



Accessibility Plan

2023–2026



Multi-Year Accessibility Plan & Report 2023-2026

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1.0 General

1.1 About Blue Ant Media

Blue Ant Media is a privately held, Canadian-controlled international content producer, distributor of television shows and documentary films, and channel operator headquartered in Toronto.

Our Canadian channels and media business includes seven (7) CRTC-licensed Canadian TV channels, including Cottage Life, Smithsonian Channel, BBC Earth, BBC First, Love Nature, Makeful and T+E, in addition to free streaming channels Homeful, Haunt TV, CrimeTime, Declassified, Love Pets and Love Drama which are available on most major streaming platforms internationally, such as Pluto TV, Samsung, VIZIO, Tubi, Rakuten and Freevee. Blue Ant also runs Cottage Life Magazine, the MobileSyrup technology news website, and operates consumer trade shows including the Fall and Spring Cottage Life Shows at the International Centre in Mississauga, Ontario; the Toronto Home and Baby Shows at the Enercare Centre in Toronto, Ontario; and the Baby Show in Canada Place, Vancouver, British Columbia.

In 2023, Blue Ant Media announced its acquisition of marblemmedia and its distribution company, Distribution360. As part of this move, the two companies retired their respective North American and UK-based production and distribution brands and merged to create one unified, studio and rights business under the name of Blue Ant Studios.

1.2 Statement of Commitment

Blue Ant Media is committed to working towards providing an inclusive and accessible environment for everyone. The company recognizes and supports the Accessible Canada Act (“ACA”), which aims to create a barrier free Canada for persons with disabilities.

As a federally regulated business, Blue Ant Media is subject to two sets of regulations under the ACA: the Accessible Canada Regulations, and the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (“CRTC”) Accessibility Reporting Regulations¹. Our Initial Accessibility Plan, published June 1, 2023, outlined Blue Ant Media's efforts to identify and tackle barriers in the following areas (as set out in the Accessible Canada Regulations²): (i) employment; (ii) the built environment; and (iii) communication, as it relates to these categories (e.g., excluding broadcasting). This updated Accessibility Plan (“Plan”) incorporates a Progress Report on these fronts.

Additionally, we have expanded our goals as a broadcaster to align with the CRTC’s Accessibility Reporting Regulations, and this Plan includes new goals encompassing: (i) Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), (ii) communication (related to broadcasting); (iii) procurement of goods, and services, and (iv) the design and delivery of programs and services. Please note that transportation services are not applicable to Blue Ant Media’s business and are therefore excluded from this Plan.

1.3 Contact Information & Feedback Process

On June 1, 2023, Blue Ant Media published a formal feedback process. We continue to welcome all

¹ Telecom and Broadcasting Regulatory Policy CRTC 2021-215

² SOR/2021-241

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feedback (including anonymous feedback) about our Plan, or any accessibility issues encountered when viewing our content, channels or using our websites. We are committed to reviewing the comments we receive and taking steps where reasonable and necessary to provide accessibility improvements in all areas of our business.

You may provide your feedback by contacting Blue Ant Media's Head of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion through any of the following methods:

Feedback Form

Email address: feedback@blueantmedia.com Phone:

416-646-4434 or 1-888-259-0555

Mail: 99 Atlantic Avenue, 4th Floor, Toronto, ON Canada M6J 3J8

1.4 Alternative Formats

If you require a copy of our Accessibility Plan in a different format, please contact us. Blue Ant Media will provide the specified alternate formats within these timelines:

- Print: 15 days
- Large print (larger text): 15 days
- Braille (a system that uses raised dots to represent letters and numbers that people who are blind or have low vision can read with their fingers): 45 days
- Audio (a recording of a person reading the text out loud): 45 days

1.5 Feedback

In the first year of our Plan, Blue Ant Media received no specific accessibility related questions or concerns through our formal feedback process. As of June 2023, this information has been captured on an internal Canadian Media Viewer Relations Report, generated monthly for leaders across the business.

1.6 Consultations

In 2023, Blue Ant Media's Canadian employees, including those who self-identify as having a disability (through workplace questionnaire), were invited to provide their input during a focus group session. We asked the focus group questions about workplace accessibility and disability awareness and recorded the feedback. The common feedback shared was about hybrid work and flexibility, mental health and disability awareness and training.

Additionally, a new open-ended question about workplace accessibility was added to Blue Ant Media's company-wide annual 'All Ears' Employee Engagement Survey (run February 12-28, 2024). The survey's questions cover the topics of inclusion and belonging, resources, and communication. The common feedback shared was about hybrid work and flexibility, mental health and a workspace/equipment review to better support employees' different needs. Blue Ant Media is committed to a culture that encourages employees to share their opinions, such that the company can continue to improve and grow. We intend to use all the feedback collected to enhance the work we do in 2024 to create a more accessible and inclusive workplace.

For our initial Plan, we consulted with people with disabilities in the following ways:

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- **Focus Group:** A session was held with employees who are members of the Blue Ant Media Diversity Council and the Employment Equity Committee. This group included both people with disabilities, and others who wanted to share their feedback. The common feedback shared included ideas to improve our physical office space, disability awareness training, and resources to enhance workplace culture by maintaining disability-friendly practices (e.g. flexible and hybrid work), and broad accessibility considerations in communications and technology.
- **Anonymous Survey:** We conducted an anonymous survey using a third-party administrator for employees who self-identified as having a disability as a part of our Employment Equity process. The survey asked employees to share their accessibility experiences based on key priority areas, as set out in the Accessible Canada Regulations. We received suggestions on how to improve Blue Ant Media's physical office space, maintaining flexible/hybrid work, and on improving hiring and retention by partnering with disability-focused organizations to support inclusion and connect us with a wider talent pool.
- **Interviews with Subject Matter Experts:** We conducted interviews with two accessibility experts – one from the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion (CCDI), and a second from the Redpath Centre. To guide these discussions, both experts were asked to review the Canadian Human Rights Commission report titled, *"Horizontal Audit in the Communications Sector: Improving Representation for People with Disabilities"* and discuss commonly reported barriers to employment and best practices. Both experts emphasized in general the importance of improving accessibility in hiring and promotions, job advertisements, providing disability awareness training and resources, and provided specific recommendations including how to make documents (including this Plan) more accessible.

2.0 Priorities under the Accessible Canada Regulations and CRTC Accessibility Reporting Regulations

2.1 Employment

At Blue Ant Media, we want to create an inclusive culture where all employees are treated with respect and dignity. Blue Ant Media strives to be reflective of Canada's diversity and reports annually under the Employment Equity Act on its employee representation in Canada for the four (4) designated groups (i.e., women, Indigenous people, racialized persons, persons with disabilities). The company's workforce self-identification questionnaire includes additional questions to help us gain a better understanding of the kinds of disabilities, both visible and invisible, of our employees.

The company recognizes that barriers exist for employees and job applicants with disabilities. As noted above, we learned through consultations that the top employment barriers are attitudes and behaviors in the workplace, a lack of disability awareness, and a lack of awareness of the systemic issues and barriers faced by people with disabilities in hiring and retention.

Over the past year, we've worked to improve accessibility in employment by:

- Updating our job postings' equity statement to make applicants aware that Blue Ant Media will provide accommodations on request at any time during the recruitment process.
- Reviewing our job postings for inclusive language and to ensure they speak to a diverse candidate pool.
- Participating in career fairs that cater to equity-deserving students enrolled in programs like Media Production, New Media, Creative Services, Journalism and Communications through various colleges and universities.

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- Updating and sharing Blue Ant Media's Accommodation Policy on our internal Workplace site and covering this topic in our 'Manager 101' training.
- Providing company-wide learning opportunities to increase mental health and disability awareness and foster a workplace culture of inclusion:
 - During Blue Ant Media's Learning Week (May 2023), the company ran a session titled "What hidden disabilities can teach us about empathy" facilitated by Kevin Rempel, 2014 Canadian paralympic bronze medalist in sledge hockey.
 - Alongside our partner, the Toronto Reel Asian International Film Festival, Blue Ant Media celebrated Asian Heritage Month (May 2024) with employees by presenting a panel with the creative team behind the film, *"We Will Be Brave."* The film follows the journey of Toronto's Good Guise collective, who advocate for healthy masculinity and communities of care.
 - During Blue Ant Learning Week (May 2024), the company ran a session for employees titled, "Menopause in the Workplace: Unleash the Potential," facilitated by Janet Ko, CEO and Founder of the Canadian Menopause Foundation.
- Conducting monthly meetings with the Blue Ant Media Diversity Council and an annual meeting with the Blue Ant Media Employment Equity Committee to identify areas for improvement.
- Surveying employees anonymously to measure their perceptions of accessibility and solicit feedback through our annual All Ears Employee Engagement Survey.

We continue to work towards our short-term goals (in progress) and medium to long term goals, which include:

- Continuing to educate leaders about accessibility and accommodation and how they can better support employees with disabilities.
- Providing learning opportunities and resources to increase disability awareness, reduce stigmas and stereotypes, and foster a workplace culture of inclusion.
- Reviewing employee survey results (e.g., onboarding, training, employee engagement, exit) with an accessibility lens to identify barriers and trends and determine appropriate follow up actions.
- Developing a set of job posting guidelines to help hiring managers create more inclusive job postings, and continuously review our career page for accessibility and inclusion.
- Continuing to review our human resource policies and processes with an inclusion and accessibility lens.
- Partnering with organizations that support persons with disabilities to increase our disability awareness and reach a wider range of candidates with disabilities.

2.2 The Built Environment

Blue Ant Media's head office is located in Liberty Village, Toronto. The company worked extensively with a design firm to create a workplace that reflects a modern and creative company and addresses the varying needs of employees. Employee consultation was an important part of the design process. Blue Ant's built environment includes various meeting spaces for working and collaboration, sit-stand desks, hand activated door openers, and a wellness room/quiet space for meditation, reflection, prayer, and breastfeeding mothers. Through our employee consultations, we have learned that some aspects of our open office space present a barrier – bright overhead lights, noise, and lack of private space do not suit the working styles of some employees with sensory and/or neurological disabilities. Other identified barriers include kitchen cabinet contents including cups and plates at heights that may be inaccessible, and the need for education around emergency planning.

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Over the past year, we've worked to improve accessibility in the built environment by:

- Reconfiguring our existing floor plan to create one (1) new meeting room and two (2) new drop-in workspaces areas so employees can meet or work in a quiet and private space if they need a break from the open-office plan.
- Reviewing our landlord and property manager's emergency evacuation plan for persons with disabilities at our head office location.

Our longer-term goals include:

- Re-communicating / conducting a refresher about our emergency evacuation plan for persons with disabilities at our head office location.
- Reviewing our current office space and assessing the need for further accessibility improvements. Consulting with employees with disabilities and where possible working with our landlord and property manager to prevent barriers and address identified barriers to accessibility.

2.3. Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

Blue Ant Media utilizes a range of communication tools, including trade and consumer-facing websites, social media platforms, and internal employee communication systems. We acknowledge the importance of enhancing the accessibility of these tools, and we are committed to taking steps to improve our public websites, beginning with the highest traffic consumer-facing sites.

In a phased approach, Blue Ant Media will ensure its websites conform to W3C WAI WCAG 2.1 Level AA, and Level AAA where possible, over the next three (3) years, focusing on groups of sites using similar website templates in each phase.

Our short-term goals related to improving ICT accessibility include:

- Assembling an internal team to design and execute our ICT accessibility plans, which will include the Director, Creative Operations, and Production Manager, Design & Development.
- Performing WCAG compliance audit checks for all channel websites (e.g. Haunt-tv.com, Bbcearth.com) utilizing Google's Lightbox tool.
- Creating 'how to' documents, and training Blue Ant Media staff and editors who regularly add and update content across our websites to ensure they are following best practices.

Our medium and long-term goals include:

- Ensuring all broadcast channel and consumer show websites are WCAG compliant.
- Testing sites on various platforms, devices, and browsers including conducting third-party testing.
- Performing WCAG compliance audit checks for all Digital Publishing websites (e.g. Cottage Life, and MobileSyrup) and corporate sites to ensure compliance of these sites.
- Continuously making updates to all of our website templates to ensure that, as new features are added, they are fully tested to ensure accessibility compliance.

2.4. Communication (other than ICT)

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Through our consultations with staff and experts, we learned that other barriers related to communication include a lack of awareness of the tools available to improve accessibility. Over the past year, we've worked to improve accessibility in communications (other than ICT) by:

- Piloting accessibility training with a small group of employees who create communications content internally and externally.
- Posting resources for employees in our Diversity Resources Hub in Workplace created by the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion (CCDI) including, *Accessibility Check for Print and Digital Documents* and *Disability and Accessibility Educational Resources* (version Feb 2023). Blue Ant Media is an employer partner with CCDI, an organization that promotes diversity, equity, inclusion in Canadian workplaces.

We remain committed to advancing the longer-term goals below:

- Creating and implementing a process to make internal employee meetings and events more accessible (e.g., Town Halls, Blue Ant Table Talks, Panels, EDI events, etc.).
- Providing accessibility training for all employees and teams who create communications content internally and externally.
- Continuing to evaluate and improve the accessibility of communications – both internally and externally.
- Continuing to engage with stakeholders from the disability community to get feedback on our communications accessibility and to understand how to improve our services and offerings.

2.5 The Procurement of Goods, Services, and Facilities

Blue Ant Media operates seven (7) CRTC-licensed specialty broadcast channels, which include BBC Earth, BBC First, Cottage Life, Love Nature, Makeful, Smithsonian Channel, and T&E. We produce, commission, and license documentary, factual, reality, and lifestyle programs for these channels, as well as for third-party licensees through our international distribution business. When commissioning and acquiring content from third parties, Blue Ant endeavors to ensure that all programming is delivered with Closed Captioning ("CC") and, when feasible, with Described Video ("DV"). In cases where content is received without CC, we ensure it is captioned before broadcast, and we are committed to increasing the amount of DV content we receive from third-party producers and distributors for content acquired or licensed for Blue Ant channels.

2.6 The Design and Delivery of Programs and Services

For each of Blue Ant Media's seven (7) CRTC-licensed broadcast channels, closed-captioning is provided for 100% of the programming airing during the broadcast day, as mandated by our CRTC Conditions of Licence. This includes captions for advertising, sponsorship messages, and promos broadcast throughout the day.

Blue Ant Media is required to provide DV for at least four (4) hours per broadcast week of programming in certain categories, including Long-form documentary, General entertainment, and Reality television. Currently, we significantly surpass this requirement and endeavor to provide additional DV wherever feasible in prime-time and throughout the broadcast day.

Additionally, Blue Ant Media recognizes the important role played by the media and broadcasting system in advancing equity and inclusion through representation of diverse voices and experiences

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on-screen and behind the scenes. Our programming team will continue to look for opportunities to better reflect Canada's diversity in the programming we produce, license and broadcast on our channels.

Our Short-term goals related to our channel services include:

- Continuing to encourage our producing partners to engage talent from underrepresented groups, including persons with disabilities, for all original programming commissioned by Blue Ant Media.
- Continuing to collect data, where feasible, from our producing partners on diversity in key roles for our commissioned and acquired programming.
- Continuing to expand the availability of CC and DV on other platforms controlled by Blue Ant Media.

Our medium and long-term goals for our channel services include:

- Increasing the amount of content provided with DV on our licensed channels, particularly during prime viewing hours.
- Collaborating with third-party producers and distributors to acquire more DV assets for both new and existing programming.

2.7 Transportation

Transportation is not relevant to Blue Ant Media's operations.

3.0 Conclusion

Blue Ant Media is dedicated to playing our part to improve accessibility by implementing this Accessibility Plan. Our position within the media industry gives our company both a platform and an opportunity to influence change and promote a more inclusive world, and we are consistently evolving to live up to that responsibility. As per the Accessible Canada Act's regulations, we will update this Plan every three (3) years and report on our progress annually. As of June 1, 2024, we have updated this Plan to include an overview of our additional goals and commitments as a broadcaster, related to the areas identified under the CRTC Accessibility Reporting Regulations as noted in Section 1.2 of this Plan. Finally, we intend to continuously consult with our employees with disabilities and other stakeholders to ensure that accessibility is being addressed and moving forward.

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4.0 Appendix

4.1 Definitions

Barrier: The Accessible Canada Act defines a barrier as “anything – including anything physical, architectural, technological or attitudinal, anything that is based on information or communications or anything that is the result of a policy or practice – that hinders the full and equal participation in society of persons with an impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairment or functional limitation.”

Disability: The Accessible Canada Act defines a disability as “any impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairment – or a functional limitation – whether permanent, temporary or episodic in nature, or evident or not, that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders a person’s full and equal participation in society.