Pivot Prioritizes Accessibility for Researchers

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Persons with disabilities should have equitable access to research funding. In support of that ideal, the Pivot team regularly reviews accessibility standards, and builds support for them into the product and the underlying development process. Result? Self-service access to Pivot's rich funding insight and funding opportunities, put within reach of many more deserving researchers.

Updated Requirements Spur Fresh Look at Accessibility

In late 2017, the Information Technology Council (ITI) released an updated version of the Voluntary Product Accessibility Template (VPAT), replacing the original version that had been in place since 2001. The VPAT is a document that allows organizations to comprehensively analyze how hardware, software, electronic content and support documentation conform to the accessibility standards required by Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. The VPAT is universally used to create Accessibility Conformance Reports (ACRs) that document product support for accessibility.

For universities, particularly those that rely on federal or other public funds to operate, it is critical to conform to the Rehabilitation Act by ensuring that all their services are equitably accessible to all users.

Pivot Teams Integrate Accessibility Into the Development Effort and Product Roadmap

The Pivot product management, quality assurance and development teams have a framework in place that makes design for accessibility a native part of the development process. During testing of each release, the quality assurance team flags accessibility issues for attention by the development team, then retests until the release passes accessibility. Any exceptions are listed in the VPAT for Pivot, and slated for attention in the next release.

The teams examined the newly updated VPAT, researched the most-recent data about accessibility and the tools available, and came up with a testing and development plan.

"When we first started our review of Pivot, the folks at Pivot reported that they take accessibility very seriously. Our review team has certainly heard that statement before from other companies, but for Pivot, that statement is absolutely true. The developers, testers, and quality assurance folks at Pivot have taken great care in ensuring that Pivot is as accessible as possible to individuals with disabilities."

- Humboldt University Accessibility Reviewer

The tools included:

- NVDA screen reader for PCs and the Mac's built-in VoiceOver functionality, both widely used by those who are visually impaired
- WAVE accessibility extension for auditing issues with labels, CSS and contrast
- WCAG Contrast Checker and Accessibility Audit Developer UI
- Deque aXe accessibility testing tool

Among the accessibility issues addressed were:

- Ability to tab through the elements on the page and navigate using only the keyboard
- Use of skip navigation links to bypass deeply nested menus
- Functional screen-reader support including presence of captions, labels and ALT tags to describe images
- Color choices that preserve minimum color contrast requirements
- Preservation of content and functionality when increasing type size

Major University Puts Pivot Accessibility to the Test

The first independent test of Pivot's conformance with the updated VPAT was performed by the accessibility review team at a large university on the U.S. West Coast. The team requested and received an Accessibility Conformance Report and Accessibility Roadmap for Pivot and began their review.

The review team was impressed that the Pivot ACR was far more detailed, specific and accurate compared to ACR reports they had seen from other vendors. For their part, the Pivot team was impressed with the knowledge the university's team had with the product, their attention to detail with the accessibility issues, and how they worked with the Pivot team to make specific suggestions and requests that addressed the exceptions identified in the ACR.

As a PIVOT QA team member reported, "The university was searching for a supplier and product that cared about accessibility, and it was very obvious that they had met with other companies who did not impress them whatsoever. They went through our VPAT and asked numerous questions about the product and the different exceptions in our VPAT that were listed. It was exciting for me from the QA perspective to show them what we had been working on, answer their questions and let them know, 'Well, yes, we know about that. That's slated for this quarter to be fixed.' They told us, 'No one else cares like you.'"

Support for the most-current standards within Pivot ensures that every researcher, including those with physical challenges, can have equitable, self-service access to the same storehouse of grant and research-funding information.

"Pivot takes great pride in their statement regarding accessibility, and it is backed up by their processes, workflows, attitudes, and knowledge of the challenges individuals with disabilities face when using computers and technology. It truly was a pleasure reviewing Pivot and working with the Pivot folks in answering our questions"

- Humboldt University Accessibility Reviewer

What is a VPAT? A VPAT, or Voluntary Product Accessibility Template, is a document that allows a company or organization to provide a comprehensive analysis of conformance to accessibility standards set by Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act.

For More information about the accessibility of Pivot, including access to the latest VPAT can be found here: https://bit.ly/3dMXIhQ.

Further reading about 508 compliance for universities and why it matters?

- **Voluntary Product Accessibility Template (VPAT)**
  http://udloncampus.cast.org/page/policy_template
- **What You Can Learn from Major Accessibility Lawsuits**
  https://www.3playmedia.com/2018/09/20/accessibility-lawsuits/
- **Making the Web Accessible**
  https://www.w3.org/WAI/
- **Seven Steps toward IT Accessibility Compliance**
  https://er.educause.edu/articles/2017/9/seven-steps-toward-it-accessibility-compliance

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