

Volunteer Accessibility Training

1. Accessible Customer Service Training

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA)

The AODA is a provincial law designed to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to inclusion. Its goal is to achieve accessibility by developing and enforcing standards in customer service, information and communications, employment, transportation, and design of public spaces. Compliance is required by the government, public sector organizations, private businesses, and not-for-profits with one or more employees in Ontario.

Who should take this training?

The AODA and the Integrated Accessibility Standards (O. Reg. 191/11) require faculty, staff, student employees, volunteers, and third-party contractors who interact with the public to complete Accessible Customer Training. This training module has been designed for **volunteers**.

Introduction to Accessible Customer Service

The University of Windsor community welcomes thousands of individuals annually—including students, staff, faculty, visitors, and community members with disabilities. Accessible customer service ensures full participation in campus life by upholding dignity, independence, integration, and equal opportunity. Accessibility is not only about physical spaces but also about awareness, attitudes, and actions.

Principles of Accessible Customer Service

1. Dignity – Treat people with disabilities as valued customers.
2. Independence – Ensure that individuals with disabilities have access to services without unnecessary help or interference.
3. Integration – Provide service in a way so that the person with a disability can benefit from the same services as others.
4. Equal Opportunity – Ensure equal access by removing barriers.

Serving People with Disabilities

Accessible customer service is about inclusion, respect, and avoiding assumptions. Use clear, respectful language and ask individuals about their preferences. Both person-first (e.g., person with a disability) and identity-first (e.g., Deaf person) language may be appropriate depending on the community or individual.

Examples of Customers in a University Context

Guided by the legislation, a customer in a university context could include students, staff, faculty, retirees, visitors, alumni, volunteers, community members, etc. The term “customer” is not limited to those who pay for services. It encompasses anyone who benefits from or interacts with the university’s offerings, especially those who may face barriers due to disabilities.

Practical Tips for Serving Customers

- **Physical/Mobility:** Ask before helping, don’t touch equipment without permission, remove items that may create a barrier in the path of travel.
- **Low Vision/Blind:** Identify yourself, give descriptive directions, offer to read documents aloud, provide orientation cues.
- **d/Deaf or Hard of Hearing:** speak directly to the person – even if an interpreter is present, reduce background noise, consider alternative communication such as typing on a cell phone or pen and paper.
- **Deafblind:** Speak directly to the person, follow their guidance for communication.
- **Speech/Language:** Be patient, ask yes/no questions, allow time, confirm understanding.
- **Learning Disabilities:** Provide information in different formats, allow extra time, rephrase as needed.
- **Developmental Disabilities:** Use plain language, give one instruction at a time, confirm understanding.
- **Mental Health:** Listen in order to meet needs, be aware of distractions/situations that can be overwhelming (e.g., loud noises, crowds), allow time to respond.
- **Neurodivergent Customers:** Use clear communication, provide flexibility, consider communicating in an area with reduced distractions.
- **Service Animals:** Do not pet or distract, allow access with handler, ensure other animals keep a respectful distance from service animals and do not interact with them.
- **Support Persons:** Always welcome support persons accompanying people with disabilities, speak directly to the customer, provide fee information upfront.
- **Assistive Devices:** Do not move or handle without permission. This may include a wheelchair or walker, a white cane, a hearing aid, an oxygen tank, or a communication board.
- **Over the Phone:** Speak clearly, confirm understanding, don’t interrupt.

When Barriers Arise

If someone experiences difficulty accessing services, ask how you can help, listen carefully, and adapt. If you cannot resolve the issue immediately, record the person's contact information and consult a supervisor. The Office of Human Rights, Conflict Resolution and Mediation can provide additional support.

University of Windsor Accessibility Policies, Procedures and Guidelines

To learn more about the University of Windsor policies, guidelines, and procedures, please visit: [Accessibility & Accommodations | Office of Human Rights, Conflict Resolution and Mediation](#)

2. Working Together: The Ontario Human Rights Code and the AODA

The **Ontario Human Rights Code (the Code)** and the **Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)** are two provincial laws that work together to protect and advance the rights of people with disabilities, but they do so in different ways:

- **The Code** is Ontario's foundational human rights law. It guarantees people with disabilities the right to equal treatment and freedom from discrimination in jobs, housing, services, and education. It requires organizations to accommodate individual needs related to disability, unless doing so would cause undue hardship (based only on very high thresholds of costs, health and safety). The *Code* has primacy, meaning if there is ever a conflict with another Ontario law, the *Code* prevails¹.
- **The AODA** is focused on building an accessible Ontario. It requires organizations to follow accessibility standards in areas such as customer service, employment, transportation, and information/communications. These are proactive rules meant to remove barriers before they happen. The AODA applies to most organizations with at least one employee, including public, private, and non-profit sectors.

How they work together:

- Both laws share the same definition of disability.
- The AODA sets broad, minimum accessibility requirements, while the *Code* may require organizations to go further to meet individual needs.

¹ Unless the other legislation specifically states that it applies despite the Code. [III. The Ontario Human Rights Code | Ontario Human Rights Commission](#)

- Meeting AODA standards does not automatically mean an organization has met its obligations under the *Code*. For example, a university might meet website accessibility standards under the AODA but still need to provide customized formats for a specific student under the *Code*.
- When there is a conflict, the law that offers the higher level of accessibility applies—usually the *Code*.

In practice, the **AODA creates system-wide accessibility standards**, while the **Code ensures individual rights are protected**. Together, they promote inclusion, dignity, and equal participation for people with disabilities across Ontario.

Contact Information

If you need additional information or would like this material in an alternative format, please contact:

Office of Human Rights, Conflict Resolution and Mediation

University of Windsor, 401 Sunset Avenue, Windsor, ON N9B 3P4

Phone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3400 | Email: hrcrm@uwindsor.ca

Website: www.uwindsor.ca/ohrcrm

Training Verification

Once you have completed this training, please complete the verification form by:

1. Fill out the form online:

<https://www.uwindsor.ca/ohrcrm/57/accessibility-learning>

2. Or, scan the QR code below:

