

NORTH DAKOTA FORMS DESIGN AND ACCESSIBILITY GUIDELINES

PURPOSE

To ensure all forms created, maintained, or published by North Dakota state agencies are:

- Professionally designed for clarity and usability.
- Fully accessible to individuals with disabilities.
- Compliant with North Dakota Century Code §54-44.6 and WCAG 2.1 level AA standards.

SCOPE

These standards apply to all fillable and print-only PDF forms published on state websites or portals that are publicly available, and supplement the current [State Forms Design Standards](#). Dynamic forms (e.g., designed in Adobe Forms Designer) are currently out of scope.

FORM DESIGN

1. Title Block

- Must include:
 - Descriptive form title (be brief, clear and concise, no internal jargon)
 - Agency name (if using “North Dakota” in agency name, logo is not required)
 - Whether using agency or state-approved logo (i.e. Great Seal, BeLegendary* logo), follow state branding standards.
 - State Form Number (SFN)
 - Revision date (not required for online forms)



FORM TITLE	(14pt, bold, all caps)
AGENCY	(12pt, not bold, all caps)
DIVISION	(12pt, not bold, all caps)
SFN xxxxx (0-2025)	(11pt, not bold)

- Subsequent pages need to include SFN, date and page number(s):
 SFN xxxxx (01-2025)
 Page 3 of 3

- Position: Upper-left corner on first page

2. Captions (Labels) and Fillable Fields

- Field labels should be concise, descriptive, and self-explanatory, and cover only one item.
- Capitalize the first letter of each word.
- Use box format with left-aligned fillable areas.
- Fonts: Sans serif (Arial recommended), 12pt minimum
- Entry (fillable) fields should be at least .4375" in height.

3. Spacing and Layout

- Uniform layout and minimal vertical alignment points.
- Margins: Minimum 1/4" on all sides.

4. Order and Alignment

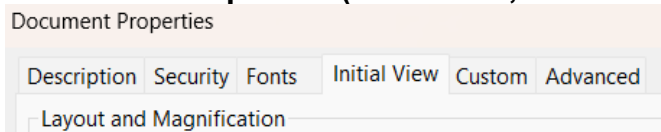
- Follow logical flow: Title Block → Instructions → Body → Conclusion
- Avoid long paragraphs of instructions; use bullet points when possible.
- Use natural reading order (left to right, top to bottom).

5. Appearance and Readability

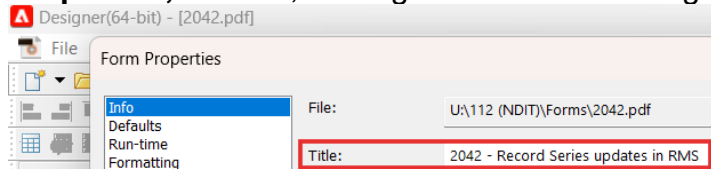
- Employ a professional, clean design without unnecessary graphics or shading.
- Limit fonts to a maximum of two complementary styles.
- Use black text on white background.
- Use bold section headers and bullets for organizing.
- Avoid personal names in labels or instructions to reduce revision needs.

ACCESSIBILITY (ADA) REQUIREMENTS

1. Document Properties (in Acrobat, use File → Properties)



- Set descriptive title (under Description tab in Acrobat, or **File → Form Properties, Info tab**, if using Adobe Forms Designer)



- Set Initial view options (e.g. to show page layout, magnification/zoom level, navigation, windows options).
- Verify “Tagged PDF = Yes” (under Description tab).
- Ensure “Content Copying for Accessibility = Allowed” (under Security tab) for reader tools.
- Set “Language = English”

Note: in Adobe Forms Designer, select top-most object (i.e. Page 1). From Object tab, change “Locale:” from default to “English (USA)”



2. Text and Structure

- All text must be selectable (not scanned images).
- All meaningful content must be tagged in logical Reading Order, ensuring hierarchy or levels aren't skipped.
 - Acrobat → Tools → Accessibility → Reading Order
 - Suggest using “Read Out Loud” (under View) or a screen reader
- Examples of proper structural tags:

- Headings (H1→H2→H3→H4)
- Lists: <L> with , <Lb1>, <LBody>
- Tables: <Table>, <TR>, <TH>, <TD> with Scope/Span

3. Links and Navigation

- Linked text must clearly describe purpose.
- Ensure logical tab order of fields for navigation.
- Provide descriptive alternative text for all meaningful linked images (including logos).

4. Form Fields

- Add tooltips, where needed, to match labels.
- Grouped field labels (e.g. radio buttons, checkboxes, drop-down options, tables) must be descriptive.

5. Images and Logos

- Logos:
 - If agency name appears elsewhere: tag logo as “Artifact” (non-content element not meant to be read by screen readers)
 - If logo is the only identifier, provide concise Alt text. (i.e. “Image of <i.e. agency name>...”
- Page Furniture must be tagged as Artifacts.
 - Examples: decorative elements, headers/footers, watermarks, borders/decorative lines, company logos

6. Color and Sensory Characteristics

- Use sufficient contrast between text and background (WCAG AA minimum: 4.5:1).
- Do not rely on color, shape, or position alone to convey meaning.

ADA COMPLIANCE CHECKLIST

This checklist will provide a summary of form accessibility needs prior to publication.

Format

- ☐ When saving forms, use standard file names (e.g. SFN 1234 – License Application.pdf)
- ☐ Ensure file extension is .pdf
- ☐ Dynamic forms are currently beyond the scope of compliance efforts

Document Properties

- ☐ Set a descriptive title in document properties
- ☐ Ensure “Tagged PDF = Yes”
- ☐ Set “Language = English”
- ☐ Ensure “Content Copying for Accessibility = Allowed”
- ☐ Set “Initial View” options (e.g., magnification, layout)

Document Structure and Headings

- ☐ Include title block on the first page and subsequent pages
- ☐ If using instructions, format as regular text (not a heading)
- ☐ Use built-in heading styles (if available) in order (Heading 1, Heading 2, etc.), similar to section/subsections in a hierarchy (no skipping levels)
- ☐ Use paragraph tags for field labels (if using Word)
- ☐ Ensure logical reading/tab order

Text and Visual Design

- ☐ Use Arial font (recommended) or Futura (accepted), 12pt minimum (excluding title block)
- ☐ Use black text on a white background
- ☐ Maintain clean, professional layout with minimal graphics
- ☐ Avoid using color, shape, or position alone to convey meaning
- ☐ Ensure sufficient contrast (minimum 4.5:1)

Interactive Fields

- ☐ Fillable fields should have descriptive tooltips, where appropriate
- ☐ Grouped fields (e.g. checkboxes, radio buttons, dropdowns, tables) must have descriptive labels.

Tables, Charts, and Images

- ☐ Use simple table structures with clear headers
- ☐ Add alt text for images (e.g. graphics, logos) and non-text elements
- ☐ Avoid using merged, split, or blank cells for layout purposes
- ☐ Tag decorative images, logos, and page furniture as artifacts

Links and Navigation

- ☐ Validate tab order and navigation
- ☐ Hyperlinks must be functional and descriptive

Testing and Validation (remediation)

- ☐ Run accessibility checker (e.g., Adobe Acrobat Full Check, Microsoft Accessibility Checker)
 - Future: Remediation tools will provide accessibility fixes
- ☐ Use text-to-speech tools to verify reading order and content as an alternative
- ☐ Conduct manual checks for reading order, headings, and field labels
- ☐ Validate/click hyperlinks to ensure open and document navigation (e.g. clickable Table of Contents)
- ☐ Ensure all interactive elements are easy to navigate with keyboard (tab/arrow keys)
- ☐ Re-test forms after any content revision or format conversion

Documentation and Publication

- ☐ Retain records of accessibility testing and remediation
- ☐ Do not publish until all accessibility requirements are met and documented