

Employment and Assistive Technology

Assistive Technology, or AT, is a common type of accommodation for individuals with disabilities in the workplace. An assistive technology device is any item that is used to maintain or improve the functional capabilities of an individual with a disability. In the area of employment, AT can provide an equal opportunity to participate in the workforce and to perform the essential functions of a particular job.

Requesting AT

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires the employee to inform his or her employer of an existing disability and provide documentation to support a request for an accommodation in the form of AT. As with other types of accommodations, the ADA requires that the request for an AT accommodation be "reasonable" and not cause an undue hardship to employers. Fortunately, many AT accommodations can be provided without great cost.

Evaluating the Need for AT

The ideal way of determining an AT accommodation is to have a professional evaluator go to the worksite to determine the individual's needs, abilities and limitations, and to work with the employer to determine the essential functions of the job. The employer, employee and evaluator work together to identify potential AT accommodations that will allow the employee to perform the essential duties. The AT can then be purchased off the shelf, customized, modified, or even designed, based on the employee's needs and the resources of the employer.

ATAC can provide referrals to professional AT evaluators. An additional resource for AT accommodations is the Job Accommodation Network (JAN), a service established by the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities. The hotline number for JAN is 1-800-232-9675.

Types of Assistive Technology

The following are a sample of the variety of assistive devices available for use in the workplace.

Persons with mobility impairments may require a ramp or lift to access a workplace. Automatic doors or modified door handles, such as U-shaped, lever-type, or push-type handles may be considered, or in some cases, required. Once inside, workstations may be modified for individuals in wheelchairs. Ergonomic computer keyboards and adapted mice are available for individuals with fine motor difficulties. Environmental control units (ECUs) enable users to turn lights and appliances on and off, adjust thermostats, or control switch-operated, battery-powered devices, and are operated by remote control, the user's voice, touch buttons or timers.

For individuals who are blind or visually impaired, screen magnification software enlarges text up to 32 times. Screen reading software reads and highlights text. Large-button or voice-activated telephones allow for independent use.

For employees with deafness or hearing impairments, telephone amplification products enhance sound. FM systems amplify a speaker's voice and diminish background noise. TTYs enable individuals to engage in conversation over the telephone by using a keyboard. Communication Access Real-time Translation, or CART, takes the spoken word, places it into text by using a stenotype machine, notebook computer and real-time software, and translates it on to a computer monitor or screen. A blinking light is a safety device that warns the individual of an emergency in the workplace, such as a fire alarm,

For individuals who have cognitive or developmental disabilities, computers and software aid in memory, planning and time management. Palm Pilots™ are microcomputers which serve a similar purpose. Computer tutorials present information in short segments which can be repeated as necessary. Tape recorders assist in memory. Earphones block out distractions from the environment. Pagers or beepers that provide voice and text messages remind the employee of appointments and other work-related activities.

Resources

If you would like more information on assistive technology and employment, please contact the Assistive Technology Advocacy Center of Disability Rights New Jersey providing information and referral, outreach and education, technical assistance and legal and non-legal advocacy in the area of assistive technology. Call 1-800-922-7233 in-state or access our Website at the address below.

The Richard West Assistive Technology Advocacy Center (ATAC) of DRNJ

210 South Broad Street, Third Floor, Trenton, NJ 08608

For voice assistance and information, please call 1-800-922-7233. TTY users may dial (609) 633-7106, or use the NJ Relay, 711 to reach the 800# above. Visit us on the web at www.drnj.org

The 58 statewide Assistive Technology (AT) Programs form a national network of statewide assistive technology programs. Information contained in this brochure represents the accumulation of knowledge of this national network. This publication was made possible by Grant Number 90AG0050-01-00 from the Administration for Community Living. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Administration for Community Living.

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