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# AT-A GLANCE

## THE ACCESS BOARD'S PROPOSED RULE (2015) TO UPDATE ACCESSIBILITY REQUIREMENTS



### HOW IS IT DIFFERENT THAN THE CURRENT RULE?

The philosophy behind the current rule is to deal with the technical implementation of the standards. Since the current rule was published over 15 years ago, there has been a tremendous amount of progress with regard to information technology. The Access Board \* initiated a refresh to deal with the innovations and changes in the technology industry. Specifically, this rulemaking proposes, “replacement of product-specific requirements with enhanced functional-based criteria due to the increasingly multi-functional capabilities of various products such as smart phones.”

### SYNOPSIS

The Access Board has released for public comment a [proposed rule](#) updating accessibility requirements for information and communication technology (ICT) in the federal sector covered by Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. The rule also would jointly update guidelines for telecommunications equipment subject to Section 255 of the Communications Act.

Visit the specific Access Board NPRM page to view details of the ICT Refresh [here](#).

### THE NEW RULE WILL:

- ✓ Organize technical provisions by functions, rather than product types, for example “two way voice communication” not “telephones”.
- ✓ Reference external standards – WCAG 2.0; ANSI C63.19-2011.
- ✓ Provide technical assistance within the document.
- ✓ Clarify ambiguities in current standards and guidelines.
- ✓ Clarify what products are covered and improves testability.



### BROAD APPLICATION OF WCAG 2.0

The proposed rule would incorporate, by reference, the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0, a voluntary consensus standard developed by ICT industry representatives and other experts. It would also require WCAG 2.0 Success Criteria to be applied not only to Web content but also to non-Web documents and software.



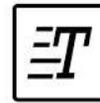
### EXPANDED INTEROPERABILITY REQUIREMENTS

The current standards require ICT to be compatible with assistive technology - that is, hardware or software that increases or maintains functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities (e.g., screen magnifiers or refreshable braille displays). But, because this requirement has proved ambiguous to enforce, the proposed rule now specifies how operating systems, software development toolkits, and software applications (Apps) should interact with assistive technology.



### DELINEATION OF "ELECTRONIC CONTENT"

The proposed rule would also specify which types of electronic content that communicates official agency business would have to be accessible. The existing standards require federal agencies to make information and data accessible but do not delineate clearly what information and data must be accessible; as a result, document accessibility has been inconsistent across federal agencies.



### REQUIREMENT FOR RTT FUNCTIONALITY

The proposed standards would require real-time text (RTT) functionality wherever an ICT product provides real-time, two-way voice communication. RTT is defined in the proposed rule as text that is transmitted character by character as it is being typed. An RTT recipient can read a message while it is being written, without waiting for the message to be completed; this is different from other message technologies such as "short messaging service", or SMS, which transmit the entire message only after typing is complete.

## ABOUT THE ACCESS BOARD

The Access Board has the statutory requirement to periodically review and, as appropriate, amend the standards to reflect technological advances or changes in electronic and information technology." (Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act). They also review and update the Telecommunications Act Accessibility Guidelines periodically" (Section 255 of the Telecommunications Act, 16 years since this has been updated). This act gives industry its guidelines for developing telecommunication products that are accessible to persons with disabilities.

## GET INVOLVED

The Access Board will hold public hearings in San Diego on March 5 and in Washington, DC on March 11 and host a webinar on March 31. Public comments are due in 90 days (April 18<sup>th</sup>) and can be submitted and viewed at [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov) (RIN: 3014-AA37).