Saint Mary's University Accessibility Plan (2022-2025)

Saint Mary's University

Message from the President

I am pleased to present the 2022-2025 Accessibility Plan for Saint Mary's University. The Plan is a comprehensive document representing a gathering together of expertise and aspiration for all forms of accessibility at Saint Mary's. While the Plan responds to the requirements of the Access by Design 2030 legislation of the Province of Nova Scotia, it sets directions that are specific to our academic community. Significantly, the Plan draws upon key components of our institutional Vision, to build on our traditions of accessibility and community engagement to be the university of choice for aspiring citizens of the world. This is not simply a lofty statement; instead, it reflects the importance of a comprehensive approach to equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility and the importance of these concepts permeating our university through active decisions and continuous improvement.

The Plan is arranged around key themes, establishing accomplishments in each but acknowledging the work still to do. We know that in the first instance we must focus on awareness and capacity-building across our organization – including recognizing that we all have responsibility for accessibility and diversity excellence. We note that the teaching, learning, and research environments are ones in which we can engage innovative and culturally responsive pedagogies, universal design language and a host of technological supports to enhance accessibility. There are many important lessons gained from online learning over the past two years that enhance our thinking and actions. Our Plan identifies multiple ways in

which a focus on accessibility must cut across our organization, through the services provided to all members of the university community and including building on the important work undertaken for students through the Fred Smithers Centre for Students with Disabilities. Accessibility becomes a central element for our workforce also so that employment at Saint Mary's reflects our commitments to diversity excellence, not simply because of, a legislative requirement but because we commit to and believe that greater accessibility brings the variety of perspectives necessary for us to be the most effective and innovative organization possible. The Plan brings attention to the physical environment of the university campus, with a focus on mobility, transportation, lighting, and learning systems, as well as the mechanisms we use for communication that need to be accessible for all members of our community. In all of these, we acknowledge our goals of removing barriers for access and achieving standards across the post-secondary sector.

Finally, the Plan highlights the importance of monitoring and continuous evaluation of our efforts. This is not a plan that is summative only but rather a road map for a formative process in which we will engage our community in the coming years. I congratulate the authors of the Plan and all members of the Accessibility Advisory Committee for your commitment and your willingness to bring diverse expertise to the table. While necessarily a 'work in progress', the Plan is a further indication of a commitment to the Vision of Saint Mary's University, and I look forward to our continued shared work.

Sincerely,

Dr. Robert Summerby-Murrary,
President & Vice-Chancellor,
Saint Mary's University

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Glossary of Terms

Accessibility – The prevention and removal of barriers (physical, attitudinal, technological, or system) to allow equitable participation for persons with disabilities or others who experience barriers to accessibility. [1]

Accessibility Act - The provincial legislation enacted in 2017 to prevent and remove barriers to accessibility for people with disabilities. It has a goal of an accessible Nova Scotia by 2030. The Act outlines some responsibilities for municipalities, universities, and other entities, including developing accessibility plans and establishing an accessibility committee. It allows Government to develop and implement standards (regulations) in education, the built environment, the delivery and receipt of goods and services, transportation, information and communication, and employment.

Accessible Employer – Reducing and preventing barriers in hiring, retaining, career development, and advancement for employees, and addressing employee needs with individualized, flexible accommodations.

Accessible Customer Service – Ensuring all persons have the same opportunity to seek, obtain, use or benefit from the service. Accessible services are easy for all people to use, interact with, and understand.

Ableism - Ableism is the discrimination against people with disabilities. It can be intentional or unintentional because many structures in society were designed without considering people with disabilities. Like racism and sexism, ableism classifies an entire group of people as "less than" by upholding harmful stereotypes, misconceptions, and generalizations.

Barrier – Anything that hinders or challenges the full and effective participation in society. Barriers can be physical, attitudinal, technological, or systemic (policy or practice). Accessibility barriers may be related to areas such as employment, education, the built environment, transportation, the delivery and receipt of goods and services, or information and communications.

Accessibility Plan 2022

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) – A teaching method that acknowledges the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and frames of reference of students and uses it to make learning more relevant and effective. It ensures that students from diverse cultures have equitable opportunities and supports for success within school systems and that design is reflected in pedagogy, not just additional targeted services.

Deaf - A sociological term referring to those individuals who are medically deaf or hard of hearing who identify with and participate in the culture, society, and language of Deaf people, which is based on Sign language. [2]

Disability – A physical, mental, intellectual, learning, or sensory impairment, including an episodic disability, that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders an individual's full and effective participation in society.[3]

Employees – Administration, faculty, and staff employed at a post-secondary institution.

Equity/ Equitable – Equity is fair treatment of individuals, acknowledging and making provisions for their differences by ensuring that employment and educational processes are free from systemic barriers. Equity does not mean ignoring differences and treating everyone the same. Instead, it means recognizing and valuing differences, removing systemic barriers, and accommodating individual differences, as needed.[4]

First Voice – First voice perspectives generally refer to the knowledge generated by persons with disabilities and others who experience barriers to accessibility that emerges from lived experience, community connections, knowledge traditions, and scholarly activities that are typically undervalued and under-represented.

Inclusion - The process of improving the terms of participation in society, particularly for individuals or groups of individuals who are disadvantaged or under-represented, through enhancing opportunities, access to resources, voice, and respect for rights. This creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust, fights exclusion and marginalization and offers the opportunity for upward mobility, and results in increased social cohesion.[5]

Meaningful access – When referring to the built environment, meaningful access is the intent to meet the needs of all users of a site (a building or outdoor space) regardless of their ability. It means that not only individual features of a site, such as an entrance or washroom, must be accessible, but the entire experience throughout.

Neurodivergent – Neurodivergent means having a brain that functions in ways that diverge significantly from the dominant societal standards of "normal". It recognizes diverse neurologies and ways of being, as variation of human experience, rather than deficiency in need of remediation or cure. It includes those who identify with autism spectrum disorder, ADHD, Tourette's syndrome, and dyslexia, to name a few. [6]

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) - An educational approach to designing instructional goals, assessments, methods and materials, and policies that work for a diversity of learners. It employs flexible approaches that can be customized and adjusted for individual student needs.

1 Accessibility Nova Scotia
2 Canadian Association of the Deaf
3 Nova Scotia Accessibility Act
4 Nova Scotia Community College Educational Equity Policy
5 Nova Scotia Community College Educational Equity Policy
6 Scorgie, K. & Forlin, C. (2019). *Promoting Social Inclusion: Co-Creating Environments that Foster Equity and Belonging.* P. 153.

About Saint Mary's University

Founded in 1802, Saint Mary's University has a long tradition of excellence in teaching, learning, and research. Located in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, SMU is home to more than 7,000 students from over 115 countries. Our physical campus is concentrated in a single city block in the South End of Halifax. Our virtual campus encompasses the world.

We Are in Mi'kma'ki

Saint Mary's University acknowledges that the university is located on the traditional land of the Mi'kmaq Nation. This territory is covered by the Treaties of Peace and Friendship which Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqiyik peoples first signed with the British Crown in 1725. The treaties did not deal with surrender of lands and resources but in fact, recognized Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqiyik title and established the rules for what was to be an ongoing relationship.

World Without Limits

At Saint Mary's University, we envision a world without limits. This aspirational goal recognizes that many individuals and communities continue to face significant limits and reminds us of the work to be done to realize our goal. Saint Mary's promises to create the space for possibility—to create space for a world that is inclusive, sustainable, diverse, positive, and resilient.

Building an Accessibility Plan for SMU

Under the guidance of its current Strategic Plan (2017-2022), SMU has a strong set of guiding principles that serve as beacons in advancing awareness and capacity building around accessibility and inclusion. Core to the strategic plan are the following vision and values:

Vision

Saint Mary's, building on its strong tradition of accessibility and community engagement, will be a university of choice for aspiring citizens of the world.

Values

- Pursuing academic growth
- Demonstrating resilience
- Developing intercultural competence
- Engaging our alumni and community
- Exercising ethical wisdom

A successful plan must reflect on our current state, recognize achievements to date, identify barriers to accessibility, chart a path forward to overcome barriers, and demonstrate a commitment to continuous learning and improvement. It must also value the experiences and expertise of persons with disabilities, Deaf and hard of hearing, and neurodiverse persons and allow for inclusive decision-making.

As we develop and grow this plan, the SMU community is committed to identifying, removing, and preventing barriers to accessibility. Our plan reflects a commitment to key values including accessibility as a fundamental human right, the priority and value of first voice, and the need for intersectional, inclusive, and collaborative approaches. As we implement the plan, we want to ensure our actions and processes to reflect a social model of disability,

which emphasizes the need to identify and address the physical and social barriers to participation imposed by and in our environments and society. Enacting this plan will require us to create awareness of social models of disability and to move mindsets and practices away from medical models and views of disability that focus on impairment, limitations, and treatment.

In support of our commitments as a public sector body to Nova Scotia's Access by Design 2030, Saint Mary's University established an Accessibility Advisory Committee. We confirm, as per the requirements articulated in the Nova Scotia Accessibility Act, that membership consists of 50% of persons with disabilities or representatives from organizations representing persons with disabilities. The perspective and input provided by the Accessibility Advisory Committee are important contributors to the continued development of this living plan document and its implementation.

Saint Mary's Accessibility Advisory Committee membership (as of April 1, 2022):

Assistant Director of Accessibility, Health and Wellness (Chair) – **Vacant**

Manager of the Fred Smithers Centre – **Jennifer Green**

Director of Diversity, Inclusion, and Wellness – **Deborah Brothers-Scott**

Studio for Teaching and Learning representative – **Jennifer Webb**

Library representative – **Sue Cannon**

Facilities Management representative – **Michelle Lavigne**

Financial Services representative – **Matt Dickinson (Interim co-Chair)**

Human Resources representative – **Valerie Wadman**

Representative from Senate Committee on Accessibility – **Dr. Sailaja Krishnamurti**

Arts Faculty Representative – **Dr. Jean-Jacques Defert**

Science Faculty Representative – **Dr. Lucie Kocum (Interim co-Chair)**

Sobey School of Business Representative – **Dr. ML Wei**

SMUSA representative – **Kyle Cook**

Student Self-Advocate – **Lyam Kenneally**

Community Representative – **Rachel Hyett (Autism NS)**

This Accessibility Plan was developed by the Accessibility Plan Steering Committee, which was formed under the direction of Dr. Malcolm Butler, Vice President Academic and Research, and Ms. Michelle Benoit, Vice President Finance and Administration. The Steering Committee's composition includes area leads and representatives from operational areas at SMU who will have key roles in the implementation and monitoring of the plan. The Accessibility Plan Steering Committee included individuals who speak with first voice,

Saint Mary's Accessibility Plan Steering Committee membership (as of April 1, 2022):

AVP Diversity Excellence – **Dr. Rohini Bannerjee (co-Chair)**
Dean of Science – **Dr. Lori Francis (co-Chair)**
AVP People and Culture – **Mark Moffett**
Manager of the Fred Smithers Centre – **Jennifer Green**
Director of Diversity, Inclusion, and Wellness – **Deborah Brothers -Scott**
AVP Student Affairs and Services – **Tom Brophy**
AVP Research & Dean of Faculty of Graduate Studies & Research – **Dr. Adam Sarty**
AVP Teaching and Learning – **Dr. Esther Enns**
AVP External Affairs – **Margaret Murphy**
University Librarian – **Suzanne van den Hoogen**
Senior Director Facilities Management – **Dennis Gillis**
Director Employee Experience – **Kennedy Fitzgerald**
Chief Information Officer – **Todd Williams**
Senate Committee on Accessibility Co-Chair – **Dr. Sailaja Krishnamurti**
Senate Committee on Accessibility Co-Chair – **Dr. Jacob Hanley**
SMUSA Representative - **Ashish Ganapathy Venkatasubramanian**
Director of Quality Initiatives & Transformation – **Janelle McNulty**

We conceive of this Plan document as a launching point for our expanding and committed work on creating an accessible SMU. This plan is offered as a living document that will develop and grow in the coming years as we consult further,

hear more voices – especially from individuals who speak with first voice as persons with disabilities, Deaf or hard of heading individuals, and neurodiverse people. The things we learn from consultation as well as our monitoring and evaluation activities will further shape the plan and our activities to identify and remove barriers to accessibility.

In building SMU's accessibility plan, we referenced the public sector bodies' tool kit issued by the NS Accessibility Directorate (2019), the NS Post-Secondary Accessibility Framework (June 2020), and the available reports from the NS Education Standards' Development Committee.

We also looked to data sources that reflected input from the SMU community. Focus groups regarding the post-secondary accessibility framework were conducted at SMU on November 7th and November 25th of 2019. Feedback received from these groups has been reflected in this Accessibility Plan. We are grateful for consultation work undertaken by the Senate Committee on Accessibility. Their 2019 report to Senate, which was derived from a survey and wide consultation among SMU Students, Faculty, and Staff was a key source of information in the development of this plan. Members of the Accessibility Plan Steering Committee, including SMUSA, were also advised to reflect on internal information sources (e.g., barriers identified to their offices, reports from previous audits of spaces and services) and include these in plan drafts.

Within the Steering Committee, working teams were formed around each pillar of the plan. Individuals whose operational roles will have key responsibilities on plan implementation took the lead on developing each pillar and in their work involved and consulted other members of the university community.

When articulating the Plan's implementation, monitoring, and evaluation we are committed to continued data collection and consultation, data analysis, plan updates based on new data, and formative and summative evaluation methods – thus allowing for continued input from and consultation with the SMU Community.

SMU's Accessibility Plan is a living document that will grow with us as we create space for Possibility and work toward a *World Without Limits*.

1. Awareness & Capacity Building

Our Goal

We endeavor to create and foster a culture of accessibility, inclusion, and equity at Saint Mary's University. Informed and guided by consultation from those who speak with first voice, we will work to identify and remove existing barriers to participation and pre-empt barriers as we develop programs, initiatives, and spaces. We strive to grow our capacity and awareness related to accessibility and inclusion among all members of the SMU Community.

Our Starting Point

Saint Mary's University has a core institutional value to pursue academic growth and thus we have several key services and spaces that support academic accessibility for members of our university community. Such as The Fred Smithers Centre of Support for Students with Disabilities, The Studio for Teaching and Learning, and The Patrick Power Library. A successful plan must reflect on our current state, recognize achievements to date, identify potential barriers to accessibility, chart a path forward to

overcome such barriers, and demonstrate a commitment to continuous learning and improvement. It must also value the experiences and expertise of persons with disabilities, Deaf and hard of hearing individuals, and neurodiverse persons and allow for inclusive decision-making. We start with the commitment that this plan is best treated as a living document that will adapt and advance accessibility based on community input and our shared experiences as we implement activities and evaluate our progress.

Actions to Date

SMU will consult and work with its wider community and beyond to grow, enact, monitor, and evaluate its accessibility plan. Several key services and initiatives are detailed under other pillars of this plan – however, all will also be essential in building awareness and capacity at our institution.

- Saint Mary's University has developed and staffed key positions in Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility, including two new Associate Vice President Positions (AVP People & Culture and AVP Diversity Excellence). Within People and Culture, there is an existing full-time Diversity and Inclusion Advisor.

- SMU has existing hubs of expertise and awareness about accessibility, including The Fred Smithers Centre of Support for Students with Disabilities, The Studio for Teaching and Learning, The Patrick Power Library, and the Faculty of Science Interpreting Centre (ASL/English), which have developed resources and supports that can inform and support future accessibility-related initiatives and services.

- Saint Mary's University Senate's Committee on Accessibility conducted a consultation with Faculty, Staff, and Students on Accessibility and Barriers to Accessibility and made a report to Senate, which included recommendations that inform academic accessibility initiatives.

- Saint Mary's University is a partner institution with the Canadian Accessibility Network (CAN). SMU has a representative on CAN's Advisory Committee and benefits in resources shared and developed within the network (e.g., training).

- SMU community members gained experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and remote operations that support remote, hybrid, and dual access to varied learning opportunities and supports (e.g., classes, labs, tutoring sessions, student advising appointment, public lectures etc).
- SMU invested in technology (hardware and software) to facilitate varied modes of access for learning (remote capture enabled classrooms, remote access to learning software).
- The development of SMU's new brand standards incorporated an accessibility review.

Barriers

Saint Mary's University is still quite early in growing our direct programming and resources in accessibility. Barriers to awareness and capacity building at our institution include:

- Many of our established supports, offices, and processes that address accessibility, are currently reactive rather than proactive or universal. For example, programs currently emphasize accommodations over universal design for learning.
- Like many post-secondary institutions, at SMU policy, procedures, and practices that relate to academic programs, supports, and regulations developed separately from those related to other student supports (e.g., student advising, student life, student health), which have evolved separately from Human Resource policy and practices for Faculty and Staff.
- Members of the SMU community vary widely in their understanding of accessibility and inclusion as core human rights and awareness of our institutional responsibilities to provide accessible and inclusive opportunities and services.

Actions Required at Saint Mary's University

- Appoint a Full-time institutional lead on Accessibility

- Develop, deliver, monitor, and evaluate accessibility training and awareness programs for Faculty Members, Staff, and Students – including on such key topics as responsibilities under provincial legislation, the NS Educational Accessibility Standards, Ableism, and Universal Design for Learning.

- Move toward accessibility policies, practices, and processes that are proactive and inclusive.

    - Review and update SMU's institutional policies, including Academic Regulations, Senate Policies, and Human Resources policies with an accessibility lens.

    - Review and develop SMU's institutional policy bank to identify and fill policy gaps related to accessibility.

    - Where possible, co-ordinate core accessibility and inclusion practices across different functional areas of the university.

- Establish and roll out policy and processes for consultation, feedback, and appeals at SMU related to all pillars of this plan. This action item includes developing a formal process of academic appeals

- Conduct an environmental scan of accessibility practices in the Canadian Post-Secondary Sector and collate resources that will support our accessibility initiatives.

- Develop an operational terms index to provide common and agreed upon language in reference to accessibility to be used across campus.

- Review and update protocols for events held at SMU (internal and external) to reflect best practices for accessibility and inclusion.

- Develop an accessibility audit and information framework, that will be used to integrate findings from previous and ongoing campus audits (including physical, virtual, scholarly, and service environments) to identify and prioritize activities, define information gaps, and shape the standards and attributes of future, comprehensive, accessibility audits.

- Explore external funding opportunities that could contribute to increasing accessibility awareness and actions at SMU.

- Engage with the appropriate offices, including Financial Services and People and Culture, to identify and secure the necessary financial and people resources to realize the implementation of the Accessibility Plan and sustained Accessibility initiatives in the future.

- Include accessibility as a key driver as we build the new SMU Strategic Plan (2023-2028).

2. Teaching, Learning, and Research

Goals

- Establish a comprehensive and integrated policy framework that reflects social and intersectional models of accessibility for teaching, learning, and academic support services.

- Address priorities for accessibility standards across all dimensions of teaching, learning, and research.

- Develop and foster more inclusive and accessible teaching, learning, and research environments.

- Offer a full range of professional development opportunities and accessible supports for teaching, learning, and research.

Our Starting Point

Saint Mary's has integrated organisational structures for academic supports and quality assurance processes. The University is also home to vibrant activities and spaces in Teaching, Learning, and Research. For example, The Studio for Teaching and Learning mobilizes Saint Mary's University's accessibility supports in a virtual environment and is a resource that supports the work of students, faculty, and staff. The Patrick Power Library works to improve resources and services, and foster a culture of accessibility, inclusion, and equity. The Fred Smithers Centre for Students with Disabilities provides academic support services and facilitates academic accommodation.

Actions to Date

- Saint Mary's University's Academic Plan and Strategic Research Plan align with principles of accessibility and include strategies to remove barriers.

- Saint Mary's University Partnered with the Province of Nova Scotia to create and lead a province-wide network of post-secondary institutions for community-engaged research, which lead to an accessible research space for community engaged research (CLARI) on campus.

- The Studio for Teaching and Learning developed teaching resources that support universal design for learning and highlight research informed teaching practices (e.g., instructional design guides, course templates, production of materials in accessible formats).

- Saint Mary's University has upgraded its digital learning infrastructure (e.g., Brightspace, Microsoft Office and Teams, Willo Labs, and Zoom).

- Offered workshops and training on anti-racism, indigenous knowledges, equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility.

- Ensured Online (WW) courses comply with WCAG 2.0 standards and apply accessibility features in course format and context appropriate ways.

- Conducted an accessibility audit of the Library's catalogue and research guide platform (LibGuides) in 2021 (as part of the Novanet Consortium)

- Collaborated with the National Network for Equitable Library Service and the Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA) to support access for people with print disabilities.

- The Library offers accessible features including an assistive technology workstation, accessible options for retrieval and delivery of material, multiple delivery modes for Research Help services, and a Library Accessibility Guide that aids service navigation and provides information on creating accessible events and documents.

- The Library invested in electronic resources, including e-books, streaming media, and databases with accessible content, including obtaining endowment funding from the Ferguson Library Trust to help fund the acquisition of resources for the blind or partially sighted.

- Identified, promoted, and provided accessibility-training opportunities for Library staff.

- Provided support to Faculty Members to ensure copyright compliance and provide students with multiple accessible options to course materials.

Actions Required at Saint Mary's University

- Build a Teaching and Learning Plan that emphasizes accessible pedagogy and pathways to support an accessible and inclusive culture.

- Incorporate accessibility in the curriculum, with such initiatives as:
    - Develop a Digital Learning Strategy that emphasizes accessibility
    - Develop areas of study explicitly focused on accessibility, equity, diversity, and inclusion.
    - Support efforts to broadly apply UDL in educational design

- Provide classroom support to help remove barriers.
- Bolster educational technologies that support accessible learning via an academic technology protocol detailing requirements for all resources, content, and programming to ensure they are accessible, and support accessibility WCAG 3.0 standards in learning content design, development, and production.
- Increase awareness and capacity to support the creation of accessible media content, including developing dedicated spaces (recording and production), and enhanced technical resources (staff and equipment).
- Support the production of accessible and culturally responsive learning materials.

- Review and update SMU's academic policies including Academic Regulations, Senate policies, Academic Support Unit policies, and Library policies with an accessibility lens and address identified policy gaps related to accessibility. This review should emphasize social and intersectional models of disability.

- Further build the library collection to support research and development relating to accessibility, equity, diversity, and inclusion.

- Develop an accessibility training plan and source, develop, and deliver professional development on accessibility for faculty, librarians, academic administrators, and staff. Programming will include topics such as:
  - Accessibility features in key institutional software (e.g., Brightspace, Banner, Degree Works).
  - Accessible and inclusive culture
  - Ableism
  - Strategies for accessible research practices and outputs

- Provide accessible library programming, training, and learning opportunities for students, faculty, and community participants.

- Establish a standing Committee on Academic Accessibility to identify and recommend methods to remove accessibility barriers throughout the units that support teaching, learning, and research (e.g., Library, Studio, CLARI, The Fred Smithers Centre, The Student Success Centre)

- Foster a network of professional educators, including champions from each department, who serve as resources for advancing social and intersectional models of accessibility and a library acquisition plan to support these initiatives.

- Develop a network of researchers with expertise in conducting studies using principles of accessibility who serve as resources to other researchers.

- Create protocols to provide resources and confidential support options to scholars who experience barriers in their teaching and research activities.

- Engage in a study regarding barriers to accessibility in study abroad, work-integrated learning, and service-learning opportunities, with recommendations for providing barrier-free global and experiential learning experiences.

- Update University policy on course outlines to include requirements on accessible publishing formats and accessibility statements that explicitly communicate key supports, resources, and processes.

- Incorporate an accessibility and inclusion audit as a standard element of regular academic program reviews.

- Identify accessibility attributes for all auditoriums, classrooms, labs, and other workspaces in the published timetable of courses.

3. Delivery of Goods and Services

Our Goal

To ensure goods and services that are sourced, procured, implemented and delivery, by Saint Mary's University are accessible by design so that all students, employees, and visitors have equitable access to Saint Mary's University's goods and services with minimal dependence on adaptation.

Our Starting Point

At Saint Mary's we have many programs and services that we offer to Faculty, Students, and Staff. Several of these are growing and focussed on student success. For example, we have placed a priority on resourcing initiatives that emphasize student success such as the new Student Success Centre. However, many of our services are located in different operational areas of campus, and part of our development will be coordination and collaboration.

Actions to Date

- Advancement, Student Affairs and Services, and the Fred Smithers Centre have collaboratively secured substantial dedicated funds to support accessibility-related research.

- The Fred Smithers Centre secured funding to enhance and purchase assistive technologies for learning, revamp its website, and increase funding for student travel.

- Hired a second Accessibility Advisor in the Fred Smithers Centre in 2021.

- The Fred Smithers Centre and Career Services implemented a flagship Student Employment Initiative (SEI) to provide career experience and job readiness training for students with disabilities.

- Recruitment and Marketing have developed and implemented accessible tour routes and recruitment events on campus.

Barriers

- Attitudinal/Knowledge barriers that are held by employees, which may reflect implicit bias about disabilities. This lack of knowledge often translates to an inability to use the appropriate acumen and languages that are generally accepted within the field of accessibility services.

- We are awaiting the results of the recent accessibility audit which will identify areas requiring modification.

- Current Staffing levels and operational budgets do not readily include funds earmarked for an effective universal design approach and thus are vulnerable to other institutional priorities.

- Accessibility is presently viewed by some services via a medical model perspective. There is a need to move toward accessibility being considered from social and intersectional perspectives and to realize the link between accessibility and the university culture as a whole.

Actions Required at Saint Mary's University

- Develop and implement procurement guidelines and processes that embed and address accessibility considerations, requirements, and criteria for all goods and services purchased or otherwise retained by Saint Mary's University.
- Review and update policies and processes in Academic Support Units (including the Fred Smithers' Centre) to further support accessibility and inclusion and to reflect social and intersectional models of disability.
- Develop and implement accessible service delivery standards.
- Develop and provide accessible customer service training for full-time employees and as appropriate for student staff.
- Provide customer services that are conducive to a positive customer service experience for everyone.
- Conduct an internal environmental scan to identify all areas of the university responsible for goods and service delivery.
- Complete a thorough internal services review to increase accessibility.
- Engage in a consultation process to identify gaps and barriers that exist as it relates to goods and service delivery.
- Work with recruitment to adopt universal and inclusive admission processes.
- Revamp and revise application forms to have multi-modal accessibility formats.
- Review scholarship and promotional processes to ensure they are available in various formats.
- Work with Facilities Management where to address concerns where physical attributes affect the delivery of goods and services.
- Identify resources required to grow and support knowledge capacities around accessibility for goods and services.
- Develop research to ascertain assistive technology and assess areas where it would be most appropriately implemented to enhance deliverability and availability of service.

- Look at the variety of resources available through Saint Mary's Bookstore and ensure resources are considerate of different learning modalities.
- Develop and distribute accessibility guidelines to staff who coordinate events and meetings.
- Develop and circulate an inventory of resources, services, and adaptive technologies available on campus to accommodate needs identified by event participants.
- Enhance transitional resources for students, faculty, and staff to identify and ensure appropriate capacities are available to allow for successful transitions into and out of Saint Mary's. These resources will identify accessibility needs, help to recognize and reduce barriers for people with disabilities.
- Develop an accessibility criteria tool in the procurement processes to ensure accessibility technology can be efficiently ordered and received as needed.
- Conduct a review of our admissions criteria and processes a minimum of every three years to ensure that any accessibility barriers are identified and removed.
- Ensure that the Service Centre and the Fred Smithers Centre staff work together to ensure students with disabilities have equity embedded within admission and scholarship criteria.
- In consultation with the Accessibility Advisory Committee and the institutional analysis office, develop a recurring survey of students, faculty, and staff to ascertain their satisfaction with the accessibility experiences at Saint Mary's.
- Clearly communicate funding and relevant financial aid opportunities to students with disabilities, Deaf or hard of hearing students, and neurodiverse students who are applying to or enrolled at SMU.
- Ensure scholarship and bursary application processes are accessible, and that the application can be accessed in alternate formats.

4. Employment

Our Goal

As an institution committed to fostering an environment of inclusion, accessibility, and respect, SMU's Employment goals are:

- Establish guidelines and procedures to ensure persons with disabilities, Deaf or hard of hearing individuals, and neurodiverse people have barrier-free employment opportunities at Saint Mary's University.
- Support the careers of employees who experience barriers to accessibility to ensure they have full access to opportunities

Our Starting Point

Saint Mary's University is committed to fostering a positive and progressive workforce reflecting the residents we serve and promoting diversity in all areas of the Institution. Saint Mary's University has several employment policies relating to equity in our employment practices including the

Employment Equity and Diversity Policy and the Policy on Conflict Resolution and the Prevention of Harassment/ Discrimination. These policies work together to reduce barriers in employment. Applicants can request accommodation related to the protected grounds of the Human Rights Code at any stage of the hiring process.

Actions to Date

- People and Culture have an existing process to review and manage short and long-term medical accommodations.

- People and Culture conduct an employment equity survey that provides data on the representation of employees with disabilities in the workforce.

- People and Culture have re-envisioned SMU's equity commitment statement and it now includes a sentence related to accommodations. The new statement is as follows:

  > *"At Saint Mary's University equity and diversity are integral to excellence and enrich our community. As an institution committed to fostering an environment of inclusion and respect, we welcome applications from women, Indigenous peoples, racialized persons/ visible minorities, persons with disabilities, persons of minority sexual orientation or gender identity and others who might contribute to the growth and enrichment of our community. All qualified candidates are encouraged to apply; however, preference will be given to Canadian citizens and permanent residents. If you require accommodations during the recruitment process, please contact Human Resources at..."*

- People and Culture have partnered with other areas of the university to develop training on Unconscious Bias. Faculty and Staff have received the training and have been trained to deliver the product.

- People and Culture developed and delivered multiple training sessions on Conflict Resolution and Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.

Barriers

- Jobs are posted in traditional ways, including web pages, which may not be accessible to some individuals.
- Staff are generally not trained to recognize barriers that may limit job opportunities for qualified individuals.
- Stigma exists in general, and at the University, around identifying as a person with a disability or as a neurodiverse person.
- People and Culture do not currently have dedicated resources for accessibility. Currently, budget allocations are not readily available within People and Culture nor central processes to fund some accessibility activities.
- Many of our current practices are reactive versus proactive, and require exceptions to process, which can present barriers.
- Many of our current practices are based on medical models of disability.
- Some employees have given feedback that they do not understand how to access or to appeal certain employment outcomes that are related to accessibility.

Actions Required at Saint Mary's University

Target Timeline 3-12 months

- Identify and hire an additional resource within People and Culture who will act as a lead on accessibility, accommodations, and return to work, ensuring the University is proactive in this domain.
- Conduct research on best practices to develop an Accessibility policy.
- Develop recruitment strategies to reach a wider and more diverse audience including persons with a disability, Deaf, and neurodiverse people.

Target Timeline: 6 – 18 months

- Develop and implement a centralized and standardized process for managing accommodation requests as one aspect of our accessibility programs.
- Develop and deliver training sessions centered on accessibility for Saint Mary's University employees.
- Establish an Employee Resource Group (ERG) or caucus for employees with disabilities.

Target Timeline: 12 – 24 months

- Invest in technology to support accessible employment.
- Develop an annual Employee Engagement Survey to inform efforts to develop a workplace culture of inclusion and engagement.
- Establish accessible recruitment and interviewing guidelines and continuous training for hiring managers, including the provision of accessible formats and communication supports for candidates with disabilities, Deaf or hard of hearing candidates, and neurodiverse candidates.
- Integrate accessibility assessments and priorities into regular workplace processes and ensure that managers prioritize accessibility and inclusion across all stages of the employment life cycle – including recruitment, onboarding, performance management, promotion, and departure.
- Review current policies and processes (e.g., for onboarding, training, and performance appraisal) with consideration of barriers and articulate plans to update said policies and procedures based on the findings.
- Develop and provide accessible customer service training for full-time employees and as appropriate for student staff.

Ongoing

- Produce annual diversity report and intersectional analysis on the representation of employees with disabilities, Deaf or hard of hearing employees, and neurodiverse employees.

- Promote awareness of the Employee Resource Group or caucus for employees with disabilities, Deaf or hard of hearing employees, and neurodiverse employees through letters of employment, new employee orientation, leadership training, onboarding modules, and labour relationships.

- Create awareness around the role formal accommodations play in accessible employment. This will be done through new employee orientation, leadership training, onboarding modules, and labour relationships.

- Promote the Employee and Family Assistance Program and other resources through letters of employment, new employee orientation, leadership training, onboarding modules, labour relationships, and the University newsletter.

- Create and promote a reporting process for employees to identify and communicate about barriers related to accessibility.

- Encourage and recognize accessibility advocacy through Employee Recognition Awards.

- Incorporate language about accessibility in all institutional communications to all employees, including student employees.

- Provide continuous training on the Duty to Accommodate in employment and accessible employment for managers and supervisors.

5. Transportation

Goal

Saint Mary's University aims to provide transportation services in an accessible manner. When the University is providing transportation, accessibility will be a key consideration.

Our Starting Point

At Saint Mary's University, the most relevant aspects of a transportation accessibility pillar (e.g., parking) intersect with the built environment, contracted services (e.g., sports team bus travel), and public transit. Saint Mary's University is served by several public bus routes and has contracted services that can respond to requests for accessible vehicles or equivalent services upon request.

Actions to Date

- Saint Mary's University students can access transit passes as part via their students' union, SMUSA.
- Travel registry processes, travel waiver forms and procedures, and field research safety assessment forms are undergoing updates and renewal.

Barriers

- Current processes may address accessibility in reactive ways that emphasize requested accommodation and user self-identification.
- Formalized travel and transportation processes in place at SMU (e.g., rental car service agreements, field trip planning considerations) may not be accessed by all user groups across campus.
- There are few tools currently available to plan travel to and movement on campus.
- The geographical physical location of campus within HRM limits access to additional transit routes.

Actions Required at Saint Mary's University

- Incorporate accessibility information (e.g., bus stops, ramp entrances, quiet spaces) into existing physical and virtual campus maps.
- Increase the availability and accessibility of wayfinding tools and signage on campus.

  As per our Goods and Services action plan:
- Review existing transit contracts for services providers to integrate accessible services.
- Design future request for proposals (RFPs) to include accessibility statements and expectations.

- Review travel planning processes to ensure the removal of barriers to participation.

- Work with Halifax Transit to promote programs that support and provide accessible transit to staff, faculty, and students.

- Bring forth accessibility concerns in its participation with Halifax Regional Municipality's Transportation Demand Management.

  As per our Built Environment action plan:

- Support accessible transportation by incorporating consideration for accessible parking, access to transit locations, and drop off locations on campus.

6. Built Environment

Our Goal

Making buildings and shared spaces accessible to all.

- Ensure meaningful access to Saint Mary's University grounds, existing buildings, new construction, and major renovations at Saint Mary's University.
- Meet accessibility standards outlined by the Province of NS.
- At minimum, Saint Mary's will comply with the Nova Scotia Building Code, and the Accessibility Act's Built Environment standard, once implemented. Saint Mary's will aim to exceed these codes and standards whenever feasible and with the greatest impact to the community, referencing CSA Standard B651 Accessible Design for the Built Environment.
- New construction will assess the opportunity for Rick Hansen Foundation certification and ratings.

- Adopt accessibility standards in alignment with provincial mandates.
- Address accessibility via a whole journey approach that considers accessibility needs and safety requirements of diverse users.

Our Starting Point

Saint Mary's University's physical campus comprises one city block in South End Halifax. The campus blends historic buildings, newer construction, parking, walkways, and outdoor green and recreation spaces. Past audits have identified barriers in some campus spaces (e.g., Loyola Academic Building and Library washrooms). We continue to work to address these gaps (e.g., two washrooms have been renovated in the last three years to add accessible stalls, improved security, general access to the washroom, and include change tables).

Actions to Date

- SMU hired a consultant who completed an audit of the campus's physical environment. A final report is expected by June 2022. The audit process was a joint Audit RFP with other Nova Scotia Post-Secondary institutions.
- Regular reviews of the campus to identify shortcomings in the physical environment, based on the Building Code to inform our annual renovation work. With an awareness of the mandate of the Accessibility Directorate, this year's audit expanded to:
    - review and assess the physical campus environment in alignment with the Province of NS Access by Design 2030 initiative;
    - reference the NS Accessibility Directorate 2020 Interim Guidelines for Indoor and Outdoor spaces in addition to the Building Code;
    - provide more details regarding issues in specific locations on campus;
    - make recommendations for how best to address, including high level cost estimates.

Barriers *(to be updated when 2022 Audit report is available)*

- Previous audits have identified specific accessibility concerns in specific locations on campus (e.g., washrooms in the Loyola Academic building).

- In some buildings, accessibility navigation currently requires users to use certain entrances and routes (e.g., ramps, automatic doors, elevators).

- In some rooms fixtures (e.g., furniture, lighting) present accessibility barriers.

- Current funding allocations need to be reconsidered to help meet the NS Access By Design 2030 initiative standards.

Actions Required at Saint Mary's University

- Continue to work closely with peer post-secondary institutions in Nova Scotia on a collaborative approach that promotes common understanding - including accessibility assessments, cost-assessment tools, auditing criteria, assessment methodology, and reporting - and to share knowledge across the sector;

- Build and maintain an awareness of existing barriers through a Built Environment Accessibility Audit, using a whole journey approach that considers accessibility and safety for diverse users and using appropriate, up-to-date guidelines and standards;

- Informed by the forthcoming report on the recent Built Environment Accessibility Audit, prioritize the removal of identified barriers in the built environment through the annual capital planning process, as well as engage additional identified funding opportunities;

- Build upon knowledge and training directed at planned site work, renovations and new construction projects, as well as regular maintenance, custodial and security efforts, to remove and prevent barriers;

- Periodically engage with consultants to update audits/reports to ensure an up-to-date understanding of barriers;

- Work with our supply chain on items such as furniture, fixtures, equipment, and lighting to increase accessibility in our space (e.g., adjustable furniture, noise, visual stimuli, colours, sightlines, safe spaces).

- Gain an understanding of infrastructure needs related to assistive devices, and emergency systems, and collaborate with SMU stakeholders on device infrastructure (such as IT) and integration into procedures;

- Engage in regular ongoing communication and work with the Saint Mary's AAC and other stakeholders to align efforts and confirm/inform priorities;

- Track progress on operationalization of accessibility initiatives as outlined in implementation and monitoring pillar of this plan;

- Establish and implement processes to maintain accessibility during temporary disruptions (e.g., during construction, snow removal, etc.) with building infrastructure and outdoor spaces;

- Ensure all emergency evacuation systems, policies, procedures, communications, and training enable the safe and efficient evacuation of persons with disabilities, those who are Deaf or hard of hearing, neurodiverse people, or others who experience barriers to accessibility during an emergency.

7. Information and Communication

Goal

Ensure that all university information and communications keep pace with or exceeds the accessibility standards for our sector and the needs of the Saint Mary's community.

Starting Point

Saint Mary's University has adopted a digital-first approach to information and communications. To ensure greater access, desktop computer systems are made available throughout the campus in accessible spaces, and we also support 'bring your own device' access to labs and printing. We aim to provide information in ways that are accessible to all persons.

Enterprise Information Technology (EIT) and External Affairs share responsibility for the main Saint Mary's website (smu.ca), its related

microsites, social media channels, and an extensive suite of student, faculty, and staff-facing digital services. As such, both parties are responsible for and committed to delivering an accessible experience both technically (meeting standards) and as a lived experience across all information channels.

Actions to Date

EIT and the Web Team at External Affairs actively embrace the web accessibility guidelines as laid out in the W3C's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 and incorporate those guidelines into all digital development.

These efforts include, but are not limited to:

- Appropriate descriptive alternative (alt) text with images, captions with live events and recorded video content, and accessible font considerations (e.g., size, contrast) are included

- Incorporate accessible features and feedback mechanisms in our information systems including appropriate coding to allow assistive technologies to navigate content without visual cues (Aria attributes), PDFs are readable and appropriately structured for assistive technologies, forms and other interfaces are accessible, and text alternatives are available for primarily visual communications.

- Ensure mass email and text-based (SMS) delivery systems are accessible.

- Provide information through plain language and in a logical order.

- Ensure emergency messages are available in formats that are accessible for all audiences.

- Saint Mary's University has adopted a "Cloud First" approach that makes digital content available securely from anywhere at any time for students, faculty and staff members including virtualized computer lab capabilities (Apps Anywhere), learning management (Brightspace), administrative systems (Banner) and productivity tools (MS365).

Barriers

- The adoption of accessible communication practices is not universal across campus and community members report challenges such as:
    - Electronic documents that are not properly formatted and cannot be read by a screen reader.
    - Language that is not clear and accessible is used in communications
    - Print materials are in non-accessible fonts
    - Videos not captioned and do not have transcriptions.
- Although web pages are structured to be easily navigable via keyboard through the desktop as well as mobile devices and assistive technologies, this is not always the case in practice.
- Localized versus centralized distribution lists for internal communications can lead to missed communication, unnecessary intermediaries, and delays in information sharing (e.g., notices related to elevator shut down).
- The university has made strategic investments in online platforms to enhance the ability of faculty, staff, and students to access information and communications and has made a conscious decision to opt for accessibility. The investment decisions have been made and the university is now in the position of launching or has recently launched the platforms.

Actions Required at Saint Mary's University

- Continue to review and incorporate accessibility best practices for the web as they evolve. This includes developing a plan to stay compliant with evolving web content accessibility guidelines that include prescribed timeline to update existing materials when new guidelines become available.
- Adopt the POUR principles of accessibility: perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust (POUR).

- Cultivate and maintain a strong understanding of accessibility principles and will prioritize ongoing accessibility training among all technical teams at Saint Mary's with responsibility for web content delivery.

- Provide formal and informal training opportunities for staff and faculty with responsibility for web content.

- Regularly perform audits of all of the University's digital platforms to ensure compliance with current standards for accessibility.

- Seek and respond to feedback from its users regarding the accessibility of its digital platforms as part of the university's Accessibility Evaluation Framework.

- Test its digital platforms for compliance with WCAG standards, as well as with users who engage assistive technologies, prior to launching them.

- Progress the adoption and rollout of accessible platforms, including
    - Roll out an administrative digital experience for Students, Faculty, and Staff largely defined by the integrated suite of Ellucian platforms, which are WCAG compliant.
    - Implement the standard and enhanced features of the Brightspace Learning Management system software by D2L, which is accessible by design, SCORM compliant and supports WCAG 2.0 web delivery standards.
    - Ensure that the University's accessibility compliant content management system (Terminalfour) for the majority of the development of its external web presence meets or exceeds the WCAG 2.0 standards through the use of that software.
    - Ensure that the University's alternative content management systems for several web-based projects and ensure maximum WCAG 2.0 compliance in those contexts.
    - Require all future third-party system interfaces (e.g., event registration, surveys, donations, payments) to meet or exceed WCAG (2.0) standards.

- Promote SMU's products, activities, and services through various social media channels and will make all efforts to ensure maximum achievable accessibility in those contexts (e.g., alt text, hard-coded captions).

- Develop and follow protocols that support decisions about and technical support for ASL-English interpretation.

- Expand the availability of Otter.ai to students, faculty, and staff to support transcription and translation.

- Train communications staff are trained in ableism and in the principles of accessibility and apply it to their work including content creation, creative design, and writing whether for print or digital communications.

- Implements reviews for externally available communications to either create accessible documents or ensure they are edited for accessibility by others before distribution.

- Maintain a website with directions to resources and supports for accessibility, our plan, links to the relevant standards and legislation, information on the advisory committee, and updates on progress and evaluations.
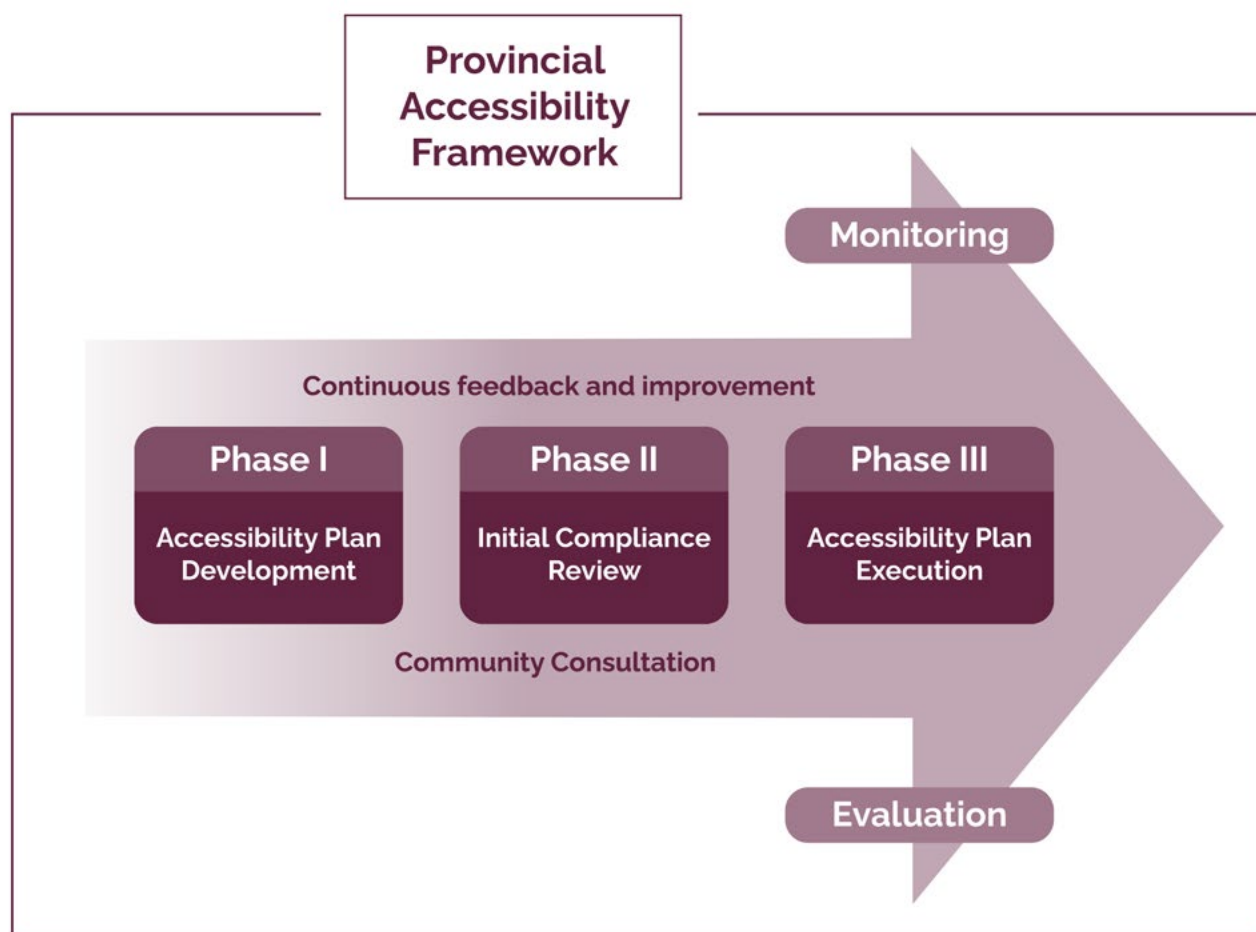
8. Implementation, Monitoring & Evaluation

Activities required to improve accessibility at Saint Mary's through the prevention and removal of barriers will be managed in accordance with the University's Accessibility plan. The three phases below illustrate the steps to build the plan, ensure the plan's compliance with the Provincial Accessibility framework, and complete the ongoing execution of the plan all the way through to periodic monitoring and evaluation for compliance and efficacy.

1.1   Phase I- Plan Development

- Establish an Accessibility Advisory Committee- half of the members must be persons with disabilities or organizations representing persons with disabilities (committee is formed and is active).

- Seek input from persons with disabilities and organizations representing persons with disabilities (ongoing).

Provincial Accessibility Framework

Monitoring

Continuous feedback and improvement

Phase I — Accessibility Plan Development

Phase II — Initial Compliance Review

Phase III — Accessibility Plan Execution

Community Consultation

Evaluation

- Prepare and make publicly available an accessibility plan for Saint Mary's University which includes:
  - Progress Saint Mary's has made removing and preventing barriers to accessibility
  - How Saint Mary's will remove and prevent barriers
  - Processes in place to assess the impact of proposed actions on accessibility
- Complete/Submit the Prescribed Public Sector Body Accessibility Act Compliance Form.
- Provide information on the Saint Mary's Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC).

- Provide a link to the Saint Mary's accessibility plan on the University's website.
- Include information about consultation.

1.2 Phase II- Initial compliance review-in progress

1. Submit the Prescribed Public Sector Body Accessibility Act Compliance Form upon publishing our Plan to the Saint Mary's University public website (by April 30, 2022).

2. Notification by the NS Accessibility Directorate of the results of our compliance status to Saint Mary's (by August 2022).

3. The adjustment of Saint Mary's plan based on feedback from the NS Accessibility Directorate compliance review, if required, by the date indicated by the Directorate.

1.3 Phase III- Ongoing execution- in progress

1. Execution of ongoing actions as outlined in the approved accessibility plan.

2. Articulate target timelines for the Actions Required at SMU listed in each of the Plan's Pillars.

3. Consultation with Saint Mary's Accessibility Advisory Committee and community. Meetings with the AAC will be held monthly in the first year of the plan, and proposed quarterly thereafter.

4. Evaluation of actions in accordance with defined evaluation frameworks.

5. Monitoring and periodic reporting to Saint Mary's Executive Management Group.

6. Adjustments and improvements to the accessibility plan resulting from ongoing consultation, advice from the AAC, monitoring, and evaluations.

1. Monitoring

To monitor Saint Mary's compliance with the priorities outlined in the NS Post-secondary Accessibility Framework, a progress assessment model will be developed by SMU's Institutional Data Analysis and Planning (IDAP) department in consultation with the AAC, and other key stakeholders, IDAP will create a report that tracks the progress of actions taking place within the following eight focus areas identified in the Saint Mary's Accessibility plan:

- Awareness and Capacity Building
- Teaching, Learning, and Research
- Information and Communication
- Delivery of Goods and Services
- Employment
- Transportation
- Built Environment
- Implementation, Monitoring, and Evaluation

Monitoring the progress of each Pillar will ensure that the activities documented in the Accessibility Plan are being completed in a timely fashion. Working on behalf of the SMU Accessibility Lead, IDAP will gather the status of actions from identified responsible managers/departments and seek feedback from other stakeholders including the AAC quarterly in the first year and annually thereafter for presentation to Saint Mary's Executive Management Group.

The progress assessment will gauge the completion of the plan's actions. For actions that should be in progress, the following status indicators will serve to identify actions that are falling behind and where mitigation/ escalation is required to put them back on track:

Not Started, Started, Somewhat Complete, Mostly Complete and Completed

In cases where escalation or mitigation are required a plan to advance the activity will be instated.

Adjustments to the plan will be reviewed with the Saint Mary's Advisory Committee to ensure first voice representation in decision-making processes.

2. Evaluation

Saint Mary's will put in place an evaluation framework to assess the actions and projected outcomes as documented in the plan. In consultation with the Saint Mary's Accessibility Advisory Committee, an Evaluation Working Group will be established to develop and implement an evaluation process. IDAP will be responsible for periodic collection and reporting of evaluation data on behalf of the Accessibility Lead to the Saint Mary's Executive Management Group.

3.1 Phase I- Evaluation Framework development

The first year will involve the development of an Evaluation Framework and a Logic Model to connect the goals associated with each focus area to relevant activities and anticipated outcomes. The Framework will include a measurement matrix to identify the optimal way to assess progress toward each outcome. The matrix will identify relevant indicators and data sources. This matrix will guide the IDAP to identify existing data sources or develop new ways to measure indicators as needed. The matrix will identify outcomes to be measured using primary data collection from members of our community with relevant lived experience.

3.2 Phase II- Formative Evaluation

Will take place in years two and three and will involve formative evaluation. A formative evaluation is designed to evaluate progress towards outcomes and inform changes, modifications, and

improvements to the implementation plan. The evaluation will be overseen by Accessibility Lead and garner input from Saint Mary's Accessibility Advisory Committee. Steering and project committees required to govern/execute changes to the plan elements will be identified as needs are identified. We are committed to developing the SMU Accessibility Plan 2022-2025 as a living document.

3.3 Phase III- Summative Evaluation

Will take place in year four and involve a summative evaluation of outcomes achieved. A summative evaluation will illustrate if the plan achieved its goals and will be pivotal in helping to direct our planning for the next phase in the NS Accessible by Design 2030 initiative. Saint Mary's will share this evaluation report with its community and relevant stakeholders.