

Federal Website Modernization Checklist

Ten steps to align your website with 21st Century IDEA, Section 508, and the America by Design push. Print it, check it off, and share it with your team.

The 10-step checklist

- ☐ **01 Inventory your sites.**
List every domain and subdomain, who owns it, and its traffic. Retire or merge duplicates.
- ☐ **02 Rank by impact.**
Find the tasks people do most, like applications, payments, and status checks. Fix those first.
- ☐ **03 Adopt USWDS early.**
Start new builds on U.S. Web Design System components instead of retrofitting later.
- ☐ **04 Test on real phones.**
Try top tasks on older Android and iOS devices and on slow connections.
- ☐ **05 Test with people and tools.**
Scanners catch only part of the problems. Add keyboard and screen reader testing to every release.
- ☐ **06 Watch page weight.**
Compress images, limit heavy scripts, and set a performance budget.
- ☐ **07 Write in plain language.**
Follow [plainlanguage.gov](https://www.plainlanguage.gov) so people know what to do on the first read.
- ☐ **08 Fix your forms.**
Replace PDF forms with accessible web forms wherever you can.
- ☐ **09 Make search work.**
Site search should return useful results for the words people actually type.
- ☐ **10 Document and review before launch.**
Keep a record of accessibility and security checks for every release.

Key requirements and dates

Requirement	What it means	Applies to
21st Century IDEA (2018)	New and redesigned sites must be mobile friendly, accessible, consistent, searchable, secure, user driven, and free of duplicate content.	Federal agencies
Section 508	Websites and digital content must be accessible. The standard aligns with WCAG 2.0 Level AA.	Federal agencies
America by Design (Aug 21, 2025)	Executive order creating the National Design Studio. Agencies were asked to show initial results by July 4, 2026 and to adopt USWDS.	Federal agencies
ADA Title II: April 26, 2027	Websites and apps must meet WCAG 2.1 Level AA.	State and local governments serving 50,000+ people
ADA Title II: April 26, 2028	Same WCAG 2.1 Level AA standard.	Smaller governments and special districts

Questions to ask your web vendor

- ☐ Is the site built on USWDS or another tested design system?
- ☐ How do you test accessibility beyond automated scans?
- ☐ What is our page weight on a mobile connection?
- ☐ Which PDF forms can become accessible web forms?
- ☐ Who owns each domain, and when was it last reviewed?
- ☐ Do we get documentation for every release?

Free resources

- **USWDS:** designsystem.digital.gov
- **Section 508:** section508.gov
- **21st Century IDEA:** cio.gov
- **Plain language:** plainlanguage.gov
- **ADA Title II rule:** ada.gov

Read the full guide: digitalventuredesign.com/news

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This checklist is general guidance, not legal advice. Sources: CIO.gov, Section508.gov, FedScoop, ADA.gov. Updated September 2026.