



# Engaging with persons with disabilities



# Land acknowledgement

We begin by acknowledging that we are in Mi'kma'ki, the traditional territory of the Mi'kmaq People.

We acknowledge that people of African descent have been in Nova Scotia for over 400 years and we honour and offer gratitude to those ancestors of African descent who came before us to this land.



# Learning objectives

What is public engagement?

How you can put the principles into action?

Why is accessible engagement important?

What are the five principles of accessible engagement?





# Understanding disabilities



**of Nova Scotians 15 years and older have at least one disability**

The Canadian Average is: 22.3%.



This represents 229,430 people in Nova Scotia.



# Disabilities can be...

- Physical (related to mobility)
- Sensory (such as hearing or seeing)
- Cognitive
  - Learning
  - Intellectual
  - Developmental
  - Neurological (such as autism or ADHD)
- Mental-health related
- Pain related
- Related to chronic health problems



# Section 1: What is public engagement?



# Your engagement experience

Think about a time when you were engaged in a process about a decision that affected your life.

As a citizen, an employee, or a member of a particular group, etc., how did it feel to be given the chance to provide input and feedback on the decision?

How does it feel when you are NOT involved in decisions that affect you, or when you face barriers to being able to participate?



# What are barriers to engagement?

## *What Is a Barrier?*

“...anything that hinders or challenges the full and effective participation in society of persons with disabilities, including a physical barrier, an architectural barrier, an information or communications barrier, an attitudinal barrier, a technological barrier, a policy, or a practice.” (Accessibility Directorate glossary)

Persons with disabilities face barriers to being able to participate in decisions that affect their lives.



# Barriers to engagement

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Amy Grant - Pink Lnu



# Reflection

**What stood out to you from this video?**

**What barriers did you notice in these stories?**

**What barriers have you witnessed or experienced in your community, organization, or workplace?**



# Accessibility is achieved when...

...our environments, services, products, and policies are designed and built from the very start in a way that allows people with disabilities to fully and equally participate.

Accessibility ensures people with disabilities are included in all of life's experiences, benefits, opportunities, and choices.



# Public engagement is for everyone

*“Public engagement is premised on the belief that everyone has the right to be involved in decisions that will affect their life. Accordingly, governments and organizations around the world are increasingly engaging the communities they serve to inform the development of policies, programs and initiatives.”*

(Simon Fraser University’s Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue, 2020)

# How public engagement increases over time

(public engagement continuum)

## Increasing public engagement

### 1. Inform

Provide members of the public with balanced and objective information to help them understand the issue.

### 2. Consult

Collect information and feedback from the public.

### 3. Collaborate

Engage the public to review and discuss the issue, develop alternatives and identify the preferred solution.

### 4. Empower

Place the final decision making in the hands of the public.





# Public engagement is effective when it...

- includes the people who will be affected by a change or a decision
- leads to more informed decision-making
- helps your organization's programs and services succeed
- gives citizens a better understanding of issues and decisions
- builds public support



# Section 2: Why is accessible engagement important?



# Accessible engagement is important because it...

- builds trust over time with communities that have not felt included. This requires a consistent and active investment of time and resources.
- recognizes the different ways community members learn, communicate, and engage with information
- respects and responds to the insights, lived experiences, and expertise of persons with disabilities, and that enhances understanding and leads to better decisions
- helps re-balance power between organizations and citizens



# Promising practices for engagement

Perhaps you're at the beginning of your accessible engagement journey. Or maybe you've been on it for some time.

What promising practices have you experienced or incorporated into your community, organization, or workplace?





# Promising practices for engagement

- Remember: no decision about us without us
- Ask people what they need; don't make assumptions
- Use employee resource groups to provide advice or input on activities or initiatives
- Be aware of how often you ask people with disabilities to engage on issues, as burnout can be an issue
- In-depth interviews are good for understanding barriers
- Pay an honorarium for participating in committee work
- Communication materials should be accessible by design



# Section 3: What are the five principles of accessible engagement?



# How confident do you feel...

**...engaging persons with disabilities online, in person, and through surveys, etc.?**



# The five accessible engagement principles

- 1. Be authentic and accountable.**
- 2. Build relationships with communities**
- 3. Account for differences within communities.**
- 4. Plan early and actively.**
- 5. Learn and improve.**





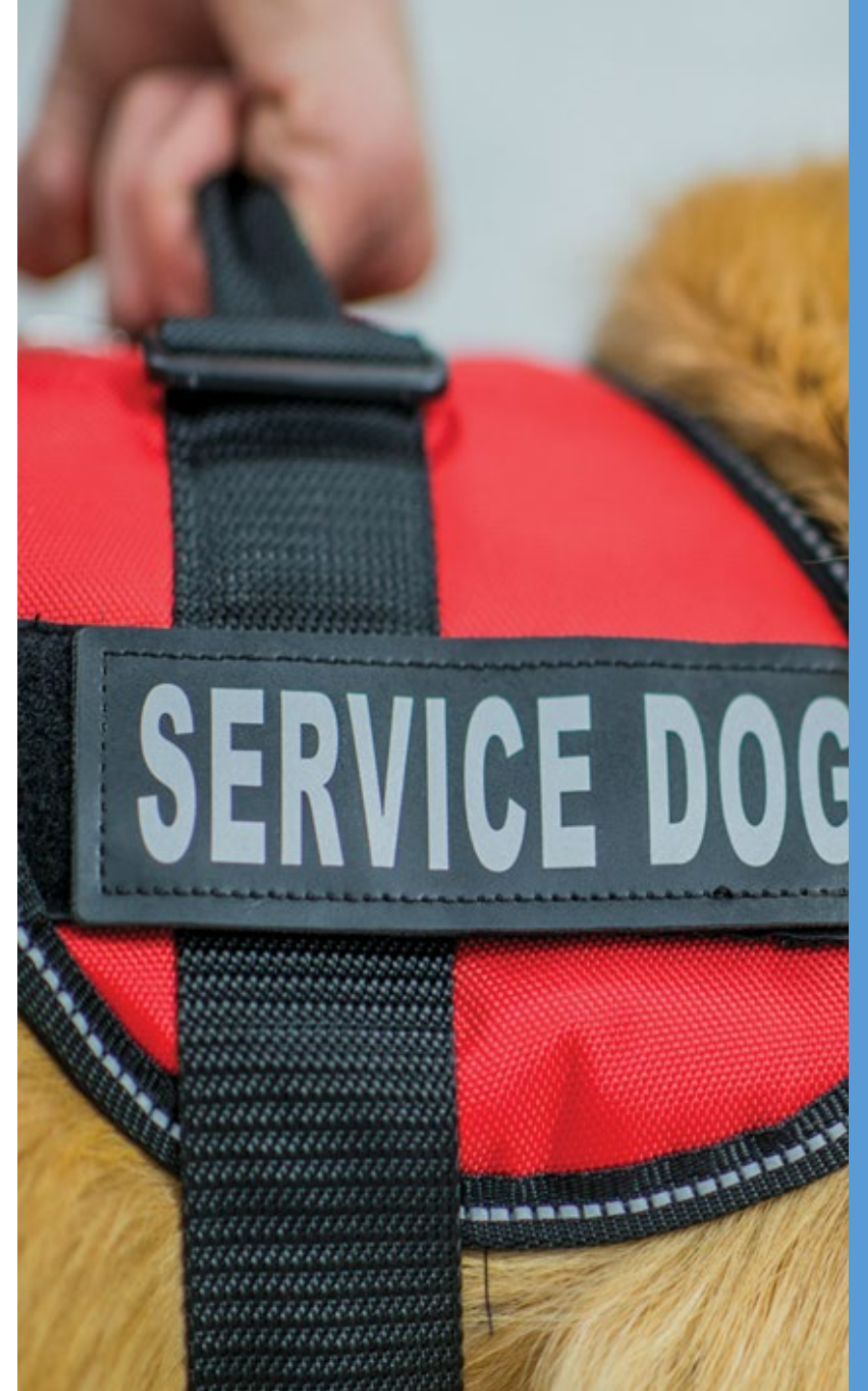
# 1. Be authentic and accountable

- Show true interest in participants' ideas and input.
- Be clear about how much influence participants have on decisions.
- Be open to all the results and follow through on commitments.



## 2. Build real relationships with communities

- Build trusting and respectful relationships by setting aside time and resources to engage with communities. You may have to reach out multiple times.
- Share power with communities; work together to make sure the public engagement benefits everyone.





### 3. Account for differences within communities

You could have six people in a room who need ASL interpretation, but that doesn't mean their experiences are identical. Some members of the group might be racialized, and some might have mental health disabilities, for example.



# 4. Plan early and actively

- Plan for accessibility from the beginning.
- Think about the visible, invisible, and unexpected barriers, and be adaptable to new needs.
- Make sure people can easily participate without having to ask for assistance.





## 5. Learn and improve

Making public engagement accessible to everyone is a process, not a destination. There will always be ways we can improve access as we learn more about diversity and inclusion, and about meeting a full range of human needs.

# Impact of accessible engagement

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# Reflection

**What stood out from these stories?**



# Section 4: How can you put the principles into action?



# The five accessible engagement principles

- 1. Be authentic and accountable.**
- 2. Build real relationships with communities.**
- 3. Account for differences within communities.**
- 4. Plan early and actively.**
- 5. Learn and improve.**



# Practising the principles

## Scenario 1

**Your organization is making renovations to a building. How do you get public input on accessibility considerations for the new space?**

# Practising the principles

## Scenario 1 - Suggestions

- Engage the public early in the planning and design process/meetings
- Use photos and/or virtual tours of spaces to better inform and include the public
- Also offer in-person tours

Topics to discuss could include

- Explaining/promoting awareness of changes and why they are important
- Directional signage
- Online and in-person plans





# Practising the principles

## Scenario 2

**Your organization is developing a new program for youth.  
How do you get input from youth with disabilities?**

# Practising the principles

## Scenario 2 - Suggestions

- Build trust by building relationships
- Ensure there is youth representation on any committees
- Work through the school system
- Meet youth where they are - engage them on platforms they use, make the effort to know what those are
- Appoint youth to staff positions to ensure you have their voice at the table all the time
- Listen authentically - don't make decisions FOR people
- Provide an honorarium



# Practising the principles

## Scenario 3

**Your organization wants to improve the accessibility of your website. How do you engage persons with disabilities in this process?**

# Practising the principles

## Scenario 3 - Suggestions

- Test and gather/incorporate feedback
- Account for differences in community
- Ensure first voice representation to help guide the process (planning early, different ways to collect feedback, building real relationships with community)
- Ensure there are different ways to engage
- Have a feedback button for continuous improvement



# Practising the principles

## Scenario 4

**Your organization is looking to fill two spaces on a committee or board. How do you engage persons with disabilities who have not been previously involved with your organization?**

# Practising the principles

## Scenario 4 - Suggestions

- Be clear in what you hope to achieve at an event; share experiences with attendees and lay out what you want them to do
- Offer food at in-person events
- Open house community events
- Recruit from staff, clients, and outreach to groups that represent persons with disabilities



# Practising the principles

## Scenario 5

**You've recently gone out to your stakeholders/community for feedback on an upcoming initiative. You heard from a very small number of persons with disabilities. How can you be sure you've heard from enough people to have a true first voice perspective?**

# Practising the principles

## Scenario 5 - Suggestions

- Reach out to the community or other partners to expand reach
- Make a commitment to review feedback and evaluate progress
- Build check-ins for accountability
- Make the feedback public - provide progress reports on feedback provided and actions taken





# Opportunities to improve

**What are some ways you can improve your practices, mindset, and approaches when engaging with persons with disabilities?**



# Reflection

**One thing I'm taking away from this webinar is...**

**Something I want to try...**

**Thank you!**

Contact us at  
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