

Guide to Accessible  
**Festivals  
& Outdoor  
Events**



[ontario.ca/accessibility](http://ontario.ca/accessibility)

# Contents

- Accessibility in Ontario . . . . .3**
- What are my requirements? . . . . .4**
  - Accessible Parking Spaces . . . . .5
  - Public Transportation . . . . .6
  - Paths of Travel . . . . .6
  - Stages and Seating . . . . .7
  - Food Services and Public Eating Areas . . . . .8
  - Washrooms and Temporary Toilets . . . . .9
  - Rest Areas/Quiet Spaces . . . . .9
  - Rain/Wind/Sun Shelters . . . . .9
  - Signs . . . . .10
  - Support Persons. . . . .10
  - Service Animals . . . . .11
  - Training Staff and Volunteers . . . . .12
  - Communication Supports . . . . .13
  - Maps and Information . . . . .14
  - Other Accessibility Considerations . . . . .15
- Promote your Festival. . . . .16**
- Ask for Feedback . . . . .17**
- Accessible Festival Planning Checklist . . . . .18**
- Questions? We're here to help: . . . . .20**

# Accessibility in Ontario

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) makes it possible for people of all abilities to be a part of their communities every day. Its vision is to make Ontario accessible by 2025.

One in seven people currently has a disability. By 2036, as the population ages, 1 in 5 Ontarians will have a disability and people with disabilities will represent 40 per cent of the total income in Ontario.<sup>1</sup>

It makes good business sense to plan your festival or outdoor event with people with disabilities in mind.

This guide will help you increase attendance and make your festival more enjoyable for everyone by improving the event's accessibility. It can help you with planning your festival, running the event, and gathering feedback and improving the festival after it ends.

## Did you know?

A person with a disability can be someone who:

- has low or no hearing
- has low or no vision
- lives with a mental health issue
- uses a cane, wheelchair or other mobility device to get around

1. Martin Prosperity Institute, Releasing Constraints: Projecting the Economic Impacts of Improved Accessibility in Ontario, 2010. <http://www.martinprosperity.org/media/ReleasingConstraintsAccessible.html>

# What are my requirements?

Does your festival organization have one or more employees? Remember to count seasonal or part-time employees.

**If you have one or more employees** your festival has legal requirements to meet on accessibility. **If your festival has 20 or more employees**, you must report to the government on how you are meeting these requirements.

To find out if your organization is required to comply with the AODA, visit the [ontario.ca/Accessibility](https://www.ontario.ca/Accessibility). It will help you find out what you have to do to comply with Ontario's accessibility law.

If your festival is organized and run entirely by volunteers, you are not required to comply with the AODA. Regardless of your organization's size, this guide is designed to help you improve the accessibility of your festival so that the people who come back year after year can do so regardless of their ability and you can attract new festival-goers with disabilities to your festival.



## Accessible Parking Spaces

Many people will use a car or van to get to your event. **Picking a venue** with accessible parking or creating a sufficient number of accessible parking spaces will make it easier for people with disabilities attend your festival.

### **Tip:**

Your festival location may have to comply with accessibility requirements of the Design of Public Spaces Standard (DOPS) under the AODA. Please visit [ontario.ca/Accessibility](https://www.ontario.ca/Accessibility) for more information.

Even if your venue doesn't need to comply with DOPS, you can use **the requirements** (<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/110191%23s80p36s1>) as a guideline to decide on the number or size of accessible parking spaces you should have.

**When planning event parking**, create accessible spaces as close as possible to:

- paths to the nearest accessible venue entries and exits
- any lifts and ramps for people using mobility devices
- pay stations (for example, a ticket booth or a parking-lot operator station)

Consider providing a designated passenger drop-off area that is clearly marked with signs and located close to the event entrance.

### **Tip:**

It's helpful to use arrival, exit and directional signs that are clear and can be read in all light conditions. The signs should start outside the parking area, so festival goers can easily find accessible parking.

## Public Transportation

Some of your festival participants may be arriving and leaving by public transportation. Consider **providing accessible public transportation information** for festival participants with disabilities wherever you post general transportation information. This information could include:

- schedules of accessible buses, trains and shuttles
- information on whether the buses on the route are accessible
- whether shelter is provided at the bus stop
- whether the train or subway station has an accessible elevator.

**Consider using accessible vehicles** for festival-specific transportation. For example, provide a shuttle service from a remote parking lot to the event area.



## Paths of Travel

As you **plan your festival**, think about the routes people will take throughout the venue. Plan for accessible paths across the site that link all attractions and essential services.

You could buy or rent temporary outdoor flooring to help stabilize paths on uneven surfaces, like sand and grass.

### **Tip:**

Electrical wires are a tripping hazard for everyone. Keep electrical wires out of paths of travel, or use cable protectors that are wheelchair accessible and are in bright/contrasting colours to alert people with low vision.

## Stages and Seating

If your event uses a stage, consider buying or renting a ramp to provide stage-access for people who use mobility devices. Keep in mind that there are other requirements for stages, for example in the Ontario Building Code or other municipal regulations.

**When planning your event**, consider creating or reserving areas with enough room for mobility devices. These areas will need to have a view of the stage from a seated position. They will also need to have seats and extra space for friends, family, support persons and service animals.

Some seats should be positioned to allow service animals to accompany their owner and rest in front of or under the seat.

## Food Services and Public Eating Areas

Event participants should be able to easily reach food services using an accessible path, and food service booths should allow a person in a wheelchair to reach them. Consider having large print copies of menus for people who have low-vision.

When buying or renting tables **before your festival**, it's a good idea to ensure at least 20 per cent of tables are accessible for someone with a mobility aid (or to provide at least one accessible table in each eating area). Manufacturers of accessible tables provide tables with a range of dimensions to accommodate differently sized mobility devices. By providing a mixture of different types of accessible tables that accommodate a variety of mobility devices, you can ensure that guests of all abilities will be able to use your seating areas. Ensuring flat, firm, and stable space around the table, under it, and on the path to reach it will help guests who use mobility devices get around your festival's eating areas.

### **Tip:**

Although you may not need to comply with the **Design of Public Spaces Standard** (<http://www.ontario.ca/page/how-make-public-spaces-accessible>), you can use this information as a guideline for accessible eating areas.



## Washrooms and Temporary Toilets

It's a good practice to **plan for accessible washrooms**. Accessible toilets can make or break festival enjoyment for a person with a disability. Accessible washrooms and temporary toilets should be at ground level and away from crowds and sound systems, but not so far that they're inconvenient to reach. Keep in mind that there are other requirements for washrooms, for example in the Ontario Building Code and your municipality's laws.

## Rest Areas/Quiet Spaces

**Before your festival**, consider designating a quiet space for rest, especially if your event attracts large crowds and is longer than a couple of hours. This can be helpful for individuals with different types of disabilities or needs such as people with mental health issues, sensory issues, fatigue issues and nursing mothers.

## Rain/Wind/Sun Shelters

Prolonged exposure to rain, wind and sometimes sun can be an unpleasant experience. Some people with disabilities are at particular risk from the elements.

**When planning your festival, consider** providing open- or closed-sided tents to provide weather protection. If your festival-goers run the risk of being overheated, consider renting cool mist canopies or fans to cool people (and service animals) in extreme temperatures.

## Signs

Signs should be in a large, easy to read font with good colour contrast – for example, a sans serif black font on a white background.

Clear signs at drop-off zones and parking areas will help direct people to specific areas across the event site. Signs should indicate the accessibility features located along the path of travel and event areas. Signs at different heights can also help assist people moving through crowds, and help them see when they are at specific locations.

### **Did you know?**

**Sans-serif fonts include:**

Arial

Century Gothic

Verdana

Univers

## Support Persons

Support persons may be helping some people with disabilities at your festival. A support person must be allowed to go wherever the person they support goes.

**Post the admission price for support persons** wherever you have information about entry fees (such as on your website and at entrance gates). Consider reducing or waiving the entry fee for support persons.

### **Did you know?**

A support person can help with:

- mobility
- personal care
- medical needs — and more

## Service Animals

Guide dogs are one type of **service animals** (<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/r07429%23BK3>), but other kinds of animals are trained to help people with disabilities.

**At your festival**, a person with a disability and their service animal can go to all areas that the public would normally be allowed to go.

**When planning your festival**, consider designating a suitable area as a relief area for service animals. Make sure to let volunteers know how to direct people to this area and post signs so people know where to go.

### **Tip:**

Provide water for service animals. The care of service animals belongs to their owner, but by making care of service animals easier, you'll create a welcoming festival for people who are assisted by service animals.



## Training Staff and Volunteers

If your festival organization has at least one staff person, you must train your staff and volunteers on **Ontario's accessibility laws** (<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/110191>), which can be incorporated into your regular volunteer training. Visit our website for information about the **training requirements** (<https://www.ontario.ca/page/how-train-your-staff-accessibility>).

Free training modules and resources to train your staff and volunteers are offered at **AccessForward.ca**. and at <http://www.findmyspark.ca/resources-non-profits>

If you are entirely organized by volunteers, it's still a great idea to train your volunteers on:

- how to communicate with people with different types of disabilities
- your accessibility features
- your evacuation procedures for people with disabilities
- how to give feedback to festival organizers about the event's accessibility

### **Tip:**

**Use considerate language when talking about disabilities.** For example, use person first language such as:

- "people with disabilities" instead of "disabled people" or "the disabled."
- Use the right words: 'Disability' versus 'handicap'
- Reference specific disabilities when appropriate, such as a person with epilepsy or a person who uses a wheelchair
- Avoid sympathetic statements: victim of, suffers with, or stricken with a particular illness or disability
- If you're not familiar with the disability, don't make assumptions.

One in seven Ontarians has a disability, so there's a good chance that at least one of your festival's staff or volunteers has a disability. By taking into account staff and volunteers with disabilities, you can show staff, volunteers, and festival-goers that accessibility for all participants is important for your event. If you are required to comply with the accessibility laws, you have requirements under the **Employment Standard** (<https://www.ontario.ca/page/accessible-workplaces>).

## Communication Supports

There are many ways to make sure the music, performances, speakers or exhibits at your festival are accessible. **When planning your event**, consider:

- booking a person to provide captions for live events
- **booking an interpreter who is qualified in American Sign Language or in Langes des signes quebécois** ([http://www.oasli.on.ca/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=3&Itemid=3](http://www.oasli.on.ca/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3&Itemid=3))
- providing volunteers to describe performances to persons with low or no vision

**Before your festival**, be sure to post information about communications supports you provide on your website and in other places you provide general information about your festival. This can help people with disabilities make an informed decision about attending your festival.

**Both before and at your festival**, remind speakers, performers, masters of ceremonies and other presenters to:

- speak at a normal pace
- stay within the allotted time
- make sure there is a clear view of their face and mouth
- use the microphone at all times
- use language that is considerate of persons with disabilities

## Maps and Information

You can help people make informed decisions about whether your event is accessible to them by providing detailed information about your festival's accessibility features **before your event**.

Brochures, websites, ads and maps can include a variety of topics such as whether there are accessible toilets, viewing areas, accessible performances such as American Sign Language and the location of accessible parking spaces.

Consider how you can make your festival information accessible to ensure everyone can find your information in a way that meets their needs. To learn more about how to make information accessible visit <https://www.ontario.ca/page/how-make-information-accessible>

### Tip:

Give people with disabilities access to the emergency and safety information for the event, like maps, evacuation plans, brochures or signs. Before your festival, check whether there is anything that would make these items hard to read, see, hear or understand for someone with a disability.



## Other Accessibility Considerations

When **planning your festival, you should think about including:**

- **Dedicated accessibility volunteers** — one of the best ways to make sure that accessibility is being considered is to make accessibility the responsibility of some of your event volunteers or to create an accessibility committee.
- **Accessible Equipment** — there are accessibility options for buying or renting accessible festival equipment, from picnic tables to admission gates. For information on how to buy or rent accessible equipment visit <https://www.ontario.ca/page/accessibility-rules-procurement>
- **Mobility device charging stations** — consider providing outlets for people with power wheelchairs, scooters and other electronic mobility devices and medical equipment.
- **Accessibility information areas** — consider providing dedicated spots where people with disabilities can get information on the festival's accessibility features. A dedicated information booth that offers accessibility information should be put near the entrance. In addition, relevant information about accessibility features should be placed on signs or available in pamphlets throughout the venue. Information booth areas should have level pathways, booths should be at a height that someone using a wheelchair could access, and brochures should be in large print and high-contrast formats for people with low vision.
- **Accessibility Advisory Committees** — your municipality may have an **Accessibility Advisory Committee** (<https://www.ontario.ca/page/how-serve-municipal-accessibility-advisory-committee-guide>). Consider consulting with them in the planning phase of your festival. Contact your municipality for more information.

# Promote your Festival

**Before the festival**, tell people about your accessibility features. This will introduce returning festival goers to new features and will help new festival goers with disabilities make informed choices.

Websites are the most popular source for information about an event's accessibility features. Consider adding an accessibility information section to your website.

## **Tip:**

Make accessibility information on your site easy to find, and ensure volunteers and organizers are prepared to answer accessibility-related questions.

Promoting your accessibility features in the same places where you promote your festival in general will let potential festival goers know their accessibility needs are being seriously considered. Think about including accessibility information:

- in print ads and features in local news
- through your social media
- on posters and flyers
- any other place you promote your festival



# Ask for Feedback

Find out how successful your accessibility features are by asking for feedback. If you are required to comply with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, you are required to have a way to receive feedback.

**Before the festival:** ask what accessibility features people would like during any pre-festival consulting you do.

**At the festival:** get feedback from festival goers. Make sure you have more than one way to collect feedback and let people know what you plan to do with the feedback you receive. If you already have a feedback form, add a question about accessibility. It can be as simple as asking “Were your accessibility needs met? If not, what can we do to improve your experience?”

Visit our website for information about **collecting feedback** (<https://www.ontario.ca/page/how-make-information-accessible>).

**After the festival:** consider the feedback you heard. Are there suggestions or concerns that can be addressed in the planning for next year?

# Accessible Festival Planning Checklist

- ❑ **Accessible Parking Spaces** – accessible parking spaces should be placed close to venue entries and exits, accessible toilets, pay stations and lifts/ ramps.
- ❑ **Public Transportation** – post local accessible routes and schedules.
- ❑ **Paths of Travel** – provide wide, even, slip-resistant paths, without steps or barriers that lead to all the public areas of the event.
- ❑ **Stages and Seating** – provide a ramp for your stage, and ensure the stage is visible for someone watching from accessible seating or from a wheelchair.
- ❑ **Food Services and Public Eating Areas** – design food areas so that someone who needs mobility support can easily navigate them. Provide options for people using wheeled mobility devices.
- ❑ **Washrooms and Temporary Toilets** – provide accessible toilets or washrooms at ground level, away from crowds and sound systems.
- ❑ **Rest areas and rain/wind/sun shelters** – offer quiet areas and weather shelters.
- ❑ **Signs** – provide high-contrast signs in high and low positions, and make sure signs use sans serif fonts that are readable in all light conditions.
- ❑ **Support Persons** – a support person can go wherever the person they support goes. Post any admission fees for support persons in the same place general admission information is found.
- ❑ **Service Animals** – a person with a disability can be accompanied by their service animal to all areas available to the public.
- ❑ **Training Staff and Volunteers** – train staff and volunteers to welcome people with disabilities and on your festival's accessibility features.

- ❑ **Communication Supports** – consider offering captioners, sign language interpreters, or individuals who can describe performances.
- ❑ **Maps and Information** – provide information about your festival’s accessibility features and consider people with disabilities in your emergency plans. Provide an accessibility information area.
- ❑ **Other Accessibility Considerations** – provide dedicated accessibility volunteers, rent/buy accessible equipment, provide accessibility information areas.
- ❑ **Promote your Festival** – tell people about your accessibility features in the same places you promote your festival.
- ❑ **Ask for Feedback** – collect feedback before, during, and after the festival.



# Questions? We're here to help:

## Learn more

To learn about how Ontario is becoming more accessible, visit [ontario.ca/Accessibility](http://ontario.ca/Accessibility)

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