



Halifax Public Libraries  
**Accessibility  
Plan**  
2022-2024





# Introduction & Vision

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Public libraries are places for everyone – they encourage participation, facilitate connections, and provide information to all. Equality and open access are fundamental to public libraries, and Halifax Public Libraries embraces the responsibility that comes with this. We know that to be a welcoming and inviting place for everyone, it is essential that we remove barriers and work towards true inclusivity – helping build strong and thriving communities.

Open access to wide ranging information and knowledge, along with sharing of stories is at the heart of libraries. To meet

the needs of everyone, we will continue to explore ways to improve equitable access to library materials and services. We will continue to work with partners to ensure that everyone is included and reflected in their public library – whether it is in our hiring practices, space design, or program and material offerings. The Library is for everyone.

**We know that our community is at its best when we ensure that everyone has the opportunity to fully participate in our society, working together for a more inclusive future.**





# Guiding Principles

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## Human Rights

We recognize that barriers may prevent some community members from fully participating in society. These barriers can be physical (such as staircases), in our attitudes (such as having certain beliefs about people with disabilities), and more. We believe accessibility is a fundamental human right and will show that in our library service.

## Inclusion

We are committed to ensuring public libraries are places where everyone is welcome to learn, socialize, and work. All community members and employees are treated with the same respect and dignity.

## Creativity & Flexibility

We are committed to being creative, forward thinking, open to change, and flexible in our approach to becoming accessible.

## Lived Experience

We are committed to understanding and working with the people and communities we serve and learning from their unique experiences.

## Community Led

We are committed to connecting with our communities, as well as consulting and working with them to understand their needs.

## Diversity

We recognize the full range of disabilities, and also understand that a person's identity and life circumstances and experiences can overlap with their disability to create barriers that keep them from participating in society. We will reflect this understanding in our policies, programs, and services.

## Care & Compassion

We are committed to seeing the potential and value in every individual during each interaction, treating individuals with empathy, and understanding people have unique and specific needs.

## Communication

We are committed to producing content that is easily understood.





# Outcomes and Priorities

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We will work to build a more inclusive Nova Scotia and Library.

## **Provide equitable access to all services and collections**

### **We will:**

- train our staff to be aware of the various needs of all community members;
- offer accessible community programs;
- find creative ways to encourage participation and use of library services, programs, and spaces;
- offer access to information, knowledge and enjoyment in a variety of formats;
- provide volunteer opportunities that are accessible to all;
- purchase and make available content that is created by and for the community.

## **Be an employer of choice for everyone**

### **We will:**

- provide a barrier free and inclusive recruitment and orientation process;

- provide education, resources, and tools to managers and supervisors to help create an inclusive workplace culture;
- provide the tools and information staff need to easily access supports and services required to be successful and grow in their career;
- offer training with various approaches and formats.

## **Communicate and provide a digital environment that is fully accessible**

### **We will:**

- be a leading provider of accessible information and technology services;
- provide assistive software and hardware so everyone has access to technology and internet;
- communicate in various ways that take into consideration how community members access information;
- create easy-to-navigate and fully accessible online environments.





## **Provide spaces that are welcoming and enjoyed by all**

### **We will:**

- design and renovate spaces that meet the needs of everyone;
- create spaces that are easy to use and navigate;
- create opportunities for individuals to have control over their environment.

## **Incorporate the rights of people with disabilities in all policies and planning**

### **We will:**

- review all current policies and procedures to identify and remove barriers;
- ensure all new policies and procedures are developed with full consideration of all individuals and their various abilities.

## **Be a community leader in developing an inclusive Nova Scotia**

### **We will:**

- partner with community groups, organizations, and companies that support and work for a more inclusive Nova Scotia;
- work with community members, groups, and organizations to understand their needs and support their work;
- build public awareness and understanding of the importance of building an inclusive Nova Scotia.

## **Continue to learn, grow, and build our understanding of inclusion**

### **We will:**

- engage with individuals and organizations to understand their experiences;
- partner with community members to build programs and services that meet their needs;
- invest in staff learning and development.





# Monitoring and Assessment

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Each year the Library will create an action plan that outlines the work the Library will undertake to achieve the outcomes and priorities identified in the Accessibility Plan. The Library will report to the Halifax Public Libraries Accessibility Advisory Committee on

the progress towards achieving the outcomes.

In addition the Library will report to the community through their Annual Report which will include highlights and key actions for the year.





# Removing and Preventing Barriers

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Halifax Public Libraries exists to support collective growth in our community. Every member of our community wants to thrive and contribute, and the Library is here to support them. The Library has been responding to community needs and adjusting spaces and services to remove barriers. We are proud of the work that has been done, and are eager to continue to identify and remove barriers.

Highlights of work that has supported a more accessible Library and community:

## **Removing Late Fines**

The foundation of the public library includes free and equitable service to all; however, a library fine can create a barrier to access. Late fines disproportionately impact individuals with limited access to childcare, transportation, employment opportunities, and other needs. The community identified that eliminating late fines would remove a significant barrier to participation in library services, and in response, the Library permanently removed all late fines and cleared all previous fines from community members' accounts in May 2020.

## **Collections for Individuals with Print Disabilities**

Access to knowledge and enjoyment from the written word is the foundation of Libraries. Some community members may not be able to access the written word. This may be due to a print disability—a learning, physical or visual disability that prevents a person from reading print material. To ensure equitable access, the Library, in collaboration with the Centre for Equitable Library Access and the National Network for Equitable Library Service, provides access to written work in alternate formats such as electronic text, braille, and audio.

## **Digital Divide**

How we access information, health care, services, shopping and more have shifted to the digital environment. A digital divide exists in Canada. Many rural areas lack internet infrastructure, and there are gaps in provision of digital services for people living with disabilities. The Library is working to address the digital divide by providing access to reliable free internet and devices at Library locations and in community spaces. Kiosks with lendable technology and WiFi hotspots further close the digital divide in areas where there may not be a Library branch.





### **Assistive Technology**

Providing free internet access helps to address a barrier for some in our community. For some community members, it may be that hardware or software is required to access the internet. The Library offers assistive technology workstations at many of our locations that feature adjustable tables, large viewing screening, large-print keyboards, screen reader software, text-to-speech adapter, and screen enlargers.

### **Electronic Collections**

For some community members, electronic offerings increase access to library materials and resources, but for others electronic resources may present additional access challenges. The Library has been working to maintain a balanced collection that includes both physical and electronic materials. In collaboration with Library partners, improvements have been made to software interfaces that make electronic resources more accessible.

### **Home Delivery and Borrow by Mail Services**

Library service is rooted in the branches, but not bound by them. Some community members are not able to access a physical library location. This may be

due to long or short-term circumstances, illness, caregiver responsibilities, or other circumstances. The Library offers a home delivery program where Library staff work with community members to select materials which are delivered to their home or mailed through Canada Post.

### **Tool Kits**

The Library has worked with community organizations to develop lendable tool-kits that allow individuals and families to borrow items that are curated for their circumstances. For example, Autism Tool Kits provide an opportunity for families and individuals to test out a variety of visual, sensory and fidget items allowing them to assess their usefulness before investing in a specific item.

### **Public Awareness**

Libraries serve as a common ground for anyone and every topic, enhancing community understanding of important issues. In collaboration with the community and Halifax Regional Municipality, the Library continues to work to build community awareness and understanding of disabilities. The Library hosts events and programs promoted through an online portal to celebrate and help understand the experiences of individuals living with a disability.







## **Library Spaces**

Library spaces are built for the community to enjoy. However, physical library spaces are not always accessible to everyone. The Library has been working to make improvements to library spaces to improve access and remove barriers. Particular attention has been placed on improving entrances with the addition of ramps and sliding doors at several of our locations and improving accessible washrooms.

## **Employment**

The Library aims to reflect the community in everything that we do—including our staff. The Library has reviewed and adjusted hiring practices to be more inclusive. Education and experience requirements have been adjusted to acknowledge the value of lived experience. The Library commits to continuous improvement to be a welcoming and inclusive employer that values diversity of perspectives and experiences.





# Accessibility Advisory Committee

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The Library would like to thank the members of the Accessibility Advisory Committee who shared their experience, knowledge and expertise in the development of this plan. Each brought their lived experience and together set the direction for a more inclusive library experience.

## **Committee members:**

Carole Arsenault  
Sam Bambrick  
Paige Black  
Elizabeth Doull  
Sarah Eyland  
Kayleigh MacDonald  
Jen Powley

## **Library Staff members:**

Mairead Barry  
Cynthia Gatto  
Lori MacNeil  
Sam Sternberg

