

Piloting Accessibility Diversity Assessment Tool (DAT): Supporting Employees with Disabilities in SMEs



This report was produced as part of a project funded by the Future Skills Centre (FSC), with financial support from the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program.

FSC is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to preparing Canadians for employment success. We believe Canadians should feel confident about the skills they have to succeed in a changing workforce. As a pan-Canadian community, we are collaborating to rigorously identify, test, measure, and share innovative approaches to assessing and developing the skills Canadians need to thrive in the days and years ahead. The Future Skills Centre was founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint ADE, and The Conference Board of Canada

The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Future Skills Centre or the Government of Canada.





The Diversity Institute conducts and coordinates multi-disciplinary, multi-stakeholder research to address the needs of diverse Canadians, the changing nature of skills and competencies, and the policies, processes and tools that advance economic inclusion and success. Our action-oriented, evidence-based approach is advancing knowledge of the complex barriers faced by underrepresented groups, leading practices to effect change, and producing concrete results. The Diversity Institute is a research lead for the Future Skills Centre.



The Future Skills Centre (FSC) is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to driving innovation in skills development so that everyone in Canada can be prepared for the future of work. We partner with policy makers, researchers, practitioners, employers and labour, and post-secondary institutions to solve pressing labour market challenges and ensure that everyone can benefit from relevant lifelong learning opportunities. We are founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint, and The Conference Board of Canada, and are funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills program.



The Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) is the indispensable partner of business and Canada's largest, most influential provincial chamber. It is an independent, non-profit advocacy and member services organization. The OCC has 60,000 members, including large multinational corporations, small-to-medium-sized enterprises, labour unions, postsecondary institutions, non-profits, associations and close to 150 chambers of commerce and boards of trade. The OCC's mission is to convene, align and advance the interests of its members through principled policy work, value-added business services and broad engagement to drive competitiveness and economic growth in the province.



Authors

Wendy Cukier, PhD

Founder and academic director, Diversity Institute, Ted Rogers School of Management
Professor, Entrepreneurship & Strategy, Toronto Metropolitan University

Katlynn Sverko

Director, research – special projects, Diversity Institute

Contributors

Joey Chong

Program manager, Diversity Institute

Benymen Israilov

Research Assistant, Diversity Institute

Carter Man

Research Assistant, Diversity Institute

Matthew McDonald

Research Assistant, Diversity Institute

Publication Date

September 2024

Contents

Context	1
Goals	8
The Accessibility DAT	9
Methods	12
Preliminary Findings	13
The Way Forward	16
Appendix A: Accessibility Diversity Assessment Tool	
Questions	19
References	22

Context

Persons living with disabilities face various barriers in employment and the workforce. This report aims to enhance workplace inclusivity for persons living with disabilities by leveraging SMEs as key drivers of disability inclusion. The Accessibility Diversity Assessment Tool seeks to support organizations, especially small and medium-enterprises (SMEs), in developing and implementing EDI within their organizational practices and processes. The overall goal of this report is to improve accessibility and promote equitable employment opportunities for persons living with disabilities.

Persons living with disabilities and their employment

According to the most recent data from Statistics Canada, as of 2022, 27% of Canadians aged 15 years and older -nearly 8 million people in Canada- have one or more disabilities.¹ This is an increase from 2017, where the disability rate was 22%, with about 6.2 million people.² This increase is reported to be due to greater recognition of mental health issues, cognitive differences, and an aging population.³

Disability is a strong predictor of employment outcomes, labour market earnings, and economic status.^{4,5,6,7,8} Employment statistics highlight the gaps and challenges faced by persons with disabilities in the workforce. According to the 2022 Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD), the unemployment rate remained higher among persons with a disability compared to people without disabilities (7.6% vs. 4.6%).⁹ Among persons aged 16-64, 65.1% of those living with a disability were employed compared to 80.1% of those without disabilities.¹⁰ The employment rate gap between persons with and without disabilities was 19.8% points in 2023.¹¹

Research highlights several barriers that prevent persons living with disabilities from entering the labour market or impeding their success in the workplace. These barriers include accessibility challenges, stigma and stereotypes related to disabilities, a lack of employer awareness of creating inclusive and accessible work environments, misperception of accommodation costs, and unclear diversity legislation for employers, particularly in small and medium enterprises (SMEs).^{12, 13, 14, 15, 16} These factors impact decisions about disability disclosure and contribute to microaggressions in the workplace.^{17,18}

In addition, the employment outcomes of persons living with disabilities vary depending on the severity and type of the disability.^{19,20} 76% of persons living with a mild disability are employed

compared to 67% of those living with a moderate disability, 49% of persons living with a severe disability and 31% of those living with a very severe disability.²¹ More particularly, persons living with disabilities that often or always limit their daily activities are most likely to be unemployed long-term.²² Amongst those with post-secondary education, university graduates with severe disabilities have worse employment outcomes than those who did not finish high school without disabilities.²³ 32.4% of persons living with visible disabilities with a bachelor's degree or higher report that they do not have the opportunities to use their skills, education, and experience in the workplace.²⁴ Findings showed that amongst those who are unemployed, 50% of persons living with disabilities which affect their daily activities have been out of work for five or more years, compared to less than half (21%) of people without a disability.²⁵

Persons living with disabilities who are unemployed and not actively searching for work are also more likely to report that their physical health is fair or poor, and much more likely to report they have a physical or mental disability.²⁶ A survey on unemployment and disability found that 77% of employed respondents reported excellent or good health compared to only 32% of those who are unemployed and not looking.²⁷ This indicates a potentially vicious cycle, where unemployment and poor health may reinforce each other, further emphasizing the importance of employment opportunities and support to improve health outcomes and benefits.²⁸ Additionally, social and economic disadvantages, such as lower living standards and reduced income, have become more prevalent among individuals with disabilities, affecting 12.3% of this group compared to 7.4% of those without disabilities.²⁹

Many persons living with disabilities are highly educated and motivated to make contributions to the Canadian economy. Research shows that employees with disabilities often provide higher net value to organizations,³⁰ and can lead to increased profits, cost-effectiveness, and better employee retention.³¹ At the societal level, the employment of persons living with disabilities can reduce their dependence on government income support, and enhance their social inclusion.³² However they continue to face barriers and discrimination in their employment and career advancement opportunities.^{33,34,35}

In the workplace, persons living with disabilities are at an increased risk of experiencing workplace harassment and discrimination due to their disability.³⁶ Recent research by the Diversity Institute and Environics Institute, supported by the Future Skills Centre, shows persons living with disabilities report high levels of workplace discrimination in the private sector (30%), government (39%), and nonprofit sectors (44%). Those with intersecting identities—for example, Indigenous Peoples or racialized people with disabilities, often face additional and compounded barriers.³⁷ In addition, prospective employers who lack the education and awareness about fostering an

inclusive and accessible work environment are less willing and able to hire or accommodate persons living with disabilities.^{38,39} This is especially concerning for persons living with invisible disabilities, such as chronic pain and mental or neurological conditions, who are less likely to be recruited or hired if they disclose their disabilities to prospective employers.^{40,41} Once employed, persons living with disabilities often find that they lack the adequate accommodations to ensure their success, despite legislated requirements in many provinces.⁴² The lack of employers engaging in accessibility and inclusive workplace practices, a majority of which are small and medium-sized enterprises with limited resources, often hire from default talent pools without considering additional pipelines, overlooking those from equity-deserving groups such as persons living with disabilities.^{43,44} There is extensive research that shows persons living with disabilities do not have access to adequate career counselling and services, wraparound supports, and employment pathways that consider their individual needs.^{45, 46, 47, 48}

The Government of Canada has launched several programs to support persons with disabilities. For example, as part of the *Employment Strategy for Canadians with Disabilities* initiative,⁴⁹ the government has allocated \$272.6 million through the *Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities*⁵⁰ and announced \$6.5 million in funding for seven organizations working with Indigenous, Black, and racialized Canadians with disabilities to provide supports to help improve employment for members of these communities that face additional and unique barriers.⁵¹

The *Employment Strategy for Canadians with Disabilities* is a plan to break down the barriers and close the job gap for persons with disabilities by 2040.⁵² This initiative is part of the *Disability Inclusion Action Plan*⁵³ and aligns with the principles of the *Accessible Canada Act*,⁵⁴ which was launched in 2019. The *Employment Strategy for Canadians with Disabilities* focuses on three main goals: 1) Individuals: helping persons with disabilities find and maintain good jobs, advance in their careers, or become entrepreneurs; 2) Employers: assisting employers in creating inclusive and accessible workplaces; and 3) Enablers: increasing the capacity of organizations that support disability inclusion in employment.⁵⁵ This strategy represents a significant step towards building a more inclusive and equitable Canadian workforce.

The role of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs)

To build towards increasing the number of persons living with disabilities in Canada's labour supply, it is critically important to assess how organizations and businesses can deliver programs, services, and offer employment through tailored support. Addressing barriers through employer practices and policies, improving accessibility within workplaces, and hiring persons living with disabilities could result in an increase in Canadian GDP by \$16.9 billion by the year 2030.⁵⁶ Additionally, projections suggest that by enhancing workplace conditions for accessibility,

Canadians with disabilities could contribute 550,000 additional workers to the labour force by 2030.⁵⁷

There is also increasing recognition of the role SMEs play in promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion, particularly in providing employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.^{58,59} Given their prevalence—SMEs make up over 90% of Canadian businesses and employ 88.5% of the country’s private sector workforce, holding significant potential for driving inclusive hiring practices.^{60,61,62} For example, the Government of Canada initiated a campaign to inform SME employers of this significant untapped labour pool source addressing their labour force needs and further disability inclusion goals.⁶³

SMEs have legal obligations, social and moral imperatives, as well as business advantages to advance diversity and inclusion for persons living with disabilities. Governments are increasingly enacting laws and regulations that require businesses to adhere to EDI principles and accessibility standards.^{64,65} In addition, standards are also emerging at the national and international level, along with voluntary initiatives, such as the 50-30 Challenge, that encourage organizations to increase the representation of equity-deserving groups—including persons with disabilities—in leadership and senior roles.⁶⁶ On the business side, customers are becoming more socially conscious and prefer to support socially responsible businesses and demonstrate a commitment to EDI.^{67, 68, 69, 70} Investors and stakeholders are increasingly considering EDI factors in their investment decisions, SMEs seeking investment should implement and demonstrate robust EDI practices to attract funding and meet the expectations of socially responsible investors.^{71 72, 73} SMEs should also foster EDI values to attract a diverse pool of applicants and retain their existing workforce by creating an environment where all employees feel valued and included.^{74 75}

Barriers faced by SMEs in adopting disability inclusion

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) face several barriers that affect their ability to hire, retain, and accommodate persons living with disabilities.⁷⁶ Underlying factors contributing to the underemployment of persons with disabilities in SMEs include negative biases, stigmatization regarding their work-related abilities, and concerns about perceived costs of accommodation.^{77,78,79} Employers from SMEs were found to have less favourable attitudes towards persons living with disabilities than in larger companies. Many SMEs employers lack the awareness and education on disabilities, leading to negative or inaccurate biases and stigmatization regarding the work abilities of persons living with disabilities.^{80,81, 82} There are misconceptions that persons living with disabilities are unwilling to engage in challenging roles that influence hiring decisions throughout the employment cycle.⁸³ In turn, these biases and

stigmatization affect hiring decisions and contribute to the underemployment of persons living with disabilities. Furthermore, employers often fail to identify candidates with disabilities in their applicant pools, leading to inadequate accessibility supports that undermine performance.⁸⁴

Compared to larger companies, SMEs often lack the funding, resources, and knowledge to effectively integrate employees living with disabilities into their workplaces.^{85, 86, 87, 88} Particularly, cost was reported to be a major concern for SMEs employers to hire and offer accommodations to persons living with disabilities.⁸⁹ SMEs report the lack of resources and budgets to create adaptive roles for persons living with disabilities due to the size and operational challenges of SMEs.⁹⁰ Moreover, many SMEs are interested in EDI but do not know the relevant and effective ways to start and the actions to take.^{91, 92}

In a report by the Government of Canada, findings suggest that SMEs employers are motivated to integrate an EDI lens to their hiring and recruitment processes.⁹³ Some SMEs report being driven by an equity-based perspective and want to offer opportunities to those facing barriers in the labour market. Other SMEs reveal that they see employing persons living with disabilities as a viable way to access new talent pools. Despite their interests or efforts in engaging in inclusive employment practices, only a small number of SMEs have adopted a formal inclusive workplace policy into their companies.⁹⁴

Overall, effective disability inclusion requires company-wide support; SMEs often lack dedicated staff or departments to focus on these initiatives and do not have in-house EDI experts to translate complex EDI principles into an effective organizational strategy.⁹⁵ Moreover, SMEs have a lack of disability awareness, including finding available support (i.e., government support), and a lack of commitment from the senior management levels.⁹⁶ At large, SMEs face significant barriers that hinder the development of effective disability inclusion policies and practices within their companies.

Opportunities and advantages for SMEs to adopt disability inclusion

Despite these barriers, SMEs can be a key contributor in promoting disability inclusion in the workplace, especially compared to larger or international companies.⁹⁷ One key advantage of SMEs is the smaller employee size. The smaller employee size allows for easier implementation of training programs and a more targeted approach to training for disability inclusion. Moreover, the small company size can provide a more accessible contracting process, reducing the layers and phases typically associated with the traditional contracting process in larger companies.⁹⁸ This streamlined and more simplified approach can alleviate the barriers, such as extensive interviews and lengthy procedures involving multiple levels of approval, for persons living with disabilities

entering the workforce. SMEs can respond to the unique needs and capabilities of their candidates more swiftly, and tap into a diverse talent pool that may be overlooked by larger companies.^{99, 100} Indeed, hiring persons living with disabilities can enhance firm competitiveness and profitability in the long-term.¹⁰¹

Another significant advantage of SMEs is their ability to provide flexible and adaptable job roles and job descriptions.¹⁰² SMEs are able to offer workplace adjustments for persons with disabilities in more responsive manners due to their smaller sizes. SMEs often have a more personalized approach to disability inclusion in the workplace and establish closer relationships with their employees.¹⁰³ This applies to both the hiring and retaining of persons living with disabilities, including those who acquire a disability while already employed.¹⁰⁴ The personalized approach can foster a sense of belongingness, acceptance and inclusion for employees living with disabilities. Due to their sizes, SMEs can also monitor and assess EDI progress and effectiveness more readily and effectively.¹⁰⁵

In addition, governments and support systems (e.g., NGOs and foundations) around the world are providing initiatives designed to promote disability inclusion within SMEs.¹⁰⁶ These partnerships and connections further position SMEs as future leaders in disability inclusion. Furthermore, SMEs are often actively involved in their local communities through partnerships and local engagements. This provides opportunities for SMEs to make a meaningful impact on disability inclusion at the grassroots and community levels.¹⁰⁷

Implementing EDI strategies in SMEs

To effectively integrate persons with disabilities into their workforce, SMEs can build their commitment by implementing EDI strategies across six core domains within their business operations – governance and leadership, human resources, values and culture fostering accessible work environments, measurement and tracking of EDI initiatives, and value chain, through various of the following strategies. Promoting persons living with disabilities into leadership roles can provide optics, perspectives, and the influence necessary to dismantle workplace biases towards employees with disabilities and enact change through a “tone from the top” approach, as senior leaders can lead through example and reinforce values that embody inclusivity.¹⁰⁸ Human resources practices and processes need to be shaped to accommodate persons living with disabilities through inclusive job advertisements, alternative job application methods, unconscious bias training for staff and managers, and tailored flexible work options which consider the diverse needs of persons living with disabilities.¹⁰⁹ Accessible work environments, which are typically governed by a growing body of legislation and standards, must be implemented to provide vital assistance to those with physical, mobility, and cognitive impairments.¹¹⁰

Another prominent way SMEs have embedded inclusivity within their culture is through accessibility policies and long-term accessibility plans, which incorporate employee training, information and communication standards to meet the needs of persons living with disabilities, and employment processes that facilitate recruitment and retention of persons living with disabilities.¹¹¹ To be effective, SMEs need to develop EDI strategies that are tailored to their specific organizational context, size, industry, and workforce. SMEs can partner with external organizations, such as advocacy groups like the Discover Ability Network (DAN), which are specialized and have the expertise to help them increase their exposure to persons living with disabilities for recruitment and create inclusive strategies through free training, virtual workshops, and learning modules that enhance hiring opportunities for persons living with disabilities within their business.¹¹²

Education, skills, and competency training are readily available and freely accessible for SMEs and organizations alike to learn how to remove barriers that restrict employment opportunities for persons living with disabilities. Furthermore, leveraging inclusive and assistive technology solutions is an innovative way to create a more accessible work environment for persons living with disabilities.¹¹³ The financial costs associated with the development of new technologies can be offset through government incentives and securing funding grants or loans, such as WorkBC¹¹⁴ and Mentor Works,¹¹⁵ which helps make these technologies more affordable and accessible for SMEs experiencing financial constraints. Catering to the needs of employees with disabilities as well as consumers with disabilities provides alternative business opportunities. This can help with overall profitability and business viability, as SMEs which respond to the needs of persons with disabilities through the development of tailored products and services can discover new revenue streams when they diversify their business offerings.¹¹⁶ There are untapped market segments in procurement, product design, marketing, sales, and support to engage with the disability community and market. Embracing these strategies not only helps fulfill legal obligations and moral imperatives but also positions SMEs to thrive in an increasingly diverse economy.

Goals

There is considerable evidence to indicate that increasingly organizations across sectors and sizes understand the importance of robust EDI policies to advance their organizational goals. The research supports the notion that EDI strategies ensure organizations have access to talent, new ideas and innovation and are better able to serve increasingly diverse markets while avoiding risk. Yet many lack the knowledge and capacity needed to develop and implement EDI strategies. The Diversity Assessment Tool (DAT) App was developed to support organizations, with a particular focus on SMEs, in developing and implementing EDI. The DAT App is a free-to-use digital tool developed by the Diversity Institute at Toronto Metropolitan University that provides a simple diagnostic and generates recommendations for a customized EDI strategy illustrated with relevant best practices.

The purpose of the project is to iterate, build, and test an Accessibility Add-On to the DAT App, named Accessibility DAT, to strengthen the specific recommendations related to disability, accessibility and inclusion. The project will:

1. Develop diagnostic questions focused on aspects of disability accessibility and inclusion
2. Provide recommendations illustrated with best practices to support the development of a customized strategy
3. Test the Accessibility DAT Add-on with key stakeholder organizations to get feedback and suggestions
4. Make the Accessibility DAT add-on available to the public for SMEs.

This interim report focuses on the development and implementation of the diagnostic tool and feedback from participants.

The Accessibility DAT

In 2022, the Diversity Institute, with a number of partners, launched the first version of the Diversity Assessment Tool Application (DAT App), a digital tool to help SMEs get started with a customized EDI strategy. Since then, the DAT App has been updated and improved based on feedback from organizations to make the tool more impactful when developing an equity, diversity, and inclusion strategy. The DAT App has been designed to be adaptable to different contexts and is among the tools supporting the 50 – 30 Challenge. Today, over 390 organizations have used the DAT App to develop their EDI strategy

The DAT report, templates and examples help organizations identify opportunities, take action and create sustainable change informed by a database of over 1200 best practices. Feedback has confirmed its usefulness, for being a straightforward tool that provides a clear snapshot of their current status, as well as easy-to-follow recommendations for next steps. The DAT App also helps organizations to measure their change and growth, as organizations are able to reuse the tool after implementing the proposed strategies from their report.

The Accessibility Add-On to the DAT App, Accessibility DAT, was initially created in partnership with the Ontario Chamber of Commerce’s DiscoverAbility Network project, to supplement the DAT with specific assessments concerning persons with disabilities. Disabilities may include physical, intellectual, neurological, cognitive and mental-health differences. The Accessibility DAT offers an opportunity for SMEs to examine their policies, processes, and practices in order to develop a strategy that not only complies with legal requirements but also creates a welcoming and productive workplace.

Using the six dimensions that structure the DAT App, questions surrounding disability inclusion and accessibility inclusion were created:

1. **Governance, Leadership, and Strategy:** An important step is to set the “tone at the top.” Ensuring diverse representation in leadership, governance, and decision-making teams leads to a range of perspectives on strategic issues. It also signals who belongs and is important for engaging diverse employees and responding to stakeholder expectations.
2. **Human Resources Processes:** This involves a comprehensive assessment of an organization’s human resource processes from a diversity and inclusion perspective, including recruitment, selection, training, retention, promotion, and separation. This is critical for building the pool

of diverse talent.

3. **Values and Culture:** As Peter Drucker said, “culture eats strategy”. Building a culture that recognizes the value of diverse people and creates an environment that is inclusive of all is challenging. Not only must organizations have policies to support compliance with rules and regulations, but also practices that reinforce core values.
4. **Measuring and Tracking of EDI:** “What gets measured gets done” and setting targets and measuring progress is critical to guiding and implementing your accessibility strategy.
5. **Diversity across the Value Chain:** Bringing a diversity and inclusion perspective to business processes will help connect your EDI strategy to your corporate strategy. Here organizations need to consider procurement, research and development, product and service design and delivery, marketing, and communication.
6. **Outreach and Expanding the Pool:** How the organization builds partnerships and works with other stakeholders to advance diversity and inclusion will help drive change. This can apply to philanthropic activities and corporate social responsibility but also to partnerships with educational institutions to grow the next generation or to government relations work.

The Accessibility DAT consists of 42 questions, where the respondent is asked “Yes” or “No” regarding if they have specific policies or strategies in place (See Appendix A). Upon completion, a report is automatically generated to provide respondents with recommendations and best practices in disability inclusion and accessibility. The report provided in the current iteration of the tool provides links to 19 best practices in disability and inclusion.

The following explains the current and expected future phases of the Accessibility DAT:

- **Phase 1 (Current):** Development of the first iteration of the tool and its initial testing with disability community members
- **Phase 2:** After revisions of the tool following its initial testing, revisions to the tool and addition of new best practices. Tool will be tested again with a larger sample.
- **Phase 3:** The tool will be implemented as an add-on to the DAT App, where organizations completing the EDI tool can select to complete the add-on to receive an additional report and recommendations regarding disability inclusion and accessibility.

This report is focusing on the phase 1 activities and discusses some feedback from the users on their experiences with the tool.

Methods

This report evaluates the effectiveness of the Accessibility DAT by examining user experience, including interaction with the platform and opinions on its usefulness. A survey was conducted with partners in the accessibility community to achieve this.

As a pilot project, outreach was conducted with ten partners in the accessibility space. Meetings were conducted to discuss the pilot project with three organizations: Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work (CCRW), Inclusive Design for Employment Access (IDEA), and Liberty Co. The three organizations are all Canadian organizations with each of them having a unique focus on various areas of employment support for persons living with disabilities. CCRW is a registered charity that provides both employment services for job seekers with disabilities and support to businesses who wish to hire employees who are persons living with disabilities. IDEA is a social innovation laboratory that conducts research to develop knowledge and solutions relating to inclusive employment and disability confidence. Liberty Co is a consultancy focused on increasing neurodiverse employment, with a special emphasis on autism. CCRW proceeded to distribute the survey to their staff to test the Accessibility DAT and provide feedback through an online survey. The survey was open starting August 2024. To date, a total of five users have tested the tool, with more partners being invited to test the tool. Another iteration targeting a broader audience across Canada will be implemented later.

The survey data was analyzed descriptively to assess user feedback on various aspects of the tool, including the user experience, the usefulness of the tool, and relevancy of the report and its recommendations. The results will inform future updates to the tool before it is released to the public, ensuring it meets accessibility requirements as well as provides suggestions and recommendations that properly support the needs of the disability community.

Preliminary Findings

User experience

Based on the Phase 1 pilot feedback, the overall user experience of the Accessibility DAT appears largely positive, with respondents appreciating its ease of navigation and appropriate length. Specifically, 60% of users agreed that the length of the assessment was suitable, and the same percentage found the tool easy to navigate, with no negative responses. The language used was generally accessible, though some mixed responses (20% disagreeing, 20% neutral) indicate room for further simplification to better serve a wider audience. Regarding the relevance of the questions, 60% of respondents strongly agreed that they were pertinent, though 40% remained neutral. This suggests that, while the tool is effective in its current state, there may be opportunities to refine certain questions to ensure they fully align with users' diverse contexts and needs.

Usefulness of the accessibility DAT

The feedback on the usefulness of the Accessibility DAT suggests that it effectively helps organizations understand the importance of accessibility and evaluate their current efforts. Specifically, 60% of respondents strongly agreed that the Accessibility DAT helped them understand why accessibility is important to their company, while 40% found it helpful in accurately assessing their current accessibility initiatives. Additionally, 60% agreed that the tool was useful for uncovering gaps and challenges in their efforts. However, some mixed feedback emerged regarding the ability of the Accessibility DAT to clarify definitions and ideas of accessibility, with 40% disagreeing and only 20% strongly agreeing. Similarly, the usefulness in identifying goals and metrics received more neutral responses, suggesting an opportunity for further refinement to enhance its effectiveness in guiding organizations towards clear, actionable accessibility goals.

Usefulness of the recommendations

The feedback on the usefulness of the recommendations generated from the Accessibility DAT across different perspectives shows a generally positive response, with most participants finding the suggestions to be at least somewhat useful. Across the six areas assessed—Governance, Leadership and Strategy; Human Resources Processes; Values and Culture; Measuring and Tracking of EDI; Diversity across the Value Chain; and Outreach and Expanding the Pool—60% of

respondents rated the recommendations as somewhat useful, while 40% found them very useful in all categories except "Diversity across the Value Chain," where only 20% rated it as very useful. These results indicate that the recommendations are practical for most users, though there is room to enhance the impact, particularly concerning integrating diversity perspectives across the value chain, to better support organizations in implementing comprehensive accessibility strategies.

Usefulness of website

The feedback on the usefulness of the website reveals that the Accessibility DAT effectively encourages users to pursue an accessibility strategy, with 80% agreeing and 20% strongly agreeing. It also provides clarity regarding company mission, vision, and values related to accessibility, as well as aiding in analyzing strengths and weaknesses—both of which received high positive ratings from 80% of respondents. However, there were mixed responses in areas like reflecting on current accessibility scores and identifying and evaluating options for strategies, with 40% of respondents expressing neutrality or disagreement. Similarly, while the website supports understanding accessibility needs both internally and externally, and implementing plans for accessibility, some users still reported a need for additional clarity. These insights suggest the tool is generally well-received, but adjustments could enhance its ability to support organizations in reflecting on past progress and evaluating strategic options.

Satisfaction

The likelihood of recommending the Future Skills and Careers website was generally positive, with 80% of respondents indicating they would recommend it to a friend, classmate, or colleague. Specifically, 40% rated it as "highly recommended," while another 40% chose "recommended." However, one respondent (20%) indicated they would not recommend it. This suggests that while most users found value in the website, there are aspects that could be improved to ensure more consistent positive experiences across all users.

Final words

The open-ended feedback highlighted several areas for improvement to enhance the usability and effectiveness of the Future Skills & Careers website. Respondents emphasized the need for more accessible language, suggesting that some of the questions could be less intricate and easy to understand, which would encourage users from accurately responding. Providing clear definitions alongside questions would improve clarity and ensure responses accurately reflect users' situations.

There was also a desire for more specific guidance, particularly when questions referred to particular organizational policies. Respondents recommended including hints on where to find relevant information. Additionally, the inclusion of peer-reviewed resources to support recommendations and the incorporation of an intersectional perspective were suggested to strengthen the credibility and relevance of the content. A progress bar was also recommended to help manage expectations around the length of the Accessibility DAT, making the experience more user-friendly.

The Way Forward

The pilot project to test the first iteration of the Accessibility DAT will guide future iterations and improvements of the tool before it is released to the public.

Key findings

Overall user experience

- **Length of Assessment:** 60% found the site easy to navigate, and the same percentage found the tool easy to navigate, with no negative responses.
- **Accessible Language:** The language used was generally accessible, though some mixed responses (20% disagreeing, 20% neutral).
- **Content Relevance:** 60% of respondents strongly agreed that they were pertinent, though 40% remained neutral.

Usefulness of the accessibility DAT

- **Accessibility Understanding:** 60% of respondents strongly agreed that the Accessibility DAT helped them understand why accessibility is important to their company, while 40% found it helpful in accurately assessing their current accessibility initiatives. Additionally, 60% agreed that the tool was useful for uncovering gaps and challenges in their efforts.
- **Issues with Clarity:** Some mixed feedback emerged regarding the ability of the Accessibility DAT to clarify definitions and ideas of accessibility, with 40% disagreeing and only 20% strongly agreeing.

Usefulness of the recommendations

- 60% of respondents rated the recommendations as somewhat useful, while 40% found them very useful in all categories except "Diversity across the Value Chain," where only 20% rated it as very useful.

Usefulness of website

- **Accessible Strategies:** The Accessibility DAT effectively encourages users to pursue an accessibility strategy, with 80% agreeing and 20% strongly agreeing.

- **Issues in Accessibility Scores:** There were mixed responses in areas like reflecting on current accessibility scores and identifying and evaluating options for strategies, with 40% of respondents expressing neutrality or disagreement.

Satisfaction

- **High Likelihood of Recommendations:** The likelihood of recommending the Future Skills and Careers website was generally positive, with 80% of respondents indicating they would recommend it to a friend, classmate, or colleague. Specifically, 40% rated it as "highly recommended," while another 40% chose "recommended."

Final words

- Respondents emphasized the need for more accessible language, suggesting that some of the questions could be less intricate and easy to understand, which would encourage users from accurately responding.
- There was also a desire for more specific guidance, particularly when questions referred to particular organizational policies. Respondents recommended including hints on where to find relevant information.

Implications

User Experience and Accessibility: The pilot feedback highlights a generally positive user experience with the Accessibility DAT, especially in terms of navigation and length. However, mixed responses regarding the relevance of questions and the complexity of language indicate areas for potential improvement. Simplifying the language and ensuring all questions are relevant to a variety of organizational contexts could enhance user engagement and accessibility.

Usefulness of Accessibility Support Features: The usefulness of specific features like understanding accessibility definitions and identifying goals received mixed feedback, suggesting a need for clearer explanations and more actionable guidance. Respondents indicated that incorporating concrete examples, peer-reviewed resources, and an intersectional perspective could significantly improve the tool's ability to effectively support users in understanding and implementing accessibility strategies.

Enhancements for Practical Usability: The open-ended feedback points to a need for more practical support in the form of definitions, hints for locating relevant information, and a progress bar to help manage expectations. Providing such resources, alongside clearer language, would likely lead to more accurate responses and a better overall user experience. This approach could also increase the likelihood of users recommending the tool, expanding its reach and impact.

Since the overall project aims to improve accessibility and accommodations best practices in SMEs, which in turn improves understanding and knowledge of Canadians on accessibility and disability inclusion, and eventually increase labor market participation of persons with disabilities, this pilot project is ideally going to serve as the foundation of a long-term project. The feedback collected from the preliminary findings will help to shape the tool as it continues to improve. The next steps for the tool are to proceed onto phase 2 and 3, where the tool will be revised and tested with a larger sample, and eventually large-scale implementation as an add-on to the DAT App, where it will be accessible by the public.

Appendix A: Accessibility Diversity Assessment Tool Questions

Question #	Question
Governance	
Q1	Is there representation of persons living with disabilities on the board of directors and/or leadership?
Q2	Does the organization have an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy that references persons with disabilities?
Q3	Is leadership required to undertake accessibility training?
Q4	Do leaders communicate the case for thinking about persons living with disabilities as part of the business strategy?
Human Resource Processes	
Q5	Does the organization have a strategy to recruit persons living with disabilities?
Q6	Does the organization provide accommodations for persons living with disabilities throughout the recruitment process?
Q7	Does your company have an EDI statement in job postings regarding reasonable accommodation?
Q8	Does the organization review job postings to remove unnecessary job qualifications that would present a barrier to persons living with disabilities?
Q9	Does the organization have diverse selection committees?
Q10	Do people involved in the recruitment and selection process have EDI training which addresses issues of accessibility? Does the employment interview process include unconscious bias training?
Q11	Are guidelines for the process and alternative forms of interview questions prepared to accommodate persons living with disabilities?
Q12	Do all employees get mandatory training on Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) compliance suited for their roles?

Question #	Question
Q13	Are the organization's professional development programs inclusive for persons living with disabilities?
Q14	Does the organization offer a career planning system for employees living with disabilities?
Q15	Does the organization actively offer mentorship opportunities for employees living with disabilities?
Q16	Does the organization consider accessibility in the exit interview format and questions?
Q17	Is diversity tracked in employee separations - eg. retirements, dismissals, voluntary exits, layoffs?
Culture	
Q18	Does the organization have an accessibility policy?
Q19	Does the organization have documented Individual Accommodation Plans (IAPs) for employees living with disabilities?
Q20	Does the organization have individualized workplace emergency response plans for employees living with disabilities?
Q21	Does the organization have policies for Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) physical accessibility requirements?
Q22	Does the organization have policies for Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) digital accessibility requirements?
Q23	Does your company have a publicly available Accessibility Statement?
Q24	Does your organization have a formal accessibility committee or employee resource group for persons living with disabilities?
Q25	Does the organization provide a safe process for employees living with disabilities to disclose their need for change in the workplace, and does not require the disclosure of medical details to ensure accommodation?
Q26	Are organizational social events and celebrations designed so that employees living with disabilities are able to participate without barriers? Is there a protocol to follow?
Q27	Are flexible working arrangements available?
Measurement and Tracking EDI	
Q28	Are there employment metrics and targets for persons living with disabilities including different roles as well as full time and part time employment?

Question #	Question
Q29	Is there accountability for diversity targets, as they relate to persons living with disabilities, built into recruitment and performance management systems?
Diversity across the Value Chain	
Q30	Are vendors from diverse backgrounds, including persons living with disabilities, engaged as a part of the buyer selection process?
Q31	Is accessibility and compliance with Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) a consideration when selecting new contractors or vendors?
Q32	Do requests for proposals, whether digital or physical, include the requirement for accessibility as determined by the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)?
Q33	Is accessibility considered in research and development of products and services?
Q34	Are persons living with disabilities involved and engaged in the research and development of products and services?
Q35	Does the organization use inclusive design practices?
Q36	Does the organization include representation of persons living with disabilities on public and internal facing materials without stereotypes?
Q37	Does the organization include standards for inclusive communications?
Q38	Are all goods and services provided to customers in a way that respects the dignity and independence of persons living with disabilities?
Q39	Does your organization provide a variety of ways for receiving feedback and engaging with customers?
Outreach and Expanding the Pool	
Q40	Does the organization work with external partners to improve participation of and services to persons living with disabilities?
Q41	Does the organization communicate the importance of integrating persons living with disabilities in the workplace to external stakeholders?
Q42	Does the organization engage with the ecosystem to advocate for persons living with disabilities?

References

- ¹ Vergara, D., & Hardy, V. (2024). Labour market characteristics of persons with and without disabilities, 2023. Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/71-222-x/71-222-x2024002-eng.htm>
- ² Vergara, D., & Hardy, V. (2024). Labour market characteristics of persons with and without disabilities, 2023. Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/71-222-x/71-222-x2024002-eng.htm>
- ³ Statistics Canada. (2024, April 3). *The disability rate in Canada increased in 2022*. <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/o1/en/plus/5980-disability-rate-canada-increased-2022>
- ⁴ Prince, M. J. (2014). Locating a window of opportunity in the social economy: Canadians with disabilities and labour market challenges. *Canadian Journal of Nonprofit and Social Economy Research*, 5(1), 6.
- ⁵ Khayatzadeh-Mahani, A., Wittevrongel, K., Nicholas, D. B., & Zwicker, J. D. (2020). Prioritizing barriers and solutions to improve employment for persons with developmental disabilities. *Disability and rehabilitation*, 42(19), 2696-2706.
- ⁶ Ballo, J. G. (2020). Labour market participation for young people with disabilities: the impact of gender and higher education. *Work, Employment and Society*, 34(2), 336-355.
- ⁷ Almalky, H. A. (2020). Employment outcomes for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities: A literature review. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 109, 104656.
- ⁸ Maroto, M. L., Pettinicchio, D., & Lukk, M. (2021). Working differently or not at all: COVID-19's effects on employment among people with disabilities and chronic health conditions. *Sociological Perspectives*, 64(5), 876-897.
- ⁹ Vergara, D., & Hardy, V. (2024). Labour market characteristics of persons with and without disabilities, 2023. Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/71-222-x/71-222-x2024002-eng.htm>
- ¹⁰ Statistics Canada. (2023, August 30). *Labour market characteristics of persons with and without disabilities in 2022: Results from the Labour Force Survey*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/230830/dq230830a-eng.htm>
- ¹¹ Vergara, D., & Hardy, V. (2024). Labour market characteristics of persons with and without disabilities, 2023. Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/71-222-x/71-222-x2024002-eng.htm>
- ¹² Hickox, S. A., & Liao, C. (2020). Remote work as an accommodation for employees with disabilities. *Hofstra Lab. & Emp. LJ*, 38, 25.
- ¹³ Abney, A., Denison, V., Tanguay, C., & Ganz, M. (2022). Understanding the unseen: Invisible disabilities in the workplace. *The American Archivist*, 85(1), 88-103.
- ¹⁴ Van Beukering, I. E., Smits, S. J. C., Janssens, K. M. E., Bogaers, R. I., Joosen, M. C. W., Bakker, M., ... & Brouwers, E. P. M. (2021). In what ways does health related stigma affect sustainable employment and well-being at work? A systematic review. *Journal of occupational rehabilitation*, 1-15.
- ¹⁵ Lindsay, S., Fuentes, K., Tomas, V., & Hsu, S. (2023). Ableism and workplace discrimination among youth and young adults with disabilities: A systematic review. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, 33(1), 20-36.
- ¹⁶ Bonaccio, S., Connelly, C. E., Gellatly, I. R., Jetha, A., & Martin Ginis, K. A. (2020). The participation of people with disabilities in the workplace across the employment cycle: Employer concerns and research evidence. *Journal of business and psychology*, 35(2), 135-158.
- ¹⁷ Cukier, W., Jahangir, Y-T., & Hinz, F. (2023). Engaging employers in Activating persons living with disabilities. Diversity Institute. *Internal Report*.
- ¹⁸ Maroto, M., & Pettinicchio, D. (2020). Barriers to economic security: Disability, employment, and asset disparities in Canada. *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue canadienne de sociologie*, 57(1), 53-79.
- ¹⁹ Cheatham, L. P., & Randolph, K. (2022). Education and employment transitions among young adults with disabilities: Comparisons by disability status, type and severity. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 69(2), 467-490.

- ²⁰ Almalky, H. A. (2020). Employment outcomes for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities: A literature review. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 109, 104656.
- ²¹ Cukier, W., Parkin, A., Saiphoo, A., Borova, B., & Edwards, M. (2024). *Gender, diversity, and discrimination in the workplace*. Diversity Institute. https://www.torontomu.ca/content/dam/diversity/reports/gender--diversity-and-discrimination-in-the-workplace/Gender,%20Diversity%20and%20Discrimination_EN.pdf
- ²² Parkin, A., Cukier, W., Borova, B., Saiphoo, A., & Edwards, M. (2024). *Unemployment in Canada: A report from the survey on employment and skills*. Diversity Institute. https://www.torontomu.ca/content/dam/diversity/reports/environics-unemployment-in-canada/Unemployment_in_Canada.pdf
- ²³ Parkin, A., Cukier, W., Borova, B., Saiphoo, A., & Edwards, M. (2024). *Unemployment in Canada: A report from the survey on employment and skills*. Diversity Institute. https://www.torontomu.ca/content/dam/diversity/reports/environics-unemployment-in-canada/Unemployment_in_Canada.pdf
- ²⁴ Parkin, A., Cukier, W., Borova, B., Saiphoo, A., & Edwards, M. (2024). *Unemployment in Canada: A report from the survey on employment and skills*. Diversity Institute. https://www.torontomu.ca/content/dam/diversity/reports/environics-unemployment-in-canada/Unemployment_in_Canada.pdf
- ²⁵ Parkin, A., Cukier, W., Borova, B., Saiphoo, A., & Edwards, M. (2024). *Unemployment in Canada: A report from the survey on employment and skills*. Diversity Institute. https://www.torontomu.ca/content/dam/diversity/reports/environics-unemployment-in-canada/Unemployment_in_Canada.pdf
- ²⁶ Parkin, A., Cukier, W., Borova, B., Saiphoo, A., & Edwards, M. (2024). *Unemployment in Canada: A report from the survey on employment and skills*. Diversity Institute. https://www.torontomu.ca/content/dam/diversity/reports/environics-unemployment-in-canada/Unemployment_in_Canada.pdf
- ²⁷ Parkin, A., Cukier, W., Borova, B., Saiphoo, A., & Edwards, M. (2024). *Unemployment in Canada: A report from the survey on employment and skills*. Diversity Institute. https://www.torontomu.ca/content/dam/diversity/reports/environics-unemployment-in-canada/Unemployment_in_Canada.pdf
- ²⁸ Parkin, A., Cukier, W., Borova, B., Saiphoo, A., & Edwards, M. (2024). *Unemployment in Canada: A report from the survey on employment and skills*. Diversity Institute. https://www.torontomu.ca/content/dam/diversity/reports/environics-unemployment-in-canada/Unemployment_in_Canada.pdf
- ²⁹ Statistics Canada. (2024). *Poverty and low-income statistics by disability status*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1110009001>
- ³⁰ Fisher, S. L., & Connelly, C. E. (2020). Building the “business case” for hiring people with disabilities: A financial cost-benefit analysis methodology and example. *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*, 9(4), 71-88.
- ³¹ Lindsay, S., Cagliostro, E., Albarico, M., Mortaji, N., & Karon, L. (2018). A systematic review of the benefits of hiring people with disabilities. *Journal of occupational rehabilitation*, 28, 634-655.
- ³² Aitken, Z., Beecher Kelk, A., Saxby, K., Ye, L., Petrie, D., Kavanagh, A., & Dickinson, H. (2022). *Impact of part time work for people with disabilities*. The University of Melbourne. https://www.unsw.adfa.edu.au/sites/default/files/documents/RFQ07019_MSPGH_CRE_DH_Wise_Employment_Report.pdf
- ³³ OHRC. (2016, June 27). *Policy on ableism and discrimination based on disability*. <https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/book/export/html/18436#:~:text=people%20without%20disabilities,-,It%20is%20clear%20that%20people%20with%20disabilities%20continue%20to%20experience,their%20skill%20level%20and%20competence.>
- ³⁴ Lindsay, S., Fuentes, K., Tomas, V., & Hsu, S. (2023). Ableism and workplace discrimination among youth and young adults with disabilities: A systematic review. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, 33(1), 20-36.

- ³⁵ Bonaccio, S., Connelly, C. E., Gellatly, I. R., Jetha, A., & Martin Ginis, K. A. (2020). The participation of people with disabilities in the workplace across the employment cycle: Employer concerns and research evidence. *Journal of business and psychology*, 35(2), 135-158.
- ³⁶ Jones, A-M., Finkelstein, R., & Koehoorn, M. (2018). Disability and workplace harassment and discrimination among Canadian federal public service employees. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 109(1), 79-88. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6964508/>
- ³⁷ Cukier, W., Parking, A., Saiphoo, A., Borova, B., & Edwards, M. (2024). *Gender, diversity and discrimination in the Workplace*. Diversity Institute. https://www.torontomu.ca/content/dam/diversity/reports/gender--diversity-and-discrimination-in-the-workplace/Gender,%20Diversity%20and%20Discrimination_EN.pdf
- ³⁸ Cukier, W., Jahangir, Y-T., & Hinz, F. (2023). Engaging employers in activating persons living with disabilities. Diversity Institute. *Internal Report*.
- ³⁹ Munsell, E. G., Kudla, A., Su, H., Wong, J., Crown, D., Capraro, P., ... & Heinemann, A. W. (2024). Employers' perceptions of challenges and strategies in hiring, retaining, and promoting employees with physical disabilities. *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*, 67(3), 177-189.
- ⁴⁰ Cukier, W., Jahangir, Y-T., & Hinz, F. (2023). Engaging employers in activating persons living with disabilities. Diversity Institute. *Internal Report*.
- ⁴¹ Tomas, V., Ahmed, H., & Lindsay, S. (2022). Unravelling the complexities of workplace disclosure among persons with non-visible disabilities and illnesses: a qualitative meta-ethnography. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, 32(3), 538-563.
- ⁴² Dong, S., Hespe, P., & Monagas, K. (2022). Requesting workplace accommodation among individuals with mobility disability: A qualitative investigation on barriers and facilitators. *Journal of Applied Rehabilitation Counseling*, 193-209.
- ⁴³ SRDC. (2022). Disability and the Workplace: Challenges, trends, and best practices among SMEs in Canada. https://disabilityandtheworkplace.ca/images/Integrated_Report_ENG.pdf
- ⁴⁴ Keating, B. W., & Worsteling, A. (2023). Improving employment outcomes for people with disability in small and medium enterprises: protocol for a scoping review. *BMJ open*, 13(4), e069573.
- ⁴⁵ Parkin, A., Cukier, W., Borova, B., Saiphoo, A., & Edwards, M. (2024). *Unemployment in Canada: A report from the survey on employment and skills*. Diversity Institute.
- ⁴⁶ Campbell, P., Wilson, E., Howie, L. J., Joyce, A., Crosbie, J., & Eversole, R. (2024). The Role of Shared Resilience in Building Employment Pathways with People with a Disability. *Disabilities*, 4(1), 111-126.
- ⁴⁷ Martin, B. C., & Honig, B. (2020). Inclusive management research: Persons with disabilities and self-employment activity as an exemplar. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 166(3), 553-575.
- ⁴⁸ Blanck, P. (2020). Disability inclusive employment and the accommodation principle: emerging issues in research, policy, and law. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, 30, 505-510.
- ⁴⁹ Statistics Canada. (2024, July 7). *Employment strategy for Canadians with disabilities*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/disability-inclusion-action-plan/employment-strategy.html>
- ⁵⁰ Statistics Canada. (2023, September 9). *Opportunities fund for persons with disabilities*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/opportunity-fund-disability.html>
- ⁵¹ Statistics Canada. (2024, July 11). *Government of Canada launches the employment strategy for Canadians with disabilities*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/news/2024/07/government-of-canada-launches-the-employment-strategy-for-canadians-with-disabilities.html>
- ⁵² Dino, A. (2024, July 24). *Canada unveils employment strategy to close job gap for persons with disabilities by 2040*. Lexpert. <https://www.lexpert.ca/features/canada-unveils-employment-strategy-to-close-job-gap-for-persons-with-disabilities-by-2040/387502>
- ⁵³ Government of Canada. (2024). *Canada's disability inclusion action plan*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/disability-inclusion-action-plan.html>

- ⁵⁴ Government of Canada. (2019). Accessible Canada act (S.C. 2019, c. 10). <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/a-0.6/>
- ⁵⁵ Government of Canada. (2024). *Canada's disability inclusion action plan*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/disability-inclusion-action-plan.html>
- ⁵⁶ The Conference Board of Canada. (2018). *The business case to build physically accessible environments*. <https://www.rickhansen.com/sites/default/files/downloads/2018-07/cboc-final-report-feb2018-accessible.pdf>
- ⁵⁷ The Conference Board of Canada. (2018, February 23). *Widespread economic benefit to be gained from making workplace more accessible for people with disabilities*. Canada Newswire. <https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/widespread-economic-benefits-to-be-gained-from-making-workplaces-more-accessible-for-people-with-disabilities-674936343.html>
- ⁵⁸ Javed, H. (2024). Creating a positive workplace culture: diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. In *Innovative Human Resource Management for SMEs* (pp. 367-394). IGI Global.
- ⁵⁹ Molyneux, C. (2021). *Disabled people, work, and small-medium-size enterprises (SMEs)*. Lancaster University (United Kingdom).
- ⁶⁰ Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada. (2020). *Key small business statistics – 2020*. Government of Canada. https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/061.nsf/eng/h_03126.html#2.1
- ⁶¹ bdc. (n.d.). *10 things you (probably) didn't know about Canadian small businesses*. <https://www.bdc.ca/en/articles-tools/business-strategy-planning/manage-business/10-things-didnt-know-canadian-sme>
- ⁶² ISED. (2022). *Key small business statistics 2022*. <https://ised-isde.canada.ca/site/sme-research-statistics/en/key-small-business-statistics/key-small-business-statistics-2022>
- ⁶³ Employment and Social Development Canada. (2023, December 4). *Government of Canada celebrates the launch of the Canadian Business Disability Network to help advance the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workforce*. Government of Canada. <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/news/2023/12/government-of-canada-celebrates-the-launch-of-the-canadian-business-disability-network-to-help-advance-the-inclusion-of-persons-with-disabilities-i.html>
- ⁶⁴ Government of Canada. (2021). Employment equity act (S.C. 1995, c.44). <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/e-5.401/>
- ⁶⁵ OHRC. (n.d.). Policy on ableism and discrimination based on disability: Duty to accommodate. <https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-ableism-and-discrimination-based-disability/8-duty-accommodate>
- ⁶⁶ Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada. (n.d.). The 50-30 Challenge: Your Diversity Advantage. Government of Canada. <https://ised-isde.canada.ca/site/ised/en/50-30-challenge-your-diversity-advantage>
- ⁶⁷ Betts, K. (n.d.). Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) across the consumer value chain: A North American perspective. Deloitte. <https://www.deloitte.com/global/en/Industries/consumer/about/diversity-equity-and-inclusion-dei-across-the-consumer-value-chain.html>
- ⁶⁸ Mohr, L. A., Webb, D. J., & Harris, K. E. (2001). Do consumers expect companies to be socially responsible? The impact of corporate social responsibility on buying behavior. *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, 35(1), 45-72.
- ⁶⁹ Mandhachitara, R., & Poolthong, Y. (2011). A model of customer loyalty and corporate social responsibility. *Journal of services marketing*, 25(2), 122-133.
- ⁷⁰ Olsen, D., Brennan, D., & Osula, J. (2024, September). *Towards a socially conscious start-up brand: EDI in entrepreneurial branding*. *European Conference on Innovation and Entrepreneurship*, 19(1), 588–595.
- ⁷¹ Chalmers, J., Cox, E., & Picard, N. (2021). The economic realities of ESG. PwC. <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/issues/reinventing-the-future/take-on-tomorrow/download/sbpwc-2021-10-28-Economic-realities-ESG.pdf>
- ⁷² Chiu, B. (2022, March 1). Investors are waking up to market potential of diversity, equity and inclusion. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/bonniechiu/2022/03/01/investors-are-waking-up-to-market-potential-of-diversity-equity-and-inclusion/>

- ⁷³ Sparkes, R., & Cowton, C. J. (2004). The maturing of socially responsible investment: A review of the developing link with corporate social responsibility. *Journal of business ethics*, 52, 45-57.
- ⁷⁴ Diversity Institute. (2024). Best practices for advancing equity, diversity and inclusion in manufacturing. <https://www.torontomu.ca/diversity/reports/best-practices-for-advancing-equity--diversity-and-inclusion-in/>
- ⁷⁵ SME Magazine. (2024, February 3). The SME benefits of an inclusive workforce. <https://www.smeweb.com/the-sme-benefits-of-an-inclusive-workforce/>
- ⁷⁶ Sepulveda, T. (2021). Barriers to hiring and accommodating people with disabilities in small and medium sized businesses: A scoping review. *Journal of Applied Rehabilitation Counseling*, 52(2), 104-114.
- ⁷⁷ Sepulveda, T. (2021). Barriers to hiring and accommodating people with disabilities in small and medium sized businesses: A scoping review. *Journal of Applied Rehabilitation Counseling*, 52(2), 104-114.
- ⁷⁸ International Labour Organization. (n.d.). *A digital shift: Youth employment and skills development in the digital economy*. <https://www.ilo.org/media/361041/download>
- ⁷⁹ Goodman, N., Deane, S., Hyseni, F., Soffer, M., Shaheen, G., & Blanck, P. (2024). Perceptions and bias of small business leaders in employing people with different types of disabilities. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, 1-14.
- ⁸⁰ Sepulveda, T. (2021). Barriers to hiring and accommodating people with disabilities in small and medium sized businesses: A scoping review. *Journal of Applied Rehabilitation Counseling*, 52(2), 104-114.
- ⁸¹ International Labour Organization. (n.d.). *A digital shift: Youth employment and skills development in the digital economy*. <https://www.ilo.org/media/361041/download>
- ⁸² Goodman, N., Deane, S., Hyseni, F., Soffer, M., Shaheen, G., & Blanck, P. (2024). Perceptions and bias of small business leaders in employing people with different types of disabilities. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, 1-14.
- ⁸³ Hemphill, E., & Kulik, C-T. (2016). Which employers offer hope for mainstream job opportunities for disabled people? *Social Policy and Society*, 15(4), 537-553.
- ⁸⁴ Bonaccio, S., Connelly, C-E., Gellatly, I-R., Jetha, A., & Martin Ginis, K-A. (2020). The participation of people in the workplace across the employment cycle: Employer concerns and research evidence. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 35, 135-158.
- ⁸⁵ SRDC. (2022). *Disability and the Workplace: Challenges, trends, and best practices among SMEs in Canada*. https://disabilityandtheworkplace.ca/images/Integrated_Report_ENG.pdf
- ⁸⁶ Bank of Canada. (2016). Financial constraint and productivity: Evidence from Canadian SMEs. https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2016/banque-bank-canada/FB3-5-2016-44-eng.pdf
- ⁸⁷ Cukier, W., Jahangir, Y-T., & Hinz, F. (2023). Engaging employers in activating persons living with disabilities. Diversity Institute. Internal Report.
- ⁸⁸ Molyneux, C. (2021). *Disabled people, work, and small-medium-size enterprises (SMEs)*. Lancaster University (United Kingdom).
- ⁸⁹ Sepulveda, T. (2021). Barriers to hiring and accommodating people with disabilities in small and medium sized businesses: A scoping review. *Journal of Applied Rehabilitation Counseling*, 52(2), 104-114.
- ⁹⁰ Government of Canada. (2022). *Disability and the workplace: An integrated report*. https://disabilityandtheworkplace.ca/images/Integrated_Report_ENG.pdf
- ⁹¹ Future Skills Centre. (2024). *Project Insights Report: Capacity building for Canadian small and medium-sized enterprises*. <https://fsc-ccf.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/capacity-building-for-canadian-small-and-medium-sized-enterprises-1.pdf>
- ⁹² Government of Canada. (2022). *Disability and the workplace: An integrated report*. https://disabilityandtheworkplace.ca/images/Integrated_Report_ENG.pdf
- ⁹³ Government of Canada. (2022). *Disability and the workplace: An integrated report*. https://disabilityandtheworkplace.ca/images/Integrated_Report_ENG.pdf
- ⁹⁴ Government of Canada. (2022). *Disability and the workplace: An integrated report*. https://disabilityandtheworkplace.ca/images/Integrated_Report_ENG.pdf

- ⁹⁵ Diversity Institute. (2021, June 17). Canada's small and medium enterprises struggle to identify the skills and talent needed to recover and grow. Canada Newswire. <https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/canada-s-small-and-medium-enterprises-struggle-to-identify-the-skills-and-talent-needed-to-recover-and-grow-new-report-shows-867982415.html>
- ⁹⁶ International Labour Organization. (n.d.). *Disability inclusion in small and medium-sized enterprises*.
- ⁹⁷ International Labour Organization. (n.d.). *Disability inclusion in small and medium-sized enterprises*.
- ⁹⁸ SME Web. (n.d.). *The SME benefits of an inclusive workforce*. <https://www.smeweb.com/the-sme-benefits-of-an-inclusive-workforce/>
- ⁹⁹ SME Web. (n.d.). *The SME benefits of an inclusive workforce*. <https://www.smeweb.com/the-sme-benefits-of-an-inclusive-workforce/>
- ¹⁰⁰ Proudly Canadians. (n.d.). *Business benefits of hiring disabled people*. <https://proudlycanadians.ca/business-benefits-of-hiring-disabled-people.php>
- ¹⁰¹ Baker, S. (2023). *Disability as a source of competitive advantage*. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2023/07/disability-as-a-source-of-competitive-advantage>
- ¹⁰² SME Web. (n.d.). *The SME benefits of an inclusive workforce*. <https://www.smeweb.com/the-sme-benefits-of-an-inclusive-workforce/>
- ¹⁰³ International Labour Organization. (n.d.). *Disability inclusion in small and medium-sized enterprises*.
- ¹⁰⁴ International Labour Organization. (2023). *Disability inclusion in small and medium-sized enterprises: Analysis of a survey among National Business and Disability Networks*. <https://www.ilo.org/media/361041/download>
- ¹⁰⁵ SME Web. (n.d.). *The SME benefits of an inclusive workforce*. <https://www.smeweb.com/the-sme-benefits-of-an-inclusive-workforce/>
- ¹⁰⁶ International Labour Organization. (n.d.). *Disability inclusion in small and medium-sized enterprises*.
- ¹⁰⁷ International Labour Organization. (n.d.). *Disability inclusion in small and medium-sized enterprises*.
- ¹⁰⁸ Cukier, W., Jahangir, Y-T., & Hinz, F. (2023). *Engaging Employers in Activating Persons Living with Disabilities*. Diversity Institute. *Internal Report*.
- ¹⁰⁹ Government of Canada. (n.d.). *Hire persons with disabilities*. <https://www.jobbank.gc.ca/hiring/persons-with-disabilities>
- ¹¹⁰ Government of Canada. (n.d.). *CAN-ASC-1.1 Employment*. <https://accessible.canada.ca/centre-of-expertise/employment>
- ¹¹¹ Shaw, L., Daraz, L., Bezzina, M-B., Patel, A., & Gorfine, G. (2014). Examining Macro and Meso Level Barriers to Hiring Persons with Disabilities: A Scoping Review. *Environmental Contexts and Disability*, 8, 185-210.
- ¹¹² Discover Ability Network. (n.d.). *About Discover Ability Network*. <https://discoverability.network/about/>
- ¹¹³ Abraham, E. (2024, January 29). *Assistive technology: Canada's little-known opportunity*. TheFutureEconomy. <https://thefutureeconomy.ca/op-eds/assistive-technology-eyra-abraham-lisnen/>
- ¹¹⁴ Government of British Columbia. (n.d.). *WorkBC*. <https://www.workbc.ca/>
- ¹¹⁵ MentorWorks. (n.d.). *Government funding directory*. <https://www.mentorworks.ca/government-funding/>
- ¹¹⁶ AIR. (2018, April 17). *Meeting the needs of adults with disabilities in the marketplace*. <https://www.air.org/news/press-release/meeting-needs-adults-disabilities-marketplace>