NRC·CNRC

NRC Accessibility Progress Report 2024

National Research Council Canada
Conseil national de recherches Canada

Canada

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Catalogue Number: NR1-23E-PDF, ISSN 3111-3265

This document is available on the Government of Canada website: Accessibility progress report 2024 for the National Research Council of Canada

Aussi disponible en français sous le titre : Rapport d'étape sur l'accessibilité 2024 pour le Conseil national de recherches du Canada

Accessibility progress report 2024 for the National Research Council of Canada

December 2024

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General

Feedback is essential to developing our future accessibility plans, which will build upon the NRC Accessibility Plan 2023-2025. Comments, recommendations and ideas from our employees and members of the public are a valuable part of this feedback. We commit to documenting and reviewing all feedback and addressing concerns as quickly as possible. We will acknowledge receipt of feedback on accessibility unless it is submitted anonymously.

Examples of enquiries and feedback:

- Requesting a copy of the accessibility plan, progress reports or feedback process

- Requesting alternate formats such as large text or braille
- Information about a barrier
- Comments about implementation of the action plan

To share feedback or submit an enquiry, complete the online accessibility feedback form. You can identify yourself or submit feedback anonymously; however, we are unable to acknowledge or reply to anonymous feedback.

The main contact for the NRC's accessibility plan is the manager of Workplace Programs.

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Overview

This progress report highlights the positive strides the National Research Council of Canada (NRC) made since the December 2023 progress report. Over the past year, we completed an additional 15 actions, bringing the total to 28 out of 41 actions to address the main accessibility barriers. With 13 actions in progress, we remain committed to building a more inclusive and accessible future for all.

Foundational areas of focus:

- Organizational culture and change management

- Governance and oversight

Priority areas of focus from the Act:

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

Foundational elements

Organizational culture and change management

The NRC strives for a workplace culture that supports and fosters accessibility. Our culture and shared responsibility will support and sustain this important work across all areas of the plan.

Barrier 1: Managers and employees lack awareness about accessibility including the goals of the Act

Action 1.1 completed as per Accessibility progress report 2023.

Action 1.2

Develop training programs tailored to employees, supervisors and service providers to help them understand their roles and responsibilities in ensuring accessibility and fostering a barrier-free workplace. Training will

be delivered in accessible formats.

Planned completion date: December 2023

Revised completion date: March 2025

Status: In progress

Updates:

- NRC Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy (2024–2027) has a specific focus on enhancing inclusive competency practices. Under this objective, additional training will be identified to support building awareness around accessibility.
- Created an accessibility landing page on our Intranet, which provides employees with a wealth of tools and resources, including access to the Canada School of Public Service Accessibility Learning Series, toolkits and other materials designed to foster greater understanding and expertise in accessibility.
- Tailored training has been offered to service providers across the NRC, including key areas for Information and Technology and communication professionals.
- Developed training related to our accommodation process for employees, supervisors and service providers. Rollout will begin in January 2025.

Governance and oversight

A coordinated approach with regular monitoring and oversight is key to making steady and timely progress in advancing our objectives.

Barrier 2: Lack of a coordinated approach for advancing accessibility

Action 2.1

Identify who is accountable for accessibility and establish clear roles and responsibilities for its implementation and decision-making.

Planned completion date: June 2023

Revised completion date: December 2024

Status: Completed

Updates:

- Defined key partners' responsibilities on reporting progress and challenges related to accessibility and providing an annual update to senior executives.
- Established clearer responsibilities for service providers in supporting and advancing accessibility practices.
- Provided tools, resources and learning opportunities to key partners including internal service providers to enhance overall competency, supporting a coordinated and effective approach in advancing accessibility best practices.

Action 2.2 completed as per Accessibility progress report 2023.

Action 2.3

Publish annual progress reports starting in December 2023 on the implementation of the plan.

Planned completion date: December 2025

Status: In progress

Updates:

- Published the first annual progress report in December 2023.

- The second progress report will be published in December 2024.

Areas under the *Accessible Canada Act*

Employment

The NRC is committed to being an accessible employer and strengthening the hiring, support, participation and retention of persons with disabilities. The following actions will help eliminate representation gaps and create an inclusive and barrier-free work environment where employees with disabilities can thrive.

Barrier 3: Persons with disabilities are not recruited and represented at a level relative to the available workforce in Canada

Action 3.1 and 3.2 completed as per Accessibility progress report 2023.

Action 3.3

Develop an outreach strategy to recruit persons with disabilities. Establish one or more strategic partnerships with organizations that advance employment of persons with disabilities to increase NRC hires and to better support and retain them in our workforce.

Planned completion date: September 2023

Revised completion date: January 2025

Status: In progress

Updates:

- Built partnerships with organizations that advance the employment of persons with disabilities.
- Developed and launched a pilot internship program for persons with disabilities that offers interns meaningful paid, short-term work experience (4 to 6 months).
- Contracted with a partner to strengthen the internship program and provide coaching services to supervisors to support the intern's onboarding, development and overall employment experience.
- Added a specific focus on closing representation gaps against labour market availability for persons with disabilities to the new NRC Equity, Diversity and Inclusion strategy (2024-2027). Additional focused outreach and recruitment efforts will be undertaken to sustain progress.

Barrier 4: Employees are reporting that the current accommodation policy and process is lengthy and challenging to navigate

Action 4.1

Review and update the accommodation policy and streamline our practices to better support employees.

Planned completion date: December 2023

Revised completion date: January 2025

Status: In progress

Updates:

- Collaborated with internal service providers to streamline the accommodation process and establish clear communication channels and procedures.

- Created a process to identify and prioritize accommodation requests including software and hardware requests that help improve timely accommodations.
- Training for supervisors and employees will be launched in January 2025.
- The objective is that employees and supervisors understand and can clearly navigate the accommodation process, fostering transparency and accountability.

Action 4.2

Establish service standards for accommodation requests and monitor response times.

Planned completion date: December 2023

Revised completion date: January 2025

Status: In progress

Updates:

- Established service standards for accommodation requests amongst service providers.
- Response times will be monitored by service providers pending future launch of an online request process.
- Service standards will be rolled out to supervisors and employees in early 2025.

Action 4.3

Implement a standard practice to follow up with employees with disabilities who have submitted accommodation and adjustment requests to ensure they have the tools and equipment they need.

Planned completion date: June 2024

Revised completion date: January 2025

Status: In progress

Updates:

- Identified the accessibility feedback form as a tool to collect feedback, best practices, and an avenue to follow-up if necessary.

Barrier 5: Lack of community, sense of belonging and sources of support for persons with disabilities

Action 5.1 to 5.3 completed as per Accessibility progress report 2023.

Built environment

The NRC strives to ensure its built environment is welcoming and accessible for employees, partners and members of the public. Our built environment includes buildings and workspaces.

Barrier 6: Not all NRC buildings, parking facilities and designated drop-off zones are fully accessible

Action 6.1 completed as per Accessibility progress report 2023.

Action 6.2

Establish the process to engage with persons with disabilities to address accessibility during the planning, implementation and post-implementation stages for new builds and retrofits to existing buildings.

Planned completion date: December 2024

Status: Completed

Updates:

- Piloted a new process for a major office retrofit project to design and develop new and accessible workspaces. Received more than 200 responses from a survey on pre-design planning to inform accessibility best practices.
- Developed an approach to engage with employees to identify accessibility barriers encountered in the workplace during the planning, implementation and post-implementation stages of project delivery for large-scale building retrofits and new build projects.
- Information collected will be taken into consideration during design development and implementation. Following project completion, employees will have an opportunity to provide additional feedback for consideration in future projects.

Action 6.3

Utilize tools to help identify deficiencies with respect to accessibility issues in the management of real property assets (buildings).

Planned completion date: March 2024

Revised completion date: March 2026

Status: In progress

Updates:

- Assessed software solutions to identify and address accessibility barriers and deficiencies in the built environment.
- After identifying potential software solutions, a comparative analysis of platforms was conducted to assess capabilities and outcomes.
- Ongoing efforts are underway to determine which tool best meets our needs.

Action 6.4

Engage with building owners for all NRC-leased facilities to develop strategies to address accessibility deficiencies.

Planned completion date: December 2024

Revised completion date: December 2025

Status: In progress

Updates:

- Initiated discussions with other government departments and the National Research Council of Canada Industrial Research Assistance Program to understand their processes for addressing accessibility deficiencies and establish a successful engagement process.
- Continue to work with key partners and building owners to support the removal of all accessibility barriers in NRC-leased spaces.

Information and communication technologies

Accessible information and communication technologies help ensure barrier-free access to information, tools and digital resources for employees and clients. The long-term goal is to make digital platforms fully accessible for all.

Barrier 7: Systems, tools and communications channels on our networks are not fully accessible

Action 7.1

Develop awareness and training requirements for IT professionals to gain better knowledge of accessibility.

Planned completion date: March 2024

Status: Completed

Updates:

- Organized accessibility training for web developers in several of the corporate applications teams.
- Integrated web accessibility efforts in monthly activity reports for senior management, for visibility and awareness.
- Identified training courses and tutorials for IT professionals.
- Compiled and promoted training resources (training and course lists) for IT professionals, which are also available to all employees.

Action 7.2

Commence regular, ongoing accessibility assessments of current websites and applications.

Planned completion date: March 2025

Status: Completed

Updates:

- Introduced requirement for all new corporate applications to consider accessibility requirements or complete an assessment prior to launch.
- Conducted numerous web accessibility assessments for new applications and existing web forms and websites. Completed 27 full and partial assessments from January 1, 2024, to June 18, 2024.

Action 7.3

Create an inventory of digital resources and prioritize and track their improvement.

Planned completion date: March 2024

Status: Completed

Updates:

- Expanded the inventory.
- Defined target scope of inventory to include web applications and websites.
- Refined process to engage with internal partners and gather inventory items from across the organization.

Action 7.4

Develop accessibility requirement standards for procured IT solutions.

Planned completion date: December 2023

Revised completion date: December 2024

Status: Completed

Updates:

- Launched a new business process automation software (Process Street) to embed accessibility considerations into procurement processes, procedures and policies.
- Equipped procurement officers and clients with tools and considerations to support accessibility practices.

Barrier 8: The NRC does not have the necessary tools, processes and resources to support technology-related accommodation requests

Action 8.1

Develop and publish a list of software and tools available to enhance accessibility.

Planned completion date: March 2024

Status: Completed

Updates:

- Published and advertised a list of tools to employees. List will be updated as required.

Action 8.2

Put a process in place to identify and prioritize software and hardware requests to help improve accessibility.

Planned completion date: December 2024

Status: Completed

Updates:

- Developed intake form to identify and prioritize accessibility-related software and hardware requests.
- Developed and socialized service standard for accessibility-related IT requests.

Communication, other than information and communication technologies

The NRC is committed to equipping and supporting NRC employees to acquire skills to apply accessibility standards and develop compliant communications products. All communications products in print and on digital platforms must be accessible and inclusive for all NRC employees and Canadians.

Barrier 9: Not all internal and external communications products (print and online) are consistently accessible

Action 9.1

Identify existing online content that does not comply with the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat's standards on accessibility and guidelines for making communications products and activities accessible.

Planned completion date: March 2023

Revised completion date: September 2025

Status: In progress

Updates:

- Identified 2,786 external web pages to be reviewed and adjusted for accessibility.
- Identified 1,300 intranet pages to be reviewed and adjusted. Anticipated start date for intranet revision and adjustment is December 2024.

Action 9.2

Update existing non-compliant online content as per the new Information and Communications Technology standard.

Planned completion date: April 2025

Revised completion date: September 2025

Status: In progress

Updates:

- Undertaking accessibility adjustments based on the current Government of Canada Standard on Web Accessibility until the Government of Canada's new information and communications

technology standard (ICT) is released. Approximately 53% of the revisions and adjustments have been completed.

- Following the release of the new ICT standard, previous work will be reviewed to ensure appropriate alignment with it.

Action 9.3

Perform ongoing quality-assurance exercises on all communications products.

Planned completion date: December 2025

Status: Completed

Updates:

- Developed and shared an accessibility and plain language checklist on requirements for print and online communication materials.
- Designed a system to enable users to assess all new print and online content for accessibility compliance before it is published.
- Added to our automated translation form a section to confirm an accessibility review was conducted before documents are translated.

Action 9.4

Provide training and support to communications professionals on how to create accessible documents and on the use of plain language.

Planned completion date: April 2024

Status: Completed

Updates:

- Developed and presented 7 accessibility training sessions to internal communications professionals. Presentations are ongoing.

- Established regular online training on accessibility for employees working in communications.
- Held a plain language training session in both official languages for Communications Branch employees.
- Provided ad hoc accessibility presentations to other NRC divisions.

Action 9.5

Raise awareness on accessibility and provide advice to employees, through internal channels (employee and supervisor newsletters), on preparing and publishing documentation.

Planned completion date: December 2024

Status: Completed

Updates:

- Updated information about accessibility on our Intranet with new content and additional resources.
- Published several articles, guidelines and resources about accessibility internally.
- Featured accessibility on the intranet home page as needed. Experienced considerable increase in accessibility awareness (+18% views since April 2024).

Action 9.6

Develop a schedule to regularly share resources, guidance and standard practices on how to develop accessible documents and materials. Promote the information monthly through our internal channels.

Planned completion date: January 2024

Status: Completed

Updates:

- Identified opportunities (specific events and commemorative days) to raise awareness about accessibility and related resources.
- Communicated information and resources internally to develop accessible documents and materials.
- Guided employees and supervisors on accessibility best practices, including using plain language, creating accessible documents and organizing inclusive meetings and events.
- Promoted relevant training and initiatives related to accessibility, including those offered by the Canada School of Public Service and Accessibility, Accommodation and Adaptive Computer Technology service at Shared Services Canada.
- Developed and shared an accessibility and plain language checklist on the requirements for print and online communications materials.
- Developed and shared accessible Microsoft Office templates for reports, presentations and more to all employees.

Procurement of goods, services and facilities

The NRC strives to ensure accessibility is considered in all procurement processes. Procurement refers to the acquisition of goods and services through purchase orders and contracts. The procurement action plan includes both the process of procurement and the goods and services that are being procured.

Barrier 10: Lack of knowledge on accessibility and barriers faced by persons with disabilities in the procurement process

Action 10.1 completed as per Accessibility progress report 2023.

Action 10.2

Provide accessibility guidance to employees with procurement responsibilities based on Public Services and Procurement Canada guidelines.

Planned completion date: December 2024

Status: Completed

Updates:

- Embedded guidance throughout the procurement process to enable procurement officers to consider accessibility in their practices and procedures.
- Process Street software will enable procurement professionals to integrate new tools and resources to sustain efforts in supporting accessibility best practices.
- Next steps include monitoring compliance of this action. A dashboard will be developed to track procurements for accessibility considerations.

Action 10.3 and 10.4 completed as per Accessibility progress report 2023.

Barrier 11: Procurement documentation is not consistently available in accessible formats

Action 11.1 completed as per Accessibility progress report 2023.

Action 11.2

Convert inaccessible documentation, beginning with external procurement documents.

Planned completion date: December 2024

Status: Completed

Updates:

- Identified and assessed 48 external procurement documents to align with accessibility standards.
- Created a tracking sheet to record the document structure, typography, website links, non-text elements and multimedia to manage the changes.
- New documents will be compliant with accessibility standards and will undergo a review process to ensure accessibility.

Design and delivery of programs and services

The NRC is committed to making every program and service it offers accessible. The initial focus of the design and delivery of programs and services will be on the National Research Council Industrial Research Assistance Program. The program provides advice, connections and funding to help Canadian small and medium-sized businesses grow, increase their innovation capacity and take ideas to market.

Barrier 12: Accessibility is not fully integrated into the design and delivery of programs and services

Action 12.1

Conduct a review of programs and services across the NRC to identify barriers in design and delivery. This review will result in recommended areas of focus going forward.

Planned completion date: March 2024

Status: Completed

Updates:

- Collected 2022–2023 NRC data from the TBS Service Inventory on past and future actions to enhance service accessibility. This includes doing website assessments, providing online documents in accessible formats and giving internal training.
- Identified accessibility best practices from other science-based departments and agencies to inform future service designs.
- Presented the findings from these exercises to an executive NRC service management committee to inform and continue to improve our approach to service management.
- Work with service owners to identify additional steps to improve and prioritize accessibility in all of our services.

Actions led by the National Research Council Industrial Research Assistance Program:

Action 12.2

Review and assess all of the documentation and communications products (website, materials) against accessibility standard.

Planned completion date: December 2024

Revised completion status: March 2025

Status: In progress

Updates:

- Leveraged consultants to review the National Research Council of Canada Industrial Research Assistance Program's documentation and communications products to provide recommendations to enhance accessibility.

- Developed action plans and work is underway to make all materials accessible.

Action 12.3 completed as per Accessibility progress report 2023

Action 12.4

Contribute financial support to up to 5 client companies in the advanced manufacturing sector to hire persons with disabilities, in particular people identifying as being on the autism spectrum.

Planned completion date: December 2023

Revised completion status: March 2025

Status: In progress

Updates:

- Contributed $208,000 through 2 projects with Ontario-based company SocialliiASD that aimed to match candidates on the autism spectrum with career opportunities in the manufacturing sector.
- Carried out a second project to provide client companies with access to SocialliiASD services to review workplace policies and practices to support the creation of a neuro-inclusive workplace.

Action 12.5

The National Research Council of Canada Industrial Research Assistance Program will evaluate assistive technologies such as teletypewriter (TTY) technology, chatbots, live-agent chat services, real-time text and video relay services in its call centre.

Planned completion date: September 2023

Revised completion date: December 2025

Status: In progress

Updates:

- Reviewing the call centre script for inclusive language and clarity of processes.
- Continuing to explore assistive and adaptive technologies and solutions to support accessibility in our call centre.

Transportation

The NRC reviewed all its policies, practices, programs and services, and determined there are no barriers in the area of transportation.

Consultations

Engaging with persons with disabilities is essential to building an accessible workplace. Throughout the implementation of our plan and related initiatives, we have prioritized consultations so the voices of persons with disabilities and other equity-deserving groups lead our efforts.

Key consultations held in the past year:

- Consulted with persons with disabilities during our review of employment systems to help identify barriers, to inform our Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy. The NRC engaged with the Indigenous Strategy and Engagement team, racialized persons and the Committee on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion.
- Consulted with the NRC Persons with Disabilities Employee Network and the bargaining agents on streamlining the accommodation process.
- Consulted with the Committee on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion on the proposed revisions to the *Employment Equity Act*.

- The NRC Council working group on equity, diversity and inclusion held a consultation session with persons with disabilities and Indigenous peoples.

The insights gained from these consultations were instrumental in shaping the implementation of our accessibility plan. As we continue this journey, we remain committed to listening, reflecting on and incorporating the feedback from persons with disabilities and all equity-deserving groups. We deeply value the contributions of everyone who participated in these consultations and encourage ongoing dialogue.

Feedback

Over the past year, we consistently leveraged the valuable feedback we received from employees at all levels to refine our efforts and guide our approach. This feedback has informed our current initiatives and helped us identify new areas of focus as we continue to evolve and strengthen our commitment to accessibility.
Moving forward, we will build on these insights, continuing to align our actions with the needs of our community and reflect our ongoing dedication to fostering an inclusive, barrier-free environment.

Conclusion

Completing this annual progress report highlighted the organizational shift towards integrating accessibility into our practices, policies and programs. We will continue to uphold our commitments to reaching the goals outlined in the *Accessible Canada Act* and creating a barrier-free Canada by January 2040, both in our workplace and for those accessing our programs and services.

As we enter the final year of our current plan, our focus is on completing the outstanding actions while continuing to identify and eliminate barriers for an accessible workplace. We believe diversity is the cornerstone of inclusive innovation, which depends on creating a work environment that is inclusive, respectful and supportive for all.

Date modified:
2024-12-18