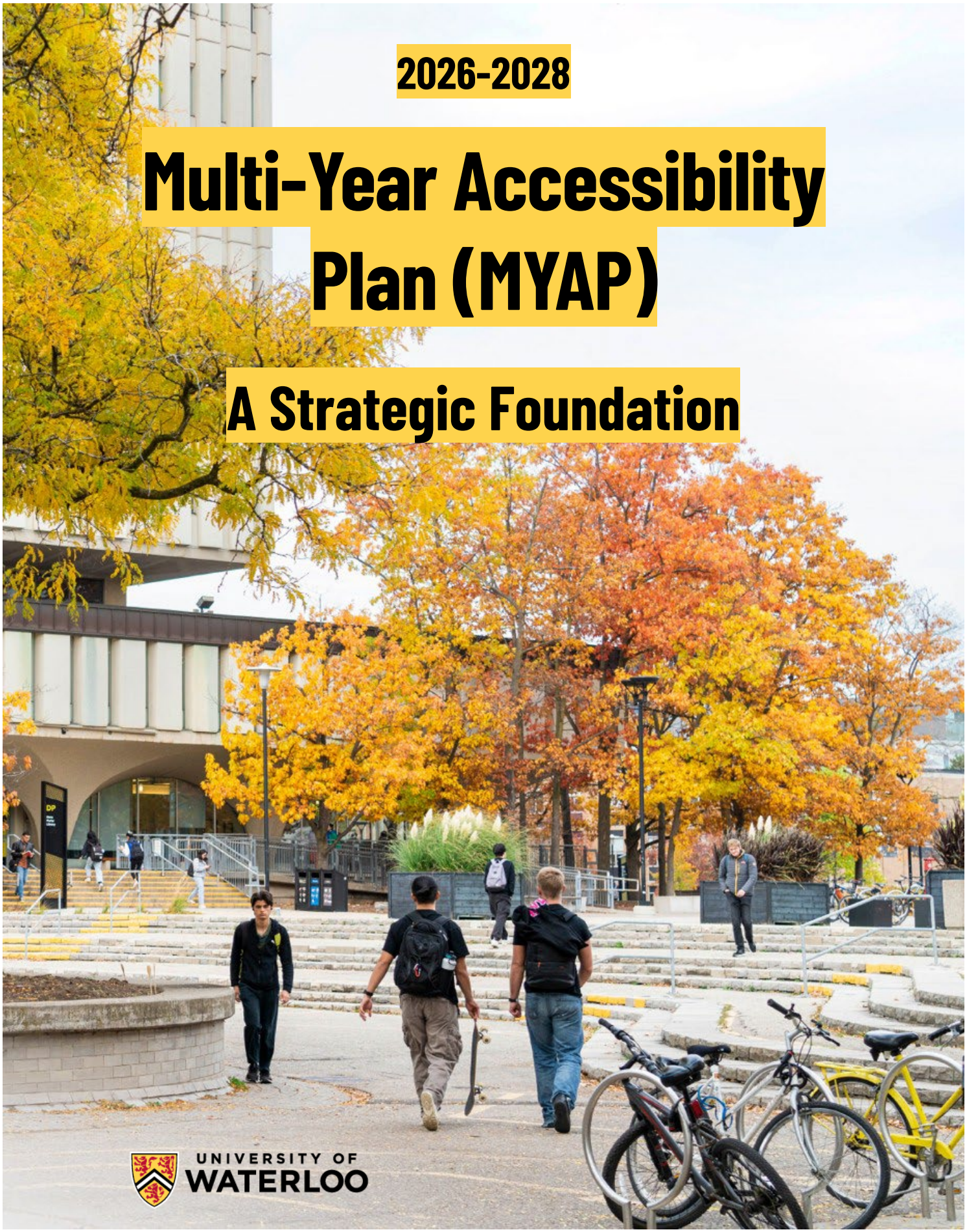
2026-2028

Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (MYAP)

A Strategic Foundation



UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO

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Territorial Acknowledgement

The University of Waterloo acknowledges that much of our work takes place on the traditional territory of the Neutral, Anishinaabeg, and Haudenosaunee peoples. Our main campus is situated on the Haldimand Tract, the land granted to the Six Nations that includes six miles on each side of the Grand River. Our active work toward reconciliation takes place across our campuses through research, learning, teaching, and community building, and is coordinated within the Office of Indigenous Relations.

Message from the Accessibility Steering Committee

The University of Waterloo is committed to advancing accessibility and disability inclusion as core components of an equitable, inclusive, and welcoming campus community.

Over the past several years, the University has made significant progress through accessibility initiatives, strengthened governance structures, community engagement, and institution-wide projects such as the Accessible Education project. These efforts have reduced barriers, increased institutional capacity, and established important foundations for accessibility and disability inclusion.

As Waterloo continues to evolve, the University recognizes an opportunity to move beyond individual accessibility initiatives toward a more coordinated, sustainable, and institutionally embedded approach. This 2026-2028 MYAP serves as a strategic bridge between Multi-Year Accessibility Plans, focusing on the foundational work needed to support the next phase of accessibility planning and implementation.

While accessibility will continue to be advanced through dedicated projects and initiatives, long-term progress requires accessibility to become part of how the University routinely plans, makes decisions, allocates resources, and measures success. Waterloo is committed to advancing systemic change towards an accessible campus, and sharing our journey with you along the way.



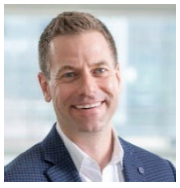
Jennifer Gillies

Associate Provost, Campus Support and Accessibility



Paul Fieguth,

Associate Vice President, Academic Operations



Martin Cooke

Associate Vice President, Academic

Introduction

This Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (MYAP) is organized around four interconnected strategic priorities that will guide Waterloo's transition from accessibility initiatives to a more sustainable model in which accessibility is embedded within the University's systems, structures, and decision-making processes:

- **Leadership and Governance**: Strengthening accountability and leadership capacity for accessibility.
- **Operations**: Embedding accessibility within institutional systems, processes, and decision-making.
- **Accessible Education**: Sustaining and advancing accessible teaching and learning practices.
- **Community Building**: Strengthening engagement, consultation, and collaboration with people with disabilities.

Together, these priorities support a shift from compliance-focused activities toward sustainable institutional practices that embed accessibility into the University's culture, governance, operations, teaching and learning, and decision-making.

Strategic Goal

Our strategic goal is to create a university where accessibility is intentionally integrated into every aspect of institutional life, enabling all members of the Waterloo community to participate, contribute, and thrive. This goal will be achieved by embedding accessibility into the systems, structures, decisions, and everyday practices of the University so that accessibility becomes a shared institutional responsibility and a sustainable driver of inclusion, belonging, and excellence.

Guiding Principles

The University's accessibility work during 2026-2028 will be guided by the following principles:

- **Accessibility by Design**: Consider accessibility from the outset rather than retrofitting solutions after barriers emerge.
- **Shared Accountability**: Accessibility is everyone's responsibility and requires leadership at all levels of the institution.

- **Lived Experience Expertise**: People with disabilities are essential collaborators in identifying barriers and shaping solutions.
- **Sustainability and Integration**: Accessibility should be embedded within existing systems, processes, and decision-making structures.
- **Continuous Improvement**: Accessibility is an ongoing journey that requires evaluation, learning, and adaptation.

Strategic Approach

While all four strategic priorities are interconnected, leadership and governance serve as the foundation for sustainable accessibility progress. Lasting institutional change requires clear accountability, shared ownership, and decision-making structures that support accessibility beyond individual projects, initiatives, and specialized offices.

The priorities outlined in this MYAP are intended to strengthen Waterloo's capacity to identify, prevent, and remove barriers while embedding accessibility into the core functions, decisions, and accountabilities of the University.

MYAP Strategic Priorities

Leadership and Governance

The next phase of accessibility advancement at Waterloo requires clear accountability structures and shared ownership across the institution. While specialized offices play an important leadership role, accessibility cannot be advanced through centralized efforts alone. Sustainable progress depends on leaders across the University understanding and fulfilling their accessibility responsibilities within their own areas of accountability.

Because many accessibility obligations are implemented through decentralized operational processes across the University, leaders must understand where accessibility intersects with their own portfolios, systems, services, and decision-making responsibilities. As a result, Waterloo will engage members of Senior Leadership Council in a structured discovery process designed to strengthen institutional capacity, clarify responsibilities, identify risks and opportunities, and establish priority actions within their respective portfolios.

Through this collaborative approach, accessibility considerations will increasingly be integrated into planning, operations, risk management, resource allocation, and decision-making across the institution.

Building on the successful governance model established through the Disability Inclusion Steering Committee (DISCo), this work will help ensure that accessibility remains a leadership priority and that progress is supported through sustainable institutional structures rather than isolated initiatives.

Desired Outcomes

- Accessibility responsibilities are clearly understood across senior leadership.
- Accessibility considerations are routinely incorporated into planning and decision-making processes.
- Units have sustainable capacity to identify and address accessibility barriers within their areas of responsibility.

Operations

Creating an accessible university requires more than individual accessibility improvements. It requires accessibility considerations to be integrated into the systems, processes, technologies, facilities, and operational practices that shape the daily experiences of students, employees, and visitors.

During the 2026-2028 period, Waterloo will focus on strengthening the institutional infrastructure that supports long-term accessibility outcomes. This includes enhancing accessibility-related data, improving compliance monitoring, supporting proactive planning and maintenance processes, and integrating accessibility considerations into project planning and decision-making.

Reliable accessibility data will support evidence-informed decision-making, proactive risk management, and more effective allocation of resources. Improved visibility into training completion and accessibility obligations will strengthen institutional accountability while supporting leaders and employees in fulfilling their responsibilities.

Together, these efforts will help create operational systems that identify and address barriers proactively rather than reactively, supporting more accessible and inclusive campus environments over time.

Examples of this work include strengthening institutional oversight of mandatory accessibility training requirements, improving the collection and management of information related to accessible campus features, and enhancing processes for preventative and emergency maintenance planning. Together, these initiatives will support proactive planning, accountability, and long-term sustainability.

Efforts to embed accessibility into institutional processes and projects are further supported by the **Equitable Consultation and Community Engagement Guide**. The Guide provides a framework for meaningful engagement with persons with disabilities and enables units to identify accessibility risks, barriers, and opportunities early in project planning and decision-making.

Desired Outcomes

- Accessibility requirements are embedded within institutional processes.
- Compliance monitoring is strengthened.
- Accessibility data supports proactive planning and resource allocation.

Accessible Education

The conclusion of the Accessible Education project marks an important transition from innovation to sustainability. Through this cross-faculty and cross-functional initiative, the University developed resources, supports, processes, professional learning opportunities, and policy improvements that have advanced accessible and inclusive teaching and learning across campus.

Building on the project's recommendations and demonstrated successes, Waterloo will focus on sustaining and embedding accessible teaching practices across faculties and academic units, including work-integrated learning. Particular attention will be given to maintaining resources and supports for instructors, establishing sustainable governance structures, and integrating accessibility principles into the broader student learning experience, such as co-operative education programming.

By continuing to design accessibility into educational experiences from the outset, Waterloo will reduce barriers to participation and learning while supporting academic excellence for all students.

Desired Outcomes

- Accessibility is increasingly embedded within core teaching and learning practices.
- Students experience fewer barriers to participation and learning.
- Faculties have sustainable supports to advance accessible education.

Community Building

Meaningful accessibility progress depends on partnership with people who bring lived experience of disability. Guided by the principle of "nothing about us without us," the University is committed to engaging persons with disabilities as active contributors to consultation, planning, decision-making, and community-building efforts.

Meaningful engagement strengthens accessibility outcomes by ensuring that institutional initiatives are informed by the expertise, perspectives, and experiences of those directly affected by barriers. Consultation is not simply a legislative requirement; it is a critical source of insight that improves decision-making, strengthens accountability, and supports more inclusive outcomes.

The Disability Affinity Program plays an important role in advancing both community-building and consultation. In addition to creating opportunities for students, staff, and faculty with disabilities to connect and support one another, the program provides a flexible mechanism through which institutional initiatives can engage disability communities in meaningful and project-specific ways.

This approach reflects community feedback that engagement is often most meaningful when individuals can participate in projects, initiatives, and conversations that are directly relevant to their interests, experiences, and expertise rather than through a standing advisory structure.

Building on this model, Waterloo will continue to strengthen consultation practices and create opportunities for persons with disabilities to influence accessibility priorities, policies, programs, and projects across the institution.

Since its establishment, the Disability Affinity Program has contributed feedback and lived-experience expertise to a variety of institutional initiatives, including transportation planning, athletics programming, student experience projects, and other accessibility-related consultations. This work demonstrates how community-informed engagement can strengthen project outcomes while creating opportunities for meaningful participation.

Both the Disability Affinity Program and the Equitable Consultation and Community Engagement Guide will be leveraged to support the University’s commitment to meaningful consultation in the development of our MYAPs. By integrating accessibility considerations into consultation, planning, and implementation processes, the University can support more inclusive outcomes and reduce the creation of future barriers.

Desired Outcomes

- Persons with disabilities are meaningfully engaged in institutional decision-making.
- Community expertise informs accessibility priorities and solutions.
- Consultation processes support more inclusive outcomes across the University.

Measuring Progress and Looking Ahead

Measuring Progress

Progress toward the strategic priorities outlined in this strategy will be monitored through ongoing evaluation, reporting, and consultation activities.

The University will assess progress through:

- implementation of priority initiatives and recommendations;
- increased accessibility capacity and accountability across units;
- strengthened compliance monitoring and reporting practices;
- participation in accessibility consultation and engagement activities;
- feedback from people with disabilities and disability communities; and
- evidence of accessibility considerations being integrated into institutional planning, decision-making, and operations.

This information will help inform continuous improvement efforts and support the development of Waterloo's next Multi-Year Accessibility Plan.

Looking Ahead

Advancing accessibility is essential to achieving Waterloo at 100 and creating a university where all members of the community can participate, contribute, and thrive.

The 2026-2028 Accessibility Strategy represents the next phase of Waterloo's accessibility journey. Having established important foundations through targeted initiatives, governance structures, and community partnerships, the University is now focused on embedding accessibility into the systems, structures, and decisions that shape institutional life.

Through strengthened leadership, sustainable operational practices, accessible education, and meaningful engagement with people with disabilities, Waterloo will continue building an institution where accessibility is not viewed as a separate initiative, but as a fundamental characteristic of excellence, inclusion, and belonging.

The work undertaken during this bridge period will inform the development of Waterloo's next Multi-Year Accessibility Plan and position the University to achieve lasting, institution-wide accessibility outcomes.

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TEMPLATE FP2925 - 02-2024