

Office of Disability Employment Policy

Recruiting and Hiring Disabled Workers



To build an inclusive and effective workforce, employers need to know where to find skilled employees, what steps promote hiring workers with disabilities, and create environments where workers with disabilities can thrive, and how to embody the values that are important to these workers. The strategies in this section will help you recruit and hire disabled workers for your organization.

[Collapse All](#)

▼ **Setting commitments for hiring workers with disabilities**

Under the ADA and Rehab Act, organizations may develop specific initiatives to recruit and hire disabled workers. Employers can also take intentional actions beyond what the law requires to support and retain workers with disabilities. These laws allow such actions so that disabled workers can benefit. Organizations can:

- State a preference for disabled candidates and vocational rehabilitation clients.
- Reserve or prioritize jobs for candidates with disabilities.
- Provide specific supports for employees with disabilities beyond those legally required.
- Set a goal for disability representation in the workforce beyond what is required for certain employers.

Employers should be mindful of applicable state and local laws to ensure their affirmative action efforts comply with these laws as well.

To maximize access to these benefits, employers can also invite candidates and employees to self-identify as a person with a disability. Self-identification is a confidential and voluntary process in which people with disabilities tell their organization, that they identify as a person with a disability. Some federal contractors and subcontractors may be required under the law to take certain hiring and retention actions. Learn more in the chapters “Planning for Disabled Workers” and “Advancing Disabled Workers.” Employers can also consult the [EEOC’s disability-related resources webpage](#) for more information on targeted initiatives.

Some states have established targeted programs for hiring people with disabilities. For example, the State of Virginia has a targeted hiring program for disabled workers that allows for an alternate hiring path for focused recruitment. You can learn more about this policy from the [Virginia Department of Human Resource Management \[PDF\]](#).

▼ Finding and targeting candidates with disabilities

[Recruiting people with disabilities](#) starts with knowing where to look. No matter the size or type of their organization, employers should be proactive when taking [steps to find candidates with disabilities](#).

Vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies work with people with disabilities to build skills and find employment. You can recruit candidates from your [state VR agency](#). You can also find people with disabilities and organizational support through [VR’s National Employment Team](#) (the NET) and the NET’s [Talent Acquisition Portal](#). More information on VR agencies is available in the “Resources and Glossary” chapter. VR is part of the public workforce investment system, and [American Job Centers](#) across the country can also assist employers in finding workers, including workers with disabilities.

Many people still learn about jobs from friends and family—and people with disabilities are no exception. Like many job seekers, disabled workers also use social media to find and apply for jobs. Employers can post about job openings and their organization’s workplace experience on social media. Be mindful of technical accessibility in the posts themselves as well.

In addition, organizations with an ERG for workers with disabilities can ask that group to spread the word about job opportunities.

Federal agencies seeking to hire talented people with disabilities for internships or permanent jobs can use the [Workforce Recruitment Program \(WRP\)](#). The WRP database contains more than 2,000 resumes from college students, graduate students, and recent graduates with disabilities from a wide variety of majors and backgrounds.

For more evidence-based advice on recruiting people with disabilities, review EARN’s resource, “[Online Recruitment of and Outreach to People with Disabilities: Research-Based Practices](#)” [PDF].

▼ Showing your commitment to inclusion

To attract talented candidates with disabilities, employers should show their commitment to inclusion from the outset—at the recruitment stage. Employers can make sure to:

- Create messaging that is disability inclusive and accessible and provides people with disabilities the opportunity to engage.
- Build a company marketing brand that highlights representation of people with disabilities.
- Demonstrate an understanding of accessibility at every stage of the employment cycle, from recruitment to advancement (e.g., accessible certification programs for skilled trades professionals).
- Readily providing information during recruitment about the interactive accommodations process.

There are many companies that have developed initiatives or instituted processes that can offer guidance to others:

- [One multinational beauty product company](#), which implemented a disability employment pilot program beginning in 2017 to support the staffing of its distribution centers.
- [A small, advanced manufacturing and engineering company in New York’s Hudson Valley](#), which has pursued regional partnerships since 2018 to improve recruitment efforts, provides extra training and support to participants as needed, and ensure candidates with disabilities have the prerequisite skills to complete apprenticeships.

▼ Being flexible in recruitment

Standard hiring processes often exclude candidates with disabilities. With some flexibility in recruitment, however, employers can hire disabled candidates more easily.

Changes in hiring practices may be big or small, depending on the needs of the organization and the key tasks involved in each role. But many changes can be instituted relatively quickly and easily to make the hiring process significantly more inclusive of disabled applicants. Examples include:

- **Removing nonessential tasks from job descriptions.** For example, the standard description of the role of quality control inspector in a solar panel factory may include the ability to lift 25–50 pounds. In practice, however, if inspectors are using a lift to check the panels, then the physical task may not be essential. Many people with disabilities see such a task they cannot do, and assume they cannot do the job, even though it is not an essential part of the job.
- **Reviewing the list of qualifications required of candidates.** Consider the essential qualifications of the position and ensure they are truly essential; if they are not, they can be made optional. For instance, minimum education requirements can be re-evaluated. Many people with disabilities do not have certain types of certifications or education because of barriers to access. The job description for a truck driver will need a commercial driver's license, for example, but may not need a bachelor's degree.
- **Accepting work samples and proof of experience rather than over-relying on traditional resumes.** Traditional resumes can often be inaccessible for people with disabilities. The format of these documents may make them difficult to create for people who rely on assistive technology. Many disabled workers also have gaps in employment history that can translate unfavorably on a traditional resume. So, instead of a resume, employers can ask for a work sample. Many employers have successfully changed these processes to recruit workers with disabilities, including those with mental health conditions.
- **Finding other ways to assess candidates besides interviews.** Traditional interviews can be inaccessible to people with disabilities, such as autism, that affect their social interaction. Businesses can use practical assessments, hands-on skill tests, or paid job trials in place of an interview to assess candidate fit and skill. There are ways to make interviews more accessible too, such as by providing interview questions in advance. Other examples are available in the resources.
- **Using skills-based hiring.** This is a flexible recruitment practice that focuses on skills rather than education. Learn more about skills-based hiring from [this resource from the Office of Personnel Management](#).

[Flexible recruitment](#) works best when your workplace culture is also inclusive of disabled workers. Take a look at this [case study of an electrical manufacturer in St. Louis, MO.](#), which discusses the ways the company made recruiting more flexible and inclusive in the context of inclusion more broadly.

Learn more about inclusive culture in the chapter “Retaining and Supporting Disabled Workers.”

▼ Partnering with local organizations

Partnerships can help employers build a disability-inclusive workplace. They are key to expanding access to education, training, and high-quality employment opportunities for people with disabilities. They can also help employers [learn about disability inclusion and identify candidates with disabilities](#).

Local partner organizations can vary widely. Many businesses collaborate with organizations, such as:

- Community organizations, including universities and [community colleges](#), which are particularly useful for finding qualified workers in the skilled trades.
- Workforce development and VR agencies. The [Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation](#) is an association of VR agencies across the country that provide employment services to 1.2 million people with disabilities and provides resources on hiring and supporting disabled workers.
- [Regional Veterans' Employment Coordinators](#).
- [Centers for Independent Living \(CILs\)](#). The [National Council for Independent Living](#) provides resources and listings of CILs across the country that can help employers hire and support workers with disabilities.
- Other local nonprofits that source talented workers with disabilities. Businesses can tailor their efforts to ensure they are collaborating and partnering with organizations that can help [expand their talent pipeline to include people with specific disabilities, such as autism or ADHD](#).

To learn from one employer's successful experience, watch EARN's recorded webinar "[Creating an Effective Talent Strategy Through Local and Regional Partnerships](#)," which discusses how Colorado Springs Utilities, the public energy service provider for 500,000 households in Colorado, uses partnerships to recruit and support disabled workers.

▼ Using Registered Apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs to connect workers with disabilities to Good Jobs

Apprenticeship benefits both employers and job candidates. [Registered Apprenticeship Programs \(RAPs\)](#) are a particularly effective method of flexible recruitment. A RAP is an [industry-driven, high-quality career pathway](#) [PDF] through which employers can develop and prepare their future workforce, and job seekers can obtain paid work experience, progressive wage increases, classroom instruction, and a nationally recognized credential.

Many businesses in the construction, energy, and manufacturing industries have used RAPs to [hire and train diverse candidates, including workers with disabilities](#) [PDF]. Learn about [new training guidelines and standards for apprenticeships in the clean energy sector from the Department of Energy](#); the Biden-Harris Administration, the AFL-CIO Union, and DOL supported the development of these standards. Some RAPs are provided by employers in collaboration with educational institutions and service providers.

A [pre-apprenticeship program](#), which may last from a few weeks to a few months, is designed to prepare workers for entry into RAPs or other job opportunities. Pre-apprenticeships may have variety of program elements, but at the core, their purpose is to place candidates on a pathway to employability through a RAP. Pre-apprenticeships are not required to but will ideally include wages or a stipend for the participant when funding allows.

What is inclusive apprenticeship?

An [inclusive apprenticeship program](#) is an apprenticeship program designed to be accessible to and inclusive of all candidates, including people with disabilities. When an apprenticeship program is inclusive, it creates pathways to well-paying jobs for people with disabilities—including those with cognitive, neurological, physical, mental health, and sensory disabilities—offering training and credentials to help them succeed in their desired careers.

Disability inclusion contributes to employers' financial success. Employers who invest in disability inclusion [experience 1.6 times more revenue, 2.6 times more net income, and two times more economic profit](#) [PDF] than employers who do not invest in disability inclusion.

You can learn more about inclusive apprenticeship from the resources below:

- [Apprenticeship.gov](#), managed by DOL's Office of Apprenticeship, offers tools, resources, and information about regulations on apprenticeship. You can also consult [industry-specific resources](#) for success stories and examples of apprenticeships for specific job roles.
- [This inclusive apprenticeship program success story](#) from the [National Center on Leadership for the Employment and Economic Advancement of People with Disabilities \(LEAD Center\)](#), which spotlights two young people with disabilities who completed apprenticeships with the Parks and Recreation Department in Collinsville, Ill.
- [This LEAD Center webinar](#), which provides information about apprenticeships and employment opportunities for disabled people in the construction industry, and provides real-life success stories of workers with disabilities in construction.

▼ Updating recruitment materials to show workers with disabilities they are welcome in your workplace

An organization's recruitment materials can influence whether disabled candidates apply. Research shows that job seekers with disabilities look for signals that a job will be inclusive. Employers should be sure that their materials include:

Statements on inclusion and information about workplace practices. This includes information about workplace flexibility options or any initiatives to enhance work-life balance; an accessible, easy-to-find process for requesting accommodations; statements on inclusion that explicitly include disability; and resources on any disability programs that may be available.

Accessibility. Make sure that all materials, including flyers, brochures, and graphics, are accessible for people with disabilities. If information is not accessible, many people cannot learn about, apply for, or work at your organization because they will not be able to perceive or access the information using the tools available to them. To avoid this problem, make sure materials adhere to [common accessibility standards](#).

Inclusive words and images. [Research](#) shows that when an organization uses disability-inclusive images and messaging to recruit workers, disabled people are more likely to apply. Employers should also consider accessibility and inclusion strategies in their interview and onboarding practices, by providing interview questions prior to the interview or offering breaks, for example. Learn more from the resources linked below.

Testimonials. Job seekers want realistic information about working at an organization. Disabled candidates look for information beyond the standard job description. Testimonials, videos, stories, and other content can help organizations tell their story.

Learn more from these resources and real-world examples:

- [This brief from EARN](#), which discusses online outreach to job seekers and how job seekers with disabilities assess and act on information on employers' websites.
- [This career page checklist from EARN](#), which helps make sure organizations' websites are as inclusive and attractive to disabled candidates as possible.
- The Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) [TSO Realistic Job Preview](#), a video for potential candidates that explains the day-to-day tasks and realities of working as a security officer in commercial airports. This video has helped the TSA recruit many new staff, including staff with disabilities. Not every employer's materials need be as intricate, but the TSA's video provides a helpful example.
- This case study of [a major retail pharmacy chain's specialized hiring program](#) highlights the benefits of an inclusive work culture, stories from workers with disabilities, and the benefits of disability inclusion as a federal contractor.

▼ Using plain and inclusive language

[Plain language](#) is communication that the intended audience can easily understand the first time they read or hear it. Employers should make sure that their materials are written in plain language, so all members of the public can more easily understand them.

Language that is plain to one set of readers may not be to others, however. Material is in plain language if your audience can:

- Find what they need
- Understand what they find the first time they read or hear it
- Use what they find to meet their needs

Plain language is not only easier for many people to understand, but it also makes it easier for organizations to express their support for inclusion. For example, rather than using the phrase *individuals who find this benefit necessary*, employers can use plain language to say the same thing more clearly: *workers who need this benefit*.

Inclusive language is the use of words, phrases, and expressions that are respectful of people and avoids exclusionary language. Inclusive language helps employers be more accurate and build trust with employees and colleagues. Words can make the difference between forging positive connections and creating distance.

There are many ways to make your language more inclusive. Here are some tips to keep in mind:

- Many people with disabilities have different preferences when it comes to language. For example, some prefer to be described as a "person with a disability" (i.e., person-first language), while others prefer "disabled person" (i.e., identity-first language). Learn more about these preferences and be sure to ask colleagues with disabilities what they prefer.
- Be aware of the tone used to describe people with disabilities. Use positive language and a respectful tone when speaking about people with disabilities.
- Use inclusive images that accurately depict disabled people in the workplace. This helps demonstrate your commitment to hiring and retaining disabled workers.

For more on plain language and how to use it, visit [PlainLanguage.gov](#). For help finding appropriate, accurate, and inclusive language, see the [Disability Language Style Guide](#) from the National Center on Disability and Journalism.

▼ Paying workers a fair wage

Fair wages are a pillar of the [Good Jobs Principles](#) [PDF]. In a good job, workers receive a stable and predictable living wage that fairly compensates them for the work they do. Similarly, transparency in pay—such as offering a pay range in job listings—also avoids uncertainty that deters workers from applying.

Being mindful of legal requirements

The federal minimum wage is required by state and federal law. The federal Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) mandates that most workers receive this minimum wage; often, state and local laws require the payment of [higher minimum wages](#). In practice, however, a minimum wage may not be a living wage in many areas. These laws may also apply:

- **[Davis-Bacon and Related Acts \(DBRA\)](#)**. Employers in the construction industry may have a separate legal obligation to pay workers the prevailing wage on projects funded by the government. The DBRA require employers who are federal contractors or are working on federally funded or assisted construction projects to pay workers at least [applicable Davis-Bacon prevailing wages](#), including any benefits, for construction work performed, including work performed by disabled workers.

DOL determines prevailing wages for labor classifications for specific geographic areas across the country, [available at SAM.gov](#). In addition, employers should be aware that separate state or local prevailing wage requirements may apply to their publicly funded construction project and may require the payment of higher wages to their workforce. Check with a contracting officer and/or the funding agency.

- **[Service Contract Act \(SCA\)](#)**. Employers that enter into service contracts with the federal government or the District of Columbia may have a legal obligation to pay workers the prevailing wage under the SCA. Employers performing work under an SCA-covered service contract must pay covered workers, including most workers with disabilities, at least the prevailing wage for the classification in which they are working. The wage rates and fringe benefits to be paid are specified in the applicable SCA wage determination, which can be found [online at SAM.gov](#).
- **[EO 13658](#) or [EO 14026](#)**. Employers that perform work on or in connection with federal contracts may have to pay a higher minimum wage to workers on those contracts, per EOs 13658 and 14026. EO 14026 applies to certain construction and service contracts, including contracts subject to the Davis-Bacon Act or the SCA that were entered into, renewed, or extended on or after January 30, 2022.

You can learn more about minimum wages, the DBRA, the SCA, and applicable EOs from the resources below. State and local laws sometimes require wage floors in other industries too.

- DOL's Wage and Hour Division, which has comprehensive information about the federal [minimum wage](#), [state and local minimum wages](#), [the FLSA](#), [the DBRA](#), and government contract-required prevailing wages.
- Living wage calculators, which can help employers figure out appropriate wages by location. See the following for help:
 - [ALICE \(Asset, Limited, Income Constrained, Employed\) Essentials Index](#)
 - [The Economic Policy Institute](#) [PDF]
 - [The Living Wage Calculator](#)
 - [Self-Sufficiency Standard](#)

Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE)

A good job is one in which competitive integrated employment (CIE) is possible. More and more employers are creating CIE opportunities for disabled workers. CIE opportunities involve compensation at or above minimum wage, and comparable to pay for employees without disabilities performing similar duties and with similar training and experience; include the same level of benefits provided to employees without disabilities in similar positions; ensure employees with and without disabilities interact with one another and work at the same location; and present opportunities for advancement similar to employees without disabilities in similar positions.

You can learn about CIE from the resources below:

- [ODEP's CIE Transformation Hub](#), which has [everything you need to know about CIE](#) and how different policies support CIE.
- [This fact sheet from the LEAD Center](#) [PDF], which connects the Good Jobs Principles to CIE and disabled workers. Also consult the LEAD Center's [success stories](#) and [related webinars](#) on CIE in good jobs.

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