

CrossAbility Roundtable Report

Executive Summary

A government agency's focus on best meeting the community's needs is at the forefront of service. HB21-1110 identified the need for government agencies to comply with digital accessibility Website Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.2 (WCAG) by July 1, 2024. In late 2023, City staff developed an Accessibility Task Force to assess the requirements and duties enumerated in state law.

The broader question was how to meet that requirement while fostering inclusivity and equity for employees and community members. The CrossAbility Roundtable was established in 2024 in response to HB21-111, and community feedback was sought to enhance accessibility across digital platforms and in-person meetings. The inclusion of participants with diverse accommodation needs, including language, hearing, and sight, underscores our commitment to inclusivity and equity within our organization and community and gives true insight into the effectiveness of accommodations.

The Roundtable focused on evaluating and improving website design, implementing inclusive accommodations for meetings, identifying effective communication channels, and enhancing customer service interactions.

This report documents the outcomes from initial meetings, highlighting recommendations and action plans. Feedback from the February 2024 meeting emphasized improvements to website accessibility, addressing issues such as language clarity, GIS map compatibility, and mobile responsiveness. These efforts are supported by ongoing collaborations with IT and accessibility experts.

The June 2024 meeting centered on optimizing social media and communication channels, with preferences for Facebook and insights into effective content formats. Additionally, the effectiveness of mailed postcards and podcasts were explored, emphasizing inclusive content and effective dissemination strategies.

The fall and winter 2024 meetings focused on enhancing accommodations during public meetings and improving interactions with City staff.

Through these proactive efforts, staff continuously aim to foster a more accessible and inclusive environment, ensuring equitable access to City services for all community members. Ongoing evaluation and technology exploration will continue to drive improvements beyond the group's conclusion, reinforcing the City's commitment to accessibility and community engagement.

Introduction and Overview

In response to accessibility compliance requirements, the CrossAbility Roundtable was established as a tactic in the City of Grand Junction Accessibility Plan. This initiative aimed to comprehensively assess and improve the accessibility of City digital platforms and in-person meetings/ interactions.

The establishment of the CrossAbility Roundtable highlights the City's dedication to inclusivity and equity for both the organization and the community. By utilizing the insights and experiences of Roundtable members, City staff aims to continuously improve the accessibility of City communications. The evaluation objectives include the following:

1. Evaluation and improvement of website design and functionality
2. Implementation of accommodations for in-person meetings, such as language interpretation, ASL, hearing, and visual assistive technology
3. Effective identification of inclusive communication channels for disseminating information
4. Evaluation of customer service interactions with the integration of accommodations

Participant Selection

To ensure that the feedback from the Roundtable accurately reflects the specific needs of community members who will use these accommodations, participants were selected based on their knowledge of and access to City services, as well as their ability to use email, social media, and basic computer skills. Some participants required daily accommodations related to vision, mobility, hearing, and language (specifically English as a second language). Participant ages ranged from 17 to 67.

Including individuals who speak English as a second language in the project was essential to assess their user experience when navigating City communication channels. This inclusion does not imply that speaking English as a second language qualifies as a disability.

Selection of Key Areas of Study

City staff identified four critical areas of focus, which were reviewed during quarterly meetings throughout 2024. The topics chosen aimed to centralize and standardize communication practices across the City. Each topic area is pivotal in enhancing accessibility and inclusivity within the organization's communication framework.

- **Website Accessibility (Q1 2024):** The digital presence is pivotal in facilitating information dissemination and interaction with the community. Ensuring the website is accessible to all individuals, including those with visual, auditory, and other abilities, is a fundamental priority. The CrossAbility Roundtable reviewed the City of Grand Junction's website, critiqued current accessibility features, and recommended enhancements to ensure compliance with best practices and regulatory standards.

- **Use of Social Media and Other Communication Channels (Q2 2024):** Social media platforms, postcards, print ads, flyers, and radio commercials all serve as dynamic channels for engaging with multiple audiences. It is imperative that our social media content and print materials are inclusive and accessible. The Roundtable assessed the accessibility of our social media posts and multimedia content, and proposed strategies to improve accessibility and engagement across all platforms.
- **Accommodations During Public Meetings (Q3 2024):** In-person interactions remain integral to our community engagement strategy. Ensuring that our physical meeting spaces, communication materials/ devices, and presentation methods are accessible to individuals with diverse needs is critical.
- **City Customer Service (Q4 2024):** This is a collection of narratives in which individuals with disabilities reflect on their experiences with customer service. These stories detail how accommodations were either provided or suggested. The narratives cover both positive and negative interactions with City of Grand Junction offices and other businesses across the United States.

These key areas of study were driven by the department's goal to create innovative, accessible communication channels for both internal and external stakeholders. By focusing on these areas, not only were the regulatory requirements met, but also fostered an inclusive and engaging community. The insights and recommendations from the Roundtable have guided efforts to develop comprehensive strategies that enhance communication accessibility.

Feedback From Q1 Meeting: Website Accessibility

During the first meeting, the CrossAbility Roundtable conducted a comprehensive review of the City's website accessibility features. Participants highlighted several areas where improvements were necessary to ensure equitable access to information and services for all community members. A summary of the issues identified, and steps taken to address and correct issues are listed:

- **Update Language for Water Service Boundaries:** Feedback indicated that the language directing water users to the GIS Map for verifying service limits needed clarification. The language directing customers has been updated to ensure clarity when end users review the page.
- **City GIS Maps are Not Compatible with Screen Readers:** A majority of Roundtable participants indicated that City GIS maps do not prompt or notify users with screen readers and create a frustrating experience. We are currently collaborating with the GIS staff to explore solutions and study strategies employed by other municipalities.
- **NotifyMe Webpage Enhancement:** The CrossAbility Roundtable pointed out user issues with the City's NotifyMe webpage, which serves as a platform for end-users to sign up for alerts. Redesign of this page is being conducted by the City of Grand Junction's current website manager (CivicPlus) to create a more user-friendly dashboard, simplifying the alert subscription process.

- **City Website is not Mobile-Friendly:** Multiple participants presented concerns with the layout and functionality of the City website on their cell phone. A full website redesign, including a review of mobile and tablet layouts, has been completed. Buttons, icons, and text are now larger and scroll seamlessly on mobile devices following the design updates.
- **Language Translation button Adjustment:** Concerns were raised about the Google Translate button being hard to find. This issue has been resolved with the website redesign, as the button is now located in front of a high-contrast background, which meets WCAG established in HB21-1110.
- **Confusing Website Icons:** Users noted that the previous website icons located on the bottom of the website were not user-friendly or accessible to screen readers. During the recent website redesign, these icons were removed and replaced with colored images, increased font size, and a high-contrast background. This change was significant to the group and positively impacted the user experience.
- **Accessibility Assistance Button Design:** In collaboration with Monsido, an entity through the webhost, CivicPlus, an accessibility icon is featured on the City website to help users with different impairments to better navigate the website. The Roundtable users noted that the icon placement and color on the website were out of context and did not appear to users as a tool. Monsido advised the color, nor was the icon able to be adjusted; however, when relaying the information to the Roundtable, users were glad to know the functionality and services that the tool provided. Staff will remain in contact with Monsido to advise of potential adjustments if possible.
- **Request for Accommodations for Future Meetings:** Members presented the need for Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) services in future Roundtable and public meetings. A request to explore Hearing Loop systems was also made, results of such investigation are included in the *"Feedback from Q4 Meeting: Customer Service Interactions"* section.

These actions reflect staff commitment to addressing the concerns raised by the CrossAbility Roundtable and implementing tangible improvements to website accessibility. By incorporating their recommendations, staff can accommodate an inclusive environment that meets the diverse needs of the community.

Feedback From Q2 Meeting: Use of Social Media and Other Communication Channels

This meeting discussion revolved around the exploration of alternative communication channels. Participants were required to identify their primary social media platforms and express their preferences for specific platforms. A summary of the issues identified and the steps taken to address them:

- **Social Media:** The majority of the group preferred Facebook as the most effective social media platform because of its capacity to offer diverse information, including events and entertainment. Additionally, there was interest expressed in Nextdoor, although members are less familiar with it. Regarding content format on social media, there was

no consensus on whether videos or photos are preferred for conveying information. As long as posts include a comprehensive caption and videos have subtitles, the group has not encountered any difficulties in understanding the messages.

- **Postcards:** Mailed postcards were reported to be significantly effective communication tools. This was attributed to technological advancements, including screen readers and tools like Be My Eyes, among others. Staff asked users what the preferred size of a mailed postcard should be. The majority of the group commented that a 5x7" postcard should be the standard, and that the minimum font size should be no smaller than 12 points for readability.
- **Podcast:** The group highly sought out the idea of a podcast hosted by various City staff to discuss current projects and initiatives. The group emphasized that these podcast episodes should also include videos with Closed Captioning to ensure accommodations for all. Staff will continue to research options for hosting a City podcast.
- **Stakeholder Relationships:** Most of the participants said that they tend to attend events shared by institutions, groups, or people that they connect with and are part of their community circle. If the host is unknown, they are less likely to attend an event or meeting.
- **Promotion:** The timing of event promotion is crucial to ensure attendance. A standard practice among communication dissemination is to begin any campaign at least two weeks in advance, allowing community members to plan and commit to attending. According to feedback, placing event advertisements in specific sections of the newspaper, such as "Off the Clock," is effective due to the bundling of similar types of information. Additionally, flyer dissemination should follow the same timing recommendations.

Feedback From Q3 Meeting: City Council and Public Meetings

During the third meeting, members of the CrossAbility Roundtable attended a City Council meeting either virtually or in-person depending on their preference. Input from their experience informed discussions on how staff can enhance public comment, staff presentations, amplification of sound, and access via live streaming. A summary of the issues identified, and the steps taken to address them:

- **Digital Accessibility and Adjustments:** Roundtable members provided insights to improve accessibility for City Council meetings, including exploring hearing accommodation options, ensuring clear signage, and offering closed captioning for virtual and in-person meetings. Best practices emphasized setting deadlines for accommodation requests, using consistent language for GoToWebinar Meeting links, and providing accessible digital materials in PDF or Word formats. They also recommended using Speech-to-Text as a temporary solution for captions and verbally explaining graphs and charts in PowerPoint presentations to enhance inclusivity.

- **Facility Upgrades:** The group suggested that the City of Grand Junction improvements could include the staff microphone volume for better clarity for both in-person and virtual attendees and creating a designated area for community members requiring accommodations, such as wheelchair access or assistance for hearing and visually impaired individuals. Additionally, the auditorium doors should be widened to accommodate modern wheelchairs, or an alternative entry point should be identified to minimize disruption. Meeting agendas has also been adjusted to include language around Closed Captioning software and increased font size for users.
- **City Council and Presenters Training and Education:** The Roundtable group noted that City Council members and presenters should receive training to improve hearing accessibility by consistently speaking into the microphone, facing the audience, and lowering computers when addressing the group. Additionally, presenters should verbally explain the content of charts and graphs to ensure clarity for all attendees. Staff have provided training materials for presenters to use the microphones and presentation materials properly. This is an ongoing education for all who utilize public meetings hosted by the City.

Feedback From Q4 Meeting: Customer Service Interactions

In the concluding session, Roundtable members provided insight from previous customer service interactions they had with businesses, companies, or individuals where accessibility was either offered or not available. This feedback assisted City staff in identifying areas for improving exemplary service by providing training and education on current assistive accommodations.

- **In-Depth Staff Training:** CrossAbility Roundtable members shared experiences highlighting the importance of staff awareness in providing accommodations during customer service interactions. Their feedback underscored the need for enhancing awareness of how staff can provide reasonable accommodations during interactions and in-depth customer sensitivity training.
- **Signage For Accommodations:** The group expressed a great need for more apparent signage regarding accessibility accommodations offered by the City of Grand Junction and how to receive assistance. These accommodations consist of both digital and physical.
- **Promotion of Accommodations Offered:** Participants expressed the need for promotion and education to community members about current accommodations and how to request them. The Communications and Engagement staff plan to continue to assist in providing digital accessibility training and education for staff members and work with the CrossAbility Roundtable group to be advocates for the reasonable accommodations.

Conclusion

The Communications and Engagement team acknowledges the significance of accommodations in ensuring equitable access to information in order to improve services and access for all community members and visitors.

- **Website Updates:** Buttons and icons have been updated to include high-contrast backgrounds, large font, and easy-to-understand navigation cues. Through a website redesign, the layout and functionality have been updated to better serve screen readers and other assistive technology. This included making the City website compatible with mobile devices.
- **Social Media Strategy:** After learning that Facebook and Nextdoor are the most favored platforms by the members, future campaigns and dissemination of information can be leveraged to share communications to share City-related information. Users also identified that videos and photos are equally effective when reviewing social media posts as long as captions are descriptive. Moving forward, social media strategies will be developed to incorporate closed captioning, alt text for photos, and informative captions.
- **Print Materials:** Regarding print materials, the postcard size is a key consideration. The size of 5x7" was selected as the most optimal. Equally important is the need for an impactful message and a font size that ensures optimal visibility. It's worth noting that individuals with visual impairments can benefit from online apps that assist in reading postcards, underscoring the importance of clear communication.
- Furthermore, our findings indicate the significance of strategic advertising placement within newspapers. Most attendees exhibited a preference for specific newspaper sections in which they already feel comfortable, consequently demonstrating a tendency to bypass other sections.
- **Podcasts:** The City will explore new formats of presenting information to the public, including podcast updates bi-weekly or monthly to promote City events, initiatives and projects.
- **Customer Service:** Enhancing awareness of how staff can provide reasonable accommodations during meetings and public interactions through signage and customer training.
- **Continuous Improvement of Accommodation Technology:** Continue to explore and update current accommodation software and equipment to enhance and expand services.

City staff will maintain the CrossAbility Roundtable member connections to engage when appropriate for various City-related projects and communications. The CrossAbility Roundtable group has provided key insights for digital accessibility and built a trusted relationship with the Communications and Engagement Department. As a result of their input, City staff can continue improvements aimed at serving the needs of all community members through the tools and knowledge gained from the CrossAbility Roundtable members.