Accessiblü

Managed Digital Accessibility Ops

Accessibility Evaluation Report:

COVE Studio

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Conducted by: Accessiblü, LLC

For: Library Accessibility Alliance (LAA)

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Summary of Accessibility Findings

Accessiblü conducted a **high-level accessibility evaluation** of the COVE Studio platform from COVE Collective to assess its usability for individuals with disabilities. The review was conducted using automated testing tools, keyboard-only navigation, and attempted manual inspection for conformance to select WCAG 2.2 AA success criteria.

Important Note: Due to a critical accessibility barrier encountered during testing, we were unable to complete the full screen reader evaluation using JAWS and NVDA assistive technologies. Upon loading the initial landing page, a user profile setup modal immediately appears with a non-functional close button for screen reader users, preventing access to the platform's core functionality.

Key Findings

The COVE Studio platform shows promise as a collaborative digital humanities tool, with some positive accessibility features evident in its design approach. However, a critical barrier at the entry point prevents screen reader users from accessing the platform entirely. This fundamental issue must be addressed to ensure equitable access to this valuable academic resource. While the platform appears to have structured content organization and logical navigation patterns for sighted users, the inability to bypass the initial modal creates an immediate and complete accessibility failure that impacts the platform's usability for individuals who rely on assistive technologies.

Addressing the modal accessibility issue would unlock access to what appears to be a thoughtfully designed collaborative workspace, allowing researchers and academics with disabilities to fully participate in digital humanities projects.

Top 3 Issues Identified

1. **Critical Modal Accessibility Barrier**
    - The initial user profile setup modal cannot be closed using screen readers (JAWS or NVDA), completely preventing access to the platform.
    - Impact: Screen reader users, individuals with motor disabilities who rely on keyboard navigation, and anyone using assistive technology cannot access the platform.
    - WCAG Success Criteria: 2.1.1 Keyboard (A), 2.1.2 No Keyboard Trap (A), 4.1.2 Name, Role, Value (A).

2. **Insufficient Alternative Text for Images**
    - Document thumbnails and project images lack meaningful alternative text descriptions.
    - Impact: Screen reader users cannot understand the content or context of visual materials, limiting their ability to identify and select appropriate documents or projects.
    - WCAG Success Criteria: 1.1.1 Non-text Content (A).
3. **Interactive Element Accessibility**
    - Various buttons and controls may lack proper labeling and keyboard accessibility based on automated testing results.
    - Impact: Users relying on assistive technology may not be able to identify the purpose of controls or activate them reliably.
    - WCAG Success Criteria: 4.1.2 Name, Role, Value (A), 2.1.1 Keyboard (A).

Disabilities Impacted

Blind and Low-Vision Users

- **Issues:** The non-functional modal close button creates a complete access barrier, preventing entry to the platform. Additionally, missing alternative text for images and potentially inadequate screen reader support for interface elements.
- **Impact:** Users who rely on screen readers are completely unable to access the COVE Studio platform, preventing participation in collaborative digital humanities projects and research activities.

Users with Motor Disabilities

- **Issues:** The modal cannot be dismissed using keyboard commands, creating a keyboard trap. Additional navigation elements may not be fully keyboard accessible.
- **Impact:** Keyboard-only users become trapped at the initial modal and cannot proceed to use the platform's collaborative features, effectively excluding them from digital humanities workflows.

Users with Cognitive Disabilities

- **Issues:** Unclear interface labeling and potentially inconsistent navigation patterns may create confusion, though the modal barrier limited full evaluation.
- **Impact:** Users who benefit from clear, consistent interface design and predictable interaction patterns may struggle to navigate the platform effectively once the modal issue is resolved.

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Page-Specific Findings and Impact Analysis

Note: Due to the critical modal accessibility barrier, comprehensive screen reader testing was not possible for most platform areas. The following findings are based on automated testing and limited manual inspection.

COVE Studio Landing Page

Issue	WCAG Success Criteria	Description	Example
Critical Modal Barrier	**2.1.1 Keyboard (A), 2.1.2 No Keyboard Trap (A)**	User profile setup modal appears on page load with non-functional close button for assistive technology users.	Screen reader users cannot dismiss the modal using Escape key or other standard keyboard commands, preventing platform access.
Missing Alternative Text	**1.1.1 Non-text Content (A)**	Project thumbnails and document preview images lack descriptive alternative text.	Document thumbnails display only generic or missing alt text, providing no context about content.
Unclear Button Labels	**4.1.2 Name, Role, Value (A)**	Some interactive elements may lack clear programmatic labels.	Navigation and action buttons may not properly communicate their function to assistive technology.

Impact Summary:
The landing page presents a complete access barrier for screen reader users due to the modal issue. Once this critical problem is resolved, the platform shows potential for accessible use with its organized project structure and clear visual hierarchy. The missing alternative text for project thumbnails would need addressing to ensure users with visual impairments can effectively browse and select projects.

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COVE Studio Landing Page Screenshot

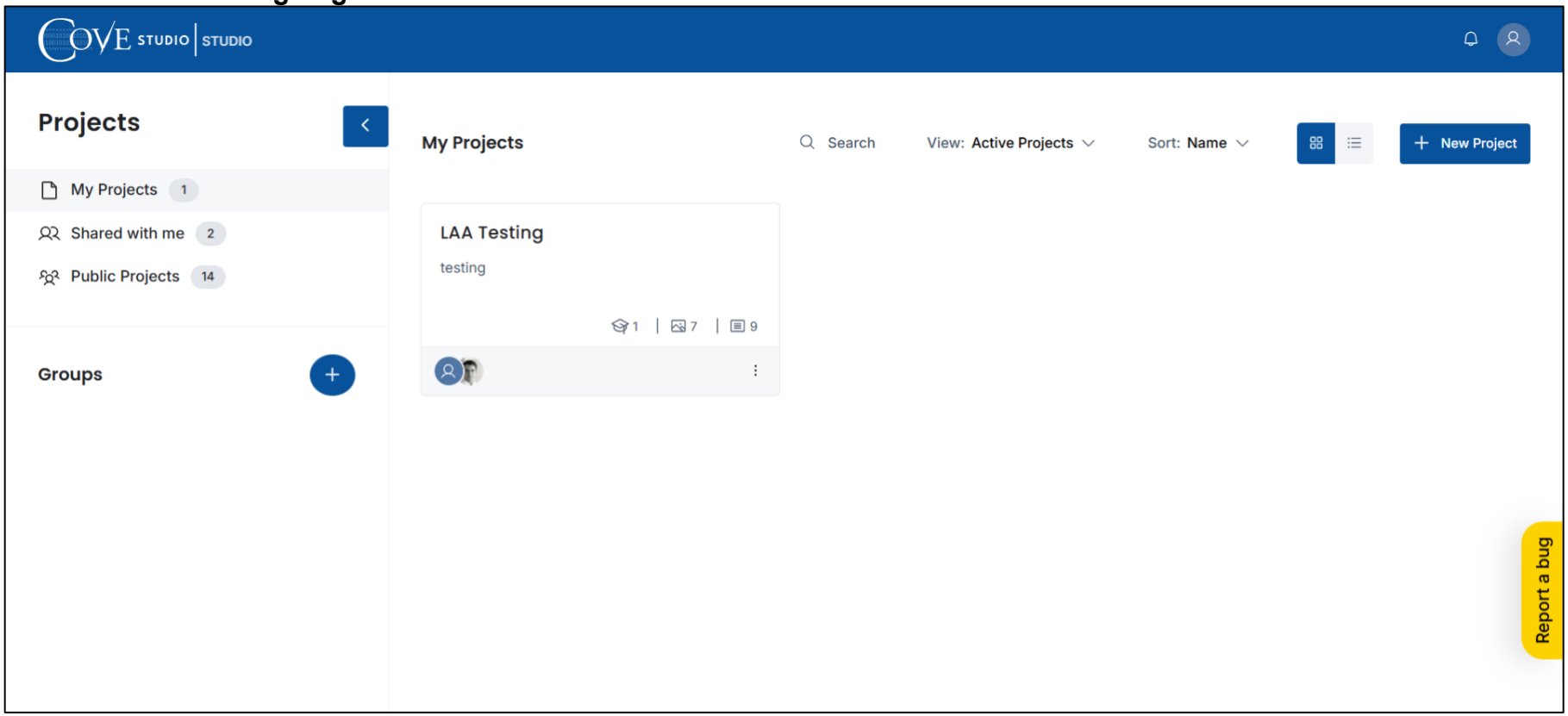

Figure 1. The COVE Studio main landing page displays project organization and collaboration features, though an inaccessible modal dialog currently blocks access.

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LAA Testing Project Page

Issue	WCAG Success Criteria	Description	Example
Document Navigation	**2.1.1 Keyboard (A)**	Document selection and navigation may not be fully keyboard accessible.	Users may not be able to navigate between documents using only keyboard input.
Missing Alternative Text	**1.1.1 Non-text Content (A)**	Document thumbnails and preview images lack meaningful descriptions.	Historical images and documents display without descriptive alternative text.
Filter Accessibility	**4.1.2 Name, Role, Value (A)**	Document filtering options may not be properly labeled for screen readers.	Filter controls may not announce their current state or purpose to assistive technology.

Impact Summary:
The LAA Testing project page offers rich collaborative features for working with historical documents and images. However, the accessibility barriers identified would significantly impact users with disabilities' ability to navigate, filter, and interact with the document collection effectively.

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LAA Testing Project Page Screenshot

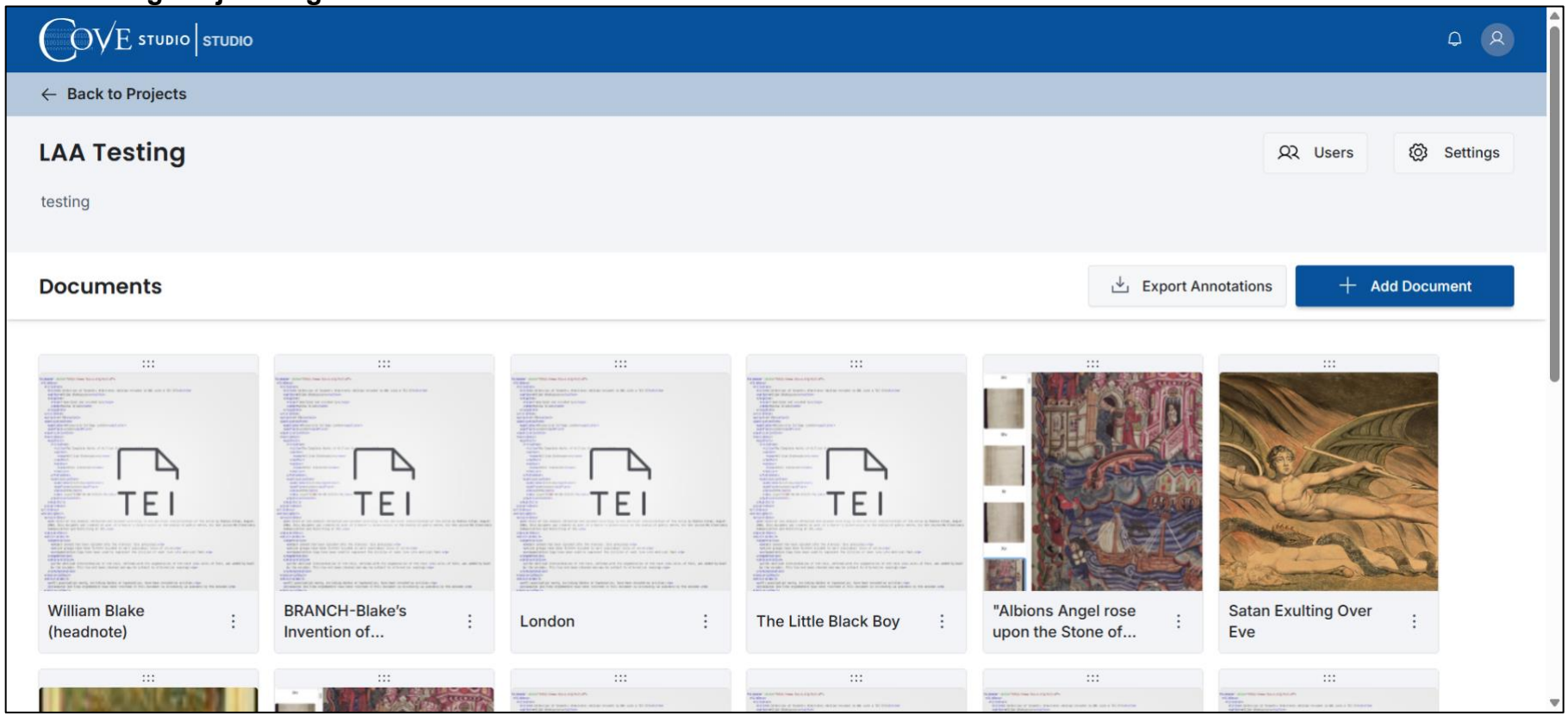

Figure 2. The LAA Testing project page displays various historical documents and images in a collaborative workspace format.

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Code Snippets

Modal Accessibility Issue (Critical Priority)

```
<!-- Current problematic implementation -->
<div class="modal-overlay">
  <div class="modal-content">
    <button class="close-button" onclick="closeModal()">×</button>
    <h2>Set up your profile</h2>
    <!-- Modal content -->
  </div>
</div>

<!-- Recommended fix -->
<div class="modal-overlay" role="dialog" aria-labelledby="modal-title" aria-modal="true">
  <div class="modal-content">
    <button
      class="close-button"
      onclick="closeModal()"
      aria-label="Close profile setup dialog"
      type="button">
      <span aria-hidden="true">×</span>
    </button>
    <h2 id="modal-title">Set up your profile</h2>
    <!-- Modal content -->
  </div>
</div>

<!-- JavaScript should also handle Escape key -->
document.addEventListener('keydown', function(event) {
  if (event.key === 'Escape' && modalIsOpen) {
    closeModal();
  }
});
```

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Missing Alternative Text for Document Thumbnails

```
<!-- Current problematic implementation -->
<img src="document-thumb.jpg" class="document-thumbnail">

<!-- Recommended fix -->
<img src="document-thumb.jpg"
    alt="William Blake manuscript page showing handwritten text and illustration"
    class="document-thumbnail">
```

Improved Button Labeling

```
<!-- Current problematic implementation -->
<button class="action-btn">⚙</button>

<!-- Recommended fix -->
<button class="action-btn" aria-label="Document settings">
  <span aria-hidden="true">⚙</span>
</button>
```

Final Thoughts and Recommendations

COVE Studio represents an innovative approach to collaborative digital humanities research, offering features that could greatly benefit academic communities. The platform's visual design suggests thoughtful consideration of user experience, with clear project organization and intuitive document management interfaces.

However, the critical modal accessibility barrier currently prevents a significant portion of potential users from accessing these valuable features. This issue essentially creates a "digital front door" that remains locked for users of assistive technology, undermining the platform's potential to serve as an inclusive research tool.

The good news is that the underlying platform architecture appears sound, and addressing the identified accessibility issues would unlock significant value for researchers and academics with disabilities. The collaborative features, document annotation capabilities, and project management tools could become powerful assets for inclusive digital humanities work once these barriers are removed.

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Recommended Fixes

• **Immediately address the modal accessibility barrier** by ensuring the close button functions properly with keyboard navigation and screen readers, implementing proper ARIA attributes, and adding Escape key functionality.
• **Implement comprehensive alternative text** for all document thumbnails, project images, and visual content to ensure screen reader users can understand and navigate the material effectively.
• **Enhance keyboard accessibility** throughout the platform, ensuring all interactive elements can be accessed and activated using keyboard navigation alone.
• **Add proper ARIA labels and roles** to all interactive elements, ensuring assistive technology users can understand the purpose and current state of controls.
• **Implement consistent focus management** to ensure users can navigate logically through the interface using keyboard commands.
• **Test with actual assistive technology users** to validate that fixes work effectively in real-world usage scenarios.
• **Develop accessibility testing protocols** for future updates to prevent similar barriers from being introduced.
The investment in addressing these accessibility issues would position COVE Studio as a leader in inclusive digital humanities tools, opening up collaborative research opportunities to a broader and more diverse academic community.

Disclaimer

Accessiblü prepared this report as a high-level accessibility evaluation of the COVE Studio platform. Due to a critical accessibility barrier preventing screen reader access, this evaluation was limited in scope compared to our typical comprehensive testing methodology. The evaluation utilized automated testing tools, keyboard-only navigation where possible, and manual inspection for select WCAG 2.2 AA success criteria.
This report does not represent a comprehensive WCAG compliance audit and should not be seen as a certification of accessibility compliance. The findings presented focus on the most significant barriers encountered during testing, and additional accessibility issues may exist that were not identified due to testing limitations.

No Legal Liability:

Accessiblü offers this report for informational purposes only. It assumes no legal responsibility for accessibility violations or compliance failures resulting from its use. Organizations seeking formal certification should conduct a comprehensive audit and user testing with individuals with disabilities after addressing the critical barriers identified in this report.

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Limitations of Testing:

This evaluation was conducted at a specific time, and platform updates may have occurred after testing was completed. The inability to complete full screen reader testing significantly limited the scope of this evaluation. A follow-up evaluation is recommended once the critical modal accessibility barrier has been resolved.