



Canadian
Intergovernmental
Conference
Secretariat

Secrétariat
des conférences
intergouvernementales
canadiennes

Canadian Intergovernmental
Conference Secretariat

2026-2028
Accessibility Plan

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1. General

This is the full version of the Canadian Intergovernmental Conference Secretariat's (CICS) Accessibility Plan. An easy read version, that is shorter and simpler than the plan, is available here: www.scics.ca/en/accessibility. Copies of CICS's first Accessibility Plan (2023 to 25) and annual progress reports are also available on the website.

1.1 Description of the Canadian Intergovernmental Conference Secretariat (CICS)

CICS is a federal agency that provides planning services when different levels of government need to meet with each other. CICS provides services to provincial, territorial, and federal levels of government. First ministers, ministers and deputy ministers often need to share important information and plans with one another. Holding a conference is one way to do this. Conferences can be complicated to plan. CICS helps governments by taking care of the technical and administrative parts of running a conference. This way leaders and speakers at the conference can focus on the information they need to share. We take care of tasks like distribution of documents, setting up conference registration, setting up the conference site, organizing translation and interpretation services, and providing technical support.

1.2 Statement of Commitment

CICS provides a valuable service to governments and the people they serve. We help governments communicate important information with each other through conferences.

We are committed to being accessible because we are committed to serving the Canadian public and the governments that represent them. That includes people with disabilities.

CICS is committed to making work more accessible for our employees. We want our employees to be included and supported at work.

We are committed to making sure our services are accessible for people who use them. This includes being accessible for government leaders, workers, and journalists with disabilities. We want clients to know they can trust us with their conference needs. And we will advise our clients to make accessible choices when making decisions about their conferences. We want CICS conferences to be inclusive.

This accessibility plan will help us to achieve these goals. Beyond this accessibility plan, we are committed to continuous learning and improvement when it comes to accessibility. We pledge to do this in consultation with people with disabilities.

1.3 Contact Information and 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 this 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 or about this plan by contacting:

Position title: Senior Planning and Reporting Analyst

E-mail: info@scics.ca

Telephone: 613-296-1138 (Answered between 9:00am to 3:00pm Eastern Time Monday to Friday. Leave a message if no answer.)

Mail: P.O. Box 488, Station 'A', Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 8V5

You can use the contact information above to:

- request CICS's accessibility plan in an accessible format;
- request the description of CICS's feedback process in an accessible format; or
- provide feedback.

This plan and a description of our feedback process 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

1.4 Definitions

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 Canadian government.

Procurement: The process of acquiring goods, services, or facilities in a way that considers accessibility from the start, so that they can be used by all people, including people with disabilities.

Secretariat: A government office.

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG): Guidelines that make web content accessible to a wider range of people with disabilities.

2. Consultations

This section outlines how people with disabilities were consulted in the preparation of this accessibility plan. Listening to people with lived experience is essential, and CICS is committed to ongoing conversations to ensure our decisions are accessible and equitable.

To inform this plan, we conducted consultations in 2 ways:

1. An employee survey
2. A focus group with stakeholders with disabilities

What we heard in these consultations helped guide the priorities and actions in this plan.

2.1 Consultations With Employees Who Have Disabilities

We conducted a survey in July of 2025. We asked all CICS employees about barriers and ways to improve accessibility at CICS. The invitation was sent via email, and the survey was available in accessible formats such as SurveyMonkey.

Our priority was hearing from employees with disabilities. However, CICS is a small organization. To collect more feedback, we also asked employees close to someone with a disability to share their observations or suggestions.

A total number of 13 employees responded to the survey. No employees self identified as having a disability.

We asked the following questions:

- Q1. I am aware of employment barriers at CICS
- Q2. I have experienced employment barriers at CICS

- Q3. Comments or suggestions to share regarding employment barriers at CICS
- Q4. I am aware of built environment barriers at CICS
- Q5. I have experienced built environment barriers at CICS
- Q6. Comments or suggestions to share regarding built environment barriers at CICS
- Q7. I am aware of technological barriers that impact people with disabilities at CICS
- Q8. I have experienced technological barriers at CICS
- Q9. Comments or suggestions to share regarding technological related barriers at CICS
- Q10. I am aware of information and/or communications barriers at CICS
- Q11. I have experienced information and communications barriers at CICS
- Q12. Comments or suggestions to share regarding information and/or communications barriers at CICS
- Q13. I am aware of procurement barriers at CICS
- Q14. I have experienced procurement barriers at CICS
- Q15. Comments or suggestions to share regarding procurement barriers at CICS
- Q16. I am aware of policies or procedures that create systemic accessibility barriers for people with disabilities at CICS
- Q17. I have experienced systemic accessibility barriers at CICS due to policies or procedures
- Q18. Comments or suggestions to share regarding systemic accessibility barriers at CICS
- Q19. I am aware of transportation barriers at CICS
- Q20. I have experienced transportation barriers at CICS

- Q21. Comments or suggestions to share regarding transportation barriers at CICS
- Q22. I am aware of accessibility barriers at CICS that have not been covered in this survey
- Q23. I have experienced accessibility barriers at CICS that have not been covered by this survey
- Q24. If you have raised issues relating to accessibility barriers at CICS and they have not been addressed, please provide details about the barrier and the requirements to eliminate it
- Q25. Final comments or suggestions to share regarding accessibility barriers at CICS
- Q26. If you would like to participate in a focus group to discuss Accessibility at CICS in more depth, email megan.timmons@scics.ca to volunteer

2.2 Consultations With Stakeholders Who Have Disabilities

In the summer of 2025, CICS invited stakeholders to participate in a virtual focus group to share their experiences with accessibility, including any barriers they have encountered or observed at CICS conferences. The invitation was sent by email to a contact list of over 900 stakeholders, which included conference organizers and attendees. Stakeholders who self-identify as having a disability were specifically encouraged to take part.

A virtual focus group was held over Microsoft Teams and facilitated by a third-party accessibility consulting firm. Of the 13 people who responded to the invitation, 2 attended the session. One of the participants identified as a person with a disability. In addition, one person submitted written feedback and another participated in a one-on-one virtual interview.

Participants were asked to reflect on their experiences and to identify what is working well and where challenges remain. Stakeholders were asked the following questions:

1. Please share how you usually engage with CICS and why you wanted to participate in this session.
2. Have you experienced accessibility barriers as an attendee or as an organizer? Can you describe what that was like?
3. When thinking about accessibility at CICS conferences, as an attendee or organizer, what do you think is working well?
4. When thinking about accessibility at CICS conferences, as an attendee or organizer, where are challenges showing up?
5. If you could change one thing about how CICS approaches accessibility, in planning or delivery, what would it be?
6. Are there accessibility practices you've experienced at other events, either as a participant or organizer, you think CICS could learn from?
7. Is there anything we haven't asked you think is important to share about accessibility at CICS conferences and events?

2.3 What We Heard

Feedback from the consultations helped us to write this plan. Participants highlighted areas of strength as well as opportunities for improvement.

Overall, employees highlighted uneven bilingual communication and the need for captioning to support both employees and clients. They also noted physical accessibility barriers such as unreliable elevators, broken doors, and limited accessible parking, which can make commuting difficult. For business travel, employees who require accessible arrangements for flights, hotels, or ground transportation currently rely on case-by-case accommodation requests, as no formal process is in place to guide these requests.

Participants shared that CICS's virtual events are generally accessible from an oral delivery standpoint, but written and visual materials can create challenges for some

attendees. Participants identified both digital and communication-related barriers. These include inaccessible file formats, limited guidance on meeting platform accessibility features, and unclear procedural requirements.

Some key themes from the feedback we received are:

- **Digital accessibility:** Challenges navigating online meeting platforms and accessing materials in formats compatible with screen readers or other assistive technologies.
- **Accessible communication and processes:** Complex forms, unclear procedural requirements, and limited opportunities for direct support can create barriers for participants with vision, cognitive, or other disabilities.
- **Participation and engagement:** Few people with disabilities are actively engaged in CICS events, possibly due to low awareness or other broader systemic barriers, including those related to the hiring process of the public servants who attend or organize CICS conferences.
- **Built environment and transportation accessibility:** Issues with building access and parking, and the need for clearer processes for requesting accessible travel arrangements.

2.4 How We Used this Feedback in Our Accessibility Plan

Feedback from consultations helped shape the goals in this plan, particularly in ICT, communications, the built environment, and transportation. In response, CICS has committed to a range of actions to improve accessibility across its operations, including those below.

ICT and Communications

- Train staff on creating accessible documents and communication products.
- Launch an intranet accessibility space (SharePoint) with practical resources and best practices.
- Update the conference management system to improve accessibility.

- Implement internal accessibility guidelines, including a conference planning checklist.
- Update the communications policy to include accessibility, bilingualism, and plain language requirements.
- Add accessibility-related questions to post-conference surveys.
- Develop a client-facing checklist of accessibility best practices.
- Promote live captioning in internal meetings.

Built Environment and Transportation

- Provide employees with clear information on accessible commuting options, including parking, building entrances, and nearby public transit.
- Establish a clear process for employees to submit accommodation requests for accessible business travel, including flights, hotels, and ground transportation.

We're grateful for the contributions of both the employees who shared their experiences and the focus group participants. We recognize that consultations must be ongoing, and we're committed to building relationships of trust with people who have disabilities to support accessible and inclusive decision making.

3. Areas Described under Section 5 of the Accessible Canada Act (ACA)

3.1 Organization-Wide Initiatives

Accessibility is part of everything we do at CICS. Some teams have specific responsibilities, but everyone has a role to play. CICS aims to create an inclusive workplace and ensure that accessibility is considered in all aspects of our work.

Actions Taken and Barriers Identified

Since 2023, CICS has strengthened its accessibility governance and awareness. The Accessibility Officer role was created to lead accessibility planning, reporting, and initiatives across the organization. Accessibility training was completed by 96% of Conference Services employees, increasing awareness of accessibility and inclusion. CICS also formalized consultations with employees, conference organizers, and conference participants through annual and post-event surveys.

Some barriers remain, including the need to formalize consultations with people with disabilities and to include accessibility in performance measures across the organization.

Commitments for 2026 to 2028

- By December 2026, we will formalize consultations with people with disabilities by adding optional self-identification questions and accessibility-specific feedback prompts to existing employee and client surveys. Feedback will remain anonymous and will be used to inform accessibility planning and reporting.
- By December 2028, we will integrate accessibility into employee performance measurement by adding an accessibility-related objective or question to annual performance discussions for all employees.
- Starting in January 2026, we will share accessibility progress updates during extended management meetings on an annual basis.
- From January 2026 onward, we will include accessibility and disability inclusion in all Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion sessions by sharing updates on accessibility progress or related learning resources in each session.
- From 2026 to 2028, we will review accessibility considerations during the planning of new initiatives across CICS by ensuring that accessibility is discussed and documented before initiatives are approved.

- In 2026 and 2027, we will publish a short public update on our progress against this plan, consistent with the approach in our 2023 to 25 Accessibility Plan.

3.2 Employment

CICS is a very small organization of approximately 40 employees. Because every employee plays a key role, the workplace must be accessible and inclusive. The 2023 to 25 Accessibility Plan committed to clarifying the accommodation policy, reviewing job postings, and improving accessibility awareness across the organization.

Actions Taken and Barriers Identified

Job postings have been reviewed and updated for accessibility, and mandatory accessibility training on event accessibility has been completed by 96% of Conference Services employees. These actions increased awareness of accessibility and inclusion across CICS.

However, some barriers remain. The updated accommodation policy was delayed and has not yet been finalized. The shared technical workspace, where staff prepare and test equipment, has noise and visual distractions that make it difficult for some employees to focus. Staff also reported uneven bilingual communication and said they would benefit from more support when learning new digital tools.

Commitments for 2026 to 2028

- By December 2026, we will reduce noise and visual distractions in the shared technical workspace by providing noise-cancelling headsets or visual partitions where possible.
- By December 2027, we will finalize, publish, and implement a clear, plain-language accommodation policy that explains how employees can request accommodations, the roles and responsibilities of managers, and the timelines for responding to requests.

- From 2026 to 2028, we will provide ad hoc training and quick reference materials on new digital tools as they are introduced, to support employees in learning new technologies.
- From 2026 to 2028, we will promote consistency in bilingual and accessible communication by sharing reminders and best practices with staff during internal meetings and through the intranet.

3.3 The Built Environment

Some employees work remotely, while others work from our Ottawa office at 222 Queen Street. For those working on site, the built environment must be safe and accessible. The 2023 to 25 Accessibility Plan identified barriers in the physical environment, including parking, signage, and conference spaces. Because CICS leases its office space and does not control conference venue choices, our ability to remove some barriers is limited.

Actions Taken and Barriers Identified

An internal accessibility review of our office environment conducted in 2025 confirmed that barriers remain in areas such as accessible parking and wayfinding signage. Employees also reported that recurring issues with building infrastructure, such as broken doors and elevators, create challenges. Some improvements have been made through minor workspace adjustments and accessibility repairs, but barriers remain. Accessible parking and elevator reliability continue to pose challenges. Employees have also expressed a need for clear information about accessible routes and entrances.

Commitments for 2026 to 2028

- By December 2028, we will provide clear guidance on accessible routes and entrances through our internal communication channels to help employees navigate our spaces.

- From 2026 to 2028, we will improve the process for employees to request workspace accommodations by promoting the Government of Canada's new accessibility and accommodation tool for workplace adjustments.
- From 2026 to 2028, we will work with the building landlord to address priority accessibility barriers, including parking and elevator reliability.
- Once the Government of Canada releases the new Wayfinding and Signage Standard (expected in 2027), we will review the new requirements and develop an implementation plan to update our office signage in the next accessibility plan cycle.

3.4 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 connect with our clients across the country. Many of the conferences we support are now hybrid, with both in-person and virtual participants. These tools allow us to run conferences in a safe and efficient way. It is important that the technology we use is accessible to employees, clients, and conference participants.

Actions Taken and Barriers Identified

Since 2023, CICS has made progress in improving digital accessibility. The Conference Management System has been launched, and IT staff have completed accessibility training. These improvements have made it easier to manage conferences and provide technical support to clients.

However, some barriers remain. The public-facing website does not yet meet the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 Level AA standard, and staff and clients need clearer guidance on creating accessible digital documents. While CICS supports clients in organizing conferences, we do not produce all conference materials and therefore have limited control over their accessibility. To address this, CICS will

continue to provide best practices and resources to help clients and staff create accessible content.

Commitments for 2026 to 2028

- From 2026 to 2028, we will implement regular updates to the Conference Management System to improve accessibility, functionality, and user experience.
- By December 2026, we will provide staff with training and quick reference materials on accessible document creation and the use of accessibility features in commonly used software.
- By December 2027, we will create an intranet accessibility space (SharePoint) to provide practical resources and best practices on accessible digital tools, documents, communications, conferences, and procurement.
- By December 2028, we will overhaul the public-facing website to meet core requirements of WCAG 2.1 Level AA.

3.5 Communication, other than Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

Communication is at the core of CICS's work. We communicate with clients to plan conferences, support governments in sharing information with one another, and provide information to the media and the public. The 2023 to 2025 Accessibility Plan committed to updating the communications policy, training staff, and ensuring new documents are accessible.

Actions Taken and Barriers Identified

CICS has increased awareness of accessible event communication through training on event accessibility completed by 96% of employees who support conferences, and through guidance provided by the Accessibility Officer. Efforts have also been made to

improve the consistency of bilingual communication and to apply accessibility standards to internal and external documents.

Some barriers remain. The communications policy has not yet been updated to include accessibility, bilingualism, and plain language requirements. Conference documents and presentation materials are created by clients rather than by CICS, which limits our ability to ensure their accessibility. In these cases, CICS provides guidance and best practices to help clients make their materials accessible. While captioning is available for recorded or virtual content, it is not yet consistently available for live internal meetings.

Commitments for 2026 to 2028

- By December 2026, we will train staff on how to create accessible documents and communication products.
- By December 2027, we will update the Communications Policy to include accessibility, bilingualism, and plain language requirements.
- By December 2027, we will publish guidance and a client-facing checklist of accessibility best practices to help clients create accessible conference documents and materials.
- By December 2028, we will ensure all new public communications and digital documents meet accessibility requirements under the Government of Canada's Standard on Web Accessibility and WCAG 2.1 Level AA.
- From 2026 to 2028, we will promote the use of live captioning in internal virtual meetings by sharing guidance on how to enable captions in Microsoft Teams and Zoom, and by encouraging meeting organizers to include captioning options in meeting invitations.

3.6 The Design and Delivery of Programs and Services

CICS supports intergovernmental meetings across Canada by helping governments plan and deliver conferences. This includes providing logistical support, technical services, and administrative coordination. The people who use our services, our clients, make the final decisions about their conferences, including accessibility features such as venues, materials, and formats. This means that while CICS cannot control every accessibility decision, we have a responsibility to guide and support our clients in making inclusive choices. A well-run conference includes accessibility, and CICS can help make this happen through advice, training, and accessible tools.

Actions Taken and Barriers Identified

Since 2023, CICS began developing internal accessibility guidelines for staff. This work has helped identify barriers and inform future planning. However, the internal accessibility guidelines were delayed due to competing priorities and still need to be finalized. Consultations also confirmed that clients would benefit from more consistent accessibility advice during the planning stages of conferences.

Commitments for 2026 to 2028

- By December 2026, we will complete and implement internal accessibility guidelines for CICS staff, including a checklist of priority accessibility considerations when organizing conferences.
- In 2026, we will hold an information session and training for staff that includes new guidance from Accessible Standards Canada.
- From 2026 to 2028, we will continue to provide accessibility guidance to clients during conference planning discussions and encourage the inclusion of accessible features such as barrier-free venues, accessible seating, and captioning where possible.

3.7 The Procurement of Goods, Services and Facilities

When accessibility is considered from the start, barriers are reduced. Accessibility standards in procurement processes help ensure that goods, services, and facilities are usable by everyone.

Actions Taken and Barriers Identified

The 2023 to 2025 Accessibility Plan committed to including accessibility requirements in Statements of Work and establishing a source list of accessibility service providers. These goals have now been achieved. CICS now consistently includes accessibility requirements in procurement documents and uses Government of Canada standing offers and supply arrangements to access accessibility service providers as needed. While accessibility is now part of our procurement process, staff noted that practical guidance on how to apply accessibility criteria could be easier to find. Ensuring that staff involved in procurement understand how to evaluate accessibility considerations will help CICS continue to reduce barriers in the goods and services we purchase.

Commitments for 2026 to 2028

- In 2026, we will provide training for staff involved in procurement-related tasks, including new guidance from Accessible Standards Canada and best practices for accessible procurement.

3.8 Transportation

CICS does not provide transportation services to employees or clients. However, employees must commute to the Ottawa office and travel across Canada to support conferences. The 2023 to 2025 Accessibility Plan did not identify goals under transportation. Since then, new barriers have been identified. Recent employee feedback and internal reviews found challenges such as limited accessible parking and occasional building access issues, which can make commuting difficult. Employees who travel for work may also need support arranging accessible flights, hotels, or ground

transportation. Currently, these accommodations are handled case by case, and there is no formal process to guide employees through travel-related requests.

Actions Taken and Barriers Identified

CICS provides travel support and accommodations as needed, but the process for requesting accessible travel arrangements is informal. Employees have also noted that information about accessible commuting options is not easily available in one place.

Commitments for 2026 to 2028

- From 2026 to 2027, we will provide employees with clear information on accessible commuting options, including parking locations, building entrances, and nearby public transit connections. This will be posted on the intranet accessibility space (SharePoint).
- By December 2027, we will establish and communicate a clear process for employees to request accessible travel arrangements, including for flights, hotels, and ground transportation, as part of the new accommodation policy.

4. Conclusion

The work we do at CICS is important. We bring representatives of the federal, provincial, and territorial governments together at conferences to discuss issues important to all Canadians.

We are committed to being accessible because we are committed to serving and representing the Canadian public. That includes people with disabilities. We want to be accessible for all—for our employees, our clients, the people who attend our conferences, and the Canadian public.

This Accessibility Plan will guide our improvements from 2026 to 2028. It is one step in our ongoing effort to make CICS a more inclusive and accessible organization. We will publish annual progress updates to share what we have achieved and what still needs to be done.

We welcome feedback at any time on our accessibility efforts and this plan. Feedback helps us identify barriers and improve our practices. Information on how to share feedback is available on our website at www.scics.ca/en/accessibility.

Looking ahead, our focus in early 2026 will be on launching the new accessibility initiatives outlined in this plan, continuing collaboration with our employees and clients, and embedding accessibility as a core part of everything we do.