

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-15-574](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

CVAA was enacted to help ensure that people with disabilities have full access to the benefits of technological advances in communications. The act required FCC to establish regulations and conduct public outreach and included a provision that GAO review FCC's efforts. GAO examined (1) the extent to which FCC established complaint and enforcement procedures within CVAA-required time frames and conducted public outreach, (2) the actions FCC has taken to ensure industry compliance with CVAA's recordkeeping provisions and to determine the level of industry compliance with accessibility requirements, and (3) stakeholders' views on the effect of CVAA's recordkeeping obligations on the development and deployment of new communications technologies.

GAO reviewed FCC's regulations, orders, and biennial reports to Congress; surveyed a random sample of companies certifying compliance with CVAA requirements; assessed FCC's efforts to conduct public outreach against key practices GAO previously identified through an expert panel; and interviewed FCC officials and representatives from industry associations, consumer advocate groups, and disability research organizations selected based on CVAA-related comments they submitted to FCC.

What GAO Recommends

FCC should evaluate its public outreach efforts and ensure those efforts incorporate key practices. FCC concurred with the recommendation and intends to take action to address it.

View [GAO-15-574](#). For more information, contact Mark L. Goldstein at (202) 512-2834 or goldsteinm@gao.gov.

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ACCESSIBLE COMMUNICATIONS

FCC Should Evaluate the Effectiveness of Its Public Outreach Efforts

What GAO Found

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) established accessibility complaint and enforcement procedures within the time frames mandated by the 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010 (CVAA) to ensure that people with disabilities would have access to advanced communications. FCC's complaint and enforcement procedures enable consumers to file (1) a pre-complaint Request for Dispute Assistance (RDA), (2) an informal complaint, or (3) a formal complaint if consumers believe a communications product or service is not accessible to people with disabilities. From October 8, 2013, to April 1, 2015, FCC received 48 RDAs and no informal or formal complaints. FCC has undertaken numerous efforts to inform the public about CVAA's protections and remedies by, for example, hosting seminars and webinars and publishing consumer guides on accessibility issues. However, GAO found FCC's efforts do not always align with key practices for conducting public outreach. In particular, FCC has not evaluated the effectiveness of its public outreach efforts. Without such an evaluation, FCC does not know the program's effectiveness in informing the public of the protections and remedies available under CVAA and thus cannot reasonably assure the quality, quantity, and timeliness of the outreach program. Evaluating the outreach efforts would also enable FCC to determine whether current resources allocated to the outreach program are appropriate or need adjustment.

FCC has taken limited actions to ensure industry compliance with CVAA's recordkeeping provisions and does not know the extent to which industry is fully complying with the requirements to make products and services accessible. FCC established the Recordkeeping Compliance Certification and Contact Information Registry to help ensure industry compliance with recordkeeping requirements. Companies subject to any CVAA accessibility requirement must submit an annual certification to FCC that they are maintaining records of their efforts to make their products accessible through the Registry. FCC could not say whether industry is complying with CVAA accessibility requirements because FCC lacks an objective measure for making this determination. However, developing a measure might not be cost effective given that FCC has received no informal or formal complaints asserting non-compliance with these requirements. In FCC's 2014 biennial report to Congress, FCC based its determination of industry compliance on public comments and industry association reports.

Stakeholders GAO surveyed and interviewed generally reported that CVAA's recordkeeping obligations have not affected the development and deployment of new communications technologies. Specifically, GAO estimated that between 59 and 70 percent of companies view CVAA's recordkeeping requirements as having had no effect on their development and deployment of new communications technologies. Overall, industry associations and disability advocates GAO interviewed generally agreed that accessibility improved since the passage of CVAA. Industry associations highlighted a number of association-led efforts to bring industry and consumers together to ensure that the needs of disabled consumers are being addressed. Advocates for people with disabilities indicated that there were still many ways in which the accessibility of communications technology could be further improved, but some believed that CVAA resulted in more widely available accessible technology.