

Make Your Workplace Accessible

People with disabilities have skills, abilities and experience that can add value in your workplace. By opening up your search for talented employees and making your workplace accessible, you create a win-win situation. You find the right person for the job. You create a place where anyone can work and be productive – and you allow employees of all abilities to compete in the marketplace.

You may have to provide workplace accommodation for some employees. Many options available to you as an employer can be low-cost or no-cost. You may have to make some changes to workstations or provide an assistive device or assistive technology, but many changes are simple.

Here are some things to consider as you get ready to make your workplace accessible:

Job Advertisements

- Clearly state that your organization has an equal opportunity policy.
- Use simple typeface that is easy and large enough to read.
- Provide the job ad in alternate formats such as large high contrast print, HTML and plain language.
- Consider using other methods of advertising such as web-based listings and radio ads.
- Look beyond mainstream sources for candidates. Contact agencies that provide employment support services to people with disabilities, local agencies and campus placement offices.
- Remember that people with disabilities may not have acquired formative work experience that employers seek, but they may have other valuable experience and skills that will make them productive employees.
- Focus on skills, abilities, expectations, and desired outcomes. Ask for credentials only when necessary to do the job such as a degree in law or medicine.

Job Descriptions and Requirements

- Separately identify what skills and experience are needed to do the job and what desirable qualities the candidate can bring to the job.
- Make sure what you ask for is relevant to the job (e.g., a physical test).
- On application forms, ask for information that is relevant to the job.
- Make the application available in alternate formats.

Recruitment and Selection

- Make your selection process consistent for all applicants.
- This includes interviews, tests and other screening tools. By using the same criteria for everyone, you will be able to assess each person's skills and be able to make fair, informed decisions.
- When you contact candidates for an interview, ask if they have any accommodation needs. They may need to use a computer to do a test, materials in large high contrast print, or a sign language interpreter.

Recruitment and Selection, con't

- Train front-line staff greeting job candidates on how to interact with people with disabilities.
- Be clear about what you can and cannot ask during an interview.
- The Ontario and Canadian human rights commissions can provide you with questions that can and cannot be asked, along with ways to phrase questions.
- Ask only questions that are job-related. For example, you cannot ask about health problems. However, you may ask about the person's physical abilities if they have to move heavy objects as part of their job.
- Ask how candidates will fulfill job requirements instead of asking if they can fulfill them.

Applicant Testing

- Give tests that will show you if the candidate can do the job.
- Make sure you give the same test and clear instructions to all candidates.
- You may have to give the test verbally, or provide a computer for candidates to do the test.

Starting Work

- Provide training for supervisors and managers so that they understand how to support employees to do their jobs well.
- Ask employees what job-related support they need and follow up later to see if something needs to be changed.
- Meet with staff, if needed, before a new employee with disabilities starts work. Your team may be worried if they don't know how to interact with colleagues with a disability.
- Assess your workplace to make sure it meets occupational health and safety rules.

Training

- Allow enough time for carrying out training tasks.
- Train all employees in general accessibility awareness. You may want to consider more training for the workgroup the new employee is joining.

Doing the Job

- Work with employees with disabilities to adapt tasks as needed.
- You may have to look at the workload and job tasks of the group to see if tasks need to be reassigned to or from employees in your group.

Keeping Matters Confidential

- Let employees know that their personal matters will be kept confidential.
- Employees may choose not to disclose a disability. You should tell them that you are ready to work with them if they choose to tell you about it.
- You can help reduce personal stress, and can look into other ways to support them in doing their job well.

Retaining Employees

- Policies and practices should be the same for all your employees.
- Retain and promote staff using the same criteria for all employees.
- Make sure all employees have the chance for learning and personal development.
- You may have to change the work that employees do or how they do it. Anyone may acquire a disability during their lifetime, or a disability may become more limiting.
- Identify training needs when you regularly assess the work performance of all employees.

Retaining Employees, con't

- Focus on achievements and how well someone does their job when you are assessing performance. Don't focus on any disabilities employees may have.
- Make sure all employees know about opportunities for transfers and promotions. Provide information in accessible formats. Avoid informal contacts so that you don't exclude anyone who may be interested.

Dismissal/Termination

- Document your actions and make sure you can back them up, based on existing legislation.
- Keep records, have employees discuss concerns and document responses.
- Make sure you thought of all options in looking for ways to support employees.
- Consult with legal advisors to get information about laws that apply to you and your workplace.

Monitoring Results

- Keep track of positive changes for making your workplace accessible.
For example:
 - people's attitudes – take surveys or ask a focus group.
 - improved accessibility – conduct an accessibility audit and try to fill in any gaps.
 - access to job candidates – find out how your efforts to widen the search for candidates has paid off.

The Inclusive Workplace

It is important that employees feel they can disclose information and ask for assistance. Here are ways you can create an open environment:

- respect employees' confidentiality.
- find creative ways to solve problems.
- learn from others.
- let people know they are included, valued and accepted.
- use language that focuses on people, not on disabilities.

Listen to employees with disabilities – they're the experts in what they need. You should:

- listen to what employees tell you about their disabilities and what they think is needed.
- ask questions when you don't understand.
- get information to help you understand specific disability issues.
- be creative, flexible and look for new ways of doing things.
- get your employees to test any special equipment or device before you purchase.

Workplace Accommodation

Examples of accommodation include:

- voice input or speech recognition aids.
- voice synthesizer.
- TTY telephone service.
- computer screen magnifiers.
- flexible scheduling and reduced or part-time hours.
- quiet workspace.
- written instructions.
- self-paced workload.
- frequent breaks.
- alternate methods of communication (telephone, tape recorder, verbal instructions).
- larger tasks divided into smaller one.

