

## Considerations in Hiring a Visually Impaired Employee

### How to Find Employees

Employees who have a visual impairment can be highly motivated and successful individuals, having overcome what many people might consider a challenging work/life barrier. With that in mind, you might very well be interested in locating and recruiting such individuals.

There are a host of organizations and agencies that might help you find employees who are blind or visually impaired, as well as helping you with the hiring process. The best place to start would be the [employer resources](#) section of this website that will provide you with a number of local agencies and training centers in your area.

In addition, the following national agencies might prove helpful in linking you up with these unique and hardworking individuals.

[The Employer Assistance Referral Network \(EARN\)](#) is a free national employer service that connects employers with employment services that provide access to job-ready candidates with disabilities in their community. EARN is supported by the Department of Labor.

The [eSight Careers Network](#) provides a bridge between employers and job seekers as well as topical information for employers concerning disability.

Other helpful links for connecting with potential employees include:

- [Career One Stop](#)
- [Career Opportunities for Students with Disabilities \(COSD\)](#)
- [Office of Disability Employment Policy \(ODEP\)](#)

- [Workforce Recruitment Program \(WRP\)](#)
- [Lift, Inc.](#)
- [National Organization on Disability \(N.O.D.\)](#)

## The Job Application Process

Blind and visually impaired applicants need to be given the same opportunity as all other applicants. Once the applicant has self-identified as blind or visually impaired, the employer needs to provide appropriate accommodation to allow equal opportunity.

In all cases, simply focus on the requirements of the job, and what the applicant can do, not on the disability and on what he or she cannot do. If all job applicants are required to complete an application, then blind or visually impaired applicants may need some assistance to do so. Accommodations may include:

- If the applicant has self-identified him or herself as blind or visually impaired, provide the application in advance of the interview.
- Make applications available electronically: by e-mail, CD, or on your web site.
- If the application must be completed on site, provide someone to read the application and record the applicant's responses.
- Provide the applicant with adaptive technology (if available) on site.

## Administering Employment Tests

An employment test must measure the [essential functions of the job](#). Therefore, any testing needs to assess an applicant's abilities, not disabilities. An open discussion with a blind or visually impaired applicant can usually result in recommendations to make the test accessible. Accommodations may include:

- Provide someone to read the test to the applicant and record his or her responses.
- Make the test available electronically, and provide the applicant with appropriate assistive technology to access it.
- Ask if a state or local agency for the blind can administer the test.
- Determine if the applicant has already passed a similar test (for example, tests measuring typing speed and accuracy, spelling, grammar, or basic math skills).

## ADA Requirements

The [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#) offers specific requirements for testing applicants with disabilities. Here are some useful requirements to remember:

- Test results must be designed to reflect the applicant's skills, knowledge, aptitude, and other job related factors, not the effects of the applicant's disability.

- Unless the applicant's disability interferes, the test should be administered as is done with all other applicants.
- Tests need to be available in alternative format to accommodate the applicant's disability unless the particular method of testing is an essential part of the job or the evaluation process.
- Reasonable accommodations might include an assistant to read test questions and record the applicant's responses.
- The test can be presented in large print, braille, or electronically with a speech synthesizer.
- Employers are encouraged to announce in advance that testing will be required.
- Notification may be printed on the application form, in the invitation letter, or other recruitment communications.
- Advance notice of testing allows the applicant to request specific accommodations before arriving or upon arriving at the test or interview site.

## Interviewing Visually Impaired Candidates

If you know that an applicant is blind or visually impaired, you may be concerned about what questions you are allowed to ask during an interview. Relax, and use the following suggestions to guide you.

- Remember that a blind or visually impaired person is a person first. Lack of vision is just one characteristic and doesn't define a person any more than his or her hair color does.
- Visual impairment does not equate with helplessness. When you greet an applicant, you may want to ask if he or she needs assistance. Some people with visual impairments will want to take your arm while others will prefer to follow your verbal directions.
- When you enter the interview room, it may be helpful to describe the setting to the applicant. For instance, "We are going to sit at a round table. Your chair is on your left, and I will sit across the table from you."
- Focus on the person's qualifications to do the job. Matters that are not job-related, such as how or when an applicant lost his or her sight, are not relevant to the interview.
- Never pet a dog guide. A dog guide is a working animal. While some of these dogs are beautiful and friendly, lengthy discussion about the dog during the interview takes time away from discussing the applicant's qualifications.
- Don't be afraid to use terms like "See you later" or "Do you see what I mean?" Blind and visually impaired people use them too.

## Interviewing Dos and Don'ts

Do Ask Applicants...

- what accommodations, if any, will be needed for the interview or testing (e.g., online application, reader/recorder, extra time for test)

- only those questions that focus on the person's abilities as they relate to [essential functions](#) of the position
- if the applicant understands the essential job functions of the position
- if the individual can perform the essential job functions, with or without accommodations( e.g. "This job requires editing documents. How would you go about that task?")
- for evidence/demonstration of specific skill or expertise (only if asked of all other applicants)
- for information on any job-related education or training they have undergone
- about experience or licenses (if the same is asked of all others)
- for help when unsure of your interaction

#### Do Not Ask Applicants...

- what accommodations will be needed to perform the job before you have extended a conditional offer of employment
  - questions directly or indirectly related to the existence, nature, severity, cause, or prognosis of their disability; or how their past attendance record has been influenced by it
  - if the individual thinks the job would be "too hard" because of his or her disability
  - how the applicant would perform non-job-related tasks
  - to demonstrate a job-related or other skill if you do not require all other applicants to do so
  - about the type of benefit package the applicant seeks
  - questions that will not ultimately and directly affect your assessment of the applicant's qualifications and thus your hiring decision
- [Next: Video: A Hire Vision](#)

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