NSCAD University Accessibility Plan

2025-2028

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1. Introduction

In 2017, the Nova Scotia Government passed the Bill 59: Accessibility Act (link) to make Nova Scotia accessible by 2030.

In order to assist public, private and non-profit organizations to identify, prevent and remove barriers, the Nova Scotia Accessibility Directorate has been tasked to lead compliance work related to the Accessibility Act. The Accessibility Directorate (https://novascotia.ca/accessibility/) defines goals and commitments in six areas. Adding in Awareness and Capacity Building, NSCAD's Accessibility Plan focuses on the areas as follows:

- Awareness and Capacity Building
- Education
- Information and communications
- Employment
- Transportation
- Built environment
- Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation

Many of the Accessibility Standards in Nova Scotia that will support policy are still under development. Nevertheless, by doing an environmental scan of post-secondary education sector across the country, we feel comfortable developing plan that will be robust and reflect the standards that will be approved.

NSCAD convened its Accessibility Working Group in 2020 and they have led a gap and barrier analysis. That report informs this inaugural five-year Accessibility Plan, and subsequent revisions and updates to the Plan. The ultimate goal of the plan is to bring NSCAD into compliance with the standards for each of the areas above within the required timeframe. Beyond our legal obligations, the plan aims to clearly demonstrate our commitment to providing a truly accessible setting for studying, working and living. Therefore, this document outlines NSCAD's plan of initiatives to be launched over the coming years.

We want to work towards fostering a culture of opportunity and belonging. Integral to that culture is inclusion and diversity here at NSCAD, a value that is put forth in our [Academic Plan: Opportunity and Belonging, 2020-25](#) as well as our [Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Targeted Action](#) [Plan.](#) We believe that the initiatives proposed in this plan will help us make considerable progress in the areas of accessibility and accountability.

2. About NSCAD University

NSCAD is in Mi'kma'ki, on the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq Nation. This territory is covered by the "Treaties of Peace and Friendship" which Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqiyik peoples first signed with the British Crown in 1725. The treaties did not deal with surrender of lands and resources but in fact recognized Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqiyik title and established the rules for what was to be an ongoing relationship between nations.

Our vision

Informed by the past, engaged by the present, looking to the future, and guided by the intention to make positive change, NSCAD University is a beacon to those who seek to know the world as it is and to create what it might be.

Our mission

NSCAD University is an immersive, rigorous, and supportive academic community where members are known and celebrated for their creativity and differences. Through active inquiry we identify, define, and approach the complexities of our world, challenge conventional thinking, and create value and economic impact thought art, media, craft and design.

The core values that define and inspire us

NSCAD is a unique and beloved educational community, recognized internationally for its leadership and innovation in creative practice, research and pedagogy. NSCAD is Nova Scotia's university for creative careers, art and research. NSCAD is

committed to collectively leveraging its unique strengths and resources to advance the economic, social and cultural well-being of all Nova Scotians (long- standing and newcomers).

NSCAD's graduates are uniquely placed to thrive in the emerging creative structures globally. At NSCAD, creative thinkers foment new ideas. With its studio-based, experiential, work-integrated, iterative, collaborative, technology-enabled, and critique-based pedagogies, NSCAD is the ideal preparation for the anticipated futures and the attendant surprises. NSCAD must be ready to take a leadership role in articulating the values and principles of the emerging reality (first among these values is sustainability—environmental, fiscal, creative, and social) and advocating for creative futures. We must lead by example.

Students, Faculty and Staff

In 2021, NSCAD conducted a university-wide census. Thirteen per cent of faculty and staff self-identified as a person with a disability; and 35% of students self-identified as a person with a disability. The 2021 NSCAD census data suggests that faculty and staff experience disability at the same rate at the general population; it is noteworthy that disability is nearly three times more prevalent in the student body.

Who	Percentage
Faculty/ Staff	13%
Students	35%

3. NSCAD University's commitment to accessibility

NSCAD University is committed to maintaining the dignity and independence of all members of its administrative and teaching staff, its students and all visitors to the campus. NSCAD seeks to ensure that NSCAD campus is inclusive, and that each person enjoys free and unhindered access to NSCAD's programs, goods, services, facilities, communications, events and employment opportunities.

4. Responsibilities and delegation of powers

Anyone acting on behalf of NSCAD is responsible for being aware of and meeting the accessibility standards, for working together to meet these standards and for creating a working, teaching and learning environment that is inclusive.

The Vice-President (Academic & Research) and Provost is responsible for compliance with the accessibility standards. This office oversees the development of NSCAD's Accessibility Plan and delegates authority and responsibilities to the individuals holding the roles below and the following units to ensure the Accessibility Plan is implemented.

- Communications
- Dean, academic directors, and chairs
- Managers and directors in administrative areas
- Finance
- Operations (Facilities, IT, HR)
- Accessibility Advisory Committee

NSCAD Accessibility Advisory Committee was created in fall 2020. It provides advice to NSCAD's senior administration on identifying, preventing, and eliminating barriers to people with disabilities in NSCAD programs, services, initiatives, and facilities. The committee is composed of students, faculty, staff and members of the community. People identifying with a disability represent at least 50% of the constituency.

Evaluation

NSCAD is meeting legislated timelines for implementation. Listening to and acting upon feedback is an integral part of the evaluation process. NSCAD will continue to review and expand engagement and consultation strategies across campus and with the broader community, and especially with persons with disabilities.

Additional evaluation and reporting efforts include:

- Annual review of the Accessibility Plan and preparation of progress reports; posted online and available in alternate formats upon request
- Compliance reports submitted to the Accessibility Directorate of Nova Scotia, which regulates compliance for all Nova Scotia organizations
- Feedback logged for internal performance assessment; data from feedback is used to better prioritize and identify issues and barriers

5. 2025-28 Accessibility Framework

NSCAD's multi-year plan was developed in collaboration with different sectors of NSCAD. The process anticipates consultations with students and members of NSCAD community at large. This plan describes the actions taken by NSCAD to make its environment accessible so each member of NSCAD community can enjoy free and unhindered access to all activities offered on campus.

We have divided the plan into seven sections, in line with the areas addressed by the Act:

- Awareness and Capacity Building
- Education and Admissions

- Information and Communications
- Employment
- Transportation
- Built Environment
- Procurement, Goods and Services

In each section, we define the standards to follow, and we outline our proposed initiatives during the course of 2025 to 2028. Identifying accomplishments and initiatives will help us make our campus accessible and meet the requirements of Act. In 2020, NSCAD engaged ReachAbility, an accessibility support organization, to conduct an environmental scan of its community and infrastructure, leading to recommendations based on first-voice feedback and legislative standards. People involved were NSCAD past, current and prospective students, faculty, staff and members of the art community,

In addition, other engagement sessions, mostly targeted to students, were led by the Office of Opportunity and Belonging.

NSCAD's Accessibility Framework is conceived to be comprised of two phases:

- Phase One (short-term) – Compliance – 2025-28
- Phase Two (long-term) – Effectiveness and Impact – 2029-2032

6. Summary Table of Accessibility Actions

Table. Summary of Accessibility Actions and Progress to date (S = Start Line, P = In Progress, C = Finish Line

Goals	2025-2028 Initiatives	Proposed Actions (Reviewed by Accessibility Committee)	S	P	C
1. Awareness and Capacity Building NSCAD develops and implements policies and procedures that will incorporate the basic principles of accessibility — dignity, independence, integration and equity.	Develop multi-year institutional accessibility plan (annually reviewed).	Appoint a dedicated and staff position with relevant expertise on accessibility to provide support to students requiring disability support and offer guidance to university staff and faculty on UDL, responsibilities, etc. Attend and work collaboratively with provincial PSE committees and working groups for knowledge exchange and the development of a suite or resources and tools to be used through all PSE in the province. Define and identify barriers to awareness and capacity building (attitudinal, communication, systemic/organizational, technological, physical)		X X	X
	Develop accessibility policy and associated administrative procedures.	Edit Accessibility policy to take a non-medicalized approach to disability (e.g. remove renewal dates for accessibility medical documentation) Ensure Accessibility policy goes through governance review processes (E.g. Senate policy and planning committee)	X X		
	Campaign to promote and raise awareness of the accessibility policy	Work collaboratively with NSCAD Accessibility and Accommodations Committee to develop programs and			X

and administrative procedures.	initiatives as well as bring awareness to accessibility from the first voice perspective.				
		Design an interactive, accessible webpage dedicated to NSCAD Accessibility Plan – include links to NSCAD accessibility, NS Accessibility and Canada Accessibility plans as well as list other internal and external resources.			X
		Include a clear and concise roadmap/timeline detailing the university's planned path, KPI, timeline and outcomes (with descriptive ALT text of the image).	X		
		As an added feature -- short clips, videos and foundational module should be available (similar to the one on Brightspace).	X		
		Collaborate with the provincial Accessibility Directorate to build capacity and increase awareness about the obligations of the post- secondary sector under the NS Accessibility Act.			X
		Develop and deliver awareness workshop and training opportunities for staff, faculty/instructors, technicians to improve and build capacity on accessibility and accommodations.		X	
	Create a mechanism for employees to raise awareness of Accessibility Policy, with special attention	Consider and implement feasible recommendations from the Reachability report (included in Appendices) which was gathered from the perspective and first voice of NSCAD staff, student and faculty.		X	

	Activity	Description			
		to onboarding new employees.			
	Update policy and guidelines on accommodations measures for students with disabilities.	Review and update current NSCAD accessibility policies, protocols and practices to fill gaps and ensure they are clear and comprehensive to all participants of accessibility and accommodation. Include process for activating the policy when necessary to resolve concerns arising from disability requests.		X	
		Collaborate with the Province to advise and launch collated "Make Teaching and Learning Accessible' guideline that will support accessibility initiatives. Complement guideline roll out with workshop to solidify learning and discussion.	X		
	Campaign to promote and raise awareness of policy and guidelines on accommodations measures for students with disabilities.	Develop evaluation opportunities for NSCAD general student population and students who access disability supports to provide feedback and recommendation on service and areas of improvements (e.g. Events, surveys, reporting tool, informal feedback mechanisms, etc.).		X	
	Host events related to meeting Accessibility needs	Communicate best practices for creating accessible events.	X		
		Engage student population to expand their learning about accessibility through program initiatives (e.g. Time Management workshops for neurodiverse students, disability and art exhibition opportunities, etc.)		X	

Category	Initiative	Action			
2. Education	Provide instructors and technicians with training on creating inclusive learning environments.	Create ongoing training opportunities through specially designed foundational training modules on accessibility.			X
	Review library materials.	Review via meetings between Opportunity and Belonging and Library Team	X		
	Implement initiatives for obtaining accessible library resources.	Create a cohesive strategy between Opportunity and Belonging and Library Team	X		
	Ensure the learning management system (e.g., Brightspace, Teams) and overall classroom pedagogy are built with accessibility in mind	Updated course descriptions, as well as website overview information to include potential barriers for students, allowing them to make informed decisions before registering for classes. Provide training to instructional designers on Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 (WCAG 2.0) Provide training on creating accessible documents for university employees, current software includes MS Word, PowerPoint and PDF. Create and distribute guide for instructors on the top accommodations requests by students	X X	X	X
3. Information and Communications	Establish a process for feedback on the accessibility of NSCAD's website.	Host an annual event in October related to feedback on the NSCAD Accessibility Plan and the website.	X		

	Ensure all university wide documents are available in an accessible format and that all staff and faculty are training on creating accessible documents	Create a Collaboration between Facilities and Opportunity and Belonging to ensure emergency and safety procedures are available in accessible formats	X		
		Provide training on creating accessible documents for university employees, current software includes MS Word, PowerPoint and PDF.	X		
		Create process for creating university publications in accessible formats.	X		
		Create interactive map using innovative ideas and digital tools to help student, staff and visitors navigate NSCAD campuses.	X		
		Ensure university website is WCAG 2.0 compliant (and maintains highest accessibility standard).	X		
		Implement a process for evaluating whether NSCAD's website Train webmasters and communications officers on the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 (WCAG 2.0).	X		
4. Employment	Develop employment equity plan to incorporate principles and values established in EDI plan and in accordance with provincial requirements.	Develop onboarding practices focused on accessibility and inclusivity.	X		
		Implement guidelines for work placements involving students with disabilities.	X		
		Evaluate and review guidelines on providing accommodation measures to employees	X		

	Launch awareness campaign and training for managers on accessibility best practices related to hiring and meeting with candidates.	Refine HR policies, procedures and guidelines to bring them into compliance with provincial standard.	X		
5. Built Environment	Continue the development of facilities strategy to ensure that we have accessible, climate-resilient and inclusive facilities by 2030. The facilities strategy includes new build and renovation of existing infrastructure.	Where feasible, upgrade washrooms to ensure they are gender neutral and accessible.		X	
		Work with consultants to review current major renovation construction plans and ensure they are in compliance with the upcoming standards for the design of public spaces (Accessibility Standards for the Built Environment). Where possible exceed these standards following industry best practice, CSA-B651 and PAS 6463. Investigate certification through the Rick Hansen Foundation to publicly promote the institutions commitment to accessibility in the built environment.		X	
		Ensure consideration of all current and future coastal hazard data, including HRM Pluvial, Fluvial and Costal Flood Hazard Maps, the government of Nova Scotia Coastal Hazard Map, and best practices for coastal construction to ensure climate resilience of NSCAD's new campus.		X	
		Ensure NSCAD is included in Port of Halifax Climate Action and Resiliency Plan to ensure that future infrastructure, assets, and operations are resilient in the face of climate change.		X	

	Develop communications and training related to the built environment at NSCAD to promote and improve accessibility on campus	Improve wayfinding on all campuses.		X	
		Develop a Web page on accessibility of NSCAD's buildings.	X		
		Develop accessibility procedure to communicate alternate route or location of services in case of temporary closure or renovations.	X		
		Train facilities staff to become familiar with all accessibility standards.	X		
6. Transportation	Ensure availability of Accessible transportation methods at all NSCAD Campuses	Work with Halifax Port Authority and Halifax Transit to reinstate the bus routes at the Port Campus (priority), including a safe pick-up and drop-off area for Access-A-Bus Services.		X	
		Work with the City of Halifax to determine proximate locations of accessible campus parking.		X	
7. Procurement, Goods and Services	Review and update procurement policy, procedures and practices to procure goods and services.	Identify gaps and barriers to good and services delivery through consultative process and previous ineffective practices	X		
		Collaborate with Admissions and recruitment to identify a proactive process to initiating conversation about disability supports with incoming students			X

	Develop and implement Guidelines on accessible goods and services.	Develop and implement guidelines (Terms of reference, MOUs) for engaging with external disability service providers (e.g., ASL interpreters to support students at university events)	X		
	Train employees responsible for purchasing on procurement procedure as it relates to accessibility.	Assess NSCAD proficiency with the use of assistive technology Ensure all software purchased meet accessibility guidelines and can output accessible documentation/reports as required.	X X		

7. Next Steps

Monitor progress and success of the plan throughout the next five years by:

- Assessing and evaluating the framework
- Reframing objectives as required
- Continue research and adjust framework and action plan to best standards
- Provide training for new and continuing employees
- Seek community feedback actively and continually
- Through annual census and associated working groups, compare accessibility-related data to monitor improvement and progress.
- Draft the next 5-year plan (2027-2032)

8. Conclusion

NSCAD has made considerable progress over the last few years in defining barriers on campus in order to make it a more accessible space for all members of NSCAD community. While the built environment poses challenges for adaptation, all the accomplishments described in this document have been possible through the efforts and teamwork of numerous dedicated and committed individuals in our different services and faculties. We would like to acknowledge their work and thank them for their contributions. These accomplishments will act as a steppingstone for implementing the various initiatives planned for the next three years. NSCAD will continue to work on identifying and eliminating barriers that remain so we can create a truly inclusive environment for studying, working and living.

Appendix 1

Definitions

Definitions

1. **Accessibility:** giving people of all abilities opportunities to participate fully in everyday life.

2. **Accessible format:** A presentation of information that uses large print, recorded audio and electronic format, braille or other formats usable by persons with disabilities.

3. **Barrier:** Anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society because of his or her disability, including a physical barrier, an architectural barrier, an information or communications barrier, an attitudinal barrier, a technological barrier, a policy or a practice.

4. **Disability:** Disability: As defined in the Nova Scotia Human Rights Code, a condition involving a physical disability, a developmental disability or a learning disability. A disability can be visible or invisible and includes:
   a. any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, and physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device;
   b. a condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability;
   c. a learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language;
   d. a mental disorder; and
   e. an injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997.

5. **Goods and services:** Anything NSCAD produces or acquires from suppliers and all activities and interactions that result in an exchange of information, documents or products for the benefit of NSCAD community or the general public, including academic programs and services.

6. **Information and communications:** Data, facts, information and knowledge transferred in a variety of forms as well as interactions between members of NSCAD community or with the general public in order to provide, send or receive information. Information and communications can be promotional, informative, administrative or pedagogical in nature and in text, audio, digital or graphic format distributed in a printed, Internet, audiovisual, multimedia or physical form.
7. **University community:** The group of persons with a substantial relationship to the institution and that visit NSCAD, including students, employees, contractors, speakers and visitors.