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WHITE PAPER

Digital Access and Accessibility in the Resident Experience

Discover how public sector technology can reduce barriers and enhance engagement.

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Digital Access and Accessibility in the Resident Experience

Introduction: The Role of Digital Access in Modern Government

As society becomes increasingly reliant on digital platforms, the importance of accessible and inclusive government services has never been more apparent. For many residents, accessibility isn't just a legal requirement — it's a lifeline. Digital access is about connection, inclusion, and building trust between residents and the public sector.

Yet, significant barriers remain. Outdated systems, poorly designed platforms, and limited inclusivity in technology often prevent residents from accessing essential services. These barriers not only exclude individuals with disabilities but also diminish overall trust in government operations.

This white paper explores the challenges of digital access and accessibility, highlighting practical, actionable solutions to improve the resident experience. By adopting modern technologies, public sector leaders can create stronger connections with their communities and ensure no resident is left behind.

Industry Trends: Why Digital Accessibility Matters Now

Digital accessibility has transitioned from being a niche concern to a mainstream expectation. Public pressure for digital equity is intensifying, driven by rising expectations for seamless, user-friendly government platforms and reinforced by requirements such as the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) Version 2.1, Level AA.

Statistics, a recent federal rule, and research findings demonstrate the urgency of addressing this issue. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that roughly 1 in 4 U.S. adults lives with a disability affecting hearing, vision, cognition, mobility, self-care, or independent living.[1] The U.S. Department of Justice published a rule on April 24, 2024, updating Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to ensure web and mobile accessibility for public services, programs, and activities, particularly benefiting individuals with disabilities. However, according to Gartner® research,[2] "Because of a lack in training and funding, many governments struggle with incorporating accessibility into their design and development processes in a manner that continually improves accessibility for people with disabilities while also reducing legal liabilities."

Despite these challenges, opportunities abound. Cloud-based, accessible technologies are enabling governments to reduce barriers and foster meaningful engagement. These advancements can not only improve usability but also build trust and accountability with residents.

1. Okoro CA, Hollis ND, Cyrus AC, Griffin-Blake S. Prevalence of Disabilities and Health Care Access by Disability Status and Type Among Adults — United States, 2016. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2018;67:882–887. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6732a3

2. Gartner, Use a Government Digital Accessibility Program to Improve CX for People With Disabilities, Roland Rivera, October 15, 2024 (Report accessible to Gartner clients only)

Digital Accessibility in the Public Sector: 3 Key Challenges

1. Lack of Inclusive Design

A primary challenge for public sector organizations is the lack of inclusive design in their technology platforms.

What is inclusive design? Inclusive design ensures that anyone — regardless of age, background, or other characteristics — can access a service, participate fully, and benefit equally. Many systems fail to consider the diverse needs of residents, creating barriers for individuals with disabilities. For example, payment portals that do not support screen readers effectively exclude visually impaired users, making routine tasks unnecessarily difficult. Similarly, residents facing safety concerns, such as those needing to file protective orders, may be unable to do so in person, highlighting the critical need for accessible online filing systems.

The impact of this exclusion is far-reaching. When services are inaccessible, residents may feel alienated, and trust in government institutions can erode. This lack of engagement not only affects individuals but also undermines the broader goals of government programs designed to serve communities equitably.

2. Fragmented and Outdated Systems

Another significant obstacle is the prevalence of fragmented and outdated systems. Public sector entities often operate with disconnected platforms, creating inefficiencies that frustrate both residents and staff. These legacy systems also make it challenging to adapt to evolving accessibility standards.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, governments struggled to deliver timely rent relief due to the limitations of their existing systems. This scenario underscores the need for modern, integrated solutions that can scale to meet urgent demands.

3. Navigating Compliance Challenges

Adhering to accessibility standards like Web Content Accessibility Guidelines presents both technical and organizational challenges. Governments must define what conformance to accessibility requirements means for their entity. They should also invest in tools and training to eliminate barriers to critical workflows while mitigating the risk of legal and reputational harm. However, accessibility conformance should be viewed as more than a regulatory requirement; it represents an opportunity to create user-friendly, inclusive services that benefit all residents.

Solutions for Enhancing Digital Accessibility

Embracing Inclusive Design Principles

Inclusive design is foundational to creating accessible public sector technology. This approach prioritizes understanding the needs of diverse users and addressing potential barriers from the outset. Free and low-cost tools such as Google Lighthouse, IBM's Equal Access Toolkit, and TPGi's ARC Toolkit provide valuable resources for identifying and resolving accessibility issues during development.

Conducting user research and incorporating feedback throughout the design process can lead to more intuitive and accessible platforms. Accessibility audits, conducted at regular intervals, help ensure substantial conformance to usability requirements as systems evolve.

Modernizing Legacy Systems Through the Cloud

Cloud-based platforms offer scalable, flexible solutions for governments seeking to modernize outdated systems. By transitioning to cloud technologies, public sector entities can integrate accessibility into their core infrastructure while improving efficiency and adaptability.

For instance, Tyler Technologies' workforce case management solutions and business one-stop platforms exemplify the benefits of cloud-based modernization. These systems enable streamlined workflows and improved service delivery while meeting accessibility standards.

Accessible Payment Technologies

Financial inclusion is essential for accessibility, supporting unbanked and underbanked populations alongside residents with disabilities. About 5.6 million U.S. households don't have checking or savings accounts,[3] often facing costly check-cashing fees and security risks from carrying cash. Accessible payment technologies, such as prepaid debit cards, digital wallets, and payment apps, reduce these barriers while enhancing financial equity.

Modern payment platforms benefit governments and residents by lowering costs, improving security, and ensuring timely disbursements during emergencies. By adopting flexible and inclusive systems, agencies can better serve all demographics. For a deeper dive into this topic, see the Tyler white paper, "Improving Financial Equity."

The Benefits of Accessible Government Technology

Accessible government technology delivers tangible and intangible benefits that extend across communities.

Unified, accessible platforms lead to shorter service delivery times, improved conformance with legal standards, and higher resident satisfaction. For example, school districts that implement inclusive transit systems enable students with special needs to participate in community activities, enhancing their educational experiences and quality of life.

Intangible benefits include strengthened community trust and increased resident engagement. For example, Chattanooga's Open Data Portal shows how governments can use data to promote accountability. By making metrics on law enforcement activities publicly accessible, Chattanooga has built trust and reduced barriers to information. Outcomes like these not only improve public perception but also encourage greater participation in civic initiatives, creating a virtuous cycle of engagement and trust.

Implementing Accessibility: 5 Key Considerations

Successful implementation of accessibility initiatives requires thoughtful planning, collaboration, and the right resources to meet the diverse needs of all residents. Consider taking the following steps:

1. Conduct comprehensive accessibility audits to identify gaps and prioritize improvements.
2. Engage residents and focus groups during the design process to ensure systems address real-world needs.
3. Implement pilot programs to refine solutions before scaling.
4. Address potential challenges like budget constraints and integration with legacy systems through careful resource allocation.
5. Partner with a trusted technology provider to gain expertise and tools for scalable, accessible solutions tailored to the public sector.

3. Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation. (2023). FDIC National Survey of Unbanked and Underbanked Households. Retrieved from https://www.fdic.gov/household-survey/2023-fdic-national-survey-unbanked-and-underbanked-households-report.

Conclusion: Prioritizing Accessibility for a Connected Future

Accessibility is not just a compliance requirement — it is a cornerstone of building stronger, more connected communities. By prioritizing inclusive design and modernizing systems, governments can reduce barriers, enhance engagement, and foster trust with their residents.

Public sector leaders have an opportunity to transform the resident experience through innovative, accessible technologies. Tyler Technologies is committed to empowering governments with the tools and expertise they need to achieve these goals. Now is the time to act. Together, we can create a future where every resident has equal access to the services they need.

Additional Resources

For additional insights for government leaders, visit Tyler's Resource Center. If you would like more information about Tyler solutions, contact us at info@tylertech.com or visit tylertech.com.

About the Authors

Kathy Wolf is the senior director of user experience at Tyler Technologies. With a passion for inclusive design, she has dedicated her career to creating user-centered applications that connect communities and improve lives.

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ABOUT TYLER TECHNOLOGIES, INC.

Tyler Technologies (NYSE: TYL) is a leading provider of integrated software and technology services for the public sector. Tyler's end-to-end solutions empower local, state, and federal government entities to operate efficiently and transparently with residents and each other. By connecting data and processes across disparate systems, Tyler's solutions transform how clients turn actionable insights into opportunities and solutions for their communities. Tyler has more than 44,000 successful installations across 13,000 locations, with clients in all 50 states, Canada, the Caribbean, Australia, and other international locations. Tyler has been recognized numerous times for growth and innovation, including on *Government Technology's* GovTech 100 list. More information about Tyler Technologies, an S&P 500 company headquartered in Plano, Texas, can be found at **tylertech.com**.

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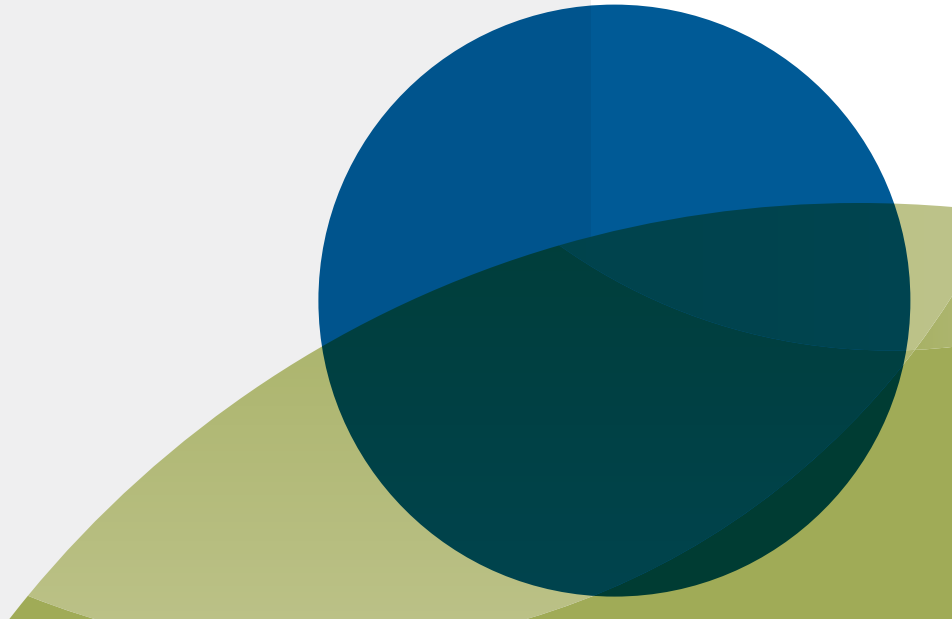

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