



ACCESSIBILITY CONFIDENT EMPLOYERS

Tip Sheet: Disability Accommodations at Work

What is accommodation?

“Accommodation” in an employment setting is the adjustment or change to a rule, practice, condition, or requirement of employment to consider the specific needs of an individual or group with one or more of the protected characteristics (in this case, physical and mental disability) in the [Nova Scotia Human Rights Act](#).

The diversity of disabilities will require a diversity of accommodations, and these may be very specific to each individual. Some examples of these are assistive/adaptive technology, extra time during an interview to complete testing, flexible working arrangements (location, hours) and noise canceling headphones or other sensory-friendly work environments. Managers and employers should take a proactive approach to accommodation that supports timely decisions and appropriate supports.

There will always be a need provide accommodations for persons with disabilities, even as accessibility progresses. Persons with disabilities have the right to request and receive appropriate, flexible accommodations and employers are required by law to offer accommodations. However, our goal is to design our spaces and services, so they are accessible for everyone, to reduce the need for individual accommodations.

The **duty to accommodate** arises when an employee has disability and requires some change to do their work or seeks modified duties to remain in the workplace. This could look like a person with a disability can do the work but must do it in a different manner than someone without a disability. Another situation it may arise would be when a disability has stopped a person from being able to perform all the duties they did before or were done before in the job position.

Individuals may experience barriers differently, and just because you have the same diagnosis does not mean you will need the same accommodation.

Accommodation Examples

- **policy and procedure changes** (e.g., modifying work hours; location of duties; how tasks are expected to be completed)
- **supports** (e.g., employment coaches, guide dogs/service animals, personal support worker, workplace attendant, interpreters)
- **equipment** (e.g., technical devices including assistive technology; alternative work materials, communication aids, ergonomic workstations)
- **structural modifications** (e.g., handrails, ramps, widened doorways, accessibility to common facilities, sensory modifications).

How do we Accommodate Employees?

Recognize the need for accommodation

Generally, the onus to request accommodations is on the person with a disability. Often people may not ask for an accommodation because they don't know that they have a right to ask for it. A request for accommodation does not have to be in writing. It can look like a conversation with a manager.

Gather relevant information and assess needs

- Ensure that the employee or candidate understands their responsibilities.
- Talk with the employee about the barriers they may face in the workplace that might hinder their productivity, including any accommodation that was provided on an informal basis or any accommodation that was provided in a previous position or organization.
- To best support the employee with their work-related needs, the focus should be on finding appropriate and efficient accommodation solutions. This includes having the person who is to be accommodated involved in discussions.

Make and implement an informed decision

- Take the time to review the request, understand the needs and review any supporting documentation.
- Work with all relevant parties, beginning with the employee, their union representative where applicable, and, if necessary, co-workers, to determine one or more possible accommodations.
- Empower the employee to call in other parties to help make the process easier
- Consult the individual about the best approach to explaining the accommodation to anyone affected by the measures, if necessary. Inform others, as needed, and agreed upon, in a timely manner.
- Try to find effective, practical, timely and cost-efficient solutions while ensuring the employee's dignity, privacy, confidentiality, comfort, and autonomy.

Document and follow up

- Document the process, even if it's simply a summary email.
- Managers should respect the dignity and privacy of the person being accommodated. Communication with others should be limited to those who need to know and to what they need to know.
- Records should document the process and be kept private and confidential
- Regularly follow up with the individual and modify the accommodation as needed when the circumstances change.
- Integrate accommodation needs into future human resources and business planning.

A project of Sea Change CoLab with funding from the Government of Canada.

