DITAP Refresh Project

Audit Findings Report

Delivered in partnership by

CivicActions

Experience Institute

TandemGov

About this report

This report presents the findings of a comprehensive curriculum audit for the Digital Information Technology Acquisition Professional Training Program (DITAP).

Conducted by CivicActions in partnership with Experience Institute (Ei) and TandemGov, the audit was commissioned by the United States Digital Service (USDS), as part of a large-scale curriculum redesign project (DITAP Refresh) to ensure that DITAP remains an innovative, adaptable, and future-proof training model for federal procurement professionals.

The report outlines the project's background, mission, and vision, along with an executive summary of the audit process and purpose. Following that, it provides an overview of the audit methodology, detailed findings and actionable recommendations that set the stage for the upcoming curriculum design phase.

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Background

The DITAP program was established to bridge the gap between traditional procurement training and the specialized skills required to acquire and manage digital services effectively.

DITAP equips government procurement professionals with the skills needed to navigate digital services acquisitions through agile practices, human-centered design (HCD), and iterative development.

DITAP enables federal procurement professionals to deliver modern, citizen-focused public services with greater efficiency and transparency by fostering inter-agency and cross-agency collaboration, driving innovation in procurement practices, and aligning with federal mandates such as the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) and the Office of Federal Procurement Policy (OFPP) guidance.

Originally developed in 2015 in response to a challenge by OFPP and USDS, the program has trained nearly 1000 federal professionals across six training providers.

While DITAP has achieved notable success, the rapidly evolving nature of technology and procurement demands an updated curriculum to maintain relevance, impact, and government efficiency.

Through this audit, DITAP aims to address outdated content, refine its learning methodologies, and enhance its accessibility, to ensure it continues to empower procurement professionals to deliver high-quality digital services efficiently.

DITAP Refresh Project Mission

To transform how federal agencies acquire and deliver digital services by equipping procurement professionals with the skills, mindset, and tools to navigate the complexities of modern acquisition.

DITAP Refresh Project Vision

To establish DITAP as an open-source learning model that is scalable, adaptable, and future-proof—fostering continuous learning and innovation across the federal procurement landscape.

DITAP Refresh Project Values

The project centers around the following values:

- **Collaboration:** building an inclusive community of contributors and stakeholders
- **Transparency:** ensuring open governance and open-source learning model
- **Innovation:** ensuring experiential learning and deliver improved digital outcomes that keep pace with innovation and emerging technologies
- **Adaptability:** enabling the curriculum to evolve with changing technologies and needs
- **Impact:** enabling the government to be a better buyer of digital services

Executive Summary

Overview of the Audit Process

The DITAP curriculum audit is a foundational step in modernizing and future-proofing the program. This initiative supports the USDS' vision of creating an open-source learning model that is scalable, adaptable and responsive to the evolving needs of federal procurement professionals.

The curriculum audit was designed to evaluate the program, ensuring its continued relevance and effectiveness in equipping federal procurement professionals to meet the evolving needs of the field. A team of curriculum designers, accessibility experts, and subject matter experts conducted a structured review of the program's materials and delivery mechanisms

This included examining all course content and supporting resources, such as PowerPoint slides for in-class sessions, facilitator agendas, self-study materials available on the learning management system (LMS), scenarios, projects, assessments, and case studies, to evaluate their accuracy, relevance, and alignment with modern procurement challenges.

The audit team reviewed all the links to references and cited materials, evaluated each case study, and flagged outdated or incorrect resources. Additionally, the team investigated current assessment methodologies used by DITAP providers to understand how different approaches work for learners and graduates.

The Audit Process Workflow

The audit process followed a well-defined workflow, incorporating specific roles and a ticketing system in a USDS <u>GitHub repository</u> to ensure thorough evaluation and comprehensive coverage.

Following an Agile approach, the audit team iteratively reviewed and refined the process, making adjustments when gaps or inefficiencies were identified.

This flexibility helped ensure the audit remained effective and responsive to findings.

The key areas of focus included:

- **Core learning objectives:** evaluating their relevance and alignment with the Learning Design Document (LDD) maintained by USDS and the DITAP mission.
- **Course materials:** reviewing slides, facilitator guides, self-study materials hosted on the LMS and other instructional resources.
- **Supporting resources:** accessing case studies, scenarios, assessments and references provided in the materials including required or optional readings.
- **Assessment methodologies:** assessing the evaluation tools and approaches used including knowledge checks and project-based evaluations.
- **Accessibility standards:** reviewing compliance with Section 508 WCAG standards.

This approach to the audit lays the groundwork for updating the DITAP curriculum, addressing identified gaps, enhancing accessibility, and integrating innovative instructional methods.

Key Findings

The Findings section of this report focuses on the results of the audit, which was designed to modernize and future-proof the program. Key findings include:

Curriculum Design

While learning objectives were generally effective, assessments need updates, and content accuracy requires substantial revision due to outdated information. Hands-on skill practice varied throughout the course, with later releases offering more opportunities.

User Experience

Formatting was simple but could be clearer. Cognitive load was mostly manageable, but some areas were text-heavy. Spelling and grammar were acceptable, though plain language usage was inconsistent. Link functionality was problematic, and accessibility issues were present.

Digital Services and Procurement Practices

The curriculum needs to reflect modern practices and incorporate lessons from successful procurements. Competencies require streamlining and updating, and outdated content needs replacing with current information and trends. Misalignment with the intended audience was noted, with some content being too tactical and others lacking specificity.

Case Study Approach and Outdated Content

Case studies are valuable but need to be updated with modern examples. Outdated content, especially regarding cloud technologies, procurement strategies, and emerging areas like AI and ML, needs to be revised.

Key Findings Continued

The audit emphasizes the need to update and modernize the DITAP curriculum to align with current practices and better serve the needs of federal procurement professionals.

By providing key findings and actionable recommendations, this comprehensive audit lays the groundwork for a refreshed DITAP program that is better aligned with modern procurement practices. It aims to enhance accessibility, foster experiential learning and ensure federal procurement professionals are empowered to deliver high-quality digital services efficiently.

These findings and insights will guide the upcoming Design Phase, ensuring DITAP continues to be a transformative force in federal procurement.

Actionable Recommendations

The audit team identified the following recommendations for consideration:

- Update outdated content and links
- Ensure content aligns with current government regulations
- Create more engaging and interactive content
- Incorporate scenario-based learning and gamification
- Emphasize collaboration and peer-to-peer learning
- Prioritize accessibility, comply with Section 508, and adhere to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)
- Modernize the learning experience through innovative tools and techniques
- Align curriculum with current needs while anticipating future skills
- Develop comprehensive assessment strategies
- Ensure clear communication and expectations for learners and instructors
- Establish a feedback loop for continuous improvement

Objectives

Why is the audit being conducted?

The audit is the first step in addressing the need to refresh the DITAP curriculum. It responds to changes in digital services procurement practices and challenges, rapidly evolving technologies, and the needs of the federal government. It also evaluates outdated content, tools, and resources to ensure alignment with federal mandates and agency requirements.

The audit aims to:

- Evaluate the curriculum's relevance and alignment with modern procurement practices and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence.

- Identify gaps and opportunities to better support the federal workforce acquiring digital services effectively.

- Create a starting point for an open-source curriculum that fosters continuous improvement and scalability.

Audit objectives

The curriculum audit was conducted to ensure the DITAP training program remains a modern, relevant, and effective training program for federal procurement professionals. While procurement practices and technologies have advanced over the past decade, the curriculum has remained unchanged.

The lack of updates has created a gap between training provided by DITAP and real-world needs of today's federal procurement professionals. Emerging technologies and modern methodologies have been critical in digital services acquisition, yet they are not adequately reflected in the current curriculum.

By aligning the curriculum with current procurement challenges, technologies, and experiential learning methods, the audit acts as a springboard for the program's continued success, scalability, and adaptability in an evolving landscape.

Conducted by CivicActions (CA) in collaboration with Experience Institute (Ei) and TandemGov, the audit aligns with a broader mission to foster transformative learning experiences, improve digital acquisition outcomes, and build a community of change ambassadors equipped for 21st century challenges.

What are the specific goals of the audit?

The following objectives were established for the DITAP curriculum audit to ensure alignment with the overarching goals of the program redesign:

1 **Evaluate alignment with program goals**: Assess the curriculum's alignment with the program's mission to equip federal procurement professionals with the skills, behaviors, and knowledge necessary for effective digital service acquisition.

2 **Review current course materials**
   a. Review current course materials: Assess all course materials, facilitator resources, and case studies for accuracy, relevance, and accessibility.
   b. Assess whether materials align with the knowledge and skills required for modern digital service acquisitions.
   c. Identify outdated or broken links and resources

3 **Identify gaps and opportunities**: Highlight gaps or outdated elements in the curriculum and identify areas where innovative instructional methods, modern tools, and experiential learning practices can be incorporated.

4 **Incorporate accessibility**: Review materials and delivery systems for compliance with Section 508 and Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) to ensure inclusivity for all learners.

5 **Provide actionable recommendations**: Develop clear, prioritized recommendations for curriculum updates and enhancements, setting the stage for the upcoming curriculum redesign phase.

How does the audit support the overall program's success?

Achieving the objectives of the audit will directly contribute to the success of the DITAP program by:

1. **Keeping content relevant:** updating the curriculum to reflect current and future procurement challenges.
2. **Improving learning outcomes:** incorporating experiential learning approaches to foster deeper engagement and improving skills.
3. **Supporting growth and scalability:** allowing the curriculum to be adapted for different roles or job functions.
4. **Fostering innovation:** establishing a system for regular updates, making the curriculum adaptable to future changes.

Scope

60%
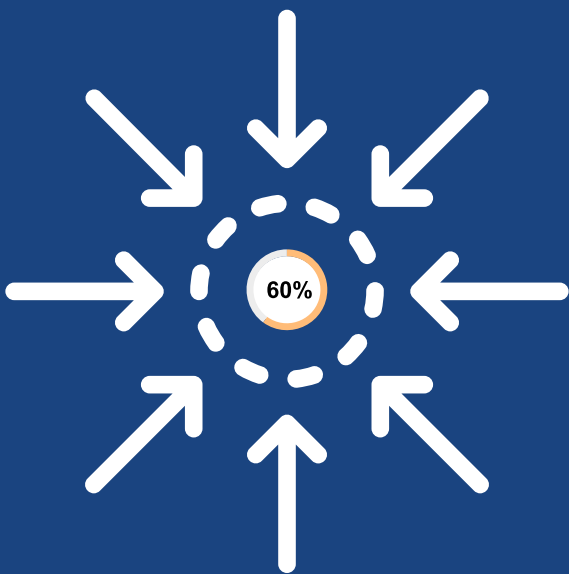
The DITAP curriculum audit focuses on evaluating the core program materials developed and maintained by the USDS. This core curriculum accounts for approximately 60% of the content delivered by DITAP providers, forming the foundational framework that all vendors utilize in training.

The audit assesses the relevance, accuracy, accessibility, and alignment of these materials with core learning objectives identified during the formation of the DITAP program.

Focus areas

Given that approximately 40% of the DITAP curriculum is designed by vendors, the audit concentrates solely on the standardized, shared curriculum maintained by USDS. This includes:

- **Core learning objectives**: Evaluating their alignment with the Learning Design Document (LDD) maintained by USDS and the DITAP mission.
- **Course materials**: Reviewing slides, facilitator guides, self-study materials hosted on the LMS, and other instructional resources.
- **Supporting resources**: Accessing case studies, scenarios, assessments, and references provided in the materials including required or optional readings.
- **Assessment methodologies**: Assessing the evaluation tools and approaches used, including knowledge checks and project-based evaluations.
- **Accessibility standards:** Reviewing compliance with Section 508 and WCAG standards.

What's not included?

The audit focuses exclusively on the materials that make up the USDS-maintained core curriculum. The audit does not encompass the approximately 40% of the content uniquely created or modified by individual DITAP vendors to customize their delivery of the program. This includes:

1. **Vendor specific content**: Proprietary materials developed by individual vendors to enhance the course, and facilitator-specific modifications used in delivery of the program.
2. **Delivery mechanisms**: Teaching styles, a unique format or tools introduced by vendors to meet their specific program delivery needs.

The audit also did not include classroom observations or interviews with facilitators, meaning the review is limited to the instructional materials provided. Although members of the audit team are also facilitators of the DITAP program, limited responses from other facilitators and a short time frame restricted our ability to gather further feedback.

This audit represents a structured review of the core curriculum and does not attempt to assess the full spectrum of what is delivered by DITAP providers. While the audit establishes a baseline understanding of the program's foundational elements, it recognizes that vendors may have created diverse interpretations and implementations of the DITAP curriculum. This limitation is acknowledged to ensure transparency in the audit's scope and methodology.

By focusing on the USDS-maintained core curriculum, the audit provides actionable insights for modernizing the curriculum while allowing for future collaborative efforts with vendors to enhance consistency and scalability across the broader DITAP ecosystem.

Limitations of the audit

The following limitations were noted when conducting the audit:

- The audit did not include live classroom observation or interviews with facilitators, making it challenging to evaluate how materials are presented and used in practice.
- Facilitator materials did not include speaker notes, making it difficult for auditors, especially procurement subject matter experts (SMEs), to assess the full instructional intent of these resources.
- Achievement of learning objectives: It was challenging to assess whether learning objectives are fully achieved in scenarios and activities without observing live courses.

- Exclusion of vendor-specific content (40%): The audit focuses exclusively on the core curriculum and does not account for vendor-specific content.
- Current participants were not surveyed to gain insights into the efficacy of the program in real world applications.

These limitations highlight areas that can be addressed during Phase 2, Design Phase.

Methodology

Summary

The curriculum audit was a comprehensive effort led by a multidisciplinary team of government professionals, contractors, and subject matter experts (SMEs) with expertise in acquisition, facilitation, curriculum design, and user experience.

The team reviewed 178 learning assets, including instructional slide decks, in-class activities, self-paced materials, and participant resources, to ensure alignment with learning objectives, technical accuracy, accessibility standards, and practical application.

Audit criteria encompassed curriculum design, content accuracy, user experience, and real-world applicability, creating a robust framework to evaluate and enhance the program.

Using a structured module-by-module approach, the team conducted both detailed and high-level reviews of content, allowing them to assess individual materials while identifying broader patterns and trends.

Critical input from Digital Services and Procurement SMEs validated the curriculum's relevance and highlighted opportunities to align content with modern procurement practices.

Feedback from 82 alumni through a targeted survey provided invaluable user insights, offering a real-world perspective on the program's effectiveness.

This holistic approach ensured a thorough evaluation of the curriculum, providing key insights that will help build a more modern and future-proof training program.

Audit team

In preparation for this project, a diverse team was assembled for this audit process. US government professionals and contractors backgrounds in acquisition, facilitation, and curriculum design supported this effort by auditing the learner experience from their unique vantage points.

Each role contributed to the audit in the following manner:

- **Curriculum Designers**: Ensured each learning asset was aligned to the learning objectives published in the Learning Design Document (LDD).
- **User Experience and Accessibility Specialists**: Evaluated materials and systems for compliance with Section 508 standards and general user inclusivity.
- **Digital Services and Procurement Subject Matter Experts (SMEs)**: Assessed the technical accuracy, relevance, and applicability of content based on current procurement policies and practices.
- **Facilitators and Stakeholders:** Provided insights into program delivery, learner needs, and real-world applications to guide the evaluation process.
- **Project Managers**: Coordinated the audit process to ensure milestones were met, resources were effectively utilized, and team efforts aligned with the project's overall goals and timeline.

Meet the team

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Erin Murphy
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Audit process

Management

The audit process followed a well-defined workflow to ensure thorough evaluation and comprehensive coverage. The team established and maintained a streamlined ticketing workflow in GitHub to prioritize and track tasks. They facilitated the breakdown of work into manageable Agile sprints, with the goal of maintaining alignment with the project schedule and milestones.

The team prioritized key curriculum focus areas to ensure that the most critical elements were addressed early in the audit. They maintained an iterative process, using insights and feedback from each phase to refine their approach and enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of subsequent work, ultimately delivering a more focused and impactful audit.

Design

In the curriculum, learning modules, often referred to as releases, bring together diverse learning materials focused on specific themes or topics. To streamline the curriculum audit, the team adopted a module-by-module approach, dedicating specific sprints to audit specific releases. This method allowed the team to concentrate on manageable portions of the curriculum, ensuring a thorough and detailed review of each module and related materials.

For each release, a dedicated spreadsheet was created to document the audit findings, which was stored in a shareable folder for team collaboration. This setup enabled auditors to work asynchronously, allowing flexibility in submitting their feedback while maintaining alignment. To ensure consistency in their auditing process, the team held regular meetings to ensure adherence to auditing criteria and discuss any ambiguities or challenges encountered.

Key areas of focus included:

- Assessments
- Curriculum Design
- 508 Compliance
- Spelling and Grammar
- Plain Language and Broken Links
- Digital Services and Procurement Standards

It is important to note that while each role has its own distinctive considerations for which to evaluate, overlap was present between roles. Specifically, both Curriculum Designers and SMEs both reviewed the learning objective effectiveness.

However, the main distinction between these audits was theory versus practice of the training content. The Curriculum Designers closely examined adherence to the intended design of the training as outlined by the learning objectives in the Learning Design Document (LDD), whereas the SMEs provided feedback regarding professional relevancy and on-the-job application.

Scope

The team successfully audited approximately 178 pieces of content in the following categories:

- orientation documents
- instructional slide decks
- in-class activities
- participant packets
- facilitator summaries
- experiential learning activities
- self-paced learning materials and assessments.

The following table provides an overview of the breadth of the materials and how each fit within the curriculum:

Orientation materials

41 audited
Introductory materials that provide an overview of the program, including goals, expectations, and logistics.

Purpose: To orient participants and set the stage for a successful learning experience.

Intended user: Participant

Instructional slide decks

15 audited
Slide presentations designed to support instruction, clarify key concepts, and guide discussions.

Purpose: To provide visual and structured support for conveying information effectively.

Intended user: Participant, Facilitator

Activities

12 audited
Interactive exercises conducted during class sessions to promote engagement and reinforce learning.

Purpose: To actively involve learners and enhance understanding through participation.

Intended user: Participant

Participant Packet

4 audited
Comprehensive resources provided to participants, including schedules, worksheets, and supplementary materials.

Purpose: To equip learners with the tools and information needed to navigate and succeed in the program.

Intended user: Participant

Facilitator Summaries

5 audited
Concise summaries for facilitators, outlining session objectives, key points, and instructions for delivery.

Purpose: To assist facilitators in delivering consistent, effective sessions.

Intended user: Facilitator

Experiential Learning Activities

29 audited
Hands-on activities that simulate real-world scenarios, allowing participants to apply skills in a practical context.

Purpose: To build practical skills and bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Intended user: Participant

Self-Paced Learning Materials

63 audited
Flexible, on-demand resources that allow learners to progress at their own pace.

Purpose: To accommodate diverse learning styles and schedules, ensuring accessibility and mastery of content.

Intended user: Participant

Assessments

9 audited
Evaluative tools such as quizzes, knowledge checks and scenario-based activities designed to measure participant understanding and skill application

Purpose: To measure how effectively participants engage with and learn materials

Intended user: Participant

Audit criteria

The audit evaluated key elements of the curriculum content to ensure quality, clarity, accuracy, and alignment with learning objectives. The following criteria were assessed:

Curriculum design

- **Learning Objectives (LOs)**: Objectives were checked for clarity, measurability, and alignment with course outcomes.
- **Assessments**: Assessments were evaluated for coverage of all LOs and their alignment with practical, real-world scenarios.
- **Practicing Key Skills and Behaviors**: The content was analyzed to ensure alignment with practical, job-relevant skills and behaviors. objectives. The following criteria were assessed:

Content

- **Accuracy:** The content was examined to ensure it is current, accurate, and aligned with industry standards. Outdated or irrelevant material was identified for replacement.

User experience

- **Accessibility:** All materials were checked to ensure accessibility, such as alternative (alt) text for images, transcripts for videos, and closed captioning. Decorative images without alt text and missing accessibility features were flagged.

- **Language:**
  - **Spelling and Grammar:** Sections with five or fewer errors were marked as "No" while specific corrections were noted.
  - **Plain Language:** Content was evaluated to ensure writing was clear, simple, and aimed at a 6th-8th grade reading level per industry standards. The Hemingway Editor was used to evaluate readability. Note that this criterion excluded external content such as passages from the FAR, executive orders, and government regulations.
- **Broken Links:** Links were tested, and broken URLs were flagged.
- **Cognitive Overload:** Materials were checked to make sure they were engaging, logically organized, and free of superfluous information. Content was assessed for flow and chunking, adhering to the general guideline that working memory retains 3–5 chunks of information at a time.

Subject Matter Expert (SME) Review

- **Core Competencies:** Materials were reviewed to evaluate how accurately they prepare learners for the following competencies:
  - Digital Services in the 21st Century: Describe digital services in the 21st century, including what they are, who provides them, how they are delivered, and why they are important
  - Understand What You Are Buying: Determine the problem to be solved while effectively supporting and communicating with the customer and industry

- Awarding & Administering Digital Service Contracts: Conduct and award digital service contracts, using and applying metrics and incentives appropriately, and applying proper course correction when necessary
- Conduct and award digital service contracts, using and applying metrics and incentives appropriately, and applying proper course correction when necessary
- Leading Change as a Digital IT Acquisition Professional: Apply techniques to create a culture of innovation within your sphere that enables you and others to effectively lead and influence customers to the best solutions
- Application of Skills: Apply techniques learned in the course through various activities

These standards provided a structured framework for assessing the training program and identifying gaps and opportunities to enhance the overall learning experience.

Findings

Audit findings

The audit of the DITAP curriculum identified strengths, gaps, and opportunities across several key areas, including the content of the course itself, curriculum design, accessibility, clarity, usability, and course structure.

These findings provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of the training materials and highlight actionable opportunities to enhance participant engagement, alignment with learning objectives, and delivery effectiveness.

Curriculum design focus areas

The curriculum design audit specifically examined how well the training materials supported the full-scope of the DITAP certification experience through four focus areas: learning objectives, assessments, content accuracy, and practicing key skills and behaviors. This section explores the design choices and instructional strategies used to guide participants through the learning journey, with an emphasis on practical application and alignment with intended outcomes.

To evaluate these areas, the audit team considered key questions:
- Are the learning objectives relevant and measurable?
- Does each educational unit provide an opportunity to practice or demonstrate a specified learning objective outlined in the Learning Design Document?
- Is the content accurate?
- Does the curriculum offer meaningful opportunities to practice skills essential for day-to-day tasks and future responsibilities?

The findings in this section provide a focused look at the instructional infrastructure of the DITAP curriculum, assessing not only the clarity and structure of the learning materials but also their ability to equip participants with the skills and knowledge needed for success in their roles in the federal procurement of technology. Each focus area is detailed in the following subsections, offering insights into strengths and areas for improvement for enhancing the overall design of the curriculum.

Focus area one: learning objectives

Learning objectives were evaluated for clarity, measurably, and alignment with course outcomes. Auditors determined that 78% of the learning objectives were relevant, measurable, and aligned with course outcomes. This demonstrates that the curriculum generally was effective in supporting learning objectives. It also narrows the scope of actionable opportunities for course redesign to target and strengthen the 22% of materials assessed that can be improved, allowing deeper examination. While individual items in each release did not always address every objective, all objectives were present across the broader learning experience.

78%
of learning objectives were relevant, measurable, and aligned

Focus area two: assessments

Assessments were evaluated for their ability to measure learning objectives and reflect the real-world application of skills. Findings suggest that while assessments address key outcomes, they require updates to align more closely with current procurement challenges and ensure relevance to participants' day-to-day roles.

Focus area three: content accuracy

The audit reflected that curriculum accuracy was a key area for actionable opportunities, with 46% of material audited being found sufficiently accurate. While a negligible amount of material was found to not be accurate. Note that "not accurate" can overlap with items "not current" but also includes content that may have been completely replaced by new executive orders, technological advancement, best practices or other updated guidance.

46% of material audited found to be sufficiently accurate

The largest opportunity was found in the category of "accurate, but not current," totaling 53% of materials. This outcome is not wholly unexpected, given the amount of time that has passed since the adoption of DITAP by USDS in 2016.

For example, executive orders, articles, websites, blogs, thought leaders and resources from 2012 were current at DITAP's inception, but may not be current now. Items that are "not current" can be described in more detail as not up-to-date, not current best practices, or no longer available as a digital resource.

The DITAP Alumni Survey, conducted in November of 2024, found that over 75% of respondents believed that the DITAP curriculum is current for today's procurement process. The survey feedback may be influenced by how long ago a participant went through the program.

75% of respondents believed the DITAP curriculum is current for today's procurement process

I feel the DITAP curriculum content is current for today's procurement process.

Answered: 82   Skipped: 0
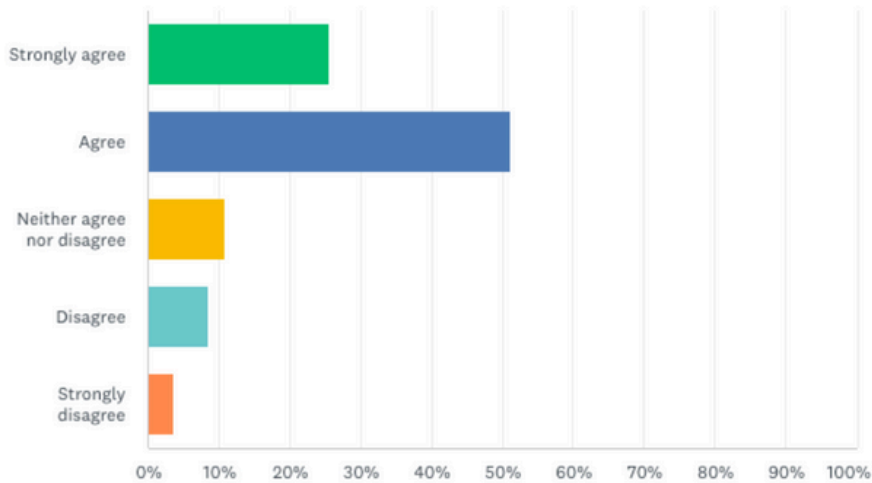
This leads the audit team to believe that, while accuracy needs attention in redesign, it has not yet been a substantial blocker to the benefit of the overall program. In addition, it is of note that the accuracy rating would decline as time goes on and the materials grow further out of date.

Focus area four: practicing key skills and behaviors

The curriculum audit evaluated whether DITAP participants are provided with opportunities to practice key skills and behaviors essential for modern digital service procurements. Across the five curriculum releases, the audit revealed varying levels of hands-on skill application, reflecting the distinct focus of each phase of the program.

Releases 1 and 2 primarily introduce participants to the digital services industry, key players, and the services they provide. As a result, opportunities for skill practice were moderate, with 47% and 78% of audited items respectively offering meaningful hands-on application.

In contrast, Releases 3 and 4 place greater emphasis on procurement-specific content, which naturally aligns with more opportunities to practice critical skills. This focus is reflected in the audit results, with 86% and 84% of items supporting active skill application. However, a smaller subset of Release 4 showed a 50% split, suggesting inconsistency in practice-focused design within certain modules. These findings highlight a logical progression in the curriculum design, with increasing skill application opportunities as participants advance through procurement-focused content.

Across Releases 2 through 5, three required assignments for certification emerge as clear opportunities for participants to practice key skills and behaviors in meaningful ways. While each assignment offers valuable experiential learning, they could benefit from visual enhancements and a more modern instructional design approach to improve clarity, engagement, and usability.

1. **Shadowing Assignment:** This activity immerses participants in the realities of digital service delivery by requiring them to shadow a product manager, developer, or digital services team member—inside or outside of government—for at least 16 hours. The assignment fosters familiarity with modern design and development approaches, promotes direct engagement with digital services teams, and builds cross-sector trust between acquisition professionals and customers.

2. **Stakeholder Assignment:** In this structured activity, participants conduct interviews with relevant stakeholders to clarify issues, uncover motivations, and build alignment around innovative solutions. With the support of guided templates, participants are equipped to identify challenges, structure conversations, and establish a thoughtful framework for engagement, reinforcing their ability to navigate stakeholder relationships effectively.

3. **Live Digital Assignment (LDA):** This capstone-style group project spans the program, enabling participants to apply their learning to a real-world digital challenge faced by an agency. The LDA emphasizes teamwork, consultative problem-solving, and critical thinking skills as participants hypothesize, research, and prototype a solution—a digital product, service, or tool—to address an identified challenge.

These assignments provide rich opportunities for participants to practice key procurement and digital service skills and also represent cornerstones of applied learning within the curriculum. With targeted updates to their instructional design—such as refined templates, enhanced visuals, and streamlined workflows—they could deliver an even more engaging and effective training experience.

Our user research supports the applicability of these projects and hands-on learning activities with 55 out of 82 respondents sharing that they can explain how they have applied the curriculum to the current digital acquisition process.

I can explain how I've applied the curriculum content to the current digital acquisition process.

Answered: 82   Skipped: 0
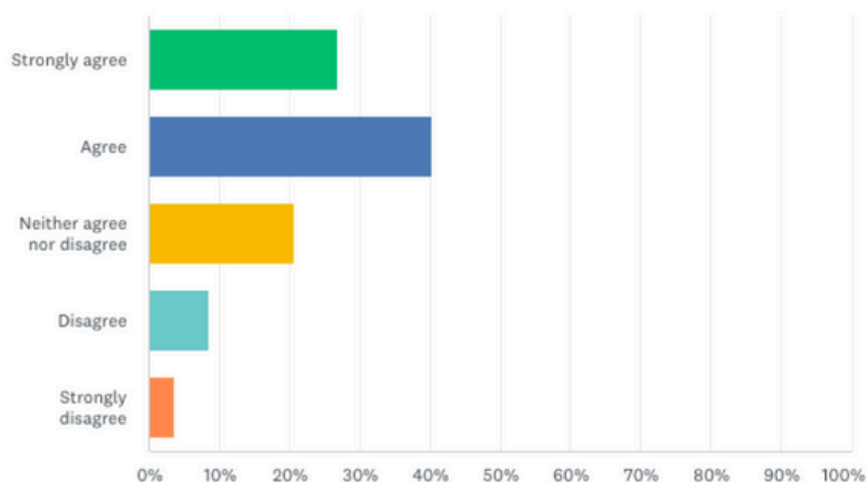
User experience (UX) focus areas

One in four Americans have a disability. The majority of these are invisible and because of the stigma associated with disability, many people choose not to identify. DITAP graduates include people who are blind and low-vision. DITAP providers are encouraged to ask the participants privately if they have any accommodation requirements. Instructors can take steps to ensure that the course is accessible for all learners, enabling them to perceive, operate, and understand the content effectively.

The purpose of the user experience audit was to review key areas of the educational unit to ensure it is accessible, user-friendly, and effective for all learners. It focused on evaluating the clarity and simplicity of the content, the ease of navigation, the accuracy of language, and the functionality of links. This review is important to identify potential barriers that could hinder the learning experience and to ensure the material meets the needs of all participants.
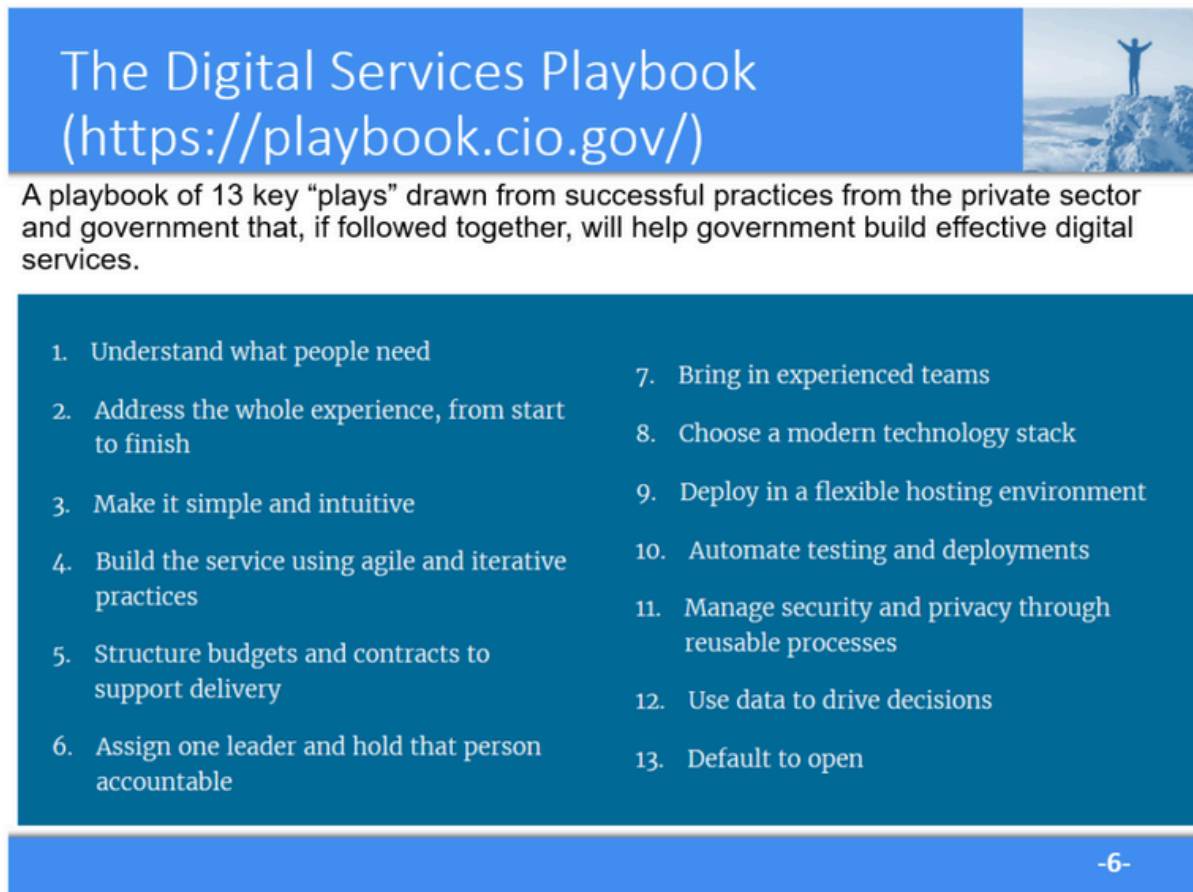
Focus area one: formatting complexity

The formatting of the DITAP materials is relatively simple, which helps guide learners' attention and enhances comprehension. However, some users may still face challenges due to the need for more structured navigation and explanatory elements, such as clear headings and detailed instructions. The absence of these elements may hinder ease of use and clarity for some learners. To improve course formatting, it is recommended to use clear and descriptive headings, structure content with bullet points or numbered lists, maintain consistency in font styles and sizes, and incorporate visual elements to reinforce key concepts and promote learner engagement.

The image below illustrates an example of unclear and inaccessible formatting. Specifically, the header includes a URL, and the numbered list is presented as text embedded in an image, both of which can create challenges for individuals using screen readers.

Example slide from DITAP MVP Day 2 Orientation

Focus area two: cognitive load

Managing cognitive load in a course is essential to ensure learners can process, retain, and apply new information without feeling overwhelmed. As a general guideline, learners can retain about 3-5 chunks of information in their working memory. The audit revealed the majority of slides and course pages presented content in a relatively simple format, which can help reduce cognitive load.

Improvements can be made to large blocks of text in the course which can overwhelm learners, making it harder to focus, process information, and retain key concepts. Complex information can be broken into smaller, manageable chunks and presented sequentially, allowing learners to process one concept at a time.

In a survey of DITAP Alumni conducted in November of 2024, over one-third of respondents believed the amount of information in each release was just the right amount, while just under one-third thought it was a little too much.

When presented with an option to provide more information, respondents noted that while sometimes the releases included too much or not enough information, they felt the information was not covered well enough in the virtual classrooms and was frequently outdated.

In my opinion, the amount of information presented in each release was

Answered: 82   Skipped: 0
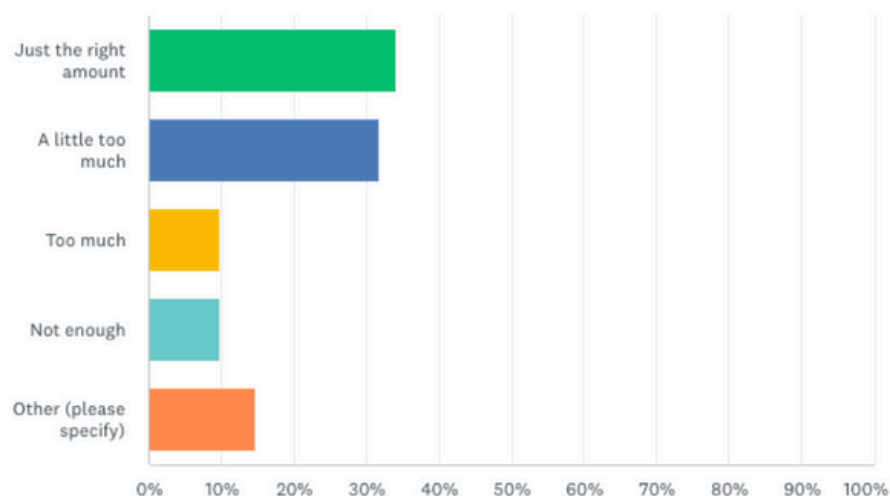
Focus area three: spelling, grammar, and plain language

The audit highlighted inconsistencies in the application of plain language principles. While the content is generally understandable, there may be areas where clarity is compromised, particularly for learners whose first language is not English.

Course content that lacked plain language featured lengthy, complex sentences and technical terms or industry jargon, making the material difficult to understand.

Additionally, while some content was at an acceptable reading level, other sections were rated at a post-graduate level for readability, posing additional challenges for learners. Spelling and grammar were not highlighted as major issues but could affect overall readability and comprehension.

Focus area four: link functionality and alternative text

Link functionality across the materials was inconsistent, and specific link errors were identified. Some PDF resources appeared to lack accessibility as required by Section 508 standards, with no control over whether external providers adhered to accessibility guidelines when creating these documents.

Additionally, the absence of alternative text for images, charts, and tables, coupled with inaccessible PDFs, creates barriers for users who rely on assistive technologies. This lack of accessibility impacts the overall usability of the educational unit.

Rubric criteria	Meets Expectations	Needs Improvement
Educational unit requires spelling and grammar updates	55%	45%
Educational unit uses plain language	45%	55%
Educational unit is free from broken links	67.5%	32.5%
What is the page/slide complexity?	77%	23%
Educational unit content effectively manages cognitive load	90%	10%

Digital services and procurement practices focus area

The audit highlighted that much of the course content reflects the mental model from its original development, rooted in a time when innovation, agility, and streamlining processes were central themes. With a decade of advancements, what does effective digital service procurement look like today?

To update the content meaningfully, the audit suggests anchoring revisions around lessons learned from successful modern examples. Identifying recent procurements that demonstrate excellence across various characteristics can provide a framework for the course. This approach would not only modernize the curriculum but also ground it in real-world, proven practices.

Subject matter experts (SMEs) were integral to this audit process, bringing critical insights from their experience to help shape a forward-looking, practical perspective on what "good" procurement entails today. Their expertise ensures that the updated curriculum remains relevant, actionable, and reflective of current best practices.

Evaluation of competencies

SMEs provided detailed feedback on each competency, identifying strengths, areas for enhancements, gaps and recommendations. The audit identified opportunities to simplify and refine the competencies for better alignment with the curriculum. Competency 1 remains relevant but requires updates to reflect current technologies. SMEs noted overlap between Competencies 2, 3, and 4, suggesting a more streamlined structure.

There could be an opportunity to create a competency that covers all activities that take place pre-award (understanding needs, market research, acquisition strategy, and proposed process and evaluation), and another competency that focuses on post-award management.

"Application of Skills" may no longer need to be a stand alone competency, as exercises are already integrated throughout the content. Folding this into other competencies could reduce redundancy and sharpen the curriculum's focus. These adjustments will align competencies with course content, providing a clearer, more cohesive framework for learners.

Competency 1: Digital Services in the 21st Century

This competency remains relevant and essential as a foundational element for DITAP, equipping the contracting officer community with an understanding of the technology and digital service landscape most pertinent to federal agencies. It ensures a common baseline for all course participants, who may have varying levels of experience with procurements in the technological and digital services domains.

However, some materials under this competency are outdated and no longer fully represent the current technological and digital service environment. Emerging areas such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, and advancements in cloud services highlight the need for updated content. Additionally, the evolution of software as a service (SaaS) solutions—including no-code/low-code platforms, build-versus-buy decisions, and Agile development practices—underscores the importance of revisiting this competency to align with current trends and practices.

The audit identified a critical need to refresh content associated with this competency, particularly in areas such as cloud technologies, compliance, and procurement strategies, to ensure relevance and provide participants with an up-to-date understanding of the digital landscape.

Competency 2: Understanding what you are buying

The audit found that individual elements of the content associated with this competency are valuable and relevant; however, there is a lack of depth in procurement requirements and a need for more modern examples. Auditors highlighted outdated content throughout the materials.

As noted below, if this competency is intended to focus on early-stage acquisition, there is a significant opportunity to integrate current case studies of successful digital service procurements. These case studies could emphasize effective strategies and provide examples of "what good looks like" in practice.

The sections of content within this competency appear somewhat disparate and overlap with both Competency #1 and Competency #3. For instance, "Agile," a key methodology in the digital services landscape, could be expanded within Competency #1.

The "influence conversation" content appears to be unrelated to the current competency description. Instead, tactical procurement topics, such as market research and acquisition strategy planning, would better align with this competency if it is meant to address the early stages of acquisition, prior to solicitation and evaluation. Finally, since Competency #3 also covers acquisition planning, the distinction between these two competencies remains unclear.

Competency 3: How do you buy

This competency covers relevant, valuable, tactical content. The activity of building out an acquisition package is relevant to course participants' job function, and helps to ground the course in real world application, as does the vendor engagement component.

As noted above, recommend considering where the boundaries of this competency stop and start relative to both Competency 2, and competency 4. If the acquisition process is the guiding organizational principle behind the content in 2,3, and 4, there is an opportunity to better delineate the content across them.

While the approach, framework, intent of many of the exercises and activities for this competency felt relevant and worth keeping, consistent notes about updating and improving the substance from the auditors.

The agile delivery content included under this competency is likely too far down in the delivery weeds to be of significant use to a contracting officer, would recommend revisiting whether that is necessary and consider removing some of it to focus on what is most important for the audience.

This competency, and the following one, may benefit the most from an updated case study approach aligned around current/recent digital service oriented procurements, and the specific tactical elements associated with them that led to successful procurement outcomes.

Competency 4: Awarding & administering digital service contracts

This competency remains strong in its focus on exit strategies, but further refinement is needed to ensure clarity and alignment with related content. Specifically, the boundaries between this competency and the preceding one should be more clearly delineated to define which aspects of the award process fit under each.

The evaluation and award decision process remains a critical element, and increasing the depth of content in this area through a case study on successful digital service procurements would provide valuable, real-world insights. Similarly, the content on post-award delivery could benefit from a stronger focus on the specific contractual issues that contracting officers are likely to encounter in practice.

Additionally, the section on metrics and incentives would be more effective with actionable examples to guide participants in applying these concepts in their work. These updates would enhance the practical relevance of this competency and better prepare contracting officers for the challenges they may face.

Competency 5: Leading change as a digital IT acquisition professional

The content remains valid and provides useful information; however, there are areas that require improvement to enhance its impact. The course appears to assume that acquisition professionals lack change-management knowledge rather than skills, which could benefit from further clarification and adjustment.

While the lean acquisition canvas is a promising tool, its execution within the course is lacking. Additionally, the sections on cultural innovation and leadership strategies would benefit from greater depth to provide more actionable insights.

Furthermore, the course does not adequately address the hierarchical limitations that acquisition professionals face in influencing key decisions in digital-services acquisitions.

It also lacks specificity on how to create meaningful change within the acquisition context. Strengthening these elements would make the course more practical and effective for participants.

Competency 6: Application of skills

The use of case studies, the shadowing exercise, and the live digital assignment effectively grounds the theory, helping students engage more deeply with the material. However, there are areas that need improvement to enhance their relevance and impact.

The case studies are outdated and do not reflect the full lifecycle of modern digital service acquisitions, missing key insights into what works and what doesn't in today's context. While the live digital assignment provides valuable exposure to Agile practices and product thinking, it falls short of addressing specific anchor needs in digital service acquisitions, limiting its practical application.

Additionally, the exercises lack clear instructions, interactivity, and a consistent structure, which reduces their effectiveness. Addressing these gaps would significantly improve the learning experience and better prepare participants for real-world challenges.

Reimagining case studies

The audit underscored the value of case studies in teaching the tactical aspects of procurement in the DITAP curriculum. It is strongly recommended retaining case studies as a primary teaching tool due to their effectiveness in grounding theoretical concepts in real-world application.

However, updates are needed to ensure their continued relevance and usability. Many of the existing case studies are outdated, reflecting procurement practices that no longer align with the current landscape. To address this, the curriculum should incorporate newer case studies, including those developed through the USDS case study challenge.

SMEs also recommend streamlining case studies to improve usability. A concise format, similar to the Harvard Business Review (HBR) case studies or briefs, would focus on key aspects of the case study for discussion and engagement. It would reduce the need for participants to read larger sections of the document that aren't relevant.

Integrating a set of case studies consistently across different sections of the curriculum could further reinforce the learning by revisiting familiar scenarios in varied contexts.

Updating and refining case studies will ensure they remain a relevant and effective method for teaching modern procurement practices while enhancing the overall learning experience.

Outdated content

SMEs highlighted significant portions of the curriculum as outdated. While some foundational knowledge remains relevant, modern examples and industry trends are notably absent. Specific examples of outdated content include:

- **Cloud Technologies and Compliance Frameworks:** Content on FISMA, FedRAMP, and ZTA does not reflect current best practices or updates.
- **Procurement Strategies:** Many strategies fail to address nearly a decade of industry changes.
- **Emerging Areas:** Artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) are mentioned but lack sufficient depth and actionable insights.

Misalignment of content with the intended audience

The audit revealed misalignment with the level of detail across the curriculum that would be needed for acquisition professionals to be effective.

In some areas, the content dives too deeply into tactical delivery details, potentially overwhelming participants and reducing focus on broader strategic concepts.

Conversely, other areas lack the specificity or actionable guidance needed for practical application.

Some examples of inconsistencies are:

- **Agile Methodologies:** The emphasis on Agile methodologies in the curriculum may overextend into areas where such a framework is less relevant or intuitive for the audience. While Agile concepts are critical to modern procurement, the course structure—organized around terms like "Releases" may not align with the natural workflows of acquisition professionals. A more intuitive approach to organizing content could improve comprehension and make the material more accessible to both participants and facilitators.
- **Overly Tactical Content on Delivery Techniques:**
  - Quote from SME: "Way too much in the weeds of delivery. It's good context but far too tactical to be useful for most acquisition professionals."
- **High-Level Content Without Nuance:**
  - Quote from SME: "The acquisition strategies section is useful but remains too high-level and fails to reflect the nuances of other vehicles or industry changes."
  - Specific example from release 3:
    - Lean Acquisition Canvas: A promising concept but poorly executed and overly simplistic.
    - Cultural Innovation and Digital Transformation: Addressed superficially, with little actionable guidance or depth.
- **Lack of Clarity and Framing:** Exercises were inconsistently structured, sometimes lacking clear expectations or decision-making elements.
- **Asynchronous Activities:** Discussion board exercises were flagged as potentially ineffective, with concerns that they do not generate meaningful engagement or outcomes.

Actionable Recommendations

Actionable recommendations

The findings and recommendations outlined in this report provide a comprehensive roadmap to enhance the curriculum, delivery methods, and user experience of the training program.

Drawing from participant feedback, subject matter expert (SME) insights, and industry best practices, these actionable recommendations aim to address key challenges while capitalizing on the program's strengths.

The focus areas include curriculum design, user experience (UX) enhancements, course structure improvements, virtual delivery optimization, and the integration of practical, real-world examples.

In addition, recommendations are provided for each of the curriculum's core competencies. By implementing these recommendations, the program can ensure it remains engaging, relevant, and aligned with participant needs and evolving industry trends. The following sections organize the recommendations by area of improvement.

Curriculum design

1. Ensure learning objectives are measurable, practical, and directly tied to assessments.
2. Collaborate with SMEs to refine objectives for real-world relevance.
3. Simplify overly tactical scenarios; focus on broader strategic insights.
4. Provide clear framing, instructions, and expectations for all exercises to enhance engagement.
5. Validate asynchronous activities (e.g., discussion boards) with training providers.
6. Explore gamification and collaboration platforms for improved effectiveness.
7. Develop a comprehensive facilitator guide with speaker notes and delivery guidance.
8. Include instructions for both synchronous sessions and asynchronous activities.

User experience

1. Add alternative text for images, charts, and tables to meet Section 508 compliance.
2. Expand captions and transcripts across all video and audio content.
3. Test materials with users relying on assistive technologies for inclusivity validation.
4. Align content with plain-language standards for readability and accessibility.
5. Address spelling and grammar issues; define acronyms consistently with a style guide.

Course structure

1. Consider restructuring into modules for clarity; reduce reliance on text-heavy slides.
2. Create a learning objectives map with linked content and resources.
3. Use visuals to simplify complex topics; incorporate workflows for better understanding.

Virtual delivery optimization

1. Design for virtual or hybrid environments, integrating synchronous and asynchronous elements.
2. Utilize collaborative tools, gamification, and participant-driven notes for engagement enhancement.

Sample content

1. Update content with emerging technologies (e.g., cloud, artificial intelligence/machine learning) and modern procurement strategies.
2. Expand and modernize case studies to reflect current industry practices.
3. Include practical examples of procurement documents (e.g. Statements of Work, Statements of Objectives, Performance Work Statements) and financial considerations (e.g. acquisitioning strategies, pricing models, financial monitoring).
4. Validate exercises and scenarios with training providers for alignment and relevance.

Streamlining request for proposal (RFP) processes

1. Develop a starter kit with sample language for RFPs to reduce complexity and risk for procurement officers
2. Introduce tools like strategy mapping to help procurement officers clarify objectives, align resources, and streamline decision-making.

Validate and alignment

1. Validate exercises and scenarios with current training providers and adjust based on feedback.

Competency specific recommendations

Competency 1: Digital Services in the 21st Century
- Identify the technology and digital service areas most relevant to agencies today.
- Consider a survey approach to the alumni community to identify patterns in the types of tech procurements they are seeing on the ground.
- Conduct data analysis on agency buying patterns.
- Research and analyze major federal policies developed since initial content development and program changes (FedRamp) to identify all of the major areas we want to cover for this competency and initiate content development for those.

Competency 2: Understand what you are buying
- Evaluate the scope of what this competency area should, or should not cover, per the points above.
- Focus this competency around key areas such as market research, effectively engaging with industry, and developing acquisition strategies

Competency 3: How do you buy
- Prioritize enhancing the underdeveloped sections on financial operations and acquisition frameworks to ensure comprehensive coverage and clarity.

Competency 4: Awarding & Administering Digital Service Contracts
- Include a deeper and more tactical focus on the evaluation and award process to ensure course participants can effectively leverage it to select strong vendor partners across the various technology areas emphasized in Competency 1.

Competency 5: Leading Change as a Digital IT Acquisition Professional
- Look to other change-management initiatives within procurement and create case studies or lessons learned that would be familiar to acquisition professionals to help them recognize influence opportunities.
- Add more activities that can help acquisition professionals "practice" change management directly, rather than just learn about it.

Competency 6: Application of Skills
- Refactor both the case studies and live digital assignment activities.
- Consider revisiting this as a standalone competency, given that application exercises are embedded throughout the entire course.

Conclusion

Conclusion

The curriculum audit of the Digital IT Acquisition Professional (DITAP) program reveals important insights regarding its design, content, and delivery, with both strengths and areas for improvement. While the curriculum effectively builds a progressive learning experience, particularly through hands-on assignments such as shadowing, stakeholder interviews, and the Live Digital Assignment (LDA), inconsistencies in content application and accessibility remain significant.

As participants advance through the curriculum, they are increasingly exposed to critical procurement skills, with Releases 3 and 4 offering greater opportunities for skill application. However, the audit identifies areas where content could be updated and streamlined for better relevance and user engagement, including outdated case studies, insufficient clarity in instructional design, and gaps in accessibility compliance.

While the hands-on assignments provide substantial experiential learning, improvements in visual design and modern instructional techniques could further elevate the participant experience. Ensuring that materials are accessible, user-friendly, and aligned with current digital service trends will help learners better navigate and apply key concepts in real-world procurement scenarios.

The curriculum should address inconsistencies in content complexity and the balance between strategic and tactical information. Streamlining content and incorporating more up-to-date industry practices will ensure that DITAP graduates are fully equipped to manage digital services acquisitions in a rapidly evolving landscape. Overall, targeted updates to both the content and instructional design, alongside ongoing feedback from users and subject matter experts, will significantly enhance the effectiveness and accessibility of the program for all learners.