# Make it Stop!

## The case against, and alternatives to, direct accessibility testing of vendor products and platforms

Accessing Higher Ground 2021

Assertion: We have a very unbalanced approach to getting information about a11y in the products that we purchase and use. We give away too much free accessibility information and consulting to vendors we’re paying.

* Several examples
  1. Testing candidate products and sharing results
  2. Testing candidate products and sharing results with selected product vendor
  3. Testing products already that we already own and sharing results with product vendor
  4. Providing remediation guidance to vendors in any of the above situations
* I’ve done this lots of times
* Important: must have organizational will to make this change, with active leadership by senior leadership
* Also: must have more of us approaching this differently for it to become expected
* Also: this will take partnerships within the organization
  1. At my institution, I have found that IT, separate purchasing group over contracts, separate purchasing group over requests for proposals
* Also: Not talking about beta test programs
* In other parts of this conversation like information security or web hosting reliability, if someone doesn’t deliver what’s in the contract then they’re gone. Accessibility? “Well let’s work around it and take good notes”
* We have internalized too much of the burden for accounting for accessibility in our purchased or used technology
* Understandable approach
  1. Gather needed information
  2. Follow through on obligations under procurement policy at federal, state, organizational level
  3. Show due diligence
  4. Need to plan for accommodations required later
  5. Help to hopefully improve accessibility in the products that we purchase and use
* Flawed model though
  1. Creates a very unbalanced workload
  2. Sets expectation that this unbalance is the norm
  3. Doesn’t let us get enough in return while it often takes hours of our time
     + We may get a better product, true. I just think there are other ways to do that.
  4. Devalues accessibility to pass along reporting and consulting without compensation
     + Combine with many that don’t field questions about accessibility or see it in their client’s priority lists
     + If they don’t see the value, how can we expect them to invest in accessibility appropriately?
  5. Why would we pay for something that the vendor realizes the value of?
     + Is there a parallel in other part of tech acquisition/ownership?
* Or are there alternative tools and approaches? A couple of suggestions:
  1. Let’s start with the Voluntary Product Accessibility Template (VPAT)
  2. Just using a VPAT and additional questions I’ll get to later, we can get a clear picture of relative accessibility across products (remember that’s what we’re looking for along with anticipating accommodations for inaccessible parts)
     + VPAT is a form vendors fill out to declare conformance to accessibility standards in their product(s)
     + We don’t trust VPATs because the information is so often unclear, incomplete, or possibly wrong/misleading/inaccurate.
       - This last part is key: what does it say about where accessibility fits in that vendor’s product strategy?
     + The VPAT is a tool and if you don’t know how to use it then it won’t work well to do its job
     + Everything in the VPAT reflects the vendor’s maturity with accessibility
     + Let’s look at one
       - [Adobe Spark VPAT](https://www.adobe.com/accessibility/compliance/adobe-spark-webapp-2019-acr.html)
     + Questions you should ask:
       - Is this the most current VPAT?
       - Does this cover the current version of the product?
       - What role does the listed contact have/is that person still on board?
       - Is there any information you would like to add in the notes that will help us to make a more informed decision?
       - Specify how you test the platform (more)
       - In Success Criteria
         * Supports? Specify how. What HTML or other elements and attributes do you use to be sure that every interactive element is keyboard accessible?
         * Partially Supports? Specify what elements, workflows, components, etc. do not support that SC and roadmap to fix
         * Does not Support? When will it? (Roadmap with specific timelines)
  3. Bigger picture: another option, still critical: Accessibility interview or survey
     + Look to the [Policy Driven Adoption of Accessibility (PDAA)](https://dir.texas.gov/resource-library-item/policy-driven-adoption-accessibility-pdaa-vendor-assessment) model
     + Might be possible to scale it to fit
     + Accessibility Interview: ask questions about how accessibility fits into the vendor design, development, maintenance, etc.
       - Basically, what is their accessibility program like?
     + Gauge maturity of the org
     + Processes, workflows, people in the org
     + Can also make into a questionnaire
  4. Leverage [the HECVAT](https://bit.ly/3Fk5JJ7) (now with 100% more accessibility!)
     + Information security self assessment
     + More integral to decision making
     + More forceful with respect to having vendors provide clear, complete information
  5. Independent assessment
     + Require third party assessment and VPAT or conformance report prepared by an independent accessibility expert
  6. Make sure your RFP, contract, statement of work, etc. is clear about your process
     + Do you require a roadmap for fixes of inaccessible stuff? Put that in your contract
     + Be specific and clear
     + Hold them to it
* After purchase/already purchased
  1. Very different if you do or don’t have a11y written into contracts
  2. Going to have to determine organizational risk tolerance
  3. You can and should still get a VPAT
     + Look at what you already have and vet that
     + Ask for that meeting
  4. Easier to test the tool directly
  5. Came to my head working with AZTAP
  6. Have also had loads of situations where client finds a11y bugs and vendor wants them to pay to fix
  7. Alternative
     + Go through VPAT process above during contract renewal
     + Have the accessibility interview
     + Add language to contract, again maybe at renewal time
     + Ask for roadmap, commitment, etc.
     + Plan for needed accommodations
     + Decide how long you’re willing to carry the risk
     + Will need more decision makers