



UNITED STATES
POSTAL SERVICE®



Manager's Guide to Reasonable Accommodation

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MANAGER'S GUIDE TO REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION



This publication answers some commonly asked questions about the [Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#) and will help you in making reasonable accommodation decisions concerning your employees.

WHAT IS THE REHABILITATION ACT?

The Act prohibits discrimination against qualified federal government employees and job applicants with disabilities. As a federal employer, the Postal Service is required to provide reasonable accommodation to such individuals so that they can perform the essential functions of their jobs. Accommodations are not required when they impose an undue hardship on the employer or endanger the health and safety of the individual or others.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR PROTECTION UNDER THE REHABILITATION ACT?

The Act protects four categories of people. Regardless of category, an individual must be qualified to perform the job and show that he or she is a person:

- With a disability.
- With a record of a disability
- Associated with a person with a disability.
- Regarded as having a disability.



HOW DO YOU DETERMINE WHO IS A PERSON WITH A DISABILITY?

To determine whether an individual is a person with a disability, you must resolve two questions:

- Does the person have a physical or mental impairment?
- If so, does that physical or mental impairment substantially limit a major life activity?



WHAT IS A PHYSICAL AND/OR MENTAL IMPAIRMENT?

These impairments can include:

- Any physiological disorder or condition.
- Cosmetic disfigurement.
- Anatomical loss affecting one or more of the following body systems: neurological, musculoskeletal, special sense organs, respiratory, cardiovascular, reproductive, digestive, genito-urinary, hemic, lymphatic, skin, and endocrine.
- Mental impairments can include any mental or psychological disorder, such as mental retardation or organic brain syndrome, and can encompass emotional or mental illness and some learning disabilities.

WHAT IS A MAJOR LIFE ACTIVITY?

Generally, a major life activity is an activity of fundamental significance within the meaning of the Rehabilitation Act, and not simply something important to a particular individual. These activities include obvious functions such as hearing, seeing, walking, speaking, caring for self, performing manual tasks, and breathing.

WHEN DOES AN IMPAIRMENT SUBSTANTIALLY LIMIT A MAJOR LIFE ACTIVITY?

An impairment substantially limits a major life activity when it either renders an individual unable to perform it or significantly restricts his or her performance when compared to an average person's performance of the same activity.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION?

Reasonable accommodation enables individuals with disabilities to perform the essential functions of their jobs. It is not intended to result in preferential treatment.

Note: The Postal Service requires the same performance and standards of conduct of employees with disabilities as it does of other employees.

WHAT ACTIVATES THE ACCOMMODATION PROCESS?

The reasonable accommodation process is activated whenever a request for reasonable accommodation is made, orally or in writing, by the employee or applicant, or by someone acting on the individual's behalf. To request an

accommodation, an individual may use plain language and need not mention the Rehabilitation Act or use the phrase “reasonable accommodation.” The reasonable accommodation process is also activated whenever an employee with a known physical or mental impairment is observed having difficulty performing



the essential functions of his or her job because of their impairment. For local record keeping and to ensure that every request receives a timely decision, verbal requests for reasonable accommodation should be documented.

WHAT DETERMINES WHETHER AN ACCOMMODATION IS REASONABLE?

There is a critical four step interactive process that involves the employer and the qualified individual with a disability. It is a flexible, problem-solving approach and makes the reasonable accommodation process individualized and fact specific.

STEP ONE:

DETERMINE ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS OF THE JOB

Essential functions are fundamental job duties of the employment position the individual with a disability holds or desires and are exclusive of the marginal functions of the position. *Remember: Determine essential functions of the job on a case-by-case basis.*

STEP TWO:

IDENTIFY THE INDIVIDUAL’S ABILITIES AND LIMITATIONS

The individual is usually best able to tell you what he or she is able to do. Discuss the job with the individual. When necessary, obtain medical information regarding the disability, the individual’s functional limitations, and the need for reasonable accommodation.



Based on all information provided, determine whether the employee or applicant is a qualified individual with a disability. If yes, go to Step 3. If no, provide the employee or applicant with a decision and rationale behind the decision.

STEP THREE:

IDENTIFY POTENTIAL ACCOMMODATIONS

Now, determine whether the individual can perform the essential job functions. If not, determine whether accommodations can be made to enable the individual to safely perform these functions. Begin by asking the individual what he or she thinks is needed to perform the job. *Remember: To identify potential accommodations and their feasibility, consult with the appropriate parties (e.g., Operations, Safety, and Medical).*



STEP FOUR:

DETERMINE THE REASONABLENESS OF ACCOMMODATIONS AND SELECT OPTIONS

Consider whether the proposed accommodation would:

- Eliminate or alter the essential functions of the job.
- Impose an undue hardship on the Postal Service.
- Violate the terms of a collective bargaining agreement.
- Fail to eliminate or reduce the direct threat of harm.

Consider the individual's preferences, the effectiveness of each accommodation, and related costs. Select the accommodations most appropriate for both the Postal Service and the individual. The selected accommodations need not be the best or most expensive, or even the ones preferred by the individual. So long as they are reasonable and enable the individual to perform the essential functions, they are acceptable. *Remember: The employer makes the ultimate decision concerning what accommodations to adopt.*

In all instances, requests for accommodation should be processed as promptly as possible given the facts and circumstances. Where the requested accommodation is simple and straightforward, and no extenuating circumstances apply, you should provide it as soon as possible but no later than 20 business days from the date of the request. Document your decisions for all reasonable accommodation requests on the appropriate Reasonable Accommodation Checklist from Handbook EL-307.

If you deny the accommodation, you must promptly notify the employee or



applicant in writing of the denial and the reasons for it. The denial must notify the individual of rights to request reconsideration, the right to file an EEO complaint, and any other appeal rights to which the individual may be entitled. Consult with your

Manager, Human Resources or designee for further advice.

**DOES EVERY
QUALIFIED INDIVIDUAL
WITH A DISABILITY
REQUIRE AN ACCOMMODATION?**

No. Many qualified individuals with disabilities are able to perform the job without any particular or extensive accommodation. Often, when an accommodation is necessary, it is incidental rather than substantial in scope or cost.

**DOES REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION
APPLY TO APPLICANTS TAKING
POSTAL EXAMINATIONS?**

Most job applicants and current employees taking postal examinations annually do not need accommodation in testing. However, for some qualified individuals with disabilities, the examination can serve as an artificial barrier to demonstrating the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to perform the essential functions of the job. In these instances, the Postal Service provides reasonable accommodation to qualified individuals to enable their participation in the competitive process.



**WHEN CAN AN EMPLOYER
ASK DISABILITY-RELATED
QUESTIONS OR REQUIRE
MEDICAL EXAMINATIONS?**

Only after a bona fide job offer is made.

WHAT IS A BONA FIDE JOB OFFER?

An offer of employment made to an applicant selected either competitively or noncompetitively after having met the overall eligibility and personal suitability requirements. It's conditional on the satisfactory result of the medical assessment.



WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A MEDICAL ASSESSMENT?

This assessment gives an employer critical information about an applicant's ability to perform a job by identifying physical and/or mental restrictions or limitations, and the degree of risk for further illness or injury within the next 6 months.

The assessment may suggest job modifications or accommodations that would reduce applicant risk and allow the applicant to perform the job safely. With this assessment, the employer has what is needed to make an informed hiring decision. The assessment is not a recommendation for or against hiring and placement; that decision rests with the employer.

IS AN OCCUPATIONAL INJURY ALWAYS CONSIDERED A DISABILITY UNDER THE REHABILITATION ACT?



No. An employee with an occupational injury defined as a disability by the Federal Employees' Compensation Act (FECA), may not have a disability under the Rehabilitation Act. The Rehabilitation Act defines disability as follows:

- A physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity.
- A record of such impairment.
- Being regarded as having such impairment.

Impairments resulting from occupational injury may not be severe enough to substantially limit a major life activity, or they may be only temporary, non-chronic, and have little or no long-term impact.



**ARE ALL EMPLOYEES
PROTECTED BY
THE REHABILITATION ACT
ENTITLED TO LEAVE UNDER
THE FAMILY AND
MEDICAL LEAVE ACT (FMLA)?**

No. Employees protected under the Rehabilitation Act must be independently eligible for FMLA leave. Eligibility for FLMA leave depends on several factors (e.g., length of service and hours worked).

**WHY IS IT NECESSARY
TO USE THE REASONABLE
ACCOMMODATION CHECKLISTS?**

The checklists are designed to document the reasonable accommodation decision-making process in all matters of employment and placement when accommodation is an issue. Use of the checklists facilitates an objective and consistent approach to evaluation and selection procedures and establishes an accurate and timely written record.



**WHERE CAN I GET
ADDITIONAL
INFORMATION
ABOUT
REASONABLE
ACCOMMODATION?**

Handbook EL-307, Reasonable Accommodation, provides detailed information on reasonable accommodation and the interactive process. It is available on the Postal Service Intranet.