

2023 Accessibility Progress Report

Office of the Secretary to the Governor General

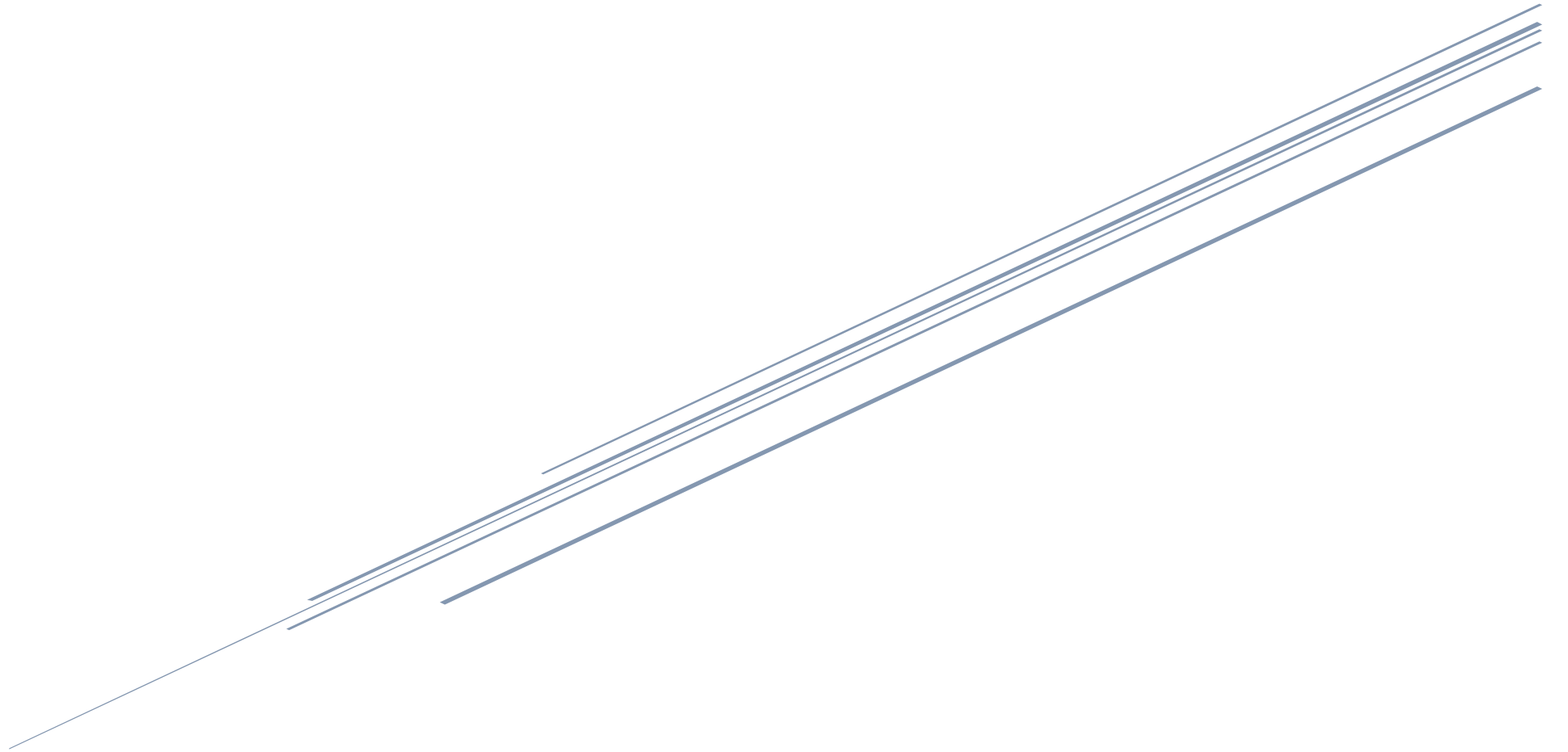


Table of Contents

General	2
Feedback.....	2
Consultations	2
Employment.....	3
The Built Environment.....	4
Information & Communication Technologies.....	5
Communication*, other than information and communication technologies.....	5
The Procurement of Goods, Services and Facilities	6
The Design and Delivery of Programs and Services	6
Transportation	7
Conclusion	7

General

Alternate Formats

The Office of the Secretary to the Governor General (OSGG) is pleased to present the first report on progress made under the 2022–2025 Accessibility Plan. Should you require an alternate format of the contents of this Plan, you may submit your request by mail, email or telephone using the information outlined below under ‘Contact Information’. The OSGG will endeavour to respond to requests to make this Plan available in print, large print, Braille, audio format or an electronic format that is compatible with adaptive technology as soon as possible.

Feedback Process

The OSGG has designated the Head of Human Resources as the recipient of feedback pertaining to its accessibility plan, the implementation of the plan and the barriers encountered by all individuals who interact with the OSGG in one manner or another. Individuals are invited to submit their feedback by mail, email or telephone using the information outlined below under ‘Contact Information’. Anonymous feedback is also possible, however, acknowledgement of receipt is unable to be provided for such cases.

Contact Information

To the attention of: Head of Human Resources, OSGG

Phone number: 343-576-7483

Toll-free/TTY 1-800-465-6890

Mailing address: 1 Sussex Drive
Ottawa ON
K1A 0A1

Email address: accessibility-accessibilite@gg.ca

Feedback

The OSGG did not receive any feedback via the designated avenues pertaining to its accessibility plan, the implementation of the plan or barriers encountered by individuals who interact with the department. The OSGG has only received one comment from an external stakeholder related to some images that were used in the first Accessibility Plan tabled December 31, 2022, but not regarding the content of the accessibility plan. No informal feedback was provided to management within the organization during conversations with employees, visitors or external stakeholders. The organization will therefore rely solely on the consultations conducted, as outlined in the following section, to inform the improvement and advancement of its efforts to achieve a fully accessible OSGG.

Consultations

In keeping with the principle of “nothing about us without us”, the OSGG consulted with its employees on the mitigation strategies proposed for each of the areas of focus included in the first Accessibility Plan through an anonymous online survey. For the first progress report, a new survey was designed, this time, to get a pulse on whether employees are satisfied with the progress the organization has made to date and to seek new input from all employees, with or without a disability. While last year’s survey was targeted solely to the OSGG’s own employees, given that employees of the National Capital Commission (NCC), the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and commissionaires all call Rideau Hall their workplace, these individuals were solicited for their feedback specifically on the built environment.

The Employee Survey

This year, the OSGG Accessibility Survey focused on satisfaction with progress reported to date on each mitigation strategy outlined in the 2022-2025 Accessibility Report. Unfortunately, participation in the annual survey was incredibly low, with only 23 participants completing the survey. This is likely attributable to survey fatigue as two additional surveys circulated prior to the release of the Accessibility Survey, and a short survey window of one week.

As a result of the low participation rate, few trends were able to be extracted from the data obtained while still protecting confidentiality. The OSGG is also unable to determine the representation of persons with disabilities within respondents; departmental participation from the OSGG, RCMP and NCC; nor can it dive into the rationales provided through narrative explanations while still protecting anonymity. It is evident that the OSGG must engage persons with disabilities through other means while still providing a safe and confidential space to provide candid feedback.

Keeping in mind that the low participation rate may result in an inaccurate picture of satisfaction with the measures taken by the OSGG to identify, mitigate and eliminate barriers, overall, survey results were positive. The significant majority of respondents indicated that progress reported to date and anticipated next steps for each area of focus will contribute to an improved, barrier-free experience for persons with disabilities. This being said, small but notable dissatisfaction was observed in three areas: Communications; Procurement of Goods, Services and Facilities; and the Design and Delivery of Programs and Services. More specifically, 9.1% of respondents indicated dissatisfaction with the OSGG's plan to participate in an interdepartmental committee on accessibility and to offer training to employees of the Creative Services and Web team to improve the accessibility of visuals. The same proportion of respondents also expressed dissatisfaction with Materiel Management & Procurement's intention to develop accessibility awareness training for clients by March 2025. Given that narrative comments could not be shared to further the analysis due to the small participation rate, the OSGG was unable to obtain further details on what specifically is causing dissatisfaction and if there is a desire for management to focus efforts elsewhere.

Finally, while 100% of respondents indicated that they feel that the progress made and the next steps outlined under the Design and Delivery of Programs and Services will contribute to an improved, barrier-free experience for persons with disabilities, dissatisfaction was expressed on the advancement of visitor-facing strategies. With dissatisfied responses ranging from 4.5% to 9.1%, it could be concluded that employees feel that further discussion and focus is needed on the visitor experience. Management will tap into employees of all levels to solicit additional feedback and input on improving the accessibility of the OSGG for visitors and guests alike.

Employment

As an organization within the Core Public Administration, human resources activities at the OSGG are guided by relevant legislation, regulation, policies, directives and guidance, including the *Public Service Employment Act* (PSEA), the *Employment Equity Act* and the *Official Languages Act*. The Government of Canada as a whole is in the process of updating this overall framework, which will guide OSGG's work to create a work place and work environment that are accessible by design. Since the publication of the OSGG's Accessibility Plan in December 2022, the final changes to the PSEA came into effect, including a new responsibility requiring organizations to prioritize accessibility when creating recruitment processes by evaluating assessment methods for biases and barriers and taking reasonable efforts to mitigate, and where possible, eliminate them.

In its 2022-2025 Accessibility Plan, the OSGG committed to identifying, mitigating and removing barriers throughout the five key phases of the employee lifecycle: recruitment, onboarding, development, retention and transition. Entry into and mobility within the public service for persons with disabilities was identified as a barrier for which a starting mitigation strategy of working in partnership with the Public Service Commission (PSC) on the implementation of the above-mentioned change to the PSEA was identified. While the process of identifying, mitigations and removing barriers in recruitment processes will be an ongoing process and considered regular business, the OSGG has completed the initial education component. A workshop was held in late June on the changes to the PSEA and how to conduct an evaluation for biases and barriers. The OSGG has adopted the PSC's [Tool for Mitigating Biases and Barriers in Assessment](#) as the primary method in which the evaluation is to be documented, including changes made and mitigation strategies. Human Resources Advisors in staffing are leading the evaluation of biases and barriers in order to support their clients in the application of the theoretical knowledge they obtained during the June workshop. Advisors will continue to support their clients when it comes to creating barrier free recruitment processes to ensure that they adopt the 'accessible by design' mindset.

As a second commitment to removing barriers during the recruitment phase of the employee lifecycle, the OSGG committed to creating a targeted outreach function within the Human Resources Directorate (HRD) that is mandated with establishing partnerships with universities, colleges, communities, etc. to recruit individuals with disabilities. The HRD began reaching out to universities in the national capital region over the course of the summer to obtain information on recruitment avenues for current students, upcoming graduates and recent graduates that identify as belonging to one or more equity-seeking communities. Thus far, no success has been had in identifying programs or initiatives that directly support persons with disabilities in career development.

In addition, the HRD has liaised with the PSC in regards to participating in the Federal Internship Program for Canadians with Disabilities. This program aimed to offer 2-year internship opportunities in the federal public service to 125 persons with disabilities between 2019 and 2025. Unfortunately, given the OSGG's late inquiry, and fortunately, due to the great success of the program, the recruitment goal has already been completed and the program is not recruiting or hiring. Should the PSC consider expanding the program past 125 recruits and past 2025, the OSGG will put forward its candidacy as a hiring organization.

For the development and retention phases of the employee lifecycle, the OSGG has committed to focusing on educating management on Duty to Accommodate and to introducing mentorship, sponsorship and learning opportunities that support employees with disabilities, their development and their advancement within the public service. This past summer, the OSGG introduced its first Learning Curriculum, outlining mandatory training for employees and those with supervisory or managerial responsibilities. The HRD will be incorporating the Canada School of Public Service's course [Disability Management and Workplace Wellness](#) (INC120) into a revised version of the learning plan and request that all managers complete this course within six (6) months. In regards to employee development, the OSGG has recently begun exploring the Mentorship Plus program from the Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) and is currently preparing a proposition for implementation of the mentorship component of the program at the OSGG. It is anticipated that a pilot cohort of mentees will begin next fiscal year.

As part of the retention and transition phases of the employee lifecycle, the HRD is working on establishing a Disability Management Framework, which will address accommodation, support for recovery and prevention. The Framework is intended to provide management with the necessary tools and guidance to support sound decision making, and to equip them with the knowledge and resources needed to support employee wellness. A consultative process involving key stakeholders is currently underway, leveraging the Disability Management Handbook as a guiding resource. This initiative aims to facilitate discussions and formulate the Departmental Disability Management Framework and Policy, with the targeted completion date set for April 2024.

The Built Environment

The OSGG conducts its operations within a unique portfolio of buildings in Ottawa and in the City of Québec. Many of these buildings are designated heritage properties and are of national significance. While the OSGG has been occupying these buildings for a considerable length of time, the department does not own them. As such, the OSGG works closely with its landlords, the NCC and Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC), to ensure these buildings have the capacity to support OSGG employees, operations and services to the public.

Given the buildings' age, accessibility was not a factor that was considered in their construction. While some accessibility upgrades have been completed over the years, much more needs to be done to ensure that all Canadians, including federal employees, guests and public visitors, are able to fully access all aspects of the OSGG's built environments. Consequently, in its 2022-2025 Accessibility Plan, the OSGG identified as a barrier that not all guests and employees are able to access public spaces and employee workspaces.

In order to mitigate and remove this barrier, the OSGG works in partnership with the NCC to prioritize and implement recommended upgrades included in the Universal Accessibility Assessment for Rideau Hall, with a focus on the most critical areas to ensure employee and visitor accessibility. One of the upcoming projects from the NCC is to modernize one of the building on the ground of Rideau Hall, the Gate Lodge. The OSGG and the NCC discussed future vocation and accessibility improvements as part of the NCC planning stage of the project. Also, both organizations recently created the Rideau Hall Accessibility Working Group (RHAWG) with representation from NCC and the OSGG to provide a forum for the discussion and review of issues relating to accessibility, with the objective of making continuous improvements at Rideau Hall. The RHAWG is a forum where both organization can collaboratively raise issues, opportunities, priorities, provide advice, guidance, and align efforts. The first meeting is planned for winter 2024.

In partnership with PSPC, some actions were also considered as a mitigation measure, such as identifying, prioritizing and implementing accessibility upgrades at the Citadelle and at LaSalle Academy as needed, and ensuring future renovations are inclusive by design. The OSGG and PSPC meet on a monthly basis to discuss both work locations. Thus far, no specific accessibility issues have been identified, but the OSGG will continue to work in collaboration with PSPC to make improvements where and when necessary.

Information & Communication Technologies

As its business becomes increasingly digital, the OSGG will build its capacity and capability to consider accessibility from the start, so that information and communications technology products, services and content are usable by all. In addition to its public facing website, www.gg.ca, the OSGG uses 23 internal systems for its operations in support of the Governor General of Canada. The public website provides Canadians with current information about the Governor General of Canada and an overview of recent and upcoming activities. Furthermore, the website is used to find out about the Canadian Honours Program and its recipients, to nominate Canadians for recognition, to request an anniversary greeting and to consult the Public Register of Arms, Flags, and Badges of Canada.

The OSGG is committed to ensuring that all of its systems meet modern accessibility standards. To this end, the OSGG implemented the mitigation strategies outlined under its 2022-2025 Accessibility Plan to ensure that all new systems, including internally developed or externally procured hardware and software, meet modern accessibility standards that are “accessible by default”. Existing systems that undergo significant upgrades are being modified to comply with modern accessibility standards. The OSGG’s public facing website is undergoing a technological upgrade. The new version of the website will comply with all current accessibility guidelines. Compatibility with screen readers is one example of a barrier that will be addressed with this upgrade. The OSGG’s website is also used to publish information in PDF format. The OSGG has implemented guidance on creating accessible source documents to ensure their compatibility with adaptive computer technology by creating templates. This will ensure that the OSGG’s public facing portal meets the informational needs of all Canadians. The OSGG is committed to implementing these same mitigation strategies to its existing internal systems to address any barriers for its staff. This will be an on-going process until all of its 23 systems are fully compliant.

Communication*, other than information and communication technologies

*Communication includes the use of American Sign Language, Québec Sign Language and Indigenous sign languages

In the 2022–2025 Accessibility Plan, the OSGG committed to ensuring all communications initiatives, products and services meet the highest standards of accessibility and inclusion, as per the [Policy on Communications and Federal Identity](#) and the [Treasury Board Standard on Web Accessibility](#).

The OSGG identified barriers and areas of improvement including:

- Lack of knowledge, experience and expertise in developing the full scope of accessible communications products;
- Public information, including information on the OSGG’s website and on its digital platforms, is not always accessible to all users;
- Visuals and information on digital platforms may not be fully inclusive or representative of the disability community;

Since the publication of the Accessibility Plan, the OSGG has implemented a number of solutions aimed at addressing these barriers.

All OSGG employees are required to complete *Addressing Disability Inclusion and Barriers to Accessibility*, which helps create an inclusive workplace through disability awareness training that fosters a deeper understanding of the different types of barriers people face every day in the workplace.

The OSGG ensures that all communications documents on its website and on its digital platforms, including photos and videos, conform to accessibility requirements as per the [Accessible Canada Act](#) and the [Government of Canada’s Policy on Communications and Federal Identity](#). This includes but is not limited to accessible formatting, alternative text, colour contrasting, closed and open captions, subtitles, transcripts, accessible font style and sizing, camelCase (a practice that allows screen reader technology to distinguish words or hashtags and is better for low literacy) and white spacing. Greater care is dedicated to ensuring inclusivity in the visuals and content on the digital platforms, with a particular focus on content that fosters increased awareness of mental health and related disabilities, and content that can help alleviate stigmatization of visible and invisible disabilities.

The OSGG is committed to providing accessible services and information to all Canadians, and will continue to find ways to remove barriers so that all Canadians can participate in and engage with the communications products and activities supported by the OSGG.

The Procurement of Goods, Services and Facilities

In its 2022-2025 Accessibility Plan, the OSGG committed to making its procurement barrier-free for the broadest range of end users. As a result, OSGG's procurement documents, such as Request for Proposals (RFP) and resulting contracts, have been reviewed and adjusted to comply with the guidance on [Making documents more accessible](#), published by Employment and Social Development Canada. Furthermore, procurement officers endeavour for accessibility considerations to be included when defining requirements for goods and services and for deliverables to incorporate accessibility features, where appropriate. In addition, procurement files contain clear justifications if it is determined that accessibility considerations are not appropriate as part of commodity specifications, or if it is not possible to obtain goods or services that comply.

Lack of knowledge, experience and expertise in developing accessible evaluation criteria and ensuring that contract deliverables include accessibility features was identified as a barrier and as a result, the Materiel Management and Procurement (MM&P) team identified available training for its procurement officers in order to increase their awareness and knowledge of the impact of the [Accessible Canada Act](#) in procurement, and on the importance and details of accessible procurement. To date, all of the MM&P team have completed the identified training. Furthermore, the OSGG is committing for all new procurement officers to complete these trainings within three (3) months of joining the team, if not already previously completed. In addition, the MM&P team will continue to consult with the Accessibility Procurement Resource Centre (APRC) when appropriate.

The OSGG also committed to update its procurement internal procedures and adapt new direction on accessible procurement and deliver procurement accessibility awareness training to Project Authorities (PA) and Technical Authorities (TA) within the OSGG. This is intended to provide its employees with the necessary tools and guidance for accessibility considerations when considering and defining requirements for a procurement. Progress is ongoing with a target completion date of March 2025.

The Design and Delivery of Programs and Services

The Chancellery of Honours of the OSGG recognizes and honours Canadians with medals, awards, decorations and heraldic emblems. It brings to light the stories of successes and unsung heroes in our communities. The Chancellery administers aspects of the [Canadian Honours System](#) and several [Governor General's Awards](#). The Chancellery is also home to the [Canadian Heraldic Authority](#), which is headed by the governor general, and creates and records coats of arms, flags and badges for Canadian citizens, corporations and institutions.

The nomination and application process includes several phases where possible barriers must be identified and addressed to ensure it is as barrier-free as possible. These phases include: outreach and engagement; nomination submission; research; analysis and assessment; recommendation and decision; communication with nominator and recipient; and presentation. A similar process is in place for applications for heraldic emblems. A review of the process was completed in 2023. The review recommended possible improvements, including: improved digital tools to support the process; automation of some tasks; identification and resolution of potential systemic barriers to nominators; as well as other potential changes.

On the Heraldry side of the Chancellery's operations, application forms for the creation of heraldic emblems have been entirely reviewed and simplified in paper and web formats (fully accessible HTML forms). All of the communications templates being used by the Canadian Heraldic Authority have been edited, using bullet points as well as clear and simple language as much as possible. Forms for art production are now fillable PDFs for ease of access and convenience. Gender pronouns are requested as of first contact with applicants to show respect for gender identity, and text in official documents granting heraldic emblems has been rendered gender-neutral. Last but not least, the Canadian Heraldic Authority is the only honours program to have its own communication platform: a Facebook page. Efforts have been made to simplify the communications being shared on this platform, and to add alt text to increase the accessibility of posts.

The Chancellery is reviewing the recommendations and developing a plan to address the issues identified. To support a broad focus on promoting diversity and inclusion, all Chancellery staff completed training that covered anti-bias, inclusion and accessibility awareness. Additional training sessions on gender-based analysis will be completed, as well as a thorough review of language used on the Chancellery sections of the OSGG website.

The OSGG ensures that plans are proactively in place to support visitors and guests with physical mobility restrictions and provides other types of accommodations, such as sign language interpretation, on an as requested basis. Moving forward, the OSGG will look at ways of incorporating accessibility into its public services to ensure that people of all abilities are accommodated and able to participate in the programs, services and events offered at Rideau Hall and the Citadelle. Plans to address some of the physical barriers within the department's two sites are addressed in the built environment section of this strategy. As such, the commitments noted above focus on improving services relating to non-physical types of disabilities, including neuro-diverse and other types of invisible disabilities.

Transportation

Although the OSGG's 2022-2025 Accessibility Plan did not contain information related to Transportation, it is important to note that the parking lot for employees, members of NCC and the RCMP have designated area for parking reserved for people with mobility issues. The parking lot is also used by guests during events held at Rideau Hall.

Conclusion

While some progress has been made, in early 2024, the Secretary and leadership team at the OSGG will engage in a series of roundtable discussions with employees to better understand the accessibility challenges faced by employees, visitors and guests and to set in motion concrete improvements that can be made and reported on in December 2024 as part of our response to the 2022 Accessibility Plan.