



**BROADCASTING ACCESSIBILITY FUND
FONDS POUR L'ACCESSIBILITÉ DE LA RADIODIFFUSION**



**Review of the Canadian Communications Legislative Framework
Broadcasting and Telecommunications Legislative Review Panel
Responding to the New Environment: Call for Comments**

Submission of the Broadcasting Accessibility Fund Inc.

January 11, 2018

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Introduction

The Broadcasting Accessibility Fund Inc. (the Fund) is pleased to provide its submission to the Review of the Canadian Communications Legislative Framework that is being undertaken by the Broadcasting and Telecommunications Legislative Review Panel (the Review Panel).

The Fund is now in its fifth year of operation, and was created as part of the tangible benefits package associated with Bell Canada's acquisition of CTV. The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) approved its creation together with initial funding of \$5.7M. (See Broadcasting Regulatory Policy CRTC 2012-430 [here](#)).

Our mandate states that the Broadcasting Accessibility Fund:

- (a) Acts as an independent and impartial funding body to support and fund innovative projects that provide platform-neutral solutions to promote accessibility of all broadcasting content in Canada;
- (b) Funds only projects that are incremental to the existing regulatory obligations of the broadcasting industry in Canada;
- (c) Funds projects which provide practical solutions that tangibly increase accessibility in broadcasting and which, whenever possible, make use of inclusive design principles to promote accessibility at the earliest stages and in the most cost-effective manner for new technologies and applications in Canada; and
- (d) Provides efficient and accessible service in English and French, and provides documentation for grant applicants in the official language of their choice.

To date, the Fund has provided approximately \$2.5M in funding to 24 projects (17 of which have been completed) designed to enable Canadians with disabilities the opportunity and means to access broadcasting content on multiple platforms. A list of projects, grant recipients and grant amounts are attached in the Appendix to this Submission.

The objective of our submission to the Panel is not to advocate for any particular element of a revised communications legislative framework. The Fund recognizes that accessibility to communications services for persons with disabilities will comprise a theme of the Review Panel's deliberations. Our goal is therefore to inform the Review Panel about our organization, its achievements to date and its future plans.

Governance & Accountability

The Fund is a not-for-profit, independent and impartial organization. Although the Fund operates independently, it is held accountable by the Canadian Accessibility Sector, the Broadcasting Industries and the CRTC, with whom the Fund maintains a strong working relationship.

Our Board of Directors includes six Accessibility Directors, four of whom represent specific areas of disability: Hearing, Sight, Mobility and Cognitive. Two Accessibility Directors are Independent. Our Board also includes two representatives from the Broadcasting Business Industry and one from the Broadcasting Distribution Industry.

As set out in our by-laws, all Board & Committee meetings and decisions require the participation and voting of a majority of Accessibility Directors. There are no exceptions to this policy, so that the organization is always driven in favour of accessibility solutions and results.

Over 30 organizations are registered as stakeholders with the Fund, enabling participation on its Board of Directors as well as voting for members. Several leading national consumer advocacy groups and broadcasters are strong advocates for the Fund and the continuation of its mandate.

Directors and Officers of the Fund for 2018-19:

Allister Byrne, Chair and Accessibility Director – Independent
Max Beck, Treasurer and Accessibility Director – Mobility
Marcia Yale, Accessibility Director – Sight
Jim Hardman, Accessibility Director – Hearing
Gordon Fletcher, Accessibility Director – Cognitive Group
Charlene Caines, Accessibility Director – Independent
Soo Kim, Broadcasting Industry Director – Business
David Errington, Broadcasting Industry Director – Business
David Bennett, Broadcasting Industry Director – Distribution Undertaking

Richard Cavanagh – CEO/ Funding Officer
Staff: Alena Wickware – Project Manager

The Grant Program

To fulfill our mandate and address numerous and persistent content accessibility gaps and barriers, the Fund established a Grant Program that is open to applications from the public.

Each February, a Call for Letters of Intent is announced. Those proposals that best address our goals are then invited to submit a full application to the Fund. Projects are encouraged in areas such as R&D (such as new apps or software), Education (such as developing post-secondary courses in Accessible Content), Business Innovation (such as seed funding or new business cases), or combinations of these streams.

Overseen by a Committee of the Board, the Grant Program operates on a core principle: resolving content accessibility issues must be achieved incrementally, and approved projects ideally build on previous work. Between 2015 and 2018, the Fund has held four grant competitions and approved 24 applications. The average grant awarded is just over \$100,000 per project.

The Grant Program maintains established guidelines and criteria for funding that have proven very effective in ensuring the most promising and results-driven projects are selected for a grant.

Strong and Effective Management

As noted above, initial capital for the Fund from the CRTC decision that established it was \$5.7M. A subsequent transaction in the industry between BCE Inc. and Astral Media Inc. provided another \$620K to the Fund, spread over seven years and dedicated to French-language content accessibility projects. All funds have been invested conservatively to generate interest income as an offset to some operational costs.

Each year, a portion of original capital is released for the Grant Program and to support operations. The majority of funds are directed to grants – over 72 percent of available annual funds. Less than 28 percent is used for operations.

In addition, the Fund's by-laws require that operational funding and funds for Board of Directors costs be capped at 5 percent and 1 percent of original working capital respectively. Costs related to accessibility for Directors and Staff are not counted against the cap.

Future Direction of the Fund

The Fund is exploring opportunities for additional funding sources, including partnerships, sponsorships and other models. The Fund is a viable target for additional funding, and is well positioned to become a permanent feature of the Canadian accessibility landscape for the following reasons:

- The Fund is making an important impact on the advancement of content accessibility, and is doing so incrementally such that approved projects build on one another going forward.
- There is a significant amount of work still required to address on-going gaps in content accessibility.
- The Canadian Accessibility Sector and Canadian Broadcasting Industry are supportive of the Fund and its continuing work in addressing content accessibility gaps.

Our achievements to date include the development of accessible online content and media interfaces, post-secondary courses on media accessibility, accessible mobile technology apps, improved closed captioning software, richer described video experience, research of accessible set-top cable boxes, emergency alert accessibility and transcripts for radio programming.

The Fund has also been approached to consider integrating telecommunications into its mandate, which will be considered moving forward.

Conclusion

With an unwavering focus on innovation and creativity, rigorous standards and solid management, the Fund is uniquely positioned to continue its work in facilitating solutions to content accessibility issues across multiple platforms.

The Board of Directors and stakeholders of the Fund are hopeful that the Broadcasting and Telecommunications Legislative Review Panel recognize and support the role of the Broadcasting Accessibility Fund as part of the wider communications landscape in Canada and will help ensure that the Fund has a place in furthering accessibility to broadcast content in updated *Acts*, throughout their consultations.

Contact Information

For further information about the Fund, please contact:

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