

Inclusive Service Descriptions

What are the elements of an inclusive service description?

What is an essential function?

What is a marginal function?

What is the definition of a “Qualified Individual with a Disability”?

Section III: Inclusive Service Descriptions

Key Words and Terms

Accommodations

Essential Functions

Marginal Functions

Qualified Individual with a Disability

Service Description

What are the elements of an inclusive service description?

Inclusive service descriptions contain all the elements of a good service description, but also clearly demonstrate the essential and marginal functions of a position. They are a critical first step to creating an inclusive service environment. Taking the time to ensure that your service descriptions are inclusive will assist you in outreach and recruitment. It will send a clear message that you are actively inclusive and will help you make good management decisions.

Matching an applicant with a disability and a service position is virtually the same as matching any other applicant with a service position. Spending time to create a current, thorough, and clear service description is well worth the energy and will increase your ability to make good matches for all participants.

Evaluate service positions periodically. Positions change and you should reflect those changes in the service description. An essential function is one that is critical to the position. Teaching is an essential function of a tutoring position. A marginal function is less important: the nature of the position does not change if the function is removed. Answering the telephone might be a marginal function for a tutor. The key objective of a service description is to identify the functions of the position that are essential.

What is an essential function?

An essential function is a task or service duty that is critical to the position. If it is not performed, then the nature of the position is fundamentally changed.

Three factors that make a function essential:

- the position exists to perform a specific function;
- there are a limited number of other participants available to perform the function or among whom the function can be distributed; and
- a function is highly specialized and the person in the position is selected for special expertise or ability to perform it.

The chart below provides explanatory examples.

| The position exists to perform a specific function | There are a limited number of other participants available to perform the function or among whom the function can be distributed | A function is highly specialized, and the person in the position is selected for special expertise or ability to perform it |
|---|--|--|
| <p>Example Participant will provide education through public speaking and information dissemination.</p> | <p>Example Participant will have a commercial vehicle driver's license.</p> | <p>Example Participant must have the ability to understand and communicate in Spanish and English.</p> |
| <p>Example Participant will read stories to preschool children in their homes.</p> | <p>Example Participant must have previous experience installing drywall.</p> | <p>Example Participant will provide estate planning legal advice to participants at the senior day care center.</p> |

When identifying essential functions:

- Identify the purpose and importance of the tasks
- Consider the frequency with which the task is performed

- Consider the amount of time required to perform the function
- Consider the consequences if the function is not performed
- Distinguish between the methods and results, i.e., focus on the end result rather than the method
- Essential functions must be completed, but they can often be completed in any variety of ways rather than in one particular manner

Identifying the essential functions will be invaluable when:

- Interviewing applicants
- Determining the qualifications of applicants
- Identifying accommodations for qualified applicants with a disability
- Ensuring a meaningful experience for participants

What is a marginal function?

A marginal function is one that is part of a service position, but not essential. It may be a task that is done on an as-needed basis; or a task that can be easily reassigned. Analyzing service functions is crucial in determining if they are essential or marginal.

When identifying marginal functions:

- Identify the purpose and necessity of the task
- Consider whether the task is critical to the service position; if it is not performed, will the nature of the position be fundamentally changed?
- Consider if the task can be performed on an as-needed basis
- Consider if the task can be easily reassigned

Service task:

Participants will provide homework help to third grade students at an after-school program. Participants will occasionally fix snacks for students as needed.

The essential functions:

Ability to read and explain third grade subject matter, ability to communicate effectively with children.

The marginal function:

Fixing snacks at the end of the tutoring session.

TIP

In essence, marginal functions are less critical and significant.

Example: “Participants will sweep the floor at the end of the arts and crafts session.”

TIP

The essential and marginal functions of a position will vary depending on your program and resources.

Service Task:

Participants will establish committees of residents in low-income housing to promote self-sufficiency and drug/crime prevention programs.

The essential functions:

Effective communication, diplomacy and tact, planning, organization, and follow through on activities and goals.

The marginal functions:

Answering telephones, computer skills, and boxing and transporting materials to meetings.

What is the definition of a “Qualified Individual with a Disability”?

A “qualified individual with a disability” is able to perform the essential functions of the position with or without accommodations. He or she must also meet any qualifications or certifications that the program has in place, such as being a registered nurse. Simply because someone may be a person with a disability does not mean that you must accept him or her to serve as a participant in your program. The individual must meet the same qualifications as other participants in the program. Individuals who wish to be participants must be able to perform the essential functions of the position with or without accommodations.

Service Description Template

| | |
|--|---|
| Service Position Title | Indicate title and whether a full- or part-time position. |
| Immediate Supervisor/Title | List name and/or title. |
| Service Position Summary | Briefly describe the responsibilities of the position in a narrative format. |
| Essential Functions of Position | List all basic duties that must be performed with or without reasonable accommodations. Identify only the tasks essential to the position. Focus on function, not “how to’s.” For example, if the essential function is to get from A to B to conduct training, do not say driving or a driver’s license is required. |
| Marginal Functions of Position | List additional duties that are preferred, are re-assignable to others, or can be eliminated or otherwise do not change the nature of the position. |
| Principal Working Relationships | Identify internal and external working relationships required for successful accomplishment of responsibilities. |
| Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities | Identify the specific areas of knowledge and abilities required to be qualified for the position, as well as any required skills. |
| Academic and Experience Qualifications | List minimum qualifications and experience required to be eligible for the position. Do not include “nice to have’s.” |
| Service Conditions | Identify the conditions under which the position must be accomplished. For example, service is to be performed in a classroom, or service is performed primarily outdoors, or service involves travel outside the state. |
| Physical, Emotional, and Intellectual Demands | Identify the degree to which these demands are applied to the requirements of the position. An example of an emotional demand might be: |

Patience is required because of work with children with cognitive disabilities. An example of an intellectual demand might be: Duties include extensive research and analysis of data.

Equipment Used

List the types of tools and equipment used in this position.

Other than completion of marginal functions, the above functions may be completed with or without accommodations. This description lists the minimum duty requirements.