Accessibility Plan
2025-2028

To request an alternate format or to provide feedback on the 2025-2028 Acadia University Accessibility Plan please email accessibility@acadiau.ca.

Land Acknowledgement

We recognize that Acadia University is on the unceded, un-surrendered ancestral and present-day lands of the Mi'kmaw nation called Mi'kma'ki. Acadia University is located within the district of Sipekne'katik, the area of wild turnip and potato, in the place they called Esoqwatik, "where the water stops." It is a place that is rich with the stories of Kluscap and home to the Mi'kmaw creation story.

This territory is covered by the Peace and Friendship treaties which are a chain of treaties signed by Mi'kmaq, Wolastoqiyik, and Passamaquoddy nations and the British Crown. These treaties did not surrender land or resources, but instead were treaties signed between Indigenous nations and the British recognizing each other's authority and committing to co-exist on these lands.

Relational Recognition

Acadia recognizes that African Nova Scotians are a distinct people with collective rights tied to over 52 land-based communities in that part of Mi'kma'ki known as Nova Scotia. As an institution, we recognize that African Nova Scotians are a distinct people whose histories, legacies and contributions have enriched that part of Mi'kma'ki known as Nova Scotia for over 400 years.

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Message from Associate Vice-President, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism

As the Associate-Vice President of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Anti-Racism (EDI-AR) at Acadia University, it is my privilege to present the Acadia Institutional Accessibility Plan on behalf of the university. This plan exemplifies our commitment to fostering an inclusive environment that acknowledges and values the diverse needs of our community members.

Accessibility is not merely a compliance requirement; it is a fundamental right that promotes equality and empowerment. In this plan, we outline our ongoing efforts to identify barriers, implement wise practices, and ensure that all individuals, regardless of their abilities, can fully participate in academic, professional, and social opportunities within our institution.

We have made significant strides in enhancing accessibility across various platforms, from the built environment, to teaching and learning, mental health, and wellbeing as well as employment and residential spaces for employees and students. Our collaborative approach involves engaging with members of our university community, including students, staff, faculty, and community partners, to create actionable solutions grounded in first voice, lived experiences.

Our plan embeds an intersectional approach to accessibility. At Acadia, we recognize the importance of addressing the diverse experiences of students, staff and faculty based on the interplay of multiple social identities, such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, and disability. By applying an intersectional lens, we can better identify systemic barriers and create more inclusive environments that support our campus community. For instance, tailored support services, inclusive curriculum design, and targeted outreach initiatives can help ensure that students, staff, and faculty with disabilities have equitable access to resources and opportunities. This holistic perspective not only fosters academic success but also promotes a campus culture that values diversity and empowers every individual to thrive, thereby

enriching the overall educational experience for all students and work experience for staff and faculty.

This collective work serves as both a reflection of our achievements and progress as well as a roadmap for our forward-looking vision and future initiatives. We are dedicated to continually improving our practices and ensuring that our commitment to accessibility is ingrained in the fabric of our institution's culture.

I invite you to explore the findings and recommendations within this plan and join us in our journey toward an accessible and inclusive future.

Thank you for your support, engagement, and leadership.

Sincerely,

Lerato Chondoma
Associate-Vice President of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Anti-Racism
Acadia University

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Guiding Principles

Acadia University is grateful to our community for their time, patience and passion to participate in surveys, consultations, workshops, committees and working groups to identify barriers and opportunities to increase accessibility and overall wellbeing at Acadia. The Guiding Principles outlined below reflect the values and perspectives contributed by our university community, providing a solid foundation to guide the effort of Acadia's Accessibility Plan and its implementation.

Human Flourishing & Well-being
We aim to foster an environment where all people feel supported, valued and thrive academically, in research, in scholarly pursuits, and in their personal and professional lives. Acknowledging that health inequities affect our campus community, we will not only remove barriers to accessibility but also enhance the quality of life for all. We strive to build a campus community that embeds social justice, equity, physical and psychological safety for everyone.

Intersectionality
We recognize the complex and overlapping systems of oppression and privilege that impact individuals and communities. We recognize that each person's identity is shaped by multiple factors that influence their experiences, opportunities, and challenges. By embedding an intersectional lens, we strive to empower first voice experiences and ensure that students, staff and faculty with disabilities have their unique experiences acknowledged and valued in our work. We commit to embedding an intersectional approach when evaluating accessibility in our policies, programs, and services so as not to perpetuate interconnected systems of inequality.

Nothing About Us Without Us
We prioritize the perspectives of people with disabilities, including those who are Deaf and/or neurodivergent, in our decision-making processes to advance accessibility at Acadia. We recognize a wide range of disabilities, including invisible and episodic ones, and involve affected individuals in all accessibility-related decisions. Decisions about accessibility at Acadia include the full and direct participation of members of groups affected by that decision.

Human Rights

We uphold accessibility as a fundamental human right that allows everyone to participate in all aspects of life.

Collective Responsibility & Accountability

We share a collective responsibility and dedication to accessibility, and we expect every member of the Acadia community to participate in our efforts to enhance accessibility and equity. We foster an environment of ongoing learning and development, supporting each other in our commitment to ensuring meaningful accessibility for all.

Safe Work Environments, Dignity, & Autonomy

We are committed to creating a safe, inclusive work environment where all individuals are treated with dignity and have the autonomy to participate fully. This includes removing barriers, providing necessary accommodations, and fostering a culture of respect and equity for persons with disabilities including those who are Deaf and/or neurodivergent.

Introduction

Background

Founded in 1838, Acadia University is among one of Canada's oldest and most respected liberal arts universities. With over 3,500 students, Acadia offers more than 200-degree combinations across its Faculties of Arts, Pure and Applied Science, Professional Studies, and Theology. Additionally, Acadia is one of the largest employers in the Annapolis Valley, employing over 500 full time and 500 part time faculty, staff and students. In 2025, more than 30% of our student body is registered with Accessible Learning.

In 2017, Nova Scotia enacted the Accessibility Act, which acknowledges accessibility as a human right and sets the goal of creating an accessible Nova Scotia by 2030. This involves preventing and removing barriers in six key areas: built environment, education, employment, transportation, goods and services and information and communication. Post-secondary Institutions were prescribed as public sector bodies, requiring them to create an Accessibility Advisory Committee, comply with accessibility standards in the six key areas as they are enacted, and develop a comprehensive accessibility

plan every three years. This document represents Acadia's second Accessibility Plan, the 2022-2025 Plan can be accessed here.

In 2020, Nova Scotia's Post Secondary Sector developed an accessibility framework to establish a shared vision and cooperation among institutions through the execution of individual accessibility plans. This framework encompasses eight commitment areas, including the six outlined in the Accessibility Act, as well as Awareness and Capacity Building, and Implementation, Monitoring, and Evaluation. Acadia aligns our Accessibility Plan with the commitments set forth in the Nova Scotia Post Secondary Accessibility Framework, enabling us to pursue initiatives that enhance accessibility not only at our institution but across the entire sector.

Accessibility Acadia

Over the past three years, we have made significant strides in laying a strong foundation for our accessibility initiatives, which we now refer to as Accessibility Acadia. Under the guidance of Acadia's AVP EDI-AR, Accessibility Acadia has been established as the governance and support model for our accessibility efforts. It serves as a central hub for various areas of commitment aimed at empowering individuals to enhance accessibility. Acadia's governance model incorporates Working Groups, each led by a Working Group Lead. The Working Group Leads offer technical expertise to the Accessibility Advisory Committee, which oversees and directs the Acadia Accessibility Plan and accessibility work at Acadia. They will also play a crucial role in providing technical support during the development of the Accessibility Implementation Plan.

Accessibility Acadia also encompasses the Acadia Senate Disability Policy Committee, which will engage in and support the creation of an Institutional Accessibility Policy.

Accessibility Acadia will continue to grow and evolve as we implement our second accessibility plan, adhere to newly legislated standards for designated public sector bodies across the province, and collaborate with other organizations to further improve accessibility.

Acadia Accessibility Advisory Committee

The Acadia University Accessibility Advisory Committee (AUAAC), chaired by the AVP EDI-AR, consists of members from across campus, including student, faculty, and staff representatives who have lived experiences with disabilities and subject matter expertise. Members provide first voice perspectives on the accessibility work at Acadia and play a pivotal role in helping ensure Acadia becomes accessible and meets its obligations under the Nova Scotia Accessibility Act. See Appendix A for the 2024-2025 membership.

"An Accessible Acadia is physically, socially, economically, and culturally accessible. I think broadening our definition is something we need to change."
Acadia Faculty Member

Working Groups

Acadia currently has three established working groups: Built Environment, Education, and Employment. These working groups provide operational experience and offer recommendations to the AUAAC for feedback. As the province releases recommendations for draft standards, new working groups focusing on transportation, information and communication, and delivery of goods and services will be established. They will assess how to implement potential standards effectively. Furthermore, Acadia is adopting a holistic approach that goes beyond mere compliance with standards. To enhance belonging and inclusion within our institution, we are establishing two additional working groups: Student Experience and Mental Health and Well-Being. These groups will incorporate their perspectives into all eight areas of commitment outlined in the accessibility plan.

Implementation Committee

The Implementation Committee consists of senior staff and administrators tasked with carrying out the recommendations of the AUAAC.

Consultations

Acadia engaged with its community to discuss accessibility barriers and priority actions through the following mechanisms:

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- Accessibility Foundation Workshops
- Built Environment, Education and Employment Working Group meetings
- Student Accessibility Action Group meetings
- Acadia Accessibility Advisory Committee meetings
- Virtual Town Hall
- Meetings with interested individuals and groups

The insights gained from these engagements were communicated to the Working Group Leads and played a crucial role in shaping Acadia's Accessibility Plan for 2025-2028.

Plan Development

To develop Acadia's 2025-2028 Accessibility Plan, a thorough assessment was conducted to determine what initiatives were occurring at Acadia to improve accessibility. Information was gathered from various sources, including working groups, existing reports, and individual discussions, and compiled into an internal working document shared with the AUAAC and working groups. Acadia's 2025-2028 Accessibility Plan includes several highlighted areas of progress. The data, along with insights from the engagements mentioned earlier, helped identify barriers, gaps, and key priorities to guide efforts in improving accessibility at Acadia.

Working groups were tasked with reviewing and modifying the existing commitments from the first plan, recommending actions to take over the short (next 3 years) and long term (3-10 years) to improve accessibility, and propose ways to measure and track progress to assess the impact of the actions. Working groups referenced draft standards and recommendations when drafting their recommended actions when they were publicly available from the Nova Scotia Accessibility Directorate. Recommended actions were compiled in the draft 2025-2028 Accessibility Plan then shared with the AUAAC to provide feedback. Feedback was incorporated then presented to Acadia senior leadership, including the President and Executive leadership responsible for Academic, Student Experience, Finance and Operations, and Advancement, for final approval.

Our Plan - Areas of Commitment

Acadia University commits to advancing accessibility through eight key focus areas outlined in our 2025-2028 Accessibility Plan, in alignment with the Nova Scotia Post-Secondary Accessibility Framework (2020). These priority areas are: (1) Awareness and Capacity Building, (2) Teaching, Learning, and Research, (3) Information and Communications, (4) Delivery of Goods and Services, (5) Employment, (6) Transportation, (7) Built Environment, and (8) Implementation, Monitoring, and Evaluation.

Awareness and Capacity Building

Acadia University is dedicated to fostering a culture of accessibility and equity, focusing on eliminating participation barriers and enhancing knowledge among employees and students.

Commitments:

- Develop and implement training programs to educate employees and students about accessibility, equity, human rights, and disability rights, and barriers to participation in post-secondary education.
- Encourage and support academic departments and employees to incorporate accessibility and disability topics into relevant course curricula, promoting inclusive learning environments. This includes all the aspects of health and wellness that support an inclusive learning environment.
- Build capacity and increase awareness of Acadia's responsibilities under the Accessibility Act.

Progress

- Three Acadia employees trained to deliver the Accessibility Directorate Accessibility Foundations workshop with four workshops delivered from December 2023 to December 2024, reaching 84 faculty/staff and 32 students.
- Equity training is delivered to incoming students, Residence Assistants, Teacher Assistants twice a year and is mandatory for all faculty every three years.
- Resources developed include an Accessibility Resources LibGuide, an employment equity webpage, and a handbook for diverse recruitment

including a catalogue of advertising venues to reach diverse candidate pools.

- Acadia has hosted numerous events to raise awareness of accessibility including workshops on creating accessible documents and universal design for learning (UDL), book clubs on ableism, and celebrations of Autism awareness month, National Accessibility Week, Human Rights week and International Day of People with Disabilities.

Short-term actions (2025-2028)

- Identify and implement training programs (e.g., accessible customer service, inclusive education practices such as Universal Design for Learning).
- Provide annual training on recognizing and eliminating accessibility barriers (e.g. Accessibility Foundations workshops) potentially offering class credit for accessibility training where appropriate.
- Coordinate and collaborate across departments for coordinated training efforts and seek joint learning opportunities.
- Engage with local, relevant organizations to foster relationships and identify opportunities for collaboration.
- Develop and support the Accessibility Acadia, including development of internal resource-sharing platforms and a public website to share resources more widely.
- Build capacity through engagement and participation with other organizations such as the Nova Scotia Post-Secondary Institution Community of Practice and the Canadian Accessibility Network, etc.

Mid to Long-term actions (2025-2035)

- Create a culture with accessibility as a core value through continuous education, policy integration, and leadership commitment.
- Cultivate a culture in which accessibility is a fundamental value by prioritizing continuous education, integrating inclusive policies, and demonstrating strong leadership from individuals with lived experiences and community members with disabilities.

Teaching, Learning and Research

Acadia University is committed to inclusive and accessible teaching and learning, and collaborative research on accessibility.

Commitments

- Ensure access to and use of accessible technology in teaching and learning.
- Equip faculty and staff to remove learning barriers through inclusive practices and equitable assessments based on universal design principles for learning and culturally responsive teaching.
- Establish a common standard for resource access, including accommodations, to support academic success, wellness and transitions to employment, community, or further studies.
- Foster research and scholarship on accessibility and disability studies, highlighting first voice researchers at Acadia University leading collaborative accessibility research initiatives.
- Enhance inclusive post-secondary education options for students with intellectual disabilities.
- Integrate health and wellness into classroom environments, communications, and assessments.

Progress

- Acadia offers the Work Integrated Learning Program to connect students with disabilities to employment opportunities and employment readiness workshops and support.
- Acadia University is home to numerous accessibility and disability researchers, including a Tier II Canada Research Chair in Healthy Inclusive Communities. Over $350,000 in research funding has been secured for accessibility and disability studies since 2020.
- Axcess Acadia offers a unique four-year education pathway for students with intellectual disabilities or developmental disabilities, who would not qualify for the standard admission to Acadia University. Only a few post-secondary institutions in Nova Scotia currently offer a similar program.
- The new Accommodate software, implemented in Fall 2024, streamlines accommodation management for students.

Short-term actions (2025-2028)

- Create a comprehensive institutional accessibility policy with implementation guidelines to guide implementation of the Acadia Accessibility Plan. (Policy and Process)
- Review common accommodations within programs to enhance accessible and inclusive teaching practices. (Teaching Development)
- Update new course and program proposals to align with current accessibility standards and practice, as applied to learning outcomes, required learning technologies, information about the instructional environment, etc. (Curriculum)
- Update program review policies and self-study templates to integrate policy and legislative accessibility commitments. (Curriculum)
- Incorporate demographic information including students registered with accessible learning into the program review process. (Curriculum)
- Plan sustainable funding for accessible learning services and identify required institutional financial contributions. (Student Supports)
- Document processes and provide instructions for students to access temporary accommodations. (Student Supports)
- Review and update documentation requirements for accommodations. (Student Supports)
- Review and update Accessible Learning procedures to reflect the Accommodate software implementation. (Student Supports)
- Ensure accessibility service information is available in accessible formats. (Education and Awareness)
- Create a visual, virtual inventory of learning spaces on campus and their accessibility features. (Teaching and Learning Spaces)
- Assess assistive technologies in use at Acadia and identify financial barriers for students. (Student Supports)
- Compile a research inventory on accessibility and disability studies at Acadia. (Research)

Mid-to-Long-term actions (2025-2035)

- Review institutional policies, processes and the committees who develop them to ensure accessibility standards are considered. (Policy and Process)
- Collaborate with first voice representatives on policy development and feedback. (Policy and Process)

- Develop a non-credit or micro-credential program to train faculty and staff on topics such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Assistive Technology, Culturally Responsive Pedagogies, Inclusive Education, Accessible Learning Assessment, etc. (Teaching Development)
- Ensure that all course materials reflect inclusive and culturally responsive pedagogies and are provided in multiple formats. (Teaching Development)
- Create an Accessible Teaching Team including an Educational Developer, Academic Librarian, an IT Accessibility Specialist, and student employees to enhance course accessibility. (Teaching Development)
- Revise Senate policies regarding course proposals to align with Nova Scotia Accessibility Education Standards. (Curriculum)
- Create a curriculum map aligning essential requirements with the Nova Scotia Accessibility Education Standards. (Curriculum)
- Streamline student advising processes (Colleague, staff training) and enhance transition planning for students by centralizing their program pathway information. (Student Supports)
- Commit to developing Accessible Learning Services with comprehensive academic support strategies. (Student Supports)
- Implement an intersectional approach to student advising that doesn't require multiple specialist staff appointments e.g. academic advisor, Accessible Learning Advisor, International Student Advisor, Enrolment/Admissions etc. (Student Supports)
- Develop and provide accessible resources that align with Public Post-Secondary Education Standards. (Education and Awareness)
- Review and update information about programs, services, and policies for students and provide them in plain language and accessible formats. (Education and Awareness)
- Equip faculty and staff with accessibility education resources. (Education and Awareness)
- Provide students with foundational knowledge in accessibility. (Education and Awareness)
- Review policies and access standards for virtual and physical learning environments. (Teaching and Learning Spaces)
- Ensure accessible learning spaces and technology are available for students, staff, and faculty. (Teaching and Learning Spaces)

- Create a learning technology HUB for Acadia. (Learning Technologies)
- Conduct an environmental scan of what assistive technologies are being used and supported at other institutions. (Learning Technologies)
- Partner with Nova Scotia Universities to develop a central assistive technology library and to pursue funding collaboratively. (Learning Technologies)
- Create a shared institutional accessible learning technology library. (Learning Technologies)
- Improve transparency around supported technologies. (Learning Technologies)
- Incentivize, promote, and celebrate research on accessibility and disability studies, and broader research initiatives that incorporate first voice. (Research)
- Expand library collections to enhance accessibility and include more disability studies resources. (Library)
- Support greater capacity within the library to digitize and make accessible print content within the collection. (Library)

Information and Communication

At Acadia University, information and communication are designed to be accessible.

Commitments

- Ensure the communications policies, procedures, and practices at Acadia University facilitate accessibility.
- Deliver institutional communication in formats that are accessible to all.
- Review and implement a common standard to enhance the accessibility of the Acadia University website.

Progress

- Images in social media communications on Acadia's primary accounts now include alternative text.
- ASL interpreters have provided support for various campus events, including convocation and Town Halls.
- Acadia's main websites have undergone audits for compliance with WCAG 2.1 industry standards since 2023, resulting in significant

improvements. Technology Services have increased their awareness and education regarding accessibility issues.

Short-term actions (2025-2028)

- Aim for a high level of compliance with WCAG 2.1 AA standards across Acadia's primary site.
- Enhance training and reference materials for departmental website trustees, focusing on the most common accessibility errors.
- Launch a new website template/platform for the main Acadia website and departmental sites, developed with accessibility best practices in mind.

Mid to Long-term actions (2025-2035)

- Support the creation of action plans for departmental websites to enhance accessibility.

Delivery of Goods and Services

Acadia University is committed to ensuring that students, employees, and visitors with disabilities, as well as those facing accessibility barriers, have equitable access to the goods and services it provides.

Commitments

- Develop and implement accessible customer service training for employees.
- Design physical customer service spaces that foster positive accessibility customer service experiences.
- Integrate accessibility into procurement processes by establishing common accessibility language, requirements, and criteria in tenders for goods and services at Acadia University.
- Ensure that services at Acadia University are accessible to persons with disabilities and others encountering accessibility barriers. This includes accessible communication, support for assistive technology, accessible digital content and technologies, as well as the accommodation of service animals and support persons.

Progress

- In 2024, a new accessible front desk was constructed at the Vaughan Memorial Library. Every service point now features height-adjustable desks, allowing flexibility for both employees and users, and the desk color contrasts with the floor to enhance visibility for individuals with low vision. Clear space is also provided for easy access and use.
- Several Requests for Proposals (RFPs) for construction projects have required bidders to demonstrate their adherence to accessibility standards and regulations by providing relevant examples in their proposals. The RFPs stipulate that alternative accessible routes must be communicated if accessible pathways are obstructed during construction.

Short-term actions (2025-2028)

- Review existing accessible customer service training and collaborate with Human Resources to provide this training to Acadia employees.
- Create an inventory of all physical service sites at Acadia and evaluate their accessibility.
- Develop a checklist to enhance accessible customer service resources for Acadia products and services, including information on obtaining alternative communication formats.
- Establish a standardized question for inclusion in all procurement requests for proposals concerning goods and services purchased by Acadia University.
- Ensure that the technology procurement process adheres to accessibility standards, particularly for Learning Technologies.

Mid to Long-term actions (2025-2035)

- Incorporate accessible customer service training into the onboarding process for all new service hires.
- Verify that all physical service sites are accessible and that online services have been evaluated for accessibility.
- Develop a Procurement Accessibility Policy.

Employment

Acadia University prioritizes accessibility and equity as an employer, actively supporting the careers of employees with disabilities and others facing accessibility barriers. The institution is dedicated to ensuring that its workforce reflects the diverse population of Nova Scotia.

Commitments

- Facilitate and promote the recruitment, selection, transition, career development, and advancement of persons with disabilities or those facing accessibility barriers through inclusive processes, policies, and practices.
- Build capacity among employees and senior leadership to cultivate a culture of inclusion and equity that supports, retains, and provides opportunities for career growth to employees with disabilities or others who experience barriers to accessibility.
- Ensure institutional policies and procedures provide inclusive, adaptable accommodations and adaptive tools for employees with disabilities or others who experience barriers to accessibility and appropriate and supportive leave practices and return to work plans.
- Uphold practices and programs that prioritize the health and well-being of all employees.

Progress

- A new Human Resources Information System was acquired in 2024, with implementation scheduled for 2025, featuring accessibility tools such as screen reader compatibility and keyboard navigation.
- A Work from Home Policy was established in 2024.
- Accommodation language has been integrated into Human Resources and the Provost and Vice President Academic Office employment webpages, job advertisements, and interview invitations, proactively inquiring about candidates' accommodation needs.
- Enhanced Group Benefits (effective April 1, 2025) will expand mental health coverage, therapies and hearing aids, along with new offerings such as continuous glucose monitoring, health coaching, chronic

disease management, fertility support, gender-affirming care, and laser eye surgery.

- Since 2022, new positions have been created to bolster accessibility initiatives, including an Associate Vice-President of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism, a Manager of Accessibility Standards, Compliance and Projects (Built Environment), an Employee Engagement Coordinator, and an Assistant Dean of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion for the Faculty of Pure and Applied Science.

Short-term actions (2025-2028)

- Improve data collection on recruitment and retention to emphasize the significance of accurate self-identification among employees.
- Develop clear workplace accommodation and return-to-work policies and procedures to support individuals requiring accommodations due to disabilities.
- Establish a centralized workplace accommodation fund to address accommodation costs, alleviating financial burdens on individual departments.
- Collaborate with Human Resources (HR) and Acadia's Work Integrated Learning (WIL) Program to enhance employment opportunities for students with disabilities, providing mentorship and career access. HR will work with hiring managers to promote this program and inclusive hiring practices.
- Ensure all job postings are accessible and reach diverse candidate pools by utilizing inclusive job formats and accommodations during hiring, training hiring managers on best practices, employing inclusive imagery and messaging in recruitment materials, and posting on diverse job seeker platforms like Equitek Employment Equity Solutions.
- Maintain central records of employee training participation and completion within HR.

Mid to Long-term actions (2025-2035)

- Conduct a policy audit to identify gaps in accessibility and inclusivity (e.g., hiring, accommodations, performance management) and benchmark against standards and wise practices in higher education and industry leaders.

- Identify further accessibility and equity barriers within employment at Acadia by consulting (focus groups, surveys) with employees with disabilities, equity-deserving groups, campus community members, senior leaders, the AUACC, and the Office of EDI-AR to gather insights and recommendations.

Transportation

Transportation options provided for employees and students are designed to be accessible.

Commitments

- Work in partnership with the Town of Wolfville, the Nova Scotia Community Transportation Network, and Kings Transit to support accessible and affordable public transportation to and from campuses, ensuring proper infrastructure for bus stops, sidewalks, and signage.
- Provide accessible parking on campus, adhering to standards such as those set by the CSA Group, the Rick Hansen Foundation, or relevant provincial built environment guidelines (once established), for students, employees, and visitors with disabilities or others facing accessibility challenges.

Progress

- In 2023, assessments of accessible parking on campus were conducted in accordance with the CSA B651:23 standard, leading to recommendations for enhancing signage and pavement markings. Updates to pavement markings were made, and three new accessible parking spaces were introduced in 2024.

Short-term actions (2025-2028)

- Collaborate with the Town of Wolfville on their Micro-transit pilot project, which aims to offer on-demand and/or scheduled transportation services in a specific area to enhance accessible transportation options.
- Ensure that accessible parking is available within 50 meters of the main entrances of buildings where individuals work, study, live, and engage in activities on campus.

Mid to Long-term actions (2025-2035)

- Equip safety and security vans to accommodate persons with disabilities and their assistive devices.

Built Environment

Acadia University is dedicated to providing meaningful access to its buildings and outdoor spaces for all users.

Commitments

- Adopt standardized accessibility measures to ensure meaningful access to all existing buildings, new construction, and major renovations. Institutions will adhere to the Nova Scotia Building Code, the Town of Wolfville Accessibility Plan building code requirements, and the Accessibility Act's standards for the built environment, with an aim to surpass them when possible. New construction will be viewed as a chance to exceed basic accessibility requirements, e.g. achieving the Rick Hansen Foundation Gold Rating.
- Develop recommendations focusing on priority areas (e.g., building features and renovation phases) to identify, prevent, and remove accessibility barriers.
- Conduct an accessibility audit to evaluate campus buildings and outdoor areas. Incorporate accessibility assessments into the facilities management inventory and budgeting processes, ensuring alignment with the Accessibility Act's standards.
- Create a standardized reporting tool for facilities management employees to track and report advancements in accessibility as part of the planning process, integrating the Accessibility Act's standards into this tool.
- Collaborate with the Town of Wolfville to improve the accessibility of both municipal and post-secondary infrastructure.
- Establish and implement processes to maintain accessibility during temporary disruptions with building infrastructure and outdoor spaces, including construction or seasonal related elements (e.g. snow removal).
- Ensure all emergency evacuation systems, policies, procedures, communications and training enable the safe and efficient evacuation

of persons with disabilities or those facing accessibility challenges during emergencies.

- Update and monitor a cost assessment for complying with the Accessibility Act's built environment standard.

Progress

- An accessibility assessment of 44 buildings on Acadia's campus was completed in 2021, identifying barriers along with cost estimates to fix these barriers. The identified barriers and costs have been incorporated into deferred maintenance software for project planning. To monitor the progress in removing barriers, the costs associated with resolved issues are deducted from the total identified. As of January 2025, 4.3% of recommendations have been addressed, amounting to approximately $1 million out of $21 million in identified accessibility needs.
- Six new universal washrooms were created, including two equipped with adult change tables.
- Over 20 power door openers have been added throughout campus facilities.
- Accessible signage (tactile, Braille, high contrast) has been installed in five buildings on campus.

Short-term actions (2025-2028)

- Continue to focus on priority areas for improving accessibility (individual needs, entrances, washrooms and wayfinding) and work with AUAAC to identify other areas of focus.
- Continue to work with contractors to ensure accessibility is maintained during temporary building and outdoor disruptions.
- Further develop policies, procedures, communications, and training regarding emergency evacuations.
- Continue development of a new static map and exterior wayfinding strategy for the Acadia campus.
- Publicly share plans related to snow and ice control, maintenance of parking facilities, and keeping building entrances accessible.
- Create sensory friendly spaces on campus.
- Ensure that defibrillators located on campus, which protrude more than 100 mm from the wall, are detectable by cane.

- Seek funding to support retroactive enhancement of accessibility measures.

Mid to Long-term actions (2025-2035)

- Make sure that every public building on campus has an accessible entrance.
- Ensure that each public building on campus is equipped with a universal washroom.
- Improve clarity and accessibility in campus wayfinding systems

Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation

Acadia University will continuously monitor and assess progress in reducing accessibility barriers, evaluating the impact on students and employees, and identifying opportunities to enhance educational access.

Commitments

- Align the commitments of the Acadia Accessibility Plan with the Nova Scotia Post-Secondary Accessibility Framework to foster collaboration and coordination among post-secondary institutions in Nova Scotia.
- Develop a unified monitoring tool and evaluation framework to regularly review and report on progress toward the commitments detailed in the plan and their impact on accessibility at Acadia University.
- Seek adequate funding from the federal and provincial government above the regular operating grants available to Acadia University to ensure compliance with the legislation and to realize the commitments within the plan - recognizing the significant, additional costs of implementing aspects of this framework and meeting the requirements of the Accessibility Act.

Progress

- In 2022, an evaluation framework for the Nova Scotia post-secondary accessibility framework was created to guide the sector in regularly assessing and reporting on progress toward commitments and their impact on removing accessibility barriers across the sector. Acadia was one of the 11 Nova Scotia post-secondary institutions (PSIs) involved in the development of this framework.

- As a next step for implementation of the Nova Scotia post-secondary accessibility evaluation framework, Acadia is now collaborating with the Nova Scotia Community College and Saint Mary's University to develop a PSI Accessibility Evaluation Survey. Institutions can voluntarily use this survey to gather information from faculty, staff, and students on how institutions are doing in improving accessibility. The survey will be ready for institutions to use in April 2025.
- Since 2019, Acadia has secured over $650,000 from various programs to enhance accessibility in its built environment.

Short-term actions (2025-2028)

- Continue leadership on the development and implementation of the Post-secondary Institutions (PSI) Accessibility Evaluation Survey.
- Collaborate with the Accessibility Directorate and other PSIs in the Community of Practice to co-develop and share resources.
- Work with the Accessibility Directorate and other PSIs to pursue funding to comply with the legislation and standards.
- Create templates and processes to monitor progress regarding the actions outlined in this plan.

Mid to Long-term actions (2025-2035)

- Collaborate with organizations to benchmark and assess how the PSI sector is progressing in accessibility on a national level.

Next Steps

Acadia University is dedicated to executing the actions outlined in this plan over the next three years. Under the Accessibility Acadia governance model, the AVP EDI-AR will collaborate with the AUAAC, Working Group Leads, and the Acadia Senate Disability Policy Committee to develop an Acadia Accessibility Policy supplemented by Implementation Guidelines to facilitate the execution of the Institutional Accessibility Plan. Additionally, Acadia will formulate a comprehensive Strategic Implementation Plan in 2025, detailing strategies, specific actions, resource allocation, and benchmarks for implementation timelines of 1-3 years, 3-5 years, and 5-10 years. This implementation plan will identify pilot projects eligible for external funding and will work in conjunction with the Acadia Accessibility Policy and

Implementation Guidelines to ensure accountability for the initiatives outlined in this 2025-2028 Plan.

This plan highlights several key initiatives with significant overlap in our commitments, including the creation of an institutional accessibility policy, conducting environmental scans and audits to evaluate existing policies, processes, and services, enabling a systematic accessibility review, and establishing mechanisms to monitor key metrics as specified in the implementation plan. All these efforts will fall under the coordination of the AVP EDI-AR Portfolio and will be centralized within the Accessibility Acadia hub.

To promote sustainable implementation of our plan in the initial 1-3 years, our strategy will include the following actions:

1. Recruit a part-time Accessibility Acadia Coordinator within the Office of EDI-AR.
2. Establish an Accessibility Acadia Hub that offers resources for the Acadia community.
3. Organize the inaugural Post-Secondary Institutions Accessibility Symposium, focusing on the rural context of accessibility, in the fall of 2025, occurring biennial thereafter.
4. Enhance participation in the Nova Scotia Post-Secondary Institution Community of Practice and the Canadian Accessibility Network, including ongoing leadership in developing guides, toolkits, and best practice guidelines.

We view this plan as a dynamic document that will adapt to legislative requirements and reflect ongoing feedback from our community.

Appendices

Appendix A: Acadia Accessibility Advisory Committee

The AUAAC consists of members from across campus, including student, faculty, and staff representatives who have lived experiences with disabilities and subject matter expertise. Intersectionality was considered when assembling the group who reviewed the applicants to the AUAAC as well as who was selected to participate in the AUAAC. At least one half of the AUAAC must be persons with disabilities or representatives from organizations representing persons with disabilities. The 2024- 2025 membership consists of the following:

- Lerato Chondoma, Associate Vice-President, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism (Chair)
- Emily Duffett, Coordinator, Work Integrated Learning (Assistant to Chair)
- Brett Hatfield, Reporting and Records Coordinator
- Cameron Barnard, Student
- Esteve Hassan, Associate Professor
- Hannah Frail, Student
- Jennifer Ingham, Deputy Mayor, Town of Wolfville
- Kate Johnstone, Accessible Learning Support Advisor
- Lily Rich, Student
- Maggie Jean Neilson, Academic Librarian
- Melanie Clouthier, Admin Coordinator & Operation Support
- Natalie Swain, Assistant Professor
- Polly Leonard, Director of Human Right & Equity Office
- Samantha West, Administrative Assistant

Appendix B: Glossary of Terms

Adapted from Appendix A in the Nova Scotia Post-Secondary Accessibility Framework Terms of Reference

Accessibility includes the prevention and removal of barriers (physical, attitudinal, technological, or system) to allow equitable participation for persons with disabilities or others who experience barriers to accessibility.

Accessibility Act refers to the provincial legislation enacted in 2017 to prevent and remove barriers to accessibility for people with disabilities. It has a goal of an accessible Nova Scotia by 2030. The Act outlines some responsibilities for municipalities, universities, and other entities, including developing accessibility plans and establishing an accessibility committee. It allows Government to develop and implement standards (regulations) in education, the built environment, the delivery and receipt of goods and services, transportation, information and communication, and employment.

Accessible Employer refers to reducing and preventing barriers in hiring, retaining, career development and advancement for employees, and addressing employee needs with individualized, flexible accommodations.

Accessible Customer Service refers to ensuring all person have the same opportunity to seek, obtain, use or benefit from the service, Accessible services are easy for all people to use, interact with, and understand.

Alternative Text (alt text) is a description of an image or other visual content that appears in digital media. Alt text is usually hidden from view but is read aloud when screen readers reach an image. It helps people who are blind or have low vision understand what's on the screen.

Assistive Technology refers to any device, software, or tool designed to help individuals with disabilities perform tasks, improve accessibility, and enhance their independence. This can include mobility aids (e.g., wheelchairs, prosthetics), communication tools (e.g., speech-to-text software, screen readers), adaptive learning technologies, and environmental modifications (e.g., automatic doors, voice-controlled devices).

Barrier includes anything that hinders or challenges the full and effective participation in society. Barriers can be physical, attitudinal, technological, or systemic (policy or practice). Accessibility barriers may be related to areas such as employment, education, the built environment, transportation, the

delivery and receipt of goods and services, or information and communications.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) refers to a teaching method that acknowledges the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and frames of reference of students and uses it to make learning more relevant and effective. It ensures that students from diverse cultures have equitable opportunities and supports for success within school systems and that design is reflected in pedagogy, not just additional targeted services.

Deaf refers to a sociological term referring to those individuals who are medically deaf or hard of hearing who identify with and participate in the culture, society, and language of Deaf people, which is based on Sign language.

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.

Employees refer to administration, faculty, and staff employed at a post-secondary institution.

Equity/Equitable includes the fair treatment of individuals, acknowledging and making provisions for their differences by ensuring that employment and educational processes are free from systemic barriers. Equity does not mean ignoring differences and treating everyone the same. Instead, it means recognizing and valuing differences, removing systemic barriers and accommodating individual differences, as needed.

First Voice refers to a perspective of knowledge generated by persons with disabilities and others who experience barriers to accessibility that emerges from lived experience, community connections, knowledge traditions, and scholarly activities that are typically under-valued and under-represented.

Inclusion includes the process of improving the terms of participation in society, particularly for individuals of groups of individuals who are disadvantaged or underrepresented, through enhancing opportunities, access to resources, voice and respect for rights. This creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust, fights exclusion and marginalization and offers the opportunity of upward mobility and results in increased social cohesion.

Meaningful access when referring to the built environment, is the intent to meet the needs of all users of a site (a building or outdoor space) regardless of their ability. It means that not only individual features of a site, such as an entrance or washroom, must be accessible, but the entire experience throughout.

Neurodivergent means having a brain that functions in ways that diverge significantly from the dominant societal standards of "normal." It recognizes diverse neurologies and ways of being, as variation of human experience, rather than deficiency in need of remediation or cure. It includes those who identify with autism spectrum disorder, ADHD, Tourette's syndrome, and dyslexia, to name a few.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) refers to an educational approach to designing instructional goals, assessments, methods and materials, and policies that work for a diversity of learners. It employs flexible approaches that can be customized and adjusted for individual student needs.

Appendix C: Celebrating Inclusion, Equity, Diversity, and Accessibility

Date	Awareness Theme
September 10	**World Suicide Prevention Day** - Increase awareness about suicidal behaviour and action on how to prevent suicide
Last week of September	**International Week of the Deaf** - Celebrate the various Deaf communities around the world
September 23	**International Day of Sign Languages**- Increase awareness of the importance of sign language, the use of many sign languages and recognize sign language as a human right
September 30	**National Day of Truth and Reconciliation / Orange Shirt Day** - Day of remembrance for the victims of the residential school system in Canada
October 1	**Treaty Day-** Marks the beginning of Mi'kmaq History Month in Nova Scotia and recognizes the Mi'kmaq people and culture
October 1-31	**Mi'kmaq History Month-** Promote awareness about the Mi'kmaw culture and heritage in Nova Scotia https://mikmaqhistorymonth.ca
October 1-31	**Learning Disability Awareness Month** - Raise awareness and reduce stigmas surrounding learning disabilities
October 10	**World Mental Health Day** - Promote awareness around mental health issues and raise support for mental health
2nd Thursday of October	**World Sight Day** - Promote awareness towards blindness and vision impairments
3rd week of October	**Invisible Disabilities Week** - Promote awareness, education, and support for various invisible disabilities
November 1-30	**Indigenous Disability Awareness Month** - Indigenous peoples in Canada experience disabilities at a higher rate, IDAM raises awareness
1st full week of November	**International Stress Awareness Week** - Raise awareness about stress prevention and learn techniques to alleviate stress
2nd Thursday of November	**World Usability Day-** Promote the importance of universal usability and design

November 17	**International Students Day** - Promote an accessible education for all students
December 3	**International Day of Persons with Disabilities** - Promote an understanding of disability issues, support, and human rights
December 10	**Human Rights Day** - Honouring the UN's adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
January 4	**World Braille Day** - Raise awareness to barriers people who are blind or visually impaired face. Celebrate the invention of braille which has transformed accessibility for those with visual impairments.
February 1-28/29	**African Heritage Month / Black History Month** - Celebrate and recognize the achievements of African Nova Scotians throughout history
1st full week of February	**National White Cane Week** - Raise awareness to the challenges Canadians with visual impairments face
February 1-7	**Eating Disorder's Awareness Week (EDAW)** - Raise awareness about eating disorders and provide resources for those seeking treatment and for education purposes.
February 12	**Sexual & Reproductive Health Day** - Raise awareness and provide resources to improve overall health in communities.
March 8	**International Women's Day** - Celebrating the achievements of women and working towards gender equality
March 21	**International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination** - An effort to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination through education
March 22	**World Water Day** - Celebrates water and raise awareness for the 2.2 billion people living without access to safe and clean water
March 31	**International Transgender Day of Visibility -** celebrates transgender people, raises awareness of discrimination faced by transgender people, and acknowledging their contributions to society.

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April 1-30	**World Autism Month** - Raise awareness about people with autism spectrum disorders throughout the world
April 7	**World Health Day** - Focus on health problems or issues throughout the world and promote physical and mental well-being
April 11	**Dog Therapy Appreciation Day** - Celebrate and educate people on animals' role in assisting in the well-being of humans
April 22	**Earth Day** - Support the environment's protection by providing education initiatives to protect and restore the earth
May 1-31	**Mental Health Awareness Month** - Promote an understanding about mental illness and how they affect Canadians to reduce the stigma around mental health
May 17	**International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia –** Honours the date the World Health Organization made the landmark decision to declassify homosexuality as a mental disorder in 1990.
May 21	**World Day for Cultural Diversity** - Celebrates cultures around the world and signifies diversity as an agent of inclusion and positive change
June 1-30	**National Indigenous History Month** - Educate about the culture, contributions, experiences, and history of Indigenous peoples
June 21	**National Indigenous Peoples Day** - Celebrate the heritage, cultures, and achievements of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples