onBoard
Canada

Invited, Understood and Embraced:

A BOARD GOVERNANCE TOOLKIT FOR THE INCLUSION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Ryerson University

The Chang School of Continuing Education

Invited, Understood and Embraced: A Board Governance Toolkit for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities

onBoard Canada

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Content

About

[onBoard Canada](#), a Program of The Chang School of Continuing Education, Ryerson University, provides online governance training for everyone and bridges the diversity and inclusion gap by matching qualified candidates to not-for-profit organizations and public boards, elevating their impact across Canada.

The Accessibility Project

The Accessible Boards Toolkit was funded by The Accessibility Project, a collaboration between The Chang School, DMZ, and Sandbox by DMZ.

The Accessibility Project is a community and grant program that offers funding opportunities of up to $25,000 to champion entrepreneurial talent and innovative ideas that will support people with disabilities.

onBoard Canada's Accessible Boards Toolkit project was one of the 21 projects selected for this funding opportunity.

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Introduction

"When people hear that I have a learning disability, they think I can't learn."

~ Maggie

"Often when people see me in a wheelchair, they speak to me very slowly in very short sentences. Like I'm stupid."

~ Jaspreet

"Once I mentioned that I have a disability, some people stopped talking to me. Others slowed their speech down drastically with me. I can hear, I can think, I have eyes, I have a college degree. I don't need the patronizing voice."

~ Thomas

"When people realize that I am blind, they shout at me instead of talking to me in a normal tone."

~ Lorna

"Going into a busy store and having an anxiety attack in the middle of the store. Having everyone walk away from you to avoid you. Not uncommon to see people rush away or security come in to 'deal with the problem.' Inappropriately, instead of being sensitive. Most often I just need space to calm down, get reassurance and understanding. My anxiety will pass."

~ Christine

Maggie, Jaspreet, Thomas, Lorna, and Christine live in our communities. They are our neighbours, fellow shoppers, coworkers, fellow riders on public transit, library patrons, clients of our community services, and so on. In their own words, they tell us how they are perceived and treated in their communities---in our communities.

As members of our communities, they access community (e.g., not-for-profit and profit agencies), public (e.g., hospitals, universities/colleges), and municipal (e.g., City of Toronto, City of Saskatoon) services. Unfortunately, people like Maggie, Jaspreet and their friends are largely absent and overlooked on the boards of the very agencies,

organizations or companies where they access services and where their insights and perspectives as customers or clients would make an invaluable contribution.

Over the past several decades, Canada has made efforts to recruit employees from diverse communities into workplaces. For many, diversity means women, racial minorities, the LGBTQ2+ community, and Indigenous Peoples. People with disabilities have not been deliberately excluded; they are simply overlooked.

Much-belated legislation was introduced to redress this omission. The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) became law on June 13, 2005. The purpose of the AODA was to develop, implement and enforce mandatory accessibility standards regarding goods, services, facilities, accommodation, employment, buildings, structures and premises. In doing so, it aimed to eliminate societal discrimination against people with disabilities.

Fast forward to 2019. We discover that, although the final deadline to be in compliance with the Customer Service, Information and Communications, and Employment Standards components of the AODA passed on January 1, 2017, the lived experience of people with disabilities lags well behind. For example, a woman who uses a wheelchair had reservations at a restaurant. She was told when she arrived to use the freight elevator and come through the kitchen to reach her table in the dining room. The owner thought that he was providing Accessible Customer Service!

The Employment Standard is not faring much better. While 41 per cent of Ontario's adults with disabilities have a post-secondary education — compared to 53 per cent in the general population — the unemployment rate among people with disabilities is 16 per cent, compared to 7.6 per cent for people without disabilities. People with disabilities who are working earn on average $31,000 a year, compared to $44,000 for those without disabilities.[1]

New legislation has recently been passed by the Government of Canada to further advance and achieve the rights of persons with disabilities. The Accessible Canada Act (Bill C-81) received Royal Assent on June 21, 2019. The Act intends to ensure a Barrier-Free Canada by 2040. This law now requires the Government of Canada, as well as, agencies, companies and organizations under federal jurisdiction to ensure that public spaces, workplaces, employment programs, communications and information, and technologies be accessible to everyone. The Accessible Canada Act seeks to prevent and eliminate barriers and create more opportunities for persons with

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[1] Partnership Council on Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities: Initial Report. Publishing Update March 2019. Retrieved from Government of Ontario

disabilities. While the Act does not apply specifically to the organizations for which this Toolkit has been developed, it further promotes an inclusive society in Canada.

The Accessible Canada Act also merges with the rights and protections for persons with disabilities already enshrined in the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Currently, only Ontario, Manitoba and Nova Scotia have passed legislation protecting the rights of persons with disabilities, but it is hoped that other provinces and territories will follow suit in the not-too-distant future.

Although there is still a lot of work to be done, the Accessible Canada Act is a historical step towards inclusive legislation that will have a positive impact on persons with disabilities in Canada.

Putting strategies in place to assist people with disabilities to enjoy actively participating in society is long overdue. It is essential that as a society, we include, respect, appreciate and value the contributions all members are able to make.

How to Use This Toolkit

This Toolkit is not specifically about assisting organizations to meet their obligations under the Customer Service, Information and Communications, or Employment Standards of the AODA, although it should have a positive influence on the process. Rather, it has been developed to assist boards of governance to adopt inclusive policies and practices to welcome and recruit people with disabilities and to foster an inclusive environment. In doing so, it will add much-needed credibility at the leadership level of organizations that are now obligated to meet the Standards under the AODA.

As discussed in the Introduction, this Toolkit:

- Demonstrates the need for organizations to adopt disability-inclusive board governance practices and policies that will allow for the full inclusion and active participation of people with disabilities in leadership spaces, and more specifically, on boards;

- Outlines the key steps a board should take to accomplish this by providing specific assessment tools to determine the board's current state and readiness for accessibility and inclusion;

- Makes recommendations for using inclusive language, organizing and hosting accessible meetings, inclusive behaviours, and ongoing team building activities for boards

For more information on inclusive board governance, [Building Inclusive Governance [A Toolkit for Not-for-profit Boards and Organizations]](#) published by onBoard Canada (2019) includes excellent samples of Terms of Reference, policies and other documentation useful for boards of governance. We encourage readers to consult that publication as well.

Numerous studies have concluded that diverse perspectives in decision-making lead to effective decisions by boards and are more beneficial and responsive to the community and clients the organization serves. However, in addition to diversity, organizations and their respective boards must actively build a culture of inclusion so that historically excluded groups, such as people with disabilities can feel respected and valued.

Adopting a Successful Accessibility Strategy

Creating an inclusive culture in organizations begins with:

- Adopting a successful accessibility strategy;
- A conversation by the board because it requires top-level commitment from them and executive management;
- Creating a strategic vision of an inclusive organization where the integration of people with disabilities is built in;
- Senior leadership defining an organization-wide commitment to accessibility;
- Including into the strategic planning process a multi-year plan that incorporates an accessibility strategy that flows out at all levels through all departments, programs and services, and is reflected in their policies, procedures and practices;
- Champions who understand and are committed to the inclusion and integration of people with disabilities

The impetus for these conversations could be a combination of one or more of the following:

- A business strategy to reach new markets for increased sales;
- Recognition that a customer/client base is not receiving good customer services, or a particular market may not be receiving services at all;
- The desire to reflect and represent the community in its entirety, to be more diverse and inclusive;
- Wanting to do better, to be better and do the right moral thing to be inclusive;
- Compliance with laws that come into effect that require organizations to put in place policies, procedures and practices to eliminate barriers to accessibility.

Regardless of the source of inspiration, having the conversation is vital even though it may be fraught with misunderstandings and disagreements (see Appendix 2: Using Inclusive Language to learn more on how to engage with board members).

Challenges

Examining Biases[2]

The road to inclusion can be bumpy. Board conversations often reveal mixed reactions and unconscious biases. Some people are unaware of their own biases and prefer the status quo, which is often familiar and comfortable. The strongest resistance may come from this group. Others may find themselves somewhere in the middle. They are aware of discrimination and cautiously acknowledge and accept that a new path should be struck. They may not enter into the conversation wholeheartedly, but are willing to chart a new course for the 'good of the organization.' Others will be the trailblazers. They understand the business case for embracing diversity and inclusion, of opening the doors to welcome people with disabilities. These board members understand the value that people with disabilities will bring to the board, to the organization, and ultimately, to the community. These board members will be the champions.

Your board members will fall somewhere along the range among these groups. Boards will meet with resistance as some members do not wish to engage in these conversations and will likely resign from the board. That's okay. New prospects may not want to join once they are aware of the new vision and mission. And that's okay too. Working with board members who are committed to creating a new vision and mission inclusive of people with disabilities, and recruiting new members who share that commitment is an exciting prospect! (See Appendix 4: Leadership and Accountability to explore where your board falls on the disability-awareness scale.)

The YMCA (Peterborough Haliburton) Board of Directors found that having the conversation about their diversity composition was uncomfortable for some, which led to several board member resignations. It was clear that those members were not ready for a change to diversity and inclusivity. The remaining board members saw an opportunity to invite new members who were willing to embrace the new vision and direction.

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[2] onBoard Canada. (2019). Unconscious Bias and the Board. Retrieved from onBoard Canada.

Confronting Myths

Conversations about including people with disabilities comes with its share of misinformation. For example, organizations are concerned that the additional cost of accommodating people with disabilities will be too high. The myth has been largely debunked. When a cost exists, a one-time expense can be up to $500. However, many accommodations are reasonable or have no costs, such as arranging meeting schedules or ensuring appropriate lighting. Accessible infrastructure costs may exceed these, but organizations have a duty to accommodate to the point of undue hardship, as defined by the Ontario Human Rights Commission. For further information, please visit OHRC-Undue Hardship.

Other myths lead to assumptions and misunderstandings about people with disabilities. A few common myths are listed below, but also refer to the quotes at the beginning of this Toolkit for the real-life perception of people with disabilities:

1) They are ignorant and do not have the knowledge, education or skills to be able to work or participate in a leadership role;
2) They are inferior and are not able to fully participate in society;
3) They are to be pitied because of their disability and need charity to be able to live;
4) They are stereotyped and it is assumed that all individuals with a particular disability experience life in the same way. However, all are hampered by their disability and will always need help. Ultimately, they are not able to live a full life (see Appendix 1: Understanding Disabilities to learn more about many common disabilities and how to accommodate them).

An invaluable point to remember is that, except for a few accommodations, most people with disabilities are able and live a happy and full life, participating in all aspects of society. Accepting people with disabilities as individuals capable of the same needs and feelings as yourself, and recruiting qualified people with disabilities, whenever possible, is a powerful beginning.

Steps to Creating and Adopting an Accessible Board of Governance Strategy

Timing of Conversations

Having made the decision to adopt an accessible board of governance strategy, it is prudent for not-for-profit boards to start these conversations during the several months leading up to the organization's Annual General Meeting (AGM).

While your organization's Constitution/By-laws typically have provision for recruiting new members in between AGMs who are then formally voted in as new board members at an upcoming AGM, changes to the Vision, Mission and Values require the approval of the Membership.

As such, this process is lengthy (can be several weeks or months). It requires board, staff and community consultation through a series of meetings and/or workshops, normally facilitated by an external consultant with expertise in visioning and governance. A collateral benefit of the community consultations is that new board members are often recruited through this process, as community members become aware of the new disability-friendly direction and are keen to participate in putting it into effect.

Please reference [Building Inclusive Governance [A Toolkit for Not-for-profit Boards and Organizations]](#) available for excellent detail on a comprehensive approach to diversity-building on boards of governance.

Defining Who You Are

- Review the organization's Mission/Vision statement to ensure that it includes a specific statement about valuing persons with disabilities as part of the organization - as employees, volunteers and clients/customers, and not just a statement about valuing diversity (see [Appendix 8: YMCA Diversity and Inclusion Statement](#) to learn more on how to frame your organization's mission, vision, and statement of inclusion).

- Update the Mission/Vision through extensive and inclusive consultation to ensure it requires a specific commitment to diversity and inclusion of people with disabilities. (Note that any changes to the mission/vision will require Membership approval at the AGM).

- Assess the board's skills base as they relate to its mission/vision. How do they align with the organization's mission?
- Assess the board's diversity. Is it representative of its staff, community, clients/customers, including people with disabilities? (See Appendix 3: Board Diversity Self-Assessment and Appendix 7: Inclusive Behaviours).

- Ensure that the Constitution/By-laws specify the percentage of the board of directors who must be people with a disability. Changes here will require approval of Membership at the AGM.

Recruiting and Onboarding New Members

- Ensure the Board Governance/Nominations Committee recruitment strategy includes outreach to people with disabilities. (See Diversity in Governance [A Toolkit for Nonprofit Boards]);

- Ensure board orientation and education for new directors includes a commitment to recruiting and welcoming people with disabilities to the board. The onboarding/orientation will include a section on Mission/Vision, Constitution/By-laws, 'Understanding Disabilities, Accommodations, and Etiquette,' Mentoring, Roles and Responsibilities, Policies, Fiduciary Responsibilities, Strategic Plan and Service Priorities. (See Diversity in Governance [A Toolkit for Nonprofit Boards], Section 4, Creating an Effective Board, for detailed direction);

- Ensure board orientation and education for new directors includes a commitment to serving people with disabilities and employing people with disabilities.

Strategies for Establishing Inclusivity and Ensuring Accountability

(See [Appendix 5: Organizational Diversity and Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities– A Self-Assessment Tool](#) for detailed elements of specific strategies)

- Ensure strategic planning goals and objectives include a multi-year, organization-wide strategy for growing client/customer base of people with disabilities and increasing employment of people with disabilities with objective and measurable targets;

- Ensure accountability for progress toward accessibility targets on board and staff is affirmed in annual plans;

- Ensure strategic partnerships and alliances include disability organizations;

- Ensure CEO/President and executive management annual performance goals include achievement toward increases in client/customer base of people with disabilities, and employees with disabilities, are established in strategic plan goals

- Ensure leadership communicates a convincing business need for creating a culture of inclusion for employees with disabilities. Hold all staff meetings at which the board presents the new vision and mission with a statement inclusive of people with disabilities. This will have all been discussed at the Mission/Vision revisioning workshops, which would have included staff and community participants. But it's important to communicate the outcome to the whole staff team and to reiterate the business case. Be sure to conclude with a Q and A (Question and Answer) opportunity so no one leaves with any misunderstandings.

- Ensure that leadership models the inclusive behaviours they want to see throughout the organization. Establish trust by being open and honest. Be welcoming.

As Taru Virkamaki, President of the YWCA (Peterborough Haliburton) recalls: The agency was under fire and public scrutiny for being racist and discriminatory after a program review by the Ministry of Community and Social Services in response to a client complaint. The board, under her leadership, accepted the critical review and stated publicly at a news conference that "it was difficult to read, but we accept the criticism and have committed to changing our policies and practices to be more inclusive. We acknowledge our discriminatory practices on the board and in our programs, and apologize to those women who we've discriminated against."

The media and public response was immediate. "It's nice to see an organization whose leadership is not being defensive, and is taking this critical report to heart." A key element of this story, says Virkamaki, is that, "as a board, we made a commitment and we did exactly what we said we would do. The commitment was genuine and during the following year, it was clear to the community the extent to which we changed our board recruitment strategy, hiring practices and client services to be more inclusive and reflective of our community."

- Leadership formalizes a recognition program for people managers and employees with disabilities who have made considerable contributions to inclusion and to the business objectives.

The following steps are operational and will be relevant to boards of smaller organizations that may have an administrative role:

- Providing goods and services to people with disabilities is an integral part of the organization's product and customer service standards;

- Annual budgets include allocation of resources for all departments for disability planning, training, customer service and recruitment;

- Recruitment of people with disabilities is an integral part of an organization's recruitment and employment strategy;

- Medical and occupational health policies have been reviewed and do not discriminate against people with a disability;

- Ongoing outreach activity is part of the strategic plan that encourages other organizations to adopt accessibility strategies;

- Community engagement with disability organizations, suppliers, and people with disabilities is an ongoing activity;

- Performance on achieving accessibility strategies is monitored on a regular basis against objective and measurable targets;

- Employees with disabilities are asked directly if the workplace supports their needs through employee surveys, focus groups, or discussions with employee resource groups.

Conclusion

Good governance practices lead to better and stronger organizations that reflect the diverse and rich fabric of society and of our communities. Ensuring that people with disabilities are included in the leadership of your organization models true diversity as it reflects your community. It leads to better customer service and employment opportunities too. It offers a beacon of hope for those who have been disenfranchised, marginalized or simply overlooked.

Appendix 1: Understanding Disabilities

"Defining" and "labeling" disabilities is a personal experience for people with disabilities and carries personal and social implications. When connecting with a person with a disability, it is generally best to allow the individual to indicate the preferred way to refer to their disability. In doing so, they set the tone on when or how to discuss their disability, and help to ensure that the communication is done with sensitivity and dignity.

Disabilities can be defined into four broad categories; each includes a variety of conditions and definitions - auditory, cognitive, visual and physical. Typically, disabilities can be genetic, acquired, episodic, chronic, or temporary. The disabilities defined below are not exhaustive in each category, but provide a general overview of particular disabilities that are more common. People with disabilities also use assistive devices. A tool, technology, or other mechanism enables them to do everyday tasks and activities, such as moving, communicating or lifting. Assistive devices help people with disabilities maintain their independence and dignity. Some common assistive devices are:

- Digital audio player
- Magnifier
- White cane
- Hearing aid
- Mobility device--wheelchair, scooter, walker, cane, crutches
- Personal oxygen tank
- Electronic notebook or laptop computer
- Personal data managers
- Mini pocket recorders
- Communication boards
- Screen readers (e.g., JAWS, Narrator, Voiceover, NVDA)
- Captioning

Note: This list is not exhaustive and should be updated as new technologies/tools become available. All toolkits are living documents and are intended to be revised and updated with new information whenever possible.

Type of Disability	Definitions	Accommodations	Etiquette (Do's and Don'ts)
Auditory	**Deaf or deafened** describes people who have little or no functional hearing. People who are profoundly deaf may identify themselves as culturally Deaf or oral deaf. In Deaf culture (indicated by a capital "D"), it describes a person who has severe to profound hearing loss. **Oral deaf** are people who prefer to communicate verbally and auditorily, were born deaf or became deaf before learning to speak, and taught to speak. May not use American Sign Language. **Hard of hearing** are people whose hearing loss ranges from mild to profound, and usually communicate using their residual hearing and speech. They may supplement communication by speechreading, hearing aids, sign language and/or communication devices. **Deafened** are people who have lost their hearing slowly or suddenly in adulthood. They may use speech with visual cues, such as captioning or computerized note-taking, speechreading or sign language.	**Common accommodations required may include:** • Hearing aid • Paper and pen • Personal amplification device (e.g., Pocket Talker) • Phone amplifier • Relay Service • Teletypewriter (TTY) • Hearing ear dog • Sign language interpreter	<u>**DO's**</u> • Ask if your surroundings are suitable and if you can be seen or heard clearly. • Choose a well-lit area to make speechreading easier. • Get the person's attention before you speak. A shoulder tap is proper if the person is near you, or wave your hand. • Remove visual distractions for someone who is deaf (e.g., don't stand in front of a bright window), and remove audio distractions for someone who is hard of hearing (e.g., stand away from office equipment). • Maintain eye contact • Speak clearly, naturally and at a moderate pace – don't shout. • Keep your hands away from your face and do not chew gum or cover your mouth. • Be patient and ready to write things down if you are not being understood or if you don't understand.

			• Body language helps to project the meaning of what you're saying; be animated. Use facial expressions and gestures when appropriate. • Rephrase when you are not understood. For more information, please see [Canadian Hearing Society](#)
Cognitive	**Cognitive impairment** means that a person has trouble remembering, learning new things, concentrating, or making decisions that affect their everyday life and ranges from mild to severe. Cognitive impairments may be a result of: **ADD/ADHD** is a medical condition affecting a person's ability to focus, sit still, and pay attention. They may have difficulty in focusing on tasks or subjects, or they act impulsively. **Brain Injury** has a number of causes, including Stroke, illness, Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), brain tumours, and Meningitis, among others. **Persons with Autism/Asperger** is part of the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). All ASDs share the following three major characteristics:	People with cognitive disabilities look like anyone else, so you will not know unless he/she/they tell(s) you. When interacting with a person with cognitive disabilities: • Use plain language • Speak in short sentences • Have access to a tape recorder for meetings • Remind them of important deadlines via memos or e-mail • Provide type written minutes of each meeting • Use direct and precise explanations • Give detailed instructions for tasks • Be clear about your expectations of him/her/them	**DO's** Tips for interacting with people who have cognitive disabilities: • Treat a person with a cognitive disability with the same respect and consideration as everyone else. • Be confident and reassuring. Listen carefully and work with them to help. • If someone appears to be in a crisis, ask them to tell you how you can help

	1. Problems with communication or language, 2. Poor social skills, and 3. A restricted range of interests and/or repetitive behaviours	• Use written as well as oral instructions • Check that you have been understood • Hold one-to-one meetings for discussions • Ensure the person is involved in the team • Give one-to-one training rather than group training	
Cognitive (continued)	**Learning Disabilities (LDs)** are specific neurological disorders that affect the way a person stores, understands, retrieves and/or communicates information. People with learning disabilities are intelligent and have abilities to learn despite difficulties in processing information, and a pattern of uneven abilities. • LDs are invisible and lifelong. • LDs can occur with other disorders • LDs are NOT the same as mental retardation, autism, deafness, blindness, behavioral disorders or laziness. • LDs are not the result of economic disadvantage, environmental factors or cultural differences.	**The most common ways to accommodate people with LDs are:** • Provide information on tape, through written instruction or e-mail to people with auditory processing problems. • Break tasks into chunks with tightly structured time frames for those who may have issues with sequencing information, memory or organization. • Enable people who are easily distracted to have time to reflect in a quiet location. • Grant extra time to read material and/or have a volunteer to read content for them. • Offer a mentoring program to partner existing board member with a new	**DO's** • Have patience and be willing to find a way to communicate • Ask how you can best help • Speak normally, clearly and directly to them • Take time and be patient-- some persons with LD take longer to understand and respond • Ask them how they would like to receive information-- pen and paper? Time alone to think and then answer? Be courteous and patient, and let them tell you the best way to communicate/interact.

		member with LD for guidance, support and occasional assistance. Many people with LD have identified performance gaps and have developed strategies to compensate for their problem areas, too.	
People with LDs can succeed when solid coping skills and strategies are developed			
Visual	**Vision loss** is a significant reduction in vision that affects a person's life and cannot be fully corrected by glasses or contact lenses. This could be anything from a partial loss of vision to complete blindness. It includes: • People who are blind or partially sighted from birth or in early childhood. • People who acquired a sudden blindness or sight loss because of illness, a chronic condition or a traumatic injury. • People who have acquired blindness or sight loss	**Recommendations from CNIB:** • Use high contrast colours for text and background. • Print material in black and white so it's most readable. • Use sans serif fonts, e.g. Arial. • Ensure all pathways, meeting spaces and working environments are barrier-free and clear of obstruction • Ensure signage is clear and appropriate in size • Use large print in communications and documents • Use appropriate forms of communications such as Braille (transcription services are available) • Use large print/Braille labels or tactile dots on equipment, tools, facilities and documents	Suggestions for interacting with a person who is blind or partially sighted. **<u>DO</u>** • Identify yourself when approaching and speak directly to them. • Speak normally and clearly. • If you offer assistance, wait until you receive permission. • Offer your arm (the elbow) to guide the person and walk slowly. • If you are giving directions or verbal information, be precise and clear, e.g., if you are approaching a door or obstacle, say so. • Identify landmarks or other details to orient them to the environment around them **<u>DON'T</u>** • Never touch them without asking permission unless it is an emergency.

		• Provide magnification devices • Use electronic text and voice mail. • Provide an electronic and accessible copy of all printed materials (e.g., event agenda, meeting itinerary) well-before the meeting or event. This will allow users of screen-readers to have access to the information. • Consider meeting schedule to allow for public transit • Portable note takers: handheld devices that electronically receive, store and retrieve data. For more information, visit the [CNIB Foundation](#)	• Don't touch or address service animals – they are working and have to pay attention always. • Don't assume the individual can't see you. • Don't leave them 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.
Physical	Many types of orthopedic or neuromuscular impairments that can affect mobility. These include but are not limited to amputation, paralysis, Cerebral Palsy, Stroke, Multiple Sclerosis, Muscular Dystrophy, Arthritis, and spinal cord injury. **Musculoskeletal diseases (MSD)** include rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis, osteoporosis (stress fractures), major limb trauma, spinal disorders, tendonitis and carpal tunnel syndrome. These can lead to chronic pain and difficulties with	There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities. All do not require a wheelchair. People who have arthritis, heart or lung conditions or amputations may also have difficulty moving, standing or sitting. Sometimes it may be difficult to identify a person with a physical disability. Accommodations for people with mobility impairments are: • Accessible environment, including all public areas, washrooms, cafeterias/lunch areas, lounges, etc.	**DO** • Offer to help (opening a door, carrying packages) if it makes sense. Ask yourself, "Would I want help in a similar situation?" • Consider a person's wheelchair or walker as an extension of their body. Therefore, leaning on the wheelchair or walker, or placing your foot on a wheel, is not okay. • Speak to a person who uses a wheelchair, walker, cane,

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	• Wide aisles and uncluttered meeting areas. • Adjustable height and tilt tables. • Equipment located within reach. • Notetakers, scribes and support persons. • Flexible meeting hours, including remote option • Access to handicapped parking spaces, wheelchair ramps, curb cuts, restrooms, and elevators. • All communications available in electronic format.	or crutches in a normal voice strength and tone. • Talk to a person who uses a wheelchair at eye-level whenever possible. Sit rather than stand, if possible. • Feel free to use phrases such as "walk this way" with a person who cannot walk. Expressions such as this are commonly used by wheelchair users

mobility. An ageing population is particularly at risk for developing MSD. Mobility aids include canes, walkers, and wheelchairs.

Appendix 2: Using Inclusive Language

Language has the powerful effect of including or excluding people, sometimes inadvertently, sometimes deliberately. When we consider inclusive language when engaging with people with disabilities, it is important to speak about the person and not their disability. The person always comes first and not their disability. Here are a few simple guidelines to help ensure sensitive and respectful discussions before, during and after your board meetings.

1. Do not refer to a person's disability(ies) unnecessarily.

2. Do not describe or refer to a person by their disability, e.g., 'blind board member.' Use his/her/their name.

3. Use terms that recognize that the disability is only one characteristic of the person or group. In most cases, there is no need to refer to a person's disability at all.

4. Use precise and accepted terms (where possible, ask the individual, as noted in the etiquette section above).

5. Stay away from euphemisms, however commonly they may already be used (e.g., 'differently-abled', 'challenged').

6. Do not use language that implies victimhood or suffering as part of any illness, disease, disability or impairment. Don't say, 'Ashma is suffering from hearing loss.' Say, 'Ashma is living with hearing loss'.

7. Do not use pejorative or derogatory language that was used at a time when there was little sensitivity for or understanding of disabilities. Words such as 'schizo', 'gimp', 'spaz', 'retarded'--there are too many to mention--have no place in any conversation or context.

8. Do not gush or flatter people with a disability when they are going about their daily activities. It is patronizing to speak of a person with disability as heroic or amazing because they have a job and do it well. Likewise, do not compliment a new board member with a disability for having the courage to join the board. Similarly, don't assume they won't be able to participate or accept an active role or task on the board because of their disability.

Appendix 3: Board Diversity Self-Assessment

Board Assessment Questions	Yes	No	To Be Done	Next Steps
Does your board reflect the diversity of your community regarding people with disabilities?				
Do you advertise board vacancies in local papers, through various social media channels, online newsletters of organizations, and through disability groups/agencies?				
Do you recruit from diverse groups in your community to fill board vacancies?				
Is knowledge of disabilities recognized as a valued skill when selecting new board members?				
Is proficiency in languages other than the official languages and ASL recognized as a valued skill when recruiting board members?				
Is knowledge of cultures and traditions, including Deaf culture recognized as a valued contribution/skill when recruiting board members?				
Do you recognize knowledge of languages other than the official languages, and knowledge of cultures and traditions as valued skills when evaluating staff?				
Does your board use inclusive language during meetings?				
When recruiting, do you ask potential candidates how comfortable they feel about working with				

others from diverse backgrounds in the workplace, including people with disabilities?				
Has your board and management received training on all AODA Standards as required by the AODA as part of this agency, or another?				
Are all communications (e.g., meeting notes, itineraries, event agendas, etc.) available in an electronic format, and are all materials sent well-before the meeting or event?				
Are meeting spaces, pathways, and restrooms barrier-free, clear of obstruction, and accessible?				
Do board members feel comfortable enough to address exclusionary behaviours?				

Appendix 4: Leadership and Accountability[3]

Leadership is involved and accountable for validating and demonstrating a commitment to building diversity and inclusion that includes persons with disabilities. Below is a checklist that describes the various stages of disability awareness among board members and their understanding and commitment to inclusion.

Invisible (I)

☐ Most leaders are not aware of the importance of diversity

☐ Most leaders are uninformed or defensive when issues of discrimination are brought to their attention

☐ Most leaders see a focus on inclusion as pulling resources away from the organization's core strategic priorities

☐ Most leaders use stereotypes or discriminatory language

☐ Most leaders are not familiar with AODA Standards

Awareness (A)

☐ Most leaders make occasional statements supporting the importance of diversity, or mention inclusion informally to staff or the public

☐ Most leaders require instructions and/or scripts to discuss diversity and inclusion

☐ Most leaders attend community events that promote diversity, but mostly as photo opportunities

☐ People from underrepresented populations who are considering joining a board of directors are informally encouraged, mostly via personal relationships with other directors

☐ Accountability for inclusion of persons with disabilities is part of at least one management level person's activities

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[3] Adapted from The Alberta Urban Municipalities Association. Measuring Inclusion Tool, 2017. Pg. 12. Retrieved from the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association.

Intentional Inclusion (II)

☐ Most leaders include the importance of diversity and including persons with disabilities in major communications and link it to the organization's mission

☐ Most leaders willingly make speeches and statements about inclusion of persons with disabilities, but these are usually limited to diversity-specific functions, projects or events

☐ Most leaders initiate conversations about increasing the inclusion of persons with disabilities on the board and take responsibility for action

☐ Most leaders support the development of an inclusion strategy

☐ There is an awareness that a diverse senior leadership team is important

Strategic Inclusion (SI)

☐ Most leaders can articulate the Board's inclusion strategy, including how the inclusion of persons with disabilities enables the achievement of core strategic priorities

☐ Most leaders make internal and external speeches or statements about the inclusion of persons with disabilities to a variety of groups

☐ Most leaders intentionally appoint a diverse management team that includes persons with disabilities

☐ Leaders with disabilities are increasingly being elected and/or appointed to the board of directors

☐ Progress on inclusion initiatives is regularly reported to community members and groups, particularly those that work with persons with disabilities

Culture of Inclusion (CI)

☐ Most leaders actively and adequately respond when issues of discrimination against persons with disabilities are brought to their attention

☐ Most leaders publicly initiate and support diversity-related initiatives especially as they apply to persons with disabilities, even if they are perceived by the public to be controversial

☐ Senior leaders are seen as change agents and role models and inspire others to take individual responsibility and become role models themselves

☐ A senior leadership team that is fully representative of the diversity of the community, including persons with disabilities is part of the organization's expected outcomes
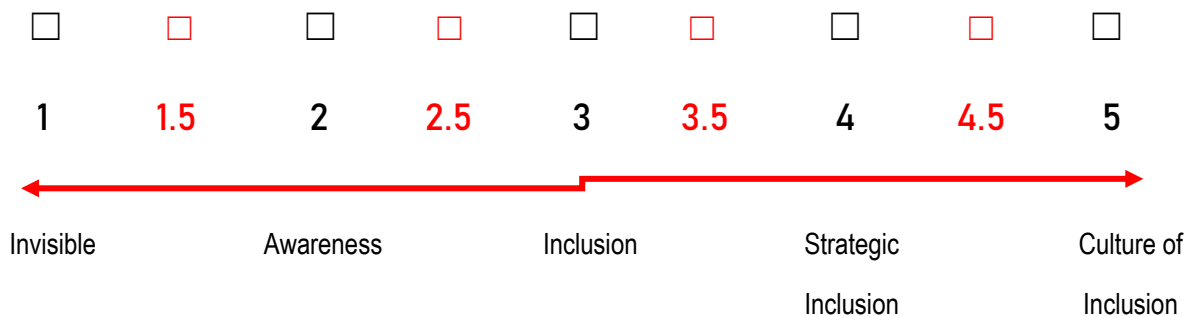
☐ Majority of board members across a range of layers of identity rate their senior leaders as treating them fairly and inclusively

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Leadership and Accountability Score

Total # for Invisible (I) indicators selected	
Total # for Awareness (A) indicators selected	
Total # for Intentional Inclusion (II) indicators selected	
Total # of Strategic Inclusion (SI) indicators selected	
Total # of Culture of Inclusion (CI) indicators selected	

Your Self-Selected Level of Inclusion Score

Based on your answers. Select the level that you feel is most representative of your current state of inclusion for persons with disabilities in your Leadership and Accountability.

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
1	1.5	2	2.5	3	3.5	4	4.5	5

Invisible   Awareness   Inclusion   Strategic   Culture of
                                                   Inclusion   Inclusion

Appendix 5: Organizational Diversity and Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities – A Self-Assessment Tool[4]

Please rank the status of each of the following items on a scale of 0 to 3, according to the ratings shown below:

0 - Not yet started
1 - Beginning phase
2 - Well under-way
3 - Fully Developed (including monitoring/review procedures)
N/A - Not Applicable/Do not know

Where appropriate, please add your comments to explain or illustrate your rating.

STANDARDS	MEASURES	STATUS	COMMENTS
A. GOVERNANCE			
1. POLICIES, GUIDELINES AND PRACTICES Vision: The organization's commitment to creating an environment free of systemic and individual barriers to inclusion is incorporated into the policies, guidelines and practices of the organization. This includes a specific statement about including people with disabilities.			
1.1. The organization's commitment to diversity and inclusion is known and understood by all board members, management, staff, volunteers, and organizational affiliates.	1.1. a) The board has made public its commitment to diversity and inclusion of people with disabilities.		
	1.1 b) Opportunities for the involvement of diverse segments of the population, as well as all members of the organization (board, staff, volunteers) have been clearly defined in the development of		

	organizational policies and strategies.		
	1.1. c) The organization has incorporated the principles of diversity and inclusion of people with disabilities into its statement of values.		
1.2. Anti-discrimination and workplace harassment policies are in place, including principles and objectives of diversity and inclusion of people with disabilities in the areas of governance, programs, services and human resources management.	1.2. a) The organization allocates appropriate resources (staffing, time, financial resources) to the development and review of policies relating to diversity and inclusion of people with disabilities.		
1.3. Principles of diversity and inclusion of people with disabilities are embedded in all organizational policies and practices.	1.3. a) The organization has addressed issues of diversity and inclusion of people with disabilities in its strategic plan. 1.3. b) The organization has assessed its existing policies, guidelines and practices to determine if they are congruent with the principles of diversity and inclusion of people with disabilities.		
1.4. Mechanisms are established to monitor and measure progress towards achieving organizational change to reduce barriers to inclusion and equity.	1.4. a) The board has explored the possibility of systemic barriers to inclusion existing in their governance and board policies and practices.		
	1.4. b) The board has formulated an action plan to eliminate barriers to inclusion.		

	1.4. c) The board has put a monitoring procedure in place regarding progress made in the areas of diversity and inclusion of people with disabilities.		
2. LEADERSHIP Vision: The organization's leaders' commitment to diversity and inclusion of people with disabilities is known within the organization and in the community, and is reflected in the decision-making structures and processes of the organization.			
2.1. The board and management provide informed leadership in the implementation of anti-discrimination and workplace harassment policies.	2.1. a) The board has clearly outlined its expectations for management on the implementation of diversity and inclusion of people with disabilities policies.		
	2.1. b) The board has clearly outlined its expectations for management on the implementation of workplace discrimination/harassment policies.		
	2.1. c) The board has developed clear guidelines to follow if the policies are breached.		
	2.1. d) The board and management have committed resources for the effective implementation of diversity and inclusion of people with disabilities in workplace discrimination/harassment policies and programs.		

3. INCLUSIVENESS OF PROCESS Vision: The decision-making process is inclusive and reflects community needs and expectations.			
3.1. Information concerning governance structure and opportunities to serve are effectively communicated to members of diverse communities within the service area.	3.1. a) The organization has developed a communications strategy to inform diverse populations of its activities and invite them to participate.		
	3.1. b) The organization has developed a comprehensive list of community and ethnic media.		
	3.1. c) The organization has developed a comprehensive list of community, regional and provincial groups and organizations that deal directly with diverse and/or marginalized populations, including people with disabilities.		
	3.1. d) The organization has developed a comprehensive list of other points of access for reaching diverse communities (i.e. places of worship, community centres, social clubs etc.).		
	3.1. e) The organization has compiled and updated provincial and regional profiles including demographics and social, economic, health and environmental issues.		

3.2. Partnerships between community organizations and the organization are in place, reflect the diversity of the population, and are functioning well.	3.2. a) The organization has developed an effective and inclusive formal and informal working relationship with diverse community groups and organizations.		
	3.2. b) The organization has developed a two-way consultation mechanism with diverse communities.		
	3.2. c) Partnerships are actively sought with organizations representing diverse populations.		
	3.2. d) Partnership agreements include a process for conflict resolution.		
3.3. Members of diverse communities are equitably, including people with disabilities, represented in the different levels of the organization, i.e. board, committees and management.	3.3. a) The organization has explored the possibility of systemic barriers in the recruitment, selection and retention processes for board, committees and senior management (i.e. advertising outlets, criteria for selection, interview process, time/financial requirements for participation).		
	3.3. b) The board has explored the possibility of barriers existing in the way it and its committees function (e.g. time and location of meetings, accessibility of building, availability of child/elder care, meeting style).		

	3.3. c) Orientation and training are provided to members as needed to increase their ability to participate effectively.		
	3.3. d) Time is set aside in meetings for each member to express their perspective and concerns.		
	3.3. e) Ground rules have been determined which state how group members are to relate to one another.		
	3.3. f) Terms of reference for committees include a process for conflict resolution.		
	3.3. g) The organization has developed a plan to eliminate barriers and to enhance participation in the board and committees.		
3.4. Effective mechanisms are in place to handle complaints about incidences of discrimination from organizational affiliates,	3.4. a) The organization has developed a mechanism for effectively handling complaints of incidences of discrimination from organizational partners, affiliates, volunteers and community groups.		

volunteers and community groups.	3.4. b) The organization has developed a strategy to ensure that the board, management, staff, organizational affiliates, volunteers and community groups are aware of their right to access the complaints procedure to address any incidence of discrimination.		

B. PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

1. SERVICE PLANNING

Vision: Services are barrier-free and appropriate to the needs of diverse communities, including people with disabilities.

1.1. Participation of diverse communities in the needs identification and planning of programs and services is supported and encouraged.	1.1. a) Key members of diverse communities, including people with disabilities, have been invited to participate in the planning of the organization's programs and services.		
	1.1 b) The organization has obtained information about the needs and interests of these diverse communities.		

2. SERVICE DELIVERY Vision: Programs and services are responsive to the values, norms and needs of diverse communities, including people with disabilities.			
2.1. Programs and services are adapted to take into account and accommodate the values, norms and issues of diverse communities, including people with disabilities.	2.1. a) Staff adapt programs and services to respond to identified needs and issues, such as: • Meals/childcare/transportation, • Respect for faith/spiritual practices, • Meeting times, locations and structures. • Services respond to expressed issues and needs		
2.2. Appropriate linguistic resources are provided to ensure equitable utilization of organizational programs and services by diverse communities, including people with disabilities.	2.2. a) The various linguistic groups have been identified within its service area, including ASL.		
	2.2. b) The organization has developed an action plan with members of diverse communities, including people with disabilities, to eliminate language barriers to accessing programs and services.		

3. OUTREACH Vision: Diverse communities, including people with disabilities, in the service area know of the organization's programs and services.			
3.1. Effective, equitable and appropriate strategies are utilized to communicate programs and services with diverse communities, including people with disabilities, within the service area.	3.1. a) An outreach strategy has been developed and appropriate resources allocated to reach the various communities in an equitable manner.		
	3.1. b) A communication strategy has been developed to provide information to various communities within the service area, including: • Targeted media (TV, audio/radio, print, social media) • Community newspapers • Key informants • Community leaders		
	3.1. c) The organization has established a two-way communication mechanism with diverse communities in its service area.		

C. HUMAN RESOURCES			
1. STAFF RECRUITMENT/RETENTION/PROMOTION Vision: All levels of staff reflect the diversity found in the province.			
1.1. Staff, organizational affiliates and volunteers reflect the diverse communities, including people with disabilities, in the broader community.	1.1. a) The organization has explored the possibility of barriers in the recruitment, hiring, promotion and retention of diverse staff, organizational affiliates and volunteers.		
	1.1 b) Paid and volunteer opportunities have been advertised in non- mainstream media (i.e. target media, community newspapers, newsletters of professional associations and community organizations).		
	1.1 c) The organization has consulted with members of diverse communities, including people with disabilities, regarding the development of the recruitment process.		
	1.1 d) The organization has reviewed the interview process for biases, such as: diversity among the interviewers and bias-free questions.		
	1.1 e) Mentoring and conflict resolution systems have been put into place to ensure the retention of diverse staff, organizational affiliates and volunteers.		

2. BOARD/STAFF/VOLUNTEER TRAINING Vision: All staff and volunteers are knowledgeable about how social, disability, political, economic and cultural differences affect the ability of diverse groups to fully participate in their communities, and are skilled in working with diverse members of the community.			
2.1. All staff, board members and volunteers are given opportunities to participate in diversity and inclusion of people with disabilities knowledge and skill development programs.	2.1. a) The knowledge and skills of its board, management, staff and volunteers have been assessed in the areas of diversity and inclusion of people with disabilities.		
	2.1. b) The organization has developed a diversity and inclusion of people with disabilities education program, attended by all staff, board members and volunteers.		
	2.1. c) The organization has involved members of diverse communities in the planning, delivery and evaluation of the diversity and inclusion of people with disabilities education program.		
	2.1. d) The organization keeps its resources current for staff, professionals and volunteers to update their knowledge and skills on appropriate service delivery to diverse communities, including people with disabilities.		

Appendix 6: Preparing for Accessible Meetings

Your organization should make a commitment to ensuring that all meetings are inclusive. The composition of your board of directors (and possible guests) should determine which accommodations are essential to accommodate any people with disabilities. The list below includes accommodations for a variety of disabilities. A best practice is to ask board members (and guests) about their needs. Also keep in mind that accommodations often benefit everyone who is attending the meeting.

1) When sending out notices of meetings and agendas, ensure they include contact information for requesting accommodation. Typically, once your board members with disabilities have indicated the supports they need at meetings, they or other members will only need to request accommodations if their needs change, or if you have invited guests.

2) When a board meeting in person is planned, ensure that:
   - People are given enough time to arrange transportation (e.g., Wheel-Trans in Toronto will attempt to schedule a ride with one-week's notice. It cannot be booked earlier than that. Also, if a person attempts to book a ride too close to an event, it may be impossible to do so as Wheel-Trans is based on first come, first served);
   - Interpreters and/or live captioners, or note takers are booked well in advance;
   - Conversion of printed materials into alternative formats is arranged;
   - All documentation is sent at least two weeks before the meeting for review.
   - Costs are planned and budgeted so that all can participate.
   - A site check for accessibility of the meeting room itself and of the entrances to the room is done before any meetings are scheduled.

3) Check for the following before using a meeting room or facility:
   - Automatic doors and obstacle-free hallways and paths;
   - Doorways providing access are a minimum of one metre across;
   - Tactile signage;
   - Access to the outdoors so people can walk their dogs during breaks;
   - Ample space for walkers, movement, wheelchairs;
   - Sufficiently spacious for interpreters, captionists, audio systems;
   - Accessible restrooms on the same floor as the meeting space;
   - Lever door knobs;
   - Sound quality of the room with no external noise or echoes;
   - Lighting quality, preferably with non-fluorescent lights;
   - Volunteers or personal attendants, if required, are able to get to the meeting.

4) Review evacuation plans at the beginning of each meeting.

5) Schedule regular health breaks every 20 to 30 minutes.

6) When serving food or drinks, keep in mind that some people will require assistance or volunteers, especially if service is buffet style.

7) Promote a scent-free environment at the meeting and in washrooms, and other public spaces.

8) Consider seat allocation for those who read lips, need interpreters, are hard of hearing, have a notetaker, or use a service animal.

9) The board requests advance copies of all materials from presenters for interpreters, captionists, advisors, notetakers.

10) Encourage one voice at one time.

11) Encourage everyone to speak clearly and at a moderate pace.

12) Allow and encourage extra time for people to be able to articulate and participate fully.

13) Prepare visual aids using at least 18 point Sans Serif font with high contrast colours (black type on white background is best) for people with vision impairment or loss.

14) Ensure all video material is close captioned or has descriptive narration.

15) Presentation materials in slide shows use plain language, and are not filled with numerous graphics or imagery.

16) When meetings exceed 20 minutes, provide two interpreters because each interpreter needs a break after 20 minutes.

17) Advise participants that interpreters will sign everything during the meeting and will not censor or edit.

18) Parking spaces specifically designed for people who use wheelchairs are 'accessible parking spaces' not 'disabled parking spaces'. The same goes for accessible rooms, accessible lifts, accessible toilets, etc.

19) Scheduling activities for your board members to get to know each other at a personal level and to encourage better understanding of each other around regular meetings is an important step.

Appendix 7: Inclusive Behaviours[5]

1. Greet people authentically -- say 'Hello' and acknowledge their presence.

2. Create a sense of "safety" for yourself and your team members.

3. Work for the common good and shared success.

4. Listen as an ally -- listen, listen, listen and engage.

5. Lean into discomfort -- be willing to challenge yourself and others. Examine your unconscious biases.

6. Be intentional. It's not a quick fix, it's a journey towards a culture of inclusion.

7. Create 360-degree vision: ask others to share their thoughts and experiences, and accept their frame or reference as true for them.

8. Respect people's opinions, even if you may not agree with them.

9. Address misunderstandings and resolve disagreements.

10. Speak up if or when people are being excluded. Create a safe environment for all perspectives, and address exclusionary behaviours.

11. Ask who else needs to be in the room to understand the whole situation. Consult with the community you are working with.

12. Build trust: Do what you say you will do and honour confidentiality.

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Appendix 8: YMCA Diversity and Inclusion Statement

Diversity and Social Inclusion

Our Strong Start, Great Future vision is that our communities will be home to the healthiest children, teens and young adults. To realize our vision, the YMCA of Greater Toronto is committed to broadening and deepening our work in diversity and social inclusion, reflecting the diversity in the GTA and supporting healthy transitions for children, teens and young adults as well as older adults across all the dimensions of diversity.

The YMCA of Greater Toronto recognizes and values Diversity and Social Inclusion as underpinnings of what we stand for and what we do. We regard the diversity of people and communities as assets and recognize their contribution to the social, political and cultural enrichment of the GTA and this Association.

As a socially-inclusive YMCA, we ensure that diverse individuals and communities share in power, give voice effectively to their issues, are involved in decision-making processes and have fair access to information and services. We also challenge specific forms of exclusion, including systemic barriers.

The YMCA is focused on creating and sustaining a culturally-competent organization that reflects the populations and communities we work with. Our commitment to diversity and social inclusion is reflected in our [“Strong Start, Great Future” Strategic Plan](#) and [Diversity and Social Inclusion Strategy (2018-2021)](#).

“The YMCA will be an organization where all people are regarded as assets, where individuals and communities are able to access information and services, participate in and benefit fully from programs and employment, while sharing power, giving voice to their issues, and taking part in the decision-making process”.

“Renewed emphasis on diversity and social inclusion, in many cases with special emphasis on eliminating barriers to people with disabilities and individuals, and families with low incomes. The YMCA will not only comply with new provincial legislation on accessibility but will energetically pursue its building blocks of access, choice, social inclusion, and prevention.”

YMCA Strategic Plan, “Strong Start, Great Future 2010-2020”