



Accessibility Customer Service

Best Practices and Procedures Policy

INTRODUCTION:

The Town of Northeastern Manitoulin and the Islands is committed to ensuring that we use the best practices and procedures when interacting with people with disabilities. The Town will also educate all staff on the different types of disabilities.

The Town is committed to providing customer service to person 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 our goods and services,
- Allows a person with disabilities to benefit from the same service, in the same place, and in a similar way to other customers, and
- Understands that each individual may need a slightly different type of accommodation.

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 purpose of this legislation is to ‘achieve accessibility for Ontarians with disabilities with respect to goods, service, facilities, accommodation, employment, buildings, structures and premises’. It will also create more opportunities to persons with disabilities to work, study, enjoy recreation and contribute to society.

The AODA creates implements and enforces standards for accessibility in five key areas: customer service, information and communication, employment, built environment and transportation.

The first standard, Customer Service came into effect January 1, 2010. This Standard details specific requirements for all service providers. In general, provider must deliver service in a way that preserves the dignity and independence of people with disabilities. Providers must also integrate services and provide equal opportunity.

Accessible Customer Service can mean many things. Mainly 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.

Accessible customer service should be courteous helpful and prompt. Each person and each disability is different so it is important to know a little bit about how to best communicate, interact and assist people with disabilities.

COMMUNICATION:

Choosing the right word when talking about disabilities can influence and reinforce public perception. They can create either a positive or negative view of people with disabilities or an indifferent or negative depiction.

Some general tips that can make our communication and interaction more successful are as follows:

- use **disability** or **disabled** not handicap or handicapped
- never use demeaning or disrespectful words such as retarded, dumb or crippled
- use **person with a disability** as opposed to a disabled person
- never assume you are familiar with a disability if it is not visually obvious, wait until it is described to you

People with disabilities prefer the following terms used to describe their disabilities:

Instead of:	Please Use:
Afflicted by cerebral palsy	Person who has cerebral palsy or Person with a disability
Aged – the Elderly	Seniors
Autistic	Person with autism
Birth Defect	Person with a disability since birth
Blind	Person with a vision disability
Brain damaged	Person with a brain injury
Confined to a wheelchair	Person who uses a wheelchair
Crazy or Mental	Person with a mental disability
Cripple	Person with mobility impairment
Deaf	Person with a hearing loss
Deaf and Dumb	Person who is deaf without speech
Disabled	Person or people with a disability
Epileptic, Fits, Spells	People who have epilepsy or has seizures
Handicapped	Person with a disability
Hidden disability	Person with a non-visible disability

Instead of:	Please Use:
Invalid	Person with a disability
Learning disabled	Person with a learning disability
Mentally retarded	Person with an intellectual/development disability
Mongoloid	Person with Downs Syndrome
Normal	Person who is not disabled
Patient	Person with a disability or is the word for Relationship between a physician and client
Physically challenged	Person with a physical disability
Spastic	Person who has muscle spasms
Stutterer	Person with a speech impediment
Visually impaired	Person with vision loss

PHYSICAL

Physical disabilities include a range of functional limitations from difficulties in moving one or more body parts to congenital disabilities such as tendonitis. A physical disability may affect an individual's ability to:

- perform manual tasks such as turning a door knob
- move around independently
- control the speed or coordination of movements
- reach, pull or manipulate objects
- have strength or endurance

Best practices and procedures for employees of the Town with regards to people with physical disabilities are as follows. It is important to note that not all physical disabilities are easy to identify.

- speak normally and directly to your customer
- ask if they need help before you act
- do not touch or lean on their wheelchair or other devices
- communicate to them the accessible features of the immediate area
- keep ramps and corridors free of clutter
- step around a counter that may be too high or wide to better serve the customer
- provide seating for those who cannot stand in line
- be patient – customer will identify their needs to you

HEARING:

Hearing loss can cause problems in distinguishing certain frequencies, sounds or words. A person who has hearing loss may be unable to:

- use a public telephone
- understand speech in a noisy environment
- pronounce words clearly to be understood

Best practices and procedures for the Town employees with regard to people with a hearing disability may include the following general tips:

- attract the customer's attention by gently touching their shoulder or waving your hand.
- always ask how you can help, do not shout but speak clearly, do not raise your voice
- be clear and precise when giving directions, make sure they understand
- face the person and keep your hands and other objects away from your face and mouth when speaking
- people with hearing loss may use a sign language interpreter – remember to speak or interact with that person not the interpreter
- if the issue is personal – please be discreet and use a private room whenever possible
- if the person uses a hearing aid, please try to use a quiet area
- write notes to communicate if deemed necessary
- do not touch service animals at any time
- there is a Relay Service available by calling 1-800-855-0511 where the operator is the intermediary. Use this service if you are required to make a call to someone with a hearing disability. IT is free for local calls and standard long distance charges apply.

DEAF-BLINDNESS:

A person who is both deaf and blind has significant difficulty assessing information and performing daily tasks. This disability interferes with communication, learning, orientation and mobility.

Various communication devices are used by people with a deaf-blind disability. Some of these various sign language systems, Braille, telephone devices, communication boards, and an intervener. An intervener is a trained professional who helps their client with communication issues by using special sign language, manual alphabet and/or finger spelling.

The Town's best practices and procedures for customer/residents with this type of disability include:

- never assume – some people with this disability do have partial sight or hearing
- the customer will most likely explain how to communicate with them by way of a card or a note

- never address or touch a service animal
- never touch a person with this disability without permission unless it is an emergency
- patience is very important
- direct your attention to the customer at all times

VISION:

Few people with this disability are totally blind, many have limited vision issues. Some have tunnel vision or loss of side or peripheral vision, other lack central vision (cannot see straight ahead) and some see the outline of objects and some see the direction of light.

A person with vision loss may have:

- difficulty reading or seeing faces
- difficulty maneuvering in unfamiliar places
- inability to differentiate colours or distances
- a narrow field of vision
- the need for bright light, or contrast
- night blindness

The Town's best practices and procedures for customers/residents with vision disability include:

- verbally identify yourself before making physical contact
- do not touch or approach service animals
- verbally describe the setting and/or location as necessary
- offer your arm for guidance if necessary – do not grab or pull
- never touch the person without first asking permission, unless it is an emergency
- do not leave the customer in the middle of the room, guide them to a chair or a more comfortable location
- do not leave without acknowledging

INTELLECTUAL:

A disability can affect a person's ability to think and reason. Downs Syndrome, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, brain trauma or psychiatric disorders are a few of the intellectual disabilities. People with this type of disability may have difficulty with:

- understanding spoken or written information
- conceptual information
- perception of sensory information
- memory issues

At the Town, we realize that customers/residents with intellectual disabilities may have difficulty doing many things that we take for granted. Our best practices and procedures will enable out employees to understand this type of disability and help us to recognize

the signs. The following are some general guidelines to help us serve out customers/residents with intellectual disabilities:

- do not assume what a person can or cannot do
- use clean simple language
- be prepared to explain and provide examples regarding information
- remember that the person can and will make their own decisions
- be patient and verify your understanding
- if you do not understand, ask again
- provide one piece of information at one time
- speak directly to the person

SPEECH:

A speech disability involves the partial or total loss of the ability to speak. Speech disabilities include:

- pronunciation
- pitch and loudness
- hoarseness or breathless
- stuttering or slurring

The Town knows that to be able to have good customer service communication is of utmost importance. Best practices and procedures developed for speech disabilities include the following:

- communicate in a quiet environment whenever possible
- your full attention to the customer/resident is required at all times, never interrupt
- ask them to repeat if necessary or write their message to you
- ask questions that can be answered 'yes' or 'no' whenever possible
- make sure you understand, repeat the information back to them to verify
- communicate with patience, respect and willingness

LEARNING:

People with a learning disability have average or above average intelligence but take in and process information in different ways. Some examples of learning disabilities are:

- difficulties in reading
- problem solving
- time management
- way finding
- processing information

MENTAL HEALTH:

These are the three main types of mental health disabilities:

- Anxiety
- Mood
- Behavioral

Some common signs of mental health issues are aggressive acts, irritated and edgy, pushy, abrupt, unable to make decisions, start laughing or angry for no apparent reason.

The Town's best practices and procedures in relation to mental health disabilities include the following:

- treat each person as an individual. Ask how you can make him/her most comfortable and respect their needs to the utmost
- try to reduce stress and anxiety in situations
- stay calm and courteous, focus on the service needed and how you can help

SENSORY DISABILITY:

Smell, touch and taste are three sensory disabilities that people can have.

A person with a smelling disability may have allergies to certain odours, scents or chemicals or may be unable to identify dangerous gases, smoke, fumes or spoiled food.

A person with a touch disability may be unable to sense texture, temperature, vibration to pressure.

A person with a taste disability has limited ability to recognize the four primary taste sensations; sweet, bitter, salty and sour.

Other disabilities result from a range of other conditions, accidents, illnesses and diseases including asthma, cancer, and heart and stroke disease.

One very important factor for all of us to remember is that disabilities are not always visible or easy to distinguish.

ASSISTIVE DEVICES:

The term "assistive device" refers to an auxiliary aid such as communication aids, cognition aids, personal mobility aids and medical aids. The following is a list of some assistive devices that could be available to people with various disabilities:

- canes, crutches, wheelchairs, walkers
- hearing aids
- accessible telephone service – TTY/teletypewriter
- electronic door openers
- accessible parking areas
- accessible ramps
- screen reading software application for the Town's website

Some best practices and procedures for the Town in regards to activities a to assist people with disabilities that could be adopted are as follows:

- council chambers should have the microphones turned on at all public meetings to assist those residents that are hearing impaired

- Municipal Elections will provide election materials in accessible format when requested
- location for elections should be accessible for electors with disabilities
- always ask permission before touching an assistive device of any kind

USE OF SERVICE ANIMALS AND SUPPORT PERSONS:

As Town employees, we should be aware of the use of service animals and support persons for resident/customers with certain disabilities. Our best practices and procedures include:

- every employee is to use reasonable efforts to allow persons with disabilities to use their own assistive devices to access goods and/or services
- every employee shall allow persons with disabilities to be accompanied by their service animal unless the animal is excluded by law
- if an animal is excluded by law to enter the premises, the reason must be explained to the person with disabilities
- other reasonable arrangements to provide goods and/or services shall be explored and acted upon with the assistance of the person with the disability whenever needed
- should a service animal be unruly or disruptive, an employee may ask the person with the disability to remove the animal from the area or refuse access to goods and/or services
- every employee should be aware that some people with disabilities may be accompanied by their support person or service animal while accessing goods and/or services
- service animals assist people with a variety of disabilities: visual, hearing, autism, epilepsy, diabetes, etc. The disability may not always be apparent
- service animals are not limited to dogs
- a service animal is a working animal, do not touch, feed or speak to the animal unless given permission to do so
- a support person is someone whose presence is justified by the support and assistance he/she provides exclusively for a person with a disability
- a support person may be a personal support worker, family member, volunteer or a friend
- remember to speak directly to the customer, not the support person
- before talking about confidential information, check with the customer if they would like the support person present
- staff members may not always be introduced to the support person

WHEN A PERSON WITH A DISABILITY IS HAVING A DIFFICULTY:

If a person with a disability is having difficulty, keep the following items in mind:

- ask “How may I help you”
- do not assume you know how to help them
- do not feel hurt if they do not want assistance

- keep a positive, flexible and willing attitude
- remember it may take extra time to assist a person with a disability
- know the resources and assistive devices available to help
- the following assistance may help a person with a disability:
 - assist someone to reach for items
 - offer to read a program guide, bill etc.
 - provide pen and paper to communicate

If it should happen that for some reason, the staff cannot serve a person with a disability; staff would need to be able to offer alternative methods of service while informing those that may be impacted personally. If this situation arises, staff will inform the CAO so steps can be taken to address the situation so it does not occur in the future.

SERVICE DISRUPTION:

A service disruption is any instance, planned or unplanned where services or facilities to customers with accessibility needs are not available.

The area where the disruption occurs is responsible to complete the appropriate Notice of Service Disruption form and post it in a conspicuous location in their area.

A planned disruption typically occurs through maintenance and should be posted, at a minimum at least one day prior to the disruption occurring. The notice is to be posted in a conspicuous location and on the website.

FEEDBACK:

To ensure the Town is providing excellent customer service, Feedback Forms have been created and will be placed in public locations. It is anticipated these forms will gauge the level of accessible service the Town provides.

The Feedback form is two-sided, one side for the customer to complete, providing their comments and the other for staff to address the customer concerns. The staff member receiving the feedback form is required to complete the date received and whether any response or action had been or will be taken, signing their name and dating the form. This side of the form is also to be completed upon receiving verbal or electronic feedback.

It is not necessary for the customer to provide their name or contact information; however, staff will be unable to respond to the feedback should this information not be provided.



Postal Bag 2000
Little Current, ON P0P 1K0
Phone: 705-368-3500
email: jmoore@townofnemi.on.ca

Feedback Form

Thank you for visiting the Town of Northeastern Manitoulin and the Islands. We value all customers and strive to meet everyone's needs. Please tell us about your visit:

Did we respond to your customer service needs? Yes or No
If no – what could we have done to improve?

Was our customer service provided to you in an accessible manner? Yes or No
If no – please explain _____

Did you have any problems accessing our good and/or services? Yes or No
If yes – please explain _____

Please add any other comments you may have: _____

Your contact information: (optional)

If contact information is provided, we will provide a response.

Thank you for taking the time to fill-in the Feedback Form.

Name: _____
(staff member receiving the form)

Date: _____
(date the form was received)

Action taken at the time the form was received:

Signature

Date

CAO comments:

CAO Signature

Date



Notice of Service Disruption

There will be a scheduled service disruption at:

_____ impacting the
deliver of goods and/or services for customers from

_____ to _____
Time Time

The goods and/or service unavailable during this service interruption are:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

The services listed above can be accessed at the following time, date, location or method:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

We apologize for any inconvenience this disruption has caused. Should you require additional information on the delivery of this service, please contact the Town at 705-368-3500