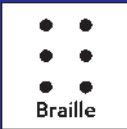


COUNT US IN



Removing Barriers to Political Participation

Quick Reference Guide



Accessible
Constituency,
Riding Association,
Central Party and
Campaign Offices

Count Us In: Removing Barriers to Political Participation Quick Reference Guide to Accessible Constituency, Riding Association, Central Party and Campaign Offices

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People with Disabilities are Voters

There has been steady progress and many positive changes to the election process in Ontario to help ensure that people with disabilities are able to vote. Yet, key barriers remain that prevent the full and equal political participation of all people in Ontario **before** they go to the polls.

At present, a lack of opportunity exists for people with disabilities to interact with the candidates and organizers during the election process. At the same time, accessibility barriers are preventing candidates from benefiting from the views and involvement of voters with disabilities. Political candidates have the opportunity to engage this portion of the voting public by taking steps to ensure that their campaign activities are accessible to everyone.

Making your campaign, party or constituency office accessible will help with this, but you also need to look at all aspects of how you deliver your campaign and anticipate how to adjust these activities to meet the needs of voters with disabilities.

People with disabilities deserve the same opportunities as everyone else to participate in all election activities. In the coming years, age related disabilities will increase as the generation of baby boomers ages, creating an even greater need for inclusion and accessibility in the electoral process.

Providing an accessible environment need not be complicated or expensive. In fact many changes cost nothing at all or have a minimal impact on the bottom line — but they can have a huge impact on voter engagement.

You can make positive changes to your campaign activities by actively involving voters with disabilities. Value their input, as they are the 'experts.' Taking the time to listen to their experiences will often lead you to solutions that, once identified, are easily incorporated into your everyday activities and will lead to long lasting improvements in accessibility and excellent customer service.



How to Use This Guide

The Quick Reference Guide to Accessible Constituency, Riding Association, Central Party and Campaign Offices has been developed to assist you and your campaign team to look at ways of actively ensuring that voters with disabilities are included in practical ways in your activities from the launch of your campaign to Election Day.

Accessibility is key to meaningful interaction with all voters. An office located on the ground floor that is easily accessible, close to public transport and with convenient parking, away from railroads and other sources of environmental noise, is the most desirable location for you to meet and interact with voters. A building that is accessible to people with disabilities will benefit all users.

It is important that you carefully assess your building, as it is easy to overlook barriers. If a facility has steps without a ramp, multiple levels without an elevator, no accessible stall in the washroom or inadequate parking, you will need to look elsewhere for a more accessible facility.

It is helpful to use a checklist when visiting a site or assessing your own facility to make sure that important features are not overlooked. It is likely that a facility will not meet every requirement on a checklist, but using a checklist is important, as it will help to identify barriers that can be removed or modified.

The goal of your assessment should be to provide universal access for all people, including all ages and abilities, an overall functional environment, which will benefit everyone and offer equal opportunity to information and interaction with members of your campaign team, community services, employment, and volunteer experiences.

You should consider the needs of people with mobility, agility, strength, endurance and coordination disabilities; vision and hearing loss, cognitive and learning disabilities and the needs of people with mental illness.



Excellent Customer Service Is Essential

Excellent customer service is the responsibility of all levels of an organization and not simply of its front-line staff. Customer satisfaction should be integrated into all internal processes and policies. With this in mind, the points below will assist you and your campaign team in providing excellent customer service for voters with disabilities:

- ✓ Always treat anyone with a disability with the same respect and courtesy that you would offer to everyone else.
- ✓ Extend common courtesies as you would to anyone else. Shake hands and/or give them your business card. If the person cannot shake your hand or grasp your card, they will tell you.
- ✓ Treat adults with disabilities as adults.
- ✓ Use words that put the person first, referring to them as a “person with a disability” or “person with hearing loss.” Do not use words like “handicapped,” “retarded,” “crippled,” or “wheelchair bound”.
- ✓ Don’t worry about substituting words. It’s okay to use words like “see,” “walk,” or “hear.” Don’t avoid common expressions when they fit naturally into the conversation.
- ✓ Offer assistance to a person with a disability if it seems appropriate, but wait until the offer is accepted before you help.
- ✓ Listen to any instructions that the individual gives about the best way to assist them and respond accordingly. If you are helping and aren’t sure what to do, ask.
- ✓ If you are having trouble understanding something the person’s says, do not pretend that you do. Ask the individual to repeat what he or she said and then repeat it back. In some cases it may be helpful to use pen and paper. Do not finish sentences for the person with a disability.

- ✓ When talking with a person who has a disability, speak directly to them rather than to a companion, assistant or interpreter who may be with them.
- ✓ Get the person's attention before you speak. Use eye contact and a simple wave to connect visually when speaking with a deaf, deafened or hard of hearing person.
- ✓ Don't shout; speak clearly and distinctly, and at a moderate pace.
- ✓ Rephrase, rather than repeat, when you are not understood.
- ✓ Do not overspeak to fill in words or finish the person's thoughts or sentences.
- ✓ As with anyone else, let a person with a disability make their own decisions regarding what they can or cannot do. Do not make assumptions.
- ✓ Be considerate, some people with disabilities may need extra time to complete a task. Be considerate.
- ✓ If you are talking to a person in a wheelchair and the conversation lasts more than a few minutes, consider sitting down to be on the same level as the person, and to share eye contact.
- ✓ It is prohibited to deny a person access to a place or a service because a guide dog accompanies them. Avoid petting or distracting the dog. They are hard to resist – but they're on the job and petting, although well intentioned, can put both the handler and the dog in danger. Be aware that service animals are used to serve a range of disabilities, including vision and hearing loss, epilepsy, learning and developmental disabilities.

Office Accessibility Checklist

ACTIVITY	YES	NO	ACTION
Transportation			
Is your office located on a route that is served by accessible public transportation?			
Is the name and address of your building clearly visible from the street and sidewalk?			
If visitors to your office need to navigate a main road to access the building, is there a pedestrian crosswalk close by?			Crosswalks served by an audible and visual traffic-crossing signal are preferred. Where there is a change in level, for example where the sidewalk meets the street, curb cuts are necessary.
Parking			
Is accessible parking available for visitors?			At least one accessible parking space should be provided on the shortest, safest accessible route to the accessible building entrance.
Is the accessible parking space clearly marked with the International Symbol of Accessibility?			Provide signage to designate the barrier-free space(s) as reserved for permit holders.
Is the parking space firm and level?			Parking surfaces must be firm and level to be used safely. Avoid gravel.

ACTIVITY	YES	NO	ACTION
Are curb cuts provided?			All sidewalks should have curb cuts at locations near parking and along the route to the primary entrance.
Is the space large enough to meet the needs of a visitor who uses a van equipped with a wheelchair lift?			Accessible car parking spaces need a minimum width of 2400mm plus a 1500mm wide access aisle. Van parking spaces need a minimum width of 3500mm plus a 1500mm wide access aisle for wheelchair lifts. The length of the space is determined by municipal bylaws. Two adjacent spaces may share the same access aisle.
Is the parking area and route to the entrance well lit?			
Are the parking areas and route of travel properly maintained?			Snow and ice should be removed and uneven surfaces should be repaired as soon as possible.
Accessible Route of Travel			
Is the route to the entrance accessible?			Accessible routes should be unobstructed and have continuous, smooth, hard surfaces with no abrupt changes in level and should not require the use of stairs.

ACTIVITY	YES	NO	ACTION
Is the route wide enough so someone using a wheelchair, scooter or service animal can travel safely?			The clear width should be at least 1600mm wide. The minimum clear space required by most mobility devices to turn around is 1670mm and should be available in areas such as landings and at intervals along longer routes so that someone using a wheelchair or scooter can turn around.
Is the route clear of protruding or low hanging objects?			Beware of signs, furniture, garbage cans, trees and other items that can pose a hazard to someone who is blind or has low vision. Avoid obstructions below knee level. A protruding object placed higher than 100mm above the floor is difficult to detect by a person using a white cane.
Does the route of travel require a ramp to make it accessible?			Ramp slopes should be a maximum of 1:12. Slopes of 1:16 to 1:20 are easier for most people to negotiate. That is: for every 1" of vertical rise, 12" of horizontal ramp is required (e.g. a 5" curb would require a 60" ramp to be built). A handrail is necessary on both sides of a ramp.
Is your office easily identified by signage?			For exterior areas, signs need to be located near the entrance between the ground and eye level and positioned where they will not cause injury to allow close inspection by someone with low vision.

ACTIVITY	YES	NO	ACTION
Is your sign easy to read and understand?			Clear, high contrasting letters and uncluttered information (not too many messages) is easier to understand by people with low vision, cognitive and learning disabilities and people who are unfamiliar with the location.
Entrance			
Is your entrance accessible?			Your office should have a primary entrance that allows people with disabilities to approach and enter the building in the same manner as everyone else. The primary entrance should have level access, a low threshold and not require the use of stairs.
Does your office present itself as a welcoming environment?			A welcoming environment is important for all people and helps to highlight the safety and security (perceived and real) for people with a cognitive disability or mental illness.
Is your doorway wide enough for a person using a wheelchair or scooter to pass through?			Accessible doors and doorways within the building should provide a minimum of 810mm of clear space. That is, when the door is open, the space from the door to the opposite side of the doorframe should be a minimum of 810mm.

ACTIVITY	YES	NO	ACTION
Is the door easy to open?			The exterior door should be easy to open with lever or “D”-type handles. A power door opener or automatic door is preferred.
Is your entrance easy to see?			The entrance should be clearly identified by signage, and by painting the door, or frame, in a different colour from the surrounding surfaces. Clear glass doors are difficult to see and pose a safety hazard. A strip of contrasting colour mounted continuously 1350mm above the floor will help make it more visible.
Is your entrance well lit?			Provide lighting at entrances so that there is not a sudden drop in lighting levels from the outside to the inside in the daytime; highlight obstructions that may prove a hazard to people who have low vision. Make sure signs are well lit.
Circulation			
Does your interior space provide a clear path of travel?			People with disabilities should be able to gain access to all areas in your office. Interior routes should be minimum 1100mm wide with a 1600mm by 1600mm turn-around space a minimum of 30m apart in long corridors.

ACTIVITY	YES	NO	ACTION
Is your space easy to navigate?			<p>People with a vision loss benefit from simple, straightforward design and layout. Large open concept areas may be confusing and difficult to navigate by people who are blind or visually impaired and people with cognitive disabilities.</p> <p>Designing your space so that the walls, floors, doors and furniture are high in colour contrast will aid in navigation.</p>
Is your space clear of protruding or low hanging objects?			<p>Obstructions or hazards in circulation areas like the reception area, lobby or corridors should be avoided. Low hanging signs, suspended lighting or other potential hazards such as plants or garbage cans pose detection problems for a person with low vision.</p>
Is your space noisy?			<p>Open concept spaces can be difficult to hear in as sound reverberates. Breaking spaces up into smaller spaces by using portable screens may be helpful as this isolates sounds and reduces background noise. Avoid the use of hard surfaces, especially on floors as sound can echo, making it difficult to hear.</p>
Are the floor finishes safe?			<p>Loose rugs and mats are a tripping hazard and can also hinder wheelchair users. They</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(continued)</p>

ACTIVITY	YES	NO	ACTION
			should be avoided. Floors should be finished with non-slip, non-glare surfaces. Carpets should be of short, dense pile. Avoid floor patterns that are visually confusing.
Is your office cluttered with unnecessary furniture and other items?			An office that is overly cluttered could be hazardous to people with mobility disabilities or someone with a vision loss. Be aware of items that could present a barrier and avoid objects in unexpected places like extra chairs placed in a hallway, washroom supplies stored in the accessible stall and boxes received by delivery stored in front of the reception desk.
Signage			
Are the signs throughout your office clear, concise and consistent?			Good signs and sign systems will stop people feeling worried or confused and prevent people from getting lost. Signs should be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clear (easy to see and understand); • concise (simple, short and to the point); and • consistent (signs meaning the same thing should always appear the same and be consistently located).
Can the signs be read by someone with a vision loss?			Use large print signs with a clear typeface and contrasted from the background such as (continued)

ACTIVITY	YES	NO	ACTION
			<p>light coloured characters or symbols on a dark background or dark coloured characters or symbols on a light background.</p> <p>Signs placed on glass panels or doors can be difficult to read and should be avoided.</p> <p>Key directional signs like washrooms, exits, and room numbers should contain raised (tactile) and Braille lettering.</p>
Reception and Office Area			
<p>Is your reception area easy to recognize?</p>			<p>A reception area or information point that is obvious as soon as a building is entered is helpful for everyone. A reception desk that is located directly in front of the entry point to the building is preferred.</p>
<p>Is the reception area well lit?</p>			<p>Lighting should avoid patches of sudden changes from brightly lit to dark areas. Good general lighting and lighting on the faces of the reception staff will help people with low vision and people with a hearing loss.</p> <p>Provide different lighting options. For some people, glare and bright light reduces functional vision, for others not enough light has the same effect.</p> <p>Desks and counters should be placed so that light falls on faces and does not come from behind.</p>

ACTIVITY	YES	NO	ACTION
Is your reception desk accessible to someone who is seated?			<p>Counter tops or reception desks should have a clear area of approach in front of them and counters that are no higher than 860mm above the floor with clear knee space below.</p> <p>Self-serve materials should be placed so that a person who is seated can reach the materials safely.</p>
Is your reception area in an open space?			<p>Reception areas located behind glass windows present a barrier to someone with a hearing or vision loss.</p>
Are office desks and meeting room tables accessible?			<p>Ensure that tables in areas such as offices and meeting rooms, are a maximum of 860mm high, and have a clear knee space below.</p> <p>Office furnishings that are a contrasting colour from the floors and walls make them easier to be seen by someone with low vision.</p>
Have you taken into account the needs of voters who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing?			<p>Purchase a TTY (teletypewriter or text telephone) and make it available next to the telephone in a common area for public use.</p> <p>Ensure your internal TTY system is compatible and accessible to receive and make TTY calls from and to the public. All staff should be trained in its use.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(continued)</p>

ACTIVITY	YES	NO	ACTION
			<p>Make sure there is an unobstructed view of people's faces in all areas where verbal visual communication may take place.</p> <p>Reduce background noise as much as possible.</p> <p>Maximize the use of written information.</p> <p>Any television set displaying information for the public should be captioned.</p> <p>Paper and a pen should be made available for deaf voters to communicate with office staff if requested.</p> <p>Make staff aware of procedures to obtain the services.</p>
<p>Have you taken into account the needs of voters who are blind or visually impaired?</p>			<p>Be prepared to make written information available in alternative format if requested. Alternative formats can include large print, Braille, audio cassette, or disk.</p> <p>Make sure that materials provided in print or large print are of high contrast. Fourteen point, Arial or Verdana fonts are very reader friendly. Avoid 3rd or 4th generation photocopies.</p> <p>If forms need to be filled out, they should either be available in large print, or staff should offer to assist people to fill forms out.</p>

ACTIVITY	YES	NO	ACTION
<p>Have you taken into account the needs of voters who have environmental sensitivities?</p>			<p>Staff members and volunteers should refrain from wearing fragrances, and keep their use of scented products, for example highly fragrant deodorants or aftershave, to a minimum.</p>
Accessible Washrooms			
<p>Does your office have an accessible washroom?</p>			<p>If modifying an existing washroom is not possible, design of at least one individual accessible unisex washroom should be considered. Although larger in size, unisex washrooms provide an individual with the ability to have assistance by a caregiver or spouse.</p>
<p>Are fixtures and accessories placed so that they can be accessed by someone using and wheelchair or scooter?</p>			<p>Appropriate transfer space on one side and in front of the toilet should be provided. Flush controls should be located on the transfer side of the toilet. Accessories (such as light switches, mirrors, soap dispensers, hand dryers, coat hooks, and shelves) should be mounted at a height that is accessible from a seated position. Dispensers and other accessories should not block the safe use of the grab bars, transfer or maneuvering space.</p>

ACTIVITY	YES	NO	ACTION
Training			
<p>Has customer service and disability awareness training been provided as part of regular office training procedures?</p>			<p>Customer service training for staff should familiarize them with the accessible features of the office, the availability of extra help or adjustments to the way the service is provided, to make sure services are accessible to voters with disabilities. Disability awareness training will give staff the confidence to offer help in appropriate ways.</p>
<p>Do you monitor and review the accessibility improvements you have made to your office and services?</p>			<p>It is important that accessibility improvements are regularly reviewed and maintained to ensure that they continue to benefit voters with disabilities.</p>
Fire and Life Safety			
<p>Have you established a Fire and Safety Plan for the evacuation of people with disabilities?</p>			<p>All facilities should have an Emergency Policy and Emergency Evacuation Plan that addresses the needs of people with disabilities.</p>
<p>Are there systems in place to visually alert people with hearing loss to emergency situations?</p>			<p>Make sure your fire alarms have both a visual and an audible signal and are strategically placed to be seen and heard from all areas including the washrooms.</p>



Understanding Disability

Disabilities can take many forms. They may be permanent or temporary; developmental or physical; severe or mild; for the young or the old; or any combination of disabilities. A person can be born with a disability or someone could become injured resulting in a temporary or permanent disability. Some disabilities are visible and many are non-visible. Since you never know who may want to interact with you during the election process, it is important that you plan to include all people.

Physical Disabilities

There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities, and while people who use mobility aids like wheelchairs, scooters, crutches or canes are most recognizable, it is important to consider that not all people with physical disabilities require a mobility device. People who have arthritis, heart or lung conditions or amputations may also have difficulty with stamina, moving, standing, sitting or the ability to reach or grasp. It may be difficult to identify a person with a physical disability.

Vision Loss

There are varying degrees of vision loss and a distinction between blindness and low vision. In some cases, it may be difficult to tell if a person has a vision loss. The majority of people living with a vision disability have some vision. Some people are totally blind. Vision disabilities can reduce one's ability to see clearly or can affect the range of visual field. Some people can distinguish between light and dark, or between contrasting colours, or read large print, but have difficulty with small print or low-light situations. Others may have a loss of peripheral or side vision, or a lack of central vision, which impacts a person's ability to distinguish details, like recognizing faces or reading. Vision disabilities can restrict a person's ability to read print and signs, locate landmarks or see hazards. They may use a white cane or service animal to help with orientation and movement in an environment.

Deafness and Hearing Loss

Hearing loss ranges from mild to profound. The distinctions between the terms “deaf”, “Deaf”, “deafened”, and “hard of hearing” are based principally on the individual’s preferred language (spoken or signed) rather than on the actual degree of hearing loss. Deaf, deafened and hard of hearing individuals may use hearing aids, cochlear implants, and/or other assistive-listening and communication devices.

Deaf-Blindness

A person who is deaf-blind has some degree of both vision and hearing loss. This results in greater difficulties in accessing information and managing daily activities. Most people who are deaf-blind will be accompanied by an intervenor, a professional who helps with communicating. An intervenor is trained in many adaptive communication methods, depending upon the preferences of the person who is deaf-blind. The intervenor may guide and interpret for their client.

Speech Disabilities

People with speech disabilities may have problems communicating. For many reasons, people may have difficulty speaking clearly — for example, as a result of a stroke or cerebral palsy — which may result in difficulties with verbal communication. Some people may use communication boards or other assistive devices to help communicate. A speech disability often has no impact on a person’s ability to understand.

Cognitive Disabilities

Cognitive disabilities may affect understanding, communication, or behavior and can be attributed to brain injuries, developmental or learning disabilities. It is not always easy to identify someone who has a cognitive disability. Some conditions, such as Down’s syndrome exhibit physical characteristics, but there are others that are not so apparent. People with a cognitive disability may have difficulties recognizing, understanding and remembering information.

Mental Illness

Mental illness is a disturbance in thoughts and emotions that may decrease a person's capacity to cope with the challenges of everyday life. Mental illness can take many forms, just as physical illness does. Mental illnesses include schizophrenia, mood disorders (such as depression and bipolar disorder), anxiety disorders, personality disorders, and eating disorders



More Information

Additional Resources

While there are many resources about accessibility, six excellent Canadian resources are available that can help to ensure your offices and the services you provide are accessible to people with disabilities. These resources include the technical specifications required for barrier-free design.

Accessible Design for the Built Environment. (CAN/CSA B651-04)
Mississauga: Canadian Standards Association, 2004.
www.csaintl.org/onlinestore/GetCatalogItemDetails.asp?mat=000000000002015478

Standards for Barrier-Free Design of Ontario Government Facilities. Toronto: Ontario Realty Corporation, 2006.
www.orc.on.ca/AssetFactory.aspx?did=1243

Hospitality Accessibility Checklist. Toronto: Greater Toronto Hotel Association, 2003.
www.gtha.com/pdf/covers-appendices/coverpage.pdf

Customer Service Standard for People with Disabilities
(CAN/CSA B480-02)
Mississauga: Canadian Standards Association, 2002.
www.csaintl.org/onlinestore/GetCatalogDrillDown.asp?Parent=3081

Get Connected to Deaf, Deafened and Hard of Hearing People: A Guide for Service Providers and Businesses. Toronto: The Canadian Hearing Society, 2003.

www.chs.ca/info/access/busguide/eng1.html

Every Voter Counts. Toronto: Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario, 2007.

www.ontario.cmha.ca/content/reading_room/network_story.asp?CID=7595

Who Can Help?

There are many organizations, which work with and on behalf of people with disabilities that may be able to provide further guidance. Some of these organizations have expertise in auditing facilities for accessibility, and providing disability awareness training and have offices throughout the province.

The following organizations contributed to the development of this guide:

Canadian Paraplegic Association Ontario

520 Sutherland Drive,
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Toll Free: 1-877-422-1112
Tel: 416-422-5644
Fax: 416-422-5943
E-mail: info@cpaont.org
www.cpaont.org

CNIB

1929 Bayview Avenue
Toronto, Ontario M4G 3E8
Tel: 416-486-2500
Toll Free: 1-800-563-2642
Fax: 416-480-7717
TTY: 416-480-8645
E-mail: ontario@cnib.ca
www.cnib.ca

The Canadian Hearing Society (CHS)

271 Spadina Road
Toronto, Ontario M5R 2V3
Tel: 416-928-2500
Toll-Free: 1-877-347-3427
TTY: 416-964-0023
Toll-Free TTY: 1-877-347-3429
Fax: 416-928-2506
E-mail: info@chs.ca
www.chs.ca

Ontario March of Dimes

10 Overlea Blvd.
Toronto, Ontario M4H 1A4
Tel: 416-425-3463
Toll-free: 1-800-263-3463
e-mail: info@dimes.on.ca
www.marchofdimes.ca

Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario

2301 - 180 Dundas Street West
Toronto, Ontario M5G 1Z8
Tel: 416-977-5580
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E-mail: info@ontario.cmha.ca
www.ontario.cmha.ca

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Disclaimer

The material contained in this guide is for information and reference purposes only and is not intended as legal or professional advice. The adoption of the practices described in this guide may not meet the needs of your organization or a particular individual. The Government of Ontario does not warrant or guarantee the accuracy, completeness, timeliness, or usefulness of any information contained in this guide and shall not be responsible or liable, directly or indirectly, in any way, for any loss or damage of any kind incurred as a result of, or in connection with the use of, or reliance on, any such content.

In Ontario, legislation prescribes specific responsibilities related to the accommodation of persons with disabilities.

For the purposes of this guide, the following legislation is the minimum accommodation requirements service providers must be aware of and comply with (list not inclusive):

- ✓ Ontario Human Rights Code
- ✓ Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA)
- ✓ Ontario Building Code

For full versions of these Codes and Acts please refer to www.e-laws.gov.on.ca

