

VOTE
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Accessible Customer Service

Handbook for Election Staff

Did you know that 1 in 7 people in Ontario has a disability?

Accessible Customer Service:

It is about treating everyone with respect and dignity, and as simple as asking: how may I help you?

Take a moment to ask “**how may I help you?**”

Ask, do not assume, and never assist unless asked to.

Listen and speak directly to the person.

Know the accommodations and special services available.



Welcome to the Election Team!

As an Election Official, you play a critical role in creating a positive voting experience for all voters, including people with disabilities. Accessible customer service includes understanding that access to the services we provide may require some flexibility or adjustment to be accessible to some individuals.

This handbook contains helpful information and tips on how you can provide accessible customer service.



Serving People with Different Disabilities

Physical disabilities

There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities. Some people may use mobility aids such as a wheelchair, scooter, crutches or a cane. Some may have difficulty sitting, walking or standing for long periods of time.

Service Tips:

- Remove obstacles and arrange furniture to provide clear paths.
- When talking to someone in a wheelchair or scooter consider sitting down so you can make eye contact with them.
- Do not touch items or equipment without permission.
- If you have permission to move a person's wheelchair do not leave them in an awkward, dangerous or undignified position.
- If there is a lineup, offer to provide a chair to anyone who may not be able to stand for long periods of time.

Cognitive disabilities

Cognitive disabilities can impact a person's behaviour, understanding, communication or ability to remember information. This can include someone with a brain injury, dementia, learning disability, or developmental disability.

Service Tips:

- Do not assume what a person can or cannot do.
- Use plain language and speak in short sentences.
- Be patient – people with some cognitive disabilities may take a little longer to process information, to understand and respond.
- Speak directly to the person, not to their companion or attendant.

Vision loss

There are varying degrees of vision loss. Some people with vision loss can be completely blind, while the majority are partially-sighted. Some people with vision loss may use a service animal or a white cane.

Service Tips:

- Do not assume the person cannot see you.
- Identify yourself when you approach the person and speak directly to them.
- Never touch the person without asking permission, unless it is an emergency.
- Offer your elbow to guide the person and walk slowly.
- When providing directions or instructions, be precise and descriptive. Use measurements, such as feet or metres for example.
- If you are guiding a person, do not leave them standing in the middle of a room. Take them to a chair, table or wall, to help them stay oriented.
- Remove obstacles in advance if possible for a clear path of travel. If an unexpected obstacle appears in your path when guiding someone, let them know the obstacle is there and then guide them around it.
- Do not walk away without saying goodbye. If you need to leave the person, let them know you are leaving.

Speech or language disabilities

Someone with cerebral palsy, hearing loss or other disabilities may have difficulty with verbal communication. Some people may use a communication board or other assistive devices.

Service Tips:

- Do not assume that a person with a speech disability cannot understand you.
- Whenever possible, ask questions that can be answered with “yes” or a “no”.
- Be patient. Do not interrupt or finish the person’s sentences.
- Let the individual explain the best way to communicate with them.

Hearing loss

People who have hearing loss may be deaf, deafened or hard of hearing. Some people may use a hearing aid, and some can read lips. They may also be oral deaf - unable to hear, but prefer to talk instead of using sign language.

Service Tips:

- Get the person's attention and face the person before speaking.
- Offer another method of communicating such as using pen and paper.
- Direct the person to a quieter area to reduce background noise.
- Make sure you are in a well-lit area where the person can see your face.
- Speak directly to the person, even if they are accompanied by an interpreter or intervenor. These are people who help those who are deaf and blind.

Mental health disabilities

Mental health disability is a broad term that encompasses disabilities such as schizophrenia, depression, and anxiety. Mental health disabilities range in severity and can affect a person's capacity to cope with everyday challenges, think clearly, and concentrate.

Service Tips:

- Treat everyone with the same respect and consideration.
- Listen carefully and be calm, confident and reassuring.
- Do not be confrontational. Make instructions clear and, if needed, set limits with the person as you would others.
- If someone is speaking very loudly, respond softly. It will often help them to modulate their tones.
- If someone appears to be in a crisis, obtain assistance and ask them to tell you the best way that you can help.

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. Personal assistive devices can include things like wheelchairs, hearing aids, white canes or speech amplification devices, magnifiers, special lighting, and speech synthesizers.

Service Tips:

- Do not touch assistive devices unnecessarily, unless it is an emergency.
- Consider a person's wheelchair or walker as an extension of the person's body.
- Always ask for permission before touching assistive devices.
- Do not lean on the wheelchair or walker, or rest your foot on a wheel of the device.
- Remove obstacles and arrange furniture to provide a clear passage.
- Avoid asking what the device is for, if it is not apparent.



Service Animals

Service animals are trained to assist people in a variety of ways, depending on their disability. It is the law that you cannot refuse a person entry to a voting place because they are accompanied by a service animal. There are a variety of service animals including, but not limited to, dogs, small horses and birds. Not all service animals wear special vests or harnesses.

Service Tips:

Do not touch or address service animals. They are not pets, they are working and have to pay attention at all times.



Assisting Voters with Disabilities in the Voting Place

As an Election Official, you may be asked to assist a voter in the voting place.

Service Tips:

- Use discretion when asking a voter if they require assistance.
- Do not single out a voter if you believe they may have a disability.
- Do not discuss a voter's needs or disability in front of other voters.
- Treat all voters with dignity and respect.
- If you are assisting a voter with marking their ballot:
 - Remember that the secrecy and confidentiality voting is very important.
 - Use quiet conversation or a pen and paper to communicate with the voter.
 - Be mindful of other voters at the voting screens.
 - Give the voter time to review their selection(s).
 - Ensure the voter's ballot is placed in the secrecy folder once it has been marked.
 - Direct the voter to the vote tabulator.
 - If requested, accompany the voter to the vote tabulator.

Barriers to Accessibility

Attitudinal barriers are caused by how people think or behave. They can be based on stereotypes and discrimination or a lack of understanding.

Examples:

- Thinking that people with disabilities are inferior
- Making assumptions about what people can and cannot do. For instance, assuming that a person with a speech disability cannot understand you because they are not responding to you verbally

Information, communication and technology barriers occur when a person cannot easily understand information or communicate their answers.

Examples:

- Print is too small to read
- Signs are posted too high to be read
- A noisy environment where the person cannot hear or concentrate

Physical barriers are features of buildings or spaces that make it difficult or impossible for people with disabilities to access them.

Examples:

- Pathway in the voting room is too narrow
- Poor lighting in the voting screen area
- Crowds of people that might block paths



**PUSH
TO OPEN**

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