



**Federal Economic Development Agency
for Southern Ontario**

**Accessibility Plan Progress Report
December 2023**

Accessibility Plan Progress Report
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as represented by the Minister responsible for the
Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario
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General

The Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario (FedDev Ontario) published its [Accessibility Plan](#) in December 2022. The Plan is based on the guiding principles in the [Accessible Canada Act](#), the [Accessible Canada Regulations](#) and the goals established by the Office of Public Service Accessibility (OPSA) in the [Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada](#).

To submit feedback on the Plan or on barriers within FedDev Ontario, or to request copies of FedDev Ontario's Accessibility Plan, please use the [Provide feedback button](#) found on our [Accessibility Plan web page](#), or connect with us at:

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FedDev Ontario's Statement of Accessibility

FedDev Ontario is committed to creating a working environment where:

- everyone is treated with dignity and respect, regardless of disability or ability;
- everyone has barrier-free access to full and equal participation in the work and activities of FedDev Ontario, regardless of disability or ability; and
- everyone has the opportunity to be involved in the development and design of FedDev Ontario's activities, with the objective of reaching equal and meaningful participation for all employees.

Accessibility is under the umbrella of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) at FedDev Ontario, and is grounded in respect and the acknowledgement that our differences make us stronger. The drivers of accessibility at FedDev Ontario include:

- our intention to make FedDev Ontario the best it can be for employees and clients alike, regardless of disability or ability;
- the [Accessible Canada Act](#);
- the [Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada](#); and
- Canada's support to the United Nations [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#).

Progress in accessibility at FedDev Ontario

Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.

Maya Angelou

FedDev Ontario's progress in working toward the goals set in its Accessibility Plan has been a journey in raising awareness, discovering strengths, addressing weaknesses and adopting better ways of working. We are proud of the ways our employees have joined together to make the Agency a place where everyone, regardless of ability or disability, has what they need to do their best work and feels accepted, respected and valued.

Employment

FedDev Ontario's goals for accessibility in employment are:

1. Job seekers and employees with disabilities see FedDev Ontario as an employer of choice.
2. Job seekers and employees with disabilities have access to employment opportunities at FedDev Ontario and can contribute at their full potential.
3. The Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat's targets of seven percent for recruitment and six percent for promotion of persons with disabilities in the public service are supported.

FedDev Ontario has undertaken concrete steps toward accessibility in employment. Since July 1, 2023, as part of the changes to the [Public Service Employment Act](#), all assessment methods are reviewed to address biases and barriers faced by persons belonging to any equity-seeking group, including persons with disabilities. All job advertisements specifically welcome requests for accommodations at all stages of the process, and emphasis has been placed on readability, inclusiveness, representativeness and neutrality. Additionally, twice a year at a minimum, all hiring managers receive information on the various diversity and inclusion recruitment options available to them, including options aiming to increase the representation of persons with disabilities within the Agency.

FedDev Ontario recently completed an Employment Systems Review to evaluate DEI elements in the Agency's internal policies and directives. FedDev Ontario's Human Resources team reviewed these policies and directives and DEI considerations have been assessed and incorporated where necessary.

After being hired, an employee who requires accommodations is supported by their manager in these requests. Managers have received training on the use of the Government of Canada Workplace Accessibility Passport (the Passport). The Passport is a tool that helps employees identify barriers in the workplace preventing them from doing their best work. Together, the employee and the manager discuss solutions and work to eliminate the barrier. Managers have resources to help them get accommodation measures in place quickly so that the employee receives the support they need. If the best accommodation solution is beyond what the manager's cost centre can absorb, FedDev Ontario has a dedicated fund set aside to assist with these purchases.

Orientation sessions for new employees introduce them to the work of champions across the Agency, including the Accessibility Champion. Committee involvement of new employees is encouraged and welcomed. In addition, employees are made aware of training opportunities through the Canada School of Public Service (CSPS) to better familiarize themselves with accessibility in the Government of Canada and its importance in their daily work. Beginning in fiscal year 2025, it will be mandatory for managers to complete CSPS's course [Addressing Disability Inclusion and Barriers to Accessibility \(INC115\)](#) to increase their knowledge of accessibility issues and to develop confidence in addressing these issues within their teams.

Ten percent of employees at FedDev Ontario have self-identified as having a disability and, since April 2023, three out of twenty-five internal promotions went to persons who self-identified as having a disability. This knowledge is used to make adjustments to the working environment and to workplace events so that everyone can participate fully. This means providing sign language interpretation during meetings and presentations; offering quiet spaces in office locations for employees seeking a workplace without distractions; reserving specific closed offices for employees with light sensitivities; and continuing to promote a safe, accessible and inclusive working environment.

FedDev Ontario is pleased that, in the 2022 Public Service Employee Survey (PSES), 90 percent of employees were satisfied with responses to their accommodation requests. These results demonstrate a workplace culture that accepts different ways of working and a willingness to provide positive support. However, the remaining 10 percent will not be ignored. In a recent series of consultations with Agency staff on PSES results, employees were encouraged to help shape FedDev Ontario's workplace by building on what is working and sharing ideas for improvement. The ideas generated by these consultations will feed into the Agency's Management Framework to assist in making FedDev Ontario a workplace of choice

The Built Environment

FedDev Ontario's goals for accessibility in the built environment are:

1. Staff are equipped with the tools they need to do their work.
2. All office locations are accessible and barrier-free.

FedDev Ontario is headquartered in Waterloo, Ontario, and has office locations in Toronto, Peterborough and Ottawa. These offices are located in privately-owned and -managed buildings, and each building meets the requirements of [Accessibility in Ontario's Building Code](#). At the time of this report, there have been no employees who have indicated that they do not have the tools they need to do their work.

The Accessibility committee at FedDev Ontario is representative of employees at the Agency who have visible and invisible disabilities. Their input and perspective informs decisions regarding FedDev Ontario's physical workspaces. The work that the committee does to raise awareness of accessibility opportunities and challenges gives staff the tools they need to develop greater confidence when addressing a situation where accessibility must be a guiding factor.

In order to better understand built environment accessibility, a voluntary accessibility audit of FedDev Ontario's Waterloo office was completed by Public Services and Procurement Canada. The audit

revealed satisfactory results and gave suggestions for how to increase accessibility in the Agency's work spaces. These suggestions will influence upcoming lease renewals in Toronto and Waterloo, as FedDev Ontario seeks to incorporate the promising practices outlined in the audit. When accessibility is considered at the beginning of a process rather than as an afterthought, we can determine the best use of finances and resources while creating benefits for everyone using the space.

Information and Communications Technologies (ICT)

FedDev Ontario's goals for ICT are:

1. All new systems, software, websites and equipment are accessible by all employees.
2. Employees with accessibility needs have access to adaptive technologies to do their work effectively.

FedDev Ontario recognizes that, with the pace of change in ICT, efforts to ensure accessibility for all employees will be an ongoing process. In this area, FedDev Ontario seeks to raise awareness of resources that support employees in their use of new tools and technologies, with the end goal of accessibility forming part of the way work is accomplished daily.

The Accessibility committee at FedDev Ontario has curated an intranet page of tools, links and templates for easy access to resources for employee use. Included in these resources are supports for managers as they navigate accommodation requests. Managers and employees can use the Passport to address barriers faced in ICT. Managers can also draw on the [Accommodations, Accessibility and Adaptive Computer Technology](#) program's Lending Library for quick access to short-term adaptive technology and devices.

Communications

FedDev Ontario's goals for communications are:

1. Accessibility is a primary consideration when developing documents, presentations and events.
2. Employees and managers have an increased level of confidence in how accessibility is approached and achieved.

To develop an "accessible-first" approach to documents, presentations, web content and other files, FedDev Ontario's Accessibility committee has been consistently working to raise awareness of resources and tools. The committee has also been working to demystify accessibility: the available tools and templates remove the guesswork, and help to incorporate accessibility early in a project so that everyone benefits.

The Communications team at FedDev Ontario has shared accessibility processes and considerations for internal and external events. Whether the occasion is hybrid with sign language interpretation and transcription available, or whether it is in person with consideration given to building entrances and accessible spaces for everyone, these processes are creating confidence in how accessibility is approached in events that bring Agency staff together. Everyone has the right to be included and to know that they matter.

FedDev Ontario's Accessibility committee and Communications team work intentionally to make internal and external Agency communication products accessible and inclusive. This work includes careful reviews of language and formatting, with close attention to plain language, inclusive pronouns and jargon-free descriptions. The resources available on FedDev Ontario's "Inclusive Content" intranet page and in the [Digital Accessibility Toolkit](#) encourage and support staff to make accessibility part of the way they work every day.

Procurement

FedDev Ontario's procurement strategies continue to use the principles of universal design when considering the purchase of goods and services, including:

- The design is useful to people with diverse abilities.
- The design is flexible to accommodate a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.
- Using the purchased good or service is easy, regardless of experience, knowledge, language or concentration level.
- The design of the item minimizes hazards to the user.
- The item can be used efficiently, comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue.

The Procurement team at FedDev Ontario incorporates accessibility considerations throughout the procurement process. Part of this intentional work includes reminding cost centre managers of their responsibility to make accessibility a priority in contracting and procurement. To encourage this, FedDev Ontario's Procurement team is adopting a checklist, gleaned from Transport Canada, that walks cost centre managers through three simple questions related to accessibility for each procurement process. By completing this checklist, managers are indicating that they have considered accessibility and that their procured good or service is useful for people of all levels of ability.

FedDev Ontario's Accessibility committee has taken time in monthly meetings to learn more about accessible procurement and has taken advantage of the resources available from OPSA, including the video, "[What does it mean to consider accessibility in government procurement?](#)" These links and resources are available to all staff on the Agency's Accessibility intranet page.

The design and delivery of programs and services

FedDev Ontario's goals in the design and delivery of programs and services are:

1. Policy development is done with a lens of accessibility to present information and services to the widest range of clients.
2. Program information and tools are available in multiple formats to best serve clients.
3. The process of applying for and participating in FedDev Ontario's programs and services is free from systemic, cultural, attitudinal or physical barriers.

The mandate of FedDev Ontario is to support economic development across southern Ontario through a suite of funding programs for businesses, communities and not-for-profit organizations. Making the process of program delivery accessible for the clients FedDev Ontario serves is imperative to achieving

this mandate. FedDev Ontario incorporates [Gender-based Analysis Plus](#) (GBA Plus) elements into its program planning and works through the lens of inclusivity to reach the diverse population present in southern Ontario. Companies that apply for FedDev Ontario's programming are assessed against [DEI criteria](#) and are encouraged to expand their DEI plans. One of the ways that companies can do this is by participating in the [50-30 Challenge](#), a voluntary initiative that seeks gender parity (50 percent women and/or non-binary people) on boards and senior management and significant representation (30 percent) on boards and/or senior management of members of other equity-deserving groups.

In September 2023, FedDev Ontario made it simpler to apply to the Agency's regional funding programs by introducing a timed intake approach. This change gives a more predictable and service-oriented experience for applicants, offering increased transparency and clarity in timelines and processes. The Agency also modernized the program interface, improved navigation and streamlined the application form with an emphasis on plain language, making it easier for applicants to get relevant information in an accessible format.

Recognizing that some applicants may find the information posted on the website unsuitable for their needs, the Agency offers virtual technical briefings to guide potential applicants through program details and the application process in an alternative format. Moreover, to address the unique barriers experienced by some Indigenous businesses and communities, and to promote fair access to funding opportunities, Indigenous applicants have the flexibility to apply at any time without a deadline. These client-centric service improvements reinforce our commitment to responsive and timely service while contributing to greater accessibility for all applicants.

Transportation

Transportation is out of scope for FedDev Ontario as the Agency does not manage transportation for its clients or employees. However, FedDev Ontario employees are asked to use transportation for various parts of their jobs, whether that be for client site visits, training opportunities in other locations, or for Agency-related meetings. In any case where travel and transportation are required and there are accessibility concerns, FedDev Ontario partners with its employees to overcome barriers and ensure the highest level of success for the intended travel.

Consultations

As FedDev Ontario continues to implement its Accessibility Plan, consultations have been important in guiding activities and actions that feed into the Plan's goals. Key among these consultations are monthly meetings with the Accessibility committee, comprised of employees with disabilities who are able to speak directly to issues of accessibility and identify barriers within the Agency.

FedDev Ontario is also part of the GC Workplace Accessibility Passport Adopter Community of Practice. Monthly meetings bring together departments from across the public service that are implementing the Passport. Developments and best practices are shared for the benefit of all.

The Accessibility committee has engaged the extended management community at FedDev Ontario with a presentation on the Passport, encouraging managers to use this tool as a way to begin conversations with their employees to address barriers in the workplace.

Regular presentations to FedDev Ontario's executive committee have been instrumental in gathering feedback and obtaining executive support for proposed actions.

Accessibility events at FedDev Ontario have been impactful by allowing staff to engage on accessibility issues that affect them on personal levels. For example, in recognition of International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD) in 2022, FedDev Ontario hosted a panel discussion with employees who are caregivers for someone with a disability. From the conversations sparked by this event, a new group was formed at FedDev Ontario called Caregivers' Space. This group meets once each month to touch base, share experiences, provide support and actively listen. The Caregivers' Space is an example of how FedDev Ontario employees are creating a community where everyone is welcomed, respected and heard and where participants can expand their learning and understanding.

The Agency's event for IDPD 2023 featured a panel of employees who are allies for someone with a disability. They presented their lived experiences with accessibility barriers, the often difficult process of overcoming these barriers, and described how these experiences are shaping their approach to accessibility.

Feedback

To date, FedDev Ontario has received three feedback submissions through the feedback form for the Accessibility Plan.

The first submission encouraged the Agency to see the implementation of accessibility in information technology (IT) as an ongoing task. With the rate of change in IT, it will always be necessary to ensure that any new systems or software implemented in the Agency are suitable for use by all employees. The Accessibility committee is reminded that much of the work to promote accessibility across the Agency will be ongoing and the committee will continue to raise awareness of the need for accessible workplaces, tools and documents.

The second submission came from an employee on behalf of FedDev Ontario clients, who indicated that the claims process for recipients of Agency funding was not always accessible and clear. The Accessibility committee has taken note of these concerns. FedDev Ontario recognizes there are ongoing opportunities to re-examine the recipient journey and adjust processes for greater clarity and accessibility.

Finally, FedDev Ontario received feedback from an individual who noted that a website of a funding recipient was not available in both French and English, and did not meet Government of Canada website accessibility standards. While the recipient was found to be compliant with the official languages requirements of their contribution agreement, the individual was thanked for the submission and was encouraged to approach the company directly with that feedback.

Conclusion

FedDev Ontario is proud of the way that its employees have accepted the responsibility of accessibility and the strides that have been made in the areas represented by this report. As we continue to learn about accessibility, we will implement this knowledge in honest efforts to continue to do better.

From the outset, the goal of the [Accessible Canada Act](#) has been to make Canada's public service the most inclusive public service in the world. FedDev Ontario's Accessibility Plan, feedback tools and the evidence presented in this progress report are supporting this goal.

When we do our best to allow everyone the opportunity to participate and contribute without barriers, we make Canada better for all.

Glossary

Accommodation (Adjustment) – any change in the working environment that allows a person with a disability or functional limitation to do their job. Changes can include:

- adjustments to the physical workspace
- adaptations to the equipment or tools
- flexible work hours or job-sharing
- relocation of the workspace within the greater workplace
- reallocation or exchange of some non-essential tasks for others
- time off for medical appointments

Accommodations (adjustments) can be temporary, periodic or long-term, depending on the employee's situation or changes in the workplace.

Barrier – anything that hinders or prevents the full and equal participation in society of persons with an impairment, including physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairments, or a functional limitation (obstacle). Barriers include anything physical, architectural, technological or **attitudinal**. * Barriers can also be based on information, communications or anything that is the result of a policy or a practice.

***Attitudinal barriers** (attitudes) are behaviours, perceptions and assumptions that discriminate against persons with disabilities. These barriers often emerge from lack of understanding, which can lead people to ignore, to judge, or have misconceptions about persons with disability.

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.

Discrimination – treating someone differently or unfairly because of a personal characteristic or distinction. Whether the discrimination is intentional or not, it imposes disadvantages not imposed on others or withholds or limits access that is given to others. Under the *Canadian Human Rights Act*, there are 13 prohibited grounds of discrimination:

- race
- national or ethnic origin
- colour
- religion
- age
- sex
- sexual orientation
- gender identity or expression
- marital status
- family status
- genetic characteristics (including a requirement to undergo a genetic test or disclose the results of a genetic test)
- disability
- conviction for an offence for which a pardon has been granted or in respect of which a record suspension has been ordered

Inclusion – the act of including someone or something as part of a group. An inclusive workplace is fair, equitable, supportive, welcoming and respectful. Inclusion recognizes, values and leverages differences in identities, abilities, backgrounds, cultures, skills, experiences and perspectives that support and reinforce Canada's evolving human rights framework. (Source: [Building a Diverse and Inclusive Public Service: Final Report of the Joint Union/Management Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion.](#))