U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

Office of Disability Employment Policy

Advancing Disabled Workers

Like other employees, workers with disabilities want opportunities to grow in their jobs. Employers, too, can benefit from helping all their workers, including disabled workers, build skills and do well in their roles. The strategies in this chapter will help employers advance disabled workers so everyone can excel.

Collapse All

⌄ **Supporting all employees' growth**

An employer's commitment to disability inclusion needs to include supporting employees with disabilities throughout their careers, offering opportunities for them to grow, develop, and advance professionally [PDF]. Doing so will help companies retain their skilled employees.

Start by diving deeper into how the organization handles professional development, accommodations, performance management, and more. This can include examining processes, setting up new ways to engage employees, and offering new opportunities. Learn how one media and technology company did just that to strengthen its commitment to including workers with disabilities.

Offer workers the same learning opportunities, regardless of disability. When possible, offer training to all workers in a job category. For example, give all Level I–certified welders the chance to complete training to gain a Level II certificate. In addition, survey workers about their access to training opportunities and use the results to see whether workers with disabilities have equal access.

Provide accessible training and professional development. Disabled workers may need accommodations or adjustments to complete some training. Many resources exist to help make in-house training accessible or to provide an accessible external program.

Offer informal learning opportunities too. Research shows that mentors can help new workers adjust to their new role better than they could alone. Many disabled workers find mentorship programs to be especially helpful. According to research in the construction industry, mentorship programs lead to higher job satisfaction and worker retention. Employers can learn more about mentorship programs and how to develop them in the workplace through this resource from EARN.

⌄ Encouraging self–identification

When a person tells their employer they have a disability and the information is tied to them as an individual, that is disability disclosure. People disclose disabilities for a variety of reasons, including to get a reasonable accommodation, to be open about who they are, or as part of an employee resource group.

Self-identification is a confidential and voluntary process in which people with disabilities tell their organization, on a pre-approved form, that they identify as a person with a disability. This data remains confidential and is used in the aggregate to gather diversity data for the employer.

To measure progress toward inclusion goals, it is critical that employers create an environment in which employees and applicants feel comfortable self-identifying, particularly when their disability is nonapparent. People with disabilities may fear self-identification for a variety of reasons, including previous negative experiences and concerns that an employer will discriminate against them or engage in unlawful retaliation (e.g., not hire them, focus on their disability rather than their actual work performance, limit their opportunities for advancement, or terminate them).

People with disabilities report that they are more likely to self-identify if they see their employer making concerted efforts to recruit and hire candidates with disabilities and reacting positively to other employees' self-identification.

Employers can use a number of strategies—including cultural, process, and policy changes—to foster an inclusive work culture and to encourage applicants and employees with disabilities to self-identify. Learn more on EARN's "Encouraging Self-Identification" webpage.

⌄ Providing usable feedback on workers' performance

All workers, including employees with disabilities, need positive and constructive feedback. Yet managers sometimes avoid honest performance discussions with workers because of discomfort or legal concerns.

Accessible and inclusive performance management is easy to conduct. Here are some tips that may help:

- Be sure that performance expectations for employees with and without disabilities are clear and align with the job. Written performance expectations help.
- Make sure performance goals are clear—that the employee is expected to contact a certain number of customers each week, for example.
- Include information on behavioral expectations, such as dress codes or typical lunch break times.
- Document employees' performance in writing. Be sure to document not only areas that need improvement, but also what the worker does well. Ensure your feedback is accessible to the employee.
- Let employees know when things are going especially well, and also as soon as possible when an issue arises. Use direct language to address what happened. Offer to help, but do not address an employee's disability unless the employee brings it up first.

An employee may ask for an accommodation to ensure they can meet performance goals. Consult the chapter "Retaining and Supporting Disabled Workers" to learn more about accommodations. These resources can also help you support employees' performance:

- EARN's practical guidance on accessible and inclusive performance management. This resource includes tips on aligning performance expectations with the tasks of a position, addressing behavioral performance, and providing constructive feedback for improvement.

Submit Feedback

- JAN's page on <u>performance and production standards</u>, which provides information on accessible measurement of and feedback on performance, and how to ensure performance management is compliant with the ADA.

⌄ Tracking and reporting on progress

Employers should continuously track their progress toward disability inclusion goals. Metrics are most effective when they are updated and used often.

Track progress on a regular schedule—yearly, for example. Have a standard process for doing so. If a factory has several divisions working on different product lines, for example, the same checklist could be used to assess hiring in each division. Federal contractors may be subject to certain specific requirements regarding how to track their progress towards disability inclusion.

AOCs, or access and opportunity committees, can convene workers, employers, and other groups to monitor compliance with laws and progress toward goals. (Learn more about AOCs in the chapter "Planning to Include Disabled Workers.") AOCs are often established through PLAs, or project labor agreements. Make sure that any AOC includes the voices of workers with disabilities. Disability inclusion should also be included in each AOC goal. These can take different forms, depending on the workplace and industry. You can also incorporate this monitoring elsewhere in a PLA.

In one example, the San Diego Unified School District <u>included monitoring for procurement from disabled veteran-owned businesses in its PLA</u> [PDF]. The PLA's signatories—including workers, employers, unions, and community groups—track this goal together, along with other inclusion-related goals.

Employers should determine who is responsible for achieving goals and reporting on them. Goals are often easier to reach when a specific person or team is accountable for reaching them. For example, if the head of each engineering division is responsible for all hiring, that person should report metrics and be held accountable for them.

Learn more about creating, tracking, and using metrics from EARN's "<u>Measure Success</u>" page. The information and video training on the page include information on designating responsible employees and teams.

<u>Scroll to Top</u> ⊕

Program Areas   **Research**   **Initiatives**   **News and Publications**   **NDEAM**   **ADA**   **About**

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT⊞   **LABOR DEPARTMENT**⊞   **ABOUT THE SITE**⊞

White House	About DOL	Freedom of Information Act
Coronavirus Resources	Guidance Search	Privacy & Security Statement
Disaster Recovery Assistance	Español	Disclaimers
DisasterAssistance.gov	Office of Inspector General	Important Website Notices
USA.gov	Subscribe to the DOL Newsletter	Plug-Ins Used on DOL.gov
Notification of EEO Violations	Read the DOL Newsletter	Accessibility Statement
No Fear Act Data	Emergency Accountability Status Link	
U.S. Office of Special Counsel	A to Z Index	

Office of Disability Employment Policy

An agency within the U.S. Department of Labor

200 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, DC 20210
<u>1-866-4-USA-DOL</u>
<u>1-866-487-2365</u>

Submit Feedback