



# Accommodating Service Members and Volunteers with Traumatic Brain Injury

There are many qualified individuals with Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) who have served in national service programs and many more who can serve. Causes of TBI can range from an automobile accident to a sports related injury. Individuals who experience TBI can have difficulty with memory loss, understanding instructions, or maintaining attention for long periods of time.

It is important that all members, with and without disabilities, know they may request reasonable accommodations. In an inclusive environment where reasonable accommodations and support are offered if needed, a qualified service member with TBI can successfully serve in national service programs. Below is more information about possible accommodations to help assist a service member to successfully engage in meaningful service.

## What is Traumatic Brain Injury?

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines TBI as

[a neurological condition] caused by a blow or jolt to the head or a penetrating head injury that disrupts the function of the brain. Not all blows or jolts to the head result in a TBI. The severity of a traumatic brain injury may range from 'mild,' i.e., a brief change in mental status or consciousness to 'severe,' i.e., an extended period of unconsciousness or amnesia after the injury.

Every year approximately 1.4 million people in the U.S. sustain a TBI. About 75% of these are concussions or other forms of "mild" TBI. Other people who sustain a TBI may have more severe injuries that may result in a wide range of functional changes affecting aspects of daily living including: behavior, emotions, language, learning, sensation, and/or thinking<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/tbi/TBI.htm>

## **Sample reasonable accommodations that could assist a service member with a Traumatic Brain Injury:**

- Provide written or electronic instructions for tasks to be completed
- Change lighting to high intensity white light; increase access to natural light
- Allow service member to use a headset while serving to help maintain concentration
- Remind service member of important deadlines via email, text message or a pop-up calendar
- Provide an electronic organizer, watch or pager with timer function
- Allow service member to tape record meetings for easy playback
- Establish an open line of communication to discuss performance and effectiveness of accommodations

Please be aware that not all individuals with TBI will need reasonable accommodations to perform their service<sup>2</sup>.

### **Member story:**

Joe Tierney dedicated two years of his life to service as an AmeriCorps NCCC member in 2001 and then became an NCCC leader in 2002 based in Charleston, SC. During those years he tutored children, built houses, designed and built wheelchair ramps, surveyed and mapped a historical graveyard, blazed trails, worked at a camp for children and adults with disabilities, and much more. Of his time there, he writes, "Throughout my service I met some amazing individuals, traveled to some fascinating locations, and learned a variety of skills, but most importantly my service gave me the opportunity to recover, the ability to experience life with a smile. I made the decision to join AmeriCorps because I felt an obligation to give back; I understood that I was very fortunate to have recovered and that I would have never done it without the help of many thoughtful, committed, competent individuals." Joe is an individual with a traumatic brain injury.

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<sup>2</sup> Examples were adapted from JAN's website,  
<http://www.jan.wvu.edu/media/BrainInjury.html>

## Resources regarding TBI and reasonable accommodations:

- Brain Injury Association of America (BIAA)  
<http://www.biausa.org/index.html>
- Facts About Traumatic Brain Injury  
[http://www.biausa.org/elements/aboutbi/factsheets/factsaboutbi\\_2008.pdf](http://www.biausa.org/elements/aboutbi/factsheets/factsaboutbi_2008.pdf)
- Job Accommodation Network (JAN) on Accommodation and Compliance Series: Brain Injury  
<http://www.jan.wvu.edu/media/BrainInjury.html>

## For more information, please contact the National Service Inclusion Project (NSIP):

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E-mail: [nsip@umb.edu](mailto:nsip@umb.edu)

Website: [www.serviceandinclusion.org](http://www.serviceandinclusion.org)

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/serviceandinclusion>

Twitter: [http://twitter.com/NSIP\\_Online](http://twitter.com/NSIP_Online)

Second Life:

<http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/Health%20Commons/202/10/22>

The National Service Inclusion Project (NSIP) is training and technical assistance provider on disability inclusion, under a cooperative agreement (#08TAHMA001) from Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). NSIP partners with the Association on University Centers on Disability, National Council on Independent Living, Association on Higher Education and Disability and National Down Syndrome Congress to build connections among disability organizations and all CNCS grantees, to increase the participation of people with disabilities in national service.