

Accessibility Hour with OOD

Learner's Guide

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Overview

Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD) supports employers in creating workplaces that are diverse and inclusive of employees with disabilities. The “Accessibility Hour with OOD” virtual training answers some of the most common questions we receive from employers. This learner’s guide offers information, best practices, and resources regarding service animals, face coverings, Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), reasonable accommodations, and recruitment and inclusion. **The information included is for educational purposes, is not an exhaustive list, and is not intended as legal advice. Employers should follow the health and safety guidelines which apply to them, including those specific to the COVID-19 pandemic, when integrating ideas and accommodations into the workplace.**

Service Animals

Service animals can be trained to perform a specific task for an employee with a disability at work, so employers can consider the use of a service animal as a reasonable accommodation. Examples of ways service animals perform a task for employees with disabilities include:

- Providing stability for an employee with difficulty balancing and walking,
- Providing navigation guidance for an employee who is blind or has low vision.,
- Alerting a deaf or hard of hearing employee of sounds in the workplace., and
- Providing a sense of calm for an employee with anxiety disorder.

Although the EEOC does not address service animals in the workplace directly in its guidance, the use of a service animal can be considered a reasonable accommodation under Title I. Here are some best practices when considering a service animal as a reasonable accommodation:

- Educate the staff who process accommodation requests that the use of service animals in the workplace can be considered a form of reasonable accommodation.
- Employers are not required to obtain documentation but are permitted to when the disability and/or the need for the service animal as a reasonable accommodation are not obvious.
- Assess the request for the use of a service animal as you would all requests. Consider the forms of reasonable accommodations that support using a service animal at work, such as:
 - Modifying a “no animal” policy,
 - Permitting a flexible break schedule,
 - Considering using leave to permit the employee to attend training of a service animal,
 - Providing the employee with a private office so the animal is in an enclosed area when there are other employees with allergies or fears, and
 - Providing the employee with an office near an exit to manage the animal’s needs.
- Determine if the request is effective and reasonable. If considerations need to be made for coworkers due to having an animal in the work environment, consider if this is feasible.
- Implement a trial period to assess the effectiveness of the service animal.
 - The employer should expect the animal to be trained to act appropriately.
 - Generally, the employee is responsible for caring for the service animal’s needs, ensuring the animal is not disruptive, and keeping the animal clean.
- Collaborate with the employee to establish the animal’s relief area, designate a break schedule to tend to the animal’s needs, and practice emergency procedures for shelter in place and evacuation situations.

When a service animal is used in the work environment as a reasonable accommodation, employers may have to provide accommodations for other employees with allergies or fears. Here are some best practices for managing allergies when a service animal is in the work environment:

- Designate separate work areas and paths of travel,
- Provide one of the employees with an enclosed workspace,
- Plan for using common areas at different times,
- Determine if the employee using the service animal can use a different reasonable accommodation during meetings when an employee with an allergy will be present,
- Consider alternatives for in-person communications, such as email, phone, or videoconference,
- Permit a flexible schedule to minimize working at the same time,
- Permit a flexible break schedule for the employee with the allergy to manage needs for fresh air, taking medicine, or going to the doctor,
- Use a portable air purifier at each workstation,
- Add HEPA filters to existing ventilation system and increase cleaning of work areas, and
- Ask the employee if he is willing to use dander care products on the animal regularly.

Here are some best practices for managing fears when a service animal is in the work environment:

- Provide adequate space between the employee and the animal.
- Relocate the person to avoid being near the animal.

Confidentiality guidelines must be followed when providing reasonable accommodations. However, when a service animal will be in the workplace, the employer may want to inform employees. In addition, employers may wish to provide disability awareness training to educate all employees on proper etiquette with a service animal. Here are some best practices to consider:

- Ask the employee using the service animal what his preference is for educating all employees about how to interact with a service animal.
- When the employee does not want his disability and/or the need for the service animal disclosed, make only a general announcement that a service animal will be present at work for a specific purpose and is not to be interacted with in any way. Collaborate with the employee using the service animal to create the announcement before notifying all employees.
- When the employee prefers to disclose his use of the service animal, consider providing disability awareness training about service animals at work. Collaborate with the employee using the service animal to ensure his comfort level with the content. The employer could ask the employee if he wants to conduct the training, but this is certainly not required. This type of training may address important topics such as:
 - Service animals are working and performing important tasks.
 - The employee using the service animal is responsible for its care and supervision at all times.
 - Do not pet the service animal. For more tips refer to OOD's fact sheet "[Service Animals in the Workplace](#)".
- Periodically remind employees about proper etiquette with a service animal because employees may begin to relax the rules and engage with the animal over time.

The Disability:IN network website includes a resource titled "[Service Dog Accommodation Checklist & Ownership](#)" which identifies how to incorporate a service animal into the workplace. This learner's guide does not refer to service animals as addressed in Titles II and III of the ADA. For more information, please visit the U.S. Department of Justice publication "[Service Animals](#)."

Face Coverings

The EEOC has a published guidance called "[Pandemic Preparedness in the Workplace and the Americans with Disabilities Act](#)" which has been updated for the current COVID-19 pandemic. The EEOC states during a pandemic an employer may require employees to wear personal protective equipment (PPE), such as a face mask or a face covering. When an employee with a disability needs a reasonable accommodation regarding PPE, the employer should provide one unless doing so causes an undue hardship. When a disability and/or the need for an accommodation are not obvious, an employer may seek medical documentation to verify a disability exists and to identify the need for an accommodation.

When an employee with a disability requests a reasonable accommodation associated with wearing a face covering, the employer should begin the interactive process as it would with any request. Collaborate with the employee to identify alternative forms of PPE if feasible that do not cause an undue hardship. Here are some examples to consider:

- Determine if alternative types of facial coverings, such as a shield or visor would be sufficient.
- Permit a modified schedule which allows taking a break to remove the mask in a socially-distanced environment, such as outside to get fresh air or in a private space.
- Permit telework from a home office.
- Provide temporary reassignment to a job that permits telework or limits the need to wear a mask.
- Permit leave temporarily until the mask requirement is lifted.
- Provide a private office where the employee can remove their mask.
- Use alternative communication methods, such as phone calls, chat messages, and video conferencing to collaborate with coworkers.

The general use of face coverings presents unique challenges for deaf and hard of hearing employees who rely on lip reading, facial expressions, and clear sounds to communicate with others. Not all deaf and hard of hearing employees lip read, but many rely on facial expressions and clear sounds to communicate with others. Here are some ideas to consider for improving communications when interacting with a deaf or hard of hearing employee:

- Use clear face masks which are large enough to show the lips, teeth and facial expressions.
 - Where to purchase clear face masks:
 - Full-face visibility mask from [ClearMask](#)
 - Clear surgical mask from [The Association of Medical Professionals with Hearing Losses](#) (AMPHL)
 - A list of clear face masks and clear face shields from [Knowledge Base](#)
 - A list of clear face masks from the [Job Accommodation Network](#)
 - How to make clear face masks:
 - Pattern from [Adult Advocacy Centers](#)
 - Instructions from [Hearing, Speech & Deaf Center](#)
- Use clear face shields, where permitted, which offer greater visibility of the entire face.
 - Where to purchase clear face shields:
 - A list of clear masks and clear face shields from [Knowledge Base](#)
 - Single-use medical face shields from [GloShield](#)



- An article by [Forbes](#) highlighting face shield options
- A list of clear face shields from the [Job Accommodation Network](#)
- Implement alternative methods of communication for quick conversations:
 - Incorporate gestures and demonstrations into your communications.
 - Utilize text messaging and email.
 - Use Speech to Text applications:
 - [AVA](#) speech to text application.
 - [Otter](#) speech to text application.
 - Write notes on a dry erase board, a Boogie Board, or via pen and paper:
 - Portable dry erase board via [Amazon](#).
 - [Boogie Board](#) writing tablet.
- Permit employees to video chat from a different room in which proper social distancing permits an employee to remove the mask for the conversation.

Please note, OOD does not endorse products or vendors. The resources shared above are intended to serve as examples to help you identify solutions.

ADA Title I

Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) makes it unlawful to discriminate against individuals with disabilities in all aspects of employment and requires covered employers to provide reasonable accommodations unless doing so causes an undue hardship. Title I is enforced by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the EEOC has published several documents providing guidance for employers to help them navigate their responsibilities.

Reasonable Accommodation: A reasonable accommodation is a change in the hiring process or in the workplace that enables an applicant or employee with a disability to participate in work-related activities. Types of reasonable accommodations include making the physical or digital environment accessible, restructuring a job, modifying a policy, permitting a flexible schedule, providing equipment, providing readers and interpreters, permitting telework, using leave, and providing reassignment.

At times, employers may receive a request from an employee for a change at work without the employee disclosing a disability. To receive a reasonable accommodation under Title I, an employee must have a disability. When an employee requests a change at work and does not link this to a disability, this is not a request for reasonable accommodation. However, if the employer is unsure whether an employee is requesting a reasonable accommodation, the employer may ask questions to clarify what the employee is requesting and why. For example, an employer may ask why the employee is requesting a change at work and/or “How can I help?”.

When an employee with a disability requests a change in the workplace related to a medical condition, this is a request for a reasonable accommodation. The employer should begin the interactive process, which is an informal collaboration between the employee with a disability and the employer. The goal of this collaboration is to identify what barrier the employee is facing in the workplace, how this relates to the disability, and how a reasonable accommodation will remove this barrier. An employer may request medical documentation when the disability or the need for a reasonable accommodation is not obvious but is not required to do so. The employer is permitted to require the documentation come from an appropriate medical provider, such as a physician, mental health professional, or an occupational or

physical therapist. An employee with a disability often knows what will work best, so a good place to start is with asking the employee what ideas they have. If neither you nor the employee can identify an effective solution, there are outside sources that can help:

- With the employee's permission, an employer may consider asking the employee's medical provider for recommendations or to comment on a specific accommodation being considered.
- [Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities](#) is a state agency that provides Ohioans with disabilities the services and support they need to attain and maintain employment. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services are customized for each employee through assessments and one-on-one meetings with professional VR counselors.
 - Interested Ohioans with disabilities may visit www.oodworks.com for more information.
- The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) is a federally-funded source of guidance on workplace accommodations and Title I. Visit JAN for more information: <https://askjan.org/>
- The ADA National Network provides guidance and training on how to implement the ADA. The network has ten regional centers. Ohio is in the Great Lakes Region.
 - The ADA National Network website: <https://adata.org/national-network>
 - The Great Lakes Region website: <http://www.adagreatlakes.org/>

Reasonable versus Undue Hardship: During the interactive process, the employer will determine whether an accommodation is reasonable or whether it causes an undue hardship. Undue hardship must be based on an individualized assessment using the EEOC criteria. An undue hardship means an accommodation causes significant difficulty or expense for the employer. The employer is encouraged to reference the [EEOC guidance](#), which includes factors such as the cost and nature of the accommodation as well as the employer's size, financial resources, number of employees, the nature of the business, and the impact on operations.

When deciding whether an accommodation is too costly, the employer should consider its net cost after considering all possible outside sources of funding. The employer is encouraged to explore these resources to determine eligibility and possibilities for funding:

- Assistive Technology Industry Association. "[AT Resources Funding Guide](#)"
- Internal Revenue Service. "[Tax Benefits for Businesses Who Have Employees with Disabilities](#)"
- Job Accommodation Network's [article on funding](#)
- Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities services for eligible Ohioans with disabilities:
 - Information about Vocational Rehabilitation: <https://ood.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/ood/>
 - For individuals to apply for services: <https://www.oodworks.com/>
 - Information about services for employers: <https://ood.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/ood/information-for-employers>
- The employee requesting the accommodation may be asked to pay the portion of an accommodation deemed an undue hardship by the employer, after a proper assessment of the accommodation is made, including consideration of all funding sources.

When an accommodation is determined to cause an undue hardship, the employer is expected to consider whether another accommodation exists that is reasonable.

Interactive Process: Employers are not required by the ADA to create a formal process for providing reasonable accommodations. However, when an employee with a disability requests an

accommodation, the employer is expected to engage in an informal interactive process with the employee to collaboratively identify the need for the accommodation and an effective solution. It is a best practice to create a process to manage requests efficiently and provide training for all employees on the right to request a reasonable accommodation. In addition, include an accessibility statement in hiring materials and invitations for events, such as trainings and meetings, with contact information for requesting a reasonable accommodation. This combination of training on the reasonable accommodation process and providing the accessibility statement sends a message to employees that you are an inclusive employer that cares about what they need. For information on how to create a reasonable accommodation process, please view OOD's archived webinar titled "[Navigating the Reasonable Accommodation Process.](#)"

Note: the COVID-19 pandemic may pose unique circumstances when navigating the interactive process. Employers are encouraged to reference the EEOC guidance to better understand these circumstances, such as:

- An employee's need for an additional or altered reasonable accommodation,
- Obtaining medical documentation,
- Providing a temporary reasonable accommodation, and
- When a reasonable accommodation causes an undue hardship.

Employers have asked about the risks they face if they do not provide reasonable accommodations. Title I of the ADA requires covered employers to provide reasonable accommodations to applicants and employees with disabilities unless doing so causes an undue hardship. If an employee with a disability believes they have been denied a reasonable accommodation, she may file a charge with the EEOC. According to the Northeast ADA Center's "[The Small Business at Work Toolkit](#)", studies show that 58% of accommodations are free, and those that were not had a median cost of \$500. Studies have also revealed that employees with disabilities have higher performance ratings, are absent less, and stay on the job longer than employees without disabilities. These results demonstrate that providing a reasonable accommodation, when needed, to attain or retain a qualified and talented employee with a disability is a good investment.

Performance: Employees with disabilities are expected to meet the qualification standards of the job and be able to perform the job's essential functions, with or without reasonable accommodation. One way to manage performance effectively is to clearly communicate productivity expectations and consequences for low performance to all employees. At times, a barrier may exist in the workplace which prevents an employee with a disability from performing a task. Sometimes a poor evaluation is the first indicator to an employee with a disability that his disability is contributing to performance.

Low performance should be addressed with employees with disabilities in the same way it is addressed with all employees with low performance. An employee with a disability may choose to disclose a disability during this discussion and may or may not request a reasonable accommodation.

When the employee discloses a disability and states it is contributing to low performance, clearly communicate the performance expectations and ask the employee in what way the disability is affecting her ability to perform the job. If the employee does not ask for a reasonable accommodation, the employer may ask what they can do to help the employee be able to perform the job. If the employee indicates she knows what would help or would like to pursue exploring options for a reasonable

accommodation, begin the interactive process. If the employee declines help, the employer may provide the employee with information of whom to contact if she decides to pursue options another time.

Employers have requested strategies to effectively address low performance and manage unconscious biases during the process. Here are some suggestions to consider:

- Provide training to supervisors and managers on how to recognize a request for a reasonable accommodation and what steps to take when one is received.
- Provide disability awareness training designed to help employees examine personal attitudes and biases toward people with disabilities. OOD provides Windmills Disability Awareness Training for employers at no charge. Information about this training is available on our [website](#).
- Be open to the possibility of a job being performed in another way. Often there is more than one way to perform a task. Of course, an employer does not have to implement another method to performing the job if this method causes an undue hardship.

Reassignment: Reassignment to a vacant position is a form of reasonable accommodation that the EEOC guidance refers to as the reasonable accommodation of “last resort.” This accommodation should only be considered when an employee with a disability can no longer perform the essential functions of the job due to the disability, with or without a reasonable accommodation, or when it has been determined that effective accommodations cause an undue hardship. The EEOC includes criteria and guidance for employers when using reassignment as a reasonable accommodation.

Employers have asked whether they must maintain the employee’s higher level of pay if the employee is reassigned to a vacant position with a lower level of pay. The answer from the EEOC guidance is no, unless the employer transfers employees without disabilities to lower level positions and maintains their higher level of pay. However, reassignment is intended to be a transition to a vacant position of equivalent pay and benefits. If there is no such vacant position, then a lower level position may be considered for reassignment.

Accessible Physical Environment: Employers are encouraged to make changes to existing work environments and facilities for general accessibility. However, under Title I of the ADA, employers are not required to make existing facilities accessible unless an applicant or employee with a disability requests a reasonable accommodation. Employers are responsible to provide reasonable accommodations for qualified applicants and employees with disabilities to participate in the hiring process, to perform the job’s essential functions, and to enjoy the privileges of employment, unless doing so causes an undue hardship.

Here are some examples of areas in the physical environment an applicant or employee with a disability may request be made accessible as a form of reasonable accommodation:

- Work environment, building, worksite, and facilities,
- Parking lots,
- Entrances and exits,
- Internal routes of travel,
- Workstations,
- Tools and equipment,
- Shared spaces like conference rooms, break areas, and restrooms, and

- Signage, alarms, and emergency exits.

Employers have requested an assessment of the accessibility of their physical, built environments. The New England ADA Center has created an [ADA Checklist for Existing Facilities](#) (Checklist) based on the [2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design](#) (Standards) from the Department of Justice. The Standards are accessibility regulations that apply to Titles II and III of the ADA and provide minimum requirements for new construction and alterations of existing buildings. The Checklist includes an assessment for these priority areas: approach and entrance, access to goods and services, toilet rooms, and additional access (drinking fountains, public telephones, and fire alarms). The Checklist is based on the Standards but does not include an exhaustive list of its technical guidelines. Note: what an applicant or employee with a disability needs for physical accessibility of the built environment may at times be greater than what the minimum requirements are as indicated in the Standards. Employers should consult the Standards for guidance on their responsibilities under Titles II or III of the ADA.

Reasonable Accommodations

Employers have inquired about reasonable accommodations for the unique work environments employees with disabilities are working in due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, employers are interested in learning about working remotely, accessing the virtual environment, and working onsite within the parameters of the pandemic's safety guidelines. Title I of the ADA is still enforced during the COVID-19 pandemic, but [EEOC guidance](#) states Title I does not interfere with or prevent an employer from following the guidance of state and local public health authorities or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Remote Work

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many employers shifted employees, including employees with disabilities, to a remote work environment. Employers have asked how working remotely has affected employees with disabilities and how they can help. The impact of working remotely on employees with disabilities is unique to each employee. For some employees with disabilities, the remote work environment is more accessible. Remote work may alleviate the time, effort, and stress that comes with getting ready for work and commuting to the workplace. In addition, working remotely enables employees to design the workstation in a way that is more accessible for them and may permit the flexibility to work when their energy levels are most optimal. However, the remote work environment can create workplace barriers for some employees with disabilities.

Mental Health Disabilities: Due to the pandemic and/or the shift to working remotely, employees with mental health disabilities may experience exacerbations of their condition and have difficulty handling the changes to daily routines and activities. When a request is made for a change in the remote work environment, employers should engage in the interactive process just as they would with any request for a reasonable accommodation. In May, OOD delivered a webinar "[Mental Health Disabilities in the Workplace](#)" which discussed reasonable accommodation from a general perspective and how to navigate aspects of Title I of the ADA such as performance, confidentiality, and communications. Some ideas for reasonable accommodations include:

- Permit a flexible break schedule to manage symptoms, stress, and anxiety. A break may be used to get fresh air or to participate in a mindfulness exercise via an app on a smart device. A mindfulness exercise involves focusing on sensations and feelings in the moment without

judging or interpreting thoughts. A mindfulness exercise may include breathing exercises, guided imagery, and mini-meditations to promote relaxation and stress management.

- Provide a noise cancelling device, such as noise cancelling earbuds, to minimize background noise, such as the sounds of others working in the home or dogs barking outside.

Physical Disabilities:

Employers have asked how to evaluate the remote work environment when an employee requests a reasonable accommodation for a physical disability. First, an employer may ask the employee questions during the interactive process to identify the functional limitation the employee is experiencing at work, what the barrier is in the work environment, and what ideas he has to remove this barrier and enable job performance. Also, employers may consider asking the employee to complete a self-assessment of the workstation or consult with a vendor to provide a virtual assessment to identify barriers and effective solutions. Here are some resources for self-assessments:

- Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation offers [ergonomics tools and resources](#) on their website that includes a computer workstation needs assessment, computer set-up checklist, and computer positioning tips.
- US Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) offers a [Computer Workstations eTool](#) on their website that includes a checklist for an evaluation and a purchase guide.

Virtual Environment

The COVID-19 pandemic has led many employees to participate in work tasks in the virtual environment which may pose challenges for employees with disabilities. This guide includes general ideas for making the virtual environment accessible.

Blind and Low Vision: Employees who are blind or have low vision may face barriers in the virtual environment when accessing documents and participating in video calls. Also, applicants who are blind or have low vision may face barriers with virtual interviews. Here are some examples of reasonable accommodations that may be effective:

- Determine if the virtual platform being used is compatible with assistive technology, such as screen reading and magnification software.
- Consider communicating over the phone when there are limitations with internet service or accessibility constraints with the virtual platform.
- Ensure shared documents are accessible, including the ability to be read by a screen reader. Minnesota IT services offers a resource on their website titled "[Accessible Electronic Documents](#)" that describe how to create accessible documents in Word, PDF, InDesign, PowerPoint, and Excel.

Deaf and Hard of Hearing: Employees who are deaf or hard of hearing may face barriers in the virtual environment when communicating through phone calls and participating in training through a video conference. Also, applicants who are deaf or hard of hearing may face barriers with virtual interviews. Employers may consider removing barriers through providing reasonable accommodations such as video relay services, American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation, or captioning services.

Video relay service is a form of telecommunications which enables deaf and hard of hearing individuals who use ASL to communicate with voice telephone users. Video relay is a free public service that works

through use of video equipment, a communications assistant, and a phone line or an internet connection. For more information, please visit the websites listed with the resources below:

- Federal Communications Commission (FCC). "[Video Relay Services](#)"
- Ohio Relay. "[Welcome to Ohio Relay](#)"

When considering ASL, check to ensure the employer's virtual platform supports a third-party participant. If it does not, consider implementing a virtual platform that does, such as Zoom. It can be helpful to create a list of ASL interpreters to contact when a request is made. For more information on best practices when working with a sign language interpreter and to identify myths and facts when working with deaf or hard of hearing employees, please view our [fact sheet](#).

Note: A sign language interpreter is often needed for communications such as interviews, trainings, and presentations. For day-to-day communications, other low-tech options can be considered, such as speech to text apps on smart devices, exchanging quick notes, and texting. Remember to collaborate with the deaf or hard or hearing employee to determine the effective reasonable accommodation.

Another option for reasonable accommodation is captioning. Employers have inquired about the types of captioning available and what alternatives are available when captions generated by artificial intelligence (AI) are not accessible. Types of captioning commonly used in the virtual environment include artificial intelligence (AI) and live captioning.

- Some virtual platforms offer AI captioning, also known as automatic speech recognition (ASR) which can be beneficial. However, AI is not perfect and can make errors in punctuation and spelling which can cause confusion.
- Live captioning, also known as communication access real-time (CART), is provided by a trained stenographer who translates what is said into real-time text that is displayed on a computer or smart device. CART can be provided remotely, known as remote CART. Make sure to check the virtual platform being used to ensure it supports the use of remote CART.
- JAN offers a resource list of remote CART providers on their webpage titled "[CART Services – Remote](#)." OOD does not endorse products or vendors but offers resources for employer consideration.
- Access Innovation Media has an article on their website titled "[Should You Use Computer-Generated or Human-Generated Captions](#)" which indicates the advantages and disadvantages of AI and live captioning with a comparison of accuracy, cost, turn-around time, quality, accents, speech variations, and technical language.

To identify the accessibility of common virtual platforms, consider these resources:

- Disability:IN's resource titled "[COVID-19 Response: Digital Accessibility and Other Best Practices for Remote Work](#)" and locate the title "**Become familiar with accessibility features of your conferencing software.**"
- The Hearing Loss Association of America's (HLAA) [comparison matrix](#) of accessibility features offered by various virtual platforms. Some of the features considered include types of captioning, using a relay service, pinning an ASL interpreter, enlarging video, and using text chat.
- An article from Diverse Ability Magazine titled "[How to Pick an Accessible Virtual Meeting Platform](#)" provides information on the accessibility features of virtual platforms.

Onsite Work within Pandemic Guidelines

Many employers shifted to a remote work environment early in the COVID-19 pandemic, but not all. Some employers did not have the option to permit employees to telework and determined how to safely continue business operations in accordance with public health guidelines. Now, some employers are bringing remote employees back to the workplace. Whether a business remained open with employees onsite or is transitioning them back from the remote environment, employers are asking what kinds of reasonable accommodations may be needed by employees with disabilities in the onsite COVID-19 work environment. An effective reasonable accommodation is determined on a case-by-case basis with the employee and the employer engaging collaboratively in the interactive process. Please consider the following general ideas for reasonable accommodations in accordance with required public health guidelines:

- When physical distancing guidelines are marked on the floor, consider using high contrast colors and textured markers for employees with low vision.
- Provide orientation and mobility (O&M) training for blind and low vision employees to become familiar with the physical changes and identifying markers in the new work environment.
- When an employee has a limitation with wearing a face covering, consider the ideas for reasonable accommodations included in the section on [Face Coverings](#) in this learner's guide.
- Make sure training on safety procedures, proper use of PPE, and sanitization protocols is delivered in an accessible format. Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities delivered a webinar "[Supporting Employees with Disabilities During COVID-19](#)" that discussed best practices for communicating training information with employees with disabilities.

Recruitment and Inclusion

As discussed earlier, there is a business case for employing individuals with disabilities. A good first step to create an inclusive work environment is to expand recruitment efforts to include sources of qualified applicants with disabilities. OOD can support employers in this effort by partnering to source qualified candidates with disabilities for open positions. In addition, make sure job announcements and postings are accessible and include the job's essential functions and an "equal opportunity employer" statement.

OOD can source qualified candidates with disabilities to employers through the services we offer Ohioans with disabilities who desire to attain or retain employment. OOD also offers services to employers to support their efforts in creating inclusive work environments. These services include:

- [OOD](#) provides Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services for Ohioans with disabilities which are customized through assessments and one-on-one meetings with professional VR counselors. Interested individuals may visit www.oodworks.com for more information.
- [OOD](#) offers a variety of free services for employers to promote and support the hiring of individuals with disabilities including candidate sourcing and hiring events, customized [training programs](#), worksite accessibility [consultations](#).
- Specifically, OOD offers training for employers on disability awareness and disability etiquette. These trainings provide information geared toward making everyone feel more comfortable and included. For more information, please visit the links below:
 - Business Relations Team: <https://ood.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/ood/information-for-employers/business-relations-team/>
 - No-Cost Training Program for Your Business: <https://ood.ohio.gov/static/Resources/Disability%20Awareness%20Training.pdf>

- Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities delivered a virtual training “[Disability Etiquette](#)” that discussed best practices for communicating training information with employees with disabilities.

Employers have inquired about ways to prepare for a newly hired employee with a disability. Employers may wish to review their onboarding process and consider some of these best practices:

- Assign an employee to oversee requests for reasonable accommodation to ensure the request is facilitated efficiently and that reasonable accommodations are in place for the first day of work.
- Include an accessibility statement in communications delivered to newly hired employees regarding the activities included in orientation, details of the work environment, and information about the job. This enables a newly hired employee with a disability to determine if a reasonable accommodation is needed. It also ensures the employee has the information needed to make the accommodation request.
- Be familiar with common requests for accommodations, such as making documents accessible, providing print documents in alternative formats, permitting the use of service animals, conducting onboarding in a physically accessible location, and providing a sign language interpreter.

For information on best practices, view the virtual training delivered by Opportunities for Ohioans “[Inclusive Hiring: Applicants with Disabilities](#)” which is archived on our website.

Employers have asked who the leaders are in accessibility and how to determine whether their organization truly is inclusive. The Disability:IN organization offers a series of documents under the topic of “[Disability Inclusion Employment Best Practices](#)” that addresses benefits, recruitment, retention and advancement, and accommodations. These documents are a collection of best practices from those employers who have top scores on the [Disability Equality Index \(DEI\)](#). The DEI is a comprehensive benchmarking tool employer can use to gauge how their disability inclusion efforts compare with that of other companies. Practices measured by the DEI include culture and leadership, enterprise-wide access, employment practices, community engagement, and supplier diversity. The [Disability Employment Tracker](#) is available through the National Organization on Disability for employers to benchmark their efforts in creating diverse and inclusive workplaces.

In addition, the Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN) offers a [Primer on Disability Inclusion](#) on their website with information on how to create a workplace that is accessible and welcoming for applicants and employees with disabilities. This primer discusses characteristics of disability-inclusive companies, such as culture, recruitment, retention, accommodations, commitment to disability inclusion in policies and procedures, accessible information and communications, self-identification policies, and measuring effectiveness.

Finally, a disability-focused [Employee Resource Group \(ERG\)](#) is one strategy successful employers use to encourage disability inclusion in all aspects of employment. An ERG also focuses on creating a supportive environment in which employees with disabilities can feel comfortable to bring their “whole self” to work. ERGs commonly review workplace practices through the lens of accessibility and inclusion and influence policies and procedures.

Conclusion

Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD) appreciates your interest in identifying solutions and resources to support a workplace that is diverse and inclusive of employees with disabilities. Each employee with a disability, each employer, and each workplace is unique and because of this, the effective strategy to create a work environment that is accessible and inclusive will be unique. We hope the information shared in this learner's guide and virtual training are helpful in supporting your efforts.

Resources

Service Animals

- ADA National Network. "[Service Animals](#)"
- ADA National Network. "[Service Animals and Emotional Support Animals](#)"
- ADA National Network. "[Service Animal Resource Hub](#)"
- ADA National Network. "[The Americans with Disabilities Act Questions and Answers](#)"
- Disability:IN. "[Service Dog Accommodation Checklist & Ownership](#)"
- Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion. "[Service and Emotional Animals in the Workplace: What Federal Employers Should Know](#)"
- Job Accommodation Network. "[A Guide for Coworker Interaction with Service Animals in the Workplace](#)"
- Job Accommodation Network. "[Emotional Support Animals in the Workplace: A Practical Approach, Volume 12, Issue 04](#)"
- Job Accommodation Network. "[Service Animals](#)"
- Job Accommodation Network. "[Volume 2, Issue 01](#)"
- U.S. Department of Justice. "[Frequently Asked Questions about Service Animals and the ADA](#)"
- U.S. Department of Justice. "[Service Animals](#)"

Face Coverings

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "[Considerations for Wearing Masks](#)"
- Great Plains ADA Center. "[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Resources](#)"
- Great Plains ADA Center. "[FAQs: The ADA, Small Business and Face Mask Policies](#)"
- Job Accommodation Network. "[Accommodation Strategies for Returning to Work During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)"
- Job Accommodation Network. "[Masks for COVID-19 Management and ADA Accommodations](#)"
- Southeast ADA Center. "[The ADA and Face Mask Policies](#)"
- U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. "[Pandemic Preparedness in the Workplace and the Americans with Disabilities Act](#)"
- U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. "[What You Should Know About COVID-19 and the ADA, the Rehabilitation Act, and Other EEO Laws](#)"

ADA Title I

- ADA National Network. "[The Americans with Disabilities Act Questions and Answers](#)"
- Department of Justice. "[2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design](#)"
- Employer Assistance and Resource Network. "[Physical Accessibility](#)"
- New England ADA Center. "[ADA Checklist for Existing Facilities](#)"
- Northeast ADA Center. "[Small Business at Work Toolkit](#)"

- Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities. "[Navigating the Reasonable Accommodation Process](#)"
- The Job Accommodation Network. "[Recognizing an Accommodation Request Under the ADA](#)"
- U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. "[Applying Performance and Conduct Standards to Employee with Disabilities](#)"
- U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. "[Enforcement Guidance on Reasonable Accommodation and Undue Hardship under the ADA](#)"
- U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. "[The ADA: Your Responsibilities as an Employer](#)"
- U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. "[Your Employment Rights as an Individual with a Disability](#)"

Reasonable Accommodation and Accessibility

- Access Innovation Media. "[Should You Use Computer-Generated or Human-Generated Captions?](#)"
- Access Innovation Media. "[Types of Captioning You Must Know](#)"
- Caption First. "[The Gold Standard in Communication Access](#)"
- Disability:IN. "[Covid-19 Response: Digital Accessibility and Other Best Practices for Remote Work](#)"
- Disability:IN. "[Digital Accessibility Statement Best Practices](#)"
- Diverse Ability Magazine. "[How to Pick an Accessible Virtual Meeting Platform](#)"
- Federal Communications Commission. "[Video Relay Services](#)"
- Forbes. "[Working From Home Opens The Door to Employing People with Disabilities](#)"
- Hearing Loss Association of America. "[Video Conferencing Platforms Feature Matrix](#)"
- Job Accommodation Network. "[Accommodation Strategies for Returning to Work During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)"
- Job Accommodation Network. "[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\), Stress, and Mental Health Conditions](#)"
- Job Accommodation Network. "[Making a Statement – About Reasonable Accommodation and Equal Opportunity](#)"
- Job Accommodation Network. "[Online Application Systems: Sample Language for Accommodation Statements](#)"
- Job Accommodation Network. "[Teleconference Accessibility and Hearing – Keeping Deaf and Hard of Hearing Employees in the Loop](#)"
- Job Accommodation Network. "[Telework](#)"
- Job Accommodation Network. "[The ADA and Managing Reasonable Accommodation Requests From Employees with Disabilities in Response to COVID-19](#)"
- Minnesota IT Services. "[Accessible Electronic Documents](#)"
- Ohio Relay: <https://www.ohiorelay.com/>
- Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities. "[Disability Etiquette Training](#)"
- Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities. "[Inclusive Hiring: Applicants with Disabilities](#)"
- Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities. "[Mental Health Disabilities in the Workplace](#)"
- Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities. "[Navigating the Reasonable Accommodation Process](#)"

- Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities. "[Supporting Employees with Disabilities During COVID-19](#)"
- U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. "[What You Should Know About COVID-19 and the ADA, the Rehabilitation Act, and Other EEO Laws](#)"

Recruitment/Inclusion

- Disability:IN. "[Disability Equality Index](#)"
- Disability:IN. "[Disability Inclusion Employment Best Practices](#)"
- Disability: IN. "[ERG/BRG Resources](#)"
- EARN. "[EARN's Primer on Disability Inclusion](#)"
- EARN. "[Recruitment & Hiring](#)"
- Job Accommodation Network. "[Incorporate Reasonable Accommodation Practices into Your Onboarding Process](#)"
- Northeast ADA Center. "[The Small Business at Work Toolkit](#)"
- Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities. To apply for services: <https://www.oodworks.com/>
- Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities. "[Inclusive Hiring: Applicants with Disabilities](#)"
- Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities. "[Information for Employers](#)"
- Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities. "[Welcome to Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities](#)"

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