

Keeping Everyone Connected:

Why Accessible Communication Matters to Our Communities

Powering Our Province

Here at Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro (Hydro), we take pride in our responsibility to be a crown utility that the people of our province can depend on. Our teams manage our provincial electricity system - the majority of the energy we produce comes from our province's clean, renewable hydroelectric resources which powers homes, communities, and industries across Newfoundland and Labrador. Our provincial transmission system spans thousands of kilometers through some of the most remote, geographically challenging and isolated areas. Through high-voltage terminal stations and lower-voltage distribution stations, our system connects power from Labrador to the island and all the coves, towns, and harbours along the way.

Nature of Our Work

As the primary supplier of electricity for our province, we focus on delivering the safest, most reliable electricity to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Our teams are constantly monitoring and maintaining our system, but at the easternmost edge of North America, we routinely face intense weather conditions that sometimes have a significant impact on our electricity grid.

In times of power outages, our skilled teams focus on restoring power for our customers as safely and as quickly as possible. But we also know that communicating with our customers and keeping them updated is just as important.

In these events, our Powerline Technicians are on the ground working to resolve the matter, while our communications and customer service teams are working behind the scenes to ensure our customers are getting the most up to date information. Due to the nature of our work, most of the critical, time-sensitive information we need to share with the public is often unforeseen.

Even when it comes to the most unexpected events, it's crucial that we provide clear, timely updates to our communities to help keep them informed. We also understand our responsibility to make every effort to share information in an accessible manner.

Working With Our Communities

Planning for accessibility is best represented when external organizations who advocate for Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility (IDEA) are involved in strategy development. Our Employee Engagement and Diversity team at Hydro consulted with local organizations such as InclusionNL, Triangular, Newfoundland Labrador Association of the Deaf (NLAD) and other IDEA professionals to help us improve the ways we share our information.

"Nothing about us, without us" is the guiding motto of accessibility related work, and we have incorporated this into our work. Our Accessibility Committee is grateful to have such a strong partnership with InclusionNL, a local organization that helps businesses and employers create barrier-free places, policies, and practices, and for their involvement in all areas of Hydro's Accessibility Plan as we work to make our work more accessible.

One area we have recently highlighted as an improvement opportunity, is our ability to reach the deaf and hard of hearing communities, and those who require information in American Sign Language (ASL). Particularly during unplanned events, news and media availabilities, where information is presented live. We've sought guidance from Triangular Communications, NLAD, and local professional ASL interpreters, to provide guidance on ways to ensure our information is more accessible. Our meetings discussed opportunities on how we can use their services during unexpected events, such as acquiring interpreters on short notice, and providing contacts in the community with media releases and transcripts of the event to ensure the information is reaching everyone.



Our Commitment to Accessibility

At Hydro, accessible, barrier-free communication is part of our organization's commitment to IDEA. As the people's utility, it's our responsibility to be responsive, transparent and accessible to the people who depend on us. These efforts are led by our Engagement and Culture team and driven by an Accessibility Committee, consisting of employees from across our organization who work to identify and implement practices that support accessibility and eliminate unintended barriers, all informed by people with lived experience.

During times of an outage, a significant event, or an important public update, our operations, emergency response, and communications teams work together to use the expertise and recommendations set forth by our Accessibility Committee.

Accessibility at Hydro has been a journey that we have been actively pursuing and committed to over time. Although our organization has made great progress to date, we understand that there will always be room for growth. By listening to our communities, identifying barriers and developing strategies to improve accessibility, we acknowledge this as an ongoing conversation that will continue to shape our work.

We All Work Better When We Work Together

Our IDEA journey has taught us that it's not only important to understand who we communicate with, but also how we communicate with the communities we serve. Our goal is to make Hydro a safe and inclusive workplace and to ensure that we are responsive and accessible to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

This is an ongoing commitment that we continue to work towards each and every day. We're excited to continue working together and playing our part in making Newfoundland and Labrador more accessible for everyone.

ACTIONS TO DATE

Hydro's 2024-2026 Accessibility Plan is built upon focus areas with clear objectives and goals that we've implemented to date, and future goals we are currently working towards. Our actions to date for information and communication are:

- Adding alt text to our social media posts for graphics and images.
- Using #CamelCase in our social posts to help clearly communicate any hashtags.
- Training for our Communications team in using smart brevity, which reduces content length and considers how people take in information.
- Provide guides and recommendations to make our public virtual sessions more accessible, including promoting the embedded closed caption feature.
- Our teams assess the use of colour contrast in our visuals for readability.
- Official corporate font has shifted to Open Sans - a more accessible, sans-serif font.
- Our website is WCAG compliant, with continuous progress being made when posting content to ensure barrier-free communication.

In terms of general areas that we have implemented accessibility practices throughout our organization, actions to date are:

- Already having a strong commitment to IDEA - a good foundation to build upon.
- All employees and supervisors' complete diversity and inclusion training upon hire, and this training is renewed regularly.
- We have strong existing partnerships with external organizations who are of and for people with disabilities to assist us on our IDEA journey.
- We provide information sessions or share insights throughout the year to help educate our employees on matters relating to accessibility and equity.