



CORPORATE ACCESSIBILITY

General Information

Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians

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Introduction

Thank you for reaching out to us. Many charities like ours who work with the most vulnerable people in Canada are often asked to assist for-profit companies with advice and consultations. We value our time and expertise and hope you do as well. Please consider a donation to our organization commensurate with the fee you would normally pay to any other management, technology or logistics consulting firm. You will be showing your commitment to accessibility in a very meaningful manner.

Please click here to donate - <https://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/aebc/>

AEBC would be pleased to work with your organization on a fee for service basis to develop and train employees who have visual impairments or speak directly to your management team to help develop policies and practices that would assist in making your company more accessible.

There are several companies and charities that offer robust and comprehensive consultations as well.

You may wish to start with the federal government and their regulations:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/accessible-canada-regulations-guidance/consultation/section5.html>

The Rick Hansen Foundation also offers a certification program for employers and workplaces.

<https://www.rickhansen.com/become-accessible/rating-certification>

The Ontario Government has a very good webpage to assist businesses in developing their plans.

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/how-create-accessibility-plan-and-policy>

General Questions and Answers

What are the biggest obstacles faced by persons with disabilities in the workplace?

The biggest obstacles faced by persons with disabilities in the workplace can vary, but some common challenges include:

- a) **Accessibility barriers:** Many workplaces lack physical accessibility features, such as ramps, elevators, accessible restrooms, and properly designed workstations. These barriers can limit the mobility and independence of employees with disabilities. Individuals who are blind or who have partial sight can sometimes be excluded because companies feel it is too expensive to improve the physical environment or simply do not think it is needed.
- b) **Lack of inclusive policies and practices:** Companies may not have inclusive policies that accommodate diverse needs, such as flexible work arrangements, reasonable accommodations, or accessible communication methods. This can hinder the full participation of employees with disabilities.
- c) **The creation of policies is a bare minimum step for inclusion.** It is the practices that make the real difference.
- d) **Limited opportunities for skill development:** Persons with disabilities may encounter challenges in accessing training programs, professional development opportunities, and career advancement, which can limit their ability to reach their full potential in the workplace.
- e) **Inaccessible technology:** Much of the proprietary software that companies use is programmed in non-standard languages and/or using non-standard controls that assistive technologies such as screen-readers can't interface with properly. There are also often changes in systems (such as software updates) which cause a sudden inability for a worker to do tasks which were easily done before.

What are the biggest obstacles faced by persons with disabilities trying to secure employment?

When trying to secure employment, persons with disabilities often face specific obstacles, including:

- a) **Prejudice and bias:** Employers may have misconceptions about the abilities of persons with disabilities, leading to discriminatory hiring practices and unconscious bias during the selection process. Often employers feel it is too inconvenient or expensive to provide accommodations, which is very short term and discriminatory thinking. Employers who hire people with disabilities often speak about the loyalty and worth ethic of their employees as well as the advantages of having diversity all aspects.
- b) **Limited accessibility during recruitment:** Online application systems, interview processes, and job fairs may not be designed to be accessible to individuals with various disabilities, which can exclude them from applying or participating in the recruitment process. Online forms can be difficult for screen readers and .PDF files are rarely accessible. By using the principles of universal design, applications can be made better for everyone.
- c) **Lack of targeted support and accommodations:** Job seekers with disabilities may struggle to access the necessary support, such as vocational training, job placement services, or assistive technologies, which are crucial for their successful employment.
- d) **Fear of disclosure and discrimination:** Some individuals with disabilities may be reluctant to disclose their disability due to fear of discrimination or negative perceptions from employers, which can hinder their ability to receive appropriate accommodations and support. Many employers will simply dismiss individuals from the candidate pool if they request accommodations. Assumptions about competency and being unaware of the myriad of technical supports available enable this discriminatory practice.

How do we reimagine processes and our built environment through the lens of a person with a disability?

To reimagine processes and our built environment through the lens of a person with a disability, some key considerations include:

- a) **Universal Design:** Adopting universal design principles ensures that environments, products, and services are usable by the widest range of people, including those with disabilities. This involves creating spaces, technologies, and processes that are accessible, functional, and inclusive by design.
- b) **Accessibility standards and guidelines:** Following established accessibility standards, such as the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) for digital content, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), or the Accessible Canada Act (ACA) for physical spaces, helps ensure that the built environment and digital interfaces are accessible to people with disabilities.
- c) **Consultation and inclusion:** Engaging individuals with disabilities and disability advocacy organizations in the planning, design, and decision-making processes can provide valuable insights and ensure that diverse perspectives are considered.
- d) **Continuous improvement:** Regularly evaluating and updating processes and the built environment is essential to address evolving accessibility needs. Feedback from employees, customers, and stakeholders with disabilities should be actively sought and integrated into ongoing accessibility initiatives.

What are some of the biggest mistakes we can make when reviewing how accessible our workplace is?

Some of the biggest mistakes when reviewing workplace accessibility include:

a) Ignoring diverse disabilities: Accessibility assessments should consider a wide range of disabilities, including physical, sensory, cognitive, and invisible disabilities. Focusing solely on one aspect of accessibility may overlook the needs of other individuals. Many organizations focus on mobility issues such as designated parking spots and access for wheelchairs while ignoring other important considerations such as public transportation availability, colour schemes to allow low-vision individuals to navigate and the inclusion of service animals in the design of their workplaces.

b) Lack of employee input: Failing to involve employees with disabilities in the review process can result in overlooking crucial accessibility challenges and potential solutions. Employees' firsthand experiences and insights are invaluable in identifying barriers and implementing effective accessibility measures.

c) Relying solely on minimum legal requirements: While compliance with accessibility laws and regulations is essential, it is equally important to go beyond the minimum requirements. Striving for inclusivity and exceeding legal obligations can lead to a more accessible and welcoming environment for individuals with disabilities.

d) Neglecting ongoing maintenance and updates: Accessibility is an ongoing process, and regular maintenance and updates are necessary. Failing to address issues promptly or neglecting to update accessibility features over time can undermine the effectiveness of accessibility initiatives.

It's important to remember that disability experiences and needs can vary greatly among individuals, so a comprehensive and person-centered approach is crucial when addressing accessibility in the workplace.