



## SHARED SERVICES CANADA

### Request for Information for the Procurement Process for Adaptive Technology Products and Services

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Closing Date and Time	14.00 – 17 November 2021		
Time Zone	Eastern Standard Time (EST)		
Destination of Goods/Services	Not applicable – Request for Information Only		
Email Address for Submitting your Response by the Closing Date	<a href="mailto:Angelina.abuba@canada.ca">Angelina.abuba@canada.ca</a>		

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## Request for Information for the Procurement Process for Adaptive Technology Products and Services

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### 1. General Information

#### 1.1 Introduction

- a) Background: As expressed in the [Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada](#) entitled “Nothing without us” released 27 May 2019, the Government of Canada (GC) has committed to hiring 5,000 persons with disabilities by 2025. This will greatly increase the demand for purchasing adaptive technology (AT) products such as screen-reader software and ergonomic input devices, as well as AT services such as real-time transcription of speech to text.

Currently, the GC has a multitude of source lists for goods and services, held by numerous ministries including Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC). These may not clearly identify AT that is most commonly requested by GC employees, and may not contain the most current AT. The GC’s goal is that employees with disabilities receive their AT accommodations as quickly as possible, to ensure they can be productive and succeed at their jobs.

The challenges with Adaptive Technology (AT) that the GC faces include that AT:

- i. are largely low dollar value items
- ii. are purchased to meet an employee’s needs
- iii. are not purchased in bulk
- iv. can be classified as a piece of “office equipment” vs. AT
- v. is not listed on any single source list, if one exists.

#### Definitions

**Adaptive (or Assistive) Technology (AT)** within this document refers to any software, hardware or technology-enabled service that enables individuals who encounter barriers in performing their job, especially when using computers or other electronic equipment, to do so more successfully.

**AT product** or “product” within this document shall refer to any adaptive technology product, service or combination of both product and service. This definition also includes hardware supporting users of AT software– for example, keyboards and microphones – and other products or services commonly employed as accommodations for employees with disabilities, injuries or ergonomic requirements.

**GC source lists** may include Supply Arrangements, Standing Offers or other GC procurement vehicles. As stated in the [Supply Manual](#), “Source lists are generally the basis for requesting suppliers to bid/provide an offer or arrangement when a competitive procurement is not publicly advertised.”

Annex A provides a summary of the most common types of AT used to address user accessibility needs.

- b) **Response Costs:** SSC will not reimburse any supplier or any of its representatives for any overhead or expenses incurred in participating in or responding to any part of the RFI phase. Suppliers are also responsible for carrying out their own independent research, due diligence and investigations (including seeking independent advice) that they consider necessary or advisable in connection with their participation in the RFI process and any future procurement process.

## 1.2 Overview of the Project

- a) **Objective:**

Through this RFI, the GC would like to understand:

- 1) what AT products and services exist in the marketplace to meet the varied needs of GC employees and how they can be sourced; and
- 2) whether or not these AT products and services are already on existing GC source lists.

The results of this RFI will be analysed and evaluated to determine next steps including providing the information submitted through this RFI to clients find the best products to meet their needs and provide clients with a list of vendors who have responded to this RFI as to which products they can supply. Clients are responsible for purchasing their AT. It is unlikely that the RFI will result in a solicitation.

- b) **Scope of Anticipated Procurement:**

- i) **Potential Client Users:** This RFI is being issued by SSC. It is intended that the resulting information and any possible subsequent solicitation would be used by SSC to provide shared services to one or more of its clients. SSC's clients include SSC itself, those government institutions for which SSC's services are mandatory at any point during the life of any resulting instrument(s), and those other organizations for which SSC's services are optional at any point during the life of any resulting instrument(s) and that choose to use those services from time to time. Any subsequent procurement process will not preclude SSC from using another method of supply for any of its clients with the same or similar needs, unless a subsequent solicitation for this Project expressly indicates otherwise.

## 1.3 Submitting Questions

- a) Questions about this RFI can be submitted to the Contracting Authority at his or her email address identified on the cover page up until [5] working days before the closing date and time indicated on the cover page of this document. Canada may not answer questions received after that time.
- b) To ensure the consistency and quality of information provided to suppliers, significant questions received and the answers will be posted on the Government Electronic Tendering Service (GETS) as an amendment to this RFI.

## 2. Information Requested by Canada

### 2.1 Comments on Preliminary Documents

This RFI includes the following documents with respect to which Canada is seeking comments from suppliers:

- a) Annex B – Instructions from Respondents
- b) Annex C - Workbook

All documents reflecting Canada's anticipated requirements for this Project that are provided to suppliers during the RFI process are preliminary or draft requirements only and are subject to change. These requirements, or parts of them, may be updated before or during any subsequent solicitation.

Suppliers are requested to provide their comments, concerns and, where applicable, alternative suggestions regarding how the requirements or objectives described for the Project could be satisfied. Suppliers are also invited to provide comments regarding the content, format and/or organization of any draft documents provided with this RFI. Suppliers should explain any assumptions they make in their responses.

### 3. Supplier Responses

#### 3.1 Submitting a Response

- a) **Time and Place for Submission of Responses:** Suppliers interested in providing a response should submit it by email to the Contracting Authority at the email address for submitting a response identified on the cover page by the closing date and time identified on the cover page of this document.
- b) **Responsibility for Timely Delivery:** Each supplier is solely responsible for ensuring its response is delivered on time to the correct email address.
- c) **Identification of Response:** Each supplier should ensure that its name and return address, the solicitation number, and the closing date are included in the response in a prominent location. The supplier should also identify a representative whom Canada may contact about the response, including the person's name, title, address, telephone number and email address.

#### 3.2 Confidentiality

If a supplier considers any portion of its response to be proprietary or confidential, the supplier should clearly mark those portions of the response as proprietary or confidential. Canada will treat the responses in accordance with the *Access to Information Act* and any other laws that apply.

### 4. Canada's Review of Responses

#### 4.1 Review of Responses

Responses will not be formally evaluated. However, the responses received may be used by Canada to develop or modify any draft documents provided with this RFI and its procurement strategy. Canada will review all responses received by the RFI closing date and time. Canada may, in its discretion, review responses received after the RFI closing date and time.

#### 4.2 Review Team

A review team composed of representatives of Canada will review and consider the responses. Canada may hire any independent consultant(s), or use any Government resource(s), to review

any response. Not all members of the review team will necessarily participate in all aspects of the review process.

### **4.3 Follow-up Activity**

Canada may, in its discretion, contact any suppliers to follow up with additional questions or for clarification of any aspect of a response. Canada's follow-up may involve a request for a further written response or for a meeting with representatives of Canada.

## ANNEX A - SUMMARY

### WHAT IS AT?

AT is defined in the “Definitions” section on page 3 of this document.

Every user of AT is unique and has unique needs. As such, there are many different AT solutions in use within the GC that address requirements related to vision, hearing, cognitive, learning, physical, and other types of disabilities. These solutions provide people with disabilities with better access to their environment, software and systems.

The following information is provided to give an overview of some of the most common types of AT used to address user accessibility needs.

### Types of Adaptive Technology

#### Vision Enhancement Technology

Vision Enhancement Technology is used by a wide variety of individuals with some form of visual impairment, commonly referred to as "low vision", in situations where the person still relies on their vision to consume information.

Each person will require features and settings specific to their situation. Adaptations could include using high contrast colours, large print, or magnification. It may also be helpful to have information on the screen read aloud. However, as low vision is sometimes accompanied by hearing loss, audio alone as an accessibility solution will not meet everyone's needs.

#### Most Common Tools

- Screen Magnification Software
- Magnifying Glasses and Digital Magnifiers for paper documents
- Document and DAISY (Digital Accessible Information System) Readers

#### Vision Replacement Technology

Vision Replacement Technology is used by individuals with a form of visual impairment, commonly called blindness, when the person is no longer able to rely on, or never relied on, their vision to consume information. These technologies do not technically replace vision, but they present otherwise visually-conveyed information in a different modality such as through Braille or speech.

Most desktop and mobile operating systems include or support AT solutions for blind users. The AT attempts to identify and interpret what is being displayed on the screen including events such as windows opening and user actions that are performed. The AT conveys this information to the user through text-to-speech, sound effects, haptic feedback, Braille or any combination of these.

On a device with a touch screen, AT changes the way the touch screen is interacted with. For example, Touch Exploration Technology allows the user to explore the screen with touch without activating the items on the screen.

#### Most Common Tools

- Screen Reader Software
- Braille Displays
- OCR (Optical Character Recognition) Software & Scanners

- Braille Translation Software and Braille Printers
- Portable Note Takers
- DAISY (Digital Accessible Information System) Readers

### **Audio Enhancement Technology**

Audio Enhancement Technology is used by individuals with some form of hearing impairment or limitation and some users with speech or communication related impairment. There are a wide variety of needs and requirements in this category of technology. Solutions can be relatively simple like t-coil hearing aid compatibility or much more complex like remote Communication Access Real-time Translation (CART) service, which provides written access to the spoken word.

Information must be made available with limited hearing. Individuals who do not hear beeps or recognize spoken words may require a program to prompt them in a different manner, such as using a screen flash, displaying spoken messages as text or by translating audio cues to visual ones.

People with limited hearing often cannot see well either, especially people who are older. Allowing them to use their residual hearing is therefore important, rather than having to rely on sight alone.

#### *Most Common Tools*

- Captioning and Visual Alerts For Audio Events
- Audio adapters and Bluetooth transmitters
- Messaging Systems
- Communication And Real-time Translation (CART) and Remote CART services
- Light Flashers
- Blackberry/Smartphone communications

### **Audio Replacement Technology**

Audio Replacement Technology is used by individuals for whom receiving audio information is not a viable channel. Technology in use in this category primarily relates to communication. It often revolves around in person conversations, meetings or virtual conversations. Solutions can be as simple as using a laptop with an extra keyboard for text based conversations or as complex as voice recognition based captioning systems.

Information conveyed by audio alone is not accessible to individuals who are deaf. Solutions for these users must be usable without hearing. People who do not hear beeps or recognize spoken words may require a program to prompt them in a different manner, such as using a screen flash, displaying spoken messages as text or by translating audio cues to visual ones.

#### *Most Common Tools*

- Sign Language Alternatives for print and audio
- Video Remote Interpreting (VRI)
- Messaging Systems
- Communication And Real-time Translation (CART) and Remote CART services
- Light Flashers



- Smartphone communications

### **Mobility and Dexterity Enhancement and Replacement Technology**

Mobility and Dexterity Enhancement and Replacement Technology is used by individuals with physical limitations. This type of AT provides modes of operation that do not require fine motor control or simultaneous actions, can be used with limited reach and strength and provide modes that do not require specific response times.

Voice Recognition is a relatively simple solution in this category. It allows the user to control the device and to input text using only their voice. In some cases, a more complex or custom solution such as switch access may be required. There are many different kinds of switches on the market that can be used to replace mouse operations. Switches can also be used to communicate with a device using different coding systems such as Morse code, which allows interaction even with severely limited mobility and dexterity.

Certain physical impairments make speaking difficult for some individuals. Systems that can speak for a user can help individuals with speech impairments. Most of the software packages used for these applications operate with a speech synthesizer.

#### ***Most Common Tools***

- Alternate Input Devices (keyboards, mice, switches)
- User interface automation (macros) and rate enhancement software
- Voice recognition software

### **Cognitive and Learning Style Enhancement Technology**

Cognitive and Learning Style Enhancement Technology is used by individuals with some form of learning disability or neurological requirement. There are a wide variety of needs and requirements in this category of technology. Solutions can be simple, like calendars and task lists, or as complex as multi-modal document reading.

Voice Recognition helps persons with dyslexia and dysgraphia who may have difficulty expressing themselves in text. Software tools such as phonetic spell check and advanced thesaurus are also common. Usually a combination of document reading, magnification solutions and alternate input devices are used to improve the experience for these users.

Using a combination of software packages can reduce incidences of epileptic seizure, which may be otherwise triggered by specific patterns of light or sound.

#### ***Most Common Tools***

- Document and DAISY Readers
- Spelling and writing aids
- Voice Recognition Software
- Items that disable flashing or popups
- Note takers
- Noise cancelling headsets

## ANNEX B – INSTRUCTIONS TO RESPONDENTS

Respondents must complete the attached Excel workbook “AT Products (to fill).xlsx” and return it with their submission for this RFI. Please read all instructions before you begin.

To complete the workbook:

- 1) Go to the “Company information” worksheet and fill in your responses to the questions.
- 2) Go to the “Unlisted items” worksheet and complete these steps for any product or service that meets the definition of adaptive technology given in Annex A:
  - a. Select the category in the “Product Category”. If you are not sure, or no listed category applies, pick the last entry “Unknown or unlisted category”.
  - b. Enter the manufacturer’s name in the “Manufacturer” column.
  - c. Enter the product name and model number in the “Product name and model number” column.
  - d. Enter the GC supply list name and number in the “Existing supply list name and number” column. If the product is not currently on any GC supply list, enter “New.”

**Note:** If the product exists on multiple GC supply lists, please duplicate the row for the product so there is only one unique supply list name and number per row.
  - e. You may enter a version number or release year in the “Version number (optional)” column, as appropriate.

**Note:** If you supply multiple versions of product, editions for different languages or with different Software Maintenance Agreements (SMAs), please duplicate the row for the product so there is only one unique product version per row.
  - f. You may provide further details and comments in the “Product details and comments (optional)” column.
  - g. You may enter a hyperlink to your catalogue in the “Your catalogue link (optional)” column.

Once you have completed the workbook, we recommend that you change “to fill” in the file name with your company name or acronym.

For example, the Acme Widget Company may save the workbook “AT Products (to fill).xlsx” as “AT Products (Acme Widget Company).xlsx” or “AT Products (AWC).xlsx”.