

# REMOVING BARRIERS TO INCLUSION

Everyone should have the opportunity to experience the benefits that giving to others through volunteering provides. Barriers to participation of people with disabilities are often unintentionally created and, once identified, are often easily removed. **This fact sheet will help you better understand what your organization can do to make sure it provides and promotes a welcoming and inclusive environment.** Please refer to the *Supporting Volunteerism by People With Disabilities Guidebook* for detailed steps for inclusive volunteering.

## DID YOU KNOW?

- Many people living with mobility-related disabilities are inadequately served by public transportation
- Factors such as inflexible time requirements, snow accumulation and inclement weather can greatly affect if someone with a disability is able to participate
- Disability can be visible or invisible
- Asking for accommodations, being expected to disclose having a disability or constantly having to check for accessibility can become tedious, frustrating, and/or alienating
- Some people with disabilities require attendant support to participate in the community; often, these supports have to be booked in advance and do not have a lot of flexibility
- People with disabilities are just as diverse as everyone else, so you can be sure there is a volunteer with a disability who can meet your needs
- Being a more inclusive organization will help you be more effective in your mission

## HOW TO BETTER SUPPORT/WELCOME VOLUNTEERS WITH DISABILITIES

Small changes in your promotional materials and how you define tasks and determine task assignments can make a big change in your ability to recruit/retain skilled volunteers who have a disability.

## STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS

- Check that your web site meets web content accessibility guidelines (WCAG) by using free site-checkers such as [www.achecker.ca](http://www.achecker.ca) or <http://wave.webaim.org/>, and give the report to your site administrator to help him/her correct any accessibility issues. Aim for Levels AA or AAA compliance with WCAG
- Communicate that you are looking for **volunteers of all abilities**
- State in all of your recruitment communications that you are an **equal opportunity organization, and are ready to accommodate volunteers of all abilities**
- Use **plain language** in communication materials
- Make it known that volunteers can **help/work from home or within their community**

*If your organization advertises your willingness to accommodate, this lets people with disabilities know that you are open to diversity and open to having a non-judgemental discussion of his/her needs .*

- **Use diverse imagery** within your promotional materials such as those available for a fee at [www.photoability.net/](http://www.photoability.net/), a database of stock real photos of people with disabilities

*If people see images that they identify with, then they will understand that your organization is inclusive.*

## STRATEGIES FOR TASK ASSIGNMENTS

- Ask prospective volunteers what they would like to do for your organization, what skills they would like to utilize and develop, what assistance and accommodations they may require, and what goals they aspire to achieve through volunteering experiences
- Focus on the strengths of your volunteers by reassigning or redesigning tasks or parts of tasks to maximize volunteer strengths and minimize barriers that make tasks difficult to accomplish
- Ask staff and volunteers with disabilities to share their insight and help you redesign tasks

*Allowing volunteers to identify what they are good at, where they need assistance, and what tasks would be meaningful for them will create an opportunity for volunteers to tell you how they can best fit into the organization, without anyone having to guess or make assumptions about what they can do to fully participate.*

- Whenever possible, create roles with **flexible timelines** or opportunities to **participate remotely** or **with a support worker**; make the availability of these flexible roles known to volunteers

*By alleviating travel and time constraints, volunteers who frequently manage other commitments will be able to volunteer for your organization.*

## STRATEGIES FOR CREATING AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT

- Assess your location and physical environment for potential accessibility issues using checklists such as those published by the Ontario government to support accessibility legislation  
[www.ontario.ca/page/how-make-public-spaces-accessible](http://www.ontario.ca/page/how-make-public-spaces-accessible)

*Accessibility assessments go beyond ramps, larger washrooms and door openers, and also include safety, signage, floor and wall finishes, lighting and other features.*

- Prepare an inclusive attitudinal environment by providing **disability sensitivity and inclusion training** to current and new paid staff and volunteers
- Implement **policies and procedures that support inclusion** and demonstrate a commitment to inclusion and diversity:
  - Hold meetings in an accessible, clutter-free location, regardless of who is attending.
  - Use invitations to events or meetings, and the way they are run, as an opportunity to model inclusive practices, such as those at [www.liberatingstructures.com/design-elements/](http://www.liberatingstructures.com/design-elements/)
  - Provide a way for individuals to participate in meetings from home using free software such as Skype or teleconferencing
  - Only purchase software and systems that are accessible
  - Set specific plans for inclusion such as captioning all new videos on the web

*When your organization makes accessibility and inclusion an expectation rather than an afterthought, you are enabling diverse participation without an individual having to self-identify as disabled or having to advocate for accommodations and accessible alternatives.*

**BY IMPLEMENTING THESE STRATEGIES YOUR ORGANIZATION WILL FOSTER INCLUSION AND REMOVE BARRIERS TO VOLUNTEERING BY PEOPLE LIVING WITH DISABILITIES**