

# 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.