



AMERICAN JOB CENTERS HOW TO EFFECTIVELY SERVE JOB SEEKERS WITH DISABILITIES



American Job Centers (AJCs) provide services and solutions for job seekers such as employment tools and resources, career guidance, and training opportunities. AJC staff and partners of the AJC Network might have questions on how best to serve job seekers with a disability.

This FAQ provides useful information and resources for both new and veteran staff that can support AJC staff and partners in serving job seekers with disabilities.

Q 1: How can I promote effective service delivery when working with individuals with disabilities?

When considering how best to serve people with disabilities, a great deal of emphasis is often placed on physical access. While this is clearly important for people who use wheelchairs, or people with sensory disabilities (such as those who are blind, visually impaired, or deaf), there are people with other types of disabilities for whom physical access is not an issue. For people with learning disabilities, mental health conditions, head injuries, and many other disabilities, the issue is not necessarily access to facilities as much as access to programs and services. In considering the needs of people with disabilities, the AJC's focus should take a holistic approach and focus on equal access to programs and services as well as physical access. Actively practicing empathy, learning, and adapting can create a more inclusive and understanding environment for everyone.

Q 2: Whose job is it to serve people with disabilities in AJCs?

While there are staff in the AJC who serve targeted populations, people with disabilities are represented in ALL populations (e.g., Veterans, Youth, Older Workers, Dislocated Workers, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients, Justice Involved People, etc.). It is the job of every staff member at the American Job Center to serve people with disabilities.

Q 3: What does "Universal Accessibility" mean for people with disabilities in AJCs?

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), the legislation that governs AJC services states that AJCs must be universally accessible, meaning that any individual can access the core career and training services of the AJC Network. The Nondiscrimination and Equal Opportunity Regulations for WIOA are also very clear:

- People with disabilities have a right to use the services of the AJC system.
- AJCs must be readily accessible to people with disabilities.

- People with disabilities are entitled to reasonable accommodations and modifications when using AJC services.
- People with disabilities should not be automatically referred to the public Vocational Rehabilitation system for services.

Q 4: What physical barriers might people with disabilities experience when accessing AJCs?

In all areas of a building used by the public, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires a totally accessible interior path from point of entry to all public services. The design elements affected by this requirement consist of:

- Vestibule configuration/counter heights
- Door sizes and corridor widths
- Acceptability door opening and closing
- Elevator access and control
- Toilet room and stall dimensions/drinking fountain location and dimensions
- Telephone and TTY (text telephone) provisions
- Signage design and location/visual and audible alarm accommodations
- Ramps or lift access to all raised seating/quantity of accessible seating

Q 5: What programmatic barriers might people with disabilities face at AJCs?

Under Title II of the ADA a public entity's (e.g., AJC) services, programs, or activities, when viewed in their entirety must be readily accessible to and usable by people with disabilities.

- Achieving program accessibility requires the following:
 - Reasonable modification to policies and procedures
 - Acquisition or redesign of equipment or assignment of auxiliary aides
 - Provision of service at alternate sites
 - Structural modification or physical barrier removal

Q 6: What communication barriers might people with disabilities face at AJCs?

AJCs are required to be able to communicate with persons with disabilities as effectively as with those without disabilities. For assistance, reference the [Disability Checklist](#). Effective communication could include, but is not limited to the following:

- Having a list (also available in alternative formats) that includes all assistive technology available and some suggested reasonable accommodations.
- Having a written process in place for procuring interpreters and other reasonable accommodations.
- Having materials available in alternative formats (e.g., Braille, Large Print, electronic copies on CD).
- Using plain language and breaking complex information into more manageable parts for both written and verbal communication.

Q 7: What is the best way to define “job readiness” for individuals (with and without disability) accessing AJCs and their partners?

All too often people with disabilities are mistakenly determined not to be “job ready” due to their disabilities, and as a result, are put into specialized services or programs to help them become “job ready.” An important role of AJCs and their partners is to develop and increase the preparedness of job seekers (both those with and without disabilities). Preparedness, in this instance, includes helping someone with a job search, identifying relevant work skills and/or securing job training for the positions being pursued, creating or tailoring resumes, problem solving work transportation barriers, referring to appropriate job matches, etc.

Q 8: What should you focus on when serving or working with an AJC customer who has a disability?

It is important to make it easy for job seekers with disabilities to request a reasonable accommodation. It is important to clearly indicate verbally and in writing the availability of reasonable accommodations and modifications in publicity materials and intake forms, in the reception area, at orientations, and elsewhere to all incoming AJC customers. AJC staff should also determine if the customer with a disability will need or benefit from additional resources beyond those offered in the AJC. However, staff should not *assume* that a customer with a disability will need additional resources or even a reasonable accommodation to access the AJC’s services.

Q 9: How should you refer to a customer with a disability when talking to a colleague?

Positive language empowers. It is best to ask the person/group if they prefer person-first language or identity-first language. If the preference is not known or cannot be determined, default to using person-first language. When writing or speaking about people with disabilities, it is important to put the person first. Person-first language is a way to describe what a person has, rather than what the person is. It focuses on the person first and the disability, condition, or illness second, as part of the whole person. Examples include a “person with cancer,” not a “cancer patient,” an “individual with a disability,” not a “disabled person.” Some communities prefer identity-first language because they consider the characteristic as a defining part of their identity. The Deaf and autistic communities often show preference for identity-first language – Deaf student, autistic individual.

Group designations such as “the blind” or “the disabled” are inappropriate because they do not reflect the individuality, equality, or dignity of people with disabilities. Further, words like “normal person” imply that the person with a disability isn’t normal, whereas “person without a disability” is descriptive but not negative. Individuals are sometimes concerned that they will say the wrong thing – it is better to ask questions than to say nothing at all.

Q 10: What do you need to know about disability disclosure and handling of confidential information?

Disability-related information is any information that discloses that the customer has a disability. Some examples include information about special education, referral notes to Vocational Rehabilitation, a box checked off that a customer is receiving Supplemental Security Income/Social Security Disability Insurance on intake form, a person self-disclosing that they have a disability, etc. AJC staff should not disclose a customer's disability with staff in Business Services to minimize any information that would be learned by potential employers.

Disability-related inquiries are legal and recommended when:

- Screening customers who are experiencing employment problems or showing signs of non-apparent disabilities.
- Determining eligibility for targeted programs.
- Determining whether and which reasonable accommodations would help customers succeed in employment.
- Assessment of skills, prior work experience and employability.
- Creation of a service strategy.
- Determining supportive programs such as childcare, transportation, housing assistance, or benefits counseling.

Q 11: Where can you find information related to reasonable accommodation, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), training, and workplace issues for individuals with disabilities? `

[JAN - Job Accommodation Network \(askjan.org\)](http://askjan.org) is the leading source of free, expert, and confidential guidance on workplace accommodations and disability employment issues, as well as provides a searchable database on workplace accommodations. JAN shares information about the ADA and how it applies to the workplace for applicants/ employees with disabilities. You can also find information on accommodation options/ ideas for applicants/employees with disabilities.

Q 12: How do you familiarize yourself with federal disability nondiscrimination laws?

The [U.S. Department of Labor elaws \(Employment Laws Assistance for Workers and Small Businesses\) Advisors](#) are a set of interactive, online tools to help employers and employees learn more about their rights and responsibilities under numerous Federal employment laws. The [Disability Nondiscrimination Law Advisor](#) was developed by DOL's [Office of Disability Employment Policy](#) (ODEP).

A Disability Nondiscrimination Law Advisor is designed to help employers determine which Federal disability nondiscrimination laws apply to their business or organization. This Advisor can:

- Help recipients of Federal financial assistance understand their responsibilities under these laws.
- Provide employers with a customized list of Federal disability nondiscrimination laws that may apply and links to detailed information that will help employers understand their requirements under these laws.

Q 13: When should you refer job seekers to Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)?

VR programs are an integral part of the statewide workforce development system. State VR programs provide services for individuals with disabilities, consistent with their strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice, so that they may prepare for and engage in competitive integrated employment or supported employment and achieve economic self-sufficiency. To be eligible for the VR program, individuals must have a physical or mental impairment that results in a substantial impediment to employment and who require and can benefit from VR services to achieve employment and maximize career goals. Job seekers with disabilities can be referred to VR programs if they would benefit from such services.

AJCs and VR services have a shared responsibility to assist job seekers with disabilities in securing employment leading to economic self-sufficiency. Collaborating by sharing resources and braiding services can greatly enhance the success of their programs, but more importantly, of their joint customers.

**Content from this FAQ was created from the following resources:

- [WorkforceGPS - American Job Center Access 30-Second Training Series](#)
- [Person-first and Destigmatizing Language | National Institutes of Health \(NIH\)](#)
- <https://www.nih.gov/nih-style-guide/person-first-destigmatizing-language-disproportionately-affected>
- [Working Across Partners: A Day in the Life of an American Job Center - Scenario: Benefits of Cross Training \(d2leuf3vild4d.cloudfront.net\)](#)
- [State Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program | Rehabilitation Services Administration \(ed.gov\)](#)

For more information, please email WDTAP@dol.gov