

Export Development Canada 2024 Accessibility Progress Report

December 13, 2024

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Summary

We have taken time to ensure that we fully understand the Accessible Canada Act. We have adjusted our approach to meet our goals. Our progress this year will help us be more accessible in the future. We are always working to improve access and inclusion in all we do, and this approach is key to our success.

Our DiversABILITY Employee Resource Group gave us feedback about this report. You can learn more in the “Consultations” and “Feedback” sections.

Earlier this year, our organization held its first in-person, all-staff event since 2020. It was our most accessible event to date, but we learned that we have more to do. We have also included the feedback that we received from the DiversABILITY Employee Resource Group after the event.

Going forward, we commit to ongoing accessibility improvements. Change is happening.

We welcome your feedback, suggestions, or questions on this report. Please see our Contact Us section to share any comments you may have.

Highlights

Growing Our Team

We now have people in roles to support accessibility at EDC. They include:

- A Change Advisor
- A Learning & Development Advisor
- An Accessibility Associate.

These new roles show commitment to accessibility and inclusion at the top levels of EDC. Our leaders support the accessibility work we need to do.

Our Accessibility Steering Committee

This year, we established an Accessibility Steering Committee with senior leaders from across the organization. We held meetings each month to:

- Make sure our accessibility work is moving ahead as planned.
- Keep leaders aware of our access and inclusion issues.
- Make sure teams are doing what they need to do to get issues resolved.

These meetings are vital. They keep leaders talking about accessibility issues, which become priorities for EDC to understand, address and find solutions for.

Our Accessibility Training Program

Training is key to accessibility awareness across EDC. It also helps us build a foundation of knowledge to support our work and the Accessible Canada Act. This year, we developed our first "Accessibility Competency Framework." This framework outlines what people need to know and be able to do regarding accessibility. Specific staff groups need to be able to support other staff members. We are figuring out who will need training. We will base our decisions on whether someone is in a priority training role. For example, will the person be assigning learning goals? Or will they be recommending training for others?

Building Disability Awareness

The DiversAbility Employee Resource Group has really helped to make people at EDC aware of accessibility issues.

- The group hosted a speaker series to talk about access and inclusion.
- The group shared their stories in town halls and took part in several sessions. Some examples of their stories include: "Navigating Invisible Disabilities" and "Learning to Live with Hearing Impairment."
- One member wrote an article for our intranet titled "Disability and Why Accessibility Matters." Sharing this article was part of EDC's Self-ID campaign.
- The group also advised on changes to a video about invisible disabilities.
- The group met with our People and Culture team to give feedback on the accommodation process.

Partnering with AccessNow

AccessNow wants to learn how accessible the world is. The organization is working with others to map accessible places and spaces. The DiversAbility Employee Resource Group partnered with AccessNow on a project to map accessibility in our communities. In September, they launched the event online. Staff mapped out locations that were and were not accessible. We met again in October to talk about the project and how to apply what we learned to our work at EDC.

What We've Learned

We are committed to accessibility. We do not wait until standards are released before we start our work. Instead, we listen to our staff with disabilities, work with consultants, and community partners. We have proactively reached out to these experts to help guide us so that we can be prepared and stay ahead in our approach

to accessibility. We have set goals and moved forward with our accessibility plans. We have accomplished a lot this past year, and there is more work to do. We are building an inclusive and accessible workplace.

Here's what we will do over the next year:

- We will look at what we have already done.
- We will then figure out where we need to focus our efforts.
- We will then build our next accessibility plan based on what work we need to do.

Focusing on the Priority Areas of the Accessible Canada Act

EDC's first [3-year Accessibility Plan](#), published in 2023, outlines our [previously identified barriers](#) and refers to publishing dates for the standards developed by Accessibility Standards Canada. We refer to them in the sections as "2023-2025 Accessibility Plan Activities/Actions". These sections are under each priority area of this report. We have changed these dates in this report if Accessibility Standards Canada did not publish them when we thought they would. These publishing dates may change again in the future.

Employment

2023-2025 Accessibility Plan Activities/Actions

- Benchmark against ACA standards for employment
 - Standard on Accessible Employment is targeted for publication in 2025.
- Partner with disability employment partners and hiring teams to attract, engage, enable, and retain employees with disabilities.
- Increase employee awareness of our accommodation program and provide guidance to support employee accessibility requests.
- Increase employee awareness of wellness and mental health services and provide guidance to leaders and employees to promote access to supports.

We are committed to accessibility, inclusion, diversity, and equity at EDC. We want to build an inclusive work culture for staff with disabilities. We recognize that this is a journey and will take time and ongoing commitment to achieve our goals.

This year, we've improved our accommodations program. The biggest change is an update to the intake process for medical accommodations with our insurer, Canada Life. Our goal is to make this process as simple and accessible as possible for staff who need support.

Only a few requests for accommodations have been made during the hiring process. The most common request is from candidates asking for extra time to answer questions. In 2025, we plan to find out if there are better ways to help candidates when hiring. We have started working with community partners such as the Employment Accessibility Resource Network (EARN) and Performance Plus Rehabilitative Care. We hope to continue these partnerships in 2025.

We know good mental health is essential for everyone. We engage our staff each year in May during National Mental Health Week. We let them know how to look after their mental health and what supports are available. We hold webinars, have a mental-health-specific workshop and share resources on mental health. We share information again in October during Healthy Workplace Month. It is important to make sure our staff know how they can find support if they need it. Our leaders can join the Workplace Mental Health Leadership Certificate Program, which helps them better support their teams. We will start training to help leaders be culturally sensitive in 2025.

When we first developed our Accessibility Plan, we did not realize how much effort it would take to support the Employment priority area of the Act. To develop an Employment standard that covers all stages of work, we will need to do the following:

- Look at the issues that already exist in employment and how they relate to accessibility
- Develop a plan that includes access and inclusion in employment
- Identify roles and responsibilities of staff.

This work will begin in 2025. We will make improvements in 2026 after Accessibility Standards Canada publishes their Employment Standard.

We want to continue improving our efforts. Feedback from the following groups helps us make sure all our programs are the best they can be:

- Staff with disabilities
- The DiversABILITY Employee Resource Group
- Allies of people with disabilities.

Built Environment

2023-2025 Accessibility Plan Activities/Actions

- Benchmark against ACA standards published for built environment.
 - Standard on Accessibility of Outdoor Spaces targeted for publication in 2025.

- Standard on Accessible Emergency Egress, and Model Standard on the Built Environment – Accessibility, targeted for publication in 2025.
- Complete an audit of our Head Office and develop an action plan to prioritize and implement relevant actions to our spaces as needed.
- Work with our lessors to incorporate accessibility best practices for our leased spaces.
- Increase employee and visitor awareness and adoption of emergency and safety procedures and available support when at EDC spaces or events.

We are committed to ensuring that all our office spaces are accessible and inclusive for staff and visitors with disabilities. We lease all our office spaces. Our health and safety standards include specific guidance for people with disabilities and cover emergency procedures.

Since our last report, our Real Estate and Facilities team has made progress in removing barriers in our physical office spaces. These spaces include our head office in Ottawa and hubs across Canada.

In November 2023, Adaptability Canada assessed our head office. We asked them to find out how accessible it was for people with invisible disabilities. We received their report in January 2024. Our team combined these findings with an earlier assessment from the Rick Hansen Foundation. The team is using the findings to improve our Ottawa office. They have also designed a new office in Montreal using this information.

The team has developed an action plan that outlines:

- timelines
- expected impact
- responsibilities
- budget needs for increased accessibility.

We are working on making these changes now. We expect some projects to continue into 2025 and after that.

We have made accessibility improvements at the Ottawa office over the past year. They include:

- We installed accessible door openers at the Fitness Centre and for doors on the 5th floor.
- We installed an automatic door operator for the 18th-floor patio.
- We added visual fire alarms in the following areas:
 - the parking garage
 - the changing facilities
 - the universal washrooms on the 2nd and 17th floors

- We made sure we understood who was responsible for accessibility improvements between our landlord and us.

For our new Montreal office, we have used best practices from the accessibility assessments in our design. We have included in our plans:

- Universal washrooms
- Wayfinding and signage to guide people
- Colour contrasts for better visibility
- Enough space for people to easily move around in meeting rooms.

In Vancouver, we made our kitchen more accessible. We made the following changes:

- We added more seating options with backrests and armrests on some seats.
- We added more kitchen storage that is accessible. We make sure the key items are stored lower down so people can easily reach them.
- We used Accessible Design for the Built Environment standards in the kitchen design. (CSA/ASC B651:23)
- We used what we learned from the Rick Hansen Foundation and Adaptability Canada assessments in our kitchen's design.

We have installed emergency equipment at accessible heights in our Toronto and Edmonton offices. The Rick Hansen Foundation recommended this best practice, which is also in the standard.

Information and Communication Technologies

2023-2025 Accessibility Plan Activities/Actions

- Benchmark against ACA standards for ICT.
 - CAN-ASC-6.1 – Information and Communication Technology, based on the European harmonized standard, EN 301 549, was published in May 2024.
- Create an equal experience for our digital services and products for all users, including people with disabilities.
- Use our digital platform, EDC.ca, to set the benchmark for accessibility for EDC's web-based experiences.
- Develop an action plan and timeline to update or replace our technology and telephony that do not meet digital accessibility requirements.
- Increase employee awareness and use of accessibility features embedded in technology, platforms, and digital tools regularly used at EDC.

Our goals for digital accessibility may have been set higher than we can reach right now, but we are moving forward. We want to improve customer and employee experiences.

EDC approved the following standards and guidelines for digital accessibility on June 24, 2024:

- CAN/ASC – EN 301 549:2024 standard, and
- Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2 Level AA.

We made this change less than one month after Canada published its national Information and Communication Technologies standard. The WCAG Guidelines provide internationally recognized standards for making web content more accessible to people with disabilities. This change was important for us to ensure we provide accessible services now and in the future.

We changed our system to reserve office desks in the Spring of 2024. We use ServiceNow, which complies with the Level 2.1 AA WCAG guidelines. ServiceNow is working towards the 2.2 AA guidelines to offer an improved accessibility experience.

Our Digital Platform & Architecture team is finishing a technology scan. They want to figure out which types of testing tools EDC needs. They are also looking at assistive technology tools. The team expects to decide on automated testing tools by the end of the year. They also want to have a plan for using them by that time. In the meantime, we are using BrowserStack's accessibility module. It is an existing application in the technology we use.

The Marketing team has developed a digital roadmap to guide their accessibility priorities. The Brand team developed plans earlier this year for new accessible brand guidelines. The guidelines will feature higher contrast colours and fonts that are easier to read. These changes will help make EDC communications more accessible for everyone. We have started testing the new guidelines with a few reports on EDC.ca and in pitch decks. In 2025, the Brand team will continue to work on the brand guidelines some more and ask people with disabilities for feedback.

We continue to work on EDC.ca and will use our new accessible brand guidelines. EDC.ca's global styles now create a more accessible look and feel across the website. These changes include:

- Fonts that are easier to read
- Higher contrast ratios between text and backgrounds
- Tested Interface elements such as buttons and fields using assistive technologies like NVDA, VoiceOver, and JAWS.

With these changes in place, we launched a new homepage that follows WCAG 2.1 AA standards. We used apps to test that the following digital equipment and controls work.

- keyboard navigation
- screen readers
- zoom and text resizing
- colour contrast
- semantic HTML

We are building a search function that will be accessible on our website. We are also developing content management practices that will make sure our content is well-organized and easy to find. This practice will benefit everyone.

Our Tech Operations and Services team is updating the tech solutions in our offices so they are more accessible.

- We are replacing older equipment in approximately 20 mid-size rooms so we can use the accessible Microsoft Teams features.
- We are making changes to the main boardroom at our head office. These changes will include updates such as:
 - hearing loops
 - better mics and cameras
 - brighter screens
 - improved lighting settings.

EDC is proud to provide staff with the option to work from home and in the office, which is known as a hybrid work environment. We are creating digital profiles of staff to support their workplace accommodations. Our system will remember what each employee needs and get them the same support at home on their digital equipment as they do in the office. This work aims to provide solutions. Some examples include:

- We will offer device authentication for users with accessibility needs.
- We will let staff use personal devices wherever they work.
- We will make sure that screen readers and text-to-speech technology are compatible with EDC security protocols.
- We will find solutions for converting inaccessible documents to documents that everyone can read.

As part of EDC's annual Community Investment Day, the Accessibility team teamed up with the DiversABILITY Employee Resource Group to offer a workshop on how to make documents accessible. In the session, staff learned about:

- Accessibility features in Microsoft products, including creating accessible Word documents.
- The best practices when using Teams.
- PowerPoint features such as PowerPoint Live.

The workshop was held in person and online. It was a great way to promote digital accessibility in our workplace.

Communication, other than Information and Communication Technologies

2023-2025 Accessibility Plan Activities/Actions

- Benchmark against ACA standards for communication.
 - Standard on Plain Language is targeted for publication in 2026.
- Provide content, brand, and design expertise to embed accessibility into all corporate and internal communications.
- Provide communications expertise for external and internal website redesign and updates to ensure equal access to information for people with disabilities.
- Embed accessibility into corporate events and meetings and provide guidance to planners and hosts for non-corporate events and meetings led by employees or team.

Our Brand team shared the upcoming brand guidelines for accessibility at our 2024 staff conference. These guidelines are a tool to make sure what we say is clear. They also help us reach more people to tell them about EDC. Our new guidelines are key because they provide accessibility for our customers and staff.

We have been using our Microsoft VivaEngage page since May. It shares updates about access and inclusion with our staff. This page highlights our work and the programs, initiatives, and learning opportunities we have built. We now reach almost 2 times more people through this page than when we started. Staff are interested in the information we offer them. The DiversABILITY Employee Resource Group also uses its VivaEngage page to let staff know about accessibility issues. The group advocates for access and inclusion for all people who are involved with EDC.

Over time, we plan to offer training in plain language principles to the following teams:

- Social Media
- Internal and External Communications
- Economics
- Website
- Environmental, Social and Governance

This training will help our teams reach different audiences. This writing style includes people with disabilities.

Procurement of Goods, Services and Facilities

2023-2025 Accessibility Plan Activities/Actions

- Benchmark against ACA standards for procurement.
 - Standard on Accessible Procurement targeted for publication in 2027.
- Establish accessibility expectations of suppliers in our Supplier Code of Conduct.
- Incorporate accessibility requirements in our Procurement Policy and Guidelines, including public competitive procurement processes for suppliers.
- Enhance our Supplier Diversity Program to increase participation of businesses owned by people with disabilities.

We want to make sure the goods and services we buy are accessible. We are working to understand the best way to do so. We have discovered helpful resources since we shared our plan. These resources include toolkits from non-profit organizations, colleges and universities. We are using all this information to build a process that will help us reach our goal.

We are being bold as we develop our new guidelines. We are not waiting to be told to make changes. We are moving ahead with best practices and standards in accessibility so we can stay ahead. We highlighted our way of working in the "Information and Communication Technology" section of this report. As part of our effort, we have our first draft policy on digital accessibility! This policy uses Canada's Information, Communication and Technology standard and Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.2 Level AA. We want to use the latest accessibility standards when deciding what we buy. We will build guidelines and standards into our process.

Next year, the Accessibility team will partner with the Procurement team. We want to know how we can make buying goods and services more accessible. What changes do we have to make? We will create a plan that changes the process we use. The plan will include the following steps:

- Find out what gaps exist in the buying process.
- Create a clear plan for improving the process.
- Define the priorities for EDC.
- Define the roles and responsibilities of the people involved in the process.

We will use this plan to shape our next 3-year accessibility plan.

The key players in the accessible buying process include:

- business owners
- product owners
- technical leaders

We will offer training in the future to support these key players. We want to make sure accessibility is part of their buying process right from the start.

We have worked with Shared Services Canada this year. We use their expert advice to choose words in contracts and Statements of Work that promote access and inclusion. The Procurement team oversees buying. They took part in a webinar in June on accessible buying.

The Accessibility team has started supporting teams that evaluate proposals and take part in vendor demos. The goal is to help accessibility become a main part of buying goods and services.

Design and Delivery of Programs and Services

2023-2025 Accessibility Plan Activities/Actions

- Benchmark against ACA standards for design and delivery of services and programs.
 - Standard on Design and Delivery of Accessible Programs and Services Part 1 targeted for publication in 2028.
 - Standard on Design and Delivery of Accessibility Programs and Services Part 2 targeted for publication in 2028.
 - No standards for design and delivery of services and programs are currently targeted for publication.
- Establish ad hoc advisory groups to help scale, embed, and sustain accessibility within teams.
- Build a culture where universal design and the user experience guide the design and delivery of our services, programs, and products.
- Partner with teams to meaningfully engage people with disabilities at all phases of the design and delivery lifecycle of our services, programs, and products.
- Use EDC's design system to support digital accessibility goals for the design and delivery of our services, programs, and products.

This year, we wanted our staff conference to be more accessible than ever before. Our goal for the day was to ensure that everyone could fully take part in the event. We are proud to say that it was our most accessible conference so far.

Here's what we did to make the day a success:

- We shared EDC's future accessible brand guidelines on the mainstage to over 2,000 employees, which was very well received.
- We set up a desk at the event with staff who could assist anyone who needed help during the day.

- We created a fully keyboard-accessible microsite about the conference. Visitors could navigate the site without using a mouse.
- The site included contact information for the Accessibility Lead. By sharing this information, people had another way to reach out if they needed help with things like:
 - getting to the venue
 - using the facilities
 - asking general questions
- We had volunteers available during the day to offer help.
- We had closed captioning for all live presentations during the main part of the conference.
- We set up 2 out of 4 breakout rooms for people who needed audio-visual displays. We also had interpretation services.
- We created a QR code so remote staff could attend the conference sessions online. It made it easier for people to join.
- We had a quiet room where staff could take a break from the busy conference.
- We set up seating so that everyone could join in comfortably.

Our Learning and Development team also had success in their work. They looked at how to remove barriers in the learning systems we use. They made the following changes to improve our learning and development processes.

- Our learning management system now conforms to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. These changes make learning on the system easier for users. The system's administration is also easier because of changes made to meet the guidelines.
- We have also changed the design to improve the learning experience for staff with visual and hearing impairments.
- The platform that hosts our learning materials now also meets Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. We can provide accessibility across all learning resources.
- Any custom learning modules produced by EDC staff also follow the guidelines.
- We started developing an online guide for digital accessibility last year. We are pleased to say it is complete! It is now available to our staff on the learning system

Transportation

2023-2025 Accessibility Plan Activities/Actions

- Benchmark against ACA standards for transportation.
 - Standard on Accessible Travel Journey targeted for publication in 2027.

- Provide accessible travel information in relevant EDC communications to help people with disabilities plan their trip to EDC-hosted events or meetings.

Accessibility was an important part of this year's staff conference. We made an effort to make sure that travel and wayfinding were part of the conference planning. We provided the following information to our staff:

- We provided a map of the first level of the conference centre at the event. The map was a reference for people who wanted visual cues and helped people find their way around during the day.
- We also added this map to the microsite so staff could access it easily when they wanted it.
- We added accessible parking and transportation details to the event microsite. Our staff could plan their best travel options ahead of time.

We have been working with the Corporate Services team to help choose a company to manage our staff's work travel. We have included accessibility factors as part of what we expect from a service provider. The travel company will have to provide functional and accessible services. For example, the travel platform we use should:

- Offer features that support people with vision, mobility and cognitive issues.
- Provide an accessible booking tool.
- Provide access to a call centre where people can help our staff when they face barriers.

We expect all our staff to have a good experience throughout their travel journey.

Feedback

We hosted our first in-person staff conference since 2020 in June 2024. Our goal was to make it our most accessible event to date. The DiversABILITY Employee Resource Group gave us feedback that we can use to plan a better conference next year. Here's what they said:

- The venue was too small for all our staff, so it was hard to move around, especially during pre- and post-event receptions.
- The quiet room was poorly marked, so there were many disruptions in the room. We need clear signage and better map labelling at future events.
- People at the back of the room did not see the captions on the main ceremony screens. We should have additional screens.
- The lunch line was disorganized, causing mobility issues.
- Crowding outside breakout rooms made it hard to enter and exit smoothly.
- There was a lack of face masks and hand sanitizer at the venue.

We appreciate the feedback from the DiversABILITY Employee Resource Group about the conference. We will use their suggested changes as we plan the next one. We want to make sure that the conference meets the needs of all staff.

We have not received any feedback from the public or staff for this reporting period other than what we shared above. We are always open to feedback and look forward to any input as we move forward.

Consultations

To prepare for this Progress Report, EDC consulted with staff with disabilities by engaging with our DiversAbility Employee Resource Group. The resource group has 14 staff who bring diverse professional or lived experience to their work at EDC and within the group.

We first engaged with the group directly by sharing a draft of this Progress Report. The group gave us feedback on the report's content.

The group has guided accessibility projects over the past year. We have described these projects throughout this report.

We have also engaged the services of an accessibility firm called Left Turn Right Turn. The firm facilitated a focus group for the DiversAbility Employee Resource Group. We hoped that group members would give feedback on the Progress Report. Approximately 5 employees took part in the discussion. We used this approach for the following reasons:

- We wanted the conversation to be constructive.
- We wanted our discussions to be well-aligned with EDC's responsibilities under the Accessible Canada Act.
- We wanted the group to share their honest perspectives with a neutral party.

During the focus group, people said they would like EDC to increase the number of their meeting times with the resource group. They said they would like to talk about their role as consultants. They also want to know how we include other staff with disabilities. The group appreciated the chance to consult on this Progress Report, but they would have liked to be involved in developing the report earlier in the process.

The group would also like to see EDC's Accessibility Plans and Progress Reports shared and used across the organization. Promoting our plans will help staff become more aware and understand accessibility issues. The staff's understanding will increase buy-in to support access and inclusion. This group wants messages about our Accessibility Plans and Progress Reports to go beyond what EDC needs to do to

comply with the law. They want all staff to know that accessibility is a priority at EDC. Increased accessibility leads to a more welcoming workplace for all staff. It also means better customer service for our clients.

The DiversAbility Employee Resource Group is happy with the accessibility work taking place at EDC. They hope that we will continue to work on access and inclusion. The group looks forward to building relationships with key people at EDC. They want to help create an accessible future for EDC and make sure that staff and clients are well-served.

The Accessibility team is glad they got the feedback from the focus group. We will look at how best to use the advice for our future activities and actions.

General

About Our Accessibility

We want everyone to feel included and have equal access to all experiences at Export Development Canada (EDC). In 2023, we published our first [3-year Accessibility Plan](#), which is now in its second year. Our goal is to make sure that everything we do is accessible. This progress report describes all the work we have done so far.

We Have Alternate Formats Available for You

We are proud to offer the following documents in alternate format.

- 2023 and 2024 Accessibility Progress Reports
- Accessibility Plan
- A description of our feedback processes.

Below are the formats that we have available for you. You can also find out how much time we need to prepare your document.

- Print PDF format – We will send it 15 days after you request it.
- Large print PDF – We will send it 15 days after you request it.
- Large print Word – We will send it 15 days after you request it.
- Braille – We will send it 45 days after you request it.
- Audio format – We will send it 45 days after you request it.

Give Us Your Feedback

We welcome your comments and feedback on this progress report. You may also have advice on how we could better provide this information to you. We would like to hear from you if you have any feedback or questions. For example, we would like to

know if you faced any barriers when you visited our workplace or website. Has our accessibility plan created any new barriers for you? Please let us know how we are doing with our accessibility work.

Ways to Contact Us

Here are all the reasons you may want to contact us:

- To send us feedback
- Request a copy of our progress report in an alternate format
- Request a copy of our accessibility plan in an alternate format
- For a description of our feedback process

You can contact us...

- By email at accessible@edc.ca
- Online, by using the [accessibility feedback form](#)
- By telephone: 1(800) 229-0575
- On Social media: [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [YouTube](#), [Instagram](#)
- In-person or by mail:

Accessibility Lead
Export Development Canada (EDC)
150 Slater Street
Ottawa, ON
K1A 1K3
Canada

Our Accessibility Lead will let you know when they receive your feedback. If you want us to get back to you directly, please make sure you leave your contact information. We may use your feedback right away to make accessibility changes. We may also include it in our accessibility plans. We hope to hear from you!