

# Steps For Success:

Hiring, On-Boarding, And Retaining People  
Who Are Blind Or Have Low Vision


## Overview



# Technology and Accommodations in the Workplace: Insights & Recommendations for Human Resources and Hiring Managers

## Introduction

Research has demonstrated that many hiring managers and Human Resources (HR) professionals are not well-prepared to recruit, hire, and retain employees who are blind or have low vision. The recruiting, interviewing, and hiring of blind persons may appear as a daunting undertaking to human resources and other hiring managers. Many hiring managers simply do not know how blind and low-vision employees use computers or office equipment, for example [1]. Workplace technology can also present barriers to inclusion during the recruitment, application, interviewing, onboarding, accommodation, and retention stages of employment.



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AFB conducted the Workplace Technology Study (WTS) to better understand and document the technology-related experiences of American workers who are blind or have low vision. In 2021, AFB conducted a survey of 323 blind and low-vision individuals who were employed in a variety of sectors. This report combines the original research findings with policy guidance and recommendations from technical assistance resources on inclusive employment practices. For each stage of the employment cycle, we present a summary of requirements and best practices, findings from the report, and recommendations specifically geared for HR staff and hiring managers to ensure full inclusion of blind and low-vision employees.

## Key Definitions

- **Reasonable Accommodations:** Under Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), reasonable accommodations are changes to the place where work is performed or the way in which the work is performed that allow people with disabilities equal opportunities in employment while also not causing “undue hardship” on the employer [2]. Three categories of reasonable accommodations are outlined in the ADA: modifications or adjustments to the job application process, modifications or adjustments to the environment, manner, or circumstances that enable the employee with a disability to perform the essential functions of the job, and modifications or adjustments that allow for equal benefits and privileges of employment [3].
- **Undue Hardship:** Undue hardship as outlined in the ADA is an accommodation that would be overly financially burdensome or difficult for an organization to execute. Undue hardship can be determined by a number of factors including cost, financial resources of the organization, and size, number of employees, and type of operation of the organization [3]. This is rarely awarded to employers, as the threshold is set quite high. [4] In *US Airways, Inc. v. Barnett*, 535 U.S., 122 S. Ct. 1516 (2002), the Supreme Court found that an employee only needs to show that an accommodation seems reasonable, after which the burden of proof shifts to the employer to be specific about why the accommodation would create undue hardship [3]. With the burden of proof weighing so heavily on the employer, undue hardship is rarely granted.
- **Disability:** The ADA defines disability in legal terms rather than medical. Someone is considered to have a disability if they are a “person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment.” [5]
- **Artificial Intelligence:** Congress defines artificial intelligence as “machine-based system that can, for a given set of human-defined objectives, make predictions, recommendations or decisions influencing real or virtual environments” [6]. In HR, this can take the form of systems that leverage big data to predict the applicants’ success during the recruitment and screening phases of employment.

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A record number of people have left their jobs since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, seeking new or different opportunities that better align with their personal lives and professional interests. Among the pool of job seekers, some have disabilities, including blindness or low vision. Hiring people with disabilities can bring many benefits to an organization: Workers with disabilities are reliable, innovative, and adept at solving problems. Businesses that hire people with disabilities enjoy high customer satisfaction and strong team morale.

With many companies reevaluating their diversity, equity and inclusion efforts due to greater awareness for equitable workplaces, HR departments need to see accessibility as a key tenet in the HR discipline.

## Significance of Our Research

Deploying accessible hiring practices is not only the right thing to do, but a requirement under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Through our work and further analysis of the AFB Workplace Technology Study, we obtained qualitative data highlighting the need for employers to integrate accessibility throughout their work instead of treating accessibility as an afterthought. Participant feedback further supports the practice of building a comprehensively accessible website and conveying an explicit commitment to accessibility, as described below.

**Although our WTS research did not specifically investigate employers' recruitment practices, some participants noted experiences of accessibility and accommodations being treated as an afterthought, rather than being incorporated into the hiring process from the outset. One WTS participant noted:**

**“Coming to a new company as somebody who has accessibility needs is usually a nightmare to navigate processes that are optimized for the 99th percentile, and they just don't know how to handle people who have different needs.” —*White male in his 40s who became visually impaired as an adult.***

## Actions You Can Take

Recruitment of individuals who are blind or have low vision can be enhanced by (1) establishing relationships with vocational rehabilitation personnel and other organizations working with people who are blind or have low vision; (2) creating and maintaining accessible company web pages, job postings and other career information; and (3) emphasizing a commitment to providing accommodations.

In supporting our mission to create a world of no limits, we've outlined additional actions you can take to make accessibility not only a part of your recruitment efforts, but part of the recruitment foundation.

**1. Establish Relationships:** Establishing relationships with organizations that work with people who are blind or have low vision, can be an effective way to find candidates to fit specific jobs within an organization. Job openings can be shared with potential applicants through a variety of organizations. There is a plethora of organizations at the state and national level that have programs designed to reach people with disabilities and actively encourage applicants with disabilities to apply for job openings. Following is a handful of organizations, which depending on your location, could have resources and/or partnership opportunities available.

- National Federation of the Blind
- The American Council of the Blind
- Veteran Readiness and Employment Services through the US Department of Veteran Affairs
- National Industries for the Blind and Associated Agencies (a network of 100 independent nonprofit agencies across the country that provide a wide range of employment and rehabilitative services for the blind)
- State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies (including State VR Services, State Supported Employment Services, and Independent Living Services for Older Individuals Who Are Blind in all 50 states)
- Centers for Independent Living and State Plan for Independent Living By State

**2. Job Posting & Application Accessibility:** Ensure all organizational web pages, employment applications, and the job application process remains accessible, with maintenance to ensure continuity per the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) international standards, including WCAG 2.0, WCAG 2.1, and WCAG 2.2 The following reference materials provide additional context around how to make web content more accessible for people with disabilities.

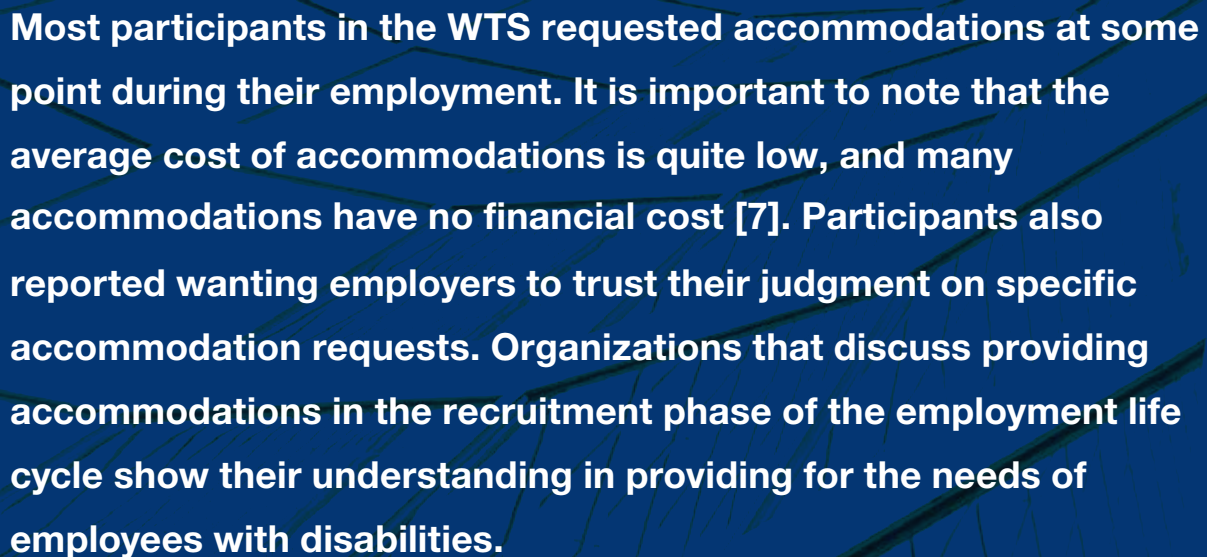
- WCAG 2.1 At A Glance
- AFB Digital Inclusion Intro for Developers

### **3. Create A Process for Requesting Reasonable Accommodations:**

A request for reasonable accommodation is the first step in an informal, interactive process between the employee and the employer. Employers who emphasize a commitment to providing accommodations provide assurance that employees who are blind or have low vision will be able to work in an environment where they are able to perform their job tasks effectively. Reasonable accommodations for applicants should be clearly stated during the hiring process, as well as for employees. Wording should be specific about reasonable accommodations that have been or could be provided within the organization (i.e., testimonials from current employees with disabilities).

This process should include:

- Method and/or way for requesting accommodations
- Contact person for requests, including email and phone number
- Online form that is fully accessible
- Include language to your job application, website, and Career Page
- Accessible screening tests and/or additional forms for interviews
- Clearly state benefits for persons with disabilities, such as flextime, telework, and work-life balance.



**Most participants in the WTS requested accommodations at some point during their employment. It is important to note that the average cost of accommodations is quite low, and many accommodations have no financial cost [7]. Participants also reported wanting employers to trust their judgment on specific accommodation requests. Organizations that discuss providing accommodations in the recruitment phase of the employment life cycle show their understanding in providing for the needs of employees with disabilities.**

**4. Website and Mobile App Maintenance:** Creating and maintaining accessible web pages and mobile recruitment apps, not only allows for qualified candidates to find job openings, but also shows an organization's commitment to inclusion and accessibility. A comprehensively accessible web page helps all applicants, regardless of disability status, understand the organization, its products, values, and people.

**5. Formatting and Captions on Website(s) and Social Networks:** Ensure accessible formatting is used within posts on networking platforms, videos are described and captioned, and that all forms are accessible using only the keyboard. Without an accessible career page, prospective employees may not know there is a job opening available or may not have access to all the information about the job. A comprehensive, inclusive career page will entice qualified candidates with disabilities to apply for job openings. Showcasing a message about diversity and inclusivity from someone high up in an organization shows applicants how people with disabilities are valued at every level of the organization.





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