

Digital Accessibility Platforms: Selection, Architecture, and Tradeoffs



Platform decisions now sit beside design systems, CI/CD, and procurement cycles



Three decision axes: selection (build/buy/hybrid), architecture, and tradeoffs



For accessibility leads, product and engineering, Design Ops, content, IT, procurement



Outcomes: repeatable evaluation, architecture vocabulary, defensible tradeoff model



Roadmap: chaque module maps to a rollout decision milestone, ending in a 90-day timeline



Why Platform Decisions Are Urgent in 2026

REGULATION | MARKETS | ACCESSIBILITY | RISK | MOMENTUM



EAA enforcement since June 2025 lifted EU procurement demand ahead of the US



DOJ Title II (2024) triggered a US state and local procurement wave still working through



Automated scanning reaches only 30–40% of WCAG 2.2 criteria – the question is workflow



2026 WebAIM Million: 95.9% of top homepages still fail, averaging 56.1 errors



Federal lawsuits rose 27% in 2025 to 3,117; 2026 projected near 6,176

Platform Landscape: Six Functional Categories

A clearer view of the tools, support, and capabilities across the accessibility ecosystem.



Automated testing and scanning

axe-core, WAVE, Lighthouse, Pa11y, enterprise crawlers with site-wide scheduling and history



Manual and assistive-technology testing support

guided workflows, keyboard and screen-reader evidence capture



Design and code linting

Figma/Sketch plugins, IDE linters, Storybook component scanning — catch defects pre-ship



Monitoring and regression detection

continuous production scans, trend history, per-release regression views



Overlays and runtime remediation widgets

separate category with distinct legal and technical record



Training and knowledge platforms

role-based enablement tied to remediation guidance



More inclusive products.
Broader possibilities.

Vendor Archetypes, Consolidation, and AI Claims

More
Accessible
Together

Enterprise platforms

Siteimprove, Level Access, Deque axe suite — crawl estates, manage workflow, five figures annually



Engineering-first tools

Deque (axe-core), Evince, TPGi ARC — closest to release, weakest governance



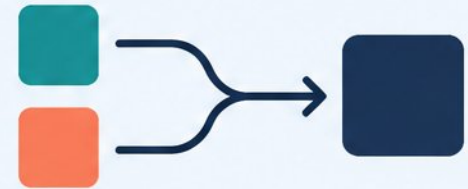
Fragmentation risk

Deque 5+ products, Stark 6+ tools — data silos, no single source of truth



Consolidation active

Level Access bought UserWay (2024); Stark added EAA frameworks early 2026



AI coding agents pass only 8–25% of automatable checks; 37–60% with instruction files



Multi-engine testing (proprietary + axe-core) now a scored differentiator



Single-engine platforms miss what alternative approaches catch

Requirements First: Turning Obligations into Platform Criteria



Translate WCAG 2.2 AA, EN 301 549 v3.2.1, and Section 508 into testable criteria



Standards lag: 508 anchors to WCAG 2.0, EN 301 549 to 2.1 — 2.2 criteria omitted



Coverage model: web, mobile, PDFs, email, kiosks, third-party content



Role-based requirements: developer, designer, content, QA, procurement



Non-functional needs decide contracts: SSO, data residency, APIs, TCO

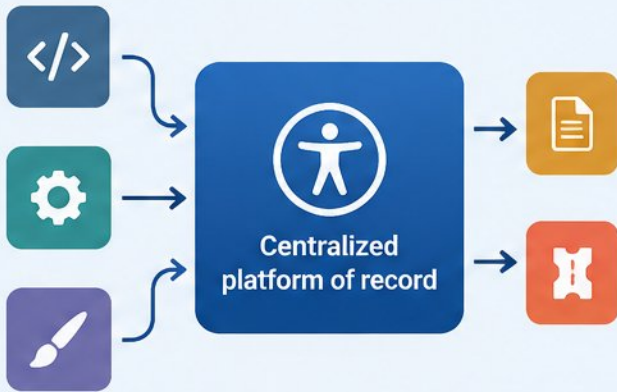


Avoid scan-only focus, vague wording that blocks comparable bidding

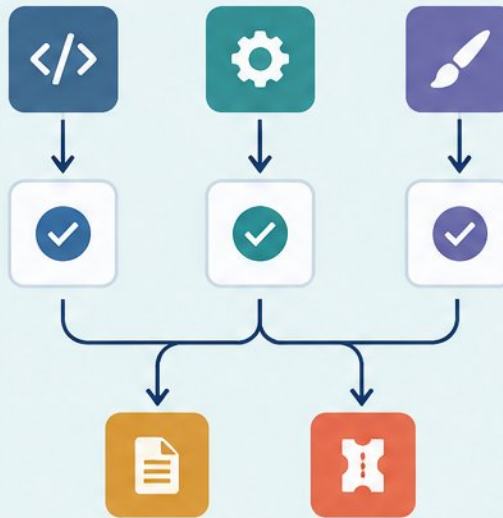
Architecture Patterns: Where Accessibility Capability Lives

Different patterns. Shared goal. An accessible, inclusive digital experience.

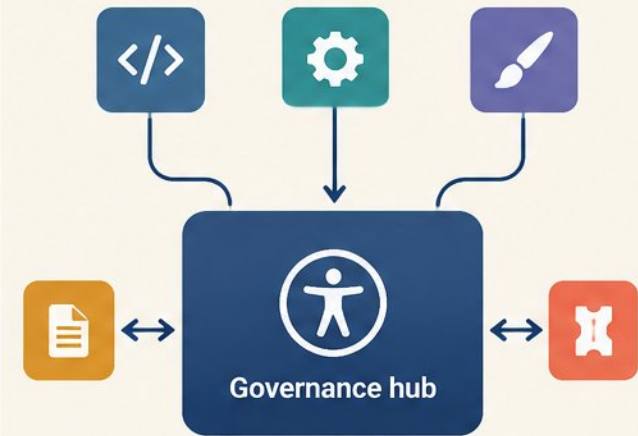
- A Pattern A — Centralized platform of record**
strong governance visibility, weak proximity to the commit



- B Pattern B — Federated tooling in CI/CD, IDE, and design**
fast feedback, but evidence fragments



- C Pattern C — Hybrid governance hub plus distributed execution**
the model most large organizations converge on



- Normalize issues, share severity, deduplicate engines so metrics survive a tool change



- Integrate source control, pipelines, design tokens, CMS, ticketing; scan components to fix once



- Split build / scan / report / gate jobs; one stable gate check; read-only token on forks

Reference Architecture in Practice: Pipeline and Evidence



- Three events only: pull_request, trunk push, workflow_dispatch
- Never pull_request_target: scans execute contributor builds next to write tokens
- Matrix by viewport and route group; a shard names its owner
- fail-fast: false plus unique artifacts so one failure hides nothing
- Only the report job gets write access; only the gate blocks merges
- Land the gate in warn mode, soak a week, then flip
- Evidence first: SARIF, run summaries, dated artifacts

The Tradeoff Model: Coverage, Cost, Velocity, and Risk



Automated scans ~30–40%;
hybrid audits 70–80%; full
manual with users 95%+



A clean scan is a floor,
not a finish line



Build vs. buy vs. hybrid:
control and data ownership
against time-to-value



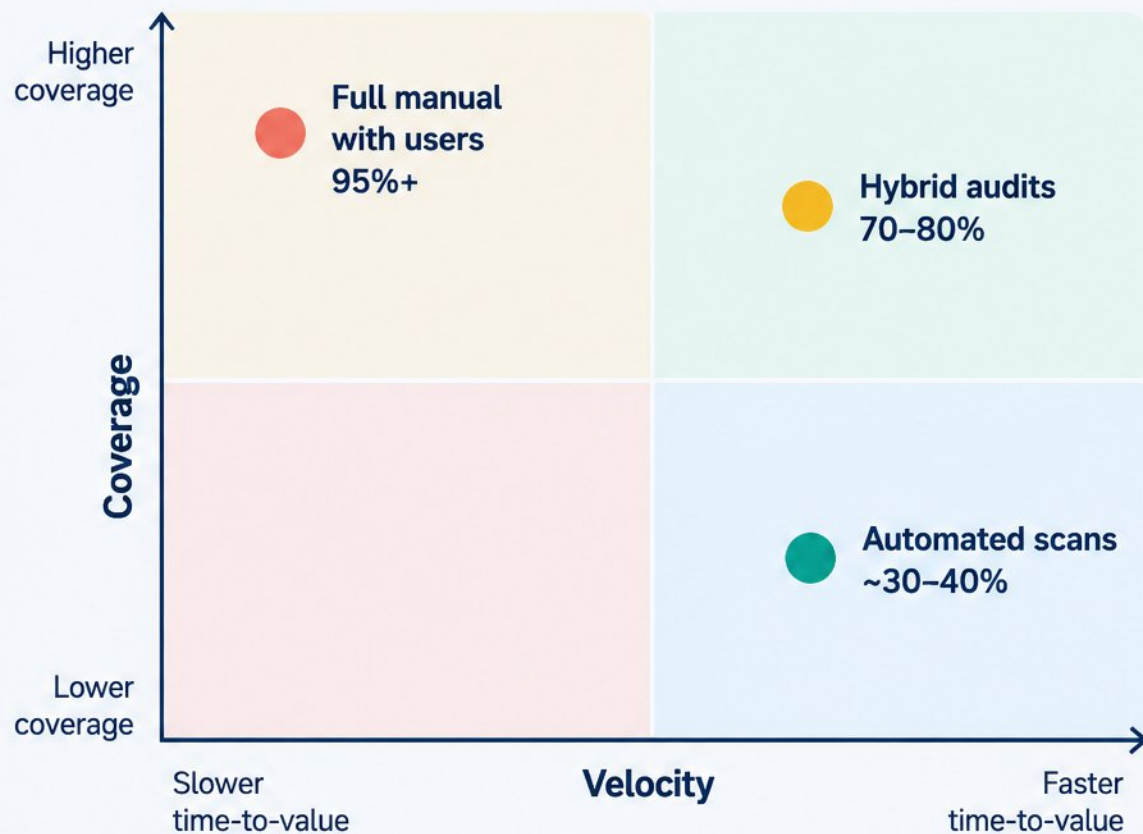
Cost on one axis: per-seat,
per-domain, per-page tiers,
bundled audit hours



Enterprise list prices 2026:
\$15,000–\$120,000/year;
PDF, mobile, audit move price



Overlays: 1,000+ widget sites
sued in 2024, ~quarter of filings



Relative cost (illustrative bands)

Lower cost

Mid cost

Higher cost



Higher risk exposure toward the lower-right.

Overlays and Auto-Remediation: The Case You Must Be Able to Defend



Overlays adjust presentation at runtime: text size, contrast, reading masks — useful as a preference toolbar



They cannot repair source markup, write alt text, fix heading order, or resolve keyboard traps



FTC April 2025: accessiBe paid \$1M under a 20-year order barring unsubstantiated conformance claims



1,000+ overlay-equipped businesses were sued in 2024; some settlements required removing the widget



Defensible position: personalization yes, funded code-level remediation in your source, dated records



Evaluation in Practice: Scorecards, Pilots, and Procurement

From criteria to confidence. A practical path to accessible solutions.



Weight the scorecard

- Weight the scorecard: methodology 30%, credentials 25%, price 25%, references 20%



Challenge the ACR

- Challenge the ACR: VPAT 2.5, dated within 6–24 months, named assistive technologies



Log red flags

- Log red flags: blanket "supports WCAG" claims, blank title blocks, refusal to sign accessibility clauses



Pilot against your backlog

- Pilot against your backlog: authenticated flows, known defects, false positive rate



Enforce it

- Enforce it: independent ACR review, severity-keyed timelines, withheld payment tranche



Rollout and Adoption: From Selection to Daily Practice



Phased rollout: pilot teams, then business units, then enterprise-wide



Keep the gate in warning mode long enough to observe a normal week



Enabling roles: central owner, embedded champions, Design Ops, embedded QA



Role-based enablement: engineers, designers, content authors each get tailored paths



Embed checks into definition of done and CMS guardrails that prevent issues



Healthy signals: findings with owners, verified remediation velocity, falling regressions



Failure modes: unowned findings, untriaged reports, everything marked critical



Operations and Governance: Keeping It Sustainable



Operating model: intake, triage, severity bands, ownership, SLAs — closing on validated remediation



Tiered cadence: CI checks on change, scheduled template scans, manual review on major releases



Component monitoring first: one date-picker or modal fix clears many screens



Evidence: dated assessments, exception decisions with named acceptors, VPAT/ACR-ready records



Dashboard: criticals per template, remediation velocity, regression rate, release pass rate



Lifecycle: re-evaluations cadence, exit terms up front, W3C Maturity Model for measurable progress



Decision Workshop: Choosing an Architecture for Your Context



Scenario A: EAA and Title II enterprise — pattern C, platform of record plus audit



Requirements

Map to compliance, accessibility, and enterprise needs.



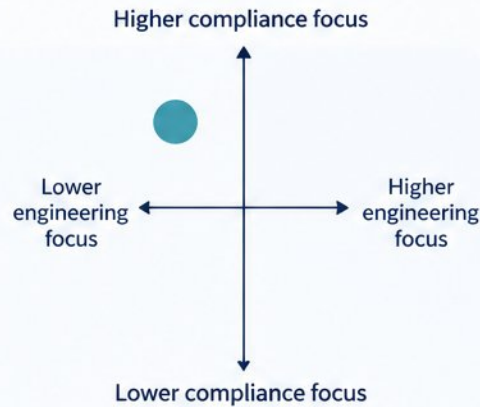
Pattern choice

Pattern C, platform of record plus audit.



Not buying

Be explicit about what you are not buying.



Engineering
Objections



Security
Objections



Legal
Objections



Finance
Objections



Scenario B: CI/CD-driven product org — engineering-first tooling, contracted audits



Requirements

Map to product speed, engineering workflows, and audit needs.



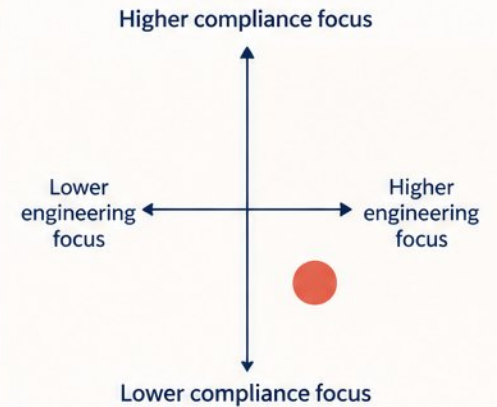
Pattern choice

Engineering-first tooling, contracted audits.



Not buying

Be explicit about what you are not buying.



Engineering
Objections



Security
Objections



Legal
Objections



Finance
Objections



Map requirements to patterns; name what you are explicitly not buying.



Agree scorecard weights before bids; pilot metrics that separate demo from fit.



Anticipate engineering, security, legal, and finance objections early.



Close with named owners and a 90-day decision timeline.

Key Takeaways and Resources

Build Accessible
Products Together



Principle

- Requirements before vendors; architecture before procurement



Pitfalls

- Pitfalls: overlays as compliance, automation-only, unowned findings



Role actions

- Role actions: leads set standard; engineering gates CI/CD; Design Ops maintain libraries



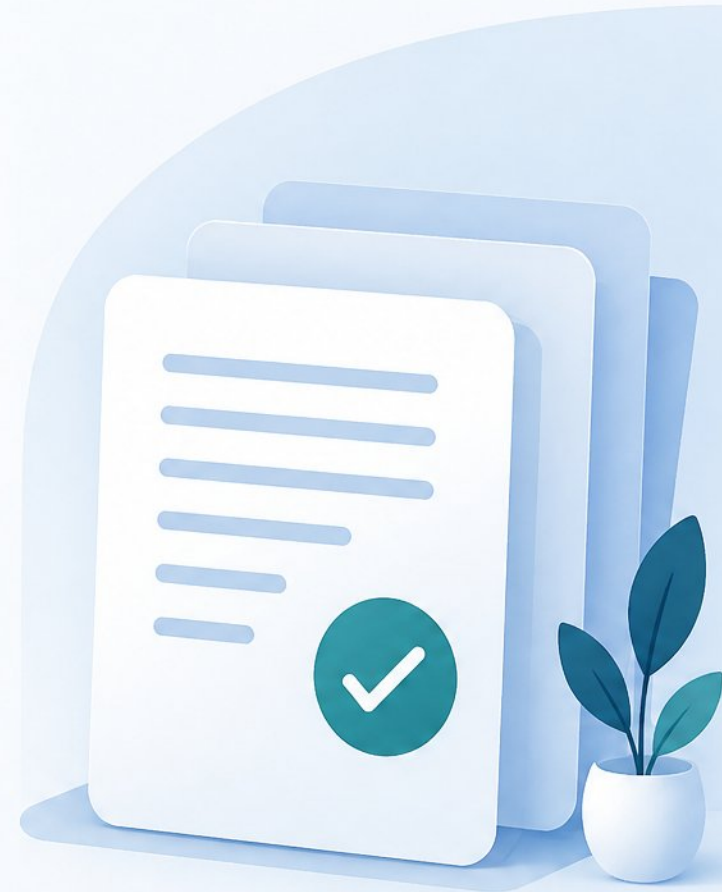
Resources

- Resources: WCAG 2.2, EN 301 549 v3.2.1, ITI VPAT 2.5, Overlay Fact Sheet



Keep current

- Keep current: re-review annually, WCAG 2.2 as floor, refresh scorecard



Standards today.
More inclusive tomorrow.

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