



THE TOWNSHIP OF UXBRIDGE

“May I Help You?”

Understanding Accessible Customer Service

Volunteer / Staff Guide

Part #1: Background

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) was passed by the Ontario legislature with the goal of creating standards to improve accessibility across the province. The AODA allows the government to develop specific standards of accessibility that are designed to help make Ontario more accessible.

One of the standards that has been developed, and is now law, is the Accessible Customer Service Standard. This standard details specific requirements for all providers of goods and/or services in Ontario.

Compliance with this Standard requires the Township of Uxbridge to:

1. Establish policies, practices and procedures on providing goods and/or services to people with disabilities.
2. Communicate with a person with a disability in a manner that takes into account his or her disability.
3. Allow people with disabilities to use their own personal assistive devices to access our goods and use our services.
4. Allow people with disabilities to be accompanied by their guide dog or service animal in those areas of Township premises that are open to the public, unless the animal is excluded by law.

5. Allow people with disabilities who use a support person to bring that person with them while accessing goods or services in Township premises open to the public or third parties.
6. Train staff, volunteers, contractors and any other people who interact with the public or other third parties on the Township's behalf on a number of topics as outlined in the Accessible Customer Service Standard.
7. Establish a process for people to provide feedback on how the Township provides goods or services to people with disabilities and how Staff will respond to any feedback and take action on any complaints.
8. Provide notice when facilities or services that people with disabilities rely on to access or use the Township's goods or services are temporarily disrupted.

Part #2: What is Accessible Customer Service?

The Township of Uxbridge is committed to providing customer service to persons with disabilities in a manner that:

- respects their **dignity** and **independence**;
- is **integrated** as fully as practicable into the method of service delivery;
- ensures an **opportunity equal** to that given to other customers to obtain and use the Township's goods and services; and
- allows persons with disabilities to benefit from the same services, in the same place and in a similar way as other customers.

Accessible customer service can mean many things. Mostly, it is the understanding that each individual may need a slightly different type of accommodation.

For example; a person who is blind may need to have information read aloud to them, an individual with a learning disability may need to have instructions written down and someone who uses a wheelchair may need help in finding a route they can use.

Accessible customer service is **good** customer service -- courteous, helpful and prompt.

Part #3: What can I do?

Always start with people first. In language, that means saying "a person with a disability", rather than "a disabled person". In any interaction, it means addressing the person's service needs, rather than focusing on the disability. Let's take some time to understand the definition of different disabilities and some tips to assist you in providing accessible customer service.

A “**Disability**” as defined by the AODA includes:

- any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is 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; or
- an injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the Insurance plan established under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997*; (“handicap”).

Each table below defines a specific category of disability and outlines some tips to help you provide service to Township ‘customers’.

Hearing Disabilities

Definition:	Tips for Serving Customers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deaf – severe to profound hearing loss • Hard of Hearing – a person who uses their residual hearing and speech to communicate • Deafened – caused to hear poorly or not at all 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attract customer’s attention before speaking – gentle touch on the shoulder or wave of your hand • look directly at the person • may have to use pen and paper • speak clearly, keep your hands away from your face • reduce background noise • ensure appropriate lighting

Vision Disabilities

Definition:	Tips for Serving Customers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • most individuals who are legally blind have some remaining vision – very few are totally blind • low or no vision can restrict ability to read signs, locate landmarks, or see hazards • may use guide dog or white cane • may need to view written documents in large print or with help of magnifier 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • don’t assume customer can’t see you • speak directly to the customer • offer your elbow to guide • if they accept, walk slowly, wait for permission • identify landmarks • be precise and descriptive with information • don’t leave customer

Deaf/Blind Disability

Definition:	Tips for Serving Customers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cannot see or hear to some degree • Many will be accompanied by a support person (a person who helps with communication by using Sign Language that involves touching the hands of the client) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • speak directly to your customer, not the support person • identify yourself to the support person

Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities

Definition:	Tips for Serving Customers
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Intellectual development and capacity that is below average• can mildly or profoundly limit ability to learn, communicate, do everyday activities and live independently• may be an invisible disability• they may understand you more than you realize	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• don't assume what a customer can or cannot do• use plain language• take your time – be patient• ask: "Do you understand this?"• provide one piece of information at a time – step-by-step instructions• offer information in more simple concepts

Learning Disabilities

Definition:	Tips for Serving Customers
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• affects how a person acquires, interprets, retains or takes in information• in many cases, individual has average or above-average intelligence• may affect<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ language-based learning○ mathematics○ writing, fine motor skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• take some time – be patient• demonstrate a willingness to assist• speak normally, clearly and directly to your customer• provide information in a way that works for your customer (i.e. pen and paper)• be prepared to explain any materials that you provide

Mental Health Disabilities

Definition:	Tips for Serving Customers
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• defined as the absence of psychological well-being and satisfactory adjustment to society• some common features of mental health disabilities are:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ phobias and panic attacks○ hallucinations○ mood swings○ bipolar disorders (depression and manic phases)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• treat customer with same level of respect and consideration• be confident and reassuring• do not be confrontational• if the customer is in crisis, ask how best to help• take customer seriously• don't take things personally

Speech or Language Disabilities

Definition:	Tips for Serving Customers
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• may have problems communicating• may have difficulty pronouncing words, may slur or stutter• may use communication boards or other assistive devices	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• don't make assumptions• give whatever time they need to get their point across• ask questions that can be answered 'yes' or 'no', if possible• don't interrupt or finish your customer's sentences• may have to use pen and paper• say: "I don't understand, can you please repeat that?"

Physical Disabilities Affecting Mobility:

Definition:	Tips for Serving Customers
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• may restrict a person in the following ways:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ control or speed of movement○ coordination and balance○ ability to grasp some objects○ ability to walk long distances○ ability to sit or stand for prolonged periods of time• can be present at birth, result from disease, injury• may be temporary	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• speak directly to the customer• ask before you help• respect personal space• don't move any items they may have• describe what you are going to do, beforehand• don't leave your customer in an awkward, dangerous or undignified position

Most importantly, recognize your nervousness and relax! People with disabilities are generally aware they may need some accommodations and will work with you. Just remember to ask how you can help.

Part #4: How should I interact with persons with disabilities who use assistive equipment and/or the assistance of a support person or a service animal?

1. **First**, let's take some time to understand what these different assistive options are:

"Assistive Equipment" includes:

- devices that people may bring with them or that are already on the premises and are used to assist persons with disabilities in carrying out activities or in accessing the services provided by the Township of Uxbridge.
- assistive devices include, but are not limited to, wheelchairs, wheelchair lifts, walkers, white canes used by people who are blind or who have low vision, note-taking devices, portable magnifiers, recording machines, assistive listening devices, personal oxygen tanks and devices for grasping.

"Support Person" means:

- in relation to a person with a disability, another person who accompanies him or her in order to help with communication, mobility, personal care or medical needs or with access to goods or services; and
- may be a paid professional, a volunteer, a family member or a friend.

"Service Animal" is:

- an animal which is specially trained to assist an individual with disabilities;
- an animal is a "Service Animal" if it is readily apparent that the animal is used by a person with a disability for reasons relating to his or her disability, for example a guide dog wearing a harness; and

- if it is not readily apparent that the animal is a Service Animal, then a letter from a physician or nurse confirming that the person requires the animal for reasons related to the disability is required. The disability does not have to be stated.

2. Next, let's take some time to understand how you should interact with persons with disabilities who may use one or more of these assistive options:

Customers using **Assistive Equipment:**

- it must be understood that it is inappropriate to lean on or reach over them;
- it must be ensured that the person is permitted to enter the premises with the device and to utilize the device unless excluded by law;
- potential barriers to the use of assistive devices must be removed where possible;
- it must be ensured that persons with disabilities are aware of assistive devices available on the Township's premises or otherwise supplied by the Township; and
- assistive devices must be offered in a manner that respects the person's dignity and independence

Customers with **Support Persons:**

- must be assured that both persons are permitted to enter the premises together
- the person with a disability must be not prevented from having access to their Support Person while on Township premises;
- must give consent to the Township if confidential information is going to be shared when a Support Person is present; and
- must be confident that we speak directly to them and not the Support Person.

Customers with **Service Animals:**

- must be allowed anywhere customers normally have access;
- must understand that they are responsible for the care and supervision of the Service Animal;
- must be confident that we will avoid talking to, touching or making eye contact with the Service Animal;
- must be assured that they are permitted to keep their animal with them unless the animal is otherwise excluded by law from the premises (e.g. areas where food is prepared).

Part #5: What happens if for some reason we can't serve a person with a disability?

It is possible that from time to time there will be disruptions in a Township service, such as a lift under repair, renovations or works projects that limit access to an area, or technology that is temporarily unavailable. If a disruption in service is planned, and expected, it is important to provide reasonable notice.

People with disabilities may often go to a lot of trouble to access services, such as booking transit or arranging a ride. By providing notice, a person can be saved an unnecessary trip. Notice can be provided on the Township's website, by telephone, or in writing and, where possible, a Notice should also be posted at the affected facility.

In the event of an unexpected disruption in service, the Township must provide notice in a variety of ways and as quickly as possible. Staff will consider offering alternative methods of service while informing those that may be impacted personally.

It is important to recognize that there are internal & external resources available to assist in delivering Township services to persons with disabilities. We must all be responsible for the following:

- review the Accessible Customer Service Policy
- review the relevant Operational Procedures
- speak to Team Leader, Supervisor and/or Manager
- review the internet: www.town.uxbridge.on.ca/accessibility.

The Bell Relay Service Operator is available to assist in placing or receiving calls to/from persons who use a TTY. There is no charge for local calls. To place a call through the BCRS (Bell Canada Relay Service), call: 1-800-855-0511.

Copies of the Township of Uxbridge Accessible Customer Policy Statement and the Standard Operating Procedures for Accessible Customer Service, Accessibility Training, Disruptions in Services, Feedback Mechanisms and Support Persons / Service Animals can be made available at the Clerk's Department, Town Hall, 51 Toronto Street South, Uxbridge.

For further clarification or additional information, please call Diana Stephen, Township of Uxbridge Deputy Clerk / Accessibility Coordinator, at 905-852-9181, ext. 209