

Book Review

Michael Fernandez, editor

The Digital Accessibility Handbook for Libraries. By Carli Spina and Rebecca Albrecht Oling. Chicago: ALA Editions, 2025. 280 p. \$59.99 softcover (ISBN 9798892553148).

The Digital Accessibility Handbook for Libraries is a comprehensive how-to guide on making libraries more user-friendly for patrons with disabilities. The intended audience is librarians, library students, and other library professionals beginning their accessibility work. Many of the insights related in this text would be helpful to professionals in institutions working to design new spaces or services for their constituency. Institutions embarking on usability testing of their physical and online spaces would also benefit from the insights in the *Handbook*, especially chapter 7. Although the overt focus of the book is on patrons with disabilities, the authors do an excellent job of establishing that accessibility benefits all patrons: “Go beyond disability to include considering other aspects of access, such as offering testing options in multiple languages or targeting recruiting to ensure different segments of the community are represented” (78). The authors emphasize the incredible value of inclusive design in digital and physical library spaces and services, demonstrating why buy-in from patrons—especially disabled patrons—will benefit libraries. The *Handbook* explains governing legislation and current practices, attempts to look forward to the future of accessibility by exploring new and emerging technologies, and provides suggestions on how they can be applied to making libraries more usable. For example, chapter 7 includes detailed instructions on how to use accessibility features in both iOS and Android for testing purposes (142).

The *Handbook* is on par with other resources supporting accessibility in libraries, including *Web Accessibility: Practical Advice for the Library Information Professional* edited by Jenny Craven, *Serving Patrons with Disabilities* edited by Kodi Laskin, *Creating Inclusive Library Environments* by Michelle Kowalsky and John Woodruff, and *Universal Design for Learning in Academic Libraries* edited by Danielle Skaggs and Rachel M. McMullin, as well as countless other articles and reports published in the area of accessibility in libraries, many of which are referenced in this book.¹ The *Handbook* compiles the different individual reference focuses to create an extensive resource for libraries on accessibility, usability, and disability. The authors succeed in summarizing key concepts in accessibility and library usability, providing valuable insight to their readers.

Chapter by chapter, the authors focus on different aspects of accessibility and usability in libraries. Chapter 1 begins with an introduction of foundational and governing legislation regarding accessibility in the United States, as well as summarizing different types and levels of impairment or models of disability. Chapter 5, “Digital Media and File Accessibility,” considers the entire footprint of the library—from file types and storage to accessible keyboards—and provides actionable considerations to help librarians build momentum toward a more accessible, usable online library. For a crash course in web accessibility, chapter 3, “Principles of Web Accessibility,” is a must read. For libraries short on staff and funding, but high in need, chapter 4 (“The Accessible Library Website”) and chapter 13 (“Digital

Accessibility on a Budget”) provide detailed suggestions on exactly where librarians can start making their online spaces more welcoming to all users. These chapters introduce the accessibility principle under discussion, as well as how the topic affects patrons, or could be applied to libraries, while providing an extensive and comprehensive list of references for readers in each area.

The authors do not shy away from stating how difficult and ongoing the path to inclusivity is, stating, “As librarians we are trained to admit what we don’t know and fear getting things wrong. This is all a normal part of the imposter syndrome we feel when we approach technical tasks that deeply affect our users” (133), but they deliver excellent understanding of the challenges librarians face and offer research and practice-informed recommendations to overcome them. In fact, many chapters start out with a real-life example of a patron’s challenge when confronted with an inaccessible library service or space. For example, chapter 4 shares a familiar scenario, “a blind patron wants to use the library’s website to sign up for an upcoming book club but finds that their screen reader is incompatible with the accessibility overlay on the site” (73). Spina and Oling then equip the reader with the knowledge, tools, and guidance to address the described scenario and similar situations in the future.

The standout feature of this book is the inclusion of interviews with library professionals who are working on accessibility initiatives. Placed at the end of each chapter, these question-and-answer segments help to reiterate the accessibility concept discussed in the chapter, as well as provide the reader with advice and practical application of those concepts in libraries. These key insights help to show librarians that real inclusivity can be achieved and consistently improved upon. The interviews also help to establish a community of care, encouraging librarians to reach out to community experts and library colleagues for guidance or assistance. Chapter 10’s “Top Tips” is an interview with Jingling Wu from Texas Tech University Libraries, which provides ideas and recommendations for librarians seeking to implement artificial intelligence into their accessibility work, specifically improving website accessibility (194).

Overall, *The Digital Accessibility Handbook for Libraries* helps to organize the overwhelming world of accessibility in small bites for librarians, library students, and other professionals by summarizing not only critical principles but also current research in library accessibility. Spina and Oling set out on the essential task of demystifying accessibility principles and practice while maintaining a patron-centric approach to accessibility. They focus on individual experience rather than compliance; in their own words, “It is true that institutions must meet the legal requirements of their jurisdiction, but they can and should strive to then continue to work with disabled individuals to make their spaces, collections, services and communities inclusive, usable and user friendly” (16). The *Handbook* is a thorough introduction to current inclusivity practices and library principles, and it empowers readers to look to the future—not only in assistive technologies and their applications, but to put usability at the head of their considerations when they build and redesign spaces and services. Going one step further, the authors stress the importance of what they call “meaningful inclusion” (16). Spina and Oling encourage librarian readers to focus on the whys of accessibility and how usability of digital and physical spaces

can make or break a users' relationship with the community and resources. The authors gently encourage developing a community of advocacy, integrating empathy and awareness in every aspect of library spaces and services.—*Faye O'Reilly (faye.oreilly@wichita.edu), Wichita State University, Kansas*

Note

1. Jenny Craven, ed., *Web Accessibility: Practical Advice for the Library and Information Professional* (London: Facet Pub, 2008); Kodi Laskin, *Serving Patrons with Disabilities: Perspectives and Insights from People with Disabilities* (Chicago: ALA Editions, 2023); Michelle Kowalsky and John Woodruff, *Creating Inclusive Library Environments: A Planning Guide for Serving Patrons with Disabilities* (Chicago: ALA Editions, an imprint of the American Library Association, 2017); Danielle Skaggs and Rachel M. McMullin, *Universal Design for Learning in Academic Libraries: Theory into Practice* (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2024).