

The Corporation of the Township of Seguin



Accessible Customer Service Policy

December 2009

The Corporation of the Township of Seguin Accessible Customer Service Policy

1. Our mission

The Township of Seguin will deliver goods and services to our customers ensuring they are accessible and consistent with Provincial legislation.

2. Our commitment

In fulfilling our mission, The Corporation of the Township of Seguin strives at all times to provide its goods and services in a way that respects the dignity and independence of all people, no matter what their abilities. We are also committed to giving people with varying abilities the same opportunity to access our goods and services and allowing them to benefit from the same services, in the same place and in a similar way as other customers.

3. Providing goods and service to people with disabilities

The Corporation of the Township of Seguin is committed to excellence in serving all customers with varying abilities and we will carry out our functions and responsibilities in the following areas:

3.1 Communication

We will communicate with all people in ways that take into account their varying abilities.

We will provide appropriate training to staff, Council and volunteers who communicate with customers on how to interact and communicate with people with various types of abilities.

3.2 Telephone Service

We are committed to providing fully accessible telephone services to our customers. We will train staff to communicate with customers over the telephone in clear and plain language and to speak clearly and slowly to meet the customer's needs.

We will offer to communicate with customers by email or written text if telephone communication is not suitable to their communication needs or is not available.

3.3 Assistive devices

We are committed to serving people with disabilities who use assistive devices to obtain, use or benefit from our goods and services. We will ensure that our staff is trained and familiar with various assistive devices that may be used by customers with disabilities while accessing our goods or services.

3.4 Billing

We are committed to providing accessible invoices to all of our customers. For this reason, invoices will be provided in the following formats upon request: hard copy, large print, or by e-mail.

We will answer any questions customers may have about the content of the invoice in person, by telephone or email.

3.5 Standard Practices (Appendix A)

The Corporation of the Township of Seguin will establish standard practices to assist in providing accessible Customer Service.

These Standard Practices will form part of the mandatory training requirement for Council, employees and volunteers.

4. Use of service animals

We are committed to welcoming people with disabilities who are accompanied by a service animal (unless excluded by other law, then an alternative means of assistance will be provided) on the parts of our premises that are open to the public and other third parties. We will also ensure that all Council members, staff, volunteers and others dealing with the public are properly trained in how to interact with people with disabilities who are accompanied by a service animal.

5. Support persons

We are committed to welcoming people with disabilities who are accompanied by a support person. Any person with a disability who is accompanied by a support person will be allowed to enter The Corporation of the Township of Seguin's premises with his or her

support person. At no time will a person with a disability who is accompanied by a support person be prevented from having access to his or her support person while on our premises.

5.1 Fees

Fees will not be charged for support persons for admission to The Corporation of the Township of Seguin premises for any events where a fee is required.

5.2 Request for support

The Corporation of the Township of Seguin may require a person with a disability to be accompanied by a support person when on The Corporation of the Township of Seguin's premises, but only if a support person is necessary to protect the health and safety of the person with a disability or the health and safety of others on the premises.

6. Notice of temporary disruption (See Appendix B)

The Corporation of the Township of Seguin will provide customers with notice in the event of a planned or unexpected disruption in the facilities or services usually used by people with disabilities. This notice will include information about the reason for the disruption, its anticipated duration, and a description of alternative facilities or services, if available.

The notice will be placed at all public entrances and service counters on our premises. The notice will also be posted on our web site.

7. Training for staff

The Corporation of the Township of Seguin will provide training to Council, all employees, volunteers and others who deal with the public or other third parties on their behalf, and all those who are involved in the development and approvals of customer service policies, practices and procedures. Individuals in the following positions will be trained:

All Township of Seguin Staff (Full and Part Time), Council of the Township of Seguin, Boards and Committees of Council, Township of Seguin Volunteer Firefighters, Volunteers, and third parties who will

come into contact with the public while doing work for the Township of Seguin.

This training will be provided **within 90 days** after staff commences their duties. Training will include the following:

- The purposes of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 and the requirements of the customer service standard
- How to interact and communicate with people with various types of disabilities
- How to interact with people with disabilities who use an assistive device or require the assistance of a service animal or a support person
- What to do if a person with a disability is having difficulty in accessing The Corporation of the Township of Seguin's goods and services
- The Corporation of the Township of Seguin's policies, practices and procedures relating to the customer service standard.

Applicable staff will be trained on policies, practices and procedures that affect the way goods and services are provided to people with disabilities. Staff will also be trained on an ongoing basis when changes are made to these policies, practices and procedures.

8. Customer Feedback (See Appendix C)

The ultimate goal of The Corporation of the Township of Seguin is to meet and surpass customer expectations while serving customers with disabilities. Comments on our services regarding how well those expectations are being met are welcome and appreciated. An Invitation for Feedback and availability of our Accessible Customer Service Policy will be posted on our website and at the Township of Seguin Municipal Office.

8.1 Customer Feedback Process (See Appendix D)

Feedback regarding the way The Corporation of the Township of Seguin provides goods and services to people with disabilities can be made by e-mail, verbally, written or by using the Feedback Form available on our website, at our libraries or at the Township of Seguin Municipal Office.

8.2 Addressing feedback (See Appendix E)

All feedback will be directed to the Accessibility Coordinator. A response will be given to the customer and feedback will be recorded.

9. Modifications to this or other policies

We are committed to developing customer service policies that respect and promote the dignity and independence of people with disabilities. Therefore, no changes will be made to this policy before considering the impact on people with disabilities. Any policy of The Corporation of the Township of Seguin that does not respect and promote the dignity and independence of people with disabilities will be modified or removed.

10. Questions about this policy

This policy exists to achieve service excellence to customers with disabilities. If anyone has a question about the policy, or if the purpose of a policy is not understood, an explanation should be provided by the Accessibility Coordinator or the Chief Administrative Officer of The Corporation of the Township of Seguin.

Accessible Customer Service Standard

Best Practices

What is it?

The Accessibility Standards for **Customer Service** is a Regulation under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disability Act 2005. It is the first of several Regulations that will replace the Ontarians with Disability Act 2001. This Regulation establishes accessibility standards for **customer service** as it applies to every designated public sector organization.

Why does it exist?

The Ontario government recognizes that people with disabilities face many barriers, not just the built environment. The majority of people with disabilities do not use wheelchairs. 16% of Ontario's people have some sort of disability. We could all one day suffer from a disability. Different barriers affect but are not limited to people with the following conditions:

- Hard of hearing or deaf
- Partially sighted or blind
- Poor grip, limited manual dexterity or mobility limitations
- Learning or intellectual disabilities
- Speech impairments
- Mental health problems

What must we do?

As a municipal organization we must develop policies, procedures and practices to ensure that

- The municipal services are provided in a manner that respects the dignity and independence of persons with the disabilities
- The provision of municipal services to persons with disabilities and others is integrated (not segregated) unless an alternative measure is necessary, whether temporary or on a permanent basis, to enable a person with a disability to obtain use or benefit from the municipal services

Persons with disabilities are given the opportunity equal to that given to others to obtain, use and benefit from the municipal services

How are we going to do that?

Employee training will review the purposes of the Act and the requirements of the Regulation as it applies to **Customer Service**.

What will we learn?

- How to interact and communicate with persons with various types of disabilities
- How to interact with persons with disabilities who use an assistive device or require the assistance of a guide dog or other service animal or the assistance of a support person
- What to do if a person with a disability is having difficulty accessing our municipal services

How & when will we learn this?

On going training sessions will take place in addition to the use of this manual. Four principals that will guide this training for accessible customer service are **dignity, independence, integration and equality of opportunity**.

Training must also be provided on an ongoing basis in connection with changes to the policies, practices and procedures of this municipality governing the provision of services to persons with disabilities. All municipal staff, members of Council, volunteers, third parties, or anyone who deals with the public on behalf of the Township of Seguin, or is responsible for the creation of policies and procedures is included in this training.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT...

Service Animals

A service animal is any animal used by a person with a disability for reasons relating to the disability where it is readily apparent that the animal is used by the person for reasons relating to his or her disability; or where the person provides a letter from a physician or nurse confirming that he or she requires the animal for reasons relating to his or her disability; or a valid identification card signed by the Attorney General of Canada or a certificate of training from a recognized guide dog or service animal training school.

Some thing to remember when working with a customer with a service animal:

- Persons with a disability may enter premises owned and operated by the Township of Seguin accompanied by a service animal and keep the animal with them if the public has access to such premises and the animal is not otherwise excluded by law. If a service animal is excluded by law, the Township of Seguin will ensure that alternate means are available to enable the person with a disability to obtain, use or benefit from the Township's goods and services.
- If it is not readily apparent that the animal is a service animal, staff may ask the person with a disability for a letter from a physician or nurse confirming that the person requires the animal for reasons relating to his or her disability. Staff may also, or instead, ask for a valid identification card signed by the Attorney General of Canada or a certificate of training from a recognized guide dog or service animal training school.
- It should be noted that it is the responsibility of the person with a disability to ensure that his or her service animal is kept in control at all times.
- Don't touch or address service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.

Support Persons

A support person is another person who accompanies a person with a disability in order to help with communication, mobility, personal care or medical needs or with access to goods or services.

Some things to remember when working with a customer with a support person:

- We are committed to welcoming people with disabilities who are accompanied by a support person. Any person with a disability who is accompanied by a support person will be allowed to enter The Corporation of the Township of Seguin's premises with his or her support person. At no time will a person with a disability who is accompanied by a support person be prevented from having access to his or her support person while on our premises.

- Fees will not be charged for support persons for admission to The Corporation of the Township of Seguin premises for any events where a fee is required.
- The Corporation of the Township of Seguin may require a person with a disability to be accompanied by a support person when on Township property, but only if a support person is necessary to protect the health and safety of the person with a disability or the health and safety of others on the premises.

Assistive Devices

An assistive device is any device that is designed, made, or adapted to assist a person perform a particular task. For examples, canes, crutches, walkers, wheel chairs, and shower chairs are all assistive devices.

Some things to remember when working with a customer with an assistive device:

- A person with a disability may provide their own assistive device for the purpose of obtaining, using and benefiting from the Township of Seguin's goods and services.
- Exceptions may occur in situations where staff has determined that the assistive device may pose a risk to the health and safety of a person with a disability or the health and safety of others on the premises. In these situations and others, staff may offer a person with a disability other reasonable measures to assist him or her in obtaining, using and benefiting from the Township's goods and services, where other such measures are available.
- It should be noted that it is the responsibility of the person with a disability to ensure that his or her assistive device is operated in a safe and controlled manner at all times.
- Never touch or move an assistive device except in an emergency situation.

Customers with Vision Disabilities

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 disabilities can 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. Others may use a guide dog or white cane.

Here are some tips on serving customers who have vision disabilities:

- Identify yourself when you approach your customer and speak directly to them.
- Speak normally and clearly.
- Never touch your customer without asking permission, unless it's an emergency.
- If you offer assistance, wait until you receive permission. Offer your arm (the elbow) to guide the person and walk slowly.
- Don't touch or address service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- If you're giving directions or verbal information, be precise and clear. For example, if you're approaching a door or an obstacle, say so.
- Don't just assume the individual can't see you.
- Don't leave your customer in the middle of a room. Show them to a chair, or guide them to a comfortable location
- Identify landmarks or other details to orient your customer to the environment around them
- Don't walk away without saying good-bye
- Be patient. Things may take a little longer.

Customers Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

People who have hearing loss may be deaf or hard of hearing. 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.

Here are some tips on serving customers who are deaf or hard of hearing:

- Always ask how you can help. Don't shout
- Attract the customer's attention before speaking. The best way is a gentle touch on the shoulder or gently waving your hand.
- Make sure you are in a well lighted area where your customer can see your face.
- Look at and speak directly to your customer. Address your customer, not their interpreter
- If necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier, for example a pen and paper.
- Don't put your hands in front of your face when speaking.
- Be clear and precise when giving directions, and repeat or rephrase if necessary. Make sure you have been understood.
- Any personal (e.g. financial) matters should be discussed in a private room to avoid other people overhearing.
- Be patient. Communication for people who are deaf may be different because their first language may not be English. It may be American Sign Language (ASL).
- If the person uses a hearing aid, try to speak in an area with few competing sounds.

Customers with Physical Disabilities

There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities, and not all require a wheelchair. People who have arthritis, heart or lung conditions, or amputations may also have difficulty with moving, standing or sitting. It may be difficult to identify a person with a physical disability.

Here are some tips on serving customers who have physical disabilities:

- Speak normally and directly to your customer. Don't speak to someone who is with them.
- People with physical disabilities often have their own ways of doing things. Ask before you help.
- Be patient. Customers will identify their needs to you.
- Don't touch assistive devices unless it is an emergency.
- Provide your customer information about accessible features of the immediate environment (automatic doors, accessible washrooms, etc.).
- Remove obstacles and rearrange furniture to ensure clear passage.

Customers with Mental Health Disabilities

People with mental health disabilities look like anyone else. You won't know that your customer has a mental health disability unless you're informed of it. And usually it will not affect your customer service at all. Sometimes, however, if this person is experiencing difficulty in controlling their symptoms or is in a crisis, you may need to help out. Be calm and professional and let your customer tell you how you can best help.

Here are some tips on serving customers who have mental health disabilities:

- Treat a person with a mental health disability with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else.
- Be confident and reassuring. Listen carefully and work with your customer to meet their needs.
- If someone appears to be in a crisis, ask them to tell you the best way to help.

Customers with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities

People with intellectual or developmental disabilities may have difficulty doing many things 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 an intellectual or developmental disability like anyone else. They may understand more than you think, and they will appreciate you treating them with respect.

Here are some tips on serving customers who have an intellectual or developmental disability:

- Don't assume what a person can or cannot do.
- Use plain language and speak in short sentences.
- Make sure your customer understands what you've said.
- If you can't understand what's being said, don't pretend, just ask again.
- Provide one piece of information at a time.
- Be supportive and patient.
- Speak directly to your customer, not to their companion or attendant.

Customers Who Have Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities can result in a host of different communications difficulties for people. They can be subtle, as in having difficulty reading, or more pronounced, but they can interfere with your customer's ability to receive, express or process information. You may not be able to know that someone has one of these disabilities unless you are told, or you notice the way people act, ask questions or use body language.

Here are some tips on serving customers with learning disabilities:

- Patience and a willingness to find a way to communicate are your best tools.
- When you know that someone with a learning disability needs help, ask how you can best help.
- Speak normally and clearly, and directly to your customer
- Take some time. People with some kinds of learning disabilities may take a little longer to understand and respond.
- Try to find ways to provide information in a way that works best for them. For example, have a paper and pen handy.
- If you're dealing with a child, be patient, encouraging and supportive.
- Be courteous and patient and your customer will let you know how to best provide service in a way that works for them.

Customers with Speech or Language Impairments

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.

Here are some tips on serving customers with speech or language impairments:

- Just because a person has one disability doesn't mean they have another. For example, if a customer has difficulty speaking; don't assume they have an intellectual or developmental disability as well.

- If you don't understand, ask your customer to repeat the information.
- If you are able, ask questions that can be answered 'yes' or 'no'.
- Be patient and polite, and give your customer whatever time he/she needs to get his/her point across.
- Don't interrupt or finish your customer's sentences. Wait for them to finish.
- Patience, respect and a willingness to find a way to communicate are your best tools.

Dealing with Customers with Disabilities Over the Phone

Here are some tips on serving customers with disabilities on the phone:

- Speak normally, clearly and directly.
- Don't worry about how their voice sounds. Concentrate on what is being said.
- Be patient, don't interrupt and don't finish your customer's sentences. Give your customer time to explain him/herself.
- Don't try to guess what your customer is saying. If you don't understand, don't pretend. Just ask again.
- If you're not certain what was said, just repeat or rephrase what you've heard.
- If your customer has great difficulty communicating, make arrangements to call back when it is convenient to speak with someone else.
- If a telephone customer is using an interpreter through the Bell Relay Service just speak normally to the customer, not to the interpreter.
- Visit http://www.bell.ca/specialneeds/PrsSN_SvcRelay.page for more information on the Bell Relay Service.

Welcoming ALL Customers with Disabilities

Here are some ways you can provide better service to customers with disabilities.

- Treat people with disabilities with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else.
- Patience, optimism, and a willingness to find a way to communicate are your best tools.
- Smile, relax, and keep in mind that people with disabilities are just people.
- Don't make assumptions about what type of disability or disabilities a person has.
- Some disabilities are not visible. Take the time to get to know your customers' needs.
- Be patient. People with some kinds of disabilities may take a little longer to understand and respond.
- If you're not sure what to do, ask your customer, "May I help you?"
- If you can't understand what someone is saying, just politely ask again.

APPENDIX A

- Ask before you offer to help — don't just jump in. Your customers with disabilities know if they need help and how you can provide it.
- Find a good way to communicate. A good start is to listen carefully.
- Look at your customer, but don't stare. Speak directly to a person with a disability, not to their interpreter or someone who is with them.
- Use plain language and speak in short sentences.
- Don't touch or address service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.



Township of Seguin NOTICE OF TEMPORARY DISRUPTION OF SERVICES

Location of Disruption

Type of Disruption

Reason for Disruption

Duration of Disruption

Alternative facilities or services

For further information, please contact:

**STAFF NAME
NUMBER
EMAIL**



Invitation for Feedback on the Provision of Goods or Services to People with Disabilities & Availability of Policy

We want to hear from you!

**We strive to improve accessibility for our
customers with disabilities.**

We welcome your feedback.

To share your comments, request a feedback form or request a copy of our accessibility policy, please contact Heather Schmalz, Accessibility Coordinator, at (705) 732-4313 or hschmalz@seguin.ca

Township of Seguin
Customer Feedback Form

Thank you for visiting the Township of Seguin. We value all of our customers and strive to meet everyone's needs.

Please tell us the date and time of your visit:

Did we respond to your customer service needs today?

- YES
- NO

Was our customer service provided to you in an accessible manner?

- YES
- SOMEWHAT
- NO (please explain below)

Did you have any problems accessing our goods and services?

- YES (please explain below)
- SOMEWHAT (please explain below)
- NO

Please add any other comments you may have:

Contact information (optional)*:

Thank you,
Heather Schmalz
Accessibility Coordinator
hschmalz@seguin.ca
(705) 732-4313

Record of Customer Feedback

Date feedback received:

Name of customer:

Contact information:

Details:

Follow-up:

Action to be taken:

Accessibility Coordinator

Date

Director of Community Services

Date