

HomeEquity Bank Accessibility Plan - Annual Progress Report

General

At HomeEquity Bank, our commitment to accessibility is rooted in our values, which guide us to include everyone. One Team, One Vision acknowledges our efforts to foster an inclusive community that achieves more by pulling together. Our efforts to achieve accessibility are deeply connected to, and mutually reinforced by:

- the Bank's priorities, including ongoing work in support of equity, diversity and inclusion;
- legislation, such as the Canadian Human Rights Act, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Canadian Labour Code and the Employment Equity Act;
- the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and
- the Bank's commitment to the Senior's Code.

We recognize that accessibility is an ongoing and central element of being an inclusive organization. The plan we developed builds on our inclusive mindset and practices.

Inclusiveness and accessibility are direct results of understanding and meeting the needs of those of us with disabilities. For that reason, our plan was developed in consultation with employees who identify as having a disability, and this report outlines our progress.

As outlined in our Accessibility Plan, our commitment to inclusion and accessibility incorporates a feedback process so that employees and members of the public can share their ideas and input with us.

We are committed to responding in a prompt and effective manner. To provide feedback on accessibility, we provided the contacts below:

Contact: Client Relations

Mailing address: 200 Bay St., Suite 3500, South Tower, Toronto, ON M5J 2J1

Email: <mailto:clientrelations@heb.ca> Webpage: www.homeequitybank.ca

Toll-free, North America: 1-866-331-2447

This contact information is provided so that individuals may:

- Provide feedback on HomeEquity Bank's accessibility plan.
- Provide feedback regarding the barriers encountered when dealing with HomeEquity Bank
- Request copies of HomeEquity Bank's accessibility plans, progress reports, and feedback process descriptions in alternate formats

Progress Update

1. Employment

Accessibility must be ensured at every stage of employment. This means accommodations must be made available to candidates and employees upon request and accessibility should be embedded into policies, processes and practices, including recruitment, onboarding, professional development, disability leaves, and return-to-work processes.

Barrier 1

At the time of posting, we did not have an understanding of this population due to the fact that we did not have the capability for candidates to self-identify.

Progress

- Currently, candidates cannot self-identify as being a candidate with a disability. HomeEquity Bank is currently reviewing vendors in order to ensure that we have this functionality.
- In 2023, external hires with disabilities increased to 2.4%. This is an increase on the year prior. It is noteworthy that external hires have to self-identify as being a person with a disability. Though we have made improvements, there is still progress required to attract qualified candidates with disabilities according to their availability in the labour market for our occupations.
- HomeEquity Bank people leaders participated in an unconscious bias workshop hosted by an external consultant. As part of the training materials, people leaders were trained on limiting bias in their hiring practices. Evidence-based statistics were also provided to re-enforce the importance of disability inclusion.

2. Built environment

The built environment is the physical environments where people live and work. Newly developed or redesigned buildings and public spaces are expected to incorporate universal designs and to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.

Barrier 2

Our current office is a newly designed space, with several enhancements to accessibility and the overall employee and client experience.

Progress

- Although we made several enhancements to accessibility at our new office, ensuring accessibility is an ongoing effort. Our office space is regularly reviewed by the Health and Safety Committee to ensure that there are no barriers to accessibility going forward.
- Our Health and Safety Committee performs Ergonomic Assessments at an employee's request and provides helpful resources to support an ergonomic home set up.

3. Information and communication technologies

Information and communication technologies are various technological tools and resources used to transmit, store, create, share or exchange information.

Barrier 3

The low awareness of tools available for individuals to request that accessibility features be turned on or activated limits the ability of employees and guests with disabilities to use them.

Progress

- HomeEquity Bank continues to operate in a Hybrid work environment. As part of our technology offerings, employees are able to utilize real-time closed caption functions in virtual meetings.
- As part of our "Customer Experience Vision and Ambition," we continued to deepen our investment in clear and accessible communications to ensure all our customers feel comfortable and confident when banking with us. This initiative drove enhanced training, performance management, communications standards, and access to tools to help simplify processes, build subject-matter expertise and accountability, and create an even better client experience. This includes:
 - Improved web accessibility score in 2023 to 95.5 per cent as we continue our work towards 100 per cent accessibility.
 - Launched a new "Voice of the Customer" (VOC) program to proactively capture customer feedback and ascertain any obstacles in their customer experience.

4. Communication (other than information and communication technologies)

This priority area recognizes that people give, receive, and understand communication in different ways. We must take these differences into account and provide communications in various accessible formats for people who require them. Some examples of communication products include signs, wayfinding, documents, and forms that are not technologically based.

Barrier 4

The Bank's standard document templates and formats for its files, reports and presentations may not always meet the accessibility needs of their users.

Progress

- Our new office space includes signs at central locations which direct employees to frequently used spaces.
- Our new desk booking platform includes wayfinding maps which guide employees to their booked desk.
- HomeEquity Bank introduced a new internal online learning program, Open Sesame in 2023. Among the 30,000 courses available in a variety of formats, there are courses that have been launched to assist employees in utilizing the various office tools made available to them and their accessibility functions.

5. Procurement of goods, services and facilities

The Accessible Canada Act requires us to consider accessibility requirements for procurement and include accessibility as part of the provision of goods, services and facilities, where appropriate (e.g., accessible technology, materials and amenities).

Barrier 5

Accessibility considerations are not fully embedded in the Bank's procurement framework and tools.

Progress

- The Bank continues to explore strategies to embed accessibility considerations in the Bank's procurement framework across the organization.

6. Design and delivery of programs and services

Design and delivery of programs and services includes the programs and information for Persons with Disabilities.

Barrier 6

The Bank does not have documented internal accessibility best practices. This plan will help to encourage more open dialogue between internal stakeholders as we seek to understand accessibility needs across the organization for both consumers and employees.

Progress

- The Bank maintains an internal page which provides guidance and resources for servicing our clients:
 - Clear language principles ensure all Bank communication are customer-focused: clear, simple and honest, while promoting understanding of the bank's products.
 - Communications such as application documents, annual statements or marketing materials can be made available to customers in large print or braille upon request
 - A list of employees that speak second languages to help translate with clients.

Barrier 7

A lack of standard measures to assess internal and external programs limits the evaluation of their accessibility.

Progress

- Due to a lack of feedback, there are limitations to evaluating accessibility at the bank. More efforts will be made to ensure the Bank is provided with feedback regarding accessibility, which will allow for accessibility metrics to be reviewed to track and evaluate overall change.



Consultations

As part of our Consultation process, HomeEquity Bank invited employees who had self-identified as having a disability to a voluntary one-on-one feedback meeting via Microsoft Teams. The purpose of these meetings was to help the organization identify, remove, and prevent barriers.

Anyone who chose to participate was asked questions to understand what barriers exist in the workplace and what improvement can be made to enhance our accessibility at HomeEquity Bank.

HomeEquity Bank recognizes the need to improve accessibility and we will continue to leverage the input of people with disabilities to become more accessible.

Feedback

Any individual can provide HomeEquity Bank with accessibility feedback utilizing the multiple methods available – via mail, phone or email. HomeEquity Bank has not received external feedback regarding accessibility since launching the plan. We remain committed to promoting awareness and reviewing any feedback that is provided to the Bank.

Appendix – Accessibility Act Definitions

Barrier

Anything—including anything physical, architectural, technological or attitudinal, anything that is based on information or communications or anything that is the result of a policy or a practice—that hinders the full and equal participation in society of persons with an impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairment or a functional limitation.

Disability

Any impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairment—or a functional limitation—whether permanent, temporary or episodic in nature, or evident or not, that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders a person’s full and equal participation in society