

Procurement of ICTs for Inclusive Government and Public Sector: Guide for Engaging ICT Vendors

Introduction

This document was created by G3ict – The Global Initiative for inclusive ICT - to help government and public sector agencies at all levels (e.g. national, state, and local governments, municipal and regional authorities, government-funded programs) integrate accessible information and communication technologies (ICT) into their policies and practices. The goal is to ensure government and public sector agencies are well equipped to move toward a stronger commitment to making accessibility a part of their ICT procurement, including by having more productive engagements about digital inclusion with technology vendors. This Discussion Guide will help governments and public sector agencies prepare for those engagements. This Guide is one of several resources G3ict and its partners have developed to support digital inclusion worldwide.

The [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (CRPD) recognizes the accessibility of ICTs both as a human right (Article 9) and as an enabler of other human rights. 177 countries worldwide have signed on to the CRPD. Many national and local laws, regulations, and policies align with these CRPD commitments as well with globally relevant ICT accessibility standards, such as [EN 301 549](#) (EU); [Section 508 of Rehabilitation Act](#) of 1973 (USA) technical requirements, and [WCAG 2.0](#)/ISO/IEC 40500 (2013). In early 2018, the W3C released an updated version of that standard, [WCAG 2.1](#).

- For ICT, **accessibility** is generally accepted as being the quality of a mainstream technology such as a computer, mobile phone, self-service kiosk, or piece of software, to be used by the widest range of users possible, regardless of their abilities or disabilities. Accessibility makes it easier for anyone to see, hear, and use a device and to customize their digital

environment according to their own preferences, needs, and abilities. Interoperability between the built-in access features and add-on accessible technologies are needed to ensure accessibility for a full range of individuals with disabilities.

- **Public procurement policies** set the expectations, criteria, and limits for how goods, services, and infrastructure development will be purchased. Public procurement processes have gained increased attention as an effective policy tool to promote the accessibility of ICT equipment, software, applications, and services purchased by governments or government-funded programs of all levels. It is common practice for governments to promote ICT privacy and security by including them as part of their procurements. ICT accessibility can be added as a priority in a similar way.
- **Globally relevant accessibility standards** such as [EN 301 549](#) (EU), [WCAG 2.0/ISO/IEC 40500](#) and the technical requirements of [Section 508 of the U.S. Rehabilitation Act](#) are commonly referenced as criteria in Requests for Proposals (RFPs). Many ICT providers design and develop their products and services to meet these criteria. It is a common practice for governments to request vendors provide accessibility conformance reports demonstrating how they meet these standards.

The Discussion Guide

The Institutional Imperative

- In today's world governments and public sector agencies are responsible for creating equal access to employment, education, and provision of public services, including, e.g. access to justice systems, to people of all abilities by creating an inclusive digital environment. This includes people with physical/visible, cognitive, and learning disabilities, as well as people with hidden or temporary disabilities (due to injury, illness, fatigue, etc.), and even non-native language speakers.
- Due to the rapid building of digital society, governments and public sector agencies are responsible for equipping every citizen with the necessary skills and access.

The Role of Technology Vendors

- Governments and public sector agencies worldwide, whether city, state, or national, rely heavily on ICT vendors for products, services, and expertise. Often, that reliance extends to objectives and legal requirements related to ICT accessibility and digital inclusion.
- G3ict has heard from both governments and public sector agencies and technology vendors that engagements between the two often are not as productive and enlightening as they might be. Many governments and public sector agencies have low awareness of ICT accessibility and could benefit from deeper and more structured discussions with technology vendors.
- Many technology vendors have a strong commitment to accessible products and services but are not able to link these to the specific goals and strategies of governments and public sector agencies.

This Discussion Guide was developed to help governments and public sector agencies engage technology vendors in more productive discussions of ICT accessibility and digital inclusion, ultimately supporting a more inclusive society where every person reaches his/her maximum potential.

Preparing for Discussions with Vendors

To maximize the value of ICT investments, governments and public sector agencies can prepare for engaging with technology vendors with the following considerations:

- *When* – Discussions with technology vendors about ICT accessibility and digital inclusion often take place during the procurement process - either at the stage of market research or during the evaluation of responses to a Call for Tender/Request for Proposal. Governments and public sector agencies can take these steps prior to engaging in discussions with vendors:
 - Identify key internal stakeholders that should be aware of and contribute to discussions with vendors;
 - Raise awareness internally about accessible ICTs and the role they play for citizens and employees;

- Assess the government or public sector agency’s current use of and need for accessible ICT;
 - Assess the current and potential accessibility needs of citizens and staff;
 - Do research to get a sense for what the market has to offer and to explore how other governments have deployed accessible ICTs to benefit citizens and staff.
- *Who*
- Officials of government ministries, departments and agencies, on national, state, and city levels, procurement officers, administrators, CIOs/IT personnel, accessibility specialists, etc. can form a working group, share their knowledge and vision for and contribute to a procurement process that results in an environment benefitting everyone;
 - Accessibility specialists, staff who request accessible tools for end users, and IT personnel responsible for ICTs deployment should play an important part in procurement decision-making;
 - Citizens and staff with accessibility needs.
- *What* – Meet with ICT vendors and discuss how to create an inclusive digital environment. Below are the questions governments and public sector agencies can raise with technology vendors about ICT accessibility and digital inclusion and important points to look for in vendor responses. Getting this information will help you make the best purchasing decision. Sharing the questions with vendors prior to the meetings will allow them to come fully prepared and aware of the topics of interest. Note that the possible replies listed with each question below reflect how a vendor with a high level of accessibility maturity might respond.

Questions for a Meaningful Discussion with ICT Vendors

No	Discussion topic	How Leading ICT Vendors Might Answer...
	<i>Corporate Commitment to Accessibility and Internal Processes</i>	

No	Discussion topic	How Leading ICT Vendors Might Answer...
1	How do your company's structure and policies support a comprehensive commitment to accessibility and inclusion?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have an explicit internal corporate policy regarding the accessibility and inclusion of their products and internal operating procedures to support that policy; • Have the active engagement of higher executives on accessibility topics; • Consider accessibility a competitive advantage and business opportunity; • Include accessibility as a requirement in their compliance and social responsibility processes; • Have dedicated accessibility professionals such as a Chief Accessibility Officer, corporate accessibility team, developers and program managers within business groups responsible for accessibility; • Has reputation for working externally with end users and customers to gather feedback and influence product roadmaps; • Have an internal philosophy of inclusion and helping every person to reach his/her maximum potential and make accessibility an integral part of that philosophy; • Demonstrate commitment to persons with disabilities as part of diversity and inclusion for their own employees, including through hiring policies and employment programs.

No	Discussion topic	How Leading ICT Vendors Might Answer...
2	What kind of experience does your company have in producing accessible technology?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have experience making their products accessible, can explain what actions they take to meet the requirements and able to share the roadmaps or process guidelines; • Aware of commonly used accessibility technical standards and their relevance to policy and market requirements in different countries and regions; • Can offer examples of how they meet various accessibility standards and requirements; • Aware of inclusive/universal design principles and implements them in the development process; • Can offer examples of how they collect and work with user feedback to improve usability.
3	What specific development processes in your company ensure the accessibility of your products?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a process to ensure the newly released products are designed and developed to be accessible; • Can explain how standalone apps may provide specific additional accessibility functionality work in cooperation with their accessible products; • Have an internal accessibility standard or guide based on global accessibility standards required in the development of all products and services; • Have a dedicated team or individuals available to consult with product developers to ensure products can be used by the broadest range of users possible;

No	Discussion topic	How Leading ICT Vendors Might Answer...
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have accessibility specialists focused specifically on the public sector market; • Have channels for getting feedback from individual users with disabilities, employees with disabilities and external customer, as part of the development process.
Accessibility Testing & Conformance		
4	How do you test the accessibility of your products and demonstrate conformance with accessibility requirements and global accessibility standards?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish accessibility conformance statements for how products meet global accessibility standards, such as EN 301 549 (EU), Section 508 of Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (USA) technical requirements and WCAG 2.0/ISO/IEC 40500; • Provide a channel for purchasers to make inquiries about results of conformance statements; • Use additional testing protocols to validate accessibility, e.g. code-based testing approaches for accessibility compliance and conformity; • Cooperates with a network of organizations and/or institutions to test the accessibility of products; • Can describe how they include users with disabilities in usability testing or conduct tests against common user scenarios that include the needs of persons with disabilities.
Deploying Products		

No	Discussion topic	How Leading ICT Vendors Might Answer...
5	How can your product be used to meet our specific accessibility needs and requirements?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain how mainstream technology is accessible by default for users with different disabilities, how accessibility features within mainstream technology are turned on and off in certain situations, and how assistive technology, which can be supplemental to mainstream technologies, may benefit people with certain disabilities (e.g. visual or hearing impairments); • Share use cases that demonstrate how the product has been used by other organizations and users in similar situations and what did they achieve with its help (e.g. created accessible content for end users, ensured all employees and citizens have equal access to content, met the needs of those with learning disabilities, helped to accommodate the needs of recent migrants and non-native speakers); • Provide insights and strategies to benefit all staff and citizens without leaving anybody behind; • Demonstrate actual features as well as use cases and scenarios for government and public sector staff, including accessibility specialists and information technology professionals, who are better positioned to evaluate whether a product meets current accessibility needs and requirements (fully or partially).

No	Discussion topic	How Leading ICT Vendors Might Answer...
6	Please describe how ICT accessibility can align with and help advance our broader inclusion goals and strategies. How can your product be used by a broad spectrum of users with any abilities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate how the products are non-stigmatizing and how persons with disabilities may use them to communicate and collaborate with others without making their disability apparent; • Speak to how the products might also be used by people who are not aware they have a disability or have a temporary disability due to injury, illness or fatigue; • Address how accessibility in ICT can benefit many people, e.g. non-native speakers; • Point to how people of all abilities can empower themselves to take advantage of accessibility in products.
7	To what extent is your product compatible with other ICTs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirm compatibility with other ICTs already deployed in the government or public sector agency's system, which may also contribute to maximizing the value of the investments.
8	How does accessibility affect the price of your product?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain how accessibility is an integral part of the product and doesn't increase the cost a government or public sector agency would bear to ensure an inclusive digital environment; • For products focused on making technologies accessible for people with certain disabilities, demonstrate what range of people can use it.
<i>After Sales Support for Effective Deployment</i>		

No	Discussion topic	How Leading ICT Vendors Might Answer...
9	How can we take full advantage of your product with respect to accessibility and inclusion? How can you support our deployment of your product?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proactively detail how they support deployment by clients early in the procurement process rather than after the fact and how this support can be integrated into actual contract language; • Realize deployment and actual use of any ICT is a measurement of a successful procurement process; • Interested not solely in selling their products, but also in increasing deployment rate; • Provide online/offline consultations to government or public sector agency's IT staff, share best practices, help to adapt purchased products to the accessibility and inclusion needs of clients.
10	How do you provide online/offline training and training materials?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support government and public sector agencies in taking full advantage of their investments into accessible ICT through the organization of training and guidance to all stakeholders, including citizens and community members; • Provide training materials on their websites and regularly refresh them; • Provide online and even offline training for end users to ensure the product is successfully deployed and its full functionality is used for the benefit of all.
11	How do you support or participate in knowledge-sharing communities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and support product specific knowledge-sharing communities where users of their products can share their experiences, use cases, scenarios, tips & tricks, and give or ask for advice;

No	Discussion topic	How Leading ICT Vendors Might Answer...
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make themselves available to participate in NGO and third-party communities to educate the community and increase your organization's return on investments through the full-scale use of purchased products; • Help direct users to existing knowledge-sharing communities with which they work.
12	How do you collect customer feedback and use it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Point to formal channels where customers with disabilities get support with products, including issues, accessibility questions and use of related assistive technologies; • Share the updates which were made to a product based on the users' feedback; • Have more than one way of collecting feedback and demonstrate how it is understood and used.

Additional Resources

This document was developed to align well with other inclusive and accessible ICTs procurement tools developed by G3ict, its partners, and global experts. Please refer to the following:

- [Model ICT Accessibility Policy Report](#)
- [Smart Cities for All Guide to Adopting an ICT Accessibility Procurement Policy](#)
- [e-Accessibility Policy Toolkit for Persons with Disabilities](#)
- [Buy ICT for All portal](#)

- [9 Steps to Procuring Accessible ICTs for Inclusive Education](#)
- [Procurement of ICTs for Inclusive Education: Guide for Engaging ICT Vendors](#)
- US Department of Homeland Security's [Trusted Tester Program](#).

For more information about accessibility and technology please go to the [G3ict](#) and the [International Association of Accessibility Professionals](#) (IAAP) websites. Many technology vendors also have dedicated accessibility pages on their websites where you can find a range of related and helpful information.