Research, Education And Economics

Reasonable Accommodation

U.S. Department of Agriculture
Agricultural Research Service
Office of the Administrator
Civil Rights Staff

USDA recognizes that all its employees need the tools necessary to be productive, and that making reasonable accommodations is a way of accomplishing this mission.

Request for accommodations must be considered on a case-by-case basis and in the majority of cases, can be resolved between the employee and supervisor.

As it relates to reasonable accommodation, a **disability** is: A physical (any physiological disorder or condition affecting one or more body systems) or mental impairment (any psychological or mental disorder) that substantially limits one or more major life activities.

A reasonable accommodation is: A change in the work environment or the application process that would enable a **qualified individual** with a disability to have equal access to the benefits of employment.

A qualified individual with a disability has the skills, experience, and education and can perform the essential (critical) functions of the position with or without reasonable accommodation.

Three categories of reasonable accommodation include modifications or adjustments to:

- Job application process;
- Enable individuals with disabilities to perform essential and fundamental job duties;
- Provide individuals with disabilities equal access to the benefits and privileges of employment.

The Mission Area Designee/Disability Program Manager (DPM) has overall responsibility to ensure compliance with obligations to provide reasonable accommodation to qualified employees.

How to request an Accommodation

Employees or applicants with disabilities who need reasonable accommodations are responsible for making their needs known to the appropriate official.

Employee/Applicant's Responsibility

- Notify the Personnelist, Supervisor or DPM when the need for an accommodation arises;
- Employees should complete REE Form 172 "Request for a Reasonable Accommodation" which may be found on Informs;
- Suggest accommodation options; and
- Provide medical documentation to the DPM or the Department's Medical Officer.

Supervisor/Manager's Responsibility

The employer and the employee with the disability should engage in an interactive process to clarify what the employee needs and identify the appropriate reasonable accommodation.

- Have employee complete REE Form 172;
- Forward a completed copy of REE Form 172 to the DPM;
- Discuss the need for any medical documentation to be provided to the DPM or the Department's Medical Officer;
- Suggest accommodation options; and
- Contact the ARS Civil Rights Staff (DPM) for additional assistance regarding reasonable accommodation.

Under the Reasonable Accommodation process, all medical information obtained in connection with the accommodation **must be kept confidential** and filed separately from the individual's personnel file. The DPM will maintain custody of all records, including medical records obtained or created during the process of reasonable accommodation.

The Accommodation Timeline

The process shall begin no more than **five** business days from the date of the request. If granted, the accommodation shall be received no more than **thirty** business days from the date of request. It may be necessary to extend this time frame due to extenuating circumstances (employee's supervisor shall notify the employee).

Denial of an Accommodation

A reasonable accommodation is not required if the employee has not been determined to be a "qualified disabled individual", if the accommodation would impose an undue hardship on the organization, when to do so would lower quality or production standards, or when the accommodation would provide personal use items (glasses, hearing aids, etc.)

A denial of request (using REE Form 173) shall be immediately communicated to the requestor, with copies sent to the first line supervisor and DPM. The reason for the denial shall include specific reasons. The employee will be informed of his/her rights under the equal employment complaint procedures.

For More Information Contact:
REE Disability Program Manager
USDA/ARS/CRS
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Room 3552-S
Washington, DC 20250
Voice: (202) 720-6161
Fax: (202) 690-0109

Or contact your local Area Civil Rights Manager.

Beltsville
(301) 504-6507

Headquarters
(202) 720-6161

Midwest Area
(309) 681-6632

Mid South Area
(662) 686-5201

National Agricultural Library
(301) 504-6575

North Atlantic Area
(215) 233-6625

Northern Plains
(970) 492-7053

Pacific West Area
(510) 559-6076

South Atlantic Area
(706) 546-3614

Southern Plains Area
(979) 260-9416

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To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

The following agencies are part of the REE Mission Area:

Agricultural Research Service
(202) 720-6161

Cooperative, State, Research, Education and Extension Service
(202) 720-2700

Economic Research Service
(202) 694-5005

NASS
National Agricultural Statistics Service
(202) 720-8257

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