

Transcript: Leveraging Your Customer Base to Create Policy, Beth Meyer. AccessibilityPlus 2022.

Thank you so much for having me here today. I am Beth Meyer. I'm here to speak a little bit about leveraging your customer base to create policy. I'll tell you a little bit about myself. I am an 88 coordinator and and certified aid coordinator and spent time working on Department of Justice settlement agreement.

I also spent about 20 years on on on top of my ADA role being involved with the independent living philosophy and movement and working with our Centers for Independent Living. Currently, I'm I am the executive director of the Florida Independent Living Council, and we're charged with with creating a state plan which is similar to a roadmap of independence for our individuals with disabilities that live in our state. And this plan is revised every three years. It's like, I said, a roadmap of of of where we need to focus during the three year period to increase independent living for our citizens with disability in our state.

Some of the things that we're going to talk about today are going to revolve around an understanding of of the the compliance baselines, the things that are expected of us understanding projects and maybe different ways of looking at what that project and action items are for your community and for your stakeholders, understanding your community and really leaning on them when you are establishing state councils. The value of collecting data and what you do with that data. And then, you know, and then policy updates is just a broad overview of what we're going to be talking about today.

So some of the things just quickly that that y'all are listening and participating in this, this webinar is, you know, clearly there's compliance baselines that have been set and are changing. And so that is represented in those to over 2000 website accessibility lawsuits that you are reviewing.

We know that we're had to point zero is replacing the 2.1 standard because the DOJ settlements are telling us that that's our roadmap, that's where we get our trends and understanding what is expected of us. So some of the DOJ settlements that you've been reviewing are the Champagne or Urbana, the Hy-Vee and Company and Rite Aid.

And so if you look at the months, the dates of that, the DOJ expects compliance that also kind of trends. It shows you what is going to be expected. So, you know, you start with nine months and 90 days and 30 days for that for these specific DOJ settlements, if you're a government, you're going to get more time. And but this does set a trend, and it does also allow us to understand what the expectations are and where you could definitely recognize litigation and lawsuits increasing. So now we're going to talk a little bit about, you know, an understanding of a project and really where to start.

So does your organization have a policy on web accessibility, as you might say? Yeah, we have a really good individual on that. But do you have a policy on what the expectations are? The expectation is that your roadmap to when guidelines are changed and updated so that you can be current.

Is there a clear understanding of when it was last updated and and what changes will need to be made to make it compliant or current? If you are looking at some of those lawsuits, you're going to understand that this is something that needs to be discussed because the ADA is it's a moving target.

It doesn't just stay, but it actually it's like a programmatic ad accessibility for your consumers or for your customers or for your citizens. It's do they have access to what you are communicating? And so this is a great opportunity to kind of reflect on that and and and really assess your organization.

You know, when we talk about how has your customer or consumer base or or community provided input, so, you know, it's really and what is a process for that? It's really important that we understand by engaging the community.

one of the things that I feel like we were successful with when I was a coordinator is really taking a look at understanding that there's diversity within the community. There's diversity of disability. There's it's not. one way is the only way there might be multiple ways of tackling access in your community, but you have to know your community to be able to move forward on this. So. When we when a statement is made, as has your customer base provided input, that's just a check for you to understand. Do I know my community and who I am serving?

And so that's just a little something that you can put in the back of your mind. Do you have it manuals? I mean, are they updated or what are your expectations of your organization? Really, what process of review of this do you have in your in your own organization or office?

OK, so we're going to expand a little bit about what we just discussed because it's it's so important and understanding the customer base. What does that mean? So there are many times and I know that many of the ADA coordinators understand this.

There are services provided in a community that you might not even be aware of without really digging into your community. You might have a one of the best rehabilitation facilities for a spinal cord or brain injuries in your in your state, and it might be in your the area that you are that you are serving.

It's very important to understand that because people live where they receive services, they don't they don't go live in a community where they don't receive any services. It's just that's predominantly something that just that doesn't happen. People live where they receive services.

They live in close support of the community that they identify with it with the community, through surveys or through your centers for independent living or your or your rehabilitation for senators of brain and spinal cord injury groups. I mean, there are service providers throughout your state that you're going to be able to connect with, but it serves you well to understand your policy and when it serves you well to know that your community. If you don't know who lives in your in your state or in your county, how are you going to create a relevant and friendly?

Policies and procedures to protect your organization if you live in a community and you have done nothing to understand your community and you, then you're on the now you're on the the defense here in your communications. And if you want to stay in in in the communication realm, through your websites or through your your your outreaches, if you want to stay on that side of collaboration and synergy and bringing people together to be the best organization you can be, then then it is really important that you own this. So again. Policy is relevant when you understand who lives in your who's your customer base or who is in your community, if you're an aid coordinator who are your citizens. By the way, they're they're all taxpaying citizens. So, you know, it's important that you understand that. So this is there's a picture on this slide and it's from a scene from Alice in Wonderland. There's a little girl looking in a giant hole and looking down into this dark hole.

And the reason why this picture was chosen is because many times we start, we understand that the individuals that live in our community, we understand that and we will get their feedback and we talk to them and we are making sure that we're collaborative.

And because many times the people that are doing this are not people with disabilities, which can be problematic. What happens is, where is all that data go? Does do you say we're going to do a really good job and we are going to do a better job of communicating?

And then you set up a new policy and procedure and we're going to get your input. Where's the input going? Is it just going to go into that giant vortex hole that it normally goes into where there's not any type of quantifier that comes out of that?

It's going to allow us to to do the job that needs to be done. If you're seeking for input from the community, it is really important that when you when you take that input that there's some type of measurable or some type of action or process to get the data back out.

And I see this with my public forums and my town halls. Many times the frustration level of, yeah, we'll say something will tell you, but it's been the same way for 20 years. And you know, that's sometimes what you hear.

And you know what the right? So how do we take data and turn it into a roll it into data that is that is going to create relevant policy or procedures? And and are we

connecting with the community to have them review that data because it's really important that the community is involved?

And I'll tell you why, because they actually know the best way to do it. And many times you have cost savings. You have now engagement. You have ownership. And and it is a it's a win win. So it's really important that when you are asking for data from the community.

That you get a broad base. Diverse input. And that way, you're able to make the best policies. It is not. It does not it will not serve you well if you take one population within the community and have that one population represent everybody in the community, it usually backfires or it turns into another just another disenfranchised type of attitudes. And so it's really important that when you are asking for feedback that you have a policy in place or process in place to make, make sure that you are collecting that data. And if you're in it and if you don't know how to get there, there's a lot of agencies that are in place that can help you, and they can help you and partner with you to make sure that your your customers having the best experience that they can with your. With your organization. And so it's very important. This is the I would say the most important is to get your company, your community input and to make sure that you're that you are being responsible with the data that you are receiving. So this slide basically, we're talking about the focus groups and disability across disability based focus groups or councils. There's a multitude of different ways an organization can connect with the community.

The reason why it's important that it's across disability is because of because of the feedback and because the input is going to be extremely different, which will create problems with the policy if we're not looking at our community and who we are serving.

one of the things is is, you know, there's all kinds of new and relevant ways of communicating with the community. We see this in emergency management and through this COVID time. You know, when we're looking at simple language and many times companies will think, oh, simple language, that's the best because that's like I could use simple language, which would allow me to talk to all people with disabilities. And that is extremely not true. In fact, sometimes when simple language is pushed out for communication purposes for an organization. And it's the only thing that's really pushed out.

It's looked at as potentially, you know, you're talking down to me. How can I be involved? How can I? I need more information. I need to understand exactly what are my my options. There's no way that this is all there is.

We hear this kind of language, especially during a state of an emergency at some, you know. So we have to look at different types of of buckets or different types of of of. Individuals representing demographics that are not, you know, all be the same, if you're a organization that works, you're you have a a gym and you

are you're you are encouraging people to join you and be healthy. That's great. You might want to partner with the rehabilitation hospital that's working on spinal cord injuries and see how do you how can you make that accessible for the community?

How are you? Are you including them? Is it accessible? This is how you mitigate your any litigation that's down the road. You stop lawsuits through the planning, through the the beginning, the setting up, understanding the community. That's how you work around being sued on a regular basis because you're not getting it right.

It's going to it's going to be about who's at the table, what input you have. Are you listening? And what data when you when you're reaching out to your community, you're creating these policies? Does that the the individuals that you're reaching out to, does that represent the community?

It's really important that this is not a place where people are coming giving advice that stops there. I mean, you can't say I did my job. The job is and in the work that's done after you meet with the groups.

That's the job. You know, that's the policies. Those are the procedures, and it's ongoing. The ADA is changing constantly and you have got to it's an ongoing relationship with one of the largest. Civil rights groups. That we have in our country that's growing exponentially and we have to be able to understand.

You know, I have to have access. To a Web site, I have to have access to register for something on a website. And can I physically get to the building and how does that work? And are are the staff trained?

Are people? Is there? Is there a training that is in place to protect the organization? You should be able to. Serve customers with disabilities and have a best practice for your organization at the same time, and you then reduce your lawsuits.

So it's frustrating when we hear lawsuits on some of the older issues like the the the building access. It's quite frustrating. But what we if we look at as an organization program access is the ability for someone to participate in your program, whether it's a website, whether it's a training, whether it's to purchase supplies, whatever are you engage, engage in your community. You can do all these things at one time. And it's extremely, extremely important that we look at this holistically and take and see the project through to the end. OK, so here we go.

How do you? How do you sell it? This is very this is a challenge. This is a challenge because it's usually because you're usually having to sell it to people that don't have a disability, that don't get it, that don't understand or they're going to pull that I have an aunt or an uncle that or nephew, you know, and they're going to pull that card, which really doesn't allow for a fully developed understanding of the community. You know, if you're your organization has to have a organic process in

place that that that is open to understanding what is the compliance component, understanding what the law is and understanding that out of that good comes from best practices. Out of that can come some actual best practices for your organization. Maybe you start self reflecting and say, Gosh, we don't even have any individuals in our workforce. I mean, how are we really creating an opportunity to meet our customers?

What? What's the we don't even have anyone internally for our workforce? Sounds like your H.R. department needs to, you know, possibly get involved in and understand that incorporating your community if you're at, I don't know too many companies that are that go into a town that don't try to embrace the community for and really gain the trust as a as a, you know, a a opportunity to make more money to to bring your product and grow your business. You know, money is money and and that's something that you might want to consider. If you know your community and you are connecting with your community and your organization is working towards this, then this is exactly what the end game is. You're getting you're getting a community that is incorporated and involved in the relate in in the in the policy suggestions. But you're having a relationship with your community. And so, you know, you might have, for instance, there was a a automobile manufacturer that came up with shields.

So that sign like sign language interpreters were able to to their face was able to be seen so that when they are engaging with the community or someone who is deaf, they are able to see their inflections of their face.

This also helped, by the way, reduce anxiety with a lot of our individuals who are on the autism spectrum that were reacting from not being able to see a face. So, you know, one thing led to another thing, but we have here.

We have a company that goes out and says we know who you're trying to to reach. We know what you need and we can produce it for you and help this country as we navigate through the pandemic. So, you know, it's thinking out of the box a little bit, but many times there's there's this, this the value of the input and the relationship and the policies they all go together and and it is something that grows a solid business. It allows you to be a leader and and and you end up engaging with a community that might have never even got to know your product because it wasn't because you were the barrier.

And so when someone comes to a website and they want to buy something or they want to set up an appointment which you would most likely be reimbursed for. I mean, this is if you you, you can look at it, whatever lens you need to look at it, whether it's just the business lens.

But if you want what's good for your business? You are shutting out people who are coming to your business to spend money, to do the work and and to buy or schedule appointment, and we want to make sure that you consider understanding that that one lens is not the lens that you need to to look through this

at. We would like you to consider that having a very proactive group that is working towards serving the community or understanding the community are selling to the community, all of that is applicable. Understanding your community, creating policies.

Where does a decade ago? Does it go in the giant vortex or who's reporting it? It's like a step one, step two, step three. But then the then who is? How do we update the policies? How many times do we see where it's one and done?

OK, so we fixed our website. It's done. It's it's you know what? So today, today it might be compliant, but but you don't want to stop there. You want to grow on that. It might be compliant today, but are you reaching the maximum amount of people that you can reach?

Many times policies. Could surpass what the expectations are. And it would be a good a best practice, especially in technology. The technology has been there for a very long time. The policies have not been there, the expectations have not been there.

So, you know, it's a great field to look at how your organization can be the best that it can be through constantly reviewing that process and you'll get your ideas from. You'll get your ideas from the community. You'll get your best practices from the community by conversations.

And if you're a coordinator, I mean, you have to know who you're serving and you have to know the people that live in your community. And and and if it's a private organization, you understand where your money comes from because you might be a, you know, a a company.

But when you're being tapped into for a pandemic, that's different with federal law federal funding. That's something that you need to consider. I hope I've been able to convey my enthusiasm and processes and how how important they are.

The policies are really understanding and compliance baseline. You got to know what the law says. You've got to be able to project what is happening down the road. And it's so easy. It is unbelievable. Just look at those DOJ reports and it tells you what is going to happen.

Reviewing take that time and then review your policy, take the time and say, OK, I can see that this and this is happening. What are we going to do with our policy to make sure that we're updating it and we're compliant?

Identifying your stakeholders, you got to have a relationship with them. It's meant you must in order to engage them. Right. So your customers and your policies and your stakeholders are all altogether and they are part of the team, create that input, be just put it out there if it's not compliant.

Let's hear about it. Why isn't it compliant? We want to hear from you, community. Why are you having any issues with our website? How can we make it more compliant for you? We actually want to hear from you.

Take that data and make sure that once you take that data that there's a process to to implement those good ideas, make sure that that that feedback is not going to, you know, an assistant at a desk who has no idea what the next steps are supposed to be.

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