

## Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Accessibility Highlights

### Highlighting: Halifax Central Library Receives Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certified Gold Ranking

*" [Creating] a welcoming and accessible environment at Halifax Central Library has meant listening to staff, customers, and the public."*

*- Katie Wimmer, Space Planning and Design Manager, Halifax Central Library*

The Halifax Central Library celebrated a major accessibility accomplishment this past August, achieving the highest level of accessibility possible for the built environment. The library has earned 'RHF Accessibility Certified Gold,' the top accessibility rating under the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification™ program. The Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification (RHFAC) is a national rating system for the built environment that measures and certifies accessibility. The system helps organizations understand the accessibility of a facility, how to identify barriers and what improvements can be made.

Halifax Central Library earned a rating score of 84% according to the RHFAC model, which is no easy accomplishment. An organization must score 80 percent or higher to achieve the gold certification. According to the Rick Hansen Foundation website, there are only 129+ sites that have achieved the gold certification, which shows Halifax Public Libraries' commitment to removing barriers and improving accessibility for community and staff of all abilities.

Here are some of the highlights from the Halifax Central Library's scorecard [from the Halifax Public Library's website]:

- Exterior approaches and entrances scored 86%
- Interior services and environment scored 85%
- Sanitary facilities scored 77%
- Wayfinding and signage scored 80%
- Evaluating mind-friendly environments scored 93%
- Technology and innovation scored 100%

Katie Wimmer, the Space Planning and Design Manager for the Halifax Central Library, says that designing and maintaining accessible public spaces is challenging. "Often, what works for one person does not work for another. For example, people with low vision typically benefit from well-lit spaces, whereas the same spaces can cause stress and anxiety for people with sensory disabilities." Katie says that good design is all about balancing these needs. She says that the Halifax Central Library has taken a people-first approach to this work. "Fostering a welcoming and accessible environment at Halifax Central Library has meant listening to staff, customers, and the public when they come forward with ideas or concerns and maintaining continuing education amongst our organization on best practices for accessible design."

When asked if they had advice for other organizations, Katie recommended engaging a professional to complete a rating. "The rating system is incredibly [detailed] and goes far beyond the requirements of the Building Code to provide meaningful access to all in the built environment. The first step in the journey is understanding, so a discussion with an accessibility consultant, such as an RHFAC Professional, can open your eyes to challenges or barriers that may exist that you were not aware of."

Katie says Halifax Public Libraries plans to continue using the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification. Halifax Central Library is the first library site to receive a rating. Moving forward, Katie says the organization aims to make this level of accessibility the new standard for all major projects and new buildings, which is in line with Halifax Regional Municipality's commitment to accessibility.



Please take a look at their blog post about this project [here](#) to review a full score breakdown and highlighted accessibility features at the Central Library.

