

**REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS  
FOR PERSONS WITH  
DISABILITIES**



*Office of Equal Opportunity Programs*

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## ***NSF'S COMMITMENT***

NSF is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities, not only for employees and applicants but also for individuals conducting business at the Foundation. This includes, for example, panelists, members of advisory committees, participants in workshops held at NSF, speakers, and visitors with appointments with NSF staff.

NSF covers the cost of providing reasonable accommodations through a central fund managed by the Office of Equal Opportunity.

This brochure describes reasonable accommodations in line with Federal laws as applied to employees and applicants for employment, as well as individuals conducting business with NSF as indicated above.

## ***LEGAL OBLIGATIONS***

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, protects qualified individuals with disabilities from employment discrimination in the Federal government. The Rehabilitation Act also protects from discrimination individuals with disabilities who seek access to Federal programs and services. Additionally, the standards applied under Title 1 of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) are used to determine (1) applicability for providing reasonable accommodations under the Rehabilitation Act, and (2) violations of the Rehabilitation Act with respect to a complaint alleging discrimination.

Under the Rehabilitation Act, a Federal agency is required to provide ***reasonable accommodations*** for a ***qualified individual with a disability***.

### ***WHO IS AN "INDIVIDUAL WITH A DISABILITY"?***

According to ADA, an ***individual with a disability*** is a person who has:

- a **physical or mental impairment** that *substantially limits* one or more major life activity, such as hearing, seeing, walking, speaking, learning, breathing, etc.;
- a record of such an impairment; or
- is regarded as having such an impairment.

The term "*substantially limits*" refers to the person having significant restrictions as to the condition, manner or duration under which the individual can perform a major life activity in comparison to a person without the disability.

### ***WHO IS A "QUALIFIED INDIVIDUAL WITH A DISABILITY"?***

With respect to employment, a ***qualified individual with a disability*** is a person with a disability who meets the requisite skill, experience, education and other job-related requirements, and who, with or without reasonable accommodation, can perform the essential functions of such position.

## ***WHAT IS “REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION”?***

A *reasonable accommodation* is a modification or adjustment to a job or the work environment that will enable a qualified individual with a disability to participate in the employment application process, to perform job functions, or to conduct business at NSF. Reasonable accommodations also include adjustments to assure that a qualified employee with a disability has equal access to the benefits and privileges available to applicants and employees without disabilities.

The term *reasonable* indicates that an organization is not expected to provide an accommodation that imposes an “undue hardship” on the operation of the organization. The phrase ‘undue hardship’ is used to describe a change that would be unduly costly, extensive, substantial, disruptive, or that would fundamentally alter the nature or operation of the organization.

### ***WHEN ARE REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS REQUIRED?***

Reasonable accommodations are required in three aspects of employment:

- to ensure equal opportunity in the application process;
- to enable a qualified individual with a disability to perform the essential functions of a job and other work-related activities; and
- to enable an employee with a disability to enjoy equal benefits and privileges of employment.

Reasonable accommodations also are extended to individuals conducting business at NSF, as described earlier.

Reasonable accommodations should be offered when the organization becomes aware that there is a workplace barrier that is preventing the individual, due to the disability, from effectively competing for a position, performing a job, or gaining equal access to a benefit of employment. Generally, the agency will become aware of the individual’s need for accommodation from the individual. After receiving a request for reasonable accommodation, the agency should participate in an informal dialogue with the individual to determine what accommodation, if any, would be appropriate.

Every reasonable accommodation must be determined on an individual basis. With respect to employment, a reasonable accommodation must always take into consideration two unique factors:

- (1) the specific abilities and functional limitations of a particular individual with a disability; and
- (2) the specific functional requirements of a particular job.

### ***WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR REQUESTING REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS?***

Generally, it is the responsibility of the qualified individual who needs the accommodation to inform the organization that an accommodation is needed. A request does not have to use special words such as “reasonable accommodation” or “disability.” If an employee with a known disability is not performing well or is having difficulty in performing a job, the organization should assess whether this is due to a disability. Under such circumstances, the organization may inquire whether the individual needs an accommodation.

### ***IS DOCUMENTATION REQUIRED?***

If an individual requests an accommodation and the need for the accommodation is not obvious, the agency may request that the individual provide medical documentation to assist in determining

whether a reasonable accommodation is appropriate. This information must be submitted to the Office of Equal Opportunity Programs for coordination and approval.

***WILL MY REQUEST FOR REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION BE KEPT  
CONFIDENTIAL?***

Yes. The information provided in support of reasonable accommodation requests is available only to the designated agency staff that are responsible for coordinating accommodation requests and providing accommodation services. Any employee who obtains or receives information related to a reasonable accommodation is required to keep this information confidential.

***WHAT SHOULD I DO TO REQUEST OR INQUIRE ABOUT REASONABLE  
ACCOMMODATIONS?***

Whether you are inquiring for yourself or on behalf of someone else, please contact the NSF Office of Equal Opportunity. Any member of the OEOP staff will be able to assist you.