City Manager's Office

November 24, 2026

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Paul Buddenhagen, City Manager

Re: Digital Accessibility Progress Update

The City of Berkeley has been improving the accessibility of its web content and will continue to prioritize efforts to fully comply with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

A Department of Justice rule on digital accessibility goes into effect April 24, 2027. The rule sets the Web Content and Accessibility Standards (WCAG) 2.1 AA as the technical standard for all state and local governments' web content and mobile apps.

The City of Berkeley's goal is to provide digital content that meets or exceeds the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 Level AA. This memo outlines work from May-October 2026. See the May 2026 progress memo for a summary of previous work completed.

Since May, the City has done the following:

Accessibility audit and remediation of BerkeleyCA.gov

The Blind Institute of Technology (BIT) has informed us that 100 percent accessibility is never possible. The standards of accessibility keep evolving as technology changes and will require continual testing and improvements.

Nonetheless, the federal guidelines provide baseline priorities. To assess our current status, BIT conducted an accessibility audit of BerkeleyCA.gov for compliance with WCAG 2.2. Three auditors assessed a representative sample of key pages on the website. Two auditors are native screen-reader users and one is a color-blind individual. The audit found 176 accessibility issues, broken down by severity:

- 7 blocking
- 48 high
- 65 medium
- 54 low
- 2 cosmetic

The auditors provided a comprehensive list of the errors with explanation and suggested corrections.

Rolling Orange, the City's contracted web developer, has addressed 53 issues, including all 7 of the highest priority "blocking" issues. Addressing these issues used 172 of the 300 annual maintenance and service hours from the City's annual contract with Rolling Orange.

Work paused temporarily to obtain funding for additional web development hours. Thanks to Council approval, the developers will be resuming work to remediate the remaining issues.

After the developers resolve issues, BIT will test again to confirm compliance, then write up an accessibility statement documenting the website's compliance with WCAG standards.

Increased resources for City Staff

The Communications Division has created a host of resources, tip sheets, and other resources for staff on the Division's SharePoint page. This includes:

- Microsoft Word templates for board and commission meetings that the Clerk Department has built with accessibility
- Microsoft Word and PowerPoint templates that the Communications Division has built with accessibility in mind
- Step-by-step tutorials with screenshots on how to create and edit accessible documents
- Emails to vendors to ensure that they build accessibility into their software and documents
- Accessibility guidelines for web pages, social media, videos, and third-party applications
- Guidance on how to connect to City-authorized remediation services

Citywide accessibility training

Digital Accessibility is a concern distributed across all departments and all City staff, regardless of whether they oversee any software platforms. Council reports and public presentations are among the variety of documents can end up on digital platforms.

To address this issue, the Communications Division also coordinated with the Blind Institute of Technology to host five citywide trainings on document accessibility. The trainings took place over October-November 2026 and covered accessibility tips for Word, PowerPoint, and Excel.

Over 200 unique staff registered for the trainings. These staff represented 16 City departments, including staff from the offices of the Mayor and City Councilmembers, Library, Auditor, and Rent Board. Staff who attended came from all levels of the

organization, from executive staff and Directors to others. BIT's trainer said it was the largest training he'd ever hosted.

Staff gave positive feedback on the trainings. Overall satisfaction averaged 4.13 out of 5. Several respondents stated they appreciated the trainings and materials provided.

The survey data also suggest the training improved confidence levels. Average self-rated comfort increased from 2.34 before training to 3.68 after training.

The survey also asked staff what would help them incorporate accessibility into their work. Key themes from the feedback:

1. **Reference materials:** Written steps for each software, manuals with screenshots, handouts, one-page guides and checklists, etc.
2. **Ongoing expertise:** Access to an expert to ask questions as they come up.
3. **Remediating existing documents:** These trainings focused on building accessible documents from scratch, but many staff are trying to fix documents that they didn't create themselves.
4. **More templates:** Request for accessible templates for Council staff reports, contracts, etc.
5. **Organizational support:** Continuous emphasis from leadership to encourage all staff to adopt accessibility principles.

Accessibility consultant: Blind Institute of Technology

In addition to the accessibility audit of BerkeleyCA.gov and the training series, the Blind Institute of Technology (BIT) is developing an overall assessment of and recommendations for improving accessibility at the City of Berkeley. BIT is using the Accessibility Maturity Model as an industry-standard method of assessing organizational processes. Their recommendations will provide a roadmap for the City to fully meet WCAG 2.1 AA standards.

As part of that process, BIT has so far:

- Conducted a survey of 25 staff who manage digital platforms for the City
- Created a guide and process for assessing vendor VPAT forms
- Written a preliminary assessment of the City's current accessibility maturity

Accessibility requirements in contract boilerplate

The City Attorney's Office updated the technology software contract boilerplate to require vendors to have ongoing compliance with WCAG 2.1 AA. Among other things, the contract boilerplate requires VPATs annually or within 30 days of software upgrades. The updated boilerplate is available for all departments to use moving forward.

Online form-building software

The Communications team has worked with several departments to purchase a software for building online forms. PDF forms are among the most difficult type of PDF documents to make accessible for people with disabilities due to the interactive elements.

An HTML-based online fillable form is a better experience for most users, with or without disabilities. The purchased software, Cognito, allows staff to easily build fillable online forms. Several departments now have access and are working on building out their forms.

These and more to come will replace PDF forms with accessible online fillable forms.

Third-party web platforms

Staff in the Citywide Digital Accessibility Task Force have documented over 90 digital tools the City uses to engage with the public.

- **Free tools:** 34 are free services, mainly various social media channels
- **Contract for off-the shelf products:** 37 are software the City purchases to support specialized functions, such as hosting the Municipal Code, sending out email newsletters, scheduling chipper appointments, applying for permits, registering for recreation programs, paying parking tickets, etc.
- **Custom built:** 21 are custom built solutions, mainly custom websites and ArcGIS maps or hub sites.

Staff have so far collected 29 vendor VPAT/ACRs, documents that outline the software's compliance with WCAG standards. Work continues to collect all vendor VPATs and have respective departments assess their compliance.

As part of its work with the City, BIT has been developing a VPAT verification guide to help staff in all departments with a consistent structure.

Culture Change

Our overall goal is to move the culture of the organization to prioritize online accessibility. The Communications Division has met with the Commission on Disability, HR's training officer, BIT, and others to see how this can move forward.

As City Manager, I am personally committed to this work that makes the city's information more accessible to everyone.

cc: Senior Leadership Team
Crystel Hadley, berkeleyca.gov website manager/Digital Communications Coordinator, Communications Division