June 2022 IT Accessibility Community Meeting Captioned Text

The June 14, 2022 IT Accessibility Community Meeting was hosted as a virtual meeting by the General Services Administration, Office of Government-wide Policy.

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>> Yvette Gibson: Good morning -- good afternoon, oh my goodness. Good afternoon, and welcome, welcome, welcome everyone to our June I.T. accessibility meeting. We are so glad that you're here.

I am not going to delay these two presenters that we have who are absolutely, if I can say this without getting in trouble, adore, Betsy Sirk and Antonio Haileselassie -- Antonio, do it for me because this time I messed up. I'm usually good.

>> You usually get it perfect.

It's Antonio Haileselassie.

>> I get you you guys can't say that. Any way, I'm going to turn it over to these wonderful people from NASA and let them take it away.

>> Betsy Sirk: Thank you so much, Yvette, and the feeling is mutual. There are very few of us who really relatively few people who work on accessibility across the government. And we just have this special bond because we're -- we all have the same common goal of trying to improve the experience of using I.T. for government, customers, and for the public. So it's just -- it's really great to be part of this team.

And we were really thrilled when Yvette reached out and said, you know, there's been a lot of talk and interest in acquisition and how I.T. accessibility relates to that.

That happens to be the area that I guess for about five years now I've really focused on getting out there and trying to get the word out in every form possible about some best practices and what we can all do to come together, whether you're on the acquisition side, whether you're on the I.T./CIO side, whether you're a customer, or whether you're just a member of the public that's trying to access information. I think this is a really important topic and thank you for having us.

So we are going to share with you two presentations today, and I believe that there's going to be a break in the middle. So after that wonderful welcome by Yvette, we are going to start by doing a presentation that I like to call accessibility throughout the acquisition lifecycle.

So we're going to kind of walk you through the steps of what federal acquisition usually entails, and how we can weave accessibility throughout it.

After -- we're going to leave a lot of time for questions and answers, so we do encourage you to type those in the chat.

People are looking at it, if there's something where it really doesn't make any sense, I'm not sure if you've got the ability to unmic or not, our GSA folks will let us know. But get your questions out there. Our goal is to allow ten to 15 minutes at the end for questions and answers.

Then we're going to have a ten-minute break and then we're going to after an activity that Yvette will lead, we're going to do another presentation on accessibility.

We're going to do a review for those acknowledging maybe those only able to join at 2:00 and not at 1:00.

So there's a little bit of a repeat on some of the background, but then it's a different flavor. We're really excited to share with you a guide that our NASA team developed [lost audio].

>> Yvette Gibson: Betsy, you put yourself on mute.

>> Betsy Sirk: I honestly didn't touch it. Is it okay? I swear, I didn't touch anything.

>> Yvette Gibson: You're back.

>> Betsy Sirk: Can you hear me now?

>> Yvette Gibson: You are back.

>> Betsy Sirk: That is the strangest thing.

I didn't touch my mouse, I didn't touch anything, but thank you.

But anyway, two of our summer interns had the idea after sitting in industry outreach meetings that we conduct and I do that as the chairperson of a federal CIO council's accessibility Community of Practice subteam called industry outreach. And they sat in on these meetings and they said, you know, wouldn't it be a good idea to share with industry these best practices and answer some of these frequently asked questions for them and help them create reports.

So the second presentation that's going to be given by me as well as Antonio is going to really go into that industry outreach piece and what we're doing. With the hopes that you, then, if you're Section 508 program manager from a federal agency or work in another office, we want you to be able to share this guide widely with them to promote accessible content.

So with that, I'd like to just go into the presentation. It does say --

>> Support with.

>> Betsy Sirk: Getting some audio feedback.

>> Yvette Gibson: Hang on, Betsy. I'm not sure -- okay, we got it.

>> Yvette Gibson: It also says letting you know recording paused. I don't know if you want to enact that again or --

>> Recording in progress.

>> Betsy Sirk: Awesome. Thank you. And let's see, before I --

okay. I'm just getting pop-up messages and everything like that. So what I want to do is review with you how you can download these charts at the beginning. So if you want to have a set of the slides during our presentation, there is on the title screen that is being shown now for the first presentation we're doing on accessibility through the acquisition lifecycle, there is a URL that you can go to that would allow you to actually download the charts. And that is www.tinyurl, that is t-i-n-y-u-r-l -- dot-com/acquisition, a-c-q-u-i-s-i-t-i-o-n charts, and the C is capital there too.

Again, that is only if you would like to download the slides as we go through them.

But we're -- we will make sure that you are able to access this for later use if not.

So again, welcome and thanks again for Yvette for letting us speak. I serve as the chairperson of the industry outreach program under our accessibility community of practice and I am the Section 508 program manager within NASA and chair our agency's working group. We have many different centers across the country and we all try to get together to share our best practices across the agency.

So thrilled to be here.

Next slide, please.

Okay, great. And this one says agenda. And it's our second slide of the deck. And we're going to go over just an introduction of 508. I can go back -- thank you so much.

An introduction of 508, why it matters. Why I feel like I'm preaching to the choir here about why it matters, I also value listening to other presenters that work in this space and their ideas and take it on, because we are often called on to advocate for and to proselytize about why this is important.

So even though it my seem very, very natural to us that why wouldn't one talk about this, we're hoping we're going to share some little nuggets with you that you can then use to help make the case for why accessibility matters.

Again, we'll give this acquisition overview.

I think it's kind of unique in that I developed one of the first forms of this presentation back with my the somewhat recently retired John Sullivan from GSA where we would do what we would call the acquisition road show together. Because we cochaired the industry outreach committee. I miss him dearly, but we said this is an important presentation to put together because you can't really go to one place and kind of understand the overall acquisition lifecycle.

So that's what we're kind of hoping that we'll do for you and showing where I.T. accessibility fits in.

So that's broken down into two pieces overall, new contracts and then those where there is an existing contract vehicle or you're buying a commercial off the shelf product called a COTS.

We're going to share some best practices and resources.

Without further ado, next slide, please.

A lot of words on this one.

Section 508 intro. It didn't reinvent the real, but the latest and this is key, because a lot of times people get Section 508 and it's provisions and it's technical standards confused with other great legislation out there like the Americans with Disabilities Act.

This is actually Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. When it went into place in the 70s, I think 1978, we couldn't even envision the technology that we're dealing with today.

So back then it stated that there is a requirement that federal agencies make their information and communication technology, and that's that acronym ICT, accessible to all its employees and members of the public regardless of their need to use assistive technology or disclosed or undisclosed disability. But basically everybody has a right to accessible ICT.

Many of you may remember it used to be referred to as electronic and information technology, EIT. This is just a more updated term for that.

So whether or not there's another federal law like TARA or others that define I.T., the ICT definition is supposed to build upon that. So that's why we're kind of using them interchangeably and throwing them together and we also have a distinguished members of the United States access board on here and they can answer any other questions about definitions and the other laws as our colleagues here too.

But basically this has been for a long time, that I.T./ICT, it's defined as any equipment interconnected system or subsystem of equipment, and it doesn't have to be interconnected, it's just all included, that's used in the automatic acquisition, storage, analysis, manipulation, management, movement, control, display, switching, interchange transmission or reception of data or information. It's very proud in its definition. And it applies to technology that we buy, we being the Federal Government, excuse me, that we buy, we develop, we maintain, or we use.

So really it doesn't matter where it comes from if we made it, if we're purchasing it, if we're implementing something for use by our employees or if it's in the case of public access to information for use by the public, this applies. Section 508 applies.

Now, we did some examples, and this is not meant to be exhaustive, but everybody probably assumes, oh, you're talking computers and hardware and software. Per riff rals, peripherals are involves, et cetera. If it has a function that falls under the definition of IT/ICT, it applies. There's no such thing as, oh, I'm specialized scientific equipment so 508 does not apply. In fact, it does depending on how you define functions.

We all know it applies to office equipment, multifunction devices that do multiple functions, telecommunications equipment, websites, videos, electronic documents, official agency communications and more.

And remember now what we're doing is we're looking at how does this device function that determines whether or not this applies? So back when the original standards were published and then implemented in 2001, there was not the understanding of how these devices worked the way we have today.

I like to look at it as it took 16 years to do a refresh of the standards so the technical standards that define 508 were revised 16 years later.

I don't know about you, but nothing stays current in technology for 16 days, much less 16 years. So I think the fact that the original standards hung around that long and were still relevant is a testimony to the forethought that was put into making them.

And I think that now the revised standards really have taken advantage of even though you can look to that and say, gees, that was five years ago.

But still, they're really looking at IT in a different way. Next, please.

Okay. The why this matters, back one slide, please, it jumped. Thank you.

Why this matters.

I was at -- in person, which was one of those times when we could go to big in-person conferences in 2019 at Gartner's symposium if the was the first time in my recollection that one of the much awaited trends and predictions, strategic predictions that are presented by their distinguished vice presidents included one that talks about people with disabilities and assistive technology.

I was floored. I was thrilled.

But what they said then and, again, this was a prediction they made for 2020 and beyond way back in 2019, and they said, by 2023, the number of people with disabilities employed will triple due to artificial intelligence and emerging technologies by using those they will reduce barriers to access so that people with disabilities and people who use assistive technology will gain access and their ability to be gainfully employed.

This is huge. What that means for us is that we better have accessible technology when they come to the workforce or they will not be enabled. So if you need reasons why this is so important to us, not just because it's the right thing to do and because it's the law, but look at this. Only 30% of the labor force in the U.S. with disabilities is employed. Now this number may have gone up a bit, it may have gone down, sadly. I have not researched current findings to see how the pandemic may have impacted this stat. But this will just give you a rough idea and it was certainly true a couple of years ago when we put this together.

But organizations that employ actively employ and seek people with disabilities have close to 90% higher retention rates, over 70% increased productivity, almost 30% increased profitability, and then, of course, we talk about diversity and inclusion. Well, this is how you do it. Added diversity and employing people with disabilities, that's not a monolithic route, that's a diverse group. And that brings added perspectives and it also helps our design.

My main takeaway from this slide is inaccessible technology hurts employees and organizations. This is not we or they. This is together. This is -- this is something that if we don't have accessible technology, it hurts us all.

And accessibility is a win/win situation for industry and government, one of the big things that I do with my team is that engaging with industry to get them to understand that if you at least assess your products for their accessibility against the 508 technical standards, you know where you stand and the U.S. Government is able to consider you to buy.

Because we are obligated to buy the most accessible technology that meets our requirements.

If you are now the front there and say you're the first person to who has their accessibility conformance report for their scope and none of the other competing scopes have theirs, we're going to buy yours. So this is really, really important so see that it is a win/win situation even if you don't end up wanting to sell to the government. If you're a company understanding your accessibility improves your customer experience and allows you to sell to more people.

Next slide, please.

All right. This one suspect called acquisition overview. And I'm going to try to swiftly get to the end so we have a lot of time for questions.

So the federal acquisition processes that are out there provide us key opportunities to -- it's like a gate. To ensure that accessible technology is acquired. A lot of times if we're building stuff in-house, we may have the processes to ensure that requirements to build accessible technology as well as secure technology and many of the other requirements that not just the CIO, but other organizations and in federal acquisition levy upon acquisitions, this is really, really a key time that we can define and get in up front.

Building -- building accessibility into these acquisitions, it's kind of the -- a reiteration in a different way of the chart that I just gave about why is this important?

Well, if you make your acquisitions of IT accessible from the start, it enables your workforce's productivity, it improves your customer experience, it prevents the risk of litigation. And also it really, really -- you can't even -- you can't underestimate the expense to retrofitting ICT solutions. Many of us have been in this situation where if we did not state the requirement for accessibility or we didn't state it accurately and then we have a contractor performing their work against their statement of work and their technology that they're giving us is not accessible, it's very expensive to go back and then say, okay, how do we redesign this? How do we build this?

So getting it in up front is how we don't -- how we avoid this expense of retrofitting.

Studies have shown anywhere from 10% to a 50% increase in cost if you have to redo technology that is not accessible per, you know, making it accessible and being in conformance with the Rehabilitation Act.

And also obviously it allows those with disabilities on an equal footing. There should not be even if there's equivalent methods to accessing the data, it should be an equal playing field.

So, there is no one size fits all here. What we're taking about is what are you buying?

How is it being procured?

Is it commercial off the shelf?

Are you doing custom development?

Are you buying IT support processes?

Are you just providing products?

How are you procuring it? Are you doing a full and open competition?

Are you writing a new statement?

Are you doing a request for proposal, request for quote?

Are you using established governmentwide vehicles? There are many methods to buy.

We need to understand up front what we're doing so that we're sure that accessibility is incorporated in the right manner.

Next slide, please.

Okay. So here for a new contract, say you are not able -- it's always the best practice to use an existing contract vehicle, whether that's writing a task off of that or whether it's a governmentwide contract where you just use it, whether it's a schedule you're buying from, it's always best not to reinvent the wheel if you have a contract that's available to you and within scope for acquiring what it is you need to buy.

But say that's not the case.

You really do need to do a new contract. You need to understand up front what the accessibility requirements are for this particular action. First of all, determine whether or not you are procuring services or products that are considered information and communication technology.

And if they are, then let's know that up front. And that's going to form how you are stating those.

And then the next is, conducting the market research.

So, you know, a lot of these steps are going to be similar for existing contracts, but, you know, this can't be more critical right here than for a new contract conducting market research. You need to make yourself aware of are there accessible products or services available within the market already?

Are you going to be able to get what it is you need in this manner? So, you know, doing that research up front is really critical.

And then step three, developing the solicitation language. This is the more specific you can be in understanding what it is that you're trying to buy and understanding how the Section 508 technical standards may apply to this, incorporating all of that in the solicitation language is critical.

So just as contract terms and conditions for testing and validation, it's not just buying it, but when you're talking about accessibility, you're not one and done. You need to be sure that you are conforming to the Section 508 standards throughout the contract's period of performance. And just be clear of what applies and what the expectations are of the government when you write your language.

GSA has a bunch of great tools.

There are tools for developing contract language, so it actually helps guide you through that. Go to Section 508.gov if you haven't already to get that kind of solicitation language started.

And now step four, evaluate each proposal. So we're at the stage now where we've written our solicitation, we've put now -- we put out our statement of work and our performance work statements and we're asking for the contractor community to respond. And we're looking at their proposals and we're evaluating the proposals to validate what claims have they made against the stated accessibility requirements?

If it's already fore known commercial off the shelf products, they would be stating whether or not they're met or whether or not they have provided an accessibility conformance report, and those were to different things. One is a disclosure of how has our product performed against a technical standard? So that's not relevant for services, it's just relevant for products.

But it also could be stating that we have acknowledged that all of our deliverables that we provide to you, whether they be presentations or software we're developing or hardware that we're building, that we understand that those must be accessible as well. Regardless of what it is, trust but verify.

That's a very quick way of saying, we all know that we're not -- not every shop, not every acquisition shop or CIO shop is set up to have the staff that's going to go back and retest.

But there are some certain key things in evaluating what a company sends you to say did they just do a brush stroke and say we support, we support, we support, or is there some kind of thoughtfulness in here that gives us an indication that --

that, you know, verify as best you can. But that -- that they seem to be taking this seriously and addressing what our requirements are regarding accessibility.

And again, in step five, validate over time. If -- if the contract was to provide products and services, it's not just the initial delivery be accessible, but any time that those solutions are updated, whatever they be, hardware, software that had the contractor is building or even deliverables to you, just ensure that the updated versions of whatever is being provided meet the Section 508 requirements, that the contract called out originally.

That's why stating all of this stuff in your solicitation language in the contract is so critical. Going back afterwards, not so easy.

Next slide, please.

All right. So for existing contracts or COTS solutions, the person who has the requirement and we'll call them the requiring official, they are the one that identify the product or service to be purchased. And they usually know the acquisition method as well.

Sometimes they don't, but they usually are collaborating with maybe a contract specialist or a contracting officer.

And they know what their choices are, if any, as to how they want to proceed.

Now, we've put together what we almost call the 508 triage here to help you navigate the use of existing contracts and COTS.

There are several exceptions, and we're going to get to all of them by the next slide. But there are just a handful, there's three specific exceptions that if you determine up front within 508 that one of these exceptions applies, you don't technically need to obtain a technical conformance report.

Some agencies say we don't care if this applies, we're going to try to get it any way, and that's great. Because these exceptions apply based on use case.

So it really can change. Say you're buying a product and one of these exceptions may be applicable for the use of that product at that time. But maybe later you're buying the product and none of these apply. And you're going to need to get the report. An agency may see a pattern like that and say, we're going to engage with industry and get the report up front. But we're going to go over what the law says that you need.

So if someone is claiming a national security system, a federal contracts or for certain pieces of ICT that's located in maintenance or monitoring spaces, just for the status indicators and operable parts, if they are going to say that those apply, they would not need to get the ACR.

That last one we're kind of on the fence about, the functions located in maintenance monitoring spaces, because technically it's really only about the operable parts. So you may need -- you may actually need an accessibility conformance report if other standards need to be addressed .

But just in general, if one of these apply, we're jumping to step 5 that we'll see on the next page. But let's say they don't.

So our big thing here is you've got to get and obtain an accessibility conformance report from industry. Generally, the person who develops this report, the company that develops this report is the product developer, he -- not the reseller.

Sometimes companies have contracts with a third party for their products or services.

Either way, whoever is responsible for providing you with the product, whether it's the vendor that has the relationship and reaches back out, I had actually changed some of these charts so we'll get you an updated version so that changed to industry so I don't think this is quite the newest version of the charts, apologize for that. But hopefully it's clear enough that you get this.

Industry in developing this report, which simply discloses against each relevant technical standard whether or not that section 508 technical standard is supported, so whether it's met, partially met, or not met.

And the words that we asked to be used are supported, partially supported, or not supported.

That report is the cornerstone of making our accessibility determinations. We can't compare one product to another should there be more than one that meets your agency's needs. If these reports don't exist.

So we've put a lot of effort in collaborating with the I.T.

industry council who came up with these templates years ago, in fact, they came up with templates before the standards were revised. And those are going to be versions 1.0 and those are obsolete now. Some of you may still be getting them from industry. So it's been five years and we're strongly encouraging now that your old version of a report is not going to be acceptable anymore, you need to use a version 2.0 because that refers to the revised standards.

But anyway, that will be the cornerstone our acquisition, determinations, and decisions.

I'm going to do a shout-out to the program that Antonio and I work under, NASA SU which is a governmentwide acquisition contract because several years ago we -- this is what they get when they have me in their ear going, we need to do something to facilitate getting these ACRs from customers.

So the way that NASA SEWP works is it's a precompeted contract to buy IT, and there are close to 150 contract holders, over 80% of whom are small businesses. And we hold them accountable for getting that accessibility conformance report from the developer of the product that they're selling.

Most these contract holders, while some of them to do actually develop the products that people are buying, they're usually selling somebody else's products. So we're holding them accountable for getting that report at the time of quote.

And then there's a tool that one goes in when they're trying to use SEWP, it's called a request for quote, they is simply check a box and say provide that report. So again, this is just one example of an acquisition vehicle that is trying to help you get that report. But regardless of what acquisition vehicle you're using, you need to request that report up front from the person after they respond and you're considering the quote or whatever it is, this is when you identify the product and the maker of the product and simply ask them for it.

Some of the bigger companies, Apple and Dell and HP, they have varying stages of it being available on their website.

Sometimes you do scan their website and some is a if the report isn't listed here you can then email us to request it.

They all handle it differently.

But -- and we wish that there was an easy repository of completed reports to address.

Even if they may end up being outdated, at least we would know.

But that's what this whole obtaining accessibility conformance report is about.

Step three, evaluating the ACR to determine overall level of conformance. I will be brutally honest with you here. We are thrilled when we get an accessibility conformance report that we think is valid, we think it's been completed accurately, that really shows that every single technical standard is met.

There are some out there. But most of the time we are going to get ACRs, again, good ones, that show some of the standards have been met and some of the standards have not been met.

Some have been partially met. So that we can't just with a brush stroke say this is substantially conformant and we can go on.

We're getting there, but we know some of the functions are not accessible per the report.

And then nonconformance means most the applicable standards are not met. Both partial conformance and nonconformance, we're going on to the next page now which is existing contracts/COTS solutions page 2 of 2, what do we do if it's not full conforming?

Well, we determine through market research are there comparable products available?

And what's really key here is that you understand that the 508 law does not make an agency change its technical requirements for what they need.

If there really only is one product that's available to meet their needs, we really, really insist on getting that accessibility conformance report, but it may be the only one that we get because there are no comparable products.

Or perhaps there are comparable products, we need to review how accessible that product is versus how accessible the one is that we have the report.

So if we're looking and we're trying to make a comparison, we need that basic information. So again, what this step is about is reviewing the accessibility conformance report.

We ask you to partner with other organizations and other parts if you're not the Section 508 manager yourself but you're working the acquisitions job, make sure there's a good collaboration there. Because this is is not just you take it at face value what they state.

And there's no such thing as counting up, well, you know, say that there were 50 standards that apply and 35 of them were fully supported so we can ignore the others.

It's not about that. It's about some standards are really more impactful than others if they're not followed. And so you really need to engage with the people who understand this and review this to make sure you're buying the most accessible products.

So now we're back to step five.

Back to, meaning I mentioned it earlier that if one of those other exceptions that we talked about in step one or two, national security, federal contracts, or maintenance and monitoring spaces we copy those down here, determine and document possible exceptions.

So even if you did not require that accessibility conformance report, you still have to document it per the Section 508 of the rehab act law. It actually tells you which of these -- most of these require you provide some sort of statement asserting how or why this exception applies.

So that's simply what that means. They're not -- it's not extensive documentation pra --

processes, they're not detailed reports, but they are required across the board. And every agency in its implementation of this is going to accept different versions of reports or handle it differently. But bottom line, you can't just check a box and say, I'm done.

It's this exception.

So you really do have to understand what it is you're claiming one of these exemptions, the case is, how the product that's being bought is being used, and then just identifying what you need to state in your document. And that's especially true for best needs or fundamental alteration.

Undue burden, it could be true in your agency, the context for saying undue burden reads like there are not enough resources at the agency level or department level to make this accessible. And that doesn't really apply to COTS directly, it's kind of weird. But also that's kind of a hard thing to assert.

So undue burden is rarely used, at least in our cases.

Fundamental alteration is basically like a best meets in that it's saying that some of the technical standards could not be met because of the very nature of what the product is or does.

For example, if it's just inherent visualization and there are some functions to which you could do equivalent data access but you couldn't do all of the functionality that was being required with -- by following all of the 508 standards, you need to document which of those standards you cannot meet without changing your requirements.

And then you're still going to have your best meets documentation that you're buying the product that best meets it.

Unless all of the other standards are fully met, in which case you would just need to claim the fundamental alteration.

That sounds like a lot, it is a lot, but the easiest is once one has gone through this process and you document this process and you collaborate, it should be easier the next time and the next time.

The only thing that's going to be fresh is reading that accessibility conformance report from a company and making sure that it's filled out correctly.

And we're going to go into a little bit more about that especially with Antonio in the second presentation.

So then the next step, buy the product. And here's the key thing. The industry is off the hook at this point because we bought their product even knowing that possibly it is not fully accessible but it best met our requirements. Your agency is still on the hook to provide equivalent access to and use of the information and data.

This is the alternate means for those who need it.

So just because this is the best product out there, the most accessible product out there, if we know there's an accessibility issue, we within our agency have to do something in order for our people to be able to get equivalent access to that data.

The other key point I want to bring up on this chart is that -- and I should have said this, I'm sorry, on step five instead are jumping to step six, but I wish I had a dollar for every time industry tries to claim an exception. Oh, this is going to be used in federal contracts only or this is national security or this is best meets. They don't know what they're talking about, they're just reading over the law.

The applicability of exceptions is never determined by industry, only by the government. So it's the U.S. Federal Government who understands its use case of what it is going to buy. They are the ones that have to assert one of these claims.

So next slide, please.

Okay. Best practices. Just to reiterate, identifying your accessibility requirements early, up front in the acquisition lifecycle prevents costly rework. The collaboration that I spoke of earlier among anybody that's involved in the acquisition defining the requirements, acquiring or even using the ICT, it's going to yield more accessible ICT because when we engage in industry, and we give them consistent messaging that this has been a law for 21 years but we know, we hear ya that certain agencies are asking for this report and others aren't, we also know that certain factions within one agency are asking for it and others aren't, there could be legit reasons based on those exceptions. Or it could be we're just not consistent yet in our application.

The more we collaborate and work together, the more consistent we aretor industry and the more accessibility b able to I.T. they will become.

Because they're developing these reports and understanding that everybody is asking for them and it's giving them good information.

So again, as a best practice, let industry know that we're going to require these ACRs and we're going to evaluate your proposal for 508 compliance.

Whether it's new contractor or existing vehicles, this is true.

And also please don't take your accessibility conformance reports at face value. Make sure they look to be valid. And we've done whole training sessions on that. But if there's a red flag for you because perhaps things are left out that you think shouldn't be left out, then engage with your community there. Or reach out to us to help share ideas.

I think this Section 508 program manager community and the accessibility Community of Practice, we are here to promote that.

So let's make sure that we're sharing the information to help out our colleagues should they get an ACR that they have questions about.

This demystifying Section 508 guide, we've got links to it in these presentations and as I said to Antonio in the second presentation will go into it. We got the blessing of the IT industry council of our guide before we released it and we released it last November and we've just been promoting it.

And again, the brainwork originally of a couple of our summer interns. So it's really, really great. And we have received nothing but positive industry feedback saying that it's helping them. Our intent is we can't meet with all of them one on one. We've met with over 500 companies and that's great, but nobody has the time, the bandwidth to do all of that. So at least if we give them the template that they're yoursing to build a report and giving them the demystifying guide, it helps them prepare these reports.

And again, as best practice, NASA SEWP is the one I'm calling out, not because I'm trying to show favorites, but I have been out there trying to urge my colleagues for many years in the acquisition community, do the same thing that SEWP did. Make your vehicles work on behalf of the customers to help them get these accessibility conformance reports.

And so far, we haven't moved there yet. But hopefully we will. Hopefully GSA, nif or DoD, anyone with acquisition reports will make getting these easier for your customers.

The next slide, please.

Our last one is called resources. We have a link to the demystifying guide. We have links to the technical standards, links to 508.gov. We have a SEWP link for anyone that's interested. And Antonio just shared in the chat the copy of the link to get these presentations.

So with that being said, I think we might have a few minutes left for the questions and answers.

And I would just like to open it up to will people be able to just unmute their mics and ask us questions or should we just look into the chat?

>> Yvette Gibson: So it probably will be easier to look into the chat and I have your first question. He asks, do we need supplemental accessibility reports?

>> Betsy Sirk: I am going to answer for this personally and then turn it over to my colleagues. I have never heard of supplemental accessibility report. I have no idea what that is.

>> Yvette Gibson: Okay, he said it's the description of evaluation methods to produce the ACR.

>> Betsy Sirk: Okay. Do you know who coined that term? Is that a group? I don't know, is that -- Antonio, are you familiar with supplement like as an acc contract Nome, supplemental accessibility report? I'm not sure where that is emanating from, so I want to be able to address that.

>> Antonio Haileselassie: I've never heard of that as well. If they're completing a accessibility conformance report, there's a section that asks for their evaluation methods where they can provide some of that information.

Outside of that, I haven't heard of a separate report.

>> Betsy Sirk: Correct. And please reach out to us afterwards and we can kind of get to the bottom of, you know, where -- what's being asked for.

But what Antonio was referring to, and you're going to see that in the second presentation, is that the template that was --

okay, Robert Baker coined SAR.

But that is not a -- that's not a -- plus one for more information on SAR. I don't know if there's anything you can share.

>> Antonio Haileselassie: I think he's saying he wants more information as well.

>> Betsy Sirk: There we go.

Perhaps this was something that was done with within -- what was Robert Baker's agency? DHS? I don't know.

>> Yvette Gibson: Yes, Betsy, that was it.

>> Betsy Sirk: Okay, great. So this is what one would do.

Remember when I was making references to when you get an accessibility conformance report you're going to review it to make sure it looks valid? The first page of the report there's like nine or ten pages of instructions and then on page ten I think it's nine pages of instructions and on page ten it says the accessibility conformance report. So if you're using the VPAT, the most recent one is 204 revision 58. On this cover sheet this is where the company will give information about who's preparing the report, when it is, what the product is and product description and it asks you evaluation methods used. With you -- but there is no government wide document as to how they produce that report other than stating what their methods were.

Often we see it's based on product knowledge. Their evaluation is based on product only in. It can be that they either use tools, automated tools, or they just did -- they used trusted tester script, it could be multiple things.

But there is no recognized official term called SAR that's a requirement across the board.

So if you're industry -- excuse me, if your agency is using something in addition, that's great. But it's not anything that's officially recognized as a requirement.

>> Yvette Gibson: Thank you, Betsy. So we have a question from Paula and then I saw a hand go up.

So from Paula Castro, is there specific training for COs, KOs, to educate them on Section 508 requirements?

>> Betsy Sirk: No, this is excellent. We get asked this all the time. This presentation that I've done, to be honest, we were some of the first that were trying to target a contracting office. So I first did a version of this presentation to the national contract manager's association and it went over very, very well. Because even though GSA is a very big participant in that, it was never a topic that was strictly 508. But beyond what we've done, I would defer to you, Yvette, and to others that run the governmentwide 508 program, are you aware of any acquisitions specialists specific training that talks about the stuff that we're sharing today?

>> Antonio Haileselassie: I want to mention the training available in [multiple conversations] specifically for that.

>> Yvette Gibson: That's what I was think.

>> Betsy Sirk: I was giving you an in.

>> Yvette Gibson: We have training available if you go into Section 508.gov and you can do a search on training, you should find --

>> I think it's in there.

>> Yvette Gibson: Can you mute yourself, please?

>> Is that possible?

>> Yvette Gibson: Hello, did you mute yourself, please?

Thanks.

>> That's why I don't think you should have done more than one at a time.

>> Yvette Gibson: Okay. Any who, so there's training available there. You can also reach out to me. I'll put my email address in the chat. If you have additional questions on training related to Section 508 requirements. So we don't hold up the time, we're getting close to break time.

So Randy had a technical question. So -- oh, before Randy is Amina, then Randy. So Amina, your turn.

>> I don't like texting in chat. So I want to provide more information about supplemental accessibility report. What Robert told me was, and this makes sense for those of us who are bringing in COTS, but then we're doing integration to include cyber requirements or whatever requirements our organization may have to address other compliance-related issues.

So once you do that integration, you want to do another sort of accessibility testing to ensure that you haven't broken what was already accessible if it was accessible.

That was -- that is the intent of SAR. So it would be an internal agency testing process.

>> Antonio Haileselassie: Bruce Bailey says as -- SAR could be an OST process but is not part of the [?]

>> Betsy Sirk: Correct.

>> Yvette Gibson: Thank you for giving further insight on that, Amina, and thank you, Bruce, my guy. Thank you, Bruce. And thank you Betsy and Antonio for catching that.

So what I'm going to do is I'm going to let Randy go ahead and ask --

>> Betsy Sirk: If you don't mind, Yvette, in the interest of time, Randy's question is not related to this presentation at all, so I would ask if that could be -- if she could direct that to you afterwards. Because it's talking about --

>> Yvette Gibson: Oh, I didn't even read it.

>> Betsy Sirk: How to request captions and transcript services.

That's not about this presentation, but I think that you all can provide --

>> Yvette Gibson: Yeah, I can help her.

>> Betsy Sirk: Excellent.

>> Yvette Gibson: Randy, my email's in the chat, shoot me an email. Let's see what else we've got.

>> Betsy Sirk: Yeah. I don't know if there's anything else.

Go for it.

>> Yvette Gibson: Oh, two hands raised. I think I saw them pop up.

>> Betsy Sirk: Bruce.

>> Yvette Gibson: Bruce. All right, Bruce, come on.

>> Betsy Sirk: We love Bruce.

>> Be social and turn on my camera. It's Bruce Bailey from the access board.

Amina, I want to know where I can learn more about what should be in a SAR? Do you think that's posted someplace? What goes into it?

>> Call Baker out of retirement, he'll tell you more.

Actually --

>> Yeah, right.

>> I have a slide deck on it that talks about it. I have to dig it up.

>> Yvette Gibson: Dig it up, Amina, maybe we can share it with everyone. Is that okay? Or not.

>> No, or not. Or not.

>> Betsy Sirk: Well --

>> Let's not confuse people for what the real requirement is for an ACR with something more in the.

>> Yvette Gibson: That is true.

For those who would like to, because we don't want to add --

create any confusion.

>> Betsy Sirk: Yeah.

>> Yvette Gibson: Just shoot me an email and I'll reach out to Amina.

>> Betsy Sirk: And just as --

for full disclosure, Robert and I, let's just say, didn't always see eye to eye on our intents with what we were doing. We collaborated, but he was always focused on after you get an ACR what do you do with it? And I was focused on, well you can't do your review until we get the ACR. So while we both needed to coexist, this, perhaps, was one of the processes that he was drilling down and working on after you get ACRs how do you look at them, how do you validate them, things like that.

And he and I and others did, in fact, present on things like that. But what we really want to bring home for this community is we hear you and the struggles of getting these reports. And many agencies are being very strict admirably and saying we're not going to buy because it's violating the law. We're not going to buy technology that the company is refusing to disclose its accessibility. But others are.

And they may be claiming an exception erroneously or they may just be avoiding it. That's why this presentation is so important that when you're buying something, at least you have an opportunity to know what you need to get to enable you to move forward legally.

And beyond the legal requirement, it's more important that you're understanding that your actions of buying something that's inaccessible, if you don't know that it's really inaccessible, you can't provide equivalent access for your people.

So oftentimes you will see, I just want to shout this out really quick, if a company responds to you with a request when you request an accessible conformance report and they simply provide a statement either saying it doesn't apply to our products and that statement is wrong, or they give you a statement saying, well, we try to be as accessible as possible, or they give you a statement stating we are not accessible and we have not evaluated this product, none of those are acc -- are acceptable.

So that's where we come in and we try to give them the guide and we try to educate them as to how it's in their best interests, not just because I want to do business with the government, but because don't they want to sell their product to more people to at least disclose this?

So that's where we come in. So again, we all exist in this ecosystem, but you can't move forward if you don't have this done right. And, you know, we want to help.

Thank you, Yvette. I'm not sure if there were any other questions left.

>> Yvette Gibson: What we can do is I don't want to take any more time from the break. We can break here. Everybody come back at 2:05, and then if you have more questions, just put them in the chat during the ten-minute break. And we can address them before we move forward to Antonio. Okay. So everyone, you are officially on break until 2:05. If you have any additional questions for Betsy, just put them in the chat.

>> Betsy Sirk: I'll stay on.

>> Yvette Gibson: Thank you. Go ahead and take a break.

[Break]

.

>> Yvette Gibson: We're at 2:05, and we have to get to Antonio's presentation. So we can -- what we can do is bring -- at the end, if we want to hang on and have some more discussion, we can do that.

Okay. Is that okay, Amina?

I think that's okay with her.

>> Yes, it is. It's great.

>> Yvette Gibson: Okay. Great.

So welcome back, everyone. We are going to jump right in, just before we jump into Antonio's presentation, I will --

>> Antonio Haileselassie: It's a joint presentation, just to let you know.

>> Yvette Gibson: Yes, Antonio's and Betsy's joint presentation. I'm so sorry, I didn't put my camera on. But before we go there, I am going to put a question in the chat.

The first person that chats me the correct answer, there will be a gift card coming your way.

So we will not hold up Antonio, though. I'm going to put the question in the chat for everyone. And whoever chats me the correct answer, you will get it. Oh, phewy, let me make sure I put everything in there. Go ahead, Antonio, please. Oh, Betsy first, I'm so sorry.

>> Betsy Sirk: That's okay. I also wanted to -- I was remiss in trying to see the other participants, but I wanted an opportunity to introduce the rest of my team. We have our two summer interns that hopefully have been able to join this meeting. And at the end when we have time for questions and answers, that's awesome.

But Rio is a student that just completed his undergraduate degree in Computer Science from Vanderbilt and is currently doing a data science master. So also has amazing experience related to research and accessible technology, et cetera.

And then we also have joining us Owen Chong who hails from the University of Mary Washington in Virginia and he's a rising junior there. And he also has experience working and is a Computer Science major, both amazing students as well as focused and passionate about improving the case of accessible IT.

So we're just thrilled to have both of them with us. And then Courtney Ritz, I'm not sure if Courtney is on. Antonio, have you been able to see that?

>> Antonio Haileselassie: It looked like she was on earlier.

>> Betsy Sirk: Awesome. She's my alternate Section 508 program manager, so she's joining us as well. At the end, hopefully we have time for questions, just like we've been engaging after the first presentation, will be available to all of us as a team to answer anything. And also to engage in esteemed access to the 508 programs to jump in.

So welcome. For those of you who were able to join us for the first presentation, there's going to be a little bit of redundancy, but I also know that some people weren't able to make this until after 2:00 so just bear with us as we go through it.

But I am the chairperson of the federal CIO council's accessibility Community of Practice, specifically the industry outreach subteam.

And we work primarily to help be that liaison and engage industry to understand how this government law applies to the products that the government wants to buy that they build and how it's a win/win situation for them to at least assess their product against the Section 508 technical standards so they are aware of how accessible their product is.

And the more improvements they make in that area, the bigger audience they can engage. So that's what we do there too.

I am thrilled to be joined by Antonio Haileselassie who is an accessibility specialtyist who -- specialist who works with me on the NASA program. He helps me with industry meetings or focus groups, but these are where we engage with industry and help guide them through how they create these accessibility conformance reports.

So if you will joined us for the first time, you'll see a big focus of our presentations in acquisition is getting industry to provide that information so we can move forward.

If you wouldn't mind scrolling up just a little bit, I want to read out the link, but it's not showing on my screen, Antonio, so I'm not sure if perhaps if you see it --

>> Antonio Haileselassie: I can read it out.

>> Betsy Sirk: Go ahead.

>> Antonio Haileselassie: To find the link, it's www.tinyurl Dom/demystifycharts. So tinyurl.com/demystifycharts.

>> Betsy Sirk: So you can go there and get the charts later.

So this presentation is different in that we'll be focusing on and the outcome is introducing you to our demystifying Section 508 guide that was the brainchild of a couple of our NASA interns last summer and that Antonio and I spent a few months collaborating with the IT industry council to get their approval and blessing to roll this out.

So it's been out for a few months now and we are trying to -- our dream, our hope is that every federal agency that gets a hold of this who is engaging with industry and accessible acquisition, please share it with them. We have a URL where it's available under SEWP, NASA SEWP. We're going to go into that later.

But we're working with a Section 508 team on getting a link on Section 508 as well. But we're going to into go into why Section 508 matters and that's only to set stage for what's more of an informal walk-through of our guide.

There's a navigation component to it. You'll see how the guide is used and you may ask, this is a demystifying guide for industry, how does this help me?

Hopefully this helps you by answering some frequently asked questions that you have. But also the more consistent we are across the government of requiring the accessibility conformance reports be provided by industry, the more they hear that across the board, the more likely they are to develop these reports and understand that this does, in fact, apply to their products and services.

So you are a key in -- within your agency sharing this with them so that in helping them they help us.

So that's our big picture.

Again, we will share some resources and have time for questions and answers, which is our favorite piece.

So with that being said, the first slide here is Section 508 introduction. Again, this is the exact same slide as our earlier presentation. I just want to say that the key points here, 58 of the Rehabilitation Act has been around since, I believe, the late '70s. And it required that federal agencies make information communication technology accessible to its employees regardless of disability. But it was amended in, I believe, 1998 to really focus on ICT and then the technical standards came out and were published actually to go to be enforced in 2001.

So we were looking at 21 years of section 58 of the Rehabilitation Act being around and giving us some teeth to enforce providing our employees and members of the public with accessible technology.

The point of IT or ICT in its definition is that it's pretty all encompassing. Oh, thank you for -- I need the access point to correct me, the original act was 1973. So they couldn't really envision the IT component. But I believe that was 1998, Bruce will correct me if I'm wrong. But anyway, we also have in our chat now for those of you who are able to access it, the guide that Antonio's going to be sharing.

He has provided a link there for you to download it.

And also there is a link within these presentations if you download them to also access the guide.

But basically if you think it's IT, if it has any kind of smell to -- of IT in its functionality, it's probably going to fall under this definition, which is any equipment, interconnected system or subsystem that's used in the automatic acquisition, storage, analysis, evaluation, manipulation, management, movement, control, display, switching, interchange, transmission or reception of data or information.

And this applies to all the technology that the Federal Government procures, develops, maintains, or uses.

So this is pretty far reaching.

And we provide some examples of IT not to be limiting, but also to just spark your interest of what this applies to. It's not just computers, hardware, and software. In addition to computers, hardware and software, it's peripherals, it's scientific and specialized equipment. Most equipment, again, it's going to depend on how it functions, but you can't just do a broad brush and say that doesn't apply because I'm specialized. No, 508 has various technical standards that apply to that.

To office equipment, to devices that function in multiple ways, multifunction devices, like your printers and your scanners and your all in ones, your cell phone today, your mobile phone includes so much functionality and technology that it's hard to just call it telecommunications equipment because it's kind of a computer too. But this does apply to telecommunications equipment.

Also to your electronic content, which is your documents, your videos, your websites, and official agency communications. All of this is just the beginning of examples of ICT.

And then as I mentioned Earl -- earlier, the original 508 standards were issued in 2001 and revised in 2017. Next slide, please.

Why 508 matters. Again, apologize for the redundancy for those of you who attended our first session. But these were really, really key findings that we wanted to share with you in the hopes that you will then share them. And especially if you are in a situation with having to make a business case or justify beyond the fact that this is the U.S. law why this is important and why it matters.

So when I was at the Gartner symposium way back in 2019 pre pandemic, a lot of people, 10,000 plus attendees go there are largely like a CIOs, but people from all walks of life.

And they listened to what is Gartner going to share with us as its top predictions in IT trends for 2020 and beyond.

For the first time ever, I believe it was number two, they stated by 2023, and that's just next year, the number of people with disabilities employed will triple due to AI and emerging technologies that are being used to reduce barriers to access so that more people can join the workforce.

Well, we need to be ready for it as more and more people with disabilities, which is a big untapped labor pool right now, because only 30% of people with disabilities roughly are in the workforce. If we don't have accessible technology for them to use, we are shooting ourselves in the foot, collectively.

And that the positives about employing people with disabilities is organizations have close to 90% higher retention rates. They have over 70% more increased employee productivity. Close to 30% more profitability. Obviously that applies to the private sector, but also you can think of anything if you're within a federal organization such as NASA SEWP that is actually an acquisition vehicle and a working capital fund, that applies to us too with profitability.

But the key point here is added diversity that people with disabilities bring. It's not a monolithic group, it's a very diverse group. Added diversity and customer experiences and added perspectives yields better design solutions period. So no matter how many laws or acts we have or executive orders that reinforce this, this is the real world reason why we need to do this. It just helps.

The negative side, inaccessible technology, what does it do? It hurts employees and the organization. None of these benefits can be realized and our employees can't do their jobs.

That's why we need to do this.

Our mission has been in our governmentwide industry outreach program as part of our accessibility Community of Practice, we call it ACoP, it should be seen as a win/win because the Federal Government requires this. It's a law that is we to follow when we buy accessible -- when we buy technology, we are -- we are compelled to buy the most accessible technology available that meets our needs.

What's in it for industry? Not just because they get to sell to the government, that is a huge thing. But it allows them once they understand what these standards are, they can reach a broader audience. And guess what? Many of the companies are international. Our standards aren't even asterisk and robust as some of the our colleagues overseas. And to other countries, foreign countries, require stricter accessibility requirements than we do even.

So this is not something that's unique to the United States.

Fortunately the world is moving toward more accessibility and accessibility standards within their countries to just promote this across the board.

What happens when you design thinking about accessibility in mind? You're going to improve your customer experience across the board.

The next slide, please.

So here I'm going to summarize acquisition as an overview, because that will give you the context for why we built this guide and then I'll turn it over to Antonio to walk through it.

Acquisition overview slide 1 of 2, it's identifying that up front there's a great opportunity that the federal acquisition process provides for identifying how Section 508 goals can be achieved. Because if we build accessibility into acquisitions, we're going to enable our workforce. We're going to improve the customer experience. We're going to prevent the risk of litigation or highly reduce it because we're breaking the law if we don't consider this.

We also are going to avoid the very, very expensive retrofitting of ICT solutions because we didn't consider accessibility up front.

There have been multiple studies that show that there's either a 10% to up to a 50% project cost increase when you don't build accessibility in up front. So there's a huge impact here.

And also we want to allow those with disabilities on an equal footing.

There should not be regardless of the assistive technology you use or of any type of accommodations you may have, you should be on an equal footing and have equivalent access to data and information to do your job, as people that don't have a disability or have is not disclosed anything that they need additionally. If should be an equal playing field.

So what happens when you include accessibility requirements in acquisitions and how do you to it?

Well, Well, it depends on what's being procured. Are you going for an off the shelf pro conduct that's -- product that's already there. What you're buying is gol is going to determine how you access and how you're procuring it. This is mentioning some of the methods that people can use, credit cards, purchase cards.

You can buy -- write a new contract, open competition. You can do request for proposals, request for quotes. Using established governmentwide acquisition contracts that several federal agencies have for the entire Federal Government.

Regardless of the method that you're using, you will -- there will be little tweaks as to how you consider including the accessibility requirements but bottom line, you need to include them somehow. So while one size does not fit all, the key takeaway here is that ensuring that we get the accessibility requirements in early, regardless of your acquisition method, is the way to go.

Next slide, please.

This is going to be our acquisition overview slide 2 of 2. So for new contracts and solicitations, and these are ones where you're writing a statement of work or you're righting a performance work statement, this is where we are advising everyone ensure that the appropriate ICT accessibility requirements, the 508 requirements, are included.

And also let industry know that government will be evaluating their proposals to how they address Section 508, the requirements that we've stated.

It's not only important, we're just not putting it in there to do it lip service and to say we checked the box. We're really going to evaluate your response to see do you know what you're talking about here? Is this feasible?

If you're buying a commercial off the shelf product, there's no statement of work for that.

There is, hey, I want to go out and I want to buy, I've been using this as an example, because we've had the pleasure of meeting with two or three different companies and I'm happy to say that all of them have provided accessibility conformance reports. So very, very specialized scientific equipment that does meet some of the standards for 508 to be applicable.

So when we're using that, you would request from the company whatever product it is you're buying an accessibility conformance report.

Many of you have used the term VPAT interchangeably with VRR.

They're not exactly the same, but here's what the relationship is. A VPAT is developed by the IT industry council. This is a council that represents IT companies, very large companies across the world, they wanted to do something to help their industry partners develop these reports. So when the technical standards came out, even the original technical standards for 508, so way back when in 2001, a few years later the ITIC came up with a template called the voluntary product accessible template. At the time there was no 2 point X, they were all 1 point X or nothing because it just referred to the original standards.

Those standards, there was one place that industry could go and say hey, I don't have to go through the law, I can go back and I can see. Here are all of the standards listed.

And in the original standards up through 2017, it was kind of easy to go down the checklist of the standards. Not so much now when the revised standards came out in 2017 and enforced in 2018, they not only focused on how a product functions and included more standards and redefined and better defined certain standards for hardware and software and documentation, they also did something pretty big. Which was, hey, there's some international standards out there called web content accessibility guidelines, which by the way, don't only apply to web, but they apply to other electronic content. And we are going to incorporate by erchs in the section 508 revised law, we're going to incorporate the WCAG 2.0 standards.

So by doing so, you now have a long list of Section 508 standards as well as all the WCAG level A and level AA criterion when they call them success criteria, we call them technical standards. But these are international guidelines that are used across the world.

They actually have a level AAA that's above and beyond what the U.S. Section 508 requires that a company does. But if a company wants to go above and beyond and do all three levels, maybe they're subbing a lot internationally, we accept that too, it's just not a requirement.

But if you looked at all of that, it's kind of a bear to navigate. It's difficult to find all of the standards. You can go obviously directly to the technical standards. But what the ITIC did was they updated their template. The letter V for voluntary is because the ITIC has no authority to require that industry does anything. The U.S.

law, we are required to bite most accessible products, but we're not actually required to tell industry you're required do this. We just need it.

So that's why we've developed this cooperative collaborative environment so that it's VPAT 2.4, there's one specifically that refers to rev for revision REV Section 508, that's the one that we use. That's a template that a cup -- company uses.

If you go through the instructions, there's like nine pages of instructions in the template, and then the page you come to on page 10, it says accessibility conformance report. You strip off those instructions and industry starts its report, it's accessibility conformance report on page 10.

That's what that relationship is, they give us that report.

We honestly don't care, I'm a little bit particular because I think it's very confusing out there. I'd rather everybody call it an accessibility conformance report, but the key is here, getting this from the companies.

And most of the times then use a VPAT. Sometimes they develop their own report because they have picked up each and ever standard that's relevant and created their own report template. So that is fine.

But either way, that's what we're talking about. So what's this demystifying guide? Before I introduce -- get Antonio on here.

We have held meetings with close to 500 companies over the past four years and obtained many, many accessibility performance reports from companies who either said 508 does not apply to us and the product we're offering, we don't care, we don't think we should have to do this, but we acknowledge it applies but we don't want to. We've made a statement saying, we're not accessible because we don't want to take the time to understand the technical requirements, so just consider us not accessible and you can still go ahead and buy us. No.

Many, many other versions of that. This is an attempt to, in this guide, answer their questions, try to explain the win/win situation, the scenario that I laid out where, yes, we require this for our understanding so we can purchase it. But the reason you should care about this industry is it's going to make you more acquire -- aware of how you can market your product because more accessibility means more customers. And also this isn't as hard as you think.

So our interns who sat in on a couple of these painful meetings with us last year came up with the term demystifying it, because they were hearing common questions asked in these meetings. And our goal was to get industry to understand and agree and produce an accessibility conformance report. And in close to 100% of the time, we got that report in a pretty swift period of time, anything from a day to a week.

And these were for companies that were, perhaps, at times reticent for weeks.

So we want to enable our customers, like with the NASA, to buy equipment for their missions. And this isn't about them just doing it legally, obviously we have to say that, but getting them set for the future so that they'll be able to do repeated buys based on these reports.

So that's how this guide came about. It took -- after our intern sadly left us, there's only about a ten-week internship period, ten to 12 weeks, and then Antonio and I worked to roll this out by collaborating with the ITIC and other key parties within the accessibility Community of Practice. And we're really proud of it. Industry is finding it useful and we want you to be sharing it.

So the next slide, please.

Antonio.

I'm now going to turn it over to Antonio to walk you through the actual guide. And we will be looking in the chat for questions and when we're done here, we're is going to have time to entertain more of your questions. Take it away, Antonio.

>> Antonio Haileselassie: Thank you, Betsy.

As Betsy was saying, our interns, we had some fantastic interns last year. And we're sitting on these meetings -- I'm trying to spotlight myself, sorry.

We're sitting in on these meetings and the same issues kept coming up. We kept having the same questions, the same problems, we were repeating ourselves consistently.

And so they said, well, why don't we, as our project, create this guide, a guide for industry to use so that you don't have to keep holding these meetings. And they were individual meetings with vendors.

So let me pull this up guide here. And they were individual meetings with the vendors. And so it was time consuming, it's still time consuming because when we give them the guide still some don't understand. But it has reduced our need to have the number of meetings we've been having because there's a lot of information here that we don't need to repeat or go over.

So this guide, called demystifying Section 508, I'm not going through what's in the guide and the details of the information in the guide, but I'm going to walk you through what's here and just give you a sense of how to use the guide.

If you choose to use it, you give it to your -- you send it out to industry when they're having trouble with your VPAT.

You know, just have a sense of what's in here.

So let me start off. We start off with demystifying Section 508 and it's industry guide. And this serves to demystify the ACR for your product regardless of your experience level with Section 508. I'm going to call out our interns, Ellen Doll and others who were fantastic interns last year.

I did put the link in the chat.

But you'll notice we have two navigations. We have table of contents, quick navigation, 508 overview. Information and communication technology defined. Accessibility conformance reports. How to complete an ACR. And then frequently asked questions and references.

And that's our table of contents. But in addition to that, the interns wanted to do something a little different.

Interns tend to be -- tend to think outside the box. So they wanted to do something like a Turbo Tax-type navigation in a PDF format. Ultimately we had to make this 508 compliant, so it was challenging. But we mainly did it.

But there's a quick navigation here. So it starts out with the option to jump to how to complete an ACR. Maybe you don't need all the other information.

And you just want to know how to complete an ACR. So that link is there. You click on the link, it takes you directly to how to complete an ACR.

There's also a link directly to frequently asked questions. But the question set here is first, are you familiar with Section 508? If it's yes, you click on this -- you just go to the next question here, which would be do you want to know how Section 508 exceptions are granted?

Or you can click on no, just take me straight to the part about Section 508 because you want to learn more, right? So you would click on that or hit enter and it will take you right to your Section 508 overview.

Then there's a link here to be able to click back to your quick navigation if you needed to.

And then there's a few more questions. Are you familiar with the acronym ICT? If not, you can go straight to the part about ICT.

Do you know about what an ACR is? If not, take me to the part about ACRs. Do you know what a VPAT is? No. Take me there.

Are you familiar with WCAG? Do you want tips on how to complete an ACR? Yes, it will take you straight to how to complete an ACR.

So, they wanted to make it really simple and easy to use for any vendor, you know, just so you don't have to go through all of the information in the beginning. If you've ever seen a VPAT, there's about 12 -- about ten pages of just strictly instructions before you actually get to the VPAT. And some of the instructions are a little hard to understand the wording, in my opinion. But, you know, if you read through it it makes sense.

But it can be a lot. Sometimes you just want to know how I can complete this thing. That's what we were finding from vendors, that's what they wanted. How I do complete it?

So this particular guide takes them straight to that information.

But let me just quickly go through some of the headings here. In the 508 overview, you know, we talked about what is Section 508. We go over why Section 508 is important. The benefits of Section 508. Who does it help? Talks about color contrast, closed captioning, keyboard only navigation. And then what's the difference between the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act? Because a lot of vendors didn't know that there was a difference.

So they wanted to make sure that information was there.

My company currently does not sell products for the Federal Government. Does Section 508 still apply to the products I sell? This is the next heading.

Are there waivers or exceptions that we can -- that we can claim?

And of course, there are no waivers to Section 508. There are, however, exceptions provided in the law, but we let the vendors know these exceptions cannot be claimed by industry since these are exceptions that can only be claimed by the Federal Government and it's depending on how the product is being used.

All right. Then our next heading level one, information and communication technology defined. What is ICT? Is there a difference between ICT and IT?

And we explain that. Basically they're built on top of each other.

What are some less common examples of ICT? And then we go into robotics, lasers, radar, things that, you know, because we were finding that particularly with NASA, we deal well a lot of scientific equipment and so a lot of the vendors who are, you know, delivering scientific equipment say hey, Section 508 doesn't apply to us and then we have to make sure they do or they can.

And then the next heading, accessibility conformance reports. What's an ACR? Answer that question.

Are there different methods for developing an ACR?

What is a VPAT? You know, sometimes you don't understand what the difference is between a VPAT and an ACR. Basically a VPAT -- I'm sorry, a VPAT is an ACR just using the VPAT template.

Is an ACR voluntary in because of course, in the name VPAT the V stands for voluntary. So a lot of vendors or a lot of industry just says hey, this is voluntary, I don't have to complete this. They need to understand that the Federal Government is required to make a purchase with -- to make a sale with the Federal Government, to do business with the Federal Government.

What is WCAG? Why is WCAG important to Section 508 and why does it apply to software and, you know, so the next question have does WCAG only apply to web content? So we explain that.

And then the best part. How to complete an ACR using a VPAT.

This is the thing that helps vendors often. Now I do want to point out the ITI has downloadable -- on YouTube has videos going into a lot of detail. One of the things is we did make reference to those videos if someone wanted to go into those videos. But for example, step one, download the VPAT. And we give the information on where to download it.

Step two, complete the ACR, accessibility conformance report title page. We have the information here that you want to fill out.

And understand the three columns the VPAT tables. First column criteria. Second column performance level. And third column remarks and explanations.

As far as conformance level, you know, supports, partially supports, does not support, not applicable. This guide explains what that means.

And when we talk about remarks and explanation, it explains when to provide remarks and explanations, for example, when it's only partially supports or does not support, we need information on why so that, for example, as Betsy was saying, we need to make sure that even though we may purchase a product that is not fully accessible, we still need to provide an alternate means for people with disabilities. We need to still provide that access.

So if we are aware of what the problem is, question then be able to provide that access.

So we make sure they know if it's partially supports, does not support, let us know why.

All right.

Step four, complete table one, success criteria A, success criteria AA from the WCAG standards. We explain the WCAG standards, et cetera.

Step five, determine the applicable of the revised Section 508 standards of your product. So go through and figure out which standards apply to your product, because these standards are designed to be based upon the function of your product. The features of your product. So you have to ask yourself, does my product have this feature? And therefore, is -- is this particular standard applicable? And then if it is applicable, do I meet it?

Do I support it? Do I not support it? So we explain that to the industry, to vendors.

All right. And finally, and this was important for the --

our interns, interns wanted this step six, a final checklist to make sure the ACR is complete.

So you go through, you go through this checklist, are you using the correct version? Did you exclude the first several pages of instruction? Did you complete the information fields at the top of the ACR? If applicable success criteria A, you know, which standards were applicable? Are you use willing the correct phrases to describe conformance level, supports, partially supports, et cetera.

Did you complete the remarks column? If it's partially support, does not support. And is your ACR document accessible?

That's a very important step, you know, sometimes you can provide an ACR document, if it's not in an accessible format, you know, it's -- it's not valuable to us. We want to make sure the ACR is also fully accessible.

And then finally, frequently asked questions. And these were questions that came directly out of all of the sessions that we were having with our interns.

How do I determine if my product is compliant with Section 508? How I do know which version of the VPAT to use?

I've not completed a VPAT ACR before, why am I being required to complete it now? That's an exact question that came out.

My company created a ACR years ago, may I use the same one today?

And we talk about, you know, the original standards. Should I complete an ACR if my product is not fully accessible?

Right. A lot of times a lot of the vendors, a lot of industry doesn't want to complete a VPAT because they know that their product is not fully accessible.

So we let them know, yes, still complete your VPAT. Be honest.

We can still make purchases, but at least we have a sense of what level of accessibility your product has.

My product was not web based.

Do the WCAG 2.0 standard guidelines apply?

My product has support documentation. I do need to complete -- I'm sorry, my product has support documentation, hardware and mobile application. Do I need to complete three separate ACRs?

My product is an add-on for the product. Am I responsible for completing the ACR for my product? I'm not going through all of these.

The last one, my product contains both software and support documentation which section of the VPAT do I need complete?

And then there's some references, some standard references at the end of our guide. And I'm telling you, as the interns were developing this guide, you know, I worked days with them and we were just putting this together. Just loved working with them. And just their thoughts and, you know, how they would -- their thought process putting it together.

I'm proud of this, Betsy's proud of it, we're proud of our interns that put it together.

But please do feel free to use this. Send this to industry if the does help. We've got fantastic feedback from industry saying hey, you know, this really helped me. And then they've come back with a perfect VPAT.

So without even sitting down and talking, we just gave them the guide and perfect VPAT.

So definitely suggest it. If you have any questions, feel free to ask.

Betsy, I'll let you jump in.

>> Betsy Sirk: Thank you so much, Antonio. I don't think there's anything in the chat now, but we did have a resources page that I don't know if you want to share that. At the last page of the presentation.

>> Antonio Haileselassie: Yep, I'm switching back now.

>> Betsy Sirk: Perfect. Guess what, I learned and thank you so much, Michael, that you can go to Section 508.gov and find our guide.

>> Antonio Haileselassie:

Awesome.

>> Betsy Sirk: I didn't realize you guys had done that. We're very, very happy with that because we like sending everybody to Section 508.gov and finding it in as many places as possible is wonderful. We haven't heard back from the IT industry council, but they said they would put it on their website as well.

So Antonio mentioned the training videos. It was -- oh, gosh, maybe a year and a half ago I think perhaps two years ago that we were working with ITIC as those videos were getting rolled out in the is that collaboration I was talking about earlier that's really necessary as a community to help everyone on this. So bringing these resources together.

So with that being said, it looks like we've got the ten minutes remaining for any kind of questions and please, you know, shout-out either in the chat or go ahead and raise your hand and we're happy to address it.

>> Antonio Haileselassie:

Michael said I love Antonio's excitement when he said radar.

Love it.

Any other questions?

>> Betsy Sirk: I don't see a question here but I have a comment and I'm assuming that means on the guide. It says consider replacing click with select.

>> Antonio Haileselassie: Yeah, [?] for verbally saying that.

>> Betsy Sirk: Sure. I'm not really seeing anything. Some shout-out to the interns. And again, I want to do a shout-out to Courtney Ritz, our NASA 508 colleague as well as Owen Chong and Rio. Rio and Owen are our current NASA interns and we are running the same -- we rant same ad, if you will, for the opportunity to work on making IT more accessible throughout NASA and also supporting our governmentwide efforts.

We are honored to get such amazing candidates apply.

Because as you can imagine, there may be more flashy internships available throughout NASA. There's a lot. And they're always ultra competitive. But we are just -- we're really humbled that they have joined us today for this. And that also last year our two interns, one is doing a stint at capital one bank while she continues to be an undergraduate, that's Ellen.

And the other one is a graduate student now, but she also took a NASA position called a NASA pathways position, which means that she is back working at NASA. So we could not be more happy. They were amazing and Antonio said, it's always great to have the fresh ideas and perspectives come through that the interns provide.

Because many of us have just been working so closely to this, we don't see what appears to be either confusing or can be done in a better way to make it more accessible.

So that's really what's great for us.

>> Antonio Haileselassie: I'm not seeing any new questions, but do we want to introduce Courtney and our interns, our new interns?

>> Betsy Sirk: Yeah, go for it.

>> Antonio Haileselassie: Okay.

>> Yvette Gibson: Let me --

okay, yes. Please, you can go ahead and introduce them and we will close out right after your introductions.

>> Betsy Sirk: I just said, so maybe to put on the camera and wave for our interns, I just did their introductions. Rio, do you want to put yourself on camera and wave? If you can. If not, we're having some system issues with Zoom.

And then the other one would be Owen. Don't know if you're available to shout out.

>> Antonio Haileselassie: I think Courtney's available.

>> Betsy Sirk: Courtney, do you want to say hello to everyone?

>> Sure. Hopefully everyone can hear me.

>> Betsy Sirk: We can.

>> Great. Hi there. I've enjoyed sitting in and listening to this because even though these are things I'm familiar with, working with all these wonderful NASA folks, it's always, you know, a learning opportunity.

Thank you.

>> Betsy Sirk: Thank you, Courtney.

And for those of you who are usually focused on -- if you're not the Section 508 program manager responsible for everything, oftentimes there are certain aspects of the role, like somebody is very attune to what you need to do for custom development, building your applications, building your websites. That skill set could be very different from working this acquisition area. While it's the same technical standards, it's a different perspective in the different skill set. So the more that we collaborate and share across all of our different roles, the better we are in coming together to ensure we're doing this right for our people across the board.

But just feel very honored to have Courtney and Antonio and the interns be part of our NASA team, which is way too small and way underfunded as I'm sure many of you can relate to that situation.

But we're just thrilled to have this opportunity and hopefully we didn't bore you.

>> Yvette Gibson: Thank you, Betsy. Thank you, Antonio. We appreciate you guys.

And I wanted to give a special shout-out to our interpreters, Shameka and -- Shameka, what was the other lady's name?

>> Lucy.

>> Yvette Gibson: Lucy. Thank you so much Shameka and Lucy, we appreciate you. To my guy, Mike Horton, thank you, Mike.

And to all of you that attended, Bruce, thank you. And we appreciate you guys. We'll hang out for another five or ten minutes if you have any additional questions. And I know Amina wanted to say something.

Look out -- we look forward to seeing you in August and please, please, please, Mike put the link in the chat for the -- to do our follow-up survey. Please, we really would like to hear --

get your feedback because these are put on for you guys. So we like to know what you would like to -- what you would like to hear discussed.

So please, it's so important to us to hear your feedback.

I think that's it. Mike, did I miss anything?

>> No ma'am.

>> Yvette Gibson: Cool. Well thank you for attending everyone. We'll hang out for another five or ten minutes if you want to discuss anything.

>> Betsy Sirk: Does NASA have experience purchasing ICT for classified work or classified networks? Yes. Again, it's going to depend on the requiring official. We're not talking a national security exception because if it's a national security exception and the only case we've ever had for that is ground system software that was being used overseas. Because we typically don't have that exception.

It is going to be -- if our criteria is, is the NASA civil servant going to be using this or is it going to be incidental to our contract?

So we wouldn't necessarily know if it is -- if something is classified, we probably wouldn't see it. It probably would not be put through the regular acquisition process. So we don't even ask those questions. And I'm not sure, Rosemary, if that addressed -- addresses your particular question. But perhaps you can -- if you're still around, you can elaborate.

I'm sorry, that was one of the questions that I saw.

>> Excuse me, I can ask a question?

>> Yvette Gibson: Yes.

>> Betsy Sirk: Sure.

>> Is it possible you guys can email the survey link? Because I use a screen reader and it's hard to get on this link because I'm on my smartphone right now.

>> Yvette Gibson: No worries. I responded, yes, I will email it to you, don't worry about that.

>> You are amazing. Thank you, guys.

>> Yvette Gibson: You are so welcome.

>> All right. Bye.

>> Yvette Gibson: Bye-bye.

Do we see anything else?

>> Betsy Sirk: No, I may be the person Rosemary dropped off I was trying to address more about the buying IT for classified purposes.

>> Yvette Gibson: Oh.

>> Betsy Sirk: Here's one, what kind of advice can you give to other agencies that have not invested in accessibility staff to improve their accessibility efforts?

That is -- it depends on what your role is. Obviously support from the top is critical.

Because there's only so much that -- from the ground up can get through. And that's, unfortunately, where most of the accessibility initiatives fall is on mandates.

So the only advice that I would give is try to, you know, pound the pavement and try to find as high up as possible an executive sponsor. You know, it may be a no-brainer that your CIO under which many of the IT initiatives fall should be the one to be that. But oftentimes it is not .

So you need to find people within their organization or a sister organization that could really help support you.

And then also look at if you are seeing -- if you're working accessibility and you just don't have the resources and all that, try to find some low-hanging fruit. Try to find one process that's recommended as a best implement and see how far that gets you.

I found that calling out the latest, you know, DEIA actor any other laws or executive orders, that doesn't get you very far.

Unless it's on somebody's radar screen because they've got to address it.

If they find something that's real and you've got a solution to it and you do something whether it's just a piece of a process, then maybe incrementally you can get there.

But I think not having a sponsor, you know, executive sponsor for the work that you're trying to do, it's really hard to make any headway. But 20 years in at NASA we're nowhere near where we should be. But we've got some great successes within the enterprise and then we have some that are lagging behind.

So what we try to do, in light of not having the resources being applied at the entire agency level, is we try to get the ground level support at each of the NASA centers finding the people who are on the front lines trying to do this as another duty as assigned, finding ways to help them to do it better and making progress that way. But you need to have somebody high up in the organization that's going to acknowledge that we need to be doing this.

So hopefully that's just sharing some insights.

>> This is Mike. If I could tack on to your perfect thought there. You do need that executive sponsor. But the position is the 508 program manager, if you're delegated as that role, one of your jobs is to raise that awareness. And that is to your executive suite, to your HR. I would work with them to build an awareness course that every employee has to take. And so that they understand each of their rolls.

IT, I tirks is one of those things that's not one particular proeflg professional's role. If you look at the lifecycle of a product you have a needs statement that turns into requirements and this thing you need to buy to meet your business need. And then it goes through that procurement, it's award and then it's either deployed as a COTS product or developed as a cuss tomb product and test and used before it's decommissioned. There are dozens and dozens of professionals that work in a specific kind of role in nurture that thing along. And each of those people have a responsibility to ensure that 508 is built into that product with respect to whatever they're doing.

Whether, again, that's putting in the requirements in the solicitations, you know, having the QASPs in your award, working with your contracting officer to make sure they're maintaining performance as they iterate the product.

And then those people that additional duty is assigned, publish this.

I don't know HTML or how to publish, but I just fill in the titles in these little fields and publish.

Well, there's a little bit more to know about that. So everyone's got a role. I did in the chat, Myriam, I provided a link to our playbook which is a series of things that go through getting that sponsorship, doing assessment of your program, building a team, you know, building out a test process. We have those here. So there's a lot of resources on 508.gov, certainly if you have questions, Betsy is a wealth of knowledge and she can certainly help out there.

We have resources on 508.gov and then from the program side certainly our team is happy to help and you can reach out to us at Section.508@GSA.gov.

Hopefully that's just not way too much information all at once.

>> Betsy Sirk: I just want to go on record that I'm very impressed that Mike has his own backdrop with his name and picture. He didn't audio describe it, but I would not do it justice. It's a cute little -- well, do you call that a meme or do you call it your mini meme?

>> Avatar.

>> Your Avatar, I guess a mean has kind of a negative connotation. But he's got this adorable Avatar with himself with his name as his backdrop.

So I'm smiling listening to what he says.

Thank you for those excellent questions. And to those of you who are in the situation and like Marian, thank you for your comments about being the sole person in a contractor or trying to do this, hopefully some of the charts we shared about why accessibility matters and why this is important is something that you can be using within your organization to get them to take notice.

So thanks, everyone, again for the opportunity and I'll hang around until Yvette and Mike call it a day.

>> Yvette Gibson: I'm calling it. I'm calling it. I'll call it in one minute, 3:05. Since I just love you, Betsy.

>> Hey, Betsy, if you send me your me moji, I'll make one for you.

>> Betsy Sirk: You know what I noticed they're all thinner and cuter than the real person. I'm sorry, but that's what people do.

>> That's what mine is. It's the wonder me.

>> Nobody's going to put like, you know, maybe I can look like Avatar from the movie Avatar, that would be cute.

>> Betsy, I am sure you do a me moji that is --

>> I will, Mike. I'll take you up on that.

>> All right. But I can't be as cool as Antonio. He's got that NASA thing like he's in NASA central with his glasses.

>> Yvette Gibson: That's nice.

>> Betsy Sirk: And mine is totally behind my head. Like it's not --

>> Move it over here.

>> My problem I can't even see myself so I never think about it but I think there are a lot of cool ideas so I'll have to think of something. I know, I could do something from space camp because I'm sure I've got one of me flying the orbiter. That would be a good one.

>> Betsy Sirk: If you don't mind me sharing, how old were you when you went to space camp?

>> I was -- let me see. It was

[ Event concluded ]