

REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS IN THE WORKPLACE

This fact sheet is meant to serve as a basic overview of reasonable accommodations, including the definition of “reasonable accommodation,” some examples, and a short rundown of the reasonable accommodation process. This document has information that may be useful for employers, human resources, employees, and others.

What is a reasonable accommodation?

A reasonable accommodation is any modification or adjustment to the application or hiring process, to the job, an employment practice, or the work environment that allows a *qualified individual with a disability* to perform the *essential functions* of the job.

When is a person qualified for a reasonable accommodation?

A qualified individual with a disability is an individual who:

- Meets the skills, experience, education, and other job-related requirements of the position.
- Can perform essential functions of the job, with or without a reasonable accommodation.

What are “essential functions?”

Essential functions are job duties that are fundamental to the position, as opposed to marginal duties. These job duties are *required* job tasks. Factors for determining essential functions of a job include:

- Whether the position exists specifically to perform these essential functions.
- The number of other employees who are available to perform the same job duties.
- The expertise or skills required to perform the essential functions.

Are employers always obligated to provide reasonable accommodations?

An employer has a responsibility to provide accommodations unless doing so would cause *undue hardship*, or in cases of *direct threat*.

Undue Hardship: When an accommodation is expensive, difficult, disruptive to the work environment, or will fundamentally change the nature of the position.

Direct Threat: A significant risk of threat to the safety of the employee or others that cannot be eliminated, or lessened, even with reasonable accommodations.

What are types of reasonable accommodations?

- Change a job.
- Change a policy.
- Provide accessible parking.
- Change a facility for accessibility.
- Change tests and training materials.
- Provide a product, equipment, or software.
- Change or design a product.
- Allow a flexible work schedule.
- Obtain a service.
- Reassign to a vacant position.

What are some examples of reasonable accommodation?

Supervision change: A supervisor gives feedback on paper, rather than verbally, for an employee who communicates better through written materials.

Accessible parking: Due to her disability, an employee is unable to walk long distances. However, reserved parking is only provided to upper management at her workplace. As a reasonable accommodation, the employee's manager reserves a spot in this VIP parking lot for her, which is closer to the entrance.

Service Animals: An employer reasonable modifies their office's "no animals" policy, in order to welcome an employee's service animal, which is used as an alert dog. For more in-depth information on this topic, see the Northwest ADA Center's [*Service Animals as an Employment Accommodation*](#) fact sheet online.

Equipment change: Using "assistive technology," an employee with low vision has their computer changed so that the screen is magnified. The employee can then correctly enter and read information.

Reorganization of the job: An employee who has an intellectual disability benefits from a structured routine at work. Keeping all the essential functions, the individual's job is changed by making it more consistent from day to day.

Reassignment: This is the reasonable accommodation of last resort. An employer may reassign an employee to an open position if the employee can no longer perform the essential functions of their current job. **The employer does not have to create a new position, no other employees should be transferred or terminated in order to make a position vacant for the purpose of reassignment, and the individual with a disability must be qualified for the new position.**

REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION PROCESS

According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and Title I of the ADA, the reasonable accommodation process, or the “interactive process,” must be considered on a *case-by-case* basis. This section is designed to help understand the phases of that process. For more in-depth information on the reasonable accommodation process, see the [Conducting a Reasonable Accommodation Interview](#) fact sheet on the Northwest ADA Center’s website.

Obtain preliminary documentation.

- The employee may be required to provide documentation of a disability from the appropriate medical professional if the disability is not obvious.

Initiate an interactive dialogue to discuss how the employee’s limitations affect work activities and what can be done to enable the person to perform the essential functions of the position.

- All participants involved must agree to maintain confidentiality when discussing accommodations.

Both the employee and the employer may suggest appropriate accommodations.

- The employee usually knows what accommodations work best, because they know their barriers. The employer may negotiate alternative, equal or better, options. Ultimately, the **employer** is the one to make the decision on whether a request is “reasonable.”

Implement the agreed upon reasonable accommodation.

- Agree what accommodations will take place.
- Agree when the accommodations will begin.
- Agree on what the accommodation will achieve. For example: *How will the accommodation allow the employee to be successful at work? How will it remove workplace barriers?*

The interactive accommodation process should be ongoing.

- The employer and the employee should continue communication to determine if the accommodations are working and make adjustments accordingly.

Document dates, actions taken, and adjustments made to assure continued success.

All parties involved should document information about the reasonable accommodation process in order to maintain an accurate record and so that they can review the process and know what they have done to act on the accommodation.

Resources

The Job Accommodation Network (JAN)
800-526-7234, www.askjan.org

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) ADA Information
Line
800-669-4000 (Voice), 800-669-6820 (TTY), www.eeoc.gov

About Our Organization

Northwest ADA Center provides technical assistance, information, and training regarding the Americans with Disabilities Act. Information is provided from the regional office in Washington State and state anchors in Alaska, Idaho, and Oregon. Specialists are available to answer specific questions pertaining to all titles of the ADA and accessibility of the built environment. Training staff offer presentations to businesses, organizations, schools, people with disabilities, and the general public.

Northwest ADA Center ♦ 800-949-4232 ♦ www.nwadacenter.org



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Alternate formats available upon request.

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