

# BBI BRIEFS

*A publication of the Burton Blatt Institute (BBI) at Syracuse University*

## **Reasonable Accommodation Policies & Practices**

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# Reasonable Accommodation Policies & Practices

Policies related to reasonable accommodation of disabilities are particularly central in ensuring that requests for reasonable accommodation are treated effectively and fairly. Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act requires employers to provide reasonable accommodations to qualified individuals with disabilities, unless to do so would cause undue hardship. Components of an effective reasonable accommodations policy may include:

- Written policies and easily available information on procedures for requesting an accommodation
- Minimal, transparent and written procedure for processing accommodation requests
- Clear identification of point people involved in evaluating accommodations requests and a transparent process of negotiating accommodations requests
- Internal company disability advocate to assist employer and employees in negotiating accommodation<sup>1</sup>
- Confidentiality and medical privacy for employees, such that only information about a disability's functional limitations needed to evaluate the accommodation request is solicited and all disability-related information is maintained in separate and confidential files.
- Central company funding source, so that any costs of accommodations are not borne by smaller units or divisions<sup>2</sup> and employees with disabilities are not perceived to be a drain on local resources.

Disability accommodations policies are most effective when they are integrated with other worker accommodations policies such as family needs, health and well-being, life-work balance, or with professional development opportunities.<sup>3</sup> In other words, inclusive cultures are generally typified by flexibility and receptivity to meeting all employee requests for accommodations, wherever possible and reasonable. In this type of climate, disability accommodations are not seen as special treatment, but rather just one form of accommodation that all employees can access.

The practice of negotiating and providing accommodations constitutes an additional opportunity for generating an experience of “interactional justice”.<sup>4</sup> Interactional justice refers to the experience or feeling that managers and colleagues with whom one is interacting are behaving fairly, reasonably, and respectfully.<sup>5</sup> Elements associated with interactional justice include:

- Employee perception that requests are welcomed, respected and evaluated carefully
- Management flexibility in attempting to meet accommodation requests wherever possible
- Commitment to an interactive process, including making a substantial effort to find a mutually agreeable and effective resolution.

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Employers may benefit from aggregate documentation and tracking of disability accommodations. Record-keeping on types of disabilities and corresponding accommodations, and longevity of accommodated employment, can be particularly useful. As management personnel shift over the years, record-keeping is particularly helpful in order to ensure that lessons learned from prior successful or refined accommodation practices continue to benefit workers. Specific assessment of the functionality and comparative success or failure of accommodations can be implemented based on multiple indicators:

- Surveys of employees receiving accommodation
- Work performance, both before and after accommodations are secured, and compared between workers with and without disabilities
- Employee feedback, both written and documented verbal
- Employee retention rates
- Employee advancement rates

The practical and economic benefits of providing reasonable accommodations are substantial, both for employers and employees. While many accommodations are without economic cost, or are low-cost, even those accommodations that involve some expense frequently yield substantial rewards, including the economic benefits of improved productivity and performance and of worker job satisfaction.<sup>6</sup> It is also possible that the cost of an accommodation can be subsidized by a third party, such as Vocational Rehabilitation or by tax credits.

More tools and resources related to developing a positive and disability-inclusive working environment are available through our Toolkit at the **[Demand-Side Employment Placement Models project website](#)**.

YOUR FEEDBACK IS IMPORTANT TO US!

You are invited to participate in a research study examining the benefits and impact for employers of the Employer Demand briefs and toolkit resources. [Learn more about the survey](#).

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1 Consortium.

2 Id.

3 Id.

4 Id.

5 Id.

6 Tatiana I. Solovieva et al, Cost of Workplace Accommodations for Individuals with Disabilities: With or Without Personal Assistance Services, 2 Disability & Health J. 196, 201 (2009).

## Project Partners



**Center for Research on Collaboratories and  
Technology Enhanced Learning Communities**



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The Demand-Side Employment Placement Models project is a comprehensive research and dissemination grant from the U.S. Department of Education, National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR), Grant No. H133A060033. Led by the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University, the project is generating a better understanding of market-driven workforce trends, and informing employment practices and policies to prepare individuals with disabilities for the changing needs and requirements of the present and future workforce.

**To learn more go to [bbi.syr.edu](http://bbi.syr.edu)**



**‘We can change the world.  
The first step is to change ourselves.’**

**- BURTON BLATT**

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