Tips for Procuring Universally Accessible Software

Be Aware
The first step to procuring accessible software is to be prepared to apply your awareness of the basic points of accessibility when evaluating software. If you are not familiar with what makes software accessible be sure to enlist the assistance of someone who is. The U.S. Department of Justice has a software procurement checklist/guide, which uses mostly non-technical language at http://www.justice.gov/crt/508/report/software.htm.

Demo Accessibility Features
Ask the vendor for a demonstration of the accessibility features of the proposed software.

Communicate with Vendor
Provide vendors with detailed accessibility criteria that must be met rather than allowing general high-level statements about accessibility of their product. Clearly state the seriousness with which a false accessibility claim would be viewed.

Test
Ask for a test copy so you can run your own tests. The Purdue Web Accessibility Committee has collected a list of common evaluation tools for your testing at http://www.purdue.edu/webaccessibility/resources/index.html#tools.

Ask For References
Ask for contact information for current users, including those in your field, other Purdue departments, and other universities. If it is used elsewhere at Purdue, try to make an appointment for a demo and Q&A with that department.

Ask what government agencies use the software. Although there are exceptions, generally speaking, by law any software purchased by the federal government must meet accessibility requirements. Two helpful sites are http://buyaccessible.gov/ and http://buyaccessible.net/VARC.

Ask for Help
Have knowledgeable staff verify as many of the vendor’s accessibility claims as practically possible. Consider consulting with ITaP staff members who work extensively with individuals with disabilities. You may call the ITaP Help Desk (4-4000) and ask that an ITaP assistive technology specialist contact you.

Work with Procurement Services (procurementcontracts@purdue.edu) to include a clause in the purchase agreement. Require the vendor to fix accessibility issues found within a specified time limit after purchase.

Purdue is an equal access/equal opportunity university.
Look At Peer Institutions
Two universities known to be leaders in web accessibility have prepared brief pages on purchasing accessible software. They are the University of Illinois (http://purchasing.cita.illinois.edu/) and the University of Washington (http://www.washington.edu/accessibility/procurement.html).

Last Resort
Despite your best efforts, you may eventually face an either/or situation. You may determine that there is no available software that meets your operational needs and is also accessible. If that happens, you may need to request an exception from the Office of Institutional Equity (http://www.purdue.edu/ethics/oie/). Your case will be much stronger if you can demonstrate your best efforts through following the tips listed above.

Prepared by
Purdue University Web Accessibility Committee (http://www.purdue.edu/webaccessibility/)