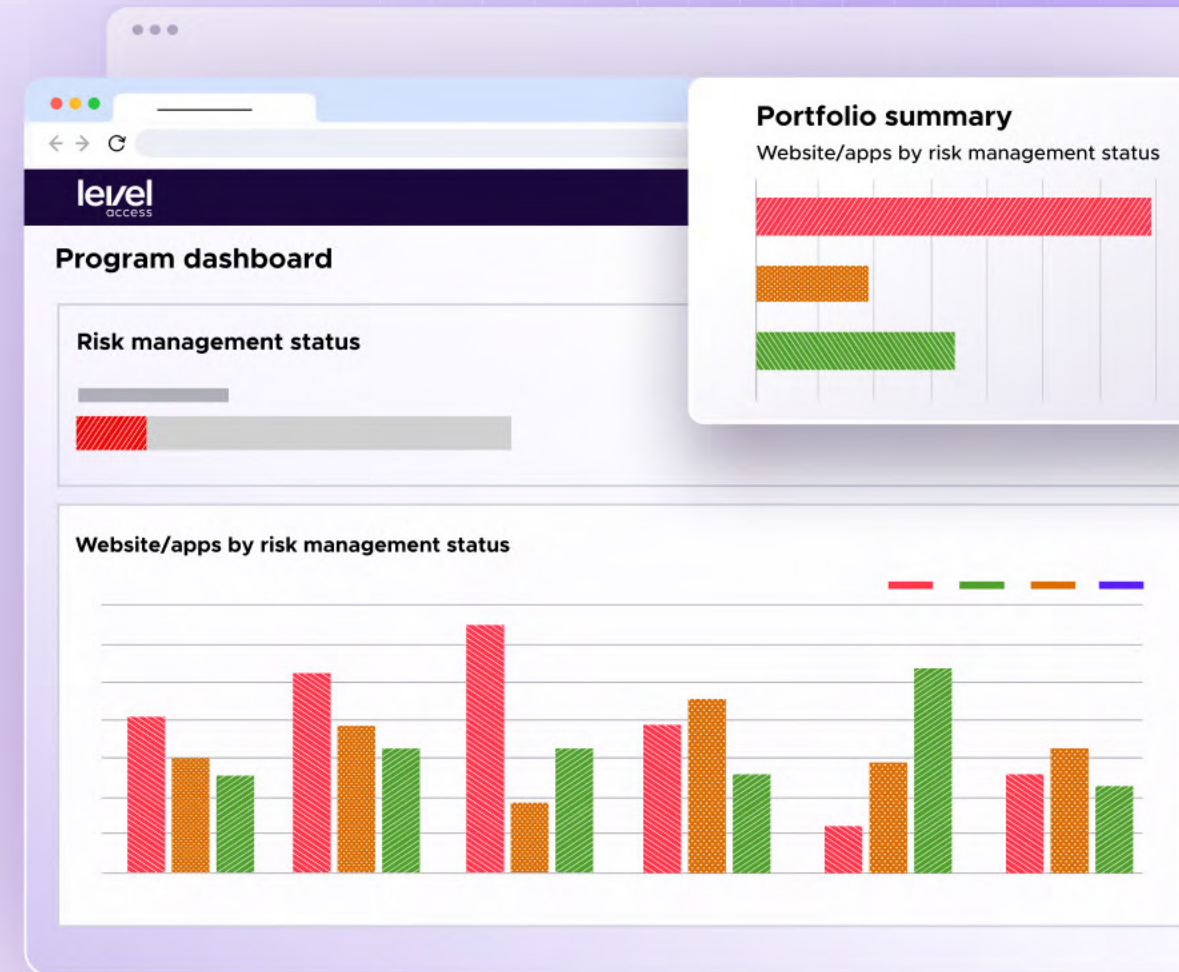
The right third-party digital accessibility solution will equip you with tools for reporting on the current state of accessibility across your enterprise, and for specific brands, divisions, and digital experiences. Seek a solution that unifies data from automated scans and manual evaluations, and that allows you to track trends in accessibility over time.





## The Level Access Program Management dashboard

Prioritizing projects and reporting on progress across an entire portfolio of assets can be complicated. The Level Access Platform's Program Management dashboard can help accessibility leaders streamline both efforts by providing a dynamic snapshot of accessibility performance and surfacing high-impact opportunities for improvement.



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## **Establish processes for maintaining accessibility over time**



Digital accessibility is an ongoing effort. Digital experiences are dynamic, and chances are, the assets in your portfolio are continually being updated with new features and content. It's crucial that you have systems and documentation in place to ensure that they remain accessible over time, including the following practices.

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“Accessibility is a practice. It’s always unfinished. You can get to a point where you’re efficient, but it’s never really done. It’s just a way of doing business, a way of life.”



**Dr. Stephen Framil,**  
Director and Corporate Global Head of Accessibility,  
Merck

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## Embedding accessibility in the digital experience creation life cycle

**The best way to keep your digital experiences accessible is to prevent new issues from emerging in the first place.**

As you've likely learned by now, remediation can be time-consuming—so minimizing the need for future remediation work is key to your program's long-term success. Work to embed accessibility into the digital experience creation life cycle by helping designers, developers, and other roles involved in producing new experiences prioritize it in their daily work. Beyond role-specific training, consider implementing:



### Designer tools:

Plugins for designers, like the [Level Access Figma plugin](#), allow UX and UI professionals to proactively address common accessibility issues in new designs while they work. For larger-scale projects, such as redesigning a website or creating a style guide, consider engaging an accessible design expert to perform a more comprehensive review.



### Developer tools:

A variety of tools, including [software development kits \(SDKs\)](#) and testing integrations, can help developers and quality assurance professionals catch and fix accessibility issues while code is still in a local or pre-production environment.

## Creating a digital accessibility policy and governance structure

While embedding accessibility into experience creation is key to maintaining accessibility on a tactical level, this shift ultimately takes place within individual teams. As an enterprise, you need mechanisms for holding teams accountable for continually prioritizing digital accessibility across your organization.

To do this, you'll need to develop a digital accessibility policy: a document that outlines the specific accessibility standards that your organization adheres to and the processes in place for upholding them. If your organization has not yet achieved conformance with these standards, your policy should include timelines for when conformance will be achieved. Typically, accessibility leads will work with legal and compliance teams to create this policy. Once finalized, the policy should be distributed to all teams within your organization.

Clearly define processes for enforcing this policy, including which specific team members are accountable for ensuring adherence. Because a single individual or team may not be capable of enforcing a policy across your entire enterprise, consider empowering multiple accessibility leads who are responsible for overseeing digital accessibility adoption, in accordance with policy, within individual functions, brands, and / or divisions. If you take this approach, it's critical that you maintain a center of excellence that can work with these leads to help maintain consistent standards.



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“Your accessibility priorities need to be just as important as your functional priorities. Work with development leaders to set the expectation that a product with accessibility barriers won’t be released, and encode this in your accessibility policy.”



**Ray Campbell,**  
Senior Digital Accessibility Analyst,  
United Airlines

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## Procuring accessible third-party products

While you may have strong processes in place for ensuring the accessibility of digital experiences your organization creates and maintains, inaccessible third-party products that you integrate into your experience may create barriers for users. And even though you didn't develop these products, you may still be held legally accountable for accessibility issues. For example, the [European Accessibility Act \(EAA\)](#), which applies to most organizations that do business in the European Union, does not provide an exception for most third-party technology.

To avoid jeopardizing your organization's accessibility and compliance efforts, include clear requirements for product accessibility in your organization's procurement guidelines. When evaluating a third-party product, request that your vendor provides a completed Voluntary Product Accessibility Template (VPAT®)—called an Accessibility Conformance Report (ACR)—demonstrating that the offering meets your accessibility requirements.

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“When we started our accessibility journey, Level Access met us where we were. The team guided us and supported us every step of the way. And now our program is flourishing, with Level Access still by our side.”



**Dr. Stephen Framil,**  
Director and Corporate Global Head of Accessibility,  
Merck

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## Kickstart your enterprise accessibility practice with a trusted partner

Building an enterprise accessibility program can feel complicated, and you shouldn't approach it alone. A third-party digital accessibility solution provider can provide you with the tools and guidance you need to make an impact at every stage of your journey. Level Access is the market's only digital accessibility solution uniquely designed to best support enterprise organizations. Our approach combines industry-leading expertise with secure software that seamlessly integrates into your existing tech stack, making it easy for teams across your organization to embrace accessibility as a way of work. And with unlimited seats and support, our solution is ready to scale with your accessibility goals. To get started, [contact our team today](#).

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