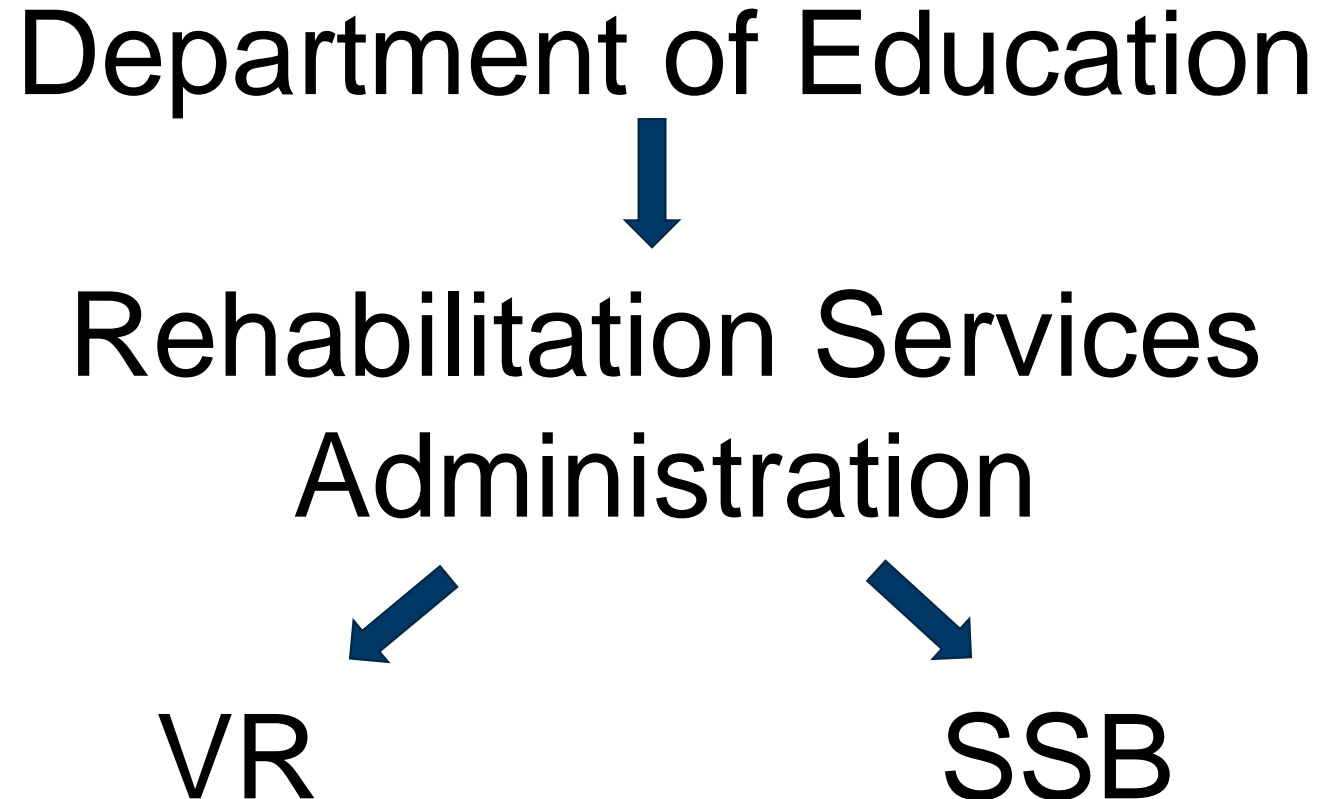




Finding New Sources of Employees: Supports for Employees with Disabilities

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Rehabilitation Act of 1973



What is a vocational rehabilitation program?

- Individuals with disabilities, eligibility based
- Created on the mindset that everyone that wants to work, can work
- Assigned a vocational counselor
- Work with a team of professionals on a consistent goal of gainful employment
- Provide the skills and tools necessary to be as competitive as possible in the job market

State Services for the Blind Vocational Rehabilitation

- Age 14 and over
- Must agree to employment being the goal
- Majority seeking educational credentials
- High on education, low on experience
- Due to the various places people are at in their lives, 14-15% will be seeking employment
- 14% will have obtained gainful employment

Disabilities in America

- Nearly 20% of working age Americans
- Nearly 42% of individuals 65 and older
- Fewer than 15% were born with their disability
- Chances increase as one ages
- 17% of individuals 45 and older experience significant vision loss

What Is A Disability?

A physical, mental, cognitive, or developmental condition that impairs, interferes with, or limits a person's ability to engage in certain tasks or actions or participate in typical daily activities and interactions. (*Merriam-Webster*)

What is a disability according to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)?

- A person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities
- A person with a record of an impairment
- A person who does not have a disability, but are regarded as having one

Disabilities are not always apparent. Never assume.

Hidden/Non-Apparent Disabilities

What is a hidden disability? It is when you cannot tell someone has a disability by just looking at them.

This definition includes:

- Recovering from a serious illness
- Asthma
- Heart disease
- Epilepsy
- Lupus
- Learning disability
- Long haul COVID
- Mental health

Neurodiverse

Differing in mental or neurological function from what is considered typical or normal (frequently used with reference to autistic spectrum disorders); not neurotypical.

This definition includes:

- Autism
- ADHD
- Dyslexia
- Tourette's
- Intellectual Disability
- And others

Mental Health Disorders

A mental disorder is characterized by a clinically significant disturbance in an individual's cognition, emotional regulation, or behavior. It is usually associated with distress or impairment in important areas of functioning.

This definition includes:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Bipolar
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Schizophrenia
- And others

Foundation of Disability

Anyone at any time can acquire a disability.

Disability occurs across all races, ethnicities, genders, ages, religions, political affiliations, and sexual orientations.

Video: Disability Etiquette



Disability Etiquette Basic Principles

- Use “people first” language.
- Every person is different, even if they have the same disability.
- Speak directly to the person, not interpreters or caregivers.
- Ask before jumping into help. If they accept the offer, listen to any instructions the person may want to give
- Do not touch assistive devices or service animals without permission.
- Disability is not something to be shamed or pitied.
- Just because someone has a disability, it doesn’t mean they are “courageous,” “brave,” “special,” or “superhuman.” People with disabilities are the same as everyone else. It is not unusual for someone with a disability to have talents, skills, and abilities. People aren’t “heroes” because they have a disability.

Core Principles

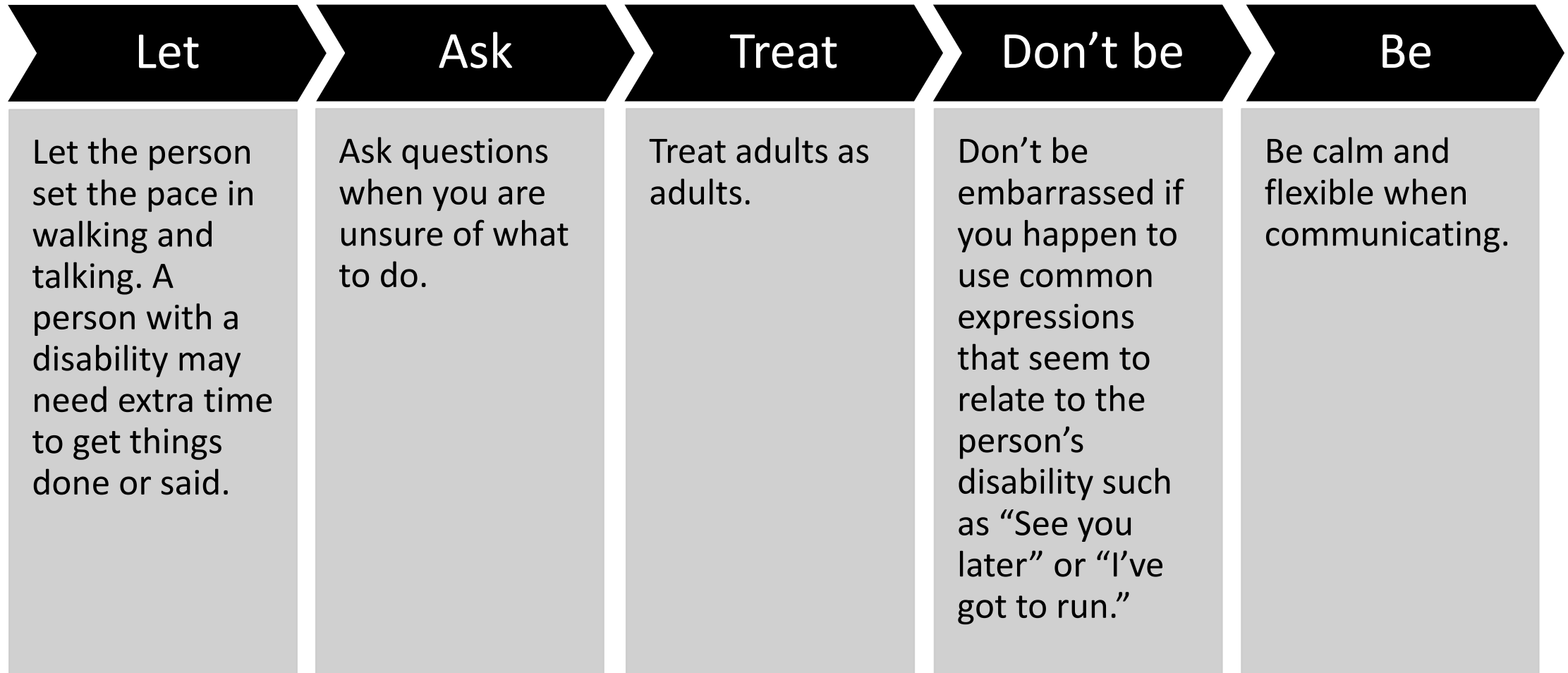
For everyone:

- The needs and abilities of people with disabilities vary from person to person, even among individuals who are considered to have a similar type of disability.
- Treat people as people
- Trust your instincts about offering assistance if you think it will be helpful. Ask “Can I assist you?” If they decline assistance, please do not insist on helping.

For supervisors/managers:

- Focus only on the performance and not the disability

Disability Etiquette Flow Chart



Person First vs Disability First

Person First

- Person with vision loss or person who is blind
- Person with hearing loss or person who is deaf
- Person who uses a wheelchair
- Person living with a mental illness
- Person with an intellectual disability

Disability First

- Blind man
- Deaf person
- Handicapped or wheelchair bound
- Mentally ill person
- Mentally retarded (no longer used)



VRS AND SSB talent

- **Office/Administrative Support**
- **Food Preparation/Serving**
- **Building/Grounds Cleaning & Maintenance**
- **Sales and Related Transportation and Material Moving**
- **Production**
- **Personal Care and Service**
- **Healthcare Support**
- **Installation, Maintenance, and Repair**
- **Community and Social Services**
- **Education, Training, and Library**
- **Healthcare Practitioners and Technical**
- **Computer and Mathematical**
- **Construction and Extraction**

An Inclusive Culture: Attract and Keep Talent

You're Probably Already on Your Way!

- Employee Resource Groups
- Employee Development
- Work Site Assessments
- Inclusive Job Descriptions
- Work Stations: wrist rests, ergonomic chairs, foot rests
- Electric Door Openers: handy when carrying large items, using strollers
- Re-organization: reduced movements, materials made handier, efficient task flow, streamline
- Visual Cues: color coding, labels, filing
- Lighting: reduce all around eye fatigue
- Flexible Work Schedules
- Inclusion Equals Retention!

Return on Investment

Obtaining and retaining employees with disabilities helps:

- Meet 503 compliance metrics
- Can provide effective and innovative business solutions
- Enhances workplace diversity
- Longevity... Employees who have disabilities statistically stay in their jobs, lowering turnover costs
- Gain access to the... third largest market segment 87% of the American public prefers to do business with a business that hires individuals with disabilities.

How VRS and SSB Can Help

Recruitment, Retention, Promotion

Internships, On-the-Job Training, Job Tryouts

Customized Training

Technical Assistance and Resources

Connect with Youth

Accessibility and Accommodation Check-ins



Disability Hiring Resources

Bite Sized Learning

[Disability Inclusion Bite Sized Learning Modules | CareerForce \(careerforcemn.com\)](#)

Employer Reasonable Accommodation Fund

<https://mn.gov/deed/business/financing-business/eraf/>

DEED-State Services for the Blind

[State Services for the Blind \(SSB\) / State Services for the Blind \(mn.gov\)](#)

STAR Program

[Minnesota STAR Program - A System of Technology to Achieve Results / STAR \(mn.gov\)](#)

DEED Vocational Rehabilitation Services

[Hiring People with Disabilities / Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development \(mn.gov\)](#)

Job Accommodation Network (JAN)

[JAN - Job Accommodation Network \(askjan.org\)](#)



EMPLOYMENT AND
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Employer Reasonable Accommodation Fund (ERAF)

Ray McCoy | ERAF Program Coordinator



- Two-year pilot program that reimburses eligible employers for reasonable accommodation purchases made for job applicants and/or employees with disabilities
 - Reimburses purchases made from July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2025
- Promotes hiring of people with disabilities by reducing any real or perceived financial hardships of providing accommodations
- Available to Minnesota small to medium sized employers
- Appropriated \$2m per year, \$300,000 of which is budgeted for administrative costs
- Organizationally housed within State Services for the Blind but marketed as a DEED program
- Official Launch Date: September 1, 2023

Employer Eligibility

- The employer is domiciled within the legal boundaries of Minnesota and has its principal place of business as identified in its certificate of incorporation in the state of Minnesota;
- The business employs not more than 500 employees on any business day during the preceding calendar year; and
- The business generates \$5,000,000 or less in gross annual revenue.

Qualifying Reasonable Accommodations (Examples)

- Assistive technology
- Captioning services
- Ergonomic workstations or seating
- Job coaching
- Lifting aids
- Lighting and alarms
- Low vision aids and devices
- Noise-cancelling devices
- Readers
- Sign language interpreters
- Signage
- Specialized software
- Subscriptions for assistive technology
- Transcription of materials into Braille or audio formats
- Wheelchair ramp

Reimbursement Limits

- The maximum total reimbursement per eligible employer in a state fiscal year (July 1-June 30) is \$30,000. This amount encapsulates both onetime and ongoing reasonable accommodations expenses.
- Submissions for onetime reasonable accommodation expenses must be no less than \$250 and no more than \$15,000 per individual with a disability. If an employer submits a reimbursement for more than the maximum amount, ERAF will only reimburse up to the \$15,000 limit.
- Submissions for ongoing reasonable accommodation expenses have no minimum or maximum requirements. Ongoing expenses are those expenses for ongoing services, such as sign language interpreting or captioning services.

ERAF Application Steps

1 Employee completes their internal process confirming their disability and need for accommodations

2 Contact us to schedule a FREE consultation to discuss what reasonable accommodations you need

3 Purchase the reasonable accommodation(s) for a job applicant or employee with a disability

4 Complete the ERAF Application on our website

Reimbursement Process

- When completing the application, the employer MUST attach proofs of purchase.
- ERAF Program Coordinator reviews application within 5 business days of receipt.
- If application is approved, ERAF technician contacts employer to complete a substitute W-9 form; employer may be asked to register in SWIFT if they anticipate future reimbursements.
 - Our ERAF Technician will help them through the entire process
- Reimbursement is processed in SWIFT, and the reimbursement check is sent to the employer within 30 days. If employer is set up as a supplier in SWIFT, funds can be instead direct deposited.

Reimbursement Denials

- Potential reasons for denials:
 - Not an eligible employer
 - Not a qualifying reasonable accommodation under the definition of state law
 - Not for a job applicant or employee with a disability
 - Eligible employer has met \$30,000 fiscal year limit
 - Missing or insufficient documentation for proof of purchase or cost
- Employers are provided an appeal process.

Important Notes

- The reimbursement employers receive is not taxable. However, they are still advised to consult with a tax accountant.
- Employers do not need to submit proof of eligibility at time of application. The application process was intentionally made to be as easy to complete as possible.
- We will be conducting quarterly financial audits of the reimbursements.
- Employers may be required to return a portion or all of the funds they received if we find through our audits, they did not meet the requirements of the program.

Technical Assistance and Consultation

- ERAF Program Coordinator is available for technical assistance (TA) and consultation at **no cost to employers**. TA is available for the following activities:
 - Understanding the Americans with Disabilities Act as it pertains to hiring and retaining individuals with disabilities and implementing reasonable accommodations;
 - Consulting on how to locate, purchase, and implement reasonable accommodations that meet the needs of individuals with disabilities;
 - Connecting employers to disability-related trainings and resources, including DEED-specific programs and initiatives; and
 - Answering any questions about the ERAF.

Thank You!

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