



Office of Institutional Equity

WKU Supervisor Guidance: Responding to Religious Accommodation Requests

This guidance is intended to assist supervisors in responding to employee religious accommodation requests and should be read in conjunction with WKU's [Religious and Cultural Observations Policy, No. 1.4000/4.2700](#).

Most requests can be resolved through direct communication between the employee and supervisor. The Office of Institutional Equity (OIE) serves as a resource for consultation, facilitation, and review when questions arise or when a request cannot be resolved informally.

1. Recognize a Request

- A request does not need to be formal or use specific terminology.
- Any communication indicating a conflict between a job requirement and a sincerely held religious belief, practice, or observance should be treated as a request for a religious accommodation.
- Religious beliefs and practices may be associated with traditional organized religions, newer faith traditions, or individual sincerely held religious beliefs.

2. Respond Promptly and Respectfully

- Acknowledge the request as soon as possible.
- Meet with the employee to understand the conflict and the accommodation being requested.
- Maintain a neutral, respectful, and non-judgmental approach.
- Do not challenge the validity, significance, or legitimacy of the employee's religion or beliefs.
- Supervisors should generally assume a request is based on a sincerely held religious belief unless there is objective reason to question sincerity. Questions regarding sincerity should be discussed with OIE before seeking additional information from the employee.

- Do not request documentation or supporting information regarding the employee's religious beliefs or practices unless, after a consultation with OIE, limited information is appropriate to evaluate the request. Focus on the workplace requirement and potential accommodations.
- Supervisors may approve routine accommodations that do not create operational concerns. OIE should be contacted at any stage and should be consulted before a request is denied.

3. Consider Possible Accommodations

- Examples may include schedule adjustments, voluntary shift swaps, flexible break periods, leave usage, remote work arrangements when appropriate, modifications to dress or grooming requirements, or other reasonable accommodations that enable the employee to observe religious practices while meeting essential functions of their job
- Consider each request individually based on the employee's duties and operational needs.
- The University is not required to provide the employee's preferred accommodation if another reasonable accommodation effectively resolves the workplace conflict.
- Approved accommodations may be ongoing or recurring. Supervisors and employees should communicate in advance when accommodations will be needed and revisit arrangements if workplace circumstances change.

4. What Supervisors Should Not Say:

- Questioning whether a belief is "important enough" or "sincere enough."
- comparing one employee's religious practices to another's
- suggesting an employee abandon or modify a religious practice or belief
- discouraging an employee from requesting an accommodation.

5. Consult Applicable Policies and OIE

- Review relevant university policies and workplace requirements.
- Supervisors should consult OIE before denying a request for religious accommodation.
- Requests involving broader institutional requirements should be reviewed with OIE.
- See [Religious Accommodations](#) for additional information and resources.

6. Assess Undue Hardship

- Consider whether the requested accommodation would impose substantial increased costs in relation to the conduct of the University's operations or otherwise create significant operational difficulties, safety risks, or legal conflicts.
- Do not deny a request solely because it creates minor inconvenience or requires administrative adjustment.

7. Ongoing Accommodations

- Approved accommodations may be modified if job duties, operational needs, or other relevant circumstances materially change. Supervisors should consult OIE before modifying or discontinuing an approved accommodation.

8. Maintain Confidentiality

- Treat requests and related information as confidential employment information.
- Share information only with individuals who have a legitimate business need to know.

9. Document the Interaction

- Maintain a record of the request, discussions, accommodation considered, and outcome.
- Documentation is especially important when a request is denied, modified, or referred for review.

10. Religious Discrimination or Harassment Concerns

- Employees may also report discrimination, harassment, exclusion or differential treatment on the basis of religion, religious beliefs, practices, or lack of religious affiliation.
- Such concerns should not be treated solely as requests for accommodation. Supervisors should promptly refer employees to OIE for information regarding reporting options or submit the [Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation Reporting Form](#) on behalf of the employee.
- Supervisors should not attempt to investigate allegations of discrimination, harassment, or retaliation independently.
- Please refer to the [Discrimination and Harassment Policy, No. 0.2040](#) for more information.

11. Know When to Refer

- Contact OIE if you are unsure how to proceed.
- Refer complex requests, disagreements, potential undue hardship concerns, or policy-related issues to OIE.

12. Apply Consistently

- Handle similar situations in a consistent and equitable manner while evaluating each request on its individual and specific circumstances.

13. Do Not Retaliate

- Employees should not be penalized, discouraged, intimidated, or treated adversely for requesting a religious accommodation or raising related concerns.

14. Foster a Respectful Workplace

- Support an environment where employees feel comfortable raising accommodation needs and seeking assistance when conflicts arise.

Remember: WKU is committed to fostering a workplace that respects employees' religious beliefs, observances, and practices while maintaining effective university operations. When in doubt, pause, consult, and collaborate with OIE.