



**2023**

# **Accessibility Progress Report**

Business Development Bank of Canada

December 22, 2023

# Table of contents

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- General..... 3
  - 1.1 Description of BDC..... 3
  - 1.2 Statement of Commitment..... 3
  - 1.3 The Accessible Canada Act ..... 3
  - 1.4 Contact Information & Feedback Process..... 4
  - 1.5 Alternative Formats ..... 4
- Areas Described under Section 5 of the Accessible Canada Act (ACA) ..... 5
  - 2.1 Organization-Wide Initiatives ..... 5
  - 2.2 Built Environment ..... 6
  - 2.3 Employment ..... 7
  - 2.4 Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) ..... 8
  - 2.5 Communications, Other than ICT ..... 8
  - 2.6 Procurement..... 9
  - 2.7 Design and Delivery of Programs and Services ..... 10
  - 2.8 Transportation ..... 10
- Consultations..... 11
- Feedback..... 13
- Conclusion..... 13
- Glossary ..... 14

# Accessibility Progress Report

## General

### 1.1 Description of BDC

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The Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC) is a federal Crown corporation. That means that while we are overseen by the Government of Canada, we run independently to help [entrepreneurs](#). An entrepreneur is someone who starts their own business. We support entrepreneurs across Canada to expand their business by providing loans, advice, and resources. We complement the role played by traditional banks. We can offer loans that other lenders cannot because we take on more risk.

### 1.2 Statement of Commitment

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BDC is dedicated to being accessible to everyone, including people with disabilities. This includes being as accessible as possible to our employees, clients, and partners. We recognize that people with disabilities are the experts in their own experience and accessibility. Many of our initiatives focus on consulting with people with disabilities and learning from their lived experiences. We also recognize that accessibility is an ongoing process. This plan will evolve, and we will continue to make improvements over time. Moving forward, we will address barriers as soon as we become aware of them, even if they are not identified in our Accessibility Plan. This plan is part of our commitment to do better for people with disabilities.

### 1.3 The Accessible Canada Act

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The Accessible Canada Act (ACA) is a new law designed to make Canada more accessible for everyone. Starting December 2022, federal organizations must make plans on how they will become more accessible. BDC's [Accessibility Plan](#) outlines what we will do in 2023, 2024, and 2025.

In December 2025, we will write a new plan about what we will do after that. In years when a new plan is not required, progress reports will be issued instead. This year's Progress Report shares what

we've learned over the past 12 months through feedback and through consultations with people with disabilities. It also shares updates on our accessibility actions.

## 1.4 Contact Information & Feedback Process

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BDC welcomes feedback, including anonymous feedback, about this Progress Report and our Accessibility Plan. We also welcome any feedback you might have about the accessibility of BDC. We are committed to reviewing and responding to the feedback that we receive and taking steps to address barriers identified through this feedback.

You can submit feedback about accessibility at BDC or this plan by contacting BDC Human Resources – DEIA at:

- E-mail address: [accessiblebdc@bdc.ca](mailto:accessiblebdc@bdc.ca)
- Telephone number: 1-877-232-2269 Ext 5
- Mailing address: 5 Place Ville Marie, Montréal, QC H3B 5E7

We will also accept feedback about our accessibility through our social media accounts, which include the following [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#), and [YouTube](#).

## 1.5 Alternative Formats

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You can request alternative formats of this Progress Report by contacting: [accessiblebdc@bdc.ca](mailto:accessiblebdc@bdc.ca)

An electronic format of our Accessibility Plan and this Progress Report can be downloaded now from [BDC's website](#).

BDC will provide alternative formats as soon as possible. At the latest, we commit to providing them within these timelines:

- Print: 15 days after your request is received
- Large print (larger text): 15 days after your request is received
- Braille (a system of raised dots that people who are blind or with low vision can read with their fingers): 45 days after your request is received
- Audio (a recording of someone reading the text out loud): 45 days after your request is received

# Areas Described under Section 5 of the Accessible Canada Act (ACA)

## 2.1 Organization-Wide Initiatives

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BDC is committed to engaging with people with disabilities on an ongoing basis. This will ensure that all accessibility improvements that we make reflect the real experience and priorities of people with disabilities. As the disability movement says: “Nothing about us without us.”

BDC has made significant progress on the organization-wide initiatives in our Accessibility Plan. We did the following this year:

- The Accessibility Steering Committee met every 2-3 months. This Committee is senior leaders across the organization. These meetings aim to ensure our accessibility work is moving forward. We have found that this has been important to keep accessibility part of every decision and clearly communicate its importance to leaders.
- We also also created an Accessibility Working Committee. This Committee includes an accessibility representative from each priority area to address organization-wide issues related to accessibility.
- A mandatory training on disability and accessibility awareness for all employees was deployed organization-wide. Training our employees in this way helped us improve accessibility in all aspects of our operations. The training will help to make sure that employees understand what accessibility means and why it is important. It will also help them to understand how to make their work more accessible. The training involved people with disabilities talking about their experiences. It included sharing about visible and non-visible disabilities, their real experiences, and how they had been supported in the workplace. About 95% of our employees have been trained this year and we are following-up with those that missed it. Participants have reported that the training was very impactful.
- We did a few different activities to hear the voices of people with disabilities. These consultations are important to make sure that our accessibility initiatives are aligned with their experiences and priorities. We also wanted to understand the needs and awareness of people without disabilities about accessibility. The key findings from these consultations are included in other parts of this Progress Report. Our consultations included:
  - Holding two focus groups of employees with disabilities, with approximately 20 attendees.

- Sending a survey to all BDC employees to ask about their satisfaction with BDC accessibility and their awareness of tools and resources.
- Sending a survey to small and medium business through BDC ViewPoints, an online expert panel of entrepreneurs.
- Adding questions on accessibility and accommodation in surveys and questionnaires to the workforce.
- We will be launching a page dedicated to accessibility on our Intranet to update employees on the status of our accessibility action plan.

While we have made progress through these organization-wide activities, we know that we still have work to do. Organizational culture change takes time. We also need to make sure that we keep the progress that we make. We will continue to find ways to make and keep changes to our culture and how we improve accessibility.

## 2.2 Built Environment

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BDC has over 100 offices across Canada. In some cities, these are large downtown offices and in others we have smaller offices. We sometimes share spaces with other organizations.

This year BDC has implemented the following [built environment](#) initiatives:

- We updated our emergency evacuation plan to reflect our [hybrid work model](#). We plan to launch an emergency evacuation training to all our employees. We are training all our employees to equip them to assist people during an emergency. The training is currently being developed and will be deployed in 2024.
- We have assessed and determined that we have enough [quiet workspaces](#) to meet the needs of employees. Based on the number of employees in business centres across Canada, we are confident that we have enough rooms available for employees who find it difficult to work in an open-plan office. We will continue to monitor if we have enough quiet workspaces and if they are meeting the needs of our employees.
- We have worked with business centres in some regions to make sure that future storage, including kitchen cabinets, copy rooms and personal lockers, are fully accessible for employees who use wheelchairs. We have reviewed our accessibility standards and will use them in upcoming projects.
- We installed braille signage in our Toronto office to test its placement before installing it at other offices. We made some changes based on the test and plan to install braille in new offices and offices as they are renewed or renovated.

- We have also started planning for the other built environment initiatives in our Accessibility Plan. This includes gathering information to plan for [visual alarms](#) and changing how we choose office spaces in the future.

## 2.3 Employment

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BDC has about 2,800 employees across Canada. We offer a flexible work environment in which employees can work in our offices or remotely. We are also committed to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in our hiring practices and [talent strategy](#) and are making improvements.

This year BDC has implemented the following employment initiatives:

- We recognize that barriers exist for employees and applicants with disabilities. There are also added challenges for employees who have non-visible disabilities. We have revamped our accommodation process to make it easier for employees and leaders to have an open dialogue. We have a dedicated advisor who supports and accompanies both employees and leaders to have authentic conversations around accommodation and supports them with their requests. All requests are now documented to ensure a smooth process and better employee experience. We have also created a process to maintain accommodations as employees change jobs and departments within BDC. In the future, we will work with employees with disabilities and managers to check if these changes have made accommodations smoother. We will also look for any further changes that we should make.
- We have implemented a central fund to pay for some accommodations. We have also developed a process for our teams to work together to find the budget for more expensive accommodations.
- We have reviewed the language in our code of conduct policy to ensure that the most up-to-date language is being used. We launched our code of conduct in September with a fully accessible PDF version.
- We have added more content and training materials on accessibility in our welcome conference for new hires and in our training for our new leaders. Additional tools and resources have also been added to the different trainings for employees and leaders to better equip our workforce to support employees living with disability.
- All employees were required to complete accessibility training on disability and accessibility awareness. This training included both visible and non-visible disabilities and best practices for leaders. We are working alongside the different internal groups, such as the Employee Resource Group for Persons with Disabilities, to develop resources, educational workshops, and to create awareness, including for human resource employees and managers.

- We are continuously refreshing our job postings for inclusive language, disability inclusivity, and essential job requirements. All of our job postings now include an offer of accommodation and a statement about diversity that includes people with disabilities.
- We partnered with organizations in the disability community, such as [Auticon](#), on hiring and navigating the hiring process. These relationships have proven to be very useful to both the candidates and their teams as the hiring team and leaders are supported to better integrate candidates with disabilities.
- Every two years, we ask employees to update their information, including completing a self-identification questionnaire. This year, we asked employees to complete the form in September. 95% of employees completed the self-identification questions. The number of employees identifying as having a disability nearly doubled – from 3.5% to 8% of our workforce. This change reflects that more employees are feeling confident in sharing their information. It speaks to a shift in our culture, through education, communication, programming, and ultimately in employee engagement.

## 2.4 Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

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BDC uses a variety of digital tools and technologies, including our public website (<https://www.bdc.ca/en>), social media platforms, videos, and digital resources for entrepreneurs.

This year BDC has implemented the following ICT goals:

- We confirmed that the accessibility features of Microsoft Office 365 are enabled for all employees.
- We have partnered with firms, [AccessiBrand](#) and [Digital11y Accessible](#), owned by people with disabilities. They are conducting a review of the accessibility of our websites and applications. We will work with these firms to make the required changes to our websites to address barriers identified as easy to update, including colour contrast and focus borders for buttons.

## 2.5 Communications, Other than ICT

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BDC develops and distributes information and resources to help entrepreneurs. Members of the public can reach out to us by phone, email, mail, or through the website.

This year BDC has implemented the following communications goals:



- We updated our current code of conduct for communications to ensure it includes mention of people with disabilities and accessibility. We published it as an accessible PDF document.
- We have partnered with an accessible marketing firm, [Accessibrand](#), owned by people living with disability to complete an accessibility gap assessment. The firm will deliver a roadmap to address accessibility gaps in areas such as social media, content, web, events, corporate communications, and branding. We have leveraged the firm to upskill the staff working in BDC's communications department.
- We have enabled closed captioning for 30 external events (15 in English and 15 in French) on our official platform, ON24. We have also made sure that our quarterly meetings with our CEO (Rendez-vous with Isabelle) have proper closed captioning. Starting in the new year, these calls can also be supported by sign language interpreters (i.e., American Sign Language (ASL) and Quebec Sign Language (LSQ)) provided by [Asign](#). We also partnered with a vendor to support and review all live transcripts. We will consider whether we need to make any changes to our event planning processes to include accessibility.
- We have created a process for requesting and receiving documents and materials in alternate formats. It is available on our Intranet and available to all functions.

## 2.6 Procurement

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BDC often buys technology and goods that support our operations and services. The process of buying is called “procurement”. We are making sure that accessibility is considered when we procure external goods and products.

This year BDC has implemented the following procurement initiatives:

- We have established a Source List for required accessibility services (e.g., Braille, large print digital audio, captioning, descriptive video, and sign language interpretation).
- We have partnered with and become a member of the [Inclusive Workplace and Supply Council of Canada](#) (IWSCC). The IWSCC is a non-profit that committed to helping veterans and people with disabilities grow their businesses through exposure and networking opportunities. IWSCC will support us in reviewing that accessibility considerations are added to procurement documents. We are working with them to review our directives, policies, checklists, requirement templates, and template contracts.

## 2.7 Design and Delivery of Programs and Services

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BDC works to support entrepreneurs across Canada. We do this by providing services such as business loans and advice, or advisory services. We also offer more specialized loans, investment solutions and venture capital to help entrepreneurs grow their businesses. Our advisory services focus on various areas of running a business. This includes leadership and management, sales and marketing, and business strategy. We also provide resources and tools on our websites, such as our Entrepreneur's Toolkit and Business Loan Calculator.

This year, BDC has implemented the following initiatives for programs and services:

- We have started collecting data about clients identifying as having a disability in April. We will begin to analyze this data once we have enough responses to do so.
- We are working with our Accessibility Working Committee, Employee Resource Group for People with Disabilities, and our research team to conduct research and gather useful data on entrepreneurs with disabilities in Canada. This will help us better serve and provide funding to entrepreneurs with disabilities.
- We have communicated on our website that accommodations are available for clients and entrepreneurs with disabilities, and how accommodations can be accessed. We will monitor how this process is working and whether any changes are needed.
- We have conducted research through an online survey through BDC ViewPoints, an online expert panel of entrepreneurs. Questions explored how small and medium business are thinking about accessibility, what steps they are already taking, and where they need additional support. This research is aimed at how BDC can help to improve the accessibility of small and medium businesses.
- We are working with IWSCC ([Inclusive Workplace and Supply Council of Canada](#)) to provide ongoing educational and mentoring programs for business owners with disabilities and veterans. We participated in the matchmaking with small business owners and provide ongoing feedback. We also attended several webinars with IWSCC.

## 2.8 Transportation

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BDC does not currently run any transportation services. Any barriers related to travel to our offices would be discussed in the [built environment section](#).

# Consultations

BDC recognizes that people with disabilities are the primary experts on their own experiences with accessibility. BDC is committed to listening to people with disabilities.

In implementing our Accessibility Plan this year, we consulted people with disabilities in the following ways:

- We consulted with employees through an anonymous survey. The survey asked whether employees experienced any barriers while working at or interacting with BDC. We also asked employees who answered the survey to give details about the barriers they encountered. Finally, we asked for suggestions for improving accessibility at BDC. Through the survey, employees identified accessibility barriers such as difficulties with the process to receive workplace accommodations. We have identified opportunities to improve survey questions and how we analyze this data in the future.
- To get additional feedback from people with disabilities, we held two focus groups for people with disabilities in April and May 2023. Approximately 20 employees attended. Employees shared concerns about BDC's perception of this community and the effectiveness of its inclusion efforts. They noted a need for deeper understanding, recognition, and support for people with disabilities within the bank. Shared personal experiences highlight discomfort disclosing disabilities and fears of negative consequences. Participants stressed the importance of increasing awareness and personal connections with individuals who have disabilities within the bank. Overall, there is a call for greater understanding, inclusivity, and recognition of non-visible disabilities in the workplace. The findings from this focus group informed the training that we completed over the summer and the changes we made to the accommodations process. We expect that the activities that we completed this year, including training and policy changes, have started to change this experience. We will continue to monitor this in the future.
- We conducted an anonymous survey to get feedback directly from BDC clients. This survey included questions about how BDC clients are thinking about accessibility in their business and the accessibility of BDC services. We will analyze the responses to identify future areas of improvement.

In addition to the mid-year consultations above, we also shared a draft of this Progress Report with the Employee Resource Group of People with Disabilities (ERG). Along with accessibility advisors, [Left Turn Right Turn \(LTRT\)](#), we met with the ERG and asked them for their feedback, thoughts, comments, and recommendations about BDC's progress and about the report.

They were excited about the progress that was made in the first year. The ERG also noted that change takes time and ongoing effort. Things like culture change cannot happen in one year but take ongoing efforts to make and keep meaningful change to our culture. We are also committed to monitoring those changes to make sure that they have had the impact that we intended or if new barriers have been created. For example, we need to monitor the impact of the changes to our accommodation process. Or as BDC offices change and how people use those offices, employee needs or the availability of quiet workspaces may change.

In 2024, we want to examine how we consult employees and clients with disabilities so that we can have deeper engagement and conversations to inform our work going forward. There are opportunities to refine how we ask questions in surveys, how we analyze those results, and when and how we consult employees and clients with disabilities.

# Feedback

We have only received one piece of feedback about our plan or accessibility through our official process. The person requested a document in an accessible PDF, which we provided. This has prompted us to also work on a broader solution to ensure documents are accessible.

We have also received a few comments from employees with disabilities outside the feedback process. We responded to these comments and discussed how their concerns can be resolved. Their comments has informed how we completed our accessibility improvements. It has also reminded us of the need to continue to monitor progress and to improve how we engage employees with disabilities about those improvements.

# Conclusion

BDC is dedicated to improving accessibility, addressing current and future barriers to accessibility, and making our operations accessible to everyone. We are proud of the progress that we have made in this first year of our Accessibility Plan. We are confident that we have laid a strong foundation to make sure that BDC can continue to make meaningful change. Highlights of these changes include:

- Setting up the committees needed to drive accessibility work forward, both with leaders and people implementing accessibility changes.
- Training all staff on accessibility and disability awareness.
- Adding accessibility to our values and discussions around diversity, equity, and inclusion: DEI+A.
- Revamping our accommodations process to better support managers and employees with disabilities through accommodation requests.
- Consulting employees and clients with disabilities.
- Researching accessibility and disability awareness among our clients.

We will also continuously revisit our Accessibility Plan to ensure that accessibility is being addressed. Accessibility is not an outcome but rather a process. We need to continue to monitor our progress, identify further areas of improvement, and any new barriers to remove.

# Glossary

**Built environment:** The parts of our communities created or changed by people. This includes buildings, sidewalks, roads, and parks.

**Entrepreneurs:** An entrepreneur is someone who starts or owns a business.

**Hybrid work model:** BDC employees work from BDC offices sometimes and from home sometimes.

**Quiet workspaces:** Places where people can work with less noise and fewer distractions.

**Talent strategy:** The way that we find, hire, train, promote, and keep employees.

**Visual alarms:** A kind of smoke and emergency alarm that has a light. This makes sure that people who are deaf, hard of hearing, or wearing headphones will know about an emergency.

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