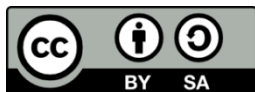
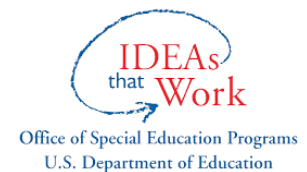


Technical Assistance Needs of OSEP-Funded Centers: Summary of 2025 Data Collection

September 2025

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Introduction

This document was prepared by the National Center on Accessible Digital Educational Materials & Instruction (NCADEMI or “n-cademy”) to report on the findings of a mixed methods study of the current challenges and opportunities OSEP-funded centers experience in producing accessible digital content for targeted users of products and services (e.g., technical assistance recipients, teachers, students with disabilities, or families). The purpose of the mixed methods study was to identify specific technical assistance products and services NCADEMI can provide to help OSEP-funded centers improve their digital accessibility practices.

To that end, NCADEMI conducted two knowledge development activities targeted at OSEP-funded centers between January and August 2025. These activities were a survey and a focus group. This report summarizes the information collected from each activity. The closing section describes NCADEMI’s proposed technical assistance products and services for OSEP-funded centers during the second year of NCADEMI’s project period, October 1, 2025–September 30, 2026.

The intended audience of this report is the leadership and staff of OSEP-funded centers. Users of this report will understand the baseline data collected by NCADEMI and how that data informs our targeted technical assistance for this crucially important population.

Focus Group Findings

NCADEMI hosted a two-hour virtual *Focus Group of Representatives of OSEP-Funded Centers* on August 11, 2025. The study team’s protocol and the questions asked of participants are provided in Appendix A.

Eight representatives from five OSEP-funded centers participated in the focus group session. The participants represented a cross-section of projects in areas of technical assistance and dissemination, technology and media services, state data collections, and parent-training and information centers.

The following four pages summarize the participants’ responses to NCADEMI’s prepared focus group questions.

What are the primary formats of the digital products or services your center or project develops?

Documents, particularly PDFs, and HTML web pages were the most frequently cited formats by the participants, followed by slide decks, videos, and social media. Podcasts, spreadsheets, and video conferences also entered the discussion. One center develops its own mobile applications and another creates web-based modules on a learning management system.

What successes has your team experienced in relation to improving the accessibility of your products or services?

Several participants referenced an organizational culture of accessibility already within their centers/projects, including a reliance on collaboration to ensure products are accessible from the beginning of the design process. One university-based center takes advantage of free trainings offered by its campus digital accessibility office. This digital accessibility office also provides an “accessibility ambassador” program, which some staffers in the university-based center have completed. Those accessibility ambassadors provide one-on-one coaching for staffers to co-create resources. Additionally, that university-based center shares an accessibility tip at every staff meeting. These tips are archived and stored in a shared space for later reference.

One participant explained their center also has an accessibility team supporting product development. This center also conducts usability studies with assistive technology users. Another center reported their marketing team develops accessible templates, such as Word and PowerPoint files, to make accessibility easier for everyone. This same center’s organization has adopted the [World Wide Web Consortium \(W3C\) Accessibility Maturity Model](#) to guide continuous internal improvements.

While a culture of accessibility was a highlighted feature of the discussion, small steps toward accessibility improvements were also celebrated. One center recently implemented the use of proper headings in documents, explaining their center publishes numerous briefs. Another participant informed the group they are the first communications staff member for their center’s small team, which is just getting started on making materials accessible.

What barriers has your team experienced in relation to improving the accessibility of your products or services?

A participant launched into this discussion by saying pushback from some team members can be a barrier. Specifically, the concern is collective attitudes. The participant expressed the following perception of accessibility by some of their team members: “Why make these modifications that are only going to benefit a small proportion of the population, as opposed to what's easier for everyone else?” The participant added, “This reluctance on some of our developers has been tough to see.” Several participants discussed the varied levels of knowledge among the members of their teams and the challenges to getting everyone up to speed on accessibility. Two participants cited the sheer volume of inaccessible content their centers need to remediate as a barrier. All participants related to a lack of time and resources as a barrier.

What specific aspects of digital accessibility does your team find most challenging?

Several participants cited PDF accessibility as particularly challenging, with one participant explaining, “You think you've made a fully accessible PDF, and then we'll send it internally for somebody to test, and it is not.” The conversation about PDF accessibility led to a broader deliberation about the relevance of PDFs for technical assistance and whether they should be replaced by accessible web pages. Meeting technical accessibility standards for websites and mobile apps was also identified as an ongoing challenge by multiple participants.

What accessibility methods or strategies does your team currently use when creating a digital product or service?

Participants shared the following methods and strategies:

- Leveraging the native accessibility features of the product used to create the material.
- Keeping the product simple to avoid complex accessibility fixes.
- Following organization-provided accessibility guidelines by product type.
- Using accessibility checkers built into product development software.
- Using color contrast checkers.
- Using proper heading structure in documents.
- Subscribing to third party providers for creating accessible PDFs, closed captions, and transcripts.

- Contracting with web accessibility providers to conduct website accessibility evaluations and audits.
- Using AI to get answers and guidance for accessibility questions.

How do you currently evaluate the accessibility of a product or service you've developed?

Many of the same methods referenced in answers to the previous question were repeated here, particularly the use of built-in product accessibility and color contrast checkers. One participant added keyboard-only navigation checks and another said their center has assistive technology users, either internal or external to the center, who test for accessibility.

What digital accessibility-related training have members of your team completed?

One participant reminded the group of their university's "accessibility ambassador" program, which has been completed by some of their center's staff. Another participant said their state education agency offers recurring webinars on digital accessibility the center takes advantage of. Several participants shared that the members of their teams with formal training in accessibility will offer coaching sessions or "just in time" support for those with less experience.

Are specific types of digital accessibility supports or resources available that would be helpful to your team, but that you've been unable to locate?

Participants shared the following suggestions:

- Information specific to making spreadsheets accessible.
- Guidance on making surveys accessible.
- Supports for developing accessible web-based learning modules.

What formats of technical assistance from NCADEMI would be most useful to your team?

Participants shared the following suggestions:

- Tools for evaluating accessibility with recommended standards.

- Resources for novice creators of accessible content (e.g., tips for accessible slide decks).
- Product-specific coaching and consultation.
- Office hours.
- Meetings by appointment.
- Resources in both text and video formats.

Is there any information we've missed?

One participant suggested NCADEMI address the role of AI in solving digital accessibility problems. Another suggested NCADEMI might help centers prioritize digital accessibility goals.

Of all the things we discussed, what to you is the most important?

A participant said timely support is most important. Another participant highlighted the need for messaging that conveys the “why” behind the importance of accessibility.

Survey Findings

NCADEMI's *Survey of OSEP-Funded Centers* was open between January 15–July 31, 2025. A copy of the survey instrument is available in Appendix B.

Thirteen participants completed the survey. While all survey questions were optional, all 13 participants responded to each question.

For what types of digital content and material would your team most benefit from accessibility technical assistance?

Respondents were asked to select up to five types of content/material from a provided list. The types of digital content/material are listed below by percentage of respondents who selected each:

- Website content – 54%.
- PDF files – 46%.
- Word processing documents; videos; infographics – 31% each.
- Images; social media; mobile applications; live webinars; spreadsheets – 23% each.
- Website applications; presentations – 15% each.

- Podcast/audio files – 8%.

One respondent selected “other” and specified “fillable forms.”

What digital accessibility topics would be most helpful to your team?

Respondents were asked to select up to five topics from a provided list. The topics are listed below by percentage of respondents who selected each:

- Document accessibility testing – 54%.
- Data tables – 46%.
- Content structure; website accessibility testing; website navigation – 38% each.
- How people with disabilities use technology – 31%.
- Transcripts for video and audio; audio description; accessibility audits – 23% each.
- Advanced HTML; fonts and text – 15% each.
- Use of color; links; video captions; images – 8% each.

Please rank in order the following formats of technical assistance from 1 to 4, with 1 indicating most helpful to your team and 4 indicating least helpful.

When asked to rank in order four formats of technical assistance, “Targeted just-in-time resources to help with specific tasks” was ranked most helpful by the majority of participants. “Community of Practice with opportunities to collaborate with other projects” was ranked as the least helpful. The remaining options tied for being ranked in the middle of most and least helpful: “Webinars (live and recorded)” and “In-depth tutorials and learning modules for self-directed use.”

Please share any additional information regarding your center’s needs for improving the accessibility of products and services.

The final survey question gave participants an opportunity to share the following additional information:

- “I’m a developer interested in getting caught up on current best practices!”
- “Community of Practice was ranked 4 simply because of time constraints and competing priorities. Our center is running a program that utilizes Word documents heavily and our content developer struggles with accessibility on the Word

documents that participants use. We are also developing a number of tools in spreadsheets and have found our team lacks a basic understanding of how accessibility works in spreadsheets.”

- “We are always open to learning how to do things in different or better ways.”
- “Making sure that the products and services from a small, federally funded TA&D meet accessibility guidelines.”
- “Some brief checklists for the basics on accessibility for different things (PPT, websites, word documents) would be very helpful.”
- “How AI is affecting accessibility.”

Technical Assistance for OSEP-Funded Centers

For synchronous activities, the data collected from OSEP-funded centers indicates a strong preference for on-demand, just-in-time, technical assistance from NCADEMI. As a multi-faceted technical assistance center with multiple recipient groups, NCADEMI needs to balance its team availability for OSEP-funded centers with competing priorities. To achieve this balance, NCADEMI will offer weekly office hours to provide OSEP-funded centers with open opportunities to discuss accessibility issues. OSEP-funded centers can also contact NCADEMI directly by email or phone (voice/text) for even more immediate assistance on brief questions. As NCADEMI builds relationships with other centers, we may identify additional technical assistance activities that are synchronous in nature.

For asynchronous resources, OSEP-funded centers will find NCADEMI’s current and future web-based learning modules applicable to their own product development. NCADEMI will curate additional resources on highly-needed topics identified in this study, identified in the course of providing technical assistance during office hours, and identified in response to email and phone requests.

Summary

NCADEMI’s mixed methods study generated valuable information on the current challenges and opportunities experienced by OSEP-funded centers in producing accessible digital content for targeted users of products and services. NCADEMI achieved the study’s purpose in that we used the collected data to identify specific technical assistance products and services to help OSEP-funded centers improve their digital accessibility practices. The NCADEMI team looks forward to partnering with our colleagues in other OSEP centers in this shared pursuit.

Recommended Citation

National Center on Accessible Digital Educational Materials & Instruction. (2025, September). *Technical Assistance Needs of OSEP-Funded Centers: Summary of 2025 Data Collection*. Logan, UT: Author. Retrieved [insert date] from <https://ncademi.org/audiences/osep-centers>

Appendix A. Focus Group Protocol and Questions

The NCADEMI National Digital Accessibility Needs Focus Group of Representatives of OSEP-Funded Centers was convened on August 11, 2025, 3:00–5:00 p.m. ET. The meeting was recorded with transcription enabled. Informed consent was required from participants per Utah State University’s Institutional Review Board. Participants were informed they could leave the meeting at any time, and they were free to answer or not answer any question. Participants were also informed no personally identifiable information would be used by the researchers in the process of analyzing and using the data collected from the focus group.

1. Let’s start with brief introductions. Please state your name, job title, and the name of your OSEP-funded project. Optionally, we welcome knowing your reason for choosing to participate in this focus group. [Facilitator calls on participants one at a time.]
2. What are the primary formats of the digital products or services your center or project develops? Examples of formats are websites, video conferences, apps, documents, slide decks, videos, podcasts, and social media.
3. What successes has your team experienced in relation to improving the accessibility of your products or services?
4. What barriers has your team experienced in relation to improving the accessibility of your products or services?
5. What specific aspects of digital accessibility does your team find most challenging?
6. What accessibility methods or strategies does your team currently use when creating a digital product or service?
7. How do you currently evaluate the accessibility of a product or service you’ve developed?
8. What digital accessibility-related training have members of your team completed? Other than formal training, how do members of your team develop accessibility skills?
9. Are there specific types of digital accessibility supports or resources that would be helpful to your team, but that you’ve been unable to locate?
10. What formats of technical assistance from NCADEMI would be most useful to your team?
11. As a reminder, the purpose of this focus group is to collect information that will help the NCADEMI team understand current challenges and opportunities experienced by OSEP-funded projects in relation to producing accessible digital content for the users

of your products and services. Specifically, we are interested in learning how NCADEMI can assist your team with improving digital accessibility practices. To that end, is there any information we've missed?

12. Of all the things we discussed, what to you is the most important?

13. We are in the final minutes of the session. Are there any additional comments anyone would like to make?

Appendix B. Survey Instrument

The *NCADEMI National Digital Accessibility Needs Survey of OSEP-Funded Centers* was administered entirely online via an accessible online form. Informed consent was required from participants per Utah State University's Institutional Review Board.

1. For what types of digital content and material would your team most benefit from accessibility technical assistance? Choose up to 5.

- Images
- Word processing documents
- Videos
- Website content
- Website applications
- Infographics
- Social media
- Presentations
- Podcast/audio files
- Mobile applications
- Live webinars
- PDF files
- Spreadsheets
- Other (please specify)

2. What digital accessibility topics would be most helpful to your team? Choose up to 5.

- How people with disabilities use digital technology (screen reader, magnification)
- Use of color (contrast, meaning)
- Content structure (headings, lists)
- Fonts and text (sizes, readability)
- Links
- Data tables
- Video captions
- Transcripts for video and audio
- Audio description
- Images (alt text, color)
- Website accessibility testing

- Document accessibility testing
- Advanced HTML (ARIA, forms)
- Website navigation
- Accessibility audits
- Other (Please specify)

3. Please rank in order the following formats of technical assistance from 1 to 4, with 1 indicating most helpful to your team and 4 indicating least helpful.

1. Webinars (live and recorded).
2. Targeted "just-in-time" resources to help with specific tasks.
3. Community of Practice with opportunities to collaborate with other projects.
4. In-depth tutorials and learning modules for self-directed use.

4. Please share any additional information regarding your center's or project's needs for improving the accessibility of products and services. (Open ended)