

RHF Certification Program Prototype

Name of Model Prototype:

The Rick Hansen Foundation Certification Program (RHF Certification Program)

Name of Model Prototype Leader:

Rick Hansen Foundation (RHF) with the support of a number of organizations detailed below.

Objectives of the Model Prototype:

For over 30 years, Rick Hansen has been dedicated to creating an inclusive world where people with disabilities are living to their full potential. The RHF delivers on this goal by creating programs and initiatives that raise awareness, change attitudes, and remove barriers in the built environment. By working with governments, corporate partners, the disability community and service organizations, we are a catalyst for a more accessible and inclusive society.

The overarching **objective** is to develop and implement a **RHF Certification Program**, which, by April 1, 2018 will be fully field-tested, approved and recognized in Ontario and be scalable across Canada and around the world. The Program will reinforce the expectation that minimum personal/public safety and accessible design approaches be used throughout the Canadian **built environment**, while providing appropriate recognition for those who pursue additional levels of excellence in **inclusive design** above mandated minimums. This certification program will provide independent, third-party verification that public or private spaces are meeting the highest possible levels of inclusive design.

We believe the RHF Certification Program will be a positive vehicle to bring issues of accessibility, inclusivity and a barrier-free world into the center of daily conversation of Canadians.

We will carry out a pilot phase in Ontario which will be funded by government and have the following key strategies:

1. **Field test all aspects of the certification program** including getting our inclusive design rating tool validated by a recognized authority (e.g. Canadian Standards Association), verifying that the learning outcomes of the accreditation training program are properly recognized and approved (e.g. by a post-secondary institution), providing high value-added services to building owners, landlords and developers which will ensure the long-term financial sustainability of the business model.
2. **Implement a training and accreditation program** to underpin the certification program, providing people with the necessary education and expertise to conduct credible and accurate assessments of the built environment.
3. **Recruit, train and employ people with disabilities** to conduct building assessments.
4. **Support a technology hub** where resources, administrative activities, user reviews and other tasks can be carried out through both consumer-facing functionality as well as back-office support for participating organizations.
5. **Create educational services** for businesses, employers and leading organizations to increase awareness and advance expertise in the field of accessibility and inclusive design.

Outcomes of the Model Prototype:

The key outcomes for the pilot phase through to April 1, 2018 and beyond include:

1. Policy and infrastructure improvements and advancements on inclusive, barrier free design.
2. People with disabilities have an opportunity to enhance their skills and participate in a new social enterprise.
3. Successful delivery of a self-financing social enterprise.
4. Economic and social benefits associated with a barrier free built environment are well understood in the public and private sectors.
5. A measurable shift in levels of awareness and public attitudes about the potential of people with disabilities and the barriers they face in the built environment.

Key performance indicators will be developed in order to track progress against the outcomes identified above (e.g. number of facilities exceeding minimum standards, number of people with disabilities removed from ODSP funding, number of jurisdictions wishing to consult with Ontario, etc).

Executive Summary of the Model Prototype:

The mission of the RHF is “To inspire leaders, influencers and the public to join Rick Hansen in creating a global movement to remove barriers in the built environment, and thereby liberate the potential of people with disabilities.”

Canada needs a national certification program that measures accessibility in the built environment and the RHF is well positioned to bring the key players in the disability community together with governments and corporate Canada to deliver this in a truly unified, cohesive manner.

Of all the barriers identified during the Working Groups consultations (attitudes, physical accessibility, employment, lack of information, health and education), the RHF is focusing on the ‘built environment’ because we believe the most significant barrier that people with disabilities face is access to public and private built environments: office buildings, retail stores, community centres, schools, parks, among others – essentially all the places a person would wish to live, work and play.

The RHF’s strategic direction and resources are aligned with the government of Ontario’s accessibility goals to develop and test a certification program. It will be a positive and visible initiative through which Ontarians will be able to better understand the issue of accessibility; see the social and economic value of promoting an inclusive society; and, engage in the collective pursuit of removing physical barriers in the built environment.

Throughout 2015, we operated a pilot program in BC in which we recruited, trained and employed people with disabilities to carry out building assessments using an accessibility design rating system. This program is expanding to allow for the field testing of an enhanced inclusive design rating tool as well as our best practices training program which is what we intend to adapt and apply in Ontario as part of an ambitious national certification program **targeting the built environment** to begin with. We may move to other categories (e.g.

customer service, IT, etc), as appropriate, in collaboration with other expert organizations, but our focus is clear at the moment. As we did in BC, we will also recruit and train people with disabilities for the Ontario pilot program.

Model Prototype Components:

A certification program – including a rating system (similar to LEED which certifies green buildings) to help building owners and operators understand accessibility requirements and upgrade or build to higher standards/best practices.

Training and accreditation of accessibility assessors – to ensure buildings being reviewed are being assessed using consistent methodology and businesses have confidence that the assessors are well trained.

Incentives – encourage governments to offer incentives (such as tax breaks or streamlined permitting) to buildings that exceed accessibility standards, similar to incentives for energy efficiency with LEED.

Consulting services – professional services such as accessible design reviews for major projects and master planning; full project access assessments and planning reviews; audits of existing facilities and construction drawing reviews, among others.

Training and educational services for businesses and employers looking to enhance their understanding of accessibility and inclusion.

Revenue streams to help the program be self-financing post pilot phase including: 1) building assessments or audits; 2) accessibility consulting on new developments or big projects; 3) accessibility product assessment/procurement; 4) training and educational services; and, 4) certification and re-certification of building projects.

Branding and marketing of the program and associated tasks which will largely be the domain of the lead organization in consultation with government, corporations and partner organizations.

Governance which will follow the “hybrid” model set out by the Working Groups which includes a combination of citizen-driven input with a more traditional oversight structure that includes independent establishment and maintenance of identified recognition levels as well as other appropriate checks and balances.

Fit with Working Group Recommendations:

The proposed RHF Certification Program aligns well with the Working Group guiding principles and recommendations. Our model will follow the same functional priorities agreed by the Working Groups which is reflected in our objectives and strategies outlined above. We will support an organizational structure that can deliver a professional program, establish benchmarks, marshal resources, award certification, and monitor the program’s effectiveness.

We will use our existing “Planat” web-based accessibility portal to manage a range of administrative tasks including uploading assessment and certification reports, receiving and curating “crowd-sourced” building reviews, hosting professional development content, online training and community feedback.

By following a “LEED”-style certification approach which uses recognition tiers and a solid but flexible governance model, we have a recognized approach to follow and this will allow us show progress more quickly and get building owners and developers on side early. Lastly, by focusing on a pilot project in the built environment, we can build on a wealth of existing standards, inclusive design principles and academic rigour to again, move faster.

Principles Not in Alignment with the Prototype:

We agree that the certification program is not about compliance, but rather the pursuit of excellence, and does not replace enforcement mechanisms under the AODA. We also recognize that to encourage businesses, building owners and developers to aspire to a higher standard, it may be worth including a recognition level in our inclusive design rating tool which would be “meeting the building code”. Therefore, by extension, the building assessment process we recommend may result in advice or guidance on what it might take for a client to reach the level of recognition associated with meeting the existing accessibility requirements contained in the building code.

Organizational Capacity to Deliver and Sustain the Prototype:

For almost 30 years, RHF has functioned as a social innovator – identifying and implementing collaborative solutions to challenges in the built environment and broader society. Through its programs and initiatives, RHF has created a national presence and nation-wide network of disability-related stakeholders and partners.

This experience and expertise will enable us to establish partnerships with federal and provincial governments, corporations, other service providers, employers and funders to ensure the long-term viability and success of the certification program.

Proposed Partners and Resources to Support Delivery and Sustainability:

Working in partnership with recognized experts in the areas of accessibility assessments (e.g. Adaptability Canada), standards (e.g. Canadian Standards Association) and accredited training (e.g. post-secondary institution) is critical to the success of this project. RHF recognizes we need the support of public and private sectors to field test our program in their buildings and spaces. Endorsements from those who believe in the approach of RHF and will stand with us to design and deliver a world-class program are provided as Additional Information below. Further endorsements and support are expected during the public review of our Model Prototype proposal.

As pilot projects get underway, additional partners will be sought or will come to the table in the spirit of collaboration to work with RHF and help deliver the program. 30 years of social innovation aimed at bringing like-minded groups together to solve accessibility problems and remove barriers gives RHF a solid base from which to operate.

Benefits to business:

The benefits of a certification program are extensive including: access to a larger customer base; being an employer of choice; future-proofing your buildings from building code changes; recognition as a leader in promoting accessibility and inclusivity.

We also agree with the summary noted in the Phase I report which states: “Through our discussions, business owners have identified improving customer service, increasing revenue, and improving branding and marketing opportunities as key motivators for change to their business model. Particularly business owners with a high degree of awareness and experience with accessibility saw a link between these key motivators and certification. Certification could help to expand their client base, diversify services, and welcome new, talented employees, in turn increasing revenue. Recognition and visibility for businesses that show excellence in accessibility is a further driver for change.”

Cost to business:

The cost to business during the pilot phase will be minimal insofar as we will aim to have government underwrite the cost of assessments. Beyond the pilot phase, as a market for accessibility assessments and certification grows, businesses can expect to pay a fair market rate in return for a professional assessment and review (as well as expert insight) of their facility or development – much as a LEED consultant is valued in the marketplace today.

Regarding the cost of improving accessibility beyond the minimum, there is a growing body of research that indicates that the value/square foot of new developments which are built using universal and inclusive design principles is higher and can be expected to grow as people search for alternatives to traditional building design. Done right, universal and inclusive design does not need to be a cost driver and indeed, can deliver a strong ROI.

Piloting Strategy

Overview

There are a large number of incremental steps leading to the launch of a fully validated RHF Certification Program by April, 2018. If community support for this proposal warrants moving forward, a detailed project plan and dedicated resources will be assigned over the next two years.

Other key activities to be carried out during the Ontario Pilot Phase include pursuing relationships with groups including the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA), Canadian Construction Association and other industry associations, developers, corporations, public sector landlords and others. The goal is to secure candidates for pilot phase assessments as well as build up credibility of the emerging program in order to lock down a pipeline of business for the post-pilot period.

Ongoing consultations, monitoring and evaluation will be carried out throughout the pilot phase in consultation with Ontario, community advocates, businesses and key advisors to Ontario.

Milestones

1. May/16 – July/16 – Negotiate terms and conditions with the Province of Ontario to launch a pilot program by September 1, 2016.
2. July/16 – Sept/16 – Recruit owners/landlords/large tenants to offer buildings for field-testing.
3. Sept/16 – Nov/16 – Train the first group of assessors using RHF inclusive design program which will be the baseline leading towards a full tiered program.

4. Sept/16 – April 1/18 – In parallel with the field testing, RHF to engage partners who can assist in the further development, refinement and validation of training program material, personnel accreditation standards and the inclusive design rating tool.
5. Dec/16 – Launch first assessments using trained consultants which guarantees Ontario a high standard of assessment while testing out certain aspects of a tiered rating system.
6. Dec/16 – April/18 - Carry out assessments measuring against standards evolving out of ongoing work with partners and in consultation with the disability community, builders, architects and other experts.

Area of Focus:

The built environment – defined as the man-made surroundings that provide the setting for where we live, work and play; ranging from buildings and parks or green space to neighborhoods and cities that can often include their supporting infrastructure, such as transportation networks.

Scope:

During the pilot phase, we want to field test all aspects of our program in all areas of the built environment and physical spaces in order to refine/optimize our inclusive design rating tool. We will work with corporate champions, governments and progressive communities to showcase projects that demonstrate the value of aspiring to reach for a higher level.

Rationale:

The rationale behind our piloting strategy is simple: we need to field test all the concepts, components and material behind both the inclusive design rating tool as well as our training program to reach a level of validated acceptance in the marketplace. We also need to communicate the value and importance of a certification program in order to create the critical mass of paying customers to launch a true social enterprise.

Five Year Vision:

In five years, Canada will have a recognized rating guide against an inclusive design standard that is scalable across Canada and potentially the world. There will be a training program that is approved and delivered at level that gives recognition to a marketable accreditation for the person taking the training. We will have created a new and thriving market for accessibility and inclusive design consultants who will be leaders in guiding developers and building owners to reach higher. We will have recruited and trained a significant number of people with disabilities who will be making a career out of being accessibility and inclusive design consultants carrying out important and meaningful work for society. Finally, we will be building on the measurable outcomes identified above regarding seeing a visible shift in the accessibility of the built environment.

Additional Information – Endorsements

Adaptability Canada, Jeff Wilson, CEO

As a company leading the field inclusive design consulting and serving large public and private organizations across Ontario and Canada, it is vital to develop a certification system that values the efforts made by those looking to embrace a proactive approach to put aside the protection granted to them by grandfathering and exceed minimum standards as set out by AODA. These

organizations are focused on delivering a superior customer experience to all customers, the public and employees that serves people of all ability equally.

In my opinion, there are few organizations capable of developing and implementing a program of this importance and size. The Rick Hansen Foundation has the resources, experience, personnel and most importantly respect of both the business sector and the disability sector. Because of this, Adaptability Canada full supports and endorses the Rick Hansen Foundation to lead this pilot and take this beyond Ontario to serve the needs of Canadians and Canadian business.

Gerald Parker (formerly of Beyond Ability)

“I am really honoured the Rick Hansen Foundation has asked for my ongoing insight and support for the important game changing Certified For Access project. Simply put, RHF has inclusively put forward a thoughtful, practical and collaborative evolution in this prototype. It is likewise with great pride I endorse this important undertaking that will raise the bar, employ people with disabilities and very positively make Ontario and Canada more accessible to all that live, work, play, invest in and visit here.”

Additional endorsements from the business community, disability organizations and service providers will be submitted as part of the public review process.