

Newfoundland and Labrador Public Libraries Accessibility Plan 2024-26



Prepared by Andrew Lockhart, Director of Accessibility Planning

Available in alternate formats. Please contact:

Newfoundland and Labrador Public Libraries

48 St. Georges Avenue

Stephenville, NL, A2N 1K9

Telephone: (709) 643-0900

Fax: (709) 643-0925

Email: accessibility@nlpl.ca

Message from the Provincial Board

Newfoundland and Labrador Public Libraries has been helping people and communities in this province connect with each other since 1935.

Public libraries have evolved over the decades into community hubs that strive to provide access to a variety of resources, spaces, and opportunities for the public.

We, the Provincial Information and Library Resources Board, are proud to continue in our role of providing access to a full range of library services that are broadly beneficially to our communities.

I am pleased to present the Accessibility Plan for the Newfoundland and Labrador public library system for the period of 2024 to March 31, 2027.

The report was prepared by NLPL's Director of Accessibility Planning and reviewed by The Provincial Information and Library Resources Board on July 30, 2024.

My signature below is on behalf of the Board and affirms our accountability for the preparation of this Plan and our commitment to achieving the goals.

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Chair, Provincial Information and Library Resources Board

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About Newfoundland and Labrador Public Libraries

- The **Provincial Information and Library Resources Board** (commonly known as **Newfoundland and Labrador Public Libraries** or **NLPL**) is a provincial government agency responsible for all public library services in Newfoundland and Labrador under the Public Libraries Act.
- NLPL operates 94 public libraries in communities large and small throughout the Province. These libraries are organized into four divisions – Western Newfoundland & Labrador Division, Central Division, Eastern Division, and Provincial Resource Division (known as St. John’s Public Libraries).
- Each local library has a **Local Library Board**. These advisory boards support their local library by engaging in fundraising, community engagement, and advocacy activities. There are approximately 500 volunteer local library board members and a large number of other individuals who volunteer their time in support of public library services.
- A representative of each local board is appointed to their respective **Divisional Library Board**. Divisional library boards assist the organization by helping ensure that services and programs are consistent throughout the different regions of the province, implementing policies, and assisting with promotion and fundraising.
- The chairs of the four regional boards along with six members appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council make up the **Provincial Library Board**, which directs the organization.
- Our **Vision** is:

A Public Library System providing access to a full range of library services that meet the needs of everyone supporting personal growth, and continued learning while engaging and connecting with people and communities.

About the Accessibility Plan

This Accessibility Plan was researched and prepared by the Director of Accessibility Planning at the direction of the Provincial Library and Information Resources Board.

Research for the Plan included a review of existing NL Accessibility Plans, plans and policies of other Atlantic Canadian library systems, and a review of current research on the topic.

The Plan identifies the existing collections, programs, and services which enhance accessibility, inclusion, and equity in our communities; identifies existing barriers within the organization through consultation with our stakeholders; and sets focus areas and goals where NLPL will make improvements over the next three years.

Statement of Commitment

- Public libraries are for everyone. They strengthen communities and create a more equitable society.
- Newfoundland and Labrador Public Libraries strives to provide library services and materials that are accessible to everyone in the province.
- Newfoundland and Labrador Public Libraries is committed to continually identifying and removing barriers that prevent the full participation of all.
- While developing **new** programs and services to meet the changing needs of our communities, we will also increase awareness of our **existing** services and programs.

Definitions

These definitions are derived from the [Government of Canada's Guide on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Terminology](#) and [NLSchools' Accessibility Plan](#).

Accommodation: Any technical aid or device, personal support, disability-related support or other accommodation a person may require to fully participate in meetings, events and information sessions.

Accessibility: The quality of an environment that enables a person to access it with ease.

Barrier: anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in society, including:

1. A physical barrier,
2. An architectural barrier,
3. An information or communications barrier,
4. An attitudinal barrier,
5. A technological barrier,
6. A barrier established or perpetuated by an Act, regulations, a policy or practice

Disability: A physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, sensory, learning or communication impairment, or a functional limitation, whether apparent or not, and permanent, temporary or episodic in nature, that hinders a person's full and equal participation in society when they face a barrier.

Diversity: The presence of a wide range of human qualities within a group, organization or society. The dimensions of diversity include ancestry, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, language, physical and intellectual ability, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation and socio-economic status.

Equity: A condition or state of fair, inclusive, and respectful treatment of all people. Equity does not mean treating people the same without regard for individual differences.

Inclusion: The practice of using proactive measures to create an environment where people feel welcomed, respected and valued, and to foster a sense of belonging and engagement.

Neurodivergence: A departure from what is considered typical in a person's neurological function or behavioural traits.

2SLGBTQI+: Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and others

Access to Library Services

NL Public Libraries has always endeavored to ensure that its services are accessible to all individuals within Newfoundland and Labrador. Many traditional library services enhance accessibility, inclusion, and equity in our communities:

- NLPL provides high speed internet access at all library locations. This includes the use of public computers and free access to wireless internet. NLPL also partners with other government entities to improve access to digital government services, such as supporting the provincial vaccine passport system.
- **Books By Mail** is a library service offered to people who cannot access a physical library building because of a disability or because they live in a community where there is no public library. Material can be requested through phone, mail, or email and is mailed directly to the patron's address. The Books by Mail service is offered throughout the province.
- The **Home Reader Service** operates in St. John's, Gander, Grand Falls-Windsor, and Corner Brook. The service delivers materials free of charge to people who cannot visit the library, new parents, people with disabilities, and people living in care facilities or seniors housing. This service delivers new books and take back previously loaned materials on a rotating schedule.
- **Library on the Go** is a mobile pop-up library that visits City of St. John's community centres using our specialized outreach vehicle. Library materials are available for borrowing, and users can sign up for cards and learn about library services. The service started September 2022 and averages four stops per month.
- Thanks to recent improvements to our catalogue system and mailing processes, material in any library can be requested by any patron around the province. This means that patrons in smaller communities have access to the same resources as those in larger areas, and not just what is on the shelf at their own library.
- NLPL offers access to the **Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA)** collection for people who have difficulty reading print due to a visual, physical, or learning disability. CELA is a national not-for-profit organization focused on the creation, collection, delivery, and preservation of both digital and physical alternate format accessible materials for Canadians.
 - CELA services are available to patrons with a perceptual disability as defined under the provisions of the Copyright Modernization Act, which includes:
Learning disability: an impairment relating to comprehension; Physical disability:

the inability to hold or manipulate a book; Visual disability: severe or total impairment of sight or inability to focus or move one's eyes.

- NLPL has been a member of the CELA since 2017. In 2023-24, NLPL patrons borrowed 10,289 audio books, 209 braille books, and 417 e-text books and 5,983 newspapers through CELA.
- NLPL's **Digital Library** provides access to digital library materials from anywhere in the province through an internet connection. This service allows the downloading of electronic books and audiobooks, from within the library or home, to a variety of devices. This service improves accessibility for individuals who are not within travel distance of a public library, and for persons with visual and fine motor skills disabilities.
 - Within the Libby App, fonts can be changed to suit patrons' needs, including 15 font sizes on their device. The app also features a five font options including OpenDyslexic, a dyslexia-friendly font that has more generous line-spacing.
- A **Diversity Audit (Race and Ethnicity)** by the Social Fabric Institute Inc. and a **Racial Equity Plan** have led to improvements in the diversity of NLPL's collection through purchase of new material, removal of out of date material, and changes to the subject headings used to organize and search for material in our catalogue. These processes led to the creation of a formal Indigenous Collection and new initiatives, such as our Indigenous Storyteller in Residence (Fall 2023).
- NLPL has a **Large Print (LP)** book collection of over 15 thousand physical books available to everyone. This collection circulated 55,041 times in 2023-24.
- NLPL has a dedicated **Indigenous Collection** of over four thousand books that is available to everyone. This collection exposes patrons to indigenous authors and material of Newfoundland and Labrador. Items in this collection circulated 28,048 times in 2023-24.
- NLPL has a **Multi-lingual Collection** of 1,900 Books available to everyone. In addition to providing materials for people who may not have English or French as their primary language, it provides learning opportunities for people who wish to learn a new language. This collection circulated 6,102 times in 2023-24. This collection was expanded through The Welcome Project, a community consultation project aimed at making our libraries more welcoming for newcomers, which included translation of informational pamphlets and purchase of multilingual children's books in 47 languages.
- NLPL has a **French Language Collection** of over 6,000 books available to everyone. A French Services Specialist was hired in May of 2023 to provide print and digital French language content, support collections development, and develop French language programming including book clubs for school-aged children.

NLPL also offers programs focused on accessibility, including:

- Mount Pearl Public Library provides a Paws for Stories program which provides children with reading disabilities the opportunity to read books in the presence of a St. John Ambulance therapy dog.
- Mount Pearl Public Library provides a monthly CELA Book Club that is specifically designed for persons with print disabilities. Primarily focusing on mystery novels, library staff provide assistance with accessing CELA and the NLPL digital library.
- Conception Bay South holds a weekly social event for persons who are neurodivergent. This program allows young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 to meet people and socialize.
- Gander and Grand Falls-Windsor Public Libraries hold weekly Sensory Friendly Hour. This program physically adjusts library space to enable persons with sensory needs to use the library. These adjustments include dimming overhead lights, muting computers, and promoting reduced sound levels within the library.
- Gander and Grand Falls Windsor Public Libraries partnered with the Association for New Canadians and held Welcome Week programs, Multilingual Family Story times/book readings and Crochet and Conversation events.
- Springdale Public Library partnered with the Green Bay Community Employment Corporation (an organization supporting person with developmental disabilities) and held programming and events such as Fight for Access Presentations, Inclusive Game Night and Community presentation to celebrate Red Shirt Day.
- Conversation Cafés and Board Game Nights at multiple libraries in partnership with the Association of New Canadians, helping New Canadians work on their English conversation skills and meet new people.
- Corner Brook hosts a monthly Queer Book Club in partnership with Corner Brook – Bay of Islands Pride, promoting diverse library material while providing a safe and welcoming space for the 2SLGBTQI+ community in rural Newfoundland.
- Port aux Basques hosted Autism Awareness session presented by Autism Involves Me, a local advocacy group working towards more accessible community services for people with Autism.
- St. John’s has hosted Let’s Talk About: American Sign Language information sessions.

Consultation

Feedback on existing barriers at NL Public Libraries was collected from staff, local library boards, and members of the public. This feedback was used to generate and prioritize which goals this Accessibility Plan would set for the next three years.

- The NL [Disability Policy Office](#) provided initial feedback on the plan.
- All NLPL staff were invited to provide feedback. Many NLPL staff members have decades of experience working with the public in communities around the province and have direct knowledge of the barriers patrons face day to day in using our libraries.
- Approximately 500 people serve on local boards at 94 libraries across the province. Part of local boards' role is to represent the needs of their communities in the system. Each local board was contacted and asked to provide a submission to be reviewed as part of the Accessibility Plan process.
- The public consultation occurred as part of the St. John's Public Libraries annual general meeting in St. John's and online on May 22, 2024.
- A draft plan was submitted to several community partners for review and feedback:
 - [CNIB NL](#)
 - [Autism Canada](#)
- Focus areas were developed by analyzing the barriers identified by stakeholders in their feedback.

Goals and Focus Areas

The following focus areas were developed to address and resolve the barriers identified in the library system and to create action items that can be monitored and evaluated.

The goals selected and their prioritization were based on the feedback received and what was feasible to achieve within NLPL's limited fiscal resources. Addition external funding would allow for accelerated progress and additional goals.

All goals are to be completed by Dec 31 of the noted year and will be reported on in NLPL's annual reports.

Focus Area One: Built Environment

Lead: Executive Director

Physical barriers limiting the public's access to NLPL spaces were the most frequent barrier mentioned and the barrier given the highest priority in the feedback received.

NLPL operates 94 libraries in the province. Nineteen of these libraries operate out of NLPL-owned and maintained buildings; the remaining 75 libraries are in leased commercial spaces, or in provincial or municipal government buildings.

Making our libraries barrier free is a priority and many recent renovations have led to improved accessibility. This includes upgrades to entrances, reconfiguring programming spaces to be more accessible, adding automatic doors, and installing or updating exterior ramps. NL Public Libraries will continue to implement selected options using our capital budget, with improvements to building accessibility maintained as a top priority. NLPL will continue to enhance services that were identified as helping with this issue, such as virtual programs, Library on the Go, Books by Mail, and our Digital Library.

- 2024: Updated information will be sent to all library OH&S Committees for them to review and implement. Improvements to be implemented will include: moving material from low and high shelving, reorganizing furniture and shelving to allow easier movement within libraries, handrails in washrooms, and the removal of clutter and excess furniture.
- 2025: NLPL will review all libraries for basic levels of accessibility to the public and post the results publicly on each library webpage. This will ensure that members of the public are aware of the physical accessibility of our spaces and the accommodations they may need to request in order to participate in library programming. Basic accessibility

information will include whether the facility features: designated accessible parking spaces, step-free entrance or if a ramp or elevator is present, automated door at entrance, entrance having a width of at least 35", washroom door having a of at 32", a washroom with at least with 5' turning area, and a gender-neutral washroom.

- 2026: NLPL will commission full external accessibility audits of two sample locations around the province, one urban library and one rural. The results of this process and the results of the Department of Transportation and Infrastructures' study of the accessibility of government buildings will be reviewed as part of the development of NLPL's 2027-2029 Accessibility Plan.

Focus Area Two: Promotion and Public Engagement

Lead: Director of Library Operations

NLPL currently offers many accessibility focused services and programs. Public knowledge of these services and programs was identified as a barrier: the public cannot avail of services if they do not know they exist. Lack of awareness of the Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA) and the services provided by our partnership. Another barrier was confusion relating to the names and locations of different libraries, such as inconsistency in library names and lack of exterior signage, and lack of interior wayfinding signage.

- 2024: An accessibility information webpage will be added to the NLPL website. All information relating to accommodations and accessible services will be detailed on the page, including information on how to request an accommodation and how to access CELA services. The page will also include a feedback form specifically for accessibility concerns, suggestions, or questions.
- 2025: NLPL will launch a promotional campaign highlighting accessible services and programs, with a focus on the Centre for Equitable Library Access. This will include additional staff training in partnership with CNIB NL.
- 2026: NLPL will review and create standards for the names of existing libraries, external signage, and internal signage and wayfinding.
- 2026: Leading up to the 27-29 Accessibility Plan, public engagement sessions will be organized. This will include a survey that can be completed physically or digitally, along with public consultations in several communities around the province. Particular attention will be placed on input from communities without physical libraries, remote areas, and Labrador.

Focus Area Three: Programs and Services

Lead: Executive Director

NLPL offers many library services and programs that enhance accessibility, inclusion, and equity in our communities. Barriers identified relating to library programs and services included the limited number of hours that many libraries operate, lack of awareness of what accommodations the public can request, and the monetary cost of library use. Staff identified the need for a formalized process the public can follow to request accommodations, as well as additional training relating to accommodations.

Library late fees have been identified as a significant barrier, particularly for low-income households. While NLPL has not collected late fees on library material since 2020, late fees are still an official policy.

Limited hours of operation were mentioned as a particular barrier for everyone. Ideal hours of operation and levels of service have already been identified by NLPL's Future State Plan. Additional funds would need to be secured to increase service levels. To meet this need, NLPL will continue to advocate for increases in its budget. NLPL has implemented improvements to programs and services to mitigate the barrier of limited operating hours, such as: take-home resources and kits, virtual and hybrid virtual/in-person library programs that allow for asynchronous participation, the expansion of digital material, and new services being added to the digital library.

Difficulty hearing speakers or program leaders due to a lack of sound reinforcement was identified as a barrier. Once successful solution piloted since 2023 at the CBS Library is a specialized audio amplification system, which can be expanded to additional locations.

Noise and bright lighting were identified as barriers for some neurodivergent patrons. Many libraries are small spaces, where noise is hard to control, especially during busy story times or programs that involve music or movement. Low-sensory hours at libraries was suggested as a service that solution, especially if the hours are consistent and well-advertised.

The diversity of NLPL's collection (see the Access to Library Services section) was identified as a strength. NLPL will continue to evaluate and improve the diversity of our library materials, with an emphasis on housing more material in small and medium libraries in addition to larger centers.

- 2024: An Accessibility Response Plan for staff members engaging with the public will be developed. This plan will include a full accommodation process that can be followed and a form that indicates the types of accommodations that NLPL can offer. A process for the evaluation of these requests will be created. The Accessibility Response Plan will include training for frontline staff. All of this information will be made available on an updated accessibility webpage.

- 2025: At its next strategic planning session, the Provincial Board will evaluate the feasibility of implementing the recommendation of our 2022 Fines Report and eliminate monetary fines for the return of overdue materials.
- 2025: Portable speaker systems will be added to four additional locations around the province: Corner Brook, Gander, St. John's, and Mount Pearl.
- 2026: A low-sensory hours service will be developed and implemented at feasible libraries.

Focus Area Four: Internet and Connectivity

Lead: Director of Information Technology

The two major barriers identified in this area are a lack of access to high speed internet, especially in rural areas, and lack of support for navigating increasingly digital-based government services. These were identified as barriers in our consultation and in the Accessibility Plans of other provincial departments. Though accessing the internet may be easier than ever before, the devices and skills required to access these government services are not.

NLPL will continue to provide high-speed internet access at all of our libraries, including the use of public computers and free access to wireless internet. Additional upgrades to the quality and speed of Internet in rural areas will continue to be prioritised as new internet infrastructure becomes available. NLPL will continue to partner with other government entities to improve access to digital government services. In addition, methods of bringing technology to rural areas and to people without internet access will be explored. This includes new preloaded tablets with educational material for young children and a pilot to circulate wireless internet hotspots.

Program or event registration needing to be by phone or in person was identified as a barrier for working parents, patrons with hearing difficulties or English language learners by staff. Overreliance on social media for providing library information was also highlighted. Both of these barriers will be addressed by a new NLPL website, which is in development. It will feature a complete redesign and new features, such as an events calendar that will allow online program registration. Additional feedback from the Accessibility Plan process will be integrated into the website development.

- 2024: NLPL will begin lending tablets loaded with early literacy materials at all public libraries. The tablets have no connectivity or cameras, and are preloaded with apps and videos for use at home.

- 2025: Annual accessibility reviews of the NLPL’s website will occur to ensure sections remain up to date. The results of the reviews will be integrated into the provincial annual reports.
- 2026: NLPL will evaluate the feasibility of providing wireless internet hotspots for circulation by the public, with a pilot launched in 2026.

Focus Area Five: Communication

Lead: Executive Director

Changes to provincial government policy and the implementation of this plan will require improvements in several areas of communication within NLPL. These improvements will make NLPL’s reporting more accessible and transparent to the public, and make it easier for people to participate in events

- 2024: The Government of Newfoundland Labrador’s new Communication Policy, which standardizes how documents are produced and formatted and on accommodations processes for public documents and events, will be adopted by NLPL. All public documents produced by NLPL will adhere to the new standards described in that policy. The policy will be used as a guide for internal communications and will inform library promotions and social media practices. All Provincial and Divisional annual reports will adhere to the new communication standard.
- 2025: NLPL will form an Accessibility and Equity Committee that reviews this document quarterly and ensures that goals of the Accessibility Plan are met and that process is being made to remove identified barriers.
- 2026: A committee will be formed to review current promotional practices, including physical posters, social media posting, and other methods of promoting libraries. The committee will generate a report with promotion standards and recommendations that will reviewed and implemented by NLPL.

Promotion, Monitoring, and Evaluating

Training relating to the Accessibility Plan will occur as part of the implementation of the Accessibility Response Plan.

An Accessibility and Equity committee will be formed to monitor the process. The committee will report directly to the Executive Director and be responsible for reviewing the plan, monitoring each goal, and providing updates to the Executive Director. The committee will also monitor updates to relevant provincial policies and accessibility laws and regulations and ensure compliance, and provide feedback on new initiatives.

The Accessibility Plan will be made publicly available on the Newfoundland and Labrador Public Libraries' website.

Accessibility will be a standing item on the annual divisional library board meetings. A section on accessibility improvements will be added to the annual report for each library division. This has already been implemented for the provincial annual report issued by NLPL's Executive Director starting with the 2023-24 fiscal year.

In the final year of the 24-26 Accessibility Plan we will host multiple public engagement sessions on accessibility. This will include a survey and public consultations in communities throughout the province.

Appendix A: Summary of Goals

Area	2024 Goals	2025 Goals	2026 Goals
1: Built Environment	Update OH&S information	Review and make public basic accessibility levels of facilities	External accessibility audits of two libraries
2: Promotion and Public Engagement	Publish accessibility information webpage	Launch CELA training and promotion	Create naming and signage standards Public engagement sessions
3: Programs and Services	Develop and implement Accessibility Response Plan	Eliminate fines if feasible Acquire 4 more portable speaker systems	Reduced sensory hours developed and implemented
4: Internet and Connectivity	Launch Playaway tablets	Implement accessibility reviews of website	Pilot wireless internet hotspots
5: Communication	Implement Communication Policy	Form Accessibility and Equity Committee	Implement Promotion standards