St. Francis Xavier University (StFX) Accessibility Plan 2025-2030

Introduction

StFX is committed to fostering an inclusive, barrier-free campus, aligning with Nova Scotia's goal of an accessible province by 2030. Building on the Accessibility Plan 2022–2025, this updated framework establishes short-term, fiscally viable targets (2025-2028) and long-term strategic objectives (2028-2030) to meet evolving provincial accessibility standards. The St.FX Accessibility Plan 2022-2025 continues to be the framework for St.FX Accessibility Plan with the Accessibility Plan 2025-2028 serving as an amendment to update the previous iteration of the Accessibility Plan.

Acknowledging that accessibility continues to be everyone's responsibility, this amendment serves to reaffirm StFX's institutional commitment to the advancement of EDIA in the post-secondary sector.

Guiding Principles

Human Rights

We uphold accessibility as a fundamental human right and model this in our work. This involves ensuring that all members of the university community demonstrate a shared responsibility for equity and accessibility within a human rights framework, by prioritizing the prevention and removal of structural, systemic, and individual barriers that prevent equitable access. An accessible campus must be designed for the meaningful participation of all members, ensuring our policies, programs, practices, and services are flexible and responsive.

First Voice

We value first voice and prioritize it in our decision-making, recognizing the lived experiences of students and employees with disabilities and others who experience barriers to accessibility. Their experience, expertise, and leadership, including evidence generated by first voice researchers, must be prioritized in this work.

Equity

We are committed to creating equitable learning and working environments, where everyone is treated with dignity and respect. Practicing equity and accessibility in teaching, learning, working, and living environments will advance awareness, and facilitate better representation, independence, and well-being for all members of our university community.

Intersectionality

We understand the diversity of disabilities and embrace how diverse identities and lived experiences intersect and impact accessibility. Accordingly, we champion diversity, in all forms; whether for Indigenous peoples, individuals of all genders and sexual orientations, race, ethnic origin, disability, age, religion as well as anyone living at the intersection of these identities. We will reflect this understanding on our policies, programs, and services.

Wholistic Well-Being

We recognize the importance of representing a cross-disability perspective that is respectful and inclusive of all experiences of disability. We will create work and learning environments grounded in respect and support, guided by a shared responsibility for equitable access and the mental health and well-being of our faculty, staff, and students.

Universal Design

We apply principles of Universal Design to increase accessibility for all community members. The premise is, that if we build systems that are accessible, we lower the barriers that exist for the 11 full participation of all community members. As well, when we build proactive approaches into our systems and policies, we take the burden off the individual and are better able to meet community members where they are at in their lives. Although a legal obligation may only require "accommodation as required", we seek proactive and permanent accessible solutions.

Collaboration and Shared Responsibility

We recognize that successful learning and employment outcomes are the result of a shared responsibility and commitment on the part of students, faculty, and staff, and expect all community members to advance and contribute to the ongoing development of an environment that is equitable and accessible. By building understanding and capacity, we strive for a campuswide culture of continuous improvement in all aspects of accessibility. We are committed to putting our words into meaningful action.

Continuous Learning and Improvement

We recognize the need for change and the importance of including persons with disabilities in the process. We commit to ensuring policies, programs, and procedures are continuously reviewed and improved to reflect new learning and research, and to respond to the changing needs and experiences of learners and educators. We commit to transparency and accountability in demonstrating progress and improvement towards our equity and accessibility objectives.

Highlighted Accessibility Achievements

The St.FX Accessibility Plan builds on St.FX's commitment to equity and accessibility. Some recent initiatives include:

- Creation of Accessibility Advisory Committee to meet on a regular basis to guide plan implementation and ongoing review.
- Tramble Centre works collaboratively with students and faculty to create individual plans for students with diagnosed, permanent disabilities.
- Launch of the Engage, Develop, Grow your Employability program (EDGE) to provide equitable and accessible career related support to students.
- Establishment of annual StFX award for accessible and inclusive communities, in honour of Jeff Murray.
- StFX professor Dr. Katie Aubrecht lead accessibility act independent review for Nova Scotia
- StFx celebrated Access Awareness Week to recognize local accessibility advocates and champions.
- Campus-wide audit of built environment to identify access barriers.
- Brian Mulroney Institute of Government creates accessible classrooms and barrier free washrooms.
- Creation of StFX student accessibility advisory committee to prioritize first voice initiatives.
- StFX adopts an updated Harassment and Discrimination policy for all University Community members, visitors, and contractors.
- Centre for Employment Innovation (CEI) through various activities conducts partnerships, projects, and research that enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion in workplaces in Nova Scotia.
- CEI implemented a Youth Accessibility Research Intern to explore the gap in the workplace for youth with exceptionalities.
- Spatializing Care Lab continues arts-informed health research focussing on structures and conditions that influence mental health and wellness inequities and disparities
- StFX held a two-day gathering, Disability, Access, Equity and Education: Creating Welcoming Communities, that explored questions of disability, access, and equity from diverse perspectives.
- Accessibility as a Collaborative Practice (Collab4Care) project focussed on accessibility as collaborative practice in Maple League Universities.
- Human Rights and Equity team provides a variety of training sessions to help create a respectful community.
- All full time employees are required to complete a minimum of four hours of EDIA educational opportunities annually as per S.1.8(3) StFXAUT Collective Agreement

- StFX Health and Counselling is available to all registered part-time and full-time students Monday to Friday with fully qualified physicians, counsellors, and nurses.
- Supports and resources including captioning and accessible course design are available for staff
- StFX is a member of the Canadian Accessibility Network (CAN) and Wabanaki Accessible Canada Partnerships Project.
- StFX website redeveloped to ensure plain language and general access to the StFX Website.
- Launched Diversity Engagement Centre mentorship program for students from historically excluded groups.
- Launched self-paced learning modules to provide first-year students with transitional knowledge and skills

Strategic Priorities & Targets

1. Teaching, Learning, and Research

In Progress(2025-2028):

- Expansion of Teaching & Learning Centre's accessibility training for faculty including professional development programs aimed at equity and accessible education.
- Collect best practices in accessible program design, development, and delivery to create solutions and evidence-informed pedagogy that improves accessibility.
- Integration of culturally responsive pedagogy in professional development workshops.
- Continued development for training and resource development for accessible course delivery.
- Development of an institutional Digital Strategy to ensure accessibility in learning management systems.
- Complete and publish comprehensive HR policy review using an intersectional lens, adapting HR policies as appropriate through review recommendations

Next Steps(2028-2030):

- Increase faculty participation in EDIA training including record keeping of the training to monitor increased participation for growth and learning.
- Expand accessibility resources in online learning environments including appropriate training on online accessibility features.
- Conduct research into digital accessibility gaps and enhance assistive technology tools.
- Integrate accessibility metrics into faculty performance evaluations.

2. Information and Communication

In Progress (2025-2028):

- Implementation of Communication Access Realtime Translation at University events.
- Policy updates for accessible communication across all university platforms.
- Expand ASL and alternative format offerings at University Events
- Ensure all major campus communication channels meet accessibility compliance.
- Develop campaign to raise awareness about diverse experiences of disability focusing on first-voice perspectives.

Next Steps (2028-2030):

- Develop a reporting tool for accessibility concerns related to university communications.
- Enhance training for web developers and content creators on accessibility.
- Audit social media accounts and create accessibility guidelines to be used for Accessibility Standards of Communication.

3. Goods and Services

In Progress (2025-2028):

- Procurement policy updates to prioritize accessibility by incorporating accessibility requirements when purchasing goods or services. Request that RPF's include language with respect to accessibility when appropriate
- Development of accessible customer service training and EDIA training for all professional staff.
- Ongoing implementation of accessibility-focused vendor selection criteria.

Next Steps (2028-2030):

- Create a list of resources of when and how to engage and consult with persons with disabilities
- Complete implementation of accessibility requirements in procurement.
- Launch a vendor accessibility certification initiative.
- Assess service delivery gaps for students requiring accessibility accommodations.
- Develop a tracking mechanism for compliance with accessibility service delivery.

4. Employment

In Progress (2025-2028):

- HR policy review using an intersectional accessibility lens.
- Expansion of mental health and workplace accommodation resources.
- Training for hiring committees on inclusive recruitment.
- Provide all new employees with EDIA training as a part of their onboarding.

Next Steps (2028-2030):

- Implement targeted accessibility hiring goals.
- Establish formal mentorship programs for employees with disabilities.
- Increase data collection on accessibility barriers in hiring and retention.
- Launch employee accessibility awareness initiatives across all departments.

5. Transportation

In Progress (2025-2028):

- Review of accessible parking compliance with CSA and Rick Hansen Foundation standards.
- Collaboration with transit providers for improved accessible transport options.
- Deliver accessibility training to all staff responsible for transportation

Next Steps (2028-2030):

- Implement technology for real-time tracking of accessible transit options.
- Upgrade pedestrian pathways to meet accessibility best practices.
- Increase the number of fully accessible campus transport vehicles.

6. Built Environment

In Progress (2025-2028):

- Ensure new construction projects integrate universal design principles.
- Ensure all emergency mapping and evacuation systems are in place to enable the safe and efficient evacuation of persons with disabilities

Next Steps (2028-2030):

- Establish an annual campus accessibility review process.
- Enhance wayfinding systems for individuals with visual impairments.

Implementation and Monitoring

- **Annual Accessibility Reports**: StFX will release an annual accessibility progress report, tracking advancements and identifying areas needing improvement.
- **Accessibility Advisory Committee**: A dedicated team, including first-voice representation, will continue to oversee policy execution and provide recommendations.
- **Alignment with Provincial Compliance Standards**: Regular updates will be made to ensure continued compliance with **Nova Scotia Accessibility Legislation** and evolving provincial accessibility standards.

Conclusion

This plan represents StFX's commitment to meaningful accessibility improvements while highlighting the institution's recent success in accessibility. By 2030, the university will be a model for inclusivity in post-secondary education, ensuring a barrier-free experience for all members of the community. Ongoing engagement, policy evolution, and infrastructure investments will make StFX a leader in accessibility, fostering a learning environment where all individuals can thrive.