

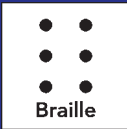
COUNT US IN



Removing Barriers to Political Participation

Accessible All Candidates Meetings

Quick Reference Guide



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Count Us In: Removing Barriers to Political Participation Quick Reference Guide to Accessible All Candidates Meetings

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X People with Disabilities are Voters

There has been steady progress and many positive changes to the election process in Ontario to help ensure that people with disabilities are able to vote. Yet, key barriers remain that prevent the full and equal political participation of all people in Ontario **before** they go to the polls.

At present, a lack of opportunity exists for people with disabilities to interact with the candidates and organizers during the election process. At the same time, accessibility barriers are preventing candidates from benefiting from the views and involvement of voters with disabilities. Political candidates have the opportunity to engage this portion of the voting public by taking steps to ensure that their campaign activities are accessible to everyone.

Making your campaign, party or constituency office accessible will help with this, but you also need to look at all aspects of how you deliver your campaign and anticipate how to adjust these activities to meet the needs of voters with disabilities.

People with disabilities deserve the same opportunities as everyone else to participate in all election activities. In the coming years, age related disabilities will increase as the generation of baby boomers ages, creating an even greater need for inclusion and accessibility in the electoral process.

Providing an accessible environment need not be complicated or expensive. In fact many changes cost nothing at all or have a minimal impact on the bottom line — but they can have a huge impact on voter engagement.

You can make positive changes to your campaign activities by actively involving voters with disabilities. Value their input, as they are the 'experts.' Taking the time to listen to their experiences will often lead you to solutions that, once identified, are easily incorporated into your everyday activities and will lead to long lasting improvements in accessibility and excellent customer service.



How to Use This Guide

All voters want to have the information they need to decide who to vote for on Election Day. One way to get that information is to go to a meeting where all of the candidates in the riding talk about what they plan to do about important issues and respond to voter's questions.

Taking part in the democratic process by attending a local All Candidates meeting is something most people take for granted. However, not everyone can take advantage of this opportunity. People with disabilities commonly experience barriers in directly accessing their candidates during All Candidates meetings.

The *Quick Reference Guide to Accessible All Candidates Meetings* has been developed to assist you and your planning team to look at ways of ensuring that voters with disabilities have the opportunity to participate in All Candidates meetings in a setting that supports their ability to communicate directly with candidates.

By building accessible information and communication strategies into the planning of your meeting, you can meet the information needs of all voters. Remember – communication is a two-way street. You are not only providing information to voters but you are also putting in place effective ways for political candidates to seek the views of voters with disabilities.

The Guide provides recommendations on effective strategies and information about alternative formats, assistive technologies and services to make sure your meeting is accessible to the largest possible audience.

Three important points need to be considered when planning an accessible All Candidates meeting:

- ✓ **Physical access to the meeting location**
- ✓ **Access to the dialogue that will take place during the meeting**

- ✓ **Ability for voters to pose their questions to candidates and receive the answer to their questions in a way that is understood by them.**

Advanced planning will ensure that the needs of voters with disabilities are anticipated and acted upon ahead of time. Even when you do not know in advance whether any of your participants may need accommodations, you should be prepared to arrange your meeting to be accessible so that everyone can participate independently.

Choosing a Location

When deciding on a location for an All Candidates meeting, a site that has been recommended by a credible local disability organization with expertise in barrier-free access is ideal. It is also recommended to plan an on-site visit to the location under consideration to determine its level of accessibility before you book your meeting. Inquire about recent renovations or current construction that may have an impact on accessibility. The following are some guidelines to consider when evaluating a location:

Transportation

- ✓ Select a meeting space that is located on a route that is served by public transportation.

Signage

- ✓ The location should have signs for the street address and/or building name that are clearly visible from the street and well lit during evening events.

Parking

- ✓ Determine whether there are a reasonable number of accessible parking spots available for participants.
- ✓ Ensure signage is provided to designate the barrier-free

space(s) as reserved for permit holders.

- ✓ All sidewalks should have curb cuts at locations near parking and along the route to the accessible entrance.
- ✓ Snow and ice should be removed as soon as possible in winter months.

Temporary solution for your meeting:

Concern: Parking is available, but there are a limited number of accessible spaces, and there is no van-accessible parking.

Solution:

- ✓ Designate additional accessible parking by finding a level parking area near the accessible entrance
- ✓ Provide a sign designating each additional parking space and make sure the access aisle of each space is connected to the accessible route to the accessible entrance
- ✓ Use three parking spaces to make two van-accessible parking with an access aisles
- ✓ Use traffic cones to mark the additional spaces and accessible route

Sidewalks and Paths of Travel

- ✓ A barrier-free path of travel from the parking lot to the meeting entrance should avoid stairs, sudden changes in level, and slippery or unstable ground.
- ✓ Beware of signs, furniture, garbage cans, trees and other items that can pose a hazard to someone who is blind or has low vision
- ✓ Level access is preferred. However, if ramps are required, they should be gradual in slope and have handrails on both sides.

Entrances, Lobbies and Corridors

- ✓ The entrance should be wide enough for a person using a wheelchair or scooter to pass through it safely. Access

through the main entrance is preferred.

- ✓ Doors should be clearly visible and in a contrasting colour to the area around it. The doors should be easy to open, with lever handles or other handles that can be used without grasping or twisting of the wrist. A power door opener or automatic door is preferred.
- ✓ Provide signs indicating where the meeting is taking place within the building. Use signs that are large enough and clear enough to be read by people with low vision.
- ✓ Have someone positioned as a greeter to welcome participants to the meeting and to direct them to the meeting room.
- ✓ Hallways and doorways leading to the meeting room should be wide enough to permit the passage of people using wheelchairs and scooters.
- ✓ Hazards in the lobby and corridors should be avoided. Low hanging signs and other items like plants or garbage cans or objects in unexpected places are dangerous to people who are blind or visually impaired.

Accessible Washrooms

- ✓ Your meeting location must have washrooms that are large enough to accommodate scooter and power wheelchair users and are equipped with at least one accessible stall. A unisex washroom is preferred.
- ✓ The accessible washrooms must be located on the same floor and in close proximity to the room where your meeting is taking place.
- ✓ Doors to the washroom should have a raised (tactile) male or female sign or Braille lettering.
- ✓ Ensure fire alarms are located in the washrooms and include both audible and visual signaling.

Meeting Space

- ✓ Select a meeting room located on the main floor to avoid the need for elevator use, ramps or stairs.
- ✓ Ensure that the meeting room is large enough to

provide circulation and seating for voters who use wheelchair, scooters, guide dogs or other mobility aids.

- ✓ Reserve a block of seating near the front of the room for individuals who prefer close proximity to the sign language interpreter and captioning screen.
- ✓ Ensure the location provided for the sign language interpreter is well lit and on the stage with the candidates and moderator.
- ✓ Check for audible noise levels that may be distracting, such as ventilation systems or noise from adjacent rooms.
- ✓ Check for sources of visual noise, such as flickering lights or reflections.
- ✓ Movable chairs, rather than fixed seating, provides more options for accessibility as participants can choose where they sit and adjust seating according to their needs.
- ✓ Where microphones are provided for questions, provide at least one hand held microphone and assign responsibility to a member of your team for the operation of the microphone.
- ✓ Check that cables, wires and floor microphones are well secured. Where floor microphones are used in aisles, ensure that the aisles are wide enough so that they do not block traffic.

Additional Considerations

- ✓ Check to see that fire alarms have both a visual and an audible signal and are strategically placed to be seen and heard from all areas of the building.
- ✓ If refreshments are to be provided, provide bendable straws and lightweight cups and an option for sugar free beverages.
- ✓ Note that it is prohibited to deny a person access to a place or a service because a guide dog accompanies them.

Additional information about choosing an accessible meeting location can be found in the *Quick Reference Guide for Accessible Campaign, Riding Association, Central Party and Constituency Offices*.



Advertising an Accessible All Candidates Meeting

It is important to factor accessibility into the promotion of your All Candidates meeting in order to ensure that people with disabilities are aware of the meeting and its accessibility. The following are some important tips for promoting an accessible All Candidates meeting:

- ✓ Ensure that the invitations, notice of meeting and all promotional materials include information that your meeting is accessible.
- ✓ Be sure to include your TTY (Teletypewriter) number in all the advertising and promotional materials about the meeting.
- ✓ Take advantage of the services offered through VoicePrint. VoicePrint, a division of The National Broadcast Reading Service, broadcasts readings of full-text articles from more than 600 Canadian newspapers and magazines. They also provide advertising opportunities through a fee-for-service program.
- ✓ Reach the largest number of possible participants by providing your notice of meeting and promotional materials to local disability organizations. Links to organizations can be found in the 'More Information' section at the end of this document.
- ✓ If you plan to invite local media, make sure there is room for them to set up equipment without affecting the accessibility of the space.

Additional information about accessible advertising, including recommendations for Web site and e-mail accessibility can be found in the *Quick Reference Guide to Accessible Campaign Information and Communication*.



Assistive Technologies and Services

In order for everyone to understand and participate in the dialogue during the meeting, it is important that you arrange for appropriate assistive technologies and services to be made available. The following are key resources for making an All Candidates meeting accessible:

Sign Language Interpreting

Sign Language Interpreting supports communication between people who use American Sign Language (ASL) and people who use spoken English [or Langue des signes québécoise (LSQ) and spoken French]. Sign language interpreters are knowledgeable in the language and culture of both Deaf and hearing people. They provide communication in both a sign language and a spoken language and are bound by a professional Code of Ethics. Sign Language is a requirement for a successful and accessible All Candidates meeting.

Real-time captioning

Real-time captioning (or CART) uses stenographic and laptop computer technology. A captionist types exactly what each speaker says and the dialogue appears on a laptop computer monitor or is projected to a large screen so that it can be read by all participants, including people with hearing loss. Real-time captioning is a requirement to a successful and accessible All Candidates meeting.

Sign language interpreting and real time captioning is a requirement for an accessible All Candidates meeting. As these resources are in high demand, schedule sign language interpreters and captionist as soon as you confirm the date of the meeting.

Deaf-Blind Intervenor

Deaf-Blind Intervenor provides individuals with deaf-blindness with information from the environment, and may provide communication on behalf of the individual. Be prepared to accommodate requests to arrange for an intervenor. Generally, individuals will arrange for the intervenor themselves.

Attendant Service

Attendant Service delivers non-medical physical assistance to help people with a physical disability perform activities of daily living when a person cannot perform these functions themselves. At a meeting, these services might include assistance with toileting, assistance with jackets and other street clothing, assistance with refreshments and other personal care. Providing attendant service is a requirement for a successful and accessible All Candidates meeting.

Assistive Listening Technology and Systems

Assistive Listening Devices (ALDs) are designed to improve communication for people with hearing loss in situations where hearing aids alone are inadequate. Assistive listening devices carry the sound across distance and over background sounds. The desired sound is sent directly into the listener's ears. Instead of hearing from across the room, sound is heard as if the speaker is right next to the listener and background sounds are reduced. Assistive listening devices include FM systems, infrared systems and personal amplification systems. Assistive Listening Devices are a requirement for a successful and accessible All Candidates meeting.

- ✓ **FM systems** send signals from the transmitter to the receivers by way of wireless, designated radio waves. The speaker uses the transmitter or it can be jacked into the amplifier of an existing PA system. The receiver is worn by the hard of hearing individual who can adjust the volume.
- ✓ **Infrared systems** use light energy to transmit the signal from the transmitter to the receiver.
- ✓ **Personal amplification systems** assist communication with a hard of hearing person who is not wearing a hearing aid. It is a portable one-to-one communication device. A speaker talks into the lapel microphone. The sound is then carried directly to the headset of the hard of hearing individual. This minimizes background noises and the distance between speaker and listener.



Budgeting for Assistive Technologies and Services

This guide is intended to provide information on accessibility strategies and budgeting considerations for meeting organizers wishing to make their meeting accessible. It is important to note, however, that the responsibility for ensuring the accessibility of All Candidates meetings, including budgeting costs, lies with the meeting organizers.

Use accessibility as a budget line item when you begin the financial planning for the meeting. Provide enough funds to cover technology and services that will be required at the meeting to make it accessible, such as sign language interpreting, real-time captioning and attendant service. You will need to contact an appropriate supplier to get an actual estimate of the costs. Links to suppliers can be found in the 'More Information' section at the end of this document. The following are some general guidelines, based on current market prices at time of publication, that can help you out when determining your budget

Sign Language Interpreting

For sign language interpreting, the cost will be based on how long the service is needed and whether one or more interpreters will be required. Currently, the base rate for interpreting service is \$110 per interpreter for up to two hours of service. After that, \$55 is charged for every hour or part thereof.

Real-time Captioning

For voice-to-text captioning, also known as real-time captioning or CART, the cost will be based on how long the service is needed and whether one or more captioners will be required. Generally speaking, one CART provider can write for a 6-hour day with appropriate breaks.

Currently, while the rates for captioning vary depending on the skill set of the captioner and meeting content, rates begin at \$125 per hour per captioner and usually require a 4-hour minimum, which includes a three hour minimum for the actual

voice-to-text CART service and one hour of preparation before the meeting. After that, the rate is charged for every hour or part thereof. Rough draft transcripts may be available after the meeting, but there may be additional charges for this service.

Attendant Services

The costs for attendant services vary depending on which service provider is used, how long the service is needed and whether one or more attendants will be required. For public meetings, providing at least one male and one female attendant is recommended. Currently, the base rate for attendant services is \$30.00 per hour per attendant.

Sample Budget

Based on the requirements for sign language interpreting, captioning and attendant services as outlined above, the base cost for a typical two-hour meeting would breakdown as follows:

Sign Language Interpreting	
— 2 interpreters at \$110.00 (2 hours each)	\$220.00
Real-time Captioning	
— 1 captioner at \$125.00 (four-hour minimum)	\$500.00
Attendant Services	
— 2 attendants at \$30.00 (2 hours each)	<u>\$120.00</u>
Sub Total	\$840.00

Additional expenses may be incurred, depending on the number of assistive listening devices that may need to be rented and whether any print materials will need to be made available in alternative formats such as Braille and large print. As the candidates will be responsible for supplying their own campaign literature in alternative formats, it is unlikely there will be additional print information for distribution by the meeting organizers. The costs for providing an accessible meeting can be shared among the participating campaign teams.



Conducting the Accessible All Candidates Meeting

Before the Meeting

Prior to beginning the All Candidates meeting, the following steps will help to ensure that assistive devices and services function smoothly throughout the meeting:

- ✓ Test Assistive Listening Devices and microphones to make sure that they are in working order.
- ✓ Adjust the lighting so that the location provided for the sign language interpreter is well lit.
- ✓ Check for distracting audible and visual noises and adjust accordingly.

During the Meeting

While there are variations for the format of an All Candidates meeting, the debate format will lend itself to a more accessible meeting if it allows for one speaker at a time to present their views and respond to questions. It is important for the moderator to introduce and communicate the rules to maintain order and enforce timelines during the meeting.

The same rules apply to accessible All Candidates meeting as to non-accessible meetings. However, some additional points need to be taken into consideration in order to maintain the accessibility of the dialogue.

The moderator needs to be aware of interpreting and captioning. If the pace of the discussion is too rapid, the moderator will need to remind the participants to speak at a moderate pace so that their comments can be interpreted and transcribed effectively. In addition, the moderator needs to firmly direct the conversation so that only one person is speaking at a time in order to allow each person's conversation to be interpreted and understood correctly before the next speaker begins.

Typically, there is a maximum time limit in effect for members of the audience to pose their questions. This is necessary to

avoid long speeches and to maximize the number of questions posed during the meeting. Some flexibility should be allowed for those who have difficulty speaking or whose questions need to be voiced by an interpreter or transcribed by a captioner.

Understanding Disability

Disabilities can take many forms. They may be permanent or temporary; developmental or physical; severe or mild; for the young or the old; or any combination of disabilities. A person can be born with a disability or someone could become injured resulting in a temporary or permanent disability. Some disabilities are visible and many are non-visible. Since you never know who may want to interact with you during the election process, it is important that you plan to include all people.

Physical Disabilities

There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities, and while people who use mobility aids like wheelchairs, scooters, crutches or canes are most recognizable, it is important to consider that not all people with physical disabilities require a mobility device. People who have arthritis, heart or lung conditions or amputations may also have difficulty with stamina, moving, standing, sitting or the ability to reach or grasp. It may be difficult to identify a person with a physical disability.

Vision Loss

There are varying degrees of vision loss and a distinction between blindness and low vision. In some cases, it may be difficult to tell if a person has a vision loss. The majority of people living with a vision disability have some vision. Some people are totally blind. Vision disabilities can reduce one's ability to see clearly or can affect the range of visual field. Some people can distinguish between light and dark, or between contrasting colours, or read large print, but have difficulty with small print or low-light situations. Others may have a loss of peripheral or side vision, or a lack of central vision, which

impacts a person's ability to distinguish details, like recognizing faces or reading. Vision disabilities can restrict a person's ability to read print and signs, locate landmarks or see hazards. They may use a white cane or service animal to help with orientation and movement in an environment.

Deafness and Hearing Loss

Hearing loss ranges from mild to profound. The distinctions between the terms "deaf", "Deaf", "deafened", and "hard of hearing" are based principally on the individual's preferred language (spoken or signed) rather than on the actual degree of hearing loss. Deaf, deafened and hard of hearing individuals may use hearing aids, cochlear implants, and/or other assistive-listening and communication devices.

Deaf-Blindness

A person who is deaf-blind has some degree of both vision and hearing loss. This results in greater difficulties in accessing information and managing daily activities. Most people who are deaf-blind will be accompanied by an intervenor, a professional who helps with communicating. An intervenor is trained in many adaptive communication methods, depending upon the preferences of the person who is deaf-blind. The intervenor may guide and interpret for their client.

Speech Disabilities

People with speech disabilities may have problems communicating. For many reasons, people may have difficulty speaking clearly — for example, as a result of a stroke or cerebral palsy — which may result in difficulties with verbal communication. Some people may use communication boards or other assistive devices to help communicate. A speech disability often has no impact on a person's ability to understand.

Cognitive Disabilities

Cognitive disabilities may affect understanding, communication, or behavior and can be attributed to brain injuries, developmental or learning disabilities. It is not always easy to identify someone who has a cognitive disability. Some

conditions, such as Down's syndrome exhibit physical characteristics, but there are others that are not so apparent. People with a cognitive disability may have difficulties recognizing, understanding and remembering information.

Mental Illness

Mental illness is a disturbance in thoughts and emotions that may decrease a person's capacity to cope with the challenges of everyday life. Mental illness can take many forms, just as physical illness does. Mental illnesses include schizophrenia, mood disorders (such as depression and bipolar disorder), anxiety disorders, personality disorders, and eating disorders



Additional Resources

There are many resources about accessible information and communication. The resources listed below support the recommendations made throughout this Guide:

More information about interpreting services and providing access and accommodation to you and deaf, deafened, and hard of hearing voters is available through The Canadian Hearing Society's web site at: www.chs.ca

Information about Attendant Services is available through the Canadian Paraplegic Association Ontario web site at www.cpaont.org and the Ontario March of Dimes web site at www.marchofdimes.ca

More information about Ontario-based companies and organizations that provide services or assistance for people with disabilities, including assistive technology, transcription, captioning and Braille translation services is available through the Directory of Accessibility at www.accessibilitydirectory.ca

Additional suppliers for assistive technology, transcription, captioning and Braille translation services can be found through the online Canadian Company Capabilities Database maintained by Industry Canada at

www.strategis.ic.gc.ca/sc_coinf/ccc/engdoc/homepage.html

Information about disability organizations in your community is available through the Access Guide Canada web site at

www.abilities.ca/agc/index.php

More information about VoicePrint, a division of The National Broadcast Reading Service is available at

www.voiceprintcanada.com

Who Can Help?

There are many organizations, which work with and on behalf of people with disabilities that may be able to provide further guidance. The following organizations contributed to the development of this guide:

Canadian Paraplegic Association Ontario

520 Sutherland Drive,
Toronto, Ontario M4G 3V9
Toll Free: 1-877-422-1112
Tel: 416-422-5644
Fax: 416-422-5943
E-mail: info@cpaont.org
www.cpaont.org

CNIB

1929 Bayview Avenue
Toronto, Ontario M4G 3E8
Tel: 416-486-2500
Toll Free: 1-800-563-2642
Fax: 416-480-7717
TTY: 416-480-8645
E-mail: ontario@cnib.ca
www.cnib.ca

The Canadian Hearing Society (CHS)

271 Spadina Road
Toronto, Ontario M5R 2V3
Tel: 416-928-2500
Toll-Free: 1-877-347-3427
TTY: 416-964-0023
Toll-Free TTY: 1-877-347-3429
Fax: 416-928-2506
E-mail: info@chs.ca
www.chs.ca

Ontario March of Dimes

10 Overlea Blvd.
Toronto, Ontario M4H 1A4
Tel: 416-425-3463
Toll-free: 1-800-263-3463
E-mail: info@dimes.on.ca
www.marchofdimes.ca

Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario

2301 - 180 Dundas Street West
Toronto, Ontario M5G 1Z8
Tel: 416-977-5580
Fax: 416-977-2813
E-mail: info@ontario.cmha.ca
www.ontario.cmha.ca

Accessibility Directorate of Ontario

Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services
777 Bay Street, 6th Floor, Suite 601
Toronto, Ontario M7A 2J4
Tel: 416-326-0207
Toll-free: 1-888-520-5828
TTY: 416-326-0148
Toll-free 1-888-335-6611
Fax: 416-326-9725
E-mail: accessibility@css.gov.on.ca
www.mcass.gov.on.ca

Disclaimer

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In Ontario, legislation prescribes specific responsibilities related to the accommodation of persons with disabilities.

For the purposes of this guide, the following legislation is the minimum accommodation requirements service providers must be aware of and comply with (list not inclusive):

- ✓ Ontario Human Rights Code
- ✓ Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA)
- ✓ Ontario Building Code

For full versions of these Codes and Acts please refer to www.e-laws.gov.on.ca

