

State of Kansas IT Accessibility Program

Background

Information technology (IT) is now a vital part of many aspects of everyday life, including government services. Many government workers of varying ages, skills, and occupations depend on access to computer systems to perform their daily work. In turn, more and more government services and information are being delivered electronically over the World Wide Web via a growing array of devices (smartphones, tablets, laptops, kiosks). While electronic service delivery presents many opportunities for greater access, technology may also erect unintentional barriers for some users. The State of Kansas must ensure that access to its information and communications technologies and systems is equitable and inclusive for everyone, including people with disabilities.

The State has had a policy¹ in place since 2000 that requires all State organizations to comply with a hybrid of internationally accepted and federally mandated web content accessibility guidelines. Implementation of this policy was initially supported by the State's Web Accessibility Subcommittee (WAS), a diverse group of volunteers from State agencies, Regents institutions, and the accessibility advocacy community. As the effort matured, the WAS undertook a strategic planning effort to determine the actions and resources needed to improve the effectiveness of the State's IT accessibility efforts.

The resulting recommendations include:

- Increased emphasis on leadership and guidance by policy makers, as well as high-level sponsorship and support of the effort
- Institution of programs for ongoing communication, training, and support
- A performance focus, putting tools in place to both support developers and to assess compliance on an ongoing basis
- An investment in full-time staffing to lead and support the program

As a result of this planning effort, in January 2008, the position of Director of IT Accessibility

was created within the Department of Administration. In addition, the Kansas Partnership for Accessible Technology (KPAT),² a high-level board composed of senior program and policy leaders, was formed in December 2008 to oversee a renewed program that was sponsored by both the administration and throughout State government.

Scope

The goal of the State IT accessibility program is to provide the leadership, policy direction, and support necessary to make all State of Kansas content and services delivered through information and communications technologies accessible to everyone, including people with disabilities. The breadth of this goal and the wide range of impacted systems, organizations, and activities require a high degree of participation, cooperation, and support throughout State government.

Successful implementation involves several dimensions:

- *Governance*: Setting, promulgating, and maintaining policy and standards; understanding legal liability and responsibilities
- *Assistance*: Providing consulting, training, documentation, and support for implementers, both technical (e.g., for web developers) and relating to process (e.g., specifying requirements for third-party developed systems or services.)
- *Communication*: Advocacy for affected constituent groups; raising and maintaining awareness of the issues, requirements, and solutions; promoting the initiative; listening to concerns; and championing successes
- *Assessment*: Monitoring compliance, establishing accountability, reporting progress to stakeholders and oversight groups.

Governance

The IT accessibility program is driven primarily by the KPAT, an independent partnership of stakeholders in IT accessibility established by

Executive Order of the Governor.³ The KPAT coordinates and oversees the activity of the program as a whole, provides stakeholder input and guidance, endorses policies, and takes a leadership role in promoting the effort throughout State government. The membership of the Partnership is diverse, including agency decision-makers; representatives from disability community advocacy, support, and service organizations; IT officers; and other interested parties. It participates in the State IT governance structure⁴ and works closely with other related groups like the Information Network of Kansas, vets proposals through the IT community via the Information Technology Advisory Board, and advises the Information Technology Executive Council. Ad hoc committees, generally consisting of personnel from the organizations represented in the KPAT who have interest and expertise concerning the subject at hand, take up tasks relating to individual initiatives.

Initiatives

While many topics will warrant the attention of the program over time, its initial focus is on web accessibility. In this effort, five areas of work have been identified:

- *Requirements:* In 2009, the State of Kansas Web Accessibility Requirements policy was revised, in large part to reflect a recent, major revision to one of the two influential standards from which the State requirements are derived. Pertinent advances in technology and changes in federal accessibility standards are continually monitored, and this policy is reviewed annually and modified as required to ensure the State is fully up-to-date and in step with the rest of the industry.
- *Communication:* Work is ongoing to develop and implement a communication plan to build a common awareness of the program and solicit ongoing feedback to help shape and improve the work.
- *Training:* Developing a comprehensive and far-reaching program of training and resources for developers is essential.
- *Monitoring:* To broadly scan and evaluate web content for compliance with accessibility requirements, an enterprise assessment tool

was recently selected and is being made available, through grant funding, to all State of Kansas employees, contractors, and vendors that are working on State of Kansas projects. While not a panacea, such a tool is invaluable in quantifying progress, providing consistent metrics, and providing implementers resources for testing and feedback during development.

- *Procurement:* Just as important as support for State developers is recognizing that many systems are developed outside the State by third-party vendors and brought in either as commercial off-the-shelf software or custom development. State agencies also contract with third-parties to provide web-based services directly to their customers. In all such cases, the end product must be held to the same accessibility standards as the State's other offerings. To this end, specification of accessibility requirements and review and verification of compliance have been formally integrated into the State's IT project planning procedures. The IT accessibility program will likewise continue to examine other ways to ensure that accessibility requirements are included in the purchasing process, from requirement specifications to contract language to vendor communications and education.

Contact Information

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¹ Information Technology Policy 1210: State of Kansas Web Accessibility Requirements

(<http://da.ks.gov/kito/itec/Policies/itecitpolicy1210.htm>)

² Kansas Partnership for Accessible Technology
(<http://da.ks.gov/kpat/>)

³ Executive Order 08-12
(<http://www.kslib.info/executive/documents/EO%2008-12.pdf>)

⁴ IT Governance Model (http://da.ks.gov/kito/Documents/ITGovModel_11_2005.pdf)