

Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency

Accessibility Action Plan 2026-2028



Atlantic Canada
Opportunities
Agency

Agence de
promotion économique
du Canada atlantique

Canada

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Accessibility Action Plan 2026-2028

Champion's Message

The Agency's 2026-2028 Accessibility Action Plan has been developed in alignment with the Clerk's Call to Action on Anti-Racism, Equity and Inclusion; the Calls to Action outlined in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Report and *Many Voices One Mind: A Pathway to Reconciliation*; the Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service; the Public Service Pride Network's open letter to deputy ministers; and the Action Plan for Black Public Servants. We remain committed to proactively and systemically identifying, removing, and preventing barriers to accessibility.

The Agency is supported by its Employment Equity (EE), Inclusion and Anti-Racism Committee which plays a vital role in advancing ACOA's shared commitment to a workplace where every employee feels welcomed, respected, valued and included. The committee brings together representatives from equity-seeking employee networks, regional and branch working groups, and committees dedicated to accessibility, inclusion, equity and anti-racism. Together, committee members work to foster an inclusive, accessible, safe and healthy environment that reflects the diversity of the people it serves. Committee members and I will continue to raise employee concerns and collaborate with senior management to develop meaningful, lasting solutions.

Our plan is also aligned with Canada's Plain Language Standard, published in October 2025. Developed by an Accessibility Standards Canada committee composed largely of people with disabilities and members of equity-deserving groups, this new National Standard provides clear guidance to help organizations identify, remove and prevent communication barriers. It reinforces our efforts to create barrier-free communication and supports the broader objectives of our 2026–2028 Accessibility Action Plan.

Looking ahead, ACOA will continue to prioritize increasing awareness and uptake of the Digital Accessibility Passport, supporting managers in creating inclusive and supportive work environments, and streamlining the accommodation process so employees have timely access to the tools and supports they need to perform at their best.

With the dedication and collaboration demonstrated across the Agency, I am confident that we will continue to make meaningful and sustainable progress toward becoming an even more accessible, representative and inclusive workplace.

Kurt Chin Quee

Vice-President, Finance and Corporate Services

ACOA's Employment Equity, Inclusion and Anti-Racism Champion

General

Vision

To be the most accessible and inclusive public service in the world.

Guiding principles

- Nothing without us: persons with disabilities are involved in the design and implementation of the strategy
- Collaboration: departments and agencies work in collaboration with each other, with bargaining agents, and with other public, private and not-for-profit organizations
- Sustainability: the strategy prioritizes actions that will have an enduring impact
- Transparency: the strategy is developed and implemented transparently, and departments and agencies will report openly and transparently on their efforts to remove barriers

Goals

Six goals are key to realizing the vision:

1. Employment
2. Built environment
3. Information and Communication Technology (ICT)
4. Communication, other than ICT
5. Design and delivery of programs and services
6. Procurement of goods, services and facilities

Contact

The person designated to receive feedback on behalf of ACOA is:

Accessibility Coordinator
Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency
644 Main Street
Moncton, New Brunswick E1C 1E2
Telephone: 506-871-8071
Toll free: 1-833-834-3004
Email: accessible@acoa-apec.gc.ca

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.

Feedback

The [Accessible Canada Act](#) clearly indicates that the Agency has a duty to develop and implement a system to receive, and respond to, feedback from employees and clients on any issues relating to accessibility, or a lack thereof. As such, the Agency has developed a [secure online tool](#) – the Accessibility Feedback Form – that any ACOA employee or client can use to report any barrier(s) to accessibility and/or suggestions for improvement. All information reported will be kept confidential.

You may also provide feedback directly to the person listed under **Contact** above. Receipt of feedback will be acknowledged in the same manner in which it is received.

Summary

ACOA's 2026-2028 Accessibility Action Plan is in response to the requirements of the *Accessible Canada Act*, which requires all Government of Canada entities to present a three-year accessibility plan, with progress reports in intervening years (2026 and 2027), to achieve a Canada without barriers on or before January 1, 2040. This plan is a commitment to act and make sustainable progress by building a culture of inclusiveness that values diversity, combats discrimination and prevents future barriers (see definition under **Glossary** at the end of this report) in the workplace.

The report is the result of engagement with ACOA's Employees with Disabilities Network (EWDN) – and consultations with other subject matter experts across offices of primary interest, fulfilling the obligation of co-development based on the “Nothing Without Us” principle.

It includes key elements from the [Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada](#), complements the Employment Equity, Inclusion and Anti-Racism (EEIAR) Action Plan 2023-26, and responds to findings from the 2024 Public Service Employee Survey (PSES). The EEIAR Action Plan summarizes the way forward to meet the needs of the four designated employment equity groups and to create a diverse and inclusive work environment, free of barriers for all employees. This report also takes into consideration recent changes to the Accessible Canada Act, ensuring we are current and up-to-date with regulatory changes around accessibility.

The next steps following the publication of this Action Plan are to develop an implementation strategy with clear timelines, activities and accountability to ensure sectors and stakeholders are held accountable. Central to this will be the continued need to consult with the EWDN and stakeholders in the preparation of the legislated annual progress reports in 2026 and 2027.

ACOA's action plan

The section that follows provides an overview of how ACOA plans to address the Government of Canada's Accessibility Strategy and its goals.

Employment

Barriers that exist at ACOA

1. Opportunity to provide employees with disabilities with more career development support
2. Need to more accurately reflect responsibilities in departmental job advertisements to encourage interest from persons with disabilities
3. Employees with disabilities report lower satisfaction with accommodations provided during the staffing process compared to employees without disabilities

How ACOA will remove these barriers

1. Deliver an information session to employees with disabilities on available professional development resources
2. Deliver an information session to hiring managers on how to better support employees in their career development
3. Create an agency-wide mentorship initiative
4. Deliver a training session to hiring managers on available tools to help them develop inclusive job advertisements that do not exclude persons with disabilities
5. Require hiring managers to consult tools designed to identify and minimize biases and barriers before posting job advertisements

6. Deliver a training session annually to hiring managers on the Duty to Accommodate
7. Deliver training sessions annually on the online accessibility GC passport

The built environment

Barriers that exist at ACOA

1. Physical barriers exist at ACOA, including doors with no push buttons, a lack of wayfinding and signage, workstations/conference room tables that are not height-adjustable, non-accessible kitchen equipment, etc.
2. Evacuation plans do not include provisions for the safe removal of employees with disabilities
3. Employee events are not always inclusive of those with mobility issues
4. Some employees have expressed challenges in finding/booking accessible workstations
5. Some offices lack accessible washrooms

How ACOA will remove these barriers

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 all access doors, etc.
2. Draft new evacuation plans for each ACOA office that include provisions for the safe removal of employees with disabilities and hold regular drills
3. Ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities is prioritized when booking meeting/event spaces. Locations that meet accessibility requirements should be given priority
4. Create more accessible workstations and/or ensure employees with disabilities have priority in booking those that exist
5. Engage with PSPC and/or landlords for regional offices and at Head Office to determine whether/how accessible washrooms would be feasible

Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

Barriers that exist at ACOA

1. Not all platforms are accessible to all users
2. Need for raised awareness as not all employees know about tools and functions available to facilitate accessibility

How ACOA will remove these barriers

1. Prioritize identifying, preventing, and removing accessibility barriers when acquiring and deploying new information technology tools, solutions, and equipment
2. Assess whether products, services, and technology used in, or purchased for the workplace result in accessibility limitations for persons with disabilities
3. Promote the availability and training for accessibility tools and resources to employees
4. Consider accessibility requirements in the development, testing and implementation of AI
5. Develop an ICT plan that includes accessibility and ensures that ACOA's plan for its digital infrastructure embraces accessibility and interoperability with assistive technology used by people with disabilities

Communications, other than ICT

Barriers that exist at ACOA

1. Creating Communications products that are fully accessible by default
2. The intranet and internet may not meet the new accessibility guidelines (Digital Regulations) and plain language standards.
3. Low awareness of the concepts of physical and mental disability as well as of accessibility challenges that may exist among employees
4. When the Agency holds in-person funding announcements, these events can sometimes be inaccessible to employees, other federal staff, the public, clients and the media

How ACOA will remove these barriers

1. Staff will complete either the Accessibility, Accommodation and Adaptive Computer Technology (AAACT) workshop on creating accessible documents or the Canada School of Public Service (CSPS) course on the subject
2. AAACT workshops will be promoted through the events calendar and on the Agency's intranet
3. Ensure content published on the Agency's website, in English and French, complies with new CAN/ASC EN 301 59:2024 standards by June 2028
4. Ensure required web statement is posted by June 2027 on both the English and French Agency website
5. Continue to promote the use of plain language on the Agency's intranet and internet sites to benefit all users
6. Integrate the Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) [Guidelines on Making Communications Products and Activities Accessible](#) when planning and developing communications products and activities
7. Use of the [Digital Accessibility Toolkit](#) will be promoted to support the creation of accessible content
8. Continue to promote employee awareness around disability/accessibility within the Agency, including National AccessAbility Week (May) and International Day of Persons with Disabilities (December 3), as well as training events to raise awareness and create an inclusive culture
9. For public announcements, per the new Canada accessibility standard
 - a. the venue and the content of the program will be physically accessible
 - b. the announcement itself will be accessible (e.g., a sign language interpreter, accessible documents)
 - c. a plan for accommodating support persons, service and guide dogs will be established

Design and delivery of programs and services

(See also the **Client-focused** section below.)

When this plan was developed, no barriers in the design and delivery of programs and services were identified. However, ACOA is proactively committed to ensuring that its programs and services remain accessible.

Procurement of goods, services and facilities

Barriers that exist at ACOA

1. Procurement officers may lack understanding of accessible procurement obligations to improve accessibility

How ACOA will remove these barriers

1. Increase procurement officers' understanding of accessible procurement obligations to improve accessibility and ensure that the department remains in good standing and compliant with its obligations with regards to accessible procurement

Consultations

To uphold the principle of Nothing Without Us, ACOA consulted extensively with employees with disabilities while developing this Action Plan. The Agency recognizes that to implement meaningful actions, it must include those who stand to benefit the most from the plan and its execution.

The consultation process for ACOA's Accessibility Plan included virtual meetings with small and large groups as well as targeted group discussions. The plan includes input and feedback from the following groups.

Accessibility Working Group, comprised of senior management as well as employees with disabilities or with family members with disabilities, or who are responsible for accommodations at the Agency.

Employees with Disabilities Network, comprised of employees with disabilities – both visible and invisible – who can speak directly to accessibility and identify barriers within the Agency. The EWDN conducted an Agency-wide survey regarding barriers – the results of which have been included in this plan. One hundred and fourteen individuals responded to the survey, representing a response rate of nearly 20 percent.

Employment Equity, Inclusion and Anti-Racism Committee, which is made up of representatives from all the networks, regions and committees across the Agency.

In-house survey

The Employees with Disabilities Network (EWDN) conducted a survey of all Agency staff from July 25, 2025 to August 1, 2025. A total of 114 individuals responded, representing a participation rate of close to 20%. Of those who responded, 19% said they had encountered barriers in the workplace. Of those barriers:

- 29% were physical
- 18% were systemic
- 15% were technological

Some of the comments received included the following:

- Not all offices are ergonomically adequate
- Length of time for accommodations is an issue
- Need more accessible doors and washrooms
- Events are not inclusive of those with mobility issues
- Difficulty hearing presentations/issues with captioning in TEAMS meetings

Issues noted in the comments have been incorporated into appropriate "barriers" and/or "goals" in the **Action Plan** section of this document.

Culture

ACOA's employee-led network of Employees with Disabilities meets at least once a month and organizes events around National AccessAbility Week in May and International Day of Persons with Disabilities in December. It also publishes articles on the Agency's intranet site, Rendezvous, for both occasions and for Red Shirt Day and other relevant dates/events.

Two Agency champions have been appointed for the EWDN. The champions provide the network with visible and sustained leadership, and advocate for the network. Their objectives include:

- Strategic development and advice
- Advocacy
- Influence
- Communication
- Collaboration
- Promote network activities
- Continuous improvement

The Agency wants to prioritize accessibility and ensure its employees understand:

- that accessibility means more than just accommodation
- why accessibility matters
- how to make the department more accessible and inclusive

ACOA also wants employees with disabilities to feel an increased sense of worth, belonging and purpose. The Agency would like to proactively implement workplace protections against intimidation, fear and bystander apathy.

It still strives to **recognize ableism** where it exists. Recognizing that an anti-ableism policy is distinct from an accessibility policy, the Agency's goals are to:

- a. ensure that organizational practices, systems and communications do not reflect or perpetuate ableist exclusionary practices that may directly or indirectly promote, sustain or entrench discrimination
- b. establish and maintain hiring, promotion and work-related policies that will build and support an inclusive employment environment where these individuals participate and contribute fully
- c. ensure that services are provided in a fully respectful manner that addresses and removes any barriers to service and the workplace, including ableist practices and attitudes
- d. meet the requirements of the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Accessible Canada Act

ACOA also wants to ensure that everyone is treated as an equal member of the team because inclusion is critical to the creation of a healthy workplace culture. The PSES 2024 results indicate that 86% of ACOA staff with disabilities felt they were accepted as an equal member of the team, nearly identical to the Agency's overall rate at 87%.

Culture shift is a collective effort. Executives and employees alike have a shared responsibility to understand and address ableism in their own lives. Recognizing ableism and making accessibility a priority are key factors in ensuring that progress is not merely performative

To that end, ACOA has a new Office of Workplace Culture and Employee Engagement (OWCEE). This role will support all employees by advancing equity, diversity and inclusion, wellness, professional development and workplace culture. Key activities will include:

- advancing the Agency's 2023–2026 Employment Equity, Inclusion and Anti-Racism Action Plan
- leading consultations to identify opportunities to improve ACOA's culture and human resources practices
- providing stewardship for senior management and champions
- collaborating on mental health and wellness, accessibility and linguistic duality initiatives

Client focus

Even though the Agency identified no barriers for this reporting period for the design and delivery of programs and services, the Programs unit will strive to work with stakeholders to ensure accessibility in the following areas:

- ACOA will continue to develop initiatives by considering the issues, challenges and opportunities for people with disabilities through gender-based analysis plus (GBA+)
- ACOA's Business Information Service call centre includes a TTY line
- ACOA's online client portal, ACOA Direct, respects the accessibility standards established by the Government of Canada
- ACOA will continue its efforts to meet or exceed TBS's Standard on web accessibility on all internal and external Programs pages
- Alternate formats (e.g. audio, Braille, large print) for program information, applications and other documents will be prepared when requested by a client

Training

As required by the new Digital Regulations (s. 12), ACOA will provide training on accessibility to the following persons:

1. Every employee (including senior management)
2. Individuals involved with the design and delivery of a service
3. Employees and other persons who provide services on behalf of the Agency
4. Employees who work directly with the public or whose work impacts the public

Much of this training will be provided in-house (e.g., information on the *Accessible Canada Act*) and will be developed in conjunction with the EWDN. Training will be provided to all current employees, to new staff as they join the organization and, at minimum, every two years on an ongoing basis.

ACOA will keep records of the training provided that include:

1. a list of people who have been trained
2. the dates on which they were trained
3. the percentage of people that have received the required training
4. a copy of the training policy and plan
5. a copy of the training content delivered

Glossary

Ableism is discrimination or exclusion based on the conscious or unconscious belief that people with disabilities are less valuable or capable. Ableism may be embedded in attitudes, actions or systems, and can result in barriers that limit opportunities, access and inclusion for persons with disabilities in all areas of life, including work, education and community participation.

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.

Accessible format includes other formats of communicating information, including but not limited to, audio formats, braille, large print, plain language and sign language (ASL/ LSQ).

Assistive device – Any medical device, mobility aid, communication aid or other aid that is specifically designed to assist a person with a disability.

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.

Equitable – Considering all customers' unique experiences and individual needs, in the delivery of customer service, to ensure customers have access to the resources and opportunities necessary to obtain, use and benefit from the services.

Inclusive design considers the full range of human diversity with respect to ability, language, culture, gender, age and other forms of human difference (from [Inclusive Design Research Centre](#)).

Plain language – A communication is in plain language if its wording, structure and design are so clear that the intended audience can easily find what they need, understand what they find, and use that information. From the [International Plain Language Federation](https://www.iplfederation.org/) (<https://www.iplfederation.org/>).