

Developing Decision-Making Criteria for Purchasing and Reviewing Assistive Software Technology

Engagement Strategy

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Introduction

McMaster's Partnered in Teaching and Learning Strategy launched in April 2021. One of the impact areas included in the strategy is to Develop Active and Flexible Learning Spaces. A key objective within this area is to develop a Digital Learning Strategy for the University. A Project Team was struck up in August 2021 to advance this work and in May 2023, the 3-year [Digital Learning Strategic Framework](#) was launched to the McMaster community.

McMaster's Digital Learning Strategic Framework

McMaster's Digital Learning Strategic Framework is comprised of a vision, guiding principles, strategic priorities, and commitments that were developed with the input of over 850 students, staff, faculty, and senior leaders. A summary of the key strategic components is highlighted below.

- **Our Vision** - Digital learning at McMaster enabled by our people will engage our educators, learners, and community partners wherever they are with our world class educational opportunities. We will leverage technology to enhance teaching and learning, foster inclusive excellence, and cultivate innovative learning spaces.
- **Our Guiding Principles** – People Centered, Learning First, Fostering Belonging and Flexibility Forward
- **Our Four Strategic Priorities** – Develop digital literacy and proficiency, build institutional capacity and capability, create effective learning opportunities, and advance innovation through collaboration

Partnered Implementation

The success of the Digital Learning Strategy's implementation will depend on the cooperation and collaboration of partners across campus to coordinate and develop new content, processes and programs. Currently, digital teaching and learning is shared across the McMaster Library, the MacPherson Institute for Leadership, Innovation and Excellence in Teaching, University Technology Services (UTS) and the Office of the Vice-Provost (Teaching & Learning). Each of these partners owns specific software, technology and/or resources to support and implement digital teaching and learning.

To support the implementation of this strategy, a Project Team comprised of staff from these four areas as well as a Steering Committee made up of faculty members from across the university are working together to champion this institutional initiative.

Project Background

As part of the Digital Learning Strategic Framework, McMaster has committed to creating a clear and transparent process for the lifecycle for teaching and learning technology which would include procuring, deploying, supporting, and decommissioning technologies. As part of this commitment, the University is prioritizing the process to review technology and licenses to assistive software to support access to education for our learners with disabilities.

This objective of this Engagement Strategy is to outline the activities involved in developing a clear process map and decision-making criteria for assistive software and the engagement activities and questions that will be used to collect feedback and inform these deliverables.

Key Messages

The following key messages will be utilized throughout the engagement and communication activities for this project:

- McMaster is committed to creating a clear process for the life-cycling of technology.
- We are beginning to act on this commitment by undertaking a systematic review of assistive software, which we hope to scale to other categories of teaching and learning technologies.
- A key deliverable we hope to create from this work is decision-making criteria to support staff who are tasked with procuring and reviewing new or existing technology. This set of criteria will:
 - provide guidance to those making decisions about the life-cycling of assistive software;
 - encourage discussion about the important factors going into decisions regarding technology;
 - support a smoother experience for learners using assistive software.

Phase One Engagement Approach

The first phase of this project was conducted between February and March 2024 with financial support from eCampus Ontario. The objectives, target audience and key messages below were used during the first phase and are presented for your information. The key deliverable from this phase was the *Draft Decision-Making Criteria for Selecting and Reviewing Assistive Software Technology*.

Due to the time-limited nature of this phase, we prioritized engaging with front-line staff and their managers to develop a deliverable that could be further refined in future engagement phases. We estimate that this deliverable took approximately eighty hours (forty hours per person with two people working together on conducting interviews, compiling notes, analyzing data, and writing the draft) to complete.

Engagement Objectives

- To collect information regarding the assistive software currently licensed by McMaster
- To understand existing factors considered when making decisions about procuring new technology
- To collect feedback on what else should be factored into decision-making
- To learn about informal procedures in place in units that manage assistive software around campus
- To connect with individuals working in assistive technology at McMaster and learn about how their practices may help others working in the same field

Target Audience

- University Technology Services
- University Library
- Student Accessibility Services and Student Affairs
- Teaching and Learning Centre

Engagement Activity by Stakeholder

Key informant interviews were held with staff who support students with using AT and / or make decisions regarding the procurement of AT. These interviews formed the basis for the criteria developed as part of this project. The project team met with staff and asked a series of questions about their experiences supporting and/or managing assistive software at McMaster. These questions can be found in **Appendix A: Phase One Interview Questions**.

Phase Two Engagement Approach

Currently phase two is planned for Fall 2024 in order to meet with formal committees and groups that break over the summer and to engage student users of AT. The deliverable for this phase will be a final version of the *Draft Decision-Making Criteria for Selecting and Reviewing Assistive Software Technology*, including the integration of the student perspective on how to integrate their feedback in the review of AT.

Engagement Objectives

- To provide an update to key stakeholders on the implementation of McMaster's Digital Learning Strategy
- To collect feedback on the *Draft Decision-Making Criteria for Selecting and Reviewing Assistive Software Technology*
- To better understand the key metrics, feedback, and/or factors that would influence a decision-making process for renewing or purchasing assistive technology.

Target Audience

- IT leads for each Faculties
- University Technology Services
- University Library
- Student Accessibility Services and Student Affairs
- Teaching and Learning Centre
- Office of Equity and Inclusion
- Student users of AT

Engagement Activity by Stakeholder

| Engagement Activity | Target Stakeholders | Description |
|----------------------|---|--|
| Focus Groups | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phase 1 Interview Participants Teaching and Learning with Technology Committee Technology Roundtable Accessibility Community of Practice Digital Learning Strategy Steering Committee | <p>We will begin with a quick presentation that will describe the project background, team and the results from phase one. The <i>Draft Decision-Making Criteria for Selecting and Reviewing Assistive Software Technology</i> will be presented to participants and shared in advance of the session.</p> <p>Participants will be asked:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is anything missing from the existing draft criteria? Are there prompts or other factors that contribute to your decision-making for selecting or reviewing assistive software technology? 2. How could the Decision-Making Criteria be best formatted for your use? 3. Where would you look for a tool like this? 4. Are there other resources or support you would need to help you make decisions regarding assistive technology? |
| Student Focus Groups | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student AT users | <p>We will begin with a quick presentation that will describe the project background, team and the results from phase one.</p> <p>Participants will be asked:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What challenges do you face when using assistive technology for your curricular or co-curricular work? 2. How would you like to be engaged in providing feedback on assistive technologies? 3. Where do you go to learn about assistive technology? 4. Do you feel supported with your assistive technology use at McMaster? |

Appendix A: Phase One Interview Questions

1. Introductions and Overview

- a. Discuss your role and experience with accessible software within your unit.
- b. Would you identify yourself as primarily involved in procurement, management, support, etc.?

2. Assistive Technologies Inventory

- a. Identify any assistive software you frequently work with in your currently position.
- b. Share your knowledge about ownership and management of assistive software.

3. Procedural Improvements and Pitfalls

- a. Describe a process for the procurement, management, or support of assistive software that you feel would improve the experience of users across campus.
- b. Identify any current barriers or gaps which impede the use of assistive software within your unit.
- c. Are there any formal mechanics for users of assistive software to report feedback within your unit?

4. Conclusion and Follow-up

- a. Ask for any names or groups we should engage as the project progresses.