



**U.S. AIR FORCE**

# REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION FACTSHEET FOR SUPERVISORS OF EMPLOYEES WITH DISABILITIES

**Air Force Equal Opportunity Policy Office - SAF/MRQ**

## **What is a reasonable accommodation?**

Reasonable accommodation (RA) is a modification to a job or work environment, or to a policy or procedure to enable a qualified applicant or employee with a disability to participate in the application process or to perform essential job functions.

## **What does a reasonable accommodation accomplish?**

Reasonable accommodation ensures that a qualified person with a disability can perform the essential functions of his/her/job and ensures he/she has the same rights and privileges of employment as those without disabilities. It is not reasonable accommodation to alter or lower performance standards or expectations.

## **Is providing a reasonable accommodation required?**

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 USC §791 et seq.) as amended by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, as amended (42 USC §12101 et seq.) requires all federal agencies to provide reasonable accommodation to qualified individuals with disabilities who are employees or applicants for employment, unless to do so would cause undue hardship. Air Force policy on the provision of RA is set forth in DAFI 36-2710.

Section 501 of the  
Rehabilitation Act

**The Rehabilitation Act of  
1973, protects qualified  
employees and applicants  
with disabilities in the  
Executive Branch of the  
Federal Government from  
employment  
discrimination based on  
disability. It requires  
federal agencies to provide  
reasonable  
accommodation for known  
physical or mental  
disabilities to qualified  
employees and applicants,  
unless to do so would  
cause an undue hardship.**

**The Law also ensures  
equal access to Federal  
programs, activities, and  
facilities for people with  
disabilities.**

### **How should an employee request a reasonable accommodation?**

A person with a disability can make the request orally or in writing. The individual need only note that they are experiencing some limitation due to a medical condition. They need not use any special language such as “disability” or “reasonable accommodation.” The request may be made by the individual or by a third party on behalf of the individual. The request may be made to a supervisor or manager in the individual’s immediate chain of command or to the Disability Program Manager (DPM). This triggers the “interactive process”. Once triggered, it is critical that the process proceed promptly without any unnecessary delay

When the supervisor receives the reasonable accommodation request, he or she shall acknowledge receipt of the request and enter into an interactive dialogue process within 10 business days of the request. The reasonable accommodation process begins as soon as the oral or written request is made to any supervisor in the employee’s chain of command. Therefore, communication is a priority throughout the entire process. The supervisor/manager will take a proactive approach in searching out and considering possible accommodations, including consulting with the DPM, medical personnel and other appropriate resources for assistance, and will explain the process to the employee.

### **What documentation can a supervisor request?**

If the need for an accommodation is not obvious (e.g. an employee uses a wheelchair), a supervisor can ask the employee for reasonable supporting documentation. This is documentation sufficient to establish that the employee has a covered disability and establish the need for the accommodation the employee seeks. The documentation should not be a “blank request” to seek the employee’s entire medical record. Medical information is confidential, must not be disclosed to anyone who does not have a need to know, and must be filed separate from personnel files. Unauthorized disclosure of medical information is a violation of the law.

### **What is the interactive process?**

The interactive process is the discussion that takes place between the employee and the supervisor (augmented by the DPM as needed) to determine what limitations the individual is experiencing due to a medical impairment, clarify what the individual needs, and identify what accommodations might be helpful in working around those limitations.

### **What kind of actions may reasonably accommodate employees?**

An accommodation may involve making an existing facility readily accessible; modifying work schedules, hours, policies or methods; acquiring or modifying equipment; providing qualified readers or interpreters; or modifying examinations, training, or other programs. As a last resort, RA may include reassigning a current employee to a vacant position for which the individual is qualified. In selecting the particular RA, the principal test is that the device, service, or modification of policy or method must be effective so that it enables the individual to apply for the job, to perform the essential functions of the job, and to have equal access to the facility, information, activity or event.

### **Is a supervisor obligated to provide any accommodation that is requested?**

No. Once a supervisor has been made aware of a need for an accommodation, he or she must engage in an interactive process to help determine what accommodations might be appropriate. The Supervisor does not have to provide the exact accommodation requested, but must have meaningful discussions with the employee about what will work and what is reasonable. Supervisors must make reasonable efforts to determine the appropriate accommodation by consulting with the employee and giving primary consideration to his/her

preference. The supervisor may select an alternative accommodation as long as it is effective and enables the employee with a disability to perform the essential functions of his/her job.

### **Who is the decision authority for reasonable accommodation?**

The first level supervisor is the decision authority for reasonable accommodation. Once you are aware there may be a need for reasonable accommodation, contact the local DPM who will assist in identifying the employee's limitations, and in identifying accommodations to work around the limitations.

### **Who pays for any necessary devices or equipment needed as a reasonable accommodation?**

Much of the special equipment, devices, and assistive technology is provided at no cost by the DoD Computer/Electronics Accommodations Program (CAP).

Commanders have a legal obligation to provide reasonable accommodations to employees with disabilities. An ESP code (7F) has been established to track all requests for reasonable accommodation. This will allow organizations (at all levels) to properly plan for yearly RA costs. Should an organization be forced to defer another requirement in order to support a reasonable accommodation request, then an unfunded request can be submitted through that organization's established corporate process. Therefore, funding shortfalls are not a valid basis for denial of reasonable accommodations

### **What if I deny a request for reassignment?**

Supervisors must notify the employee in writing if a request for reasonable accommodation is denied and no alternative accommodation is offered. The denial must include specific reasons for the denial and the employee or office that made the decision. All denials of reasonable accommodations must be reviewed and coordinated by the installation and/or organization legal office and routed for review and endorsement by the Wing Commander (or equivalent) or designee, not below the level of O-6 or civilian equivalent. The supervisor must notify inform the employee of his/her right to file an EEO complaint, the procedures for doing so, as well as identify and explain any avenues available for informal dispute resolution For disability-related complaint procedures, see [DAFI 36-2710](#), *Equal Opportunity Program*.

### **If I provide a RA to an employee and other employees ask why the employee has special equipment or a modification to policy or procedure, what can I tell them?**

You may tell them it is a private matter and in compliance with federal policy. You may not reveal any information, to include that a RA was requested. All RA requests must remain confidential. If the employee with the RA chooses to share the information, that is the employee's choice but it does not release you from your requirement to keep the information confidential.

### **Where should I go for more information about reasonable accommodation?**

The Disability Program Manager or servicing Civilian Personnel Office may be contacted for information on reasonable accommodation. Additional information may also be found on the Equal Employment Opportunity website at <https://www.eeoc.gov/policy/docs/accommodation.html>.