

Tips To Help When Interviewing People With Disabilities

An interview is a conversation; therefore, it's important to have a list of questions about the essential functions prepared to ask each candidate. This will eliminate the possibility that you will ask information from one applicant that you do not obtain from all applicants. Limiting conversation to the same topic and handling the interview in the same manner for every applicant ensures fairness and helps to protect you from charges of discrimination.

I. Interview Process – Start and Accommodations

- Give directions to the interview site by including accessibility information.
- Make sure the route to the interview site, the entry to the building, and the room for the interview are all accessible.
- You cannot ask if they need accommodations. You may state that accommodations are available and how much notice you will need in order to provide the accommodation. (Example: “48 hours may be needed to contact a sign language interpreter.”)
- Do not make assumptions about the ability or the accommodations that will be needed.
- Examples of accommodations: For persons who are deaf or hard of hearing, speak normally with your mouth clearly visible or communicate in writing if necessary. In some cases, arrange for a sign language interpreter. For persons who are blind or visually impaired, provide forms and tests in Braille or large print.

II. Interview Process – Welcome

- Begin with a handshake and good eye contact. Be sensitive to a person's physical needs. They may not be able to open their hand, but will extend the closed fist. Take the hand in the palm of your hand, shake the hand, but be gentle. Maintain eye contact with the individual with a disability even if they are blind or using a sign language interpreter.
- Remember to treat the person as an individual, not as a disability.
- Speak to the job candidate just as you would to any other individual.
- Do not patronize a person with a disability.
- Be patient, tolerant and good listener.
- Remember: People first, then the disability – speak to the person first, then the disability.

III. Interview Process – Questions

- Ask all applicants the same questions.
- Ask questions that are related to the job and job performance.
- Questions about the individual's disability are not appropriate. Questions about the ability to carry out the job are permitted.
- Focus your questions on whether the applicant has the ability and skills to perform the essential functions of the position.

Samples of appropriate questions:

“This position typically requires carrying a 30 pound backpack in the back country for 3 to five miles. Do you have the ability and training to do that? Can you do this?”

“This position requires taking information over the phone and entering it into the computer. Do you have the skills and training to do that? Can you do this?”

“Can you do this?” is appropriate and acceptable to ask of all participants.

- You can describe essential functions and ask the applicants if they have the ability and skills to perform the task.
- You may ask about education, work experience, licenses or certificates that are relevant to the position.
- You can ask if the applicant can meet attendance expectations.
- You can ask the applicant if they can travel 2 to 3 days at a time.
- You can ask the applicant if they can work week-ends.

IV. Interview Process – Selection

“After all applicants have been interviewed, it is time to make your selection. Base your decision on the applicant’s ability to perform only the essential functions of the position, with or without accommodations. In an inclusive environment, needing an accommodation is not reason, in and of itself, not to hire an applicant with a disability. In an inclusive environment, the first consideration is not cost or inconvenience, but rather inclusivity, accessibility, and equal opportunity.”

Josie Athman, Access Coordinator
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Do	Don’t
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell me about yourself – education, work experience, and personal goals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have a disability or illness that I should know about?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are your greatest strengths? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you ever filed a worker’s compensation claim?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are your weaknesses? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you taking any prescription medications?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell me about your interests. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How many days did you miss work last year because of being sick?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This position requires working flexible hours. Can you do that? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you ever been hospitalized or had surgery?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you file documents? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What diseases have you had?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This job requires driving. Are you licensed to operate a motor vehicle? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you ever received SSDI or SSI?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This job typically requires lifting and carrying 15 pound boxes. Can you do that? How would you move these boxes from point A to point B with or without a reasonable accommodation? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To do this service you will obviously need reasonable accommodations. What are they?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This work is seasonal and requires that employees work 15 hours of overtime during September. Can you do that? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell me about your health and medical history.

If the applicant volunteers that he/she can perform the essential functions of the task with an accommodation then you may ask, “What accommodations will you need to perform this task?”