



Canadian
Intergovernmental
Conference
Secretariat

Secrétariat
des conférences
intergouvernementales
canadiennes

Canadian Intergovernmental
Conference Secretariat

2023-2025
Accessibility Plan

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1. General

This is the full version of the Canadian Intergovernmental Conference Secretariat's (CICS) Accessibility Plan. An easy read version, that is shorter and simpler than the plan, is available here: www.scics.ca/en/accessibility.

1.1 Description of the Canadian Intergovernmental Conference Secretariat (CICS)

CICS is a federal agency that provides conference planning services when different levels of government need to meet with each other. CICS provides conference services to provincial, territorial, and federal levels of government. First ministers, ministers and deputy ministers often need to share important information and plans with one another. Holding a conference is one way to do this. Conferences can be complicated to plan. CICS helps governments by taking care of the technical and administrative parts of running a conference. This way leaders and speakers at the conference can focus on the information they need to share. We take care of tasks like distribution of documents, setting up conference registration, setting up the conference site, organizing translation and interpretation services, and providing technical support.

1.2 Statement of Commitment

CICS provides a valuable service to governments and the people they serve. We help governments communicate important information with each other through conferences.

We are committed to being accessible because we are committed to serving the Canadian public. That includes people with disabilities.

CICS is committed to making work more accessible for our employees. We want our employees to be included and supported at work.

We are committed to making sure our services are accessible for people who use them. This includes being accessible for government leaders, workers, and journalists with disabilities. We want clients to know they can trust us with their conference needs. And we will advise our clients to make accessible choices when making decisions about their conferences. We want CICS conferences to be inclusive.

This accessibility plan will help us to achieve these goals. Beyond this accessibility plan, we are committed to continuous learning and improvement when it comes to accessibility. We pledge to do this in consultation with people with disabilities.

1.3 Contact Information & Feedback Process

CICS welcomes feedback from our employees, clients, conference attendees, and members of the public. We welcome feedback about accessibility at CICS and about this plan. Feedback can be submitted anonymously. We are committed to reviewing the feedback we receive and taking steps to address barriers that are identified through this feedback.

You can submit feedback about accessibility at CICS or about this plan by contacting:

Carole Bourget, Assistant Secretary

E-mail: info@scics.ca

Telephone: 613-995-2341

Mail: P.O. Box 488, Station 'A', Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 8V5

An electronic version of this plan that is compatible with assistive technology can be downloaded immediately from our website at: www.scics.ca/en/accessibility

This plan and a description of our feedback process can also be provided in alternative formats, within the following timelines:

- Print – 15 days
- Large print (Increased font size) – 15 days

- Braille (a system of raised dots that people who are blind or who have low vision can read with their fingers) – 45 days
- Audio (a recording of someone reading the text out loud) – 45 days

1.4 Definitions

The following definitions apply throughout this plan:

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

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

Built Environment: The physical spaces where work is done, and services are provided.

Conference: An event where different groups of people meet to discuss shared business virtually or in person.

Disability: Any impairment, or difference in physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, or communication ability. Disabilities can be permanent, temporary, or can change over time.

Intergovernmental: Between different levels and types of government.

Secretariat: A government office.

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG): Guidelines that make web content accessible to a wider range of people with disabilities.

2. Areas Described under Section 5 of the Accessible Canada Act (ACA)

2.1 Organization Wide Initiatives

Accessibility needs to be a part of everything we do. We need to prioritize accessibility early and often to be truly accessible. Some people and teams at CICS will have a greater role to play. However, we all have responsibilities in making CICS more accessible. This needs to be an organization-wide mission. Up until 2022, CICS did not actively consult with or sought feedback from people with disabilities. We need to, because the perspectives of people with disabilities are the most valuable when thinking about accessibility. They are the most impacted by accessibility. We need to listen to their feedback.

The following goals will help us fulfill that mission:

- By June 2023, we will develop a strategy around ongoing engagement and consultations with people with disabilities, internally and externally.
- By December 2023, we will implement our strategy for ongoing engagement and consultation with people with disabilities.
- In 2023, surveys and questionnaires looking for feedback about CICS will include question(s) about accessibility.
- In 2024, we will create and implement a process for requesting and receiving documents and materials in alternate formats.

2.2 Employment

CICS is a small agency, with 32 employees. There is a lot of work to do but not many people to do it. This means that our employees have many duties. We count on our staff to do their jobs well. Our workplace needs to be accessible for them to do this.

We want our staff to know they can be accommodated if they face barriers at work. We are working on our accommodations policy to make sure that people understand that accommodations are available. We will also make sure staff know how to request and receive accommodations. We will make sure disability is included in our diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) strategies.

Here are the ways we are improving accessibility in employment:

- In 2023, we will review our accommodation policy. We will make sure that the process and who is responsible for that process are clear.
- In 2024, we will create an accessibility officer role. This role will be like the role of health and safety officer. They will be the staff member dedicated to accessibility in the organization.
- In 2024, we will review and revise the language of our job postings and the description of roles to make sure they are inclusive and accessible.
- In 2024, we will review and revise our Code of Conduct and other relevant policies to include stronger and more specific language around disability and accessibility.

2.3 The Built Environment

Since the pandemic, some people at CICS work from home, and some people work at our main office in Ottawa. More people may return to work in the office full-time in the future. We want our offices to be safe and accessible.

We asked employees how they felt about accessibility in our offices. We also worked with an accessibility specialist who helped us uncover barriers in the built environment. This plan will help us decide which barriers are easiest to fix, and which are the most important. We will work to fix those barriers first. We will then work to fix lower priority barriers. Accessible parking, colour contrast on some doors and surfaces, physical barriers in conference spaces, and wayfinding and signage are some of the areas needing improvement. However, as tenants in our building, we have limited control over

the built environment. Working with the building landlord will be important to make our offices safe and accessible for everyone.

The following goals will help us reduce or remove barriers:

- In early 2023, we will conduct a thorough review of the barriers and recommendations identified in our built environment assessment. We will determine priority barriers to address within the next three years.
- Starting in 2023, we will begin to work with the building landlord to address identified priority barriers. In 2025, we will identify which remaining barriers should be included in our next Accessibility Plan.
- In 2023, we will work with the building landlord to investigate options for accessible emergency notification methods for people with disabilities.
- Starting in 2023, we will create a feedback mechanism for employees to share their comments about the functionality and accessibility of workspaces.
- Starting in 2023, we will have a process for employees with disabilities to request adjustments or accommodations to their workspaces.

2.4 Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

Web technology plays a large role in how we do our work at CICS. Our office is in Ottawa, but we work with people all over Canada. Web tools help us to connect with our clients across the country.

Since the pandemic, many of the conferences we support are now virtual. Web technology allows us to run these conferences in a safe way. It is important that the technology we use is accessible to people who work at CICS, people who use our services, and people who attend our conferences.

We worked with a web accessibility specialist to help us uncover barriers on our website and in the systems we use. Our conference management system is being updated and will be more accessible than our current system. This system helps clients make

requests for conference services. It also helps us to manage the tasks of conference planning. People also use this system to register for our conferences. Our website also needs some updating to be accessible.

These goals will help CICS build and source more accessible information and communications technology:

- Starting in 2023 and using the findings of our 2022 web accessibility assessment, we will fix known barriers in our internet and intranet sites and web tools.
- Starting in 2024, all new web content created by CICS will meet or exceed WCAG 2.0 standards.
- In 2024, we will implement mandatory web accessibility training for all new and current employees working in IT.
- In 2024, we will implement a new conference management system which has been user tested by people with disabilities. At minimum, it will be Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 AA conformant.

2.5 Communication, other than ICT

A big part of the work CICS does involves communication. We communicate with clients to plan conferences. And we help governments communicate with each other by setting up these conferences. We also help governments communicate information to the Canadian public and the media.

We have a responsibility to make sure that the way we share information is accessible to everyone. Our communications policy will include accessibility standards so that staff and the public can access the information they need. This means new documents and other kinds of communication, like social media, will be accessible moving forward.

Here is how we will make sure our communication is accessible:

- In 2023, we will update our communications policy to include accessibility standards.

- In 2024, all staff who create documents will be trained on creating accessible documents.
- In 2024, all new documents that are created will be accessible according to our newly developed standards.
- In 2024, we will develop a client communications policy. This policy will require that clients submitting information for publication by CICS meet a minimum threshold of accessibility.
- Starting in 2024, we will add audio descriptions or transcripts that are compatible with screen readers to all newly created YouTube videos and other streaming content.
- In 2025, we will make accessible versions of previously created high priority documents that are still in regular use.

2.6 The Design and Delivery of Programs and Services

A lot of the work CICS does depends on our client. The people who use our services make the final decisions about conference planning. However, it is our responsibility to help our clients make decisions. We want their conference experience to run smoothly. A well-run conference includes accessibility. If we want to be more accessible as an organization, we need to encourage accessible practices with our clients too. We need to ask them about their accessibility needs when they come to us for help. And we need to encourage them to think about how to make their conferences more accessible.

Here are our goals to improve accessibility of our services:

- In 2023, we will develop an internal set of accessibility guidelines. The guidelines will include a checklist of priority items for CICS staff to consider when organizing conferences.

- In 2023, we will develop a checklist of accessibility best practices for conferences, which we will include as part of our regular communication with clients.
- Starting in 2023, we will add a question(s) to our conference feedback surveys asking attendees about their experiences with accessibility, as well as requesting feedback on the accessibility of conference sites.
- Starting in 2023, we will establish and maintain a list of conference sites for which accessibility barriers have been identified. This list will help us guide clients when selecting a site to host their conferences.

2.7 The Procurement of Goods, Services and Facilities

When accessibility is considered at the start of any process, barriers are reduced. Accessibility standards in procurement processes ensure that goods, services, and facilities are ready to use by anyone who needs them.

The following goals have been created to ensure accessibility is a priority in procurement:

- In 2023, we will ensure that accessibility considerations are added to our statements of work for vendors, when applicable.
- In 2024, we will establish a Source List for required accessibility services (e.g., Braille, digital audio, captioning, descriptive video, sign language interpretation).
- By December 2024, procurement officers will receive accessibility training.

2.8 Transportation

CICS does not provide transportation services to employees or customers. No goals have been created under the heading of transportation.

3. Consultations

To make this accessibility plan, CICS consulted people with disabilities. We asked our employees with disabilities about barriers and ways to improve accessibility at CICS. We also asked people who have used our services and who have attended our conferences if they have encountered barriers working with us. We asked for their feedback on how our services and conferences could be more accessible.

We will continue to listen to and work with people with disabilities to improve accessibility at CICS. One of the ways we will do that is by including questions about accessibility in our registration system and our post-conference surveys. We look forward to building relationships with stakeholders with disabilities to make sure their perspectives are a priority in the work we do.

3.1 Consultations With Employees Who Have Disabilities

A survey about accessibility at CICS was made and sent to all employees. Our priority was hearing from people with disabilities. However, CICS is a small organization. To collect more feedback, we also asked employees close to someone with a disability if they had any thoughts to share. Feedback from people who answered the survey mostly focused on barriers in web tools at CICS. Overall, employees with disabilities reported positive experiences. Solutions to the few barriers identified by employees are included in our accessibility goals throughout this plan.

3.2 Consultations With Stakeholders Who Have Disabilities

A second survey was made and sent to people who have used CICS's services or who have gone to a CICS conference in the past two years. Each year we help organize as many as 100+ conferences. To receive the best feedback, CICS sent the survey to all

clients and attendees of conferences for which we had received accommodation requests. This way we could be sure we were reaching people with disabilities.

88 people answered the survey. 20 of them were people with disabilities and 3 were people close to someone with a disability. People who answered the survey noted barriers in the physical environment at some CICS conferences. They also mentioned that CICS does not discuss accessibility early enough in the planning process. Most respondents were happy with accommodations we provided, but they wished CICS would be more proactive about accessibility. Solutions to these barriers are included in our accessibility goals throughout this plan.

4. Conclusion

The work we do at CICS is important. We bring representatives of the federal, provincial and territorial governments together at conferences to discuss issues important to all Canadians.

We are committed to being accessible because we are committed to serving and representing the Canadian public. That includes people with disabilities. We want to be accessible for all—for our employees, our clients, the people who attend our conferences, and the Canadian public.

This accessibility plan will be our guide to improvement over the next three years. It is just one of many steps we are taking to make CICS accessible, but it is an important one. We will publish an update to this plan every year to share our progress.