

Creating an Accessible Workplace

Quick Tips for Employers

Creating an accessible workplace is easy and it will have a positive impact on your entire workforce. Thanks to technology, accommodating employees with vision loss takes little effort. Accommodation is simple, often inexpensive, and financial assistance is available. This document will provide a number of quick tips for creating an accessible workplace. It will help you provide accommodation on the job and during the hiring process. You will also find a list of additional resources. It is important to remember accommodation should be provided in consultation with the employee/applicant.

Quick Tips for the Physical Environment

- Ensure walking pathways (indoors and outdoors), meeting spaces and working environments are barrier free and clear of obstruction
- Add contrasting colour and texture strips on stairs
- Ensure signage is clear, not obstructed, and in an appropriate size

Quick Tips for the Psycho-Social Environment

- Ensure open communication with your employees while respecting confidentiality and the right to privacy
- Discuss potential needs for accommodation with employees and ask "How can I help?"

Quick Tips for Accommodations

A number of employees who have vision loss can benefit from low-tech accommodations such as improved contrast, magnification and lighting. Some employees may need high-tech assistive technologies such as synthetic speech software or other technical modifications. Training and job modification may be required.

Examples of Low-Tech Accommodation

- Ensure overall lighting meets the specific needs of the employee with adjustments and/or additional lighting resources
- Use large print in communications and documents
- Use appropriate forms of communications such as braille (transcription services are available)
- Use large print/braille labels or tactile dots on equipment, tools, facilities and documents
- Provide magnification devices
- Use electronic text and voice mail communication methods instead of written notes
- Assign people to help with printed and handwritten materials that cannot be converted electronically
- Adjust work schedule to allow for public transit
- Allow for sharing or switching certain job tasks

Examples of High-Tech Accommodation

- Use of software/hardware with synthetic speech output to translate text to speech (computers, data phones, PDA's, etc.)
- Computer screen-magnification programs that change font size and shape, enlarge icons, enhance mouse pointer and change screen colors
- Devices such as closed-circuit television (CCTV) to enlarge printed documents
- Refreshable braille systems that transcribe information from a computer screen
- Portable note takers: handheld devices that electronically receive, store and retrieve data. They are equipped with speech and/or refreshable braille display output.

Quick Tips for Hiring Candidates with Vision Loss

The Job Application Process

Applicants with vision loss need to be given the same opportunity as all other applicants. The employer must provide appropriate accommodation to allow equal opportunity for the candidate once he or she has self-identified as blind or partially sighted. Focus on the requirements of the job and what the applicant can do, not on the vision loss. Applicants who are blind or partially sighted may need assistance if you require a written application.

Accommodations may include:

- Providing the applicant with the application in advance of the interview
- Making applications available electronically: by e-mail, CD, or online
- Provide someone to read the application and record the applicant's responses or allow them to bring a volunteer to assist them with this process if the application must be completed on site
- 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, testing needs to assess an applicant's abilities not disabilities. An open discussion with an applicant who has vision loss usually results in recommendations to make the test accessible.

Accommodations may include:

- Providing someone to read the test to the applicant and to record his or her responses
- Provide extra time to complete the test
- Making the test available electronically and providing the applicant with appropriate assistive technology to access it
- Asking if a provincial, municipal or local agency for the blind can administer the test
- Determining if the applicant has already passed a similar test
For example, tests measuring typing speed and accuracy, spelling, grammar or basic math skills

Quick Tips for Interviewing Candidates with Vision Loss

You may be concerned about what questions you should ask an applicant who is blind or partially sighted. The following suggestions may help.

- Remember that someone who is blind or partially sighted is a person first. Vision loss is just one characteristic and doesn't define a person any more than his or her hair color does.
- Vision loss does not equate with helplessness
- When greeting an applicant you may want to ask if he or she needs assistance. Some people who are blind or partially sighted 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 vision, are not relevant to the interview
- Never pet a guide dog without asking the owner's permission
- While some guide dogs are beautiful and friendly, a lengthy discussion about the dog during an interview can distract you from discussing the applicant's qualifications
- Don't be afraid to use terms like "See you later." or "Do you see what I mean?" People who are blind use them too.

Interviewing Do's & Don'ts

Do ask the applicant...

- What accommodations, if any, will be needed for the interview or testing (e.g., online application, reader/recorder, extra time for test)
- Questions that focus on the applicant's abilities as they relate to essential functions of the position
- If the applicant understands the essential job functions of the position
- Whether the individual can perform the essential job functions with or without accommodations (e.g. This job requires editing documents. How would you complete that task?)
- For evidence/demonstration of specific skill or expertise (only if all other applicants have been asked)
- 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 you are not sure how to interact ("How can I best help you..." or "How can I show you?")

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 vision loss, 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 vision loss
- 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 is seeking
- Questions that will not ultimately and directly affect your assessment of the applicant's qualifications and thus your hiring decision

Final Quick Tip

Ensure you understand that everyone's vision is different and each person with vision loss has individual needs; therefore, the employer needs to ask what would be most helpful. This will allow for better communication, will build trust and lay the foundation for a path to success.

Special thanks to the American Foundation for the Blind & CareerConnect®

Additional Resources for Employers

CNIB

1-800-563-2642

www.cnib.ca

Ministry of Community & Social Services

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act

1-866-515-2025

www.mcass.gov.on.ca

Job Accommodation Network

1-800-526-7234

www.askjan.org

American Foundation for the Blind CareerConnect® Virtual Worksites

Visit a virtual office, restaurant, classroom, or call center to learn how these environments can be made accessible to workers who are blind or partially sighted. Each page contains a graphic with embedded links that connect you to detailed information about the accommodations — including product reviews, product evaluations, and in some instances, videos of the products in use. You can also view videos of employees who are blind or partially sighted being active in their workplace.

www.afb.org/Section.asp?SectionID=7&TopicID=330

American Foundation for the Blind-Assistive Technology

To learn more about assistive technology for people who are blind or partially sighted, visit the AFB Assistive Technology section.

www.afb.org/Section.asp?SectionID=4&TopicID=31

CNIB: Seeing Beyond Vision Loss

1-800-563-2642

cnib.ca

July 2011

Page 6

City of London Facility Accessibility Design Standards

www.london.ca/d.aspx?s=/Accessibility/accessibilitystandards.htm

Access World

To learn more about accessibility technology for people who have vision loss, visit AFB Access World.

www.afb.org/aw/main.asp

Source: CNIB

This document can be accessed at:

<http://www.cnib.ca/en/services/resources/Pages/default.aspx>.

