2024 Accessibility Progress Report
Office of the Secretary to the Governor General
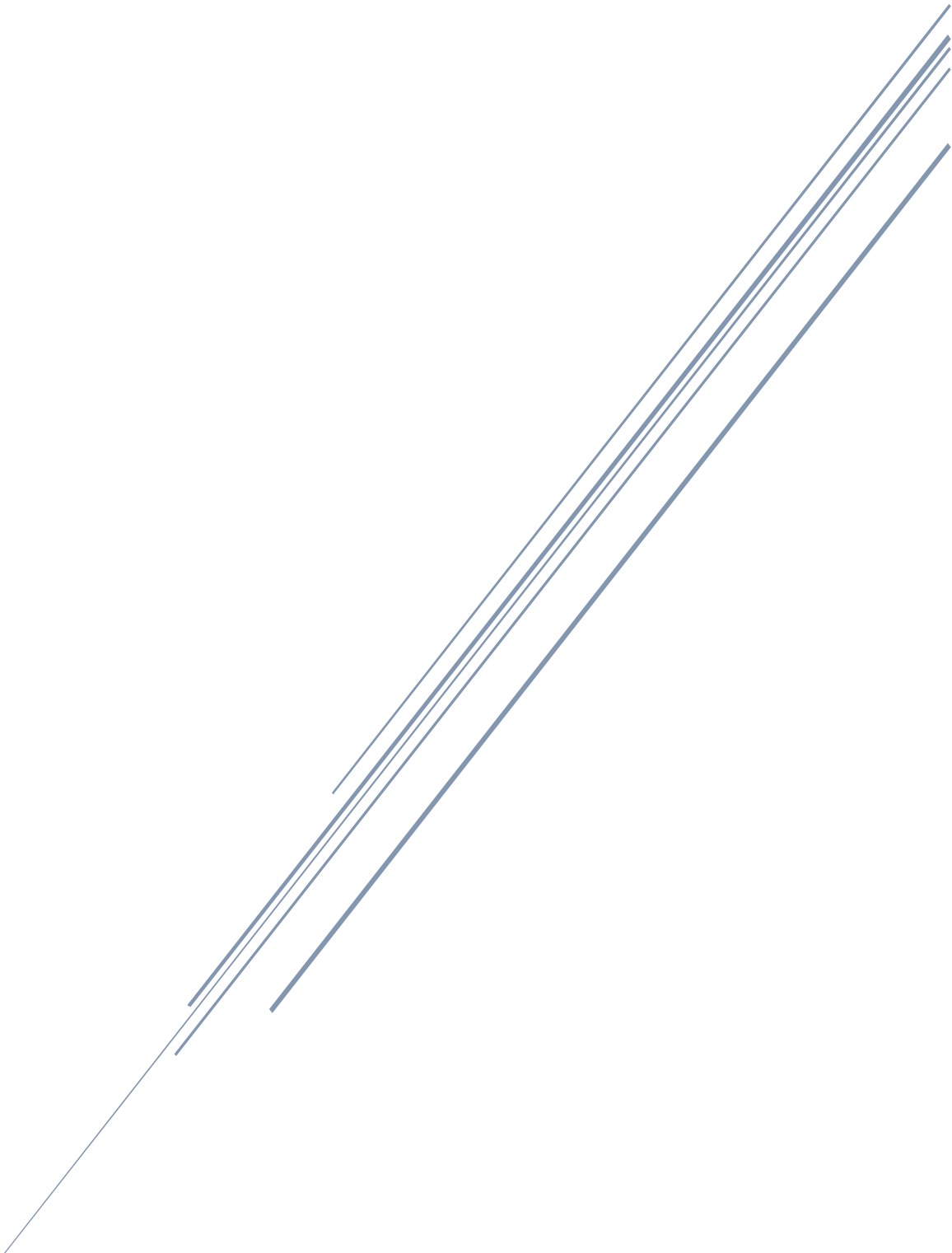
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General

Alternate Formats

The Office of the Secretary to the Governor General (OSGG) is pleased to present the second report on progress made under the 2022–2025 Accessibility Plan. Should you need to consult it in an alternate format, you may submit your request by mail, email or telephone using the information outlined under "Contact Information" (see below). 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 that may be encountered by all individuals who interact with the OSGG in any manner. Individuals are invited to submit their feedback by mail, email or telephone using the information outlined below under "Contact Information" (see below). Anonymous feedback is also accepted. However, please note that acknowledgement of receipt will not be available for such cases.

Contact Information

To the attention of:

Head of Human Resources, OSGG

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Feedback

During the reporting period, the OSGG did not receive any feedback via the designated avenues pertaining to its 2022–2025 Accessibility Plan, the implementation of the plan or barriers encountered by individuals who interact with the department. 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

A survey was conducted last year to collect employee feedback, but the low participation rate (only 23 respondents) highlighted that this means of communication was not the most effective. As a result, we opted for a new approach this year.

The leadership team at the OSGG held a series of employee round tables to better understand the challenges faced by employees, visitors and guests. The goal of these discussions was to implement concrete improvements, while taking into account constraints regarding physical modifications due to the status of historic sites or monuments and the responsibilities of the National Capital Commission (NCC) and Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) as the owners of the buildings.

Round Tables

Based on the Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada, the Human Resources Directorate (HRD) created a strategy document that includes guidelines and a feedback form to lead these discussions. This strategy covered six (6) categories (employment, technology, culture, built environment, services and the measurement of progress) and included open questions for each category. The leadership team was mandated to review these questions with employees and to record the information collected from the feedback form. This document is a flexible guide that helps focus discussions on other relevant subjects.

The round tables between management and employees revealed a lack of understanding of the term "accessibility," as some of the concerns raised, although relevant, were not directly related to this subject.

The discussions highlighted the need for accessibility training and awareness-raising activities to improve employees' and managers' knowledge and increase their awareness of this important subject. This clarification will help structure future discussions and will ensure consistent understanding across the organization.

Employment

As it is an organization within the Core Public Administration, the OSGG's human resources activities 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*. Among recent amendments to the PSEA, the one that came into effect on July 1, 2023, related to section 36, paragraph 2 stipulates that before an assessment method is used, an evaluation must be conducted to identify whether the method includes or creates biases or barriers that disadvantage people belonging to equity-seeking groups. When necessary, reasonable efforts must be made to eliminate or mitigate these effects.

In the 2022–2025 Accessibility Plan, the OSGG remains committed to identifying, mitigating and removing barriers throughout the five (5) key phases of the employee lifecycle: recruitment, onboarding, development, retention and transition. Entry into and mobility within the public service for people with disabilities were identified as and remain barriers. The OSGG continues to make progress in terms of identifying, mitigating and removing barriers in recruitment processes, although this will be an ongoing process and considered regular business.

The HRD continues to recommend the Public Service Commission's (PSC's) Tool for Mitigating Biases and Barriers in Assessment to hiring managers as the primary method for documenting the evaluation, the changes made and appropriate mitigation strategies employed. Human resources advisors on the staffing team 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 workshop held when the amendment to the legislation came into effect. 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, based on the PSC's standards, as set out in the Tool for Mitigating Biases and Barriers in Assessment.

From a client services point of view, implementing the tool caused some issues when processing staffing actions, especially when they were non-advertised staffing actions. For example, the tool was meant to be completed before assessments were conducted to ensure transparency and to work toward bias- and barrier-free recruitment. However, some clients tend to send in their completed documents at the end of the staffing action, after completing the assessments, without consulting the tool, which poses the risk of proceeding with a staffing action that does not follow the guidelines aimed at reducing and mitigating potential bias.

We can therefore conclude that there is a lack of awareness among hiring managers about the importance of this requirement. "Learning sessions" on this subject are planned for next year.

As a second commitment to removing barriers during the recruitment phase of the employee lifecycle, the OSGG will create a targeted outreach function within the HRD that is responsible for establishing partnerships with universities, colleges, communities, etc., to recruit individuals with disabilities.

The HRD is communicating with universities in the National Capital Region to obtain information on recruitment avenues for current students, upcoming graduates and recent graduates who identify as belonging to one or more equity-seeking communities. To date, the HRD has been unable to identify programs or initiatives that directly support people with disabilities in career development; however, staffing advisors systematically suggest that clients consider targeted approaches for under-represented employee groups as a first step in staffing a position.

For the employee development and retention phases, the OSGG is committed to focusing on educating managers so they understand the duty to accommodate, and we are currently developing our first mentoring program within the department. This program is aimed mainly at supporting employees with disabilities in their development and in their public service career. We plan on launching the program's first cohort in early 2025.

Moreover, as of 2025, the HRD will integrate the Canada School of Public Service's course Disability Management and Workplace Wellness (INC120) into its learning curriculum, which includes mandatory training for employees, managers and supervisors. Although this course was initially meant to be mandatory in June 2024, its integration was postponed to 2025 so all the disability management tools currently being designed could be finalized. This framework of tools will help managers and employees to understand why they need to take this training. All managers will need to take this training within six months.

For the retention and transition phases of the employee lifecycle, the HRD is working to establish a disability management framework, which will address accommodation, support for recovery and prevention. The framework is intended to give management the tools and guidance needed to support sound decision making, and to equip them with the knowledge and resources needed to support employee wellness. A consultation process involving key stakeholders is underway, based on the principles of the Managing for Wellness—Disability Management Handbook for Managers in the Federal Public Service. The purpose of this initiative is to foster constructive discussions and to implement a comprehensive departmental disability management framework and policy. Although the initial completion date was set for April 2024, we postponed it to May 2025 to ensure the delivery of a solid, well-supported framework that meets our high standards. We are determined to achieve this important goal.

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. Although the OSGG has been occupying these buildings for a considerable length of time, it does not own them. As such, the OSGG works closely with their owners, the NCC and PSPC, to ensure that these buildings can support OSGG employees, operations and services to the public.

Given the buildings' age, accessibility standards have changed, as this was not a factor that was considered when they were being built. 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 the lack of access for guests and employees with reduced mobility to certain public spaces and some employee work areas because of these areas' inaccessibility (lack of ramps or elevators).

In order to mitigate and eliminate this barrier, the OSGG is working in partnership with the NCC to prioritize and implement the upgrades recommended in the universal accessibility assessment for Rideau Hall, with a focus on the most critical areas to ensure employee and visitor accessibility. While the NCC initiates plans related to the lifecycle, health and safety, and operations of its various buildings on the Rideau Hall grounds, the NCC and the OSGG focus on creating multi-purpose spaces that are accessible to visitors, guests and federal employees. One of the NCC's upcoming projects is to modernize one of the buildings on the Rideau Hall grounds: the Gate Lodge. The OSGG and the NCC discussed future functions and accessibility improvements as part of the NCC planning stage for various projects, including the restoration of the veranda, the functional plan for the administration wing and the restoration of the Gate Lodge. The two organizations also recently created the Rideau Hall Accessibility Working Group (RHAWG), with representatives from the NCC and the OSGG, to provide a forum for the discussion and review of issues related to accessibility, with the objective of making ongoing improvements at Rideau Hall. The RHAWG is a forum where both organizations can collaboratively raise issues, opportunities and priorities, provide advice and guidance, and align efforts. The first meeting should take place in the winter of 2024-2025.

In partnership with PSPC, some actions were also considered as mitigation measures, such as identifying, prioritizing and implementing accessibility upgrades at the Citadelle and the Chancellery (located at 373 Sussex Drive) as needed, and ensuring future renovations are inclusive by design. The OSGG and PSPC meet on a monthly basis to discuss both work locations, which, due to their age and earlier construction, are more physically accessible for persons with disabilities than Rideau Hall. No specific accessibility issues were identified for either location, but the OSGG will continue to work in collaboration with PSPC to make improvements where and when necessary.

Information and Communication Technologies

As its processes become 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 accessible to all. In addition to its website (www.gg.ca), the OSGG uses 23 internal systems for its operations in support of the Governor General of Canada. The website provides Canadians with current information about the Governor General of Canada and an overview of recent and upcoming activities. The website can also be 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 website is undergoing a technological upgrade. The new version of the website will comply with all current accessibility guidelines. Compatibility with screen readers is an example of a barrier that will be addressed with this upgrade. The OSGG's website also publishes information in accessible 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 faced by its staff. This will be an ongoing process until all 23 systems are fully compliant with accessibility standards. Moreover, the OSGG's 2024 rollout of Office 365 incorporates advanced accessibility features, which helps improve the compliance of existing systems.

The OSGG is also committed to creating a partnership with the Accessibility, Accommodation and Adaptive Computer Technology (AAACT) program, which provides services to ensure an inclusive and accessible work environment for employees with disabilities. The program proposes workplace adaptations, adaptive technologies and personalized support to help employees to be more independent and effective.

This partnership will bring significant benefits to our department and will ensure that employees with disabilities have the tools and resources they need. It will also support our objective of creating an inclusive work environment, which will promote talent retention and build up the department's reputation in terms of diversity and inclusion. This partnership

will also help us to meet the requirements of the *Accessible Canada Act* by ensuring a workplace that complies with accessibility standards.

Communication,* Other than IT and Communication Technologies
*Communication includes the use of American Sign Language, Québec Sign Language and Indigenous sign languages.

In its 2022–2025 Accessibility Plan, the OSGG committed to ensuring that all communication initiatives, products and services meet the highest standards of accessibility and inclusion, as per the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat's Policy on Communications and Federal Identity and Standard on Web Accessibility.

The OSGG identified barriers and areas of improvement, including the following:

- 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; and
- visuals and information on digital platforms may not be fully inclusive or representative of people with disabilities.

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

The Addressing Disability Inclusion and Barriers to Accessibility (INC115) course was included in the learning curriculum last year; this course is mandatory for all OSGG employees. The purpose of this course is to promote an inclusive workplace by making employees aware of the realities of people with disabilities. It helps them to better understand the different types of barriers that people can face every day in their workplace.

Since its launch, the course has had a 74% completion rate, which shows employees' growing commitment to strengthening inclusion at the OSGG. This course is a key element in the OSGG's strategy to eliminate barriers to accessibility and ensure a more equitable work environment for all.

The OSGG ensures that communication documents on its website and on its digital platforms, including photos and videos, conform to accessibility requirements under 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, and white spacing. Greater care is dedicated to ensuring inclusivity in the visuals and content on the digital platforms and in content that can help alleviate the 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 communication 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 requests for proposals (RFP) and their resulting contracts, have been reviewed and adjusted to comply with the guidance set out on Employment and Social Development Canada's Making documents more accessible page. 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. Procurement files also 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 deliverables include accessibility features was previously identified as an obstacle. To resolve this issue, the Material Management and Procurement (MM&P) team implemented a corrective measure by asking all procurement officers to take training on the impacts of the *Accessible Canada Act* in terms of procurement and the importance of accessible procurement. To date, all members of the team have successfully completed this training.

In addition, the OSGG is committed to ensuring that all new procurement officers complete this training within three months of joining the team, if they have not previously taken it. The following four courses are now mandatory for the entire team, and for new employees within three months of hiring:

- *The Accessible Canada Act and Government Procurement*

- *What does it mean to consider accessibility in government procurement*

- Spotlight on ACCESSibility Micro-Learning Series: Procurement (INC1-V33)

- Workplace Accommodation Consultation Series: Accessible Procurement (INC1-V35)

The team will also continue to consult with the Accessibility Procurement Resource Centre (APRC) when appropriate to ensure the effectiveness and compliance of accessible procurement practices.

Furthermore, the OSGG committed to updating its internal procurement procedures, adapting new direction on accessible procurement and delivering procurement accessibility awareness training to project authorities (PA) and technical authorities (TA) within the OSGG. This will give employees the tools and guidance needed to take accessibility into account when considering and defining procurement requirements. Progress is ongoing, with a target completion date of March 2025.

The Design and Delivery of Programs and Services

The OSGG's Chancellery of Honours 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. It administers all 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.

Based on the information collected in 2023, an additional study was conducted to better understand the Order of Canada nomination process, focusing on the people nominated and those who nominate them. This information will guide future awareness-raising activities.

In this context, specific attention was paid to candidates' and nominators' accessibility and diversity. Several actions have been taken to better understand the representation of under-represented communities, including people with disabilities.

Since 2019, voluntary diversity information has been collected from award recipients, including data on Indigenous peoples, visible minorities, people from the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and people with disabilities. This information allows us to better understand diversity within Order of Canada honours and to identify under-represented groups.

To improve accessibility and diversity in the nomination process, the Chancellery has begun work to extend this data collection to nominators starting in 2025. This new component will allow us to better understand the demographics of nominators, to identify diversity gaps and to ensure that all communities, including people with disabilities, are represented equitably. The Chancellery is also planning to collect diversity data about those who are nominated in order to examine the reasons for unsuccessful nominations and to make the process more accessible and inclusive.

Moreover, to support this commitment to inclusivity and non-discrimination, mandatory training on gender and diversity analysis plus (2SLGBTQIA+) has been added to the learning curriculum for all OSGG employees. The goal of this training is to make employees aware of accessibility and diversity issues, and to ensure that decisions are made equitably and without bias; it will also ensure that the Order of Canada nomination process is inclusive, non-discriminatory and respectful of the diversity of all Canadian communities.

On the Heraldry side of the Chancellery's operations, application forms for the creation of heraldic emblems have been entirely reviewed and simplified in their paper and web formats (fully accessible HTML forms). All of the communication templates being used by the Canadian Heraldic Authority have been edited, using bullet points and plain language as much as possible. The use of plain language is now consistently applied in all communications. 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 the wording 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. Additional efforts are also made to provide alt text for images on the Facebook page.

The Chancellery is reviewing recommendations and developing a plan to address the issues identified. To support diversity and inclusion, all Chancellery staff has completed training that covered anti-bias, inclusion and accessibility awareness. Additional training sessions on gender-based analysis will be completed, as will a thorough review of the 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 at the department's two locations are addressed in the built environment section

of this strategy. As such, the commitments noted above focus on improving services related to non-physical types of disabilities, including neurodiverse and other types of invisible disabilities.

As part of our commitment to promoting inclusivity and accessibility among OSGG employees, we will be implementing the Accessible Workplace Passport as of 2025. This voluntary and confidential tool will allow each employee to document their accommodation needs by identifying the obstacles encountered in their work environment and by proposing practical solutions. The goal is to foster a proactive, collaborative approach by facilitating discussions between employees and their managers to ensure appropriate accommodations measures are taken. The goal of implementing the passport is to reinforce workplace inclusivity and accessibility while ensuring the confidentiality of the information collected. This initiative will be an important step in creating a work environment that fully supports the success of each individual employee, regardless of their specific needs.

Conclusion

In 2025, the OSGG will continue its efforts to promote inclusivity and accessibility through several key projects. In collaboration with the National Capital Commission and Public Services and Procurement Canada, physical improvements will be made to the buildings to improve accessibility while respecting the constraints of heritage sites. This work will help make work and service areas more accessible to everyone, including people with reduced mobility.

The OSGG will also create a mentorship program to support the career progression of members of under-represented groups and to foster employee development. At the same time, integrating the Accessible Workplace Passport will be a key initiative, as it will be a voluntary, confidential tool that will allow each employee to document their accommodation needs. This program will foster a proactive, collaborative approach by facilitating discussions between employees and their managers to ensure appropriate accommodations measures are taken.

The OSGG will also create a partnership with the Accessibility, Accommodation and Adaptive Computer Technology program. This program will provide workplace adaptation solutions, adapted technologies and personalized support to help employees with disabilities to be more autonomous and effective while ensuring an inclusive work environment.

The goal of these initiatives is to eliminate physical and digital barriers, which will create an environment where all employees and the public can participate fully and feel included.