Creating Accessible Emails

What is Accessibility?

Accessibility is the practice of making things meaningful and easy to use for people of all physical and cognitive abilities. The goal is to let as many people as possible access a resource.

Digital Accessibility Defined

Digital accessibility refers to the inclusive practice of removing barriers that prevent interaction with, or access to websites, digital content and tools (social media, pdfs, documents, emails), and technologies (video, audio, animations, kiosks, and mobile apps) by people with disabilities.

Put simply, web accessibility is the idea that digital content should be usable by all people, no matter their location, device, or ability.

Why is Email Accessibility Important?

1. Because human-centered design is at the core of accessibility, the changes you make — from color contrast to font sizes — will benefit every person on your list.
2. If your emails aren't accessible, you're automatically excluding a subset of your audience and reducing your reach.
3. If subscribers can't read your email content or interact with your calls to action (CTAs), then they literally can't engage with your emails. They also won't be likely to stick around for future emails, either. That can negatively impact your email program performance while increasing your unsubscribe rate.
4. Litigation is a serious threat to any company not meeting the needs of its entire audience.
5. If someone gets two emails from competing brands – one they can read and interact with and the other that isn't accessible – which email do you think they'll click on? Who do you think will win their business?

6. By making your emails accessible to everyone, you're speaking directly to their needs and showing that you understand their everyday lives.
7. That means creating accessible emails that show you understand how people with both temporary and permanent impairments engage with your brand.

The reason is simple: If people have trouble viewing, reading, clicking on, or understanding your email campaigns, they won't take the actions you expect.

Statistics You Need to Know

- Over 1 billion people live with some form of disability.
- Over 27% of the US population (91 million people) live with a disability – the largest minority population.
- 79.5% of people with disabilities rely exclusively on screen reader audio.

Legal Reminder – Americans with Disabilities Act

- Title III of the ADA - Businesses that are open to the public (Title III) Title III prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities by businesses open to the public (also referred to as "public accommodations" under the ADA).
- Title III of the ADA requires that every owner, lessor, or operator of a "place of public accommodation" provide equal access to users who meet ADA standards for disability.
- Online businesses: Websites are considered as "places of public accommodation". By extension, emails also fall under Title IIF of the ADA, especially when they include exclusive discounts, pre-sale opportunities or other perks that aren't available elsewhere.

The basis for Lawsuits for failing to provide accessible experiences.

Is email accessibility THAT different?

This is a solid Maybe, email accessibility has some of the same principles (color and contrast, alt-text, etc) but it also has unique elements:

- Limitations: such as image blocks, visual displays that only show plain text, formatting, and interactive content.
- Attachments: Beyond the email message body itself, you have to take into account any attachments (e.g. PDF documents, Word Documents, etc.), which also need to be accessible.
- Each email platform has its own accessibility checker and accessibility features.
- A user can prefer to receive accessible content, this is a checkbox that will alert anyone sending said user emails that the email may not be accessible

Email Formats

Emails can be composed in 3 different formats:

1. HTML
2. Plain text
3. Rich text
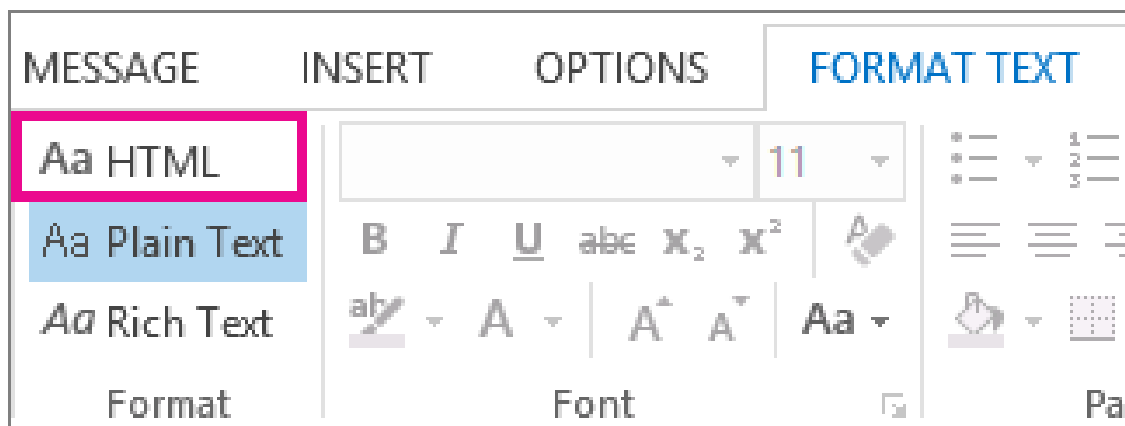
HTML

HTML strips the email from all stylistic options (bold text, italics, etc.), so the plain text that you wrote should make sense without images or placement, etc. This is the best format for accessibility, however, not a lot of people like using it due to its visual limitations.

Hi Bobby,

Thanks for meeting me yesterday.

Kind Regards,

Leonardo Romeo
Operations Manager

Office +1 (555) 6718 5409 Mobile +1 (555) 3911 2087
Address 274 Ann Drive, Pompano Beach, FL 33060

Rich Text

Rich text formatting is less accessible than HTML, since it does not have full support for things like headings and list structures, you can format text with bullets, can align text, and can use other options, including adding linked objects.

Hi Bobby,

Thanks for meeting me yesterday.

Kind Regards,

Trevor McGuiness
Construction Manager
Alpine Construction
+1 (555) 4911 9918

Plain Text

This format works for all email programs, but it doesn't support bold or italic text, colored fonts, or other text formatting. The plain text format also doesn't support showing
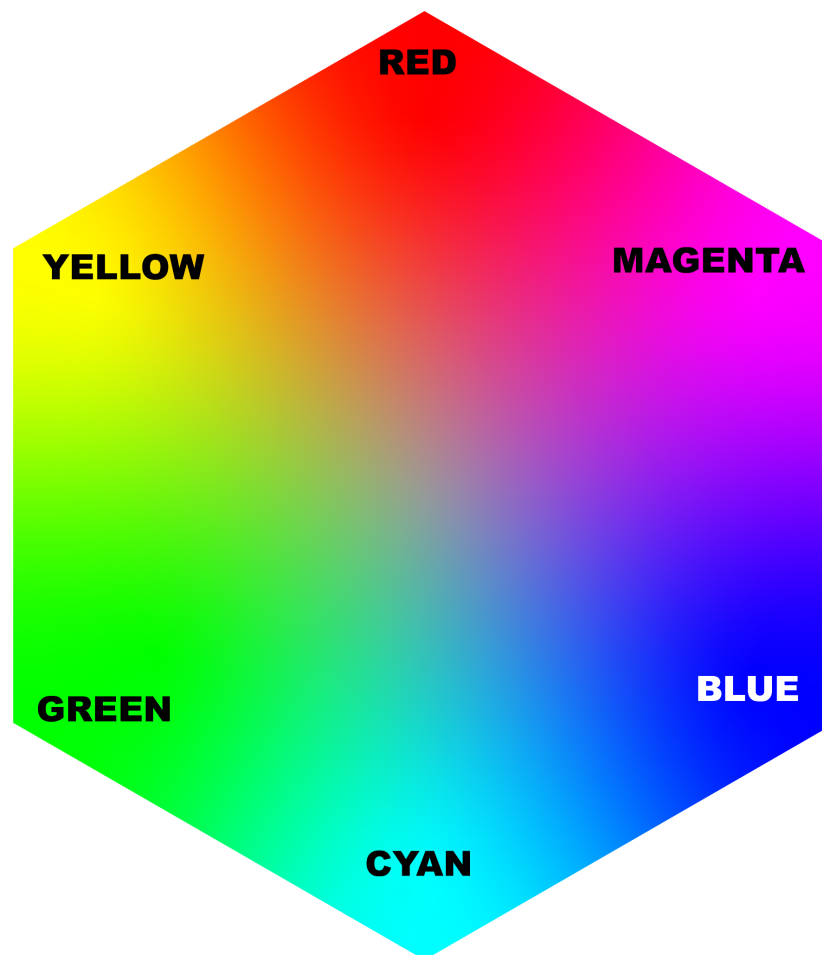
pictures inside the message, although you can include pictures as attachments. It is JUST text

Hi Bobby,

Thanks for meeting me yesterday.

Kind Regards,
Alice Bussell
Smooth Fabrics
+1 (888) 8817 8172

Color and contrast

The rules for color and contrast apply just like they do for all other content:
4,5:1 for all text, images, images of text
3:1 for large text (larger than 18 pts.)

The use of color

Try to avoid using color to send a message of its own, a bright red warning will not be read the same by screen readers that will not detect or inform the user of the text color. Make sure the information you want to convey does not depend on the color.
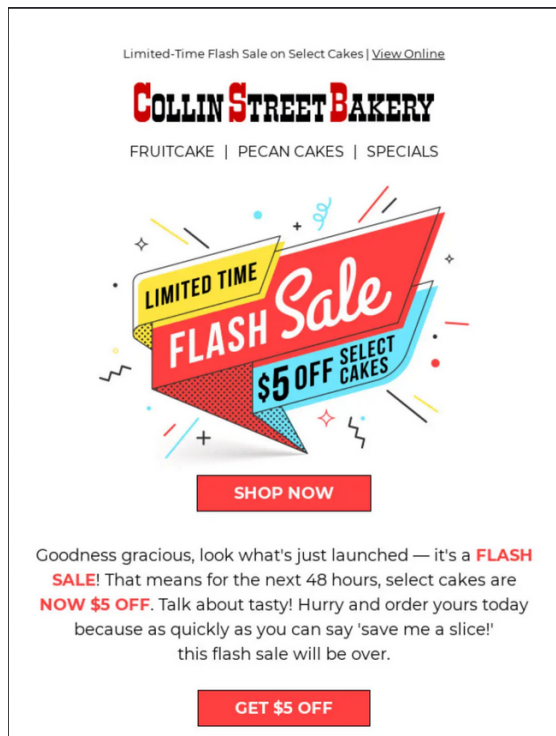
Font Size

You can pick the font size before you send an email, it is recommended at least a middle size for the font so that would be around 14 pts.

Font type

Most accessible and common fonts:
- Helvetica
- Verdana
- **Times**
- Century Gothic
- **Tahoma**
- Courier

We recommend using a Sans Serif font family, this means simple lines and easy to read. A good test is to type a number 1, a capital I, and a lowercase l, if you can tell the difference between them easily then you're on the right track.

Example for several fonts in one image:
- "limited-time flash sale on select cakes view online" This is in a sans serif font.
- "collin street bakery" this is in a serif font meant to imitate saloon/wild west aesthetics.
- "fruitcake, pecan cakes, specials" this is in a sans serif font but not the same as the first sans serif font.
- "Limited time, flash sale, $5 off select cakes" this is in a pop art style image of bubbles.
- "Goodness gracious, look what's just launched- it's a FLASH SALE!..." this is an add copy that is in a sans serif font, however, it is a different font from the first two sans serif fonts used. Also part of the text is in red and all caps to call attention to it.

We recommend avoiding the use of too many different typefaces within one email. A difference in size to delineate importance (Title, H1, subtitles) is okay as long as it has the same font type. I would recommend a maximum of two font types in one email.

Headings

Headings help determine a visual hierarchy as well as an informational hierarchy, they are especially important for anyone that uses a screen reader since they will aid with formatting and easy understanding. This is done through Semantic markup which means coding the email content.

H1 should be the main title, it is the subject of the email, don't skip headings, to use headings you have to use the style menu they should be preprogrammed there. If the color and contrast is wrong you can always modify the visual input of the heading.


Alternative Text

Alternative text is a description of an image and it can be autogenerated, but always review the text. Sometimes its okay other times it "picture of a banner" You need to make sure that all the images you have are correctly identified. So if you are advertising something like a sale the alt text for the sale banner has to read exactly the same as the

text on the image. As a general rule of thumb avoid using "image of", "picture of" on actual alt text. Remember that images that are purely decorative should have a null alt text or be marked as decorative.

Avoid image-only emails their font size can't be altered and might lose comprehensiveness when someone zooms in.

Visual Media

Some email services do not support embedded videos, but links for them can be added to emails. Videos should have captions and audio descriptions, remember to correct the grammar and spelling for videos. It is always a good idea to also provide a transcript that can be understood by braille keyboards.
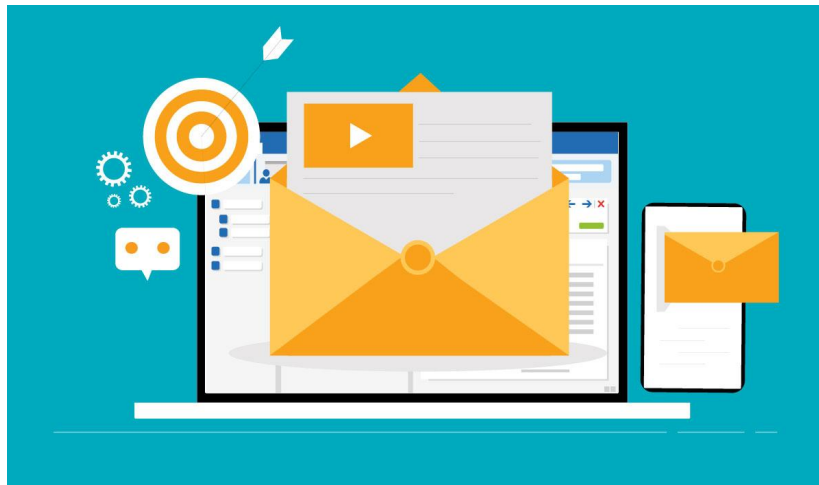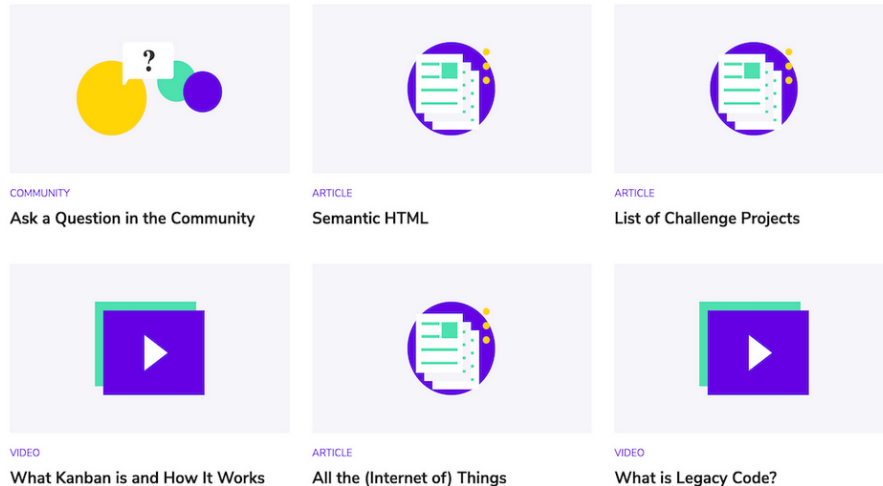

Visual Cues

Just like you have to avoid a dependency on color to communicate you also have to be careful with visual cues (emojis, shapes, icons, etc.) Assistive technology may not be able to convey what you are trying to communicate and there will be a break in intention and understanding. Underlining text can be confusing since links should be the only underlined text.

Flashing GIF/Image

My advice for this is, Just Don't. Flashing images/gifs can trigger seizures, and migraines amongst other issues, so avoid using them at all. I know they're eye-catching but it is not worth having that reputation with people, if you do trigger someone you will forever be remembered as a terrible sensory experience and may be blocked.

The speed of the reproduction of the GIF you sent might not be the same for other users, and the GIF will loop endlessly so be very careful not to send something that flashes or that might start flashing due to the speed of the reproduction.

COMMUNITY
Ask a Question in the Community

ARTICLE
Semantic HTML

ARTICLE
List of Challenge Projects

VIDEO
What Kanban is and How It Works

ARTICLE
All the (Internet of) Things

VIDEO
What is Legacy Code?

Zooming in

This is a very important one due to the variety of devices an email can be opened on, you should be able to zoom in on text by at least 400% without any loss, distortion, or clipping of the content. This should be compliant without the use of assistive technology.

Links

Make sure they are underlined and that the color and contrast is compliant to a 3:1 ratio. You also have to ensure that the purpose of the link is clear and that it is easy to navigate, avoid "read more" or any generic link text.
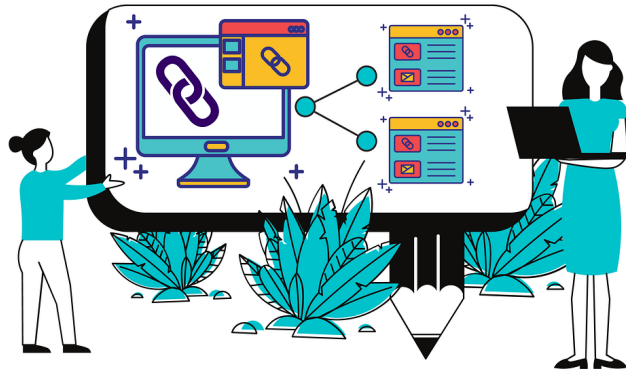
Tables

Tables can be confusing to navigate for someone with a screen reader, but tables are mostly used for layout purposes in that case mark your layout tables as presentational so they can be ignored by screen readers.

- Table
  - Table Header Row
    - Table Header Cell
    - Table Header Cell
    - Table Header Cell
  - Table Row
    - Table Data Cell
    - Table Data Cell
    - Table Data Cell
  - Table Row
    - Table Data Cell
    - Table Data Cell
    - Table Data Cell

Only the <tr> (table row) and <td> (table data) elements should be used. Specifically, layout tables must not include:

- The <caption> element
- The <summary> attribute
- The <th> element
- The scope attribute

- The headers attribute

TH Disability TH gory	TH Participants	TH Ballots Completed	TH llots incomplete/ Terminated	TH ults		
				Accuracy TH	Time to complete	
TD d	TD 5	TD 1	TD 4	TD 34.5%, n=1	TD 199 sec, n=1	
TD Vision	TD 5	TD 2	TD 3	TD 98.3% n=2 (97.7%, n=3)	TD 716 sec, n=3 (1934 sec, n=2)	
TD terity	TD 5	TD 4	TD 1	TD 98.3%, n=4	TD 72.1 sec, n=4	
TD ility	TD 3	TD 3	TD 0	TD 95.4%, n=3	TD 416 sec, n=3	

Attachments

You can attach different types of formats but remember any document you have attached must be accessible on its own before being sent. If you attach an untagged PDF and the person cannot read it that's on you.


Automated Native Accessibility Checkers

That sounds complex but it basically is an automated checker that runs while you create the email. You DO need to activate these features in the accessibility menus for every email platform.

The checker is automated so that means it WILL NOT catch every issue, you still have to be conscious of the materials you use when making an email especially if the email is meant to be sent en-mass like every marketing email that has ever existed. Using

templates is an excellent option here but always remember to manually check the emails before sending.For example on Outlook you can select "Show me accessibility warnings while I work" to ensure that it's always running
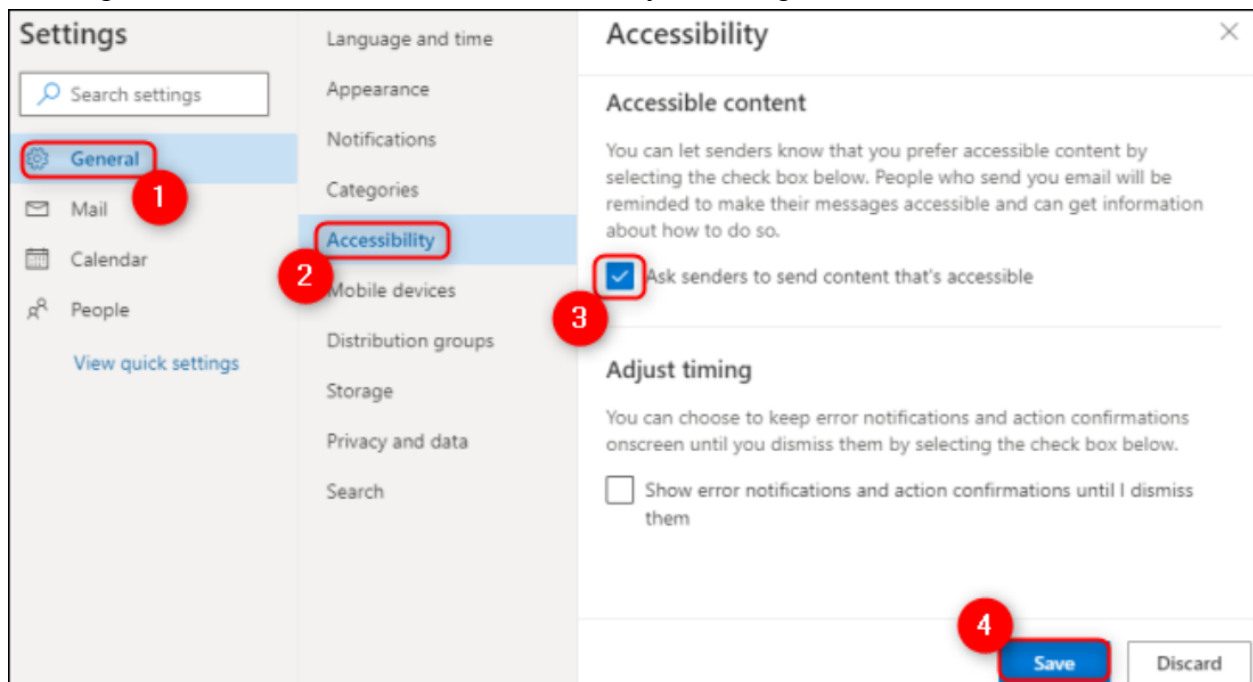
Happy disability pride month
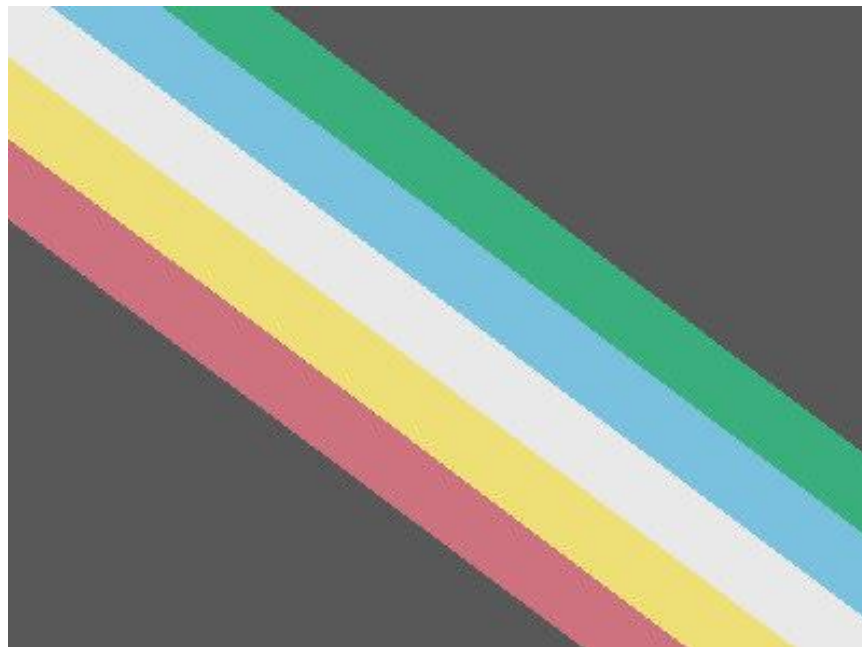
What's Next?

To learn your website compliance risk and top high-risk issues:

Send your website's URL to kalfonsodc@resultsonellc.com
For a free automated audit!

ADDITIONAL TRAINING AVAILABLE

- Creating Accessible Content: The Basics
- Social Media & Accessibility
- Creating Accessible PDFs
- Introduction to Assistive Technology
- Introduction to Disability Inclusion
- Inclusive Practices for Conducting Accessible Virtual Meetings
- Creating Accessible Emails

Upcoming Events

[Net Earning from Self-Employment and SSDI/ Medicare](#)
Wednesday, July 19, 2:00 – 3:30PM EST
Presented by Griffin-Hammis Associates
[Preparing for Accessing Capital](#)
Wednesday, August 2, 2:00 – 3:30PM EST
Presented by Community Business Partnerships
[Starting Small with My Big Goals](#)
Wednesday, August 16, 2:00 – 3:30PM EST
Presented by Griffin-Hammis Associates
Guest Speakers:
    - Daman Wandke of [Wandke Consulting](#)
    - Victor Ocando of [Adapt The Game](#)

NDI Small Business Hub

- Are you an aspiring entrepreneur or existing business owner with a disability wanting help to START, BUILD and GROW your business? Visit www.disabilitysmallbusiness.org or email rchavez@ndi-inc.org
- Want to join a dynamic learning community focused on key financial health topics for business, such as budgeting, managing cash flow, risk management, insurance, taxes, building credit, and loan and grant applications? Email cbolas@ndi-inc.org for more information.
- Visit our Streaming TV channel for informational and motivational content for disability owned small businesses at www.DisabilityOwned.com
- Access training, mentoring, business coaching, and grant opportunities through our new partnership with Verizon Small Business Digital Ready! Register here: [Small Business Training | About Verizon](#)
- Want to "Stay In The Know" about NDI's small business hub? Join our [mailing list](#)!

NDI Small Business Team

Nikki Powis, Director Small Business Programs

npowis@ndi-inc.org

Ruth Chavez, Small Business Community Navigator

rachvez@ndi-inc.org

Caroline Bolas, Small Business Specialist

cbolas@ndi-inc.org

Alexis Jones, Small Business Project Coordinator

ajones@ndi-inc.org