About the W3C
Web Accessibility Initiative

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The World Wide Web is fast becoming a de facto standard for communicating information on-line, yet this technology has inadvertently created barriers for people with disabilities: "new" Web content is not just text and freely combines graphics, audio, and video, severely limiting efficient communication for users with no visual or hearing capabilities for instance.

As the the Web rapidly displaces existing media, there is an increasing social expectation for its accessibility and also a growing trend to require this accessibility; this, combined with the realization of the benefits that a Universal Design approach will bring to the Web at large (telephone users for instance, with no screen access), has led the W3C to take on a new leadership role and launch in 1997 the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) program.

The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) coordinates the evolution of the Web core protocol (such as HTML, CSS, PICS, HTTP, etc) and has a mission to "lead the Web to its full potential". It was therefore uniquely suited to host this accessibility effort.

The W3C Web Accessibility Initiative is pursuing accessibility of the Web through five primary areas of work:
1. Technology reviews and development. Centered on protocols and data formats, especially HTML, CSS, XML, SMIL, DOM.
2. Guidelines for use of the technology. Targeted at User Agent and Authoring tool developers, and Page Authors.
3. Education&Outreach. Raising the awareness of the content creation community to the Accessible Design "philosophy".
4. Tools for evaluation and repair of Web Pages.
5. Research and advanced development.

In order to adequately focuses on Education & Outreach, as well as Research & Development (which are not core W3C activities), a WAI International Program Office (IPO) has been created which enables partnering and coordination among the many stakeholders in Web accessibility: industry, disability organizations, government, and research organizations. The WAI IPO is separately funded from W3C Member activities, thru sponsorship of governments (NFS, DoE and European Commission TIDE), and corporations which have shown their leadership in Web accessibility and Universal Design (including IBM/Lotus, Microsoft, NCR, and Riverland).

Much like other W3C domains, the WAI coordinates several different activities through a series of electronic mailing list (most of them public), Web areas, telephone conference calls and face-to-face meeting (international location). Altogether, several hundred people are involved in this activity.

Please consult the Web site http://www.w3.org/WAI, which is continuously updated, to refer to the latest and historical information about the project.