



# ETHICAL WEB **COLLECTIVE**

Championing an accessible, secure, fast, and sustainable web

an initiative by **Plänk**

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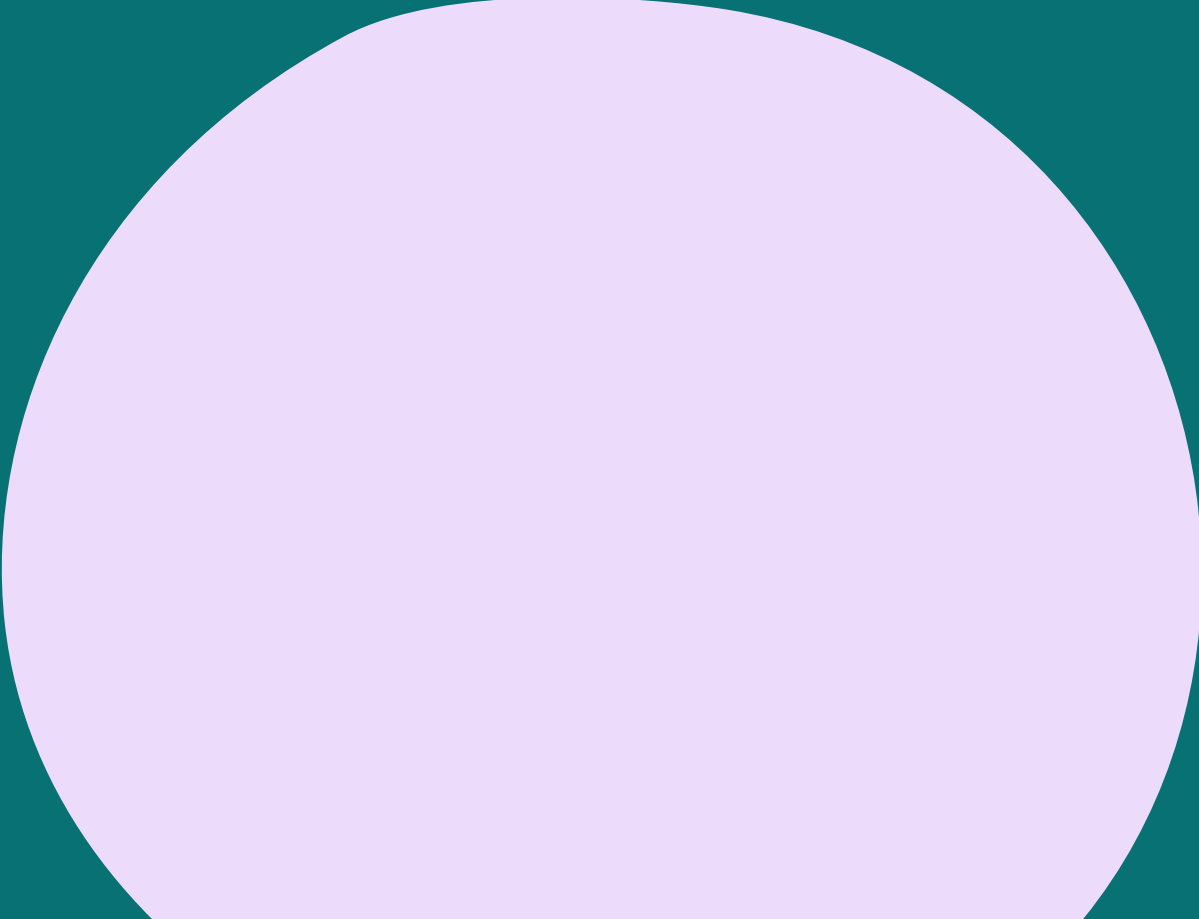
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## ***WHAT IS ETHICAL WEB DESIGN?***

Ethical web design is an approach to creating digital spaces that take into account the moral rights that individuals have over their information and their ability to participate in those online spaces. It is creating a digital project, whether it is content, design or development, that is built with clients, their community, and the environment in mind.

As creators, the onus is on us to ensure our projects are as responsible as they are innovative.



## OUR COMMITMENT

Within this framework, we are setting website design and development standards that make sense to us as a team and are for the benefit of our clients, their audiences, and communities. It sets a benchmark for how we develop web projects and is the foundation for how we discuss user interfaces and experiences.

Below are the four pillars that guide us while building our websites to ensure we are contributing to an ethical and sustainable web:

### Accessibility & Inclusion

We will meet the W3C WCAG 2.2 AA guidelines to ensure each website we create offers a comparable, high-quality experience for all users.

### Privacy & Security

To ensure transparency and secure data handling, our processes are built upon the seven principles of the GDPR - the EU's basic regulations and expectations for data protection. We also remain up to date on PIPEDA and Quebec's Law 25 to guarantee the protection of the personal information of Canadian residents.

### Responsible Development

Our team will continuously verify and improve our work using **Google's WebDev standards** - which we use to test and benchmark our work on Performance, Accessibility, Best Practices and SEO.

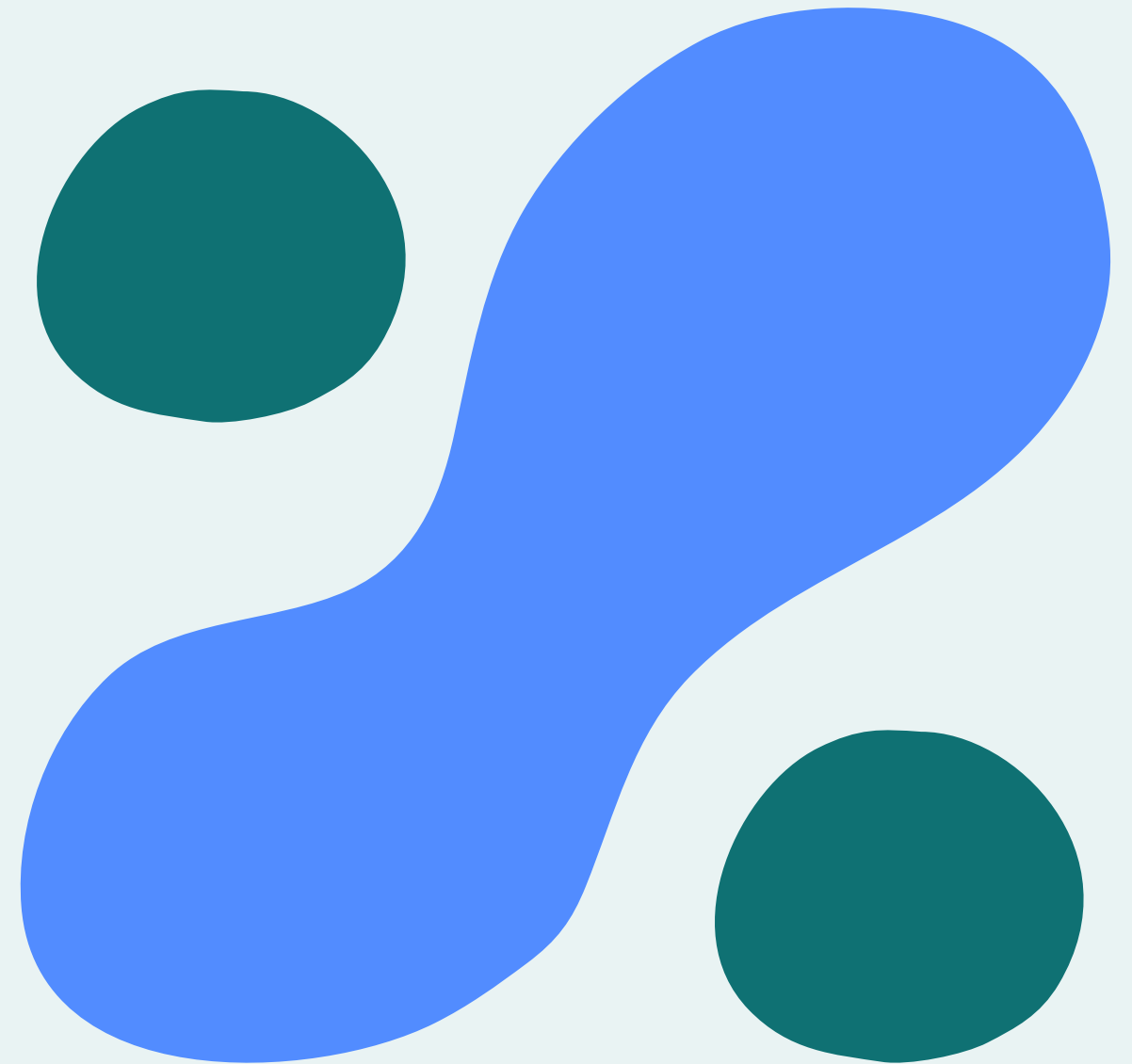
### Environmental Impact

We will continue to optimize our code and assets to lower a site's carbon footprint and energy impact. We also guide our clients on producing lower emissions through measures such as green hosting and carbon offsets.



Accessibility & Inclusion

# Offering *equitable* digital spaces



## ***INTRODUCTION***

Web accessibility focuses on everything from the content to the software and hardware used to create and navigate the web. We aim to make digital spaces inclusive to everyone who comes across them.



## DID YOU KNOW?

# 15-20%

of the population lives with a disability, which is why it's incredibly important to think about how different individuals interact with your website and accommodate their needs.

Web accessibility boils down to essential for some and useful for all. Being inclusive and adapting to those with disabilities truly benefits everyone. Case in point, sidewalks that were adapted for wheelchairs benefit parents with strollers and closed captions for non-hearing individuals benefit those in loud or quiet environments. When your website is more inclusive, you make your content available to more people and improve their overall user experience.

## OUR COMMITMENT

### Be inclusive to as many people as possible

In addition to being accessible and inclusive from a technical point of view, we want to uphold an environment of respect for all individuals regardless of their identities. At Plank, we make sure to create a space where all individuals are welcome, and that extends to how we work with our clients. All members working at or with Plank are expected to treat those around them with dignity and respect. For website visitors, we stay informed about inclusive practices, ask important questions, and remain empathetic.

### Meet W3C WCAG 2.2 AA Guidelines

The **W3C Web Accessibility Initiative** (WAI) is an initiative that brings together industry professionals, disability organizations, governments, and research labs from all over the world. They created the **Web Content Accessibility Guidelines** (WCAG) and are dedicated to providing resources to simplify their application. These guidelines and support materials help individuals use the web to its full potential. And since technology and online experiences are constantly evolving, they are also consistently being updated and improved.

While our testing guidelines are far more detailed, we wanted to share with you some of the standards we review for each of our projects. The WCAG guidelines are under 4 principles: perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust.

## THE *PRINCIPLES*

### Perceivable

This principle ensures users can perceive the information and user interface with their available senses. Some users perceive information visually while others use sound and/or touch. To do so we develop our projects in a way that allows users to comprehend the content on a web page using alternative text, labels, captions, and headers. This also includes making sure design elements are visible to a wide range of people through text size, typography, and colour contrast. We encourage our clients to use proper alt text and closed captions for the content they are managing.

### Operable

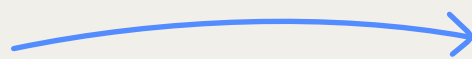
A lot of individuals do not use a mouse to navigate through a website. Instead, they will use their keyboard or assistive technology, such as screen readers or voice recognition. We make all functionality of our websites available from a keyboard. We include clear ways for a user to determine where they are on a web page to assist in navigation. We are also aware of content that can cause seizures or photosensitive reactions, and provide users with warnings or the ability to switch off animations when needed.

### Understandable

This involves creating a user experience and writing content that is understandable to the broadest possible audience. We do so by encouraging our clients to use simplified language and avoid writing jargon or acronyms without defining their meaning. Understandable websites include a navigation that is predictable and repeated on multiple pages to avoid users from being disoriented or distracted. When building forms or other required user actions, we include descriptive instructions, error messages, and the ability to review submissions to help users avoid or correct their mistakes.

### Robust

Creating a robust website involves testing whether the content is compatible with multiple browsers, assistive technologies, and other user agents. We test all our projects on screen readers, multiple devices, and while using keyboard navigation to ensure we're providing a positive experience for users with visual or physical impairments.



If you'd like to learn more about web accessibility and how you can create a more accessible website, read our blog post outlining ***12 tips for publishing inclusive content***.



Privacy & Security

# Ensuring a *secure* web environment



## ***INTRODUCTION***

Privacy and security become a significant concern in a world ruled by data. Many, if not most, of a user's daily actions are monitored and tracked using technology. When it comes to building a website, it becomes our responsibility to protect the choice, control and security of a user's personal information. Not only is it a legal requirement, but it is also necessary to build trust with your users.

We understand the challenges of wanting to provide users with a more personalized experience but the key is to give them the power of choice. We believe that your users' information is of primary importance, and we should be clear about what your organization will do with their data. This can be achieved by being transparent about your position on meeting all the different national guidelines such as CASL or GDPR.

## OUR COMMITMENT

### Meet the seven core principals of the GDPR

While there are many global standards and guidelines to securely store and manage personal data, we use the European Union's **General Data Protection Regulation** (GDPR) as our baseline as it is currently the most detailed and explicit. The GDPR is based on Seven Key Principles, which make up the core standards of our approach to Privacy and Security.

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- 01 All individual data is processed lawfully, fairly and transparently
  - 02 Limit the collection and processing of information to its original purpose
  - 03 Gather the minimum amount of data required that is adequate and relevant
  - 04 Keep only accurate data and take the necessary steps to ensure if it is not accurate, that it is erased or corrected as soon as possible
  - 05 Limit the storage of information for only as long as is necessary
  - 06 Ensure that all information is secured and confidential and that it is stored with integrity
  - 07 Be able to demonstrate that we are accountable for and can comply with the aims of the GDPR as stated above
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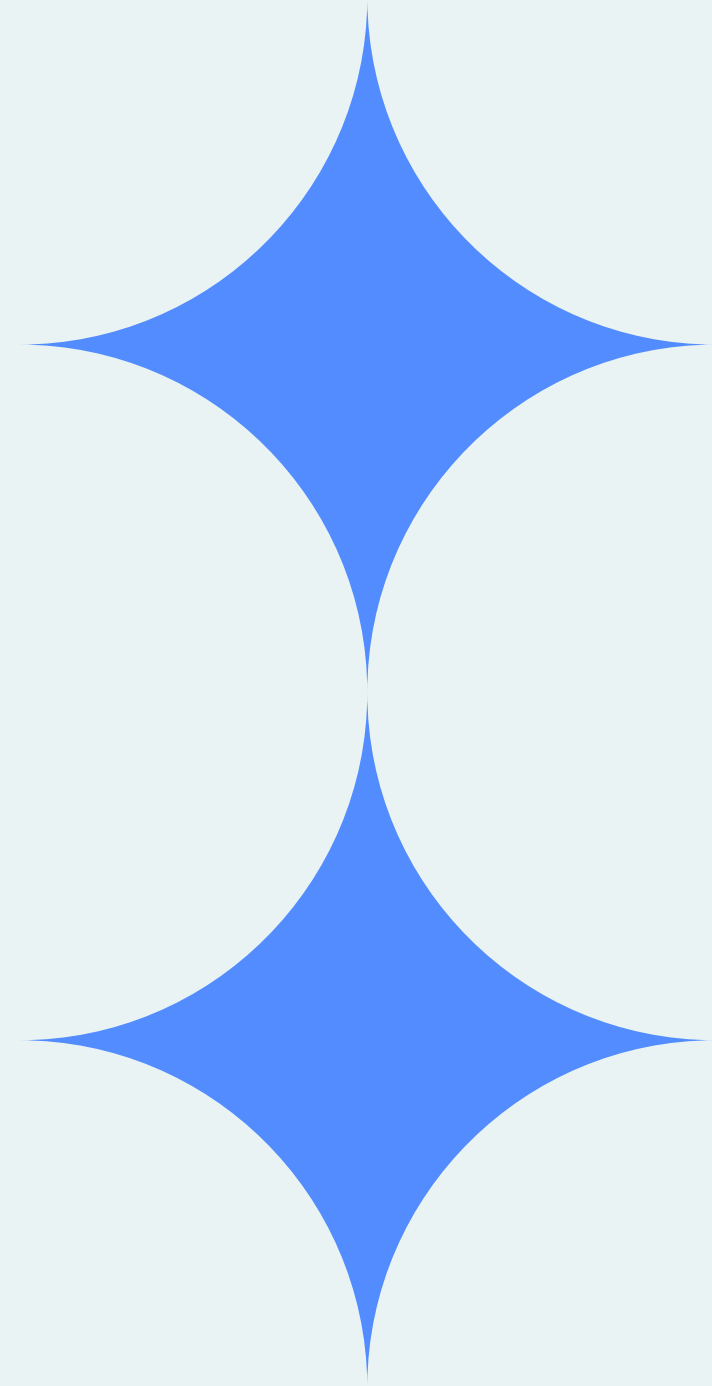
### Communicate clearly and openly

In the interest of being more transparent, we want to highlight the policies and principles that are important to us and a part of our commitment to our clients and their users when we build a website. Our core commitments are to:

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- 01 Clearly communicate in our Privacy & Terms of Use what information we collect, how we store it, who we share it with (with as few 3rd party partners as possible), and what exactly it is used for.
  - 02 Regularly audit our code to ensure that others aren't using or capturing our data in malicious ways.
  - 03 Integrate cookie banners that require users to give documented consent before their data is processed.
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Responsible Development

# Building websites *with integrity*



## ***INTRODUCTION***

One of the most important aspects of being a responsible digital citizen is creating to the best of our ability and continuously investing in our learning. To ensure the long-term health of our websites, we make sure that the code is developed using best practices, and is forward-thinking so that it can be easily maintained and iterated on.

The Internet is constantly changing and new technologies are being developed every day. For this reason, our process consists of peer reviewing our work, ensuring proactive problem solving, ***version control*** ***best practices***, and proper documentation. We acknowledge that we will make mistakes but we will continue to push forward, own our mistakes and learn from them to keep getting better at our craft.

## OUR COMMITMENT

### Meet coding and development best practices

We work with a testing guide and QA grid at regular intervals during the development of the project. We are therefore able to confidently state that our standard browser testing covers: Microsoft Edge; the most recent versions of Firefox and Google Chrome; Safari 12 and above for Mac; Safari and Google Chrome for iOS 12 and above; Google Chrome and Firefox for Android 10.0 and above. We test every site we build against benchmarks at web.dev across all four categories: Performance, Accessibility, Best Practices & SEO.

We also know that good design doesn't happen in a vacuum. We work closely with both the project managers, developers, and our clients, every step of the way, to resolve any conflicts as soon as they arise and arrive at the best possible solutions. It's what sets a project apart from good to great.

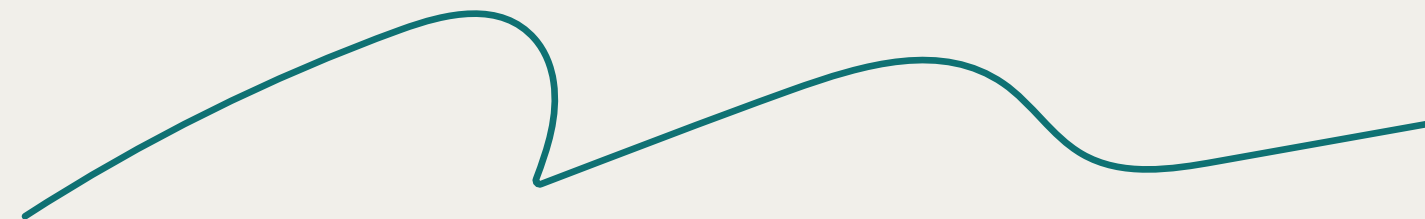
### Invest in proper training and documentation

In addition to ongoing collaboration with our clients, we always set up training sessions to walk them through the best practices for working on their website. With the proper documentation throughout the development process, we can ensure the sustainability of the site post-launch and for years to come. The inner workings of a website, CRM and CMS must be available to all team members. Our goal is to ensure that our clients' institutional knowledge can be easily passed on.

### Be involved members of the development community

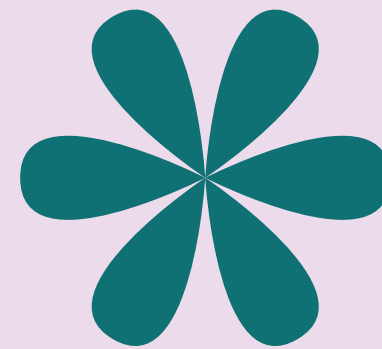
The foundations of the internet and open source community were built on the principles of access, collaboration and generosity. With that in mind, we recognize how much we benefit from it so we contribute back to the open source community whenever we can. We currently contribute to **WordPress' Five for the future.**

We believe that it is our responsibility to always be working hard not only to level up our team's skill set through ongoing training and development but also to give them time to experiment and research. We want them to stay up to date, iterate and improve their work, take calculated risks, and push our craft forward. We also want them to consider future teams who will maintain it in the future, so we believe in meeting quality coding standards and documentation.



Environmental Impact

Actively pushing  
for a *greener* web



## ***INTRODUCTION***

The benefits of technology and going digital are endless. Technology allows us to optimize our workflows, facilitate collaboration across departments, make education more accessible, make information more readily available to consumers, the list goes on. But we rarely think about what it takes to get there. The reality is that it takes a lot of resources to build all the technology we use daily, and most of the time we don't think of the consequences - the heaps of garbage that build up from all the latest tech drops and the energy it takes to sustain our use of them.

Every time someone loads a page of your website, there is a small energy impact, which at first seems negligible. But if the code and assets aren't optimized and you experience a lot of traffic, the impact builds up quickly.



## DID YOU KNOW?

# by 2025

The carbon footprint produced by global consumption of technology is similar to the amount produced by *the airline industry*. What's even scarier is that it's expected to **double by 2025** as more people around the world gain access to tech.

We have a responsibility to be more sustainable in our practices because a lot of companies only care when it affects their bottom line. If we actively seek out sustainable options in everything we do, we are pushing for a greener planet.

## OUR COMMITMENT

### Optimize our code and assets

While we want all of our projects to be outstanding and award-winning from a design perspective, a website optimized for speed and performance matters just as much, if not more. As a result, we do not use unnecessary or bloated code and are mindful of offering a high-quality user experience that keeps people coming back to and engaging with our work.

The benefit of investing in optimization isn't only load time and user retention, but also to reduce the energy used by a server by taxing it less, reducing the energy needed to transmit and deliver all of those pixels, and the computing power needed to display our work. While all of this effort may seem like a lot to invest into a smaller, low-traffic website, the impact grows exponentially on high-traffic sites. Something as simple as optimizing an image properly can quickly add up if you have 20,000 or more unique visitors on a daily basis.

### Use green web hosting

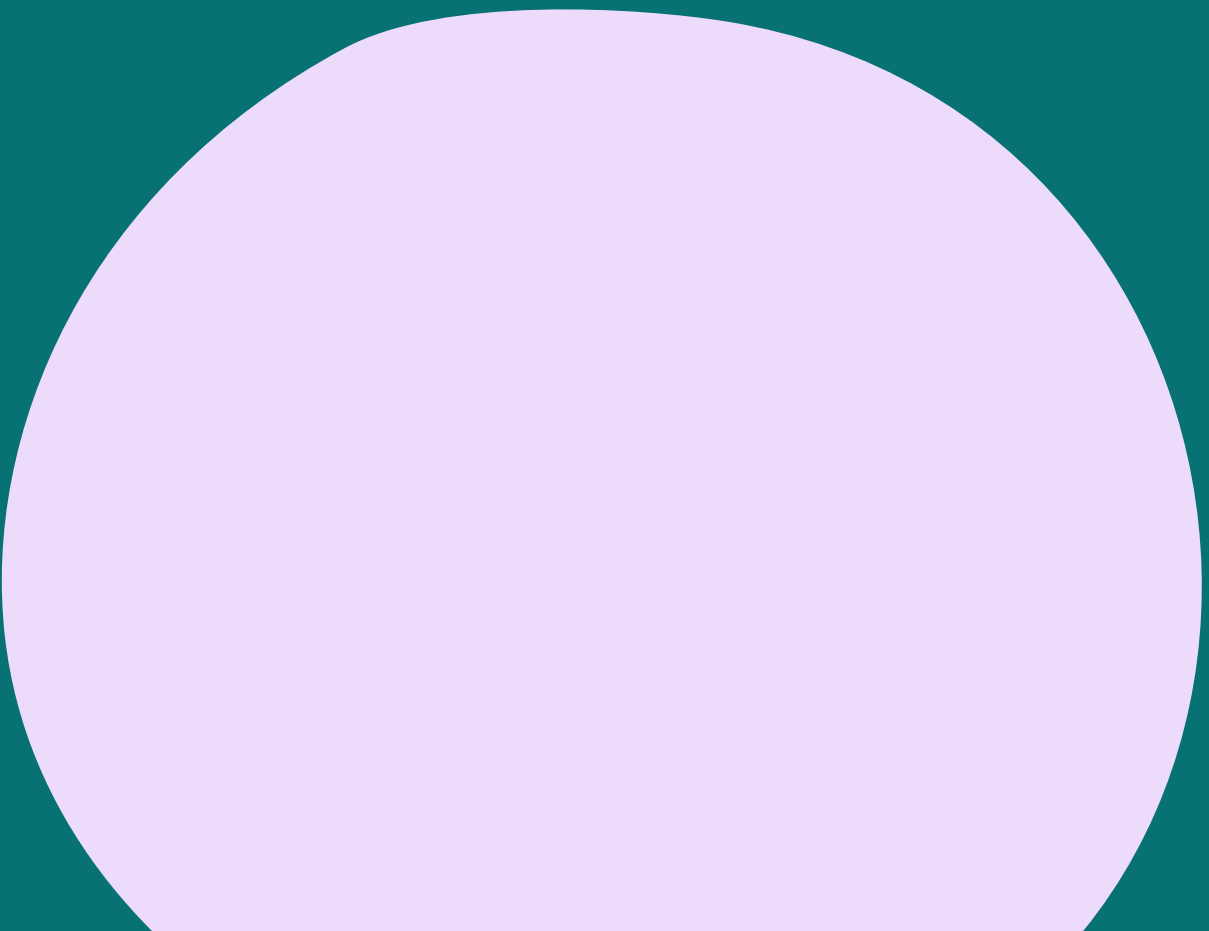
Green website hosting aims to reduce the environmental impact of a website's energy consumption. Through multiple strategies such as carbon offsetting or using renewable energy, energy-hungry computer servers can become carbon-neutral.

There was a time when the idea of using a green website hosting partner was a difficult and niche option to consider. Today, with **so many mainstream** and reliable partners, using an environmentally responsible hosting company is a viable option for hosting any modern website.



## ***CONCLUSION***

We use these principles as our guiding star to encourage us to create our best work and to always approach our web projects with a user-first approach. Although we cannot be a perfect internet citizen, we are committed to remaining accountable and transparent. The internet changes every day and we must adapt with it responsibly. We will continue to share our findings, knowledge and actionable tips to encourage others to join us in making the web a better place.





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- 20 Ethical Analytics



*BE PART OF THE CHANGE*

# ETHICAL WEB **COLLECTIVE**

visit the Ethical Web Collective website for more information

an initiative by **Plänk**