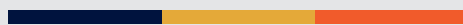




Accessibility Plan 2022–2025



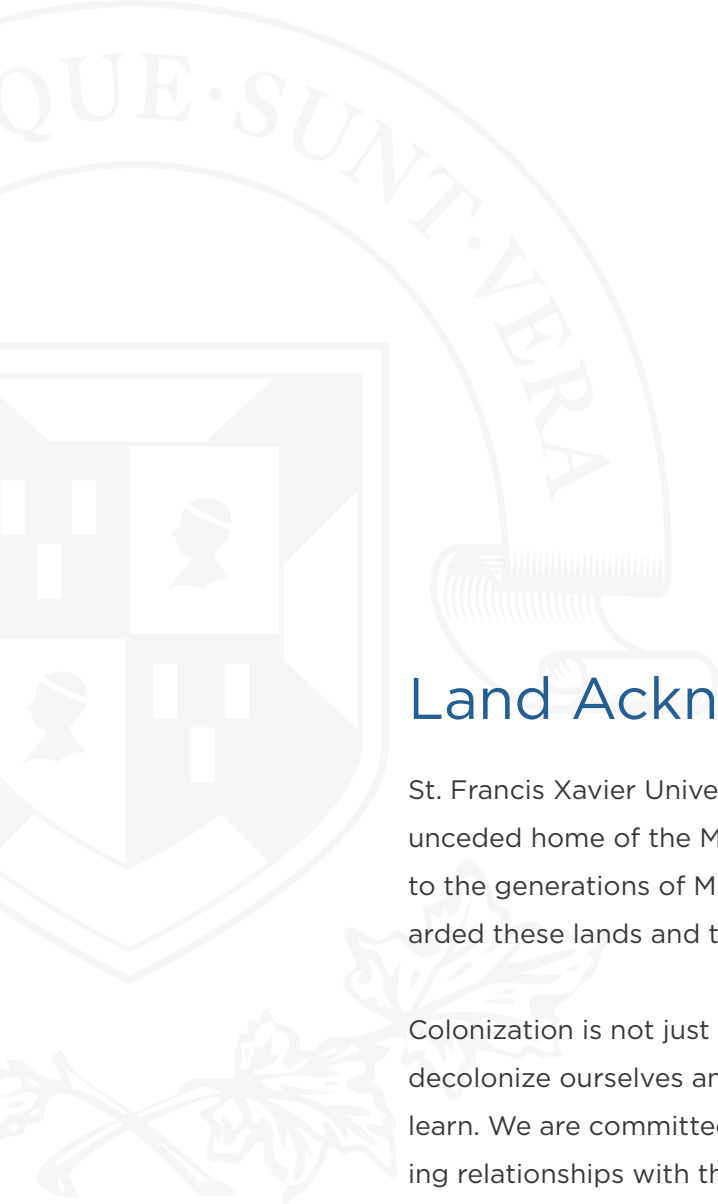
ST. FRANCIS XAVIER
UNIVERSITY

This document is available in alternate formats, upon request.
Please contact us by email at AccessibilityPlan@stfx.ca

StFX University values equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility (EDIA).

As an educational institution, we work proactively to embed practices related to equity, anti-racism and accessibility in all aspects of our university culture, curriculum, and experience. The woven fabric incorporated throughout our integrated planning framework is a representation of the collective commitment to engage in the work that must be done to achieve our vision: to build our University the Way It is Meant to Be.





Land Acknowledgement

St. Francis Xavier University stands on the lands of Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded home of the Mi'kmaw. We express our deep gratitude and appreciation to the generations of Mi'kmaw who, since time immemorial, have loved and stewarded these lands and the beings who call them home.

Colonization is not just history; it exists in the present tense. While we strive to decolonize ourselves and our institution, we know there is still much for us to learn. We are committed to doing the hard work of self-reflection and to repairing relationships with the Mi'kmaw on whose lands we reside, including embracing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Calls to Action and embodying their spirit in our day-to-day lives.

Ms-t wiaqpulti'kl ankukamkewe'l | We are all treaty people





Message from the President

StFX is committed to equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility (EDIA) on our campus. This is outlined in the University Strategic Plan: *Building Our University the Way it is Meant to Be*, and our work is continuing. The last two years and the COVID-19 pandemic has served as a reminder that identifying and addressing barriers to full participation within our institution is an ongoing and evolving commitment that requires continuous learning and improvement. As StFX continues to enhance its culture of equity and belonging, it will require the recognition and support of everyone on campus to ensure the identification, prevention, and removal of barriers to accessibility.

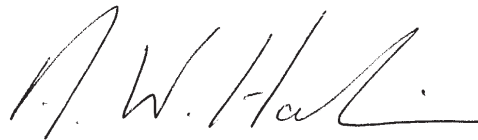
An equitable campus builds a culture where persons with disabilities know that they matter, that they belong, and that StFX is a place where they can flourish. This goal cannot be achieved through the work of one area alone. It will require a coordinated campus-wide effort that engages partners in systemic change as we examine all areas of our institution from academic policies and practices to goods and services to the built environment. We all have a role to play.

Reaching the province's goal for Nova Scotia—to be barrier-free by 2030—will require a strong, collaborative response and commitment to this important call for action. The aim of this document is to describe the measures that StFX University will take moving forward to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to persons with disabilities and individuals who experience barriers to accessibility so that our faculty, staff, students, alumnae, and members of the broader community can access the university in a way that ensures dignity and independence. Our goal is



to advance our understanding of what makes a truly accessible campus, and to translate that knowledge into a culture that builds accessibility into everything that we do.

A lack of accessibility is a larger social issue that StFX is not immune to, and as an engine of social change the university can be part of developing innovative, equitable solutions. As StFX shifts from compliance to competency with the Nova Scotia Accessibility Act, I, on behalf of all members of our community, look forward to building on what we have achieved to date. My thanks to the many members of the university community for their dedication and collaborative efforts as we continue to make progress towards an accessible campus. Accessibility is everyone's responsibility. Ongoing input from all members of the StFX and broader community is welcomed as we work together towards creating an environment that ensures that everyone has a full and enriching StFX experience.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A. W. Hakin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "A" and a long, sweeping underline.

Dr. Andy Hakin
President and Vice-Chancellor



Public Communication of the Accessibility Plan

The StFX Accessibility Plan is available

- Online at mystfx.ca/accessibility-plan/
- By telephoning (902) 867-2381
- By email at AccessibilityPlan@stfx.ca
- In alternate formats as requested

Accessibility Feedback

StFX University recognizes that feedback is critical to the process of identifying and removing barriers to participation as well as improving how we deliver our services to persons with disabilities. **The Accessibility Feedback Online Form** available at mystfx.ca/accessibility-plan can be used to submit feedback about accessibility can be used to submit feedback about accessibility.

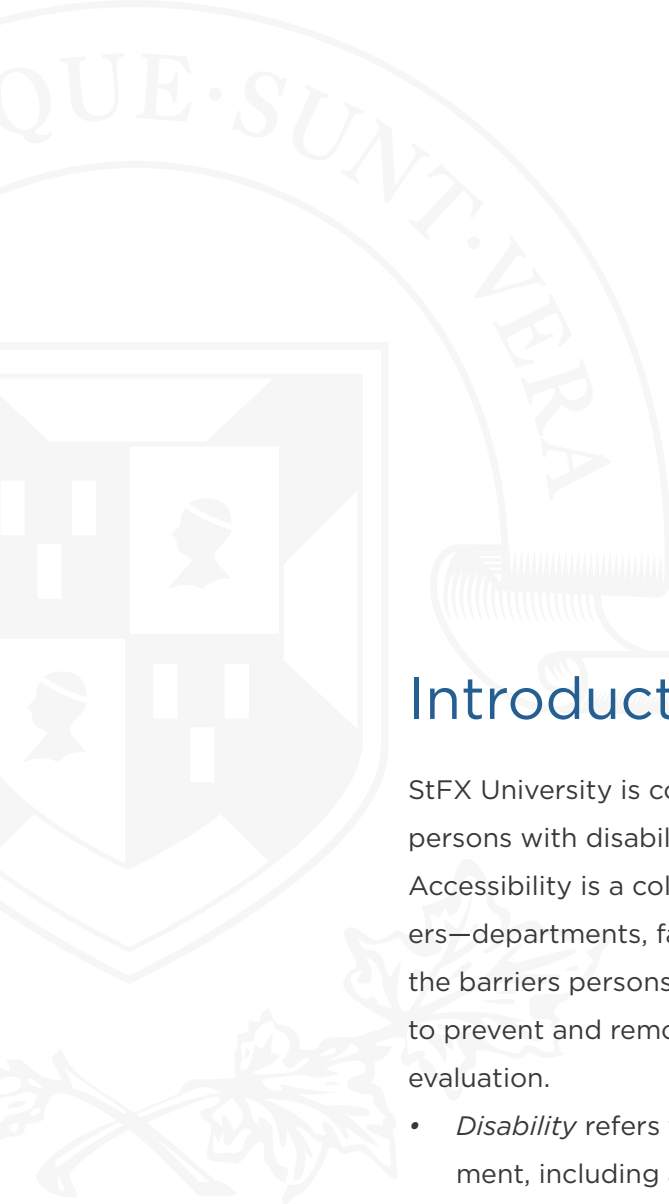
Feedback may also be given by emailing AccessibilityPlan@stfx.ca, by telephone at (902) 872-2381. You may also send feedback via regular mail:

Office of the President
4130 University Avenue
Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada
B2G 2W5



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Introduction

StFX University is committed to building an equitable and accessible campus for persons with disabilities and individuals who experience barriers to accessibility. Accessibility is a collaborative practice, requiring participation from all stakeholders—departments, faculty, staff, students, and partners. It requires understanding the barriers persons with disabilities face accessing education and committing to prevent and remove them through ongoing implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

- *Disability* refers to a physical, mental, intellectual, learning, or sensory impairment, including an episodic disability, that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders an individual's full and effective participation in society.¹
- *Accessibility* includes the prevention and removal of barriers (physical, attitudinal, technological, or system) to allow equitable participation for persons with disabilities or others who experience barriers to accessibility.²
- *Barrier* refers to anything that hinders or challenges the full and effective participation in society. Barriers can be physical, attitudinal, technological, or systemic (policy or practice). Accessibility barriers may be related to areas such as employment, education, the built environment, transportation, the delivery and receipt of goods and services, or information and communications.³

See Appendix A for a Glossary of Additional Terms.

¹ Nova Scotia Accessibility Act

² Nova Scotia Post-Secondary Accessibility Framework, 2020.

³ Nova Scotia Post-Secondary Accessibility Framework, 2020.



As part of StFX's institutional commitment to advancing EDIA, the StFX Accessibility Plan describes StFX accessibility-related commitments, and the strategies and initiatives that will be used to achieve them. The overarching goal of the plan is to articulate our institutional commitment and approach to advancing accessibility on campus and identify actionable initiatives that will help us progress towards our vision of an equitable, accessible university community.

Acknowledging that accessibility is everyone's responsibility, the goals set out in the plan will guide our collective actions for change as we contribute to the province's goal of an accessible Nova Scotia by 2030. In addition, the Accessibility Plan provides a roadmap for accessibility which further serves the university in the following ways:

- To improve accessibility across the priority areas identified in the Nova Scotia Accessibility Act and the Nova Scotia Post-Secondary Accessibility Framework.
- To establish shared accountability and responsibility for accessibility for persons with disabilities at StFX, including funding accessibility-related expenses through standard operating budgets and identifying other sources of revenue streams.
- To increase knowledge and understanding of accessibility, equity, human rights, disability rights, and barriers to participation in post-secondary education.
- To continue efforts to incorporate accessibility issues in university equity initiatives.

Alignment and Coordination

For the Accessibility Plan to be successful with its implementation objectives, it is necessary for it to be aligned with other StFX strategic and guiding documents, policies, and procedures. It will mean integration of accessibility within our integrated planning framework and associated operational plans, including those related to academics, research and creative works, and student experience and opportunities. It will also require meaningful change across all areas of the university, including our policies, procedures, practices, technology, infrastructure, communications, and awareness. Taken together, these are the levers that will bring about change. This Plan is a living document that demonstrates our institutional

commitment to ongoing learning and action. It will be reviewed and updated as provincial standards are released and as additional goals are identified through implementation.

Centering First Voice

Critical to advancing equity and accessibility at StFX is connecting and listening to members of our community. Developing an Accessibility Plan has been a collaborative effort, stewarded through the StFX Accessibility Advisory Committee and StFX Student Accessibility Advisory Committee. Each committee includes members who have lived experience with disabilities, as well as those who are responsible for providing service, education, or research at the university.

See Appendix A for the Accessibility Advisory Committee's Membership and Terms of Reference. The development of the Plan was informed by:

- A series of campus-wide consultations between November 2021 and March 2022, including focus groups and meetings with individuals and groups.
- Intentionality around committee membership—each group includes members who have lived experiences with disabilities, as well as service providers at the university.
- Consultation with people with disabilities, campus groups representing persons with disabilities, and service providers responsible for accessibility work.
- A series of online focus groups to gather feedback and recommendations for accessibility improvement across each area of focus.
- Dedicated web content on StFX's public website, including an online feedback form (available 24/7) to capture feedback and advice.
- Intentional connection with other strategic initiatives at StFX that have significant overlap, for example, the StFX Student Experience and Opportunity Plan and President's Action Committee on Anti-Racism report.

- The initial recommendations to the Minister of Justice on Accessibility Standards in Education: Phases 1 & 2. The Education Standard Development Committee is assisting the Accessibility Advisory Board with making recommendations to the Minister of Justice on the content and implementation of a proposed standard to prevent and remove barriers to accessibility in early childhood, primary, secondary, and post-secondary education.

Facilitation and Accountability

Accessibility and equity are constantly evolving with ever-changing circumstances. As a result, StFX is committed to a phased and iterative approach to implementation of the Accessibility Plan. The initiatives listed in each area of focus will be part of a comprehensive Accountability Framework. For each initiative, we will identify a leader in the University that will be responsible for its implementation; a metric or key performance indicator (KPI) to measure its progress; and activities that have occurred or are occurring in the University in response to it. Those tasked with implementation will have the authority to define accountabilities, resource requirements, and track their progress.

We will continue to review the Plan every three years and make changes as needed. We will inform each iteration with careful assessment and evaluation of our progress that aligns with the Nova Scotia post-secondary accessibility evaluation tool. As we progress into implementation, we will continue to expand engagement and consultation strategies across campus and with the broader community, especially persons with disabilities, Deaf, and neurodivergent persons. Over the next three years, we intend to make progress on all initiatives outlined in this document. Those initiatives identified as High Priority within the Accessibility Plan indicate the areas where StFX will initially focus our efforts as part of a phased and iterative approach to implementation. This timeline aligns with the expected finalization and release of provincial accessibility standards. At the end of the three years, we will revise the Accessibility Plan to ensure alignment with accessibility legislation and provincial standards.



StFX's Commitment to Accessibility

Creating a positive living, learning, and working environment requires a proactive community that demonstrates genuine care, compassion, and respect for all. Together, StFX University is committed to building an equitable and accessible community in which all faculty, staff, and students can flourish. Our commitment to accessibility begins with identifying, removing, and preventing environmental, structural, and attitudinal barriers to accessibility in all aspects of university life.

We recognize that disability is impacted by environmental, structural, and attitudinal barriers that limit the full participation of persons with disabilities. We work proactively to embed practices related to equity and accessibility in all aspects of our university culture and experience and cultivate a sense of belonging that supports the dignity, safety, and well-being of all faculty, staff, and students. By recognizing how social, attitudinal, and physical barriers create disability, we shift our focus from any perceived deficit of the person to the environment where we can seek solutions to remove barriers to accessibility.

We recognize that successful learning and employment outcomes result from shared responsibility and expect that all community members actively work to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to persons with disabilities. We draw on available research and scholarship, and on evidence-informed practices to advance an equitable and accessible campus.



As part of our commitment to building an equitable and accessible environment for all, StFX is committed to going beyond legislative requirements and recognizing the diversity in lived experiences that are central to campus life. Everything that we offer—including to physical spaces, teaching, and learning activities, research and creative works, student and employee supports and resources, operational policies and procedures, and co-curricular activities and career opportunities—will provide an equitable and accessible experience for every member of our community.

Principles

The development and implementation of the StFX Accessibility Plan provides the university with the opportunity to take a comprehensive look at its services, policies, procedures, practices, and programs to determine which aspects of its operations require action towards advancing equity and accessibility. To support progress and meaningful implementation of the Plan, a strong foundation built upon the following principles will guide our community in breaking down barriers, eliminating bias, and challenging ableism, so that all students, staff, and faculty can be agents of positive change. These principles are not listed by order of importance. Indeed, each principle is integrated within and integral to all initiatives outlined in this document.

Human Rights

We uphold accessibility as a fundamental human right and model this in our work. This involves ensuring that all members of the university community demonstrate a shared responsibility for equity and accessibility within a human rights framework, by prioritizing the prevention and removal of structural, systemic, and individual barriers that prevent equitable access. An accessible campus must be designed for the meaningful participation of all members, ensuring our policies, programs, practices, and services are flexible and responsive.

First Voice

We value first voice and prioritize it in our decision-making, recognizing the lived experiences of students and employees with disabilities and others who experience barriers to accessibility. Their experience, expertise, and leadership, including evidence generated by first voice researchers, must be prioritized in this work.

Equity

We are committed to creating equitable learning and working environments, where everyone is treated with dignity and respect. Practicing equity and accessibility in teaching, learning, working, and living environments will advance awareness, and facilitate better representation, independence, and well-being for all members of our university community.

Intersectionality

We understand the diversity of disabilities and embrace how diverse identities and lived experiences intersect and impact accessibility. Accordingly, we champion diversity, in all forms; whether for Indigenous peoples, individuals of all genders and sexual orientations, race, ethnic origin, disability, age, religion as well as anyone living at the intersection of these identities. We will reflect this understanding on our policies, programs, and services.

Wholistic Well-being

We recognize the importance of representing a cross-disability perspective that is respectful and inclusive of all experiences of disability. We will create work and learning environments grounded in respect and support, guided by a shared responsibility for equitable access and the mental health and well-being of our faculty, staff, and students.

Universal Design

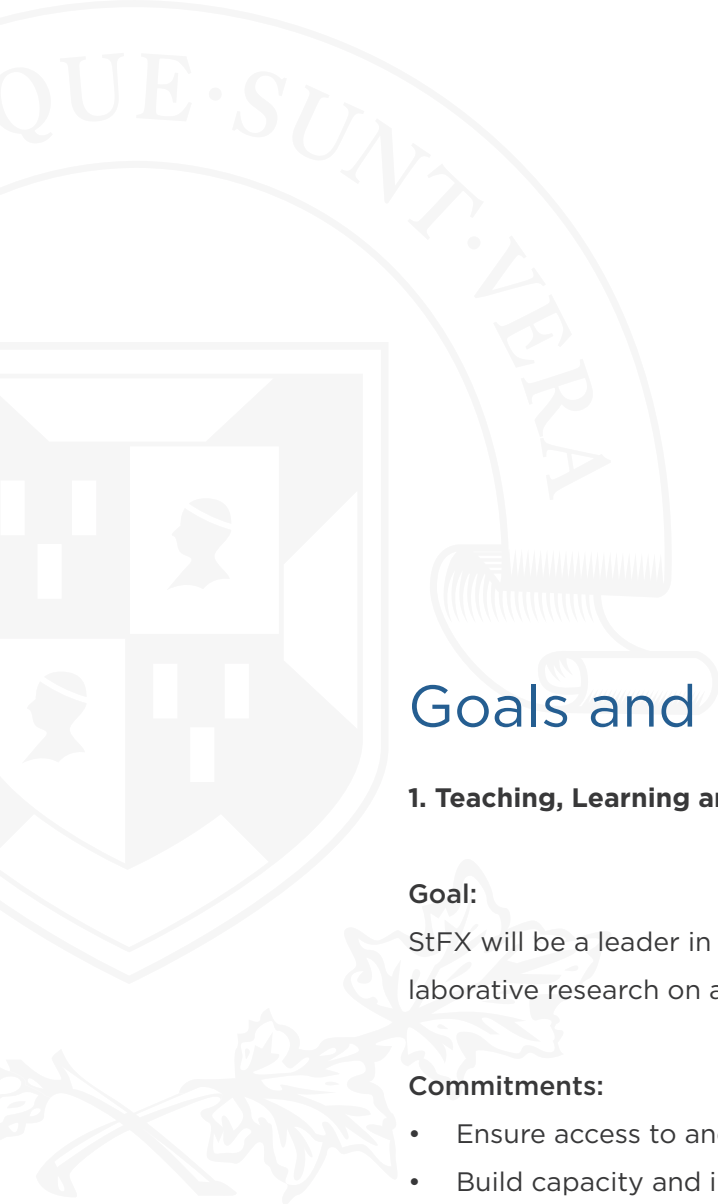
We apply principles of Universal Design to increase accessibility for all community members. The premise is, that if we build systems that are accessible, we lower the barriers that exist for the full participation of all community members. As well, when we build proactive approaches into our systems and policies, we take the burden off the individual and are better able to meet community members where they are at in their lives. Although a legal obligation may only require “accommodation as required”, we seek proactive and permanent accessible solutions.

Collaboration and Shared Responsibility

We recognize that successful learning and employment outcomes are the result of a shared responsibility and commitment on the part of students, faculty, and staff, and expect all community members to advance and contribute to the ongoing development of an environment that is equitable and accessible. By building understanding and capacity, we strive for a campus-wide culture of continuous improvement in all aspects of accessibility. We are committed to putting our words into meaningful action.

Continuous Learning and Improvement

We recognize the need for change and the importance of including persons with disabilities in the process. We commit to ensuring policies, programs, and procedures are continuously reviewed and improved to reflect new learning and research, and to respond to the changing needs and experiences of learners and educators. We commit to transparency and accountability in demonstrating progress and improvement towards our equity and accessibility objectives.



Goals and Commitments

1. Teaching, Learning and Research

Goal:

StFX will be a leader in inclusive and accessible teaching and learning, and collaborative research on accessibility.

Commitments:

- Ensure access to and use of accessible technology in teaching and learning.
- Build capacity and implement supports for faculty and other employees to remove barriers to learning through inclusive practices and equitable assessment, such as principles outlined in universal design for learning and culturally-responsive pedagogy.
- Identify and adopt a common standard for ensuring students have access to resources, including accommodations, to support academic success, wellness, and transitions from high school and to employment, the community, or further study.
- Support the growth of research and scholarship on accessibility and disability studies, including collaborative accessibility research initiatives, led by first voice researchers.
- Expand and improve access to inclusive post-secondary education options for students with intellectual disabilities.



High Priority Initiatives:

- 1.1 Develop, implement, and resource a sustainable operations model for the StFX Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC). Ensure that the Teaching and Learning Centre has the capacity to support the development of resources, supports, and professional development for faculty and instructors related to equity and accessibility.
- 1.2 Identify the improvements to teaching, learning, and research that have been caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Evaluate the impacts of these changes through an accessibility lens. Use this information to help determine priority initiatives that will remove barriers and improve accessibility in teaching, learning, and research (i.e., online and hybrid learning formats).
- 1.3 Build capacity through expanded resources, supports, and professional development for faculty, staff, and instructors related to accessible program and course delivery and instruction. Training and professional development should:
 - Recognize accessibility as a critical aspect of StFX's commitment to equity.
 - Include inclusive education principles and practices, such as universal design for learning and culturally responsive pedagogy.
 - Be relevant to different roles, departments, and settings.
 - Occur on an ongoing basis to incorporate changes to policies, practices, and procedures at the provincial and institutional levels.
- 1.4 Develop resources and regularized professional development to assist faculty and instructors in better understanding the academic accommodations process and how to liaise with the appropriate services to support their students, including students involved in research activities and programs.
- 1.5 Request Senate review existing course approval processes to ensure accessibility principles are reflected in the design, development and delivery of all courses and programs. Also request Senate develop a process that can be used for the review of all courses. This should include:

- The use of inclusive education principles such as universal design for learning, and culturally responsive pedagogies.
 - Integrate diverse experiences and perspectives, including persons with disabilities.
 - Integrate concepts related to accessibility, disability rights, and barriers to participation that prioritize first voice.
- 1.6 Establish a policy and procedures with respect to ensuring timely access to interim academic accommodations while waiting for further medical or psychological documentation before confirming the accommodations and accessibility services.
- 1.7 Develop an institutional digital strategy to support the development of accessible digital teaching and learning experiences for all faculty, staff, and students. Systems must be digitally accessible, interconnected, and aligned with user needs and tasks.
- Evaluating existing digital teaching and learning platforms and activities, including learning management systems (both synchronous and asynchronous).
 - Ensuring compatibility with effective and appropriate assistive technology.
 - Training for faculty, staff, and students on the application of accessibility features.
 - Consideration of the accessibility impacts on students of requiring the use of multiple digital platforms within a course or program.
- 1.8 Support instructors and faculty members with disabilities in accessing and being successful in research environments. This should include:
- Identifying, preventing, and removing internal barriers to accessibility in academic research-related hiring, promotion, and career progression at StFX.
 - Strengthening professional development and training to enhance awareness, sensitivity and cultural competencies related to equity and accessibility in the StFX academic research environment.

- 1.9 Expand StFX University’s membership and contributions to accessibility partnerships, organizations, and consortium that extend teaching, learning, and research into community. This should include expanding StFX’s work in local community (ex. service learning, community-based research projects), as well as collaborative research and community engagement activities as a member of the Canadian Accessibility Network (CAN).
- 1.10 Enhance ongoing and collaborative partnerships with the Government of Nova Scotia, donors, research funding agencies, and other post-secondary institutions to support the growth research and scholarship on accessibility and disability issues, especially the work of first voice researchers. This support must include:
- Embedding accessibility as a criterion for evaluation in provincial and institutional research grants and funding opportunities.
 - Stimulating funding for research and scholarship in accessibility and disability studies.
 - Creating scholarships for students to support research on accessibility and disability issues.

Other Initiatives:

- 1.11 Invest in technology to support accessible learning, including technology to support alternative format course material, up-to-date assistive technology, assistive listening systems in classrooms and auditoriums.
- Communicate the resources and services currently available to students, faculty and staff in classrooms and auditoriums.
- 1.12 Ensure students with disabilities have timely, accessible, flexible, and culturally relevant ways to demonstrate their learning. Learning assessment options used by faculty and instructors should:
- Be designed using inclusive education principles, such as universal design for learning and culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy.
 - Be available in multiple accessible formats.

- Identify how each assessment option within courses and programs connects to essential academic requirements. When possible, provide examples of alternate ways of demonstrating learning to provide students with clarity around expectations.
- 1.13 Create an accessibility policy for the provision of instructional materials in accessible or conversion-ready formats. This policy would address materials such as textbooks and course materials. Ensure instructional materials developed, procured, and used by faculty and instructors:
- Are designed using inclusive education principles, such as universal design for learning and culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy.
 - Integrate diverse perspectives and experiences, including persons with disabilities.
 - Are available in multiple accessible formats. Where accessible formats are not available, alternative means of representing the information, are provided.
- 1.14 Ensure StFX research centres and institutes consistently demonstrate engagement in accessibility and disability studies in their annual reports and strategic plans. Provide information and professional development resources to help researchers demonstrate attention to accessibility in their research funding proposals and programs.

2. Information and Communication

Goal:

Information and communication at StFX are accessible.

Commitments:

- Ensure the communications policies, procedures, and practices facilitate accessibility.
- Ensure institutional communication is delivered in formats that are accessible.
- Apply a common standard to ensure the accessibility of StFX websites (e.g., WCAG 2.1 AA)

High Priority Initiatives:

- 2.1 Develop a multi-year Communications Plan and Annual Status Report.
 - Develop a communications plan to share assessment data and progress on accessibility planning and improvements with key university and community partners, including faculty, staff, and students.
- 2.2 Develop an institutional accessibility communications strategy, in consultation with persons with disabilities to communicate StFX's commitment to accessibility. Our commitment should be evident through key institutional messages and intentionally planned programming including university events, such as speakers' series, conferences, and awareness campaigns.
- 2.3 Consult with the disability, Deaf, and neurodivergent communities to develop an educational campaign to raise awareness about diverse experiences of disability and the importance of accessibility to human rights and equity. Communications should be delivered in accessible formats and focus on promoting accessibility, eliminating stigma, and building understanding of disability-related issues.

- 2.4 Develop and implement websites, web content and software to reflect the WWW Consortium Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0, Level AA Standards.
- Evaluate the StFX University website to ensure plain language and general access.
 - Integrate the use of screen reader technology into the website.
 - Provide training to ensure that accessibility of website content and materials is maintained by people who develop and upload information to the website.
 - Evaluate the experiences of users navigating the new StFX University website, through an accessibility lens. Collect feedback from first-voice perspectives throughout the process.
- 2.5 Establish a process for persons with disabilities and Deaf and neurodivergent persons to identify accessibility barriers and areas for improvement. The Office of Equity and Human Rights will be responsible for receiving the feedback and directing the issue to the appropriate department for action and follow-up.
- 2.6 Create a campus-wide communications strategy to streamline communications and transition for new and incoming students and employees. This should include:
- Proactively providing information to all incoming students and employees about the availability of accessibility services and supports, and how to access them.
 - Ensuring this information is accessible and easy to find on StFX websites.
 - Developing clear processes for requesting accessible formats.

Other Initiatives:

- 2.7 Audit social media accounts and content for access and create accessibility guidelines. These guidelines should be informed by evidence-based practices and the Information and Communications Accessibility Standards, once developed.
- Provide training to ensure that accessibility of website content and materials is maintained by people who share information via StFX social media channels.
- 2.8 Provide or arrange for the provision of multiple, accessible formats and communications supports so that people with disabilities, Deaf, and neurodivergent people can equitably access the information presented. Where accessible formats are not available alternate means of representing the information that ensures equitable access should be provided.
- 2.9 Create communications guidelines for accessibility in all knowledge creation and sharing (e.g., documents, presentations, websites, social media, meetings, events, and conferences), which are shared internally and externally. These guidelines should be informed by evidence-based practices and the Information and Communications Accessibility Standards, once developed.

3. Goods and Services

Goal:

Students, employees and visitors with disabilities or others who experience barriers to accessibility have equitable access to goods and services provided by StFX.

Commitments:

- Develop and provide accessible customer service training for volunteers and employees.
- Provide customer service physical spaces that are conducive to positive accessible customer service experiences.
- Embed accessibility into procurement processes, including creating common accessibility language, accessibility requirements and criteria in tenders for goods and services purchased by StFX.
- Ensure services provided by StFX are accessible to persons with disabilities and others who experience barriers to accessibility, including accessible programs, services and supports; communication, supporting the use of assistive technology; accessible digital content and technologies; and welcoming services animals and support persons.

High Priority Initiatives:

- 3.1 Develop and deliver customer service training specifically to support the provision and delivery of accessible services at StFX. This training should be developed in collaboration with the Government and Nova Scotia and other post-secondary institutions and include customized customer service training specific to StFX.
- 3.2 Implement various assessment tools to evaluate the accessibility of existing customer service spaces on-campus. This should include identifying physical space improvements required to meet the provincial built environment standards and guidelines, once completed. Ensure services are accessible and welcoming to service animals and support persons.

- 3.3 Establish procedures for including persons with disabilities in the design, development, review and implementation of policies, practices, and services impacting faculty, staff, and students with disabilities, and Deaf and neurodivergent persons. These procedures must ensure:
- Persons with disabilities and individuals who experience barriers to accessibility are consulted in decision-making.
 - The implications of these policies, programs, and services on persons with disabilities, and Deaf and neurodivergent persons are prioritized.
 - These decisions are informed by a broad base of evidence-informed practices that prioritize first voice experience and expertise.
- 3.4 Review and revise the StFX Procurement Policy, integrating accessibility when updating procurement practices. Promote the new procurement policy, along with associated checklists for implementation as they are developed. The new policy should:
- Reflect StFX commitment to accessibility
 - Incorporate accessibility designs, criteria and features when procuring or acquiring both high-cost and low-cost goods or services.
 - Be reviewed annually and revised to reflect the Nova Scotia Accessibility Act and Accessibility Standards for Goods and Services, once developed.
- 3.5 Provide professional development and training to university finance and procurement teams on the relevance to accessibility to their work. Training should align with professional development delivered by Human Resources, and include additional training specific to finance and procurement.
- 3.6 Maintain the ongoing coordination of the StFX Student Accessibility Advisory Committee to provide leadership opportunities for students with disabilities and ensure that their voices and lived experiences are reflected in program and service design, development, and delivery.

- 3.7 Complete a needs assessment and recommendations for accessibility supports and services at StFX University, including services and supports available for students with temporary or episodic disabilities. Planning should include assessing staffing needs, funding structures, supervision, and accountability in relation to the goals outlined in the Accessibility Plan, new provincial accessibility standards, and the vision of ‘all students flourishing’ outlined in the StFX Student Experience and Opportunity Plan.
- 3.8 Embed equity and accessibility in the development and execution of special student-facing events and programming, such as Orientation Week, Homecoming, etc.
- 3.9 Create group mentoring networks for students from historically-excluded groups to come together in community, share experiences, explore, and access academic, personal and career opportunities and pathways. This includes Indigenous, Black, minoritized, 2SLGBTQIA+ students, international students, first-generation students, and students with disabilities.
- 3.10 Review existing co-curricular programs, services and supports through an EDIA lens to meet the needs of both specific and broad intersectional student identities, including Indigenous, Black, minoritized, 2SLGBTQIA+, international students, first-generation students, and students with disabilities.

Other Initiatives:

- 3.11 Integrate targeted co-curricular programming and engagement opportunities for students with disabilities, with a focus on enhancing the first-year experience and experiential learning.
- 3.12 Expand programming options for students with intellectual disabilities.

- 3.13 Map the stages of the procurement process and identify relevant decision-points where accessibility should be considered. Evaluate and improve processes for procuring and contracting accessibility services, to ensure timely completion and compensation for these services.
- 3.14 To support the Procurement Policy, develop accessibility checklists for those purchasing media, videos, marketing materials, software, hardware, web apps, general goods and services. The checklists should be:
- Accessible to all users, in addition to Procurement Office staff
 - Based on evidence-informed practices that are communicated through the purchase application process and RFPs
 - Aligned with the Nova Scotia Accessibility Act and Accessibility Standards for Goods and Services, once developed.

4. Employment

Goal:

StFX University is an accessible and equitable employer, supports the careers of employees with disabilities or others who experience barriers to accessibility, and ensures its employees reflect the diversity of Nova Scotians.

Commitments:

- Ensure processes, policies and practices facilitate and encourage the recruitment, selection, transition, career growth and advancement of persons with disabilities or others who experience barriers to accessibility.
- Build capacity among employees and senior leadership to cultivate a culture of inclusion and equity that supports, retains, and provides opportunities for career growth to employees with disabilities or others who experience barriers to accessibility.
- Ensure institutional policies and procedures provide inclusive, adaptable accommodations and accessible tools for employees with disabilities or others who experience barriers to accessibility and appropriate and supportive leave practices and return to work plans.

High Priority Initiatives:

- 4.1 Design, develop and implement regular and ongoing professional development programs in accessibility for StFX faculty, staff, and instructors. Training should:
- Include disability rights, inclusive education, ableism, barriers to participation, accessibility policies and resources provided by StFX.
 - Be provided as part of mandatory orientation requirements for new staff, faculty and instructors, as well as ongoing professional development.
 - Be updated regularly and informed by evidence that prioritizes first voice.
 - Complement equity and anti-racism training for faculty, staff, and instructors, to align with recommendations identified by the President's Action Committee on Anti-Racism.

- 4.2 Build capacity among senior leadership to cultivate a culture of equity and accessibility at StFX by ensuring all employee learning involves clear processes to support proactive accommodation and accessibility planning and implementation.
- 4.3 Review and identify gaps in employment-related policies, processes and practices that support equity, accessibility, and accommodation. When developing, reviewing, and implementing employment-related policies and procedures, StFX will ensure that:
- Persons with disabilities are consulted about these decisions.
 - These decisions are informed by a broad base of evidence-informed practice that prioritizes first voice experience and expertise.
- 4.4 Create a standardized mechanism for StFX University to collect and share disaggregated qualitative and quantitative data on accessibility barriers and their impacts on students, staff, and faculty with disabilities, and individuals who are Deaf and neurodivergent. Data should include:
- The well-being and achievement of students with disabilities, and Deaf and neurodivergent students.
 - Identified institutional barriers to accessibility and human rights complaints.
- 4.5 Ensure institutional policies and procedures provide accommodations and accessibility tools for employees with disabilities or others who experience barriers to accessibility; including appropriate and supportive leave practices, flexible work practices, and return to work plans.
- Develop and introduce an Employee Workplace Accommodations Policy and Return to Work Policy for employees who have been absent from work due to a disability and require accommodation to return to work.
- 4.6 Facilitate accessibility during recruitment, hiring and employee selection processes. This should include:
- Proactively providing information to all potential applicants about the availability of accessibility services and supports, and how to access them.

- When arranging specific accommodations, StFX will consult with the applicant to provide or arrange for the provision of suitable accommodations that meets their specific accessibility needs.
 - When making offers of employment StFX will notify successful applicants of the University's policies for accommodating employees with disabilities.
- 4.7 Create and maintain practices and procedures to support new employees with disabilities, and individuals who are Deaf and neurodivergent. This should include:
- Providing the information to new employees as soon as practical after they begin, including when changes to policies and procedures occur.
 - Consulting with the employee to provide the appropriate accommodations in a manner that recognizes the employee's accessibility needs.
- 4.8 Maintain ongoing partnerships between StFX Career Services and the Tramble Centre for Accessible Learning to provide students with disabilities with access to career mentorship, workplace connections and employability. Increase student engagement in the Engage, Develop, Grow Your Employability (EDGE) Program, and assess the impacts of the program on students with disabilities.
- 4.9 Provide staff, faculty, and instructors with disabilities, and individuals who are Deaf and neurodivergent with timely access to effective accessibility services and supportive assistive technology that meet their work-related needs. This means ensuring:
- Access to accessibility services and appropriate assistive technology that is proactive, flexible and responsive.
 - Accessibility barriers that impact a staff person's ability to fully participate in the workplace and to do their job is not impacted or delayed due to a delay or lack of access to these services and appropriate assistive technology.

Other Initiatives:

- 4.10 Increase the number of co-curricular engagement and paid employment opportunities available, with a particular focus on expanding employment opportunities for students from historically-excluded students, including Indigenous, Black, minoritized, international, first-generation students and students with disabilities. This should include:
- Identifying, removing, and preventing barriers to accessing current paid employment opportunities for students with disabilities, including internship and co-op placements.
- 4.11 Develop a guide to support managers' capacity to implement accessible employment practices in collaboration with first-voice perspectives.
- 4.12 Communicate the progress of the development of the Province of Nova Scotia Accessible Employment Standard and its future application to the university community.

5. Transportation

Goal:

Transportation provided to employees and students is accessible

Commitments:

- Collaborate with local municipalities, the Nova Scotia Community Transportation Network, and community transit service providers to ensure accessible, affordable, public transportation to and from campuses, including bus stop infrastructure, sidewalks, and signage.
- Ensure accessible parking (that meets a standard such as CSA Group, Rick Hansen Foundation, or provincial built environment standard, when developed) on campuses is available students, employees and visitors with disabilities or others who experience barriers to accessibility.

High Priority Initiatives:

- 5.1 Develop and deliver accessibility training and professional development to departments responsible for built environment/transportation. Training should align with professional development delivered by Human Resources, and include additional training specific to transportation.
- 5.2 Develop a Campus Master Plan, including accessibility standards. Ensure updates and revision to StFX Campus Master Plan include:
 - Comprehensive landscape planning, incorporating accessibility.
 - Increase to the number of trash cans in high-traffic pathways.
 - Upgrades to outdoor lighting.
 - Updates to pathways, including slopes, sidewalks, roadways, and entrances.
- 5.3 Review and update existing processes and procedures from an accessibility lens and better support persons with disabilities during temporary access disruptions. This should include temporary building and weather-related disruptions (procedures for snow removal, communication regarding projects and other unplanned events with accessibility impacts).

Other Initiatives:

- 5.4 Develop and execute a project to ensure accessible signage and wayfinding, specific to transportation on StFX campus.
- Ensure accessible wayfinding is incorporated into the Campus Master Plan and reflects the provincial Built Environment Accessibility Standards, once developed.
- 5.5 Collaborate with the Town and County of Antigonish and community transit service providers to ensure accessible, affordable public transportation to and from campus.
- 5.6 Develop a multi-year budget and annual allocation process for continuing to advance and improve accessible transportation initiatives on-campus. This would include:
- Development of a funding program.
 - Development of signature joint projects.
 - Allocation of additional funding through existing sources such as facilities renewal, new strategic initiative funding, loan and grant program, or capital campaigns.

6. Built Environment

Goal:

Buildings and outdoor spaces on StFX University campus provide meaningful access for intended users.

Commitments:

- Develop recommendations for common priority areas (i.e., building features, phases) in which to identify, prevent and remove barriers to accessibility.
- Collaborate with local municipalities to integrate accessibility of municipal and post-secondary infrastructure.
- Establish and implement processes to ensure accessibility during temporary disruptions with building infrastructure and outdoor spaces, such as construction or seasonal related elements (e.g., snow removal).
- Ensure all emergency evacuation systems, policies, procedures, communications, and training enable the safe and efficient evacuation of persons with disabilities or others who experience barriers to accessibility during an emergency.
- Seek a partnership with government to develop a system-wide cost assessment

High Priority Initiatives:

- 6.1 Develop a comprehensive consultation process and best practices for engaging persons with disabilities decision-making related to the in planning, design and implementation of new construction and major renovations.
- 6.2 Establish a Built Environment Working Group to review the StFX Accessibility Audit and establish a process for phasing improvements to the built environment.
 - Working Group membership should include persons with lived experiences of disabilities and individuals who experience barriers to accessibility on campus, as well as the relevant service providers.
 - Members will advise the StFX Accessibility Advisory Committee on progress where decisions are required.

- 6.3 Develop a strategy for Accessibility Plan implementation and funding, including a multi-year budget and annual allocation for built environment initiatives.
- 6.4 Develop a common reporting tool, in collaboration with other post-secondary institutions, for facilities management employees to track and report progress on improving accessibility as part of StFX's accessibility planning process. Integrate the Provincial Built Environment Accessibility Standard into this tool, when developed.
- 6.5 Streamline the accommodations process and develop a communications strategy to ensure that persons with disabilities, including individuals who experience temporary or episodic disabilities, are aware of the services and supports available and how to access them.
- 6.6 Ensure all emergency evacuation systems, policies, procedures, communications, and training enable the safe and efficient evacuation of persons with disabilities and others who experience barriers to accessibility during an emergency. Documents must be created and made available in accessible formats.

Other Initiatives:

- 6.7 Adopt Provincial Built Environment Accessibility Standards to ensure meaningful access to existing buildings, new construction, and major renovations, aiming to exceed them when feasible. New construction will be considered an opportunity to exceed minimum accessibility standards; for example, by meeting Rick Hansen Foundation Gold Rating.
- 6.8 Develop and utilize a common accessibility auditing tool to assess the accessibility of campus buildings and outdoor spaces. The tool should be developed in collaboration with the Built Environment Working Group, including first-voice perspectives. Integrate the Provincial Built Environment Accessibility Standard into this tool, when developed.

- 6.9 Implement a process for ongoing built environment audits to assess accessibility improvements. Continue carrying out building and campus-wide accessibility audits through the Facilities Management team to understand the accessibility improvements that should be made to each site. Use the results to identify, prevent and remove barriers to accessibility for common priority areas.
- 6.10 Develop a response plan, process, and funding plan for additional accessibility enhancements and requests.



Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation

Listening to and acting upon feedback is an integral part of the evaluation process. StFX will regularly monitor progress to remove barriers to accessibility, evaluate the impact on students and employees, and continue to identify opportunities to improve access.

As an immediate next step, an Accountability Framework for all initiatives has been developed. For each initiative, a leader in the University that will be responsible for its implementation; a metric or key performance indicator (KPI) to measure its progress; and activities that have occurred or are occurring in the University in response to it. Those tasked with implementation will have authority to define accountabilities, resource requirements, and will be responsible for tracking their progress. Additional monitoring and evaluation efforts will include:

- Establishing an Accessibility Implementation Working Group, to provide oversight to the implementation of the initiatives identified in the StFX Accessibility Plan and guidance to the departments accountable for implementation.
- Ensure the commitments outlined in this plan are reflected and operationalized as required of public sector bodies under the Accessibility Act.
- Review standards from the province as they are released and determine if updates to the plan are needed as a result.
- Ensure alignment of the Accessibility Plan and other strategic planning efforts at StFX University including, but not limited to, policies, practices and initiatives related to equity, diversity, discrimination, and harassment. Ensure policies, practices and initiatives include explicit reference to ableism and disability.



- Develop a common monitoring tool and evaluation framework to regularly assess and report on progress towards meeting the commitments outlined in this Plan.
- Review this Plan every three years and update as required.
- Seek adequate funding from the provincial government above the regular operating grants for Nova Scotia's post-secondary institutions to implement the commitments under this Plan, recognizing the significant additional costs of implementing aspects of this framework and meeting the requirements of the Accessibility Act.

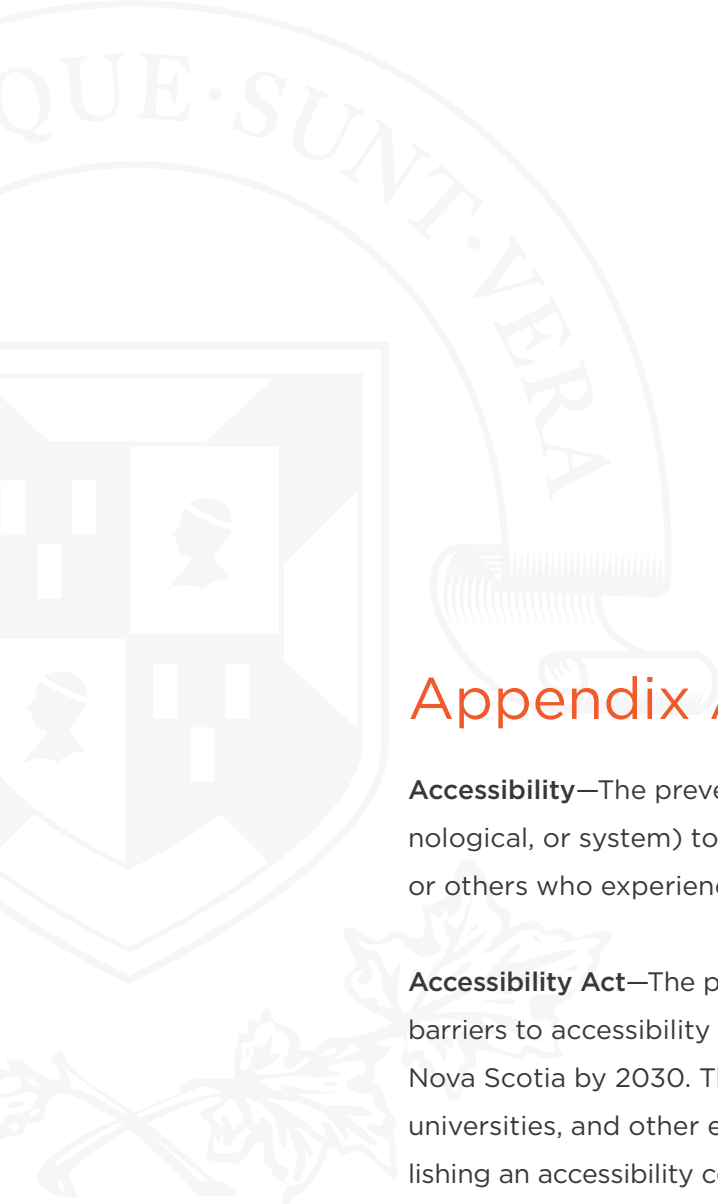
Frequent reporting (e.g., on a quarterly or biannual basis) is proposed at the onset of the implementation to identify and address any critical issues or barriers that could impede the implementation of the recommendations and the success of the overall initiative. As the initiative progresses, annual reports may suffice. These reports and updates should be provided and discussed at the University's governing tables (e.g., Board of Governors, Senate, Executive Council), with the intention of reviewing progress, mitigating identified risks, and celebrating successes. To improve transparency and ensure accountability, these updates should also be made available to the University community. The community should be given the opportunity to provide feedback on the progress made on the recommendations to facilitate continuous learning and improvement.

Appendices

[Appendix A: Glossary of Terms](#)

[Appendix B: Accessibility Advisory Committee Membership](#)





Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

Accessibility—The prevention and removal of barriers (physical, attitudinal, technological, or system) to allow equitable participation for persons with disabilities or others who experience barriers to accessibility.

Accessibility Act—The provincial legislation enacted in 2017 to prevent and remove barriers to accessibility for people with disabilities. It has a goal of an accessible Nova Scotia by 2030. The Act outlines some responsibilities for municipalities, universities, and other entities, including developing accessibility plans and establishing an accessibility committee. It allows Government to develop and implement standards (regulations) in education, the built environment, the delivery and receipt of goods and services, transportation, information and communication, and employment.

Accessible Employer—Reducing and preventing barriers in hiring, retaining, career development and advancement for employees, and addressing employee needs with individualized, flexible accommodations.

Accessible Customer Service—Ensuring all persons have the same opportunity to seek, obtain, use or benefit from the service. Accessible services are easy for all people to use, interact with, and understand.

Barrier—Anything that hinders or challenges the full and effective participation in society. Barriers can be physical, attitudinal, technological, or systemic (policy or practice). Accessibility barriers may be related to areas such as employment, ed-



ucation, the built environment, transportation, the delivery and receipt of goods and services, or information and communications.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP)—A teaching method that acknowledges the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and frames of reference of students and uses it to make learning more relevant and effective. It ensures that students from diverse cultures have equitable opportunities and supports for success within school systems and that design is reflected in pedagogy, not just additional targeted services.

Deaf—A sociological term referring to those individuals who are medically deaf or hard of hearing who identify with and participate in the culture, society, and language of Deaf people, which is based on Sign language.⁴

Disability—A physical, mental, intellectual, learning or sensory impairment, including an episodic disability, that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders an individual's full and effective participation in society.⁵

Employees—Administration, faculty, and staff employed at a post-secondary institution.

Equity/ Equitable—Equity is fair treatment of individuals, acknowledging and making provisions for their differences by ensuring that employment and educational processes are free from systemic barriers. Equity does not mean ignoring differences and treating everyone the same. Instead, it means recognizing and valuing differences, removing systemic barriers and accommodating individual differences, as needed.

⁴ Canadian Association of the Deaf.

⁵ Nova Scotia Accessibility Act

First Voice—First voice perspectives generally refer to the knowledge generated by persons with disabilities and others who experience barriers to accessibility that emerges from lived experience, community connections, knowledge traditions, and scholarly activities that are typically under-valued and under-represented.

Inclusive—The process of improving the terms of participation in society, particularly for individuals or groups of individuals who are disadvantaged or under-represented, through enhancing opportunities, access to resources, voice and respect for rights. This creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust, fights exclusion and marginalization and offers the opportunity of upward mobility and results in increased social cohesion.

Meaningful access—When referring to the built environment, meaningful access is the intent to meet the needs of all users of a site (a building or outdoor space) regardless of their ability. It means that not only individual features of a site, such as an entrance or washroom, must be accessible, but the entire experience throughout.

Neurodivergent—Neurodivergent means having a brain that functions in ways that diverge significantly from the dominant societal standards of “normal”. It recognizes diverse neurologies and ways of being, as variation of human experience, rather than deficiency in need of remediation or cure. It includes individuals who identify with autism spectrum disorder, ADHD, Tourette’s syndrome, and dyslexia, to name a few.⁶

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)—An educational approach to designing instructional goals, assessments, methods and materials, and policies that work for a diversity of learners. It employs flexible approaches that can be customized and adjusted for individual student needs.

⁶ Scorgie, K. and Forlin, C. (2019). Promoting Social Inclusion: Co-Creating Environments that Foster Equity and Belonging, p. 153.



Appendix B: Accessibility Advisory Committee Membership

StFX Accessibility Advisory Committee

Andrew Beckett, Chair—Vice-President, Finance and Administration,
StFX University

Ainslie Murray—Student, Bachelor of Arts, StFX University

Amanda Casey—Associate Professor, Human Kinetics, StFX University

Elizabeth Kell—Coordinator, Tramble Centre for Accessible Learning,
StFX University

Jeana Sugrue—Student, Bachelor of Arts, StFX University

Kevin Benjamin—Manager of Facilities, Ancillary Services, StFX University

Leon MacLellan—Director, Facilities Management, StFX University

Rachel Todd—Residence Life Coordinator, Residence Life, StFX University

Rita Murray—Community Representative

Shafik Nanji—Instructional Designer/Online Specialist, Continuing Studies,
StFX University

Amylee Day—Student, Bachelor of Science, StFX University

Margaret McKinnon—Director, Health, Counselling, and Accessible Learning,
StFX University

Steven Estey—Community Representative



StFX Student Accessibility Advisory Committee

Colleen Smereka—Disability Resource Facilitator, Tramble Centre for Accessible Learning (Co-Chair)

Eilidh Stewart-Arsenault—Bachelor of Science with Major, StFX University

Elizabeth Abler—Bachelor of Arts with Major, StFX University

Jada Totten—Bachelor of Education (Elementary), StFX University

Jordyn Conn—Bachelor of Arts with Major, StFX University

Maëlle Weber—Women & Gender Studies, StFX University

Mary Anne Melanson—Master of Adult Education, StFX University

Mikayla Luchlow—Bachelor of Education (Secondary), StFX University

Sydney Chambers—Bachelor of Arts with Major (AQUA), StFX University