INTERVIEWING PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Interviewing people with disabilities should not be any different than interviewing non-disabled people. However, interviewers need to be sensitive to disability limitations. Allow the person with a disability to educate you as to any assistance he or she may need.

**General Tips for Interviewing People with Disabilities**

- Conduct interview in a manner that emphasizes abilities, achievements and individual qualities.
- Conduct your interview as you would with anyone. Be considerate without being patronizing.
- If it appears that a person’s disability inhibits performance of a job, focus on HOW the person can perform the job.

*If the person you are interviewing is deaf or hard of hearing Ask the person to choose a place to sit where he or she will be comfortable.*

- Speak directly to the person being interviewed. If he or she reads lips, speak at a normal rate while facing the person and be sure to keep your hands away from your mouth. Do not exaggerate your lip movements, but speak expressively because the person will rely on your facial expressions, gestures and eye contact.
- If the interviewee is using an interpreter, do not address the interpreter. It is commonplace for the interpreter to be seated beside the interviewer, across from the interviewee. Interpreters only facilitate communication. They should not be consulted or regarded as a reference for the interview. Also, keep in mind that just because someone uses a sign language interpreter during the interview does not mean that he or she will require an interpreter at all times to do their work.
- Do not shout. A deaf person cannot hear you and if the interviewee is using an assistive listening device, you may actually hurt his or her ears.
- If an interpreter is not present and if the person is reading lips and something is not clear, it is ok to write notes back and forth.
If the person being interviewed is blind or has a vision disability

- Always identify yourself and others who may be with you.
- Describe the interview setting (for example, say, “There is a table in front of you and a seat to your right.”)
- When offering seating, place the person’s hand on the back or arm of the seat. A verbal cue is helpful as well.
- Use specifics such as “left ten feet” or “right two yards” when directing a person with a visual impairment.
- If the person has not offered his or her hand, offer yours and say, “May I shake your hand?”
- The interviewee is unable to “read body language”.
- Let the person know when you need to move locations or end the conversation.
- Provide a well-lit area for the interview.
- Avoid sharp contrasts of light and darkness. A person’s visual acuity may change under different light conditions.
- Offer assistance in filling out forms. Most persons with visual impairments can fill out forms and sign their names if the appropriate spaces are indicated to them.

If the person being interviewed has speech-related disabilities-

- Phrase questions so that they can be answered with short responses.
- Give your total attention to the person. Don’t be afraid to ask for clarification if necessary.
- Do not complete the person’s thoughts for them. Be patient and wait for the entire response.
- Never pretend to understand if you are having difficulty doing so. Repeat what you understand and the person’s reactions will clue you in and guide you to understanding.
- Speak with a normal tone of voice. Most speech-impaired persons can hear and understand without difficulty.
If the person being interviewed uses a wheelchair, cane, or crutches

- Double check to be sure that the interview site is accessible. If the interview site is inaccessible, be prepared to find an alternate location.
- Be sure to contact the interviewee to make arrangements in advance.
- When scheduling interviews, be aware that applicants may need to make transportation arrangements. In giving directions, consider accessible traveling routes, accessible parking spaces, and physical obstacles such as stairs, curbs or steep hills that may hinder or delay a person using a wheelchair, cane or crutches.
- Be aware that some wheelchair users may choose to transfer themselves out of their wheelchairs (into an office chair, for example) for the duration of the interview.
- Remember that a wheelchair is part of a person’s body space. Don’t lean against it.
- Find a location where you can sit down and be at eye level with each other.
- Allow persons using canes or crutches to keep them within easy reach.
- Allow guide dogs to accompany the interviewee. Do not pet or otherwise distract the dog.

Specific interviewing tips for working with people who have Cognitive or Psychiatric Disabilities

- Rephrase comments or questions for clarity.
- Stay focused on the person as he or she responds to you.