



Guidance on the Accessible Canada Regulations

Alternate formats

September 2022



Guidance on the Accessible Canada Act: Alternate formats

Large print, braille, MP3 (audio), e-text and DAISY formats are available on demand by [ordering online](#) or calling 1 800 O-Canada (1-800-622-6232). If you use a teletypewriter (TTY), call 1-800-926-9105.

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This guidance includes links to Government of Canada and other resources that provide tips and information relating to alternate formats. By providing links, Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) is pointing to possibly helpful information, but not endorsing it. [Consult the Canada.ca terms and conditions](#) for more about links to non-Government of Canada resources

Introduction

The [Accessible Canada Act](#) (ACA) requires federally regulated entities (organizations) to prepare and publish:

- accessibility plans,
- progress reports, and
- descriptions of their feedback processes

Under the [Accessible Canada Regulations](#) (regulations), organizations must make these documents available in alternate formats upon request. The regulations say which alternate formats people can request, and how they can request them. They also say how long it should take an organization to fulfill a request.

This guidance will help organizations understand and meet these requirements. It includes details on the alternate formats an organization must provide. It recommends ways organizations could handle and respond to requests. It also includes tips to help organizations ensure their accessibility plans, progress reports, and feedback process descriptions are accessible.

In line with the [principles of the ACA](#), this guidance reflects input from the disability community.

This guidance is **not** legally binding. However, it does describe actions that the ACA and its regulations require. These descriptions use the words “must” and “required.” The guidance also includes tips and recommendations. These tips and recommendations use the words “recommend,” “should,” “may,” “suggest,” and “could.”

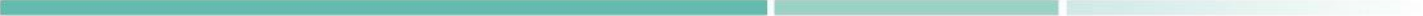
Note: This document uses some short forms to make it easier to read. In some places, the guidance talks about requests for “formats” or “alternate formats.” This short form is also not legally binding. It also does not apply to any text other than what is in this guidance and its annex.

This means requests for copies of accessibility plans, progress reports, or feedback process descriptions. It also means that these documents are to be:

- made available to the requester as soon as feasible, but within the applicable deadlines set out in the regulations
- in the formats set out in the regulations:
 - print
 - large print
 - Braille
 - audio format
 - an electronic format that is compatible with adaptive technology that is intended to assist persons with disabilities

You can also read [guidance](#) on:

- [preparing and publishing accessibility plans](#)

- 
- [consulting persons with disabilities](#)
 - [feedback process descriptions](#)
 - [simple, clear, and concise language](#)
 - progress reports

Key concepts

What the regulations say

The regulations set the rules for:

- what types of alternate formats people can request from your organization
- how people can make a request
- when your organization must fulfill a request

The regulations list the alternate formats organizations must provide. Organizations may choose to provide information in additional alternate formats as well.

Types of alternate formats

Some people may have difficulty reading online or print documents. They can ask organizations to provide documents in alternate formats.

This section describes the alternate formats that your organization must make available upon request.

You can also read the [annex](#) on making documents more accessible.

Print: printed or electronic text.


Large print: printed or electronic text with a larger font size and [good colour contrast](#). The smallest font size should be between 16 and 20 points.

Braille: a system of cells and dots that represent characters and numbers. Braille can be in electronic or physical format. Readers use their fingertips to read raised dots on paper. Some electronic devices can read Braille in electronic format as well.

You can find more information about Braille on the [CNIB Foundation](#) website.

Audio format: an audio recording or data file. This format can be in different forms, such as an MP3 file or a [DAISY file](#).

Electronic format: a text format, document, image or file in a digital form that is compatible with adaptive technology that is intended to assist persons with disabilities. Users navigate documents by moving between pages, sections, chapters and tables of contents.



You can find general best practices for electronic formats at the [Accessible Publishing](#) website, among others. You can also [consult the Government of Canada's Digital Accessibility Toolkit](#) for additional tools and resources.

Manner of request

The “General” heading of accessibility plans and progress reports must say how the public can communicate with your organization. This information must allow people to request alternate formats, and must include at least:

- position title of the person designated to receive feedback on behalf of the organization
- the mailing address of your publicly accessible business(es)
- a telephone number
- an email address

The “General” heading must also include the manner and information by which the public can communicate with your organization. This could include things like a website or a social media account, if your organization uses them.

Read the guidance on preparing the [“General” heading in an accessibility plan](#).

Note: this section of the guidance focuses on the methods of request for alternate formats. This section does not address all the information that must be contained under the “General” heading. Read the guidance on preparing the [“General” heading of accessibility plans](#) and progress reports for more information.

Guidance on progress reports will be available in 2022.

Deadlines

All organizations must make alternate formats available to the requester as soon as feasible.

The regulations also set deadlines for organizations to meet such requests. The deadlines depend on the requested format and the type of organizations.

- For print, large print, and electronic formats:
 - federal government entities, including departments, agencies, Crown corporations, or government-related entities such as the Canadian Forces or Parliamentary entities: **within 15 days** after the day the request was received
 - federally regulated private sector entities with an average of 100 or more employees: **within 15 days** after the day the request was received
 - federally regulated private sector entities with an average of 99 or fewer employees: **within 20 days** after the day the request was received
- For Braille or audio formats:

- all regulated entities: **within 45 days** after the day the request was received

Read [subsections 1\(2\) and 1\(3\) of the regulations](#) to learn how to calculate your average number of employees.

Recommendations and best practices

Acknowledging a request

When someone requests an alternate format, you should let them know you received their request. You could send a personal reply or use a standard response. You could also reply using the alternate format the person requested.

Your reply could say when the person can expect to receive the alternate format. You could also mention the deadline for providing the alternate format. Read the [guidance section on these deadlines](#).

You may wish to send this reply within 48 hrs of receiving the request. You could also retain electronic or print copies of requests in the same way that you retain copies of feedback.

It is a best practice to create a log to record requests for alternate formats. The log can track the following:

- date the request was received
- if an acknowledgement or receipt was sent
- who requested the format, the format requested
- who is responsible for preparing the format, and when the request was fulfilled

Remember: You must make the alternate format available to the requester as soon as feasible, but by the applicable deadline specified in the *Accessible Canada Regulations*.

Publicizing alternate formats


You should try to make it as easy as possible for someone to request alternate formats.

If you have a website, you could include information about alternate formats in your contact section or feedback process description. You could also include information about alternate formats on the pages where you publish your accessibility plans and progress reports.

Remember that your timelines for making alternate formats available must be within the deadlines set by the regulations.

Making a request online

Some people may request alternate formats using the contact information in your accessibility plans and progress reports. If you also communicate with the public by other means, people may use those



means to make requests as well. For example, other means may include social media. Ensure that your organization plans how it will receive and respond to such requests.

Online request form

One approach would be allowing people to request alternate formats by filling in an online form on your website. Such forms can be challenging for some people to fill out. Therefore, you may need to take extra steps to make them accessible. If you use one, remind people that they can also make requests by the other means set out in the paragraph above (under “Making a request online”).

You can also consult the [Government of Canada Digital Accessibility Toolkit for making accessible digital forms](#).

Your organization could use the form to collect a variety of information, including about:

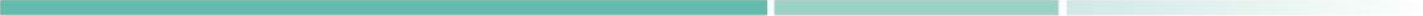
- the requester
 - name
 - email address
 - telephone number
 - mailing address (if they need to receive the alternate format by mail)
 - Date of the request

Ensure you only ask the requester’s personal information that is needed to fulfill the alternate format request.

- the document
 - your accessibility plan, progress report, or feedback process description
 - which version of the document they are requesting, such as the most recent or a previous version
- the alternate format
 - which alternate format(s) they are requesting
 - additional details, such as official language preference
 - requesters could indicate the specific type of a particular format they are requesting, for example:
 - for an audio format, whether they prefer or need a specific file type, such as .MP3 or .WAV
 - for Braille, whether they require a physical or electronic document
- the manner in which the requester would like to receive the alternate format, for example:
 - by email or by mail
- details for any other alternate formats your organization has chosen to make available upon request

Downloadable request form

Your organization could also provide a fillable .pdf or .docx version of the request form. The requester could fill out the form using their word processor or PDF software. They could also print it and complete



it by hand. A downloadable form should allow requesters to provide the same information as the online form.

Remember to include information about how to submit the form. This could include:

- an email address to which the requester could send a scanned version of the form
- a mailing address to which they could send a printed version of the form
- an online tool they could use to upload and submit the completed form directly

Email address

You must include an email address under the “General” headings in your accessibility plans and progress reports. People must be able to use this address to request alternate formats. You could also list the information requesters should include with their request.

Making it easier for people to submit a detailed request will help your organization meet the request within the deadlines.

Hiring service providers

Once you receive a request for an alternate format, you will need to produce it. Most organizations can produce formats like print or large print by themselves. Some organizations may also be able to produce Braille, audio, or electronic formats themselves.

If your organization cannot produce a particular alternate format by itself, we recommend hiring a service provider.

We recommend you consult the disability community for advice on choosing an alternate format provider. Their experience may help you make the best choice. You may also wish to consider more than one provider. If so, you could ask for references and samples of their work.

Making alternate formats available

If it is not clear how the requester would like to receive the alternate format, we suggest you ask them. Different requesters may have different needs, preferences, or technologies.


Some may prefer to receive the alternate format by mail. Others will want to receive it electronically. Some may want to pick it up themselves.

In all cases, ensure that you make the alternate format available as soon as feasible.

Proactive availability

You must make these formats available upon request. When feasible, you could also have alternate formats ready before someone asks for them.

For example, you could publish some alternate formats when you publish the original documents. This could include large print or certain electronic formats. This would help you reduce the time and effort needed to meet some requests.



You could also post some alternate formats on your organization’s digital platform. This might remove the need for some people to request an alternate format. You may want to record the alternate formats, by type, downloaded from your digital platform. Such information may help you to decide what alternate version types would be a better use of your resources.

Alternate formats for consultations

You must make your accessibility plans, progress reports, and feedback process descriptions available in alternate formats upon request.

When you consult persons with disabilities, they may ask you to provide information in alternate formats. For virtual or other consultations, you could check if your materials are compatible with screen readers or other assistive devices.

Providing consultation information in alternate formats can help make your consultations more accessible. This will allow participants to contribute more fully.

Content

When a request arrives, ensure that the alternate format has exactly the same content as the published version of the accessibility plan, description of feedback process or progress report.

Annex: Making documents more accessible

Note: this annex accompanies the guidance on making the following documents available in certain [alternate formats](#):


- accessibility plans
- progress reports
- feedback process descriptions

This annex includes links to Government of Canada and other resources that provide tips and information relating to accessibility. By providing links, Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) is pointing to possibly helpful information, but not endorsing it. [Consult the Canada.ca terms and conditions](#) for more about links to non-Government of Canada resources.

Overview

A few basic steps can make your documents more accessible from the start. Even simple formatting measures like font size, headings and image descriptions can make almost any document more accessible. Creating an accessible document from the start also helps with lower the volume of requests for alternate formats.

You can also use the tools included with most word processing software to check the accessibility of your document. Some of these tools will even suggest changes to improve accessibility.



This annex offers tips and recommendations for removing common accessibility barriers in your documents. It also includes links to some resources you may find helpful. You can also consult:

- [guidance on using simple, clear, and concise language in accessibility plans, and feedback process descriptions](#)
- [consulting persons with disabilities annex: understanding disabilities](#)

Language and writing

No matter what document you are creating, there are language and writing guidelines that can make it more accessible.

- Use simple, clear, and concise language
 - Keep sentences short
 - Use an active voice instead of a passive voice when this is possible, and when it does not make your sentence more difficult to understand
 - Use common words and terms that most people are likely to understand
 - Use technical language or jargon only when necessary
 - [Consult the guidance on simple, clear, and concise language](#) for more tips and recommendations

Text and document format

Many popular word processing software and publishing applications allow you to format documents to make them more accessible.

- Use a font size of 12 points or larger to ensure visibility
- Use fonts that are sans serif (for example, Helvetica, Calibri, Arial, Geneva, or Verdana)
 - Serifs are small decorative elements, like hooks or curls, that can make some fonts more difficult to read
 - Times New Roman and Garamond are examples of two popular fonts that use serifs and should not be used
- Use plain text whenever possible
 - Words in italics can be difficult for some people to read
 - Words in all capital letters can also be difficult to read, especially to those using assistive devices like screen readers
 - Words in all capital letters can also be difficult to read for people who rely on word shape to read
 - [Abbreviations and acronyms](#) can be confusing or unclear, especially if the document includes a lot of them
- Use bold text sparingly, and only for emphasis as bold text will not be recognized by a screen reader
- Align text to the left

- Centred text, especially in long sections, can be difficult for some people to read
- Justified text can also be difficult to read, especially for people with cognitive disabilities or if people use assistive devices like screen readers
- Use the program's built-in spacing features to make space between sentences and paragraphs
 - Spacing that you create by skipping lines (such as by pressing the “enter” key multiple times) may be confusing for people who use screen readers
- Make sure there is strong contrast between text colour and background colour
 - Black text on a white background is best
 - You can use an [online contrast analysis tool](#) to check if your colours have a strong enough contrast
- Do not rely only on colour (such as text in red), emphasis (such as text in bold) or asterisk to indicate important information
 - This may not be accessible to readers who are colour-blind or who use screen readers
 - It also may not be accessible to some readers with learning, reading, or memory disabilities
 - Hyperlinks are an important exception
 - They can be underlined, and should appear in a different colour of text when possible
- Update your document's file properties to reflect its contents, making them more accessible to users of assistive devices like screen readers
 - Make sure that the “Title” field includes the document's title
 - Make sure your document's language setting (such as French or English) is correct

Headings

Formatting your document's headings properly will make your document more accessible. People who use screen readers or other assistive devices use headings to navigate documents.

Do not create a heading only by highlighting the text. Do not use a different font, colour, or emphasis (such as bold, italic, or underlining) to create a heading either. These headings may look distinct, but screen readers or some persons with disabilities may not recognize them.

Use the “Heading” style function included in most word processing software instead. Heading levels should represent the structure of the document.

- A heading 1 is the title or main content heading of the document
 - A document should usually have only one heading in the heading 1 style
- A heading 2 is a major section heading
- A heading 3 is a subsection of heading 2
- A heading 4 is a subsection of heading 3, and so on

Do not skip headings levels (for example, using heading 4 after a heading 2, with no heading 3 in between). This can pose problems for screen reader users.

Alternative text for images and other visual elements

Images can be a good way to make information more accessible to some persons with disabilities. Diagrams, maps, and charts can help communicate complex information in ways that are easier to understand.

At the same time, images may be hard to understand for some persons with disabilities. For example, persons with low vision may magnify documents or web pages. Images can appear pixelated and become hard to understand when magnified.

You should use images only to enhance information that is already available in the text, not to replace it. If you include images, also include descriptions of the images in captions or alternative text (also known as alt text). This will allow people who use screen readers and other assistive technology to know what the images contain.

There are two ways to include descriptive text for your document's images:

- use the “alt text” function in your word processing software
 - you can typically add alt text to visual elements like pictures, shapes, charts, SmartArt, Icons and 3D models
- provide descriptive text near the image in the document itself
 - some word processing software includes a “caption” feature that will allow you to connect a description to the image
 - you could also include a written description just before or just after the image

Keep the following tips in mind when preparing descriptive text for images:

- describe the content and function of the image accurately
- be simple, clear, and concise
- there is no need for descriptive phrases (such as “an image of...” or “a graphic of...”), as screen-reading software can already identify images
- Images containing text should comply with the colour contrast guidance presented in the ‘Text and Document Format’ section as described above.

Tables

Tables can be a good way to present a large amount of data. However, they may need additional formatting to be accessible. While the most accessible approach is to avoid tables altogether, this may not always be possible.

If a table is necessary, keep the following tips and recommendations in mind:

- use the “Table” function in your word processing software to build the table
- include proper headers
- avoid common barriers like:

- merged cells
- empty cells
- rotated text direction
- poor colour contrast between text and cell backgrounds
- remember that people who use screen readers or other assistive technology may navigate the table by pressing the “tab” key
 - test navigation by pressing the “tab” key multiple times to check the reading order in your table

Hyperlinks

Hyperlinks to other web pages or locations also often need additional formatting to be accessible. When adding hyperlinks to your document:

- use underlining or a different font colour to distinguish hyperlinked text from plain text
 - this is one of the few times you should use underlining or font colour to distinguish one piece of text from another
- remember that people who use screen readers may navigate the document by moving between elements, including hyperlinks:
 - use descriptive text explaining to the reader where the link will take them, for example:
 - descriptive text: “read the [Accessible Canada Act](#) to learn more about how federally regulated entities must identify, remove, and prevent barriers”
 - not descriptive: “click here to learn more about barriers”
- do not copy and paste an URL into a document
 - the URL should be embedded behind descriptive text, for example:
 - descriptive text with embedded URL: “the [Accessible Canada Regulations](#) require that federally regulated entities prepare and publish accessibility plans”
 - not descriptive with full URL link: “The *Accessible Canada Regulations* require that federally regulated entities prepare and publish accessibility plans. Read more at: <https://laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/regulations/SOR-2021-241/>”

Indented lists

Use the bullet list or number list functions in your word processing software to create indented lists. Do not use the “tab” key to indent content in lists. Screen readers cannot navigate indented lists using the tab function. You should also ensure that bullet list entries are simple, clear, and concise.

Watermarks or background images

Avoid watermarks or background images in documents. They can reduce the contrast between text and background. This can make the document more difficult to read.



Table of contents

Include a table of contents for longer documents with multiple sections or chapters. This can help readers navigate the document. If possible, use your word processing software to create a table of contents automatically. An automatic table will include your properly formatted headings. It can also allow each table entry to serve as a hyperlink to that section of the document.

Accessibility checking tools

Once you have completed your document, some word processing software allows you to check its accessibility. However, keep in mind that using these tools does not ensure a fully accessible document. You will need to review your document for a more complete level of accessibility.

The [Accessibility Checker function in Microsoft Office programs](#) is an example. This feature identifies accessibility issues and suggests changes. Clicking on an item in the checker's results highlights that item in the document. It also describes the problem and suggests a repair. However, it does not check for such things as colour contrast, text styling, logical order or skip-level headings.

Accessible presentation slides

Digital presentation slide decks are a common way to present information. They may also present barriers for some people. Many of the tips and recommendations for making text documents more accessible also apply to presentation slides. Programs like [Microsoft PowerPoint](#) and [Google Slides](#) also include features to support accessibility.

To create more accessible slide decks, keep the following principles in mind:

- start with the design theme for your presentation
 - choose from the themes included with your software program; they are usually designed to be accessible
 - choose a theme with a strong colour contrast between the text and background
 - avoid distracting visuals, such as animations and slide transitions
- use a sans-serif font large enough to be read easily from a distance (at least 18 point)
- use built-in spacing features
 - do not press the “enter” or “tab” keys multiple times to skip lines; screen readers cannot navigate such features
- make sure each slide has a short, unique title
- do not fill slides with too much information
 - use bullet points rather than paragraphs
 - aim for a maximum of 3 to 7 bullet points per slide
 - format them using the built-in bullet or number function
- make sure the reading order in your document makes sense and is correct

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- test the reading order pressing the “tab” key repeatedly
 - consider writing your content in a word processing program first, and then pasting each section into your slides
 - ensure any images in your slides include captions or alt-text descriptions

Links and resources

Explore more tips, tools, and information on creating accessible documents through the links below.

Government of Canada resources

- [Creating Accessible Documents](#) (CRTC)
- [Designing accessible services - Digital Accessibility Toolkit / Sharing space](#) (Canada.ca)
- [Making communications accessible in the Government of Canada](#) (Canada.ca)
- [The Canadian Style - TERMIUM Plus®](#) (Translation Bureau)
- [Tools and resources](#) (Canadian Digital Service)

Other resources

- [Accessibility checker function](#) (available in English only, [WebAIM](#))
- [Accessibility features in Google Docs](#) (available in English only, [Toronto Metropolitan University](#))
- [Accessibility features in OpenOffice](#) (available in English only, [OpenOffice](#))
- [Accessibility features in WordPerfect Office](#) (available in English only, [WordPerfect](#))
- [Clear Print Accessibility Guidelines](#) (PDF; [CNIB](#))
- [Contrast Checker](#) ([WebAIM](#))
- [Color Contrast Checker](#) ([TPGi](#))
- [Create Accessible Tables](#) (Microsoft)
- [Creating Accessible Pages Documents](#) (Michigan State University)
- [Creating Accessible Presentation Slides](#) (available in English only, [Press Books](#))
- [Designing for Screen Reader Compatibility](#) (available in English only, [WebAIM](#))
- [Harmonised European Standard V3.2.1, EN 301 549: Accessibility requirements for ICT products and services.](#)
- [Heading Structure in Word Documents](#) (available in English only, [WebAIM](#))
- [How to make your Word Documents Accessible](#) (Microsoft)
- [How to make your PowerPoint presentations accessible](#) (Microsoft)
- [Links and Hypertext Formatting](#) (available in English only, [WebAIM](#))
- [Word and PowerPoint Accessibility Evaluation Checklist](#) (available in English only, [WebAIM](#))
- [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1](#) (WCAG)