

Encouraging Applicants with Disabilities: Job Descriptions and Announcements

Job announcements and descriptions can play an important role in creating a pipeline of candidates that includes qualified people with disabilities. When done well, these documents serve as the first opportunity to communicate a culture of inclusion and workplace flexibility. Nevertheless, job announcements and descriptions often contain language or unnecessary details that may prevent people with disabilities from applying.

Encouraging diverse applicants requires more thought and intention than simply including an Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) statement in the job announcement, because true equal opportunity for employment is more than just a tagline. This practice tool contains examples and suggestions to help construct high quality job announcements and descriptions that may increase the number of qualified applicants with disabilities your organization attracts.

Accurate Information Can Improve Job/Candidate Fit

Thorough and accurate job descriptions can yield a larger number of candidates who are a good fit for the position. In addition to the purpose of a position, people with disabilities may be more likely to apply for a job if they are able to get a sense of:



The specific activities the job entails. Conducting a [task analysis](#) can help to identify all of the components of a job, and to glean information helpful for delineating between “marginal” and “essential” job functions.



The work environment. Identifying specific information about the work environment can help a potential applicant make a decision about job fit. Is the environment loud, quiet, bright, dark, cramped, hectic, or fast-paced? Is the workspace open or do people have offices? The answer to these questions can be an important factor in a job seeker’s decision to apply.



The workplace culture. Workplace culture plays a large role in employee engagement, which in turn influences employee fit and retention rates. Corporate values and commitment to diversity should be evident in the job announcement and description.



The potential for workplace flexibility. The job description should be as clear as possible about the possibility of flexible scheduling or remote work, worksite location options, opportunities for rotational assignments, and particular benefits like paid time off.



Physical requirements. Certain jobs require some degree of physicality to complete. Employers should be very clear about those requirements, but avoid overestimating physical tasks (e.g., an office manager who must be able to lift 50 lbs.) Use of a task analysis process can improve accuracy in estimating physical requirements. People with disabilities need accurate information to determine if they can perform physical functions of the position, *with or without* accommodations.

Words Matter

The words used to describe job functions can be the difference between whether or not a person with a disability chooses to apply. Consider the following examples of simple language changes, which decrease the likelihood of unintentionally ruling out otherwise qualified applicants with disabilities. An effective job description will describe *what* needs to be done, not *how* the applicant needs to do it:

Old Description	New Description
Must be able to drive between multiple locations for client appointments	Must be able to travel between multiple locations for client appointments
Must have strong written and oral communications skills	Must be able to communicate with others effectively
Must be able to stand for long periods of time	Ability to remain at work station for long periods of time
Must be able to see hazards and hear directions in a hectic environment	Must be able to respond quickly and effectively to directions and safety hazards

Be sure to mention the process for requesting an accommodation during the application and interview phase in the job announcement, and include contact information for making the request.

Marginal vs. Essential

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)¹ provides guidance on determining whether a job function is *essential* or *marginal*. A candidate with a disability could request to have marginal functions waived or reassigned as a form of reasonable accommodation, but all candidates must be qualified to perform essential functions, *with or without* an accommodation.

¹ EEOC, 1991. The ADA: Your Responsibilities as an Employer. Retrieved from <https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/guidance/ada-your-responsibilities-employer>

There are many factors to consider when determining essential functions, including:

- ✓ The amount of time dedicated to the task
- ✓ The degree of skill required
- ✓ The impact of reassigning the task
- ✓ Employer judgement of task importance
- ✓ The frequency of the task
- ✓ The amount of time it takes to perform the task

Each task is measured against all of these factors and perhaps more, as meeting a single criterion may not be sufficient to determine whether it is essential. For example:

- A marketing professional might frequently stuff envelopes for mass mailings. However, the task could be easily reassigned to an administrative support professional.
- A program manager might be responsible for developing a departmental budget once every year. The task is infrequent, but requires a specific skill set and would be very cumbersome to reassign to another employee.

Minimum Qualification Standards

People with disabilities experience bias and other barriers to employment, which can result in fewer professional opportunities compared to their non-disabled peers. Employers who are willing to emphasize “skills for employability” over standardized minimum experience qualifications are likely to receive a more diverse pipeline of applicants. In some cases, it is possible that skills for employability are more important than a specific degree or years of experience. It is often true that job-specific skills can be taught on the job, but other skills cannot, such as:

- ✓ Interpersonal skills
- ✓ Systems thinking
- ✓ Critical thinking
- ✓ Teamwork
- ✓ Problem solving
- ✓ Innovation
- ✓ Time management

In some cases, a job description might include these types of skills in lieu of a specific number of years of experience in similar positions, or a certain degree.

An employer is never required to hire anyone who is not qualified for the job, but it is possible to attract a more diverse pool of qualified candidates, including those with disabilities, with small changes to the way in which open positions are defined, announced, and described.

Resources

EEOC Guidance: Job Applicants and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): <https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/guidance/job-applicants-and-ada>

Job Accommodation Network: Accommodation and Compliance: Job Descriptions: https://askjan.org/topics/jobdesc.cfm?csSearch=2589127_1

Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN) Topics: Job Descriptions: <https://askearn.org/topics/recruitment-hiring/job-descriptions/>

U.S. Department of Education: Employability Skills Framework: <https://cte.ed.gov/initiatives/employability-skills-framework>

The Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN) is a resource for employers seeking to recruit, hire, retain, and advance qualified employees with disabilities. It is funded by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy under a cooperative agreement with Cornell University. For more information, visit AskEARN.org. Preparation of this item was fully funded by the United States Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy in the amount of \$8,000,000 (four-year total grant amount) under Cooperative Agreement No. OD-33975-19-75-4-36. This document does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Labor, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.