

Province of Manitoba's Disabilities Issues Office

Tips for Consultation

Consultation Requirement under *The Accessibility for Manitobans Act*

All public sector organizations in Manitoba are required to prepare Accessibility Plans under *The Accessibility for Manitobans Act*. Affected public sector organizations include the Government of Manitoba, municipalities, regional health authorities, Crown Corporations, postsecondary institutions, school divisions, and public agencies, boards and commissions. Section 33(4) of the AMA reads:

"Consultation required

33(4) In preparing an accessibility plan, a public sector body must consult with persons disabled by barriers or representatives from organizations of persons disabled by barriers."

What is consultation under the AMA?

Consultation is a two-way relationship in which public sector organizations seek and receive the views of citizens, clients or communities on policies, programs or services that affect them. Consultation should occur at various points in the planning process:

- evaluating existing policies and programs
- assisting in identifying priorities
- helping in the design of new policies and programs
- monitoring new initiatives.

"Nothing about us without us"

People with disabilities must be involved in decisions and plans that affect them. They are the experts. Inclusion begins with actively engaging all stakeholders. Consultation related to preparing an Accessibility Plan will benefit from the participation of a broad range of people including:

- as a priority, people with disabilities and their organizations
- family members and caregivers
- service providers and academics with expertise in disability issues

Types of Consultations

Consultation can take many forms. By considering how your organization already interacts with various stakeholders, consultation can be incorporated into on-going activities and communications. The more your organization engages participants, the more you are likely to learn from your consultation. For people with limited experience with accessibility barriers, in-person engagement of persons with disabilities is especially valuable.

1. Phone Calls

Your organization may already know organizations representing or providing services to Manitobans with disabilities. One option is to prepare five to ten questions to phone these organizations to get their opinions about the range and impact of barriers. Further, if you already phone clients to remind them of appointments, or patrons to advise them of up-coming events, you may wish to add a question about their experiences with accessibility. Offer alternative formats. E-mail or texting are options for persons who are hard-of-hearing or Deaf.

Pros

- Phone calls help establish introductions between organizations.
- High level information can be obtained with little cost.

Cons

- Phone calls do not allow time to engage participants fully in the topic.
- Respondents may be preoccupied by the interruption to other activities.
- It may take time and several calls to reach the right person.

2. Feedback Forms

Many organizations ask for feedback from their clients, patrons and participants on an ongoing basis. If you ask for feedback at the end of a public event, add a question that asks about the accessibility of the information and the venue. Another option is to ask for feedback on accessibility at your reception desk or on your website. Ensure accessibility to the form and offer alternative formats.

Pros

- Respondents can complete website feedback at a time and location that suits them.
- Feedback is built into regular business with little cost.

Cons

- Response rates may be low because there is little motivation to give feedback.
- Individuals will likely focus on a specific incident that affected them, rather than offer advice on broader organizational priorities for accessibility.

to discuss their experiences with different types of barriers and offer their priorities for solutions.

Distribute background information and an agenda in advance, and ask participants what accommodations they require to participate.

Pros

- A broad range of perspectives is represented.
- Relationships and accountability to the stakeholders are strengthened.
- Open discussion builds community knowledge about accessibility and the organization.
- A number of topics can be discussed at once.

Cons

- Without strong facilitation, some participants' opinions may dominate the discussion and the report.
- Adequate human and financial resources must be budgeted.
- The report is qualitative in nature and may be considered subjective by some.

6. Attend Events Organized by Stakeholder Organizations or the Disabilities Issues Office (DIO)

To gain a broader perspective on accessibility and disability issues, consider attending one of the many forums or annual general meetings organized in Manitoba. This can be a great way to gain contextual information to inform your Accessibility Plan ..

Pros

- Low human and financial resources required (often free),
- Focused on the priorities of the stakeholder group
- Builds community relations

Cons

- Offers contextual information, but not responses to consultation issues
- Timing and agenda may not be practical
- If only one organizational representative attends the report is very s subjective