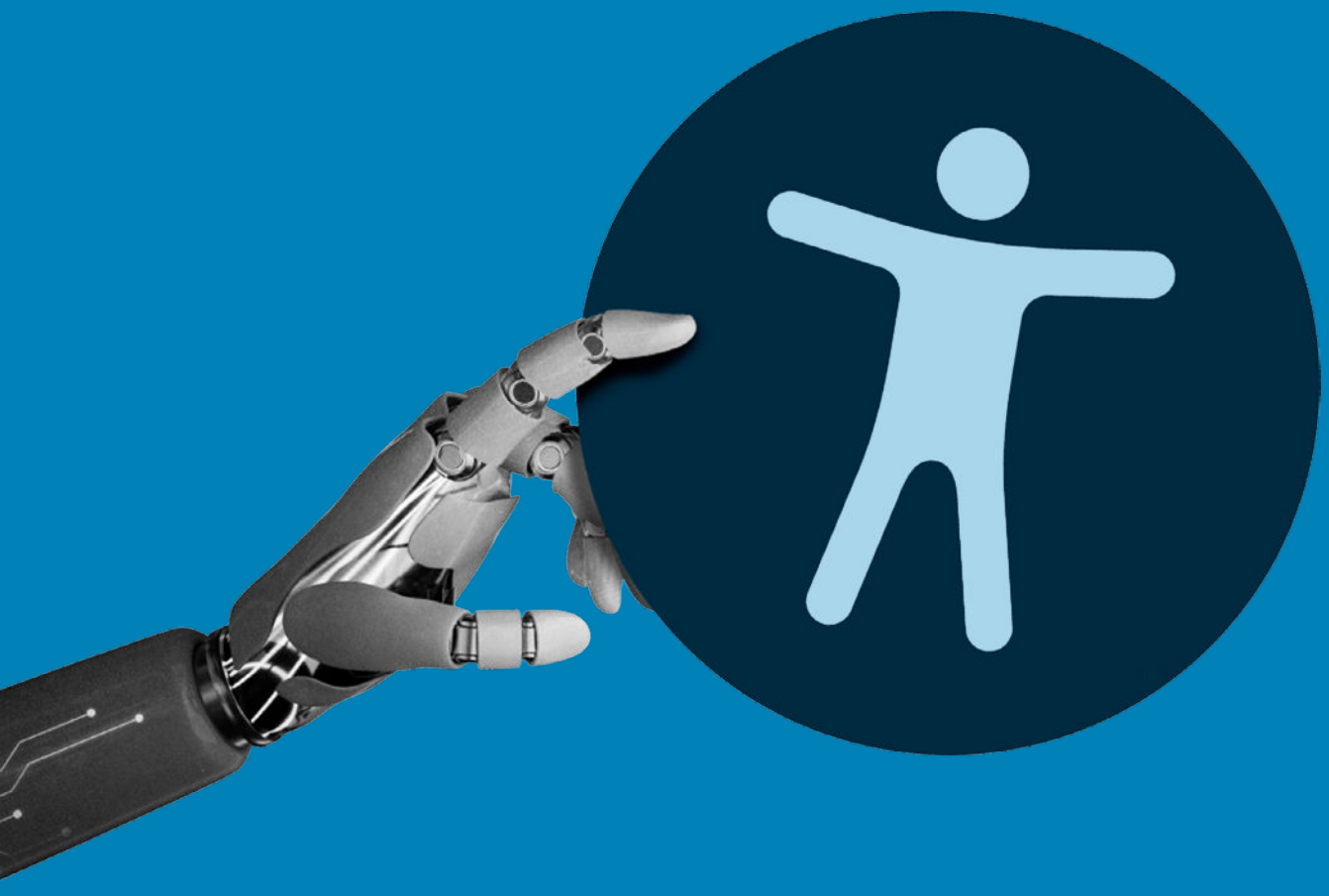
WEBINAR COMPANION PIECE

# AI for Accessibility: Inclusive Tech in Action



National Organization on Disability


# What Is Accessible AI?

Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming how organizations hire, communicate, and collaborate. **However, these systems are only as inclusive as the people, data, and assumptions shaping them.** Without disability representation in design, testing, procurement, and leadership, AI can reinforce barriers rather than remove them.

Accessible AI refers to AI systems, tools, and interfaces designed, developed, and tested so they can be easily used by everyone, including people with disabilities.

**"Technology alone doesn't create these problems, and it doesn't solve them either. Humans are part of this process."**

– Sara Walsh, Chief Operations & Finance Officer, National Organization on Disability

# Why It Matters

AI systems are already embedded into hiring processes, healthcare systems, education, productivity tools, customer service platforms, and workplace communication. For people with disabilities, this creates both enormous opportunity and significant risk.

## Potential benefits include:

- Automated alt text generation
- Flexible communication tools
- Personalized user experiences
- Realtime captions and transcription
- Reduced administrative burden
- Voice-controlled interfaces

At the same time, poorly designed systems can create new forms of exclusion. Bias in AI is not abstract. The systems learn from human-created data, processes, and assumptions. If disability perspectives are missing during development, systems may exclude or disadvantage users with disabilities.

## Potential risks include:

- Automated systems that reinforce existing biases
- Inaccessible digital interfaces
- Resume-screening tools that disadvantage candidates with nontraditional work histories
- AI in interviewing can disadvantage the neurodivergent—in particular, people who have a hard time with eye contact or have other affectations
- Tools trained on incomplete disability data

**“Accessibility is the floor, not the ceiling.”**

– Ariana Aboulafia, Project Lead, Disability Rights in Technology Policy, Center for Democracy & Technology


# Workplace Barriers in AI Systems

Organizations are adopting AI tools quickly, often without fully evaluating accessibility implications. Inaccessible systems frequently create cumulative burdens rather than isolated incidents.

## Common barriers include:

- Digital tools that do not work with assistive technology
- Hiring assessments that are inaccessible to disabled candidates
- Platforms without reliable captioning or communication options

**These barriers can create frustration, exclusion, and additional labor for employees.**

# Move Beyond Compliance: Practical Strategies for Organizations

Legal compliance is important but should not be the only goal. Accessibility standards and regulations evolve slowly, while technology evolves rapidly. Organizations that focus only on minimum legal requirements risk falling behind both ethically and operationally.

## Include Disabled Voices Early

Representation should include multiple disability perspectives, including non-apparent disabilities. Involve employees and other stakeholders with disabilities during:

- Leadership conversations
- Policy development
- Product design

Accessibility testing should include real users with disabilities and real-world environments. Organizations should evaluate tools:

- Before deployment
- During implementation
- Regularly after deployment

## Prioritize Transparency

Transparency helps prevent harm before it occurs. Employees and job seekers should know:

- How accommodations can be requested
- When AI tools are being used and what those tools are evaluating

## Build Accessibility into Procurement

Before purchasing new systems, ask vendors:

- Can accessibility features be customized?
- How is disability data protected?
- Is the platform Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) compliant and has it been tested with assistive technology?
- What accessibility support is offered post-launch?

→ **For more information on assessing any vendor's attention to accessibility standards and practices, see NOD's resource Evaluating Vendors for Accessibility.**

**"The question is not 'Did we meet the minimum requirement?' The question is: 'Would a disabled person actually enjoy working here?'"**

– Winston Ben Clements, Keynote Speaker & Disability Advocate

# Actions Organizations Can Take Today

| Focus Area | Leadership | Managers | Teams |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Accessible & Inclusive AI Adoption** | Build accessibility into AI strategy and procurement | Ensure AI tools and workflows are accessible and adaptable for diverse employee needs | Use accessible meeting tools, captions, readable formats, and inclusive digital practices |
| **Communication & Collaboration** | Include disabled voices in decision-making | Share agendas, expectations, and changes related to AI tools clearly and consistently | Use multiple communication methods and respect different communication styles |
| **Transparency & Trust** | Communicate how AI systems are used, what data is collected, and how decisions are made | Discuss AI-driven workflows openly and create space for employee questions or concerns | Ask questions and seek clarity |
| **Lead in Emerging Tech** | Conduct ongoing accessibility, usability, and bias audits | Pilot accessible workflows and evaluate technology impacts on employee experience | Embrace inclusive ways of working and identify barriers early |
| **Nurture Strong Teams** | Invest in accessibility learning and training | Encourage flexibility and feedback | Help build adaptable, inclusive, and collaborative team environments |

## Key Takeaway

AI has quickly changed the tech landscape. The opportunity now is to shape that future intentionally by embedding accessibility, inclusion, and disability perspectives into our adoption and use of these new tools.

## Thank you to our speakers for lending their time and insight **to our webinar.**

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