

What is a Statewide Digital Accessibility Coordinator and Why Does Your State Need One?

The number of Americans above the age of 16 with at least one disability has risen 38 percent in the last decade, according to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#). At the same time, demand for digital services from state government has skyrocketed. The need for digital accessibility—beyond the requirements of [Section 508](#)—is paramount for state government. An information technology (IT) digital accessibility team dedicated to digital accessibility can significantly help states improve and maintain their digital accessibility. There are at least 15 states who have a digital accessibility coordinator role (mostly within the state chief information officer—CIO—office) who heads the digital accessibility team and many more who have plans to create the positions who contributed to this report. Here we will explore the benefits of a digital accessibility team lead.



What does a statewide digital accessibility coordinator do?

Below are several examples of the roles and responsibilities of a statewide digital accessibility coordinator. In general, the role serves as the point person for coordinating state digital accessibility, including:

- Improve access to state programs and services, making interaction with government easier.
- Assess and implement user accessibility and user experience improvements for digital products and services.
- Develop and implement statewide digital accessibility policies, practices and/or strategic plan.
- Audit state websites, social media platforms, portals, applications, internal systems and processes.
- Advocate for accessibility best practices (beyond simply compliance) to state agencies.
- Conduct accessibility training for state employees, provide technical expertise and evangelize the importance of digital accessibility.
- Work with procurement office and vendors to ensure contracted products and services are accessible.
- Collaborate with agencies outside of the CIO office including human resources, state ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) coordinators and EEO (equal opportunity coordinators).
- Digital accessibility coordinator is a generic term to describe this role and titles may vary. Title examples include statewide digital accessibility coordinator, chief IT accessibility officer, chief information accessibility officer.
- Positions can be created at the discretion of the state CIO, via legislation or, as in the case of [Commonwealth of Massachusetts](#), be created via executive order.

Updated Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requires federal agencies to make their electronic and information technology (EIT) accessible to people with disabilities. The law [29 U.S.C § 794 \(d\)](#) applies to all federal agencies when they develop, procure, maintain or use electronic and information technology. State government organizations that receive federal funding are required to have their websites comply with Section 508. There are also several [state laws and policies](#) that mandate accessibility.



Why is this role important?

We asked the NASCIO state IT community why a statewide digital accessibility coordinator role is important and most said the role helps their state address accessibility more consistently and effectively and with empathy and awareness. They also said that the role enables states to integrate digital accessibility proactively and strategically, helping to build organizational maturity. Here is a sampling of what they said:

“Simply put, it’s the right thing to do. When we develop content for groups that are or have historically been overlooked, we improve services for everyone. Creating equitable government services shouldn’t be an afterthought, it should be a motivation for innovation and improvement.”

--Kathryn Michener, Director of User Experience, State of New Hampshire

“Ensuring that digital information in systems used by employees, residents and visitors is easily available to everybody at an equal access level is the right thing to do.”

--Laura Clark, CIO, State of Michigan

Advice for states who don't have the role

We also asked our state IT community for advice for states who don’t have the role but who would like to establish it. (As a side note, for states who don’t have the position but want one, funding seems to be the biggest roadblock to establishing the position). In the absence of a defined statewide accessibility coordinator role, NASCIO members recommend assembling a review team to make sure policies and procedures are where they need to be. They also recommend working with all statewide departments to have consistent policies across the state and documenting the true cost of the position vs. the cost and risk to the state of not having one.

“Keep pushing forward and provide education on why this position is needed. Accessibility is often overlooked in daily work, not from lack of caring but from lack of awareness.”

--Kathryn Michener, Director of User Experience, State of New Hampshire

“Ensure there is leadership support and associate this position with a wider effort to build a digital accessibility program. Enable communication channels within the organization and consult with other states who have this role to identify best practices and where this role may best fit organizationally.”

--Henry Quintal, Digital Accessibility Coordinator, State of Maine

“Find accessibility champions at all levels of the organization to help add accessibility to the work they’re doing so it can be promoted from within. There is no way one person, or one team can do it all.”

--Ellen Strom, Chief Accessibility Officer, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

“In addition to setting statewide policy, ideally the statewide digital accessibility officer role is someone who can build community engagement through collaboration and knowledge sharing, as well as through mentoring agencies’ new accessibility officers.”

--Marie Cohan, Statewide Digital Accessibility Program Administrator, State of Texas

Resources

[Access Illinois: Elevating Accessibility for Residents with Disabilities](#)

[How to Build a Culture of Accessibility with MN Chief Information Accessibility Officer Jay Wyant](#)

[NASCIO Q&A on IT Accessibility](#)

[MA executive order establishing chief IT accessibility officer](#)

[Section508.gov](#)

[The Viscardi Center](#)

[The Bobby Dodd Institute](#)

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About the National Association of State Chief Information Officers

Founded in 1969, the National Association of State Chief Information Officers (NASCIO) represents state chief information officers (CIOs) and information technology (IT) executives and managers from the states, territories and District of Columbia. NASCIO's mission is to foster government excellence through quality business practices, information management and technology policy. NASCIO provides state CIOs and state members with products and services designed to support the challenging role of the state CIO, stimulate the exchange of information and promote the adoption of IT best practices and innovations. From national conferences to peer networking, research and publications, briefings and government affairs, NASCIO is the premier network and resource for state CIOs.