Strategic Action Plan

for Web Accessibility at Brown University

May 15, 2018

INTRODUCTION

Diversity and inclusion are central to Brown University's mission, and the University is committed to sustaining a culture in which each individual's dignity is acknowledged and accorded with respect. In support of this objective, the University in 2017 began to expand the implementation of policies, procedures and practices to ensure newly created websites meet standards for web accessibility.

In spring 2018, Brown formalized efforts to apply accessibility standards to all websites in the brown.edu domain. Brown joined colleges and universities across the country responding to direction from the Office of Civil Rights, and the University appointed a task force comprising individuals from Computing and Information Services (CIS), Student and Employee Accessibility Services (SEAS), and the Office of University Communications (OUC) tasked with addressing accessibility issues with Brown's online and web content. This Strategic Action Plan details the processes, procedures and actions Brown will follow to create a more accessible and inclusive website for the University.

1. Policies and Procedures to Address all New Online Content and Functionality

Beginning in 2017, Brown implemented the following policies, procedures and practices to ensure newly created websites comply with international accessibility standards:

- **1.1 Staffing restructure to support oversight of accessibility (*June 2017)*.** The University in 2017 restructured its provision and oversight of web services to ensure clear governance and oversight of websites across the institution, including the capacity to ensure accountability for accessibility. Website creation and development previously could be initiated and carried out by multiple offices on campus, and offices and departments often initiated web projects with external vendors. The consolidation of talent and responsibility for website design and strategy, as well as the establishment of new governance, made it possible to take the steps outlined in 1.2-1.4 of this section.

- **1.2 Website pre-launch checklist** *(April 2018).* The Office of University Communications (OUC) has primary responsibility for determining if and when new Brown websites are launched into the University's public web presence. Prior to April 2018, Brown did not have written accessibility or quality standards to assess newly created websites. To address this issue, OUC created and released a "Website Pre-Launch Checklist" to evaluate the accessibility and quality of new websites prior to launch.

  If OUC receives a request to launch a website that does not comply with these requirements, OUC staff members contact the appropriate web content editor in the hosting office or department regarding the resolution of any accessibility issues. The site is launched into the public web presence only after the accessibility issues are addressed.

- **1.3 Review of current policies and development of new policies and procedures** *(September 2018)*. Brown's current Technology Accessibility Guidelines articulate web accessibility standards for the University, but do not have full guidelines, policies or procedures that are specific to the University's website. In order to expand the existing guidelines and create new

written policies and procedures to address the accessibility of new online content, a working group of individuals from Computing and Information Services (CIS), Student and Employee Accessibility Services (SEAS), and the Office of University Communications (OUC) will review the University's [Technology Accessibility Guidelines](#) and draft a new set of policies and procedures related to the University's website.

- **1.4 Launch a Designated Vendor Program for outsourced web and digital projects (*Fall 2018*).** Brown will create a Designated Vendor Program that limits creation of vendor-contracted sites at Brown to designers and developers with the experience and expertise to meet web accessibility standards and requirements. Vendors in the program will be contractually obligated to create websites for University clients that comply with Brown's digital accessibility policies and guidelines.

2. Making Existing Content Fully Accessible

The University's current web presence is large and fragmented, and a patchwork of discrete solutions to individual websites will not result in a fully accessible web presence. In order to ensure that Brown's existing online content becomes fully accessible, Brown is taking a comprehensive approach: The University is redesigning and rebuilding its website with the primary goal of achieving full accessibility.

To complete this work as expeditiously as possible, Brown has contracted with an external agency with expertise in digital accessibility. The University has already completed several milestones in this effort:

- **2.1 Issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) seeking external expertise (*September 2017*).** Brown issued an RFP to external firms with expertise in digital accessibility to assist with a comprehensive redesign of the University's website in September 2017. The first objective listed in the RFP document was "Creating an Accessible Website" for Brown. The RFP also specified the accessibility standards the newly rebuilt website should meet.

- **2.2 Selected an agency with accessibility expertise (*December 2017*).** Brown selected an external agency to assist with its comprehensive website redesign in December 2017. The selection of an agency was based, in part, on the firm's previous experience with creating fully accessible websites for colleges and universities.

- **2.3 Launched a Scope of Work (SOW) to rebuild brown.edu to meet accessibility requirements *(February 2018)*.** Brown launched an SOW with an external agency for a comprehensive website redesign in February 2018. The SOW specifies that new webpage templates will be compliant with accessibility standards and that compliance will be verified through testing.

Future implementation steps

In order to complete the process of making Brown's highly utilized online content fully accessible, the University will complete the following action items. For the purposes of this Strategic Action Plan,

"highly-utilized pages" are pages that receive more than 100,000 unique page views each year as reported by Google Analytics.

- **2.4 Develop training for distributed web content editors** *(Summer 2018)*. Brown's Computing and Information Services, Office of University Communications and Student and Employee Accessibility Services will jointly create and begin to deliver website accessibility training across the University. Requiring the University's distributed network of web content editors to participate in accessibility training will help ensure that new and existing online content created by Brown's faculty, staff and student employees complies with accessibility standards. See section 4.0 "Training" for additional information.

- **2.5 Implement a dedicated accessibility and usability reporting tool** *(Summer 2018)*. Brown will acquire and configure a dedicated accessibility and usability reporting tool during summer 2018. The tool will automatically generate reports of potential accessibility errors and email these reports to the appropriate web content editor. Information about the existence and use of the accessibility and usability reporting tool will be shared with the University community on the brown.edu website, and via an announcement in the daily "Today@Brown" email digest distributed to all faculty, staff and students.

- **2.6 Take delivery of fully accessible web templates** *(December 2018)*. The external agency contracted for the brown.edu rebuild project is expected to deliver functional and fully accessible web templates by December 2018. The University will verify the web templates are fully accessible through testing. Brown will accept the final delivery of the new web templates from the agency only after verifying that the templates comply with accessibility standards.

- **2.7 Relaunch the brown.edu homepage using fully accessible web templates** *(First Quarter 2019)*. The University is scheduled to relaunch the brown.edu homepage and its highly utilized subpages in early 2019 using the fully accessible web templates created by the agency. During this phase, the Office of University Communications will be responsible for migrating content into the new templates, and the project team will undergo the University's new content accessibility training program prior to migration.

- **2.8 Systematically relaunch Brown's highly utilized websites using fully accessible web templates** *(Second Quarter 2019 through December 2019)*. By the second quarter of 2019 Brown's communication and technology teams will have the requisite tools for systematically moving through Brown's highly utilized websites and ensuring they are fully accessible. (These tools include the fully accessible web templates, a web content accessibility training program for content editors, and a dedicated accessibility and usability reporting tool.)

Brown's critical and highly utilized existing online content will be appropriately updated to reflect the needs of the community and other users at the conclusion of this comprehensive effort.

3. Process to Ensure that Inaccessible Content is Made Accessible

Student and Employee Accessibility Services (SEAS) serves as the first point of contact for users who have concerns about the accessibility of Brown's online content. In order to ensure that inaccessible content is made accessible in an expedient manner, the University will complete the following action items:

- **3.1 Add a web accessibility link to the brown.edu website footer** *(November 2018)*. Brown will add an accessibility link to the footer of each website hosted by the University's central content management system by November 30, 2018. This link will direct users to a webpage where they can report accessibility issues with Brown's online content.

- **3.2 Finalize and implement procedures for providing an accessible version of reported content** *(November 2018)*. SEAS will receive "issue reports" when members of the Brown community, or the public at large, report an accessibility issue with the University's online content via the footer link. SEAS will develop written procedures to ensure that:
  - The focus of Brown's efforts will be providing equitable access to information.
  - The accessibility concern is acknowledged and information is gathered.
  - Appropriate steps are taken to get information to the person seeking it:
    - For Brown community members, SEAS will locate information and provide it in as comparable a format as possible.
    - For requests from outside the Brown community, the SEAS office will notify the office responsible for the online content that could not be accessed to support them in providing the content in an accessible and timely way.
  - Concerns regarding video captioning are routed to the proper office at Brown that assists with ensuring that video available on the web is captioned.
  - SEAS reports systemic accessibility issues with website templates or online content to the Office of University Communications for review and system-wide resolution.

4. Training

Brown will develop, and begin delivering, website accessibility training by September 2018. To ensure that web content editors in the University community have access to high quality accessibility training, Brown will complete the following action items:

- **4.1 Appoint an Accessibility Training Working Group** *(Spring 2018)*. A working group of i individuals from CIS, SEAS, and OUC will develop a new accessibility training program.

- **4.2 Considerations for new training program.** The training working group will consider the following topics during the development of the University's accessibility training program:

- ○ How to provide information to web content editors about their responsibility to comply with the University's accessibility benchmarks.

  - ○ Training for distributed web content editors on web standards and how to create and sustain accessible content.

  - ○ Writing and updating the web accessibility documentation and "how-to" guides on the University's website.

  - ○ Video training opportunities for website accessibility.

  - ○ The identification of third-party training opportunities for technical web developers and designers at Brown.

- **4.3 Delivery of new training** *(by September 2018)*. Brown will begin delivering new web accessibility training by September 1, 2018. Brown will require an employee representative from every academic or administrative unit responsible for editing their web content to complete the training. Web accessibility training will be incorporated into in-person training sessions for web content editors, and training will also be made into a standalone video and/or training module and provided through an online learning system.

5. Summary Reporting

Brown will compile quarterly reports on the accessibility of the University website using the dedicated accessibility and usability reporting tool established in action item 2.5, above. The University will use the following metrics to evaluate the efficacy of its digital accessibility efforts:

1. The number of accessibility issues identified on the University's homepage and other critical or highly-utilized pages.
2. The total number of webpages on brown.edu affected by accessibility issues.
3. The number of requests received by SEAS to make inaccessible content accessible per section 3.1 above.
4. The number of individual web content editors who participate in web accessibility training.

Numerical benchmarks for each of the above metrics will be captured to establish a baseline for measuring future progress.

The Office of University Communications and Computing and Information Services will analyze the quarterly reports generated by the accessibility and usability reporting tool and compare the results to the numerical benchmarks. This will ensure the implementation of the Strategic Action Plan has the intended effect of increasing the accessibility of Brown's website, and effectively measure the University's progress toward its goal of creating and deploying a highly accessible website.

CONCLUSION

The concrete actions defined in this Strategic Action Plan will resolve issues related to accessibility on the University's website and make Brown's digital presence more usable and inclusive for all individuals. These actions will also advance Brown's goal of ensuring that all members of the University community feel they are provided with equal opportunities to thrive at Brown.