Best Practices for Accessible Event Planning

Huron County Accessibility Advisory Committee (HCAAC)

County of Huron

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HURON COUNTY

Contents

Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that the County of Huron is situated on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, and Neutral peoples and is connected to the Dish with One Spoon wampum, under which multiple nations agreed to care for the land and its resources by the Great Lakes in peace. We also acknowledge the Upper Canada Treaties signed in regard to this land, which include Treaty #29 and Treaty #45 ½.

We recognize First Peoples' continued stewardship of the land and water and the historical and ongoing injustices they face in Canada. As a committee dedicated to fostering accessibility and inclusion, we acknowledge our responsibility to engage meaningfully with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples, reinforce our efforts toward reconciliation and uphold and value the traditions, rights, and contributions of Indigenous Peoples.

Introduction

This guide outlines best practices to ensure your event is inclusive and accessible for all community members. Under the [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA),](#) event organizers must provide equal access to services and facilities. This checklist is not exhaustive and only addresses the critical areas, consult your local administration for further guidance and to meet legal obligations regarding specific accessibility requirements.

General Planning

- **Designate a Coordinator**: Assign someone to oversee all accessibility aspects.
- **Consult Accessibility Standards:** Ensure compliance with the [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)](#).
- **Early Communication:** Provide early, accessible information about the event via multiple formats (print, email, large print, etc.).
  - **Notify Public of Service Unavailability:** Proactively inform attendees if any accessible services (e.g., ramp, accessible washrooms, sign language interpretation, elevators, etc.) are temporarily unavailable or not provided. Provide alternate accommodation where possible.
- The registration form should include space for attendees to request accommodation, such as sign language interpretation, assistive listening devices, or accessible seating.

Venue Accessibility

Outdoor Venue

- **Accessible Parking:** Provide accessible parking spaces near the event entrance. Ensure parking areas are clear of obstacles, have slip-resistant surfaces and do not open into traffic.

Note: When blocking off an area for an event, ensure accessible parking remains clear and provide temporary, well-signed accessible parking. If there is no website, include information about its location on the event's website or communicate it through signage, flyers, or local announcements.

- **Accessible Pathways:** Provide clear, stable, and accessible pathways throughout the venue, at least *1600 mm* wide. Avoid trip hazards such as exposed cables or uneven ground.

  Note: Displays or booths must not obstruct sidewalks to maintain a clear width of at least 1000 mm for individuals, mobility devices, or service animals. If access is blocked, provide temporary ramp access (e.g., a **StopGap** *ramp) to ensure accessibility.*

- **Rest Areas**: Provide accessible seating and rest areas outside the accessible pathways at regular intervals at outdoor events.

- **Portable Toilets**: Ensure large, accessible portable restrooms are provided at every bank of outdoor washrooms.

- **Public Transit:** Provide accessible public transit information, including shuttle services, if applicable.

Indoor Venue

- **Entrance & Exits:** Ensure accessible entrances and exits are provided.
- **Hallways:** Maintain at least a minimum of *1100 mm* clear pathways.
- **Elevators:** Ensure elevators are accessible and have Braille or auditory signals
- **Lighting:** Adjustable lighting to assist individuals with visual disability.
- **Washrooms:** Accessible washrooms with sufficient space for mobility aids, including grab bars. Additionally, washrooms should be clearly marked with accessible signage.

Seating & Layout

- **Seating:** Provide accessible seating areas, including spaces for mobility devices and companions—reserve seating near presenters for attendees with hearing or visual disabilities.

- **Stage Access:** If a stage is used,
  - Ensure an accessible ramp or lift (in case the stage is too high) is available.
  - Clear floor space (*minimum 1370 mm long by 810 mm wide; ideally 1500 mm long by 900 mm wide*) and clear turning space (*minimum 1500 mm-1700 mm diameter; ideally 2100 mm diameter*) are provided on the stage with accessible audio-visual controls.

- Ensure the stage is included in the Emergency Exit Plan.
- **Quiet Spaces:** Designate quiet or sensory spaces for individuals needing sensory breaks.

    *Note: Outdoor eating areas at events should be connected by accessible pathways. Use materials like **Mobi-Mat®** (or similar) to create stable paths over grass or sand, ensuring easy navigation between different parts of the event for individuals using mobility devices.*

Assistive Services

- **Language Interpretation & CART:** Offer Sign Language Interpretation (SLI) and CART services upon request and display live captions when possible.
- **Assistive Listening Devices**: Make assistive listening devices available for individuals with hearing disability.
- **Accessible Documents:** Provide materials in accessible formats, such as large print, Braille, or screen reader-compatible digital formats.

Service Animals

- **Service Animal Areas:** Provide designated rest, relief areas, and water bowls for service animals.
- **Accommodation:** Ensure service animals are allowed in all areas where attendees are permitted.

Support Persons

- Ensure free or reduced admission for support persons.
- Provide seating next to the individual they are accompanying.

More information on Support Persons under the Customer Service Standard is available here.

Dietary Considerations

- **Food & Beverage:** Ensure food service tables or counters are accessible and offer flexible options like seated service. Clearly label food options for allergies and dietary restrictions and offer adaptive drinking aids.

Communication & Promotion

- **Inclusive Promotion**: Promote the event as accessible by mentioning features like accessible seating and parking. Use large fonts and accessible language in all marketing materials.
- **Signage:** Use high-contrast, large, and clear signage to direct people to accessible parking, seating, and washrooms.
- **Customer Service Kiosk:** Ensure that tables and counters have standard knee and toe clearance, with top surfaces between *730 mm* and *860 mm* from the floor or ground or designed to be height-adjustable.

Volunteers & Training

- **Mandatory Training:** Train staff and volunteers in AODA-mandated training.
- **Free Training Resource**
  - AccessForward.

Emergency Planning

- **Emergency Exits:** Ensure accessible emergency exits and clear evacuation routes; safety plans should be available and accessible to everyone, including the public.
- **Preparedness:** Train staff and volunteers in emergency procedures, including assisting individuals with disabilities.

Post-Event Evaluation

- **Feedback on Accessibility:** Collect feedback from attendees on the event's accessibility, including any areas for improvement.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Use feedback to improve future events and share best practices.

Guide To Event Accessibility

The Government of Ontario published the Guide to Event Accessibility resource in summer 2024. This guide is a resource for individuals and organizations to help you make your indoor

or outdoor event more accessible, and provide you with information to help with planning, running and gathering feedback on your event.

References

- [Cornell University, Accessible Meeting Checklist](#)
- [Government of Canada, Common Accessibility Measures](#)
- [McMaster University, Events Accessibility Checklist Ontario Festivals & Events Guide](#)
- [Ontario Accessible Events Checklist](#)
- [Ontario Municipal Social Services Association Guide to Conducting Accessible Meetings](#)
- [Planning Accessible Events Guide, Ontario](#)
- [Queen's University Accessible Events Checklist](#)
- [University of Toronto, Chestnut Conference Centre Accessibility Checklist](#)