CITY OF WHITEHORSE

Local Government
Accessible Communication Guide

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• The Hon Susan Ryan AO, Age Discrimination Officer
• Scope Communication Resource Centre
• Yooralla Communication Access Network
• Victorian Electoral Commission
• Youth Affairs Council of Victoria
• Cultural Perspectives
• Media Access Australia
• Prioletti Consulting.

The *Whitehorse Accessible Communication Project* is a joint partnership between Whitehorse City Council's Community Development and Communications Departments.

For additional information, please contact Council's MetroAccess Development Officer on 9262 6333.

The *Building Inclusive Communities Program –* MetroAccess is a partnership between the State Government of Victoria and local government.

Contents

Acronyms

ACRONYM	FULL TITLE
AT	Assistive Technology
CALD	Culturally And Linguistically Diverse
DDA	*Disability Discrimination Act 1992*
EMR	Eastern Metropolitan Region
HACC	Home And Community Care
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
WCAG	Web Content Accessibility Guidelines

Introduction

People's ability to read at a proficient level, understand and interpret information, influences their ability to make informed decisions and participate in the life of the community.

Councils have a long history of offering information in alternative formats at the request of an individual or community group. Alternative formats have in practice included making information available on the internet, translation of information into community languages, producing large print and audio versions of documents available on request and the development of summary documents. However, people who experience literacy or communication barriers may not be aware that they can request information in an alternative format or what is included in the suite of alternative formats.

The barriers experienced may stem from limited education opportunities or outcomes, the presence of a disability, speaking a language other than English and a lack of confidence or feelings of being overwhelmed with the amount of information presented at any one time.

Whitehorse City Council has a strong commitment to ensuring community members have the opportunity to communicate with and receive information from Council in a manner that meets their needs. The *Whitehorse Accessible Communication Project* provided an opportunity for Whitehorse City Council to bring eastern metropolitan region (EMR) councils together to explore the issues and opportunities emanating from the desire to provide accessible communication that meets the needs of the community. EMR council officers attended the *Accessible Communications Forum* and associated workshops in late 2013. The *Accessible Communication Guide* captures the research, knowledge, information and resources resulting from the forum and workshops.

The *Accessible Communication Guide* provides council officers with a local government focused resource that prompts thinking, suggests actions and provides linkages to further resources. The information contained in the guide is a resource only and is not intended to provide an exhaustive list of tools, techniques or instructions.

Each council is unique with individual priorities and resources that will influence starting points and progress towards implementing accessible communication strategies.

Accessible Communication and Legislation

Victorian councils have legislative obligations relating to the provision of accessible communication. Legislation relevant to this guide includes but is not limited to:

	LEGISLATION
FEDERAL GOVERNMENT	*Disability Discrimination Act 1992* *Racial Discrimination Act 1995* *Age Discrimination Act 2004* *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*
STATE GOVERNMENT	*Victorian Local Government Act 1989* *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* *Victorian Multicultural Act 2011* *Victorian Disability Act 2006* *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001*

Human Rights Approach

The *Accessible Communication Guide* is set within a human rights framework to ensure that:

- All people in the community are considered in all stages of communicating with and receiving information from their council
- Potential human rights issues are identified prior to the implementation of proposed communication, policy, projects or other council initiatives
- Councils are able to meet their legislative and policy obligations.

The *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006 (Charter)* requires public authorities such as local government to act consistently with the human rights contained in the Charter. This is achieved through the deliberate consideration of human rights in the development of policies, plans, making laws, delivering services, and making decisions. By understanding and promoting human rights councils can help to build a culture of human rights within the community.

> Accessible communication options provide all community members with opportunities to communicate by reducing barriers and engaging in meaningful and supportive ways.
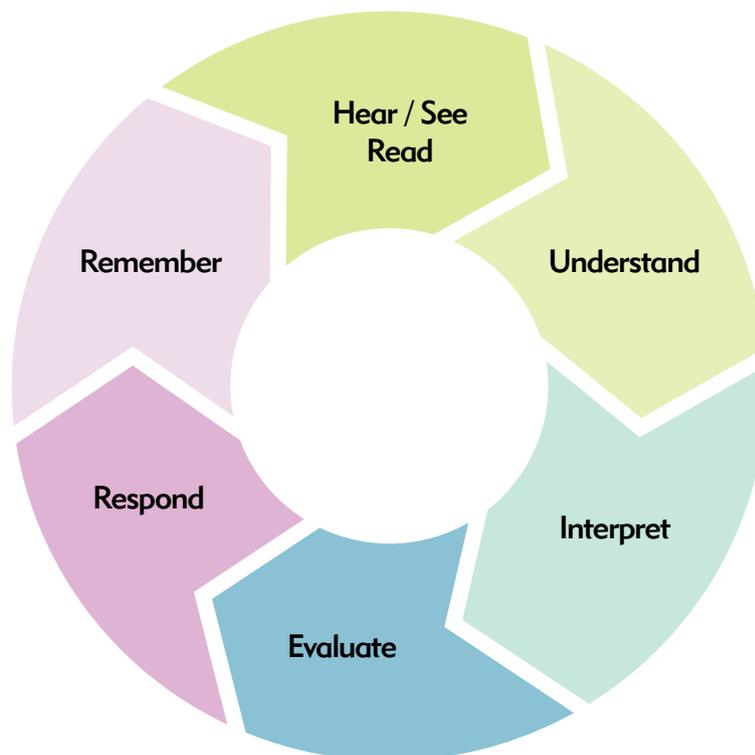
What is Accessible Communication?

Communication is generally seen as imparting or exchanging information by speaking, writing or using some other medium; it involves the sending and receiving of information. The communication process requires the ability to process and understand the information that is shared and respond accordingly. This interaction is displayed Diagram 1.

Diagram 1: Communication Process

Accessible communication is purposefully developed for people who for a variety of reasons cannot use or access standard information formats. Community members may experience barriers to communication for a variety of reasons including:

- Limited education opportunities or outcomes
- Presence of a disability
- Speaking a language other than English
- Presence of mental illness
- Lack of confidence
- Feelings of being overwhelmed with the amount of information presented at any one time.

Councils' provision of accessible communication is intended to assist people who experience a barrier in one or more steps in the communication process.

For example:

A person who is ageing may feel overwhelmed when presented with a large amount of information regarding their eligibility for a program or service. This may prevent the person from reading the material as they may question their ability to understand the information.

Providing clear, concise information that uses imagery to convey the message may be helpful to the person. This can be achieved by providing easy to understand fact sheets that explain the basic requirements and a contact for further information may assist the person.

Accessible communication requires the development of awareness and valuing the different ways people understand and communicate information. The provision of accessible communication enables people to understand information, make choices and decisions, express feelings and needs, and participate in community life.

Accessible communication requires councils to continue to be aware of the changing needs of community members, the technologies available to assist people and the need to develop a suite of responses across a variety of mediums to communicate with the community.

'At least 95 per cent of published information is not available in an accessible format.'

Vision Australia – 7 Steps to Print Accessibility 2013

Simple Versus Simplistic

There is a misconception that accessible communication requires a 'dumbing down' of information or that producing documents in a simple easy-to-read format will impact on the professional image of the organisation. However, unless some of the more complex information produced by organisations is presented in a more accessible format it will be meaningless to a significant proportion of the community.

To highlight the difference between complex, plain and Easy English, Scope provided the following example.

Complex Language:

It is important that you shall read the notes, advice and information detailed opposite then complete the form overleaf (all sections) prior to its immediate return to Council by way of the envelope provided.

Plain Language:

Please read the notes opposite before you fill in the form.
Then send it back to us as soon as possible in the envelope provided.

Easy English:

- Read all the information on page 13
- Fill in the blue form
- Put the form in the envelope
- Send the envelope to me by Friday 20 May 2014.

Accessible communication involves:

- Simplifying language
- Using minimal punctuation
- Simplifying layout and design
- Images that illustrate the heading or key messages (Scope).

Plain language is advocated in all council communication strategies.

It is easily understood by most people in the community, gets the message across quicker and less time is spent explaining the content of documents.

Who Benefits from Accessible Communication?

Often accessible communication is directly linked to people with a disability; however, low literacy levels are common in the broader community. The International Assessment of Adult Competencies, Australia 2011-2012 (ABS 4228.0, 2013) indicates that nearly half (43.7 per cent) of the Australian adult population had low literacy and numeracy skills. Level 3 skills are considered to be the minimum needed in order to meet everyday life and work demands (National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2012).

Around 3.7 per cent (620,000) of Australians aged 15 to 74 years had literacy skills at Below Level 1, a further 10 per cent (1.7 million) at Level 1, 30 per cent (5 million) at Level 2, 38 per cent (6.3 million) at Level 3, with only 14 per cent (2.4 million) at Level 4, and 1.2 per cent (200,000) at Level 5. This information is depicted in Diagram 2.

The International Assessment of Adult Competencies (ABS 4228.0, 2014) found that lower levels of literacy were associated with education outcomes, employment status, age and English as a second language.

Diagram 2: Proportion at each literacy level, 2011–12

Literacy Skill Level
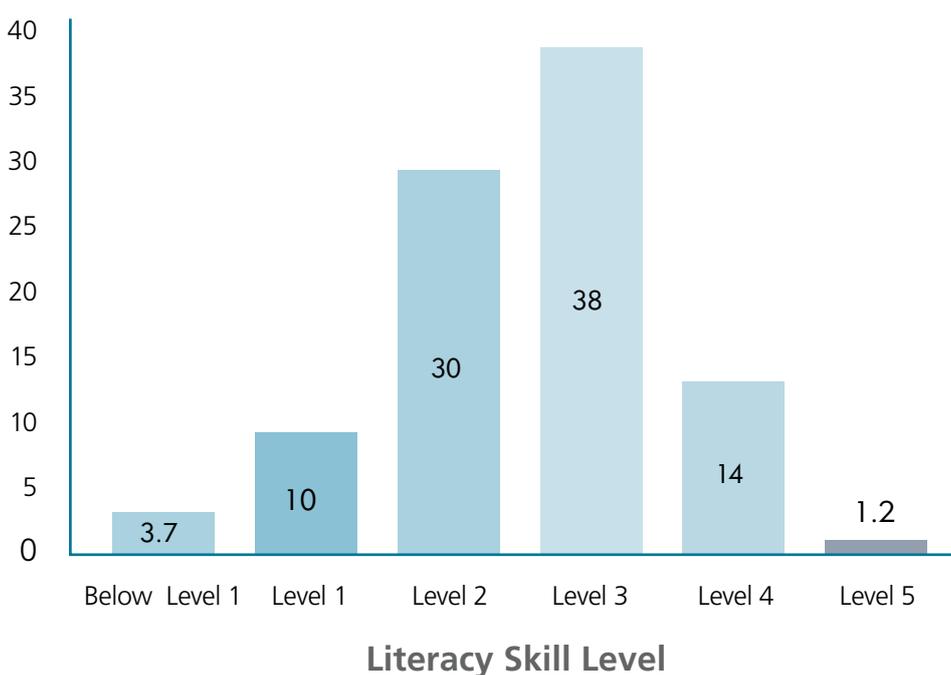
The EMR is comprised of the following local government areas:

- Boroondara
- Knox
- Manningham
- Maroondah

- Monash
- Whitehorse
- Yarra Ranges.

Demographic information sourced from the Social Statistics website indicates that our communities are diverse in language, places of birth, age structures and education attainment levels, all good reasons for providing information in accessible formats. The following EMR demographic data relates to older people, young people, people from culturally diverse communities and people with a disability who were all the focus of the forum and workshops.

EMR DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION
Approximately 1,450,941 people live in the region
26.7 per cent of people were born in an non-English speaking country
3 per cent settled in the last 2.5 years
30 per cent of people born overseas speak a language other than English at home
4.3 per cent of people born in a non-English speaking country report limited English fluency
The top five languages other than English spoken across the region are Mandarin, Cantonese, Greek, Italian and Vietnamese
26 per cent of population are aged between 5 - 24 years
10 per cent of people are aged between 20 - 24 years reported completing `less than Year 11
13.9 per cent of the population is aged over 64 years
Approximately 33,758 people living in the EMR report a level of disability
4.4 per cent of residents report requiring assistance with core tasks
0.4 per cent of the EMR population identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

How Do We Make Communication Accessible?

The community's impression of local government is influenced by the way it communicates. The method of communication and words used in letters, reports, proposals, contracts, instructions, procedures, brochures, flyers, invitations and programs help to promote a positive relationship with community members.

It is not enough to get the facts right. Information must be complete, accurate and use language that the reader can understand. Accessibility needs to be considered in all communication and in the various formats used to convey Council information. The Tasmanian Government (2014) argues that times have changed and it is no longer the reader's responsibility to understand a document, it is now considered the writer's responsibility to make the document easy to understand.

This section of the guide provides information and examples relating to:

- Planning accessible communication
- Formatting written material
- Pictures and images
- Web accessibility
- Accessible online documents.

Planning Accessible Communication

Planning accessible communication will ensure people do not miss out on valuable information and opportunities. The design of communication should be simple and uncluttered.

1. What Are the Key Messages I Would Like to Get Across?

List the messages you want to get across and why they are important in simple statements. The clearer the message, the easier it will be for the target audience to understand and respond to the communication.

For example:

State the purpose of the communication in simple sentences. The messages conveyed in the *Accessible Communication Guide* are:

1. **Access to information is a human right**

2. **Legislation confirms councils' obligation to make sure communication is accessible to all community members**

3. **Accessible communication is not difficult.**

2. Who is the Target Audience?

Understanding who you are trying to communicate with aids the identification of the communication method, language and design you will ultimately use.

Consider:

Is the information intended for adults, young people or children, people from a particular cultural community, people with a disability, all people in the community or a particular person?

Are there key people in the target audience that you can discuss your aims and communication methods with, for example; a religious or community leader?

Using councils' representative committees such as disability advisory committees and youth representative committees is another way to ensure your message will be meaningful to the target audience. Council officers have strong network or partnerships with community-based networks such as multifaith networks and migrant settlement committees that could be a source of valuable experience and knowledge.

3. Is There a Cultural Context to Be Considered?

Providing information in a culturally sensitive and relevant way builds meaning for people in that specific community. Sometimes this requires specific strategies and at other times it requires the careful crafting of a universal document.

Building Relevance

Ensuring that the communication is relevant to a broad range of community members increases the accessibility of the communication. To achieve this, communication must use language that is relevant to the community and images that represent the community.

Consider:

Symbols
The presence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags can indicate to Indigenous community members that they are welcomed or that the information is relevant to people in their community.

Individual or Family
Communication for the general Australian community tends to focus on the individual – your health will improve if you stop smoking. However projects described by Cultural Perspectives during the forum highlighted that a focus on family impacts are more effective when marketing to the Arabic and Vietnamese communities.

For example:

In Australia the focus of the message has been – your health will improve if you stop smoking, smoking will kill you.

Working with Arabic and Vietnamese communities the more successful messages have included impacts on the family – what will happen to your family if you get sick?
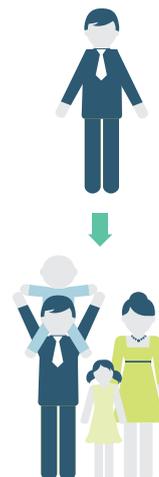
4. Language Translations

If the document is to be translated into community languages, target the groups you are trying to engage. There needs to be a checking process to ensure the intent of the translation is captured.

For example:

Words such as 'disability' have no direct translation in some languages and have been translated to 'mad person' or terms such as 'early intervention' have been translated to 'pre-emptive strike' as there was no direct translation of the term.

It is good practice to promote the availability of published documents in other languages through a statement on a hard copy document or having the option on web pages for people to self-select the relevant language.

If the promotion or event provides face-to-face communication opportunities then use international symbols to convey that language and Auslan interpreters can be provided.

5. Communication Type

Councils use a variety of methods to communicate with the community. The planning process will identify how that information will be presented to the community.

Are you creating a:

- Strategic plan or policy
- Letter to residents
- Handbook or guide
- Promotional brochure
- Information sheet?

Two fold or book-style brochures are the best option for people to open if they have limited hand skills associated with a disability or medical conditions such as arthritis.

Will the document:

- Be available as a download on the internet only
- Be available as a download on the internet and as a hard copy
- Will handouts be provided; for example, information from community presentations?

Environmentally-friendly recycled non-reflective paper is recommended. Ensure that your paper colour provides the required contrast requirement between the paper colour and any text or image appearing on that paper.

6. Include Contact Details

Including contact details enables people to have access to more information if required and provides an opportunity to check understanding and explore information at a greater depth.

Contact details should include:

- Key contact position
- Physical address
- Land line contact / mobile number/ SMS number
- National Relay Service Number or TTY (Telephone Typewriter)
- Telephone Interpreter Service
- Email address
- Website address.

Communication through email or SMS enables people who have hearing or speech difficulties to communicate with Council.

7. Access Information on Promotional Material

A range of access information can be included in promotional material for events, forums and other gatherings.

Consider using the reverse side of a flyer to include a map and information that identifies:

- The location of accessible car parking and the closest alternative parking including any costs.
- The most accessible entrance if the main entrance is not accessible
- The public transport options – include bus numbers, train lines
- The availability of language and Auslan interpreters.

Formatting Written Information

The information contained in this section applies to all written communication for example:

- Letters
- Policy and strategic plans
- Online content
- Research
- Promotional material such as brochures.

There are four key elements of effective writing:

1 Clarity   Write simply to avoid unnecessary complexity.
Use words readers will be familiar with.

2 Conciseness   Be brief and to the point. Sentences should
be 15-20 words. Think about the length of paragraphs.

3 Accuracy   Use the most suitable words to convey what
you mean and ensure your spelling is correct.

4 Coherence   Structure your writing logically and link
your ideas smoothly.

For specific organisational expectations, refer to your council's Writing, Design or Style Guide.

8. Terminology / Language

The words you use to communicate are powerful – they can empower or disempower people. It is important that the language and terminology used are consistent within the document.

- **Use active voice when writing**

  For example:

  When using active voice, the subject performs the action
  e.g. 'No one responded to the expression of interest.'

  When using passive voice, the subject receives the action
  e.g. 'The expression of interest was responded to by no one.'

- **Avoid technical language.**
  Use everyday words that are easy to understand. Where technical language is used, provide an explanation of the terms.

  For example: The 'road reserve' is the area from property boundary to the road that includes the footpath, nature strip, kerb and kerb channel.

- **Avoid abbreviations and acronyms.**
  Where you have to use abbreviations and or acronyms, explain them in the body of the text when it is first used.

  For example: Councils in the eastern metropolitan region (EMR) …

- **Avoid generalisations and euphemisms**
  A generalisation takes specific qualities and applies them broadly.

  For example: All people born in Scandinavian countries have blonde hair.

  A euphemism refers to the substitution of a mild, indirect or vague term for one considered harsh, blunt, or offensive.

  For example: Where terms such as 'passed away' are used instead of 'died'.

- 'Person first' writing puts the emphasis on the person or people rather than focusing on the disability, background, religion or other characteristic. Using person first writing will assist you to avoid generalisations, creating a respectful relationship with the audience. The following examples highlight preferred language use.

  For example:

USE	DON'T USE
People with a disability People with disabilities	Disabled people The disabled
People from the Chinese community	Chinese people The Chinese
People who use wheelchairs Jason who uses a wheelchair	People confined to a wheelchair Wheelchair users
Mr Smith who has dementia	Mr Smith suffers from dementia

9. Fonts

- 12 point sans serif fonts is the minimum requirement for accessibility. Sans serif fonts do not have the small counterstrokes capping at the end of each character's main strokes. Helvetica Medium, Arial, Tahoma are sans serif fonts. Fancy, decorative styles may result in confusion.

For example:

> *Fancy decorative styles are harder to read even using 14pt fonts*

> Sans serif fonts are easy to read

- It is not uncommon for people with vision impairment to request information in 18 font or higher. However, it is not as simple as photocopying a document from A4 to A3. Photocopied enlargements change the paper size but may not enlarge the font size to the desired level. Photocopied enlargements may also decrease the sharpness of the lettering and images. It is best practice to reformat the document to the size requested.

- Use standard upper and lower case as this will generally improve word and letter recognition when compared to italic, small or large capital only styles.

For example:

> USING CAPITAL LETTERS MAKES IT HARDER
> FOR PEOPLE WITH VISION AND
> LITERACY ISSUES TO RECOGNISE LETTERS.

- Limit the use of italics and underlining to improve letter recognition.

- Characters such as brackets, semi colons, slashes and hyphens should be used sparingly to enhance the accessibility of documents.

10. Styles

Use the Microsoft style ribbon to create consistent headings and layout features. The inbuilt features of the Microsoft style function link to the features with PDF program to increase the accessibility of the document once it is converted to PDF. Largely this occurs through the PDF 'tag' structure that is read by assistive technology. This is similar for InDesign and Excel programs.

11. Colours

Contrast refers to the difference between the colour of the writing and the colour of the background. Some people prefer to read light text on a dark background over the more commonly used dark text on a light background.

For example:

The text box with grey on green writing is much harder to see than the white on pink text box.

Some people cannot read text if there is not enough contrast between the text and the background.

For others bright colours (high luminance) are difficult. They need low luminance.

A quick contrast check is to turn your document, including the images into a grey scale. The document will be difficult to read if there is not enough contrast between the background colour and writing or images.

- Approximately 8 per cent of males and 0.4 per cent of females experience red/green colour blindness. A further 5 per cent of people experience blue/green colour blindness. Where documents contain red writing on a green background or vice versa the person who experiences colour blindness would not be able to read the information.

For example:

Normal Vision   **Red/Green Colour blindness**

- If all promotional material is uniform in colour and layout it may be difficult for people to identify different services, programs or information. Using colour variance in the title may assist people.

For example:

If all of the brochures relating to children's services included a dark purple heading and all of the park and vegetation information contained a dark green heading the person is assisted by the visual colour change.

- Using colours for headings within a document is effective and draws the reader's attention. Heading colours need to be consistent throughout the document and also have the appropriate colour contrast to both the background and text that immediately follows the heading.

- Do not use colour alone to convey instructions or meaning.
  Use colour along with words.

  For example:

  Push the red button for further information about program A, the orange button for program B and the blue button for program C.

- Reduce distractions by not using watermarks or complicated background designs. The more colourful and busy the watermark or background design, the more difficult it is to focus on the text:

  For example:
  Which of the following text boxes is the easiest to read?

12. Columns

When using columns within a document ensure there is a good amount of space between each column. Limit the number of columns that appear on the page and ensure that there is consistency within larger documents.

Some screen reader software scan directly across columns. Long columns require the person to scroll up and down to read which can be difficult for people who have limited hand movement.

Where columns are used within a document, setting the reading order of the document using Adobe Acrobat Pro can increase accessibility.

14. Table of Contents

All documents over 10 pages must have a table of contents. A table of contents enables the reader to skip to the relevant section. The table of contents should be inserted once the document is finalised and correctly formatted.

Using Microsoft styles to format headings ensures that the table of contents is directly linked to the heading contained in the document. Heading levels from the table of contents can be adjusted to depict the desired level of detail.

To create a table of contents in Microsoft Word

Select Reference Tab	Select Table of Contents	Select Preferred Style

15. Page Numbering

To increase the online accessibility of documents it is important that a consistent page numbering style is used throughout the document. When converted to PDF formats, documents that contain more than one page numbering style may appear misaligned.

16. Headers and Footers

Header and footers created using the Microsoft Insert function can be ignored by assistive technologies when they are assigned a blank alternative text.

17. Scanned Text

It is important to use actual text rather than scanned text, screen grab/ dump within a document. Scanned text is presented as an image within the document and the content cannot be read by assistive technology.

Pictures and Images

Accessible communication strengthens the relationship between images, pictures and text. Images and pictures used within accessible communication relate directly to the content of the document, with the express purpose of providing clues to the reader about the topic and or content.

17. Pictures

The term picture here is used to describe a range of images from purposefully taken photographs, stock photographs, clip art, line drawings or other images.

- Images that directly relate to a particular section of the text should appear close to the text e.g. a graph should immediately follow or precede the explanatory text.

- Placement of pictures used to highlight a portion of the text should appear consistently on either the left or right hand side of the text throughout the document.

- Ensure images do not interfere with left to right scanning of text and avoid placement of decorative images within columns as this will impact on screen reader functioning.

- Pictures can be used effectively to reinforce messages in the text but without care they may convey unintended messages.

For Example:

If Council is developing program brochure that aims to promote a parent support program to young parents of children with a disability then:

Pictures used should reflect the target group and include images of young parents with children with a disability.

Include a reference to what will happen in the program e.g. if it is play-based parent support group then include an image of parents talking while their children with a disability are playing.

Consider the potential unintended messages of images used in promotions.

Continuing with the previous example, if all images are of families or children without a disability, the unintended messages may:

• Reaffirm that the child with a disability is different or unworthy

• Convey to the parents that the program isn't for their child Suggest that other parents in the program won't understand their circumstances

• Images need to be sharp, clear and not cluttered with other stimulating information.

For Example:
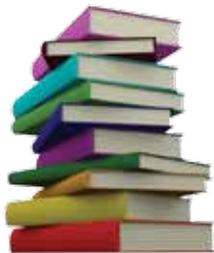Images for 'books' taken directly from Microsoft Clip Art

Image 1   **Image 2**   **Image 3**

Image 1: *It is difficult to see the stack of books against the busy background.*

Images 2 and 3: *Are more accessible; just different image types.*

18. Graphs and Tables

Graphs and tables are a visual way of explaining complex information. When using graphs, diagrams or other visual information it is important that the key information is also contained in the main body of the text.

- The accessibility of the document will be improved by using the Microsoft 'Insert Table', 'Insert Chart' or 'SmartArt' which builds consistency within the document.

- For data tables, column header rows should be identified. Open Table Tools Design Tab select the header row check box. This will also be the repeated header if the table breaks across a page.

- Avoid the use of merged or split cells as they impact on assistive technology functioning.

- Screen reader software will pick up the text and read row by row therefore it is important that tables are understandable when you read it from left to right on each row. Use the 'Tab' function to preview the order in which the screen reader will read the table.

A	B	C
1	2	3
1	2	3
1	2	3

19. Animation

People who have photosensitive epilepsy may experience seizures triggered by flickering or flashing imagery.

Flashing items contained in a document should not flash more than three times in any one second period.

If it is essential to include flashing or blinking elements in your communication, you must warn the reader so they can avoid it, or turn the flash component off. The information needs to be supplied in the information in another format within the web page.

Web Accessibility

Australia, like many other countries, has come to rely on internet-based communication as a means of providing information to and obtaining information from community members. Independent access to information is the main driver for ensuring that online information and content is accessible to all people in the community.

In addition to the broad range of impacts associated with a disability, access to the internet may be limited by the person's individual circumstances such as:

- Being able to use a keyboard or mouse, or change between the two
- Having a text-only screen, a small screen or a slow internet connection
- Having an early version of a browser, a different browser type, a voice browser or a different operating system
- Being in a situation where their eyes or hands are busy or interfered with i.e rapid uncontrolled hand or eye movements
- Not being able to clearly hear the computer, for example voice quality of reader or being in a distracting noisy environment
- Having limited knowledge of the software accessibility features or how to access the software that meets their needs.

Assistive technologies enable people with disabilities and other members of the community to perform tasks on a computer they would otherwise be unable to accomplish. Commonly used assistive technologies include:

- Keyboard control and shortcuts
- Screen readers
- Screen magnifiers
- Speech recognition software
- Closed captions and Teletext
- Alternative input devices
- Optical character recognition
- Joysticks or trackballs
- Touch screen keyboards and mouse controls.

Web accessibility requires making the content of the website available to every user. Web accessibility requires both a strategic and technical approach. It also involves the content of websites including:

- Video, audio and flash
- Documents – PDF, Word, Excel.

Accessibility requirements are mandated in government policy, legislation and through whole of government commitments.

The WCAG 2.0 Structure contains four principles, 12 guidelines, 61 success criteria and hundreds of sufficient and advisory techniques. These four levels work together to increase accessibility. The following table provides greater detail of the WCAG 2.0 Guidelines. For more detailed information about the WCAG 2.0 Principles and Guidelines as well as examples of how these can be achieved can be found on the WC3- Principles and Guidelines 2.0 web page.

WCAG 2.0 Principles and Guidelines

PRINCIPLE	GUIDELINE	
1. PERCEIVABLE	1.1	Provide text alternatives for any non-text content so that is can be changed into other forms people need, such as large print, Braille, speech, symbols or simpler language
	1.2	Provide alternatives for time-based media
	1.3	Create content that can be presented in different ways, (for example simpler layout) without losing information or structure
	1.4	Make it easier for users to see and hear content including separating foreground from background
2. OPERABLE	2.1	Make all functionality available from a keyboard
	2.2	Provide users with enough time to read and use content
	2.3	Do not design content in a way that is known to cause seizures
	2.4	Provide ways to help users navigate find content and determine where they are.
3. UNDERSTANDABLE	3.1	Make content readable and understandable.
	3.2	Make Web pages appear and operate in predictable ways
	3.3	Help users avoid and correct mistakes
4. ROBUST	4.1	Maximise compatibility with current and future user agents including assistive technologies

The diversity of Australian web users with disabilities and their right to independently access information is recognised by the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) in its accessible web design and development resources. It also provides a reminder that failure to cater for the diverse needs of people with disabilities online can be interpreted as a breach of Section 24 of the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992.* Further Information and resources regarding the accessibility of the world wide web in relation to people with a disability can be found on the Australian Human Rights Commission website.
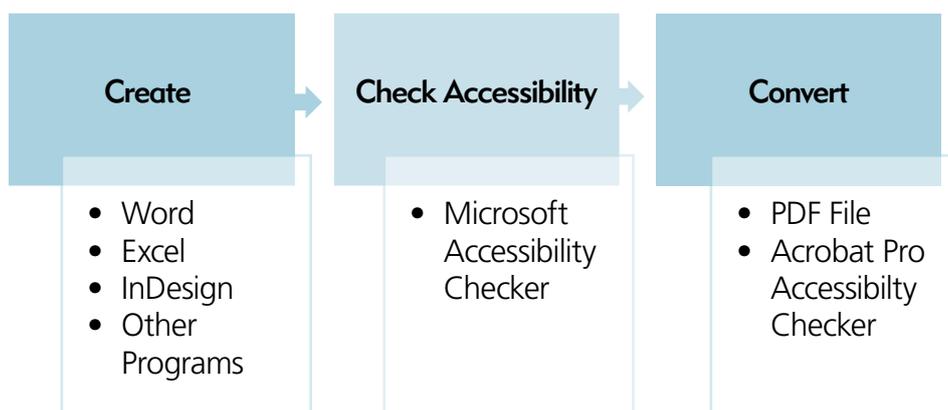
Online document formats

Generally there are three common options that are used to publish on the web:

- Web pages in Hyper-Test Markup Language (HTML)
- Microsoft Word document
- Portable Document Format file (PDF).

The provision of accessible web-based communication ensures that all community members can interact with Council and use the available information to make decisions and participate in the life of the community. The accessibility features of software and websites continues to improve; however, there are still limitations.

It is common practice to create a document in Microsoft Word, Excel, InDesign or HTML format and the convert it to a PDF file. For online documents to be accessible it is important that the original document is accessible. The following diagram displays the create check and convert process and programs to check the accessibility of documents.

Process to create accessible PDF file:

Create	Check Accessibility	Convert
• Word • Excel • InDesign • Other Programs	• Microsoft Accessibility Checker	• PDF File • Acrobat Pro Accessibilty Checker

The Microsoft Office 2013 Accessibility Checker provides a list of 'errors' and 'warnings' that appears on the side of the computer screen along with 'fix' tips. Working through the issues presented will increase the accessibility of the document.

To use the Microsoft Office 2013 Accessibility Checker:

Select File		Select Info		Select Check for Issues		Select Check Accessibility
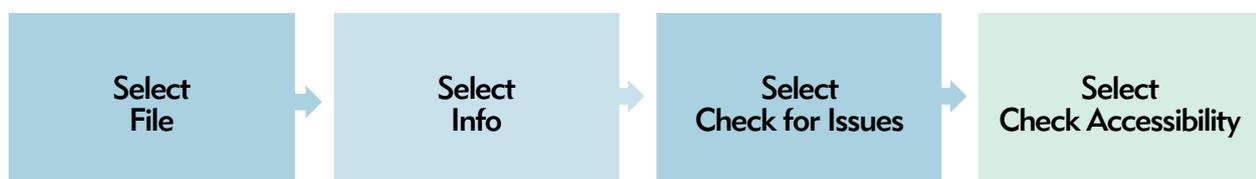
To learn more about the accessible features contained in Microsoft Word programs download Microsoft – Creating Accessible Word Documents guide.

Webpages in HTML

HTML web content is generally considered the most accessible of the three online formats with significant accessibility guidance from the WCAG 2.0 standards. Content authors generally publish content directly on a web page in HTML where:

- The layout and the style are relatively simple
- The information is clear and concise
- Keywords are considered important
- The document is short or contains multiple short sections that can be spread over multiple web pages
- The document is non-linear
- The documents require editing and updating
- The documents need to link to additional online information resources
- A social media component is required.

HTML and XHTML pages are more robust and improve search engine functions. Creating a solid page structure in HTML and using Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) to set the visual presentation of the web will increase the accessibility and usability.

Microsoft Word Document

Changing software capabilities have resulted in significant improvements to Microsoft programs, making it easier to incorporate accessibility features e.g. accessibility checker in Microsoft Office 2010 and Office 2013.

Microsoft Word documents are popular and commonly published online if the document:

- Requires further editing
- Is lengthy; for example, a report
- Needs to be self-contained
- Is linear
- Provides an accessible alternative to a PDF.

Microsoft Word has inbuilt features that enable greater accessibility.

For example:

Using 'Styles' ribbon enables the creation of a predictable structure within the document, links headings to the content page and tags within PDF files.

The 'Insert' functions such Tables, Chart or SmartArt to create graphics increases access for people who use assistive technology.

Portable Document Format (PDF) File

PDF files are popular and helpful in some circumstances. However, it is important to note that PDF documents are inherently inaccessible.

The Australian Government's recent *Accessibility of the Portable Document Format for People with a Disability Report* describes a number of limitations in detail.

> The Australian Government states that where a PDF document is to be published on a website, an alternative such as an accessible Word document must be published alongside it.

PDF documents are common on the web and are generally used when the document:

- No longer requires editing
- Is lengthy; for example a report
- Layout and style needs to be perfectly replicated when a hard copy is printed
- Needs to be self-contained
- Is too large to be emailed and the smaller file size is required
- Is linear.

When people refer to 'accessible' PDF files, they are usually referring to PDF files that have been tagged. PDF tags use a set of standardised structure types and attributes that represent all page content. A PDF's structure is stored separately from the

visible content with in built pointers from each to the other. The accessibility of PDF documents lies in the ability of the page creator to ensure a logical structure and tags have been used appropriately. Correct use of these functions improves the ability of assistive technology to successfully navigate the document for the reader.

Adobe Acrobat Pro is a tool for creating, editing and viewing PDF files. This tool does contain elements that will improve the accessibility of the document. The simplest and most efficient way to create accessible PDFs is to ensure that the original document is created in an accessible manner.

JavaScript

JavaScript is a popular method for creating dynamic web pages as it adds in the action and information processing to the more static HTML content. JavaScript should be used only to complement HTML. People who use assistive technology are likely to disable JavaScript as it can negatively impact on screen reader capabilities. It is important therefore that webpages do not rely solely on JavaScript to function. Where JavaScript is used it is important that all functions can be used from the keyboard.

Adobe Flash

Adobe Flash is commonly used to program multimedia presentations that can be viewed the same way on most computers. Due to the nature of Flash content, Adobe Flash does not work well with assistive technologies. This leads many people who use assistive technology to disable Adobe Flash.

How Do We Make Online Documents Accessible?

The online world provides numerous ways for people and communities to engage with local government and vice versa. To derive the most from this exchange, the information, documents and websites used by local governments should be accessible.

As with written communication, the accessibility of online communication addresses the following areas:

- Defining clear messages
- Knowing the audience
- Considering the cultural context
- Type of communication required
- Formatting written information
- Use of images and pictures.

This section builds upon the information presented earlier in the guide to present accessibility requirements and techniques that increase the accessibility of internet documents.

The information is general and does not equate to WCAG 2.0 compliance and should therefore only be used as a guide. Organisations seeking to attain full WCAG 2.0 compliance can use the WCAG 2.0 Checklist which provides a range of useful practical advice.

20. Keyboard Functions

Ensure that all website functions and actions required on the website can be achieved using keyboard functions. Many people are not able to use a mouse to navigate through a website and voice activated software cannot replicate mouse functions as effectively as keyboard usage.

21. Styles

Creating documents using 'Styles' contained in the Microsoft Home ribbon builds a consistent format within the document and links to the tags used in PDF files. Furthermore, it adds a standardised mark-up that can be easily read by most assistive technologies.

22. Text

The ability for the user to resize the text without losing function is critical to accessibility. Text should not be fully justified, that is aligned to both left and right margins as this will impact on scanning functions of assistive technologies.

23. Language

Providing the opportunity for people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities to self-select language options increases the accessibility of the website to people from these communities.
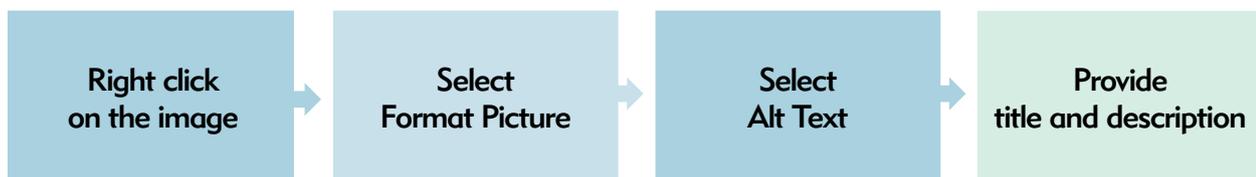
24. Navigation

To inform users of the website's content, use a site map and locate a 'skip to main content' or 'skip to navigation' at the top of each page. This allows the user to skip repetitive elements on a page and/or locate specific sections.

25. Alt Text

Creating text alternatives for all images enables assistive technology to vocalise the text and be able to describe the content or image. This is referred to as Alt Text. All images, graphs, data tables that convey information to the reader are required to have Alt Text.

To add Alt Text

| Right click on the image | → | Select Format Picture | → | Select Alt Text | → | Provide title and description |

26. Decorative Images

Decorative images are images that contain no meaning or additional information to the reader. Typically, these are design images for example: headers and footers, images lines or graphics separate page content.
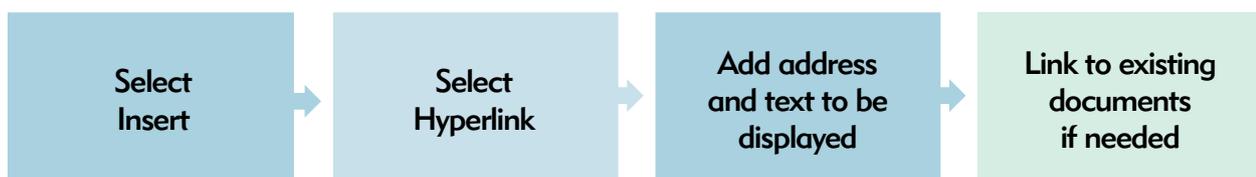
A 'Blank' Alt Text can be assigned in Word documents or the 'Artefact' tag in Adobe Acrobat Pro which will enable decorative images to be ignored by assistive technologies.

27. Hyperlinks

Every hyperlink should inform the reader of the destination and make sense if read out of context to the page. Links such as 'click here' or 'more information' should be avoided.

To ensure greatest accessibility, it is important that the Insert Hyperlink function is used and that hyperlinks are not copied and pasted into documents. Hyperlinks should be assigned an Alt Text.

To insert hyperlinks:

| Select Insert | → | Select Hyperlink | → | Add address and text to be displayed | → | Link to existing documents if needed |

28. Captions and Transcripts

Captions and transcripts are to be applied to all video and live audio information. This provides people who are deaf or have hearing loss the ability to read the information. It should be noted that captioning is not the same as subtitles, which translate language. Captioning includes speech and verbal cues for sounds such as [phone rings] or [romantic music plays] etc.

29. Auslan

Consider the use of pre-recorded Auslan interpretation as an alternative to audio. It is important to note that captions and transcripts would still be required as not all people with hearing loss can communicate using Auslan.

30. Audio Content

Ensure that audio content is easy to hear and is free from additional background noise. There needs to be at least a 20 decibel difference between background and foreground audio elements. Audio content needs to be adjustable and enable background noise to be turned off.

31. Completing and Submitting Forms

Where people are required to complete and submit forms or any information it is important that no time limits are applied to the web page and the person is able to recover from any errors.

Ensuring that the person is not timed out of forms and that the person can interrupt and save partially completed information provides greater accessibility.

If an error is detected by the person completing the form they should be able to correct it. If an input error is automatically detected by the program and suggestions for corrections are known, then the suggestions should be provided to the user.

Where the web page involves legal commitments or financial transactions then at least one of the following must be provided:

- Reversible. The submission is reversible
- Checked. The document is checked for input errors and the user is provided with the opportunity to correct errors
- Confirmed. There are mechanisms to review, correct and confirm information prior to finalising submission.
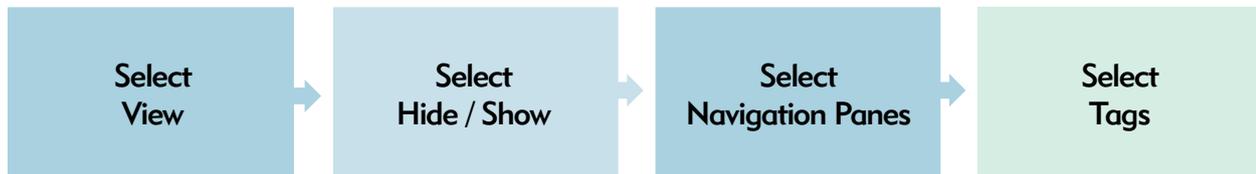
32. Tags

After a document has been converted to a PDF file it is important to check the tag structure in the Tags Panel in Adobe Acrobat Pro for accuracy. The Tags Panel provides the options to view, reorder, rename, modify, delete and create tags as required.
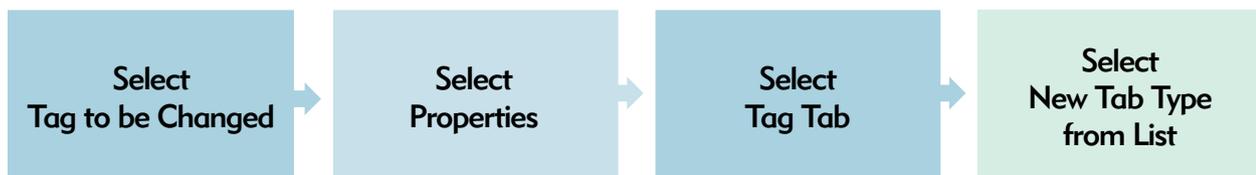
How to:

View the Tags Panel:

Select View	→	Select Hide / Show	→	Select Navigation Panes	→	Select Tags

The highlighted content option shows where the selected tags are located in the document.

To modify tags:

Select Tag to be Changed	→	Select Properties	→	Select Tag Tab	→	Select New Tab Type from List

Tags can be moved by dragging them to the correct location and can be 'nested' by dragging one onto another.

33. Touch Up Reading Order

The Touch Up Reading Order function contained in Adobe Acrobat Pro determines which order the document's content is presented to the user relying on assistive technology. It must reflect the logical content of the structure.

If the reading order on a page needs to be changed this can be achieved through the Order Panel where you can drag and drop items in the Order Panel to the correct position.

34. Tabs

Tab order in Acrobat Pro allows you to easily view and set the reading order of the document.

To set the tab order:

Select Page Thumbnails	→	Select All Page Thumbnails	→	Select Menu	→	Select Page Properties
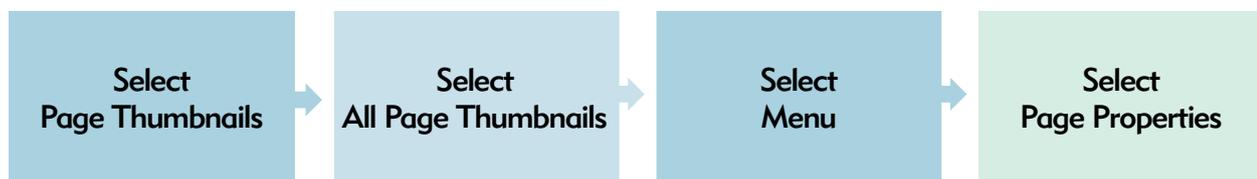
Next Steps

Embedding accessible communication into the processes of local government is dependent on the priorities and resources of the individual council but it is not at odds with the objectives of councils to:

- Communicate with and engage the community in Council activities and decision making processes

- Be responsive to and meet the needs of the community

- Comments such as 'this is huge' and 'I don't know where to start' were raised during the forum and workshops. Developing and embedding accessible communication in the practice of the organisation takes time; however, you can make a start by:

  - Making accessible communication part of the work you undertake – this will influence others and effect change

  - Ensuring accessibility is considered in the documents you develop or are asked to provide review comments. Where you are providing review comments provide a reason to the author to increase their knowledge. For example: using the insert tables function makes it easier for screen readers to read the table contents to the person

  - Share your knowledge of accessible communication by talking to people in your team, department and in working groups

  - Where you recognise the accessibility of a piece of communication, congratulate the author and highlight it in discussions as good practice.

Checklist

This checklist is provided as summary of the information contained in this guide. It contains guidance in relation to creating accessible communication but does not replace or address all elements of compliance required by WCAG 2.0. This checklist can be used in its entirety or in sections.

NO	ITEM	YES	NO	ACTION TO BE UNDERTAKEN OR REASONING
Planning				
1.	Key messages have been listed and can be easily stated			
2.	Target audience has been identified and considers:			
	– People with a disability			
	– People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds			
	– Older people			
	– Young people			
	– All of community including the above target groups			
	– A particular subset of the community i.e. men over 45 years from the Chinese community			
3.	The cultural context has been considered			
4.	The communication will use one or more of the following to check that the intended message is presented in a way that is appropriate for the target audience			
	– Council's Disability Advisory Committee			
	– Council's Youth Representative Committee			
	– External reference committees such as interfaith networks, migrant settlement committee			
	– External organisations such as Indigenous service providers, Migrant Information Centre, disability service providers			

NO	ITEM	YES	NO	ACTION TO BE UNDERTAKEN OR REASONING
5.	The written communication will be a:			
	– Strategic plan or policy			
	– Letter to resident(s)			
	– Handbook or guide			
	– Promotional brochure			
	– Information sheet			
6.	The written communication will be available:			
	– Through the website only			
	– As a hardcopy and on the website			
	– Only as a hardcopy			
7.	Contact details include:			
	– Key contact position			
	– Physical address			
	– Landline contact / mobile contact/ SMS contact			
	– National Relay Service Number or TTY Contact			
	– Telephone Interpreter Service number			
	– Email address			
	– Website address			
8.	Consultation, event or festival promotional material contains access information			
	– Location of venue including map reference or image			
	– Location of accessible parking on site or closest to venue			
	– Presence and location of car parking and alternative public car parking			
	– Most accessible entrance – if the main entrance is not accessible			
	– Public transport options			
	– Availability of Auslan or language interpreters			

NO	ITEM	YES	NO	ACTION TO BE UNDERTAKEN OR REASONING
Formatting Written Information				
9.	Format			
	Non reflective paper has been used for all hardcopy documents			
	All online functions can be operated via the keyboard			
	Microsoft 'Styles' are applied to all headings in the document			
	One page number style has been used throughout the document			
	Headings appear in a consistent manner within the document			
	Headers and footers have been created using the Microsoft Insert function			
	The web page or document does not rely on Java Script or Adobe Flash to operate			
10.	Navigation			
	A table of contents is included where the document has more than 10 pages			
	A Site Map is provided to assist people navigate the website			
	'Skip to main content' or 'Skip to navigation pane' is located at the top of each web page			
11.	Terminology and Language			
	Language translations have been considered:			
	– Identified process to check that translated information conveys intended meaning			
	Online users can self-select preferred languages			
	Auslan and language interpreters have been considered where face to face interactions occur			
	The document is written in:			
	– Complex language			
	– Plain English			
	– Easy English			
	An active voice is used within the communication			

NO	ITEM	YES	NO	ACTION TO BE UNDERTAKEN OR REASONING
	Person first language is used throughout the document			
	Abbreviations and acronyms have been explained in the text			
	There are no generalisations or euphemisms			
12.	Fonts			
	A minimum 12 font sans serif font is used throughout the document			
	Online readers can adjust the font size			
	People are informed of how to request larger print versions of the document			
	Standard upper and lower case text is used throughout the document			
	There is limited use of characters within the document. For example: brackets, colons, semi colons, slashes and hyphens			
	There is limited use of italics and underlining within the document			
13.	Colours			
	Contrast between colour of the writing or images and the background has been checked			
	There is no red writing on a blue background or vice versa within the document			
	Colour and words have been used to convey instructions			
	Watermarks and complex background designs have not been used in the document			
	Heading colours have been consistently applied throughout the document			
14.	Columns			
	The use of columns is minimalised within the document			
	There is a good space between columns appearing on a page			
	The Touch Up Reading Order Tool has been used to set reading order where columns appear in an online document			
15.	Hyperlinks			
	Hyperlinks are 'inserted' not copied and pasted			
	Hyperlink text accurately describes the destination			
	There are no 'click here' or 'more information' links			

NO	ITEM	YES	NO	ACTION TO BE UNDERTAKEN OR REASONING
16.	**Online Form Completion**			
	Where people are asked to submit information at least one of the following:			
	– is true			
	– It is reversible			
	– Prompts checking of information			
	– Requires confirmation of information			
	Input errors can be identified, highlighted and described to the user in text			
	Suggestions for corrections if known are provided to the user when input errors are identified			
Images and Pictures				
17.	Pictures contained in the document directly relate to the content			
18.	Images are sharp, clear and not cluttered with additional information			
19.	Images are located in a predictable position within the document			
20.	Alt text descriptions are provided for all pictures and images contained in the document			
21.	**Graphs and Tables**			
	Information contained in graphs and tables is explained in the body of the text			
	Microsoft insert Table has been used for all tables appearing in the document			
	Microsoft insert Chart has been used or all graphs appearing in the chart			
	'Style' headings have been applied to all graphs and tables			
	Merged or split cells in tables have been avoided where possible			
	Where possible tables do not break across pages			
	Where pages break across pages repeated header rows are used			
	Alt text descriptions are provided for all tables and graphs contained in the document			

NO	ITEM	YES	NO	ACTION TO BE UNDERTAKEN OR REASONING
	Tab function has been used to check the readability of all tables contained in the document			
22.	Animation			
	There are no animated or flashing items contained in the document			
	Where animated or flashing items appear there is a warning to the reader			
	The reader has the ability to turn the animated or flashing item off			
	The reader has access to the information contained in the flashing or animated item in another format			
Audio Information				
23.	Provide text version for all audio and video content – captions / transcripts			
24.	Audio level can be adjusted (turned up or down)			
25.	Background noise can be switched off			
26.	Pre-recorded Auslan interpretation for all audio and video has been considered			
Increasing the accessibility of PDF's				
27.	Tag structure in the Tags Panel has been checked for accuracy			
28.	Touch Up reading order has been utilised to specify reading order especially where columns are used			
Accessibility Check				
29.	Microsoft Accessibility Checker has been used			
30.	Adobe Acrobat Pro Accessibility Checker has been used			

References

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013) International Assessment of Adult Competencies, Australia 2011-2012 (ABS 4228.0)

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013) Census

Australian Government (2010) Accessibility of the Portable Document Format for People with a Disability. Report: **finance.gov.au/publications/pdf-accessibility-study/docs/PDF_study.pdf**

Australian Human Rights Commission: www.humanrights.gov.au. Information and resources regarding the accessibility of the World Wide Web in relation to people with a disability can be found at **humanrights.gov.au/disability-rights-world-wide-web-accessibility**

Media Access Australia (2013) Service Providers Accessibility Guide: A quick reference guide for accessible communications **mediaaccess.org.au/disabilitycare-providers-guide**

Microsoft guide to creating accessible word documents can be downloaded from: **office.microsoft.com/en-au/word-help/creating-accessible-word-documents-HA101999993.aspx**

Social Statistics: **socialstatistics.com.au**

Tasmanian Government (March 2014), Tasmanian Government Communications Guide **communications.tas.gov.au**

Victorian Department of Human Services (2010) Accessible Events Guidelines and Checklist for Organisers, Chairs, Speakers and MCs **dhs.vic.gov.au/ds/disabilityact**

Vision Australia (2013) 7 Steps to Print Accessibility: How to create inclusive information. Vision Australia: Melbourne

WCAG 2.0 Principles and Guidelines can be found at : **w3.org/TR/WCAG20/**

Acknowledgement of Country

In the spirit of reconciliation, Whitehorse City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri people as the traditional owners of the land now know as Whitehorse and pays respect to its elders past and present.

Contacting Council

Telephone: 9262 6333
Fax: 9262 6490
Email: customer.service@whitehorse.vic.gov.au
NRS: 133 677 then quote 9262 6333
(Service for deaf or hearing impaired people)
Telephone Interpreter Service: 131 450

Service Centres

Whitehorse Civic Centre

(main Service Centre)

379-397 Whitehorse Road

Nunawading 3131

Box Hill Service Centre

Box Hill Town Hall

1022 Whitehorse Road

Box Hill 3128

Forest Hill Service Centre

Shop 275, Forest Hill Chase Shopping Centre

Canterbury Road

Forest Hill 3131

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