# Coordinated Accessibility Strategy

## 2025-2030

**Carleton University**

# Contents

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In 2020, Carleton University launched its first Coordinated Accessibility Strategy (CAS), developed through extensive consultations with the community. The first CAS made substantial strides, progressing on 39 out of the 40 recommendations. It enhanced our internal and external recognition of accessibility as part of our culture, aimed for standards that go beyond compliance and focused on world-class accessibility and disability research. In spring 2025, we introduced this next iteration of the CAS, which will guide us through to 2030. This updated strategy continues to reflect Carleton's commitment to a culture of accessibility.

The CAS sets our course with broad, longer-term objectives and strategic actions for creating a more accessible campus in the context of existing internal and external strategies, policies and legislation. It is meant to provide direction and guiding principles for the specific actionable steps and activities that take place during the implementation of the strategy.

We would like to acknowledge the support and commitment of the CAS Advisory Committee (Appendix A) in the development of this strategy. We would also like to acknowledge the members of the Carleton community, particularly those with lived or living experience of disability, for engaging in the creation process, contributing their experiences, illuminating barriers, shaping content and providing continuous feedback for the strategy. Feedback was collected in a variety of formats, including focus groups, online feedback forms and one-on-one meetings which provided us with perspectives and ideas for the direction of the CAS. The development of this strategy benefitted immensely from the input and shared knowledge of students, faculty and staff to create a framework that represents the voices of our diverse community.

The landscape of post-secondary education is transforming and institutions, including Carleton, are navigating financial constraints. Even with this challenge, we remain deeply committed to improving accessibility on our campus. There are numerous actionable steps that we can undertake both individually and collectively as a community to reflect our values. It is in this spirit that CAS has been developed. By working together, we can create a more inclusive and accessible campus for all members of our community.

## Algonquin Territory Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that our community is located on the unceded, unsurrendered territory of the Algonquin. We must strive to further strengthen relationships between Carleton and the Algonquin communities, and endeavour to accelerate the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives, ways of teaching and healing and knowledge in our campus practices.

# DEFINING ACCESSIBILITY

The term "accessibility" can have different meanings depending on the context. Informed by definitions in the Accessible Canada Act[i] and the United Nations[ii], in the context of the Coordinated Accessibility Strategy (CAS), accessibility encompasses:

- the ability for a person with a disability to access and participate to the fullest in the Carleton community on an equal basis and without discrimination;

- any environment, service, or activity whether physical or virtual; and

- attitudinal and systemic barriers.

Consistent with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities[iii], we recognize "that disability is an evolving concept and that disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others."

The CAS frames disability as inclusive of visible- and non-visible disabilities that are temporary, episodic, or permanent, across a wide spectrum of cognitive, developmental, intellectual, medical, mental health and illness, physical and sensory disabilities. We recognize that there are biases and stigma faced by individuals with disabilities. The CAS aims to provide a framework to promote understanding of disability as part of human diversity.

For the purposes of this strategy, we have adopted a person-first approach in our language. However, we acknowledge and respect the many ways in which individuals self-identify, and that identity is multifaceted, shaped by the intersection of various factors. We hope that the chosen language can be understood to represent the variety of experiences, preferences and lived realities within our diverse community.

# SNAPSHOT OF ACCESSIBILITY AT CARLETON[1]

**4,600**

Number of Carleton students registered with the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities[iv]

**38,940**

Number of accommodated exams[v]

**2,800**

Approximate number of monthly service calls received by Attendant Services[vi]

**4.9%**

Percentage of Carleton faculty who identified with a disability[vii]

**7.9%**

Percentage of Carleton non-faculty workforce who identified with a disability[viii]



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[1] Statistics are from 2023-2024

# ACCESSIBILITY AT CARLETON:
## STARTING FROM STRENGTH

Carleton University is a dynamic and innovative university with over 30,000 undergraduate and graduate students and over 5,000 faculty, staff, contract instructors and teaching assistants[ix]. The university strives to be an inclusive community; one that leads from a place of service and commitment.

## History of Accessibility

Carleton University has a long history of supporting students with disabilities, beginning in the 1970s with accessible residences and the introduction of the Attendant Services Program in 1987. The Carleton Disability Awareness Centre (CDAC), a student-run hub, was formed in 1988 to create a sense of community and awareness through events and advocacy. The establishment of the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities in 1990 centralized academic accommodations and support services for students. The first Student Mental Health Framework was established in 2009 to address mental health and success for students in campus life. The Accessible Career Transitions (ACT) program was launched in 2016 to offer career support and job opportunities for students with disabilities. The Research, Education, Accessibility and Design (READ) Initiative, established in 2012, led the way and laid a strong foundation for the launch of the Canadian Accessibility Network in 2020 and the Accessibility Institute in 2022.

# Culture of Accessibility

The Coordinated Accessibility Strategy (CAS) serves as a framework to support Carleton's commitment to fostering a strong culture of accessibility across the campus by coordinating programs and initiatives related to accessibility, while prioritizing the creation of an inclusive environment for all students, employees and visitors.

Since its inception in 2020, more than 175 different initiatives across seven areas of focus have been undertaken, with several activities spanning multiple areas and recommendations. Engagement in accessibility activities has more than tripled, with over 35 units on campus actively contributing to the implementation of the CAS. The following section provides some highlights of the progress made.

## Collaborative Specialization in Accessibility

The graduate-level specialization launched in 2023 and is a unique multidisciplinary education experience that facilitates the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes for building an accessible and inclusive society. It engages with 16 different programs across campus.

## Accessible Communications

Web Services created Web Accessibility Training Modules through its Web Workshops platform. These modules are designed to help individuals at the university understand the fundamentals of web accessibility and ensure that online content is usable by people with disabilities.

## Accessible Procurement Policy

The university's accessible procurement policy, developed in collaboration with on-campus experts, was designed to align with both the institution's needs and the requirements set forth by the provincial government of Ontario.

## Research Chairs

Canada Research Chairs are prestigious academic positions established by the Government of Canada to support world-class research and innovation at Canadian universities. Carleton has allocated four Canada Research Chair positions to the areas of accessibility and disability.

## Built Environment

A team is conducting extensive audits of the physical campus in accordance with a national standard - a set of accessibility guidelines and certifications designed to improve accessibility in the built environment. Additionally, a door opener project launched in 2024 resulting in 25 new openers on campus and the addition of the Key2Access OpenUp app on 90 doors.

# Accessibility Institute

In 2022, the Accessibility Institute at Carleton University was acclaimed. Previously known as the Research, Education, Accessibility and Design (READ) Initiative (established in 2012), the Institute is a dynamic hub of interdisciplinary accessibility research, education and training and community engagement. The Institute is a recognized leader in accessibility and is home to the National Office for the Canadian Accessibility Network, as well as steward of the CAS.

At Carleton University, we are committed to creating an accessible and inclusive community for all - students, faculty, staff and visitors. While significant progress has been made, we recognize that accessibility is an ongoing journey and that there are still areas for improvement. The CAS guides our efforts as we continue to strive to foster a campus where everyone can fully participate and thrive, while ensuring that accessibility is a shared responsibility across the university.

More information on Carleton's resources, initiatives and programs relating to accessibility can be found on the accessibility commons: carleton.ca/accessibility.

# PURPOSE, VISION AND GUIDING VALUES

## Purpose

The Coordinated Accessibility Strategy (CAS) serves as a catalyst that drives Carleton University's culture of accessibility and acts as a framework that guides the campus community in its implementation of accessibility initiatives.

## Vision

Our vision is to continually strengthen Carleton's commitment to accessibility, and to be a recognized leader, nationally and globally.

## Guiding Values

**Inclusivity:** We are guided by the value of inclusion, striving to create opportunities for every person to participate in all aspects of our campus community to the fullest extent possible.

**Innovation:** We will continually strive for transformational change in the area of accessibility. We aim to be acknowledged as leaders and trailblazers of accessibility.

**Collaboration:** We aim to engage both internal and external community members in collaborations and partnerships to build capacity by facilitating and mobilizing interdisciplinary knowledge, experience and expertise among students, staff and faculty.

**Commitment:** We are guided by our ongoing, genuine and lasting commitment to this endeavour, and will strive for a campus-wide culture of continuous improvement in all aspects of accessibility. We are committed to transparency and putting our words into action.

**Collective responsibility:** We recognize that to strive for true inclusion, accessibility must be embedded into all aspects of our campus. It is the collective responsibility of our community to challenge ableism to work towards a more inclusive campus and world.

# AREAS OF FOCUS: OBJECTIVES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Coordinated Accessibility Strategy outlines seven areas of focus, comprising 14 objectives and 25 strategic actions. The areas of focus have continued from the original strategy, and the objectives and strategic actions have been updated based on community consultation. Collectively, they guide Carleton's vision for accessibility.

The seven areas of focus are:

1. Coordination and leadership
2. Education and training
3. Information and communication
4. Physical campus
5. Employment and employee support
6. Student support services
7. Research and development

# 1. Coordination and Leadership

## Description:

This area of focus aims to strengthen the effectiveness of accessibility initiatives, promote diverse representation and sustain Carleton's reputation as a leader in accessibility.

## Objectives:

- Foster a culture of accessibility across the university through continued commitment, leadership and effective communication, striving for international recognition as a leader in accessibility

- Ensure representation in decision-making processes and strengthen the impact of accessibility initiatives

## Strategic Actions:

- Implement feedback mechanisms with the campus community as a way to support progress and identify new or evolving needs

- Establish cross-functional working groups to address accessibility challenges and to ensure a coordinated approach

- Formalize institutional policies for accessibility as a priority at all levels, ensuring that accessibility is embedded in decisions, operational practices and long-term strategies

- Ensure persons with disabilities and other equity-denied groups are involved in decision-making processes related to the Coordinated Accessibility Strategy

# 2. Education and Training

## Description:

This area of focus supports the knowledge and skills needed to foster accessible and inclusive teaching, learning and research environments. It involves inclusive practices through academic programs, skills-based certification training and professional development initiatives.

## Objectives:

- Increase the awareness of accessibility and disabilities, and encourage consistent support from educators, to foster inclusive environments

- Offer comprehensive academic, educational and professional development programming focused on accessibility and disability

## Strategic Actions:

- Provide incentives, skills and resources for educators to consider universal design for learning (UDL)[2] and digital accessibility in the creation and delivery of academic activities and experiential learning

- Explore and expand the availability of online courses to better meet the diverse needs of learners and educators

- Continually assess and improve accessibility across all aspects of the academic experience, including research environments

- Develop new academic and professional development programs and courses that have a focus on accessibility or disability

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[2] UDL is a framework that guides the development of flexible learning environments and materials to accommodate individual learning differences, ensuring all students have an equal opportunity to succeed

# 3. Information and Communication

## Description:

This area of focus supports digital accessibility, as well as how we share information across platforms and departments, including information technology, learning management systems and communication practices that go beyond compliance standards.

## Objectives:

- Ensure digital accessibility across departments and platforms by consistently applying accessibility standards, aiming to go beyond compliance

- Develop strategies and tools for early-stage accessibility assessment in content creation and encourage the use of clear, simple language in all materials to ensure that information is easily accessible

## Strategic Actions:

- Create and provide training on communication accessibility standards, including course syllabi and university forms, so that people with disabilities can access, use and benefit from information

- Ensure all Carleton templates are accessible and continually improve based on user experiences and feedback

- Explore integrated accessibility evaluation tools for digital content

# 4. Physical Campus

## Description:

This area of focus highlights the commitment to reduce accessibility barriers across the physical campus, including structural and sensory (e.g., visual, auditory) elements, to ensure people can access and navigate the campus.

## Objectives:

- Aim to be a leader in accessible design by adopting and promoting design standards that exceed the minimum requirements

- Improve the overall navigation experience of the campus, including examining existing accessibility barriers, to ensure it is easily accessible for everyone

## Strategic Actions:

- Adopt an accessible design standard that surpasses minimum requirements

- Prioritize and undertake accessibility retrofits, including in research spaces and those identified as part of the accessibility audit [3]

- Enhance the clarity and consistency of wayfinding across campus to improve navigation, including signage, campus building pages and digital maps

- Ensure an inventory of accessible parking that is responsive to the needs of the community

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[3] Campus audits are a comprehensive evaluation conducted using a national standard which surpass existing building codes

# 5. Employment and Employee Support

## Description:

This area of focus aims to enhance workplace inclusion for persons with disabilities by promoting representation, improving accessibility and fostering a supportive environment for all employees. It also involves including employees with disabilities in providing input into the implementation activities related to this area of focus.

## Objectives:

- Increase representation of persons with disabilities across all work environments and promote inclusive practices throughout the employee cycle, from recruitment to offboarding

- Coordinate effective mechanisms for workplace accommodations and foster a workplace culture in all work environments, including teaching and research, that actively challenges and reduces negative biases and misconceptions about employees with disabilities

## Strategic Actions:

- Identify and respond to gaps in employment-related policies, procedures and practices that support accessibility, accommodations and disability-competent inclusion across all stages of employment

- Build capacity, knowledge and resources for managers, department chairs and HR staff to support employees with disabilities, including specialized expertise on equitable workplace accommodations

- Provide training and guidance on disability inclusion across all work environments, including understanding the spectrum and diversity of visible- and non-visible disabilities

- Regularly review, improve and implement timely communication of clear, effective and consistent processes, including roles and responsibilities, for workplace accommodations, so that employees with disabilities feel supported in all work environments

# 6.  Student Support Services

## Description:

This area of focus includes services across the university and throughout the campus community. It aims to support the needs of students throughout their university journey and in fostering their personal, professional and academic potential. This includes continuing to provide accessible services and environments to help students thrive both inside and outside the classroom.

## Objectives:

- Continue to provide and strive to improve on comprehensive supports for students with disabilities and accessibility expertise across all student services to fully support students with disabilities to achieve their personal, professional and academic potential

- Foster a culture of inclusion and community by encouraging the participation of students with disabilities in all aspects of university life

## Strategic Actions:

- Enhance communications in the accommodations process, ensuring clarity for students at all points

- Review standards and address gaps in service across student-facing departments and units and clearly outline roles, expectations and responsibilities regarding accommodations for students with disabilities

- Expand awareness and training for faculty, staff and student peers to better support the academic success of students with disabilities

# 7. Research and Development

## Description:

This area of focus seeks to cultivate a thriving, inclusive research community that leads the way in accessibility and disability research.

## Objectives:

- Foster a research culture that prioritizes inclusivity and accessibility across all stages of research and supports a community of world-class accessibility and disability researchers, including researchers with disabilities

- Ensure significant contributions and leadership from researchers to build a published knowledge base in accessibility and disability

## Strategic Actions:

- Encourage researchers to foster research labs and lab processes that take accessibility into consideration and build knowledge by providing accessible, timely information, guidance and training

- Conduct an environmental scan at Carleton to inform strategic recommendations and actions that strengthen internal and external partnerships and community engagement in accessibility and disability research

- Promote the visibility and dissemination of research in accessibility and disability by developing and implementing strategies to share findings with both academic and non-academic audiences

# IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

Carleton University is committed to building on its culture of accessibility and values the lived experience of disability, consistent with the principle of nothing about us without us. The implementation of the Coordinated Accessibility Strategy (CAS) will include representation of Carleton University community members who are living the experience of disability. As part of the implementation, we will acknowledge the spectrum of disabilities, both visible and non-visible, and individual choices in disclosing disability. We also will recognize different ways lived experience is manifested and represented as a function of cultural and intersectional factors.

## Implementation Structure

Carleton's senior leadership, through the Offices of the Vice-Presidents, oversees the implementation of the CAS, led by the Vice-President (Students and Enrolment) (VPSE). The responsibility of the implementation of the strategy is reflected in three groups: Advisory Group, Working Groups and Operations Group (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: CAS Implementation Structure**
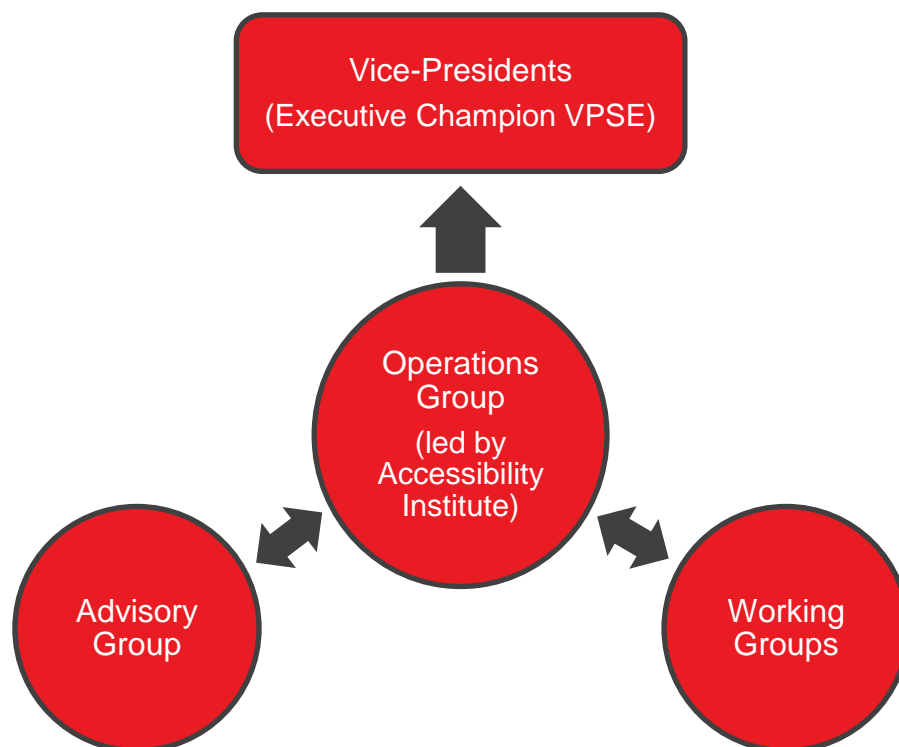
## 1. Advisory Group

The CAS advisory group will provide advice, recommendations and guidance regarding the direction of the strategy. The advisory group will be led by the CAS co-chairs and will meet 2-3 times per year or as issues arise that require the group's input.

There will be an opportunity for Carleton community members to self-nominate as a volunteer for the advisory group. The operations group will ensure that overall membership will be representative of the university community.

## 2. Working Groups

Working groups will be formed for each area of focus. The working groups will operationalize the CAS objectives and strategic actions into tasks, developing corresponding assessment measures to support the evaluation of the strategy. Working group plans will be shared with the community. Representatives for the working groups will include university members (Appendix B) that are responsible for key programs, services and infrastructure and those with lived experience of disability.

## 3. Operations Group

The operations group will be responsible for day-to-day coordination and will be housed in the Accessibility Institute. The group will support overall processes, activities and help develop the overall evaluation framework. It will also act as a central hub to support the working groups and the advisory group, as well as liaise with senior leadership.

# Reporting Back

Regular reporting will be made to the Vice-Presidents at Carleton University. An annual report will be created and shared with the Carleton community that will cover the activities of CAS, including a progress update related to objectives and strategic actions.

Additionally, based on feedback from the Carleton community, there will be regular touchpoints with the community to learn about what is working well and where we can challenge ourselves to do better. As part of this process, action plans formed by the working groups will be shared with the community.

All Carleton community members are encouraged to reflect on how they can contribute to creating an accessible and inclusive campus environment. As such, all are invited to consider becoming more actively involved in the development or delivery of specific strategic actions.

With ongoing collaboration, accountability and a focus on continuous improvement, we look forward to creating a campus that is welcoming and accessible for everyone.

# Endnotes

[i]Government of Canada. Accessible Canada Act, S.C. 2019, c. 10. Available at: https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/A-0.6/

[ii]United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Division for Social Policy and Development, "Accessibility and Development Mainstreaming disability in the post-2015 development agenda", United Nations, 2013, https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/2013/12/24/accessibility-and-development-mainstreaming-disability-in-the-post-2015-development-agenda/.

[iii]United Nations, "United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocol", December 2006, https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convention_accessible_pdf.pdf, p. 1.

[iv]Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities, Carleton University, January 2025.

[v]Scheduling and Examination Services, January 2025.

[vi]Attendant Services Program, Carleton University, January 2025.

[vii]http://oirp.carleton.ca/databook/index/html/personnel.htm.

[viii]Ibid.

[ix] https://carleton.ca/about/facts/

# APPENDIX A: Group Composition for Strategy Renewal

Appendix A lists the individuals who have been instrumental in guiding the development of the strategy**.** There were two guiding bodies:

## 1. Coordinated Accessibility Strategy Working Group

- **Ariel Birkinshaw**, CAS Project Coordinator, Accessibility Institute
- **Adrian Chan**, Professor, Systems and Computer Engineering (Co-chair)
- **Lakin Fletcher**, Manager, Strategic Initiatives
- **Cathy Malcolm Edwards**, Lead, Implementation of CAS, Accessibility Institute
- **Boris Vukovic**, Director, Accessibility Institute (Co-chair)

## 2. Coordinated Accessibility Strategy Advisory Committee

- **Carli Agostino**, Access Services Librarian
- **Jack Cameron**, Undergraduate Student Representative
- **Krista Craven**, EDI Learning Specialist
- **Bruce Hamm**, Director, Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities
- **Ishtiaque Hossain**, Graduate Student Representative
- **Ikram Jama**, Director, Human Rights and Equity
- **Heather Logan**, Professor, Physics
- **Maria McClintock**, Assistant Director, Strategic Initiatives and Communications
- **Elspeth McCulloch**, Assistant Director, Digital Learning
- **Benny Michaud**, Director, Centre for Indigenous Support and Community Engagement
- **Joseph Nelson**, Director, Enterprise Applications
- **Debbie Orme-Rego**, Director, Staffing and Labour Relations (Professional Services)
- **Daniel Redmond**, Director, Operations and Maintenance
- **Kyla Reid,** Assistant Director, Research Development
- **Jamie Rodger**, Assistant Director, Digital Communications
- **Jane van den Dries,** Assistant Director, Academic Initiatives and Operations

# APPENDIX B: Group Composition for Working Groups

Working groups will be formed for each area of focus, with representation of key stakeholders from across the university. At minimum, a representative from each group listed below should be identified as part of the relevant working group.

- Office of the Vice-President (Students and Enrolment)
- Office of the Provost and Vice-President (Academic)
- Office of the Vice-President (Research and International)
- Office of the Vice-President (Finance and Administration)
- Accessibility Institute
- Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities
- Faculty Member(s)
- Graduate Student Representative(s)
- Undergraduate Student Representative(s)
- Facilities Management and Planning
- Centre for Indigenous Support and Community Engagement
- Teaching and Learning Services
- MacOdrum Library
- Information Technology Services
- Human Resources
- Department of Equity and Inclusive Communities
- Department of University Communications

## Accessibility Institute

3500 Carleton Technology and Training Centre (CTTC)
Carleton University
1125 Colonel By Drive, Ottawa, Ontario  K1S 5B6

Email: accessibility.institute@carleton.ca
Phone: 613-520-2600 ext. 7323

**carleton.ca/accessibility-institute**

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