

Year 2 Accessibility Action Plan Progress Report

About this publication

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General

Message from the Champion of Inclusion, Equity and Anti-racism

The Agency's Employment Equity (EE), Inclusion and Anti-Racism Committee is active and brings together members from every equity seeking group's employee network, regions/branch working group, and committee linked to accessibility, inclusion, equity and/or anti-racism. We are committed to building and sustaining an inclusive, accessible, safe and healthy workplace that welcomes, respects, values and includes voices from diverse backgrounds.

A key priority remains 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 the advancement of the Calls to Action articulated in the Truth and Reconciliation Report, *Many Voices Once Mind: A Pathway to Reconciliation*, the Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service, the open letter from the Public Service Pride Network to deputy ministers as well as the Action Plan for Black Public Servants. The committee members and I are dedicated to supporting this work by raising issues voiced by our employees to senior management and finding tangible solutions together.

Our efforts are supported by the renewed focus on the values and ethics code which at its heart espouses the fundamental respect for people and an inclusive values-based culture.

The Agency continues its efforts in identifying, removing and preventing barriers to accessibility. The Agency's Accessibility Action Plan is complementary and essential to focus dedicated efforts to create a barrier-free workplace for people with disabilities. This year our focus is to educate employees on the usage of the Accessibility Passport and guide managers in creating an inclusive and barrier-free work environment. The Agency is also working on streamlining the accommodation process to help provide tools and/or support measures for employees to be at their best in the workplace. I am confident that with the ongoing commitment demonstrated thus far, we will continue to make sustainable progress toward becoming an even more accessible, representative and inclusive workplace.

Kurt Chin Quee

Vice-President, Finance and Corporate Services

Executive Summary

At ACOA, persons with disabilities represent 13% of all employees which is above the workforce availability of 9.5%. Through the 2022 Public Service Employee Survey, employees indicated their overall satisfaction with their employment, possibly due to the Agency's efforts to ensuring the needs of persons with disabilities are considered and accommodated. The survey also signalled areas for improvement. The 2024 Public Service Employee Survey currently under way will provide valuable insights into advancements made.

ACOA has made great progress against the objectives in its Accessibility Action Plan (see ACOA's Progress below), for instance:

- ACOA employs persons with disabilities at a rate significantly above the workforce availability.
- Almost a quarter of employees promoted self-identify as persons with disabilities.

There are accessible washrooms in most regional offices, with plans under development to address gaps.

- All managers are currently being trained on how to discuss and use the GC Workplace Accessibility Passport.

Additional training is planned for employees on how to complete the passport and discuss barriers with managers.

- A new, fully accessible feedback form is now online, and there is a dedicated phone line for employees and clients to communicate any issues relating to accessibility.

Moving forward, ACOA's next Action Plan will include:

- Measuring progress against objectives using data.
- Consulting persons with disabilities (internally and externally) to uncover what barriers are being faced, and solutions.

Contact

Feedback may be provided to:

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.

Representation

The [2022 Canadian Survey on Disability](#) noted that persons with disabilities (PwDs) were more likely to be employed than in the past. However, focus is still required as 27% of Canadians aged 15 years and over had one or more disabilities that limited them in their daily activities.

The most common barriers were those related to:

- features inside or outside public spaces, such as entrances or exits or sidewalks (56%)
- communications (48%)
- behaviours, misconceptions or assumptions (37%)
- online activities (17%)

At ACOA, persons with disabilities represent 13% of all employees which is above the Workforce Availability of 9.5%.

Of those ACOA employees with disabilities who responded to the 2022 Public Service Employee Survey:

- 85% said that they get a sense of satisfaction from their work (compared to 87% for all employees who answered the survey).
- 85% said they felt that discrimination has adversely affected their career progress.
- 79% felt that accessibility or accommodation issues adversely affected their career progress.
- 58% believed they have opportunities for promotion based on their education, skills and experience.

Employment Equity Act Report

The most recent Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat [Employment Equity Act Report](#) featured data on the current state of representation for PwDs. Of the 4 employment equity groups, PwDs remain the only group not meeting workforce availability levels across the Public Service. While representation of PwDs has increased to 6.9%, this figure remains below the workforce availability of 9.2%. Hiring employees with disabilities is one of the most effective ways to promote inclusion and foster a positive attitude in the workplace.

ACOA is a Canada Workplace Accessibility Passport adopter which the report spotlights as a leading initiative in creating a more diverse, inclusive and accessible public service.

The Canadian Labour Force

All Canadians have the right to participate fully and equally in society. For persons with disabilities the struggle has been long and difficult to exercise that right.

In Canada, 69.6% of persons with disabilities are part of the labour force, compared to 84.2% of persons without disabilities (Statistics Canada). Of PwDs employed in the labour force, between 30% and 40% consider job change or advancement difficult due to their condition (Statistics Canada). For many PwDs, asking for accommodations is an awkward experience. So many don't ask, either because they are uncomfortable asking (42.2%), do not want to make things difficult for the employer (33.2%), do not want to disclose the need for accommodation (34.8%), or because they fear a negative outcome (33%).

ACOA's Progress

The following provides an overview of the progress the Agency has made toward its objectives, as outlined in [ACOA's Accessibility Action Plans 2022 – Updated \(April 2024\)](#).

Employment

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

Results

- The Agency has implemented its talent management program and leadership learning journey, Building and Supporting Leaders, 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
- 13.0% of ACOA employees self-identify as persons with disabilities. From April 1 to September 30, 2024, 21.4% (3/14) of successful candidates in promotional staffing processes self-identified as a person with a disability. The Agency surpassed the proportionality of representation with its number of promotions for persons with disabilities.

2. Objective: 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 19% above workforce availability for Indigenous employees, racialized/Black employees and persons with disabilities by the end of 2024-25.

- From April 1 to September 30, 2024, the Agency hired 1 net new employee who self-identified as part of the persons with disabilities group.
- The Agency exceeded this objective for persons with disabilities and has a representation rate of more than 25% above workforce availability (WFA). As of September 30, 2024, the Agency has a representation of 13% (objective is 11.5%, or 25% above WFA).

3. Objective: Advertise employment opportunities in an accessible format, particularly important on private sites (versus jobs.gc.ca).

Results

- The Agency continues to leverage the Public Service Commission's platforms to advertise employment opportunities on Facebook and LinkedIn.
- The Agency continues to confer with consultants to find candidates for potential employment.
- The Agency continues to prioritize intentional staffing processes for persons with disabilities in classification levels where gaps exist. From April 1 to September 30, 2024, the Agency completed 1 intentional staffing process for persons with disabilities.

4. Objective: 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. The list of external stakeholder organizations was updated over the summer months.
- The Agency shares its posters with stakeholder organizations to ensure appropriate outreach during EE-intentional staffing processes.

5. Objective: 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 are continually provided opportunities to further develop their competency in valuing diversity and inclusion by participating in the Agency's mandatory DICE (Diversity, Inclusion, Competence, Excellence) conversation. The Agency also promotes the training offered by the Canada School of Public Service and continues to offer various events such as panels of employee-led networks, 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 renewing the public service's commitment to values and ethics, the Agency's Values and Ethics Champion shared information on how values can serve as a compass in our daily work. These values and ethics conversations are taking place at management tables and with employees.
- The Agency's Human Resources Advisors continue to promote and guide hiring managers through intentional hiring processes with a focus on accommodation and accessibility.
- The Agency offered training to managers on the use of the Canada Workplace Accessibility Passport.
- An internal site has been developed for hiring managers to share hiring tools, educational pieces, and existing staffing pools specifically for persons with disabilities.

Built environment

- 1. Objective: Develop a Disabilities Considerations Checklist of 5-10 items per location to make the physical workspace more accessible for all: signage (including 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 (HO), and is at various stages of completion. HO has added sit-to-stand desks at multiple flex spaces, and is discussing the addition of height adjustable tables and stools in the boardrooms. In Ottawa, some offices have had VariDesk adjustable units added to permit employees to work sitting or standing.
- 2. Objective: 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. Objective: 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. At HO, the plan is available on the SharePoint corporate Occupational Health and Safety site.**

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. Objective: 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. At Head Office, this is under discussion as the Agency's lease is being renegotiated and the landlord will be responsible for installing an all access, fully accessible washroom.

Information and communication technology (ICT)

1. Objective: 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 via the intranet page of the Employees with Disabilities Network on Rendezvous as well as the A-Z listing on Rendezvous.
- As of September 2024, information sessions are being offered to managers on how to work with the Passport, with the objective of having all managers trained by the end of fiscal 2024-25.

2. Objective: All major new information technology (IT) systems, both internal and external, launched as of 2023 are accessible.

Results

- All new IT systems that are purchased are accessible, with all accessibility features turned on when the equipment is provided to the employee.

3. Objective: Measure and reduce wait times for workplace accommodations.

Results

- The Agency continues to look for a solution that measures wait times for workplace accommodations, with the accessibility coordinator taking Accessibility Measurement Workshops to find a means of statistically measuring the time it takes for an accommodation request to be met.

Design and delivery of programs and services

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

Results

- All external facing forms on the website were updated in 2024 and are fully accessible. Accessibility is built into the process when developing any new external-facing documents.

2. **Objective: 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

1. **Objective: Make all templates accessible by the end of summer 2023.**

Results

- All internal templates, including presidential and ministerial templates, have been converted to accessible formats.
2. **Objective: Promote Accessibility, Accommodation and Adaptive Computer Technology (AAACT) workshops so staff can learn how to create accessible documents/templates.**

Results

- AAACCT workshops on how to create accessible documents/templates are promoted via articles on Rendezvous and through the learning events calendar on a regular basis. A session was provided to employees in May 2024 on the services the AAACCT provides, such as a lending library.
3. **Objective: 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 was redesigned to be more accessible, following WCAG guidelines and plain language use. The new version was launched in June 2023.
4. **Objective: 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 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.

The accessibility passport and training for managers

ACOA's Accessibility Coordinator was trained earlier this year as a Canada Workplace Accessibility Passport Facilitator and began giving Passport Information Sessions to managers in September, in English. An outside facilitator has been providing the French sessions. The Agency's goal is that all managers will have taken the sessions by the end of fiscal 2024-25. So far, 5 sessions have been given in 2024.

The Agency is promoting sessions in its events calendar as well as on Rendezvous. Sign-up has been strong, with over 80 managers having taken the course so far.

A Passport session was provided to the Human Resources Committee on October 8.

Feedback

A new feedback form was developed and uploaded to the website in October 2024. Clients and employees no longer need to download a form and then email or mail their feedback to the Agency – they simply fill in [the form](#) and click the submit button once they are done.

ACOA also has a new dedicated phone number for people to provide feedback. It is monitored on a regular basis and feedback will be responded to quickly.

Over the course of this year, the Accessibility Coordinator received feedback directly from several employees regarding issues with flex spaces, completing the Passport and accommodations. No feedback was received via the feedback form or by telephone.

What we've learned

We need mandatory accessibility education and training for all employees – especially managers. We need conversations about accessibility to become organizational priorities. Everyone needs to be involved in creating a more accessible workplace.

The return to the office mandate has highlighted a need to continue to review our processes to accommodate individuals in our evolving physical environment and to ensure our offices are overall more accessible.

We have learned that we need to better understand the onboarding process and to start the accessibility conversation as early as possible – with the letter of offer, as we do now, and the initial Welcome conversation that takes place within months of a new employee starting work at the Agency.

We've learned that we need to measure our progress – and so the Accessibility Coordinator has taken both Accessibility Measurement Workshops that were offered this fall. They will inform our plans going forward.

Where we are going from here

ACOA recently created a new Accessibility Advisory Group composed of both management and employees with disabilities (visible and invisible). This group's work will inform the next Accessibility Action Plan.

Measuring our progress

All actions need to be tracked by objective data. Meaningful measures can produce high-quality data. Data provides evidence to pinpoint issues, progress, and what remains unknown. That evidence is critical to guide future action. Federally regulated entities (FREs) must use, collect and share high-quality data in all their initiatives to improve accessibility, in consultation with PwDs.

In the context of accessibility and disability inclusion, data is information that we can collect, measure, and analyze to:

- increase awareness on diverse lived experiences
- identify and learn more about barriers and their causes
- challenge assumptions that may hinder progress, and
- see progress in efforts to identify, remove and prevent barriers

Data can come in many forms like text, numbers, or facts. It can come from many sources including surveys, public records, interviews, or stories.

We need data to learn about the unique and complex lived experiences of PwDs, especially when making decisions.

ACOA's Accessibility Coordinator has taken the Measurement Data sessions offered by the GC in order to better measure our level of success. ACOA will strive to put in place measurable (SMART) goals in its next Action Plan.

Consulting persons with disabilities

Building awareness starts with listening and asking questions, from a place of genuine curiosity. This is one reason why *Accessible Canada Act* (ACA) regulations make it mandatory for FREs to

consult with PwDs in developing their accessibility plans. Such consultations can help influence meaningful action.

While awareness is essential to identifying barriers, it alone does not guarantee accessibility for PwDs. Canada has shown awareness about accessibility issues for decades. Yet, as the federal government heard during cross-country consultations that led to the ACA, many PwDs are still experiencing significant barriers in their daily lives.

Awareness must lead to a commitment for change to happen. Because of Canada's complex governance structure, commitments must be made at its various levels of government and by FREs to ensure consistency of accessibility practices across the country.

In the coming year, ACOA plans to consult PwDs within the Agency to discover what barriers they still face in the workplace, and what we can do to remove those barriers – without creating new ones.

Training employees

In 2019, the federal government published its first Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada. The Strategy recognized a lack of awareness of accessibility matters among federal public servants. In response, the Canada School of Public Service began adding accessibility-specific training courses and videos to its learning catalogue.

There are now dozens of learning tools available to employees in the federal public service. They cover topics such as disability inclusion, building accessible documents and virtual events, inclusive client service, procurement, inclusive hiring practices, inclusive design, and unconscious bias. Although most of these are voluntary, **some of the courses are mandatory, particularly for managers**. ACOA VPs have asked that managers complete the Passport Information Session by the end of fiscal 2024-25.