

[HOME](#)[WHAT'S NEW](#)[CALENDAR](#)[PRODUCTS](#)[NEWS RELEASES](#)

Accessibility Plan 2005-2006

Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

TABLE OF CONTENTS

[Introduction](#)[Message from the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs](#)[Report on Achievements of 2004-2005 Planning Commitments](#)[Commitments and Strategies for 2005-2006](#)[For More Information](#)

INTRODUCTION

The recent passage of the landmark Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 marks a new era of accessibility in Ontario. This legislation will make Ontario one of the world leaders in improving accessibility for people with disabilities.

While the government is moving forward to implement the new legislation, there will be a transition period during which government and parts of the broader public sector will continue to have planning and other obligations under the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001 (ODA). These obligations will remain in effect until they are repealed and replaced by standards under the new act.

Under the ODA, Ontario government ministries, municipalities, hospitals, school boards, colleges, universities and public transportation organizations are required to develop annual accessibility plans to make policies, practices, programs, services and buildings more accessible to people with disabilities. These plans must be made available to the public. Accessibility planning efforts to date have developed a strong foundation for the development of accessibility standards that will ensure real and effective change.

This document is the third annual accessibility plan developed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. It highlights achievements of the 2004-05 plan and outlines commitments for 2005-06 so that no new barriers are created and, over time, existing ones are removed.

This ministry intends to build on its achievements by implementing initiatives that support the government's efforts and commitment to continue to make Ontario an inclusive and accessible province, where people of all abilities have a chance to fully participate and achieve their potential.

MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS



I am pleased to present the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs' Accessibility Plan for 2005-2006.

All public sector and broader public sector organizations are required by law to have an annual accessibility plan and to make it available to the public. This is the third year in which plans have been written and are being implemented by organizations such as ours across the province.

This year marked the passage of the landmark Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, and a new era in accessibility. This legislation will make Ontario a world leader in improving accessibility for people with disabilities. The Ontario government continues to take a leadership role in identifying, removing and preventing barriers, and improving accessibility through a participatory, proactive and integrated approach that spans the priorities of customer service, employment, communications and information, and the built environment.

Here at the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, we are building on the success of our previous two plans and continuing to move forward to ensure that there is progress in meeting the needs of persons with disabilities who come into contact with this ministry regardless of whether they are staff, members of the general public or ministry stakeholders.

This ministry has worked diligently to put processes into place to better educate staff with regard to accessibility. Examples of this work include providing staff with the tools they need to ensure that ministry and stakeholder meetings are accessible, providing front-line staff with the knowledge required so that persons with disabilities get the same level of service as those without disabilities and ensuring that alternate formats of ministry products and publications are available upon request. This is a snap-shot of some of the work that has gone on in the past year. The pages that follow provide more examples and more detail.

This year's plan has been organized into four categories: customer service, employment, communications and information, and the built environment. If you have any comments on this year's plan, please send them using the contact information located at the end of this document.

Sincerely,

Leona Dombrowsky
Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

REPORT ON ACHIEVEMENTS OF 2004-2005 PLANNING COMMITMENTS

The ministry is pleased to report on the achievements for 2003-2004. We have moved forward on our accessibility commitments in many areas. You will note that our commitments are ongoing to ensure that accessibility continues to be considered in the delivery of quality public service. The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) was successful in achieving, and in some cases, surpassing, planned commitments outlined in its 2004-05 Accessibility Plan. The following section provides a status report.

1. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to supporting ongoing compliance with the Ontarians with Disabilities Act and improving accessibility for people with disabilities through the work of the Accessibility Planning Work Group (APWG).

Status: Ongoing

Action and Timeframe: The ministry expanded the number of participants on the APWG. The group includes staff with disabilities and those who have expertise in disability issues. Detailed action plans with short-term and medium-term targets were developed by the working group for each of the commitments outlined in the plan. Where warranted under the commitments, processes, tools and plans were developed or implemented to address accessibility (i.e., procurement practices, barrier free report).

An executive champion worked closely with the group to provide advice and act as liaison with senior management. Quarterly meetings were held and updates provided on the progress made toward annual commitments. The working group developed and participated in two education and awareness events to provide insight into disability issues for ministry staff and to increase its own knowledge.

2. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to conducting a review of accessibility issues in its locations across the province.

Status: Ongoing

Action and Timeframe: As a first step to increasing accessibility generally in its locations across the province, the ministry reviewed the new guidelines for barrier free access released in November 2004 by the Ontario Realty Corporation (ORC). With the assistance of the ORC, OMAFRA developed a checklist for barrier-free access, which included emergency evacuation and signage, for its 14 locations across the province. The ministry then conducted a review of all locations with public access. As a result, a report was prepared listing specific barriers which need to be addressed. Priority areas requiring attention will be included in the ministry's 2006-2007 infrastructure plan.

3. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to continuing its practice of considering accessibility issues in its collaborations with other ministries.

Status: Ongoing

Action and Timeframe: The ministry is co-located with different ministries at a number of its 14 locations with public access across Ontario. A checklist for barrier-free access was prepared with the assistance of the ORC and applied to these locations to guide the review. The ministry's Facilities Management Unit will lead the review with ORC and other co-located ministry's to determine accountabilities and near-term vs long-term actions.

In addition, the ministry also collaborated to identify physical barriers to accessibility at the Guelph head office through a building user committee.

The ministry collaborated with the Land and Resources Cluster of ministries to start the process of selecting a new information technology web content management system. The system's ability to ensure barrier-free access to persons with disabilities will be an important requirement in choosing the new system.

4. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to continuing its work with its agencies, boards and commissions (ABCs) to assist them in becoming compliant with the ODA.

Status: Ongoing

Action and Timeframe: The ministry's commitment to inform and build awareness of accessibility issues resulted in leads being identified to act as a liaison with three of the ministry's largest scheduled ABCs: AGRICORP, Ontario Farm Products Marketing Commission, and the Ontario Farm and Rural Affairs Appeal Tribunal. Since each of these ABCs are located at the 1 Stone Road complex, many of the built environment accessibility issues are dealt with through ORC and OMAFRA's facilities management unit.

In order to address other accessibility issues, members of the accessibility planning working group developed a presentation to be used at board meetings. Staff of each ABC committed to provide an overview of accessibility issues to their respective board members.

In addition, a staff member from the Appeal's Tribunal sits on the ministry's APWG and has worked to develop the guideline under the commitment noted below.

5. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to develop a procedural guideline to support the planning of public meetings and stakeholder consultations.

Status: Ongoing

Action and Timeframe: Ministry managers were updated on the ODA plan during the October 1st, 2004 Managers' Forum. The need to ensure public meetings and stakeholder consultations were accessible to all members of the public was highlighted.

Subsequent to this meeting, the ministry, through its accessibility planning working group (APWG) committed to develop a guideline to ensure accessibility needs were considered when planning ministry-sponsored public meetings and stakeholder consultations. The Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration developed detailed guidelines which were reviewed and adapted by the APWG to address OMAFRA needs.

6. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to maintaining its practices of providing publications in accessible formats to members of the public and staff.

Status: Ongoing

Action and Timeframe: The ministry assigned a staff member to respond to requests for publications in alternative formats such as Braille and tape. To date, no requests have been received.

7. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to providing advice and direction to staff related to considering accessibility issues when procuring goods and services.

Status: Ongoing

Action and Timeframe: Following the release of the Guideline for Procurement, OMAFRA's finance committee reviewed the need to amend the procurement process to ensure that accessibility issues were considered for all major purchases over \$5,000. As a result of this review, an information meeting was held for all managers to brief them on the changes to the procurement process. Subsequently, the procurement control checklist was amended. Purchasers must now sign off that they have considered accessibility issues before the request can proceed.

8. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to continuing the practice of clearly identifying TTY numbers on publications.

Status: Ongoing.

Action and Timeframe: The ministry continued to fulfil its commitment by ensuring TTY numbers were included on all OMAFRA products that contained a toll-free number.

The ministry's TTY equipment has been relocated to the ministry's telecommunications unit and staff have been trained on its usage.

9. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to maintain its compliance with ODA requirements for all public facing Internet sites and internal staff intranet sites.

Status: Ongoing.

Action and Timeframe: The ministry is working with the Land and Resources Cluster of ministries to select a new web content management system. The system's ability to ensure barrier-free access to persons with disabilities will be addressed on an ongoing basis.

In the meantime, work continues to ensure full website compliance for accessibility using the appropriate protocols for both the public facing internet sites and the internal staff intranet sites.

10. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to conducting a full review of employment policies, processes, practices and tools to identify potential barriers to accessibility to people with disabilities.

Status: Ongoing.

Action and Timeframe: The ministry worked to ensure that human resources support staff acting as proctors during interviews for job competitions were prepared to respond to requests for accommodation in the interview process. No requests for accommodation for job interviews were made this past year.

Consultations are underway to adopt a Ministry of Labour practice of identifying accommodation to persons with disabilities as part of recruitment advertising.

The ministry will continue to review its employment policies, practices and tools to identify any new potential barriers.

The OPS Employment Accommodation Fund (EAF) is in place for people with disabilities. It reimburses ministries for the cost of providing eligible employment accommodations to all employees. The fund was promoted to managers, and as a result, two persons with disabilities accessed the fund.

There were a total of 96 requests for ergonomic assistance this past year. A total of 80 workstations were visited and received consultations including 17 visits by an external ergonomic service provider. Of these 80 workstation consultations, 29 were accommodation requests which resulted in providing workstation equipment and or accessories including alternative pointing devices, footrests and specifically sized and/or outfitted chairs.

The ministry participated in a pilot training session designed to build awareness of accessibility issues among front line staff. A training package has been prepared and will be used to provide training to front line staff as part of the ministry's 2005-2006 plan.

11. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to reviewing all existing and new legislation, regulations and policies for ODA and compliance.

Status: Ongoing

Action and Timeframe: The ministry's Legal Services Branch conducted a search of all ministry legislation and regulation to ensure that language included in these documents is in keeping with guidelines for terminology available through the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration. The search confirmed that ministry legislation does not include any inappropriate language regarding persons with disabilities.

12. **Commitment:** The ministry continues to consider accessibility issues in the review/approval of proposals for the funding for transfer payment organizations and capital programs.

Status: Ongoing.

Action and Timeframe: To date no ODA related issues have been identified with respect to funding initiatives. The ministry will continue to monitor all funding requests to identify and take action to identify and remedy any accessibility issues.

Work is also progressing on ODA communications to organizations involved in transfer payments.

13. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to improving access to people with disabilities.

Status: Ongoing

Action and Timeframe: The ministry embarked on an awareness campaign in 2004-2005 which included setting up a home page for Accessibility Planning on the OMAFRA Intranet site. The accessibility planning working group posted its meeting minutes and established links to the ministry's plan, policies and other resources such as the Ministry of Citizenship website. An electronic suggestion box was put in place on the ministry's intranet site, which provided staff the opportunity to identify barriers to accessibility in the workplace.

Two general awareness sessions were also held: one held in cooperation with a University of Guelph Centre for Students to assist students with disabilities, and one as part of the ministry's wellness program, focusing on living with people who have mental disabilities, led by a representative of the Canadian Mental Health Association.

| [Top of Page](#) |

COMMITMENTS AND STRATEGIES FOR 2005-2006

This section represents the ministry's plan, including new commitments and initiatives for the coming year.

Customer Service

1. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to supporting ongoing compliance with the ODA and improving accessibility for people with disabilities through the work of the accessibility planning work group (APWG).

Action: The APWG will continue to develop action plans and timeframes to support the commitments outlined in the accessibility plan, and promote awareness and education on the plan and accessibility issues generally through its website and through learning sessions for employees.

Timeframe: September 2005 - August 2006

2. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to continue to provide advice and direction to staff to help them consider accessibility issues when procuring goods and services.

Action: The ministry will continue to promote the need to consider accessibility issues through communications to managers and staff involved directly in supporting the purchase of goods and services. The ministry will monitor major procurement activity by undertaking an audit at fiscal year end to ensure that consideration is being given to accessibility issues.

Timeframe: April - June 2006

3. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to continuing its practice of considering accessibility issues in its collaborations with other ministries.

Action: The ministry will be involved with a number of collaborative initiatives over the coming year, including: work with the Land and Resources Cluster on the implementation of new software to help maintain the ministry's websites; and, the implementation of the findings of a province wide review of barriers to accessibility at resources centres where office space is shared with other ministries. Consideration to accessibility issues will be given to each of these collaborative projects.

Timeframe: September 2005 - June 2006

4. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to ensuring that public meetings and stakeholder consultations are accessible to members of the public with disabilities.

Action: The ministry will promote its procedural guideline in support of accessible public meetings and stakeholder consultations to all staff. It will monitor requests made by members of the public with disabilities.

Timeframe: September 2005 - August 2006

5. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to ensuring that persons with disabilities who come to ministry locations are provided with the same level of customer service as persons without disabilities receiving customer service.

Action: The ministry will implement a training program for front line staff at regional locations and in its Guelph contact centre to enhance awareness of the issues persons with disabilities face.

Timeframe: September 2005 - August 2006

Employment

1. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to ensuring that hiring practices include consideration for persons with disabilities.

Action: The ministry will continue to ensure that all interviews for job competitions are held in accessible locations, and that accommodation is made for candidates with a disability who request it.

Timeframe: September 2005 - August 2006

2. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to removing barriers to enable individual employees to function to their

potential in the workplace environment.

Action: The ministry will continue to respond to individual requests for workplace accommodation for employees with disabilities, especially with regard to ergonomic assistance.

Timeframe: September 2005 - August 2006

Communications and Information

1. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to maintaining its practices of providing publications in accessible formats.

Action: The ministry will continue to respond to individual requests for publications and provide a summary of requests on a quarterly basis to the accessibility planning working group.

Timeframe: September 2005 - August 2006

2. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to continuing the practice of clearly identifying TTY numbers on publications.

Action: The ministry will continue to ensure that communications products containing a toll free contact number include a TTY number as well.

Timeframe: September 2005 - August 2006

3. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to maintain its compliance with ODA requirements for public facing Internet sites and internal staff Intranet sites.

Action: The implementation of new software to enhance the management of content on ministry websites will allow the ministry to effectively maintain compliance with ODA requirements.

Timeframe: September 2005 - August 2006

Built Environment

1. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to continuing to identify barriers to accessibility in locations across the province.

Action: The ministry will build on its 2004-2005 review of office locations with a list of follow-up issues to be inspected by facilities staff to identify specific priorities for inclusion within the ministry's 2006-07 infrastructure plan, as well as for future years.

Timeframe: September 2005 - August 2006

2. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to continuing its work with its agencies, boards and commissions (ABCs) to assist them in becoming compliant with the ODA.

Action: The ministry will provide support and advice as needed with regard to changes under the new legislation to enable ABCs to consider accessibility issues within their respective organizations.

Timeframe: September 2005 - August 2006

Acts and Regulations

1. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to reviewing all new legislation, regulations and policies for ODA and compliance.

Action: The ministry will build on its previous review of language in its legislation and regulations to establish a schedule for reviewing new and revised legislation to ensure that accessibility issues are considered.

Timeframe: September 2005 - August 2006

2. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to continue the practice of considering accessibility issues in the review/ approval of proposals for the funding for transfer payment organizations and capital programs.

Action: To this time, no ODA related issues have been identified with respect to funding initiatives. The ministry will continue to monitor all funding requests to identify and take action to remedy any accessibility issues.

Timeframe: September 2005 - August 2006

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Questions or comments about OMAFRA's accessibility plan are always welcome.

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Toll Free: 1 888 466-2372

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Visit the Ministry of Community and Social Services' Accessibility Ontario web portal at: www.mcass.gov.on.ca/accessibility/index.html. The site promotes accessibility and provides information and resources on how to make Ontario a barrier-free province.

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| [Top of Page](#) |

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