



Accessibility for Manitobans Act: Folklorama's Accessible Customer Service Practices

Introduction

Folklorama is a cultural arts organization that operates on a year-round basis, with the mission to bring people together by sharing ethno-cultural experiences. The two (2)-week Folklorama Festival is the organization's flagship event, and its business divisions At Home, At Work, At School, and At Play operate continuously in support of Folklorama's mission.

Folklorama is committed to creating an accessible environment for all and continuously works with staff and volunteers to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to provide the best customer service experience possible for all patrons.

Background: Accessibility for Manitobans Act (AMA)

The Accessibility for Manitobans Act (herein referred to as "the AMA") passed unanimously in 2013 and aims to significantly increase accessibility in Manitoba. Under this standard, all Manitoba organizations with at least one (1) employee (including businesses and not-for-profit organizations) must adopt policies and procedures that help achieve respectful, barrier-free customer service.

Compliance with the AMA will be guided by five (5) accessibility standards. The standards relate to Customer Service, Employment, Information and Communication, Transportation, and Design of Outdoor Public Spaces.

The AMA identifies the following four (4) guiding principles of accessibility:

- **Access.** Persons should have barrier-free access to places, events, and other functions that are generally available in the community;
- **Equality.** Persons should have barrier-free access to those things that will give them equality of opportunity and outcome;
- **Universal design.** Access should be provided in a manner that does not establish or perpetuate differences based on a person's disability;



- **Systemic responsibility.** The responsibility to prevent and remove barriers rests with the person or organization that is responsible for establishing or perpetuating the barrier.

Barriers to Accessibility

The AMA, Section 3.1 defines a barrier as “anything that interacts with (a physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory) impairment in a way that may hinder the person’s full and effective participation in society on an equal basis.”

There are five (5) categories of barriers identified by the AMA:

- **Attitudinal barriers** result when people think and act based on false assumptions.
 - Example: A staff member mistakenly speaks to an individual’s support person because they assume the individual with a disability will not understand or be able to respond.
- **Informational and communication barriers** are created when information is offered in a form that suits some, but not all, of the population.
 - Example: Print that is too small for some people to read; a public address system that a person with hearing loss cannot hear.
- **Technological barriers** occur when technology, or the way it is used, cannot be accessed by people with disabilities.
 - Example: Websites that are not accessible to people who have low vision and use screen reader software.
- **Systemic barriers** are policies, practices, or procedures that result in some people receiving unequal access or being excluded.
 - Example: Job descriptions that may exclude people with a disability, such as requiring a driver’s license when the job does not require driving.
- **Physical and architectural barriers** are physical obstacles that make it difficult for some individuals to easily access a place or location.
 - Example: A doorknob that cannot be turned by a person with limited mobility or strength; a hallway or door that is too narrow to allow a person who uses a wheelchair to pass through safely.



Statement of Commitment and Practices

Folklorama's Accessible Customer Service Practices are consistent with the principles of independence, dignity, and equality of opportunity for people with disabilities.

Folklorama is committed to the AMA and its customer service regulations. Our operations aim to reflect its ongoing practices and measures of the eight (8) requirements of the Customer Service Standard. Any current or future policy or practice not respecting and promoting the principles of dignity, independence, integration, and equal opportunity for people with disabilities will be reviewed, modified, or removed.

1. Communication and Information

To determine the barrier, we will ask the customer their preferred method of communication. We will communicate with people in ways that consider the nature of the barrier.

Practices will include the following:

- Signage or verbal greetings will begin with "How can we help?"
- Exhibit patience and moving conversations to a quieter space, if needed.
- Having paper and pens available, should the customer wish to communicate in writing.
- Ensure all publications and presentations:
 - Are produced in easy-to-read fonts and plain language;
 - Inform users that publications are available in alternate formats upon request;
 - Are verbally read to customers, when requested.
- Website and online ticketing will:
 - Include ALT tags to support those using screen readers;
 - Include information on how to access documents in an alternate format (Example: Large print with alternative text);
 - Provide contact information for verbal communication, should the customer require additional information.



- Internal Special Events will include provision for accommodation for those with hearing or visual impairments.

2. Assistive Devices

People with disabilities may use their personal assistive devices when accessing our goods, services, and facilities. In cases where the assistive device presents significant and unavoidable health or safety concerns, we will attempt to use other measures to ensure the person with a disability can access our goods, services, and facilities.

Practices will include the following:

- Staff and volunteers will be trained in how to provide appropriate customer service to people using assistive devices.
 - Example: Staff will not touch or move assistive devices without the customer's permission.
- Staff will meet customers at the main building entrance door, should they require assistance entering the building as the door does not automatically open.
 - Our video system allows staff to be proactive in asking if additional assistance is required.
- Staff will ensure that in-person customers receive necessary accommodation(s) to access all required services.

3. Support Persons

We welcome people with disabilities that are accompanied by a support person.

Practices will include the following:

- Staff will be trained in appropriate behaviour regarding support staff persons.
 - Example: The customer is the person with the disability, not the support person, and the customer will be addressed directly whenever possible.



- Upon request to the Folklorama Offices, Folklorama Festival Pavilion Admission will be granted at no charge to the support person who presents with appropriate identification. This policy and procedure for accessing complimentary admission will be communicated to the public annually.
- Pricing for all other programming will be communicated in marketing materials ahead of time so the customer is aware in advance that charges apply.

4. Service Animals

We welcome people with disabilities and their service animals. Service animals are allowed in areas that are open to the public.

Manitoba's Human Rights Code defines a service animal as "an animal that has been trained to provide assistance to a person with a disability that relates to that person's disability." A service animal can often be identified through visual indicators, such as its harness, vest, certificate, or through the assistance it is providing, however identifiers are not a requirement.

In some cases, a person's disability may prevent them from maintaining physical control of the animal. In this case, the person is expected to maintain control of the animal by voice, signal, or other means.

Animals that provide comfort and companionship and that are not trained to assist with a person's disability-related need are not considered to be service animals, as per Manitoba's Human Rights Code.

Practices will include the following:

- Staff will be trained to understand the rights of people accompanied by service animals.
- Staff will welcome the customer with the service animal but will not interact with the animal, as this can distract the animal from its work.

- When staff are unsure if an animal is considered as a service animal, they will:
 - Ask the client to confirm if the animal is assisting them;
 - Ask what assistance the animal has been trained to provide, related to their disability;
 - Not require handlers to disclose their diagnosis or personal health information.
- Respond respectfully to concerns raised by other customers but refer to Manitoba's Human Rights Code as reasoning for welcoming service animals.
- If another law prohibits the service animal, we will do the following to ensure people with disabilities can access our goods, services, and facilities:
 - Explain in detail why the animal is excluded.
 - Discuss with the customer another satisfactory way of providing goods, services, and facilities.
- Advise the customer when the service animal's behaviour is inappropriate, such as repeated barking, whining, snapping, or defecating. If poor behaviour persists, the customer may be asked to leave.
- Should staff have an allergy or feel uncomfortable around certain animals, they will ask a fellow staff member to assist the customer to ensure that the customer service requirement is met.

5. Maintain Barrier- Free Access

Barrier-free access is an important component of providing accessible customer service to all.

Practices will include the following:

- Keep entranceways cleared of snow, ice, and debris that may limit access.
- Arrange to meet a customer if they cannot access our offices due to a lack of designated accessible parking.
- Offer to assist with accessing the main entrance, as the door does not have an automatic open button.
- Ensure hallways and meeting rooms are free of clutter, such as boxes and technical equipment.
- Ensure standing signage is not a tripping hazard.
- Have space for mobility devices in the waiting room and allow space for mobility devices by re-arranging furniture, where required.



6. Notice of Temporary Disruption

In the event of a planned or unexpected disruption of services or facilities, we will promptly post notices and, when possible, announce the disruption. A posted notice or announcement will include information about the reason for the disruption, its anticipated length of time, and a description of alternative facilities or services, if available.

Services/facilities at the Folklorama offices include:

- Ramp to the main entrance
- Elevator
- Accessible washroom (2nd floor)

Practices will include the following:

- Personally inform customers who may be affected by the disruption of services and offer assistance, if possible.
 - Ensure that anyone who may have a meeting scheduled at the offices is called by telephone or emailed to inform of the disruption.
- If the disruption of service is known in advance, post notices at the front entrance and on the telephone answering service. Include the reason for repairs, expected timeline, and where to go for more information.
- If the temporary disruption of services is unanticipated, such as during an electrical outage, place a notice at the building's front entrance and include in the notice where to go for more information.
- If there is alternate access (Example: Public elevator is under repair but stairs are available), inform customers and offer assistance to use the alternate access.
- Provide verbal notice by intercom when a customer buzzes to gain entry and offer an alternate solution:
 - Staff will go to the main floor to meet the customer, should there be a service disruption to the elevator and the customer not be able to climb the stairs.
- Should the disruption occur when the customer is already onsite at the office, the situation will be immediately explained by our staff and as required, an alternate solution will be established in conjunction with what is best to meet the needs of the customer.



7. Feedback Process

We welcome feedback on how we provide accessible customer service, as this helps us to identify barriers and respond to concerns appropriately.

Practices will include the following:

- Customers are welcome to provide their feedback in-person, through postage mail, via telephone, and by email.
 - Should a customer wish to provide feedback differently, Folklorama staff will accommodate this request whenever possible.
 - Methods for providing feedback will be posted on Folklorama's website.
- Feedback will be directed to front-line staff for their review and will be disseminated to the appropriate department head.
 - An automatic response will be sent to the customer indicating receipt of the feedback and the timeframe in which the customer should expect a response.
 - Generally, customers can expect a response within two (2) business days.
- Feedback will be tracked internally, and the appropriate staff person will follow up with the customer with next steps.

8. Training

All staff and new employees will receive training on accessible customer service.

Practices will include the following:

- Include training as a part of the orientation of new staff during their first month of employment.
- Managers will ensure that any seasonal employees/volunteers are oriented to our customer service practices.
- Anyone involved in developing policies will be oriented to our customer service practices, and any policies developed will be in line with these practices.
- Any changes to our accessible customer service practices will be communicated to staff.



Training will include:

- The purpose of the AMA and the requirements of the customer service standard.
- Explanation of all policies relating to the Accessibility Standard for Customer Service.
- How to interact and communicate with people disabled by barriers, including people with disabilities using an assistive device or requiring the assistance of a service animal or a support person.
- What to do if a person with a disability is having difficulty in accessing our goods, services, and facilities.

Making public events accessible

While this standard is currently deemed optional for business and non-profit organizations, Folklorama will make every effort to consider accessibility for all of its public events by:

- Announcing events in a manner that is accessible.
- Holding events in accessible meeting places and public venues when possible.
- Reviewing requests for relevant disability accommodation and making those accommodations to the point of undue hardship.

How to contact Folklorama regarding Accessibility

If you have any questions or feedback on Folklorama's Accessible Customer Service Practices or require an accessible service, please contact us using the information below:

Main telephone line: (204) 982-6210

Main email address: Info@folklorama.ca

Mailing address: 2nd Floor, 183 Kennedy Street
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3C 1S6