



Alabama Department of
REHABILITATION SERVICES

Rehabilitation Engineering and
Assistive Technology

Reasonable Accommodations to Boost Hiring and Retention Needs

Bobbi Stephenson, Director, Business Relations Program

Michael Papp, Program Manager, Rehab Engineering and Assistive Tech

one mission

ONE DEPARTMENT. ONE MISSION

Our mission is to enable Alabama's children and adults with disabilities to achieve their maximum potential.

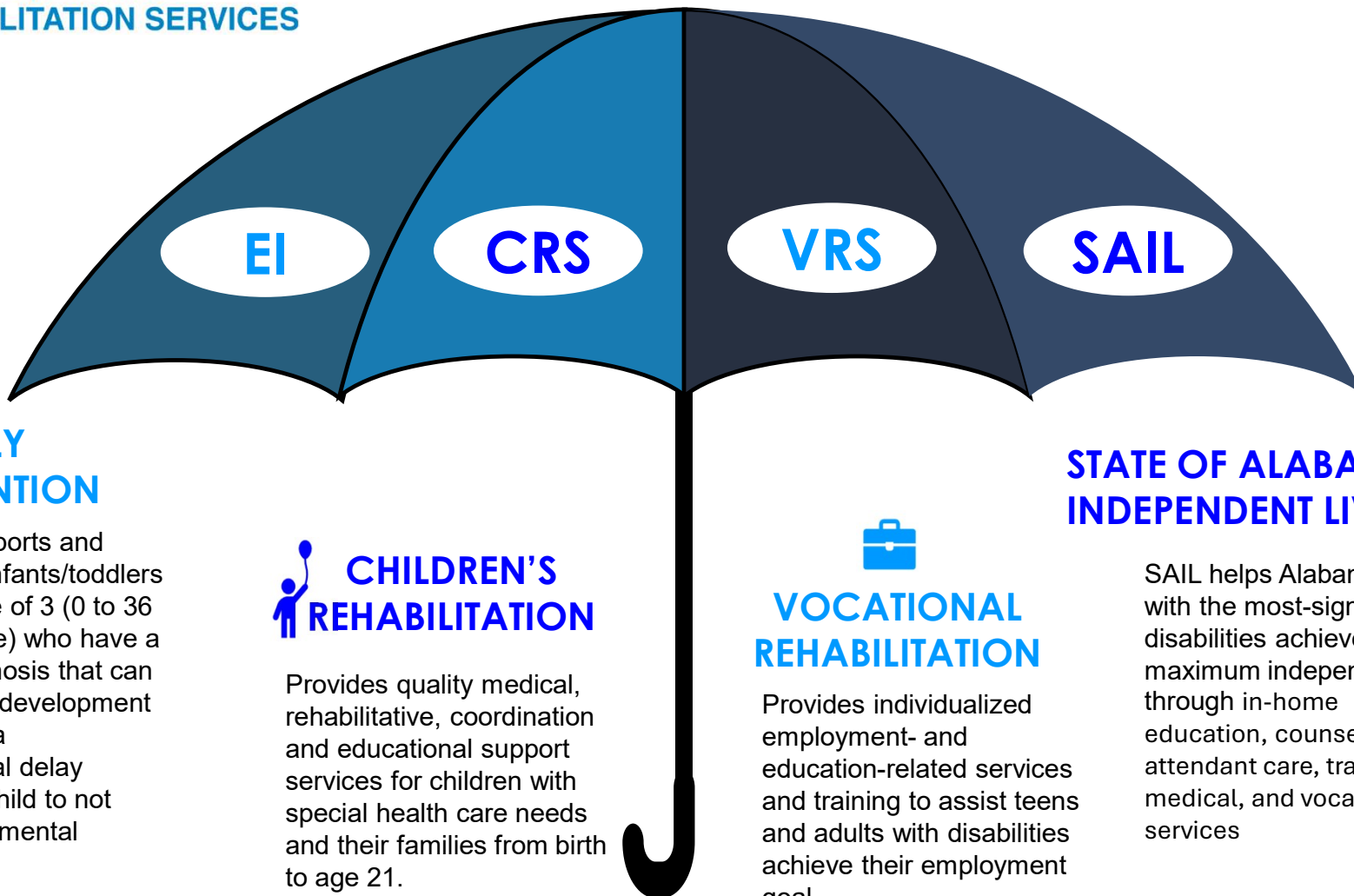
Welcome & What We'll Cover



By the end of this session, you'll be able to:

- Identify accommodations that support hiring and retention
- Learn how and when to disclose disability
- Apply strategies for asking questions and finding solutions
- Describe how ADRS supports employers, employees, and businesses throughout the process

One idea to keep in mind today: everything we share — ideas, technology, process support — are recommendations. Under the ADA, employers decide what's a reasonable accommodation for their workplace.



Two Programs, One Partnership



- Works directly with employers on recruiting candidates with disabilities
- Consults with employers on ADA and accommodation questions
- Connects businesses to incentives, training, and technical assistance
- The bridge between job seekers/employees and the workplace



- Evaluates job tasks and functional barriers
- Recommends and, where needed, fabricates or loans assistive technology
- Provides technical consultation to employers and employees
- Statewide resource: APTAT (Accessing Potential Through Assistive Technology)

Alabama's Disability Workforce Connection



What services will the Business Relations Program provide?

We connect employers to an untapped talent pool of job ready candidates through a variety of no-cost services including recruitment, retention, and resources.

Recruitment

We evaluate your company's workforce needs and identify qualified candidates within our talent pool. As our candidates become your new hires, follow-up support ensures that they continue to be valued employees.

Training

We provide customized disability etiquette and awareness trainings to equip business and industry with the appropriate manner of interacting with individuals with disabilities.

Retention

Retaining a Valued Employee (R.A.V.E.)

We assist business in retaining valued employees whose performance may be affected by disability, utilizing specialized rehabilitation engineers to customize accommodations and reduce retention costs to maintain a productive workforce.

Financial Incentives

We help business and industry understand and access tax credits and other financial incentives that are available to employers who hire our candidates.

Technical Assistance

We offer expert assistance to help identify reasonable accommodations and resources that improve productivity and retention for employees with disabilities.

Contact us to learn more:

205-290-4465

rehab.alabama.gov



A program of the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services

A Few Terms, Plainly Stated

Qualified individual with a disability

A person who meets the job's requirements and can perform its essential functions, with or without an accommodation.

Reasonable accommodation

A change to the job or work environment that helps a qualified person with a disability perform the job.

Interactive process

Once a need is identified, the employer and employee work together to find a workable solution.

Undue hardship

The narrow exception: significant difficulty or expense for that specific employer — not the norm.

One Point Worth Repeating

ADRS, VR staff, and the person with a disability can **identify barriers** and **recommend** options — but the final decision on accommodations belongs to the employer. What's reasonable for one employer may not be for another, since it depends on that employer's operations, resources, and job requirements.



Same Request, Different Answer

The same accommodation request can be reasonable for one employer and not for another — it depends on that employer's operations.

Employer A — Office Job

Flexible workflow, individual desks, staggered deadlines

Request: a later, flexible start time

Likely reasonable — work can shift without disrupting coverage or teammates.

Employer B — Manufacturing Line

Fixed shift coverage, sequential line work, other roles depend on this one starting on time

Same request: a later, flexible start time

May not be reasonable here — but the employer and employee can still explore other options together (e.g., a shift swap).

Deciding Whether to Disclose

Whether you're interviewing or already employed, disclosure is a personal decision — these questions can help you think it through.

- 1 Do I need an accommodation to perform this job or interview successfully? If not, disclosure isn't required.
- 2 Is my disability visible or already apparent? This affects how much choice I actually have.
- 3 Will not disclosing put my performance, safety, or job security at risk?
- 4 What protections exist once I disclose — confidentiality, and protection against retaliation?

Practical tip: you only need to disclose enough to justify the specific accommodation requested — not a full diagnosis. VR and RE&AT can help you think this through privately before you say anything to an employer.



ROCKY MOUNTAIN
A D A C E N T E R

Retaining a Valued Employee

RAVE is a Vocational Rehabilitation service for employers that helps them better manage disability in the workplace and a service for employed individuals with disabilities, helping them to keep their job or be better prepared to deal with disability issues affecting promotional opportunities.



5 Steps to R.A.V.E- Retaining a Valuable Employee

1

Contact

Contact Vocational Rehabilitation Services for assistance with workplace accommodations.

2

Meet

Schedule a confidential meeting with VR, a company representative, and the employee.

3

Evaluate

Participate in an evaluation to identify and suggest reasonable accommodations for the workplace barrier.

4

Feedback

Receive written recommendations for reasonable accommodations from subject-matter experts.

5

Solutions

Employer decides which recommendation(s) to implement and works with VR to put the solution in place.

Everyone involved — employee, supervisor/HR, Business Relations Consultant, VR Counselor, Rehabilitation Engineer — plays an advisory, collaborative role. The employer implements the accommodation it determines to be reasonable.

Two Paths to Getting Accommodations

Path A · Through Vocational Rehabilitation

VR counselor, Business Relations Consultant, and Rehabilitation Engineer collaborate with the employer to identify barriers and recommend options

Useful when you don't know where to start, need an AT assessment, or the employer wants a knowledgeable third party to consult

ADRS/VR brings expertise and recommendations — the employer still makes the final call

Path B · Self-Advocacy Directly with Employer

Follow your employer's accommodation policy, if they have one.

Otherwise, put your request in writing, tied to a specific job task or barrier — not the diagnosis

Suggest a possible solution if you have one, framed as a starting point for discussion, not a demand

You can request a modest trial period

If self-advocacy stalls, that's the cue to loop in VR/ADRS for more recommendations — not to escalate a decision

Categories of Accommodations

Assistive technology



Hardware, software, and devices

Job task/ duty modifications



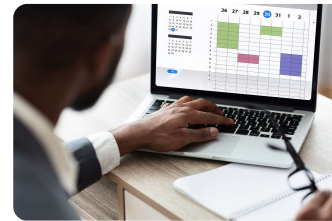
Adjusting how or what parts of a job are done

Environmental/ workspace changes



Physical layout, furniture, lighting, noise

Policy/schedule flexibility



Start times, breaks, remote work arrangements

Training and communication support



Instructions, onboarding, ongoing coaching

Employer has final say. Every category above is a suggestion pool — the employer chooses from it and approves what's implemented.

Assistive Technology Examples



Speech-to-text / dictation

Built-in OS voice control (Windows Voice Access, macOS Voice Control) and AI dictation now built into Microsoft 365 and Google Workspace — no separate purchase needed.



Adapted computer access

Ergonomic and one-handed keyboards, trackballs, eye-gaze and head-tracking control.



Vision tools

CCTV/video magnifiers, screen readers (JAWS, NVDA, built-in VoiceOver/Narrator), plus AI tools like Be My Eyes' AI assistant and smartphone OCR/scene description.



Communication & phones

UbiDuo or ILA (Instant Language Assistant) for in-person conversations; live AI captioning (Ava, Otter.ai, Live Transcribe) and built-in smartphone captioning have expanded this space.



Cognitive/organizational supports

Calendar and reminder apps, smart pens, note-taking apps, and AI writing/summarization tools.

How We Evaluate to Accommodate

1

Identify job task abilities needed



2

Compare to the individual's functional abilities



3

Identify the gap



4

Suggest Assistive Technology or accommodation options



Real-World Examples

Five accommodations, five very different barriers — physical, neurological, vision, learning, and hearing.

*In each of these, our team and the employee proposed the fix — **the employer made the call to implement it.***

Case 1: Returning a Veteran Plumber to Work

VR partnered with the VA's Voc Rehab & Employment program to help a master plumber with a service-related back injury return to his trade.



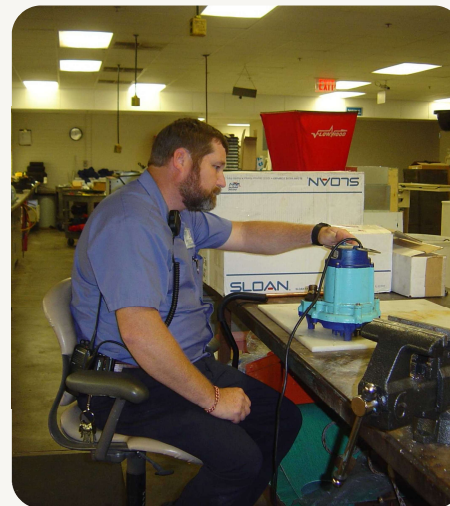
Overhead reaching

Hand-crank height-adjustable scaffold, narrow enough to roll through 36" doorways



Bending & stooping

Mechanic's rolling stool with a tool tray for working under sinks and fixtures



Standing at a bench

Bench-height stool for alternating sitting and standing while rebuilding pumps



Heavy lifting

Hydraulic lift cart for moving cast iron and heavy fittings to bench height

Also provided: a heavy-duty scooter for covering the large hospital campus, and a "Toilet Kart" for lifting and setting floor- and wall-mounted fixtures.

Case 2: Keeping a Truck Driver on the Road

A licensed commercial truck driver with a traumatic brain injury — valued by his employer and motivated to keep working.

Barriers

- Chronic migraine headaches due to the brain injury
- Vision in the right eye intermittently impaired

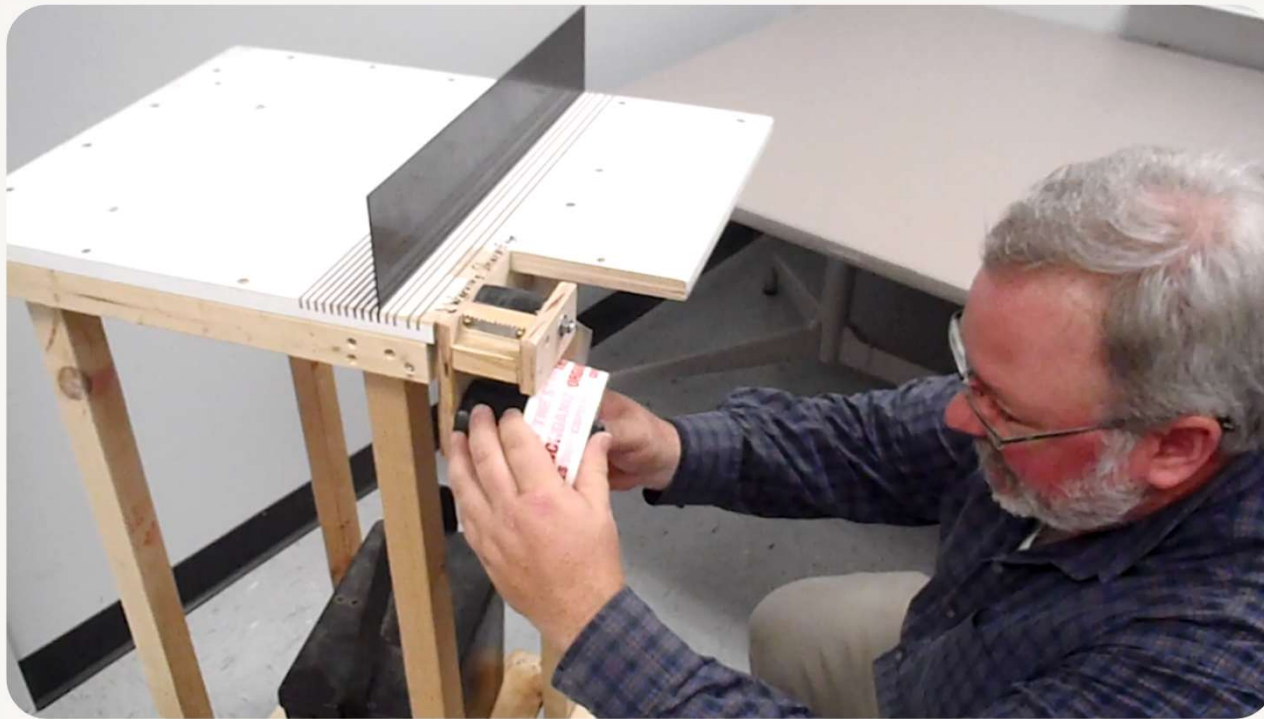
Solutions

- VR counselor connected him with a neurologist — treatment greatly reduced the migraine problem
- The employer required drivers to see the right side of the truck; a flat and cross-view mirror was added to the right front fender to restore that visibility



Low-cost, high-impact: a simple mirror kept a skilled, motivated employee on the job.

Case 3: Redesigning the Task, Not the Person



Shipping department

- A man working in shipping had difficulty with vision and dexterity, and couldn't tape cartons cleanly enough to meet quality standards
- Poor dexterity made it hard to hold and operate a hand tape gun; poor vision made it hard to position it on the package

Solution: a custom packing tape table — the box slides against a fixed tape dispenser, so the task no longer requires precise hand-eye coordination to align a moving tape gun.

Case 4: From Classroom Tools to Workplace Tools

A college student with dysgraphia, dyslexia, dyscalculia, and a receptive language disorder, working toward a job in a law office.

Accommodations



- Digital Books with text-to-speech or recorded audio
- Grammarly, combined with speech recognition and Immersive Reader, which is built into Microsoft Office 365 products
- Genio, an AI-powered note-taking tool for recording and transcribing lectures and meetings
- AI writing and summarization tools built into Microsoft 365 / Google Docs now layer on top of these for even more support

These same tools transfer directly into workplace reading, writing, and meeting tasks.

Real-World Examples

Deixysla

A femid who has deixysla dbesiced to me how she eeepicnxres radneig. She can raed, but it takes a lot of ciotonrtanecn, and the lteerts seems to "jmuap aruond".

I rebmremeed ranideg about [tgyeoyimlpca](#). Wluodn't it be poslisbe to do it itcvletenairy on a wsbetie with Jpiacvrast? Srue it wloud.

Feel like mkiang a blaoromkkt of this or shomtineg? [Fork it](#) on gtuihb.

Dixeysla is caehicezrartd by diftluifcy wth lennairg to read flclunty and with aucartce cepeosmiohnrn dsitepe normal ileetcginnle. Tihs icuendls dtlfcifiuy with pohcnlaogil aswaernes, pogcnoohlail dodecnig, pnoerssicg seepd, oatpgrriohhc ciondg, aiutdroy sroht-trem moemry, Inaggaue siklls/varebl coieemproshn, and/or rpaid nanimg.

Dnemepvaeoltl rdianeg dodiersr (DRD) is the msot cmomon lnrneiag diblistiay. Dslxeiya is the most roegiezncd of mnaedg drieordss, hoeewvr not all rndeieg derirdoss are lneikd to dxlesiya.

Some see dysxleia as dtnsiit form rdnaieg dffilcieiuts rnlesiutg from oehr csueas, scuh as a non-nueocaglril dceinciefy wth voisin or herniag, or poor or iedtqanaue radneig irotuisnctn. Terhe are terhe popoesrd ctnvigoie stbeyups of dyilesxa (aoutdriy, vasiul and antentiotal), authgolh iauddnviil caess of dixylsea are betetr eexlipand by siiecfpc uenlnyrdig noyrcsgpaouhliel deficits and co-onruccing lnaneig dliistaibeis (e.g. anttoetin-difecit/htietyvcirpay disdreor, math dtlabisiy, etc.). Atlguhoh it is criosedned to be a rtpceeie lgaanuge-baesd lianerng dsibiiltay in the rarecesh liteturare, dixeylsa aslo afetcfis one's espisexrve lgaugne slkis. Racrereshes at MIT found that pleope with dliesyxa eihxtiebd imaieprd vicoe-critnoeogin abielitis.

Sucroe: [Widkpiea](#)

Case 5: Supporting a Front Desk Receptionist

Difficulty hearing patrons at the desk (especially accented or ESL speech), phone calls, small meetings, and quick verbal instructions from a supervisor.

Technology accommodations



- ILA Pro device for live captioning/translation with walk-in patrons
- CapTel office phone for live-captioned calls
- Hearing aids paired with a remote microphone
- A phone-based captioning app as backup when the ILA Pro isn't available

Non-tech / process accommodations



- Supervisor knocks and makes eye contact before speaking
- Supervisor defaults to email or phone so captioning applies
- Remote mic placed near the speaker in meetings; employee seated in the speaker's line of sight
- A designated speaker spot in the conference room
- Written confirmation of directives to verify understanding

Other ADRS Assistive Technology Partners

APTAT — Accessing Potential Through Assistive Technology

Lending Library



Try devices before committing — al.at4all.com

Device Demonstrations



See AT in action before a purchase decision

5 DME Reuse Centers



Refurbished equipment available statewide

Training



For employers, employees, and service providers

Information and Resources



Guidance for organizations to implement, manage, and use an AT Program

Contacts & Resources

ADRS Business Relations Program:

Bobbi Stephenson, Director · 205-290-4465 · rehab.alabama.gov

APTAT Lending Library:

<https://accessingpotential.org/>

Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology:

Michael Papp · 205.290.4460 · rehab.alabama.gov/services/re-and-at

Other ADRS Specialty Programs that provide assistive technology include Vision Rehabilitation Therapy, Orientation and Mobility, and Adapted Driver Training . For more information, visit <https://rehab.alabama.gov/>

Accommodation Resources

- Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services - <https://rehab.alabama.gov/>
- Accessing Potential Through Assistive Technology - <https://accessingpotential.org/>
- Job Accommodation Network - <https://askjan.org/>
- O*Net Online - <https://www.onetonline.org/>
- Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability - <https://askearn.org/topic/accommodations>
- Office of Disability Employment Policy - <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep>
- Disability Rights and Resources - <https://drradvocates.org/>
- Southeast ADA Center - <https://adasoutheast.org/resources/states/alabama/>
- Rehabilitation Engineer - <https://www.rehabengineer.com/>

Takeaways

- 1 Start simple — the lowest-tech solution that solves the problem is often the right one
- 2 It's not one-size-fits-all — the same barrier can call for different solutions in different workplaces
- 3 Keep the goal of the accommodation in mind, not just the tool
- 4 Collaborate — employee, employer, and ADRS/VR each bring something to the table
- 5 Don't be afraid to ask

One more time: ADRS, VR, and the individual can identify barriers and recommend solutions — the employer decides what's reasonable for their workplace.

Questions?

Bobbi Stephenson

Director, Business Relations Program

205-290-4465

Michael Papp, M.Sc.Eng.

Program Manager, Rehabilitation Engineering & Assistive Technology

205.290.4460

michael.papp@rehab.alabama.gov

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/michael-w-papp/>

rehab.alabama.gov