Ontario

How to serve on a municipal accessibility advisory committee: Guide

A guide to help members of municipal accessibility advisory committees carry out their responsibilities, engage with their municipal government and work well as a team.

Overview

About 1.65 million Ontarians have a [disability (http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-and-guidelines-disability-and-duty-accommodate/2-what-disability)](http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-and-guidelines-disability-and-duty-accommodate/2-what-disability) and may face [barriers to accessibility (https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/05a11#BK2)](https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/05a11#BK2). They may find it hard to access local services, enter public buildings or use public transit.

While all levels of government are working to improve accessibility, municipal governments have a special role to play. Municipalities serve communities and manage many important programs and services that touch our daily lives, such as libraries, social housing and emergency services, and parks and roads.

About this guide

Accessibility advisory committees advise municipal councils about the requirements and implementation of Ontario's accessibility standards. According to the law, municipalities with 10,000 or more residents must establish an accessibility advisory committee. The majority of committee members must be people with disabilities.

This guide will help you build the practical knowledge and skills you will need to contribute to your accessibility advisory committee and carry out the work more effectively.

It can also be a useful resource for municipalities.

What you need to know

As a member of an accessibility advisory committee, you need to understand:

- how Ontario's accessibility laws affect your work
- your role and responsibilities
- how to remove barriers to accessibility
- the structure and decision-making processes of municipal government

Accessibility laws that impact your work

[Accessibility laws (https://www.ontario.ca/page/about-accessibility-laws)](https://www.ontario.ca/page/about-accessibility-laws) help improve accessibility for people who have disabilities. Since your job is to advise municipal councils on how to remove barriers for people with disabilities, it's important for you to understand Ontario's various laws related to accessibility. Here's a quick summary:

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)

The [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/05a11)](https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/05a11) allows Ontario to develop, implement and enforce [accessibility standards (https://www.ontario.ca/page/about-accessibility-laws#section-1)](https://www.ontario.ca/page/about-accessibility-laws#section-1), which are rules that help ensure people with disabilities can benefit from accessible:

- customer service
- employment
- information and communications
- transportation
- public spaces

The Ontarians with Disabilities Act (ODA)

The [Ontarians with Disabilities Act (https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/01o32)](https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/01o32) helps the government improve opportunities for people with disabilities. Under the ODA, all municipalities must:

- prepare an accessibility plan each year and make it available to the public
- include people with disabilities in their planning processes, such as the members of the accessibility advisory committee
- remove barriers over time (the act gives municipalities the flexibility to set their own priorities and timelines)

The Ontario Planning Act

Municipal governments plan their communities, including streets, parks, public transit, libraries, social housing and other social services. The [Ontario Planning Act (https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90p13)](https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90p13) guides the planning of land use in Ontario. Accessibility advisory committee members review those planning documents.

The Ontario Building Code

The Building Code Act (https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/92b23) governs the way buildings are constructed, renovated or changed. The Building Code (https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/120332) is a regulation under this act and sets out requirements that help maintain standards for, among others, barrier-free accessibility. Municipalities enforce the Building Code Act and the Building Code.

Under the Building Code, a building and its facilities are barrier-free if people with physical or sensory disabilities can approach, enter and use them. The requirements apply (but are not limited) to:

- parking
- entrances
- elevators
- washrooms
- halls
- doorways and doors
- spaces in seating areas
- ramps
- signs

The Building Code's requirements for barrier-free design apply to most uses of buildings. There are a few exceptions, such as:

- houses, including semi-detached houses, duplexes, triplexes, town houses, row houses and boarding or rooming houses with fewer than 8 boarders or roomers
- high-hazard industrial buildings
- buildings that are not intended to be occupied on a daily or full-time basis

The Building Code does not require building owners or operators to upgrade their existing buildings to meet the current Code requirements. However, when building owners renovate a building or change their buildings' use, they may be required to meet the Building Code's requirements for barrier-free accessibility.

The Ontario Human Rights Code

The Ontario Human Rights Code (http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/ontario-human-rights-code) protects people from discrimination and harassment. It clearly sets out rights and responsibilities for everyone in Ontario.

The Blind Persons' Rights Act

The Blind Persons' Rights Act (https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90b07) provides someone who is blind the legal right to:

- be accompanied by a specially trained guide dog in all facilities open to the public, and not be charged extra because of the guide dog's presence
- equal housing opportunities, and no special conditions or terms can be imposed because of the dog's presence

The act prohibits discrimination against blind persons who use guide dogs in the areas of services, accommodation, facilities and occupancy. It also prohibits persons who are not blind from using white canes.

The committee's role and responsibilities

Role

The role of the municipal accessibility advisory committee is to provide advice to the municipal government on a wide range of municipal processes to help make public services and facilities accessible to everyone.

Responsibilities

The three main activities of an accessibility advisory committee are to:

1. Advise municipal council about:
   - the requirements and implementation of accessibility standards (https://www.ontario.ca/page/about-accessibility-laws)
   - the preparation of accessibility reports
   - other matters for which the council may seek its advice
2. Review site plans and drawings described in section 41 of the Planning Act (https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90p13#BK61) that the committee selects
3. Perform all other functions that are specified in the regulations

Providing advice

Accessibility advisory committees do advocate for change:

- focus on providing unbiased advice to municipal council
- avoid championing just one issue, take a broader view
- learn about the organization's processes and scope of ability to effect change to understand potential constraints
- ensure that you are familiar the AODA and its standards

Learning about barriers to accessibility

Build your knowledge of barriers (https://www.ontario.ca/page/how-serve-municipal-accessibility-advisory-committee-guide#rating) by engaging others. Keep in touch with these contacts to confirm your understanding as your committee works through an issue. Learning about barriers that someone experiences will expand

your understanding of how to develop solutions or advice to accommodate more people.

For example:

- Consider cross-disability issues, not just one concern such as wheelchair access
- Understand that accessibility needs to be achieved over time
- Consider how public feedback from people with disabilities could be brought forward and addressed and, if required, be included in accessibility planning
- Establish achievable goals and priorities
- Recognize that many factors – such as budgets – should be addressed when providing advice

Reviewing site plans

A site plan is a drawing, or set of drawings, of proposed improvements to a property. Municipalities may exercise further control over the details of development. They do this through a process called site plan control. Through this process they can:

- review a developer's plans and either approve or ask for changes
- consider the accessibility of a development proposal

The municipality may pass by-laws that set out the areas that are subject to site plan control. These areas must be described in the official plan. The review of site plans by municipal staff ensures that developers will provide:

- properly located buildings that fit in well with nearby businesses and the community
- safe and easy access for pedestrians
- a good design for landscaping, parking and drainage

The site plan must also take into account the requirements of other agencies and departments that have jurisdiction.

The elements of a site plan

For example, a site plan could include:

- buildings
- driveways
- entrances
- curbs or ramping
- parking areas
- sidewalks
- landscaping
- fences
- exterior lighting
- municipal services

In some cases, a site plan will also set out elevations and slopes of walkways.

The site plans design standards

The municipality sets the design standards for site plans, based on the requirements of the Ontario Building Code, the Planning Act and the AODA's accessibility standards. Design standards help your municipality ensure new developments are accessible for all.

What you need to do

For the most part, barriers to access are created unintentionally during the design process. They are largely due to a lack of understanding of the issues. For that reason, accessibility issues should be addressed as early as possible in the site planning process.

Accessibility advisory committees can get involved in reviewing some site plans for:

- municipal offices
- community centres
- recreation centres
- other sports facilities
- etc.

Your accessibility advisory committee may not want or need to review every site plan submitted. Instead, you may want to set up processes to:

- Choose the types of developments you will review. For example, your committee may decide to focus on reviewing new municipal developments. It may choose site plan reviews according to the proposed use. For example, you may focus first on community centres, arenas and civic centres.
- Consult with municipal staff to determine what accessibility criteria you will use with site plans. Municipal staff can tell you which accessibility criteria can be enforced, or, if there are municipal standards already in place that you may use to review a site plan.
- Ensure that your municipality consults the accessibility advisory committee on certain types of site plans. For example, your municipality could include your accessibility advisory committee on the checklist of reviewers of these plans.

By law, municipalities must provide site plans and related drawings to accessibility advisory committees on request. Accessibility advisory committees need to:

- find out if their municipality has its own design guidelines and ensure that each committee member involved in reviewing site plans has a copy of the guidelines
- set up a process to receive notice when site plans are submitted
- request site plans in a timely fashion

- respond promptly to prevent delays in the approval process

While the role of an accessibility advisory committee is to provide advice to municipalities, the advice may not always be endorsed.

Some municipalities audit their municipal building and facilities to assess their accessibility and identify barriers to remove (https://www.ontario.ca/page/how-serve-municipal-accessibility-advisory-committee-guide#barriers) . Accessibility advisory committee members may be asked to participate in such an audit.

Conducting building audits and site visits

When conducting building audits and site visits, a mix of criteria is recommended for reviewing site plans for accessibility. Your accessibility advisory committee can start with the barrier-free design requirements of the Ontario Building Code and the requirements of the Design of Public Spaces standards under the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (https://www.ontario.ca/document/how-comply-integrated-accessibility-standards-regulation) (IASR). However, these are widely seen as minimum standards only. So, plan to add other criteria to achieve the most suitable level of accessibility.

You are not restricted to just meeting the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation. Municipalities and their accessibility advisory committees are free to go beyond the IASR to improve accessibility for their communities – so long as they meet minimum standards.

Some municipalities have developed accessibility criteria that go beyond minimum accessibility standards. For example:

- The City of London (2007 Facility Accessibility Design Standards (https://www.london.ca/city-hall/accessibility/Pages/Facilities-Accessibility-Design-Standards.aspx))
- The Town of Oakville (Universal Design Standards (http://www.oakville.ca/assets/general%20-%20residents/aUniversal-Design-Standards.pdf))

Site visits checklist

If members of the accessibility advisory committee conduct an audit of a municipal facility, they could also keep a record of the facility, who conducted the audit, what audit tool(s) were used, and the date the audit was conducted.

Universal design principles are used to make products – and places –as useable and accessible as possible. The following checklist is based on these principles. It is a sample audit tool for accessibility advisory committees to use when they audit a facility for built environment features.

The checklist is divided into four sections:

- Accessible approach and entrance
- Access to goods, programs and services
- Usability of restrooms
- Additional access

Each section presents a series of questions based on the seven principles of universal design.

Principles of universal design

The principles of universal design below can help guide you when you review site plans and conduct site evaluation.

1. **Equitable use:** the design can be used by people with diverse abilities.
2. **Flexible use:** the design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.
3. **Simple and intuitive use:** the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills or level of concentration.
4. **Perceptible information:** the design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of other conditions or the user's abilities.
5. **Tolerance for error:** the design minimizes hazards and the adverse effects of accidental or unintended actions.
6. **Low physical effort:** the design can be used efficiently and comfortably with a minimum of fatigue.
7. **Size and space for approach and use:** appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation and use regardless of user's body size, posture or mobility.

Rating a facility

You can use this checklist [1] (https://www.ontario.ca/page/how-serve-municipal-accessibility-advisory-committee-guide#fn1) to help you conduct accessibility audits of municipal buildings or facilities, guided by the seven principles of universal design.

Accessible approach and entrance

Principle 1: Equitable use

- Is there an accessible route from the street that is the same for everyone?
- Is the accessible route from parking the same for all users?
- Is the main entrance the same for all users?
- Is the design appealing to all users, with accessibility well-integrated into the design?

Principle 2: Flexible use

- Is there more than one way to enter the building?
- If there is a ramp, are there also stairs that are designed according to Ontario Building Code requirements and your municipal accessibility design guidelines, if such guidelines exist?

Principle 3: Simple and intuitive use

- Is the route to the building easy to find and use?
- Is the entrance easy to find?
- Can you see vertical transportation options from the entrance? (for example, elevators and escalators)

Principle 4: Perceptible information

- Is there exterior signage and is it usable by all people?
- Is good lighting available?
- Is the building directory easy to find?
- Is the directory available in alternate format (e.g., for blind users)?

Principle 5: Tolerance for error

- Is the path of travel free of danger from cars?
- Does the path avoid unexpected level changes?
- Is there shelter at the entrance for use in bad weather?

Principle 6: Low physical effort

- Are the routes to entrances efficient, minimizing wasted effort?
- Can all people easily use both inside and outside doors?

Principle 7: Size and space for approach and use

- Can outside building areas be used by people of all heights?
- Is there room to exit a vehicle, if using an assistive device such as a scooter or wheelchair or if carrying large packages?

Access to goods, services, programs, activities

Principle 1: Equitable use

- Is the same, accessible route to the lobby and throughout the building available to everyone?
- Can all public spaces be used by everyone?
- Can seating be used by everyone?
- Can the entrance to each space be accessed by everyone?
- Can everyone make use of tables, counters, controls?
- Is the design appealing to all users?
- Is the air quality satisfactory for most users?
- Are accessible features built into the overall design scheme?

Principle 2: Flexible use

- Does the interior route provide choices to users? (For example, if there is an elevator or escalator, are there also stairs designed according to Ontario Building Code requirements?)
- Are seating options varied (mix of heights, movable)?
- Can daily users adjust temperature controls in their local area?

Principle 3: Simple and intuitive use

- If there is more than one floor? Is there a consistent layout?
- Are routes through the building easy to find?
- Are elevator and other key areas visible or clearly marked?
- Does signage address a wide range of literacy and language skills?

Principle 4: Perceptible information

- Does the building information system use a mix of symbols, print, and/or tactile methods to present vital information?
- Do all the rooms have signage in accessible formats with good contrast?
- Is the signage readable under a range of conditions?
- Are building acoustics designed for effective communication?
- Is good lighting available?
- Are emergency alarms visible to people with hearing limitations?
- Are emergency maps or exits accessible for people with vision loss?

Principle 5: Tolerance for error

- Are hazardous elements eliminated, isolated or shielded? This includes:
    - Staircases (especially the undersides)?
    - Hanging signs or structural elements?
    - Access to dangerous areas?
- Is the path of travel free of tripping hazards?
- Are exit routes obvious?

Principle 6: Low physical effort

- Is the route efficient, minimizing wasted effort?
- Are there places to sit and rest along long corridors? Railings?
- Can doors and windows be opened easily?

Principle 7: Size and space for approach and use

- Can people using wheelchairs, scooters, walkers and strollers enter and exit easily?
- Within each area, is there a clear line of sight to important elements for any seated or standing user?
- Can all components be used by people of different heights?

- Can all controls be reached and used by people with varied abilities?
- Is there adequate space to use equipment (strollers, luggage carts, walkers)?

Usability of restrooms

Principle 1: Equitable use

- Is a rest room with accessible features located as conveniently as other rest rooms?
- Is the accessible design appealing to all users?
- Are accessible features built into the design?
- Is the air quality satisfactory for most users (well vented, no scented cleaning or air freshening products)?

Principle 2: Flexible use

- Is there a family restroom that parents with children and others needing help can use?

Principle 3: Simple and intuitive use

- Is the route to the rest room easy to find and use?
- Is the entrance easy to find?
- Are the soap dispensers and faucets well placed and easy to use?

Principle 4: Perceptible information

- Is the rest room signage usable by people with low or no vision or limited literacy (including pictograms)?
- Is good lighting available?

Principle 5: Tolerance for error

- Have tripping hazards been eliminated?
- Are all fixtures free from objects that block and limit their use?
- Are heated pipes shielded to prevent burns?
- Can toilet stall doors be closed and locked with limited manual dexterity?
- Can people with children and using equipment easily get in and out of the stall?

Principle 6: Low physical effort

- If there are multiple floors, is an accessible rest room on each floor?
- Does the route to the restroom minimize wasted effort?
- Can the door be opened with ease, limited strength?
- Can all controls be operated with ease by people with limited strength?
- Are there grab bars in the accessible toilet stall?

Principle 7: Size and space for approach and use

- Can the features be used by people of different heights?
- Does the stall door provide room to enter and exit if using any equipment, packages, luggage?
- Is there room for a helper or parent in the toilet stall?
- Is the space free of obstacles that interfere with use (trash receptacles, supply storage)?

Additional access

Principle 1: Equitable use

- Are drinking fountains reachable by children, as well as short, tall and seated users?
- Are telephones with text displays available with other phones?
- Is the design appealing to all users?
- Are accessible features built into the design?

Principle 2: Flexible use

- Are public telephones usable by people at different heights?
- Does the pay phone allow multiple calling options (credit card, calling card, coin, collect)?
- Does the telephone "booth" design provide a place to write comfortably?

Principle 3: Simple and intuitive use

- Are fountains and phones readily found?
- Do the designs of phones and fountains make them as easy to use as possible?

Principle 4: Perceptible information

- Is signage provided in legible fonts and pictograms?
- Is good lighting available?
- Does the acoustical environment allow for effective telephone use?

Principle 5: Tolerance for error

- Does the position of the phone and/or fountain avoid hazards?
- Are protruding objects shielded?

- Does the location of the phone assure some privacy?

Principle 6: Low physical effort

- Is the phone and/or fountain easy to use by tall, short or seated people?
- Is there a place to sit while using the phone?

Principle 7: Size and space for approach and use

- Does the placement of the phone or fountain allow for use by a person using any equipment?

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[1] These questions were adapted from the Principles of Universal Design by the Global Universal Design Educator's Network (GUDEN) ©. This checklist (version 2003) was adapted for use in this guide with permission from the GUDEN. The Principles of Universal Design © 1997 NC State University, Center for Universal Design. The principles were conceived and developed by the Center for Universal Design at North Carolina State University in 1997 and remain relevant. Use or application of the Principles in any form does not constitute or imply acceptance or endorsement by the Center for Universal Design of the use or application.

Participating in consultations

According to the [Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (https://www.ontario.ca/document/how-comply-integrated-accessibility-standards-regulation)](https://www.ontario.ca/document/how-comply-integrated-accessibility-standards-regulation), municipalities must consult with the public, people with disabilities, **and their accessibility advisory committees** (if they have one):

1. When establishing, reviewing and updating their multi-year accessibility plans
2. When developing accessible design criteria in the construction, renovation or placement of bus stops and shelters
3. When determining the proportion of on-demand accessible taxicabs required in the community
4. On the need, location and design of accessible on-street parking spaces when building new or making major changes to existing on-street parking spaces
5. Before building new or making major changes to existing recreational trails to help determine particular trail features
6. On the needs of children and caregivers with various disabilities in their community when building new or making major changes to existing outdoor play spaces
7. On the design and placement of rest areas along the exterior path of travel when building new or making major changes to existing exterior paths of travel.

Additionally, municipalities that provide conventional transportation and specialized transportation must consult with the public, people with disabilities, **and their accessibility advisory committees** (if they have one):

- When gathering feedback on their accessibility plan through an annual public meeting.

Reviewing plans of subdivision

Under the [Ontario Planning Act (https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90p13)](https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90p13), municipalities must consider accessibility when reviewing draft plans of subdivision. In some cases, it may not be clear to officials what to look for when reviewing a draft plan. Municipal accessibility advisory committees can help guide this process.

Reviewing official plans

Municipalities use official plans to guide their development. These are the municipalities' strategic planning documents and are not the same as accessibility plans. An official plan:

- sets out a municipality's long-term vision for the use of land in the community
- provides direction to council, developers, and citizens
- covers things like housing, public transit and parks.

Every official plan is prepared with input from the municipality's citizens and other interested stakeholders. Municipalities must update their official plans every five years. Before doing so, they must hold a special meeting of council to discuss any revisions needed. This meeting must be open to the public.

Tip

The five-year review of your municipality's official plan is a good time for your accessibility advisory committee to provide input. The plan may affect how accessible your municipality is for people with disabilities.

Budgeting for accessibility

Some municipalities have a dedicated "accessibility fund" in place. This is considered a best practice. It helps ensure there is money to pay for the recommendations brought forward by accessibility advisory committees and municipal staff.

Many municipalities have also hired an accessibility coordinator to guide the accessibility planning process.

Dedicated annual funds for accessibility improvements may vary from one municipality to another. It's up to each municipality to assess its needs.

What if your municipality does not want to set up a dedicated accessibility fund? Another option could be that each department includes a line for accessibility that could be attached to a particular project to cover costs such as those related to the development of documents in alternate formats.

Providing accessible places to vote

The [Municipal Elections Act (https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/96m32)](https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/96m32) governs municipal elections in Ontario. It states that in choosing a location for a voting place, the clerk shall have regard to the needs of electors with disabilities. Accessibility advisory committees may provide advice to help municipalities plan for

accessibility. The checklist above (https://www.ontario.ca/page/how-serve-municipal-accessibility-advisory-committee-guide#rating) can also help.

Working with the media

The media can give your accessibility advisory committee opportunities to inform the public about an issue or problem in your municipality. Ensure that you:

- Follow your corporate and/or municipal media policy
- Understand the policy
- Consult with your municipal council before contacting the media

Accessibility advisory committees can be part of a team, but only if there is trust. Leading by example to build trust will demonstrate the value of the accessibility advisory committee as part of the organization's team approach.

Often, we fear the media because we worry that the facts will be distorted, or, that the story will leave the wrong impression. While that may happen in some cases, the advantages of media coverage are significant. They are well worth the time it takes to prepare for a successful media encounter.

Creating change: where to start

What is preventing your municipality from improving accessibility? Take a step back and look at what's not working. Identify actions. Then prioritize them. The following questions can guide you:

- What strategies or actions can we accomplish within one year? Five? Ten?
- What are the most exciting?
- What are the most frustrating?
- What are the easiest to accomplish?
- What will be the hardest to accomplish?
- What will have the most impact?
- What will be more affordable?
- What are most important for the committee?
- What are you most committed to working on?

While this list of questions is not complete, it can help you plan more strategically. This is an effective, positive and forward-thinking way to plan for accessibility.

Removing barriers: how to set priorities

How do you decide what steps to take first to remove barriers in your community? You can consider a number of criteria. Here are few suggestions:

- practicality
- feasibility
- engagement and participation
- impact
- support for accessibility standards

The following questions can help your municipality and accessibility advisory committee prioritize actions to remove barriers to accessibility.

Practicality

- Will this action help your municipality reach its accessibility goals?
- Is it a logical way to reach the goals?
- Has it been tried in your community or elsewhere? (e.g., is it a best practice?)
- Has it worked?
- Does common sense or logic suggest that it will work?
- Does research or expert opinion support the plan? How?

Feasibility

- Have you identified local resources to carry out the accessibility plan? (skills, equipment)
- How easy will it be to mobilize them?
- Have you identified further resources, if needed?
- Is the plan cost-effective?
- Are there any actions you could take right away? Should you do these first to achieve quick success?

Engagement and participation

- Are there ways your accessibility advisory committee can ensure the accessibility plan is being well-communicated to people with disabilities and encourage more meaningful support for it in your community?
- Will the people or groups most affected by the accessibility plan take part in implementing it?
- Do community members feel the accessibility plan adequately reflects common barriers they may be experiencing?
- Does the accessibility advisory committee's planning take into account barriers that have been identified through the municipality's feedback process, as required under the AODA?
- Have you coordinated your accessibility advisory committee's goals and objectives with other groups, advocates or partners?

Impact

- Does the accessibility plan address the barriers you have identified?

- Will the actions have a long-term impact?
- Will they affect many people in the community?
- Will your plan create major change? How?
- Are there any health and safety concerns?

Meeting requirements of accessibility standards

- Does your accessibility plan address the requirements of the AODA's accessibility standards?
- What is the timeline to meet AODA requirements?
- How can these be addressed in short- and long-term planning?

How municipal government works

Municipal government is the level of government below a provincial government. It has authority over municipal affairs. It is sometimes called "local government," which also includes boards and agencies such as school boards and health units.

Working well with municipal government requires a sound understanding of both its structure and its decision-making processes. Here are the most common ones.

Legislation

In Ontario, the Municipal Act (https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/01m25) and the City of Toronto Act (https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/06c11) give municipalities a range of powers. They empower two-tier municipalities to govern their affairs as they consider appropriate and to respond to municipal issues.

The Municipal Act recognizes the importance of ongoing consultation between the Ontario government and municipalities on matters of mutual interest. It recognizes the memorandum of understanding between the Province of Ontario and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/Page5022.aspx). The City of Toronto has a similar arrangement with the Province, called the Toronto-Ontario Cooperation and Consultation Agreement (http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/Page9507.aspx).

Currently there are 444 municipalities in Ontario. Each municipality is a geographic area whose inhabitants are incorporated. For municipal purposes, municipalities are defined under the Municipal Act as:

Single-tier municipality: a municipality, other than an upper-tier municipality, that does not form part of an upper-tier municipality (such as the City of Thunder Bay or the City of Ottawa).

Upper-tier municipality: a municipality of which two or more lower-tier municipalities form part (such as the Region of Waterloo or the County of Bruce).

Local municipality: a single-tier or lower-tier municipality.

Lower-tier municipality: a municipality that forms part of an upper-tier municipality (such as the Town of Bancroft, which is part of the County of Hastings).

Regional municipality: an upper-tier municipality that was a regional or district municipality or the County of Oxford on December 31, 2002 (such as the Regional Municipality of Peel).

Consolidated Municipal Service Managers: these are municipalities that have been designated to deliver particular services for one or more municipalities.

District Social Service Administration Boards: these boards deliver particular services in a way similar to Consolidated Municipal Service Managers on behalf of areas without municipal organization in Northern Ontario. They deliver social assistance programs including Ontario Works, social housing and child care services.

Municipal councils

Regardless of size, all municipalities are governed by a council. Council members are elected by the citizens of the municipality. Upper-tier councils are made up of representatives from lower-tier member municipalities.

Head of council

The head of council – the mayor or the reeve – sets the tone. He or she can influence priorities during the term of council. While mayors and reeves, like other councillors, have only one vote, they can influence the way others vote.

Councillors

Councillors have different roles in their work as elected officials. Some focus on issues related to their particular community. They tend to bring local concerns to the table. Others get more involved in issues that affect the whole municipality.

The role of elected officials includes:

- Representing their constituents. For example, they may defend a neighbourhood decision to protect a park and not allow development.
- Representing their municipality and their constituents at community events.
- Developing and supporting policies that guide the services the municipality provides.
- Passing laws, known at the municipal level as by-laws, to regulate the actions of people and businesses in the municipality (e.g. parking and noise by-laws).
- Approving the municipality's strategic plan
- Sitting on council committees such as the waste management, budget, or accessibility advisory committee. Councillors may sit on more than one committee.
- Deciding what services and level of service the municipality should offer and determining how to pay for them, within the limits of provincial legislation.
- Working with other agencies involved in similar issues. Examples include housing, social services, environment and transportation agencies.

By-laws

By-laws are rules and regulations governing everyone – including associations or corporations. Municipal councils pass municipal by-laws which can affect the local community. Your accessibility advisory committee can help ensure that accessibility issues are part of any new by-laws.

For example, there are by-laws that set the number of parking spaces designated for use by people with disabilities. There are by-laws that direct the way council and its committees work. Depending on local by-laws, for example, some accessibility advisory committee s may have to manage their meetings according to Robert's Rules of Order (https://www.ontario.ca/page/how-serve-municipal-accessibility-advisory-committee-guide#chairing) .

Municipal committees

Much of the work of municipalities is done by committees. Following are examples of the most common ones:

Standing committees

Standing Committees undertake a wide range of activities. For example, they oversee administrative operations, conduct hearings or act as review bodies. Councillors normally sit on standing committees, while municipal staff act as advisors. In some cases, standing committees include members of the public.

What standing committees do

A municipal standing committee usually focuses on a specific area of business. For example, it may deal with planning and development, social housing, public health or public works. Standing committees also provide a forum to debate issues and allow interested groups and people to make presentations. The chair of the committee presents regular reports to council and asks for changes in policies and procedures.

Ad Hoc Committees

Ad Hoc Committees are created by standing committees to investigate and report on a particular matter. Unlike a standing committee, an ad hoc committee is not a legal entity. It has no statutory powers.

Executive Committees

Executive Committees are usually part of a budget or policy committee.

Citizens' advisory committees

Citizens' Advisory Committees are made up of citizens and experts as well as councillors and municipal staff. These committees vary in structure, responsibility and length of term. An accessibility advisory committee is an example of this type of committee.

Administrative staff

Every municipality has staff to administer the policies, programs and services that council has approved. Staff must operate within applicable provincial legislation, guidelines and standards.

Staff: an important resource

Municipal staff provide expert advice to help council members make decisions. They also support the accessibility advisory committees and are a key resource for them. However, accessibility advisory committees should not be completely dependent on municipal staff to determine their workplan or priorities.

Many municipalities have an accessibility coordinator who promotes and coordinates accessibility throughout the municipality and assists an accessibility advisory committee with its work. The accessibility coordinator is the liaison between accessibility advisory committee members and municipal staff and elected officials. As a single point of contact, he/she guides accessibility advisory committee members through municipal processes, provides advice, and channels their questions to appropriate municipal staff. The accessibility coordinator is the key contact for accessibility advisory committee members and helps the committee run smoothly.

Municipal budgets

Municipalities raise money in three main ways:

- property taxes
- fees and charges (such as recreation program registration fees, licenses, and other user-pay programs)
- transfer payments from provincial and federal governments

Through a yearly budget process, municipal councils set spending priorities for the year. They also determine how they are going to pay for municipal programs and services.

Budgets: a key opportunity

During the municipal budget process, citizen input is encouraged through a mix of public meetings, committee work and council meetings. This is a prime opportunity for your accessibility advisory committee to raise awareness of accessibility issues within the municipal budgeting process. The accessibility advisory committee can ask to make a presentation to their municipal council, and often this must be requested ahead of time.

Municipal government policy

A policy is a high-level plan or statement that:

- identifies goals
- sets the direction and/or a course of action to achieve those goals

Who implements policy?

Once council has approved a policy, the municipal administration will put it into action. This team can include the chief administrative officer, city clerks, standing and executive committees, corporate services and other departments.

Staff expertise

Municipal staff can include experts such as engineers, planners, librarians, electricians, computer technicians, accountants, and social workers. Some staff, such as the Ontario Provincial Police and nurses, may not be considered municipal staff at all, yet they work closely with municipalities. Staff are in a good position to contribute to the evaluation of a policy – sharing what works well, and what doesn't. And remember: as an accessibility advisory committee member, you too have special expertise that can help municipal staff in their work.

How to work well as a team

Most accessibility advisory committees include people from many different walks of life. They bring varied backgrounds, experiences and perspectives. In this chapter, you will find information about proven approaches to effective teamwork.

In this chapter you'll learn about:

- Tips for building a strong team
- Solving problems and other strategies
- Tips for making decisions
- Establishing subcommittees

Tips for building a strong team

Here are some tips on coming together as a team. You may also consider arranging a training and orientation session for your accessibility advisory committee.

Establishing ground rules

Set some ground rules up front. They may help your committee work as a strong team. And you may avoid the problems that committees can sometimes run into when they have no guidelines.

Ground rules can include formal procedures, such as rules of conduct guided by your municipality's procedural by-laws. They can also include informal procedures. There is no one set of ground rules. These guidelines will help your accessibility advisory committee get started.

The committee will:

- Agree on how members will conduct themselves.
- Send out agendas and other materials required for the meeting at least two weeks ahead of time so all members can come prepared.
- Always begin and end meetings on time.
- Ensure all members and guests introduce themselves at every meeting.
- Maintain confidentiality as a team. The team's processes are the team's business. Don't discuss these matters outside of the team.
- Summarize and clarify all team decisions at the end of each meeting.
- Celebrate successes and have fun!

Members will:

- Arrive on time and be prepared for the meeting. For example, they should have reviewed the agenda.
- Remain open to all ideas.
- Speak in order. No side conversations, no muttering, no interrupting.
- Use "I" statements.
- State assumptions up front.
- Avoid finger-pointing or assigning blame for problems. Every problem is a committee problem.

Check your team's progress

Even with ground rules in place, committees go through growing pains and different stages of development. Working in teams takes time and patience. It is rare for a newly formed group to instantly work well as a team. Here are some signs that your team is growing stronger[2] (https://www.ontario.ca/page/how-serve-municipal-accessibility-advisory-committee-guide#fn2) :

- There is an informal, comfortable and relaxed atmosphere when you are together.
- Members have a high degree of confidence and trust in one another.
- Members co-operate and work well together.
- Members listen to one another and respect differences.
- Constructive criticism is frequent, frank and comfortable.
- The team embraces the free sharing of ideas and feelings.
- No one dominates the meeting.
- Each person's skills and contributions are acknowledged and respected.

Understanding how a committee works

Groups and group members all play different roles as they work together to achieve common goals. The effectiveness of any group depends on the ability to balance between task and maintenance functions. The following may help your committee identify and distinguish between the two.

10 task functions of teams:

1. **Initiating activity:** suggesting new ideas, new definitions of the problems and new solutions or a new way to organize material.
2. **Seeking information**: asking for clarification of ideas, requesting more information or facts.
3. **Giving information**: offering facts or generalizations, relating one's own experience to group problems to illustrate points.
4. **Giving opinions**: stating an opinion or belief concerning a suggestion or one of several suggestions, particularly concerning its value rather than its factual basis.
5. **Elaborating**: clarifying, giving examples of developing meanings, trying to envisage how a proposal might work if adopted.
6. **Co-ordinating**: clarifying relationships among various ideas or suggestions, trying to pull ideas and suggestions together or trying to draw together activities of various sub-groups or members.
7. **Summarizing**: pulling together related ideas or suggestions, restating suggestions after the group has discussed them.
8. **Testing feasibility**: applying suggestions to real situations, examining how practical and workable an idea may be, pre-evaluating decisions.
9. **Checking standards**: assessing group decisions or results against group standards and goals.
10. **Diagnosing**: determining sources of problems, appropriate actions, and the main roadblocks.

8 maintenance functions of teams:

1. **Encouraging**: being friendly, warm, responsive to others, praising others and their ideas, agreeing with them and accepting their contributions.
2. **Gate-keeping**: trying to make it possible for all members to make contributions by saying things like "we haven't heard from John yet."
3. **Setting standards**: stating standards for the group to use in making decisions, reminding the group to avoid decisions which conflict with group standards.
4. **Following**: going along with the decisions of the group, somewhat passively accepting the ideas of others, serving as audience during group discussion and decision-making.
5. **Expressing group feeling**: summarizing the group atmosphere, describing reactions of the group to ideas or solutions.
6. **Testing consensus**: asking for group opinions to find out if the group is nearing consensus or a decision, sending up trial balloons to test compromise solutions.
7. **Harmonizing**: mediating, reconciling points of view, finding compromises.
8. **Reducing tension**: draining off bad feelings by jesting or putting a tense situation into a wider context.

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[2] Adapted from Iowa State University Extension's "Group Decision Making Toolkit."

Tips for solving problems

All organizations and committees face tough problems at times. They must find creative methods to solve these problems, make decisions and focus on reaching their goals.

Problem solving is a set of activities designed to generate, implement and evaluate solutions. It's really about creating choices. Here are some things to remember when solving problems:

- Don't press or bicker about your own views. Present your position logically. Then listen to the reactions of other members and consider them carefully. Try to get underlying assumptions out in the open so the team can discuss them.
- Don't look for a winner or a loser in each discussion. Look for the most acceptable alternative to all parties.
- Did you know disagreements can help the group's decision? It's true. With a wide range of opinions there is a greater chance the group will come up with more effective solutions. So don't change your mind just to avoid conflict. Value differences of opinion. They are natural and to be expected. Seek them out and try to involve everyone in the decision process.

Problem solving revolves around finding good new ideas. Brainstorming, conducting surveys and holding discussion groups are three ways to do this.

Brainstorming

One person or a group can brainstorm ideas. It requires a setting where people are free to think out loud. They can blurt out as many ideas as possible within a specified time period. No one can evaluate or criticize their ideas during this time.

This approach encourages the free flow of ideas. Ideas are simply recorded. They are only evaluated later.

Surveys

Surveys tap into the ideas of a large group of people. Surveys present people with the problem and ask them to choose from a series of solutions.

Discussion groups

Discussion groups, made up of those directly involved in decision making, should avoid quick judgments. They should stay focused on the problem – not on the personalities of people involved in the room.

Tips for making decisions

Once you have some ideas to consider, there are several ways your committee can approach the final decision. These include straw polling, voting and consensus.

Straw polling

Straw polling asks for a show of hands on an idea, but you can find other ways to make it accessible for everyone. For example, you can combine verbal and visual signals.

In most cases, straw polling is a quick check that can save time. To make it work, the group needs to agree on a set of signals everyone will use throughout the meeting. These signals enable people to gauge how others are reacting. Signals also provide feedback for a speaker who is trying to work with a large group.

Voting

Voting is a decision-making method that works best for large groups. To avoid alienating minorities, the group can decide to pass a motion only if it gets a two-thirds majority. Or, the group could decide to combine voting with consensus (see next page).

Large or more formal groups generally follow "[Robert's Rules of Order (https://www.ontario.ca/page/how-serve-municipal-accessibility-advisory-committee-guide#chairing)](https://www.ontario.ca/page/how-serve-municipal-accessibility-advisory-committee-guide#chairing)". Some groups limit the privilege of voting to people who have come to three or more consecutive meetings. Voting usually means deciding between X and Y. Sometimes voting allows a blended solution, part X and part Y.

Consensus

Consensus aims at bringing the group to agreement by addressing all concerns. It does not require unanimity. Consensus can take longer than other processes but it fosters creativity, cooperation and commitment to final decisions.

7 steps to reaching consensus

An effective consensus process aims at bringing a group to mutual agreement by addressing all concerns. How do you get there?

Trust is a key prerequisite. If your group adopts consensus as a decision-making method, you do not have to use consensus of the whole group to decide everything. You can (and should) empower individuals, committees, or task forces to make certain decisions.

Here is a sample outline of an approach you could use during your meetings:

1. A presenter states the proposal. Ideally, a written draft has been distributed before the meeting.
2. The group discusses and clarifies the proposal. No one presents concerns until this step is complete.
3. The facilitator then asks for any legitimate concerns. If there are none, the facilitator asks the group if it has reached consensus. If there are concerns, the recorder lists them where everyone can see them. The group then tries to resolve each item on the list.

Legitimate concern: a definition

Consensus means substantial agreement of members, without persistent opposition, by a process that takes into account the views of all members in the resolution of disputes. Unanimous decisions are not necessarily required to achieve consensus.

For consensus to work properly, everyone must understand the meaning of "legitimate concern." In simple terms, it is the possible outcomes of a proposal that might:

- cause harm to the organization or the common good
- conflict with the purpose or values of the group.

Consensus will not work properly if concerns come from ego or vested interests, or from unstated tensions around authority, rights, personality conflicts, competition or lack of trust.

1. The presenter has first option to:
   - Clarify the proposal
   - Change the proposal
   - Explain why it is not in conflict with the group's values
   - Ask those with concerns to stand aside.

By "standing aside," a person indicates a willingness to live with a proposal. By "crossing off a concern," a person indicates they are satisfied with clarifications or changes.

2. If concerns remain unresolved and concerned members are not willing to stand aside, the facilitator asks everyone to focus on the group's common purpose and values. The group may need to go through a special session to review concerns and resolve conflicts.
3. The facilitator checks again to see if those with concerns are willing to stand aside or cross off their concerns. If not, the facilitator asks for more ideas to resolve the concerns. The process continues until everyone finds the proposal acceptable or stands aside. Often the solution is a "third way." It lies between either/or, or yes and no.
4. If time runs out and concerns persist, the facilitator may:
   - Conduct a straw poll
   - Ask those with concerns once more if they will stand aside
   - Ask the presenter to withdraw the proposal
   - Contract with the group for more time
   - Send the proposal to a sub-group
   - Conduct a vote, requiring a 75% to 90% majority.

At the conclusion of the process, the facilitator states the outcome clearly.

Tips for resolving conflict

Conflicts sometimes arise when people bring different beliefs, experiences and values to a committee table. Even where members agree on an overall goal, some strongly disagree about the best way to achieve the goal.

Conflict can become a problem if not properly managed. It can harm the otherwise positive working relationships between committee members. Conflict can also spread like wildfire. It may start with one or two members, but quickly affect others. This can lead to a dysfunctional committee.

That's why it's vital to deal with conflict quickly and carefully. Here are seven tips[3] (https://www.ontario.ca/page/how-serve-municipal-accessibility-advisory-committee-guide#fn3) :

1. Treat each other with respect.
2. Recognize diversity. Understand and value members' different backgrounds, perspectives, cultures, languages, training and points of view.
3. Confront the problem. Discuss it with the other person. Choose a place where you both feel comfortable. Speak calmly.
4. Describe the problem in clear, concrete terms. Be specific. Avoid language that will escalate the situation. Focus on the behaviour, not the person. Use the word "I," not "you."
5. Seek first to understand, then to be understood. Listen carefully. Try to imagine how the other person sees things. Then explain how you see the problem. Be quick to express any changes to your views as you talk things through.
6. Explore other solutions. Take turns offering new ideas. Don't judge the other person's ideas. Think and talk positively.
7. Agree on a solution you both understand and can live with. Work to find a win-win solution. Be committed to resolving the conflict.

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[3] Adapted from the Centre for Collaborative Planning's Collaboration: Concepts to Consider Guide. www.connectccp.org/library/title/collaboration (http://www.connectccp.org/library/title/collaboration)

Establishing subcommittees

Creating a subcommittee can be an effective way to focus on a specific issue. For example, a subcommittee could focus on issues related to the standards related to the AODA. A subcommittee could also help move projects forward in these areas.

Like the full committee, a subcommittee may require terms of reference. This document will lay out its mandate, membership, deliverables and timeframes.

Tip

One municipality includes the option of subcommittees in its accessibility advisory committee's Terms of Reference:

"The Advisory Committee may form subcommittees and working groups as may be necessary to address specific issues, noting that clerks do not provide secretarial support to these groups. These subcommittees and working groups shall draw upon members of the advisory committee as well as outside resource members as deemed necessary. The chair of the subcommittee and/or working group shall be a voting member of the advisory committee."

Is your team geared for participation?

Will your committee adopt a participatory style? Or will it fall into the pitfalls many conventional groups do? The following chart[4] (https://www.ontario.ca/page/how-serve-municipal-accessibility-advisory-committee-guide#fn4) illustrates the difference between the two. Of course, many groups will fall in between the two.

Participatory groups

- Everyone participates, not just the vocal few.
- People give each other room to think and get their thoughts all the way out.
- Opposing viewpoints are allowed to coexist in the room.
- People draw each other out with supportive questions: "is this what you mean?"
- Each member makes the effort to pay attention to the person speaking.
- People are able to listen to each other's ideas because they know their own ideas will also be heard.
- Each member speaks up on matters of controversy. Everyone knows where everyone stands.
- Members can accurately represent each other's points of view – even when they don't agree with them.
- People refrain from talking behind each other's backs.
- Even in the face of opposition from the person in charge, people are encouraged to stand up for their beliefs.
- A problem is not considered solved until everyone who will be affected by the solution understands the reasoning.
- When people make an agreement, it is assumed that their decision still reflects a wide range of perspectives.

Conventional groups

- The fastest thinkers and most articulate speakers get more air time.
- People interrupt each other on a regular basis.
- Differences of opinion are treated as conflict that must either be stifled or solved.
- Questions are often perceived as challenges, as if the person being questioned has done something wrong.
- Unless the speaker captures their attention, people space out, doodle or check the clock.
- People have difficulty listening to each other's ideas because they're rehearsing what they want to say.
- Some members remain quiet on controversial matters. No one really knows where everyone stands.
- People rarely give accurate representations of the opinions and reasoning of those whose opinions are at odds with their own.
- Because they don't feel they have permission to be direct during the meeting, people talk behind each other's backs outside the meeting.
- People with conflicting, minority perspectives are commonly discouraged from speaking out.
- A problem is considered solved as soon as the fastest thinkers have reached an answer. Everyone is then also expected to get onboard regardless of whether all members understand the logic of the decision.
- When people make an agreement, it is assumed that they are all thinking the exact same thing.

How effective is your committee: questionnaire

Forming a strong team can take time as the team evolves through recognizable stages. The following questionnaire[5] (https://www.ontario.ca/page/how-serve-municipal-accessibility-advisory-committee-guide#fn5) may help you assess what stage your team has reached. It is based on a model of group development proposed by Bruce Tuckman. There are a number of different models in existence, but the Tuckman model is seen as the most established and remains widely used. This model has become an accepted part of thinking about how teams evolve, based on four stages:

1. **Forming**: team members are introduced.
2. **Storming**: the team transitions from "as is" to "to be." This stage is recognized as the most difficult.
3. **Norming**: the team reaches consensus on the "to be" process.
4. **Performing**: the team has settled its relationships and expectations.

It is good practice to check on the stage of your committee periodically. With experience, your committee will be able to manage the shift through the different stages more easily.

The following questionnaire contains statements about teamwork. For each one, rate how rarely or how often your team displays each behaviour using the scoring system below.

Scoring system

- Almost never : score 1 point
- Seldom: score 2 points
- Occasionally: score 3 points
- Frequently: score 4 points
- Almost always: score 5 points

For example, if you rate item one as "occasionally," give your committee 3 points. Record your answers on the scoring sheet that follows these statements.

1. We try to have set procedures or protocols so that meetings are orderly and smooth (e.g., reduce interruptions, give everyone an opportunity to have their say).
   - Almost never (1 point)
   - Seldom (2 points)
   - Occasionally (3 points)
   - Frequently (4 points)
   - Almost always (5 points)
2. We are quick to get on with the task at hand. We do not spend too much time in the planning stage.
   - Almost never (1 point)
   - Seldom (2 points)
   - Occasionally (3 points)
   - Frequently (4 points)
   - Almost always (5 points)
3. Our team feels that we are all in it together. We share responsibilities for the team's success or failure.
   - Almost never (1 point)
   - Seldom (2 points)
   - Occasionally (3 points)
   - Frequently (4 points)
   - Almost always (5 points)
4. We have thorough procedures for agreeing on our objectives and for planning the way we will perform our tasks.
   - Almost never (1 point)
   - Seldom (2 points)
   - Occasionally (3 points)
   - Frequently (4 points)
   - Almost always (5 points)
5. Team members are afraid to ask others for help.
   - Almost never (1 point)
   - Seldom (2 points)
   - Occasionally (3 points)
   - Frequently (4 points)
   - Almost always (5 points)
6. We take our team's goals literally and assume a shared understanding.
   - Almost never (1 point)
   - Seldom (2 points)
   - Occasionally (3 points)
   - Frequently (4 points)
   - Almost always (5 points)
7. The team leader tries to keep order and contributes to the task at hand.
   - Almost never (1 point)
   - Seldom (2 points)
   - Occasionally (3 points)
   - Frequently (4 points)
   - Almost always (5 points)
8. We do not have fixed procedures. We make them up as the task progresses.
   - Almost never (1 point)
   - Seldom (2 points)
   - Occasionally (3 points)
   - Frequently (4 points)
   - Almost always (5 points)
9. We generate lots of ideas, but we do not use many because we fail to listen to them. Or, we reject them without fully understanding them.
   - Almost never (1 point)
   - Seldom (2 points)
   - Occasionally (3 points)
   - Frequently (4 points)
   - Almost always (5 points)
10. Team members do not fully trust the other members. We monitor others who are working on a specific task.

- Almost never (1 point)
- Seldom (2 points)
- Occasionally (3 points)
- Frequently (4 points)
- Almost always (5 points)

11. The team leader ensures that we follow the procedures, do not argue, do not interrupt and keep to the point.
    - Almost never (1 point)
    - Seldom (2 points)
    - Occasionally (3 points)
    - Frequently (4 points)
    - Almost always (5 points)

12. We enjoy working together. We have a fun and productive time.
    - Almost never (1 point)
    - Seldom (2 points)
    - Occasionally (3 points)
    - Frequently (4 points)
    - Almost always (5 points)

13. We have accepted each other as members of the team.
    - Almost never (1 point)
    - Seldom (2 points)
    - Occasionally (3 points)
    - Frequently (4 points)
    - Almost always (5 points)

14. Our team leader is democratic and collaborative.
    - Almost never (1 point)
    - Seldom (2 points)
    - Occasionally (3 points)
    - Frequently (4 points)
    - Almost always (5 points)

15. We are trying to define the goal and what tasks we need to accomplish.
    - Almost never (1 point)
    - Seldom (2 points)
    - Occasionally (3 points)
    - Frequently (4 points)
    - Almost always (5 points)

16. Many of the team members have their own ideas about the process. Personal agendas are rampant.
    - Almost never (1 point)
    - Seldom (2 points)
    - Occasionally (3 points)
    - Frequently (4 points)
    - Almost always (5 points)

17. We fully accept each other's strengths and weaknesses.
    - Almost never (1 point)
    - Seldom (2 points)
    - Occasionally (3 points)
    - Frequently (4 points)
    - Almost always (5 points)

18. We assign specific roles to team members (e.g., team leader, facilitator, time keeper, note taker, etc.).
    - Almost never (1 point)
    - Seldom (2 points)
    - Occasionally (3 points)
    - Frequently (4 points)
    - Almost always (5 points)

19. We try to achieve harmony by avoiding conflict.
    - Almost never (1 point)
    - Seldom (2 points)
    - Occasionally (3 points)
    - Frequently (4 points)
    - Almost always (5 points)

20. The tasks are very different from what we imagined. They seem very difficult to accomplish.
    - Almost never (1 point)
    - Seldom (2 points)
    - Occasionally (3 points)
    - Frequently (4 points)
    - Almost always (5 points)

21. There are many abstract discussions of concepts and issues. Some members are impatient with these discussions.
    - Almost never (1 point)
    - Seldom (2 points)
    - Occasionally (3 points)
    - Frequently (4 points)
    - Almost always (5 points)

22. We are able to work through group problems.
    - Almost never (1 point)
    - Seldom (2 points)
    - Occasionally (3 points)
    - Frequently (4 points)
    - Almost always (5 points)

23. We argue a lot even though we agree on the real issues.
    - Almost never (1 point)
    - Seldom (2 points)
    - Occasionally (3 points)
    - Frequently (4 points)
    - Almost always (5 points)
24. The team is often tempted to go above the original scope of the project.
    - Almost never (1 point)
    - Seldom (2 points)
    - Occasionally (3 points)
    - Frequently (4 points)
    - Almost always (5 points)
25. We express criticism of others constructively.
    - Almost never (1 point)
    - Seldom (2 points)
    - Occasionally (3 points)
    - Frequently (4 points)
    - Almost always (5 points)
26. There is a close attachment to the team.
    - Almost never (1 point)
    - Seldom (2 points)
    - Occasionally (3 points)
    - Frequently (4 points)
    - Almost always (5 points)
27. It seems as if little is being accomplished with the project's goals.
    - Almost never (1 point)
    - Seldom (2 points)
    - Occasionally (3 points)
    - Frequently (4 points)
    - Almost always (5 points)
28. The goals we have established seem unrealistic.
    - Almost never (1 point)
    - Seldom (2 points)
    - Occasionally (3 points)
    - Frequently (4 points)
    - Almost always (5 points)
29. Although we are not fully sure of the project's goals and issues, we are excited and proud to be on the team.
    - Almost never (1 point)
    - Seldom (2 points)
    - Occasionally (3 points)
    - Frequently (4 points)
    - Almost always (5 points)
30. We often share personal problems with each other.
    - Almost never (1 point)
    - Seldom (2 points)
    - Occasionally (3 points)
    - Frequently (4 points)
    - Almost always (5 points)
31. There is a lot of resistance toward the tasks at hand and approaches to improve quality.
    - Almost never (1 point)
    - Seldom (2 points)
    - Occasionally (3 points)
    - Frequently (4 points)
    - Almost always (5 points)
32. We get a lot of work done.
    - Almost never (1 point)
    - Seldom (2 points)
    - Occasionally (3 points)
    - Frequently (4 points)
    - Almost always (5 points)

Scoring sheet

In the chart below, mark the score of each statement on the questionnaire. When you have entered all the scores for each question, total each of the four columns at the bottom.

Forming stage	Storming stage	Norming stage	Performing stage
1.	2.	4.	3.
5.	7.	6.	8.
10.	9.	11.	12.
15.	16.	13.	14.
18.	20.	19.	17.
21.	23.	24.	22.
27.	28.	25.	26.

29.	31.	30.	32.	
Total:	Total:	Total:	Total:	

Results

The lowest possible score for any stage is eight (Almost never). The highest possible score for any stage is 40 (Almost always). The highest of your four scores indicates which stage you think your team is most like. If your highest score is 32 or more, it is a strong indicator of the stage your team is in.

The lowest of the three scores is an indicator of the stage your team is least like. If your lowest score is 16 or less, it is a strong indicator that your team does not operate this way. If two of the scores are close, you are probably going through a transition phase, except:

- If you score high in both the Forming and Storming Phases, then you are in the Storming Phase.
- If you score high in both the Norming and Performing Phases, then you are in the Performing Stage.

If there is only a small difference between three or four scores, then this indicates that:

- you have no clear perception of the way your team operates, or
- your team's performance is highly variable, or
- you are in the Storming Phase (this phase can be extremely volatile with high and low points).

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[4] Adapted from Kaner, S. (2007). Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making.

[5] This questionnaire was adapted with permission from D. Clark 2004. It is presented as a training tool only, and it has not been formally checked for reliability or validity.

How to lead an accessibility advisory committee

Chairing a committee requires a highly developed set of skills. In this section you will find some guidelines and resources for committee chairs. These will help clarify the role of the chair, reinforce core responsibilities, and support a facilitative leadership style.

Chairing a meeting: Robert's Rules of Order

The role of chair can be difficult, as Henry Robert found out when he was asked to chair a meeting. He realized he didn't know how. He turned to parliamentary laws to guide him – only to find out that every part of the country used a different procedure. So, he decided to write the "Robert's Rules of Order." The first edition was printed in 1876. There have been many editions since.

Here is a simplified version of the rules. It is adapted from the website of the Social Planning Council of Ottawa:

1. The chair of a meeting shall be allowed to debate on all subjects under discussion. He or she must temporarily turn over the chair to the Vice-chair or other committee member during such debate and any voting that follows.
2. The committee can appeal any decision of the chair. A two-thirds majority vote of the members present is needed to sustain the appeal.
3. Any member appealing a decision of the chair may state his or her reasons for doing so. The chair may then give the reasons for his or her decision before the question is put to a vote. Once the vote has been taken, the matter shall be considered as settled.
4. When two or more members rise at the same time, the chair shall name the one to speak.
5. When a member is called to order by the chair or any member, that person shall at once take his or her seat. Every question of order shall be decided by the chair without debate, subject to rule number two.
6. No motion shall be debated until seconded.
7. Appeals and motions to reconsider or adjourn are not debatable.
8. When a question is under debate, no motion shall be received except to lay on the table, to postpone, to commit to a committee, or to amend.
9. No person shall interrupt another while speaking, except in accordance with rule number five.
10. A motion to adjourn shall always be in order, except when another motion is before the meeting.
11. When a motion is made and seconded, the chair may ask the mover to reduce the same to writing and to hand it to the chair. The chair shall read this note before the meeting for debate.
12. Any mover of a motion shall be free to accept changes thereto. If the mover does not accept a change after it has been duly seconded, the chair shall hold a vote on this amendment before the members vote on the original motion.
13. Every officer, on leaving his or her office, shall give to his or her successor all papers, books, documents, and money belonging to the association.
14. The chair, at any meeting, may limit the time of any speaker on any motion or discussion.
15. A Rule of Order may be suspended by a two-thirds vote of the members present at any meeting. The suspension shall apply only for that meeting.

The role of the chair

One municipality has summarized the following role of its accessibility advisory committee chair:

1. With the help of municipal staff, determine any special meeting provisions. Determine quorum and call the meeting to order.
2. Identify agenda items. Gauge discussion among members and ensure adequate consideration has been given to each item. chairs generally offer their guidance and ask questions without taking a specific position on a matter.
3. Keep a record and determine speaking order and ensure all members have had an opportunity to provide their input. Ensure any members of staff or the public has an opportunity to comment, where appropriate.
4. Facilitate consideration of main motions, ensuring there are seconders.
5. Rule on procedures with the assistance of staff, as appropriate.
6. Ensure items are dispensed with in a timely and fair manner.
7. Facilitate decorum and appropriate behaviour.
8. Ensure all matters of the committee's business are considered in the work plan.
9. Represent the committee at a yearly presentation to council.

Chairing an accessible meeting

A successful meeting takes preparation. A successful and accessible meeting can take a little extra care and planning. Here are some steps to keep in mind:

At the start of the meeting

- Start on time – stop all side conversations, get everyone's attention.
- Ask all present to introduce themselves. This includes interpreters and guests. Remind people to identify themselves before speaking for the benefit of those who have a visual disability.
- Inform people of the nearest emergency exits and accessible washrooms.
- Encourage clear speech at a relaxed pace. This will help interpreters, note-takers and others to communicate with people who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing.
- Review the agenda. Make any revisions needed.
- Set clear time limits. For longer meetings, indicate when you will have breaks.
- Review action items from the previous meetings.

During the meeting

- Use your leadership skills!
- A chair's responsibility includes determining speaking order, facilitating motions and ensuring there are seconders. The chair also rules on procedures, keeps order and maintains proper behaviour.

At the end of the meeting

- Confirm the action items: who, when and what?
- Set the date and place for the next meeting. Start an agenda.
- Close the meeting positively. Sum up key decisions.

After the meeting

- Ensure the secretary, clerk or chair sends out meeting notes – particularly the action items.

Ask for feedback

From time to time, the chair should ask for feedback from members on meetings. It's important because it will help identify what is working and what is not. For instance:

- Are meetings running smoothly? Are they well attended?
- Are meetings getting the desired results?
- Is the committee working well as a group? Is there room to improve?

A review can be a few minutes at the end of a regular meeting. Or you can set up a meeting to conduct a longer review. This can be a time to acknowledge successes. It is also a chance to make changes – ranging from the way decisions are made, to the kind of food served.

For a more formal review, you may need to do follow up, one-on-one interviews with participants to learn more. A formal review would also warrant a detailed report.

Regular reviews will help to make sure that your meetings are effective. This in turn will help your team achieve its goals to make your community inclusive and accessible.

Leadership styles

While the chair plays many roles, none is more important than being an effective leader. Leaders fall into two main camps: the traditional and the facilitative leader. Here are the main differences.

Traditional leader

- Assumes leadership
- Provides structure and control
- Tells
- Uses control (uses personal power, makes decisions)
- Expects uniformity
- Uses authority to get things done.

Facilitative leader

- Shares leadership
- Provides direction
- Asks questions and listens
- Involves others (builds consensus, shares in setting common goals, recognizes differences in a group)
- Empowers others to get things done.

Facilitative leaders recognize the value and efforts of the whole team. They are most likely to get the best from the group. Here are some tips on how to be a facilitative leader[6] (https://www.ontario.ca/page/how-serve-municipal-accessibility-advisory-committee-guide#fn6).

Five tips to be a facilitative leader

1. **Return a question or comment to the person in the group who raised it**. Do not provide all the answers.
Example:
Team member: "I don't like the approach we're taking here."
Leader: "What do you think we should be doing?"
2. **Make sure everyone is working on the same content**, using the same process, at the same time.
Example:
Leader: "Let's stay focused on identifying the problems."
3. **Name something that isn't working**. Get it out in the open where it can be worked on.
Example:
Leader: "It's very quiet here. What does the silence mean?"
4. **Prevent lengthy arguments** and battles about the "right" way to proceed.
Example:
Leader: "There are many approaches that will work. Let's decide on one so we can keep moving forward."
5. **Use body language to support your words**. Ask questions with palms open. This shows you are open to hearing from the group. Write on a flip chart to focus the group on the problem. Repeat what you are writing, so people who are blind or have low vision also know what is being written.

11 tips for effective meetings

As a member of an accessibility advisory committee, you will be working with a mix of other people and other groups. It's important to keep meetings on track.

Here are 11 tips for leading an effective meeting[7] (https://www.ontario.ca/page/how-serve-municipal-accessibility-advisory-committee-guide#fn7) :

- **Stay neutral on content**: Focus on the process roles. Avoid the temptation to offer opinions about the topic under discussion. Use questions and suggestions to offer ideas. Never impose opinions on the group.
- **Listen actively**: Look people in the eye. Speak in their direction. Use attentive body language. Use eye contact or other agreed-upon signals to let people know they can speak next, and to prompt those who are quiet to participate.
- **Ask questions**: This is the most important tool. Questions test assumptions. They invite participation. They also help you gather information and probe for hidden points. Effective questions allow you to delve past the symptoms and get at the causes.
- **Paraphrase to clarify**: Repeat what people say to let them know they are being heard. It also lets others hear their points a second time and clarifies key ideas.
- **Synthesize ideas**: Get people to comment and build on each other's thoughts. Ensure that any ideas the group records (for example, on a flip chart) in fact reflect the collective thinking. This builds consensus and commitment.
- **Keep on track**: Set time guidelines for each discussion. Appoint a timekeeper or use a timer. Call out milestones. Point out when the discussion has veered off topic. "Park" off-topic comments and suggestions (see step 11 below).
- **Give and receive feedback**: "Hold a mirror up" from time to time to help the group see itself. For example, "Only two people are engaged in this discussion, while three people are reading. What's this telling us that we need to do?" Also, ask for and accept feedback about your role as leader.
For example, ask "Are we making progress?" or "How's the pace?"
- **Test assumptions**: Bring any assumptions people are operating under out into the open. Clarify them, so they can be clearly understood by everyone. Challenge them where needed.
For example: "On what basis are you making the comment that…"
- **Collect ideas**: Keep track of emerging ideas and final decisions. Make clear and accurate summaries on a flip chart so everyone can see. Read them out for the sake of people who are blind or have low vision. Keep notes brief and concise. They must reflect what was said, not what you think was said.
- **Summarize clearly**: Listen attentively to everything that is said. Then offer concise and timely summaries. Sum up when you want to revive a discussion that has ground to a halt, or to end a discussion when it seems complete.
- **Label and park sidetracks**: The facilitator is responsible for letting group members know when they're off track. Tape a flip chart sheet to a wall to record all side track items. The group may decide to pursue the sidetrack. Or, they may stop the current discussion and get back to the agenda. The sidetracks can be included in a future agenda if the group wishes.

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[6] Source: Schulich School of Business, York University, Division of Executive Development's "Facilitative Leadership Course Handouts" (June 1998).

[7] Adapted from Volunteer Canada's Facilitated Discussions: A Volunteer Management Workbook
http://volunteer.ca/content/facilitated-discussions-volunteer-management-workbook (http://volunteer.ca/content/facilitated-discussions-volunteer-management-workbook)

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Related

Ontario accessibility laws (https://www.ontario.ca/page/accessibility-laws)

Training on accessibility (https://www.ontario.ca/page/how-train-your-staff-accessibility)

What is a disability? (http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-and-guidelines-disability-and-duty-accommodate/2-what-disability)

Planning for barrier-free municipalities (http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/Page1290.aspx) : Guide

International best practices in universal design (http://www.chrc-ccdp.ca/eng/content/international-best-practices-universal-design-global-review)

Guides for accessible community engagement (http://www.omssa.com/accessible-community-engagement/omssa-guides/)

Accessibility rules for municipalities (https://www.ontario.ca/page/accessibility-rules-municipalities)

Questions or feedback (https://www.ontario.ca/form/contact-us-accessibility)

Guide to making accessibility policies and plans (https://www.ontario.ca/document/how-create-accessibility-plan-and-policy)