NATIONAL SECURITY AND INTELLIGENCE REVIEW AGENCY SECRETARIAT

Accessibility Plan – Second Progress Report

December 2024

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In accordance with the *Accessible Canada Act* (ACA), I am pleased to publish the National Security and Intelligence Review Agency Secretariat (NSIRA Secretariat)'s second progress report for its Accessibility Plan 2022 – 2025. This progress report describes the work that has been done to implement activities over the course of 2024.[1]

Our commitment to creating an inclusive environment is reflected in our ongoing work to remove barriers and respond proactively to feedback. This dedication is also embedded in our institutional Vision, Mission, and Values statement adopted in 2024, which underscores inclusiveness as a core value. This year, we have made a number of improvements towards integrating accessibility as a core component of our operations.

Key changes include the incorporation of accessibility principles into the Rules of Procedure, explicitly providing for participants in investigations to request accommodations and receive procedural support through the Registrar. We also updated our branding to meet accessibility standards, including our website, promotional materials and recruitment resources.

Ensuring that the organization is accessible by design requires continued attention. In 2025 we will not only continue our efforts, but also prepare for a new accessibility plan. The goal is to complete what we started in 2022 and seek opportunities to build on our success. I look forward to continuing our progress together.

Charles Fugère
Executive Director, NSIRA Secretariat

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[1] In this report, references to 2024 mean the period starting January 1 and ending December 31, 2024.

GENERAL

The Executive Director of the NSIRA Secretariat, who is the deputy head and employer, leads the Secretariat that supports the Review Agency in the fulfillment of its mandate under the *National Security and Intelligence Review Agency Act*. The Secretariat is responsible for monitoring feedback, evaluating progress and establishing its future accessibility plans.

In compliance with the requirements of the ACA and the *Accessible Canada Regulations*, this progress report is available on NSIRA's website, which is used to communicate with the public.

To request a copy of this or our previous progress report, the accessibility plan, or a description of the feedback process in an alternate format[2] or to provide feedback about our progress report(s), the accessibility plan and any barriers encountered in dealing with NSIRA, please contact the NSIRA Secretariat by mail, telephone, or email at:

National Security and Intelligence Review Agency Secretariat
P.O. Box 2430, Station "B"
Ottawa, Ontario, K1P 5W5

Telephone: 1-833-890-0293

Email: info@nsira-ossnr.gc.ca

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[2] Alternate formats include print, large print, Braille, audio format or an electronic format that is compatible with adaptive technology that is intended to assist persons with disabilities.

INTRODUCTION

The National Security and Intelligence Review Agency Secretariat published its Accessibility Plan 2022 – 2025 in December 2022 and its first progress report in December 2023. This second progress report describes the work that has been done to implement activities between January 1 and December 31, 2024.

The Accessibility Plan 2022 – 2025 set out three priority areas to improve accessibility:

1. Increasing staff awareness about accessibility and the barriers that limit access for Canadians with disabilities.

2. Ensuring Canadians have access to NSIRA's publications and services.

3. Continuing to advance a culture of respect and inclusion by integrating accessibility in all aspects of the organization's work.

Through the efforts of the Senior Advisor, Wellness Initiatives, the NSIRA Secretariat can monitor progress, identify areas for improvement, and ensure overall coherence across the activities outlined in the accessibility plan.

Progress with respect to the priority areas and the accessibility plan is set out on the following pages. It is organized according to the seven key areas outlined in the ACA namely: employment; built environment; information and communication technologies (ICT); communication other than ICT; procurement of goods, services, and facilities; design and delivery of programs and services; and transportation.

The NSIRA Secretariat does not have ultimate control over certain fundamental aspects related to the built environment, technology or security and must, therefore, adjust its pace to align with the direction given by the responsible policy centres. Despite these constraints, the NSIRA Secretariat was able to make advances on several fronts.

PROGRESS VIS-À-VIS ACCESSIBLITY PLAN

1. Employment

While developing the accessibility plan in 2022, the NSIRA Secretariat identified gaps with respect to employment. There was no written accommodation process for persons with disabilities employed in the NSIRA Secretariat. Furthermore, there was limited material available about accessibility requirements, resources, and information.

Status: On track

The NSIRA Secretariat was able to make advances in relation to many of the priorities with respect to employment in the last year. The Director, Human Resources Services, and the Senior Advisor, Wellness Initiatives, worked together on 14 specific cases in 2024, to ensure that employees received accommodations to enable them to participate fully in all aspects of their work experience. Additionally, progress was made in the following areas;

Training and Capacity Building on Accessibility

Human resources (HR) employees responsible for accessibility attended training on the Government of Canada Workplace Accessibility Passport (the Passport); a tool that helps federal public service employees with disabilities access the supports they need to excel at work. This training improved their foundational skills in accessibility, enabling them to offer higher-quality advice and guidance to managers and employees. To further promote accessible and inclusive communication, all HR staff completed "Accessible Documents" training, enhancing their ability to communicate effectively with candidates and employees regarding staffing and other HR matters. Additionally, a training video on "Making Documents Accessible" was added to the new mandatory training guides.

Resources and Support Initiatives

An Accessibility Resource Centre was launched and published on the NSIRA Secretariat's intranet. This centre offers "How to" guides, training, and information on the Passport, accessible communications and technology, making key resources easily accessible to all staff. To promote the Passport, all newly hired employees were introduced to it during their onboarding and orientation sessions, ensuring awareness of this important accessibility tool. Managers and employees were regularly encouraged to make use of the Passport.

Accessibility in Recruitment and Staffing

The NSIRA Secretariat continued to take steps to ensure accessibility in its recruitment process. All recruitment and staffing materials, including communications with candidates at all hiring stages, included information about accommodations and accessibility. For example, interview invitations and written exam notices clearly stated that accommodations are available upon request. A centralized accommodation process, managed by the Senior Advisor, Wellness Initiatives, was developed to protect the candidates' privacy consistent with the "need to know" principle for handling personal information. Additionally, a "Fact Sheet on Inclusive Recruitment" was provided to managers to support bias-free hiring. A feedback questionnaire was also developed and distributed to candidates requesting accommodations during the selection processes, helping the HR team to assess the effectiveness of these measures.

Promoting Accessibility Awareness

The NSIRA Secretariat promoted accessibility awareness among staff and managers. Accessibility-related training, tools and events were regularly shared with subject-matter experts and staff as appropriate. For example, a session on "Understanding Digital Accessibility and Disability Inclusion" was shared with information technology experts, while a session on accessible procurement was shared with procurement specialists. A "Quick Guide on Accessible Documents" was also developed and shared with managers, and tailored sessions were made available to entire teams. National AccessAbility Week was promoted for the second consecutive year, highlighted by an internal session entitled "Accommodations at NSIRA".

Collaboration and Consultation

To ensure accessible internal digital training, the NSIRA Secretariat consulted Shared Services Canada (SSC)'s Accessibility, Accommodation, and Adaptive Computer Technology (AAACT[3]) program for feedback on accessible tools. This step supported the ongoing development of a fully accessible digital training program within the Secretariat.

Representation Data and Self-ID Initiatives

As noted in its previous progress report, the NSIRA Secretariat launched a new Self-ID Questionnaire in 2023, which is completed by all new hired term

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[3] The AAACT program supports an inclusive, barrier-free public service by providing adaptive technologies, training and accessible digital solutions, helping departments create inclusive content and workplaces while enabling employees with disabilities or injuries to thrive.

and indeterminate employees. Data for 2024 indicated that 17.5% of the NSIRA Secretariat's workforce identified as persons with disabilities. Additionally, the data revealed that 16% of newly hired employees self-identified as having a disability. The NSIRA Secretariat continues to make progress in increasing the overall representation of persons with disabilities within the organization in keeping with the Vision, Mission and Values statement adopted during the reporting period, and in particular the Value of Inclusiveness.

2. Built Environment

The accessibility plan identified barriers in the built environment including heavy doors without automatic door openers; airlocks between doors; tripping hazards; narrow corridors; lack of accessible signage; restrictions with respect to assistive devices and job aids; an emergency alert system that flashes lights but does not emit an audible alarm; lack of control over lighting or temperature within the office space; and an outdated building emergency evacuation plan. Some of the barriers were tied to physical security requirements of the Treasury Board Policy on Government Security and other policies that apply to the NSIRA Secretariat.

Status: Ongoing

The NSIRA Secretariat made some progress incorporating accessibility requirements in the built environment. An ongoing challenge is that the NSIRA Secretariat's built environment is subject to standards established by Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) and the Communications Security Establishment (CSE). The following provides additional detail about progress in respect of the built environment:

Accessibility in Construction and Design

The NSIRA Secretariat engaged with CSE to gather information on accessibility considerations for the construction of the NSIRA Secretariat's new office, ensuring that accessibility was a key component of infrastructure planning and design.

Several adjustments were made to the new office location to enhance accessibility, despite the design being completed before the ACA came into force. These included ergonomic adjustments and adaptive equipment setup supported by the Senior Advisor, Wellness Initiatives, which was well-received by employees and will continue as an ongoing initiative.

Addressing Physical and Mobility Barriers

Heavy doors, identified as a barrier for persons with mobility challenges, were repaired to ensure the proper functioning of automatic door openers, significantly improving accessibility and ease of use.

Accessible Communication and Signage

As noted above, in some areas the NSIRA Secretariat does not operate on its own. Considerable work was undertaken to establish a process for ordering Braille signage before the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (TBS) advised that it would be providing guidance on the use of signage for the public service once Accessible Standards Canada finalizes its standards. It is anticipated that Accessible Standards Canada will finalize the standards on accessible signage and wayfinding sometime in 2025.

Enhanced Visual and Cognitive Accessibility

In response to barriers caused by the existing alarm lighting system for individuals with visual and cognitive impairments, the NSIRA Secretariat opted to replace continuous flashing lights with LED alternatives, providing a more inclusive and manageable alert system.

Supportive Security Processes for Assistive Devices

Recognizing the need to streamline security processes for assistive devices, the Security Team developed a list of pre-approved electronics, such as hearing aids and heart monitors, expediting their approval for workplace entry and enhancing employee support.

3.   Information and Communication Technologies

The accessibility plan identified barriers with respect to information and communication technologies (ICT), notably that neither the intranet website, nor the internet website were fully accessible. Documents on both websites were not designed with accessibility in mind. Individuals bringing a complaint did not have the option to bring a complaint through any means other than by completing a templated form and persons with a hearing impairment had limited options for engaging with the Registrar.

Status: Ongoing

Much of the NSIRA Secretariat's Information Management (IM) and Information Technology (IT) teams' work in 2024 was focussed on the launch of a new institutional electronic document and records management

system. Despite operating with slightly reduced staff levels, progress was made in the following areas:

Document Accessibility and WCAG Compliance

The NSIRA Secretariat reviewed and modified previously published documents, including fillable forms, to ensure compliance with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 standards. This served to enhance digital accessibility across all published materials.

IT Accessibility Partnerships and Interim Solutions

The NSIRA Secretariat leverages IT services provided by other government institutions, which operate under distinct service models managed through formal, non-binding agreements. While these service models present inherent challenges in adapting to specific accessibility needs due to their structure and limitations, the NSIRA Secretariat engaged both providers informally to address accessibility gaps. As a result, some interim accessibility solutions were successfully implemented (such as expediting equipment and technology requests for adaptive tools), while efforts continue to identify and implement further measures, reflecting a commitment to improving IT accessibility within the current constraints.

Accessibility Resource Centre

As previously mentioned, the NSIRA Secretariat launched an online Accessibility Resource Centre, creating a dedicated space for Accessible Technology. This centre provides employees with access to adaptive tools and programs available, promoting awareness and use of supportive technology to foster inclusivity in the workplace.

Accessibility-Focused Training for IM and IT Teams

Training guides for IM and IT teams were reviewed and updated to include several accessibility-related courses. These additions, including sessions developed by Government of Canada programs specializing in digital accessibility (such as the AAACT program), reinforce the NSIRA Secretariat's commitment to building digital accessibility expertise within its workforce.

Assessment of Digital Complaints Portal Feasibility

In the past year, a feasibility study was undertaken to evaluate the development of a web-based complaints portal aimed at digitizing the complaints process and enhancing accessibility. However, the study identified several significant constraints early on, including financial limitations, technical challenges associated with the organization's current IT

infrastructure, and privacy and security concerns. As a result, the initiative was postponed indefinitely. The NSIRA Secretariat remains committed to exploring alternative approaches to improve accessibility and enhance user experiences within the complaints process while addressing these challenges.

4.   Communications other than ICT

The accessibility plan aimed to address several barriers with respect to communication for staff and members of the public, including the absence of a process to provide alternate formats and communication support upon request. Other barriers included technical or sector-specific language in public facing documents and reports, as well as the lack of guidance or established procedures for use of closed captioning, sign language interpretation or teletypewriters for persons with a hearing disability.

Status: Ongoing

The NSIRA Secretariat finalized its recruitment process to hire a Communications Writer/Editor and a Senior Communications Advisor in November 2024. Both employees are expected to be on board in early 2025. Their responsibilities will include implementing a communications strategy and continuing to implement the communications activities identified in the Accessibility Plan 2022-2025. In addition, progress was made in the following areas in 2024:

Accessible Review Reports

Review reports are a critical mechanism through which the Review Agency fulfills its mission to serve Canadians by independently reviewing national security or intelligence activities. Significant effort was undertaken to update the NSIRA Secretariat's style guide and template for drafting review reports, to incorporate comprehensive accessibility guidelines and ensure all reports produced on behalf of the Review Agency meet high accessibility standards. These updates are expected to be available for internal consultation by the end of 2024, with final approval anticipated in 2025. In the interim, other internal review policies have been revised to reflect accessibility guidelines. These resources have been shared internally and are already in use.

Accessible Publication Formats and Online Presence

Reports published on behalf of the Review Agency by the NSIRA Secretariat in 2024 were made available in both HTML and PDF format, with alt text

included for all graphics and images to improve accessibility. Alt text was also integrated into posts on X and LinkedIn, ensuring inclusive and accessible online engagement. Additionally, and as previously mentioned, the NSIRA Secretariat's Webmaster worked to ensure all previously published materials, including publications and reports, met WCAG 2.1 compliance. To further accessibility, a statement was added to the Accessibility Notice on our public website, inviting users to contact us to report any barriers encountered while using our website or to request information in an alternative format.

Accessibility Guidelines for Events

Administrative staff received detailed guidelines for planning and hosting accessible events, both virtual and in-person. The guidelines emphasize making accessibility a default consideration and include a requirement for all event and meeting invitations to identify a dedicated Accessibility Contact for individuals to communicate specific needs, fostering a more inclusive experience.

Accessible Communications Support

The NSIRA Secretariat established processes to access accessible communications resources as needed. This includes, among other things, leveraging PSPC's Translation Bureau for sign language interpretation and arranging for Braille printing, ensuring that both internal and external communications can be tailored to meet diverse accessibility needs.

Accessible Branding and Promotional Materials

Efforts to improve accessibility in branding have led to several changes, including a new color scheme for better readability and an updated standardized email signature that aligns with accessibility standards. Additionally, HR-related promotional materials used at job fairs – such as business cards, banners and other items – were redesigned to increase accessibility, demonstrating a commitment to engaging with a broad cross-section of individuals and recruiting a diverse workforce.

5.   Procurement of Goods, Services and Facilities

Although no barriers were identified with respect to the procurement of goods, services and facilities, the accessibility plan nevertheless noted that improvements could be made to ensure "accessibility by design" in procurement practices.

Status: Ongoing

In July 2024, the NSIRA Secretariat's Finance & Procurement team welcomed a new Procurement Team Leader, who introduced a structured approach with a dedicated focus on accessibility in procurement. Progress was made in the following areas:

Training and Capacity Building

Training resources were provided to cost centre managers to support the integration of accessibility considerations into procurement processes and practices. This training ensured that managers are equipped with the necessary knowledge to incorporate accessibility into all stages of procurement, promoting inclusivity in the acquisition of goods and services.

Enhanced Accessibility Training for Leadership

The procurement management team attended specialized training focused on accessibility in procurement. This training enhanced their understanding of accessible procurement requirements and strengthened their capacity to lead inclusive procurement practices within the NSIRA Secretariat.

Accessibility-Driven Procurement Practices

Accessibility remains a central focus in all ongoing procurement activities. Work began to review practices to ensure compliance with accessibility principles and incorporate standard accessibility requirements into procurement practices.

6.   Design and Delivery of Programs and Services

An important part of the Review Agency's mandate is to investigate complaints related to activities carried out by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, the CSE, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) if the complaint is closely related to national security, as well as complaints related to the denial or revocation of security clearances, and other matters under its purview. Ensuring that Canadians with disabilities can participate fully in these processes is integral to the investigations, however when the NSIRA Secretariat's Accessibility Plan 2022 – 2025 was published, Rules of Procedure did not clarify accessibility options to accommodate the needs of persons with disabilities, while also complying with the necessary security requirements.

Status: Ongoing

As the work began to address the barriers identified with respect to the Review Agency's investigation mandate, it became clear that accessibility is

contingent primarily on the built environment. The accessibility plan reported barriers such as heavy doors without automatic door openers. This included the hearing room where investigative proceedings are held. Tripping hazards and restrictions with respect to assistive devices were also noted, among other concerns.

Similarly, progress around programs and services is inextricably linked to the barriers with respect to ICT. For the complaint investigation process, this included the internet website, which was not fully accessible, and lack of clarity for persons with a hearing impairment to engage with the Registrar.

The new internet website includes a more user-friendly interface that meets WCAG standards. Complainants can more easily navigate to the information and forms they need to bring a complaint. The complaint forms themselves have been redesigned to be more accessible. Additionally, the following activities were underway in 2024:

Commitment to Accessibility in NSIRA's Rules of Procedure

A new section was drafted for the Rules of Procedure to reflect a commitment to ensuring accessibility. This progress aligns with continuing efforts to incorporate accessibility requirements within the built environment, demonstrating a comprehensive approach to creating an inclusive and accessible operational framework.

Case-by-Case Accessibility Arrangements

Amendments to the Rules of Procedure now clarify that investigation participants may request and access alternate arrangements tailored to their specific accessibility needs. This flexible approach ensures that participants can fully engage in investigative proceedings with the necessary accommodations, enhancing inclusivity and equitable participation.

Notification of Accessibility Needs

The revised Rules of Procedure specify that the Registrar must be notified of any barriers encountered by, or accessibility requirements of, participants. This provision ensures that accessibility needs are proactively addressed, fostering a supportive environment for all individuals engaging with the Review Agency and in turn promoting access to justice.

Procedural Assistance for Complainants

The revised Rules of Procedure now clarify that individuals wishing to bring forward a complaint are entitled to procedural assistance from the Registrar

if they encounter barriers. This includes support for individuals with cognitive disabilities who may require assistance in articulating their complaints or allegations, promoting access for a diverse range of disabilities.

7.   Transportation

The NSIRA Secretariat did not identify any barriers or develop an action plan with respect to this element.

Although specific actions were not identified, it is worth noting that the NSIRA Secretariat's offices are in Ottawa, where employees and members of the public may use various modes of transportation to reach the work sites. Accessible transportation services are provided by OC Transpo in Ottawa and by the Société de Transport de l'Outaouais in Gatineau. Individuals who use their personal vehicles may park in designated spots available at nearby lots. Information is provided to new hires about designated parking spaces.

CONSULTATIONS

The ACA requires consultations with persons with disabilities in preparing progress reports. The activities outlined in the accessibility plan for completion or launch in the second year aimed to improve accessibility for the workforce and in the workplace.

Thanks to the introduction of a Self-Identification Questionnaire, employees who identified as a person with a disability were specifically invited to provide insight. Additionally, all staff were offered an opportunity to share their feedback on the implementation of the Accessibility Plan, regardless of self-identification. Members of the Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Committee were also invited to share their perspectives on progress, barriers and potential solutions. This approach enabled the NSIRA Secretariat to gather diverse insights and first-hand experiences, fostering a better understanding of the steps taken and actions still needed to create a more inclusive and accessible organization.

FEEDBACK

General feedback from employees

A key highlight from the feedback was the significant reduction of accessibility barriers for employees with cognitive needs through improvements in IM and IT – a meaningful step forward in fostering an inclusive and accessible work environment.

The feedback also underscored a need to update existing PowerPoint templates, which were based on an outdated website and not fully accessible. The issue has since been resolved, as detailed in the "Communication other than ICT" section of this report, with the NSIRA Secretariat's branding now fully aligned with accessibility standards. Additionally, concerns were raised regarding the lack of adequate sound equipment in collaborative spaces used for large informal gatherings, which previously made it difficult for some to hear speakers. This barrier has been addressed through the purchase of a portable microphone and speaker combination, enhancing the accessibility of these spaces and ensuring inclusive participation in future gatherings.

Feedback from employees and external applicants about accommodations

Feedback on the accommodations process and its integration into the staffing process indicated that employees feel their accommodations are provided within a reasonable timeframe and that the solutions effectively meet their needs. Notably, no recommendations for improvement were suggested.

Feedback from the public

No feedback was received from members of the public about the accessibility plan during the year under review.

The NSIRA Secretariat will continue to welcome feedback in the coming year.