

# **Coordinated Accessibility Strategy**

**Listening Phase Feedback Report**

# Overview

The following report is a summary of the feedback received regarding the renewal of Carleton's Coordinated Accessibility Strategy (CAS) throughout the listening phase of the consultation.

## Consultation Meetings

A total of 13 consultation sessions were hosted for members of the Carleton community, with six additional sessions being cancelled due to no registrations. Sessions were offered for:

- Faculty and staff
- Students
- Racialized students
- International students
- Indigenous students
- Students with disabilities

The sessions included a combination of open sessions for the campus community and closed sessions for equity-denied groups. In total, more than 35 people participated in the open and closed consultations.

The objective of these sessions was to host a supportive space wherein members of the university community could provide their feedback on the CAS. To provide insight into how the feedback from the consultation sessions was solicited, we have included the outline of the consultation presentation with the question list for these sessions as Appendix A.

## Online Feedback

In addition to in-person sessions, the Carleton University community was able to submit feedback by email or anonymously via an online form. During the listening phase, there were 48 anonymous form submissions and 0 emailed responses.

## Feedback Received

The combined feedback received during the listening phase aligned to themes that resonated with the existing areas of focus in CAS. These 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

## Considerations

It is important to understand the wide range of feedback from everyone on campus. While many people talked about specific things, like procedures or accessible seating near elevators, this gave us a bigger picture of the issues at hand that shaped our responses. Additionally, it is worth noting that while the responses are categorized by themes/areas of focus, there is an interconnectedness among many of the recommendations.

Other underlying considerations across the strategy include the allocation of resources, including funding, which participants felt needed to be strategically prioritized to effectively address accessibility. To respond to this feedback, the proposed strategy will recognize the current context while highlighting achievable ways that we can continue our commitment to accessibility as a community.

Additionally, there was a desire to continue an intersectional approach, recognizing that individuals' experiences of disability are intertwined with intersecting factors such as race, gender and socioeconomic status. This is reflected in the CAS strategy as part of the overall approach, implementation and evaluation.

Furthermore, there was a focus on barriers faced by individuals who identify as neurodivergent or identify with episodic or dynamic disabilities or mental health conditions. These discussions highlighted the importance of acknowledging and addressing barriers to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for all. We have tried to reflect this as part of the definition of accessibility and persons with disability in the strategy.

# 1. Coordination and leadership

## Feedback

Based on the feedback received, barriers to accessibility in coordination and leadership include challenges in collaboration and partnership across departments, which can impede the development of accessibility initiatives. Without strong cross-campus partnerships, efforts can become disjointed or insufficient.

The community also shared that the absence of regular, comprehensive reviews of accessibility means that the university may not adequately assess or respond to evolving needs, leaving gaps in support that contribute to disappointment among those impacted.

Additionally, without diverse perspectives at the table, the university may overlook or inadequately address the barriers faced by people with disabilities.

## Response

The renewed CAS draft recommends the establishment of cross-functional working groups, which will focus on specific accessibility challenges and opportunities. The strategy also recommends the implementation of focus groups with the campus community as a mechanism to support progress and identify new or evolving needs.

The strategy implementation will prioritize regular communication with the campus community about the steps we are taking and the outcomes of these ongoing efforts. Furthermore, it will actively seek input from persons with disabilities and other equity-denied groups in the decision-making processes related to accessibility activities across the strategy, ensuring that their voices remain central to our work moving forward.

## 2. Education and training

### Feedback

While Carleton has made significant strides in prioritizing accessible education, there are still opportunities to ensure everyone can fully participate. Pedagogical frameworks like Universal Design for Learning (UDL) are encouraged to accommodate diverse learning styles, yet not all professors consistently use these methods, which can lead to disparities in student success. The level of support from professors also varies, with inconsistent understanding of and commitment to accessibility.

In addition, although alternate formats for course materials are available to support accessibility, they are often not provided in a timely manner, leaving some students at a disadvantage.

There is also interest within the Carleton community for more online or hybrid education and training opportunities, not only for academic courses but for professional development.

Lastly, the importance of integrating the topic of accessibility into programs and courses was raised.

### Response

To address inconsistent implementation of approaches such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL), the draft CAS includes the promotion of incentives, skills and resources for educators for UDL in the creation and delivery of academic activities and experiential learning, including how to provide alternate formats.

The strategy implementation will work collaboratively with stakeholders to continue exploring how to continually assess and improve accessibility across all aspects of the academic experience, ensuring that Carleton is responsive to the needs of all learners. The draft CAS also recommends exploring the availability of online and hybrid courses, including in professional development, to better meet the diverse needs of learners and educators.

The strategy will also encourage the development of new academic and professional development programs and courses in accessibility and disability.

### 3. Information and communication

#### Feedback

One key challenge in information and communications is applying accessibility standards across departments and platforms inconsistently. This can create confusion and frustration for those with disabilities.

With the increasing reliance on digital media—websites, online courses, social media and videos—there is a need for better tools to assess and ensure accessibility from the start of content creation.

Clear, simple language is also crucial. Many of Carleton's materials, such as course syllabi and forms, use complex language. Using more accessible language can improve understanding for a wider audience.

Finally, offering multiple accessible communication channels is important to ensure everyone can receive and respond to information in their preferred method.

#### Response

The CAS draft recommends the development of accessible communication standards to help guide more accessible and easier to understand communications. Additionally, these guidelines can ensure all Carleton templates are accessible and improved based on user experiences and feedback.

The strategy will also explore the integration of accessibility tools to evaluate digital content.

## 4. Physical campus

### Feedback

Wayfinding came up as a key area for improvement. For instance, many people had trouble navigating external pathways. Clear and concise signage was emphasized to improve visibility and usability. Additionally, the inclusion of braille signage and tactile markings indoors was recommended to better support individuals with visual impairments. There were also suggestions to update the accessibility information on building pages to ensure accuracy and assist in wayfinding.

The feedback received highlights several key areas where improvement is needed, such as frequent requests for accessible parking, additional automated door openers across campus, more reliable elevators and improved seating by elevators and in the academic quad.

### Response

The draft CAS includes a recommendation that wayfinding is continually enhanced to improve navigation of campus, including signage, updated campus building pages and digital maps. It also includes prioritizing and undertaking accessibility retrofitting of barriers, particularly those identified as part of the ongoing audits. This complements the door opener project that has resulted in 20 new openers on campus and the retrofitting of approximately 140 existing door openers across the Carleton University campus with the Key2Access OpenUp system. The strategy also recommends that there is an inventory of accessible parking that is responsive to the needs of the community.

## 5. Employment and employee support

At Carleton University, there is an opportunity to strengthen the support available to employees with disabilities, particularly in the areas of workplace accommodations and employee support. Key issues raised include frustration with the workplace accommodation process due to delays and a lack of clarity or inconsistencies in receiving the accommodations needed. Individuals with disabilities also reported challenges with policies related to accommodation. Attitudinal barriers have also been experienced. Furthermore, a general lack of awareness and training among staff and management about disability inclusion, including neurodivergent-specific considerations, can perpetuate these challenges.

### Response

The draft CAS outlines the regular review and improvement of timely communication of clear, effective and consistent processes for providing workplace accommodations, ensuring that employees feel supported throughout their career. Further to that, given the interrelatedness of accommodations with other policies and practices, the strategy proposes a review to identify gaps in employment-related policies, practices and training that support accessibility, accommodations and disability-competent inclusion across all stages of the employment cycle. It also outlines a recommendation that employees with disabilities are involved in providing input and participating in efforts to enhance accessibility in the workplace so that the improvements in accessibility are responsive to lived experience.

Lastly, it identifies that consideration should be given to opportunities for training about disability inclusion in the workplace, including for neurodivergent-specific considerations.



## 6. Student support services

### Feedback

Feedback was shared regarding experiences related to student support services, which impact the ability of students to fully engage with the academic environment.

The accommodation process requires students to navigate administrative procedures that can be time-consuming and unclear. One related issue is the timing of the process. Students report delays in getting their accommodation requests approved or communicated to instructors, leading to gaps in the support they receive. The length of time it takes to process requests can also cause anxiety, as students may worry whether their accommodations will be in place before important academic deadlines. Additionally, there is a desired emphasis for accommodations related to mental health challenges, chronic illnesses, or neurodivergent-specific disabilities.

Coordination of accommodations is another challenge experienced by students, particularly when multiple departments, instructors, or offices are involved. Students reported feeling confusion or frustration if they need to communicate with several people or if different parts of their accommodation process do not align smoothly.

The Academic Consideration Form received specific feedback. For example, some students feel the need to provide detailed medical documentation or do not know the correct timing or process for submitting their requests. Additionally, some students worried that their requests could be met with skepticism.

Finally, access to multifaith rooms is a concern for students who need quiet, private spaces for religious practice or spiritual reflection. Challenges arise when these rooms are not physically accessible or are restricted by limited hours of availability.

### Response

To address concerns raised, the draft CAS recommends enhancing existing communications about accommodation processes and accessibility standards across student-facing departments to ensure clarity for students and timely access to relevant services. This can help students understand what is expected of them and the associated decision-making

processes. The strategy implementation will expand awareness and training for faculty, staff and student peers to better support the academic success of these students.

## 7. Research and development

### Feedback

Accessible research environments are needed. These environments should go beyond compliance with accessibility standards, fostering a culture of inclusion where all researchers and trainees, regardless of their abilities, can fully participate and contribute.

### Response

The draft CAS proposes continuing to encourage researchers in developing research labs and lab processes that take accessibility into consideration. This will help foster a research culture that prioritizes inclusivity and accessibility at all stages of research, from planning to dissemination. The strategy also recommends an environmental scan at Carleton to inform strategic recommendations and actions that strengthen internal and external partnerships in accessibility and disability research. Further, the draft strategy recommends that there is representation of researchers with disabilities in the university and that continued emphasis is placed on building a published knowledge base in accessibility and disability.

# Appendix A: Information and Feedback

## Session Agenda

Duration: 1 hour

1. Welcome, land acknowledgement, introductions
2. Overview of the coordinated accessibility strategy
3. Reflect on the current state
  1. What does an accessible campus look like to you?
  2. What strengths does Carleton have when it comes to accessibility? What does it do well?
  3. Where do you see gaps or areas for improvement?
4. Reflect on the future state
  1. What opportunities should the strategy pursue over the next 5 years?
  2. What other factors should we consider regarding the strategy?
5. CAS Renewal Timeline
6. Closing Remarks