



Nova Scotia Museum

Accessibility Plan



Nova Scotia Museum Accessibility Plan
March 2023
Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism & Heritage

Photos: *CSS Acadia*, Maritime Museum of the Atlantic
 Wagon Ride, Ross Farm Museum
 Blacksmith Shop, Sherbrooke Village

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Nova Scotia Museum Accessibility Plan

Message from the Nova Scotia Museum

The Nova Scotia Museum and the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage recognize the commitment and excellent work done by the Nova Scotia Museum Accessibility Advisory Committee to develop this plan.

The Nova Scotia Museum and its 28 sites are fully committed to

- developing multi-year accessibility plans
- establishing accessibility advisory committees
- complying with the accessibility standards that public sector bodies must follow

Signed by:

Laura Bennett
Director, Nova Scotia Museum

Stephanie Smith
Executive Director, Archives, Museums and Libraries

Melissa MacKinnon
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Introduction

Nova Scotia has more persons with disabilities than any other province in Canada.

Having a disability can make it difficult for a person to physically enter a museum site and its buildings. The person may also find it difficult to experience the museum's exhibits and collections, or to access information on the museum's website. We need to identify the barriers that keep persons with disabilities from fully participating in society, remove those barriers, and prevent them from happening again.

That's why Nova Scotia passed the Accessibility Act in 2020.

Nova Scotia will be fully accessible when Nova Scotians of all abilities can enjoy everything the province has to offer. Accessibility is a human right and Nova Scotia has a goal of being fully accessible by 2030.

This document outlines what the Nova Scotia Museum is doing and has done in the past to become accessible.

This year we developed an overarching accessibility plan that provides the vision, goals, and commitments that will guide us to become more accessible. Each of our 28 sites will use this plan to develop their own plans based on their own accessibility needs.

Our plan focuses on nine areas:

1. Awareness and Capacity Building
2. Physical Environment
3. Visitor Experience
4. Collections
5. Employment
6. Delivery of Goods and Services
7. Information and Communication
8. Public Transportation
9. Accountability

We know that in order to reach our goals we must always be learning about accessibility and sharing that information with others. We also know we need to listen to persons with disabilities so we can understand their

experiences. To develop this plan, we talked to people who have a disability and/or belong to organizations for persons with disabilities.

Purpose

The Nova Scotia Museum's Accessibility Plan states our main goals and our commitments to accessibility. This plan will guide us as we develop accessibility goals for each of our 28 museum sites.

Vision

All Nova Scotians and visitors will have full and fair access to the sites, exhibits, spaces, collections, services, resources, and programs offered by the Nova Scotia Museum. This includes opportunities to work, volunteer, and contribute to the museums.

We will work with our provincial museum partners to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to accessibility so that visitors of all abilities can experience everything the Nova Scotia Museum has to offer.

Principles

These principles will guide us as we develop accessibility plans for our 28 sites:

Human Rights – We recognize that persons with disabilities often have to deal with barriers that keep them from fully participating in society. These barriers can be physical (such as staircases), attitudinal (such as having certain beliefs about people with disabilities), and more. We believe accessibility is a human right and will make sure our visitor experiences and overall service are accessible.

Inclusion – Our museum sites are places where everyone is welcome to come, learn, spend time with other people, and work. Our visitors, staff, and partners are treated with the same respect and dignity.

Creativity – We are creative, forward thinking, open to change, and flexible in our approach to becoming accessible.

First Voice – We listen to the people and communities we serve and learn from their unique experiences. We encourage and support all the people who work for us, and all those we work with.

Community led – We connect with our diverse communities. We ask for their advice and work with them to understand their needs.

Diversity – We understand there is a full range of disabilities. We also understand that a person's identity and situation in life can overlap with their disability to create new barriers that keep them from participating in society. We bring this understanding to our policies, programs, and services.

AREAS OF FOCUS

We have nine areas we will focus on when we develop accessibility plans for our museum sites:

1. Awareness and Capacity Building
2. Physical Environment
3. Visitor Experience
4. Collections
5. Employment
6. Delivery of Goods and Services
7. Information and Communication
8. Public Transportation
9. Accountability

1. Awareness and Capacity Building

Goal

The Nova Scotia Museum will raise awareness about the importance of access, inclusion, and First Voice. We will increase on our own abilities in these areas. We will make sure our staff, visitors, and the communities we serve have equal and fair access to everything our 28 museum sites have to offer.

Commitments

- We will increase awareness about the importance of accessibility with other museums in Nova Scotia and across Canada.
- We will develop new programming and interpretation on accessibility and disability rights, human rights, diversity, and inclusion.
- We will provide training for our staff on accessibility, diversity, and inclusion and on the needs of all communities we serve.

2. Physical Environment

Goal

The Nova Scotia Museum sites will be welcoming spaces that are accessible for people of all ages and abilities.

Commitments

- We will work with our community partners to create spaces that everyone, including users, visitors, partners, and all staff, find easy to use and move around in.
- We will provide ways for persons with disabilities to fully experience everything the museum has to offer.
- We will ask the Department of Public Works to use universal design practices when they are building new structures or maintaining existing ones at our museum sites.
- We will work with persons who have disabilities to identify barriers at our museum sites and offer solutions to these barriers. These solutions could include new ways of interpreting and designing our collections, exhibits, and public spaces, as well as tools to make the experience more inclusive.

3. Visitor Experience

Goal

The Nova Scotia Museum will create in-person and virtual exhibits, programs, and events that are accessible and inclusive for everyone.

Commitments

- We will ensure all new visitor experiences provide materials in accessible formats. Examples of these formats include plain language, captions on videos, or sign-language interpreters.
- We will improve the accessibility of our existing visitor experiences.
- We will provide new ways for people to physically access our outdoor experiences. These could include trails, wagon rides, and ship tours.
- We will raise awareness within the disability communities and organizations about our accessible in-person and virtual exhibits, programs, and events.
- We will seek input from disability communities and organizations and include First Voice when designing and developing new visitor experiences and offerings at our sites.

4. Collections

Goal

The Nova Scotia Museum will share its provincial collection (where appropriate) with all users, visitors, staff, and partners. This includes artifacts and specimens in the collection.

Commitments

- We will ensure our provincial collection includes stories of persons with disabilities.
- We will share existing collections at our sites in an accessible way.
- We will continue to seek input from persons with disabilities to improve how the stories of our collections are shared and how our provincial collection can be expanded.

5. Employment

Goal

The Nova Scotia Museum will make sure persons with disabilities have equal and fair access to employment opportunities, including internships, student, and volunteer positions.

Commitments

- We will provide coaching and mentoring to help persons with disabilities who are starting their museum careers.
- We will ensure that job training and career development opportunities are available and accessible for employees of all abilities.
- We will have policies and practices that encourage us to select and hire persons with disabilities.
- We will ensure that all job postings and calls for volunteers can be received, understood, and shared with persons of all abilities.
- We will ensure all staff have access to training opportunities that contribute to a respectful and supportive work environment for everyone.

6. Delivery of Goods and Services

Goal

The Nova Scotia Museum will provide a range of goods and services that are accessible, inclusive, and meet the needs of our users and visitors.

Commitments

- We will sell items in our museums and online stores that are created by persons with disabilities and/or organizations that support them.
- We will make sure any new goods and services we develop and deliver at our sites will be accessible.
- We will explore new admission pricing so persons of all abilities can access our goods and services. For example, we could adjust the pricing for persons with disabilities who have a support person.

7. Information and Communication

Goal

The Nova Scotia Museum will ensure that the information we share and provide is accessible to all users, visitors, staff, and partners. We will ensure that people of all abilities can receive, understand, and share the information they need.

Commitments

- We will ensure that all new information and communication can be received, understood, and shared with persons of all abilities.
- We will use technology to create online environments that are fully accessible and easy to navigate. We will share our approach with other museums in Nova Scotia.
- We will explore new technologies that will help us better share our information with our users, visitors, staff, and partners.

8. Public Transportation

Goal

The Nova Scotia Museum will identify existing and/or potential transportation barriers to and from our museum sites and work to minimize or remove them.

Commitments

- We will work with community members, groups, and organizations to understand the needs of, and barriers for, persons with disabilities who use public transportation to access our sites.
- We will encourage other government bodies to develop new programs and measures that improve public transportation to our sites for persons with disabilities.
- We will explore partnership opportunities with community groups, organizations, and companies that offer transportation for persons with disabilities.

9. Accountability

Goal

The Nova Scotia Museum and our 28 sites will measure and evaluate how well our accessibility plans are helping us comply with Nova Scotia's accessibility standards.

Commitments

- We will review and update our operations manual, including its resource materials, to ensure they include accessibility.
- We will work with the Department of Public Works to create an annual action plan that outlines the actions we need to complete to achieve the goals and commitments in our accessibility plan.
- We will report to the Nova Scotia Museum Accessibility Advisory Committee, our department's executive and senior management teams, and the Accessibility Directorate on the progress we have made toward achieving our goals.
- We will create annual reports to publicly highlight and report on the actions each site has taken.
- When possible, we will call for new provincial programs and support to achieve the goals and commitments identified in our accessibility plans.

Our Work Toward Accessibility

Even before we developed this plan, we knew we needed to make changes to improve accessibility for persons with disabilities. Back in 2021, we started gathering feedback from our 28 sites and making the following improvements in these four areas:

Physical Environment

During winter 2021, all of our sites completed accessibility assessments that identified areas in their physical environments that needed to be improved. We found there were six priority areas that needed to be improved in all sites: signage, washrooms, ramps, access to upper levels and basements, power door openers, and interpretation of our exhibits and programs.

Visitor Experience

The Nova Scotia Museum started providing AIRA services at all 28 sites in summer 2021. AIRA is an app that connects blind and low-vision people to live, trained agents. The agent helps the person access and understand visual information, such as signage, displays, and more.

Employment

The Nova Scotia Museum works with many community groups that help youth with disabilities get job experience and skills-development opportunities. These groups include the Easter Seals and Autism Nova Scotia. We have helped several youth gain experience in museum operations, frontline visitor service, and interpretive programming.

Information and Communication

Nova Scotia Museum websites are built in Drupal, a content management system that makes web content accessible. Websites built in Drupal easily work with adaptive technologies such as

- text-to-speech (TTS)
- speech-to-text (STT)
- screen magnification
- browser extensions

Each Nova Scotia Museum website has an accessibility tab that takes the visitor to a description of the accessibility services and features available at that museum site.

Community Engagement

The 28 Nova Scotia Museum sites have invited accessibility advocates and groups to help us identify existing barriers for visitors who

- are blind/have low vision
- have a cognitive and/or sensory disability
- use wheelchairs and mobility devices

In summer 2021, we held an online accessibility survey so people who identified as having a disability could share with us the barriers they experienced when visiting our sites. They also shared their suggestions for how we could improve accessibility. Most of the barriers they told us about related to the grounds and the built environment.

Glossary of Terms

Accessible – Something is accessible when the barriers that prevent people with disabilities from fully participating have been removed. See the definition of “barrier” below.

Adaptive Technology – Versions of existing technology that provide different/accessible ways for a person to interact with the technology. For example, a screen enlarger/magnifier makes type bigger for people with low vision. And voice recognition software allows a person to use a computer using voice commands.

Barrier – Anything that makes it difficult for someone to participate in society. Barriers can be

- physical (such as stairs)
- attitudinal (such as an opinion or belief)
- technological (such as the way technology works)
- systemic (such as hiring practices in an office)

In Nova Scotia, we are working to remove barriers in employment, education, the built environment (see definition below), transportation, the delivery and receipt of goods and services, and information and communications.

Physical Environment – Physical structures (buildings), facilities, and spaces where people live, work, shop, socialize, etc. These include outdoor spaces such as amphitheatres and boatsheds.

Closed Captioning – Text hidden in a television picture that cannot be seen unless it is decoded. Just like subtitles, the decoded text may appear at the bottom of the screen.

Disability – A physical, mental, intellectual, learning, or sensory impairment, including an episodic disability. When a person with a disability encounters a barrier, they are unable to fully and effectively participate in society.

Equality / Equity (equitable) – Equality means everyone is treated the same. Equity means everyone is treated fairly, based on their needs and abilities.

First Voice – First Voice refers to the knowledge held by persons who have

first-hand experience with an issue. In the case of disabilities, this means listening to the people who have a disability and have experienced barriers because of it. In the past, the experiences of persons with disabilities were typically undervalued and underrepresented.

Inclusive – To welcome, value, and respect all people.

Nova Scotia Museum – A collection of historic houses, villages, mills, and thematic museums that tell the stories of people and events that shaped the cultural and natural heritage of Nova Scotia. The 28 sites that make up the Nova Scotia Museum are all owned and operated by the province or in partnership with not-for-profit societies and commissions.

Provincial Collection – The artifacts and specimens under the care of the Province of Nova Scotia.

Standard – A standard is the quality or measure that serves as the basis to which others must or should conform.

Staff – All paid and unpaid staff employed at our museums, including volunteers, board members, interns, students, curator emeritus, and research associates.

Site – The physical environment including buildings, grounds, gardens and landscape features, trails, roads, pathways, and signage.

Universal Design – The design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaption or specialized design (Ronald Mace, 1988).

Visitor Experience – The ways in which museums engage with their audiences and provide access to their collections, sites, and buildings. This includes in-person and virtual exhibits, tours and demonstrations, storytelling, theatre, talks and lectures, workshops, activity sheets and discovery stations, interactions with artifacts, specimens, buildings and landscapes, websites, social media, and online content.

References

Nova Scotia Accessibility Act

Nova Scotia Public Libraries Accessibility Framework

Nova Scotia Accessible Events Guide

Town of Wolfville Accessibility Plan

Appendix A: Nova Scotia Museum Accessibility Advisory Committee

The Nova Scotia Museum Accessibility Advisory Committee is made up of people who are

- living with a disability
- from an organization that represents people with disabilities
- associated with a Nova Scotia Museum site

Each member volunteered to serve on this committee for three years. They played an important role in creating this plan and will continue to help the Nova Scotia Museum become more accessible.

Laura Bennett	Committee Sponsor and Director, Nova Scotia Museum
Kevin Barrett	Committee Co-chair and Coordinator, Heritage Property Program
Janet Maltby	Committee Co-chair and Manager, Rural Sites, Nova Scotia Museum
Amy Coleman	Committee Coordinator and Curator of Visitor Experience, Maritime Museum of the Atlantic
Rodney Chaisson	Executive Director, Baile nan Gàidheal / Highland Village
Andrea Davis	Executive Director, Black Loyalist Heritage Centre
Shauna Ferrar	Client Service Supervisor, Dartmouth Adult Services Centre Industries
Michelle Hebert	Manager, Employee and Public Engagement, Equity and Engagement Division, Department of Health and Wellness
Michael Huggins	Site Manager, Haliburton House and Shand House Museums

Kiera Sparks Lucas	Advocate, Blogger, and Nova Scotia Museum Volunteer
Ashleigh Pringle	Policy Analyst, Office of Equity and Anti-Racism Initiatives
Dar Wournell	President, Halifax Chapter, Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians and Vice President, Guide Dog Users of Canada

Appendix B: Terms of Reference: Nova Scotia Museum Accessibility Advisory Committee

Purpose

The purpose of the Accessibility Advisory Committee is to advise the Nova Scotia Museum on how we can identify, prevent, and eliminate barriers that keep people with disabilities from fully participating in our programs, services, initiatives, and facilities. The committee plays an important role in helping us become accessible and meet our responsibilities under Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act.

Role

The Accessibility Advisory Committee does the following:

- 1) They advise us on how to prepare our accessibility plan, as well as how to put it into action and make sure it is working. According to the Accessibility Act, our plan must include these three items:
 - a) A report on the actions we have taken and will take to identify, remove, and prevent barriers.
 - b) A way to measure how the actions we take as part of this plan improve accessibility. These actions include policies, programs, practices, and services, as well as any new acts or by-laws we develop.
 - (c) Any other necessary information the act asks for.
- 2) They review and update the accessibility plan at least every three years.
- 3) They meet with stakeholders to talk about accessibility.
- 4) They advise us on how accessible our existing and proposed services and facilities are.
- 5) They recommend ways we can achieve the goals in our accessibility plan.
- 6) They review information from staff and senior leadership, and make recommendations on that information when asked to.
- 7) They help ensure we are following federal and provincial government rules and regulations.

Who Is on the Committee and How Long They Serve

The Accessibility Advisory Committee must have 10 members.

At least half of those members must be people who have disabilities or are from an organization that represents people with disabilities.

Members are on the committee for three years.

The committee must elect someone to serve as chair every year.

Meetings

The committee must meet at least four times a year, or as often as necessary to do their job.

A minimum number of five members must show up in order for a meeting of the committee to be considered valid.

The committee can establish working groups to explore specific issues related to the accessibility plan or other responsibilities of the committee. A working group can include members who are not Advisory Committee members, however, the chair of a working group must be a member of the Accessibility Advisory Committee.

Appendix C: Nova Scotia Museum Sites

Baile nan Gàidheal / Highland Village
Balmoral Grist Mill
Barrington Woolen Mill Museum
Black Loyalist Heritage Centre
Cossit House Museum
Dory Shop Museum
Firefighters' Museum of Nova Scotia
Fisheries Museum of the Atlantic
Fisherman's Life Museum
Fundy Geological Museum
Haliburton House Museum
Lawrence House Museum
Le Village historique acadien de la Nouvelle-Écosse / Historic Acadian Village of NS
Maritime Museum of the Atlantic
McCulloch House Museum
Museum of Industry
Museum of Natural History
North Hills Museum
Old Meeting House
Perkins House Museum
Prescott House Museum
Ross Farm Museum
Ross Thomson House

Shand House Museum

Sherbrooke Village Museum

Sutherland Steam Mill

Uniacke Estate Museum Park

Wile Carding Mill Museum

Appendix D: Nova Scotia Museum Operating Partners

Annapolis Heritage Society
Black Loyalist Heritage Society
Bridgewater Museum Commission
Cape Sable Historical Society
Cumberland Geological Society
Firefighters Museum Society
Le Village historique acadien de la Nouvelle-Écosse
Lunenburg Marine Museum Society
New Ross District Museum Society
Nova Scotia Highland Village Society
Old Sydney Society
Queens County Historical Society
Shelburne Historical Society
Sherbrooke Village Restoration Commission
Pictou County Genealogy and Heritage Society