

Teams that Produce Accessible Content

Creating content that is easily accessible for social safety net benefit applicants and recipients can take a village. The range of expertise needed to design materials and websites that are both accurate and easy to understand is no small feat. It often requires input from policy experts, communications leads, designers, and software developers. However, this task need not be as daunting as it seems. This guide discusses general characteristics shared by organizations that have found success at creating accessible content, as well as several case studies that detail successful accessible content teams.

Best Practices of Accessible Content Teams

There are two practices successful teams have in common:

They invest in capacity building and scale incrementally

It's possible to start small and scale incrementally. This includes both the size and number of projects to tackle and the size of the team. Even teams with limited skill sets can make a big difference. Indeed, the alternative — having only one accessible content expert — can create bottlenecks. By investing in training more people to create accessible content, setting up style guides, and requiring accessible practices, organizations are able to shift to accessibility as the rule rather than the exception.



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Putting it Into Practice



CORONAVIRUS STIMULUS PAYMENTS

What are the Coronavirus Stimulus Payments?

The government distributed two payments to eligible families to help during the economic crisis caused by the Coronavirus. If you haven't received any payments or are waiting for your second payment, this site will help you understand what you need to do to get your money.

Who is eligible for a Stimulus Check?

The vast majority of Michigan residents are eligible to receive a stimulus check from the federal government this year. Even if you have no income, you are still eligible, but need to take action to receive your stimulus payment. **This includes individuals with low or no earnings who normally don't file taxes.** Every American adult earning less than \$75,000 (or couples earning less than \$150,000) is eligible for a stimulus check from the federal government this year. While this site is geared toward Michigan residents, the information is applicable nationwide.

If you still have questions about your stimulus check after reviewing this website, call the IRS at 800-919-9835 or, United Way at 844-322-3639.

[See if you're eligible](#)

[Information in Spanish and Arabic](#)



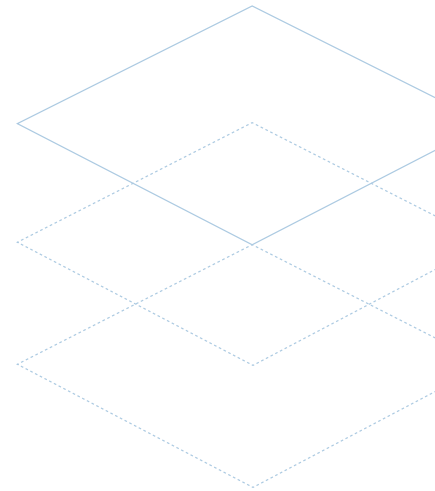
A screenshot from the Coronavirus stimulus payment website.

When the federal government announced that stimulus checks would be administered as a COVID-19 cash relief program, many advocates immediately recognized a potential equity problem. The program called for distributing checks through the Internal Revenue System (IRS). However, millions of poor families who needed this relief the most would not receive their checks since they earned below the tax-filing threshold and did not file tax returns. Others were unbanked.

In order to overcome this barrier, University of Michigan Poverty Solutions connected with Civilla to conduct aggressive outreach to inform people who were unlikely to automatically receive a payment about the steps they needed to take.

Poverty Solutions and Civilla embarked on a rapid user research and design process to produce the Coronavirus stimulus payment website. They worked with people in the site's target audience to translate information from IRS bulletins into plain language. They also designed the website to be mobile-responsive—an important feature because U.S. residents with low incomes are dependent on smartphones for their internet access. In addition, they provided website content in Spanish and Arabic, the two most commonly-spoken languages in Michigan aside from English.

Having practiced the principles of human-centered design, plain language, and content design while partnering with Civilla on the stimulus payment website, Poverty Solutions applied these principles to their next policy communication effort for the public. In April 2021, Poverty Solutions launched a new website with a similar breakdown of steps needed to get the Child Tax Credit, which was expanded under the American Rescue Plan.



Find Out More on the Digital Benefits Hub

To learn more about how Poverty Solutions was able to quickly roll out such an important and effective tool, check out the full case study.

They use collaborative tools

Collaborative tools and products help organizations engage colleagues and stakeholders in content creation. These can include shared text documents that allow for collaboration and iteration, as well as more advanced content management tools that allow for co-creation and enforce editorial workflows.

Putting it Into Practice

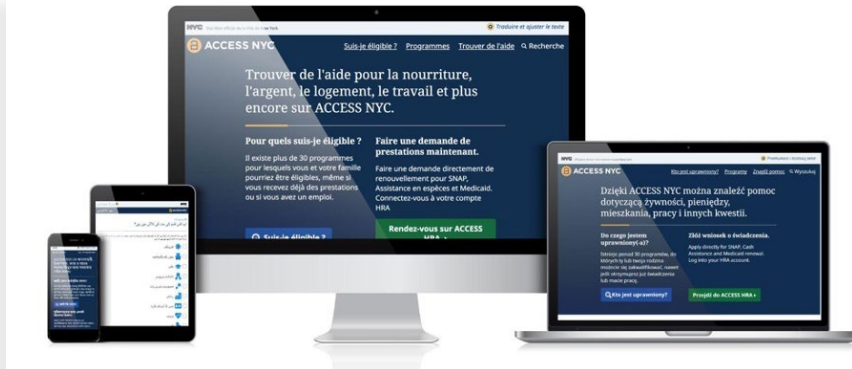
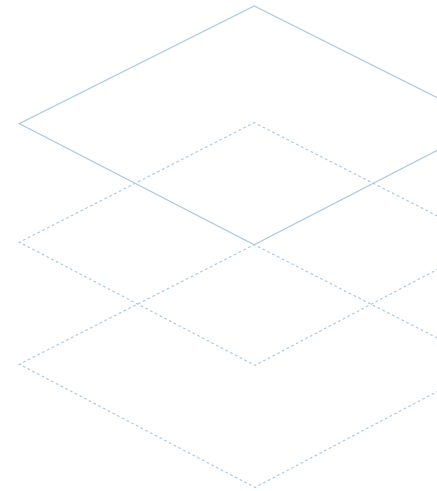


Image of various devices displaying ACCESS NYC's website in a different language on each screen.

[ACCESS NYC](#) is New York City's public benefits information site and eligibility screener. The website serves as a one-stop-shop where residents can learn about more than 80 city, state, and federal social safety net benefits and programs. ACCESS NYC includes information about how to apply for benefits and what documents are required. Users can also check their eligibility for the more than 40 benefits and programs available in the city and find help nearby—all in 11 languages.

In 2016, the [New York City Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity](#) (NYC Opportunity) set out to redesign ACCESS NYC. NYC Opportunity centered redesign around the needs and experiences of residents seeking benefits. The team reviewed ACCESS NYC usage patterns and connected with residents, benefits navigators, and staff at government agencies to understand why people come to ACCESS NYC, the benefits information they are looking for, and the challenges they face in accessing that information.

Once the team uncovered the most important information to include on ACCESS NYC, they partnered with staff across city agencies to rewrite the website in plain language and reorganize the hierarchy of content. For example, through user testing, the team learned that residents and benefits navigators are better able to find, understand, and take action on benefits information when a short, plain language description of the type of assistance comes first, followed by the official program name.



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To learn more about how NYC Opportunity became the team that City Hall now approaches first to update benefits information for the public, as well as how the infrastructure they built allows them to produce this content at scale, read the [full case study](#) as well as our [primer on Designing for Multilingual Translation and guide on Tools to Manage and Share Content](#)

As part of redesign, the team reimagined the editorial flow by which content for ACCESS NYC and other websites owned by NYC Opportunity was created, managed, and distributed. All benefits content now follows the same set of steps. Once content is drafted and edited, it goes through reviews with plain language experts and benefits agency liaisons before getting final approval and undergoing translation.

NYC Opportunity also recognized that successful redesign required building a team with expertise across multiple areas of knowledge. Since the relaunch, the team has developed a set of style guides and templates and cross-trained staff at partner agencies to build capacity and scale the creation and management of accessible program content for other types of government services.



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For more information on accessible content, check out our guide to [Best Practices for Accessible Content and additional information on benefits outreach](#).

Get in Touch

Our Digital Benefits Network team is here to help!

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Please contact us with any thoughts, questions, or potential collaborations via email at digitalbenefits@georgetown.edu