

Accommodations

What are accommodations?

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How do I determine whether I can reasonably accommodate a particular person?

Section VII: Accommodations

Key Words and Terms

Accommodations

Assistive Listening Device

Disability Business and Technical Assistance Centers (DBTACs)

Essential Functions

Functional Limitations

Inclusive Service Environment

Independent Living Centers (ILC's)

Interpreter

Job Accommodation Network (JAN)

Qualified Individual with a Disability

Real Time Captioning

What are accommodations?

Accommodations refer to all of the technology, services, and changes in policy, procedures, and the built environment that enable individuals with disabilities to perform essential functions or to equally participate in events and programs. The list of potential kinds of accommodations is limited only by creativity. An accommodation will vary depending on the individual need, the disability, the program, resources available, and the tasks that need to be completed.

Accommodations can be very inexpensive: printing a document in large, clear font, providing written instructions, purchasing a headset for a telephone. Approximately 80% of accommodations cost less than \$500 (according to the Job Accommodation Network [JAN], www.jan.wvu.edu). Some accommodations are more expensive: providing interpreter services, installing a mechanical lift or purchasing new software. Accommodations that are part of an accessible environment are generally designed to assist a particular individual.

Types of accommodations

- Removing barriers and increasing accessibility
- Restructuring a service position
- Modifying a service schedule
- Modifying policies or procedures
- Obtaining or modifying equipment or devices
- Reassignment to a vacant position
- Providing services, such as qualified readers, interpreters, or real-time captioning
- Adjusting or modifying training activities, materials, or examinations

Some individuals will need one or two accommodations, and others may need more.

When do I need to provide accommodations?

There are at least two common instances when you will need to provide accommodations. One is for public events and meetings that your program may sponsor, including service activities. In these cases, you should ensure that you provide members of the public an opportunity and a means to request accommodations.

A simple statement goes a long way in communicating to the public that you are striving to create an inclusive environment. It also gives you advance notice of a need for a particular accommodation so that you will have time to ensure that it is in place.

The second instance in which you will need to provide accommodations is when you have a request from a qualified individual with a disability in your program. Here are some important points:

- An inclusive environment does not presume a person requires an accommodation, but creates conditions that are open and allow for effective communication about needs.
- An inclusive service environment creates conditions that give

Example Accommodations

Jeremy has a visual disability and needed software to “read” text to him. The program purchased the software.

Annette cannot drive and relies on a local transportation service that could not get her to her service site by 9:00 a.m. An adjustment was made to her schedule to accommodate the transportation need.

Zach, who has a hearing loss, has trouble hearing in team meetings. The program borrowed an assistive listening device from the local independent living center.

TIP

Insert in a brochure or flyer: This meeting will be held in a fully accessible location. Should you require other accommodations, please contact (insert your program contact name and number/email).

a qualified individual with a disability the confidence to request the needed accommodation(s) and carefully considers each request.

- An inclusive service environment engages in a dialogue with the individual requester to help determine the appropriate and effective accommodation(s).
- An inclusive service environment provides accommodations with the goal of truly enabling an individual to fully participate and contribute. It approaches the provision of accommodations as one of doing all it can do to ensure access and inclusion, rather than focusing on what “has to happen.”

TIP
There is no obligation to provide an accommodation until you are asked.

How do I provide accommodations?

Once an individual requests an accommodation, the process of evaluating your ability to provide that accommodation begins. The first step is to open a dialogue with the individual to find out what functional limitations exist that might prevent the accomplishment of essential functions. In addition, discuss any existing barriers that might prevent or limit participation in the program or activity.

In many cases, individuals will know what they need and how to secure it. In some cases, individuals will not be certain what they will need. This is when technical assistance can be beneficial and cost-effective.

What should I keep in mind about accommodations?

- People with disabilities are all very different—some have extensive experience in requesting and using accommodations and others do not. Some will be able to tell you exactly what they will need, others will not. In some cases, this is because an individual will not have extensive experience with accommodations, but more often, it is because the individual does not yet have a full understanding of what they will need. They may know their needs, but not their service environment. For some people with disabilities, the accommodations need-

In some cases, the need for an accommodation may not be obvious. Once a request is made, you may, under certain conditions, ask for documentation about the need for an accommodation. This can be a complex area so call upon the range of resources provided in this Handbook for more information and guidance on this issue. See the Legal Requirements section (Section XII) and Appendix D of this Handbook for further information.

ed will vary depending on the specific circumstances of the activity or program.

- Individuals who are requesting accommodations also want their service experience to be successful and rewarding but they may have had difficulties or negative experiences in securing accommodations in the past. Remember, that as a program director or supervisor, you are in a position of authority, and you have the ability to create a positive or negative experience. If you approach requests for accommodations from the perspective of creating an inclusive environment and of maintaining open communication, the results will be much more positive. Openness and creativity are important when working with a participant with a disability in determining appropriate and effective accommodations.
- A service term is often limited. If it takes as long as six months to put accommodations into place, the service term is well underway, and everyone becomes frustrated. The more inclusive and open the environment, the more likely it will be that someone will request accommodations early in their service term, and the sooner you can provide the accommodation.
- Discussions about accommodations must remain as confidential as possible. While sometimes it is impossible for the accommodations themselves to be “invisible,” it is not necessary for the provision of accommodations to become a program-wide discussion or debate.

How do I determine whether I can reasonably accommodate a particular person?

There may be times when someone requests an accommodation that you feel is too expensive, unwieldy, or impacts your program’s ability to meet its mission. Under these circumstances, it is always a good idea to contact technical assistance resources for guidance. There may be options neither you nor the participant thought about that might fully accommodate the person’s functional limitations and allow him or her to perform the essential functions of the position – and do so less

TIP

Retaining participants: Be aware that people may ask for accommodations without using the word “accommodation.” For example, a new service participant, who uses a wheelchair, informs his supervisor that the wheelchair cannot fit under the desk in his office. This is a request for an accommodation.

expensively, more efficiently, or more effectively. Technical assistance resources include:

- The National Service Inclusion Project (NSIP) of the Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts/Boston is the organization funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service to provide its grantees with training and technical assistance in the area of disability inclusion. NSIP can be reached at 1-888-491-0326 or paula.sotnik@umb.edu.
- The Disability and Business Technical Assistance Centers (DBTACs) are a federally funded resource that can assist you. They can be reached at 1-800-949-4232 (voice/TTY) or www.adata.org.
- The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) is another excellent resource that is available to you at no cost. JAN can be reached at 1-800-526-7234 (voice/TTY) or www.jan.wvu.edu.
- Independent Living Centers (ILCs) are federally funded and located across the country and can provide you with assistance. You may find your closest ILC at www.ilru.org.

Keep in mind that you are legally required to provide an effective accommodation, unless you can prove that doing so is an undue financial or administrative burden to your program. Simply because the accommodation may be difficult to achieve, time-consuming, or costly does not necessarily qualify as “an undue financial or administrative burden.” Please see Section XII: Legal Requirements of this Handbook for further discussion on this topic.

It is important to maintain confidentiality about accommodations to the greatest extent possible.