



Cariboo Regional District

Accessibility Plan

September 2023





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Territorial Acknowledgement

The Cariboo Regional District acknowledges that it is situated on the traditional and unceded territory of the Dakelh, Tsilhqot'in, Secwepemc First Nations.

Acknowledgement of Key Contributors

The CRD thanks everyone who contributed to the development of this plan, including members of its Accessibility Advisory Committee, Disability Alliance BC, the Province of British Columbia, and the Local Government Management Association of British Columbia.



Executive Summary

The Cariboo Regional District is committed to building an accessibility plan that identifies not only the most apparent accessibility issues, but also those barriers which are far too often overlooked. Having struck our accessibility committee and developed the Plan, staff at the CRD will look to continue this momentum, setting goals and priorities to increase accessibility and remove barriers at all levels of the regional district across all services we proudly provide to our residents.

Introduction

About Us

The Cariboo Regional District (CRD) is a regional government which delivers services to regional residents in remote, rural, and urban areas. Our services include solid waste management, land use planning, development regulation, emergency management, fire protection, recreation, libraries, and utility systems. The region is divided into 12 electoral areas and 4 municipalities – Quesnel, Williams Lake, 100 Mile House and Wells. The region's population was 62,931 as of the 2021 Census.

Our Accessibility Story

Our previous accessibility initiatives include the following projects:

- Universally accessible wilderness trails – in 2006, the CRD board passed a resolution committing to developing the Cariboo-Chilcotin as a world leader in accessible outdoor recreation through the development of low mobility trails. The CRD has developed 28 accessible trails in various wilderness locations throughout the region.
- CRD-owned facilities are designed to meet BC Building Code requirements as renovations occur, including accessibility requirements.

CRD libraries are participating in the Accessible Reading BC pilot project which gives access to an accessible collection of BC-published eBooks hosted on the National Network for Equitable Library Service platform.

Guiding Framework

This Accessibility Plan seeks to address accessibility challenges and barriers that prevent our community members from fully participating in and taking advantage of the services of the Cariboo Regional District. The plan will address accessibility standards relevant to our operations, specifically: employment, service delivery, built environment, information and communications, and procurement.

The development of the plan will comply with the *Accessible B.C. Act* and its principles of inclusivity, adaptability, diversity, collaboration, self-determination, and universal design.

The plan will also attempt to build upon and incorporate the accessibility work and policies already implemented within the organization. For instance, the CRD policies regarding website style, email subscriptions, and public hearing posting standards consider the accessibility concerns of people with visual impairments. The CRD has been diligently keeping to the accessibility guidelines of the BC Building Code in all its infrastructure and recreational projects.

Our goal is to create a framework to identify and eliminate barriers to accessibility.



About Our Committee

Mandate and Purpose

The *Accessible B.C. Act* mandates numerous public sector organizations to complete the following actions by September 1, 2023:

1. Establish an accessibility committee,
2. Develop an accessibility plan, and
3. Create a public feedback tool.

Each of these actions must be completed by September 1, 2023 in order to meet legal requirements under the Act.

The purpose of our Accessibility Committee is to make recommendations on the development and implementation of the Accessibility Plan in alignment with the Act and its regulations.

Recruitment and Committee Members

The *Accessible B.C. Act* requires that the accessibility committee include more than half its members be either persons with disabilities or those who work for disability-serving organizations.

We are looking to invite new members to add their voices to the committee. This will improve our understanding of the accessibility needs of our region and the actions we can take to address those needs.

Membership Term

Committee members serve a 1-year term, which may be extended. The Chairperson is selected by the Committee for a 1-year term beginning in May of each year.

Initial Focus of Committee

The CRD Accessibility Advisory Committee's focus has been to:

1. Meet the mandated requirements of the Accessible B.C. Act,
2. Identify accessibility barriers in our facilities and communications, and
3. Support the Region's plans to address and remove these barriers as a year-one priority.

Consultation Conducted

Our initial plan will focus on addressing issues identified by an internal review of our facilities and services. The internal review highlighted accessibility barriers that may prevent our citizens from equal participation in our services.

What We Did

On-site evaluations of libraries and administrative offices were conducted. All 18 facilities were assessed against specific accessibility criteria. A survey was also distributed to service managers with the intent of gathering feedback and calling attention to a variety of barriers that must be considered.

The main themes of the consultation revolved around physical spaces, communications, and IT standards, as well as attitudinal barriers.



Gathering Feedback

We will collect feedback from people to understand their accessibility concerns to identify and evaluate accessibility barriers in our services and facilities. Feedback will be collected by voicemail, email, and in-person interviews. All feedback mechanisms will use plain language, be consistently available, and be presented in accessible formats. We will record feedback and follow up as necessary. Feedback will be sorted by accessibility standards and then reviewed by the Accessibility Advisory Committee, which may recommend action to management or the Board.

Barriers Identified

Following our initial consultation, we have identified several areas of concern with our physical and virtual spaces.

Several of our buildings do not meet current accessibility standards. Missing features include wide entrances, access ramps, handrails, and electronically opened doors. These buildings will need to be retrofitted to ensure all community members have equal access to these buildings.

We have also identified accessibility issues with our web platforms. Although our website and web forms are legible by screen readers, they require additional work to make the contents comprehensible to people with visual impairments.

Based on this, we have prioritized improvements to these systems that will serve as our guide for the next 3 years to remedy these shortcomings.

Our 3-year Plan

Summary

The current plan sets goals up to September 2026. In that time, we will work to remedy **physical barriers**, **virtual barriers**, and **community engagement**.

Priority #1: Physical Barriers

1. Nazko Library Branch
 - a. In collaboration with the property owners of the Nazko community hall, the Manager of Procurement will assess the feasibility of building accessibility ramps, accessible washrooms, and a wheelchair-accessible entrance for the Nazko Library Branch.
 - b. If the project is determined to be achievable, the Manager of Procurement will establish a work plan and a manageable timeline.
2. Library furniture
 - a. Facility managers, where computer desks are not compatible with wheelchairs, will submit a request for the purchase of new desks that are more compatible with assistive devices
 - b. Library branches that have shelving that is too tall to be accessible by people in wheelchairs, will present an alternative shelving and storage arrangements
3. Accessible doorways (in Williams Lake, Nazko, and Big Lake Branches)
 - a. The Manager of Procurement will meet with the property owners (where Nazko and Big Lake Library branches are located) and determine whether changes can be made. If not, alternative solutions will be presented



- b. Accessible doorways will be considered when Williams Lake Library renovation project will be outlined by the manager of the branch and the manager of procurement

Priority #2: Virtual Barriers

1. Reliance on digital communications
 - a. Explore opportunities to use non-digital media to communicate with CRD residents and interested parties
2. Web forms
 - a. Ensure availability of forms in PDF and print
3. HR Applications
 - a. Reduce the number of fields on job applications presenting barriers to candidates.
4. Website
 - a. For the duration of the plan, limit the use of accordion menus, and utilize additional pages/links if needed to reduce reliance on accordion menus.
 - b. Investigate if accordion menus pose accessibility concerns.

Priority #3: Community Engagement

1. Committee Recruitment
 - a. Actively seek to recruit non-CRD affiliate representatives to join the CRD Accessibility Advisory Committee, including persons living with disabilities or advocates
2. Community Workshops
 - a. Plan a series of community-based workshops to identify sub-regional/community-level specific challenges for CRD-governed communities
3. Annual Consultations
 - a. Commit to an annual consultation and review process involving persons living with disabilities and their advocates

Monitoring and Evaluation

The Accessibility Plan will be reviewed by our Accessibility Advisory Committee during regular meetings to ensure that we are making progress on planned actions. The priority level of certain action items may be adjusted based on the availability of funding, staffing, and material supplies.

Conclusion

The specific goals of the Accessibility Plan are meant to evolve over time; as this is a living document, the amendments will be necessary. However, the purpose of this Accessibility Plan will always remain the same: to highlight accessibility and equal participation among all our stakeholders.



How to Give Us Feedback

We want your feedback on accessibility issues with our facilities and services. Let us know what you think by reaching out to us through:

- Voicemail: 1-888-507-6009
- Email: crdaac@cariboord.ca
- Mail: CRD Accessibility Advisory Committee
Suite D, 180 N. 3rd Avenue, Williams Lake BC V2G 2A4
- In person: You may either drop off your suggestions at one of our locations or request that the staff pass on your concerns to the CRD Accessibility Committee.