

# Practical Strategies to Improve your Digital Accessibility

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Digital accessibility concerns access to digital content by people with disability and other diversities. Digital accessibility has become a critical consideration for the tribunal sector, as new technologies play an increasing role in client services, case management, lodgement, dispute resolution and decision-making.

Digital accessibility may seem complex but there's no need to feel intimidated. Below are some practical tips for tackling digital accessibility in your own practice and being a force for positive change in your organisation.

## Become comfortable talking about Digital Accessibility

When supporting or working with someone who has a disability, you're not expected to have all the answers. Working together to troubleshoot accessibility will be far more effective than making assumptions about how a person can participate and what supports they will need.

Invite an open discussion about the person's accessibility needs and preferences. It's ok if you don't feel confident with these conversations at first, but don't let fear or uncertainty get in the way of positive collaboration. There are some terrific resources to help you feel comfortable and confident when working in this space, including:

- Scope UK's [End the Awkward interview series](#) and [End the Awkward TV ad campaign](#), which build inclusion confidence in the general public through humour and real-life stories from people with disability.
- This [guide to communicating with people with disability](#), from the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations

For a more detailed introduction to collaboration in Accessible Design, check out the free e-book: [Just Ask: Integrating Accessibility throughout Design](#).

## Become familiar with assistive technologies

Assistive technology may be used by individuals with disability across a range of digital participation contexts, for example:

- *Reading, writing and viewing* (e.g., glasses, braille, screen-readers, audio described video, captions, dictation software)
- *Communication* (e.g., hearing aids, speech-generating devices, communication books or boards)
- *Computer access* (e.g., specialised computer mice, keyboards and switches).

If you haven't had much experience with assistive technologies or people who use them, the [Assistive Technology Australia website](#) is a great place to learn more.

If you are working with someone who has a disability, ask them about any assistive technologies they would like to use as part of their tribunal participation, and check whether any special adaptations will be required to support the integration of these technologies. For example:

- A person using a screen-reader may need access to Word documents rather than PDFs.
- A person who uses a hearing aid may require a hearing-loop or other technology to access sound during presentations, meetings or hearings.
- Websites, apps and software programs may require buttons and menus that can be navigated with a keyboard as well as a mouse.

To learn more about integrating and working with assistive technologies in the digital environment, see the South Australian Government's guidelines for [accessibility for assistive technology users](#).

## Create Accessible Content

Take some time to familiarise yourself with important considerations for content development. This includes:

- Adhering to the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) principles](#) for colour, font, captioning, audio-description, images, assistive technology compatibility, and safety.
- Using [plain language principles](#) wherever possible to support comprehension
- Providing [Easy Read](#) or [audio/visual](#) materials to augment written information
- Creating digital content that is [easy to find and navigate](#).

Did you know that most word processing and publishing programs now include an in-built accessibility checker? These will screen your content for accessibility issues and suggest solutions or improvements. For more information on how to activate and use these features see:

- Microsoft's [guide to using the Accessibility Checker](#) for Outlook, Word, PowerPoint, and Excel
- Adobe's guide to using the [PDF Accessibility Checker in Acrobat Pro](#)

## Use Inclusive Language and Imagery

Not sure how to refer to disability or diversity?

- Consult the [Australian Government Style Manual](#) for tips on respectful and inclusive language when describing disability, age, or cultural, linguistic, gender and sexual diversity.
- If you are talking about an individual, be guided by their own preferences for terminology. For some further information about this, see the [Australian Federation of Disability Organisations](#) terminology guide.

Consider diversifying your stock images to increase the visual representation of people with disability or diversity in your media and documents. Check out some of the free diverse stock image collections on [this list](#), along with some guidelines for their meaningful use.

Remember that some content might be sensitive, inappropriate or triggering for certain people or cultural groups.

## Practice accessible, meaningful and inclusive community consultation

Collaborating with community members who have disability and drawing from their lived experience is a powerful strategy for inclusive design. To maintain healthy and productive partnerships, consider the following best-practice principles:

- Implement good accessibility practice in your engagement and feedback approaches – for some practical tips on collaborating and co-designing with people with a disability, see the [Connect With Me Co-Design Toolkit](#). For a wide range of general tips and activities for human-centred design and co-design, see Ideo's [DesignKit](#).
- Check that all essential voices are represented in your consultation. Consider the impact and value of intersectionality (i.e., people representing multiple diversity perspectives), and ensure that consultation activities are inclusive of people with complex communication or support needs where relevant.
- Design consultation activities that are purposeful and genuine. Seek clear and directed feedback and provide follow-through and responses to feedback received. If you are testing a new service for accessibility or inclusion, consider the following [tips for optimal user experience testing](#).
- Respect and value the time of collaborators and community consultants. You can do this by sourcing and making use of existing information before you begin consultation work, ensuring that consultation sessions and surveys are as efficient as possible, and by providing reimbursement or payment for any significant contributions made outside of a paid or volunteer role.
- Balance the need for representation of minority communities with the costs of representation burden. Just because someone has a disability, this does not make them an obligate spokesperson for disability or accessibility causes. For large tasks consider making use of professional disability or access consultants alongside any invited community members, to reduce workload and obligation.

For further guidance, see the Victorian Government's [Inclusive Consultation and Communication with People with a Disability practice guide](#).

## Source Funding and Support for Accessibility and Inclusion Initiatives

Several funding schemes exist to support access and inclusion in Australian workplaces and public services. Some of these are linked to an individual service user or employee, while others can support general accessibility projects. Funding will vary depending on your local region, but good places to start your search include:

- National Employment Assistance Fund (EAF) – see the Australian Government’s [Job Access](#) site
- [Disability Employment Australia](#)
- The [Information Linkages and Capacity Building \(ILC\) program](#), which provides funding and support for organisations to build their capacity for inclusive service delivery.
- The [Community Grants Hub](#) (national).

For good information on making your workplace accessible, see also the [NSW Government’s Public Service Commission information](#) on this topic.

## Learn more about accessibility for your practice...

For more information on the accessibility of tribunal, courtroom and legal technologies, see:

- Blanck, P., Wilichowski, A. & Schmeling, J. (2004). Disability Civil Rights Law and Policy: Accessible Courtroom Technology, William & Mary Bill of Rights Journal, 12(3). [Permalink](#).
- G3ICT (2021):
  - [Inclusive Courts Checklist](#)
  - [Access to Justice resources](#)
- NSW Department of Communities and Justice (2020). *Disability Inclusion*. [Webpage](#).
- The Justice Project: [Access to Justice Report](#) (Law Council of Australia)
- The United Nations [International Principles and Guidelines on Access to Justice for Persons with Disabilities](#).

For more information on the use of Artificial Intelligence and Replacement Technologies with diverse populations, see:

- Australian Human Rights Commission (2020). *Using artificial intelligence to make decisions: Addressing the problem of algorithmic bias*. See AHRC [website](#) for report.
- Zalnieriute, M. and Bell, F. (2021). ‘Technology and Judicial Role’, *The Judge, the Judiciary and the Court: Individual, Collegial and Institutional Judicial Dynamics in Australia*. Cambridge University Press. [Permalink](#).

## Contact Details

For any questions about this handout, you are welcome to email Dr Kate Anderson via [kate.anderson2@deakin.edu.au](mailto:kate.anderson2@deakin.edu.au). Please include Accessible Tribunals or COAT in the subject line.