



Art Gallery of Nova Scotia Accessibility Plan

JANUARY 2025



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Introduction

Nova Scotia has the highest percentage of people with disabilities in Canada, highlighting the importance of fostering an accessible environment. Many individuals face challenges accessing public spaces, engaging with exhibits, or finding information online due to physical, informational, and other barriers (obstacles limiting full participation for a person with a disability). Addressing these barriers is essential to creating an inclusive society where everyone can participate fully.

In 2017, Nova Scotia took a significant step forward by enacting the Accessibility Act. This legislation sets the Province on a path to becoming fully accessible by 2030, ensuring that accessibility is recognized as a basic human right.

At the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia (AGNS), we strive to create a welcoming and accessible (easily used and navigated by people with disabilities) space for all visitors, staff, and volunteers. We are committed to supporting these values by developing an accessibility framework that aligns with the provincial Accessibility Act while meeting the unique needs of the communities that seek to engage with the museum.





ARTIST'S STATEMENT
The artist's statement is a written account of the artist's thoughts and feelings about their work. It is a personal and subjective statement that provides insight into the artist's creative process and the meaning behind their work. The statement is often included in an artist's portfolio or exhibition catalog.

Our Vision

The Art Gallery of Nova Scotia is dedicated to making sure that everyone, regardless of ability, can access and enjoy our exhibitions, programs, and spaces. We are committed to creating an art gallery where accessibility is a core value in everything we do. Our goal is to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to participation so that all visitors, staff, and community members can experience the AGNS in a welcoming and accessible way.



Principles

These principles guide the AGNS as we work to eliminate barriers, enhance inclusion, and create an accessible space for all.

Accessibility as a Human Right

Everyone has the right to access and enjoy AGNS offerings. We are committed to identifying and removing barriers that prevent full participation, ensuring equitable access for all.

Centering Lived Experience

We value the perspectives of individuals with disabilities and prioritize listening to their lived experiences. Their insights guide our decisions to create a more accessible museum environment.

Celebrating Layers of Identity

We understand that barriers to accessibility can be compounded by other aspects of identity such as race, gender, or socioeconomic status. We are committed to addressing these intersecting challenges in our policies and practices.

Innovation and Adaptability

We approach accessibility with creativity and flexibility, using imaginative solutions to ensure all visitors can enjoy our spaces and services.

Collaboration with Community

Accessibility is a shared responsibility. We work with diverse community groups and organizations to ensure our approach reflects the needs of those we serve and is responsive to evolving standards and expectations. We are open to feedback from the community to help us improve and grow.

Areas of Focus

Our accessibility plan is a living document, one that is continuously updated and revised to reflect new information, developments, or changing circumstances. The plan will be informed by ongoing consultation and collaboration with persons with disabilities, advocacy groups, and community organizations.

This plan focuses on five (5) areas:

- 1 Visitor Experience
- 2 Information and Communication
- 3 Awareness and Capacity Building
- 4 Employment
- 5 Built Environment

By focusing on these key areas, we aim to ensure individuals with disabilities have equal access to all services provided by AGNS, including our exhibitions, programs, and visitor materials. Each section of this plan is designed to improve accessibility through clear goals, commitments, and specific actions which will create a more accessible environment for all visitors.

1

Visitor Experience

1.1 Exhibitions: Physical and Informational Accessibility

GOAL

To design exhibitions that align with Universal Design principles (a method of design for environments, products, or services to be usable by everyone, ensuring full participation), with an ongoing commitment to exploring and addressing barriers to accessibility.

COMMITMENTS

Physical Accessibility

- Design exhibition spaces in consideration of physical barriers, testing new approaches to improve accessibility.

Informational Accessibility

- Ensure all visual and textual elements supporting exhibition interpretation are designed for maximum readability, clarity, and accessibility.
- Collaborate with disability advocates, artists, and experts to co-develop multi-sensory (adjusting environments to support individuals with sensory sensitivities), tactile (design features that enable individuals with visual impairments to interact with their environment through touch), and alternative formats for exhibition content to engage a wider range of audiences.

Visitor Input and Continuous Improvement

- Actively gather input from visitors through consultations, focus groups, and pilot programs to better understand the needs, expectations, and experiences of visitors of all abilities, using this to inform future exhibition design.

1

Visitor Experience

1.1 Exhibitions: Physical and Informational Accessibility

2025-26 ACTIONS

Accessibility Review

- Conduct a comprehensive audit of exhibition spaces, focusing on areas such as display heights, lighting, pathways, tactile elements, and label readability. This review will help us establish the areas of concern as we begin to identify exhibition accessibility standards.

Exhibition Design Guidelines

- Create comprehensive accessibility design guidelines that will serve as a framework for evaluating and enhancing accessibility during exhibition design phase.

External Consultation

- Engage with external accessibility consultants and visitors with disabilities to identify gaps in accessibility within current exhibition spaces and gather actionable feedback to improve future designs.

1

Visitor Experience

1.2 Programs: Accessible and Multi-Sensory Engagement

GOAL

To create programs that engage visitors with disabilities in meaningful, equitable ways by exploring innovative, multi-sensory approaches.

COMMITMENTS

Program Guidelines

- Ensure all AGNS programs comply with program accessibility guidelines for accommodations of visual, auditory, and physical supports.

Multi-Sensory Initiatives

- Incorporate multi-sensory elements into programs to enhance engagement for all visitors. This may include tactile, auditory, and interactive components fostering a more accessible experience.

Co-Designed Programs

- Showcase accessibility as a driver of creativity and inclusion by collaborating with community groups, artists, and visitors with disabilities to co-design and test program ideas that address their needs, interests, and feedback.

1

Visitor Experience

1.2 Programs: Accessible and Multi-Sensory Engagement

2025-26 ACTIONS

Review Program Accessibility

- Perform an assessment of current AGNS programs to identify accessibility gaps. This will involve gathering feedback from disability community members, including program participants, through surveys and focus groups to understand barriers and gather actionable insights.

Develop Accessibility Framework for Programs

- Develop program accessibility guidelines that ensures all future programs are inclusive. This framework will include strategies offering a range of accommodations, such as sensory-friendly adaptations (modifications made to the environment, including reducing lighting, noise, or tactile stimulation), alternative formats, and flexibility in program delivery to support full participation for all attendees.

1

Visitor Experience

1.3 Visitor Welcome and Resources

GOAL

To empower visitors with disabilities by developing accessible orientation tools to enhance their ability to navigate the Gallery independently, confidently, and comfortably.

COMMITMENTS**Accessible Orientation**

- Create an accessible orientation experience for all visitors providing information in formats that cater to different needs (e.g., large print, audio, braille).

Wayfinding and Support Materials

- Ensure all wayfinding (design of signs and navigation aids that help people move through spaces safely and efficiently) tools, such as maps, signage, and guides, meet accessible design standards. This includes clarity of text, use of high contrast, and consideration of visual and cognitive accessibility needs.

Ongoing Improvement and Visitor Feedback

- Regularly test and refine orientation resources to ensure they remain effective and accessible.
- Collect and analyze feedback from visitors with disabilities to guide continuous improvement of orientation tools and resources based on evolving visitor needs and preferences.

1

Visitor Experience

1.3 Visitor Welcome and Resources

2025-26 ACTIONS

Analyze the Visitor Journey

- Break down the typical visitor experience, from arrival to exploring exhibits, to identify challenges that people with various disabilities might face. This detailed analysis will provide a thorough understanding of the accessibility barriers to be addressed.

Collaborate with External Consultants

- Partner with external accessibility consultants and disability advocacy organizations to identify gaps in current visitor resources and recommend improvements for greater inclusivity.

Review Existing Orientation Tools

- Begin a detailed review of existing orientation and navigation tools (maps, signage, guides) to evaluate their effectiveness and accessibility. This includes assessing factors such as readability, contrast, language clarity, and availability of alternative formats (e.g., braille, audio, or digital).

Develop Wayfinding Accessibility Framework

- Research, develop and implement a standardized framework for creating accessible wayfinding systems. This will ensure pathways, signage, and navigation aids meet the needs of all visitors, regardless of ability.

2

Information and Communication

GOAL

To ensure all communication, online platforms, and physical materials at AGNS are accessible, providing clear, inclusive, and understandable information to all visitors.

COMMITMENTS

Accessible Formats

- Ensure communication materials are designed in a way that makes them accessible, considering a variety of formats like large print, plain language, and other options to meet diverse needs and ensure ease of understanding for all visitors.
- Digital content will be designed with accessibility in mind, aligning with established accessibility guidelines like WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) to create a more accessible online experience.

Clarity and Readability

- Communications will prioritize clear and easy-to-read brand language to improve accessibility for diverse audiences

Accessible Communication Standards

- Guidelines for accessible communication will be developed, offering a framework for creating accessible materials across all platforms (print, digital, and in-person formats).

Community Driven Feedback

- Feedback from visitors with disabilities will be actively integrated into communication strategies to ensure diverse needs are met effectively.

2

Information and Communication

2025-26 ACTIONS

Develop Communication Guidelines

- Research and define accessibility standards for all communication types (print, digital, and in-person). Create and implement clear guidelines for producing accessible content across all platforms.

Audit Existing Material

- Conduct a comprehensive review of existing communication materials to identify compliance with accessibility standards. Begin to update materials that fall short of these standards.

Audit Digital Accessibility

- Begin an in-depth audit of the AGNS website to identify and address visual, auditory, and navigational barriers.

3

Awareness and Capacity Building

GOAL

To enhance internal awareness and staff capacity in accessibility and inclusion by providing specialized training, fostering professional development, and strengthening the Accessibility Advisory Committee.

COMMITMENTS

Staff Awareness

- Promote the importance of accessibility and inclusion across all AGNS operations, with a focus on staff roles that directly interact with visitors.

Comprehensive Training

- Develop and implement training plans to educate all staff on accessibility needs, enabling effective support for visitors from diverse backgrounds with varying accessibility needs.

Professional Development

- Establish a structured professional development approach, ensuring staff stay updated on the latest accessibility standards, practices, and technologies.

Develop Advisory Committee Capacity

- Strengthen the capacity of the Accessibility Advisory Committee by expanding its membership and defining clear roles and responsibilities.

3

Awareness and Capacity Building

2025-26 ACTIONS

Audit Staff Training

- Conduct an audit of current staff accessibility training to identify gaps and areas for improvement.

Launch Training Program

- Design and launch a mandatory training program for all staff, focusing on accessibility best practices. This will include specialized training to frontline staff to address diverse visitor needs and ensure familiarity with new policies and accessibility updates.

Develop Advisory Committee

- Broaden the Accessibility Advisory Committee's membership to include diverse perspectives, ensuring comprehensive representation. Develop and implement a formalized Terms of Reference (TOR) for the Accessibility Advisory Committee, clearly outlining its goals, roles, and responsibilities to guide its ongoing work effectively.
- Partner with external accessibility consultants and community organizations specializing in disability advocacy to identify gaps in current visitor resources.
- Research, develop and implement accessibility framework for wayfinding systems, ensuring pathways, signage, and navigation aids meet the needs of diverse users.
- Conduct a detailed review of existing orientation and navigation tools to evaluate their effectiveness and accessibility such as readability, contrast, language clarity, and alternative formats.

4

Employment

GOAL

To foster an accessible workplace where individuals with disabilities can thrive, ensuring equal opportunities for meaningful employment, volunteering, and professional growth at the AGNS.

COMMITMENTS

Accessible Recruitment

- Ensure all job postings, calls and hiring practices for volunteers, and internship opportunities can be received, understood, and shared by individuals of all abilities.
- Develop and implement hiring policies and practices that actively encourage the hiring of individuals with disabilities for employment, volunteer, and internship roles.

Workplace Accommodations

- Provide reasonable accommodations to enable employees, volunteers, and interns with disabilities to perform their roles effectively and feel supported.

Professional Development

- Ensure training, career development, and professional growth opportunities are accessible to all employees, volunteers, and interns, regardless of ability.

2025-26 ACTIONS

Enhance Accessibility in Recruitment

- Review and enhance job postings, application systems, and interview processes to improve accessibility and inclusivity for applicants with disabilities.

Improve Career Advancement Opportunities for Staff with Disabilities

- Investigate barriers faced by staff with disabilities in advancing their careers and identify actionable opportunities to support professional growth within the AGNS.

5

Built Environment

GOAL

To create a welcoming and accessible built environment at the AGNS by embracing universal design principles, eliminating barriers, and offering accessible solutions that meet the diverse needs of all visitors.

COMMITMENTS

Universal Design Integration

- Collaborate with the Nova Scotia Department of Public Works (building owner and operator) to incorporate Universal Design principles into new construction projects and ongoing maintenance of existing gallery spaces.

Community Engagement

- Partner with community organizations, accessibility consultants, advocacy groups, and individuals with disabilities to identify and address barriers in the AGNS built environment.

2025-26 ACTIONS

Audit Built Environment Accessibility

- Conduct a comprehensive accessibility audit of the AGNS built environment, focusing on assessing current barriers and identifying areas for improvement, with input from community organizations, accessibility consultants, and individuals with disabilities.

Next Steps

In-Depth Analysis of Accessibility Audit Findings

Upon completion of the accessibility audits within each area of focus, the AGNS will undertake an examination of the audit outcomes and recommendations. This critical analysis will enable us to identify and prioritize key areas requiring enhancement, ensuring that the proposed interventions are both impactful and aligned with the strategic objectives of the Gallery.

Formulation of a Phased Implementation Strategy

Building on the insights gleaned from the audit review, AGNS will develop a robust and detailed phased implementation strategy. This strategy will encompass:

- Precise, actionable steps to rectify identified accessibility barriers.
- A comprehensive timeline, ensuring that each intervention is executed in a timely and efficient manner.
- A thorough allocation of the necessary human, financial, and technical resources to ensure the successful execution of each phase.

Integration into the Updated Three-Year Accessibility Plan

The phased implementation plan will be integrated into an updated, three-year Accessibility Plan. This plan will function as a roadmap, guiding our ongoing commitment to accessibility and providing clear milestones to monitor progress and measure success over the next three years.

Finalization and Submission of the Accessibility Strategy

The updated three-year Accessibility Plan, incorporating both the audit findings and the phased implementation strategy, will be finalized and formally submitted by March 31, 2026.

Appendices

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Accessibility

The design or adaptation of spaces, services, or products to ensure they can be easily used and accessed by people with disabilities, meeting their specific needs.

Audit

A systematic review conducted to evaluate, assess, or verify compliance, performance, or processes. Audits may be performed internally, by third parties, or through a hybrid approach, such as using toolkits provided by accessible nonprofit organizations to guide self-audits.

Barrier

Any obstacle preventing a person with a disability from fully participating in an activity, service, or space.

Living Document

A document that is dynamic and designed to evolve over time, continuously updated and revised to reflect new information, developments, or changing circumstances.

Sensory Accessibility

Modifications made to the environment, such as adjusting lighting, noise levels, and tactile stimulation, to create a more comfortable and inclusive space for individuals with sensory processing disorders or sensitivities.

Tactile Accessibility

The design and implementation of features and resources that allow individuals with visual impairments to interact with their environment and experience content through touch.

Universal Design

A design approach for environments, products, or services that ensures they are usable by all people, enabling full participation.

Wayfinding

The design of signage, navigation aids, and paths that assist people in orienting themselves and move through physical spaces, ensuring they can find their desired destinations efficiently and safely.

ART GALLERY OF NOVA SCOTIA ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The AGNS Accessibility Advisory Committee is composed of individuals who are:

- Living with a disability.
- Connected with the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia through their role as staff, volunteers, artists, or community members.

Each member has volunteered a two-year commitment to the committee. They played a key role in shaping this plan and will continue to assist the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia in its ongoing efforts to improve accessibility.

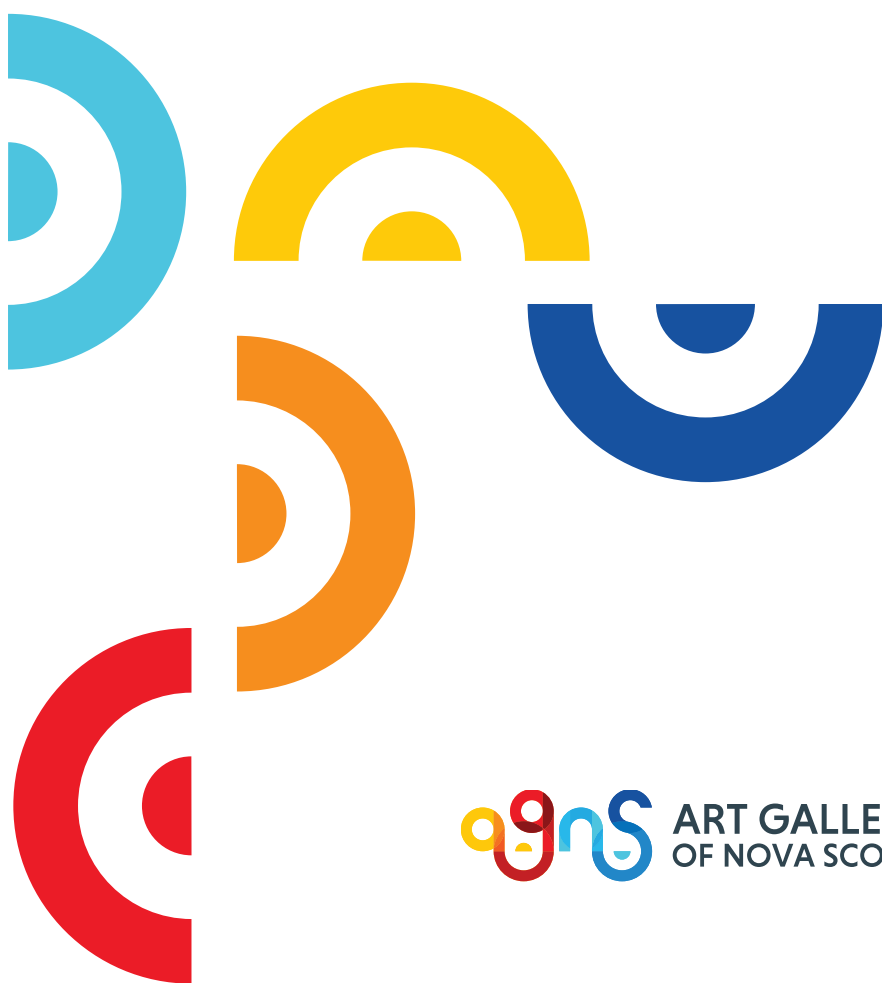
Natalie Downie | Manager, Visitor Experience, Art Gallery of Nova Scotia

Fabiyino Germain-Bajowa | Curatorial Assistant, Art Gallery of Nova Scotia

Aiden Gillis | Indigenous Arts Programmer, Art Gallery of Nova Scotia

Alison Robertson | Visitor Experience Associate, Art Gallery of Nova Scotia

Deborah Vail | Graphic Designer, Art Gallery of Nova Scotia



1723 Hollis Street, Halifax
Nova Scotia B3J 3C8 agns.ca