Accessible Manifestos

Because no-one should be excluded from democracy

Why is it important?

Without an accessible manifesto, not everyone would be able to find out what you are promising to do! Blind people and people with low vision, along with many people with dyslexia, use assistive technologies when accessing the internet, and there are many people who don't use assistive technologies that still benefit from having the plain text available. Making your election communications accessible is important for democracy, and it's the responsibility of each candidate to ensure that they do this. Fortunately, it's really easy to do!

So what should my manifesto look like?

It's always best to design for accessibility first. That way, everyone gets the same great experience, no-one feels like their needs are a second-thought, and you don't have to do anything extra!

Using text/HTML

The easiest way to build an accessible manifesto is to use HTML to create your design. If you're happy with the default styling, it's also really easy to create your manifesto in this way, since the editor allows you to format your text via familiar and easy-to-use buttons, without having to dig into the code.

If you want more control over your design, you will need some knowledge of HTML and CSS. The online editor for the manifesto doesn't allow you to include <style> tags, but fortunately it's really easy to convert a <style> block into inline style attributes using an online tool such as https://htmlemail.io/inline/.

Using images

Lots of people create their manifestos as images, that they then upload and embed into the page. This allows people to create complex visual designs with little technical knowledge, but obviously presents a challenge for accessibility. To fix this, if you decide to make an image-based manifesto, you will also need to include the plain text at the bottom of the page, formatted using the controls in the editor, as you would for a basic text/HTML manifesto.

Anothing things to keep in mind is that sometimes candidates upload images containing text that's hard to read even for people who don't have a relevant disability. Using small text, low contrast, or background

colours that are too vivid, can quickly put people off reading your manifesto, and that will hurt your election campaign.

What is plain text?

When we talk about plain text in manifestos, we simply mean text that's not part of an image. As a general rule, if you can't highlight the text and copy-and-paste it somewhere else, it's not plain text! But that doesn't mean that your manifesto should be devoid of formatting.

Semantic formatting is also important for accessibility. This just means using headings for your headings and lists for your lists, just like you would in a Word document. Without this formatting, your plain text manifesto would just be a structureless block of text for some people, regardless of any visual structure you try to create. Giving content the correct formatting puts it in context, and enables users of assistive technologies to navigate your manifesto in the same way that everyone else does.

How to make your plain text accessible

Use semantic formatting

Format your text using the controls in the editor to give both visual and semantic structure. Headings should be formatted as headings, lists should be formatted as lists, etc.

Use the right heading levels

Using the right heading levels is visually important and allows users of screen readers to understand the context and navigate the different sections of your manifesto. Heading 1 is your page title, heading 2 is for section titles, and further headings can be used to break your content down further.

Keep the contrast high

While it's fine to change the background and foreground colours, you need to be sure to maintain high contrast to ensure that people can read it. You can check the contrast two colour using https://webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker/; you should pass at least WCAG AA, and ideally you should reach the AAA standard.

Don't over-use emphasis

You can use bold and italics to emphasise key parts of your manifesto pledges, but you should do so sparingly. Ideally, you should only be emphasising a few words at a time. If you feel like you need to highlight a large chunk of text, you likely aren't conveying your message effectively, and you should rewording it.

Add alternative/alt text to informational images

If you include images in your manifesto, you need to consider what the purpose of them is in order to determine whether they need alt text.

- If the image is purely decorative, it shouldn't have alt text.
- If the image conveys information that is not available in the text, then you should add alt text that gives that information.
- If your manifesto is image-based and your plain text is separate, don't add alt text to your manifesto images - the content is already available in your plain text manifesto!

If you need to add alt text, you can do so when you upload your image, or afterwards by right clicking on the image in the editor and selecting "image properties".