Practical Steps to Website Accessibility

What is website accessibility?
Website accessibility means that a site is set up to enable persons with impairments or disabilities to use the site. For example, a visually impaired person may employ a "screen reader" (which vocalizes text) to navigate and interact with a site. But a screen reader is only effective if the site can be read by screen reading software. Mind you, website accessibility is not limited to assisting those with visual impairments, but also allows those with auditory, cognitive, neurological, physical, and speech impairments to engage effectively with the site.

Why should I make my website more accessible?
First and foremost, because people with impairments are possible clients. It's also important to support those with impairments and allow them the same opportunity to use sites on a substantially equal basis with the unimpaired. And, of course, there are legal reasons. California courts have determined that the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires a business to modify its website and apps to make them accessible. Plaintiffs' attorneys have also argued that websites that are not accessible violate the Federal Fair Housing Act (FHA). These attorneys are making demands and suing real estate agents and brokerages in California.

What does it mean to be accessible?
When making a site accessible, you should take steps to ensure your website is accessible to a broad range of impairments. The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines provide methods to do so. While there is no legal safe harbor or standard for accessibility, attorneys who specialize in the ADA suggest that designers and site owners try to meet the "WCAG 2.1 AA" standards. These guidelines change, like all things related to computers.

What are some examples of issues to be considered?
Non-text content such as audio or video should have text alternatives. These help those who have visual or hearing impairments transform your content into forms they need, and are generally accessible to screen readers, screen magnifiers, and braille conversion technologies.
- Photos should include "alt-text" describing the image that can be read by screen readers
- Videos without audio could have an equivalent text description
- Videos with audio could use text captioning to benefit the hearing impaired

Content should be adaptable in different ways to help those with different impairments access it:
- The site should be structured so those using assistive technology can follow the organization
- The site should be navigable using a keyboard only (no mouse)
- Have contrast between foreground and background, and between overlapping colors
- Text should be able to be resized
- Flashing icons or text should be limited
- Changes in context should be predictable, and controlled by the user (for example, completing a contact form shouldn't automatically submit it – let the user click a submit button instead)

While these examples are only some of the steps that will make a site more accessible, they demonstrate that increasing your website's accessibility isn't impossible.

What can I do *right now* to make my website more accessible?
- **Understand and improve your website's accessibility**. While you can review the guidelines and analyze your own site's accessibility, it is easier to let experienced providers do it. But if you'd like to do it yourself, there are

also automated tools (such as AccessiBe or UserWay) that will scan your site, identify issues, and automate some of the elements in the WCAG guidelines. These tools can be an affordable, significant step towards making your site more accessible. We provide more information on AccessiBe, a tool that C.A.R. uses for its own websites, below. You could also work with a web designer with experience conforming to accessibility guidelines. You should ensure your chosen expert is familiar with the WCAG standards and has implemented them on other sites. You can also hire a website auditing and consulting firm, though these are often prohibitively expensive.

- **Accessibility Coordinator**: Appoint an "Accessibility Coordinator" – this can be you! Add this person's phone number and email address to the accessibility statement. An Accessibility Coordinator will be the point person for receiving and responding to all communications with anyone requiring an accommodation, especially where the need was not addressed by the website or was not anticipated. Your Accessibility Coordinator should keep records of contacts regarding site accessibility, what the user's issue was, and how and when it was resolved. They should also note in those records if you *don't* get contacted regarding accessibility for a long time.

- **Add a Website Accessibility Statement to your site**: Add a statement to your website that expresses a commitment to providing an accessible website. This can be a footer that appears on every page of your site. The Statement should provide contact information for anyone having difficulty accessing the site. (For example, see [NAR's accessibility statement](#)). The statement should identify your Accessibility Coordinator.

- **Be responsive to issues.** The accessibility statement invites users that have trouble accessing the website to contact the accessibility coordinator directly. Your automated tool or web designer may issue a report identifying issues with your site's accessibility. Whenever you learn of an accessibility issue, respond and resolve the issue. If there is a specific issue with the website, fix it. If your user suggests a reasonable beneficial step, make the change. If they would like to be communicated with in a particular way, communicate with them in that way. Keep a record of issues – the automated report, or the email from a site user – and how you responded, to demonstrate that you responded quickly when issues were identified.

- **Listen to CAR's webinar on website accessibility**. [This webinar](#) will offer you a range of practical advice for both immediate steps that can be taken and more long-term approaches. In particular, it will help you to implement the next few steps while providing you with a broader understanding of website accessibility issues and overall goals. It's only 35 minutes in length, and it is presented by CAR's tech savant and Chief Technology and Innovation Officer, Josh Sharfman, and Assistant General Counsel, Brian Manson.

Can I make my website 100% accessible?
You probably can't make your site 100% accessible to every person with any impairment, because there can be so many different needs. But you can reach more potential clients and serve more people by taking many reasonably available steps towards making your website accessible, and by being open to requests and suggestions to help others with different needs.

What tools are available?
There are accessibility tools available, but they are only a small part of the process. For example, C.A.R. works with a service called AccessiBe to monitor C.A.R.'s own websites. (UserWay is another tool, and there are others. C.A.R. does not specifically endorse AccessiBe.) These are simple-to-code tools that help make certain aspects of a website more accessible for certain impairments. They also offer a regular scan and report feature that can help you identify issues with your site. If you use a service like this, fix the issues they identify, and document the fix in your files. While these tools move you towards both compliance and demonstrating that your compliance efforts are underway, no tool is a one stop solution. They can't provide alt-text for photos, or captioning for audio, for example. You should remain vigilant to ensure your site remains accessible to all your users.