# Our Doors Are Open Guide to Accessible Congregations Workshop Video Transcript

1.65 Million Ontarians have a disability.

Many are not having their needs met because of barriers to participation at their places of worship

So let’s start opening our doors

With support from the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility, Our Doors Are Open Project was developed by the Inclusive Design Research Centre at OCAD University with a multi-faith team of experts who have lived experience of disabilities.

Hello, and Welcome to this Our Doors are Open Workshop video.

Before you begin, be sure to have the Our Doors Are Open Guide for Accessible Congregations.

You can view it on our web site or download it at opendoors.idrc.ocadu.ca/guide-for-accessible-congregation/

With this training video and the Our Doors are Open Guide, we offer diverse faith communities simple and creative ideas to increase inclusion and accessibility for people with disabilities in worship services, events and community activities.

This Workshop enables communities to:

* Recognize barriers that prevent the full participation of people with disabilities;
* Brainstorm simple and creative solutions to remove these barriers; and
* Welcome and fully include people with disabilities in their community.
* By the end of this video, you will:
* Be able to describe one or more welcoming qualities of your community
* Name one or more ways people with disabilities can actively participate in your community
* Have a plan for action

Think about what is meant by welcoming.

Remember a time you felt welcomed or of your first day in your faith community:

* What made you feel welcome?
* What keeps you coming back?

If you are a group then share your answers

(pause the video for more time)

Inclusive thinking means:

keeping the diversity and uniqueness of each individual in mind. The needs of individuals with disabilities are very diverse so a mass solution does not work well; people need options and flexible solutions.

changing habits and behaviours.

Your community may need to consciously bring inclusive thinking into all activities before these inclusive habits are developed.

Getting to know what you need to think about to be inclusive can be easier than you expect.

We recommend as a first strategy a very simple approach:

Just ask. Just listen.

To start making your faith community more accessible, you’ll need to follow three steps. We’re going to go through all these steps in order. You can follow along on page 12 of your guide.

The first one is: Form an Inclusion Committee

An Inclusion Committee is made up of the community’s champions for accessibility and inclusion.

A good Inclusion Committee should:

* Meet regularly, at least three times per year.
* Discuss the needs of the members with disabilities.
* Plan ways to change the space and their practices in order to improve access.
* Find (and take steps to repair) areas that have challenges for people with disabilities.
* Develop short- and long-term financial and organizational plans so that the community can welcome as many people with diverse needs as possible.

The second step in getting organized is: Identify barriers

You can follow along on page 13 of your guide.

Identifying and removing barriers is a key step in the inclusion process.

Pause the video and take a look at the Our Doors Are Open Accessibility checklist on pages 14-16 of the guide. Your Inclusion Committee should review these features.

The third step in getting organized is: Make a plan.

You can follow along on page 17 of your guide.

* Your committee can review the items on the checklist marked as “not yet” and decide which can be remedied simply and quickly, and which will need more time and resources.
* Select the order that you want to address each item. You may want to start with the easier ones and just one of the items that will take more resources.
* For each item, determine what resources (people, material, money) you will need and how you will get them.
* Have a short-term and long-term plan that will let you address each of the items. Your short-term plan should have more details and specific dates. Your long-term plan may have step by step goals like setting aside funds or applying for grants.

Your community may unwittingly exclude people with disabilities, because many traditions and environments have been designed without considering the needs of people with disabilities. Even when we know better, we can still be exclusive because we have not fully integrated inclusive thinking into the design of our traditions, activities, and spaces.

We suggest you start with shifting attitudes. You can follow along in the Getting Down to Work section on page 18 of the guide.

There are many ways to change attitudes and to promote the participation of people with disabilities, here are some ideas:

* Listen to the needs of people with disabilities in your community.
* Let people with disabilities volunteer on a flexible schedule or in pairs.
* Think about what functions are required to participate like standing, seeing, hearing, reaching, writing or reading and think about alternatives like putting items within reach or using a tablet with large font or a screen reader

Next, consider how to improve your communications. We have tips on page 22 of the guide.

Communication is a process of providing, sending, receiving, and understanding information. A person’s disability may affect the way that the person expresses, receives, or processes communication.

* Think about what might help someone who has vision loss, hearing loss, or a learning disability to understand it. For example, using large print for someone with vision loss.
* Use clear fonts and contrasting colours for any documents.
* Project text, provide tablet computers and install hearing systems to accommodate more members.
* Finally, consider how to make your facilities accessible. You can read more on page 25 of the guide.

Physical accessibility is often the most addressed aspect of the needs of the disability community, but accessibility does not end with ramps for wheelchair users. Consider how people are going to arrive at, move through and experience your space.

* Provide information about accessible parking and wheelchair access.
* Make your indoor and outdoor pathways free of barriers.
* Provide inclusive, clear, high-contrast signage.
* Check the acoustics and have quiet conversation areas
* Indicate the location of accessible bathrooms.
* Provide a sensory room with dim lighting.

Once you have an active Inclusion Committee you are well on your way. Here’s what you can do next.

* Make an active effort to welcome people with disabilities to your community.
* Let people know that inclusion and accessibility is a priority in your community.
* Build relationships with people with disabilities.

You can learn strategies for reaching out on Page 28 of the guide.

There are many different ways to reach out to people with varied abilities some of which are listed here:

* Make a statement in your community bulletins or newsletters
* Invite people with disabilities through social media
* Have a section on your website that details your accessibility features and commitment to inclusion
* Host an accessibility mapathons
* Contact disability organizations to invite new members

Thank you for taking the time to open your doors with us, and best of luck on your new inclusive journey.

For more help moving forward with some of the topics we’ve discussed today, or to get more information on methods and ideas, visit our website: opendoors.ocadu.ca