



Volunteer Toronto

Advanced

Accessibility and the AODA

Resource Guide & Workbook

Compiled by the Engaging Organizations Department

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Using this Resource Guide & Workbook

The Accessibility and the AODA resource guide & workbook has been compiled by Volunteer Toronto to help community groups, non-profits and charitable organizations with the tools to ensure compliance to the AODA. Each resource has been selected to give you an idea of what to do effectively serve clients with disabilities and recruit & work with volunteers with disabilities. It is important to remember that these are guidelines informed by best practices; you can adapt them to your situation as needed.

Accessibility and the AODA

The **Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act** (AODA) is provincial law that is in place to ensure your organization is accessible for all clients, community members, staff and volunteers with disabilities. In order to effectively serve your mission and your community – and ensure your organization is following the AODA's guidelines and policies, you must follow the Customer Service Standards to run an accessible program.

This workbook will cover the legally mandated requirements of the AODA for your clients as well as the best practices for ensuring volunteers with disabilities can effectively serve your mission and contribute to your volunteer program. Here are the contents of the workbook:

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What is a Disability According to the AODA?

The word “disability” has many connotations and can be interpreted broadly. When you think of “disability,” what comes to mind? Do you think of a person who uses a wheelchair? Or a person with a service animal? There are many kinds and degrees of disabilities – being hard of hearing is different from being deaf, having low vision is different from being legally blind.

A disability can happen to anyone at any time. Some people are born with a disability, while others may develop a disability because of an illness or an accident. Sometimes it’s because a person is aging.

There are a variety of disabilities that fall under five general categories:

- **Physical disabilities**
including mobility (use of a wheelchair or walking-assistive device), visual impairment, hearing impairment, physical impairment, deaf-blind
- **Developmental disabilities**
including Autism Spectrum Disorder, down syndrome, cerebral palsy
- **Chronic Illness**
including terminal illnesses, chronic Fatigue Syndrome, back pain/physical pain, diabetes
- **Mental Illness**
including anxiety disorders, mood disorders, psychotic disorders, addiction, personality disorders
- **Learning disabilities**
including Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, Dysgraphia, challenged ability to store, process or produce information

Some disabilities can be in multiple categories, such as speech or language disabilities.

A person who has any of these, or any other disability, is not a “disabled person.” Instead, think about the person first – “person with a disability.”

The Four Principles of the AODA

The AODA is working with all sectors of business to create an Ontario accessible for all people with disabilities by 2025. To achieve this mission, the AODA is driven by these four core principles:

DIGNITY: What does the principle of dignity mean?

Policies, procedures and practices that respect the dignity of a person with a disability are those that treat them as clients who are as valued and as deserving of effective and full service as any other client. They do not treat people with disabilities as an afterthought or force them to accept lesser service, quality or convenience. Service delivery needs to take into account how people with disabilities can effectively access and use services and show respect for these methods.

INDEPENDENCE: What does the principle of independence mean?

In some instances, independence means freedom from control or influence of others and the freedom to make your own choices. In other situations, it may mean the freedom to do things in your own way. People who may move or speak more slowly should not be denied an opportunity to participate in a program or service because of this factor. A volunteer should not hurry them or take over a task for them if they prefer to do it themselves in their own way.

INTEGRATION: What does the principle of integration mean?

Integrated services are those that allow people with disabilities to fully benefit from the same services, in the same place and in the same or similar way as other customers. Integration means that policies, practices and procedures are designed to be accessible to everyone including people with disabilities. Sometimes integration does not serve the needs of all people with disabilities. Alternative measures, rather than integration, might be necessary because the person with a disability requires it or because you cannot provide another option at the time. If you are unable to remove a barrier to accessibility, you need to consider what else can be done to provide services to people with disabilities.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY: What does the principle of equal opportunity mean?

Equal opportunity means having the same chances, options, benefits and results as others. In the case of services it means that people with disabilities have the same opportunity to benefit from the way you provide goods or services as others. They should not have to make significantly more effort to access or obtain service. They should also not have to accept lesser quality or more inconvenience.

AODA for Volunteers and the Clients they Serve

When the AODA became law in 2005, their goal was create an accessible Ontario by 2025 by removing barriers in a number of areas. Under the AODA, mandatory Accessibility Standards have been developed for all organizations and businesses that provide goods or services in Ontario to the public or to third parties. Accessibility Standards are the rules that all businesses and organizations – including nonprofit organizations, agencies and other charities – in Ontario will have to follow in order to identify, remove and prevent barriers to accessibility.

The AODA's five Accessibility Standards are:

- Customer Service
- Transportation
- Information and Communications
- Employment
- Built Environment

COMPLIANCE & YOU

Nonprofit organizations with at least one paid employee (full, part-time or seasonal) in Ontario must comply with the Customer Service Standard when providing goods or services in Ontario. Organizations with 50 or more employees have additional requirements related to documentation and reporting.

[Click here to learn more](#)

As part of the AODA's continued roll-out to 2021, each Accessibility Standard has a different enforcement date based on a number of factors. This section of the workbook will primarily focus on the Customer Service Standard as it applies to clients your organization – and your volunteers – will serve. The Customer Service Standard came into effect for all nonprofit and charitable organizations on January 1, 2012.

Inclusive Client Service

All volunteers of your organization are required to comply with the **Customer Service Standard** of the AODA. Volunteers are an agent and important representative of your organization and often present one of the main public faces of your organization. Volunteers have the right to expect sufficient training from your organization in order to comply with the Standard. In keeping with the Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement, volunteers should be treated as a valued and integral member of the human resources team and should receive training that is customized to the volunteer role and individual needs. Volunteers also have a responsibility to attend the required training and comply with the training they receive.

Some of the main aspects of the Customer Service Standard that volunteers may encounter in their role include:

Adhering to the principles of independence, dignity, integration and equal opportunity in all experiences with people with disabilities	Understanding and supporting the use of assistive devices, support animals and support persons
Communicating in a manner that respects people's needs	Understanding your organization's feedback process

Ensuring your organization is compliant with the Customer Service Standard and providing services to all existing and potential clients – regardless of ability – requires a few steps and a greater understanding of accessibility across your organization. Focusing on inclusive client service will ensure all members of your community have access to your services.

Let's start with some definitions:

Customer/client	Person with a disability	Person-first language
The person receiving the service – the AODA uses “customer”, but in the case of non-profit and charitable organizations, the term “client” is more appropriate	Language that is respectful of the individual	Recognizes that service is to the person, not to the disability

Accessible customer service is about understanding that people with disabilities may have specific needs. It can be as simple as asking **“How can I help?”** and making small changes to meet the need. Look at your organization's policies, practices and procedures to determine ways to meet the needs of all clients in your community.

Volunteers should be aware and understanding of permissions for people with disabilities:

- **Using personal assistive devices** – wheelchairs, white cane, oxygen tanks
- **Accompaniment by a service animal** – seeing-eye dog, seizure alert animal, psychiatric service dog
- **Accompaniment by a support person** – communication, guiding, physical needs

Through training and practice, volunteers should be able to offer all services equally to any person, regardless of ability or disability. *Volunteers must:*

Communicate in a manner that takes into account a person's disability	have written instructions along with verbal, guide through movement
Provide notice of a temporary disruption in service	indicate ahead of time if possible and use any means necessary to contact clients
Give advance notice of admission fee if charged, and if applicable to support person	in many cases, you should not charge the support person an admission fee
Clearly explain the accessible process for your organization to receive feedback and respond to complaints	feedback box, e-mail inbox, feedback phone line

One of the most important parts of having an inclusive client service model in your organization is to be **aware of** and **eliminate barriers**. Barriers come in all shapes and forms, but can be categorized as attitude, physical or communication. Attitude barriers could include stereotypes and language that focuses on a person's disability rather than on their abilities. Physical barriers tend to be the most obvious, such as the lack of ramps or appropriate accessible washrooms. Communication barriers might be noticeable at first – information may be provided only in print in one font size, or the website is not properly viewable in a high contrast mode. Acknowledging and addressing these barriers can help make it easier to become more welcoming and accessible for people with disabilities.

To help you properly prepare an inclusive client service model for your organization, you can follow this process to stay on track:

1. Determine a person (or persons) to be responsible for preparing accessible policies, practices and procedures
2. Identify who needs to be trained – which volunteers may need more training or more specific training than others
3. Establish a training roster and schedule
4. Communicate plans and progress to engage commitment in being fully accessible form everyone in your organization

Customer Service Standard Policy

Creating an inclusive client service policy will help ensure your organization is compliant with the AODA's Customer Service Standard and will provide a guiding document for your community-serving volunteers to refer back to when working with clients with disabilities. Volunteer Toronto's Customer Service Standard-compliant policy is below, as well as a list of items you can include in your own accessibility policy.

Preamble	<i>Policies, practices and procedures were developed by staff and volunteers who had received the appropriate training on the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act and the Customer Service Standard. They are regularly reviewed to ensure that they reflect current service delivery needs and standards. Staff and volunteers are encouraged to identify any modifications needed as circumstances or services change.</i>
Core Principles	Volunteer Toronto strives to ensure that our service delivery supports the AODA core principles of independence, dignity, integration and equal opportunity. Volunteer Toronto encourages all nonprofit organizations to respect the AODA core principles when engaging and managing volunteers. Volunteer Toronto also encourages all nonprofit organizations to adopt the Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement, thus committing to value and support the contribution of volunteers through respectful, meaningful and inclusive engagement.
Specific	Volunteer Toronto subscriber organizations are asked to assess and identify the actual abilities needed for a volunteer position when posting opportunities on our web site.
Assistive devices, service animals & support persons	Volunteer Toronto: • allows customers with disabilities to use assistive devices to access our services and wherever possible provides other measures when needed. • welcomes guide dogs or other certified service animals to accompany customers in any area of the premises open to the public. • encourages anyone with a disability to have their support person accompany them to attend an office visit, a training session or a special event. No attendance fees are charged for a support person. This information is on our web site and on our registration forms.
Feedback	Volunteer Toronto provides a contact form on our web site for customer feedback about the accessibility of our services to people with disabilities. We have a process for responding promptly to feedback and will take appropriate action on any complaints that we receive.

Facility, building, office and/or used space	Volunteer Toronto's office is in an accessible building and provides an accessible washroom. Space can be adjusted in the waiting area or in an interview room for assistive devices, a service animal or a support person. Volunteer Toronto ensures that venues chosen for off-premise events are fully accessible and have adopted and implemented policies that support the AODA. Outreach initiatives organized by Volunteer Toronto will take place in accessible facilities and consider possible accommodation needs to communicate with those attending. Response to requests for Outreach initiatives to take place at a hosted venue will be assessed for accessibility and accommodation needs. Volunteer Toronto strives to eliminate or minimize the use of scented products in our office and training space. Our web site asks that individuals who wish to visit our office and registrants for training events observe our request for a scent free environment. Registration forms for Volunteer Toronto events request information about the accessibility needs of registrants. When accommodation is requested, contact is made to ensure needs can be met.
Communication	Volunteer Toronto communicates with people with disabilities in a manner that takes into account the person's disability. Our web site provides an adjustment for font size. Office reception considers alternate forms of communication based on individual need. On request, Volunteer Toronto will provide materials in advance of a training event to a registrant with a disability, or their support person, to facilitate an inclusive and effective learning experience.
Training	Volunteer Toronto provides training on serving people with disabilities to all staff, volunteers and students who interact with the public on our behalf as outlined in the Customer Service Standard. New members of staff will receive training on the AODA and on Volunteer Toronto's policies, procedures and practices for serving people with disabilities. The staff handbook will include the training material required by the Customer Service Standard, as well as VT policies, procedures and practices. All Volunteer Toronto volunteers receive training on serving people with disabilities and an orientation to Volunteer Toronto policies, procedures and practices. The volunteer handbook contains training material as required by the Customer Service Standard and Volunteer Toronto policies, procedures and practices.

CSS Training for Volunteers

Providing training for your volunteers on the Customer Service Standards – and your inclusive client service guidelines – is integral at the beginning of a volunteer's engagement and throughout their work with your organization. Regardless of the size of your organization, every volunteer should receive training to ensure your organization is providing the best service to all clients and developing policies, practices and procedures to that are in line with the Customer Service Standard and the AODA as a whole.

Your training for volunteers should primarily focus on preparing volunteers for welcoming, interacting with and communicating with clients with disabilities. Begin with general information on providing service to clients with disabilities:

- If a volunteer is unsure of what to do, always start with asking the client “may I help you?” – clients with disabilities will know if they need help and how you can provide it
- Volunteers must always speak directly to the person with a disability, not to their support person or companion
- Avoid stereotypes and making assumptions about what type of disability or disabilities a person has – remind volunteers that some disabilities are not visible and clients are not required to give information about any disability they may have
- Volunteers should be patient – people with some kinds of disabilities may take a little longer to understand and respond; listen carefully when starting any interaction with a client
- Volunteers must not touch or speak to service animals as they are working and have to pay attention at all times
- Volunteers must not touch assistive devices without permission
- Consider offering interactive client interaction opportunities, such as self-serve checkout or direct payment services, that can be used by people with various types of disabilities
- Consider including people with disabilities in the testing or evaluation of communication services

Your volunteer training should then cover a specific range of disabilities that volunteers may interact with. For more information on each, click the link to be taken to a “Tip Sheet” on ways to interact and communicate with clients with each type of disability. Use these tips to develop your volunteer training.

Welcoming and interacting with clients:

- [With vision impairment](#)
- [Who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing](#)
- [Who are physically disabled](#)
- [With speech impairments](#)
- [Who are Deaf-Blind](#)
- [With mental health disabilities](#)
- [With intellectual or development disabilities](#)
- [With a learning disability](#)

You should also cover some specifics of delivering services to clients by other means, specifically:

- [Delivering services in the home to clients with disabilities](#)
- [Delivering services over the phone to clients with disabilities](#)

After covering all of this material, use an assessment tool to ensure that volunteers have retained the information and will comply in future interactions with clients and community members. Assessment tool examples include: scenario/role play activity, quiz/test, group discussion, matching activity.

Be sure to provide additional resources for your volunteers to refer to during their engagement with your organization – if all volunteers receive a handbook, include a section about the Customer Service Standard and working with clients with disabilities. If you keep centralized policies and documents, make sure that the content of the training is readily available amongst these files. You can even include this information on your website, either publicly accessible or in a volunteer and staff portal. Either way, ensure your volunteers have the materials and follow-up information they’ll need to effectively serve and work with clients with disabilities.

AODA for Managers of Volunteers

The first part of this workbook primarily addresses communicating, interacting and working with clients who may have disabilities. As a manager of volunteers, you may also engage and work with volunteers with disabilities. Along with providing training on the Customer Service standard, advanced compliance measures are required by your organization. These refer to the **Integrated Access Standards**:

- Primarily covering the Transportation, Information & Communications and Employment standards
- Overarching AODA compliance requirements for accessible information – providing physical, digital, high-resolution, audio, sign-language, etc. media
- Integrating accessibility into all aspects of programs and services
- Feedback requirement designed to allow clients, community members and volunteers to provide feedback on your services and programs
- Multiple methods of feedback: e-mail, mailed-in, voicemail, telephone
- Ensuring volunteers are able to receive and pass on feedback, as well as providing it themselves

COMPLIANCE & YOU

Nonprofit organizations with fewer than 50 staff (including part-time, seasonal and contract employees but not including volunteers), had a compliance deadline of January 1, 2016 for providing updated training and feedback opportunities (the Integrated Access Standards). Organizations with 50 or more staff had a deadline of January 1, 2015.

[Click here to learn more](#)

COMPLIANCE & YOU

Nonprofit organizations with fewer than 50 staff (including part-time, seasonal and contract employees but not including volunteers), have a compliance deadline of January 1, 2017 for the Employment Standard. Organizations with 50 or more staff had a deadline of January 1, 2016.

[Click here to learn more](#)

As a volunteer manager, it is recommended that you adhere to the AODA's **Employment Standard** for staff and volunteers as a best practice. The Employment Standard primarily focusses on recruitment, assuring applicants that your organization will accommodate candidates with disabilities throughout the process. If a candidate requests accommodations, your organization is obligated to work with the candidate to ensure they are able to apply in a timely way. Additionally, you are required to ensure staff and volunteers have access to accessibility information and you must work with staff and volunteers to create accommodation plans to ensure they can continue working and contributing to your organization.

Guidelines for Accessible Volunteer Selection

When posting volunteer roles, ensure your organization's diversity and accessibility statement is located somewhere in the position description, most commonly at the end. This statement should address your organization's commitment to an accessible work place and providing accommodations for applicants. This is a statement that Volunteer Toronto has used when posting roles: "Volunteer Toronto is dedicated to building a workforce that reflects the diversity of the community in which we serve. We are committed to providing an inclusive and accessible workplace."

As part of the Ontario Human Rights Code, you cannot discriminate against any volunteer candidate with a disability. Remember that some disabilities may be invisible, such as a mental illness or a learning disability. When recruiting for volunteers, make a clear statement of the skills and abilities you're looking for as well as the tasks and requirements of the role. If a potential candidate with a disability notices an element of the role that they may not be able to do, it's likely they won't apply. However, if they do apply, you must ensure you have considered all potential accommodations for that role and the volunteer before you decline the potential volunteer's application.

Ensuring the recruitment and screening process is as accessible as possible for potential volunteers is important to ensure that you are recruiting from the largest potential pool of individuals. Your accessibility and diversity statement will help attract a wide range of volunteer candidates, but you should also consider ways to make your selection process more accessible. Here are a number of potential disabilities and suggestions for creating a more accessible selection process.

Type of Disability	Accommodation for Selection Process
Vision Impairment	Large-print application form, interview questions, information; magnifying glass
Deaf, deafened or hard of hearing	Written questions; sign-language interpreter; written interview
Physically disabled	Interview in accessible facility; web video interview; e-mailed application (instead of in-person)
Speech impairments	Written interview; pre-recorded video; longer time period for interview
Intellectual disabilities	Interview questions provided in advance; task assessment; support person assistance
Learning disabilities	Interview questions provided in advance; multiple application/interview techniques (portfolio, video application)

Accommodations for Volunteers

Along with providing accommodations for volunteers with disabilities during the recruitment and screening process, you should ensure you are able to provide accommodations for volunteers with disabilities that engage with your organization. An important distinction about accommodating volunteers with disabilities is that this should not cause undue hardship for you or your organization. Undue hardship could mean cost, resources, time and/or health and safety factors. For instance, you may have a volunteer role that requires moving around a park or large facility for an event. You may have a candidate looking to fill this role who has a mobility disability. If the the cost of accommodating this volunteer's disability would be too high for your organization or require the use of resources over and above what is commonly used, then this would cause undue hardship for your organization.

For the most part, it is easy to create accommodations that will help any volunteer succeed and do the best they can in their role. Here are a few examples of volunteers with disabilities and the potential accommodation for their role. Consider some other possibilities in the chart below.

Volunteer with Disability	Accommodation
Data entry volunteer with failing vision and hand cramps	Larger computer screen & ergonomic keyboard
Graphic design volunteer with social anxiety and depression	Volunteer is able to work from home and "telecommute" for meetings
Research volunteer who is hard of hearing	Mirror near desk so volunteer can see when people are coming, captioning on videos for research
Event volunteer with a speech impairment	Provide signs for direction and answering questions to all volunteers
Volunteer with a learning disability	
Volunteer with a chronic illness	
Volunteer who uses a walker	

Resources & Links

Volunteer Toronto's AODA Enabling Change resource to assist compliance with Board, Senior Leadership, Staff and Volunteers	https://volunteertoronto.site-ym.com/?aoda
Volunteer Toronto's Legislation Related to Volunteer Management online learning course – ensure you're compliant with the AODA and many other municipal, provincial and federal laws related to volunteer management	https://volunteertoronto.site-ym.com/store/ViewProduct.aspx?id=4117563
Accessibility Directorate of Ontario – includes anonymous <i>Accessibility Compliance Wizard</i> to help ensure your organization is up to date	www.accesson.ca
Human Resources Professionals Association (HRPA) AODA compliance resources – including details on working with clients and accessible recruitment & selection	http://www.hrpa.ca/Pages/AODA.aspx
<i>Working Together: The Ontario Human Rights Code and the AODA</i> – a free web learning service from the Ontario Human Rights Commission about intersections of accessibility and the Ontario Human Rights Code	http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/learning/working-together-code-and-aoda
<i>Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act</i> – full text of the AODA	http://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/05a11
Access Forward – <i>General AODA compliance information</i> for non-profit organizations, including feedback processes and other volunteer-related activities	http://www.accessforward.ca/resources/Training%20Booklet%20for%20Small%20Private%20and%20Not%20For%20Profit%20Organizations.pdf

Next Steps

To continue your volunteer management journey, there are a number of other workbooks created by Volunteer Toronto to assist you every step of the way:

Basic

- Planning, Recruiting & Selecting
- Training, Supervising & Supporting
- Evaluating, Retaining & Developing
- Engaging Group Volunteers
- Professional Development for Managers of Volunteers

Intermediate

- Planning for Volunteer Involvement
- Volunteer Recruitment
- Volunteer Selection
- Training & Orientation
- Volunteer Retention & Recognition

Advanced

- Giving Volunteers Feedback
- Short-Term Volunteers
- Long-Term Volunteers
- Volunteer Boundaries & Dismissal

Check out our **Online Learning Centre** for a variety of courses to further enhance your learning and improve your practice - go to volunteertoronto.ca/?page=OnlineLearning

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