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**The Cost (and Benefit) of Doing the Right Thing**

**Nova Scotia**

Nova Scotia recently rewrote the Accessibility Act garnering more support due to its stronger language and harsher penalties. Bill 59 was passed on April 28th, 2017 by the house starting the Province’s journey to improve the lives of Nova Scotians with disabilities by 2030. We all know that this is the right thing to do. That through accessibility standards those with disabilities will have a greater chance of independence in their personal and professional lives. But while the Act will improve the lives of those with disabilities it comes at a cost to the businesses, organizations and government departments who will now have to ensure they are prepared to facilitate all disabilities in the workplace.

**Canadian Examples**

In November of 2014 Ontario set out to review their Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, to determine its effectiveness, challenges and areas for improvement. Not surprisingly, cost of implementation was found to be a challenge for organizations. Organizations of all sizes were worried, and rightly so, about the significant unbudgeted costs that would be incurred to meet legislation. Costs included infrastructure and operations needed to cover areas ranging from ongoing facility maintenance to inclusion training.

“Small business said the cost of complying with regulations at all levels of government is an increasing challenge and the needs of small firms in particular should be kept in mind when bringing in new regulations”

– Mayo Moran

There was push-back from the disability stakeholders, expressing that accessibility has been required under the Human Rights Code since 1982 and therefore should be a cost of doing businesses. A balanced approach for calculating costs of accessibility was the common idea to promote funding options for businesses.

**Accessibility Standards**

The standards that may be created to ensure workplaces are more accessible are:

* Customer Service
* Information and Communications
* Employment
* Transportation
* Design of Public Spaces

For a business, this list can mean increasing capital and operating costs, but it also can incur benefits for employers and employees. These benefits include:

* Better job retention
* Higher attendance
* Lower turnover
* Enhanced job performance and work quality
* Better safety records

**Funding**

Given the financial cost of creating an accessible workplace the Canadian Government has created funding assistance programs to ensure businesses are able to comply with the standards set out for them in each Province’s Accessibility Act.

The Enabling Accessibility Fund is a Federal Grants and Contributions program which supports capital costs of construction and renovations related to improving physical accessibility and safety for people with disabilities in Canadian communities and workplaces.

From installing screen reader devices, hearing induction loop systems, automated door openers, constructing a universally designed office or retrofitting a washroom with an accessible toilet, grab bars and taps, the Enabling Accessibility Fund works to enable Canadians with disabilities to participate in their community and the economy.

* Employment and Social Development Canada

The Community Accessibility Stream provides funding for projects that improve accessibility in communities across Canada. The funding may be used for: renovating, retrofitting or constructing community facilities where programs and/or services are or will be offered to people with disabilities; retrofitting motor vehicles used as community-based transportation; and, providing information and communications technologies for community use.

The Access-Ability Program provides a wage subsidy of $10/hour to employ a young person aged 15-30 with a disability to work for a business for 39 weeks for business in Nova Scotia.

**Benefit > Cost**

There are numerous financial costs associated with ensuring an organization is accessible for all, but given the return on investment there are more benefits than costs associated with doing the right thing.

**More to Follow…..**

**References:**

Business Benefits of Accessible Workplaces

The Conference Board of Canada

<http://www.conferenceboard.ca/documents/6264_accessibleworkplaces_br_av.pdf>

Legislative Review of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act

Mayo Moran

<https://www.ontario.ca/document/legislative-review-accessibility-ontarians-disabilities-act>

Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation: A Training Booklet for Small Private and Not-for-Profit Organizations

Access Forward

<http://www.accessforward.ca/resources/Training%20Booklet%20for%20Small%20Private%20and%20Not%20For%20Profit%20Organizations.pdf>

Funding: Enabling Accessibility Fund

Employment and Social Development Canada

<https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/disability/eaf.html>