# ACCESSIBILITY IN RESEARCH LABS

## A PRACTICAL TOOLKIT FOR RESEARCH TEAMS



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RÉSEAU QUÉBÉCOIS ÉQUITÉ DIVERSITÉ INCLUSION

WITH THE COLLABORATION OF THE MCGILL EQUITY TEAM

Equity Team


*In the photo: George Wang (left) and Maria Vera Ugalde (right)*

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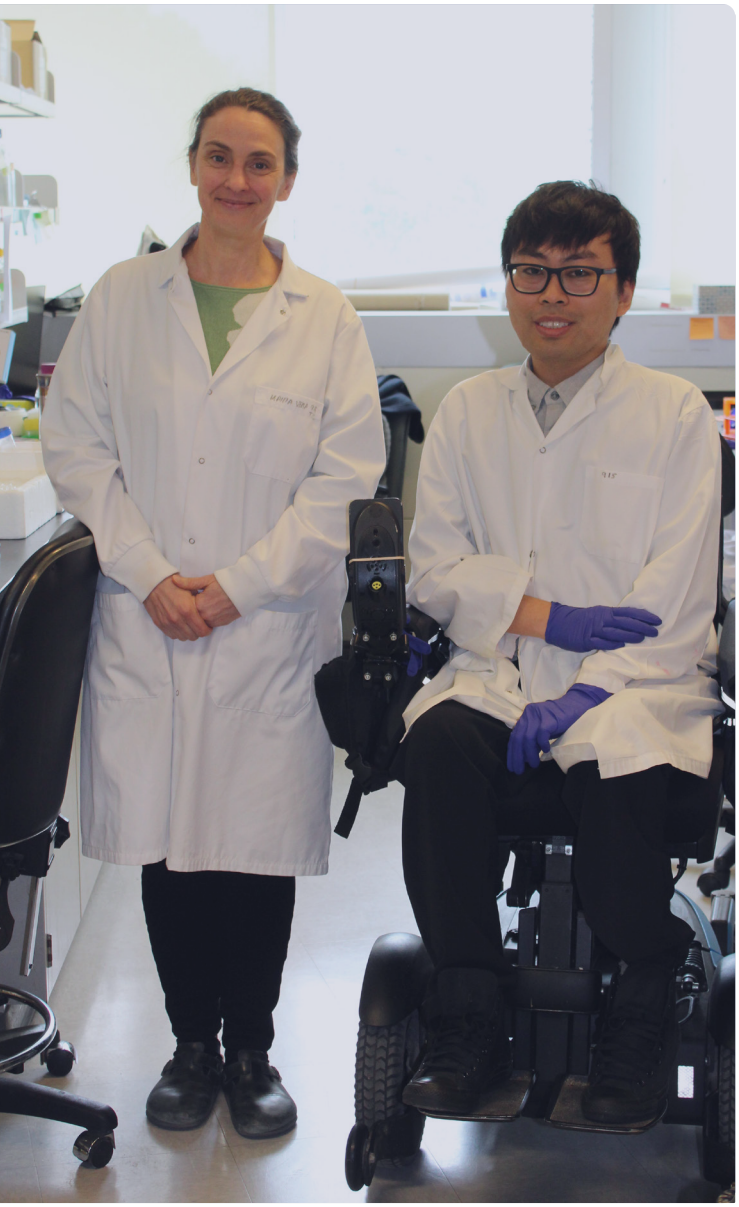


*In the photo: Maria Vera Ugalde (left) and George Wang (right)*

After discussions between D2R's Senior Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Advisor and various professors and research staff, it became clear that a significant gap exists in guidance on how to make research labs more accessible.

Therefore, the following individuals collaborated to develop this Practical Toolkit for Research Teams on Accessibility in Research Labs:

- **Catherine Roy**, Accessibility Advisor for the Equity Team at McGill University
- **George Wang**, Postdoctoral Researcher engaged in Accessibility initiatives at McGill University
- **Maria Vera Ugalde**, Associate Professor for the Department of Biochemistry at McGill University
- **Jade Fabiano**, Mediation and Investigation Advisor at the Office of Mediation and Reporting at McGill University
- **Bibiana Pulido**, General Director of the Quebec Interuniversity Network for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
- **Mariloue Daudier**, Senior Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Advisor for the DNA to RNA (D2R) initiative at McGill University

One of the main goals of this document is to share widely — beyond McGill University and D2R —best practices to equip professors, trainees and research staff with tools to foster accessible research labs.

Having an accessible space requires sincere openness, flexibility and a solution-oriented mindset. Therefore, this practical toolkit may not be perfect and cover every possible scenario. However, we hope that this humble contribution will help many research lab members to be part of the solution to address accessibility needs by being aware and equipped to create more accessible, equitable and inclusive environments.

# Why Accessibility Matters in Research?

Accessible research environments support participation, innovation, and excellence in research. Yet many research spaces, particularly wet labs, continue to present barriers for researchers and employees with disabilities. An individual's ability to join and work in a research group should be driven by their scientific curiosity and potential. Accessibility in research matters to reduce these barriers and create equitable research opportunities for all.

Accessibility goes beyond compliance and accommodations; it is about creating research environments where a wider rang e of people can fully participate and contribute.

Many accessibility improvements are low-cost and can benefit the entire team. Successful implementation requires proactive planning, flexible practices, and inclusive communication.

This toolkit provides practical guidance for:

- **Legal considerations and accountability in research labs**
- **Onboarding researchers with disabilities**
- **Supporting accommodations in research environments (including seeking institutional funding to ease the ability to implement accommodations)**
- **Improving accessibility in wet labs**

*In the photo: Prof Ugalde's Lab at McGill*

Accessibility is a collective responsibility. This toolkit is designed for any research lab member, from principal investigators, co-investigators, research staff to trainees.

## Definitions

Advancing accessibility is about creating barrier-free communities, workplaces and services for all. For the meaningful inclusion of people with disabilities in research labs, here are a few basic definitions.


**Accessibility** means enabling persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life, having access to all aspects of society on an equal and equitable basis with others (Source: United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 9 – Accessibility).

**Barrier** means 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 a 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 a functional limitation. (Source: Accessible Canada Act).

**Disability** means 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 (Source: Accessible Canada Act).

## Accessibility as a shared responsibility

As a Principal Investigator (PI) or supervisor seeking guidance to support accessibility in research labs, while you are leading your team, it is important to know that you are not alone in this work. Institutions offer a range of services that can support you. You do not need to be perfect. Simply beginning with an awareness of different strategies, resources, and testing tools outlined in this document already makes you an important part of the solution.

**Research teams are encouraged to consult available institutional resources early when questions or accessibility concerns arise.**

Institutional supports may include:

- Primary support contacts for undergraduate and graduate students:
  - Student Accessibility Office of your institution (example from McGill University: Student Accessibility & Achievement)
  - Accessibility Advisor
  - Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Advisor
- Primary contacts for postdoctoral researchers and employees:
  - Human Resources Services of your institution (example from McGill University: HR – Accommodations for employees with disabilities)
  - Accessibility Advisor
  - EDI Advisor
- Additional contacts
  - Lab Safety Offices
  - Ergonomic Assessments services
  - Funding programs for accommodations or adaptive equipment (example from McGill University: the Central Accommodation Fund)

# 01 | LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN RESEARCH LABS

To help navigate conversations on disability, diagnoses, accommodations, and discrimination here is a short description of basic legal considerations that should be shared with all research team members.

## Disclosure

Divulging information on a diagnosis is the decision of the person living with a disability. However, disclosure can help to create opportunities for accommodations to make the research environment more accessible and inclusive.

- For employees:
  - Under the Quebec Human Rights Principles, employees are not required to disclose a diagnosis. Therefore, employees should not be forced to divulge their disability if they do not want to.
  - Employers may request relevant information about functional limitations to assess accommodation needs.
- For students:
  - In the university context, students are typically required to provide appropriate documentation (often including a diagnosis) to access formal academic accommodations through institutional processes.
  - At McGill, accommodations are based on documented functional limitations supported by medical information.


## Duty to Accommodate

Under the Québec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms, individuals have the right to equality and to be free from discrimination based on protected grounds, which include disability.

The duty to accommodate is a legal obligation that arises where a rule, policy, or practice—whether intentional or not—creates a disadvantage linked to a protected ground.

Accommodation involves:

- Adapting practices, policies, or environments, or
- Granting exceptions or adjustments

to ensure that individuals can fully exercise their rights and participate on an equal basis.

The duty to accommodate recognizes that equal treatment is not always equitable and may require differential treatment to prevent or address discrimination. See the section on “Creating a More Accessible Wet Lab” at the end of the document for a list of different examples of accommodations.

# Limits of Accommodation: “Undue Hardship”

The duty to accommodate is not unlimited. Under the Quebec Human Rights Principles, accommodation must be provided up to the point of undue hardship.

An accommodation may constitute undue hardship where it:

- Interferes with the proper functioning of the organization.
- Creates significant health or safety risks.
- Infringes on the rights of others.

The assessment is context-specific and must consider:

- Operational requirements (including safety in high-risk environments such as laboratories).
- Available resources and organizational constraints.
- Whether reasonable alternatives have been explored.

The burden is on the organization to demonstrate undue hardship with objective evidence that the proposed accommodation would impose an excessive constraint, based on criteria developed by the courts.

*In the photo: Prof Ugalde’s Lab at McGill*

## Examples that may not meet the threshold for accommodation *(Wet lab context — Illustrative examples)*

- Requests that would compromise health and safety standards (e.g., removing essential safety protocols required for handling hazardous materials).
- Requests that would fundamentally alter core course or job requirements (e.g., eliminating all hands-on lab work where in-person experimentation is an essential component).
- Situations where no reasonable alternative exists to meet safety or regulatory requirements despite attempted adjustments.

*Note: Each situation must be assessed individually, with consideration of possible alternatives.*

## What can be done in case of discrimination or barriers to accommodation?

Individuals who experience or witness discrimination, or barriers to accommodation, are encouraged to seek information, support, or to make a report through appropriate institutional channels.
For instance, at McGill University, the Office for Mediation and Reporting (OMR) provides:

- Confidential consultations, including information about relevant McGill policies, processes, and available options.
- Access to informal and formal resolution pathways (including mediation and investigation).
- Referrals to relevant support services.

## DID YOU KNOW?

* Individuals may seek guidance without being required to file a formal complaint.

* A confidential consultation does not constitute a formal report.

* Support services are available regardless of whether a formal report is made.

* Individuals may choose whether to pursue an informal or formal process, based on their needs and preferences.

# 02 | ONBOARDING RESEARCHERS WITH DISABILITIES

The onboarding process can significantly shape whether researchers feel welcomed, supported, and able to succeed. To do so, supervisors in research labs can plan different elements to foster an accessible environment.

**To create research environments that are truly empowering and meaningfully adapted, it is important to avoid making assumptions about a person's needs, abilities, or preferred ways of working.**

## Start with Accessible Communication

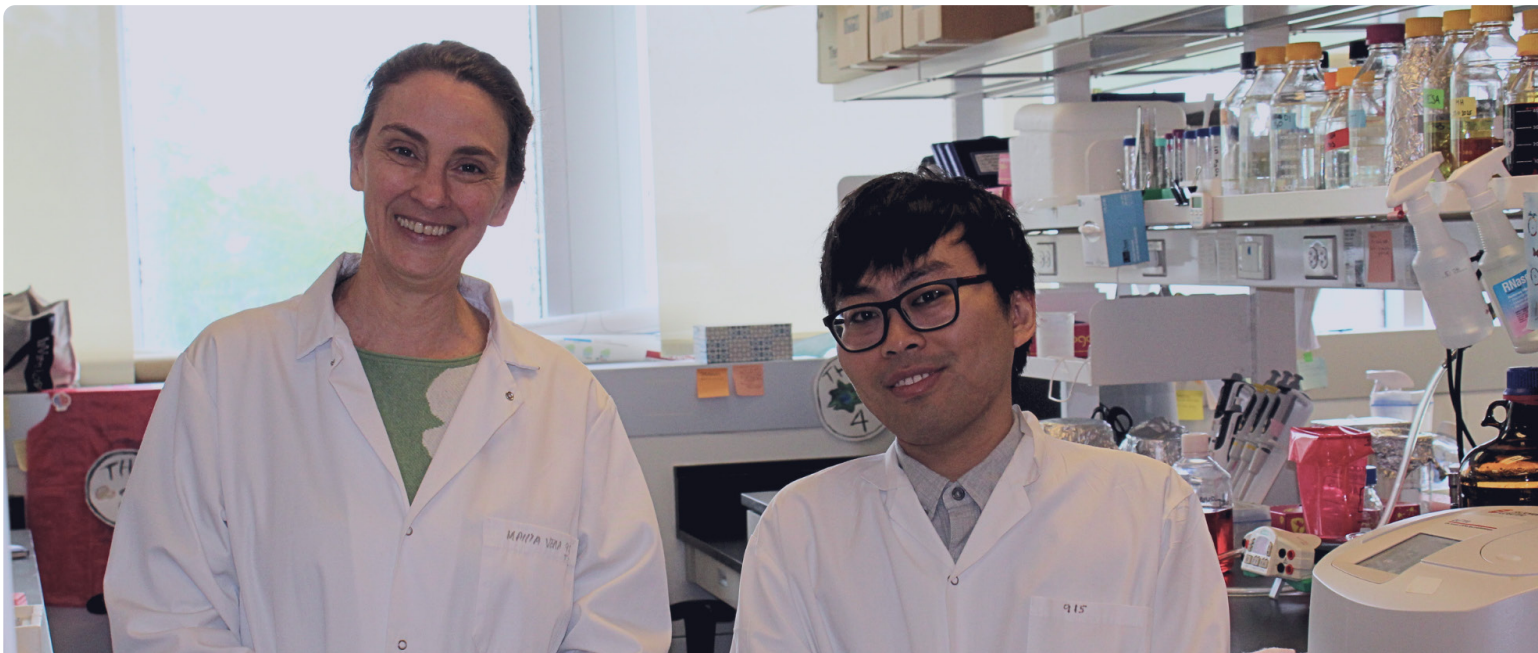
Accessible communication practices include:

- Add an equity statement on the lab website or job posting, as this is a main way that individuals find prospective labs to join. It could be integrated in the Lab Members page and read something like: *"Our lab welcomes all individuals regardless of national origin, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, and disability status"*

- Providing onboarding materials in accessible digital formats
  - Accessible digital formats help ensure that documents and materials can be used by people with a wide range of disabilities, including individuals who use screen readers, magnification software, voice to text tools, or keyboard navigation. Examples may include properly structured word documents, accessible PDFs, caption videos, readable PowerPoint presentations, and digital materials that use clear organization, descriptive section titles, text descriptions for images, and sufficient colour contrast. Additional guidance on creating accessible digital content is available through resources such as WebAIM's Creating Accessible Documents and the W3C Web Accessibility Initiative.

- Sharing key procedures and expectations in writing (ex. What are key deliverables, what is expected if a student wants to become a professor, what are key people to talk with in the lab)
- Using clear and consistent communication (ex. Regularly schedules meetings to check-in)
- Ensuring lab protocols are easy to access and navigate (ex. Sharing a clear document on protocols)
- Asking all team members whether there are supports or accessibility considerations that would help them succeed (checking-in from the beginning and regularly)

*In the photo: Maria Vera Ugalde (left) and George Wang (right)*



# Discuss Accessibility Early

Accessibility conversations should be collaborative, respectful, and focused on removing barriers.

**Researchers should not feel pressured to disclose more information than necessary. However, you can create a climate that welcomes accessibility discussions in an appropriate way.**

Discussions on accommodations are encouraged to take place as early as when an individual is officially hired, and secondary discussions in the onboarding process may be made with the guidance of the accessibility office of your institution. Early discussion on accessibility practices include:

## Discussing accessibility needs early in the onboarding process

Examples:

- **In the communications in the email confirming the research position** include a sentence like: *"We are committed to fostering an inclusive and accessible research environment. If there are any workplace accommodations or accessibility considerations that would support your participation in this role, we encourage you to discuss them with us at any time. We will do our best to accommodate your needs".*

- **At the onboarding meeting**, highlight your commitment to ensuring that all team members can work in equitable conditions, and emphasize that you welcome any accessibility requests. When needs are known in advance, it may sometimes be possible to explore budget options to adapt the research environment where feasible. You can also acknowledge that, while it is often helpful to address these needs as early as possible, you understand that circumstances may evolve over time and that requests may arise later. Reassure team members that you will remain flexible and responsive as needed.
  - Beyond your personal commitment as a research lab lead, you are invited to share resources such as the Student Accessibility Services of your institution for undergraduate and graduate students. For postdoctoral researchers and research associates, you can refer them to HR for additional support.

- Focusing on functional needs rather than medical details (disclosure of disability must be voluntary- consult the short guide on disclosure). Intrusive questions on disability situation should not be asked, including diagnostics. Not everyone may choose to divulge. Respect their rights.
  - Recognize that needs may change over time. For instance, some disabilities may be episodic, such as mental health fluctuations, recovering time after an accident or an illness that may be progressing.
  - Maintain confidentiality and privacy. To do so, you can mention that it is important for you as a supervisor to maintain confidentiality and privacy as desired by the person in question. If the person disclosed their disability to you, you can ask them what they would prefer sharing with other members of the lab and what they would prefer keeping private. **Do not do any assumptions without consulting first!**

### DID YOU KNOW?

According to the Human Rights and Youth Rights Commission, it is not permitted to ask if a person has a disability in an interview process.

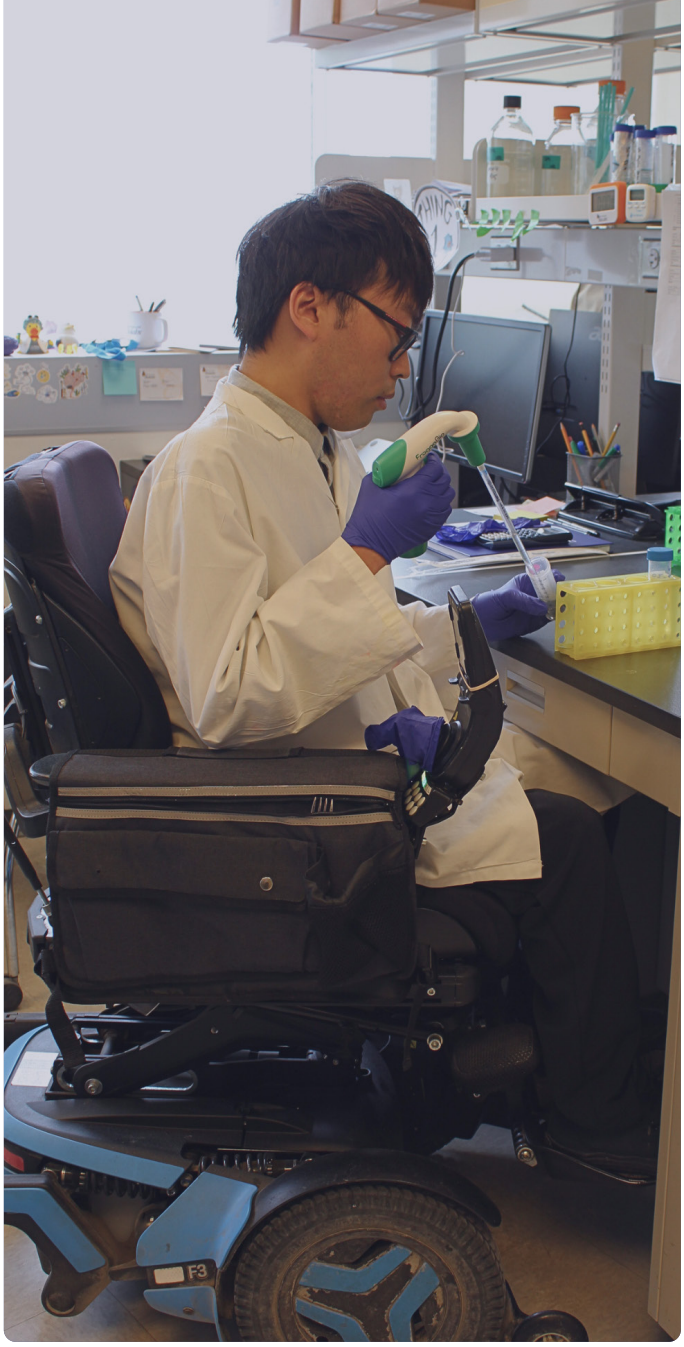
## Build Flexibility into Research Environments

Not all research tasks need to be performed in the same way or on the same schedule

**Flexibility can improve productivity and reduce barriers for many team members.**

Where feasible integrate flexibility practices such as:

- Allowing flexibility in scheduling. For instance, you can adapt meeting times to be outside of hours to drop/pick up children, or factor in the time that a team member may need to get adapted transport to go from a class to your lab.
- Identifying tasks that can be completed remotely.
- Breaking down complex procedures into manageable steps. For instance, you can use the Goblin Tools and LeanTime to help break down task lists to a customizable level (especially to support neurodiversity).
- Providing clear timelines and priorities both in verbally and in writing.
- Considering alternative ways of completing tasks while maintaining research integrity and safety. For instance, a student with a mobility disability may be tasked with taking care of computers and programs while others may be given responsibilities such as taking care of garbage disposal or solution preparation.



*In the photo: George Wang in the lab*

## Foster an Inclusive Lab Culture

An inclusive lab culture is essential to accessibility. Inclusion refers to feeling valued, welcomed and respected.

**Researchers are more likely to seek support when they feel psychologically safe doing so.**

Research teams should be accountable to supporting inclusion by:

- Encouraging respectful communication. For example, ensuring team discussions remain constructive, allowing people time to contribute during meetings, and avoiding dismissive or stigmatizing comments about disability, accommodations, or mental health. To help build respectful communication, consult this video on different examples of microaggressions.
- Avoiding assumptions about capacity or competence. For example, not assuming a researcher cannot perform certain tasks based on visible or nonvisible disabilities, and/or discussing barriers collaboratively rather than making decisions on someone's behalf. Persons with disabilities can ask the PI and any lab members for assistance themselves whenever they need it. Responses to accommodation requests should be supportive and carried out in a reasonable timeline.

- Normalizing accessibility discussions. To do so, there must be a shift in mindset from compliance to inclusion. This permits conversations around accessibility to be standard practice rather than a daunting topic of conversation. For instance, accessibility considerations can be integrated into daily routine activities such as proactively mentioning accessibility measures at the start of a meeting (ex. live captions or screen reader support), include visual descriptions in alt-text for electronic communications and by defining your space for people with visual impairment (ex. stating your name before speaking, describing what you are wearing and doing). Also, supervisors can routinely ask team members whether there are tools, adjustments, or communication practices that would support their work, rather than waiting for problems to arise.
- Supporting mentorship and peer learning. For example, pairing new lab members with experienced colleagues, sharing informal strategies for navigating lab procedures, communicating academic and career advancement opportunities equitably, or creating opportunities for collaborative problem solving.
- Treating accessibility as a shared responsibility rather than an individual issue. For example, recognizing that accessibility is not solely the responsibility of the individual requesting support, but something that supervisors, colleagues, and institutions all collaborate to through planning, communication, and lab design.

Lab supervisors should see this accessible lab culture development as a work in progress. Working in highly performant environments, there may be a tendency to aim at perfection. However, it is better to try and readjust a few elements listed above than doing nothing. You can also seek support from the accessibility or EDI specialists at your institution.

## SPECIAL NOTE ON RECRUITMENT OF LAB MEMBERS WITH DISABILITIES

Before onboarding, there is a hiring process where PIs and their lab members can play a meaningful role in creating opportunities that are welcoming to persons with disabilities.

Good practices include:

- Having an EDI statement in your job posting and on your website.
  - Example of McGill's statement: *McGill University hires on the basis of merit and is strongly committed to equity and diversity within its community. We welcome applications from racialized persons/visible minorities, women, Indigenous persons, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities, and persons of minority sexual orientations and gender identities, as well as from all qualified candidates with the skills and knowledge to productively engage with diverse communities. McGill implements an employment equity program and encourages members of designated groups to self-identify.*

- Asking if there are any accessibility needs to consider in the interview or other recruitment steps.
  - For instance, at McGill University, this sentence is used in job offers: *Persons with disabilities who anticipate needing accommodations for any part of the recruitment process may contact, in confidence, accessibilityrequest.hr@mcgill.ca.*

# 03 | ACCOMMODATING RESEARCHERS AND EMPLOYEES WITH DISABILITIES

## Accommodation is Individualized

**Nothing about us without us: accommodations should be developed collaboratively with the individual whenever possible.**

There is no "one size fits all" approach to accommodation. Effective accommodations depend on the individual, the research environment, the nature of the work, and rely on preliminary and ongoing discussions where individuals communicate their needs. Individuals will often have a very personalized idea of what accommodation they need that they may utilize at home or have received in prior workplaces. In addition, supervisors can suggest additional possibilities based on the needs that an individual communicates, to foster proactive inclusion.

Possible accommodations may include:

- Flexible scheduling (see examples above in the section Build Flexibility into Research Environments).
- Assistive technology.
- Modified workstations.
- Equipments positioned at a level easy to reach for team members in wheelchairs (ex. placing the equipments in freezers and on shelves at a lower level).
- Alternative communication methods.
- Adjustments to task allocation.
- Ergonomic equipment (see the Creating a More Accessible Wet Lab below for a few examples).

## Focus on Essential Tasks

The goal of accommodation is to enable participation in essential research activities while maintaining safety and research integrity. In some cases, there may be multiple ways to complete a task or achieve a research objective. Focusing on essential requirements can help identify opportunities for flexibility and adaptation.

Accommodation strategies should be reviewed periodically, as needs and research contexts may evolve over time.

*Table 1: Examples of Accommodation Strategies*

| BARRIER OR NEED | POSSIBLE ACCOMMODATION STRATEGY |
|---|---|
| Fatigue or chronic pain | Flexible scheduling, seated work options |
| Sensory sensitivity | Noise reduction strategies, modified lighting |
| Limited dexterity | Adaptive tools or modified equipment |
| Cognitive overload | Written procedures, task checklists, clear prioritazion |
| Visual disability | Screen readers, magnification tools, accessible digital documents |
| Chronic illness | Hybrid work for non-lab tasks, flexible pacing |

# Responding to Accommodation Requests

When responding to accommodation requests:

- Respond promptly and respectfully,
- Involve the individual in identifying solutions and avoid assumptions (example of an empowering response from a supervisor: *"Thank you so much for letting me know that you need an accommodation for X. Equitable participation is important in our lab to help everyone thrive. As you are the expert of your own needs, please let me know what you need at anytime. I will never impose my ideas of what you need, so please feel comfortable with reaching out to me at anytime"*
- Focus on barriers rather than limitations,
- And consult institutional resources when needed, such as an Accessibility Advisor or Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Advisor at your institution.

Delays or unclear processes can create unnecessary barriers and stress.

*In the photo: Maria Vera Ugalde in her lab*

# 04 | CREATING A MORE ACCESSIBLE WET LAB

## Physical Access and Layout

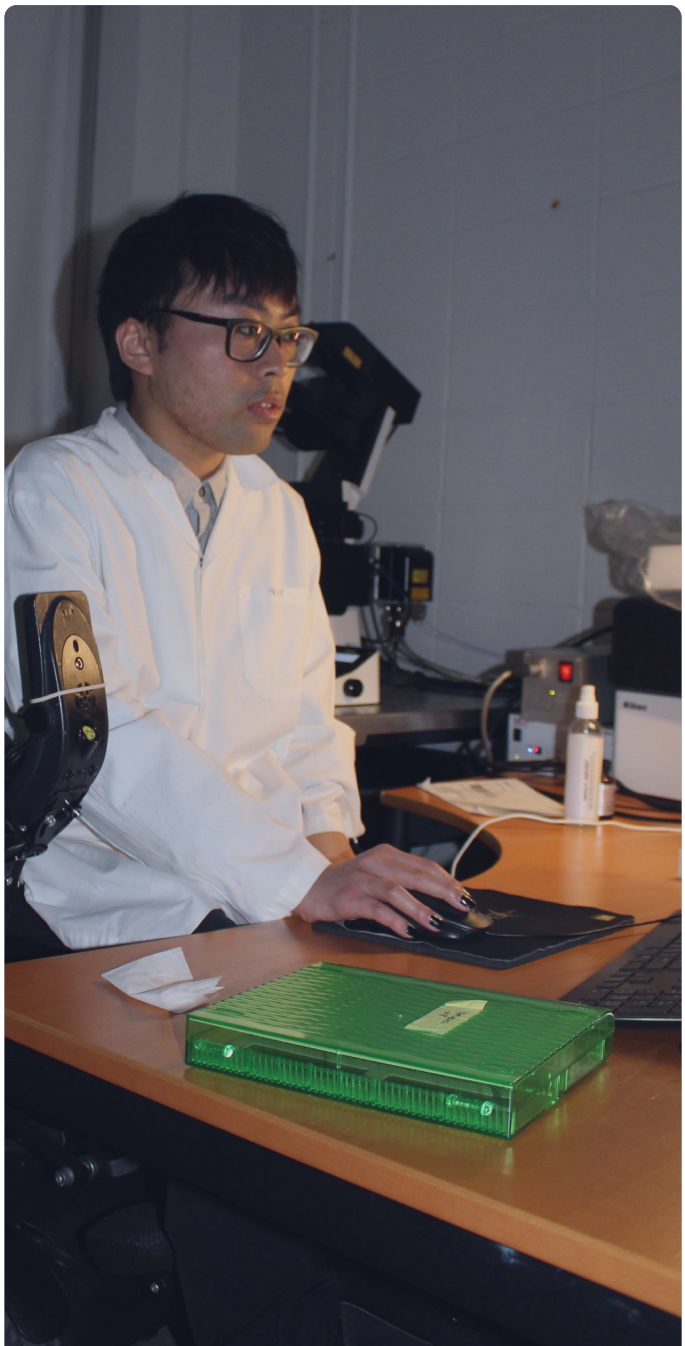
Accessibility should be considered during both new lab planning and renovations. However, beyond accessible (re) construction, it is possible to play an active role in supporting safe navigation and participation for individuals with diverse mobility needs in wet labs. These initiatives that improve accessibility have lasting universal benefits to the work environment for all team members.

Easy to implement practices to create more accessible wet labs include:

- Maintaining clear and unobstructed pathways (ex. avoid cluttering aisles with bookbags and cell phone chargers).
- Providing sufficient space for mobility devices (ex. making sure that there is wheelchair/walker accessibility for all the activities required in the lab when feasible).
- Using adjustable-height workstations where possible.
- Ensuring commonly used materials are within reachable range.
- Installing doors that are easy to open or automated where feasible

Some accessibility improvements may require infrastructure modifications, such as automatic door openers, accessible washroom upgrades, or workspace adaptations. At McGill, these types of projects may be considered through the Universal Access Capital Projects Fund. In some cases, accessibility related costs may also be eligible through research grant funding, depending on the nature of the project and the funding framework. Researchers and supervisors are encouraged to begin conversations early with relevant institutional partners, as infrastructure requests typically require assessment, prioritization, and budget review, and timelines for approval and implementation may vary depending on project scope and available resources.

*In the photo: George Wang in the lab*



## Ergonomic Equipment

Beyond accommodating people with disabilities, ergonomic equipment in research labs also make tasks easier in general for all lab members, when applied to group equipment or if remaining in the lab indefinitely. Accommodations rarely detract benefit from other team members, usually they introduce universal benefits.

# Examples of Ergonomic Equipment for Wet Labs:

*List is not exhaustive*

**Liquid Handling and Pipetting**

- Electronic Pipettes: These require significantly less force to activate than manual pipettes, reducing thumb strain.
- Multichannel Pipettes: Used to reduce the total number of repetitions needed for filling plates.
- Lightweight/Balanced Pipettes: Designed to minimize hand grip force.
- Low-Profile Waste Receptacles/Tubes: Short containers prevent excessive wrist bending and shoulder elevation.

**Seating and Workstations**

- Adjustable Lab Chairs/Stools: Features include 5-leg bases with casters, adjustable seat height, backrest/lumbar support, and waterfall seat edges to improve circulation.
- Height-Adjustable Workstations/Benches: Allow seamless transition between sitting and standing, accommodating different user heights.
- Anti-Fatigue Mats: Used in standing areas to provide cushioning and reduce stress on legs and back.
- Footrests/Foot Rings: Essential for supported posture when working at higher bench levels.

**Microscopy and Inspection**

- Adjustable Microscope Stands/Viewing Heads: Allow the microscope to be positioned closer to the user to prevent neck strain.
- Microscope Cameras/Monitor Systems: Eliminate the need to look through eyepieces, allowing for a neutral head and neck position.
- Forearm Pads/Supports: Reduce contact pressure on elbows and forearms while operating equipment.

**Tools and General Supplies**

- Thermoplastic Pellets (e.g., Thermo-Pellets): Mouldable material that can be used to customize and thicken handles on tools to reduce required grip force.
- Easy-Open Items: Tools like cap openers, tube openers, or Eco Funnels that minimize repetitive gripping motions.
- Padded/Large-Diameter Handles: Used on tools to improve grip comfort.

**Laboratory Safety and Support**

- Mobile Carts/Trolleys: Assisting in transporting heavy solutions or equipment, reducing manual lifting strain.
- Thin, Flexible Gloves: Reduce the force needed for gripping, compared to thick or ill-fitting glove.

Some accommodations may require funding for equipment, adaptive technology, or workspace modifications. Researchers and supervisors are encouraged to connect with their local HR advisor, Disability Management and/or the Central Accommodation Fund to explore available support and funding processes. Early conversations can help ensure that accommodations are implemented effectively and in a timely manner.

## Equipment and Tools

Lab equipment is often designed with a limited range of users in mind.

**Small adaptations can significantly improve usability and independence.**

Equipment and tool accessibility practices include considering:

- Whether equipment can be adapted or modified.
- The accessibility of controls and displays.
- Whether tools can be used with limited dexterity.
- Providing alternative methods or tools where feasible.
- Ensuring digital interfaces are accessible.

Research teams are invited to request funding for this equipment through dedicated funding opportunities within their institutions. For instance, The Central Accommodation Fund has been established by McGill University in order to streamline and standardize the process for financing workplace accommodations. The Central Accommodation Fund is an integral part of McGill meeting its obligations as an employer under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in Quebec. The Central Accommodation Fund is available to assist with the accommodation requirements of university employees with disabilities and is administered by the Office of the Provost and Vice-Principal – Academic.

Requests for the fund should be completed in collaboration with the employee's supervisor and/or HR advisor. Additionally, it is possible to include accessibility needs in your budget when applying for grants.


*In the photo: George Wang in the lab*

## Sensory Environment

Wet labs can involve intense lighting, noise, and chemical exposure.

**Sensory accessibility can improve comfort, concentration, and safety.**

Sensory accessible environment practices include where possible, considering:

- Reducing unnecessary background noise.
- Minimizing glare and harsh lighting.
- Using clear and high-contrast labels.
- Considering sensitivities to odors or airborne irritants.
- Creating quieter or lower-stimulation work areas where feasible.

## Safety and Emergency Procedures


Accessibility and safety should be approached as complementary objectives. While safety requirements are essential in research environments, accessibility considerations deserve thoughtful evaluation rather than being dismissed prematurely due to perceived risks or operational constraints. In many cases, collaborative planning and creative problem-solving can identify solutions that support both safe and accessible participation in research activities.

Assessment of safety and emergency procedures include considering:

- Verifying that fire alarms are both audible and visual.
- Ensuring the accessibility of emergency equipment. For example:
  - Ensuring emergency equipment such as eyewash stations, safety showers, fire extinguishers, and emergency shut-offs can be reached and used by individuals with diverse mobility needs.
  - Making sure that pathways to emergency equipment are clear and unobstructed.
  - Considering whether controls, handles, or activation mechanisms can be operated with limited strength or dexterity.
- Analyzing whether evacuation procedures account for diverse needs. Examples may include accessible evacuation routes, visual an auditory emergency alerts, accessible assembly points, and clear procedures for supporting individuals who may require assistance during emergencies
- Providing safety training in multiple formats. Institutions often offer trainings on safety through Facilities Management Services.
- Ensuring emergency information is clear and easy to understand. Clear communication can help reduce confusion and support faster, safer responses during emergencies for all lab users. For instance:
  - Using plain and concise language in emergency instructions.
  - Providing information in multiple formats (written, visual, verbal, and digital).
  - Using clear signage, symbols, and high contrast visuals.
  - Avoiding overly complex or highly technical language where possible.
  - Making emergency procedures easy to locate and reference.
  - Providing step-by-step instructions for critical procedures when appropriate.

A number of units within a university, including Environmental Health and Safety, Facilities Management and Ancillary Services, Human Resources, and accessibility-related services, can help researchers and supervisors explore solutions that support both accessibility and safety in research environments.

## Clarity as an equity measure

Clear organization and communication practices improve accessibility for all lab users.

**Reducing uncertainty can help improve both accessibility and efficiency.**

Clear communication practices include:

- Using consistent labeling systems
- Keeping shared spaces organized and predictable
- Clearly communicating expectations and timelines
- Offering demonstrations or visual supports where appropriate
- Providing written protocols and procedures. Written protocols can support consistency, reduce uncertainty, and improve accessibility for a wide range of lab users. For instance:
  - Providing step-by-step written instructions for common lab procedures
  - Making protocols available in accessible digital formats
  - Supplementing verbal training with written reference materials
  - Using clear headings, consistent formatting, and plain language where possible
  - Including visuals or diagrams to support complex procedures
  - Ensuring updated versions of protocols are easy to locate and access

# 05 | KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Accessibility supports inclusive excellence and participation in research.
- Many accessibility improvements are low-cost and benefit entire teams.
- Accessibility is most effective when considered proactively.
- Inclusive communication and flexibility can significantly reduce barriers.
- Accessibility is an ongoing process of learning, adaptation, and collaboration.

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