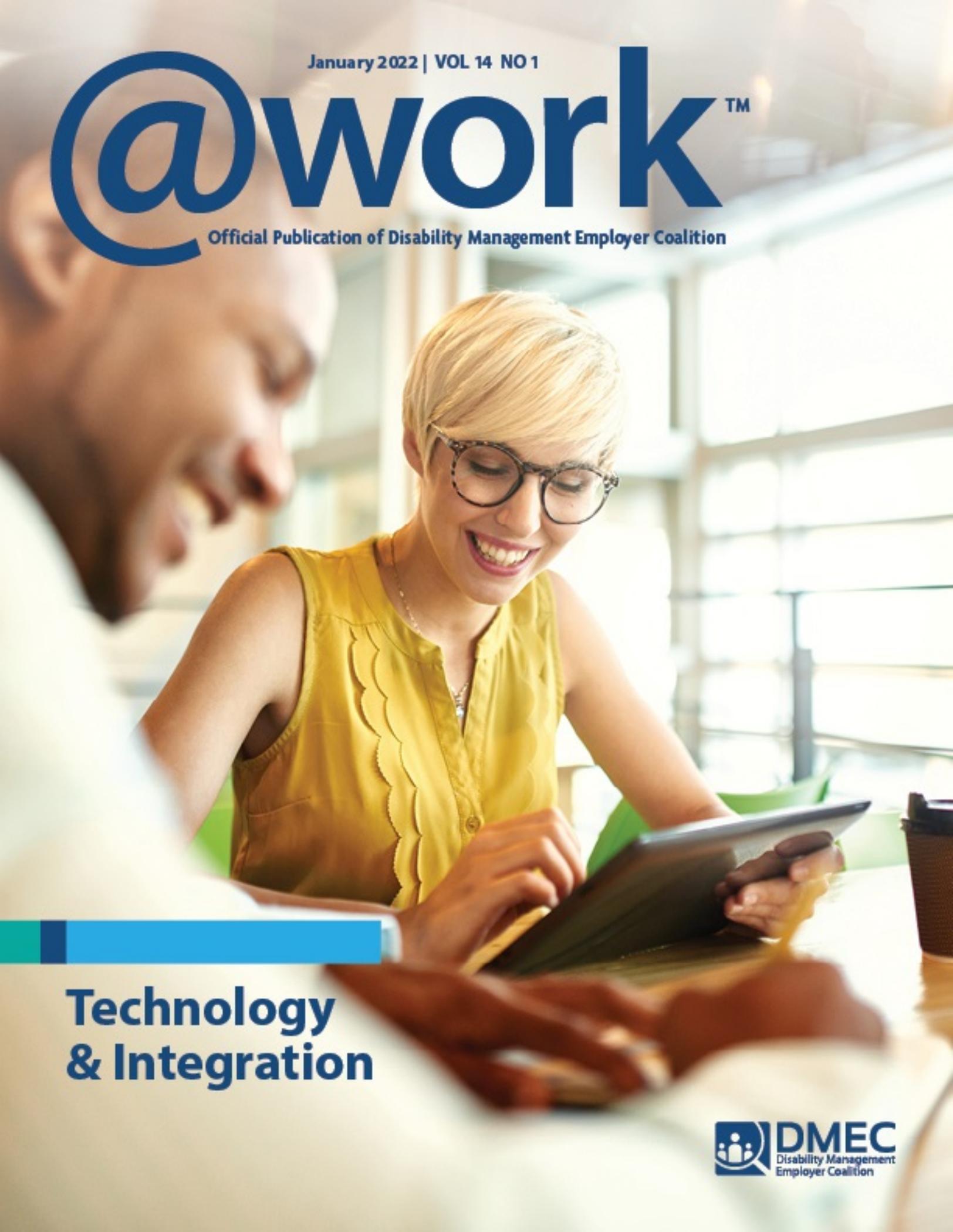


January 2022 | VOL 14 NO 1

@work™

Official Publication of Disability Management Employer Coalition



Technology & Integration

USING THE TECHNOLOGY ON HAND TO CREATE SYSTEMS THAT WORK



By Rachel Shaw, MBA, President, Principal Consultant, Shaw HR Consulting

Tens of millions of Americans who work at companies with more than 100 employees were required to get the COVID-19 vaccine or be tested weekly under new Occupational Safety and Health Administration regulations. A vast number of employers are expected to take the mandate route as testing program costs can be high and the issue of whether employers can require employees to pay for their tests depends on state laws and whether testing is offered as a reasonable accommodation.¹ Legal guidelines require

employers to consider exemptions for those with disabilities or religious conflicts.²

As such, vaccine exemption programs are now a priority for many human resource professionals. Employers have become all too familiar with COVID-19-related programs and, once more, the issue with managing vaccine exemptions is lack of experience and the sheer size of the project.

Up to 11% of employees in the U.S. are applying for vaccine exemptions³, and many employers do not have the knowledge or capacity to manage the volume of requests. While some organizations will outsource this work, many won't have that luxury. However, it's possible to leverage the technology on hand to improve efficiency.

Basic Technology Gets the Job Done

1. Create a system for employees to obtain forms for medical or religious exemptions without staff support. This seemingly minor function has major impact as employers with 2,000 employees — when using the 11% of the workforce estimate — can expect hundreds to ask for vaccine exemption forms and complete requests.
2. Ask web administrators to create online intake forms so employees can select exemptions and get correct forms automatically via email. If tracking isn't necessary, create webpages so employees can download the correct forms. Send an email with the information (the URL, instructions for completing the form, and other relevant details) to all employees, and include it in outreach when employees are asked to certify vaccination status. In our experience, this step alone will save staff hundreds — if not thousands — of emails, depending on company size.
3. Route all vaccine exemption questions to a unique email address so the appropriate team members can respond within a set time frame.

4. Use electronic signatures via a secure program such as Adobe Sign or DocuSign if you ask employees to sign vaccine exemption accommodation agreements, such as agreeing to wear face coverings or submit to regular COVID-19 testing.
5. Use Excel, Smartsheet, or Google Sheets to track incoming forms, approvals, denials, forms that require additional actions, or interactive process steps.

Must-Have Vaccine Exemption Templates

Creating template options for your vaccine exemption process simplifies the process and ensures everyone has what they need. Ask legal counsel to review templates before implementing a program and consider the following recommendations:

- Medical vaccine exemption form
- Religious vaccine exemption form
- Religious exemption follow-up for clarification template letter and form
- Vaccine exemption approval letter
- Vaccine exemption accommodations agreement
- Vaccine exemption denial letter

With an increasing number of mandates, these time- and resource-friendly tips can help you implement and track process solutions immediately.

References

1. DMEC *Legislative Updates* Blog. OSHA Issues Emergency Temporary Standard Requiring COVID-19 Tests or Vaccinations for Most Employers. Nov. 5, 2021. Retrieved from <http://dmec.org/2021/11/05/osha-issues-emergency-temporary-standard-requiring-covid-19-tests-or-vaccinations-for-most-employers/>
2. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. *Technical Assistance: What You Should Know About COVID-19 and the ADA, the Rehabilitation Act, and Other EEO Laws*. Retrieved from <https://www.eeoc.gov/wysk/what-you-should-know-about-covid-19-and-ada-rehabilitation-act-and-other-eeo-laws>
3. Alpert Reyes E, K Rector. Thousands of LAPD Employees Plan to Seek Exemptions to COVID-19 Vaccine Mandate. *Los Angeles Times*. Sept. 13, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2021-09-13/vaccine-exemption-requests>