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# The Right to Information: Why Digital Accessibility Is Integral to DEIA



A primer for state and local governments

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## Digital accessibility is in the national spotlight

**As more federal and state agencies prioritize digital accessibility, organizations must follow their lead to serve all constituents and provide equal opportunities for participation in government.**

In 2021, President Joe Biden signed an executive order directing federal agencies to take action to advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) within their organizations. The imperative included, among other items, ensuring all information and communications technology (ICT) used by agencies was accessible to people with disabilities.

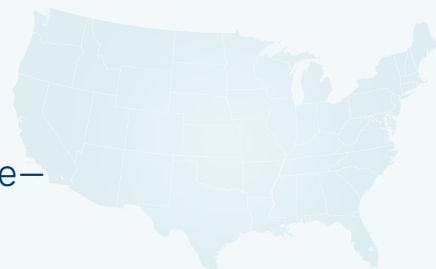
By championing inclusive technology at the federal level, Biden aimed to set an example for the rest of the nation. And several states have already encoded digital accessibility into law.

Starting in July 2024, the use of inaccessible digital products by state and local governments in [Colorado](#) will constitute a civil rights violation.

California [passed legislation](#) requiring that government organizations use accessible ICT as early as 2016 and mandates that state entities audit their digital assets for accessibility every two years.

While many state and local governments are not yet legally accountable for meeting specific digital accessibility requirements, this is likely to change. The U.S. Department of Justice has announced its intent to publish revised regulations for Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which would establish clear technical standards for state and local government websites. Additionally, agencies have an obligation to their constituents and employees to prioritize inclusion.

More than 60 million people in the U.S. live with disabilities. Governments are responsible for ensuring that all members of the communities they serve—and all members of their workforce—can easily access websites, information, and resources.



But what does it mean to make technology accessible, and how does this fit into agencies' broader commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion? We'll provide answers in this primer.

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## What is digital accessibility?

Digital accessibility refers to the practice of making digital products—including websites, apps, software platforms, and digital content—accessible to all people, regardless of whether they have a disability. Many pieces of civil rights legislation, including Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, cite the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) as the globally accepted set of standards for assessing digital accessibility.

WCAG provides dozens of individual success criteria for evaluating the accessibility of a digital experience. These are based on four overarching criteria: perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust.

By this definition, an accessible digital product is one that all people can navigate, interpret, and derive meaningful value from.

# How digital accessibility at the government level contributes to equity for all

There's a reason that federal laws, and some state laws, mandate digital accessibility. Online inclusion is necessary for fairness and justice in today's digital world. Here are a few of the ways that digital accessibility contributes to a more equitable society.

## ▶ Equal access to information

Government organizations are often the most reputable sources of information about issues that urgently affect the public, such as natural disasters and health crises. It's imperative that all people have access to this information for their safety. Additionally, government information regarding legal and political developments can shape how constituents vote, making digital accessibility critical to democracy.

## ▶ Individuals' privacy and security

Many programs run by state and local governments, including public health-care initiatives, process information that is intended to be confidential for individuals' privacy and safety. When the technology associated with these programs isn't accessible, people with certain disabilities may need to rely on another party for support—which entails disclosing sensitive information and may put their security at risk.

## ▶ Fair employment

Most employers today, including government organizations, rely on a range of digital products for their day-to-day operations, as well as to hire new talent. When these products aren't accessible, people with disabilities face significant barriers to professional success—and by extension, to economic security.

## ▶ Building a stronger community

Beyond enabling people with disabilities to hold government jobs, digital accessibility is necessary for people with disabilities to participate in a broad range of government activities. It ensures all individuals have a chance to contribute and give back to their communities. An accessible, inclusive society is resilient and adaptable to change.

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## Follow through on your commitment to DEIA

State and local governments exist to serve **all** their constituents, and inclusive technology is essential for meeting this responsibility. It's also a pillar of fair, non-discriminatory employment practices. Organizations that exclude individuals from public information and services—or create unjust barriers to professional opportunities—risk serious reputational consequences as well as legal consequences in some states.

Addressing digital accessibility doesn't need to be overly time-consuming. As the leading digital accessibility solution provider, Level Access combines advanced software with training and expert managed services to help organizations quickly and cost-effectively create and maintain inclusive digital properties.

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### About Level Access

We have a product that is authorized for use by the federal government through FedRAMP, so it can easily map to state governments' security requirements. Contact our team today to receive a free risk assessment for your organization.



### Request a free risk assessment

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