

CivicActions

# What Green Digital Policy can Learn from Digital Accessibility Policy?

Green Digital Accessibility — Nov 30



## Some Background — Mike Gifford

- Drupal Core Accessibility Maintainer
  - IAAP CPWA Certified
  - W3C Invited Expert
  - University: Environment / Development Studies
  - Haven't owned a car since 1991
  - Owned a web business for 21 years
  - Based in Ottawa Canada, but living in France till August
- Actively engaged in promoting accessibility in several open source projects.



# Some similarities

## Context - Both are Important!

96.3% of home pages had detected WCAG 2 failures!

Source: [WebAim Million](#)

An estimated 1.3 billion people experience significant disability

Source: [WHO](#)

The digital industry is now responsible for between 2-5% of global emissions.

Source: [Lancaster University](#), [EU Commission](#)



# Sustainability & Accessibility

- Both tend to be considered at the end of a project, if at all
- They are generally seen as “cosmetic” changes like image size or alternative text
- Multiple roles on a digital team share responsibility
- Both are easy to overlook when people evaluate a site
- If addressed later, solutions tend to be fragile & expensive
- Both need to embrace a journey of progress over perfection

:-?



## Automated Tools

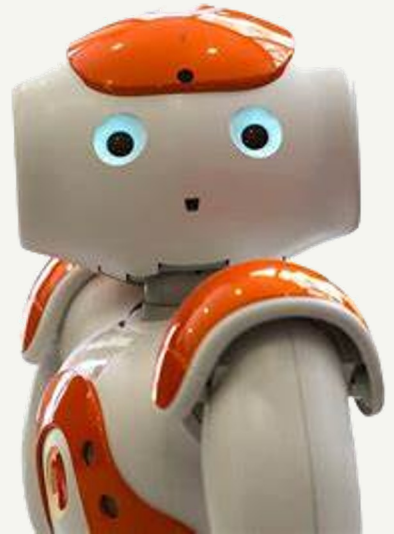
- CynthiaSays & Bobby
- WAVE Toolbar
- Siteimprove
- **Axe & QualWeb**
- Pa11y + axe, Cypress-axe
- Purple Hats
- EcoGrader
- WebsiteCarbon.com
- Greenframe.io
- DImpact.org
- **CO2.js**
- **kube-green.dev**



**EcoGrader**

## Humans Are Needed Too

- How do we make sure that the author's message is correctly conveyed to all readers?
- Semantic meaning needs to line up with the author's message
- Users need to be able to complete digital tasks efficiently
- An automated tool does not understand anything, let alone customer experience





# Web Accessibility



# Web Accessibility Has History

## Guidelines/Standards

- Section 508 (1998)
- WCAG 1.0 (1999)
- WCAG 2.0 (2008)
- Revised Section 508 (2017)
- WCAG 2.1 (2018)
- WCAG 2.2 (2023)



## Some Legislation

- AODA - Ontario (2005)
- UK's Equality Act (2010)
- Japan's Act for Eliminating Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (2013)
- Web Accessibility Directive (2016)
- Accessible Canada Act (2019)
- European Accessibility Act (2019)

# Guidelines Must Evolve Alongside Technology

- WCAG 1.0 very much was written for HTML & with set assumptions about browser capacity
- Years after assistive technology moved to using the DOM, accessibility, experts were claiming sites shouldn't use JS
- WCAG 2.0 didn't anticipate the impact of smartphones, XR or for that matter Google Home, Alexa or Siri
- Parse errors (4.1.1) were being raised as concerns by experts, even though it wasn't a problem for users



## An Evergreen Approach is Required

- WCAG criteria were initially written for a few disabilities — it is still a struggle to support a range of disabilities
- Policy guidance pointed to WCAG 2.0 AA rather than conformance with the latest WCAG Recommendation
- Initial goals of WCAG were to evaluate a single page, not a user journey
- Industry focus on reporting errors, rather than improving the process for producing digital content

## Most Effective Government Legislation

- Demands transparency and regular reporting so that progress can be monitored
- Includes some form of enforcement, if only a nominal fine & some bad public relations
- Written to be evergreen, so that it can evolve to meet today's best practices
- Sites should have a common place to describe what they are doing to ensure they are following best practices





# Web Sustainability

## History of WSG

- The SustyWeb Community Group started in 2013
- Tim Frick spearheaded the work of over 50 individuals
- The group was broken down into: UX / WebDev / Hosting / Business / Metric
- The group wanted to use WCAG as a model, but also drew heavily on: [GR491](#), [GRI](#), [ISO](#), [SDGs](#), as well as France's [RGESN](#) & [AFNOR](#)



# Web Sustainability Guidelines (WSG)

- There are 6 sections to the WSG including the Introduction and Glossary
- The substantive key success criteria are:
  - 2. User-Experience Design
  - 3. Web Development
  - 4. Hosting, Infrastructure and Systems
  - 5. Business Strategy and Product Management
- Supporting documentation is being actively developed



## Some WSG Highlights

- Written with a consistent voice and structure
- Metric for both the expected impact and level of effort
- Categorized benefits for sustainable behavior
- First draft generated in a community group, rather than getting stuck in an official W3C Working Group
- Referencing external resources and guidelines outside the W3C
- Written with a holistic approach — considering the impact of the system



## WSG Innovations

- JSON File for guidelines
- Having both a formal WCAG formatted guideline & human-readable [SWD documentation site](#)
- Early interest in automated testing
- Solid background for implementing both usability and technical implications
- Extensive taxonomy more easily allowing for alignment of success criteria
- Broad approach to sustainability, not simply looking at CO2

## Future Legislation

- One of the key challenges with legislation is that there isn't agreement in how impacts will be measured
- France is a real leader in [digital sustainability](#), and other countries are following suit
- Global Initiatives on tracking Scope 1, 2 and 3 Emissions:
  - California's Climate Corporate Data Accountability Act (Bill SB 253)
  - European Union's Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD)



# Our Future Needs Both

## Both are critical for our collective future

- Disability is an integral part of the human experience
- Our society and economy is entirely based on our environment
- We need to intentionally build systems that allow us to support a variety of abilities
- At the same time, we need to reduce our environmental load on the planet



# Accessibility Awareness will Help Sustainability

- Everyone can benefit from knowing how their actions can impact the environment
- Better sustainability practices should be written to include everyone, including people with disabilities
- Making the effort to write in plain language helps everyone



## Procurement Shapes Incentives — A11y



- Accessibility hasn't been very successful
- USA spent 20 years trying to shape incentives with Voluntary Product Accessibility Template (VPAT)
- VPATs have become an expensive checkbox exercise
- Many organizations simply ask for WCAG compliance
- Without the ability to determine if vendor claims are accurate, vendors are unlikely to invest in accessibility
- CivicActions has created an alternative with [OpenACR](#)

# Procurement Shapes Incentives — Sustainability

- Sustainability cannot wait 2 decades to change behaviors
- When sustainability becomes part of legislation and organizational policies, we need procurement onboard
- Clients need to see that sustainability included in all stages of the project, and that vendors understand
- Organizations need to factor the impact of digital into their Scope 1, 2, & 3 emissions





# Calls to Action



## Work With Others

- Build in better support authors for to create better content
- Find ways to fix upstream problems — bugs in those projects will affect yours
- Communicate about the efforts your team has taken to improve quality



# Ask Questions

Suppliers need to understand that sustainability and accessibility are important to you

**How does your product/service:**

- Improve accessibility?
- Include people with disabilities?
- Incorporate testing into your process
- Track improvement over time
- Measure its environmental impact?
- Manage e-waste
- Identify the most CO2 intensive activities
- Ensure that servers are powered by green energy



## Dare to be Open

- Using and contributing back to open source solutions ensures that best practices evolve more quickly
- When designers, developers and users are able to engage to improve good ideas, they get better faster
- Engaging in an open source community can be a good way to collectively create better software





Thanks!

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## Questions

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