



**WRITTEN SUBMISSION FOR THE
PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATIONS IN ADVANCE OF THE
2023 BUDGET**

**ELIMINATING BARRIERS TO CONTENT ACCESSIBILITY
FOR CANADIANS WITH DISABILITIES**

October 6, 2022



- **RECOMMENDATION:** The federal government provide funding for the Broadcasting Accessibility Fund in the amount of \$2.5M to support the on-going work of the Fund focused on the elimination of barriers to broadcasting content accessibility for Canadians with disabilities.



Broadcasting Accessibility Fund
Eliminating Barriers to Broadcasting Content Accessibility for Canadians with Disabilities

Background

The Broadcasting Accessibility Fund (the Fund) is an independent not for profit funding body that provides grants for innovative projects in English and French, to advance accessibility to broadcasting content across multiple platforms for Canadians with disabilities.

Established through CRTC Broadcasting Regulatory Policy 2012-430 and driven by a concerted effort by consumer groups representing people with disabilities to include “accessibility” as part of benefits arising from broadcasting industry transactions, the Fund has been in operation since 2014 – and is the only fund of its kind, anywhere.

The Fund was originally provided with a \$5.7M capital contribution (purchase of CTV by Bell Media); a subsequent direct benefit of \$680,000 (acquisition of Astral Media by Bell Media) dedicated to French-language projects; and a direct benefit of \$726,000 (acquisition of Shaw’s broadcasting services by Rogers, distributed in three increments from 2022 to 2024).

To date the Fund has completed seven cycles of grant awards, supporting 38 projects with a total of \$4.1M committed to addressing on-going gaps in broadcasting accessibility. All projects are approved by a nine-member Board of Directors (six Accessibility Directors and three Broadcasting Industry Directors).

Successful applications to the Fund provide evidence that they will improve accessibility to broadcasting content in the areas of hearing, sight, cognitive and/or mobility disabilities through R&D, Education, Business Development, or a combination of these.

Project results from 2014 to 2022 include but are not limited to:

- Major developments in Closed Captioning, through the application of AI technologies and voice recognition research that address the key issue of captioning accuracy for live programming content.

- Significant advancements in Described Video, in both English and French broadcasting content, enriching the experience for persons with sight disabilities alongside potential cost reductions for broadcasters.
- Exploring a number of solutions through apps, infrared technologies and other device improvements enabling persons with mobility disabilities greater levels of accessibility to content on various platforms.
- Delivering accessibility professionals to the broadcasting workplace through several degree and certificate programs offered by post-secondary institutions with our support.

Continuing our work under strengthened *Broadcasting Act* policy objectives

The Fund has been strongly supportive of Bill C-11, *The Online Streaming Act* which enshrines in its policy provisions accessibility to content **without barriers** for persons with disabilities. Any broadcasting and/or online undertakings operating under Bill C-11's eventual regulatory framework will need to look to these sorts of technological advancements to meet the new, strengthened "without barriers" legislative standard for the provision of broadcasting services to Canadians with disabilities.

We respectfully note that BAF has long been the principal driver of research and development into new technology to enable participation without barriers in the Canadian broadcasting system by Canadians with disabilities. Bill C-11's strengthened policy objective will stimulate demand for research and development into content-accessibility solutions, just as the Fund nears the end of its confirmed resources.

The Fund has approximately two full years (i.e., 2022 and 2023) of financial resources for grants and operations remaining. While significant progress has been made on addressing a number of content accessibility barriers, noted above, progress is incremental, and success is typically achieved through multi-phase/ multi-year projects.

To address the anticipated increase in demand for the Fund's grants and operations, and to bridge the corresponding gap in available funding as Bill C-11's supporting framework takes several years to develop and implement, we are seeking a federal government contribution of \$2.5M to continue our work on the complex challenges of content accessibility. This support will enable the Fund to apply resources to:

- Continue to address issues related to live Closed Captioning (e.g., live sports, news & special events), with a particular focus on new voice recognition technologies.
- Improve the experience while reducing the cost of Described Video, potentially enabling broadcasters to expand its production.
- Harness the massive potential of AI in accessibility technologies, an area that may warrant a call for specialized research and development.
- Research and drive solutions to content accessibility for people with exceptionalities, which requires longer term, highly technical study.

- Continue to tap into and grow the talent pool of accessibility professionals in Canada, a stated goal for the Fund from the broadcasting industry.
- Pursue unique opportunities with partners; for example, an initiative focusing on content accessibility in native languages for indigenous youth with hearing loss (which is 3X - 5X the national average).
- Challenge post-secondary institutions to focus their deep R&D skills on content accessibility barriers through University Challenges and other initiatives – contributing to the growth of Canadian accessibility culture.

Conclusion

The Fund operates with two full-time staff and limited contract support and will continue to do so moving forward. It is and will continue as a fiscally responsible organization, directing more than 70 percent of funds to grants and setting limits on all operational costs. Our average grant per project is approximately \$107K, recognizing that the best results are those that become self-sufficient after an initial push from the Fund.

The Fund recognizes key milestones in accessibility achieved by government to date, including passage of the *Accessible Canada Act* and the establishment of a portfolio that specifically mandates disability inclusion. To this end, the Fund is well positioned to become an active part of government's accessibility agenda.

Over the past eight years, the Broadcasting Accessibility Fund has achieved measurable results in addressing barriers to content accessibility. Support from government will effectively amplify this impact, and will drive the innovation, creativity and inclusive design that are critical to overcoming these on-going challenges for Canadians with disabilities.

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Project Summaries:

www.baf-far.ca/en/results

www.baf-far.ca/fr/résultats

