

## **MUSEUM NOTE: Accessibility**

This Museum Note will help your museum to comply with the Ontario government's **Interpretation and Education, Physical Plant and Community Standards** as outlined in the *Standards for Community Museums in Ontario*.

Standards enable community museums to:

- provide the appropriate care and management of collections
- meet visitors' expectations
- be accountable and transparent to the community, funders and donors

### **Access – definition**

Museums must make their services and resources available to **all** potential users.

The AODA definition covers many different types of disability, such as:

- Deafness or hearing loss
- Intellectual or developmental disabilities
- Learning disabilities
- Mental health disabilities
- Physical disabilities
- Vision loss

A disability can be permanent or temporary

### **Accessibility requirements: identified**

Museums must also comply with accessibility requirements where they are identified in the standards. Museums must also meet accessibility requirements where they are **referenced** or **implied** in the standards:

Specifically [see *italics*]:

#### **Community standard**

The museum is *accessible* and relevant, and draws support from its community.

#### ***Requirements***

The museum has a written policy that defines its relationship with the community, and that will:

- a. ensure that it performs its role as a steward of the collection
- b. ensure that it provides services and programs consistent with its statement of purpose that meet the needs and interests of the community

- c. endeavour to allow all sectors of the community to participate in the museum's decisions, goals and directions that may affect them or reflect on them
- d. include members of the community in museum activities
- e. identify and pursue appropriate community partnerships
- f. endeavour to provide *equality of access* to information about the museum's collections, services and programs through adequate promotion
- g. endeavour to *provide equal access to all members of the community, both physically and intellectually*, to the museum's collections, information, services and programs, including through electronic means e.g., a website or social media.

**Human resources standard:**

***Requirements***

A community museum must:

1. have a written human resources management policy stating that it will:
  - a. ensure that staff responsible for administering the museum and its collections have *appropriate professional training*
  - b. ensure that all museum activities are carried out by *appropriately trained staff*
  - c. ensure that each staff member has a written job description (see Glossary)
  - d. ensure that human resource management, including recruitment, performance assessment, and termination is conducted in an ethical manner and is consistent with accepted practice and applicable legislation
  - e. *ensure that staff are provided with information on health and safety hazards in the workplace and are trained in their management or mitigation*
  - f. ensure that at least one person on staff has current First Aid training
  - g. endeavour to provide *equal access to the workplace by staff of all abilities*
  - h. ensure that staff are familiar with and adhere to a museological code of ethics
  - i. *meet municipal, provincial and federal legislative requirements relating to people in the workplace*

**Governance standard:**

***Requirements***

3. The museum's operation and administration must: *a. meet municipal, provincial and federal legislative requirements that have a bearing on its operations and activities*
4. The museum and its staff must:
  - a. demonstrate *a commitment to ethical behaviour* as an institution and as individuals

**Exhibition Standard**

***Requirements***

A community museum must:

7. Ensure that *exhibits are accessible and capable of being used and enjoyed by visitors of all ages and abilities*

(See the A.O.D.A. Wizard for your organization's specific requirements such as the Accessibility Standard for Customer Service, and dates for implementation)

### **Interpretation and education standard:**

As a community museum, your interpretation and education programs allow the community to interact more closely with your collections and information and reach *audiences of all ages, interests and abilities*.

A community museum must:

1. have a written interpretation and education policy stating that it will:
  - a. ensure that the theme, content and format of interpretation and education programs are –
    - consistent with the museum's statement of purpose
    - *meet the needs and interests of the communities it serves*
  - b. *establish priorities for the development of interpretation and education programs*
  - c. ensure that responsibility for interpretation and education programming is given to *properly trained staff*
  - d. demonstrate a commitment to accuracy and fairness, *inclusivity and respect* in interpretation and education programs
  - e. demonstrate a commitment to *ethical behaviour* in interpretation and education programs
  - f. demonstrate a commitment to meet conservation standards in use of artifacts
  - g. meet *municipal, provincial and federal legislative requirements* that have an impact on interpretation and education programs (e.g. copyright, *disability legislation*)
  
2. have an interpretation and education program consisting of a mix of school programs, public programs, and special events; all interpretation and education programs must:
  - a. be consistent with the museum's statement of purpose and meet the *needs and interests of the communities it serves*
  - b. promote learning and enjoyment
  
3. ensure the relevance, accuracy and effective communication of its interpretation and education programs (*see above for A.O.D.A. requirements*) by:
  - a. establishing clearly defined and measurable learning objectives and outcomes, and undertaking a process of program evaluation
  - b. using *appropriate expertise* – including staff, volunteers, community groups, or consultants
  - c. carrying out research

4. ensure all staff involved in the development and delivery of interpretation and education programs, have the *appropriate skills and training*
5. provide sufficient space and a *safe and secure environment* for interpretation and education programs

### **Physical plant standard:**

As a community museum, your buildings and grounds must provide a *safe and functional environment for visitors, staff*, the collection and associated activities.

This objective must be balanced with the need to preserve the integrity of heritage buildings as artifacts themselves, as well as archaeological resources present on the property.

### ***Requirements***

A community museum must:

1. ensure the design and layout of its building(s) and grounds:
  - a. accommodate the *physical and functional needs of its users, staff*, collections and activities
  - b. are appropriate to the museum's statement of purpose, and to its community role and image
2. meet its obligation to federal, provincial and municipal requirements that apply to *physical safety of staff, visitors and property*

### **The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act**

Under the [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005](#) (AODA), every public and private organization in Ontario that has one or more employees **must** provide accessible customer service to persons of all abilities.

The AODA impacts five areas of everyday life:

- customer service
- information and communication
- employment
- transportation
- built environment

AODA website: [www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/05a11](http://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/05a11)

## Compliance

A museum's accessibility policy should commit to the principles of accessibility and inclusion for all. Under AODA, all public and private organizations are required to set policies, practices and procedures concerning goods and services to people with disabilities.

Before establishing the museum's policy on accessibility, it is the responsibility of the museum board, staff and volunteers to become familiar with the Act and the associated standards.

An accessibility policy should:

- emphasize the museum's commitment to work in consultation with people with disabilities
- state how the museum will prevent or remove physical, architectural, information, communication, attitudinal, technological, and policy and practice barriers within all areas of the museum
- define "barriers" and "disability" in accordance with the most recent legislation
- outline how the museum will measure the progress of the implementation of better accessibility
- identify who is responsible for overseeing the implementation; the museum's policy should include a provision for regular policy reviews

To comply with the AODA Standards for Customer Service, museums **must**:

1. establish policies, practices and procedures for providing goods or services to people with disabilities; this includes a policy about:
  - allowing people to use their own personal assistive devices
  - assistance offered by your museum e.g. assistive devices, services or methods
2. use reasonable efforts to ensure that your policies, practices and procedures are consistent with the core principles of:
  - independence
  - dignity
  - integration
  - equality of opportunity

3. communicate with a person with a disability in a manner that takes into account his or her disability
4. train staff, volunteers, contractors and any other people who on a number of topics as outlined in the Customer Service Standard, including those:
  - who interact with the public or other third parties on the museum's behalf
  - who are involved in developing the museum's policies, practices and procedures on the provision of goods or services
5. allow people with disabilities to be accompanied by their guide dog/service animal in all areas of the museum that are open to the public
6. allow people with disabilities to be accompanied by a support person while accessing the museum's goods or services that are open to the public or third parties
  - provide notice ahead of time on whether admission would be charged for a support person of a person with a disability
7. provide notice to people with disabilities when the facilities or services they rely on to access or use the museum are temporarily disrupted
8. establish a process that allows people to comment on how the museum serves people with disabilities and how the museum will respond to both negative and positive feedback
  - make this information readily available to the public in alternative formats, upon request.

## **Heritage buildings**

Museums that are in, or have, historical buildings should commit to the principle of accessibility to the fullest extent possible. This includes providing alternative means of access that can be used when necessary.

## **Accessibility in practice**

### **Customer service**

Accessibility planning should anticipate visitors' expectations, including:

- Can I find the information I need on your website or by telephone?
- Is the website accessible, is the telephone available in TTY?
- Are all staff and volunteers helpful and friendly?
- Is signage to the museum helpful?
- Can I get there by public transportation?
- Is there plenty of parking?

- Is the entrance obvious?
- Are groups expected to enter at a different place? How will I know this?
- What will it cost?
- How long will our visit be or how long should we plan to stay?
- Will there be activities suitable and of interest to all ages and abilities: *e.g. a blind patron?*
- What information is available in my language?
- Are the washrooms clean?
- Is there food available or nearby?

## Access guide

In general, people with disabilities need to plan a visit to your museum ahead of time and more carefully than others. Museums can help by providing accurate information about the services and amenities that are available at their site.

Preparing an **access guide** is the best way museum can ensure that visitors have the information they need. The guide should be posted on the museum's website. Staff and volunteers must be trained to be able to answer all inquiries about the museum's accessibility.

The information included in an access guide will be useful for all museum visitors, not just visitors who have a disability.

A museum access guide should include the following information:

- hours of operation
- map of the museum's location
- public transportation routes to the museum
- accessible parking spaces and their location
- location of accessible entrances and emergency exits
- assistive devices that may be borrowed
- location of amenities e.g. accessible –
  - bathroom facilities
  - baby changing facilities
  - breast-feeding facilities
  - first aid
  - raised print gallery guides
  - orientation videos
  - multi-sensory activities
- location of ramps and elevators as well as the number of stairs
- availability of seating
- universal symbols for access
- list of services, indicating what services are available
- museum contact information, including telephone number, email and the website address

## **Case studies**

Here are some examples of initiatives that museums have undertaken to enhance the enjoyment of all museum visitors.

### **Museum: Jordan Historical Museum**

The Jordan Historical Museum has taken steps to increase its accessibility in order to provide high quality visitor experiences for everyone who visits the museum.

**Museum staff and volunteers** are trained, in accordance with the AODA, to offer assistance where required. They offer services such as –

- verbal tours of the various exhibits
- provide tactile tours where the safety and condition of the artefacts allow
- temporarily increase the lighting in all exhibits for visitors with visual impairments

The museum provides **services and resources**, such as –

- walking tour brochures in print form for persons with hearing impairments
- additional seating in the reception area where visitors can rest
- a binder with enlarged images and texts for the visually impaired
- large magnifying sheets for viewing smaller artifacts
- larger font sizes for labels [22 point text]
- portable ramps for school house visitors
- a permanent ramp attached to the historic house
- areas not accessed by ramps have detailed photos available for viewing
- space in exhibit areas for ease of movement for wheelchairs and walkers
- text panels and display cases placed at optimal viewing height for people who use wheelchairs

### **Museum: Red Lake Regional Museum**

The Red Lake Regional Museum is guided by the principles of inclusion, participation and respect. Their goal is to ensure the museum is a welcoming destination for all and, to that end, has taken steps to make it more accessible.

Example: Museum staff used the *Smithsonian Guidelines for Accessible Exhibit Design* as a guide when developing their “Digging the Past for the Future: A Journey into Red Lake’s Archaeological Past” exhibit.

Steps were taken to ensure the exhibit was accessible to all, including:

- text panels and display cases placed at optimal viewing height for people who use wheelchairs
- hands-on interactives created by staff to provide an engaging experience that utilized multiple senses.
- Museum staff provided a tactile experience by creating replicas of three artifacts.
- Three videos were developed to add an audio and visual element to the exhibit.
- Staff took into consideration the width of the pathways when designing the exhibit to ensure that there was ample space for wheelchair access.
- Staff incorporated different learning styles into the exhibit.

While museum staff could not incorporate every measure recommended in the Smithsonian guide, Red Lake Regional Museum were able to create an exhibit, with a limited budget, that enhanced the quality of the experience for each visitor. As the museum’s cataloguing assistant said, “the trick is to be imaginative and [to] be ready to adapt ideas”.

### **Recommended resources**

Alberta Museums Association. Standard Practices Handbook for Museums, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. 2014.

CMOG Standards Resources:

<a href="#"><b><i>Moore Museum Accessibility Plan</i></b></a>	Moore Museum PDF
<a href="#"><b><i>Accessible PDF Instructions</i></b></a>	City of Hamilton PDF
<a href="#"><b><i>Assistive Devices Policy</i></b></a>	City of Hamilton PDF
<a href="#"><b><i>Braille Printing Guidelines</i></b></a>	City of Hamilton PDF
<a href="#"><b><i>Clear, Accessible and Large Print Guidelines</i></b></a>	City of Hamilton PDF
<a href="#"><b><i>Communication Policy</i></b></a>	City of Hamilton PDF
<a href="#"><b><i>Disruption Notice Policy</i></b></a>	City of Hamilton PDF
<a href="#"><b><i>How to Convert Word Documents into Braille</i></b></a>	City of Hamilton PDF
<a href="#"><b><i>Preparing Accessible Word Documents</i></b></a>	City of Hamilton PDF
<a href="#"><b><i>Resident and Visitor Feedback and Complaints Policy</i></b></a>	City of Hamilton PDF
<a href="#"><b><i>Service Animals Policy</i></b></a>	City of Hamilton PDF
<a href="#"><b><i>Support Persons for Persons with Disabilities Policy</i></b></a>	City of Hamilton PDF