State

Texas

Agency

Texas Department of Information Resources

Award Category

Information and Communications Technology

Project Title

Tex-cessible: Texas-Sized Outreach from State to Nation

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Contact

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Executive Summary

As nearly four million individuals in Texas have disabilities, the Texas Statewide Accessibility Program housed within the Texas Department of Information Resources (DIR) empowers 176 state agencies and institutions of higher education in their efforts to make technology accessible. The program strives to ensure that government services and content are available through multiple ways to ensure that access is not contingent upon a single sense or ability. The Statewide Digital Accessibility Program establishes and directs the statewide digital accessibility strategy and collaborates with state and national IT leaders, public higher education, and vendors to enhance compliance with state and federal digital accessibility regulations and industry best practices.

In April 2024, the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) issued a new federal standard for web accessibility in state and local government. In response, the Statewide Digital Accessibility Program saw an opportunity to create awareness, build a roadmap to compliance, and create a strategy to build statewide and national collaboration with public sector entities. The result of this Texas-sized outreach effort has led to the highest level of community engagement in the history of the statewide program.

Idea

What problem or opportunity does the project address

In April 2024, the DOJ issued a new federal standard for web accessibility in state and local government. The new rule under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was designed to improve state and local government websites and mobile applications by removing barriers to access for people with disabilities. The rule changed the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) industry standard from WCAG 2.0 level AA to WCAG 2.1 level AA, having a significant impact on states. The higher standard introduced several new success criteria that enhance accessibility, particularly focusing on users with cognitive and mobility disabilities and mobile applications. Aside from the technological impact, an additional problem with the new rule was a lack of awareness within state and local governments. Additionally, the new rule impacted K-12 schools who lacked clear web accessibility compliance requirements beforehand.

Why does it matter?

Population statistics for people with disabilities are **28.7 percent of Americans** (97 million people) and **12 percent of Texans** (3.7 million people). People with disabilities (both adults and students) rely on their public entities' websites as the first point of contact and access via computer, smartphone, or tablet. To help address the needs of these Texans, DIR began working and collaborating with state and local governments, educating and providing guidance for the new rule and how to implement the new standard.

The rationale for building connection among public entities in Texas and nationally was to address the knowledge and skill gap highlighted by the rule change. By improving collaboration and creating channels for communication and knowledge sharing, DIR was able to support residents' access to public sector websites, mitigate risks of non-compliance with the new rule, and promote economic development. Accessible websites serve both the residents and the government of the state.

Impacts from delayed action include risk exposure associated with non-compliance, such as legal actions from the federal government and the private sector. Legal investigations carry administrative costs of public information requests, employee time redirected for discovery, attorney's fees, fines, and the cost of remediating non-compliant technology reactively. Texas is a large state with over 100 state agencies; 128 institutions of higher education; over 1,200 school districts; 254 counties; almost 1,500 incorporated cities, towns, and villages; and almost 3,000 special districts, according to the latest census data.

An additional rationale is the economic benefit to state and local entities. For example, Texas is a business-friendly state with small businesses operated by people with disabilities. Those businesses transact with state and local governments, generating revenue via taxes, fines, permitting fees, administrative fees, and other forms of revenue. Institutions of higher education that provide accessible technology (websites, course materials, digital libraries) are a draw for students with disabilities who will attend these schools knowing they have a better chance of academic success. This compliance then increases the institutions' revenue through tuition, fees, housing, and food services.

What makes it different?

In January 2024, the Statewide Digital Accessibility program added a weekly office hour for state agencies and institutions of higher education. This weekly informal meeting has received positive feedback, and average weekly attendance grew from 18 attendees in 2024 to 32 in 2025. Attendees report that they like having the ability to collaborate with their state peers and that they appreciate the focused attention from DIR to answer their questions and provide clarification. Texas also coordinated with the ADA Southwest Region in November 2024 to host a question-and-answer session regarding the new rule. This session included several other states and helped the ADA Southwest Region to develop a frequently-asked-questions sheet to share locally and nationally.

Seeing the need to include Texas local government, in January 2025, both state and local government entities in Texas were invited to attend monthly statewide digital accessibility meetings. The goal was to bring state and local employees together to share consistent messaging and align compliance methodologies. To date, 300 state and local employees have registered to attend the meetings. These meetings include guest speakers and open forums for attendees to ask questions, share, and learn from each other. Local governments make up 15 percent of the meeting attendees, with DIR seeing an increase in direct communications from local entities. Monthly meeting surveys, which have a 38 percent response rate, have comments

showing gratitude and praise from attendees, and 98 percent agree that the meetings are informative and that the presenters are knowledgeable.

Local government employees were also invited to join the DIR Digital Accessibility mailing list and a private Microsoft Teams site where state and local employees can collaborate in real-time, access training materials, share resources (such as templates, policies, and tools), and receive educational materials on digital accessibility best practices.

DIR provided personalized training and information sessions for agencies upon request, supplied a roadmap to compliance with the DOJ Title II rule, and presented at six local conferences in Texas. These conferences included IT and procurement attendees from state and local agencies, higher education, and K-12.

Texas is quickly becoming a leader in the nation for its digital accessibility community-building and its digital accessibility maturity. What sets Texas apart is the bespoke approach to customer interaction and inclusion, elevating customer experience and supporting their individual projects to implement the new industry standard.

What makes it universal?

The new DOJ Title II rule impacts all US states and territories, and they all have the same compliance deadline of April 24, 2026. Digital accessibility also made the 2025 Chief Information Officer Top Ten Priorities list for the first time prompting the National Association of Chief Information Officers to create an IT Accessibility working group for state members. DIR holds a seat on the Digital Accessibility Multi-State Collaborative and leveraged that group to prompt other states to adopt a unified approach to push information out, not only to state entities, but also to local entities. This prompted the group to work with the National Association of State Technology Directors and request that they host a session specific to digital accessibility and the new DOJ Title II Rule. DIR suggested that state accessibility officers work with procurement administrators because it's a proactive way to ensure government is procuring compliant technology products and services.

Additionally, DIR increased outreach and collaboration nationally, recruiting nine states to join the Multi-State Digital Accessibility Collaborative, speaking at four national and state conferences outside of Texas, and building relationships with the ADA Southwest Region, national civil rights lawyers, and industry experts.

Implementation

What was the roadmap?

This project was under Texas' Digital Accessibility Program at DIR. Functions under the program include rulemaking, statewide outreach, training, compliance support, a web scanning program,

enterprise procurement evaluations, and representing DIR and the state of Texas at the state and national level.

The project management approach leveraged an agile methodology, allowing the project to cover multiple functions simultaneously. This approach allowed the program to cast a wide net in messaging and deploying resources.

Project assessment will be measured in the 2026 Information Resources Deployment Review (a biennial survey providing data on statewide compliance with technology rules). Successful implementation includes a reduction in questions and agencies deploying their own projects to build new—or update their existing—websites. The current Texas legislative session received budget requests specific to the new rule, and a new web accessibility bill is currently awaiting the Governor's signature. DIR provided input on this bill. Additionally, U.S. Representative Pete Sessions, from Texas, introduced a bill at the federal level to establish uniform accessibility standards for websites and applications.

Who was involved?

Stakeholder Groups	Role
Legal and Finance Subject Matter Experts (Agency Staff)	Advisors
Government Relations (Agency Staff)	Advocacy
Executive Leadership (Agency Staff)	Advocacy and Oversight
National Group (State Leaders)	Advocates and Advisors
Professional Organizations	Advocates
Vendors	Advocates and Implementation
Texans	Beneficiaries
IT and Procurement (Agency Staff)	End-user
Statewide Digital Accessibility Program (Agency Staff)	Implementation and Advocates
State and Local Agencies	Implementation and End-user
Universities and Junior Colleges	Implementation and End-user
Legislative Bodies	Oversight and Implementation
Federal Agencies (ADA, US Access Board, General Services Administration)	Oversight and Training

Communication was leveraged using multiple modalities such as digital tools, in-person opportunities, and a knowledge repository. Stakeholder buy-in outside of DIR was generated organically due to the shared need to comply with the rule. Internal buy-in was achieved using data, risk assessments, and conversations around the compliance requirements and economic benefits.

Legal advisors and experts were contacted once the DOJ rule was published. They were instrumental in understanding and interpreting the rule. They also helped ensure that messaging was consistent with the rule. Agency procurement and IT experts were end users and subject matter experts. Executive leadership advocated for the project and provided oversight, while legislative contacts and legislators reviewed policy changes and fiscal requests.

State and local governments leveraged meetings, knowledge sharing, bespoke training, and presentations. Vendors are being trained in policy and technical requirements. They also provided training for state and local governments via the monthly meetings and DIR's Technology Today Series.

The national group provided expertise and shared individual state laws, rules, and policies for compliance. The group is a way to align methodologies, policies, and messaging across individual states. Federal experts provided supplemental information and resources.

Conferences and organizations provided a way to reach more entities and spread messaging.

How did you do it?

Resources for this project included people and organizations such as:

- Digital accessibility experts from the federal government, state leadership, and industry;
- Financial, legal, procurement, IT, and government relations agency staff;
- Professional organizations, vendors, and non-profits; and
- Vendors.

Organizational architecture, policy, and industry standards for digital accessibility were the foundational components for this project.

Impact

What did the project make better?

The purpose of this project was to build collaboration among state and local governments, generating awareness and instilling action to prepare for the new rule. The rule increased the compliance level for websites, mobile applications, web applications, and e-documents. The new level presented a significant level of effort for state and local governments to achieve compliance. Additionally, most of these public entities only have two years to comply.

The need for awareness was key. Many local governments were unaware of the new standard. K-12 schools now had a clear requirement replacing ambiguous regulations from the past. State governments with immature digital accessibility programs had no idea where to start and federated states like Texas had agencies who did not understand the requirements in the rule.

Connecting these entities through a collaborative approach leveraging multiple resources and communications channels has increased awareness and launched compliance projects around the state and the country. The benefits of this project for public entities are:

- Risk mitigation from legal actions due to non-compliance;
- Cost savings to the public entity on legal fees, lost productivity, and remediation costs; and

- Better resident experience when interacting with government websites.

How do you know?

Feedback has been positive and engagement through the various communication channels continues to grow. To date there are 300 registered attendees for the monthly meetings, and attendance is up 150 percent from last year. The Mutli-State Collaborative has added eight states in the past 18 months, and monthly attendance and engagement is up in that group as well.

DIR has received the following feedback from state and local governments (January 2025 - May 2025):

- *"Love having sessions like this! Super informative and easy to follow as a newcomer to the accessibility team!"*

- *"These webinars provide useful information. I appreciate the DIR staff for hosting."*

- *"Thanks for arranging the speaker, very informative. It's always great to get info about our path forward including legislative updates."*

- *"It gave me a good framework to pursue a better approach to accessibility at my institution."*

- *"I'll try to encourage participation by more school districts who may be uninformed and/or unprepared for compliance with DOJ rules."*

- *"Very informative meeting, great value for our county. Thank you."*

- *"Great to have these open sessions for Q&A. The interaction is very valuable.*

What now?

There are still 11 months left until the compliance deadline. States need to update their rules and policies; agencies are working to implement the new standard and train their teams. This community will continue to be a resource for each other, sharing templates and policies, and supporting each other when issues arise. The initial and ongoing investment in this project is time. There was no increased cost or technology expansion to inform the public entities and build the community. The time investment has built trusted relationships and expedited learning and action. It has created consistency and aligned messaging across a broad network. This project is a great example of how government entities can do more by listening to their customers and doing what's right for their residents. Compliance and improved technology experiences are the natural benefit from building these relationships and strengthening these communities. This approach supports the current government shift to be more efficient with resources by working smarter.