

Policy

21st Century Integrated Digital Experience Act

December 20, 2018

Overview

The [21st Century Integrated Digital Experience Act](#) (21st Century IDEA), enacted in December 2018, is a U.S. federal law designed to modernize how government agencies deliver digital services to the public. Its primary goal is to improve the usability, accessibility, and security of federal websites and digital platforms, ensuring that citizens can efficiently access information and complete government services online. The Act mandates that agencies adopt user-centered design practices, implement mobile-friendly and accessible websites, and streamline digital interactions to reduce complexity and duplication.

The law also emphasizes the digitization of paper-based processes, the adoption of electronic signatures, and the use of shared and standardized digital services across agencies. Agencies were required to submit plans for implementing these changes and report annually through 2023 to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) on progress. By establishing clear standards for federal digital experiences, the 21st Century IDEA Act aims to create a more efficient, transparent, and citizen-focused government, while encouraging agencies to leverage modern technologies such as cloud platforms, automation, and analytics to improve service delivery.

Public-Facing Service Modernization

180 days after issuance, agencies were required to make the following changes to all their public-facing digital services:

- Website Modernization:
 - Agencies must ensure all public-facing websites are mobile-friendly, secure, accessible, and easy to navigate.
 - Websites should adhere to Section 508 accessibility standards to accommodate users with disabilities.
- Digitization of Paper-Based Services:
 - Convert paper forms and manual processes into digital workflows.
 - Reduce reliance on physical paperwork for public-facing services.
- Electronic Signatures:
 - Accelerate adoption of digital and electronic signatures for forms, approvals, and submissions.
 - Ensure electronic signature solutions comply with federal standards (e.g., ESIGN Act).
- Customer Experience Improvement
 - Focus on user-centered design to simplify interactions with government services.
 - Provide consistent, streamlined digital experiences across agency platforms.
 - Implement feedback mechanisms to monitor and improve user satisfaction.
- Standardization and Shared Services
 - Adopt shared services and centralized platforms where possible to reduce duplication.
 - Standardize digital offerings across agencies for consistency and efficiency.

What Does This Mean for Government?

Federal agencies are required to:

- Redesign their websites and online services to be mobile-friendly, accessible, secure, and user-centered.
- Replace paper-based processes with digital workflows, adopt shared platforms, and use electronic signatures, leading to faster service delivery and reduced administrative costs.
- Agencies are responsible for continuous improvement. While annual reporting ended in 2023, agencies must still meet modernization milestones under OMB guidance (M-23-22).

The passage of the 21st Century Integrated Digital Experience Act signals a clear and lasting shift in federal government priorities toward digital transformation, accessibility, and customer experience.

Expect agencies to modernize their websites, forms, apps, and other public facing services to be user-friendly, secure, and accessible.

What Does This Mean for Industry?

This is an opportunity for contractors, integrators, and developers involved in customer experience projects to align their solutions with the mandates and opportunities from this act.

Key takeaways for vendors:

- Federal demand for user-centered design is now mandated, not optional. The Act legally requires agencies to modernize websites and digital services around accessibility, usability, and customer experience. Vendors that offer UX research, accessibility testing, and digital service design can position their solutions as essential for compliance rather than as enhancements.
- Digitization and automation are top modernization priorities. With mandates to replace paper-based forms and adopt electronic signatures, agencies are actively seeking workflow automation, digital form builders, and e-signature solutions that improve efficiency and meet legal requirements
- CX vendors that provide audit-ready accessibility documentation, analytics dashboards, and measurable service improvements can differentiate themselves as low-risk, high-value partners for federal digital transformation.

In short, this Policy requires that federal public-facing services meet certain standards of ease, usability, and accessibility.

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