



Municipal Assessment Agency Inc. Accessibility Plan 2024 – 2026



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Introduction

The Canadian Survey on Disability reported in 2022 that approximately 30% of people living in Newfoundland and Labrador identify as having a disability, and that people with disabilities experience barriers to participating in their communities.

In an effort to improve accessibility across the province, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador established the **Accessibility Act NL** on December 3, 2021. The Accessibility Act outlines the principles and goals for an accessible province and provides the following requirements for public bodies:

- Comply with the standard by the specified time period;
- Prepare and keep records to follow the regulations, and make records available for inspection and examination;
- Develop an accessibility plan within two years of the Accessibility Act becoming law. Accessibility plans must be updated every three years and made public;
- As accessibility standards are implemented, they will be integrated into the plan;
- Consult with persons with disabilities, or representatives from organizations of persons with disabilities, in the development and implementation of accessibility plans; and,
- Set up an Accessibility Advisory Committee, depending on the size of the public body.

In response to this new legislation, the Municipal Assessment Agency Inc. (MAA) formed an Accessibility Advisory Committee to lead the development of our initial Accessibility Plan.

This Accessibility Plan will help guide our organization as we work towards identifying, preventing, and removing barriers to inclusion experienced by persons with disabilities.

Statement of Commitment

The Municipal Assessment Agency Inc. is committed to improving accessibility by identifying, preventing, and eliminating barriers to programs, services, and infrastructure as per the **Newfoundland and Labrador Accessibility Act**.

Consultations

As per the Accessibility Act, persons with disabilities and organizations representing persons with disabilities were consulted in the development of this accessibility plan.

Information shared during consultations included the following:

- Create a culture where people feel supported in requesting disability-related accommodations.
- Create a culture where all types of disabilities are considered and all types of barriers are identified and removed.
- Create workplaces that avoid harsh lighting, ensure low noise levels, proper acoustics, warm paint colors, clear contrast with borders on walls, and transition strips on stairs and ramps to ensure sensory friendly spaces.
- Consider accessibility when purchasing office equipment.
- Consider varying literacy levels and technology literacy levels when implementing online services.
- Online services should not replace other options such as in-person, telephone or text communication. Education may be necessary to assist individuals navigating online platforms.
- Public spaces include signage communicating the assistive technology, equipment or accommodations available at that site, such as hearing assistive technology. Staff training and proper maintenance of such devices are important.
- Recommend turning on cameras during virtual meetings to assist with lip reading.

MAA will continue to consult persons with disabilities and organizations representing persons with disabilities as we continue to develop our accessibility confidence.

Achievements to Date

An Accessibility Advisory Committee was formed in 2023 via an organization-wide 'Call for Volunteers.' The Accessibility Advisory Committee is composed of two representatives from management and two representatives from the bargaining-unit.

The Accessibility Advisory Committee reviewed the focus areas as identified in the Accessibility Act in order to identify strengths, gaps, and opportunities within our organization:

- Programs and services to ensure everyone has equitable access.
- Built environment to make buildings accessible.
- Information and communication to ensure everyone can receive, understand, and share the information provided by the organization.
- Services and facilities to ensure people with disabilities have equitable access to services.
- Accommodations to ensure accessible and inclusive accommodations.
- Education to ensure accessible access to education and training for all students.
- Healthcare to provide accessible and inclusive healthcare for all persons.
- Employment to ensure an accessible workplace, and support people with disabilities in finding and maintaining meaningful employment.

Our initial Accessibility Plan was created in December 2023 as per the Accessibility Act.

Accessibility Goals

Goal # 1 – Promote Accessibility Awareness

Professional Development training for all staff and Board Members to build accessibility confidence.

- Building Accessibility Confidence
- Accessibility Confidence – Putting It to Action
- Power of Language

Indicators

- By December 31, 2024, all MAA employees will complete the ninety-minute **Building Accessibility Confidence - An Intro** training.
- By December 31, 2025, all MAA employees will complete the three-hour **Accessibility Confidence – Putting It to Action** training.
- By December 31, 2026, all MAA employees will complete the one-hour **Power of Language** training.

Goal # 2 – Ensure Application of Accessible Communications Policy

MAA will follow the Accessible Communications Policy for all documents, training, information, and resources. This includes using plain language, alt text for images, making alternate formats available upon request, and ensuring the website complies with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, including appropriate contrast for text, and discernible colors for graphics.

Indicators

- By December 31, 2024, the Accessibility Committee will identify where the organization is not meeting the standards outlined in the Accessible Communications Policy.

- By December 31, 2025, the website will be updated to adhere to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.
- By December 31, 2026, the organization will meet all standards outlined in the Accessible Communications Policy.

Goal # 3 – Improve Building Accessibility

MAA will evaluate all Agency facilities based on the Universal Design Standard, which meets or exceeds the **Buildings Accessibility Act** and associated regulations. This evaluation is anticipated to be completed within three years and will incorporate feedback from persons with disabilities.

Indicators

- By December 31, 2024, MAA will complete an accessibility study of all Agency-owned or occupied buildings.
- By December 31, 2025, MAA will use results of the accessibility study to develop an action plan to improve efforts to overcome barriers to accessibility in Agency-owned or occupied buildings.
- By December 31, 2026, MAA will continue implementation of the action plan to overcome barriers to accessibility in Agency-owned or occupied buildings.

Goal # 4 – Improve Equity in the Recruitment Process

Collaborate with the Public Service Commission to enhance accessibility and ensure a recruitment process free of barriers. Ensure Selection Board Chairs receive training to increase equity in the recruitment process.

Indicators

- By December 31, 2024, analyze the recruitment process to identify opportunities where accessibility initiatives can be implemented.
- By December 31, 2025, implement the results of the prior assessment concerning the recruitment process and train Selection Board Chairs to build a consistent foundation of disability awareness.
- By December 31, 2026, assess the effectiveness of the new recruitment communication through further consultation with stakeholders.

Promoting, Monitoring, and Evaluation

The Accessibility Plan is publicly available on www.maa.ca and the plan will be presented to all employees and Board Members before March 31, 2024.

The outcomes of the Accessibility Plan will be monitored and evaluated on an ongoing basis by the Accessibility Advisory Committee.

Conclusion

Through the ongoing evaluation of the 2024-2026 Accessibility Plan, the Municipal Assessment Agency will work to create change by identifying, preventing, and removing barriers to accessibility. MAA will collaborate with stakeholders as we operationalize this plan and work towards creating a province that is fully accessible for all.

Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

Accessibility

As defined in the Government of Canada's Guide on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Terminology, accessibility is the quality of an environment that enables a person to access it with ease.

Accessibility Plan

As defined in the **Accessibility Act**, an accessibility plan is a plan to address the prevention, identification, and removal of barriers in the policies, programs, practices, and services of a public body.

Accommodation

The Government of Canada's Guide on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Terminology defines accommodation as a measure taken by management based on the personal circumstances of an employee that is designed to enable them to carry out their duties and fully participate in work-related activities. Examples include acquiring or modifying equipment, software or devices, modifying work schedules, or providing assistance through support services.

In the context of providing services to the public, an accommodation is any technical aid or device, personal support, disability-related support, or other accommodation a person may require to fully participate in meetings, events, and information sessions. Examples include accessible meeting rooms, accessible formats for documents, American Sign Language interpreters, live captioning, and decision-making supporters.

Barrier

A barrier means anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in society. Barriers can be physical, architectural, information or communication related, attitudinal, technological, or established by or perpetuated by an act, regulation, policy, or practice.

Physical/Architectural Barriers

Physical and architectural barriers happen when features of buildings or spaces limit people's access.

Examples: Stairs without ramps or elevators; low lighting or weak color contrast; lack of accessible parking or washrooms.

Information and Communication Barriers

Information or communication barriers exist because not all people read or understand in the same way. When information is not communicated in a way that all persons can access or understand it, it presents a barrier.

Examples: Public meetings or events without American Sign Language interpretation; PDF documents made from images instead of text; websites that do not comply with current Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.

Attitudinal Barriers

Attitudinal barriers happen when people do not understand how disabilities affect people's lives. These misunderstandings can lead to false assumptions about what persons with disabilities can do, want, or need. Attitudinal barriers come from an unconscious bias. Attitudinal barriers happen because of stereotypes, lack of awareness, and discrimination.

Examples: Someone may not assign a laptop to a new employee who is blind because they assume the person cannot use a computer. Someone may speak very slowly and loudly to someone with a speech disability because they assume the person cannot understand them. Someone may assume that employment accommodations for persons with disabilities involve significant costs, resources, and time, even though this is not necessarily the case.

Technology Barriers

Technology barriers happen when technology is not accessible to persons with disabilities.

Examples: Website functions that only work when users click with a mouse, which presents a barrier for people who control their computers using speech or keyboard commands instead. Training modules that are not compatible with screen reader software.

Legal Barriers

A barrier established by or perpetuated by an act, regulation, policy, or practice. This may be a legal barrier within legislation, or within departmental policies and procedures.

Example: In order to access certain services, persons may be required to provide substantial medical documentation and/or assessment, complete a form that is not available in accessible format, or complete a phone assessment or interview.

Disability

As defined in the **Accessibility Act**, disability includes a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairment, or a functional limitation that is permanent, temporary, or episodic in nature that, in interaction with a barrier, prevents a person from fully participating in society.

Inclusion

As defined in the Government of Canada's Guide on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Terminology, inclusion is the practice of using proactive measures to create an environment where people feel welcomed, respected, and valued, and to foster a sense of belonging and engagement. This practice involves changing the environment by removing barriers so that each person has equal access to opportunities and resources and can achieve their full potential.

Appendix B: Resources

(2023, December 1). *Canadian Survey on Disability*. Statistics Canada.

<https://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p2SV.pl?Function=getSurvey&SDDS=3251>

(2023, December 31). *Government of Newfoundland and Labrador Accessibility Plan 2024-2026*. Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

<https://www.gov.nl.ca/cssd/accessibility-act/#Plans1>

(2021, December 3). *Accessibility Act*. Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

<https://www.assembly.nl.ca/Legislation/sr/statutes/a01-001.htm>