

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-24-107031](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Federal agencies provide services through ICT, such as websites, electronic documents, and kiosks. If ICT is not accessible, millions of Americans who have a disability may be unable to access these services. Section 508 is intended to make federal ICT accessible, but GSA and others have reported that federal ICT accessibility has been a persistent challenge.

GSA recently published its first annual *Assessment*, based on self-reported information from 249 agencies and sub-agencies. OMB also issued guidance to federal agencies on Section 508 ICT accessibility. Further, DOJ is required to issue reports on the topic every 2 years. GAO was asked to review GSA's *Assessment* and OMB's guidance, and how agency implementation of this guidance is tracked.

This report (1) summarizes GSA's *Assessment* and OMB's guidance; and (2) describes how OMB tracks agencies' implementation of its guidance, and the roles of GSA, DOJ, and the Access Board in tracking guidance implementation. The Access Board is a small federal agency responsible for setting standards for agency compliance with Section 508 and providing technical assistance.

GAO reviewed and analyzed GSA's *Assessment* and OMB's guidance, and interviewed officials from GSA, DOJ, OMB, and the Access Board. In addition, GAO reviewed other agency documentation and relevant federal laws and guidance.

View [GAO-24-107031](#). For more information, contact Elizabeth H. Curda at (202) 512-7215 or curdae@gao.gov.

September 2024

FEDERAL ACCESSIBILITY

OMB Is Tracking Agency Implementation of Its Guidance on Information and Communication Technology

What GAO Found

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requires federal agencies to develop, procure, maintain, and use information and communication technology (ICT) that is accessible to people with disabilities. However, in December 2023 the General Services Administration's (GSA) *Governmentwide Section 508 Assessment* reported low compliance with federal ICT accessibility requirements and made recommendations to agencies. In the same month, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) published guidance for agencies that included recommendations, expectations, and requirements. GSA's *Assessment* and OMB's guidance generally fit in four categories:

- **Managing ICT accessibility programs.** According to GSA's *Assessment*, 48 percent of agencies reported they had no formal ICT accessibility program, or it was in development. OMB required that agencies establish Section 508 programs with appropriate resources, such as staff, technology, and tools.
- **Building knowledge.** GSA found that 50 percent of agencies reported that their ICT staff sometimes or never had sufficient knowledge to ensure that accessibility requirements were met. GSA recommended and OMB set an expectation that agencies develop training plans for staff.
- **Creating accessible ICT.** GSA reported that 53 percent of agencies that procure ICT did not always verify that procured ICT met accessibility requirements. Both GSA and OMB recommended that agencies use available tools to incorporate ICT accessibility requirements into the contracting process.
- **Monitoring accessibility.** GSA found that 44 percent of agencies reported they lacked formal written policies and procedures to process and resolve complaints related to ICT accessibility. OMB required that by March 2024, agencies establish or update their public feedback mechanisms for complaints.

Examples of Considerations for Information and Communication Technology Accessibility



Include alt text for images that describes any information that is communicated visually



Include text transcriptions for audio-only files for people to read along



Make websites navigable using only a keyboard

Source: GAO analysis of information from the World Wide Web Consortium and www.Section508.gov. | [GAO-24-107031](#)

OMB staff said they have started to track the implementation of its requirements with deadlines that have passed. They also will use three mechanisms to continue tracking implementation: 1) agencies' responses to questions in GSA's *Assessment*, 2) desk officer reviews of selected agencies' ICT programs, and 3) reviews of agencies' ICT budget requests to ensure they are appropriately prioritizing accessibility. Officials at the Access Board, GSA, and the Department of Justice (DOJ) stated they do not have direct roles in ensuring that agencies implement OMB's guidance, but that their ongoing responsibilities related to ICT accessibility will likely support agencies' implementation.