



Advancing Accessibility in Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM)

Melissa Myers is the Accessibility Advisor for Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM), Nova Scotia's most populated municipality. Since the creation of this role in 2019, HRM has been at the forefront of integrating accessibility considerations into its infrastructure, policies, and services. The municipality first established an accessibility plan in 2021 and is currently in the process of updating this plan to reflect ongoing needs and progress.

Strategic Actions and Implementation

Accessibility Task Force: This group consists of representatives from all HRM business units, meeting quarterly with more frequent gatherings of sub-committees to address specific issues.

Focus on the Built Environment: Efforts are underway to ensure that municipal buildings and new constructions meet high accessibility standards. HRM is also exploring ways to make construction zones accessible.

Employment and Hiring Practices: HRM is refining its accommodations during the hiring process to better support candidates with disabilities who are not yet employees.

Duty to Accommodate Policy: Creating an accommodation policy for employees and applicants.

Future Work and Ongoing Projects

Transportation: Current projects include auditing bus stops for accessibility and ensuring public transport systems are inclusive.

Digital Accessibility: HRM is focusing on making information and communications, including websites and IT systems, accessible. This involves collaboration with vendors to uphold accessibility standards in digital platforms.

Learnings and Impacts

A significant challenge has been the absence of a baseline for measuring progress, making it difficult to quantify the impact of various initiatives. Despite this, HRM has implemented corporate accessibility training delivered monthly, which has created a shift towards integrating an accessibility lens across municipal operations.

Advice and Reflections

Melissa emphasizes the slow nature of change and the importance of acknowledging and celebrating small victories along the way. Training staff and fostering an organizational culture attentive to accessibility are crucial for sustainable progress. HRM's experience highlights the importance of setting clear performance indicators to evaluate the effectiveness of accessibility measures effectively.

By focusing on both immediate and long-term needs, and fostering an inclusive culture internally, HRM aims to lead by example in creating a more accessible environment for all its residents. The municipality's ongoing efforts to refine and implement its accessibility plan reflect a commitment to continuous improvement and community engagement.

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