

# Consultation Tips

## Consultation Requirements Under The Accessibility for Manitobans Act

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## **Consultation Requirements Under The Accessibility for Manitobans Act**

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

“Consultation required

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

### **What is consultation under the AMA?**

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

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

## **“Nothing about us without us”**

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

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

## **Plan Your Consultation**

**Consider what questions you want to ask, and who can best answer them.**

Begin by determining what kind of feedback would be most useful to identify potential barriers. Consider:

- employee attitudes
- information and communication
- technological barriers
- physical barriers
- systemic barriers (related to policies and processes)

Then, identify key stakeholders, inside and outside the organization, who can offer more information and personal experience in dealing with these barriers and how to overcome them.

There are many disability organizations in Manitoba that can consult with public sector organizations around accessibility and inclusion issues. By searching “disability organizations” you will find updated contacts in Manitoba’s Community Services Directory (<http://www.contactmb.org/>).

## **Create Accessible Consultations**

**In your notice to participants, invite requests for disability accommodations.** Ensure your consultations are accessible by using a Disability Accommodations Checklist:  
<http://www.accessibilitymb.ca/disability-accomodations-checklist.html>

## **Value Your Consultants**

Set a budget for the consultation. Consider offering participants an honorarium, as you would any consultant, to show you value their expertise and time. At meetings, offer food and drink to welcome participants and to accommodate dietary needs of some disabilities, like Diabetes. Offer reimbursement of participants' costs, such as transportation and parking.

## **Provide Background Information**

In advance of consulting, offer participants a chance to become familiar with the topic and to consider how it relates to their expertise. Provide background information about the AMA and your organization in a way that is easy to understand, including for persons affected by barriers of communication and understanding.

For example, if you are asking about barriers to participation in your organization, background information on the types of accessibility barriers may assist participants to consider the broad range of barriers, beyond physical access. Consider sharing the list of barriers and solutions found at: <http://www.accessibilitymb.ca/types-of-barriers.html>.

## **Types of Consultations**

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

## 1. Phone Calls

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

### Pros

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

### Cons

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

## 2. Feedback Forms

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

### Pros

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

### Cons

- Response rates may be low because there is little motivation to give feedback.

- Individuals will likely focus on a specific incident that affected them, rather than offer advice on broader organizational priorities for accessibility.

### **3. Email / Web Surveys**

Email and web surveys can be used to reach a broad range of staff, clients, patrons and participants to gather information about a specific topic, like accessibility. A survey may be a good first step to determining priorities for an Accessibility Plan. Not all on-line survey tools are accessible; a preferred Canadian tool is Qualtrics.

#### **Pros**

- Surveys allow a quantitative assessment of community opinion.
- They are a quick and cost effective way to sample a large number of people.

#### **Cons**

- Surveys assume a level of knowledge or opinion that may not exist.
- They do not contribute to two-way relationship building.

### **4. Interviews/Focus Groups/Roundtable Discussions**

Face-to-face interviews and discussions are a good way to explore issues raised through preliminary surveys, for example to determine the most significant short-term priorities.

Focus groups often respond to a series of questions, whereas “round tables” encourage new issues and perspectives to be raised. Both are good ways to involve communities with common interests, for instance, staff and clients or rural and urban participants.

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

#### **Pros**

- A broad range of perspectives is represented. For instance, curb cuts that are good for wheelchair users may be considered

hazardous by persons with visual impairments.

- Relationships and accountability to the stakeholders are strengthened.
- Open discussion builds community knowledge about accessibility and the organization.

### **Cons**

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

## **5. Small Group Workshops**

Workshops are ideal for larger groups and for addressing more than one topic at a time. Workshops often begin with a presentation, followed by a question period. Then, participants are divided into smaller groups to discuss specific topics. Sometimes, each group discusses a different topic. The group records their main points and reports back to the larger group.

For the purpose of an Accessibility Plan, participants may be asked to discuss their experiences with different types of barriers and offer their priorities for solutions.

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

### **Pros**

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

### **Cons**

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

## **6. Attend Events Organized by Stakeholder Organizations or the Manitoba Accessibility Office (MAO)**

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

### **Pros**

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

### **Cons**

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



## **For more information, or to request alternate formats:**

Visit **AccessibilityMB.ca** or contact:

Manitoba Accessibility Office

630 – 240 Graham Avenue

Winnipeg MB R3C 0J7

Phone: 204-945-7613 (in Winnipeg)

Toll-Free: 1-800-282-8069, Ext. 7613 (outside Winnipeg)

Fax: 204-948-2896

Email: [MAO@gov.mb.ca](mailto:MAO@gov.mb.ca)

Department of Municipal Relations

Municipal Finance and Advisory Services

508 – 800 Portage Avenue

Winnipeg MB R3G 0N4

Phone: 1-204-945-2572

Legal disclaimer: This information complements the application of the regulations under The Accessibility for Manitobans Act (AMA) and is not legal counsel.