



Art Gallery of Nova Scotia Accessibility Plan 2026-29



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Image description cover: A small group of adults in an exhibition space gathered around an older visitor using a wheelchair, with framed artworks displayed on the walls behind them.

Image description page 3: An older visitor viewed from behind, using a mobility aid for support, looks at a large abstract painting.



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 exhibitions, or finding information online due to physical, informational, and other barriers. 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 and maintain a welcoming and accessible space for 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 Gallery.





ARTIST'S STATEMENT: The work is a response to the question of what it means to be human in a world of constant change and uncertainty. It explores the themes of identity, memory, and the human condition.



Vision

The Art Gallery of Nova Scotia is dedicated to making sure that people of all abilities 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, reduce, and prevent barriers to participation so that 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 identify, reduce, and prevent barriers to accessibility to enhance inclusion and support accessible experiences across our spaces and programs.

Accessibility as a Human Right

Everyone has the right to access and enjoy what the AGNS offers. We are committed to identifying and reducing barriers to increase equitable access.

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 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 intersectionality in our policies and practices.

Innovation and Adaptability

We approach accessibility with creativity and flexibility, using resourceful solutions to support inclusive experiences across our spaces and services.

Collaboration with Community

Accessibility is a shared responsibility. We work with diverse community groups, organizations, and individuals to help inform our approach and respond to the needs of those we serve. We welcome feedback to support ongoing learning and improvement.

Accessibility Progress to Date

The Art Gallery of Nova Scotia (AGNS) has implemented various initiatives to improve accessibility for people with disabilities.

Analyze the Visitor Journey

Consultations were completed with people with a variety of lived experiences with disability to analyze the visitor journey throughout the Gallery. The consultations identified challenges throughout the visitor experience for people with disabilities, from arrival at the Gallery to exploring exhibitions.

Review Existing Orientation Tools

A review of existing orientation and navigation tools is underway to evaluate their effectiveness and accessibility and to determine areas of focus to improve orientation tools for visitors with a variety of lived experiences.

Inclusive Group Visitation Process

The group visitation intake process was updated to include questions about accessibility needs, helping staff understand and consider the requirements of visiting groups to support a more accessible experience.

Exhibition Design Consultation

External accessibility consultants and visitors with a variety of lived experiences with disability were engaged and identified gaps in accessibility within current exhibition spaces and provided feedback to improve future exhibition designs.

Program Accessibility Audit

An accessibility audit was completed of the current AGNS programs as part of a wider program review by external consultants. This audit highlighted areas of success, identified gaps in accessibility, and established areas for improvement within current programming.

Continuing Partner Programs

The AGNS partners with provincial organizations that represent people with disabilities to deliver accessible programming. This includes the Artful Afternoon program with the Alzheimer Society of Nova Scotia and the Autism Arts and Employment Works programs with Autism Nova Scotia.

Information & Communication

The AGNS website and digital platforms include accessibility features to support visitors with disabilities. Images shared on the website and social media platforms include alt text to support visitors who use screen readers, and closed captions are included on video content where possible. The current AGNS website, launched in 2023, was designed to meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) at the time of launch and includes accessibility information to help visitors plan their trip to the Gallery.

Interpretive Resources

The AGNS provides American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation for select public programs and events to improve access for people who are deaf, as well as others who use ASL.

Accessibility Advisory Committee Development

The Accessibility Advisory Committee was strengthened through expanded membership including people representing a variety of lived experiences. This includes people with disabilities and representatives from accessibility organizations in the community. Terms of reference were also developed and ratified to guide the committee's role and work.

Staff Training Audit

An audit of current staff accessibility training is underway to identify gaps and areas of improvement within the training programs to improve accessibility training for AGNS staff.

Built Environment Accessibility Audit

A comprehensive accessibility audit of the AGNS built environment and exhibition spaces was completed by external accessibility consultants. This review identified barriers to accessibility for people with a variety of disabilities and established areas for improvement throughout the Gallery.

What We Heard

This Accessibility Plan reflects what we heard from people living with disabilities. We received input from lived-experience consultations, members of the Accessibility Advisory Committee, and visitors with disabilities.

Participants shared that visits to the AGNS can include meaningful moments of ease and enjoyment. Wide aisles in many exhibition areas and open, welcoming spaces were noted as supporting comfortable movement and allowing visitors to focus on the art and the overall Gallery experience.

Many spaces offer good access, including the Gallery Shop where appropriate lighting levels and clear price tags support some accessible shopping experiences. The Maud Lewis Gallery was also consistently identified as a particularly meaningful experience and often carries strong emotional significance for visitors.

At the same time, participants noted that accessibility can feel inconsistent throughout the building, depending on a person's lived experience. Some visitors shared that orientation upon arrival can require additional effort, particularly when information is shared verbally or when wayfinding supports do not work well for all visitors.

Participants also described that certain building features, such as washrooms, exhibitions, and circulation routes, may require additional effort for some visitors. In these areas, elements such as door operation, maneuvering space, seating availability, and the layout of fixtures and equipment can influence comfort and ease of experience.

Overall, the feedback suggests that while many aspects of the Gallery support positive and meaningful visits, some visitors encounter areas where accessibility is less consistent. These insights are greatly appreciated and will help guide ongoing efforts to strengthen inclusive access and improve the overall Gallery experience for visitors over time.

Areas of Focus

This Accessibility Plan guides the AGNS in identifying priorities, setting goals, and implementing actions to reduce barriers and enhance inclusion. The Plan was informed by consultation with people with disabilities, whose perspectives helped shape the goals and commitments outlined in the Plan.

This Plan focuses on five (5) areas:

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

By focusing on these key areas, we aim to improve accessibility and support meaningful participation in AGNS services, including our exhibitions, programs, and visitor materials. Each section of this Plan outlines goals and commitments to help create a more accessible and inclusive environment.

1

Visitor Experience

1.1 Visitor Welcome and Resources

Goal

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

Commitments

Orientation

- Enhance the orientation experience for visitors as they arrive at the Gallery by providing information in formats that cater to a variety of needs and experiences

Wayfinding

- Update signage and wayfinding tools throughout the Gallery to improve navigation for visitors
- Incorporate accessibility standards and best practices when developing new signage and wayfinding tools
- Consider physical, sensory, and cognitive disabilities when updating signage and wayfinding tools to reduce the risk of creating new barriers

Ongoing Improvement

- Continue to test and refine orientation resources so they remain effective and accessible

Visitor Feedback

- Establish a feedback process to offer the opportunity for visitors to provide feedback through a variety of formats
- Collect and analyze feedback from visitors with disabilities to guide continuous improvement of orientation tools and resources based on evolving visitor needs and preferences

Sensory-Friendly Resources

- Develop sensory resources to support visitors with diverse sensory needs, offering tools and materials that help enhance comfort and engagement during gallery visits

1.2 Exhibitions

Goal

To design inclusive exhibitions with an ongoing commitment to reducing barriers to accessibility, while supporting meaningful engagement for visitors with disabilities.

Commitments

Physical Accessibility

- Design exhibition spaces in consideration of physical barriers to provide exhibitions that are accessible for people with disabilities including those using mobility and access aids and other assistive equipment

Informational Accessibility

- Design visual and textual elements supporting exhibition interpretation to enhance readability, clarity, and accessibility
- Consider opportunities to provide alternate formats and multi-sensory features for exhibition content to support a wider range of audiences

Multi-Sensory Considerations

- Consider opportunities to collaborate with disability advocates, artists, and experts to co-develop exhibitions that include multi-sensory features that enable individuals to engage through a variety of senses

Artist Representation

- Identify opportunities within the exhibition strategy to increase representation of artists with disabilities

Visitor Input

- Actively gather input from visitors through feedback and consultation to better understand the needs, expectations, and experiences of visitors of all abilities, using this to inform future exhibition design

Exhibition Design Guidelines

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

1.3 Programs

Goal

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

Commitments

Program Guidelines

- Enhance accessibility for AGNS programs through the development of program accessibility guidelines which will consider accommodations, alternate formats, and flexibility in program delivery to support full participation for attendees

Multi-Sensory Considerations

- Explore opportunities to incorporate multi-sensory elements into programs to enhance engagement for a wide range of visitors. These may include tactile, auditory, and interactive components contributing to a more accessible experience

Low-Sensory Considerations

- Explore opportunities to provide sensory-friendly resources and experiences within AGNS programs to support visitors with diverse sensory needs

Co-Designed Programs

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

1.4 Collections

Goal

To strengthen inclusive access to the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia's permanent collection and support opportunities to increase representation of artists with disabilities within the permanent collection.

Commitments

Permanent Collection

- Explore ways to strengthen inclusive access to the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia's permanent collection of art through online collection resources and in-person research visits

Artist Representation

- Consider opportunities to increase representation of artists with disabilities within the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia's permanent collection

2 Information and Communication

Goal

To ensure that communication, online platforms, and physical materials are accessible, providing clear, inclusive, and understandable information for visitors.

Commitments

Accessible Formats

- Design communication materials in consideration of informational barriers to provide materials that are accessible for a wide range of visitors
- Prioritize clear and easy-to-read brand language to improve accessibility for diverse audiences

Accessible Communication Standards

- Begin auditing current communication materials to identify and address barriers to accessibility for a variety of visitors
- Enhance accessibility for communications through the development of accessible communication guidelines to provide materials across AGNS platforms that are accessible for users with diverse needs and experiences

Digital Content

- Begin auditing the AGNS website to identify and address barriers to accessibility for a variety of visitors
- Design digital content in consideration of technological and informational barriers to provide a more accessible online experience for visitors with diverse needs and experiences

Community Driven Feedback

- Integrate feedback from visitors with disabilities into communication strategies to effectively meet the diverse needs of visitors

3

Awareness & Capacity Building

Goal

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

Commitments

Staff Awareness

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

Comprehensive Training

- Develop and implement training to strengthen staff knowledge of accessibility and inclusive practices, enabling effective support for visitors with diverse access requirements

Professional Development

- Consider opportunities for professional development to help AGNS staff strengthen their understanding of accessibility and inclusive practices across Gallery spaces and programs

Maintain Advisory Committee Capacity

- Maintain the capacity of the Accessibility Advisory Committee through sustained membership and clearly defined roles and responsibilities

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

- Promote accessible and inclusive practices in developing and sharing job postings, calls for volunteers, and internship opportunities to support a broad range of applicants

Accessible Hiring Practices

- Develop and implement hiring policies and practices that support the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in employment, volunteer, and internship roles

Workplace Accommodations

- Provide reasonable accommodations that enable employees, volunteers, and interns with disabilities to perform their roles effectively and access necessary support

Professional Development

- Promote accessible training, career development, and professional growth opportunities for employees, volunteers, and interns

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 visitors.

Commitments

Built Environment Improvements

- Collaborate with the Nova Scotia Department of Public Works (building owner and operator) to advance accessibility improvements within Gallery spaces
- Continue addressing identified accessibility improvements to enhance access for a variety of visitors as budget allows
- Identify and apply for accessibility-focused grants and funding to complete accessibility improvements in Gallery spaces

Universal Design Integration

- Support the application of universal design principles in construction projects and the ongoing maintenance of existing Gallery spaces

Community Engagement

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

Conclusion

The Art Gallery of Nova Scotia (AGNS) will continue to strive to create a welcoming and accessible Gallery experience for visitors, staff, and volunteers through the implementation of this Plan. We are grateful for the input from people living with disabilities, whose perspectives helped shape this Plan. By following the goals and commitments outlined here, AGNS aims to reduce barriers, enhance inclusion, and support meaningful participation across our spaces, programs, and services.



Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

Accessibility

The ability for people with disabilities to independently and fully participate in society. It includes the design of products, services, and environments in ways that recognize and account for a wide range of disabilities.

Audit

A systematic review conducted to evaluate, assess, or verify compliance, performance, or processes.

Barrier

Anything that prevents a person from fully and equally participating in society. This includes physical or architectural, technological, attitudinal, information or communications, and systemic or organizational barriers.

Built Environment

Any human-made space in which people live, work, learn, and play. This includes buildings, rights-of-way, and outdoor spaces.

Disability

Any condition that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders an individual from fully and equally participating in society. This includes physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication, or sensory impairments, including episodic disabilities.

Multi-Sensory Design

The intentional design of environments, products, or services that engage multiple senses simultaneously to engage individuals with diverse abilities.

Universal Design

A design approach of seven principles that is applied to environments, products, or services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaption or specialized design.

Wayfinding

The design of navigation systems such as signage, tactile cues, sounds, and layouts to help all people independently find their way in built environments.

Appendix B: AGNS Accessibility Advisory Committee

The Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) advises the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia (AGNS) on identifying, preventing, and removing barriers for people with disabilities. The committee supports the development and implementation of the AGNS Accessibility Plan and helps guide the Gallery's work to meet its obligations under the Nova Scotia Accessibility Act.

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

- Living with a disability
- Members of organizations that represent people with disabilities
- Connected with the AGNS 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 AGNS in its ongoing efforts to improve accessibility.

Appendix C: Snow and Ice Control Plan

The Art Gallery of Nova Scotia (AGNS) maintains a Snow and Ice Control Plan to manage winter conditions around the Gallery. The plan outlines measures to help ensure safe, accessible, and unobstructed access to building entrances for visitors, staff, and volunteers throughout the winter season.

Plan Overview

- Monitor winter weather conditions and potential hazards
- Remove snow and ice during and after weather events
- Clear sidewalks, stairs, and entrances
- Apply salt or other materials to reduce icy conditions
- Conduct regular checks to ensure entrances remain free of snow, ice, or other weather-related obstructions (temporary measures may be implemented if immediate clearing is not possible)
- Prioritize clearing of accessible routes and the primary entrance in the Courtyard
- Maintain an emergency salt supply on site
- Document and report winter hazards and maintenance actions

Operational Decisions During Severe Weather

During severe weather events, AGNS may delay opening, close early, or remain closed to ensure the safety of visitors, staff, and volunteers.

Communication

When weather conditions affect access or operating hours:

- Updates are shared on the AGNS website and social media platforms
- On-site signage is posted where appropriate
- Telephone messages are updated to reflect changes to opening hours or access conditions
- Staff are informed and available to assist visitors as needed

Appendix D: Plan for Accessible Entrance(s)

The Art Gallery of Nova Scotia (AGNS) is committed to ensuring that entrances remain free of physical obstructions, allowing safe and independent access for visitors, staff, and volunteers. This includes impassable barriers on or above pathways that prevent people from using an entrance.

The AGNS has three (3) entrances including two (2) public entrances at the Level 1 South Building and one (1) security entrance at the Lower Level. The primary public entrance is located in the Courtyard between Hollis Street and Bedford Row and provides direct access to the Lobby. This Courtyard entrance is typically the most accessible for visitors with wide doorways and clear approach.

Keeping Entrances Free of Obstructions

The Art Gallery of Nova Scotia will take proactive steps to keep all entrances, and their approach routes, clear of physical obstructions. This includes:

- Regular monitoring of entrances, paths, and doors during operating hours
- Ensuring snow, ice, debris, furniture, signage, deliveries, or temporary installations do not obstruct access
- Coordinating with staff, contractors, and vendors to prevent unplanned barriers at entrances

Responding to Obstructions

When a physical obstruction is identified:

- The AGNS will remove the obstruction as quickly as possible
- If immediate removal is not feasible, staff will implement temporary measures to maintain access where possible
- An alternate accessible entrance will be identified and supported by clear wayfinding and staff assistance, when required

Communication and Notice

When an accessible entrance is temporarily unavailable due to maintenance, construction, or other unavoidable circumstances, the AGNS will:

- Provide advance notice whenever possible through the Gallery's website and on-site signage
- Clearly indicate the location of alternate accessible entrances
- Ensure front of house staff are informed and able to assist visitors

