

Nova Scotia Accessibility Advisory Board
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, July 6, 2023 – 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Virtual Meeting by Zoom

Rosalind Penfound (Chair), Max Chauvin (Vice Chair), Linda Campbell, Birgit Elssner, Ellen Johnson, Anne Sinclair, Melissa MacKenzie, Earl Muise, Lewis Pope, Denise DiGiosia

Regrets: Marcie Shwery-Stanley

Guests: Kristina King, Director of Governance and Accountability, Hillary MacDonell Senior Policy Analyst, Karen Anthony Secretary to the Executive Council Office, Shawn Mosher and Mora Stevens, Governance Consultants, Executive Council Office.

Staff: Terri Lynn Almeda, Dawn Stegen, Kristel vom Scheidt, Jordan Keddy, Cris Adams, Laura Beth MacPherson, Craig MacKinnon, Amy Middleton

1. Welcome

Roz Penfound, Chair welcomed everyone to the Accessibility Advisory Board meeting with a Mi'kmaq and African Nova Scotian land acknowledgement. She recognized that Nova Scotia will be host to the North American Indigenous Games that will be held from July 15- 23, 2023 in various venues across Dartmouth, Millbrook First Nation and Sipekne'katik. Roz also recognized the recent passing of Mi'kmaw elder, activist, historian and author Daniel Paul, who was a recipient of a Nova Scotia Human Rights award in 2022 for his contributions to building cultural awareness and understanding of L'nu'k history, traditions and community.

2. Board Operations

a. Review of Agenda

The agenda as previously circulated was accepted.

b. Outstanding Business

Dawn Stegen, Executive Director gave staffing updates noting that Cris Adams and Andrew Jantzen are back from leave and that hiring is ongoing for the Manager and Senior Policy Analyst positions, and for the Program Officer for Compliance and Enforcement.

She also noted that the Recommendations for a Standard in Education were submitted to the Minister of Justice.

The Directorate is working on educational materials for restaurants and staff continue to provide support and educational resources to PPSB's. One recent webinar on Accessible Social Media was attended by over 160 participants.

To follow up on an action item from the June meeting, staff are currently reviewing feedback from the Request for Proposals procurement process for the ASL Coordinator position.

3. Business

a. Executive Council Office: Accessibility work

Roz introduced guests from the Government of Nova Scotia Executive Council Office (ECO) to present on their accessibility commitments in the Government's Accessibility Plan as well as address feedback they received on the application process for provincial Agencies, Boards and Commissions (ABC's).

Kristina King, Director of the Governance and Accountability Unit gave an overview of the work the team does to provide policy analysis and operational support to Executive Council (Cabinet), including sharing the responsibility with Departments for the coordination and appointment to all ABC's. She spoke about the importance of ABC's reflecting the diversity of Nova Scotians and that goals include improving communication, reducing inconsistencies, and removing barriers in the application process. Upcoming work will ensure their website and application portal follows accessible design best practices, and ABC's will be provided with training and educational resources to improve the accessibility of their processes and operations.

Following the presentation there was time for questions and discussion. There was a suggestion for an orientation guide on how to use the online application portal to assist individuals to navigate the system and better document their skills and experiences. ECO mentioned an orientation video for potential applicants and newly appointed board members is in the planning. A follow up question was posed about the content of the training materials, and to build on other materials that have already been developed by the Directorate.

Another Board member commented on the time it takes before applicants are advised if they are appointed, and as a result some individuals may find it difficult to plan around other commitments. Some qualifications such as senior board leadership, advocacy, and work in public sector may be limiting to some people who don't have this experience but would still make valuable contributions. Some qualifications may be creating barriers for people with different lived experiences and that some individuals with a disability have no way to acquire these skills. They suggested that each qualification be reflected in the scoring rubric that is used to screen applicants.

The Board suggested more could be done to make communication on upcoming vacancies in plain language and the reapplication process for subsequent terms easier.

Roz thanked the guests for their presentation and commitment to accessibility.

b. What an Accessible NS by 2030 Means

Roz and Dawn led a conversation on the expectations of an accessible province by 2030. Commitments in the Act, Access by Design 2030 Strategy, what other jurisdictions are doing, and what has been completed since the Act was enacted in 2017 was presented.

The standards development process and timeline for standards was reviewed. The Directorate plans to increase communication efforts on standards and compliance and enforcement measures by 2030.

Following the presentation there was time for the Board to have a discussion. The possibility of requesting funds for specific issues going forward, such as sidewalk infrastructure in rural communities was raised.

The public is not aware of a lot of the work underway, and more priority should be given to communicating current projects and the reasons behind delays in standard work. The difference between making the province accessible by 2030 and a “go forward” strategy of accessibility in major renovations and new buildings was discussed. It was noted that the impact of the standards will not be felt until compliance and enforcement measures are in place and there are sufficient resources to support PPSB’s.

The recommendations from the National Truth and Reconciliation Commission and report into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and specifically how the province can collaborate with the Federal government on equity issues was mentioned. Working with Mi’kmaq communities to help support them to advance accessibility and share the work between the Indigenous communities and government was suggested.

c. Act Review Recommendations

Terri Lynn Almeda, Director of Program and Services and Jordan Keddy, Junior Policy Analyst led a presentation on draft responses to some of the recommendations that are specific to the Board and the Standard Development Committees in the Act Review Report. They addressed each recommendation separately and received input into several responses including conversations on intersectionality, housing, accountability, and timelines.

d. Roundtable

Roz began the roundtable with a follow up from the May Board meeting and the conversation with Cynthia Carroll, Executive Director of Autism Nova Scotia and Chair of the Education Council on Disability, Inclusion and Accessibility. She recommended that the Board communicate to the Minister of Justice on these issues through a letter, emphasizing the rights of students with disabilities. There was consensus among Board members on this approach.

Action: Roz to speak with Cynthia before proceeding.

Roz drew attention to the written materials included in the Board package related to the Federal level on the Disability Inclusion Action Plan, and Accessibility Standards Canada. One member mentioned their participation in the working group on the Quality of Life Index for people with disabilities, which will continue into the fall.

4. Adjournment

Roz adjourned the meeting with a reminder that the second part of the July meeting will be held in a week and include a presentation from the Rick Hansen Foundation.