Candidate's Guide to Accessible Elections

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This guide was developed in partnership with the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario

Preamble

This guide is intended to draw your attention to the measures candidates should be considering to ensure equal opportunity for all electors to access your candidate information and to interact with you. These measures should include aspects of your campaign including: literature through print media, audio and video messages, and access to your campaign office (if you are intending to campaign from an office that is separate from your home).

Be sure that all of your campaign activities are accessible to everyone!

Campaign Literature

1. **Print Media**
   Printed campaign materials are one of the most common methods of communicating with your candidates during your campaign. Consider the following when preparing your campaign literature:

   - What is the font size on your material? Will you have separate large print copies? Is your material easily read (i.e. simple sans serif fonts such as Arial)

   - Do you have magnifying sheets available to help a person with low vision to read your materials? Could the material be offered in an alternate format, if requested?

   - Can you have key pieces of your literature in alternative formats (e.g. Braille, large print, e-text versions)?

   - Ensure that your print materials provide details on whether your campaign office (if you have a campaign office) is accessible.

   - Consider accessibility provisions for your website. Do you have scalable print? Is the font size large enough? Is there sufficient contrast between the colour of the background and any text? Has alternative text been provided to describe any images used on your website?

   - If you elect to provide a TTY number in your campaign office/home, be sure to include your TTY number in all the advertising and promotional materials.

   - Consider the services offered through VoicePrint, a division of The National Broadcast Reading Service, which 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.

2. **Audio/Video Media**
   Radio and Video campaign messages also often form part of a candidate's campaign portfolio. Consider the following when preparing your campaign literature:

   - Recorded messages provide consistent information and access for individuals after-hours.
   - Will you offer these messages in alternative formats? Advertise that these formats are available and how they can be accessed.
   - You may wish to consider providing subtitles for video communications.
   - Consider captioning for live video presentation of electoral debates.

3. **One-on-one communication**
   Will you consider offering Sign Language Interpreting?
   Sign language interpreters are knowledgeable in the language and culture of both hearing impaired and hearing people. They provide communication in both sign language and a spoken language and are bound by a professional Code of Ethics.

   The websites below provide a directory of interpreters, as well as tips on finding an interpreter, negotiating terms for agreements, etc. click on the

   Ontario Association of Sign Language Interpreters' (OASLI) website:
   http://www.oasli.on.ca

   Association of Visual Language Interpreters of Canada's on line directory:
   http://www.avlic.ca/store/directory.php

   At candidate meetings, you may wish to consider providing a recording secretary and have a screen available to broadcast information for the hearing impaired.

   Click on the links below for more detailed tips on communicating with people with disabilities:

   Quick Reference Guide to Accessible Campaign Information and Communication –
   http://www.mcss.gov.on.ca/mcss/english/pillars/accessibilityOntario/planning/campaign/

   Quick Reference Guide to Accessible All Candidates Meetings -
   http://www.mcss.gov.on.ca/mcss/english/pillars/accessibilityOntario/planning/candidates/

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Campaign Office

Choosing a Location

Many candidates campaign from their homes, However, if you are thinking of establishing a campaign office separate from your home, your campaign office may be your primary venue for meeting one-on-one with the electorate. You will want to be sure that the location is suitable to accept any elector who wishes to attend your office. The following is a recommended checklist to consider:

Getting There and Getting In…

- Is the office located on a route that is served by accessible public transportation?
- Is the name and address of the building clearly visible from the street and sidewalk? If needed, is there a pedestrian crosswalk close by? Crosswalks served by an audible and visual traffic-crossing signal are preferred. Where there is a change in level, for example where the sidewalk meets the street, curb cuts are necessary.
- Is accessible parking available for electors? At least one accessible parking space should be provided on the shortest, safest accessible route to the accessible building entrance.
- Is the accessible parking space clearly marked with the international symbol of accessibility?
- Is the parking space firm and level?
- Are curb cuts provided? All sidewalks should have curb cuts at locations near parking and along the route to the primary entrance.
- Is the space large enough to meet the needs of an elector who uses a van equipped with a wheelchair lift?
- Are the parking spaces and route of travel properly maintained? Snow and ice should be removed and uneven surfaces repaired as soon as possible.
- Is the route to the entrance accessible? Accessible routes should be unobstructed and have continuous, smooth, hard surfaces with no abrupt changes in level and should not require the use of stairs. Plan to have routine checks made throughout the day.
- Is the route wide enough so someone using a wheelchair, scooter, or service animal can travel safely?

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- Is the campaign office easily identified by signage? Is the sign easy to read and understand?
- Is the entrance accessible? If there are steps, there needs to be a ramp so people using mobility aids or who have mobility impairments can get in. Steps, even a small single step, can make the campaign office inaccessible to many people with disabilities and seniors.
- Is the ramp well designed and safe? Does it have handrails on both sides? Does it have a suitable slope? If the ramp is temporary, is it securely attached to the steps so it cannot slip or wobble?
- Is the door hardware accessible? Are there lever or pull handles? Be sure the door hardware passes the "fist test". This means it can be operated by a person using a closed fist.
- Is the doorway wide enough for a person using a wheelchair or scooter to pass through?
- Is the door easy to open? If the doors are heavy, awkward to open or have handles that may be out of reach, can you prop them open in a safe manner? If you do prop them open, make sure you don't obstruct the entrance and nearby floor space.
- Is the entrance easy to see?
- Is the entrance well lit?

Inside the Office
- Is there level access from the entrance to the office area? Internal stairs are just as much of a problem as external ones. It may be necessary to install ramps.
- Are doormats level with the floor to prevent potential tripping hazards. If not, you may consider removing them, provided of course this does not create further hazards.
- Is the flooring non-slip, even and level? Highly polished surfaces can be slippery for some users, while thick carpeting and loose rugs or mats can cause people to trip or get stuck. Glare from polished surfaces can be a problem for people with visual impairments.
- Is the office area well lit?
- Are there seats available for people to rest if needed?
- Are corridors inside the office facility spacious enough for a wheelchair or scooter to pass through comfortably? Obstructions such as stacked furniture or piles of boxes can cause problems for visually impaired people, as well as people with limited mobility.
- Is there enough space inside the office area for a wheelchair or scooter to move about easily?

Make Provisions for Service Animals
- It is prohibited to deny a person access to a place or service because a guide dog accompanies them. Be sure that the facility use agreement does not prohibit service animals. Service animals must be allowed to remain with the person with a disability.

Telephone Access
- Consider providing a TTY number.

Accessible Washrooms
- Does your office 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.

- Are the accessible washrooms located on the same floor and in close proximity to the office?

- Do the doors to the washroom have a raised (tactile) male or female sign or Braille lettering?

Customer Service
- Are your staff/volunteers trained as it relates to customer service for persons with disabilities?

Other
- Are you providing refreshments to visitors? If so, provide bendable straws and lightweight cups and an option for sugar free beverages.

Budgeting

Costs associated with ensuring your campaign is accessible to your electors must be reported as per the legislated requirements.

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.

Understanding Disability: Know Your Electors' Needs And Communicate Your Solutions

Some examples of barriers to people with disabilities:

Barrier Type	Example
Physical	A doorknob that cannot be operated by an elderly person with limited upper-body mobility and strength.
Architectural	A hallway or door that is too narrow for a wheelchair or scooter.
Informational	Typefaces which are too small to be read by a person with low-vision.
Communicational	A speaker at a meeting who talks loudly when addressing a deaf participant.
Attitudinal	A campaign event that discourages persons with developmental disabilities from participating.
Technological	Information on a web site, which cannot be accessed by a person who is blind or visually impaired and who has reading software on a computer.
Policy/Practice	A practice of announcing important messages over an intercom that people with hearing impairments cannot hear clearly.

Disabilities can take many forms and can range from temporary to permanent. Often disabilities are non-visible and no one should ever make assumptions. Disabilities include developmental, cognitive and physical challenges/conditions of persons of any age.

Listed below is a brief description of types of disabilities. Understanding people's needs and challenges may help you better communicate with them.

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

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person with a physical disability. If you're not sure what to do, ask the person, "May I help you?" People with disabilities know if they need help and how you can provide it. For more tips, click here.

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, only some 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. There are specific things you can do to communicate with a voter with vision loss – for e.g. identify yourself when you approach the person and speak directly to him or her, even if he/she is accompanied by a companion. For more tips, click here.

Hearing Impaired, Deafness and Hearing Loss: Hearing loss ranges from mild to profound. The distinctions between the terms "deaf", "deafened", "hearing impaired" 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, hearing impaired and hard of hearing individuals may use hearings aids, pen and paper, personal amplification devices, hearing aid dog or other assistive-listening and communication methods. Attract the person's attention before speaking. Generally, the best way is by a gentle touch on the shoulder or with a gentle wave of your hand. Look at and speak directly to the person. Address them, not the interpreter or support person. For more tips, click here.

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. Identify yourself to the intervenor when you approach a person who is deafblind, but then speak directly to the person as you normally would, not to the intervenor. For more tips, click here.

Speech Impairments: 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

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boards or other assistive devices to help communicate. A speech disability often has no impact on a person's ability to understand. Ask them to repeat the information if you don't understand. Ask questions that can be answered "yes" or "no" if possible. For more tips, click here.

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 apparent. People with a cognitive disability may have difficulties recognizing, understanding and remembering information. Don't assume what a person can or cannot do. And always speak directly to the person, not to their companion or support person. For more tips, click here.

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. Treat a person with a mental health disability with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else. Be patient, confident and reassuring. Listen carefully and work with them to try to meet their needs. If someone appears to be in a crisis, ask him or her to tell you the best way to help. For more tips, click here.

During your campaign planning process, consider contacting your local organizations, such as the CNIB, Canadian Hearing Society, etc and discuss with them your campaign plans. This will assist you to better understand the needs of people in your electorate with disabilities. They are a valuable resource in providing input and feedback.

For more tips on how to communicate with people with disabilities, go to the Accessibility Directorate's training resource at http://www.mcss.gov.on.ca/NR/rdonlyres/D049A18E-6C0C-4292-A11A-E75BF4ADD70C/5222/TrainingResourceFeb200920090211FINALENPUB2.doc (go to Page 10 for communication tips).

> Additional resources are available via the link below:
> http://www.mcss.gov.on.ca/mcss/english/pillars/accessibilityOntario/planning/election.htm