

Customer Service Accessibility Information Guide

Preamble

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* was enacted by the Ontario Government in 2005. Its purpose is stated in Section 1:

“Recognizing the history of discrimination against persons with disabilities in Ontario, the purpose of this Act is to benefit all Ontarians by,

- (a) developing, implementing and enforcing accessibility standards in order 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; and
- (b) providing for the involvement of persons with disabilities, of the Government of Ontario and of representatives of industries and of various sectors of the economy in the development of the accessibility standards.”

Under this *Act*, a number of regulations are anticipated addressing several areas of accessibility. These regulations will propose standards that must be met by organizations across the province including all levels of government and their various bodies. The first standard is the customer service standard, which this information guide and related policy addresses. Other standards that are in the process of being developed include transportation, information and communication, employment and the built environment. These standards are expected by regulation over the next few years.

The Customer Service regulation establishes accessibility standards for customer service and applies to every provider of goods or services. All public bodies including governments and their related organizations must be in compliance with this regulation by January 1, 2010. All private sector organizations must be in compliance by January 1, 2012.

Expectations

This information guide is under the Customer Service Accessibility Policy as adopted by the Council of the Township of Malahide. You need to be familiar with both the policy and the guide.

When providing services to the public, regardless of whether they have a disability or not, it is expected of all members of the municipal organization (as

defined the Township of Malahide's Accessible Customer Service Policy) to do so in a respectful, courteous and considerate manner. Rudeness and disrespect will not be tolerated and those persons exhibiting such behaviour may be subject to disciplinary action.

Communication

In addition, when providing services to a person with a disability, the following applies:

1. When interacting with persons with disabilities, the Staff must take into consideration the particular type of disability that they have. For instance, if a person is deaf, the Staff may need to communicate by writing notes to each other. If a person is confined to a wheelchair, the Staff may need to move to a different location within the office to provide face-to-face communication. If a person has a mental impairment or developmental disability, the Staff may need to break down the information into simple parts using easy to understand words. It is up to the Staff providing the service to assess the situation, discuss options with the person accessing the service if necessary and provide the service in the most appropriate manner.
2. When interacting with a person with a disability who requires the assistance of a service animal, the Staff shall bear in mind the following:
 - (a) Do not pet or touch a service animal. Petting or touching a service animal when the animal is working distracts the animal from the task at hand.
 - (b) Do not feed a service animal.
 - (c) Do not deliberately startle a service animal. Avoid making noises at the animal (growling, whistling, etc.)
 - (d) Do not separate or attempt to separate a person from his or her service animal.
 - (e) Avoid initiating conversation about the service animal, the person's disabilities or other service animals one has known.
 - (f) Remember that not all disabilities are visible. The nature of a person's disability is a private matter and you are not entitled to inquire for details. Further, a person is not required to provide any information about training or the specific tasks the service animal performs.

3. When interacting with a person with a disability who requires the assistance of a support person, the Staff shall bear in mind the following:
 - (a) Talk to the person who is accessing the services offered by the municipality and not to the support person. If the support person is providing language intervention (sign language, interpretation, etc.), all responses should be directed to the person making the inquiry and not the support person.
 - (b) Do not separate or attempt to separate a person from his or her support person.
 - (c) Remember that not all disabilities are visible. The nature of a person's disability is a private matter and the Staff are not entitled to inquire for details. Further, a person is not required to provide any information about the specific tasks the support person assists with.

4. During the development of printed or electronic information, the Staff should design the originals to be more accessible. Have large print or screen-reader compatible options available in the office or on the web site. Items to consider when producing printed materials:
 - (a) Contrast – use high contrast colours for text and background
 - (b) Point size – keep text larger (12-18 points) and use a mix of upper and lower case letters
 - (c) Leading – the space between lines of text should be at least 25 percent of the font size
 - (d) Font – use standard fonts with easily recognizable characters and a medium thickness; avoid light type with thin strokes
 - (e) Margins and columns – separate text into columns to make it easier to read, use wide binding margins or spiral bindings; flat pages work best for vision aids such as magnifiers
 - (f) Paper finish – use a matte or non-glossy finish to cut down on glare, avoid watermarks or complicated background designs
 - (g) Clean design and simplicity – use distinctive colours, sizes and shapes on the covers of materials to make them easier to tell apart. (Reference: Canadian National Institute for the Blind, *Print Clarity Standards*, June 2006)

Resolutions

If a person with a particular type of disability is having difficulty accessing the Municipality's services, the Staff should discuss with them the barrier they have encountered. The discussion should include alternatives the person would like to use, alternatives the Municipality can readily provide and a mutual agreement as to the method of service delivery. The discussion should be documented and forwarded to the appropriate Department Head. Where feasible, long-term solutions should be implemented to address the barrier or issue encountered.