

FINAL REPORT 2026

Enhancing Social Cohesion by Creating Accessible Festivals and Events



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PARTICIPATION



ACCESSIBILITY



INCLUSION



COMMUNITY



PROJECT START

May 22, 2023



PROJECT END

March 31, 2026



RECIPIENT

Independent Living Canada



PROJECT NUMBER

ASC-23/24-038-C

Advancing accessibility in festivals and events across Canada through lived experience, research, and collaboration.



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Accessibility Standards
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Enhancing Social Cohesion by Creating Accessible Festivals and Events

Final Report

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Land Acknowledgement

As a national organization operating virtually, Independent Living Canada recognizes that our work takes place across many traditional territories and homelands. We acknowledge the land known today as Ottawa, where our national presence is anchored, is located on the unceded and unsurrendered territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabe Nation.

This project was coordinated across multiple regions of Canada. We also recognize that this work drew insights and responses from individuals across Canada, spanning many Nations, treaties, and territories.

Funder, Project Team, and Participants

This project is funded by Accessibility Standards Canada and the Government of Canada.

Independent Living Canada would like to thank everyone who worked on the project, and provided support. A full list of names is in [Appendix A](#). We also want to thank the participants, who took time to provide input through our surveys, confirm the results in our focus groups, and engage with this project from 2023 to 2025.

Purpose of This Report

The input we received from goers and organizers across Canada will help shape accessibility recommendations. All Canadian festivals and events can use these to improve accessibility. The recommendations will also inform the development of next-generation accessibility standards.

Terms Used In the Report

In this report, the term “goers” refers to people with disabilities who have attended festivals and events. The lived experience and First Voice of people with disabilities was paramount. “Goers” also refers to those who support us, including caregivers, assistants, family members, interpreters, and disability organizations. Supporters may, or may not, have disabilities. However, they witness barriers and their impact on the people they support. So, their input helped broaden the data set findings.

The term “organizers” refers to those involved in promoting, planning, hosting, content creation, performing, vending, supplying security and medical services, venue providers, and those who hold other roles in Canadian festivals and events.

When we use the term “festival and events”, this refers to large or small, outdoor, indoor, and online festivals and events in Canada.

The term “Long Survey” refers to the initial 12 to 14 question online survey. The terms “Quick Survey” and “Event Survey” refer to shorter six to seven question surveys, conducted online and in person. The “Youth Survey” refers to an eight question survey. It was shared with youth (under 29 years old) through post-secondary disability offices and stakeholder networks across Canada.

The term “support person(s)” is used in this report to include caregivers, attendants, companions, intervenors, interpreters, and friends or family members who assist a person with a disability.

This report uses disability-related language. We aimed to use person-first language when referring to people with disabilities. Some communities prefer identity-first language, such as Deaf or neurodivergent communities. We respect these preferences.

Some language in the report comes directly from participant responses, and may not reflect how every person or community identifies. We recognize that people use different language or terms to describe disability and lived experience. The study does not capture the experiences of all people with disabilities. Findings may not reflect the diversity of disability experiences across Canada.

The term “service dog or animals” has been used in this report. In Canada, many people only use the term “service dog”. However, in the survey data the terms “service animal”, “guide dog”, and “service dog” were found. So, the term used encompassed both dogs and animals.

Executive Summary

Accessibility at Canadian festivals and events is improving, but many people with disabilities still face barriers that affect whether they can attend, participate fully, or stay for the entire event. Improving accessibility requires planning for it across the whole festival and event experience, including information, planning, onsite services, and content programming.

What This Study Shows

- Accessibility barriers remain common. 58% of goers reported leaving early, not enjoying a festival or event, or avoiding attendance due to accessibility barriers.
- Accommodation requests are frequent, but barriers are not always reported to organizers.
- Goers emphasize lived participation outcomes such as comfort, affordability, and the ability to stay for the full event.
- Organizers emphasize how accessibility is planned and delivered, including venue barriers, budgets, and planning timelines.
- Accessibility improves most when it is treated as a coordinated, end-to-end system across promotion, planning, services, and content programming.

Between 2023 and 2025, Independent Living Canada asked Canadians to share their experiences with accessibility at festivals and events across Canada. The study gathered the lived experiences of Canadians with disabilities and those who support us (goers).

It also asked people involved in festival promotion, planning, hosting, content creation, performing, supplying security and medical services, venue providers, and those who hold other roles (organizers), to self-report about accessibility. The research then compared organizer self-reporting with goers' lived experiences.

A total of 1,549 people across Canada participated in the study. 1,104 goers completed surveys, 232 participated in focus groups, and 213 organizers responded to surveys.

Of all participants, 56% reported having a disability, 33% reported no disability, and 11% did not answer or preferred not to say. Comment analysis suggests many participants in the last group may also have had disabilities but chose not to disclose this information.

Goers reported frequent accessibility barriers. Over half (52.5%) had requested accommodations, and 58% said barriers had caused them to leave early, not enjoy a festival or event, or avoid attending entirely. Organizers reported receiving accommodation requests at a similar rate (62.8%), but fewer (37.8%) reported hearing about barriers. This may suggest barriers may not always be reported, reporting processes are unclear or feel unsafe, or organizers are not acting on them.

The study analyzed accessibility across three focus areas, Accommodations, Barriers, and Accessibility Improvements, and organized the findings into four categories: Promotion, Planning and Hosting, Services, and Content.

Promotion

Clear accessibility information online and in print before the event is essential. Goers emphasized the importance of knowing what supports are available before buying tickets or arriving onsite. Providing clear accessibility information, accessible ticketing and accommodation request processes, and transparent policies related to support people and service dogs or animals can help people plan their visit with confidence. Reducing or eliminating extra costs for support persons and other accessibility supports can also significantly reduce barriers.

Planning and Hosting

Planning decisions shape accessibility outcomes. Both goers and organizers identified accessible venue selection, step-free routes with stable surfaces, accessible parking and drop-off close to entrances, and clear accessible signage and maps as essential for safety and independent navigation.

Organizers also highlighted practical challenges such as venue barriers, budgets, and temporary event environments. Planning accessibility early and using continuous improvement practices can help reduce barriers.

Services

Essential onsite services help determine whether people can stay and participate comfortably. Goers emphasized the importance of reliable accessible washrooms that are easy to find and well maintained, accessible seating and rest areas located throughout the site, and safe crowd and lineup management. Disability-informed training for staff, volunteers, and security was also identified as critical to ensure accessibility supports are delivered consistently and respectfully.

Content

Accessible content programming environments support full participation. Both groups emphasized the importance of communication accessibility, including captioning and sign language interpretation. They also highlighted the need for sensory-friendly spaces and supports, with clear information about noise levels, lighting warnings, crowd conditions, air quality, scents, and when quiet spaces are available.

Key Findings

Across the study, the same accessibility priorities appeared repeatedly:

- Accessible venues and step-free routes
- Accessible parking and arrival areas
- Reliable accessible washrooms
- Clear and accessible information, signage, and maps
- Accessible seating and rest areas located throughout the site
- Communication supports such as captioning and sign language interpretation
- Sensory-friendly spaces and supports
- Disability-informed training for staff, volunteers, and security

Goers focused on lived participation outcomes, such as being able to stay for the full event, affordability, and reducing the need for repeated accommodation requests. Organizers focused more on how accessibility is planned and delivered, including venue challenges, budgets, timelines, and planning processes.

Conclusions

The findings show that accessibility works best when it is planned as a coordinated, end-to-end system rather than a series of individual accommodations. Accessibility needs to be considered across the entire event experience end-to-end, from promotion and ticketing to arrival, onsite services, and content programming.

While the foundations of accessibility are widely understood, the next step is ensuring these practices are applied consistently across festivals and events of all sizes. This way, accessibility becomes a reliable and expected part of festival and event experiences across Canada.

Scoping Review and Human Rights Context

Festivals and events are how many Canadians connect with culture, community, and each other in person, and online. For the 27% of Canadians over 15 years old who have disabilities (Statistics Canada, 2023b), barriers can force us to leave early, not enjoy the experience, or not attend at all.

This review uses a barrier-focused approach, based on the social model of disability. It recognizes that disability-related barriers can be created by environments, policies, processes, information, communication, and attitudes (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2016).

This framing is important, because the accessibility of festivals and events depends not only on the physical infrastructure, but also on a coordinated end-to-end system across promotion, planning, services, and content programming. Also important are digital accessibility, and ensuring that everyone involved is disability informed. Accessible festivals and events require proactive, coordinated approaches rather than relying on individual accommodation requests and self-advocacy.

Canadian Accessibility Legislation

Canada has the federal Accessible Canada Act (ACA) and standards under it (Accessible Canada Act, 2019). Ontario and Manitoba have accessibility acts with enacted standards, and Nova Scotia has one official standard (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005; Accessibility for Manitobans Act, 2013; Accessibility Act, 2017). Quebec's framework applies only to government and public bodies (Act to Secure Handicapped Persons, 1978).

Some of the standards cover aspects of festivals and events, such as service delivery, customer service, built environment, design of public spaces, employment, and information and communications (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005; Government of Ontario, 2011; Government of Ontario, 2013; Accessibility for Manitobans Act, 2013;

Government of Manitoba, 2015; Government of Manitoba, 2019; Government of Manitoba, 2022; Accessibility Standards Canada, 2024a; Accessibility Standards Canada, 2024b; Government of Nova Scotia, 2025).

Other provinces have acts but are still developing standards, including Newfoundland and Labrador, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and New Brunswick (Accessibility Act, 2021; Accessible British Columbia Act, 2021; Accessible Saskatchewan Act, 2023; Accessibility Act, 2024).

Canada also has federal and provincial human rights legislation, plus other disability-related laws. However, there is currently no Canadian standard or legislation specifically focusing on end-to-end festival and event accessibility, across promotion, planning, services, and content programming.

International Accessibility Legislation

In the jurisdictions reviewed, there was no legislation identified that is specifically dedicated to festival and event accessibility. However, several laws do cover aspects of them. In the United States, the Americans with Disabilities Act covers public assembly places (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990). Related standards and guidance address temporary events, assembly areas, and accessible seating (U.S. Department of Justice, 2010; ADA National Network, 2015).

In the UK, the Equality Act 2010 requires service providers to make reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities, which applies to events and event services (Equality Act, 2010). Australia's Disability Discrimination Act 1992 covers access to premises and to goods, services, and facilities, which can include event settings (Disability Discrimination Act, 1992).

The European Accessibility Act strengthens digital accessibility requirements for certain services, including e-commerce services such as online ticketing (European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2019).

Internationally, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognizes participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure, and sport as a right (United Nations, 2006).

Canadian Standards Gaps and the Path Forward

The first gap is that no dedicated standard addresses festival and event accessibility end-to-end across promotion, planning, services, and content programming. Without this kind of standard, expectations remain inconsistent across provinces, venues, and festival and event types. This report's own findings confirm this pattern.

This is especially important in temporary and outdoor settings, where terrain, surfaces, and distances can impact participation (Accessibility Standards Canada, 2025a, 2025b, 2026). Festivals and events may also have barriers related to lineups, crowds, temporary accessible washrooms, and limited sensory or communication supports, as the report showed.

At the federal level, Accessibility Standards Canada has developed, and is developing, accessibility standards that may be relevant to some festival and event features, including the built environment, self-service technologies, and outdoor spaces (Accessibility Standards Canada, 2026). However, the draft CAN-ASC-2.1 Outdoor Spaces standard appears more directly relevant to outdoor festival and event settings (Accessibility Standards Canada, 2025b).

Digital accessibility is another gap. While Canada has federal and provincial accessibility standards that include websites and apps, none specifically cover festival and event registration, ticketing, maps, or sector-specific digital information.

International evidence confirms that barriers need to be lowered. A 2025 UK study found that 71% of disabled visitors struggled to find key venue information before attending. Only 9% said booking systems fully allowed them to state their accessibility needs, suggesting that many systems do not support clear communication of access requirements (Indigo Ltd, 2025). An earlier UK study found that 82% of respondents had experienced problems booking access for live music events (Attitude Is Everything, 2018).

Under the ACA, relevant standards include CAN/ASC-EN 301 549:2024 on accessibility requirements for ICT products and services and CAN-ASC-

3.1:2025 on plain language. However, these standards are voluntary unless adopted into regulation, and they apply to the federal government and federally regulated entities rather than generally to the broader festival and event sector (Accessibility Standards Canada, 2024a; Accessibility Standards Canada, 2025c).

Québec's Standard on Web Accessibility applies to government departments and public bodies, not generally to private-sector or non-profit organizations (Gouvernement du Québec, 2024).

The result is that festival and event digital accessibility, including ticketing platforms, registration forms, event apps, and online access information, remains largely ungoverned by a consistent Canadian standard.

A third gap is limited attention to intersectionality. Disability can intersect with other identities, including gender, age, sexuality, race, culture, language, being Indigenous, and newcomer status.

These intersections can create layered barriers, but standards do not address them clearly. British Columbia is different because their act recognizes that barriers can be affected by intersecting forms of discrimination and explicitly recognizes the rights of Indigenous peoples in standards development (Accessible British Columbia Act, S.B.C. 2021, c.19).

A future federal Canadian standard would be stronger if it built in intersecting identities, as well as direct consultation with communities. This would reduce the need for people with disabilities to expend time and energy to address the same barriers one festival or event at a time. The report backs this up, as organizers may report offering supports, while goers still describe major barriers and having to self-advocate in practice.

The creation of a new dedicated federal festival and event standard would address a significant gap in how festival and event accessibility is defined, expected, and delivered.

What the Human Rights Record Shows

Canadian human rights decisions show that accessibility is not only about getting through the door. It is also about dignity, independence, and having an experience that is comparable to others. Three theatre cases help show this clearly. In *Canadian Odeon Theatres Ltd. v. Huck* (1985), access was not considered equal when wheelchair users were limited to the very front. In *Miele v. Famous Players Inc.* (2000), requiring people to use separate entrances, intercoms, or wait outside was treated as discriminatory. In *Turnbull v. Famous Players Inc.* (2001), broader remedies were ordered across multiple venues, and arguments about accommodation costs were examined closely.

The festival and event specific record is smaller, but it still shows important patterns. The ARCH Disability Law Centre review identified 10 Canadian cases related to event accessibility. Seven were from Ontario, two were from British Columbia, and one was from Alberta. Two applicants successfully proved discrimination: *Turnbull v. Famous Players Inc.* and *MacLean v. Gerry Robert Enterprises dba Black Card Books*. The two procedural dismissals were *Vizcaya v. United Jewish Appeal Federation of Greater Toronto* and *Wozenilek v. Book Shelf of Guelph Ltd. (cob The Bookshelf and Guelph Jazz Festival & Colloquium* (as cited in ARCH Disability Law Centre, 2024).

A key pattern is that several cases were decided on threshold legal issues rather than a full review of accessibility needs. In *Woitowicz v. Wexford BIA* and *S.Y.L. v. Replay Marketing*, nearby residents were not considered to be in a “service relationship” with organizers under human rights law (ARCH Disability Law Centre, 2024).

Other cases turned on *prima facie* discrimination. In Ontario, that means showing disability, an adverse impact in a service, and that disability was a factor in the adverse impact. Five cases in the review addressed this issue, and three did not succeed because that connection was not established. One example in the ARCH review was *Vizcaya v. imagineNATIVE Film and Media Arts Festival*. It showed that decision-makers look closely at whether the

barrier complained of was tied to disability (ARCH Disability Law Centre, 2024).

The cases also show the limits of complaint-driven systems. People bringing complaints often faced a high evidentiary burden. They often had to show that they attended the event, that the harm was not speculative, and that they had made organizers aware of their disability and engaged in the accommodation process (as summarized in ARCH Disability Law Centre, 2024).

Once discrimination is established, the responsibility shifts to organizers to show that accommodation was not possible without undue hardship. The cases suggest that cost alone does not typically amount to undue hardship without further evidence. Overall, these decisions point to the need for clear processes and communication channels so accessibility can be addressed early, rather than only after harm has occurred.

Research and Practice in Canada and Internationally

The initial scoping review found that academic research focused specifically on festival and event accessibility appears to be limited. In a curated review of articles published in “Event Management” from 2000 to 2024, Darcy and Dickson (2025) identified only eight articles addressed accessibility by people with disabilities, representing less than 1% (0.82%) of the journal’s output. They also reported that only two of those articles engaged people with disabilities in the research.

Bossey (2020) identified digital and technology-related accessibility barriers in the live music festival context. Lee and Jenifer (2025) emphasized disability confidence and awareness, representation, and the importance of involving people with disabilities in planning and decision-making.

Leahy and Ferri (2022) found that barriers to cultural participation extend beyond entry, including access to cultural goods and services more broadly. Broader Canadian data also shows that people with disabilities or long-term conditions experience barriers in online activities, communication-related

online activities, and digital technology use, which can affect participation across many settings (Statistics Canada, 2025).

Practical guidance seems to be more developed than the academic literature. Ontario and Nova Scotia both provide public event-planning accessibility resources, Manitoba provides accessibility requirements and policy guidance for public events and meetings, and the Government of Canada provides guidance for accessible virtual events (Government of Manitoba, n.d.; Government of Nova Scotia, 2018; Government of Canada, 2025; Publications Ontario, n.d.).

Across these sources, accessibility should be planned proactively as a coordinated end-to-end system across promotion, planning, services, and content programming, rather than addressed only after individual requests are made.

International guidance from the W3C, Australia's Disability Gateway, and Attitude Is Everything makes the same point. Accessibility is part of the full festival and event journey, from access information, ticketing, and travel through to participation in services and programming. This includes providing clear accessibility information in advance and planning for accessibility across how events are organized, communicated, and delivered (Attitude Is Everything, n.d-a.; Attitude Is Everything, n.d-b; Disability Gateway, n.d.-b; W3C Web Accessibility Initiative, 2022).

What Is Being Done Well

Disability-led and disability-informed examples are especially important, because they show what happens when accessibility is treated as a coordinated end-to-end system across promotion, planning, services, and content programming. The report also points to the importance of this kind of coordinated approach.

AccessFest, for example, publicly described designing the event around accessibility from the start. Organizers highlighted accessibility features and shared advance information about access and supports. They also identified

areas for continued improvement and invited feedback (AccessNow, 2025a, 2025b). This supports continuous improvement practices reflected in this report.

Other organizers have recognized that accessibility extends beyond the physical space. Rory McLeod of Xenia Concerts emphasized that accessibility could involve multiple barriers across the event experience, not only physical access (Seguin, 2025). Sunfest organizers also acknowledged ongoing access challenges (Seguin, 2025).

Quebec examples in the COPHAN Universal Accessibility Guide also show concrete measures already being used in practice, such as free companion entry, adapted spaces, adapted free shuttles, reserved parking, and accessible washrooms. Festivals such as the Festival de Jazz de Montréal, Francofolies, and FESTIVOIX are examples of these kinds of measures in practice (COPHAN, 2025).

These festival and event organizers spoke openly about ongoing challenges and next steps. Even when barriers remain, this openness helps show that accessibility is an organizational responsibility and supports ongoing improvement based on feedback from people with disabilities and disability communities.

Economic Context and Research Gaps

Accessibility is economically important for organizers. It affects participation, audience reach, repeat attendance, and long-term sustainability. This is reflected in this report's findings, where 58% of goers reported leaving early, not enjoying a festival or event, or avoiding attendance due to accessibility barriers.

The Conference Board of Canada projected that consumer spending by Canadians with physical disabilities would rise from \$165 billion in 2017 to \$316 billion by 2030 (Conference Board of Canada, 2018). It is also estimated that improved physical accessibility could contribute a \$16.8 billion GDP gain by 2030 (Conference Board of Canada, 2018). For festival and

event organizers, this means that accessibility is not only a legal or ethical issue, but also a participation, audience, and market benefit.

Research on festival and event accessibility remains limited, especially in Canada. More work is still needed on rural and remote events, Northern contexts, Francophone and Deaf communities, Indigenous and racialized communities, and intersectionality and overlapping barriers.

This report helps address part of that gap by presenting data from Canadian goers and organizers. Taken together, the literature, the human rights record, and this report's findings point in the same direction. Accessibility works best when it is planned early, is coordinated end-to-end across promotion, planning, services, and content programming, and is shaped by people with disabilities from the start (Lee & Jenifer, 2025; Leahy & Ferri, 2022).

Research Framework

In this section, we cover the basic components of the research study framework.

Research Objectives

The research study had three main objectives.

First Objective

The first objective was to **examine the accessibility status of Canadian festivals and events between 2023 and 2025 from the perspective of goers.**

To meet this objective, the study addressed the following question:
What are the lived experiences of people with disabilities, and those who support us (goers), when attending festivals and events in Canada?

Second Objective

The second objective was to examine the accessibility status of Canadian festivals and events between 2023 and 2025 from the perspective of organizers. To meet this objective, the study addressed the following question:

What are festival and event organizers self-reporting about accessibility at Canadian festivals and events?

Third Objective

The third objective was to compare the findings from goers and organizers, to identify gaps and inform recommendations to lower accessibility barriers. These recommendations are intended to inform potential future Canadian accessibility standards and support festivals and events in improving accessibility. To meet this objective, the study addressed the following question:

How does organizer self-reporting about accessibility compare with the lived experiences of goers, and where do gaps exist?

The following section outlines the methods used to collect and analyze the data to address these research objectives.

Data Collection

To answer the questions in the first objective, we gathered data through 16 online and in person surveys from late 2023 to late 2025. The initial results from the goer Long Survey from December 2023 to February 2024 were given to goer, online and in person, focus groups from June to November 2024. They confirmed there were no changes to the final goer recommendations, created from the survey data.

More information about the individual surveys is in the [Who Participated Section](#).

Data Analysis

We analyzed quantitative and qualitative survey data to understand the current state of festival and event accessibility, and how it can be improved. Quantitative data identified patterns and trends, such as how often barriers were reported, or where people lived.

Qualitative data included written comments that were grouped into themes to reflect goer lived experiences and organizer self-reporting. These themes were then grouped into the four study categories, detailed in the next section. Focus group qualitative data was analyzed to confirm the final survey analysis and findings.

All analysis presented in this report comes directly from the data. The only addition was that organizers should compensate people with disabilities for auditing, testing, consulting, or other services.

Four Study Categories

In all the surveys, we asked both goers and organizers about accommodations, barriers, and ways to improve accessibility. We grouped responses into four study categories for analysis. Some responses could fit

into more than one category, but only the primary category was used. The four study categories are:

1. Festival and Event Promotion

This includes websites, social media posts, forms, printed and digital brochures, ticket buying process, accessibility information for services and features, online event sign up and registration, etc.

2. Festival and Event Planning and Hosting

This includes buildings, outside and indoor spaces, venues, transportation, parking, passenger drop off and pick up areas, maps, signage, entrances, exits, ramps, elevators, handrails and railings, overall layout, emergency planning, virtual event software (Zoom, Whova, Teams), etc.

3. Festival and Event Services

This includes accessible washrooms and temporary toilets, pathways to washrooms, security, medical, booths, vendor areas, food services and public eating areas, hand washing areas, accessibility features, language support, onsite information, ticket booth and pick up area, etc.

4. Festival and Event Content

This includes sound and visual environment, rest areas and quiet spaces, stages, standing and seating areas, green rooms, performance areas, weather shelters, scent free space, sensory friendly spaces, choice of accessible viewing areas, sign language interpreters, audio description, support people, service dogs or animals, emotional support animals, assistive devices, etc.

Focus Areas

In all surveys, we asked goers and organizers for input on three focus areas:

1. Accommodations (Requesting and Receiving Support)
2. Barriers (Barriers and Their Impacts)
3. Accessibility Improvements (Proactive and Future-Focused)

Who Participated

Here is the analysis of who participated in our research study.

How Many People Participated

In total, 1,104 goers responded to one of 10 surveys, with 96.1% in English (1,061) and 3.9% in French (43). A total of 213 organizers responded to one of 6 surveys, with 84.5% in English (180) and 15.5% in French (33).

Table: Goer Responses by Survey and Total

Goer Survey Name	Participant Number
Youth Survey 2 – French	0
Event Survey – French	3
Youth Survey 2 – English	3
Youth Survey 1 – French	5
Long Survey – French	7
Quick Survey – French	28
Youth Survey 1 – English	31
Event Survey – English	159
Quick Survey – English	405
Long Survey – English	463
Total All Surveys	1104

Table: Organizer Responses by Survey and Total

Organizer Survey Name	Participant Number
Quick Survey – French	0
Government Survey – French	1
Government Survey – English	12
Quick Survey – English	20
Long Survey – French	32
Long Survey – English	148
Total All Surveys	213

Participation Comparison

The project received 5.2 times more responses from goers (1,104) than from organizers (213). This indicates that most input reflects people with disabilities' lived experience, as well the experiences from those who support

us. French responses made up 3.9% of goer responses (43) and 15.5% of organizer responses (33). Although French surveys were distributed equally, response levels were lower.

Participation Takeaways

The data and recommendations were formed primarily from goers who speak English. However, organizers should always consider other languages in all aspects of festivals or events, as well as with their staff and volunteers.

Where Do People Live

We received location information from 1,104 goers and 213 organizers. Organizers were not asked where they live, only where their festivals and events were located. It is assumed that the majority live in the same province as their festival or event.

Most goer responses came from British Columbia (26.4%), Ontario (23.2%), and Alberta (12.4%). Just over 9% chose not to answer this question. Among organizers, the most common festival locations were New Brunswick (23.0%), Ontario (22.0%), and Quebec (10.0%). There were no responses from the Northwest Territories or Nunavut despite multiple attempts. This may be due to the differences in disability-related terms used in those locations.

Table: Location of Goers and Organizers

Province or Territory	Goer Number	Goer % (Out of 1104)	Organizer Number	Organizer % (Out of 213)
British Columbia	292	26.4%	7	3%
Ontario	256	23.2%	46	22%
Alberta	137	12.4%	16	8%
Saskatchewan	68	6.2%	16	8%
Manitoba	62	5.6%	6	3%
Newfoundland and Labrador	56	5.1%	20	9%
Nova Scotia	52	4.7%	19	9%
Quebec	38	3.4%	21	10%
New Brunswick	35	3.2%	49	23%
Prince Edward Island	8	0.7%	6	3%
Yukon	1	0.1%	0	0%

Northwest Territories	0	0.0%	1	0%
Nunavut	0	0.0%	0	0%

Location Comparison

Ontario ranked near the top for both groups, with 256 goer responses and 46 organizer responses. The main difference is that goer responses were most concentrated in British Columbia (292), while organizer responses were most concentrated in New Brunswick (49).

Location Takeaways

This location data may suggest that accessibility planning should include clear information for people, no matter where they live. It also should include on-site improvements where festivals operate, ideally in partnership with disability communities across provinces and territories.

Disability Identification

Out of 1104 goer participants, 703 people (63.7%) identified as having a disability and 258 people (23.4%) did not. A further 143 people (13.0%) preferred not to say or did not answer.

Table: Goers Identification With Disability

Response	Goer Number	Goer % (Out of 1104)
Identifies as having a disability	703	63.7%
Does not identify as having a disability	258	23.4%
Preferred not to say AND Did not answer	143	13.0%

A total of 1,003 people responded to the follow-up question about the types of disabilities they had. Participants could select more than one disability type. So, percentages reflect the proportion of respondents who selected each category.

The most identified disability type was Physical (Mobility, Pain, and Flexibility) (42.1%), followed by Cognitive (Neurological, Neurodiverse) (23.5%) and Mental Health (23.0%). Thus, physical, neurological, and mental health disabilities were the most frequently represented among respondents.

Table: Goers Type(s) of Disabilities

Disability Type	Goer Number	Goer % (Out of 1003)
Physical (Mobility, Pain, and Flexibility)	422	42.1%
Cognitive (Neurological, Neurodiverse)	236	23.5%
Mental Health	231	23.0%
Sensory (Visual, Hearing, Deaf-Blind)	211	21.0%
Other Disability or Disabilities	124	12.4%
Learning	103	10.3%
Communication (Speech, Language)	77	7.7%
Intellectual	63	6.3%

124 goers chose “Other disability or disabilities” (11.2%). These included allergies and environmental sensitivities, neurological conditions, chronic and systemic illnesses (including Long COVID), and other health-related conditions.

These medical conditions have been put into 10 categories in [Appendix B](#). The most identified categories were “Allergies, Sensitivities, and Environmental Conditions” (8.9%), “Neurological and Brain-Related Conditions” (8.1%), “Mental Health and Neurodevelopmental Conditions” (6.5%), and “Gastrointestinal, Metabolic, and Endocrine Conditions” (6.5%).

Table: Goers ‘Other Disability or Disabilities’ Categories

Disability Category	Goer Number	Goer % (Out of 124)
Allergies, Sensitivities, and Environmental	11	8.9%
Neurological and Brain-Related	10	8.1%
Mental Health and Neurodevelopmental	8	6.5%
Gastrointestinal, Metabolic, and Endocrine	8	6.5%
Immune System, Infectious and Systemic	7	5.6%
Mobility, Physical and Functional	5	4.0%
Respiratory and Breathing	3	2.4%
Fatigue, Energy, and Sleep-Related	3	2.4%
Cardiovascular and Autonomic	2	1.6%
Other Medical	1	0.8%

In the organizer survey, 213 people responded. 17 people (8.0%) selected “I have a disability.” This question captured disability identity only, not type.

Table: Organizers Identification With Disability

Response	Organizers Numbers	Organizer % (out of 213)
No Disability Indicated	196	92.0%
I Have a Disability	17	8.0%

“Prefer not to say” and “Did not answer” were excluded from the table. There was no “Does not identify” option. Thus, it is assumed those who did not select “I have a disability”, do not identify as having a disability.

Disability Comparison

In the goer surveys, 703 of 1,104 participants (63.7%) identified as having at least one disability, and some selected multiple types. In the organizer survey, 17 of 213 respondents (8.0%) selected “I have a disability.”

Disability types cannot be compared because organizers were not asked about type.

Disability Takeaways

The large number of responses in the goer’ “Other disability or disabilities” category shows that disabilities can vary widely, and that accessibility needs may be visible or invisible. The organizer survey included people who identified with disabilities. This highlights that accessibility supports matter for festival teams, as well as audiences.

The goer data highlights the need for organizers to provide strong planning for all disabilities, but especially mobility and physical accessibility, cognitive and neurodiversity supports, mental health supports, and sensory accessibility.

One other possible finding is that the “prefer not to say” and “did not answer” responses may highlight the importance of respecting people’s privacy, while

still making sure that ways to request accommodations are clear and welcoming.

How Participants Identify

In total, 1,104 goers answered the identity question. There were 2,099 selections, because multiple options were allowed. Women represented 61.8% of responses, compared to 20.5% men and 4.3% non-binary participants. The most common additional identities were LGBTQ2S+ (13.9%), Senior (10.1%), and Racialized Person (10.1%). A total of 9.6% did not answer this question.

A total of 213 organizers responded to the identity question. There were 337 selections, because multiple options were allowed. The most common identities were Woman (64.3%), Man (28.2%), and LGBTQ2S+ (15.5%). 17 organizers (8.0%) selected “I have a disability,” and one person (0.5%) did not answer.

Table: Goers and Organizers Identification

Identity Categories	Goer Number	Goer % (Out of 1104)	Organizer Number	Organizer% (Out of 213)
Woman	682	61.8%	137	64.3%
I have a disability	435	39.4%	17	8.0%
Man	226	20.5%	60	28.2%
LGBTQ2S+	153	13.9%	33	15.5%
Senior	112	10.1%	19	8.9%
Racialized person	111	10.1%	9	4.2%
Did not answer	106	9.6%	1	0.5%
Youth	76	6.9%	13	6.1%
Indigenous	48	4.3%	6	2.8%
Non-binary	48	4.3%	15	7.0%
Language minority	40	3.6%	11	5.2%
Newcomer to Canada	21	1.9%	4	1.9%
Other	21	1.9%	5	2.3%
Prefer not to say	20	1.8%	7	3.3%

Table: Goers and Organizers Identification Total Numbers and Percentage

Identity Categories	Goer Number	Organizer Number	Total Number	Total % (Out of 1317)
Woman	682	137	819	62.2%
I have a disability	435	17	452	34.3%
Man	226	60	286	21.7%
LGBTQ2S+	153	33	186	14.1%
Senior	112	19	131	9.9%
Racialized person	111	9	120	9.1%
Did not answer	106	1	107	8.1%
Youth	76	13	89	6.8%
Indigenous	48	6	54	4.1%
Non-binary	48	15	63	4.8%
Language minority	40	11	51	3.9%
Newcomer to Canada	21	4	25	1.9%
Other	21	5	26	2.0%
Prefer not to say	20	7	27	2.1%

Identity Comparison

When comparing goers to organizers, percentages are used because of the group size difference (1,104 goers and 213 organizers). As well, multiple selections were allowed, so totals do not equal 100%. In both groups, Woman, Man, and LGBTQ2S+ were among the most common identities.

The percentage selecting “I Have a Disability” was lower for goers in this question than in the Disability question. This is likely because many had already answered that previous question, and did not want to duplicate their answer.

Identity Takeaways

These results show that both festival audiences and organizers (and their staff) include people with diverse identities. This reinforces the need for welcoming, clear, and privacy-respecting accessibility practices that consider ‘intersectionality’, or multiple identities.

Another takeaway is that organizers need to design festival and events, as well as their workplaces and offices, to be inclusive by default. They should use welcoming language, “prefer not to say” options, and low-barrier accommodation processes.

Participant Roles

Out of 1,104 participants, 470 goers answered the question about whether they support people with disabilities. The most common answer was being part of an organization such as a disability, health, employment, or government service (173 people, or 36.8%). This was followed by not being in a support role (159 people, or 33.8%), and being an individual supporter such as a caregiver, assistant, interpreter, intervenor, or family member (138 people, or 29.4%).

Table: Goer Roles

Goer Roles	Goer Number	Goer % (Out of 470)
Yes, I am part of an organization, such as an employment, health or disability organization, government service, etc.	173	36.8%
No, I am not in these roles	159	33.8%
Yes, I am a person, like a caregiver, assistant, interpreter, intervenor, family member, etc.	138	29.4%

All 213 organizers selected one festival type they were associated with the most. Most were involved in Arts and Culture (59.6%), followed by Community (10.8%), Agriculture (5.6%), Multicultural, Diversity, Specific Groups, and Language (4.7%), and Government (3.8%). Overall, Arts and Culture festivals and events were most common in this dataset.

Table: Organizer Festival Types

Festival or Event Type	Organizer Number	Organizer % (Out of 213)
Arts and Culture	127	59.6%
Community	23	10.8%
Agriculture	12	5.6%

Festival or Event Type	Organizer Number	Organizer % (Out of 213)
Multicultural, Diversity, and Language	10	4.7%
Government	8	3.8%
Seasons	8	3.8%
Other	8	3.8%
Multiple Types	6	2.8%
Disability and Inclusion	3	1.4%
Sports	3	1.4%
Automotive	2	0.9%
Indigenous	1	0.5%
Family and Children	1	0.5%
Holiday	1	0.5%

All 213 organizers selected one or more festival types they were most associated with. Multiple selections were allowed, so percentages don't add up to 100%. There were 697 selections, or about 3.3 roles per person. The most common roles were Creator, Planner, or Organizer (87.8%), Host or Manager (47.9%), Paid Staff (40.8%), and Promotion or Marketing (36.2%). This shows that many organizers take on multiple roles. Almost double the participants are paid (87) versus unpaid (46).

Table: Organizer Roles

Festival or Event Role	Organizer Number	Organizer % (Out of 213)
Creator, Planner, or Organizer	187	87.8%
Host or Manager	102	47.9%
I am paid	87	40.8%
Promotion and Marketing (Print or Digital)	77	36.2%
Content Creator	52	24.4%
I am not paid	46	21.6%
Emergency Planning	33	15.5%
Safety and Security	30	14.1%
Venue Provider	20	9.4%
Vendor	18	8.5%
Other role(s)	13	6.1%

Festival or Event Role	Organizer Number	Organizer % (Out of 213)
Performer or Talent	7	3.3%
Transportation	7	3.3%
Medical and Health	5	2.3%
Volunteer, Volunteer Coordinator, or Manager	5	2.3%
Executive Director	5	2.3%
Board Member or Chair	3	1.4%

Roles Comparison

The goer question measures roles related to supporting people with disabilities, while the organizer question measures festival roles and types. The questions measure different kinds of roles, so direct comparison is limited.

Many goers reported supporting people with disabilities through organizations or personal relationships. Organizers reported holding multiple festival roles, averaging about 3.3 roles per person. This suggests that people in both groups often take on several roles.

Support networks connect the two groups. A large portion of goers reported supporting people with disabilities through organizations (36.8%) or as individual supporters (29.4%). This indicates that many festival attendees may also be part of support networks, which might shape accessibility needs and expectations at events.

Organizer responses show that festivals often rely on people who carry several responsibilities at once. This is especially true in Arts and Culture events, the most common festival type. As a result, accessibility responsibilities may be spread across several roles rather than assigned to a single person.

Overall, the findings suggest that both attendees and organizers operate within overlapping roles and networks. Accessibility planning may be more effective when festivals recognize these overlapping roles, engage

supporters of people with disabilities, and clearly assign accessibility responsibilities within organizing teams.

Roles Takeaways

The data on goer roles suggests that many goers support people with disabilities either personally or professionally. This reinforces the need for clear accessibility information for goers with disabilities, as well as those who support us.

All role datasets suggest that both attendees and organizers are often involved in overlapping support or organizational roles connected to festivals and events.

Findings by Research Objective

In this section, we focus on the analysis of the goer and organizers datasets.

Objective 1: Goer Lived Experiences

The first research objective question was:

“What are the lived experiences of people with disabilities, and those who support us (goers), who attend festivals and events in Canada?”

The question will be answered through analysis of the goer datasets across the three focus areas: **Accommodations, Barriers, and Accessibility Improvements**. In the Accommodations and Barriers focus areas, both survey responses and free-text comments provided by goers were analyzed.

Goer Accommodations Findings

This first area of focus provided a snapshot of the current state of accessibility accommodations at Canadian festivals and events. Across all surveys, goers were asked: **“Have you, or a person with a disability you support, asked for accessibility accommodations before or during a Canadian festival or event?”**

The response options were Yes, No, or Not Sure. A total of 1,065 participants answered this question out of 1,104 total participants. **Just over half of goers reported Yes** (559 people, or 52.5%). This indicates that many goers, or people supporting them, are actively requesting accessibility accommodations.

A substantial number of respondents selected No or Not Sure (503 people, or 47.5%). These responses may be more complex than on face value, and may reflect a range of experiences.

Some participants may not have needed accommodations. It may be that others don't know that accommodations could be requested, may be unsure

how to request them, or may not know what is available. It is possible that some may choose not to ask because they expect the process will not work, or that organizers will not act, and have limited emotional energy for self-advocacy.

Table: Goers Asking For Accommodations Before or During a Festival or Event

Response	Goer Number	Goer % (Out of 1062)
Yes	559	52.5%
No	381	36.0%
Not Sure	122	11.5%

Goers were then asked to share their experiences in a free-text response field. Almost all comments focused on barriers people experienced, and changes they would like to see.

In total, 493 responses described requested accommodations across the four study categories. Across 135 distinct codes, participants referenced 1,433 accommodation-related actions and needs. Based on the analysis of these free-text comments, the following recommendations were developed.

Accommodations Recommendations Promotion

- **Provide Information and Contacts in Advance to Reduce Self-Advocacy**

Proactively publish clear accessibility and accommodation information. Ensure the information is easy to find before the festival or event through a central online accessibility hub and printed materials. Provide multiple contact options such as phone, and email. Provide a simple request process, and offer a dedicated accessibility contact. This reduces the self-advocacy burden.

- **Eliminate or Reduce Costs and Communicate Support Policies**

Eliminate or reduce costs by offering support-person discounts, free tickets, sliding-scale options, and other cost supports. Accommodations should not bring extra fees whenever possible. Clearly communicate

support-person policies and available financial supports in advance, including how people can access them. This reduces financial and participation barriers.

Planning and Hosting

- **Ensure Accessible Washroom Access**

Provide sufficient accessible washrooms near key areas, along step-free routes, with clear accessible signage and proper maintenance. Accessible washrooms are essential for participation and help reduce barriers to independence.

- **Provide Crowd and Lineup Management Supports**

Plan and provide safe lineup management and crowd control. Include clear line-up supports, and enough disability-informed staff to manage busy areas. Participation becomes unsafe or not possible without this management.

- **Create Accessible Arrival Areas, Routes, Signage, and Maps**

Ensure step-free routes, use ramps when needed, and maintain stable surfaces from arrival to content programming to exits. Provide accessible parking and drop-off areas with minimal travel distances from entrances, clear and accessible signage and wayfinding, and provide accessible maps in advance. This includes clear language, high-contrast text, large readable fonts, and may include raised lettering or Braille. This supports independent safe navigation and advance planning for people who use mobility devices, wheelchairs, walkers, scooters, canes, or crutches, as well as people without sight.

Services

- **Provide Accessible Seating and Rest Areas Throughout the Site**

Provide enough accessible seating and rest areas throughout the site near content programming, food areas, and lineups. These should include equitable sightlines, supports for transfers and diverse body sizes, and space for support people. This increases comfort and stamina, supporting full participation.

- **Train Staff and Volunteers**

Provide disability-informed training, and ensure staff and volunteers can

respond respectfully and resolve accessibility barriers. This is crucial to ensure accommodations and options can be provided quickly, and additional communications barriers are not created.

Content

- **Provide Sensory-Friendly Spaces and Supports**

Provide quiet spaces, noise management, scent-free practices, good air quality, and sensory-friendly environments. Clearly identify these spaces with accessible clear signage. This allows people to participate longer and more comfortably in a safer environment.

- **Provide Communication Accessibility Supports**

Provide captioning, subtitles, and other communication supports for content programming and key announcements. Clearly communicate in advance how these supports can be accessed. This is essential for equitable participation.

- **Provide Sign Language Interpretation**

Provide qualified sign language interpreters for content programming and announcements. Clearly communicate in advance when and where interpretation will be available. Plan for diverse sign language needs if needed (such as ASL, LSQ, etc.). This is essential for participation for people who are in the Deaf, deaf, and hard of hearing communities.

Goer Barrier Findings

This second area of focus provided a snapshot of the current state of accessibility barriers at Canadian festivals and events. Across all surveys, goers were asked: **“Have you, or a person with a disability you support, been forced to leave a Canadian festival or event due to barriers, not enjoyed the experience, or decided not to attend?”**

A Barrier was defined as anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully taking part, equally, in all areas of society. Barriers can be visible or invisible. They can be physical, attitude related, technology based, systems and policy related, etc.

A total of 1,065 goers answered this question out of 1,104 participants. **58% of goers reported that barriers had forced them to leave a festival or event, not enjoy the experience, or decide not to attend.**

28% percent said No, 10% said Not Sure, and 4% were recorded as No Answer. These findings suggest that for almost two thirds of goers, barriers can significantly affect whether they attend festivals and events, how long they stay, and whether they are able to fully enjoy the experience.

Table: Goers Experienced Barriers Before or During A Festival or Event

Response	Goer Number	Goer % (Out of 1065)
Yes	622	58%
No	302	28%
Not Sure	101	10%
No Answer	40	4%

Goers were then asked to share their experiences in a free-text response field. Almost all comments focused on barriers people experienced, and changes they would like to see.

In total, 596 responses described barriers across the four categories used in the study. Across 110 distinct codes, participants referenced 1,843 barrier-related actions and needs. Each response was coded, and there were on average 3.1 coded themes per response. This reflects that many **goers experienced multiple, interacting accessibility gaps rather than a single isolated issue**. Based on the analysis of these free-text comments, the following recommendations were developed.

Barrier Recommendations

Promotion

- **Eliminate or Reduce Costs and Communicate Support Policies**
Provide accessible ticketing and clear policies that do not create additional costs for accessibility needs or accommodations. Publish clear, easy-to-find accessibility information in advance and provide responsive ways for people to ask questions or request support.

Minimize or remove extra costs for support people. Ensure staff, volunteers, and security respond respectfully and consistently. Ensure ticket pricing and administrative processes do not create barriers that prevent participation.

Planning and Hosting

- **Prioritize Accessible Venue Selection and Site Layout**

Prioritize accessible venues and design site layouts with step-free entry and predictable accessible routes connecting entrances, viewing areas, accessible washrooms, food services, and information points. This helps identify and address barriers early and provide options where barriers remain, reducing the need for accommodation requests before the event begins.

- **Provide Continuous Mobility-Accessible Routes**

Plan mobility-friendly, stable, wide, obstacle-free routes from arrival to exit. Provide ramps where level changes occur, ensure adequate turning space, and provide solutions for slopes, mud, sand, gravel, and other uneven terrain. This supports people who use mobility devices such as wheelchairs, walkers, scooters, canes, or crutches to move independently.

- **Ensure Accessible Washroom Access**

Accessible washrooms are a critical onsite need. Provide accessible washrooms or portable units near content programming areas that can be reached on step-free routes. Ensure adequate turning space for wheelchairs or service dogs or animals, accessible door hardware, and privacy for personal care. Lack of accessible washrooms is often linked to participants leaving early.

- **Provide Accessible Seating and Rest Areas Throughout the Site**

Provide seating and rest areas throughout the site, including near content programming, food areas, and lineups. Ensure accessible seating with equitable sightlines and space for companions or support people. Reduce long waits and standing-only areas and make it easy to request assistance without repeated self-advocacy. Design for the

ability to stay for the full event, recognizing that leaving early can signal accessibility barriers.

- **Provide Crowd and Lineup Management Supports**

Crowds and lineups can create safety barriers. Provide alternative lineup options, seating while waiting, clear staff support, and ensure accessible routes remain clear through crowded areas to reduce fatigue and risk.

- **Make Arrival, Departure, and Transportation Accessible and Predictable**

Provide accessible parking close to step-free entrances and accessible drop-off and pick-up areas. Provide clear transit information and accessible shuttle options where distances are long. This supports planning and independent travel.

Services

- **Train Staff and Provide Clear Escalation Processes**

Provide disability-informed training for staff, volunteers, and security, and ensure clear escalation processes are in place to prevent denial of accessibility options or accommodations. This reduces the need for repeated self-advocacy and additional communication barriers.

Content

- **Provide Sensory-Friendly Spaces and Supports**

Share sound and sensory expectations in advance and offer quiet or low-stimulation spaces so people can regulate and rejoin content programming. Ensure accessible seating with equitable sightlines so participants can remain comfortably engaged.

- **Provide Communication Accessibility Supports**

Provide captioning, sign language interpretation, and clear visual announcements for key content programming and information. Clearly communicate what supports are available and where and when they can be accessed. Plan for diverse sign language needs (such as ASL or LSQ). This supports equitable participation and helps people engage comfortably and safely.

Goer Accessibility Improvement Findings

The third and final focus area examined Accessibility Improvements for Canadian festivals and events. Across all surveys, goers were asked two variations of the same question:

“What are your suggestions for making Canadian festivals and events more accessible?”

and

“How would you make Canadian festivals and events more accessible for people with disabilities?”

Based on analysis of the free-text responses, the following recommendations were developed.

Accessibility Improvement Recommendations

Promotion

- **Eliminate or Reduce Costs and Provide Accessible Ticketing Supports**

Publish accessible, plain-language information and policies, including accessible ticketing policies, and support person procedures. Ensure there is a clear place to share accessibility needs and accommodations requests. Minimize or remove extra costs for support people.

Accommodations should not bring extra fees whenever possible. This reduces financial and participation barriers.

Planning and Hosting

- **Provide Clear and Accessible Signage**

Provide clear and accessible signage and wayfinding, and provide accessible maps in advance that mark routes, services, and viewing areas. This helps people plan their visit and navigate the site safely and predictably.

- **Design Wheelchair and Mobility-Accessible Routes**

Plan accessible step-free routes from arrival to exit and key areas.

Ensure adequate route width, turning space for wheelchairs or service dogs or animals, stable surfaces. This supports independent navigation

and safe movement for people who use mobility devices such as wheelchairs, walkers, scooters, canes, or crutches, as well as people without sight.

- **Prioritize Accessible Venue Selection and Site Layout**

Prioritize accessible venues and design site layouts with step-free entry and predictable accessible routes connecting entrances, and enough space to allow for full participation. This helps identify and address barriers early and provide options where barriers remain, reducing the need for accommodation requests before the event begins.

- **Make Parking, Arrival, and Departure Accessible**

Provide adequate accessible parking and accessible drop-off and pick-up areas close to step-free, obstacle-free entrances and exits. This should be paired with clear arrival guidance in online and print materials provided before the festival or event. This supports planning, safety, and independent travel.

- **Provide Crowd and Lineup Management Supports**

Plan and provide safe lineup management and crowd control. Include clear line-up alternatives and supports, and enough disability-informed staff to manage busy areas. Participation becomes unsafe or not possible without this management.

Services

- **Ensure Accessible Washroom Access**

Provide reliable accessible washrooms near key areas along step-free routes, including portable accessible washrooms where permanent facilities are limited. Ensure adequate turning space for wheelchairs or service dogs or animals, and accessible grab bars. These supports are essential for participation and help ensure safety and dignity.

- **Provide Accessible Seating Throughout the Site**

Provide seating throughout the site with equitable sightlines, including near content programming, food areas, and lineups. This supports comfort and full participation in content programming.

Content

- **Provide Communication Accessibility Supports**

Provide captioning, sign language interpretation, and clear visual announcements for key content programming and information. Plan for diverse sign language needs (such as ASL or LSQ). This supports equitable participation and helps people engage comfortably and safely.

- **Provide Sensory-Friendly Spaces and Supports**

Create quiet or low-stimulation spaces and provide environmental supports. Share sensory expectations and warnings in advance, including noise levels, lighting warnings, crowd conditions, and when quiet spaces will remain low stimulation. These spaces support people who need to plan, self-pace, regulate, and rejoin content programming when ready.

What the Goer Datasets Show

Across the three goer datasets, priorities were highly consistent. Goers described accessibility as needing to work end-to-end so they can plan their visit, arrive at the site, move through it, access essential services, and participate in content programming without added burden.

The same core accessibility elements appear across all three datasets: step-free routes and stable surfaces, clear accessible signage and wayfinding, accessible washrooms, accessible parking and arrival areas, and distributed seating and rest options. Communication supports, including sign language interpretation and captioning, and sensory-friendly spaces were also consistently identified as essential for full participation.

The three goer datasets highlight **different parts of the accessibility experience**.

The **Barriers dataset** focuses on the consequences of inaccessibility. Goers describe how barriers such as inaccessible venues or routes, crowding, and sensory or noise overload can lead to fatigue, safety risks, early departure, or deciding not to attend.

The **Accommodations dataset** focuses on the request process. Participants describe how they ask for support and the effort required to navigate processes, often needing to repeatedly explain their needs. The findings emphasize the importance of clear information, predictable policies, and disability-informed trained staff to reduce the self-advocacy burden.

The **Accessibility Improvements dataset** focuses on design solutions. Goers describe the changes organizers can plan from the start, including accessible venues, accessible parking, clear and accessible signage, step-free routes, accessible washrooms, seating, and planned communication and sensory supports.

Taken together, the datasets show that accessibility must work **end-to-end**. Goers need to be able to plan their visit, arrive and move through the site, access essential services, and participate in content programming without barriers. When these elements are in place, people are more likely to attend and stay for the full event. When they are not, participants may need to self-advocate repeatedly, manage fatigue or safety risks, or leave early.

What the Goer Findings Mean Overall

A comparative analysis of the recommendations from the three goer datasets, **Accommodations, Barriers, and Accessibility Improvements**, shows strong agreement on what matters most for accessibility, even though each dataset approaches the issue from a different angle.

The **Accessibility Improvements dataset** emphasizes what organizers can design and plan in advance, including accessible venues, step-free routes, accessible parking, clear and accessible signage, accessible washrooms, seating, and planned communication and sensory supports.

The **Barriers dataset** highlights what happens when these elements are missing or unreliable. Goers describe how inaccessible routes, crowding, noise, and missing supports can lead to fatigue, safety risks, or leaving the event early.

The **Accommodations dataset** focuses on the request process, emphasizing the need to reduce self-advocacy through clear accessibility information, predictable policies, disability-informed trained staff, and consistent support processes.

Together, the findings point to a shared goal: **making accessibility the default so goers do not have to negotiate participation at every step.**

Across all three datasets, goers consistently identify the same core priorities: reliable arrival and navigation, accessible washrooms, distributed accessible seating and rest areas, communication supports such as sign language interpretation and captioning, sensory supports, and clear accessibility information before the event.

Goers also emphasize that accessibility improvements should apply to festivals and events of all sizes. Even when budgets are limited, organizers can reduce barriers by sharing clear accessibility information, providing a reliable point of contact, training staff and volunteers, and planning how people will arrive, wait, and move through the space.

Final Goer Recommendations

Based on this comparative analysis of the three datasets, the following final recommendations reflect the perspectives of goers.

Promotion

- **Provide Accessible Ticketing and Accommodation Supports**

Provide clear accommodation options, accessible ticketing, and a dedicated accessibility contact who will provide consistent responses. Collect accessibility needs during registration and ticketing where possible. Provide an identifiable onsite accessibility team or help desk to resolve issues quickly. Ensure support options are available online, by phone, and onsite. Publish accessible, plain-language information and policies, including accommodation request procedures, accommodations options, cost elimination or reduction policies, and

support person policies. This should be online and in print. This helps reduce the need for repeated self-advocacy.

Planning and Hosting

- **Prioritize Accessible Venue Selection and Site Layout**

Select accessible venues early and confirm accessibility through audits or walkthroughs with people who have lived experience (with compensation) before finalizing site plans. Plan site layouts with step-free routes connecting entrances, content programming areas, accessible washrooms, food services, and information points. If limitations or barriers exist, be transparent and communicate them early and identify available options. This supports planning, comfort, and safety.

- **Provide Step-Free and Wheelchair-Accessible Routes**

Provide a step-free, stable, wide, obstacle-free route network throughout the site. Stable, usable surfaces are essential, especially for outdoor venues. Include ramps where level changes occur, minimal stairs, stable surfaces, and sufficient width and turning space for wheelchairs or service dogs or animals. Provide solutions for uneven terrain such as slopes, mud, sand, or gravel so people who use mobility devices, wheelchairs, walkers, scooters, canes, or crutches can move safely and independently.

- **Provide Clear Accessible Signage and Wayfinding**

Provide accessible parking and accessible drop-off and pick-up areas close to step-free entrances. Reduce long travel distances with transport supports. Provide clear arrival instructions in advance and accessible maps that mark accessible routes, accessible washrooms, quiet spaces, drop-off and pick-up points, and accessible seating or viewing areas. Use high-contrast, consistent clear and accessible signage. This supports independent navigation, choice of routes, and advance planning.

- **Provide Crowd and Lineup Management Supports**

Provide crowd and lineup supports to reduce safety risks and fatigue. Offer alternative lineup options for long lineups, priority options where

needed, seating while waiting, staff support, and clear procedures to reduce long waits and standing-only conditions. This promotes comfort and confidence.

Services

- **Ensure Accessible Washroom Access**

Provide sufficient accessible permanent or portable washrooms near key areas that can be reached along step-free routes. Ensure washrooms are maintained, have adequate turning space for wheelchairs or service dogs or animals, clear accessible signage, and are distributed across the site on step-free routes. Accessible washrooms were also consistently identified as essential.

- **Provide Accessible Seating and Rest Areas With Weather Supports**

Provide accessible seating and viewing areas across the site (not just one location) with equitable sightlines, including wheelchair spaces and space for support people. Include rest areas for fatigue management for both participants and staff. Provide weather supports such as shelters, shade, and heat-relief options near content programming and activity areas to support comfort and safety.

- **Train Staff, Volunteers, and Security**

Provide disability-informed training early and ensure staff, volunteers, and security understand accessibility policies and how to respond to accommodation requests respectfully, quickly, and consistently with person-first support. Clear procedures and training help prevent new communication barriers and reduce the need for repeated self-advocacy.

Content

- **Provide Communication Accessibility Supports**

Provide captioning, sign language interpretation, and clear visual announcements for key content programming and information. Plan for diverse sign language needs, such as ASL or LSQ, and communicate in advance what supports will be available and where they can be

accessed. This supports equitable participation and helps people engage comfortably and safely.

- **Provide Sensory-Friendly Spaces and Supports**

Create quiet or low-stimulation spaces and provide environmental supports. Share sensory expectations and warnings in advance, including noise levels, lighting warnings, crowd conditions, air quality (such as smoke or cannabis), scents, and when quiet spaces will remain low stimulation. These spaces support people who need to plan, self-pace, regulate, and rejoin content programming when ready.

Additional Evidence Sources

There were three components of the research study that provided supporting evidence for goer lived experiences.

Site Visits

Four project Site Coordinators in Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario, and Newfoundland and Labrador attended a total of 15 festivals and events in their regions from late 2023 to early 2024, to assess accessibility. Before the informal assessments, Site Coordinators were given resources and tips on accessibility auditing.

They conducted site visits at a wide range of indoor and outdoor festivals and events, and three of these were French based. This included a festival of lights on boats, an international film festival, a women's film festival, a beer and music event, an intercultural storytelling festival, and an event focused on sex, desire, and data. Specific festival and event names are not included, because accessibility barriers may have changed since the visits.

In the visits, it was clear that accessibility is strongest when **step-free routes, accessible washrooms, seating, and clear accessible signage and wayfinding** are in place. Participation becomes more difficult when any part of this chain breaks. For example, when areas are accessible only by stairs, ramps are steep, travel distances are long, terrain is uneven, or routes are unclear.

The site visits, along with the goer lived experiences, highlight that accessibility must work **end-to-end**, not just at the entrance. Goers need to be able to **arrive, move through the site, and stay for content programming safely and comfortably**.

Some differences emerged. The **site visits** highlighted practical examples of **partial accessibility and venue challenges**. The goer lived experiences from the surveys, based on the lived experiences of thousands of Canadians, emphasized making accessibility **predictable and reliable**. Participants highlighted the need to reduce self-advocacy, provide clear accommodation processes, train staff, volunteers and security, and include sensory spaces and supports and communication supports (such as sign language and captions) within content programming.

Together, these two sources provide a practical roadmap for organizers: address the **physical accessibility basics**, be transparent about limitations, and support participation with **clear information, disability-informed trained teams, and consistent supports** so people with disabilities can stay and fully participate.

Focus Groups

How Many People Participated and Where Do They Live

The focus groups for goers were held from June to November 2024. There were 1568 goers who signed up, and 428 attended the sessions. At the end, **232 goers** passed the final identity checks, and did not submit Artificial Intelligence (AI) generated content. There were **47 focus groups** conducted by the four Site Coordinators. 17 were in person, 29 online by Zoom, and one was hybrid. As well, a focus group was held by the Coordinator in a 2024 Independent Living Canada Conference presentation.

Three sessions were held in French, two in American Sign Language, and one was in Mandarin and Cantonese. Out of the 232 people, 202 were English speaking, 15 French speaking, and 15 Cantonese and Mandarin. Of those who shared their location, participants came from across Canada, with

the majority being from British Columbia, then Saskatchewan and Alberta.

Table: Location of Focus Group Goers

Province or Territory	Goer Number	Goer % (Out of 232)
British Columbia	60	25.9%
Ontario	29	12.5%
Alberta	37	15.9%
Saskatchewan	45	19.4%
Manitoba	5	2.2%
Newfoundland and Labrador	26	11.2%
Nova Scotia	5	2.2%
Quebec	1	0.4%
New Brunswick	0	0.0%
Prince Edward Island	0	0.0%
Yukon	0	0.0%
Northwest Territories	0	0.0%
Nunavut	0	0.0%

Disability Identification

Out of 232 goer participants, **148 people (63.8%) identified as having a disability** and 62 people (26.7%) did not. A further 22 people (9.5%) did not answer.

Table: Focus Group Goers Identification With Disabilities

Response	Focus Group Numbers	Focus Group % (Out of 232)
No Disability	62	26.7%
I Have a Disability	148	63.8%
No Answer	22	9.5%

The most identified disability type was **Physical (Mobility, Pain, and Flexibility) at 35.3%**, followed by Cognitive (Neurological, Neurodiverse) at 14.2%, and Mental Health at 16.8%. By far, physical disabilities were the most chosen option at 35.3%.

These results indicate that mobility, neurological, and mental health disabilities were the most frequently represented among respondents. Participants could select more than one disability type, so the percentage does not add up to 100%.

Table: Focus Group Goers Type(s) of Disabilities

Disability Type	Focus Group Number	Focus Group % (Out of 232)
Physical (Mobility, Pain, and Flexibility)	82	35.3%
Cognitive (Neurological, Neurodiverse)	33	14.2%
Mental Health	39	16.8%
Sensory (Visual, Hearing, Deaf-Blind)	36	15.5%
Other Disability or Disabilities	0	0.0%
Learning	26	11.2%
Communication (Speech, Language)	8	3.4%
Intellectual	13	5.6%

How Participants Identify

Women represented 52.6% of responses, compared to 31.5% men and 2.6% non-binary participants. The most common additional identities were Senior (13.8%), Racialized Person (12.1%) and LGBTQ2S+ (9.5%).

Table: Focus Group Goers Identification

Identity Categories	Goer Number	Goer % (Out of 232)
Woman	122	52.6%
Man	73	31.5%
LGBTQ2S+	22	9.5%
Senior	32	13.8%
Racialized person	28	12.1%
Did not answer	0	0.0%
Youth	18	7.8%
Indigenous	10	4.3%
Non-binary	6	2.6%
Official language minority community member	7	3.0%
Newcomer to Canada	1	0.4%

Identity Categories	Goer Number	Goer % (Out of 232)
Other	0	0.0%
Prefer not to say	0	0.0%

Focus Group Procedure

A list of 15 barriers ([Appendix C](#)) was created from data collected from 470 participants in the Accessibility Improvements focus area of the goer Long Surveys. These were conducted between December 2023 and February 2024. An initial skim analysis was completed at that time. After this stage, an additional 634 survey participants were added to the dataset, and two additional focus areas, Accommodations and Barriers, were also included in the final analysis.

The 15 barriers identified in the initial analysis were later shared with goer focus groups, conducted both online and in person between June and November 2024. Along with the list of barriers, focus group participants were asked to consider three questions.

1. What is missing from this festival and event barrier list?
2. What are your top three festival and event barriers?
3. What are your suggestions for making Canadian festivals and events more accessible?

Focus Group Findings

When the focus group results were compared with the full goer dataset (1,104 participants) from all surveys and focus areas, they confirmed the final goer analysis and recommendations. No major differences were found.

Website Audits

The goer and organizer datasets rarely discussed the digital space, or online festivals and events. One exception appeared in one item in the organizer Accessibility Improvement dataset. While this area was not widely covered, a website audit component was added to broaden the study to include digital accessibility.

Two websites connected to site visits by the Newfoundland and Labrador Site Coordinator were audited by **Empower Disability Services** in **November 2023**. These audits followed the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1. They used both automated tools (axe DevTools and WAVE) and manual testing, including keyboard-only navigation, screen reader testing, and zoom or magnification checks.

A second audit project was conducted by the **Rick Hansen Foundation** in **April 2025**. This examined **13 festival and event homepages** selected by the Project Coordinator to represent different types of festivals and events in Canada. The websites received brief usability audits using common devices and assistive technologies, including screen readers. Specific website names from the two projects are not included, because accessibility conditions may have improved since the audits.

The two projects differed in scope. The **Rick Hansen Foundation audit** reviewed many websites, which helped identify common patterns across the festival and event sector. Issues included missing or broken “skip to main content” links, confusing navigation, heading structure problems, and limited readability tools such as text resizing or contrast controls.

The **Empower Disability Services audit** examined only two websites, but conducted a deeper review using both automated and manual testing. This audit placed greater emphasis on colour contrast, moving or auto-updating content such as carousels, and technical barriers like unlabeled iFrames, or features that did not work with screen readers.

When findings from both audits were compared, a consistent theme emerged that echoed the final research findings. When festival and event websites are not designed and maintained with accessibility in mind, goers can face avoidable barriers when finding key information, purchasing tickets, and planning their visit.

The audits repeatedly identified barriers related to page structure (such as headings and menus), unclear or missing labels on links and buttons, missing

or unhelpful alternative text for images, and features that do not work reliably with keyboard navigation or screen readers. Many of these barriers can be fixed with straightforward updates and make high impacts, especially when websites are re-tested with assistive technologies after changes are made.

Both audit projects identified similar priority barriers. Lowering these barriers can make festival and event websites more usable and accessible for everyone. The following **five recommendations** were identified.

1. Use a Clear Heading Structure

Use one main page heading (H1) and consistent section headings so users can navigate pages quickly.

2. Use Descriptive Labels For Links and Buttons

Use descriptive, unique text for links and buttons. Avoid generic wording such as “Learn more” or “Click here.”

3. Add Meaningful Alternative Text to Images

Provide descriptive alternative text for images that convey information. Mark decorative images as decorative so assistive technologies skip them.

4. Ensure Compatibility with Assistive Technologies

Confirm that key tasks work with keyboard navigation, screen readers and other technologies. This includes menus, ticketing processes, forms, and key information pages.

5. Re-Audit and Include Auditors with Lived Experience

Include people with disabilities who use assistive technologies in accessibility audits and compensate them for their expertise. After updates are made, re-test the website to confirm improvements.

Objective 2: Organizer Self-Reporting

The second research objective question was:

“What are festival and event organizers (organizers) reporting about festival and event accessibility in Canada?”

The question will be answered through analysis of the organizer datasets across the three focus areas: **Accommodations, Barriers, and Accessibility Improvements**. In the Accommodations and Barriers focus areas, both survey responses and free-text comments provided by organizers were analyzed. First though, we will detail the analysis of the organizer accessibility knowledge and capacity questions.

Organizer Accessibility Knowledge and Capacity Findings

Organizers were asked about their familiarity with making festivals and events more accessible. Most **organizers** reported being at least **Moderately, Very or Extremely familiar with making festivals and events accessible for people with disabilities (73%)**. The most common response was “Moderately familiar” (39%). However, 27% were Slightly Familiar or Not at all Familiar, pointing to a need for clear tools and practical guidance.

Table: Organizer Familiarity with Accessibility

Response	Organizer Number	Organizer % (Out of 213)
Moderately familiar	83	39.0%
Very familiar	67	31.0%
Slightly familiar	47	22.0%
Not at all familiar	10	5.0%
Extremely familiar	6	3.0%

Disabilities Considered in Planning

Organizers were asked if they were familiar with accessibility, which types of disabilities they consider when planning for accessibility. This was a multiple-selection question, so the percentages do not add up to 100%. In total, organizers made 692 selections, averaging about 3.25 selections per

organizer. Note that those who were not familiar also answered this question in error.

Nearly all organizers (**95.3%**) selected **Physical disabilities**, and just over half (**55.9%**) selected **Sensory disabilities**. Fewer organizers selected Cognitive, Communication, or Mental Health disabilities. A small number (3.3%) skipped the question. However, three participants who previously reported being “not at all familiar” with accessibility did respond to this question, and did not skip it.

Table: Organizer Familiarity with Accessibility: Disability Types Considered

Category	Organizer Number	Organizer % (Out of 213)
Physical (Mobility, Pain, and Flexibility)	203	95.3%
Sensory (Visual, Hearing, Deaf-Blind)	119	55.9%
Cognitive (Neurological, Neurodiverse)	85	39.9%
Communication (Speech, Language)	78	36.6%
Mental health	73	34.3%
Intellectual	63	29.6%
Learning	51	23.9%
Other Disability or Disabilities	8	3.8%
Not familiar (skipped)	7	3.3%
More Than One Disability	5	2.3%

Organizer Training Practices

Organizers who indicated they were familiar with accessibility were asked whether they provided accessibility training for staff or volunteers. Note that those who were not familiar also answered this question in error. Responses showed that **training is not consistent across festivals and events**. Many organizers did not answer this question, with **52.6% of respondents skipping it**.

Among those who responded, **27.7% reported that staff or volunteers had received training**, and **2.8% selected “Somewhat.”** Another **16.9% said no training was provided**. These findings suggest that basic accessibility

training should be included as part of onboarding and pre-event preparation for all staff and volunteers.

Table: Organizer Familiarity with Accessibility: Did They Train Staff or Volunteers

Response	Organizer Number	Organizer % (Out of 213)
Did Not Answer	112	52.6%
Yes	59	27.7%
No	36	16.9%
Somewhat	6	2.8%

Organizer Accessibility Needs

We asked organizers, what they needed to make their festival or event more accessible. They ranked their choices in order of importance.

Table: Organizer Needs To Make Festivals and Events More Accessible Rank Number

Category	Rank
Awareness and Disability Information Training	1
I don't know, I am not sure	2
Funding or Grants	3
Accessible Information and Communications Training	4
Sharing Tips and Solutions with Other Festivals and Events	5
Tips and short "How to" Videos or Webpages on All Topics	6
Digital Accessibility Training	7
Audits By Auditors with Disabilities	8
Accessibility Consultant or Company Services	9

For organizers who ranked their needs, they reported the **biggest need for improving accessibility** at festivals and events was **Awareness and Disability Information Training**. The next most common response was "I don't know / I'm not sure," suggesting that some organizers need clearer starting points, examples, and guidance on where to begin.

Funding or Grants ranked third, highlighting that resources remain a significant challenge. Respondents also identified Accessible Information and Communications Training (4th), Sharing Tips and Creative Solutions with Other Festivals and Events (5th), and Quick Tips and short “How to” Videos or Webpages on All Topics (6th) would be helpful supports.

Lower-ranked but still relevant needs included Digital Accessibility Training (7th), Audits By Auditors with Disabilities (8th), and Accessibility Consultant or Company Services (9th). If free audits, training, and support were widely available and promoted, these priorities might shift to higher rankings. The current ranks suggest that organizers would benefit from additional guidance and support related to digital accessibility.

What the Organizer Accessibility Knowledge and Capacity Findings Mean

The organizer findings from this last section show capacity gaps. While most organizers reported being moderately familiar with accessibility, more than one quarter reported being only slightly or not at all familiar. Accessibility training was also inconsistent, with fewer than one-third reporting staff or volunteer training.

Organizer familiarity is uneven. 73% say they are moderately to extremely familiar, but 27% say they are only slightly or not familiar. This demonstrates that accessibility knowledge across the sector is uneven. This suggests that many organizers need practical tools, examples, and guidance.

Disability awareness is narrow. Organizers mostly selected physical disabilities (95.3%) and sensory disabilities (55.9%). But much fewer selected cognitive, communication, mental health, or other disabilities. This shows that accessibility planning is often centered on mobility and physical access, while other disability experiences receive less attention. This supports the findings in the goer datasets referring to sensory overload, communication barriers, and invisible disabilities.

Accessibility training was also inconsistent, and training and capacity gaps exist. Fewer than one-third reporting staff or volunteer training, and 52.6% skipped the question. This shows that accessibility training is not consistently integrated into event operations. Accessibility training should be part of onboarding and pre-event preparation.

Organizers are asking for support. The ranked needs show awareness and disability training, funding, accessible communications training, peer learning and sharing tips were ranked highest. This shows that organizers want practical guidance and resources. The sector is motivated but lacks tools.

The organizer findings provide insight into how festivals and events currently approach accessibility, including their familiarity with accessibility concepts, the types of disabilities they consider in planning, the training provided to staff and volunteers, and the supports organizers say they need to improve accessibility. These responses highlight both the progress being made and the capacity gaps that remain within the sector.

Organizer Accommodations Findings

Organizers were asked slightly different questions depending on the survey. In the Long Survey, organizers were asked:

“Have festival or event goers asked for accessibility accommodations before, or during, your festival or event?”

In the Event Survey and Quick Check Surveys, organizers were asked:

“Have festival or event goers reported barriers or asked for accessibility accommodations?”

The response options were Yes, No, or Not Sure. A total of 180 participants answered this question out of 213 participants. Most organizers reported **Yes (113 organizers, or 62.8%)**. This indicates that many festivals and events receive accessibility accommodation requests, and may already address them as part of their operations.

A smaller number of organizers selected No or Not Sure. These responses may possibly reflect several factors. Some organizers may not have received accommodation requests. Other possibilities include differences in event size and staff training, the visibility of the accommodation request process, or how feedback from people with disabilities is collected. These may possibly influence whether requests or barriers are identified.

Table: Organizers Accommodations Asked For and Barriers Reported To Them

Response	Organizer Number	Organizer% (Out of 180)
Yes	113	62.8%
No	44	24.4%
Not Sure	23	12.8%

After this question on all surveys, organizers were asked to “Share details about what was asked for, what you offered, and what you would change next time”, with a free form text field. Almost all comments focused on what was asked for and what they would change.

In total, 113 responses described requested accommodations across the four categories used in the study. Across 189 distinct codes, participants referenced 414 accommodation-related actions and needs. Based on the analysis of these free-text comments, the following recommendations were developed.

Accommodations Recommendations Promotion

- **Plan for Venue Barriers**
Identify venue barriers in advance, reduce barriers where possible, and clearly communicate any remaining barriers and available options. This helps people plan their visit safely.
- **Create and Communicate Support Policies**
Create clear support person policies and communicate them in advance, at ticketing and entry points online and on site. Ensure

ticketing and accommodation processes are straightforward and supported by a clear request process and a dedicated accessibility contact. This is crucial to ensure accommodations and options can be provided quickly, and additional communications barriers are not created.

Planning and Hosting

- **Provide Accessible Parking and Signage**

Provide accessible parking and drop-off areas close to step-free entrances. Ensure clear and accessible signage and wayfinding. This helps people plan their visit and navigate the site safely and predictably.

- **Provide Step-Free Routes and Barrier-Free Access**

Provide step-free routes to participation and viewing spaces. Use barrier-free paths and ramps where level changes occur. This supports people who use wheelchairs and other mobility devices. This supports independent navigation for people who use mobility devices, wheelchairs, walkers, scooters, canes, or crutches, as well as people who need mobility support and people without sight.

- **Design Accessible Site Routes**

Plan accessible routes across the site from arrival to key areas. Ensure adequate route width, turning space, stable surfaces, and clear solutions where terrain or historic buildings create barriers. This supports independent predictable navigation for people who use mobility devices, wheelchairs, walkers, scooters, canes, or crutches, as well as people without sight.

- **Make Venue Selection and Setup Accessible**

Make accessibility a baseline requirement when selecting and setting up venues. Use accessibility audits, and plan for upgrades to improve accessibility over time. This helps identify barriers early, address them where possible, and provide options where barriers remain before the festival or event begins, reducing the need for accommodation requests.

- **Create Continuous Improvement Practices**

Use feedback to improve accessibility year over year. Encourage and

welcome input, track changes, and communicate supports and known limitations transparently and early. This helps identify and eliminate barriers, reducing the need for individual accommodation requests.

Services

- **Ensure Accessible Washrooms and Essential Onsite Supports**
Provide sufficient accessible washrooms near key areas, including portable accessible washrooms where needed. Offer escort or guide support and privacy-respecting ways for people to request assistance.

Content

- **Provide Accessible and Reserved Seating**
Provide accessible and reserved seating with predictable sightlines, and ramps to seating, stages, and activity areas. This supports comfort and full participation in content programming.
- **Provide Sensory-Friendly Places and Communication Supports**
Provide communication accessibility through sign language interpretation, open or closed captioning, visual supports, and assistive listening where possible. Offer sensory-friendly spaces and options, such as quiet spaces and hours, as well as clear information about lighting and sound. This supports comfortable, equitable, and safe participation.

Organizer Barrier Findings

For organizers, slightly different questions were used across the surveys. In the Long Survey, organizers were asked: **“Have festival or event goers reported any issues or concerns about barriers?”**

A barrier was described as anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully taking part, equally, in all areas of society. Barriers can be visible or invisible. They can be physical, attitude related, technology based, systems and policy related, etc.

In the Event Survey and Quick Check **Surveys**, the question combined

barriers and accommodations: **“Have festival or event goers reported barriers or asked for accessibility accommodations?”**

The question did not ask when this happened, so this could be for before, during, or after a festival or event. The response options were Yes, No, or Not Sure. A total of 180 organizers answered the question out of 213 participants.

Responses were mixed: **37.8% reported that goers had raised barrier concerns**, 42.2% said they had not, and 20.0% were not sure. Taken together, this suggests that barriers affect many goers, but it is possible that not every barrier experience is being reported back to organizers, or organizers are not acting on them.

Table: Organizers Barriers Reported To Them

Response	Organizer Number	Organizer % (Out of 180)
No	76	42.2%
Yes	68	37.8%
Not Sure	36	20.0%

After this question, organizers were asked to “Share details about what was asked for, what you offered, and what you would change next time”, using a free-text response field. Almost all comments related to what was asked for and what they would change.

In total, 69 responses described barriers across the four categories used in the study. Across 68 distinct codes, participants referenced 78 barrier-related actions and needs from goers. Based on the analysis of these free-text comments, the following recommendations were developed.

Barriers Recommendations

Promotion

- **Prioritize Accessible Venue Selection and Plan for Limitations**
Prioritize accessible venues, identify venue limitations and alert goers early before the festival or event. Communicate both limitations and solutions clearly so people with disabilities can plan safely.

Planning and Hosting

- **Create Continuous Improvement Practices**

Establish regular feedback review and upgrades as a standard part of event operations. Conduct accessibility audits or walkthroughs for venues and routes with people who have lived experience (with compensation). Track fixes and verification as part of an annual continuous improvement cycle. Ensure digital accessibility is included. This helps identify and eliminate barriers, reducing the need for individual accommodation requests.

- **Provide Continuous Mobility-Accessible Routes**

Ensure step-free mobility device access to entrances and key locations with clear accessible routes that avoid stairs-only areas. Reduce barriers by widening pinch points, removing obstacles, and keeping primary routes clear and well-marked. This supports independent movement.

- **Make Parking, Arrival and Departure Accessible and Predictable**

Improve and manage accessible arrival options. Increase accessible parking, provide reserved accessible spaces, ensure close drop-off and pick-up locations, and use clear accessible signage and enforcement to support safe arrival and departure.

- **Ensure Step-Free and Wheelchair-Accessible Movement Throughout**

Stabilize and maintain travel surfaces and park terrain to avoid uneven routes. Use preventative maintenance, temporary flooring or mats, and seasonal planning such as snow and ice clearing. Ensure routes remain clear and obstacle-free to support independent movement.

- **Budget for Accessibility**

Build realistic accessibility budgets early and treat accessibility supports as core event costs. Seek grants and partnerships where needed.

Services

- **Ensure Accessible Washroom Access**

Provide reliable accessible washrooms that can be reached on step-free routes. Include portable accessible washrooms when permanent

facilities are limited and place them near content programming areas with clear signage.

- **Train Staff and Volunteers**

Provide accessibility training for staff and volunteers, including respectful interactions with support persons, service dog or animal policy application, and how to respond to accommodation requests. This is crucial to ensure accommodations and options can be provided quickly, and additional communication barriers are not created.

Content

- **Provide Communication Accessibility Supports**

Provide captioning (open captions if possible), sign language interpretation, and clear visual announcements and assistive listening supports for key content programming and information. Plan for diverse sign language needs (such as ASL or LSQ). This supports equitable participation and helps people engage comfortably and safely.

- **Provide Sensory-Friendly Spaces and Supports**

Share sound and sensory expectations in advance, including how and when quiet spaces will remain low stimulation. These quiet or low-stimulation spaces support people who need to regulate and rejoin content programming and help participants remain comfortably engaged.

Organizer Accessibility Improvement Findings

The third and final focus area examined Accessibility Improvements for Canadian festivals and events. Across all surveys, organizers were asked two variations of the same question:

“How have you made promotion, planning, hosting, services and content more accessible?”

and

“Promotion, Planning and Hosting, Services and Content: Have you made this more accessible?”

Based on analysis of the free-text responses, the following recommendations were developed.

Accessibility Improvement Recommendations

Promotion

- **Provide Clear and Accessible Accessibility Information in Advance**
Publish clear, easy-to-find accessibility information before ticket sales, including event times, locations, accessibility features, and known limitations. Keep information consistent across websites, social media, digital and printed materials. Use a single accessibility webpage as the primary source and reinforce it through printed materials, email, ticketing, and social media so people can plan their visit. Include accessible digital practices such as image descriptions. This will support confident planning by goers.
- **Provide Accessible Ticketing and Support Options**
Provide accessible ticketing and support options, including online, phone, and onsite assistance, with a dedicated accessibility contact who has received disability-informed training. Collect accessibility needs during registration and ticketing where possible. Provide an identifiable onsite accessibility team or help desk to resolve issues quickly. Accommodations should not bring extra fees whenever possible. This reduces financial and participation barriers.

Planning and Hosting

- **Prioritize Accessible (Outdoor) Venue Selection and Site Layout**
Prioritize accessible venues and design site layouts with step-free entry, minimal stairs and ramps when needed, accessible routes, and usable accessible washrooms. For outdoor venues, design routes with stable level surfaces, wide obstacle-free paths, and minimized terrain barriers. Where resources are limited, use partnerships and targeted funding to support accessibility improvements. This helps identify and address barriers early and provide options in advance, reducing the need for accommodation requests.
- **Provide Wheelchair and Mobility-Accessible Routes**
Provide step-free mobility-friendly routes throughout the site, including

ramps where level changes occur. Ensure accessible entrances and exits from arrival areas to content programming and key services, so people who use mobility devices, wheelchairs, walkers, scooters, canes, or crutches can move safely and independently.

- **Provide Clear Accessible Signage and Wayfinding**

Provide clear, consistent accessible signage and wayfinding. Use accessible maps and clearly marked routes to identify entrances, accessible washrooms, parking areas, drop-off and pick-up locations, and viewing areas. This supports independent navigation, choice of routes, and safe movement across the site.

- **Make Arrival and Transportation Accessible and Predictable**

Provide accessible parking and accessible drop-off and pick-up areas close to entrances. Provide clear transit information and accessible shuttle options where distances are long. This supports planning, safety, and independent travel

- **Create Continuous Improvement Practices**

Establish a continuous improvement cycle that includes accessibility audits, feedback reviews, and updates after each event. Conduct accessibility walkthroughs with people who have lived experience (who are compensated) and track improvements over time. Ensure digital accessibility is also reviewed as part of this process.

Services

- **Ensure Accessible Washroom Access**

Provide reliable accessible washrooms that can be reached on step-free routes. Include accessible portable washrooms when permanent facilities are limited. Ensure adequate turning space for wheelchairs or service dogs or animals, clear accessible signage, and that they are distributed across the site on step-free routes near content programming areas.

Content

- **Provide Communication Accessibility Supports**

Provide captioning, subtitles, sign language interpretation, and clear visual announcements for key content programming and information.

Plan for diverse sign language needs (such as ASL or LSQ). Clearly communicate in advance when and where these supports will be available. This supports equitable participation and helps people engage comfortably and safely.

- **Provide Accessible Seating, Rest Areas, and Weather Supports**
Support participation in content programming with accessible seating and viewing areas that include wheelchair spaces with equitable sightlines. Provide rest areas throughout the site to help manage fatigue for participants and staff. Include weather supports such as shelters, shade, and heat-relief options near content programming and activity areas to support comfort and safety. Support attendance with service dogs or animals and sensory needs by clearly communicating policies and providing quiet or sensory-friendly spaces and notices. These supports increase participation, safety, and comfort.

What the Organizer Datasets Show

Across the three organizer datasets, priorities were highly consistent. Shared priorities appear most clearly in **mobility and arrival**. Organizers consistently identified accessible parking and drop-off close to step-free entrances, stable and wide routes with turning space for wheelchairs or service dogs or animals, and clear accessible signage and wayfinding so people can navigate independently.

Accessible washrooms that can be reached on step-free routes were also repeatedly identified as essential for dignity and participation. Organizers also described accessibility as needing to work “**end-to-end**.” This suggests that the information shared before the event must match what is available onsite, and staff and volunteers (and security) must be prepared to provide accessibility supports consistently.

Across the three datasets, end-to-end accessibility depends on several connected elements:

1. Clear and accurate accessibility information and policies before the event.
2. Predictable arrival areas and step-free routes.

3. Essential onsite services, especially accessible washrooms.
4. Content programming that includes communication supports (such as sign language interpretation and captioning) and sensory-friendly spaces.

Where the datasets differ is mainly in the **reasons behind accessibility gaps**. The **Barriers dataset** focuses on challenges that prevent accessibility, including limited control over venues or rented sites, budgets, uneven terrain, parking limitations, and missing communication supports such as captioning, sign language interpretation, or assistive listening. The **Accessibility Improvements and Accommodations datasets** focus more on practical actions and continuous improvement across promotion, site planning, onsite services, and content programming.

What the Organizer Findings Mean Overall

Taken together, the organizer datasets show that accessibility must be planned and delivered as a **coordinated, end-to end system**, rather than as individual fixes.

The **Accommodations dataset** highlights the **service delivery side of accessibility**, including accessible parking, mobility supports, accessible seating and viewing areas, sensory spaces, sign language interpreting, and support-person options. These findings show that accessibility is not only about meeting technical requirements. For example, a venue may technically be step-free, but still feel inaccessible if routes are unstable, signage is unclear or not accessible, or accessible parking is far from entrances.

Across the datasets, several **accessibility planning and delivery gaps** appear repeatedly. These include parking availability and long distances from parking to entrances, unstable outdoor terrain, venue challenges such as historic or rented sites with limited control, accessible washroom placement and reliability, and gaps in communication supports such as captioning or sign language interpretation. Staff training and consistent policy application are also important, because without them policies related to support persons or service dogs or animals may be applied unevenly.

Overall, the findings suggest that accessibility improves most quickly when it is treated as a coordinated, **end-to-end system**. This includes setting venue and route standards early, budgeting for key supports such as accessible washrooms, clear and accessibility signage, and communication supports such as captioning and sign language interpretations, providing disability-informed training staff and volunteers, and testing the full accessibility journey before opening.

Where challenges exist, such as historic sites, rented venues, or limited budgets, the findings suggest combining short-term solutions, such as temporary ramps, mats, shuttles, reroutes, with longer-term improvements through partnerships and upgrades.

Final Organizer Recommendations

Based on this comparative analysis of the three datasets, the following final recommendations reflect the perspectives of organizers.

Promotion

- **Create and Communicate Support Policies**

Provide clear policies and a predictable request process for support persons and service dogs or animals. Include a dedicated accessibility contact and privacy-respecting ways to request support. Clearly communicate these policies in advance so people can plan their visit and reduce the need for repeated self-advocacy.

Planning and Hosting

- **Prioritize Accessible Venue Selection and Site Layout**

Select accessible venues early and proactively confirm accessibility through audits or walkthroughs with people who have lived experience (with compensation) before finalizing site plans. Plan site layouts with step-free entry, accessible routes connecting entrances, content programming areas, washrooms, food services, and information points. Communicate limitations and available options clearly when barriers remain.

- **Provide Wheelchair and Mobility-Accessible Routes**
Provide a step-free route network throughout the site from arrival to content programming and key services. Ensure stable surfaces, adequate route width, and turning space for wheelchairs or service dogs or animals, so people who use mobility devices such as wheelchairs, walkers, scooters, canes, or crutches can move safely and independently.
- **Provide Accessible Parking and Transportation Options**
Provide accessible parking close to step-free entrances and accessible drop-off and pick-up areas. Where distances are long, provide accessible shuttle or cart options to support safe arrival and independent movement across the site.
- **Provide Clear Accessible Signage and Wayfinding Maps**
Use clear, high-contrast, consistent accessible signage and share accessible maps in advance. Mark routes, washrooms, entrances, quiet spaces, drop-off areas, and accessible seating or viewing areas so people can navigate independently.
- **Create Continuous Improvement Practices and Provide Training**
Establish a continuous improvement cycle that includes accessibility audits, feedback collection, and post-event review. Use this feedback to improve accessibility year over year. Provide disability-informed training for staff, volunteers, and security. Create a visible accessibility help point with trained staff or a dedicated accessibility contact, so people can quickly request assistance.

Services

- **Ensure Accessible Washroom Access**
Provide sufficient accessible permanent or portable washrooms near key areas that can be reached along step-free routes.
- **Provide Accessible Seating and Rest Areas With Weather Supports**
Provide accessible seating and viewing areas across the site (not just one location) with equitable sightlines. Include rest areas for fatigue management for both participants and staff. Provide weather

supports such as shelters, shade, and heat-relief options near content programming and key areas to support comfort and safety.

Content

- **Provide Communication Accessibility Supports**

Provide communication accessibility through sign language interpretation (such as ASL or LSQ), captioning or subtitles where possible, and assistive listening supports. Clearly communicate in advance what supports will be available and where they can be accessed. This is essential for participation for people who are in the Deaf, deaf, and hard of hearing communities.

- **Provide Sensory-Friendly Spaces and Supports**

Provide quiet or low-stimulation spaces and environmental supports. Share sensory expectations in advance, including noise and lighting, and protect them from unexpected disruptions. This supports people for planning, and self-pacing.

Organizer self-reporting provides only one perspective on accessibility. To better understand how accessibility is experienced in practice, the next section compares these organizer responses with the lived experiences reported by goers. This comparison helps identify where priorities align and where gaps remain between what organizers report providing and what people with disabilities experience when attending festivals and events.

Objective 3: Goer Experience Versus Organizer Self-Reporting

The third, and final, research objective question was:

“How does organizer self-reporting about accessibility compare with the lived experiences of goers, and where do gaps exist?”

The question will be answered through a comparative analysis of the three goer and organizer datasets across the focus areas of **Accommodations, Barriers, and Accessibility Improvements**.

Accommodations Question Comparison

Goers reported whether they had asked for accessibility accommodations, while organizers reported whether goers had asked them for accommodations. **52.5% of goers** reported **Yes**, compared with **62.8% of organizers**.

One possible explanation for this difference is that accommodation requests may be concentrated at certain festivals, particularly those with clearer contact points, accessible information, or larger audiences. Another possibility is that some goers request accommodations only when they believe their request will be welcomed and acted upon.

Table: Goers Accommodations Asked For Versus Organizers Accommodations Requests

Response	Goer Number (Out of 1065)	Goer %	Organizer Number (Out of 180)	Organizer %
Yes	559	52.5%	113	62.8%
No	381	36.0%	44	24.4%
Not sure	122	11.5%	23	12.8%

Accommodations Question Takeaways

The findings suggest that organizers can support equitable participation by making accommodation requests easy to find and use. This includes clearly posting contact information, offering multiple ways to request

accommodations (such as email, phone, or web forms), responding promptly, and confirming what will be provided. Clear processes may also reduce “Not Sure” responses for both goers and organizers.

Accommodations Recommendations Comparison

The goer and organizer free-text comments on accommodations were compared to develop the following additional insights and recommendations.

Goer Top Five General Accommodations Themes

1. Self-Advocacy
2. Seating Provided
3. Accessible Washrooms
4. Wheelchair Accessibility
5. Cost Elimination or Reduction

Organizer Top Five General Accommodations Themes

1. Accessible Parking
2. Wheelchair Accessibility
3. Mobility Support
4. Accessible Venue
5. Continuous Improvement and Venue Limits

The goers’ top recommendations focus on making planning easier and ensuring supports are reliable. In contrast, the organizer report focuses more on arrival and movement around the site, whether venues are ready to support accessibility, and how to improve accessibility over time. Goers emphasize the parts of the experience that reduce fatigue, safety risks, and the need to repeatedly ask for help or self-advocate. While organizers emphasize the practical decisions and limits that affect what accessibility supports can be provided at the event.

- **Areas of overlap** include accessible parking and arrival areas, step-free routes and ramps, wheelchair and mobility access, accessible washrooms, accessible seating and viewing areas, communication

supports such as sign language and captioning, and sensory-friendly options.

- **Goer additions** include seating distributed throughout the site, staff training and accountability, and cost elimination or reduction measures. Accommodations should not bring extra fees.
- **Organizer additions** include a structured continuous improvement processes and explicit planning for venue challenges and barrier removal strategies.

Overall, the goer report highlights lived experience and reliability, what makes participation possible on the day. While the organizer report highlights the decisions and practical challenges. These differences are important because gaps can leave goers carrying the responsibility for managing accessibility themselves.

Key Differences

- **Goer emphasis:** reducing the self-advocacy burden and supporting comfort and stamina through distributed seating.
- **Organizer emphasis:** practical decisions such as accessible parking, mobility supports, venue selection, and improving accessibility over time.
- Goers emphasize **Service category barriers**, including staff training and crowd and lineup supports, more strongly than organizers.
- Goers also place greater emphasis in the **Promotion category**, such as clear accessibility information, ticketing processes, and policies.

Final Accommodation Recommendations

These final accommodations recommendations were created from the comparative analysis of the goer and organizer free-text responses.

Promotion

- **Build a Proactive Accommodations System and Reduce Self-Advocacy**
Create an easy-to-find accessibility hub that clearly lists available accommodations, known limitations, and how to request supports.

Provide a predictable request process, a dedicated accessibility contact, and accessible multiple contact options such as phone and email. Ensure consistent and respectful responses across staff and volunteers.

- **Eliminate or Reduce Costs and Communicate Support Policies**
Eliminate or reduce disability-related costs where possible, such as through companion or support person discounts or sliding-scale options. Accommodations should not bring extra fees whenever possible. Keep accommodation requests low-barrier and avoid unnecessary documentation. Clearly explain policies in advance. This reduces financial and participation barriers.

Planning and Hosting

- **Create Accessible Parking, Arrival Areas, Routes, and Signage**
Treat arrival as part of accessibility. Provide accessible parking and drop-off areas close to step-free entrances, and ensure accessible wayfinding from arrival to entry. Use high-contrast clear and accessible signage. This supports independent navigation.
- **Provide Step-Free and Wheelchair-Accessible Routes**
Plan routes end-to-end from arrival to content programming, services, and exits. Use ramps where needed, keep routes wide and obstacle-free, and prioritize stable, slip-resistant surfaces that support mobility devices and people with balance-related disabilities. This helps people plan their visit and navigate the site safely and predictably.
- **Select an Accessible Venue and Create Continuous Improvement Practices**
Make accessibility a baseline requirement in venue selection and layout. Use accessibility audits and checklists to confirm step-free entry and routes. Plan practical solutions where barriers exist, such as temporary mats, alternative routes, shuttles, or relocating key services. Clearly communicate any barriers and solutions in advance so people can plan safely. Use feedback to improve accessibility year over year. Encourage and welcome input, and track change. This helps identify

and eliminate barriers, reducing the need for individual accommodation requests.

- **Provide Crowd and Lineup Management Supports**

Provide alternative lineup options, seating while waiting, clear disability-informed staff support, and designated accessible routes through crowded areas to reduce fatigue and safety risks.

Services

- **Ensure Accessible Washroom Access**

Provide sufficient accessible washrooms in usable locations along step-free routes, with clear accessible signage and regular maintenance. Ensure washrooms are located near content programming and high-traffic areas, so participation supports health and dignity.

- **Provide Accessible Seating and Rest Areas Throughout the Site**

Offer seating and rest areas throughout the site, including near content programming, food areas, and lineups. Provide accessible seating with equitable sightlines and space for companions or support persons where needed. This increases comfort and stamina, supporting full participation.

- **Train Staff and Volunteers and Align Security Practices**

Provide disability-informed training and respectful, privacy-aware problem solving. Ensure staff, volunteers, and security understand accommodation policies, including those related to support persons and service dogs or animals, and apply them consistently without stigma. This ensures additional communications barriers are not created.

Content

- **Include Communication Supports and Sensory-Friendly Spaces**

Provide captioning, sign language interpretation, and clear visual announcements for key content programming and information. Offer quiet and low-sensory spaces, share sound and lighting expectations in advance, and address air quality and scent considerations. Clearly communicate what supports are available and where and when they can be accessed. This allows people to participate longer and more comfortably in a safer environment, in an equitable way.

Barriers Question Comparison

Goers described whether barriers affected their ability to attend or enjoy a festival or event. Organizers described whether they heard about barrier concerns from goers. **58.0% of goers** answered “**Yes**”, compared with **37.8% of organizers**. Organizers were also more likely to answer No (42.2%) than goers (28.0%).

There could be many potential reasons for this difference. Goers may have left without reporting, didn’t have the emotional energy to self-advocate, felt it was not clear how to share barrier reports or concerns, or felt that the reporting would not be acted upon.

Table: Goers Barrier Experienced Versus Organizers Barrier Reports

Response	Goer Number	Goer % (Out of 1065)	Organizer Number	Organizer % (Out of 180)
Yes	622	58.0%	68	37.8%
No	302	28.0%	76	42.2%
Not sure	101	10.0%	36	20.0%

Barriers Question Takeaways

The findings suggest a practical step for organizers to support equitable participation. Organizers can make it easier and safer to report barriers before, during, and after an event. They can clearly share contact options, train staff, volunteers and security to respond respectfully, and make accessibility information easy to find so people know what supports are available and how to ask for help.

Barriers Recommendations Comparison

The goer and organizer free-text comments on barriers were compared to develop the following additional insights and recommendations.

Goer Top Five General Barrier Themes

1. Venue inaccessible
2. Mobility inaccessibility
3. Accessible washroom availability

4. Early departure
5. Noise overload

Organizer Top Five General Barrier Themes

1. Continuous Improvement
2. Mobility Barriers
3. Parking Limitations
4. Wheelchair Accessibility
5. Budget Limits

The goer recommendations related to barriers focus on lived experience outcomes, including the ability to stay for the full event, affordability, reduced self-advocacy, and reliable services. The organizer recommendations related to barrier reporting focus more on how accessibility is planned and delivered, such as step-free routes, accessible parking and arrival areas, venue challenges, budgeting realities, and continuous improvement processes.

Areas of overlap include step-free routes and stable surfaces, accessible parking and drop-off areas, accessible washrooms, and communication and sensory supports. Both groups identify Planning and Hosting as the foundation for accessibility.

Goer additions include affordability and ticketing barriers, reduced self-advocacy, and reliable services such as seating distribution, washroom location, and lineup management. Goers also emphasize sensory conditions, crowd density, and the presence of communication supports such as sign language.

Organizer additions include accessibility audits, partnerships, continuous improvement processes, and explicit planning for venue challenges.

Overall, the goer report highlights lived experience and participation outcomes. The organizer report highlights how accessibility is planned and delivered and the practical challenges that come with it, including budget, venue control, site barriers, and planning timelines.

Key Differences

- **Goer emphasis:** staying for the full event, affordability, reduced self-advocacy, reliable services such as seating and washrooms, and manageable sensory and crowd conditions.
- **Organizer emphasis:** practical decisions about what can be delivered, such as accessible parking and mobility access, venue choice and limitations, communication supports, and improving accessibility over time.
- **Goers place greater emphasis** on Services, such as washrooms, seating, and lineup management, which affect whether people can stay safely and comfortably.
- **Organizers more often** frame barriers as site and site challenges within Planning and Hosting.
- In Content, goers emphasize sensory and crowd conditions, while organizers emphasize delivering communication supports reliably. In Promotion, goers highlight affordability and the self-advocacy burden, while organizers focus on policies and processes.

Final Barrier Recommendations

These final barrier recommendations were created from the comparative analysis of the goer and organizer free-text responses.

Promotion

- **Eliminate or Reduce Costs and Communicate Support Policies**
Publish accessible, plain-language information and policies, including accommodation request processes, ticketing policies, and support person procedures. Keep information accurate and up to date. Minimize or remove extra costs for support people and ensure staff and security provide respectful and consistent support. Accommodations should not bring extra fees whenever possible.

Planning and Hosting

- **Provide Crowd and Lineup Management and Accessible Seating**
Plan and provide safe lineup and crowd management. Reduce the impact of lineups and crowds through layout planning, seating in lineup

areas, and priority accessibility assistance when needed. Participation becomes unsafe or not possible without this management.

- **Create Continuous Improvement Practices and Budget for Accessibility**

Use an ongoing accessibility improvement cycle that includes audits, fixes, verification, and post-event review. Ensure people with disabilities contribute feedback and are involved in planning (with compensation). Build realistic budgets that include digital and onsite accessibility as core costs and pursue grants and partnerships where needed. This helps identify and eliminate barriers, reducing the need for individual accommodation requests.

- **Prioritize Accessible Venue Selection and Site Layout**

Prioritize accessible venues and design site layouts with step-free entry, stable routes, and predictable accessible routes connecting entrances, viewing areas, accessible washrooms, food services, and information points. Communicate both limitations and available solutions clearly so people with disabilities can plan safely.

- **Provide Continuous Wheelchair and Mobility-Accessible Routes**

Ensure step-free access to all key areas from arrival to exit through clear accessible routes that avoid stairs and remain free of obstacles and trip hazards. Provide ramps where needed and plan solutions for slopes or uneven terrain. This supports independent movement for people who use mobility devices such as wheelchairs, walkers, scooters, canes, or crutches, people who don't have sight, and others.

- **Make Parking, Arrival and Departure Accessible and Predictable**

Provide adequate accessible parking close to step-free entrances, reserved accessible parking, accessible drop-off and pick-up areas, and clear accessible signage with appropriate enforcement. This supports planning and independent travel.

Services

- **Ensure Accessible Washroom Access**

Provide reliable accessible washrooms near key areas along step-free routes, including portable accessible washrooms where permanent

facilities are limited. Ensure proper maintenance, adequate turning space for wheelchairs or service dogs or animals, accessible door hardware, and privacy for personal care. Lack of accessible washrooms is often linked to participants leaving early.

- **Train Staff and Volunteers**

Provide disability-informed training for staff and volunteers and ensure consistent policy application to reduce stressful interactions, repeated self-advocacy, and additional communication barriers.

Content

- **Provide Communication Accessibility Supports**

Provide captioning, sign language interpretation, and clear visual announcements for key content programming and information. Plan for diverse sign language needs (such as ASL or LSQ). Ensure systems are tested to confirm they function reliably. This supports equitable participation and helps people engage comfortably and safely.

- **Provide Sensory-Friendly Spaces and Supports**

Include quiet or low-stimulation spaces. Share sound and sensory expectations in advance, including noise levels, crowds, scents, and how and when quiet spaces will remain low stimulation. These spaces support people who need to plan, self-pace, regulate, and rejoin content programming when ready.

Accessibility Improvement Comparison

The goer and organizer free-text comments on Accessibility Improvements were compared to develop the following additional insights and recommendations.

Goer Top Five General Accessibility Improvements Themes

1. Accessible Washrooms
2. Wheelchair Accessibility
3. Seating Provided
4. Accessible Venue
5. Accessible Parking

Organizer Top Five General Accessibility Improvements Themes

1. Accessible Venue
2. Outdoor Venue
3. Accessible Washrooms
4. Wheelchair Accessibility
5. Clear Accessible Signage

The goer recommendations focus more on the “day-of experience”. These included whether someone could enter the event, move around the site, access a washroom, manage fatigue, and safely navigate crowds and lineups. This appears in stronger emphasis on crowd and lineup supports and onsite essentials such as food and water access. Goers also place strong emphasis on affordability and ticketing barriers.

The organizer recommendations focus more on accessibility planning and delivery, including venue audits, continuous improvement practices, and communicating accessibility information on websites and social media before people arrive. Organizers also identify practical challenges such as budget limits. They also describe strategies to build accessibility capacity over time through funding and partnerships.

Areas of overlap include accessible venue selection and setup, step-free and wheelchair-friendly routes, accessible washrooms as a basic requirement, and clear accessible signage and wayfinding. Both groups also highlight comfort, and participation supports such as seating and rest options, and communication accessibility for people who are Deaf or hard of hearing.

Goer additions include stronger emphasis on crowd and lineup supports, access to basic onsite services, and affordability and ticketing barriers.

Organizer additions include planning tools such as accessibility audits, communication systems, and continuous improvement processes that account for budgets and practical limits.

Overall, the goer dataset highlights lived participation outcomes, focusing on whether people can access and remain at the event safely and comfortably.

The organizer dataset focuses on how accessibility is planned and delivered, including limits related to venues, budgets, and planning timelines.

Key Differences

- **Goer emphasis:** the “day-of experience”, including entering the event, moving around the site, accessing washrooms, managing fatigue, navigating crowds and lineups, and addressing cost barriers.
- **Organizer emphasis:** planning and delivery related items including venue audits, accessibility communication before events, budgeting realities, and continuous improvement.

Together, the findings suggest a practical approach: treat the most common goer needs as baseline expectations and use organizer tools such as audits, accessibility needs capture, staff training, and continuous improvement to deliver these supports consistently.

However, the data reflects what goers request and what organizers report providing, rather than measuring accessibility outcomes directly. Tracking repeatable measures year over year, such as site audit results, accommodation requests and response times, and post-event feedback from people with disabilities, would provide a clearer picture of accessibility improvements over time.

Final Accessibility Improvement Recommendations

These final recommendations related to Accessibility Improvements were created from the comparative analysis of the goer and organizer free-text responses.

Promotion

- **Provide Clear and Accessible Accessibility Information in Advance**
Publish clear, easy-to-find accessibility information before ticket sales, including event times, locations, accessibility features, known limitations, and a dedicated accessibility contact. Keep information consistent across websites, social media, digital, and printed materials. Use a central accessibility webpage (with a printable version or other

printed materials) and reinforce it through social media, email, and ticketing so people can confidently plan their visit. Clearly communicate policies related to service dogs or animals and sensory supports.

Planning and Hosting

- **Prioritize Accessible (Outdoor) Venue Selection and Site Layout**
Select accessible venues early and confirm accessibility through audits or walkthroughs with people who have lived experience (with compensation) before finalizing site plans. This is especially important for outdoor venues. Plan site layouts with step-free entry, minimal stairs and ramps where needed, accessible routes, and usable accessible washrooms. If limitations or barriers exist, communicate them clearly and early, and identify available options or accommodations. This helps reduce the need for accommodation requests and self-advocacy.
- **Provide Wheelchair and Mobility-Accessible Routes**
Provide a step-free route network across the site, including ramps where level changes occur. Ensure stable surfaces, adequate route width, and turning space for wheelchairs or service dogs or animals. Ensure accessible entrances and exits from arrival areas to content programming and key services so people who use mobility devices such as wheelchairs, walkers, scooters, canes, or crutches can move safely and independently.
- **Provide Clear Accessible Signage and Wayfinding**
Use clear, high-contrast, consistent accessible signage and accessible maps that mark routes, washrooms, quiet spaces, parking areas, drop-off and pick-up locations, and accessible seating or viewing areas. This supports independent navigation and safe movement throughout the site.
- **Make Parking, Arrival and Transportation Accessible and Predictable**
Provide accessible parking and accessible drop-off and pick-up areas close to step-free entrances. Provide clear arrival instructions in advance and accessible transportation or shuttle options where distances are long so people can plan and travel independently.

- **Provide Crowd and Lineup Management Supports**

Provide safe crowd and lineup management. Offer alternative lineup options, seating while waiting, staff support, and clear procedures to reduce fatigue and safety risks.

Services

- **Ensure Accessible Washroom Access**

Provide sufficient accessible washrooms near key areas along step-free routes, including portable accessible washrooms where permanent facilities are limited. Ensure washrooms are maintained, have adequate turning space for wheelchairs or service dogs or animals, and clear accessible signage. Ensure washrooms are distributed across the site along step-free routes.

- **Provide Accessible Seating and Rest Areas With Weather Supports**

Provide accessible seating and viewing areas across the site (not just one location) with equitable sightlines, including wheelchair spaces and space for companions or support persons. Include rest areas for fatigue management for both participants and staff. Provide weather supports such as shelters, shade, and heat-relief options near content programming and key areas to support comfort and safety.

- **Provide Accessible Ticketing and Accommodation Supports**

Provide accessible ticketing and support options, including online, phone, and onsite assistance, with a dedicated accessibility contact who has received disability-informed training. Collect accessibility needs during registration and ticketing where possible. Provide an identifiable onsite accessibility team or help desk to resolve issues quickly. Train staff and volunteers to respond respectfully and consistently, so people do not need to repeatedly explain their accessibility needs. Provide financial and administrative supports that enable participation. This includes policies on cost elimination or reduction strategies, and companion or support person access. Note that accommodations should not bring extra fees whenever possible.

Content

- **Include Communication Supports and Sensory-Friendly Spaces**
Provide captioning, subtitles, sign language interpretation, and clear visual announcements for key content programming and information. Plan for diverse sign language needs such as ASL or LSQ and clearly communicate in advance when and where these supports will be available. Include quiet or low-stimulation spaces and communicate sensory expectations in advance, including noise levels, crowds, scents, and when quiet spaces will remain low-stimulation. This supports equitable participation and helps people engage comfortably and safely.

Final Conclusions and Recommendations

This section summarizes the main findings of the study and what they mean for improving accessibility at Canadian festivals and events. It brings together the perspectives of both goers and organizers and highlights the key insights from the three focus areas: Accommodations, Barriers, and Accessibility Improvements. The section also outlines practical recommendations and considerations for future accessibility standards and ongoing evaluation.

Overall Findings

This study examined the accessibility of Canadian festivals and events between 2023 and 2025 through two perspectives: the lived experiences of goers and the self-reported practices of organizers. By analyzing data across the focus areas of Accommodations, Barriers, and Accessibility Improvements, the research identified both shared priorities and important gaps in how accessibility is planned and experienced.

Across all datasets, accessibility was consistently described as needing to work **end-to-end**. This suggests that goers must be able to plan their visit in advance, arrive at the event, move safely through the site, access essential services such as accessible washrooms and seating, and participate in content programming without barriers at each step. When any part of this chain breaks down, the result can be fatigue, safety concerns, repeated self-advocacy, or early departure from the event.

Both goers and organizers identified the same core accessibility elements. These included step-free routes and stable surfaces, accessible parking and arrival areas, clear accessible signage and wayfinding, accessible washrooms, accessible seating and rest options, and communication supports such as sign language interpretation and captioning. Sensory-friendly spaces and supports were also consistently identified as important for full participation.

What the Comparison Shows

The comparison of goer experiences and organizer self-reporting shows strong alignment in identifying the **foundations of accessibility**, particularly

within the built environment and site logistics. However, the analysis also highlights differences in emphasis.

Goers focused primarily on **lived participation outcomes**. Their responses described whether they could stay for the full event, manage fatigue, navigate crowds safely, and access reliable services such as washrooms, seating, and communication supports. Goers also emphasized affordability, clear information before the event, and reducing the need to repeatedly request accommodations.

Organizers focused more on **how accessibility is planned and delivered**, including venue barriers, budgets, planning processes, and timelines. Organizers described how accessibility is delivered through planning tools such as venue audits, accessibility policies, staff training, and continuous improvement processes.

These differences are significant because they influence how accessibility priorities are set. When lived experience and festival and event planning and delivery are not aligned, people with disabilities may still face barriers that require additional self-advocacy or lead to reduced participation.

Why These Findings Matter

These findings highlight that accessibility at festivals and events is not only a technical issue, but also a planning and service delivery issue. While many organizers recognize the importance of accessibility, the comparison with goer experiences shows that gaps remain between what is planned and what is experienced in practice.

Addressing these gaps requires treating accessibility as a coordinated, end-to-end system that connects planning, communication, service delivery, and content programming. When these elements work together, accessibility becomes more reliable, and participation becomes more equitable.

Implications for Festivals and Events

Taken together, the findings suggest that accessibility improves most

effectively when it is treated as a coordinated and planned, end-to-end system **rather than a series of individual accommodations**.

Festivals and events that plan accessibility early, communicate clearly before the event, provide reliable onsite supports, and provide disability-informed training to staff to respond consistently, are better able to support equitable participation. Accessibility improvements do not depend on large budgets or large events. Even smaller festivals and events can reduce barriers by providing clear information, predictable support processes, and thoughtful planning of arrival, movement, and participation.

The findings also show that accessibility must extend beyond the physical site. Policies, communication practices, staff training, and service delivery are equally important in determining whether accessibility works in practice.

Final Integrated Recommendations

Based on the comparative analysis of goer and organizer datasets, the following priorities emerged as the most important actions for improving accessibility at Canadian festivals and events.

- **Plan accessibility early.**
Accessibility should be considered during venue selection, site layout planning, and content programming design. Early planning allows organizers to identify barriers, communicate limitations clearly, and implement solutions before the event begins.
- **Provide clear accessibility information before the event.**
Accessible information, ticketing policies, and accommodation request processes should be easy to find and understand both online and in printed materials. Clear communication reduces uncertainty and helps people plan their participation.
- **Ensure accessible arrival and navigation.**
Accessible parking, drop-off areas, step-free routes, and clear and accessible signage and wayfinding are essential to allow people to arrive and move safely through the event.
- **Provide reliable essential services.**
Accessible washrooms, distributed accessible seating and rest areas,

and accessible viewing options help people stay comfortably and safely at events.

- **Include communication and sensory accessibility in content programming.**

Captioning, sign language interpretation, assistive listening, and sensory-friendly spaces should be planned as part of content programming design.

- **Provide training for staff, volunteers, and security.**

Disability-informed training and consistent policies ensure that accessibility supports are delivered respectfully and reliably.

- **Use continuous improvement practices.**

Accessibility audits (with compensation for auditors with disabilities), feedback from people with disabilities, and post-event reviews can help organizers improve accessibility year over year. This should include both online and physical environments.

Implications for Accessibility Standards

The findings from this study suggest several important considerations for future accessibility standards related to festivals and events in Canada.

First, accessibility standards should reflect the full **event experience**, not only the built environment. Physical accessibility, such as step-free routes, accessible washrooms, and accessible parking, remains essential. However, the findings show that accessibility also depends on clear information, predictable policies, disability-informed trained staff, and reliable communication supports such as captioning and sign language interpretation. Standards that address only physical on-site locations may not fully support participation, if other elements of the experience create barriers.

Second, accessibility standards should support **end-to-end accessibility**. This suggests that ensuring that accessibility works across the entire event journey: before the event (information and ticketing), during arrival and navigation (parking, routes, and signage), through essential services (washrooms, seating, and rest areas), and within content programming environments (communication accessibility and sensory supports). When

accessibility is addressed across all of these stages, people with disabilities are more likely to attend and stay for the full event.

Third, the findings suggest that standards should recognize **accessibility planning and delivery realities** faced by organizers. Many organizers reported challenges related to budgets, venue control, and temporary event environments, such as outdoor venues or rented spaces. Accessibility standards should therefore support practical accessibility planning and delivery, including clear guidance, planning tools, and phased improvements where full accessibility cannot be immediately achieved.

Finally, accessibility standards should encourage **continuous improvement** rather than one-time compliance. Accessibility audits, staff training, feedback from people with disabilities, and post-event review processes can help festivals and events strengthen accessibility over time.

Taken together, the findings suggest that future accessibility standards for festivals and events should combine **clear baseline expectations with practical accessibility planning and delivery guidance**, ensuring that accessibility becomes a consistent and reliable part of event planning and delivery.

Future Measurement and Research

This study provides detailed insights into the experiences of goers and the practices reported by organizers. However, the data reflects what people report experiencing or providing, rather than directly measuring accessibility outcomes over time.

To better understand progress in accessibility across the festival and event sector, future work should include **repeatable measures**, such as:

- Site accessibility audit results.
- Accommodation request tracking and resolution times.
- Post-event feedback from people with disabilities.
- Digital accessibility assessments of festival websites.

Collecting and reporting this information consistently would make it possible to track improvements and identify where additional support or guidance is needed.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the foundations of accessible festivals and events are well understood by both goers and organizers. The next step is ensuring that these foundations are embedded consistently, so that accessibility becomes a reliable and expected part of festival and event experiences across Canada. Continued collaboration with people with disabilities will be essential to ensure that festivals and events across Canada become more accessible, inclusive, and welcoming for everyone.

Appendix A: Project Team and Partners

Project Team

Thank you to everyone on the project team; partner centres; our project advisory committee; and other project partners.

Independent Living Canada Project Team:

- Freda Uwa: National Executive Director
- Lisa Snider: Project Coordinator
- Omotola Abayomi: Alberta Site Coordinator
- Amanda Lush: Newfoundland and Labrador Site Coordinator
- Véronique Hardy: Ontario Site Coordinator
- Jennessa Faubert: Ontario Site Coordinator
- Jhun Ramos: British Columbia Site Coordinator
- Necole Young: British Columbia Site Coordinator
- Kohl Gray: Administrative Assistant
- Steve Lind: Finance
- Tom Pugliese: Communications and Marketing

Partner Centres:

- Independent Living Resource Centre of Calgary
- Empower The Disability Resource Centre
- Disability Resource Centre for Independent Living
- Richmond Centre for Disability

Project Advisory Committee

- Freda Uwa: Independent Living Canada
- Diane Kreuger: ILRC Calgary
- Kathy Hawkins: Empower: The Disability Resource Centre
- Ella Huang: Richmond Centre for Disability
- Nancy Pagani: Richmond Centre for Disability
- Jennifer Jucknat: Disability Resource Centre for IL
- Winnie Luk: Disability Screen Office
- Sam Mason: Voice of Albertans with Disabilities (Former)

- Mandy Penney: Disability Advocate
- Dan Ashworth: Researcher CBC Music (Former)
- Robin East: Barrier Free Saskatchewan
- Kevin Ng: Rick Hansen Foundation
- Shawna Joynt: Canadian Association of the Deaf
- Courtney Lanouette: Gateway Association (Former)
- Rojan Nasiri: Richmond Community Social Development
- Amanda McCulley: Richmond Community Social Development
- Olivia Boguslaw: Richmond Community Social Development

Others Who Provided Research

- Suzanne Larocque: Independent Living Canada
- Laetitia Mfamobani: Rick Hanson Foundation
- Jim Escott: Empower Disability Services
- Hannah Lee: ARCH Disability Law Centre (Former)
- Florence Kwok-Intern: ARCH Disability Law Centre (Former)

Appendix B: Other Disabilities List

Allergies, Sensitivities, and Environmental Triggers

- Air quality allergies
- Environmental allergies
- Food allergies
- Multiple chemical sensitivities
- Perfume and tobacco scent allergies or conditions
- Scent allergies or sensitivity
- Sensitivity to light, noise, and air pollution
- Severe anaphylactic allergy
- Sunlight sensitivity
- Water allergies
- Electromagnetic hypersensitivity

Respiratory and Breathing Conditions

- Asthma
- Breathing-related conditions
- Being oxygen dependent

Neurological and Brain-Related Conditions

- ADHD
- Auditory processing disorder
- Brain injury
- Epilepsy
- Essential tremors
- Head injury
- Hot-weather-triggered conditions and seizures
- Migraines
- Short-term memory loss
- Stroke recovery

Mental Health and Neurodevelopmental Conditions

- Anxiety or general anxiety disorder
- Asperger's
- Autism
- Child abuse victim
- Major depressive disorder
- OCD

- Seasonal affective disorder
- Winter depression

Cardiovascular and Autonomic Conditions

- Heart issues
- Postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome (POTS)

Immune System, Infectious and Systemic Conditions

- Being immunocompromised
- Cancer
- Chronic illness
- Invisible illness
- Long COVID
- Lyme and tick-based illnesses
- Mould illness

Gastrointestinal, Metabolic and Endocrine Conditions

- Celiac disease
- Cholesterol
- Diabetes
- Gastrointestinal conditions
- Having an ostomy
- Liver conditions
- Loss of sensation of feeling full
- Obesity

Fatigue, Energy and Sleep-Related Conditions

- Chronic fatigue
- Energy-related conditions
- Sleep disorder

Mobility, Physical and Functional Conditions

- Age-related conditions
- Being oxygen dependent
- Down syndrome
- Dynamic movement disability
- Temporary use of a wheelchair

Other Medical Conditions

- TSD

Appendix C: Focus Group Barriers List

1. Sensory Friendly Areas, Quiet Areas, and Rest Areas
2. Seating
3. Parking, Shuttles, and Transportation
4. Pathways and Movement
5. Washrooms
6. Staff Education and Training
7. ASL Interpretation, Captioning, and Audio Description
8. Discounted Admission, Free Admission for Support Person, and Provide Support People or Guides
9. Detailed Information on Accessibility Features
10. Masking Measures, Air Quality, Shaded Areas, and No Scents
11. Consultation with People with Disabilities, Disability Organizations, or Accessibility Consultants at Planning Stage
12. Signage and Wayfinding
13. Free or Low-Cost Rentals of Equipment
14. Pre-Planning for Accessibility
15. Ramps

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