



# Research Questions

**Principal Question: How are organizations managing the workflow and processes for alt-text and other online access features?**

## Digital assets and in-house expertise

- What digital assets do you currently have available? (in-gallery, online and for your social media)
- What digital expertise do you currently have available?
- Are there dedicated staff for digital?

## Access expertise and digital measures

- What accessibility expertise do you currently have available? Are there dedicated staff for accessibility?
- Have you brought in external experts for any of your access initiatives?
- Have you trained your staff in supporting/being aware of access issues both digitally and/or for in person visits?
- What accessibility measures (if any) have you taken in your digital efforts?
- Are there any you are planning to take but do not implement yet?
- Where are some places you've enabled greater accessibility in your physical space?
- How do you embed accessibility measures into exhibit development?
- Do you have a review process for accessibility? If so, who does it? If not, is there any other form of quality control or feedback from users?

## Alt-text specific workflow and implementation

- What was the catalyst for starting to embed alt-text on your website? (specific moments, new hires etc.)
- Specifically thinking about alt text for images, what is the workflow you use right now to make sure images have alt text?
- How do you ensure different departments are involved in this process?
- Who owns writing alt-text descriptions for your online images?
- How do you review the quality of text written? Do you have a monitoring system or someone with final oversight to review content and guidelines?
- How did you train staff to be ready to develop image tagging?
- How is the process after text has been written to have that merged with your website systems?
- What would you say is the biggest challenge to embedding accessibility in your process?
- What hurdles have you had to overcome?
- Under which department and budget does developing alt-text and access features usually fall?
- Have you in the past/ do you currently actively fundraise for accessibility assets? If so, who owns those fundraising projects? (education, programming, marketing...)

# Interview Participants

## Cultural Institutions



**Amon Carter Museum**  
*Fort Worth, TX, USA*



**Cooper Hewitt**  
*New York, NY, USA*



**MCA Chicago**  
*Chicago, IL, USA*



**Metropolitan Museum of Art**  
*New York, NY, USA*



**RISD Museum**  
*Providence, RI, USA*



**Science Museum**  
*London, UK*

## Digital Accessibility Expert



The Coyote Project is an initiative operated by Prime Access Consulting and was originally co-conceived by Sina Bahram, Susan Chun, and Anna Chiaretta Lavaetelli when Susan and Anna were at MCA Chicago.

The goal of this collaboration was to increase their digital accessibility through the implementation of alt-text, one output of which was a set of alt-text guidelines that are now widely used across the industry, including many of our research participants for this project.

Sina Bahram, who leads PAC, spoke with us as part of our research to advise us on best practices.

# Key Takeaways

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## Preparation

- Organizations with clear leadership for alt-text implementation, and ideally with co-leaders from both access and digital teams, seem to have more efficient and consistent alt-text workflow processes and outcomes.
- Organizations with more advanced alt-text procedures have generally spread out the cost/budgets across different departments whose staff are involved in writing the text. The goal here is to position this work as a shared commitment, not the remit of one single team.
- Before launching formal processes for integrating alt-text on websites, project leaders focused on aligning their colleagues around the value of the initiatives through all-staff presentations and educational videos. This values-alignment helped establish shared responsibility and accountability early on.
- When creating your organization's own guidelines for alt-text, consider the common challenges for writers, notably around describing abstract art and addressing race and gender. The guidelines should also help with determining core details to include, and how to avoid personal interpretation.

## Training

- Training for different staff to support on alt-text writing should first include educational materials to properly align the reasons for this work, and how alt-text properly serves those with visual impairments.
- Organizations often provide both in person trainings as well as access to online videos and resources so staff can continue to refer to the guidelines afterwards. Repeat trainings also helps build retention.
- To practice writing alt-texts, many organizations start with group work in order to empower writers before asking them to write text independently. Group work is especially useful for more challenging pieces like abstract work.
- Depending on the level of expertise within your own organization and on your access teams, working with external experts is critical to get the perspective of the community for whom this work is intended.
- There are different views on which staff are best suited for writing alt-text (e.g., are curators too close to the artwork?), but everyone agrees this work is too large in scale to be done by single departments. Some organizations are even looking to supplement with external contractors.

# Key Takeaways

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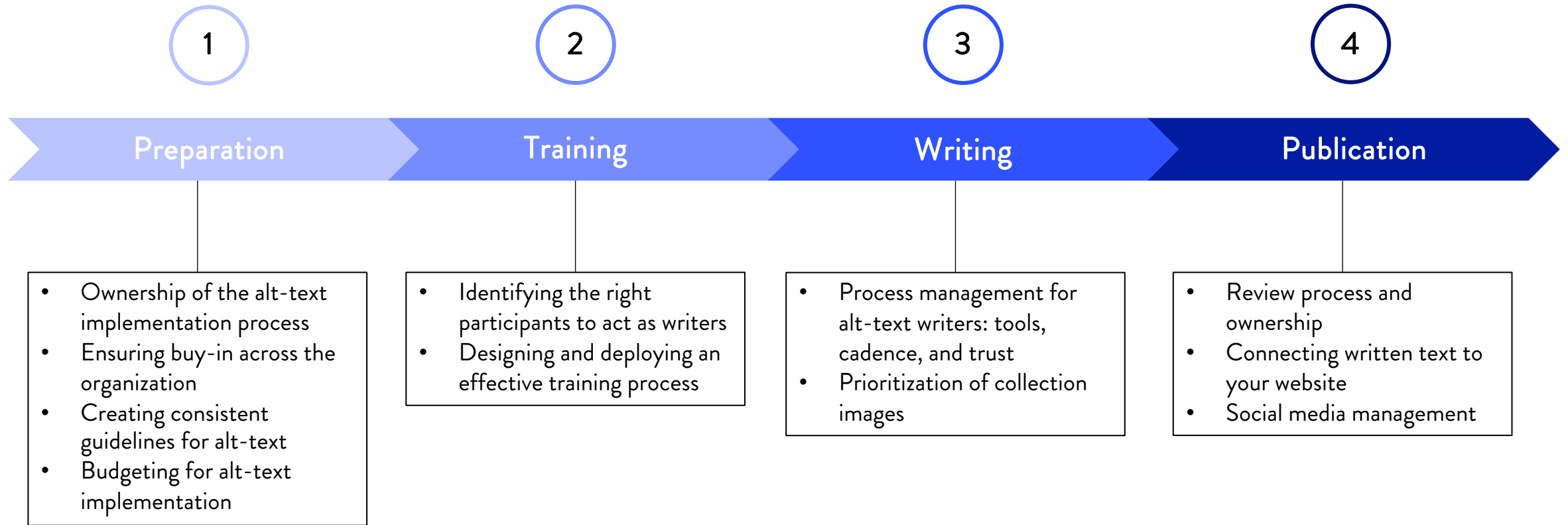
## Writing & Processes

- During the pandemic closures, many organizations brought in their visitor services teams to support on writing alt-text. This was a period with more consistent time and momentum around this work; however, the workflows were only temporary and now organizations must revise their processes with staff back onsite.
- Some organizations have set up a voluntary corps of staff writers with set targets and timelines to chip away at writing alt-text for their vast collections, while others rely on interns and students to support on this work. Ideally, this is something that can be integrated into staff regular workloads.
- Organizations have their own own workflow processes based on staff capacity, as well as the tech systems they use and how well they are integrated with their websites.
- Some organizations also have more consistent content reviews, while others rely heavily on training and built-in trust to expedite alt-text publishing.
- If consistent workflow processes for alt-text are hard to achieve, organizations have hosted “writing marathon” events to push for intensive alt-text writing moments.

## Publication

- Alt-text publication is often a multi-step process before content is pushed onto live websites. The integration of CMS and DAM systems is a critical link to ensure content gets reviewed and published efficiently.
- The Coyote Project, launched by Prime Access Consulting, is an existing tool used by several research participants that supports both technical integration as well as workflow integration for alt-text descriptions. Custom APIs may be required to integrate with museum systems.
- As organizations look ahead to future initiatives, it is important to continue auditing digital accessibility practices to ensure that the standards they have put in place are continuing to be met.
- Organizations are also being intentional to focus not only on alt-text for their website images, but to look beyond and create more consistent standardized systems for website and in-person access overall.

# Report Outline



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Preparation

# Ownership of Alt-Text Implementation

	Amon Carter Museum of American Art	Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum	Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago	Metropolitan Museum of Art	RISD Museum	Science Museum, London
<b>Who owns/has oversight over the initiative</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manager of Access Programs and Resources</li> <li>• Digital Content Strategist</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Director of Cross-Platform Content</li> <li>• Accessibility &amp; Inclusion Manager</li> <li>• Head of Visitor Experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Associate Director of Digital Marketing *</li> </ul> <p><i>*Took over process from predecessor</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Senior Managing Educator, Accessibility</li> <li>• Product Manager</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Director for Digital Initiatives</li> <li>• Associate Registrar for Digital Resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Head of Access &amp; Equity</li> </ul>
<b>Core departments leading implementation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access</li> <li>• Marketing (website)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital</li> <li>• Access &amp; Inclusion</li> <li>• Visitor Experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital/Marketing</li> <li>• Visitor Experience*</li> </ul> <p><i>*Involved only in 2020</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education (Access within Education)</li> <li>• Digital</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital</li> <li>• Registration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access (within Learning team)</li> <li>• Digital/Web team</li> <li>• New Media team</li> <li>• Interpretation (within Gallery and Exhibitions Dept)</li> <li>• Collections Services</li> </ul>
<b>Other departments involved in content creation</b>	<p>Core support from Registrar office</p> <p>Content writers from curatorial, marketing, comms, development, graphic design, front line visitor experience, education</p>	<p>Curatorial supports on content creation/ alt-text writing</p> <p>During the pandemic writing support also came from visitor services staff and shop staff</p>	<p>Right now more limited support from other departments; visitor services supported during pandemic closure</p> <p>Alt-text output currently living with social producer and web manager</p>	<p>Cross-departmental alt-text editors/writers for the website</p> <p>Including membership, conservation, education, curatorial- almost every department has at least two editors</p>	<p>Work delegated to work-study students, who are trained and supervised by Director of Digital Initiatives and Associate Registrar for Digital Resources.</p>	<p>Web team manages implementation</p> <p>Exhibition and gallery teams do a lot of the content writing, based on where the content lives on website</p>
<b>Budget allocations</b>	<p>Lives across different department budgets based on staff involved</p> <p>Education department covered the honorarium for access partners</p>	<p>Dedicated accessibility budget within larger Learning and Education department.</p> <p>Accessibility work is also embedded in department budgets e.g., Exhibitions</p>	<p>Held within visitor experience team's budget – covering the staffing costs*</p> <p><i>*Only in 2020. Currently there is no budget for alt-text implementation</i></p>	<p>Digital team budget with Access team as 'consultants'</p>	<p>Digital team budget</p>	<p>Often in exhibition and gallery budgets as part of their planning process</p>



# Joint Project Leadership Supports Accessible Digital Content

The Amon Carter Museum of American Art, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art both adopted comparable models with two leaders from Access and Digital working together to spearhead the accessibility of their digital initiatives including the guidelines, training and processes for alt-text.

The **Carter** leveraged the overhaul of their website to hire for a new position of Digital Content Strategist who would be in charge of ensuring the accessibility of all digital content.

This role, in tandem with the Manager of Access Programs and Resources, was tasked with creating the guidelines and workflows for embedding alt-text and making the process as easy as possible for content writers.

This leadership partnership was successful by virtue of the combined expertise of digital production on one side and accessible content on the other. Together they established the framework for alt-text before pulling in staff to write the content. They are also the two leaders in charge or overseeing the content, with the final oversight.



**Co-leadership between Digital and Access facilitates institutional change towards more accessible digital content**

To facilitate digital content creation at **the Metropolitan Museum of Art**, the Product Manager decentralized the website so writers and editors from across different departments could take ownership of web content, including a push to embed alt-text descriptions.

While this website change was occurring, the Access team were looped in to establish the guidelines and training for writing alt-text that is available to all content editors.

This leadership partnership was successful because, together, Digital and Access spearheaded an institutional change on how content is produced online. They developed workshop tutorials not only on how to use the website and upload content for the 130 writers, but also on how to write appropriate alt-text.

# Communicating Around Shared Responsibility

Creating alt-text across all web images and large digital collections is no small feat, therefore getting institutional buy-in from the start is critical to secure the support needed from staff across departments. This also ensure this work is truly embedded as an organizational value. Below are several tactics for getting initial institutional buy-in.



## Kickstarting these efforts with an all-staff presentation

- **Emphasizing that digital accessibility is everyone's responsibility:** "We did at one point present it to all staff in the fall of last year. There was already buy-in, but we did make everyone aware of it (because we're doing a lot of DEIA training and mindfulness) to say, it's the whole museum who's responsible for this, not just certain staff."
- **Explaining alt-text to make sure everyone understands the function and value of the work:** "Not everyone fully understands the functionality of [alt-text] or the importance of it. So, making it an all-staff important presentation makes it feel like something they'll all eventually be a part of and something they can talk to the community about us having."



## Facilitating staff involvement through education and sensitivity

- **Aligning staff on mindset and educating around accessibility:** "Really focus on mindsets — this is everybody's responsibility ... I also think that what we learned at the very beginning when we made this pivot to a priority commitment was that, first, it's not one person's responsibility and, second, there needs to be education."
- **Using educational videos to set baseline of understanding, and not assuming awareness:** "People who are not using screen readers don't have context for [alt-text]. So, what we decided to do when we got our first grant was to create videos educating the staff about how these different tools are used, and then why the work is necessary. It sounds basic, but it's really important."



## Maintaining the commitment with ongoing reminders and check-ins

- **Checking in consistently with department reps to keep momentum and shared commitment:** "While the content management sits in the marketing department, we have a group of content stewards, reps from each department ... I work with that group quarterly and I try to impress upon them that the website is really the representation of the museum in the virtual world, so this really belongs to all of us."
- **Holding frequent trainings to maintain all-staff accountability around this work:** "It's not *my* website, it's everybody's, and I need this whole team to keep that straight. And that's the same for the alt-text ... We have constant training to make everyone understands why it's important."

# Spreading the Cost Demonstrates Institutional Buy-in

Across many of our conversations, there was a general acknowledgment that institutional buy-in is crucial to make this work successful. One aspect of demonstrating that commitment is to ensure the cost and workload is shared across departments.



**By embedding the work within different departments, the Amon Carter Museum of American Art spreads cost and accountability.**

For the initial staff training and the consultation with their community partners at *Lighthouse for the Blind*, the museum's education department covered the fees.

For all content writers and people on staff who volunteered to create alt-text, the work is part of their regular responsibilities and duties, and therefore not given a specific staffing budget line.

The same premise holds for the digital team who manages the website and online content. Alt-text integration is part of their duties therefore is also embedded as part of their overall budget and not given a specific line item.



**The Cooper Hewitt shares accessibility costs across departments' different relevant budgets.**

The museum's Access Manager who lives within the Learning and Education department, manages their own small budget that covers items without an obvious home in other departments. For instance, the access budget covered the initial cost of working with Prime Access Consulting. The hope is for those recurring costs to be shared across departments.

The majority of other costs associated to accessibility work is embedded in department budgets — for example, the exhibitions department includes budget lines for access materials in their planning process, and all verbal descriptions for videos come from the video budget.

For both the Carter and Cooper Hewitt, splitting the costs of Access work across other departments that are directly in charge of websites, digital content, staffing, training, etc. demonstrates an institutional commitment that this work is indeed shared and not just the remit of one single department.

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## Guidelines & Training

# Principles For Creating Your Style Guide

## Some general best practices

### Securing expert support

- Bringing in experts to review more challenging alt-text ensures a thoughtful approach
- Consulting actual users who will benefit from the alt-text to weigh in on guidelines and training is critical
- Helping explain to staff why this is important in early stages of project implementation secures commitment

### Setting writers up for success

- Using meta tags (embedded content descriptors that tell search engines what a page contains) helps writers keep descriptions clear and honest and limits personal interpretations.
- Working on text both as a group and separately can aid in the brainstorm process and getting comfortable
- Providing definitions and examples help set a baseline

### Description and language standards

- Norms for consistent language, capitalization, etc. helps avoid potential discomfort or concerns with text writing
- 15-30 words per alt-text description is the best practice limit
- Most agree that short and clear descriptions are best — focus on facts
- Match your alt-text to the intent of the image or of the media that you're using. Just like you'd give more/less space to an image, you give more/fewer words to the descriptions depending on the image size and/or prominence

## Challenges to address & support writers

- How do you help writers avoid adding too much interpretation into alt-text vs. longer descriptions ?
- How do you support writers when discussing more challenging works like abstract art?
- Do your guidelines have clear and standardized instructions on how to address race, gender, identification etc.?
- What advice do you provide to help writers determine the details that are important to include and the details that can be omitted?
- How should writers think about ordering the details in a piece of alt-text?
- How do you encourage writers to refer to guidelines beyond training and set that behavior as a standard practice?

# Launching Pad: Cooper Hewitt Style Guide

Cooper Hewitt Design Museum published their [online guidelines](#) for image descriptions. This publicly available resources is conceived as a living document that will continue to evolve and respond to changing needs and standards for accessibility, The guideline is structures with clear and concise recommendations as well as additional resources.

## PART 1: Introduction

Image descriptions help visitors who are blind or have low-vision access the information contained in images. Description also makes it easier to find images through the image's content as opposed to the caption or title of the object that it depicts. This document outlines types of descriptions, the structure of a description, and recommendations to help guide writing descriptions (with examples).

### Definitions

- Alt-text
- Long Descriptions
- Caption
- Structure

## PART 2: Recommendations

- **General recommendations**
  - Do not repeat text
  - Phrases to avoid
  - Transcribe text
  - Avoid jargon
  - Managing interpretation
- **Core aspects of a description**
  - Subject
  - Size
  - Color
  - Orientation and relationships
  - Medium and style
- **Describing people**
  - Physical features
  - Age
  - Gender
  - Ethnicity and skin-tone
  - Identification
- **Enriching description**
  - Alternative senses
  - Reenactment and embodiment
  - Metaphor
  - Narrative structure
- **Infographics/ Data visualization**
  - Diagrams
  - Graphs
  - Maps
  - Mathematics
  - Tables

## PART 3: Resources

### [Art Beyond Sight Guidelines for Verbal Description](#)

While designed for providing tours of art objects to visitors who are blind or have low-vision, these guidelines are an excellent starting point when learning about image description.

### [Diagram Center Image Description Guidelines](#)

These guidelines provide great information about describing charts, maps, and technical images.

### [Poet Image Description Tool](#)

A tool for describing images in ePub books produced by the Diagram Center.

# What Does Training Look Like



## What your training should include and look like

### Training format:

- In-person training to practice applying guidelines together in groups
- Recordings available for staff to refer to (online archive of resources)
- Based on cycle of workflows, consider repeat trainings/refreshers

### Training content:

- Walk through guidelines, including advice, style references etc.
- Break down the anatomy of a proper visual description – where to start, the details to include and the details to omit etc.
- Training to pick up on biases in language use and how and what we describe
- Practice writing alt-text visual description solo and in groups

### Who runs/ supports the training

- Some organizations invited experts during training to weigh in on best practice and share what they felt worked and didn't work in descriptions
- Other organizations have sufficient on-staff expertise to lead and design trainings independently

## Framing your project with education first

Before starting with actual training on how to write alt-text, many organizations felt it was critical to set up the entire initiative around educating staff about accessibility and bias.

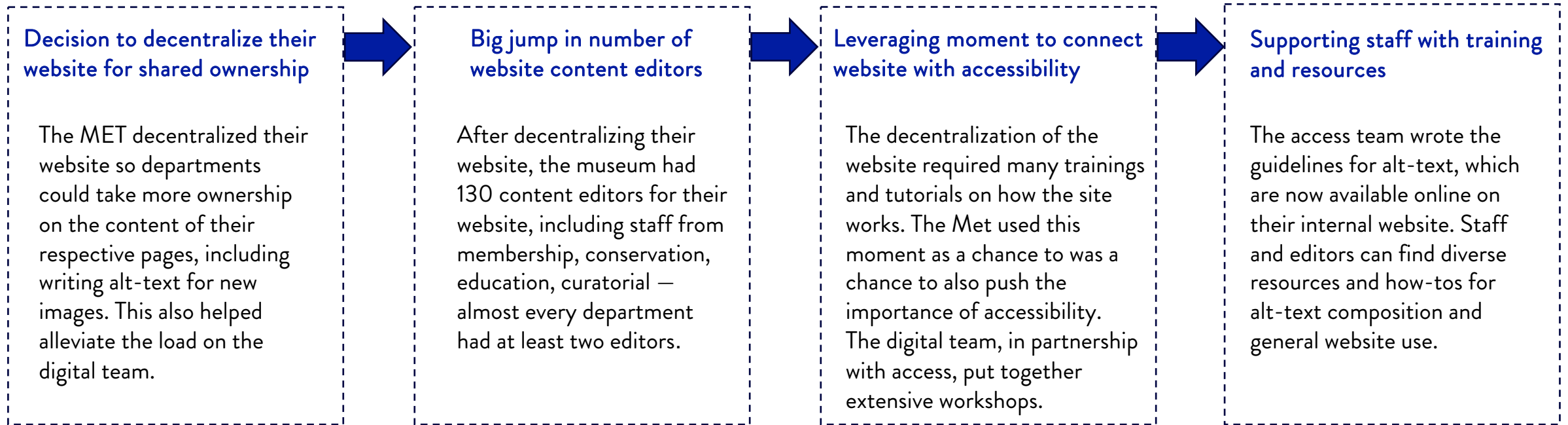
**CASE EXAMPLE: Cooper Hewitt Design Smithsonian** developed a four-part training series of videos to provide staff that initial education about accessibility, which they felt was necessary for team members to receive before they could dig into the work of building the tools and processes for the organization.



1-How-does-accessibility-... ns.mp4    2-What-does-accessibilit... ns.mp4    3-What-is-image-descrip... ns.mp4    4-How-do-I-describe-an... ns.mp4

# Shared Efforts Requires Trust Building and Training

As many organizations rely on staff and/or interns from diverse departments to help writing alt-text, building trust and ensuring that staff feel trained and empowered to write alt-text is critical. Here we have an example of what happened at The MET to support their efforts both in terms of website content and alt-text composition.



From their extensive training and available resources and guidelines, the museum is trusting content editors to take ownership of their content and to write appropriate alt-text. Building competencies and trust helps spread the workload.



# Who Should Do The Work

Based on the organization's own mode of implementing alt-text and workflow processes, we heard different approaches for who they solicited and how they involved staff in the process.

	Staff: Multiple Departments	Staff: Education	Staff: Visitor Services	Staff: Curatorial	Non-staff volunteers	Students/ interns
<b>Pros</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corp of staff volunteers are more committed</li> <li>• Cross-department representation creates shared accountability org-wide</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Often well-versed and aware of access needs, and committed to the work</li> <li>• Experience with different interpretation methods and visual descriptions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be more aware of access and visitor needs based on their frontline work/interactions</li> <li>• Can position alt-text as part of wider visitor service experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very familiar with the collections and exhibitions- they can help prioritize which works to add alt-text to</li> <li>• New way of engaging with visitors and collections</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't have same time constraint as full-time staff</li> <li>• Opportunity for volunteers to learn more of the collections</li> <li>• Can increase output</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Great way to learn about the collection</li> <li>• Don't have the same time constraints as full-time staff</li> </ul>
<b>Cons</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be hard to implement/ enforce with staff schedules/managers</li> <li>• May be first thing to get cut if too busy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Likely to be very busy- would need to fit into their schedule</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Now that staff are back in person, very limited time to work on alt-text</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May use too much professional jargon</li> <li>• May add too much interpretation</li> <li>• Likely first thing to get cut of too busy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not the same oversight and accountability as with staff</li> <li>• Harder to manage/ likely will require more reviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May not feel confident to write text/ publish</li> <li>• May require more trust building/ reviews to confirm quality of texts</li> </ul>
<b>Questions to ask yourself</b>	<p>Staff members are volunteering their time in addition to their primary roles, so creating structures that allow for them to complete the work efficiently will be key for this approach to be successful. Questions to ask include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can I set up a workflow /targets that do not take up too much staff time?</li> <li>• How often do I need to get the group together?</li> <li>• Can they do this work solo? / can this fit into their day-to-day work?</li> </ul>				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do we have a reliable corps of volunteers/interns who could do this work?</li> <li>• How would we manage/review their work? Do we have staff available?</li> <li>• Is training enough for them to write text with confidence?</li> </ul>	

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## Writing & Processes

# Finding Your Workflow

Depending on the size of the organization and scale of digital images that need text descriptions, museums have set up various forms of workflows from who is involved in the writing, the image selection and writing process and the review and publishing processes.

## Who is writing the texts?

During pandemic closures, many museums saw a peak in this work with visitor services staff free to work on text descriptions. Now museums must reassess their process to embed in workflows even with staff back onsite.

- The Carter selected a **group of volunteers from across departments** to spearhead alt-text writing (started with 10, now at 16)
- RISD has assigned this work to their **work-study students**. With **training around implicit bias and using accessible language**, they are trusted to write the content independently.
- Coyote is set up where alt-text could conceivably be written by **volunteers and/or crowd-sourced**.

## Image selection and writing process

Most organizations agreed that having writers select which images to describe led to more commitment and enjoyment; and that a mix of individual and group writing supports empowerment around the process.

- At Cooper Hewitt, a shared spreadsheet has the **priority images pre-selected**. Writers put their name next to artworks, then draft their descriptions in that same spreadsheet.
- Similarly, the Carter team has a massive spreadsheet of artworks, and writers can **select which works they want to write alt-text for**.

## Review and publishing process

Based on the degree of training and autonomy provided to writers, some organizations do not review written content pre-publication, while others have a final step of review before alt-text gets pushed to the website.

- At the MET when content editors first start providing content they don't get full publishing access. They publish to the review site and the digital team reviews and approves. **Eventually they can request full publishing permissions**.
- Several museums either already do/ are planning to make it a **publishing requirement to include something in the alt-text field**

# Keeping Momentum and Considering Other on Access Processes

During the pandemic closures, many museums enjoyed a peak in output in terms of writing alt-text, thanks especially to the mobilization of their visitor service and shop teams who could not work onsite. With staff back onsite many museums are struggling to maintain the same momentum and processes. There are however ways to be creative with text writing, and ensuring new exhibition images have alt-text in their workflows.



## If consistency is hard to achieve for alt-text, focus on single writing events

- **Single-day events to boost alt-text writing:** “I’ve tried lots of different ways to engage staff in this work but we’re all very busy. We’ve done a staff image “descript-a-thon” where we take an afternoon, but that still can’t keep up with the volume of images that we need described”
- **Fun incentives to engage busy staff:** “In the past we did alt-text sprints, all get in a room over lunch to churn out as many descriptions as you could in an hour. Then drop-ins. Donuts For Descriptions. Spend 30 mins on alt-text”



## Working with exhibitions to push for access onsite and online

- **Prioritizing new exhibition images for alt-text:** “For upcoming exhibitions I’ll get a checklist of objects from the curators. If there are high priority images from an upcoming exhibition that will be featured on our website or social, I’ll prioritize describing those”
- **Working with exhibition team to set access standards for their projects:** “The exhibition teams create a separate document which looks at diverse access features in our guidelines, and they determine how they can integrate them in their planning process. We would usually bring in an external access consultant for advice.”



## Other areas for digital access

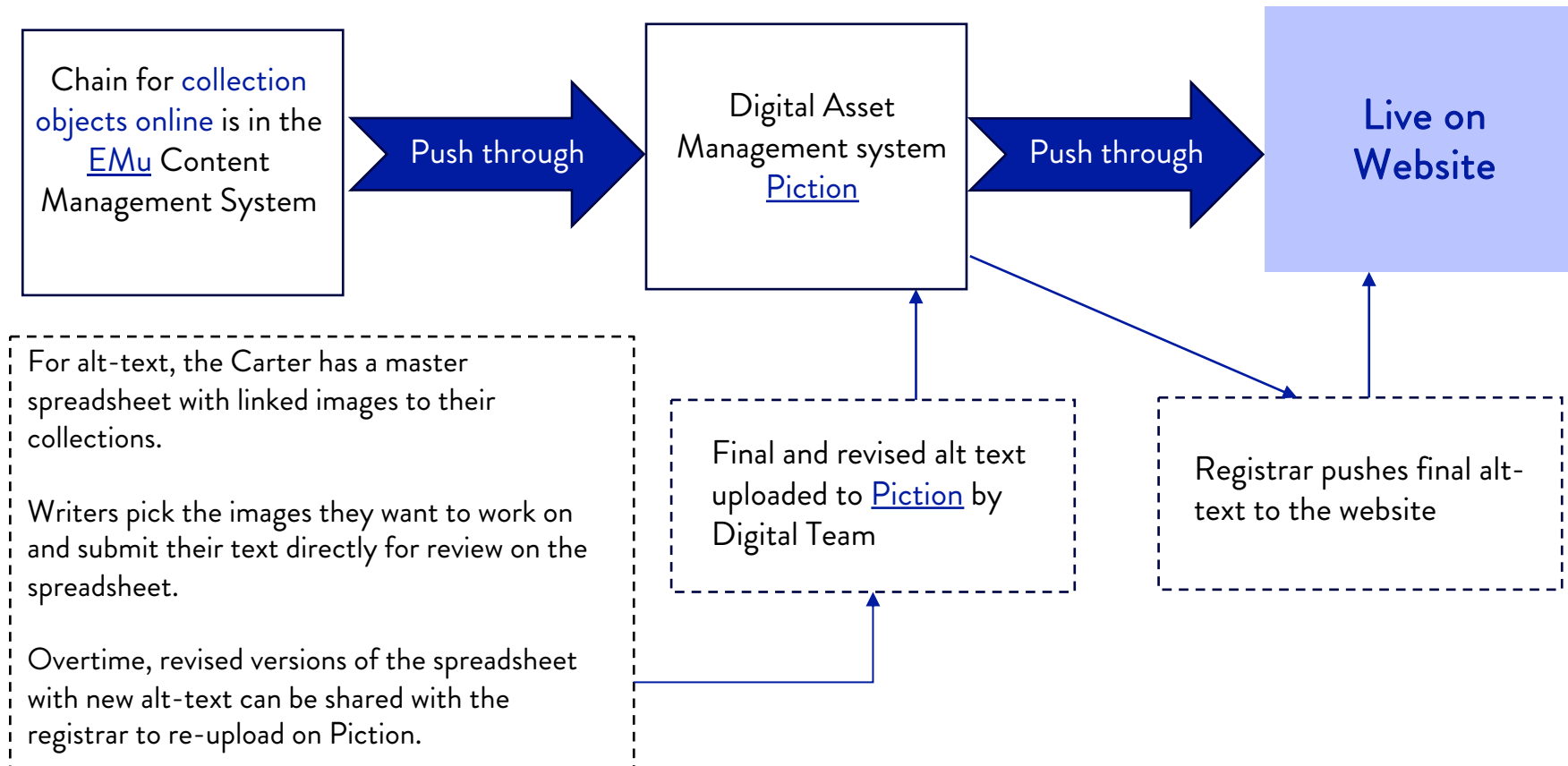
- **Having a process for other non-collection images:** “There are other images besides collection images online and on our website that do have alt-text. For example, and when people are writing blog posts we have checkpoints and it’s their responsibility.”
- **Considering other website access features:** “Something else that we’re doing and that digital manages is the events calendar. We made sure to have an accessibility filter there, and then on the event pages we have access icons. We’ve been discussing an accessibility component to use across the site”

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Publication & Next Steps

# Technical Solutions To Upload Alt-Text

## Case Example: Pushing Alt-Text to the Website at the Carter



### Other technical notes we heard:

- If using Prime Access Consulting's Coyote program, your organization's internal systems need to be linked
- Ideally, get a bespoke API (Application Program Interface) to integrate the systems together
- Wordpress is easy to link with other systems
- To enforce normalizing alt-text, some organizations put intentional obstacles in place in their web structure so they can't build content without having alt-text associated with it. Restrictions are set up in their CMS.

# Current State of Alt-Text on Social Media

There are varying degrees of integration for alt-text on social media at participating organization, but overall, everyone is committed to making images on social as accessible as the images on their websites.

## Establishing alt-text website process, before tackling alt-text for social media

“Because I sit in the marketing department, our social media manager is also on our team. So, my manager said, ‘let’s figure out the process for getting alt-text online, and once that’s nailed down we can work on establishing processes for social media and email marketing.’ So, it’ll probably come sooner rather than later, but definitely something we’re working towards.”

## Alt-text already integrated into social media processes and managed by marketing department

“Outside of our collection, when it comes to social media, that is pretty much on the communications team’s plate. They know to do that, and that it’s standard practice for any image we share on socials. When they share collection images we already have alt-text for, they don’t have to duplicate that work with their own description.”

“The social media team is a great partner in accessibility. Both in terms of content and having things like image descriptions. They write that text for social media posts and we often ask artists to help with their posts as well.”

Reminder: different social media sites have different specifications for alt-text, so your text will likely need to be adjusted based on which form of social media it is being shared to. Always follow the process and formatting of the platform.

# How the Coyote Project Can Help

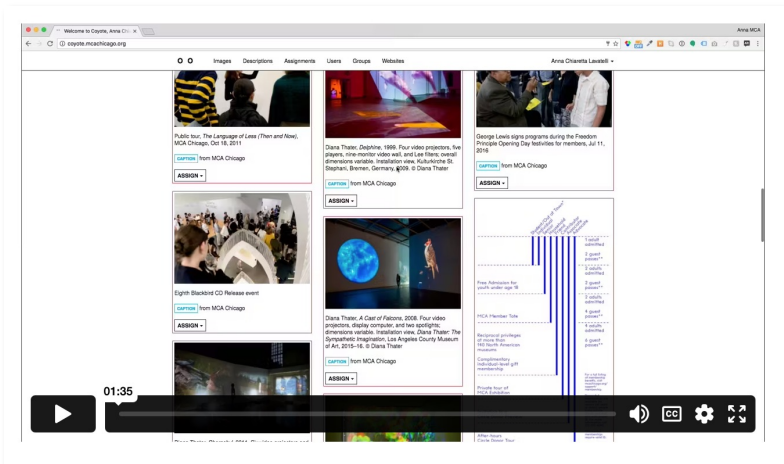
**OVERVIEW:** Coyote is a project developed by cultural heritage professionals and people from the accessibility community to encourage the use of visual description in museum practice. Originally intended to help people who are blind or have low vision experience images online, the project's scope has expanded to encompass other uses for visual description, to serve both sighted visitors and those with low vision.

**WHY:** “The real problem was, ‘how do we codify a proper workflow and best practices for visual description such that as many people as possible in the organization can participate in generating those descriptions — and to use this as a learning opportunity?’”

- Sina Bahram- President and Founder, Prime Access Consulting

**WHO:** “For visual descriptions, the education folks are the ones who do really well. They’re there to learn and teach, that’s their currency — knowledge construction. You don’t want to be so academic in your description because you want the agency to remain with the visitor.”

- Sina Bahram- President and Founder, Prime Access Consulting



## Part 1 – Technical Integration

Coyote is a web-based tool that knows about your images via plug-ins for Wordpress and other CMS.



## Part 2 – Workflow Integration

Solutions to formalize this practice to encourage people to do this as part of their workflow



# Other Considerations and Next Steps For Accessibility



## Soliciting Feedback & Auditing Progress

The **RISD Museum** has hired company [Ablr](#) to do a check on their standards. They will look at the alt-text process to give feedback, as well as **look at the museum's accessibility statement to make sure they are in compliance.** [Ablr](#) will provide suggestions on next steps.

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At the **Science Museum**, plans are in place to do a more formal audit of their alt-text tagging. They currently have automated auditing that **requires an alt-text tag for an image to be uploaded on the website**, but it does not evaluate the actual quality of the tag itself. Next audit will also focus on the accessibility of their apps.



## Other digital efforts to enhance access



The **MET** has a **digital map that provides critical access information** to users such as doorway information. As a next step, they want to include full accessibility routing with step-through instructions, as well as indications of spaces with additional assistance, such as security guards who operate elevators.

The MET's Digital team also manages their events calendar where they made sure to have **an accessibility filter with access icons on dedicated event pages.** The Digital team is discussing a standardized accessibility component to use across the site for anything that needs accessibility information.

# Appendix: Participant Workflows

# The Carter Establishes A Precise Timeline and Workload



## Material Preparation

In early 2022, the Manager of Access Programs and Resources and the Digital Content Strategist were given the task to **create a protocol and a style guide to write alt-text**. The guide is continually updated with new scenarios they come across.

The museum established a specific timeline for this project, working in 4 months intervals.

## Training

For the first round, ten writers were **handpicked among volunteers**.

Training was then run by the Carter's Manager of Access Program and Resources and Digital Content Strategist.

The museum's community partner – Lighthouse did a presentation as part of the training series. Lighthouse also participated in reviewing the practice alt text written during the training sessions.

## Writing

Once training is complete, the **writers can select the works they want to write alt-text for from a spreadsheet**.

Each of them is expected to hand in 10 alt-texts every two weeks, for a total of 50 alt-texts in 10 weeks time.

Writers are given total flexibility – they can use the whole 10 weeks or write everything in a day, if they choose.

## Publication

At the end of the 10 weeks, **The Digital Content Strategist and the Manager of Access Programs and Resources review all the content** in 6 weeks time.

The Digital Content Strategist and the Registrar then work closely to upload the material to the museum's CMS, which is linked to their Digital Assets Management software. This, in turn, publishes the final alt-text on the museum's website.

# Cooper Hewitt Focuses on Priority Areas and Group Work

## Material Preparation

Thanks to a grant from the Smithsonian Institute, the Director of Cross-Platform Content and the Accessibility & Inclusion Manager were able to create **educational videos about accessibility and the importance and use of alt-text tools (e.g., Coyote)**.

They also compiled guidelines for the entire Smithsonian network.

## Training

During the pandemic closures, the initial groundwork for staff education was laid with hands-on training and group writing practice for alt-text composition.

**Many staff involved came from visitor services**, as their priorities changed most drastically during this period without on-site visitors.

## Writing

During closure, the museum held **weekly virtual meeting with a working groups**. Staff members would sign up to write images on their own during the week, then use the working group to collaborate on particularly difficult descriptions.

Since reopening, staff time has been reduced for this effort. The team has tested various initiatives – such as “descript-a-thons” – but given the scale of text needed, the museum is considering working with contractors to support on the rest of their collection.

## Publication

The museum also used **Coyote to organize their workflow system**. For instance, the Project Manager would use the tool to define priority areas for the writers and to manage the review process.

# MCA Finds Creative Ways To Leverage Limited Capacity

## Material Preparation

Developed a training that focused on writing factual and straightforward descriptions, rather than more poetic descriptions which can become more confusing for writers.

These guidelines were published with Coyote and have become an industry tool for many museums.

## Training

During the pandemic closures, Visitor Services and Shop staff underwent training to focus their time on writing alt-text given the change in their roles without on-site visitors.

The training focused on writing factual and straightforward descriptions.

They would write and submit their compositions remotely, supervised by their own Directors.

## Writing

While the museum was closed, staff would dedicate their work time to this task. There was considerable momentum.

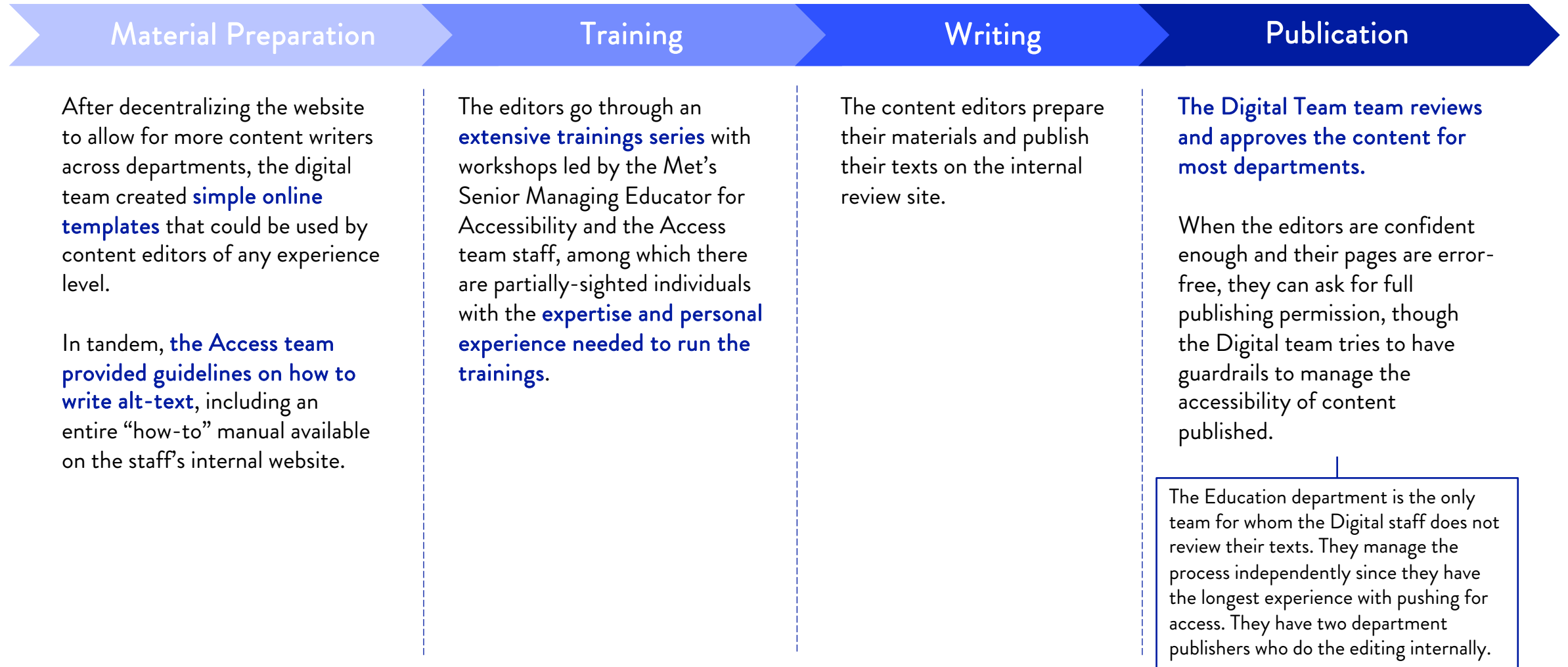
Prior to the pandemic between 2016-2019, management organized “Alt-text sprints” and fun initiatives (e.g., “Donuts for Descriptions”) to continue this work, but these efforts are now more ad-hoc.

## Publication

Editors would then revise and publish the text provided by staff, using software provided by the Coyote project.

Turnover in the editor group can be a challenge, leading to some backlog of alt-text.

# The MET Enables Cross-Departmental Content Editing



# RISD Embeds Alt-Text as Part of Student Work-Study

## Material Preparation

The Director for Digital Initiatives and the Registrar for Digital Resources, along with the Editor for Publications and one curator, developed a **4-part implicit bias training that focuses on how we look at and describe images.**

## Training

Participating work-study students undergo the RISD-designed training, which is **held on Canvas and lasts 4-6 hours.** It is supervised by the Director for Digital Initiatives and the Registrar for Digital Assets.

**The training focuses on confronting implicit bias and using accessible language in visual descriptions.** After completing the training series, students are trusted to manage the writing process independently.

## Writing

The students are given a **list of objects that they must describe during independent work time** throughout the week, with two students per list (creating two versions of the same alt-text).

Those students then pair up to create a shared set of alt-text based on the best combination of their descriptions.

## Publication

The Director for Digital Initiatives and the Registrar for Digital Assets read the material.

**However, since they invest in building trust since the training phase, they do not re-write or send the text to the editors for review.**

RISD Museum receives external consultancy from a contractor and from Ablr, a consultancy company specialized in Disability Inclusion and Digital Accessibility. The external help is focused on the web infrastructure and on some publications- not on the alt-text students write.



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