



# Polar Knowledge Canada

## **Accessibility Plan**

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## Preamble

The [Accessible Canada Act \(ACA\)](#) requires that all federal government entities prepare and publish accessibility plans. The intent of this exercise is to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to accessibility in order to help achieve a barrier-free Canada.

The 7 areas covered by section 5 of the *Accessible Canada Act* are:

- 1) Employment; Access to employment opportunities and accessible workplaces.
- 2) Built environment; Move freely around buildings and public spaces.
- 3) Information and communication technologies; Accessible digital content and technologies.
- 4) Communication (non-information and communication technologies); Barrier-free services and spaces for persons with communication disabilities.
- 5) Procurement of goods, services and facilities; Ensure purchases of accessible goods, services and facilities.
- 6) Design and delivery of programs and services; Receive services that are accessible to all.
- 7) Transportation; Barrier-free federal transportation network.

## General

For all inquiries or feedback on Polar Knowledge Canada's Accessibility Plan, please contact Jennifer Hogel, Human Resources Advisor at [HR\\_RH@polar-polaire.gc.ca](mailto:HR_RH@polar-polaire.gc.ca) or by phone at (343) 548-4982. You may also send your inquiry or feedback by mail to 1, rue Uvajuq place, CP 2150, Cambridge Bay, NU X0B 0C0

## Areas described under section 5 of the *Accessible Canada Act*

### Employment

#### Barriers identified:

1. Polar Knowledge Canada is currently in the process of building an Employment Equity program and is at 7% representation for persons with disabilities, which is just shy of the Workforce Availability for this designated group at 9%. Not having an Employment Equity program is a barrier to employment for people with disabilities since we do not have all the resources available to our employees with disabilities that could help them progress through their careers. Building the Employment Equity program is currently a priority for the Human Resources team.
2. Currently, Polar Knowledge Canada only tracks data on "Accommodation Type", but lacks insight on the full accommodations process, which can mean that there may be barriers that have not been identified within the process for people with disabilities. Tracking the full accommodation process is something that we will be looking at to ensure it is efficient, effective and barrier free.

#### Actions:

- Polar Knowledge Canada will engage on the development of an Employment Equity program by the end of fiscal year 2023-24.
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- Included in this program will be to leverage other similar organizations to create a network of employees with disabilities that meets regularly to discuss disability-related issues and champions the inclusion of people with disability.
  - This program will include the regular promotion of training and events aimed at improving accessibility, disability awareness, inclusion and disability confidence of our employees.
  - ❑ Since the *Accessible Canada Act* has broadened the definition of “disability” and also recognizing that disabilities can arise at any point in life, Polar Knowledge Canada will launch an internal email campaign as part of its Employment Equity plan, explaining the expanded definition of ‘disability’ as well as the importance of ‘Self-Identification’, and will encourage employees to revisit their self-identification status if they so decide, which may increase our current representation rates.
  - ❑ Polar Knowledge Canada will continue to work towards meeting and surpassing the current Workforce Availability target for persons with disabilities (9%) by actively promoting the hiring of students and employees through the use of various government run employment programs aimed at persons with disabilities.
  - ❑ Polar Knowledge Canada’s Human Resources and Occupational Health and Safety teams will work together to improve its tracking on accommodations to include:
    - a. Number of requests.
    - b. Rejected/Refused requests (i.e. not approved)
    - c. Accommodation type (e.g., IT hardware/software, workspace, environment related, personal support services, non-physical such as reduced work hours or change in duties)
    - d. Cost
    - e. Days from request to full implementation of accommodation
  - ❑ Polar Knowledge Canada will continue to conduct proactive consultations with employees on a regular basis seeking further feedback on the accessibility of our employment for people with disabilities (e.g., surveys, townhalls, working groups, etc.).

#### Intended Results:

Having a comprehensive Employment Equity program will support employees in all employment equity groups by providing resources and programs to help them progress through their careers.

With the promotion of various employment programs for people with disabilities to management, along with running a self-identification campaign, Polar Knowledge Canada can improve its representation rate for persons with disabilities.

Tracking more information around the accommodations process will provide Polar Knowledge Canada with a fuller understanding of the process to identify any missed barriers more easily and to watch for barriers that may arise in the future. This will help overall employment of people with disabilities by creating and maintaining a process free of barriers.

By continuing ongoing consultations with employees through surveys, townhalls, and working groups Polar Knowledge Canada will be able to track improvements to the barriers to employment for people with disabilities that have been identified, as well as to help identify any new barriers that may arise in the future.

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## Built Environment

### Barriers identified:

1. The natural environment in Cambridge Bay can create challenging conditions for people with disabilities to get to and from the office.
2. Various sensory related concerns (scents, flickering lights, temperature, background noise/distractions) were identified as barriers within the Ottawa office due to the open concept.

### Actions:

- Polar Knowledge Canada will ensure every employee is provided a laptop, and a phone with internet access. Additional accommodation requests (magnifying screen, ergonomic mouse) will also be tracked. In inclement weather, employees can tether the internet from their phone to their laptop at home. This removes the need for physical access to the Canadian High Arctic Research Station when it is difficult to commute.
- Polar Knowledge Canada will ensure there are signs posted in all offices regarding the use of scents being prohibited. There will also be 'quiet rooms' available for staff to use in the event of a need to focus or work in solitude.
- Polar Knowledge Canada will continue to consult with employees and seek feedback related to the built environment, to determine if there are any potential barriers for people with disabilities that have not been found or that arise in the future.
- Facilities Management and Human Resources will watch Canada School of Public Service's [Video: Spotlight on ACCESSibility Micro-Learning Series: Built Environment](#) in order to further our understanding of the Government of Canada accessibility requirements to ensure that future service contracts include high standards for accessibility.

### Intended Results:

Ensuring that each employee has the tools they need and access to reliable internet at home will remove the barrier for people with disabilities to be able to work during inclement weather.

Continuous employee feedback will allow Polar Knowledge Canada to get a better understanding of any accessibility challenges we have at our two locations; help identify any potential barriers that have not yet been identified or that arise in the future and help improve our overall accessibility to our built environments.

## Information and Communication Technologies

### Barriers identified:

No barriers have been identified for Information and Communication Technologies at this time.

Although no barriers have been identified, action items were created to continue to improve our Information and Communications Technologies for all employees including persons with disabilities.

### Actions:

- Polar Knowledge Canada will continue to promote the existing services for accessibility, accommodations and adaptive computer technology offered through Shared Services Canada
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which provides services to help integrate employees with disabilities, injuries and ergonomic requirements and who require access to systems, programs, information, computers and computer resources.

- Information Management/Information Technology Team along with Human Resources will watch this Canada School of Public Service's [Video: Spotlight on ACCESSibility Micro-Learning Series: Information Technologies](#) to learn about the latest trends in the industry and share practical strategies to procure, design and implement accessible Information Technology from the start.

#### Intended Results:


Continuing the promotion and use of accommodations and adaptive computer technology will ensure that employees with disabilities have the tools that they need to access information without any barriers.

## **Communication (non-Information & Communication Technology)**

#### Barriers identified:

1. Polar Knowledge Canada requires that all documents and presentations be accessible. However, not all employees have received training on how to create accessible and inclusive communications products. As a small organization, the Agency isn't always able to ensure accessible files are posted due to the volume of information. This creates a barrier for people with disabilities to be able to access the content they need. Learning plans, including mandatory trainings will be created which will help in the creation of accessible content for people with disabilities.
2. Barriers identified by employees include backlighting in meetings, too many people or some people present virtually and some in person, which create barriers to hearing effectively in meetings for the hearing impaired. This can be improved by providing training to managers on holding more inclusive meetings.

#### Actions:

- The following learning material will be made mandatory for all employees beginning in fiscal year 2023-24.
    - [Video: Making Documents Accessible](#).
    - Read this [Accessibility Guide](#) to learn how to create accessible documents.
    - Read Polar Knowledge Canada's [Writing guide](#) to learn how to write in plain language.
  - Polar Knowledge Canada has created and will continue to promote on an annual basis this  [Accessibility Guide](#) for accessible writing.
  - Polar Knowledge Canada is developing a mini-Connexions blog series highlighting sections from their Accessibility Guide.
  - Polar Knowledge Canada will promote the Canada School of Public Service's [Job aid: Planning Accessible Virtual Events](#) and this [Job aid: Promoting Inclusive Workplaces](#) to managers to help ensure that all meetings are inclusive and barrier free.
  - The communications Directorate along with Human Resources will watch this Canada School of Public Service's [Video: Spotlight on ACCESSibility Micro-Learning Series: Communications](#) to ensure
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that our approach to communications meets or exceeds accessibility requirements and to help identify any potential barriers that currently exist that have not been identified.

Intended Results:

Making training on creating accessible and inclusive documents mandatory will ensure that all documents are created and posted accessibly.

Ongoing promotion of the Polar Knowledge Canada Writing Guide and Accessibility Guide will create familiarity with our employees and help ensure that accessible writing is second nature.

## **Procurement of goods, services and facilities**

Barriers identified:

No barriers to the procurement of goods, services and facilities have been identified at this time.

Although no barriers have been identified, action items were created to continue to improve our procurement of goods, services and facilities.

Actions:

- ❑ Facilities Management and Human Resources will watch Canada School of Public Service's [Video: Spotlight on ACCESSibility Micro-Learning Series: Built Environment](#) to further our understanding of the Government of Canada accessibility requirements to ensure that any future facility contracts are accessible by design, where possible, so that employees with disabilities can use them without adaptation.
- ❑ The procurement team and Human Resources will watch Canada School of Public Service's [Video: Spotlight on ACCESSibility Micro-Learning Series: Procurement](#) to learn about improving our procurement system using recommendations from the Public Service Accessibility Strategy, as well as read [Public Service & Procurement Canada's Accessible procurement information](#) to ensure that procurement opportunities in the future will have accessibility criteria incorporated from the beginning.

Intended Results:

Ongoing consultations will allow us to continually monitor for any missed barriers or any new barriers that may arise in the future.

Ongoing education will provide Polar Knowledge Canada with the knowledge to stay up to date with the most accessible procurement practices available.

## **Design and delivery of programs and services**

Barriers identified:

No barriers to the design and delivery of programs and services for persons with disabilities have been identified at this time.

Although no barriers have been identified, action items were created to continue to improve our delivery of programs and services for all employees as well as persons with disabilities.

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#### Actions:

- Polar Knowledge Canada will continue to consult with people with disabilities on the resources used to ensure our design and delivery of programs and services remain inclusive and barrier free.
- The Human Resources team will watch Canada School of Public Service's [Video: Spotlight on ACCESSibility Micro-Learning Series: Programs and Services](#) to learn how to better design and deliver accessible programs and services and to integrate accessibility considerations early on in program design.

#### Intended Results:

These consultations will provide the Agency with a broader understanding of design and delivery of our programs and services and will allow us to continually monitor for any missed barriers or any new barriers that may arise in the future.

## **Transportation**

#### Barriers identified:

No barriers to transportation have been identified at this time.

Although no barriers have been identified, action items were created to continually monitor our transportation situation.

#### Actions:

- Polar Knowledge Canada will monitor the resources used to ensure our transportation is inclusive and barrier free to people with disabilities.

#### Intended Results:

Ongoing consultations will provide a more comprehensive understanding of our transportation resources and processes and will allow us to monitor for any missed barriers or any new barriers that may arise in the future.

## **Consultations**

Polar Knowledge Canada encouraged all employees to participate in the consultation process in the drafting of our Accessibility Plan. As we do not have a formal employee network for persons with disabilities at Polar Knowledge Canada, we launched the consultation by sending a call-out email to all employees (currently 102 FTE) seeking volunteers who self-identify as having a disability to participate in determining any existing barriers for persons with disabilities. We received responses from 5 volunteers. We followed up with a questionnaire to gain insight on our current state of accessibility within the Agency and used the responses received to help identify the barriers for each of the 7 areas in section 5 of the *Accessible Canada Act*. Polar Knowledge Canada will continue to conduct consultations with employees to track progress of action items within this report, to seek ongoing feedback and to monitor for new barriers in order to improve our accessibility for persons with disabilities.

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