

Issued: June 17, 2011
Revised: November 1, 2012
Reviewed: January 1, 2015, January 1, 2016, January 1, 2017, January 1, 2018, January 1, 2019

Introduction

The Stratford Festival has a long-established practice of providing high levels of customer service to its patrons. We strive for excellence on all four of our stages; the experience that a patron encounters when interacting with employees and volunteers - whether on the phone, through written communication, or in-person - also needs to meet this high standard.

The Festival aspires to extend this level of customer service to all patrons, including those with a disability. Many changes to our programs, facilities, and services in recent years have helped to improve our ability to serve patrons with disabilities.

The Festival is committed to providing reasonable accommodation to its patrons with disabilities. The Festival is also dedicated to continuous improvement, and will continue to evolve its practices in this regard.

Definitions

“**Disability**” as defined by the *Ontario Human Rights Code* as,

- (a) any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device,
- (b) a condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability,
- (c) a learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language,
- (d) a mental disorder, or
- (e) an injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997*; (“handicap”).

“**Access**” means that the Festival is committed to making its premises and services available to patrons with a disability by removing barriers, and in a manner that embraces the principles of dignity, independence, integration and equal opportunity.

“Dignity” means that service is provided in a way that allows the person with a disability to maintain self-respect and the respect of other people.

“Independence” means when a person with a disability is allowed to do things on their own, without unnecessary help or interference from others.

“Integration and Equal Opportunity” means that service is provided in a way that allows the person with a disability to benefit from the same services, in the same place, and in the same or similar way as other customers, unless an alternate measure is necessary to enable a person with disability to access goods or services. They should not have to make significantly more effort to access or obtain service. They should also not have to accept inconvenience or lesser quality. Sometimes this may mean that the Festival has to treat individuals slightly differently so that they can benefit fully from the services.

Accessible Patron Services

In demonstration of the Festival’s commitment to accessibility, an Accessibility Committee was established in 2007 with a mandate of:

1. Creating, monitoring, and amending policies relating to accessibility;
2. Identifying areas where the Festival may improve its buildings and services for patrons with disabilities;
3. Advocating for changes to policies, practices and facilities to further assist patrons with disabilities;
4. Making recommendations for capital spending in order to facilitate improvements to buildings or services;
5. Keeping abreast of new legislation and best practices in the area of serving patrons with disabilities; and,
6. Researching and reviewing new technologies and assistive devices as they become available.

The Festival recognizes that the provision of fully accessible services in accessible facilities is a process that is under constant review and improvement. Feedback on any aspect of the accessibility program at the Festival is encouraged from employees, volunteers and patrons, and will be reviewed and embraced by the Accessibility Committee.

ASSISTIVE DEVICES & SERVICES

A - 02

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Policy:

The Stratford Festival is committed to serving patrons with disabilities, and ensuring that those who use assistive devices will benefit from enjoying a fulfilling experience at the Festival.

Procedures:

The Festival will ensure that all employees and volunteers are aware of the various assistive devices provided by the Festival that may be used by visitors with disabilities while accessing our programs, products and services. Assistive devices are devices that are used to assist persons with disabilities in carrying out activities or in accessing the services of persons or organizations.

The Festival currently provides the following to assist our patrons with disabilities while attending a theatre performance:



- Wheelchairs are available to borrow, on a first come first serve basis and are located in the First Aid Room in each theatre. Patrons are to see an Usher or House Manager.
- Our theatres offer wireless, assistive listening radio frequency receivers which are available to borrow at no charge. Guests are encouraged to bring their own ear-buds/headphones for optimal performance though we do have a limited number of headsets to loan out. Our listening devices are also compatible with t-coil equipped hearing aids and cochlear implants. To ensure availability, please reserve your listening assistive device at the time of booking your ticket. Voluntary donations are gladly accepted at the time of pick to help support all of our accessible programs.
- Motorized door controls on barrier-free exterior doors in all buildings
- Elevators in all multi-level, public use buildings
- Special access parking; spaces at our Festival theatre may be reserved in advance at the time of ticket purchase
- Special access and companion seats, which need to be reserved at the time of ticket purchase
- Special access washrooms with assistive bars
- Hand railings in all theatres
- Braille House programs, which may be borrowed from the Coat Check (Festival Theatre) or House Manager (all other theatres) after the opening of the production(s).
- Magnifying sheets (to assist in reading house programs or other materials), may be borrowed from the Coat Check (Festival Theatre) or House Manager (all other theatres)

Festival employees and volunteers can assist patrons in locating and using assistive devices upon request.


The Festival also welcomes patrons who bring their own assistive devices (canes, wheelchairs, walkers, service dogs etc.) and provides accessible eating areas and theatre seating. Due to fire regulations and space limitations, large assistive devices (eg. walkers) will be stored outside of the auditorium during performances. Employees will assist in storage and retrieval of assistive devices. The Festival is not responsible for any lost/damaged items if they are stored during a performance.


Additional Assistive Services

The Festival contracts bus companies to provide direct round-trip transportation to Stratford from Toronto daily throughout the performance season. Patrons requiring accessible bus transportation need to reserve this in advance, and request an accessible vehicle at the time of reservation.

The Festival provides a live audio description service for patrons who are blind or have low vision on select performance. These performance dates are marked on the performance calendar with a  symbol. On selected audio description dates, the Festival provides touch tours to enhance your experience. An audio describer will lead you through a tour in which you'll be able to touch and handle fabrics, props and costume items for the play you are about to see. To book a tour, please contact the Box Office at 1-800-567-1600. These tour dates are marked on the performance calendar with a  symbol.

The Festival offers American Sign Language interpreted performances on selected dates for patrons who are deaf or deafened and communicate using ASL. These performance dates are

marked on the performance calendar with an  symbol.

The Festival offers Open Captioned  performances on selected dates for patrons who are deaf or hard of hearing who may benefit from captioning technology to enhance or replace the spoken dialogue and sound effects.

The Festival is committed to researching and implementing additional assistive devices as technology evolves and additional solutions become available.

COMMUNICATION

A - 03

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Policy:

The Stratford Festival's customer service policies and procedures take a person's disability into account when communicating with the individual. Two-way communications is a process of providing, sending, receiving and understanding information. To communicate in an effective way, Festival employees and volunteers consider how the disability affects the way that the person expresses, receives or processes communications. Where possible, the Festival employee or volunteer asks the patron directly the best way to communicate with him/her.

Procedures:

The Festival uses a variety of ways, wherever possible, to make communications more accessible by:

- Considering the needs of people with disabilities during the planning stage of services and communication development.
- Using plain language to make a document easier to read for people with certain learning disabilities.
- Offering information in alternate formats:
 - Passing hand-written or typed information back and forth;
 - Braille house programs;
 - Printed hand-outs of commonly used information;
 - Magnifying sheets for reading;
 - Email as an alternate channel to provide accessible communication.

The Festival is continuing to research new technologies and is committed to improving the communications options available to patrons with disabilities.

SERVICE ANIMALS

A - 04

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Service Animals

Policy:

The Stratford Festival is committed to welcoming patrons with disabilities who are accompanied by a trained, accredited service animal. A service animal may accompany a patron or any third party with a disability to all parts of the premises that are open to the public. Service animals may be used for, but not limited to, the following disabilities: vision loss, physical disability, hearing loss, autism, epilepsy etc. Although service animals are most commonly dogs, other service animals could include, but are not limited to, ferrets, monkeys or other animals. The Festival ensures that all employees, 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.

Procedures:

To be considered a service animal under this standard, it must either be readily apparent that the animal is designated and trained as a service animal. The person with a disability may be asked to provide a letter from a regulated health professional confirming that it is required because of his or her disability. The Festival enforces a general policy that does not permit pets inside the auditorium, however, service animals are exempted as they are considered working animals. They are used by people with disabilities to overcome barriers much like assistive devices like a white cane or a wheelchair.

Guide dogs or other service animals, including service animals in training, are allowed to accompany people with disabilities on the Festival premises in areas that are open to the public. If a patron with a service animal is intending to see a performance he/she needs to advise the Box Office representative when purchasing tickets so that an appropriate seat (aisle or special access) may be assigned. The House Manager and Stage Manager of the performance will also be advised that a service animal will be in the theatre.

At times, due to capacity, patrons with disabilities, accompanied by service animals may be advised that the crowded conditions may make it difficult to manoeuvre. If the service animal is causing a disturbance for other visitors, the patron and accompanying service dog may be required to leave the area or the Festival premises.

The owner is responsible to "stoop and scoop".

Patrons bringing a service animal need to review any patron advisories about special effects that are in a production that may affect their service animal (eg. noise, lights, other animals, etc.)

This information may not be known at the time of booking, but can be confirmed by the box office staff and/or on site staff closer to the date of the performance. The Festival anticipates there will be special situations and is prepared to make every effort to accommodate the circumstances on an individual basis, as they arise, keeping safety to all patrons and service animals in mind.

For more information, patrons may contact our Box Office staff at 1-800-567-1600, or speak directly to an onsite staff member when they visit our premises.

SUPPORT PERSONS

A - 05

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Policy:

The Stratford Festival is committed to welcoming patrons with disabilities who are accompanied by a support person. Any person with a disability who is accompanied by a support person is allowed to enter the Festival's premises with their support person. At no time will a person with a disability who is accompanied by a support person be prevented from having access to their support person while on the Festival premises.

A support person is an individual hired or chosen by a person with a disability to provide services or assistance with communication, mobility, personal care, medical needs or with access to goods or services.

Procedures:

Each patron with a disability and their accompanying a support person attending a performance or event is required to have a valid ticket to that performance or event. Admission prices will be charged for both attendees based on the location of the seating section chosen.

Complimentary admission for one support person accompanying a patron with a valid CNIB card or an Access2Entertainment card will be granted. Any additional requests will be considered on a case by case by basis by the Festival.

Should the Festival **require** that a person with a disability be accompanied by a support person for health and safety reasons, complimentary admission for the support person will be provided. The Festival would consult with the patron in advance and determine if the health and safety of the individual could be protected by alternate means.

Patrons may contact the Festival box office at 1-800-567-1600 or orders@stratfordfestival.ca for more information, or to request that their situation be considered.

TEMPORARY DISRUPTION OF SERVICE

A - 06

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Policy:

The Stratford Festival is aware that temporary disruptions of services (daily functions – elevators, physical operations) and programs may occur due to reasons that may or may not be within the Festival’s control or knowledge. These disruptions of service may be particularly challenging for patrons with a disability.

The Festival will make all reasonable efforts to provide advance notice of the disruption to the public, including information about the reason for the disruption, its anticipated duration and a description of alternative facilities or services, if any, that may be available.

Procedures:

Advance notice of a disruption of services will be made, if possible, through the following communication channels, as appropriate:

- The Festival’s website: www.stratfordfestival.ca
- Temporary on-site signage
- Social Media (eg. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)

In the event of an unexpected disruption, advance notice may not be possible. In such cases, the Festival will provide on-site signage.

Staff and volunteers will be kept informed through pre-shift meetings, emails, and the Intranet as appropriate.

Patrons with a disability who are inconvenienced, or cannot access the Festival premises due to a temporary disruption of service should speak to a Box Office representative or House Manager for assistance and accommodation.

FEEDBACK

A - 07

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Policy:

The Stratford Festival values feedback from its patrons and has established processes in place to receive and respond to such feedback. The Festival welcomes feedback from patrons with disabilities about their experience at the Festival, and the quality of their interactions with Festival employees and volunteers.

Procedures:

Patrons with disabilities can offer their feedback in the following ways:

- Patron Feedback Forms available at all Box Office and Theatre Stores or through the House Manager at each theatre;
- Mail correspondence to: Audience Services, 55 Queen Street, P.O. Box 520, Stratford, ON N5A 6V2
- E-mail to guestservices@stratfordfestival.ca
- Telephone customer service at 1-800-561-1233, ext 5502
- In person to Festival staff, management or volunteers;

Patrons providing feedback will be asked to provide their name and contact information (phone, e-mail and/or address).

Once feedback is received, the following actions will be taken:

- The feedback will be directed to the appropriate person.
- The feedback will be assessed for appropriate action.
- A response, if required, will be made in a timely manner.

The feedback process is readily available to the public through:

- A notice on the web site;
- A sign in all theatre locations;

Accessible formats and communication supports are available upon request.

TRAINING

A - 08

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Policy:

The Stratford Festival provides training to all employees and volunteers on providing goods and services to visitors with disabilities. The Festival also ensures that contracted third parties who deal with the public, have the required AODA training.

Procedures:

Individuals in the following positions will be trained by the Festival:

- Board of Governors;
- All employees
- Volunteers.

Training on serving patrons with disabilities will supplement the larger training program, which includes basic orientation, training on effective communication, general customer service expectations, and specific Festival policies and procedures. A variety of training methods may be employed, including formal and informal training sessions, presentations, train the trainer, e-training, hand outs, fact sheets, and videos, depending on the type of position.

The training content, required by the Customer Service Standard, includes no less than the following:

- The Festival's commitment to access and customers with disabilities
- The history of the legislation and 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.
- How to use the assistive devices available on the Festival's premises or otherwise that may help with the provision of goods or services to people with disabilities.
- What to do if a person with a disability is having difficulty in accessing the Festival's goods and services.
- The Festival's policies and procedures relating to the customer service standard.
- On-going training in connection with any changes to the Festival's policies and procedures governing the provision of goods and services to people with disabilities is provided.

Training records are kept for staff and volunteers who have completed training and include the name, date and content. An evaluation process is in place for continuous improvement in

training content and delivery. New staff and volunteers receive training as soon as practicable, after an employee or volunteer commences their duties.

A sustainability plan for ongoing training has been developed and includes:

- Budget guidelines;
- Resources;
- Incorporating access into the orientation program;
- Training updates.

POSTING OF POLICIES

A - 09

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Policy:

Notices are posted, informing the public that the documents required by the Customer Service Standard are available upon request and will be provided in a format that takes a person's disability into account.

Procedures:

Documents are available through the following networks, as appropriate.

- Web site: www.stratfordfestival.ca
- Intranet (*Willpower*) and HR bulletin boards for staff and volunteers;
- At each theatre's Box office and House Manager's office
- From the Customer Service Coordinator at 1-800-561-1233, ext. 5502 or guestservices@stratfordfestival.ca

INTEGRATED ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS POLICY

A-10

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Introduction

The following policy has been established by the Stratford Festival to govern the provision of services with Regulation 191/11, “Integrated Accessibility Standards” (“Regulation”) under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*.

These standards are developed to break down barriers and increase accessibility for persons with disabilities in the areas of information and communications and employment.

The Stratford Festival is governed by this policy as well as the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service Policy and the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* in meeting the accessibility needs of persons with disabilities.

Commitment

The Stratford Festival is committed to treating all persons in a way that allows them to maintain their dignity and independence. We believe in integration and equal opportunity. We are committed to meeting the needs of persons with disabilities in a timely manner, and will do so by preventing and removing barriers to accessibility and meeting accessibility requirements, where possible, under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*.

This policy will be implemented in accordance with the time frames established by the Regulation. Please see the multi-year accessibility plan for implementation time frames, which fall between January 1, 2012 and January 1, 2021.

Accessibility Plan

The Stratford Festival will develop, maintain and document an Accessibility Plan outlining the organization’s strategy to prevent and remove barriers from its workplace and to improve access for persons with disabilities.

The Accessibility Plan will be reviewed and updated at least once every five years, and will be posted on the organization’s website. Upon request, The Stratford Festival will provide a copy of the Accessibility Plan in an accessible format.

Self-Service Kiosks

The Stratford Festival will have regard for accessibility criteria when designing, procuring or acquiring any new self-serve kiosks to better serve persons with disabilities.

Training Employees and Volunteers

The Stratford Festival will ensure that training is provided on the requirements of the accessibility standards referred to in the Regulation and continue to provide training on the *Human Rights Code* as it pertains to persons with disabilities, to:

- all of its employees and volunteers;
- all persons who participate in developing Stratford Festival's policies; and,
- all other persons who provide goods, services or facilities on behalf of the company

The training will be appropriate to the duties of the employees, volunteers and other persons. Employees will be trained when changes are made to the accessibility policy. New employees will be trained as soon as practicable after hiring.

The Stratford Festival will keep a record of the training it provides.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS STANDARDS

Feedback

The Stratford Festival will continue to ensure that its process for receiving and responding to feedback is accessible to persons with disabilities by arranging for the provision of accessible feedback formats and communication supports, upon request.

Accessible Formats and Communication Supports

Upon request, the Stratford Festival will provide, or will arrange for the provision of, accessible formats and communication supports for persons with disabilities in a timely manner that takes into account the person's accessibility needs due to disability.

The Stratford Festival will consult with the person making the request in determining the suitability of an accessible format or communication support.

The Stratford Festival will also notify the public about the availability of accessible formats and communication supports.

Accessible Websites and Web Content

The Stratford Festival will ensure that our Internet websites, including web content, conform to the World Wide Web Consortium Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0, at Level AA except where this is impracticable.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Recruitment

The Stratford Festival will notify its employees and the public about the availability of accommodation for applicants with disabilities in its recruitment process.

Recruitment, Assessment or Selection Process

The Stratford Festival will notify job applicants, when they are individually selected to participate further in an assessment or selection process that accommodations are available upon request in relation to the materials or processes to be used.

If a selected applicant requests an accommodation, the Stratford Festival will consult with the applicant and provide, or arrange for the provision of, a suitable accommodation in a manner that takes into account the applicant's accessibility needs due to disability.

Notice to Successful Applicants

When making offers of employment, the Stratford Festival will notify the successful applicant of its policies for accommodating employees with disabilities.

Informing Employees of Supports

The Stratford Festival will continue to inform its employees of its policies (and any updates to those policies) used to support employees with disabilities, including policies on the provision of job accommodations that take into account an employee's accessibility needs due to disability. This information will be provided to new employees as soon as practicable after commencing employment.

Accessible Formats and Communication Supports for Employees

Upon the request of an employee with a disability, the Stratford Festival will consult with the employee to provide, or arrange for the provision of, accessible formats and communication supports for information that is needed to perform his/her job, and information that is generally available to other employees.

In determining the suitability of an accessible format or communication support, the Stratford Festival will consult with the employee making the request.

Workplace Emergency Response Information

The Stratford Festival will provide individualized workplace emergency response information to employees who have a disability, if the disability is such that the individualized information is necessary, and if the Stratford Festival is aware of the need for accommodation due to the employee's disability. The Stratford Festival will provide this information as soon as practicable after becoming aware of the need for accommodation.

Where the employee requires assistance, the Stratford Festival will, with the consent of the employee, provide the workplace emergency response information to the person(s) designated by The Stratford Festival to provide assistance to the employee.

The Stratford Festival will review the individualized workplace emergency response information when the employee moves to a different location in the organization, when the employee's overall accommodations needs or plans are reviewed.

Documented Individual Accommodation Plans

The Stratford Festival will maintain a written process for the development of documented individual accommodation plans for employees with disabilities. If requested, information regarding accessible formats and communications supports provided will also be included in individual accommodation plans. In addition, the plans will include individualized workplace emergency response information (where required), and will identify any other accommodation that is to be provided.

Return to Work Process

The Stratford Festival maintains a documented return to work process for its employees who have been absent from work due to a disability and who require disability-related accommodations in order to return to work. The return to work process outlines the steps the Stratford Festival will take to facilitate the return to work and will include documented individual accommodation plans as part of the process.

This return to work process will not replace or override any other return to work process created by or under any other statute (ie. the *Workplace Safety Insurance Act, 1997*).

Performance Management, Career Development & Redeployment

The Stratford Festival will take into account the accessibility needs of employees with disabilities, as well as individual accommodation plans, when conducting performance management, providing career development and advancement to employees, or when redeploying employees.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT STANDARD

The Stratford Festival will meet the Accessibility Standards for the Design of Public Spaces when building new public areas, or making modifications to public spaces. Public spaces applicable to the Stratford Festival include:

- Accessible off street parking
- Exterior paths of travel
- Service counters

The Stratford Festival will ensure that any disruption to accessible public spaces and service related elements will be clearly outline through signage, the Festival's website, and social media. Alternatives to accessible features and services will be provided if possible.

Questions about this policy

This policy has been developed to break down barriers and increase accessibility for persons with disabilities in the areas of information and communications and employment. If anyone has a question about the policy, or if the purpose of a policy is not understood, please contact:

Human Resources

519 271-4040 ext 2360

humanresources@stratfordfestival.ca