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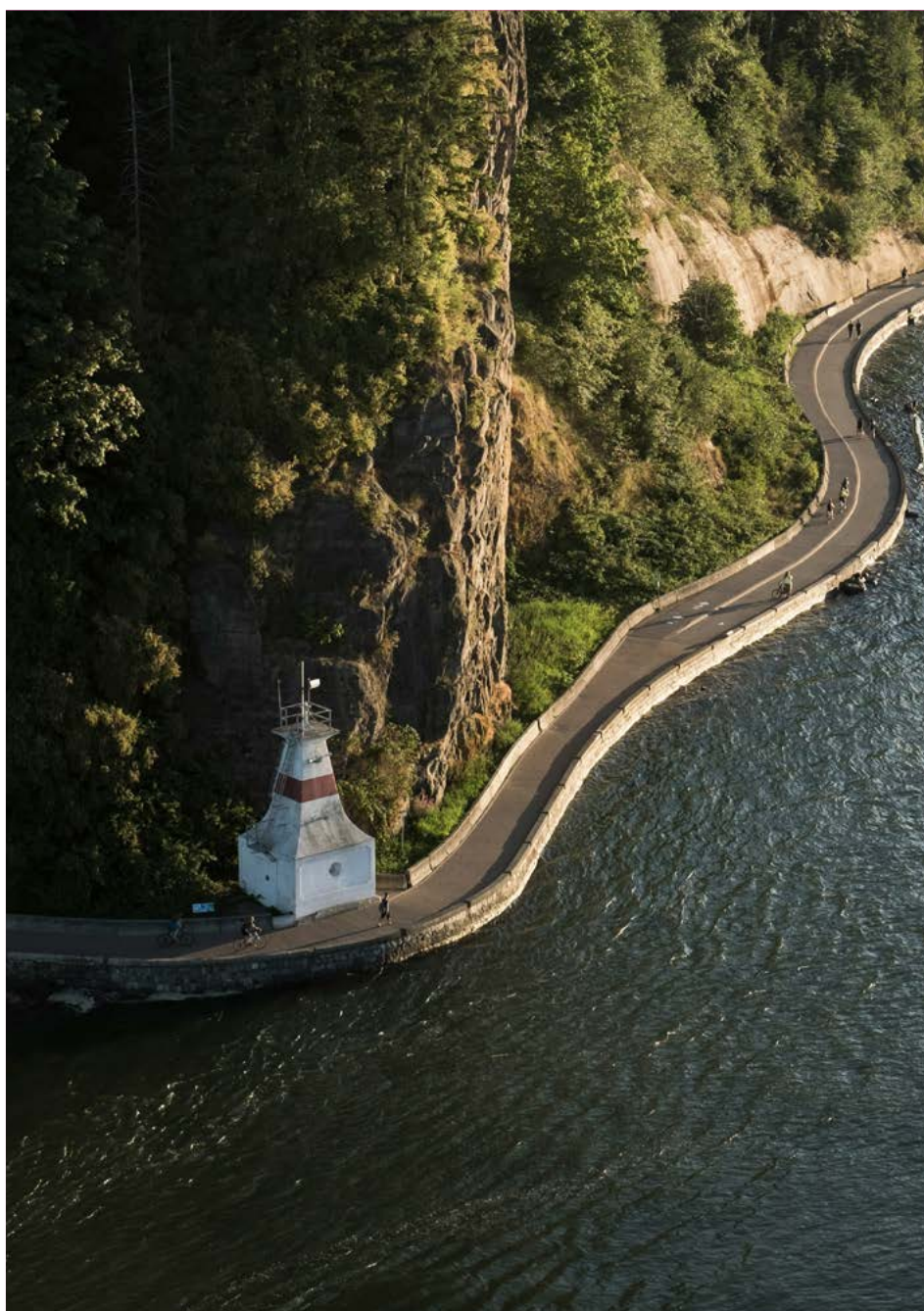
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September 2024

Small Business BC Accessibility Plan

Territory Acknowledgement

We respectfully acknowledge our place of work is within the ancestral, traditional and unceded territories of the Xwməθkwəy'əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and sə'lilwəta/səlilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) nations and that we serve the Peoples of the many Nations throughout British Columbia.



About this Accessibility Plan

Welcome to the Small Business BC (SBBC) Accessibility Plan.

We are excited to present this comprehensive plan, developed with support from Untapped Accessibility. Our commitment to accessibility is at the core of our mission, and this plan is a significant step toward creating an inclusive environment for our small business community.

Our Accessibility Plan highlights our accessibility work to date, and identifies key barriers that impact our small business community. The “Action Plan” section outlines our priorities for addressing these barriers to ensure our services, resources, and facilities are accessible to everyone. We believe that accessibility is not just a requirement of the Accessible BC Act, but a vital part of our growth and success.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to Untapped Accessibility for their expertise and guidance in crafting this plan. Together, we are making strides towards a more inclusive future for all small businesses in British Columbia.

Accessibility Statement

This plan is accessible to PDF/UA standards. If you require an alternative format, please contact us:

Email: accessibility@smallbusinessbc.ca or askus@smallbusinessbc.ca

Phone: 604-775-5525

Toll Free in B.C.: 1-800-667-2272

Accessibility Statement

We understand that language around disability is always changing – and preferences for terminology may differ among communities and individuals. To support inclusivity for the most people possible, this Accessibility Plan alternates between using “person-first” and “identity-first” language. For example, you will see “person with a disability” and “disabled person”. This is a good practice in written communications. However, in communicating directly with people from the disability community, we understand that it is best practice to use their preferred terminology. We acknowledge that becoming more accessible is a journey and we are always learning to evolve our knowledge and language use.

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Message from the Board Chair

As stewards of British Columbia's small business community, SBBC recognizes the importance of listening to and learning from diverse perspectives.

We strive to create a space where all voices are heard and everyone can contribute to the conversation. We aim to build trust and strengthen relationships with our community by fostering an environment of authenticity and sincerity.

When you demonstrate your commitment to accessibility through your business practices, it shows customers, employees, and your wider community that your business is open to everyone. Ensuring your business is accessible is a cornerstone of inclusivity and opportunity.

SBBC's Board of Directors is committed to fostering an inclusive space where everyone has the opportunity to succeed. SBBC is working in partnership with Untapped Accessibility to develop this Accessibility Plan in accordance with the Accessible BC Act.

As small businesses, you have a unique role in fostering environments where every individual, regardless of ability, feels welcome and valued. By embracing accessibility, we not only comply with regulations but also unlock untapped potential, broaden our customer base, and strengthen our communities.

Thank you for your dedication to making our businesses and communities more accessible.

Sincerely,

Joyce Yip, P.Eng., MBA, FCG, Acc. Dir., PMP

Board Chair

Small Business BC

Message from the CEO

As a queer person living with multiple disabilities, I agreed to accept the role of CEO at Small Business BC (SBBC) on the condition that our services should be available to every entrepreneur in the province.

SBBC is committed to fostering a diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment that empowers entrepreneurs from all backgrounds to thrive and succeed.

SBBC is dedicated to supporting entrepreneurs at every step of their journey. We celebrate our differences, including racial background, cultural identity, newcomer status, geography, economic means, disability, and others.

SBBC is grateful to be working with Untapped Accessibility on this Plan. Eight million Canadians aged 15 and over (27 percent) have at least one disability. These individuals are often unemployed or underemployed.

Whether you're just starting out on your entrepreneurial journey, or you're an established company looking to grow, focusing on workplace accessibility is a great way to reach your business goals.

Not only will it open you to a whole new talent pool of skilled workers, but you'll also comply with long-standing Canadian laws, boost your employee retention, and increase demand for your products and services.

SBBC will be updating this Accessibility Plan every three years, so please use this plan as a resource in your own accessibility journey.

Sincerely,

Thomas E. Conway

CEO

Small Business BC

Who is Small Business BC?

SBBC is the premier resource centre for British Columbia's entrepreneurial community. We are a non-profit organization that supports BC entrepreneurs to start and grow their businesses. Like those we serve, we are a small business of dedicated and passionate entrepreneurs.

Established in 2002, SBBC emerged to help small businesses get off the ground. Since then, we have transitioned with the times and built a roster of products and services to support entrepreneurs to thrive in our digital world. We now provide comprehensive support to entrepreneurs, guiding them from business inception to long-term growth with the following offerings:

- Free resources and education services
- Expert business advisors
- Engaging community events

Mission

SBBC is an independent non-profit providing holistic support to BC businesses throughout their entire journey. We provide affordable, universal access to expert advice, education, and unbiased business resources.

Vision

We exist so every BC business has someone in their corner – whether they need practical advice or a source of inspiration.

Values

Entrepreneur focused. We proactively provide programs and individualized services that exceed the expectations of business owners and startups.

Integrity. We are honest and forthright. We act ethically and deliver what we promise.

Diversity and inclusion. We strive to create an open, accessible, inclusive, and equitable environment in which every individual has the opportunity to flourish.

Collaborative partnerships. We advocate and collaborate with individuals and organizations to meet the business owner and startup needs.

Innovative and excellence. We are constantly improving, pursuing excellence in all we do to be the preeminent business service provider in British Columbia.

Community-oriented. We are an active member and vital part of the communities we serve.

Wellness. Pursuing a balanced, healthy, and fulfilling life.

Stewardship. We manage all SBBC resources effectively and transparently.

Accessibility at SBBC

SBBC is committed to creating and sustaining a diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible environment that fosters a sense of belonging for all community members. We believe that every person, regardless of their background, identity, or ability, should feel valued, supported, and empowered to pursue their entrepreneurial dreams.

As stewards of BC's small business community, we recognize the importance of listening to and learning from diverse perspectives. We strive to create a space where all voices are heard, and everyone can contribute to the conversation. We aim to build trust and strengthen relationships with our community by fostering an environment of authenticity and sincerity, and a culture of accessibility.

We acknowledge that feeling supported, represented, and worthy is essential for everyone's well-being. We strive to be a source of guidance and motivation for our community by providing expert advice and practical solutions. We encourage and inspire you to reach your full potential by providing business resources tailored to your unique needs. We believe that by working together and sharing our experiences, we can create a shared understanding for building a stronger, more resilient, and accessible business community.

Key Definitions

Accessibility

Accessibility is the work we do to ensure people with disabilities can participate in society on an equal basis with others. It focuses on proactively identifying, preventing, and removing barriers at a systemic level.

Disability

The Accessible BC Act defines disability as the inability to participate fully and equally in society because of the interaction between an impairment and a barrier.

This definition recognizes that impairment alone does not cause disability. Rather, when something in the environment poses a barrier to a specific impairment, disability occurs. The role of environment is key to understanding disability in this context, as environments are where barriers can emerge.

Barrier

A barrier is anything that hinders the full and equal participation of a person with an impairment. There are five main types of barriers:

Environmental – the physical and infrastructural obstacles that prevent people with disabilities from fully and equally engaging and interacting with a space. Examples include:

- A building entrance at the top of a staircase with no ramp or elevator.
- Lighting in a space that creates harsh shadows that cause difficulty for someone with a visual impairment.

- An “accessible washroom” that cannot accommodate a wheelchair user and a support person and/or service animal.
- Cluttered environments that make it difficult for people with mobility or sensory challenges to navigate the space.

Attitudinal – the behaviours, perceptions, and assumptions that create misconceptions and false ideas about people with disabilities. Examples include:

- Assuming inability or believing people with disabilities cannot do certain tasks or perform in certain roles.
- Being overly protective of people with disabilities, preventing them from taking risks, making decisions, or engaging in new learning or activities.
- Holding low expectations of people with disabilities and moving forward in planning and decision-making without questioning this perception.
- A belief that accommodations are the same thing as preferential treatment, and using this reasoning to justify declining an accommodation request.

Policy and practice – these barriers are embedded in the way things are done in an organization. By design, these types of barriers hinder full and equal participation of people with disabilities in the everyday functioning of an organization.

Examples include:

- Workplace policies that require staff to work in office a minimum of three days per week.
- Hosting an annual team building event that takes place in a local resort that is not accessible.
- Inadequate maintenance policies that lead to a failure to address accessibility issues such as broken elevators, non-functional automatic doors, or poorly maintained ramps.
- Lack of an accommodations budget, making it difficult for employees with disabilities to get the support they need to do their jobs.

Information and communications – these barriers prevent people with disabilities from accessing, understanding, and using the information they need. They also prevent people from communicating the information they need to communicate. Examples include:

- Websites that do not follow the WCAG accessibility standards, making it difficult for users with visual, auditory, or cognitive impairments to navigate and access content.
- Legal documents or company policies that are written in complex language without plain language summaries.
- Hosting a training event without arranging appropriate translation services for an employee who has a hearing impairment.
- Publishing a company video without captions.

Technology – these are obstacles related to the use of digital tools, platforms, and other technological devices that prevent people with disabilities from fully engaging with a task or process. Examples include:

- Hosting company training modules on a Learning Management System (LMS) that does not have accessibility features.
- Multi-factor authentication processes that require visual verification and do not provide alternatives.
- Reliance on a project management software that cannot be read by screen readers.
- An employee website portal that is difficult to use on a smartphone or tablet (as some people rely on these tools for their accessibility features).

Executive Summary

SBBC is dedicated to advancing accessibility across British Columbia's small business community. Guided by the Accessible BC Act and our core organizational values, commitments, and policies, this plan highlights our goal to ensure every BC business has the support they need to become accessible and inclusive.

Our approach to accessibility is proactive. We are focused on identifying, eliminating, and preventing barriers within our product and service offerings. This commitment extends to our online resources, educational offerings, advisory services, events, grant administration, and advocacy efforts.

Central to this work is our Accessibility Committee, composed of representatives from most SBBC departments, ensuring wide-ranging viewpoints and lived experiences are considered.

With support from the Accessibility Committee, we have identified highlights of our accessibility work to date. These begin with the comprehensive accessibility office audit we did with the Rick Hansen Foundation in April 2022. Our workplace met the Gold standard for the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certificate. This work was followed by an in-depth research study conducted in October 2023. The study surveyed small business owners on their level of knowledge and attitudes toward accessibility. Insights from this research went on to inform the development of a dedicated Workplace Accessibility Resources hub, which launched in March 2024. This landing page provides articles, webinars, guides, workbooks, and videos, equipping small businesses with the essential tools to enhance accessibility in their workplaces.

Additional accessibility highlights include our partnership with Community Futures, a program that supports entrepreneurs with disabilities, and the internal accessibility training sessions we have provided to staff. SBBC also participates on the Presidents Group and various other accessibility committees. Other notable programs include the Workplace Accessibility Grant, and Accessibility Education Month.

We also engaged in an extensive review of the accessibility barriers that are impacting our staff and small business community. Some of the major barriers include website stability issues and WCAG non-compliance, built environment barriers, such as poor signage and inaccessible elevator features, and information barriers related to the format of available resources.

Moving forward, we remain committed to removing barriers as a top priority. Our action plan will address continued improvements to accessibility for both clients and staff, as well as ongoing development of accessibility resources for the small business community. Our accessibility plan will be reviewed and updated every three years.

We encourage public feedback on our accessibility initiatives. Feel free to contact us:

Email: accessibility@smallbusinessbc.ca

Phone: 604-775-5525

Toll Free in B.C.: 1-800-667-2272

Six-Step Plan

1. Framework Guiding our Accessibility Work
2. Accessibility in our Context
3. Barriers at SBBC
4. Action Plan
5. Monitoring and Evaluation
6. How to Give Feedback

1. Framework Guiding our Accessibility Work

SBBC's accessibility work is guided by the Accessible BC Act, along with our internal ways of working, as reflected in our service commitment, guiding principles, and organizational policies.

Accessible BC Act

The Accessible BC Act received Royal Assent on June 17, 2021. The requirements and principles in this legislation guide our accessibility work.

Requirements

The Accessible BC Act requires that prescribed organizations:

1. Establish an accessibility committee to assist the organization in identifying, addressing, and preventing barriers.
2. Develop an accessibility plan to identify, remove, and prevent barriers.
3. Develop and implement a public feedback mechanism for members of the public to share comments on the barriers they face when interacting with the organization.

As a prescribed organization, SBBC is complying with these requirements. Our organization has worked with our internal Accessibility Committee to develop and publish this Accessibility Plan. The committee also supported the design of a process for community members to inform us of any barriers faced when engaging with SBBC (see "6. How to give us feedback" section for details).

Principles

In accordance with the Accessible BC Act, our work is guided by the following principles:

Inclusion. Our work aims to increase the inclusion of people with disabilities as small business owners, employees of small business owners, and customers of small businesses. We are also working to ensure SBBC is an accessible and inclusive workplace for employees with disabilities. Our goal is that disabled people can fully and equally participate at all levels of engagement with our organization.

Adaptability. We understand that disability and accessibility are evolving concepts. Our organization is committed to adapting our accessibility work as the services, technology, and attitudes surrounding disability change.

Diversity. We understand that people with disabilities in our business community have many different identities and life experiences that impact their relationship to prejudice and discrimination. Our goal is to drive accessibility work from an intersectional lens, so we are better positioned to anticipate and respond to these intersectional experiences.

Collaboration. SBBC cannot do this important work alone. We understand that increasing accessibility and inclusion is a shared responsibility and everyone has a role. Our work is focused on engaging with our disability community and other stakeholders to explore challenges and collaborate on solutions.

Self-determination. We are working to create a culture of inclusion and accessibility that empowers people with disabilities to engage with our organization in the ways that work for them.

Universal design. Our approach to accessibility is driven by the concept of universal design, which favours a universal approach to the development of an environment. In other words, we aim to ensure everyone who is part of the SBBC community can access, understand, and use our services to the greatest extent possible.

Coming Standards

SBBC acknowledges that standards are being developed as part of the Accessible BC Act. Our organization looks forward to receiving further guidance from the province, their accessibility committee and other technical committees supporting the development of these standards.

In anticipation of the standards, SBBC has considered the following standard areas in the development of this plan:

Employment. Our plan considers accessibility for four key groups, including staff who work at SBBC (see “2. Accessibility in our context” section for details).

Delivery of services. Our plan examines barriers in our five areas of service delivery: 1) resources, 2) education, 3) advice, 4) events, and 5) grants (see “2. Accessibility in our context” section for details). We also partnered with Lux Insights on a market research project - and the report from this project is considered in our plan. It provides insight into what our small business community needs from SBBC to improve their own inclusion and accessibility.

Built environment. SBBC conducted an office audit with Spectrum Ability to identify barriers in the workplace. This plan considers the built environment barriers highlighted in this report (see “3. Barriers at SBBC” section for details).

Information and communications. The Lux Insights project helped us understand our business community’s preferred resource and information formats. For example, our community prefers simple and easy-to-use formats - like checklists and frequently asked questions documents - for resources on how to begin their own inclusion and accessibility work. For information related to workplace inclusion and accessibility, email, websites, and social media are best. We have considered these insights in the development of this plan.

Transportation. The Spectrum Ability office audit identified barriers with the accessible parking spaces available at the SBBC office. These barriers are included in this Accessibility Plan.

SBBC Ways of Working

This Accessibility Plan is also guided by SBBC’s ways of working, which are reflected in our service commitment, guiding principles, and internal policies.

Service commitment

SBBC is committed to providing the highest levels of customer service to our clients. Our team is invested in your success, and nothing gives us greater pleasure than seeing your business idea come to life.

Guiding principles

These principles guide our culture and shape how each member of the SBBC team shows up, internally and externally:

Lead with compassion. We create a safe space for our clients to bring their issues and obstacles – and we never judge the position they're in. We know that everyone's story, background, and goals are unique. We meet everyone where they're at, and always with kindness, patience, and understanding. We listen carefully, break things down and never make anybody feel less than.

Come one, come all. We celebrate the diversity that enriches BC's business economy and shine a light on the business owners' achievements in underrepresented communities. Whether they come from a rural region or a bustling city centre, or they're a team of one or ten, we show everyone that their contribution is important and valued. We want to inspire future business owners from all walks of life.

Think like an entrepreneur. We do a lot with a little. We have an innovator's mindset – instead of getting defeated or intimidated by roadblocks, we dig in and get creative. We practice what we preach and lead by example by following the advice we give our clients. Our eyes are always open for a better way to do things. We stay tuned into new ideas and approaches.

Internal policies

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion at SBBC. Our external/internal DEI statement guides the work we do in striving to elevate every BC business. The full statement can be found on [our website](#). We endeavor to keep promoting and improving our resources to support various communities, including small business owners that identify as having disabilities.

2. Accessibility in our Context

Who is our accessibility work focused on?

SBBC is focused on accessibility for the following groups:

- Small business owners who want to become more accessible for their customers with disabilities.
- People with disabilities who own small businesses.
- People with disabilities who work in small businesses.
- People with disabilities who work at SBBC.

How are we organizing barriers in this Accessibility Plan?

In terms of organizing the identification and analysis of barriers at SBBC, this plan considers five key areas of service delivery:

1. Online resources we provide - including barriers related to accessing our online resources (for example, web accessibility barriers that impact efficient use of our website).
2. Education we develop - including barriers related to the process for accessing educational content (for example, barriers related to registering, purchasing, and accessing training resources).
3. Advice we offer - including barriers related to physically accessing our advisory services (for example, built environment barriers that impact how clients can get to the office).
4. Events we offer - including barriers related to physically accessing our events and engaging with the information provided (for example, barriers in the event registration process and material formats).
5. Grants we administer - including barriers related to the grant application process (for example, web accessibility barriers that impact use of the grant application process).

Internal Committees Supporting this Work

Accessibility Committee

Our Accessibility Committee is a volunteer committee with eight members representing various SBBC departments, backgrounds, and abilities. We have members with lived experience of disability, as well as members with formalized training on best practices in accessibility.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee

The SBBC Diversity Equity and Inclusion Committee also supports our accessibility work. This group is made up of staff from each department and meets once a month. The committee's strategic direction is to make change and improve diversity, equity, and inclusion for the team internally, for future hiring and retention, and for how we support our client communities.

Do What You Say and Say What You Do. This committee focuses on actions, not just words. They encourage open discussion around diversity, equity, and inclusion across the organization. Through these discussions, the committee has identified problem areas and identified solutions, which include efforts to advance the accessibility of our physical office spaces.

Highlights of our Accessibility Work

SBBC strives to create an open, accessible, inclusive, and equitable environment in which every individual can flourish. We are thrilled to do everything we can to not only improve employment outcomes for staff with disabilities, but also support our many entrepreneurs with disabilities by creating a more accessible consumer marketplace.

The highlights in this section represent significant milestones, but they are not an exhaustive list of our efforts. We continue to strive for accessibility improvements, and our work is ongoing.

Workplace Accessibility Resources

With support from the BC Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, SBBC has launched a [Workplace Accessibility Resource](#) hub. This is an online space filled with resources to help small business owners improve accessibility at their workplace. We offer articles, live webinars and their recordings, checklists, guides, workbooks and more. Examples of resources include our [Accessibility Check-in for Small Businesses](#) and our [Website Accessibility Checklist](#). You can also [book](#) a free 30-minute consultation with our in-house accessibility advisor until the end of March 2025, with possibility of extension.

Workplace Accessibility Resources Internal Reference Guide –This internal reference guide was created by and for SBBC staff and has been informed by extensive accessibility research and learnings from various sources. The 4-page guide is a quick reference to support staff with providing workplace accessibility support to clients with disabilities. It includes a summary of various internal training session takeaways, such as how we talk about workplace accessibility (what we aim to say and not say), workplace accessibility best practices for supporting clients, and a list of hyperlinked resources by category.

Spectrum office audit

In April of 2022, SBBC worked with Spectrum Ability to conduct an accessibility office audit. This audit resulted in a report highlighting the accessibility successes and challenges at SBBC, as well as the recommended solutions to the challenges.

In the short and long-term areas of the report, there are challenges that are within our organization's control and challenges that are out of our control. Those we have control over are highlighted in the action plan section. For the barriers that occur in spaces controlled by our landlord, further advocacy is needed.

Lux Insights Accessibility Report

In October of 2023, SBBC worked with Lux Insights for a market research project around accessibility in the small business community. The goal of the project was to learn how SBBC could best reach small businesses in BC and raise awareness about accessibility.

Through an online survey with 403 small business leaders across BC and 8 in-depth interviews, the project collected information around four key objectives:

1. Gauge awareness of, comfortability with, and attitudes toward key accessibility issues among small businesses in BC.
2. Gauge awareness and usage of accessibility resources among small businesses in BC.
3. Identify preferred formats, delivery methods, and channels among small businesses in BC for accessibility information and resources.
4. Identify how key accessibility measures vary across BC and other small business characteristics to create a baseline for future waves of research.

This project resulted in a research report highlighting key insights and implications around accessibility for small businesses. SBBC used this information to tailor accessibility resources and marketing to meet the needs of our small business community.

Presidents Group membership

Formed in 2013, the [Presidents Group](#) is a network of 25 change-driven BC business leaders who are champions for more accessible, inclusive workplaces. The group plays an advisory role to BC's Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, and meets quarterly to share best practices amongst one another. Tom Conway, SBBC's CEO has been an appointed member of the Presidents Group since 2020.

Accessible Service Delivery Standard Technical Committee Participation

Tom Conway is a member of BC's Accessible Service Delivery Standard Technical Committee and the Provincial Accessibility Committee. Both are developing recommendations to the Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction on proposed accessibility standards in areas including service delivery.

Partnership with Community Futures

SBBC maintains a long-term partnership with the [Community Futures Entrepreneurs with Disabilities Program](#) (CF EDP) to support eligible clients coming through that program. This partnership involves financial support from Community Futures that makes it possible for CF EDP clients to benefit from fee-based advisory, business planning, and education that SBBC offers.

Internal Team Training

In early 2024, SBBC staff received accessibility training sessions from Untapped Accessibility. The first session was open to the entire staff team and focused on establishing a robust foundation of accessibility knowledge. The second was available to our client-facing teams.

Awareness Education for External Subject Matter Experts

Before beginning work with external subject matter experts who deliver live education to our audiences, SBBC shares guidelines on important things to note when working with us and our audiences. The first page includes a section with Accessibility & Inclusion tips. We provide constructive feedback to reiterate these points to support subject matter experts before and after educational sessions.

Pledge to Measure

Small Business BC took part in the 2022 and 2023 [Pledge to Measure](#) initiative hosted by the Presidents Group. With plans to engage in the 2024 survey (and future surveys to come), our continued involvement will help us create and sustain a culture of transparency and accountability by measuring disability inclusion within our staff team.

We are proud to be part of the growing list of businesses committed to hiring and improving the representation of people with disabilities in the workforce!

Workplace Policies and Practices

Our Operations team regularly introduces new tools and software to support doing our work effectively across in-person and remote work locations.

Roop's Story

In partnership with Presidents Group, we developed a [video spotlighting Roop Johal](#), our Director of Partnerships. Roop speaks about her experience with Dyslexia and how it provides her many advantages at work.

This video highlights the value of hiring people with disabilities to expand the potential for creativity and problem solving in your business. A critical addition to our accessibility resources page, Roop's video showcases our commitment to our own accessibility, and our commitment to supporting BC entrepreneurs to lead accessible businesses.

Accessibility Education Months

The first Accessibility Month of Education took place in January 2020 and after a few more iterations, we hosted [Accessibility Month: It Matters](#) in September 2021. This was one of our biggest months of free business education featuring ASL interpretation and closed captioning to date. Our educational sessions covered a variety of popular business topics, from business planning to marketing to payroll. This was one of our first partnerships with the BC Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction. The work continued into 2022 and 2024, with more free education offerings with accessibility supports such as webinars with ASL, transcripts, and captions.

Workplace Accessibility Grant

In June of 2021, we began administering the [Workplace Accessibility Grant](#). This grant program offers eligible small businesses up to \$5,000 for projects that enhance workplace accessibility. Examples of projects include installing ramps, adjusting lighting, providing anti-bias training, refining interview processes, offering ASL interpretation, revising policies with legal advice, creating accessible documents and forms, updating web accessibility, and acquiring assistive technologies like flashing fire alarms and specialized tools.

Due to this program's popularity, we had to temporarily suspend the processing of new applications. Our immediate focus is to disperse available funding to the applications that have come in. For those we cannot process, we have established a waitlist.

3. Barriers at SBBC

Barrier identification is a priority and ongoing process at SBBC. Upon review of our five key service areas, we have identified several accessibility barriers that are impacting client access to our offerings. The Lux Insights Accessibility Report also highlights barriers to consider.

Online Resources we Provide

Currently, folks are experiencing barriers related to site stability and web accessibility when using our website. This impacts their ability to understand, find, and access the information they need.

Education we Develop

Our educational offerings include live in-person, online, and hybrid courses, and a library of on-demand education including: e-learning courses, templates, guides, checklists, articles, and videos.

We have identified accessibility barriers in the booking, purchase, and sign-up processes, as well as in our educational products themselves. Our current systems make it difficult to purchase free educational materials or register for courses, as both require several steps to successfully complete checkout. These barriers impact our registration numbers and keep current and prospective business owners from accessing relevant information.

Advice we Offer

There are barriers related to physically accessing our advisory services. For instance:

- There are various signage issues in our office building, making it difficult to navigate for our clients.
- The elevator that clients use does not have floor numbers with braille, nor are there auditory announcements for each floor and the direction of travel (up or down).

These environmental barriers prevent clients from taking advantage of our services. For more information on the physical barriers in our office space, see the Spectrum Office Audit report.

With regards to our advisory services themselves, we have recognized information barriers in the way we share content. Our resources are mostly in written format, making them inaccessible to those who struggle to process text-based information.

Events we Offer

The same environmental and informational barriers mentioned previously also impact our events. Clients experience challenges when registering for events and accessing the accommodations they need. Those attending live events may face barriers in navigating the event space and accessing information in their preferred format. These barriers may prevent people with disabilities from registering and attending such events.

Grants we Administer

Most of the barriers facing our grant programs are related to the accessibility on our website. Applying for a grant requires a person to access the website, understand complex information, and submit information in a web form for consideration. These barriers may prevent eligible business owners from accessing funding they are otherwise qualified for.

Barriers Facing Small Businesses

While the goal of our accessibility research wasn't to identify barriers, the report provides helpful insights into some of the barriers small business leaders face in delivering on their own accessibility. The largest seems to be having a low/limited understanding of what accessibility means. For example, when asked about accessibility, most respondents referred to wheelchair accessibility. The report suggests that resources could be tailored to helping small business leaders expand their understanding of accessibility and think critically about all it can encompass.

A particular area that was not well understood by small business leader respondents was sensory limitations. And another noteworthy finding was that mental health challenges were common among respondents - yet small businesses were under-performing in their mental health support priorities. The report recommends future resources be focused on sensory and mental health-related disabilities.

The project also provides insight into how small business leaders wish to receive accessibility information (for example, format, delivery methods, and communication channels). One of the biggest barriers noted here was that respondents felt overwhelmed with information. Many did not know where to start and found the goal of improving workplace accessibility daunting.

A recommendation was to ensure future resources deliver information in simple and easy to use formats like checklists and frequently asked questions documents. The report also recommends that these resources be available on platforms that are easy to find (for example, email, website, and social media). These insights may factor into considerations for the creation of resources overall, including those unrelated to accessibility. In other words, these insights can help SBBC improve the accessibility of all our future resources.

4. Action Plan

Work Underway

The Digital Transformation Project aims to remove barriers on our website, making our online resources more accessible to staff and clients.

Here are the project details:

1. Audit and discovery phase (complete)

We spent several months reviewing our website and operations. This review showed that we needed to update our digital systems. We also completed a brand refresh in early 2022, to support our online presence.

2. Project goals (in progress)

SBBC will work with various partners to execute these priorities, including web accessibility consultants, a web development agency, and a branding/design agency.

The Digital Transformation Project is funded by the Government of Canada, the Province of BC, and SBBC. We expect to wrap the project up by January of 2025.

Priority #1

Our first priority is to address the barriers in our five service areas that impact our clients.

Area	Barriers	Next steps	Long-term focus
Online resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Website instability and WCAG non-compliance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct thorough WCAG audit and implement necessary changes to meet WCAG 2.1 AA standards. Enhance website stability through server upgrades and optimization. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete Digital Transformation Project.
Education offerings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complex booking, purchase, and sign-up processes. Accessibility issues in educational products. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simplify the registration and check-out process for courses and materials. Provide multiple formats for educational content. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrate accessible e-learning platforms that comply with accessibility standards. Regularly review and update educational materials to ensure ongoing accessibility compliance.

Area	Barriers	Next steps	Long-term focus
Advisory services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical access issues in office space (see Spectrum Office Audit report). Information accessibility challenges. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Address other built environment barriers identified in the report (that are in our control). Develop alternative formats for advisory resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage in advocacy with the landlord to make larger built environment changes to address remaining barriers identified in Spectrum Office Audit report (for example, installing braille floor numbers and auditory announcements in elevators).
Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environment and information barriers impacting event registration and participation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure event registration forms and processes are simple and accessible. Provide clear information on available accommodations and how to request them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Train event staff on accessibility best practices. Regularly review event spaces and make necessary modifications to enhance accessibility.
Grant programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Web-related accessibility issues affecting the grant application process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simplify the grant application process and make instructions clear and concise. Ensure web forms are accessible and compliant with WCAG standards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide grant application assistance through multiple channels (for example, phone, email, in-person). Regularly review and update grant application procedures to maintain accessibility.

Priority #2

Our next priority is to identify and address barriers that impact our current and future staff. The first task will be to develop and distribute staff surveys to identify accessibility issues and gather feedback. Next, the Accessibility Committee will compile survey data to identify common barrier themes and explore action plans to address barriers that have the biggest impact.

This will likely be the focus of the next iteration of this Accessibility Plan.

Priority #3

Our third priority is to continue developing accessibility resources for our clients. This will also be a focus of the next iteration of the Accessibility Plan.

Area	Barriers	Next steps	Long-term focus
Workplace Accessibility Resources as a long-term theme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited understanding of accessibility among small business leaders. Limited awareness of accessibility resources available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus future resources on sensory and mental health-related disabilities. Establish SBBC as a leader in accessibility by building public awareness of available resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain the Workplace Accessibility Resources landing page to keep it active and relevant Transition workplace accessibility from a project to an integral part of our public-facing resources.

5. Monitoring and Evaluation

To monitor and measure progress, the Accessibility Committee will conduct regular check-ins on priority #1 of the action plan. To report on progress, they will provide an annual update to the Senior Leadership team and Board of Directors. For transparency, SBBC will also post an annual progress update to our website.

A more thorough review and evaluation of the Accessibility Plan will occur every three years. The results of this evaluation will also be made public on our website. This evaluation will inform the next iteration of this plan (focusing on priorities #2 and 3), which will be released in 2027.

6. How to Give Feedback

As part of our ongoing commitment to accessibility, SBBC has developed a dedicated email address for public feedback on accessibility challenges: accessibility@sbbc.ca. Members of the public are welcome to use this email to report any barriers, or other accessibility challenges they face when interacting/engaging with SBBC.

We will also accept accessibility feedback through our general contact channels:

Email: askus@sbbc.ca

Phone: 604-775-5525

Toll Free in B.C.: 1-800-667-2272

The Accessibility Committee will regularly review and evaluate all new requests that have come in through these portals.

Appendices

[Workplace Accessibility Resources](#)

[The Current State of Small Business Accessibility in BC](#)