



Research Report

MaRS-RHF Municipal Cohort Accelerator | June 2024

The background of the slide features a dynamic, abstract design. It consists of numerous thin, curved lines in shades of blue and purple that sweep across the frame from the bottom left towards the top right. These lines create a sense of motion and depth, resembling light trails or data paths. The overall color palette is cool, dominated by these blues and purples, which contrast with the white text and background areas.

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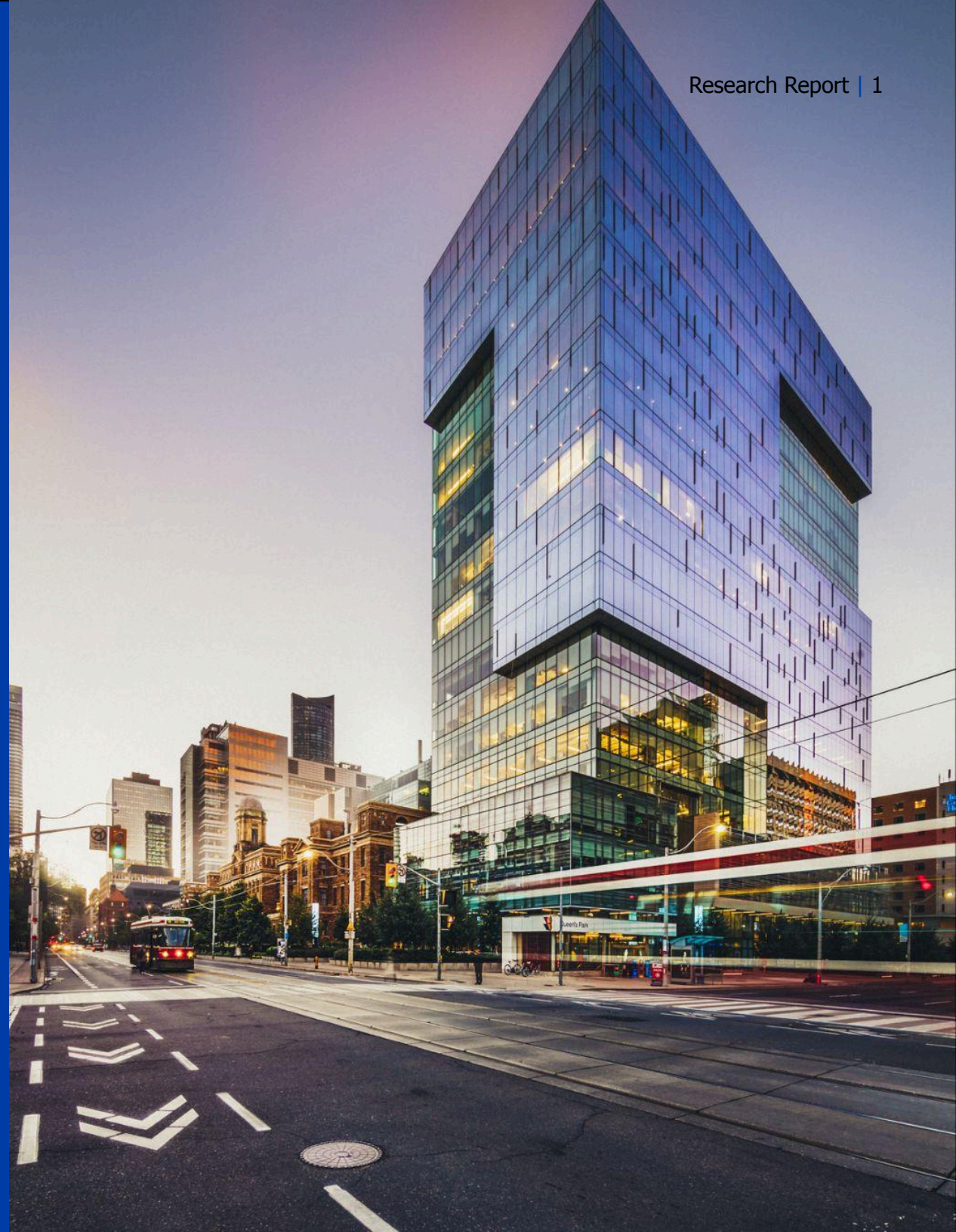
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Land Acknowledgement

We would like to take a moment to acknowledge that MaRS is located in Tkaronto, or colonially known as Toronto, on the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and the Wendat and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.

Wherever you are, please join us in paying our respects to the original stewards of this land and committing ourselves to thoughts and actions that will lead to meaningful reconciliation.

While reviewing the Research Report, we invite you to reflect on opportunities in your own communities to go beyond land acknowledgements in inviting participation and engagement of Indigenous neighbours and residents in our efforts to build more accessible sites and communities through meaningful reconciliation.



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Executive Summary

Municipalities, and organizations alike, are faced with many barriers when adopting accessibility policy in the built environment, making it challenging to improve use of space, inclusive design, and adaptive processes to improve accessibility.

The dynamic nature of the accessibility landscape, combined with the growing number of standards and frameworks employed across Canada, makes it difficult and confusing for communities who are required to implement, monitor and enforce these standards, but also for those working within those policies, such as developers, contractors and employers, who are required to comply with the long list of standards and frameworks.

Throughout this report, we focus on **8 barriers** that were surfaced during the research phase;

- attitudinal barriers
- complex regulatory environment
- resistance to change
- budget constraints
- unique urban geography
- competing priorities
- limited internal and external expertise
- political factors

To overcome the challenges and barriers, municipalities need an **accessibility-confident and enabled organization to manage disability as a business priority**. This shift could improve customer experience, productivity, project and program development, inclusive employment opportunities, and community trust.

These opportunities include;

- increase education and awareness
- leverage municipal authority for regulatory measures and incentives
- shift to an accessibility culture
- embrace procurement practices and universal design
- embrace urban identity and diverse neighborhoods
- build capacity
- accessibility leadership

The biggest improvement a municipality can make right now is to **get started**. Utilize current resources and capacity, acknowledge that mistakes will happen and that is okay, and understand that **accessibility is a learning journey rather than a destination**.

Included in this report

Accessibility Standards in Canada Overview |
Barriers | Opportunities and Enablers |
Case Studies | Short-Term and Long-term
Actionable Items | RHFAC Feedback

Introduction

Project Background

MaRS Discovery District (MaRS) and the Rick Hansen Foundation (RHF) conceived the idea for a municipality cohort series in 2021. MaRS had just completed a highly successful municipal cohort series with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) and small to medium sized municipalities. The cohort was a deep dive into improving capacity for action around community building retrofits to improve climate outcomes in municipalities. MaRS was also starting to tackle accessibility more deeply as an innovation ecosystem topic and recognized that there was an opportunity to engage partners more deeply around this issue.

Simultaneously, RHF was noticing a significant gap in capacity for policy development and implementation around accessibility and the built environment. In 2021, many provinces across Canada were also starting to introduce accessibility legislation and conceive of built environment standards, while Canada itself had just introduced the federal accessibility act. In provinces where legislation was introduced previously, there appeared to be a gap between meaningful policy and access.

The combination of these factors led MaRS and RHF to come together to conceive, design, and develop a similar approach for municipalities focused on accelerating accessibility policy adoption in the built environment with a focus on building capacity for small and medium sized municipalities (population of 300,000 and below).

The cohort would focus on three elements:

1. **an initial research phase**
2. the **development and delivery of a series of four workshops** to help municipalities, and
3. the **construction of an initial, template, municipality policy adoption roadmap** that could be used by any municipality to assess their progress and plan their own actions.

This report focuses on the **initial research phase**.

Research Methodology

The research, conducted in the fall of 2023, aimed to understand the barriers to adopting accessibility policy in the built environment.

A mix of primary and secondary research was conducted, which included:

- interviews with 27 individuals across 17 organizations
 - which included 10 municipalities, 1 provincial government, 1 university, 2 commercial real estate organizations, 2 accessibility support organizations, and 1 accessibility advisor.
- an environmental scan to survey the landscape of RHFAC competitors, customers, and new product and service innovations; and
- supplementary secondary research to further understand the barriers, and opportunities to address said barriers.

Accessibility Standards in Canada Overview

All levels of government within Canada play a pivotal role in the shape and vision for Canada's built environment. Canada's accessibility standards are set at the federal, provincial and municipal level.

According to a [2020 CSA Group study](#), accessible built environments "ensures the physical environment allows persons with disabilities to move freely around building and public spaces (indoor and outdoor)"[1].

Federal Policies

At the national level, there are multiple policies that specifically impact accessibility in built environments:

- Accessibility Canada Act (ACA), 2019
- CSA/ASC Accessibility Standards
- National Building Code of Canada (NBC), 1941

Accessibility Canada Act (ACA)

The Act applies to federally regulated entities and organizations, such as banking, telecommunications and transportation, federal buildings, Crown corporations, the Canadian forces, and federal public administration. The legislation established Accessibility Standards Canada (ASC) to develop national accessibility standards and establish the Chief Accessibility Officer and an Accessibility Commissioner to enforce the Act [2].

Through a collaborative effort with the Canadian Standards Association (operating as CSA Group or CSA), ASC creates accessibility standards that are expected to influence the chance of adoption or adaptation by other entities, such as provinces and territories [2].

CSA/ASC Accessibility Standards

Accessibility standards are for federally regulated entities and federal organizations. Provincial and territorial governments are encouraged to develop their own accessibility standards. CSA Group and ASC collaborated to publish accessibility standards that impact the built environment:

- [CSA/ASC B651– Accessible Design for the Built Environment](#)
 - This standard addresses the design aspects of indoor and outdoor physical spaces and the elements within them to remove barriers to access [3].
 - This standard is referenced in the National Building Code and other legislation across Canada [3].
 - CSA/ASC B651:23 is the newest edition, superseding its predecessor CAN/CSA B651:18 [3].
 - The [Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification Program \(RHFAC\)](#) references CSA/ASC B651 [4].
 - The Rick Hansen Foundation recently updated their certification program to [RHFAC v4.0](#), which is available as of January 2024.
 - Version 4.0 builds upon the previous rating survey with updated technical specifications arising from updates to building codes, accessibility design standards (CSA B651 and CSA B652), other emerging research, and best practices [4].
- [CSA/ASC B652 – Accessible dwellings](#)
 - This standard outlines the recommendations for accessible home design, including the design, construction, and renovation of accessible homes [5].

National Building Code of Canada (NBC), 1941

- A building code is a regulation which describes the minimum requirements for public health, safety and welfare for the design and construction of buildings [6].
- NBC is the model building code that forms the basis for all provincial and territorial building codes. As Canada's constitution gives the ten provinces and three territories jurisdiction over construction, it must be adopted by an authority having jurisdiction in order to come into effect [7].
- Provinces and territories can adopt the NBC model code in its entirety, or adopt and adapt selected provisions to meet their local needs [6].
- The 2020 edition was published in March 2022. To come into effect, the national model codes must be adopted by a regulatory authority, which can take months or years before a province or territory adopts the new Codes [7].

Provincial and Territorial Policies

Building Codes

Under Canada's constitution, provinces and territories have primary jurisdiction over construction and are responsible for enacting the NBC through legislation, which are then implemented at the municipal level [7]. At the municipal level, provisions may also go beyond the minimum requirements in the provincial/territorial building code to meet zoning bylaw or land-use regulations. The enablement of local governments to require construction-related measures that go beyond – or supersede – their respective provincial building code, depend on provincial or territorial legislation and jurisdiction [1, 6, 7].

Building codes list the minimum built environment requirements that public and private infrastructure must meet within a given jurisdiction.

It is assumed, but not required, that both public and private organizations will go beyond minimum requirements. As of 2020, four provinces published building codes with specific accessibility-related provisions that differ from NBC 2015 [1]. These include:

- [National Building Code 2019 – Alberta Edition](#)
- [British Columbia Building Code 2018](#)
- [Ontario Building Code Act, 2015 \(amended\)](#)
- [Construction Code \(Québec\), 2020 \(amended\)](#)

All other provinces and territories have either adopted or adapted the NBC and accessibility provisions within in its entirety or with amendments [1].

Accessibility Standards

Provinces and territories are encouraged to adopt or adapt national accessibility standards or implement their own. As of January 2024, six provinces and territories have accessibility legislation with built environment standards, with one under development [1].

- [Ontario \(2005\)](#)
- [Manitoba \(2013\)](#)
- [Nova Scotia \(2017\)](#)
- [British Columbia \(2021\)](#)
- [Newfoundland and Labrador \(2021\)](#)
- [Saskatchewan \(2023\)](#)
- [Nova Scotia \(under development\)](#)

Refer to [Appendix 1 - Provincial and Territorial Accessibility Standards Overview](#) for an overview of each province and territory (as of January 2024).

**Figure 1 - Provincial and Territorial Policies
Building Codes and Accessibility Standards**





Barriers

Based on primary and secondary research, 8 barriers were identified that municipalities face in adopting accessibility policy in the built environment. The barriers are presented in order of highest to lowest prevalence and impact.



attitudinal barriers



complex regulatory environment



resistance to change



budget constraints



unique urban geography



internal and external expertise



competing priorities



political factors

Opportunities and Enablers

To overcome the challenges and barriers to developing and implementing accessibility policy in the built environment, municipalities need an accessibility-confident and enabled organization to manage disability as a business priority. This will allow them to improve customer experience, productivity, project and program development, inclusive employment opportunities, and community trust.

This information is based on primary and secondary research completed in fall 2023, and supplemented from the findings, discussions, and outputs of the 2024 MaRS-RHF Municipal Cohort Accelerator.

Each barrier will have its coordinated opportunity and enablers, with recommendations to short-term and long-term actionable initiatives in the appendix to help the municipality or organization be more accessibility-confident. Refer to [Appendix 2 - Short-Term and Long-Term Actionable Initiatives](#) for a full list of recommendations.

The biggest improvement a municipality can make right now is to get started. Utilize current resources and capacity, acknowledge that mistakes will happen and that is okay, and understand that accessibility is a learning journey rather than a destination.

Opportunities and Enablers

Increase Education and Awareness

Identified as the most significant barrier to change, overcoming attitudinal barriers can be a difficult feat [8]. The discrimination and social prejudice directed towards people with disabilities are deeply embedded in misconceptions, stigma, internalized ableism, and lack of information [8]. In order to tackle this barrier, there must be a change in attitude by decision-makers, staff implementers, and the community. This change cannot be the sole responsibility of one individual, but must be a collaborative and coordinated effort between the municipality, service providers, and the community. Greater coordination and stronger partnerships promote awareness within partner organizations, as well as at the community level, by using partners' own networks to channel and share information more broadly.

Opportunities to address this barrier include increasing education and awareness, recognizing and understanding the full spectrum of disabilities (including people with developmental and mental health disabilities, environmental sensitivities, and addictions), recognizing and understanding the impact of intersectionality, shifting to an accessibility culture and applying an accessibility lens (learn more under [Shift to an Accessibility Culture](#)), and increasing social inclusion [8].

Attitudinal Barriers

Attitudinal barriers make it challenging to identify, address and prevent barriers found in municipal infrastructure, services, processes and information. Misconceptions about accessibility, subjective perspectives of priorities, fears of rising costs, or a lack of understanding of the benefits of accessibility can affect support from stakeholders (e.g., City staff, City Councillors, policymakers, external contractors, developers, and private citizens providing input and feedback) for related policies.

These stakeholders may lack understanding surrounding the importance of accessibility in the built environment, may not fully understand the legal requirements related to accessibility standards, or may not know that standards and legislation are meant to be minimum requirements and that fully accessible built environments exist beyond codes and legislation. As primary research shows, attitudinal barriers from internal and external stakeholders are municipalities' most significant challenges when adopting accessibility policy in the built environment. Attitudinal barriers are further amplified by resistance to change.

“People lack knowledge about accessibility. And sometimes, stigma is associated with this lack of knowledge. We have a large population of people with disabilities, and yet accessibility isn’t always a priority. Having a ramp that leads to a back door doesn’t allow them the dignity to enter the facility the same way their peers would.”

- Municipality representative

Complex Regulatory Environment

Policies and frameworks associated with accessibility standards are complex. They encompass legislation, regulations and programs that span federal, provincial and municipal jurisdictions and multiple government departments. According to [CSA Group](#), there were over 270 unique accessibility legislation, standards and guidelines being employed across Canada in 2020 [1]. This number has increased greatly since 2020, as British Columbia, Newfoundland and Labrador and Saskatchewan have further developed their accessibility standards or legislation, and with Nova Scotia currently developing theirs as well. Refer to [Appendix 1 - Provincial and Territorial Accessibility Standards Overview](#) to learn more about the standards and policies being employed across Canada.

“There are so many inconsistencies in standards between federal and provincial. The guidelines compete with each other and don't make sense operationally. Most guidelines are designed for adult accessibility, but how does it translate to childcare facilities? It just doesn't make sense in that specific space or context.”

- Municipality representative

The dynamic nature of the accessibility landscape, combined with the growing number of standards and frameworks employed across Canada, makes it complex and confusing to harmonize and coordinate. This adversely creates gaps, inconsistencies, and contradictory and/or operational misalignment in applying, monitoring, and enforcing accessible building codes, standards, and regulations.

Impact of Complex Regulatory Environment

While standards are set at various government levels, the majority of the public complaints regarding built environment accessibility are handled by officials at the municipal level. However, due to the complex regulatory environment, scarce resources, limited jurisdiction, and absence of clear and definitive guidance, municipalities often have difficulty enforcing and addressing accessibility barriers. As a result, they often find it challenging to effect compliance with accessibility policies, which hinders their effectiveness and accountability.

“Enforcement and compliance are huge barriers for us. We have no teeth to enforce compliance. When higher legislation isn't in place to support municipal strategies and plans, it makes it harder to implement and enforce.”

- Municipality representative

Built environment complaints pose high costs for municipalities, irrespective of whether a violation is found. These complaints demand financial resources and time, diverting resources from other community priorities [9]. Most municipalities expressed the need for more resources, enforcement mechanisms, and guidance from their respective provincial governments to help prevent and address their complaints.

Opportunities and Enablers

Leverage Municipal Authority for Regulatory Measures and Incentives

Encouraging Accessibility Through Regulatory Measures

Historically, there has been a lack of accessibility requirements for private developers in construction as current building codes are limited in terms of accessibility [10]. While challenging, it does open an opportunity for municipalities to leverage their regulatory authority over land use and building standards (through land zoning, density permissions, and building types) to ensure construction projects prioritize inclusion by design in new builds and deep retrofits, and introduce accessibility features into private buildings [11]. As an example, Vancouver amended its building code to ban door knobs in favour of lever-type devices in all new construction, including private homes, a measure which has a fairly low cost impact [12].

Other proactive examples include new inclusionary zoning bylaws and prioritizing and accelerating construction projects that help the municipality achieve their accessibility goals. In recent years, several municipalities, such as Montréal and Toronto, have attempted to accelerate the supply of affordable housing, including affordable market rental, through innovative land use planning, such as the adoption of inclusionary zoning and upzoning [11, 13, 14]. A similar approach can be adapted for accessibility, or embedded within other housing standards.

Encouraging Accessibility Through Incentives

Another opportunity for municipalities is to consider incentivizing companies that align with the municipality's accessibility goals. This could include providing rebates or tax deductions for the sale or land transfer of buildings or subdivisions that meet specific accessibility targets, or requiring that new builds include a certain percentage of new apartment or subdivision dwellings to be barrier-free [15, 16]. Municipalities could embed accessibility targets into their approval matrices, or create streamlined approval processes to accelerate construction that meets specific accessibility targets.

"Until the Rick Hansen Foundation almost literally knocked at our door, we had never realized how imperative it is that we start to think about accessibility. Of course we thought about it as a matter of code compliance and quasi regulatory consideration to meet minimum requirements, but we were not really thinking it through. And so we finally realized that we have a role to play, and that role is critical. Because if our buildings aren't accessible, we can't attract tenants, we can't optimize their tenancy, and we can't meet demands of aging populations."

- Private organization

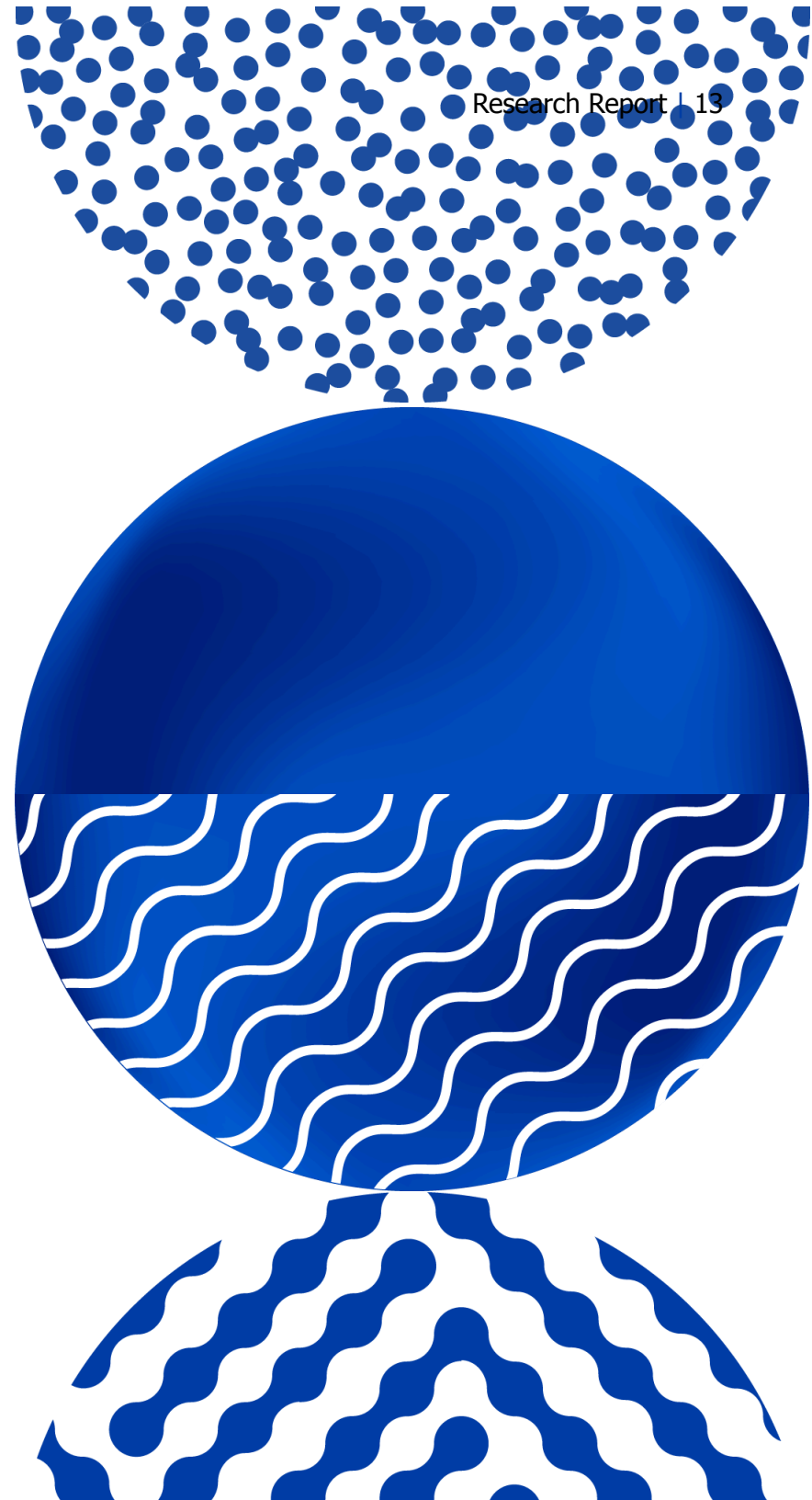
Educating and explaining how increasing accessibility and universal design has multiple safety, legal, and financial benefits to developers (e.g., increased ROI, enhanced brand names, increase in attrition rates) will be crucial to get private companies to prioritize accessibility [16]. In the context of developers and other companies (e.g., architects), commercial drivers are often more influential than social drivers [16]. Learn more under [Universal Design](#).

Resistance to Change

Change can be met with resistance, especially as accessibility is not at the forefront of everyone's needs or wants. Resistance is prevalent when altering existing infrastructure or introducing new regulations due to perceived misconceptions based on attitudinal barriers [17]. Further, municipalities may be reluctant to adopt new technologies - even those that enhance accessibility - due to liability concerns and risk aversion culture [17]. As accessibility is not static and needs to continue to evolve, there is a constant need to change and adapt to its dynamic environment.

“Resistance to change is very prevalent regarding universal washrooms. **People don't like change, and they don't understand why it's needed.** Most people hear 'accessibility' and think **it only impacts** someone in a wheelchair **and no one else.**”

- **Municipality representative**



Opportunities and Enablers

Shift to an Accessibility Culture

Committing to meet the accessibility needs of people with disabilities requires an internal and external shift in culture. While municipalities have limited control over external culture, the focus on internal change can lead to causal consequences and positively influence the community and external culture. Shifting to an accessibility culture to achieve meaningful results requires zealous intention, understanding and application. Three examples of culture shift strategies are:

include people with disabilities, explain the 'why', and foster accessibility leadership champions [18].

Include people with disabilities

The most effective way to achieve meaningful results is to include those who stand to benefit from those results. Adopting the policy motto 'Nothing about us, without us' ensures that people with disabilities are included in the creation of policies and regulatory frameworks that impact them [19]. It also ensures that municipalities are applying an accessibility lens to their policies and relying on the principle of full participation that emphasizes that people with disabilities deserve full and equal access to life in the community [19]. Accessibility starts within, and including people with disabilities sends the message to its community that it is indeed a priority.

Explain the 'why'

Properly understanding accessibility is crucial for municipal employees and policymakers to avoid creating and/or maintaining barriers to participation. Abstaining not only promotes social exclusion, but has considerable financial implications due to liability and litigation costs. While most city employees understand the financial and legal implications and ramifications, barriers continue to exist and accessibility requirements are ignored or overlooked. This is likely due to pre-existing attitudinal barriers and ableist culture. As briefly explained in [Increase Education and Awareness](#), education and awareness is required.

Furthermore, as some individuals are tangibly motivated, it may be difficult to properly conceptualize the barriers. To help employees further understand the implications, it is important for them to understand how and why specific practices promote or obstruct accessibility. Other enablers include embracing universal design and shifting towards proactive practices (see [Embrace Procurement Practices and Universal Design](#)). If implemented well, it reduces the need for individualized accommodations, while also communicating that access and equity is important to the municipality and community, making people who need additional support feel included.

Foster accessibility leadership champions

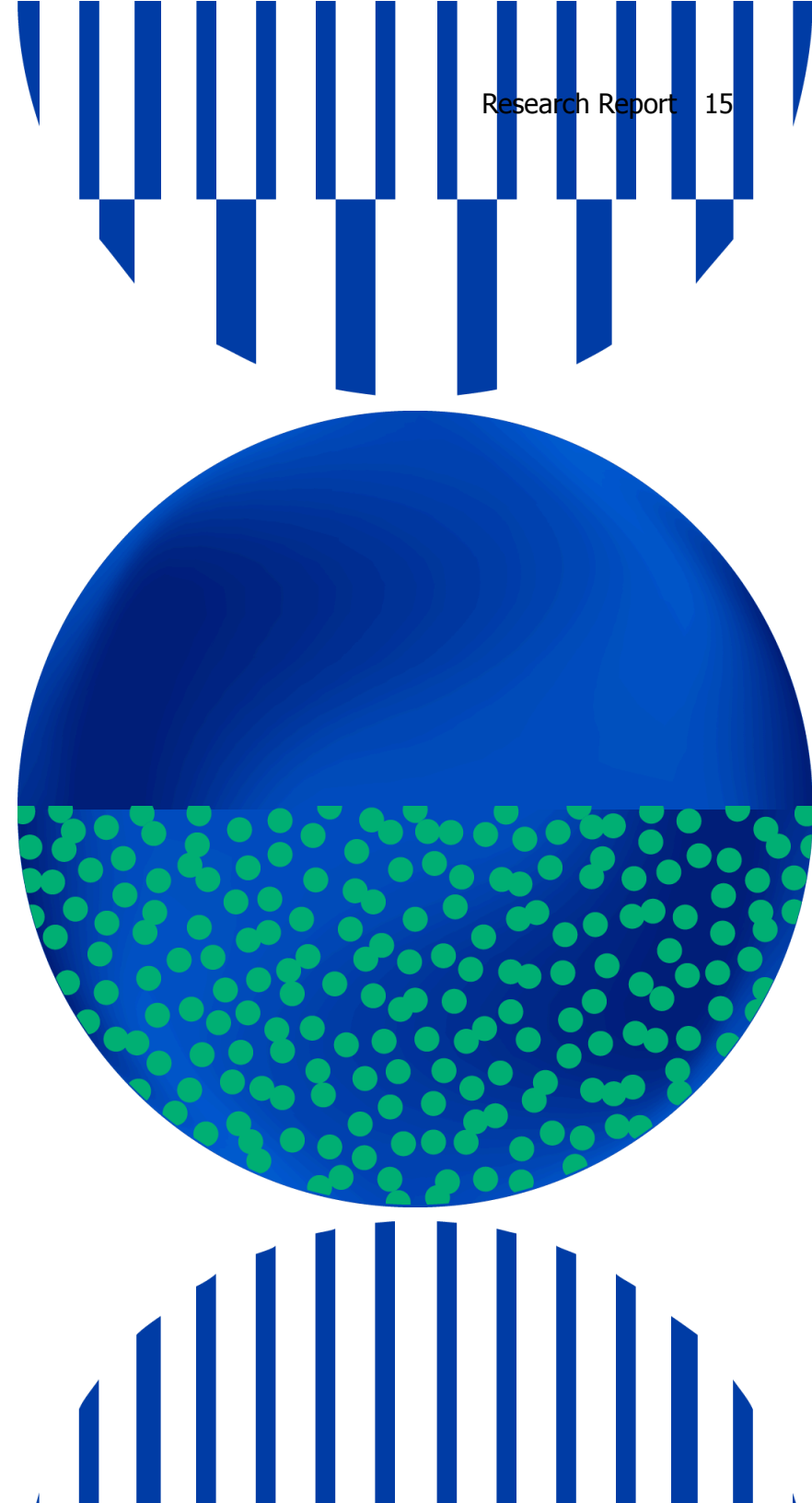
An essential part of a strategy for culture shift and implementation is identifying someone at the senior management level within municipal operations to drive the strategy forward [17]. Having an accessibility champion that is committed to addressing issues and embedding an accessibility culture will ensure that organizations make tangible progress towards accessibility goals. Learn more under [Accessibility Leadership](#) [20, 21].

Budget Constraints

Municipalities are being asked to do more with less, which is very challenging with current budgets and growing public needs. Limited financial resources can make it challenging to invest in accessibility and infrastructure improvements, such as retrofits of existing structures to meet accessibility standards [9]. While budget constraints were a significant barrier discussed during primary research, the unique urban geography of the municipality dictated the budget and its impact.

“Budget is always number one. We hear that time and time again. Millions sound like a lot, but **when you start to purchase, retrofit, or change old buildings, it really adds up”**

- Municipality representative



Opportunities and Enablers

Embrace Procurement Practices and Universal Design

Improving accessibility in the built environment has many economic benefits for a municipality and its community. Making facilities and built environments more accessible would allow more people with disabilities to access educational institutions, expand employment opportunities, increase consumer spending, increase social engagement and inclusion, and improve the overall well-being of individuals. In 2018, The Conference Board of Canada estimated that improving workplace accessibility would result in a permanent increase in real GDP of over \$16.8 B by 2030, generating significant additional revenue for governments [21].

Municipalities can leverage an opportunity to significantly improve their services and the lives of residents - while meeting budget constraints - by conducting audits, adopting universal design concepts, as well as adopting innovative procurement practices, leveraging purchasing power and collaborative procurement efforts.

Audit and Prioritization

Audits provide a baseline to strategically determine the feasibility, cost implication and a mechanism for prioritizing actions to align with accessibility goals. It further reduces expenses by eliminating duplication of resources, decreasing the number of temporary hyper-individualized solutions, anticipating and planning for future accommodations, and creating cost saving opportunities.

Universal Design

Universal design is a forward-looking solution that considers the relationship between accessible and sustainable design, ensuring that the built environment is adaptable to meet its community members' current and future needs. Incorporating universal design in the built environment promotes social inclusion, reduces stigma by putting people with disabilities on an equal playing field, and, most importantly, is cost-effective [21, 22, 23].

Innovative procurement practices

Innovative procurement practices are promising for municipalities to continue service delivery while exploring opportunities for significant change with minimal risk. There are varying practices and approaches to innovation procurement that can be combined or adapted to support the needs of a municipality, including **challenge-based procurement** and **outcome-based specifications** [24, 25, 26].

Leveraging Purchasing Power

Leveraging purchasing power to incorporate accessibility into procurement practices allows municipalities to prioritize inclusive and accessible vendors, products and services. This is sometimes called 'Social Procurement,' a measure municipalities implement to incorporate equity in local projects' solicitation and evaluation [27].

Collaborative Procurement Efforts

Collaboration in procurement helps increase purchasing power, enhance the sharing of best practice information, gain alignment on critical policies, and increase efficiencies in procurement activities and appropriate allocation of resources to help municipalities manage budget constraints [28, 29].

Learn more about these opportunities and enablers under [Appendix 3 - Embrace Procurement Practices and Universal Design](#).

Unique Urban Geography

Urban geography goes beyond the traditional bounds of physical geography by examining various aspects of urban life and the built environment.

“We're an amalgamated municipality and we're incredibly spread out. So **we have a lot of outliers**. This makes it **challenging for planning as every area has unique needs.**”

- Municipality representative

Accessibility needs and challenges may differ based on the physical, social and economic aspects of urban geography (e.g. rural or urban area, coastal or inland, northern or southern climate, aging or youthful populations, social and cultural values and norms, economic job flow, etc.). These various aspects impact municipal planning and development, making each municipality unique to their urban environment.

Temporary changes to the built environment caused by construction or weather-related incidents were identified as being particularly challenging by people with disabilities, as accessibility is likely to be an afterthought during planning and execution. Furthermore, as risk aversion is typically maintained within government culture, decision-makers often hesitate to adopt programs or initiatives successfully implemented elsewhere, believing them irreproducible due to their municipalities' unique urban geographies [30].

Opportunities and Enablers

Embrace Urban Identity and Diverse Neighborhoods

Embracing a community's unique requirements is needed to sustain an accessible city. A nuanced approach considers the diverse needs of neighbourhoods combined with tailored policies and interventions based on each area's specific characteristics to help identify, address and avoid inequalities, and promote supportive built environments.

Tailored Policies to Promote Healthy Communities

Studies have shown that treating municipalities as diverse neighbourhoods rather than single entities can improve health outcomes, social inclusion, and increased access to services [30, 31, 32].

Addressing Contemporary Challenges

Understanding the dynamic interplay between individuals and their environment helps municipalities better address their multifaceted challenges by creating strategic policies that are feasible, inclusive and environmentally sustainable [33].

Tactical Urbanism

Tactical urbanism is a quick-win approach that consists of rapid, low-cost project implementation that addresses safety issues, equity concerns, and infrastructure gaps while engaging with the community and promoting innovative solutions [34, 35, 36].

Learn more about these opportunities and enablers under [Appendix 4 - Embrace Urban Identity and Diverse Neighborhoods](#).

Opportunities and Enablers

Building Capacity

Building capacity on the topic of accessibility policy in the built environment can be enhanced for internal municipal staff and elected officials, as well as for external stakeholders like consultants and contractors.

Internal

The most apparent solutions to limited expertise rely on increasing internal staff to include people with disabilities, incorporating disability training to increase education and awareness and encouraging shifting to an accessibility culture [18]. When professionals without disabilities participate in positions of influence, policy, program and project designs often overlook the needs of persons with disabilities, hindering the desired outcome and impact [18, 37].

However, increasing city staff isn't always feasible for municipalities. Learn more about the different tactics to help address limited expertise under [Appendix 5 - Building Internal Capacity](#).

External

Procuring external resources (e.g., contractors, consultants) labelled as subject matter experts in accessibility who do not meet the desired outcomes or targets can be highly frustrating and wasteful for municipalities. To avoid these situations, incorporate specific targets, metrics or benchmarking tools to prevent room for misinterpretation of accessibility (e.g., meeting [CSA/ASC B651:23 specifics](#)).

Limited Internal and External Expertise

Internal

Smaller municipalities may have limited in-house expertise in accessibility and universal design, which can hinder the development and implementation of effective policies. Moreover, accessibility units or departments tend to be siloed from the rest of the organization, creating challenges in coordinating efforts among diverse stakeholders and impeding the execution of multi-departmental or interdisciplinary initiatives. Furthermore, historically, municipal decision-makers did not prioritize accessibility issues during the development process, and many buildings that remain in use today reflect this mindset [9]. The lack of willpower and historical infrastructure design without accounting for disabilities has resulted in accessibility barriers that need addressing.

External

When municipalities procure external resources (e.g., contractors, consultants) labeled as subject matter experts in accessibility, issues and inconsistencies arise during the work or implementation, as their knowledge is based on the minimums set by the building codes, inadvertently creating barriers to accessibility.

"Some design consultants will tell you that they are experts in accessible design, but then you see the design and question the term 'expert'. **When we start to ask questions, we're met with 'well, it meets the code...'**. But **building codes don't create meaningful accessibility**. Instead, for lack of a better term, **you're getting the bare minimum.**"

- Municipality representative

Competing Priorities

Across municipal government

Municipal governments often have numerous competing priorities, including transportation, housing, social services, and climate change-motivated programs [9]. Accessibility improvements may compete with other pressing issues for funding and attention; hence, competing programs or upgrades can inadvertently create accessibility barriers.

“If we have an accessibility project that takes x amount of dollars and one of the water mains needs to be replaced, **guess where that money’s going? It’s not going to accessibility. It’s going to fix the road.**”

- Municipality representative

Within the Accessible Design Space

As noted by multiple municipalities, competing priorities exist within the accessibility community. Advocate groups tend to be specific (e.g., [CNIB Foundation](#), [Canadian Association of the Deaf](#), [Canadian Down Syndrome Society](#)) and can come at the expense of other equity-seeking groups, as disabilities may require competing accommodations. For example, when it comes to accessible infrastructure, digital touch screens are helpful wayfinding alternatives for many population groups, including those who are hard of hearing or Deaf. However, they pose significant limitations to those with dexterity or vision impairments.

“We are **struggling with competing priorities at a micro level**. There are some advocates that are passionate, but their **priorities are very specific**. How do you make a decision when the loudest voices come at the **expense of other equity seeking groups?**”

- Municipality representative

Opportunities and Enablers

Collaboration and Integrated Plans

While many elements of municipalities make them unique, there are still common challenges that can be shared. Engaging in community networks is an efficient way to find opportunities and enablers to common barriers, collaboratively working together to improve outcomes, and share knowledge and expertise. It also creates a database of case studies, helping gain stakeholder buy-in with proven outcomes and benefits.

Developing long-term plans that **integrate** various sectors (e.g., climate change-motivated programs, housing, transportation, housing, and economic development) helps ensure balanced and cohesive municipal growth that meets the needs of its community. Accessibility is an integral part of all municipal sectors, and should be planned as such, rather than a separate entity [37].

Other enablers include embracing universal design, which shifts toward proactive practices and promotes the efficient use of resources by designing multi-functional and adaptable spaces that can serve various needs over time. Learn more under [Universal Design](#).

Opportunities and Enablers

Accessibility Leadership

Elected leaders are the key decision-makers, ensuring municipalities and organizations meet intended strategic goals. When they communicate that disability inclusion is meaningful to the business, it catalyzes involvement, creativity, and action across the organization [38, 39]. To ensure accessibility is a priority within a municipality, regardless of shifting political factors, it is imperative to create and implement a strategic accessibility plan with measurable outcomes so that if an incoming elected leader does not believe in accessibility, they cannot dismantle existing strategies and frameworks that are already in place. Similarly, putting in place an accessibility strategy and action plan for the built environment can help empower elected officials that are accessibility champions to double down and move work forward in the municipality at a faster pace than was previously possible [39].

Lastly, while changes in administration and leadership can create barriers to implementation, the biggest barrier lies within attitudinal barriers and lack of commitment [8, 20]. Increasing education and awareness, shifting to an accessibility culture, and having an accessibility champion that is committed to addressing issues and embedding an accessibility culture, will ensure that organizations make tangible progress towards accessibility goals. Having an inclusive community culture establishes accessibility as a business priority for all.

Political Factors

Political considerations and shifts in municipal leadership can influence the prioritization of accessibility policies. Changes in administration may lead to shifts in focus, resource allocation and accessibility prioritization.

“We look to our elected officials to set the tone, and if they’re not setting the tone, and it’s not something that seems to be top of mind for them, then it’s not going to be top of mind for anyone else.”

- Municipality representative



Case Studies

Case Study 1: City of London, ON

Background

Population

422,324 (2021)

1004.3 people per square kilometre [40]

Legislative context

The City of London is mandated by the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (2005) and is required to:

- Document and communicate a multi-year accessibility plan, to be updated at least once every five years
- Establish an Accessibility Advisory Committee
- File an accessibility compliance report

Refer to [Ontario](#) for additional legislative context.

Accessibility Policy Overview

Current State

The City of London developed the Facilities Accessibility Design Standards (FADS) Guideline, which was originally introduced in 2001 and approved by the City Council in November 2021. The purpose of the FADS framework is to address the needs of persons with mobility and hearing impairments, cognitive impairment, limited stamina and/or dexterity [41, 42].

Stakeholder Engagement

In the process of developing the guide, the City of London interviewed city employees with disabilities as well as members of the community in order to better understand the most pressing accessibility issues [43]. The City also consulted Access Without Limits and Employee Resource Groups (ERG) [43].

Perceptions of Accessibility Policy

The FADS framework is widely popular because it takes a common-sense approach to equitable access and universal design. Other communities are able to adopt FADS and they are invited to officially request permission to adopt this guide by submitting a "FADS Authorization Request" form [44]. As of 2021, more than 50 municipalities in Canada and the United States have utilized FADS in their communities. Furthermore, the City of London is consulted on many accessibility issues and programs, indicating that it is held in high regard as a standard for accessibility [44].

Lessons Learned

Although London's accessibility standards are ambitious and widely admired, the reality of government policies is that they are in constant revisions [45]. RHFAC promotes universal design principles, providing a much more stable framework for municipalities to adhere to even if government policies are revised. This is also significant for persons with disabilities as it would ensure standardized accessibility across municipalities.

Case Study 2: Halifax Regional Municipality, NS

Background

Population

439,819 (2021)

80.3 people per square kilometre [46].

Legislative context

Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) is mandated by the Act Respecting Accessibility in Nova Scotia (2017), and is required to:

- Establish an Accessibility Advisory Committee.
- Develop an accessibility plan.
- Update the plan every three years.

Refer to [Nova Scotia](#) for additional legislative context.

Accessibility Policy Overview

Current State

HRM's Accessibility Strategy, which was approved by Council in May 2021, consists of 30 action items to improve accessibility over a 10-year period [47]. The action items focus on six key areas: Built Environment, Goods & Services, Education, Information & Communication, Employment, and Public Transportation & Transportation Infrastructure [47].

HRM's strategy is considered RHFAC certificate-compliant. Among other Built Environment action items, HRM will use Rick Hansen gold certification and CSA B651 standards for future infrastructure in the Halifax region, as well as for any current infrastructure (including street infrastructure) that it owns [48]. To ensure the Built Environment action items are implemented, the municipality has also

passed a by-law stating that buildings must meet B651 standards [48].

Stakeholder Engagement

HRM has an Accessibility Advisory Committee, which advises on the impact of municipal policies, programs and services on persons with disabilities [47, 48]. The Committee has existed for over 20 years; its input, along with feedback from the broader accessibility community and municipality residents, has been key to successful strategy/policy development [47]. This Committee also hosts annual town halls that are open to the public [48]. In addition, municipal officials actively work on educating residents, both on an ad hoc basis when resistance to change arises and during formal initiatives such as Access Awareness Week.

Perceptions of Accessibility Policy

HRM has a very good reputation from a tourism perspective. Tourists feel comfortable and safe visiting the city, knowing that city infrastructure is recognized by an externally recognized organization, which results in more credibility.

Lessons Learned

In HRM, the Accessibility Directorate falls under Justice, thus giving it more teeth. Other factors officials have cited as key to the success of accessibility initiatives include active community engagement, ample funding, political continuity (HRM has had the same mayor for 12 years), and strong buy-in among municipal decision-makers. However, some officials have expressed concerns about limited capacity, emphasizing that sufficient human and financial resources are needed for municipalities to meet their accessibility objectives.

Case Study 3: City of Richmond, BC

Background

Population

209,937 (2021)

1629 people per square kilometre [49].

Legislative context

The City of Richmond is mandated by the Accessible British Columbia Act (2017), and is required to:

- establish an accessibility committee
- establish an accessibility plan
- establish a tool to receive feedback on accessibility.

Refer to [British Columbia](#) for additional legislative context.

Accessibility Policy Overview

Current State

Access and Inclusion Policy 4012 provides the policy framework for the City to further advance accessibility and inclusion in Richmond and to foster a more welcoming and inclusive environment for everyone that lives, works and plays there [50]. The City is currently in the process of developing the Richmond Accessibility Plan 2023–2033, which will guide the advancement of accessibility in Richmond over the next ten years [50]. The final plan will be presented in early 2024 [50].

The draft Plan has six strategic pillars: An Accessible Community, An Inclusive Organization, Accessibility in the Built Environment, Accessible Programs and Services, Accessible Communications and Technology, and Research & Monitoring [51].

Stakeholder Engagement

The City has formed the Richmond Accessibility Advisory Committee. Its first meeting took place in April 2023 [52]. The Committee acts as a resource and provides advice to the City Council to support the advancement of accessibility in the city [52].

Perceptions of Accessibility Policy

Generally there is strong public support for accessibility initiatives, but some dissenters question why taxpayers are funding them. There also seems to be a general reluctance to go beyond what the building code requires. Municipal staff believe that updates to the code will be needed in order to drive real change in the built environment.

Lessons Learned

More training and a clearer definition of “fully accessible by 2040” could help City staff achieve greater success when it comes to implementing accessibility initiatives. Staff frequently express the belief that they don’t have the background or expertise to take on accessibility work, as well as confusion around what “fully accessible by 2040” would look like at the municipal level.

Case Study 4: Carleton University

Background

Located in Ottawa, Carleton University is a self-proclaimed leader in accessibility among Canadian postsecondary institutions [53]. More specifically, Carleton offers an accessibility-focused academic curriculum, advanced research in accessible design, courses and training expertise in accessibility and inclusion, and meaningful engagement with relevant stakeholders [53]. In July 2018, Carleton University launched the Disability Studies Minor through the Feminist Institute of Social Transformation [54]. This program aims to explore different aspects of disability which include, but are not limited to, historical, cultural, economic, physical and social aspects [54].

Accessibility Policy Overview

Current State

Carleton's Coordinated Accessibility Strategy is a framework that serves as the university's main accessibility guide [55]. According to the official strategy report, the purpose of the strategy is to continue fostering the university's accessibility initiatives [55]. Engaging with internal and external stakeholders, including staff, faculty members and students, Carleton is committed to the long-term marathon of promoting inclusivity on campus [55]. The strategy identified seven areas of focus: Coordination & Leadership, Education & Training, Information & Communication, Physical Campus, Employment & Employee Support, Student Support Services and Research & Development [55].

Carleton recognizes the importance of RHF's significant contribution to making spaces more inclusive. In response to an aging population, an increasing number of people with disability, and federal and provincial accessibility targets, Carleton University announced that they were

fully committed to an accessible campus [56]. To aid with this commitment, Carleton University has adopted the Rick Hansen Foundation's Accessibility Certification (RHFAC) program as its own. Carleton University decided to adopt RHFAC's standards as they go well beyond those of the City of Ottawa and the province of Ontario [56]. Carleton is in the process of rating over 40 sites on their campus and intends to have all new sites built to RHFAC Gold standards [57]. They intend to upgrade all existing buildings to meet RHFAC requirements.

Carleton University's Accessibility Institute, which emerged from an initiative to foster interdisciplinary action in the accessibility space, is an internal unit at the university aligned with relevant campus policies and requirements.

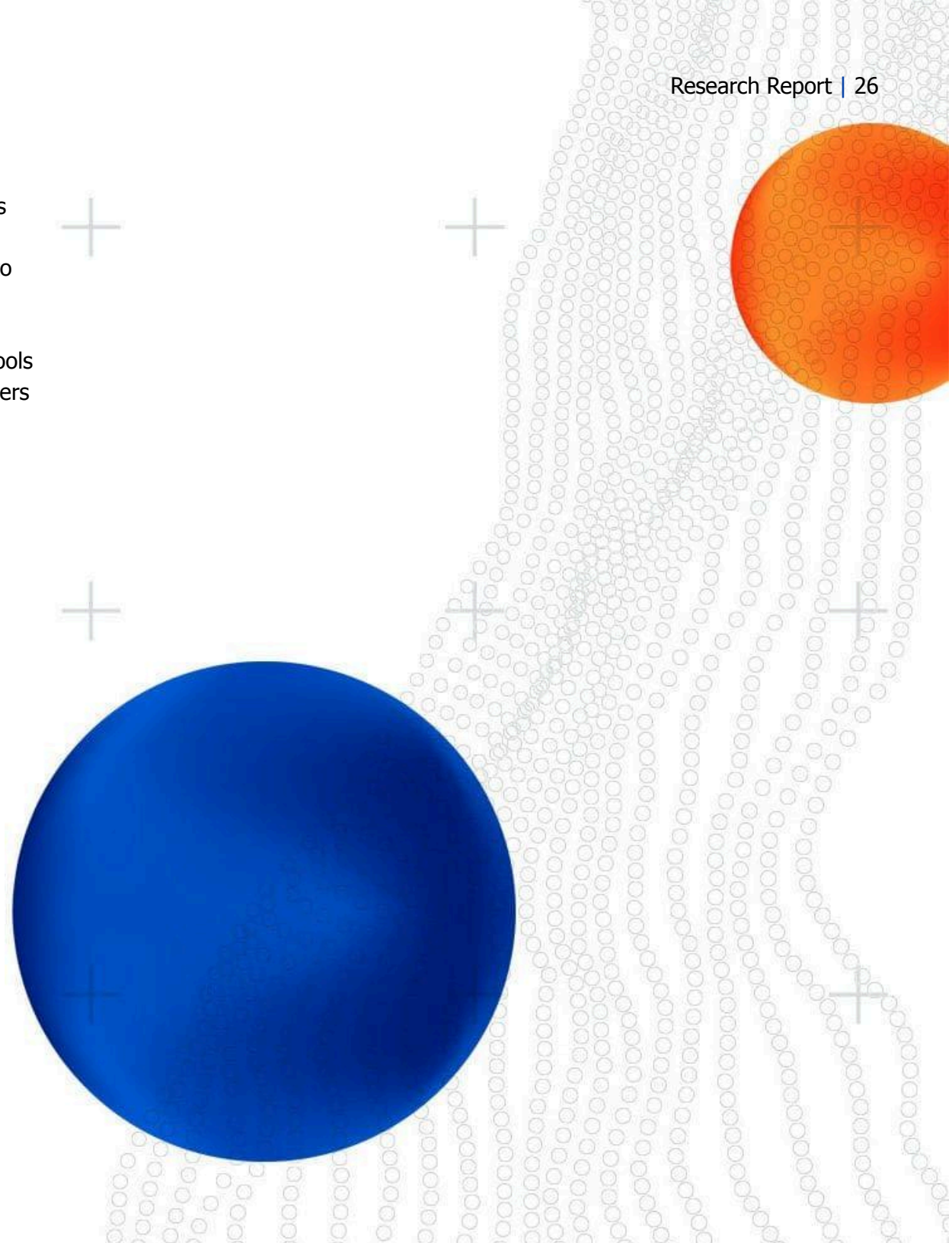
Stakeholder Engagement

In addition to working directly with RHF, Carleton works with other post-secondary institutions as well as the Employment Accessibility Resource Network (EARN).

Carleton created the Canadian Accessibility Network (CAN), to which RHF also belongs [58]. The network is composed of more than 100 members belonging to universities, colleges, post-secondary institutions, corporations, government departments or organizations supporting people with disabilities [58]. CAN's mission is to advance accessibility, mobilize strategic partnerships dedicated to action-oriented leadership in advancing accessibility as well as leverage Canada's accessibility assets across industries and encourage positive cultural shifts to foster equity [58].

Practical Implications

The findings from this research highlighted that the barriers that impact a municipality's ability to improve the policy landscape are complex and interconnected, which has led to ill-equipped organizations that lack confidence to manage disability as a business priority. By flipping the barriers as opportunities, MaRS was able to identify frameworks and tools that enable municipalities to take action against these barriers which can be applied in practice.



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Appendices

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Provincial and Territorial Accessibility Standards Overview

Alberta

According to the [Alberta Advocate for Persons with Disabilities: 2022-2025 Strategic Plan](#), creating provincial legislation is one of its key priorities, with a goal for legislation by 2025 [59]. However, as of November 2023, there was no accessibility legislation underway [59].

British Columbia

Title: [Accessible British Columbia Act](#)

Commencement: Received royal assent in June, 2021 [60].

Application: Standards apply to public sector organizations.

Legislation: The legislation created by the Government of British Columbia and the Provincial Accessibility Committee guides the development, implementation and enforcement of accessibility standards [60]. Standards are developed two at a time and are implemented in a phased approach [60]. Organizations are given at least one year from when the standard is listed in the Regulations to when they must comply [60].

Requirements: Public sector organizations must [60];

- Establish an accessibility committee
- Develop an accessibility plan
- Establish a process for receiving public feedback.

Manitoba

Title: [Accessibility for Manitobans Act](#) (AMA)

Commencement: Received royal assent in December, 2013 [61].

Application: Standards apply to Manitoba's private and public sector organizations in a phased approach. Standards developed apply first to the Manitoba government, then the public sector, and finally to small municipalities and private organizations [61].

Legislation: The Accessibility Advisory Council develops standards to provide a long-term, systemic, proactive approach to accessibility [62]. The fourth standard enacted under AMA, the Accessible Transportation Standard Regulation, addresses aspects of accessible public transportation [62]¹. The Accessibility Standard for the Design of Outdoor Public Spaces, which focuses on sidewalks, pathways, parks and other built environment aspects, will be the fifth standard under AMA. As of February 2024, the standard is still under development, but is estimated to be enacted in 2024 [63]. Plans include integrating barrier-free Universal Design principles and work environment accessibility when undertaking government projects for current and new buildings, leased spaces, upgrades and refreshes [62, 63].

Requirements: All public sector organizations are required to [63]:

- Create an accessibility plan that addresses systemic barriers in policies, practices and procedures.
- Update the plan every two years.
- Make the plan available to members of the public upon request.
- Note: the AMA allows two or more smaller municipalities to share an accessibility plan.

¹ Obligated organizations have until January 1, 2027, to comply with accessibility requirements, except for conventional transit operators who have until January 1, 2042 to upgrade existing buses to meet physical accessibility requirements. Any new buses purchased after January 1, 2027, are required to meet accessible design requirements [63] .

New Brunswick

In December 2023, the [Achieving Greater Accessibility: New Brunswick's Framework for Accessibility Legislation](#) was tabled in the legislature [64]. The framework is expected to be introduced into legislation in spring 2024 [64]. Once introduced, standards will begin development in 2025 and implementation in 2029, using a phased approach [64].

Newfoundland and Labrador

Title: [Newfoundland and Labrador Accessibility Act](#)

Commencement: Received royal assent in December, 2021 [65].

Application: Standards apply to all public bodies.

Legislation: The Act will improve accessibility by identifying, preventing, and removing barriers that prevent persons with disabilities from fully participating in society [65]. The Accessibility Standards Advisory Board was established in June 2022 [65]. It provides recommendations to the Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities regarding the establishment and content of accessibility standards and the periods for their implementation [65].

Requirements: By December 2023, all public bodies are required to [65];

- Develop an accessibility plan, which should include the measures to take in barrier removal and the procedures to assess that the measures are working.
- Make the plan available to members of the public.
- Update the plan every three years.
- Public bodies are encouraged to set up an Accessibility Advisory Committee.
- Public bodies are encouraged to consult with persons with disabilities or representatives from organizations of persons

with disabilities in developing and implementing accessibility plans.

Northwest Territories

As of February 2023, the Northwest Territories do not have an accessibility standard to address accessibility in the built environment.

Nova Scotia

Title: [Act Respecting Accessibility in Nova Scotia](#)

Commencement: Received royal assent in April, 2017 [66].

Application: Public sector bodies and other organizations prescribed by the regulations.

Legislation: The Government of Nova Scotia's Accessibility Directorate is responsible for administering the Accessibility Act and advancing disability issues within the government [66]. The Built Environment Accessibility Standard is the first of six accessibility standards that are being developed for Nova Scotia [66]. In September 2023, the Government of Nova Scotia shared its proposed Built Environment Accessibility Standard to receive public comments [68]. The target for enactment of the Built Environment Accessibility Standard Regulations is 2024, with regulation becoming effective in 2026 [69]. It is anticipated that accessibility standards will be implemented through amendments to the Nova Scotia Building Code, Accessibility Regulations, and accompanying Guidelines [67].

Requirements: Under the Accessibility Act, municipalities, universities, and other organizations must [66]:

- Establish an Accessibility Advisory Committee.
- Develop an accessibility plan.
- Update the plan every three years. As new accessibility standards are implemented, those standards should be integrated into the plan.

Nunavut

As of February 2023, Nunavut does not have an accessibility standard to address accessibility in the built environment.

Ontario

Title: [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act \(AODA\)](#)

Commencement: Received royal assent in June, 2005 [68].

Application: AODA applies to public and private organizations.

Legislation: The most detailed accessibility legislation governing the private sector in Canada, the AODA, sets out a process for developing and enforcing accessibility standards that organizations must follow [68]. To adopt a cultural shift towards the adoption of accessibility, the AODA is the first of its kind to require staff to be trained on accessibility [68]. This goes beyond mandating that organizations produce accessible products and services.

Requirements: The AODA requirements and reporting deadlines depend on the type and size of an organization. All organizations must [68];

- Meet specific requirements concerning employment, customer services, information and communications, transportation and the built environment.
- Develop and maintain policies governing how they achieve or will achieve accessibility.

Additionally, all businesses and non-profit organizations with more than 20 employees must [68]:

- File an accessibility compliance report (1-3 years, depending on the type and size of the organization).

Additionally, all businesses and non-profit organizations with 50 or more employees must [68]:

- Develop a statement of commitment to accessibility and make it publicly available.
- Document accessibility policies and make them publicly available and available in accessible formats upon request.
- Document a multi-year accessibility plan updated at least once every five years.

Additionally, designated public sector organizations must also [68]:

- Communicate their accessibility policies to employees and customers.
- Review and update the multi-year accessibility plan at least once every five years.
- Prepare a status report on the implementation of the multi-year plan.
- Ensure the multi-year plan and status report are publicly available and available in accessible formats upon request.
- Establish an Accessibility Advisory Committee (for the council of every municipality with a population over 10,000).

Prince Edward Island

As of February 2023, Prince Edward Island does not have an accessibility standard to address accessibility in the built environment.

Québec

Note that Québec's 'Accessibility Legislation' is largely debated by advocates due to multiple reasons (e.g., lack of timelines or goals, failure to recognize basic disability needs (e.g., sign language), use of permissive language) [69]. While it does include recommendations to ensure public-sector employers facilitate "the adaptation of the built environment to the needs of handicapped persons and their families without discrimination or privilege" it does not include built-environment requirements [69].

Title: [Act to Secure Handicapped Persons in the Exercise of their Rights with a View to Achieving Social, School and Workplace Integration](#)

Commencement: 1978, amended in 2004 [70].

Application: Public sector organizations.

Legislation: Québec was the first province to pass an accessibility law in 1978, amended in 2004 to prohibit discrimination in employment and public entities [70].

Saskatchewan

Title: [The Accessible Saskatchewan Act](#)

Commencement: Received royal assent on May 17, 2023 and came into force on December 3, 2023 [71].

Application: Government of Saskatchewan, public sector bodies, and others as prescribed. Eventually, the Act will be required by private organizations (no current timeline).

Legislation: Recently enacted, the Accessibility Act legislation will help make Saskatchewan a more accessible province for persons with disabilities by creating new standards. Plans include [71]:

- Creating the Saskatchewan Accessibility Office, which will provide education on accessibility.
- Increasing public awareness.
- Monitoring compliance and enforcement.
- Appointing an Accessibility Advisory Committee to advise on standards.

Requirements: The legislation will require accessibility plans and annual progress reports. However, there are no current timelines for implementation.

Yukon

As of February 2023, Yukon does not have an accessibility standard to address accessibility in the built environment.

Appendix 2 - Short-Term and Long-Term Actionable Initiatives

This information is based on primary and secondary research completed in fall 2023, and supplemented from the findings, discussions, and outputs of the 2024 MaRS-RHF Municipal Cohort Accelerator to provide municipalities and other organizations with short-term and long-term actionable initiatives to become more accessibility-confident.

Short-term actions are objectives that are anticipated to be achievable within a year. Long-term actions are initiatives that are anticipated to take more than a year. Of course, the length of each initiative is dependent on the resources currently available to the municipality or organization.

Increase Education and Awareness

Short-term actions

Express a commitment to disability inclusion.

A great first step to take, if it hasn't been done already, is to develop and communicate a statement of the organization's commitment to inclusion and ensuring equal access and participation for people with disabilities.

Begin your commitment by getting leadership buy-in, and work with the appropriate teams (e.g. human resources, communication and legal) to draft a statement that represents the municipality's commitment. Creating a culture of disability inclusion begins at the top. Leaders must demonstrate a genuine commitment to disability inclusion and communicate it clearly throughout the organization. Learn more about the importance of leadership under [Accessibility Leadership](#).

Leverage AODA's 'Statement of Organizational Commitment', found in their [Accessibility Policy Sample](#) document, to help draft your own commitment to disability inclusion. **Ensure to include a disability definition that includes the full spectrum of disabilities.** Furthermore, consider adopting the social model of disability (vs. traditional medical model) as a starting point to help create and foster an accessibility culture. To learn more about the social model of disability, access the [Historical Overview](#) from the United Nations' report on International Norms and Standards Relating to Disability.

This commitment should be evident in both words and actions, showing that disability inclusion is not simply a checkbox, but a fundamental aspect of the organization's culture. Consider your organization's vision, overall goals and its current level of disability inclusion. Consider the accessibility message you want to convey to the employees and public. Consider any federal, provincial or municipal standards, policies and legislation that define or relate to disability inclusion. Consider putting the statement of commitment on your website, if you have one.

Example of a commitment to disability inclusion: *This policy outlines the accountability and responsibilities that [organization] will enact to uphold our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion, the standards outlined in the [2005 Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA), the Ontario Human Rights Code] and other applicable legislation.*

Internal commitment to disability inclusion

Review internal policies and practices to ensure they reflect a commitment to disability inclusion. Review current policies and practices that exist within the municipality (e.g., organizational policies, human resources policies and guidelines, training programs

and documents, communication policies, accessibility plans, accommodation policies, etc.) and work with the appropriate teams (i.e., human resources, communication and legal) to update language regarding disabilities.

Consider implementing policies such as reasonable accommodations, flexible work arrangements, and accessible communication channels.

Ensure your disability definitions include the full spectrum of disabilities (e.g., including people with developmental and mental health disabilities, environmental sensitivities, and addictions), and acknowledge the impact of intersectionality.

Establish a process to receive and implement accessibility accommodation requests. Leverage AODA's 'Employment' section, found in their [Accessibility Policy Sample](#) document, to help draft your own accommodation request process. Ensure to communicate changes and implementation plans of the updated policies and practices across the organization.

Foster an inclusive community

To help you get started, book a free [RHF Ambassador presentation](#) to help rethink how communities can be more inclusive.

Create and share accessibility best practice guidelines and toolkits with partners and communities. Examples include guidelines for accessible documents, accessibility checklists for meetings and events, and solutions to common problems that can easily be implemented across the community to ensure more accessible buildings.

Tip: leverage the City of Vancouver's [Accessible events checklist and resources](#) and [RHF's Accessibility Certification Tip Sheet](#). Consider uploading the resources on your website, if you have one.

Create and share a list of disability support services, reliable contacts, and sources of information to partners and communities. Leverage [Disability Support](#) and Canadian Disability Resources Society's [support directory](#) as starting points to find local programs and services.

Promote an inclusive community

Promote outstanding examples of accessibility through a city award program or spotlight series. This creates an opportunity to partner with local media companies or advocacy groups to develop and implement the campaign. Get inspired by Nova Scotia's [Success Stories](#) and BOMA Canada's [Accessibility Award](#) given to participants of the [RHF Building Without Barriers Challenge](#).

Increase engagement by leveraging social media to share infographics, lived experience stories or digital mediums (podcasts, TV shows, movies, music, arts) to help spread awareness and education across the municipality. To ensure posts are accessible, leverage Accessible Libraries' [Checklist: Creating Accessible Social Media Posts](#).

Participate in conferences and events to develop and strengthen partnerships with communities to instill trust and mutual respect.

Support an inclusive community

Additional tips to support an inclusive community include:

- Review (or create) municipal meeting and event standards to identify areas for increased inclusion.
- Ensure municipal programming has support available for participants with disabilities to increase participation and inclusion.
- Communicate what accessible or assistive accommodations, supports, technologies or services will be available.

- Promote city events in advance to allow participants to schedule transportation and request individual accommodations.
- Ensure the municipality events calendar of events is regularly updated.
- Establish scent-free policies at all municipal meetings.
- Establish a process to receive and implement accessibility accommodation requests. Sample language: Please share any accommodations that would help make this event more accessible to you.

Long-term actions

Create an accessibility policy and plan

Create a framework and timeline to implement priority actions with the help of an Accessibility Policy and Plan. This includes legislation, establishing a framework, evaluation metrics, and gathering feedback. Resources to help you get started include BC Accessibility Hub's [Developing Your First Accessibility Plan: A Guide for BC Prescribed Organization](#), Nova Scotia's [Accessibility Planning Toolkit for Municipalities](#).

The plan should also include education and awareness and address the underrepresentation of people with disabilities, and its impact on employment, housing and services. To help you get started, leverage the City of Vancouver's Accessibility Strategy titled [Transforming Attitudes, Embedding Change](#).

Leverage Municipal Authority for Regulatory Measures and Incentives

Short-term actions

Establish a baseline of mutual understanding

To begin, address the concept of acceptable (minimum) level of accessibility within building codes, and what the municipality's expectations are in terms of accessibility related to the building codes.

Develop a consulting or co-creation process to receive input from persons with disabilities experiencing barriers on upcoming building projects.

Review and address current challenges

Review municipal policies, programs and bylaws to evaluate opportunities to include accessibility and/or universal design requirements in regulatory frameworks.

Create working groups of cross-departmental staff that work in construction or related areas, to discuss challenges and barriers they face when adopting, implementing or incorporating accessibility into their programs or projects. Utilize best practices, new ideas, pooled funds and cross-collaboration to avoid duplication of efforts and create efficiencies and new learning opportunities.

Require that any future municipal decisions, policies, services and programs that impact built environment and accessibility are screened and assessed for impact.

Increase education and awareness of universal design

Studies have shown that a common barrier to universal design is a

lack of clear, structured information. Designers are overwhelmed by available information, making it difficult to gather knowledge efficiently. Proactively providing stakeholders access to the right information reduces barriers to adoption and enables inclusive design.

Practical drivers of adopting universal design guidelines generally involve promoting economic advantages, such as more lucrative markets, enhanced brand names, and opportunities for innovation. Prioritize presenting the information in a design-relevant manner to support designers' cognitive process to understand direct adoption and application. To do so, leverage RHF's [universal design guidelines](#).

Host webinars or information sessions to provide additional support and to answer questions. This provides an opportunity to leverage and involve the community by working with advocacy groups and/or individuals with lived experience to provide an accessibility lens and understanding from the perspective of those impacted by barriers and legal services to provide legal interpretations of building codes definitions, implementation and implications.

Encourage developers and private organizations to increase their education and awareness to stay ahead of the curve in relation to accessibility in the built environment. Share accessibility resources and guides that focus on creating more accessible buildings, such as Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA) Canada's [2022 Accessibility Guide](#), BOMA Canada's [2021 Accessibility Guide: How to create inclusive buildings for everyone, everywhere](#) and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC)'s [Universal Design Guide](#) report for multi-unit residential buildings that have single-level units in low-, mid- or high-rise buildings with common areas and entrances.

Offer incentives to encourage developers and private organizations to contribute to accessibility.

Long-term actions

Embed accessibility into policy and regulatory frameworks

Amend building codes to introduce accessibility features into private buildings. Consider cost offset opportunities through regulatory relaxation, fee reductions or waivers and fast-tracked approvals for construction and projects that meet specific accessibility metrics or targets.

Develop and maintain a housing strategy that focuses on the full spectrum of housing and built environment needs, including accessibility. Include affordable and accessible housing, planning, zoning, licensing, regulation, enforcement, taxation and other measures within municipal authority.

Only allow community and commercial projects if they are accessible and/or offer accessibility education to the community.

Better-than-code requirements

Harmonize with other jurisdictions to agree on terminology and establish criteria for better-than-code requirements to increase consistency and reduce confusion.

Work collaboratively with local educational institutions to increase accessibility education requirements in professional education programs that impact built environments, such as engineering, architecture and planning.

Work collaboratively with other orders of government to identify respective areas of responsibility and shared obligations to increase accessibility in the built environment.

Note: these long-term actions depend on proper buy-in, which is heavily tied to [increasing education and awareness](#), shifting to an [accessibility culture](#), and [accessibility leadership](#).

Shift to an Accessibility Culture

Creating an accessibility culture requires a holistic and sustained effort involving many efforts and commitments, such as fostering an inclusive culture, encouraging inclusive practices, leadership commitment, etc. By embedding accessibility into the core values and practices of the organization or community, it becomes a natural and integral part of the culture.

Short-term actions

Foster inclusive culture

Shifting to an accessibility culture within an organization or community involves fostering an inclusive environment where accessibility is a fundamental value. This includes adopting the social disability model, encouraging inclusive language and educating employers on exclusive linguistic practices, such as misusing disability words, linguistic microaggression and casual ableist language, and increasing understanding of the full spectrum of disability across all city departments and related boards to foster an accessibility culture. The latter includes understanding that disabilities can be permanent, temporary, invisible, or might change over time.

To support fostering an inclusive culture, consider the following resources:

- Forbes' article [It's Time To Stop Even Casually Misusing Disability Words](#)
- University of the Fraser Valley's resource [Ableism: Language and Microaggressions](#).

Encourage inclusive practices

Develop and implement clear accessibility policies and guidelines that outline expectations, standards, and procedures. This could include communicating core values, mindsets and behaviors your organization strives to achieve.

Review current internal processes and documents to discover and acknowledge where barriers to participation may exist. This includes:

- removing exclusive linguistic practices
- creating job descriptions that focus on essential skills and avoiding unnecessary requirements that may exclude people with disabilities
- ensuring that recruitment processes are accessible (including online applications, interviews, and onboarding procedures)
- providing necessary accommodations to support employees with disabilities, such as adaptive technology, flexible work arrangements, and accessible workspaces
- considering all types of disability in staff training, hiring, decision-making, and event planning activities
- integrating accessibility considerations into all organizational practices, including hiring, procurement, and customer service.

When possible, provide additional information or clarification for practices that are less self-evident or common, and describe how it can benefit the larger community. As an example, captions are typically associated with individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, which someone might deem a 'small population'. However, studies have shown that captions benefit a much larger population, including children, adults learning to read, non-native speakers, people with developmental disabilities, individuals who are neurodivergent, and any individual in a crowded or noisy place.

Shifting to an accessibility culture within a broader organization is a collaborative effort that requires the involvement and commitment of all departments, not just Human Resources. Inclusive practices can also include incorporating peer storytelling in the workplace.

Storytelling is a great way to understand diverse experiences and everyday barriers. This could also include creating meaningful opportunities to engage with community members or advocacy groups to acknowledge lived experiences. To get started, here are some videos to provide varying perspectives;

- [Sean Crump: Inclusion Through Design: You're Only Temporarily-Able Bodied](#) - TEDxYYC
- [Aimee Mullins: My 12 pairs of legs](#) - Ted Talk
- [Stella Young: I'm not your inspiration, thank you very much](#) – TEDxSydney

Another opportunity is to encourage empathy exercises. Empathy exercises invite individuals to think more deeply about the challenges that people with disabilities face. Leveraging the personas found in [this excerpt from the book 'A Web for Everyone'](#), by Sarah Horton and Whitney Quesenbery or the Government of Canada's [Persona's with Disabilities for inclusive user experience \(UX\) design](#), get your team to imagine how each persona might have encountered barriers in the built environment to access a specific municipality service or program. Encourage them to reflect on the challenges and frustrations experienced, and some solutions to remove those barriers.

Designers use personas to represent the different types of people who might be interacting with a product or service. They're created using qualitative and quantitative research, and provide a reliable and realistic representation of your key audience, help inform functionality, help uncover gaps, and help highlight new opportunities. They're typically used with a journey map, which is a visualization document that showcases the steps that a user would take to accomplish a specific goal.

It is important to note that short empathy exercises do not capture long-term experience, complete perspectives or the impact of multiple disabilities and/or intersectionality.

The two opportunities listed above are also great possibilities to invite, collaborate or engage with advocacy groups or members of your community.

Recognize and reward inclusive practices

Recognizing and celebrating success is crucial for motivating employees, reinforcing desired behaviors, fostering a positive culture, sustaining engagement, increasing visibility, improving retention and recruitment, promoting accountability, and providing psychological benefits. These practices contribute to the overall success and well-being of the organization and its members. Ensure to recognize and celebrate achievements and milestones in accessibility to motivate and encourage ongoing efforts, and when possible implement incentive programs to reward departments and individuals who contribute significantly to accessibility goals.

This could include hosting formal or informal events to recognize and celebrate achievements of all sizes, or highlighting successes in internal or external newsletters, intranet or social media platforms.

Demonstrate commitment to inclusivity

Offer or create work opportunities for people with disabilities to be a part of the decision-making process. This includes hiring staff with disabilities, contracting advisors, subject matter experts or those with lived experience, or creating working groups composed of people with disabilities. Ensure to include opportunities for underrepresented people with disabilities, and those who face additional intersectional barriers. Including people with disabilities in decision-making processes is a crucial element in shifting to an accessibility culture

within an organization. It demonstrates a commitment to inclusivity and diversity, and it brings unique perspectives and skills to the workplace.

Establish multiple channels for collecting feedback to continuously inform and improve practices.

Cross-departmental collaboration

Shifting to an accessibility culture requires the collective effort of the entire organization, with leadership driving the commitment and every department playing a crucial role. Human Resources can spearhead the initiative, but success depends on widespread participation, collaboration, and shared responsibility across the organization. Form an interdisciplinary task force or committee that includes representatives from various departments (e.g., HR, IT, Facilities, Marketing) to coordinate and drive accessibility initiatives.

Here are a few suggestions of shared responsibilities:

- Human Resources to lead the development of inclusive hiring practices, provide training, and ensure workplace accommodations.
- Information technology (IT) to ensure digital accessibility, including websites, software and internal systems.
- Facilities to ensure physical spaces are accessible, considering elements like ramps, wayfindings, and restrooms.
- Marketing and communications to create accessible marketing materials and communication strategies.

Long-term actions

Create a framework and timeline to implement priority actions

Incorporate inclusive values in the overall organizational strategy. The framework should include developing and maintaining a vibrant network of employees with disabilities. Implement accountability mechanisms to monitor the framework and increase accountability. Update all internal processes and documents to ensure they're fully accessible. Develop and maintain an advisory committee (either internal or external) that can provide advice on the accessibility of the department, programs and services.

To support creating a framework, consider leveraging the Conference Board of Canada's [The Business Case to Build Physically Accessible Environments](#), Chapter 6 (p.33).

Comprehensive training programs

Provide ongoing training for all employees on accessibility awareness, best practices, and specific skills related to their roles. Ensure all accessibility-related training documents are updated to reflect the full spectrum of disabilities, and that all staff are compliant with updated education and terminology. Set out a process for developing and enforcing accessibility standards that organizations must follow.

Suggested resource: Rick Hansen Foundation's [Inclusion & Accessibility Training](#).

Embrace Procurement Practices and Universal Design

Overcoming budget constraints while leveraging procurement practices and universal design requires strategic planning, collaboration, and innovation.

Short-term actions

Leveraging technology and lived experiences

Use innovative solutions to create smart, accessible infrastructure. For instance, digital wayfinding apps and automated systems can enhance accessibility at a lower cost compared to physical alterations.

Leverage crowd-sourced technology platforms, such as [AccessNow](#), to identify accessibility barriers and prioritize cost-effective solutions based on real-time data and user feedback.

Collaborative Procurement

Nurture and strive for a collaborative ecosystem approach to inclusive procurement, including capacity building and supportive networks for diverse-owned businesses and social enterprises. Identify and map common procured goods and services with other municipalities to find commonalities and propose collaborative purchasing opportunities. Example: partner with nearby municipalities to jointly purchase accessible playground equipment, achieving lower prices through bulk purchasing and negotiating power.

Demonstrate commitment to inclusivity

Accept the [RHF Building Without Barriers Challenge](#) to not only establish your municipality as a leader in accessibility, but to invest in accessibility and take advantage of resources allocated to participants, including;

- One Accessibility Awareness Training Session for staff
- Full tuition grant for RHFAC Training course for one staff member
- Exclusive webinars on accessibility in the built environment
- Participants' logo to be displayed on the RHF website
- Acknowledgement at the BOMEX 2024 Awards Gala
- Award from RHF (to be given out at BOMEX 2024)

Develop a process to capture data on client satisfaction from the perspective of persons with disabilities. Develop a response plan, portal, process, and funding plan for additional accessibility enhancements and requests.

Implement a process for ongoing built environment audits to assess accessibility improvements. Develop a process and review requirements to capture accessibility features for all projects throughout the inception, design, construction, and completion phases. If provincial built environment accessibility standards cannot be met, then reasons should be documented following processes for alternative compliance mechanisms.

Develop a communication process to let the community know when barriers in the physical environment have been addressed and/or removed.

Inclusive and Efficient Procurement Practices

Nurture and strive for a collaborative ecosystem approach to inclusive procurement, including capacity building and supportive networks for diverse-owned businesses and social enterprises.

Analyze current processes and practices related to procurement to identify and map opportunities to incorporate accessible procurement policies. Consider adding a supplier diversity policy to current procurement frameworks to include more accessibility-owned businesses (as well as other diversity suppliers, such as women, BIPOC and 2SLGBTQ+). Suggested resource: Disability:INclusive Workplaces' [Accessibility Technology Procurement Toolkit](#) to help identify opportunities.

Identify priority areas to help shift to an inclusive procurement practice promoting inclusive culture. This includes identifying possible

improvements to enhance the accessibility of bid documents, such as using plain language, providing alternate formats, and creating a mechanism to receive feedback from vendors and suppliers that allows for reporting accessibility concerns or issues encountered during the procurement process. Leverage AnchorTO and Buy Social Canada's [Recommendations as actions for municipalities and institutions](#) (p.23) list as a starting point.

When possible, incorporate accessibility criteria and features when procuring or acquiring goods, services or facilities. Accessibility should form a meaningful weight for the overall criteria. The [Council of Ontario Universities](#) recommends 5% to 10%, unless determined otherwise as part of the procurement process.

Complete Buy Social Canada's worksheets in [A Guide to Social Procurement](#) to be guided through the social procurement implementation process.

- Worksheet 1: Social Purchasing Audit (p. 3)
- Worksheet 2: Social Procurement Policy Framework (p. 50)
- Worksheet 3: Social Purchasing Selection Weighting (p. 53)
- Worksheet 4: Assessing Your Social Purchasing Opportunities (p. 55)
- Worksheet 5 - 7: Community Benefit Agreements (pp. 62-70)

Universal Design Implementation

Invest in universal design from the outset of projects. Although initial costs may be higher, universal design reduces the need for costly retrofits and adaptations later, leading to long-term savings. Ensure all new infrastructure projects incorporate universal design principles. Designing for all users from the start can prevent expensive modifications and improve accessibility for everyone.

Long-term actions

Strategic procurement practices

Establish long-term framework agreements with suppliers for commonly used accessible goods and services. This reduces procurement time and costs while ensuring consistent quality and compliance with universal design principles. Consider adding a supplier diversity policy to current procurement frameworks to include more accessibility-owned businesses (as well as other diversity suppliers, such as women, BIPOC and 2SLGBTQ+).

Draft accessibility requirements in municipalities' procurement processes, templates and contracts. Accessibility should be considered early and across vendors to ensure it is included and prioritized in finalist selection criteria. Increase awareness and resources related to accessibility purchases among procurement specialists. Incorporate accessibility language in your Supplier Codes of Conduct. Tip: sample procurement language by [Disability:IN](#).

Establish a measurement framework to evaluate outcomes. Incorporate metrics associated with registration, bidding, outcomes, and awarded contracts. Be clear on intended outcomes; evaluating and learning from implementing interventions is critical. Suggested resources:

- British Columbia Social Procurement Initiative's guidebook titled [Measuring What Matters: Measurement Framework Guidance For British Columbia Social Procurement Initiative](#).
- Buy Social Canada's [Social Value Menu: Goods and Services Templates for Implementation](#)
- Council of Ontario Universities' [Accessible Procurement Guide](#)
- Disability:INclusive Workplaces' [Accessibility Technology Procurement Toolkit](#)

Provide businesses owned by equity-deserving groups and social enterprises equal access to procurement opportunities by identifying and removing barriers in current processes and policies.

Suggested resources:

- AnchorTO and Buy Social Canada's [Self Attestation Removing Barriers to Diversity in Supply Chains](#) to identify and remove barriers
- BCSPI vendor information sheet titled [Sell Your Social Value: Information On Social Procurement For Businesses](#)

Recommend accessible procurement policies to private organizations to give preference to facilities that meet current accessibility standards when buying or leasing new buildings or spaces. Include an option to implement through amendment or policy interpretation.

Review the current division of responsibilities between the province and municipality and map out cost-sharing opportunities. Discuss cost-sharing with your province to ensure decision-making power and funding responsibilities are appropriately linked.

Suggested resource: Ontario 360's [In It Together: Clarifying Provincial-Municipal Responsibilities in Ontario](#) policy paper.

Strategic auditing and reporting

Develop standard reporting and auditing tools to aid with strategic planning, optimizing efficiencies and cost savings.

Make audits available to the public so that individuals can assess potential barriers prior to arrival. Tip: leverage Arts AccessAbility Network Manitoba's [Accessibility Audit Database](#) for inspiration.

Embrace Urban Identity and Diverse Neighborhoods

Short-term actions

Public space design and path of travel

Consider accessibility in public spaces so that people have a straight path of travel. Host design workshops in diverse neighborhoods to gather input on public space improvements, ensuring that plans reflect the community's identity and needs. Establish a neighborhood ambassador program where local residents advocate for and assist with the implementation of inclusive built environment policies.

Make building and floor plans easy to find on the current city websites to allow individuals to understand potential barriers prior to arrival.

Emergency preparedness and response

Review and update existing procedures and processes to identify and eliminate accessibility barriers and better support persons with (dis)abilities in temporary building disruptions and emergencies during:

- Temporary building and weather-related disruptions (procedures for snow removal, communication regarding projects and other unplanned events with accessibility impacts)
- Evacuation procedures - including fire alarm upgrade, expansion of accessibility scope and updates to emergency evacuation signage to meet Nova Scotia Provincial Built Environment Accessibility Standards

Consult with persons with disabilities on an emergency evacuation plan, and prepare or revise the plan according to the specific needs of employees with disabilities. Update winter maintenance strategy based on consultations. Include visual alarms (e.g., flashing lights) to signal an emergency to people with hearing disabilities.

Long-term actions

Strategic initiatives

Develop strategies and programs that meet the needs of specific populations, such as developing specific interventions for equity-seeking and vulnerable groups with particular needs.

Build Capacity - Internal

Short-term actions

Collaboration and partnerships

Leverage existing resources and knowledge from other municipalities. Work with advocacy groups to create pilot initiatives.

Inclusive planning and design

Review the built environment in consultation with persons with disabilities (employees, clients and other people who regularly conduct business in the building) to identify how it could be more accessible and inclusive. Actively promote accessibility features and services offered in public-facing spaces to free up resources tied to public inquiries.

Establish working groups to ensure accessibility is integrated and respected across all municipality projects. Based on the working groups and/or secondary data, create and introduce personas to inform accessibility in design. Designers use personas to represent the different people interacting with their products. Personas help focus decisions surrounding the built environment by adding a layer of real-world considerations to the conversation. They offer a quick and inexpensive way to test and prioritize accessibility throughout development. Get inspired by the persona found in [this excerpt from the book 'A Web for Everyone'](#), by Sarah Horton and Whitney Quesenberry or the Government of Canada's [Persona's with Disabilities for inclusive user experience \(UX\) design](#).

Long-term actions

Ongoing consultations and feedback

Establish a formal consulting process to receive ongoing input from persons with disabilities and employees experiencing barriers.

Strategic initiatives

Include the following suggestions into the organization's strategic initiatives:

- Develop a framework to close the employment gap among professionals with disabilities.
- Increase access to core funding and long-term partnerships to support stronger institutionalization for persons with disabilities.
- Increase capacity-building efforts such as leadership training and mentoring support for people with disabilities within the organization.
 - Studies have shown that mentoring persons with disabilities with leaders is increasingly critical as their roles as advisors and representatives of the disability community expand.

Build Capacity - External

Short-term actions

Evaluation and hiring criteria

Include language and certifications around accessibility (e.g., targets, processes or metrics, RHFAC) in matrices used when evaluating and hiring external contractors.

Established trusted partnerships

Work with consultants that are already working on municipal projects to increase their education and awareness by sharing best practice resources. Create a list of trusted partners that meet accessibility needs, based on experience or recommendations from other municipalities, trusted community members, or advocacy groups.

Long-term actions**Evaluation and standards compliance**

Incorporate quality assurance and other criteria for private consultants that have been hired to support accessibility planning, audits, assessments, and accessibility upgrades. Incorporate accessibility best practices and benchmarks to ensure requirements are correctly understood.

Accessibility Leadership**Short-term actions****Maintain continuity in accessibility initiative**

Ensure that ongoing accessibility projects and initiatives have clear documentation and reporting mechanisms to provide continuity across political transitions. Hold regular briefings or orientations for new political leadership and administrators on existing accessibility policies, projects, and their importance.

Strengthen institutional knowledge

Establish knowledge-sharing sessions or workshops to transfer institutional knowledge about accessibility initiatives to new staff and administrators. Document best practices and lessons learned from past accessibility projects to inform future decision-making.

Continuously engage stakeholders and community members

Maintain regular communication and engagement with disability advocacy groups, community organizations, community members and

stakeholders to keep them informed about ongoing and planned accessibility efforts. Seek feedback and input from stakeholders on potential changes or adaptations needed due to shifting priorities.

Flexible budgeting and resource allocation

Advocate for flexible budgeting practices that allow for adjustments in resource allocation based on evolving priorities and political mandates. Prioritize quick-win projects, such as pilot projects, that can demonstrate tangible improvements in accessibility without requiring extensive resources.

Long-term actions**Comprehensive training programs**

Implement ongoing education and training programs for staff and elected officials on disability rights, universal design principles, and the benefits of inclusive environments.

Institutionalize Accessibility Policies

Embed accessibility considerations into long-term strategic plans and institutional frameworks to ensure sustainability across political cycles. This includes creating an accessibility plan with an embedded accountability framework, and timelines to implement priority actions. Co-create with advocacy groups and people with disabilities to ensure the strategy is helpful for the people it is designed to serve.

Build cross-departmental collaboration

Foster collaboration across different municipal departments and agencies to integrate accessibility considerations into all facets of urban planning, development, and maintenance. Establish inter-departmental working groups or committees focused on accessibility to ensure a coordinated approach.

Appendix 3 - Embrace Procurement Practices and Universal Design

Municipalities are being asked to do more with less, which is very challenging with current budgets and growing public needs.

Improving accessibility in the built environment has many economic benefits for a municipality and its community. Making facilities and built environments more accessible would allow more people with disabilities to access educational institutions, expand employment opportunities, increase consumer spending, increase social engagement and inclusion, and improve the overall well-being of individuals. In 2018, The Conference Board of Canada estimated that improving workplace accessibility would result in a permanent increase in real GDP of over \$16.8 B by 2030, generating significant additional revenue for governments [21].

Municipalities can leverage an opportunity to significantly improve their services and the lives of residents - while meeting budget constraints - by conducting audits, adopting universal design concepts, as well as adopting innovative procurement practices, such as capitalizing on innovative partnerships and focusing on pilot projects, leveraging purchasing power.

Audit and Prioritization

While seemingly counterintuitive, conducting a well-designed audit of existing facilities is generally beneficial, but especially when experiencing budget constraints. Audits provide a baseline to strategically determine the feasibility, cost implication and a mechanism for prioritizing actions to align with accessibility goals. It further reduces expenses by eliminating duplication of resources, decreasing the number of temporary hyper-individualized solutions, anticipating and planning for future accommodations, and creating cost saving opportunities (e.g., reducing costs associated with

administration and procurement, allowing for bulk purchasing and cost negotiation).

While incorporating inclusive elements into the built environment may seem overwhelming, prioritization of 'quick wins' or immediate safety concerns can help municipalities get started. According to a longitudinal study in Sweden, minor improvements to the built environment (e.g., wayfinding, levelling pavement, separating cyclists and pedestrians, lowering curbs, lowering speed limits, wider sidewalks, more benches, safer traffic crossings) can have a significant influence on an individual's perception of environmental barriers [72]. Some quick wins can include [3, 12, 73, 74, 75, 76];

- Ensuring first-aid kits and defibrillators are at an accessible height, based on [CSA Accessible Design for the Built Environment](#) standard (between 400 and 1200 mm from the floor).
- Developing a maintenance schedule and standard for all accessibility features on municipal facilities to ensure that key amenities, such as automatic door openers or level curb cuts, are regularly tested and maintained.
- Leveraging lived experiences and crowd-sourced technology, such as [AccessNow](#), to understand, assess and address common built environment barriers in your municipality.
- Creating a category for accessibility complaints and a mechanism to address the complaints.
- Establishing scent-free policies at all municipal buildings, including switching to scent-free cleaning supplies and hand soaps in washroom dispensers, and removing air fresheners and deodorizers.
- Increasing tactile indications in washrooms and for wayfinding.
- Installing light switch covers that have appropriate contrast to the walls.

- Applying continuous opaque strips at the level indicated by the [CSA Accessible Design for the Built Environment](#) standard on all glass doors to create better visibility for people with low vision.
- Posting directional signage at all municipal-owned buildings to assist with navigation.
- Ensuring printed materials use plain language, have large print versions, accessible file formats (PDF and Microsoft Word), audio formats, and use closed captions for multimedia.
 - Among the 5.2 million Canadians who indicated they had difficulty with print material, 77.4% had difficulty seeing words in print, 25.0% had difficulty holding or turning pages of print material, and 42.2% had difficulty reading or understanding words in print [76].
- Installing lever-type door devices (instead of door knobs).
- Asking suppliers to provide carpets that have been off-gassed prior to installation.
 - New carpets can produce off-gassing, an issue for people with environmental intolerances or sensitivities.
- Avoiding fixing furniture (e.g., tables, chairs) to accommodate a person using a wheelchair easily.
- Communicating when the barrier has been addressed and removed as those impacted by said barrier might be unaware of the changes due to avoiding the area/barrier.
- Communicating the various services and possible accommodations available to city employees and community members to avoid underutilizing tools and services.

For quick wins and a no- low- and medium-cost checklist associated with quick wins, consult the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification™™ (RHFAC) program, and The Ontario BIA Association's [The Business of Accessibility: How to Make Your Main Street Business Accessibility Smart](#). While cost savings are essential for municipalities, equity and inclusion should always be the foremost consideration.

Universal Design

Universal design is a forward-looking solution that considers the relationship between accessible and sustainable design, ensuring that the built environment is adaptable to meet its community members' current and future needs. Incorporating universal design in the built environment promotes social inclusion, reduces stigma by putting people with disabilities on an equal playing field, and, most importantly, is cost-effective. A significant barrier to the application and widespread adoption of universal design is the perceived additional cost, with psychological research demonstrating that stakeholders (e.g., architects, designers, councillors, public) often overestimate the costs associated with the accessibility of buildings and the application of universal design [22].

Another complexity arises when allocating costs to accessibility or universal design is categorized as an 'add-on', rather than incurred costs, regardless of the intended level of inclusion. For example, when renovating or retrofitting a historic building, adding an elevator to a two-floor building might be categorized as an accessibility cost, whereas an elevator for a four-story building is considered standard practice and thus wouldn't be categorized as a universal design cost. Consequently, the cost of accessibility becomes context-dependent and subjective to the individual, making it difficult to assess the cost implications associated with accessibility [22]. Despite this, studies have shown that universal design can reduce costs as it is a proactive approach to accessibility, avoiding costly retrofits and temporary hyper-individualist services and solutions. A Belgian study examined the direct costs associated with the universal design of public buildings and found that the additional universal design costs for new builds varied between 0.94% and 3.92% of the total cost, depending on building type and size [22]. Meanwhile, costs associated with universal design features in renovations were between 2.24% and 14.9% of total cost, depending on building type and size [23].

Similarly, a Canadian study conducted by HCMA Architecture + Design found that the average new construction cost increase to achieve RHF Accessibility Certified Gold with a score of at least 80% is estimated to be an additional 1% of the construction when meeting the National Building Code of Canada (NBC) [23]. For a comparison cost breakdown of meeting RHFAC standards to NBC, see the [RHFAC Cost Comparison Feasibility Study](#) report.

Innovative procurement practices

The word innovation, in itself, is often perceived as risky by government standards. Innovative procurement practices are promising for municipalities to continue service delivery while exploring opportunities for significant change with minimal risk. Furthermore, the practices can increase cross-sector and cross-jurisdictional collaboration when a group of municipalities works together to solve a common accessibility issue. They can also open more opportunities for sharing solutions, while creating flexible and iterative processes [24]. There are varying practices and approaches to innovation procurement that can be combined or adapted to support the needs of a municipality. Examples that have been gaining traction within municipalities include:

- Challenge-based procurement
- Outcome-based specifications

Challenge-based procurement. Challenge-based procurement uses problem statements and outcomes within the context of innovation procurement. The purchaser, in this case, the municipality, focuses on solving a municipal challenge or problem for which a solution still needs to be created. The challenge is a statement that captures the complexity of the situation, issue, and opportunity and specifies the outcomes desired from developing and implementing a solution [25]. The intent is to open up the bidding process to a larger

audience of suppliers and generate innovative proposals.

Challenge-based procurement allows municipalities to run pilot projects and test new solutions without committing to a scaled procurement contract. Pilot projects allow organizations to test new solutions in real-world environments, test new supplier relationships, and directly award suppliers that align with your procurement objectives [26].

Outcome-based specifications. Outcome-based specifications describe the end performance or function expected from a solution and what should be achieved. This allows municipalities to create more flexibility in their procurement process, providing the market with an opportunity to offer innovative solutions and procure new technologies or solutions that do not (yet) exist on the market.

To learn more about innovative procurement processes and approaches, access [The MIX Challenge Toolkit: Tools & Techniques for Challenge-Based Innovation Partnerships & Procurement](#), [What's in the MIX: Challenges and Opportunities for Municipal Innovation Procurement](#) and [Procurement Office Or "Living Lab?": Experimenting with procurement and partnerships for smart cities technologies in Canada reports](#).

Leveraging purchasing power

Through procurement spending on goods, services and facilities, employers and service providers hold power and responsibility to prevent and address, rather than create or condone, accessibility barriers for the people they serve and employ. Leveraging purchasing power to incorporate accessibility into procurement practices allows municipalities to prioritize inclusive and accessible vendors, products and services. This is sometimes called 'Social Procurement,' a measure municipalities implement to incorporate equity in local

projects' solicitation and evaluation [27]. Incorporating social procurement processes can further increase inclusive economic growth, maximize investments by producing additional value for communities, and provide opportunities for equity-deserving communities. Examples of incorporating accessibility in procurement policies include [26, 27, 77, 78]:

- Implementing self-attestation for diverse-owned suppliers.
- Establishing policies that all new bids on goods and services must include accessible and social considerations in procurement evaluation criteria/requirements.
- Explicitly naming accessibility as required criteria.
- Soliciting background information on supplier accessibility and diversity, equity and inclusion policies and procedures.
- Awarding greater value to proposals where proponents have their own internal accessibility and/or diversity, equity and inclusion policies.
- Prioritizing organizations that contribute to accessibility via education, employment opportunities, training programs, community involvement, or other.
- Partnering with community organizations to help build community capacity and deepen engagement with small businesses.
- Language highlighting anticipated changes in accessibility standards or legal requirements.
- Requiring at least one bid invitation to be directed to a certified diverse supplier for purchases of goods and services between a certain monetary threshold.
- Requiring prime contractors to include a specified percentage/quota of the sub-contracts to be diverse-owned and -operated suppliers and subcontractors.
- Vendors/suppliers plans to address accessibility gaps, and associated remediation plans.

- Vendors/suppliers level of training and experience, such as accessibility related certifications like RHFAC
- Plans to ensure accessibility policies are adhered to and to track and evaluate implementation of said criteria.
- Establish penalty procedures for intentional misrepresentation of accessibility or diversity targets.
- Non-binding language to encourage accessibility procurement as part of procurement principles.
- Allowing for flexibility of procurement criteria to encourage creativity in how respondents might deliver their commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion.
- Establishing contracts (specific number or dollar value) available only for diverse suppliers.

To learn more about accessible procurement and questions to consider during the evaluation process, access the Council of Ontario Universities' [Accessible Procurement Guide](#). For more information regarding Social Procurement and its implementation, review Buy Social Canada's [A Guide to Social Procurement](#) and AnchorTO and Buy Social Canada's [Self Attestation Removing Barriers to Diversity in Supply Chains](#).

Collaborative Procurement Efforts

Municipalities can increase their purchasing power by collaborating with other municipalities or jurisdictions to combine resources. Regional collaboration in procurement helps enhance the sharing of best practice information, gain alignment on critical policies, and increase efficiencies in procurement activities and appropriate allocation of resources to help municipalities manage budget constraints. For example, any municipality within Nova Scotia can leverage Halifax Regional Municipality's existing approved vendors and standing offers to increase their buying power, providing cost-effective

solutions to address budget constraints and knowledge-share with minimal effort. Collaborative models include [28, 29]:

- **Cooperative Purchasing Group (CPG).** Member municipalities work together to cooperatively purchase common goods and services, and share best practices and information.
- **Joint solicitation.** Collaborative procurement approach where two or more municipalities aggregate their goods and services needs into a single solicitation.
- **Shared Service Organization (SSO).** Requirements of member municipalities are centralized and the SSO conducts procurement activities on behalf of participating municipalities, shifting responsibility from the municipality to the SSO.
- **Policy Collaboration.** Process and framework where municipalities collaborate to standardize policies and supplier qualification standards.
- **Canadian Collaborative Procurement Initiative:** A federal initiative that gives access to provinces, territories, and municipalities to federal contracts and solicitations.

Currently, municipalities in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) collaborate on procurement efforts primarily through joint-solicitation and local cooperative purchasing groups (e.g., York Purchasing Co-operative, Halton Co-operative Purchasing Group) as well as leveraging existing group purchasing organizations or other levels of government (e.g., Mohawk Medbuy, Province of Ontario's Vendors of Record) [29]. The local cooperative groups have well established and successful track records, which have encouraged them to look for broader collaboration opportunities. In 2021, it was estimated that their procurement collaboration had potential annual benefits of \$140m-\$280m (costs vary by scale of annual procurement spend) [29]. It's important to note that the success of their collaborative efforts is underpinned by critical drivers, including

established policies, governance, processes, participation, and creating shared goals [29].

To learn more about collaborative procurement, the benefits and limitations, and assess the suitable model for your municipality, review the City of Toronto's [Regional Procurement Integration Review](#) report.

Appendix 4 - Embrace Urban Identity and Diverse Neighborhoods

Municipalities should acknowledge that a one-size-fits-all approach to urban development is ineffective; instead, embracing a community's unique requirements is needed to sustain an accessible city. A nuanced approach considers the diverse needs of neighbourhoods combined with tailored policies and interventions based on each area's specific characteristics to help identify, address and avoid inequalities and promote supportive built environments.

Tailored Policies to Promote Healthy Communities

Studies have shown that treating municipalities as diverse neighbourhoods rather than single entities can improve health outcomes, social inclusion, and increased access to services. Tailoring policies and interventions to a community's unique needs reduces centralist bias [30]. It provides equitable access to support provided by the built environment and public infrastructure (e.g., transportation systems, parks and green spaces, social services, educational facilities and affordable housing) [30].

For example, municipalities with aging populations could benefit from targeted policies to create supportive built environments. As populations age, older individuals are susceptible to "double risk" by being disadvantaged by both socio-demographic risk factors (living alone and low income) and facing significant barriers due to unsupportive built environments (unequal access to resources to support independent living and mobility) [30]. As an example, car-dependent neighborhoods are unsupportive for low-income earners and older populations as they discourage participation for those who cannot drive by limiting their access to services and amenities that provide them with independence and dignity [30]. Numerous age-associated conditions, such as multidimensional

impairments (e.g., decreases in visual and auditory reaction times, reflexes, spatiotemporal navigation or spatial awareness) and neurological conditions, increase the risk of driving impairments [30, 31]. Combined with the rising costs associated with driving, many older adults may choose to stop driving. The impact of ceasing to drive or losing a driving license can result in an increase in mental health symptoms and a decrease in an individual's physical, social and cognitive function [30]. Walkable cities and access to reliable public transport have mitigated the negative impacts associated with driving and have many benefits for the community. Examples include increased food security and sufficiency, strengthened safety for pedestrians and motorists alike, decreased social exclusion, positive impacts on physical activity, physical health and mental health of individuals, and climate impact by reducing emissions [32]. However, as municipalities are unique, it is essential to understand how diverse factors, such as macroeconomic considerations, governance, infrastructure, and community organizations, impact the built environment and the distinctive characteristics of its neighbourhoods.

Other tailored policy examples [30, 79] include:

- Expanding multiplex policy and zoning changes to increase mixed-use development and accelerate the supply of inclusive and sustainable communities.
- Policies focused on the built environment spectrum that encourage development for adaptable or modular buildings and spaces. This provides the opportunity for individuals to age within their community, maintain current social support, and create adaptable and continuously accessible cities.
- Update planning policies to encourage neighborhood node development with more medium-density homes.

Addressing Contemporary Challenges

Urban identity is a complex concept that reflects a municipality's distinct and dynamic physical, social, and cultural characteristics [33]. Historically, municipalities have been viewed as a static state rather than a holistic and uniquely dynamic character.

“Since cities are constantly changing and evolving new forms, their urban identity is created through the complex interaction of natural, social and built elements. Therefore, the urban environment has to be considered from a historical perspective, not merely by understanding historically significant buildings, but rather through the evolution of the local urban context, with respect to human activity, built form, and nature.” [80]

Understanding the dynamic interplay between individuals and their environment helps municipalities better address their multifaceted challenges by creating strategic policies that are feasible, inclusive and environmentally sustainable [33]. Studies on urban planning and urban identity suggest adopting a framework to understand and assess the unique identity of a municipality, and the diverse spectrum of factors that influence it. A 2023 study titled [A Comprehensive Methodological Approach for the Assessment of Urban Identity](#) created a methodology based on three dimensions – spatial scale, observer's perspective, and temporal evaluation – to create strategic urban planning interventions [33]. Embracing and monitoring the continuous evolution of a municipality is essential to develop policy

and decision-making processes that meet the needs of its community, and communities to come.

Tactical Urbanism

Short-term, quick-win approaches to urban development have been gaining popularity to address the frustrations associated with bureaucratic red tape. Tactical urbanism is a quick-win approach that consists of rapid, low-cost project implementation that addresses safety issues, equity concerns, and infrastructure gaps while engaging with the community and promoting innovative solutions [35]. They allow fun and creative projects to 'pop up' across a city. They can be leveraged as a demonstrable intergenerational approach that compliments the unique identity of a municipality. The [Tactical Urbanism Toolkit](#) created by the TransLink TravelSmart team and Urban Systems provides the “opportunity to re-imagine the look, function, and role of public spaces by quickly applying best practice street design principles to real world situations” [34]. Examples of tactical urbanism programs include [34]:

- Pop-up or temporary parks or parkettes are used to activate underutilized space.
- Pop-up bicycle lanes or recurring short-term road closures to provide more space for physical activity.
- Converting underutilized parking spaces into seasonal patios.

It is important to note that tactical urbanism isn't an end, but should be a component of more contextually considered efforts [35]. Actions using this thinking should support ideas from concept to scaling, through assessing which efforts are working and could be deployed more broadly across a municipality, which need modifications and further testing, and which need to be retired because they didn't resonate [36].

Community Networks

While many elements of municipalities make them unique, there are still common challenges that can be shared. Engaging in community networks is an efficient way to find opportunities and enablers to common barriers, collaboratively working together to improve outcomes, and share knowledge and expertise. It also creates a database of case studies, helping gain stakeholder buy-in with proven outcomes and benefits.

Appendix 5 - Building Internal Capacity

Building capacity on the topic of accessibility policy in the built environment can be enhanced for internal municipal staff and elected officials, as well as for external stakeholders like consultants and contractors.

Internal

The most apparent solutions to limited expertise rely on increasing internal staff to include people with disabilities, incorporating disability training to increase education and awareness and encouraging shifting to an accessibility culture. When professionals without disabilities participate in positions of influence, policy, program and project designs often overlook the needs of persons with disabilities, hindering the desired outcome and impact.

However, increasing city staff isn't always feasible for municipalities. Municipalities can incorporate viewpoints of persons with disabilities through consulting or co-designing with advocacy groups and/or persons with disabilities.

“Co-designing with the community has helped us **find some forward thinking and innovative solutions** to [our accessibility challenges] that we wouldn't have found otherwise. These solutions have been looked at by other municipalities across the province, and even by our transportation ministry.”

- Municipality representative

Other tactics that municipalities and other organizations have leveraged to help address limited expertise include;

- Creating 'cheat sheets' or master documents to ensure consistency during turnover.
- Sharing best practices within the organization, community members and other municipalities
- Collaborating with other organizations or municipalities to reduce workloads.
- Creating and introducing personas to inform accessibility design in policies, programs and projects.
- Inviting advocacy groups representing persons with disabilities to conduct "Access Audits" from end-users' perspectives.
 - This feedback is invaluable to identify subtle barriers that are challenging to address otherwise, helping enhance desired outcomes by respecting diverse human profiles, strengthening community relationships, and improving standards.
- Piloting initiatives in consultation with persons with disabilities.
 - For example, the Public Service of Canada established a partnership with CNIB BlindSquare over a one-year pilot project to assess, install, create messages and maintain messaging for several accessibility beacons at three of their locations [81].