ACCESSIBILITY IN ALBERTA

A survey of municipalities

Voice of Albertans with Disabilities

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Accessibility in Municipalities in Alberta

Context for Accessibility

The World Health Organization estimates that 15% of the global population, roughly 1 billion people, live with some form of disability. This means that approximately half a million people in Alberta have a disability. The type of disability may range from physical, neurological, psychiatric, cognitive, and learning disabilities. While the disabilities they have are diverse, they all share one thing in common - each of these Albertans lives in a community within a municipality.

Individuals with disabilities make up one of the most open and inclusive minority groups; anyone can belong and can join at any time. Whether an Albertan is born with a disability or acquires it throughout their lifetime, the debilitating effects can hamper their ability to access all elements of society.

The Voice of Albertans with Disabilities (VAD) believes that by working together and collaborating on solutions, we can help make municipalities accessible for all Albertans.
**What is accessibility?**

Often, when people hear the word accessibility, they immediately think of ramps and wide doorways for wheelchairs. While that is definitely a part of accessibility, there are many other elements which play a role.

*The removal of any barriers to someone who is experiencing disability (a physical, mental, intellectual, learning, communication or sensory impairment - or a functional limitation) whether permanent, temporary or episodic in nature, so that they can fully and equally participate in society.* - Interpreted from the definitions of the Accessible Canada Act.

**MUNICIPALITIES: WHERE IT ALL BEGINS**

Every Albertan with a disability lives in a community within a municipality. The municipality is responsible for so much of what happens during a citizen’s day-to-day life. Municipalities are responsible for making sure the snow is cleared on the sidewalks and away from community postal boxes, they take away garbage and provide transportation, they may provide a multitude of recreation activities to name only a few services; in short, municipalities are the closest to the people.
In Alberta, we still have people who are unable to access their municipal council meetings, open houses or public hearings because they cannot hear what is being said. They may not be able to safely walk down a set of stairs in public buildings because there are no lines to differentiate one step from another, facilitating a fall. Connecting with an individual’s elected representative may be difficult because braille is not included on the business card.

**ACCESSIBILITY SURVEY**

VAD received a grant from the Government of Canada to bring awareness to the importance of accessibility and inclusion across different sectors and communities. The grant provided the opportunity for VAD to conduct surveys of 30 municipalities across Alberta. The responses provide an indication of how accessibility is being approached in the province. The questions in the survey can be found in appendix A of this report.

All municipalities contacted were sent an email outlining the project and provided a link to the survey. The email was followed up with a phone call one week later. For those who did not respond to the initial email or voicemail, several more attempts were made via email or phone. In total, 12 municipalities responded to the survey. Of those 12 respondents, 8 were from towns and 4 from cities. The responding municipalities range in population from under 2,000 to over 1,000,000 and represent 44% of total land area occupied by municipalities in Alberta. Responses to the survey can be found in Appendix B of this report.
SURVEY RESULTS

A variety of municipalities responded to the survey covering areas as far east as Lloydminster, west to Banff, south to Cardston, and north to Athabasca. The Cities of Edmonton, Calgary and Medicine Hat also responded to the survey. Limitations of the information collected include an under representation of Northern Alberta, only 11% of municipalities being contacted, and there was no representation from villages or summer villages.

Bylaws or policies around ensuring accessibility
Out of twelve respondents, five indicated they did not have any bylaws or policies around ensuring accessibility for their residents. One municipality said they used the Provincial Building Code to dictate their accessibility standards and five said they had specific bylaws and policies.

Some of the municipalities have adopted policies specific to accessibility such as inclusion and diversity policies, barrier-free policies and parking regulations. Typically, the larger the municipality, the more extensive and specific their policies appeared.

Unofficial or ad-hoc policies ensuring accessibility
A majority of municipalities said they have unofficial or ad-hoc policies that ensure accessibility. Four indicated they did not.
Some examples of unofficial or ad-hoc policies included:
• Funds to retrofit old buildings
• Partnering with non-profits for accessible transportation
• Municipal council taking into account accessibility issues in their destination retirement town whenever making decisions.
• Incorporating a fully accessible transit fleet and continuing to improve all the stops.
• Waiving recreation fees for caregivers.

Does your municipality have resident input into accessibility issues?
The majority of municipalities took a wait and see approach to accessibility issues, indicating that issues of accessibility would come up during more general consultations. Seven municipalities reported that they do not have residents providing input to municipal officials’ on accessibility concerns. It was anticipated that accessibility concerns would be brought forward on an individual basis so it could be addressed.

Five municipalities either had advisory committees or they worked with groups within the community on accessibility issues. Edmonton, Medicine Hat and Calgary have accessibility advisory committees that provide ongoing input and feedback.

Innovative Examples of Accessibility
Of the twelve municipalities that responded to the survey, seven could not identify any innovative examples of accessibility within their community. Of the
five that identified innovation, some mentioned specialized transit, ramp curbs, and building access.

Calgary provides vibrotactile audible pedestrian signals and urban Braille (a system of tactile information serving the needs of the visually impaired or blind). The City of Medicine Hat hosts accessible tours for buildings, an accessible vehicle show and shine and an annual emergency preparedness session for vulnerable persons. The City of Edmonton uses the hearing loop technology in their recreation centers and have established an accessible playground standard.

*Barriers to providing a more accessible community*

The municipalities identified several barriers to providing a more accessible community, the most common being a lack of financial resources. Lack of resources was mentioned as a barrier to retrofitting legacy buildings and hiring staff to address accessibility issues; a total of five municipalities cited this as a barrier. Four municipalities voiced concerns around the difficulty faced with aging infrastructure. In addition, two respondents reported that awareness within the municipality and attitudes were barriers to creating a more accessible community.

Only two respondents said they have no barriers to being accessible.

*Does your community employ an individual to address accessibility?*

Only one community said they employed an individual to specifically address accessibility. Other communities did not identify having a specific person
delegated or the task was under the job description of someone else such as the town engineer, a safety code officer or a safety advisor.

Of note is the City of Medicine Hat who talked about inclusion coordination happening across departments, with a multi-year accessibility improvement plan.

The City of Edmonton has an accessibility services officer and a senior’s accessibility liaison. In addition, the City has a corporate accessibility committee.

*Stories or innovations to share?*

Of the twelve communities, none had any stories to share.
SUMMARY
Accessibility is defined as the removal of barriers for someone who is experiencing disability so they can fully and equally participate in society and the first place that individuals with disabilities look to be included is in their own communities.

Voice of Albertans with Disability has had the opportunity to research how the municipalities in Alberta address the concerns of their residents with disabilities regarding accessibility. In total, 12 municipalities responded to the survey. Of those 12 respondents, eight were from towns and four from cities. The responding municipalities range in population from under 2,000 to over 1,000,000 and represent 44% of total land area occupied by municipalities in Alberta.

Results from the municipalities who responded showed that accessibility concerns are handled in an array of formal policies and bylaws to unofficial or ad-hoc manners. Overall, we found that the larger the population, the more formal the policies and therefore the more proactive approach taken. It is interesting to note that population did not play a part in formal feedback policies from their residents or whether financial resources were a concern.

As we conducted the survey, it quickly became apparent that accessibility is an issue that is difficult to quantify and assess. Many municipalities conducted accessibility work ‘off the side of their desk’ as one of many other roles they played. Because accessibility is part of so many departments - transportation, bylaw, recreation and utilities to name a few - there is often no strategic
approach to planning and implementing initiatives or applying an accessibility lens when approaching municipal projects. Many municipalities are reliant upon a reactionary approach, waiting for residents to point out access concerns after the fact, rather than implementing a proactive approach of creating and maintaining a barrier-free and accessible Alberta.
Appendix A- Survey Questions

Q1. Municipality Name  
Q2. Contact Name  
Q3. Contact Phone number and/or Email  
Q4. Do you have any bylaws or policies around ensuring accessibility for your residents?  
Q5. Do you have any unofficial or adhoc policies around ensuring accessibility for your residents?  
Q6. Does the municipality have resident input into accessibility issues? (i.e. Advisory committee, if so who do they advise/report to?)  
Q7. Do you have any innovative examples of accessibility in your community?  
Q8. What are the barriers your municipality has to provide a more accessible community?  
Q9. Does your municipality/community employ an individual to address accessibility of municipal buildings?  
Q10. Do you have any stories or innovation to share?  
Q11. Is municipality interested in a presentation on results to council and administration during National AccessAbility Week (last week in May/June)  
Q12. Who would be the contact person to set up a presentation?
Appenidx B- Survey Answers

Respondent 1

Q1 Municipality Name
Town of Banff

Q4 Do you have any bylaws or policies around ensuring accessibility for your residents?
Yes - Land Use Bylaw as it relates to Provincial Building Codes, and sidewalks, etc.

Q5 Do you have any unofficial or adhoc policies around ensuring accessibility for your residents?
Municipal Buildings - new development conforms to accessibility standards

Q6 Does the municipality have resident input into accessibility issues? (Advisory committee, if so who do they advise/report to?)
No

Q7 Do you have any innovative examples of accessibility in your community?
No

Q8 What are the barriers your municipality has to provide a more accessible community?
Access to commercial establishments based in old buildings, trails
Q9 Does your municipality/community employ an individual to address accessibility of municipal buildings?
No, not exclusive to accessibility

Q10 Do you have any stories or innovation to share?
Respondent skipped this question

Q11 Is municipality interested in a presentation on results to council and administration during National AccessAbility Week (last week in May/June)
Perhaps

Q12 Who would be the contact person to set up a presentation?

Respondent 2

Q1 Municipality Name
Town of Provost

Q4 Do you have any bylaws or policies around ensuring accessibility for your residents?
No
Q5 Do you have any unofficial or adhoc policies around ensuring accessibility for your residents?
No

Q6 Does the municipality have resident input into accessibility issues? (I.e. Advisory committee, if so who do they advise/report to?)
No, if there is an issue hopefully they would come to the Town so that I could address it.

Q7 Do you have any innovative examples of accessibility in your community?
No

Q8 What are the barriers your municipality has to provide a more accessible community?
Funds

Q9 Does your municipality/community employ an individual to address accessibility of municipal buildings?
No however as we replace or upgrade facilities we are conscious of accessibility issues, and try to address them at the time.

Q10 Do you have any stories or innovation to share?
No

Q11 Is municipality interested in a presentation on results to council and administration during National AccessAbility
Week (last week in May/June)
Yes we would.

Q12 Who would be the contact person to set up a presentation?
Myself

Respondent 3

Q1 Municipality Name
Rocky Mountain House

Q4 Do you have any bylaws or policies around ensuring accessibility for your residents?
no

Q5 Do you have any unofficial or adhoc policies around ensuring accessibility for your residents?
Council has allotted funds to retrofit our older Aquatic Centre to accommodate clients with disabilities. The Rocky recreation centre underwent considerable renovations in 2014-2016 and is fully accessible. Main Street was completed reconstructed in 2014-2016 as well. The terraced design allows for barrier-free access to all storefronts.
Q6 Does the municipality have resident input into accessibility issues? (i.e. Advisory committee, if so who do they advise/report to?)
Resident input is solicited as projects arise; no dedicated accessibility advisory committee.

Q7 Do you have any innovative examples of accessibility in your community?
Respondent skipped this question

Q8 What are the barriers your municipality has to provide a more accessible community?
Aging infrastructure and limited financial resources. New construction obviously meets current standards.

Q9 Does your municipality/community employ an individual to address accessibility of municipal buildings?
no

Q10 Do you have any stories or innovation to share?
Not at this time - some final accessibility upgrades have been deferred to 2020.

Q11 Is municipality interested in a presentation on results to council and administration during National AccessAbility Week (last week in May/June)
not at this time
Q12 Who would be the contact person to set up a presentation?
Respondent skipped this question

Respondent 4

Q1 Municipality Name
City of Edmonton

Q4 Do you have any bylaws or policies around ensuring accessibility for your residents?
Policy C589, C463 and C466 - currently under review - proposing a new policy C602 Accessibility for People with Disabilities Policy to replace these. Will be presenting to council fall 2019.
Departments also have their own departmental or branch instructions, i.e. caregiver guidelines and wristbanding procedures. (Zoning) Bylaws around garden suite accessibility, parking and construction hoardings/snow and ice etc. also have elements of accessibility.

Q5 Do you have any unofficial or adhoc policies around ensuring accessibility for your residents?
Access Design Guide Measuring Up Edmonton Leisure access pass
Caregiver waive of fees for recreation centres
Q6 Does the municipality have resident input into accessibility issues? (I.e. Advisory committee, if so who do they advise/report to?)
Accessibility advisory committee (AAC) reports directly to council with support from administration (citizen services, social development branch - citizen access and inclusion section)

Q7 Do you have any innovative examples of accessibility in your community?
Hearing loop technology - Edmonton tower, Recreation centres
Researching pool pods for Lewis farms
Annex H accessible playground standard

Q8 What are the barriers your municipality has to provide a more accessible community?
Funding for retrofits
Attitudinal barriers “requirements/bare minimums” vs following best practice

Q9 Does your municipality/community employ an individual to address accessibility of municipal buildings?
Yes
Accessibility services officer, seniors accessibility liaison with support from staff in urban design. Has a corporate accessibility committee with other individuals as well.

Q10 Do you have any stories or innovation to share?
A lot of recent work into the accessibility policy update and updating access design guide. Recipient of Rick Hansen accessible cities award in 2017.
Q11 Is municipality interested in a presentation on results to council and administration during National AccessAbility Week (last week in May/June)
Possibly!

Q12 Who would be the contact person to set up a presentation?

Respondent 5

Q1 Municipality Name
The Town of Cardston

Q4 Do you have any bylaws or policies around ensuring accessibility for your residents?
No specific bylaw or policy with requirements above and beyond building code.

Q5 Do you have any unofficial or adhoc policies around ensuring accessibility for your residents?
Yes, Cardston is a destination retirement Town. There are several retirement homes and a large senior population in Cardston. Several members of Town Council are members of the Seniors Society so our Council is very conscious and considerate of accessibility needs, and always takes those needs into account when reviewing infrastructure improvements and other projects.

Q6 Does the municipality have resident input into accessibility issues? (I.e. Advisory committee, if so who do they advise/report to?)
The Seniors Society works closely with the Town of Cardston. The Tanner Senior Centre is a Town-owned facility that, under agreement, is operated and maintained to a degree by the Seniors. If there are any accessibility issues or concerns in Town, they are typically brought to the attention of one of our Councillors, and discussed at Council.

Q7 Do you have any innovative examples of accessibility in your community? While reconstructing sidewalks following roadwork, it is our policy (unwritten) to install accessibility ramps at intersections where they previously did not exist. The Town is also funds the "Handibus", a taxi service in Town that provides transportation for people with special accessibility needs.

Q8 What are the barriers your municipality has to provide a more accessible community? As one of Alberta's oldest municipalities, there are some structures in Town that are over 100 years old that are not as accessible as they should be, but the nature of them being recognized as historical buildings makes improvements difficult. Take the Courthouse Museum for example: The Cardston Courthouse was the first Courthouse constructed in Alberta, made out of sandstone mined from a nearby quarry. An accessibility ramp cannot be installed without significant alterations to the structure, and because of the nature of its construction (large sandstone blocks) and the regulations surrounding alterations to historical structures, it's very difficult to add any more accessibility.
Q9 Does your municipality/community employ an individual to address accessibility of municipal buildings?
The Town engineer is responsible for addressing accessibility in municipal buildings.

Q10 Do you have any stories or innovation to share?
No

Q11 Is municipality interested in a presentation on results to council and administration during National AccessAbility Week (last week in May/June)
Perhaps

Q12 Who would be the contact person to set up a presentation?

Respondent 6

Q1 Municipality Name
Town of Bow Island

Q4 Do you have any bylaws or policies around ensuring accessibility for your residents?
Yes, our Land Use Bylaw addresses disability parking regulations at properties and the Traffic Bylaw ensures accessibility is enforced with the residents.
Q5 Do you have any unofficial or adhoc policies around ensuring accessibility for your residents?
No

Q6 Does the municipality have resident input into accessibility issues? (I.e. Advisory committee, if so who do they advise/report to?)
No, we currently research Alberta regulations and proceed from there.

Q7 Do you have any innovative examples of accessibility in your community?
Not at this time.

Q8 What are the barriers your municipality has to provide a more accessible community?
Aging infrastructure cause developmental challenges for construction and property owners to provide access.

Q9 Does your municipality/community employ an individual to address accessibility of municipal buildings?
Yes, as a safety advisor, I have done this in the past.

Q10 Do you have any stories or innovation to share?
I do not recall any at this time.
Q11 Is municipality interested in a presentation on results to council and administration during National AccessAbility Week (last week in May/June) 
Yes

Q12 Who would be the contact person to set up a presentation?

Respondent 7

Q1 Municipality Name
Town of Westlock

Q4 Do you have any bylaws or policies around ensuring accessibility for your residents?
yes

Q5 Do you have any unofficial or adhoc policies around ensuring accessibility for your residents?
yes

Q6 Does the municipality have resident input into accessibility issues? (I.e. Advisory committee, if so who do they advise/report to?)
no

Q7 Do you have any innovative examples of accessibility in your community?
no
Q8 What are the barriers your municipality has to provide a more accessible community?
awareness

Q9 Does your municipality/community employ an individual to address accessibility of municipal buildings?
not specifically

Q10 Do you have any stories or innovation to share?
no

Q11 Is municipality interested in a presentation on results to council and administration during National AccessAbility Week (last week in May/June)
Not in May or June, but possibly in the Fall.

Q12 Who would be the contact person to set up a presentation?

Respondent 8

Q1 Municipality Name
Town of Athabasca
Q4 Do you have any bylaws or policies around ensuring accessibility for your residents?
No

Q5 Do you have any unofficial or adhoc policies around ensuring accessibility for your residents?
no

Q6 Does the municipality have resident input into accessibility issues? (I.e. Advisory committee, if so who do they advise/report to?)
no

Q7 Do you have any innovative examples of accessibility in your community?
no

Q8 What are the barriers your municipality has to provide a more accessible community?
no barriers

Q9 Does your municipality/community employ an individual to address accessibility of municipal buildings?
no

Q10 Do you have any stories or innovation to share?
no
Q11 Is municipality interested in a presentation on results to council and administration during National AccessAbility Week (last week in May/June) no

Q12 Who would be the contact person to set up a presentation? yes

Respondent 9

Q1 Municipality Name
Town of Claresholm

Q4 Do you have any bylaws or policies around ensuring accessibility for your residents? No

Q5 Do you have any unofficial or adhoc policies around ensuring accessibility for your residents? Yes

Q6 Does the municipality have resident input into accessibility issues? (I.e. Advisory committee, if so who do they advise/report to?)
There are regular (every few years) "Needs Assessment" surveys put out/completed by FCSS who then provides a report to Council. Though accessibility isn't a direct focus or potential issue asked about on the survey,
issues could be raised through various questions (i.e. barriers to work, areas of need, etc).

Q7 Do you have any innovative examples of accessibility in your community? Cement/curb grinding to provide better accessibility up onto a sidewalk from the street/parking where costs prohibit and space is insufficient to provide true accessibility grades/ramps.

Q8 What are the barriers your municipality has to provide a more accessible community? Old infrastructure/buildings and lack of funding.

Q9 Does your municipality/community employ an individual to address accessibility of municipal buildings? No

Q10 Do you have any stories or innovation to share? No

Q11 Is municipality interested in a presentation on results to council and administration during National AccessAbility Week (last week in May/June) No
Q12 Who would be the contact person to set up a presentation?
Respondent skipped this question

Respondent 10

Q1 Municipality Name
City of Lloydminster

Q4 Do you have any bylaws or policies around ensuring accessibility for your residents?

Q5 Do you have any unofficial or adhoc policies around ensuring accessibility for your residents?
The City of Lloydminster partners with Border City Connects (a non-profit paratransit provider) to access the Government of Saskatchewan Transit Assistance for People with Disabilities grant.
Q6 Does the municipality have resident input into accessibility issues? (I.e. Advisory committee, if so who do they advise/report to?)

No advisory committee.
Council conducts regular public consultations that allow residents to voice their concerns on a variety of issues. These consultations are undertaken in different formats (in person, online, etc) to ensure all residents have the ability to share community concerns. https://yourvoicelloyd.ca/?_mid_=324

Q7 Do you have any innovative examples of accessibility in your community?
Not that I am aware of without further research

Q8 What are the barriers your municipality has to provide a more accessible community?
Cost and availability of funding.

Q9 Does your municipality/community employ an individual to address accessibility of municipal buildings?
A specific position does not exist.
The City partnered with the Canadian Paraplegic Society in 2011 to audit City facilities.
Q10 Do you have any stories or innovation to share?
Not that I am aware of without further research

Q11 Is municipality interested in a presentation on results to council and administration during National AccessAbility Week (last week in May/June)
Yes

Q12 Who would be the contact person to set up a presentation?
The process through which organizations can request the opportunity to present to Council can be found here:

Respondent 11

Q1 Municipality Name
City of Calgary

Q4 Do you have any bylaws or policies around ensuring accessibility for your residents?
Calgary Corporate Accessibility Policy
Access Design Standards
Q5 Do you have any unofficial or adhoc policies around ensuring accessibility for your residents?
Sustainable Building Policy
Social Well-being Policy

Q6 Does the municipality have resident input into accessibility issues? (i.e. Advisory committee, if so who do they advise/report to?)
Advisory Committee on Accessibility
Access Design Committee

Q7 Do you have any innovative examples of accessibility in your community?
Vibrotactile Audible Pedestrian Signals
Truncated domes on curb ramps
Urban Braille

Q8 What are the barriers your municipality has to provide a more accessible community?
Captioning and Sign Language Interpretation
Sidewalk Hoarding walk arounds with ramps
Access Design Standards as part of Procurement process

Q9 Does your municipality/community employ an individual to address accessibility of municipal buildings?
Yes they are Safety Code Officers
Q10 Do you have any stories or innovation to share?  
Accessibility has been a component of our Smart Cities initiatives and making sure they are inclusive.

Q11 Is municipality interested in a presentation on results to council and administration during National AccessAbility Week (last week in May/June)  
Yes

Q12 Who would be the contact person to set up a presentation?  

Respondent 12

Q1 Municipality Name  
City of Medicine Hat

Q4 Do you have any bylaws or policies around ensuring accessibility for your residents?  
Yes, including in our Municipal Development Plan and Municipal Servicing Standards Manual.

Q5 Do you have any unofficial or adhoc policies around ensuring accessibility for your residents?  
Absolutely, here are two examples:
1) Parks and Recreation department has been working on upgrading all of their facilities to current accessibility standards and have made considerable progress. 2) Medicine Hat Transit has a fully accessible fleet and has for 20 years and is continuing to improve the accessibility of its stops.

Q6 Does the municipality have resident input into accessibility issues? (I.e. Advisory committee, if so who do they advise/report to?)
Yes the City has had an Advisory Committee on Disability Issues (ACDI) since 1992. ACDI reports to Council through the Public Service Committee. ACDI advises City Council and all City Departments on issues related to persons with disabilities. ACDI also advocated to other authorities that formulate policy and/or offer programs that affect people with disabilities.

Q7 Do you have any innovative examples of accessibility in your community?
* Special Transit allows regular transit users who qualify for Special Transit, to use the service when getting to and from their bus stop in the winter is not feasible
* Accessible Home Tour for builders
* Accessible Vehicle Show & Shine
* Annual Emergency Preparedness Sessions for vulnerable persons
* each year the Advisory Committee assists with comprehensive accessibility audits for the Parks and Recreation department as well as providing a prioritized recommendation to the Municipal Works department prior to the detailed planning for an area they are planning for rehab.
Q8 What are the barriers your municipality has to provide a more accessible community?
It takes time and money.

Q9 Does your municipality/community employ an individual to address accessibility of municipal buildings?
Yes. The Community Inclusion Coordinator works across the organization on these issues. Safety Codes Officers enforce the code. Corporate Asset Management staff, Parks and Recreation staff and many others all work together to ensure that we are creating meaningful accessibility wherever possible. Multi-year plans are in place for future accessibility improvements as well.

Q10 Do you have any stories or innovation to share?
* 2013 ACDI produced a report on why playgrounds are important for children on the autism spectrum including their continuing importance through junior high years.
* 2015 ACDI brought in a speaker and hosted hearing accessibility information sessions (induction loops) and Q & A's for local hearing aid practitioners, safety codes officers, the department that looks after new builds and their consultants as well as the public.
* 2018 created a curated YouTube playlist on the topic of accessible homes in support of the Accessible Home Tour initiative as an ongoing resource for builders as they discuss options with clients.
Q11 Is municipality interested in a presentation on results to council and administration during National AccessAbility Week (last week in May/June) no thank you. ACDI was recently invited to presented to Council on April 1, 2019 and was pleased to receive the ongoing support of Council.

Q12 Who would be the contact person to set up a presentation? Respondent skipped this question