EHRC RHIEC

From Disability to Inclusion

Project Resource Kit

The electricity sector employs over 100,000 people across Canada, and it's facing a growing labour market challenge. Many skilled workers are retiring, and the sector is undergoing transformation.

This presents a unique opportunity to engage in the intentional diversification of our workforce. For people with disabilities seeking employment and long-term careers, there are opportunities in a wide array of occupations, even in careers not usually associated with the electricity sector.

Disability to Inclusion Project Resource Kit

The *EHRC Resource Kit for Hiring and Retaining People with Disabilities in the Electricity Sector* is an online resource developed as a result of EHRC's *Disability to Inclusion* project (under the [EnAbling Change Program](#)) in partnership with the [Government of Ontario](#). The kit gives employers a variety of accessibility tools and materials to help them improve access and supports for people with disabilities who work or wish to work in the Canadian electricity industry.

The *Resource Kit* is designed to help organizations develop employer-driven initiatives for inclusion and accessibility (whatever the scope or resources may be). The kit provides employers with practical information and common-sense solutions to ensure that people with disabilities can find employment and succeed in rewarding careers within the industry. It is by no means comprehensive—it is meant to provide answers to key questions in an easy-to-use format, with a supporting compendium of links to additional resources in a downloadable format that can provide further information.

The *Resource Kit* is a living resource which will be continuously updated as new materials are developed or discovered. At the bottom of each page, you can find a link where you may connect with us to suggest additional resources. We welcome your input and feedback.

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Boiler plate text

Leading the Way with an Inclusive Culture

With an aging workforce (and the increase in disability that can accompany aging), impending mass retirements, and a desire by utilities to be socially inclusive in their hiring, employers need to be aware of the potential that people with disabilities bring to the workplace. Beyond the argument that it is the right thing to do, it makes good business sense. Employers can access an under-utilized labour pool, including people who have a broad range of skills, education, and experience. Building a more inclusive and accessible workplace leads to lower absenteeism, higher productivity, and increased morale[1, 2] As a result, employers, HR professionals and managers in the sector require knowledge, skills, strategies, and tools to build their comfort and confidence with creating accessible and adaptable environments. Building workplaces that support people with disabilities is critical. We need to actively make our workplaces more accessible, and work against "old ideas": the stigma and stereotyping that leads to discrimination. Many employers within the electricity sector have knowingly hired persons with disabilities. ALL employers in the sector, however, have someone with a disability as an employee, whether the employer knows it or not. More than 20% of Canadians have one or more disabilities[3] (the majority of which are not physical, or are non-apparent[4]). For people with disabilities, quality employment means they can actively participate in their communities, workforce, and the larger economy. For industry employers, it means tapping into an underused talent pool to address labour market challenges while at the same time having a positive impact on innovation, profitability, and the ability to accommodate and retain talent[5]

Inclusion Initiatives

There are three key elements to ensure accessibility initiatives are both successful and sustainable:

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1. Hartnett, Helen P. et al. 'Employers' Perceptions of the Benefits of Workplace Accommodations: Reasons to Hire, Retain and Promote People with Disabilities'. 1 Jan. 2011 : 17 – 23.

2. Lindsay, S., Cagliostro, E., Albarico, M., Mortaji, N., & Karon, L. (2018). A systematic review of the benefits of hiring people with disabilities. Journal of occupational rehabilitation, 1-22.

3. Easter Seals (n.d.). Disability in Canada: Know the Facts. https://easterseals.ca/en/disability-in-canada-facts-figures/

4. Canadian Mental Health Association (2021). Fast Facts about Mental Health and Mental Illness. https://cmha.ca/brochure/fast-facts-about-mental-illness/

5. Getting to Equal: The Disability Inclusion Advantage. Accenture Consulting 2018

1. Leadership

Understand and believe in the value of an inclusive workplace
Leadership sets the tone and the priorities in creating an accessible organization. Leaders or employers may need to work with existing staff to demonstrate the organization's commitment to building an inclusive workplace. We know that inclusion leads to a healthy workplace culture, and an inclusive workplace is a strong predictor of employee engagement at work, regardless of differing abilities.

Active support from Senior Management
The practice of being accessible requires the whole team to work together. Senior management, and management generally have a critical role to play in modeling inclusive behavior and demonstrating the value that accessibility brings for all workers.

Removal of barriers
As a leader, removing barriers might mean you act across different fronts in the organization. Some barriers to inclusion in the workplace are systemic, including biases in the hiring process and stigma in the workplace; and some might be workplace specific, such as lack of physical accessibility or a lack of appropriate workplace accommodations.

Develop an action plan, monitor and review
Your accessibility plan explains how the organization is finding, preventing, and removing barriers. Once you have a plan in place, you can track your progress towards inclusivity goals, and modify your approach as needed.

Identify priorities
As part of your plan, prioritize areas for improvement in accessibility practices, and identify ways your organization could improve the removal and prevention of barriers.

2. Culture

Embedding health and wellbeing in the organization
Organizations thrive, and have greater productivity, when their employees are healthy and happy. Creating a culture of health and wellbeing starts from an explicit commitment to valuing the wellbeing of workers and develops hand-in-hand with creating a workplace of inclusion and belonging.

Ensuring a healthy and safe workplace environment
There is a misconception that persons with disabilities are more likely to get sick or injured on the job. This is incorrect. In fact, workers with disabilities are more likely to work safely[6]. As an employer,

your commitment to creating a healthy and safe workplace extends beyond the physical, into creating a psychologically healthy workplace for all employees. Employees feel valued and included

An important part of building a culture that supports accessibility is creating a workplace that is respectful and inclusive overall. When employees feel psychologically safe at work, they are more likely to disclose if they have a disability, and more likely to ask for accommodations that improve their job performance. And since we know "what gets measured gets improved"[7], the more workers who disclose their disabilities, the more opportunity a workplace has to improve its practices and monitor progress towards inclusivity goals.

Supporting staff with disabilities
Depending on the size of your workplace, you might consider establishing a disability-oriented Employee Resource Group (ERG), which is a voluntary, employee-led group that supports group-members, and the employer, to help foster a diverse and inclusive workplace. Other supports for staff could include a streamlined process for requesting work accommodations and offering training or information to all staff centering disability at work.

Promoting work/life balance
One of the most straightforward ways to improve accessibility in the workplace is to make adjustments that positively impact all employees. Promoting work/life balance, including "logging off" times, remote work, and flexible work (where appropriate) improve working conditions for all workers, not just workers with disabilities.

3. Communication

Effective communication
Effective messaging is clear, concise, ongoing, bidirectional, and uses respectful language. Clear communication is important for all of the points outlined in the "culture" and "leadership" categories above. Respectful language, or inclusive language, is part of accessible communication. In Canada, it is common practice to use "person-first" language. When talking about people with disabilities. For example, rather than "the blind receptionist at the desk is named Mo", we would say "Mo is the receptionist at the front desk. She is blind".

However, some people with disabilities prefer to use 'identity-first' language. With 'identity-first' language, the identifying word is placed first, highlighting the person's embrace of their identity, for

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[6] Lindsay, S., Cagliostro, E., Albarico, M., Mortaji, N., & Karon, L. (2018). A

[6] systematic review of the benefits of hiring people with disabilities. Journal of occupational rehabilitation, 28(4), 634-655.

[7] https://www.thehrdirector.com/features/big-data/what-gets-measured-gets-improved/

example "I am a disabled person", rather than "I am a person with a disability". When in doubt, ask the person how they would like to be addressed.

All staff feel included and involved
An inclusive and diverse workplace helps generate innovation and engagement. Employers lead this through intentionally practicing inclusion – helping employees feel like they have a voice, being open to all ideas, supporting employees to advance their careers, and articulating to employees that their work is valued.

Overall, establishing an inclusive business culture begins with leadership at the highest levels, including top executives, leadership teams, and boards of directors. Mid-level managers and supervisors, and particularly human resources staff and other personnel involved in hiring decisions, must also understand the role they play in facilitating an inclusive environment.

Finally, communicating the company's goal of an inclusive and diverse workplace to employees at all levels of the organization and indicating what they can do to help are also extremely important. One action company-leaders can take is to adopt formal expressions of commitment and intent related to the recruitment, hiring, retention, and advancement of qualified individuals with disabilities. In some jurisdictions, formal accessibility policies and plans are legal requirements. In Ontario, for instance, all businesses (including non-profits and the public sector) with more than one employee must now have a written policy and plan to improve accessibility in the workplace.

Prior to and throughout this project, employers have demonstrated their commitment to building an inclusive and supportive workplace for people with disabilities either entering or already employed within the sector. Some employers have already taken strides to improve workplace accessibility and recruit people with disabilities, providing leadership and promising practices in their sector, while others are looking to get started and wondering how.

What counts most is the commitment to achieving an inclusive workplace and willingness to act. Commitment at all levels of an organization is critical to creating and maintaining a truly diverse and inclusive work environment.

Previous EHRC research findings show a high level of senior management commitment and accountability for accessibility, and good practices for implementing workplace accommodations and adjustments. Many organizations have also made genuine efforts to ensure their corporate vision, goals and objectives reflect principles of inclusion.

> Establishing an inclusive business culture begins with leadership at the highest levels, including top executives, leadership teams, and boards of directors.

Useful Resources

Business Case For Hiring People With Disabilities

[Canadian Apprenticeship Forum](#) – This forum provides information for employers interested in hiring apprentices, including a national list of incentives, supports and resources for accommodating people with disabilities in skilled trades.

[Presidents Group – Why Hiring People With Disabilities is Good for Business Now: The "New Normal" and New Opportunities](#) – A business case for hiring people with disabilities. Includes research findings about employing persons with disabilities and how the COVID-19 pandemic has evolved business models of work.

[The Business Benefits of Accessibility (Infographic)](#)

[Hiring People with Disabilities is Good for Business in "New Normal" (Infographic)](#)

[Canada Human Rights Council—Improving representation for people with disabilities](#)

[Business Benefits of Accessible Workplaces (Conference Board of Canada)](#) – People with disabilities remain an overlooked talent pool in the labour market and often struggle to find meaningful employment opportunities. There are clear business benefits, both direct and indirect, to accessible employment practices, including access to an untapped labour pool, large consumer markets, enhanced disability management, improved brand image, and broader community/societal benefits.

[Projecting the Economic Impacts of Increased Accessibility in Ontario](#) – Study commissioned by Government of Ontario which examines the potential economic impact of achieving substantially higher levels of accessibility.

[Who do we benefit when we make Ontario accessible?](#) – A video commemorating the 10th anniversary of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities act; when we work together to make Ontario accessible, who do we benefit?

[Employers' Toolkit: Making Ontario Workplaces Accessible to People With Disabilities, 2nd Edition](#) – This fully accessible toolkit was created to help Ontario employers tap into a vibrant and underutilized labour pool—people with disabilities—and assist employers in meeting the Employment Standard of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

[UN Enable – Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) – The Secretariat for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (SCRPD) falls within the Division for Social Policy and Development (DSPD) of the United Nations Department of

Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA). SCRPD serves as a focal point on disability issues within the United Nations system (PDF).

Changing The Corporate Culture

[Canadian Abilities Foundation. Neglected or Hidden: Connecting Employers and People with Disabilities in Canada. Summary Report](#) – A report on a nation-wide research report conducted to identify employment-related barriers for people with disabilities and to develop a better understanding of how to overcome them. Includes statistical data from the survey.

[Center for Advanced Human Resources Studies – Discrimination in Organizations: An Organizational-Level Systems Perspective](#) – Cornell University's Centre for Advanced Human Resource Studies takes a look at discrimination in organizations and provides employers with strategies and tools to help overcome challenges surrounding discrimination.

Bonaccio, S. et al. (2020). [The Participation of People with Disabilities in the Workplace Across the Employment Cycle: Employer Concerns and Research Evidence](#) – Recommendations for organizations committed to creating more effective, equitable, and inclusive workplaces are suggested about specific concerns that employers have about people with disabilities, from pre-employment and entry experiences to the final dissolution of the employment relationship.

[Enterprise Health Solutions: Connecting Health Management Talent to the Modern Workplace](#) – A guide for introducing cost-effective employee health programs. In addition to providing tools and templates, the organization (1) details the processes required to achieve a healthier workforce (2) suggests ways to define, measure, and track specific initiatives using many of the same techniques that have improved the performance of business operations vacations and other types of leave, and (3) offers proven tactics and strategies for managing complex change, particularly changes in the culture of an organization of work.

[Miner R. People Without Jobs, Jobs Without People. Miner and Miner Management Consultants](#) – A detailed overview of the effects of our aging population on the labour market in the decades ahead.

[Beatty, J. et al. (2018). On the Treatment of Persons with Disabilities in Organizations: A Review and Research Agenda](#) – This study examines the treatment of persons with disabilities by reviewing 88 empirical studies of management, rehabilitation, psychology, and sociology research. Seven gaps are highlighted for organizations to consider and support their development of a more inclusive workplace.

Accessibility & Disability-Related Terms

You've likely heard of "DEI", an acronym for "Diversity, Equity and Inclusion". Diversity refers to the presence of differences within a given setting; in the workplace, that may mean differences amongst people in race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, and socioeconomic background. Equity is the act of ensuring that processes and programs are impartial, fair, and provide equal possible outcomes for every individual. Inclusion is the practice of making people feel a sense of belonging at work.

The next step in thinking about diversity, equity and inclusion at work is to re-frame the DEI conversation to one about "IDEA" – that is, Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and **Accessibility.**

Including accessibility as a central pillar of our initiatives helps us to think beyond conventional ideas of disability and start to think about access to opportunity for all people. A well-known analogy says:

- Diversity is where everyone is invited to the party.
- Inclusion means that everyone gets to contribute to the playlist.
- Equity means that everyone has the opportunity to dance in as much space as they need.
- Accessibility means everyone can get in the door.

So, while diversity and inclusion are our goals, we can't get there without a specific focus on accessibility, on opening the door for everyone. For if people can't "get in the door", how can we achieve our diversity goals?

How is a disability defined?

The most common forms of disability in Canada, and in the Canadian workforce, are related to pain, mobility, flexibility, and mental health. A large proportion of disability in Canada is also comprised of blind/low vision, Deaf/hard of hearing, intellectual, developmental, and learning disabilities – all disabilities that may not be evident to the onlooker.

Below are some common terms and their definitions:

Accessibility – Accessibility refers to the design of products, devices, services, or environments for people who experience disabilities. Accessibility means giving people of all abilities the opportunities to participate fully in everyday life. Ontario has laws to improve accessibility for people with disabilities, including the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and the [Ontario Human Rights Code](#). There are also accessibility laws in Nova Scotia, British Columbia, Manitoba and federally.

People with disabilities are often thought of as those in wheelchairs and with visible physical disabilities. However, most disability is non-apparent.

Accessible – In the case of a facility, readily usable by individuals with different disabilities; in the case of a program or activity, presented or provided in such a way that a particular individual can participate, with or without auxiliary aid(s); in the case of electronic resources or web interfaces, accessible with or without assistive computer technology.

Accommodation – An adjustment or modification to make a program, facility, job or resource accessible to a person with a disability.

In employment, accommodation is to address and ameliorate disability-related barriers that impact an employee's ability to perform the essential duties of their job. Employees must make their accommodation needs known, and job accommodations are then developed to meet individual employee's needs. Accommodations for an individual worker may also increase accessibility for others in the workplace. Accommodations, once made, will need to be re-visited periodically, as an employee's needs may change, especially with emergent disabilities related to ageing. Employers have a legal duty to accommodate workers on the job, up to the point of "undue hardship", a high legal bar under provincial human rights codes.

Adaptive or assistive technology – Hardware or software products or features that provide access to a computer that is otherwise inaccessible to an individual with a disability.

Accessibility Acts (legislation) – Five Canadian provinces (Ontario, British Columbia, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, and Quebec), as well as the Federal Government currently have legislation (laws) mandating accessibility related policies and actions to improve opportunities for persons with disabilities. The Acts are the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA); the Accessible Manitoba Act (AMA); the Act Respecting Accessibility in Nova Scotia (NSAA); Quebec's Act Respecting Equal Access to Employment in Public Bodies; and the Accessible Canada Act (ACA). British Columbia has recently (2021) passed an accessibility act (BCAA) and is in the process of developing standards.
Collectively, these Acts address the removal of barriers in Customer Service/Goods and Services; Information and Communication; Employment, The built environment/design of public spaces; and Transportation. Each Act, in each jurisdiction, has its own requirements for compliance with the law, and its own mechanism for enforcement.

Age-related Disabilities/Impairments – The aging process is characterized by the acquisition of progressive multiple minor impairments predominately related to sight, hearing, dexterity, mobility, and cognition. In combination, these can lead to high levels of disability and dependency. While aging itself is not considered a disability, a persons' accessibility needs may change as they age.

Alternate Formats – Formats useable by people with disabilities. These may include, but are not limited to, Braille, ASCII text, large print, and recorded audio. As part of compliance with accessibility legislation, some critical information for employees and clients must be available in alternate formats upon their request.

Alternate Methods – Different means of providing information, including product documentation, to people with disabilities. Alternate methods may include, but are not limited to, voice, fax, relay service, TTY, Internet posting, captioning, text-to-speech synthesis, and audio description.

Assistive Technology or Assistive Device – Any item, piece of equipment, or system, that is commonly used to increase, maintain, or improve accessibility for individuals with disabilities. Includes items such as communication devices, adapted appliance for accessible living, environmental control devices, modified housing, adapted computers and peripherals (mice, etc), and specialized software.

Barrier – A barrier is a circumstance or obstacle that prevents full and equitable usability of a space, device, tool, or digital environment. For people with disabilities, barriers can take many forms including attitudinal, communication, physical, policy, programmatic, social, and transportation. Removing and preventing barriers increases accessibility.

Disability – The 2019 Accessible Canada Act defines disability as "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.

It is worth noting that the definition of disability provided by the ACA, as well as by the NSAA and the AMA emphasizes that "disability interacts with a barrier". The interaction with the barrier, rather than the disability itself, is what creates inaccessibility.

Disability Confidence – Disability confidence refers to having knowledge about, comfort with, and understanding of how to include people with disabilities in the workplace. Organizations and leaders grow their disability confidence by interacting/working with those with disabilities to improve positive attitudes, social inclusion, and empathy. At the same time, companies enhance their understanding of disability, and develop ways to removing barriers and increase accessibility.

Medical model and social (non-medical) models of disability – The "medical model of disability frames disability as a physical or mental (biological) limitation of a person, whose actions and self-advocacy are assumed to be the primary solutions for improving

We see in this definition that a disability can be apparent or non-apparent, chronic, sudden, or intermittent, and can take many forms.

their experiences in life. Though outdated, this perception is still the more common way of thinking about and understanding disability.

A newer understanding of disability, known as the "social model", understands disability as the result of environments, attitudes and social norms that make the world unwelcoming to the range of humans' physical and mental differences and prevents some people from full participation in society. It is the experience of inequity that create disability.

Standard – Accessibility Acts federally and across the provinces are put into action through the creation of accessibility standards. These standards are laws that apply to individuals, governments, and public and private sector organizations and are designed to improve accessibility. The accessibility standards in each province outline the legal requirements to identify, remove and prevent barriers, and contain timelines for the implementation of required measures.

Universal Design – Universal design (sometimes also called inclusive design or barrier-free design) is the design and structure of an environment, process, or plan so that it can be understood, accessed, and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age or ability. Principles of universal design include: design that is simple, flexible and intuitive to use; design that requires low physical effort and has a high tolerance for error (the design of the structure or process minimizes the potential for harm that could come from incorrect or accidental use); universal design avoids segmenting or stigmatizing all users; and universal design strives to make information perceptible to all users, presenting essential information (job training information as an example) in as many ways and formats as possible.

Useful Resources

Legislation, Standards & Reporting

Accessibility Laws – Ontario has laws to improve accessibility for people with disabilities. Learn about the requirements and compliance reporting deadlines you need to follow depending on the type and size of your organization.

About accessibility laws – Legislation, accessibility standards, action plans and progress reports that help make Ontario a more accessible province for people with disabilities (includes the Ontario Human Rights Code).

The Path to 2025: Ontario's Accessibility Action Plan – Ontario's plan to ensure the province remains on track to creating an accessible province in the decade ahead.

Quick List for Ontario Employers
- Review your accessibility requirements at Ontario.ca/accessibility
- Make sure you are meeting every requirement that is currently in effect for your organization, as of January 1, 2017.
- File your accessibility compliance report at Ontario.ca/AccessibilityReport.

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Annual Report 2019 – The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Annual Report looks at the progress being made towards an accessible Ontario by 2025.

Who do we benefit when we make Ontario accessible? – A video commemorating the 10th anniversary of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act; when we work together to make Ontario accessible, who do we benefit?

Working Together – A video about how the Ontario Human Rights Code relates to people with disabilities.

September 2016 Mandate letter: Accessibility – Premier's instructions to the Minister on priorities

Education & Training

Accessibility Directorate's monthly toolbox – Subscribe to be always up-to-date on the Standards, accessibility news and resources!

AccessForward – Training for an Accessible Ontario – Provides free training modules to meet the training requirements under Ontario's accessibility laws. Developed in partnership with the Government of Ontario.

AccessibilityWorks – A website that features webinars, information sessions and an online toolkit to help small and medium-sized businesses **understand** accessibility requirements.

Accessibility Workplaces and Policy

Accessible Workplaces – Ontario's Accessible Employment Standard requires you to make your employment practices accessible to meet the needs of employees and job applicants with disabilities. Learn how to meet the standard.

Access Talent: Ontario's Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities – Strategy to help people with disabilities find employment.

Handbook for Accessible Employment – A short guide with checklists, samples and templates to help small organizations implement the accessibility standard for employment.

Employers' Toolkit: Making Ontario's Workplaces Accessible to People with Disabilities – A comprehensive resource guide to the Employment Standard designed to help organizations make their workplaces accessible to people with disabilities – includes fillable and customizable templates.

Harold Jeepers Video Series – Human Resources Professionals Association – A series of short videos presenting the Employment Standard and examples of good practices.

How to create accessibility policies – A template for private and non-profit organizations with 1 to 49 employees on how to create accessibility policies.

How to create an accessibility plan and policy – A guide and template on how to prepare accessibility policies and a multi-year plan. This is for private and non-profit organizations with 50 or more employees and for public sector organizations.

Sample Industry Accessibility Plans

Electrical Safety Authority

Hydro Ottawa

Hydro One

Ontario Power

Alectra Utilities

Toronto Hydro

Other Resources

Planning Accessible Events: So Everyone Feels Welcome – A booklet with many low-cost and no-cost things to do to create more inclusive events

Serve-Ability – An online course that will help organizations train their members who work with customers or create policies and procedures on how to interact with people with different disabilities.

A Planning Guide for Accessible Conferences – A guide with practical information on how the identify, remove and prevent barriers when planning a conference.

Human Resources and Skills Development Canada – Guide to Planning Inclusive Meetings – Well-planned meetings are an essential communication tool for any organization. This guide helps meeting planners learn to organize meetings that are accessible and inclusive.

Guide to Accessible Public Engagement – A guide providing the resources and best practices organizations need to develop and support accessible public engagement.

The Inclusive Design Guide and The Inclusive Learning Design Handbook

Guide for web developers – A guide to help website developers understand how to create accessible websites and web content.

Guide to hiring a web developer – A guide to help organizations through the process of assessing and hiring a web developer.

Accessible Digital Office Document Project – A website to help users create accessible office documents and choose accessible office programs that one's organization can use.

AChecker: Website Accessibility checker – This free intensive e-course will help web content editors and web developers to quickly build the knowledge, skills, and practical experience needed to support an organization's web accessibility compliance efforts.

Digital Accessibility Teaching and Learning ResourcesA series of practical online courses and textbooks with the aim of encouraging others to address topics related to digital accessibility in their own teaching. They are also available to readers who want to understand how digital accessibility affects them personally and to those who wish to develop expertise with digital accessibility.

Legislation, Accessibility Standards & Reporting

Employers need to keep pace with important legislation that affects the way they do business. Ontario was the first province to enact specific legislation establishing a goal and timeframe for accessibility improvements. Since then, Manitoba, and Nova Scotia have passed robust accessibility legislation, as has the Government of Canada. British Columbia is also developing legislation on accessibility. Each jurisdiction has developed their own implementation timelines, and reporting requirements.

What is the Accessible Canada Act?

An Act to ensure a barrier-free Canada (the Accessible Canada Act, or ACA) came into force on July 11, 2019. Standards to accompany the Act are under development. The Accessible Canada Act recognizes the existing human rights framework that supports equality for people with disabilities in Canada. This includes:

- the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms
- the Canadian Human Rights Act, and
- Canada's commitments as a State Party to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The Accessible Canada Act builds on these frameworks through an emphasis on identifying, removing, and preventing barriers to accessibility. The Act applies to organizations under federal responsibility, including but not limited to:

- the Government of Canada, including government departments, agencies, and Crown corporations
- parts of the private sector that the Government of Canada regulates, such as:
  - Nuclear energy
  - banks
  - the federal transportation network, including:
  - airlines
  - rail, road, and marine transportation providers that cross provincial or international borders
  - the broadcasting and telecommunications sectors
  - the Canadian Forces and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

The Act requires organizations to prepare and publish accessibility policies and plans, set up feedback mechanisms, and report on progress towards accessibility.

Act Name	Date	Goal of the Act	Focused on
Accessible British Columbia Act (ABCA)	June 2021	BCAA is implemented in the Public Sector, requiring organizations to establish an accessibility committee, an accessibility plan, and a build a tool to receive feedback on their accessibility.	Standards for the Act are under development, but are focused on: • Employment • Built environment • Information and communications • Procurement • Service delivery • Transportation • Health • Education
Nova Scotia Accessibility Act (NSAA)	April 2017	Once implemented, accessibility standards will apply first to the Government of Nova Scotia, followed by the Public Sector. Standard implementation for the Private Sector will follow at a later date.	Standards to be developed and implemented by 2022 in the following areas: • Built environment • Education • Information and communications • Goods and services • Transportation • Employment
Accessibility for Manitobans Act (AMA) and Standards (AMAS)	Dec. 2013	The act impacts all businesses (private, public, nonprofit) in the province. To increase accessibility in employment, businesses are required to review their recruitment, hiring, training, and return to work processes with a view towards accommodation and accessibility.	The AMA has 5 accessibility standards, covering: • Customer Service • Employment • Information and communication • Transportation • The Built Environment
Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)	June 2005	Set to establish a process for developing and enforcing accessibility standards to ensure that people of all abilities can participate fully in everyday life, with a goal of making Ontario more accessible by 2025.	Beginning in 2017, Ontario businesses and non-profits with 1 employee or more must comply with the AODA. Additionally, employers with 20 or more employees must file an accessibility compliance report with the Government of Ontario.

What are the accessibility standards that are currently in place?

Accessibility standards are laws that government, businesses, non-profits, and public sector organizations must follow to become more accessible. The Ontario Government has identified five areas of daily life and has established accessibility standards to help organizations identify and remove barriers within them. Click on each area below to learn more:

- Employment Standard*
- Customer Service Standard
- Information and Communications Standard
- Design of Public Spaces Standard
- Transportation Standard

*The focus of EHRC's *Disability to Inclusion* project and of this toolkit is on the Employment Standard across all jurisdictions. Further

information and resources on creating accessible workplaces and policy can be found below.

Many EHRC stakeholders, members and partners are based in Ontario and Alberta. Alberta has yet to develop accessibility legislation, but the accessibility standards and legislation in Ontario are well established. General requirements of existing standards in Ontario and elsewhere are outlined below.

Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR) Guidelines

AODA standards are part of the IASR which includes, in addition to requirements specific to each standard, the following general requirements:

- provide training to staff and volunteers
- develop an accessibility policy
- create a multi-year accessibility plan and update it every five years
- consider accessibility in procurement and when designing or purchasing self-service kiosks

The guidelines for the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation will be undergoing a review. The standards you need to follow and reporting deadlines you need to meet still apply.

How do I Complete my Accessibility Compliance Report in Ontario?

Step-by-step guidance on completing an accessibility compliance report for your business, not-for-profit or public-sector organization.

Manitoba and Nova Scotia do not currently require organizations to report on their accessibility compliance. Organizations must complete accessibility plans, and must describe their progress in identifying, removing, and preventing accessibility barriers.

Federally, under the ACA, organizations must complete reports showing their progress towards identifying and removing accessibility barriers.

Additional Resources

What you will need before filing your ACR

ACR form for business or non-profit organizations

ACR form for public sector organizations

Step-by-step guide to completing your ACR form in video, described video and readable PDF formats

Disability Inclusive and Accessible Recruiting

Building an inclusive culture, as discussed in an earlier section, takes thought, time, and commitment. In order to be attractive as an employer to candidates with disabilities you will want to be able to demonstrate and communicate your inclusion practices and organizational accessibility goals to job applicants.

This section is a brief introduction to accessibility in your hiring and recruitment process. You can also learn about accessible (as well as diverse, equitable, and inclusive) hiring and recruitment in more detail in our *Illuminate Opportunity* toolkit.

Outreach

Using effective outreach and recruitment strategies is essential to building a qualified and diverse workforce. To effectively build a pipeline of qualified applicants with disabilities, employers will need to engage in a variety of recruitment practices, including connecting with disability-serving organizations and using targeted recruitment and social networking sites so that job seekers with disabilities can learn about your organization.

Communications

To maximize a company's ability to attract qualified individuals with disabilities, it is important to communicate your commitment to employing individuals with disabilities and information about the inclusive and diverse work environment you offer or are building. Communication can be virtual (on your company website, or through your job advertisements), written (in your communications with disability-serving organizations or other networks) and word-of-mouth at networking events or in your community more generally. Communication about your commitment to inclusion is also self-fulfilling; the more employees with disabilities work for your organization, the more you are demonstrating your commitment in action.

Recruiting

When advertising jobs, the ad should note the availability of accommodations for the application process, as well as for the job itself. Organizations should use an accessible online application process and should consider building in flexible processes around interviewing, such as providing interview questions in advance, or considering conducting interviews in-person, over the phone and by videoconferencing.

Organizations should review the job descriptions and essential functions of all positions to determine whether they help or hinder the hiring and advancement of qualified persons with disabilities. Aspects of a job that are considered "bona fide occupational requirements" should be reviewed carefully to assess what is truly needed in the role.

Reducing Bias in the Selection Process

Unconscious bias is an innate human characteristic; even open-minded and well-meaning individuals unwittingly allow unconscious feelings to guide their decision-making. In other words, the sincerest corporate commitment to inclusion and diversity may be derailed by biases that employers and hiring managers don't even realize they have. Some approaches to reducing unconscious bias include developing an awareness of your own biases, having a structured interview process, and using a panel for interviewing candidates.

Useful Resources

The Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN) – Free resources that help employers tap the benefits of disability diversity. They educate public- and private-sector organizations on ways to build inclusive workplace cultures and empower them to become leaders in the employment and advancement of people with disabilities. Includes resources to help employers recruit, hire, retain and advance people with disabilities.

WorkInCulture's Inclusive HR Toolkit – A general online resource addressing human resources practices from the perspective of inclusion. This toolkit includes adaptable and adoptable policy examples, best practices, links, resources, and checklists.

Employers' Toolkit: Making Ontario Workplaces Accessible to People with Disabilities, 2nd Edition – The Conference Board of Canada has partnered with the Ontario government's EnAbling Change Program to develop resources to help employers tap into a vibrant and underutilized labour pool—people with disabilities.

Tapping the Talents of People with Disabilities – This resource guide, developed to assist employers in hiring people with disabilities and integrating them into their workplace, contains practical advice on everything from pre-employment considerations through recruitment and selection, appropriate modifications to accommodations, and workforce education.

Guide to Hiring Persons with Disabilities for Saskatchewan Employers – Addresses the need for employers to have information on employing persons with disabilities that is Saskatchewan specific. This

guide will also be useful for other interested stakeholders wanting information on the employability of persons with disabilities.

[Path Employment Services](#) – Specializes in helping people with disabilities get jobs. Knowledgeable professionals work collaboratively with job seekers to develop a range of services to employers to ensure that the hiring process is successful and to assist with employee training and retention.

Noteworthy Initiatives, Reports and Articles

[Partnership Council on Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities: Initial Report](#) – The council submitted recommendations to the government on how to enhance employment opportunities for Ontarians with disabilities.

Deloitte: [The Road to Inclusion](#) – Integrating people with disabilities into the Workplace

Integrating people with disabilities into the workplaces (Deloitte Canada Annual Dialogue on Diversity Report). This report contains findings from a series of cross-Canada round-table meetings with representatives from the business community, special interest groups, government agencies, and Paralympic athletes.

[Carleton University's Accessibility Institute](#)

[Youth with Disabilities System Change for Lifelong Career](#)

[Partnership Council on Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities: Initial Report](#)

Inclusive Job Descriptions

[How Changing One's Work in Job Descriptions Can Lead to More Diverse Candidates](#)

Eliminating Recruitment Bias

[WorkInCulture – Recruitment Processes](#)

[Seven Steps to Reduce Bias in Hiring](#)

[How innovative companies combat unconscious hiring bias](#)

[Identifying and Avoiding Interview Biases](#)

[Breaking down bias: How recruitment tech is making hiring more fair](#)

[6 Tips for Taking the Bias Out of Your Hiring Process](#)

Self-Disclosure

[Transition Resource Guide for Students with Disabilities](#)

[Make it Safe for Employees to Disclose Their Disabilities](#)

[The Skill of Self-Disclosure](#)

[Self-Disclosure in the Workplace](#) – A guide for both individuals who are self-disclosing and their coworkers who are being informed of disclosure.

Disability Inclusive and Accessible Retention & Promotion

Employee retention is a concern for every organization. Many existing employee programs, such as orientation and onboarding programs, career development programs, and mentoring programs, can be modified or enhanced to increase retention rates of employees with disabilities.

This section is a brief introduction to improving retention for employees with disabilities and making the career advancement process accessible to all. You can also learn about accessible (as well as diverse, equitable, and inclusive) retention in more detail in our *Illuminate Opportunity* toolkit.

Typical onboarding programs acclimate new employees to the workplace culture and educate them on relevant policies and procedures. An onboarding program aimed at increasing accessibility and inclusion would still be delivered to all employees but would include accessibility-specific information such as reasonable guidance on disclosure, accommodation procedures, emergency preparedness procedures and would be delivered in various accessible formats.

An effective onboarding process is the first step in creating a culture of belonging and inclusion in the workplace. Onboarding and orientation, when delivered with a view of increasing accessibility has a positive impact on employee retention and productivity.[8]

Career development programs such as conferences, training, and rotational assignments are proven employee retention strategies. HR should ensure that all online professional development opportunities and workplace events are fully accessible in accordance with the Web Accessibility Standards (WCAG 2 https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/), as well as reserve a portion of employee training funds to provide accessibility-related accommodations for training opportunities. Further resources on this topic can be found in Section 3. The Legislation, Accessibility Standards & Reporting of this toolkit under *Useful Resources – Other Resources relevant to Accessibility Standards*.

Workplace mentoring programs and employee resource groups are additional tools employers can use to help increase recruitment and retention, improve organizational culture, and provide guidance and

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[8] Carucci, R. (2018). To retain new hires, spend more time onboarding them. Harvard Business Review, 1-5.

feedback to employees and managers about disability issues. Employees may be more likely to open up and achieve their full potential if there is a dedicated member of staff or group that they could talk to with shared experiences to help them navigate.

The Value of Mentorship

Feedback from industry stakeholders has emphasized the significant role that mentors and sponsors can play in attracting and retaining workers from underrepresented groups to the sector. This type of support is particularly key for employees with disabilities. All too often, concerns about being open about disability generate fear and/or hinder talented people from pursuing opportunities to display their skills and achieve their full potential.

Furthermore, those who have acquired a disability during employment (be that apparent or non-apparent, permanent, or temporary) may also face challenges, real or perceived, as they adapt to a changing set of circumstances. This could include having to transition to a new type of role or having to deal with the perception that they are unable to ever be "as good as they were" due to an illness or reduced quality of health.

Traditionally, mentoring means a one-on-one relationship through which a senior person (the mentor) motivates and supports the personal or professional development of a junior person (the mentee). Today, however, mentoring has evolved to also include a variety of models, including virtual, peer, reverse-and-flash programs. And, in many organizations, "mentoring cultures" are being established to encourage "natural mentoring" to occur without specific program parameters.

To develop an organic or structured mentoring program in your organization, the company could consider the following steps:

Individuals with disabilities continue to face attitudinal barriers in employment. The mentoring process can help break down some of these barriers by encouraging individuals with disabilities to be open about their experience and take a more active role in pursuing and planning their careers while obtaining practical skills, knowledge, and support. Individuals planning or advancing their careers receive information, encouragement, and advice from their mentors, who are experienced in the career field of the mentee. Mentors get a first-hand look at the mentee's abilities while serving as trusted counselors. Mentorship can also help individuals already in the workforce navigate career transitions or accommodations after or during disability, as well as provide peer support for everyday day challenges.

Mentoring (people with disabilities) also ends a message to other employees that the company really does care about people. Oth-

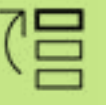er employees in the workplace benefit from the positive dynamic and attitude changes in corporate culture created by all individuals involved in the mentoring process.

The Value of Establishing an Employee Resource Group

Employee Resource Groups (ERG) are voluntary, employee-led groups whose aim is to foster a diverse, inclusive workplace aligned with the organizations they serve. A number of Canadian companies, including Hydro One, Scotiabank, RBC and AIG are establishing ERGs to advance disability inclusion in the workplace

ERGs can enhance the sense of inclusion and belonging at work for people with disabilities, positively impacting workplace culture, and creating an open environment that encourages employees to disclose their disabilities. It is estimated that only a very small percentage of people with disabilities disclose their disability at work, particularly those with non-apparent disabilities. Research has found, however that people who do disclose at work have higher job satisfaction, higher productivity, and better performance than those who don't. Creating an environment that supports disclosure can also help organizations assess their progress and compliance with disability inclusion initiatives by enabling a more accurate measure for diversity in their workforce. ERGs often have an executive sponsor, either a leader with a disclosed disability or an ally. The involvement of company leadership in supporting an ERG acts as another way to enhance and strengthen a culture of inclusion in your workplace.

> Mentoring programs can be eye-opening – in many cases misunderstandings exist amongst employers unsure how to address a person's disability. Once the employer starts working with a person with a disability, he or she begins to see the person's capabilities rather than the disability.

Useful Resources

Canadian Apprenticeship Forum – Provides information for employers interested in hiring apprentices, including a national list of incentives, supports and resources for accommodating people with disabilities in skilled trades.

Career Edge Organization – Administers several internship programs, including:

Ability Edge – National internship program for graduates with self-declared disabilities to assist them in gaining career-building work experience. Employers benefit from:

- Immediate access to a dynamic talent pool.
- Simplified recruiting and administration through an award-winning website.
- Personalized HR support available from professionals experienced in workplace/disability issues.
- Ability Edge handles the payroll and paperwork for each internship.

Recruiting, Hiring, Retaining and Promoting People Disabilities

State of the Nation: Retaining and developing employees with disabilities

Attracting and Retaining Workers with Disabilities

Working with Employers to Recruit and Retain People with Disabilities and Disorders

Disability Employment and Inclusion: Your Guide to Success

Practical Guide to Hiring People with Disabilities

Employers' Guide to Hiring and Working with Professional with Disabilities

Disability-focused ERGs serve to:

- **Reduce unconscious bias** towards people with disabilities.
- **Improve inclusive hiring efforts.**
- **Raise awareness of workplace issues** that affect people with disabilities.
- **Create a safe and empathetic space** where people with disabilities and their allies can openly discuss issues facing them, and offer each other support and advocacy.
- **Provide feedback to other corporate stakeholders** on physical and digital accessibility issues, including advising on organizational accessibility plans and policies.

Disability Management & Accommodation

Employees that have disabilities need to be accommodated in the workplace, both as a progressive management strategy and due to legislated requirements under the Human Rights Codes in most jurisdictions. The good news is only 20% of workers with a disability require any accommodation, and in nearly two-thirds of cases where accommodation was needed, the cost was less than $500.[9] Other common accommodations, like flexible schedules or remote work options, cost nothing at all. Further, many employees bring their accommodations with them.

Statistics prove that people with disabilities are excellent employees, taking off less sick time and demonstrating greater company loyalty than workers without disabilities. Even co-workers report greater engagement scores when the workplace culture is one of inclusion, diversity, and accessibility.[10]

This is due in part to the large number of existing employees with non-apparent, undisclosed disabilities that feel more secure and welcome in a workplace that embraces accessibility.

With forecasted workforce challenges in the electricity sector, now is the time to attract the best and the brightest including people with disabilities, a greatly underused resource of skills and knowledge.

Some people with disabilities may need what's known as "reasonable accommodations" in order to perform the essential functions of a job. It is important for employers to consider the procedures and administrative mechanisms they use to ensure accommodations are put into action efficiently.

Strategies and Recommendations

Below are 10 strategies for implementing reasonable accommodations successfully and efficiently:

1. Developing, implementing, and communicating the written procedures for processing requests for reasonable accommodations.

2. Establishing an administrative mechanism for minimizing or centralizing the cost of an accommodation

3. Developing and maintaining an inventory of common accommodation solutions that can be quickly and easily deployed upon request.

4. Establishing an administrative mechanism or centralized source of expertise (appointing a specific individual and/or establishing an office) for assessing, evaluating, and providing reasonable accommodations (including assistive technology) to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of the reasonable accommodation process.

5. Providing training for executives, managers, and line staff about new strategies and devices, such as telework and assistive technologies.

6. Ensuring that both managers and employees are aware that they may contact someone, internal or external to the organization, to receive confidential and free advice and technical assistance on workplace accommodations.

7. Creating an online system for tracking accommodations in order to document their successful use.

8. Allowing line managers to authorize reasonable accommodations, with team review of denials and a requirement that all denials be signed by upper-level management.

9. Assigning a full-time director of disability services or workplace supports to coordinate accommodations strategies.

10. Regularly revisiting accommodation solutions to ensure their ongoing effectiveness and appropriateness

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[9] Conference Board of Canada. (2015). Employers' Toolkit: Making Ontario Workplaces Accessible to People With Disabilities. 2nd Edition. Retrieved from: https://www.conferenceboard.ca/accessibility/toolkit.aspx

[10] Connolly, C.E., & Fisher, S.L. (2021, August 8). Why it makes good business sense to hire people with disabilities. The Conversation. https://theconversation.com/why-it-makes-good-business-sense-to-hire-people-with-disabilities-164476

Below are just a few examples of accommodations that can be made to facilities and equipment. This is not an exhaustive list – if you have questions about ensuring accessible workspaces, we encourage you to seek expert advice (see "Selected resources" for more information).

Please also see the Disability to Inclusion [project video](#) to learn more about Hydro One's accommodation and return to work processes for employees with disabilities including advances in technology employed.

Accessible equipment and workspaces	Provide accessible communication devices such as hands-free telephones or voice-to-text/text-to-voice translation.	Provide document holders to make typing easier.
Provide accessibility software such as screen readers or large print.	Install carpets or non-slip strips to promote ease of movement.	Adjust the height of shared items such as photocopiers, printers, and fax machines to promote ease of access and reach.
Accessibility of Common Spaces	Widen hallways and entrances to workspaces and common areas.	Install access ramps and automatic door openers.
Ensure that washroom facilities are accessible	Provide designated accessible parking spaces	Install air filters to restrict or limit respiratory or skin irritants.
Consider low-glare light, natural light and stronger light for visual disabilities during meetings/ interviews/ presentations.	Ensure presentation material is accessible.	Provide sign language interpreters/captioners as needed.
Change the venue, if necessary, to promote ease of access Emergency equipment and procedures.	Install a visual signal to complement the auditory alarm.	Ensure workplace emergency procedures are developed to ensure the safety of all staff, including people with disabilities.

General adjustments to workflow and processes to promote accessibility
- Modifying job tasks
- Provide flexible scheduling
- Assess the potential for remote work

In Canada (2019), the majority of accommodation requests were workspace-related requests (such as specialized desks or chairs, or specific spaces in which to work), followed by non-physical accommodation requests, such as scheduling changes, light duties or requests for redeployment.

Useful Resources

Accommodation Practice

[Canada Apprenticeship Forum](#) – This forum provides information for employers interested in hiring practices, including a national list of incentives, support, and resources for accommodating people with disabilities in skilled trades.

[Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC) – Publications about an Employer's Duty to Accommodate](#) – A detailed guide to help employers develop their own accommodation policies. The guide includes a model policy and sample working, sample forms, information on conducting an analysis of existing programs and procedures, and information about an employer's rights and responsibilities to accommodate employees and job candidates.

Disability Management

[WSIB Return to Work/Disability Resources](#) – Provides a library of resources including return to work accommodation tool, Return to Work/Disability Management Assessment Tools, resources other organizations offer t help achieve a successful return to work outcome, Organizations that offer Return to Work/Disability resources and other related information.

[Conference Board of Canada – Creating an Effective Workplace Disability Management Program](#)

[National Institute of Disability Management and Research (NID-MAR)](#) – An organization committed to education, research, policy development and implementation resources to promote workplace-based disability management programs for ill, injured, or disabled workers. Services include an audit program to help employers evaluate, monitor, and improve their disability management strategies.

Physical Demands Analysis

Mental Health

[Mental Health Commission of Canada](#) – The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) leads the development and dissemination of innovative programs and tools to support the mental health and wellness of Canadians. Through its unique mandate from the Government of Canada, the MHC supports federal, provincial, and territorial governments as well as organizations in the implementation of sound public policy.

[MHCC National Standard of Canada](#) for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace (the Standard) – the first of its kind in the world, is a set of voluntary guidelines, tools and resources intended to guide organizations in promoting mental health and preventing psychological harm at work. Launched in January 2013, it has garnered uptake from coast to coast, internationally and across organizations of all sectors and sizes.

[Mental Health First (MHFA)](#), is the help provided to a person developing a mental health problem pr experiencing a mental health crisis. Just as physical first aid is administered to an injured person before medical treatment can be obtained, MHFA is given until appropriate treatment is found or until the crisis is resolved.

The MHFA Canada program aims to improve mental health literacy and provide the skills and knowledge to help people better manage potential or developing mental health problems in themselves, a family member, a friend or a colleague.

[Ontario Shores – Self-Help Resources and Additional Supports](#) – Ontario Shores Centre for Mental Health Sciences (Ontario Shores) provides pages for more support groups, information and tools related to a variety of Mental health topics.

[Conference Board of Canada – Healthy Brains at Work: Estimating the Impact of Workplace Mental Health Benefits and Programs](#) – Third briefing in a four-part research series – Healthy Brains at Work – Presents an estimate of the potential impact on the economy if effective mental health benefits and workplace programs were enhanced in Canada.

[Conference Board of Canada – The Role of Employers in Addressing Mental Health at Work (Infographic)](#)

[Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety: Podcasts](#) – CCOHS produces free monthly podcasts on a wide variety of topics related to workplace health and safety. Each episode is designed to keep employers current with information, tips and insights into the health, safety and wellbeing of working Canadians. Podcasts include topics on mental health and workplace wellness.

[Mental Health Works](#) – Helps organizations manage their duty to accommodate employees experiencing mental disabilities in the workplace. This guide provides valuable information and resources that will assist employers to find the right accommodation solutions for their employees.

[ConnexOntario](#) – A free and confidential hotline that provides comprehensive information about mental health issues, services and supports in Ontario.

Assistive Technology

[Neil Squire Society](#) – Assesses the needs and recommends assistive technology in settings at home, school or in the workplace for individuals with physical and other disabilities. They offer a variety of fee-based services for employers, including rehabilitation, functional assessments, ergonomics, mentorship, assistive technology and more.

[Assistive Devices Program](#) – If you have a long-term physical disability, you can get help paying for equipment and supplies when you qualify for the Assistive Devices Program.

[Industry Canada – Assistive Devices Companies](#) – Links to directories of companies providing services related to assistive technology/assistive devices.

Leading & Promising Practices

Encouraging Opportunities through Diversity Planning at Hydro Ottawa Holding Inc.

Hydro Ottawa owns and operates two subsidiary companies, Hydro Ottawa Limited and Energy Ottawa Inc. Hydro Ottawa Limited is the 3rd largest municipally-owned electrical utility in Ontario, serving more than 324,000 customers in the City of Ottawa and the Village of Casselman. Energy Ottawa Inc., the largest municipally-owned producer of green power in Ontario, generates renewable energy and provides commercial energy-management services. Our core businesses are electricity distribution, renewable energy generation, and energy conservation and management services. We are a recognized leader for our environmental sustainability, strategically-aligned community investments, innovation in customer communication, and employment experience.

Hydro Ottawa's vision is to be a leading partner in a smart energy future. Our mission is to create long-term value for our shareholder, benefitting our customers and the communities we serve. With that mission in mind, Hydro Ottawa's 2016-2020 Strategic Direction sets out a balanced program for strong performance in our existing operations, coupled with sustainable and profitable business growth. Our strategy is customer-centric, financially responsible, and responds to a strategic environment that will further strengthen our commitment to enhancing customer value while growing our business at the same time.

Name of Program, Policy or Initiative: Persons with Disabilities Initiatives

At Hydro Ottawa, we understand that in order for our organization to recruit and retain a diverse workforce we have to think strategically about our business needs, and most importantly, involve our employees in the process. This led to the development of our first ever Diversity Plan, as part of our Talent Management Strategy, which was created to align with Hydro Ottawa's 2012-2016 Strategic Direction.

The objectives of the Diversity Plan are centred around attracting, retaining, and engaging employees while supporting the company's focus on customer value, organizational effectiveness, and corporate citizenship. The Diversity Plan focuses on a wide range of diversity groups: Women, Members of Visible Minorities, Persons with Disabilities, Youth, LGBT, and New Canadians, with First Nations being added in 2015.

Our Diversity Plan, developed by a working group of employees, has two main elements – foundational initiatives intended to foster overall inclusion, and specific initiatives targeted towards our identified diversity groups.

For example, a variety of training initiatives are provided to existing employees and those joining our organization, to further share and explore organizational culture and values that promote a diverse and inclusive workplace.

Guided by our Diversity Council, we have already launched many targeted initiatives, with plans to continue implementing more over the course of 2016. Hydro Ottawa's Diversity Council, co-sponsored by two executives and comprised of volunteer employees from across the organization, is an advisory body on all things diversity. The Council advises on how we can continue to drive progress on diversity and inclusion at Hydro Ottawa, engage our employees in diversity initiatives and monitor performance in the implementation of our Diversity Plan.

> Our foundational initiatives foster an underlying culture of inclusion practices in our environment and address leadership alignment, communication, employee involvement and training – all of which are essential for success.

Action: The targeted initiatives related to persons with disabilities completed to date include:

- Launching a cross functional Accessibility Committee with an executive sponsor which will continue to take us beyond compliance.
- Being an active member of Employment Accessibility Resource Network (EARN), a community initiative, led by United Way Ottawa. EARN brings together employers and service providers with the goal of increasing meaningful employment opportunities for people with disabilities in Ottawa and the National Capital Region. We have participated on the speaking panel at events and at career fairs, and been mentors at interview preparation workshops.
- Successfully recruiting candidates directly from EARN careers fairs.
- Educated people leaders on mental health, to help understand prevalence, impact, and approaches to use.
- Annual participation in Canadian Mental Health Association's (CMHA) "Mental Health Week." In 2016 we posted daily information articles that promoted positive mental health. We also invited employees to "get loud for mental health" on Thursday, May 5th by wearing green and submitting photos of themselves and their teams participating in this initiative. Employees working in the field who were not able to wear green for safety reasons were able to show their support by taking a photo with Mental Health Decals on their vehicles.

Success Factors

- Top priority of our President and CEO which means that he has been and continues to be visible, supportive and involved with diversity matters. The same support is provided by our Board of Directors who receive regular updates on our progress.
- Champions at all levels (employee, management, and executive levels) and within different divisions and work centres.
- Involving employees in the creation of the Diversity Plan and the initiatives – as they are defined and as they are rolled out.
- Getting involved in the community (including EARN).
- Understanding that mindsets need to change as well as behaviours.

Lessons-Learned

During the initial development and launch of our 2014-2016 Diversity Plan, there was some resistance from employees. Generally speaking, resistance was due to lack of knowledge and education, misunderstandings of what diversity is and trepidation about what it meant. For example, employees were concerned about whether or not there were quotas and what the purpose or intent was behind the launch of a diversity plan. The consultative process to involve employees, taking an incremental approach with our initiatives, and the importance of educating and communicating with employees became very apparent as key to ensuring success.

Throughout our 2014-2016 Diversity Plan, our focus was on communicating and educating and through our diversity council and sub-groups, finding champions to create a broad base of support. As a result, we are now well positioned to continue to implement the initiatives outlined in our original Plan and provide leadership in the development and implementation of our 2017-2020 Diversity Plan which is currently underway. It is important however that our champions continue to find the right balance between their diversity work and their ongoing duties.

What's Next?

We are committed to creating a more diverse and inclusive workplace for persons with disabilities and our 2017-2020 Diversity and Inclusion Plan is currently under development to ensure this journey continues. The focus of the Accessibility Committee is now on continuing to move our organization from a culture of compliance to one of inclusion and to that end, on detailing specific initiatives for the 2017-2020 period.

Broader Application

What is the key recommendation you would make to any organization who seriously wants to invest in this area?

- Understand that most workplace accommodations cost less than $500.
- Know that it is as much about attitude and culture as it is about architecture.
- Start slow, involve, and engage employees – educate, educate, educate.
- Solicit senior level support and "grass roots" support simultaneously.

Hydro One – During our research on the Enable Change project we have come across one example of a very innovative and exciting program that, while not officially a 'mentoring program' exhibits all the positive traits of one. The Accessibility, Inclusivity and Disability (AID) Network at Hydro One is an informal peer support and advocacy group for employees in the workplace with a range of disabilities in a range of jobs who come together regularly to share knowledge, experience, and connections with anyone who wants to join.

Together they work towards shared learning and understanding and help each other through some of the challenges they may be experiencing in the workplace as a result of their disability whether acquired prior to or on the job. The network also serves as a forum for organizational change and management guidance in ensuring appropriate accessibility accommodations and practices are implemented e.g. accessibility considerations in organizing and planning special events.

Manitoba Hydro – Manitoba Hydro participates in a transitional employment program called Project Search to provide work placements for high school students with intellectual disabilities in their final year of school — the program is offered in partnership with a non-profit organization, SCE Lifeworks.

For over a decade, Manitoba Hydro has managed an Acquired Brain Injury Program to help persons who have sustained severe brain injury reintegrate into the workforce — the program partners with support agencies such as the Manitoba Brain Injury Association and features customized vocational assessment, training and job coaching.

Learn More: http://content.eluta.ca/top-employer-manitoba-hydro#-section-18

SaskPower – SaskPower maintains a diversity department that is responsible for developing programs and initiatives to improve workplace diversity and inclusion as well as a joint diversity committee, comprised of representatives from unionized and management employee groups — the committee also consults with five employee affinity groups, which are responsible for implementing initiatives related to their respective focus. SaskPower's Network for Employees with Disabilities recently helped review the organization's recruitment process for inclusion and help remove potential barriers to access.
Learn More: http://content.eluta.ca/top-employer-saskpower#section-18

Enbridge – Enbridge manages the "Oasis Coordinator Project", which employs adults with developmental disabilities to maintain kitchen space in the company's office towers. In addition, Enbridge is engaged in diversity community partnerships such as the National Education Association for Students with Disabilities (employment workshop for students).
Learn More: http://content.eluta.ca/top-employer-enbridge#section-18

Additional Resources

Making Inclusion a Journey instead of a Checklist

AODA Accessibility Best Practices Across Canada

A Practical Handbook on Accessible Web Design

Dos and Don'ts on designing for accessibility

Accountability & Continuous Improvement

While the adoption of written policies, practices, and procedures is necessary to enhance employment opportunities for qualified individuals with disabilities (and to meet legislative requirements), the ultimate objective is ensuring their use and implementation. Best business practices include putting systems in place to ensure review and continuous improvement relating to training; establishing accountability measures and mechanisms; and designating responsible individuals.

Training

"People don't know what they don't know." It is critical that companies extend training on accessibility to employees across the entire organization. Legislation in Ontario, Manitoba and federally mandate training for all employees, at all levels and divisions in the organization. More specialized training may be offered to staff involved in the recruitment, hiring, promotion, and retention processes. This may include **more depth of training in:**

- Understanding legal requirements
- Disability etiquette and awareness
- Retention and return-to-work strategies
- Overcoming stereotypes and other attitudinal barriers
- Reasonable accommodation procedures
- Targeted hiring programs

Training and learning on accessibility related policies and practices should be implemented as an ongoing component of the company's diversity initiatives-Establishing Accountability Measures

It has been stated that "what gets measured gets improved." Specific strategies and practices that your company can use to measure its progress toward creating an inclusive workplace include establishing annual quantitative goals, objectives, and benchmarks related to the following:

- Outreach to and recruitment (including referrals) of people with disabilities
- Hiring, retention, and advancement of people with disabilities; and
- Sponsored educational, training, recreational, and social activities that are inclusive of and/or focused on disability issues.

Training and learning on accessibility related policies and practices should be implemented as an ongoing component of the company's diversity initiatives – Establishing Accountability Measures.

Establishing Accountability and Continuous Improvement Mechanisms

Accountability and continuous improvement mechanisms are necessary to determine if current policies, practices, and procedures are effective and whether the company is improving employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. Examples of strategies and practices regarding **accountability and continuous improvement mechanisms that have proven successful** include the following:

1. **Annually reviewing, from an accessibility perspective, all employment-related activities, including:**
   - Job posting, recruitment, advertising, and job application procedures, including testing
   - Processes for Hiring, promotion, upgrading, and layoffs that ensure equitable consideration and opportunity
   - Rates of pay and any other forms of compensation, including fringe benefits
   - Job assignments, job classifications, job descriptions, and seniority lists
   - Sick leave, leaves of absence, and other available leaves
   - Training opportunities, apprenticeships, attendance at professional meetings and conferences, and
   - Any other terms, conditions, and privileges of employment.

2. **Conducting annual self-assessments, including identifying accessibility trends and/or issues needing more attention such as:**
   - Tracking information related to the provision of reasonable accommodations that could be used to assess the effectiveness of accommodations and the process;
   - Tracking data relating to the representation of individuals with disabilities in the workforce to ascertain trends, including the efficacy of recruitment, hiring, retention, and promotion initiatives; and
   - Establishing a complaint tracking and monitoring system to identify areas needing systemic improvements.

3. **Seeking input from employees with disabilities regarding implementation of policies and strategic plans using employee surveys, focus groups, and discussions with employee resource and advisory groups.**

4. **Based on these reviews and assessments, developing strategic plans that include proactive steps and the**

implementation of specific actions necessary to address any noted deficiencies.

5. **Providing regularly scheduled reports to company leaders and/or other high-ranking managers regarding implementation of the company's strategic accessibility plans, including completion dates and managers who are accountable and responsible for various action items.**

Designating Responsible Individuals

Designation of authority and responsibility for ensuring accessibility is of central importance to enhancing and securing implementation of disability employment policies and practices. Specific examples of strategies and practices that have proven successful include:

- Assigning and defining the scope of responsibility for implementation to specific individuals.
- Identifying the responsible individual(s) in internal and external communications.
- Providing top management support (including budgets) and, if appropriate, staff to manage implementation.
- Explaining to managers and supervisors how performance elements included in their performance plans related to the recruitment, hiring, advancement, and retention of persons with disabilities will be assessed.

Additional Resources

How to Do an Accessibility Review

Assessing web page accessibility

Accessibility Testing Tools and Practices

Partnership

One of the key factors to a successful and accessible hiring strategy for people with disabilities is finding the right community partner(s) and providers. Across Canada, there are many organizations focused on employment for people with disabilities. Many are private social enterprises or non-profits; there are also numerous programs and agencies operated by governments at all levels.

A growing number of employers have established initiatives to increase the participation of employees with disabilities within their companies as a component of their workforce planning and diversity strategies.

This section provides a glossary of available resources and service providers to help employers access underutilized segments of the labour market, including people with disabilities.

Glossary of Partners

Abilities Canada

AbilityFirst

Barrier Free Employers – Canadian Human Rights Commission

Canadian Association of Professionals with Disabilities

Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work (CCRW)

Canadian Hearing Society (CHS)

Canadian Council on Social Development

Community Living Ontario

DisAbled Women's Network Ontario

Equality in the Workplace – Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC)

Goodwill Hamilton and Halton Region

Hire for Talent

Jobs Ability Canada

Join – Job Opportunity Information Network

Lime Connect Canada, Inc.

Mental Health Commission of Canada

MHCC National Standard of Canada

Live, Work, Play

Make a Change Canada/Faire un Changement Canada

Ontario March of Dimes (OMOD)

Ontario Shores Center for Mental Health Sciences

PATH Employment Services (Hamilton)

Persons with Disabilities Online – Government of Canada

Products – Neil Squire Foundation

reachAbility

Ready Willing Able

Routes to Work – Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA)

Services for Students with disABILITIES (SSWD) – Brock University

Specialisterne

Spinal Cord Injury Ontario

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