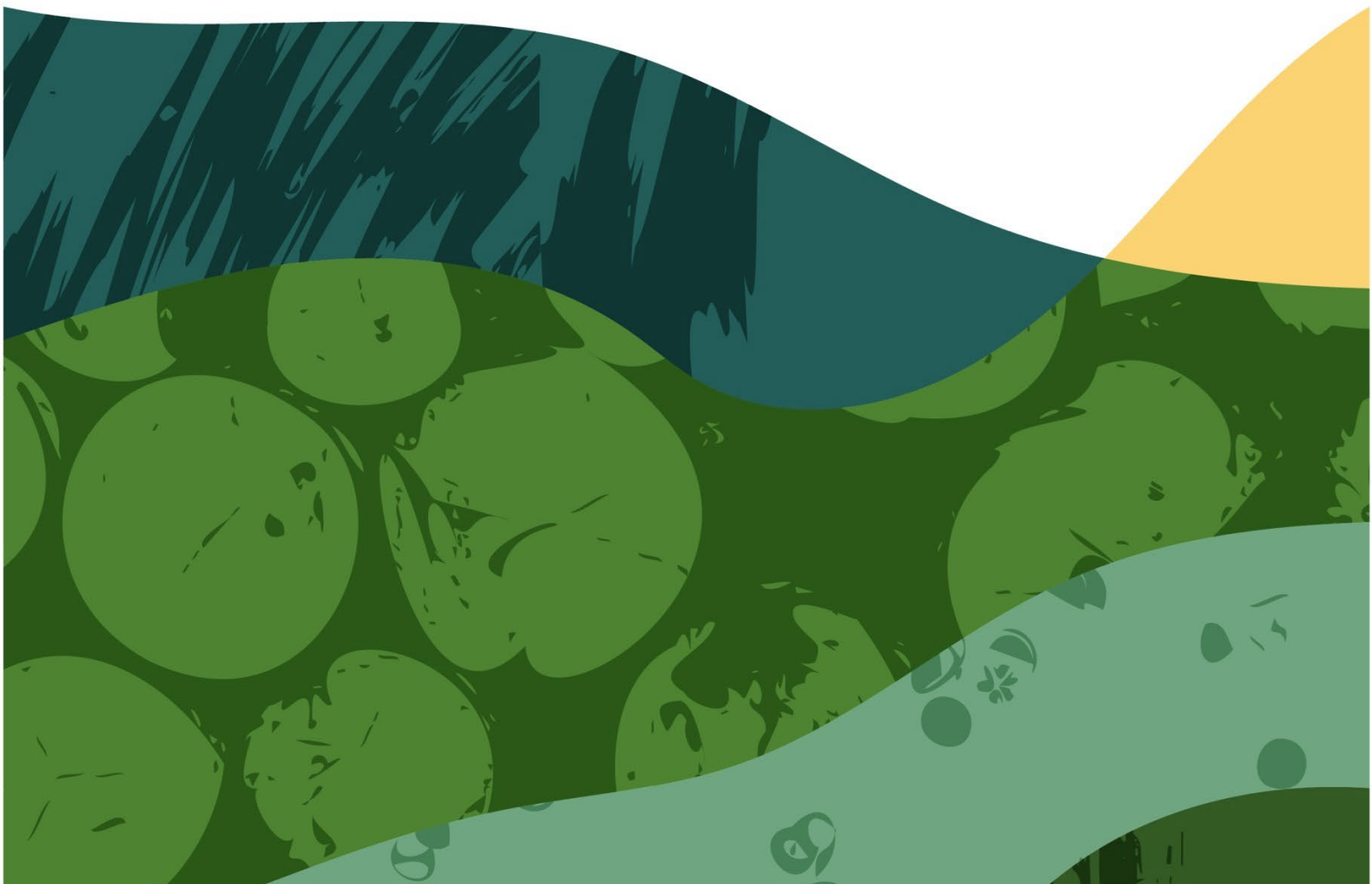




Regional District of
Kitimat-Stikine

Accessibility Action Plan

2023 – 2025





Kleanza Creek

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	2
Message from the Chair	3
Introduction	4
Guiding Framework	4
Vision	7
Commitment Statement	7
Descriptions & Principles	7
Focus Areas	9
Actions & Implementation	10
Goals	10
Action Plan	10
Monitoring	15
How to Give Us Feedback	16

Acknowledgements

The Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine (RDKS) is situated within the traditional territories of the Nisga'a, Gitksan, Wet'suwet'en, Haisla, Tsimshian, Heiltsuk and Tahltan Nations. Our staff and Board of Directors respectfully acknowledge the privileges of living in our region and collaborating and working with First Nations. Recognizing the importance of these relationships and working towards truth and reconciliation are key priorities for the RDKS.

Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee

The RDKS wishes to express gratitude to the members of the Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee. They have generously provided their time and expertise to identify barriers to accessibility and inclusion for people with disabilities in our communities. They also advised on how to best prevent and remove these barriers moving forward.

This committee includes partner representatives from different public sector organizations, including local governments, libraries, and a post-secondary education institution. The RDKS also worked with community accessibility advisory members, including experts, self-advocates and residents with personal experiences related to accessibility.

The knowledge and valuable insights they shared have helped us to create this Accessibility Plan to address accessibility issues in our organization, while also assisting partner organizations in creating their own accessibility plans.

The RDKS thanks them for their contributions to the first phase of our accessibility planning and for their commitment as we continue our journey to improve accessibility in our organizations going forward.

Message from the Chair



On behalf of the Regional District of Kitimat–Stikine Board of Directors, I am pleased to share with you the Regional District of Kitimat–Stikine Accessibility Plan – Phase 1 (2023 to 2025). This document is the result of the efforts and dedication of the Board, our Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee, Regional District staff, and feedback from the broader community.

This is the initial phase of our first Regional District Accessibility Plan, and we are excited to have taken this step in an effort to improve our own awareness, accountability, and transparency in this area.

The Regional District of Kitimat–Stikine is home to a wide array of communities, and we are all strengthened by the diversity of people that live here. Our Regional District is committed to removing barriers that could limit the full participation of our population. We will use this plan to strive for equal access for everyone who lives, works, or visits here.

Again, we are early in our journey. We recognize the need for an ongoing commitment from the Board and staff to work together with our advisory committee members to ensure accessibility and inclusion remains top of mind in all our decisions.

I look forward to implementing this important plan and ensuring that accessibility is a priority in our Regional District.

Philip Germuth, Chair

Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine Board of Directors

Introduction

The RDKS is situated in Northwestern British Columbia. Our region spans a geographic area of over 100,000 km² with a population of almost 40,000 people. Here diversity takes on many shapes and forms.

Guiding Framework

Accessible British Columbia Act

The RDKS's Accessibility Plan is based on a law called the *Accessible British Columbia Act*. This law is very important because it helps identify, remove, and prevent barriers that make it difficult for people to access services in our province. The goal is to make British Columbia more accessible for everyone.

The law covers different areas where accessibility is important. These areas include:

- Making sure services are easy to use for everyone.
- Ensuring that education is accessible to all, regardless of disabilities.
- Creating opportunities for people with disabilities to find employment.
- Making information and communications easy to understand and access.
- Ensuring that health services are accessible to everyone.
- Using fair and accessible methods for buying goods and services.
- Making the environment and buildings accessible to people with disabilities.
- Ensuring transportation is available for everyone.

As a public sector organization, we have a responsibility to follow the *Accessible British Columbia Act*.



The Skeena River

This means we must do several things to demonstrate how we are improving accessibility:

- Create an advisory committee.
- Create an accessibility action plan.
- Create a tool to receive public feedback on accessibility matters.

Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee

To inform the development and content of our Accessibility Plan, we are working with an advisory committee that represents our communities.

In 2023, the City of Terrace (CoT) invited the participation of several public sector organizations (partners) from our region to inform the accessibility planning exercise that we were working on as required by the *Accessible British Columbia Act*.

The CoT and the RDKS put out a call to the public for advisory members (advisors). Advisory membership strives to include and consult with persons with disabilities and the organizations that support them to understand the accessibility needs. The committee also invites participation of members that identify as Indigenous. Together this group of partners and advisors form the Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee (JAAC).

The committee's main goal is to address accessibility issues in different areas of our organizations and remove barriers that may prevent people with disabilities from full participation.

The JAAC helps us to:

- Develop a common language to refer to matters related to disability and accessibility.
- Identify barriers to accessibility and inclusion in our organization and communities.
- Come up with strategies and ways to remove and prevent these barriers.
- Develop our Accessibility Plan and help other organizations to do the same.
- Gather public input on accessibility and inclusion issues affecting people with disabilities.

The committee members support each other in developing plans to improve accessibility within their own organizations. They also support the development of ways for the public to give feedback on barriers to accessibility and solutions to address these barriers so that partners can better understand the needs of the people they serve.

We are creating a tool and process for the public to provide feedback on our action plan. We want to know about any challenges people face when interacting with or within our organization. This feedback is important for improving our Accessibility Plan and our service delivery in the future.

Official Community Plan

From a Planning perspective, the RDKS has the ability to address and implement accessibility design components through clearly identified objectives, goals and policies to guide land use decisions. These typically apply to commercial, industrial, intensive residential, and multi-family residential developments. (see the Area E OCP).

Housing Needs Study

The RDKS Housing Need and Demand Studies – Electoral Areas, B, C & E identify challenges and priorities around housing, with accessibility being a component identified in survey responses.

Vision

“Ours are communities that are diverse in membership, that are inclusive of the abilities and needs of all citizens, where everyone can participate meaningfully and fully.”

Commitment Statement

The RDKS is committed to identifying, removing, and preventing barriers across its services, programs, communications/engagement, and infrastructure, to benefit the community in a way that respects the dignity and independence of disabled persons.

The RDKS values the contributions from all people and believes diversity strengthens our community. The RDKS recognizes the essential knowledge and perspectives of people with lived experience of disability and commits to making sure those voices are part of community planning.

The RDKS will work to ensure staff and Board are aware of their roles in supporting accessibility for people living with disabilities and will support positive community attitudes and practices to improve accessibility.

Descriptions and Principles

Barriers to accessibility can affect everyone, but they particularly impact individuals with disabilities and their families. These barriers stop people with disabilities from fully participating in society on an equal basis.

To help our communities better understand accessibility and disability, here are some important terms we're using in our Accessibility Plan. These definitions come from Disability Alliance BC and the BC Accessibility Hub:

- Accessibility means how easy it is for people to use and enjoy programs, services, and environments, enabling everyone to participate fully in society without facing obstacles.
- Barriers refers to anything that prevents a person with an impairment from fully and equally participating in society. Barriers can be found in or caused by environments, attitudes, practices, policies, information, communications, or technologies, and may be influenced by different forms of discrimination.
- Disability refers to the inability of a person to fully and equally participate in society due to the interaction of an impairment and a barrier.
- Impairment refers to limitations in a person's physical, sensory, mental, intellectual, or cognitive functioning, which can be temporary, permanent, or come and go.

The Social Model of Disability

Our Accessibility Plan includes person-first language and language that is based on a social model view of disability, which helps us understand and describe accessibility and disability in an inclusive way.

The traditional medical model of disability sees people as disabled because of their impairments or differences. It focuses on fixing the disability itself as the main problem and doesn't consider the individual's personal experience or promote inclusive ways of living.

On the other hand, the social model of disability believes that disability is not solely caused by an individual's impairments, but by how our society is organized. It aims to remove barriers for people with disabilities that limit the independence, choice, and control in their lives. These barriers can be physical, like inaccessible environments, or attitudinal, like negative perceptions towards people with disabilities. According to this model, society should adapt and become more inclusive to accommodate people's disabilities or diverse abilities, rather than expecting individuals to change to fit into an inaccessible world.

In the plan, we use a combination of person-first language, such as "person or people with a disability" and social model described identify-first language, such as "disabled person". We do this to respect and acknowledge a variety of preferences and perspectives when discussing disabilities.

Accessibility Principles

The *Accessible British Columbia Act* has some important principles that organizations must follow when creating or updating their accessibility plans. We used the definitions from the

foundation document of the BC Framework for Accessibility Legislation. These definitions support the rights of people with disabilities, along with the principles set by the province for accessibility:

- **Adaptability:** Accessibility plans should reflect that disability and accessibility concepts can change over time as services, technology, and attitudes towards disability advance.
- **Collaboration:** Accessibility plans should encourage organizations and communities to work together. Making communities accessible is a shared responsibility, and everyone has a role to play in promoting access and inclusion.
- **Diversity:** Accessibility plans should recognize that people with disabilities come from various backgrounds and have unique characteristics, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and life experiences. It's important to acknowledge and consider these differences when creating accessibility plans.
- **Inclusion:** Accessibility plans should reflect that all residents of British Columbia, including those with disabilities, can fully participate in and be treated equally within their communities.
- **Self-determination:** Accessibility plans should help people with disabilities feel confident and in control of their own decisions, so they can live the lives they want.
- **Universal Design:** Accessibility plans should be designed in a way that meets the needs of all people, regardless of their abilities, disabilities, or other characteristics. This means creating spaces, products and services that are usable by everyone.

By following these principles, organizations can contribute to a more accessible and inclusive British Columbia, where everyone has equal opportunities and rights.

Focus Areas

Information and Communication is one of the eight standards within the *Accessible British Columbia Act*. This standard looks at the barriers that people face when they interact with others, signage, printed materials, or technology like websites and documents.

We are dedicated to making sure that everyone in our community can access and understand the information we provide. This first phase of our first accessibility plan focuses on finding and reducing barriers to accessible information and communication within our organization and the communities we serve.

By setting standards and taking action in this area, we will better ensure that everyone can get the same information in ways that suits their needs.

We continue to work with the Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee and the public to address needs within additional areas of focus as described in the B.C. legislation. We commit to evolving our RDKS Accessibility Plan accordingly.

Barriers to accessible information and communication can occur when people with disabilities are left out because they have or use different ways of communicating.

For example:

- Using small print or not providing large-print versions of materials.
- Creating web pages that cannot be read by screen readers.
- Not using closed captioning for videos, events or meetings.
- Not having information available in sign language.

Actions and Implementation

Disabled persons may experience barriers in participating in local government activities when information is provided in an inaccessible format or without the communication supports they need. This makes it difficult for them to access services, get information, attend events, and join discussions.

Goals

To ensure that all residents – regardless of their abilities – have access to RDKS services, programs, communications, and engagement opportunities.

Action Plan

Our action plan is broken down into three priority action areas for accessible public information and communication. Each of these areas is detailed with observed barriers, actions, accountable departments at the RDKS, and targeted completion timeline.

Priority Area #1: Accessible Content

Barrier	Actions	Department(s)	Targeted year*
<p>Public-facing delivery of information</p> <p>Potential issues with the level of accessibility (visual, auditory, intellectual) of public information being disseminated and delivered, including online, print, customer service information and signage.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provide training in best practice (specific to this focus area) and tools for delivering accessible information to staff responsible for producing, procuring, or delivering public information and communications. ○ Investigate and offer training across identified areas of need. 	<p>Cross-dept. through Internal Accessible Working Group</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Q 2 & 3 – 2024 Ongoing ○ Q 1 & 2 – 2024 Ongoing
<p>Internal written documents (procedures, policies, and general information)</p> <p>Layout of content, clarity of language and modes (methods) of communication are inconsistent and at reading levels that may be difficult for all to access.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Review key RDKS documents through an accessibility lens. ○ Review key departmental documents through an accessibility lens. ○ Assess readability of key internal-facing documents to ensure we are following best practices for reading levels. ○ Investigate best practice and offer staff training across identified areas of need. 	<p>Cross-dept. through Internal Accessible Working Group</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Q 2 & 3 – 2024 Ongoing ○ Q 2 & 3 – 2024 Ongoing ○ Q 2 & 3 – 2024 Ongoing ○ Q1 – 2024 Ongoing
<p>Front desk and customer service</p> <p>Physical barriers may impede communication across counters. Clarity (tone, volume, speed etc.) of staff to public may be</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Best practices review ○ Provide in person or online staff training 	<p>Cross-dept. through Internal Accessible Working Group</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Q1 – 2024 ○ Q1 – 2024 Ongoing

challenging for persons with varied levels of ability to understand.			
Signage posted to communicate public information may not be accessible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Develop guidelines for accessible signage ○ Review existing for content, visual and other access ○ Add signage identifying accessible options for building entry and navigation ○ Utilize JAAC for consistent materials development, posting and distribution 	Internal Accessibility Working Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○Q1 – 2024 ○Q1 – 2024 ○Q1 – 2024 ○Ongoing

* Subject to budget approval

Priority Area #2: Accessibility for Public Communication and Engagement

Barrier	Actions	Department(s)	Targeted year*
<p>Public meeting accessibility Public meetings and engagement efforts may not be reaching all citizens due to accessibility challenges.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Create public meeting accessibility through ensuring establishing a checklist of accessibility needs for RDKS sponsored/provided public meetings ○ Make RDKS meetings more accessible through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closed captioning • Training staff and Board • Consider additional formats/platforms ○ Utilize 'Get Involved RDKS' as a feedback mechanism ○ Generate additional feedback options for more fulsome and accessible engagement 	<p>Cross-dept. through Internal Accessible Working Group</p>	<p>○Q2 & 3 - 2024</p>

* Subject to budget approval

Priority Area #3: Further efforts/Meetings to Identify Additional Areas of Need, Priorities and Actions

Barrier	Actions	Department(s)	Targeted year*
Regional District communications and engagement may not be adequately capturing community feedback on needs and opportunities to address them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ensure staff is aware of and follow posts on barriers/needs/solutions ○ Generate additional options for gathering community feedback ○ Accessibility Services Canada Training 	<p>Communications</p> <p>Cross-dept. through Internal Accessible Working Group</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○Q1 - 2024 Ongoing ○Years 1 and 2 ○Q1 - 2024 Ongoing
Additional Areas of Focus, Barriers and Solutions need to be identified over the upcoming two years to ensure that the RDKS Accessibility Plan continues to address accessibility needs within the jurisdiction of the RDKS.	Continued meetings and discussion with internal accessibility working group of RDKS and JAAC to identify additional opportunities for improving accessibility	Cross-dept. through Internal Accessible Working Group Internal Accessible Working Group Members with JAAC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○Initiated Oct 2023 Ongoing Years 1 and 2
Financial capacity to implement options for reducing and preventing barriers to accessibility is limited	Seek opportunities for access to funding to implement actions of the RDKS Accessibility Plan	RDKS Internal Accessibility Working Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○Ongoing Year 1

* Subject to budget approval

Monitoring

The Accessibility Plan will be reviewed by our internal RDKS Accessibility Advisory Committee and the JAAC during regular meetings to ensure that we are making progress on planned actions. The priority level of certain action items may be adjusted based on the availability of funding, staffing, and material supplies.

Responsibilities

The RDKS Accessibility Plan is overseen by the Board and implemented by RDKS staff. The RDKS CAO holds responsibility for the overall direction of staff in accordance with the Accessibility Plan and will operate at the direction of Board with input from the Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee. At their discretion, the CAO may assign the responsibility for implementing various aspects of the Accessibility Plan to specific staff members.

Reporting

The RDKS Accessibility Plan will be reviewed and updated at least once every three years in accordance with the *Accessible British Columbia Act*. Updates will be informed by input from the Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee and the RDKS's Internal Accessibility Working Group and the public through the Get Involved RDKS platform* and other means of public engagement as they are developed as part of Phase 1 of the RDKS's Accessibility Plan.

The Accessibility Plan will be a standing item on the JAAC agenda. Updates on the Accessibility Plan will be provided to the public, the RDKS's online assets, and via Board through reports submitted by the JAAC as appropriate. The frequency of these reports will be annual or as deemed appropriate by Joint Accessibility Committee and Board.

*Get Involved RDKS: <https://getinvolvedrdks.ca>.

How to Give Us Feedback

We want your feedback on accessibility issues with our facilities and services. Let us know what you think by reaching out to us through:

- Phone: 250-615-6100 or toll free: 1-800-663-3208
- Email: info@rdks.bc.ca
- Mail: RDKS Accessibility Advisory Committee
300-4545 Lazelle Ave., Terrace, B.C. V8G 4E1
- In person: You may either drop off your suggestions at one of our locations or request that the staff pass on your concerns to the RDKS Accessibility Committee.
- Get Involved RDKS: <https://getinvolvedrdks.ca>

You can also find our Accessibility Plan on our website: www.rdks.bc.ca

If you want a standard or accessible version of this document, you can request it for free by ph.: (250) 615-6100 or toll free: 1-800-663-3208 or email: info@rdks.bc.ca



Totem pole carving, Gitwinksihlkw Village, River in background



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