

Interregional Advisory Committee for
Library Accessibility (IACLA)

Activity Report

2023-24



Cape Breton
Regional
Library



**Public
Library** | Colchester-
East Hants



**Cumberland
Public Libraries**



eastern
counties
REGIONAL LIBRARY

**West
Counties
Regional
Library**

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Welcome Message

On behalf of the Interregional Advisory Committee for Library Accessibility (IACLA), we invite you to read our 2023-24 Activity Report, covering the period of April 1, 2023, to March 31, 2024.

We are proud of the progress our member regions have made this past year and look forward to more advancements in the coming year. The IACLA plan is an evolving document allowing each region flexibility to prioritize action areas. With this approach, the committee benefits from a shared learning environment.

We remain committed to working towards our libraries being welcoming, inclusive, and accepting public spaces for all people.

On behalf of IACLA, we would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to the committee members who completed their two-year term in June 2023. Their time and attention in helping to advance accessible library services and programs are of tremendous value to our communities.

Best,

Lisa Mulak, Co-Chair

Jonathan Manley, Co-Chair

Dedication

This report is dedicated in memory of Alnoor Rajan Talwar, former IACLA Community Member. Though he is no longer with us, his dedication to accessibility continues to guide and inspire our work.

My disability does not define me
My strength, my shamelessness, my abilities
and my tenacity in my attempts to fit in
to reclaim and live with honor and dignity,
despite my disability,
are what ultimately define me

Excerpt from **Do You See Me?**
A Poem, by Alnoor Rajan Talwar

What We Believe

Human Rights – We recognize the many barriers which limit full participation of persons with disabilities, and we uphold accessibility as a fundamental human right to be modelled on our library service.

Inclusion – We commit to creating equitable and inclusive learning, social, and working environments within public libraries, where community members and employees are treated with respect and dignity.

Creativity – We will advance accessibility with creativity, adaptivity, and forward-thinking. Public libraries commit to being proactive and flexible in our approach.

First Voice – We will listen to and be informed by the unique experiences of individuals and communities that public libraries serve and commit to advocating for all the people we employ and all those we work for and work with.

Community-Led – We recognize that creative solutions come from new connections and are committed to connecting, consulting, and working collaboratively with our communities to understand their needs.

Diverseness of Disabilities – We recognize the complex nature of disabilities and acknowledge the impact to accessibility individual differences of identity, perspective, circumstance, and experience can have. Disability is regarded as part of diversity, and this will be reflected in public library policies, programs, and services.

2023/24 Committee Members

Annapolis Valley Regional Library

Jai Soloy, Coordinator of Public Services

Cape Breton Regional Library

Lisa Mulak, Regional Librarian

Colchester-East Hants Public Library

Tiffany Bartlett, Chief Executive Officer (until October 2023)

Sarah Wood, Community Engagement Director (October 2023 to Jan 2024)

Jeff Mercer, Chief Executive Officer (February 2024 – present)

Cumberland Public Libraries

Charlotte Gallivan, Community Engagement Librarian

Eastern Counties Regional Library

Laura Emery, Chief Executive Officer

Western Counties Regional Library

Erin Comeau, Executive Director and Regional Librarian

Special Resource Person to the IACLA

Kelli Woo Shue, Nova Scotia Provincial Library

Ella Porter, Community Representative

Robert Trevor MacLean, Community Representative

Adrienne Collins, Community Representative

Jarod Jenkins, Community Representative

Jon Hutt, Community Representative

Jennifer Saunders, Community Representative

Railynn Cann, Community Representative

Kimberley James-Cartmill, Community Representative

Jonathan Manley, Community Representative

Kaleigh Cormier, Community Representative

Michelle Vacon, Community Representative

Michelle Wood, Community Representative

2022-23 Activity Highlights

Annapolis Valley Regional Library

The Annapolis Valley Regional Library (AVRL) is working through a number of challenges presented by continued staffing shortages. Unfortunately, this situation has limited our ability to begin new initiatives. We have, however, continued to see success and/or progress in the following areas:

Website

Accessible services provided by AccessiBe have been renewed.

AccessiBe works in two ways:

1. Working behind the scenes to provide further optimization for screen readers and keyboard navigation;
2. Using **accessWidget**, an accessibility interface that allows for user controlled, design-related adjustments to the entire website.

Collections

A policy review for Collection Development is underway with the intent of making the material selection guidelines as clear as possible. The Centre for Free Expression, based out of the Toronto Metropolitan University, maintains a database of current Canadian library policies. This has been a valuable resource for finding best practices and policy templates.

<https://cfe.torontomu.ca/databases/library-policies-database>

Adaptive Equipment

AVRL continues to offer loans of adaptive equipment. The adult sized Hippocampe and accessories (Tomato seat, balloon tires (for beach or snow), & ski attachment) can be borrowed for a 2-week period from any of our 11 branches.

Cape Breton Regional Library

Library Collections

We have updated our Collection Development Policy, which can now be found on the Cape Breton Regional Library (CBRL) website. The policy includes guiding principles, including a commitment to building collections that reflect Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility. Our goal is to ensure our collections are accessible to everyone.

Over the last year, we continued to purchase materials in various formats, including large print books and audiobooks. We also added adaptive technology such as C-Pen Readers and the Envoy Connect. Both of these devices assist users with accessing reading materials.

We purchased a new microfilm reader, a significant addition that greatly improves access to our historical newspaper collection, enhancing its accessibility and usability.

Information and Communication

Our library staff has shown exceptional dedication to learning about making our communications welcoming and inclusive. Over the last year, CBRL employees actively participated in workshops related to this area, including plain language training and accessible social media.

We continue to prioritize website design and content according to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.

We added personal amplifiers for people to use in library branches. These devices amplify sounds closest to the listener while reducing background noise. People can use them with or without hearing aids. They are particularly helpful for individuals with hearing impairments, facilitating one-on-one conversations or small group listening situations such as book clubs, meetings, or library information sessions.

Programs and Services

People who cannot visit the Library in person can sign up for a library card through a form on our website, and the card will be sent in the mail.

CBRL received two generous donations of equipment from the community. A wheelchair and optic reader are now available for in-person use at our main branch. This equipment will improve access to our collections and enhance the user's library experience.

Built Environment

To improve accessibility in our spaces, we purchased additional seating options, including lightweight chairs with and without armrests. We also added stools with a rounded base, providing an active seating option for patrons who benefit from movement while seated.

Employment

Reachability's CEO, Tova Sherman, delivered Disability Awareness training at an all-staff in-service.

CBRL staff received training on accessibility settings in Windows 10 and the Library's digital apps.

Colchester-East Hants Public Library

1. Training

- a. Regional communications staff completed a Social Media Accessibility Workshop hosted by the Accessibility Directorate
- b. Staff created Accessible Communication Guidelines, and the rollout began in fall 2023. The guidelines will eventually apply to all library communications (online, print, etc.)
- c. All staff received annual refresher training on third-party assistive services (NNELS and CELA)

2. Public Policy Development

- a. The six new/updated policies passed by the CEHPL Board in March 2023 went through an Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility audit by an external human rights consultant, and we worked with Inclusion NS to have them translated into plain language
- b. "Accessibility" and "Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion" are two of the four main guiding principles outlined in our new Collection Development policy
- c. At the September 2023 meeting, the CEHPL passed nine new/updated policies. These policies went through an Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility audit by an external human rights consultant, and we worked with Inclusion NS to have them translated into plain language

3. Collections

- a. We launched a collection of Playaway audiobooks. These are digital devices, each preloaded with a single audiobook, that are a new alternative format in our catalogue
- b. We launched a new resource - PressReader, a digital platform providing access to newspaper and magazine publications. PressReader includes several accessibility-enhancement features

- c. We launched a collection of C-Pen Reader 2 devices. These are portable scanning pens that reading printed text out loud, designed to assist those with reading challenges (such as dyslexia) or those learning to read in English, French, or Spanish.
- d. We increased our Library Delivery Service (deposits of library materials delivered directly to group settings (e.g. continuing care homes))
- e. We added 186 new DAISY audiobooks to our catalogue, for a total collection of 418

4. Facilities

- a. We purchased a new rollator and extra-wide wheelchair for public use at our Truro location. They are serviced regularly by a local pharmacy partner
- b. Multilingual welcome signage has been ordered for our library branches accessibility in our spaces, services and programs. Staff are using the community feedback to inform our service planning.

5. Website

- a. In fall 2023 our website underwent an independent accessibility audit. We continue to work on issues that were identified, including updating pages into plain language

6. Disability Awareness Drive

- a. We hosted our second annual Disability Awareness Drive, kicking off on International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPWD). For IDPWD this year, we highlighted our accessible resources and initiatives in-branch and on our social media and website for a period of two weeks.

Cumberland Public Libraries

Policy Development:

In February 2023, the Cumberland Public Libraries (CPL) hired Chrysalis Human Rights Agency to audit our existing policies. The goal of this assessment was to provide CPL with guidance on how to improve our policies with respect to equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility.

Chrysalis completed their audit of our Personnel and Operations Policies in September 2023, and provided CPL with a full report, recommendations for improvements, and an overview to share with our board.

Rewriting of our Policies is ongoing, with updated policies being presented to our board quarterly for approval.

Employment:

Our performance appraisal self-assessment forms have been updated to include questions about staff accessibility needs. We hope that by including questions regarding accessibility on our appraisal forms, staff will feel more comfortable telling management about any accessibility needs required.

Staff Training:

Over the past year, several CPL staff have attended accessibility-training sessions.

These sessions include:

- A session on accessible social media feeds at the Nova Scotia Library Association's conference,
- A plain language session provided to Prescribed Public Sector Bodies by the Accessibility Directorate,
- A wayfinding and signage lunch and learn with eyecandy SIGNS,
- De-escalation training with de-escalation expert Ryan Dowd,
- Mental Health First Aid training, and

- Harm reduction and Naloxone training with Northern Healthy Connections Society.

Training library staff on accessibility is an ongoing process. Any opportunity to gain more accessibility knowledge is taken; ensuring staff remain up-to-date on current accessibility trends and regulations.

Built Environment:

We have asked the Town of Amherst to help make our programming space more accessible at the Amherst Library. Money to pursue this project is not available this year, but discussions are ongoing.

The Municipality of Cumberland County has hired a Community Engagement Coordinator. This Coordinator is making county spaces more fair, diverse, inclusive, and accessible. Our Library Director has reached out to the Coordinator about visiting library locations to talk about accessibility improvements.

Eastern Counties Regional Library

Built Environment

In the Summer of 2023, an initial project was completed at the Petit de Grat Library to help improve the location's accessibility. This work was requested by the Municipality of the County of Richmond as part of the Rick Hanson certification process. They had the library assessed by a consultant they hired to guide them through this certification process. It involved reducing/removing visual clutter from the walls and windows. Removing furnishings impeding traffic flows and comparing current spacing between shelving and furnishings to the Standards Council of Canada's Accessible Design for the Built Environment guidelines.

Renovations were then completed at the Petit de Grat Library in April 2024 to repair damage from Hurricane Fiona. This work included replacing the flooring. We requested that when the shelving bays were moved back into position, they be spaced apart (150 cm) to meet accessibility guidelines.

Please see an image of the shelving now spaced apart to meet accessibility requirements.



Accessible computer workstations were installed at the Port Hawkesbury and Chéticamp Public Libraries. These workstations feature larger monitors, adjustable height workstations, high-contrast keyboards, and standing/accessible mice.

Information & Communication

Changes were made to the Eastern Counties Regional Library (ECRL) website in June 2023 to provide more information to the public about accessibility at ECRL. An accessibility feedback form was included in the addition of an accessibility page to get more input from the community.

All social media images now include alt text descriptions, and ECRL PDF documents are made readable (OCR) for maximum accessibility for staff and the public.

Programs & Services

Michelle Greencorn, Public Services Manager, completed the Accessibility Directorate's online workshop, Accessibility Foundations.

Library branch staff completed self-directed training materials on Windows accessibility features. We began advertising that this accessibility assistance was available in April 2024.

Collections

We promoted International Day for Persons with Disabilities on December 3 by highlighting materials and authors who discuss accessibility or identify as a person with a disability.

Western Counties Regional Library

Western Counties Regional Library included the actions described below in its annual management activities. The library board reviews these action items every four months. Some actions will take more than one year to complete because of the size of the project. Activities that are not completed within the year will be added to next year's management activities.

Area of Focus: Collections

Action: We reviewed the collections policy and collection management guidelines to support the development of more diverse and representative collections. Western Counties Regional Library's Collections Development and Maintenance policy can be viewed on the Library's website. Here is the link to the [Collections Development and Maintenance policy](#)

Action: We introduced Playaways to the collection and also created a collection of audiobooks in daisy format. We continue to look for and choose materials for our collections that are by and for persons with disabilities.

Employment

Action: We are creating an orientation and training package for new staff which will include the Working with Abilities Training. All Western Counties Regional Library staff will participate in the Working with Abilities Training in the Winter 2025 once the orientation and training package is complete and an accommodation process has been created.

Information and Communications

Action: Our public website is accessible and meets the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. Here is the link to the [Western Counties Regional Library website](#). There is

also a page on our website that provides information about the Library's accessibility plans and the accessible services that we offer. Here is the link to the [accessibility page](#).

Action: We created two sets of guidelines for staff, one Writing in Plain Language and the other Quick Guide for Producing Accessible Documents in Print and Online. Our Public Relations Manager is now using these guidelines to produce communications for the public.

Action: We are reviewing all the existing signage in our ten branches. We are currently gathering an inventory of the signs that are in our libraries. The next steps will be to decide which signs are needed and then we will make them accessible.

Action: We held a weeklong campaign for Disability Awareness Month and featured our new Playaways as a new addition to our collection. This activity will now happen every year.

Programs and Services

Action: We offered workshops on how to access Western Counties Regional Library's digital resources and gave tips on how to use the accessibility features that were available with these resources.

Built Environment

Action: We adjusted the floor height of the shelves to twelve inches from the floor in the adult areas of Weymouth, Digby and Yarmouth library branches.

Action: We applied for and received a grant from the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage to hire someone to lead the accessibility review for the Library's ten branches. We will ask community members for their participation in the review in September 2024 once we start the review process.

Contact Information

For more information, please contact your local Library:

Annapolis Valley Regional Library: www.valleylibrary.ca

Cape Breton Regional Library: www.cbri.ca

Colchester-East Hants Public Library: www.lovemylibrary.ca

Cumberland Public Libraries: www.cumberlandpubliclibraries.ca

Eastern Counties Regional Library: www.ecrl.ca

Western Counties Regional Library: www.westerncounties.ca