



**Outsourcing  
Web Development:  
A Guide for Hiring Contractors  
to Develop Accessible  
Websites and Web Content**



## Acknowledgements

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## The Aim of this Guide

This aim of this guide is to help you through the process of hiring an outside contractor to develop an accessible website and accessible web content for your organization. The guide offers suggestions on how to identify website developers who have experience in designing accessible websites and to bring the project to a successful conclusion. It also provides a sample of a Request for Proposal (RFP) to help you assess and choose the right website developer.



## Background

The Government of Ontario passed the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act in 2005, with the goal of making Ontario accessible for people with disabilities by 2025. Accessibility standards are being created as part of the act. The standards are rules that organizations in Ontario have to follow to identify, remove and prevent barriers so that people with disabilities will have more opportunities to participate in everyday life.

In 2011, the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR) was enacted under the AODA. The Information and Communications Standard under the IASR requires large organizations in Ontario to make their web content accessible within a given timeline. Obligated organizations include any Ontario organization with 50 employees or more that provides goods, services or facilities to the public or other third party.

For information on the requirements for websites in the Integrated Accessibility Regulation Standard and on the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), please go to Appendix B



## Benefits of Web Accessibility

Many organizations have adopted the web as either a primary or important secondary means of doing business. As more and more people use the web for research, purchasing, entertainment and social and business communications it makes good business sense for any web-enabled organization to include as many potential customers as possible. Ensuring that your website meets the Ontario standards for accessibility is an important start to reaching a wider customer base.

Barriers to the accessibility and usefulness of your website are encountered not only by customers with disabilities, but also by people in any situation where their sight, hearing, mobility or understanding is limited by circumstance . . . such as a temporary injury, noisy environment or changing eyesight. There is also an enormous group of people in the aging demographic, many of whom are expecting (and demanding) more flexible and more accessible ways of using the web.

There are further benefits of providing accessible websites. An accessibly marked up website will expose information such as titles, headings, alternate text descriptions of images, transcripts of audio content and descriptions of video content. This exposure of more “relevant” content to search engines increases the possibility of higher rankings in customer-searches (also known as Search Engine Optimization or SEO). Accessible websites are also easier to convert, manually or automatically, to be usable with any web-ready device including tablets, smart-phones, telephone and voice-based systems, and so on.



## In House versus Outsourcing

It takes very little web programming knowledge to develop a simple website. Increasingly, even quite complex websites can be assembled with readily available tools and building-blocks. However, building websites that feature the newest technologies and advanced capabilities still requires expert knowledge.

Developing a website in-house may be an option for some organizations, but for many organizations outsourcing will likely be the most appropriate route to go.

Regardless of the size or complexity of a web project, developing websites that meet the AODA's website accessibility standards requires very specific expertise which many developers are still learning – this is true whether the developers are on staff or third parties with whom you contract. The good news is that learning how to create accessible web content isn't very difficult.



## Choosing a Web Developer to Work With

Identifying a suitable developer for an accessible website project requires careful research and screening. It is important to verify that potential developers truly understand your organization's needs, as well as the technical requirements for accessible websites. As a minimum, the website developers you are considering should demonstrate that they;

- understand the requirements of the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR) under the AODA
- are technically proficient with the development of accessible website design and web content; and are
- are able to discuss and communicate technical concepts in layperson terms

### Do your research:

Here are some strategies you might consider to identify a web developer with expertise in accessible websites and web content:

- Ask potential developers to provide links to three accessible websites that they have designed and comply with WCAG 2.0 A.
- Interview developers face-to-face, to see how well you can communicate with each other
- Ask for client references - a minimum of three is recommended





## Reference Checks:

Client references are an excellent source of information on the technical capabilities of potential developers, as well as their ability to communicate. Here are some questions you could consider asking:

- Did the developer understand your company's accessibility requirements for its website?
- Did the proponent clearly communicate what they needed from you to complete the assignment?
- Did the proponent provide you with a schedule, and did they keep to it?
- Was the assignment completed on time and on budget?
- Are you aware of clients with disabilities using your website?
- Are your clients with disabilities pleased with the usability of your site?



## Assess their work:

Checking the accessibility of websites designed by potential developers is another great way to assess their understanding of website accessibility requirements. There are at least three ways to undertake such testing:

- Use On-line testing tools such as AChecker ([www.achecker.ca](http://www.achecker.ca))
- Identify some clients with disabilities and ask them to use the sites
- Hire an accessibility expert to review the sites

## Selection Process

There are several ways to assess potential web developers. One is the formal process of a Request for Proposals or RFP as a way of identifying suitably qualified developers. There is a sample of a RFP for purchasing accessible website design and web content development services in Appendix A.

You may choose to use a less formal process. In this case you might want to ask for a written proposal of the services to be provided, a list of deliverables, a project schedule, a fee schedule and a schedule for fee payment.

Here's a suggested list of tasks that you could ask developers to include in their proposal.

- Provide a written summary interpreting their understanding of your business practices and typical clients
- Prepare a project plan, with key deliverables, scheduling milestones and communication protocols
- Review and test your existing website for accessibility using an automatic evaluator, manual assessment and assistive technology at the start and end of project
- Assess and list required changes to achieve WCAG 2.0 Level A or AA depending on your preference and legal requirements
- Develop and present proposed accessibility update strategy for review, discussion, and approval
- Pilot technical changes for site navigation and a sample Web page with a variety of content types
- Testing of the pilot by others
- Full production and implementation



## What You Need to Provide to the Developer to Achieve a Successful Project

A successful accessible website development or refresh project will involve significant input and effort from your organization. The content for the website should be developed by the individuals, departments or the business units that are the most familiar with your organizations' business practices and goals for the website. Using your in-house information (IT) technology department to develop or modify content to make it accessible is generally not recommended... they are technical folks... not content specialists.

### What you will need to provide your developer:

- A clear profile of your organization and how it does business – identify the key products and/or services that you provide
- A clear description of the purpose of your website within your business practices
- A clear profile of your clients, and how they access your products and/or services
- Website content in plain language, that is easy for your customers to understand
- A logical organizational structure for the information - be consistent and meaningful with headings and numbering systems - the fewer mouse clicks the quicker and easier it will be for your customers to find the information that they need
- Alternate text descriptions for all diagrams and images - if it's too difficult to explain in words, you might question the complexity of the information and present it in a different way



## User Testing

Before going 'live' with a new accessible website, it's very important to test it. On-line website accessibility test sites are a good way to evaluate the accessibility of your site but a manual assessment and testing the site using assistive technology are essential. However, involving people with disabilities to test the website is perhaps one of the best ways to ensure your website is accessible.

People with disabilities are 'experts' in using accessible websites so be sure to include them in your user-testing activities. Possible sources of such users include:

- staff with disabilities
- focus groups of customers with disabilities
- local organizations that represent people with disabilities





## Conclusion

Developing an accessible website is a collaborative effort between an organization and a suitable developer. It doesn't need to be a difficult or complicated process, but it does require planning, careful selection of a developer to work with and comprehensive end-user testing.



## Appendix A - Sample RFP Wording

The following is a sample RFP for purchasing accessible website design and web content development services. It focuses on the development process, deliverables, key events and technical benchmarks. You may want to contact your legal counsel if you have any concerns regarding legal aspects of the contract.

It should be noted that this sample RFP focuses on making an existing website accessible. If you plan on contracting a web developer to create an entirely new website, you will need to modify the content.



## Appendix A - Sample RFP Wording

### **Preamble:**

[Your organization] is looking to hire a web developer to assist with the implementation of the accessible website requirements mandated under the AODA (2005). More specifically, to make adjustment to our existing company website (list URL if available) to comply with Section 14: Accessible websites and web content of the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation– Ontario Regulation 191/11.

We are looking for a web developer with proven experience in creating accessible websites and web content which comply with WCAG 2.0 Levels A and AA.

### **Proponent Qualification:**

The successful proponent will demonstrate the following qualifications:

- At least two years of website development experience
- Successful completion of at least 3 accessible website projects – list details including; client organization, accessibility benchmark(s) used for the project, and URL of the site

## Appendix A - Sample RFP Wording

### **Technical Requirements of the Project:**

The successful proponent will undertake all necessary tasks to redesign and update [your organization's] existing website, to achieve compliance with WCAG 2.0 – Level A (or Level AA). The proponent will be responsible for providing a fully-functional accessible website, which passes the WCAG Level A compliance test on [choose an on-line website checker and provide URL]. It is acknowledged that the proponent's responsibility is limited to the technical aspects of website accessibility. The prime responsibility for the content on the site remains with [your organization].

### **Project Deliverables:**

The successful proponent will prepare the following deliverables as a minimum:

1. A brief Project Plan, outlining the proponents understanding of [your organization's] business practices and typical client profiles, with a particular emphasis on how the organization's website is used. Additionally, the plan will identify key deliverables, scheduling milestones and communication protocols.
2. A Project Strategy Report, outlining the key accessibility requirements and proposed strategy for the updating of [your organization] website to achieve compliance with WCAG 2.0 – Level A (or Level AA).
3. A pilot version of the proposed accessible website, including the complete site organization/navigation strategy, graphic approach ('look-and-feel'), as well as some sample web pages with typical content.
4. A completed draft version of the accessible website.
5. Based on feedback and adjustments from user-testing, a final version of the accessible website.



## Appendix A - Sample RFP Wording

### **References:**

The successful proponent will provide three suitable references, demonstrating their technical competence in the design of accessible websites and ability to work and communicate with non-technical clients. For each reference, please provide the following:

- Client organization:
- Name of contact person;
- Position of contact person within the organization:
- Brief description of the accessible website assignment:
- URL for client's accessible website:
- Date of assignment:
- Client's telephone number
- Client's email

### **Project Schedule:**

The successful proponent is expected to work cooperatively with [your organization], to develop a project schedule that is efficient and realistic for both parties. Key scheduling milestones will be identified within the Project Plan (Deliverable 1).

### **Fee Proposal:**

Please provide a fee breakdown based on the project deliverables, inclusive of any project disbursements.

## Appendix B - Timelines and the Provision of Accessible Websites and Web Content under the AODA

Timelines and the Provision of Accessible Websites and Web Content under the AODA			
Type of Organization	Type of Web content	Compliance with WCAG 2.0 Level A	Compliance with WCAG 2.0 Level AA
Government of Ontario and Ontario Legislative Assembly	New* internet and intranet websites and web content		January 1, 2012
	All* internet websites and web content		January 1, 2016
	All internet and intranet websites and web content		January 1, 2020
Designated Public Service Organizations	New internet and intranet websites and web content	January 1, 2014	
	All* internet and intranet websites and web content		January 1, 2021
Large Organizations (50 or more employees)	New internet and intranet websites and web content	January 1, 2014	
	All* internet and intranet websites and web content		January 1, 2021
* Live captions, pre-recorded audio descriptions and content posted prior to 2012 are not required to be WCAG compliant. However, organizations will need to make it accessible upon request in accordance with section 12 of the IASR.			

What is a new website?

New websites are those sites with a completely unique domain name (e.g. www.newbusiness.ca) or a website undergoing a significant refresh. There's no standard definition for a significant refresh. As a best practice, you may want to ask yourself "Am I changing over 50% of the website?" Think in terms of content, design and the technology.

### Outsourcing Web Development

A guide for hiring contractors to develop accessible websites and web content