



# Disability Inclusive Volunteering

A Toolkit for Nonprofits



## Introduction

The Disability Inclusion in Volunteering (DIV) Task force was formed to discover, develop, unlock, plan, and promote volunteer activities for persons with disabilities in Fairfax County and the Northern Virginia region. Disability inclusion is not only good for the individual, but also their families and the community in which they live.

Our goal is to provide volunteer experiences that are meaningful and fulfilling, as they are for all who volunteer, and promote a sense of being valued. In addition, volunteering is a way for people of all abilities to hone existing skills and develop new ones to advance their employment objectives.

Whether your organization already understands the benefits of welcoming volunteers of differing abilities, or has less experience with including volunteers with disabilities, we will provide training and technical support to help you develop inclusive volunteer opportunities.

This toolkit is designed to guide your organization to welcome volunteers with disabilities and to support their inclusion so that together we can serve the needs of our community.

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## Call to Action

Fairfax County's "[One Fairfax](#)" policy is a declaration that all residents deserve an equitable opportunity to succeed — regardless of their race, color, sex, nationality, sexual orientation, religion, disability, income or where they live. One Fairfax is a framework—or “lens”—that is used to consider equity in decision-making and in the development and delivery of future policies, programs, and services.

Volunteer Fairfax is committed to using this One Fairfax framework and working to promote equity across all our programs and services. One way to do this is to promote greater inclusion of people with disabilities in volunteering.

*Disability inclusion in volunteering is not just good policy, it's good for business!*

- People with disabilities represent an untapped pool of potential volunteers.
- People with diverse experiences bring different ideas and talents to the table.
- People who feel included are loyal and enthusiastic.
- Disability inclusion is a vital part of a company's diversity, equity, and inclusion initiative.
- Companies enjoy reputational benefits when they include people with disabilities.

**Source:** [Getting To Equal: The Disability Inclusion Advantage](#)

## How Can my Organization Participate?

Volunteer Fairfax has developed training for nonprofits on welcoming volunteers with disabilities. Organizations that complete the training will be listed on our webpage with these toolkits and resources.

### *What does it mean to provide a good volunteer experience?*

We asked people with disabilities what they are seeking in a volunteer experience. Some of the most common answers include:

- A welcoming, respectful environment
- Willingness to provide reasonable accommodation to volunteers with disabilities
- Meaningful activity, not just busy work, with appropriate training
- A professional environment with clear expectations regarding hours, tasks, attire
- Constructive feedback

Volunteering allows people of all abilities to give back to their community, engage in issues they are passionate about, and connect with like-minded people. Volunteering also allows all people, regardless of ability, the opportunity to gain work experience, improve skills, explore career choices, and establish relationships with employers.

### *What is a reasonable accommodation?*

In the employment context, a reasonable accommodation is any change to the application or hiring process, to the job, to the way the job is done, or the work environment that allows a person with a disability who is qualified for the job to perform the essential functions of that job and enjoy equal employment opportunities.

Similarly, in the volunteer context, a reasonable accommodation is any modification to the volunteer opportunity or site that enables person with a disability to perform the task assigned.

## *Americans with Disabilities Act*

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) became law in 1990. The ADA is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in all areas of public life, including jobs, schools, transportation, and all public and private places that are open to the general public. The purpose of the law is to make sure that people with disabilities have the same rights and opportunities as everyone else. The ADA is divided into five titles (or sections) that relate to different areas of public life.

### **Title I Employment**

### **Title II Public Services: State and Local Government**

### **Title III Public Accommodations and Services Operated by Private Businesses**

### **Title IV Telecommunications**

### **Title V Miscellaneous Provisions**

**Source:** [ADA National Network](#)

The ADA does not specifically address volunteer service; however, the ADA may apply to volunteering in limited circumstances: 1) if it is a program of a state or local government, and 2) if a volunteer program may be considered a “good or service” of a business. Regardless of whether the ADA applies to volunteers, opening volunteer opportunities to people with disabilities is in keeping with the spirit of the law: to promote the full inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of society.

**Source:** [Volunteers and The Americans With Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#)

## Becoming a Welcoming Organization

There are many ways to provide a warm welcome to all volunteers, including those with disabilities.

Volunteer Fairfax requests the following preparatory actions to receive volunteers:

1. Complete the Volunteer Fairfax Inclusive Volunteering Training Webinar.
2. Make sure you have created a log-in and organization profile in the Volunteer Management System VolunteerNow. Use the nonprofit guide [found here](#) for instructions.
3. When creating an opportunity that applies to people with disabilities, invite them to request reasonable accommodation.

**Sample language:[Organization] welcomes volunteers with disabilities. If you need a reasonable accommodation, please contact [name and phone number/email of specific person].**

4. Be sure to check the “Inclusive Opportunities” box under “Opportunity For”, to allow better navigation and to be included under the Inclusive Volunteer icon.
5. Create a clear description of the volunteer opportunity that includes
  - a. Summary of position
  - b. Organization’s mission or purpose
  - c. Essential functions of position
  - d. Schedule and location
  - e. Requirements, including detailed description of any physical requirements
  - f. Work environment, including environmental factors [Resource for Job/Role Description](#)
6. Be ready to receive questions from volunteers with requests for accommodations.
7. Provide Onboarding/Orientation for the volunteer. [Resource for Onboarding](#)
8. Regularly review performance and provide constructive feedback to the volunteer.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### *What are some examples of reasonable accommodation?*

**Example 1.** An individual with intellectual disability may need a checklist or chart to help them remember the steps involved in completing a task.

**Example 2.** An individual with a physical disability may need to sit instead of stand, use a raised stool, an adjustable table or other modified workstation.

**Example 3.** An individual with a developmental disability may need to bring a support person to help them stay on task.

**Example 4.** An individual with a visual impairment or a reading disability may need special software that reads computer text aloud. An individual who is deaf may need a sign language interpreter or may text or write notes to communicate.

**Example 5.** An individual with a physical or mental health condition may ask to bring a service dog with them.

### *Are reasonable accommodations expensive?*

Generally, no! In the examples above, most reasonable accommodations cost little or nothing. Sign language interpreters are paid by the hour but may not be needed the entire time a deaf person is volunteering. Many people who use software such as text-to-speech or screen readers have the software on their own devices. Most cell phones and computers have accessibility features built in.



## Frequently Asked Questions (cont.)

*Is the organization responsible for providing a support person for a volunteer with a disability who needs one as a reasonable accommodation?*

If a volunteer with a disability needs full-time direct support to volunteer, the volunteer is responsible for providing their own support person. Some people with disabilities employ their own attendants, companions, or other direct support professionals. These services may be covered by Medicaid or private pay. Some individuals may have job coaches through state or county programs, while others may be accompanied by a parent or sibling. If the volunteer only needs occasional supervision or feedback, it is expected that the welcoming organization provide that supervision.

*How do I address a volunteer with a disability who has behavioral or conduct problems?*

Volunteers with disabilities are expected to meet the same conduct standards as those without disabilities. General conduct standards, such as prohibitions on violence, threats of violence, stealing, or destruction of property, apply to all volunteers, including those with disabilities. Some volunteers may have disability-related behavior that is unusual in your organization. For example, a volunteer with a mental health condition may talk to themselves, or a volunteer with an autism spectrum disorder may engage in repetitive hand motions. In such cases, the supervisor should consider first whether the behavior is truly disruptive to the business, or simply makes others uncomfortable. There may be a reasonable accommodation that would help resolve the issue.

*What if the volunteer is not able to perform the task assigned?*

Using our computer matching system, we hope that volunteers will select opportunities that are appropriate to their skills. A good volunteer experience will include training on the task to be performed, regular check-ins to see how things are going, and constructive feedback to help the volunteer improve. The individual may need a reasonable accommodation, job coaching, or in some cases, reassignment.

## Resources

[Etiquette: Interacting with People with Disabilities](#)

[JAN: Job Accommodation Network](#) Includes a searchable database of disabilities and accommodations, with examples for different types of jobs.

[An Overview of the Americans With Disabilities Act](#)

[Getting To Equal: The Disability Inclusion Advantage](#)

[Volunteers and the Americans With Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#)

[How To Develop an Inclusive Supported Volunteering Scheme](#)

[Inclusion of Persons With Disabilities in Service Days and Events](#)

[Attracting Volunteers with Disabilities](#)

[Mid-Atlantic ADA Center](#)





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Stay tuned for additional training opportunities for Inclusive Volunteering Fall 2023.