

Internships & Field Experiences

Serving Deaf & Hard of Hearing Students

Internships, practicums, and other field experiences offer students a chance to gain real-world knowledge and skills to become gainfully employed. The most satisfactory outcomes occur when all parties—service providers, placement coordinators, and disability services professionals—work together to ensure an accessible placement for students who are deaf or hard of hearing.



Legal Mandates

With few exceptions, it is unlawful to deny participation in an internship, just as it is discriminatory to deny admission to a postsecondary institution based on disability. All qualified students should have access to the same options and choices as other students.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) says a qualified individual with a disability is a person who meets the qualifications for performing the essential functions of the position, with or without accommodations. If a clinical site requires all applicants to complete a certain number of credit hours prior to applying for an internship, for example, then all individuals should be afforded the opportunity to meet this criteria regardless of a disability. In fact, those who are choosing students for various sites cannot inquire about the student's disability as a part of the placement process. If the student satisfies the qualifications, then the internship coordinator or employer can consider whether the student can perform these functions with a reasonable accommodation after the student discloses the need for accommodations.

Educational institutions receiving any federal funding have a responsibility to provide accommodations for students with disabilities during internships, practicums, or clinical experiences according to the ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Title III of ADA applies to private educational institutions. The cost of accommodations for a field experience that is part of the academic program is the responsibility of the institution.

Institutions are required to provide reasonable accommodations unless they create an undue burden. An undue burden is determined on a case-by-case basis. The overall resources of the organization are taken into account when determining whether the accommodation creates an undue burden.

Who's Responsible?

All sponsored programs, activities, or services must be made accessible by the hosting entity, whether it is a school, employer, or organization.

- If the field experience is considered part of an academic program, the institution is responsible for providing and paying for accommodations.
- If the opportunity is offered by an organization or employer, they may be responsible. If the intern is considered an employee, the intern is eligible for the same protections afforded other employees under the ADA.

Planning for Internships:

When a student participates in a field placement, the school and host site can collaborate to provide effective accommodations with input from the student. The ADA's Title II (for state and local governments) and Title III (for commercial facilities and private entities) state that primary consideration should be given to the individual making the request.

- **Be informed.** Learn more about your institution's policies for providing accommodations for internships or field placements. Connect with others who have experience providing accommodations in specific settings.
- **Be proactive.** Involve all parties, including the individual, before the placement or internship. Develop a plan, including relevant contacts and a description of the service provider's role in the placement.
- **Be flexible.** There are no set rules about accommodating field placements. Determinations can be made on a case-by-case basis. Be prepared to explore alternative options when necessary.

