

Accessible Meetings

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APPROVAL INFORMATION

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POLICY STATEMENT:

The Regional Municipality of York is committed to making its programs, services and facilities accessible for all residents of York Region, including people with disabilities attending workshops, meetings and events hosted by The Regional Municipality of York. Workshops, meetings and events may be made accessible as needed and/or upon request only.

APPLICATION:

To all Regional Employees.

PURPOSE:

Under the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001 (ODA)*, all municipalities in the province have a legal obligation to prepare an annual accessibility plan identifying barriers in its bylaws, programs, procedures, practices, policies, facilities and services.

With the proclamation of the *AODA* in June 2005, the *ODA* will eventually be replaced. When the new standards are released, York Region will be well positioned through the achievements already made in accessibility planning under the *ODA*.

DEFINITIONS:

Accessible: Capable of being entered or reached, approachable; easy to get at; capable of being influenced; obtainable; easy to understand or appreciate.

Assistive Listening Systems:

An assistive listening system receives a feed from the audio system found in lecture halls or meeting or conference rooms. This communication support makes it easier for people who are hard of hearing to hear and understand speech even from a distance. For example, a wireless FM system, which consists of a transmitter and receiver, can be used with or without a hearing aid.

Barrier: The *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001 (ODA)* defines a barrier as anything that stops a person with a disability from fully taking part in society because of that disability.

Computerized Note takers:

Computerized note taking is a service that can make a meeting or presentation more accessible to people who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing. It may also be requested by people with visual disabilities because it allows them to refer to the saved electronic notes afterwards using screen reading software. Note takers use a laptop computer with a standard keyboard and an overhead screen or monitor. Computerized note taking is not a verbatim transcript, but summarizes what is spoken while still maintaining accuracy and the spirit and intent of the speaker.

Disability:

Disability means:

- (a) any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes, mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical coordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device;
- (b) a condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability;
- (c) a learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language;
- (d) a mental disorder; or,
- (e) an injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997*.
(*Ontario Human Rights Code*)

Real-Time Captioning (also known as CART):

Real-time captioning can make a meeting or presentation accessible to people who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing and who may not use sign language. It provides simultaneous (real-time) speech to text translation. A real-time captioner uses a court reporting steno machine, coded to type verbatim text with minimal keystrokes. The steno machine is connected to a laptop containing special software that converts the key strokes and displays the text being spoken for the user to read on an overhead screen or monitor.

Sign Language Interpreters:

A sign language interpreter is necessary whenever communication is required between deaf and (non-signing) hearing people. Interpreters should be available at events, meetings or presentations attended by people who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing.

DESCRIPTION:

The following are guidelines to assist you in accessibility planning for your event. These guidelines reflect an optimum level of accessibility which may not always be feasible. To view an Accessible Meeting Checklist click on [Appendix A](#).

If you are in doubt about the level of accessibility at a potential venue, it is recommended that you consult with The Regional Municipality of York, *ODA* Staff Committee, Property Services Staff, members of the YRAAC, or a local disability group who has expertise in barrier-free access and/or meeting planning.

1. PRE-EVENT PLANNING

The key to accessibility is advanced planning. Even when it is unknown whether any of your participants may require accessibility accommodations, you should be prepared to arrange your meeting or event to be accessible to ensure that people with disabilities can participate.

When arranging meetings, it is important to consider these two components of access in the pre-event planning stage:

- physical access to the meeting space; and
- access to the meeting contents and proceedings.

Prior to the event you may wish to:

- Assign a member of the planning team for making the event accessible
- Ensure that the invitation/registration for the event or notice of meeting includes information about the accessibility of the event and if possible, ask for specific accommodation needs (e.g. “Please indicate any additional requirements you may have in order to participate in the meeting or conference”).
- When appropriate, provide information about local services such as accessible transportation, emergency veterinarians, and/or wheelchair repair services.
- Prior to confirming the date of your event, determine if other disability-related events are taking place in the area during the same timeframe which may impact on the availability of service providers.
- Where feasible, schedule sign language interpreters and/or real time captionists as soon as possible after confirming the date of the event and the need for this service(s).
- If meals are not provided at the event, provide information about accessible restaurants in the vicinity.

2. PHYSICAL ACCESS TO THE MEETING AREA

When planning your event there are several aspects to the physical environment that should be considered to ensure the meeting area is accessible.

a. Choosing a location

Items to consider when choosing a location include the following:

- Parking
- Entrances
- Washrooms
- Meeting rooms
- Doors
- White noise (background noise that may interfere with hearing)
- Visual fire alarms (for use by persons who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing)
- Telephone access
- Customer service areas
- Recent renovations/current construction
- Availability of auditory equipment
- Sensitivity training of staff
- Relieving area/water bowls for service dogs.

b. Exterior Access

Items to consider when assessing exterior access include:

- Signage
- Parking
- Sidewalks/Path of Travel
- Accessible Transit

c. Interior Access

Items to consider when assessing interior access include:

- Entrances and Lobbies
- Elevators
- Accessible Washrooms
- Hallways and Corridors
- Meeting and Conference Rooms
- Making refreshment and dietary arrangements

3. ACCESS TO MEETING CONTENTS AND MATERIALS

When planning your event it is important to remember to ensure the content of your event is also accessible.

a. Invitations and promotional materials

- Invitations and promotional material about your accessible event should contain the International Symbol of Accessibility and other accessibility symbols. To view an International Symbols of Accessibility list click on [Appendix B](#).
- Where feasible, invitations should be made available in multiple formats for people or organizations that require or request them (Refer to Regional Municipality of York Multiple Formats Guidelines).
- The invitation and promotional materials should include a note that asks participants to request any additional requirements they may have in order to participate in the meeting or conference.

b. Accessible communications

- Oral presentations should be supported with sign language interpreter/real-time captioner, where necessary.
- Print materials should also be made available in alternate formats, such as CD or large print, where feasible.
- Adjust the numbers of multiple format documents you will need according to the anticipated audience. For example, if the anticipated audience consists of seniors, you may consider producing a greater number of printed materials in large print.

RESPONSIBILITIES:

Department Heads/Directors/Managers/Supervisors

- Approval of additional costs related to making a meeting, workshop, conference etc. accessible.
- Ensure employees are aware of guidelines.

Regional Employees

- Familiarize and follow guidelines when planning meetings, workshops, or Regional events.

REFERENCE:

[Appendix A - Accessible Meeting Checklist for Planning an Accessible Event](#)

[Appendix B – International Symbols of Accessibility](#)

[Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001](#)

[Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005](#)

[Ministry of Community and Social Services - Accessibility Directorate: Planning for Accessible Meetings](#)

[Canadian National Institute for the Blind, Print Clarity Standards June 2006](#)

CONTACT:

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