



The role of your Accessibility Advisory Committee

Prepared by the Accessibility Directorate, August 2024

■ Purpose of this Tool

This tool was developed to support prescribed public sector bodies (PPSBs) in reviewing the role, governance structure, and coordination of their accessibility advisory committees (AAC) as part of their process of updating organizational accessibility plans.

■ Legislative Requirements

The Nova Scotia Accessibility Act has the following requirements in relation to AAC's:

- Every prescribed public sector body must have an accessibility advisory committee
- At least one-half of the members of an accessibility advisory committee must be persons with disabilities or representatives from organizations representing persons with disabilities

■ Role of Accessibility Advisory Committees

The Accessibility Act does not outline a specific role accessibility advisory committees must play in developing, implementing, and updating accessibility plans. PPSBs have reported that their committees have various roles in advising PPSBs in identifying, preventing, and removing accessibility barriers. This includes:

- Supporting the implementation of accessibility plans
- Advising organizations about accessibility
- Supporting the process of updating accessibility plans

It is important to consider the specific role your accessibility advisory committee will play to support the renewal of your plan, and the implementation of your updated plan once complete.

■ Revisiting the Role of Your Accessibility Advisory Committee

The following is a suggested process for reviewing the role of your accessibility advisory committee. You may choose to use some, all, or none of these steps, depending on what is relevant to your committee.

- 1) **Assess the current role and function of your accessibility advisory committee.** Consider asking current committee members and relevant staff the questions below. To get the best quality feedback, consider asking these questions in an anonymous survey or coordinate a facilitated focus group with the committee.
 - What committee work and processes do they feel functioned well? Why?
 - What committee work and processes would they change? Why?
 - Should the committee meet more or less often? Why?
 - Were meetings accessible? What improvements could be made?
 - What additional support does the committee need to fulfill its mandate?

2) **Review your committee's terms of reference and governance structure.**

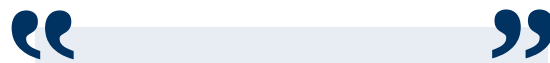
You may need to update your terms of reference, based on feedback received, to reflect new priorities and the role the accessibility advisory committee will play in updating and implementing your accessibility plan. There is a template for accessibility advisory committee terms of reference in [The Accessibility Planning Toolkit for Prescribed Public Sector Bodies](#).

3) **Consider the financial resources** available for the committee to support future meetings and work.

- Financial and human resources may be needed for engagement processes, training, accessibility services, etc. Check with your organizational leadership to understand the resources available to support the work of your accessibility advisory committee.

4) **Recruit new committee members**, if necessary.

- The Accessibility Act does not state a minimum or maximum number of committee members. You may need to recruit more members if you do not have representation to meet updated priorities or if you do not meet the requirement to have at least half of the committee members be persons with disabilities or representatives of disability organizations.
- Reflect on the future function of the committee, and whether the current membership represents the various priority areas the committee will be carrying out.
- Reflect on whether your current committee represents a sufficient variety of disabilities and expertise to bring diverse perspectives to your planning.
- Consider intersectionality in representation on your advisory committee. People with disabilities are diverse and have multiple parts of their identities that overlap, such as race, gender, sexuality, age, and more.



We created an ad hoc Accessibility Advisory Committee (originally) formed to address the requirements of the Accessibility Act [which was] dissolved August 31, 2023. A formal terms of reference was developed and a new committee is being formed for 2024; some of the members of the inaugural committee will continue.

– Katie Aubrecht, Associate Professor and Canada Research Chair, St. Francis Xavier University

- Consider what lessons were learned from your first recruitment process. You may choose to hold an open or closed appointment process, or some other approach. Ensure your approach is accessible. Refer to the [Guide to Planning Accessible Meetings and Events](#).
- Develop an approach to promoting the invitation for new members and how you will build awareness in the community about the opportunity to take part on your committee.

5) Confirm a chair and vice-chair for the committee if membership has changed.

- Although it is not required under the Accessibility Act, it is recommended that a chair and vice-chair be selected to support the committee with meeting the terms of reference and chairing meetings. Consider individuals with facilitation and leadership skills for these positions.

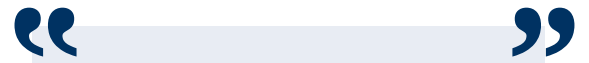
6) Confirm a staff member to support the work of the accessibility advisory committee.

- While it is not required under the Accessibility Act, it is recommended that you appoint an accessibility lead to support the work of the committee, if you have not already done.

7) Orient new and existing members.

Having a documented orientation process for new members of the committee will help members understand their roles and responsibilities and will provide important background for the work they are doing.

- If you have not done so recently, review the Accessibility Act and your obligations, your organization’s activities, and committee mandate. This is not only for new members, but a refresher for everyone. Consider what has changed in the context of the committee’s work, and what new issues or topics are emerging.



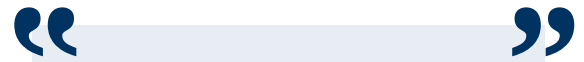
The Village has a representative on the Kings County Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee. The wealth of shared information, staff support and accessibility planning created by this committee has been invaluable in aiding the Village in moving forward with its own accessibility plan. The introduction of the accessibility coordinator has been a tremendous help in providing guidance and support to our Village by assisting with an accessibility assessment and other related activities.

– Robert Sealby, Vice-chair Village of Greenwood Commission, Village of Greenwood

- Consider an orientation for PPSB staff working on accessibility actions and with the committee.
- Consider offering accessibility training to committee members. More information on training opportunities can be found in [Resources for Updating Your Accessibility Plan](#).
- Consider contacting other PPSBs to share learnings from previous orientations, either individually or through various PPSB subgroups.
- Spend time welcoming committee members into the committee and consider multiple rounds of orientation with smaller amounts of information rather than one large orientation.
- Use plain language, especially when introducing committee members to the organizational context and their role. A resource on plain language can be found in [Resources for Updating Your Accessibility Plan](#).

8) Host meetings and carry out committee duties.

- Refer to the [Guide to Hosting Accessible Meetings and Events](#) and [Guide to Hosting Accessible Online Meetings and Events](#) for ways to make the committee more accessible to committee members.
- Think about what structure you will have for your committee meetings.
 - Consider including subject matter experts on staff or in the community to attend your committee meetings to provide additional context to the work.
 - Provide a discussion space where committee members feel valued and are comfortable expressing views outside of the committee mandate.
 - Consider a combination of in-person and virtual meetings throughout the year.



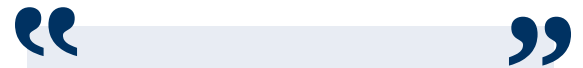
All staff and some committee members are presently in the process of IDEA (inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility) training. The online training focuses on IDEA fundamentals and unconscious bias training. The hope is that all staff increase their knowledge and awareness of removing barriers for persons with disabilities. Additional follow-up training may be required to highlight the importance of respectful communication with people with disabilities.

– Earl MacKenzie, Director of Engineering and Public Works, Town of New Glasgow

■ Accessibility Advisory Committee Engagement and Relationship Building

The following are considerations for engaging members of accessibility advisory committees.

1. Consider ways to have meetings with less formality. Meeting virtually can feel less formal and encourage people to relax in their own space. Meeting in person can also provide connection and social time during breaks.
2. Sharing the time to speak can support engagement. Consider holding a roundtable discussion where each member has an opportunity to contribute during every meeting.
3. For committees that are a mix of community members with disabilities, boards of directors, organizational representatives, or staff, all members may not need the same information or have the same perspective. Consider holding some joint meetings and some meetings just for community members that are less formal.
4. Consider working groups to focus on specific projects or topics.
5. Consider interactive activities related to the committee's mandate, such as tours of buildings or experiencing PPSB programs and services being delivered.
6. Create opportunities for committee members to engage in staff or community events that bring awareness to accessibility and promote the role of the committee.



Our accessibility advisory committee has started to do walkthroughs of municipal spaces during our meetings to take notes on how we can make our spaces more accessible from a First-Voice lens.

– Kevin Waters, Active Living Coordinator, West Hants Regional Municipality