



An Association of Accessibility Professionals

Key Points

- The technology industry is working to address the needs of people with disabilities and temporary impairments, but many businesses and organizations are unaware of the available tools for making devices, applications, and content more accessible or they lack the expertise to use those tools.
- Accessibility has been advanced primarily by self-taught practitioners who have not had the benefit of internationally recognized standards, professional certifications, or a pipeline of university-trained developers and engineers with expertise in accessibility.
- Without an international community of trained accessibility experts who share a body of knowledge and can help educate businesses about accessibility, it will be difficult to further advance the cause of accessibility within the technology industry.
- Microsoft is taking a leadership role in the formation of the International Association of Accessibility Professionals (IAAP), which aims to transform accessibility from a grassroots effort into an internationally respected and recognized profession.

BACKGROUND

As technology has become an increasingly vital part of our lives, progress has been made in incorporating accessibility features into some devices, services, and software. But innovation in this area has been piecemeal and accessibility remains an afterthought for many organizations that rely on or produce technology, for a number of reasons:

- Many organizations do not fully understand the mainstream value generated by investments in accessibility features and technology.
- The adoption of accessible technology has been hindered by the cost and complexity of integrating it into existing devices and software, and there are limited venues for professionals to share information or offer peer support.
- Corporations, governments, and educational institutions that want to make their devices, services, and software accessible have difficulty finding designers and developers with sufficient expertise in this area.
- There are no internationally accepted professional standards or curricula related to accessibility to guide and train developers and engineers.

MICROSOFT APPROACH

The technology industry, accessibility advocates, and government leaders have been struggling for years to find more effective ways to encourage the development of innovative accessibility solutions in devices, services, and software. In 2011, Microsoft participated in a year-long study (with support from the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy) whose findings support the conclusion that an international association of accessibility professionals would be a step in the right direction.

Microsoft is taking a leadership role in the formation of the International Association of Accessibility Professionals (IAAP), which will provide the strategic leadership, global perspective, and sustained investment needed to transform accessibility into an internationally respected and recognized profession. The diverse array of founding members includes companies and

organizations such as AT&T, Barclays, Scotiabank, Adobe, Hewlett-Packard, AbilityNet, and Ai Squared.

The major goals of the organization are:

- To create a globally recognized set of training materials related to accessibility. These could be organized as separate courses for business leaders, designers, developers, and so forth.
- To create a global community of individuals and organizations that spreads awareness of the need for accessible technology and offers resources to support the accessibility profession.
- To provide a global forum for accessibility professionals to share information, offer peer support, and track accessibility-related developments in technology and public policy.
- To develop and administer one or more professional accessibility certifications and offer continuing education to help practitioners augment their expertise as the field evolves.

The IAAP's mission, strategic objectives, governance structure, and other details have been finalized, and the association plans to launch and begin accepting members in the spring of 2014.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Policymakers have an important role to play in raising awareness of the need for accessible technology and encouraging the development of additional resources for developers and engineers. In particular, they should encourage organizations and businesses to join the IAAP and support the effort to build a globally recognized accessibility profession.

They should also focus on the following priorities:

- **Making the case for accessibility.** Policymakers are in a unique position to promote digital inclusion and can help corporations, government entities, and educational institutions understand the broader societal value and economic benefits of investing in accessible technology and accessibility professionals.
- **Promoting the need for trained professionals.** Recognizing the shortage of accessibility experts is the first step toward promoting investment in training and resources for developers and engineers. Policymakers can promote dialogue about this shortage and the need for a supported profession.
- **Encouraging public-private partnerships.** Governments, industry, and consumer advocacy organizations can deliver the greatest benefits in the area of accessibility through collaboration to establish appropriate principles and professional standards.



Helpful Resources

Microsoft Accessibility website
www.microsoft.com/enable

International Association of Accessibility Professionals
www.accessibilityassociation.org

Assistive Technology Industry Association
www.atia.org