ACCESSIBILITY PLAN 2023

BCIT®

"Disability isn't the problem.
Barriers are the problem."

— Stephanie Cadieux,

Chief Accessibility Officer,
Government Of Canada

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments

This guide was developed by BCIT with the support of Trish Kelly and the team at Untapped Accessibility.

BCIT would like to thank Jackie Gruber and Kacem Habiballah, co-chairs of the BCIT Accessibility Committee and Working Groups, for their leadership and dedication to realizing this plan.

Accessibility Statement

This guide is accessible to PDF/UA standards. If you require an alternative format, contact the BCIT Respect, Diversity, & Inclusion Department to request one: respect@bcit.ca

A Note About Language

Language preferences can be highly personal and vary from community to community and person to person. In this document we are choosing to alternate between person-first and identify-first terms to reflect this diversity in some small way. We also advise that when discussing anyone else's disability, to ask the person for their preferences when possible.

The British Columbia Institute of Technology acknowledges that our campuses are located on the unceded traditional territories of the Coast Salish Nations of Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish), səl̓ilwətaʔɬ (Tsleil-Waututh), and xwməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam).

Message from Our President

I am honoured to introduce the BCIT Accessibility Plan 2023, our first Institute plan in support of the Accessible British Columbia Act.

The BCIT Accessibility Plan provides an overview of the compliance measures, such as the formation of the Accessibility Steering Committee, the creation of the feedback strategy used to solicit/collect valuable feedback from our community, and the release of our Plan.

I am grateful for the dedication and commitment of the BCIT Accessibility Steering Committee and the Accessibility Plan Working Group over the past year. This is just the beginning, and I look forward to the continued work in the proactive identification, removal, and prevention of barriers to participation at BCIT. We continue to strive to move beyond compliance to make BCIT campuses inclusive for all. The Plan also outlines the actions we will consider to make BCIT campuses inclusive, barrier free environments for our students, staff, faculty, and partners.

There is a long journey ahead, and we hope you will join us. Accessibility is a shared responsibility and we welcome continuing input from all members of BCIT and the broader community as we work together towards making an accessible environment for all.

Dr. Jeff Zabudsky
President

Message from BCIT's Accessibility Steering Committee Co-Chairs

We are pleased to provide BCIT's first Accessibility Plan that identifies barriers to accessibility at BCIT and proposes actions to prevent and remove these barriers. We view this Plan as a first step; we will be consulting further with our community over the fall and will be updating our plan as a living document.

We would like to extend our gratitude to members of the Accessibility Steering Committee and the Accessibility Plan Working Group for their time, energy, dedication, and enthusiasm in this work. We would also like to thank those who attended our first consultation session in June 2023 and to those who will participate in the future.

We will be conducting further consultation over the fall and welcome further feedback by accessing the online accessibility feedback form or the Safety Wise app.

Thank you for your commitment and support.

Jackie Gruber

Co-chair and Director, Respect, Diversity, and Inclusion

Dr. Kacem Habiballah

Co-chair and Interim Associate Vice President, Academic Operations

Introduction

ABOUT BCIT

Since 1964, the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT) has taught and trained experts, professionals, and innovators who shape our economy across BC and around the world.

We are proud to deliver an education that goes beyond textbooks and classrooms.

Our students gain the technical skills, real-world experience, and problem-solving ability needed to embrace complexity and lead innovation in a rapidly changing workforce.

Through close collaboration with industry, our network of alumni and partners continues to achieve global success.

BCIT'S COMMITMENT TO ACCESSIBILITY

BCIT is moving towards creating a fair, equitable, and welcoming culture that will include, engage, and connect all members of our community. This culture must permeate all aspects of BCIT and everyday interactions with one another. Our goal is to create a holistic environment in which everyone can engage with the highest degree of confidence, authenticity, and agency.

We are committed to ongoing identification and removal of all barriers that prevent full and meaningful participation in all facets of campus life. We aim to exceed all applicable legislation, including full compliance with the standards specified under the Accessible British Columbia Act (ABCA).

OUR ACCESSIBILITY LENS

In the fall of 2022, the newly formed BCIT Accessibility Steering Committee began our discussion by considering the social model of disability. This model views barriers in society as the limitation to people with disabilities, rather than the disability or impairment itself being the limitation. This model was used as the basis for our exploration of the barriers to accessibility that affect people with disabilities in our organization.

Committee members Joanna Angelidis, Associate Director, Student Wellbeing and Accessibility, and Amanda MacKearney, former VP of Equity & Sustainability for the BCIT Student Association presented the key principles, approaches, goals, and legislative characteristics of the social model to the Steering Committee and the Working Group. Additionally, the presentation included a description of the medical model, the traditional model of disability that excludes people with disabilities due to their limitations and creates biases and barriers in society.

Through this Accessibility Plan and the action items outlined within, we strive to make the shift from the medical model of disability to the social model, removing barriers so that our students and employees with disabilities have equal access in all aspects of their involvement at BCIT.

Definitions

Here are a few key definitions that may help you as you read this plan.

ACCESSIBILITY

People with disabilities encounter many situations where their ability to participate on an equal basis is impaired by the way our society has designed services, environments, and policies. Attitudes and assumptions also create barriers to equal access. Accessibility is the work we do to ensure people with disabilities can access all aspects of society, including education and employment, on an equal basis with others. It includes seeking ways to remove barriers to access, including physical barriers, attitudes, policies, technology, and how we convey information.

DISABILITY

The *Accessible BC Act* defines a disability as "an inability to participate fully and equally in society as a result of the interaction of an impairment and a barrier." An impairment may be permanent, temporary, or episodic. It is important to note that an impairment, whether it is a physical, sensory, mental, intellectual, or cognitive impairment, does not on its own disable people. Disability occurs when someone with such an impairment encounters a barrier.

BARRIER-FREE

A barrier can result from environments, attitudes, policies, practices, technology, or communications designed without proper consideration of the inherent diversity and variation of the human condition. Without this consideration, people with disabilities may not have equal access alongside other members of society.

INCLUSION

> *"Inclusion is an attitude and approach that embraces diversity and differences and promotes equal opportunities for all. Inclusion is not just about people with disabilities. When our communities include and embrace everyone, we are ALL better able to reach our full potential."* — Inclusion BC

Opportunities for Action

This plan documents our steps so far to centre accessibility in our work and to outline what we see as the next steps in engaging a larger audience in our efforts to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to access for people with disabilities.

We expect our accessibility plan to be a living document—the place where we capture the progress we are making alongside our evolving understanding of what it means to be an accessible organization.

In the years to come, we will provide regular annual updates on our progress.

All access issues that prevent equal and full participation of people with disabilities at BCIT, and in society at large, deserve to be addressed.

We envision accessibility as a central consideration in our communities, as we design educational environments, buildings, and communities as well as every other facet of society.

As we take on the difficult task of deciding which areas should be prioritized, we keep in mind the domains where BCIT has the greatest opportunity to create a more accessible future. These domains are:

- As educators
- As employers
- As learners and advocates

BCIT's Framework

The framework for our accessibility plan is informed by the realities of legislative requirements and our own policies, as well as our ambitions to be an organizational ally to those working to create a future inclusive of all people.

Our framework has been created based on:

a. Accessible BC (ABC) Act

The *Accessible BC Act* requires that we develop an accessibility committee, an accessibility plan, and a feedback mechanism to support partners who wish to report accessibility barriers they experience when interacting with our organization.

Beyond these three requirements, the *Accessible BC Act* also asks us to consider the following principles as we develop our accessibility plan:

- Inclusion
- Adaptability
- Diversity
- Collaboration
- Self-determination
- Universal design

b. Other legislation

Before the *Accessible BC Act*, the British Columbia Human Rights Code recognized the inherent rights of people with disabilities, and other equity-deserving communities, to allow all British Columbians to have full and free participation in all aspects of life. This fundamental piece of legislation paved the way for today's conversations about accessibility.

c. Related BCIT policies

As BCIT looks to build an accessibility plan, we also must consider the polices that were created with a vision of an equitable and accessible future for all. These include:

- BCIT Indigenous Vision webpage
- BCIT Anti-Racism Framework webpage
- Policy 7507 BCIT Harassment and Discrimination (downloadable PDF)
- Policy 4501 Accommodation for Students with Disabilities (downloadable PDF)
- BCIT Accommodation Guideline and Procedure (downloadable PDF)

Our Approach

Our approach to accessibility is informed by the BCIT Vision, Mission, and Values:

VISION

- Empowering People.
- Shaping BC.
- Inspiring Global Progress.

MISSION

Partnering learners and industry for success through workforce development.

OUR VALUES

Our values guide our behaviour—our interactions, our approaches to teaching and learning, and our responses to each other. Ultimately, our values must inform how we work and how we make decisions.

We know from our consultations and from initial experience in implementation that these values— while endorsed by the community—are not consistently reflected throughout our learning and working environments. We have made meaningful progress since 2018, and the strength of the community through the pandemic is testament to that work.

We will continue our efforts to make these values synonymous with BCIT. This is fundamental if we are to fully realize our goals of serving the success of our people, partners, and the province through applied learning that leads to practical, real-world results.

At BCIT we strive to:

ACHIEVE EXCELLENCE

We strive to achieve excellence in everything we do and to accomplish real and measurable results.

EMBRACE INNOVATION

We embrace innovation, ignited by imagination and creativity, to improve our approaches, opportunities, and outcomes.

CHAMPION DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

We champion diversity of experiences, ideas, cultures, and perspectives, fostering a community permeated with equality and inclusivity.

PURSUE COLLABORATION

We believe in the power of collaboration to amplify our efforts.

ENGAGE WITH RESPECT

We work from a position of respect for others' expertise, insight, and inherent worth, and we reflect a respect for future generations in our passion for sustainability.

Accessibility Domains

BCIT has many opportunities to improve accessibility for our communities. We see three key domains where we can contribute to a more accessible future.

AS EDUCATORS

As a leading post-secondary institute with more than 45,000 students enrolled across five campuses, we have a wide range of areas where we can reduce and eliminate barriers for students with disabilities including:

- Policies
- Admissions
- Enrollment
- Communications (e.g., websites)
- Academic program delivery
- Support services
- Facilities and operations

AS EMPLOYERS

Recognized as one of Canada's Best Employers by Forbes, and as a BC Top 100 employer, BCIT employs over 2,600 people. As a significant employer with an aim to create an inclusive work environment, there is much work we can do to create a more accessible workplace. Examples of focus areas include:

- Policies
- Recruitment
- Communications
- Facilities and operations

AS LEARNERS AND ADVOCATES

BCIT wishes to approach accessibility with the courage to work at the edge of innovation and with the humility to call ourselves learners. We are actively curious about how we can be both learners and leaders in applying an accessibility lens to our work as a learning organization. Examples of focus areas include:

- Applied Research
- Communications
- Learning and Teaching

About the Accessibility Steering Committee and Accessibility Plan Working Group

ORIGIN STORY

In August 2022, a call went out to the BCIT community looking for volunteers to sit on the BCIT Accessibility Steering Committee and participate in related working groups. The purpose of the committee is to assist the Institute in identifying barriers to active participation and to advise on how to remove and prevent such barriers in our community through the development of an accessibility plan.

Approximately 60 individuals put their names forward to be a part of this important work from which 30 were selected to sit on the Accessibility Steering Committee. It was also decided at that time to form a 12-member Accessibility Plan Working Group.

The first few meetings for both groups were focused on education related to the Act, as well as both the medical and social models of disability. The groups further engaged in informative discussions and identification of barriers found in our community. Once we had an outline, an additional 26 people were invited to consult on the plan framework.

PURPOSE AND MANDATE OF THE ACCESSIBILITY STEERING COMMITTEE

BCIT established the Accessibility Steering Committee in September 2022. The Accessibility Steering Committee promotes the Institute's compliance with each standard regulated under the Accessible British Columbia Act and contributes to the development and evolution of the Accessibility Plan.

In addition, the committee's mandate is to help the Institute implement relevant parts of the Strategic Plan.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Accessibility Committee has identified the following guiding principles to support their work:

ACCESS

Persons should have barrier-free access to education, services, places, events, and other functions generally available to BCIT community members.

EQUITY

Persons should have barrier-free access to anything that gives them equity of education, opportunity, and outcome.

UNIVERSAL DESIGN

Access should be provided in a manner that does not establish or perpetuate differences based on a person's disability.

SYSTEMIC RESPONSIBILITY

The responsibility to identify, prevent, and remove barriers rests with the person or organization that is responsible for establishing or perpetuating the barrier.

NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US

People with lived experience of disability are the authorities on the barriers that prevent their full and equal participation in all aspects of our organization. Only by centring their voices will we create meaningful change.

"I urge you to be challenged and inspired by what you do not know."

— Michael J. Fox

Work to Date

Socializing the **Accessible BC Act** requirements

The support of all functional areas is critical to ensuring that BCIT can make meaningful progress. To raise awareness, BCIT's Respect, Diversity, and Inclusion team has presented to internal teams including:

- Human Resources
- Board of Governors HR Committee
- Senior Leadership Team
- Deans' Council
- Education Council
- Information Technology Services
- Associate Deans' Forum
- Director's Forum

GATHERING FEEDBACK

Feedback mechanism development

When designing a feedback mechanism, we wanted to ensure that the tool itself would be as accessible as possible. A well-formed web form meets that requirement.

BCIT selected Gravity Forms, a WordPress plugin, as the best tool to develop our feedback mechanism. It was already used on the public website to create and manage web forms and we had already done the work to ensure that this tool is well-integrated with our website, both design and accessibility-wise.

We modeled the questions and flow of the form on the Provincial Government's excellent accessibility feedback form, with slight changes to make the questions more relevant to the BCIT environment.

We also wanted to avoid confusion between the new feedback form and the existing processes for students and employees to request accommodations. To that end, we added an initial question to ensure that anyone who ended up on the form by mistake would be directed to the correct resource.

You can view our feedback mechanism or submit a report of an accessibility barrier on our accessibility hub website.

Community consultation

In June 2023, BCIT brought together a small group comprised of members of the community to share their own perspective of the accessibility work ahead of us. Their feedback is included in the following "Barriers Identified" section.

In fall 2023, BCIT will engage the wider internal community in a series of engagement events to gather further information about accessibility barriers experienced by stakeholders and to test the direction of the Accessibility Plan.

Surveying employees and students

BCIT seeks to foster a climate of collaboration, understanding, and mutual respect between all community members and ensure an inclusive, accessible working and learning environment where everyone can succeed.

As such, BCIT is embarking on designing and creating an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) strategy. All staff and students were sent an EDI survey in June 2023 with questions related to accessibility. Results from this survey will help BCIT establish a baseline of who we are and how we are doing as an organization.

Barriers Identified

Several barriers and possible actions were identified by the BCIT Accessibility Planning Working Group and Accessibility Steering Committee during meetings between January 2023 and April 2023.

The following list simply represents the beginning of our work to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to accessibility. To expand on this work, we will continue to engage people with experience of accessibility barriers. We will also work with BCIT internal departments and leaders to determine a timeline for removing the barriers we identify.

BARRIER TYPE: BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Barriers identified

We learned that accessibility barriers in the built environment impact the experience of students, faculty, and other staff.

Some issues are persistent and point to decades of development that did not account for equal access for all. For example, campus designs that include large amounts of stairs or considerable distance to a transit stop create persistent barriers for people with disabilities.

Historically, people with disabilities were left on their own to try to solve these issues, or they were simply left out. This will need to shift as we look at applying an accessibility lens to the design of our physical spaces.

We also learned that accessibility barriers can pop up with little notice, and what may be an inconvenience to nondisabled people can be an unsurpassable barrier to people with disabilities. Elevators out of service, inconsistent clearance of snow, and construction detours may be less permanent, but can significantly impact participation.

Possible actions

We know that accessibility is always more successful if considered early in the planning process. We learned that applying universal design principles to development and design processes will mean less need for accommodations or remediation in the future.

As we look at developing our accessibility actions regarding our buildings, campuses, and worksites, our internal teams will need to consider an accessibility mindset to improve how we plan and amend our built environment.

BARRIER TYPE: CAPACITY

Barriers identified

While our working group and committee did not identify specific barriers related to capacity, they noted that a reduction in capacity of BCIT's team would create barriers to sustaining the work of improving accessibility. The members of these groups realize that without specific resources, progress will stagnate or halt.

BARRIER TYPE: COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Barriers identified

Communication and information technology is a vast category of accessibility barriers. We learned that a lack of accessibility considerations can impede people with disabilities from receiving critical information like service interruption notifications.

People with disabilities whose vision or hearing is impacted also find barriers to receiving the same quality of experience; for example, when documents designed without accessible design principles in mind don't convey the same nuance or importance.

Possible actions

While information and communication technologies present many barriers, they are also areas where innovation is providing opportunities to remove or prevent barriers.

For our internal teams, there will be many options that will improve accessibility for students, employees, and the broader community. Training in creating accessible documents for content creators, new software applications, improvements in automated processes, and systematic auditing tools can all be considered by our internal team as they develop their accessibility action plans.

BARRIER TYPE: DELIVERY OF SERVICES

Barriers identified

Barriers to service delivery are connected to the previously noted built environment and information and communication technology barriers. As we continue to engage the community, we expect to hear more specific barriers related to delivery of services.

Possible actions

Applying an accessibility lens to service delivery will present opportunities to remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities. In the coming years, as the Government of BC develops the accessibility standard for service delivery, our organization will receive more prescriptive instructions on embedding accessibility into service delivery.

BARRIER TYPE: EDUCATION

Barriers identified

As a post-secondary institution, barriers to access for people with disabilities is a known and pressing issue. Our committee and working group noted that without an accessibility lens on class scheduling, people with disabilities can't participate on an equal basis with others. Examples discussed included venues that are not wheelchair-friendly, class environments that challenge the focus of people with neurosensorial conditions, and a lack of consideration for the incredible diversity of languages on campus.

Possible actions

Committee and working group members noted that there will be many opportunities to systematically assess processes, such as the enrollment process and admission process. There will also be many options to consider for organizational-wide tools that could influence how curriculum is developed and delivered. Finally, there are many opportunities to reach beyond compliance and be true leaders in accessible education.

BARRIER TYPE: EMPLOYMENT

Barriers identified

We learned that barriers preventing equal participation in the workforce include a general low awareness of accessibility. Attitudes and unexamined beliefs about what people with disabilities can do also create barriers. We also learned that a dated understanding of disability, including the concept of the medical model of disability, may be underpinning policies and processes like accommodations for employees.

These issues are common barriers existing in many workplaces, but it is important to note our accessibility committee and working group confirm that BCIT is not immune to these barriers.

Possible actions

People with disabilities on staff and within our community can point the way to solving and removing these barriers. In our working group and accessibility committee meetings, nearly a dozen potential actions have already been identified.

As we continue to build out the BCIT accessibility actions, we expect the list of barriers and solutions will continue to expand. We will work with our internal teams to assess the possible actions and create clear objectives and actions to improve the accessibility of the employee experience.

BARRIER TYPE: HEALTH

Barriers identified

While we know that people with disabilities experience barriers related to accessing health care, our committee and working group have not identified specific barriers. We will continue to invite BCIT community members to let us know how these barriers show up at BCIT and we welcome their recommended solutions.

Possible actions

In addition to inviting feedback from more community members, our committee and working group note that an accessibility audit of our health centre would be a practical step in evaluating the barriers to access that are within BCIT's control to address.

BARRIER TYPE: PROCUREMENT

Barriers identified

The Government of BC has identified procurement as an accessibility area that will be developed into an accessibility standard. While our working group and committee did not identify specific barriers related to procurement, we are holding space for this coming standard in our planning.

Possible actions

Our work going forward will include reviewing our current procurement process and opportunities to consider accessibility in purchase decisions.

BARRIER TYPE: TRANSPORTATION

Barriers identified

We learned that transportation barriers impact how people access parking, transit, pathways, and travel between buildings. We know that more transportation barriers will be identified as we continue community engagement and internal assessment.

Possible actions

Transportation is a key area for future assessment. It was also noted that we will need to consider joining forces with local governments and transit authorities to be effective, and that we have much to learn from other post-secondary institutions about their work on accessibility.

Our Next Steps

As we move forward, we will continue to share updates about our progress on the BCIT Accessibility Hub. The hub includes our accessibility plan, our feedback mechanism, and recommended accessibility resources.

The hub will also house information about public engagement sessions that will be held in fall 2023.

Monitoring

A monitoring report will be produced and shared on the BCIT Accessibility Hub on an annual basis and will be delivered at the first accessibility committee meeting of each year.

Evaluating

At a minimum, BCIT will conduct a review and evaluation of the Accessibility Plan every three years. The first evaluation of the plan will be delivered September 2026.

"There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives."

— Audre Lorde

EDUCATION
FOR A COMPLEX WORLD.

bcit.ca/accessibility-hub

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