



Maine State Government  
Dept. of Administrative & Financial Services  
Office of Information Technology

## **APPENDIX A – Standards and Best Practices for Accessible Information and Effective Communication**

### **STATEMENT**

These Standards and Best Practices are incorporated as Appendix A of the “Accessibility Policy on Effective Electronic Communications.”

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## 1. Preamble

The enforceable standards in these “Standards and Best Practices” are those that State employees and contractors shall follow to comply with the State of Maine’s [“Digital Accessibility Policy”](#).

### 1. Advisory Note:

**Additional Recommendations and Methods.** Also included in this document as additional guidance are the best practices and other recommendations that State employees and contractors should be aware of and can follow unless the intent of the Policy can be met through equivalent practices.

Methods to achieve accessibility are continuously improving. Thus, it is appropriate to use practices that are up to date.

**A. Intent.** The intent is to make available in appropriate alternative formats and to provide effective communication so that people with disabilities, including but not limited to people who have vision impairments or who are deaf or hard-of-hearing, are provided effective communication.

### 1. Advisory Practical Guidance:

Usually, conveying information in alternative formats is effective if the same content is communicated auditorily and/or visually.

There should always be an electronic version of a written document. This allows the material to be converted to alternative format (e.g., Braille or large print) or to be provided on disk or by email, as needed.

**B. Disability-Related Resources.** The ADA Accessibility Coordinator can provide a list of “Disability-Related Resources” for obtaining auxiliary aids and services.

The following sections of Appendix A explain standards and best practices related to various media in more detail.

## **1. Advisory Procedural Guidance:**

**Planning and Production for Timely Availability.** To “make materials available” in alternative format and to “provide effective communication” involves three types of activity: planning, production of materials for distribution, and readiness to provide accommodations.

- (1) Planning. State employees and contractors must plan ahead for the anticipated audiences, including identifying what formats will be appropriate for general use and distribution and how to be ready to make further accommodations (see (3), below) when requested.
- (2) Production. State employees and contractors shall produce materials in formats appropriately accessible for the known audience to whom the information is presented.
- (3) Timely Availability of Auxiliary Aids and Services. When a person with a disability requests auxiliary aids or services, such as a sign language interpreter or alternative format materials, staff or contractors shall provide them in a timely manner, which means as soon as practicable based on the necessary logistical arrangements for a requested format but in no case later than ten business days from the request.

Best Practice 1(1). Planning with universal design in mind is key to ensuring that an audience can easily use materials.

- Learn about universal design to know how to judge what formats are appropriate in various settings.
- Plan for and include funding for accessibility in the agency’s annual budget process so that resources are available when needed.
- Planning ahead means allowing enough time to identify and carry out preparatory steps based on the nature of the event, the variety of materials, and who will be the audience.
- Authors need to anticipate how materials will be used and distributed and then prepare the original document properly. For example, if the participants are known, it is appropriate to contact participants to ascertain individual access needs.

Best Practice 1(2). Learn how to make appropriate auxiliary aids and services available when necessary to ensure effective communication. For example, when preparing for a workshop, program announcements should say that auxiliary aids and services can be made available and must list the contact person who will help meet participants’ communication needs.

## **1. Advisory Procedural Guidance, continued:**

**Requests from Individuals with Disabilities.** State and federal law require the agency to provide an opportunity for individuals with disabilities to request an auxiliary aid or service or other accommodation so that the request can be honored in a timely manner. Individuals who need auxiliary aids and services or other accommodations should make their needs known to the designated State employees.

- (1) Notice. The agency should include a notice in program materials describing what is available and how to make a request for an auxiliary aid or service or other accommodation.
- (2) Primary consideration. When an auxiliary aid or service is requested, the agency should give primary consideration to the choice expressed by the individual. "Primary consideration" means that the public entity must honor the choice, unless there is an equally effective means of communication available.

Best Practice 1(3). Provide notice to the public with enough lead-time to meet requests.

Best Practice 1(4). It is important to consult with the individual to determine the most appropriate auxiliary aid or service, because the individual with a disability is most familiar with his or her disability and is in the best position to determine what type of aid or service will be effective.

## 2. Captioning

Video media with an audio track, such as streaming video, videotapes and film clips, owned or produced by the State and intended for use by either State employees or the public, must be captioned according to this section.

Vendors who can provide captioning are listed in “Disability-Related Resources.”

- A. Caption Format.** The captioning may be either open or closed.
- B. New Acquisitions.** An agency that obtains or produces video media intended for use by either State employees or the public shall ensure that it is captioned.
  - (1) **Video Production.** When an agency produces, contracts with a vendor, or otherwise arranges for production of video media, the agency shall ensure the product is captioned irrespective of medium.
  - (2) **Video Acquisitions.** When video media are offered to the State for sale or free of charge and there is a version with captions, the State shall only purchase or select the captioned version.
  - (3) **Uncaptioned Acquisitions.** For items that are not available for purchase with captions, or for items given to the State without captions, the State agency shall assure that captioning will be added by requesting captioning from the producer of the item in its next edition or by obtaining a script and adding captioning.
- C. Existing Materials.** Material already owned by the State as of the date of this policy need not be modified to include closed captioning when alternative methods, such as provision of a script, effectively communicate the content.
- D. Transcribed Hearings.** Comments for the record on video that are accompanied by a transcript need not be captioned.
- E. Live Events.** State employees and contractors shall provide auxiliary aids and services appropriate for the known audience during videoconferencing or other broadcast events and in any recording of the event. Effective communication depends on who attends an event and what is being presented. It may include interpreters, closed or open captioning, or description of displayed material.

### 3. Web Documents

Web-based documents and materials shall comply with Maine State Web Standards and Digital Accessibility Policy of the State of Maine. State agency employees and contractors shall follow the policy and standards at:

<https://www.maine.gov/oit/policies/DigitalAccessibilityPolicy.pdf> and  
<https://www.maine.gov/oit/policies/webstandards.html>.

#### 3. Advisory Guidance:

Among the many resources that describe techniques for designing websites to be accessible, the State Webmaster Resource Center contains numerous tools and technical guides. To obtain permission to use the resources, contact [creative@InforMe.org](mailto:creative@InforMe.org), then go to <http://www.maine.gov/webmasters> and [http://www.maine.gov/webmasters/tutorials\\_guidance/accessibility](http://www.maine.gov/webmasters/tutorials_guidance/accessibility).

In addition, WebAIM has one of the most comprehensive sites for learning and exploring at all levels, including many training articles: <http://www.webaim.org/>.

### 4. Electronic Slide Presentations and Learning Tools

**Content.** The content of electronic visual materials for presentation or learning shall be made accessible for vision-impaired individuals.

**Publishing.** Electronic presentations and learning tools that are posted on the web shall be in a format readable using screen readers.

#### **4. Advisory Procedural Guidance:**

Methods for making visual materials accessible will vary according to equipment and software being used and who is in the audience. Note the following recommendations as guidance:

**Authoring.** State employees and contractors who author electronic visual materials for presentations or as learning tools using standard desktop software programs shall produce the materials in a format that is readable by visually impaired persons using screen readers.

**Presentation.** State employees and contractors who will be using electronic visual materials for live presentation or training shall provide them upon request to an individual who has a disability, in advance of the event, in a format readable by the individual. During public presentations or training, the presenters shall ensure the content is effectively communicated for audience members who cannot see the material.

#### **4. Advisory Practical Guidance:**

Guidance for creating accessible PowerPoint presentations is available from WebAIM: <http://www.webaim.org/>. Additional resources, such as for publishing to electronic presentations on the Web, are listed in "Disability Related Resources." The following are alternative methods for providing accessibility for electronic presentations:

Best Practice 4(1). Following these steps is one method for creating an electronic file of a PowerPoint presentation readable by people who use screen readers:

1. Save the PowerPoint presentation as an RTF file.
2. Print both the native PowerPoint presentation file and the RTF file.
3. Compare the differences in the contents of the two files.
4. Type into the RTF file whatever information appears in the PowerPoint presentation but is missing from the RTF version (e.g., text, the meaning of images and of charts or tables).
5. Forward the updated RTF version of the presentation to members of the audience who need it, in advance of the actual presentation, so they can review it before the presentation occurs.

Best Practice 4(2). Presenters should communicate the content of any visual displays or projections aurally, such as by reading or describing what is shown during a presentation, as appropriate to the audience or participants.

#### **5. Telephone, Relay Calls and TTY Communications**

The State of Maine is committed to ensuring accessibility to information technology for both citizens and employees with disabilities and to be a model for other states in providing access to departments and agencies for all citizens including the deaf, hard-of-hearing and speech-impaired. Most often citizens make initial contact with the State by phone, or in the case of the deaf or hard-of-hearing, by TTY.

**5. Advisory Guidance:**

**Answering Calls.** Whenever possible, a person rather than an automated answering machine shall answer public agency phone calls. A person should answer TTY calls, whether answering using Maine Relay 711 on a workstation or answering using a TTY.

- A. Transferring TTY Calls.** Incoming TTY calls being transferred from the State operator or other number shall be routed to the appropriate staff with Maine Relay 711 at their desk. Callers who reach an unattended workstation shall be automatically re-routed to an attended workstation, or be given the option of leaving a message or returning to the State operator.
- B. Messages.** When callers make a direct call to a State employee who is unavailable, the answering system shall be configured so the caller will be able to leave a message. State employees shall return all messages in a timely manner.
- C. Training.** Each agency shall ensure that sufficient State employees know how to participate in relay calls and that staff answering or placing Maine Relay 711 or TTY calls are trained on how to use the equipment and to communicate with TTY callers.
- D. Notifying the Public.** In addition to the general number listed in phone directories to reach the State operator, each department shall list any direct Maine Relay 711 lines or TTY numbers it provides for public access. The State or agency number for TTY caller access shall accompany other public contact phone numbers on any publications or communications (letterhead, business cards, brochures or fliers, facsimile cover pages, posters, web sites, public service announcements).
- E. Maintenance.** Each agency shall ensure that equipment is working properly.

- F. Performance.** State employees shall report technical operational problems to the OIT Help Desk. The agency shall make the responsibility of employees using Maine Relay 711 or TTY communications a part of the employee's performance review.

**5. Advisory Note:**

Maine Relay 711 is a technology most State agencies use for communication with TTY users. It is a network-based system with special provisions for the communication needs of the deaf and hard-of-hearing with advanced communications and messaging features. It is a blending of telephone and computer technologies which links TTY callers with every Maine Relay 711 personal computer user on the local and wide area networks. This system can be compared to an instant messaging system. Maine Relay 711 increases the rate of successful TTY communications.