



NNELS Accessible Publishing Summit: Summary Report

**Northern District Library, Toronto
January 28-29 2019**

By the [National Network for Equitable Library Service \(NNELS\)](#)

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About NNELS

The [National Network for Equitable Library Service](#) (NNELS) is a digital public library of books for Canadians with print disabilities, and an advocate for an accessible and equitable reading ecosystem for Canadians with print disabilities. NNELS is funded by eight Canadian provinces and territories and housed by the [BC Libraries Cooperative](#). To learn more about NNELS, click [here](#).

About the Summit

On January 28th and 29th, 2019, [NNELS](#) and the [BC Libraries Co-op](#) invited over [50 people](#) involved the ebook production and distribution chain (including authors, editors, designers, publishers, distributors, librarians, alternate-format producers, users of alternate formats, and government representatives) to Toronto to participate in a [two-day summit](#) focused on accessible publishing in Canada.

The goal was to create a space where all those who have a stake in accessible publishing would be able to work together to build a community, develop partnerships, gain a deeper understanding of the current state of accessible publishing in Canada, identify assets, challenges, and opportunities amongst stakeholder groups, and work on the ways in which the accessible publishing landscape can be developed and improved upon in Canada.

The agenda for the two days of the summit can be viewed, here: [English](#) | [Français](#)

Introduction

Over the two days of demonstrations, presentations, and discussions, a number of themes arose, in addition to the importance of creating accessible ebooks. These included:

- The acknowledgement that not only do ebooks need to be more accessible, they need to be more findable/discoverable.
- The need for training, of librarians, publishers, vendors, distributors, and more. There are many points in the book publishing and distribution chain where moves toward accessibility can be introduced, and in order for this to happen, there will need to be training and education.
- The necessity of collaboration, and perhaps even resource-sharing, between and within the various stakeholder groups.
- The importance of including people with print disabilities into the process, from testing and evaluating ebooks, to remediating backlist titles, to working with vendors to develop and refine metadata, and more. Many readers with print disabilities will have the experience and technical skills required to make meaningful contributions in accessible publishing.

The Experience of Readers with Print Disabilities—Ebook Demonstration and Debrief

In the morning on the first day, Daniella Levy-Pinto, Coordinator for the [team of Accessibility Testers](#) at NNELS, gave a presentation on the experience of readers with print disabilities. In 2018, Daniella and the Accessibility Testers began evaluating EPUBs from a number of Canadian publishers, as well as assessing reading platforms and applications.¹ To

¹ Since the summit, the Accessibility Testers have written and published a number of useful documents and reports. To read more about it, please visit www.accessiblepublishing.ca. You can read an overview of the [EPUB Accessibility Audits](#), download a [best practices guide](#) for publishers, read [reports on reading apps](#) including Libby, OverDrive, PressReader, and RBDigital, and more!

test the EPUBs, the testers open files using a variety of hardware, software, and screen readers. They document their user experience, noting their ability to navigate and read the files; this is what they demonstrated to attendees.

To get a sense of these demonstrations, please take a look at these illustrative videos made by the testers, on: [headings](#); [page navigation](#); [tables of contents](#); and [fixed vs. reflowable layout](#).

Challenges & Solutions

Some of the main issues with EPUBs that the Accessibility Testers shared included:

- use of visual information only or visual cues;
- lack of semantic tags;
- screen readers not announcing a variety of elements;
- images with zero or minimal description;
- a lack of page numbers;
- Tables of Contents that were broken or incomplete;
- the use of EPUB 2 instead of EPUB 3; and
- the use of fixed layout instead of reflowable.

Daniella and the team explained that all these issues could be solved by using valid HTML5 tags. Publishers can preserve the visual layout of the ebook while ensuring a seamless reading experience for users of assistive technology. This would enhance the reading experience of all users, not just those with a print disability. A book that is flexible, adaptable, and properly coded goes a long way.

For a detailed look at specific solutions, the testers have developed a document which can be downloaded: [Accessible Publishing Best Practices: Guidelines for Common EPUB Issues in Plain Language](#) (also available in [French](#)).

The Meaning of Accessibility

Following the demonstration, attendees had an open discussion about what accessible publishing is, what it can be, and what it needs in order to become more widespread and robust.

- Accessible publishing should be timely; born-accessible books should be available to all readers at the same time as the print version. These born-accessible works should have robust metadata so that they are easily findable, both to libraries and to individual readers. The digital texts should be accessible via any device – computer; e-reader; tablet; Braille displays, etc.
- Accessible publishing is inclusive and equitable. It benefits everyone – not just readers with print disabilities. It should be intersectional, common, and something that people advocate for.
- Born-accessible works create a more equitable world because they give people with print disabilities options and opportunities. This should be the norm; this should be simple and straightforward. High-quality born-accessible works are also technologically sophisticated, and this is valuable beyond the realm of accessibility.
- Accessibility can also mean sales; there is a huge audience of people with print disabilities – nearly one in ten Canadians – and many would love to be able to buy books when they are published.
- Training and education should be incorporated at all levels, among all stakeholder groups. There is a shared responsibility, among everyone who contributes to the publishing supply chain, to work toward ubiquitous born-accessibility.

Panel on Accessible Publishing

In order to gain insight into the perspectives from the wide range of stakeholder groups that were present at the summit, a few people we asked to give brief presentations.

Publishers' Perspective: Kate Edwards & Shannon Culver

Kate Edwards is Executive Director of the [Association of Canadian Publishers \(ACP\)](#); and Shannon Culver is Manager of Technology for [eBOUND Canada](#). ACP represents independent, English language, Canadian publishers. They have 115 publisher-members, about 80% of which have fewer than 10 employees. eBOUND is a sister organization, founded in 2011, which now has 70 client publishers.

Kate and Shannon noted that accessibility is not a new discussion in the publishing world. It has been a point of consideration for publishers in Canada, and internationally, for years, and most publishers are very aware that there are guidelines and best practices documents already available ([International Publishers Association](#), [Book Industry Study Group](#)). They noted that these guidelines have featured majorly in discussions, but that it is time to move to implementation.

The conversations about accessible publishing in Canada and internationally are reminiscent of ebook conversations from ten years ago, and the same questions are coming up, regarding staff capacity for production, whether outsourcing will be needed, what the market looks like, what is the business case, etc.

Professional development and ongoing training on new and emerging standards will be needed, as well as research to determine demand, partnerships with ebook vendors and wholesalers; and collective projects and shared resources to reduce barriers for smaller publishers.

With ebooks, government investment was essential to reduce those barriers and create partnerships, and will be again for ensuring the accessibility of ebooks.

There is still a lot to be done, but Shannon and Kate are optimistic.

The Promise of EPUB: Rachel Comerford

Rachel Comerford is Senior Director of Content Standards and Accessibility at [Macmillan Learning](#), and co-chair of the [EPUB 3 Community Group](#) at the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)

Rachel spends a lot of time communicating with organizations about why EPUB is important. She talks to companies, schools, and individuals and about how EPUB files provide a more accessible experience than PDF, as they are much easier to navigate, have better interoperability, integrate accessibility in a non-proprietary standard, and can contain better metadata. Importantly, EPUB files can be read on a variety of devices and platforms, which enhances their flexibility for all users!

Among students, teachers, and even different accessibility offices, there is reluctance to move away from PDF. A few of their reasons are: PDFs are more known and more common than EPUB; they know how to read and share PDFs; also, people unfamiliar with HTML often think that it is scary and/or difficult; and some “know” that publishers can’t be trusted.

In general, in order to make advances in the state of accessible publishing in Canada, the needs that she sees right now are:

- an understanding of the accessible publishing supply chain;
- understanding who the key players are in the supply chain; and
- a gap analysis to see where those organizations are falling short regarding accessible publishing.

Alternative Format Challenges: bob Minnery & Adam Wilton

bob Minnery is the Manager of [Alternative Education Resources for Ontario \(AERO\)](#); Adam Wilton is the Program Manager for the [Provincial Resources Centre for the Visually Impaired \(PRCVI\)](#) in BC. Adam and bob also represent the [Canadian Association of Educational Resource Centres for Alternate Format Materials \(CAER\)](#) whose members produce K-12 and post-secondary educational materials in accessible formats for students with print disabilities.

Some of the biggest challenges that alternate format producers like Adam and bob face are:

that they often work historically, retrofitting old titles into EPUB, which can take a long time depending on the complexity of the test; as they work specifically with educational materials, these delays can be particularly problematic; and

many of their users are reluctant to move to EPUB, even though it is the most flexible format. There needs to be training and education to help people become more comfortable with EPUB;

One aspect to alternate format production for publishers to keep in mind is that if a version of a work is commercially available, then people must purchase that version, whether it is a library or an individual. Alternate format producers like NNELS, PRCVI, and AERO only create accessible works when there is no other option.

Educational materials need to be timely, but they often arrive late because they need to be retrofitted. They hope that soon, students will be able to expect more from their educational materials, specifically for navigability and timeliness.

Government Funding and Accessibility:

Julie Fairweather & Michel Côté

Julie Fairweather and Michel Côté administer the Canada Book Fund and work for the [Department of Canadian Heritage](#). Julie is Director of Book Publishing Policy, and Michel is the Manager of Book Publishing Policy & Programs.

Julie and Michel spend a lot of time interacting with publishers and organizations who interact with the publishing industry. They are working to make sure everyone has access to Canadian publications. There is a tendency to go straight to solutions (i.e. force book publishers to only create born-accessible work, etc.), but they recognize that there is still a lot of work to be done when it comes to having accessible publishing be the norm.

They are concerned that, while there is certainly more that can be done to support publishers in making the transition to create accessible books, there are also issues on the production side, like findability and metadata. There is an opportunity to learn from the collective approach developed in Quebec.

Distribution will be key, because it is not solved when it comes to ebooks, it's not an established business model. The ebook pricing just by itself is an issue that we need to sort out. Accessibility is tied in with e-publishing and we need the channels to allow people to access these books. Production is

one thing, but the main issue is discoverability; being able to find the books, and being able to distribute them.

Copyright exception is also important. If there is no commercial version available, then Alternate Format producers can create an accessible version. If book publishers produce born-accessible works, then that's a whole different game economically. Will people still have access to these books if that happens? Will libraries still be able to access them? Will there be an agreed-upon price?

Julie is worried about older people who are losing their sight as they age or facing whatever age-related disabilities may prevent them from accessing and consuming books. Imagine the learning curve when trying to teach an older person to use an e-reader, and the economic impact of that change. She is confident that publishers, with help and incentive, will catch up in terms of accessibility.

They look forward to a future where everyone in Canada has access to the many Canadian-authored books that are being produced. That's the objective of the Canada Book Fund and it includes people with print disabilities.

International work on Accessibility: Marisa DeMeglio & Sarah Hilderley

Marisa DeMeglio works in Software and Standards Development at the [DAISY Consortium](#); Sarah Hilderley is responsible for Communications at [Inclusive Publishing](#), DAISY Consortium, and editor of the Inclusive Publishing Newsletter. DAISY is a global team of organizations working toward equal access to information, regardless of who is looking for access. They include more than 150 organizations, such as: libraries for print disabled people, government agencies, disability groups, and more.

DAISY is working on specifications, authoring tools, and developing validations and conformance testing. They are also participating in accessibility conformance testing groups, distribution, and reading systems testing such as what's happening at [EPUBtest.org](#) where people report their experience with EPUB in different formats. People have various devices, operating systems, programs, so testing is multi-faceted and complex. There is no single solution.

DAISY (and Marisa) want to demystify accessibility in publishing, and make it something concrete that we can be incorporated into the publishing

process from the start, and that people already know how to ensure. Accessibility should be accessible.

Sarah works on an originally Google-funded project in DAISY called [Inclusive Publishing](#). Its focus is to provide information on mainstream accessibility for their four main readership groups: publishers, developers, consumers, and education groups. They are encouraging publishers to develop content that is born-accessible and readable for all readers.

Their activities and goals are to provide a hub to facilitate information sharing internationally and to encourage best practices and user standards. They do this via articles, news pieces, information about their events, and their newsletter.

Sarah's hopes for the future include making more connections in the inclusive/accessible publishing landscapes, and building on work that is being done around the world.

Producing EPUB 2 vs. EPUB 3

A valuable discussion about EPUB 2 and EPUB 3 was had, as many publishers are still producing EPUB 2. EPUB 3 offers much more flexibility when it comes to incorporating accessibility, and should be what publishers are working toward.

Until recently, there were still vendors who would not accept EPUB 3, which is why some publishers have not explored moving to the newer format; therefore, it will be important to educate the market and teach people about EPUB 3. It was noted that a lot of publishers are using Adobe Indesign to create EPUB, and it's just a different toggle (for EPUB 2 or 3). They are still opting for EPUB 2 instead of EPUB 3 because they feel it's simpler/less scary.

BookNet Canada did a survey and found that about 50% of publishers surveyed produced EPUB 3. Their survey also checked awareness and implementation of accessibility; awareness was high, but active implementation it was really low. It will be helpful to create a checklist for producing EPUB 3, and making sure it's accessible.

A few participants discussed the power of including people with print disabilities in the publishing process; if it were possible for them to be more

involved, it wouldn't be so abstract to talk about accessible publishing. NNELS has accessibility testers evaluating EPUB files from publishers, but it would be helpful to incorporate them earlier on in the workflow.

How do we know that EPUB 3 is "it" and that there is not some new format coming down the line?

- There may be, but learning EPUB 3 will give you the solid base you need.
- Also, EPUB 3 is still being worked on, but the [Publishing Working Group](#) is always keeping EPUB 3 in mind as they continue to develop publishing technologies. Any changes to EPUB 3 will be additions - they will not take anything away.
- There is a current revision going on with EPUB 3, but it is just evolving with the web.

Assets, Challenges and Opportunities: Discussion by Stakeholder Groups

The attendees broke up into their stakeholder groups to discuss what they have to offer the advancement of accessible publishing; what obstacles and/difficulties they face; and the possibilities for action that they could explore.

Stakeholder Group	Assets	Challenges	Opportunities
Users of Accessible Formats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creativity & experience • Resourcefulness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of awareness • Inaccessible apps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating awareness • The ability to give feedback directly to publishers and vendors
Publishers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content • Where there's a will, there's a way! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal resources (technology, HR, time) • Rich content • Lack of standardization on reading platforms & vendor systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sales/business case • Technology (emerging formats, standards, implementation, possibilities of EPUB 3)
EPUB Veterans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DAISY Resource Suite (Knowledge base, Pipeline, Ace/SMART, epubcheck, epubtest.org) • Standards influence (EPUB 3, BISG Accessible Publishing Guide, W3C Business/Working/Community Groups, Accessible EPUB 1.0 Specifications, Accessible Metadata Specifications) • Benetech Resource Suite (Global Certified Accessible, MathML Cloud, DIAGRAM Center) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education: Getting the word out to all of the right people <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Getting more participation • User-friendly tools for creating and consuming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raising awareness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Accessibility challenges (i.e., go without mouse, display, etc.) ◦ "Pepsi Challenge" (EPUB 3 vs PDF) • Providing concrete resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ metadata ◦ best practices (W3C CC) ◦ AI ◦ templates/boilerplates • Retire EPUB 2
Alternate format producers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy arm • Centralized efficiency • Relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost • Jurisdictional challenges: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Province / territory & sector (K-12, public, post-secondary, etc.) • Systems change • Technical literacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible Justice League of Canada • Advocacy and training • Users as actors

Stakeholder Group	Assets	Challenges	Opportunities
Librarians	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Democratic, free, accessible ● Many service points ● Knowledge of customer & community needs ● Expertise <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Literacy ○ Collections ○ Outreach ○ Programs ○ Technology ● Visionary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Patron and staff awareness of available accessible services ● Access to content (devices, collections, platforms, discovery, literacy) ● Money / Capacity / Resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Advocate customer needs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Vendors ○ Developers ○ Publishers ● Training <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Public ○ Staff ● Connecting accessible services to readers
Government representatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Canada Book Fund requires some digital publishing ● Strong disability community advocates ● Strong provincial government relationships with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Publishers ○ Education ○ Libraries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Permanent, sustainable funding ● Consensus building among provinces & feds ● No control over the industry; uncertainty of imposing a “stick” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Legislation(s) ● Engaged leaders and departments in government
Reading Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Most major reading systems are EPUB 3 compliant ● Market share, resources and relationships, influence on publishers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Internal support; the business case for accessibility ● Digital Rights Management (DRM) ● Lack of connection with stakeholders and their data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Explore new solutions for DRM and licensing ● Access to testers and co-designers with perceptual disabilities ● Make the entire customer journey accessible and usable

Goals & Working Groups

Participants were asked to build on the ideas they had heard and generated thus far on accessible publishing: assets to amplify, challenges to address, opportunities to take, visions for the future... and, based on the conversations that had taken place, they were encouraged to share their recommendations/suggestions for how to go about making ebooks fully accessible to readers with print disabilities.

These ideas were then refined, and the question “What clarity and depth can we bring to this set of recommendations(s)?” was discussed. From this discussion were borne a number of action items which were assigned to 9 different working groups. The groups and their tasks are outlined here.

- **Website Metaproject:** The members will develop a website with a repository of resources, guides, templates, examples, and more. The audience will be content creators (publishers, authors, etc.), as well as librarians, readers, and generally anyone who has a stake in accessible publishing.
- **Certification Metaproject:** This group will work toward defining standards and making space in order to create an accessibility certification process in Canada.
- **Government Policy & Legislation:** This group will work on identifying “carrots” and “sticks” in accessible publishing in Canada; they will also write policy templates and guidance documents for developing internal accessibility policies, and work to include vendors in the discussion of AP in Canada through incentivization or other means.
- **Hiring People with Disabilities in Publishing:** Members of this group will work to raise awareness of the importance and necessity of including people with disabilities in the testing and development of high quality ebooks.
- **Licensing & Rights:** This group will look into alternatives to Digital Rights Management as well as things like collective licensing.

- **Search & Discoverability:** The members of this group will look into how metadata for accessible books can be improved, resulting in increased findability for accessible published ebooks.
- **Training & Social Inclusion:** This group will focus on building awareness of the EPUB 3 format, and sharing guides and resources for producing and using EPUB.
- **Growing the Network:** This group will work on outreach and networking, building up and connecting people who have an interest in AP, whether as producers, consumers, or distributors.
- **Content Creation:** This is a group where content creators (authors, publishers, etc.) can share materials and have discussion about content creation.

Conclusion

Bringing together a variety of stakeholders and giving them the space to share and discuss their unique perspectives was perhaps the most meaningful aspect of the Accessible Publishing Summit. To have publishers, alternate format producers, readers with print disabilities, government workers, librarians, and more, all in the same room working on accessible publishing, was a powerful step in advancing the state of this topic in Canada. The working groups will carry on the work that was begun, and connections will continue to be made and built upon. It is clear that there are a great number of passionate people and organizations, and the conversations and plans that took place at the summit set the stage for a bright and inclusive future.

Summit Details

Attendees

- Chloé Baril (Directrice de l'accueil et du prêt à la Grande Bibliothèque) – [Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec](#)
- Roger Beatty (Director, Accessible Publishing) – [Canadian National Institute for the Blind \(CNIB\)](#)
- Jillian Bell (Director of Marketing & Finance Officer) – [SaskBooks](#)
- Nicolas Boudreault (Higher Education Officer) – [Copibec](#)
- Karoline Bourdeau (Accessibility Tester) – [National Network for Equitable Library Service \(NNELS\)](#)
- Michael Ciccone (Executive Director) – [Centre for Equitable Library Access \(CELA\)](#)
- Maria Cipriano (Senior Collections Specialist) – [Toronto Public Library](#)
- Rachel Comerford (Senior Director of Content Standards and Accessibility) – [Macmillan Learning](#)
- Michel Côte (Manager, Book Publishing Policy) – [Department of Canadian Heritage](#)
- Shannon Culver (Manager of Technology) – [eBOUND Canada](#)
- Marisa DeMeglio (Software and Standards Development) – [DAISY Consortium](#)
- Melanie Dumas (Directrice de la référence et du prêt) – [Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec](#)
- Kate Edwards (Executive Director) – [Association of Canadian Publishers](#)
- Éveline Favretti (Project Manager) – [Association nationale des éditeurs de livres](#)

- Julie Fairweather (Director; Book Publishing Policy and Programs) – [Department of Canadian Heritage](#)
- Danny Faris (Accessibility Tester) – [National Network for Equitable Library Service \(NNELS\)](#)
- Kaden Faris (Accessibility Tester) – [National Network for Equitable Library Service \(NNELS\)](#)
- Matt Garrish (Editor, Digital Publishing Standards and Processes) – [DAISY Consortium](#)
- Noah Genner (CEO & President) – [BookNet Canada](#)
- Amy Haagsma (Editor) – [Editors British Columbia](#)
- Sarah Hilderley (Communications: Inclusive Publishing) – [DAISY Consortium](#)
- Lindsey Hunnewell (Digital Marketing Coordinator) – [Nimbus Publishing Ltd.](#)
- Cara James (Developmental Editor) – [Pearson](#)
- Kim Johnson (Library Network Consultant, Resource Sharing) – [Government of Alberta](#)
- Teresa Johnson (Research and Planning Librarian) – [New Brunswick Public Library Service](#) & [Canadian Federation of Library Associations \(CFLA\)](#)
- Kyle Keele (Department Head, Product Design Ops) – [Rakuten Kobo Inc.](#)
- Catherine Kelly (Communities Librarian) – [Nova Scotia Provincial Library](#)
- Abigail Kidd (Junior Policy Analyst) – [Employment and Social Development Canada](#)
- Charles LaPierre (Technical Lead, Diagram+Born Accessible) – [Benetech](#)

- Daniella Levy-Pinto (Coordinator, Accessibility Testing)- [National Network for Equitable Library Service \(NNELS\)](#)
- Ka Li (Accessibility Tester) – [National Network for Equitable Library Service \(NNELS\)](#)
- bob Minnery (Manager) – [Alternative Education Resources for Ontario \(AERO\)](#)
- Steve Murgaski (Accessibility Tester) – [National Network for Equitable Library Service \(NNELS\)](#)
- Heidi Propp (Accessibility Tester) – [National Network for Equitable Library Service \(NNELS\)](#)
- Wendy Reid (Senior Quality Analyst) – [Rakuten Kobo Inc.](#)
- Lillian Sullam (Ebooks team member) – [Penguin Random House](#)
- Lindsay Tyler (Senior Manager) – [Centre for Equitable Library Access \(CELA\)](#)
- Tristene Villanyi Bokor (Accessibility Librarian) – [Ottawa Public Library](#)
- Heidi Waechtler (Executive Director) – [Association of Book Publishers of BC](#)
- Krista Wilcox (Director General; Office of Disability Issues) – [Employment and Social Development Canada](#)
- Adam Wilton (Program Manager) – [Provincial Resource Centre for the Visually Impaired \(PRCVI\)](#)

Organizing Committee

- Laura Brady – [House of Anansi Press](#)
- Leah Brochu – [NNELS](#)
- Laurie Davidson – [BC Libraries Cooperative](#)
- Michelle De Agostini – [NNELS](#)

- Sabina Iseli-Otto – [NNELS](#)

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