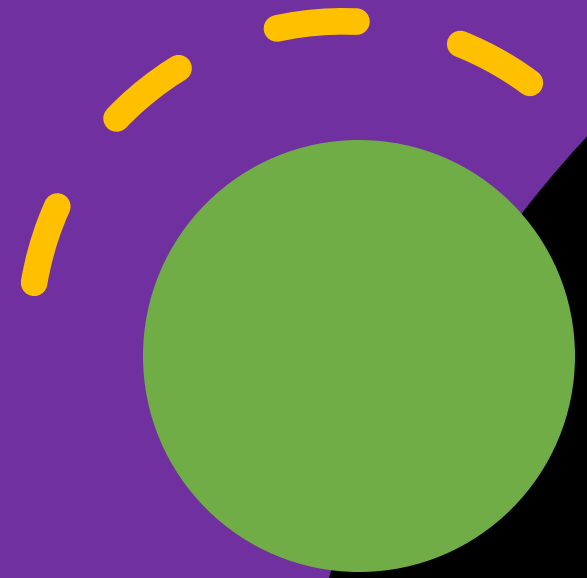
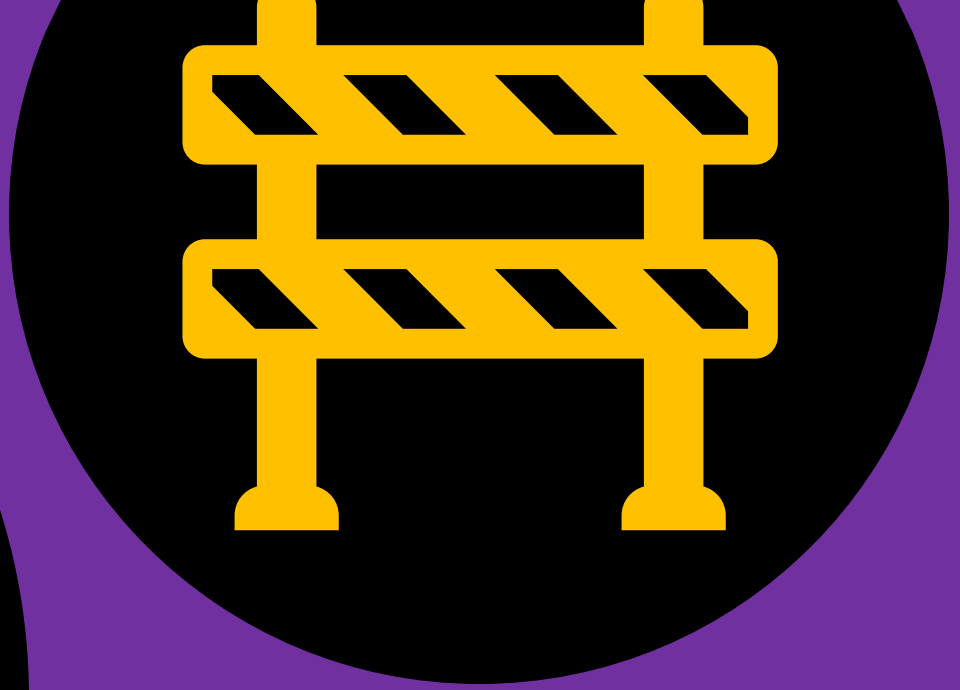
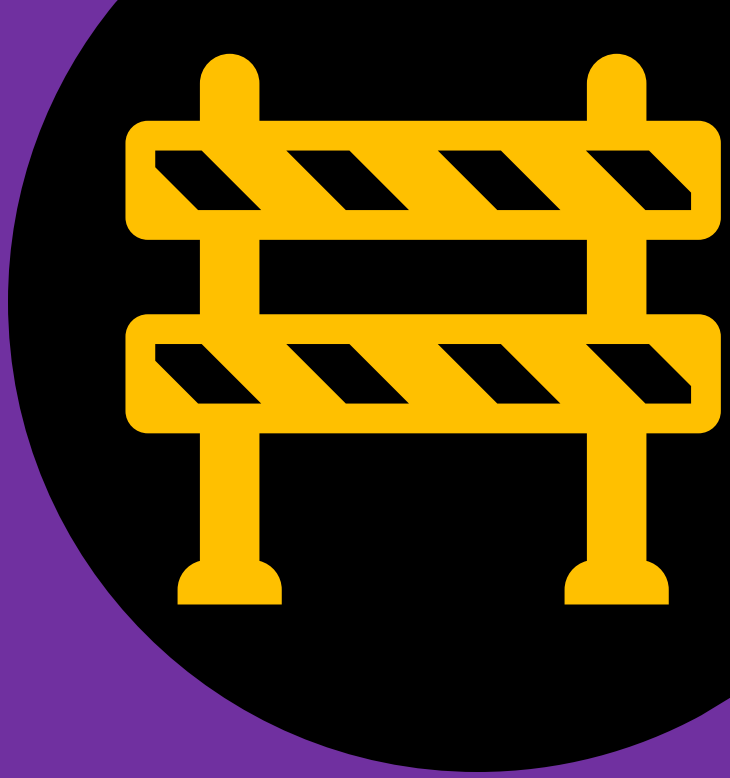


Accessibility Beyond Code Compliance

Aaron Gustafson
@Aaron@front-end.social
@AaronGustafson

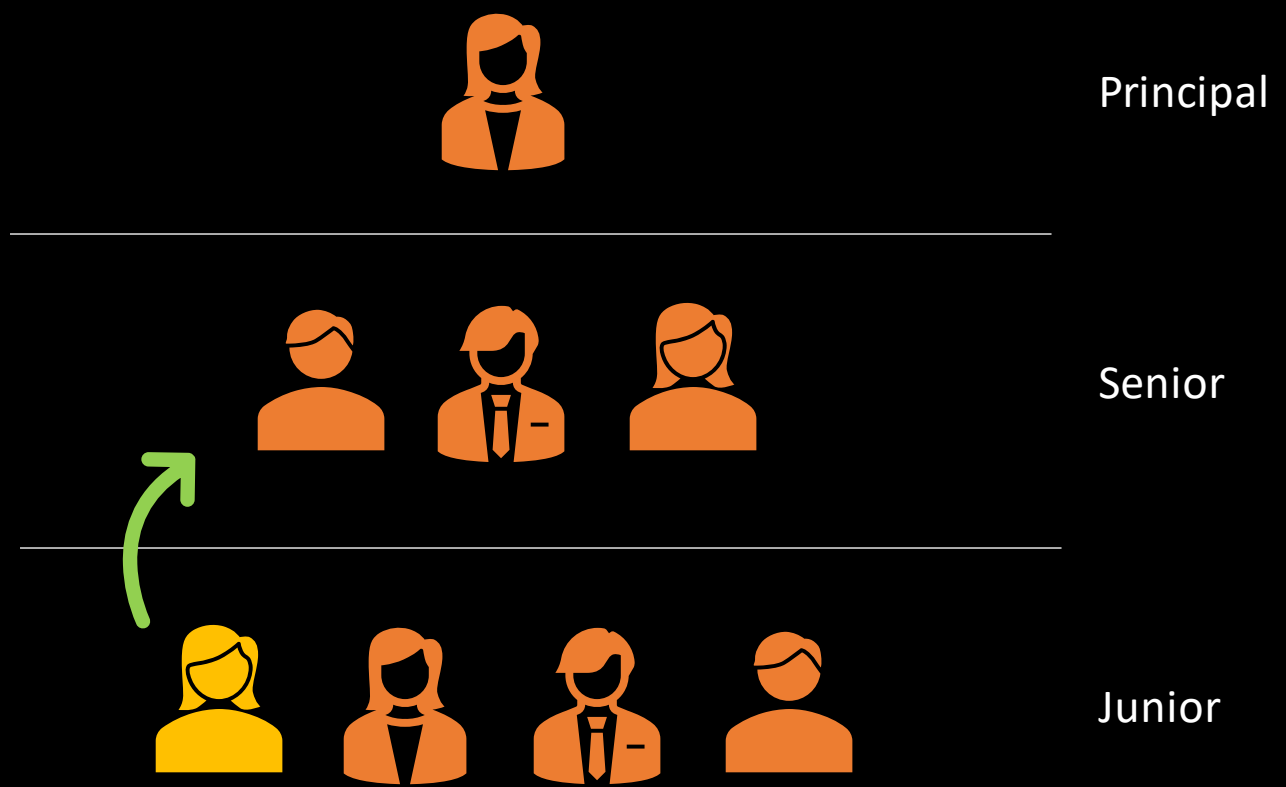




Cruel irony: accessibility devs face barriers too

We often get put in a box

We can level up



But we’re still in that box

Life in the box…

- Colleagues don’t understand (or value) what I do
- I need like three (or more) of me to handle the workload
- Teams are resistant to changing the way they do things
- Progress feels glacially slow and some days I feel I’m going backwards
- I feel isolated on the team or the company

You’ve got so much more to offer

I’m here to talk to you about opportunity!

Who am I?

Web *.*

Publisher

DevRel

Educator

W3C Ed.

Strategist

Opportunities abound for accessibility devs

AI Research & Ethics

Diversity & Inclusion

Design Systems

Product Design

Data Science

Codify coding best practices

(Design Systems & Strategies)

Align designers & developers
(small orgs)

- Advocate for the creation of a design system
- Participate in the development & maintenance of the design system
- Pair program with component owners
- Audit the design system regularly
- Level up your colleagues' accessibility skills
- Train new folks on the design system
- Celebrate accessibility wins loudly and often

Lead accessibility strategy
(large orgs)

- Ensure accessibility is considered in the all product development processes
- Communicate the importance of accessibility to key stakeholders
  - Make it a priority for their organizations
  - Secure the resources and support needed to achieve your goals
- Establish accessibility guidelines & processes for teams to ensure consistency across teams and products
- Grow your colleagues through training and mentorship
- Celebrate accessibility wins loudly and often

Your unique perspective and skills will help build greater alignment on accessibility among teams and improve morale by speeding up development & reducing bugs!

Shape what you build

(Product Design)

“Shift left” to avoid potential problems

- Embed with product teams to learn about their vision & goals
- Provide feedback early and often, highlighting any potential problems so they can be avoided
- Educate your colleagues and help them integrate inclusive design into their own processes
- Ensure people with disabilities are included in any user testing and validation to identify areas for improvement

Contribute to your company's bottom line

- Save your company time and money
- Limit your company's legal risk
- Increase customer satisfaction, loyalty, and advocacy
- Avoid customer loss due to lack of compliance
- Create new revenue opportunities

Your unique perspective and skills will ensure your company ships higher quality products, with fewer bugs, for less money!

Measure the right things

(Data Science)

Highlight disabilities

- Ensure key business metrics include data from people with disabilities
- Include additional product metrics that reflect the experience of different disability communities
- Measure the time necessary to complete key tasks when using different AT and track improvements & regressions over time

Measure accessibility compliance

- Capture automated testing passes and track compliance over time
- Highlight accessibility bug activity
  - How many new?
  - How many remediated?
  - How many outstanding?
  - How many marked “won’t fix”?
  - Average age of outstanding bugs
- Include this data in top-level product reports

Build accessible dashboards & tools

- Ensure all analysis tools are accessible
- Ensure charts are accessible
- Provide access to raw data tables
- Enable API access to data to enable colleagues to create additional tooling that works better for them

Your unique perspective and skills can help your company make decisions that result in more inclusive and accessible products that provide a better user experience (and may even increase revenue).

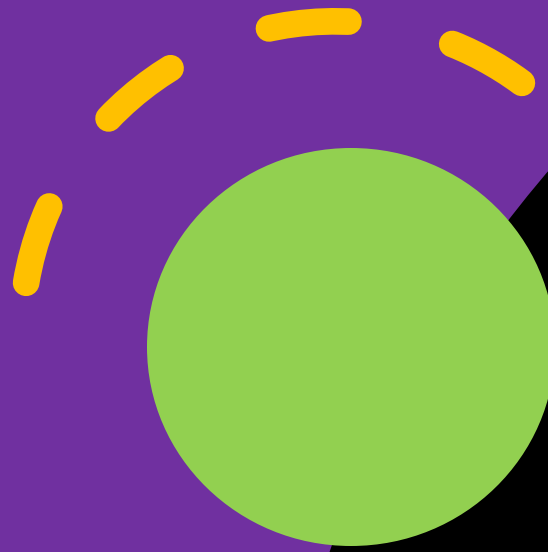
Protect us from ”the machines”

(AI Research & Ethics)

AI can meaningfully improve people’s lives

Identify opportunities to make inclusive AI

- Observe how people with disabilities interact with the world today and consider how AI can
  - Increase independence
  - Make certain actions easier, more intuitive, or efficient
  - Increase the richness of an experience
- Co-design with folks from a range of disability communities
- Don’t assume everyone from a given community wants the same thing



AI for Accessibility

(my program @ Microsoft)

ORBIT

Benchmark dataset

77 Blind and low-vision collectors

486 Objects

3,822 Videos

2,687,934 Frames

7-8 videos per object

2-10 objects per user

User’s bucket

Mentra

A Neurodiversity Employment Network

Tapping into the neuro-exceptional potential
of 1 billion humans worldwide.

Join the movement

A data-driven tool that maximizes career success for neurodivergents.

Refresh (⌘R)

Problem Statement

1 Billion+

Suffering

1 Trillion $

Economic Loss Each Year

Top Problems In Current Mental Health Solutions

Costly fragmented

Lack of context and cultural nuances

Lack of continous mental health availability that is key for recovery

Clinician population scarcity

AI can also perpetuate or exacerbate exclusion

Address bias & exclusion head-on

- Identify bias (or potential bias) in datasets
- Promote representation of people with disabilities in datasets
- Ensure people with disabilities are not exploited by datasets
- Ensure all interfaces to the AI tools are accessible
- Ensure the products created by AI are accessible
- Validate that the products of AI are not directly biased or exclusionary and they they cannot be used to perpetuate bias or exclusion

Your unique perspective and skills can help can ensure advancements in AI/ML are beneficial (and not harmful) to people with disabilities!

Build & grow inclusive teams

(Diversity & Inclusion)

Why does D&I matter?

- Diverse teams == diverse perspectives & lived experiences
- If valued, that knowledge can make it easier to identify potential barriers (and opportunities) earlier in a project
- More likely to exhibit empathy toward all users, including those with disabilities
- More innovation
- Better decision-making

More: https://hbr.org/2016/11/why-diverse-teams-are-smarter

Fix leaks in the pipeline

- Ask questions & make changes:
  - Do we have a disability hiring policy?
  - Are our recruiters “screening in” people with disabilities?
  - Where are we posting jobs? Are they reaching people with disabilities?
  - Is the language of our job postings exclusionary?
  - Is our interview process inclusive and accommodating of people’s disabilities?
- Actively solicit disabled talent for roles in your company

Diverse talent will flee an unwelcoming environment.
Churn is expensive.

Influence team culture to improve retention

- Change the frame:
  - lack of diversity creates knowledge gaps
  - diverse hiring helps to fill those gaps
  - Diverse colleagues' knowledge & lived experiences have value
- "Call in" non-inclusive/biased behaviors
- Improve the inclusiveness of processes and environments
- Normalize disability in everyday interactions

If there is no room for diverse talent to grow in their careers, many will leave

Nurture & promote diverse talent

01

Write recommendations for colleagues, prioritizing for diversity

02

Observe promotions & ask questions of management if you don’t see diverse representation

03

Mentor and reverse-mentor colleagues with a goal of growing the careers of people with disabilities

Shape company policies & trainings

- Suggest edits to existing company policies
- Draft new policies
- Suggest freely-available accessibility and D&I trainings to colleagues
- Create (or co-create) workshops & trainings for your company or team
- Push for your company to mandate accessibility and D&I training
  - Push for additional training specifically for people managers
- Advocate for diverse representation and the modeling of inclusive behavior in all in-house video-based trainings

Your unique perspective and skills can help increase the inclusiveness of your company for fellow employees, which will lead to the creation of more inclusive products and services!

These are just five areas that need you...

AI Research & Ethics

Diversity & Inclusion

Design Systems

Product Design

Data Science

You are more valuable than you realize.

You are change maker.

Thank you.

Aaron Gustafson
@Aaron@front-end.social
@AaronGustafson