

Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency
Year 1 Progress Report on
the Accessibility Action Plan

The Honourable Gudie Hutchings
Minister of Rural Economic Development and Minister
responsible for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency



Atlantic Canada
Opportunities
Agency

Agence de
promotion économique
du Canada atlantique

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General

Message from the Equity, Inclusion and Anti-racism champion

The Agency's Employment Equity (EE), Inclusion and Anti-Racism Committee brings together members from every equity-seeking groups' employee networks, region/branch working group, and committees linked to accessibility, inclusion, equity and/or anti-racism. Its mandate is to provide strategic direction to build and sustain an inclusive, accessible, safe and healthy workplace with business practices that welcome, respect, appreciate and include voices from diverse backgrounds in the identification of systemic racism, discrimination and barriers. Its role is also to promote and support the implementation of the Agency's EE, Inclusion and Anti-Racism Action Plan, which is strategically aligned with the Clerk's Calls to Action on Anti-Racism, Equity and Inclusion and with the advancement of the Calls to Action articulated in the Truth and Reconciliation Report, *Many Voices One Mind: A Pathway to Reconciliation*, the Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service as well as the Deputy Minister Commitments on Diversity and Inclusion.

The committee members and I are dedicated to supporting this work by raising issues voiced by our employees to senior management and finding tangible solutions together. The Agency's Accessibility Action Plan is complementary and essential to focus dedicated efforts to create a barrier-free workplace for people with disabilities. The promotional launch of the GC Workplace Accessibility Passport during the National AccessAbility Week as well as the Accessibility Guide for Managers and Tools are examples of concrete measures already implemented as part of Year 1 of this action plan.

I applaud the efforts of all those involved in making these changes for the better. I am confident that with the commitment demonstrated thus far, we will continue to make sustainable progress toward becoming more accessible, representative and inclusive workplace.

Stéphane Lagacé

Vice-President, Finance and Corporate Services

ACOA's Employment Equity, Inclusion and Anti-Racism Champion

Executive summary

Since publishing its Accessibility Action Plan on November 2, 2022, ACOA has made progress against its objectives. It has made great strides, in particular, when it comes to Objectives 1 (employment), 2.1 (infrastructure) and 4 (communications other than ICT). ACOA has also worked to create a culture over the past year where employees recognize the importance of eliminating systemic barriers and where they understand how our differences make us better as a team.

The Accessibility Action Plan is being promoted to all staff as is the feedback form, on our intranet (Rendezvous), with the objective of gathering useful information on how we can continue to make progress on our plan.

Our Accessibility Coordinator, Cynthia Shannon, will be completing the Passport Facilitator training early in the new year, which will allow us to offer information sessions and workshops to managers and other employees about the GC Workplace Accessibility Passport.

A lot was learned over the past year. By continuing to work together, ACOA will achieve its goals to ensure a barrier-free organization.

Contact

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Format

[Contact us](#) to request alternate formats of this document, such as large print, Braille or audio.

Glossary

Accessibility means that people with and without disabilities can perceive, understand, navigate and interact with information, services and applications. The adoption of accessibility standards, guidelines and best practices ensures that systemic barriers are eliminated prior to individual accommodations.

Accommodation is a necessary measure taken to allow an employee to work to the best of their ability.

Barriers may be attitudinal, environmental or institutional. They may even be internalized.

Disability is a complex, evolving matter. The term covers a broad range and degree of conditions. A disability may have been present at birth, caused by an accident, or developed over time. It may be physical, mental, psychiatric, social or economic. Here are some disability sub-categorizations:

1. Any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness.
2. A short-term physical impairment caused by an accident, such as a broken arm or a concussion.
3. A condition of mental impairment or a developmental or learning disability (e.g. ADHD, autism)
4. A mental health condition, whether short-term, episodic or chronic, such as depression, anxiety or bipolar disorder.

ACOA's progress to date

This section provides an overview of the progress the Agency has made against its objectives, as outlined in the Accessibility Action Plan, published November 2, 2022, and which can be found at [ACOA's Accessibility Action Plans - Canada.ca](#). Also in this section is information on where ACOA expects to be vis-à-vis its goals by the end of 2024.

Objective 1 – employment

ACOA has the following goals under this objective:

1. Advertise employment opportunities in an accessible format, particularly important on private sites (versus jobs.gc.ca). Look at our application process online (i.e. have community stakeholders look at it) and ensure it is not a barrier to people with disabilities.
2. Stakeholder organizations should be consulted as a resource when hiring.
3. Review existing development programs to ensure that persons with disabilities are represented and supported at each stage, from entry to exit.
4. Close the representation gaps for people with disabilities.
5. People who can't physically work in an office should be able to work from home.
6. Develop tools and training for supervisors to enable them to create inclusive teams.

Results to date

The Agency is continually progressing to meet the six points listed above.

Notes regarding goal No. 1:

- The Agency leverages the PSC's platforms to advertise employment opportunities on Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn.
- The Agency confers with consultants to find candidates for potential casual employment.
- The Agency also created a list of stakeholder organizations where the Agency has the possibility to consult to ensure accessible posters.

Notes regarding goal No. 2:

- The Agency has one Human Resources Advisor trained as an accessibility ambassador. Their role is to help hiring managers conduct accessible hiring processes, from the posters to the evaluations as well as onboarding.
- The Agency shares its posters with stakeholder organizations to ensure appropriate outreach during EE-intentional staffing processes.

Notes regarding goal No. 3:

- The Agency is implementing its talent management program and leadership learning journey, Building and Supporting Leaders (BSL), which:
 - supports career and leadership development for all employees with enhanced intentional opportunities for people who are part of equity-seeking groups (including persons with disabilities)
 - provides a safe, healthy, accessible, respectful and supportive workplace
 - fosters and promotes continuous development through effective career conversations, self-awareness and personalized learning
 - provides mentorship and sponsorship for employees who self-declare as part of an equity-seeking group to prepare them for leadership roles

Notes regarding goal No. 4:

- All Vice-Presidents now have in their Performance Management Agreements the following performance indicator: Contribute to exceeding workforce availability representation Agency-wide by at least 13% for Indigenous employees, Racialized/Black employees and Persons with Disabilities by the end of 2023-24.

Notes regarding goal No. 5:

- The Agency developed a guide for managers and tools to assist them in identifying options for modified working arrangements and flexibility to accommodate designated groups where an employee can enter into an agreement with their manager to work from home.
- The OHS perspective on work from home for all staff, including those with disabilities, raised issues surrounding the physical, environmental and psychological abilities of staff to cope and to persevere in continuing to function to their agreed deliverables.
- The official launch of the GC Accessibility Passport at ACOA was promoted during the National Accessibility Week, where employees were made aware of how to implement this new, accessible tool.
- The TBS Prescribed Presence in the workplace (PPW) directive provided the flexibilities sought in allowing all employees to work from home on a regular basis. ACOA also fully addresses the duty to accommodate regulations for all employees.

Notes regarding goal No. 6:

- All supervisors have been provided with necessary tools and completed the required training, such as DICE – a mandatory dialogue regarding topics that touch on anti-racism, diversity, equity, inclusivity, reconciliation and positive space.
- The Agency’s HR Advisors will continue to promote and guide hiring managers through these hiring programs.
- The Agency continues to explore innovative ways to equip managers on how to manage inclusive and diverse teams.

Objective 2 – infrastructure

Objective 2.1 – the built environment

ACOA has the following goals under this objective:

1. Develop a Disabilities Considerations Checklist of 5-10 items to make the physical workspace more accessible for all: signage (incl. pictograms); create calm workspace; recirculate air through proper filters, esp. in 2.0 office space; automatic push buttons for all access doors.
2. Ensure events and meetings are accessible to all employees, and where applicable, the public
3. Evacuation plans should include how to evacuate an employee/visitor with a disability. Regular practices, with person with disability in different locations.
4. Create “calm” spaces to work – low traffic, low-level lights, little sound, soothing paint colours. There is a need for calm and consistency.
5. Universal design for new buildings – create accessible spaces.

Results to date

1. A disabilities checklist was created for each region to work from, as well as Head Office, and is at various stages of completion. The list is attached in Annex A as an Excel worksheet, showing which items have been completed in which office.
2. This goal is the responsibility of each person, team or region that organizes an event (e.g., an announcement or meeting).
3. This goal is complete.
4. Calm spaces, or wellness rooms, have been created in several regions. These rooms have been created not to work in but to relax and rest. Just five minutes of quiet down time can quickly improve concentration and stress levels. These quiet rooms are now available in all but two regions: Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia are waiting until they move offices before setting up their space.
5. This goal is complete.

Objective 2.2 – information and communication technology

ACOA has the following goals under this objective:

1. Need dedicated person in Agency who is familiar with the Accessibility, Accommodation and Adaptive Computer Technology (AAACT). Educate managers and employees about Shared Services Canada's AACT services and availability.
2. Make sure all platforms are accessible to users.
3. Adopt the GC Workplace Accessibility Passport.
4. Measure and reduce wait times for workplace accommodations.
5. ACCESSIBILITY:
 - a. provide resources (e.g., training) for employees so they can generate accessible documents with common tools (e.g., Word, PowerPoint);
 - b. enable accessibility features on all devices/software;
 - c. ensure contracts with suppliers require that documents meet accessibility requirements.

Results to date

1. the accessibility coordinator has been tasked with this responsibility in the interim, until a CIOD staff member can be found to take on this role.
2. This goal is complete.
3. The GC Accessibility Passport was officially launched and promoted during National Accessibility Week, May 28 to June 3, 2023. Employees were made aware of how to access and implement this new, accessible tool. The passport is available on the intranet page of the Employees with Disabilities Network. The document has been downloaded 7 times since then.
4. This goal is no longer valid now that the Agency has adopted the GC Workplace Accessibility Passport and accommodations are handled via an employee's manager and not through CIOD.
5. a) is ongoing as the AACT workshops on accessible documents are promoted on a regular basis on Rendezvous (the Agency's intranet site); b) is complete; c) is complete.

Objective 3 – client services

ACOA has the following goals under this objective:

1. Ensure documents are accessible to all clients. Ensure all concerned are aware of this.
2. Videos – should have sign language, cc, sub-titles and/or descriptive video
3. Develop data on client satisfaction from the perspective of persons with disabilities.
4. Pilot engagement and feedback processes from clients with disabilities.

Results to date

1. This goal is under way, and while it should be completed by the end of fiscal 2023-2024, staff changeovers may mean that the timeline for this goal gets pushed back.
2. Will be ensured on an as-needed basis. For example, for ACOA's virtual Pride Parade in August 2023, which was available to public servants across the country, we offered sign language interpretation and closed captioning.

3. We consulted with employees with disabilities to create our Action Plan and this Progress Report, but consultations with clients have not yet begun. This goal will likely be achieved in 2024.
4. See above.

Objective 4 – communications, other than ICT

ACOA has the following goals under this objective:

1. Implement a communications strategy, including an online presence, to raise awareness and promote a culture change around accessibility in the department. This includes promoting AAAC workshops on creating accessible documents.
2. Following the launch of the 2021 redesign of the website, ensure content uses plain language and is easy to read and understand.
3. Redesign Rendezvous (i.e., the Agency’s intranet) so that the format and new content, including photos, are accessible. Redesign to respect WCAG guidelines.
4. Make all templates accessible by the end of fiscal 2022-2023.
5. Promote communications around “International Day of Persons with Disabilities” (December 3), in conjunction with HR.

Results to date

1. A communications plan was prepared, with specific tasks to raise awareness and promote a culture of change around accessibility.
2. Web editors ensure content uses plain language, often using plain language apps to help them rewrite passages/phrases that are more complicated or complex.
3. Rendezvous has been redesigned to be more accessible, following WCAG guidelines and plain language use.
4. All internal templates, as well as presidential and ministerial templates, were made accessible in the summer of 2022 by a student who was hired for 6 weeks to work with us specifically for that reason.
5. The Agency, each year since 2021, promotes the International Day of Persons with Disabilities via a Rendezvous article at minimum.

Objective 5 – procurement of goods, services and facilities

ACOA had nothing to report under this objective.

Objective 6 – transportation

ACOA had nothing to report under this objective.

ACOA’s culture

Improving accessibility within the Agency is an ongoing effort. By shifting perception from the impairment to the barrier, we can create a culture of inclusiveness that leaves no one behind. The following are some of the ideals behind the culture here at the Agency:

- A culture of respect and fairness
- A diverse and inclusive workplace
- Recognizing the importance of eliminating systemic barriers
- An environment that recognizes how our differences make us better
- A workplace that recognizes the value of inclusivity

Consultations

ACOA consulted with its Working Group on Disabilities to prepare this progress report, asking broadly for their input as to which goals they felt had been achieved and which still needed work. The group consists of 13 participants, including the accessibility coordinator, with varying disabilities or with family members with disabilities, as well as several allies. Given that members are spread out across the Atlantic region, consultations took place via email on August 4, 2023. Those members who are responsible for specific goals were also consulted via Teams meetings for further information. All feedback was incorporated into this progress report.

A new Working Group will be formed soon. It will be made up of a small group of people, consisting of some members of the original group, people from the Employees with Disabilities Network, and others. This group will meet at least monthly to review the Accessibility Action Plan and keep work moving forward. Members will be responsible for various goals within the plan and will ensure that those items do not fall between the cracks when employees change positions.

Feedback

No feedback has been received on how our organization is implementing its accessibility plan, or on barriers persons who deal with our organization may have encountered.

In the latter part of this year, ACOA implemented its Communications plan for the Accessibility Action Plan and begun promoting not the plan itself but various features of the plan, including the feedback form. The goal is to have greater use of the form by employees. Articles published on ACOA's intranet (Rendezvous) include:

- "Accessibility Passport," May
- "Calm Spaces," September
- "Disabilities Checklist," November

Training

AAACT workshops have been promoted regularly through ACOA's events calendar and via articles on Rendezvous – the Agency's intranet – over the past two years. Numerous employees have taken the courses and have become proficient at creating accessible documents. And now, we are also promoting the CSPS online course, Making Documents Accessible (INC1-V46).

Our Accessibility Coordinator, Cynthia Shannon, will be completing the Passport Facilitator training in the new year, which will allow her to offer information sessions and workshops about the GC Workplace Accessibility Passport.

What we've learned

Plain language and accessible communications are not just best practices but also a responsibility. Ensuring that Canadians have equal access to information helps create communities, workplaces and services that enable everyone to participate fully in society. So, we do our best to ensure that our website pages are written at a Grade 8 level or below.

At ACOA, we also do what we can to apply an inclusive lens to our hiring activities. We provide hiring managers and Human Resources professionals with information, tips, tools and inclusive strategies to recruit a diverse workforce – one made up of people with an array of identities, abilities, backgrounds, cultures, skills, perspectives and experiences representative of Canada's evolving population.

One of the difficult things we've learned is that frequent meetings are required to mitigate issues created by staff turnover. Several small projects fell through the cracks because of a lack of communication as people changed jobs/positions, so the accessibility coordinator will be scheduling more frequent meetings to ensure she is aware of staff changeover as it happens and can ensure new employees are aware of their responsibilities with regard to the Accessibility Action Plan. This is partly the reason for a new Working Group (see **Consultations** above).

It was also recommended that an executive level champion be assigned to increase the visibility of our accessibility efforts here at the Agency. This process is under way and a champion will soon be assigned to the file.

Updating our intranet was probably our biggest, most challenging project this year – again impacted by several staff changeovers in key positions. Its deadline was moved back twice, but it was completed in June 2023 and is up and running smoothly, with a co-operative team of administrators managing its pages. We learned to work as a collaborative team, building pages in consultation with each other to ensure we were following the principles of accessibility while creating original content.

The new Rendezvous includes a strong focus on accessibility. Whenever possible, we follow the Canada.ca guidelines for accessibility, which include the colours and fonts used, plain language and easy-to-follow navigation. Many of these guidelines are built with the SharePoint Online

software, but we were cognizant of these factors when building templates and putting the RV pages together.