U.S. Forest Service Guidebook: Accessibility and Inclusive Practices

**Prepared by DEI Outdoors
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# Introduction

The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) is dedicated to creating inclusive environments that reflect the principles of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA). This guidebook provides actionable strategies and best practices to ensure all Forest Service digital and social platforms, as well as physical resources, are welcoming and inclusive for all.

# Background and Context

DEI Outdoors conducted assessments of the Chippewa and Alleghany National Forests’ websites and social media strategies. The findings can be accessed in the [Website Assessment Final Report](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1kmYsIwMEuB_Y7UQudbdvraJ94PctRXD5/view?usp=sharing). These findings informed this guidebook, which provides tools for implementing DEIA practices at the local branch level while aligning with national Forest Service goals.

**Goals:**

* Create accessible, inclusive digital and physical spaces.
* Represent diverse communities across Forest Service platforms.
* Provide actionable tools for ongoing DEIA efforts.

# Challenges Identified

**Meeting Diverse Needs:**Serving communities with varying accessibility and cultural requirements.

**Consistency Across Platforms:**Maintaining cohesive standards across a decentralized network of branches.

**Resource and Technology Limitations:**Addressing challenges in implementing accessibility and inclusive features across platforms.

# Stakeholders and Audience Analysis

**Primary Stakeholders:**

* Public Affairs teams
* USFS staff and leadership
* Local partners and advocacy groups

**Key Advocates and Partners:**

* Tribal communities (e.g., the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe)
* Conservation organizations and local leadership

# Accessibility and Implementation Goals

The Forest Service aims to:

* Promote equitable representation and access.
* Engage underrepresented groups in decision-making.
* Design inclusive spaces that align with universal design principles.

# Key Messages

**Accessibility:** Ensuring all individuals can equitably engage with Forest Service resources.

**Inclusivity:** Representing diverse communities authentically.

**Belonging:** Creating environments where all feel valued and empowered to connect with nature.

# Recommendations and Priority Plan Highlights

## Improve Website Navigation and Accessibility of Content

**How:**

* Create a “Plan Your Visit” page with sections for accessibility features, trail maps, and safety tips.
* Add interactive maps with filters like “Wheelchair-Friendly Trails.”
* Standardize trail information for consistency.

**Example:**"Green Meadow Trail: 1.8 miles, packed gravel, 2% grade, ADA-compliant restrooms at the trailhead."

**Resources Needed:** Accessibility consultants, website developers, and user testing groups.

## Include Voices, Feedback, and Experiences from a Diverse Audience

**How:**

* Partner with local organizations to co-create content.
* Launch a “Trailblazer Spotlight” series featuring diverse voices.
* Use multilingual surveys to collect visitor input.

**Example:**A video interview with a tribal leader sharing cultural insights about a trail.

**Resources Needed:** Translation services, community outreach specialists, and multimedia tools.

## Create Social Media and Communication Campaigns

**How:**

* Plan content themes like “Trail Tuesday” and “Behind the Badge.”
* Host user-generated campaigns with hashtags like #InclusiveTrails.
* Share videos showing accessibility updates.

**Example:**A short video featuring the installation of braille signage on a popular trail.

**Resources Needed:** Social media platforms, DEIA-trained content creators, and analytics tools.

## Develop Standardized Training and Content Guidelines

**How:**

* Conduct workshops on inclusive practices and accessible content creation.
* Develop a “Content Creator’s Toolkit” with templates and glossaries.
* Regularly audit digital platforms for inclusivity.

**Example:**A “Lunch and Learn” series teaching staff to write inclusive alt text for social media posts.

**Resources Needed:** DEIA trainers, accessibility auditing tools, and training materials.

# Accessibility Guidelines

#### **Website Standards:**

* Use high-contrast colors for readability.
* Add captions and transcripts to multimedia content.
* Ensure compatibility with screen readers.

#### **Social Media Practices:**

* Use alt text for all images and videos.
* Provide captions for live and recorded content.
* Incorporate inclusive hashtags and language.

# Support and Resources

**Internal Support:**

* Public Affairs teams for implementation.
* USDA leadership to endorse DEIA initiatives.

**External Resources:**

* ADA National Network
* Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)
* Disabled Hikers Trail Guides

# Conclusion

The U.S. Forest Service is committed to fostering inclusive, equitable spaces for all visitors. This guidebook provides the foundation to implement DEIA best practices at every level of the organization. Together, we can create environments where everyone feels welcomed, valued, and inspired.

#  [Supplemental Materials](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1FH-b-q_sNB7O01DhSVlcs_IRqxwb-KqS03VT9lnkE3g/edit?usp=sharing)

[**Glossary of Inclusive Language Terms**](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1FH-b-q_sNB7O01DhSVlcs_IRqxwb-KqS03VT9lnkE3g/edit?tab=t.0)Covers DEIA, LGBTQIA+, and accessibility-related terminology.

[**Instructions for Writing Alt Text and Accessibility Guidelines for Websites**](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1FH-b-q_sNB7O01DhSVlcs_IRqxwb-KqS03VT9lnkE3g/edit?tab=t.0)Step-by-step guidance for crafting accessible digital content.

[**Trail Accessibility Guidelines**](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1FH-b-q_sNB7O01DhSVlcs_IRqxwb-KqS03VT9lnkE3g/edit?tab=t.0)Details design features, signage standards, and amenities for accessible trails.

[**Detailed Examples for Priority Plan Highlights**](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1FH-b-q_sNB7O01DhSVlcs_IRqxwb-KqS03VT9lnkE3g/edit?tab=t.0)Actionable steps for implementing each recommendation.

[**Links & Additional Resources**](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1FH-b-q_sNB7O01DhSVlcs_IRqxwb-KqS03VT9lnkE3g/edit?tab=t.0)Curated tools for accessibility and inclusion.

# Closing Message from DEI Outdoors

Dear Forest Service Team,

Thank you for your commitment to inclusivity and accessibility in the great outdoors. Your efforts inspire positive change, creating spaces where all individuals feel empowered to connect with nature.

Each step you take builds a more equitable future, where everyone can experience the beauty and belonging of our shared lands. Together, we are forging new trails of inclusion, ensuring the legacy of the Forest Service reflects the diversity of the communities it serves.

With gratitude,
**The DEI Outdoors Team**