



Procuring Accessible Technology

What States and District Leaders Need to Know

“States, districts, and post-secondary institutions should develop and implement learning resources that embody the flexibility and power of technology to create equitable and accessible learning ecosystems that make learning possible everywhere and all the time for all students. Whether creating learning resources internally, drawing on collaborative networks, or using traditional procurement procedures, institutions should insist on the use of resources and the design of learning experiences that use UD practices to ensure accessibility and increased equity of learning opportunities” (2016 National Education Technology Plan, 22).

What do we mean by “accessible technologies”?

Accessibility ensures both equal access and equal opportunity for your audience, whether students, parents, educators, or other stakeholders. Equal access and equal opportunity to content, programs, resources, and learning platforms is a legal obligation, but also it ensures that your content is usable by all. Accessible technologies might include

- **Websites**
- **Online learning portals and platforms**
- **Videos posted online**
- **Digital textbooks and e-book readers**
- **Student or parent portals for scheduling, billing, or notifications**

Accessible technologies are those that people with disabilities can navigate, perceive, understand, and interact with and designers must consider physical, visual, speech, auditory, neurological, and cognitive disabilities.

Why is it so important to ensure that the technology we purchase be accessible?

Beyond the legal requirement to provide accessible content, learning materials that are inaccessible are limited in their ability to support diverse learning needs and students with disabilities, often requiring costly accommodations. Beginning with materials that are accessible saves staff the time and money of trying to retrofit inaccessible content to meet student needs and obey the law. For example, a student with a vision impairment who is taking an online course in an inaccessible platform would need to wait for an aide or support staff to read the content instead of being able to access materials independently. The cost and time involved in finding someone to support the student could have been saved using an online learning platform that was accessible from the start. Finally, accessibility features offer benefits to all your users—the ability to

magnify text, hear text read aloud, turn captions on, and change settings are features that make digital content more user-friendly and improve the learning experience for all students.

What can state and district leaders do?

Although advances in technology have created many new opportunities for students with disabilities, not all digital content is accessible. Purchased and teacher- or district-created content must be carefully reviewed and evaluated to ensure that it is not creating barriers for users with disabilities. State and local education leaders need to shift toward being proactive about accessibility, not reactive when problems arise. Being proactive begins with making accessible technology and resources an institutionwide priority and creating systems for addressing accessibility issues, including the purchasing and acquisition process for new technologies. Key steps to consider include the following:

- **Research accessibility legislation and ensure that all staff understand their legal responsibility to provide accessible learning materials and resources.**
- **Let developers and publishers know that you expect digital textbooks, resources, and learning materials to be built according to industry accessibility standards and ensure that this language is included in all vendor contracts.**
- **Make reviewing for accessibility an integral part of your purchasing and procurement of new technologies.**
- **Build staff capacity around accessibility features and considerations when selecting or developing content.**
- **Set institutionwide expectations that accessibility is mandatory and is everyone's responsibility.**

Suggested resources

Accessibility Contract Language FAQs (State of Massachusetts)

<http://www.mass.gov/anf/research-and-tech/policies-legal-and-technical-guidance/legal-guidance/procurement-forms-and-boiler-plate-lang/accessibility-for-it-solutions-contract-language.html>

The Accessibility of Learning Content for All Students, Including Students With Disabilities, Must Be Addressed in the Shift to Digital Instructional Materials (SETDA Policy Brief:)

http://www.setda.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/SETDA_PolicyBrief_Accessibility_FNL.5.29.pdf

Accessibility Standards, Specifications and Guidelines

http://aem.cast.org/creating/accessibility-standards-specifications-guidelines.html#.Vs3st_krLIU

Buy Accessible: What to Look For in Ebooks

<http://benetech.org/our-programs/literacy/born-accessible/accessible-ebooks-what-to-look-for/>

Critical Components of Quality Indicators for AIM

<http://aem.cast.org/policies/critical-components-quality-indicators.html#.Vs3t7vkrLIU>

A Guide to Accessible Purchasing (Temple University)

<https://accessibility.temple.edu/guide-accessible-purchasing>

The PALM Initiative

<http://aem.cast.org/navigating/palm.html>

Procuring Accessible IT (University of Washington)

<http://www.washington.edu/accessibility/procurement/>

To Care and Comply: Accessibility of Online Course Content

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eks3r-nE9IU>

Procuring Accessible Technology is Part II of the four-part *Digital Accessibility Toolkit: What Education Leaders Need to Know*. Be sure to view the other three parts of the toolkit and its supplementary infographics, using the links below. See the complete Toolkit [here](#).

- **Part I: What Is Accessibility?**
- **Part III: Benefits of Digital Accessibility**
- **Part VI: Legal Requirements of Digital Accessibility**
- **Infographic: Getting Started with Accessibility**
- **Infographic: 5 Things to Know About Your Role in Ensuring Accessibility**

About CoSN

CoSN is the premier voice and resource for K-12 education technology leaders nationwide. Serving more than 11 million students in America's school systems, CoSN provides education leaders with the tools and relationships to leverage technology and advance modern, engaging learning environments. Visit cosn.org to find out more about CoSN's [focus areas](#), [annual conference and events](#), [advocacy and policy](#), [membership](#), and the [CETL certification exam](#).

About CTD

The Center on Technology and Disability (CTD) is a user-centered learning and technical assistance website designed to increase the capacity of families, school systems, technical assistance providers, SEA and LEA leaders, and other key stakeholders to understand, assess, acquire, and implement appropriate assistive and instructional technology strategies and tools. CTD is administered by FHI 360, American Institutes for Research, PACER Center, and Adirondack Accessibility. Learn more: www.ctdinstitute.org.

About AIR

American Institutes for Research, in partnership with FHI360 on CTD, provides technical assistance to state and district leaders to support their efforts to integrate assistive and instructional technology strategies and tools. Established in 1946, with headquarters in Washington, D.C., the American Institutes for Research (AIR) is a nonpartisan, not-for-profit organization that conducts behavioral and social science research and delivers technical assistance both domestically and internationally in the areas of health, education, and workforce productivity. For more information, visit www.air.org.