



Cape Breton University

Multi-Year Accessibility Action Plan

2022-2025





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Glossary

Ableism - The practices, attitudes, systems, and structures in a society that prioritize normalcy and stigmatize, devalue, or limit the participation, inclusion, and potential of people with disabilities, and Deaf and neurodivergent people. Audism is the practices, attitudes, systems, and structures in a society that prioritize hearing individuals and stigmatize, devalue or limit the participation, inclusion, and potential of Deaf and hard of hearing people. Such practices discriminate against and devalue people with disabilities, and Deaf and neurodivergent persons. They often rest on the assumption that they need to be “fixed” in order to be included or to be considered successful. Ableism and audism are prevalent in our society and systems and can be subtle or obvious, unintended or intentional.

Accessibility - The prevention and removal of barriers (physical, attitudinal, technological, or system) to allow equitable participation for persons with disabilities or others who experience barriers to accessibility.

Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) - The group of individuals tasked with managing and overseeing the Multi-year Accessibility Plan by Cape Breton University

Accessibility Act - The provincial legislation enacted in 2017 to prevent and remove barriers to accessibility for people with disabilities. It has a goal of an accessible Nova Scotia by 2030. The Act outlines some responsibilities for municipalities, universities, and other entities, including developing accessibility plans and establishing an accessibility advisory committee. It allows the Government to develop and implement standards (regulations) in education, the built environment, the delivery and receipt of goods and services, transportation, information and communication, and employment.

Accessibility Services – Programs, services, processes, and policies related to assistive technology, accessibility accommodations, assessment processes, communication and interpretation services, transition planning, and others that ensure access to learning and learning communities.

Accessible - Free of barriers that hinder the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities, Deaf and neurodivergent persons.

Accessible Customer Service - Ensuring all persons have the same opportunity to seek, obtain, use or benefit from the service. Accessible services are easy for all people to use, interact with, and understand.

Accessible Employment - Reducing and preventing barriers in hiring, retaining, career development and advancement for employees, and addressing employee needs with individualized, flexible accommodations.

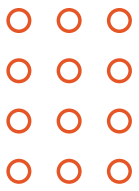
Accessible Formats - Current, quality print, electronic, audio, or visual material that is formatted so that people with disabilities, Deaf, and neurodivergent people can equitably access the information presented. This may include (but is not limited to) ensuring compatibility with appropriate assistive technology, closed captioning, described video, large print, plain language, easy read, and video transcripts.

Appropriate Assistive Technology - Any device, software, service or product system, including service animals, that reduces individual barriers to accessing and engaging in all aspects of a learning community including social, emotional, academic, and daily living activities and experiences. Assistive technology matches the specific functional skill needs, strengths, and challenges of the individual with a disability, and is, as much as possible, current and up-to-date technology.

Barrier - Anything that hinders or challenges the full and effective participation in society. Barriers can be physical, attitudinal, technological, or systemic (policy or practice). Accessibility barriers may be related to areas such as employment, education, the built environment, transportation, the delivery and receipt of goods and services, or information and communications.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) - A teaching method that acknowledges the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and frames of reference of students and uses it to make learning more relevant and effective. It ensures that students from diverse cultures have equitable opportunities and support for success within school systems and that design is reflected in pedagogy, not just additional targeted services.

Curricula - Expectations of learning through objectives and outcomes that are aligned to principles, competencies, skills, and concepts. Curricula is relevant for all learners across curricular areas and grounded in effective, evidence-based instruction and assessment practices. It is inclusive, culturally responsive, and developed using principles of universal design for learning. Curricula take into consideration and cater to the diverse needs, previous experiences, interests, and personal characteristics of all learners. It attempts to ensure that all students are part of the shared learning experiences of the classroom and that equal opportunities are provided regardless of learner differences.



Deaf - “deaf” is a medical/audiological term referring to those people who have little or no functional hearing.

Deaf - “Deaf” A sociological term referring to those individuals who are medically deaf or hard of hearing who identify with and participate in the culture, society, and language of Deaf people, which is based on Sign language.

Disability - A physical, mental, intellectual, learning, or sensory impairment, including an episodic disability, that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders an individual’s full and effective participation in society.

Employees - Administration, faculty, and staff employed at a post-secondary institution.

Equity/Equitable - Equity is fair treatment of individuals, acknowledging and making provisions for their differences by ensuring that employment and educational processes are free from systemic barriers. Equity does not mean ignoring differences and treating everyone the same. Instead, it means recognizing and valuing differences, removing systemic barriers and accommodating individual differences, as needed.

First Voice - First voice perspectives generally refer to the knowledge generated by persons with disabilities and others who experience barriers to accessibility that emerges from lived experience, community connections, knowledge traditions, and scholarly activities that are typically undervalued and under-represented.

Inclusive Learning Environment - Inclusive learning environments commit to valuing diversity and to dismantling the systemic barriers preventing a diversity of learners from full participation in their learning communities. They are accessible, prioritize the well-being and achievement of all learners, are culturally, physically and emotionally safe, utilize principles of universal design for learning, prioritize first voice, and are culturally and racially responsive.

Inclusion - The process of improving the terms of participation in society, particularly for individuals or groups of individuals who are disadvantaged or under-represented, through enhancing opportunities, access to resources, voice, and respect for rights. This creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust, fights exclusion and marginalization and offers the opportunity of upward mobility, and results in increased social cohesion.

Learning Assessment - A process or activity used to determine whether, and to what extent, a learner is making progress. This can take different forms and approaches including, but not limited to, diagnostic, formative, summative, authentic, and standardized assessments, including provincial assessments and exams.

Learning Resources - Resources and tools used by educators to support learning, such as syllabi, articles, videos, online resources, teacher guides, textbooks, and all materials and resources distributed to students and employees for virtual learning and those uploaded to and used on virtual learning spaces.

Meaningful Access - When referring to the built environment, meaningful access is the intent to meet the needs of all users of a site (a building or outdoor space) regardless of their ability. It means that not only individual features of a site, such as an entrance or washroom, must be accessible, but the entire experience throughout.

Neurodivergent - Neurodivergent means having a brain that functions in ways that diverge significantly from the dominant societal standards. It recognizes diverse neurologies and ways of being, as a variation of human experience, rather than a deficiency in need of remediation or cure. It includes those who identify with autism spectrum disorder, ADHD, Tourette's syndrome, and dyslexia, to name a few.

Neurotypical - is a term that's used to describe individuals with typical neurological development or functioning. It is not specific to any particular group, including autism spectrum disorder.

Teaching and Learning Spaces - The physical and digital spaces, where teaching and learning occurs. This includes both indoor and outdoor spaces, and spaces utilized during class trips, extracurricular activities, breaks between classes, and while at conferences, in meetings, and on practicums and work and community placements.

Transition Planning - The collaborative, learner-centered process to develop and implement plans to guide the transition from one stage of learning to another. This includes transitioning between courses, learning spaces, grade levels, education levels, and from education to employment or community living.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) - An educational approach to designing instructional goals, assessments, methods and materials, and policies that work for a diversity of learners. It employs flexible approaches that can be customized and adjusted for individual student needs.





Introduction

“Cape Breton University is strongly committed to fostering diversity within our community. We welcome those who would contribute to the further diversification of our staff, our faculty and its scholarship including, but not limited to, women, visible minorities, Aboriginal people, persons with disabilities, and persons of any sexual orientation or gender identity.”



The purpose of this document is to guide the decision-making and actions of the staff, faculty, executive, board members, and internal stakeholders, as well as other community members associated with the implementation of a multi-year accessibility action plan at Cape Breton University (CBU). Throughout this document, information will be presented in a clear, outcome-based fashion, making it easier for anyone who picks up this document to find what they need to guide the next action in the implementation plan to help make CBU a fully accessible campus, as mandated by the Government of Nova Scotia and outlined in the Nova Scotia Post-Secondary Accessibility Framework document.

Under the Nova Scotia Post-Secondary Accessibility Framework, six key areas of commitment have been identified. Cape Breton University has also identified the need for an additional area of commitment under the awareness and capacity building category.

The seven key areas that CBU will focus on changing throughout the implementation of this multi-year accessibility plan include:

- **The Built Environment**
- **Delivery and Receipt of Goods and Services**
- **Information and Communication**
- **Education**
- **Employment**
- **Transportation**
- **Awareness and Capacity Building**

Each key area of commitment has been reviewed, researched and analyzed through a number of channels and from a variety of angles to present the university with the best possible approach, based on its immediate needs and long-term goals of becoming fully accessible.

Working with staff, faculty, students, community stakeholders and partners, board members, senate committee members, existing policies, proposed new policies, existing and new research, this plan represents a community effort and commitment to accessibility across the campus in service of those who work and learn both online and in-person. This document has been developed for the purpose of considering the provincial accessibility standards, some of which are currently in development and draft form.

What is presented in the pages to follow is an action plan that is based on three stages. First, the immediate action and opportunities identified are the opportunities on which CBU can act with little to no cost to the university. These action items may require a limited budget and more involvement from the staff, faculty, and students, but are still well within reach of the university if the assumption is that at least some funds will be allocated to bringing this accessibility plan to life. And finally, the long-term action and opportunities are presented beyond 12 months from when the accessibility plan is adopted and implemented and may have larger budgets or require more time to secure funding and participation.

The three stages of action are incremental and prioritized based on the findings of the research phase. Action may be taken at any level, by anyone, in any department at the immediate action level to start implementing change. These may be considered micro-changes, however, every change counts toward bringing larger change. Short-term and long-term action and opportunity items may require additional committees, oversight, approval, and review.

Supporting Efforts from the Top-Down

This information is not presented as a critique of the university; instead, it is presented as evidence of employee division on how to proceed. Opportunity for change is evident, but the consensus seems to be focused on whether or not those opportunities can be realized because of budget constraints or bureaucracy. The lack of congruency in employee information and knowledge is evident and information sharing needs to be improved. This accessibility plan can represent the start of a new way of doing things.

Key Action Item #1: A key action item that must be addressed in the immediate future is to ensure that upon approval, the plan is circulated to the university community, and a discussion or presentation from the “top-down” needs to be scheduled so those who are putting in the work, identifying the opportunities and filling the gaps know they have the full support and backing of the university as an institution, a workplace, and most importantly, a learning environment for all.

Reaffirm the Accessibility Advisory Committee as Governing Body

The Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) has been established by Cape Breton University to oversee and own the planning, implementation and measurement of the enclosed Accessibility Plan throughout the multi-year project identified here. It is recommended that the AAC maintain the position of governing body throughout the implementation of this plan; understanding that a new governing body or authority may be assigned as needed.

Key Action Item #2: The second key action item related to the implementation of this plan is to officially assign the AAC with ownership of this accessibility plan including assigning action items to individuals, groups, departments, and stakeholders, managing budget and overseeing progress.

Creating an Accessible Accessibility Plan

Becoming an accessible campus by 2030 is about more than checking boxes and meeting standards set forth by the province. Becoming an accessible campus is going to require the full adoption and participation of the staff, faculty, students, and community stakeholders that support Cape Breton University as they move through this new age of “being.” An accessibility plan should be a living tool. It should provide not only insight and advice but action items that can be picked up at any time and be understood for implementation. Our bias as a society is to present information in one way, however a written document is not accessible to everyone. Creating an accessible version of the plan is identified as an important action item.

Key Action Item #3: The third key action item that must be addressed in the immediate future will relate to this accessibility plan: the accessibility advisory committee must work to make the information, insight, research, and action items available and accessible to the campus community. Video, audio, descriptive text, descriptive video, - just to name a few formats that could be considered when rolling out a major plan such as this accessibility plan.

Ownership of action means the difference between an accessibility plan that sits on the shelf and an accessibility plan that impacts the campus, the community, and the people it serves. Throughout the research phase, it was identified that unclear information is a problem for the university. For example, information related to the commitment to employment revealed that a strength of the university is that all job postings call for diversification of staff and faculty and the university welcomes and encourages applications from persons living with disabilities. The same group of participants also admitted that the recruitment and hiring policies and procedures - in actual practice - does not contain enough information to encourage those living with disabilities to feel welcome in applying for certain jobs. What’s more, it was identified that staff and faculty are unsure of how a person living with a disability or requiring accommodation could contribute to the workforce and felt they didn’t fully understand what the limitations or capabilities of people living with disabilities were. This is further actioned in the Areas of Commitment and Action section of this document.

These action items are further addressed and explained in the Priority Recommendations and Areas of Commitment and Action Plan sections of this accessibility plan.



Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) and Contributors

Cape Breton University's Accessibility Advisory Committee is made up of the following individuals and contributors:

Jacqueline Cote (Co-Chair) - Manager, Accessible Learning - Student Affairs
Amy Campbell (Co-Chair) - Assistant Director - Facilities Management
Tanya Brann-Barrett - Associate Vice-President, Academic & Research
John Mayich - Director, Student Affairs
Tanya Andrews - Associate Registrar, Admissions and Service Delivery
Nash Brogden - Video Content Specialist - Marketing, Communications and Recruitment
Glenda Corbett - Human Resources Generalist
Melissa Deane - Instructor, Engineering - NSGEU Representative
Sarah Ernst - Programmer Analyst - Information Systems
Amy MacNeil - Content Strategist - Marketing, Communications and Recruitment
Hope McInnis - Student Representative
Rob Power - Assistant Professor, Education - CBUFA Rep
Lee Pressey - Campus Security Officer
Scott Thomas - Human Rights & Diversity Officer
Jamie Quimby Trong - Student Representative
Courtney Vienneau - Shannon School of Business Liaison Librarian
Kerriane MacKenzie - Chief Operations Officer, International Centre for English Academic Preparation - Nova Scotia
***Jill Ellsworth** - Digital Communications Specialist
***Lydia McIsaac** - Mental Health Nurse

Organizations engaged during the research and development stage include:

CBU Students' Union Campus Security
Society of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Nova Scotians Jennifer Keeping Centre
Horizon Achievement Centre
Canadian National Institute for the Blind

*Joined committee in May, 2022

Students identifying as living with disabilities, requiring accommodation or experiencing barriers because of a lack of accessibility were also engaged in the research phase. One student enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts Community Studies program at CBU, Christene Southwell, was engaged regarding a senior project they were developing related to accessibility on campus.

Christene was generous in giving the research team their time and information related to interviewing students living with disabilities on campus. Their research helped inform parts of this accessibility plan and everyone has a role to play in bringing this plan to life.

Where We Are - Research Summary and Findings

In order to prepare this accessibility plan, a third-party consultant was tasked with identifying the next steps, conducting primary and secondary research, and collaborating with the Accessibility Advisory Committee to determine the most effective approach to developing this plan and identifying a starting point for committee members. The research phase of this project helped to shape a picture of where CBU currently stands in terms of the built environment, delivery and receipt of goods and services, information and communication, both internal and external education, awareness, capacity building, employment, and transportation.

The Nova Scotia Post-Secondary Accessibility Framework identified key principles that needed to be considered in the development of this plan. Each principle is identified below and a description of how the principle has been met by the Accessibility Advisory Committee and the third-party consultant is provided and all information presented in this plan is done so through the lens of these principles. In addition, a review of draft forms of the Accessibility Standards presented by the province has been reviewed and considered in the development of this accessibility plan.



<u>Principle</u>	<u>Definition</u>	<u>Actions to Meet the Principle</u>
Human Rights	We understand that accessibility is a fundamental human right and model this in our work. We will work to prioritize the social model of disability, recognizing disability is impacted by environmental, structural, and attitudinal barriers that limit the full participation of persons with disabilities.	Considering the need to include as many people as possible, the commitment to develop an accessibility plan was made known and a cross-section of individuals representing key persons impacted by this research were included and invited to participate.
First Voice	We value first voice and prioritize it in our work to advance accessibility, recognizing the lived experiences and expertise of students and employees with disabilities or others who experience barriers to accessibility.	In order to capture first voice, focus groups were held, recorded and analyzed for opportunities to improve immediate, short-term and long-term commitments, including a cross-section of persons impacted by accessibility or lack thereof. The AAC is made up of at least 50% of members who identify as living with a disability.
Diversity	We understand the diversity of disabilities and how other identities, circumstances, and experiences intersect and impact accessibility. Disability is valued as a category of diversity and We will work to reflect this belief in post-secondary diversity policies, programs and services.	The Accessibility Advisory Committee and subsequent committees are represented by a cross-section of persons identifying in a number of ways including disability, gender, sexual orientation, race and culture.



<u>Principle</u>	<u>Definition</u>	<u>Actions to Meet the Principle</u>
Inclusion	We are committed to creating equitable, inclusive learning and working environments, where students and employees are treated with respect and dignity.	Research was conducted in a variety of ways to be inclusive and considerate of the needs of participants including verbal, audio, video, written, descriptive, multichoice, and anonymous collection of data.
Collaboration	We share information and promote collaboration and coordination within and among our institutions, and among sectors, stakeholders, communities and initiatives. Students, employees and external service providers work collaboratively to foster learning environments, experiences, and services that create opportunities for success for students with disabilities or others who experience barriers to accessibility.	The Accessibility Advisory Committee has identified numerous community stakeholders and partnership opportunities, detailed in later sections of this plan. Throughout the research phase, information was collected from not only staff, students, faculty, senate members, board members and union members, but also community members with a vested interest in improved accessibility across organizations and our community.
Innovation	We understand that being innovative, proactive, and flexible are essential to advancing. Accessibility and are open to a variety of approaches in the implementation of our plans now and in the future.	The use of technology, digital platforms, descriptive technologies, and research aides and human interaction and interpretation provided the vehicle for data collection and analysis.

In considering the principles identified above, the following themes emerged from anonymously answered poll questions, informal and formal meetings, formal focus groups, offline conversations, formal surveys, reports, external research, and lived experience of staff, faculty, students, stakeholders, committee members, community members and partners and senate members. These findings support the key areas of commitment and inform the action items recommended in this plan.



Key Takeaways from the Research

Across various platforms and using various collection methods, participants shared information that indicated a widespread lack of awareness, education and training related to disability, accessibility, and how to support these issues on campus. In addition, the research revealed concern about the lack of motivation and intention of some faculty, staff and students to participate in awareness and capacity-building training, support or activities as a result of their perceived lack of understanding of these topics. There appears to be a generalized fear of “getting this wrong” as well as stigma associated with offering help, or, a fear of offering the wrong kind of help to employees or students who may present as needing support.

Another key area of concern for those interviewed and polled was the planned remediation of certain areas of the campus that would make accessibility easier for employees and students. Employees and students were able to acutely identify areas of the campus that have not been updated or upgraded in order to be accessible, as well as accessible options in disrepair with no effective system for how to address these issues. Other areas of concern include a lack of consistency and congruence of language used across campus (both online and in-person), as well as other areas identified in the following pages. The key takeaways from the research tools include:

Lack of Awareness

- There is agreement amongst plan participants that there is a fundamental lack of education for staff and faculty surrounding key topics such as disability, accessibility, barriers and how to support students; there is opportunity to work with other universities and organizations in the region to help remedy these issues and they should be explored
- There is confusion and uncertainty related to the importance and responsibility to help others to the point that some staff and faculty have questioned or disputed requests for help
- There is widespread misunderstanding of the modern inclusive definition of disability, as well as how prevalent and common it is within society
- Disability is seen as a burden in some cases, especially where confusion is present and is considered a bureaucratic process for someone else to deal with; however, the majority of staff and faculty seem eager to learn to help in an effective manner
- There is hesitancy to change and reform which is acceptable under the current landscape and also an underlying sense that the changes coming may be optional or “will not apply” to all
- There seems to be very little understanding of HOW to help even when staff and faculty want to
- Many students reported being unaware or completely misinformed about supports available to them as a result of inaccessible resources (websites), lack of information and dialogue on campus, or lack of training and support from faculty or staff

Lack of Motivation and Intention

- Lack of coordinated communication encouraging staff, faculty or students to help others or improve their understanding of accessibility; Missed opportunities in celebrating accessibility wins, hosting accessible events, or sharing and growing accessibility support networks
- Accessibility is currently addressed ad hoc and systems are not being developed throughout the process; staff and faculty are unsure of how to properly support students, or how to gain training to improve in these areas
- Accessibility is addressed ad hoc for employees as well, leaving managers unsure of how to properly support employees.
- From student perspective, little to no conversation is being generated on the university's part about a topic that affects a large, growing percentage of the student body

Website and Online Platforms

- Staff and faculty share a belief that the websites of the university are inaccessible on many levels
- Students have experienced numerous challenges using online learning platforms including new needs for accommodations, having existing accommodations supported, and general use of the platforms
- Students expressed lack of online course options was a barrier during the return to campus phase of the pandemic
- Expressed frustrations around lack of assistive technologies being used such as transcription or recording services for online classes, especially since notetakers are difficult to obtain
- The research also indicated that students perceived that accommodations were not fully provided during pandemic transitions and that lends to the everyday challenges that students may face when trying to access online learning; considerations for future disruptions to learning should be considered as it can be a barrier for everyone when no choice is offered
- Accommodating students online is different from accommodating students in classrooms; the same barriers to online work would be true of employees

Fear and Stigma

- Staff and faculty share a fear around saying the wrong thing when trying to offer help
- Some staff and faculty shared a fear of disclosing and identifying as having a disability
- Students expressed concerns that because of a lack of training and awareness of some faculty and staff, it is difficult and traumatic to disclose their disabilities and get proper supports, resulting in many students opting not to
- Students expressed that some academic departments seem to hold a less supportive stance on accessibility issues making disclosure and equal access to supports difficult
- Stigma within certain cultures may present problems for those who need help; social backgrounds directly impact willingness to disclose or identify or seek support as individuals and groups, and these groups may have very little knowledge or understanding of disabilities as a result. Resources being accessible is of greater importance for these groups
- Students are experiencing a difference in sharing of disability; students who shared disability felt comfortable in doing so and those who didn't share were not comfortable and tried to figure things out on their own

Immediate Accessibility Issues Needing to Be Addressed

- Some automated doors not working
- Some ramps don't provide access to doorways (no landing areas)
- Weather-related issues are common, slippery hills etc.
- Visibility issues on campus at night and during inclement weather
- Lack of accessible identified seating for persons with disabilities

Congruency in Accessible Language Across Campus

- There is a fragmented approach to accessibility because of a lack of overall governance for collecting and using data and making decisions related to accessibility (i.e. library, student union, and the registrar's office all have different websites)
- Corporate style guide not meeting standards for accessibility, many issues (contrast, colors, descriptive text, etc.)
- Accessible graphic design not present on almost all websites, signage, marketing materials
- Congruence issues with naming and referring of services (i.e. compass vs self-serve - which have been identified internally as the same thing)

Students Use Different Language than Staff and Faculty

- Student's understanding, exposure, language, perspective seem to be vastly different than faculty and staff; there are terms and resources listed in the First Year Advising Book for students and it should be listed in resources
- How students speak about these issues is different, and there is diversity within the student body that is not present in employees which needs to be respected
- Student-led efforts have high potential (peer-to-peer 4th year to 1st year supports, international to international, neurodivergent society, mental health peer support groups, etc.)

Transit Issues

CBU works with the Cape Breton Regional Municipality to try to reduce issues for students. The following issues with CBRM transit that affect CBU students and employees have been identified:

- Students who have intellectual or "invisible" disabilities are denied access to "handi-trans" buses because they don't have physical disabilities.
- Not enough accessible buses, or buses in general. One bus per hour results in students being unable to attend campus for studies, events, etc. or they may have to wait hours for a bus
- Transit routes don't provide services to many rural regions so transit is inaccessible for many students
- Many bus stops are not accessible according to employees and students

Organizations for Specific Supports Not Being Utilized

- Nova Scotia Deaf and Hard of Hearing Society can be of support
- Community organizations are not being utilized
- There is an opportunity to provide free resources while funding is sourced
- There seems to be confusion around terminology and inclusive language
- There is a perception that first voice is not being showcased

Federal Policies Dictating Perspectives

- The formal definitions of "disability" and what is covered under that definition limits the support and funding available for some people living with disabilities; it's important to remember that "disability" is an umbrella term and covers many people with many conditions, issues, and abilities.



Safe Spaces Not Common

- Students perceive a lack of accessible spaces
- Lack of events and seminars promoted as accessible or about accessible topics

Respect for Diversity

- Not all cultures accept or acknowledge disabilities and there's no plan for offering support
- There is the perception amongst students that there is a lack of understanding or acknowledgment of accessibility being an issue
- Understanding of the responsibility to EACH group of individuals is not evident; what happens when a student is turned away from support?
- There are questions around legal responsibilities and risks associated with failing to provide these types of considerations

Support Systems Not Instructional

- The faculty have reported experiencing a lack of understanding on “how” to implement plans and students report feeling unsure of how to proceed when help is needed
- The system for recruiting new employees and implementing supports is not well structured or widely understood; there are worries about mandating accessibility training for existing employees



Priority Recommendations

As part of the research undertaken to prepare this accessibility plan, and in communicating with stakeholders, community members, staff, faculty and students, it is clear that a key component related to implementing any action on behalf of the university and the Nova Scotia Accessibility Act is to support the Accessibility Advisory Committee as stewards of this plan, overseeing the review and implementation. The AAC will inform decisions through collaboration with the necessary governing bodies of the university to ensure all commitments have been met as mentioned in the introduction of this document.

Based on the findings, which have been confirmed in the literature, and identified in the resources, this accessibility plan focuses on the following priority action items.

Establishing a Governing Body and Steward

Throughout the research and development phase, several departments and survey respondents questioned what governing body or person would be responsible for ownership and implementation of the accessibility plan, including budget approval and distribution of resources and authorizing mandates to enact change. As a result, the first action items in this accessibility plan are related to the establishment of a project steward.

Action 1.0 - **Seek Approval from Executive**

Action 1.1 - **Reaffirm the AAC to own Implementation**

The AAC will consider next steps for the committee and move to implement the accessibility plan and execute the action items according to the approved plan.

Action 1.2 - **Establish Measures of Success for the Accessibility Advisory Committee**

Using the Accessibility Plan, the AAC will establish measures of success against all proposed plans to meet the provincial standards for accessibility on campus. Determining these measures of success will allow the ACC to identify starting and finishing points on each action item in this plan to determine if all standards have been met.

Action 1.3 - **Determine First Action Item for Implementation**

Using the Accessibility Plan, the AAC will choose a priority item to be implemented, measured, and reported to the governing body and apply measures of success to implementing the action item.



Moving to an Action-Oriented and Active Response

Once a governing body has been established, that governing body will be responsible for the accessibility plan and will need to review and make decisions about the plan as it is presented and manage changes as provincial accessibility standards are updated. Key areas of focus have been identified below and are further described in the action-oriented language in the pages that follow. To date, many of the accessibility updates and implementations have been reactive in nature, dealing with issues on a case-by-case basis; this plan will allow Cape Breton University to take a high-level look at where to put energy and resources and attach a timeline to them, and make decision-making easier and more focused for success, now and in the future.

Changing Perspective and Promoting Awareness

Providing education is essential for employees and students. Having a common understanding of disability and accessibility on campus will empower and promote dialogue, overcome fears and be proactive and compassionate about providing support. When everyone works in service of each other, the university moves forward to becoming more accessible. Shared understanding is vital. More than that, access to support for disabilities is a human right, and as a result of the lack of existing training, the needs of many students, staff, and faculty are going unmet. Accessibility training of staff and faculty is fundamental to creating an accessible campus and changing the perspective.

Understanding What Support is Needed

It is important to determine the accessibility needs of students, faculty and staff to inform priority decisions. If staff, faculty and students are encouraged to come forward with accommodation requests, and if this process is improved, easy to understand, and utilized, understanding can be expanded and better decisions can be made.

There will be a portal for students and faculty that houses resources in a new Accommodate System, coming in April, 2022. Ensuring that there is awareness and ongoing access to this new system will be a priority.

Changing Minds from the Top

Overcoming hesitations, oppositions, or a lack of motivation in some individuals will require a unified top-down approach. Once a well-researched and accepted training plan is developed, training and education can begin. Conversations, information sharing, and peer-to-peer support will be essential in moving the accessibility plan forward. The university should coordinate with the various bargaining units to determine potential collective agreement implications involving mandating accessibility training and education.

Improving Motivation

Accessibility requires understanding, compassion, a willingness to participate and a motivation to contribute. Developing a strategy centered around awareness building, compassion, relatability, personal responsibility, storytelling and first voice focus will be needed. Training should include “bite-sized” material to easily contribute to helping improve accessibility on campus. The strategy could also include marketing on campus to promote a change in perspective.

Advocating for Student Leadership

Student-led solutions to accessibility issues are currently being viewed as very successful as they offer safe spaces for students to feel understood by peers who have similar experiences and perspectives as they do, not to mention similar language with how to talk about them. This includes international students helping fellow international students and there is much opportunity for peer-to-peer support for all aspects of accessibility.

- One suggestion from students was to record ALL online courses or transcribe all online courses. This would reduce the need for notetakers and provide a free reliable source for notes. Recording online classes would require a simple push of a button. There is free transcription software available online to support these interim initiatives while a more robust support system is being developed as per the Areas of Commitment and Action Plan Overview section will describe.
- It should be noted that at the time this plan was being developed, MS Teams was updated to include full transcriptions that work for recordings. This may be useful to students. Before this only live captioning was available.

Encouraging Interdepartmental Collaboration

Unifying the campus should be central to the approach to achieve the consistency that seems to be lacking. To update websites, signage, marketing materials, course materials, etc., the plan will need to consider the fragmented nature of some of the departments (students' union, libraries, core websites, etc.) This will require cooperation between departments; for instance, the marketing department and the teams who build the websites.

Instructional Support and Training

There is an obvious need for training on how to support individuals with accessibility needs. On the whole, faculty is unsure of how to provide support or accommodation as there is little instruction being provided. This also applies to systems designed to teach people how to self-assess, assess others, help themselves, help other faculty/staff, etc. Compassion, understanding, motivation, and building a unified and stronger campus should be the focus.

During discussions with students experiencing disability, students reported a sense from faculty that accommodations were available but "you shouldn't really be using them". Students also shared that they felt it was clear which faculty were interested in learning about accessibility and which ones were opting out because they couldn't be mandated to participate. Some students felt that accessibility training should not be optional for staff and faculty.

Hearing and Acting Upon Student Needs

The importance of hearing from the student body on the matter of accessibility should not be overlooked. Tools, such as student body surveys can help ensure the campus is upholding its responsibility to provide equal access to contribute to all matters related to accessibility. These surveys could become a regular part of communications with the student body and could serve to increase awareness, dialogue, and support of the matters they inform. Introducing such surveys during orientation or the intake process will help provide a foundation of information on which to build decision-making processes. Speaking to students "in their language" is important, which includes recognizing that the feelings on these matters are diverse depending on culture, social factors, education, etc.



Addressing Immediate Accessibility Issues

A list of identified accessibility issues has been provided at a high level in this accessibility plan. This list is not exhaustive, but an audit of the built environment has been conducted and a consulting report from a third-party provider will be available for further discussion and decision-making beyond this plan. Some of the issues identified include fixing broken automatic door buttons, installing lights in areas of low visibility, etc. A process should be developed and shared campus-wide for how to report such issues.

Creating and Maintaining Safe Spaces

Safe spaces could be developed across the campus. They could be at accessible locations (widely lit, indoors, accessible facilities and services, accessible signage) and could be located on every campus map to promote the idea of a safe and accessible campus. While the entire campus will take many years to become fully accessible, beyond key areas like transportation, entrances, restrooms, etc., there could be hot spots of access spread out across the campus and promoted to students. These already exist in different forms, such as the JKC, the Nancy Dingwall Health and Counselling Centre, Campus Security, the Library, the Women's Centre, the Pride and Ally Centre, etc., but it seems the awareness and understanding of them falls short for many as anecdotal evidence suggests many students and faculty end up confiding behind closed doors to trusted peers, or reaching out to those not directly related to their learning, such as security guards for support with a broad set of issues. More awareness of resources that currently exist on campus - what they offer, who they support, how you can contribute to them - could improve this, while a strategy for how to build safe space resources or rebrand existing resources as safe spaces to beimize resources available on hand.

Another issue that needs to be addressed is the growing demand placed upon these existing resources. Growth strategies have been provided in the Areas of Commitments and Action Plan section of this document.

Inviting Community Involvement

Partnerships with municipal and community organizations is a key strategy highlighted in the recommendations from the province. For municipal matters like transit, cooperation will be key. The utilization of community organizations who are willing to aid in accessibility training, or act as subject matter experts, especially those willing to do so without fees as part of their operational mandate, is essential to ensuring first voice expertise, upholding responsibility to the community, and limiting expenses. Approaching this education as "collaborative" and benefiting all involved will help encourage participation.



Resources, Relationships and In-House Experts

The following information has been collected from the Accessibility Action Committee to provide a list of resources, relationships and in-house experts that can potentially provide support for the implementation of this plan. Connecting with community partners, utilizing in-house expertise, and identifying nationally-recognized free resources will also provide a starting point for education, awareness and training to get underway as soon as possible.

<u>Stakeholder Group</u>	<u>Identified Contact</u>	<u>Contact Information</u>
Jennifer Keeping Centre for Accessible Learning	Jacqueline Côté (Manager)	jacqueline_cote@cbu.ca
University Relations (in charge of Communications, Marketing and Recruitment)	Becky Chisholm (Associate Vice President)	becky_chisholm@cbu.ca
CBU Education Department	Dr. Rob Power (teaches digital accessibility; can help CBU “walk the talk”)	rob_power@cbu.ca
SitelImprove (SaaS provider for digital accessibility compliance)	Amy MacNeil (will be point of contact between CBU and SitelImprove)	amy_MacNeil@cbu.ca
Centre for Teaching and Learning	Nicole MacDougall- CTL Logistics and Project Coordinator	nicole_MacDougall@cbu.ca Providing support to faculty on the already available accessibility supports/resources
Breton Ability Centre (local group that helps individuals with varying abilities live meaningful lives) partnership with CBU may already exist, but they could certainly help inform accessibility at CBU from lived experience.	Contact BAC	info@cb-bac.ca



<u>Stakeholder Group</u>	<u>Identified Contact</u>	<u>Contact Information</u>
The Horizon Achievement Centre (local non-profit that helps provide meaningful employment to those with varying abilities, could help similarly to Breton Ability Centre above)	Contact Horizon	Contact Horizon
Independent Living Nova Scotia (accessibility resource local to Nova Scotia)	ilnsadmin@ilns.ca	ilnsadmin@ilns.ca
Nova Scotia Government (Accessibility Resources)	accessibility@novascotia.ca	accessibility@novascotia.ca
Work Wellness Institute This organization provides DEI, accessibility training in online, on-demand workshops in accessible formats for employees		
Transit Cape Breton	Kathy Donovan/James Forsey	kadonovan@cbrm.ns.ca; jrforsey@cbrm.ns.ca
CBU Students' Union	Dawn MacDougall/ Alex MacNeil	dawn_macdougall@cbu.ca; alex_macneil@cbu.ca
CBU Security	Sonya Spencer	sonya_spencer@cbu.ca
CBU Facilities	Amy Campbell	amy_campbell@cbu.ca
Chris Southwell	Student at CBU who contributed to research and shared senior research project	cbu17hkh@cbu.ca
CBU Student Affairs	John Mayich	john_mayich@cbu.ca

Stakeholder Group

Identified Contact

Contact Information

Job Accommodation Network
This is a free resource for employers in Canada to get approved accessibility and accommodation information in supporting employees; this resource may also help support students in the interim as the campus works to become more accessible

Areas of Commitment and Action

In the following sections of the plan, goals related to the individual areas of commitment are clarified; in addition, key commitments that CBU agrees to uphold are identified, as per the Nova Scotia Post-Secondary Accessibility Framework. Under each commitment, immediate action and opportunities are identified, meaning action items, tasks, conversations, partnerships, or changes that could be completed in a timely manner that are considered easily attainable or achievable. These tasks have been identified as requiring little to no financial investment on the part of the university, without arduous approval processes, and that can be assigned ownership to a person or group of people have been provided as a starting point. It should be noted that creating and managing a budget as an action item is assumed across all areas of commitment and not included as a staged item in this plan. The governing body should be responsible for the allocation and use of any budgetary items, or a working group as decided upon by the university.

Awareness and Capacity Building

Education: Teaching, Learning, and Research

Built Environment

Information and Communication

Delivery of Goods and Services

Employment

Transportation



Awareness and Capacity Building

Goal

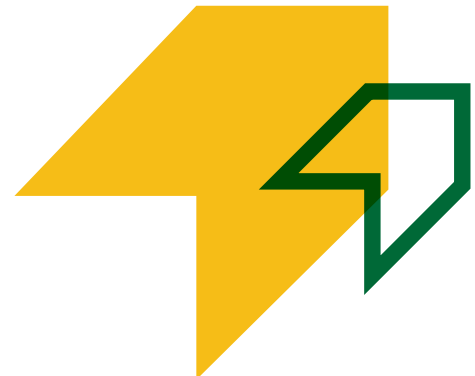
Nova Scotia's post-secondary institutions foster a culture of accessibility and equity, encourage and facilitate the prevention and removal of barriers to participation, and build capacity in these areas among employees and students.

What's Going Well

CBU has already begun developing policies and processes and identifying opportunities for awareness and capacity building through the development of the EDI Action Plan. This plan has helped inform the accessibility plan and will continue to provide insight as the university undergoes changes to become fully accessible. The university is aware of and utilizing Equity and Anti-Racism Legislation and is practicing self-assessment of areas that can be improved to become more accessible.

What Needs Work

Across many departments of the university, it is agreed upon that education is a key factor to the success of the accessibility plan. Bringing awareness and understanding will be instrumental in succeeding in the implementation of the accessibility plan. Motivating staff, faculty, and students to participate in the educational training opportunities may take time and a variety of approaches. Students report there is a sense that faculty can't be mandated into training and so they opt out because they can. Celebrating changes and achievements will help promote awareness and give the campus the opportunity to share in the collective efforts toward becoming fully accessible.





The Action Plan - Awareness and Capacity Building

Commitment

Develop and implement awareness and educational training programs for employees and students to increase knowledge and understanding of accessibility, equity, human rights, disability rights, and barriers to participation in post-secondary education.

Immediate Action and Opportunities Identified

- Identify and use free resources to begin immediate training and awareness education to employees and students
- Identify and use internal expertise and resources to provide immediate training or insight on these topics

Short Term Opportunities (1-12 months)

- Identify and reach out to develop potential partner organizations in the community who provide free or low-cost training opportunities on various topics related to accessibility
- Explore opportunities for phone service or text service for students and staff to gain information, similar to the province's 811 services

Long-term Action and Opportunities (12 months+)

- Identify key areas of training and create bite- sized training programs for SMS push or app development and use
- Explore chat app or support services app for connection, support and information related to accessibility



Commitment

Encourage and support departments and employees to review and integrate areas of accessibility and disability issues into the course curriculum of all relevant academic programs.

Immediate Action and Opportunities Identified

- Identify and use internal expertise and resources to provide employee support, improve instructions, identify authority resources and integrate free resources into every class itinerary
- Widen the definition of disability across the campus and identify opportunities for peer-to- peer or faculty-to-student support where funding is not available for students or employees needing accommodation

Short Term Opportunities (1-12 months)

- Provide training resources in various forms and professional development opportunities to employees
- Work to develop standard for capturing student and employee suggestions for improving accessibility in the classroom
- Work with students to create long-term education goals and a curriculum that is accessible based on research and user need

Long-term Action and Opportunities (12 months+)

- Identify opportunities to develop internal standards and guidelines for creating an accessibility curriculum for students, as well as training opportunities for staff and faculty

Commitment

Collaborate with the Accessibility Directorate to build capacity and increase awareness about the obligations of the post-secondary sector under the *Accessibility Act*.

Immediate Action and Opportunities Identified

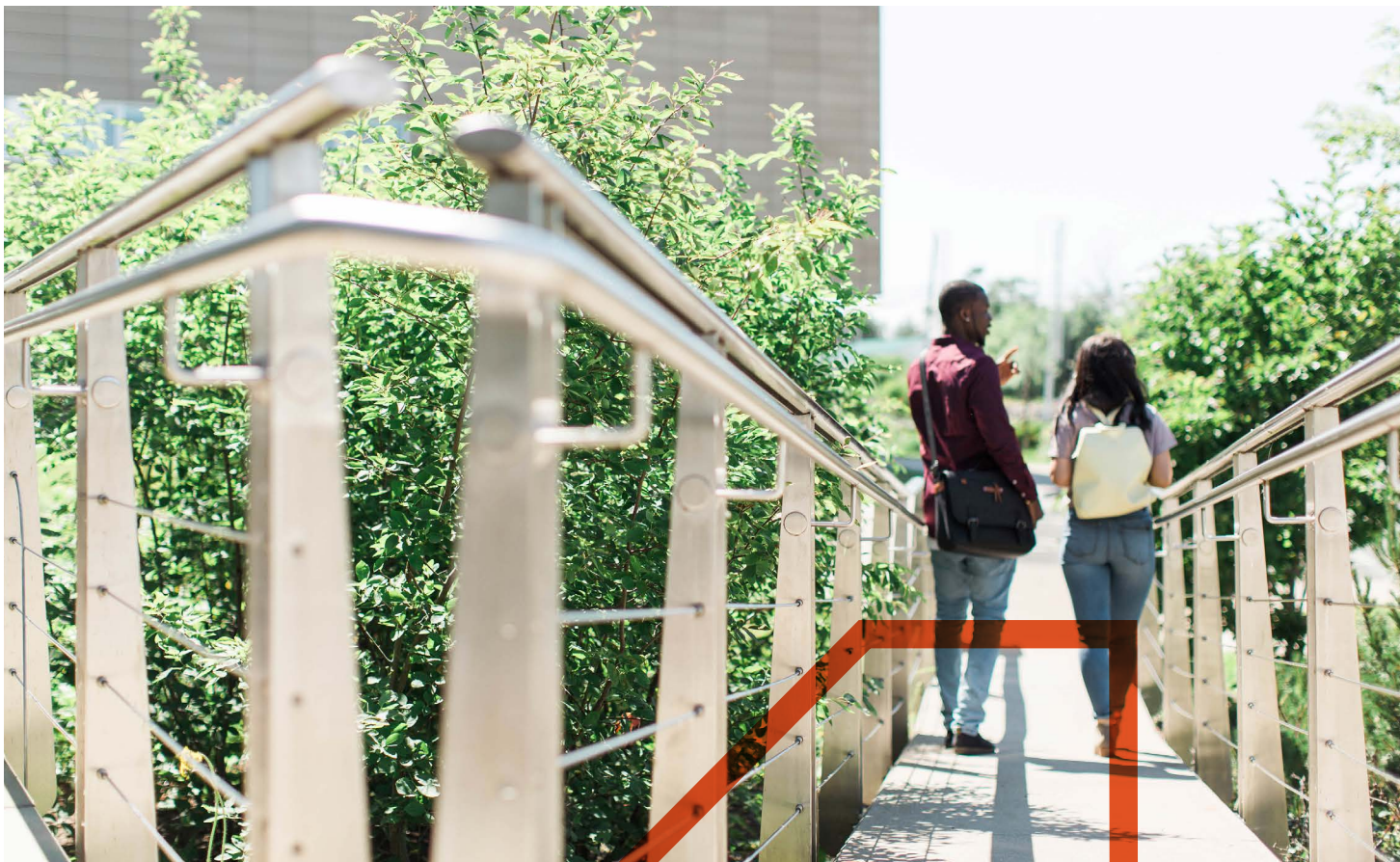
- Connect with the marketing department to identify wins and circulate improvements amongst employees and students to build momentum and motivation
- Provide the province's Accessibility Act to all employees as soon as possible and hold department discussions to identify internal opportunities for creating stakeholder awareness; each department has an opportunity to own a piece of the accessibility plan and can act to bring about change in these small groups to start

Short Term Opportunities (1-12 months)

- Provide the provincial standards (when available) to employees for review and hold summary reviews and discussions to build buy-in and further understanding of how the standards will impact their work and roles in the campus
- Work with Students' Union to develop newsletter related to accessibility and share changes and updates
- Practice transparency when information is changing or will impact certain groups of people at the university

Long-term Action and Opportunities (12 months+)

- Determine if self-assessment tools can be used to evaluate if standards are met and are being measured according to the provincial standards





Education: Teaching, Learning and Research

Goal

Nova Scotia's post-secondary institutions are leaders in inclusive and accessible teaching and learning, and collaborative research on accessibility.

What's Going Well

CBU has established infrastructure and programs in place that can be made more robust to provide support to the accessibility plan. For example, the Jennifer Keeping Centre for Accessible Learning offers a variety of supports for persons identifying as having a disability. The Centre for Teaching and Learning offers a wealth of knowledge and strategies for educators to provide accessibility and is a good starting place for improving accessibility in the university. The groundwork has already been laid for online learning and offering a variety of learning approaches across programs in the university's academic calendar.

What Needs Work

Consistent support for students, faculty, and staff is essential. The need for more robust and inclusive training across all sectors of the university has been identified. As the Centre grows, a strategy for supporting that growth will need to be addressed and implemented. With more awareness of accessibility becoming mainstream, more students and employees may come forward requiring support. There is a generalized concern for the cost associated with such upgrades and people worry about having to take on too much in order to see the plans through.



The Action Plan - Education: Teaching, Learning and Research

Commitment

Ensure access to and use of accessible technology in teaching and learning.

Immediate Action and Opportunities Identified

- Survey staff and faculty to determine the level of awareness and needs related to accessibility
- Identify and use free resources to offer interim support

Short Term Opportunities (1-12 months)

- Collect internal knowledge and insight to develop a database of tools, training, and navigation support for staff and faculty

Long-term Action and Opportunities (12 months+)

- Update and upgrade online teaching tools for accessibility and ensure internal training is available in a variety of methods



Commitment

Build capacity and implement supports for faculty and other employees to remove barriers to learning through inclusive practices and equitable assessment, such as principles outlined in universal design for learning and culturally responsive teaching and learning.

Immediate Action and Opportunities Identified

- Invite campus departments to speak to faculty and staff about how they are being inclusive; provide opportunities for information sharing and story sharing; creating a more understanding view of accessibility, accommodation, and learning
- Identify, expand and adopt flexible learning outcomes for students who require support in learning
- Lift stringent "outcome delivery" requirements for learning and focus on demonstration of learning in a variety of ways

Short Term Opportunities (1-12 months)

- Develop internal training sessions to educate on inclusive practices in the classroom
- Adopt and utilize equitable assessment tools and research opportunities for such tools to be used in the campus

Long-term Action and Opportunities (12 months+)

- Encourage the implementation of faculty- sharing and feedback systems and networks so faculty and staff are not individually responsible for progress and problem solving

Commitment

Identify and adopt a common standard for ensuring students have access to resources, including accommodations, to support academic success, wellness, and transitions from high school and to employment, the community, or further study.

Immediate Action and Opportunities Identified

- Review onboarding and graduation process of students
- Direct new and existing students to websites for information and make students aware through email or various means of when changes have been made

Short Term Opportunities (1-12 months)

- Current plans for updating the website will be underway in the next 12 months
- Provide implementation plan for website changes
- Develop inclusive onboarding kit and resource list for new and existing students

Long-term Action and Opportunities (12 months+)

- Evaluate and review opportunities for the development of an internal app which could provide information for students at all levels of enrollment including videos, text, audio, text to voice, voice to text, etc.



Commitment

Support the growth of research and scholarship on accessibility and disability studies, including collaborative accessibility research initiatives among Nova Scotia's post-secondary institutions, led by first voice researchers.

Immediate Action and Opportunities Identified

- Engage student scholarship through events, publication, storytelling
- Encourage students to share findings with campus to inform change related to accessibility (ownership and building trust)
- Encourage or plan for first voice experiences, which could include writing, video development, art projects that will raise the voice those impacted by accessibility

Short Term Opportunities (1-12 months)

- Evaluate opportunities for accessibility seminars or events to share first voice experiences amongst employees and students
- Explore opportunities for conferences for information share, storytelling, reviewing new tools, etc.

Long-term Action and Opportunities (12 months+)

- Explore opportunities and develop curriculum related to disability studies
- Fund research devoted to disability and accessibility studies in Cape Breton

Commitment

Expand and improve access to inclusive postsecondary education options for students with intellectual disabilities.

Immediate Action and Opportunities Identified

- Prepare audit of current options for students
- Invite conversation in collaboration with Jennifer Keeping Centre to redefine pre-requisites and explore what needs to happen for that to be approved
- Host open houses at JKC for information and collaboration
- Explore free resource options to direct students to in interim

Short Term Opportunities (1-12 months)

- Develop resource list for students including peer-to- peer opportunities, learning and tutoring for students with intellectual disabilities and explore opportunities for neurodivergent centre or expansion of JKC

Long-term Action and Opportunities (12 months+)

- Review and improve online learning opportunities for persons with intellectual disabilities
- Course auditing and improvement
- Review infrastructure of online portals and determine accessible improvements







Built Environment

Goal

Buildings and outdoor spaces on Nova Scotia's post-secondary campuses provide meaningful access for intended users.

What's Going Well

Work is well underway to improve the built environment of the university including an audit to identify the physical improvements needing to be completed in the coming years. An example of this is the linkway project between the Marvin Harvey building and the Arsenault Britten building. The project removed ramps with an inaccessible slope and connected the two buildings with an elevator and set of stairs that serve both buildings. Many doors have been upgraded with accessible mechanisms and information kiosks have been developed to provide direction to students and employees. New building designs have been underway and some washroom facilities have been upgraded for more accessibility.

What Needs Work

This is a specific list of action items identified by the Accessibility Committee that were echoed across interviews, focus groups, polls and surveys throughout the research phase. They are listed below. Students report not knowing about the construction projects as of late and welcomed the opportunity to share in celebrating the success of the project. There are themes across the research that demonstrate lost opportunities for bringing awareness to the issue and also publicly moving the university toward full accessibility.

- Concern for the cost to retrofit/update physical build to new standards
- Some accessibility doors are already in place; however not all the buttons are consistent in design and placement – i.e. one door in particular at Unama'ki entrance; many doors are not accessible
- Many service windows/desks do not offer a lower counter for equitable service -- i.e. wheelchairs
- Older washroom areas are not barrier-free entrance/exits
- Some lecture halls have limited accessibility
- No system to identify concerns from users
- New students/staff are not briefed on accessibility components
- Wayfinding on campus is nonexistent or contains outdated information
- Jennifer Keeping Centre is in a non-central location
- Ergonomic initiatives/guidelines for furniture accommodation have to be addressed

The Action Plan - Built Environment

1. Commitment

Adopt common accessibility standards to ensure meaningful access to existing buildings, new construction, and major renovations. At minimum, institutions will comply with the Nova Scotia Building Code, and the Accessibility Act's built environment standard, when implemented, aiming to exceed them when feasible. New construction will be considered an opportunity to exceed minimum accessibility standards.

Immediate Action and Opportunities Identified

- Perform audit and review building codes currently in practice
- Engage students and employees for specific areas of improvement
- Review list of immediate concerns and prioritize improvements; make priority list public and accessible* (see above)
- Work with and collaborate with facilities and maintenance for opportunities to improve the built environment

Short Term Opportunities (1-12 months)

- Research and develop a plan for implementing and meeting NS Accessibility Act for the Built Environment
- Develop committee for the Built Environment to oversee implementation of standards
- Create an internal standard for building and identify what standards can be utilized in new construction

Long-term Action and Opportunities (12 months+)

- Implement and work to continuously meet NS Accessibility Act



2. Commitment

Develop recommendations for common priority areas (i.e. building features, phases) in which to identify, prevent and remove barriers to accessibility.

Immediate Action and Opportunities Identified

- Identify immediate barriers and resolve as soon as possible, with priority list being made public for work to be done
- Identify opportunities for student/volunteer champions to lead student projects or community projects to bring awareness to accessibility; identify student talents to help improve the built environment; for example, NSCC construction or metalworkers built the Lingan Golf Course storage building.

Short Term Opportunities (1-12 months)

- Develop a centralized recommendation system and response timeline for when a request is made, prioritized, and followed through to completion

Long-term Action and Opportunities (12 months+)

- Create and implement a plan for ongoing improvement, using standards and prioritizing work in a transparent manner

3. **Commitment**

Develop and utilize a common accessibility auditing tool to assess the accessibility of campus buildings and outdoor spaces. Integrate institutional accessibility audits within facilities management inventory and budgeting processes. Ensure the Accessibility Act's built environment standard can be integrated into this tool, when developed.

Immediate Action and Opportunities Identified

- Assign a working group or person to research options related to developing accessibility auditing tools
- Connect with facilities and management to review auditing options and agree on a system for moving information throughout the university

Short Term Opportunities (1-12 months)

- Test drive auditing tools identified at the outside of the accessibility plan
- Determine individual departmental needs for effective use of auditing tools

Long-term Action and Opportunities (12 months+)

- Implement system-wide auditing tools and adjust where necessary
- Meet and discuss opportunities in the short- term and long-term utilizing the system-wide auditing tools



4. **Commitment**

Develop a common reporting tool for facilities management employees to track and report progress on improving accessibility as part of each institution's accessibility planning process. Ensure the Accessibility Act's built environment standard can be integrated into this tool, when developed.

Immediate Action and Opportunities Identified

- Research options and understand how tools can improve processes on campus for improving accessibility
- Identify stakeholders and liaisons at other institutions to provide resources and support
- Identify what employees and students can do in the interim while tools are being researched and developed
- Request demos of tools
- Review the Accessibility Act for recommendations of robust tools and use

Short Term Opportunities (1-12 months)

- Further develop interim systems and begin planning to utilize auditing tools
- Develop and use measurement and assessment tools

Long-term Action and Opportunities (12 months+)

- Implement system-wide auditing tools and adjust where necessary
- Meet and discuss opportunities in the short- term and long-term utilizing the system-wide auditing tools

5. Commitment

Collaborate with local municipalities to integrate accessibility of municipal and post-secondary infrastructure.

Immediate Action and Opportunities Identified

- Assign working group or person to liaise with CBRM and act as support to identify opportunities for municipal support
- Determine what priorities exist for future projects that CBRM can support

Short Term Opportunities (1-12 months)

- Provide ongoing transparency and conversation for employees and students regarding the building and environment and collaborate with CBRM for more support

Long-term Action and Opportunities (12 months+)

- Create and utilize accountability standards and identify “who owns what” in relation to ensuring the campus is accessible from both public and private methods



6. Commitment

Establish and implement processes to ensure accessibility during temporary disruptions with building infrastructure and outdoor spaces, such as construction or seasonal related elements (e.g. snow removal).

Immediate Action and Opportunities Identified

- Review current process and determine seasonal and historic barriers related to building, environment, transportation, and foot traffic

Short Term Opportunities (1-12 months)

- Develop a process or procedure for information sharing and fanning out important changes as they occur related to the building infrastructure

Long-term Action and Opportunities (12 months+)

- Use processes and systems to identify disruptions and make people aware of upcoming changes
- Identify tracking and communication systems for ensuring the campus is accessible with alternatives being offered

7. **Commitment**

Ensure all emergency evacuation systems, policies, procedures, communications and training enable the safe and efficient evacuation of persons with disabilities or others who experience barriers to accessibility during an emergency.

Immediate Action and Opportunities Identified

- Review policies, procedures, strategies, and internal information regarding emergency systems and identify interim solutions

Short Term Opportunities (1-12 months)

- Develop and update policies, procedures, strategies and internal information-sharing tools and redistribute the information in an accessible manner
- Assess and practice emergency evacuation systems

Long-term Action and Opportunities (12 months+)

- Develop annual review process and practice emergency evacuation systems and evaluate areas for improvement



8. **Commitment**

Seek a partnership with government to develop a system-wide cost assessment for complying with the Accessibility Act's built environment standard.

Immediate Action and Opportunities Identified

- Continue to engage and discuss with provincial networks.

Short Term Opportunities (1-12 months)

- Meet and begin negotiations of the pilot project and identify individual department opportunities
- Develop department-wide assessment tools for evaluating the built environment

Long-term Action and Opportunities (12 months+)

- Develop system-wide improvement process by linking departments and ensuring the flow of information is fluid and accessible to all





Information and Communications

Goal

Information and communication at Nova Scotia's post-secondary institutions are accessible.

What's Going Well

Projects that are underway related to the website to improve accessibility are exciting and that department is paving the way for online accessibility to be completed by 2023. What's more, several opportunities exist to utilize existing platforms, such as social media, upon the recommendation of students, because they already have accessibility features and functions. Staff and faculty have internal departmental systems for sharing information that could be reviewed and developed to become more accessible and wide-spread.

What Needs Work

The lack of understanding and information related to accessibility is a major theme in this accessibility plan; providing congruent information and communication in a timely manner will be a challenge for the university as it rolls out this plan. Asking and requiring participation and input are two different things: along with awareness and capacity building, obtaining "buy in" from staff and faculty to change the way they currently share - or don't share - information may be difficult and may need work to overcome. The lack of standardized reporting and addressing accessibility concerns is an issue for everyone who uses the campus. There is a strong sense that work is being completed in "silos" and departments are not sharing information for the benefit of everyone. Providing faculty with additional time to prepare accessible materials may need to be considered to support change. Conversations regarding mental health need to be strengthened and supported in addition to physical and learning disabilities. Information needs to be supplied that covers both short-term disabilities or limitations (COVID-19) and long-term, permanent disabilities for both students and staff.

The Action Plan - Information and Communications

1. Commitment

Ensure the communications policies, procedures, and practices at post-secondary institutions facilitate accessibility.

Immediate Action and Opportunities Identified

- Conduct information audit and determine how information is currently being used and disseminated throughout the campus

Short Term Opportunities (1-12 months)

- Provide training on developing accessible policies and procedures
- Create timeline for improving policies and procedures

Long-term Action and Opportunities (12 months+)

- Implement approved changes and develop ongoing audit process for policies and procedures with accessible communication indicating changes have been made



2. Commitment

Ensure institutional communication is delivered in formats that are accessible.

Immediate Action and Opportunities Identified

- Provide a variety of information as it exists now related to accessibility, learning and development
- Offering a variety of forms including video, text, audio, etc makes the information more accessible in the interim

Short Term Opportunities (1-12 months)

- Establish a communication checklist for internal development of new materials that can be used to determine if a piece of information is ready to be sent and is inclusive of accessibility needs

Long-term Action and Opportunities (12 months+)

- Develop processes based on standards of accessibility to implement new communication protocols

3. **Commitment**

Adopt a common standard to ensure the accessibility of post-secondary institution websites (e.g. WCAG 2.1 AA).

Immediate Action and Opportunities Identified

- Educate staff on digital accessibility and what WCAG 2.1 AA is and why it's important to use these formatting - free resources to start
- Review and audit website and other major tools online
- Share information in a variety of formats

Short Term Opportunities (1-12 months)

- Develop priority list for online tools and make list accessible to those impacted by the changes

Long-term Action and Opportunities (12 months+)

- Create and deliver a campaign on the new standards as prescribed by the province and use internal education opportunities or professional development training to ensure standards are adopted in a phased manner based on the priority list







Delivery of Goods and Services

Goal

Students, employees and visitors who identify as having disabilities or others who experience barriers to accessibility have equitable access to goods and services provided by Nova Scotia's post-secondary institutions.

What's Going Well

There are several projects already identified and underway to make the delivery of goods and services more accessible for staff, faculty and students. For example, the marketing department recently obtained approval for a new, more accessible website platform that is currently being reviewed and plans for rollout are underway. There are opportunities to utilize existing technologies that are already accessible, such as social media platforms, to reach students, share education, and run campaigns about the accessibility projects. There are potential opportunities to increase funding for the Jennifer Keeping Centre to be more centrally-located and there are newly redesigned spaces that are accessible including the linkway between the Marvin Harvey and Arsenault Britten buildings. There are projects underway related to "wayfinding" separate from the Accessibility Committee that are of note for this plan.

What Needs Work

Physical spaces, such as the library, convenience store, classrooms, labs, etc. all have barriers and issues related to being fully accessible; although covered under the built environment, it's worth noting here as those physical environments impact the appropriate delivery of goods and services, particularly related to the delivery of education under goods and services. The Jennifer Keeping Centre for Accessible Learning came up during the research phase in several ways and all commented that the location is not ideal for ongoing accessibility. It has been identified that there is a perceived lack of ADHD support and support for students with learning disabilities, as well as no perceived support for ASL interpretation for the deaf or hard of hearing. While research identified there are many supports that are currently offered, the lack of awareness of them indicates need for improvements in how resources are being offered. There is currently only one person mostly responsible for assessing and identifying supports for students and there is room for growing a team of supports, as well as resources to lend to improving the accessibility of the university.

The Action Plan - Delivery of Goods and Services

1. **Commitment**

Develop and provide accessible customer service training for employees.

Immediate Action and Opportunities Identified

- Identify free resources for customer services training related to accessibility and awareness in the interim

Short Term Opportunities (1-12 months)

- Begin development of training for staff related to customer service and engaging with persons living with disabilities or other barriers that prevent them from participating fully
- Exploring accessible training events, such as diverse online settings, or group sessions with expert speakers, attending conferences, etc.

Long-term Action and Opportunities (12 months+)

- Create a training program supported by industry experts in the community and in-house



2. **Commitment**

Provide customer service physical spaces that are conducive to positive accessible customer service experiences.

Immediate Action and Opportunities Identified

- Conduct review of physical spaces that are considered public and determine changes that need to be made; prioritize changes as immediate, near future, long-term goals
- Students commented that social media is a good format for disseminated information to the student body and social media already has accessibility features and functions built in; a review of these functions should be conducted

Short Term Opportunities (1-12 months)

- Reviewing how student and staff experiences have improved since the completion of previous projects, such as the linkway or “The Pit” - are students and staff benefiting from these? Create campaign to celebrate successes

Long-term Action and Opportunities (12 months+)

- Work with student body and staff to develop long- term plan for accessibility; working in conjunction with the people who will benefit from the improvement of space and service will directly impact the success of such projects

3. **Commitment**

Embed accessibility into procurement processes, including creating common accessibility language, accessibility requirements and criteria in tenders for goods and services purchased by Nova Scotia's post-secondary institutions.

Immediate Action and Opportunities Identified

- Determine what accessibility processes exist for Tenders Nova Scotia and/or other tender service sites and identify opportunities for updating policies and processes over time

Short Term Opportunities (1-12 months)

- Develop checklist/assessment form for the development of accessible procurement initiatives to ensure all outgoing projects are accessible
- Liaise with provincial government to determine supports for creating more inclusive materials

Long-term Action and Opportunities (12 months+)

- Provide training to identified groups related to the procurement process for continuing to develop language, common requirements and delivery of tenders



4. **Commitment**

Ensure services provided by Nova Scotia's post-secondary institutions are accessible to persons with disabilities or others who experience barriers to accessibility, including accessible communication, supporting the use of assistive technology, accessible digital content and technologies, and welcoming service animals and support persons

Immediate Action and Opportunities Identified

- Review current processes for providing customer service across all departments and prioritize a list of changes based on barriers, communication, assistive technologies, etc.
- Connect with community organizations for education and information on how to implement changes, particularly in managing digital technologies and identify in-house expertise for additional support

Short Term Opportunities (1-12 months)

- Identify national or international initiatives in development of accessible communication, assistive technology, and working with service animals
- Determine what can be implemented immediately and in the future

Long-term Action and Opportunities (12 months+)

- Research training options and develop programs that create inclusive language and develop a common language in the university
- Identify opportunities for national assistive technology training and awareness programs for staff and faculty
- Develop relationships with organizations regarding service animals and community support persons





Employment

Goal

Nova Scotia's post-secondary institutions are accessible and equitable employers, support the careers of employees with disabilities or others who experience barriers to accessibility, and ensure their employees reflect the diversity of Nova Scotians.

What's Going Well

The staff, faculty, and students at CBU are willing and committed to creating an accessible workplace and learning environment. There have already been numerous improvements to accessibility addressed in the recruitment and hiring policies and all job postings encourage applicants from diverse backgrounds. Consulting with the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion, the university was able to identify areas for further improvement internally and are working with the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee to make those changes over time. There is a lot of potential for community partnership and hiring people with disabilities.

What Needs Work

Like all changes, implementation takes time and resources. Some staff who were consulted feel these may not be available to them at this time. While recruitment and hiring policies are in place, there is a belief that in practice things look different and the policies are not always producing the results expected. There is a lack of systems for collecting information about accessibility and how individuals are being supported. Current staff and faculty are unsure of how capable employees could be on the job if they have disabilities - education is needed around the equal contribution of people living with disabilities.

The Action Plan - Delivery of Goods and Services

1. **Commitment**

Ensure processes, policies and practices facilitate and encourage the recruitment, selection, transition, career growth and advancement of persons with disabilities or others who experience barriers to accessibility.

Immediate Action and Opportunities Identified

- Audit current hiring practices
- Encourage story sharing of hiring practices and identify areas for immediate improvement
- Connect with community organizations on how to encourage persons living with disabilities to apply for jobs at the university

Short Term Opportunities (1-12 months)

- Begin implementing new approaches to hiring employees and invite existing employees to participate in retraining and re-upping information as available

Long-term Action and Opportunities (12 months+)

- Develop a flexible, yet clear policy for recruitment, selection and hiring of new employees and commit to inclusive hiring practices through story sharing and making employees feel safe in sharing their needs
- Consider a non-bias or third-party organization in hiring employees to eliminate bias related to disability and accessibility

2.

Commitment

Build capacity among employees and senior leadership to cultivate a culture of inclusion and equity that supports, retains, and provides opportunities for career growth to employees with disabilities or others who experience barriers to accessibility.

Immediate Action and Opportunities Identified

- Provide free training from a variety of sources to help existing employees understand the contributions persons living with disabilities can make
- Re-education of bias is important and collaborating with community partners will strengthen the message

Short Term Opportunities (1-12 months)

- Develop and implement career pathways for all employees, beginning with new employees
- Research and assign each employee a career pathway or life cycle planning kit or system to determine what they need now, in the near future, or to anticipate what they may need in the future to continue to be able to do their job to the best of their ability and develop more awareness

Long-term Action and Opportunities (12 months+)

Develop policy that allows applicants to apply in a variety of means without asking for special accommodation; for instance, in the job advertisement, encourage applicants to share a video, present a piece of work, or enter into dialogue instead of sending a formal letter or formatted resume

3. **Commitment**

Ensure institutional policies and procedures provide inclusive, adaptable accommodations and adaptive tools for employees with disabilities or others who experience barriers to accessibility and appropriate and supportive leave practices and return to work plans.

Immediate Action and Opportunities Identified

- Review and audit policies and procedures
- Invite staff to conduct research and review opportunities to improve existing policies using personal and professional practices
- Identify best practices
- Create ownership of opportunities and encourage departments to share inclusive information related to jobs

Short Term Opportunities (1-12 months)

- Make policies and procedures available in a variety of forms

Long-term Action and Opportunities (12 months+)

- Develop an internal audit system for hiring and career progression







Transportation

Goal

Transportation provided to employees and students is accessible.

What's Going Well

The university has an existing Memorandum of Understanding with Transit Cape Breton and has open lines of communication to be able to plan for future changes to improve accessibility. There are some accessible parking spots and some availability of handi-trans transportation for students and staff. There are many opportunities for transportation to be improved around campus, as well as to and from campus, including internal shuttle services ride sharing.

What Needs Work

The availability of the handi-trans bus is limited and the availability of accessible parking spots is limited and only in certain locations. There is no system for collection of concerns from campus users of the public transit system, including accessibility, as the municipality is responsible for transit system concerns and not CBU. The university is limited in its capacity to provide improvements to accessible transportation, so nurturing the existing relationship with the Cape Breton Regional Municipality is important to allow the identification of opportunities for improvement when necessary.

The Action Plan - Delivery of Goods and Services

1. **Commitment**

Collaborate with local municipalities, the Nova Scotia Community Transportation Network, and community transit service providers to ensure accessible, affordable public transportation to and from campuses, including bus stop infrastructure, sidewalks, and signage

Immediate Action and Opportunities Identified

- Assign a working group or individual to review transportation infrastructure present at the campus
- Review memorandum of understanding with Transit Cape Breton and determine if updates or changes are needed

Short Term Opportunities (1-12 months)

- Identify signage that needs to be updated and prioritize changes
- Research in-house transportation options including utilizing vans or other forms of transportation to support faculty and staff

Long-term Action and Opportunities (12 months+)

- Introduce more accessible ways to get to and from campus including introducing carpool programs, public transportation campaigns, CBU-owned vehicle use and upgrades, shuttles and more

2.

Commitment

Ensure accessible parking (that meets a standard such as provincial built environment standard, and the Nova Scotia Building Code) on campuses is available to students, employees and visitors with disabilities or others who experience barriers to accessibility.

Immediate Action and Opportunities Identified

- Audit and prioritize changes that need to be made to meet standards
- Prepare areas for winter and identify seasonal issues such as high snow banks, water pooling, etc
- Review available standards and determine working group for adoption

Short Term Opportunities (1-12 months)

- Work with facilities to ensure access is always available and develop communication protocols for informing facilities when blockages or barriers occur
- Identify alternatives for accessing the campus when barriers are in place
- Determine plan of action if public transportation is unavailable; for instance, if bus drivers were to strike

Long-term Action and Opportunities (12 months+)

- Introduce more accessible ways to get to and from campus including introducing carpool programs, public transportation campaigns, CBU-owned vehicle use and upgrades, shuttles and more



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