

The President's New Freedom Initiative Goals, Accomplishments, and Next Steps

Chapter 1. Increasing Access Through Technology

New technologies are opening opportunities for work, community living, and independence for those with even the most severe disabilities. The New Freedom Initiative commitments will help jumpstart research in assistive and universally designed technologies and will help ensure that Americans with disabilities have access to those technologies.

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 became effective in June 2001. It requires that all electronic and information technology purchased by the Federal government be usable by people with disabilities. This requirement will lead to improved services for customers with disabilities and a more inclusive, better equipped workplace for Federal employees with disabilities. Accessible electronic and information technology will transform the Federal government into a model workplace full of diverse problem solvers improving America's ability to compete in the global economy.

Federal Investment in Assistive Technology Research and Development and Access to Assistive Technology

Accomplishments

- On June 19, 2001, while touring an assistive technology lab at the Department of Defense, the President announced his strong support of the implementation of Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. He recognized the potential of Section 508 to improve disability services and public service employment for people with disabilities, calling it "one example of the successful public-private partnerships that are removing barriers to full community participation by Americans with disabilities."
- In FY 2002 the President secured \$20 million for the Department of Education Rehabilitation Engineering Research Centers, which conduct advanced research in the field of assistive technology.
- The President secured \$5 million in the FY 2002 budget for the Assistive Technology Development Fund to assist small businesses in the development and transfer of new technologies.
- The President secured \$37 million of the \$40 million he requested in the FY 2002 budget for the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) to award matching grants to states to help people with disabilities purchase assistive technology through low interest loans and other means.
- The President secured \$3 million in the FY 2002 budget, substantially increasing the funding for the NIDRR Interagency Committee on Disability Research to coordinate the many Federal disability research programs.

Other Administration Technology Accomplishments

- To facilitate a common understanding of the Section 508 requirements, the interagency Section 508 Steering Committee and Working Group were formed in Spring 2001. The

Steering Committee, led by the Department of Education, and the Working Group, led by the Office of Management and Budget, work closely with those agencies responsible for Section 508 -- the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board (Access Board), the Department of Justice, and the General Services Administration (GSA) -- to coordinate technical guidance and training. GSA's Web site at www.section508.gov includes technical assistance documents and free 508 training modules for various audiences. The Steering Committee continually updates the 508 site to address questions and needs gathered from meetings of industry, consumer groups, and government staff to discuss implementation issues and the market response to the new standards.

- The Department of Justice has developed a Web page at www.usdoj.gov/crt/508/508home/html that provides technical assistance regarding accessible technology pursuant to Section 508. Although Section 508 requires only Federal agencies to ensure that their electronic and information technologies are accessible to persons with disabilities, the Web site provides information that will be useful to private businesses, state and local governments, manufacturers of equipment and software, vendors, and individuals with disabilities regarding accessible technologies. In addition, the Department of Justice and the Access Board have provided technical assistance materials for Web and software developers at the Access Board's Web site, www.access-board.gov, and have helped develop the government-wide Web developer training material on the Section 508 homepage.