



Infrastructure  
Canada

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Infrastructure Canada

**Accessibility Plan  
2023-2025**

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Canada 

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## General

This publication is available online at [Infrastructure Canada](#) and upon request in accessible formats.

To request a copy of this Plan, including the feedback process, in an alternative format (i.e., print, large print, braille and/or audio), please send your request to:

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## How to submit your feedback

With the publication of this Plan, the [Accessible Canada Act](#) requires that INFC establish a process for receiving and dealing with feedback about this document, and on the barriers INFC employees and other people (for example, clients, suppliers, the public) face when interacting with the organization (for example, online, in person, by phone). The feedback may consist of a suggestion, compliment, or complaint relating to the Plan or the general accessibility of the organization, or it may relate regards to a person's experience in being accommodated with accessible formats or supports as may be requested when accessing the Plan or providing feedback.

INFC offers various channels to collect feedback — from employees, the public and stakeholders — on its Accessibility Plan and accessibility-related matters:

- By email: [accessibility-accessibilite@infc.gc.ca](mailto:accessibility-accessibilite@infc.gc.ca)
- By mail:  
Senior Officer for Accessibility  
Infrastructure Canada  
180 Kent Street, Suite 1100  
Ottawa, ON K1P 0B6
- By telephone:  
Toll free: 1-877-250-7154  
Teletypewriter (TTY): 1-800-465-7735
- Through an [anonymous feedback form](#)

All feedback will be directed to the Senior Officer for Accessibility, who is designated as INFC's main point of contact responsible to review, respond and analyze the feedback received.

Receipt of acknowledgement will be provided within two weeks of its successful delivery to the designated organizational contact, and will be provided by the same feedback channel in which it was received. Please note that feedback can be submitted anonymously and will be treated as a submission equal to those submitted by an identified person.

All feedback will be taken into consideration during the publication of annual progress reports on the implementation of this Plan and in the triennial renewal of the Plan. Each submission will be retained in electronic or print form for a period of at least seven years after receipt of acknowledgement.

## Privacy Notice

The personal information you provide as part of your feedback is collected under the authority of the [Accessible Canada Act](#) for the purpose of receiving feedback on INFC's Accessibility Plan. The information may be used in progress reports to assess the department's implementation of the Accessibility Plan. Progress reports, which may contain input received in an anonymized state, will be published online. The input provided may be shared in an anonymized state with other INFC employees in order to improve services. The input provided may also be used to inform future Accessibility Plans developed by the department. Other possible uses and sharing of this personal information are described in the [Outreach Activities](#) Personal Information Bank. Failure to provide this information may result in your views and opinions not being known. You have the right to the correction of, access to, and protection of your personal information under the [Privacy Act](#) and to file a complaint with the Privacy Commissioner of Canada over INFC's handling of your information.

By providing feedback, you agree to the collection, use and disclosure of personal information as outlined above.

## Executive summary and commitment statement

Infrastructure Canada (INFC) is proud to introduce its first Accessibility Plan as an important first step towards realizing the [Accessible Canada Act](#)'s commitment to creating a barrier-free Canada by 2040.

With a vision to proactively eliminate and prevent barriers faced by persons with disabilities and ensure greater opportunities for them, the Plan provides a strong foundation for the work that lies ahead to make the organization inclusive by design and accessible by default.

As a first step, the Plan identifies existing barriers to accessibility in the seven key areas identified under the *Accessible Canada Act*:

- Employment
- Built environment
- Information and communication technologies (ICT)
- Communication, other than ICT
- Procurement of goods, services and facilities
- Design and delivery of programs and services
- Transportation

It also identifies the barriers chosen as priorities for action over the next three years, provides a review of completed initiatives and their progress, and outlines the actions proposed to address these barriers over the course of this Plan and beyond.

“Canada is working to become a country, and to help create a world, where persons with disabilities are included in every aspect of society.”

— The Honourable Carla Qualtrough  
Minister of Employment, Workforce Development  
and Disability Inclusion

## Message from the Deputy Minister

With the coming into force in 2019 of the *Accessible Canada Act*, Canada demonstrated its commitment to promoting inclusion and accessibility in communities and workplaces across the country. The implementation of this *Act* also reinforces disability rights in Canada by helping to ensure greater access and opportunities for persons with disabilities.

INFC is proud to join in this commitment with its very first Accessibility Plan, an important step in ensuring that employees living with a disability can contribute fully to the workforce and experience a barrier-free workplace.

In the spirit of “Nothing Without Us”, a series of consultations were held throughout the Department, inviting people with disabilities—managers and allies alike—to share information that was meaningful and useful for identifying, removing, and preventing barriers to accessibility.

INFC’s Accessibility Plan is based on the result of these consultations, which helped identify the barriers and measures to overcome, and the areas most in need of attention for 2023–2025.

The Plan also outlines the actions that will ensure its success, the tools that will enable managers to better support their employees with disabilities, and the targets that will help keep the Department on track and focused on its goals.

I would like to thank everyone involved in this major achievement. Creating INFC’s very first Accessibility Plan is quite an accomplishment, and is an important milestone towards creating a barrier-free Canada by 2040, and shaping a more equitable and accessible public service.

Now is our time to act, because making INFC more accessible and inclusive benefits everyone!

Kelly Gillis  
Deputy Minister  
Infrastructure and Communities



## **Message from the Diversity and Inclusion Champion and the Accessibility Committee Chair**

We are pleased to support INFC's first Accessibility Plan which lays out the identified barriers and the actions needed to improve workplace accessibility over the coming years.

Developed through a series of focus groups and one-on-one interviews to ensure that it is informed by the experiences of persons living with a disability, INFC's Accessibility Plan demonstrates our commitment to the key principle of the Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada: "Nothing Without Us".

In response to the *Accessible Canada Act* that came into force in 2019, the Government of Canada launched this very important strategy as a roadmap for the public service to lead by example and become a model of accessibility for others in Canada and abroad.

As INFC's Chair of the Accessibility Committee and Champion of Diversity and Inclusion, we strongly support the Department's first-ever Accessibility Plan. We believe that this is a much needed and long-awaited step in the right direction. We are hopeful the plan will help advance the goals established to help make Canada's public service the most accessible and inclusive public service in the world. This will result in:

- Improved recruitment, retention and promotion of persons with disabilities
- Enhanced accessibility of the built environment
- Better equipped public servants to design and deliver accessible programs and services
- Usable communications and technology for all, and
- An accessibility-confident public service.

Many of us have some form of disability, whether visible or invisible, or know someone who does. We have had circumstances where we have faced barriers. Although accessibility issues can't always disappear, supportive environments, tools and people can make a difference to those who are dealing with barriers.

We all have a role to play in making our workplace accessible by default. Let's work together to make it inclusive and accessible for all.

Hasib Mamtaz  
Diversity and Inclusion Champion

Josie Sirna  
Accessibility Committee Chair

## Consultations

### Overview

Prioritizing the lived experiences of persons with disabilities requires us to go beyond prescriptive definitions of disability, accessibility and accommodation to listen to and account for the perspectives and preferences of the individuals for whom we are designing this plan. This foundational principle referred to as “Nothing Without Us” asks that nothing—including laws, policies, regulations or programs, with the potential to have an impact on persons with disabilities—be developed without their direct input and consideration.

Accordingly, this Accessibility Plan has been developed in the spirit of “Nothing Without Us”, with the ongoing support and engagement of persons with disabilities and managers at INFC; the latter of which have helped us determine the tools they need to best support their staff.

Through a series of questionnaires, focus groups, interviews, and literature reviews, the ideas and considerations of persons with disabilities have been and will be incorporated at every juncture to ensure that this Plan and its future iterations are designed with their best interests in mind.

The following section details the results of the consultation and co-creation process as well as the approach for soliciting ongoing feedback that will inform annual progress reports and Plan renewals.

After years of discussion on how we do business and what should be done to make federal workplaces and our employees’ work experience more accessible, the need for concrete action has grown significantly. It is therefore important to ensure that persons with disabilities are not only engaged in the process, but also confident in our ability to affect enduring, equitable change. The combination of ongoing engagement, the success of existing initiatives, and the effective and efficient implementation of this Plan will help build more trust and confidence for years to come as we work with persons with disabilities to achieve a barrier-free organization by 2040.

### Pre-draft research and engagement

The complexity of creating a departmental accessibility plan called for us to take into account a variety of perspectives and the lived experiences of persons with disabilities at every stage of the Plan’s creation. During the early design stage of the Plan, we were able to leverage existing sources of data internal and external to INFC.

Existing sources of data included accessibility-related feedback from an employee survey conducted in fall 2021, the findings of engagement with employees on the transition to hybrid work, the results of the 2020 Public Service Employee Survey which incorporated input from employees across the federal public service, and data from the 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability which provided aggregated information and national statistics on the lived experiences of persons living with a disability.

This was supplemented by the collective knowledge of government-wide working groups and forums, including the Interdepartmental Accessibility Community of Practice (IACoP), various discussion boards on the GCcollab and GCconnex platforms, and our collaboration with other departments and agencies who were developing plans of their own. We also consulted the [Guidelines on Making Communications Products and Activities Accessible](#) to ensure that our Plan would meet the highest possible standards for accessibility.

## **Internal direction-setting and identification of barriers**

As the Plan was being developed based on the guidelines provided by ESDC, leads for the seven priority areas were identified among INFC employees to represent the interests of and be responsible for the actions of their respective functional areas.

In consultation with these area leads, we began the exercise of completing the Public Service Organization Accessibility Self-Assessment Tool (SAT) that allowed us to assess our organization's current accessibility readiness. Part of this process included an early identification of the barriers that exist in each of the seven priority areas as well as the completed and ongoing initiatives that could already count as actions taken towards addressing these barriers.

This initial consultation was augmented by direct outreach to the members of INFC's Diversity and Inclusion Committee for Accessibility and our Anti-Racism, Equity and Inclusion (AREI) Division and its specialized Community Advisors.

## **Department-wide consultations**

With the overall direction and barriers well-defined, the theme of "Nothing Without Us" inspired our department to engage all employees and managers in the development of our first Accessibility Plan. Promoting this opportunity through a number of internal communications channels, we held consultations through which interested participants could provide input on selected themes and approaches, confirm the validity of identified barriers, and help prioritize what they believe to be the most pressing barriers to address and the possible actions that should be taken to address them.

Although persons with disabilities were the primary audience for these consultations, we also involved managers who we felt could provide valuable input on their experience and the tools that they believe are needed to help them better support and empower their employees living with disabilities to succeed.

To ensure a wide array of input, several avenues for engagement were offered:

- Four focus group sessions held in English and French over a two-week period, from late August to September using Microsoft Teams and Mentimeter software;
- Two personal interviews, conducted in English (at the choice of the interviewee) using Microsoft Teams and Mentimeter, with interested employees who could not attend a focus group session but still wished to provide their feedback verbally; and,
- A bilingual questionnaire hosted on the Microsoft Forms platform over a two-week period.

During the department-wide consultation phase, approximately 37 individuals were able to provide direct contributions, including 17 persons with a disability, 10 managers, and 10 allies.

No matter the method of engagement, there was strong, positive feedback from nearly all participants on the direction of the Plan. A recurring comment from persons with disabilities was that they felt seen by the themes, approaches, and barriers presented during the consultation sessions.

The consultations helped us to confirm the barriers that had been identified in partnership with representatives of the seven priority areas from across the department. However, the first prompt of this section presented only the priority areas and asked participants about the barriers they could identify or had personally experienced in the workplace.

This was done to ensure that the discussion on barriers would begin with an unbiased exercise that drew from lived experiences of persons with disabilities while also allowing us to identify any that we may have missed.

The following portion took the form of a reflexive exercise to encourage a critical discussion on the barriers identified in a way that allowed for continual adaptation and learning on the merits of each. The barriers were grouped under the seven priority areas and shown to participants, who were asked to comment on the impacts of these barriers on their ability to participate in the workplace and share ideas on how they could be eliminated.

A validating exercise was then introduced that allowed participants to rank the barriers under each priority area based on what they believed to be the most urgent or meaningful to address within the first iteration of the departmental accessibility plan.

The combination of these reflexive and validating exercises allowed us to finalize the list of barriers identified within our organization, determine a priority order for the barriers which were believed to be the most pressing for immediate action, and propose potential actions for eliminating the barriers by addressing the root cause of the issues.

Feedback on these consultation sessions was overwhelmingly positive, with specific mention being made of how the prompts and discussions that followed were meaningful and unafraid to tackle challenging ideas and concepts which showed our willingness to go beyond the surface of accessibility.

For the live sessions in particular, the final comments showed an excitement among participants to see the Plan progress, the momentum that it signifies, and the timeliness of its creation.

In the words of one individual, "It's about time for us to be doing this work."

## Development of the implementation guide

Once the department-wide consultations were complete, the representatives of priority areas were asked to review the complete list of barriers and determine the actions that could be undertaken to address the priority barriers, as well as identifying what they would need to tackle the outstanding barriers in the future (e.g., tools, competencies, collaborations).

The feedback from the area leads was then reviewed, carefully considering the needs, assets, and actions that might overlap across priority areas to identify where partnerships could be established between teams to strengthen the impact of the collective actions rather than duplicating efforts.

This coordination and planning concluded with the creation of the implementation guide outlined in the [final section](#) of this Plan, which provides a comprehensive review of completed and ongoing initiatives that can contribute to the elimination of a barrier, and the proposed priority actions that the organization will undertake to help eliminate priority barriers within the next three years, as well as other planned actions which will need to be further developed.

## Final approval

The support of management across the department was an important final step in the consultation process. Approval of the Plan and its implementation guide was solicited through the following governance committees:

- Directors' Committee;
- Directors General Management Committee; and,
- Deputy Minister's Executive Committee.

Presentations to and subsequent discussions with each of these governance bodies allowed for a unified perspective on and commitment to the Plan and the proposed actions to be undertaken, balancing the need for action with the Department's capacity to reasonably achieve these goals.

## Publication

This Plan will be published on INFC's departmental website and promoted in early 2023 through the organization's social media channels. The Accessibility Commissioner will be notified by email immediately upon publication of the Plan, thereby fulfilling our obligations under the *Accessible Canada Act*. Alternative formats of the Plan will be stored at INFC's offices in Ottawa and can be requested through one of the methods listed in the "General" section of this Plan.

## **Future engagement**

### **Annual progress reports**

Under the *Accessible Canada Act*, departments are required to publish yearly progress reports by December 31, 2023 and 2024 outlining the work done to complete the proposed actions planned for that year. These annual progress reports will be informed by direct engagement with the representatives of the priority areas responsible for any actions proposed for the calendar year in question.

In addition to identifying whether we have completed the actions laid out in this plan, this collaborative review will help us determine the best practices, lessons learned, and other valuable insights that can inform our approach to actions in subsequent years.

An important component of the progress reports will be the findings of bilingual consultation sessions with persons with disabilities, whose review of the progress will be used to determine whether the actions that have been completed are effectively addressing the barriers laid out in this original plan and are having a positive impact.

### **Triennial plan renewal**

INFC Accessibility Plan has a lifecycle based on three calendar years, after which it will be revised and renewed for the following three-year period.

This cycle will continue until 2040, after which the Plan and each of its future iterations is projected to have eliminated all barriers to accessibility that exist within the organization.

The annual progress reports published in each non-renewal year will inform the actions that have been achieved thus far and the work left to be done, and a comprehensive engagement with the representatives of all priority areas will be conducted to review the overall implementation of the Plan.

Following the consultative process undertaken to create this Plan (as described in the previous section), this review will be supplemented by department-wide engagement with all interested employees and managers to determine whether or not the actions completed over the first three years have made a positive impact on the identified barriers to accessibility, to ensure that any new barriers can be identified, and to reflect on the effectiveness of our approach to eliminate barriers and create an equitable, inclusive environment.

Renewal of the Plan will require us to repeat the process undertaken to create this first iteration, and will include a new implementation guide specific to the work that is left to be done and how its proposed actions will address the barriers identified as the priorities for the duration of the new plan.

## Identifying barriers to accessibility: What we heard

As we delve deeper into the present state of accessibility in our organization, identifying all potential barriers that exist within INFC and in the way we serve Canadians marks an important step in understanding what can and must be done to achieve a barrier-free INFC.

The following tools and resources helped us to complete this exercise: pre-draft research, the use of the Accessibility Self-Assessment Tool, engagement with representatives from each of the seven priority areas and other relevant parties, and department-wide consultations with persons with disabilities, managers and allies.

These consultations were particularly useful to ensure that a wide range of perspectives would be considered when identifying barriers to accessibility.

Throughout this plan, you will find the barriers listed under each priority area. They appear in order of importance based on the results of the ranking exercise completed by consultation participants. Although this first plan will not tackle all of the barriers identified, this self-assessment will help us determine which barriers are the most urgent and impactful to address through the current plan and its future iterations.

### Employment

Consultations on the *Accessible Canada Act* and on the development of the Accessibility Plan revealed that employment is considered to be the greatest cause for concern and area for improvement among persons with disabilities and managers alike. We believe that dismantling the barriers in this area will have the greatest impact in improving accessibility and building an equitable and inclusive workforce.

#### **Barrier 1.1: Lack of centralized funding and coordination for workplace accommodations**

Among the seven barriers identified in the priority area of employment, the most urgent was identified as the decentralized approach to accessing accommodations in the workplace for INFC employees.

Accommodations requests are currently dealt with on a case-by-case basis with the first point of contact for initiating such requests being between the requesting employee and their manager or Human Resources Advisor. Upon discussing the employee's needs and the measures that could be taken by the organization to help them fully participate in the workplace, the manager and/or Human Resources Advisor then becomes responsible for coordinating with the various teams involved in fulfilling the request (i.e., Labour Relations, Health and Safety, Information Technology).

Further to this, the funds that may be required to provide any such accommodation measures are provided in an inconsistent manner and derived from the cost centre of the employee's manager rather than from a centralized cost centre. This creates two potential issues:

1. As stewards of public funds, managers (and/or cost centre managers) may be apprehensive about fulfilling requests they consider to be 'wishes' which have a monetary component in order to avoid the potential misuse of public funds; and,
2. Persons with disabilities may feel pressure and be concerned about whether their manager's cost centre has the necessary funds to fulfill the request, causing them to minimize their request or request lesser accommodation measures than they truly need.

This decentralized approach to accommodations, both in terms of coordinating and funding such requests, creates a serious issue for persons with disabilities and managers who must deal with a delayed process that creates needless pressure and is not standardized across INFC.

This lack of standardization across the Department means that persons with disabilities may experience the process of requesting and receiving accommodations very differently across teams, divisions and branches.

Similarly, the accommodations that a person living with a disability is able to request from their manager is not well known across the organization. Without awareness of the types of accommodations available or examples of accommodations that have worked for other persons with the same disability, it is difficult for one to know what they can request. When factoring in the notion of invisible disabilities, this difficulty is compounded by the lack of options or awareness on what accommodations may be needed for certain invisible disabilities which can result in measures being implemented that do not meet the needs of the requesting employee.

### **Barrier 1.2: Representation gap of persons with disabilities**

According to Statistics Canada's 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability, 3.7 million, or 20% of Canadians aged 25 to 64, are persons with disabilities; only 2.1 million or 11.2% of these persons are currently employed within the workforce.

In September 2022, employment equity (EE) data showed a gap between Workforce Availability and representation of persons with disabilities; 6% of employees self-identified as a person with a disability versus a rate of availability of 8.5% (note: EE data is limited to indeterminate and term employees, not casuals or students, and is collected by an employee's self-identification of their disability).

Considering the federal government's pledge to hire 5,000 persons with disabilities by 2025, INFC must do more to hire persons with disabilities, including students. We are committed to helping close this gap within the Department and across the public service and ensuring that persons with disabilities are well-represented within our workforce.

### **Barrier 1.3: Emotional labour of self-advocacy and providing proof of disability**

For most persons with disabilities, one of the most difficult parts of navigating the workplace lies in the burden of having to constantly advocate for themselves and provide justification for how their disability affects them and how a proposed accommodation measure, could have a positive impact on their ability to contribute to the organization.



More often than not, the burden is placed on the person with a disability to prove why a certain accommodation is needed and what that accommodation should look like. Without any knowledge or awareness of the accommodation measures that have been made available to other employees, there is often great uncertainty and stress surrounding the situation, particularly when an individual's disability and proposed accommodation does not fit into the mould of visible disabilities that manifest physically.

Even initiating the conversation with their manager can be a cause for concern when these persons become fearful of potential retribution or of identifying as disabled without any positive impact. A certain level of trust must be established between an employee and their manager before they can begin to discuss the barriers that they experience at work. The manager must also be open and willing to engage in a dialogue that may shift their expectations of how their employee works. They may even be unaware of why such changes are needed.

The medical model of disability still prevails in how we perceive this barrier, with the expectation being that persons with disabilities will need a doctor's note detailing their disability and providing justification for their potential accommodations before their manager will take any action on the issue. Getting a doctor's note is not always easy, particularly in areas of the country with strained health care systems resulting in long wait times, and may also come with a cost. Requiring this of persons with disabilities should be a thing of the past.

The combination of these elements, along with the sustained emotional labour of self-advocacy for one's need for accommodations and the need to constantly provide proof of their disability through one form or other, is extremely stressful for persons with disabilities. The variation in how managers approach these situations only compounds the pressure that is faced when not knowing what to expect.

This barrier has been identified as a top priority for persons with disabilities. It would be a truly meaningful and welcome change if this emotional labour could be eliminated.

#### **Barrier 1.4: Limited interpretation of disability and how it manifests in the broader environment**

Understanding what constitutes a disability and whether someone could be eligible for or might benefit from potential accommodation measures is another barrier of concern for those who identify as having a disability as well as those who may not be aware that they have a disability, are unwilling to disclose their status, or do not yet know enough to feel comfortable with it.

Outdated definitions of disability, in particular, definitions of invisible disabilities, can create boundaries and confusion regarding whether a person's invisible disability qualifies for accommodation or if it can even be accommodated in the workplace.

The Employment Equity Self-Identification Questionnaire is one example of the limited interpretation of disability within the organization. Individuals may not identify with the outdated definitions included in the questionnaire and may feel uncomfortable self-identifying as a person with a disability.

### **Barrier 1.5: Lack of community and sense of belonging for persons with disabilities**

As a smaller department, INFC does not have as many networks or employee support groups (ESGs) as some other federal organizations. The networks that have been established here are generally smaller and less active given the volunteer nature of these groups.

While there is a Champion for Diversity and Inclusion, the Committee for Accessibility also shares this Champion with all other employment equity groups. This committee only meets on an ad hoc basis, which greatly limits its impact.

For persons with disabilities, this means that there is very little opportunity to build a community and meet others with whom they can share their lived experiences and know that they are not alone. It can be particularly difficult for those who are new in self-identifying as a person with a disability to go through the process alone and without support from peers.

Creating community and safe spaces for persons with a disability to connect with their peers and find a sense of belonging is an important step towards creating a culture of inclusion.

### **Barrier 1.6: Limited opportunity and support for career progression**

Many persons with disabilities feel that they are limited by their diagnosis when it comes to career progression. For these persons, the notion that the Government of Canada is committed to hiring 5,000 persons with disabilities by 2025 brings to mind the idea that the positions to be filled will be lower-level positions which will not allow for career advancement.

In terms of career development programs, there is a significant gap that is currently only filled by a mentorship program open to members of all employment equity groups (with 21 employees currently enrolled) and an interdepartmental leadership development program that is open to members of all employment equity groups, which currently has one participant from INFC.

The fact that neither of these programs is specifically tailored to persons with disabilities only amplifies the concern that persons with disabilities are either being grouped with other minority groups for the purpose of raising rates of diverse representation or brought in to fill administrative and clerical roles.

As we look to help persons with disabilities fully participate in the workplace and support them in advancing their careers and finding their perfect fit within the organization, there is a growing need to ensure that we are designing pathways for their training and development.

### **Barrier 1.7: Increased risk of facing harassment and experiencing stress/anxiety on the job**

With all of the barriers to accessibility and the associated stigma that surrounds conversations on disability, there is heightened concern about the possibility of facing harassment in the form of microaggressions when one is open about their disability in the workplace. There is a certain level of stress and anxiety that comes with this as persons with disabilities navigate an environment where there is the potential for stereotyping, unconscious biases and a lack of respect towards them.

There is a significant lack of awareness among employees at all levels regarding disability and the impacts that it can have on a person in their everyday life. This deficit contributes to an increased risk of harassment and anxiety, particularly when there are insufficient conversations on the topic taking place within the organization. As a result, persons with disabilities do not feel comfortable sharing their lived experiences with their peers.

The unconscious biases and stigma around disability will take time and effort to deconstruct, but it is an important step that must be taken if we are to create a welcoming space.

## **Built environment**

This priority area focuses on the design, layout and functionality of the built environment and ensuring that it is accessible to all. INFC consultations revealed the top five most prevalent barriers in the built environment of our organization and provided insight as to how we may begin to address them.

### **Barrier 2.1: “One-size-fits-all” approach for designing post-pandemic offices and hybrid work plans**

Through our consultations, we often heard that the “one-size-fits-all” approach for office design does not actually “fit all”. In fact, this approach leaves out several important accessibility considerations, such as support for those who do not fit in the “one-size-fits-all” accessible washrooms on-site, changes to key policies, consultations with persons with disabilities in choosing office furniture, and more. The “one-size-fits-all” approach fails to focus on the work being done by employees and instead, focuses on where employees are physically doing the work. In addition, the messaging around the purpose of returning to the workplace has been inconsistent to the point where employees with disabilities find it difficult to understand how it may be an advantage to them. Some employees expressed fear that the inclusion INFC has created thus far could be compromised by the emphasis on the return to the workplace and a lack of understanding of the benefits of remote work, especially as an accommodation for persons with disabilities.

It’s important to keep in mind that every individual has a unique experience of their disability, which helps us understand why a “one-size-fits-all” approach to designing offices and hybrid work plans is not effective for welcoming persons with disabilities into our organization. This is supported by the findings of our consultations. Welcoming persons with disabilities into our organization is important, not only because we are aiming to increase the number of persons with disabilities in our organization, but because persons with disabilities contribute a valuable and unique perspective to the work we do.

### **Barrier 2.2: Limited awareness of accessibility features in the physical workplace**

Our consultations confirmed that a lack of information about accessibility features in the physical workplace is one of the largest barriers to accessibility in the organization’s built environment.

Many employees shared that they are aware they need accommodations but aren't actually sure what they require. It was noted that this is often the case for those who have been newly diagnosed, as it takes time to understand a diagnosis and to determine which accommodation measures will work through trial-and-error.

Managers agreed that they would appreciate a community, group or toolbox that could provide consistent information on accessibility and share examples of accommodations that have helped other persons with disabilities in the past. It would be important to promote this group or tool to all INFC employees.

**Barrier 2.3: Adapting evacuation plans instead of including persons with disabilities in at the design stage**

Persons with disabilities need to be consulted on the building's evacuation plan to ensure their needs will be addressed in the event of an evacuation. It is important that employees be made aware of how to provide feedback on evacuation plans or following an evacuation drill.

**Barrier 2.4: Availability of contacts for immediate assistance and for reporting accessibility issues**

Employees must be made aware of who to contact should they need assistance or if they would like to report an accessibility issue. Persons with disabilities must feel confident that they can easily obtain help when needed.

**Barrier 2.5: Navigating ergonomic assessments, particularly while working at home**

Through the consultations, employees indicated that there was ambiguity in the process for requesting ergonomic assessments while working at home. As a result, some employees purchased ergonomic equipment for their home office.

Employees also recommended that ergonomic assessments should be done at the desk they work at the majority of the time, whether in the workplace or at home. The current policy should be revised in order to make ergonomic assessments available to all employees, regardless if they are working from home with or without a telework agreement in place. The person being accommodated should be at the centre of the discussion, something the Government of Canada Workplace Accessibility Passport will help with, however, it is up to the managers and functional areas to ensure they include the person in all communications. Going even further, the ideal future state would be to make ergonomic assessments the standard for all employees as part of onboarding, rather than just as an accommodation measure for persons with disabilities. This would represent true accessibility and an accessible-by-default approach and would take the onus off the employees having to advocate for themselves.

## **Information and communication technologies (ICT)**

This priority area is concerned with barrier-free tools and technology to support persons with disabilities in their work.

In general, consultations informed us that Information and Communication Technologies already exist within INFC and that there is a willingness to use them. However, there is a widespread lack of knowledge on what is available and how best to use these technologies. There was consensus that emerging technologies can offer some great tools but accessibility can be negatively impacted due to a lack of user knowledge, and in some cases, rolling out new technologies too quickly without consulting persons with disabilities.

### **Barrier 3.1: Growing need for the right technology to support persons with disabilities in their work**

Equipping the organization with the right technology to support employees in their work is necessary and it is especially important to provide persons with disabilities with the tools to support their specific needs. A concrete example of this, provided through consultations, is the need for the Department to have the technology required to test the accessibility of documents.

### **Barrier 3.2: Challenges with person-first collaboration in a hybrid environment**

Challenges with person-first collaboration in a remote-first environment can further exacerbate Barrier 1.5 – Lack of community and sense of belonging for persons with disabilities.

### **Barrier 3.3: Fragmented knowledge and limited functional training of best practices for ICT accessibility**

Training on information and communication technologies is needed throughout the Department, but it's important to recognize that individuals may be at different places in their accessibility journey. Offering gradual, optional, and consistent learning opportunities would allow people to participate when and where they are comfortable, and would also ensure that new employees could take this important training when they join the Department.

In addition to the right tools and technology (Barrier 3.1), functional training on best practices for ICT accessibility could help address the gap in testing documents to be made publicly available for accessibility. Part of the difficulty in properly testing the accessibility of documents is that different tests are required for different types of disabilities and needs, which means that various testing tools and technologies are required. The only way to successfully identify the tools and technologies, as well as the testing needed, and to confirm the validity of the outcome of the tests, is through regular and meaningful interaction with persons with disabilities in our organization. In other words, persons with disabilities should be consulted on any tools, technology or tests that are being considered and should be fully involved in the process to procure and introduce them. This leads us to the next point - the need for effective and accessible feedback mechanisms.

### **Barrier 3.4: Limited ways for users to provide regular feedback on ICT-specific accessibility issues**

Feedback from consultations on Barrier 3.3 reminds us of the importance of fully involving persons with disabilities in the process of identifying best practices, in line with the theme of “Nothing Without Us”. In order to fully involve persons with disabilities and all users who may experience ICT-specific accessibility issues, it should be easy for them to provide regular feedback. Any feedback channels must be accessible to all; if they are not, the organization risks losing valuable perspectives. This also means that a mix of traditional and alternative feedback channels will likely be required to allow everyone to contribute in a meaningful way.

### **Communication, other than ICT**

INFC is committed to making communications accessible for the public and employees alike. It does so by following existing Government of Canada guidelines and best practices, including principles of design to create accessible Web and social media content. Creating accessible communications also makes it possible for everyone to have the equal opportunity to find and use information and services as well as take part in a dialogue. We recognize that some barriers make it more challenging, but welcome the opportunity to improve in these areas by promoting best practices.

### **Barrier 4.1: Information is not always accessible to all employees**

Consultations pointed to several ways that information can be inaccessible; some are quick and easy to improve on, while others will require ongoing accessibility training and effort to address. To better understand how we can make information accessible to all, it is worth looking at this accessibility through a few different lenses.

We need to ask ourselves if the information is accessible for whom it is intended, taking into consideration their specific needs. Is it easy to request alternate formats or assistance? Could anyone, regardless of their ability or disability, find a way to successfully get help? This is important because, as we know, no two experiences of a disability are alike.

The next question that is useful to ask is, if the person receiving the information must ask for alternative formats, will they be provided to them in a timely manner so that they can participate to the same extent that others may participate? Through our consultations, employees gave examples of situations where they were sent inaccessible PDF documents and had to request Word documents. Not only could this situation make persons with disabilities feel like a burden to their employer, but it also prevents them from participating to the same degree that others can.

Managers noted that it can be very difficult for them to support their employees when materials are not fully accessible. Without mandating certain aspects of accessibility, we risk unintentionally creating barriers to information.

Although it was not specifically mentioned during consultations with employees, the department recognizes that its data can be made more accessible, and will consider improving data accessibility as it works to address this barrier.

#### **Barrier 4.2: Departmental events and activities are not always inclusive and accessible to all employees**

An employee noted during our consultations that events and activities are not always inclusive and accessible to everyone due to information not being accessible to all in the first place. This means that Barrier 4.2 likely only exists, or exists in part, due to Barrier 4.1. In order for events and activities to be fully accessible to all, it's important to start with making the invitation and preparatory documents accessible to all. An inaccessible invitation is just one of many examples of how events and activities are not always inclusive and accessible to everyone.

When planning activities and events, consideration should be given to selecting an accessible venue, and hiring a sign language interpreter or including captions if the event is virtual. The technology and tools used in events and activities should allow all attendees an equal opportunity to participate. Despite the organizations' best intentions, this is not currently the case.

#### **Procurement of goods, services and facilities**

This priority area relates to the accessibility of the procurement process itself and with the accessibility of the goods, services and facilities that are procured. It is also concerned with targeting procurement activities towards underrepresented groups, to both increase representation and inclusivity. Where possible, goods, services and facilities purchased should be accessible by design, allowing Canadians with disabilities to use them without adaptation.

#### **Barrier 5.1: Consulting after procurement instead of involving persons with disabilities early in the process**

Through our consultations, we learned that persons with disabilities feel that many decisions regarding accessibility—decisions that affect them greatly—are made without hearing their unique ideas and perspectives. Too often, they find out about a new tool that was procured for persons with disabilities during a public forum and are left feeling like their voice doesn't matter. This reiterates the need for meaningful and consistent engagement with persons with disabilities, which we see as a reoccurring theme in the feedback received for all priority areas.

If persons with disabilities are not consulted in the initial design stage of procurement, we risk not finding the best fit for the procurement need. One might think that this is only relevant in cases where goods, services or facilities are being procured for persons with disabilities, but it is important to consider that according to the most recent general disability data published by Statistics Canada, the [2017 Canadian Survey on Disability Reports](#), 1 in 5 Canadians aged 15 years and older (22%) has one or more disabilities.

In short, it is in the best interest of INFC and Canadians that persons with disabilities have the opportunity to provide input on procurement processes. By involving persons with disabilities early in the procurement process, the organization may gain valuable insight that will help to simplify the complex process for procuring the services of external service providers, and may learn how to better engage underrepresented groups in procurement activities. This would contribute to dismantling Barriers 5.2 and 5.3.

### **Barrier 5.2: Complex process for procuring the services of external service providers**

Participants in consultations recommended that INFC's Procurement Services Team should create a standing list of open vendors and offers, by consulting persons with disabilities, to ensure the right people have the right services, at the right time.

In addition to the complex process for procuring the services of external providers, it is challenging to target procurement activities towards underrepresented groups, which should also be considered by the Procurement Team when creating a standing list of open vendors and offers.

### **Barrier 5.3: Challenges of targeting procurement activities towards underrepresented groups**

As mentioned under Barrier 5.3 above, if Procurement Services creates a standing list of open vendors and offers, it is important to consider the challenges of targeting procurement activities towards underrepresented groups.

## **Design and delivery of programs and services**

This priority area is concerned with the accessible design and delivery of programs and services, both for INFC employees and Canadians.

In our consultations, participants said that when they think of accessibility in programs and services, they think of equal access to services and information. This statement points to a generalized misunderstanding of equality, equity and accessibility, and if not addressed in the design and delivery of programs and services, risks compromising their accessibility.

By clarifying that the ultimate goal is an accessible and barrier-free environment, we put aside the notion that programs and services should be designed to provide equal access to all, which is a nearly impossible endeavour if you consider that no two experiences of a disability are alike. If equal access is provided to a group of individuals with various needs, it is likely that the needs of those who differ from the majority will not be met.

With the goal of a barrier-free environment, we not only distance ourselves from the idea of equal access, but also from the idea of equitable access to programs and services. Equitable access means that individuals with unique needs are provided additional tools and support to help them access the same programs and services as all other individuals. This may sound good in theory, but this approach still places a burden on the person with disability to rely on additional support and



tools, which, as we heard in consultations, often results in the individual being late, participating at a slower rate, or missing the opportunity altogether.

Barrier-free design and delivery of programs and services would remove barriers from the environment as much as possible, making it more accessible. Persons with disabilities could then participate without having to request or rely on additional tools and support measures.

### **Barrier 6.1: Policy design regularly prioritizes other concerns over accessibility**

An example of this raised in consultations—internal to INFC—was the impacts of the hybrid direction for those with accessibility concerns, such as ergonomic assessments. As mentioned in Barrier 2.1, under the area of the built environment, there is a perception that ergonomic assessment practices have not been updated in conjunction with the hybrid direction, thus creating a barrier for those working from home to access ergonomic assessments.

### **Barrier 6.2: Unclear requirements for accessibility in programs**

One suggestion brought up in consultations, was to include accessibility-related step in the design of processes. Another idea of creating an accessible-by-default webpage for programs and services was also brought up as a potential way to help clarify the requirements for accessibility in programs and services.

### **Barrier 6.3: Gap in the availability of information, data and ongoing feedback mechanisms on accessibility**

Overall, consultations confirmed that there is a gap in availability of data, which is in part due to barriers in communication and tools which are addressed earlier in the communications-related sections (ICT and non-ICT). Another reason for this lack of data is that feedback mechanisms do not exist to collect the data. Closing this data gap is crucial for our organization to be able to make informed decisions based on the feedback received. This leads to the next point: there needs to be a way for people to provide ongoing feedback. As we heard throughout all our consultations, there should be meaningful and ongoing engagement with persons with disabilities, to ensure that the persons who will benefit from the removal of the barriers will be heard.

When creating and implementing feedback mechanisms, it is important to ensure that users will have enough space to provide detailed comments, in the official language of their choice; such as using text boxes with longer character limits. A suggestion for an improvement that could be applied immediately at INFC would be to include comment boxes on the “Nothing Without Us” page on INFC’s internal website. This would allow staff to provide regular, ongoing feedback on accessibility.

Consultation participants also expressed the need to prioritize feedback provided by persons with disabilities. Additionally, it was recommended that feedback provided by persons without lived experience be reviewed by persons living with a disability, which would enable maximum participation by those with lived experience.

Managers expressed interest in receiving continual feedback on the experience of persons with disabilities as this plan is implemented, so that they could continue to learn how to better support their employees.

**Barrier 6.4: Fragmented knowledge and limited functional training on accessibility for policy and programs**

Consultations revealed that the overall knowledge of accessibility requirements and best practices for policy and program design and delivery is inconsistent, incomplete and compartmentalized across INFC.

The current knowledge of accessibility requirements and best practices is inconsistent from an internal and external policy and program point of view; as well as being inconsistent throughout the different work areas at INFC.

The fragmented knowledge on accessibility for policy and programs design and delivery can, in part, be addressed by functional training.

When offering functional training on accessibility, it will be important to offer it to all INFC employees, and especially to those working on all policies and programs. This will help ensure that policies and programs developed and implemented in the INFC workplace and those that will impact Canadians are accessible.

To further ensure that policies and programs are accessible, we should consider including persons with disabilities at every step in the creation or review of a policy or program; and rather than making this inclusion mandatory, the focus should instead be on ensuring that the voices and perspectives of those with disabilities are heard.

**Transportation**

We acknowledge that barriers to accessible transportation may exist for employees and Canadians alike. INFC remains committed to improving the quality of life of Canadians by investing in infrastructure to foster more inclusive and sustainable communities. However, this Priority Area under the *Accessible Canada Act* falls outside the scope of this Plan.

## Dismantling barriers for all: A plan for action

As we approach the task of creating a barrier-free organization, we must identify meaningful and reasonable actions that can be achieved in a timely and effective manner. Although the previous section revealed the full extent of barriers that exist within INFC, the prioritization exercise completed during department-wide consultations helped us determine which actions should be taken within the first three years of our plan, and would be seen as both positive and significant.

The following section outlines the actions that have been identified as priorities to be addressed in our initial Accessibility Plan. These actions will help us address the barriers which are currently most prevalent at INFC. The highest priority action is to create a new Centre of Expertise for Accessibility at INFC, as the majority of other actions will rely on the capacity, guidance and assistance from this team.

Each priority action will be followed by an overview of the actions that have already been taken, are in progress or that can be attributed as a step towards the elimination of a barrier. With the creation of the Centre of Expertise for Accessibility, area representatives within INFC will be provided with the accessibility resources they need to address the rest of the barriers identified in this Plan which will be further detailed in INFC's 2023 Progress Report.

### Priority actions

#### **Action #1 (Employment): Build a centre of expertise for accessibility at INFC, as a partner for priority areas and to coordinate/fund accommodations**

**Lead:** Assistant Deputy Minister (ADM), Corporate Services Branch (CSB)

**Timeframe:** By March 31, 2023

**Goal:** To create a supporting function that will lead to improved support to address the majority of the barriers here-in. One clear example is that this action will help address Employment Barrier 1.1: Lack of centralized funding and coordination for workplace accommodations as well as support all other barriers. This will help improve workplace accommodations so that employees have the tools they need to succeed, and to measure and reduce the time it takes to receive these tools.

#### **Indicators of success:**

- Team is in place and operational to help improve workplace accommodations so that employees have the tools they need to succeed
- Team is available to support the seven priority areas leads as a partner to help bridge knowledge and awareness gaps in the space of accessibility

**Implementation guide:**

- The ADM CSB will determine where the new Centre of Expertise for Accessibility will be housed within the INFC structure, as well as the structure of the team itself and how many full-time-equivalent employees will be required
- The ADM CSB is responsible for the staffing process for the new team
- To be operationally functional, the new Centre of Expertise for Accessibility members must have the necessary training and resources
- As a priority, a process will need to be put in place for the new team to coordinate workplace accommodations, track requests, collect regular and ongoing feedback to allow for continual data collection and improvement of operations, and report on progress

**Action #2 (Employment): Pursue the recruitment of persons with disabilities to meet Workforce Availability targets by 2025**

**Lead:** INFC's Centre of Expertise for Accessibility in collaboration with key INFC area representatives

**Timeframe:** By December 31, 2025

**Goal:** To address Employment Barrier 1.2: Representation gap of persons with disabilities, by meeting [Workforce Availability](#) targets. The goal in meeting Workforce Availability targets is to close the gap in representation of persons with disabilities in our organization, so that INFC is representative of the broader Canadian population, which it serves.

**Indicator of success:**

- Workforce Availability targets will be considered met when the Employment Equity Self-Identification data shows representation of persons with disabilities is higher than the identified Workforce Availability targets by the end of 2025.

**Implementation guide:**

- Once established, the new Centre of Expertise for Accessibility will support the Talent Acquisition team, Corporate Staffing, Hiring Managers, Student Hub (recruitment), HR Partners, the AREI Division, as well as external organizations and potentially other relevant partners and area representatives with the following actions helping to meet our goal.

**The following highlights some of the work that is underway to address this priority action:**

**Employment Equity Self-identification campaign**

From 2020 to 2022, a self-identification campaign was held at INFC to encourage employees to self-identify. The campaign was directed towards all employees, including casuals, students, new employees and employees who did not yet have access to the form in INFC's human resources information management system. Emails were distributed, providing information on the benefits of self-identifying, examples of how self-identifying has improved initiatives within the organization and how it can help in the future. The messages also provided links and forms to make it easier for employees to self-identify and information on whom to contact with questions or concerns.

### **Recruitment measures taken to prioritize hiring persons with disabilities**

In 2019, the Talent Acquisition team offered two opportunities for hiring managers throughout the organization to review assessment material for several large collective processes for various groups and levels. These processes were launched to create fully qualified pools of candidates for hiring managers throughout INFC, based on an analysis of needs. INFC accepted all applicants and simultaneously prioritized hiring members of employment equity groups, which includes persons with disabilities. All qualified candidates that identified as part of an employment equity group were referred to hiring managers first. To further facilitate this and ensure that the list of qualified employment equity candidates was an attractive and ready-to-use option for hiring managers, candidates in employment equity groups were assessed before those who did not belong to an employment equity group. This ensured that candidates belonging to employment equity groups were ready for hire first, which increased their chances of being hired as there were many immediate needs. Moving forward, the recruitment process will continue to request that hiring managers consider Employment Equity candidates first when making appointments.

In the Spring of 2022, the INFC Talent Acquisition team started to promote bilingual non-imperative appointments as an option for staffing processes where employment equity is invoked as an organizational need, thus facilitating the hire of persons with disabilities and addressing Barrier 1.2.

Lastly, when Human Resources teams attend career and student job fairs, they stress the importance of self-declaration. We hope to close the representation gap of persons with disabilities in our organization by attracting individuals who are interested in self-declaring upon employment.

### **Target hiring of students with disabilities**

Information was sent by email to all INFC managers and directors in January 2022 to promote hiring of persons with disabilities from the Public Service Commission (PSC) inventories, the Federal Internship Program for Persons with Disabilities and Virtual Door. Another email was sent to all managers and directors in the summer of 2022 to promote staffing using pools/inventories containing Employment Equity candidates. We will continue to promote these hiring practices going forward.

### **Employment Systems Review (ESR)**

Under the Legislated Employment Equity Program, which covers federally regulated private-sector employers (including Crown Corporations and other federal organizations), a review of employment systems, policies and practices is required when implementing employment equity.

On April 1, 2022, Employment and Social Development Canada's Labour Program released guidelines clarifying how employers should review their employment systems, policies and practices, in compliance with the [Employment Equity Act](#) and the [Employment Equity Regulations](#). This includes guidance and tools for the main steps of the ESR, as well as a summary report. Following these guidelines, INFC will conduct an ESR in order to identify systemic and attitudinal barriers to employment opportunities faced by persons in designated groups. Given that employers must base the ESR on results of the [Workforce Analysis](#), this is the first step of the review.

### **Modernized Self-Identification Questionnaire**

The Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) is currently in the process of modernizing the Self-Identification Questionnaire, to create a questionnaire that is user-centric, builds trust in the process, is inclusive, and uses modern language. Through the use of behavioural insights, which combine psychology, cognitive science and social science, it is hoped that the modernized form will increase user participation. The new questionnaire will be launched to the Government of Canada through the TBS Application Portal. It will be completed once and will follow an employee throughout their career in the government, removing the need to complete a self-identification questionnaire at each new department. The employee will be able to update the form at any time. Once released by TBS, INFC will implement the new questionnaire, which includes expanded definitions of disabilities, within the organization.

## **Other actions completed, in progress and to be taken**

### **Employment**

#### **Barrier 1.3: Emotional labour of self-advocacy and providing proof of disability**

##### **The Government of Canada Workplace Accessibility Passport**

The Government of Canada Workplace Accessibility Passport, implemented and introduced to all INFC employees in July 2022, helps address the obstacles federal public service employees and persons with disabilities face in obtaining the tools, supports and measures to perform at their best and succeed in the workplace. All INFC employees were invited to participate in English and French Passport information sessions hosted by the Office of Public Service Accessibility. Information on the Passport is shared through articles in the employee newsletter and is included on the Accessibility@INFC intranet page. Employees or managers who need support or who have questions about the Passport can send an email to the Accessibility@INFC inbox. We continue to promote and offer information sessions on the Passport to employees.

##### **Recruitment measures taken to lesson the emotional labour of self-advocacy and providing proof of disability**

The Talent Acquisition team and HR Partners ensure that candidates in staffing processes are informed of the assessment tools that will be used as soon as possible, as well as ensuring that candidates are informed of their right to request assessment accommodations. This is an ongoing part of our hiring process.

When a request for accommodation is received regarding a PSC evaluation, the Talent Acquisition team and HR Partners share it with the PSC Assessment Accommodation Unit. For non-PSC evaluations, the accommodation is determined in consultation with the sub-delegated hiring manager or in more complex cases, by consulting with the PSC Assessment Accommodation Unit.

## **Barrier 1.4: Limited interpretation of disability and how it manifests in the broader environment**

### **Creation of the AREI Division and themed learning journeys by this team to raise awareness on Employment Equity groups, including persons with disabilities**

In light of the [Clerk's Call to Action on Anti-Racism, Equity, and Inclusion in the Federal Public Service](#) as well as the Deputy Minister Commitments on Diversity and Inclusion, the AREI Division was created at INFC in March 2021. The AREI Division serves as a catalyst and a centre of expertise for the department, helping to evolve INFC's culture from one that is open and values employment equity into one that is diverse and, more importantly, demonstrates inclusivity as one of our core values. AREI provides strategic advice, education and oversight through an intersectional and holistic approach based on collaboration with Black People, Indigenous Peoples, Racialized People, but also Persons with Disabilities and 2SLGBTQI+ Peoples.

Supported by Community Advisors, who are themselves part of the community they represent, the AREI Division offers virtual learning journeys to all employees at INFC. The most recent learning journey, for Disability Employment Awareness Month, took place throughout the month of October 2022. In these sessions, employees learned about different types of disabilities, principles of universal design, digital accessibility, statistics, and workplace culture and inclusion, in addition to participating in facilitated group discussions.

### **Awareness through staffing advice**

Talent Acquisition, Corporate Staffing and Recruitment teams continue to raise awareness on accessibility through staffing advice when running processes, and will continue to do so.

### **Awareness through training and learning activities**

Led by the Employee Experience and Talent Development team, mandatory training and learning activities on accessibility are offered to employees on an ongoing basis and promoted through the intranet, the INFC calendar of events [on the intranet], as well as all-staff emails. This will continue in the plan forward, with new training being added.

### **Awareness through onboarding**

In collaboration with a working group, the Employee Experience and Talent Development team is in the process of reviewing the new employee onboarding package to ensure that it continues to support all individuals in the organization. Moving forward, including information on accessibility in these onboarding documents is being considered.

## **Barrier 1.5: Lack of community and sense of belonging for persons with disabilities**

### **Career development programs offering a sense of belonging and community for persons with disabilities**

INFC has several career development programs in place, specifically designed to support Employment Equity deserving groups which include persons with disabilities. These programs not only provide individuals with opportunities and support for career progression, but they are also

providing a sense of belonging, by allowing people to participate in programs with their specific communities. The career development programs in place are further elaborated below, under barrier 1.6.

### **Creation of the Anti-Racism, Equity and Inclusion Division**

As we saw under Barrier 1.4, the creation of the AREI Division helps to expand awareness of disabilities and persons living with disabilities, and is helping our organization shift to a culture of inclusivity overall. Specifically, it helps shine the spotlight on persons with disabilities and their lived experiences, so community members have a better sense of belonging and can feel better supported at INFC.

### **Accessibility Committee, led by the Diversity and Inclusion Co-Champions**

The Diversity and Inclusion Co-champion roles were created in 2018. The appointed Co-champions established an Accessibility committee. With the help of the committee's chair, members participate in activities that focus on raising awareness around accessibility and supporting persons with disabilities within INFC.

### **Barrier 1.6: Limited opportunity and support for career progression**

#### **Career development programs are in place, which are specifically designed to support career progression for Employment Equity deserving groups**

- A. INFC Talent Management Program
  - Ongoing promotion of the program;
  - Ongoing process for all INFC employees (through the Performance Management cycle);
  - The most recent Talent Management Inventory was shared with HR Partners in August 2022 to promote to hiring managers.
- B. Mentorship Plus Program
  - First cohort complete;
  - Currently an analysis underway to determine if a second cohort will take place.
- C. Mosaic Leadership Development Program
  - Launched by TBS and participants fully engaged at INFC;
  - This program initially invited departments to select participants from Equity-deserving groups for EX-01 development and ultimately, for appointment. INFC saw the opportunity to go further and has committed to supporting the development of all program applicants.
- D. Coaching Circles for Executives
  - Launched in June 2022



Additionally, the ESR taking place (elaborated under Barrier 1.2) should help identify and address systemic barriers in our employment system, further supporting opportunities and career progression for persons with disabilities.

### **Barrier 1.7: Increased risk of facing harassment and experiencing stress/anxiety on the job**

#### **Raise awareness via mandatory training**

In collaboration with Occupational Health and Safety and Labour Relations, the Employee Experience and Talent Development team continues to raise awareness by requiring all employees to complete mandatory training related to Values and Ethics as well as harassment and violence prevention.

#### **Monitor formal and informal complaints and grievances to identify trends and corrective measures**

The Occupational Health and Safety, Labour Relations, and Human Resources Data Analytics teams monitor both formal complaints and grievances and informal issues/concerns impacting persons with disabilities (via Labour Relations, Exit questionnaires, Public Service Employee Survey results, etc.). This allows us to identify trends and take appropriate corrective measures.

In addition to this, the INFC Wellness team has renewed its contract with the Office of the Ombuds for Small Departments and Agencies. The Ombuds is available to assist employees and management with workplace situations and identify trends and solutions to address them. The current contract is in place until March 31, 2025.

#### **Engage in cyclical review of harassment policy to identify and address any gaps**

The Occupational Health and Safety team will engage with the new Centre of Expertise for Accessibility during the cyclical review of the INFC Workplace Harassment and Violence Prevention Policy to identify and address potential gaps.

### **Built environment**

#### **Barrier 2.1: “One-size-fits-all” approach for designing post-pandemic offices and hybrid work plans**

#### **Work with Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) to continue improving workspaces**

Since April 2020, measures have been put in place to help ensure that INFC employees have a suitable workspace at home to continue to be productive while working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic. INFC employees (indeterminate, determinate and full-time, casuals and students) are eligible to purchase basic IT equipment, such as monitors, keyboards, docking stations, mice, headphones and cables. Indeterminate and determinate employees are eligible to purchase ergonomic office furniture, such as an adjustable office chair and a sit-stand desk.

The Accommodations team at INFC will continue to work with PSPC to improve the design of in-office workspaces and will continue to follow the Canadian building code on all projects. They will work with the Centre of Expertise for Accessibility to address accommodations requests from new and current employees.

### **Creation of the INFRAfuture Secretariat**

The INFRAfuture Secretariat's work centres on how INFC can become an even better workplace, with a particular focus on people and their well-being. They are involved in providing employees with the information and resources they need for the transition to hybrid work.

### **Barrier 2.2: Limited awareness of accessibility features in the physical workplace**

#### **Information provided to employees**

The INFC intranet pages including Hybrid Work @ INFC, provide information and resources to support employees in working safely and effectively in a hybrid way. Information sessions on accessibility features for hybrid work are also made available to current and new employees.

### **Barrier 2.3: Adapting evacuation plans instead of including persons with disabilities in at the design stage**

#### **Consult persons living with disabilities, update the plan to reflect their needs and concerns and practice**

To ensure that persons with disabilities are considered and supported in building evacuation plans, INFC continues to adapt its plans to support every single individual in the organization. The Security Services team has recently updated the evacuation plan, taking into consideration individuals with accessibility needs. The updated plan will be tested during an upcoming evacuation drill coordinated by the landlord. As part of this drill, the Security team will collaborate with individuals with accessibility needs, to determine if there was any oversight of barriers that could pose a risk to a person with a disability during an evacuation.

#### **Raise awareness of assistance available for employees requiring aid during building evacuations**

During information sessions for new employees, INFC's Security Services team provides information on the processes to follow for Persons Requiring Assistance during a building evacuation. This information is also available on the Security Services intranet page.

From time to time, the team also prepares articles on the topic for the employee newsletter, including answers to questions posed by employees.

## **Barrier 2.4: Availability of contacts for immediate assistance and for reporting accessibility issues**

### **Inclusion of contacts in employee onboarding**

During information sessions for new employees, information is provided on whom to contact to report accessibility issues or to receive immediate assistance.

### **Ongoing review of onboarding material**

As mentioned just above, under Barrier 2.1, there is a dedicated team reviewing the onboarding package on an ongoing basis to ensure that the information continues to support all employees.

## **Barrier 2.5: Navigating ergonomic assessments, particularly while working at home**

### **Raise awareness of current ergonomic options available and offer virtual ergonomic coaching sessions**

The Accommodations, Labour Relations and the Occupational Health and Safety teams continue to raise awareness of ergonomic tools that can be provided to staff, including virtual ergonomic coaching sessions. INFC's intranet includes a list of ergonomic resources as well as questions and answers on ergonomics and furniture and tips and tricks for setting up a home workstation. More work is planned to support the ergonomic needs of employees with the help of the new Centre of Expertise for Accessibility.

## **Information and communication technologies (ICT)**

### **Barrier 3.1: Growing need for the right technology to support persons with disabilities in their work**

#### **Provision of equipment**

All employees are provided with the standard equipment to work in office and at home, which includes at a minimum, a tablet, docking station, dual monitors, keyboard, mouse, iPhone, chair and desk. Employees requiring additional support are encouraged to talk to their manager and bring forward those needs to the ICT team in the Department. More work will be done to provide employees with the right technology with the help of the new Centre of Expertise for Accessibility.

### **Barrier 3.2: Challenges with person-first collaboration in a hybrid environment**

#### **Good start with Microsoft (MS) Teams**

The introduction of MS Teams and the continual improvement of the software, as well as the way we use it, has increased the capacity to collaborate with colleagues, regardless if they are at home or in office. One such example of this is the introduction and use of MS Teams Live for presentations; this feature allows for many more accessibility features, as well as increased interaction between a presenter and participants. More work is planned to provide employees with the right technology with the help of the new Centre of Expertise for Accessibility.

### **Barrier 3.3: Fragmented knowledge and limited functional training of best practices for ICT accessibility**

#### **More training needed**

The Information Technology Learning team has started work on accessibility training, and they regularly share tips and tricks with INFC employees. For example, i.e., they provided all staff information sessions on Digital Accessibility in the Workplace with the help of the Employment Equity team currently responsible for accessibility.

ICT teams have acknowledged the need for more training on accessibility to be able to support employees. The new Centre of Expertise for Accessibility will work with the team to develop a role-based learning plan for all teams to ensure a common base of ICT accessibility awareness, knowledge and expertise.

### **Barrier 3.4: Limited ways for users to provide regular feedback on ICT-specific accessibility issues**

#### **Client Satisfaction survey**

Some tracking of user feedback is done through the yearly IM/IT/Security Services' Client Satisfaction survey, but ICT teams recognize that there is a need for a formal feedback mechanism especially for tracking and review of accessibility issues.

Information Technology Services plans to work on ensuring that feedback and requests for support related to ICT accessibility are categorized as such in service management ticketing solutions used by ICT teams and that a process to report on the feedback through ICT governance is established.

### **Communication, other than ICT**

#### **Barrier 4.1: Information is not always accessible to all employees**

##### **Information sent out to employees adheres to accessibility best practices**

The Communications Branch will continue to ensure that the corporate information sent out to employees follows accessibility best practices, while also providing advice to content owners, as required.

##### **Ensure that all corporate templates adhere to accessibility best practices**

The Communications Branch will ensure that corporate templates follow accessibility best practices by providing advice and guidance to template owners.

##### **Improve accessibility of INFC's intranet**

The Communications Branch will continue to improve the accessibility of INFC's intranet content.

### **Improve accessibility of departmental data**

The Chief Data Officer will review enterprise data management practices to improve data accessibility formats, tools, principles, and practices to ensure INFC data is accessible.

### **Barrier 4.2: Departmental events and activities are not always inclusive and accessible to all employees**

#### **MS Teams**

The introduction of Microsoft Teams (MS) and the continual improvement of the software features, as well as the way we use it, have increased the capacity to collaborate with colleagues, regardless if they are at home or in office. The MS Teams Live for presentations allows for many more accessibility features, as well as increased interaction between presenter and participants (i.e., all-staff meetings or info sessions).

#### **Promote best practices and resources**

The Communications Branch will promote best practices and resources when planning internal and external events and activities to be more inclusive and accessible.

### **Procurement of goods, services and facilities**

### **Barrier 5.1: Consulting after procurement instead of involving persons with disabilities early in the process**

#### **Work with Public Services and Procurement Canada**

The Procurement Services team will continue to work with the Public Services and Procurement Canada and follow guidance on involving persons with disabilities in the design stages of procurement plans.

### **Barrier 5.2: Complex process for procuring the services of external service providers**

#### **Client support provided**

The Procurement Services team is working to continuously improve how they support their clients, by providing guidance and advice on a case-by-case basis.

#### **Establish contracts for accessibility**

Create a departmental contract for Occupational Therapy/Ergonomic services and work with the new Centre of Expertise for Accessibility to identify additional contracts with external providers which can further enhance accessibility.

#### **Make procurement process information accessible**

Work with the new Centre of Expertise for Accessibility to update procurement process information to ensure that it is accessible.

### **Barrier 5.3: Challenges of targeting procurement activities towards underrepresented groups**

#### **The Pilot: Procurement of Employment System Review**

In response to the Call to Action on Anti-Racism, Equity and Inclusion in the Federal Public Service, issued by the Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to the Cabinet in 2021, INFC confirmed its commitment to engage in activities designed to result in positive change.

One such initiative is exploring how the organization can look at implementing social procurement practices. This exploration began with the contracting of our ESR and the hope was that this pilot would have a positive impact on the participation of minority-led or minority-owned businesses in not just this ESR procurement process, but all procurement processes. In trying to understand why these types of businesses are experiencing barriers in contracting with the government or are unable to compete successfully, we have reviewed and adapted the procurement evaluation criteria. Our intent is to bring lived experience into the procurement process to better understand the challenges and barriers that exist. We see the benefit to having different perspectives included so we can improve our procurement approach to benefit INFC as an organization and the larger Canadian public.

### **Design and delivery of programs and services**

#### **Barrier 6.1: Policy design regularly prioritizes other concerns over accessibility**

##### **Gender-Based Analysis Plus work**

The need to consult persons with disabilities and accessibility stakeholders has been highlighted in order to identify how accessibility could be better incorporated in policy design. Furthermore, there is work to be done to include accessibility in factors analysed through the integrated climate lens.

Regarding new programming, the department will look at ways to incentivize accessibility beyond levels provided for in minimum standards.

#### **Barrier 6.2: Unclear requirements for accessibility in programs**

##### **Communities and Infrastructure Programs Branch identified work to be done**

- Conduct assessment of core programs to determine whether biases and accessibility barriers exist
- Include accessibility-specific indicators and performance metrics in new programs
- Ensure program materials and portals are accessible and in compliance with plain language and accessible web design standards, ensure that all programs are available in multiple service delivery channels, and ensure the availability of alternative formats for documents/materials
- Work with legal services and contracting units to develop template wording to include in statement of work/selection criteria regarding usability by all Canadians as a contractual obligation

### **Barrier 6.3: Gap in the availability of information, data and ongoing feedback mechanisms on accessibility**

#### **Accessibility-specific questions**

To help address this barrier, the Data and Analytics team within the Policy and Results Branch has included accessibility-specific questions in Canada's Core Public Infrastructure Survey (CCPI). The questions were included in CCPI for 2020 and will be included for 2022.

#### **Explore how to expand information and data and to maximize its use**

The new Chief Data Officer will explore expanding the data collection, as well as leveraging the data points that already exist.

#### **Consultations**

The new Chief Data Officer plans to lead consultations with the Employment and Social Development Canada Centre of Expertise and INFC's Accessibility Committee to identify advisory committees/stakeholder networks who can advise on and assist in incorporating accessible design principles, with the objective of having in place a consultative mechanism.

### **Barrier 6.4: Fragmented knowledge and limited functional training on accessibility for policy and programs**

#### **More awareness and training on accessibility is needed**

There is a need to continue to offer and expand training on accessibility within the Policy and Programs areas. The new Centre of Expertise for Accessibility will work with the Policy and Programs area representatives to develop a common base of accessibility awareness, knowledge and expertise to be provided to their employees.

#### **Transportation**

As mentioned above, we acknowledge that barriers to accessible transportation may exist for persons with disabilities working at INFC. The Department remains committed to improving the quality of life of Canadians by investing in infrastructure to foster more inclusive and sustainable communities. However, this priority area under the *Accessible Canada Act* falls outside the scope of this Plan.

## Conclusion

INFC's Accessibility Plan is an important step towards ensuring that employees living with a disability can contribute fully to the workforce and experience a barrier-free workplace.

In the spirit of "Nothing Without Us", a series of consultations were held throughout the Department, inviting people with disabilities, managers and allies to share information and feedback that could be useful for identifying, removing, and preventing barriers to accessibility.

INFC's Accessibility Plan is based on the result of these consultations. It could not have been developed without the ongoing support and engagement of employees with disabilities, and managers who have helped identify the tools they need to better support their employees.

From the outset, INFC's goal has been to use the *Accessible Canada Act* and this Plan as a starting point from which we can engage in productive conversations, take a moment to consider ableism and the many ways in which it manifests for persons with disabilities, and advance the meaningful changes that will benefit them.

To meet this objective, the Department will focus on more than just barriers by exploring the compounding influences that underpin disability and initiating conversations on what accessibility truly means.

INFC looks forward to continuing to make progress toward achieving these goals and realizing the *Accessible Canada Act's* commitment to creating a barrier-free Canada by 2040.



## Glossary

### **Ableism**

Prejudice and discrimination against persons with a disability.

### **Accessibility**

The quality of an environment that enables a person to access it with ease.

### **Accessible**

The ability to be reached, entered or accessed by persons with disabilities.

### **Accommodation**

In the context of work, a measure taken by management based on the personal circumstances of an employee that is designed to enable them to carry out their duties and fully participate in work-related activities (noun). Some examples of accommodations are acquiring or modifying equipment, software or devices, modifying work schedules, allowing work from home or alternate locations, or providing assistance through support services.

### **Barrier**

Means anything – including any physical, architectural, technological or attitudinal, anything that is based on information or communications or anything that is the result of a policy or a practice – that hinders the full and equal participation in society of persons with an impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairment or a functional limitation (as defined in the *Accessible Canada Act*).

### **Designated groups**

The designated groups under the *Employment Equity Act* are women, persons with disabilities, Aboriginal (Indigenous) Peoples and visible minorities.

### **Disability**

Any impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairment – or a functional limitation – whether permanent, temporary or episodic in nature, or evident or not, that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders a person's full and equal participation in society (noun). Avoid the use of handicap (noun) as it is considered an obsolete term.

### **Discrimination**

The unjust or prejudicial treatment of a person or group of people that deprives them of or limits their access to opportunities and advantages that are available to other members of society (noun).

### **Equality**

The principle of treating everyone in the same manner by ensuring they have access to the same resources and opportunities (noun). Equality does not necessarily lead to fair outcomes since it does not consider people's unique experiences and differing situations.

### **Equity**

The principle of considering people's unique experiences and different situations, and ensuring they have access to the resources and opportunities that are necessary for them to attain just outcomes (noun). Equity aims to eliminate disparities and disproportions that are rooted in historical and contemporary injustices and oppression.

### **Inclusion**

The practice of using proactive measures to create an environment where people feel welcomed, respected and valued, and to foster a sense of belonging and engagement (noun). This practice involves changing the environment by removing barriers so that each person has equal (or preferably equitable) access to opportunities and resources and can achieve their full potential.

### **Medical Model of Disability**

Views disability as a defect, disease or trauma within the individual. Disability is seen as an aberration compared to normal traits and characteristics. In order to have a high quality of life, these defects must be cured, fixed, or completely eliminated. Health care and social service professionals have the sole power to correct or modify these conditions.

### **Microaggression**

A comment or action that is regarded as subtly expressing prejudice against a person or group of people (noun). Microaggressions are generally indirect and can be unintentional. Members of marginalized or minority groups are often the subjects of microaggressions.

### **Minority**

A group of people who share characteristics differing from those of the majority or dominant population, and who often experience discrimination or exclusion (noun). The term "minority" is not universally accepted, because it is usually understood as limiting the concept to numbers, when it is in fact more often about the power that is held by a dominant group.

### **Person with a Disability**

A person with a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, sensory, learning or communication impairment, or a functional limitation, whether apparent or not, and permanent, temporary or episodic in nature, that hinders their full and equal participation in society when they face a barrier (noun, phrase). The plural form of "disability" is used in expressions such as "persons with disabilities" or "people with disabilities" to highlight the variety of disabilities present within a group. The use of the adjective "handicapped" in the term "handicapped person" or "person with a handicap" is considered to be outdated and can be considered offensive.

### **Self-identification**

A person's own assertion of belonging to a certain group or category of people (noun).

### **Stigma**

The disapproval of, or discrimination against, an individual or group based on perceived characteristics that serve to distinguish them from other members of a society.

**Systemic barrier**

A barrier that results from seemingly neutral systems, practices, policies, traditions or cultures, and that disadvantages certain individuals or groups of people (noun). Systemic barriers disadvantage minority groups, racialized groups, people with disabilities, people from LGBTQ2+ communities, Indigenous people and other marginalized groups. Systemic barriers are present in all aspects of society such as employment, education, institutions and health services. Systemic barriers are not necessarily put in place intentionally but are still experienced and should be addressed.

**Unconscious bias**

A preconceived judgment that is held unconsciously by a person, and that influences their perception of or their behaviour towards another person or group of people (noun). Unconscious biases are influenced by a person's background, culture and personal experiences. They can be manifested through favouritism towards or discrimination against a person or group of people based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, (dis)ability, age, religion, or socioeconomic status.