



# A Guide to Digital Accessibility for Charities

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## The aim of this guide

Digital accessibility has become a real talking point in the third sector. Whilst there has always been an acceptance that charity websites and communications need to cater for the needs of their audience, it is an area that is often overlooked or neglected - perhaps through lack of resource, understanding or skills. At Giant Digital we are very keen to change that.

A good starting point of any charity's digital accessibility journey is addressing the website. As the digital 'shop window' to your charity, your website is at the forefront of the digital accessibility agenda. It should enable all of your users to access your content easily and equally. This will help you to make a good and lasting impression with supporters, beneficiaries and other stakeholders seeking to interact with your charity or not-for-profit organisation online.

Making your website truly accessible means considering the needs of all those with challenges and impairments. Not just those with physical disabilities, but also people with learning difficulties, vision or hearing impairments, neurodiversity and those who speak English as a second language. It can even extend to supporting those with situational impairments too.

By improving the accessibility of your charity website, you'll create a user-friendly site for everybody, irrespective of ability. Remember, even if you aren't targeting an audience with accessibility needs, it doesn't mean you don't need to cater for them.

To help ensure that no one is excluded from accessing important information and services on your charity's website, we've put together this practical digital accessibility guide. We'll cover best practice, common challenges faced by charity website users and how to identify and correct accessibility issues on your website.

If you would prefer to access this e-book in a more accessible format, please visit [www.giantdigital.co.uk/accessibility-ebook](http://www.giantdigital.co.uk/accessibility-ebook)

**Once you've had a read through of the following information, you can get started by downloading our free accessibility checklist or request a free accessibility audit of your charity website. Find out about our complimentary services for charities at the end of this e-book.**



## About Giant Digital

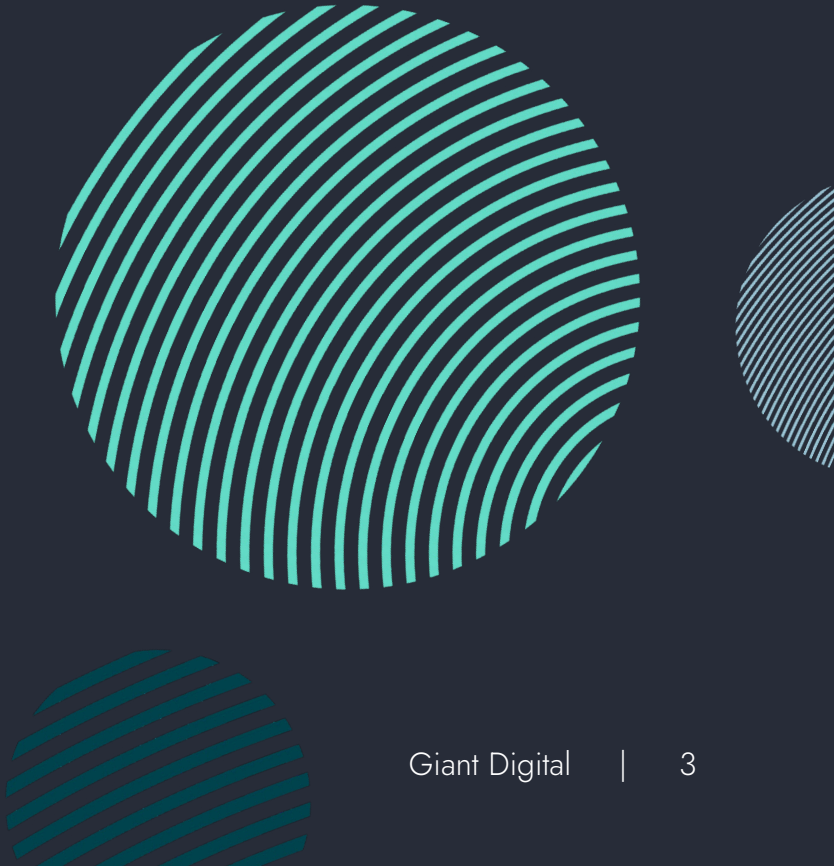
At Giant Digital we're a friendly, dedicated digital team, with a passion for helping charitable and ethical organisations achieve their goals.

As third sector specialists, we strongly believe that technology can be a power for good. We use our digital know-how to design innovative websites and platforms that support our clients in delivering positive social and environmental change across the world, whilst ensuring optimum return on investment.

Established in 2011, we have more than a decade's experience working with over 45 charities and non-profit organisations to develop tailored digital solutions that raise their profile, maximise donations, deliver great value, and help bring about positive change.

During this time we have had the pleasure of working with a range of charities supporting beneficiaries living with disabilities or accessibility challenges. Just some of these include Sight Research UK, Whizz-Kidz and Help for Heroes, the latter of which gave our team deeply valuable insights into the value of creating accessible websites for users living with some of the less visible impairments such as PTSD.

We hope this guide to digital accessibility gives you the confidence and know-how to make your charity website more accessible. If you'd like any further support from our specialist team then do get in touch, we'd be delighted to help.





# Why accessibility matters for charities and not-for-profit organisations



# Why accessibility matters for charities and not-for-profit organisations

Common issues such as slow-loading websites, information being buried in content-heavy pages, or complicated online forms can make the user-experience difficult for those with disabilities and other access needs. So, too, can unfriendly mobile pages and websites that don't consider users who rely on assistive technology.

By improving your digital accessibility, you can maximise your reach to all of your stakeholders living with disabilities or impairments. This can ensure that no one is excluded from accessing your valuable information and services.

## What do we mean by 'digital accessibility'?

Digital accessibility means creating digital content and tools that can be easily used and understood by people with disabilities, long-term illness or impairments. This includes website users with visual, auditory, physical and cognitive disabilities, and more.

To improve your digital accessibility, you'll need to design your charity's digital content in a way that enables it to be easily accessed by all your users, irrespective of their abilities.

Methods for this, some of which we'll be covering in this guide, include alternative text for images, descriptive links for people using screen readers, captions and subtitles for videos and much more.

In addition, we will discuss the importance of charities ensuring that their content is compatible with assistive technologies like screen readers and speech recognition software, as well as being accessible for keyboard navigation.

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Did you know?

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), an estimated 1.3 billion people experience 'significant disability' – that's 1 in 6 people. These include physical, neurological and cognitive disabilities.

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## Why it is important for charities to get it right?

In addition to making your charity website design more inclusive, a well thought out accessibility strategy can bring many other benefits. You'll reach a wider audience, see more effective search engine results and demonstrate your charity's commitment to corporate social responsibility, too.

In fact, accessibility is a must in today's digital third sector world. Here's why...

- **Inclusivity:** Ensuring that all your users have equal access to your service and information will result in an inclusive, diverse and ethical website for all. Not taking steps to provide an accessible website is, to many people, a form of discrimination.
  - **Charitable benefits:** Digital accessibility can bring significant benefits to your organisation. The changes you implement can increase your audience reach, drive up loyalty and trust from stakeholders, maximise engagement for your fundraising initiatives and bump up where you appear in search engine rankings, too.
  - **Competitor advantage:** By investing in digital accessibility and going further than the 'standard' online service, your organisation will have a competitive advantage as a leader in accessibility and inclusive design.
  - **Site innovation:** When you take a step back to consider how to make your website more accessible, you'll discover new and creative ways to deliver your content. This will lead to a more innovative and creative site and a better service for your stakeholders.
  - **Meet your legal obligations:** If you are a public sector body or a charity that has received public or government funding then your website must be fully accessible and meet the WCAG 2.1 AA standard. We'll talk about this in greater detail further on.
- Sustainability:** Accessible websites compliment the ethos of sustainable website design. This is because having lots of data-heavy videos, images and text-filled pages uses more energy to load up. By opting for a clean and minimalistic design, you won't just make your site easier to access and navigate, you'll make your website greener and faster, too.

## Impact of inaccessible websites on individuals with disabilities

People living with disabilities, long-term health issues and other impairments represent an increasing demographic. With an aging population to consider too, it means more of your charity website visitors are likely to have accessibility limitations.

A poor performing website can be the cause of many frustrating and significant challenges for certain users. Just some of these include:

- Unable to see images and no clear alt descriptions.
- Not being able to tell what is being said in videos.
- Website colour scheme, font or patterns making it hard to read text.
- Poorly designed navigation bar making it difficult for keyboard users.
- Too much 'audio clutter' for users with screen readers.
- Complicated heading structures making it difficult for those with screen readers to navigate.
- Multiple vague 'read more' links making it unclear what to click for users with screen readers.
- Unable to complete forms that are not keyboard accessible.
- 'Visually noisy' websites causing sensory overload or issues accessing information.
- Reliance upon inaccessible documents such as PDFs for information.

It goes without saying that charities and not-for-profit organisations who dismiss the needs of their users risk alienating and even losing them to one which can meet their needs.

By improving and maintaining accessibility across your website, you can avoid damage to your brand reputation and create a positive user experience for all.



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Did you know?

In a 2023 survey of 600 disabled and neurodiverse people, almost three quarters (73%) said they have not made purchases online due their accessibility needs not being met. Almost half of respondents (49%) have been put off making online donations and 33% have been put off direct debits.

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## Legal obligations of charities and not-for-profit organisation websites

Building on the Equality Act 2010, further accessibility regulations from the government came into force for public sector bodies in 2018. These regulations are called the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018.

These regulations mean that some charities must abide by the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (known as WCAG), the government's set of recommendations for improving web accessibility.

Whilst many charities and not-for-profit organisations are exempt from the accessibility regulations, they do apply to:

- Charities that are mostly financed by public funding, for example, The British Museum.
- Charities that provide services that are essential to the public.
- Charities aimed at disabled people.

If your charity falls into one of the above categories, it is a legal requirement that your organisation's website is fully accessible and meets the [WCAG 2.1 AA](#) standard by being "perceivable, operable, understandable and robust".

You will also be required to have an accessibility statement on your website. This is a clear statement that says how your website meets the law. [You can read a sample accessibility statement on the gov.uk website here.](#)

The next generation of guidelines, known as WCAG 3.0, is currently being planned to raise the standard of accessibility even higher. The new guidelines are set to make websites, apps, PDFs and more further accessible for people with disabilities. It is recommended charities pay close attention to the new guidelines when they come into play.

Remember, even if it isn't a legal requirement for your own charity website to be WCAG compliant, it's vitally important that it is accessible to as many supporters and stakeholders as possible, so following this set of standards is advisable to all.



# Common accessibility barriers on charity websites



# Common accessibility barriers on charity websites

In the year ending March 2021 there were a reported 14.6 million disabled people in the UK. This equates to 22% of the population, or more than 1 in 5 people. In addition, there are those who live with other impairments, long-term illnesses or limitations who are not classed as disabled, but still have additional accessibility requirements.

The challenges experienced by all these people vary widely depending on their disabilities or impairments. For this reason, your digital accessibility plan should accommodate as many user requirements as possible.

To help you get started, we'll take a look at the following demographics to highlight the wide range of accessibility needs presented by users.

- People with visual impairments
- People with hearing impairments
- People with physical disabilities
- People with mental health issues and disabilities
- People who are neuro-divergent
- Other accessibility considerations

## People with hearing impairments

Auditory accessibility means ensuring people with hearing impairments have the ability to access your digital content. This includes people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

By accommodating this demographic, you will also make it much easier for users to access your content if they live or work in environments which mean they either cannot hear content easily or have to keep their technology muted.

Auditory accessibility features typically include subtitles for videos and transcripts for audio content. Live webchats are also a useful tool so users can converse with your team without having to listen or talk to somebody on a call.

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From a survey of 600 people with disabilities and impairments\*, more than 1 in 4 (27%) people felt that websites do not generally cater to their accessibility needs, whilst only 10% of respondents felt they cater to their needs 'a lot'.

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## People with visual impairments

Visual accessibility refers to the ability of digital content to be accessed and used by people with visual impairments. This includes people who are blind, have low or distorted vision, have colour blindness or light sensitivity.

Many people with visual impairments use screen readers, a software tool that reads text displayed on a computer screen and plays it back with human speech audio.

**Did you know? Screen reader users frequently navigate a page by listing all the links found within it. If you read through all the links on one of your website's pages, is it clear what each separate link will direct them to?**

Visual accessibility features that help this demographic include:

- ✓ Alternative text for images.
- ✓ Audio descriptions.
- ✓ Website colour contrasts that comply with either AA- or AAA-requirements of WCAG.
- ✓ Clearly structured and labelled headings that help screen readers and other assistive technologies to navigate your website.
- ✓ Resizable interfaces without loss of function.
- ✓ Meaningful text-to-display and alt-text links.
- ✓ No excessive motion behind text.
- ✓ Animations that do not flash too much and the ability to disable them.
- ✓ Clearly labelled headings and content in tables for screen readers to navigate.

## People with motor disabilities

People visiting your charity website with physical disabilities such as multiple sclerosis, motor neurone disease, Parkinson's disease, spinal cord injuries, amputated limbs and more may have difficulty navigating websites.

To help access content online they may use keyboard navigation, rather than using a mouse. Or they might use voice recognition software or alternative input devices.

To help this demographic of users, ensure the design of your navigation bar is keyboard navigable to improve the experience for those who use a keyboard to journey through your website.

Keeping your website minimalistic and clutter-free will also make a big difference to users with motor impairments as it will be simpler to navigate.

Make clickable elements, such as buttons and links, large enough to be easily tapped or selected. A minimum target size of 44x44 pixels is recommended to accommodate users with motor disabilities.

## People with mental health issues and disabilities

When developing websites and digital platforms, it is important to consider those with “hidden” or “invisible” disabilities, too. These include learning and cognitive impairments, anxiety, depression, PTSD, bipolar disorder, and many more.

To help improve the UX for these website users, consider the following features:

- Add clear titles, headings and use bullet point lists.
- Use smaller, well organised paragraphs of text.
- Choose friendly fonts, softer colours and recommended contrasts.
- Use easy navigation search bars.
- Keep things simple and stay clear of repetition to avoid information overload.
- Avoid using imagery which flashes or depicts distress, trauma or feelings of hopelessness.

## Users who are neuro-divergent

Neurodiversity, or being neurodivergent refers to people diagnosed with neurodivergent conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Dyslexia, Dyspraxia and Autism.

Some neurodivergent users may experience difficulty concentrating or may find a lot of information or media overwhelming. Visually noisy websites, for instance, can be problematic for the neurodiverse. These sites may have excessive information, are hard to navigate, are too bright or create sensory overload with lots of images or videos.

There is a fantastic tool which helps those with neurodivergent conditions: a screen mask. This is a reading tool that follows your mouse or touch to help eliminate page distractions. It basically allows readers to focus on one block or passage at a time. This is usually added at a browser level through a browser extension.

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Did you know?

The top three website accessibility challenges that neurodiverse and physically disabled adults face\* are: difficulty navigating websites (22%); and difficulty reading written content (22%); difficulty navigating websites with a keyboard rather than just a mouse (18%).

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To help this demographic during your website design, make a plan of what you want to say and structure your website in a minimalistic way to avoid repetition that could overwhelm the user. You could also build in or link to a screen mask tool for your visitors to access.

## Other accessibility considerations

In addition to the disabilities and impairments mentioned above, there are other accessibility considerations which may prevent people from being able to access your content. This is a very broad demographic as anyone and everyone can have accessibility issues at various points in their lives.

Just as an example, users with other accessibility issues might include (but are not limited to):

- **New parents:** Parents with babies quickly develop a marvellous skill at being able to do almost anything one-handed. So when it comes to accessing information online, they could be nursing with their phone in the other hand, cradling a sleeping baby, or they might be trying to get a few quick jobs done while they have a few minutes to themselves.
- **Poor literacy skills or English as a second language:** Language accessibility means implementing measures that make content accessible to those who speak English as a foreign language, plus anyone with poor literacy skills.

Features that could support people with other accessibility needs include:

- Making your content minimalistic and easy to skim read.
- Providing an online chat function.
- Using translation tools such as multilingual versions of your website and translatable navigation menus.
- Avoiding jargon and acronyms as these can be very confusing for a lot of people, not just those with language barriers.
- Creating alt text, audio and video content that's simple and understandable.

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According to our survey of neurodiverse and physically disabled people, the top three accessibility tools or techniques that respondents use are: adaptive tools such as increased text (43%), screen magnifiers (32%) and voice recognition software (29%).

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# Five steps to getting accessibility right



# Five steps to getting accessibility right

To develop an accessible, inclusive website with content that can be easily reached and navigated by all your users, follow these five steps below...

## Step 1 **Review current accessibility performance**

Begin with a review of your website's current accessibility performance, comparing it against best practice criteria.

This is something we do when taking on any new client's existing website – we want to help ensure that we address any major accessibility issues from the outset, and make a plan for how the site accessibility can be improved longer term for the benefit of their users.

When we welcomed the Maggies website into our charity portfolio, we undertook a detailed audit, which raised not only a number of seo concerns, but also a number of accessibility issues too. Quite often these two factors go hand in hand, as making changes that improve accessibility also improve the ease at which web-bots are able to crawl, digest and rank your website.

For Maggies, our first priority was to fix elements such as page load speed, alt text on images, an abundance of 404s etc. These changes ensured that the Maggies website was more fit for purpose for their audience's needs, leading to greater engagement, (an increase of 20% in session duration and 10% reduction on bounce rate year on year) and an uplift of 27% in organic traffic year on year.

## Step 2 **Review audience needs**

Next, it will help to review your primary audience needs and compare this with your current performance results.

You could organise an audience working group or a survey to ask your users directly what they think about your current website, what their accessibility requirements are and what you could do differently to better accommodate their needs.

We also recommend the use of [persona creation](#) to support all aspects of website design. By identifying a stakeholder who is their champion, your accessibility persona can represent their views and highlight issues for people with disabilities that crop up throughout the charity website project development.

When designing the new Help for Heroes website we knew that it would be vital to have a full understanding of the challenges faced by users, particularly those with physical and mental health impairments that might struggle to access the charity's support services if not properly catered for online.

We undertook a series of interviews with existing beneficiaries and service delivery team members to understand how challenges such as PTSD can affect how you might interact with a website, and worked together to design a website that catered for these needs.

These included:

- **Clear and empathetic language:** Using clear, concise, and empathetic language throughout the website ensuring that the content is easily understandable by veterans with varying emotional states.
- **Simplified Navigation and an accessibility-first approach to design.** We engaged with a veteran led steering group to help test and improve accessibility throughout the lifetime of the site.
- **Crisis intervention information prominently displayed:** Such as helpline numbers or emergency contacts. Especially on pages where emotional support is discussed.

### Step 3

## Make design and content changes to your site

Now you can make your design and content changes to make your website accessible. Here's a quick checklist of some of the main tools your site should include to improve your digital accessibility.

- **Alt Text:** Add alternative text descriptions to images and other non-text content on your website to make it accessible to people with visual impairments who use screen readers. Images that are merely decorative are best given a blank alt-text label to avoid confusing a screen reader with audio clutter that isn't needed.
- **Clear Navigation:** Make sure your website's navigation is clear and easy to use for visitors and any assistive technologies being used.
- **Headings:** Use proper heading tags (H1, H2, H3, etc.) to clearly structure your content. This will help people with visual impairments and cognitive disabilities navigate your website more easily. As a bonus, this practise can also improve your SEO rankings.
- **Resizable text:** Make sure your website users can increase the size of your text without loss of function

- **Colour Contrast:** Ensure that there is sufficient colour contrast between the text and the background to make it easy to read for people with visual impairments. As a guide, check that your website colour contrasts comply with either AA- or AAA-requirements of WCAG guidelines.
- **Keyboard Accessibility:** Ensure that all functionality on your website can be accessed using a keyboard. This is especially important for people with motor disabilities who may not be able to use a mouse.
- **Audio Descriptions:** Add captions to videos on your website to make them accessible to people with hearing impairments.
- **Descriptive Links:** Use descriptive link text to make it clear what the link is for. This will help people with disabilities understand the purpose of the link before clicking on it. Avoid vague buttons or links that simply say 'Read More', which only serve to confuse and frustrate people using screen readers. Instead, you could say "Read more about digital accessibility here."
- **Consider imagery:** Avoid excessive motion behind text and avoid flashing images. In addition, photos of people in despair, perhaps with their head in their hands or crouching down, depict a feeling of hopelessness. This is not something somebody living with mental illnesses such as depression or PTSD will benefit from seeing.
- **Clearly label forms and tables:** If you have forms or tables on your website, the elements need to be properly titled to be understood by people who use assistive technologies. They should also be accessible without a mouse for keyboard users.

When building a website from scratch, we always look to build in as many of these accessibility features as possible and offer advice to charities on how to maintain them going forward. But we also know how important it is to review the accessibility credentials of websites from time to time so that standards can be maintained or issues addressed.

## Step 4

### Develop a long-term plan

Once you have worked through the checklist and you are happy with your accessibility provisions, create a long-term plan to build these changes into your ongoing digital strategy.

If your team only has the capacity to implement some of the changes now, create a realistic timeline for when your team – or a charity website development agency – will make the larger scale accessibility changes to your website

**If you do not think the necessary changes to your website can be managed in-house, perhaps due to time constraints or knowledge limitations within the team, please do contact Giant Digital for advice or support. You can find out more about what we can do for your charity at the end of this e-book.**

## Step 5

### Regularly review

Accessibility is an ongoing consideration rather than a quick-fix, so once you have a long-term plan in place you'll need to stay on top of things to maintain a good level of accessibility.

This might include regular reviews and audits, building accessibility checks into your marketing plan, meeting with your audience working group and carrying out surveys to ensure you are accommodating all your users' accessibility needs.

Whether you are undertaking a new website development project or managing an existing platform, it is never too late to establish a stakeholder working group or team of accessibility champions to help you review how your website is performing across all user needs. When working with Whizz-Kidz on their new website, we worked with a group of young people with disabilities who were able to share their experience of the new website design and usability from an accessibility point of view. It was a great learning experience all round and has enabled us to make refinements to the new website, which will be launched in Summer 2023.



**Tools to help your  
accessibility journey**



# Tools to help your accessibility journey

If you are looking to make your website more accessible, Giant Digital offer a range of tools – many of them completely free – to ensure nothing is missed that could be valuable to your visitors.

Our digital accessibility support includes a free downloadable website accessibility checklist, a free accessibility audit, and tools to help you improve the accessibility of your website content.

In this section we'll explain how each of our accessibility support services can benefit your charity or not-for-profit organisation, and how to access them.

## Free downloadable accessibility checklist

Knowing where to start can be the biggest challenge of all, so we've put together an accessibility checklist to help you work through your website.

With our handy checklist you'll quickly identify what you are already getting right, where there are gaps and what improvements need to be made.

Tip: Include our free downloadable accessibility checklist in your long-term digital strategy plan. Your charity can check back to ensure that you are consistently addressing as many tasks as possible to support the needs of your users.

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Did you know?

In a survey of 600 disabled and neurodiverse people\*, more than a quarter (27%) of respondents reported feeling that website creators don't understand digital/online accessibility needs.

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## Free accessibility health check

If you would like to review your website's digital accessibility, take advantage of a free accessibility health check from Giant Digital.

Over the last 12 years we have had the pleasure of working with a wide range of third sector organisations to develop inclusive, accessible websites used by beneficiaries, donors and other stakeholders.

When discussing the topic of digital accessibility, we have found that many charities are unaware of the full range of tools and features available today – many of them quite simple to implement.

As charities so often work with disabled or impaired people, we launched our free accessibility health check to help all charities and not-for-profit organisations understand the key accessibility gaps in their website that need addressing, and some of the actions that can be taken to make their website as inclusive as possible.

### How does it work?

Our free accessibility health check will provide an overview of your current accessibility status so can make improvements to your website.

The health check will provide you with a accessibility score and highlight any key area of concern. To help you improve your charity website's digital accessibility, it will also include recommendations recommendations for improvement.

When carrying out the website health check, we will review everything covered in our accessibility checklist, including alternative text descriptions, keyboard-friendly navigation, colour contrasts, audio descriptions, descriptive links, accessible forms and more.

Request your free charity website accessibility health check today.

## Further support and tools

In addition, we also offer the following services to help charities develop a more accessible website.

- **Accessibility deep-dive audit:** If you want a fully accessible charity website that is WCAG 2.1 compliant, book a deep-dive accessibility audit. Giant's accessibility experts will conduct user research and carry out a full in-depth audit of your entire website to establish the changes or features required to achieve a minimum of AA standard, with advice and guidance for working towards AAA standard. If you wish, we can then carry out the necessary work for you.
- **Digital content accessibility consultancy:** We are able to offer support in improving the content on your website to make it more accessible for all.

For more information on any of the above services please call Giant Digital today on 0208 152 4572 or contact us via our online form.



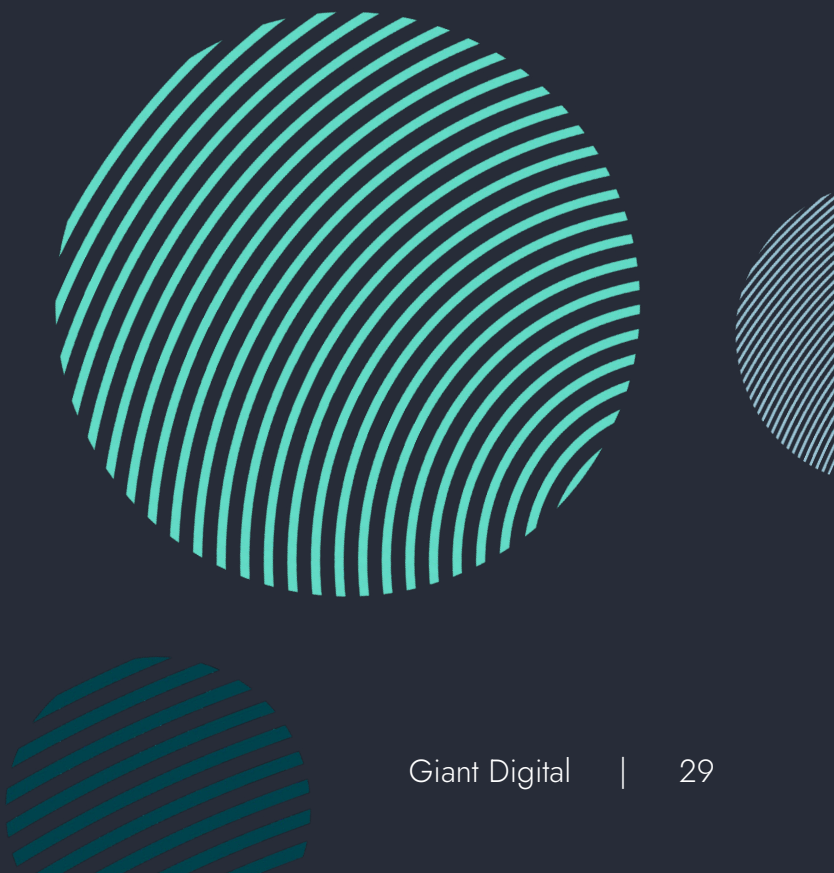
## Final thoughts

Successful digital accessibility isn't just down to the marketing, digital or website team to achieve. It needs to be considered holistically across the whole organisation. Having a working group from different departments to champion inclusivity and accessibility is the best way to get the right results and broaden understanding.

As with most things, considering accessibility at the start of your digital project or campaign is much easier than having to retro-fit it half way through – though of course it can be done with some effort and commitment. It is also easier to maintain good standards if everyone understands accessibility, so communication is key.

To best meet your short and long-term digital accessibility goals, you'll need the right tools, guidance and know-how. The good news is that you're not on your own. At Giant Digital, our expert team is here to offer as much guidance and support as you need.

Get in touch today to find out how we can support you on your digital accessibility journey.



# A passion for change.

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