



**U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the CIO**

Information Resource Management Center

Section 508 Program

Section 508 Awareness

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“USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender”

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What is Section 508?

It's the law!



- Section 508, an amendment to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, is a federal law mandating that all electronic and information technology (also known as Information and Communication Technology (ICT)) developed, procured, maintained, or used by the federal government be accessible to people with disabilities.
- Technology is deemed to be "accessible" if it can be used as effectively by people with disabilities as by those without.
- Section 508, in simple terms, requires that when Federal Agencies develop, procure, maintain or use electronic and information technology, information and data should be accessible to people with disabilities.
- As a Federal employee or contractor, you may be responsible for Section 508 compliance that aligns with your role in the organization.



What is Section 508?

- This includes Federal employees as well as citizens trying to access Federal ICT (has to be accessible internal and external)
- On August 7, 1998, the Workforce Investment Act was signed into a law that includes the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998.
 - significantly expanded and strengthen the technology access requirements of Section 508
 - created binding, enforceable standards now incorporated into the Federal Acquisition Regulations ("FAR").
- Beginning June 25, 2001, Federal contracting officials are to purchase Section 508 compliant EIT. (now AKA Information and Communication Technology (ICT)



Who determines 508 compliant products?

- Under the law and the FAR, the acquiring officer is legally responsible for determining 508 compliance.
- The FAR directs the acquiring officer to conduct market research to determine the most 508 commercially available product on the market.
- It is incumbent upon the vendor to provide as much information as possible to allow the acquiring officer to conduct market research and make the compliance determination.
- Compliance is determined by the federal employee



Section 508 Refresh

ICT Defined

- ICT includes information technology and other equipment, systems, technologies, or processes, for which the principal function is the creation, manipulation, storage, display, receipt, or transmission of electronic data and information, as well as any associated content

Products Considered ICT

- Examples of ICT include but are not limited to:
- Computers and peripheral equipment
- Information kiosks and transaction machines that provide information in public places such as Federal buildings and hospitals
- Telecommunications equipment (telephones, telephone systems)



Section 508 Refresh Continue

Products Considered ICT continue:

- Customer premises equipment (servers, routers)
- Multifunction office machines that scan, fax, print, etc.
- Software & applications
- websites
- Videos
- Electronic documents (e.g., PDF, Word, Excel, and PowerPoint)
- Mobile devices (iPhones, androids, tablets, etc.)



Differences Between Section 504 and Section 508

- **Section 504**

- Section 504 is a part of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 that prohibits job discrimination and requires employers to make reasonable accommodations for employees with disabilities. Its purpose is to make sure that qualified persons with disabilities are provided the tools, environmental modifications, or other adjustments that allow them to do their jobs. Accommodations that an agency must make under Section 504 include things such as assistive technology (AT), interpreters, and environmental modifications such as ramps or widened doorways.

- **Section 508: Providing Accessible ICT**

- Section 508 is an amendment to the Rehabilitation Act that is specific to ICT. Section 508 requires that ICT comply with specific standards designed to improve accessibility.



Why is Accessibility Important?

- More than a billion people are estimated to live with some form of disability, Which is about 15% of the worlds population.
- The number of people with disabilities is growing as national populations grow
 - older and global chronic health conditions, such as diabetes, increase.
 - Many people using assistive technology
 - People occurring temporary disabilities due to accidents.
- People are working longer so the chance of having a disability in the workplace is increasing



Why is Accessibility Important for US?

- Using digital technologies can be a problem not just for the visually impaired but a much wider section of the community.
 - Hearing impairment,
 - dementia
 - arthritis,
 - attention deficit disorder,
 - dyslexia (just some of the conditions that can make it hard for people to utilize the Web).
- By making websites and digital technologies accessible, we help to create an inclusive environment for people with a disability. Accessible websites enable people to make independent decisions, and provide greater opportunity for participation, interaction, education and employment.



Why is Accessibility Important? Continue

- There have been lawsuits filed against Federal government agencies for noncompliance and non conformance.
 - *The cost of noncompliance or nonconformance is exposure to lawsuits*
 - *The cost of compliance is minimal* if you incorporate it into your agency policy and procedures.
- Legal responsibility for compliance resides with your agency, not with the vendor!
- As you continue to get older, you may experience temporary disabilities or disabilities that will prevent you from reading or accessing technology.

The Bottom Line

- Section 508 affects all ICT that is “developed, procured, maintained or used” by the Federal government
- Not recognizing our responsibility for Section 508 in today’s environment is not a good business decision.
- There are agencies who have moved from minimal compliance to 90 -100% compliance.
- Federal government is the leader in promoting the hiring and accommodating of persons with disabilities.



The Bottom Line Continue

- Virtual and mobile workplaces present new requirements and challenges
- Watchdog organizations, advocacy groups, and unions have successfully filed lawsuits or arbitration cases.
- With the refreshed standards there will be new challenges.
 - Implementation
 - Training
 - Collaboration
- Over time everyone will experience or encounter the need for accessible content for themselves, family members, and co-workers



Questions?

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