



COLLEGE OF
THE ROCKIES

College of the Rockies Draft Accessibility Plan 2024 - 2027



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Territorial Acknowledgement

College of the Rockies serves the communities of the East Kootenays. All of the College's campuses are located in the traditional territory of the Ktunaxa people which is also home to the Kinbasket people. Five First Nations bands are located in the regional boundary of the college: four of which are Ktunaxa and one is Shuswap. Additionally, the College partners with the Kootenay Regional Office of the Métis Nation, BC.

We are thankful for all our Indigenous partners and are constantly seeking new ways to support the development of our community.

Message from President and CEO

In our mission to transform lives and communities we must first recognize that when it comes to accessing higher education, individuals' lived experiences are as unique as the individuals themselves. It is essential therefore, that we recognize and address systemic barriers that can keep learners from achieving their learning goals or prevent college employees from fully participating in our community. The College's accessibility plan sets out goals and objectives that will engage all members of the College community in making accessibility a reality for everyone.

- Paul Vogt, President and CEO

Message from Accessibility Committee Co-Chairs

The development of the *College of the Rockies' Accessibility Plan* would not have been possible without the endorsement and encouragement of College of the Rockies' leadership team, the members of the Advisory Committee, the insights from community stakeholders and the thoughtful contributions of students and employees throughout our campus communities. We are grateful for your time and perspectives. You have all played an important role in this worthwhile initiative!

We would also like to extend our thanks to the Institutional Research Team for their support in developing research instruments and for supporting data collection through the *Survey on Accessibility Experiences at College of the Rockies* which was distributed to both employees and students in 2023.

We acknowledge the Ministry of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills and Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction for their pivotal role in championing accessibility legislation and supporting institutions as they develop their Accessibility Plans.

Finally, we invite everyone at the College to join in on advancing accessibility at the College. If you encounter a barrier or become aware of a barrier someone else has experienced, we encourage you to provide feedback using the mechanisms outlined at the end of this document.

- Doris Silva, Director, Student Affairs and Ariane Tennant, Executive Director, Human Resources and Payroll

Introduction

We are pleased to share the first *College of the Rockies' Accessibility Plan!*

At College of the Rockies, we are committed to providing an experience for students, employees and the public that is truly equitable and inclusive, where people feel that they are welcome, belong and able to thrive.

Developed in accordance with the Accessible BC Act, the plan provides the recommendations that will ensure that the College advances the accessibility of the College for students, employees and the public accessing our programs and services. The Act requires that when developing or updating our plan, we must follow the following principles:

- Inclusion
- Adaptability
- Diversity
- Collaboration
- Self-determination
- Universal design

Our plan targets 7 areas:

- Education
- Policies and Procedures
- Design and Delivery of Programs and Services
- Information and Communication
- Facilities and Built Environment
- Technology
- Employee Services

We will review and renew the *Plan* approximately every three years.

Here are some key concepts used in our work¹.

Term	Definition
Assistive Device	Any device that is designed, made, or adapted to assist a person to perform a particular task.
Accessible Washroom	Accessible washrooms are toilet cubicles that accommodate wheelchair users. These washrooms provide enough manoeuvring space for different preferences of wheelchair transfer to and from the toilet.
Barrier	Anything that hinders the full and equal participation in society of a person with a disability (a) caused by environments, attitudes, practices, policies, information, communications, or technologies, and (b) affected by intersecting forms of discrimination.
Disability	An inability to participate fully and equally in society because of the interaction of an impairment and a barrier;
Impairment	Includes a physical, sensory, mental, intellectual, or cognitive impairment, whether permanent, temporary, or episodic.
Universal Design	Process of creating services and environments that are accessible to people with a wide range of abilities, disabilities, and other characteristics.
Universal Design for Learning (UDL)	An educational framework that aims to make learning accessible to all students by providing multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression.
Universal Washroom	Universal washrooms are fully accessible and barrier-free washrooms that include all-gender and single-stalled toilets, automatic doors, enough space to accommodate mobility devices, grab bars and lifts, as well as reachable sinks, hand dryers and paper towels.

¹ Adapted from <https://bcaccessibilityhub.ca/resources/glossary/>

Developing the Accessibility Plan

In developing the plan, we adopted the principle of self-determination which means that each person can make their own choices and manage their own lives. As it relates to developing this plan, that means that we created the *Plan* in partnership with individuals who have lived experience with encountering barriers at the College and have incorporated their ideas in the development of recommendations.

Accessibility Committee

In April 2023, the Accessibility Committee was formed. With the guidance, expertise, and recommendations from the College community, the committee's mandate is to:

- Identify barriers to access and inclusion and develop strategies to prevent, improve, and/or eliminate them.
- Contribute to the development and ongoing review of the *College of the Rockies' Accessibility Plan*.
- Develop tools to receive feedback on the *Plan* and on barriers to access at the College.

By actively addressing barriers and challenges faced by people with disabilities, the committee strives to create an environment that is equitable and supportive for all individuals, regardless of their abilities.

The committee is comprised of representatives from the College community, with at least half being persons with disabilities or are individuals who support persons with disabilities, and at least one Indigenous person.

Representative	Position
Ariane Tennant – Co-Chair	Executive Director, Human Resources and Payroll
Doris Silva – Co-Chair	Director, Student Affairs
Dana Wesley	Executive Director, Indigenous Strategy and Reconciliation
Michelle Taylor	Invermere Campus Manager
Mary Davies	Human Resources Advisor
Jennifer Cooper	Faculty – Child, Youth and Family Services
Kelly Fyke	Teaching and Learning Specialist
Liz Hamilton	Accessibility Services Coordinator/Counselling & Wellness

Representative	Position
Karin Fraser	Accessibility Services Coordinator
Darryl Dux	Communications Coordinator
Sue Morin	Senior Library Technician
Karla Vishloff	Digital Marketing Coordinator
Sadie Bannick	Student Representative – 2023/24 term
Hunter Rhodes	Student Representative – 2023/24 term
Avneet Gill	Student Representative – 2023/24 term

Consultations

Throughout the development of the *Accessibility Plan*, we engaged with diverse stakeholders through different methods of consultation. The *Accessibility Experiences at College of the Rockies Survey* was distributed to employees on June 23, 2023, resulting in 116 responses. A slightly modified version of the same survey was later administered to students on September 29, 2023, yielding 89 responses. Survey questions covered respondents’ engagement in educational opportunities related to disability, their encounters with barriers during their time at the College, and their awareness of accessibility services and features provided by the institution. In addition, the survey included numerous open-ended questions, enabling respondents to share detailed insights into their experiences at the College. Following anonymization and coding, the data was shared with the committee to inform their decisions in the development of the *Accessibility Plan*.

The chairs of the Accessibility Advisory Committee convened several individual and group meetings with the College’s managers and deans. Each manager was provided with a copy of the *Accessibility Plan* and the survey results. They were tasked with assessing whether the plan’s actions adequately addressed the survey responses, identifying any potential gaps, and evaluating the feasibility of the *Plan’s* timeline.

What We Are Doing Now

With a view to fulfilling our commitment to providing an experience for students, employees and the public that is truly equitable and inclusive, where people feel that they are welcome, belong and able to thrive, we currently provide the following services and programs for students, employees, and the public.

1. Education

The College:

- Designated January as Mental Health Month and offers several programs.
- Participates in Bell Let's Talk Activities and distributes the toolkit.
- Offers workshops on supporting people with mental health to student leaders, as well as employees in front-line positions.
- Provides Mental Health First Aid Training.
- Recognizes special days and events surrounding accessibility on the College's social media channels.

2. Policies and Procedures

The College:

- Has several policies aimed at supporting individuals though many are due for a review and refresh.

3. Design and Delivery of Programs and Services

The College:

- Aids eligible students to access funding for equipment, adaptive software, and other programs and services.
- Provides a variety of support services and accommodations to students with permanent or prolonged disabilities, including, learning, physical or psychological challenges.
- Incorporates Universal Design in Learning through the Program Quality Assurance Committee program review process.
- Provides a one-page Tip Sheet through Accessibility Services to all faculty, including information on how to connect with Accessibility Services, how to maintain confidentiality and the shared responsibilities of the student, instructor, and Accessibility Coordinator.
- Provides a [Moodle Accessibility/UDL Checklist](#) (CITL)
- Provides *Guidelines for Effective and Impactful Teaching and Learning at College of the Rockies*. (CITL)
- Provides a *UDL Moodle Course Template* and universal design training to faculty. (CITL)
- Hired additional staff in Accessibility Service to support the increasing number of students requiring support.
- Provides services for students with exam accommodations in The Testing Centre.
- Offers workshops on *Eight Things You Can Do Tomorrow to Make Your Online Course More Accessible* and *Writing Essential and Purposeful Alt Text*. (CITL)

4. Information and Communication

The College:

- Is working on an updated Style guide, which includes accessibility recommendations.
- Measures the accessibility score of the COTR website. As of March 2024, our score is 80.5%.

5. Facilities and Built Environment

The College:

- Provides accessible parking at all campuses.
- Has automatic doors, elevators, stair lifts, and accessible washrooms at the Cranbrook campus.
- Created and updated the Wellness Room. The space was redesigned and refurbished to promote relaxation, mindfulness, and wellbeing. 'In Use' signage is posted on the door to ensure privacy.

6. Technology

The College:

- Provides text to speech and speech to text assistive technology to students through Accessibility Services.
- Encourages use of MS Office 365 accessibility features.
- Uses Moodle 4.1 LMS, which has built-in accessibility features.

7. Employee Services

The College:

- Provides workplace accommodations and assistive equipment.
- Offers individualized ergonomic assessments.

Recommendations

1. Education

Objective: Ensure our employees and students have access to training and education on accessibility.

Number	Recommendations
1.1	Develop a Universal Design for Learning digital repository to centralize and disseminate resources.
1.2	Establish an educational program on Universal Design for Learning.
1.3	Develop and launch awareness-building and education campaigns for students and employees on accessibility topics.

2. Policies and Procedures

Objective: Ensure our policies and procedures for students, employees and visitors comply with the legislation and advance accessibility.

Number	Recommendations
2.1	Embed accessibility as an evaluative criterion in procurement and capital planning.
2.2	Embed accessibility standards as evaluative criteria when reviewing existing policies and drafting new policies and ensure accessibility standards are implemented.
2.3	Review accessibility policies and procedures at the College and explore simplification and/or integration of student and employee policies and with separate procedural documents.
2.4	Develop a budget to address accessibility issues at the College.
2.5	Engage the accessibility committee to provide an annual report on the implementation of the accessibility plan and accessibility standards.

3. Design and Delivery of Programs and Services

Objective: Ensure that every individual, regardless of ability, has access to programs and services.

Number	Recommendations
3.1	Create and implement comprehensive accessibility guidelines for hosting College events, meetings and activities and ensure event hosts and organizers are trained on the guidelines.
3.2	Incorporate accessibility standards in the emergency management plan and emergency procedures and resources, notably evacuation procedures.
3.3	Identify and address barriers to front-line student services and third-party student services through an audit.
3.4	Maintain a tool to collect feedback on accessibility issues and the <i>Accessibility Plan</i> .
3.5	Review staff allocation and analyze service levels in Accessibility Services after two-year pilot and determine whether resource allocations are appropriately aligned to meet student needs in the future.

4. Information and Communication

Objective: Ensure our information and communication is shared with our students, employees, and public in a variety of accessible ways.

Number	Recommendations
4.1	Develop a dedicated Accessibility landing page on our website which will serve as a centralized hub for accessibility resources, including the <i>Accessibility Plan</i> , relevant policies and procedures and the feedback tool.
4.2	Develop and implement standards for creating accessible print and digital content, ensuring existing print and digital content is updated when needed and new content is developed in accordance with the standards.

5. Facilities and Built Environment

Objective: Ensure that every individual, regardless of ability, can physically access our facilities and the built environment.

Number	Recommendations
5.1	Make quick changes to improve accessibility prior to the facility audit, including improving parking spaces, soundproof spaces and adjusting lighting.
5.2	Complete a facilities audit for all buildings at all campuses in accordance with the Rick Hansen standards and develop priorities and timelines in response to the audit.
5.3	Develop and review the inventory of classroom, public space and office accessible equipment and resources, identify, and address inventory gaps, and develop an easy-to-use process for requesting and assigning of equipment and resources that prioritizes people with accessibility needs.
5.4	Install and update maps and signage for all College campuses and facilities emphasizing accessible routes, highlighting service locations, and highlighting accessible and universal washrooms and quiet spaces.
5.5	Develop a plan to have accessible and/or universal washrooms on every floor at every College campus and facility and ensure all new structures include a universal washroom on every floor of every building in the plan.

6. Technology

Objective: Ensure that every individual, regardless of ability, can effectively use our digital platforms, applications, and services.

Number	Recommendations
6.1	Eliminate manual and paper-based processes for student accommodations by implementing an all-in-one system with embedded workflows for providing student accommodations and sending accommodation letters to faculty.
6.2	Generate a list of accessibility features in technologies, software dedicated to accessibility and accessibility technological equipment and then create a report outlining next steps to fulfill accessibility needs, notably exploring and addressing the resources at the regional campuses and ensuring people know how to access and use these resources.
6.3	Conduct a comprehensive accessibility audit of the College's information systems, including COTR Online, Springshare, AccessCOTR, among others, to identify barriers and gaps with accessibility standards and provide training for employees who produce content on these platforms.

7. Employee Services

Objective: Ensure that every individual, regardless of ability, can access, grow, and thrive in their employment at the College.

Number	Recommendations
7.1	Add an accessibility statement to all job postings and establish a process in HR for applicants to make requests for accessible resources and processes in the recruitment process.
7.2	Cultivate an empathetic culture where employees feel supported and welcome to broach a conversation about accessibility with their managers and/or Human Resources.
7.3	Work with Manulife to ensure services to employees about their illness leaves and/or accommodation requests are clear, relevant, and supportive.
7.4	Document comprehensive accommodation guidelines and share the guidelines with employees.
7.5	Identify and address barriers to front-line employee services and third-party employee services through an audit.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The Director, Student Affairs and Executive Director, Human Resources and Payroll are responsible for overseeing the implementation of the *Plan* and continually evaluating accessibility at the College, with the assistance of the Accessibility Committee and many other contributors at the College. A workplan has been developed with the departments who are responsible for implementing the recommendations.

Starting 2025, an annual report on the implementation of the *Accessibility Plan* and on accessibility issues that arise after the preparation of the plan will be prepared each July and presented to the President and CEO.

We welcome your feedback! Your feedback is essential to our effort to ensure that the College is accessible and responsive to the needs of students, employees and the public. Please submit your feedback through **one** of the following methods:

- Webform (anonymous option): <https://forms.office.com/r/ZBZGzs5i9z>
- Email: accessibility@cotr.bc.ca
- Phone: 250-489-2751 ex 4999
 - select 1 for students comments
 - select 2 for employees comments