



Business Matters

Encouraging Diversity in the Workplace • Promoting a Positive Environment for Business Growth

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Low interest Loan Program now Benefits Business



The Assistive Technology Loan Fund Authority (ATLFA) and SunTrust Bank, Mid-Atlantic recently expanded their low interest, long-term loan program for Virginia individuals with disabilities to include small businesses and non-profit organizations. The expanded program aims to help Virginia businesses and organizations meet building accessibility requirements under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and purchase equipment to accommodate newly hired or current employees with a disability.

Through the program, small businesses and non-profit organizations can apply for low-interest loans that feature flexible terms and favorable interest rates on a variety of financing for assistive technology purposes. Funds can be used for building modifications and equipment such as: electric door openers, ramps, bathroom modifications, vans with lifts to transport employees and computers with voice input/output. Borrowers would still qualify for any federal or state tax incentives for which these changes or purchases are eligible.

For more information on the ATLFA or to obtain an application, call (866) 835-5976 (toll-free), or visit www.ATLFA.org



Designs that Accommodate Workers with Disabilities, Benefit All

What's better than an office tool that makes a worker more productive? Office tools that can make every worker more productive.

That's the premise behind concepts like universal design—developing tools and products that can be used by almost anyone of any ability. It's also often a by-product of some assistive technology devices.

According to a recent report in the *San Jose Business Journal*, assistive technology for the office, like hands-free keyboards or voice recognition software, may seem more expensive up-front, but investing in the tools that make a job easier for a disabled worker could actually save employers money through increased productivity in both the disabled and able-bodied worker, as well as through decreased workers' compensation claims.

To read the full article, go to <http://www.ergoweb.com/news/detail.cfm?id=869>

EMPLOYMENT OR HEALTH CARE: Your Employees Shouldn't Have to Choose



People with disabilities represent a skilled and productive workforce. But oftentimes, employees with disabilities limit their work hours or turn down opportunities of job advancement because they fear they might lose crucial disability benefits, such as Medicaid, once their earnings start to increase. This fear poses a major disincentive for people with disabilities who are willing and able to go to work. Moreover, these "benefits-related" concerns limit employers' ability to maximize their employees' work potential.

In an effort to enhance employment options for workers with disabilities, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services awarded Virginia an additional \$500,000 grant to target improvements in the state's health care system so that workers with disabilities will no longer have to choose between employment or health care. This is the third year that Virginia has received a grant award under the *Medicaid Infrastructure Grant program*. The program was authorized by the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act, a law that was passed in 1999 to encourage people with disabilities to work without fear of losing eligibility for health benefits such as Medicare or Medicaid.

The current focus of Virginia's Medicaid Infrastructure Grant project is to establish a Medicaid Buy-In program for the state. Similar programs currently exist in 28 other states. Through this program, workers with disabilities will be allowed to pay a premium to participate in the State's Medicaid program, as though they were purchasing private health care coverage. A Medicaid Buy-In will permit higher income and resource levels for workers with disabilities while ensuring continuation of crucial health care coverage, thus providing an opportunity and incentive to seek gainful employment. For employers, a program that builds security for their employees translates to higher productivity and workability from their employees.

Funding to implement a Medicaid Buy-In program as a waiver (limited to 200 recipients in the first year) was included in the Governor's budget and presented to the General Assembly in December 2003. Once established, employer and consumer involvement will be critical to the success of the Medicaid Buy-in and to removing barriers to employment for Virginians with disabilities. To learn more about the Medicaid Buy-In program in Virginia, please visit <http://www.dmas.state.va.us/mb-Information.htm>.

Workers with Hidden Disabilities -- Useful tips to enhance worker productivity

When people hear the word “disability” they often think of impairments that are visually identifiable. But other forms of disability such as those that are cognitive or psychological aren’t so apparent. People with learning and/or developmental disabilities experience limitations in cognitive abilities, motor abilities, and social abilities that can affect workplace performance. Given the proper accommodations and guidance, however, employees with learning or developmental disabilities, can be productive contributors to the workplace.

Below is an overview of the types of job accommodations that might be useful for such employees:

Cognitive Limitations

Reading:

- Provide pictures, symbols, or diagrams instead of words;
- Read written information to employee or provide written information on audiotape;
- Use voice output on computer;
- Use line guide to identify or highlight one line of text at a time.

Writing:

- Provide templates or forms to prompt information;
- Allow verbal/typed response instead of written response;
- Use voice-input and spell-check on computer;
- Provide ample space on forms requiring written response;
- Use voice-activated recorder for verbal instructions.

Organization:

- Minimize clutter and color-code items and resources;
- Divide large tasks into multiple, smaller tasks;
- Use symbols instead of words;
- Use printed labels instead of hand-written labels.

Time Management:

- Provide verbal, written or symbolic reminders;
- Use alarm watch or beeper;
- Use a task list with numbers or symbols;
- Avoid isolated workstations;
- Provide space for job coach;
- Provide additional training or retraining as needed.

Social Interaction

- Implement a structure of positive feedback;
- Use visual performance charts;
- Provide tangible rewards;
- Use co-workers as mentors and provide sensitivity training to all employees;
- Provide job coach and use training videos to demonstrate appropriate behavior in the workplace;
- Model appropriate social skills such as where to eat, when to hug, how to ask for help, etc.

RESOURCES

The Employer’s Guide to Hidden Disabilities -- This booklet provides information about the ADA, hidden disabilities and workplace accommodations. It also includes an extensive list of resources related to this topic. To obtain a free copy of the guide, contact Cailin Pachter, Muhlenberg College, at 484-664-3170 or by e-mail at cpachter@muhlenberg.edu. This guide is also available online at <http://www.muhlenberg.edu/ocdp/emplguide/>.

Making Online Application Processes Accessible - Quick tips for Employers from the Job Accommodation Network - on how to make online employment applications accessible to people with disabilities. For more information, visit <http://www.jan.wvu.edu/corner/>.

Looking to Hire this Summer?



Fill your summer or permanent hiring needs with talented college students with disabilities. These candidates, from more than 175 colleges and universities, represent all majors, range from college freshmen to graduate students and law students, and have many levels of experience. To request a free copy of the 2004 Workforce Recruitment Program database on CD-ROM, please email your name, company name and mailing address to: wrp@dol.gov.

BUSINESS APPRECIATION WEEK

Together We Make A Difference



MAY 16 - 22, 2004

DRS wishes to acknowledge our business friends and colleagues who, through partnership with DRS, have welcomed persons with disabilities to their workforce and provided quality service to customers with disabilities in their place of business. We are honored to work in such company with committed business leaders and professionals who truly do make a difference in our community, and more importantly, in the lives of people with disabilities.

THANK YOU!