



BuyAccessible FedBizOpps Solicitation Assessment Program

The 1998 amendment to Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requires Federal agencies to make their electronic and information technology (EIT) accessible to people with disabilities—to ensure agencies provide “equal access” to data and information for people with disabilities as to those without disabilities. Among other requirements, Section 508 mandates GSA and the Access Board provide technical assistance to individuals and Federal departments and agencies on the requirements of the law. The responsibility for meeting this obligation was assigned to the IT Accessibility and Workforce Division within the Office of Governmentwide Policy (OGP). The creation of the BuyAccessible Program soon followed to help provide this assistance.

In 2006, the BuyAccessible Program began random sampling of solicitations posted on FedBizOpps to get insight into how well the accessibility requirements were being represented in procurement actions. The results of this assessment indicated a very low level of compliance; about 3% fully complied and 10% made some mention of Section 508. This resulted in GSA developing an ongoing, formal program of assessment and feedback to agencies and also resulted in an OMB memo [“Ensuring the Accessibility of Federal Electronic and Information Technologies Procured by Federal Agencies”](#) dated November 2007. The OMB stated its concerns over the lack of compliance with Section 508 in federal solicitations and announced that BuyAccessible had implemented a program to evaluate agency solicitations with Section 508 relevance to assess the level of compliance in a sample of solicitations.

The assessment process involves the random sampling of FedBizOpps solicitations, determining if the sampled solicitations qualify as EIT, and analyzing those that do qualify as to their degree of compliance, categorized by a simple red/yellow/green (R/Y/G) criterion. If the item(s) are subject to Section 508, but no mention is provided in the solicitation or supporting documentation, then compliance is judged as red. If Section 508 requirements are mentioned with general documentation of the Access Board Standard associated with the applicable deliverable(s), then compliance is judged as yellow. If identification of specific, relevant sections of the Access Board Standard or identification of specific, relevant provisions is mentioned, then the solicitation is judged as green.

GSA was also tasked to communicate assessment results back to departments/agencies. The intent is to raise the overall level of Section 508 compliance by the federal government. The BuyAccessible Program provides email feedback to requiring officials (if available from the solicitation), contract officers, and Section 508 Coordinators, about how well or poorly the agency or department had addressed their

Section 508 responsibility. Further, the email suggests ways in which the agency or department can improve compliance, by using the tools and resources available from GSA at no cost to help departments/agencies conform to the requirements of Section 508. These tools include the BuyAccessible Wizard (www.buyaccessible.gov) and www.section508.gov.

Agency inquiries resulting from receipt of these emails are taken on a case by case basis and provide a one-on-one opportunity to interface and explain in greater detail the specifics of the requirement and solicitation with respect to Section 508. During this interaction, the use of the BuyAccessible Wizard as a tool to assist in determining deliverable applicability and suggesting standard solicitation language is strongly encouraged.

The chart depicted below shows the results of our assessment program from its inception in 2007 through August 2009. A general year to year improvement is evident in the number of solicitations that are now mentioning Section 508 (reduction of red from 83% to 53% and increase in yellow from 10% to 32%). Unfortunately, a majority of solicitations that were red and are now yellow are due to inclusion of standard language that broadly addresses Section 508. While this is encouraging and the agency is providing awareness to potential vendors, the requirement of the agency is to identify specifically the provisions that apply to their EIT deliverables. The inclusion of broad based standard language will only result in partial compliance.

A resource available to all agencies is the BuyAccessible Wizard at www.buyaccessible.gov. This free tool guides requiring officials through the steps necessary to conduct acquisitions that comply with Section 508 and its use will result in a solicitation that is graded green. CAOs and CIOs may incorporate the use of this tool into their procurement procedures to improve compliance with the law. Another resource is www.section508.gov, which has information and free on-line training courses.

