

Information and Communications Standard

Making information accessible to people with disabilities



You want people to know about your organization's goods, services and facilities. This guide helps you do that by making your information accessible to people with disabilities.

Under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, organizations must make their information and communications accessible **when requested**.

requirements & timelines

The requirements are phased in over time, to give smaller organizations time to prepare.

Type of information	Government of Ontario	Public sector organizations		Private sector and non-profit organizations	
		50+ employees	1-49 employees	50+ employees	1-49 employees
Emergency information	2012	2012	2012	2012	2012
Feedback processes	2013	2014	2015	2015	2016
Employee information	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Public information	2014	2015	2016	2016	2017

* Requirements come into effect on January 1 of each year

For more on what you need to do, read:

- Making emergency information accessible
- Making feedback accessible
- Making information accessible to employees
- Making information accessible to the public

what does it mean to make information accessible?

Making information accessible means considering the needs of people with disabilities.

- When you create new information, think about what might help someone who has low vision, hearing loss or a learning disability to understand it.
- To make your existing information more accessible, recreate it in an accessible format; for example, use large print for someone with vision loss.
- You can also help someone to understand the information; for example, reading a menu to someone who is dyslexic or using written notes to communicate with someone who is Deaf. This is called a “communication support.” Another example would be providing an assistive listening device at a movie theatre.

Example

Before customers start to play, Stan's paintball and laser tag company shows a short video on what to do if someone gets hurt. A customer with hearing loss asks for an accessible format, so Stan gives her a transcript of what's said in the video.



steps to consider when making information accessible

Making your information and communications accessible doesn't have to be complicated or time-consuming – there are lots of ways to do it.

1. think about accessibility from the start

If you think about accessibility when you're creating new information, it not only makes it easier when someone asks for it, it makes your organization more accessible to customers and staff.

Example

Sally's salon was creating a brochure to promote their services. Sally used a large font and strong colour contrast to make it more accessible to people with low vision. She also used her word processor's pre-set styles and headings because she knows it will work with screen reader software and can easily be turned into other formats such as Braille. When a client with vision loss asked about the salon's services, Sally offered to email her the electronic file.

Tip: Whenever you create documents, build them as structured electronic files. It's simple to apply a 'style' to titles, headings, etc. and it makes them look better by keeping formatting consistent. If you create all your documents this way, then it's easy for people to read them using assistive technology, like screen readers. You can also use it to produce other accessible formats like large print, Braille, or an audio version.
For more information on creating a structured electronic file, visit
<http://adod.idrc.ocad.ca/>

Our appendix has more great tips to help you make information accessible.

2. assess your information and communications processes

What information does your organization create and how do you interact with your customers and employees? Consider things like:

- Brochures or Catalogues
- Reports and Memos
- Menus
- Signs
- Emergency Plans
- Surveys or Comment Cards
- Website
- Email
- Telephone
- Meetings
- Presentations
- Announcements

Look for potential barriers – anything that would make it difficult for someone with a disability to read, see, hear or understand. For example:

- Someone with vision loss may not see a sign or be able to read a printed brochure
- If they can't hear the narrator, someone with hearing loss might not understand a video
- Text-heavy reports may be hard for someone with a learning disability to understand.

Example

Jeff works for a company that trains its staff using online videos. Jeff is Deaf. Since his employer captions their videos, Jeff can complete the training at the same time as everyone else.

3. make it accessible upon request

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to making information accessible. People with the same type of disability may have different needs. For example, only a small percentage of people who are blind use Braille.

You don't have to have accessible formats on hand, and the law does not specify what format or communication support to use. It's flexible, because what you provide will depend on your resources, the type of information, its current format and your customer's individual needs. You don't have to provide the specific format an individual asks for, but you **do** have to work with them to try to meet their needs.

Example

Aidyn didn't enjoy his meal and wants to let the restaurant know, but he has a developmental disability and their comment card is hard for him to understand. He asks the manager if there is another way for him to provide feedback anonymously. The manager gives Aidyn their business card and invites him to send in a note.



Here are some ways you can make information accessible:

Existing Format	Ways to make it accessible
Printed or electronic document	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read the document out loud or explain it• Make a large print version• Create a structured electronic file – a file using pre-set headings, styles, and lists – so people can read it with their assistive devices, like screen readers. You can also use it to produce other accessible formats.
Technical or complicated information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use common words instead of jargon• Break text into shorter sentences and paragraphs• Use graphics to add meaning
Graphic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Include a written or verbal description
Sign	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use larger text, simple pictograms, strong colour contrast, and/or tactile elements
Verbal or audio	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make it visual – write it on a piece of paper, put it in an email or on a digital screen
Video	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Add subtitles and/or video descriptions• Provide a transcript• Consider an in-person presentation or conversation
Telephone	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use text-based technology such as email, texting or instant messaging• Use technologies designed for the hard of hearing like a teletypewriter (TTY) or a telephone relay service
Presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Share a copy of your presentation materials (e.g. PowerPoint slides or transcript)• Hire a sign language interpreter• Use a microphone

what if I can't make it accessible?

Some information is extremely difficult or impossible to alter and still convey the same meaning. For example, complex blueprints, X-rays and comprehensive charts may be unconvertible. If you can't make it accessible, explain why and provide a summary of the information instead.

can I charge a fee for making it accessible?

No. If you provide information for free, you must make it accessible for free. If you charge people for the information, you cannot charge more for the accessible version.

4. provide it as soon as possible

Once requested, you must provide accessible information as soon as possible. How quickly you can provide it may depend on the amount of information, its complexity and the format requested, combined with your organization's resources. In some cases, you may be able to provide accessible formats instantly. In other cases, it may take longer.

Example

An insurance company gives all new clients a guide to its claims procedures. It is large, complex and full of legal language. Cathy has a learning disability and tells her insurance representative that she doesn't understand it. Rewriting the guide would take months, so they decide to meet in person and go through the procedures together. After the meeting, the company uses what they learned from Cathy to make the guide easier to understand.

5. let the public know

Now that you know what making accessible information is all about, let your customers and employees know that you will make information accessible upon request. You could include a note on your website or promotional materials, create a sign, send a memo or post a notice on your staff bulletin board. The law is flexible, so use the approach that works for you.

Example

A small charity asks its donors to complete an online survey. Nadine wants to participate, but she is blind and the survey doesn't work with her screen reader. She calls the charity and talks to the manager and they decide to go through the questions over the phone instead.



where to find more information

- Learn more about the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act and find free tools and templates at ontario.ca/AccessON
- The Accessible Digital Office Documents Project is a one-stop shop for creating accessible digital documents using today's most popular office applications (Microsoft, OpenOffice, iWork, Corel, GoogleDocs, etc.) at <http://adod.idrc.ocad.ca/>
- Accessible Information and Communication: A Guide for Small Business provides an overview of how to provide information in accessible formats at www.gaates.org/aic/
- Get help designing documents for people with vision disabilities at www.lighthouse.org/accessibility/design/accessible-print-design/making-text-legible and www.euroblind.org/resources/guidelines/nr/88
- Web Accessibility in Mind can help you make PowerPoint files accessible at www.webaim.org/techniques/powerpoint
- NHS Orkney has an accessible signage checklist at www.ohb.scot.nhs.uk/images/pdf/checklistaccessiblesignage.pdf

please note:

This guide is not legal advice. If you require assistance in interpreting the legislation or the regulation, please contact your legal adviser. This guide has been created to help you understand the legislation and/or regulation and does not replace the official version of the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation, Ontario Regulation 191/11 and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA). If there is any conflict between this guide and the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation or the AODA, the regulation and the AODA are the final authorities.

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appendix: quick tips to make it accessible

Try these simple steps to make information more accessible to people with disabilities.

fonts

- Sans serif fonts like Arial are easier to read than serif fonts like Garamond or decorative ones like *Script*.
- Don't use ALL CAPS. Mixing upper and lower case gives words shape, which makes them easier to recognize and read.
- Go big. Make font sizes 12 point or larger.
- Use **bold** instead of underlines or *italics* (as they can be hard to read).

layout

- Chunk information into bulleted or numbered lists.
- Write clearly and use short sentences.
- Align text with the left margin. Don't justify text as the extra spaces between words make it harder to read.
- Use wide margins and leave space between lines – ideally 25-30% of the point size. Closely spaced text is hard to read.

colour & contrast

- High contrast is easy to read. Black text on white or yellow is best.
- Don't use colour alone to convey meaning (for example, highlighting text to show its importance). Use descriptive text or symbols instead.
- Don't use patterned backgrounds or print on glossy materials.

digital documents

- Format your document using styles (like heading 1, heading 2) to help screen reader software.
- Use tables instead of columns.
- Don't use flashing images or text.
- Add a written description (or "alt tag") to diagrams, images or charts.
- Add captions or a transcript for spoken content.
- You can test your website with free tools at www.achecker.ca or www.wave.webaim.org

presentations

- Organize your presentation so it is logical and easy to follow.
- Keep slides short – no more than three sentences per slide.
- Bigger is better. Use at least 16 point font in presentations.
- Be ready with printed and electronic versions of the presentation. Copies of your speaking notes can help too.
- Share your presentation in advance.
- If you use diagrams, sound or video, think about how to explain the content to someone who can't see or hear.

signs

- Keep text short.
- Use common symbols or images to explain important information.
- Don't overlap words and images.
- Don't use shiny or reflective materials.
- Add raised elements that can be read by touch.
- Place the sign where it's easy to see from different heights.
- Make sure it's well lit.