



# **ACCESS360: 2017 - 2018 COHORT REPORT**

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# Overview

The Washington State Board for Community & Technical Colleges is committed to the principles and practices of equal access in the digital age and works to help our colleges achieve their institutional missions with cost and personnel efficiencies in mind. Since many issues of access can be prevented by institutional efforts, it is important for the Washington community and technical colleges to evaluate how they implement recommended practices for institution-wide web accessibility. This report details the results of a multi-institute self-study of those practices that both promote, and may inhibit, the accessibility of web content across the enterprise.

During the 2017-2018 academic year, nine colleges participated in Access360, a yearlong mentorship opportunity for cross-functional campus teams as they implement accessibility policies on a broad scale to effectively, efficiently and equitably serve students, employees, and community members. Participation in Access 360 was intended to help campuses

- create (or strengthen) how college cross functional team works collaboratively to ensure successful implementation of accessibility policies and practices on their campuses;
- find time, space, and generative structures so college accessibility teams can identify achievable goals and a realistic plan;
- provide scheduled support and accountability as college accessibility teams move through their plans to fully realize their campus goals

In order to track progress made over the course of the year, participation in Access360 required colleges to complete institutional self-studies of web accessibility. Seven colleges completed and met the requirement and the results discussed in the follow section detail the progress the seven college cohort made over the course of the academic year.

## Methodology

To complete the self-study, the colleges used the [GOALS Benchmarking and Planning Tool for Institution-wide Web Accessibility](#). This web-based tool was built on global indicators of recommended practices in postsecondary education that can result in sustained web accessibility. Those indicators include: (1) Institutional Vision and Leadership Commitment; (2) Planning and Implementation; (3) Resources and Support; (4) Assessment.

Each indicator includes a set of benchmarks that signify areas that contribute to the larger domain. Colleges received a score for each benchmark to assess their current accessibility standing. The scores range from 0 - 100%. 0 - 25% indicates Below Average, 26 - 60% indicates Average, 61 - 80% indicates Good, and 81 - 100% is Excellent.

## Findings

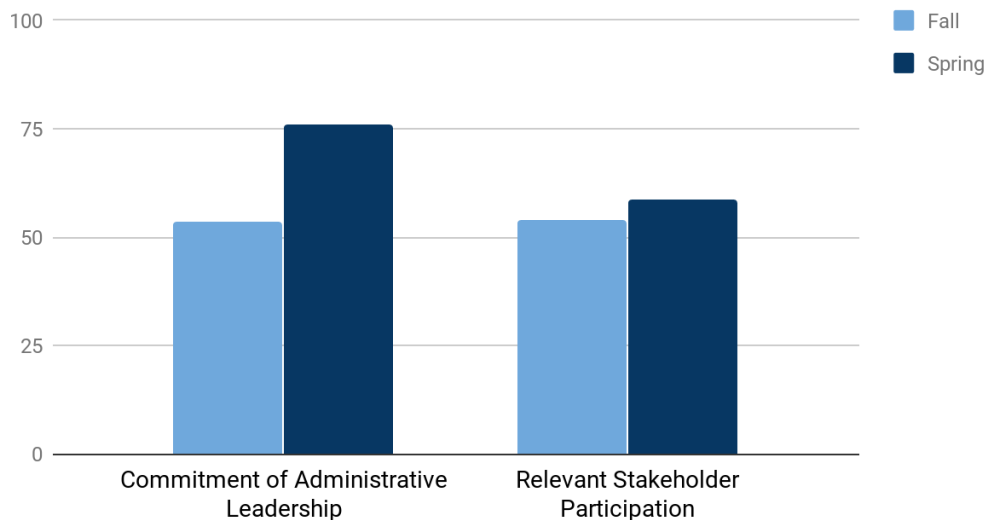
This section will detail the progress made in the four domains measured using the GOALS tool.

### Indicator 1: Institutional Vision and Leadership Commitment

## What this Indicator means:

Institution-wide web accessibility is best attained and sustained when there is leadership to support institution-wide vision and commitment toward accessibility. This support should come from many levels including an institution's governing board, administrators, and key personnel. Each must actively support, participate, and take ownership in the work and outcomes of accessibility.

Indicator 1: Institutional Vision & Leadership Commitment



## Progress in Indicator 1 Benchmarks:

Within the first indicator, greatest progress was made in the **commitment of administrative leadership** domain. Administrative leadership begins with a VISION and commitment toward change. Typically this vision, and its leadership support, stems from efforts made at top administrative levels within an institution. For some systems this would also include the institution's board of governors or trustees. Over time the leadership commitment results in the development and enforcement of an accessibility POLICY and PLAN, along with the necessary resources to implement them.

As a cohort, the colleges improved their score in this area by about 50%, going from a collective score of 50% (Average) to 76% (Good). This change was apparent over the course of the year as more colleges shared communications coming out from their college president about the importance of and their commitment to accessible technology. The vast majority of colleges came away from Access360 with a sustained institution-wide task force and institution-wide policy that is included within their college policy manual, employee handbook, etc.

The Access360 cohort experienced less progress when it came to **relevant stakeholder participation** - starting with a score of 54% (Average) and creeping up to 59% (points away from Good). Faculty, staff, and students are stakeholders as they are involved in the development, maintenance or use of institutional web content. Most colleges completed their initial self-study after having already formed a workgroup that included relevant stakeholders, as such a workgroup was one of the initial requirements to participate in Access360. Stakeholder knowledge and ownership of their role is important, as each will likely have slightly different responsibilities in planning for and achieving

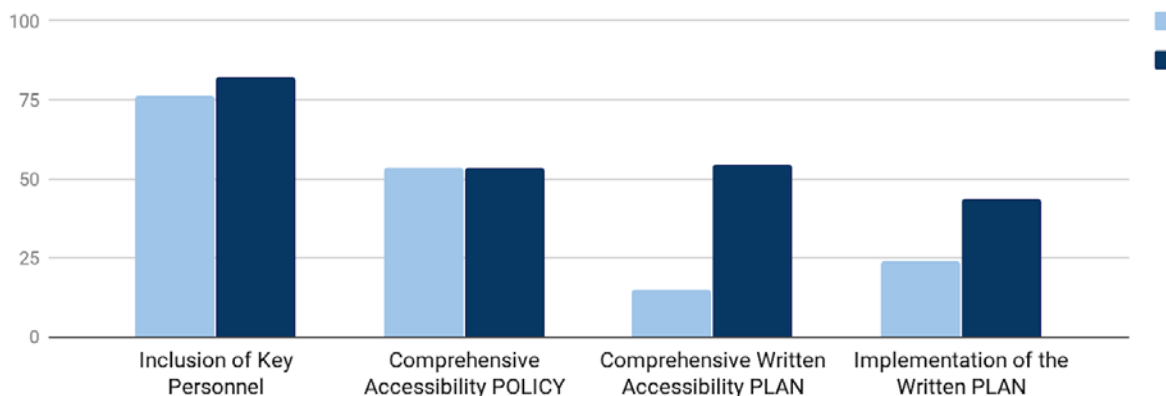
overall accessibility. Areas that were not well represented included faculty and executive level administration. At our final convening the importance of executive level support and involvement was widely discussed, with many schools who did not have that level of support requesting input on how to engage that group and/or requesting SBCTC to make evidence of support a requirement for participation in Access360.

## Indicator 2: Planning and Implementation

### What this Indicator means:

Web accessibility requires strategic planning. Administrators must establish policies and procedures along with a systematic plan to develop, institute, and maintain web accessibility across the organization.

Indicator 2: Planning & Implementation



### Progress in Indicator 2 Benchmarks:

The second indicator of the GOALS tool address the importance of having key players at the table when developing institutional policy and procedures for implementing the policy.

Identifying and involving personnel who represent key constituent groups at your institution is essential during both the planning and implementation process. Key accessibility personnel may come from many departments or units and represent disability advocates as well as leaders representing technical, faculty, and staff positions. Administrators identify and include these individuals for input as the institution moves from planning to implementation and maintenance of an institution-wide accessible web presence. The Access360 colleges were already considered Good/Above Average in terms of the **inclusion of key personnel**, but bumped into the Excellent category when the average score shifted from 76% to 82%.

A stated policy that provides specific guidelines and standards for web accessibility is necessary in order to ensure all administrators and stakeholders understand what is required of them. The web accessibility policy should appear in the same set of governing documents as other institution-wide policies. Once established, the institutional policy is promoted and enforced. Access360 schools

came to the project having already drafted, if not fully approved **comprehensive accessibility policies** - not surprising given the OCIO's Policy 188 required all state agencies to have policies in place prior to the start of Access360. Minimal change (remaining at 53% - Average) in this area is to be expected. However, through Access360, some colleges uncovered different areas in which their policy could be improved in order to be more comprehensive, such as including defining the scope, setting effective dates, consequences for non-conformance, mechanisms for review, etc.

The college cohort made significant improvement when it came to developing a **comprehensive written plan**, with a collective score of 15% (Below Average) shifting to 54% (Average). While the written implementation plans may not be as comprehensive as desired, having an institution-wide effort requires a systematic plan of action to really get moving. This plan includes strategies for all aspects of implementation including: goals, timelines, budgeting, materials, personnel, ongoing assessment, and, when necessary, revision of the plan. For institutions that require a business plan for use during cycles of continuous improvement, these elements can serve as the basis for a prospectus that includes concept, marketing, position and market analysis, financial planning, and implementation.

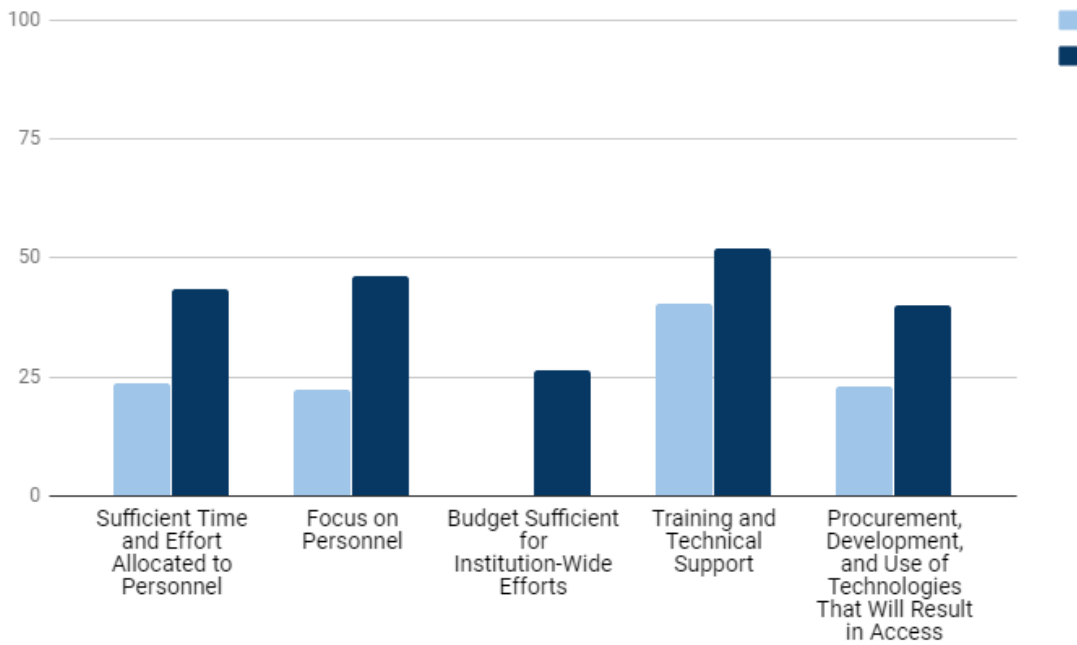
Once the accessibility policy and plan are in place, administrators and others put that plan into action, ensuring it stays on track by continually monitoring and assessing its progress. The colleges demonstrated improvement in terms of **implementation and monitoring of the written plan** shifting from 23% (Below Average) to 44% (Average). In addition to challenges around implementation, the work-groups must also develop strategies to ensure their implementation actions are consistent with the plan. In some cases colleges did not yet have the budget to support the work laid out in the plan, or may have left out strategies around communication or data collection efforts to track training. Putting a plan in place and ensuring the proper feedback mechanisms are also laid into the foundation is expected to take time and careful analysis. After the progress made this past year we believe that the Access360 schools are on their way to strengthening that foundation.

## Indicator 3: Resources and Support

### What this Indicator means:

An institution-wide web accessibility plan requires adequate resources and support. Administration must provide the resources necessary to implement the web accessibility plan with provisions to ensure that the system is sustainable and will remain accessible.

### Indicator 3: Resources & Support



### Progress in Indicator 3 Benchmarks:

The process to move to an accessible web presence takes time. Both the time and effort required for this work is identified when allocating faculty and staff responsibilities. This is an area many colleges struggle with. When evaluating **sufficient time and effort dedicated to personnel** to carry out the accessibility initiatives on our campuses, we're lucky to report that the 2017/18 Access360 cohort experienced an increase from 24% (Below Average) to 44% (Good).

An effective plan cannot be carried out without personnel with the expertise to implement it. **Focus on hiring, retaining, and supporting personnel** at all levels will help institutions attain accessibility goals. For example colleges need to have technical individuals, and those with special responsibilities, to implement the accessible technology plan. Moreover, faculty and staff typically have multiple responsibilities that require their time and attention. Therefore, it is important to provide them with clear and helpful information, sufficient time and support, and the motivation or incentives to ensure that they give the accessibility work in the plan the necessary attention. While people in every role at every college are stretched thin on time and money, the colleges did make some improvement when it came to supporting personnel and reported an increase in this area from 22% (Below Average) to 46% (Average).

Administration takes financial requirements into account when developing the written accessibility plan and budgets are designed accordingly. Necessary materials, licenses, equipment, personnel, and training are considered. The funding necessary to sustain accessibility of the system is also factored into the budget. Access360 colleges were well below average at 0% when it came to having a **budget sufficient for institution-wide efforts**, yet the colleges reported some improvement, bumping them to 26% (Average).

All personnel (i.e., faculty and staff) are provided with the knowledge, support, and materials they require to carry out their roles in implementing institution-wide web accessibility. The Access360 schools remained in the Average category in terms of staff receiving **training and technical support**, though some increase was observed in their scores shifting from 40% to 52%.

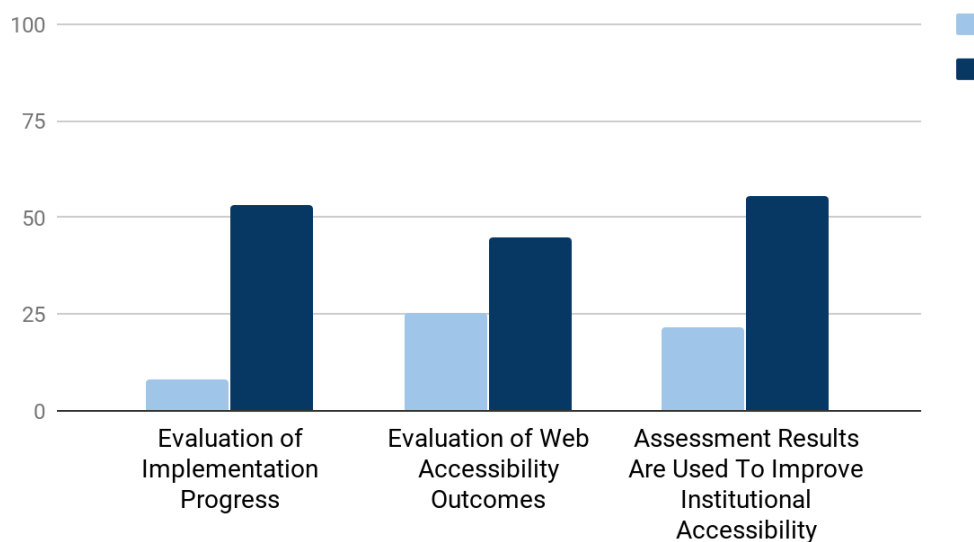
To create and maintain accessible technology, personnel choose tools that render accessible digital content. Failing to **procure, develop, and/or use technologies that support access** creates new problems and perpetuates those that already exist. A strong procurement policy, with language included in contracts, helps ensure that personnel use the institution’s resources wisely and purchase products and services aligned with institution-wide web accessibility efforts – including open source, shareware, and freeware that don’t go through the traditional procurement process. While a common pain point, the Access360 colleges experienced some improvement around procurement as they begin instituting technical standards and practices, even if not consistently across the board. Over the year the colleges shifted from 23% (Below Average) to 40% (Average).

## Indicator 4: Assessment

### What this Indicator means:

Ongoing assessment is necessary to ensure that a web accessibility plan is working and on track. Processes must be in place to measure progress, constituent satisfaction, and outcomes. This information is then used to help determine the sustainability of the current efforts and make improvements to the overall program.

Indicator 4: Assessment



### Progress in Indicator 4 Benchmarks:

Provisions are made to ensure that the plan is implemented as intended (e.g., scope, training, and support of staff, timelines). **Evaluation of implementation progress** is used to ascertain if implementation is occurring at predicted levels, and that alterations in planned implementation are



identified and communicated.

Most of the colleges began Access360 with little to no plan or data collection effort around measuring progress. This was expected, given that most schools were in the process of determining how to implement their policies. As Access360 came to a close we observed a significant shift from 8% (Below Average) to 53% (Average) as colleges developed strategies to use data and other means to report and communicate out about progress made to their accessibility plan.

No plan or policy is useful if it does not provide the intended outcome. Those tasked by the institution to improve web accessibility must periodically monitor and evaluate its status to determine if it is meeting the institution-wide web accessibility standard. Because automated web accessibility tools don't provide a complete assessment picture, key accessibility personnel should include manual checks in their evaluation plans. As technology and standards change over time, it is also important that the institution determine if the stated outcome is sufficient or if alterations could bring it more in line with current standards and practices. The Access360 colleges experienced an increase from 25% (Below Average) to 45% (Average) in the area of **evaluation of web accessibility outcomes** by using both data and manual checks to measure progress.

Data gathered from evaluations of both the process and the outcomes of web accessibility are of little value unless they are used to improve and inform what is to happen in the future. Those tasked by the institution to improve web accessibility use ongoing oversight and review of data sources continually to revise procedures to ensure the institution can create and maintain institution-wide web accessibility. Moreover, these same data can be used for future changes in institutional policy. The Access360 experiences an improvement in the area of **using assessment results to improve institutional accessibility**, as seen in the increase from 21% (Below Average) to 56% (Average).

## Conclusion

It is evident from the overall results of Access360 that focused attention on web accessibility promoted by the program has resulted in significant progress across all metrics for participating colleges. It is equally evident that progress is and will continue to be incremental and that sustaining progress requires significant commitment from college leadership.

The good news is that awareness is emerging, that the logic of accessibility and its seamless fit with the mission of colleges has activated the interest and good will of many college staff in our system. At several colleges in the Access360 cohort it has resulted in the formation of interdisciplinary communities of practice pulling together staff from academics, IT, student services, and business and finance for rich conversations that have identified and galvanized this work by demonstrating its importance to almost every aspect of college operations.

For these conversations to become normative and sustainable in colleges, Access360 has discovered that articulated executive commitment to the effort is a profound indicator for success. Leadership commitment in the form of clear messages about the importance of accessibility, about its alignment with the mission of the college, about the importance of focusing human resources on these issues are essential aspects of how accessibility becomes embedded in each college's commitment to equitable educational opportunities and inclusive campus culture. The presence of

integrated policy and planning is a necessary step to demonstrate these commitments, but it's only a first step.

In addition to policy, staff awareness and effort, and leadership commitment, financial resources are needed to accelerate progress toward these goals. Currently this is the Washington CTC system's weakest link and it's understood that accessibility is one of many important initiatives requiring funding in a challenging economic climate. The work of the Access360 cohort in this area suggests that it is likely that gains will continue to be marginal in this area; however, we believe that it is important that sustaining incremental gains is critical and that funding for this work needs to appear consistently in the budget requests of the many campus units with accessibility stakeholders.

SBCTC will continue to contribute to sustained progress in web accessibility by supporting and convening opportunities for colleges to share information and practices, and by applying strategic funding in the areas (system technologies like Blackboard's Ally, subsidized video captioning, training and information sharing around accessibility and technology) with the most impact for most colleges. Access360 will be an evolving focal point of our efforts to understand, facilitate, and measure the overall progress of our system in this critical mission area. We look forward to helping sustain the future efforts of current Access360 colleges and inviting the participation of new cohorts.



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