Accessible Elections 101

Best practices to ensuring elections are accessible for all students

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Hi y’all!

We are excited to distribute this comprehensive guide with the intention of facilitating accessible elections for every student within the CSU community. Our primary goal is to provide y’all with information that ensures that the electoral process remains inclusive and equitable for all. The Guide itself will have information related to Alternate Text, Color guides, best fonts, as well as other miscellaneous tips and tricks and hyperlinks will be provided as well.

It is crucial to emphasize that this guide is not intended as an impediment; rather, its purpose is to guarantee uniform and equal access to the provided resources for every candidate as well as every student. Ultimately, the Elections Committee retains the authority to determine the enforceability of each aspect outlined in this guide. For questions, please contact your Liaison.

An important note to add that it is expected that your campaign team will be ensuring your content is accessible, including writing the alt text for your posts, however, should you have any inquiries or require clarification on any matter, please feel free to reach out to us, with preferred contact information listed below. We are committed to serving as a dedicated resource and are here to assist you as needed. Best of luck Rams!

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**Accessible Design and Universal Design:**

Accessible Design is defined as “The design process in which the needs of people with disabilities are specifically considered.”

- This includes having interpreters for events, alternative keyboards, accommodations, etc.

Universal Design is defined as “The design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.”

- This includes captions, wide doorways, curb ramps, etc.

The difference between these two approaches are where they sit in a timeline. An accessible approach focuses on the outcome while a universal approach is focused on its approach.

Access is meant to be proactive, inclusive, and sustainable. It is heavily encouraged that candidates focus on a Universal Design approach as it acknowledges that access issues stem from inaccessible, poorly designed environments and should be addressed by the designer. The system/environment is designed, to the greatest extent possible, to be usable by all.

For a go-to guide on accessible designs, The World Wide Web Consortium (“W3C”) has developed the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines or WCAG 2.2 to ensure all forms of digital content are accessible. A link to the WCAG 2.2 can be found under the “Further Reading” section.
Alt Text Guidelines and why they are important:

What is Alt Text?
Alternate Text, commonly referred to as “Alt Text”, is a way to make visual content such as pictures, gifs, infographics, etc. accessible to blind and visually impaired people.

It is a short description of the visual content that adds context and focuses on the important details of an image.

Screen readers and other text to speech software uses alt text embedded in the image or in the captions to read aloud the content to the user.

Without alt text, blind and visually impaired people are excluded from participating in discourse, politics, and public life. Social media plays a large role in all of our lives, and alt text/image description enables blind and visually impaired people to communicate. Additionally, naming colors in alt text makes it accessible for people who are color blind.

Accessible digital content is also a requirement under the Americans with Disabilities Act (“ADA”), but inclusion of blind and visually impaired people should come from an ethical standpoint of media literacy in the digital age and not because one is trying to avoid a lawsuit.

How do I add Alt Text?

- For Instagram posts, once you are done making edits to your post, go to “Advanced Settings” and then “Write Alt Text.”
  - You do not need to add alt text to temporary media (Instagram stories, Snapchat, etc.)

Important notes to consider:

- Think about writing alt text like you are on the phone with your bestie and you're describing a photo to them they can't see.

- Use of alt text generators are highly discouraged due to software errors, grammatical errors, poor screen to text translation, and AI software is unable to capture context needed for good alt text, as a result it must be written by a person.
Alt Text Guidelines for ASCSU Election

- A brief description (1-3 sentences) of what they are wearing.
- A brief description (1 sentence) of their expression (happy, sad, angry, confident, etc.)
- A brief description of their pose (1-2 sentences)
- A brief description (1 sentence) of the background or foreground
- All text included as it is written in the images, (i.e. “VOTE FOR US” or “Vote for Us” depending on the words in the slide)
- Should be included in both the caption and advanced settings of the image, comments for overflow text.
- Each image in the post must have an image description (i.e. 3 separate image descriptions for a photoset of 3 photos)
- Logos and their text must be described.
- Colors need to be named (i.e. a navy-blue background, a teal stripe, a green logo, etc.)
  - If you are unsure what exact color it is that is ok, as long as it is close to what color you are describing.
    - “Sky Blue” is a light blue, “Midnight Blue” is a dark blue.
- Description must add and match the context of the image.

Example of Alt Text:

An Instagram ad of a woman in a chartreuse jumpsuit that looks like a wearable sleeping bag.
**Color Guide:**

Color is key for how perceive the world around us, as a result it is important for us to ensure folk are able to enjoy and utilize what is being portrayed. This section will go over how to ensure the colors used are accessible.

Accessible colors are color combinations that have enough contrast to make layered elements (such as text or icons on a background) clearly distinguishable to those visually impaired or deficient in color vision.

A key component of accessible design, accessible colors pay consideration to how people with disabilities understand information, in order to ensure all components of a page are accessible, legible, and inclusive.

For folks who are colorblind, the ability to differentiate certain hues depends on the color contrast ratio — or the degree of contrast between two layered objects (i.e. foreground and background colors).

If you are utilizing several colors in your design, avoid problematic color palettes and use accessible color combinations instead. Also, make sure these combinations are high in contrast, colors that sit opposite on the color wheel are a great way to ensure high contrast, which can be seen below.
The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines ("WCAG") has established a grading scale of guidelines categorized into three levels of compliance. They’re based on three levels — A (lowest), AA (mid-range), and AAA (highest) — that stem from the color contrast ratio of layered components.

A link to the WebAim’s Contrast Checker will be linked in the further reading section. It separates the colors into “Foreground” and “Background” so:

**A – Minimal accessibility**

Color combinations with a contrast ratio below 4.5:1 for normal text (and 3:1 for large text and graphics) will cause difficulties for many people with disabilities and impairments.

**AA – Strong accessibility**

Color pairings with a contrast ratio of 4.5:1 and above provide sufficient accessibility for use in normal text, large text and graphics.

**AAA – Enhanced accessibility**

Color combinations with a contrast ratio of 7:1 for normal text and 4.5:1 for large text and graphics provide enhanced accessibility. Government sites typically follow these standards.

* **TLDR:** A minimum color contrast ratio of 4.5:1 is best practice for text and interactive elements to meet the needs of colorblind or visually impaired users. *
**Fonts:**

Fonts are also crucial in accessible design since they impact readability and comprehension.

Accessible fonts are particularly beneficial for people with dyslexia, a learning disability that affects the part of the brain that processes language and impacts how a person reads and understands written material.

For people with dyslexia, written words can be hard to understand and comprehend. There are an estimated 43.5 million Americans that may have dyslexia, and worldwide the total number is ~780 million, so designing material that is accessible to dyslexic people is essential.

Besides dyslexia, accessible fonts are also important for people with visual impairments or other reading difficulties.

Here are some tips to make sure your fonts are accessible:

- Use sans-serif.
  - A sans-serif font is any font without embellishments on letters making it easier to read.
- Avoid italics.
- Use even amounts of white space between paragraphs.
- Follow a standard reading pattern from left to right. Try to avoid asymmetrical designs.

The following are known to be Accessible fonts:

- Calibri
- Arial
- Times New Roman
- Tahoma
- Helvetica
- Verdana
- Slab serif fonts including Arvo, Museo Slab, and **Rockwell** are also considered to be accessible.
Further Reading & Useful Sites:

- The World Wide Web Consortium’s Web Accessibility Initiative Resources - https://www.w3.org/WAI/roles/
  - Provides guidelines and comprehensive resources for designing accessible web pages and other social media needs.
- WebAIM’s Color Contrast - https://webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker/
- How to Create Accessible Designs [Tips + Examples] - https://venngage.com/blog/accessible-design/#what-is