



PDF Accessibility

Guidelines

Audience: Travis County Department Staff

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Purpose

[Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act](#) (ADA) requires state and local governments to “communicate with people with disabilities as effectively as you communicate with others.” As part of a continuous effort to improve web accessibility and compliance with ADA Section 508 and Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) on our public digital platforms, the Travis County Digital & Web Services team has established guidelines for the use of PDFs.

These guidelines aim to foster a user-centric public digital environment that prioritizes accessibility, usability, and efficiency. Departments are encouraged to collaborate with the Digital & Web Services team to ensure compliance and continuous improvement of our digital ecosystem.

Overview

This document covers whether using a PDF is the best option, as well as other options to consider when a PDF is not called for. It lays out the expectations that PDFs be accessible and optimally sized, as well as relevant, accurate, and useful for publication on one of the Travis County public websites.

Do You Really Need a PDF on Your Webpage?

While PDFs can serve as a convenient format for printable information, their use as a primary way to share information online poses challenges:

- Accessibility may be compromised unless the PDF is specifically designed and/or remediated to address accessibility standards.
- Many mobile devices will force the reader to download the file in order to read it. This slows down the user experience and consumes data on limited paid data plans.
- PDFs are occasionally updated and republished, and visitors who have downloaded an older PDF will have outdated information.
- Search engine results may not include PDFs as readily as web pages.
- PDFs offer very limited analytical data on how constituents interact with the files.

Generally, content meant to be read on a screen should be a webpage, while printable content should be a PDF. PDFs are best suited for:

- Legal artifacts with signatures, stamps, seals, or redactions.
- Documents requiring printing, like forms with handwritten or notary signatures.
- Lengthy content, such as comprehensive plans or studies longer than 10 pages.

What Options Do I Have Other than a PDF?

- Request a web page. [Consult with the Digital & Web Services team](#) to transform PDFs into dynamic, interactive web pages.
- Use an interactive form. Digital forms are effective tools for collecting and processing information. Their usage streamlines data input, reduces errors, and enhances user interaction.

Accessibility

When PDFs are necessary, they must comply with [federal accessibility standards](#) to accommodate users with disabilities, particularly those relying on assistive technologies such as screen readers.

Non-compliant PDFs should be remediated with tools like Adobe Acrobat Pro.

Size

PDFs uploaded to the site should aim to be under 1 MB to improve efficiency:

- Faster loading times enhance the user experience and reduce abandonment.
- Limited data plans are conserved.
- Improved site page speed positively affects Google ranking and content searchability.

For large PDF files, consider using Adobe Acrobat Pro or Adobe's [free online compression tool](#) to reduce file size.

Lifecycle Management

PDFs should be unpublished as soon as they are no longer relevant, accurate, or useful.

Change Log

Version	Revised	Section	Description	Name	Title
1.0	20240305	Do You Really Need a PDF on Your Webpage?	Added, “Search engine results may not include PDFs as readily as web pages.”	Erin Roberson	Technical Writer
1.0	20240227	All	Copyedited	Erin Roberson	Technical Writer
0.2	20240226	All	Ran accessibility checks	Erin Roberson	Technical Writer
0.1	20240220	All	Placed content into template	Erin Roberson	Technical Writer