

Reasonable Accommodation in the U.S. Postal Service

A Guide for Employees
and Applicants

Publication 316
April 2017



UNITED STATES
POSTAL SERVICE®

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 applies to the Postal Service™. The Act does the following:

- Prohibits discrimination based on a disability against qualified employees and job applicants.
- Imposes an obligation on the Postal Service to find ways to accommodate qualified individuals with disabilities where appropriate.



The Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA) of 2008 amended the Rehabilitation Act so that it conforms to the ADAAA changes.

Who Is Eligible for Protection Under the Rehabilitation Act?

For the Act to protect a person, the individual must be qualified to perform the job and show that he or she is a person who meets one of the following conditions:

- Has a disability;
- Has a record of a disability;
- Is associated with a person with a disability; or
- Is regarded as having a disability.

Who Is a Qualified Person With a Disability?

A qualified person with a disability is someone who meets the following conditions:

- a. Has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity.
- b. Meets the prerequisites (e.g., skills, experience, education, and other requirements) for the job the individual holds or desires.
- c. Can perform the essential functions of the position with or without reasonable accommodation.

What Is a Physical or Mental Impairment?

A physical or mental impairment can include any of the following:

- Any physiological disorder or condition.
- Cosmetic disfigurement.
- Anatomical loss affecting one or more of the following body systems: neurological, musculoskeletal, special sense organs, respiratory, circulatory, cardiovascular, reproductive, digestive, genitourinary, hemic, lymphatic, skin, immune, or endocrine.



- Any mental or psychological disorder, such as an intellectual disability, organic brain syndrome, emotional or mental illness, and specific learning disabilities.

What Is a Major Life Activity?

A major life activity includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Obvious functions such as hearing, seeing, walking, speaking, caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, breathing, eating, sleeping, standing, reading, working, lifting, and communicating.
- The operation of a major bodily function such as, but not limited to, functions of the immune, digestive, neurological, circulatory, lymphatic and musculoskeletal systems; and normal cell growth.

When Does an Impairment Substantially Limit a Major Life Activity?

The “substantially limits” standard is not a demanding one. An impairment need not prevent, or significantly or severely restrict, the individual from performing a major life activity. The Postal Service must determine whether an impairment limits substantially a major life activity without regard to the ameliorative effects of mitigating measures (with the exception of ordinary eyeglasses or contact lenses). An impairment that is episodic or in remission is a disability if it would substantially limit a major life activity when active.



What is the Goal of Reasonable Accommodation?

The goal of reasonable accommodation is to enable individuals with disabilities to enjoy equal employment opportunity. The Postal Service requires the same performance standards and conduct of employees with disabilities as it does of other employees.

Does Every Individual With a Disability Require an Accommodation?

No. Many qualified individuals with disabilities are able to advance through the selection process and perform their jobs without any accommodation.

How Do I Make a Request for Reasonable Accommodation?

If you are an employee and believe you are a qualified individual with a disability who requires accommodation in the application process (including a Postal Service exam), in your job, or in a job you seek, make an oral or written request to any one of the following:

- Your supervisor or manager.
- The manager, Human Resources (District).
- The Reasonable Accommodation Committee (RAC) chair.

If you are applying for Postal Service employment, make your request to one of the following:



- The examiner.
- The selecting official.
- The local manager, Human Resources.

Explain the nature of your limitations and the accommodation you need. Someone else can make this request on your behalf.

If you are an employee who is deaf or hard of hearing and require communication accommodations, you must submit your request for the accommodation to one of the following:

- Your supervisor or manager.
- The manager, Human Resources (District).
- The RAC Chair.
- The District Disability Coordinator.

If you are an applicant who is deaf or hard of hearing and require communication accommodations, you must follow the instructions in the job announcement.

What Are My Responsibilities?

If your disability is not obvious or already known, the Postal Service may require you to provide documentation from an appropriate professional. The documentation must do the following:

- a. Explain clearly the nature, impact, or both of the impairment;
- b. Explain the need for reasonable accommodation; and
- c. Clarify how the requested accommodation may help you to perform the essential functions of the job.

If your documentation is insufficient, the Postal Service may require supplemental medical information, including, where appropriate, examination by a medical specialist of the Postal Service's choosing and at the Postal Service's expense.

As a job applicant, if you believe that a mental or physical disability will make the testing process an artificial barrier to your demonstration of the knowledge, skills, and abilities required in the job, you must make your needs known as early as possible to the appropriate official. You may request accommodation in advance by contacting one of the following:

- The examination administration office.
- The selecting official.
- The local manager, Human Resources.





If you are an employee bidding or applying for a job and need accommodation for the job desired or in some component of the selection process (e.g., application completion, interview, training), you must make your needs known to one of the following:

- The examiner.
- The local manager, Human Resources.
- As stated in the instructions provided on the job announcement.

Request an accommodation early enough to allow for a timely decision.

What Happens After My Request Is Made?

Your request for reasonable accommodation will activate an interactive process to determine whether you are a qualified individual with a disability who meets the minimum qualifications. You are involved in the interactive process, during which the following occurs:

- The Postal Service identifies essential functions of your job or the job for which you applied.
- You and the Postal Service consider your abilities and limitations.
- You and the Postal Service identify potential accommodations and their feasibility.
- The Postal Service determines the reasonableness of the accommodations.

In addition, the Postal Service considers the following:

- Whether the accommodation would pose an undue hardship to the Postal Service.
- Whether the accommodation would eliminate or reduce any direct threat of harm to you or others.

When Will I Receive a Decision?

While expedited processing may be necessary to enable an individual to apply for a job or to participate in a specific activity scheduled to occur shortly, you will receive a decision from your manager or the examination administration office as soon as possible after the conclusion of the interactive process. In cases where the Postal Service requires substantiating



documentation or where there are extenuating circumstances, your manager or the examination administration office will notify you of the reason for any delay and the approximate date on which you can expect a decision.

What Else Should I Know?

At the Postal Service's expense, a medical expert of the Postal Service's choosing may review your medical documentation. In all cases, the Postal Service will keep your medical records confidential.



What Happens If My Request Is Denied?

The Postal Service will notify you in writing of the reason for the denial and the name of the person or the office that made the decision. Further, the Postal Service will advise you of your right to do the following:

- Participate in any informal dispute resolution processes,
- File an EEO complaint, and
- Appeal or avail yourself of other rights to which you may be entitled.

Where Can I Get Additional Information About Reasonable Accommodation?

The Postal Service intends this material as a general reference for information purposes. For detailed information, see Handbook EL-307, *Reasonable Accommodation, An Interactive Process*, available in the following formats:

- Hard copy from your Human Resources Office and the Material Distribution Center.
- Online on the Postal Service's intranet (PolicyNet at blue.usps.gov/cpim/) and Internet (about.usps.com).

The Postal Service is committed to building and maintaining an effective, diverse, and motivated workforce — a goal reinforced in the Postal Service's strategic plan.

Publication 316, April 2017
PSN 7690-07-000-7707

© U.S. Postal Service
Cover Illustration © Jose Ortega/SIS