

## Appendix D. Materials from Trainings

The following section includes the presentations from two trainings the Town of Sherborn received. Program Access training and materials were provided by Merge Diverse Abilities Inclusion Consulting. Digital Communications training and materials were created by the Edward J. Collins, Jr. Center for Public Management at the University of Massachusetts, Boston.

Program Accessibility Training

## Building Inclusive Municipal Services: Strategies for Accessibility & Belonging

Training provided on April 14, 2025 by Lisa Drennan

Website: [MERGE Diverse Abilities Inclusion Consulting | Pembroke, MA](#)



# Building Inclusive Municipal Services: Strategies for Accessibility & Belonging



Edward J. Collins, Jr. Center for Public Management



**SHERBORN, MA | MON 4/14/25 | 10AM-12PM**

**PRESENTED BY LISA DRENNAN | [MERGECONSULTING.ORG](https://MERGECONSULTING.ORG)**



# **WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS:** Terms & Exercise

## **DISABILITY 101**

Principles of Inclusion

Program Access Introduction

Words Matter: Using Inclusive Language

Disability Etiquette

## **STRATEGIES TOWARD INCLUSION**

8 Essential Habits

Bonus Tip

## **WRAP UP:** Reflections / Q&A





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# INTRODUCTIONS

**OVER 4 DECADES EXPERIENCE EMPOWERING INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES TO  
ACHIEVE THEIR ENRICHMENT GOALS & MEANINGFULLY BELONG IN THEIR COMMUNITY**

NEW ENGLAND VILLAGE



MERGE FOUNDER



SOUTH SHORE YMCA

# WHERE ARE YOU AT?

ON A SCALE OF 1-10  
WHAT EXPERIENCE OR  
SUCCESS HAVE YOU HAD  
WORKING WITH PERSONS  
WITH DISABILITIES?





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# GETTING ON THE SAME PAGE

## Terms & Inclusion Exercise

# WHO ARE PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES?

**People** with disabilities are first and foremost, people - people who have **individual abilities**, interests and needs. They are ordinary individuals seeking to live **ordinary lives**.



**1 in 4**

# LET'S TALK TERMS.....



**DIVERSE  
ABILITIES**



**PHYSICAL DISABILITY**

**LEARNING DISABILITY**

**MEDICAL COMPLEXITIES**

**NEUROLOGICAL DISORDER**

**MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES**

**NON-APPARENT OR HIDDEN DISABILITY**

**INTELLECTUAL OR DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY**



WHAT DO YOU NOTICE  
ABOUT THIS GRAPHIC  
FROM A GOOGLE SEARCH:  
**“IMAGES OF TYPES OF  
DISABILITIES”**

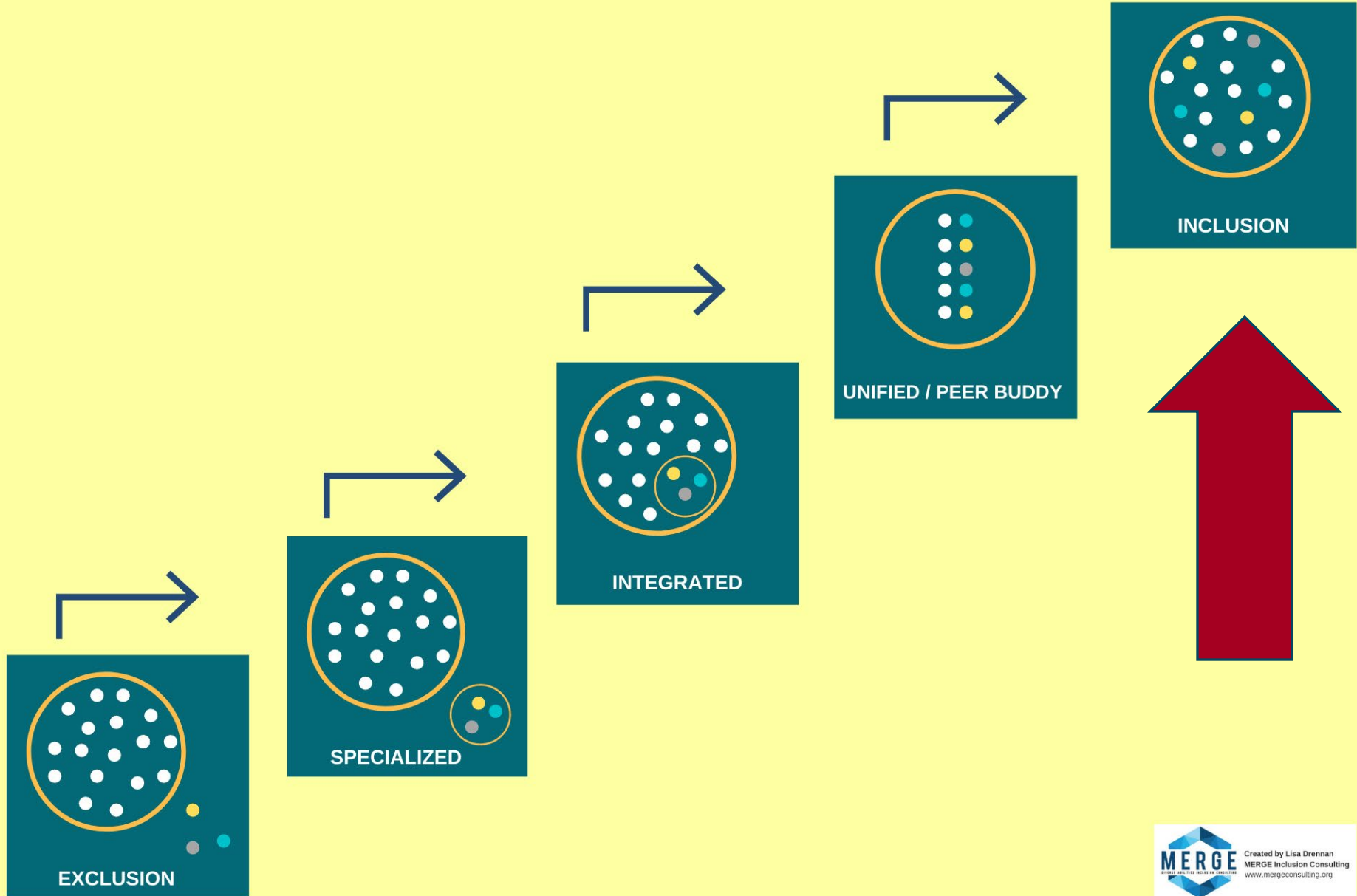
SOME DISABILITIES LOOK LIKE THIS



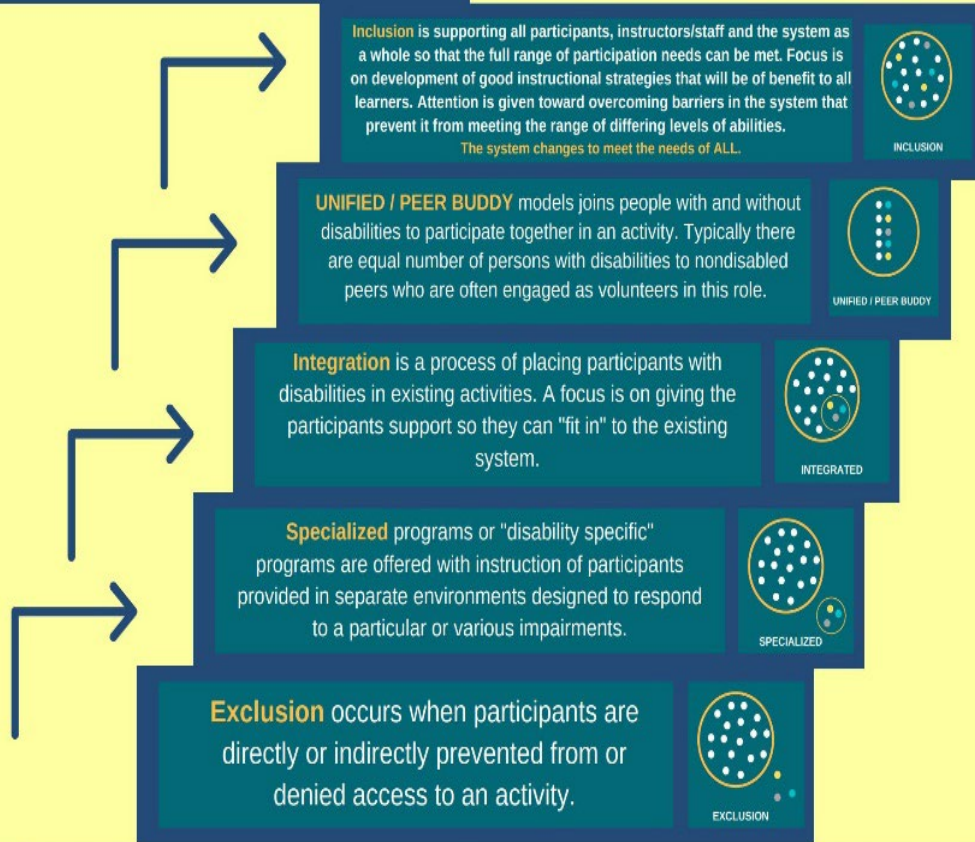
MOST LOOK LIKE THIS



Up to 70% of all  
disabilities are ‘hidden’;  
they are not immediately  
obvious to others.



## MODELS OF PARTICIPATION



MERGE Diverse Abilities Inclusion Consulting | [www.mergeconsulting.org](http://www.mergeconsulting.org)

# A Copy Of This Summary Sheet Material Will Be Available To You



# SMALL GROUP WORK



FOLLOW DIRECTIONS TO  
BREAK INTO GROUPS

DISCUSS THIS QUESTION:

**WHAT DOES  
ACCESSIBILITY  
MEAN TO YOU?**

WORK TOGETHER TO CREATE A  
**4-6 WORD STATEMENT THAT  
ANSWERS THAT QUESTION**

BE PREPARED TO SHARE WITH  
THE LARGER GROUP





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# BEST PRACTICE ON INCLUSIVE (or effective?) CUSTOMER SERVICE



# MERGE INCLUSION PRINCIPLES



Organizational  
Commitment



Meet People  
Where They Are At



Let's Get to  
Success



Meaningful  
Participation



Working Toward  
Full Inclusion



Everyone Has a  
Right to Belong

## A RESOURCE TOOL FOR ATTENDEES OF A MERGE TRAINING/CONFERENCE



### INCLUSION PRINCIPLES

THESE PRINCIPLES SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS YOUR ORGANIZATION DEFINES, GROWS,  
DEVELOPS POLICIES, OR MAKES DECISIONS AROUND YOUR INCLUSION INITIATIVE.

REACH OUT TODAY TO LEARN MORE ABOUT INCLUSION TRAININGS AND CONSULTING THAT  
CAN HELP YOUR ORGANIZATION TO WELCOME, ENGAGE AND SUPPORT PERSONS WITH  
DIVERSE ABILITIES TO BE SUCCESSFUL WITHIN YOUR RECREATION OR CAMP PROGRAMS.



ORGANIZATIONAL  
COMMITMENT

All stakeholders have a responsibility and role in ensuring that inclusive practices are used universally throughout your organization, and are given the resources to do so.



WORKING TOWARD  
FULL INCLUSION

Supporting a person to be as independent as possible in the least restrictive environment. Adaptive or specialized programs are used as a gateway toward full inclusion, not the end of the road.



MEANINGFUL  
PARTICIPATION

Opening our doors to diverse populations is a great first step, but not enough. We commit to the intentional work ensuring that every person is supported to meet their goals and to add value through their involvement.



LET'S GET  
TO SUCCESS!

A change in perspective or approach. Instead of "no we can't" we think "how can we" make this work? Using "the team" to tap into all resources to explore how you can get to YES.



MEET PEOPLE  
WHERE THEY ARE AT

We change the systems to support the person, by making accommodations and modifications. Understand that success is individualized and seek to learn about a person's goals and strengths.



EVERYONE HAS A  
RIGHT TO BELONG

To be welcomed, engaged and supported. There are many benefits and value added to opening your doors to diversity. The ADA ensures that people with disabilities have a legal right to participate.

# A Copy Of This Summary Sheet Will Be Available To You

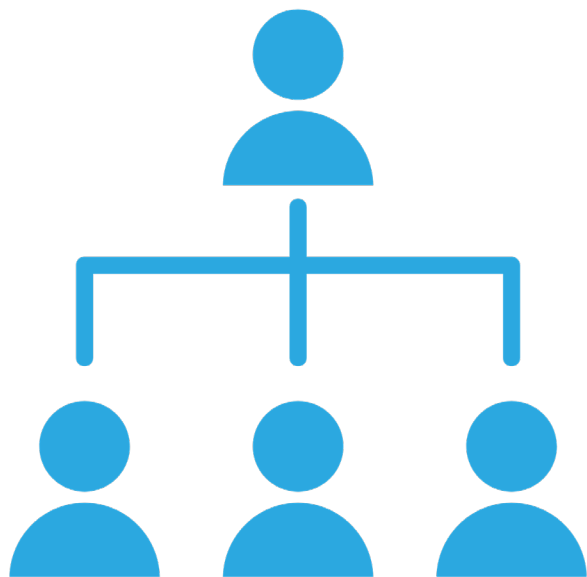
LISA DRENNAN, FOUNDER | MERGE DIVERSE ABILITIES INCLUSION CONSULTING  
lisadrennan@mergeconsulting.org | 781.724.1918 | [www.mergeconsulting.org](http://www.mergeconsulting.org)

# THAT WE WORK TOGETHER TO ENSURE



- buildings and spaces can be accessed\*\* by anyone who needs or wants to
- people can find, hear, see or understand content and materials shared
- anyone can attend and take part in events and programs

## PRINCIPAL #1

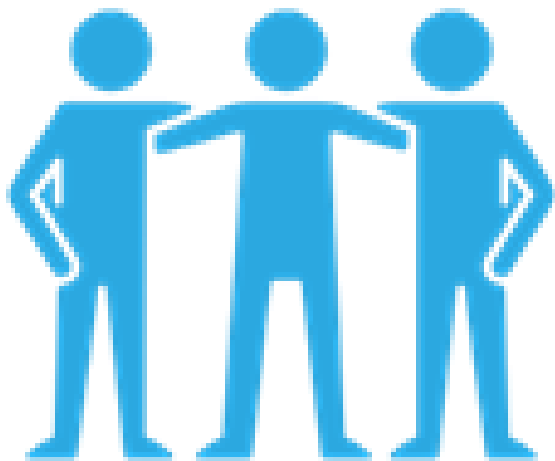


Organizational  
Commitment

- **ALL** municipality employees have a responsibility and role
- Resources and support provided at **all levels**
- **ALL** staff understand and can share with residents what accessibility means



## PRINCIPAL #2



## Meaningful Participation

- Not just physical proximity..... instead focus on **participating together**
- **Intentional work** to ensure that every individual has access to all you offer
- Everyone has something of **value** to contribute \*\*

## PRINCIPAL #3



Meet People  
Where They Are At

- We **change systems** to support the person
- By making **modifications** and **accommodations**
- **EXAMPLES INCLUDE....**

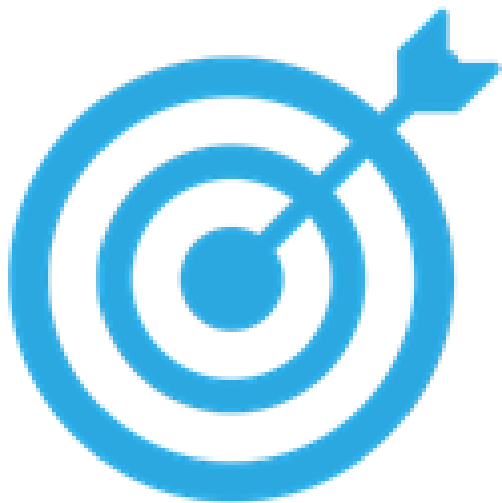
## PRINCIPAL #4



Working Toward  
Full Inclusion

- Head toward progress not perfection. It's a **dial not a switch.**
- Supports may be different in **different situations**
- Inclusive practices **benefit everyone!**

## PRINCIPAL #5



Let's Get To  
Success Mindset

- A change in our **perspective** or approach
- Instead of “**no we can't**” think “**how can we**” make this work
- Tap into your tools and resources to explore how to get to **YES**

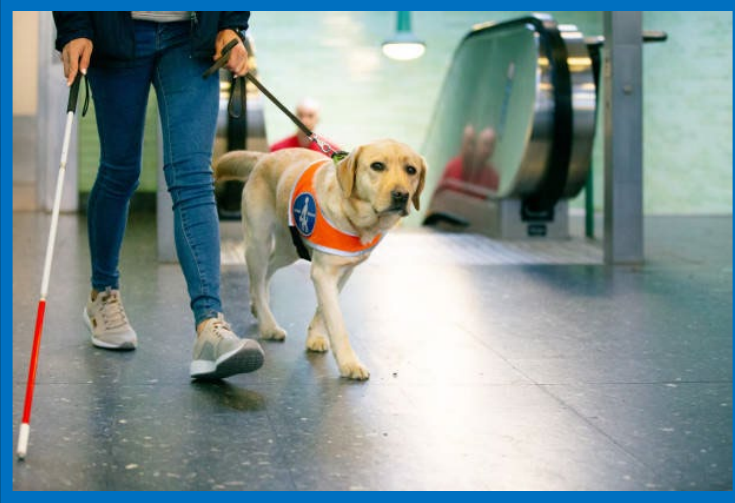
## PRINCIPAL #6



Everyone Has A  
Right To Access  
Their Government

- To be **welcomed, engaged and supported**
- The **ADA ensures** persons with disabilities have a legal right to participate





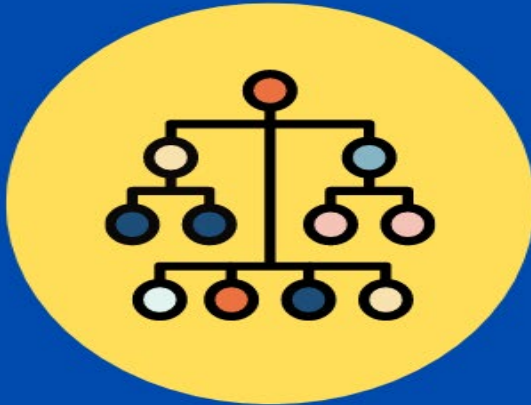
# **Inclusion** Is About Intentionally Planning For The Success Of ALL



# HOW DOES GOOD CUSTOMER SERVICE WORK MORE EFFECTIVELY?

**THE "IN ALL – FOR ALL– BY ALL" APPROACH**

**IN ALL**



**FOR ALL**



**BY ALL**

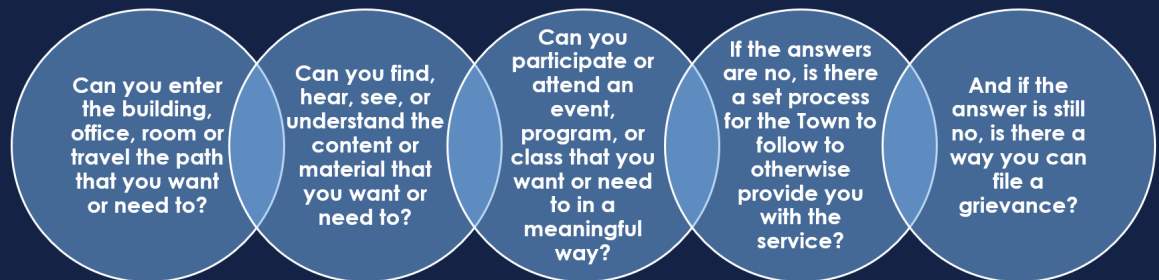


# ACCESSIBILITY

is the practice of making **information**, **activities**, and/or **environments** sensible, meaningful, and usable for as many people as possible.

**PROJECT  
GOALS**

## What Municipal Accessibility Means



# WHAT ARE EXAMPLES OF ACCESSIBILITY?



- Share an example of accessibility in action in your town
- Or pick a card and read it out loud





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# WORDS MATTER & DISABILITY ETIQUETTE



# BEST PRACTICE

## LET'S MAKE IT THIS EASY

Helping you to be  
more comfortable  
and confident  
talking to person  
with disabilities

AT&T LTE

7:40 PM

63%

IT'S OKAY IF  
YOU MAKE  
MISTAKES

# WHY WORDS MATTER



For people with disabilities, incorrect perceptions and negative attitudes (words) are often a great barrier to overcome

Sometimes the well-meaning words that others use in conversation, online and in the media have a lot to do with these attitudes

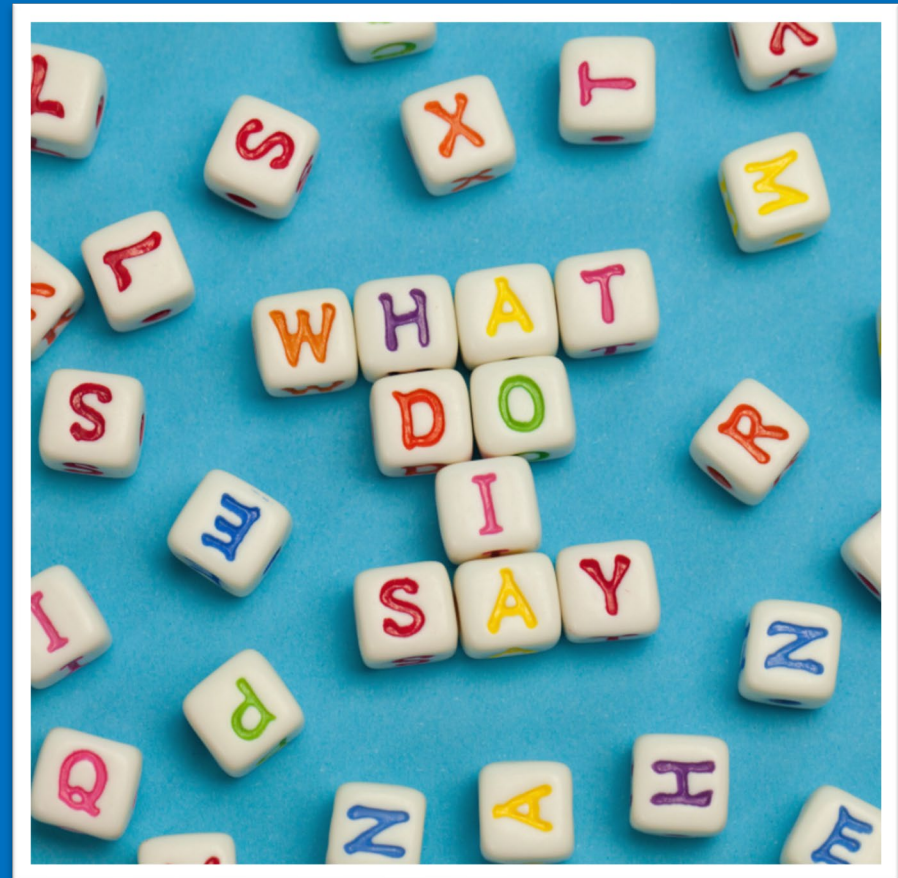
Learning and using acceptable, empowering words with a focus on positive attributes and strengths, can show respect to people with disabilities

# PERSON FIRST LANGUAGE

To Tell What a Person **HAS**  
Not What A Person **IS**

It's An **Objective** Way  
Of **Acknowledging** &  
**Communicating** About  
Disabilities

Never **Equate** A Person  
With A **Disability**



**PERSONS  
WITHOUT  
DISABILITIES OR  
NEUROTYPICAL**



**HE IS  
EXPERIENCING  
BEHAVIORAL  
CHALLENGES**



**SHE HAS A  
MENTAL HEALTH  
CONDITION**



**HE HAS AUTISM**



**\*\*\***

**PERSONS WITH  
DISABILITIES**



**PERSON WHO  
USES A  
WHEELCHAIR**



**PERSON FIRST LANGUAGE**

**ACCESSIBLE  
PARKING**



**SEPARATE  
BUS**



**AUTISM  
SPECTRUM  
DISORDER**



**HAD OR HAS A  
DISABILITY**



**HIGH SUPPORT OR LOW  
SUPPPORT NEEDS**



**WORDS TO LOSE → WORDS TO LIVE BY**



**STUDENTS WHO  
ACCESS SPECIAL  
EDUCATION  
SERVICES**



**CAMPER  
WHO UTILIZES  
INCLUSION SUPPORTS**



**WORDS TO LOSE → WORDS TO LIVE BY**

## MEET KENDRA



HI  
KENDRA  
!!!

HER NEEDS AS A  
**NEUROTYPICAL,  
NON-DISABLED  
ADULT.....**

RESPECT *HAPPINESS*  
INDEPENDENCE  
**A JOB**  
FRIENDS  
A PLACE TO LIVE

## MEET CHEYANNE



HI  
CHEYANNE  
!!!

HER NEEDS AS A  
**NEURODIVERSE  
ADULT WITH A  
DISABILITY.....**

RESPECT *HAPPINESS*  
INDEPENDENCE  
**A JOB**  
FRIENDS  
A PLACE TO LIVE





## **Look Past The Disability Ask Questions To Get To Know Someone**





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# DISABILITY ETIQUETTE

## Suggested Interactions for Specific Indications



# DISABILITY ETIQUETTE

## SUGGESTED INTERACTIONS FOR SPECIFIC INDICATIONS



### INDIVIDUAL WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

- Do **not** touch anyone's mobility equipment without their permission or without asking.
- Be **considerate** of possible pain, balance, or post-traumatic stress issues during physical contact.
- Put yourself at the person's eye level when engaging in a conversation. Instead of kneeling, simply **pull up a chair**.



### INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE BLIND OR LOW VISION

- **Identify yourself** when entering a conversation and **announce** when you leave.
- When serving as a sighted guide, **offer your arm or shoulder** rather than grabbing theirs.
- **Describe** the setting, environment, written material, and obstacles when serving as a sighted guide.
- **Resist** the temptation to pet or talk to an animal guide or service animal.



### INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE DEAF OR HARD OF HEARING

- **Gain the person's attention** before starting a conversation.
- If the individual uses a sign language interpreter, **speak directly to the person**, not their interpreter; keep your eyes on the individual and not on the interpreter.
- **Face the person** and **speak in normal tones**—not a raised or slowed down voice.

### INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE SPEECH OR COMMUNICATION DISABILITIES

- If you do not understand what the person is saying, **ask the person to repeat** what they said and then repeat it back to ensure you understood.
- **Do not** speak for the person or attempt to finish their sentences.

#### If a person uses communication device:

- Communicate **with the person not the device**. Display your usual eye contact, body language, and speech. **Respect screen privacy**, unless invited to look.
- **Never talk down** or use a childish or unusually loud voice when speaking to someone. Talk to a communication device user as you would a person without a disability.



### INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE HIDDEN OR NONAPPARENT DISABILITIES

- Engage in a dialogue to **determine individual needs**.
- Seek to understand **their lived experience**.
- **Support accommodations**, maintain flexible thinking.
- **Honor confidentiality**, and recognize that disclosing their disability in some settings comes with risk.



## SPECIFIC TO:

- physical disability
- blind or low vision
- deaf or hard of hearing
- communication disorder
- non-apparent disabilities

## DISABILITY ETIQUETTE LANGUAGE GUIDE

WORDS MATTER: Learning and using acceptable, empowering words with a focus on positive attributes and strengths, can show respect to people with disabilities.

### WORDS TO LOSE

### WORDS TO LIVE BY

the handicapped/disabled	➤	persons with a disability*
she is mentally ill/emotionally disturbed	➤	she has a mental health condition*
the Down syndrome worker	➤	an employee with Down syndrome*
confined to or wheelchair bound	➤	person who uses a wheelchair
handicapped parking	➤	accessible
stricken with, victim, suffered from	➤	had or has
special bus	➤	separate
disabled rights	➤	disability
SPED kids or Special Ed kids	➤	student who
inclusion kid	➤	camper who
differently abled/handi-capable/extra-ordinary	➤	people with
normal or healthy kids	➤	child with

\*Person First Language is used to tell what a person has, not what a person is. Exception: within the Autistic community, preference for identify first language, particularly older teens. When working with children, a language - but with all ages honor the preference.

## DISABILITY ETIQUETTE GUIDELINES

Building Inclusive Communities Together



Disability etiquette is a set of guidelines dealing specifically with how to interact with a person who has a disability. The focus of these principles is based on treating people with respect. A basic understanding of these principles can help make community members feel more comfortable when interacting with peers with disabilities. And remember if you are not sure JUST ASK!

Speak directly to a person with a disability, not to their companion, staff, aide, or family member.

Be age appropriate when you speak with an adult with a disability, as you would any other adult.

Ask before you help a person with a disability.

Avoid negative words that imply tragedy, such as afflicted with, suffers, victim, or unfortunate.

Avoid cute euphemisms such as being physically challenged, inconvenienced or differently abled.

When communicating about a person, equally important, ask yourself if the disability is even relevant and needs to be mentioned when referring to individuals.

Look past the disability get to know someone by asking questions.

Do not make assumptions about what a person can or cannot do = *presume competence*.

Avoid portraying a person with disability as inspirational simply because they live with disability. Implying a person is courageous or superhuman for doing everyday things can be patronizing.

Use person first language to tell what a person HAS, not what a person IS. An objective way of acknowledging and communicating about disabilities. "A child with Epilepsy" rather than "The epileptic child".

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# A Copy Of These Summary Sheets Will Be Available To You



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# DIVERSE ABILITIES IN OUR COMMUNITIES

# DIVERSE ABILITIES IN OUR COMMUNITIES





# HIDDEN DISABILITIES

## HOW A PERSON MAY "SHOW THEIR DISABILITY" OR TRAITS THAT A PERSON MAY EXPERIENCE

**poor social and  
communication skills**

**appears fidgety  
unable to focus or  
stimming**

**oversensitive to  
things in their  
environment**

**difficulty  
transitioning or  
following directions**

**wandering or pacing**

**common sounds may  
be painful or  
overwhelming**

**persistent need to  
know schedules**

**excessive amount of  
energy**

**literal thinking**

**processing delays**

**heightened anxiety  
or panic**

**avoiding eye contact  
or verbal responses**

# **TRAIT:**

anxiety, processing delays, poor communications skills



# **BEHAVIOR:**

**JORDAN STEPS UP TO THE COUNTER AT THE TOWN CLERK'S OFFICE TO REQUEST A COPY OF THEIR BIRTH CERTIFICATE BUT BECOMES VISIBLY ANXIOUS WHEN ASKED TO COMPLETE A FORM WITH MULTIPLE SECTIONS. THEY START PACING BACK AND FORTH, MUMBLING TO THEMSELVES, AND STRUGGLING TO PROCESS THE INSTRUCTIONS, MAKING THE CLERK UNSURE HOW TO ASSIST.**



# **RESPONSE:**

**PROACTIVE | IN THE MOMENT | AFTER AN OCCURRENCE**



# INCLUSION STRATEGIES

## BENEFITING PERSONS WITH:



- ☐ Autism | ADHD
- ☐ Mental Illness
- ☐ Developmental Disabilities
- ☐ Physical Disabilities
- ☐ Cognitive Challenges

☒ **ALL PEOPLE**

## **8 ESSENTIAL HABITS**

## **TO BUILD A CULTURE OF DISABILITY INCLUSION**

**CREATE AND SHARE VISUAL TOOLS**

**USE POSITIVE LANGUAGE**

**FACILITATE SOCIAL CONNECTIONS**

**UNDERSTAND SENSORY NEEDS**

**HAVE FLEXIBLE THINKING**

**MODIFY AND ACCOMMODATE**








**TRANSITION & PROCESSING TIME**

**WORK AS A TEAM**

## CREATE & SHARE VISUAL TOOLS

### VISUAL SCHEDULE EXPECTATION LIST

- Use pictures, text or icons
- Review together
- Make age appropriate

TEAM PRACTICE SCHEDULE	
WELCOME & PRACTICE STARTS	
REVIEW SCHEDULE & EXPECTATIONS	
STRETCHING & WARM UP	
PASSING & CATCHING DRILLS	
STATIONS	
4V4 GAMES	
END OF PRACTICE CHECK IN	



### Smart Recycling Guide

Your go-to reference for recycling in Massachusetts

AN INITIATIVE OF THE MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Metal	Plastic	Glass	Paper & Cardboard
 Food and Beverage Cans <small>empty and rinse</small>	 Bottles, Jars, Jugs and Tubs <small>empty and replace caps</small>	 Bottles and Jars <small>empty and rinse</small>	 Mixed Paper, Newspaper, Magazines, Boxes <small>empty and flatten</small>

**NO!**



**No Plastic Bags**  
Do Not Bag Recyclables



**No Clothing or Linens**  
Use donation programs



**No Hazardous Items**  
No propane tanks, batteries, sharp, or chemicals



**No Tangles**  
No tools, wires, chains or electronics



**No Food or Liquid**  
Empty all containers

Recyclopedia: Can I recycle it?

Enter name of item (ex. bottle)

Use our online search tool at: [RecycleSmartMA.org](http://RecycleSmartMA.org)

[RecycleSmartMA.org](http://RecycleSmartMA.org)

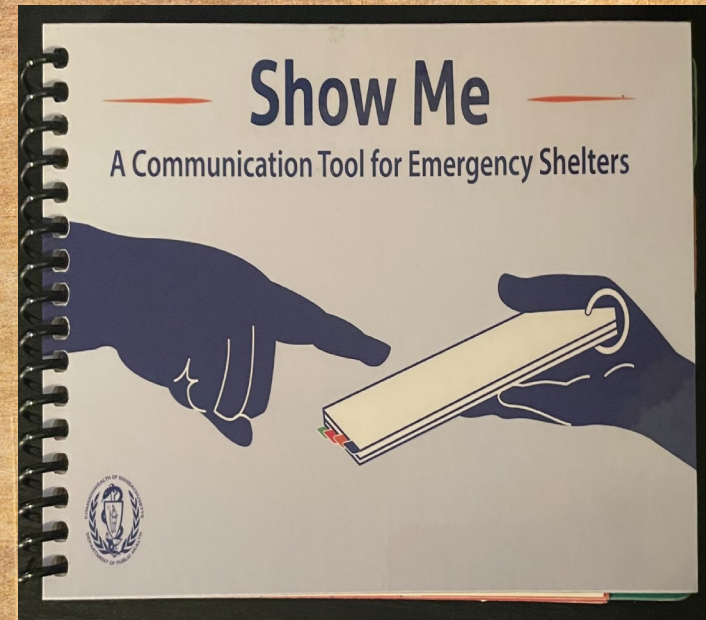
All recycling programs in Massachusetts accept the items pictured above.



## CREATE & SHARE VISUAL TOOLS

LET'S LOOK AT SOME  
EXAMPLES

WHO MIGHT BENEFIT  
FROM THE USE OF  
VISUAL TOOLS?



# 9 REASONS TO USE VISUALS



**VISUALS ALLOW TIME FOR  
LANGUAGE PROCESSING**



**VISUALS HELP ALL PEOPLE**



**VISUALS HELP SOMEONE  
SEE WHAT YOU MEAN**

EXPECTATIONS



**VISUALS HAVE NO ATTITUDE**

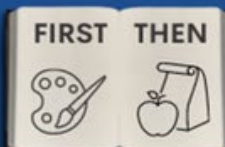
- no frustration
- no tone
- no disapproval



**VISUALS HELP REDUCE  
ANXIETY**



**VISUALS ARE PERMANENT  
(spoken words disappear)**



**VISUALS PREPARE SOMEONE  
FOR TRANSITIONS**



**VISUALS ARE TRANSFERABLE  
BETWEEN ENVIRONMENTS  
AND PLACES**



**VISUALS HELP  
BUILD INDEPENDENCE**





## **USE POSITIVE LANGUAGE**

**Focus On What You  
Would Like To See  
Or Occur**

**Rather Than  
Pointing Out  
The Bad**

**USE A HIGHER RATIO OF  
PRAISE TO CORRECTION**

### **TRY THIS:**

**It's time to start putting the books you were using back on the shelf. Can I help with that?**

### **TRY THIS:**

**Let's take a step back and find a safe way through – I'll help you.**

### **TRY THIS:**

**Take a deep breath – I'm here to help. Let's go through this one step at a time**



## FACILITATE SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Look Past Disabilities  
To Discover  
Someone's Gifts

(Strength Not Deficit  
Focused)

**Make Interest Based  
Connections**



## UNDERSTAND SENSORY NEEDS

**Some people may be  
more sensitive to  
sensory stimuli**

**FROM: sight, sound,  
touch, smell, taste**



Asterus  
@ItsAsterus

sensory overload is frustrating cause  
how am i supposed to explain that i  
don't want someone near me cause i  
can hear the washing machine  
beeping, background noise, there's  
clothes in the wrong places,  
everyone is too loud, there's dirty  
dishes and i can feel my toes too  
much



**HAVE FLEXIBLE THINKING**

**Think Outside The Box  
“The 8 Worst Words”**

**Offer Choice To  
Help Someone Feel  
In Control**



## MODIFY AND ACCOMMODATE

Can the time, duration, location be changed to accommodate someone's needs?

Can the way someone participates be adjusted to ensure they are included?



## TRANSITION & PROCESSING TIME

Allow for  
processing time

Verbal & visual cue  
prior to transitions



TALK  
SLOW

PAUSE

GIVE  
TIME TO  
PROCESS



## WORK AS A TEAM

Internally: lean on & reach out to each other – it takes us all!

Externally: build a collaborative relationship with families and disability support organizations

**At the center:  
the community member!**





# BONUS STRATEGY

## NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US

Persons with  
Disabilities  
Should Have a  
Seat at The Table

*(or a parent if  
about children)*



## 8 ESSENTIAL HABITS OF RECREATION & CAMP STAFF Toward Building A Culture of Inclusion

### 1 CREATE AND SHARE VISUAL TOOLS

- Provide a visual schedule and expectation list
  - For a group and/or individual
  - Use pictures, text or icons
  - Make age appropriate
  - Review at start of the day

### 2 USE POSITIVE LANGUAGE

- Focus on what you would like to see or occur, rather than pointing out the bad
- Use a higher ratio of praise to correction

### 3 FACILITATE SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

- Look past a disability to discover someone's gifts/talents
- Point out/model good social interactions

### 4 UNDERSTAND SENSORY NEEDS

- Know your participants for sensory avoiding or seeking
- Be proactive – provide sensory tools & spaces

### 5 HAVE FLEXIBLE THINKING

- Think outside the box "*this is the way we've always done it*" doesn't allow for flexibility
- Offer choice to help someone feel in control

### 6 MODIFY AND ACCOMMODATE

- Can the time, duration, location be changed to accommodate someone's needs?
- Can the way someone participates be adjusted to ensure they are included?

### 7 INTAKE: PRACTICAL, NOT CLINICAL

- Focus on identifying support needs
- Start by emphasis on strengths and interests
- Be a learner not a judger

### 8 WORK AS A TEAM

- Internally: lean on and reach out to each other – it takes us all!
- Externally: build a collaborative and cooperative relationship with families / support teams
- At the center: **the participant!**

A Copy  
Of This  
Summary  
Sheets Will  
Be Available  
To You



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# WRAP UP: Reflections | Q & A



**WHAT WAS YOUR  
AHA MOMENT OR  
TAKE-AWAY?**

**WHAT IS ONE NEW  
THING YOU LEARNED  
THAT YOU WILL  
IMPLEMENT?**





# THANK YOU! SHARE THE LOVE

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Lisa Drennan  
*Founder of MERGE Inclusion Consulting*

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# “Effective Engagement Techniques for Citizens with Diverse Abilities” TOP TIPS & BEST PRACTICE SUMMARY – MERGE INCLUSION CONSULTING

## **FACILITATE COLLABORATIVE INTERACTION**

- ✓ Get to know community members likes and talents to gain common interests
- ✓ Point out or model good social interactions, “Thanks for waiting so patiently”
- ✓ Partner up community members to ensure no one is left out and all are engaged

## **FLEXIBLE THINKING**

- ✓ Think outside the box: “this is the way it’s always been done it” doesn’t allow for flexibility
- ✓ Be less ridged with your response: think about the end result and how else you can get there
- ✓ Offer choices to help community members feel more in control: “would you rather \_\_\_ or \_\_\_?”

## **UNDERSTANDING SENSORY NEEDS**

- ✓ What sensory issues may be occurring? Avoiding or seeking with temperature, touch, noise, light?
- ✓ Be proactive, give an option to avoid large groups. Know if a quiet space is available
- ✓ Mood regulation: ask where they are at “Is it getting too loud for you?”

## **MAKE MODIFICATIONS**

- ✓ Can the time, location, duration be changed to accommodate someone’s needs?
- ✓ Can the way in which they participate be adjusted to make sure they are included and valued (but still safe)?
- ✓ Focus on someone’s strengths – if good at organizing have them help with a task like that

## **USE VISUAL SCHEDULES OR CHECKLISTS**

- ✓ Written and/or icons spell out what is coming next, cross off tasks/events when done
- ✓ Can be used for overall group schedule for that day or given to an individual community member
- ✓ Being able to see the sequence of events helps community members to feel comfortable and in control of their day

## **CLEAR EXPECTATIONS DEFINED**

- ✓ “Rules” created for participation, reviewed and available for the group and/or an individual community member
- ✓ Use written text and/or icons as age appropriate, generally 5 expectations, framed in the positive
- ✓ Allow for processing time, have them repeat or read back to assure they received the info

## **PROCESSING & TRANSITION TIME**

- ✓ A time monitoring strategy that gives community members a concrete visual of the passing of time
- ✓ Allow processing time to digest information and get ready for the next event/task
- ✓ Having community members involved helps them to learn to manage their time

## **THINK LIKE A TEAM**

- ✓ Identify the caregiver, family member or other support person – introduce yourself
- ✓ Be proactive: if possible, obtain any suggestions or tips ahead of time
- ✓ Give breaks when able *“can I sit with them for a bit so you can get some time alone”*

## **EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION**

- ✓ Keep confidentiality: written, verbal & electronic
- ✓ Information sharing on a “need to know basis”
- ✓ When giving direction: few words as possible, calm demeanor, low voice, be aware of your body language

## **POSITIVE LANGUAGE**

- ✓ Focuses on what we would like to see or occur, rather than pointing out the bad
- ✓ When giving direction or instructions, use a higher ratio of praise to corrections
- ✓ An opportunity to reinforce expected interactions and to model appropriate problem-solving

## INCLUSION PRINCIPLES

THESE PRINCIPLES SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS YOUR ORGANIZATION DEFINES, GROWS, DEVELOPS POLICIES, OR MAKES DECISIONS AROUND YOUR INCLUSION INITIATIVE.

REACH OUT TODAY TO LEARN MORE ABOUT INCLUSION TRAININGS AND CONSULTING THAT CAN HELP YOUR ORGANIZATION TO WELCOME, ENGAGE AND SUPPORT PERSONS WITH DIVERSE ABILITIES TO BE SUCCESSFUL WITHIN YOUR RECREATION OR CAMP PROGRAMS.



ORGANIZATIONAL  
COMMITMENT

All stakeholders have a responsibility and role in ensuring that inclusive practices are used universally throughout your organization, and are given the resources to do so.



WORKING TOWARD  
FULL INCLUSION

Supporting a person to be as independent as possible in the least restrictive environment. Adaptive or specialized programs are used as a gateway toward full inclusion, not the end of the road.



MEANINGFUL  
PARTICIPATION

Opening our doors to diverse populations is a great first step, but not enough. We commit to the intentional work ensuring that every person is supported to meet their goals and to add value through their involvement.



LET'S GET  
TO SUCCESS!

A change in perspective or approach. Instead of "no we can't" we think "how can we" make this work? Using "the team" to tap into all resources to explore how you can get to YES.



MEET PEOPLE  
WHERE THEY ARE AT

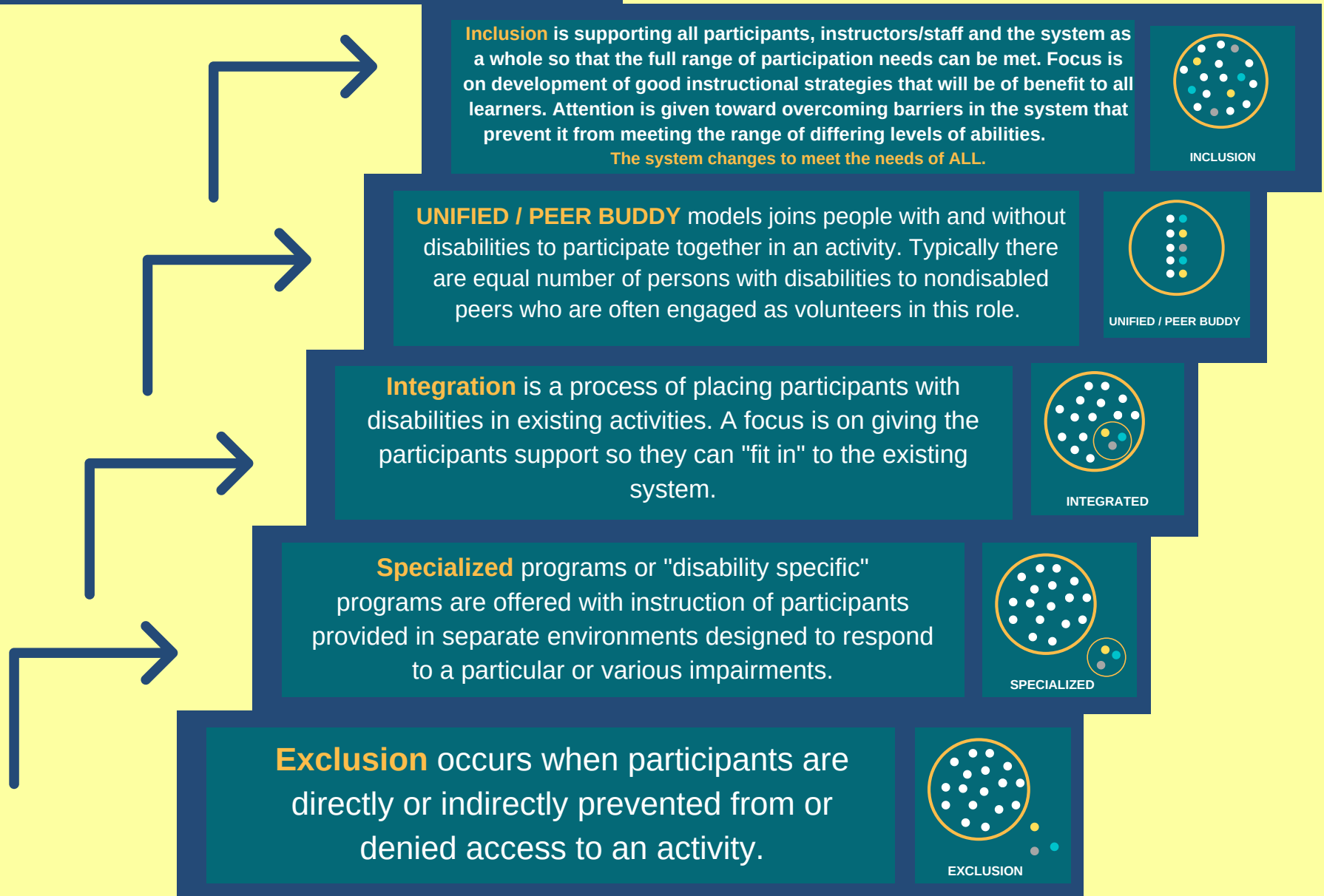
We change the systems to support the person, by making accommodations and modifications. Understand that success is individualized and seek to learn about a person's goals and strengths.



EVERYONE HAS A  
RIGHT TO BELONG

To be welcomed, engaged and supported. There are many benefits and value added to opening your doors to diversity. The ADA ensures that people with disabilities have a legal right to participate.

# MODELS OF PARTICIPATION



# DISABILITY ETIQUETTE LANGUAGE GUIDE

WORDS MATTER: Learning and using acceptable, empowering words with a focus on positive attributes and strengths, can show respect to people with disabilities.

## WORDS TO LOSE

## WORDS TO LIVE BY

the handicapped/disabled ➤ persons with a disability\*

she is mentally ill/emotionally disturbed ➤ she has a mental health condition\*

the Down syndrome worker ➤ an employee with Down syndrome\*

confined to or wheelchair bound ➤ person who uses a wheelchair

handicapped parking ➤ accessible parking

stricken with, victim, suffered from ➤ had or has a disability

special bus ➤ separate bus

disabled rights ➤ disability rights

SPED kids or Special Ed kids ➤ student who accesses special education services

inclusion kid ➤ camper who accesses inclusion services

differently abled/handi-capable/extra-ordinary ➤ people with disabilities or neurodiverse

normal or healthy kids ➤ child without a disability or neurotypical

\*Person First Language is used to tell what a person has not what a person is.

Exception: within the Autistic community, there is a trending preference for identify first language, particularly with adults and older teens. When working with children, start with person first language - but with all ages honor the preference of the individual





# DISABILITY ETIQUETTE GUIDELINES

Building Inclusive Communities Together



Disability etiquette is a set of guidelines dealing specifically with how to interact with a person who has a disability. The focus of these principles is based on treating people with respect. A basic understanding of these principles can help make community members feel more comfortable when interacting with peers with disabilities.

And remember if you are not sure JUST ASK!



**Speak directly to a person with a disability, not to their companion, staff, aide, or family member.**

**Be age appropriate when you speak with an adult with a disability, as you would any other adult.**

**Ask before you help a person with a disability.**

**Avoid negative words that imply tragedy, such as afflicted with, suffers, victim, or unfortunate.**

**Avoid cute euphemisms such as being physically challenged, inconvenienced or differently abled.**

**When communicating about a person, equally important, ask yourself if the disability is even relevant and needs to be mentioned when referring to individuals.**

**Look past the disability get to know someone by asking questions.**

**Do not make assumptions about what a person can or cannot do = *presume competence*.**

**Avoid portraying a person with disability as inspirational simply because they live with disability. Implying a person is courageous or superhuman for doing everyday things can be patronizing.**

**Use person first language to tell what a person HAS, not what a person IS. An objective way of acknowledging and communicating about disabilities. "A child with Epilepsy" rather than "The epileptic child".**

# 9 REASONS TO USE VISUALS



**VISUALS ALLOW TIME FOR  
LANGUAGE PROCESSING**



**VISUALS HELP ALL PEOPLE**



**VISUALS HELP SOMEONE  
SEE WHAT YOU MEAN**

EXPECTATIONS



**VISUALS HAVE NO ATTITUDE**

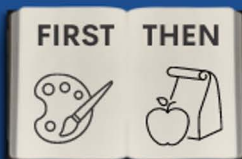
- no frustration
- no tone
- no disapproval



**VISUALS HELP REDUCE  
ANXIETY**



**VISUALS ARE PERMANENT  
(spoken words disappear)**



**VISUALS PREPARE SOMEONE  
FOR TRANSITIONS**



**VISUALS ARE TRANSFERABLE  
BETWEEN ENVIRONMENTS  
AND PLACES**



**VISUALS HELP  
BUILD INDEPENDENCE**

Digital Accessibility Training

## ADA and Communications: Digital Accessibility Training

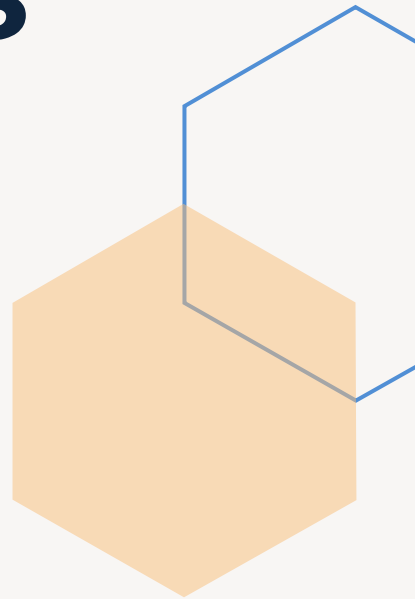
Training provided on May 7, 2025 by Kelsey Edmond

Edward J. Collins, Jr. Center for Public Management at the University of Massachusetts, Boston

# ADA and Communications: Digital Accessibility Training

Collins Center for Public Management

May 7, 2025

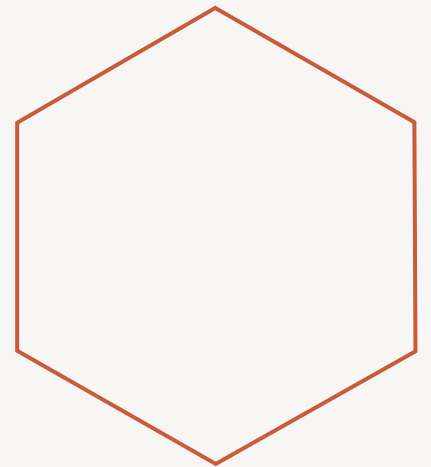






# Agenda

- Definitions
- ADA Title II
- Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)
- Digital Accessibility
  - Written Content – Write, Display, and Upload
  - Color Contrast
  - Accessible Images - Alternative Text
  - Video Accessibility
- Putting it into Practice
- Questions



# Disability:

any condition of the body or mind that makes it more difficult for the person with the condition to do certain activities and interact with the world around them.

Source: [Center for Disease Control](#)

- Disabilities may impact vision, hearing, movement, thinking, remembering, learning, communicating, mental health, or social relationships.

More than **1 in 4** adults in the United States have some type of disability  
(28.7%)



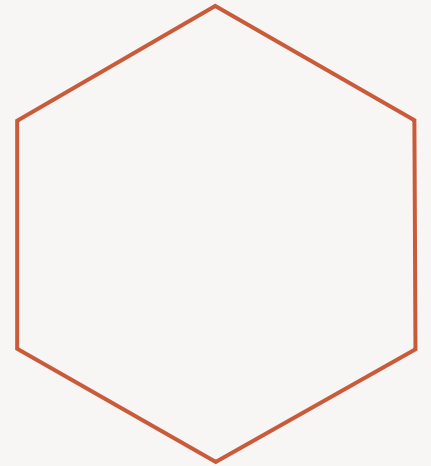
Source: [Center for Disease Control](#)



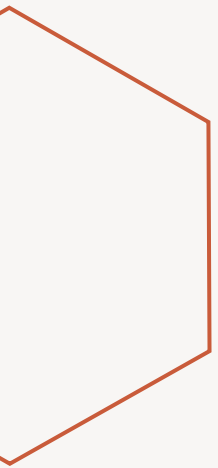
# Accessibility:

people with disabilities can get the same information, take part in the same activities, and use the same services as people without disabilities

Source: [Office for Civil Rights](#)



# Communications are...

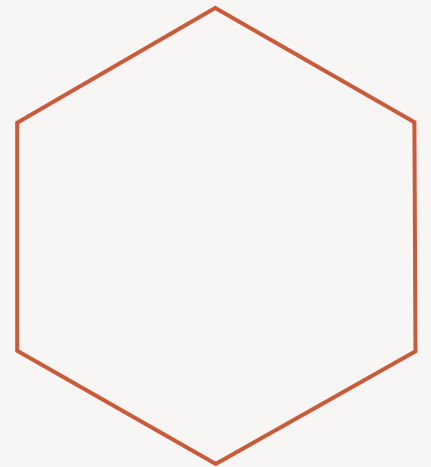
- 
- Websites
  - Social media
  - Press releases
  - Emergency alerts and notifications
  - Flyers and posters
  - Events calendar
  - Application forms
  - Town warrant
  - Meetings
  - And more!

# ADA Title II

**Title II of the ADA requires state and local governments to make sure that all their services, programs, and activities are accessible to people with disabilities.**

This includes digital spaces, such as:

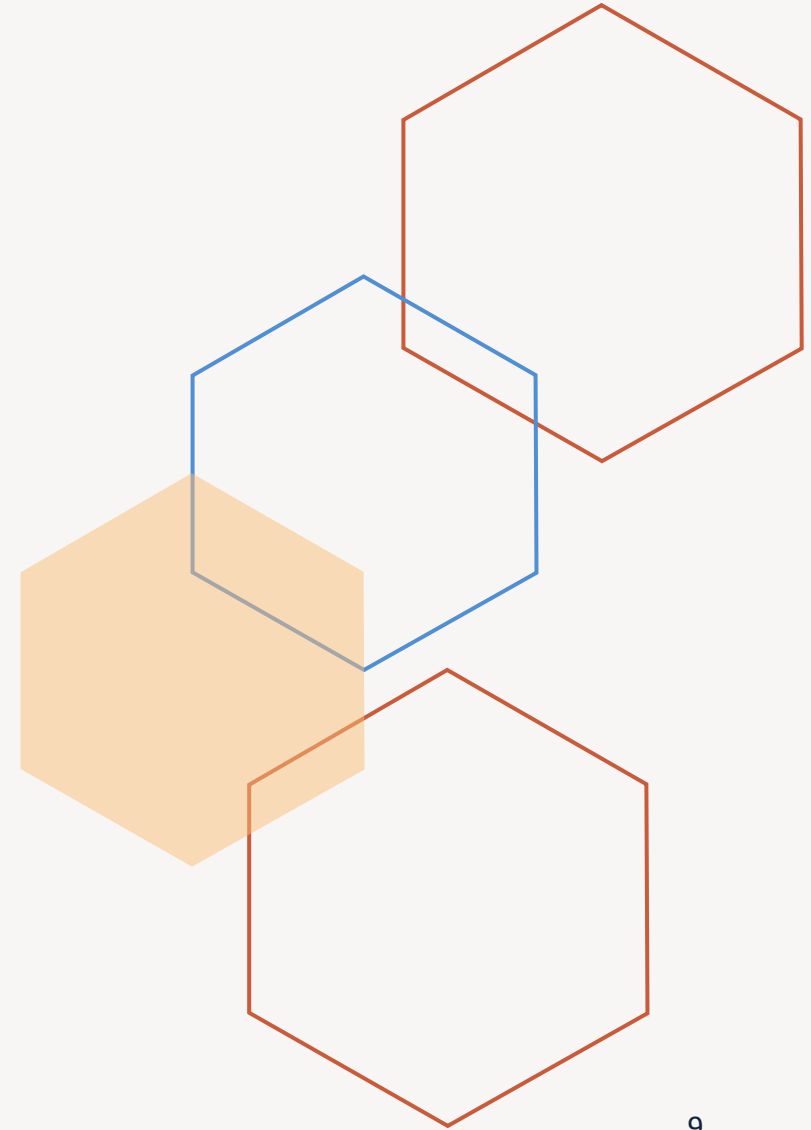
- Websites
- Mobile apps
- Online forms and documents
- Social media communications
- Videos and livestreams



# ADA Title II

**Third party content that Sherborn does not control is not required to meet Title II requirements.**

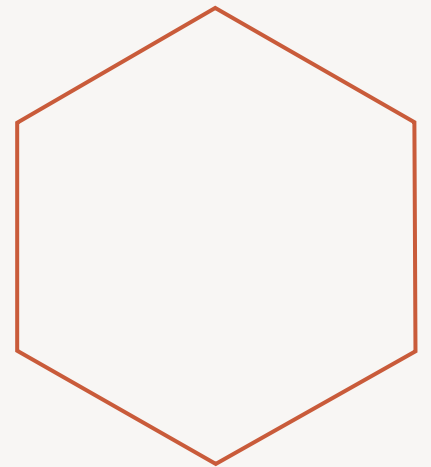
**However, any vendors hired to create or manage digital content on the Town's behalf are subject to those standards.**





# Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)

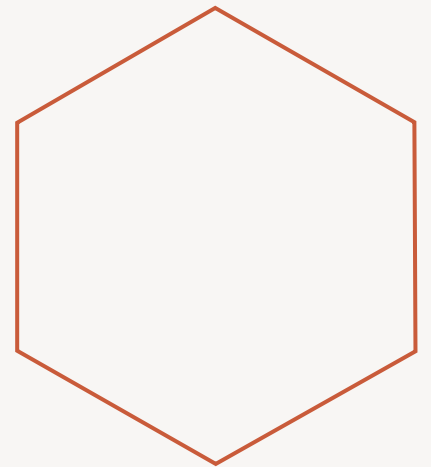
- Governments must make their websites and apps meet the WCAG 2.2 Level AA standard
- Sherborn's compliance deadline is April 26, 2027
- [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.2](#)



# Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)

## Digital Accessibility

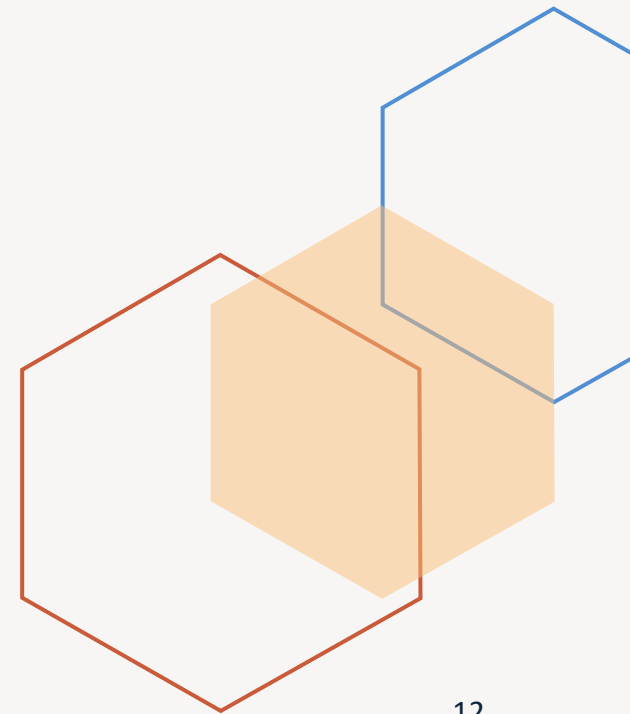
- Written Content
- Color Contrast
- Alternative Text
- Video Accessibility



# Written Content

Communications needs to be written and displayed in an accessible manner, which means that you should publish information in ways that make it easy to:

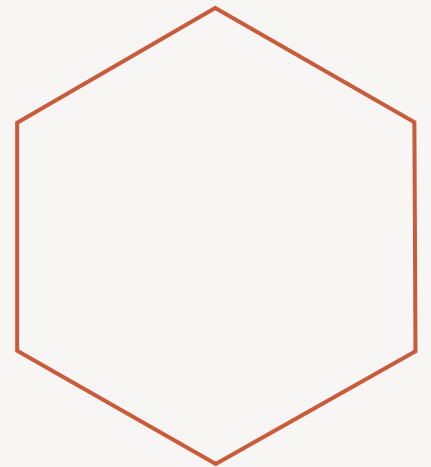
- Find
- Access
- Share
- Distribute



# Plain Language:

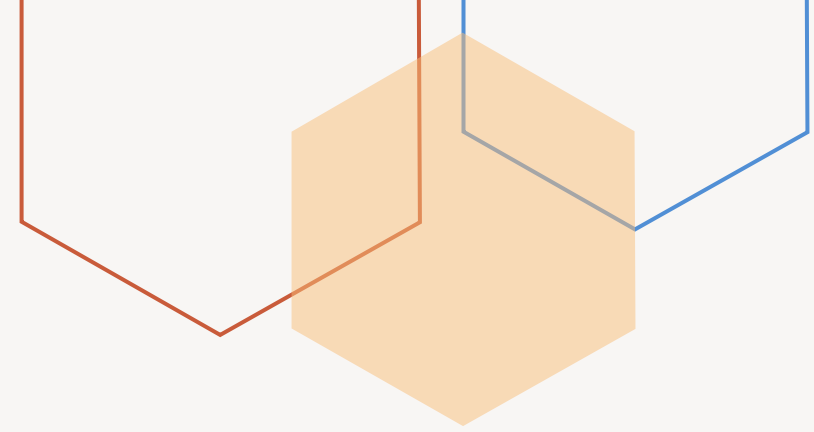
writing that is clear, concise, well-organized, and follows other best practices appropriate to the subject or field and intended audience.

Source: [Plain Writing Act of 2010](#)





# Plain Language



Ensures users can

- Find what they need
- Understand what they find the first time they read or hear it
- Use what they find to meet their needs

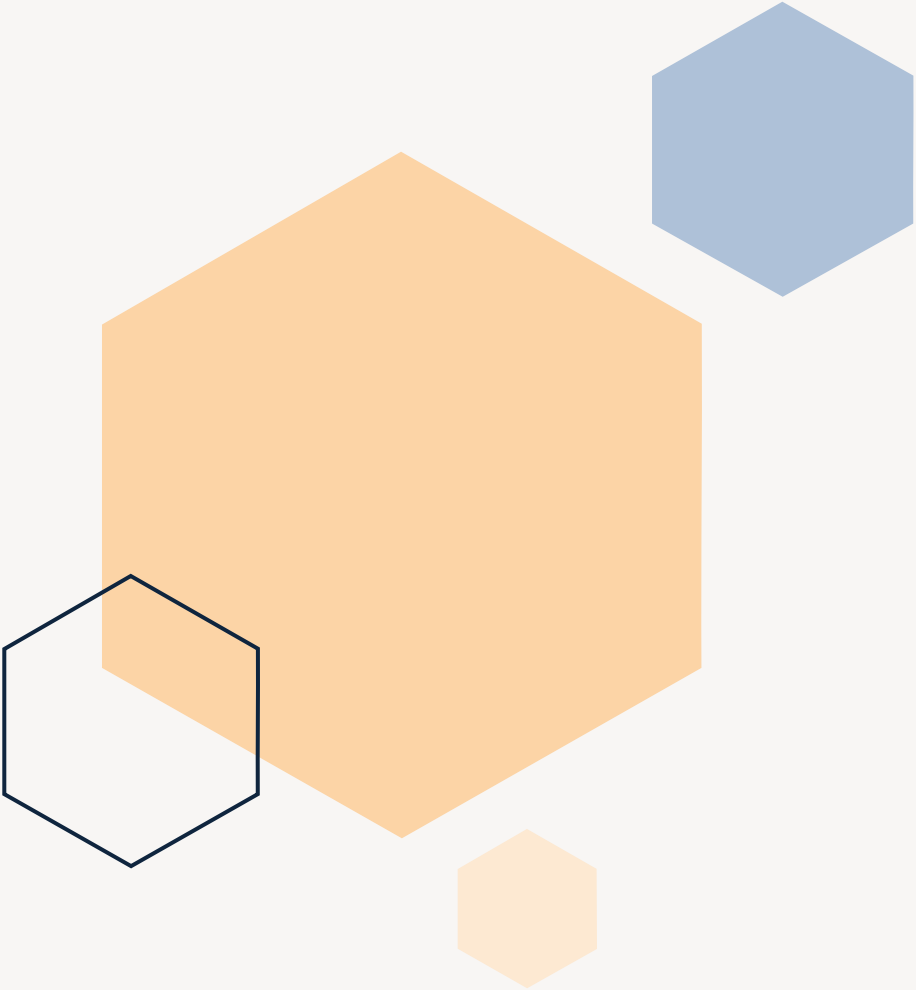
# Plain Language

## Use:

- Common, everyday words
- Short sentences and paragraphs (<20 words)
- Active voice (not passive)
  - "The Town will fix the sidewalk" instead of "The sidewalk will be fixed by the Town."
- Personal pronouns (2<sup>nd</sup> person "you")

## Avoid:

- Legal or technical language
- Long blocks of text



**“The application must be completed by the applicant and be received by the financial office no later than June 1st.”**

**“Submit your application by June 1st.”**

- [Hemingway Editor](#)

# Other Written Content Tips

- Spell out acronyms on first use
- Use #CamelCase for multi-word hashtags
- Use meaningful hyperlink descriptions

 **GOOD**

Visit [WebAIM's Link Text article](#) for details.

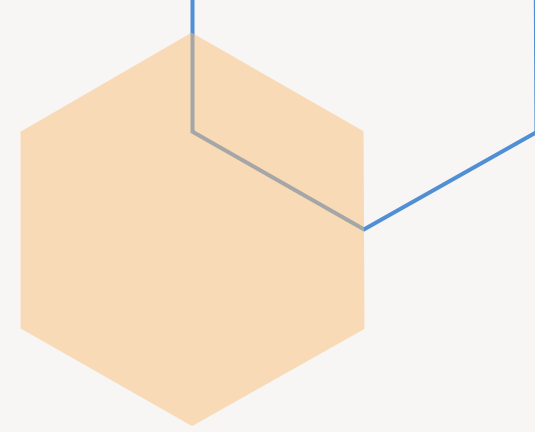
 **BAD**

[Click Here](#) for details.

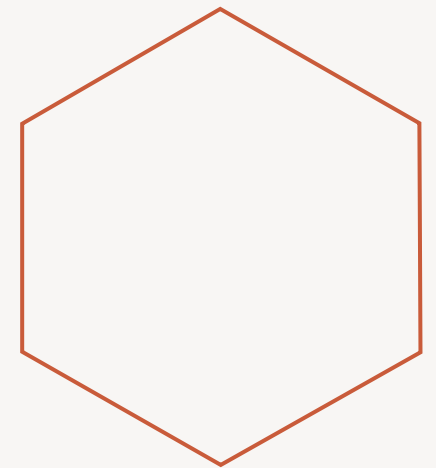
 **UGLY** (and unclickable)

[https://webaim.org/techniques/hypertext/link\\_text](https://webaim.org/techniques/hypertext/link_text)

# Structuring Written Content



Accessible communications have structured and consistent formatting, which allows compatibility with different assistive technologies

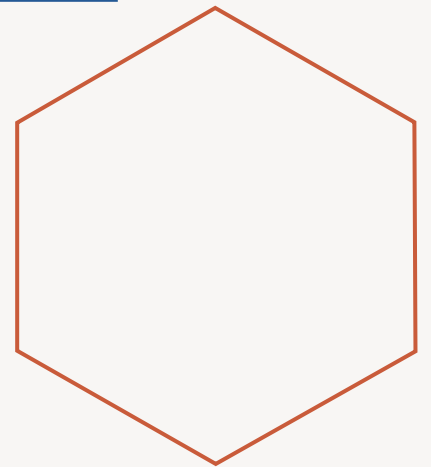




# Screen Reader:

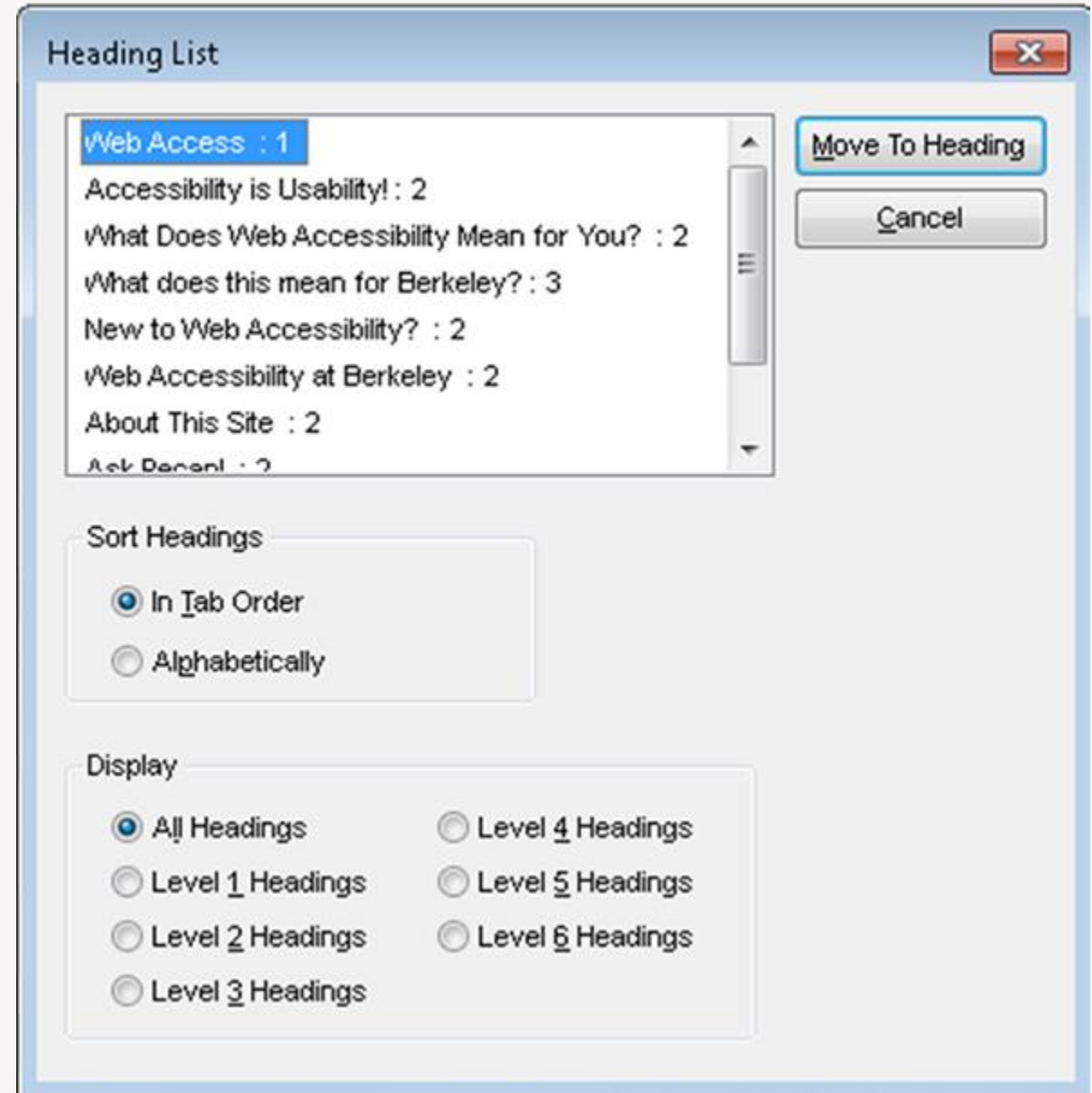
a form of assistive technology that renders text and image content as speech or Braille output.

Source: [American Foundation for the Blind](#)



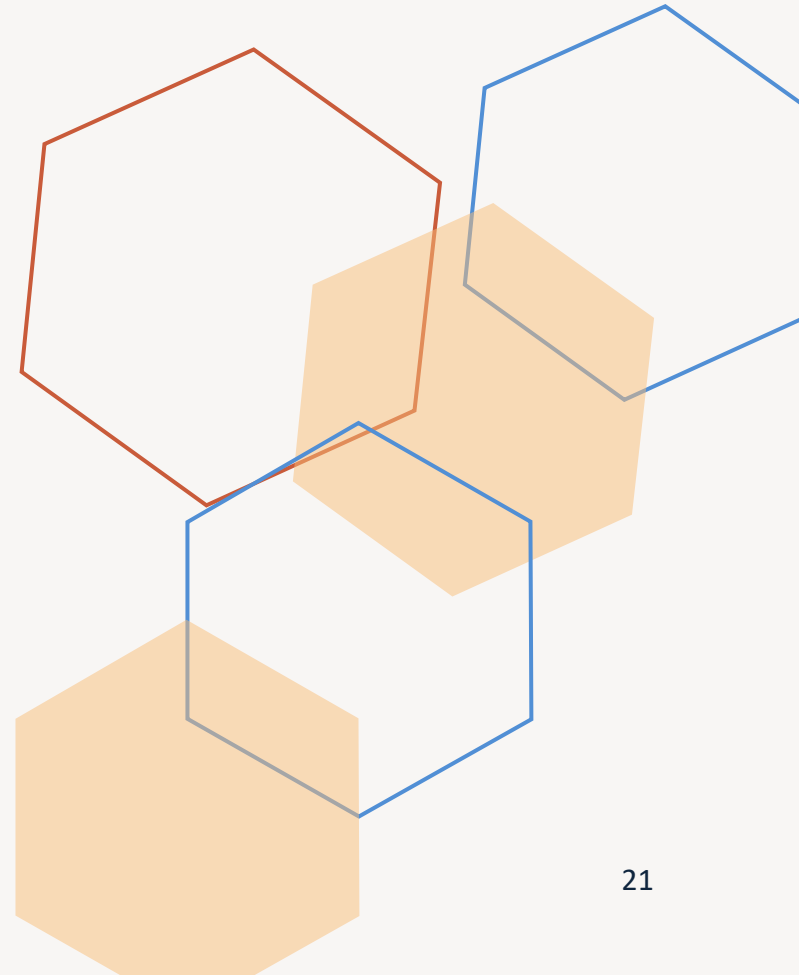
# Headings

- Give structure
- Improve comprehension
- Screen readers use headings to navigate



# Other Written Content Tips

- Font size at least 11 or 12 pt
- Avoid script fonts and italics
- Avoid scanned documents



# Uploading Content

- Use accessible file formats – PDF, Word, HTML
- Have a descriptive file naming convention
  - “2025\_Town\_Budget\_Summary.pdf” instead of “document1.pdf”

# Wet Signature / Stamp Workarounds

- Does the online version actually need a signature?
- Provide accessible version alongside scanned one
  - Clearly label this version as “Accessible Version (No Signature)” or similar
- Keep stamped version in person
  - Note on website that signed version is available in Town Hall
- Add scanned page to the end of an accessible document



# Example – Two Versions

- [Department of Public Health](#)

Learn more and share a one-pager on DPH and what we do: [DPH at a Glance PDF](#) | [Doc](#)

- [Proposition 2 ½ Training and Resources](#)

# Color Contrast:

making sure that the text and background colors are different enough from each other so that the words are easy to see and read

- Color contrast impacts the readability of content, both on the web and in print

# Color Contrast

Good color contrast means that everyone can see content no matter:

- Device
- Vision status
- Lighting
- Black and white printing
- WCAG standard ratio is at least 4.5:1
- [WebAIM Contrast Checker](#)

Test block

# Accessible Images

Images are a powerful communication tool

- Explain complex processes
- Highlight events
- Make information more engaging



# Alternative Text:

also known as alt text, is descriptive text that conveys the meaning of an image in digital content.

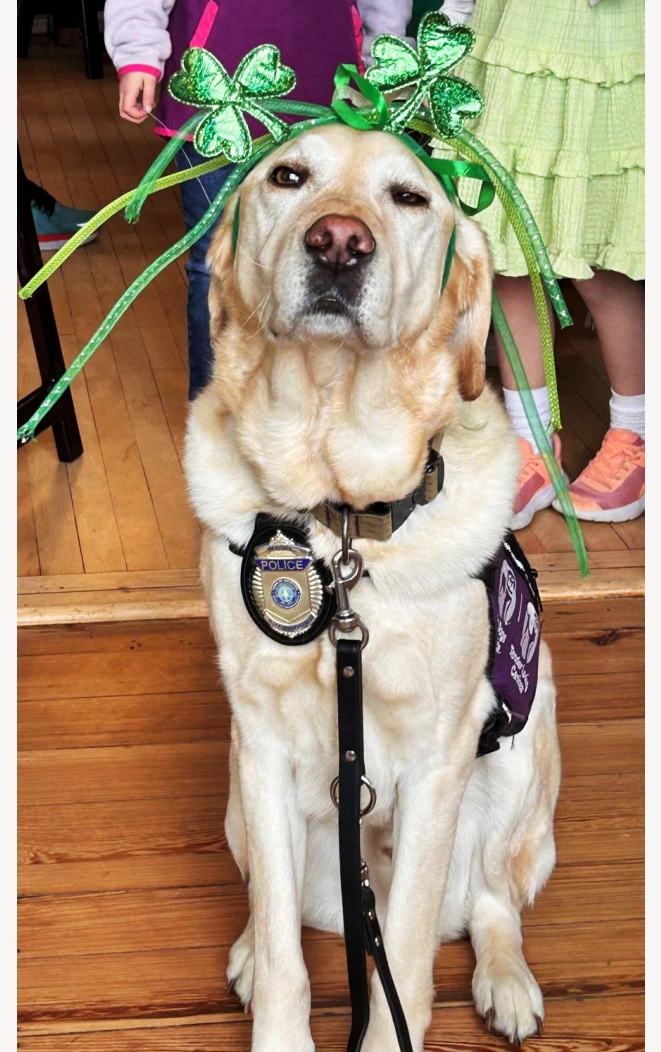
- the primary purpose of alt text is to make images accessible to individuals who are visually impaired or using screen readers.
- all non-text content needs to have alternative text that provides the same information found in the content





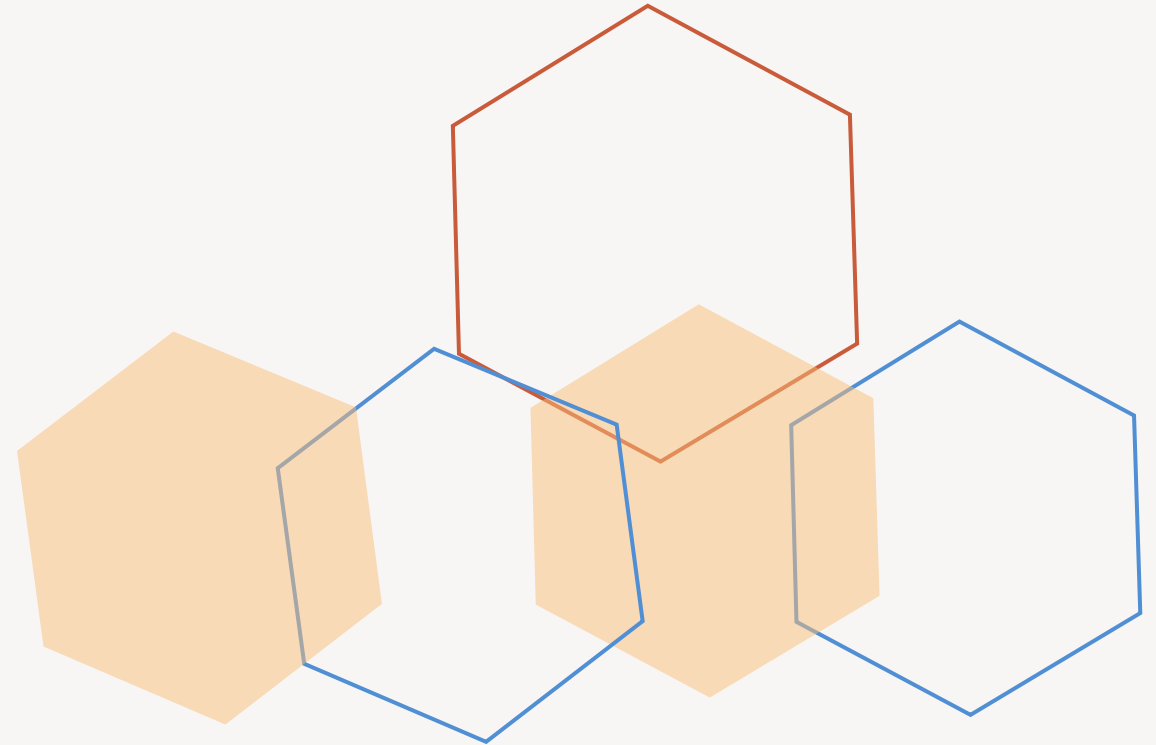
# Drafting Alternative Text

- Be accurate, objective, and succinct
- Avoid redundant phrasing
- Purely decorative content



# Video Accessibility

- Captioning videos ensure individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing can access audio content and videos



Profile

Meetings

Events &amp; Sessions

Personal Contacts

Personal Devices

Whiteboards

Notes

Surveys

Recordings &amp; Transcripts

Clips

Scheduler

Settings

Reports

Account Profile

Zoom Learning Center

Video Tutorials

Knowledge Base

General

Security

Schedule Meeting

In Meeting (Basic)

In Meeting (Advanced)

Email Notification

Other

**Remote support**


Allow meeting host to provide 1:1 remote support to another participant


**Manual captions**

Allow host to type closed captions or assign a participant/3rd-party service to add closed captions

☒ Allow host to type or assign a participant to type☒ Allow use of caption API Token to integrate with 3rd-party Closed Captioning services**Automated captions**

Allow users to enable automated captions in these languages in meetings and webinars.


Arabic, Cantonese, Chinese (Simplified), Chinese (Traditional), Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French (Canada), French (France), German, Hebrew, Hindi, Hungarian, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Malay, Persian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Spanish, Swedish, Tagalog, Tamil, Telugu, Thai, Turkish, Ukrainian, Vietnamese 

☐ Allow only the following users to enable captions for the meeting or webinar **Full transcript**

Allow viewing of full transcript in the in-meeting side panel

**Save Captions**

Allow participants to save fully closed captions or transcripts

☐ Allow only the following users to save captions from the meeting 

# Video Accessibility Tips

- Remind participants not to speak over one another
- In-person participants use microphone
- Say aloud anything addressed in comments
- Captions should not obstruct relevant information
- Have camera on for lip-readers
- Use a non-distracting or blurred background

# Putting it into Practice

- Written Content – Write, Display, and Upload
- Color Contrast
- Accessible Images – Draft and Add Alternative Text
- Video Accessibility
  
- Built-in accessibility checker

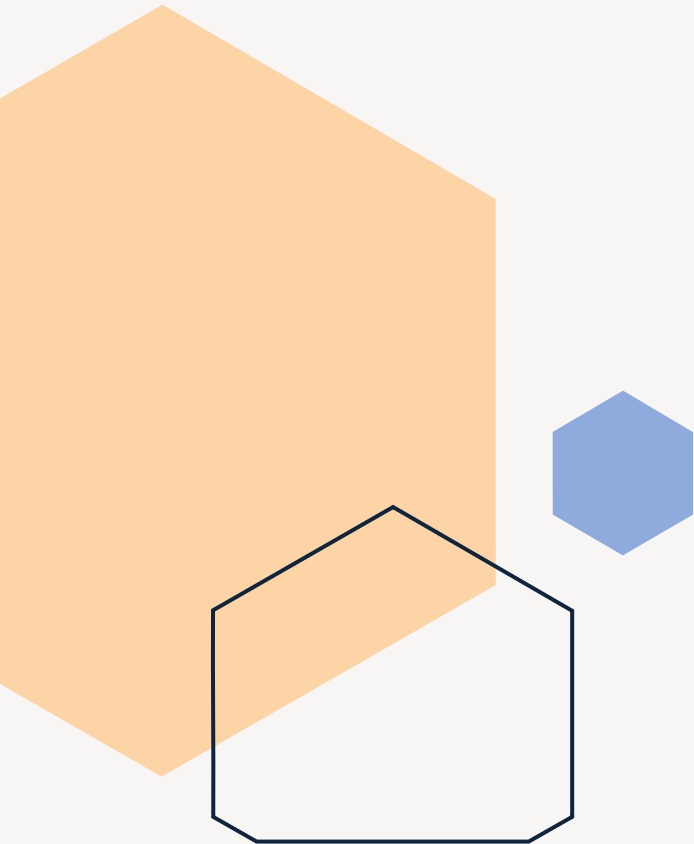


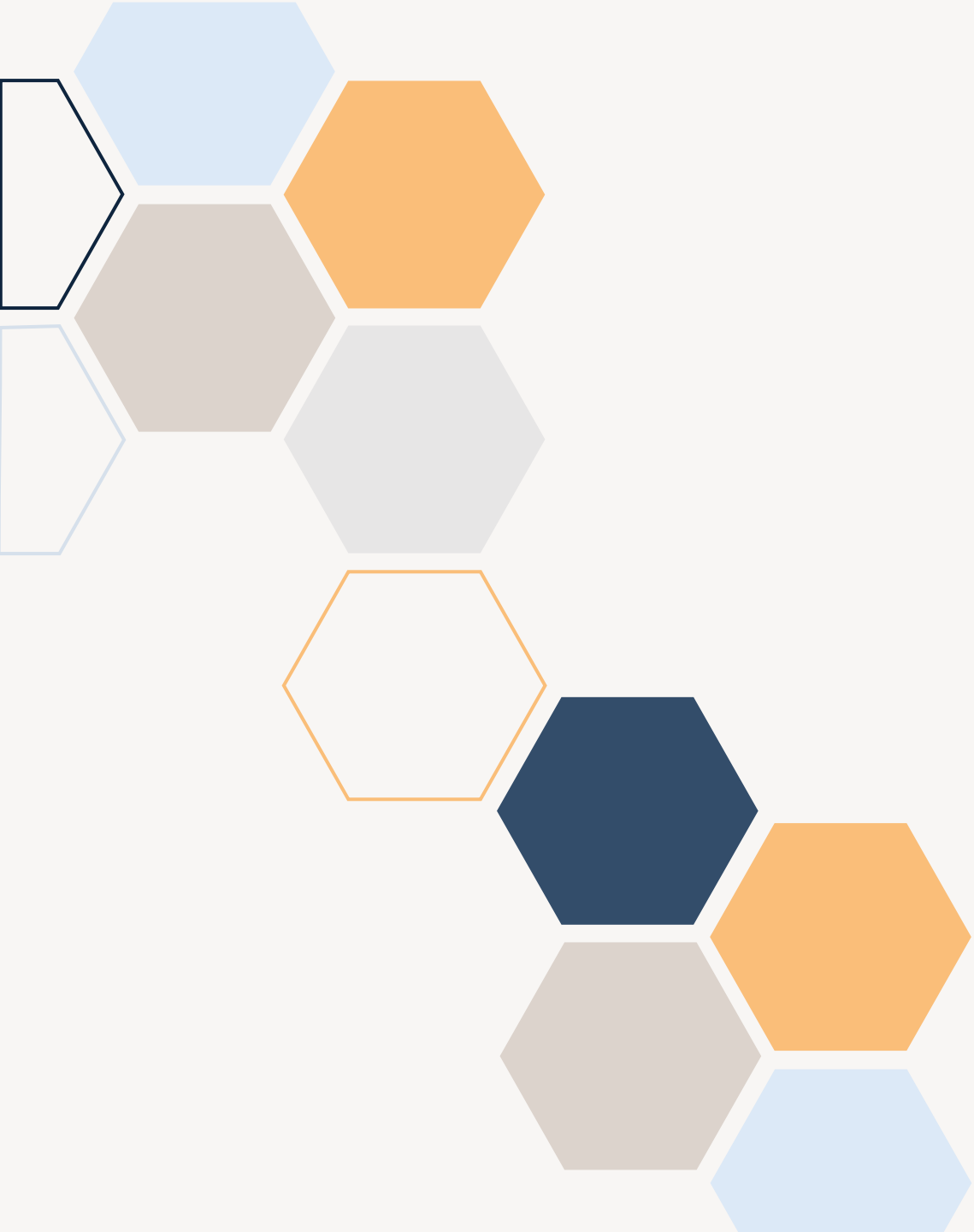
# Exceptions for Archived Content

- Older web content doesn't have to retroactively be made accessible *unless* someone asks for it
- Archive documents by creating a folder on your website clearly labeled archived documents

# Accessibility is a Continuous Process

- Governments must make their websites and apps meet the WCAG 2.2 Level AA standard
- Sherborn's compliance deadline is April 26, 2027





# Questions

**Collins Center for Public Management**

**Morgan Clark, [morgan.clark@umb.edu](mailto:morgan.clark@umb.edu)**

**Kelsey Edmond, [kelsey.edmond001@umb.edu](mailto:kelsey.edmond001@umb.edu)**

