

Executive Summary

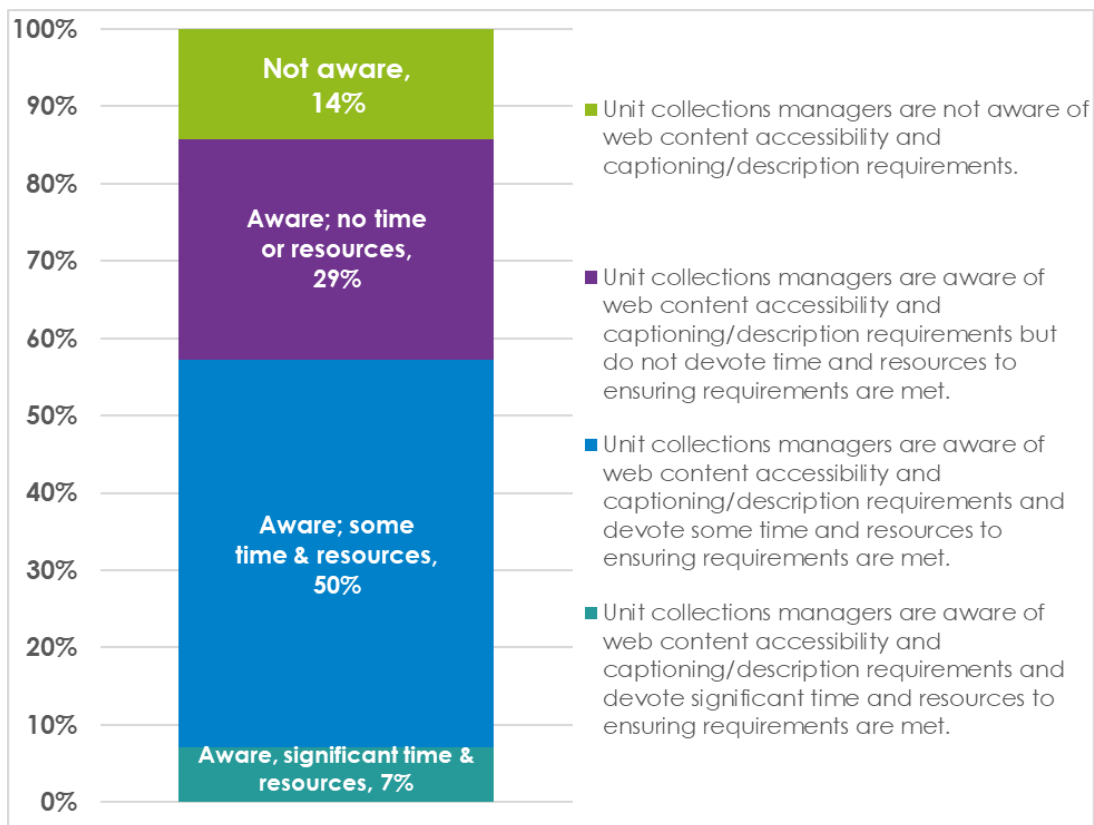
Providing access to Smithsonian Institution collections for people with disabilities, including collections that contain audiovisual materials, is a basic requirement of collections care and our institutional mission. **The Smithsonian has an ethical and legal duty to comply with these requirements reflected in the current policies:**

- [Smithsonian Directive 215, Accessibility for People with Disabilities \(SD 215\)](#)
- [Smithsonian Directive 950, Management of the Smithsonian Web \(SD 950\)](#)
- [Office of Chief Information Officer Technical Note: IT-950-TN06](#)

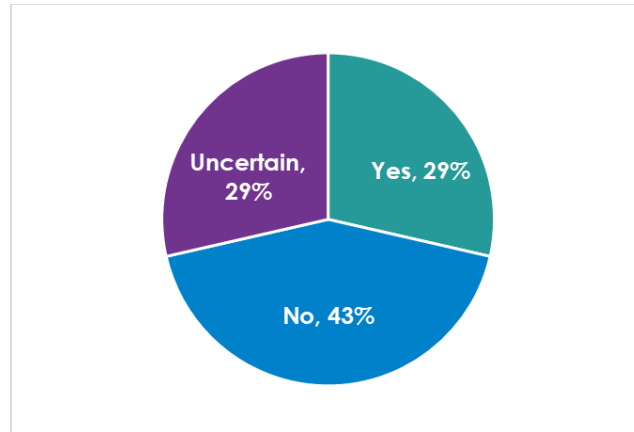
Consistent with federal laws, **Smithsonian Institution policies mandate that such access be ensured for digitized audiovisual works and born-digital audiovisual content streaming over the internet.**

A survey conducted in 2019 among the Smithsonian’s audiovisual collections managers who deal with online audiovisual collections suggests that they are **aware of accessibility requirements but lack formal guidance, training, and resources to make these collections available in accessible formats**, as highlighted in the responses to two of the survey questions below. This may explain why so **few audiovisual collections currently have existing captions, descriptions and/or transcripts.**

Which statement best describes your unit's policy on web content accessibility and captioning/ description requirements?



Does your unit currently have any dedicated budget lines for creating transcripts/ textual descriptions/ captions for audiovisual content in its collections?



Libraries and academic institutions outside the Smithsonian are also grappling with how to best develop policies and procedures that meet accessibility requirements. Notably, several such institutions have created new departments to adequately meet this challenge.

The last ten years have witnessed significant litigation brought against companies and educational institutions alike for their failure to ensure accessibility to online audiovisual material. Such litigation has proven to be costly for many institutional defendants.

The Smithsonian is committed to ensuring accessibility to digital audiovisual content, yet the logistics and specific responsibilities for doing so are unclear at the grassroots level of collections managers. Notions that accessibility responsibilities are burdensome for collections managers are misguided, as **accessibility protocol are essential activities of collections care**. Several style guides and instructions already exist for meeting accessibility requirements, specifically captioning and audio description. It is a goal of the DPO to further support these efforts by compiling information, providing resources, and making suggestions as to how audiovisual collections managers may continue to address accessibility responsibilities.

To address these needs, the most frequently requested resources by collections managers were:

1. **funding** for outside contracts and/or internal SI or contract staff to **create transcripts/textual descriptions/captions**, and
2. **regulations, training, and guidelines from the Smithsonian on how to create transcripts/textual descriptions/captions**

What Collections Managers Are Saying

“Though we know the requirements for captions and audio descriptions, it is uncertain who should be actually making that happen. As far as I can tell, only one person is doing it, but he doesn't have a great deal of support.”

“Accessibility requirements (captions/textual descriptions) have been implemented for our still image and print materials, and it is something very much on our minds for audiovisual materials, but it has not yet been implemented on our website.”

Full report available on the DPO website: https://dpo.si.edu/sites/default/files/resources/WCAG_DPO-Paper_Final_20200204.pdf