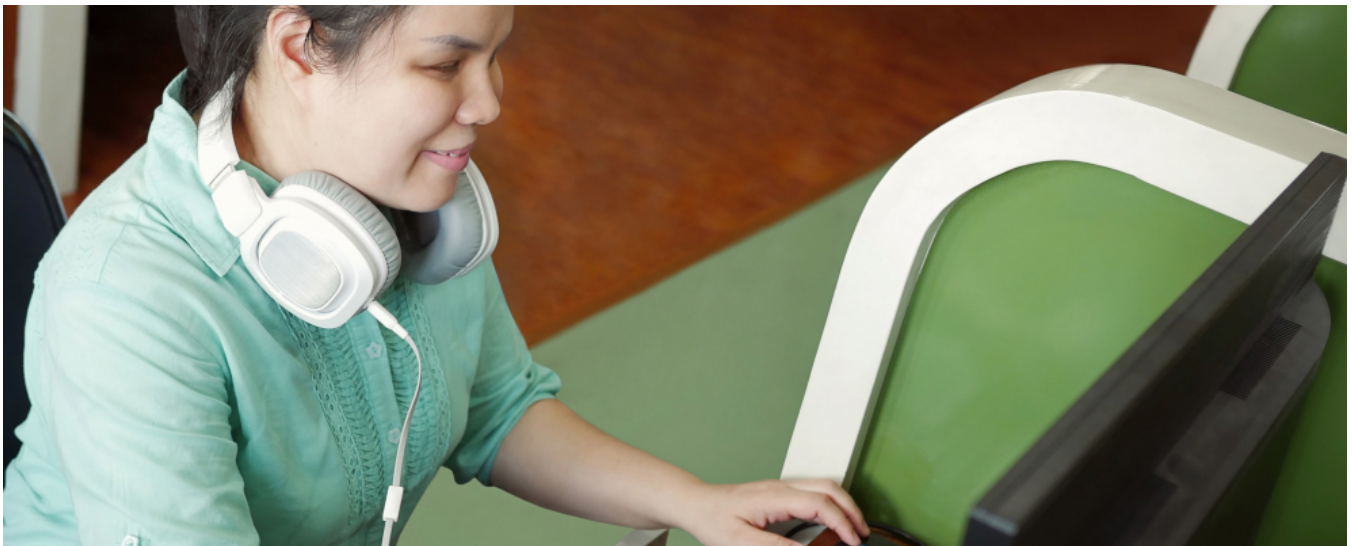# Ideas for Improving Accessibility in the Workplace

The American workplace was not built with disability in mind, so it's important for employers to step up and improve accessibility and inclusivity whenever possible.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention define disability as "any condition of the body or mind (impairment) that makes it more difficult for the person with the condition to do certain activities (activity limitation) and interact with the world around them (participation restrictions)." This goes beyond the more limited definition used by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

While you are of course required to comply with the ADA and other applicable laws, here are some additional ideas for making your office more accessible to employees with disabilities.

Ways to make your office space more accessible

- **Parking spaces**—make sure they're close enough to the building's entrances
- **Curb cuts**—these belong anywhere the ground level changes between the parking lot and the building
- **Access ramps**—these need handrails and must be graded appropriately
- **Elevators**—control panels should be about four feet above the ground and include braille or raised numbers
- **Elevator announcer**—this audio loudly and clearly enunciates the floor numbers
- **Doorways**—they should be at least 36 inches wide to accommodate wheelchairs
- **Fire alarm**—this and other emergency warnings must be both audial (alarms) and visual (lights)
- **Other workplace features and amenities**—there's always more to improve; consider restrooms, storage rooms, HR offices, water fountains and so forth

Ways to make technology more accessible

- **Inclusive software**—such as Microsoft's accessibility tools and resources
- **Screen contrast**—screens should be adjustable and capable of high brightness
- **Alt text**—this belongs everywhere, including on infographics
- **Keystrokes**—applications that require a mouse are a no-go
- **Closed captions**—needed for visual and audial material
- **Audio options**—everything on a screen should be available as audio
- **CAPTCHA tests**—they require audio, too
- **Voice-to-text**—this option should be installed on all devices

Ways to make recruitment more accessible

- **Inclusion statements**—in job ads and on company websites
- **Disability-oriented job boards**—post your openings to these as well
- **Accessible applications**—don't forget all those technology tips above
- **Reasonable accommodations**—applicants competing for the position might need these
- **Disability-focused job fairs**—put these on your list of job fairs to attend
- **Medical examinations**—these should be the same for all applicants, with no applicant required to prove more than is necessary for the job (the ADA provides a lot of rules and guidance in this area)

Additional ideas

- **Expand your diversity and inclusion training**—disability-centered content deserves a place here

- **Offer hybrid models**—in addition to providing additional flexibility to all employees, hybrid options may be particularly appealing to employees with disabilities

- **Regularly review and revise company policies**—to ensure both compliance and inclusivity

- **Track disability-related legislation and trends**—and respond accordingly

- **Start a diversity inclusion committee**—this can help employees foster community and prioritize accessibility

- **Observe Global Accessibility Awareness Day (GAAD)**—GAAD happens every year on the third Thursday of May. Use this opportunity to honor and educate those who live with disability, as well as to reassess your company's accessibility standards.

- **Be open to continued change**—the work is never truly over!

For more information

The U.S. Access Board and the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) are federal agencies. The Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN) educates employers in both the public and private sectors for free.

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