

# Accessibility through Procurement

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Access South Carolina IT

**accessibility.sc.gov**



## What's the relationship between accessibility and procurement?

[The National Center on Disability and Access to Education](#) (NCDAE) clarifies the relationship between accessibility and procurement:

One of the most brilliant aspects of the federal implementation of the Section 508 regulation for accessible electronic information technology was that procurement was tied into the process. From the very beginning, federal agencies were required to procure, use, and maintain accessible goods and services. When faced with a purchasing decision where no product was wholly accessible, the 508 regulation dictated that an agency buys the "most" accessible product.

- [NCDAE on the importance of procurement in accessibility policy](#)
- [NCDAE's examples of procurement language](#) for a Request for Proposal, Purchasing contracts of specific products, and Purchasing procedures used for general purchasing

## University of Washington on Procuring Accessible IT Guidelines

Those responsible for making decisions about which products to procure must consider accessibility as one of the criteria for acquisition. This is especially critical for enterprise-level systems or technologies that affect a large number of students, faculty, and/or staff. Considering accessibility in procurement involves the following steps:

1. Vendors must be asked to provide information about the accessibility of their products.
2. The information provided by vendors must be valid, measured using a method that is reliable and objective.
3. Those making procurement decision must be able to objectively evaluate the accessibility of products, and to scrutinize the information provided by vendors.

When discussing accessibility with vendors, request specific information about accessibility of their product, such as the following:

- Is your product accessible without a mouse? (ask them to demonstrate)
- Has the product been tested with assistive technologies (AT)? If so, which AT products were tested? Who did the testing? What was their testing methodology? What were the results?
- How is accessibility built in to your quality assurance workflow? If you roll out upgrades after we purchase the product, how can you assure us the upgrades will not break accessibility?

## **Voluntary Product Accessibility Template (VPAT)**

[The Voluntary Product Accessibility Template](#) (VPAT) is a standard form developed to assist federal agencies in meeting Section 508 requirements. Agencies can ask vendors to complete the VPAT as part of the procurement process. One limitation is that the VPAT is a self-report. Another limitation is that some vendors do not have adequate technical expertise to accurately assess accessibility. Also, Section 508 is limited, developed to be the minimum standard for federal agencies accountability. Products can technically meet Section 508 standards, but still present significant barriers in usability for people with disabilities. The VPAT doesn't evaluate these barriers.

[University of Wisconsin-Madison Guidance on Using VPAT](#)

[The VPAT Form](#)

## **Other Recommendations from ASCIT**

Procurement language can and in many cases, should require that the vendors' products be tested for accessibility using keyboard navigation, online accessibility checkers, and if possible, actual users with disabilities before procurement process is completed.