



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

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

A: The Commonwealth of Virginia is committed to inclusive hiring. The AHP is established as part of a comprehensive strategy to increase employment of individuals with disabilities within state government, which offers a non-competitive path to state employment. (AHP Link)

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

A: An AHP applicant must be certified as an individual with a [disability](#) resulting in a barrier to employment as determined by a Department for Aging & Rehabilitation (DARS) Certified Rehabilitation Counselor. If approved, the applicant will receive a Certificate of Disability (COD) that can be submitted to their employment application.

### **Q3: What are considered qualifying disabilities for the Alternative Hiring Process?**

A: A qualifying disability is one that is intellectual, developmental, mental, physical (including vision and/or hearing loss), and has been documented by a licensed medical and/or mental health provider, and has resulted in a barrier to employment.

### **Q4: How do I get a Certificate of Disability?**

A: You can get a Certificate of Disability from a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor with the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS), which simply states that you have a documented disability which certifies you to participate in the AHP. The certificate will not disclose the type of disability you have.

You will need to provide documentation of your disability to DARS, which may include, but not limited to the following:

- Records from a medical and/or mental health provider
- Veterans Administration Medical/Mental Health Records
- Social Security Administration Documentation
- School Individual Education Plan (IEP)

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

**To request a Certificate of Disability, please visit:**

<https://www.vadars.org/drs/cpid/PWContact.aspx>. You may also call DARS at 800-552-5019. If you are a sign language user, please use the videophone at 804-325-1316.

**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: <https://www.vadars.org/drs/cpid/PWContact.aspx>. You can also call DARS at 800-552-5019. If you are a sign language user, please use the videophone: 804-325-1316.

**Q6: Do I have to be a consumer of DARS to get a Certificate of Disability?**

A: No, you do not have to be a current participant in Vocational Rehabilitation to get a Certificate. However, if you think that you may benefit from DARS services, you can find an office near you by visiting <https://www.vadars.org/drs/drsoffices.htm#gsc.tab=0>, or may call DARS at 800-552-5019. If you are a sign language user, please use the videophone: 804-325-1316. If you are blind or vision impaired, contact the Department for the Blind & Vision Impaired (DBVI) at 800-622-2155.

**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 in the Recruitment Management System (RMS).

**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 Certificate of Disability.

**Q9: Do I need to disclose my disability when I apply for the position to be considered under AHP?**

A: No, you only need to provide your Certificate of Disability, which simply states that you have a documented disability resulting in a barrier to employment.

**Q10: Where can I get help completing my state application?**

A: If you are a current DARS/DBVI client, contact your Vocational Counselor. If you are not a DARS/DBVI client, you can call DARS at 800-552-5019, or email DARS at [dars@dars.virginia.gov](mailto:dars@dars.virginia.gov).

**Q11: 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.

**Q12: Are applicants approved for the Alternative Hiring Process guaranteed an interview?**

**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 certified participants.

**Q13: Does the AHP applicant need to meet any of the preferred qualifications to be screened in to interview?**

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

**Q14: If I provide my Certificate of Disability, 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.

**Q15: 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 Certificate of Disability (COD) with their employment application.

**Q16: 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.

**Q17: How long can I use an approved Certificate of Disability?**

**A:** Applicants requesting consideration through AHP should present a Certificate of Disability dated within 3 years of the application date. Applicants may be requested to periodically update their COD.

**If you have questions about your Certificate of Disability, please visit:**

<https://www.vadars.org/drs/cpid/PWContact.aspx>.

**Q18: How many times can I use my COD?**

**A:** The COD can be used multiple times when applying for wage positions, or until they secure a classified or other salaried position.

**Q19: 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.

**Q20: What kind of job assistance or accommodations can I get on the job site?**

**A:** If needed and approved by DARS 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.

**Q21: If I'm being considered for a wage position non-competitively, do I still need to provide a COD?**

**A:** Yes, applicants need to include their COD with their job application and/or resume, which will provide them priority consideration for the position.

**Q22: Do I need to provide a COD 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 COD with the application and/or resume to receive priority consideration for the position.

**Q23: Are current classified or salaried employees eligible for participation through AHP?**

**A:** No, the AHP was established to create an alternate path to state employment for individuals with disabilities. Therefore, current state employees are not eligible.

**Q24: 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.

**Q25: 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.