



## **Alternative Hiring Process Frequently Asked Questions for Applicants**

### **Q1: What is the Alternative Hiring Process (AHP)?**

A: The Alternative Hiring Process was established as part of a comprehensive strategy to increase employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

### **Q2: How do applicants participate in the AHP?**

A: An AHP applicant with a disability as defined in [Code of Virginia 51.5-40.1](#) and who has an approved AHP Letter (formerly COD) provided by the Department for Aging & Rehabilitative Services (DARS) or the Department for the Blind & Vision Impaired (DBVI) can participate in the Alternative Hiring Process. An AHP Letter will need to be uploaded with your employment application.

**Note:** Certificates of Disability provided by DARS or DBVI dated April 1, 2022, through February 29, 2024, will still be accepted as applicable for the AHP. Therefore, those applicants need not request an AHP Letter. The name change to AHP Letter became effective on March 1, 2024.

### **Q3: How do I get an AHP Letter?**

A: You can apply for an AHP Letter by visiting [AHP Letter](#) or you may call DARS at 800-552-5019. If you are Deaf/Hard of Hearing, please use the videophone at 804-325-1316.

**Note:** Certificates of Disability provided by DARS or DBVI dated April 1, 2022, through February 29, 2024, will still be accepted as applicable for the AHP. Therefore, those applicants need not request an AHP Letter. The name change to AHP Letter became effective on March 1, 2024.

You will need to provide records/documentation of your disability/diagnosis to DARS or DBVI for review for the AHP Letter. Acceptable documentation may include, but is not limited to:

- Records from a Medical and/or Mental Health Provider
- Veterans Administration Medical/Mental Health Records
- Social Security Administration Documentation
- Department of Behavioral Health & Development Services

All documentation pertaining to your disability/diagnosis will be kept secure and confidential.

### **Q4: What are considered qualifying disabilities to be eligible for the AHP Letter?**

A: A qualifying disability is one that is intellectual, developmental, mental, physical, sensory, (including vision and/or hearing loss), and the diagnosis/disability has been documented by a licensed medical and/or mental health provider.

**Q5: What if I think I have a disability, but it hasn't been documented?**

A: To request information on how you can get appropriate documentation, please visit [AHP Letter](#). You can also call DARS at 800-552-5019 or DBVI at 800-622-2155. If you are Deaf/Hard of Hearing, please use the videophone: 804-325-1316.

**Q6: Do I have to be a client of DARS/DBVI to get an AHP Letter?**

A: No, you do not have to be a current participant in Vocational Rehabilitation to get an AHP Letter. However, if you think that you may benefit from [DARS-VR Services](#), you can find a DARS office near you by calling DARS at 800-552-5019. If you think you can benefit from [DBVI-VR Services](#), you can find a DBVI office near you by visiting <https://www.vdbvi.org/apps/dbviloc/Offices.aspx>, or you may call DBVI at 800-622-2155. If you are Deaf/Hard of Hearing, please use the videophone: 804-325-1316.

**Q7: What types of positions can be offered through the Alternative Hiring Process?**

A: Commonwealth Executive Branch agencies may leverage the Alternative Hiring Process to fill wage and classified vacancies. Agencies in other branches of state government are encouraged to participate in AHP. Applicants are encouraged to review our open positions at [www.jobs.virginia.gov](http://www.jobs.virginia.gov).

**Q8: How do I apply for open positions?**

A: Applicants may apply for open vacancies through the [Recruitment Management System](#) (RMS). Applicants must designate their interest in being considered through the AHP on the application and submit a copy of their AHP Letter.

**Q9: Do I need to disclose my disability when I apply through the Alternative Hiring Process?**

A: No, you only need to provide your AHP Letter which simply states that you meet the criteria to participate in the Alternative Hiring Process.

**Q10: Can a representative (job coach, VR counselor, family member) contact the agency on my behalf about the job posting or application process?**

A: Yes, agencies can provide information about the process; however, they cannot speak specifically about the status of the application or the individual.

**Q11: Are Alternative Hiring Process applicants guaranteed interviews?**

A: No, applicants are screened by Agency HR or Hiring Managers to identify applicants who meet the qualifications for the position. Interviews are offered to the best qualified candidates. Therefore, interviews are not guaranteed for all AHP participants.

**Q12: Does the AHP applicant need to meet any of the additional considerations to be screened in to interview?**

A: Agency HR/Hiring Managers may provide priority consideration in the screening process for AHP applicants that meet minimum qualifications. An applicant's lack of additional considerations will not be used to exclude candidates in the screening process.

**Q13: If I apply through the AHP, am I guaranteed a job?**

**A:** No, you must have a successful interview and have at least the minimum qualifications for the posted job. You will still need to successfully pass a background check if one is required and/or other pre-employment requirements. The Alternative Hiring Process does not supersede the placement rights of employees in layoff status or preferential consideration for veterans.

**Q14: Are certain positions designated only for applicants with disabilities?**

**A:** No, agencies do not need to limit job announcements for the Alternative Hiring Process to specific positions. Agencies are encouraged to incorporate the Alternative Hiring Process as a standard part of the hiring process for any vacancy. Applicants will designate their interest for consideration through the Alternative Hiring Process when applying and providing their AHP Letter with their employment application.

**Q15: Are agencies required to use the AHP?**

**A:** DHRM strongly encourages all agencies to post vacancies with language that reflects the Commonwealth's focus on inclusive hiring. It is the policy of the Commonwealth to promote and increase the employment of individuals with disabilities (IWD's) directly employed at all levels and occupations by state agencies, institutions, boards, and authorities of the Commonwealth.

**Q16: How long can I use an approved AHP Letter?**

**A:** Applicants requesting consideration through the AHP should present an AHP Letter dated within 5 years of the application date. **If you have questions about your AHP Letter, please visit: [AHP Letter](#)**

**Q17: How many times can I use my AHP Letter?**

**A:** The AHP Letter can be used anytime the applicant uses the AHP.

**Q18: Who do I contact if I need accommodations or assistance with a new position and/or additional tasks?**

**A:** Talk to your supervisor, your agency's Human Resources Office, or your Vocational Counselor to discuss accommodations.

**Q19: What kind of job assistance or accommodations can I get on the job site?**

**A:** If needed and approved by DARS or DBVI and your agency, some services can include task analysis, job coaching or assessments to help you adjust to the workplace, and to learn and perform your work duties. Please talk with your supervisor, your agency HR Office, or your Vocational Counselor. You can review the [ADA Policy Guides](#).

**Q20: If I'm being considered for a wage position non-competitively, do I still need to provide an AHP Letter?**

**A:** Yes, applicants need to include their AHP Letter with their job application, which will provide them priority consideration for the position.

**Q21: Do I need to provide an AHP Letter a second time, if I apply for a classified or salaried position after being employed in a wage role?**

**A:** You are strongly encouraged to include your AHP Letter with the application to receive priority consideration for the position.

**Q22: Are current or former state employees eligible for participation through AHP?**

**A:** Yes, current and former state employees are allowed to participate in the AHP as long as they provide their AHP Letter received from either DARS or DBVI.

**Q23: How will I be evaluated? Who determines if I can perform the essential functions of the position during the 6-month provisional period?**

**A:** Your direct supervisor or manager will assess the employee's performance of the essential functions of the posted position. Managers should partner with their Agency HR to ensure appropriate accommodations are in place, as needed to ensure new employees are set up for success.

**Q24: How should an absence be handled if I need to take time off during the provisional period due to my disability? Am I allowed to return to complete the provisional period?**

**A:** Employees should discuss any needed absences with their supervisors and/or Agency HR to appropriately address their time off.

**Q26: How will my Social Security Benefits be affected if I get hired, or if I don't complete the provisional or probationary period?**

**A:** The impact of work on your benefits depends on what kind of Social Security benefits you receive (SSI, SSDI or both), the amount of money that you are earning, and the protections available to you. It is strongly encouraged that you understand the impacts of earned income on your federal benefits prior to applying for employment.

[DARS](#) and [DBVI](#) clients can receive personalized benefits counseling from a Work Incentive Specialist Advocate (WISA) who is a subject matter expert on the impact that working has on a Social Security Benefits – including programs designed to protect health insurance (Medicaid and/or Medicare), as well as assistance accessing the appropriate work incentive program through SSA. Contact your counselor at DARS or DBVI for further information.

For those who are not connected to DARS/DBVI, you can contact WIPA, a Federal Project providing free benefits counseling to eligible beneficiaries. You can call their helpline at 1-866-968-7842.