

Hiring Individuals who are Blind or Visually Impaired -A Guide for Employers.

Benefits

- High job retention and job performance
- Low absenteeism
- Diversity can drive innovation to meet challenges
- Opportunity to market to the disability community
- Federal Work Opportunity Tax Credit
- On the Job Training

Protocol

- Focus on the applicant's ability to perform the essential functions of the job with or without accommodations
- Speak directly to the person who is blind or visually impaired using their name. Greet them upon entering a room using your name and verbally acknowledge your leaving.
- You may offer sighted guide assistance by offering your arm if the person is in an unfamiliar area. The individual will take your arm just above the elbow or decline your assistance.
- Do not leave a person who is blind or visually impaired standing alone without orientation to a chair, wall, or table.
- Do not address or pet a guide dog while it is in harness and working.
- It may be beneficial to provide supervisors and co-workers training about blindness issues including information on the specific accommodations to be implemented.
- There is no need to avoid using visual language (i.e. see, look) in your discussions.
- When giving directions or describing locations use specific language, i.e. "the chair is located at 3 o'clock".

Accommodations

Low Tech – magnifiers, lighting, telescopic devices, adaptive aids (Braille, speech or large print), non-visual techniques, tactile markings, readers. Alternative formats for printed materials (job applications) - large print, Braille, audiotape, CD, digital.

High Tech - speech output for computers, large print software to magnify text on computer screen, Braille printers/refreshable display, reading machines (optical scanners) which translate print to speech or electronic format, closed circuit television enlarges printed material, portable note takers (speech, Braille).

- Each person's visual impairment needs to be evaluated individually due to the many types/degree of vision loss, the related functional limitations and each individual's skills, experience and abilities.

- The individual who is blind or visually impaired or their representative should introduce the need for an accommodation to their employer or prospective employer based on the essential functions of the job.

- The Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired is available to perform a job task analysis to identify accommodation needs and possibly provide assistance with the purchase of necessary accommodations.

Terminology

- Visual acuity – sharpness of vision, 20/200 or worse, corrected vision in best eye = legal blindness

- Visual Field – reduced field of vision, 20 degrees or less in best eye = legal blindness

- Low vision services – use of magnification, lighting and contrast, telescopic devices, and specialized glasses to improve access to standard print, reduce glare, and improve distance vision.

- Rehabilitation Teaching – adaptive aids and training using visual and non-visual adaptive techniques to perform work related tasks.

- Orientation and Mobility – independent travel training using a cane or guide dog.

COVID-19 protocols regarding guiding a person who is blind or visually impaired

Upon meeting your new employee, ask them how you can best assist them. Here are some techniques they may choose or you can offer:

- **Voice guide** – While having a casual conversation, walk in front of the person so that they can follow your voice. Depending on degree of visual impairment, some may be able to follow you visually.
- **Verbal directions** – Walk behind the person and provide detailed directions in terms of straight ahead, left and right turns and any features they might use as anticipators of direction changes (e.g. “When the floor changes from

tile to carpet, turn left.”). When giving a description of a room/work space, use specific language (e.g. “Your desk is 90° to your right.”). Be specific when giving directions to another destination in the building (e.g. “To get to the restroom, turn left when you leave your office and it’s the 3rd door on your right.”).

- **Human guide assistance** – Because physical distancing isn’t possible with this guiding technique, the person being guided should put on a glove, wash their hands or use hand sanitizer before grasping the guide’s arm. The guide should be certain that the arm being grasped is clean (e.g. be sure you haven’t covered a cough or sneeze with your upper arm). The guide also has the option of wearing a disposable sleeve or a protective arm sleeve (made of fabric and re-used after laundering) that can be worn to cover the upper arm and removed after guiding. The person being guided should re-wash their hands or use hand sanitizer again after letting go of the guide’s arm.

*Follow guidelines regarding wearing a mask when in common areas (e.g. hallways, restrooms, lobbies, etc.).