

## Employer outreach

At the Alaska Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired our mission is to equip all Alaskans for success in all avenues of life. The following information should be a great tool for employers as it explains the truths about individuals with vision loss.

### Explaining Working with Low Vision.

What is Low Vision?

Low vision is a term to describe individuals with limited eyesight. Low vision can in fact be divided into several distinct categories.

- Visually impaired refers to individuals who have vision loss that can be improved up to 20/70 with corrective lenses.
- Legally blind refers to individuals who have an eye condition that reduces the visual acuity to 20/200 with corrective lenses or diminishes visual perception to no more than 20°.

It's beneficial to know and understand that very few individuals have no visual perception and even more important to understand that an individual seeking employment usually has the skills necessary to perform at a vocational level with the use of accommodations no matter how much site they have.

### Interacting with Individuals with Low Vision:

The public may often experience some sort of awkward feelings when interacting with individuals who have low vision. Here are a few tips for alleviating those feelings and bringing about positive interactions. The information below was found on the American Foundation for the Blind's website.

- During introductions let the individual who is blind/low vision extend his/her hand for the hand shake.
- Identify yourself by name when talking with an individual with low vision, and always speak with a normal voice. Do not shout.
- In a group setting each person should verbally identify themselves to the individual with low vision.
- It's alright to use visually orientated words such as look and see.
- Ask before assisting.
- Do not interfere with a cane or dog guide.
- When directing use descriptive language such as to the left of the door.

More information about the distinctions between low vision and legally blind and how to interact with individuals with low vision can be found on the American Foundation for the Blind's website [by clicking here.](#)

### Common Myths of Blindness and Low Vision:

Here are some common misperceptions about individuals with vision loss according to the American Foundation of the Blind found [here](#) under the section Myths About Employing Individuals Who Are Blind

**Myth #1:** People who are visually impaired are limited in the jobs they can perform and the careers they can pursue.

**Reality:** Contrary to the myth that blind people can only hold low wage jobs, people who are visually impaired can perform many of the same jobs and pursue the same careers as those who are sighted.

**Myth #2:** According to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), an employer is responsible for providing all of the accommodations an employee who is visually impaired requests.

**Reality:** The ultimate decision of which accommodations to provide is up to the employer, as long as the section effectively removes necessary barriers for the employee.

**Myth #3:** Accommodations are expensive for an employer to provide for an employee who is visually impaired.

**Reality:** According to the Job Accommodation Network, 15 percent of job accommodations cost nothing. The typical one-time expenditure by employers to provide an accommodation is approximately \$500, and employers reported the accommodations are effective in increasing an employee's productivity.

**Myth #4:** Employees who are visually impaired need more supervision than other employees.

**Reality:** Employees who are visually impaired do not need more supervision. With proper training on completing the functions of a job and provision of accommodations, individuals with vision loss will perform competitively and successfully in the workforce.

**Myth #5:** People who are visually impaired can't read printed or handwritten material.

**Reality:** The availability of assistive technology has made nearly any kind of printed document accessible to people who are visually impaired.

**Myth #6:** If an employee experiences a sudden or gradual loss of vision while working, the employee will not be able to continue to perform the functions and duties of his job.

**Reality:** State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies and private organizations are available to provide orientation and mobility training, career counseling, and skill development to help clients continue performing their current job duties or to qualify for other employment opportunities.

**Myth #7:** An employee who is visually impaired will have a higher absentee rate than employees without a disability.

**Reality:** People with vision loss usually have better attendance rates than their non-disabled coworkers and are often loyal workers to the company resulting in longevity with the company.

**Myth #8:** If an employer hires an employee who is visually impaired, their insurance rates will increase.

**Reality:** Insurance premiums are based on overall actuarial events. A single individual, even if he or she is visually impaired, does not make an impact. Many states have passed regulations prohibiting differentiation in premiums on the basis of blindness without full actuarial evidence to support the distinction.

**Myth #9:** The ADA shields a visually impaired employee from disciplinary action at work.

**Reality:** An employer is always at liberty to discipline an employee who does not follow company policies or adhere to standards. The employee who is visually impaired should be held to the same standards in the same way as all other employees.

**Myth #10:** Blind people have special gifts such as a "sixth sense."

**Reality:** Although a very common and popular myth, people who are visually impaired are not endowed with a sharper sense of touch, hearing, taste, or smell. To compensate for their loss of vision, many blind people learn to listen more carefully or develop skills to increase their directional acumen.

**Myth #11:** An employee who is blind will need his materials in braille at work.

**Reality:** Some employees, especially those who were born blind, will be excellent braille readers and may use braille when they determine it is the most efficient way to complete a task at work. However, only a small percentage of blind or visually impaired people read braille. Many know enough braille

to be functional, such as making notes and labels for themselves, but they may not need any materials transcribed.

Job Analysis:

When hiring for a vacant position it is beneficial to both the company and the potential employees for a job analysis to be conducted. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, a job analysis is the best way to determine the essential functions of the job you are hiring for, “essential functions are the basic job duties that an employee must be able to perform, with or without a reasonable accommodation.” (U.S. Department of Labor) Determining what classified as an essential function will drastically decrease any unknown discrimination either in the job description or in any questions asked during the interview process.

You can find information on proper job analysis here at <https://www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/fact/opening.htm>

Once a job analysis has been conducted you as an employer will be better prepared when it comes time for accommodations. The Americans With Disabilities Act insures that every individual receives appropriate/reasonable and necessary accommodations unless said accommodations result in financial hardship. The National Technical Assistance Center of the Mississippi State University has published an article that will offer more explanations and tips for accommodating your work space. The article can be found [by clicking here.](#)

Resources for Individuals with Disabilities:

If you have any questions about your responsibilities as an employer of individuals with disabilities, you can contact your local Department of Vocational Rehabilitation office. Numbers are listed below.

Center Name	Address	Phone
Juneau Office	10002 Glacier Highway, Suite 305, Juneau, AK, 99801-8569	1(800) 478-2387
The Anchorage Counseling Center	1016 W. 6th, Suite 403, Anchorage, AK. 99501-1963	1(888) 330-6468
The Counseling and Evaluation Center	4600 Debarr Road, Suite 300, Anchorage, AK, 99508-3126	1(800) 478-2839
The Wasilla Branch Office	913 W. Commercial Drive, Wasilla, AK, 99654-6937	1(800) 770-4124
The Fairbanks Branch Office	455 3rd Avenue, Suite 150 (Entrance on Lacey Street), Fairbanks, AK, 99701	1(800) 478-2839
The Kenai Branch Office	145 Main Street Loop, Suite 143, Kenai, AK, 99611-7768	1(800) 478-3136

IF your office is not listed here, you should be able to locate it at DVR Offices | DOLWD Division of Vocational Rehabilitation on <http://labor.alaska.gov> or clicking [here.](#)

Benefits of Hiring Employees with disabilities

The IRS has several listed tax credits that businesses can qualify for when hiring individuals with disabilities [Click here for a comprehensive list.](#)

Resources:

“DVR Offices.” *DVR Offices / DOLWD Division of Vocational Rehabilitation*,  
[labor.alaska.gov/dvr/contact.htm](http://labor.alaska.gov/dvr/contact.htm).

“Learning About Blindness: Interacting with a Person Who Is Blind or Visually Impaired in the Workforce.” *Learning About Blindness: Interacting with a Person Who Is Blind or Visually Impaired in the Workforce - American Foundation for the Blind*, American Foundation of the Blind, [www.afb.org/info/for-employers/visual-impairment-and-your-current-workforce/learning-about-blindness/345](http://www.afb.org/info/for-employers/visual-impairment-and-your-current-workforce/learning-about-blindness/345).

“ODEP - Office of Disability Employment Policy.” *U.S. Department of Labor -- ODEP - Office of Disability Employment Policy - Publications - Opening Doors to All Candidates: Tips for Ensuring Access for Applicants with Disabilities*, U.S. Department of Labor, [www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/fact/opening.htm](http://www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/fact/opening.htm).

“Tax Benefits for Businesses Who Have Employees with Disabilities.” *Internal Revenue Service*, Internal Revenue Service, [www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/tax-benefits-for-businesses-who-have-employees-with-disabilities](http://www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/tax-benefits-for-businesses-who-have-employees-with-disabilities).

Web Development Team. “National Technical Assistance Center on Blindness and Visual Impairment (NTAC-BVI).” *Accommodating the Visually Impaired in the Workplace, Businesses - National Technical Assistance Center - Mississippi State University*, National Technical Assistance Center - Mississippi State University, [www.ntac.blind.msstate.edu/businesses/accommodating/](http://www.ntac.blind.msstate.edu/businesses/accommodating/).