

ADA Compliance for Your Website is Now a Priority



Submitted by
Civic Clarity Website Service
AccuNet Inc.
248-654-8715

The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) finalized a rule under ADA Title II (codified in 28 CFR Part 35) that requires state and local governments—including municipalities, downtown development authorities, and other public entities—to make their websites and mobile apps accessible. This rule specifically adopts WCAG 2.1 Level AA as the technical standard for compliance.

For municipalities with a population of 50,000 or more full compliance is required by April 24, 2026—just a few months away. Smaller entities have until April 2027.

If you have not reviewed your website, it is time. You don't need to be a developer or an accessibility expert to spot many ADA compliance issues on your website and start fixing them. In fact, a large portion of WCAG 2.1 Level AA requirements can be tested with nothing more than your keyboard, your browser, and a few free tools.

This article walks you through practical, action-oriented steps you can take right now to evaluate your website's accessibility and understand where fixes may be needed.

Test Content Reflow and Zoom (No Horizontal Scrolling)

Why it matters:

Users with low vision often zoom text instead of using screen magnifiers. WCAG requires that content still works when zoomed.

What to do:

1. Open your website in a browser
2. Zoom your browser to 200%.
3. Resize the browser window narrower.
4. Confirm:
 - All content is still visible
 - No text overlaps
 - No horizontal scrolling is required

Extra check:

- On a screen roughly 1280px wide, zoom to 400%.

- You should not need to scroll left and right to read content.

If you see side-scrolling or broken layouts, this is a WCAG failure related to content reflow .

Check Color Contrast (Including Hover States)

Why it matters:

Low contrast makes text unreadable for users with visual impairments and color blindness.

What to do:

Use a contrast checker such as WebAIM's free tool at <https://webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker/>

1. Test:
 - Body text
 - Headings
 - Buttons
 - Links
2. Look for:
 - 4.5:1 contrast ratio for normal text
 - 3:1 for large text (but aiming for 4.5:1 everywhere is safer)

Don't forget hover states:

- Hover over buttons and links.
- Recheck contrast when colors change.

Hover contrast failures are common and easy to miss .

Navigate the Entire Site Using Only Your Keyboard

Why it matters:

Users with motor disabilities may not use a mouse. WCAG requires full keyboard access.

What to do:

1. Put your mouse aside.
2. Use:
 - **Tab** to move forward
 - **Shift + Tab** to move backward
 - **Enter** to activate links and buttons

Watch for:

- A visible focus outline (you should always see where you are)
- Logical navigation order
- Ability to reach menus, buttons, and form fields

If you get trapped or lose your place, that's a failure.

Scan Pages with an Automated Accessibility Tool

Why it matters:

Automated tools won't catch everything, but they quickly flag common problems.

What to do:

1. Install the [WAVE browser extension](#).
2. Run it on every page of your website.
3. Under Details tab, review and fix all Red Errors. A very common error is missing meaningful alt text for images.
4. Under Order tab, visually review the link order of the page for logical order
5. Under Structure tab, make sure you do not have any orange alerts that your heading structure is out of order. Heading problems are extremely common and often overlooked. Best practices suggest H1 for page titles, followed by H2 for major sections, then H3 for subsections—never skip levels or use bold text as fake headings.

Treat WAVE results as approximately 80% of the ADA accessibility picture.

Clear Text & Links

Why it matters:

Color blindness, low vision, and individuals with cognitive impairments benefit greatly from clear, descriptive language that stands on its own

What to do:

1. Write descriptive link text that makes sense when read out of context. No "Click Here," instead write, "View Calendar."
 2. Never rely on color as the only way to communicate important information. If you use color (e.g., red text for negative numbers, green for positive, or highlighted required fields) include a clear text explanation so the meaning is obvious without color.
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Test Online Forms Carefully

Why it matters:

Forms are one of the biggest accessibility barriers.

What to do:

1. Tab through every form field.
 2. Confirm:
 - Each field has a visible label. Note: Placeholder text cannot be the only label.
 3. Submit the form incorrectly on purpose.
 4. Check that error messages:
 - Are clear
 - Explain how to fix the issue
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Review Videos and Audio Content

Why it matters:

Hearing-impaired users need captions and transcripts.

What to do:

- Videos must have:
 - Captions
 - Transcripts
- Audio-only content must have transcripts
- Autoplay media longer than 3 seconds must be pausable.

Using platforms like YouTube helps because captions and transcripts are built in .

Check Your Documents (PDFs, Word, Excel)

Why it matters:

Documents posted online are considered web content under DOJ rules.

What to do:

1. List every document linked on your site.
2. Separate:
 - Actively used documents (forms, applications)
 - Historical documents
3. Test a few PDFs using:
 - Screen reader preview
 - PDF accessibility checkers

Newly published documents must be accessible. Legacy documents require a clear accommodation process .

Confirm You Have an Accessibility Statement and Contact Method on Website

Why it matters:

This shows good faith and provides a remediation path.

What to do:

- Create a dedicated accessibility page
- Explain your commitment to accessibility
- Include a form or contact method for reporting issues

This won't replace compliance, but it matters during audits and complaints .

Final Thought

Website ADA compliance under WCAG 2.1 Level AA is not a one-time checklist. It's an ongoing process focused on real usability for real people.

By regularly performing these simple tests, you'll:

- Catch issues earlier
- Reduce legal risk
- Serve more members of your community

Your current website vendor probably has a plan to assist you in getting your municipal website ADA compliant. Reach out to them. You can also give Civic Clarity a call (248-684-8715) with any questions or review our ADA Accessibility help/resource documents at <https://www.civicclarity.com/local-governments/document-library/> Under ADA Accessibility folder.

Submitted by:

Julie Braun

Civic Clarity Website Service

AccuNet Inc.

248-654-8715

julie@accunet.us