

Accessible Customer Service

A Guide for the City of Burlington

December 2014



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Accessible Customer Service Training

As employees, volunteers and all other persons or organizations who provide goods, services or facilities on behalf of the City of Burlington, you have an important role to play in helping people with disabilities receive access to the same kind of opportunities as everyone else.

This booklet will give you an overview of the City of Burlington's Corporate Accessibility Policy statement and will provide tips on how to best interact with a person with a disability so that you can provide excellent customer service to all Burlington residents.

This training has been developed to meet the mandatory Accessible Customer Service training as required by the Province of Ontario.

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005

The purpose of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) is to achieve accessibility for Ontarians with disabilities with respect to goods, services, facilities, accommodation, employment, buildings, structures and premises on or before January 1, 2025 through the development, implementation and enforcement of standards.

The standards require the persons or organizations named or described in the standards to implement measures, policies, practices or other requirements within the time periods specified in the standards.

Standards developed to date through the AODA are:

- **Accessibility Standards for Customer Service** (O. Reg. 429/07) which establishes what organizations must do to make the delivery of their goods and services accessible to people with disabilities.
- **Integrated Accessibility Standards** (O. Reg. 191/11) which provides a number of general and specific requirements in the areas of employment, information and communication, transportation and the design of public spaces.

Accessibility Standards for Customer Service (O. Reg. 429/07)

Key requirements of the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service:

- **Establish policies, practices and procedures for providing goods or services to people with disabilities.**
- **Communicate with a person with a disability in a way that takes their disability into account.**
- **Welcome people to use their own personal assistive devices to access City goods or services.**
- **Welcome people with disabilities to be accompanied by their service animal in City premises that are opened to the public, unless the animal is excluded by law.**
- **Welcome people with disabilities who use a support person to bring that person with them while accessing goods or services in premises open to the public or third parties.**
- **Train staff, volunteers, or others who interact with the public or other third parties on behalf of the City of Burlington on the requirements as outlined in the Customer Service Standards.**
- **Establish a process for receiving and responding to feedback about the way goods and services are provided to people with disabilities.**
- **Provide notice when facilities or services that people with disabilities rely on are unavailable.**

City of Burlington Corporate Accessibility Policy

Policy Statement:

The City of Burlington is committed to ensuring that people of all ages and abilities enjoy the same opportunities as they live, work, play, visit and invest in our city.

We promote a caring, inclusive and respectful community where city programs, services and facilities are available to everyone, including people with disabilities. Our goal is to ensure accessibility for the public we serve and our employees.

The City of Burlington will develop, implement, maintain and enhance accessibility in a timely manner that:

- Is free from discrimination
- Is integrated with the provision of service to others, except when alternative measures are necessary to meet the needs of people with disabilities
- Strives at all times to respect the individual's dignity and independence
- Ensures that reasonable efforts are made so that people with disabilities receive services of the same quality that others receive

This policy is intended to benefit the full range of persons with disabilities, as defined in the Ontario Human Rights Code.

Scope:

Unless otherwise stated, this policy applies to the provision of goods, services and facilities by employees, volunteers and all other persons or organizations that provide goods, services or facilities on behalf of the City of Burlington.

The complete City of Burlington Corporate Accessibility Policy can be found on COBnet: <http://cms.burlington.ca/AssetFactory.aspx?did=27695>.

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.

When providing goods and services, we need to consider the needs of people who:

- have a physical disability
- are Deaf or have some form of hearing loss
- are blind or have some form of loss of vision
- are deafblind
- have a learning disability
- have a speech or language disability
- have an intellectual or developmental disability
- have a mental illness



Ontario Human Rights Code

Under the Ontario Human Rights Code, everyone has the right to equal treatment without discrimination based on the grounds of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sexual orientation, gender identification, gender expression, age, record of offences, marital status, family status or disability.

Ontario Human Rights Code definition of disability

- Any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness;
- A condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability;
- A learning disability or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language;
- A mental disorder;
- An injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the Workplace Safety & Insurance Act, 1997.

There is a positive duty to accommodate short of undue hardship, meaning that wherever unequal treatment or discrimination exists it must be remedied unless the remedy would cause undue hardship. Under the Ontario Human Rights Code, the City of Burlington has a legal obligation to accommodate any person with a disability regardless of whether they are an employee, volunteer or resident. The Ontario Human Rights Code has primacy over the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act legislation.



Understanding Barriers

People with disabilities face all kinds of barriers every day. A barrier is anything that keeps someone with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society because of their disability. Physical barriers are easy to see, like a step to access the main entrance of a building, or a building with more than one floor that does not have an elevator.

However, there are many types of barriers in addition to physical barriers. Barriers can also be more discrete, for example providing limited information to a person with a speech and language disability because of an assumption that the person also has an intellectual disability. When you think about accessibility, it is important to be aware of both visible and invisible barriers.

Below are examples of barriers that people with disabilities may encounter:



Attitude is perhaps the most difficult barrier to overcome because it's hard to change the way people think or behave. Some people don't know how to communicate with those who have visible or invisible disabilities – for example, assuming someone with a speech problem has intellectual limitations and speaking to them as if they were a child; or forming ideas about the person because of stereotypes or a lack of understanding. Some people may feel that they could offend the individual with a disability by offering help, or they ignore or avoid people with disabilities altogether. Remember, attitude is a major barrier that's within our power to change.



Architectural or structural barriers may result from design elements of a building such as stairs, doorways, the width of hallways and even room layout. These barriers may also occur through everyday practices, such as when we store boxes or other objects in hallways, obstructing the accessible path of travel.



Information and communication barriers can make it difficult for people to receive or convey information. For example, a person who is Deaf cannot communicate via standard telephone. Things like small print size, low colour contrast between text and background, confusing design of printed materials and the use of language that isn't clear or easy to understand can all cause difficulty.



Technology, or lack of it, can prevent people from accessing information. Everyday tools like computers, telephones and other aids can all present barriers if they are not set up or designed with accessibility in mind.



Systemic barriers can result from an organization's policies, practices and procedures if they restrict people with disabilities, often unintentionally – for example, a hiring process that only permits applicants to submit their resume through an online application system and the organization does not offer any alternatives to the online application process.

What is Accessible Customer Service?

Accessible customer service can mean many things. Mostly, it is understanding that access to the goods and services the City provides may at times require some modification to be accessible to some individuals.

Customer Service Tips

Being able to interact and communicate in an appropriate way to individuals with disabilities is a big part of providing accessible customer service, and sometimes the best approach is to ask the person how you can best serve them. If you are not sure what to do, ask your customer, "May I Help You?" Your customers with disabilities know if they need help and how you can best provide it. Here are some general tips:

- Always treat anyone with a disability with the same respect and courtesy that you would offer to everyone else.
- Treat and speak to adults with disabilities as adults.
- Speak directly to the person with a disability not to the companion, assistant or interpreter who may be with them.
- Don't shout; speak clearly and distinctly, and at a moderate pace.
- Let a person with a disability make their own decisions regarding what they can or cannot do. Do not make assumptions.
- Do not pet, feed or distract a guide dog or service animal from doing its job.

Examples of Accessible Customer Service

- **A person who has low vision may need to have information read aloud to them.**
- **Someone who uses a scooter may need help finding an accessible route.**
- **An individual with a learning disability may need to have instructions written down for them.**
- **A person who has a hearing loss may want to know about what assistive listening devices are available at a public meeting.**
- **A person who is unable to stand for a long period of time may benefit from seating in areas where people have to stand in line to receive goods or services.**
- **A person with an intellectual disability may need assistance with and extra time to complete forms.**
- **A person who is blind may be assisted by telling them the denominations of money being exchanged during a financial transaction.**
- **A person who is Deaf may request that a Sign Language Interpreter be available at a meeting.**

Word Choices

Choosing positive words can empower people. Inappropriate terms convey inaccurate information and perpetuate negative stereotypes.

The notion that people with disabilities are inspirational, brave and courageous for living successfully with their disability is a myth. The fact is a person with a disability is simply carrying out the activities of daily living when they drive to work, go to a movie, pay their bills or participate in a sporting event. They just may do it in a way that is different than you.

People with disabilities are ‘people first’ – unique individuals who also happen to have a disability. Use words that put the person first, referring to them as a “person with a disability” or “person with hearing loss.”

Please say this	Instead of this
Person with a disability	The Handicapped
Person without a disability; able-bodied	Normal
Person who is blind; vision loss	The Blind; The Visually Impaired
Person who is deaf; hearing loss	The Deaf
Person with a disability	Physically Challenged
Person who uses a wheelchair; scooter	Confined to wheelchair; wheelchair bound
Person with a disability	Suffers with; Victim of; Stricken by
Person with mental illness	Mental; Insane; Crazy
Person with an intellectual disability	Mentally Retarded; Feeble Minded
Accessible Parking	Handicapped Parking
Accessible Washroom / Bathroom	Handicapped Washroom / Bathroom

Physical Disabilities

There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities, and not all require use of mobility aids like wheelchairs, scooters, crutches or canes. 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 an invisible physical disability.

Customer Service Tips:

- If you are having a lengthy conversation with someone who uses a wheelchair or scooter, consider sitting so that you are at eye level.
- Ask before you help. Offer assistance but don't insist.
- Speak directly to the person.
- Avoid touching any assistive devices unnecessarily.
- Don't move items or equipment, such as canes and walkers, out of the person's reach.
- If a counter top is too high or wide to interact comfortably with a customer, step from behind it to provide service.
- Be prepared to provide information about accessible features offered at the location.



Blindness and Vision Loss

There are varying degrees of vision loss and a distinction between blindness and low vision. The majority of people living with a vision loss have some degree of limited vision. Very few people are totally blind. A vision loss can restrict someone's ability to read print or signs, recognize faces, locate landmarks or see hazards. Some may use a white cane or guide dog to help with orientation and movement, while others may not.

Customer Service Tips:

- Don't assume the individual cannot see you.
- Identify yourself when you approach a customer.
- Speak directly to the person.
- Don't leave without saying goodbye.
- Use specific directions like "behind you on your left" or "the cup is by your right hand." Avoid "over here."
- If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted.
- Offer your elbow to provide sighted guide if needed. Identify obstacles before you come to them.
- Do not pet, feed or distract a guide dog from doing its job.



Deafness and Hearing Loss

Hearing loss ranges from mild to profound. Deaf, deafened and hard of hearing individuals may use hearings aids, cochlear implants, sign language, and/or other assistive-listening and communication devices. Smart phones and text messaging can provide instant communication for people with hearing loss.

Customer Service Tips:

- Attract the person's attention before you speak. Use eye contact and a simple wave to connect visually.
- Make sure you are in a well-lit area where your customer can see your face and read your lips.
- If your customer uses a hearing aid, reduce background noise or move to a quieter location.
- Do not cover or have anything in your mouth when speaking.
- Speak directly to your customer, not to their interpreter.
- Ask one question at a time.
- Speak naturally, with normal expression and at a normal pace.
- When writing back and forth, keep sentences short.
- In group settings, talk one at a time.

Bell Canada Relay Service (BCRS) lets TTY users and hearing people talk to one another by phone with the help of specially trained BCRS operators. Users dictate to the operator the conversation, which is then relayed to the TTY phone. TTY conversation is then relayed to the regular phone user. This service is confidential and the only cost is any long-distance charges that would regularly apply. Local calls using this service are free. **The Bell Relay Number is 1-800-855-0511.**



Deafblindness

A person who is deafblind has some degree of both vision and hearing loss. This results in greater difficulties in accessing information. Many people who are deafblind will be accompanied by an intervenor, a professional who helps with communication.

Customer Service Tips:

- Don't assume what a person can or cannot do. People who are deafblind have varying degrees of both hearing and vision loss, making it unique to each individual.
- A customer who is deafblind will likely explain to you how to best communicate with them or give you an assistance card or note explaining how to communicate with him or her.
- Speak directly to your customer, not to the intervenor.
- Communication may be improved by being in an area with good lighting and reduced background noise.
- When talking about an object, help the person to understand what it is you are talking about by describing it clearly and if possible letting them touch the object itself.
- Don't leave without saying goodbye.



Speech or Language Disabilities

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

Customer Service Tips:

- Talk to people with speech disabilities as you would talk to anyone else and speak in your regular tone of voice.
- Do not speak for the individual or complete their sentences. Be patient.
- Tell the person if you do not understand what they are trying to say. Ask the person to repeat the message, tell you in a different way, or write it down.
- If you are able, ask questions that can be answered 'yes' or 'no' or with the nod of the head.
- If a customer is difficult to understand, concentrate on content not voice.
- Give your customer time to fully explain themselves. Don't interrupt.
- If your customer has a stammer, don't finish their words or sentences.



Intellectual Disabilities

An intellectual disability can be characterized by intellectual development and capacity that is significantly below average and involves a permanent limitation in a person's ability to learn or adapt to their environment. The effects of an intellectual disability can range from mild to profound. People with intellectual disabilities do not necessarily have a recognizable condition.

Customer Service Tips:

- Don't make assumptions about what a person can or cannot do.
- Use plain language and speak in short sentences.
- Give one piece of information at a time.
- Make sure your customer understands what you've said. You may wish to ask them to repeat the message back to you in their own words.
- If you can't understand what's being said, don't pretend. Just ask again.
- Be supportive and patient.
- Be prepared to repeat and rephrase your sentences.



Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities range from mild to severe and may affect a person's ability to receive, process, remember or analyze information. Some learning disabilities can interfere with a person's ability to concentrate or focus. Other learning disabilities can make it difficult for a person to read, write, spell, or solve math problems. A learning disability does not mean a person cannot learn. It means that they learn in a different way.

Customer Service Tips:

- Ask your customer how to best accommodate their needs.
- Provide information in appropriate formats.
- Minimize distractions so that full attention is on communication.
- Keep sentences short and clear.
- Use gestures or diagrams as needed.
- Avoid complex words or jargon.
- Use language that is concrete rather than abstract.
- Some people may find it difficult to read. Others may have problems with numbers.



Mental Illness

People with mental illness look like anyone else. You won't know that your customer has a mental health disability unless you are told, nor will you need to. Usually it will not affect your customer service at all. But if someone is experiencing difficulty in controlling their symptoms or is in a crisis, you may need to help out. Be calm and professional and let your customer tell you how you can best help.

Customer Service Tips:

- Be confident and reassuring. Listen carefully and work with your customer to meet their needs.
- Be respectful to the person. Do not judge.
- Use plain, clear language; avoid complex ideas and jargon.
- Talk to the person as you would talk to anyone else and speak in your regular tone of voice.
- Speak in a calm manner and present one thought at a time.
- Repeat using different words if you are not understood.
- Pay attention to non verbal cues.



Personal Assistive Devices

An assistive device is a tool or technology that enables a person with a disability to carry out everyday tasks and activities at home, at work or at play. Personal assistive devices can include things like wheelchairs, hearing aids, white canes, note taking devices, grasping devices, magnifiers or assistive listening devices. When we think of assistive devices, we often think of medical-type devices, however everyday products like smart phones and text messaging have opened up a whole world of instant communication that was unavailable only a few years ago for people who are deaf, hard of hearing or have learning disabilities.

Customer Service Tips:

- Consider the assistive device as an extension of the person's personal space. Don't touch or handle any assistive device without permission.
- Allow customers to keep and use their assistive devices as needed.
- Don't move assistive devices or equipment out of your customer's reach.
- Be prepared to tell your customer about any accessible features or assistive devices available that are appropriate to their needs, for example: assistive listening devices, closed captioning or large print documents.



Support Persons

Support persons can go anywhere with a person with a disability to help them with communication, mobility, personal care, medical needs or access to service. The support person might be a family member, friend, volunteer or paid personnel. A support person in some cases does not necessarily need to have special training or qualifications.

Customer Service Tips:

- A person with a disability may not always introduce his or her support person. If you are not sure, it is appropriate to ask, “Is this your interpreter or support person?”
- Always speak directly to your customer, not to their support person.
- Where possible, provide written materials both to the person with the disability and the support person.
- Do not discuss confidential matters in the presence of a support person without first getting the appropriate permission to do so.
- Where admission fees are charged, provide advance notice of whether or not the support person is required to pay the admission fee.



Service Animals

Service animals are used by people with many different kinds of disabilities and are specially trained to assist an individual with a disability by helping them function with greater self-sufficiency; prevent injuries; and summon help in a crisis. Service animals can be trained to open doors, pick up items, predict seizures, or alert someone to sounds such as a doorbell or telephone ring.

People are most familiar with guide dogs used by people who are blind, but not every disability is apparent. Be aware that many disabilities are invisible, such as deafness, epilepsy, autism, multiple sclerosis (M.S.), life-threatening allergies, psychiatric disabilities and others. In some cases, you may not be able to determine if someone is disabled or the extent of their disability and under no circumstances is the service provider allowed to ask about the nature of the person's disability.

The Accessible Customer Service Standard states that an animal is a service animal if it is readily identifiable that the animal is used by the person for reasons relating to his or her disability. If it is not readily apparent, the person may have a letter from a health care professional verifying that the animal is required for reasons relating to his or her disability, or an identification card from the Ministry of the Attorney General.

A person with a disability and their service animal can go to all areas that the public would normally be allowed to go. A kitchen where food is prepared is one of the few municipal environments for disallowing a service animal.

Customer Service Tips:

- Pay attention to the owner, not the service animal.
- Do not pet, feed or distract a guide dog or service animal from doing its job.
- Service animals should be fed only by the user/owner.
- The user/owner must be in full control of the service animal at all times.
- It is not appropriate to ask the nature of the disability of the service animal user.



Disruption of Service – Reasonable Notice

What happens if we can't serve a person with a disability?

It is possible that there will be disruptions in services, such as elevators under repair, renovations of buildings or outdoor spaces or technology that is temporarily unavailable. If a disruption in service is planned, it is important to provide reasonable notice.

Customers with disabilities may go to a lot of trouble to access services, such as booking transit or arranging for their support person to accompany them. By providing reasonable notice that a service is temporarily unavailable you can save the customer an unnecessary trip.

Notice can be provided by several methods and usually it is a good idea to use more than one method to provide notice. A notice on the City of Burlington website or other social media, a broadcast announcement when calling the City by telephone, a notice in the paper or a temporary sign are all ways to inform customers of service disruptions.

Disruption of Service – Unexpected Disruptions

In the event of an unexpected disruption in service, provide notice quickly and in as many ways as possible. Think about how you might offer another way to access the service when informing the customer who may be affected.

Mandatory Training Registration

Thank you for taking the time to read and understand this important information. Your effort will help us better serve all citizens of Burlington, including people with disabilities.

As required by law under Section 6 of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, Accessible Customer Service Training is mandatory for all City employees, volunteers, agents and/or contractors who act on behalf or represent the City of Burlington.

It is essential you now register that you have completed your training. Please complete and submit the attached registration card via inter office mail, scan the registration card to submit electronically or send through regular mail.

For further information, please contact:

Judi Lytle
Accessibility Coordinator
City of Burlington
Phone: 905-335-7600 ext. 7865
E-mail: judi.lytle@burlington.ca



Accessible Customer Service – Training Registration

Deliver to:

City of Burlington, Accessibility Coordinator
Capital Works Department
426 Brant Street, P.O. Box 5013
Burlington, ON L7R 3Z6

Attention: AODA Mandatory Training Registration

Employee Number: Date:

First and Last Name (Please print):

Department:

By signing and submitting this registration card, I hereby confirm my acceptance of the booklet titled 'Accessible Customer Service: A Guide for the City of Burlington.'

Further, I have read and understand the booklet material which constitutes completion of the mandatory Accessible Customer Service training as required under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 and O. Reg. 429/07 Accessibility Standards for Customer Service.

Please register my compliance.

Signature:



City of Burlington, Accessibility Coordinator
Capital Works Department
426 Brant Street, P.O. Box 5013
Burlington, ON L7R 3Z6
Attention: AODA Mandatory Training Registration

Notes

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Accessible Customer Service

A Guide for the City of Burlington

For more information visit
www.burlington.ca/accessibility

Last Revised: December 2014

