

Year 1 Progress Report

Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency

Year 1 Progress Report on the Accessibility Action Plan

The Honourable Gudie Hutchings
Minister of Rural Economic Development and Minister
responsible for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency

About this publication

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for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, 2023

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General

Message from the Equity, Inclusion and Anti-Racism champion

The Agency's Employment Equity (EE), Inclusion and Anti-Racism Committee brings together members from every equity-seeking group's employee network, each region/branch working group, and any committee linked to accessibility, inclusion, equity and/or anti-racism. Its mandate is to provide strategic direction to build and sustain an inclusive, accessible, safe and healthy workplace with business practices that welcome, respect, appreciate and include voices from diverse backgrounds in the identification of systemic racism, discrimination and barriers. Its role is also to promote and support the implementation of the Agency's EE, Inclusion and Anti-Racism Action Plan, which is aligned with the Clerk's Call to Action on Anti-Racism, Equity and Inclusion and with the advancement of the Calls to Action articulated in the Truth and Reconciliation Report (*Many Voices One Mind: a Pathway to Reconciliation*), the Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service as well as the Deputy Minister Commitments on Diversity and Inclusion.

The committee members and I support this work by raising issues voiced by employees to senior management and finding tangible solutions together. The Agency's Accessibility Action Plan is complementary and essential to focus our efforts to create a barrier-free workplace for people with disabilities. The promotional launch of the GC Workplace Accessibility Passport during the National AccessAbility Week as well as the Accessibility

Guide for Managers and Tools are examples of concrete measures already implemented as part of the first year of this action plan.

I applaud the efforts of all those involved in making these changes for the better. I am confident that with the commitment demonstrated thus far, we will continue to make sustainable progress toward becoming a more accessible, representative and inclusive workplace.

Kurt Chin Quee

Vice-President, Finance and Corporate Services
ACOA's Employment Equity, Inclusion and Anti-Racism Champion

Executive summary

Since publishing its Accessibility Action Plan on November 2, 2022, ACOA has made progress against its objectives. It has made great strides when it comes to Employment, Infrastructure, and Communications. ACOA has also worked to create a culture where employees recognize the importance of removing systemic barriers. One where they understand how our differences make us better as a team.

The Accessibility Action Plan is being promoted to all staff, as is the feedback form. We do this via the intranet (Rendezvous), with the goal of gathering useful information on how the Agency can continue to make progress on its plan.

ACOA's Accessibility Coordinator will complete the Passport Facilitator training early next year. This will allow the Agency to offer information sessions to staff about the GC Workplace Accessibility Passport.

We learned a great deal over the past year. By continuing to work together, we will achieve our goals to ensure a barrier-free organization.

Contact

Feedback may be provided to:

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Format

You may use the contact information listed above to request a copy of the accessibility plan in an alternate format, such as large print, Braille or audio. You may also use the contact information listed above to request a copy of the feedback process description in an alternate format.

Glossary

Accessibility means that people with and without disabilities can perceive, understand, navigate and interact with information, services and applications. The adoption of accessibility standards, guidelines and best practices ensures that systemic barriers are eliminated prior to individual accommodations.

Accommodation is a necessary measure taken to allow an employee to work to the best of their ability.

Barriers may be attitudinal, environmental or institutional. They may even be internalized.

Disability is a complex, evolving matter. The term covers a broad range and degree of conditions. A disability may have been present at birth, caused by an accident, or developed over time. It may be physical, mental, psychiatric, social or economic. Here are some disability sub-categorizations:

1. Any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness.
2. A short-term physical impairment caused by an accident, such as a broken arm or a concussion.
3. A condition of mental impairment or a developmental or learning disability (e.g. ADHD, autism)
4. A mental health condition, whether short-term, episodic or chronic, such as depression, anxiety or bipolar disorder.

ACOA's progress to date

This section provides an overview of the progress the Agency has made against its objectives, as outlined in *ACOA's Accessibility Action Plan 2022 – Updated (April 2024)*, which can be found at [ACOA's Accessibility Action Plans - Canada.ca](https://www.acoa.ca/ACOAs-Accessibility-Action-Plans-Canada.ca).

Employment

ACOA has 5 goals under this objective:

1. Review existing development programs to ensure that persons with disabilities are represented and supported at each stage, from entry to exit.

Results

- The Agency is implementing its talent management program and leadership learning journey, Building and Supporting Leaders (BSL), which:
 - supports career and leadership development for all employees with enhanced intentional opportunities for people who are part of equity-seeking groups, including persons with disabilities
 - provides a safe, healthy, accessible, respectful and supportive workplace
 - fosters and promotes continuous development through effective career conversations, self-awareness and personalized learning
 - provides mentorship and sponsorship for employees who self-declare as part of an equity-seeking group to prepare them for leadership roles
- 12.6% of ACOA employees self-identify as a person with disabilities. In 2023-2024, 6.6% of successful candidates in promotional staffing processes self-identified as a person with a disability. Greater emphasis will be placed in the coming year toward ensuring that the proportion of promotions for persons with disabilities is the same or above the proportion of their representation among all employees.

2. Close the representation gaps for people with disabilities.

Results

- All vice-presidents now have the following indicator in their performance management agreements: Contribute to exceeding workforce availability representation Agency-wide by at least 13% for Indigenous employees, racialized/Black employees and persons with disabilities by the end of 2023-24.
- During 2023-2024, the Agency hired 5 net new persons with disabilities (term and indeterminate).
- The Agency exceeded this objective for persons with disabilities and has a representation rate of more than 25% above workforce availability.

3. Advertise employment opportunities in an accessible format, particularly important on private sites (versus jobs.gc.ca). Look at our online application process (i.e. have community stakeholders look at it) and ensure it is not a barrier to people with disabilities.

Results

- The Agency leverages the Public Service Commission's platforms to advertise employment opportunities on Facebook and LinkedIn.
- The Agency confers with consultants to find candidates for potential employment.

- The Agency continues to prioritize intentional staffing processes for persons with disabilities. During 2023-2024, the Agency completed 7 intentional staffing processes (4 are still in progress).

4. Stakeholder organizations should be consulted as a resource when hiring.

Results

- The Agency continues to make use of the Employees with Disabilities Network to ensure posters are accessible. A list of external stakeholder organizations was developed to consult further.
- The Agency shares its posters with stakeholder organizations to ensure appropriate outreach during EE-intentional staffing processes.

5. Develop tools and training for supervisors to enable them to create inclusive teams, improving the culture at ACOA and, thereby, the satisfaction levels of employees with disabilities.

Results

- Supervisors were provided opportunities to further develop their competency of valuing diversity and inclusion by participating in the Agency's DICE initiative (Diversity, Inclusion, Competence, Excellence). This mandatory dialogue covers topics relating to anti-racism, diversity, equity, inclusion, reconciliation and positive space. The Agency also offered various events such as panels of employee-led networks, Leaders Leading Leaders, Between the Lines book club sessions, Insights Discovery workshops, and webinars from the Canadian Innovation Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace, as along with tools from the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion to managers.
- As part of the response to the Forward Direction of the Call to Action implementation, extensive dialogue on ways to be a more representative and inclusive workplace was held at every management table across the Agency.
- The Agency's HR Advisors continue to promote and guide hiring managers through intentional hiring processes with a focus on accommodations and accessibility.
- An internal site is currently being developed for hiring managers specifically to share hiring tools, educational pieces, and existing staffing pools specifically for persons with disabilities.

Built environment

ACOA has 4 goals under this objective:

1. Develop a Disabilities Considerations Checklist of 5-10 items per location to make the physical workspace more accessible for all: signage (incl. pictograms); automatic push buttons for access doors; etc.

Results

- A disabilities checklist was created for each region to work from, as well as Head Office, and is at various stages of completion.
2. Ensure events and meetings are accessible to all employees and, where applicable, the public (e.g., tables high enough for wheelchairs, sign language interpreters, etc.).

Results

- This goal is the responsibility of each person, team or region that organizes an event (e.g., an announcement or meeting).
3. Draft evacuation plans that include information on how to evacuate an employee/visitor with a disability. Regular practices should be held, with the person(s) with a disability.

Results

- Evacuation plans are in place for all regions as well as head office, and all plans include specific details for dealing with persons with disabilities.
4. Create accessible washrooms at Head Office (Moncton, N.B.) and the four regional offices (Fredericton, Charlottetown, Halifax and St. John's).

Results

- Accessible washrooms are now available in Charlottetown, Fredericton and Halifax (under construction).

Information and communication technology (ICT)

ACOA has 3 goals under this objective:

1. Adopt the GC Workplace Accessibility Passport.

Results

- The GC Workplace Accessibility Passport was officially launched and promoted during National Accessibility Week, May 28 to June 3, 2023. Employees were made

aware of how to access and implement this new, accessible tool. The passport is available on the intranet page of the Employees with Disabilities Network.

2. All major new IT systems, both internal and external, launched as of 2023 are accessible.

Results

- This goal is ongoing, and all new IT systems that are purchased are accessible, with all accessibility features turned on at all times.

3. Measure and reduce wait times for workplace accommodations.

Results

- Now that the Agency has adopted the GC Workplace Accessibility Passport and accommodations are handled via individual managers and not through CIOD, ACOA needs to establish a system for reporting on the time it takes to accommodate employees.

Design and delivery of programs and services

ACOA has 2 goals under this objective:

1. Ensure external-facing documents are in accessible formats and easy to find online.

Results

- This goal is under way, with external-facing documents being updated on an ongoing basis.

2. Establish mechanisms for clients with disabilities to provide feedback and be engaged on service improvements.

Results

- This goal is under way, with plans to engage clients in the coming calendar year.

Communications, other than ICT

ACOA has 4 goals under this objective:

1. Make all templates accessible by the end of fiscal Summer 2023.

Results

- All internal templates, including presidential and ministerial templates, were made accessible.
2. Promote Accessibility, Accommodation and Adaptive Computer Technology (AAACT) workshops so staff can learn how to create accessible documents/templates.

Results

- AACT workshops on how to create accessible documents/templates are promoted via articles on Rendezvous and through the learning events calendar on a regular basis.
3. Redesign Rendezvous so that the format and new content, including photos, are accessible. Redesign will respect Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) guidelines and plain language use.

Results

- Rendezvous has been redesigned to be more accessible, following WCAG guidelines and plain language use. The new version was launched in June 2023.
4. Organize relevant activities for employees during National AccessAbility Week in May and promote communications around “International Day of Persons With Disabilities” (December 3).

Results

- The Agency promotes the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, December 3, via a Rendezvous article at minimum. It also promotes the National AccessAbility Week in May/June, with articles and activities.

Procurement of goods, services and facilities

ACOA reviewed all its policies, practices, programs and services, and determined that there were no barriers in the area of procurement of good, services and facilities.

Transportation

ACOA reviewed all its policies, practices, programs and services, and determined that there were no barriers in the area of transportation.

ACOA's culture

Improving accessibility within the Agency is an ongoing effort. By shifting perception from the impairment to the barrier, we can create a culture of inclusiveness that leaves no one behind. The following are some of the ideals behind the culture here at the Agency:

- A culture of respect and fairness
- A diverse and inclusive workplace
- Recognizing the importance of eliminating systemic barriers
- An environment that recognizes how our differences make us better
- A workplace that recognizes the value of inclusivity

Consultations

ACOA consulted its Working Group on Disabilities to prepare this progress report. We asked for their input on which goals they felt had been achieved and which still needed work. The working group consists of 13 participants. Some have disabilities; others have family members with disabilities; and others are allies. Employees responsible for specific goals were also consulted for further information. All feedback was incorporated into this progress report.

The Agency will form a new Working Group in the near future. It will consist of some members from the original working group, along with individuals from the Employees with Disabilities Network. The group will meet monthly to review the Accessibility Action Plan and ensure work is moving forward. Members will be responsible for specific goals within the plan.

Feedback

No feedback has been received on how our organization is implementing its accessibility plan, or on barriers persons who deal with our organization may have encountered.

In the latter part of 2023, ACOA implemented its Communications plan for the Accessibility Action Plan and began promoting various features of the plan, including the feedback form. The goal is to have greater use of the form by employees. Articles published on ACOA's intranet (Rendezvous) include:

- "Accessibility Passport," May 2023
- "Calm Spaces," September 2023
- "Disabilities Checklist," November 2023

Training

AAACT workshops have been promoted regularly through ACOA's events calendar and via articles on Rendezvous – the Agency's intranet – over the past two years. Numerous employees have taken the courses and become proficient at creating accessible documents. ACOA also promotes the CSPS online course, Making Documents Accessible (INC1-V46).

ACOA's Accessibility Coordinator will be completing the Passport Facilitator training in the new year, which will allow the Agency to offer information sessions and workshops about the GC Workplace Accessibility Passport.

What we've learned

Plain language and accessible communications are not only best practices but also a responsibility. Ensuring that Canadians have equal access to information helps create communities and workplaces that enable everyone to take part in society. We do our best to ensure that our web content is written at a Grade 8 level or below.

At ACOA, we strive to apply an inclusive lens to our hiring activities. We provide hiring managers and Human Resources professionals with information, tips, tools and inclusive strategies so they can recruit a diverse workforce – one made up of people with an array of identities, abilities, backgrounds, cultures, skills, perspectives and experiences representative of Canada's evolving population.

We learned this year that frequent meetings are needed to mitigate issues created by staff turnover. Several small projects did not progress sufficiently as several individuals changed positions. The accessibility coordinator will schedule more frequent meetings of the new Working Group to ensure new employees are aware of their responsibilities regarding the Accessibility Action Plan.

It was also recommended that an executive level champion be assigned to increase the visibility of our accessibility efforts here at the Agency. This process is under way and a champion will soon be assigned to the file.

Updating our intranet was t the biggest project this year – again impacted by staff turnover in key positions. Its deadline was moved back twice, but it was successfully completed in June 2023. It is up and running, with a co-operative team of administrators managing it. Administrators have learned to work as a collaborative team, building pages in consultation to ensure they are following the principles of accessibility while creating original content.

The new Rendezvous includes a strong focus on accessibility. The Agency follows the canada.ca guidelines for accessibility, which include colours and fonts, plain language

and navigation. Many of these guidelines are built with the SharePoint Online software, but we were cognizant of these factors when creating templates and putting Rendezvous pages together.