

Understanding Job Accommodations

Some employers may be hesitant to hire a person with a disability because they fear that it will generate extra expenses. In fact, the U.S. Department of Labor has found that 51 percent of accommodations cost between \$1-500. Even more surprisingly, 15 percent don't cost anything.

In relation to the ADA, reasonable accommodation is any modification or adjustment to a job or the work environment that will enable a qualified applicant or employee with a disability to participate in the application process or to perform essential job functions. Reasonable accommodation also includes adjustments to assure that a qualified individual with a disability has rights and privileges in employment equal to those of employees without disabilities.

Accommodations will vary by individual and may be basic or require a bit of creativity. By working together, most employers can easily find a way for a person with a disability to be a part of the team.

Below are some examples of economical accommodations put in place. For a more extensive list or for specific guidance, go to the Office of Disability Employment Policy's Job Accommodation Network's site at <http://www.jan.wvu.edu/>.

BARRIER: A worker with a traumatic brain injury has a job processing checks. The checks must be numbered and placed into a sorting machine tray, but the worker gets periodically confused due to memory loss and weakness on one side of his body.

ACCOMMODATION: A job coach/trainer supplied by the rehabilitation agency assists in special training in task sequencing and equipment is adjusted to accommodate the weakness.

COST: \$0

BARRIER: An airline programmer/analyst with post-polio fatigue brought on by stress cannot be on call 24 hours a day and work overtime as needed.

ACCOMMODATION: Waiver of the requirements of 24-hour on-call duty and overtime. The employee works the hours prescribed for older adult worker program participants of the airline.

COST: \$0

BARRIER: An experienced electronics equipment inspector paralyzed from the waist down needs to perform tasks related to using precision equipment and assembly inspection. He also needs rapid mobility around the plant.

ACCOMMODATION: A heavy motorized wheelchair is stored on the premises for his use in the plant. The employee uses his own lightweight chair for travel. The bins containing items to be inspected are lowered and a lap board is provided for his specification books.

COST: Less than \$200

BARRIER: A computer service technician with cerebral palsy loses function of the lower extremities, but their job includes bending, stooping, balancing, and getting underneath the mainframe equipment to perform needed repairs.

ACCOMMODATION: An automotive repair creeper is purchased and modified with back support to enable the employee to easily slide under the mainframe equipment.

COST: \$30

BARRIER: Severe hearing loss prevents an experienced nurse from monitoring multiple alarms on medical equipment in the critical care unit.

ACCOMMODATION: The hospital transfers her to a position in the laboratory, where a vibrating pager and a portable TTY is used to direct her to various locations throughout the hospital.

COST: Approximately \$600

BARRIER: A receptionist who is blind works at a law firm. She cannot see the lights on the phone console that indicate which telephone lines are ringing, on hold, or in use by staff.

ACCOMMODATION: The purchase of a light probe, which is a pen-like product that detects a lighted button.

COST: \$45

BARRIER: An individual who has a congenital heart defect that limits strenuous activity and also has mobility limitations due to childhood polio works as a receiving clerk, which requires unpacking merchandise, checking it in, assigning numbers, and making price checks.

ACCOMMODATION: A rolling chair with locking wheels that can adjust to the level of the task.

COST: \$200

Reprinted in part from NISH's Disability Awareness Manual.