



Evaluation of the Enabling Accessibility Fund – 2016 to 2021



December 2022

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List of abbreviations

ESDC: Employment and Social Development Canada
ICT: Information and Communication Technologies

Executive summary

The Enabling Accessibility Fund (“the Program”) aims to create opportunities for persons with disabilities to fully and equitably participate in community activities, programs and services, and/or to access employment. It provides funding to enhance accessibility and remove barriers that persons with disabilities experience in communities and workplaces across Canada. The Program uses grants and contributions to contribute to the capital costs of construction and renovations intended to increase accessibility to the built environment and information and communication technologies (ICT).

This report presents the findings of the evaluation of the Enabling Accessibility Fund covering the period from fiscal year 2016 to 2017 to fiscal year 2020 to 2021. Over these years, the Program had actual expenditures of \$95.3 million.

This evaluation builds on multiple lines of evidence to report on the ongoing need of the Program, its effectiveness and efficiency. It also addresses the recent modifications that Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) made to the application process and the extent to which the Youth component is meeting its objectives.

Ongoing need and demand for the Program

Accessibility related barriers continue to negatively affect the ability of persons with disabilities to fully participate in and contribute to their communities and workplaces. These barriers are largely related to the built environment. However, there is also a lack of awareness of ICT accessibility barriers.

There is an ongoing need and demand for assistance with capital costs for the purposes of improving accessibility for persons with disabilities through both the built environment and ICT. Despite the Program’s strategies to address the high volume of applications and efforts to “stretch” the available funds, the demand for assistance from the Program continues to exceed the available financial support.

Program outcomes

Program funding enabled organizations to undertake 3422 projects to improve the accessibility of their facilities. This contributed to addressing a range of accessibility barriers and thereby improving the overall experience of persons with disabilities in their organizations.

Funded projects have contributed to increased access to and uptake of programs and services in communities, including for persons with disabilities. Other key benefits for persons with disabilities include a more inclusive environment where everyone feels they belong, and increased independence and autonomy. This, in turn, has enhanced the ability of persons with disabilities to participate in and contribute to their communities.

Funded projects have also contributed to more accessible workplaces, and increased employment and volunteer opportunities for persons with disabilities. However, the extent of uptake of these opportunities by persons with disabilities is less clear.

The Program addresses diverse accessibility barriers to support the participation of persons with disabilities of all ages and forms of disabilities, and other intersectionalities.

Program delivery modernization

In the 2020 Small projects call for proposals, the Program introduced a Flat Rate Costing Model, which calculated eligible expenses for ramps, accessible doors, and accessible washrooms. Applicants no longer needed to provide external quotes, project details or budget information for these project activities. In the same year, for the first time since 2011, there was no mandatory leveraging requirement (cost-sharing¹), which previously included either cash or in-kind contributions of at least 35% of total eligible costs.

Information provided to organizations through the Flat Rate Costing Model made it easier for organizations to apply for ramps, automatic doors and accessible washrooms. The information also improved the organizations' understanding and awareness of accessibility requirements and standards for the built environment. However, more information on ICT accessibility requirements and standards would be useful for organizations.

Further work is needed to determine the effectiveness of the Model in accurately determining costs.

The removal of the mandatory leveraging requirement in 2020 acted as an equalizer by removing barriers for organizations to access funding. However, when it was used, the leveraging requirement was an effective demand management tool, which allowed the program to expand the number of funded projects with the available budget.

Youth component

Added in 2017, the Youth innovation component, referred to as the "Youth component," aims to empower youth to work with local organizations to increase accessibility and safety in public spaces and workplaces through smaller scale retrofitting, renovation and construction projects.

The Youth Component supports a culture of change, which has contributed to creating Youth leaders that will be advocates for persons with disabilities. This component is filling some of the gaps associated with the other components of the Program such as its contribution to innovation.

Performance measurement

While the Program has improved its data collection strategy, there are gaps to be addressed to support better analysis of the Program's outcomes. Some of the gaps include lack of information on the uptake

¹ Leveraging requirement was waived for territories under the 2017 and 2018 Small projects call for proposals.

of the Workplace Accessibility stream, socio-demographic information of the Youth leader applicants and outcomes of their participation in the Youth component.

Recommendations

1. Continue to improve and strengthen the data collection strategy to support better decision making.
2. Continue to focus on increasing the uptake of the Program's Workplace Accessibility Stream.
3. Make steps to raise awareness of ICT accessibility barriers, in consultation with the disability community, and educate organizations on the ICT projects that the Program can support.
4. Re-assess specific elements of the Youth component to ensure youth leaders' engagement.

Management response and action plan

Overall management response

The Enabling Accessibility Fund is a \$13.65 million grants and contributions program that improves accessibility in communities and workplaces to enable Canadians with disabilities across Canada to more fully and equitably participate in their communities and the labour market. Initially, it was announced in 2007 as a 3-year \$45 million program. It was renewed in 2010 for an additional 3 years, and was extended on an ongoing basis in 2013. A Workplace Accessibility Stream was also introduced through the 2013 program renewal.

The Program was allocated additional funding through Budget 2016 (\$4 million over 2 years) and Budget 2017 (\$70 million in grants and contributions over 10 years). This additional funding was provided through the Social Infrastructure Fund to expand the Program's activities and further the accessibility of community spaces and workplaces across Canada. Although not in the scope of the 2022 Evaluation, it should be noted that the Program was allocated additional funding of \$90.3 million in grants and contributions over 2 years through Budget 2021 to support projects with not-for-profit organizations, women's shelters, childcare centres, small municipalities, Indigenous organizations, territorial governments, small businesses, and businesses of all sizes.

Under the Government of Canada's commitment to build a stronger and more inclusive Canada, one of ESDC'S core responsibilities is to increase inclusion and opportunities for participation of Canadians in their communities. The Program supports this core responsibility by enabling communities and employers to remove barriers to accessibility for persons with disabilities. The Program also supports significant actions taking place under Pillar 3 of the Disability Inclusion Action Plan, namely supporting accessible and inclusive communities.

The 2022 Summative Evaluation built on the lessons learned and best practices from the 2017 Evaluation, which confirmed the relevance of the program with the need for improvements in the areas of data collection, project type uptake, program awareness and the measurement of outcomes of the youth participation to the program. While both evaluations address the ongoing need, effectiveness and

efficiency of the Program, the current evaluation focused firstly on examining recent modifications made to the application process, namely the removal of the leveraging requirement and introduction of the Flat Rate Costing Model in fiscal year 2020 to 2021. A secondary set of objectives of this evaluation was to examine the extent to which the Youth Innovation component is meeting its objectives and to assess challenges related to the implementation of the new Workplace Stream. The period covered under this evaluation was from fiscal year 2016 to 2017 to fiscal year 2020 to 2021 inclusively.

Recommendation #1: Continue to improve and strengthen the data collection strategy to support better decision making

Management acknowledges the need to continue to improve the Program data collection strategy to inform better decision making, while striking a balance between organizational requirements and grant recipients' reporting capacity. In collaboration with the Program Operations Branch, the Income Security and Social Development Branch will improve its data collection strategy in fiscal years 2021 to 2025 by reviewing the data capturing methods and tools to identify potential efficiencies, while ensuring the integrity of the data collected is maintained.

Particularly, this will be done by revisiting the Application for Funding form and the project completion report templates (final reports) as well as internal processes to:

- limit the potential for data inconsistencies
- ensure the continued relevance and integrity of the data collected, while considering the administrative burden for applicants

As this evaluation period ended in fiscal year 2020 to 2021, implementation of some activities/measures have already commenced in fiscal year 2021 to 2022 and are ongoing.

Table 1: Recommendation #1 management action plan items

| Management action plan | Completion date |
|---|-----------------|
| <p>1.1 As per the standard process for each call for proposal, the project completion report template was reviewed for the Early Learning and Child Care, the Youth Innovation component and the Mid-sized projects component call for proposals.</p> <p>This review ensured that the questions remain consistent across years, responsive to changing priorities, and reflective of the specifics of each call for proposal. It also ensured that the analysis is able to inform for future policy design and future parameters of call for proposals, as well as respond to the reporting requirements, as detailed by TBS during program implementation.</p> | Ongoing |
| <p>1.2 For the collection of project completion reports, the Program moved to the Interactive Fact-Finding System online system to</p> | Ongoing |

| | |
|---|--|
| capture project completion data from successful funding recipients. This avoids manual data entry, which was required in the paper-based approach, and centralized information for ease of access and use. | |
| 1.3 A question was added in the Grant Application for Funding Form for applicants to choose and identify the stream/priority for which they are applying. This has addressed and clarified the number of application received under each priority and addresses the gap/inconsistencies in identifying the previous data on Workplace Accessibility Stream versus Community Accessibility Stream. This will improve future data analysis and program evaluation. | Completed May 2022 |
| 1.4 In order to more accurately identify demographic information on the Youth Accessibility Leaders (YALs) for the 2022 call for Expression of Interest under the Youth innovation component, an eligibility screening question about youth applicants' province of residence was integrated and made mandatory to replace the optional postal code question from the 2020 Youth call for proposal and prior. The overall objective is to collect social demographic information on youth applicants to obtain a more accurate depiction of where Youth Accessibility Leader applicants are located within Canada. | Ongoing |
| 1.5 The Income Security and Social Development Branch will review the logic model and narrative in the Performance Information Profile in order to integrate the Youth component and develop supporting indicators. | Fall 2023 (Review will be done in Fall 2023 so that it can be ready for fiscal year 2024 to 2025) |

Recommendation #2: Continue to focus on increasing the uptake of the Program's Workplace Accessibility Stream

Management acknowledges the need to continue to improve the uptake of the Program's Workplace Stream. The Income Security and Social Development Branch, in collaboration with the Program Operations Branch, will continue to focus on the Workplace Accessibility Stream of the Program in fiscal years 2021 to 2025 by exploring new strategies to increase its uptake and visibility.

As this evaluation period ended in 2020 to 2021, implementation of new activities/measures have already commenced in 2021 to 2022 and are ongoing.

Table 2: Recommendation #2 management action plan items

| Management action plan | Completion date |
|--|-------------------------------|
| <p>2.1 Subsequent to the 2017 Evaluation recommendations, from fiscal year 2016 to 2017 and fiscal year 2017 to 2018, the Income Security and Social Development Branch has implemented several measures to improve the number of proposals received from small private sector enterprises under the Workplace Stream, namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • under each component, call for proposals are no longer held separately for each stream; applications are accepted under both the Community Stream and Workplace Stream under the same call for proposal process • the mandatory leveraging requirement was reduced from 50% to 35%, and removed for territories in fiscal year 2017 to 2018 • the size limit of eligible small businesses under the Workplace Stream has been revised to include businesses that have up to 99 full-time equivalent employees, as opposed to the previous definition which limited applications from businesses with a maximum of 50 full-time equivalent employees • a renewed outreach strategy that includes information sessions, email blasts and targeted promotional activities to create more awareness about the Workplace Stream | <p>Completed May 2018</p> |
| <p>2.2 For the 2020 Small projects call for proposal, the mandatory leveraging requirement was removed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This removal served as an equalizer by reducing barriers for organizations to access Program funding.</p> | <p>Completed May 2020</p> |
| <p>2.3 For the 2020 Small projects call for proposal, workplace projects were set as a priority and a percentage of the funding envelope was dedicated to the Workplace Stream. As the Program saw a large increase in the uptake of workplace projects in this call for proposal, the Income Security and Social Development Branch will continue to experiment with various strategies, such as those outlined above, as well as the first come, first served strategy, to determine how to better target workplaces.</p> | <p>Ongoing</p> |
| <p>2.4 In 2021 to 2022, building on the last Evaluation, the Program has experimented with the leveraging requirements for different organization types and their capacity to test how it affects the funding application process for them. The Program will continue to experiment with a similar approach regarding the leveraging requirement in order to reduce barriers so that workplaces can access funding opportunities to adapt their facilities to maintain or create new employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.</p> | <p>Ongoing</p> |

| | |
|---|----------------|
| 2.5 The Income Security and Social Development Branch will interact with other ESDC programs, such as the Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities and explore leveraging the employment strategy under the DIAP, in finding ways to promote and increase awareness of the Program Workplace Stream (example: leveraging distribution lists/network opportunities of other programs). The program will also explore working with the Disability Inclusion Business Council. | May 2023 (TBC) |
| 2.6 The Income Security and Social Development Branch will explore potential links between the Workplace Accessibility Stream and the Youth Innovation Component. | May 2023 (TBC) |
| 2.7 The Income Security and Social Development Branch will explore a continuous intake model for the Workplace Accessibility Stream. | May 2024 (TBC) |

Recommendation #3: Take steps to raise awareness of information and communication technology (ICT) accessibility barriers, in consultation with the disability community, and educate organizations on the ICT projects that the Program can support

The Income Security and Social Development Branch will continue to explore ways and take necessary steps to raise awareness of accessibility barriers and solutions that are within scope of the Program funding. The evaluation found that ICT was commonly misunderstood among survey respondents and key informants, and historically, has had low uptake within the program.

Accordingly, the program will use the same methods highlighted in the evaluation as being successful in raising applicants’ understanding and awareness of accessibility standards and requirements, such as the introduction of flat rate costing as well as the Accessibility Flow chart where applicable.

The program has, and will continue to explore the following ways to engage with the disability community, increase awareness and educate organizations.

Table 3: Recommendation #3 management action plan items

| Management action plan | Completion date |
|--|-----------------|
| 3.1 In 2022, the program engaged the shelter and disability community to assess the current state of shelters that support victims of gender-based violence to identify accessibility related gaps that could be addressed by the Program for both the built environment and ICT. The program met with organizations to educate them on the Program and to discuss accessibility barriers and the overall needs of persons with disabilities within these facilities. The program also conducted a survey with shelter | Completed |

| Management action plan | Completion date |
|--|----------------------|
| <p>providers and funded an external pan-Canadian assessment of the accessibility of shelters more broadly.</p> <p>One particular element used in the external report was to capture cross-disability lived experience, in which persons with disabilities were engaged to do site assessments of shelters. While a low proportion of survey respondents noted barriers to ICT, all sites visited were found to have ICT barriers, including lack of assistive technologies and navigations systems. The shelter report findings support the evaluation recommendation to increase ICT awareness, as this may be a contributing factor to the low percentage of survey respondents indicating ICT as a barrier.</p> | |
| <p>3.2 Work is underway with an external contractor to scope the integration of ICT components that are conducive to flat rate costing. The intended benefit of which is to encourage their uptake and increase awareness among applicants. The first ICT items that will be analyzed for their suitability for flat rate costing will be safety and security alerting devices, such as visual strobes, low frequency audio alarms and vibrating smoke detection.</p> | <p>December 2022</p> |
| <p>3.3 The program will continue to research and educate applicants on ICT solutions that are eligible for funding through the Program. This will be done by guiding and supporting applicants in identifying ICT projects that can help address their accessibility needs that can be supported by the Program. Additionally, concrete examples of ICT projects will be provided in the call for proposal tools as well as further integrating ICT into flat rate costing, where applicable. The program intends to have this information available on the Program webpage ahead of the launch of the next call for proposals, preliminarily slated for May 2023 (TBC).</p> | <p>Ongoing</p> |

Recommendation #4: Re-assess specific elements of the Youth component to ensure youth leaders’ engagement

Management acknowledges that the Youth component is aligned with the overall objective of the Program by improving accessibility, supporting a culture change and engaging and involving youth in bridging some gaps of the other Program components.

As the number of youth that express interest exceeds the number of projects realized, the Program will continue to equip Youth Accessibility Leaders with information/resources to help them realize their accessibility projects.

As this evaluation period ended in fiscal year 2020 to 2021, implementation of new strategies to engage youth have already commenced in fiscal year 2021 to 2022 and are ongoing.

Table 4: Recommendation #4 management action plan items

| Management action plan | Completion date |
|---|-----------------|
| 4.1 The Income Security and Social Development Branch, in collaboration with the Public Affairs and Stakeholder Relations Branch, is leveraging Youth Accessibility Leaders in other areas to further develop their leadership. This may include call outs to take part in roundtables, to be part of delegations to international events or to participate to national activities/events. | Ongoing |
| 4.2 The Income Security and Social Development Branch, in collaboration with the Public Affairs and Stakeholder Relations Branch, will review the Program Youth Accessibility Leader recognition strategy by engaging with other ESDC programs to explore ways to recognize the contribution of Youth Accessibility Leaders. This may include disseminating a newsletter, organizing a formal recognition event, providing an incentive [such as financial]). | Ongoing |

1. Introduction

This report presents the findings of the 2022 evaluation of Employment and Social Development Canada's (ESDC's) Enabling Accessibility Fund program. The Enabling Accessibility Fund, referred to as "the Program", aims to create opportunities for persons with disabilities to take part in community activities, programs and services, and/or to access employment. It provides funding for projects that make Canadian communities and workplaces more accessible for persons with disabilities.

The objectives of this evaluation are to examine ongoing needs, effectiveness (such as achievement of program outcomes), and efficiency of the Program. It was completed in compliance with the *Financial Administration Act* and the Policy on Results.

2. Background

2.1 Program objectives

The Program was introduced in 2007. Through grants and contributions, the Program contributes to the capital costs of construction and renovation projects that aim to increase accessibility and remove barriers for persons with disabilities in communities and workplaces across Canada. It provides funding for the built environment and information and communication technologies (ICT) accessibility projects for persons with disabilities. [Appendix A](#) provides the Program's logic model with performance indicators.

The Program has the following expected outcomes:

- organizations undertake accessibility improvements to their facilities as a result of Program funding (immediate)
- accessible communities and accessible workplaces which allow persons with disabilities to have access to programs, services and employment opportunities (intermediate), and
- persons with disabilities have opportunities to participate in and contribute to community life and/or the labour market (ultimate)

2.2 Program resources

The Program has an ongoing budget of \$15 million (\$13.65 million in grants and contributions) per year. Budget 2016 provided an additional \$4 million over 2 years, starting in fiscal year 2016 to 2017 as part

of the Social Infrastructure Fund.² Budget 2017 provided an additional \$77 million (\$70 million in grants and contributions) over 10 years, starting in 2018 to 2019, as part of the Investing in Canada Plan/Social Infrastructure Fund to expand the activities of the Program. Budget 2021 committed \$100 million (\$90.3 million in grants and contributions) over 2 years for the Program to support projects with not-for-profit organizations, women's shelters, child care centres, small municipalities, Indigenous organizations, territorial governments, small businesses, and businesses of all sizes. Funding from Budget 2021 was used to fund a large inventory of projects from the 2020 Small projects call for proposals. A total of \$95.3 million in grants and contributions was spent between fiscal year 2016 to 2017 and fiscal year 2020 to 2021.

2.3 Program components

2.3.1 Small projects

The Small projects component provides grants for capital costs related to the retrofitting, renovation or construction of facilities, and for the provision of information and communication technologies (ICT). Small projects are eligible for a maximum grant of \$100,000, with an expected project duration of up to 52 weeks.³ In fiscal year 2020 to 2021, this component went through a series of changes as part of the modernization project ([see Section 6](#)).

The Small projects component has 2 funding streams:

1. Community Accessibility Stream
2. Workplace Accessibility Stream

The Community Accessibility Stream provides funding for projects that improve accessibility and safety in communities across Canada where programs and/or services are offered to persons with disabilities. Projects must be directly related to removing barriers and increasing accessibility for persons with disabilities in Canadian communities. For example, one organization received funding for an accessible dock lift to enable at least 50 of their members to be able to safely transfer into kayaks and sailboats to enjoy independent outdoor physical activity, promoting and encouraging inclusive paddle sport and outdoor activities for persons with disabilities.

The Workplace Accessibility Stream provides funding to projects that improve accessibility and safety in workplaces across Canada in which job opportunities could be created or maintained for persons with disabilities. For example, one organization offers an array of employment programs and

² The Program's enhancement is part of the broader \$81.2 billion "Investing in Canada Plan" with funding in 5 key infrastructure priorities: Public Transit, Green, Social, Rural and Northern Communities, and Trade and Transportation. The Program's enhancement contributes to the shared outcome of Canadian communities being more inclusive and accessible.

³ In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, exceptions were made as an effort to facilitate project management and completion for organizations that received funding. However, project duration requirements have now gone back to the standard 52 weeks duration.

services, such as labour market integration, for persons with disabilities. The installation of automatic door openers, an elevator, a ramp and 5 accessible washrooms improved the safety and accessibility of their space. It is expected that these improvements will help maintain employment for 90 persons with disabilities. In addition, the accessibility improvements will increase the ability of the organization to create employment opportunities and to hire 45 new employees with disabilities.

2.3.2 Mid-sized projects

This component allows organizations to undertake larger retrofit, renovation or construction projects geared towards addressing the social and labour market integration needs of persons with disabilities. Mid-sized projects are eligible for a multi-year contribution amount of up to \$3 million, which need to be completed within 5 years. The 2018 call for proposals capped project funding at \$1 million to increase the number of projects funded with the available budget.

2.3.3 Youth innovation component

Added in 2017, the Youth innovation component, referred to as the “Youth component,” has not previously been evaluated. It aims to increase youth awareness of accessibility needs, barriers and opportunities in their communities (the Community Accessibility Stream) and workplaces (the Workplace Accessibility Stream). It also aims to empower youth to work with local organizations to increase accessibility and safety in public spaces and workplaces through smaller scale retrofitting, renovation and construction projects. The organizations are eligible for a maximum grant of \$10,000 for these youth-driven projects, with an expected project duration of up to 52 weeks. For the 2020 call for proposals, this component underwent a series of modifications to improve Youth Accessibility Leaders’ (referred to as “Youth leaders”) experience by equipping them to play a more active role in the projects and by providing them with more robust support. For example, the Youth Journey Journal was introduced and social media presence was increased to help improve their engagement throughout the process.

3. Evaluation context

3.1 Previous program evaluation

The objectives of the 2017 summative evaluation were to: examine the lessons learned related to mandatory leveraging; the ongoing need for the program; the effectiveness of the Community Accessibility Stream; and, the challenges related to implementing the new Workplace Accessibility Stream.

The evaluation found the demand for program funds exceeded the funding available for both the Community and Workplace Streams. However, the mandatory leveraging requirement improved the ability of the Program to manage the high demand for funding and to expand on the number of funded projects with the available funds.

The findings also suggested the Community Accessibility Stream projects created facilities that are more accessible and the Workplace Accessibility Stream projects improved the employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

3.2 The 2022 program evaluation

This evaluation builds on the findings of the 2017 evaluation. While both evaluations address the ongoing need, effectiveness and efficiency of the Program, this evaluation examines recent modifications made to the application process⁴ and the extent to which the Youth component is meeting its objectives. This evaluation focuses on projects that received funding between fiscal year 2016 to 2017 and fiscal year 2020 to 2021 inclusively.

The data collection consisted of a mixed-methods approach that included the perspectives and views of various groups involved with the Program. This approach ensured adequate data triangulation to support robust evidence-based findings, conclusions and recommendations to the Program. The evaluation matrix and methodology, including limitations, are further outlined in [Appendix C](#).

The evaluation was comprised of 8 lines of evidence:

- document review
- literature review
- administrative data review
- survey of Program applicants and non-applicant organizations
- survey of eligible Youth leader applicants
- internal key informant interviews with government officials
- external key informant interviews with funded recipient organization representatives and Youth leaders
- 3 community case studies
- 3 expert panels on accessibility in Canadian communities and workplaces

Key limitations included challenges engaging directly with persons with disabilities in communities and workplaces who benefitted from the projects (such as the end users). Moreover, the scope of this evaluation is limited to the support provided by the Program, and does not examine the legislative and regulatory frameworks related to accessibility.

⁴ Removal of the leveraging requirement and introduction of the Flat Rate Costing Model in 2020.

4. Ongoing need and demand for the Program

Persons with disabilities are often excluded from full and equitable participation in community activities, programs and services, and/or to access employment. Building a more accessible Canada remains a top priority for the Government of Canada.⁵ Advancing accessibility in Canada is about creating communities, workplaces and services that enable everyone to participate fully in society without accessibility barriers. Persons with disabilities represent a diverse and significant portion of the Canadian population. Approximately 1-in-5 (22%) Canadians aged 15 years and older have 1 or more disabilities, and the prevalence of disability increases with age.⁶ Yet, persons with disabilities face many challenges and barriers that contribute to their social and economic exclusion. To address these challenges and barriers, in October 2022 the Government of Canada launched the [Disability Inclusion Action Plan](#) (the Action Plan).

The Action Plan is a comprehensive, whole-of-government approach to disability inclusion. It embeds disability considerations across federal programs, builds on existing programs and measures that have sought to improve the inclusion of persons with disabilities, and establishes new and meaningful actions.

The Action Plan is guided by the principles laid out in the [Accessible Canada Act](#) of 2019 and the [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) including:

- “Nothing Without Us”, which holds that persons with disabilities be involved in the development and implementation of all government systems, policies, programs and services
- a human rights-based approach to guide the development of systems, programs and processes, which includes principles of equality, anti-discrimination, participation and inclusion, and
- the principle that government systems, policies, programs and services take into account the different ways persons interact with their environments and the multiple, and intersecting forms of marginalization and discrimination faced by individuals

Among the Action Plan’s objectives is the commitment to achieve the *Accessible Canada Act* goal of a barrier-free Canada by 2040. This includes, for example, making targeted investments to create accessible and inclusive communities by addressing physical, communication and attitudinal barriers that prevent persons with disabilities from fully participating in their communities and the economy, including barriers in community buildings, workplaces, and public spaces. Accordingly, the Enabling Accessibility Fund is an important initiative identified under the Action Plan to achieve the objective of a

⁵ Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). (2022). *Employment And Social Development Canada, 2022 to 2023 Departmental Plan*. Retrieved from https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/esdc-edsc/documents/corporate/reports/departmental-plan/2022-23_ESDC_Departmental_Plan_EN.pdf

⁶ Statistics Canada. (2018). A demographic, employment and income profile of Canadians with disabilities aged 15 years and over, 2017. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-654-x/89-654-x2018002-eng.htm>

barrier-free Canada and promote the social and economic inclusion of persons with disabilities. While the objectives of the Program align with the *Accessible Canada Act* and the Action Plan, the Program serves organizations that are not under federal jurisdiction.

4.1 Ongoing need for the Program

4.1.1 Assessing the extent of accessibility

This evaluation focuses on assessing the impacts of the Program on accessibility for persons with disabilities, instead of macro-level trends (such as whether the accessibility of Canada’s built environment has been increasing). Given the financial allocation, the Program has a relatively small impact on the accessibility of Canada’s built environment as a whole.

Although not part of the stated objectives of the Program, the projects supported improvements to the “continuum of built environment accessibility” and “continuum of ICT accessibility”, which are further defined below. These concepts reflect the comprehensive nature of accessibility to ensure a barrier-free experience for persons with disabilities when taking part in community activities, programs, services or accessing their workplaces. In the context of the evaluation, these concepts were useful in assessing the extent to which the projects are supporting communities and workplaces to improve accessibility and the extent to which further accessibility improvements are needed.⁷

The **continuum of built environment accessibility** allows persons with disabilities to move between physical environments without barriers.

Examples include the extent to which persons with disabilities can:

- access the building from the outside to the inside and vice versa
- circulate throughout the building and use its various facilities autonomously, including all necessary floors, levels and sections of the building
- use the directional signage to get situated

The **continuum of ICT accessibility** allows persons with disabilities to move and function between physical and virtual environments without barriers.

Examples include:

- a wayfinding system installed throughout the facilities to enhance barrier-free circulation

⁷ The concept of the continuum was adapted from the concept of “seamless connectivity” from the following report: United Nations. (2016). *Accessibility for all: good practices of accessibility in Asia and the Pacific to promote disability-inclusive development*. Retrieved from https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Accessibility_for_%20All_2016_final_0.pdf

The continuum can also be visualized using the Program’s Accessibility project flowchart and was useful for evaluation purposes. However, it is understood that this concept is not widely used in the disability community and literature.

- screen readers installed on computers to enable equal participation in programs and services
- hearing loop installed in meeting rooms/commons areas to allow all persons to participate in meetings and gatherings
- noise cancelling/reducing headphones

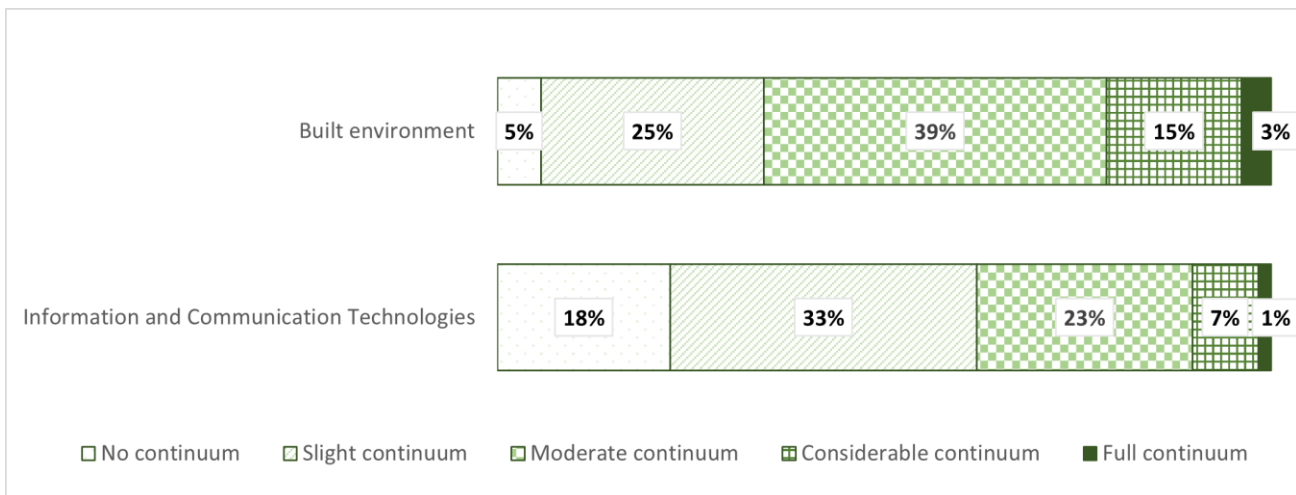
4.1.2 Need for continued support to further enhance accessibility

Key finding: While the Program has enabled accessibility improvements in communities and workplaces, there is an ongoing need for support to improve the accessibility of the built environment and ICTs.

The evaluation found that progress is being made by communities, organizations and employers in improving accessibility for persons with disabilities. However, there are still accessibility barriers that need to be addressed to ensure a more barrier-free experience for persons with disabilities.

The accessible built environment and ICT continuums were used to gauge the extent to which there are further accessibility needs in communities and workplaces. More than two-thirds (69%) of survey respondents (organization representatives and Youth leader applicants) indicated that the existence of built environment continuums of accessibility in their communities was non-existent, slight or moderate. In turn, survey respondents tended to give a lower rating for the state of the ICT continuum accessibility in their communities: Respondents were more likely to rate the state of ICT continuum as non-existent in their communities (18%) compared to the state of the built environment continuum (5%). They were also less likely to rate the state of ICT continuum as considerable or full (8%) compared to the state of the built environment (18%).⁸

Figure 1: Rating of accessibility in communities



⁸ These findings are limited to the survey respondents' personal experiences in their respective communities.

Source: Program organization survey and Youth leader Survey, N=1891.

Note: 13% reported “not sure” on the built environment continuum, and 18% reported “not sure” on the ICT continuum (not shown in graph).

Additionally, according to the expert panelists, to get to a state of more comprehensive and inclusive accessibility, there is a need to think of accessibility not as an individual issue, but more at the community level, so that accessibility barriers can be addressed more comprehensively. There is a tendency to address individual accommodation needs as opposed to universal design, and in this way, the accommodation becomes part of a checklist or an add-on. Universal design requires focusing on the use of a space for everyone, rather than classifying the needs that different groups of persons with disabilities require.

4.1.3 Accessibility barriers for persons with disabilities

Key finding: Accessibility related barriers continue to negatively affect the ability of persons with disabilities to fully participate in and contribute to their communities and workplaces. These barriers are largely related to the built environment. However, there is also a lack of awareness of ICT accessibility barriers amongst survey respondents and key informants.

Findings from the surveys, key informant interviews and expert panels, identified the built environment and ICT as the main accessibility barriers for persons with disabilities to fully participate in and contribute to their community and workplace. The lack of accessible built environment and ICTs increase the burden (time and effort) of participating in communities and workplaces, sometimes preventing participation entirely. Persons with disabilities also face stigma and attitudinal barriers that impede their full inclusion and participation in communities and workplaces, as identified in the key informant interviews, expert panels and the literature.⁹ The attitudinal barriers faced by persons with disabilities are further described in the subsequent section.

Finally, the design and delivery of programs and services for persons with disabilities were also identified as significant accessibility barriers in the communities amongst the Youth leader survey respondents. The Enabling Accessibility Fund supports projects that improve the access to these programs and services for persons with disabilities. Nevertheless, persons with disabilities should be consulted in the development of programs and services directed to them, to ensure that these are accessible to all.¹⁰

⁹ Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). (2022). *Canada's Disability Inclusion Action Plan, 2022*. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/disability-inclusion-action-plan/action-plan-2022.html#h3.7>

¹⁰ Government of Canada. (2019). *Accessible Canada Act*. Retrieved from <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/A-0.6/page-1.html#h-1153414>

Survey respondents identified the main accessibility needs related to the built environments to be automatic doors (19%), washrooms (17%) and ramps (12%) within their organizations (see Figure 2). In one of the community case studies, a recurring challenge identified was the aging built environment, sidewalk accessibility and the lack of a reliable transportation system, which limits the barrier-free experience for persons with disabilities in their communities.

Figure 2: Ongoing accessibility barriers for persons with disabilities (Word cloud)*



Source: Organization survey, text mining analytics, N=1200.

*Note: The larger the word, the more often it was cited by survey respondents

In addition, many of the organization representatives interviewed were just beginning to explore ways to improve upon the technology related needs. Many representatives stated that they did not know where to start. The identification of specific accessibility needs for ICT tools were vague as many individuals simply mentioned that they needed to improve ICT or to have more technologies to support persons with hearing, visual or sensory disabilities. In addition, some communities, such as those in northern or remote areas, have other, more general technological priorities or barriers (such as limited access to Internet), which fall outside the scope of the Program, that need to be addressed before addressing accessibility related needs.

4.1.4 Workplace barriers for persons with disabilities

Key finding: A variety of barriers prevents persons with disabilities from having the same employment opportunities as the non-disabled population, particularly the cost for employers to improve accessibility.

Employment rates are lower for persons with disabilities (59%) than for those without disabilities (89%), among those aged 25 to 64 years.¹¹ One means for workplaces to address accessibility barriers for persons with disabilities is by providing accommodations, such as adaptive workstations. This can help make a difference in the labour participation of many of these individuals, depending on their disability type, occupation and job tasks. Workplace accommodations required by persons with disabilities include workplace upgrades (such as special chairs or back supports and/or modified or ergonomic workstations) (22%), accessible built environment (6%), and specialized software.¹² Cost of improving accessibility was identified as the most prevalent barrier to hiring and accommodating persons with disabilities.¹³

Interviewed organization representatives and Youth leaders also mentioned that the lack of an accessible built environment in the workplace is a major barrier for the employment of persons with disabilities. Furthermore, according to the interviewed Youth Leaders, increasing accessibility in the workplace was identified as a priority for persons with disabilities. According to the Youth leaders, the ongoing barriers in the workplace for persons with disabilities also include:

- lack of time, awareness and resources for businesses/employers to know how to adequately integrate persons with disabilities in the workplace
- lack of education and tools for persons with disabilities
- lack of accessible transportation
- perception of employment of persons with disabilities, and employers' confidence when hiring persons with disabilities to meet their accessibility needs, and
- job description requiring physical mobility

According to the expert panelists, the attitudinal barriers affect every step of obtaining employment. This can include the accessibility of the job application and interview process; the accessibility of the workplace, preconceptions and trust issues (example: disclosure and timing of disclosure); perceptions that accommodations are costly; and accommodation needs being mistaken for a lack of productivity. There are some misconceptions related to the value of hiring persons with disabilities, which contributes to continued employment gaps. A scoping review also noted that stereotype perceptions of

¹¹ Statistics Canada. (2018). *A demographic, employment and income profile of Canadians with disabilities aged 15 years and over, 2017*. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-654-x/89-654-x2018002-eng.htm>

¹² Statistics Canada. (2019). *Workplace accommodations for employees with disabilities in Canada, 2017*. Retrieved from <http://www150statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-654-x/89-654-x2019001-eng.htm>

¹³ Sepulveda, T. (2021). *Barriers to Hiring and Accommodating People with Disabilities in Small and Medium Sized Businesses: A Scoping Review*. *Journal of Applied Rehabilitation Counseling*.

persons with disabilities might influence employers' perceptions of the costs of employing such persons.¹⁴

However, as evidenced in the literature, there are many benefits of hiring persons with disabilities.¹⁵ This includes:

- improvements in profitability (example: profits and cost-effectiveness, turnover and retention, reliability and punctuality, employee loyalty, company image)
- a competitive advantage (example: diverse customers, customer loyalty and satisfaction, innovation, productivity, work ethic, safety)
- an inclusive work culture and ability awareness

There is also some evidence that suggests building physically accessible environments would improve labour force participation and consumer spending for the 1 in 10 Canadian with physical disabilities.¹⁶ While the evidence on the benefits for employers to hire persons with disabilities is clear, costs associated with improving accessibility are the most prevalent barrier to hiring and accommodating persons with disabilities.

4.2 Ongoing demand for the Program

Key finding: The volume of applications and spending of all funds available over the 5-year period demonstrates a significant demand for assistance with capital cost projects associated with improving accessibility. However, the uptake of the Workplace Accessibility Stream is unclear due to issues with the reliability of data on this stream.

As demonstrated in Table 5, the Program expended all of the money that was allocated, and received additional funds in 2020 to 2021¹⁷ to help more organizations undertake accessibility improvements to their facilities.

¹⁴ Sepulveda, T. (2021). *Barriers to Hiring and Accommodating People with Disabilities in Small and Medium Sized Businesses: A Scoping Review*. Journal of Applied Rehabilitation Counseling.

¹⁵ Lindsay, S., Cagliostro, E., Albarico, M., Mortaji, N., and Karon, L. (2018). *A systematic review of the benefits of hiring people with disabilities*. Journal of occupational rehabilitation.

¹⁶ The Conference Board of Canada. (2018). *The Business Case to Build Physically Accessible Environments*. Ottawa: The Conference Board of Canada.

¹⁷ In 2020 to 2021, \$3.8 million was reallocated from within ESDC's free-balance to support additional projects.

Table 5: Program allocated expenditures versus actual expenditures, in \$million

| Funding/fiscal year | 2016 to 2017 | 2017 to 2018 | 2018 to 2019 | 2019 to 2020* | 2020 to 2021 | Total |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|-------|
| Allocated | 15.65 | 15.65 | 20.65 | 20.65 | 20.65 | 93.25 |
| Actual | 15.65 | 15.65 | 20.65 | 19.61 | 23.74 | 95.30 |
| Difference | 0 | 0 | 0 | +1.04** | - 3.09 | -2.05 |

Source: Actual spending amounts from the Chief Financial Officer Branch, ESDC

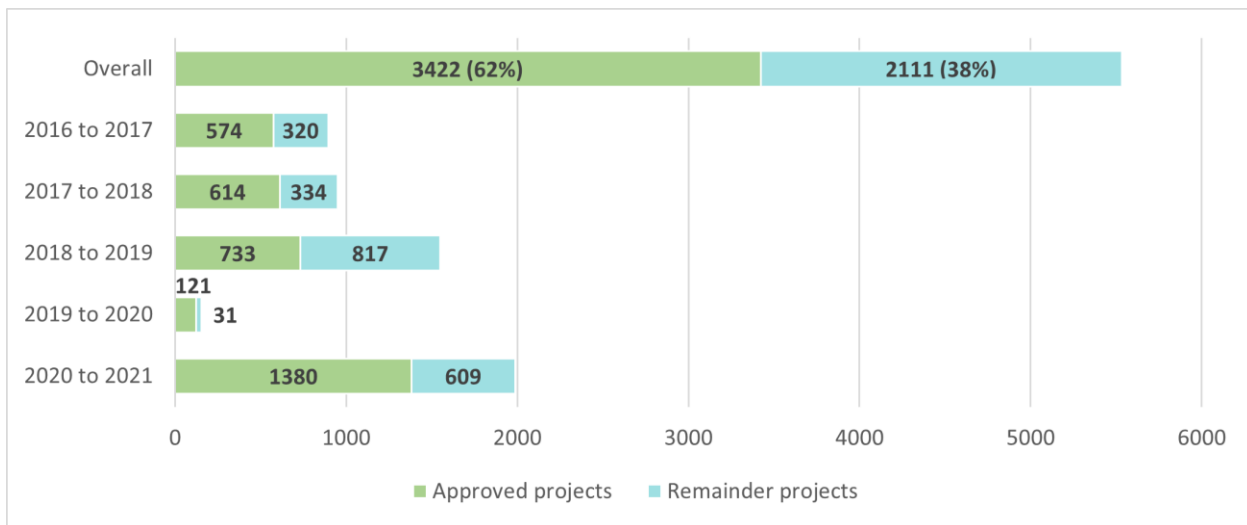
* Due to the inventory of funded eligible projects in 2018, there was no separate call for proposals in 2019 under the Small projects component; rather, projects from the 2018 Small projects call for proposals were funded in 2019 to 2020.

**Of the \$1.04 Million, \$1 million was reallocated to Social Development Partnerships Program – Disability, and \$36,450 was transferred back to the Reserve Budget for other programs at year-end.

For each year reviewed in this evaluation, the number of applications consistently exceeded the number of approved projects each year (such as funded through the Program).

The Program received a total of 5533 applications across all 3 project components between fiscal year 2016 to 2017 *and* fiscal year 2020 to 2021. Overall, 62% of those applications were approved between fiscal year 2016 to 2017 and fiscal 2020 to 2021 (see Figure 3), for a total of 3422 funded projects.

Figure 3: Program applications received and approved by fiscal year of application



Source: ESDC Common System for Grants and Contribution Database.

Under the Youth component, a total of 479 applications were received between fiscal year 2017 to 2018 and fiscal year 2020 to 2021, and 80% of those applications (n=385) were approved (see Table 6). The Program aims to fund all eligible applications received.

Table 6: Youth component applications received and approved by fiscal year of application*

| Youth projects | 2016 to 2017 | 2017 to 2018 | 2018 to 2019 | 2019 to 2020 | 2020 to 2021 | Total |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------|
| Applications | NA | 10 | 76 | 152 | 241 | 479 |
| Approved projects | NA | 9 | 54 | 121 | 201* | 385 |
| Proportion approved | N/A | 90% | 71% | 80% | 83% | 80% |

Source: ESDC Common System for Grants and Contribution Database.

*Of the 201 approved Youth projects in 2020 to 2021, 43 projects (or 21%) were under the Workplace Accessibility stream.

Under the Small projects component, a total of 4685 applications were received between fiscal year 2016 to 2017 *and* fiscal year 2020 to 2021, and 65% of those applications (n=3023) were approved (see Table 7). Of note, the overall approval rate is higher because the Program funded the 2018 inventory in 2019 to 2020. There was no separate Small project call for proposals in 2019.

Table 7: Small project application received and approved by fiscal year of application

| Small projects | 2016 to 2017 | 2017 to 2018 | 2018 to 2019 | 2019 to 2020* | 2020 to 2021 | Total |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|-------|
| Applications | 894 | 938 | 1105 | N/A | 1748 | 4685 |
| Approved projects | 574** | 605 | 665 | N/A | 1179 | 3023 |
| Proportion approved | 64% | 65% | 60% | N/A | 67% | 65% |

Source: ESDC Common System for Grants and Contribution Database.

* Due to the inventory of unfunded eligible projects in 2018 to 2019, there was no call for proposals in 2019; rather, applications from 2018 to 2019 were funded in 2019 to 2020. In 2020 to 2021, the number of approved projects includes fiscal year 2021 to 2022).

** Of the 574 approved small projects in fiscal year 2016 to 2017, 59 (or 10%) were under the Workplace Accessibility stream.

Unfortunately, the administrative data does not allow for singling out the demand and uptake of the Workplace Accessibility Stream for the Youth component and Small projects component for most years under this evaluation ([see Section 8](#)). This information is only available for the 2016 Small projects call for proposals and 2020 Youth component call for proposals. Of the 574 approved Small projects in fiscal year 2016 to 2017, 59 (or 10%) were under the Workplace Accessibility stream; and, of the 201 approved Youth projects in fiscal year 2020 to 2021, 43 projects (or 21%) were under the Workplace

Accessibility stream. Nevertheless, as per the last evaluation of the Program¹⁸, the demand for program funds as reflected in the number of applications received exceeded the supply of available funds for both the Community and Workplace streams. However, the uptake of the Workplace Accessibility Stream by organizations in the private sector was low.

For the Mid-sized projects, there was only one call for proposal in 2018 during this evaluation period, and a 2-step application process was implemented. First, organizations were invited to submit a concept for their accessibility project, and 369 concepts were received. Following the departmental assessment, in which 226 project applications were assessed by the Internal Evaluation Task Team. From those projects, 34 of the highest-scoring concepts plus the top 3 Indigenous project concepts (10%) were invited for the second step of the intake to submit a full application. The concepts were assessed on criteria such as the project relevance, feasibility of each project, cost accuracy, and proposed timelines. Overall, 14 organizations (4%) had their concept and application approved.

4.2.1 Managing high demand for the Program

Key finding: Despite the Program's strategies to address the high volume of applications and efforts to "stretch" the available funds, the demand for assistance from the Program continues to exceed the available financial support.

The administrative data shows an increase in the proportion of approved projects (from 36% of approved projects between 2009 and 2015, to 62% between 2016 and 2021). However, this could partially be explained by the fact that there was no call for proposals for Small projects in 2019; rather projects from the 2018 Small projects call for proposals were funded in 2019 to 2020. Whereas, in the previous evaluation period (2009 to 2015), there was a Small projects call for proposals every year. Furthermore, as per departmental operating budget flexibilities, departmental resources were also reallocated to fund additional projects. The demand for funding continues to exceed the available financial support.

Amongst the strategies implemented, the mandatory leveraging requirement was used as a tool for demand management between fiscal year 2016 to 2017 and fiscal year 2018 to 2019. It allowed the Program to expand the number of funded projects with the available funds. In 2020 to 2021, the Program also implemented a modernization project, which reduced the amount of information organizations had to provide when applying for funding through the Small projects component.¹⁹ After the Pilot year, this made it more efficient for the Program area to assess the applications as it reduced

¹⁸ Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). (2018). Evaluation of the Enabling Accessibility Fund. Retrieved from https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/esdcedsc/documents/corporate/reports/evaluations/EAF_Evaluation_-_Final_Report-EN.pdf

¹⁹ The modernization project also included an attestation in the application form that clients are the owner or have landlord permission to undertake the construction project. With this attestation, organizations no longer needed to provide lease agreements or landlord written approvals to the Program.

the frequency of missing information requests. These projects were also funded on a first-come, first-serve basis,' up to the amount of funds available.

In efforts to “stretch” the available funds, there was only one call for proposals for mid-sized projects (in 2018) over the evaluation period. Funding was capped at \$1 million per project rather than up to the ceiling amount allowed under the terms and conditions (\$3 million), to increase the number of projects funded. Additionally, Small projects from the 2018 call for proposals were funded over 2 fiscal years with no separate call for proposals in 2019.

With funding for small projects distributed over 2 fiscal year budgets, this unfortunately meant that there was a delay between submission of the application and ESDC’s notification on the approval. In other cases, a decision to fund project activities was communicated after the deadline date specified in the original email communication with the organizations.

Despite the high-volume of proposals received by the Program, many eligible organizations²⁰ were still not aware of the Program. As reported amongst non-applicant survey respondents, the most common reason (44%) for not applying to the Program was the lack of awareness. Non-applicants from the Atlantic were more likely to cite “lack of knowledge about the Program” as a reason for not applying as compared to other regions (67% Atlantic versus 35 to 47% for other regions). As more organizations learn about the Program, and in turn, apply for funding, strategies that could help manage the high demand will be increasingly important.

5. Program outcomes

5.1 Improved accessibility within organizations

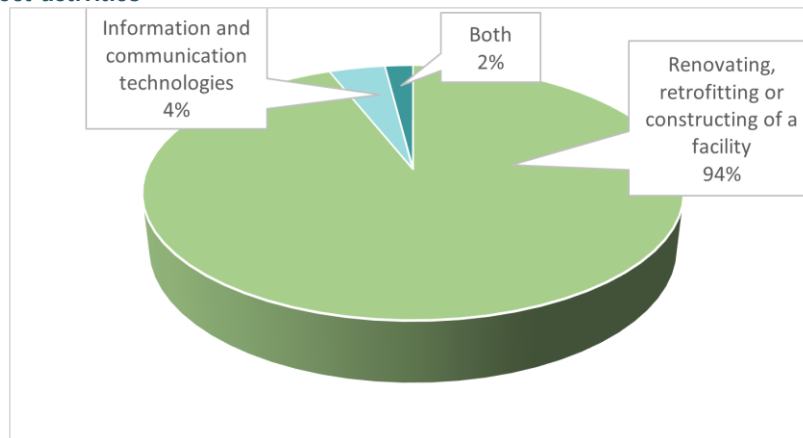
Key finding: During the current evaluation period, program funding enabled organizations to undertake 3422 projects to improve the accessibility of their facilities. This contributed to addressing a range of accessibility barriers and thereby improving the overall experience of persons with disabilities in their organizations.

Due to the enhanced funding ([see Section 2.2](#)), there has been an increase in the number of funded projects since the last evaluation, covering the period from 2009 to 2015, in which the Program had enabled organizations to undertake 2145 projects to improve the accessibility of their facilities.

The majority (94%) of funded projects covered in this evaluation focused on renovating, retrofitting or constructing of a facility, with approximately only 4% focused on ICT (see Figure 4).

²⁰ These organizations were targeted through an email communication about a call for proposal.

Figure 4: Types of project activities



Source: Completed final reports from the 2016 to 2018 Small and Youth component call for proposals as of September 2022, N=1617.

The most common types of activities undertaken by organizations were installation of automated power door openers, accessible washrooms, accessible ramps and elevators/lifts, in that order. The ICT projects were focused on accessible signage and information systems and adapted computer equipment and/or software.

The Program has enabled organizations to improve accessibility and thus, support advancements along the built environment and ICT continuums. However, no source of information comprehensively identified physical and ICT accessibility barriers in Canadian communities and workplaces. Nevertheless, organization survey respondents reported that the Program funding contributed to improved accessibility of the built environment and/or ICT. Moreover, almost two-thirds (62%) of unfunded applicants surveyed reported that they did not proceed with their accessibility project in the absence of funding from the Program, and only one-fifth (20%) indicated that they partially proceeded. This suggests that Program funding plays a role in enabling organizations and communities to undertake projects that improve accessibility for persons with disabilities.

Of note, a significant number of organizations (specifically those that received funding in 2019 and onwards) had not completed their projects at the time of data collection due to COVID-19. For those that had completed their projects, their facilities were not always accessible to persons with disabilities due to closures.

5.1.1 The funded projects have contributed to increased access to and uptake of programs and services in communities. It has also contributed to strengthening community partnerships to sustain the prioritization of accessibility in the communities

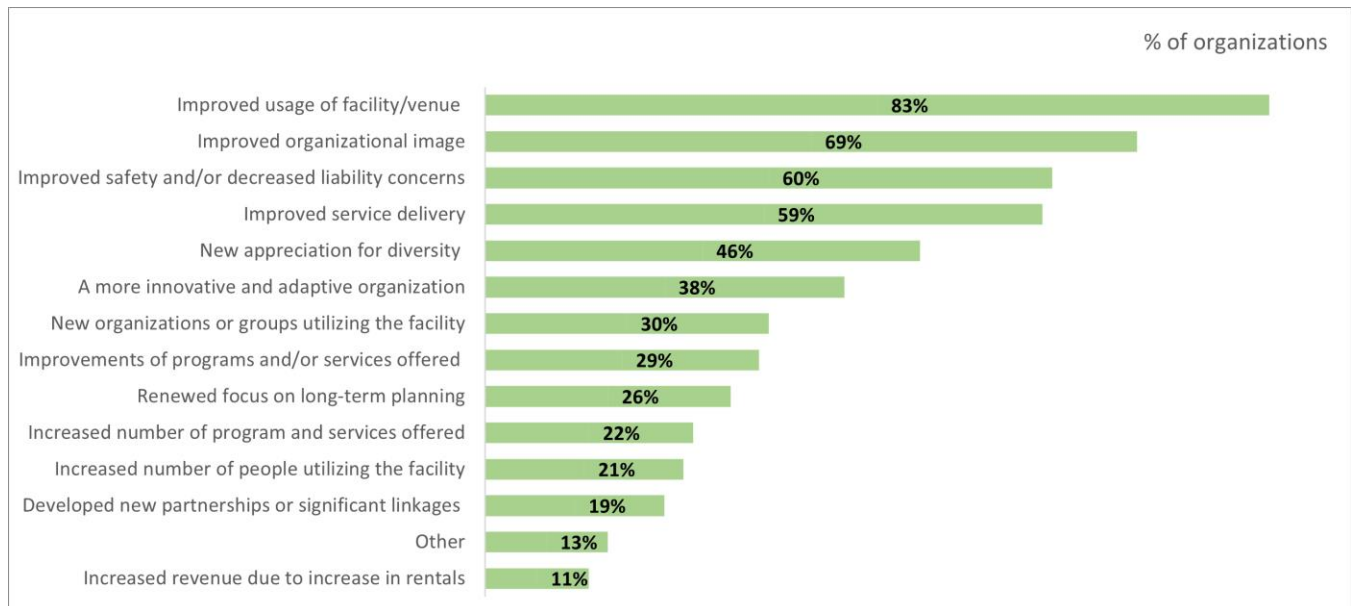
Despite challenges related to COVID-19, completed project final reports (N=1445) show that the accessibility improvements have contributed to multiple benefits for organizations in the community. For organizations that completed their project, the most commonly reported benefits for the organizations were improved:

- usage of their facility/venue (83%)

- organization image (69%)
- safety and/or decreased liability concerns (60%)
- service delivery (59%) (see Figure 5)

The improvements in the ability to provide services were highlighted in one of the community case studies. In particular, without the Program’s accessibility projects through the Youth component in their community in St. John’s, there would have been limited physical accessibility for Francophone families as they were one of the few community centres providing services for their Francophone members .

Figure 5: Benefits for organizations in the community



Source: Completed final reports from the 2016 to 2018 Small and Youth component call for proposals as of September 2022, N=1445.

Program funding had the added benefit of the development of new/enhanced partnerships as reported by 19% of funded organization representatives (see Figure 5). This was also a recurring theme amongst key informants in various communities. For example, with the mandatory leveraging requirement, funded organizations often collaborated with other members of the community. The new partnerships enabled by the funded project helped to develop a network of accessibility advocates seeking additional funding and/or whom have developed additional projects through other programs, such as the New Horizons for Seniors Program. For example, in St. John’s, it was found that youth -led projects have been catalysts to find new partners and multiple organizations have worked together to improve accessibility in large facilities.

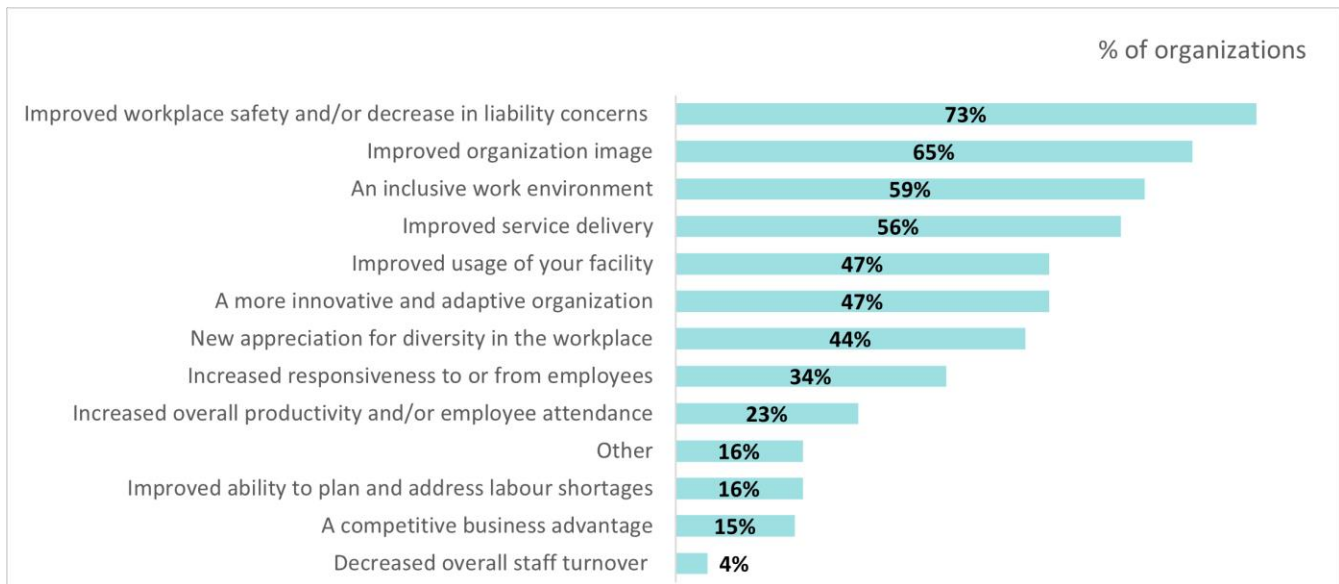
5.1.2 The funded projects have contributed to more accessible workplaces and increased access to employment opportunities for persons with disabilities

In the workplace, the most commonly reported benefits of the enhanced accessibility amongst the organizations were:

- increased/improved workplace safety and/or decrease in liability concerns (73%)
- improved organization image (65%)
- an inclusive work environment (59%)
- improved service delivery (56%) (see Figure 6)

Types of projects funded through the Workplace Accessibility Stream included installation of ramps, accessible doors and accessible washrooms, so that the space is accessible to anyone with physical challenges. These projects enabled barrier-free access to the facilities from the outside and to the washrooms in the interior, thereby providing opportunities for future employees with disabilities to work for the organization. In many cases, the existing built environment was unsafe and needed to be replaced to improve the safety for persons with disabilities and other individuals with mobility challenges accessing their place of employment. Another project consisted of creating a wheelchair-accessible front desk to help create a more welcoming, inclusive and accessible environment where both staff and clients feel they belong.

Figure 6: Benefits for organizations in the workplace



Source: Completed final reports from the 2016 to 2018 Small and Youth component call for proposals as of September 2022; N=172.

5.2 Benefits of more accessible communities and workplaces for persons with disabilities

5.2.1 Communities

Key finding: Funded projects have contributed to improved access to programs and services for persons with disabilities, a more inclusive environment where everyone feels they belong, and increased their independence and autonomy. This, in turn, has enhanced the ability of persons with disabilities to participate in and contribute to their communities.

According to organization survey respondents, the key impacts of their funded projects for persons with disabilities were:

- a more inclusive environment where everyone feels they belong (78%)
- increased access to physical spaces (75%)
- increased opportunities to participate in services/programs (62%)
- increased independence and autonomy (61%)²¹
- a more enjoyable experience in community spaces (57%)

Similar findings were also observed amongst the Youth leader survey respondents ([see Section 7](#)) and supported by the key informants.

Additionally, the key informants consulted also identified increased safety for persons with disabilities, particularly for those with mobility disabilities. They could now access community programs and services using adapted accessible built environment built to code standards (example: safer ramps with less inclination, sensory fire alarms and accessible emergency exit doors).

Of note, organizations that received funding through the Mid-sized projects were more likely to report increased access to physical spaces, increased opportunities to participate in services/program and increased independence and autonomy for persons with disabilities, as compared to organizations that received funding from the Youth innovation or Small projects component.

5.2.2 Workplaces

Key finding: Funded projects have contributed to increasing employment and volunteer opportunities for persons with disabilities in the workplace. However, the extent of uptake of these opportunities by persons with disabilities is less clear.

²¹ Persons with disabilities can now access a wider variety of services/programs with limited barriers.

A review of literature shows that the benefits to persons with disabilities of accessing employment include improved quality of life and income, enhanced self-confidence, expanded social network, and a sense of community.²²

Of the survey respondents that received funding through the Workplace accessibility stream, 20% (N=33) indicated new hires or increased volunteer opportunities, and 17% (N=27) indicated maintenance of employment as the key impacts of their funded project for persons with disabilities. Projects funded through the Community accessibility stream also contributed to these benefits: overall, funded survey respondents indicated new hires or increased volunteer opportunities (N=132; 14%) and maintenance of employment (N=64; 7%) as the key impacts of their funded project for persons with disabilities.

Almost a quarter (N=32; 24%) of those that indicated new hires or increased volunteer opportunities indicated that their accessibility project facilitated the hiring of persons with disabilities within one year of project completion. Many organization representatives interviewed were also open to hiring persons with disabilities, and perceived limited barriers to hire them now that their organization was more accessible. However, despite the benefits to persons with disabilities of accessing employment, many organizations indicated that an ongoing challenge was that persons with disabilities were not applying for these jobs.²³

5.2.3 Profile of beneficiaries

Key finding: The Program addresses diverse accessibility barriers to support the participation of persons with disabilities of all ages and forms of disabilities, and other intersectionalities.

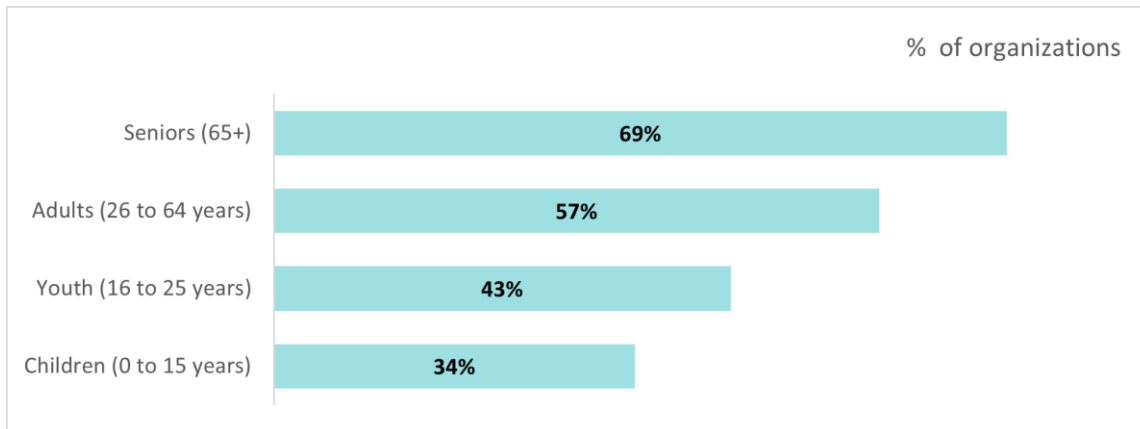
The expert panel discussions and analysis of the profiles of beneficiaries indicate that sub-groups of persons with disabilities have diverse accessibility needs, challenges and barriers, and the intersectionality of these identity factors can cumulatively disadvantage an individual. The most common age groups of persons with disabilities targeted by the funded projects were seniors (69%), followed by adults (57%) (see Figure 7). Findings from the 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability confirm that the prevalence of disability increases with age²⁴. Some funded projects also targeted various other sub-groups of persons with disabilities, such as women (24%), Indigenous Peoples (18%), veterans (18%), visible minorities (16%) and LGBTQ2 (now 2SLGBTQI+) (13%).

²² Lindsay, S., Cagliostro, E., Albarico, M., Mortaji, N., and Karon, L. (2018) A systematic review of the benefits of hiring people with disabilities. *Journal of occupational rehabilitation*.

²³ Based on the organization's knowledge since non-visible disabilities may not be disclosed.

²⁴ Statistics Canada. (2018). A demographic, employment and income profile of Canadians with disabilities aged 15 years and over, 2017. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-654-x/89-654-x2018002-eng.htm>

Figure 7: Target age demographic for funded projects*



Source: Completed final reports from the 2016 to 2018 Small and Youth component call for proposals as of September 2022, N=1619

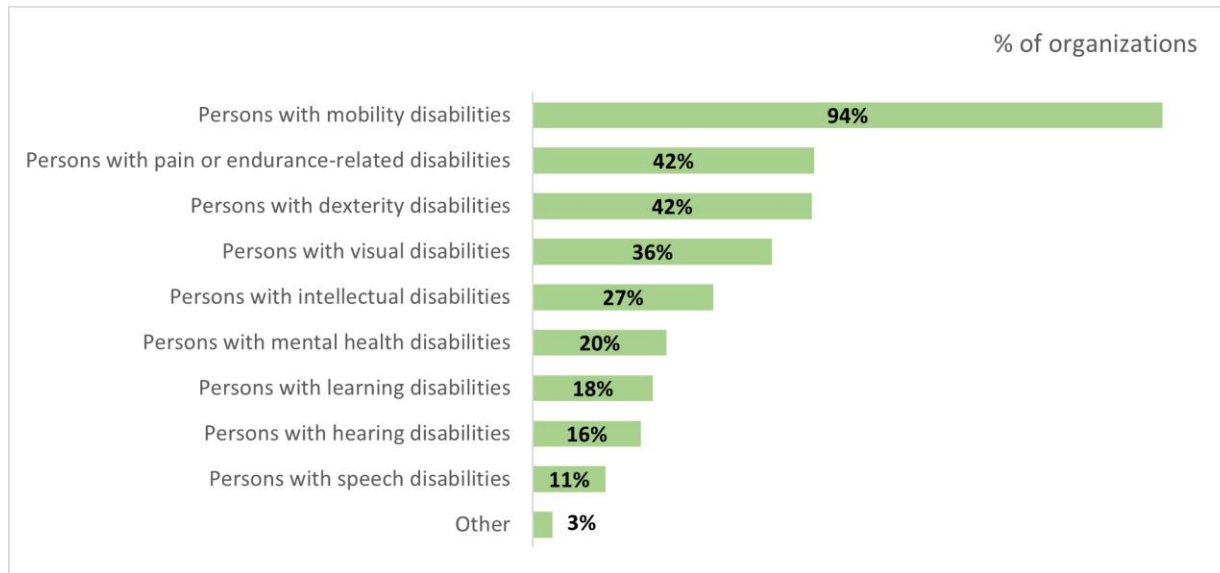
*Respondents were asked to select all that apply.

The majority of organizations targeted persons with mobility issues (94%) for their projects, followed by persons with pain and dexterity disabilities²⁵ (42% each) (see Figure 8). Indeed, disabilities related to pain, flexibility, and mobility are the most common types of disabilities amongst Canadians aged 15 years and over.²⁶ By addressing the diverse accessibility needs of Canadians through individual projects, the Program—as a whole—is working towards the universal design of spaces (as discussed in section 4.1.2).

²⁵ Statistics Canada. (2017). *Appendix B – Identifying disability types*. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-654-x/2018001/app-ann-b-eng.htm>

²⁶ Statistics Canada. (2018). *A demographic, employment and income profile of Canadians with disabilities aged 15 years and over, 2017*. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-654-x/89-654-x2018002-eng.htm>

Figure 8: Target population (by type of disability) for funded projects*



Source: Completed final reports from the 2017 to 2018 Small and Youth component call for proposals as of September 2022, N=1101.

*Respondents were asked to select all that apply.

6. Program delivery modernization

In the 2020 call for proposals under the Small projects component, the Program went through a series of changes as part of their modernization project. A central element in the modernization of the Program was the development and introduction of a Flat Rate Costing Model, which calculated eligible expenses for ramps, accessible doors and accessible washrooms. As such, applicants no longer needed to provide external quotes, project details or budget information for these project activities. Developed in conjunction with experts in universal design and construction, flat rate costing focuses on accessibility features, national building requirements and accessibility standards as directives for funded projects.

In the same year, for the first time since 2011, there was no mandatory leveraging requirement (cost-sharing²⁷), which previously included either cash or in-kind contributions of at least 35% of total eligible costs. These contributions had to be provided through sources other than ESDC, but could include funds from various sources such as the applicant organization and other federal or provincial programs. The removal of the leveraging requirement in 2020 to 2021 was a response to the COVID-19 pandemic as an effort to facilitate access to funding for all organizations, regardless of size, type or capacity.

²⁷ Leveraging requirement was waived for territories under the 2017 and 2018 Small projects call for proposals.

Since the removal of the mandatory leveraging requirement and the introduction of the flat rate costing occurred in the same year as part of the modernization work, it is difficult to measure the impact of each element individually (such as on the types of organizations applying and ease of application). Nevertheless, there were some key findings related to each element from this evaluation.

6.1 Flat rate costing model

6.1.1 Information provided made it easier for organizations to apply for the flat rate activities

The information provided to organizations through the Flat Rate Costing Model made it easier to apply for ramps, automatic doors and accessible washrooms, as indicated by the majority (74%) of survey respondents and key informants. For example, lower capacity organizations mentioned that it helped them reduce the administrative burden and gave them more time to deliver their services. They did not need to have experience or have dedicated resources for grant writing. They appreciated not having to find multiple quotes from contractors for their projects and found that it simplified the process. Finding multiple quotes from contractors was especially difficult in rural/remote communities, as well as in the context of COVID-19 and the associated labour and material shortages. According to key informants, efficiencies were also gained on the program operations side, since it made it easier for ESDC staff to review and assess applications.

However, due to the prioritization of flat rate projects (ramps, automatic doors and accessible washrooms), internal key informants mentioned there may have been less innovation especially around ICTs. However, prior to the introduction of the flat rate, there was also low uptake of ICT projects at 4% ([see Figure 4](#)). Nevertheless, simplifying the application process for these project activities provided the same opportunities for all organizations to apply, so that they can improve the physical accessibility of their facility/organization.

6.1.2 Information provided improved the organization's understanding and awareness of accessibility requirements and standards for the built environment. However, more information on ICT accessibility requirements and standards would be useful for organizations.

In addition, the Flat Rate Costing Model also contributed to improving the organizations' understanding and awareness of accessibility requirements and standards for construction. This was the case for the majority of survey respondents (78%), and was a recurring theme amongst the key informant interviews. The model put the standards, requirements and information in the hands of the organization; thereby, increasing the organizations' knowledge of accessibility and how to properly improve accessibility.

Moreover, the Flat Rate Costing Model's prescriptive guidance helped improve stewardship by capping funding allocation with funding tied specifically to the accessibility pieces. For example, with this Model, only the accessible portion of a multi-stall washroom would be funded through the Program. It also

helped from an integrity perspective by providing a standard flat rate quote for some key accessibility built environment activities, adjusting for material and labour costs across the country.

Efforts made by the Program to increase the awareness on the continuum of the built environment accessibility (example: with the [Accessibility project flowchart](#)) were also appreciated by the funded organizations and was used by many organizations to identify the most pressing accessibility needs. Web analytics also suggest that users spent time to read the information provided through the Flat Rate Costing Model. For example, visitors spent an average of almost 5 minutes on the Program's [Flat rate information page](#) in 2020 to 2021, and more than 2 minutes on the [Accessibility project flow chart page](#) in 2020 to 2021. Visitors also spent more than double the amount of time on the [Small projects component page](#) in 2020 to 2021 as compared to the previous fiscal year. This suggests that the introduction of the Flat Rate Costing Model may have contributed to increased understanding and awareness of accessibility standards.

While there is an [accessibility project flowchart](#) available to help organizations choose the right built environment-related project, there is no such information available to help organizations choose an accessibility project focused on ICT.

6.1.3 Further work is needed to determine the effectiveness of the Model in accurately determining costs

During the pilot year in 2020 to 2021, some issues were identified with the Model underestimating project costs and technical challenges with completing the calculator form. One-fifth of organization survey respondents (N=240) reported that the cost of the project was more expensive than what was estimated by the Flat Rate Costing model. This was largely due to inflation of material and labour construction costs related to COVID-19 (N=168). This brought on many challenges for these organizations. Organizations either scaled down their projects based on the amount received or had to find additional sources of funding to cope with the price increases and complete their project activities.²⁸ Some organizations also expressed that the low availability of contractors was a challenge in meeting project deadlines and finding prices that met project anticipated costs, especially in small/rural communities.

Additionally, for the 2020 Small projects call for proposal, organizations experienced technical challenges in completing the calculator form. Most of the challenges were related to the PDF forms that worked only in either Adobe Acrobat or Foxit software. Furthermore, for those that were able to use the PDF form, the costs did not auto-calculate based on their selections. Their requested funding was based on an estimate provided in the flat rate information sheet.

²⁸ While the Program had advised organizations to have a contingency budget of approximately 20% of their total project costs to offset unexpected costs, this may not have been feasible for many organizations during the pandemic. Information regarding the extent to which the project activities were underfunded is not currently available.

Going forward, this process has been automated so that applicants can see the total estimated cost of their project before they apply and can tailor their activities as necessary to suit their budget (with the re-implementation of the mandatory leveraging requirement). The calculator has also migrated from PDF to the Interactive Fact Finding Service, a more accessible and user-friendly platform. This platform is also used by other ESDC programs such as the New Horizons for Seniors Program and Canada Summer Jobs.

6.2 Removal of leveraging

6.2.1 Removal of the leveraging requirement acted as an equalizer

Key finding: The removal of the mandatory leveraging requirement in 2020 to 2021 also acted as an equalizer by removing barriers for organizations to access funding.

Since leveraging was a mandatory requirement for the entire scope of the previous evaluation, the previous evaluation solely focused on the role that leveraging played in the various call for proposals (and not any potential benefits of its removal). However, external key informants in this evaluation found the leveraging requirement to be the biggest deterrent for any organization applying to the Program.

As per the organization survey results, 38% of applicants that had a leveraging requirement found it difficult or very difficult to meet the 35% leveraging requirement. The main challenges identified were the lack of funding partners, limited budget/funds, the lack of predictability of Call-for-Proposals and the need to budget the projects in advance or to match with other grants or fundraising activities. Other challenges related to the leveraging requirements included the need to borrow money (with interest), and the difficulty to reimburse the associated loan.

There were also unique challenges based on organization capacity and type. For example, some organizations, especially not-for-profit organizations, mentioned that it was harder to raise funds for accessibility than for other causes that may be perceived as more attractive by potential partners. Additionally, raising funds is time consuming and prevents organizations from focusing on providing services for persons with disabilities. In fact, 42% of survey respondents from not-for-profit organizations found their search for additional sources of funding difficult or very difficult, as compared to 30% of private sector organizations and 27% of municipalities.

As for private sector (for-profit) organizations, key informants mentioned that while they may be in a position to contribute towards the leveraging requirement using their profits, they must see a higher return on investment. On the other hand, municipalities interviewed generally had less barriers to fund accessibility projects as they can raise funds through taxation and agreements with provincial governments. However, according to the informants, municipalities with a small or low-density population have less ability to raise funds. In addition, organizations in rural/remote areas have more difficulty in finding additional sources of funding, partly due to less funders. Moreover, survey respondents from the territories were more likely to cite “insufficient resources to complete the application”, as compared to other regions. As per the expert panels, a sliding scale for the leveraging

requirement could be considered based on the organization type, which would make it easier for some organizations to apply to the Program.

6.2.2 Leveraging Requirement was an effective demand management tool

Key finding: Despite the disadvantages for applicants of having a mandatory leveraging requirement, it was an effective demand management tool, which allowed the program to expand the number of funded projects with the available budget.

This is consistent with the findings from the 2017 program evaluation.

Both internal and external informants also mentioned that having some leveraging requirement enhanced partnerships and could be used as a measure of the organization's investment in the project. In Ottawa, the new partnerships generated by the funded projects helped develop a network of accessibility advocates seeking additional funding and/or whom have developed additional accessibility projects (not necessarily through the Program). Moreover, sourcing other forms of support indicates that the project is necessary, timely and desired by stakeholders. Informants mentioned that when an organization comes together to raise funds for the betterment of their whole organization and community, they have a bigger investment in the outcome to ensure the project succeeds.

6.3 Increasing uptake of the Workplace Accessibility Stream

Along with the removal of the mandatory leveraging requirement to increase workplace accessibility (assuming that costs were a huge deterrent for organizations to apply), other actions taken by the Program to increase workplace accessibility included dedicated funding for the Workplace Accessibility Stream of the 2020 Small projects call for proposals²⁹, and targeted email blasts on an annual basis. However, the timing for call for proposals and approval of funding were not adapted to the reality of employers who may want to hire persons with disabilities immediately.

Expert panelists and key informants identified strategies to contribute to increased uptake of available Program funding among workplaces. This could include: continued and increased dedicated for the Workplace Accessibility stream; different leveraging requirements based on the type and location of the business; exploring the link between the Workplace Accessibility stream and the Youth component; and educate organizations on the ICT projects that the Program can fund, which in turn, could be linked to employment.

They also suggested opening the Program to continuous intake or more frequent call for proposals, depending on the most efficient approach. This would enable more timely communication of the

²⁹ \$1.6 million was allocated for the Workplace Accessibility Stream for the 2020 Small projects. This amount was surpassed, for a total of \$2.4 million in approved funding for this call for proposal.

Program to organizations that require support but have limited time and/or capacity to prepare an application. It would also enable organizations to hire persons with disabilities faster as the need arises.

7. Youth component

The Youth component was added to the Program in 2017, and it is being evaluated for the first time. Thus, this section presents the findings on the rationale and need and preliminary outcomes for the Youth component. It also provides some key considerations of this model going forward.

7.1 Relevance of the Youth component

7.1.1 The Youth component supports a culture of change

On November 1, 2016, a 1-day national forum for youth took place as part of the Government of Canada's consultation process to inform the development of the *Accessible Canada Act*. Youth from across the country took this opportunity to share their life experiences and ideas on how to improve accessibility, remove barriers and increase the participation of persons with disabilities in Canadian society. Building on the momentum of the forum, the Youth component was created as a pilot process targeting the 112 youth forum participants. **It was created to complement the development of accessibility legislation and support a broader culture change by instilling in youth an awareness of accessibility opportunities within their own communities.** The survey of Youth leaders confirms that this component helped support a broader culture of change.

Expressing interest in becoming a Youth leader: Close to 3-in-4 (72%) survey respondents indicated that they were motivated due to having experienced or witnessed accessibility barriers in their community. Many respondents also indicated that they wanted to help an organization that had one or more accessibility needs (61%).

Benefits/experience as a Youth leader: More than half (54%) of survey respondents indicated that they intend to support an organization as a Youth leader in the future. Finally, survey findings suggest that the process of becoming a Youth leader leads to increased awareness of accessibility needs, barriers and opportunities among the majority (72%) of youth in this role. The majority (80%) of survey respondents indicated that they would recommend the Youth leader program to a friend.

Youth involvement with organizations beyond the Youth component: Nearly 3-in-4 (71%) of Youth leaders indicated that they remain involved with the organization(s) after the organization's received funding from the Program, primarily as volunteers for the organization.

In addition to the findings from the survey, evidence from the key informant interviews suggests that the Youth component contributed to increased youth awareness on barriers/needs and encouraged youth to become leaders in their communities. The Youth component empowered the Youth leaders because it provided them with the opportunity to engage with organizations in their community, develop an accessibility network, and recommend tangible resources when meeting with organizations to implement accessibility in their communities and workplaces. The Youth leaders did not only promote

the Program and increase awareness of accessibility needs in the community, but they also promoted it to the future generation of youth leaders through word-of-mouth.

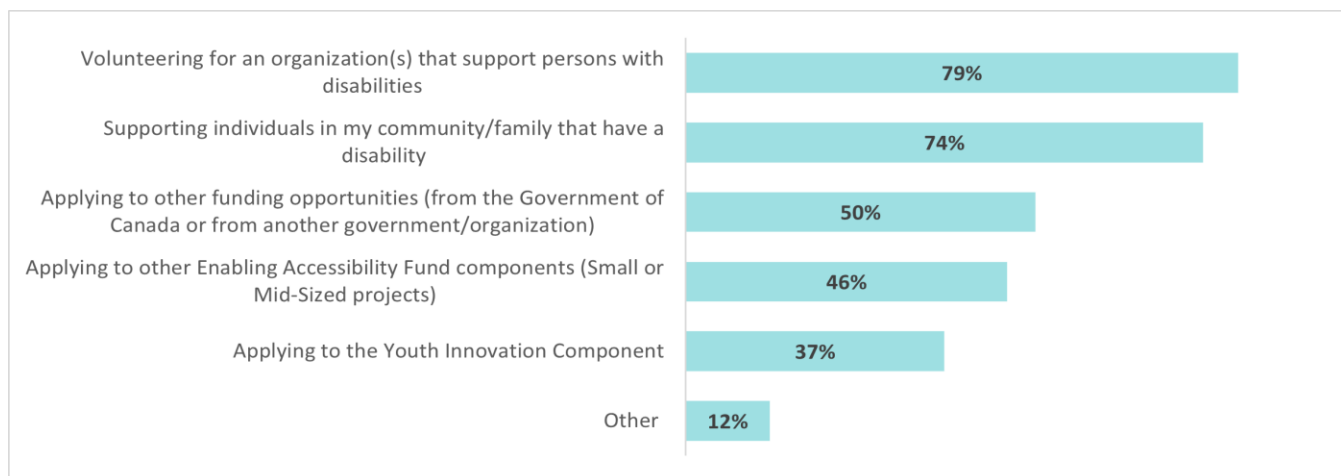
The organization representatives interviewed also gained awareness on the accessibility barriers/needs, and the Youth component helped facilitate conversations around accessibility within their communities and workplaces. Lastly, due to the size of the grants, it helped youth and organizations be creative and innovative, and express and explore their environments in different ways (see [Section 7.1.3](#)).

7.1.2 The Youth component contributes to improving accessibility for persons with disabilities

Key finding: Supporting this culture of change through the Youth component also contributed to creating youth leaders that will be advocates for persons with disabilities.

Over the fiscal year 2017 to 2018 to fiscal year 2020 to 2021 period, there were 212 unique Youth leaders and 385 accessibility projects funded. As indicated by the survey results, the vast majority (92%) of Youth leaders intend to continue to work towards improving accessibility for persons with disabilities, primarily by volunteering for an organization that supports persons with disabilities (79%) or by supporting individuals in their community that have a disability (74%) (see Figure 9).

Figure 9: Ways Youth leaders intend to continue to work towards improving accessibility for persons with disabilities*



Source: Survey of Eligible Youth Accessibility Leader Applicants, N=279.

*Respondents were asked to select all that apply.

All Youth leaders that participated in the interview process also mentioned that they would continue to improve accessibility in their communities, through various means:

- by continuing to be a Youth leader/encourage their peers to become Youth leaders
- promoting all Program components whenever they can

- advocating for accessibility
- working in the accessibility field, and/or
- including more intersectional analysis in their work

Overall, the Youth component of the Program is small and the projects may be expected to have a smaller contribution to improving accessibility. Still, as reported by the Youth leaders, these projects:

- increased access to physical spaces (74%)
- created a more inclusive environment where everyone feels they belong (74%)
- increased opportunities to participate in services/programs (71%)

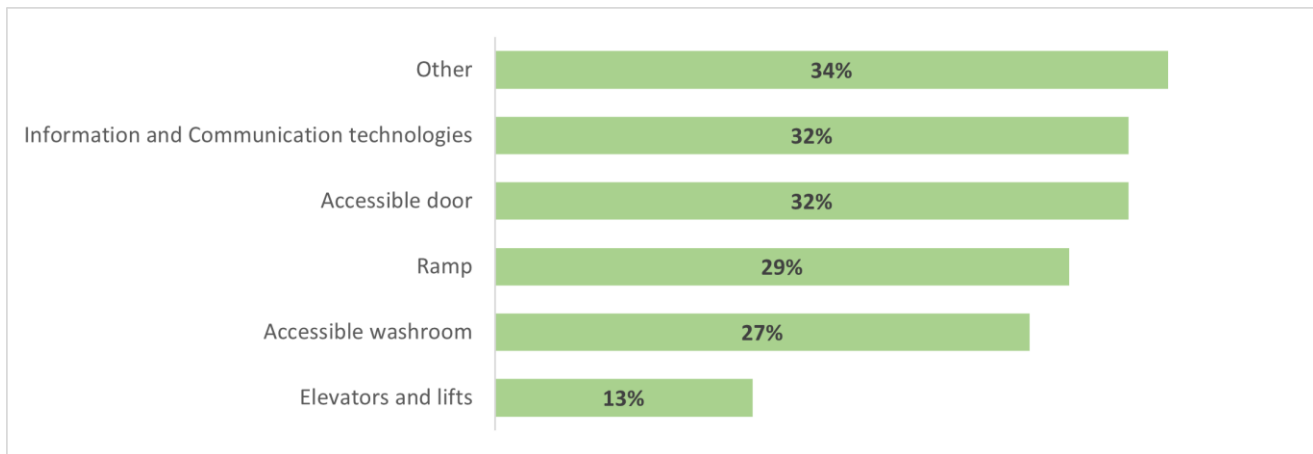
These findings are aligned with the Program organization survey, presented in Section 5.

7.1.3 The Youth component fills some previous gaps of the Program

Key finding: Despite the small size of this component, it is filling some of the gaps associated with the other components of the Program such as its contribution to innovation.

Firstly, the Youth component fosters innovative projects, including ICTs. Specifically, one-third (34 %) of Youth leaders made at least 1 request for innovative projects, primarily related to funding for adaptive sports/recreation equipment to improve accessibility for outdoor recreation (example: general sports, swimming, walking trails/pathways) or for sensory inclusion tools/products (example: equipment for sensory rooms).

Figure 10: Youth component project activities



Source: Survey of Eligible Youth Accessibility Leader Applicants, N=126.

*Respondents were asked to select all that apply.

Secondly, the evaluation found that the Youth component projects remove barriers of the application being time-consuming, and allows funding to be available for leisure and more innovative projects to address a broader spectrum of barriers. It gives organizations a taste of the program without feeling the extra pressure to complete a more comprehensive application. If they are successful, they may apply to

Mid-sized and Small projects. The rippled effect of this component was observed in one of the community case studies.

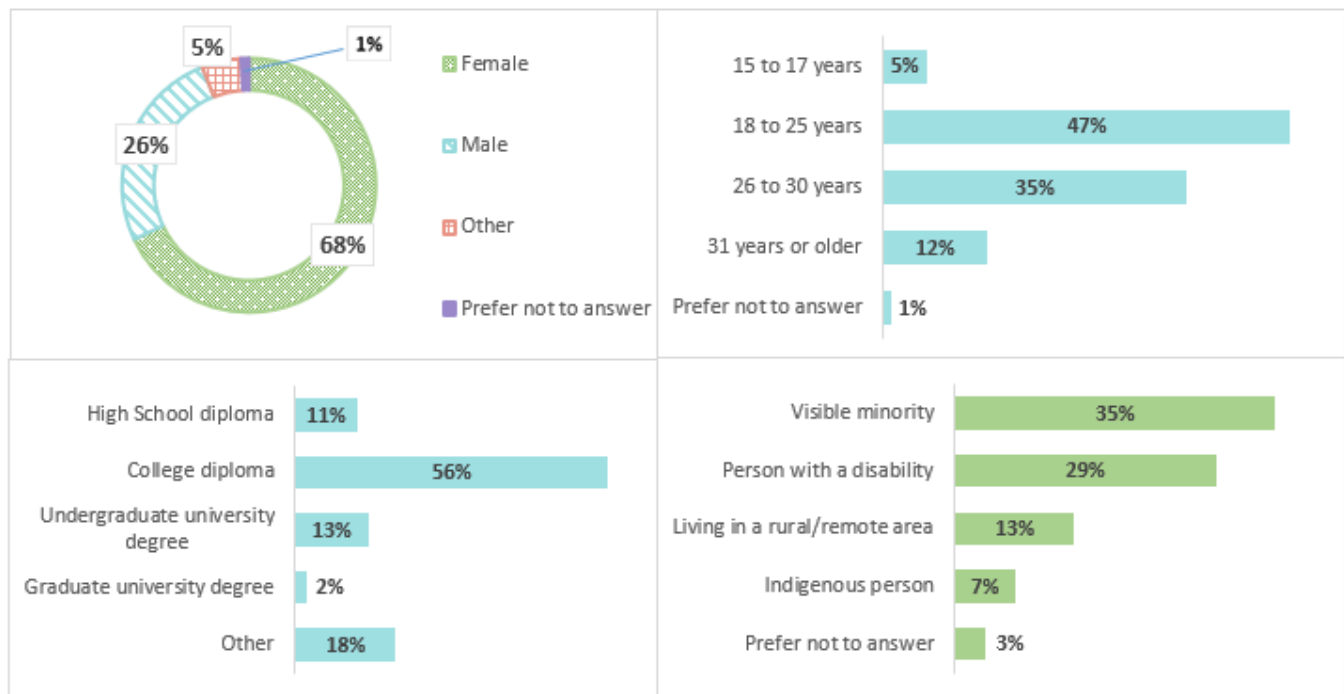
Thirdly, the evidence suggests that the projects funded under the Youth component are more balanced between Community and Workplace accessibility streams. Since the introduction of the Program’s Workplace Accessibility Stream in 2013, it has historically seen lower uptake amongst small private sector enterprises. However, through the Youth component in 2020 to 2021, 43 of the 201 youth projects funded (21%) were through the Workplace Accessibility Stream. Administrative data on uptake of the Program’s Workplace Accessibility Stream of the Youth Component are not available for previous years.

7.2 Model considerations

7.2.1 Youth leader target population

Administrative data on the sociodemographic characteristics of these Youth leaders are also not available. This evaluation uncovered some socio-demographic information about these Youth leaders (see Figure 11): most survey respondents identified as female (68%) and half of them resided in Ontario (51%). Interestingly, close to one-third (29%) of respondents identified themselves as a person with a disability, over one-third (35%) as a visible minority, 7% as Indigenous and 13% living in a rural/remote area. Most of the survey respondents completed a college diploma (56%), with few having completed a graduate university degree (2%). A lot of the Youth Leader respondents were older than the age targeted by the Youth Component (with 12% being 31 years or older).

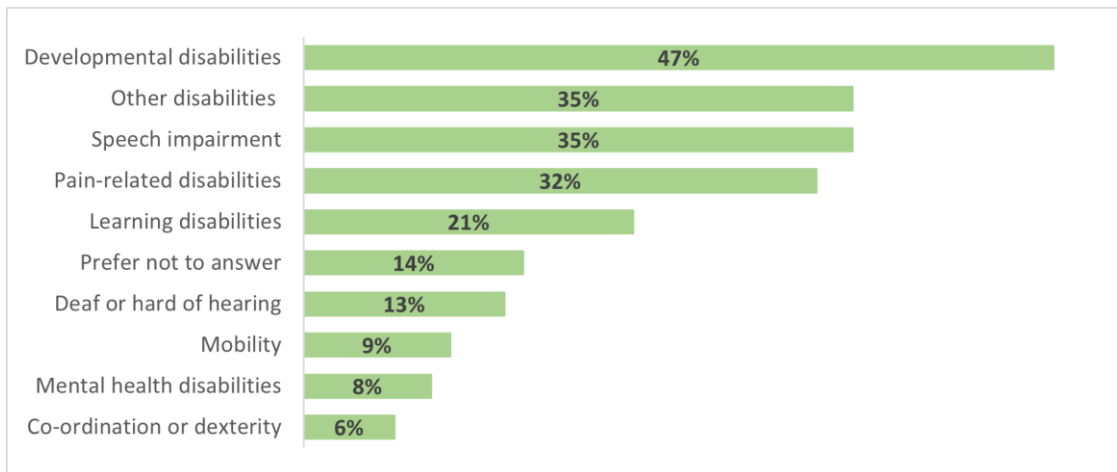
Figure 11: Demographic snapshot of Youth leader applicants



Source: Survey of Eligible Youth Accessibility Leader Applicants, N=302.

A little under half (47%) of respondents with a disability reported having developmental disabilities, approximately one-third reported having a speech impairment and pain-related disabilities (35% and 32%, respectively), and one-fifth (21%) reported having learning disabilities (see Figure 12).

Figure 12: Nature of disability of Youth leader applicants



Source: Survey of Eligible Youth Accessibility Leader Applicants, N=87.

Currently, the Program’s Youth component is open to all youth, whether they have a disability or not. However, there is evidence that suggests that Youth leaders with disabilities would be best able to articulate accessibility barriers in the built environment due to their lived experience as end-users. Indeed, survey findings show that the large majority of youth with disabilities (90%) are significantly more likely than those without disabilities (64%) to have experienced or witnessed accessibility barriers in their communities ($p < 0.05$). This was also noted by the experts. Therefore, youth with disabilities under the Youth component might be better positioned for this role, allowing for more opportunities for them.

7.2.2 Youth engagement and continual intake of the Youth component

Key finding: Proposed strategies to increase youth engagement and continual intake of the Youth component include an incentive/honorarium for the Youth leaders.

Between fiscal year 2017 to 2018 and fiscal year 2020 to 2021, of the 1471 youth whom expressed interest in becoming a Youth leader, only 212 (or 14%) successfully helped an organization to receive

funding.³⁰ This means that the number of youth that expressed interest far exceeds the number of projects realized. Moreover, amongst the youth who successfully helped an organization to receive funding, most (87%) supported only one organization. Therefore, strategies to increase youth engagement and continual intake of the Youth component were explored.

According to survey results, while more than half (54%) of youth indicated that they intend to support an organization to submit an application as Youth leaders in the future, 15% indicated they did not intend to do so. Of this 15% population, nearly 3-in-4 (72%) indicated that other priorities took precedence, approximately one-quarter (26%) reported that it was too much work, and 17% indicated that no remuneration/money incentive was provided. Non-applicant survey respondents were also asked for their reasons for not engaging with an organization and almost one-fifth (19%) of survey respondents indicated the lack of incentive/compensation for not participating in the program.

Additionally, as more time and effort may be required for these youth and persons with disabilities to physically reach these organizations, and thereby fully participate in and contribute to their community and workplace, an incentive/honorarium could help increase youth engagement and continual intake of the Youth component. Indeed, the organizations' built environment was identified as the primary accessibility barrier amongst the Youth leader survey respondents. Persons with disabilities who participated in the survey were also more likely to experience transportation as a barrier compared to the general population. According to recent literature, external barriers to volunteering for persons with intellectual disabilities include commuting and time, and recognition of work.³¹

The expert panelists also noted that youth with lived experience should be compensated for their time and expertise in advising on the projects. According to the Youth leader key informants, this could also take the form of some formal recognition, such as a ceremony or meeting with the Minister. The incentive/honorarium could also help with the engagement pieces with the Youth leaders between the time of submission of application and the funding announcement.

To help ensure continual intake of the Youth component, the Youth Panel and Youth leaders suggested including other activities under the Youth component, such as providing youth, especially youth with disabilities, with leadership opportunities so that they can be advocates for accessibility within schools and their communities. This could also include getting former Youth leaders involved as ambassadors for the future generation of Youth leaders to illustrate their experience and the benefits the project had on them, especially given that a substantial proportion of Youth leaders (12%) were older than the age group targeted by the Youth component.

In addition to ensuring youth engagement and continual intake of the Youth component, reasons for low participation of Youth leaders in outreach activities were also explored. As per the key informants, the

³⁰ Information on Youth leaders whom have contacted an organization and applied to the Youth Component but the organization was unsuccessful in receiving funding is not available.

³¹ Cruz, S., Ferreira M.R., Borges, A., and Casais, B. (2022). Barriers to volunteering in the field of intellectual disability: a cluster analysis. *International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing*.

engagement pieces with the youth between the time of application submission and the funding announcement have not been successful. According to some internal interviewees, the Program tried to engage with the youth, through a few outreach strategies (example: GC Collaboration, Youth Journey Journals) but the participation was minimal. Of note, the Youth Journey Journal was a guiding tool developed to help Youth leaders better understand the Youth component and the call for proposals process, keep track and stay engaged in their project(s). It was optional for the Youth leaders to submit the completed journals and there was no incentive/honorarium provided.

Despite attempts to measure the outcomes of the Youth component on the Youth leader, there is limited evidence/reports to determine such benefits. Some reasons cited for the lower participation amongst Youth leaders survey respondents and key informants that participated in the Youth Component between 2017 and 2021 included: lack of support and follow-up by ESDC after having been accepted into the Program; lack of incentive for youth to submit any types of activity reports/journals; low perceived value of completing the journal activities; and forms/journals not being accessible/understandable for all persons with disabilities.

8. Performance measurement

Key finding: While the Program has improved its data collection strategy, there are gaps to be addressed to support better analysis of the Program's outcomes. Some of the gaps include information on the uptake of the Workplace Accessibility stream, socio-demographic information of the Youth leader applicants and outcomes of their participation in the Youth component.

The 2017 Program evaluation recommended that ESDC take steps to improve its data collection strategy. To improve the response rates, the project completion reports for the Small component migrated from paper-based (such as sending a Word template) to an electronic report. This will be the standard approach for all Program components going forward, and is expected to capture data from successful recipients in a more efficient and centralized way. Program officials no longer have to enter the data manually in Excel sheets. However, exceptions may apply, as this is a new data collection method. Furthermore, in 2020 to 2021, the project completion report template was reviewed to ensure it remains relevant, streamlined and useful to inform future policy decisions.

The 2017 Program evaluation also recommended that ESDC take steps to improve the representation of small, private sector enterprises in the Workplace Accessibility Stream. While the introduction of the Flat Rate Costing Model and the removal of the 35% mandatory leveraging requirement in 2020 to 2021 made it easier for all organizations to apply for funding, regardless of size or organization capacity, the evaluation was unable to assess its implementation. One of the key limitations of the administrative database is that the breakdown of Workplace versus Community Accessibility Stream is not available for most project components and fiscal years under this evaluation. Specifically, this data is only available for Small projects in fiscal year 2016 to 2017 and for the Youth Innovation Component in fiscal year 2020 to 2021.

Moreover, while the final completion reports capture data on Workplace versus Community Accessibility Stream projects, it only helps tell the story for funded applications, and not all funded organizations have submitted their final reports at the time of this evaluation. For varying reasons, many of the projects have received extensions to complete their project and efforts will continue by the Program to ascertain all outstanding final reports. There were also differing final report templates, presenting challenges for compiling and comparing performance information over time. When possible, efforts were made to aggregate the performance information contained in each of the templates, and the impacts of the Community versus the Workplace Accessibility Stream on persons with disabilities were reported separately.

Additionally, for the newer Youth component, socio-demographic and contact information of all Youth leader applicants and outcomes of their participation are not available. While this Evaluation found that the Youth component is aligned with the overall objectives of the Program, the logic model and narrative in the Performance Information Profile does not demonstrate how the Youth component was integrated into the program story. The Youth component is not supported by indicators that measure the impact of the Program on Youth leaders.

Lastly, it is not possible to ascertain if Program funding accurately reflects project costs, including whether the Flat Rate Costing model accurately estimated the costs of the project activities during the pandemic. While there are separate data fields on the requested Program funding versus the received amount, this data were not reliable or accurate. However, the Program updates the Flat Rate Costing models yearly in efforts to ensure they are representative of fair market value.

9. Conclusions

There is an ongoing need and demand for assistance with capital costs for the purposes of improving accessibility for persons with disabilities. Despite the Program's strategies to address the high volume of applications and efforts to "stretch" the available funds, the demand for assistance from the Program continues to exceed the available financial support.

The evaluation findings also suggest that the Program contributes to creating accessible communities and workplaces so that persons with disabilities have access to programs, services and employment opportunities. This, in turn, allows persons with disabilities to further participate in and contribute to their communities and workplaces. The key benefits noted for persons with disabilities included: a more inclusive environment where everyone feels they belong; increased access to physical spaces; increased opportunities to participate in services/programs; increased independence and autonomy and a more enjoyable experience in community spaces. The evidence also suggests that projects under the Workplace Accessibility Stream have contributed to increasing work and volunteer opportunities, including maintenance of employment, for persons with disabilities. While the breakdown of Workplace versus Community Accessibility Stream is not available for most project components and fiscal years under this evaluation's scope, some strategies that could contribute to increasing the uptake of available Program funding among workplaces were identified. More work is also needed to

increase awareness of ICT accessibility barriers and to educate organizations on the ICT projects that the Program can fund.

Additionally, the introduction of the Flat Rate Costing Model made it easy for organizations to apply for accessible doors, washrooms and ramps, and improved the organizations' understanding and awareness of accessibility requirements and standards for construction. In some cases, the findings suggest that the Flat Rate Costing Model underestimated the costs of the project and there were technical challenges with completing the calculator form. In the same year as the introduction of the Flat Rate Costing Model, the leveraging requirement was removed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic as an effort to facilitate access to funding for all organizations. While there are some benefits to the removal of the leveraging requirement, it was also used as a demand management tool and allowed the program to expand the number of funded projects with the available budget.

The evidence presented in this report also suggests that the Youth component is aligned with the overall objectives of the Program. Moreover, it supports a culture of change, contributes to improving accessibility and fills some gaps of the other Program components, despite the small size of this component. However, the outcomes of the Youth's participation are not available. Nevertheless, proposed strategies to increase youth engagement and intake of the Youth component are further outlined in the subsequent section.

Overall, the evidence suggests that the Program is contributing towards the achievement of its intended outcomes. However, there are a few areas where improvements can be made, as reflected in the recommendations proposed by the Evaluation.

10. Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Continue to improve and strengthen the data collection strategy to support better decision making

According to evidence gathered as part of the current evaluation, and as noted in the 2017 evaluation, there is a need to improve the representation of small, private sector enterprises in the Workplace Accessibility Stream. However, the evaluation was unable to assess the full extent to which this has been implemented since the data about Workplace and Community Accessibility stream applications and organization size were not available for most years under this evaluation. Going forward, data about Workplace and Community Accessibility stream applications should be available by project component and type of eligible applicant/organization.

Additionally, socio-demographic information of the Youth leader applicants and outcomes of their participation in the Youth component are not available. The logic model and narrative in the Performance Information Profile should demonstrate how the Youth component was integrated into the program story along with its supporting indicators focused on the Youth leaders.

Moreover, it is not possible to ascertain if Program funding accurately reflects project costs, including whether the Flat Rate Costing Model accurately estimated the costs of the project activities during the pandemic. While there are separate data fields on the requested Program funding versus the received amount, this data were not reliable or accurate.

Recommendation #2: Continue to focus on increasing the uptake of the Program's Workplace Accessibility Stream

The literature showed that persons with disabilities have less employment opportunities and one of the main barriers for hiring persons with disabilities is the adaptation of the workplace. Indeed, this evaluation identified the built environment and ICT as some of the main accessibility barriers for persons with disabilities to fully participate in and contribute to their community and workplace. This evaluation also highlights the benefits of hiring persons with disabilities. Furthermore, increasing accessibility to the workplace was identified as a priority for persons with disabilities. Increasing employment opportunities for persons with disabilities through the creation of accessible workplaces should be a continual focus.

This evaluation identified some strategies that could contribute to increasing the uptake of available Program funding among workplaces. This included:

- increasing dedicated funding for the Workplace Accessibility stream
- considering different leveraging requirements based on the type and location of organization
- exploring the link between the Workplace Accessibility stream and the Youth component
- opening the Program to continuous intake or more frequent call for proposals, depending on the most efficient approach

Recommendation #3: Take steps to raise awareness of ICT accessibility barriers, in consultation with the disability community, and educate organizations on the ICT projects that the Program can support

ICT was identified as one of the main barriers which increase the burden (time and effort required) on persons with disabilities to fully participate in and contribute to their communities and workplaces. In total, based on the final completed reports, approximately only 4% of accessibility projects funded through the Program during the evaluation period were focused on ICT. While this evaluation showed a general lack of awareness of ICT amongst the organizations, the evaluation also found that there is opportunity for the Program to educate organizations on the ICT projects that the Program can support. This needs to be done in consultation with the disability community to determine the types of ICT projects the Program can support, and increase its awareness, based on an identified and informed need.

Recommendation #4: Re-assess specific elements of the Youth component to ensure youth leaders' engagement

The Youth component is aligned with the overall objectives of the Program. Moreover, it supports a culture of change, contributes to improving accessibility and fills some gaps of the other Program components. However, in order to ensure youth engagement, this evaluation raises some key considerations. For one, there is evidence that suggests that Youth leaders with disabilities would be best able to articulate accessibility barriers in the built environment due to their lived experience as end-users. Moreover, there was consensus amongst the experts and key informants that individuals providing advice and leadership in the development of projects should be compensated for their time and expertise through an honorarium or incentive. This could also take the form of some formal recognition, such as a ceremony or meeting with the Minister. Other activities that could be considered under the Youth component include providing youth, especially youth with disabilities, with leadership opportunities so that they can be advocates for accessibility within schools and their communities. Finally, other strategies to better engage youth throughout the process should be explored, such as potential synergies with other department programs that seek to promote civic engagement amongst Canadian youth.

11. Appendices

11.1 Appendix A – Logic model with performance indicators

Table 8: Logic model with performance indicators

| Logic model | Performance indicators |
|----------------------|--|
| Ultimate outcome | <p>Persons with disabilities have opportunities to participate in and contribute to community life:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • number of organizations with improved usage of their facility/venue |
| Intermediate outcome | <p>Accessible communities and workplaces which allow persons with disabilities to have access to programs, services and employment opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • number of persons with disabilities that will benefit from funded projects • number of job opportunities for persons with disabilities created or maintained as a result of the project |
| Immediate outcome | <p>Organizations undertake accessibility improvements to their facilities as a result of Program funding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • number of community spaces that are more accessible due to Enabling Accessibility Fund funding • number of communities with funded projects • dollar amount of funds leveraged (cash and/or in-kind) by other sources of funding for every dollar invested |
| Outputs | <p>Funded projects based on call for proposals priorities and criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of applications funded • % of funding provided • % of Youth Leaders who helped an organization submit a project |
| Activities | <p>Promoting the program, administering Grant and Contribution funds, and measuring and analysing the Program</p> |
| Inputs | <p>Financial resources, human resources and information technology</p> |

Notes: The Program influences the immediate outcome more directly. Intermediate and ultimate outcomes are influenced by the efforts of the Program as well as other external factors.

11.2 Appendix B – Evaluation matrix

The Program evaluation made use of multiple lines of evidence. Various data collection methods and sources ([see Appendix C](#)) helped address different aspects of the evaluation questions. This approach ensured adequate data triangulation to support robust evidence-based findings, conclusions and recommendations to the Program.

Table 9: Evaluation matrix

| Evaluation question | Lines of evidence |
|--|--|
| <p>1. To what extent have the funded projects contributed to improve accessibility to recipients' facilities and surrounding environment?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document and literature review • Administrative data review • Key Informant Interviews • Survey of applicants and non-applicants • Community case studies • Expert panels |
| <p>2. To what extent have the funded projects contributed to increased benefits/opportunities for persons with disabilities, in communities and workplaces?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document and literature review • Administrative data review • Key informant interviews • Survey of applicants and non-applicants • Community case studies • Expert panels |
| <p>3. To what extent have the modifications to the application process/criteria (example: removal of leveraging requirement and introduction of flat rate costing) affected the type of projects and organizations receiving funding?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document and literature review • Administrative data review • Key informant interviews • Survey of applicants and non-applicants • Expert panels |
| <p>4. To what extent is the Youth Innovation Component meeting its objectives?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document and literature review • Administrative data review • Key Informant Interviews • Survey of youth applicants • Community case studies • Expert panels |
| <p>5. Are the Program's performance measurement tools collecting sufficient, valid and reliable data that support ongoing monitoring and decision-making?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document and literature review • Administrative data review • Key informant interviews |

11.3 Appendix C – Methodology

Document and literature review

Reviewed policy and research documents and program performance documents that set out the rationale and expectations of the Program, as well as the results achieved. This included reviewing the application information packages for each project component in each fiscal year covered by this evaluation and the previous evaluation report.

This review was largely limited to the documentation shared by the Program area, and other information that is publicly available.

The literature review consisted of scanning both Canadian academic journal articles and the gray literature, including provincial and municipal reports, published since 2015. This included reviewing reports and data available from Statistics Canada, such as the Canadian Survey on Disability Reports.

Key search terms included persons with disabilities, disab*, access*, continuum, infrastructure, Canad*, benefit, job termination, hiring, and barrier. Databases included Google Scholar and EBSCO online database.

Administrative data review

There were 2 main sources for the Program administrative data:

1. Common System for Grants and Contributions (which includes information on projects applications by component; funded project start/end dates; and requested and received ESDC funding)
2. in-house databases for the Small projects, Mid-sized projects and Youth innovation components (which includes database focused on initial screening and assessment of the projects and a database on the final completed reports)

Key limitations: Common System for Grants and Contributions database

Data on the Community Stream versus the Workplace Accessibility Stream projects is lacking. This data is only available for Small Projects in fiscal year 2016 to 2017 and for the Youth Innovation Component in fiscal year 2020 to 2021, and is missing for the other project components and fiscal years. Therefore, it is not possible to measure the uptake of the Program's Workplace Accessibility Stream.

Moreover, name/contact information of the Youth Accessibility Leader applicants for the Youth Innovation Component as a separate data field was not available.

Another limitation was that while there were separate data fields on the requested ESDC funding and received amount, this data were not reliable and accurate.

Lastly, there was limited information on leveraging (example: the number and types of organizations screened out for not meeting the leveraging requirement, and proportion and type of funding used to meet the leveraging requirement).

Key limitations: in-house databases

At the time of Evaluation's data analysis (September 2022), the overall submission rates of the final reports were approximately 81% for the period between fiscal year 2016 to 2017 and fiscal year 2018 to 2019.³² As the project end dates and subsequently due date for each final report is different, final reports are received on an ongoing basis. At the time of finalizing this evaluation report, 97% of completed projects have submitted their reports. This difference in submission rates highlights the challenges associated with reporting on incomplete data, especially when it is stored in multiple, siloed databases. A streamlined data collection strategy, such as centralization of the software to avoid using multiple siloed databases, was suggested in the internal key informant interviews. Efforts will continue by the Program to ascertain all outstanding final reports. Additionally, no data entry nor analysis had been completed for the 2018 mid-sized final reports at the time Evaluation conducted its data analysis.

Another limitation was that, despite some attempts to measure the outcomes of the Youth Innovation Component on the Youth Accessibility Leader, there was limited evidence/reports to determine such impacts.

Survey of the Program applicant and non-applicant organizations

The survey targeted all community and workplace applicant organizations from the small projects, mid-sized projects, and the youth components who applied between fiscal year 2016 to 2017 and fiscal year 2020 to 2021. The Evaluation Directorate also reached out to non-applicant organisation representatives to learn more about their reasons for not applying, and if any improvements can be made to the application process/ criteria. Rather than using a sampling approach, this evaluation attempted to survey 100% of the target population.

The Evaluation Directorate carried out the web survey questionnaire and data analysis in-house. The survey was administered through ESDC's Interactive Fact Finding Service's web survey platform. This platform is fully customizable and meets the departmental web accessibility requirements.

The overall survey response rate was 26.4% (N=1548), with 9.1% (N=179) for the non-applicants and 35.2% (N=1370) for the applicants. The response rates appeared to vary somewhat across sub-groups, particularly based on the:

- funding status (such as, the response rate was higher amongst funded applicants as compared to non-funded applicants, and was even higher than non-applicant organization representatives), and
- fiscal year (such as more recent applicants were more likely to respond to the survey)

³² Data for fiscal years 2019 to 2020 and 2020 to 2021 were not used as many of the projects were still underway.

Survey of eligible Youth leader applicants

The survey targeted all eligible youth aged 15 to 30 years, across Canada who expressed interest to the Youth Innovation Component between April 1, 2017 and October 30, 2020. Rather than using a sampling approach, this evaluation attempted to survey 100% of the target population.

In total, 302 eligible youth completed the survey. The overall response rate was 21% (302/1399). The respondents received a \$25 gift card and the opportunity to enter a draw to win a MacBook Air upon completion of the survey.

A contractor completed this line of evidence.

Key limitations (both surveys)

There were a low number of responses from the Territories. This prevented the evaluation from generalizing data for organizations and Youth Accessibility Leaders in the territories.

Results also showed that the time lapse between participation in/application to the Program and administration of the survey had an impact on the response rates. There may have been more disengagement from the Program and recall bias may have affected their participation in the survey.

Key informant interviews

There were 8 internal interviews conducted with government officials involved with the design, delivery and policy aspects of the program.

In total, the Evaluation Directorate invited 74 external stakeholders from funded projects in various regions across Canada to participate in an interview. External interviewees were identified through the surveys in which they were asked to provide consent for a potential KII. There were 54 interviews conducted (N=8 Organizations who received funding through the Youth component; N=34 through the Small projects component and N=6 through the Mid-sized component; and, N=8 with the Youth Accessibility Leaders).

Key limitations

Direct quotes from the informants were not possible since the interviews were not audio-recorded. However, 2 evaluators validated all notes.

For the external interviews, there was very limited representation from the territories. Moreover, the key informant interviews and the survey captured the same individual organization's experiences and viewpoints. However, a deeper understanding of the issues, challenges and successes associated with the Program were gained through the key informant interviews.

Community case studies

In consultation with the Evaluation Working Group, the Evaluation Directorate selected 3 communities for the case studies:

- Ottawa, Ontario

- St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador
- Whitehorse, Yukon

The following criteria were used to make the case selections:

- regional representation (East, Central and North/Western)
- consideration of marginalized populations based on available census data (such as persons with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, newcomers and low-income groups, to the extent possible)
- community size (including rural/remote representation)
- number and type of projects funded

There were 4 lines of evidence used to inform the case studies analysis: interviews (N=17), Enabling Accessibility Fund Organization survey (n=98); administrative data; and the grey literature.

All organization representatives that received funding through the Program, and provided consent for the interview through the survey, were initially contacted by e-mail. In an attempt to increase the response rates, organization representatives in St. John's and Whitehorse were also contacted by phone. Additionally, in Whitehorse, all funded organization representatives that did not participate in the survey were contacted by email.

After the interview with organization representatives, the Evaluation Directorate asked them if they could distribute an invitation letter for beneficiaries/end-users to participate in an interview. No incentive was provided for their participation in an interview.

Key limitations

The 3 case studies offer an in-depth exploration of the 3 communities, but the findings cannot be extrapolated to illustrate the full story of all communities in Canada. Additionally, because of the small number of interviews, information from the case studies is also not generalizable to the entire community and does not necessarily reflect the realities of all organizations in the selected communities.

Generally, community case studies would require an evaluator to be on-site to increase contact with the communities and could use snowball methods to identify additional representatives to participate in the interviews. Due to the pandemic, it was not possible to travel and directly examine/observe the impacts of the projects. Case studies were limited to what the funded organization representatives shared with the Evaluation Directorate and the available gray literature.

Some of the challenges encountered in recruiting interviewees stemmed from the limited number of organizations that had responded to the organization survey in the 3 communities, especially in Whitehorse. Despite the multiple approaches used to increase the interview sample size, it was lower than what was originally intended for the case studies.

In addition, the Evaluation Directorate attempted to reach end-users. There were a limited number of beneficiaries that participated in the interviews, and therefore, this line of evidence was not as comprehensive as desired as it is missing part of the story on the end-users.

Expert panels

Three Expert Panels were conducted between November 29, 2021 and December 2, 2021, with each focused on a different theme to understand their experiences with disabilities and their accessibility needs:

1. youth (15 to 30 years)
2. adults (18 to 65 years)
3. older adults (65+)

Three experts were recruited for each panel. Experts were recruited through an online search of academic institutions, research studies, and advocacy organizations.

Various selection criteria were considered such as recognition as an expert or leader in a field related to disability in Canada with expertise in the Expert Panel age group, familiarity with the Program, as well as ensuring a broad representation across regions, knowledge of different types of disabilities, and gender-based analysis plus identity factors. Priority selection was given for those who were living with a disability. Some of the experts were from academia and/or were co-founders or in senior leadership roles for various disability organizations.

A contractor completed this line of evidence.

Key limitations

The evidence and opinions shared were limited to the perspectives of the nine experts, which limits the generalization of findings.