



Accommodation Reimbursement Fund

01/31/2018

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Background.....	3
Accommodation Fund	3
Implementation.....	4
Eligibility	4
2017 Summary.....	5
Reimbursement Requests	5
Denied Reimbursement Requests – FY17	6
Summary and Funding Shortage	6
Conclusion.....	7

Upon request, this material will be made available in an alternative format such as large print, braille or audio recording.

Contact

STAR Program
358 Centennial Office Building
658 Cedar Street
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Phone: 651-201-2640 or toll free at 1-888-234-1267
MN Relay: 711 or toll free at 800-627-3529
Fax: 651-282-6671
Email: star.program@state.mn.us

Introduction

This annual report on the State's Accommodation Reimbursement Fund is mandated under [Minnesota Statutes 16B.4805 Subd. 6.](#)

Background

The State of Minnesota recognizes the significant contribution workers with disabilities make to keep the state competitive in a global economy. To remain competitive, the State must aggressively pursue new and inclusive recruitment strategies to both prepare for the rapidly approaching workforce shortage, and ensure a state government that reflects the people it serves. However, workers with disabilities remain an underutilized resource. In 2015, there were 296,300 Minnesotans with disabilities of typical working ages (18-64) of which 44% were unemployed.¹

Minnesota Management and Budget (MMB), in collaboration with the Commission of Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Minnesotans (MNCDHH) submitted a report to the Legislature in 2015, noting that:

Several studies have cited a centralized reasonable accommodation fund as a best practice for hiring individuals with disabilities. Specifically, it can reduce the unconscious or conscious bias a hiring manager may experience when considering an applicant with a disability and the associated costs of workplace accommodations. This bias has been shown to potentially deter a manager from hiring an individual with a disability.²

Subsequent to this report, legislation was enacted to establish a fund to reimburse state agencies for qualifying reasonable accommodation expenses to better support the hiring and retention of workers with disabilities.

Accommodation Fund

During the 2015 Legislative Session, \$200,000 was appropriated to the Department of Administration to establish an accommodation fund for reimbursing state agencies (as defined in Minnesota Statute 16A.011 Subd. 12) for reasonable accommodation expenses in accordance with Minnesota Statutes 16B.4805 Subd. 6.

In 2017, the statute³ was revised to allow the Commissioner of Administration to reimburse state agencies up to 50 percent of the cost of expenses incurred in making reasonable accommodations.

¹ (2016, November). Population Notes - Minnesotans with Disabilities: Demographic and Economic Characteristics. Saint Paul: Minnesota State Demographic Center.

² 2015, February 26). Centralized Reasonable Accommodation Fund Study - Minnesota.... Retrieved January 12, 2017, from <https://www.leg.state.mn.us/docs/2015/mandated/150351.pdf>

³ 2017 Minnesota Statute 16B.4805 <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=16B.4805>

The goal of the accommodation fund is twofold:

1. To provide an equal footing for job applicants with disabilities during the hiring process, in support of Executive Order 14-14; and,
2. To provide for a more inclusive workplace environment for current state employees with disabilities.

The three types of accommodation expenses eligible for reimbursement are:

1. For **applicants for employment** in any amount;
2. For **current employees** for services that are periodic or ongoing basis; and
3. For **current employees** for one-time expenses that total more than \$1,000 for a single employee in a fiscal year

During Fiscal Year 2016, the Department of Administration (Admin) set up the fund and a method for distribution. Since its establishment, Admin has distributed \$346,541.90 to reimburse agencies that accommodated 202 individuals with disabilities.

Implementation

The Accommodation Fund is administered by the Department of Administration's STAR (System of Technology to Achieve Result) program. STAR is federally-funded and provides assistive technology services to help Minnesotans with disabilities of all ages increase their independence at home, school, work, and in their communities.

Admin, in cooperation with stakeholders, utilized multiple strategies to promote the Accommodation Fund to agencies. Separate communications were sent to agency commissioners and deputy commissioners. Human Resource directors and staff participated in focus group sessions to raise awareness, and agency Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Coordinators also assisted in promoting awareness. Additionally, information about the fund is disseminated through targeted communications to stakeholder groups, periodic newsletters, and an Accommodation Fund webpage hosted by Admin.⁴

Eligibility

Eighty-nine Executive Branch Agencies, Boards, Councils and Commissions are eligible to submit requests for reimbursement of reasonable accommodations provided subject to established eligibility requirements.

Reimbursement requests may only be submitted for state employees and job applicants. Reasonable accommodations provided on behalf of board members, unpaid student workers, interns, and volunteers do not qualify for reimbursement.

⁴ <http://mn.gov/admin/government/disability-services/accommodation-fund/>

2017 Summary

Requests and Reimbursements

Agency Requests and Reimbursements - FY17

The fourteen agencies listed below requested and received the following reimbursements in FY17:

Agency	Requests	Percentage of Requests	Reimbursement	Percentage of Reimbursements
HHS Finance Committee	\$96,235.73	56.60%	\$68,001.01	40%
Department of Human Services	\$62,255.73		\$ 42,148.19	
MNsure	\$33,980.00		\$25,852.82	
Agriculture Finance	\$5,957.00	3.50%	\$5,957.00	3.50%
Department of Agriculture	\$5,957.00		\$5,957.00	
Public Safety Finance	\$20,270.87	11.92%	\$18,265.97	10.74%
Department of Corrections	\$6,335.00		\$6,335.00	
Department of Public Safety	\$13,935.97		\$11,930.97	
Job Growth	\$126,093.01	74.17%	\$62,978.71	37.05%
Department of Employment and Economic Development	\$20,438.53		\$11,416.48	
Housing Finance Agency	\$105,654.48		\$51,562.23	
State Government Finance	\$21,604.64	12.70%	\$14,298.21	8.41%
MN.IT Services	\$20,866.64		\$ 13,560.21	
Department of Veteran Affairs	\$738.00		\$738.00	
Energy & Natural Resources	\$489.00	0.28%	\$489.00	0.29%
Department of Natural Resources	\$489.00		\$489.00	
Total	\$270,650.25		\$169,989.90	

Approved Requests – FY17

During Fiscal Year 2017, the Fund approved and reimbursed 114 accommodation requests submitted by state agencies.

Number of Approved Reimbursement by Functional Need in FY17

Number	Functional Need
4	Vision
0	Learning/Cognition
109	Hearing
1	Physical/Mobility
0	Speech
0	Other

Number of Reimbursements Approved by Accommodation Type in FY17

- 4 - One-time expenses for a state employee that total more than \$1000 in a fiscal year
- 104 - Periodic or ongoing services for a state employee
- 1 - Combination of Periodic services and One-time expense in fiscal year for a state employee
- 5 - Combination of Periodic services and One-time expense in fiscal year and any expense for a job applicant (One applicant was hired.)

Recipients (Applicants/Employees)

Of the 114 requests made during FY17:

- 109 were for state employees
- 5 were for applicants (one of the five was hired)

Denied Reimbursement Requests – FY17

Accommodation requests totaling \$3,609.77 did not meet fund requirements and were denied.

Ineligible fund requests included:

- *Board of Water* in the amount of \$1603.57. Documentation requested, but never supplied
- *MN.IT* in the amount of \$142.00. Requested invoice never supplied.
- *MN.IT* in the amount of \$1,864.20. Requested invoice never supplied.

Summary and Funding Shortage

There continues to be a steady request for reimbursements in FY18. A complete summary will appear in the next legislative report; however, it is worth noting that \$68,354.91 was requested and \$34,177.46 reimbursed during the first quarter of this fiscal year. Currently, requests for second quarter reimbursements total \$29,841.56 and are in the process of being reviewed.

During FY17, reimbursement requests exceeded the total amount available from the Fund by midway through the third quarter. Partial reimbursements were made during the third and fourth quarter to equitably reimburse as many agencies as possible during the fiscal year. A total of 50 applications from 6 agencies (Public Safety, DEED, HFA, MN.IT, DHS, and MNSure) were partially funded. The total amount not reimbursed was \$100,660.35.

Current statute establishes a \$1,000 cost threshold for one-time expenses but contains no threshold for periodic or ongoing services related to hearing (i.e., American Sign Language Interpreters and CART services), resulting in a higher proportion of funds going toward these services. For example, during FY17, 109 of the 114 applications reimbursed were for hearing-related services.

A change to the cost threshold would expand opportunities to submit a reimbursement request for one-time expenses as well as help to equalize the distribution of funds between disability types (i.e., vision, physical, speech, cognition, hearing), and functional need.

Through their use of the Fund, agency representatives have become familiar with Admin's STAR program and begun to use its free assistive technology demonstration and device loan services. They also are contacting STAR's Assistive Technology Specialist for information and assistance related to assistive technology accommodations. Utilizing STAR's services helps agencies determine if an accommodation will successfully meet an employee's needs and allows the agency to make an informed decision when purchasing assistive technology as an accommodation.

Conclusion

During FY17, use of the Accommodation Fund increased by 29% with fourteen agencies receiving reimbursement for accommodations made to 104 employees and 5 job applicants. Use of the fund will continue to grow as state agencies respond to requests for accommodations from new hires with disabilities and current employees who may develop a need for and benefit from a reasonable accommodation.

During FY18, we have received applications from agencies, boards, and commissions that have not previously used the Fund. If this trend continues, the \$170,000 allocated annually for reimbursement will quickly be exhausted.

In the absence of funds, agency, boards, and commissions will need to adjust their budgets to provide reasonable accommodations as mandated by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended.

The Accommodation Fund is a valuable resource that helps agencies, boards and commissions ensure their staff receives the help needed to stay on the job and be productive as well as allow a diverse pool of applicants to apply for state employment.