

Canadian Society for Chemistry Conference Accessibility and Inclusion Policy

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1. Terms Used in the Policy

- Accessibility features vs. accommodations.

As per the Cambridge Dictionary, “accommodation” is defined as “a special arrangement that is made for a person or group that has different needs to others.”¹ The nature of this word further alienates groups of people based on their needs and is rooted in the idea of exclusion and ableism. Therefore “accessibility features” is used instead to promote the idea of inclusion, normalizing that the needs of two different conference participants will not be the same and that the CIC is at the forefront of embracing the philosophy of full and radical inclusion.

- Diverse-ability (also spelled diversability) vs. disability.

The term “disability” is normalized and widely used in various contexts, including legislative documents. Authors of this policy acknowledge this term and the fact that many people identify themselves as someone with a disability prefer using this term. “According to the Canadian Human Rights Act, a disability is a physical or mental condition that is permanent, ongoing, episodic or of some persistence, and is a substantial or significant limit on an individual’s ability to carry out some of life’s important functions or activities, such as

¹ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/accommodation>

employment.”² Nevertheless, our abilities as humans are not as binary as the current definition suggests and a model of a spectrum is the one that fosters inclusion, understanding and helps to drive the change towards making our community fully accessible. Therefore, the term “diversability” is used as it can include anyone on the spectrum regardless of their legal or official medical status but is based on persons’ needs to benefit from the community at the maximum.

2. Conference Registration

- Conference registration form filled online by participants should include a section with accessibility features to choose from as well as an open-ended question for participants to type in requests or feedback not mentioned in the options.
- The form should be incorporated as a step in the registration process before being redirected to the fee payment step.
- Information on the accessibility requirements collected through the form should be retained (anonymized before) archived and reviewed yearly by CIC as an important source of information for identifying accessibility needs, patterns and potential gaps faced by conference participants and the community.
- An assigned conference Staff person will contact registrants who requested accessibility features as soon as possible to ensure the feature can and will be delivered correctly (e.g., securing the sign language interpreter for appropriate language or discussing the extent of venue navigation assistance).
- The form is presented in Appendix A

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<https://disabilityin.org/country/canada/#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20Canadian%20Human%20Rights%20Act%2C%20a,life%E2%80%99s%20important%20functions%20or%20activities%2C%20such%20as%20employment.>

3. Conference Website

Although every Canadian province has its own official requirements of creating accessible websites, each guideline has three levels of accessibility: A, AA, and AAA. Clear examples are provided by Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA).³

CIC will commit to design the conference page to meet at minimum AA and ideally AAA standards. CIC will use automatic assessment tools widely available online to identify the level of webpage accessibility compliance.⁴

The conference website should have a clearly visible separate tab titled “conference accessibility information” or similar, easy to be seen and navigated to by everyone. The tab should include the following information:

- Location of elevators, accessible and gender-inclusive washrooms, location of accessible parking, quiet/meditation rooms, and nursing rooms.
- Location of relief areas for service animals.
- Evacuation protocol for participants requiring assistance in case of an emergency.
- Information about reserved and proximity seating including what signage to look out for.
- Any information that must be disseminated ahead of time if the venue is inaccessible at a certain entrance or points, e.g., because of stairs with no ramp, ongoing construction or other; description of alternate routes and entrances must be provided.
- Include information that the registration form has accessibility options for registrants to indicate their needs.
- Conference events with pre-arranged accessibility enhancement, such as, but not limited to plenary speaker lectures being translated into American Sign Language.
- “Creating an accessible presentation” tips for speakers (Appendix B).

³ <https://www.ontario.ca/page/how-make-websites-accessible#section-3>

⁴ <https://www.accessibilitychecker.org/>

4. Venue

The CIC will do everything possible to select a venue that meets the requirements for accessibility outlined in this policy. The presence of the following elements must be ensured by the organizers prior to the beginning of the conference check-in at the conference venue:

4.1. Signage

- Extra visible signage on top of the one provided by the venue directing to elevators, all-inclusive bathrooms, quiet/meditation/prayer rooms, breastfeeding rooms). The minimum guidelines for visible signage based on The ADA Standards for Accessible Design and The Canadian Standards Association (CAN/CSA-B651-95, Barrier-Free Design) include:
 - a) Non-glare finish (alternatives such as matte, eggshell, or other type of finish without a glare)
 - b) High contrast: high level of contrast between text and background by placing dark characters on bright background.
 - c) Sans serif font with large size: if signage is posted on letter size/A4 paper, the writing can be seen from two meters by an average person.
 - d) Uppercase and lowercase letters: initial uppercase letters can be used to help with word recognition.
 - e) Accessibility and inclusion symbols: international symbols of accessibility should be used. For all-gender washrooms, the written term “all-gender washroom” should be used instead of a graphic representation, given the nature of current pictograms is under discussion and criticism by many communities, involving gender non-conforming communities.

4.2. Registration and Information

- Reception/information/registration stands at least one of each type of stand should be low rise such that a person can approach it from a seated position, e.g. using a wheelchair or mobility scooter.
- CIC will provide a designated *priority expedited registration line* for participants who are unable to stand for prolonged time. The station should be clearly marked,

and its availability announced in advance on the conference website in the conference accessibility tab.

4.3. Seminar and conference rooms

- Reserved and clearly marked accessibility seating must be available in all seminar rooms (min 5%-10% of room capacity, depending on the room capacity)
 - a) Proximity seating for persons with visual and audio needs
 - b) Aisle seating for persons with mobility devices/reduced mobility
 - c) A chair-free space at the end of an aisle for wheelchair/mobility scooter users
 - d) Minimum one seating section with wider space between the rows (91.5 cm or 36 inches, guided by ADA regulation of a passage accommodating the width of a wheelchair). The extra space is intended for all participants who find it physically difficult to get to the regular seats and/or stay seated in a knee-bent position for various reasons (e.g., leg casts and braces, reduced circulation, etc.)
- Poster/exhibition room requirements:
 - a) Additional easily accessible chairs on the perimeter of the room (to be accessible to use they should not just be stacked)
 - b) Aisle width between poster stands should allow two standard wheelchairs to pass and be 152.5 cm or 60 inches. Given the nature of a poster session and participants gathering around posters, the aisle width should be increased to account for that to allow mobility devices users to move freely with the upcoming traffic despite the aisle congestion.
 - c) In addition to standing cocktail tables in the exhibition/coffee break area, there should be at least two standard level seated tables available for participants to use.

5. Volunteer and Staff training.

- CIC will provide diversability sensitive and accessibility training as a part of conference volunteer and staff preparation. To prepare quality training, conference organizers will connect with appropriate organizations, such as, but not limited to the Council of Canadians with Disabilities.
- The training component should, at the minimum, include the following topics:
 - a) Assisting and interacting with participants who are blind/with reduced vision.
 - b) Assisting and interacting with participants who are deaf/hard-of-hearing.
 - c) Assisting and interacting with participants with service animals.
 - d) Assisting and interacting with wheelchair/mobility aids users.
 - e) Basic information about neurodiversity and how it affects communication and participation in meetings and conferences.

6. Program Delivery

To ensure the maximum accessibility of the conference program to participants with various needs as well as to promote the values of accessibility and inclusion among the broader attending chemistry community, the following recommendations are made:

- Providing American Sign Language (ASL) translation for the opening ceremony and keynote speakers regardless of whether it was requested by participants upon registration and based on availability within the location. Firstly, it is to raise diversability awareness among CSC membership. Moreover, by using sign language translation services CIC contributes to the general trend of normalizing these services as a part of a public events, improving access to sign language translators in Canada by indicating it is not a niche demand but a legitimate need of organizations across the country.
- Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) services upon request at the registration.
- Providing ASL translation for the entire EDI symposium regardless of the indicated needs (CART upon request).

- Use of closed caption by speakers in all oral presentations (instructions how to enable them provided in Appendix B).
- Mandatory use of microphones by session chairs and speakers regardless of the room size in all meetings and symposia.
- Speaker to provide visual description of themselves before the start of the presentation (example in Appendix C).
- Accessible stage and presentation podia: providing a ramp vs. stairs to the stage and raised areas, providing table vs. high rise podium in all seminar rooms.
- Education and involvement of session chairs to ensure the accessibility and inclusion features are incorporated by introducing Instructions and Responsibilities of Session Chairs (Appendix C).

The Board of Directors of the CSC shall review the policy every three years.

Enacted by the Board of Directors:

7. Appendices

Appendix A: Online Accessibility Features Registration Form

Please choose the accessibility options you will be using while attending the conference:

- Chair Required for Presenting a Poster
- Chair Required for Presenting a Talk
- Proximity/Reserved Seating in Presentation Rooms
- Will attend with service animal.
- Visual Accessibility
- Wheelchair/Mobility Device Accessibility
- CART - Communication Access Realtime Translation
- Sign Language Interpretation
- Assistance Navigating the Venue

Please indicate other accessibility features you would like to use not listed above or provide additional information about the option you chose (e.g., the language in which you require sign language interpretation, etc.):

Appendix B: Creating an Accessible Presentation (prepared by Dr. Belinda Heyne)

What is an accessible presentation?

An accessible presentation, whether it's a talk or a poster, is a presentation created to enable everyone to see well, hear well, and understand the information presented.

Why should I make my presentation accessible to all?

By following simple guidelines, you can ensure that no one is left out. Accessible presentations are inclusive to all and respect every attendee's needs.

How can I prepare an accessible presentation?

By following simple guidelines, you can ensure that no one is left out. Accessible presentations are inclusive to all and respect every attendee's needs.

When preparing your slides for your talk or your poster using PowerPoint (the preferred software for the conference):

Make text and visuals big enough to be read even from the back of the room.

For oral presentations, we recommend using font size 30 or higher. Use a sans serif font face, such as Calibri or Arial. These font faces are easier to read from a distance. The letters appear less crowded for people with dyslexia.

Minimize the amount of text on each slide and poster.

This should keep the focus of the audience on what you are saying, rather than just reading. If following the first guideline and you use a larger font size, this won't be an issue.

Make certain that colour is not the only means to convey your information.

People who have low vision or are colour-blind might have some difficulty grasping the information. Be mindful of having sufficient contrast between colours.

This includes having sufficient contrast between the text and colour of the background, and between colours in graphs. We recommend using a white background with black text. While this choice seems very boring, it provides the highest contrast in colour for most room settings.

Regarding graphs, avoid yellow, lime, and cyan colours, as these colours are hard to see from far depending on the lighting condition in the room. Similarly, avoid combining green and red to convey information, as most colour-blind people have difficulty distinguishing between these colours.

For oral presentations, be mindful when using motion or animations.

While animating a block of text in an oral presentation might help the audience to engage with the content, flying letters and/or images from all corners can be very distracting for some people. You should always ask yourself: will the motion make the information easier to understand? If the answer is no, you should probably refrain from using it.

Make your graphic as simple as possible, avoid presenting complex charts or tables, and don't forget to add a meaningful legend.

People might get lost trying to understand unnecessary information, which ultimately will lead to disengagement with the content you are presenting.

Provide bullet point summary of takeaway messages/claims conveyed by graphics.

This summary will keep your audience engaged and improve understanding of the content.

How can I give an accessible presentation?

When presenting your work as an oral presentation or a poster, you can make sure it is accessible to all by following these simple guidelines:

Speak clearly.

By reducing your speech speed, your audience can better understand you and keep up with your presentation.

Use simple language.

Avoid the use of jargon, acronyms, and idioms to ensure people outside your field of research can engage and learn from your presentation. When avoiding it is impossible, make sure to briefly define the non-obvious terms.

For oral presentations, use a microphone.

You should use a microphone, even if you are in a small room. Using a microphone will allow everyone in the room to hear you clearly. Don't forget that if you ask: "Can everyone hear me OK?," some people might be uncomfortable saying they cannot.

Enable the subtitle feature in PowerPoint (see below on how to do it).

The use of subtitles will allow people who are hard-of-hearing to follow your presentation. The session chair can initiate/call to attention this feature at the beginning of a session for presenters who are reluctant or forget to enable it themselves (must be included in session chair training).

Describe pertinent parts of graphics, tables, schemes, chart, and videos before playing them.

This simple action will help people with lower vision to grasp the information you are trying to convey.

Cover all displayed text.

It doesn't mean you should read your slides or poster words for words. However, you should cover all the information provided on your slides or poster.

For poster presentation, avoid crowding around a poster.

If you see already that several people are in front of a poster, you should consider coming back to it a bit later. There are many more to look at during the conference. Clustering of people in front of a poster is blocking the passage for others.

For oral presentations, how can I enable the subtitle feature in PowerPoint?

This feature is available in Office 365 for both Mac and PC, as well as PowerPoint for the web. To enable this feature, go on the Slide Show ribbon bar and select Subtitle Settings.

In the setting, you can choose both the Spoken Language and the Subtitle Language. We recommend that you choose English, as this is the official language of the conference.

The position of the subtitle can also be selected; we recommend using the default setting Below Slide.

You can modify the appearance of the subtitles, such as increasing the font, choosing the background colour, etc. To alter the appearance settings in Windows, go to Subtitle Settings > More Settings. For Mac users, go to Subtitle Settings > System Caption Preference.

Finally, to have the subtitles starting when your Slide Show presentation start, from the ribbon Slide Show, you can navigate and select Always Use Subtitles.

Appendix C: Instructions and Responsibilities of Session Chairs

General:

- Encourage speakers to provide their land acknowledgments at the beginning of the session (tips with resources available at the conference website before that).
- Introduction of pronouns from the chairs, remind speakers they can use the option to introduce themselves with preferred pronouns.
- Describe verbally locations of the emergency exits, food/beverages, restrooms, quiet rooms, and a location where someone can find a staff member/volunteer. Avoid using ambiguous statements and pointing “over there”.

“e.g., restrooms are on the same floor in the hallway, 6 meters on the right from the exit of this room if you face the exit door.”

- Keep reminding the audience to make sure the exit is always clear (accessibility and safety). Remind volunteers to do the same.

Accessibility:

- Clearly announce start and end of the session and each presentation.
- Remind speakers to provide their visual self-description by the speaker. It should be provided by the chair at the beginning of the session to set an example, then reminding each speaker to do it.

“e.g., I am a white cis woman in my twenties, with short brown hair and of average height. Today I am wearing a black t-shirt, blue blazer, and black jeans. I move around in a red wheelchair.”*

*Specific gender identification or age are the choice of the person describing themselves. The main goal is to allow blind/participants with limited vision to get an idea of who is speaking so they can associate the descriptive image with speaker’s voice.

- At the beginning, encourage presenters to visually describe graphic elements of the slides. Reference “How to prepare an accessible presentation” document on the conference website.
- Inform about reserved accessible seating at the beginning of each session: front rows for easier visual/audio/ASL, aisle, and wide row seats for those who need more space/have mobility devices.
Anyone who feels they legitimately need those seats are welcome to use them.
- Inform that the volunteer can assist the participant to accessible seating. Can suggest approaching the volunteer (at this point location of volunteers/staff is described) or raising a hand (only if comfortable to do so).
- There are people in chemistry community that face challenges such as limited hearing/hear loss. Please be considerate about those colleagues and turn on the closed captions. Inform about closed caption function. Make sure closed captions are turn on for every PowerPoint presentation, provide help turning them on if the presenter needs assistance (chairs and trained volunteers).
- Make sure all presenters use microphones regardless of the room size. Ask volunteers to connect with technical staff if sound is unclear or there is feedback.

Q&A:

- Use a circulating microphone for audience questions, volunteer in the room can help to pass it on.
- Ask for short introduction before the audience member asks question: name, affiliation (pronouns and visual description encouraged but not required).
- Session chair or the presenter should repeat the question before responding. This should be practiced also in case when audience uses microphone to ask questions.