2024 PROGRESS REPORT

2023-2025 ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

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1. General

The full version of the Canadian Intergovernmental Conference Secretariat's (CICS) Accessibility Plan is available here: www.scics.ca/en/accessibility. An easy read version, that is shorter and simpler than the plan, can also be found at the same location. The Accessibility Plan documents and Progress Reports have been written in accessible plain language, to be as clear, concise, and appropriate as possible for the intended audience.

1.1 Contact Information & Feedback Process

CICS welcomes feedback from our employees, clients, conference attendees, and members of the public. We welcome feedback about accessibility at CICS and about our accessibility plan. Feedback can be submitted anonymously. We are committed to reviewing the feedback we receive and taking steps to address barriers that are identified through this feedback.

You can submit feedback about accessibility at CICS, CICS' implementation of its accessibility plan, or barriers you have encountered when dealing with CICS, by contacting:

> Benoit Massé, A/ Assistant Secretary
>
> E-mail: info@scics.ca
>
> Telephone: 613-995-2341
>
> Mail: P.O. Box 488, Station 'A', Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 8V5

Electronic versions of CICS' accessibility plan, progress reports, and a description of our feedback process that are compatible with assistive technology can be downloaded from our website at: www.scics.ca/en/accessibility. These can also be provided in alternative formats, within the following timelines:

- Print – 15 days

- Large print (Increased font size) – 15 days

- Braille (a system of raised dots that people who are blind or who have low vision can read with their fingers) – 45 days

- Audio (a recording of someone reading the text out loud) – 45 days

2. Areas in Section 5 of the Accessible Canada Act (ACA)

Accessibility needs to be a part of everything we do. We need to prioritize accessibility early and often to be truly accessible. Some people and teams at CICS will have a greater role to play. However, we all have responsibilities in making CICS more accessible. This needs to be an organization-wide mission.

2.1 Employment

CICS is a small agency, with only 40 employees. This means that our employees have many duties, and we count on our staff to do their jobs well. Our workplace needs to be accessible for them to do this. We want our staff to know they can be accommodated if they face barriers at work.

- CICS dedicated resources to improve the accommodation processes within the organization.
  - To ensure the clarity of the accommodation process and who is responsible for that process, the onboarding documentation has been updated and implemented department wide.
  - In 2024, CICS communicated a message to inform staff about the process to request accommodations.
  - In 2025, the Secretariat will finalize this process by reviewing and updating our accommodation policy.
- After a thorough examination, an accessibility officer role was created and assigned to the position in the organization that is most effectively able to provide guidance and dedicated support regarding accessibility in the organization.
- In mid-2024, CICS established that all posts related to job opportunities at CICS will systematically be linked to official channels that contain accessibility information. Furthermore, the language of job postings and the description of roles will be reviewed and revised to ensure they are inclusive and accessible.
- Throughout the year, the Secretariat worked with experts to review and revise its Code of Conduct and other relevant policies to include stronger and more specific language around disability and accessibility.

2.2 The Built Environment

Some people at CICS work from home, and some people work at our main office in Ottawa. Most employees have returned to work in the office three days per week, and some may return full-time in the future. We want our offices to be safe and accessible. We asked employees how they felt about accessibility in our offices. We also worked with an accessibility specialist who helped us uncover barriers in the built environment.

- In 2023, CICS assessed the viability of renovating an office space currently accessible through staircase-only, with the goal of transforming it into a fully accessible collaborative workspace.

    o In 2024, it was determined that this office space renovation would be put on hold due to the high costs involved and the significant risk of our building lease terminating in November 2027. Though it is a known barrier, it does not require immediate attention as the space is not in use. Resources were allocated to other accessibility improvements outlined in this report that were prioritized based on an analysis focused on employee needs.

- Last year, CICS began investigation options for accessible emergency notification methods for people with disabilities.

    o In June 2024, CICS worked with Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC), in collaboration with Group Mach, to install 13 fire alarm strobes on the ceiling in various locations of the office, which will flash in the event of an emergency.

- In 2023, the Secretariat signed a Specific Service Agreement (SSA) with PSPC for the installation of handrails along long paths of travel.

    o In March 2024, PSPC in conjunction with Group Mach, completed the work to install handrails along long paths of travel.

- CICS' Occupational Health and Safety committee conducted research regarding processes for employees with disabilities to request adjustments or accommodations to their workspaces.

- o This research resulted in the decision to integrate the digital GC Accessibility Passport, once available government-wide, into the Secretariat's communications with employees and onboarding documentation.

2.3 Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

Web technology plays a large role in how we do our work at CICS. Our office is in Ottawa, but we work with people all over Canada. Web tools help us to connect with our clients across the country.

Since the pandemic, many of the conferences we support are now virtual. Web technology allows us to run these conferences in a safe way. It is important that the technology we use is accessible to people who work at CICS, people who use our services, and people who attend our conferences.

- Using the findings of our 2022 web accessibility assessment, we will fix known barriers in our internet and intranet sites and web tools.

  - o Significant progress is being made on the department's intranet website. An external web expert created a more accessible site on a new platform, and the official launch is planned for early 2025.

  - o Work to improve accessibility on the public website will begin next year.

- As of 2024, all new web content created by CICS meets or exceeds WCAG 2.0 standards. As part of the continued improvement action plan, CICS will also evaluate and update existing key content to improve accessibility, such as the colour contrast of the site.

- In late 2024, CICS conducted research on web accessibility training for all new and current employees working in IT. This training will be implemented in 2025.

- The Secretariat implemented a new conference management system which has been user tested by people with disabilities. It is conformant with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 AA.

2.4 Communication, other than ICT

A big part of the work CICS does involves communication. We communicate with clients to plan conferences. And we help governments communicate with each other by setting up these conferences. We also help governments communicate information to the Canadian public and the media.

- During early 2024, we created and implemented a process for requesting and receiving documents and materials in alternate formats.

- In 2024, CICS hired an external expert to update our communications policy to include accessibility standards.

- Throughout the year, staff who create documents began receiving training on creating accessible documents; In 2025, CICS will continue this process.

- All new documents that are created are accessible according to our newly developed standards.

- CICS formalized a client communications policy that requires that clients submitting information for publication by CICS meet a minimum threshold of accessibility.

- Moving forward, CICS will add audio descriptions or transcripts that are compatible with screen readers to all newly created YouTube videos and other streaming content.

2.5 The Procurement of Goods, Services and Facilities

When accessibility is considered at the start of any process, barriers are reduced. Accessibility standards in procurement processes ensure that goods, services, and facilities are ready to use by anyone who needs them.

Goals have been created to ensure accessibility is a priority in procurement.

- In 2024, CICS established method for efficiently sourcing accessibility services (e.g., Braille, digital audio, captioning, descriptive video, sign language interpretation). When the Secretariat receives any such request, our employees are able to accommodate it in a timely manner.

- Procurement officers will receive in-house accessibility training in January 2025, and additional training offered by Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) will also be communicated and encouraged at that time.

2.6   The Design and Delivery of Programs and Services

A lot of the work CICS does depends on our client. The people who use our services make the final decisions about conference planning. However, it is our responsibility to help our clients make decisions. We want their conference experience to run smoothly. A well-run conference includes accessibility. If we want to be more accessible as an organization, we need to encourage accessible practices with our clients too. We need to ask them about their accessibility needs when they come to us for help. And we need to encourage them to think about how to make their conferences more accessible.

- CICS created an internal working group to develop an internal set of accessibility guidelines. The guidelines include a checklist of priority items for CICS staff to consider when organizing conferences.

- Starting in late 2024 and continuing into 2025, the Secretariat is developing a checklist of accessibility best practices for conferences, which we will include as part of our regular communication with clients.

2.7   Transportation

CICS does not provide transportation services to employees or customers, but our offices are located in a central downtown core that has a multitude of public transportation options in its vicinity. Accessible train and bus stations are located near the office, and access to the building is fully accessible.

3.   Consultations

The Secretariat consulted with its internal stakeholders through survey format. This survey covered topics related to identifying and addressing accessibility barriers at CICS, including those in the built environment, information and communications, technology, policies and procedures, and other systemic issues. These internal consultations were not conducted solely with persons with disabilities, but rather with all stakeholders. This approach ensured that the

Secretariat received unbiased and honest feedback from those who identify as persons with a disability and those that prioritize accessibility for all. This allowed for a more fulsome understanding of the accessibility and barriers in our organizational context. Additionally, CICS implemented a new survey for external stakeholders (conference organizers) that assessed the extent to which CICS effectively fulfilled all requested accessibility accommodations in both virtual and in-person conference contexts.

4.   Feedback

Feedback from the internal survey focused primarily on improving accessibility for signage, conference room sound levels, accessibility of internal documents, as well as ensuring clarity in job postings and training formats. CICS has taken this feedback into consideration and implemented actions such as aligning signage updates with government-wide guidance, enhancing conference room accessibility by December 2024, revising internal documents, standardizing job postings to clarify physical requirements, and providing fully bilingual training. Feedback from the external survey highlighted significant improvement in accessibility for in-person conferences, with 94% agreeing or strongly agreeing that CICS effectively fulfilled requested accommodations, up from 71% in 2023. For virtual conferences, 100% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, maintaining the same high standard as the previous year.

5.   Glossary

The following definitions apply throughout this plan:

Accessibility: The design of products, devices, services, environments, technologies, policies and rules in a way that allows all people, including people with a variety of disabilities, to access them.

Barrier: Anything that might hinder people with disabilities full and equal participation. Barriers can be architectural, technological, attitudinal, based on information or communications, or can be the result of a policy or procedure.

Built Environment: The physical spaces where work is done, and services are provided.

Conference: An event where different groups of people meet to discuss shared business virtually or in person.

Disability: Any impairment, or difference in physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, or communication ability. Disabilities can be permanent, temporary, or can change over time.

Intergovernmental: Between different levels and types of government.

Secretariat: A government office.