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Positioning library employees as the primary users of accessibility systems, documentation, and workflows, this project applied a user experience (UX) design-inspired process to employee-facing implementation efforts. Interventions included accessibility audits combining automated and manual review, development of a web applications accessibility handbook, governance clarification, microlearning-based remediation strategies, collaborative "web editing parties," and shared tracking mechanisms. Findings suggest that treating accessibility as a shared practice, rather than an individual compliance task, reduced overwhelm, increased engagement, and supported more sustainable remediation efforts.

Lessons learned highlight the importance of relational UX practices, documentation as infrastructure, and iterative learning. This report offers practical insights for libraries preparing for Title II compliance while seeking to cultivate inclusive and sustainable accessibility practices.

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ABSTRACT

In response to the U.S. Department of Justice's final Title II rule on web accessibility, libraries are increasingly required to remediate complex web ecosystems under constrained timelines and capacity. While much accessibility guidance emphasizes technical compliance, less attention has been paid to the organizational, relational, and pedagogical dimensions of accessibility work in libraries. This practice-based report describes a UX-informed approach to web accessibility remediation in an academic library, grounded in principles of collective care, microlearning, and co-creation.

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Keywords: web accessibility, academic libraries, user experience design, ADA Title II compliance, accessibility training

INTRODUCTION

Web accessibility in academic libraries is often framed as a technical compliance issue: meeting standards, passing audits, or reducing institutional risk, particularly in relation to ADA Title II

requirements (Association of Research Libraries, n.d.). While necessary, this framing can position accessibility as a burdensome obligation rather than a shared professional responsibility. This is especially significant given that librarians may not feel adequately prepared to address accessibility challenges (Wentz et al., 2023), and accessibility work is often led by a single designated role, such as a UX or accessibility librarian (Pereyaslavska, 2020).

Recent regulatory changes have intensified these demands. The U.S. Department of Justice's Title II rule requires public institutions to ensure that digital content conforms to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 Level AA standards within defined timelines (Association of Research Libraries, n.d.). At the same time, research shows that accessibility issues remain widespread across academic library websites, including missing alternative text, improper heading structures, and low color contrast (Liu et al., 2024). These findings suggest that compliance-driven approaches alone are insufficient for achieving sustainable accessibility outcomes.

In response, this article presents a UX-informed approach to accessibility remediation that reframes accessibility as collective care. Rather than treating accessibility as a one-time task, this project conceptualizes it as an iterative, shared practice grounded in learning, usability, and collaboration. Drawing on user experience principles (Hunt, 2025), accessibility is embedded into everyday content practices through participatory activities, shared documentation, and ongoing support structures.

This approach contributes to library UX scholarship by demonstrating how accessibility can be operationalized through microlearning and distributed responsibility, supporting staff engagement while fostering more sustainable accessibility practices (Davis, 2025).

CONTEXT AND EXISTING PRACTICES

This project took place within an academic library maintaining a complex web ecosystem, including a Drupal-based website and multiple third-party platforms such as Springshare (LibGuides, LibAnswers, and LibCal), Omeka, and ArchiveSpace. Responsibility for public-facing content is distributed across library employees, many of whom create and manage web content alongside their primary job duties. As a result, accessibility work is decentralized, with varying levels of experience and confidence among staff.

Prior to this initiative, accessibility practices were present but unevenly implemented. Vendor-provided training and documentation were available but not consistently integrated into local workflows. Automated tools such as Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool (WAVE) were commonly used, yet staff often struggled to interpret results or determine how to prioritize remediation. These conditions reflect broader challenges in libraries, where accessibility efforts are shaped by gaps in training and coordination (Wentz et al., 2023).

Accessibility challenges were also closely tied to organizational questions. Staff expressed uncertainty about platform selection (e.g., Drupal vs. LibGuides), content ownership, and how materials should be structured or maintained. Additional questions emerged around forms, PDFs, videos, naming conventions, and when to escalate issues for support. These concerns highlight that accessibility is intertwined with governance, workflows, and institutional practices, rather than technical implementation alone.

The scale of legacy content further complicated remediation efforts. Much of the library's web content had been created over time by multiple contributors without consistent review, requiring staff to address both new and existing accessibility barriers. At the same time, unclear role expectations contributed to inconsistent practices. While Pereyaslavska (2020) emphasizes the importance of accessibility leadership, this project revealed the need to align responsibility more broadly with a variety of roles, including content authors, in addition to designated roles.

Accessibility work was also experienced as cognitively and emotionally demanding. Staff frequently described feeling overwhelmed when faced with large numbers of flagged issues or uncertain how to apply accessibility guidance in practice. In response, accessibility was reframed as an act of care rather than a marker of failure. Creating and remediating content was positioned as part of an ongoing learning process, helping reduce anxiety and support engagement.

Taken together, these conditions highlight a gap between accessibility standards and their practical implementation in distributed library environments. While guidelines such as WCAG provide technical direction, they do not address how accessibility work is coordinated, interpreted, and sustained. This gap informed the development of a more collaborative, practice-based approach to accessibility described in this study.

PRACTICE FRAMEWORK: ACCESSIBILITY AS COLLECTIVE CARE

This project was grounded in a UX-informed framework that conceptualized accessibility as a shared, ongoing practice rather than a one-time checkbox for compliance. With WCAG 2.1 AA remaining essential, the project emphasized integrating accessibility into everyday workflows in ways that were sustainable and usable for staff.

In academic libraries, accessibility is often treated as a specialized responsibility, typically assigned to developers or designated leads. However, this does not reflect the distributed nature of web content creation. In practice, accessibility outcomes are shaped by a range of contributors, including librarians, library staff, student assistants, designers, and administrators. To address this disconnect, the project drew on the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)'s Accessibility Roles and Responsibilities Mapping (ARRM), which frames accessibility as a shared responsibility across roles (W3C, 2025a). ARRM reflects this broader ecosystem by identifying multiple roles involved in accessibility, such as UX designers, developers, and content authors, each contributing

different aspects of accessible design and implementation (W3C, 2025c). It also distinguishes between primary, secondary, and contributing responsibilities, helping clarify accountability and reduce ambiguity in accessibility work.

Applying this role-based perspective aligned accessibility with existing staff responsibilities. In particular, library employees engaged in content creation were positioned as content authors within a broader accessibility ecosystem**,** working alongside developer and UX designer roles. Rather than isolating accessibility within technical roles, ARRM emphasizes that different aspects of accessibility are distributed across these roles, each contributing in complementary ways.

Within this framework, content authors are responsible for tasks that include writing meaningful alternative text, creating descriptive link text, structuring content with clear headings, and ensuring captions or transcripts are provided for media (W3C, 2025b). These responsibilities closely parallel the types of web content work already performed in libraries. By situating library employees within this role, accessibility becomes not an additional burden, but a recognized extension of existing responsibilities.

Importantly, this positioning underscores that content authors are not working in isolation but as part of a coordinated system of roles. As such, they require the same level of clarity, support, and consideration in workflows, tools, and documentation as developers or designers. Recognizing library employees as legitimate participants in accessibility work reinforces that they belong within this broader ecosystem and that effective accessibility practices depend on supporting all contributing roles. This positioning also reinforces that accessibility is achieved through coordinated contributions across roles, rather than delegated to a single point of responsibility.

UX principles further informed this approach by treating library employees as primary users of accessibility systems, including documentation and workflows. From this perspective, barriers to accessibility were not only technical, but also related to usability and clarity. Tools that produced overwhelming outputs or guidance that lacked context made it more difficult for staff to engage, even when motivated.

Framing accessibility as collective care reinforced a collaborative and iterative approach. Accessibility was positioned as an ongoing process of learning and improvement rather than a measure of individual performance. This framing helped reduce anxiety and supported more open engagement with accessibility work. Together, these elements provided a practical framework for embedding accessibility into routine practices, supporting both clearer role expectations and more sustainable participation in accessibility efforts.

METHODOLOGY: UX-INFORMED ACCESSIBILITY PRACTICE

This project followed a UX-informed, design-inspired process adapted from established UX design frameworks (Hunt, 2025). For this particular project, library employees are the identified primary users and target audience of web accessibility and remediation supportive content and user flows. Rather than applying a formal or linear UX research protocol, this process was intentionally modified to reflect the realities of academic library work, including distributed responsibility for web content, varying levels of staff expertise, and limited capacity for large-scale interventions.

The approach drew on core phases of UX design: Discover and Empathize, Define, Ideate and Design, and Test and Iterate. These phases were implemented in a flexible, iterative manner rather than as a strictly sequential process. This adaptation allowed the project to remain responsive to emerging insights and to prioritize actionable, practice-based outcomes over formal research outputs.

In this context, UX functions less as a rigid methodology and more as a guiding framework for designing accessibility practices that are usable, participatory, and sustainable within a complex organizational environment.

Preparation of Materials

Foundational materials were developed and expanded to support accessibility work across the library. These included:

- a structured accessibility checklist tailored to library platforms
- initial and evolving sections of a Web Applications Accessibility Handbook
- curated and contextualized vendor training resources

These materials served as both instructional tools and shared infrastructure. Rather than presenting accessibility guidelines in abstract terms, they translated WCAG principles into practical, platform-specific examples. This approach helped reduce ambiguity and provided consistent points of reference for staff engaging in accessibility work.

Discover and Empathize

Web Editing Party

A two-hour “web editing party” served as both a hands-on remediation session and a lightweight UX discovery activity. Library employees were invited to review their own web pages using an accessibility checklist alongside automated tools such as WAVE.

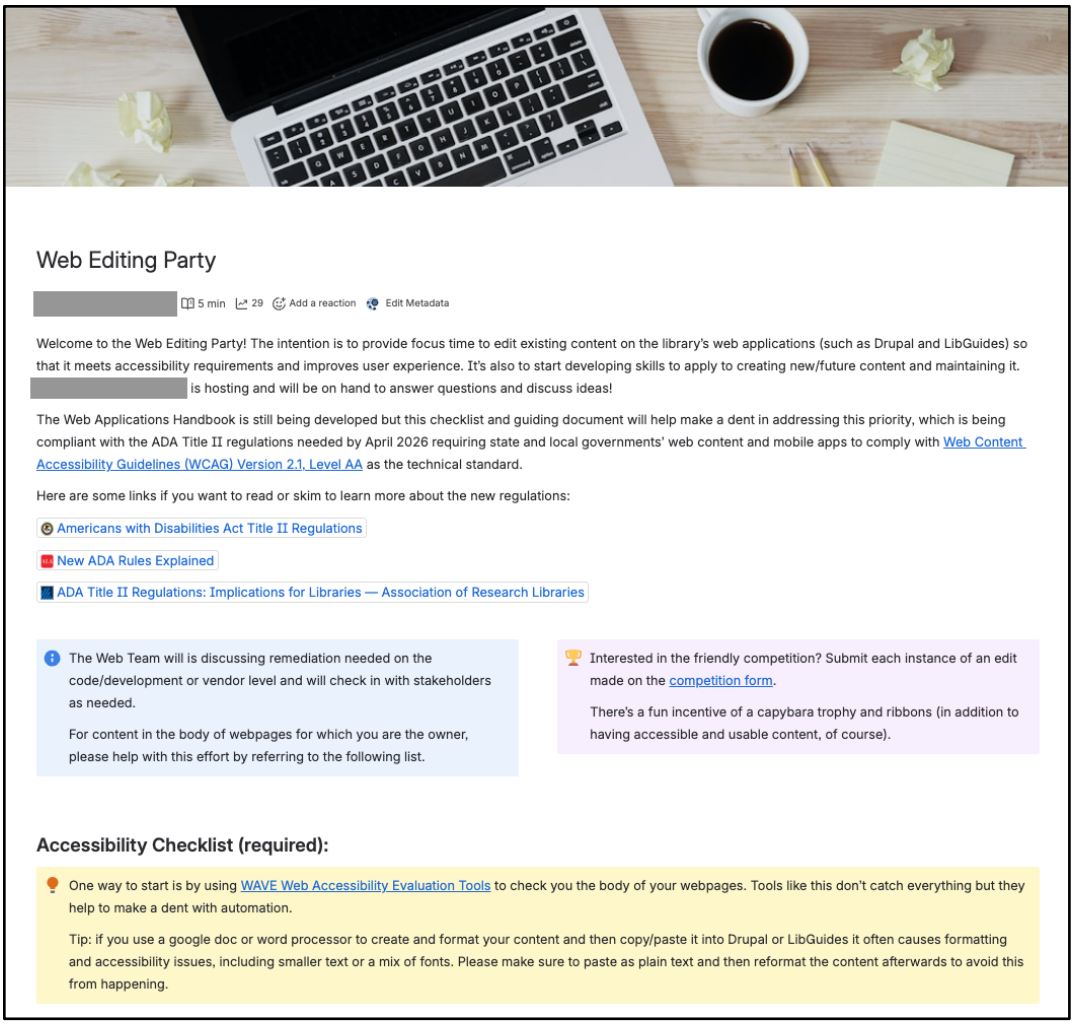

Figure 1. Cover Page of Web Editing Party Checklist in Confluence

Approximately one-third of library employees attended, with additional support expressed by colleagues who did not maintain public-facing content. The framing of the session was intentional: it balanced the urgency of ADA Title II compliance with an emphasis on care, collaboration, and ongoing support. This messaging helped reduce anxiety and encouraged participation.

Participants arrived with varying levels of confidence. Some were eager to engage, while others expressed uncertainty or overwhelm, particularly when working with large amounts of legacy content. During the session, several recurring questions emerged:

- how to interpret automated accessibility flags
- how to determine the priority of issues
- which problems required developer support
- how to avoid introducing new errors when editing content

Real-time support from front-end developers allowed staff to ask questions and receive guidance without fear of judgment. Issues that required additional follow-up were documented, reinforcing a collaborative and iterative approach.

The accessibility checklist also functioned as a set of microlearning modules, covering the areas of alt text, headings, links, color contrast, tables, PDFs, and video accessibility. The incorporation of informal elements, including humor and incentives, helped foster a sense of shared effort and community.

Web Applications Handbook Feedback

In parallel, staff were invited to provide input on a developing Web Applications Handbook. This request was intentionally framed as informal brainstorming to encourage participation and reduce pressure.

Feedback revealed widespread uncertainty around:

- Choosing the right platform (e.g., Drupal vs. LibGuides vs. Confluence vs. SharePoint)
- Whether internal content should ever live on public tools
- How content should be linked or made discoverable
- What accessibility rules apply across platforms
- Who to contact for different issues
- How forms, PDFs, videos, and other media should be created and maintained
- Naming conventions, acronyms, and the differences among tools with overlapping purposes

These insights demonstrated that accessibility challenges were deeply interconnected with governance, platform decisions, and institutional knowledge, which extended far beyond individual technical fixes.

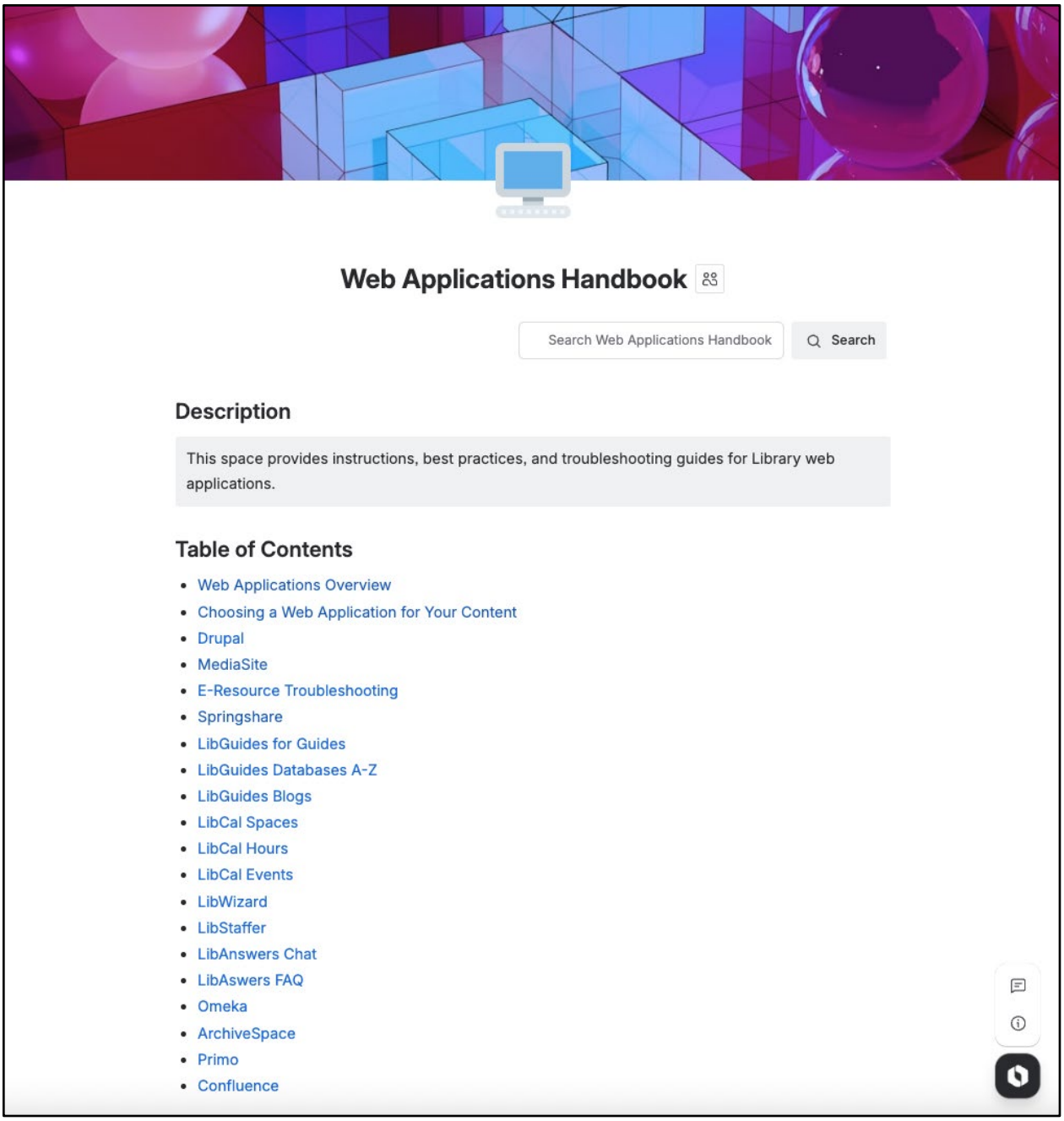

Figure 2. Cover Page for Web Applications Handbook in Confluence

Define

Insights from both the web editing party and handbook feedback clarified that barriers to accessibility were not solely technical but also organizational, cognitive, and emotional in nature.

Key problem definitions included:

- the need for clear, actionable guidance rather than abstract rules
- lack of explicit role and responsibility boundaries
- the necessity of framing accessibility as a continuous practice, rather than a one-time task
- the importance of incremental remediation strategies to reduce overwhelm

These definitions reflect the broader understanding that accessibility challenges are shaped by how work is structured and supported, rather than simply by the availability of tools or standards.

Ideate and Design

Design strategies focused on embedding accessibility into existing workflows and reducing barriers to participation. Rather than introducing entirely new systems, the project emphasized adapting and extending current practices.

Key strategies included:

- microlearning-based remediation approaches, encouraging staff to focus on one type of issue at a time
- repurposing vendor training content and integrating it into locally relevant documentation
- encouraging remediation by content element (e.g., addressing all images or headings first)
- developing accessible-by-default templates within the various web platforms

The project also produced reusable artifacts to support ongoing work, including:

- expanded accessibility checklists
- handbook sections
- code examples and templates
- platform-specific guidance
- internal updates documenting progress and changes

These strategies were designed to support incremental learning and reduce cognitive load, making accessibility work more approachable and sustainable.

Test and Iterate

Testing for this project focused on usability, confidence, and engagement, rather than formal evaluation metrics. Library employees were invited to apply guidance from the checklist and handbook, provide feedback, and request additional support as needed. Both the checklist and handbook were treated as living documents, evolving in response to staff input and changes to

platforms or requirements. Updates were shared through internal communication channels to support transparency and distributed learning.

Automated tools continued to be used to identify structural accessibility issues, but their limitations were recognized. Staff were encouraged to interpret results within the context of their content, reinforcing the role of human judgment in accessibility work. This iterative process remains ongoing, reflecting the project's emphasis on accessibility as a continuous practice rather than a completed task.

FINDINGS AND OUTCOMES

Findings

Findings from this project reinforce that accessibility work in academic libraries is shaped not only by technical requirements, but by organizational structures, staff experience, and the availability of supportive workflows. While WCAG 2.1 accessibility standards provide essential guidance, the ability to apply them effectively depends on how accessibility is framed, supported, and integrated into everyday practices.

Accessibility Anxiety Is Real and Addressable

Fear of "doing web accessibility wrong" emerged as a significant barrier to engagement. Many library employees expressed hesitation when encountering automated accessibility reports, particularly when large numbers of errors were identified without clear guidance on how to prioritize them. This uncertainty was often compounded by concerns about inadvertently introducing new issues during remediation.

Collaborative and supportive structures played a critical role in reducing this anxiety. The web editing party created a shared space where staff could engage with accessibility work alongside colleagues, ask questions in real time, and receive immediate feedback. This normalized uncertainty and reframed accessibility as a communal learning process rather than an individualized performance-based task.

Ongoing support further reinforced this shift. Virtual office hours provided recurring opportunities for staff to raise questions as they encountered issues in their own content. These sessions frequently focused on nuanced topics, such as determining whether an image should be treated as decorative or requires meaningful alternative text. Conversations around these topics highlighted that accessibility decisions often require interpretation and context, rather than strictly following automated recommendations.

One-on-one consultations offered additional individualized support, allowing staff to work through specific accessibility issues within the context of their own content. These sessions revealed that even as familiarity increased, some staff continued to experience uncertainty about

their technical skills, underscoring the importance of sustained support rather than one-time training.

Role and Platform Clarity Matter as Much as Technical Skill

Confusion around platform purpose and content ownership emerged as a major factor shaping accessibility outcomes. Staff frequently questioned when to use different platforms (e.g., Drupal versus LibGuides), where content should reside, and how users would discover it. These uncertainties often delayed remediation efforts, as staff were hesitant to make changes without a clearer understanding of expectations.

Introducing governance discussions through the Web Applications Handbook provided a pathway toward addressing these issues. By clarifying platform distinctions, identifying points of contact, and beginning to articulate shared practices, the project reduced ambiguity and enabled more confident decision-making. This finding demonstrates that accessibility is closely tied to broader organizational questions, including information architecture, content strategy, and workflow design.

Iteration Builds Trust and Participation

Framing accessibility tools and processes as iterative rather than final was critical for encouraging participation. Treating the accessibility checklist and handbook as evolving documents reduced pressure to achieve immediate perfection and created space for ongoing learning.This iterative approach also helped staff build momentum. Rather than attempting to remediate all issues at once, employees were encouraged to focus on specific elements, such as images or headings, which made the work more manageable. Over time, this incremental progress contributed to increased confidence and a greater willingness to engage in accessibility work.

Documentation Functions as Infrastructure

Library employees responded strongly to documentation that supported decision-making rather than simply listing technical requirements. The accessibility checklist and handbook were most effective as resources when they included practical examples, platform-specific guidance, and answers to common questions. This finding aligns with UX principles related to reducing cognitive load. When documentation was clear, contextualized, and easy to apply, staff were better able to take action. Conversely, abstract or overly technical guidance was more likely to result in hesitation or inaction.

Outcomes

In addition to these findings, several outcomes emerged that demonstrate how accessibility practices evolved within the organization.

Increased Engagement and Participation

Library employees engaged more actively in accessibility work following the introduction of collaborative sessions and ongoing support structures. Participation extended beyond the initial web editing party, with continued involvement through office hours, consultations, and follow-up activities.

Expansion of Support Structures and Resources

The project resulted in the expansion of accessibility documentation, including the development of the Web Applications Handbook and the refinement of the accessibility checklist. These resources became central tools for guiding practice and supporting consistency across platforms.

Development of Hybrid Remediation Approaches

Balancing training with direct remediation support proved important for maintaining progress. While the project emphasized skill development, there were also instances where project leads contributed directly to remediation efforts to meet compliance timelines. These interventions provided immediate improvements while also offering examples for staff to reference in their own work.

Increased Collaboration and Skill Sharing

Accessibility work also became a catalyst for collaboration across roles. For example, efforts to address video accessibility requirements led to discussions about captioning workflows and responsibilities. Staff with prior experience in captioning contributed examples and guidance, supporting peer-to-peer learning and knowledge sharing. This pattern of collaboration extended beyond specific tasks, contributing to a broader environment in which staff shared strategies, asked questions, and supported one another in developing accessibility practices.

Persistent Challenges

Despite these positive outcomes, challenges remained. Some staff continued to experience feelings of overwhelm, particularly when balancing accessibility work with other responsibilities. Others expressed a need for additional guidance or more opportunities for practice, often due to unfamiliarity with more complex HTML code-based issues. These continued challenges highlight that accessibility work is ongoing and that even effective interventions require sustained support and refinement over time.

DISCUSSION: LESSONS LEARNED AND CONSTRAINTS

This project highlights that accessibility remediation in academic libraries extends beyond technical compliance and is shaped by how accessibility work is supported and integrated into everyday practice. WCAG 2.1 standards provide necessary guidance, but their implementation depends on clear expectations, usable workflows, and staff capacity.

A key insight is that barriers to accessibility are often rooted in uncertainty rather than lack of motivation. Library employees were generally willing to engage but faced challenges interpreting automated tools, prioritizing issues, and understanding how accessibility aligned with their roles. Aligning accessibility tasks with existing responsibilities helped reduce these barriers and supported greater engagement.

Microlearning-based approaches were effective in making accessibility work more manageable. Focusing on elements that are easier entry points, such as alt text, headings, or link clarity, allowed staff to make incremental progress and reduced the sense of overwhelm associated with large-scale remediation. Practical strategies, including organizing work by content ownership or issue type, further supported sustained participation.

Many of the issues identified mirror patterns found in broader research on academic library websites, including color contrast and structural misuse of headings (Liu et al., 2024). However, this project underscores that identifying errors is only part of the process; sustainable accessibility depends on creating workflows and practices that support consistent remediation over time.

The limitations of automated tools were also evident. While useful for identifying structural issues, they could not fully assess meaning, clarity, or usability. In several instances, pages appeared compliant in automated reports but still presented accessibility challenges when evaluated contextually. These findings reinforce the importance of combining automated tools with human judgment, as emphasized by Spina and Albrecht Oling (2025).

Feedback gathered during the development of the Web Applications Handbook further demonstrated that accessibility is closely tied to organizational clarity. Library employees sought guidance not only on technical requirements, but also on workflows, platform use, naming conventions, and points of contact. This suggests that effective accessibility documentation should support decision-making and coordination, rather than focusing solely on compliance.

The project also highlighted the emotional dimension of accessibility work. Feelings of uncertainty and overwhelm were common, particularly when staff encountered large volumes of issues or unfamiliar requirements. Framing accessibility as an iterative learning process helped reduce these barriers and supported more open engagement.

Generative AI as an Emerging but Limited Tool

Interest in generative AI emerged as staff explored ways to support accessibility tasks, including drafting alt text or interpreting ADA Title II requirements. These uses remained exploratory and required careful human review to ensure accuracy and contextual appropriateness.

In addition to practical limitations, ethical considerations, reliability, and impacts on staff skill development, remain central. In the absence of institutional guidance, the project prioritized staff capacity building and collaborative learning over reliance on AI tools. While AI may offer future efficiencies, its role in accessibility work remains uncertain and requires further exploration.

Constraints and Ongoing Work

Several constraints shaped the project, including limited staff capacity, the scale of legacy content, uneven familiarity with tools, and evolving interpretations of regulatory timelines. Recognizing these limitations supported a focus on incremental progress rather than immediate completion. Accessibility work in this context remains ongoing. Continued refinement of documentation, workflows, and support structures will be necessary to sustain and expand progress over time.

IMPLICATIONS FOR LIBRARY PRACTICE

This project demonstrates that accessibility remediation in academic libraries requires attention not only to technical standards, but also to the organizational conditions that shape how accessibility work is carried out. As libraries respond to ADA Title II requirements, there is increasing pressure to remediate web content at scale, yet this work cannot be sustained through compliance-driven approaches alone.

One key implication is the importance of role clarity and distributed responsibility. While prior guidance emphasizes the value of a designated accessibility lead (Pereyaslavska, 2020), this project shows that accessibility is most effective when aligned with existing staff roles, particularly content creators. When staff understand how accessibility connects to their everyday work, participation increases and barriers to engagement are reduced.

A second implication is the need to embed accessibility into routine workflows. Treating web accessibility as separate from day-to-day work limits long-term progress, especially in environments where content is continuously created and updated. Integrating accessibility into day-to-day practices supports more sustainable outcomes and reduces the need for large-scale remediation efforts over time.

The findings also highlight the value of collaborative and participatory approaches. Providing time for editing sessions, office hours, and one-on-one consultations created

opportunities for shared problem-solving and peer learning, helping to normalize uncertainty and foster a sense of collective responsibility.

Additionally, documentation functions as critical infrastructure when it supports decision-making rather than simply listing requirements. Resources such as the accessibility checklist and Web Applications Handbook were most useful when they provided clear, contextualized examples aligned with local platforms and workflows.

The project further demonstrates the importance of balancing training with direct remediation support. While skill development is necessary for long-term sustainability, compliance timelines may require centralized assistance to maintain progress. Hybrid approaches that combine learning with hands-on support can address immediate needs while building capacity.

Finally, grounding decisions in established WCAG standards remains essential when navigating differing preferences or approaches to accessibility (Getz & Shotick, 2025). These standards provide a consistent baseline while still allowing for iterative refinement.

Taken together, these findings suggest that libraries preparing for accessibility remediation should prioritize organizational readiness alongside technical compliance by focusing on roles, workflows, collaboration, and documentation.

CONCLUSION

Accessibility is often framed as a technical problem to be solved or a requirement to be met. However, this project demonstrates that accessibility in academic libraries is more accurately understood as an ongoing organizational practice shaped by people, processes, and systems. By reframing accessibility as collective care, this work emphasizes the importance of shared responsibility, continuous learning, and collaboration. Rather than positioning accessibility as an individual burden or a one-time task, this approach acknowledges that creating inclusive digital environments is an iterative process that evolves alongside content, platforms, and staff expertise.

The UX-informed, design-inspired strategies described in this project provide a practical model for integrating accessibility into everyday library work. Through participatory activities, shared documentation, and role-based approaches, the project supported increased engagement, reduced anxiety, and fostered a more sustainable approach to accessibility remediation. At the same time, this work highlights that accessibility cannot be fully addressed through tools or compliance alone. Human judgment, contextual understanding, and organizational support remain essential to creating meaningful and usable digital experiences. Emerging tools, including generative AI, may offer new possibilities, but their role in accessibility work will require careful consideration of both ethical and practical implications.

As academic libraries continue to respond to ADA Title II requirements, there is a growing need for practice-based approaches that address not only what accessibility standards require, but how they can be implemented effectively within complex institutional contexts. This project contributes to that emerging conversation by demonstrating how accessibility can be operationalized through UX-informed, collaborative, and sustainable practices.

Ultimately, moving from compliance to collective care requires a shift in perspective that views accessibility as a task to viewing it as an ongoing commitment. By investing in structures that support collaboration, clarity, and continuous improvement, libraries can create more inclusive digital environments that better serve all users.

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