Our Doors Are Open

Guide for Accessible Congregations

Thank You

For a digital format of this guide,
visit our website: opendoors.idrc.ocadu.ca

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Preface

The Our Doors Are Open Guide was developed by the Inclusive Design Research Centre at OCAD University to offer diverse faith communities in Ontario simple and creative ideas to help increase inclusion and accessibility for people with disabilities during worship services, events, and all communal activities. Increasingly, new voices are challenging old approaches to understanding and explaining accessibility and inclusion. Within this guide, we have given special attention to issues of inclusion raised by organizations and by voices from the communities of people with disabilities.

Acknowledgements

The team also acknowledges that this work was completed on the land of Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island, without whom none of us would be here. The land that we all work, live, and interact with on a daily basis has a history that we need to be reminded of, and it continues to be the site of Indigenous resistance and survival to this day.

Introduction

Before sunrise, members of a Muslim family in Scarborough, Toronto, perform their ablutions, spread their prayer rugs facing Mecca, and begin their prostrations and prayers. In St. Michael's Cathedral, worshippers line up for their turn to have a priest place a wafer on their hand, murmuring, "This is the body of Christ, given for you." In the Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Hindu monks perform morning hymns (prabhatiya), and show respect to their deities with offerings of food and garments.The Unitarian Congregation of Guelph gathers to explore important life questions, support each other in living with purpose and meaning, and work toward peace and justice.

The monks of the Gajang Tibetan Buddhist Meditation Center in Parkdale, Toronto, perform meditation and hear teachings from their branch of Buddhism. On the Six Nations reserve near Brantford, First Nations men, women, and children honour the land of their ancestors. For Jewish communities in Ontario and around the world, Shabbat begins at sunset on Friday. In the Sikh communities of Brampton, the Ragis recite, sing, and interpret the verses from the Guru Granth Sahib in the presence of the community.

These and countless other moments in the lives of people across Ontario are threads of the tapestry we call religion. All religions share the goal of binding people to something beneath the surface of life. All believers ultimately desire to include everybody, bringing together people across all walks of life into their community. This unique atmosphere comes about from ritual, song, prayer, committee work, charitable work, hospitality, and other social and spiritual practices. Everyone needs to be included in these experiences, but sometimes people with disabilities are not.

Full and meaningful participation in rituals, worship, and faith community activities affirms belonging and is often an extension of one's faith. People with disabilities in your community may be excluded from participation in these activities because many traditions, activities, and spaces have been designed without considering the needs of people with disabilities. Ontario faith communities can enhance their welcoming traditions and include people with disabilities by:
•   Reflecting on the current involvement of people with visible and invisible disabilities in their community.
•   Identifying and removing barriers of attitude, communication, and architecture.
•   Encouraging people with disabilities to participate in the religious, social, and cultural life of their community.

In each section, of this guide you will find facts about people with disabilities, strategies, tips, and various resources on accessibility and inclusion, especially in faith contexts. It is our hope that the resources included here will be used to open the minds, hearts, and doors of faith communities to people with all kinds of abilities. Let's begin!

Getting Started

This section will help you understand disability and barriers to participation, as well as provide tips for how to start working with people with disabilities in your community.

Who are People with Disabilities?

They are our neighbours, friends, and family members and contribute to our communities. They want to participate in all aspects of our faith community.

When thinking of people with disabilities, some individuals tend to think only of people who use wheelchairs and who have visible physical disabilities. But disabilities can also be invisible; it is not always apparent when someone has a disability (fig. 1).

In Ontario, disability is broadly defined and includes deafness, hearing loss, developmental, learning, and mental health disabilities, and anyone who relies on a service animal, wheelchair, or other assistive device. In fact:
- Less than 3 percent of people with disabilities use wheelchairs or other mobility devices.
- About 1 in 7 people in Ontario has a disability. That's 1.65 million people. Chances are that every family in Ontario is touched by disability through their family members, friends, etc.

- By 2035 this number is expected to rise to 1 in 5 people as the population ages. As people grow older, they tend to acquire disabilities, such as hearing loss and vision loss, among others. Places of worship need to accommodate them so they can continue to be vibrant, contributing members of the faith community.
- People with disabilities are not a homogeneous group; they consist of people who may not hear well, see well, or walk easily, or they may have limited coordination or dexterity, or may process information slowly.

Figure 1. Not all disabilities are obvious. Many of your community members may have a disability.

Myths about People with Disabilities:

Everyone, regardless of ability, deserves to be treated with the same dignity and respect.

Myths

Reality

Myths	Reality
People with disabilities are inferior to "normal" people and their lives are very different.	The term "normal" is relative. We all have different abilities, talents, interests, and personalities—you name it! People with disabilities go to school, get married, work, have families, play, do laundry, go shopping, eat out, travel, volunteer, vote, pay taxes, laugh, cry, plan, and dream—just like everyone else.
We need to feel sorry for people with disabilities.	That's patronizing. People with disabilities don't need pity; they need access to opportunities.
People with disabilities are brave and courageous.	Adjusting to a disability does not require bravery or courage, it requires one to adapt to a lifestyle.
You should be careful when you're talking to people with disabilities, because they are easily offended if you use the wrong word.	You just need to be as polite and respectful as you would be when speaking to anyone. If you're not sure what to say or do, it's okay to ask (but be sure to listen).
People with disabilities do not want to participate in activities.	People with disabilities have the same preferences, perceptions, attitudes, habits, and needs as people without disabilities, and they are looking for the same quality of participation and opportunity.

(Adapted from: Accessibility Directorate of Ontario, Count Us In: Removing Barriers to Political Participation.)

What are Barriers?

Welcoming places of worship are inclusive from the front door to the pulpit, the bimah or the minbar.

Barriers are things that make it difficult — or sometimes impossible — for people with disabilities to participate fully in everyday life, including worshipping.

Many people think disabilities are barriers, but that's not the case. Barriers usually develop because the needs of people with disabilities are not considered. It is also important to acknowledge that sometimes long-standing faith traditions may create barriers. Once you understand what accessibility barriers are, you will be able to identify them more easily in your place of worship.

Information and Communication Barriers

Information and communication barriers arise when a person with a disability cannot easily receive and/or understand information that is available to others.

Examples:

- Small print in prayer books, bulletins, and posters that cannot be read by people with low vision.
- Spoken word in preaching that cannot be heard by a person who is hard of hearing.

Architectural or Structural Barriers

Architectural or structural barriers may result from a building's design elements that prevent access for people with disabilities (fig. 2).

Examples:

- Door knobs that cannot be turned by a person with limited mobility and strength, such as someone with arthritis.
- Stairs to a pulpit, a choir loft, or an upper floor that prevent access by a person using a wheelchair.
- Coatracks that cannot be reached.
- Clutter in the entrance or hallway.

Figure 2. Steps can be a barrier and snow cover makes them worse.

Attitudinal Barriers

Attitude is perhaps the most difficult barrier to overcome because it's hard to change the way people think and behave. Attitudinal barriers may result in people with disabilities being treated differently than people without disabilities.

Examples:

- Assuming someone with a speech impairment has intellectual limitations and speaking to them in a manner that would be used with a child.

- Speaking to a person's support person rather than the person with the disability.

- Ignoring or avoiding people with disabilities altogether. Remember, attitude is a major barrier that's within our power to change.

- Feeling afraid of saying or doing the wrong thing, or being rejected.

- Not addressing long-standing faith traditions that may create barriers, such as kneeling, prostration, or scripture proclamation.

Notes

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Building Relationships with People with Disabilities

Members of your community may be unsure about the best way to interact with someone who has a disability. As with most human interactions, there is some etiquette to follow. Here are a few tips on interacting and building relationships with people who have various disabilities.

Using the Right Words

- Use person-first language that puts the individual first; for example, say "man who uses a scooter" not "handicapped man" or "wheelchair user."

Figure 3. A Reena social worker listens carefully to a person with disabilities.

General Tips

- Ask "How may I help you?" and listen to the response (fig. 3).

- Be honest that you may not know exactly what to say or how to help. Saying that you do not know is the first step to learning something new.

- Include the person with a disability in resolving the experienced barrier.

- Demonstrate a warm welcome to potential new members.

- Avoid stereotypes and do not make assumptions about what type of disability or disabilities the person has. Some disabilities are not visible. It's better to wait until individuals describe their situation to you rather than make your own assumptions. Many types of disabilities have similar characteristics, and your assumptions may be wrong.

- Be patient. People with certain kinds of disabilities may take a little longer to understand and respond. A good start is to listen carefully (fig. 3).

- If you cannot understand what the person is saying, politely ask them to repeat themselves.

- Do not touch assistive devices, including wheelchairs, without permission.

Tips for Interacting with People Who Are Deaf, Oral Deaf, Deafened, or Hard of Hearing

- Speak clearly (without overemphasizing).

- Use short sentences.

- Reduce background noise and face the listener.

- Get the person's attention before beginning to speak. Try a gentle touch on the shoulder or wave your hand. Use sound amplification technology if it is available (fig. 4).

- If necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier (for example, using a pen and paper).

- Arrange seating in small groups, preferably in circles or at round tables.

- Ask speakers to provide outlines in large meetings.

Tips for Interacting with People Who Use Wheelchairs

- Assist people who use wheelchairs, who wish to be as independent as possible, only when they request it.

- If you are planning an outing, make sure that the destination is barrier-free to avoid problems for people who use wheelchairs or have other needs.

- Speak directly to the person, not to their companion or support person.

- If you need to have a lengthy conversation, consider sitting so that you can make eye contact.

- Don't touch or move a wheelchair without permission.

Figure 4. A congregant using a hearing device.

Tips for Interacting with People with Vision Loss

- Don't assume the person cannot see you.
- Identify yourself by name when you are approaching.
- Tell the person when you are leaving the conversation or area.
- Be precise and descriptive when providing directions or instructions.
- Offer your elbow to guide them as needed. Walk as you usually would.
- Ask if they would like you to read any printed material out loud to them.
- Offer to describe information.
- Do not touch or address the person's guide dog. Remember that the guide dog is not a pet, it is a working animal. If you are not sure if the animal is a pet or a guide dog, ask the person.

Tips for Interacting with People with Autism

- Routine is important for many people with autism. Surprises are often scary. Allow for predictability and give advance warning of changes. Confusion may manifest as anger, while sudden, loud noises—including unexpected applause—may cause fear.
- Give a normal greeting with brief eye contact, whether a response is forthcoming or possible. Greet the person by name.
- Offer, but don't demand, a handshake.
- Provide aides for worship-related gatherings or events.
- Offer visual support for communications and or instructions (fig. 5).
- Remember that for some people certain sensations that most people take for granted are distasteful or even painful.
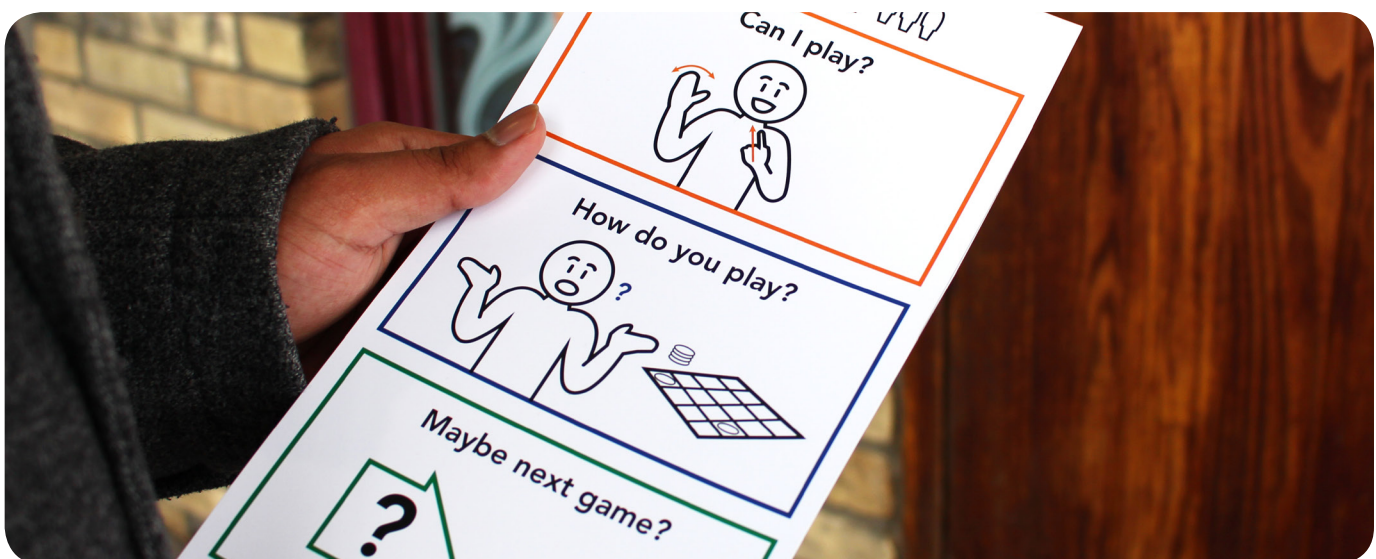

Figure 5. Visual support for communication.

Tips for Interacting with People with Alzheimer's Disease or Other Kinds of Dementia

- Listen closely to what the person is saying.

- Think about the feelings behind the words the person is saying. (Our facial expressions, eye contact, posture, arm, hand and leg positions—all of our body language speaks as loudly as our words).

- Don't ask the person to remember things that have happened in the past. Talk about what you remember or know happened, and how they were a part of it.

- Treat the person with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else.

- Be patient.

Tips for Interacting with People with Intellectual Disabilities

- Extend common courtesies, such as shaking hands.

- If you are having difficulty understanding what a person is saying, ask rather than pretend to understand.

- Have a family member or individual within the community welcome and sit with a person and assist during worship, if needed.

- Include children and/or adults with cognitive impairments in as many community programs as possible (fig. 6).

- Use plain language and speak in short sentences.

- Be supportive and patient (fig. 7).

- Speak directly to the person, not to their companion or support person.

Figure 6. Diversity is an important part of the faith community. Photographer: Vince Talotta. Collection: Toronto Star. Getty Images*

Figure 7. Reena social worker facilitating members in a discussion.

Have You Tried These Things?

- Establish procedures for welcoming new members, including members with disabilities.
- Ask the new member what they most want to get from the community.
- If you know that a person with a disability is planning to visit your place of worship, ask before their first visit if they will want any help during their visit.
- Review the community's ability to provide accessibility accommodations for new members, such as large print books, wheelchair access, and interpreting.
- If a person with disabilities is going to participate in one of your groups, focus on discovering their different skills and identifying ways they could contribute those gifts.

Progress Checklist

- ○ We recognize the existence and diversity of people with disabilities all around us.
- ○ We recognize that barriers may develop if the needs of people with disabilities are not considered.
- ○ We understand that an attitudinal barrier is the most difficult barrier to overcome, but that power to change our attitudes is within us.
- ○ If we do not know exactly what to say or how to help, then we will ask people with disabilities questions instead of making our own assumptions about how to build relationships with them.
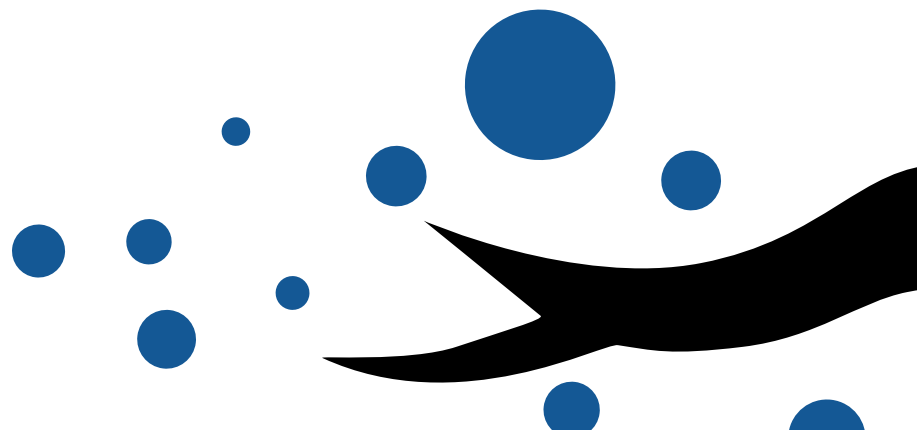
Getting Organized

To start making your faith community more accessible follow these three steps:

1. Form an Inclusion Committee
2. Identify barriers
3. Make a plan

You can learn more about each step in the sections below.

1 Form an Inclusion Committee

A good way to make inclusion and accessibility a priority in your community is to form an Inclusion Committee (also called a "disability awareness committee" or an "accessibility committee"); this is a group of people in your faith community that looks after the needs of people with diverse abilities (fig. 8). Members of inclusion committees are the community's champions for accessibility for people with disabilities.

You can begin by recruiting people with disabilities for leadership roles within your community. Having people with lived experience of disability in leadership positions is critical for creating and supporting a more inclusive infrastructure. They will be able to give advice on accessibility and inclusion matters within your community based on their personal/professional knowledge, expertise, and experience.

Help your community sustain its diverse membership and maintain enthusiasm for diversity goals by bringing up the topic of inclusion when planning all activities and continuing to take steps that continually improve and integrate inclusive thinking.

Figure 8. Inclusion Committee in action.

Tips for the Inclusion Committee meetings

- Meet regularly, at least three times per year.

- Discuss the needs of the members with disabilities.

- Plan ways to change the space and their practices in order to improve access.

- Find (and take steps to repair) areas that have challenges for people with disabilities.

- Develop short- and long-term financial and organizational plans so that the community can welcome as many people with diverse needs as possible.

- A representative from the Inclusion Committee should be part of the place of worship's management or operations team to ensure that accessibility is given prominence on management agendas.

2 Identify Barriers

Although accessibility may seem like a practical issue, it is also a theological one. When a faith community has barriers to accessing its facilities, rituals, and practices, the community is making a statement about its beliefs and about who should be included. Identifying and removing barriers is a key step in the inclusion process (fig. 9).

Figure 9. Some barriers are hidden in plain sight. Stairs without railings make the entrance inaccessible.

Brief Accessibility Checklist

Your inclusion committee will be especially helpful for identifying barriers in your faith community. Barriers were described in the Getting Started section above. You can use the checklist below to begin checking the accessibility of your services and facilities (additional checklists can be found in the resources section).

Barriers of Attitude

	Yes	Not Yet
All members, including members with disabilities, have been asked whether they feel welcome in worship, leadership, and other programs.	○	○
Our community is sincere about engaging people with disabilities in all aspects of the community. People with disabilities serve on committees or in other leadership roles.	○	○
Our community has a committee and/or disability advocate.	○	○
Ushers, teachers/leaders, and youth leaders/mentors have been instructed regarding appropriate ways to greet and respond to the needs of people with disabilities (fig. 10).	○	○
Our community leaders work with people with disabilities (and caregivers) so that needs are addressed.	○	○
Transportation (e.g., carpool or shuttle) is offered for people with disabilities who cannot drive.	○	○

To remove the barriers of attitude, go to the section on Strategies for Shifting Attitudes & Promoting Active Participation.

Barriers of Communication

	Yes	Not Yet
Our community has assistive listening devices (infrared, hearing loop, FM) available for people with hearing impairments (fig. 11).	○	○
Sign language interpretation is provided when prior arrangements have been made.	○	○
Adequate lighting is available for signing and speech reading or for individuals with low vision.	○	○
Printed materials are available in alternative formats, such as large print, audio, and digital (also Braille, when requested in advance) (fig. 11).	○	○
Information about alternative formats is prominently displayed (fig. 10 and 11).	○	○
Copies of spoken elements of worship are available for people who are Deaf or hard of hearing, and captioning is used with visual projection.	○	○
Printed and spoken elements of worship and all programs are in plain language.	○	○

To remove the barriers of communication, go to the section on Strategies for Improving Communications.

If you need assistance, please let us know

aha.idrc.ocadu.ca

aha!

Figure 10. You can support your welcome with signs.

Figure 11. Congregant with an alternative format of the reading and a hearing device.

Architectural or Structural Barriers

	Yes	Not Yet
Accessible parking is provided.	◯	◯
Entrances and hallways are free from barriers that can impede a wheelchair (door bases, grates, boxes, thick mats).	◯	◯
Door handles are lever style on all inside doors.	◯	◯
A ramp is available for access into the building.	◯	◯
Doors to rooms, especially washrooms, are at least 860 mm (0.86 m) in width.	◯	◯
Proper handrails are installed in all toilet areas for assisting in transfer and while standing.	◯	◯
At least one toilet stall has a raised seat and space next to the toilet for side transfer, and has room to turn around in a large power wheelchair.	◯	◯
All levels of the building are accessible from the inside.	◯	◯
People who use wheelchairs have choices in where to sit in any room.	◯	◯
Worship and other functions respect various sensitivities (e.g., bright light, loud noise, and strong scent).	◯	◯

To remove the barriers of buildings and facilities, go to the section on Strategies for Making Buildings and Facilities Accessible.

3 Make a Plan

Are you missing a few things from the Brief Accessibility Checklist? Perhaps all you need is a simple tweak. You may be worried that adding some of the features on the checklist may be too costly. Don't worry! There are always creative ways to tackle problems that are innovative and affordable.

Read the rest of the guide for ideas. Also, check out our website (opendoors.idrc.ocadu.ca/category/welcoming-communities) for what other communities are already doing. Do you have an accessibility solution that you are really proud of? Share your idea with us on our Facebook page (facebook.com/OurDoorsAreOpen/).

Some Ideas for Making Your Plan

1. Look at the items that have been checked "not yet." With your committee, consider which of the items you can remedy easily and which ones will take more time and resources. There are tips in the **Getting Down to Work** section below to help you learn ways to remove barriers. You may need to consult this section while making your plan.

2. Select the order that you want to address each item. You may want to start with the easier ones and just one of the items that will take more resources.

3. For each item, determine what resources (people, material, money) you will need and how you will get them.

4. Have a short-term and long-term plan that will let you address each of the items. Your short-term plan should have more details and specific dates. Your long-term plan may have step-by-step goals like setting aside funds or applying for grants.

5. Remember to consult with members of your community who have disabilities and check the Our Doors Are Open (opendoors.idrc.ocadu.ca/) website for additional help and resources.
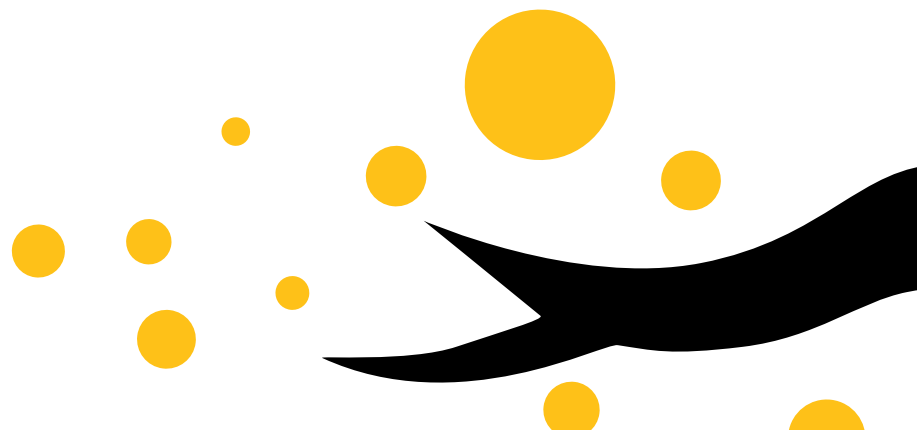
Getting Down to Work

Your faith community is most likely a welcoming one and wants to be inclusive of people with disabilities and of other individuals who may feel under-represented. You may already do things to make people with disabilities feel at home in your community. That said, your community may also unwittingly exclude people with disabilities, because many traditions and environments have been designed without considering the needs of people with disabilities. In the past, this exclusion was accepted by most and not questioned. Today, however, we know better but can still be exclusive because we have not fully integrated inclusive thinking into the design of our traditions, activities, and spaces.

1 Strategies for Shifting Attitudes & Promoting Active Participation

You can begin by actively questioning and thinking about welcoming behaviour:

- How do you demonstrate openness at the core of your faith community?
- What are your current beliefs about welcoming?
- Who is not represented or unable to participate?

Just Ask. Just Listen.

Inclusive thinking means changing habits and behaviours. Your community may need to consciously bring inclusive thinking into all activities before these inclusive habits are developed. Getting to know what you need to think about to be inclusive can be easier than you expect. We recommend as a first strategy a very simple approach:

Just Ask. Just Listen.

Ask people with disabilities, "How can we be more welcoming? How can we be more inclusive?" Listening carefully to their response can help create a shift in how you think about inclusion. Sometimes we don't ask because we feel unsure of how to interact with someone with a disability and don't want to be offensive.

Interacting with People with Disabilities

People with disabilities want to participate as volunteers in activities and on committees at places of worship. Here are some tips to make it happen.

Check the resource section for tips on interacting with people with disabilities, or follow this link to a chapter from Just Ask: Integrating Accessibility Throughout Design (http://uiaccess.com/accessucd/interact.html).

> **Accessibility does not equal inclusion. To be included in a community means to have opportunities to actively participate and make contributions to the community.**

Welcome People into Active Participation

Welcoming also means enabling participation in all aspects of your community so that individuals know that they are able to engage.

Begin by advertising that you are looking for candidates of all abilities in media/locations (virtual and physical) that are frequented by people with disabilities in your community.

- Use diverse imagery within your advertising and media materials, such as those at www.photoability.net (a for-fee database of stock photos of people with disabilities) or at other image houses online.

- Advertise! Make it known that you have flexible ways to lead and volunteer for the community (e.g., online from home, volunteer with a buddy or partner, single task volunteering, and regularly scheduled volunteering).

Set Up Inclusive Training and Meetings

- Take advantage of the flexibility of electronic text (it is easily read aloud by a screen reader, enlarged, converted to Braille, adjusted for colour and contrast, as well as shared) and provide training materials and information in accessible digital formats.

- Take advantage of freely available and inexpensive audio and video conferencing solutions to enable remote participation in training activities, meetings, and volunteer tasks.

- Use plain language in training materials.

Create Tasks in an Inclusive Manner

- Have flexible tasks so that they can be tailored to fit different people's skills and be shared. For example, an individual who is blind could teach a skill to a group of children with the help of a sighted person to manage physical supervision.

- Consider what tasks or parts of tasks can be carried out from their homes.

- Divide tasks into smaller sub-tasks/requirements so that you can better match each individual person to available tasks.

Maintaining Participation of People with Disabilities in Your Community

- Seek to have people with disabilities represented at all levels of your community. Who is on your board? Who is volunteering on the front line?

- Develop policies and procedures that support inclusion, diversity, and accessibility through the inclusion committee.

- Set continual goals for inclusion and evaluate success of meeting inclusion goals and supporting diversity.

- Find and fix barriers to participation of people with disabilities.

- Have all volunteers complete an exit interview to learn more about the volunteer experience.

- Ask potential leaders and volunteers what they would like to do for your community organization, the skills they would like to put to use, and what their goals are in working with you.

- Pay attention to travel and time constraints so someone who struggles to get around or who has to manage other commitments (such as booking attendants or medical appointments) will be able to participate in your community.

- Allow people to identify what they are good at and what they would like to do, rather than create a prescriptive role. This will create an opportunity for the person with a disability to tell you how they would best fit into the organization.

- Focus on what people are able to do and maximize these opportunities by reassigning or redesigning tasks or parts of tasks that have barriers or are more difficult to accomplish.

- When possible, create roles with flexible timelines or opportunities to participate remotely or with a support worker. Make the availability of these flexible roles known to volunteers.

Have You Tried These Things?

- Set aside a time to discuss welcoming at a regular meeting.
- Discuss who the most welcoming people are in your community and what they do.
- Listen to the voices and needs of people with disabilities in your community.
- Identify and remove barriers to being welcoming and participation.
- Offer opportunities for people to volunteer in groups or pairs.
- Offer flexible time commitments and/or partnering arrangements that will enable individuals with episodic disabilities to volunteer.
- Offer transportation (e.g., carpool or shuttle) for those who do not drive.
- Ask people what you can do to support their commitment.
- Provide access to refreshments, if applicable.
- Provide an accessible space to secure belongings.
- Ask people with disabilities to volunteer and lead in the different areas of your community.

Progress Checklist

- ○ We as a community understand the concept of welcoming.
- ○ We see the ways that all of us have a level of responsibility in ensuring accessibility.
- ○ We have established an Inclusion Committee.
- ○ We have included people with disabilities in committees, as well as in praying, singing, dancing, music, speaking, and preaching in worship services.
- ○ We have provided support and resources for people with disabilities to actively participate in the community.
- ○ The tasks needed to be completed are tailored to each person's abilities and areas of interest.
- ○ We set up and organized inclusive training workshops.
- ○ We have reached out and asked how to remove barriers to inclusion, and devised creative solutions.
- ○ We now have more items that are checked "yes" under Barriers of Attitudes on the Brief Accessibility Checklist.

Strategies for Improving Communications

Communication is a process of providing, sending, receiving, and understanding information. A person's disability may affect the way that the person expresses, receives, or processes communication.

Don't make assumptions based on a person's disability. What may be a very effective way of providing information for one person with a disability may not be for another. People with the same type of disability may communicate in different ways because of diverse skills or resources. For example, only a small percentage of people who are blind use Braille. Where possible, it is helpful to ask the person directly how to communicate with them.

How We Can Create Accessible Communication Materials

- Make sure all written and spoken materials used in worship practices, programs/ activities, and advertisements are in plain language. Offer other formats (e.g., large print, audio, digital on a website, and Braille).

- Provide text alternatives for non-text content (e.g., captions for pictures).

- Provide captions and other alternatives for multimedia (e.g., audio description of pictures and videos).

- Create content that can be presented in different ways, including by assistive technologies, such as screen readers for blind and low vision users, without losing meaning.

- Use different technology to spread your message in order to reach a wide variety of people across age and ability groups. Reach out through mobile, social media, and computer applications! Make all functionality available from a keyboard, if online.

- Make it easier for users to see and hear content.

- Give users enough time to read and use content.

- Do not use content that causes seizures (anything that flashes more than three times in any one-second period).

- Help users find what they are looking for.

- Make text readable and understandable. Use language that is to the point and gets your message across in the simplest way possible.

Tips for Creating Accessible Communication Materials

- When you create new information, think about what might help someone who has vision loss, hearing loss, or a learning disability understand it.

- For existing information, think about making it available in an accessible format; for example, using large print for someone with vision loss.

- Hire people with disabilities to create content for your community.

- Use clear fonts and contrasting colours for any documents you hand out or display (fig. 12 and 13).

- Incorporate various forms of visual, text, and audio elements into communication so that people can understand your message through the medium they feel most understandable.

- Offer to provide captioning and sign language interpretation to accommodate more members.
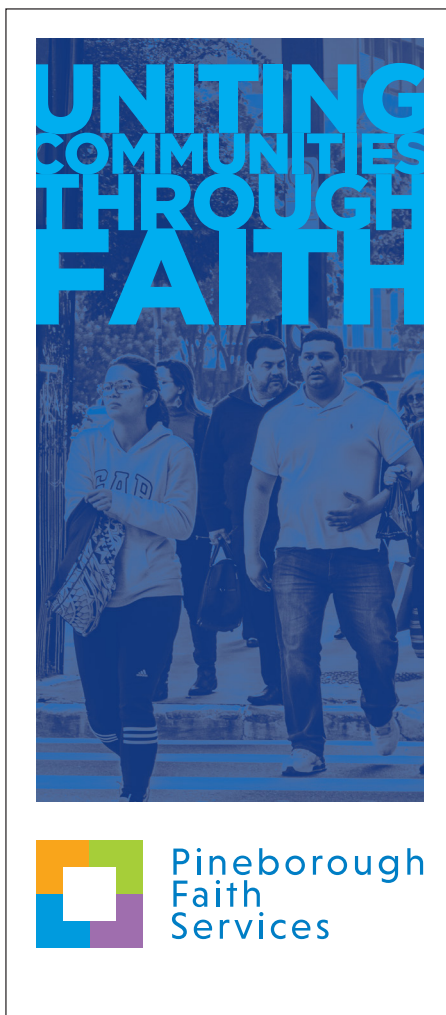

Fig. 12. This communication material contains typography that is uppercase, tight and compressed, and lacks contrast from the background making it inaccessible.

Fig. 13. This communication material properly uses lower and uppercase lettering, good spacing and sufficient contrast from the background. This is an accessible communication example.

Figure 12.

Figure 13.

Have You Tried These Things?

- Provide ample notice of events to allow people to arrange for disability accommodations.
- Include an inclusion statement on all advertising.
- Collect information about disability accommodation needs through registration forms.
- Include contact information for disability accommodation requests in your advertising.
- Follow up on accommodation requests.
- Include international accessibility symbols in your advertising to indicate disability accommodations you can offer.
- Advertise in different formats for people with diverse ranges of ability, including (but not limited to) audio-recording, Braille, and/or web-based formats.
- In your meetings and services offer materials in large-print and digital formats (some members bring their tablets to your services).

Progress Checklist

- ○ We offer information in different formats as needed in order to ensure that our message reaches people with a variety of disabilities.
- ○ We create content with a diverse audience in mind.
- ○ We have extra hard copies printed
- ○ The audio/visual controls are adjustable
- ○ We offer verbal descriptions of visual content
- ○ We are working on captioning some videos
- ○ We ensure that our message is delivered in a clear and understandable manner.
- ○ We have provided an outlet for accessibility feedback after presentations in order to further improve.
- ○ We mix up the ways we deliver our message to attract and engage all people in the community.
- ○ We now have more items that are checked "yes" under Barriers of Communication on the Brief Accessibility Checklist.

Strategies for Making Buildings and Facilities Accessible

In both urban centres and rural communities, worship spaces act as important places for out-reach, faith-based programming, and social and cultural activities. This makes worship spaces ideal for forming connections and socializing for people with disabilities. Inclusive design can be implemented in order to ensure the possibility for people with disabilities to make the most of their worship experiences (fig. 14).

Tips for Improving Access to Worship Spaces

The understanding of physical accessibility in Ontario faith communities needs to be looked at in a different way. Physical accessibility is often the most addressed aspect of the needs of the disability community, and yet many communities are still not fully accommodating. Physical accessibility does not end with ramps for wheelchair users. Access needs to include elements, such as:

- Spacious entryways
- Clear signs to guide people through buildings
- Unscented spaces
- Adjustable lighting
- Audio and visual aids
- Inclusive seating (e.g. chairs available where they are not normally used, pews being shortened in various places so space for people using wheelchairs and strollers is available throughout the place of worship, not in a single area)

Figure 14. Congregant with a mobility device is able to participate equally with this ramp to access the bimah.

Photo Courtesy of Paul Lungen, Canadian Jewish News.

Tips for Accessible Buildings and Environments

- Consider how people are going to arrive at your space.
- Consider offering diverse transportation options to members with disabilities.
- Provide information about accessible parking.
- Provide information about wheelchair access.
- Check your outdoor and indoor pathways to be sure that they are free of barriers (fig. 15).
- If you have elevators, try to make them fully inclusive for diverse members.
- Provide inclusive, clear, high-contrast signage.
- Check the acoustics. It is important to provide minimal echo.
- Indicate the location of accessible bathrooms.
- Be sure that all electrical cables and cords are securely covered for safe crossover.
- Provide a quiet area with dim lighting.

Figure 15. Keep your pathways open and clear to be accessible.

Have You Tried These Things?

- Set up the space to be generous to users of wheelchairs and scooters.
- Provide accessible seating areas in the front, middle, and back.
- Reserve seating for people with disabilities and their companions to sit together.
- Included adjustable lighting in your worship space.
- Promote a fragrance-free environment.

Progress Checklist

○ We recognize the way physical space can support or remove a person's feeling of welcome.

○ We have considered the setup of the room and how people with disabilities will interact with the environment.

○ Everybody in our community knows that service animals are welcome in all public spaces, with few exceptions (e.g., food preparation areas), and can be dogs or other animals.

○ We provided guidance to congregants on not petting or interacting with service animals who are working (e.g., wearing a harness).

○ We have an indoor or outdoor relief area for service animals and provide them with a water bowl.

○ We accommodate transportation when possible (e.g., arrange carpool).

○ We completed the accessibility checklist as a launching point into promoting a culture of accessibility.

○ We have used and promoted technology and apps to report back on how well we are doing in terms of inclusion and accessibility

○ We now have more items that are checked "yes" under Architectural or Structural Barriers on the Brief Accessibility Checklist.

Welcoming New People into Your Community

Inclusive thinking is an ongoing process that means learning new habits and behaviours.

1 Have a Plan for Welcoming New Community Members

Prepare your welcome committee members on how to interact with people with disabilities (fig. 16). Let the newcomer know that inclusion and accessibility is a priority in your community. Be clear about how any needs for an accessibility accommodation can be communicated.

If people with disabilities can share perspectives on worship spaces, committee service, community engagement, and hospitality with friends, then faith communities can offer dynamic proof of the diversity that all of our traditions strive to celebrate.

Figure 16. A member of the welcome committee greets a new community member.

2 Reach Out to People Who are not Currently Included in Your Community

As mentioned earlier, it is possible that some may have had negative experiences from previous attempts to join a faith community. It is important for you to spread the word about all the accessible and inclusive features your community has to offer. Use your current communication channels and find new ones such as posting on accessibility mapping applications like wheelmap.org/en, AXSmap. com or AccessNow.me, asking advocacy groups to tell their members about you and have your community members share with their social networks. More importantly, get the attention of people with disabilities. Look at section 2-Strategies for Improving Communications (p. 22) in this guide for more information.

3 Build Relationships with People with Disabilities

Remember, not everyone will come to your community fully ready to tell you about their disabilities or their accessibility needs. In fact, many may try to hide their disabilities or avoid entering the community completely. For people to open up, you must first build trust and a relationship.

- Ask and Listen. Still not sure if you are providing enough?

  Just ask: "How can I/we help?"
  Then listen.

  You don't need to have all the solutions. Odds are that you probably will never have solutions that would work for everyone. By directly asking people, you can show your support and your care while making more people feel welcome.

- Ask how a new member would like to participate in the community. Ask what they would need to fully participate in your community (fig. 17). This may be a good practice for all existing and new members of your community.

Figure 17. A Deaf Our Doors Are Open expert participates equally with a sign language interpreter.

Progress Checklist

○ We can identify and successfully welcome new members with disabilities.
○ We ensure that new members feel a part of the community and go out of our way to include them.
○ We have tried to incorporate person-centred planning in our community.
○ We understand the different approaches of welcoming people of a variety of disabilities with respect.

Notes

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Resources

Title	Web Address or Source	Inclusive thinking & Welcoming	Participation & Inclusion	Improving Communications	Making building & facilities accessible	Outreach	Faith
The Disability Studies Reader	Davis, Lennard J. The Disability Studies Reader: Introduction. New York and London: Routledge, 2013.	✓					All
Vulnerable Communion	http://www.faithformationlearningexchange.net/uploads/5/2/4/6/5246709/vulnerable_community_-_excerpt.pdf	✓					Christian
Removing Barries to Inclusion	https://volunteer.ca/pwd/removing-barriers	✓					General
Faith Formation for People with Special Needs	http://www.faithformationlearningexchange.net/special-needs.html	✓	✓				Christian
Foundational Books: People with Special Needs in Christian Tradition	http://www.faithformationlearningexchange.net/special-needs-books.html	✓					Christian
Inclusion Handbook: Everybody Belongs, Everybody Serves	http://images.rca.org/docs/discipleship/InclusionHandbook.pdf,"DeYoung, Terry A. and Mark Stephenson. Inclusion Handbook: Everybody Belongs, Everybody Serves. New York: Christian Reformed Press, 2013.	✓	✓			✓	All
Creating Accessible Recreation Facilities People Who Are Deaf and Hard Hearing	https://www.chs.ca/creating-accessible-recreation-facilities-people-who-are-deaf-and-hard-hearing			✓	✓	✓	General
Person-Centred Planning: Key Features and Resources.	http://www.familiesleadingplanning.co.uk/documents/pcp%20key%20features%20and%20styles.pdf	✓				✓	General
On Belonging: Lessons Learned about What Matters Most	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Pd12EUgwds	✓				✓	General
Breaking Down Barriers: a Multi-Faith Guide to Accessibility in Places of Worship	https://network.crcna.org/sites/default/files/documents/BreakingDownBarriers-GuideMF.pdf	✓	✓	✓		✓	All
Handbook for Accessible Employment	http://www.communication-access.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/ADO-Accessible-Employment-EN.pdf		✓	✓	✓		General
Access Forward: Free training modules to meet the training requiremens under Ontario's accessibility laws	http://www.accessforward.ca		✓	✓	✓		General
Engaging People with Disabilities	https://volunteer.ca/pwd	✓	✓	✓		✓	General

Title	Web Address or Source	Inclusive thinking & Welcoming	Participation & Inclusion	Improving Communications	Making building & facilities accessible	Outreach	Faith
Accessibility rules for businesses and non-profits: The rules and deadlines businesses and non-profits must follow to meet accessibility standards in Ontario.	https://www.ontario.ca/page/accessibility-rules-businesses-and-non-profits#section-0		✓	✓	✓		General
A Planning Guide for Accessible Conferences	http://www.accessiblecampus.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/A-Planning-Guide-for-Accessible-Conferences-1.pdf	✓	✓	✓	✓		General
Guide to Accessible Public Engagement	https://www.omssa.com/accessible-community-engagement/omssa-guides/view-the-guides/guide-to-accessible-public-engagement		✓	✓		✓	General
Guidelines for Ushers	http://www.stx-pburg.org/Guidelines%20for%20Ushers.pdf		✓				Christian
Accessible Digital Office Document (ADOD) Project	http://adod.idrc.ocad.ca/			✓			General
Planning Accessible Events so everyone feels welcome	http://www.sparkontario.ca/spark-plug/hosting-accessible-events			✓	✓	✓	General
Enabling Access Through Web Renewal	https://www.wlu.ca/docs/EnablingAccessHandbook_online.pdf			✓			General
AccessAbility: A Practical Handbook on Accessible Graphic Design	https://www.rgd.ca/database/files/library/RGD_AccessAbility_Handbook.pdf			✓	✓		General
How to make public spaces accessible	https://www.ontario.ca/page/how-make-public-spaces-accessible#section-7				✓		General
Guide to Conducting Accessible Meetings	https://omssa.com/accessible-community-engagement/omssa-guides/view-the-guides/guide-to-conducting-accessible-meetings			✓	✓		General
Landlords' Obligations Under The Accessibility For Ontarians With Disabilities Act	http://www.equalityrights.org/cera/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/UnlockingtheAODAPages_ToolKit_07a_20151105.pdf	✓	✓	✓	✓		General
Bahai Resources	https://www.ca.bahai.org/resources	✓					Baha'i
Building Community	https://www.building-community.ca/	✓					Baha'i
Guide To Buddhism A To Z	http://www.buddhisma2z.com/index.htm	✓	✓				Buddhist
Buddhism and Hospitality	https://www.smith.edu/religion/documents/Rotman_buddhismhospitality.pdf	✓					Buddhist
That All May Worship	http://www.aapd.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/That-All-May-Worship.pdf	✓	✓				Christian

Title	Web Address or Source	Inclusive thinking & Welcoming	Participation & Inclusion	Improving Communications	Making building & facilities accessible	Outreach	Faith
Hindu Hospitality	http://www.vishnumandir.com/wp-content/uploads/hindu-hospitality.pdf	✓					Hindu
Heart of Hinduism	https://iskconeducationalservices.org/HoH/lifestyle/810.htm	✓					Hindu
What are the examples of Muslim Hospitality?	https://www.quora.com/What-are-the-examples-of-Muslim-hospitality	✓					Islam
Hospitality to Guests	https://www.morashasyllabus.com/class/Hospitality%20to%20Guests.pdf,	✓	✓				Jewish
Community Activators: Listening Well	http://www.communityactivators.com/downloads/ListeningWell.pdf	✓		✓			General
Including Adults with Disabilities in Religious Life and Education	https://www.christian-horizons.org/res/pub/What_We_Do/Church_Engagement/Documents/IncludingAdultswithDisabilitiesinRelEdMANUAL.pdf	✓	✓		✓	✓	Christian
Accessibility, Acceptance, Islamic Education: Living as a Muslim with Disability	http://muslimmatters.org/2014/03/04/living-as-a-muslim-with-disability/	✓			✓		Islam
Disability Inclusion Resource Guide for Rabbis	http://disabilitiesinclusion.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Disability-Inclusion-Resource-Guide-for-Rabbis.pdf		✓		✓	✓	Jewish
The Task of Christian Education in Creating an Inclusive Worldview	http://www.cejonline.com/article/the-task-of-christian-education-in-creating-an-inclusive-worldview/	✓		✓		✓	Christian
Towards an Inclusive Ummah Muslims with Disabilities Speak-Out	http://camd.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Towards-An-Inclusive-Ummah.pdf		✓		✓	✓	Islam
People with Disabilities from an Islamic Perspective	http://www.fountainmagazine.com/Issue/detail/People-with-Disabilities-from-an-Islamic-Perspective		✓	✓		✓	Islam
Buddhist Ideology towards Children with Disabilities in Thailand: Through the Lens of Inclusive School Principals	http://www.icdv.net/2014paper/ws5_16_en__Buddhist_Ideology_towards_Children_with_Disabilities__703034837.pdf	✓	✓				Buddhist
Religion and Spirituality Resources	http://vkc.mc.vanderbilt.edu/vkc/resources/religionspirituality/	✓	✓		✓		Christian
Welcoming People with Developmental Disabilities and Their Families: A Practical Guide for Congregations	http://vkc.mc.vanderbilt.edu/assets/files/resources/CongregationPracticeGuide.pdf	✓	✓	✓		✓	All
Inclusion in a Faith Community: Tips and Resources for Religious and Spiritual Leaders	http://vkc.mc.vanderbilt.edu/assets/files/tipsheets/inclusionfaithleadertips.pdf		✓	✓		✓	All
Including Adults with Disabilities in Religious Life and Education	http://vkc.mc.vanderbilt.edu/assets/files/resources/disabilitiesrelmanual.pdf	✓	✓	✓		✓	All

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Inclusion in a Faith Community: Tips and Resources for Congregational Care Committees	http://vkc.mc.vanderbilt.edu/assets/files/ tipsheets/inclusionfaithcomtips.pdf		✓	✓		✓	All
A Checklist for Planning Accessible Conferences	http://www.accessiblecampus.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/A-Checklist-for-Planning-Accessible-Events-1.pdf	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	General
Accessible Communications from the University of Toronto	http://aoda.hrandequity.utoronto.ca/ communications/		✓	✓			General
Information and Communications Standard	https://www.accessforward.ca/information/	✓	✓	✓			General
Guide to Accessible Events from Ryerson University	http://www.ryerson.ca/content/dam/ accessibility/resources/guide_to_accessible_events.pdf	✓		✓	✓		General
The Power of Belonging: Welcoming Jewish with Disabilities into Jewish Communal Life	http://ou.org.s3.amazonaws.com/pdf/ ja/5766/fall66/WelcomingJewsDisab.pdf	✓	✓			✓	General
Orthodox Christian Resources for Persons with Disabilities, their Familities, Friends, and Spiritual Fathers	https://armsopenwide.wordpress.com/ resources-2/	✓	✓	✓		✓	General
Guide to Accessible Festivals & Outdoor Events	https://www.tiaontario.ca/cpages/accessibletourism	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	General