

Accessibility Plan

April 1, 2023 – March 31, 2026

Invest 
NOVA SCOTIA

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Introduction

Nova Scotians deserve equal access to the many programs, services, and facilities offered throughout our province. To make that a reality, there is much work to be done to listen, learn, and break down barriers.

In 2021, the Crown corporations that report into the Department of Economic Development joined forces to create a Crown Accessibility Advisory Committee, including our employees as well as volunteers with lived experience within the disability community.

From that collaborative work, this plan represents the goals and commitments of Invest Nova Scotia.

Invest Nova Scotia is Nova Scotia's business development agency that works to promote economic growth and community economic development in the province by enabling business, innovation, sustainability, and entrepreneurship. We are Nova Scotians supporting businesses small and large; new and new to our province. We provide access to capital that start-ups need to grow, acceleration programs and services, trade missions, in-market activities, export capacity building, and incentives for sustainability and global competitiveness.

Thank you to our committee's community volunteers whose guidance and insights have been critical in helping us identify and reduce barriers as well as shape greater accessibility in our programs, services, initiatives, and facilities. These committee volunteers are Milena Khazanavicius, Michelle Mahoney, Veronica Merryfield, Earl Muise, and Frank O'Sullivan. Each is an active champion for accessibility.

We are excited to continue working together with clients, community members, and all Nova Scotians as we build on this plan in the coming years to improve accessibility to all of Invest Nova Scotia's offerings.

Peter MacAskill

CEO, Invest Nova Scotia

Definitions

Accessibility

Accessibility is when the needs of people with disabilities are specifically considered and information, products, services, and environment are built or modified so that they can be used by people of all abilities.

Accessibility Act

The Nova Scotia *Accessibility Act* is the provincial legislation enacted in 2017 to achieve accessibility by preventing and removing barriers for people with disabilities.

ASL

American Sign Language (ASL) is a natural language that serves as the predominant sign language of Deaf communities in most of Anglophone Canada. ASL is a complete and organized visual language that is expressed by employing both manual and non-manual features.

Barrier

A barrier is defined as anything that hinders or challenges the full and effective participation in society of persons with disabilities.

CART

Communication Access Real-Time Translation, which delivers captions remotely to any screen in real-time. Also known as Live Captioning.

CSA B651-18

Guidelines from the Canadian Standards Association that outline a set of recommended technical requirements for accessible design within built environments, including sidewalks, buildings, signposts, etc.

Disability

A term of self-identification used by those with a broad range of disabilities, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication, or sensory impairment—or a functional limitation—whether permanent, temporary, or episodic in nature, or evident or not, that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders a person's full and equal participation in society.

Inclusion

The process whereby every person, regardless of age, ability, gender, income, education, religion, sexuality, and culture, who wishes to, can access and participate fully in all aspects of the activity just as any other person.

Plain Language

Clear, conversational communication that is easily understood by 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.

Definitions (continued)

Systemic Barriers

Obstacles that exclude groups or communities of people from full participation in, and the benefits of, social, economic, and political life. They may be hidden or unintentional but are built into the way society works.

TAI

Tactile Attention Indicators (TAI) are textured ground surface indicators found on footpaths, stairs, bus station platforms and more, to assist pedestrians who are visually impaired.

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1

Guidelines that cover a wide range of recommendations for making web content more accessible to a wide range of individuals with disabilities, including blindness, low vision, deafness, and hearing loss. Recommendations include easily read fonts, simpler layout for website content, and making all functionality available from a keyboard.

Developing Our Plan

In 2017, Nova Scotia passed the *Accessibility Act*: legislation that recognizes accessibility as a human right and sets a goal of an accessible Nova Scotia by 2030. Nova Scotia provincial Crown corporations were prescribed as public-sector bodies under the Act in 2019 with a mandate to establish an accessibility advisory committee and develop an accessibility plan by April 1, 2022 (extended to 2023 due to the COVID-19 pandemic).

In 2021, employees representing Crown corporations that reported into the Department of Economic Development came together as a steering group to develop the terms of reference for a joint Accessibility Advisory Committee incorporating the goals, responsibilities, and requirements outlined in the *Accessibility Act*.

The steering group launched a public recruitment campaign inviting Nova Scotians with lived and learned accessibility experience to join the Crown Accessibility Advisory Committee (CAAC) and recruited five members from across the province.

The Committee was formed with an overarching goal to identify, prevent, and eliminate barriers to people with disabilities in their programs, services, initiatives, and facilities. The Committee identified the following accessibility standards that should be addressed based on the type of work conducted by the Crowns:

1. Built Environment
2. Employment
3. Goods and Services
4. Information and Communication

Subcommittees were created to develop accessibility goals and commitments in each of these areas. Each subcommittee was comprised of CAAC members, both community and Crown representatives, and additional staff representatives who were most familiar with the standard being developed.

Through monthly CAAC meetings, subcommittee meetings and ongoing discussions, it was clear the voice of community members and their consultative role on the Committee would serve as an invaluable resource for the development of our plan.

Invest Nova Scotia is pleased to present our first accessibility plan.

Purpose

The purpose of this accessibility plan is to establish a vision and commitment for accessibility in all business offerings, including programs, services, employment, and physical spaces provided by Invest Nova Scotia, and to inform the development of future accessibility plans and actions.

Vision

A culture that supports full and equitable access for people of all abilities in all aspects of our environment, service offerings and information, and is reflected in the attitudes, behaviours, and endeavours of all Invest Nova Scotia employees.

Guiding Principles

Awareness

We will promote accessibility awareness with our employees to provide better service.

Diversity

We understand that individuals possess a variety of unique dimensions, qualities, and characteristics that make us different. We will respect and appreciate our differences.

Equity

We believe in the quality of being fair and reasonable in a way that gives equal treatment and opportunity to everyone.

First Voice

We value the contribution of Nova Scotians with disabilities in the development of this plan and the advancement of accessibility through their lived experiences.

Human Rights

We recognize that people with disabilities face barriers that hinder them from fully participating in society. We believe accessibility is a fundamental human right and we will reflect this in our programs, services, and policies.

Inclusion

We commit to ensuring the public and our employees are treated with respect and dignity.

Innovation

We believe that being innovative, proactive, and flexible is essential to advancing accessibility.

Intersectionality

We understand that a person's identity, life circumstances, and experiences can overlap with their disability. This increases barriers that prevent them from fully participating in society. We will reflect this understanding in our programs, services, and policies.

Accessibility Standards

Built Environment

Goal

We will endeavor to ensure buildings and public spaces—whether owned, leased, or operated—are barrier-free and offer design features to enhance the experience for people of all ages and abilities.

Commitments

1. During the planning and design for new construction or major renovations, apply and evaluate the design using the principles of universal design which are:
 - Equitable use: Design that is functional and appealing to all users which avoids segregating, stigmatizing, or isolating any users.
 - Flexibility in use: Provides choice in methods of use.
 - Simple and intuitive use which eliminates unnecessary complexity in design.
 - Perceptible information where the design provides necessary information effectively and simply.
 - Tolerance for error that minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.
 - Low physical effort so that the design can be used efficiently and comfortably with a minimum effort by all.
 - Space is provided for approach, reach, and use regardless of the user's body size, posture, or mobility.
2. Actively engage community partners during the initial planning and design stages and following implementation to ensure there is a collaborative dialogue on the identification and removal of barriers and the improvement of access in buildings and public spaces.
3. Undertake an accessibility audit of all owned, leased, or operated assets.
4. Develop an implementation plan that includes timelines and a reporting tool to track progress.
5. Seek a partnership with government to develop a system-wide cost and benefit assessment for complying with the *Accessibility Act's* built environment standard.
6. Collaborate with local partners, abutting property owners, and municipalities to integrate accessibility between properties.
7. Ensure access is maintained for buildings and public spaces during temporary disruptions such as construction or seasonal challenges, e.g. snow and ice.
8. Ensure all emergency evacuation systems, policies, procedures, communications, and training enable persons with disabilities or others who experience barriers to accessibility to safely and efficiently evacuate during an emergency.

Accessibility Standards (continued)

Employment

Goal

We are an accessible and equitable employer. We will support our employees by preventing and removing barriers to employment for persons with disabilities across the span of one's career.

Commitments

1. Ensure job advertisements are available in accessible formats and clearly indicate that persons with disabilities or others who experience barriers to accessibility are encouraged to apply.
2. Develop fair and equitable policies and practices that encourage the recruitment, selection, retention, and advancement of persons with disabilities.
3. Work with selected job applicants and employees to identify accessibility barriers, review accessibility requirements, and provide appropriate individual accommodations.
4. Support the development of a culture of respect and inclusion for persons with disabilities or others who experience barriers to accessibility.
5. Achieve representation from persons with disabilities.

Goods and Services

Goal

There is equal opportunity and ability for all persons to access goods and services offered by or delivered through the Crown corporation.

Commitments

1. Design and deliver goods and services without bias and without pre-determining due to accessibility requirements who can or cannot be the recipients of goods and services.
2. Accommodate persons with disabilities in the best possible way to ensure they can access goods and services offered.
3. Provide physical spaces that deliver a positive and accessible client-service experience.
4. Provide employee training to increase accessibility awareness, ensure the appropriate and respectful treatment of persons with disabilities, promote an inclusive and accessible work environment, and remain current with accessibility legislation.
5. Ensure all documents used in the delivery of goods and services are available upon request in an accessible format, such as program materials, guidelines, and application forms.

Accessibility Standards (continued)

Information and Communication

Goal

All persons can receive, consume, and share information communicated by our organization publicly and through the programs, activities, and facilities we operate.

Commitments

1. Provide digital communications, corporate documents, and other promotional material through our websites, social media, email, and other digital information sharing that is accessible to all through the use of plain language, dictation, compatibility with screen readers, and other best practices.
2. Ensure a timely feedback mechanism is available in an accessible format for persons with disabilities, and which will include an auto-generated response to acknowledge receipt.
3. Offices and public facilities can be accessed and navigated by all through inclusive signage and wayfinding tools. This may include ensuring information is readily available online or through assets to support planning in advance.
4. The terms and language we use in our communication will align with best practices to reflect the community and people we serve.
5. When planning events such as news conferences, engagement sessions, and other organization-led events, consideration will always be given to help maximize participation and access for all, including but not limited to on-site interpreters, online access, and recording content for later use.

Go Forward

With a strong foundation, we will move forward to expand, develop, and convert our goals and commitments into actions to achieve a culture of accessibility in all that we do. Guided by the goals and commitments in this plan, we will develop specific tactics with measures that allow us to evaluate success. We will report on our success and continuously maintain a focus on accessibility for all.