George Brown College logo

**Planning for Accessible Events**

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**George Brown College**

**Diversity, Equity, Human Rights Services**

Written by

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# Understanding the need

## Legislative background

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) promotes the principles of independence, dignity, integration and equal opportunity and has an end goal of preventing and removing barriers in Ontario to ensure accessibility for all Ontarians.

All events planned at George Brown College should be planned with accessibility in mind. This guide provides you practical information on how to identify, remove and prevent barriers to accessibility when planning an event.

## Keeping accessibility top-of-mind

Each person responsible for planning or contributing to the planning of an event should remember that persons with disabilities might have specific accessibility needs. Planning in advance will help to ensure that the accommodation needs of people with disabilities are anticipated and acted upon in a timely manner.

At George Brown College our general practice is to ensure we provide sign language interpretation and closed captioning for all college-wide events as well as consider all other accessibility requirements in consultation with persons with disabilities.

Considerations for accessibility should not be restricted to physical space. While the accessibility of the physical space is important, any information and or communication about the event or made available at the event as well as your process for registration need to be considered as well.

# Incorporating accessibility into the pre-planning stage

Here are some actions you should consider when planning your event:

### Involving Persons with Disabilities in Planning

* It is essential to consult with persons with disabilities as they can often recognize potential barriers in the pre-planning states.
* Do not assume that individuals with similar disabilities will have the same needs.

### Budgeting for your event

You are responsible for ensuring you have the budget to cover the costs of making the event accessible. This may include:

* Accommodation requests
* Dietary requests
* ASL Interpreting services, note takers, or closed captioning services
* Information / Communication supports
* Presentation materials in alternative format requests

### Advertisement and Registration

* If you are advertising for an event, make sure you advertise well in advance.
* Use multiple approaches (electronic, hard copy, accessible versions, for advertising for registration).
* Ensure participants / guests know what services may be available (ASL Interpreting, note taking, captioning etc.).
* Clearly identify a process for requesting accommodations during registration.
* Follow up with people who have made an accommodation request.
* Example of language that can be used in advertisement and registration process:
  + “If you require an accommodation to attend this event, please contact (name), (position), at (telephone contact information), or (email information).
* Notify participants well in advance so that they can arrange for accessible transportation, attendant services and other support services.
* Identify where accessible parking is available and where the nearest accessible entrances to the location are.
* Include the international accessibility symbols on your event advertisements. <https://www.graphicartistsguild.org/tools_resources/downloadable-disability-access-symbols>

### Preparing for Presentations

* Providing agendas / background information ahead of time.
* Provide all information to service providers at least two to three weeks ahead of time (e.g., ASL Interpreters, Captioning service providers).
* Create plain language material.
* Have material available in alternative formats in advance if requested.
* Ensure information is accessible and has easy-to-follow instructions.
* Prepare agenda with adequate meal / health breaks.
* Identify locations of accessible washroom facilities and inform participants.
* Allow time to arrange for renting audio and / or assistive listening systems.
* Allow time on the day of the event to set up and test audio and assistive listening systems.

### Preparing Presenters

The following tips are some general guidelines that you can share with presenters:

* Ensure presenters have submitted their final documents / presentation to be available to service providers at least two to three weeks before the scheduled event (e.g., ASL Interpreters, Captioning service providers).
* Present key points in multiple ways, including visual, auditory and tactile approaches.
* Present visual materials in a format that allows everyone to follow contrast colours and large, easy-to-read type.
* Presenters should arrange for captioning of the videos ahead of time.
* When projectors or video screens are not in use, turn them off - this reduces background noise.
* Presenters should repeat questions before answering.
* Presenters should rephrase questions rather than repeat.
* Presenter should always face the audience and do not turn your back to write on a board when speaking.

### Accessibility Awareness

* Encourage emergency preparedness in written material
* Promote accessible services on web sites, all brochures, posters and other media.
* Ensure there are accessible routes to the event (e.g., no construction, elevators in working order).
* Post clear, well-lit and easy-to-read signs showing locations of accessible washrooms and elevators.
* Make sure all organizers; presenters and volunteers are aware of emergency evacuation procedures.
* Make sure volunteers are easily identified, using nametags and or other identifiers.
* Events that are more than 2 hours in length typically require two interpreters, and interpreters must be given a break every hour.

### Preparing for Accessible Meeting Rooms

* Reserve a few seats in the front of the room.
* Check for clear sight lines for persons using sign-language interpreters or captioning service providers.
* Remove more than one seat for persons in a wheelchair or scooter.
* Make sure the room is well lit and blinds are closed if there is significant sunlight beaming into the room.
* Allow for sufficient space between seats / aisles.
* Accessible washrooms within a reasonable distance.
* Ensure electrical cables or cords that cross over aisles or pathways are covered.

### Evaluating Your Event

* As part of the evaluation process, ask participants both general and specific questions about what they thought of the accessibility of the event.
* Ensure your process for receiving feedback and or comments is accessible by allowing participants to provide their input in any format. For example, by phone, in an email, in persons, in writing etc.

# Accessible Meetings Checklist

## Budgeting

Have you budgeted for (check which apply):

* ASL Interpreting
* Note-taking services
* Real time captioning
* Materials in alternative formats
* Equipment to support simultaneous interpretation
* Dietary needs
* Other accessibility features

## Choosing the location

* Is the space accessible?
* Did you do a site visit before booking a location?
* Are there a reasonable number of accessible parking spots available?
* Is there a barrier-free path of travel from parking spots or drop off area to the entrance of the facility?
* Are main entrances accessible? Clearly visible at the front of the building indicating the location of an accessible entrance?
* Are there automatic door openers at all accessible entrances?
* Are there accessible washrooms located at a reasonable distance?
* Is any renovation or construction work scheduled during the time of your event?
* Are there accessible entrances to the facility nearby?
* Are there accessible emergency exists nearby and are they clearly identifiable?
* Are there elevators located close to the meeting room?

## Meeting and conference rooms

* + Is the meeting room located on the building entry floor?
  + Is the meeting room large enough to provide circulation and seating for participants who use wheelchairs, scooters, guide dogs or other mobility aids?
  + Is accessible seating available throughout the meeting space?
  + Are the aisles wide enough to accommodate easy movement?
  + Are there accessible areas interspersed throughout the room – front, middle and back?
  + Does the space have good lighting? If the meeting room has windows, are there drapes or blinds that can be used to reduce light or glare?
  + Is there any background noise? If, so, can the noise be eliminated?
  + Are there reasonable acoustics?
  + Have you reserved seating in the front row for Deaf, deafened or hard of hearing people.
  + Are the reception/refreshment areas located in an area large enough to easily accommodate people who use wheelchairs, scooters, guide dogs or other mobility aids?
  + Is the stage / speaking area, including lectern or podium, accessible to people using wheelchairs and scooters?
  + Are cables, wires and microphones well secured and away from aisles and other traffic areas?
  + Do all organizers, speakers, volunteers know the locations of the following:
    - Emergency exits
    - Accessible washrooms
    - Public telephones that are accessible

## Invitations and /or promotional materials

* Do your invitations and / or promotional material about your accessible event include the International Symbol(s) of Accessibility?
* Have you arranged for alternative formats of the invitations and or promotional material to be available upon request?
* Do the invitation and promotional materials include information that allows participants to make accommodation requests or any additional requirements (e.g., dietary preferences)?
* Consider maintaining a scent-free event and adding a statement to your invitation and or promotional material. E.g. “out of consideration to those with fragrance sensitivities, please avoid wearing scented products”.

## Emergency Planning

* Have you prepared an evacuation plan, in the event of an emergency for participants with disabilities?
* Do you have a plan to communicate this evacuation plan to organizers, participants and volunteers?

## Refreshment and dietary arrangements

* Have you given participants an opportunity to indicate any dietary needs ahead of time?
* Are all refreshments, plates, cups, and cutlery within easy reach of people using wheelchairs or scooters?
* Are there an assortment of beverages including sugar-free beverages, juices and water available?
* If food is provided buffet style, will someone be on hand to help serve people who have visual and physical disabilities?

## Communication

* Have you used appropriate terminology in all communications?
* In preparing all communications, have you made use of accessible formats?
* Have you used a font choice that is ‘sans serif’?
* In electronic communications, have you ensured all images and graphics have been tagged?
* Have you used appropriate colour contrast between text and background?

# Resources

* Accessibility Directorate of Ontario – Making Ontario Accessible,

[www.ontario.ca/AccessON](http://www.ontario.ca/AccessON)

* Ministry of Community and Social Services, Planning an accessible meeting: A checklist, Government of Ontario, <http://www.mcss.gov.on.ca/en/mcss/programs/accessibility/understanding_accessibility/planning_meeting_checklist.aspx>
* Graphics Artist Guild, Downloadable Disability Access Symbols, <https://www.graphicartistsguild.org/tools_resources/downloadable-disability-access-symbols>
* The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), How Persons with Disabilities Use the Web, is available at the following websites address, <http://www.w3.org/WAI/intro/people-use-web/Overview.html>
* The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0, <http://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/>
* The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), Use of Color, http://www.w3.org/TR/UNDERSTANDING-WCAG20/visual-audio-contrast-without-color.html
* Human Resources and Skills Development Canada: Guide to Planning Inclusive Meetings, <http://www.esdc.gc.ca/eng/disability/arc/inclusive_meetings.pdf>

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