



**Victoria  
Event  
Centre**

## **Accessibility Update**

**Victoria Event Centre  
1415 Broad St, Victoria BC, V8W 2B2**

August 15, 2018

Dear VEC community and guests,

We at the VEC would like to acknowledge the many questions, concerns, and offers of support that we have been receiving regarding accessibility to our community space. The Victoria Event Centre has been undergoing an extensive transition over the past year, with many new management, board members, and staff to compliment the dedicated team that has been here for more than a decade. Despite some ongoing challenges in our general operations, VEC staff and volunteers have been working over the last year to make the VEC more accessible in the ways that we can with a limited budget. But there is still a lot to be done.

While we've been working to make our venue more accessible, we've been slow to make public updates on our progress, and we've made some big mistakes. We want to acknowledge the tension, frustration, and hurt that some folks have experienced in trying to identify barriers and improve accessibility at the VEC. Here are some of the things we've been hearing:

- We've often been defensive when challenged or questioned around the accessibility of the space.
- We've been slow and inconsistent with communication around accessibility, and we haven't created clear lines of communication.
- We haven't done a great job of providing resources or guidelines for event organizers to make their events more accessible or to address concerns.

For all of this, we want to apologize. These mistakes have led to frustrations, hurt, and harm, and we intend to do better in the future.

In this post, we want to communicate some of our progress, challenges, and intentions around access at the VEC, as well as some opportunities to support or be involved in improving access. In what follows, we lay out the problems with the elevator

over the past year, and some plans to have a more community-engaged process around accessibility. We also provide some details about changes we've made over the past year to remove access barriers, and our goals to remove further barriers in the future.

### **The (lack of) elevator**

The most obvious and challenging barrier to accessibility at the VEC is that we are located up a flight of stairs without a working elevator or lift. Over the last two years, we had our existing elevator repaired to keep it operational; however, when we had it inspected this year it was condemned, never to be operated again. This was a huge setback for us, our community, and especially the folks who needed the elevator to access the space.

Since then, we have been investigating solutions, including a full rebuild of the elevator, a wheelchair lift, and a stair lift. Estimates for a new commercial elevator are between \$250,000-500,000 and it looks like a lift would be \$100,000-\$150,000. As a small non-profit that is working to become financially sustainable, this is a huge cost, and we will have to rely on grants and donations to make this happen. At this point, we are hoping to raise money to build a vertical platform lift at the back of the building, as one part in a broader accessibility plan.

### **Our plan of action**

We are hopeful that there is a path forward, and that it is achievable with community support. This is our plan for the months ahead:

1. **Create an accessibility working group**, including those who have lived experience of navigating mobility restrictions while accessing venues. We will assign a fund from our general revenues for honoraria for the participants' time, and hope to receive advice on how to allocate funds, what sort of equipment and upgrades should we work towards, and other questions that arise.
2. **Do a call out for public donations**. We've been reluctant in the past, because we wanted to ensure that we had a sense of the costs involved for an elevator/lift before accepting donations towards this upgrade. Now that we have a clear sense of our options, we will create an accessibility fund so that donors can have a clear sense of where their money is going. This will also help us with grant writing, as many of them require matching funds. And who knows, maybe there is a billionaire out there willing to contribute.
3. **Create space for volunteer grant writers** for this project. We have one position that includes some hours for grant writing, and we recently completed a big grant application that (we hope) will cover some of the cost of a wheelchair lift. While we have limited staff time for grants, there are lots of grants available, and more that we don't even know about. If you know of grants that the VEC could be applying for, and/or you'd like to lend your grant writing expertise to support us, please get in touch with us at [Partnerships@VictoriaEventCentre.ca](mailto:Partnerships@VictoriaEventCentre.ca)

4. **Create various avenues for sharing feedback**, questions, and general suggestions on accessibility to further clarify goals and priorities on accessibility improvements. In order to streamline communication, we have created a dedicated email for everything access-related: [access@victoriaeventcentre.ca](mailto:access@victoriaeventcentre.ca) or call and leave a message at 250.380.1280. Additionally, we will create an online form (see further down) that anyone can fill out to provide suggestions and feedback.
5. **Share information and communicate better** as updates roll in. We've made the mistake of not updating our community more regularly. This will look like an update at least every two months until we've reached our goal of a lift/elevator, and we will continue with further updates on accessibility for those who are interested. In addition to email updates, we'll post updates on our website and Facebook page as well. If you'd like to be kept up to date through email, please email us at [access@victoriaeventcentre.ca](mailto:access@victoriaeventcentre.ca).

### *Additional Accessibility Updates*

The accessibility audits we've done, alongside the feedback we've received, have helped us understand the various access barriers at the VEC and how much room we still have to improve. We are still learning about existing barriers, and identifying some changes we can make in the short term, while also working towards longer-term goals. We appreciate that accessibility is more than a single-issue concept.

Earlier this year, we had staff and supporters complete an audit of the VEC using the [RAMP access template](#). This audit approaches access from a radical, intersectional perspective and helped us identify all kinds of barriers, and understand what to pay attention to and provide information about. As well, the VEC has received feedback on accessibility in both public and private forums. This has helped us to learn, to change, and to reflect upon our policies; we are thankful for the vast array of knowledge that others are willing to share on this topic.

### **Some changes we've made so far**

We wanted to communicate some of the improvements that we've made in terms of accessibility and safety over the past 9 months:

- Created a detailed [accessibility page](#) on our website
- Changed all washroom designation to be gender-inclusive / not gender specific
- Renovated Green Room bathroom to improve accessibility
- Installed sharps containers and menstrual product disposals for all bathrooms
- Expanded the menu to include non-alcoholic cocktails
- Provided free safer sex supplies from AVI

- Replaced folding chairs with more solid chairs with padded backs and bottoms
- Integrated consent culture into the space through posters and a 'consent captain' at certain events, who responds to sexualized violence and provides support
- Switched to scent-free and scent-reduced cleaning products
- Improved ground lighting to avoid tripping hazards for folks with visual impairments
- Changed bathroom lighting from fluorescent to incandescent
- Focused on booking events that have a PWYC model, and give priority to productions with ticket prices under \$30

### **Concrete accessibility measures in the future**

Moving forward, we've identified some areas to improve on. This is an ongoing list, and we welcome input at [access@victoriaeventcentre.com](mailto:access@victoriaeventcentre.com).

- Replacing fluorescent lights in Green Room hallway
- Renovating one of the main hall washrooms to make it fully accessible for people with mobility devices
- Staff education and training about accessibility so that we are better aware of barriers, and how best to accommodate our guests.
- Supporting more events without alcohol.
- Researching and implementing scent-reduced cleaning products
- Better communication, support, and resources for event organizers that book the VEC on how to host more accessible events.
- Provide access to earplugs.
- Better identify staff and volunteers available for support during an event.

### **Support for Event Organizers**

The VEC is a non-profit venue that serves a wide variety of communities. We are a venue for private functions, as well as public events, As a result, there is a huge range in regards to the organizers' familiarity with accessibility, and what each event will require for set up. As we move forward, our aim is to be more proactive in addressing accessibility with event organizers. We plan to do this by:

- Clarifying which areas are venue access issues (i.e. VEC responsibility) and which are event planning access issues (i.e. organizers' responsibility) and how we can support each other to increase access at all events
- Creating resources to support event organizers in thinking through the ways they can make their events more accessible (i.e. posting access info, connecting them to resources such as ASL, transcription, translation, childcare, bus tickets, etc, Encouraging event organizers to consider other measures that support access,

including sliding scale and 'no one turned away' pricing, reserve seating for elders and others who need to sit, etc)

- Ensuring that any questions or concerns about venue accessibility are directed to VEC staff, and providing clear information about accessibility. One way we are seeking to create clarity here is by a new email to which all questions and concerns about access can be directed: [access@victoriaeventcentre.ca](mailto:access@victoriaeventcentre.ca) or call and leave a message at 250.380.1280

### *Ongoing Feedback, Accountability, and Repairing Relationships*

In the weeks and months ahead, VEC staff and board will be reaching out to our networks. We hope to open up dialogue and understand how people have been hurt, what changes can be made, and (hopefully) how relationships might be repaired. At this point, we don't have many answers, other than our intention in supporting this type of process, and inviting folks to participate and shape it in some way. If you'd like to be part of this process, either by providing written feedback or being part of an event, please get in touch at [access@victoriaeventcentre.ca](mailto:access@victoriaeventcentre.ca) or call and leave a message at 250.380.1280

With this said, we want to acknowledge the limited capacity of everyone that is involved here, and we hope that others understand if our response as an organization takes time. We are working diligently, and taking to heart any concerns brought to our attention.