

Western Counties Regional Library

Accessibility Plan

2025



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Welcome Message from the Committee

The Interregional Advisory Committee for Library Accessibility invites you to read our Library Accessibility Plan. Six regional library employees and nine community members worked together to develop this plan. The six regional libraries are, Annapolis Valley Regional Library, Cape Breton Regional Library, Colchester-East Hants Public Library, Cumberland Public Library, Eastern Counties Regional Library, Western Counties Regional Library.

This is the second plan that the committee produced. It builds on the first *Interregional Advisory Committee for Library Accessibility Plan, April 2022* which can be found on our six regional library websites. You may also contact your local library for a printed copy.

The Committee Members who worked on this plan are:

Railyn Cann, Community Member

Adrienne Collins, Community Member

Erin Comeau, Executive Director, Western Counties Regional Library

Laura Emery, Chief Executive Officer, Eastern Counties Regional Library

Charlotte Gallivan, Community Engagement Librarian, Cumberland Public Libraries

Jon Hutt, Community Member

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Jonathan Manley, Community Member

Jeff Mercer, Executive Director, Colchester-East Hants Public Library

Lisa Mulak, Regional Librarian, Cape Breton Regional Library

Ella Porter, Community Member

Jennifer Saunders, Community Member

Jai Soloy, Coordinator of Public Services, Annapolis Valley Regional Library

Michelle Vacon, Community Member

Michelle Wood, Community Member

Kelli Woo Shue, Manager, Client Services, Nova Scotia Provincial Library

Introduction and Method Used to Update the Plan

Introduction

In 2017, Nova Scotia became the third province to adopt accessibility legislation with the Nova Scotia Accessibility Act. Nova Scotia had a goal to be barrier-free by the year 2030 and, as public sector organizations, public libraries were included in this plan.

The Province of Nova Scotia intended to remove barriers to participation.

In 2021, six regional libraries came together to form this Interregional Advisory Committee for Library Accessibility. We invited community members to join us on the committee. Community members were persons with disabilities or were advocating for persons with disabilities. Together, we developed our first accessibility plan, the *Interregional Advisory Committee for Library Accessibility Plan, April 2022*. This plan was used by library staff as a guide to help them work towards our goal to make our libraries accessible by 2030. Between the years 2022 and 2024, library staff worked on their accessibility plans and they provided annual reports on their activities.

In the spring of 2024, the Province of Nova Scotia announced that it would be a more accessible and equitable province by 2030, but that it would not be completely barrier-free. They continue to develop and implement accessibility standards for the province.

An update on when the standards will be completed can be found here:

<https://accessible.novascotia.ca/creating-accessibility-standards>

Regardless of the Province of Nova Scotia's announcement in the spring of 2024, our regional libraries continue to work towards equitable access to library services and we aim to be barrier-free in the future.

Method Used to Update the Plan

In July 2024, we, the Interregional Advisory Committee for Library Accessibility, took on the task of reviewing our first accessibility plan. We decided that, given our time constraints, the best and most efficient way to get feedback from community members and staff was through surveys.

Public Survey

The purpose of our public survey was to identify the barriers to library services people still face. We also wanted to hear people's ideas on how we could continue to make our libraries and our services more accessible.

We encouraged people of all ages and abilities to participate in our paper or online survey. We also emailed disability advocacy groups and organizations serving persons with disabilities with links to the survey and encouraged them to share it widely. We promoted the survey on our regional library Facebook pages and our library bulletin boards.

Three hundred and eighty-seven community members of all ages and abilities participated in the public survey.

Employee Surveys

Each regional library emailed their own individual survey to their staff. The questions in the employee surveys were mostly about accessibility training and support for staff in their employment and in providing library services.

Sixty-four employees participated in the employee surveys.

Our committee met three times to review the survey responses and feedback. The regional library staff who were on the committee also reviewed survey feedback with other staff who work on accessibility projects in their regions. With this information and input from our committee members, we rewrote our *Interregional Advisory Committee for Library Accessibility Plan, April 2025*.

Our Approach to Accessibility

Our committee recognizes that accessibility is a basic human right and that all persons, including persons with disabilities, should be able to access library services. We believe that equitable access to library services is important for everyone to be able to participate and benefit from their involvement in public libraries. For example, borrowing books, participating in a program or working at the library.

We all agree that our libraries should be welcoming, inclusive and accessible. The Interregional Advisory Committee for Library Accessibility has developed this plan so that regional libraries can achieve their goal to offer accessible services by the year 2030.

As we work through the activities listed in this plan, our library staff will:

- consider that everyone experiences their disabilities differently and that this is the result of their identity, perspective, circumstances and past experiences.
- listen and learn from persons with disabilities and their experiences with accessing or trying to access library services.
- work collaboratively with persons with disabilities and disability advocacy groups to understand their needs.
- be creative and flexible in our approach to providing accessible library services. Inform staff, library board members and the public of the changes that we are making to be more accessible.
- talk to decision makers about the need to make our libraries accessible and the importance of providing library services to everyone.

As you read through this plan, you might notice specific words that are used often. In the next section, we give definitions for some of these words. These definitions are our interpretations of the words that we use to describe our plan.

Definitions

Accessibility – people of all abilities can interact with the services that our libraries provide.

Barrier – anything that makes it difficult to use library services fully and effectively.

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

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.

Equitable – modifying the delivery of our services so that people of all abilities and circumstances can participate in our libraries. This includes changes to our spaces, policies and procedures

Equity – recognizing that we do not all start from the same place and that changes must be made so that everyone has the ability to fully participate in society

Inclusive – aiming to provide equitable access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized, such as those having physical or intellectual disabilities or belonging to other minority groups.

The Structure of our Plan

Our plan is divided into six sections. They are:

1. Collections
2. Programs and Services
3. Information and Communication
4. Buildings, Indoor and Outdoor Spaces
5. Employment
6. Implementing the Plan

In each of the sections, we state our commitments to accessibility and list the activities that we will perform to make our services more accessible. We also include a list of policies that help guide us in the development of our services.

Finally, we provide a summary of our services, list the progress that we've made so far and the challenges that we face to improving our services.

1. Collections

Our Commitment

We will build our collections to include a greater variety of books and other materials in accessible formats and for different reading abilities. We will make sure that our staff have the information they need to help people find and access materials that are available.

Overview

Summary

The library's main activity is loaning out books and other materials to library members. Every year, library members borrow hundreds of thousands of items from our collections. Here are a few ways in which we make this happen.

- We manage an online catalogue where people can search for the materials that they are looking for and select which ones they want to borrow.
- We subscribe to online services that allow library members to access a variety of eBooks, audio books, videos etc. on their own devices.
- We keep collections of physical books and other materials in our library branches for people to browse and borrow.
- We provide some equipment that library members can borrow so that they can access some materials in specific digital formats. For example, DAISY Readers for materials in Digital Accessible Information System format.
- Including us, there are nine regional libraries in the Province of Nova Scotia. We all share the majority of our books and materials.

Policy

In this section, we list the policies that help guide our library staff in the development of library services.

- collections development policies

- borrowing policies
- library membership policies

Achievements

Although we still have a lot of work to do, here are some of the things we've achieved that have made our library services more accessible.

- We no longer charge people fees when they return their materials late.
- Our collections of large print books and audiobooks in Compact Disc and MP3 formats have been expanded and include a large selection of popular titles.
- We are increasing our digital collections. Digital collections include eBooks, downloadable audiobooks, streaming videos etc.
- We loan out equipment for people to be able to access materials in different formats. Examples of loanable equipment include Victor Readers, Daisy Readers, eReaders, and tablets.
- We partner with the National Network for Equitable Library Service (NNELS) and the Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA) to provide a greater selection of materials in accessible formats. The National Network for Equitable Library Service and the Centre for Equitable Library Access provide copies of books in accessible formats including audiobooks, PDF, eText, electronic braille, print braille, and mp3.
- We provide information sessions and one-on-one help on how to access library materials, including digital collections.
- We have increased our collection of short novels and nonfiction books for adults who are reading at different reading levels.

Challenges

As we work through this plan, we continue to face some challenges to providing accessible library services. Here are a few of these challenges.

- People are not aware of the variety of materials available to them.
- People do not have the technology to access materials in different formats. For example, Compact Disc, MP3 and eBook formats.

- People do not know how to use the technology needed to access materials in different formats.
- Not all library staff have been trained to use the technology that is required to access materials in each format.
- Materials in accessible formats are often more expensive and it takes longer for libraries to build their collections. These include Large Print books, audiobooks, eBooks, digital audiobooks, and other formats as they become available.
- It is difficult to build different collections of physical materials, including regular print, large print, audiobooks and talking books, without adding shelves to our libraries. Most of our libraries are small and do not have space for more shelving.

Activities

In this section, we list the activities that we will perform to make our services more accessible.

Collection Development

Collection development is the act of creating collections of books and other materials for people to borrow. It is also the act of reviewing the items in the collections to decide if some should be removed to make space for different ones.

- We will review our collection development policies to make sure that they include a statement on collections in accessible formats.
- We will continue to look for materials to add to our collections that are written or produced by and for persons with disabilities.
- We will continue to develop collections in accessible formats. These include large print books, audiobooks, descriptive and closed captioning videos, Braille books.
- We will maintain our partnerships with the National Network for Equitable Library Service and the Centre for Equitable Library Access.
- We will continue to work with Nova Scotia Provincial Library and our regional library partners to make sure that our digital collections are built to meet the needs of our community.

- We will provide ways for people to give feedback on our collections and suggestions on what items to include in our collections.

Collection Access.

Collection access is the act of finding and borrowing the materials that are available in the library's collections.

- We will continue to provide information sessions and one-on-one help on how to access library materials, including digital collections.
- We will train our library staff on how to use the technology that is needed to access materials in different formats. For example, DAISY Readers for reading materials in Digital Accessible Information System format and eReaders for reading books in digital formats.
- We will train our staff on how to help people find the information that they are looking for in the format that works for them.
- We will continue to promote our accessible collections in a variety of ways including library book lists and disability awareness campaigns.

2. Programs and Services

Our Commitment.

Our libraries provide a diverse and inclusive range of programs and services so that all Nova Scotians have opportunities to grow and succeed. We will provide equitable access to programs and services.

Overview.

We, along with all the other regional libraries in the Province of Nova Scotia, provide a set of core library services. They are:

- supporting and promoting reading and literacy.
- providing access to technology and supporting digital literacy.

- preserving and promoting culture and creativity.
- providing safe physical spaces that encourage community involvement.

The physical spaces are reviewed under section 4. *Buildings, Indoor and Outdoor Spaces*.

Programs

We offer a variety of free programs for people of all ages.

- Our programs are available for people to access in a variety of ways. This can include in-person, online and self-directed programs. Self-directed programs are those where each person who participates in a program can decide when and how they want to participate. For example, a take home craft kit or a community puzzle.
- We work with different organizations and community members to develop and deliver programs that meet the needs of the community. Some examples of programs include story times, author readings, book clubs, craft and knitting groups, kid's activities, and technology training sessions.

Services

We offer a variety of services for people in our communities. Most of these services are free.

- We help people find the information and the reading materials that they are looking for. This includes materials in different formats. For example, audiobooks, ebooks, talking books, and large print.
- We help patrons register for Centre for Equitable Library Access and National Network for Equitable Library Service. The National Network for Equitable Library Service and the Centre for Equitable Library Access provide copies of books in accessible formats including audiobooks, PDF, eText, electronic braille, print braille, and mp3.
- We provide a Borrow-By-Mail service for people who have difficulty getting to the library. Our staff are available to help people select materials to be sent to them through the mail.

- We provide an interlibrary loan service through which library members can borrow books and materials from a number of library systems in Canada. Sometimes, library members need to pay a small fee to borrow materials from other libraries such as university libraries.
- We provide one-on-one and group training on basic computer and mobile technology use. We provide Wi-Fi access in and around each of our library branches/locations.
- We provide access to public computers, the internet, and basic computer software, like Microsoft Office Suite.
- We provide scanning, photocopying and printing services. People have to pay for their photocopies and printouts.
- Some of our library branches provide a fax service, which people have to pay for.
- Some of our branches provide library users with access to technologies, such as 3D Printers, robotics, digital vinyl cutters, and sound recording software.
- Some of our libraries provide free exhibit space for local artists and artisans to temporarily exhibit their work.
- We provide community bulletin boards and pamphlet displays in our library branches. Community groups, individuals and organizations can share information about their events, activities, programs and services on these boards.

Policy

In this section, we list the policies that help guide our library staff in the development of library services.

- internet, Wi-Fi and technology use policies.
- information distribution policies for community bulletin boards and other community use spaces.
- borrowing policies including our interlibrary loans policies and agreements with the Centre for Equitable Library Access and the National Network for Equitable library Service.
- art and artisan exhibit policies.
- programming policies.

Achievements

Although we still have a lot of work to do, here are some of the things we've achieved that have made our library services more accessible.

- We continue to work with community partners to develop programs that meet the needs of our communities.
- We have introduced virtual programming to facilitate accessibility.
- We have installed accessible public computer access stations in most of our library branches.

Challenges

As we work through this plan, we continue to face some challenges to providing accessible library services. Here are a few of these challenges.

- People are not aware of the variety of services that are available to them.
- Some of our library staff are not trained on how to use the adaptive equipment and software that is available on our public computers.
- People who use the public computers may not know how to use the adaptive equipment and software that is available.
- Library staff are not sure what adaptive equipment and software to purchase to meet the needs of persons with disabilities.
- Libraries do not have the money to purchase all of the adaptive equipment or to hire the people that they may need to provide specific accommodations.
- It can be difficult to find local people to provide specific accommodations. For example, American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters.
- Library staff do not have the training and/or information that they need to respond to accommodations requests.

Activities

In this section, we list the activities that we will perform to make our services more accessible.

- We will provide different kinds of equipment and software for public computer stations that provide accessible ways of interacting with technology. For example, screen readers and voice recognition software.
- We will provide disability awareness training to library staff. Staff who participate in this training will receive information on how to better serve persons with disabilities.
- We will set aside some money to pay for the equipment or people that are needed to provide accommodations.
- We will provide ways for people to give feedback on the programs and services that we offer and make suggestions on the types of programs and services that they would like to see at the library.
- We will provide ways for people to request accommodations so that they may more fully participate in a program or benefit from a service.
- We will help people access information, programs and services in formats that work for them.
- When we need to, we will apply for grants to help us purchase assistive technology, software and equipment.
- We will continue to work with provincial committees to make sure that accessible library service remains a priority.
- We will provide training or one-on-one help on how to use the technology that is needed to access materials in various formats. Examples of formats are, eBooks, audiobooks and Digital Accessible Information System (DAISY) format.
- We will review our policies to make sure that they support the development of programs and services that are accessible and inclusive.
- We will work with community members, partners and organizations to make our programs accessible to more people.
- We will ask the companies we work with to improve the accessibility of the services and technologies they provide.

3. Information and Communication

Our Commitment

The Information and communications that our libraries produce will be easy to understand and accessible to people of all abilities. We will use plain language in all of our communications with the public. Our goal is to make sure that everyone can receive, understand, and share the information they need.

Overview

Summary

The Library delivers information and communicates to the public in a variety of ways, including:

- providing signage inside and outside the library buildings.
- posting information on library and community bulletin boards, the Library's website, and social media (examples: Facebook, X, Instagram).
- sending information through email and e-newsletters.
- featuring stories and advertising in newspapers and radio.
- informing people of library programs and services during library programs, outreach and other special events.
- communicating in-person, on the telephone or through email.
- providing print information to reach users who do not use the internet. (examples: brochures, pamphlets and booklets).

Policy

In this section, we list the policies that help guide our library staff in the development of library services. Our libraries do not currently have specific policies for information and communications.

Achievements

Although we still have a lot of work to do, here are some of the things we've achieved that have made our library services more accessible.

- We maintain accessible websites in an effort to meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.
- Library staff have received training in plain language use and have started including what they have learned in their communications.
- Library staff have been leaders in producing and making information accessible in a variety of formats (examples: print, digital).
- Library staff give people the option to communicate with them in different ways (examples: email, telephone, mail, social media platforms, in-person).
- Library staff are welcoming and have customer service training.
- Most libraries have toll free phone numbers.

Challenges

As we work through this plan, we continue to face some challenges to providing accessible library services. Here are a few of these challenges.

- Our libraries are often used to distribute information from other organizations. We have little control over the accessibility of these communications. For example, community bulletin boards, pamphlets and government information.
- It is difficult to coordinate training opportunities for staff who work in the library branches.
- Our libraries do not have all the technology for communicating with people who require accommodation.
- Not all library staff have received training on plain language communications.
- Library regions have limited promotional budgets to reach a wide audience.
- There is a lack of expertise about accessible communications.
- Not all regions have staff who are trained in communicating well with the public.

Activities

In this section, we list the activities that we will perform to make our services more accessible.

Signage

- We will work with the building and land owners to make sure that the library's exterior signage is visible and accessible.
- We will make sure that the signage in all of our libraries is accessible.
- We will develop video tours of library branches and make them available on our websites.
- We will develop library accessibility maps for locations where they could be useful.

Website

- We will conduct yearly audits of our library website to determine necessary improvements.
- The information that is on our library websites will be written in plain language and presented in an accessible format.
- Our library websites will include information on accessibility at the library. This information will include but is not limited to: ways that people can borrow materials, available assistive technology, eLibrary services, National Network for Equitable Library Service, Centre for Equitable Library Access and service animals in the library.

Staff Training

We will make sure that staff training materials are accessible. We will continue to provide training on:

- different ways to communicate with people of all ages and abilities.
- the use of inclusive and plain language.
- Train staff to include disability representation in promotional materials. For example, images on posters.
- the use of assistive communication devices.
- providing information in accessible formats.
- the assistive services that we offer to readers who have print disabilities. These include the National Network for Equitable Library Service who provides copies

of books in accessible formats and the Canadian Centre for Equitable Library Access who provides books and other materials to Canadians with print disabilities in the formats of their choice.

Service

- We will create instructions for people to follow if they need information in a format that is not offered.
- We will create instructions for people to follow if they need accommodations for communicating with library staff.
- We will provide devices that will improve one-on-one communication such as assistive listening devices and communication boards.

4. Buildings, Indoor and Outdoor Spaces

Our Commitment

We will strive to provide barrier-free experiences for everyone who visits our libraries. We will work with facilities owners to make sure that our libraries are compliant with Nova Scotia's Built Environment Accessibility Standard. A facility is a place where activities happen. For example, a building, parking lot, or outdoor walkway. Indoor and outdoor spaces include parking, sidewalks, signage, lighting, transportation connections, and more. We will advocate and act on behalf of our library users, employees and communities to make sure that our partners remain committed to providing the necessary upgrades to remove and prevent barriers to library services.

Overview

Summary

Annapolis Valley Regional Library provides services in 11 public library branches. The libraries are owned by eight municipalities. Annapolis Valley Regional Library also leases a space for their headquarters office.

Cape Breton Regional Library provides services in 11 public library branches. The libraries are owned or leased by two municipalities. Cape Breton Regional Library also leases a space for their headquarters office.

Colchester-East Hants Public Library provides services in five public library branches and two satellite branches. Satellite branches are only open a few times a month. Library staff who work in satellite branches bring a collection of books and other items for people to borrow, help people find information, and offer programs occasionally. The libraries are owned by five municipalities. The satellite branches are located in buildings that are owned by a municipality and a non-profit organization. Colchester-East Hants Public Library also leases a space for their headquarters office.

Cumberland Public Libraries provides services in seven public library branches. The libraries are owned or leased by three municipalities. Cumberland Public Libraries also leases a space for their headquarters office.

Eastern Counties Regional Library provides services in nine public library branches. The libraries are owned or leased by six municipalities and one community group. Eastern Counties Regional Library also owns their headquarters office.

Western Counties Regional Library provides library services in 10 public library branches. The libraries are owned or leased by seven municipalities, one village and two non-profit organizations. Western Counties Regional Library also leases a space for their headquarters office.

Policy

In this section, we list the policies that help guide our library staff in the development of library services.

- Nova Scotia Building Code.
- Nova Scotia's Built Environment Accessibility Standard. (no release date yet).
- Nova Scotia Accessibility Act.
- Nova Scotia Human Rights Act.
- Nova Scotia Occupational Health and Safety Act.

Achievements

Although we still have a lot of work to do, here are some of the things we've achieved that have made our library services more accessible.

- We have prioritized accessibility in the renovations and expansions of our library facilities.
- We have purchased some accessible furniture for our public and employee spaces.
- We have rearranged some of our spaces to make them more accessible.
- We have created an awareness of the need for accessible library facilities.
- We have successfully advocated for improvements to accessibility in a number of our library spaces.

Challenges

As we work through this plan, we continue to face some challenges to providing accessible library services. Here are a few of these challenges.

- The Nova Scotia Built Environment Accessibility Standards outline the requirements that organizations need to follow to prevent and remove barriers to accessibility in our buildings, indoor and outdoor spaces. These standards were not released in the first three years of our Accessibility Plan. As a result, this prevented library regions from confidently making changes to their facilities.
- We do not own our public library facilities or our headquarters offices.
- We do not have financial resources to pay for the construction costs that are associated with the majority of the upgrades required to make our library facilities accessible.
- We do not have the legislative authority to require building and facilities owners to comply with accessibility requirements.
- Library regions engage with multiple building owners, all of which have different methods for reporting and addressing accessibility issues with facilities.

Activities

In this section, we list the activities that we will perform to make our services more accessible.

Accessibility Audits

We will complete accessibility audits for all of the facilities where we provide services. This will include public library branches and satellite branches as well as our headquarters offices. We will invite the following people to participate in our audits:

- members of our accessibility advisory committees.
- persons with disabilities and disability advocacy groups.
- staff members.
- building and facilities owners.

Once we receive the reports from the accessibility audits, we will:

- share them with the building and facilities owners and our Accessibility Committee members.
- work with building and facilities owners on plans for renovating and updating our library and headquarters facilities to make them accessible.
- improve the spaces that we have direct control over. For example, we often do not need approval from building owners to change signs in the library or move furniture and shelves around.
- give regular updates to our Accessibility Committee members and other stakeholders on the progress and improvements made to our library and headquarters facilities.

Removing and Preventing Barriers

It is an ongoing process to make our library facilities accessible. To do so, we need to continue to listen carefully to the needs of all persons with disabilities. As we work to remove and prevent barriers, we will continue to:

- involve persons with disabilities, disability advocacy groups, library employees and building owners in our conversations about ways that we can make our spaces accessible.
- work with partners to remove barriers and increase access.
- provide training on accessibility standards and approaches to building accessible indoor and outdoor spaces for library staff who work on building and facilities projects.
- promote creative solutions to ensure that library sites on existing properties can be adapted to align with our commitments to accessibility.
- consider the accessibility of the furniture that is in the library's spaces.

5. Employment

Our Commitment

Our employment policies and practices reflect our commitment to diversity and inclusion. We provide equitable employment opportunities and support the careers of employees with disabilities or who experience barriers to accessibility. We advertise job opportunities in a variety of ways so that we can reach a larger number of potential job candidates.

Overview

Summary

We employ approximately 276 full and part-time staff in 61 library branches and administration offices.

We have 57 appointed Board Members who represent 34 counties, municipalities or towns.

Annapolis Valley Regional Library employs approximately 70 full, part-time staff and casual staff in 11 branches and one headquarters office. Annapolis Valley Regional

Library has 10 appointed board members. Eight members are municipal and town councillors. Two members represent the Province of Nova Scotia.

Cape Breton Regional Library employs approximately 62 full, part-time and casual staff in 11 library branches, and one headquarters with office. Cape Breton Regional Library has nine appointed board members. Four members are municipal councillors and three members are citizens appointed by their municipality. Two members represent the Province of Nova Scotia.

Colchester-East Hants Public Library employs approximately 54 full, part-time and casual staff in five branches, two part-time locations, and one headquarters office. Colchester-East Hants Public Library has 10 appointed Board Members. Seven members represent municipalities and towns, two members represent the Province of Nova Scotia and one member represents the community.

Cumberland Public Libraries employs approximately 23 full, part-time and casual staff in seven library branches and one headquarters office. Cumberland Public Libraries has six board members. Three members represent municipalities, two members represent the Province of Nova Scotia and one member represents the community.

Eastern Counties Regional Library employs approximately 22 full, part-time and casual staff in nine library branches and one headquarters with offices. Eastern Counties Regional Library has eight appointed board members. Six members represent municipalities and towns and two members represent the Province of Nova Scotia.

Western Counties Regional Library employs approximately 45 full, part-time and casual staff in 10 library branches and one headquarters with offices. Western Counties Regional Library has 14 appointed board members. Eleven members represent municipalities and towns, two members represent the Province of Nova Scotia and one member represents the Yarmouth Public Library and Museum Board.

Policy

In this section, we list the policies that help guide our library staff in the development of library services.

- All regional libraries have policies in place to govern the terms and conditions of employment.
- All regional libraries adhere to the Nova Scotia Labour Standards Code, the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act, and all other applicable labour and employment legislation.
- Two regions have a collective agreement.

Achievements

Although we still have a lot of work to do, here are some of the things we've achieved that have made our library services more accessible.

- Our recruitment process includes standardized questions and a scoring process to remove bias.
- We have upgraded staff computer software to include accessibility options.
- We use closed captioning for online Zoom meetings.
- We have addressed accommodation requests from prospective and current employees on an individualized basis.
- All of our work locations have a Scent-Free Policy to support employees with environmental sensitivities.

Challenges

As we work through this plan, we continue to face some challenges to providing accessible library services. Here are a few of these challenges.

- Most of our library branches and headquarters are not barrier free.
- Our integrated library system software, which we use to register patrons, circulate materials, and search for materials, does not have many accessibility features.
- Historical documents such as board meeting minutes and old employee performance appraisals were not produced in accessible formats and it would be difficult to reformat them all.
- Our managers are not trained to recognize barriers that may limit job opportunities for qualified individuals.

- We use basic print and online recruitment methods to attract job candidates and these methods may not be accessible to all qualified individuals.
- Our operations typically do not include human resource management specialists to provide guidance to management, and opportunities for employees to ask for assistance. There is no clear process or person to seek assistance from.
- Our managers are not trained on the employee accommodation process.
- Our employees may be reluctant to make their managers aware that they are having difficulties at work for fear of being labelled difficult or problematic.

Activities

In this section, we list the activities that we will perform to make our services more accessible.

Recruitment, Hiring and Onboarding

- Our hiring policies and practices will be reviewed. Job advertisements will include a commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility in the workplace.
- We will include clear details about employee tasks and information about available flexible work (examples: schedules are flexible, schedules are not flexible) in our job advertisements.
- We will investigate strategies for non-traditional recruitment methods.
- The orientation process for new employees will include an overview of the Human Rights Act and how to request an accommodation in the workplace.
- We will include ways for new employees to identify potential accommodation needs during their training and orientation. These could include a survey or interview.

Supporting Employees

- All of our employees will be required to take the Working with Abilities online training provided by the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission or equivalent.

- We will ensure that members of the administrative team are knowledgeable in the area of workplace accommodations, and that they will be capable of providing assistance.
- Our performance appraisal systems will include a discussion on ongoing and potential accommodation needs.
- We will provide training to all employees on recognizing the difference between equity and equality, how to be supportive of colleagues who experience barriers to accessibility and on respecting diversity in the workplace.
- Our policies will make sure that employees who have a disability or experience barriers have access to the tools they need to be successful in their employment and will be supported in their career growth.
- We will assign funds for accommodation purposes, as an indication of our commitment.
- We will review workplace emergency response plans (example fire evacuation plan) with respect to physical barriers.

Implementing the plan

Six regional libraries helped develop this plan. In April 2025, each region will be responsible for implementing this plan individually. The responsibilities and requirements for making sure that individual regions work through their plan are presented in this section.

Responsibilities

- The Regional Library Boards are responsible for approving and overseeing the accessibility plan.
- The Chief Executive Officer/Director is responsible for implementing the accessibility plan.
- Each regional library's accessibility advisory committee is responsible for advising on the preparation, implementation, and effectiveness of the accessibility plan.

Schedule/Timeline

- Each of the regional library's accessibility committees will decide how to prioritize the activities in this plan.
- All activities will be implemented by the year 2030.

Monitoring and Reporting

Each regional library's accessibility committee will prepare a progress report for their Regional Library Board on an annual basis. The report will be delivered to the first Board meeting of the fiscal year. This report will include details from the past year on the:

- performance of the policies, and their impact on accessibility.
- implementation of action items.
- recommendations to improve the plan.

The progress report will be a public document and will be posted on the Regional Library's website. The report will also be sent to local accessibility committees and disability advocacy groups.

Evaluation

The Regional Libraries will request feedback from disability advocacy groups and people with disabilities as part of their ongoing library services review.

The Regional Library Boards will conduct a review and evaluation on the Accessibility Plan every three years from adoption.

Responding to Questions and Concerns

- Any citizen of the Regional Library Board's service area can express a concern, or ask a question about the accessibility of facilities or services within the Regional Library Board's authority.
- These should be forwarded to the Chief Executive Officer/Director, or their designate.

- All responses will be made within a reasonable time. All appropriate staff will be consulted as part of the inquiry. The response shall include information relevant to the rationale for the decision.
- Any citizen of the Regional Library Board's service area can appeal to the Regional Library Board if they are not satisfied with the response provided by the Chief Executive Officer/Director. The Regional Library Board has the authority to seek additional information and recommendations before issuing a final response to the complainant.
- The Chief Executive Officer/Director, or designate, will maintain a record of all questions, and concerns submitted, and will provide a summary as part of the annual updates to the Regional Library Board.

Conclusion

This is the end of our accessibility plan. The six regions represented here would like to thank everyone who participated in creating this plan. This includes the people who responded to our surveys, our library employees and the members of this committee. We have a lot of work ahead of us and we are confident that, by following this plan, we will reach greater access to library services by 2030.