

Certification Model Prototype

Name of Model Prototype: Accessibility & Inclusion Index

Name of Model Prototype Leader: Canadian Business SenseAbility

Objectives:

1. Increase awareness among private sector business of the bottom line business benefits of being accessible and inclusive and to dispel misconceptions, bias and fear.
2. To recognize and promote individual business for their accessibility and inclusion efforts in all areas of their business:
 - Physical accessibility & inclusive design
 - Digital accessibility
 - Recruitment & employment
 - Accommodation
 - Products and services development
 - Sales & Marketing practices
 - Customer, vendor, supplier, partner accessibility
3. To support businesses by providing access to Canadian, business-focused information, best practices and resources:
 - Practical information and guidance on the principles of universal design and accessibility including premises, products and services, digital presence, best practices on recruitment, employment, accommodation, marketing, customer service, etc.
 - Research and data supporting the business case for accessibility and inclusion.
 - Business tools and training.

Outcomes:

1. Increased corporate awareness and knowledge of the world's largest emerging market and the economic necessity of being "in the game".
2. Public recognition, through the certification process, of business' accessibility and inclusion competence and confidence.
3. Increased employment of people with disabilities.
4. Increased product and services for people with disabilities.
5. Improved customer service through accessible design
6. Improved access (physical and digital).
7. Improving the lens through which business and the community in general view people with disability...a transition from 'us' and 'them', to simply 'us'.

Executive Summary of Model Prototype

Structure

We propose that the Certification Model Prototype develop as a division of Canadian Business SenseAbility.

Launched in 2014, Canadian Business SenseAbility is a national, not-for-profit, member-based business network, created by business for business. It is uniquely focused on promoting the business case for hiring and retaining people with disabilities and creating awareness around the limitless marketing opportunities available. The SenseAbility network helps companies realize the proven, bottom-line business benefits of hiring talented people with disabilities and serving a disability market worth over \$40B in Canada, \$1 Trillion globally.

Snapshot of Prototype

The business certification model currently being assessed would fit logically under the SenseAbility umbrella. As SenseAbility has already developed its own assessment tool, the disAbility Inclusion Index (DII) to assist members in moving the accessibility and inclusion lever forward, developing a certification model would be a logical next step.

Currently, SenseAbility member companies are guided annually through a corporate self-assessment using SenseAbility's exclusive *disAbility Inclusion Index (DII)*. The tool helps companies assess and measure their progress on key aspects of disability inclusion and accessibility, and identify opportunities for improvement. From there, the SenseAbility advisory team helps members focus on their specific opportunities and guide them to new heights of disAbility confidence.

The DII is currently not intended to be a certification model, but rather a voluntary guidance tool for companies to assess their progress and assist with next steps. While it contains the "bones" for a certification model, it would need to be expanded with verification steps built in.

Developed from a Canadian business perspective, SenseAbility's member-only portal makes available the very latest best practices, tools, training, expert knowledge and publications to employees of member companies, making it easy for organizations to grow their disAbility confidence.

SenseAbility would need to assess fee options for providing access to these resources for companies participating in the certification process. Membership could be one option to help ensure progress and success in the certification program.

We believe that any certification model should be based on voluntary business participation, and that it is a business decision regarding how much to do or not do, based on their current business priorities. As a SenseAbility member, companies will have opportunities to share their successes and challenges, helping to dispel misconceptions, and adding to their 'disAbility confidence' to do more.

Leadership & Governance

Canadian Business SenseAbility already exists as a support organization in helping business develop disability confidence. It is a logical organization to prime a certification

model. The existing management team would need to be expanded in order to accommodate the certification enterprise.

Canadian Business SenseAbility's Board of Directors currently consists of private-sector business executives. It also has an Advisory Board representing the disAbility community.

Revenue

Start-up funding for Canadian Business SenseAbility has been provided by the Department of Employment and Social Development, Government of Canada until March 2017. SenseAbility is also funded by annual membership fees charged to member corporations. Fees are based on size (number of employees in Canada). It is expected that the organization will require ongoing funding by both governments and members to continue its work. Membership gives member company employees access to the member portal and online resources, as well as advisory services. This model works well for large- and medium-sized corporations, but would need to be adapted for the very small business market and certification.

Fit with Working Group Recommendations

The certification model will offer businesses an opportunity to obtain an objective score on their accessibility and inclusion policies and practices, and identify opportunities for improvement. For many companies, this process of becoming 'disability confident' will take time to evolve. The certification program will:

- Help educate businesses on the business case for becoming accessible and inclusive.
- Not replace any legislation
- Be voluntary on the part of business.
- Be objective rather than subjective – based on qualitative measures and validated by an independent evaluator.
- Be a feedback mechanism to businesses.
- Enable businesses to see their progress year-over-year, be a positive feedback mechanism, and help them target and focus on areas of improvement.
- Not publicly expose businesses that do not achieve high values in scoring.
- Recognize those businesses that meet the certification standard (or close to it).

Organizational Capacity to Deliver and Sustain the Prototype:

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Since its launch in September 2014, Canadian Business SenseAbility has well established relationships and credibility with the business community in Ontario. It is currently growing these relationships nationally.

Proposed Partners and Resources to Support Delivery and Sustainability

Canadian Business SenseAbility will collaborate with organizations that are leaders in promoting universal design (such as OCAD University's Inclusive Design Research Centre, Rick Hansen Foundation, etc.) to provide resources and guidance, business organizations (Boards of Trade, Chambers of Commerce and trade associations) to market to and collaborate with businesses of all sizes.

Benefits to business:

- The business case for becoming accessible and inclusive (as identified above).
- Recognition as an accessible and inclusive organization.
- The business case is a much stronger incentive to business than recognition.

Cost to business:

Cost to be determined by what is actually offered to businesses, based on their needs:

- Nominal fees for evaluation by an accredited professional
- Optional membership fees for access to the member portal/resources
- Optional training and events.

Piloting strategy:

We would suggest two or three separate pilots: One for small business and one for large business, and possibly a third with mid-size business, as each will have distinctly different approaches and needs.

As an example for small business, the town of Sarnia has shown a business receptiveness to becoming accessible with a goal of attracting a new market and an increase in tourism.

As an example for large business, the pilot might include a sample of companies from the finance sector (who have well-developed programs for accessibility and inclusion). Their experience and feedback into the program could help drive excellence for all business.

A third option could be to include mid-size companies who have complied with the legislative requirements, but have little understanding of the business case for accessibility and inclusion.

Rationale:

The three options will provide us with a good perspective on the needs of different organizations and how they differ relative to a certification process.

Five Year Vision:

Business will no longer be able to afford to leave talent and customers behind. Ontario will lead the country in accessibility and inclusiveness.