



BUILT ENVIRONMENT

TOOL 4: Conducting Accessibility Audits in
Existing Locations

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1** Accessibility Audits
- 2** Pick the Right Audit for You
- 3** Planning for Improvement Post-Audit
- 4** References

ACCESSIBILITY AUDITS

Accessibility Audits [1]

A well-designed audit can give accurate information on the current situation, help with gap analyses, identify what works and what does not, and highlight areas for further investigation. As well as being routinely used to assist with effective and efficient business development, accessibility audits are also often used to gauge the impact of proposed changes.



The first step in developing your built environment strategy is to carry out an audit. This is the most systematic way to gather all the information you need to see what is working well and where improvements are required.



Carry out regular audits throughout the year, as well as when any changes have been implemented. This can be very cost-effective and help eliminate barriers early. Staggering audits and assessments may be the most efficient and effective method for some organizations.



Involve participants of the audit in developing the follow-up strategy. Their insights and experience are crucial for the project's success. For instance, including people with disabilities in the audit can provide a more accurate picture of accessibility.



This information, and the insight from those involved, can then be used to design out at an early stage, any actual or potential accessibility barriers.

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Introducing the right questions at the right stages of design is critical to inclusive innovation” – Samantha Estoesta, TD, Manager, Equity in Innovation and Programs

ACCESSIBILITY AUDITS

Before choosing an accessibility audit, take a look at these important key considerations: [1]

- **Secure Buy-In:** Speak to leaders and other relevant stakeholders to ensure they support the audit. All staff, including senior executives, need to understand what an audit is, why it's important, & how it will enhance the diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace.
- **Gather Resources:** Ensure that the necessary support and resources are available before the audit. Representatives from various departments can inform the audit, be involved in the process, and help develop recommendations.
- **Focus on Authenticity:** Resisting the urge to pre-plan for an audit ensures that assessments and results are accurate, realistic, and usable.
- **Be Transparent:** Before conducting the audit, make sure that everyone in the organization knows what is required of them, what will happen during the audit, and what the next steps will be after the audit (e.g., a report will be produced, recommendations will be made, etc.)
- **Manage Expectations:** It's important to manage expectations about what will come from the audit. Companies may not have the budget, time, or capacity to implement physical changes to a space. Given the support and resources they have access to, organizations will have to prioritize the order by which they address the results of the audit.

Pick the Right Audit for You

Rick Hansen Foundation [2]

The Rick Hansen Foundation (RHF) is a registered Canadian Charity, originating in 1988, petitioning to change the world by removing barriers and enabling the potential of people with disabilities. The Rick Hansen foundation has created an accessible rating system that measures the accessibility of building and sites. It promotes increased access through the adoption of Universal Design principles. For more information on the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification (FHFAC), please see:

<https://www.rickhansen.com/sites/default/files/2018-08/cboc-final-report-feb2018-accessible-1.pdf>

GlaxoSmithKline

The Inclusive Design Standards published by GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) in January 2021 in the United Kingdom, provides accessibility and inclusivity standards for employers to combine inclusive design of workplaces with inclusive management and human resource policies. The three standards published set out a strategic approach to inclusive design, follow by an outline of the main points to consider when designing for diversity.



ACCESSIBILITY AUDITS

Inclusive Futures [3]

The disability confident employers' toolkit is produced by Inclusion Works, a consortium of leading international organizations of people with disabilities (OPDs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), led by Sightsavers who are working in partnership with business leaders across the world. The Accessibility Standards follows a step-by-step guide to undertaking an accessibility audit. For more information on the Inclusive Standards Accessibility Audit, please see: [Accessibility Audit Pack - Accessibility standards.pdf](#)

The CSA Standards: Accessible Design for the Built Environment [4]

Canadian Standards Association develops standards through consensus standards development processes approved by the Standards Council of Canada. This Standard contains requirements for making building and other facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. For more information on CSA standard, please see: https://www.csagroup.org/wp-content/uploads/B651-18_EN_Errata_.pdf

Other Considerations [5]

The following resources are additional reading materials that businesses can adopt to not only go above and beyond in building towards disability confidence, but also building a strong foundational framework. By enabling high performance building – moving beyond “access” to “usability”, the following is a guide for the non-specialists:

- **Open for Business:** essential reading for those responsible for ensuring as many people as possible have easy access to goods and services - and are welcomed as valued customers and stakeholders. Open for business helps businesses take a best practice approach to making adjustments, and/or redesigning their premises, as well as showing what they should be doing to minimize legal and reputation risks.
- **The Triple Audit:** provides detailed checklists which enable managers to systematically remove barriers with unique focus on the maintenance and staff training programmes needed if buildings are to be as accessible and usable as possible for everyone

PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT POST-AUDIT

Planning for Improvement Post-Audit [1]

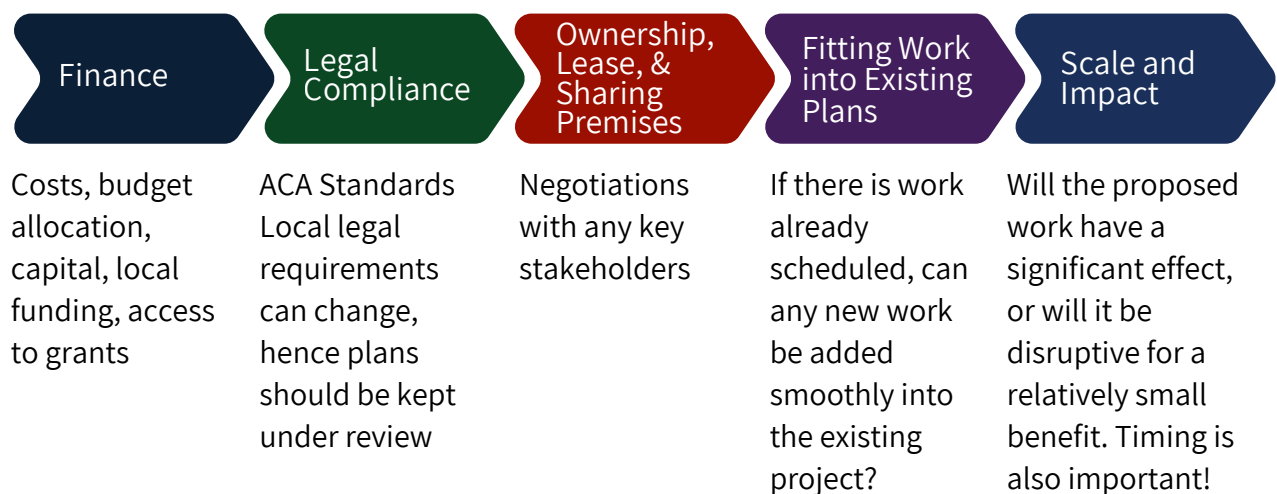
Just like a home, there is a never-ending list of jobs with an organization's-built environment. Many of these can be anticipated and scheduled for regular maintenance, whereas others will be unexpected. Timescales and deciding who is responsible for any actions and future audits should be included in any plan and strategy.

Prioritizing and Categorizing Projects to Develop

Once you have completed your audit, and know your starting point, you can decide on the next steps. Developing an accessible built environment strategy is a long-term project that should remain a permanent agenda item. Although re-building the entire environment is not feasible nor a best practice, upgrades, and renovations to ensure accessibility and inclusivity are needed. Not all issues identified in the audit will be able to be addressed immediately, so a long-term programme is required.

This may be one of the most challenging and time-consuming phases but should save time, money and retrofitting in the longer term. There are different ways of approaching this, and most projects will require a mixture:

- What is most urgent from a risk management perspective?
- What is easy to do immediately?
- How to approach the strategy – one business type or one region at a time? For others it may be by hierarchy of compliance with local accessibility regulation, followed by global standards and then best practice for example.
- A potentially slower and more holistic approach where smaller tasks can be combined to be completed in a logical order.



REFERENCES

- [1] Business Disability Forum (2022). Access for all – Creating inclusive global built environments: Global Guide. HSBC.
- [2] Brad McCannell (2018). From Where I Sit: Busting Five Myths of Universal Design. Rick Hansen Foundation. <https://www.rickhansen.com/news-stories/blog/where-i-sit-busting-five-myths-universal-design>
- [3] Sightsavers (n.d.). Accessibility standards for buildings in low and middle income settings.
- [4] National Standard of Canada (2020). Accessible design for the built environment. CSA Group. https://www.csagroup.org/wp-content/uploads/B651-18_EN_Errata_.pdf
- [5] Sightsavers (n.d.). Accessibility audit checklist.