

Accessibility Plan: Western Development Museum (WDM)

Plan timeframe: January 2025 to December 2030

Introduction

The Western Development Museum (WDM) is Saskatchewan's largest human history museum, with locations in Moose Jaw, North Battleford, Saskatoon, and Yorkton. The WDM uses a collaborative approach to achieve our mandate, becoming a museum that fosters inclusion, encourages curiosity, and shares diverse histories for the wellbeing of the communities we serve.

As a provincially funded public sector body under The Accessible Saskatchewan Act, the WDM is committed to providing inclusive, welcoming, and accessible experiences. This Accessibility Plan outlines the actions we will take over the next five years to remove barriers and enhance accessibility for visitors, staff, volunteers, and partners across our four Museum locations and the Curatorial and Corporate Services Centre. In creating and implementing this plan, our initial focus will be on accessibility in public spaces.

Engagement

To develop this plan, the WDM consulted widely, both internally and externally. Input on the WDM's current level of accessibility and areas for improvement was obtained in the following ways:

- Staff survey
- Volunteers survey
- Public survey administered by Inshtrix Research to individuals who self-identified as having a disability or supporting someone with a disability.
- Visitor services staff focus group sessions at each WDM location.
- Reports from OHS committees at each WDM location.

The information gathered provided both location specific and corporation wide insights on current accessibility for physical access, sensory and communication requirements, program and visitor experiences as well as staff and volunteer training needs.

This input identified common barriers and training needs, which can be summarized as follows:

Physical Access

- Entrances & Doors
 - Heavy doors without automatic openers can be found at all WDM locations requiring reliance on staff assistance and hindering movement between exhibit areas.
 - Narrow entrances and thresholds exist in some exhibits and common areas.
- Washrooms
 - Inaccessible and/or inconveniently located washrooms, often without raised toilets.
 - Washrooms in some WDM locations are not fully accessible because of narrow doors and difficult layouts.
 - Lack of gender-neutral washrooms in North Battleford and Yorton
 - Limited family-friendly amenities (change tables, breastfeeding spaces).
 - Lack of caregiver friendly washrooms with space for two adults.
- Exhibit Access
 - Stairs-only access to second-floor exhibits (Saskatoon) and workspaces (Moose Jaw).
 - Historic buildings and outdoor villages are inaccessible (North Battleford).
 - Gravel road access to outdoor exhibits and equipment displays (North Battleford, Yorkton).
- Outdoor Areas
 - Gravel pathways and uneven surfaces at all sites; seasonal ice hazards.
 - Parking distance from entrances creates challenges for those with breathing or walking limitations. Parking lots are poorly designed for mobility needs.
 - Gaps and uneven flooring at entrances create tripping and wheelchair obstacles.
- Other
 - Lack of ramps and railings; broken or missing automatic door openers.
 - Limited maneuvering space for wheelchairs in gift shops.
 - Boomtown Café is difficult to navigate with mobility aids.
 - Few resting areas cause discomfort for visitors with mobility issues.
 - Reception counters in visitor service and gift shop areas pose height barriers for wheelchair users.

Sensory & Communication

- No braille signage or tactile features across all sites.
- Limited audio guides and descriptive tools; small-font exhibit panels.
- Overwhelming lighting and sound in some galleries.
- Lack of clear wayfinding; signage inconsistent or insufficient.
- Minimal multilingual interpretations; need for translations (e.g., French, Cree, Ukrainian).

Program & Visitor Experience

- There is confusion about which staff can help with accessibility issues.
- Few sensory-friendly spaces or programs; sensory backpacks underutilized.
- Limited infrastructure for large school groups and special events.
- No clear online information about accessibility support (wheelchairs, benches, sensory kits).

Training Needs

- Disability awareness and communication strategies for staff and volunteers.
- Trauma-informed approaches and emergency responses for sensory/mobility needs.
- Experiential training (e.g., wheelchair practice runs).
- Autism and sensory awareness training.
- Inclusive communication and etiquette.
- Mental health and special needs support.

Accessibility Achievements

Since 2020, the WDM has made progress in improving accessibility:

- Most indoor galleries are barrier free for physical access. A notable recent improvement is the accessibility enhancements in Boomtown at the WDM Saskatoon. These enhancements include additional ramps and fall protection along the boardwalk.
- Gender neutral accessible washroom added to the main floor at the WDM Saskatoon.
- The WDM offers complimentary admission to support persons for individuals with needs.
- Sensory-friendly programming is available at some WDM locations including Sensory Backpack Program.

Goals and Actions (2025–2027)

Goal 1: Enhance physical accessibility at all WDM locations.

Actions:

- Ensure designated accessible parking is clearly marked and available at each site by June 30, 2026.
- Conduct one detailed facility accessibility audit every second year focusing on entrances, washrooms, gift shops, and heritage building access. At the conclusion of the accessibility audit, develop a project plan and fundraising requirements to address accessibility deficiencies.
 - 2026 – WDM Moose Jaw
 - 2028 – WDM Saskatoon
 - 2030 – WDM Yorkton
 - 2032 – WDM North Battleford
 - 2034 – Corporate and Curatorial Services Centre

- Conduct one exhibit accessibility audit every second year to determine current level of accessibility using the Ingenium Accessibility Standards For Exhibitions¹. At the conclusion of the accessibility audit, develop a project plan and fundraising requirements to address accessibility deficiencies.
 - 2027 – WDM Moose Jaw
 - 2029 – WDM Saskatoon
 - 2031 – WDM Yorkton
 - 2033 – WDM North Battleford
- Ensure automatic doors are well maintained and function properly for both entering and exiting WDM Museum locations.
- Add clearly marked benches at regular intervals and highlight rest points on visitor maps.
- Assess snow removal practices, adjust snow storage and removal as required.

Goal 2: Improve sensory accessibility at each WDM Museum location.

Actions:

- Offer regularly scheduled quiet hours at each WDM Museum location.
- Create quiet rooms at each WDM Museum location.
- Expand sensory-friendly programming.
- Improve awareness of sensory backpack program.

Goal 3: Improve access to information and communication.

Actions:

- Make WDM Staff and Volunteers easier to spot and position them in galleries.
- Launch new WDM.CA website that meets WCAG 2.1 accessibility standards by December 30, 2025.
- Add a clearly posted accessibility contact at each WDM location and a simple text for help option.
- Create and publish a detailed accessibility overview of public spaces for each WDM location following the completion of the accessibility audits identified in Goal 1.
- Provide clear information about accessibility supports available at each WDM location.
- Explore technology options to improve accessibility to exhibit information.
- Improve wayfinding at each WDM location highlighting washroom locations, rest areas, and accessible emergency exits.
- Develop guided routes designed for mobility devices.
- Provide detailed information to teachers on where and how programs are delivered and what accessibility supports are available for students.

¹ <https://accessibilitycanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Accessibility-Standards-for-Exhibitions.pdf>

Goal 4: Build inclusive service and programming capacity

Actions:

- Provide training for front-line volunteers and staff on communicating accessibility support and on how to identify and offer support appropriately.
- Regular review and assessment of program inclusivity including exploring tools and methods to support inclusive programming.
- Improve staff and volunteer visibility beyond the front desk with clear staff identification and simple signage that states we are here to help.

Goal 5: Collaborate with the disability community in museum planning

Actions:

- Ensure that accessibility consultation is a core requirement in future capital projects, renovations, and exhibit upgrades.
- Integrate accessibility consultation in all facilities and exhibit accessibility audits.
- Engage with individuals from the public survey who indicated that they wanted to be involved in future accessibility planning and discussions with the WDM.

Conclusion

The Western Development Museum recognizes that accessibility is an ongoing journey, not a one-time achievement. This plan reflects our commitment to creating spaces and experiences where everyone feels welcome and included. By implementing the goals and actions outlined, we aim to remove barriers, foster equity, and ensure that our museums serve as places of learning and belonging for all visitors, staff, and volunteers.

Collaboration with the disability community and continuous feedback will guide us as we adapt and improve. Together, we will build a museum environment that truly reflects the diverse stories and needs of Saskatchewan's communities.

Provide Feedback

We welcome public input to continuously improve our accessibility efforts.

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