

Conducting a Physical Workplace Assessment to Plan for the Future



portvancouver.com

bclc.com

OVERVIEW

The Vancouver Fraser Port Authority and BCLC have a commitment to diversity and inclusion. As part of this commitment, both workplaces initiated physical accessibility audits in their respective workplaces. These audits allowed them to see where there were areas of opportunity to be more physically accessible for their employees and clients.

OBJECTIVE

In constantly seeking feedback from employees, both organizations understood that there were potential areas of improvement within their physical premises.

In conducting a physical assessment, they were keen to understand the following:

- What was working well in the offices, and should therefore be maintained?
- What changes would they need to make to be truly inclusive?
- How could they prepare their workplace for the future?

APPROACH

Each organization took a different approach to the assessment.

BCLC's initial approach to the assessment was as follows:

- Spoke to a few key leaders to secure buy-in.
- Contacted an organization, Ready Willing Able (RWA), to conduct the assessment.
- RWA engaged with various leaders within the organization to better understand the roles that employees have within the organization.
- BCLC received a report that helped them understand areas of opportunity.

The port's approach was as follows:

- Solicited and received buy-in from internal partners.
- Contacted an organization that specialized in this field to conduct the audit – Frame & Associates.
- A report was compiled with key recommendations and decisions were made on the priority of these recommendations.

Buy-in from Internal Partners

Prior to commencing the audit, both organizations ensured that relevant stakeholders were in agreement with the objectives and process behind the audit. As an example, the relevant stakeholders for the port authority included: the union, facilities staff, health and safety committee, and the executive team. For BCLC, they ensured that their board and executive team was supporting of their diversity and inclusion program as a whole – which resulted in the assessment as one component.

Choosing a Partner Organization and Conducting the Audit

The port authority chose Frame & Associates to conduct the audit because they had worked with them during their government audit and because they have a long-standing relationship with Frame & Associates on equity matters. Frame & Associates conducted the walk-through of the premises using the government checklist provided to the port authority. This gave both the firm and the port authority a better understanding of the physical layout of the offices to realize areas of opportunity.

Since BCLC had a previous relationship with Ready Willing Able (RWA), they asked RWA to do a physical workplace assessment in both the Vancouver and Kamloops offices. RWA is a national partner of the Canadian Association for Community Living (CACL), the Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorders Alliance (CASDA) and their member organizations. A member of the BCLC team walked the RWA contact through the office, so they could assess the physical space. This walk-through took about 1.5 hours in each office as well as a Casino site visit. RWA was assessing the space physically, while also trying to better understand the business operations of BCLC.

Conversation with Leaders

To aid in RWA's understanding of BCLC's operations, during the physical assessment, various leaders throughout the organization shared their insights with RWA. The type of information that RWA was seeking included: what kind of work is being done in each department, what are the expectations of each employee, etc. This not only helped with the physical assessment, but also allowed RWA to help BCLC with their other objective of being a truly inclusive organization.

Key Recommendations & Decisions

The port authority's walk-through with Frame & Associates noted some work already in progress (automatic door openers, signage) as well as some areas that could be improved (placement of microwaves or supplies). The port authority prioritized these recommendations taking into account budget, immediate needs of current employees and advice from Frame & Associates.

For BCLC, the physical assessment produced a number of recommendations including:

- Building accessibility
- Natural light in the workplace
- Height of desks and workstations
- Accessible washrooms
- Cafeteria microwave location
- Fire alarms being audible and visual

RWA put together a report outlining these recommendations for BCLC's use. These recommendations will be used to improve their current physical spaces and in the future when as they expand their facilities or undergo renovations.

OUTCOMES

As a result of the audit, both organizations have a better idea of their areas of opportunity. The port has made physical amendments to their current work environments as a result of the recommendations. The port authority also has plans for any variety of accommodation requests that may arise.

BCLC has a list of recommendations to consider as they look at securing more space. They are also going through a more thorough audit with the Rick Hansen foundation to understand and prioritize any current recommendations.

LESSONS LEARNED

Both organizations learned a great deal in the process of this audit. Some of the key lessons learned are captured below.

Be Proactive

The port authority is consistently looking at how to be more proactive in their approach towards accessibility. They learned a lot from the audit and believe they would have benefitted from conducting it earlier on.

But Don't Try and Over Plan

BCLC found that not trying to pre-plan prior to the assessment was important in ensuring the assessment results were accurate and useable for the organization. They found that organizations don't know what they don't know – in other words, the point of an assessment is to make our workplace an inclusive environment where employees bring their authentic selves to work driving innovation, collaboration and ultimately organizational success for all British Columbians.

Get All Levels of the Organization Engaged

BCLC learned that having all parts of the organization engaged is a key part of the success of the assessment, and what comes after it. Engaging leaders within the organization is critical

to getting buy-in so each leader understands what is happening, why it's important, and the intent of the assessment. Having someone from HR or Recruitment involved can also be helpful if the conversations progress from a physical assessment to hiring.

Ensure You Have Support and Resources

The port authority found it extremely beneficial to have relevant stakeholders on board before conducting the audit. This helped with buy-in, budget, and enabling key decisions after the audit was complete. Being realistic about the budgetary implications of physical changes to the space was also important in managing expectations and ensuring the right order to address priorities.

Communicate

The port authority knows it is important for employees to know that accessibility is a priority for the organization. The port authority continues to look for ways to let their teams know what they are doing to make their workplace more accessible and inclusive.

Be Clear About Expectations

It is important for both organizations (BCLC and RWA in this case), to be clear about the expectations in conducting a workplace assessment. This includes what is required, how involved will the auditing organization be after the initial assessment, what kind of report will be produced, etc.

NEXT STEPS

The port authority will continue to make improvements based the information gathered in the audit. They would also like to communicate to their employees to better understand employee needs, and keep the conversation open about what potential barriers employees are facing at work.

BCLC is currently assessing the recommendations made by RWA to see what they can implement on a short and longer-term basis. They are also reviewing the report to see how the recommendations may affect new/additional space that they secure, and any renovations they plan to do. One of their next steps is working with the Rick Hansen foundation on a more thorough assessment, to help them better understand and prioritize opportunities. They will also continue to work with RWA on diversifying their hiring practices. As an organization whose goal is to be a leader in diversity and inclusion by 2022, they know that continuing to improve the accessibility of their physical space is an important part of achieving this.