

Supporting and encouraging an inclusive community



Great neighbourhoods start with you.



How to reach us

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NEIGHBOURHOODS WEBSITE

Check out the [neighbourhoods website](#) to find more how-to guides, find your neighbourhood and subscribe to the e-newsletter.

ACCESSIBLE FORMATS

This material is available in alternative accessible format upon request. Please contact us a minimum of 3-5 business days before it is required.

GUIDE VERSION

This guide was last updated November 2025.

About this guide

Inclusive communities are places where all neighbours are respected, included, and feel a sense of belonging. Neighbours and neighbourhood groups play an important role in promoting inclusive communities. This guide references provincial accessibility requirements in the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and local accessibility awareness.

This guide will help neighbours learn and explore ways to make their neighbourhood inclusive. This guide has four main sections:

1. What is an inclusive community?
2. The benefits of inclusive communities
3. How you can encourage and inspire an inclusive community
4. Event space checklist to help you plan events

What is an inclusive community?

Inclusive communities intentionally welcome and support people of all ages, backgrounds and circumstances to participate with dignity, for example: seniors, youth, children, Indigenous people, people experiencing disabilities, people experiencing mental health challenges, and people with a low-income.

Inclusive communities:

- Promote respect for all residents and equal treatment and access to buildings, programs, events, and all things in a community
- Prevent discrimination
- Involve the whole neighborhood to make decisions that impact them
- Value diversity
- Respond quickly to hate and other forms of discrimination

The benefits of inclusive communities

When all neighbours are included, the whole neighbourhood (and beyond) benefits. Check out some reasons to encourage and inspire an inclusive community:

- Neighbours from different backgrounds, situations, ethnicities, etc. make communities more interesting, supportive, and fun
- When decisions include everyone in the neighborhood, the decisions are better and everyone benefits
- Decreases instances of hate, discrimination and people feeling left out

- More neighbours come to events and participate in neighbourhood projects
- Positive social connections improve the physical and mental health of neighbours
- Community members feel safer and more welcome
- And more!

These are just some of the many benefits of inclusive communities.

How you can encourage and inspire an inclusive community

This section outlines some ways neighbours and neighbourhood groups can encourage and inspire inclusion.

RECOGNIZE AND CELEBRATE DIVERSITY

Diversity is the range of features that make people unique. These features include but are not limited to things like national origin, language, race, ability, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, income level, and family structure.

To understand your neighbourhood and its diversity, consider using the census to review who lives in your neighbourhood. Information that is collected from the [census](#) can help you identify people who may be missing or not reflected in your neighbourhood group, events, and projects. When planning initiatives, think about different people living in your area and explore ways to include everyone (some ideas are included in this guide!)

It is also important to be aware of discrimination and understand historical and present inequalities. To support your learning journey, consider signing up for diversity, equity, reconciliation, and inclusion training or attending an informational webinar. These learning activities can be done individually or as a neighbourhood group. Examples include Spectrum's [Rainbow Diversity Training](#) and CCDI's [webinar's](#).

LEARN ABOUT THE DIMENSIONS OF DIVERSITY

Whether reading an article, attending a workshop, or watching a documentary, there are many ways to learn about diversity. We encourage you to consider ways you can help other neighbours learn about diversity, equity, reconciliation, and inclusion.

The neighbourhoods team offers support to help neighbours plan learning opportunities. If you are interested in hosting a workshop or training session in your community (on topics like diversity, equity, inclusion, anti-racism, reconciliation) consider reaching out to

neighbourhoods@waterloo.ca to discuss your idea. Learning and becoming more aware of diversity and different experiences of community members is important to help make sure everyone is included.



Being kind is an important part of being a good neighbour. Learning about diversity, equity, inclusion, and reconciliation may help you understand ways you can be more welcoming and kind to neighbours.

The section below provides some learning resources and information on ways to support and encourage inclusion:

Cultural heritage

Cultural heritage can refer to people's languages, traditions, religions, foods, and more. Embrace diverse cultures by celebrating cultural holidays, serving diverse foods at gatherings, and welcoming communication in different languages.

Learning about other cultures doesn't have to involve lectures and textbooks. Embrace and explore other cultures by talking to neighbours, cooking, dancing, listening to stories, and more.



To become more inclusive, community organizations and neighbourhood groups can:

- Learn about cultural diversity in your community by connecting with neighbours from different cultures, attending multi-cultural events in the City, and by reaching out to your local library for resources about different cultures
- Share first-hand knowledge and understanding
- Name instances of hate that you are aware of and support your neighbours when hate occurs. To learn more about hate motivated incidents and responding to them, check out the [hate motivated incidents](#) how-to guide.
- Show respect and appreciation for different languages and cultures (acknowledge different religious and cultural holidays, feature diverse cultural foods, music, and traditions at community events, etc.)
- Consider connecting with people in the community that can volunteer as interpreters during community meetings and events
- Promote events and projects and share information in different ways and languages. Ask neighbours for help with translation or consider budgeting for this during planning.

Newcomers

According to a [community survey](#) in Waterloo Region, over 50 percent of newcomers (immigrants, refugees, and international students) were not involved in groups or

associations and 30 percent reported a weak sense of belonging and shared that they experience discrimination. When planning neighbourhood projects and events, consider ways you can engage newcomers and include them in the planning process.

Welcome new people to your neighbourhood. Drop off welcome packages and invite them to attend neighbourhood events and meetings. Check out the [welcoming new neighbours](#) how-to guide.



Including newcomers in community events helps to promote a sense of belonging. To include new residents consider the following:

- Share the City of Waterloo's [New to Waterloo](#) guide. This guide features helpful information for new residents in Waterloo.
- Share the [Immigration Waterloo Region](#) webpage. This webpage provides information about community resources like settlement support.
- Invite new immigrants and refugees to join your neighbourhood group or association
- Use plain language when speaking and preparing written materials
- Share information in different ways (social media, posters, personal invitations, etc.)

Gender and sexual orientation

Community events, programs, and activities must respect and include people of all genders and sexual orientations. To promote inclusion:

- Use correct pronouns to show respect for gender identity. Politely ask “what pronouns do you use?”, respect pronouns given, respect a person’s privacy to not share their pronouns, and practice using pronouns daily.
- Share your own pronouns if you are comfortable with it.
- Use neutral language. For example, rather than saying “welcome ladies and gentlemen” consider “welcome everyone” instead. To learn about gender-neutral language view the [Understanding Pronouns](#) guide from Spectrum.
- Ensure event locations have spaces like all gender washrooms available, use [Spectrum's map](#) to find spaces across Waterloo Region.
- If you make a mistake when referring to a person’s pronouns, quickly correct yourself and move on. Check out the [What To Do When You get Someone’s Pronouns Wrong](#) poster created by Spectrum for tips on what to do if you accidentally misgender someone.



Using inclusive language and peoples preferred pronouns is important. Visit KW Counselling’s [OK2BME](#) to learn more about [2SLGBTQIA+ language](#).

Age

When planning events, gatherings, and social opportunity in your neighbourhood and developing neighbourhood groups, consider how people of all ages and abilities can participate. For children and youth consider some of the following tips:

- Get children and youth involved in events by offering fun, kid-friendly activities. For example, if you are hosting an outdoor movie night, consult with local youth to see what films they are interested in seeing.
- Consider sharing information on social media to reach younger neighbours
- Find ways to include youth as volunteers and event helpers. Offer community service hours for high school students that help with your event. Reach out to local universities and colleges to advertise volunteer opportunities.
- Learn about youth engagement strategies and educate others on the importance of involving youth in community activities and decision-making. Check out the [Student's Commission: Centre for Excellence for Youth Engagement](#).

To engage older adults, consider the following:

- Some older adults may have different levels of mobility. Offer activities that are friendly to all ages, examples could include chair yoga and stretching, trivia, board games, singing, talent shows, and more.
- Take time to welcome older adults to events. Greet them and make them feel welcome and check-in throughout the event to see if they need anything.
- Encourage older adults to join the program or attend the event. Advertise in local retirement complexes and long-term care facilities.
- Do not assume that older adults use email or social media. Promote your event and program in different ways to reach a larger audience.



When planning events in neighbourhood spaces, it is common to focus on kid-friendly activities. To be inclusive for all neighbours, consider planning some entertainment, activities, or other elements that are tailored to youth, adults, and older adults.

Disability

Engaging people with disabilities and removing barriers, helps ensure everyone can participate. Some things to consider that may make it easier for people with disabilities to participate are listed below:

- Provide information in different formats for people with visual disabilities or different reading levels. Use plain language and large fonts that are easy to read.
- Include a mix of active and passive activities that encourage participation and prevent exclusion – be ready to be responsive if changes are needed.

- Provide opportunities for movement throughout the event. Avoid prolonged sitting and take breaks. This will support physical comfort and helps participants stay engaged.
- Make sure the location of your event is barrier free and visit the space in person to confirm this. For more information, check out the [gathering space map](#) to find accessible spaces and the [accessible event planning](#) checklist developed by Accessibility Canada.
- Be sure to create accessible virtual meeting spaces if you are hosting virtual meetings. Enabling closed captions and testing sound in hybrid environments before the event are ways to make virtual meeting spaces accessible check out this helpful webinar from the Public Agenda for tips about [creating accessible virtual meeting spaces](#).
- If possible, consider event inclusions such as ASL interpretation, having sensory items available such as fidget tools or noise cancelling headphones, or purchasing inclusive products like large print cards for a games night.

Indigenous peoples

In Canada, the term Indigenous refers to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples. Historical injustices and colonial legacies continue to affect the lives of Indigenous peoples. Settlers (non-Indigenous people) must recognize injustices, take time to learn, and make efforts to repair relationships.

A key learning resource is the Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. We recommend that you listen to the [report](#) and review the [94 Calls to Action](#) proposed by the Commission.



To respect Indigenous voices and beliefs, consider the following:

- Offer personalized territorial acknowledgements when beginning meetings or events. This practice is a form of respect and reconciliation. To learn about meaningful land acknowledgements, visit the [Know the Land website](#) created by LSPIRG or the [University of Waterloo territorial acknowledgement page](#).
- Celebrate and acknowledge events and traditions that are important to Indigenous peoples
- Commemorate National Indigenous History month in June
- Recognize and celebrate National Indigenous Peoples Day on June 21
- Honour the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation on September 30
- Honour and observe National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls also recognized as Red Dress Day on May 5th

Additional resources for learning:

- [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#)
- [Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Report](#)
- Learning about [residential schools](#)

Additional Dimensions

In addition to this brief list, other dimensions contribute to people feeling left out, not being included, or being oppressed. When planning opportunities to connect, it is a good idea to reflect on this question: can everyone equally participate and enjoy this activity? If not, take time to work together and make changes so all neighbours have the opportunity to participate.

ENGAGE ALL NEIGHBOURS AND BE OPEN TO DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES

Include all interested neighbours in when making decisions and planning future events, programs, and projects. To promote engagement:

- Create a welcoming and friendly neighbourhood group where neighbours feel comfortable approaching each other and working together
- Communicate in different ways such as social media (WhatsApp, WeChat, Instagram, Facebook, Weibo, X, etc.), print media (posters and flyers), email, phone, community message boards, chalk messages, and more
- Make sure all neighbours have the opportunity to provide feedback. Try different ways to collect feedback such as a Facebook poll, online survey, door-to-door chats, and websites to reach more community members.
- Invite all neighbours to meetings and events. Knock on doors, advertise on social media, post lawn signs, use sidewalk chalk, and more. Get creative to ensure invites reach everyone.

DEVELOP STRONG RELATIONSHIPS

Strong, positive, personal relationships support inclusive and vibrant neighbourhoods. For inspiration and tips for developing neighbourly relationships, consider:

- Taking time to welcome new neighbours. Make an effort to greet neighbours as they join your neighbourhood. A smile, hello, or even a welcome letter can help create a sense of belonging.
- Spend time outside or in common areas at your building. Being in these spaces can help encourage conversation and relationships.
- Engage with diverse community members and encourage sharing and learning. Be respectful, polite, and ask questions to improve your understanding.



Check out the [Being Neighbourly guide](#) for more inspiration for developing positive relationships with your neighbours. Small acts of kindness and helping neighbours in need are great ways to build positive relationships.

CELEBRATE DIVERSITY

Acknowledge and celebrate the diversity in your neighbourhood. Here are some pieces of inspiration to get you thinking:

- Coordinating activities and events that celebrate your neighbourhood's diversity. Check out the [Waterloo Neighbourhoods newsletter](#), which includes a diversity calendar with dates neighbours may be celebrating each month.
- Create opportunities for members of diverse groups to identify and share their similarities and differences within your neighbourhood group. Host group discussions where individuals can share their lived experiences in a positive and supportive environment.
- Plan events that are inclusive to all members of the neighbourhood and make sure all neighbours can engage with your event and feel welcome.

DEVELOP A DIVERSE GROUP OF NEIGHBOURS

Often neighbourhoods have groups or associations that plan opportunities for recreation and neighbourhood connection. Having diverse groups and associations helps make sure that different voices and experiences are considered when planning and making decisions. Here are some tips for encouraging diversity in your neighbourhood group:

- Develop a recruitment strategy. Reach out to communities within the neighbourhood and spread the word about your neighbourhood group. Emphasize your commitment to diversity and your interest in inspiring an inclusive community.
- Learn together as a group. Consider taking part in learning workshops or activities that focus on diversity and inclusion.
- Create an open and welcoming group where new members feel comfortable joining. Host regular meetings that are open to all neighbours and specifically invite new potential members.

To develop a diverse neighbourhood group, leaders must make take time to communicate and connect with different community members. Creating these connections will encourage community members to work with your group to plan diverse and inclusive neighbourhood events and projects.

At group meetings, factor in time for learning and discussion about diversity and inclusion. Try group exercises, like the [community bundle activity](#) or the [diversity wheel](#), to kickstart conversations. Check out the [Creating the Change We Want](#) guidebook for tips on planning neighbourhood workshops and instructions on fun, learning activities.



PLAN INCLUSIVE GATHERINGS

Community gatherings are great ways to connect with diverse populations and support belonging. Below are some important actions that will help you plan inclusive events.

Start planning early

When you start planning early, you will have time to collect feedback from neighbours and make changes to encourage inclusion. When planning, consider the following:

- Time – is the event or program occurring during common work hours? Can you offer the event at different times to suit a variety of schedules?
- Childcare – are children welcome at the event? If not, are you providing childcare?
- Event space – is the space accessible for individuals using mobility aids? Is the space accessible by public transit? Is the space convenient for attendees? To assess the accessibility of a space, consider using the event space checklist on the last page of this guide.
- Promotional material – are you communicating in a clear way through different channels? Can you advertise in different languages? Add accommodation request sections if folks are RSVPing.
- Food – are you serving food at your event? Are you accommodating dietary needs and food sensitivities?
- Theme of event and activities taking place – are the activities inclusive for all residents? Are there activities that engage different ages, abilities, and interests?
- Emergency response plan – do you have an emergency response plan that outlines important venue features and event procedures? If not, do volunteers and neighbours know what to do in an emergency?
- Accessibility concerns – do you have a way to track accessibility concerns? Can you keep a list of concerns shared by participants to help improve future events?
- Notes and materials – are you presenting information at event? Can you offer accessible notes or a session recording to share with participants after the event?

An event that seems inclusive to you, may not be to other neighbours. By planning your event early, you can ensure you have time to connect with diverse members of your community and make changes as needed.

Consider the budget

When budgeting for events, consider costs associated with being inclusive. Some additional costs may include:

- Cost of promotion through various forms (print, online, etc.)
- Costs associated with providing presentation materials in accessible formats (hiring interpreters, translators)
- Providing food and refreshment options that meet different dietary needs
- Costs associated with providing childcare and/or subsidies for childcare
- Costs associated with waiving or reducing fees to participate
- Honoraria for speakers and other professional services



Need funds to support your neighbourhood event? Check out [different funding opportunities](#) provided by the City of Waterloo!

Encourage open communication with neighbours

When planning your event, encourage open communication with neighbours. When neighbours feel comfortable, they are more likely to share their opinions and ask for accommodations. Here are some helpful ways to encourage communication:

- Designate a member of the group to address concerns surrounding inclusivity and accessibility. Having one point of contact promotes organization and reduces confusion.
- When promoting an event, clearly communicate that accommodations can be made. Here is a sample statement to include in promotions: “If you require an accessibility-related measure (e.g.: sign language interpretation, captioning, accessible parking, specific dietary needs, or any other accessibility-related measure) please contact: (name, phone number, email address, etc).” Make sure that the process for requesting modifications is simple and confidential.

Be flexible and positive

Planning inclusive events, programs, and activities takes effort and attention-to-detail. Despite our best efforts, it is important to remember that mistakes can happen. If someone identifies that part of your initiative is exclusionary, remain positive and work to address the concern in a timely manner. Respond to feedback with humility and humbleness, recognizing that giving feedback is a vulnerable action.

Surveys after the event can also help you evaluate the success of your event. In surveys, consider asking attendees what their favourite parts of the event were, if they felt engaged and included, and what could be improved for future gatherings? Consider asking attendees

if the accommodations provided were helpful and whether everyone's needs were met. Also, consider connecting with people that did not attend to understand what barriers prevented them from coming. Once you have collected this important information, use it to make future projects more inclusive.

It is also important to learn from your mistakes. Keep track of feedback from events and projects and use it to enhance future initiatives!



Event Space Checklist

When planning an inclusive and accessible event, consider using this checklist to help! This tool was adapted from the Government of Ontario's Accessible Event Planning Checklist and the Independent Living Centre of Waterloo Region Event Planning Checklist.



Many neighbourhood events take place at city parks and facilities. While most spaces are accessible, it is valuable to consider how different attendees will access your event. For example, if you are hosting your event on a grassy area at a park, it may not be accessible for neighbours that use a mobility device. It may be a good idea to visit the space and assess how you can set up your event in a way that all neighbours can attend and enjoy.

Venue

- Adequate lighting, access to electricity, and adequate power for audio/visual or physical aids
- Sufficient parking available
- Wheel-chair accessible parking spaces located near the event entrance
- Easily accessible by public transit
- Accessible washroom space
- Inclusive or gender neutral washroom
- Changing table
- Quiet designated area for reflection, meditation, or multi-faith prayer
- Private, comfortable location for breastfeeding
- Space to provide childcare
- Space for service animals to rest and relieve themselves
- Outdoor and indoor pathways free of barriers
- Space can be accessed without using stairs

- Doors are easy to open
- Cords are secured

Communications

- Contact information for accessibility request is included in invitation and promotional material
- Use a variety of communications methods to promote events
- Add closed captions for video content
- Use a minimum of 12-point font for printed material
- Use plain and accessible language
- Provide material in different languages and offer translation services when possible

Food and Refreshments

- Food, drinks, and utensils are easy to reach for people using wheelchairs
- Assistance available for buffet food service
- Bendable straws and cups with handles available
- Accommodations for dietary restrictions

Volunteers

- Volunteers reminded to ask guests, “How may I help you?”
- Volunteers assigned to resolve accessibility barriers

For more tips, check out these informational resources for planning inclusive events:

- [The Government of Ontario’s Guide for Accessible Events](#)
- [The Government of Canada’s Guide to Inclusive Event Planning](#)
- [The Festival of Neighbourhoods Inclusion Challenge](#)