

GUIDE TO

Accessible Public Engagement





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Preface

About OMSSA

The Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) is the association of the 47 Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABS). OMSSA's members plan, manage, and deliver integrated human services in housing, homelessness, employment and income support, and early learning and childcare.

Why OMSSA?

OMSSA members champion the integration of human services to create a system that is effectively coordinated, seamless and tailored locally to the needs of people so that they can maximize their potential, enhance their quality of life, and contribute to their community.

This vision of integrated service delivery is founded on four principles:

- Using a **people-centred approach** to make programs and services truly responsive to the needs of those they serve.
- Developing a **common vision and language** to remove the barriers caused by programs delivered from silos.
- Using a **systems approach** in human services delivery to transcend program boundaries and respond effectively.
- Using outcomes-based planning and **evaluation** in the spirit of continuous improvement to ensure that the process of human services integration continues to work towards the desired outcomes.

OMSSA believes that to achieve this vision, it is critical that all residents have the opportunity to participate in the decisions that affect them and their communities. Public engagement is a two-way communication that allows informed decision making. It provides the opportunity for those being consulted to share their experiences, values and priorities about social and policy issues that influence their lives.

As service system managers, OMSSA's members have a strong history of engaging with their communities and community partners to plan, manage, and deliver effective integrated human services responsive locally to people's needs. To support members, OMSSA has developed individual training supports and comprehensive community capacity-building resources in the fields of early learning and childcare, and long-term planning of housing and homelessness programs.

This guide was developed by the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association through an EnAbling Change Partnership with the Government of Ontario. It is an accompaniment to OMSSA's Guide to Conducting Accessible Meetings.

Together, the two guides provide the resources organizations need to develop and support accessible public engagement.

“Fully accessible public engagement processes are essential for sound public decision making and, in turn, support progress towards more responsive and integrated, people-centred human services. This guide is an essential tool for organizations striving to develop and deliver accessible public engagement.”

Kira Heineck, Executive Director

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Introduction

Public engagement is a process in which people who are affected by or interested in an issue are brought into the discussion. Sometimes different terms are used, such as consultation, public participation, or working in partnership.

There are different levels of engagement that range from informing the public about an issue or proposal to empowering them to take an active role in the decision-making process.

Sometimes public engagement is required by legislation. For example, several accessibility standards created as part of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) have specific requirements for consultation, including with people with disabilities.

The benefits of accessible public engagement

Whether or not public engagement is required by law, there are many benefits to engaging the public in the decision-making process.

The success of your organization's programs and services can depend on ongoing dialogue with the public. Making sure this dialogue is inclusive and considers everyone's needs also means considering the accessibility needs of people with disabilities.

Offering an accessible public engagement process can help your organization make more informed decisions. It can also give your clients, customers, or citizens a better understanding of the complexities of an issue and help build public support.

One in seven Ontarians live with disabilities, which is almost 15 per cent of the population. Your public engagement must be accessible from start to finish so that every member of the public who wants to participate can do so.

Accessibility means giving people of all abilities opportunities to participate fully in everyday life.

There are many ways to engage the public. The methods you choose depend on the purpose and objectives of your project and the level of public participation and direction you need.

Accessibility and the law

In Ontario, legislation requires that the public and people with disabilities be consulted in certain situations.

Under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, the Ontario government has developed mandatory accessibility standards to remove barriers in key areas of daily living for people with disabilities.

As part of the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR), a regulation under the AODA, there are specific requirements for consultation with people with disabilities. If a municipality has an accessibility advisory committee, the



committee must be included in the consultation process as well.

Under the Ontario Human Rights Code, organizations have a duty to accommodate people with disabilities so that they have equal access to facilities and services.

To learn more about the AODA and its accessibility standards, and the Ontario Human Rights Code, see [Appendix A](#). For a list of accessibility resources, see [Appendix D](#). For a glossary of accessibility terms, see [Appendix E](#).

By making public engagement truly accessible, organizations can engage more people and reap the benefits of full public participation.

How to use this guide

This guide takes you through the five steps of an accessible public engagement process. It also offers tips on how to evaluate the process, report back to those who took part, and embed accessible public engagement into your organization. For a quick reference checklist of the process, see [Appendix C](#).

- Step 1:** Assess the need for and identify the purpose of your public engagement process
- Step 2:** Plan your public engagement process
- Step 3:** Carry out your public engagement activities
- Step 4:** Evaluate the feedback received from the public and report back to the people who took part in the process
- Step 5:** Integrate accessibility into your future public engagement processes

Step 1: Identify Issues and Goals

Assess the need

First, identify the issue and decide if your organization needs to engage the public. Will it help your organization make the required decisions? Think about the project's timelines in relation to other activities your organization may be involved in.

Here are some questions to ask.

- Is it required by law?
- Is it early enough in the decision-making process to hold meaningful public engagement?
- Are there other public engagement activities, media activities, or community events that could interfere with the willingness of the public to be involved?
- Can you time your public engagement activities so that you can combine resources with other organizations involved in public engagement processes?

Examine the purpose

Once you have decided that a public engagement process is appropriate you need to decide on the purpose.

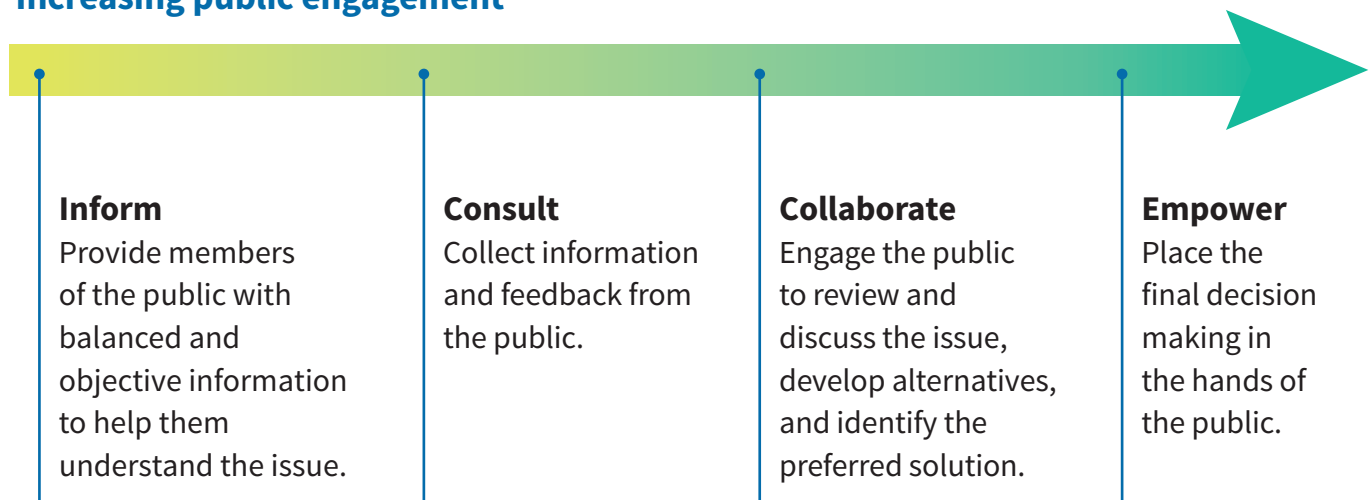
- What does your organization want to get out of it? What do you hope the public you engage gets out of it?
- Is the purpose to inform the public about the issue or do you want their feedback as well?
- Which parts of the issue are open for discussion and which are not?
- Who do you want to hear from – the general public, particular stakeholders, a specific age group, or a specific community?

The answers to these questions will help you decide what level of public engagement you should undertake.

Spectrum of public engagement

Public engagement is a continuum with an increasing level of public participation. It can range from a one-way flow of information to a collaborative process that can involve a high level of feedback and direction from the community. The different levels on the spectrum and the corresponding public engagement goals are outlined below.

Increasing public engagement



A public engagement process can incorporate one or more of these levels of engagement. Generally, the level of public engagement undertaken by most organizations includes informing, consulting and some activities related to collaborating.

Adapted from: “[Building Public Health Capacity to Engage the Community](#)”, presented at the 2008 Niagara Public Health Summit by Annette Collins and Grace Bermingham, Region of Waterloo and the [Spectrum of Public Participation](#) developed by the International Association for Public Participation.

Step 2: Plan an Accessible Public Engagement Process

Once you have decided on the level of public engagement you want, you can start designing your plan.

Choose your team

Working in a team is a good way to design a public engagement process.

Members of your team should come from different parts of your organization. Your team could include people with experience in public engagement, information technology, and financial planning as well as employees with disabilities or who have experience working with people with disabilities. These skills will be useful as your team designs and implements your public engagement process.

Depending on the level of public engagement you have chosen, you may need a project leader or coordinator, public engagement coordinator, and a meeting planner or meeting facilitator. You might also want to include people who are experts in the issue being discussed as well as an accessibility specialist.

You may also want to ask representatives from key stakeholder groups as well as community groups that work with people with disabilities to get involved as advisors.

Identify your stakeholders and/or target audience

By now you will know which members of the public you want to engage in your public engagement process. They may include the following groups.

- Members of the general public with an interest in the issue and/or who have asked to be included
- Stakeholders from all sides of the issue
- Community groups who are interested in the issue
- Customers, clients
- Employees.

Under the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation there are specific legal requirements for consultation with people with disabilities. To learn more about accessibility legislation, see [Appendix A](#).

NOTE: You will probably decide on your public engagement activities, schedule, and budget at the same time, but they are outlined separately on the following pages.

Under the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation, municipalities and some other organizations are obligated to consult with people with disabilities. Municipalities must also consult their Accessibility Advisory Committee (if they have one). For more information, see Appendix A.



Select your public engagement activities

There are four levels of public engagement along a continuum: inform, consult, collaborate and empower. The purpose of your public engagement process will determine the level of public engagement you undertake. Do you want to inform the public? Or do you want the public actively involved in developing recommendations that respond to the issue?

If the purpose of your public engagement process is to inform the public, posting media releases and fact sheets on your website, sending them to the local media or holding an open house may be sufficient.

If you decide to consult and collaborate extensively with the public you may hold public meetings, develop a survey or form a

committee to gather, assess, and report on the feedback received.

Consulting with people with disabilities can help identify and prevent barriers to accessibility that may not be easily recognizable, and can help organizations to better meet the needs of their community.

If you decide to hold in-person gatherings such as meetings or workshops, see OMSSA's Guide to Conducting Accessible Meetings.

The following pages present the four levels of public engagement and provide examples of different public engagement activities as well as some considerations for accessibility.

NOTE: While each activity has been grouped under a specific level of public engagement, activities can apply to more than one level.

Inform

With this level of public engagement, you provide information to the public — a one-way flow of information.



Ways to inform the public

Websites

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

- Websites are an effective means of sharing information with the public.
- New information can be circulated quickly.
- They are limited to people who use computers.

ACCESSIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS

- Websites can make information accessible and available to people who have vision loss, learning disabilities or difficulty getting to public meetings.
- Information on the website must be in plain language.
- The website and website content must be accessible.

Webinars

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

- Webinars can be developed to meet the needs of specific audiences.
- The involvement and attentiveness of audience may vary.
- They are limited to people who use computers.

ACCESSIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS

- Webinars are accessible for people who cannot attend meetings in person.
- Presentations and attachments must be in accessible formats.

Open Houses

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

- Open houses allow direct contact with members of the public who are interested in the issue.
- Drop-in events provide flexibility for participants to attend at a convenient time for them.
- It can be difficult to predict public response or level of participation for an open house.

ACCESSIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS

- Venue must be accessible.
- Information materials should be available in accessible formats.
- Open houses need to be promoted in various media and in accessible formats.

Local Media Articles and Coverage

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

- They have a community-wide distribution at low or no cost.
- There is risk of misrepresentation or inaccuracy.

ACCESSIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS

- Not all people with disabilities are able to read, hear or watch newspapers, radio or television.
- A variety of media need to be targeted.

Information Displays and Kiosks

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

- Many organizations use kiosks or displays and have them in their offices.
- They are a low-cost way to distribute information to a wider audience.
- Displays may be perceived as advertising by members of the public who do not trust the accuracy of the information or the purpose of the display.
- Electronic and interactive kiosks can be used to conduct surveys and gather information.
- Interactive kiosks can be intimidating and some people may need assistance using them.

ACCESSIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS

- Information displayed should be in plain language and available in accessible formats.
- Interactive and electronic kiosks are required to be accessible.

Other Information Sharing Options:

Posters, information hotlines, newsletters, and public briefings as well as targeted lunch-and-learn presentations for local businesses or non-profit organizations.

Consult

With this level of public engagement you collect information and feedback from the public.



Ways to consult the public

Public Meetings

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

- Public meetings reach a wide audience with different points of view and different experiences.
- They promote the ongoing involvement of participants who are interested in the issue.
- They can empower the public when real dialogue occurs.
- Without effective facilitation, there is risk of the meeting being dominated by one or two people or a group of people.
- If issue is contentious, the discussion can be heated or hostile.

ACCESSIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS

- Venue must be accessible.
- Presentations and background information should be available in advance and provided in accessible formats.
- Speakers need to know how to make accessible presentations.
- You need to announce guidelines for conducting accessible meetings, such as using microphones when speaking and having speakers identify themselves.
- You need to have staff members or volunteers available to assist participants with disabilities.

Surveys, Feedback Forms

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

- They are an inexpensive way to get opinions from a wide audience.
- They are voluntary, so response rates may be low.
- They can be done online or on paper.
- Paper surveys may need to be compiled manually.
- Online or mailed surveys include people who are not able to attend in-person meetings.
- Online surveys exclude people who do not have access to computers.

ACCESSIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS

- Surveys should be written in plain language.
- Online surveys should meet the standards of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.
- Surveys should be designed according to the Clear Print Guidelines published by the CNIB.

Social Media

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

- Social media may attract young people and get them involved in the issue.
- Using social media may discourage others from participating.
- Social media tends to encourage dialogue on the decision and the issues being discussed.
- The social media used – Facebook, Twitter, etc., must be monitored carefully.
- Your messages can be misinterpreted or hijacked.
- There is a challenge to ensure the discussion does not digress from the issue.

ACCESSIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS

- The discussion about the issue is accessible to people with disabilities who cannot attend meetings.
- Whatever social media you use, they should meet the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.

Public Advisory/Liaison Committees

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

- Members can be appointed or elected by target audience and be their champions on the issue.
- Public advisory/liaison committees are usually time-limited and focused on a specific issue, in contrast to citizens' panels that provide an ongoing flow of information and responses to a wide range of topics.
- The committees offer a wide range of experience and expertise.
- The committees provide input and advice over the life of the project.
- They enhance the credibility of the project.
- Committee members can meet using social media, telephone conferences and the Internet, reducing the need for in-person meetings.
- The committees require resources and staff support.

ACCESSIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS

- If the committee holds public meetings, these must be accessible.
- Recommendations from the committee should be in accessible formats.
- You must accommodate the needs of committee members who have disabilities.

Collaborate

With this level of public engagement you partner with the public to review and discuss the issue, develop alternatives and identify the preferred solution.



Ways to collaborate with the public

Citizens' Panels

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

- Members can be appointed from the community and act as sounding boards for proposed responses to the issue.
- Citizens' panels provide an ongoing flow of information and responses to a wide range of topics, in contrast to public advisory/ liaison committees that are usually time-limited and focused on a specific issue.
- Panel members can meet using social media, telephone conferences and the Internet, which reduces the need for in-person meetings.
- Establishing and maintaining the panel can be time-consuming and expensive.
- Your pool of volunteers to sit on a citizens' panel may not be large.
- Citizens' panels do not work well for small organizations.

ACCESSIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS

- You must meet the accommodation needs of panel members with disabilities.
- Information for panel members with disabilities must be in accessible formats.
- Any recommendations from panel members must be in accessible formats.
- All in-person and virtual meetings must be accessible.

Search Conferences

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

- Search conferences involve a group of people with a stake in the issue who meet to develop a list of recommendations.
- They empower the group's members to create their own agenda and do their own research.
- These conferences create a sense of commitment among the group's members.
- Group's deliberations are based on local knowledge and experience plus research.
- Group members can be effective champions of the final decision on an issue if it was informed by their deliberations.
- This is an open-ended process that can be challenging to manage.
- Search conferences do not work well for small organizations.
- The success of a search conference depends on high level of trust between the group and the organization.

ACCESSIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS

- All venues must be accessible.
- All information materials must be in accessible formats.
- In-person and virtual meetings must be accessible.
- If group members have disabilities their accommodation needs must be met.

Workshops

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

- Workshops involve a group that meets to work through an issue.
- They include large and small group exercises.
- They foster small group communication.
- They provide a forum for members to discuss difficult or contentious questions.

ACCESSIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS

- Venues must be accessible.
- Meeting materials and presentations should be in accessible formats.
- Facilitators and participants need to know the guidelines for taking part in accessible meetings.

Empower

With this level of public engagement the public makes the final decision.



Ways to empower the public

Ballots

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

- Members of the public cast a vote on the issue.
- There is a substantial cost to ensure the process is valid.

ACCESSIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS

- The voting process must be accessible.
- Those who present the issue to the public must make their presentations accessible and publish their material in accessible formats.

Prepare the budget and identify resources

While your team is preparing the budget, think about accessibility from the start. Be sure to include costs for the following items.

- Accessible meeting venues and accessible versions of printed and online information (including videos and images).
- Staff training on the Accessibility Standard for Customer Service for those involved in the public engagement process.

In addition to your core team, you may also need people with specific skills. For example, people who are skilled at coordinating projects, organizing meetings, facilitating discussions,

analyzing survey responses, and designing and maintaining websites. If you cannot fill all these needs within your organization, you may need to hire consultants.

Set the time for the process and decide on the schedule

Decide when your public engagement process will start and end for the public and begin and finish for your organization.

Remember that the schedule must include time for planning the project, publicizing it, and carrying out the chosen public engagement activities.

The schedule must also include time for gathering feedback, writing up results and reporting back to the people who took part in the public engagement process.

You will also need to include time to evaluate the process, write up the lessons you learned, and share them with your organization.

In each of these steps, you will need to factor in the time required to convert the written material into accessible formats and to ensure that websites and online information meet the standards of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). To learn about accessible websites, see [Appendix D](#).

Identify and select accessible venues

Look for accessible venues when you hold a public meeting or open house. In addition to accessible entrances, hallways and washrooms, these venues should include accessible meeting rooms that are large enough to accommodate participants who use wheelchairs, scooters or service animals, or who are accompanied by sign language interpreters and support people.

Prepare feedback and evaluation plans

Feedback — Develop a plan for collecting, tracking and analyzing the written and oral comments you will receive from the public. Decide on how you will report back to the people who take part in the public engagement process.

Evaluation — Think about how you will evaluate the public engagement process. To help with the final evaluations and reports,

you could put ongoing feedback strategies into place. Throughout the process you could request feedback from participants on the public engagement activities. This would allow you to gauge their effectiveness and make changes where possible. Another strategy is to keep the decision makers in your organization informed of the results of each public engagement activity so that they can consider planning alternative or additional activities, if needed.

TIP: Plan to accept feedback from the public in a variety of ways. For example, some people with low vision may prefer to give verbal rather than written feedback.

Write your public engagement plan and get approval to proceed

You now have the information you need to write your public engagement plan. The plan should include the need for the public engagement, who you want to engage, what you plan to do, how long it will take, how you will evaluate the process, and how much it will cost.

Share the plan with the members of your team for their feedback before presenting it to your organization's decision makers for approval.

You want the decision makers to commit themselves to the project. Make sure they are open to acting on the recommendations that will come from the process and willing to champion it from beginning to end.

Step 3: Engage the Public

Now you are ready to carry out your public engagement activities. The process you have designed may include some or all of the following elements.

Inform the public

There are many ways to inform the public and promote your public engagement process. You can use media releases, dedicated websites, blogs, YouTube and social media such as Facebook and Twitter. For more information on using social media for public engagement, see [Appendix B](#).

- Make sure that your communication materials are available in accessible formats. These may include large-print formats and descriptive captioning or sign captioning for film, video and YouTube spots.
- Make sure your website and website content are accessible. To learn about accessible websites, see [Appendix D](#).

Invite stakeholders and the public to participate

The way you invite the public to participate in your public engagement process will depend on your target audience. If you want to engage a select group of stakeholders you can send individual invitations by post or email. If you are interested in hearing from the general public, you can post the invitation on your website or around the neighbourhood, or place a public notice in the local newspaper or the cable channel.

TIPS:

- Make sure your invitation is available in accessible formats. Tell potential participants that the engagement process is fully accessible and remind them to inform you about their accommodation needs.
- Make sure all participants understand the purpose and methods of the public engagement process. Explain to participants that they may be able to join or leave the process at any time.

Provide materials in plain language and accessible formats

Information materials could include a consultation paper, information kit, brochure, or presentation. Make sure all material is written in plain language, available in accessible formats, and ready in plenty of time. This will give your stakeholders and the public time to read and respond.

- To learn about plain language communication, see [Appendix D](#).
- To create accessible documents in applications such as Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, and Adobe Acrobat, see the link to the Inclusive Design Research Centre in [Appendix D](#).
- To learn about designing accessible printed documents, see the link to the CNIB's Clear Print Guidelines in [Appendix D](#).
- To learn about accessible presentations, see the link to the Global Alliance on Accessible Technologies and Environments in [Appendix D](#).

Respond to requests for accommodation

Make sure you understand any requests for accommodation you receive. Talk to the people involved and work out plans with them. If there is a conflict between different requests for accommodation, consult with the prospective participants to find a solution.

Engage your stakeholders, target audience or general public

Regardless of the level of public participation that your public engagement plan calls for, you will need to ensure all your activities are accessible.

If your plan includes conducting a public meeting, holding a workshop or an open house, ensure the venue is accessible. To learn about accessible venues, conducting accessible meetings, including virtual meetings, workshops, etc., consult OMSSA's Guide to Conducting Accessible Meetings.

Accept feedback in many formats

Be prepared to accept comments online, on paper, and over the telephone. Make sure that members of the public know that they can submit their responses in a variety of ways and in a variety of formats.

TIP: Keep personal information confidential unless the participants in the engagement process agree to have their responses attributed to them.

Step 4: Track, Evaluate, and Report

This step is a two-track process.

1. Compile, analyze and report on feedback from the public.
2. Evaluate and analyze the results of the public engagement process and compare them to the purpose or goals of the process you identified in Step 1.

Compile and analyze feedback

Once you have completed your public engagement activities, compile, analyze, and report on the comments received by following the feedback and evaluation plan you prepared in Step 2. If the public engagement process was a collaborative one, you may issue a set of recommendations.

Report back to the public

Your report to the public should explain the reason for the public engagement process and how it worked. The report should also outline the comments received from the public and how the public's participation affected the final decision or list of recommendations. In addition, your report should note that the whole process was fully accessible.

There are many ways to release the feedback, analysis or recommendations including posting them online, issuing a media release, or holding an event and releasing a report. Whatever method you choose, remember that websites, venues, and all written and online material must be accessible.

Evaluate your public engagement process

At the end of the public engagement process sit down with your team and analyze the results in relation to its purpose.

Create a list of questions to ask about the process such as the following.

- Did the participants understand the process and their role in it? Did they understand the effect their participation had on the final decision?
- Was the process timely and effective? Did it help your organization make a decision?
- Was the process accessible and sufficiently flexible to respond to last-minute requests for accommodation?
- What did the team learn about accessibility that can be passed on to the organization?

Report back to decision makers

In addition to keeping your organization's decision makers informed throughout the public engagement process, you can prepare a final report for them summarizing the results.

This report could set out the public engagement process, outline the comments received, and describe how the public's feedback influenced the final decision. As well, the report could explain the effectiveness of the accessible public engagement process and lessons learned.

Step 5: Embed the Process of Accessible Public Engagement

Organizations can create a culture in which accessibility is integrated into their public engagement processes. This approach can lead to more engaged and informed participants and generate more ideas, interest, and collaboration.

Build on lessons learned

After you have evaluated your public engagement process, write up what you have learned, especially the best practices related to accessibility.

With this information – and, perhaps, some additional research – you will be able to develop a policy for organizing future accessible public engagement processes.

To integrate accessible public engagement into your organization’s culture, consider the following measures.

Determine the commitment for making public engagement accessible

- Find out if there is an organizational commitment to an accessible public engagement process and a willingness to improve the current practices.

Develop an accessible public engagement policy

- Ensure that this policy reflects your organization’s commitment and support for accessibility.

Obtain senior management approval

- Seek approval from senior management for the policy and a resource allocation to achieve the desired results.
- Leverage the approval to promote the policy and accessibility within your organization and to share the approved policy with the public and stakeholders.

Develop in-house expertise

- Invest in developing an in-house resource person (or group) who can provide subject matter expertise and support in conducting an accessible public engagement process.
- Build an in-house team that understands and promotes the accessible public engagement process within your organization.

Train staff to facilitate accessible public engagement

- Provide opportunities for staff to develop or strengthen their facilitation skills.
- Ensure that staff members involved in public engagement are trained in the requirements of the Accessibility Standard for Customer Service.

Share the accessible public engagement policy with staff

- Ensure that all staff members are aware of your organization’s accessible public

engagement policy and the resources available to implement it.

- Raise awareness through staff meetings, lunch-and-learn sessions, staff newsletters, or your organization’s intranet.
- Share outcomes that showcase the success of your organization’s accessible public engagement policy.

Provide tips and resources to staff

- Make the accessible public engagement process easy to implement by providing staff with checklists, frequently asked questions, or templates.
- Develop a list of contacts for help and advice on accessibility.

Embed evaluation and continuous improvement into the accessible public engagement process

- Focus on results.
- Share best practices to build the skills of the staff involved in your organization’s public engagement process.
- Collect and analyze feedback from participants to evaluate the process.
- Engage as many people as possible by building a process suitable for your community.
- Continuously improve the process, adjusting it to respond to the feedback and the lessons learned from each public engagement.



Appendix A: Accessibility Legislation

About the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005

In 2005 the Government of Ontario passed the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). Its goal is to make Ontario accessible by 2025 by creating and enforcing accessibility standards.

These standards are rules that businesses and organizations in Ontario must follow to identify, remove and prevent barriers so that people with disabilities can live and work in inclusive communities. Standards address accessibility in customer service, information and communications, employment, transportation, and the design of public spaces. The AODA is guided by the four principles of dignity, equal opportunity, independence and integration.

About the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation

Several accessibility standards are contained in one regulation under the AODA called the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation, also known as the IASR.

Under the IASR, there are specific requirements for consultation with people with disabilities. These requirements vary depending on the type of organization.

Circumstances which require consultation with people with disabilities

Designated public sector organizations (includes municipalities, district school boards, hospitals, colleges and universities, and public transportation organizations)

- When establishing, reviewing and updating their multi-year accessibility plans

Municipalities

- When developing accessible design criteria in the construction, renovation or placement of bus stops and shelters; and determining the proportion of on-demand accessible taxicabs required in the community
- On the need, location and design of accessible on-street parking spaces when building new or making major changes to existing on-street parking spaces

NOTE: Municipalities must also consult their Accessibility Advisory Committees (if they have one).

Conventional transportation providers

- When gathering feedback on their accessibility plan through an annual public meeting

All organizations

- Before building new or making major changes to existing recreational trails to help determine particular trail features

All organizations except small private or non-profit organizations (1-49 employees)

- On the needs of children and caregivers with various disabilities in their community when building new or making major changes to existing outdoor play spaces
- On the design and placement of rest areas along the exterior path of travel when building new or making major changes to existing exterior paths of travel

About the Ontario Human Rights Code

Under the Ontario Human Rights Code, organizations have the duty to accommodate people with disabilities so that they have equal access to facilities and services. By making public engagement accessible, organizations can include greater numbers and thus reap the benefits of full public participation.

“Accommodation is a shared responsibility. Everyone involved, including the person asking for accommodation, should work together, exchange relevant information, and look for accommodation solutions together.”

There is no set formula for accommodating people with disabilities... A solution for one person may not work for someone else.”

www.ohrc.on.ca/en/disability-and-human-rights

Appendix B: Using Social Media for Accessible Public Engagement

Using social and other digital media in public engagement is fast gaining ground as an effective way of reaching out to the public. If made fully accessible, social media will allow people with disabilities who may not be able to attend public meetings to participate in decisions affecting their communities.

Benefits of social media

- It can provide people with disabilities with a safe space to share experiences and ideas without the level of intimidation that can sometimes happen at larger public engagement events.
- It can be a means for almost immediate engagement when formal meetings may take longer to arrange.
- Its conversational and informal tone can benefit the engagement process.

Social media can provide more options for participation but should not be the sole means of engaging communities. It may exclude, for instance, those who do not have access to computers, and it may be intimidating to others.

Social media can be a great equalizer - the benefits and drawbacks of using it in a public engagement process are usually the same for the general public and people with disabilities alike.

Social media shares information through short clips or sound bites, which are good for quick and immediate engagement, but do not replace the richness of in-person engagement.

Things to keep in mind when using social and digital media

- Consider your audience before committing to the use of any social and digital media tools. If you create a Facebook group, who would want to join, and why? If you create a webpage, how will people find it? Answering such questions in advance can help you develop useful engagement strategies with this medium.
- Organizers using social media for engagement do not have complete control over the medium or the conversations that occur through it.
- Many popular social or digital media platforms are not yet fully accessible.
- Using social media requires dedicated staff resources to keep information current, and ensure that discussions are appropriate and not offensive.
- Your target audience and the digital and social media platforms they use will determine which social media you use in your public engagement process.

- Alternative options for participation must be available on request. Not everyone has access to a computer or the skills needed to participate in discussions using social media. Carefully crafted questions can help start conversations. Questions have the potential to create vibrant, dynamic, and creative engagement processes.
- Because of its conversational and informal nature, using social media in public engagement requires an open, transparent plan that reflects the organization's commitment to listen to all feedback and engage all audiences.

Some examples of social media

Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and Reddit: Can enable high levels of participation and can serve as tools for research and sharing information. They can also help monitor new conversations and trends on topics that are relevant to people with disabilities and people seeking information about accessibility.

Websites: Useful for sharing information on blogs and hosting forums or discussions. When using websites, it is important to ensure they are compatible with assistive technologies such as screen readers.

Wikis: A wiki (such as Wikipedia) permits many people to create content through webpages, allowing for knowledge, information, resources, and results to be generated collaboratively by a community.

There are many more examples of social media, and new technologies are constantly emerging. An in-depth study of best practices in social media including training resources for using social media in public engagement will be developed by OMSSA in the future.

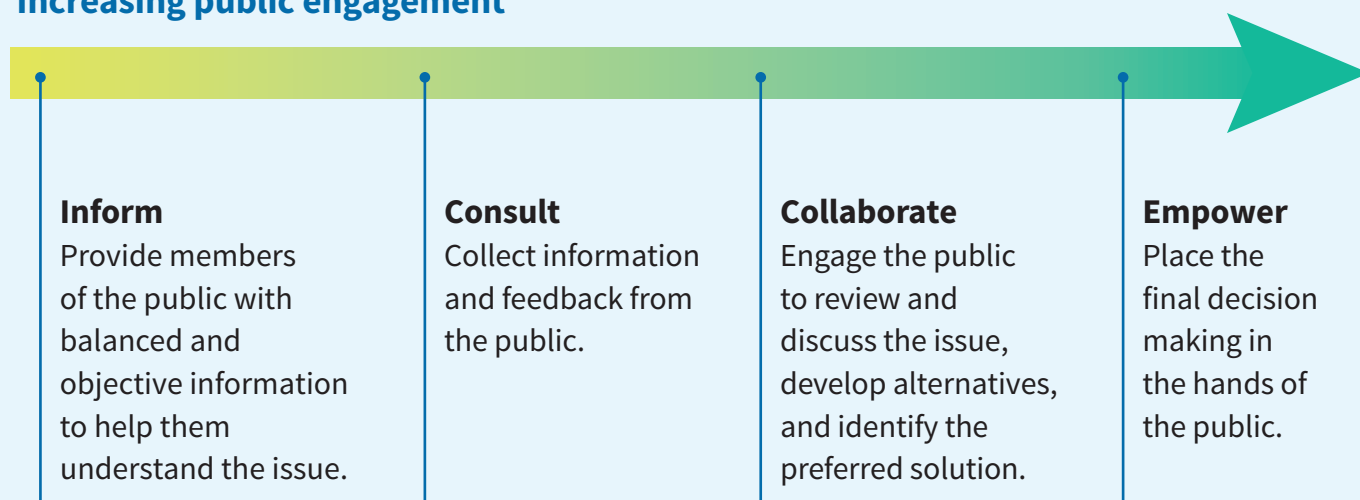
Appendix C: Quick Reference Checklist

Step 1: Identify Issues and Goals

- Assess the need for a public engagement process
- Examine the purpose of your public engagement process

Levels of public engagement

Increasing public engagement



Step 2: Plan an Accessible Public Engagement Process

- Choose your team

Who should be involved in this process?

- Public engagement coordinator
- Accessibility coordinator
- IT coordinator
- Financial coordinator
- Employee(s) with disabilities or experience working with people with disabilities
- Subject matter expert(s)
- Decision maker(s)
- Other: _____

Identify your stakeholders and/or target audience

Stakeholders by sector:

Stakeholders by geography:

Municipal Accessibility Advisory Committee members:

Community groups who are interested in the issue:

Members of the public who are interested in the issue:

Members of the public who have asked to be included:

Customers, clients:

Employees:

Select your public engagement activities

Sample activities

| Inform: | Consult: | Collaborate: | Empower: |
|---------------------------------|--|---------------------|-----------------|
| Websites | Public meetings | Citizens' panels | Ballots |
| Webinars | Surveys, feedback forms | Search conferences | |
| Open houses | Public advisory/ liaison committees | Workshops | |
| Local media coverage | Social media | | |
| Information displays and kiosks | | | |

- Prepare the budget and identify resources
- Set the time for the process and decide on the schedule
- Identify and select accessible venues
- Prepare feedback and evaluation plans
- Write your public engagement plan and get approval to proceed

Step 3: Engage the Public

Your public engagement plan will require you to take some or all of the following actions.

- Inform the public
- Invite stakeholders and the public to participate
- Provide materials in plain language and accessible formats
- Respond to requests for accommodation
- Engage your stakeholders, target audience or general public
- Accept feedback in many formats

Step 4: Track, Evaluate, and Report

- Compile and analyze feedback
- Report back to the public
- Evaluate your public engagement process
- Report back to decision makers

Step 5: Embed the Process of Accessible Public Engagement

Build on the lessons that you have learned by using some or all of the elements below to integrate accessible public engagement into your organization's culture.

- Determine the commitment for making public engagement accessible
- Develop an accessible public engagement policy
- Obtain senior management approval
- Develop in-house expertise
- Train staff to facilitate accessible public engagement
- Share the accessible public engagement policy with staff
- Provide tips and resources to staff
- Embed evaluation and continuous improvement into the accessible public engagement process

Appendix D: Accessibility Resources

Accessibility Directorate of Ontario

– Making Ontario Accessible

www.ontario.ca/AccessON

Accessibility Directorate of Ontario

– Making your website more accessible

www.mcass.gov.on.ca/en/mcass/publications/accessON/accessible_websites/toc.aspx

AChecker – Website Accessibility Checker

www.achecker.ca/checker/index.php

CNIB — Clear Print Guidelines

www.cnib.ca/en/services/resources/clearprint/pages/default.aspx

Global Alliance on Accessible Technologies and Environments — Tip sheet on creating accessible presentations

www.gaates.org/documents/ICT/TipSheet-Presentations.pdf

Graphic Artists Guild — Downloadable disability access symbols for web or print advertisements

www.graphicartistsguild.org/tools_resources/downloadable-disability-access-symbols

Inclusive Design Research Centre – Guides for creating accessible office documents using a variety of applications

<http://adod.idrc.ocad.ca/>

International Association for Public Participation

– Spectrum of Public Participation

http://www.iap2.org/associations/4748/files/IAP2%20Spectrum_vertical.pdf

Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food

– Clear writing fact sheet

www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/rural/facts/07-049.htm

Ontario Municipal Social Services Association

– Guide to Conducting Accessible Meetings

www.omssa.com

Region of Waterloo Public Health – Community Engagement in Region of Waterloo Public Health: A Look at Policy and Practice

www.chd.region.waterloo.on.ca/en/researchResourcesPublications/resources/CommunityEngagement.pdf

World Wide Web Consortium – Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)

www.w3.org/WAI/intro/wcag

Appendix E: Glossary of Accessibility Terms

Accessibility: Giving people of all abilities opportunities to participate fully in everyday life.

Accessible Formats, Alternate Formats/ Multiple Formats: Formats that enable access by a person with a disability. Common accessible formats include large print, audio cassette, Braille, CD/DVD, descriptive video, signed video, on-screen text/e-text, and plain language or easy read. A tactile diagram or pictograms may be a component of an accessible format document.

Adaptive or Assistive Technology (AT): Technological tools that facilitate computer access for people with disabilities. Technology solutions may involve simple, readily available adjustments such as using built-in access devices on standard computers, or unique combinations of software and hardware such as those needed for voice or Braille output.

Alternative Input Devices: Devices that enable control of the computer through means other than a standard keyboard or pointing device. Some examples of these include smaller or larger keyboards, eye and head operated pointing devices and “sip-and-suck systems” that are controlled by breathing.

American Sign Language (ASL) and Langue des signes québécoise (LSQ): Visual languages with unique vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and social rules of use.

Assistive Devices: Any item, piece of equipment, or product system, including those acquired commercially, modified, or customized that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities.

Barrier: Anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society because of his or her disability. A barrier may be a physical barrier, an architectural barrier, an information or communications barrier, an attitudinal barrier, or a technological barrier. A policy or a practice may also be a barrier.

Braille: A series of raised dots that can be read with the fingers by people who are blind or whose eyesight is not sufficient for reading printed material.

Communication Access Real-time Captioning (CART): Instant translation of the spoken word into text using a stenotype machine or notebook computer and real-time software. The text appears on a computer monitor or other display.

Clear Print: A design approach that considers the needs of people with vision loss, cognitive disabilities or low literacy by focusing on basic design elements such as font style, type size, contrast, and page navigation.

Described Video: Described video provides audio descriptions of what appears on a screen in video format and enables someone to hear what is being portrayed visually.

Disability: The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 definition includes physical disabilities, mental and intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, and injuries or disabilities for which Workplace Safety and Insurance benefits were claimed and received. To read the complete definition visit ontario.ca/e-laws.

Oral Interpreters: Interpreters who facilitate communication in group situations where deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing individuals rely on speech reading. The oral interpreter mouths the words of the speaker, changing them when necessary to synonyms that are more visible on the lips.

Plain Language: A way of writing and presenting information and complex messages so that they are easy to read, understand and use. Plain language includes writing using simple sentences and uncomplicated grammar. It eliminates unnecessary words and jargon, replacing them with familiar words in a conversational style.

Screen Readers: Software programs that read out loud what is on the computer monitor through digitized speech. Screen reader programs do not require the use of a mouse or other devices that require sight.

Sign Language Interpreters: Interpreters who facilitate communication between people who use sign language and people who use spoken languages.

Telephone Teletypes (TTY): TTY is an electronic device with a keyboard and a small screen that is used by people who are deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing to communicate via telephone using a text-based system.

