

Including People with Disabilities in Design Projects

The Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) resource **Involving Users in Web Accessibility Evaluation** at www.w3.org/WAI/eval/users

provides guidance on including people with disabilities in design projects, and:

- **introduces involving users with disabilities in accessibility studies,**
- **provides guidance on considerations for involving users with disabilities,**
- **includes notes on optimizing usability testing for accessibility issues, and**
- **links to additional information on involving users throughout the design process.**

While this resource is focused on Web accessibility evaluation because it is part of an evaluation resource suite at www.w3.org/WAI/eval/, much of the guidance applies in a broad range of situations, including:

- **Design projects** - Collaborating with people with disabilities early in a project helps designers and developers be more efficient and effective in addressing accessibility. For example, informal evaluations throughout development are more beneficial than only doing formal usability testing at the end of a project. In most cases, this involves:
 - finding a few people with disabilities,
 - including them throughout the development process to complete tasks on prototypes, and
 - discussing accessibility issues with them.

■ **Usability and accessibility studies** ranging from informal evaluation of a specific accessibility issue to large-scale general usability studies, and from gathering initial user requirements to evaluating existing designs.

The WAI resource covers involving users effectively, analyzing accessibility problems, drawing conclusions and reporting, and **including diverse users**; for example:

People with disabilities are as diverse as any people. They have diverse experiences, expectations, and preferences. They use diverse interaction techniques, adaptive strategies, and assistive technology configurations. People have different disabilities: visual, auditory, physical, speech, cognitive, and neurological — and some have multiple disabilities. **Even within one category, there is extreme variation**; for example, "visual disability" includes people who have been totally blind since birth, people who have distortion in their central vision from age-related degeneration, and people who temporarily have blurry vision from an injury or disease.

Include users with a variety of disabilities and user characteristics. In most cases there is limited time and budget and you cannot include many users. Selecting the optimum number of users with the best suited characteristics can be difficult. There are resources on the Web that provide guidance on determining participant characteristics for a particular situation and on finding participants with disabilities.

A complete list of **WAI Resources** is available at www.w3.org/WAI/Resources/

For updates, see www.w3.org/WAI/flyer/