



# The Accessibility Planning Toolkit for Prescribed Public Sector Bodies

Nova Scotia Accessibility Directorate

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This toolkit is available at <https://novascotia.ca/accessibility/>

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# Welcome

Nova Scotia is on a journey to become an accessible province by 2030. This includes working with post-secondary institutions, Regional Centres for Education, Health Authorities, crown corporations, and others, to remove the barriers to inclusion that people with disabilities continue to face every day.

Our collective efforts will help ensure all Nova Scotians can participate fully in society.

In September 2018, the province released the Government of Nova Scotia Accessibility Plan. This plan outlines specific actions for achieving an inclusive, responsive, and accessible workplace for Nova Scotia public servants, and ensuring our services are accessible to all.

We are pleased to provide this toolkit, which is intended to help you form an Accessibility Advisory Committee and develop your own accessibility plan.

I applaud the many efforts public sector organizations have already undertaken to improve accessibility. We need to build on this work and continue to drive the changes needed to create a more equitable and inclusive province. These changes will have significant economic and social impacts on people with disabilities, their families, and the province.

By working together, we are solidifying our shared commitment to accessibility and helping to build a welcoming province that is inclusive to all.

Sincerely,

**Mark Furey**  
Minister of Justice



## An overview of accessibility

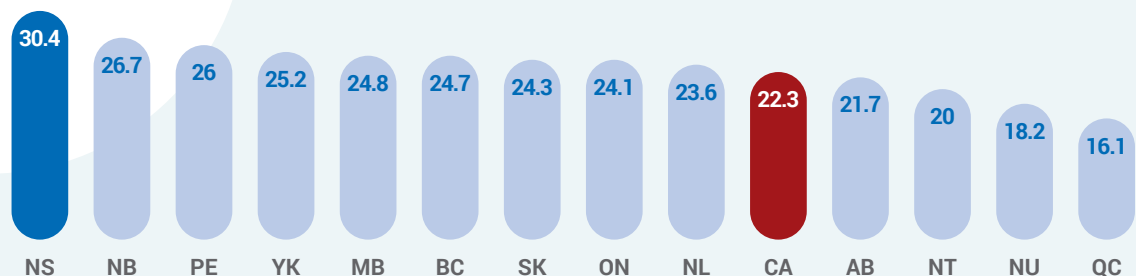
### Disability in Nova Scotia

According to Statistics Canada, 30 per cent of Nova Scotians aged 15 years and older identify as having at least one disability. That is nearly 230,000 Nova Scotians. This is the largest percentage of any Canadian province. Nova Scotia also has among the highest percentage of adults older than 65—currently 20 per cent, or 1 in 5. This percentage will increase to about 25 per cent of the population, or 1 in 4, by 2030. Because older adults are more likely to have disabilities than younger people, the number of Nova Scotians with disabilities will rise as our population ages. (Learn more at [novascotia.ca/accessibility/stats-on-disability-in-Nova-Scotia.pdf](https://novascotia.ca/accessibility/stats-on-disability-in-Nova-Scotia.pdf).)



**of Nova Scotians 15 years and older have at least one disability**

— The Canadian average is 22.3%.



This represents 229,430 people in Nova Scotia as of 2017.

(Source: *Canadian Survey on Disability 2017*, Statistics Canada)

### Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act

In 2017, Nova Scotia became the third province in Canada to pass accessibility legislation, committing to a more equitable and accessible province. The Accessibility Act recognizes accessibility as a human right, and sets a goal to make Nova Scotia an accessible province by 2030. The goal of the act is to prevent and remove barriers that restrict people with disabilities from fully participating in society. It enables the government to develop standards for accessibility, and outlines responsibilities for prescribed public sector bodies. You can read the full text of the act at [nslegislature.ca/sites/default/files/legc/statutes/accessibility.pdf](https://nslegislature.ca/sites/default/files/legc/statutes/accessibility.pdf).



In the Accessibility Act:

- ▶ A **disability** is defined as “a physical, mental, intellectual, learning or sensory impairment, including an episodic disability that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders an individual’s full and effective participation in society.”
- ▶ A **barrier** is defined as “anything that hinders or challenges the full and effective participation in society of persons with disabilities, including a physical barrier, an architectural barrier, an information or communications barrier, an attitudinal barrier, a technological barrier, a policy, or a practice.”

The Accessibility Directorate in the Department of Justice has responsibility for administering the Accessibility Act and advancing disability issues within the government. An Accessibility Advisory Board advises the government on accessibility. The majority of members are people with disabilities.

The government’s strategy for achieving an accessible province by 2030 is described in **Access by Design 2030**, available at [novascotia.ca/accessibility/access-by-design/](https://novascotia.ca/accessibility/access-by-design/). This strategy outlines how the government will work with partners and stakeholders to implement the Accessibility Act and improve accessibility for all Nova Scotians.



**Note:** In June 2019, the Government of Canada adopted the Accessible Canada Act, which will apply to organizations that fall under federal jurisdiction. This includes the federally regulated private sector, such as organizations in the transportation sectors, broadcasting and telecommunications services, and the banking and financial sectors. Learn more at [www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/accessible-people-disabilities.html](https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/accessible-people-disabilities.html)

## Provincial accessibility standards

Provincial standards will be developed for the following areas outlined in Nova Scotia’s Accessibility Act:

- ▶ **Goods and Services** – ensuring that people with disabilities have equitable access to goods and services
- ▶ **Information and Communication** – ensuring all people can receive, understand, and share the information they need
- ▶ **Transportation** – making it easier for everyone to get where they need to go
- ▶ **Employment** – making workplaces accessible, and supporting people with disabilities in finding and maintaining meaningful employment
- ▶ **Built Environment** – making public buildings, streets, sidewalks, and shared spaces accessible to all
- ▶ **Education** – making the education system accessible to all students, from early childhood to post-secondary

As described in Access by Design 2030, a plan is in place to develop and implement these standards over several years. Nova Scotians and affected sectors will be consulted before each standard is enacted. These standards will first apply to the Government of Nova Scotia, then to prescribed public sector bodies, and later to other organizations.

For an overview of the implementation plan, refer to Access by Design 2030, page 19, available at [novascotia.ca/accessibility/access-by-design/access-by-design-2030.pdf](https://novascotia.ca/accessibility/access-by-design/access-by-design-2030.pdf).

## Goods & Services

### Education



### Information & Communication



### Built Environment



### Employment



### Transportation

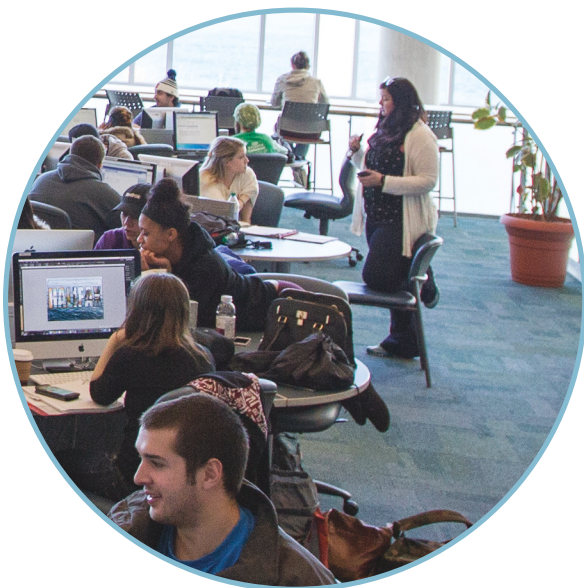


## Key requirements for your organization

Under the Accessibility Act, municipalities, universities, and other organizations may be prescribed as public sector bodies. (Prescribed means identified in the Accessibility Act General Regulations.) Once prescribed, these organizations must do the following:

- ▶ Establish an Accessibility Advisory Committee.
- ▶ Develop an accessibility plan within one year.

The act states that accessibility plans must be updated every three years. As accessibility standards are implemented, those standards should be integrated into your plan.



### *Success Story*

**The Nova Scotia Community College** (NSCC) is the first post-secondary institution in Atlantic Canada to have an Educational Equity policy designed to build collective momentum in removing systemic barriers as they strive for transformative change. This policy demonstrates the college's commitment to ensuring students have not only equitable access to education, but that they have an equitable experience, and achieve equitable success to improve both economic and quality of life measures for all Nova Scotians.

## Share your insights

Thank you to the organizations that contributed success stories for this toolkit.

What policies and actions are helping to make your organization more accessible? Email your insights, and photos if you have them, to [accessibility@novascotia.ca](mailto:accessibility@novascotia.ca).



# Establish your Accessibility Advisory Committee

The role of the Accessibility Advisory Committee is to advise your organization on identifying, preventing, and eliminating barriers to programs, services, and infrastructure, including buildings and outdoor spaces. The mandate of the committee is up to each organization to determine, but the committee should play a key role in developing your accessibility plan and helping your organization become accessible. Appendix A offers sample terms of reference for the committee.

## Questions to consider

These are some factors to consider before forming your committee and appointing an *accessibility lead* (a staff person to support the work of the committee).

### **Will your organization develop its own committee or a joint committee in partnership with other prescribed public sector bodies?**

While all prescribed public sector bodies are required to establish an Accessibility Advisory Committee, your organization may choose to form a joint committee with other prescribed public sector bodies that have a similar mandate or structure. In that case, each member must be approved separately by each public sector body represented on the committee.

### **Who should be represented on the committee?**

Under the Accessibility Act, *at least* half of the committee members must have a disability or represent an organization that represents people with disabilities.

Committee members may be staff, stakeholders, clients, community members, partners, or others.

Consider who the key stakeholders are for your organization.

Don't assume that you know who does or does not have a disability among your stakeholders.

Remember that advisory committee members will be your on-the-ground experts on accessibility.

### **How many members will the committee have?**

The act does not state a minimum or maximum number of committee members, but the Accessibility Directorate recommends that your committee include people with a variety of disabilities and expertise to bring diverse perspectives to your planning.



## **How will you recruit committee members (e.g., with an open call for applicants, a closed appointment process, or some other approach)?**

Whether you hold an open or closed appointment process, or some other approach, you will want to communicate with your various stakeholder groups about opportunities to participate on the Accessibility Advisory Committee, and the impact the work will have on advancing accessibility within the organization.

If you hold an open application process, consider advertising in alternative formats (such as large print) and accepting applications in diverse formats to encourage diverse candidates.

Appendix B shows a sample Call for Applicants for organizations that hold an open application.

Appendix C shows a sample member application form for organizations that hold an open application.

**TIP: 211 Nova Scotia** is a free, confidential information and referral service that can connect you to local community groups, nonprofits, and government departments across Nova Scotia. Dial 2-1-1 or visit [ns.211.ca](https://ns.211.ca) for help finding organizations that might recommend community members to serve on your Accessibility Advisory Committee. At the website, click on the “Disability Support and Services” icon and enter your location.

## **Will the meetings be open to the public?**

The Accessibility Act does not require Accessibility Advisory Committees to hold public meetings. However, holding public meetings may send a message of openness to your stakeholders. On the other hand, some committee members and potential applicants may not be comfortable freely expressing their opinions in public. Ultimately, the decision to hold the meetings in public or in private rests with the prescribed organization.

### **Provincial Post-Secondary Accessibility Framework**

Nova Scotia’s post-secondary institutions are collaborating to develop a provincial post-secondary accessibility framework, which will be the first of its kind in Canada. The framework will provide a shared vision for accessibility in post-secondary education and will establish collaborative commitments for advancing accessibility at Nova Scotia’s universities and Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC). It will also guide the development of each institution’s accessibility plan. Each institution will address the shared priorities and commitments in its plan, and may add its own priorities and commitments, as well.

## Appoint an accessibility lead (recommended)

While not required under the act, the Accessibility Directorate recommends that you appoint a staff member to support the work of the Accessibility Advisory Committee, including the development and implementation of the plan.

Here are some responsibilities that could be assigned to the accessibility lead(s):

- ▶ Working with the Accessibility Advisory Committee, lead the development of an accessibility plan.
- ▶ When new policies and programs are introduced, work with the committee to identify accessibility needs, and provide advice on removing barriers.
- ▶ Monitor progress in implementing the accessibility plan, and ensure the plan's priorities and actions are reflected in the organization's budget cycle and other planning documents.
- ▶ Receive and respond to stakeholder concerns, complaints, and suggestions about the plan.

## Launch the committee

★ *Required steps are marked with a star.*

- ☐ **Confirm the resources required** to establish the Accessibility Advisory Committee, to engage stakeholders, and to develop the accessibility plan.
- ★ **Recruit committee members.** Refer to the "Questions to consider" on page 6 for tips and pointers to sample tools.
- ☐ **Confirm a Chair and Vice Chair for the committee.**
- ☐ **Provide an orientation to the committee** on the Accessibility Act, the organization's obligations under the act, and the committee's mandate.
- ☐ **Agree on a Statement of Commitment.** The Statement of Commitment outlines the organization's commitment to improving accessibility. It summarizes the accessibility message your organization wishes to convey to stakeholders.

You may wish to consider the following when developing your Statement of Commitment:

- ▶ ensuring equal access and participation for all people, regardless of their abilities
- ▶ treating all people in a way that allows them to maintain their dignity and independence
- ▶ meeting the needs of people who face accessibility barriers
- ▶ identifying, removing and preventing these barriers by meeting the requirements of Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act



## Learn together

Ongoing learning and collaboration are vital qualities in an accessible organization. It is important to provide learning opportunities for staff, your Accessibility Advisory Committee, and senior leadership, on accessibility as a human right, barriers to accessibility, and your organization's obligations under the Accessibility Act. You may also choose to provide education on an area of accessibility that is of particular interest or high need for your organization.

*How* you approach ongoing learning will depend on local needs. Everything offered in this section on learning together is a recommendation, not a requirement under the act.

Some suggestions include:

- ▶ guest speakers
- ▶ experiential learning
- ▶ the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification (RHFAC) assessor training program
- ▶ online learning

### Guest speakers

At least half the members of your Accessibility Advisory Committee will be either people with disabilities or represent organizations representing people with disabilities. Consider inviting committee members or other stakeholders who have a disability to present to the committee on the barriers they face accessing programs or services from your organization. This will ensure that the voices of people with disabilities are at the table, providing a perspective from lived experience.

In addition, you may consider inviting guest speakers from local organizations that provide services to people with disabilities.

**TIP:** Dial 2-1-1 or visit [ns.211.ca](https://ns.211.ca) for help finding organizations that might provide a guest speaker.



### Success Story

The **Art Gallery of Nova Scotia** has converted their main floor washrooms into all-gender washrooms. All-gender washrooms provide an inclusive option for everyone. They also provide comfortable spaces for people who need the help of a personal care attendant and those with young children.

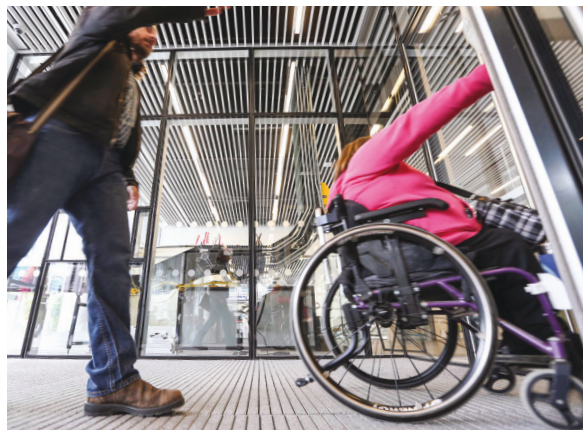
## Experiential learning

Consider giving decision makers a direct experience of barriers in the community. For example, a *Walk and Roll About*, using a wheelchair or walker, can give participants a better sense of the physical barriers in public spaces, such as:

- ▶ doorways that are too narrow
- ▶ a dangerous curb cut
- ▶ no curb cut next to an accessible parking spot
- ▶ a ramp that is too steep
- ▶ a ramp leading to a swing-out door with no platform at the top
- ▶ gravel or an unstable surface area
- ▶ a bathroom stall not designed to an accessible standard

**Important note:** There are conflicting opinions about the impact of disability simulations. Some advocates argue strongly against them, noting that an intense experience can reinforce negative stereotypes about people with disabilities. Others argue strongly in favour of simulations and point to positive outcomes. Your Accessibility Advisory Committee can help to weigh the pros and cons of different simulation approaches. If you choose to offer experiential learning, the Accessibility Directorate recommends that you ensure the activity is thoughtfully planned and facilitated. Be sure to ask a disabled person (or people) in your community to identify barriers and then focus the simulation exercise around those issues.

**TIP:** Dial 2-1-1 or visit [ns.211.ca](https://ns.211.ca) for help finding organizations in your region that might lend wheelchairs or walkers.



## Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification (RHFAC) assessor training

The RHFAC program is a LEED-style (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) rating system that trains individuals on how to help owners, tenants, and municipalities measure the accessibility of their buildings and sites. The foundation also promotes universal design principles to improve accessibility, and encourages developers, owners, and others to adopt them. ([www.rickhansen.com/become-accessible/rating-certification](http://www.rickhansen.com/become-accessible/rating-certification))

An RHFAC audit will identify assets that provide meaningful access, and those that require more work. According to the Rick Hansen Foundation, meaningful access refers to:

- ▶ the ability to independently and safely access the built environment based on planned inclusion
- ▶ the level of access for the facility as a whole

Your organization may want an RHFAC professional to audit some of your assets to the RHFAC standard—for example, buildings that are heavily used by the public. Other assets might be audited to the Interim Accessibility Guidelines for Indoor and Outdoor Spaces (Appendix F), which are less detailed.

The RHFAC assessor training program trains assessors to evaluate the accessibility of a building or site. The Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) offers the assessor training program, with support from the Government of Nova through the Business ACCESS-Ability grant program ([cch.novascotia.ca/business-access-ability-grant-program](http://cch.novascotia.ca/business-access-ability-grant-program)). Enrolling at least one staff person in the RHFAC assessor training program will help your organization to audit the built environment.

For more information about the program, contact the NSCC School of Access at [RHFAC@nsccl.ca](mailto:RHFAC@nsccl.ca) or 902-491-3557.



### **Success Story**

**Dalhousie University's Collaborative Health Education Building** is the first building east of Ontario to receive Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification.

## **Online learning**

There are many online resources—including webinars, courses, online tools, and more—that staff and committee members can use. For example, *Working With Abilities* is a free online course offered by the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission. This course gives practical information and advice to help employers in accommodating people with disabilities, and in building inclusion and respect in all workplaces in Nova Scotia. Visit [humanrights.novascotia.ca/education-training/working-abilities](http://humanrights.novascotia.ca/education-training/working-abilities).

For more suggestions about online learning, contact the Accessibility Directorate at 902-424-8280 or [accessibility@novascotia.ca](mailto:accessibility@novascotia.ca).



# Develop your accessibility plan

## Scope it out

In accordance with the act, your organization must develop a multi-year accessibility plan, in consultation with people with disabilities and organizations representing people with disabilities.

Your accessibility plan must be publicly available online. If you are asked to provide the plan in an accessible format (such as large print or braille), you must do so at no charge within a reasonable period of time.

★ *Required steps are marked with a star.*

Your plan must include the following:

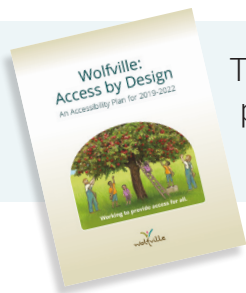
- ★ achievements to date in identifying, removing, and preventing barriers in policies, programs, practices, and services
- ★ how you will identify, remove, and prevent barriers in policies, programs, practices, and services
- ★ processes in place to assess the effect of your policies, programs, practices, and services on accessibility

Consider the following areas of focus as a starting point:

- ▶ **Awareness** – promoting awareness throughout your organization about the importance of accessibility
- ▶ **Goods and Services** – ensuring that people with disabilities have equitable access to the goods and services provided by your organization
- ▶ **Information and Communication** – ensuring all people can receive, understand, and share the information provided by your organization
- ▶ **Transportation** – making it easier for everyone to get where they need to go
- ▶ **Employment** – making your organization an accessible workplace, and supporting people with disabilities in finding and maintaining meaningful employment
- ▶ **Built Environment** – making buildings and shared spaces accessible to all
- ▶ **Education** – providing accessible and inclusive learning for all students

Bear in mind that some areas may not be directly relevant to your organization and therefore not needed in your plan. You can organize your plan in a way that best reflects your organization's mandate and best advances accessibility for your stakeholders.

Also consider including an implementation section, outlining who has responsibility for the plan; a timeline for implementation; how the plan will be monitored and evaluated; and a mechanism to respond to questions and complaints.



The Town of Wolfville piloted Nova Scotia's first municipal accessibility plan, beginning in April 2018. Check it out at <https://www.wolfville.ca/accessibility-advisory-committee.html>, under Reference

Figure 1 shows a sample outline. This is adapted from the structure that the Town of Wolfville used for its accessibility plan. For each area of focus (e.g., Built Environment, Employment, etc.), consider:

- ▶ What is the vision or **commitment**?
- ▶ What is the **starting point**—the current situation?
- ▶ What **policies** are already in place or under development? These are the rules that outline how your organization interacts with employees and stakeholders. An example of a policy could be that all employees have access to assistive devices so they can succeed at their job.
- ▶ What **actions** will your organization take to remove accessibility barriers? An example of an action could be to establish a centralized accommodation fund to pay for assistive devices.



### ***Success Story***

**Pictou-Antigonish Regional Library** (PARL) has instituted a program for the long-term loan of accessible devices that aim to decrease the barriers for people with print disabilities accessing the reading materials of their choice. PARL offers the use of in-house portable digital magnifier reading devices at each location, while visiting the library.

**Figure 1. Sample outline for an accessibility plan**

<b>Areas of Focus</b>	<p><b>Welcome message</b>  <b>Introduction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ What We Believe</li> <li>▶ Areas of Focus</li> <li>▶ Promoting accessibility awareness</li> <li>▶ Glossary of Terms</li> </ul>	
	<p><b>Goods and Services</b>  [ensuring that people with disabilities have equitable access to the goods and services provided by your organization]</p> <p><b>Information and Communications</b>  [ensuring all people can receive, understand, and share the information provided by your organization]</p> <p><b>Transportation</b>  [making it easier for everyone to get where they need to go]</p> <p><b>Employment</b>  [making your organization an accessible workplace, and supporting people with disabilities in finding and maintaining meaningful employment]</p> <p><b>Built Environment</b>  [making buildings and shared spaces accessible to all]</p> <p><b>Education</b>  [providing accessible and inclusive learning for all students]</p>	<p>For each area of focus, consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ The Commitment</li> <li>▶ The Starting Point <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Overview</li> <li>- Achievements</li> <li>- Barriers</li> </ul> </li> <li>▶ Policies</li> <li>▶ Actions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Top Priorities</li> <li>- Other Priorities</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
	<p><b>Implementing the Plan</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Responsibilities (for example: board, staff, Accessibility Advisory Committee)</li> <li>▶ Schedule or Timeline</li> <li>▶ Monitoring</li> <li>▶ Evaluating</li> <li>▶ Responding to Questions and Complaints</li> </ul> <p><b>Appendices</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Accessibility Advisory Committee Members</li> <li>▶ Community Barrier Mapping Results</li> <li>▶ Community Meeting Results</li> </ul>	

Figure 2 provides an overview of how an organization might develop and implement its accessibility plan. ☆ All of the steps in Figure 2 are required. Each step is described in more detail on the following pages. As long as you comply with the required steps, you are free to adapt the details and sample tools to suit needs.

## Figure 2. Highlights of the planning process

### Gather information:

- ☆ Consult with people with disabilities—for example, by hosting an in-person consultation or conducting a survey.
- ☆ Review your organization's accessibility achievements, barriers, and opportunities, to help identify priorities for your plan.

### Draft and approve the plan:

- ☆ Develop the draft plan and seek feedback from your stakeholders, especially those with disabilities.
- ☆ Approve the plan within one year of being prescribed as a public sector body.

### Maintain the plan:

- ☆ Make the plan publicly available online. If requested, also provide the plan in an accessible format.
- ☆ Implement the plan. This includes complying with provincial accessibility standards when they apply to public sector bodies. (Refer back to Figure 1 for implementation timelines.)
- ☆ Monitor and evaluate progress on the plan.
- ☆ Review and update the plan every three years. **Note:** In addition, the Accessibility Directorate recommends that you update your plan as new provincial accessibility standards are implemented (refer to Figure 1).



### Success Story

A New Horizons for Seniors initiative enables the Annapolis Valley Regional Library to provide tools and training to seniors with a print disability. “Empowering Participation for All” addresses needs previously identified by the library and community groups. It provides seniors the knowledge and skills to feel comfortable using technology and to be safe in that environment, thereby increasing participation in social programs offered in their community.



## Gather information

### ★ **Consult with the disability community.**

This is required under the act and it is essential groundwork for a successful accessibility plan.

Involving the community early on will allow you to collect important information from people who are directly affected by accessibility barriers within your organization—including information about specific areas of concern and priorities for action. It will be important to provide stakeholders with information on why your organization is doing this work, and what its responsibilities are under the act.

Consider what questions you are seeking input on. For example:

- ▶ What accessibility barriers exist within your organization? (Remember to ask about all areas of accessibility—not just buildings or public spaces.)
- ▶ What are the top priorities for improving accessibility within your organization?
- ▶ What is already working well to make your organization accessible?
- ▶ Who is doing work in accessibility in your community? What can your organization learn from them? Who can your organization partner with on the work?

Appendix D suggests some consultation activities, including a brainstorming exercise to capture accessibility barriers, and a sample map exercise to identify barriers within the built environment.

For tips on hosting a welcoming meeting for people of all abilities, refer to the *Guide to Planning Accessible Meetings and Events* ([novascotia.ca/accessibility/Accessible\\_Events\\_Guide.pdf](http://novascotia.ca/accessibility/Accessible_Events_Guide.pdf)), prepared by the Nova Scotia Accessibility Directorate. This resource is described briefly in Appendix E.

### ★ **Review all areas of accessibility in your organization to identify strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities.**

For example, consider how your organization communicates with stakeholders, delivers services, and hires employees.

#### ***Identify strengths and achievements***

Chances are, your organization has already taken steps to remove barriers for people with disabilities. Here are some questions to help highlight accessibility achievements:

- ▶ What experience does your organization have in reaching out to and including people with disabilities?

- ▶ What policies, if any, promote accessibility for stakeholders and for staff affected by accessibility barriers?
- ▶ What partnerships have been formed with people with disabilities or organizations representing people with disabilities?

### ***Identify weaknesses and barriers***

Here are some questions to consider when identifying barriers within your organization:

- ▶ List barriers people with disabilities have identified in accessing your programs, facilities, and services. Highlight the ones that are most significant or urgent to the public.
- ▶ What organizational policies may create barriers for people with disabilities? Consider policies affecting senior leadership, staff, and other stakeholders.
- ▶ What temporary barriers have been created by renovations, computer software upgrades, pathways that are blocked, or chemicals used that might affect people with sensitivities?

### **Consider an accessibility audit of the built environment**

One part of your review should be an accessibility audit of the built environment, including buildings and outdoor spaces. For help in planning a preliminary accessibility audit of the built environment, refer to Appendix F, Interim Accessibility Guidelines for Indoor and Outdoor Spaces. These guidelines are “interim”. They will be replaced by a standard for the built environment, once the standard has been adopted.



### ***Success Story***

#### **The Nova Scotia Health Authority**

(NSHA) uses a remote video interpreting service to connect patients to over 9000 professional interpreters in the 36 most widely used languages, including American Sign Language (ASL). The service uses tablets to facilitate full understanding through spoken and visual communication. The NSHA also provides in-person ASL interpretation.

## Draft and approve the plan

- ★ **Draft** the accessibility plan, using information collected from the Accessibility Advisory Committee, consultations, and the accessibility review, along with an understanding of your organization's budget. Develop policies and actions to support outcomes identified by the community.  
  
Remember: The plan should be accessible, too. Use plain language and clear design (Figure 3).
- **Invite** stakeholders to give feedback on the draft plan—for example, by posting it online or by holding an in-person meeting.
- **Revise** the plan based on feedback. Prioritize the actions and identify any gaps in the plan.
- **Ensure** that the Accessibility Advisory Committee approves the revised plan before it is presented to senior leadership for final approval.
- ★ **Approve** the plan.

### Figure 3. Use plain language

An important step in reviewing your accessibility plan is to ensure that the information is as accessible as possible for everyone. A best practice is to have a professional plain language editor review your plan. The goal of plain language is to communicate so clearly that the intended audience can easily find what they need, understand what they find, and use the information ([plainlanguagenetwork.org/](http://plainlanguagenetwork.org/)).

Following is an example of text before it was reviewed by a plain language editor, and after:

#### Before

Partial funding for retrofitting of residential properties is available to qualified residents, with priority given to improving entrance and egress, bathroom accessibility, and mobility in the kitchen/food preparation area for older adults. Applications may be submitted in writing to this office.

#### After

If you are 70 years or older, you can apply for a grant to help pay for home improvements that make these areas of your home safer and more accessible:

- ▶ the entrance
- ▶ the bathroom
- ▶ the space where you prepare food

Application forms are available online or at our office. If you need help to complete the form, please call. We're here to help.

## Implement and maintain the plan

How you launch and maintain your plan will depend on your needs. Except as noted by the word “must,” everything offered in this section on implementing and maintaining the plan is a recommendation, not a requirement under the act.

### Involve the community

Once your organization adopts the plan, it is important to communicate it through a variety of channels, both to celebrate the plan and to raise awareness about accessibility and your committed actions. Some examples include:

- ▶ Hosting a town hall meeting
- ▶ Setting up a booth at a community event (ensure the event is held in an accessible location)
- ▶ Posting the plan on your organization's social media accounts
- ▶ Emailing information about the plan to residents and stakeholders
- ▶ Issuing a media release

Remember, according to the Accessibility Act, the plan must be posted online, and be provided in an accessible format, upon request.

The plan must also be updated every three years, so it's important that your stakeholders continue to be given opportunities to provide input.

Consider working with the Accessibility Advisory Committee to develop a process for responding to questions, suggestions, or complaints related to the plan.

### Involve staff

Staff will identify specific budget requirements to implement the plan and will ensure priority action items are reflected in the organization's budget. Staff may wish to present budget proposals to the Accessibility Advisory Committee, along with other documents that could affect the implementation of the plan.

Your accessibility plan should be considered a living document. It's important for staff to work closely with the Accessibility Advisory Committee as the plan is implemented and evolves. As well, to keep stakeholders engaged, the committee may consider preparing an annual report card to measure performance in implementing the plan.





## Appendices / planning tools

- A. Sample Terms of Reference for an Accessibility Advisory Committee
- B. Sample Call for Applicants for an Accessibility Advisory Committee
- C. Sample application for Accessibility Advisory Committee members
- D. Suggested consultation activities
- E. Guide to Planning Accessible Meetings and Events ([link to pdf](#))
- F. Interim Accessibility Guidelines for Indoor and Outdoor Spaces ([link to pdf](#))

# Appendix A.

## Sample Terms of Reference for an Accessibility Advisory Committee

### ***Purpose***

The Accessibility Advisory Committee provides advice on identifying, preventing, and eliminating barriers to people with disabilities in programs, services, initiatives, and facilities. The committee plays a pivotal role in helping \_\_\_\_\_ become accessible and meet its obligations under Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act.

### ***Role***

The Accessibility Advisory Committee shall:

- 1) Advise on the preparation, implementation, and effectiveness of its accessibility plan. In accordance with the Accessibility Act, the plan must include
  - a) a report on measures the public sector body has taken and intends to take to identify, remove, and prevent barriers
  - b) information on procedures the public sector body has in place to assess the following for their impact on accessibility for people with disabilities:
    - ▶ any proposed policies, programs, practices, and services
    - ▶ any proposed enactments or by-laws
  - (c) any other prescribed information
- 2) Review and update its accessibility plan at least every three years, in accordance with the act.
- 3) Consult with stakeholders on accessibility in the organization.
- 4) Identify and advise on the accessibility of existing and proposed services and facilities.
- 5) Advise and make recommendations about strategies designed to achieve the objectives of the organization's accessibility plan.
- 6) Receive and review information from staff and senior leadership, and make recommendations, as requested.
- 7) Assist in monitoring compliance with federal and provincial government directives and regulations.

### ***Composition and Terms of Appointment***

The Accessibility Advisory Committee shall have \_x\_ members. At least half of the members must be people with disabilities or represent organizations that represent people with disabilities, in accordance with the act.

The members of the Accessibility Advisory Committee shall be appointed for a term of \_x\_ years.

The Committee shall elect a Chair and Vice-Chair every year.

## ***Meetings***

The committee shall meet at least   x   times per year, or as needed to fulfill its duties.

Quorum shall be \_\_\_\_\_.

The committee may establish working groups to explore specific issues related to the accessibility plan and/or other responsibilities. A working group may include members who are not Advisory Committee members. The chair of a working group must be a member of the Accessibility Advisory Committee.

# Appendix B.

## Sample Call for Applicants for an Accessibility Advisory Committee

Volunteer Opportunity:

### **Accessibility Advisory Committee for [name of organization]**

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Are you looking to make a difference in your community? Why not consider serving as a volunteer member of the newly formed Accessibility Advisory Committee?

The Accessibility Advisory Committee provides advice to [name the organization] on identifying, preventing and eliminating barriers to people with disabilities in programs, services, initiatives and facilities. The committee plays a pivotal role in helping [name the organization] to become accessible and in compliance with Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act (2017).

**At least one half of the members of the advisory committee must have a disability or represent an organization that represents people with disabilities.**

**Disability** includes a physical, mental, intellectual, learning, or sensory impairment—including an episodic disability—that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders an individual's full and effective participation in society.

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Applications are available online or can be picked up at [address]. The deadline for applications is [date]. Your completed application may be submitted by mail, in person, or by email to:

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Subject line: Accessibility Advisory Committee Volunteer

For more information about the Accessibility Advisory Committee, refer to the Terms of Reference at [link]. Or contact [name] at [phone number] or [e-mail].



# Appendix C.

## Sample Application for Accessibility Advisory Committee members

### Committee Application Form

---

Applicant Name

---

Street Address

---

Postal Code

---

Home Telephone

---

Work/Cell Telephone

---

E-mail Address

---

Occupation (if applicable)

---

Application for appointment to (Committee Name)

**Describe how your lived experience, community involvement, education, or work might be helpful to this committee.**

**Why are you interested in serving on this committee?**

**What contribution do you believe you can make to this committee?**

**What past contributions have you made on a similar committee or organization?**

**What experience do you have in exchanging your views with others and in appreciating and respecting the skills, abilities and knowledge of others?**

**Are you a person with a disability, or do you represent an organization representing people with disabilities?**

☐ Yes ☐ No

**Note:** At least one half of the members of the advisory committee must have a disability or represent an organization that represents people with disabilities.

**If you are a person with disability or represent an organization representing people with disabilities, what disability/disabilities do you or your organization represent?**

**Note:** Members with a variety of disabilities will bring diverse perspectives to this committee. We will strive to accommodate all members to ensure they are able to fully participate.

**Organization/Sector you are representing (if applicable):**

**Interview Option:** All or some of the applicants might be invited to attend a short interview. The purpose of the interviews is to give applicants an opportunity to elaborate on their application.

[insert a consent to collect and disclose personal information, if required]

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Applicant Signature

---

Date

# Appendix D.

## Suggested consultation activities

The Accessibility Act states that public sector bodies, when they are preparing their accessibility plans, must seek input from people with disabilities and representatives of organizations representing people with disabilities.

Remember to design all consultation activities to be accessible. For example, ensure that people with a variety of disabilities are able to access the information and are able to give their input. Refer to Appendix E for a *Guide to Planning Accessible Meetings and Events*.

Here are some ways to kick-start your consultation:

- ▶ Create an Accessibility Advisory Committee working group focused on consultation.
- ▶ Gather information from stakeholders, either in person (for example, at pop-up events) or online.
- ▶ Ask for suggestions to improve the accessibility of your organization.
- ▶ Ask for help in identifying accessibility priorities and possible examples, such as a hiring practice or a registration process.

Following are some sample exercises.

### Brainstorming and ideation

Here are some questions that could spark discussion at a stakeholder meeting:

- ▶ What's your current experience of accessibility in [name of organization]? (what's working; what's not)
- ▶ How can [name of organization] contribute to an accessible Nova Scotia by 2030?
- ▶ What does an accessible [name of organization] mean to you?
- ▶ What are some ways to remove accessibility barriers in [name of organization] that could be done right away and that wouldn't cost a lot?
- ▶ What accessibility improvements would you make to [name of organization] in the long term that would have the biggest impact?
- ▶ What local partnerships can you identify that could help implement some of your proposed improvements? Please be as specific as possible.

Ask participants to identify accessibility priorities—such as employment, information and communication, and delivery of goods and services—and invite them to write their ideas under each category. Wolfville's accessibility plan contains policies and actions in several categories that could be a useful starting point for a brainstorming session.

## Mapping

One way to identify priorities in the built environment is to provide maps of key areas or floor plans of buildings and ask participants to mark the following hotspots, using coloured pencils or markers:

- ▶ **Red:** circle any accessibility barriers that represent a public safety hazard for people with disabilities.
- ▶ **Orange:** circle any accessibility barriers that represent an access/equity issue for people with disabilities.
- ▶ **Green:** circle any areas in which the organization has excelled at removing accessibility barriers.

This exercise should be modified for participants with visual impairments—for example, by inviting oral feedback.

**Here is a sample map from a community meeting in Wolfville.**





# Appendix E.

## Guide to Planning Accessible Meetings and Events

(available online)

Ensuring that all Nova Scotians are able to participate in meetings and events is one important aspect of accessibility. All resources and events you plan for stakeholder consultations and for your Accessibility Advisory Committee **must** be accessible.

The *Guide to Planning Accessible Meetings and Events* offers tips and checklists on these topics:

- ▶ Scheduling
- ▶ Selecting a venue
- ▶ Promotions and registration
- ▶ Communications and accommodations
- ▶ Room set up
- ▶ Chairing or moderating events
- ▶ Effective, respectful communication

The guide encourages organizers to be flexible, creative, and open to alternative arrangements.

Download the printable pdf at

[novascotia.ca/accessibility/Accessible\\_Events\\_Guide.pdf](https://novascotia.ca/accessibility/Accessible_Events_Guide.pdf)

# Glossary of terms

## **Access by Design 2030 (2018)**

The provincial strategy for implementing the Accessibility Act. Access by Design 2030 provides a roadmap for government, businesses, and communities to work together to eliminate barriers to accessibility and make Nova Scotia accessible by 2030. ([novascotia.ca/accessibility/access-by-design/](https://novascotia.ca/accessibility/access-by-design/))

Also see the Government of Nova Scotia Accessibility Plan (2018-2021).

## **Accessibility Act (2017)**

The provincial law enacted to achieve accessibility by preventing and removing barriers for people with disabilities. The law defines the role and responsibilities of the Accessibility Directorate and the Accessibility Advisory Board, and addresses standards, compliance, and enforcement. ([nslegislature.ca/sites/default/files/legc/statutes/accessibility.pdf](https://nslegislature.ca/sites/default/files/legc/statutes/accessibility.pdf))

## **Accessibility Advisory Committee**

A volunteer committee established by a prescribed public sector body to advise on identifying, preventing, and eliminating barriers that limit people with disabilities from accessing programs, services, initiatives, and facilities. The committee plays a pivotal role in helping the public sector body become accessible and comply with Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act (2017). At least one-half of the members of the advisory committee must have a disability or represent an organization that represents people with disabilities.

## **Accessibility Advisory Board**

A 12-member provincial board appointed by the provincial government to advise the Minister of Justice on accessibility and make recommendations on accessibility standards. The majority of board members are people with disabilities. ([novascotia.ca/accessibility/advisory-board/](https://novascotia.ca/accessibility/advisory-board/))

## **Accessibility lead(s)**

Staff appointed by a prescribed public sector body to support the work of the Accessibility Advisory Committee in developing and implementing the accessibility plan. The accessibility lead(s) also liaise with the public sector body's senior management and staff.

## **Accessibility Directorate**

The provincial body that is responsible for implementing and administering the Accessibility Act, supporting accessibility initiatives and advancing broader disability-related issues. ([novascotia.ca/accessibility/](https://novascotia.ca/accessibility/))

**Barrier**

Something that makes it harder for some people to participate. Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act defines a barrier as "anything that hinders or challenges the full and effective participation in society of persons with disabilities, including a physical barrier, an architectural barrier, an information or communications barrier, an attitudinal barrier, a technological barrier, a policy, or a practice."

**Disability**

As defined in Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act: "a physical, mental, intellectual, learning or sensory impairment, including an episodic disability that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders an individual's full and effective participation in society."

**Equitable/equity**

A commitment to fairness. Equitable access is different from equal access. Equality means everybody is treated the same; equity means everybody is treated fairly, based on their needs and abilities.

**Government of Nova Scotia Accessibility Plan**

A multi-year plan setting specific priorities and commitments for achieving accessibility within the Government of Nova Scotia. The first plan was published in 2018 and covers the years 2018-2021. ([novascotia.ca/accessibility/plan](http://novascotia.ca/accessibility/plan))

**Plain language**

Clear, conversational communication that makes sense to the intended audience. The goal of plain language is to communicate so clearly that the intended audience can easily find what they need, understand what they find, and use the information ([plainlanguagenetwork.org/](http://plainlanguagenetwork.org/)).

**Prescribed**

Means "prescribed in the Accessibility Act General Regulations." The Accessibility Act enables the government to use the regulations to identify which organizations must comply with certain requirements. These requirements include forming an Accessibility Advisory Committee and developing an accessibility plan within one year. The use of the word "prescribed" in legislation is intended to give wide authority for regulations to be made that set down a specific rule or direction.

**RHF / RHFAC**

Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification. ([www.rickhansen.com/become-accessible/rating-certification](http://www.rickhansen.com/become-accessible/rating-certification))



