



## SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2025.** Please include this submission form as the first page of your electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

### PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: \_\_\_\_\_

Program Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Program Category: \_\_\_\_\_

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Website: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

### SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature:  \_\_\_\_\_

## Executive Summary

Chesterfield's *Digital Access for All: Building Accessibility Readiness* program is a countywide effort to improve digital accessibility through strategic education, advocacy and system-wide transformation. Led by the eGovernment Services Team, the program focuses on eliminating inaccessible digital formats and replacing them with responsive, translatable and more inclusive digital solutions. Through voluntary training, a cross-departmental community of practice and ongoing content audits, staff are empowered to deliver inclusive online services that meet and exceed ADA requirements. Since its launch, the program has resolved over 8 million accessibility issues, reduced the county's PDF footprint by 90% and shifted internal culture toward long-term accessibility and innovation. These efforts have improved service delivery, expanded translation access for multilingual users and earned recognition from industry leaders including NAGW and the Center for Digital Government. Chesterfield's approach is both scalable and sustainable, offering a model for other localities seeking meaningful, lasting digital inclusion.

## Problem, Challenge or Situation

Under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), state and local governments are legally required to ensure that all public programs and services are accessible to individuals with disabilities—including those offered online. The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) has made it clear that websites and digital services fall within the scope of the ADA.

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In 2024, the DOJ released a final rule requiring that public-facing web content conform to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) by April 2026. These guidelines establish best practices for digital inclusion, such as providing text alternatives for images, using proper heading structures and ensuring content is readable and navigable by assistive technologies.

Many localities, including Chesterfield, faced significant challenges in modernizing their websites to meet these standards. One of the largest obstacles was a backlog of over 18,000 PDFs, which not only failed WCAG criteria but also posed barriers to translation, mobile access and usability.

Chesterfield responded with a proactive, strategic approach—rebuilding the website from the ground up, replacing inaccessible content with structured, accessible and mobile-friendly alternatives. Voluntary training, a cross-departmental community of practice, and weekly accessibility scans created a framework for sustainable change.

The program gained momentum through strong leadership support and clear community need. Non-English speakers had reported difficulty accessing information locked in PDFs. Regional municipalities faced ADA-related settlement agreements, signaling legal risk. Chesterfield's work positioned the county ahead of the mandate, treating accessibility not as a compliance checkbox but as a commitment to better government.

By combining education, advocacy and digital transformation, Chesterfield is building a culture of accessibility—ensuring that all residents, regardless of ability or language, can fully engage with online services.

## Awards Criteria

Chesterfield's *Digital Access for All* program stands out because it goes far beyond compliance—it challenges the assumptions many local governments hold about accessibility. While some jurisdictions attempt to buy their way into readiness through costly remediation services or bolt-on fixes, Chesterfield took a different route: Building a culture of inclusion, advocacy and accountability from the inside out.

A key innovation lies in rejecting the idea that PDFs—no matter how well remediated—can support modern, mobile, translatable digital services. While PDFs are technically allowed under WCAG, they often remain one of the biggest barriers to accessibility, usability and equity. Chesterfield took steps to reducing its PDF footprint by thousands, embracing tools and formats that support responsive, accessible and machine-readable content. This approach prioritizes the user experience and future-proofs content for search engines, assistive technology and even AI platforms.

This program also redefined the IST team's role—not as gatekeepers, but as advocates and partners. When staff request inaccessible solutions, the team doesn't just say "no." They educate, support and present better alternatives that benefit everyone. This long-term, proactive engagement—through weekly touchpoints, quarterly community meetings and consistent leadership outreach—has been critical to shifting internal culture.

Chesterfield's model proves that accessibility is not just a compliance checkbox—it's an opportunity to deliver smarter, more inclusive services. And if more counties adopt this

approach, the momentum will grow. Vendors and private sector technology partners will be compelled to raise their standards, community expectations will shift, and inclusive design will become the default. This is what innovation in government should look like: Practical, scalable and transformative.

## How the Program was Carried Out

The *Digital Access for All* program officially gained momentum in 2022, led by the eGovernment Services Team within Information Systems Technology (IST). Its objectives were clear: Mitigate ADA compliance issues, reduce reliance on inaccessible formats like PDFs and deliver digital services that are accessible, translatable and mobile-friendly. More than compliance, the effort was rooted in a belief that accessible content benefits everyone—and that Chesterfield could lead the way in building a more inclusive digital government.

The program launched with two foundational efforts: A recurring ADA Compliance and Digital Accessibility course through the county's Learning Management System (LMS) and the creation of a Web Content Contributors Community of Practice collaborative space in Microsoft Teams, which now includes over 200 staff from across the organization. These were supported by hands-on audits and content reviews, one-on-one meetings with departments and a comprehensive website rebuild focused on remediating accessibility errors and replacing outdated formats with web-native, accessible alternatives.

As momentum grew, Chesterfield created a DOJ Ruling resource page on the staff intranet to help departments understand the scope of the April 2026 compliance deadline and reinforce that this was a federal mandate, not just an internal priority. Additionally, a Digital Accessibility Resource Guide was developed to complement the LMS course. This evolving internal guide includes best practices, examples, downloadable templates and links to tools like contrast checkers, screen reader tips and social media accessibility toolkits.

Accessibility scans are conducted weekly using Acquia Optimize (formerly Monsido), helping track and resolve issues. Since the program's inception, Chesterfield has remediated over 8 million accessibility issues on its website alone.

The program is managed entirely in-house. However, recognizing the limitations of local staff, the county is auditing over 40 third-party platforms and using those findings to hold vendors accountable for meeting accessibility standards—or risk losing business.

Through consistent communication, meaningful education and strong leadership support, Chesterfield is building a sustainable digital accessibility culture that goes beyond checkboxes to deliver a better experience for all users.

## Financing and Staffing

Chesterfield implemented the *Digital Access for All* program entirely with existing staff resources and without the need for additional funding. The eGovernment Services Team leads all aspects of the program, including content remediation, platform audits, LMS instruction and department consultations. The accessibility work was deliberately

integrated into Chesterfield's broader website modernization effort, ensuring that digital inclusion wasn't treated as an afterthought but as a fundamental requirement.

The only ongoing cost associated with the program is the subscription to Acquia Optimize (formerly Monsido), a quality assurance tool used to scan for accessibility issues, though this tool also supports SEO, uptime monitoring, broken links, spelling errors and custom policies beyond just accessibility.

Counties looking to replicate this program wouldn't need to invest heavily in new technology. With the right strategy, an understanding of accessibility standards and a commitment to organizational culture change, much of the work can be done in-house. A scanning tool is helpful for tracking progress and identifying issues, but ultimately, success depends more on internal leadership, education and accountability than on new spending.

## Program Results

The *Digital Access for All* program has delivered measurable improvements in Chesterfield's digital accessibility and overall user experience. Since launching, the county has resolved over 8 million accessibility issues identified across its website, making services easier to navigate and access for all users. More than 200 previous PDF or paper forms have been converted into online formats, generating over 100,000 new submissions—eliminating paper-based processes and allowing residents to conduct business efficiently from any device.

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The county has also reduced its PDF footprint from more than 18,000 to under 2,000, with a goal to cut that number in half again by the end of 2025. Content previously locked in PDFs—such as program guides, forms, newsletters and publications—has been rebuilt into web-based experiences that are accessible, responsive and fully translatable.

Staff engagement has grown steadily. Over 140 individuals across nearly every department have voluntarily taken the county’s digital accessibility course, and new participants join each session. Teams now reach out proactively for guidance, and some departments have begun producing accessible content independently—an encouraging sign that the culture is shifting.

Community feedback, especially from non-English speakers, has reinforced the value of these efforts. Translation usage on the website has expanded to over 70 languages, and direct comments have confirmed a better experience.

The impact has reached well beyond Chesterfield. The county’s approach has been shared at state and national events, including the National Association of Government Web Professionals (NAGW), Commonwealth of Virginia Information Technology Symposium (COVITS) and upcoming NACo engagements. The work has also been recognized with industry honors, including the 2024 NAGW Pinnacle Award and a Center for Digital Government’s Government Experience Award.

Internally, support has grown, with increased backing from department leaders and the County Attorney’s Office. Staff continue to engage through a thriving Community of Practice that promotes shared learning, accountability and advocacy.

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Beyond accessibility, these efforts have had strategic benefits. By structuring content with clear semantics, Chesterfield has also optimized its digital services for search engines, machine readability and AI-powered tools—positioning the county for the future of digital service delivery while building a more inclusive experience today.