AODA Compliant Holiday Event Planning



Consider guest accommodation needs before the holiday party to reduce event day problems

Across the country regulations and laws requiring organizations to take active steps to ensure inclusive practices are being applied to provide a full range of services to individuals with disabilities. In Ontario the 2005 Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act was created to facilitate the adoption of policies that support individuals with disabilities. Whether or not your organization is in Ontario and subject to AODA standards it is good policy to consider the inclusion and accessibility needs of your employees and customers.

The AODA 5 Standards

1. Customer Service
2. Employment
3. Information and Communications
4. Transportation
5. Built Environment (Design of Public Spaces)

As of January 2012 Transportation, Employment and Information and Communications have been combined into the Integrated Standard. The Customer Services standard has been in effect the longest but it is not the only standard that will be relevant for your holiday planning.

How does AODA impact your holiday party planning?

If your holiday party planning includes an invitation for your employees, customers and the public to join in, you should consider the accommodation requirements as part of your planning. If you are in Ontario, your location, activities, communications and transportation may all need to be managed in accordance with AODA.

How might your holiday party not be in compliance with AODA?

If the location you are holding your event at is not accessible, you may fail to be in compliance. For example, if you are ***holding your party in someone's private home,*** and the entrance and bathrooms are not accessible, you have a problem. Keep in mind that one of the points behind AODA is that individuals with disabilities should not be asked to go out of their way to request accommodation and that the accommodation should be readily and easily accessible. This means that the onus is generally on you

to ensure compliance.

If you are holding the ***holiday event in our own workplace*** and it is open to the public you may have a few compliance considerations beyond washroom accessibility. Consider if you are serving food on plates but have nowhere to put the food down or sit down. Have you considered how an individual with, for example, CP (cerebral palsy) who uses a mobility aid (such as crutches) will navigate the situation without having to request assistance? It only takes a few minutes to plan, but asking a caterer or food preparer to ensure there is some food available in bite sized proportions can be very useful for individuals who have difficulty handling or eating food as a result of a disability. What about your signage or activities? If your space is small and becomes crowded how will people using a mobility aid such as a wheelchair or walker comfortably maneuver through the crowd?

You will also have needed to ensure that your communications regarding the event were accessible. Did you mail invitations to all of your customers? Did you have available information that was readily accessible, perhaps posted on your website? Sometimes these are small details but worthy of building into your event planning process.

One of the goals of requiring organizations to have accommodation plans in place is to help you give thought ahead of time to how you will meet the different needs of individual's with disabilities before they are required to ask for accommodation in a public way.

Check list for Party Planning in Compliance with AODA

Consider what you need to plan, who is responsible and where relevant information/resources will be stored (and how made available).

Done	Item	Details
	Invitations and Public Communications (are they inclusive and do they invite requests for accommodation before the event including time lines for requests?)	
	Healthy Environment (Scent free notification to guests)	
	Signage (if you are putting up event day signage ensure it is barrier free, as your existing signage should already be. Ensure sings for exits, facilities, assistance and activities are disability friendly)	
	Safety Evacuation Plan (have a plan in place that provides assistance to individuals with disability in case of an emergency evacuation? Identify a 'host' responsible for assisting individuals with disabilities.	
	Materials (accessible materials during the event such as sheet music for everyone to participate in caroling).	
	Barrier Free Physical Space (this is not only about space and pathways, but usage of space and equipment. Do you have at the ready extra chairs and tables for guests who may require them? Ensure you have planned the logistics and spacing ahead of time)	

	Transportation (will guests, including employees require transportation to and from and during the event, such as to the sleigh ride?)	
	Service Animals (do you have a plan in place to accommodate the attendance and care of services animals?)	
	Staff Training (Educate your staff on how to manage requests for accommodation in a way that maintains the dignity of the individual making the request)	
	Food and Drinks (prepare foods and drinks including service, with disability in mind).	

The steps for ensuring an AODA compliant office holiday party are not a waste of your time. These steps apply to any event you host in the future and once you establish them they are easier to apply the next time around. Even if you do not have to comply with AODA it is common courtesy and good hosting to ensure your events consider the needs of all your guests.

Resources:

Making Ontario Accessible

About the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA)

Manitoba Bill 26 The Accessibility for Manitobans Act