

ADVANCING OPPORTUNITIES: ACCOMMODATIONS RESOURCES FOR FEDERAL MANAGERS AND EMPLOYEES



Every day the nation benefits from the contributions of individuals with disabilities who serve in the federal workforce. Many of these individuals are entitled to workplace adjustments, or accommodations, in order to effectively carry out their duties. A variety of resources are available to assist federal managers in making these accommodations so they can hire, retain and advance qualified individuals with disabilities.

An accommodation is a modification to a work environment or job functions to enable a qualified person with a disability to benefit from the same employment opportunities and rights afforded similarly situated individuals without disabilities. The following examples illustrate accommodations in practice in the federal setting:

- An employee who uses hearing aids was having difficulty communicating over the telephone. An in-line telephone amplifier and phone flasher were purchased and installed.
- An employee who uses a wheelchair was promoted to a job located in an historic building that was not wheelchair accessible. The agency worked with her and a contractor with expertise in restoring historic structures to design an accessible entrance and restroom and modify the elevator without detracting from the building's character.
- An employee who has a psychiatric disability that is aggravated by stress had a difficult commute. He was allowed to adjust his schedule to avoid traveling to and from work during rush hour. Because he arrived several hours before most employees, he also gained a block of time during which he could focus on priority tasks uninterrupted.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, laid the groundwork for federal agencies' responsibilities relative to reasonable accommodations. This law prohibits federal employers from discriminating against qualified individuals with disabilities and requires them to take affirmative action to employ and advance in employment qualified individuals with disabilities. It also requires them to provide reasonable accommodations to applicants and employees with disabilities unless doing so would cause undue hardship.

Two Presidential Executive Orders issued in 2000 reinforced this foundation. Executive Order 13163 directed federal agencies to strengthen their efforts to provide reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities, and Executive Order 13164 instructed them to develop written procedures for processing requests for reasonable accommodations and file them with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. At a minimum, these procedures should include:

- The procedure for initiating a request for reasonable accommodation
- The agency's process for handling such a request and making the final decision
- The time period in which a request will be granted or denied
- The individual's responsibility to provide appropriate medical information when the disability and/or need for accommodation is not obvious
- The agency's right to request relevant additional information if the nature of the disability or need for accommodation is not adequately explained
- The agency's right to have medical information reviewed by a medical expert of its choosing and at its expense

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- The process or criteria for considering reassignment if no other accommodation will allow the individual to perform their current job's essential functions
- Reasonable accommodation denials in writing that specify the reasons for the denial
- The process for tracking requests and maintaining confidentiality of medical information
- Informal dispute resolution options available to individuals when an accommodation is denied and their right to file formal complaints

■ GOVERNMENT-WIDE RESOURCES

Federal employees and managers who want more information about these requirements or assistance with accommodations in their workplaces should contact their agency's Disability Program Manager. They may also obtain guidance from the following:

Office of Personnel Management (OPM)

Disability Employment Web Page

www.opm.gov/disability

The federal government's centralized Web site for information about issues related to the recruitment, employment and retention of individuals with disabilities in the federal government, including guidance on reasonable accommodations.

Job Accommodation Network (JAN)

www.jan.wvu.edu; 1-800-526-7234 (V/TTY)

A free service from the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy that provides individualized accommodation solutions for both public- and private-sector employers via the phone and Web.

Computer/Electronic Accommodations Program (CAP)

www.tricare.osd.mil/cap

The federal government's centrally funded accommodation program. Established and managed by the U.S. Department of Defense, CAP provides assistive technology and services free of charge to more than 50 other federal agencies through partnership agreements. In addition to conducting needs assessments to identify the most appropriate solution for each individual requesting accommodation, CAP procures and delivers the accommodation and covers the costs of installation, integration and user training.

■ AGENCY-SPECIFIC RESOURCES

Some agencies also have their own programs to provide expertise and support in providing assistive technology and reasonable accommodations. These include:

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)

Technology Accessible Resources Gives Employment Today (TARGET) Center

www.usda.gov/oo/target

Supports USDA's efforts to integrate assistive technology and ergonomic solutions for employees with disabilities.

U.S. Department of Education (ED)
Assistive Technology Team
www.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/assistbrochure.html

Helps ED managers and supervisors determine and implement accommodation solutions to meet the needs of employees with disabilities.

U.S. Department of Energy (DOE)
Disability Accommodation Program/Assistive Technologies Support Team
<http://cio.doe.gov/assistive>

Provides reasonable computer and related telecommunications accommodations to assist DOE headquarters employees with disabilities.

U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI)
Accessible Technology Center (ATC)
www.doi.gov/atc

Supports current and potential DOI employees with disabilities by determining appropriate assistive technology and ergonomic solutions for the individual.

U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)
Central Office for Assistive Services and Technology (COAST)
www.dol.gov/oasam/doljobs/programs/coast.htm

Provides guidance on reasonable accommodations and related issues to DOL managers and employees and applicants with disabilities.

U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT)
Disability Resource Center (DRC)
www.drc.dot.gov

Provides assessments, job accommodations and assistive technology to DOT employees and job applicants with disabilities.

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)
Microcomputer Training Program for Persons with Disabilities (MTPPD)
www.va.gov/oirm/itss/itc/brochsb.htm

Offers computer-based adaptive equipment training and technical support to veterans and government employees with disabilities.

U.S. General Services Administration (GSA)
Center for Information Technology Accommodation (CITA)/
Assistive Technology (AT) Showcase
www.section508.gov

Displays state-of-the-art assistive technologies and ergonomic solutions and supports government agencies and the public with a wide range of assistive technology equipment.



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