



Accessible Customer Service Training Brochure

Tips on interacting with customers with disabilities, so that you can provide excellent customer service to all City of Stratford residents.



If you require this document in an alternate format, please contact clerks@stratford.ca

Table of Contents

Accessible Customer Service Training Brochure	1
Table of Contents	2
Legislation Overview—the AODA	3
Customer Service Standard	3
Interacting and communicating with people with various types of disabilities	4
People who have physical disabilities	4
People with speech or language impairments	5
People who have hearing loss	5
People who have vision loss	5
People who are deaf blind	6
People who have mental health disabilities	6
People who have intellectual/developmental disabilities	6
People who have learning disabilities	7
How to interact with people who use assistive devices	7
How to interact with people who use service animals	7
How to interact with people who require the assistance of a support person	8
What to do if a person is having difficulty accessing your goods or services	8
Our Policy	10
Policy Statement:	10
Communication:	10
Format of Documents and Information:	10
Assistive Devices:	10
Service Animals:	10
Support Persons:	11
Disruption to Services:	11
Feedback Process:	11

Legislation Overview—the AODA

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act was passed in 2005. The goal of the act is to make Ontario accessible for people with disabilities by 2025. Ontario has developed mandatory, province-wide standards to achieve this goal and to improve accessibility. A series of five standards have been developed under the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR) in key areas of everyday life including:

- Customer service
- Information and Communications
- Employment
- Transportation
- Design of Public Spaces

The Ontario Building Code was also updated to include accessibility improvements in buildings.

The standards are developed by committees that include people from the disability and business communities. The public then has an opportunity to review and comment on each standard before it is finalized.

These standards apply to both public and private sector organizations.

This training will help you better serve the needs of customers with disabilities, and is one of the requirements that the City of Stratford must meet under the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR).

Customer Service Standard

In 2007, the Government of Ontario launched the Customer Service Standard. Its goal is to ensure that people with disabilities receive the same level of customer service as everyone else. The Customer Service Standard was reviewed, and an update was released in 2016.

Under this standard, the City of Stratford must:

- Set up policies, practices and procedures on providing goods or services to people with disabilities, and make the policy publicly available.
- Make reasonable efforts to ensure that policies, practices and procedures are consistent with the key principles of independence, dignity, integration and equality of opportunity.
- Have a policy on assistive devices used by people with disabilities to access your goods or services and a policy outlining any other measures you offer to enable them to access your goods and services.

- Communicate with a person with a disability in a manner that takes into account their disability.
- Let people with disabilities bring their service animals onto the parts of your premises open to the public or open to other third parties, except where the animal is otherwise excluded by law.
- Let people with disabilities bring their support persons with them when accessing goods or services on the parts of your premises open to the public or open to other third parties.
- Let people know ahead of time what, if any, admission fee will be charged for a support person. (Refer to the policy for more information on this requirement).
- Let the public know when facilities or services that people with disabilities usually use to access their goods and services are temporarily unavailable.
- Ensure that all members of the organization are trained on accessible customer service and how to interact with people with different disabilities.
- Set up a process for receiving and responding to feedback about the manner in which you provide goods or services to people with disabilities, including what action will be taken on any complaints. Ensure that the feedback process is accessible by providing or arranging for accessible formats and communication supports, on request. Make the information about the feedback process readily available to the public.

Interacting and communicating with people with various types of disabilities

Being able to interact and communicate with people with disabilities is a big part of providing accessible customer service. If you notice a person is having difficulty accessing our services, ask how you can help. Be patient and remember your customers are the best source of information about their own needs.

People who have physical disabilities

There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities. Only some people with physical disabilities use a wheelchair. Someone with a spinal cord injury may use crutches while someone with severe arthritis or a heart condition may have difficulty walking longer distances.

Tips:

- If you need to have a lengthy conversation with someone who uses a wheelchair

or scooter, consider sitting so you can make eye contact at the same level.

- Don't touch items or equipment, such as canes or wheelchairs, without permission.
- If you have permission to move a person's wheelchair, don't leave them in an awkward, dangerous or undignified position, such as facing a wall or in the path of opening doors.

People with speech or language impairments

Cerebral palsy, hearing loss, or other conditions may make it difficult for a person to pronounce words or may cause slurring. Some people who have severe difficulties may use a communication board or other assistive devices.

Tips:

- Don't assume that a person with a speech impairment has another disability.
- Whenever possible, ask "yes" or "no" questions.
- Be patient. Don't interrupt or finish your customer's sentences.

People who have hearing loss

People who have hearing loss may be deaf, oral deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing.

Tips:

- Attract your customer's attention before speaking. Try gently touching their shoulder or waving your hand.
- 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 area.
- If necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier (e.g. pen & paper).

People who have vision loss

Vision loss can restrict someone's ability to read, locate landmarks, or see hazards. Some customers may use a guide dog or a white cane, while others may not.

Tips:

- Don't assume your customer can't see you. Many people with low vision still have

some sight.

- Identify yourself when you approach your customer and speak directly to them.
- When providing directions or instructions, be precise and descriptive.
- Offer your elbow to guide them if needed.

People who are deaf blind

A person who is deaf blind has some degree of both hearing and vision loss. Many people who are deaf blind will be accompanied by an intervener, a professional support person who helps with communication.

Tips:

- Speak directly to your customer, not the intervener.
- A customer who is deaf blind is likely to explain to you how to communicate with them, perhaps with an assistance card or note.

People who have mental health disabilities

Mental health issues can affect a person's ability to think clearly, concentrate or remember things. Mental health disability is a broad term for many disorders that can range in severity. Some customers may experience anxiety, hallucinations, mood swings or panic attacks.

Tips:

- Treat a person with a mental health disability with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else.
- Be confident, calm and reassuring.
- If a customer appears to be in crisis, ask them to tell you the best way to help.

People who have intellectual/developmental disabilities

Developmental or intellectual disabilities, such as Down Syndrome, can limit a person's ability to learn, communicate, do every day physical activities and live independently. You may not know that someone has this disability unless you are told.

Tips:

- Don't make assumptions about what a person can do.
- Use plain language.
- Provide one piece of information at a time.

People who have learning disabilities

Learning disabilities encompass a variety of disorders, such as dyslexia, that affect how a person takes in or retain information. This disability may become apparent when a person has difficulty reading material or understanding the information you are providing.

Tips:

- Be patient – people with some learning disabilities may take a little longer to process information, to understand and to respond.
- Provide information in a way that works for your customer.

How to interact with people who use assistive devices

An assistive device is a tool, technology or other mechanism that enables a person with a disability to do everyday tasks and activities, such as moving, communicating or lifting (wheelchair, magnifier, etc.).

Tips:

- Don't touch or handle any assistive without permission.
- Don't move assistive devices or equipment, such as canes and walkers, out of your customer's reach.
- Let your customer know about the accessible features in the building that are appropriate to their needs.

How to interact with people who use service animals

Service animals provide a variety of services to individuals with disabilities to allow them independence in their tasks of daily living. They may be used as guide animals or hearing alert animals, to alert of oncoming seizures or calm anxiety, or for manual dexterity.

If you cannot easily identify that the animal is a service animal, you can ask the person to provide documentation from a regulated health professional. The documentation must confirm that the person needs the service animal for reasons relating to their disability.

Please refer to the Corporate Accessibility Policy for more information.

Tips:

- Avoid touching or addressing service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- Avoid making assumptions about the animal. If you're not sure if the animal is a pet or a service animal, ask your customer.

How to interact with people who require the assistance of a support person

A support person can be a personal support worker, interpreter, volunteer, family member or friend. They may accompany your customer to assist them with communication, mobility, personal care, or medical needs.

In certain cases, your organization might require a person with a disability to be accompanied by a support person for health and safety reasons. Before making a decision, we must:

- Consult with the person with a disability to understand their needs
- Consider health or safety reasons based on available evidence
- Determine if there is no other reasonable way to protect the health and safety of the person or others on the premises.

In such a situation, you must waive the admission fee or fare for the support person, if one exists.

Tips:

- Speak directly to your customer, not their support person.
- If you're not sure which person is the customer, take your lead from the person requesting service, or ask.

What to do if a person is having difficulty accessing your goods or services

If you notice that your customer is having difficulty accessing your goods or services, a good starting point is to simply ask how you can help. Remember that your customers are your best source for information about their needs. The solution can be simple and they will likely appreciate your attention and consideration.

Sometimes in our jobs we are accustomed to doing things a certain way and have a hard

time seeing other options. It is really important to have an open mind. If someone has a request or suggestion that may be different, be willing to consider it. Likewise, it is okay to go above and beyond what you consider part of your job, for example offering directions or leading someone around the building.

If you do have a situation where things do not go well and you are not sure how you could have handled it any differently, resources are available. Talk with your colleagues and managers. Talk with your Accessibility Coordinator; they are there to help you out.

The Accessibility Coordinator is also the connection to the City of Stratford Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC), of which the majority of members have disabilities. The AAC has insight and advice to offer based on their experience.

City of Stratford Accessibility Coordinator

Phone: 519-271-0250 extension 237

Email: accessibility@stratford.ca

Our Policy

Policy Statement:

We are committed to providing equal treatment to people with disabilities with respect to the use and benefit of services, programs, goods and facilities in a manner that respects their dignity, independence, and integration, and is equitable in relation to the broader public. This commitment extends to residents, employees, visitors and other stakeholders with visible and non-visible disabilities.

Communication:

Communicate in a way that takes into account a person's disability.

Format of Documents and Information:

Provide print and verbal information in a format that takes into account a person's disability; for example, large print, Braille, audio, electronic, ASL interpreter, etc.

Assistive Devices:

Allow customers to use their assistive devices to access our services. Become familiar with the assistive devices that we offer customers and how to use them.

Service Animals:

Allow customers to be accompanied by their service animals on all areas of our premises open to the public, unless excluded by law, in which case find an alternative way to offer services. If you cannot identify that the animal is a service animal, you can ask the person to provide documentation from a regulated health professional including:

- A member of the College of Audiologists and Speech-Language Pathologists of Ontario.
- A member of the College of Chiropractors of Ontario.
- A member of the College of Nurses of Ontario.
- A member of the College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario.
- A member of the College of Optometrists of Ontario.
- A member of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario.
- A member of the College of Physiotherapists of Ontario.
- A member of the College of Psychologists of Ontario.

- A member of the College of Registered Psychotherapists and Registered Mental Health Therapists of Ontario. O. Reg. 165/16, s. 16.

Support Persons:

Allow customers to be accompanied by their support persons on all areas of our premises. Admission fees will be waived for support persons, and will be advertised as such.

Ask before disclosing confidential information in front of a support person.

In certain cases, you might require a person with a disability to be accompanied by a support person for health and safety reasons.

Before making a decision, consult with the person with a disability to understand their needs; consider health or safety reasons based on available evidence; and determine if there is no other reasonable way to protect the health and safety of the person or others on the premises.

Disruption to Services:

In the event that there is a temporary service disruption in the availability of facilities, programs, services or goods used by persons with disabilities (for example, temporary loss of lift service), we shall give notice to the public of the reason for the disruption, the date(s) of disruption, the anticipated duration and a description of alternative facilities or services, if any, that are available.

Feedback Process:

Encourage and accept feedback from all customers directly or through referral to the Accessibility Coordinator. The feedback process is to be accessible by providing or arranging for accessible formats and communication supports, upon request.

Disability impacts the lives of many Ontarians, and the numbers of people with disabilities is increasing as the population ages. Today, over 15% of Ontario's population has a disability, including more than 40% of people over age 65. About 1.5 million people in Ontario have a disability. That's one in 7 people.

