



Accessible Remote Learning and Training Guidelines

Under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), the York Region District School Board (YRDSB or the Board) is required to make all web content accessible and “provide educational or training resources or materials in an accessible format that takes into account the accessibility needs due to a disability” ([Ontario Regulation 191/11, s. 15](#)).

This means that all remote, online and/or virtual learning and training must be accessible. Remote and synchronous learning platforms must be accessible as mandated under [Policy/Program Memorandum No. 164](#) (PPM 164): Requirements for Remote Learning.

Consider the following guidelines so that people with and without disabilities can access remote, online and virtual learning and training environments in a meaningful way:

1. [Proactively meet the duty to accommodate](#)
2. [Use an accessible online platform](#)
3. [Share relevant materials in advance](#)
4. [Display information purposely and meaningfully](#)
5. [Request feedback from participants](#)

A quick reference version of these guidelines are available on page 5 as an [Accessible Remote Learning and Training Checklist](#).

I. Proactively meet the duty to accommodate

Seek accommodation needs without assumptions

Always ask all participants to communicate any accommodation needs before hosting an online learning or training session. Identifying accommodation needs ahead of time should be a regular practice for ensuring that your duty to accommodate can be appropriately met.

Never assume participants will not have any accommodations needs, even if you believe you know all the participants. Disability covers a wide range of circumstances or conditions that can be acquired, temporary or situational. It is important to recognize the fluid nature of both disabilities and the type of accommodations required for equitable participation.

Include an accommodation statement

An effective way to identify accommodation needs is by including an accommodation statement in any registration forms (e.g., Google Forms) and/or in any emails communications leading up to the online learning or training session. The following accommodation statement, adapted from the Board's Careers page, may be used as a template:

Please inform us if you have any accommodation needs regarding this online learning/training session. We are committed to providing appropriate accommodation based on any protected grounds under the Human Rights Code and consistent with the principles of dignity, individualization and inclusion.

Consult directly with the accommodation seeker

For any participant who makes an accommodation request, consult directly with that participant to provide the most appropriate accommodation in a way that respects their dignity, responds to individualized needs and best promotes inclusion.

Follow the principles of accommodation

Throughout any accommodation process, be mindful of the three principles that are central to the duty to accommodate:

1. **Respect for dignity:** Accommodation must be provided in the way that best respects the dignity of the learner or participant;
2. **Individualization:** Each accommodation request must be considered based on the individual need(s), and not based on generalizing different types of disability; and
3. **Integration and full participation:** Online learning and training environments must be designed inclusively to allow the active participation of learners or participants with accommodation needs.

2. Use an accessible online platform

The built-in accessibility features of online or virtual meeting platforms can support various accommodation needs. All of the Board-approved online platforms support screen readers, screen magnifications and keyboard accessibility.

At this time, [Google Meet](#) is the only online meeting platform to offer automatic live captions (that display the speaker's words in real-time). However, it should be noted that automatic

captions features do not caption speech with 100% accuracy. As a best practice, a professional captionist should be retained for online learning or training sessions when possible.

Did You Know?

You can [present Google Slides with automatic captions](#). This feature allows you to show automatic captions (for your voice only) in Presenter View when sharing your screen on any virtual meeting platform.¹

The benefits of having captions available to learners and participants include (but are not limited to):

- Essential for many participants who are deaf or hard of hearing;
- Supports participants with learning disabilities related to difficulties processing speech or auditory components of visual media;
- Supports participants who are English language learners;
- Helps students with word identification, meaning, acquisition and retention; and
- A solution for poor audio quality or sound-related technical difficulties.

Become familiar with the accessibility features available within the online meeting platform you are using, and be ready to share them with learners and participants as a regular practice.

3. Share relevant materials in advance

Distributing information and materials (e.g., agendas or slide decks) to all participants in advance of the online learning or training session is a proactive way to provide alternative formats. It is similar to providing printed work booklets or information packages at in-person learning or training sessions.

Sharing relevant materials in advance also gives participants the opportunity to:

- Review materials at their own pace,
- Prepare any questions they may have in advance, and
- Leave the online meeting with take-away materials for future reference.

¹¹ When using Google Slides closed captions, it is recommended to inform your audience or participants that the captions are automatically generated by Google Slides, not the video conferencing software, and that only the presenter's voice is captioned.

4. Display information purposefully and meaningfully

When opting to share or present your screen during an online learning or training session, keep in mind that not all participants may have the ability to view your screen (e.g., due to any visual impairments, technical issues or participants who phone in).

Information displayed on your screen should have a clear purpose and should be accessible to all participants in a meaningful way.

5. Request feedback from participants

After an online learning or training session, provide the opportunity for participants to share feedback. Accessibility is a learning process, and asking for feedback is a way to empirically determine your level of success with meeting accommodation needs and identify ways to improve moving forward.

Creating and asking participants to complete a [Google Form](#) is a simple way to collect and review feedback. Alternatively, a [Customer Service Feedback Form](#) is available on the BWW for use by staff to gather feedback related to any Board services.

Thank you for taking the time to include accessibility into your remote learning and training environments!

General questions related to accessibility and/or barrier removal should be directed to the Board's Accessibility Officer at aoda@yrdsb.ca.

The Accessible Remote Learning and Training Guidelines is available in alternative formats, upon request.

External References

Described and Captioning Media Program [DCMP]. (2020). [Caption it Yourself](#).

Google Help Center. (2020). [Present slides with captions](#).

Ministry of Education. (2020, August 13, 2020). [Policy/Program Memorandum No. 164](#).

Partnership on Employment and Accessible Technology [PEAT]. (2020, April 10). [How to Pick an Accessible Virtual Meeting Platform](#).



Accessible Remote Learning and Training Checklist

Proactively meet the duty to accommodate

- ☐ Ask all participants to communicate any accommodation needs ahead of time.
- ☐ Include an accommodation statement in any registration forms or emails communications.
- ☐ Consult directly with any participant who makes an accommodation request.
- ☐ Follow the principles of accommodation (i.e., dignity, individualization, full participation).

Use an accessible online platform

- ☐ Become familiar with the accessibility features available within the online meeting platform.
- ☐ Share accessibility features with learners and participants as a regular practice.
- ☐ Include live captions as a best practice.

Share relevant materials in advance

- ☐ Distribute information and materials to all participants in advance as alternative formats.

Display information purposefully and meaningfully

- ☐ Have a clear purpose for displaying information in your shared screen.
- ☐ Verbally explain or reference all visual information (for those who cannot view your screen).

Request feedback from participants

- ☐ Provide the opportunity for participants to share feedback.
- ☐ Use a [Google Form](#) or [Customer Service Feedback Form](#) to collect and review feedback.