



Accessible
Customer
Service

Overview

The Town of Newmarket is committed to providing excellent customer service while treating everyone with dignity and respect.

To do this, we must recognize the diverse needs of all our residents—including the needs of persons with disabilities.

In 2008, the Government of Ontario launched the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*. The goal of this standard is to ensure that persons with disabilities get the same level of customer service as everyone else.

The law requires that all public and private sector organizations in Ontario, including the Town of Newmarket, identify, remove and prevent barriers to accessible customer service. It also states that all staff, Council members, volunteers, board and advisory committee members must be trained on how to provide accessible customer service.

Background and Legislation

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 in five areas.

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

The goal is to have a fully accessible Ontario by 2025!

The **Accessibility Standards for Customer Service**; the first of the five standards, took effect January 1, 2010 for public sector organizations and will take effect January 1, 2012 to all other providers of goods and services .



Did you know that approximately 1.85 million or 15.5 % of people in Ontario have some type of disability.

The following is a summary of the key requirements of the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service as it applies to the Town:

1. Establish policies, procedures and practices on providing goods or services to persons with disabilities.
2. Communicate with persons with disabilities in a manner that takes into account his or her disability.
3. Set a policy on allowing persons with disabilities to use their own personal assistive devices to access our goods and use our services.
4. Allow persons with disabilities to be accompanied by their guide dog or service animal in those areas of our premises that are open to the public.
5. Permit persons with disabilities who use a support person to bring that person with them while accessing our goods or services on premises open to the public.
6. Ensure training of staff, volunteers, contractors and any other person who interacts with the public on our behalf on a number of topics as outlined in the accessible customer service standard.
7. Establish a process for persons with disabilities to provide feedback on how the Town provides goods or services to them and how the Town will respond to any feedback.
8. Provide notice when facilities or services that persons with disabilities rely on to access or use our goods and/or services are temporarily disrupted.

What is a Disability?

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* uses the same definition of “disability” as the Human Rights Code:



A “disability” is:

1. any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination, blindness or visual impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device;
2. a condition of mental impairment or developmental disability;
3. a learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language;
4. a mental disorder; or
5. an injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997*.

What is Accessible Customer Service?

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

- Respects their **dignity** and **independence**;
- Provides **integrated** goods and services as fully as practicable unless an alternate measure is necessary;
- Ensures **equal opportunity** is given to a person with a disability that is given to other customers who obtain and use our goods and services; and
- Allows a person with a disability to **benefit from the same service**, in the same place, and in a similar way to other customers.

Accessible customer service is good customer service – courteous, helpful and prompt.

How to interact and communicate with persons with various types of disabilities

Being able to interact and communicate with persons with disabilities is a big part of providing accessible customer service. Sometimes the best approach is to ask a person with a disability how you can best communicate with him/her.

[1] People who have vision loss

Vision loss can restrict a person's ability to read, locate landmarks and/or see hazards. A person with vision loss may use a guide dog or a white cane, while others may not.

Tips:

- Don't assume the person can't see you. Many people who have 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 him/her if needed
- Your customer may like you to read printed information aloud to them.

[2] People who have hearing loss

People who have hearing loss may be deaf, deafened or hard of hearing. These terms are used to describe different levels of hearing and/or the way a person's hearing is diminished or lost.

Tips:

- Attract the customer's attention before speaking. Try a gentle touch on the shoulder or a wave of 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 communication would be easier (for example, using a pen and paper).

[3] People who are deafblind

A person who is deafblind may have some degree of both hearing and vision loss. Many people who are deafblind will be accompanied by an intervenor, a professional support person who helps with communication.

Tips:

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



[4] People who have physical disabilities

There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities. Only some people with physical disabilities use a wheelchair. Physical disabilities may restrict a person in the following ways: control or speed of movements, co-ordination and balance, ability to grasp some objects, ability to walk long distances, ability to sit or stand for prolonged periods.

Tips:

- Respect personal space.
- Ask before you help.
- Don't touch items or equipment without permission.
- Don't leave the person in an awkward or dangerous position.

[5] People who have learning disabilities

The term “learning disability” refers to a variety of disorders that affect how a person may receive, express or process information. This disability may become apparent when a person has difficulty reading materials 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.
- Try to provide information in a way that takes into account the customer’s disability.

[6] People who have 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 questions that can be answered with “yes” or “no”.
- Be patient. Don’t interrupt or finish your customer’s sentences.

[7] People who have mental health disabilities

Mental health issues can affect a person's ability to think clearly, concentrate or remember things. A mental health disability is a broad term for many disorders that can range in severity. For example, some customers may experience anxiety due to hallucinations, mood swings, phobias and/or panic disorders.

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.

[8] People who have intellectual or developmental disabilities

Developmental or intellectual disabilities can limit a person's ability to learn, communicate, do everyday 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.

[9] How to interact with people who use assistive devices

An assistive device is an item a person may bring with them or that is already on the premises and is used to assist a person with a disability to do everyday activities.

Assistive devices include, but are not limited to, wheelchairs, 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.



Tips:

- Respect a person's personal space; do not lean or reach over a person's assistive device.
- If holding a lengthy conversation with someone using a wheelchair or scooter, seat yourself on a chair, squat down or back away a few feet to allow for eye to eye contact.
- Ensure a person with a disability is aware of assistive devices available on the Town's premises or otherwise supplied by the Town.
- Ask permission before handling or moving a person's assistive device.
- Assistive devices must be offered in a manner that respects the person's dignity and independence.

[10] How to interact with persons with disabilities who require the assistance of a guide dog or other service animal

People with vision loss may use a guide dog, but there are other service animals as well. Hearing alert animals help people who are deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing. Other service animals are trained to alert an individual to an oncoming seizure.

Under the *Accessibility Standards for Customer Service* regulation service animals are allowed on those parts of the premises that are open to the public unless the animal is excluded by law. You may ask a person for a letter from a physician or nurse verifying that their animal is required for reasons relating to their disability if it is not readily apparent.

Tips:

- Speak to the person, not the service animal.
- A service animal is on duty; avoid calling out or distracting them— they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- Do not pet or feed the service animal.



[11] How to interact with persons with disabilities who require the assistance of a support person

Some persons with disabilities may be accompanied by a support person, such as an intervenor. A support person can be a personal support worker, a volunteer, a family member or a friend. A support person might help a person with a disability with a variety of things such as communicating to helping with mobility, personal care or medical needs.

According to the *Accessibility Standards for Customer Service*, a support person must be allowed to accompany a person with a disability to any part of the premises that is open to the public. If an event



charges admission, advance notice must be given about what admission fee will be charged for a support person.

Tips:

- Speak directly to your customer, not the support person.
- Permit both persons to enter the premises together.
- Allow the person with a disability to have access to their support person while on the premises.
- Obtain consent if confidential information is going to be shared while a support person is present.

How to help my customer access goods or services?

All customers have their own specific needs or preferences. Being positive, flexible and open to suggestions will help to create a good customer experience. A good starting point is to ask your customer how you can help them access your goods or services.

- Take time to understand the needs of each customer.
- Be open to working with persons with disabilities to find the best solution.
- Treat all customers with respect. Give them your full attention.

Service Disruptions

It is possible that from time to time there will be disruptions in service, such as elevators under repair, renovations 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.

In the event of an unexpected disruption in service, provide notice quickly and in as many ways as possible.

Please refer to the Notice of Service Disruption template included in the Town's Accessibility Standards for Customer Service Policy CORP. 2-01





For more information on the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*, or the accessible customer service standard, visit www.accessON.ca

Portions of this brochure have been reproduced with permission from the Town of Markham.

Additional source—City of Mississauga

Information on pages 6 through 14, have been adapted and re-printed with permission from the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario, Ministry of Community and Social Services.

www.newmarket.ca 905-895-5193

Alternate formats available upon request.