



# Office of the Merit Commissioner

Upholding Fair Hiring in the BC Public Service

## Office of the Merit Commissioner Accessibility Plan 2025-2028

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## Message from the Merit Commissioner

As we continue to strive for a more inclusive society, I want to take a moment to emphasize the vital importance of developing and implementing accessibility plans within public organizations. The principles of accessibility are at the core of providing equitable opportunities for all individuals, particularly those with disabilities who we serve.

The [Accessible BC Act](#) serves as a landmark legislation, guiding our commitment to accessibility across the province. It mandates public sector organizations to establish and maintain accessibility plans, ensuring that all citizens can engage with services and facilities without barriers. The Act not only pushes us toward compliance but also fosters a culture of inclusivity that enriches our communities.

Creating an accessibility plan encourages us to assess our environments, identify barriers, and proactively address the needs of all individuals. By embedding accessibility into our organizational frameworks, we can create an atmosphere where everyone has the opportunity to participate fully in public services.

Let us advance our efforts with enthusiasm and determination. Together, we can transform our organizations into models of accessibility, aligning with the core values outlined in the *Accessible BC Act*. It is a powerful step towards ensuring that every member of our community feels valued and included.

Sincerely,

David McCoy  
Merit Commissioner  
Province of British Columbia

## Accessibility Statement/ Commitment Statement

At the Office of the Merit Commissioner (the Office), we believe that public service processes should be accessible to all. The public service must reach for a high standard of accessibility by identifying, removing, and preventing barriers that may exist for people who have disabilities. At the Office of the Merit Commissioner, we strive to meet this high standard both on our team and in the work that we do as part of public services in British Columbia. Prioritizing accessibility is not only our responsibility under the *Accessible BC Act* but it is integral to the principles by which we conduct our work and the professional values that guide how we do that work.

In our day-to-day work, the Office applies principles of fairness, impartiality, consistency, and transparency to evaluate public service hiring. In addition, we uphold standards of administrative fairness in public service dismissal processes. To fully achieve high standards of fairness, impartiality, consistency, transparency, and administrative fairness, processes must be accessible to all. Therefore, efforts to enhance accessibility directly align with the principles and standards used by the Office in our work. Improving accessibility in the public service also aligns with the Office's professional values of:

- fairness and impartiality;
- respect and integrity;
- accountability and rigour; and
- collaboration and inclusivity.

The Office is committed to providing a safe, inclusive, dignified, and welcoming environment for everyone, encouraging barrier free access to our services, and supporting the public service's efforts toward more inclusive and accessible government processes.

### Guiding Principles

As defined by the *Accessible BC Act*, this plan is guided by the following principles:

- Inclusion: All people within British Columbia, including people with disabilities, should be able to participate fully and equally in their communities.
- Adaptability: Disability and accessibility are evolving concepts that change as services, technologies, and attitudes change.
- Diversity: Every person is unique. Individual characteristics (for example, race, ethnicity, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, religion, lived experiences, etc.) greatly inform the experiences of individuals.
- Collaboration: Promoting accessibility is a shared responsibility and everyone has a role to play. The voices of members of impacted communities should be listened to and respected.
- Self-Determination: Accessibility initiatives should seek to empower people with disabilities to make their own choices and pursue the lives they wish to live.
- Universal Design: All environments, including services, should be designed so that they can be accessed, understood, and used by all people.

The principles of inclusion and collaboration are part of the Office's professional values. Others, such as universal design and adaptability, are newer discussion points for the Office. In the Office's efforts to improve accessibility, the Office is committed to learning more about these principles and how they can be applied. For example, the Office will actively work to understand universal design and how it can improve the tools that we use to communicate with our stakeholders.

## About the Office of the Merit Commissioner

The Merit Commissioner's role was established in 2001 to support the BC government's commitment to a strong, professional, vibrant public service. In 2006, the Office became an independent office of the Legislature. The Office's mandate is outlined in the [Public Service Act](#) along with [Staffing Review Regulation 443/2003](#) which provides specific legal guidance regarding staffing reviews.

The Office fulfills its by mandate auditing appointments and reviewing staffing decisions as requested by eligible employee applicants. Audits and staffing reviews are conducted to uphold fair hiring in organizations that hire under the *Public Service Act*. The Office investigates, observes, and reports on whether appointments to and within the BC Public Service are non-partisan, fair, and based on the principle of merit. Additionally, the Office assesses whether processes resulting in "just cause" dismissals follow required rules and procedures.

The Office of the Merit Commissioner is a hybrid team based out of Victoria, and consists of:

- Merit Commissioner;
- Deputy Commissioner;
- five full-time program staff; and
- one part-time staff member.

Additionally, contracted auditors provide remote services to the Office. On an as-needed basis, the Office employs the services of other contracted individuals such as legal counsel and communications services.

Much of the Office's work involves gathering, reviewing, and analyzing documentation to evaluate hiring and dismissal processes. To do this work, employees and contractors of the Office interact with employees in public service organizations who provide the documentation to be reviewed.

Outreach and consultation sometimes occur between Office leadership and other organizations, including but not limited to the BC Public Service Agency (PSA), BC Public Service (BCPS), strategic human resources staff in ministries, the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services (SSCFGS), and heads of organization under the Merit Commissioner's mandate. Another important part of the Office's work is communicating the results of those evaluations with the organizations whose work has been examined.

The Office of the Merit Commissioner interacts with many diverse individuals. As with any workforce, these individuals may have accessibility needs. It is important that the Office communicate in ways that are accessible, and that those seeking information or services do not experience accessibility barriers when interacting with the Office.

The Office of the Merit Commissioner interacts with:

- Hiring managers from competitions (up to 270 per year).
  - Through the auditing process, auditors and program managers may interact with hiring managers in any of the organizations that hire under the *Public Service Act*. The purpose of that interaction is to gather missing information or seek clarification from the hiring manager.
  - It is important that this interaction be accessible to all hiring managers.
- Public service employees (approximately 50 per year) requesting staffing reviews or asking for information about their options).
  - Through the staffing review process, employees interested in pursuing a “step 3” staffing review under the *Public Service Act* and *Regulation*, contact the Office to ask questions or to start the review process. In addition to employees who are eligible for this kind of review, the office is also contacted by employees who are not eligible, and, occasionally, by members of the public.
  - It is important that the Office explanations of process and eligibility be accessible to all people who contact our office.
- The SSCFGS, made up of elected MLAs.
- Staff at the PSA.
- Legal counsel and other subject matter experts.
- Staff at the BC Legislature.

The Office’s work seldom involves interactions with members of the public, as almost all of the Merit Commissioner’s stakeholders are internal members of the public service. The Office does not have a public-facing role, and the Merit Commissioner does not have a mandate to directly serve members of the public. For example, members of the public are not able to request a Merit Commissioner review of a hiring competition. When Office of the Merit Commissioner staff do interact with members of the public, those interactions are typically brief, occur via email or phone, and involve providing information about the Merit Commissioner’s mandate. Most commonly, the Merit Commissioner’s staff redirect members of the public to another public body or group whose mandate is better aligned with their needs (for example, the Office of the Ombudsperson).

## Roles and Responsibilities

All of the Office’s staff and contractors are responsible for the pursuit of accessibility efforts in the Office’s work. Improving accessibility is a team effort and applying an accessibility lens is a shared responsibility.

The Deputy Commissioner is responsible for compliance with the *Accessible BC Act* and revision of the accessibility plan.

The Office is also a member of the Joint Accessibility Committee with six other Independent Offices of the Legislature. This committee’s aim is to advise the Office’s on how to encourage accessibility measures and remove barriers where possible. Through collaboration with other Independent Offices on this committee, such as the Office of the Ombudsperson and B.C.’s Office of the Human Rights Commissioner, the Office benefits from the diverse perspectives, experiences, and expertise of larger offices, as well as from those with deep expertise in accessibility.

## Accessibility Goals

The goals of this plan are as follows:

1. Identify opportunities to enhance the accessibility of the methods the Office uses to report results and findings.
  - 1.1. Review commonly-used reporting tools to identify changes needed to be more accessible, for example, to follow the BC government's [accessibility guidelines](#) for business documents. These include reports for:
    - organization heads;
    - hiring managers; and
    - the public.

This review may involve an accessibility audit using external expertise, depending on budget limitations.
  - 1.2. Explore mechanisms (for example, an internal committee) to apply an accessibility lens to the creation of any new reports.
  - 1.3. Apply an accessibility lens to proposed changes to the audit program and technologies used by the Office.
  - 1.4. Review how the Office uses technology and explore additional technical expertise where more complex changes are identified. For example, changes to our case management system.
  - 1.5. Conduct an accessibility assessment of the Office website to determine what improvements can be made to bring the website to level A of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG).
  - 1.6. Make changes identified by the website accessibility review to the extent possible.
2. Enhance the Office's ability to communicate with stakeholders who have accessibility needs.
  - 2.1. Educate all staff and contractors about the accessibility tools available. These tools include, but are not limited to:
    - translators;
    - assistive technology; and
    - supports for communicating effectively with those who are neuro-diverse.
  - 2.2. Enhance communication practices for diverse audience, included but not limited to:
    - Build presentation materials that are more broadly accessible for diverse audiences;
    - Employ the use of the "accessibility checker" in audit reports and staffing review reports;
    - Explore the use of "screen tips" in Word documents to display descriptive text when required to explain complex concepts.

- 2.3. Build team knowledge and capacity through:
  - training;
  - recognition of National Accessibility Week; and
  - forming a small internal Office of the Merit Commissioner accessibility committee
3. Apply an accessibility lens to the work of auditing hiring competitions and staffing reviews.
  - 3.1. Increase internal knowledge of inclusive hiring practices, which includes hiring practices specifically recommended for people with disabilities.
  - 3.2. Publish a study of inclusive hiring practices to provide insights to hiring managers and organizations.
  - 3.3. Consider accessibility needs in the sections of the *Public Service Act* that outline the Merit Commissioner’s mandate and *Staffing Review Regulation 443/2003*.
4. Enhance accessibility supports for the team.
  - 4.1. Support addressing accessibility-related improvements identified in the accessibility audit of the 947 Fort Street building conducted in 2023. These improvements include areas such as:
    - wayfinding and room signage
    - washroom accessibility
  - 4.2. Continue to encourage and prioritize accessibility for individuals through:
    - ergonomic awareness in home and office workspaces;
    - hybrid work; and
    - fostering an environment where employees feel comfortable requesting any accommodation needed to support them in their work.

## Applying Principles to Prioritize Accessibility Actions

All four goals of this plan, and the individual actions listed under each goal, are important. As the Office of the Merit Commissioner is a small office with limited resources, resources must be used wisely to achieve results in a thoughtful and sustainable way.

Therefore, priorities for each year will be established according to the following principles:

- Improvements that can be achieved quickly will be prioritized in the first year to create positive impacts as quickly as possible.
- Where the Office receives feedback about services that are not accessible, action will be taken to improve accessibility in that instance.
- Where the Office receives suggestions for improved accessibility, suggestions will be addressed in a manner that is timely and evaluates the opportunity according to the principles in this plan.
- Sharing suggestions and learnings, and collaborating on opportunities for improvement, will be prioritized by the Office’s staff.
- Accessibility activities must be achievable within the limits of existing budget.
- Accessibility activities must be conducted within the limits of the Merit Commissioner’s mandate, as outlined in legislation (for example, the Merit Commissioner must continue to follow rules laid out in *Staffing Review Regulation 443/2003*).



## Actions to date

- Preliminary accessibility enhancements have been incorporated into individual performance audit reports and interim and final reporting tables.
- The Office has increased the use of visual graphic content in annual publications.
- The digital content of the Office website has been reviewed for accessibility improvement opportunities.
- A designated Office of the Merit Commissioner representative serves on the Joint Independent Offices of the Legislative Assembly (IOLA) of British Columbia Accessibility Committee.
- The Office has enhanced its understanding of inclusive hiring practices, including practices related to accessibility, and produced a study on [Inclusive Hiring Practices \(2024\)](#).

## Process of Creating this Plan

This plan was created with input from all staff at the Office of the Merit Commissioner and through the advice provided by the *Independent Offices of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia Accessibility Committee Consultation Process* guidelines.

Additionally, the Office consulted with the Joint IOLA Accessibility Committee to gain their feedback. The Office gratefully acknowledges the committee's suggestions and questions.

## Implementation and Assessment

This work has been underway and is ongoing. The Office commits to a formal check-in with the team on a bimonthly basis to continually examine progress and identify emerging opportunities.

At the end of year two of this plan, the Office will survey stakeholders to receive feedback on changes made to date and remaining goals. That feedback will be incorporated into the refresh of the plan that will take place within three years of this plan.

## Feedback, Evaluation, and Updates

The Merit Commissioner is committed to providing accessible and equitable services.

If you have feedback on this plan, please feel free to reach our office at 250-953-4208 or via email at [merit@meritcomm.bc.ca](mailto:merit@meritcomm.bc.ca)

This plan will be revised at least once every three years as required by [Section 11\(2\)](#) of the *Accessible BC Act*. If the Office receives feedback that requires more immediate changes, changes will be made as soon as possible. Likewise, if the Office receives feedback that can improve the plan and be made easily, the resulting changes will be made as soon as possible rather than waiting for the formal annual update process.