



U.S. General Services Administration

GSA Instructional Letter: Delivering a digital-first public experience

ADM IL 24-01

Office of Customer Experience

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Purpose:

This Instructional Letter (IL) provides a framework to strengthen our implementation of digital design requirements for GSA websites and digital services accessible by the public.

Background:

Digital channels are now a primary way that users interact with GSA. GSA must design and develop accessible websites, web-based applications, and digital services to meet users' expectations for high-quality digital experiences that are simple to use, secure, and provide clear and authoritative content, to improve customer experience, satisfaction, and trust.

1. [21st Century Integrated Digital Experience Act \(21st Century IDEA\) of 2018](#) (Dec. 20, 2018). 21st Century IDEA aims to improve the digital experience for government customers and reinforce existing requirements for federal public websites.
2. [DOTGOV Online Trust in Government Act of 2020 \(Pub. L. No. 116-260, §§ 901-907\)](#) (Dec. 27, 2020). The purpose of the .gov internet domain program is to legitimize and enhance public trust in government entities and their online services, facilitate trusted electronic communication and connections to and from government entities, provide simple and secure registration of .gov internet domains, improve the security of the services hosted within these .gov internet domains and the .gov namespace, and enable the discoverability of government services to the public and to domain registrants.
3. [Office of Management and Budget \(OMB\) Memorandum M-23-10, The Registration and Use of .gov Domains in the Federal Government](#) (Feb. 8, 2023).
4. [OMB M-23-22, Delivering a Digital-First Public Experience](#) (Sept. 22, 2023).

Applicability:

This IL applies to all GSA employees and contractors as they perform their duties. The following are exceptions:

1. The Office of Inspector General (OIG), given its independence under the Inspector General Reform Act of 2008 (5 U.S.C. §§ 401-424).
2. The Civilian Board of Contract Appeals, due to its independent authorities.

Cancellation:

This IL does not cancel or supersede any previous directive.

Roles and Responsibilities:

1. **Digital experience delivery lead.** The deputy administrator will designate a GSA employee to serve as the GSA digital experience delivery lead.
 - a. The digital experience delivery lead will be our primary point of contact responsible for communicating information to relevant stakeholders across the agency, providing requested information to OMB, engaging with other agencies to share best practices for implementation, and overseeing efforts to align with the guidance and recommendations in OMB M-23-22.
 - b. Within 180 days of this IL, GSA's Order on the [Management of the General Services Administration's Digital Presence](#) will be updated to define the role and responsibilities of the GSA digital experience delivery lead.
2. **Default to HTML.** GSA is committed to posting fully accessible content and documents to GSA websites, web-based applications, and digital services.
 - a. Pursuant to OMB M-23-22, Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) is the standard for publishing documents designed to be displayed in a web browser. HTML is the most accessible content delivery format. HTML also helps users find what they're looking for with better search engine optimization, is more responsive for mobile devices, and reduces burden on users to not have to download documents to view content.
 - b. GSA [website managers](#) and others who publish digital content on a GSA website, web-based application, or digital service will publish new or

updated content in HTML, rather than PDFs or other document types, to the greatest extent practicable. They will also identify high priority existing PDFs or other document types for HTML creation, to the greatest extent practicable.

- c. Under a timeline to be specified by the [GSA Digital Council](#), every website manager organization/executive will ensure that: (i) an audit of all of the PDFs and other document types published on a GSA website, web-based application, or digital service is completed; (ii) content that is no longer serving user needs is archived or deleted, according to the site's records retention schedule; and (iii) content that has user value is converted to HTML unless it meets the criteria described above.
 - d. Within 90 days of this IL, the GSA Digital Council, in consultation with the GSA digital experience delivery lead, will issue guidelines for acceptable use of PDFs and other document types on GSA websites, web-based applications, and digital services, and establish oversight metrics.
3. **Conduct content audits.** Regular content audits help ensure content is accurate and relevant to users.
- a. All website managers will conduct regular content reviews/audits consistent with guidance issued by the GSA Digital Council.
 - b. Within 120 days of this IL, the GSA Digital Council, in consultation with the GSA digital experience delivery lead, will issue guidance and requirements for website managers with respect to the websites they manage and associated content audits.
4. **Website rationalization.** GSA is committed to right-sizing the agency's public web footprint by avoiding the creation of new public-facing websites and domain names whenever possible.
- a. GSA is committed to transforming [GSA.gov](#) into a unified web experience that is modernized, accessible, secure, and centered on user needs. Our flagship website, GSA.gov, is the major platform for public information-only websites and content. Longer term, GSA aims to streamline GSA public-facing digital properties to ensure the agency is providing a coherent, consistent, and usable experience for end users.

- b. Within 180 days of this IL, the GSA Digital Council, in consultation with the GSA digital experience delivery lead, will establish the process and criteria for approval of any new website, web-based application, or digital service as part of the [Digital Lifecycle Program](#).
 - c. The authority for approving domain name requests (e.g., Login.gov) will remain with the CIO, consistent with [OMB M-23-10: The Registration and Use of .gov Domains in the Federal Government](#).
 - d. Any website, web-based application, or digital service that is not delivering user value, is not maintained, lacks proper resourcing, is duplicative, or is non-compliant with federal web policies will be considered for decommissioning.
 - e. Within 180 days of this IL, the GSA Digital Council, in consultation with the GSA digital experience delivery lead, will establish a specific process and criteria for decommissioning websites, web-based applications, and digital services.
 - f. By the end of fiscal year 2025, all website manager organization/executives will ensure that their inventory of websites, web-based applications, and digital services is reviewed to determine if any can be moved into GSA.gov, another top-level GSA domain, or if it can be consolidated or decommissioned. If a migration to GSA.gov is selected, the website manager organization/executive will work with the GSA.gov Digital Communications Program Management Office to establish an appropriate timeline and resourcing to conduct the work.
 - g. By the end of fiscal year 2025, all website manager organization/executives will ensure there is a written agreement in place for any website or digital property jointly managed by GSA and another agency/entity, or managed by GSA on behalf of another agency/entity. The written agreement will address the roles and responsibilities of the parties, and ensure that the website or digital property is managed consistent with this IL.
5. **Default to the U.S. Web Design System (USWDS).** Using USWDS components makes our websites more mobile-friendly and accessible, and provides a more consistent and trustworthy user experience.

- a. Section 3(e) of 21st Century IDEA requires agencies to comply with the website standards published by TTS, which are embodied by the United States Web Design System. M-23-22 reiterates this requirement and encourages agencies to use the USWDS.
- b. All GSA websites, web-based applications, and digital services will use the USWDS to the greatest extent practicable.
- c. Within 90 days of this IL, the GSA Digital Council, in consultation with the GSA digital experience delivery lead, and TTS Solutions, will define goals and measures for implementing USWDS across GSA websites, web-based applications, and digital services.
- d. Within 180 days of this IL, the Office of Governmentwide Policy will update GSA internal guidance – such as Acquisition Planning (GSAM 507); Describing Agency Needs (GSAM 511); and Acquisition of IT (GSAM 539) – to include USWDS as a standard contract term for custom development services of a GSA website or digital property.
- e. If any additional regulatory (GSAR) change(s) are needed, the Office of Governmentwide Policy will assist with that process.

Signature

/S/_____

Robin Carnahan

Administrator

11/19/24_____

Date