



## 2024 Accessibility Progress Report

### 1. General

#### 1.1 Summary

The actions identified in the Canada Council's [2023–2025 Accessibility Plan](#) demonstrate the Council's commitment to a vibrant, sustainable, diverse and accessible arts sector. This report highlights the progress made over the past 12 months against the actions identified in the Council's Accessibility Plan.

#### 1.2 Contact information

While accessibility is a shared responsibility at the Council, the following play a more active or leadership role:

- [Accessibility Governance Committee](#)

The Accessibility Governance Committee—a senior-level committee—provides strategic oversight and direction in the development and implementation of the Council's accessibility plan with support from an Accessibility Advisory Group (refer to Section 3.1 on the role of the Accessibility Advisory Group).

The Accessibility Governance Committee makes recommendations to the Director and CEO and to the Senior Management Committee (SMC) on any matters relating to accessibility. The committee is composed of the following:

- Director General, Communications and Arts Engagement (Chair)
- Director, Human Resources and Organizational Development
- Director, Arts Promotion
- Director, Strategic Policy and Planning
- Director, Communications
- Director, Finance
- Director, Granting Program Operations
- Director, Corporate Technology Solutions
- Director, Creating, Knowing and Sharing: The Arts and Cultures of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples
- Manager, Administrative and Security Services and Deputy Chief Security Officer

- [Equity, Access and Outreach team](#)

The Equity, Access and Outreach team works to advance the guiding principles of equity, diversity, inclusion and access to support and to advance diversity within the arts

sector in Canada and, through the sector, within the general public. The manager of the Equity, Access and Outreach team and the Disability Arts Officer guide, contribute to, and coordinate the development and implementation of the Council's Deaf and disability arts strategies.

### 1.3 Contact information and feedback process

Feedback about accessibility at the Council and about this report is welcomed from all employees and members of the public. Feedback can be sent anonymously. The Council is committed to reviewing and addressing all barriers identified. The feedback received is collected and kept by the Officer, Strategic Policy and Planning section.

Feedback can be provided to the Officer in the following ways:

By email: [feedback@canadacouncil.ca](mailto:feedback@canadacouncil.ca)

By phone: 1-800-263-5588 (toll-free), extension 5089

By mail:

Public Feedback

Canada Council for the Arts

P.O. box 1047

Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5V8

Information on [how to submit feedback](#) is also available on the Council's public website, as well as on the Council's intranet site.

### 1.4 Alternate formats

Alternate formats of this report and a description of the feedback process can be requested by contacting:

Officer, Strategic Policy and Planning section

Email: [feedback@canadacouncil.ca](mailto:feedback@canadacouncil.ca)

Phone: 1-800-566-4414 (toll-free), extension 5089

Mail: P.O. box 1047, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5V8

The Council commits to providing the following alternate formats within 15 business days of receiving a request:

- Print
- Large print (increased font size)
- Electronic format (text that an electronic device designed for people with disabilities can read)

The Council commits to providing the following alternate formats within 45 business days of receiving a request:

- Braille (a writing system whereby people read by feeling raised dots with their fingertips)

- audio (a recording of someone reading the text out loud)

## 1.5 Definitions

The following definitions apply throughout this report:

**Deaf communities:** Refers to people with hearing loss or who are hard of hearing, oral-deaf, deaf-blind and late-deafened, many of whom identify as culturally Deaf, i.e., as people sharing distinct sign languages, traditions, histories and values.

**Disability communities:** Refers to people living with physical or intellectual disabilities, mental or chronic illness, or neurodivergence who experience discrimination and disadvantage. Disabilities can be long-term, temporary or fluctuating.

**Barrier:** Refers to anything that might hinder full and equal participation by people living with disabilities. Barriers can be architectural, technological, attitudinal, based on information or communications, or the result of a policy or procedure.

**Accessibility:** Refers to the design of products, devices, services, environments, technologies, policies and rules in a way that allows all people, including people living with a variety of disabilities, to access them.

## 2. Areas described in Section 5 of the Accessible Canada Act (ACA)

### 2.1 Built environment

Where we are and what we have done

| Commitment   | Status            |
|--|-------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By the end of 2023, the Council will update its written emergency evacuation policy to outline processes specific to people with disabilities.</li> </ul> | Completed in 2023 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By the end of 2023, the Council will develop and distribute communications products on the accessibility of its offices.</li> </ul>                       | Completed in 2023 |

### 2.2 Employment

Where we are and what we have done

| Commitment  | Status      |
|---|-------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By the end of 2024, the Council will create a strategy to hire and retain more people who have disabilities, in consultation with people who have disabilities.</li> </ul> | In progress |

|   |                   |
|---|-------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As we roll out our new portal for job application management and tracking, we will collect feedback about the new system from people with disabilities and make accessibility-related improvements to the system as well as to related processes and tools.</li> </ul> | Ongoing           |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Also, as part of the roll-out, we will conduct a review of the user experience of applying for a job at the Council and make improvements to that experience based on the results of the review.</li> </ul>  | In progress       |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>By the end of 2023, we will review processes for employees and potential employees to self-identify as having a disability and be clear on why we are collecting this information and how it will be used.</li> </ul>  | Completed in 2023 |

The Council retained the services of a third-party firm to design, develop, analyze and report on a questionnaire to assess the user experience of its talent acquisition system and job application process. Both external and internal job applicants from the past six months will be invited to provide feedback. The data gathered from the survey will be used to refine the strategy for hiring and retaining more people with disabilities as part of the Council’s overall Talent Attraction and Acquisition Strategy.<sup>1</sup>

The Council created a Wellness and Inclusion Advisor position. The wellness and inclusion advisor provides employees with a full range of services related to the wellness program, disability management (including gradual return to work), accommodation and accessibility.

**2.3 Information and communication technologies (ICT)**

**Where we are and what we have done**

| Commitment  | Status      |
|---|-------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>By the end of 2025, the Council will conduct an accessibility audit of its public website and any IT systems that are not scheduled for replacement in the next three years. The audit will pay special attention to technical accessibility requirements and to the ease of the end user’s experience and navigation throughout Council websites. It will also include the assessment and approval of new technology related to the submission and review of grant applications.</li> </ul> | In progress |

Accessibility remains a crucial requirement for all new and existing solutions that are retained by the Council for more than three years. It has been identified as a key requirement for all new development on the Council’s granting platform where an accessibility conformance evaluation document was created to ensure a standardized approach to:

<sup>1</sup> In 2024, the representation of people living with disabilities on the Council’s workforce was 18.64%, which is significantly higher than the national labour availability rate of 9.20%.

- WCAG 2.2 conformance
- Testing
- Issue resolution
- Project team responsibilities

To enhance its online presence, the Council has partnered with a software-as-a-service company which offers a range of solutions designed to identify issues impacting content quality, accessibility, search engine optimization, and other factors.

These initiatives, among others, will ensure that the Council is well-positioned for the accessibility audit of its digital resources.

## 2.4 Communications, other than ICT

### Where we are and what we have done

| Commitment  | Status      |
|---|-------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By the end of 2024, the Council will develop guidelines for accessibility at internal (employees only) and public meetings. The guidelines will cover both virtual and in-person meetings. Once the guidelines are developed, the Council will provide employees with training on how to action them.</li> </ul> | In progress |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By the end of 2025, the Council will make sure that employees who write public documents for the Council receive training on how to write in plain language.</li> </ul>  | In progress |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By the end of 2024, the Council will develop and distribute guidelines on how to create accessible online content and documents. Employees who create online content will be informed of the guidelines and will be provided with training, as required.</li> </ul>  | Completed   |

The Council developed a guide for creating accessible digital content. The guide was designed to introduce Council employees to the essentials of developing accessible digital products and services and ensure equal access for people with disabilities. The guide, which reflects best practices, was made available to all Council employees and supplemented with training to encourage its adoption.

A working group has been struck to develop guidelines for accessibility at internal and public meetings. Work continues to ensure the guide reflects the Council’s accessibility standards. Implementation and training will be launched over the coming months.

The Council ensures that all PDF files meant for public dissemination go through an accessibility check with an outside firm.

## 2.5 The procurement of goods, services and facilities

### Where we are and what we have done

| Commitment   | Status      |
|--|-------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>By the end of 2025, the Council will complete a review of its procurement processes and make any necessary changes. During the review, we the Council will look for opportunities to increase the accessibility of the products and services we buy. For example, we may add more instructions about accessibility into our procurement policy and checklists.</li></ul> | In progress |

The Council's Procurement Policy was updated in January 2024. Accessibility is emphasized in the sections regarding requirements setting. Standard clauses are being included in Council contract terms and conditions with suppliers to ensure that deliverables meet the Council's accessibility standards.

## 2.6 The design and delivery of programs and services

### Where we are and what we have done

| Commitment  | Status      |
|---|-------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>By the end of 2025, the Council will conduct a detailed review of its delivery model for grants and prizes. The goal of the review is to make the Council and its activities more accessible to applicants. During the review, we plan to focus strongly on the experience of Deaf and disability artists when they apply for grants and participate in our programs. We will conduct the review, taking into consideration the needs of artists who are Deaf or have disabilities, and we plan to make improvements to our delivery model based on the feedback we receive. This will include:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a review of the language and text that we use to describe our programs and services;</li><li>the improvement of customer service provided during the grant and prize application process; and</li><li>reviews for our Application Assistance mechanism and Access Support program.</li></ul></li></ul> | In progress |

The Council has undertaken the following equity- and accessibility-related initiatives:

The Council is developing common granting processes across all of its Arts Granting Programs (AGP). Based on initial feedback from conversations with the Deaf and disability arts community, the Council has also initiated changes to the language used in forms and guidelines. These include:

- simplification;

- plain language; and
- inclusive language.

As part of its work on the funding model and in response to feedback received through reports, the community, and employees, the Council has sought to explore how to increase accessibility to its funding components and prizes. To accomplish this, the Council is working on improving the efficacy of its delivery of Application Assistance and Access Support.

Application Assistance provides accommodation to individual applicants or lead applicants of a group who are Deaf or hard of hearing, have a disability, are living with a mental illness, are older or are Indigenous and face significant language, geographic and/or cultural barriers when applying for grants. There are three different categories of Application Assistance:

- General Assistance is intended to support applicants and nominators who face barriers with the writing process directly due to a physical or learning disability, being partially sighted or blind, or living with mental illness.
- Sign Language Interpretation and Translation is intended for applicants and nominators who self-identify as being Deaf and require support for sign language interpretation and translation.
- Indigenous language translation into written English or French is intended to support applicants and nominators writing an application in an Indigenous language.

Access Support funding supports individual applicants who self-identify as Deaf, having disabilities or living with mental illness, as well as groups and organizations that dedicate the majority of their resources to supporting these applicants. This supplementary grant provides a contribution towards costs for specific services and supports required to carry out a project funded through a Canada Council program.

To further increase accessibility to funding programs, the process for requesting Application Assistance and Access Support will be simplified. The assessment process will be more streamlined and efficient for applicants.

To support these initiatives further, the Council has been developing an outreach framework to coordinate and prioritize communities in which the Council holds outreach and information sessions. Deaf and disability artists, groups and organizations are prioritized in this framework. It provides a forum for the Council to connect with this community and share information about its access offerings.

The Council is also exploring alternative application methods, such as video and/or audio applications. This will support applicants who face writing or language barriers when trying to access grants and prizes, such as applicants from Deaf communities.

The Canadian Commission for UNESCO (CCUNESCO) is developing its Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities with the aim of encouraging communities to establish policies to combat racism, discrimination and intolerance. The Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities

invites all municipalities in Canada to take concrete steps to build a barrier-free society in which everyone has equal opportunities to participate in its economic, political, social, cultural and recreational life and reach their full potential. More than 115 municipalities across Canada are now members of this coalition, committed to building open and inclusive societies.

## 2.7 Transportation

The Council does not run any transportation services; therefore, it has not developed any goals or actions in this area.

## 3. Consultations

The Council continues to consult people who are Deaf or are living with disabilities in all aspects of the implementation of its accessibility plan and other major projects.

### 3.1 Consultations with employees who have disabilities

The Council created an Accessibility Advisory Group to provide a forum for employees to foster dialogue, share information and ideas, and propose solutions to help identify, address and prevent barriers in the Council's programs, services, systems and operations. The group is made up of people who have self-identified as Deaf or living with a disability, have had experience with a Deaf person or a person living with a disability, or work with artists and arts organizations from the Deaf and disability community.

The group's objective is to help the Council become more open and equitable through an informed dialogue on accessibility. The group reports to and works in collaboration with the Accessibility Governance Committee (listed in Section 1.2, Contact Information). The intent is to obtain input from employees who have identified as living with a disability or who have first-hand experience in dealing with a disability.

The Accessibility Advisory Group:

- provides feedback to the Accessibility Governance Committee on the progress against the Council's Accessibility Plan; and
- contributes to employee engagement activities on topics related to accessibility.

The advice and comments provided by the Accessibility Advisory Group have been integrated into this progress report.

### 3.2 Consultations with stakeholders and people who are Deaf or living with disabilities

Consultations with stakeholders and people who are Deaf or living with disabilities are carried out according to the actions and timelines identified in the Council's Accessibility Plan.

A special group will be convened to test alternate application formats for Deaf applicants to apply for funding at the Council.



## 4. Feedback

Comments, questions and complaints received between January and December 2024 related to:

- having an audio version of program guidelines and application forms for people with a visual disability who do not use screen readers;
- the challenges posed by the paper-based registration form, which is used in one of the Council's programs;
- the time and complexity of the payment process for artists living with disabilities and the maximum amount offered through Application Assistance;
- the challenge of receiving a result letter in response to a grant application as a PDF file, which is not compatible with a screen reader;
- the challenges of using group webinars to provide feedback on applications for Deaf and disability arts applicants;
- a request for an alternate format of the Council's arts community pulse survey on the current state of the sector across Canada; and
- the challenges pertaining to meeting room set-ups for sign language interpreters.

Short-term solutions were found to address the concerns raised. Longer term solutions are being identified, and further actions may be included in the next accessibility plan.

## 5. What the Council has learned

Through analysis and the feedback received, the Council has gained a deeper understanding of the barriers experienced by the community and identified the following actions for consideration as part of future updates to the Accessibility Plan:

- analyze, in greater depth, the possible barriers faced by people with visual disabilities as they relate to the accessibility of the Council's platforms, programs and information. This may include exploring the feasibility of additional supports for those who do not use screen readers, as well as producing accessible alternative versions of application and registration forms;
- review the format of the result letters in response to grant applications to ensure that they are compatible with a screen reader;
- consider the best mechanism and/or platforms to provide feedback on applications for Deaf and disability arts applicants;
- review the set-up in meeting rooms at the Council's offices against the new accessible meeting guidelines to make it more accessible for sign language interpreters;
- determine how to use data retrieved for employment and future employment in the context of the *Privacy Act*;
- consider making creating accessible content mandatory training for all Council employees; and
- apply an equity/accessibility lens to procurement processes by ensuring efforts are made to hire service providers with disabilities and/or obtain deliverables that meet the Council's accessibility standards.

The Council recognizes the value of establishing key performance measures for each action and will incorporate them into the next accessibility plan.

## 6. Engagement, awareness and training

Council employees were provided with sensitivity training in the past year.

- **Addressing Disability Inclusion & Barriers to Accessibility:** This is a course that challenges common assumptions and beliefs about people with disabilities and aims to shift the perspective from the impairment to the different barriers faced by people with disabilities and how to make the workplace and services inclusive, accessible and barrier-free.
- **Adopting an Inclusive Mindset at Work:** Ensuring inclusion in the workplace requires the active participation and support of all employees, no matter their role. This course articulates the power of inclusion and identifies best practices for encouraging greater equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in an organization.
- **Inclusive Hiring Practices** (for supervisors): This course presents best practices and strategies for conducting an inclusive and bias-free hiring process. Participants learn about the importance of a diverse workforce and the impact that unconscious bias and other barriers can have when new talent is being recruited.
- **Overcoming Unconscious Bias in the Workplace:** This is an online, self-paced course that explores the process of overcoming organizational biases and micro-aggressions and examines how to be an inclusive leader.
- **Positive Space:** This is an information session on creating a safe and inclusive workplace for all, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.
- **Respectful Work Environment: Learning Conversations:** These sessions focus on sharing, reflecting and learning how to prevent and promptly resolve situations related to conflict, harassment and discrimination. They include a plenary component facilitated in both official languages, as well as break-out groups using an intersectional approach to ensure that age, ability, race, culture, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity and expression are considered in the conversations. As well, participants have the opportunity to choose to take part in specific break-out groups (First Nations, Inuit and Métis people; racialized people; or 2SLGBTQI+ people).
- **American Sign Language (ASL):** Several Council employees expressed interest in having the opportunity to learn sign language to foster an inclusive work environment and to enhance accessibility and support for employees with disabilities. The Council offered—on a voluntary, first-come, first-served basis—an introductory ASL course to provide basic, everyday communication incorporating Deaf culture and Deaf community content. The virtual 30-hour course was

provided by Canadian Hearing Services.

- **Ableism in the workplace:** Workshops on that theme are in the planning stages for all employees.

In 2024, the Council also promoted key dates to raise awareness and further engage employees on activities and resources related to accessibility:

- **Bell Let's Talk Day**, on January 24, to promote mental health awareness and foster open conversations;
- **National AccessAbility Week**, from May 26 to June 1, to recognize and celebrate the contributions of people who are Deaf and/or living with disabilities and promote accessibility and inclusion in the workplace; and
- **Mental Health Week and Occupational Health and Safety Week**, in May, to promote behaviours and attitudes that foster well-being, support good mental health and create a culture of understanding and acceptance.

## 7. Conclusion

Inclusion and respect are deeply rooted in the values of our organization. The Canada Council remains committed to providing programs, services and a work environment that are accessible and respectful of identities and differences and welcomes feedback from employees, artists, groups and organizations that are at the heart of Deaf and disability arts practices in Canada.