



WAYNESBURG UNIVERSITY

Digital Accessibility Policy

Policy Statement

Waynesburg University is committed to ensuring that the broadest possible audience can participate meaningfully in its programs, services, and activities. This commitment extends to the University's digital, electronic, and information technologies in accordance with the disability nondiscrimination requirements of [Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 \(29 U.S.C. § 794\)](#) and its implementing regulations, including [34 C.F.R. Part 104](#) and [45 C.F.R. Part 84](#), as revised by the [2024 HHS Final Rule](#), as well as [Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act \(42 U.S.C. §§ 12181–12189\)](#).

In simple terms, this policy details institutional response to and responsibility for digital accessibility standards clarified by *Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability in Programs or Activities Receiving Federal Financial Assistance*, an updated rule published by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in 2024 to amend Part 84 of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The HHS Final Rule requires that any recipient of HHS funding with 15 or more employees “shall ensure that the web content and mobile apps that the recipient provides or makes available, directly or through contractual, licensing, or other arrangements, comply with Level A and Level AA success criteria and conformance requirements specified in WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) 2.1” by May 11, 2027 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, [2024](#), [2026](#)).

Practically, broad implementation of this technical standard across the University's web and mobile content is intended to ensure that people with disabilities are afforded the same opportunities to acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same services as people who do not have disabilities in an equally effective and equally integrated manner, with substantially equivalent ease of use. For institutions of higher education like Waynesburg University, the HHS Rule appropriately refocuses attention to the University's commitment to student-centered learning. Further, implementation of digital accessibility standards often improves the user experience for other stakeholders in addition to people with disabilities.

Digital Accessibility Standards

Toward meeting the University's commitment to accessibility, Waynesburg expects the University's Information Technology Services and the University's Digital Content to conform to applicable WCAG 2.1 Level A and Level AA Digital Accessibility Standards to the fullest extent possible.

For the purposes of this Policy, the Digital Accessibility Standards (or “the Standards”) are The World Wide Web Consortium's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines version 2.1, Level A and Level AA

Conformance (WCAG 2.1 Level A and Level AA) for websites and web-based applications and services. Software and services that are not web-based should conform to WCAG 2.1 Level A/AA to the extent such guidelines may usefully be applied to improve the accessibility of these resources.

New Waynesburg University IT Resources

Instances of Waynesburg University's newly purchased, licensed, or internally developed Information Technology after 2024 are expected to conform to WCAG 2.1 A/AA standards to the fullest extent possible at the point of rollout or implementation. Where such conformance with WCAG 2.1 A/AA standards is not technically feasible or may require extraordinary measures due to the nature or purpose of the information or technology, a request for exception may be submitted to the Accessibility Working Group (described below) for review.

New University Web Content

As required by the 2024 HHS Rule and WCAG 2.1, Waynesburg University users using IT to post, distribute, or publish University content should aim to make such content conform to the AA standards, to the extent technically feasible and in accordance with the University's digital content framework specified in the implementation procedures. Where conformance with the AA standards is not technically feasible, Waynesburg users should consider how to make the University's digital content available in an alternative format accessible to people with disabilities.

Existing University ITS and Web Content

As further outlined in this Policy and implementation procedures, the Accessibility Working Group will establish and recommend to Senior Leadership a prioritization plan for improving the accessibility of existing University Information Technology, including websites and web-based applications, and the existing University digital content hosted, published, or communicated on those platforms. Priority will be given to University web content platforms that provide the most essential functions and are most broadly and regularly used by Waynesburg faculty, staff, and students.

Procurement Considerations

Waynesburg University personnel purchasing or procuring University Information Technology are responsible for ensuring that suppliers seeking to develop or provide IT are aware of this Policy and that contracts with such vendors hold them accountable to WCAG 2.1 A/AA standards to the fullest extent possible. Consistent with Waynesburg University's Strategic Plan, and within the confines of the budget, ITS Procurement, the business office, and others involved with procurement efforts should support these efforts in relation to IT purchases.

The implementation procedures published under this Policy will identify resources, strategies, and guidelines for securing the greatest possible level of conformance to WCAG 2.1 A/AA standards from third-party vendors, and purchasers and providers of the University's ITS are expected to adopt and practice them. The Policy expects that Waynesburg University will apply controls and direction to all internal stakeholders to prioritize and promote digital accessibility. However, the Policy recognizes that the University may be able to exert less control and direction over some third-party vendors with "off-the-shelf" information technology and content developed and marketed outside of the University's control.

Definitions

“Waynesburg University’s Information Technology Service” or “ITS” directs any and all information technology purchased, developed, deployed, or used for University business and, in the case of web-based applications and websites, is hosted on a Waynesburg-owned or -controlled domain.

“Information Technology” includes software; server-based, personal computer, mobile device, kiosks, and web-based applications and websites; website hosting and design services; development, hosting, maintenance, and archiving services; cloud-based applications and information processing or storage services; digital hardware interfaces; and digital database configurations and interfaces.

“University Content” is Digital Content created, posted, distributed or published for University business, including but not limited to externally facing web materials, instructional materials for student use, intranet content for students, faculty, and staff, and social media accounts connected to the University.

“Digital Content” consists of any information or communication accessed or displayed in a digital format or medium, as text, image, audio, or video.

“University Business” includes activities carried out by Waynesburg’s faculty and staff in furtherance of Waynesburg University’s mission of teaching but does not include activities organized or conducted by students or student organizations.

“Senior Leadership” includes the University’s President, Provost, and Vice Presidents. The Accessibility Working Group informs and advises the Risk Management Committee, which then recommends best practices and decisions to Senior Leadership.

Responsibility

Waynesburg University expects that Senior Leadership will promote broad awareness of this Policy, assign responsibility to ensure the accessibility of web and mobile materials provided within their jurisdictions, and support designated Digital Accessibility Liaisons and the Accessibility Working Group (please see below) to provide guidance in key areas. Improving digital accessibility requires the attention and commitment of the entire University community. Accordingly, all members of Waynesburg’s faculty and staff should be mindful of this Policy and aim to ensure that University digital content they post to, publish on, or communicate through the University’s ITS is accessible. This applies as well to learning platforms such as Canvas, syllabi, course / learning content, Power Points, video links, assignments and exams.

Where possible, and particularly on externally facing websites and social media platforms operated by the University, Waynesburg administrators should indicate commitment to accessibility by posting a link to this Policy.

Resources and Support

Waynesburg University is fully committed to providing resources and support to the Waynesburg campus community to effectuate and implement this Policy.

Accessibility Working Group (AWG)

The Accessibility Working Group (AWG) includes representation from University Relations, Information Technology Services (ITS), Academic Affairs, and Athletics. Within the Accessibility Working Group, individuals who have completed training in WCAG 2.1 A/AA standards may be designated as Digital Accessibility Liaisons tasked to provide guidance and support for members of the campus community.

In addition to preparing the prioritization plan described above, the AWG is responsible for (1) providing as-needed and/or periodic review and revision of this Policy and its implementation procedures, including making appropriate updates to the Policy's technical conformance criteria as industry standards and best practices evolve, with recommendations going to the President and Provost; (2) working with Senior Leadership and the Risk Management Committee to promote general awareness of this Policy; (3) assessing and reporting to the President and Provost the University's accessibility efforts as outlined in this Policy; (4) establishing a process to review and decide on requests for Policy exceptions, and (5) identifying, providing, and/or creating sustainable training guidance and available resources to assist all Waynesburg University employees in attaining and maintaining conformance with Policy standards.

University Disability Resources

Waynesburg University's Disability Services Office provides resources and guidance to support the University's efforts to ensure an accessible, inclusive, and welcoming learning and working environment for persons with disabilities while complying with federal and state regulations. The Disability Services Office provides subject matter expertise on disability-related information, procedures, and services for the Waynesburg community, digital and otherwise.

Exceptions and Remediation

In developing its prioritization plan for attaining conformance with WCAG 2.1 A/AA standards, the AWG shall consider whether web or mobile content aligns with the [five exceptions documented in the HHS final rule](#).

Additionally, campus stakeholders may submit a request for exceptions to the standards documented in this policy to the Accessibility Working Group if they believe that conformance is not technically feasible, would result in a fundamental alteration in a service, program, or activity, or would create an undue hardship. Departments or users requesting the exception must demonstrate (1) how bringing the web or digital materials into compliance would not be technically feasible, would result in a fundamental alteration to a program or activity, or would create an undue hardship; (2) whether there are accessible alternatives available; and (3) how they will provide alternative access to users who are unable to use the web or digital materials because of a disability. The expense or time to make web or digital materials compliant will not be considered a valid basis for an exception except in extreme circumstances approved by the Digital Accessibility Steering Committee. Likewise, the inconvenience of needing to conduct business functions differently than they have been done in the past will generally not be considered a fundamental alteration of a program or activity.

The Accessibility Working Group may make best-practice recommendations for some or all non-conforming portions of an instance of the University's digital content so that it may be brought into conformance by designated staff or suppliers, and the expense of that work may be charged to the party that is responsible for assuring the accessibility of that asset. If the University is unable to identify who is responsible for an instance where content that does not conform to the AA standard, then the University may ask that the non-conforming content be removed from view until it can be brought into conformance.

Upon a specific request by an individual who is unable to access specific University digital content due to non-conformance to the standards, either the requested content must be updated to conform to the AA standard, or the requested content otherwise must be made available in an alternative format in a timely manner. The party responsible for the creation and maintenance of the University's content is responsible for making it accessible or providing an accessible alternative.

Disclaimer

This Policy establishes internal guidelines and expectations for the purpose of promoting and advancing digital accessibility at Waynesburg University. Waynesburg reserves the right to modify the Policy at any time. The Policy is not intended to create, nor does it create any contractual or other legal obligation on Waynesburg's part, or any contractual or other legal right for any member of the Waynesburg community or the general public.

Policy Scope and Implementation Timeline

The scope of this policy applies to different parts of Waynesburg University's website as well as third-party, legacy, and mobile content. It also applies to applications provided as part of these websites. This policy also applies to websites, systems, and forms internal to the University, and to external-facing parts of the website and its links for public audiences.

Waynesburg University's accessibility policy includes or makes substantial efforts to include procured or syndicated third-party content as well as the original digital content created by the University. The relevance of third-party content is acknowledged and analyzed by the University pursuant to WCAG A/AA standard of this Rule, whether it is an essential part of Waynesburg's website, social media platforms, or merely tangentially involved in advertising or kiosk message board posts. In addition to contractors in the business office, ITS, Athletics, and University Relations, additional content from third party contractors at Waynesburg include but are not limited to third-party vendor content such as Elior Collegiate Dining, Chick Fil-A, Starbucks, the Nest, Follett Discover, Everbridge Emergency Alert system, StopIt Solutions app, all of which may be more prominently displayed.

Waynesburg University acknowledges that these third-party site owners are responsible for ensuring accessibility or for providing accessible alternatives, even if site owners don't have full control over their content and services. For example, social media feeds or online links may need to be monitored or moderated to ensure accessibility. The WCAG 2.1 conformance requirement for completing this process provides alternate versions and suggestions for remediation.

All items in the scope of this policy detail clear and measurable objectives, including phased-in deadline dates, by which each goal will be met.

Waynesburg University has implemented a phased approach to delivering satisfactory A/AA completion of prioritized areas of content. The University should first identify and bring up to AA standard conformance any significant barriers to accessibility. The University will then identify and implement modifications for other issues. The Accessibility Working Group commits to periodic, as-needed review and updates to ensure conformance with updated technical standards and or federal, state, and/or local guidance.

At the time of posting this policy, the deadline for compliance set forth by HHS rule is May 11, 2027 (for Waynesburg and other recipients of HHS funding with more than fifteen employees).

Note that analysis of numerous other systems and internal and external sites, such as Nelnet, Ellucian Colleague, MyConnect, NEST, etc. will continue to be analyzed for implementation based on contract status, content, resources, and their expiration or archiving status.

Digital Accessibility Background and Context

In 2024, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) published an updated final rule to its own Section 504 regulations (*Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability in Programs or Activities Receiving Federal Financial Assistance*). Though portions of this new rule are irrelevant to Waynesburg University and other private IHE's, schools like Waynesburg are subject to the component of this rule that holds that all programs and activities that receive funding from HHS and have more than 15 employees must ensure that all web, mobile, and kiosk content complies with standards outlined in the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1 level AA standard (referred to herein as *WCAG 2.1 A/AA*).

Conformance/Compliance Clarification

This section is designed to provide important distinctions and clarity on the differences between the 2024 *Title II* ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) Rule versus *Title III*, Section 504 of the ADA Rule.

Although they set forth similar standards, one (Title III, Section 504) applies to Waynesburg University as a private institution receiving federal funds, and the other (Title II) does not, as this applies only to public entities.

For clarity, Title II of the ADA requires *state and local governments* to make sure that their services, programs, and activities are accessible to people with disabilities. Title II applies to all services, programs, or activities of state and local governments. Examples of these public entities subject to this Title II Rule are any state or local office that provides services, programs, and activities through websites and mobile apps. Other examples under Title II are public offices that provide benefits and/or social services, like food assistance, health insurance, or employment services. Other *public offices* are listed below.

- Public schools, community colleges, and public universities
- State and local police departments
- State and local courts
- State and local elections offices
- Public hospitals and public healthcare clinics
- Public parks and recreation programs
- Public libraries
- Public transit agencies

***Note, private colleges and universities like Waynesburg University are NOT subject to the Title II rule change but are subject to compliance / conformance with Title III of the ADA, pursuant to Section 504 for those with disabilities. This includes undergraduate and graduate students, athletes, staff, faculty members and employees, as well as external parties such as third-party vendors, contractors, prospective students, and similar services or digital content available through the University.**

Both recent Title II changes and previous Department of Education guidance help to create a common standard to ensure that people with disabilities have full and equal access to services, programs, and activities available on websites and mobile apps.

For example, individuals who are blind may use a screen reader to deliver visual information on a website or mobile app as speech. An institution might post an image on its website that provides information to the public. If the website does not include text describing the image (sometimes called “alternative text” or “alt text”), individuals who are blind and who use screen readers may have no way of knowing what is

in the image because a screen reader cannot “read” an image. Other types of disabilities and their accommodations may be discussed further in this Policy.

Websites and mobile apps that are not accessible can make it difficult or impossible for people with disabilities to access certain digital content or important services, like admissions or financial aid information, full access to PDF forms, exam or assignment material, or general university website updates regarding academics, athletics, events, employment opportunities or other important information. Sometimes, inaccessible websites, mobile apps, and digital content can keep people with disabilities from simply ‘joining in’ or fully participating in the entire experience that higher education offers to those without disabilities.

A Rule, sometimes called a ‘regulation’, is a requirement issued by a federal agency (like in this case, the Department of Health and Human Services [HHS]). When Congress passed the ADA, it gave the Department the authority to make regulations that explain the rights and requirements for Titles II and III of the ADA. A regulation usually has two parts. The first part is regulatory text. The second part provides information about the regulatory text and what it means, which is sometimes in an appendix in the rule. These rules and regulations require compliance, or more appropriately, conformance, to the standards set forth by the rule by a certain deadline. Non-compliance can mean civil penalties, fines, damage to reputation, and could invite individual or class-action lawsuits from those who allege harm or a disparity in treatment regarding equal access to university content.

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) Explained

This section of the Policy discusses the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) international standard, including WCAG 2.0, WCAG 2.1, and WCAG 2.2. WCAG documents explain how to make web content more accessible to people with disabilities. Like many organizations that proudly externally and internally display their mission statement first, followed closely by other important claims or disclaimers, this commitment to the new HHS Rule and WCAG 2.1 digital content conformance should be omni-present in Waynesburg University’s prominent areas where students, employees, and prospective students are likely to be accessing digital information.

It starts with the declarative ‘Accessibility Policy Statement’ that should be prominently displayed on the University’s website, mobile apps, social media, and particularly with all external-facing content.

What is “WCAG” and how did it evolve?

WCAG exists in various versions: 1.0, 2.0, 2.1, and 2.2. Updated versions continue to be released to keep pace with changes in technology which is why these updates and this Policy should be *sustainable*. The first version, known as WCAG 1.0, was released in 1999 and is no longer recommended for use. A later version, WCAG 2.0, came out in 2008. In 2018, the W3C released WCAG 2.1, which built upon the guidelines in 2.0, introducing additional success criteria related to newer technologies, and addressing a broader range of disability-related needs. The latest version, WCAG 2.2, was released in 2023. The various versions of WCAG are backwards compatible, meaning the more recent version incorporates the success criteria from the earlier version, with additions. Therefore, if content conforms with WCAG 2.2, it also conforms with WCAG 2.1, and so on.

WCAG 2.2 builds on the improvements in WCAG 2.1, further enhancing accessibility for web users with low vision, cognitive and learning disabilities, and motor disabilities, including support for the use of touch-screen devices. This release was also the first version of WCAG which eliminated a success criterion that was introduced in WCAG 2.0: Success Criterion 4.1.1. This criterion was determined to be

unnecessary in later versions because almost all modern assistive technologies and browsers automatically solve for the issues it was meant to prevent. The W3C has made amendments to older versions of WCAG to ensure that digital experiences conforming with WCAG 2.2, which omits the 4.1.1 criterion, will still be conformant and backwards compatible with the earlier WCAG 2.1 and 2.0.

The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) defines certain requirements for designers and developers to improve accessibility for all people with disabilities. Waynesburg University is conformant with WCAG 2.1 level AA standards. But what are these standards and what is the digital content that may require modifications in order to conform with at least AA level of expected standards.

There are four (4) main principles which provide guidance in this area of digital content.

“POUR” is an acronym that represents these four main principles: POUR stands for Perceivable, Operable, Understandable and Robust. Below is a list explaining these four (4) principles, each with guideline examples of web-based digital content that may need to be modified for those with disabilities.

Principle #1 PERCEIVABLE

Information and user interface components which must be presentable to users in ways they can perceive. For example, it's important to present information that can be perceived in different ways, where a user can adjust color contrast or font size, or view captions for videos. Examples of these are,

Text Alternatives, Non-text content, Time-based media, Audio-only and Video-only prerecording's, Captions, live and prerecorded, Audio description, sign language media alternatives, audio only

Adaptable; Information and Relationships, Meaningful Sequence, Sensory Characteristics, Orientation, Identify Purpose

Distinguishable; Use of color, audio control, contrast, resize text, images of text, low or no background audio, visual presentation, images of text, non-text contrasting, text spacing, content on hover or focus.

Principle #2 OPERABLE

User interface components and navigation must be functional for users in ways they can operate. For example, a user must be able to perform required interactions using a keyboard or voice commands, not just using a mouse. Examples of these are,

Keyboard accessible; no keyboard trap, character key shortcuts

Enough Time; timing adjustable, pause, stop, hide, no timing, interruptions, re-authenticating, timeouts

Seizures and Physical Reactions, three flashes or below threshold, animation from interactions

Navigable; bypass blocks, page titled, focus order, link purpose in context, multiple ways, headings and labels, focus visible, location, section headings, non-obscured focus, focus appearance, input modalities, pointer gestures, pointer cancellation, label in name motion actuation, target size enhancement, concurrent input mechanisms, dragging movements and target size.

Principle #3 UNDERSTANDABLE

Information and user interface operation must be understandable. For example, information and instructions should be clear and navigation methods should be easy to understand and use. Examples of these are,

Readable; language of page, language of parts, unusual words, abbreviations, reading level, pronunciation

Predictable; on focus, on input, consistent navigation, identification, change on request, consistent help

Input Assistance; error identification, labels or instructions, error suggestion, error prevention (legal or financial data), help, redundant entry, minimum accessibility authentication, enhanced accessibility authentication

Principle #4 ROBUST

Content must be robust enough that it can be interpreted reliably by a wide variety of users and assistive technologies. As technologies evolve, code and content should remain accessible for users of common and current assistive devices and tools. Examples of this are,

Compatible; name, role, value, status messages

As technologies and standards continually evolve, it is important to keep this Policy current and updated. The text of policies that include accessibility requirements can quickly become outdated. This introduces gaps between current accessibility standards and older policies. Therefore, the Accessibility Working Group commits to periodic, as-needed review and updates to ensure conformance with updated technical standards and or federal, state, and/or local guidance.

WCAG 2.1 guidelines provide three levels of conformance: A, AA, and AAA. The generally accepted level of conformance in many countries (and in the U.S.) is Level AA. This is the level considered to be fully compliant with the HHS rule. This AA Level is the targeted objective for Waynesburg University to achieve success through this policy, annual employee training, and through close collaboration between ITS, University Relations, the Disability Services Office, and other key internal stakeholders to ensure proper and sustainable conformance.

Conformance to the Rule's Standard

There are three levels of WCAG conformance: A, AA, and AAA. Each level is built on the previous level like a pyramid. So, in order to meet Level AA, we must meet all of Level A, and in order to meet Level AAA, we must meet all of Level AA.

Level A conformance - This level represents the minimum level of conformance. Level A criteria affect the broadest group of users with the most benefits and are essential. But, with the base level of support, some barriers will still exist that impact certain groups of users.

Level AA conformance - This level is the most common target conformance level, often adopted in regulations or negotiated in legal settlements. The criteria at this level establish a higher level of accessibility that works for more users, including those who use assistive technology.

Level AAA conformance - This is the highest conformance level achievable, meaning it covers the success criteria of all three levels. However, Level AAA is not applicable or realistic in all situations, as all criteria may not apply to every digital experience. Most organizations will target Level AA conformance, but some may choose to additionally adopt specific criteria at the AAA level.

Waynesburg University is encouraged to conform with the most recent version of the WCAG AA standard as its best practice. The U.S. Department of Justice has referenced WCAG 2.1 Level AA (at minimum) as the benchmark in its more recent ADA enforcement actions. Conformance with the latest version, WCAG

2.2, will not only provide improved accessibility for every user, but it will also ensure organizations like Waynesburg University are up to date in their compliance efforts, especially with the anticipation of future policy changes and updated legal rulemaking.

IMPORTANT DISTINCTIONS: WCAG conformance and ADA compliance

While ADA compliance and WCAG conformance have become almost synonymous over the years, it's important to understand the distinction. Since WCAG itself is not a law, but a set of accessibility standards, there is no such thing as “compliance” with WCAG. However, WCAG can be, and has been, incorporated into the law as a standard for evaluating accessibility compliance, as in Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The ADA does not specifically state conforming with WCAG standards as a requirement for compliance, but WCAG was designed to help website owners achieve the level of accessibility that is required by laws such as the ADA. To remember this distinction, it can be helpful to think of accessibility laws such as the ADA as the end destination—i.e., web accessibility for all—while WCAG maps out how to get there. Waynesburg University appreciates this distinction and strives to be compliant with ADA law while conforming to WCAG 2.1 AA standards.

Any questions or comments about this Policy should be directed to Waynesburg University's Disability Services Office and/or members of the Accessibility Working Group.