

Two Deadlines, One Big Requirement: The ADA Digital Accessibility Mandate



Across Missouri—and the entire country—local governments are facing an important change in how they manage digital information. A new federal rule now requires public organizations to make their online and digital content accessible to people with disabilities. This change is often called the ADA digital accessibility mandate.

Many municipalities have heard about this requirement but are unsure what it really means or how to prepare. By looking at the issue through the “5 W’s” - *Who, What, Where, When and Why* - we can break the mandate into simple, practical terms.

WHO Is Affected?

The new accessibility requirements apply to all state and local government organizations. That includes:

- Cities and villages
- Counties
- Municipal departments
- Public utilities
- Police and fire departments
- Libraries
- Public schools and universities
- Any agency or board that serves the public

In short, if your organization is part of local government in Missouri, this mandate applies to you.

The rule exists to protect people with disabilities, including those who are blind or have low vision, are deaf or hard of hearing, have mobility challenges, or have cognitive or learning disabilities. These residents must be able to access

government information in the same way as everyone else.

This requirement does not just apply to large cities. Small towns, rural counties and special districts are included as well. The size of your community does not determine whether the rule applies—it only affects how soon you must comply.

WHAT Does “Digital Accessibility” Really Mean?

Many people assume digital accessibility only refers to a city or county website. While websites are a major part of the requirement, accessibility goes far beyond that.

Digital accessibility means that all information your organization provides electronically must be usable by people with disabilities. This includes:

Public-Facing Content

- Websites
- Online forms
- Meeting agendas and minutes
- Budgets and reports
- Permits and applications
- Public notices
- PDFs and downloadable documents
- Social media posts

Internal and Direct Communication

- Emails sent to residents
- Attachments shared with the public
- Online portals
- Electronic newsletters
- Documents provided upon request

The key point is this: accessibility is not limited to what appears on your homepage. Any document or message that your organization creates and distributes digitally must be accessible.

For example, a PDF agenda posted online for a city council meeting must be readable by screen-reading software. A utility bill emailed to residents must be formatted so that someone with visual impairment can understand it. A job application posted on your website must be usable by someone with limited visibility.

If a document is necessary for a resident to participate in a government program, service or activity, it must be accessible.

WHERE Does The Mandate Apply?

The mandate applies everywhere digital information is shared.

This includes:

- Official municipal websites
- Online document repositories
- Email systems
- Public records portals
- Online payment systems
- Social media platforms
- Internal systems used to communicate with the public

Accessibility is not limited to one specific location or platform. If your organization is providing information in digital form—no matter where or how—it must meet accessibility standards.

Even documents stored for many years, such as archived meeting minutes or old ordinances, may need to be made accessible if they are still being used by the public.

The rule focuses on equal access. If a resident can find and use information

5 Steps To Get Started:

1. Assign Ownership

Identify who is responsible for accessibility compliance.

2. Create a Plan

Establish a roadmap with goals, timelines and standards

3. Inventory Your PDFs

Understand the size of your existing document backlog.

4. Prioritize High-Risk Content

Focus on frequently used or required public documents first.

5. Assess and Budget

Run a sample audit to estimate remediation effort and cost.

online, a resident with a disability must be able to do the same.

WHEN Do Municipalities Need To Comply?

One of the most important parts of this mandate is the timeline.

The federal government has created two different compliance deadlines based on community size:

Larger Communities:

Deadline - April 24, 2026

Applies to cities, counties and public entities serving 50,000 people or more

Smaller Communities:

Deadline - April 26, 2027

Applies to cities, counties and public entities serving fewer than 50,000 people

These deadlines are firm. They are not suggestions or long-term goals. By these

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dates, public organizations must already have their digital content in compliance.

For many Missouri municipalities, this timeline is closer than it appears. Local governments often manage thousands of documents created over many years. Reviewing and updating all that material can take significant time and planning.

It is also important to understand that accessibility is not a one-time project. Any new document created after the deadline must also be accessible. Accessibility becomes part of everyday operations.

WHY Was This Mandate Created?

The purpose of the rule is simple: equal access.

For years, much of the public's interaction with government has been moved online. Residents pay bills, apply for permits, read council agendas, and communicate with city hall through digital tools.

But for millions of Americans with disabilities, much of this information has been difficult—or impossible—to use.

A person who is blind may not be able to read a scanned PDF that lacks proper formatting. Someone who relies on assistive technology may not be able to navigate an online form. A

resident with limited vision may not be able to understand poorly structured documents.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) has always required equal access to government services. The new mandate simply updates those long-standing principles for the digital world.

By requiring accessibility, the federal government is ensuring that:

- Residents with disabilities can participate fully in civic life
- Government communication is inclusive
- Public services are available to everyone
- Local governments avoid discrimination, even if unintentional

Accessibility is not just a technical requirement—it is a civil rights issue.

Common Misunderstandings

Because the topic is new to many municipalities, several myths have developed.

Myth: “Our website vendor handles accessibility, so we are covered.”

Reality: Even if your website itself meets accessibility standards, the documents you post on it—such as PDFs, forms and reports—must also be accessible. Website accessibility alone is not enough.

Myth: “Old documents don't matter.”

Reality: If archived documents are still posted online and used by the public, they may need to be made accessible.

Myth: “Accessibility only affects people with severe disabilities.”

Reality: Accessible design benefits many people, including older adults, mobile device users, and anyone who needs clearer, better-organized information.

Myth: “This only applies to big cities.”

Reality: Every public entity is included. The only difference between large and small communities is the compliance deadline.

The Risks Of Ignoring Accessibility

Failing to comply with the mandate can lead to serious consequences.

Local governments that do not provide accessible digital content may face:

- Civil rights complaints
- Investigations by federal agencies
- Lawsuits
- Required corrective action plans
- Loss of public trust
- Potential impacts on state or federal funding

Beyond legal risks, inaccessibility can prevent residents from participating in their own local government. That undermines transparency and public service.

Moving Forward

The ADA digital accessibility mandate represents a major change in how municipalities manage information. But it is also an opportunity.

By improving accessibility, local governments can:

- Communicate more clearly with all residents
- Modernize outdated records
- Improve transparency
- Strengthen public engagement



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- Demonstrate a commitment to inclusion

The key is to begin planning early. Municipalities should start by evaluating current websites, documents and communication practices. Training staff, updating workflows and creating long-term strategies will be essential steps.

Accessibility is not just about meeting a deadline—it is about ensuring that every member of the community can fully participate in local government.

Final Thoughts

Missouri municipalities exist to serve all residents. The new digital accessibility mandate helps make sure that “all residents” truly means everyone.


By understanding the who, what, where, when and why of this requirement, local leaders can take confident steps toward compliance—and toward a more inclusive future. 🌱

Brock Fuemmeler is president of IMS Technology Group, a Missouri-based information management company

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The advertisement features a blue background on the left with the Burns McDonnell logo and headline. On the right, there is a photograph of a long, narrow metal walkway or bridge extending over a body of water. A QR code is located in the bottom right corner of the image area.

headquartered in Mexico, Missouri. IMS Technology Group provides digital accessibility services to organizations nationwide, including municipalities, school districts and other public entities. The company partnered in developing an innovative PDF remediation platform called Accessibility on Demand, designed to

help organizations efficiently meet ADA and WCAG compliance requirements. Missouri municipalities can utilize Statewide Contract MS250263001 for accessibility services. To learn more about IMS Technology Group and its accessibility solutions, visit www.imstechnologygroup.com.