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INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL SECURITY ASSOCIATION  
ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONALE DE LA SÉCURITÉ SOCIALE  
ASOCIACIÓN INTERNACIONAL DE LA SEGURIDAD SOCIAL  
INTERNATIONALE VEREINIGUNG FÜR SOZIALE SICHERHEIT

# Good Practices in Social Security

Good practice in operation since: 2007

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## **Accessibility Best Practices Portal**

A case of the Social Security Administration

Special mention, ISSA Good Practice Award – Americas competition 2009

**Social Security Administration**  
United States

## **Summary**

*The Social Security Administration (SSA) Accessibility Best Practices Portal, in service since January 2007, equips and enables application development teams to access the latest guidance on applying accessibility standards to development efforts. The portal is based on the concept of accessibility best practices, which are standardized interpretations of accessibility regulations with recommended enterprise approaches to implementation. The best practices demystify the complex world of accessibility regulations by providing proven solutions, methods, and testing approaches that span the entire development life cycle, assuring consistent accessible outcomes.*

*The Accessibility Best Practices Portal provides the following advantages:*

- *significant improvements in Section 508 Compliance;*
- *reduced remediation and development cost;*
- *accelerated time to production for new development efforts;*
- *result focused solutions that deliver both usable and accessible outcomes for disabled users.*

*The Accessibility Best Practices Portal has been a critical turning point in moving from accessibility testing-centric approaches, to delivering cost effective outcomes that consider the needs of people with disabilities throughout all development life cycle stages. The results achieved constitute a major breakthrough in stimulating the development of accessible IT services at SSA.*

## **CRITERIA 1:**

### **What was the issue/problem/challenge addressed by your good practice?**

SSA needs a way to provide easy, understandable Section 508 compliance guidance to all of the components involved in building information and communications technology. Also, SSA needs to ensure that accessibility is considered at each stage of the IT product life cycle to deliver consistent and repeatable results to serve a diverse disabled community of users.

## **CRITERIA 2:**

### **What were the main objectives and the expected outcomes?**

- To make significant improvements in Section 508 Compliance.
- To reduce remediation and development costs.
- To accelerate time to production for new development efforts.
- To produce result focused solutions that deliver both usable and accessible solutions for disabled users.

### **CRITERIA 3:**

#### **What is the innovative approach/strategy followed to achieve the objectives?**

SSA developed an "equip and enable" approach to what was formerly viewed primarily as a "compliance activity" by developing an Accessibility Best Practices Portal to provide a plain English interpretation of the Section 508 Standards in the areas of requirements, recommended approaches, re-usable design and coding examples, and results oriented testing methods. The portal is utilized by the entire IT community at SSA (Designers, Developers, Test Teams and 508 compliance officials). The contents of the portal are integrated with our agency Internet and Intranet Design Standards for all web development. The portal also contains targeted on-line accessibility training. In addition to the portal, SSA provides a team of accessibility experts to provide one-on-one best practices consulting to development teams at every phase of the IT life cycle (Plan, Design, Build, Test, Implement, and Maintain) to ensure consistent results.

### **CRITERIA 4:**

#### **Have the resources and inputs been used in an optimal way to implement the practice?**

This good practice utilized the resources to optimize equipping and enabling the IT community by developing a Best Practices library and incorporating it into an extensive training and consultation program. This initiative was implemented almost entirely with internal resources, building the system on existing SSA technology infrastructure. SSA effectively utilized the expertise of contractors in support of the critical aspect of user-centered design, and technical support for requirements analysis, development, and testing.

### **CRITERIA 5:**

#### **What impact/results have been achieved so far?**

This standardized approach in implementing accessible technology using accessibility Best Practices has raised the level of Section 508 Compliance from 70 per cent to 93 per cent. In addition, 90 per cent of applications now fully conform to applicable Section 508 Standards in their first release with almost 100 per cent maintaining full compliance in subsequent releases.

Since implementing training for over 500 IT professionals on accessibility and Section 508 Compliance, SSA has also raised awareness in all components on the importance of considering Section 508 Compliance throughout the IT life cycle.

Government-wide, SSA's accessibility best practices have influenced accessibility programs at many other agencies.

## **CRITERIA 6:**

### **What lessons have been learned from the introduction of this good practice?**

In designing accessible technology, start with integrating best practices with organizational design standards. Make sure to involve people with disabilities in the design process and incorporate accessibility best practices into any functional requirements.

In coding accessible technology, start with re-usable and transferable coding examples, which are already designed with accessibility in mind. Anchored to design best practices, accessible and re-usable code can significantly reduce development efforts to create accessible outcomes.

In testing accessible technology, test with pre-defined platform specific test scripts and provide guidelines for the evaluation criteria and criticality (based on the best practices referenced above). Continue to utilize automated and manual test methods and test with and without assistive technology.

In developing accessible technology, always train using best practices and provide re-usable coding examples and templates. Remember to provide guidance on accessibility concepts in addition to object behaviors and integrate best practices guidance into tools used by developers.

## **CRITERIA 7:**

### **To what extent would your good practice be appropriate for replication by other social security institutions?**

The approach that SSA has taken can be used by any organization wishing to increase their level of Section 508 Compliance. This good practice is also applicable to any type of agency IT initiative. The key points are life cycle integration, targeting accessibility guidance based on audience role, working closely with business partners, providing an accessibility consulting "net" and a heavy emphasis on training that includes your best practices and standards.