Why accessibility in procurement?
Accessibility equals diversity. While most of us think of accessibility is to service individuals with permanent, visible limitations (e.g. physical impairments, hearing impairments, and/or visual impairments), it really is about good design and offering equal opportunity and access, all the time. Everyone will go through their day having a barrier; for example, unable to do stairs while pushing a cart; unable to operate buttons due to holding a coffee cup; unable to see lights/control panel during sundown; or unable to hear instructions because of the noise level right at class change time. If products, services, and facilities that we offer were accessible in all of these situations, then we would maintain a consistent quality in service. For individuals with disabilities, accessibility is critical in order to have any access at all.

From a legislative perspective, the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) mandates that designated public sector organizations incorporate accessibility criteria in their processes for buying and acquiring goods, services and facilities. This means we must consider accessibility, where possible, along with other criteria such as quality and cost of the items. We must also incorporate accessible design and features where possible.

How to use this toolkit:
This toolkit is divided into 5 sections, reflecting the various areas that Procurement and Contract Services work with:

1. Software and web applications
2. Facilities Management
3. Goods
4. Services
5. Libraries
6. RFx documents

Each section is designed so that it may be referenced, as needed. Where possible, accessibility should be embedded into regular procurement practices, rather than a separate, standalone process. Therefore, the following checklists are designed to be included within the standard procurement processes of each area. Opportunities to include these elements prior to implementing the procurement of a particular contract is highly recommended.
Information Technology and Web Applications

Procuring IT hardware and software solutions can be complex. It is important to understand and address how key features and functions of an application can affect accessibility.

In general, the broader the use of an application, the more accessible it should be. Some key considerations when looking to procure software include (taken from Ontario Council of University Libraries):

- Is the interface accessible via standard keyboard access methods and screen reader (i.e. without using a mouse)?
- Can the user access the operating system accessibility tools, without affecting application functionality?
- What is the compatibility with assistive technologies?
- What are the user-selected system settings for input and output?
- Does it avoid the use of a pointing device?
- Is all information (including images and frames) accessible to users with restricted or no vision, restricted or no hearing?
- Is the screen flash frequency below 2 Hertz?
- Are instructions, prompts and outputs written in plain language, and, where possible, supplemented with pictorial information or spoken language?
- Is there logical tab order for controls, input fields and other objects?
- Are there instructions for all accessibility features?
- Is there accessible documentation for training and support materials?
- Is there availability of a forum or feedback channels?
- Is the Content management systems (CMS) easy to manage by staff (accessibility fixes)

Legislative requirements:
Many software companies will note the relative legislative accessibility requirements within the United States, Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act ("Section 508). This is often referenced when responding to procurement inquiries of whether their product is “accessible”. However, the AODA’s Information and Communication standard specifically references Web Content Accessibility Guideline (WCAG) 2.0 Level AA as the standard required for all digital content. While there are many similarities, there are some noted differences between the two, as highlighted on the United States Access Board. Software providers should be prepared to answer whether their product/service meets all of WCAG 2.0 standards as noted in the AODA, including those not addressed under Section 508.

Assessment:
As with other goods/products, the ability to procure accessible software may be limited by the following factors:
• Availability of accessible versions
• Compatibility between older and newer products
• Operational or business requirements
• Urgency
• Cost

While the AODA does not preclude the University from purchasing goods that do not meet the needs of all users, the University should undergo the following steps when deciding to purchase a less accessible product:

• Communicate to the University community the limiting factors (as referenced above) that affected the University’s decision for procuring goods that do not meet needs of all users
• Provide an action plan (including timelines) to review the availability of additional accessibility options to meet the needs of all users. This may be built into the regular software upgrade schedule