Accessibility best practices

Defining PDF accessibility

To make our digital content compliant with current state and federal legal standards, it must be intelligible to assistive technologies primarily used by the blind and visually impaired. Many people with visual and other impairments rely on this technology to enjoy access to websites and other digital content. Digital content comes in many forms, such as text, audio and video files, graphics, animations, images, PDFs, PowerPoint slides, Word documents, spreadsheets and other documents posted on the state of Indiana's websites. These must all be made accessible to users of assistive technologies.

Accessibility principles

Add alternate text to images and objects

Images present challenges to visually impaired readers. Alternate text (also called "alt text") helps people who can't see the screen to understand what's important in images and other visuals. Try to avoid using too many decorative images that don't add useful information.

In alt text, briefly describe the image and mention the existence of the text and its intent. This includes pictures, maps, logos, etc. Use clear, concise terms. For example, "Person in wheelchair on ramp" may suffice rather than "Smiling woman in wheelchair posing on ramp."

Decorative images should be removed or "artifacted": artifacts are elements that are ignored by a screen reader. Avoid using text in images as the sole method of conveying important information. If you must use an image with text in it, repeat that text in the document.

Add alternate text to charts and graphs

For charts and graphs, it is necessary to provide a meaningful summary of its content. Ask yourself, "What is it that I want my readers to take away from this chart?" And don't use scanned text or forms; they cannot be read by screen readers. Please retype the text in the document or as alt text.
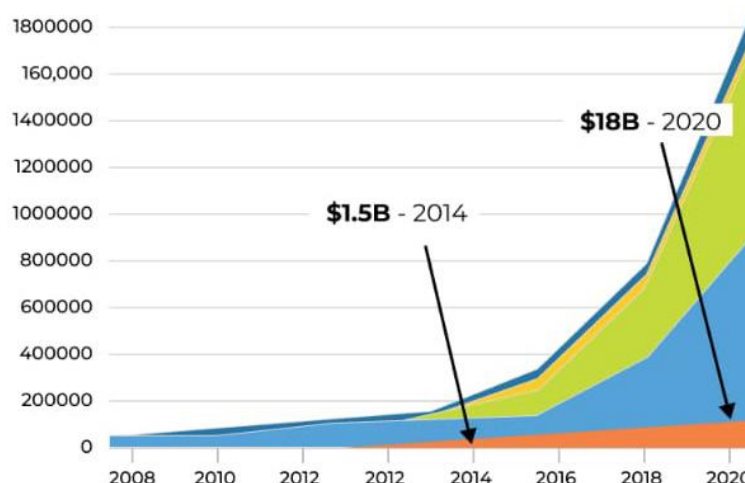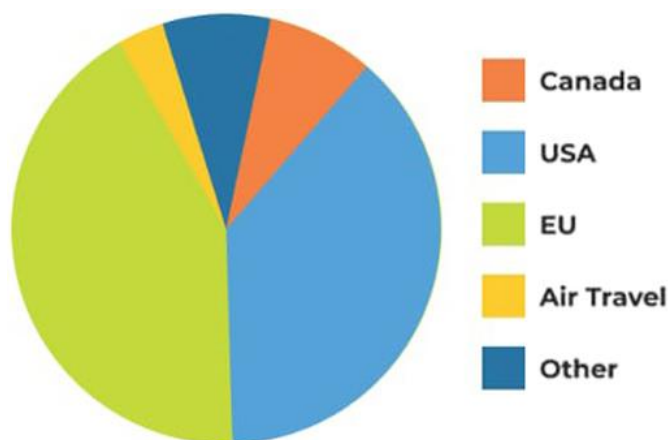
Use document styles

Use the built-in heading and paragraph styles to structure your document. To make it easier for screen readers to read your documents, use a logical heading order. For example, use Heading 1, Heading 2, then Heading 3, rather than Heading 3, Heading 1, then Heading 2. Use the **Before** and **After** spacing in the **Paragraph** box rather than using several hard returns between paragraphs.

Fill in document properties

Go into the document properties and fill out the title, author, subject (short description) and tag (keywords). This allows users to have a bit of information about the document without needing to open it. For someone using assistive technology, this can help limit the necessity of opening a document to determine if it's the one they're looking for. The "author" should be the agency, division or program rather than the name of the person who has created or modified the document.

Use color carefully

If your document has a high level of contrast between text and background, more people can see and use the content. You might test your designs by printing in black-and-white. Good color contrast will ensure readability. If possible, try using texture in graphs to highlight points of interest. Ensure that color is not the only means of conveying information. People who are blind, have low vision or are colorblind might miss out on the meaning conveyed by particular colors.

Name your hyperlinks appropriately

Your link should contain meaningful text that reflects the link destination or subject. People who use screen readers sometimes scan a list of links. Links should convey clear and accurate information about the destination. For example, instead of only linking to the text Click here or using a long, complicated URL, such as https://www.in.gov/fssa/contact-us/fssa-organizational-directory/, include the full title of the destination page, like FSSA Organizational Directory.

Use simple (not complex) tables

Avoid using nested tables, merged or split cells or blank cells for formatting. Accessible tables need a clear table structure and table headers to help guide a screen reader user. Select the **Insert** tab on the ribbon, then select **Table** > **Insert Table**. To add table headers to the first row, select **Table Tools** > **Layout** on the ribbon, then choose the **Repeat Header Rows** option in the **Data** section.

WHAT IS A TABLE?

TABLE ELEMENT	DEFINITION
Column	A list of values displayed vertically in a table on a vertical axis
Row	A single group of related data within a table on a horizontal axis
Cell	The intersection of a row and a column, containing data

Lists

- Use Word-generated, not hand-typed, numbered and bulleted lists to emphasize a point or a sequence of steps.
- Select the Home tab on the ribbon.
- Choose the Numbered List or Bulleted List option from the Paragraph group.