



**Federal Economic Development Agency
for Southern Ontario**

**Accessibility Plan Progress Report
December 2024**

Accessibility Plan Progress Report
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as represented by the Minister responsible for the
Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario
Waterloo, Ontario, 2024

Catalogue No. lu93-10E-PDF

ISSN 2817-9250

General

The Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario (FedDev Ontario) published its [Accessibility Plan](#) in December 2022. The Plan is based on the guiding principles in the [Accessible Canada Act](#), the [Accessible Canada Regulations](#) and the goals established by the Office of Public Service Accessibility in the [Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada](#).

To submit feedback on the Plan or on barriers within FedDev Ontario, to request copies of FedDev Ontario's Accessibility Plan, or to request alternate versions of the Plan, please use the Provide feedback button found on our [Accessibility Plan web page](#). You may also connect directly with our executive Champion for Accessibility, Carole Bourget:

Carole Bourget, Champion for Accessibility
Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario
410 Laurier Avenue West, 3rd Floor
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0H5
Canada
Email: fdoaccessibility-accessibilit@feddevontario.gc.ca
Phone: 343-542-1241

FedDev Ontario's statement of accessibility

FedDev Ontario is committed to creating a working environment where:

- everyone is treated with dignity and respect, regardless of disability or ability;
- everyone has barrier-free access to full and equal participation in the work and activities of FedDev Ontario, regardless of disability or ability; and
- everyone has the opportunity to be involved in the development and design of FedDev Ontario's activities, with the objective of reaching equal and meaningful participation for all employees.

Accessibility is an integral component of the mandate to advance diversity, equity and inclusion at FedDev Ontario. The drivers of accessibility at FedDev Ontario include:

- our intention to make FedDev Ontario the best it can be for employees and clients alike, regardless of disability or ability;
- the [Accessible Canada Act](#);
- the [Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada](#); and
- Canada's support of the United Nations [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#).

Progress in accessibility at FedDev Ontario

In 2024, FedDev Ontario's Accessibility Committee launched its inaugural Accessibility Check-in survey. The survey consulted all FedDev Ontario employees, giving them a platform to indicate their knowledge level of accessibility issues and to identify any observed barriers in the workplace. The results of this survey have guided committee actions to address barriers identified by employees and the broader agency goals in the areas outlined in [FedDev Ontario's Accessibility Plan](#). The committee has actively

worked to support awareness, understanding, barrier removal and allyship in reducing stigma through open dialogue and discussion. We are proud of the ways employees across the Agency have joined together in the commitment to remove barriers for all Canadians. The following progress report outlines the related key actions and activities that have been completed during the 2024 year.

Employment

As of September 2024, more than nine percent of employees at FedDev Ontario have self-identified as having a disability, and 17 percent of internal promotions in 2024 went to persons who self-identified as having a disability. This knowledge allows the Agency to make adjustments to the working environment and workplace events so that everyone can participate fully.

In 2024, the Agency delivered training to all managers and HR advisors on a new guide and process for the [Duty to Accommodate](#). Additional support was provided to managers on biases and barriers, and use of the [Government of Canada Workplace Accessibility Passport](#) (the Passport). Resources to guide conversations around the use of the Passport have been made available to managers and employees on FedDev Ontario's intranet. FedDev Ontario has central funds set aside to assist with the purchase of specialized equipment and tools as required.

The Canada School of Public Service's course, "Addressing Disability Inclusion and Accessibility Barriers," has been added to the Agency's mandatory training for managers. Further, an internal sub-delegation session, mandatory for all new managers, now includes a portion on identifying biases and barriers in assessment processes. In 2024, all HR staffing advisors attended sessions titled "Supporting Employment Equity, Diversity and Inclusion through Staffing" and "How to Conduct an Evaluation of Biases and Barriers of an Assessment Method – Intermediate."

FedDev Ontario's Accessibility Committee delivered information sessions and panel discussions during the year to increase awareness of accessibility challenges and stimulate employee engagement in barrier identification and elimination. Results of the 2024 Accessibility Check-in survey indicated that employees were interested in understanding more about the *Accessible Canada Act*, FedDev Ontario's Accessibility Plan and the Passport. Part of the committee's National AccessAbility Week activities included an engaging presentation, "The Act, the Plan and the Passport," outlining how every individual is part of the movement to create a Canada without barriers by January 1, 2040.

Promotion of FedDev Ontario's Champions network was featured in an early summer showcase with presentations by each executive champion, including the Accessibility champion. The purpose of the presentations was to draw attention to the areas supported by each champion and their committee, and to encourage involvement in the initiative. The Accessibility presentation reinforced the need for all employees to contribute to making FedDev Ontario accessible for everyone and invited employees to join the Accessibility Committee.

The 2024 Check-in survey results also indicated a desire to know more about non-apparent disabilities and how to best support neurodivergent employees in the workplace. The Accessibility Committee initiated a series of presentations with guest speakers on various invisible disabilities. To date, presentations on Dyslexia and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) have been well received by employees. Further, in recognition of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD) on December 3, 2024, FedDev Ontario actively promoted the Public Service-wide event on Understanding

Apparent and Non-Apparent Disabilities in the Workplace and delivered an Agency employee-led panel discussion on lived experiences with invisible disabilities.

Built environment

FedDev Ontario offices are located in privately-owned and -managed buildings, and each building meets the requirements of [Accessibility in Ontario's Building Code](#). The 2024 Accessibility Check-in results for the built environment included suggestions for the addition of flashing lights in boardrooms to alert employees of emergency situations and equipping exterior doors with automatic openers. The Accessibility Committee worked with FedDev Ontario's Corporate Accommodations and Security team to assess the feasibility of these installations and discussions are ongoing with building management.

Information and Communications Technologies

As Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) continues to evolve, FedDev Ontario remains committed to meeting accessibility standards and empowering all employees to interact effectively with these technologies and associated hardware. Many of the Agency's internal ICT tools have accessibility features embedded in their software.

Communications (other than ICT)

During National AccessAbility Week 2024, FedDev Ontario's Information Management team hosted a workshop geared to giving employees practical tools to build accessibility into their documents. The tips demonstrated in this workshop are available to employees in an internal guide for the creation of accessible documents, and employees can watch a recording of the workshop at any time.

In 2024, FedDev Ontario redesigned its Ambassadors' Toolkit with a simplified user interface that improves usability and accessibility for all employees. The Toolkit is a collection of materials and resources designed to help employees promote the Agency's programming and services, present FedDev Ontario's impacts across southern Ontario, enhance federal visibility, and boost digital engagement through inclusive content resources. The Agency continues to review and update intranet content to meet standards on web accessibility.

Procurement

The Procurement team at FedDev Ontario incorporates accessibility considerations throughout the procurement process. This intentional work includes providing support and awareness to cost centre managers regarding the responsibility to make accessibility a priority in contracting and procurement. In 2024, the Procurement Management Framework (PMF) was finalized and is available on FedDev Ontario's intranet. The PMF includes information related to accessible procurement and informs project authorities of policies and guidelines for accessible procurement.

Project authorities are required to indicate that they have considered accessibility when moving forward with procurement requests for goods and services. For example, any furniture required for FedDev Ontario's office locations is purchased through the lens of its usability by all Agency employees. Desks are height-adjustable and chairs conform to ergonomic standards. Ergonomic assessments will continue to be a mechanism for identifying non-standard equipment needs for staff as required.

The design and delivery of programs and services

The mandate of FedDev Ontario is to support economic development across southern Ontario through a suite of funding programs for businesses and not-for-profit organizations. Making the process of program delivery accessible for prospective and current FedDev Ontario clients is imperative to achieving this mandate.

As an alternative format to web-based information, the Agency offers potential program applicants virtual technical briefings to guide them through program details and the application process. In 2024, the Agency delivered 18 technical briefings attended by over 1,500 people. These client-centric service improvements reinforce our commitment to responsive and timely service, while contributing to greater accessibility for all applicants.

Transportation

FedDev Ontario has reviewed all its policies, practices, programs and services, and has determined that there are no barriers in the area of transportation.

Consultations

FedDev Ontario's annual Accessibility Check-in survey was established in 2024. The survey was open to all employees, regardless of ability or disability, and provides a safe, anonymous platform for staff to give feedback and to flag any areas of concern for accessibility. The results of the 2024 survey shaped the work of the Accessibility Committee throughout the calendar year. The 2025 survey will build on the baseline of information gathered from the first survey and will further enhance accessibility progress across the Agency.

FedDev Ontario's key governance committees, including the Corporate Management Committee (CMC), the Executive Committee (ExCom) and the Extended Management Team (EMT), have expressed interest in keeping abreast of accessibility work in the Agency and engaging branches to join in these efforts. As a result, the Accessibility committee makes semi-annual presentations to CMC and ExCom, highlighting accomplishments, outlining work on the horizon, and flagging any areas where additional support is required. Presentations to EMT focus on tools and resources for managers and best practices for implementing accessibility supports within their teams.

Feedback

In 2024, FedDev Ontario received one submission through the feedback form for the Accessibility Plan. In this case, a potential applicant reached out to discuss possibility of obtaining access to the Agency's program funding related to an accessible technology. The individual was connected with a FedDev Ontario program officer to pursue funding opportunities.

Conclusion

FedDev Ontario is proud of the way that its employees have accepted the responsibility of accessibility in the work environment and the strides that have been made in the areas represented in this report. We remain committed to advancing these efforts and our progress towards a more accessible Agency for our employees and clients.

From the outset, the goal of the [Accessible Canada Act](#) is to benefit all persons through the realization of a Canada without barriers. FedDev Ontario's Accessibility Plan, feedback tools and the evidence presented in this progress report are supporting this goal.

When we do our best to allow everyone the opportunity to participate and contribute without barriers, we make Canada better for all.

Glossary

Accommodation (Adjustment) – any change in the working environment that allows a person with a disability or functional limitation to do their job. Changes can include:

- adjustments to the physical workspace
- adaptations to the equipment or tools
- flexible work hours or job-sharing
- relocation of the workspace within the greater workplace
- reallocation or exchange of some non-essential tasks for others
- time off for medical appointments

Accommodations (adjustments) can be temporary, periodic or long-term, depending on the employee's situation or changes in the workplace.

Barrier – anything — including anything physical, architectural, technological or attitudinal*, anything that is based on information or communications or anything that is the result of a policy or a practice — that hinders the full and equal participation in society of persons with an impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairment or a functional limitation

***Attitudinal barriers** (attitudes) are behaviours, perceptions and assumptions that discriminate against persons with disabilities.

Disability – any impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairment —or a functional limitation — whether permanent, temporary or episodic in nature, or evident or not, that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders a person's full and equal participation in society.

Discrimination – treating someone differently or unfairly because of a personal characteristic or distinction. Whether the discrimination is intentional or not, it imposes disadvantages not imposed on others or withholds or limits access that is given to others. Under the *Canadian Human Rights Act*, there are 13 prohibited grounds of discrimination:

- race
- national or ethnic origin
- colour
- religion
- age
- sex
- sexual orientation
- gender identity or expression
- marital status
- family status
- genetic characteristics (including a requirement to undergo a genetic test or disclose the results of a genetic test)
- disability
- conviction for an offence for which a pardon has been granted or in respect of which a record suspension has been ordered

Inclusion – the act of including someone or something as part of a group. An inclusive workplace is fair, equitable, supportive, welcoming and respectful. Inclusion recognizes, values and leverages differences in identities, abilities, backgrounds, cultures, skills, experiences and perspectives that support and reinforce Canada's evolving human rights framework. (Source: [Building a Diverse and Inclusive Public Service: Final Report of the Joint Union/Management Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion.](#))