

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts (USA) has required the use of ODF for Executive Branch Documents by mid-year 2007. We will explain the origins, development, and evolution of Massachusetts Open Standards Policy, and will examine its relationship to "free and open source" software. The important role of Accessibility requirements will be closely reviewed, and the role of the vendor community and trade organizations will be described. The present obstacles to implementation of open and free software will be summarized.

We will give a detailed description and analysis of current government policy and its actualization. It will include a realistic look at technical and political barriers affecting FOSS implementation, consideration of important technical and structural characteristics of the free and open source industry, of traditional IT vendor roles, and of the way government IT staff functions. We will review accessibility tools available to current desktop technologies; the promise of free and open source accessibility tools, and their potential in Government IT infrastructure. In conclusion we will consider the role of public sector policy in determining the overall direction of IT development, we will review legal and licensing issues affecting government procurement, we will discuss ODF and PDF as "open standards", and how "free and open source" development affects "open standards". Finally, we hope to show that public sector and government IT policy support FOSS technologies are the key to assuring a strong future for open standards and effective, stable, maintainable, and economical public IT infrastructure.