



Accessibility Standards For Customer Service

Category: Human Resources
Number: HU11
Responsibility: Accessibility Coordinator
Approval: March 2010

Purpose

The purpose of this Accessibility Standards for Customer Service Policy is to fulfill the requirements set out in Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, regulation 429/07, to establish a customer service standard for the provision of its goods and services to persons with disabilities.

Scope

This policy is applicable to the entire university community who deals with the public on behalf of Algoma University.

This Accessibility Standards for Customer Service Policy shall not apply during any period where Algoma University has declared a “State of Emergency” as defined under the Emergency Management Act.

Documentation

Algoma University shall, upon request, supply a copy of the policies, practices and procedures required under the Ontario Regulation 429/07 – Accessibility Standards for Customer Service to any person.

Policy

Accessible Customer Service follows four basic principles:

- Dignity
- Independence
- Integration
- Equal Opportunity

All members of the Algoma University community will:

- provide goods or services in a manner that respects the dignity and independence of persons with disabilities.
- provide goods or services to persons with disabilities and others in an integrated manner unless an alternate measure is necessary, whether temporarily or on a permanent basis, to enable a person with a disability to obtain, use, or benefit from the goods or services.
- ensure that persons with disabilities will be given an opportunity equal to that given to others to obtain, use, and benefit from the goods or services.
- permit persons with disabilities to use assistive devices and/or support persons in the access of goods and services.
- ensure that communicating with a person with a disability shall be done in a manner that takes into account the person's disability.
- revise practices and procedures as required.

Administrative Officers are responsible for ensuring compliance to this policy. To this end, each Administrative Officer will establish, evaluate, and revise practices and procedures that ensure AODA compliance.

Feedback

Feedback from our students, clients, and customers provides Algoma University with opportunities to learn and improve. Algoma University recognizes the right of those individuals to make a complaint, compliment, or to make suggestions on ways to improve our services.

To assist Algoma University in ensuring that the delivery of goods and service to those with disabilities is provided in an effective and timely manner, individuals are invited to provide their feedback as follows:

In writing, in person, e-mail, or telephone, addressed to:

Dave Marasco, Accessibility Coordinator

Algoma University

1520 Queen Street East

Sault Ste. Marie, ON P6A 2G4

Phone: (705) 949-2301 Ext. 4218

Fax: (705) 949-6583

E-mail: david.marasco@algomau.ca

The Accessibility Coordinator will respond either in writing, in person, e-mail, or telephone, acknowledging receipt of feedback and will set out the action to be taken in response to any complaints.

ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE PROCEDURES AND BEST PRACTICES

What can I do to help people with disabilities access our services?

- Ask how you can help
- Offer a variety of methods of communication
- Understand the nature and scope of the service you offer

PROVIDING CUSTOMER SERVICE FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Physical – Physical disabilities include a range of functional limitations from minor difficulties in moving or coordinating one part of the body through muscle weakness, tremors, and paralysis. Physical disabilities can be congenital, such as Muscular Dystrophy, or acquired, such as tendonitis. A physical disability may affect an individual's ability to:

- Perform manual tasks such as holding a pen, turning a key, or gripping a door knob
- Move around independently
- Control the speed or coordination of movements
- Reach, pull, or manipulate objects
- Have strength or endurance

Best practices and procedures for Customer Service:

There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities and not all require a wheelchair. It may be difficult to identify a person with a physical disability.

- Speak normally and directly to your customer. Don't speak to someone who is with them
- People with physical disabilities often have their own way of doing things. Ask before you help
- Wheelchairs and other mobility devices are part of a person's personal space - don't touch, move, or lean on them
- Provide your customer with information about accessible features of the immediate environment (automatic doors, accessible washrooms, etc.)
- Keep ramps and corridors free of clutter
- If a counter is too high or wide, step around it to provide service
- Provide seating for those that cannot stand in line
- Be patient. Customers will identify their needs to you.

Hearing – Hearing loss can cause problems in distinguishing certain frequencies, sounds, or words. A person who is deaf, deafened, or hard-of hearing may be unable to:

- Use a public telephone
- Understand speech in noisy environments
- Pronounce words clearly enough to be understood by strangers

Best practices and procedures for Customer Service:

Like other disabilities, hearing loss has a wide variety of degrees. Remember, customers who are deaf or hard of hearing may require assistive devices when communicating.

- Attract the customer's attention before speaking. The best way is a gentle touch on the shoulder or gently waving your hand
- Always ask how you can help. Don't shout. Speak clearly
- Be clear and precise when giving directions, and repeat or rephrase if necessary. Make sure you have been understood
- Face the person and keep your hands and other objects away from your face and mouth
- Deaf people may use a sign language interpreter to communicate- always direct your attention to the Deaf person –not the interpreter
- Any personal (e.g. financial) matters should be discussed in a private room to avoid other people overhearing
- If the person uses a hearing aid, try to speak in an area with few competing sounds
- If necessary, write notes back and forth to share information
- Don't touch service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times

Deaf - Blindness – Deaf – Blindness is a combination of hearing and vision loss. The result for a person who is deaf-blind is significant difficulty accessing information and performing daily activities. Deaf-blindness interferes with communication, learning, orientation, and mobility. People who are deaf-blind communicate using various sign language systems, Braille, telephone devices, communication boards, and any combination thereof.

Many people who are deaf-blind use the services of an Intervener who relays information, facilitates auditory and visual information, and acts as a sighted guide.

Best practices and procedures for Customer Service:

Most people who are deaf-blind will be accompanied by an intervener, a professional who helps with communicating.

Interveners are trained in special sign language that involves touching the hands of the client in a two-hand, manual alphabet, or finger spelling, and may guide and interpret for their client.

- Do not assume what a person can or cannot do. Some people who are deaf-blind have some sight or hearing, while others have neither

- A customer who is deaf-blind is likely to explain to you how to communicate with them or give you an assistance card or a note explaining how to communicate with them
- Do not touch or address the service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times
- Never touch a person who is deaf-blind suddenly or without permission unless it's an emergency
- Understand that communication can take some time- be patient
- Direct your attention to your customer, not the Intervener.

Vision – Vision disabilities reduce one's ability to see clearly. Very few people are totally blind; many have limited vision such as tunnel vision, where a person has a loss of peripheral or side vision, or a lack of central vision, which means they cannot see straight ahead. Some can see the outline of objects while others can see the direction of light.

Vision loss may result in:

- Difficulty reading or seeing faces
- Difficulty maneuvering in unfamiliar places
- Inability to differentiate colours or distances
- A narrow field of vision
- The need for bright light, or contrast
- Night blindness

Best practices and procedures for Customer Service:

Vision disabilities may restrict your customers' abilities to read signs, locate landmarks, or see hazards. In some cases, it may be difficult to tell if a person has a vision disability, while others may use a guide dog and/or white cane.

- Verbally identify yourself before making physical contact
- If the person uses a service animal- do not touch or approach the animal- it is working
- Verbally describe the setting, form, and/or location as necessary
- Offer your arm to guide the person. Do not grab or pull
- Never touch your customer without asking permission, unless it is an emergency
- Don't leave your customer in the middle of a room. Show them to a chair, or guide them to a comfortable location
- Don't walk away without saying good-bye

Intellectual - Intellectual disabilities affect a person's ability to think and reason. It may be caused by genetic factors such as Downs Syndrome, exposure to environmental toxins, such as Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, brain trauma, or psychiatric disorders.

A person with an intellectual disorder may have difficulty with:

- Understanding spoken and written information
- Conceptual information
- Perception of sensory information

- Memory

Best practices and procedures for Customer Service:

People with intellectual or developmental disabilities may have difficulty doing many things that most of us take for granted. These disabilities can mildly or profoundly limit one's ability to learn. You may not be able to know that someone has this disability unless you are told, or you notice the way people act, ask questions, or use body language.

As much as possible, treat your customers with intellectual or developmental disabilities like anyone else. They may understand more than you think, and they will appreciate your treating them with respect.

- Do not assume what a person can or cannot do
- Use clear, simple language
- Be prepared to explain and provide examples regarding information
- Remember that the person is an adult and, unless you are informed otherwise, can make their own decisions
- Be patient and verify your understanding
- If you can't understand what is being said, don't pretend - just ask again
- Provide one piece of information at a time
- Speak directly to your customer, not to their companion or attendant

Speech – Speech disabilities involve the partial or total loss of the ability to speak.

Typical disabilities include problems with:

- Pronunciation
- Pitch and loudness
- Hoarseness or breathiness
- Stuttering or slurring

Best practices and procedures for Customer Service:

Some people have problems communicating. It could be the result of cerebral palsy, hearing loss, or another condition that makes it difficult to pronounce words, causes slurring or stuttering, or not being able to express oneself or understand written or spoken language. Some people who have severe difficulties may use communication boards or other assistive devices.

- Where possible, communicate in a quiet environment
- Give the person your full attention. Don't interrupt or finish their sentences
- Ask them to repeat as necessary, or to write their message
- If you are able, ask questions that can be answered 'yes' or 'no'
- Verify your understanding
- Patience, respect, and willingness to find a way to communicate are your best tools

Learning - Learning disabilities include a range of disorders that affect verbal and non-verbal information acquisition, retention, understanding, and processing. People with a

learning disability may have average or above average intelligence, but take in and process information and express knowledge in different ways.

Learning disabilities may result in difficulties with:

- Reading
- Problem solving
- Time management
- Way finding
- Processing information

Best practices and procedures for Customer Service:

- Learning disabilities are generally invisible and ability to function varies greatly
- Respond to any requests for verbal information, assistance in filling in forms, etc., with courtesy
- Allow extra time to complete tasks if necessary

Mental Health – Mental Health disabilities include a range of disorders, however there are three main types of mental health disability:

- Anxiety
- Mood
- Behavioral

People with mental health disabilities may seem edgy or irritated, act aggressively, be perceived as pushy or abrupt, be unable to make a decision, start laughing, or get angry for no apparent reason.

Best practices and procedures for Customer Service:

- Treat each person as an individual. Ask what would make him/her the most comfortable and respect his/her needs to the maximum extent possible
- Try to reduce stress and anxiety in situations
- Stay calm and courteous, even if the customer exhibits unusual behavior. Focus on the service they need and how you can help

Smell – Smell disabilities can involve the inability to sense smells or a hypersensitivity to odors and smells. A person with a smelling disability may have allergies to certain odors, scents, or chemicals, or may be unable to identify dangerous gases, smoke, fumes, and spoiled food.

Touch – Touch/ Tactile disabilities can affect a person's ability to sense texture, temperature, vibration, or pressure. Touch sensations may be reduced or heightened resulting in a hypersensitivity to touch, temperature, or the opposite - numbness and the inability to feel touch sensations

Taste - Taste disabilities can limit the experience of the four primary taste sensations: sweet, bitter, salty and sour. A person with a taste disability may be unable to identify spoiled food or noxious substances.

Other - Other disabilities may result from a range of other conditions, accidents, illnesses, and diseases, including ALS, asthma, diabetes, cancer, HIV/AIDs, environmental sensitivities, seizure disorders, heart disease, stroke, and joint replacement.

Disabilities are not always visible or easy to distinguish.

Service Animals and Support Persons

- Algoma University employees shall use reasonable efforts to allow persons with disabilities to use their own assistive devices to access goods and/or services.
- Algoma University employees shall allow persons with disabilities to be accompanied by their guide dog or service animal unless the animal is excluded by law.
- Where an animal is excluded by law from the premises, the reason why the animal is excluded shall be explained to the persons with disabilities, and other reasonable arrangements to provide goods and services shall be explored with the assistance of the person with disability.
- When a service animal is unruly or disruptive (jumping on people, biting, or other harmful behaviour), an employee may ask the persons with disability to remove the animal from the area or refuse access to goods or services. In this event, other reasonable arrangements to provide goods or services shall be explored with the assistance of the person with disability.
- Persons with disabilities may be accompanied by their support person while accessing goods and/or services. In the event that admission fees are charged, advance notice concerning what admission, if any, would be charged to a support person shall be posted in a conspicuous place.

SERVICE DISRUPTION - NOTICE

- It is possible that from time to time there will be disruptions in service (e.g. an entrance way that is under repair, renovations that limit access to an area, or technology that is temporarily unavailable).
- In the event that a disruption in service is planned and expected, it is important to provide reasonable notice.
- Notice will be provided on the website, over the phone, or in writing.

UNEXPECTED DISRUPTION IN SERVICE - NOTICE

- In the event of an unexpected disruption in service, notice may be provided in a variety of ways, and will be done as quickly as possible.
- In the event of a service disruption, alternative methods of service may be considered and those impacted by service interruption shall be informed of any alternative methods.

TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

- Every person who participates in the development of the policy, practices and procedures under Ontario Regulation 429/07 – Accessibility Standards for Customer Service must be trained appropriately in relation to this Policy.
- Every person who deals with the public on behalf of Algoma University, including 3rd parties (i.e. employees, agents, volunteers, management) must complete training in relation to this Policy.
- Current employees, agents, volunteers, management, etc. shall receive training by January 1, 2010.
- New employees, agents, volunteers, management, etc. shall receive training as soon as “practicable”, after being assigned.
- Ongoing training on changes to policies, procedures, and new equipments shall be provided.
- The method and amount of training shall be geared to the trainee’s role in terms of accessibility.
- Training records shall be kept, including the dates when the training is provided and the number of individuals to whom the training was provided.

APPENDIX A

ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE

PROCEDURES AND BEST PRACTICES

DEFINITIONS

Assistive Devices - Any auxiliary aid, such as communication aids, cognition aids, personal mobility aids and medical aids (i.e. canes, crutches, wheelchairs, or hearing aids).

Disabilities - The definition of disability as found in the Ontario Human Rights Code is:

- (a) Any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation, or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect, or illness, and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device;
- b) A condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability;
- c) A learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language;
- d) A mental disorder, or;
- e) An injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act 1997.

Employees - Any person who deals with members of the public or other third parties on behalf of Algoma University, whether the person does so as an employee, agent, volunteer, or otherwise.

Persons with Disabilities - Individuals that are afflicted with a disability as defined under the Ontario Human Rights Code.

Service Animals - Any animal individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of a person with a disability.

Support Persons - Any person, whether a paid professional, volunteer, family member or friend that accompanies a person with a disability in order to help with communications, personal care, or medical needs, or with access to goods or services.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To review the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, Ontario Regulation 429/07 in its entirety, please visit:

[Ontario Regulation 429/07](#)

For additional information visit the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) website at:

<http://www.mcass.gov.on.ca/mcass>

For more information regarding preferred language when dealing with people with disabilities, please visit:

[MCSS: Talk About Disabilities - Choose the Right Word](#)