

MANAGEMENT BOARD SECRETARIAT

*2003-2004
Accessibility Plan*



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Introduction

In 2001, there were an estimated 1.5 million people in Ontario with self-disclosed disabilities. This number is expected to increase as the population ages.

In December 2001, the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001 (ODA) was passed into law. Its purpose is to improve opportunities for people with disabilities and to provide for their involvement in the identification, removal and prevention of barriers to their full participation in the life of the province.

One of the requirements under the ODA is that Ontario government ministries, municipalities, hospitals, school boards, colleges, universities, and public transportation organizations develop annual accessibility plans to make programs, services and buildings more accessible to people with disabilities. The plans must be made available to the public.

In the Speech from the Throne, delivered on November 20, 2003, the Ontario Government confirmed its commitment to working with Ontarians with disabilities on meaningful legislation that will allow them to fully participate in building a stronger province.

This document is the first annual accessibility plan for Management Board Secretariat. The plan describes improvements to accessibility that the ministry has made to date and its commitments for the balance of the 2003-2004 fiscal year.

Report on Achievements

Management Board Secretariat (MBS), as a central agency in the Ontario government, supports Management Board of Cabinet and allocates resources to ministries, agencies, boards and commissions. It has a corporate role as “employer of the Ontario Public Service” and also has responsibilities for controllership, human resource policies, information and information technology, real estate and the Archives of Ontario. MBS helps ministries to manage their operations and resources effectively so government can better serve the public.

MBS has a history of addressing the concerns of people with disabilities and supporting initiatives to remove barriers. The *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001* (ODA), which was passed in December 2001, sets out specific responsibilities for the Ontario Public Service.

MBS provides support, advice and direction to ministries to ensure that the requirements of the legislation are met in the internal management of government. At the same time, MBS as a ministry, continues to lead by example - improving the lives of people with disabilities by taking steps within its own organization to remove and prevent barriers.

Examples of some of MBS’s achievements are outlined below.

Implementation

MBS has provided guidance and tools to ministries across government to help meet their responsibilities under the province’s new *Ontarians with Disabilities Act*. MBS has also taken steps within the ministry itself to implement improvements for people with disabilities.

The *Ontarians with Disabilities* legislation is important for all employees of the Ontario government. It sets out requirements for accessibility in the workplace, government buildings, government purchases, the Internet and other areas.

MBS had a significant role in helping to ensure employees were informed about the new legislation and their rights and obligations under the act, as members of the Ontario Public Service.

In its corporate role, MBS worked closely with the Ministry of Citizenship to provide information and resources to senior executives across the government so ministries were aware of, and able to meet, the government’s obligations under the new legislation.

MBS also provided information to employees electronically and in its monthly employee publication, *Topical*, to inform employees about the ODA and increase awareness about accessibility issues in general.

Training Managers and Supervisors

MBS developed intranet-based training for managers and supervisors on how to meet the accessibility needs of employees as well as the needs of people with disabilities who apply for public service jobs. New managers and supervisors are expected to take the training within three months of starting work in their new positions.

The training provides an overview of the ODA and related sections of the Human Rights Code; explanations about disabilities and the benefits of accommodating the needs of people with disabilities; a review of managers' and supervisors' roles in ensuring employees with disabilities have the tools and resources they need; and sources for further guidance and information.

By providing this training, MBS has helped to ensure that managers and supervisors are informed about ways they can further support employees and prospective employees with disabilities, and the tools that are available to them. This training helps to further improve access and opportunities for people with disabilities.

At the ministry level, through regular correspondence from the Chief Administrative Officer, MBS ensures that all its own managers and supervisors are reminded of their obligation to take the training that is available through the online course. New managers are expected to take the training within three months of assuming a management or supervisory position in the ministry.

Employment Accommodation Fund (EAF)

In the provincial government, ministries refer to accommodation as the specific workplace requirements that employees need to carry out their work. Accommodation includes offices and workstations for staff, meeting and technical rooms, as well as common corridors. It also includes devices employees may need such as computers with voice capabilities, hands-free telephones, wheelchair accessible desks and other items.

MBS has an Employment Accommodation Fund (EAF) that was established to provide support for employees with disabilities. The fund covers eligible expenses for “accommodation” which includes such things as alternative format materials in Braille, interpreters, workstation upgrades, and technical aids. It can also cover adaptations that may be needed to offices or meeting rooms. The program reflects the government’s Employment Accommodation for People with Disabilities Operating Policy that ensures all employees with disabilities are provided with accommodation in employment, in accordance with the Human Rights Code and the Ontario Public Service Managing Injury, Illness and Employment Program.

MBS has also improved procedures to make it easier for ministries to access the fund.

Provincial Government Internet Sites

Section 6 of the ODA requires that provincial Internet sites are more accessible to people with disabilities, unless it is not technically feasible to do so. MBS took a lead role in supporting ministries as they made changes to ensure their Internet sites were accessible to people with disabilities.

For many people, using the Internet is a quick and easy way to do business. More and more provincial government information and services are being provided online. It is important that people are able to use their computers to interact with government and it's also important that everyone has access.

Being accessible means web pages must be designed with everyone's abilities in mind. For example, web designers must take colour blindness into account. Graphics also need to be coded so that when people who are visually impaired use voice readers, their computers explain the content of the picture. When not coded in this way the computer's voice will just say "graphic" and not tell the user what the picture is.

While each ministry is ultimately responsible for its own Internet site, MBS co-ordinated planning for Internet accessibility for all government ministries, and developed and supplied ministries with an Implementation Toolkit and Guide. MBS developed an online discussion forum so webmasters could share questions and best practices. MBS also provided guidance, advice and support as ministries updated their sites as well as resources for ministries needing assistance with the conversion of material on their sites.

MBS provided more than 20 tutorials about preparing accessible Internet content and testing for accessibility, and held eight workshops and presentations on the procedures involved in making Internet sites accessible.

MBS's Internet sites now ensure greater accessibility to people with disabilities. As content is added to the ministry's Internet sites it will be tested to ensure it is accessible to people with disabilities.

Facilities and Accommodation

The Ontario government, and the Ontario Realty Corporation (ORC) on behalf of MBS, have been committed to supporting people with disabilities for many years. In 1990 the ORC developed *Barrier-Free Design Guidelines* to address requirements for barrier-free access to Ontario government-owned and leased facilities. The guidelines were developed to support and assist the design community and to serve as a guide to achieve barrier-free accessibility in government buildings.

The ORC is updating these guidelines to ensure government facilities are more accessible. It has taken a consultative approach to develop new guidelines for buildings that the government buys, leases, builds or significantly renovates.

As part of this approach, the ORC posted a questionnaire on its web site, and with the help of architectural and research specialists, consulted with internal and external stakeholders about access to government facilities. The ORC has received input from the general public as well as groups such as the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, the Ontario March of Dimes and the Canadian Hearing Society as well as builders, architects and municipal building officials. The ORC also consulted with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs (MMA) on the status and activity of the Ontario Building Code amendments in relation to barrier-free accessibility.

The facilities group in MBS provides facility accommodation planning and co-ordination to meet the ministry's program delivery requirements. A key responsibility of this unit is to ensure that any accommodations that are made for people with disabilities meet the requirements of the Building Code, the *Public Service Act*, and the Ontario Realty Corporation's guidelines.

Procurement

MBS has an important role in setting government procurement policies and guidelines for ministries to follow when they buy goods and services for their ministries, their employees or the public. MBS is also responsible for preparing procurement requests and managing government-wide contracts.

When the Ontario government updated its purchasing policies, the requirements of the *Ontarians With Disabilities Act, 2001* were incorporated in its new directives. The ODA states that when the government decides to purchase goods and services for itself, its employees or the public it shall have regard to the accessibility of the goods or services for people with disabilities.

Accessibility Activities Within MBS

In addition to its “corporate” activities, Management Board Secretariat also made significant progress within the ministry in its work to improve accessibility for people with disabilities.

MBS updated its own Internet sites and made improvements to all sites including the government’s main Internet site (gov.on.ca), the site for the Ontario Internship Program, Go Jobs and the Archives of Ontario site.

MBS also arranged for many of the key government forms to be available online, in accessible formats. This saves the public from having to phone government offices or visit them in person.

MBS provided information about employment accommodation and the Employment Accommodation Fund to its own managers and supervisors along with the requirements for ODA training. Information and links to ODA-related information are also readily available on the ministry’s intranet site.

To develop a ministry accessibility plan, MBS formed an Accessibility Plan Working Group with membership from a range of areas throughout the ministry. Members provide information and advice to help project co-ordinators develop and evaluate the Accessibility Plan. The group also includes an advisor who has expertise with the *Ontarians With Disabilities Act* and provides advice on the plan and the activities that will take place to support the plan. This group’s work is also tied to the ministry’s business planning activities.

The Archives of Ontario provides access to the valuable recorded history of the province with its extensive collection that includes mass-media, photographic, and art items. The Archives has transferred much of its collection to electronic media to make it more accessible to people across Ontario and around the world.

The Archives provides services directly to the public and MBS has upgraded the facility so it is more accessible to people with disabilities. Washrooms that are available to the public are now wheelchair accessible and sinks have been lowered to improve accommodation. The microfilm reader station in the main reading room has been made wheelchair accessible and the wheelchair ramp and automatic doors for people with disabilities were installed at the main entrance.

Commitments and Strategies for 2003-2004

Management Board Secretariat has made significant progress as it builds on the numerous initiatives already in place to support people with disabilities.

MBS is strongly committed to ongoing improvement for people with disabilities. It developed an accessibility plan for the upcoming year to guide its efforts and ensure initiatives described below work toward the goal of providing services and programs that improve accessibility for people with disabilities.

Methods to be Taken to Prevent New Barriers

Accessibility Planning in MBS

To support its commitment to improving accessibility both within Management Board Secretariat and across government, MBS's Accessibility Plan Working Group will meet regularly to review progress on activities related to the ODA and to exchange ideas for the ongoing prevention and removal of barriers.

As a ministry, MBS will take steps to improve accessibility and barrier prevention. Increased awareness of the need for accessibility and the way in which employees can participate in the identification, removal and prevention of barriers, will help make MBS a more accessible ministry. MBS will develop tools such as an employee guide that will include a set of protocols that employees can follow to identify barriers and report them, address accessibility requirements when they are encountered, remove barriers and flag opportunities where barriers can be prevented.

The protocols will also help ministry employees learn about appropriate behaviour and the approaches to use in addressing accessibility issues.

MBS will also develop a process to help employees identify barriers as they are seen and encountered. This will help the ministry determine the nature of the barriers that people with disabilities continue to encounter and this information will also help MBS in its efforts to improve accessibility.

All of these initiatives – new protocols, procedures, analysis and tools – will support MBS as it works to create a “culture of accessibility” within the ministry.

Business Planning

Management Board Secretariat has a central role in co-ordinating business planning for the government. It provides the templates and direction for ministries as they develop their plans and outline their business initiatives for the upcoming year. MBS also develops its own ministry business plan each year, outlining its initiatives and priorities for year ahead.

To help ensure that accessibility is a key consideration when ministries prepare their business plans, MBS has included a requirement that ministries include accessibility considerations in their analysis of ministry business proposals and business cases. MBS will continue to include accessibility whenever it modifies the business planning process for the government.

As a ministry, MBS will include accessibility as a training topic when the ministry enters its own 2004-05 business planning cycle. This training will be offered to all divisional representatives involved with preparing material for the business plan, all resource specialists, and all analysts involved in reviewing material brought forward in the process.

Operational Planning

Management Board Secretariat, as a ministry, will incorporate barrier prevention and barrier removal considerations into the annual guidelines that it provides to its divisions for their operational plans. The operational planning templates will be improved so they include prompts that remind divisions about the ministry's Accessibility Plan. As well, MBS will make sure all employees involved in this internal planning function are aware of the requirement to include accessibility in their planning.

Management Board Secretariat will also review the Emergency Evacuation Procedures for the Queen's Park Complex and improve its evacuation procedures for staff and visitors who need evacuation assistance. Improvements will include individualized evacuation plans for employees who need assistance.

Raising Accessibility Awareness in MBS

MBS will organize an Accessibility Awareness event to promote accessibility in a visible way and help incorporate accessibility into the organizational culture.

Business Areas to be Reviewed

Acts and Regulations

The Legal Services Branch of Management Board Secretariat completed a preliminary assessment of the ministry's legislation. In the upcoming year it will conduct a pilot review the following legislation: The Archives Act; The Floral Emblem Act; and The Management Board Of Cabinet Act. Through this pilot process, MBS will develop a formal ministry process for the ongoing review of legislation. This review process will ensure appropriate and inclusive language and identify whether programs may directly, or indirectly, be creating barriers for people with disabilities.

Policies and Programs

Employment Accommodation for Persons with Disabilities – The OPS's Employment Accommodation for Persons with Disabilities Operating Policy has been in place since 1992, and the related Manager's Guide since

1998. MBS will review this policy, which applies to all government ministries, in the context of the *Ontarians With Disabilities Act, 2001*.

The employment accommodation operating policy is in place to ensure that all employees with disabilities are provided with accommodation in employment. Accommodation includes a range of supports including such things as workstation upgrades and technical aids, assistance from interpreters, lighting adjustments for people with limited vision, and floor treatments to help people who have limited vision. The policy ensures that accommodation in employment is in accordance with the Human Rights Code and the Ontario Public Service Managing Injury, Illness and Employment Program.

The review will assess potential changes to the policy including revised, practical guidance for managers, new performance measures and ways managers and employees can consult with ministry specialists on barrier-free access, accessibility and accommodation. MBS will carry out this evaluation with support and input from the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration.

Employment Accommodation Fund – MBS will continue to fund initiatives and support the accommodation needs of people with disability.

Management Board Secretariat, as a ministry, is committed to ensuring its own policies meet the principles of accessibility. The ministry will also compile a prioritised list of policies for ongoing accessibility review.

Practices and Services

MBS provides orientation for new employees who join the ministry. In the upcoming year, MBS will include accessibility awareness and information in these sessions, which are held regularly throughout the year.

MBS will include information about the ODA in the orientation material that is posted on its intranet site.

Actions to be Taken

Barrier Identification and Prevention

The Ontario Realty Corporation together with MBS, will work on new, barrier-free guidelines now that the consultation and analysis that it began last year is complete. The new guidelines will reflect the needs and priorities that were highlighted through the consultation.

MBS will also conduct a survey of its staff to assess employees' understanding of accessibility issues. The survey will help MBS to determine how familiar employees are with the ODA, evaluate attitudes, staff comfort in addressing accessibility issues and their willingness to get involved in supporting accessibility initiatives.

MBS will also work with the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration on electronic training for all employees about accessibility and barrier removal. Ensuring employees are well-informed builds awareness and encourages employees to work individually and co-operatively to reduce barriers and enhance accessibility in their work environments, in policy development and in hiring.

To build on work already carried out, MBS will continue to provide training to managers and supervisors on how to meet the accessibility needs of employees and the accessibility requirements of people who apply for positions as government employees. MBS will report regularly to ministry human resources directors on managers/supervisors taking the required ODA electronic learning.

MBS is also developing guidelines to help ministries determine whether goods and services they plan to purchase will be used by people with disabilities and how the goods and services may be used. When it is determined that accessible goods or services are needed, the appropriate accessibility requirements will be part of that procurement process.

Improved Accessibility in Communications

Management Board Secretariat will continue to ensure all of its new MBS Internet content is accessible and meets the standards set out across the provincial government for accessibility. MBS will also continue to provide information to all employees across government through periodic articles in the monthly Topical newspaper. It will provide updates, information and resources to managers and MBS employees will get regular updates through the ministry intranet site as well as through direct links to the Accessibility Directorate website.

Improved Accessibility of Facilities

MBS will continue to respond to requests for accommodation adjustments in order to meet new accessibility requirements and to support people with disabilities who work at MBS.

Conclusion

The Ontario government will work continually for a province in which existing barriers are removed and no new ones are created – an Ontario where people with disabilities can enjoy full access to all Ontario offers.

MBS is committed to this vision. It will continue to work toward improving accessibility both within the ministry and across the Ontario Public Service.

This report outlines initiatives that MBS will embark upon this year, it sets the stage for ongoing improvement and it strives to ensure no new barriers are created.

Together, MBS employees and staff across the OPS will continue to make improvements and to remove the barriers that prevent full independence and opportunity for people with disabilities.

For More Information

Questions or comments about the ministry's accessibility plan are always welcome. Please phone :

General inquiry number : 416-326-1234

TTY number : 416-325-3408

1-800 number : 1-800-267-8097

E-mail : Accessibility_MBS@mbs.gov.on.ca

Ministry website address: www.mbs.gov.on.ca

Visit the Ministry of Citizenship's Accessibility Ontario web portal at : www.gov.on.ca/citizenship/accessibility. The site promotes accessibility and provides information and resources on how to make Ontario a barrier-free province.

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