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Employer Assistance and Resource Network



Implementing Inclusive Employment Policies and Practices

People with disabilities account for over 5.5% of those employed nationwide (see Figure 1). While the precise percentage varies among sectors,² individuals with disabilities represent an important segment of every organization's diverse workforce. But, as with any diversity group, workplace inclusion goes beyond simply employing individuals to creating an environment where every employee is valued. Organizational structures, values, policies, and day-to-day practices all influence the degree to which employees with disabilities feel truly valued by and included in their workplaces. This, in turn, can improve job performance and increase satisfaction and employee commitment. The attendant operational and efficiency impacts of improved employee performance and job satisfaction make inclusive workplaces important for employers of all sizes and industries.

This research-to-practice brief discusses how employers can increase the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in the workplace and provides concrete recommendations for human resource professionals and managers.

The Impact of Inclusive Workplaces

Effective implementation of inclusive workplace practices and policies relates directly to key metrics important to overall organizational success. As employers move beyond simply recruiting a defined number or percentage of candidates from diverse backgrounds toward creating workplaces that value a broad range of perspectives, they may realize performance benefits in key areas.

Key Benefits Include:

- Increased employee:
 - o Job satisfaction
 - o Commitment, or loyalty, to company
 - o Tenure, or length of time with company
 - o Organizational citizenship behaviors
- Reduced employee:
 - o Turnover intention

The impact of these metrics on organizational operations, effectiveness and cost make the creation of inclusive workplaces critical to employers of all sizes and industries.

Inclusive Employment Policies and Practices

While many employers report actively recruiting a diverse workforce and a majority report that they offer diversity awareness training to employees, fewer engage in activities intended to make their organization more inclusive (see Figure 2).

Workplace inclusion of individuals with disabilities is a product of company-wide policies *and* the attitudes and practices of managers and supervisors. Together these factors influence employee perceptions about the work environment which, in turn, impact engagement, job satisfaction and productivity.

There are three key policy and practice areas that impact organizations' disability diversity and inclusion: **strong recruitment, training, and advancement opportunities; strong accommodations-related policies and practices;** and **strong positive corporate culture, including top management.**

Acknowledgement

This research brief summarizes the document entitled *Conducting and Benchmarking Inclusive Employment Policies, Practices and Culture*, which is based on research conducted by the Disability Case Study Research Consortium (DCSRC) led by the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University. This consortium included prominent representatives from business, labor, and disability organizations, as well as nationally recognized disability

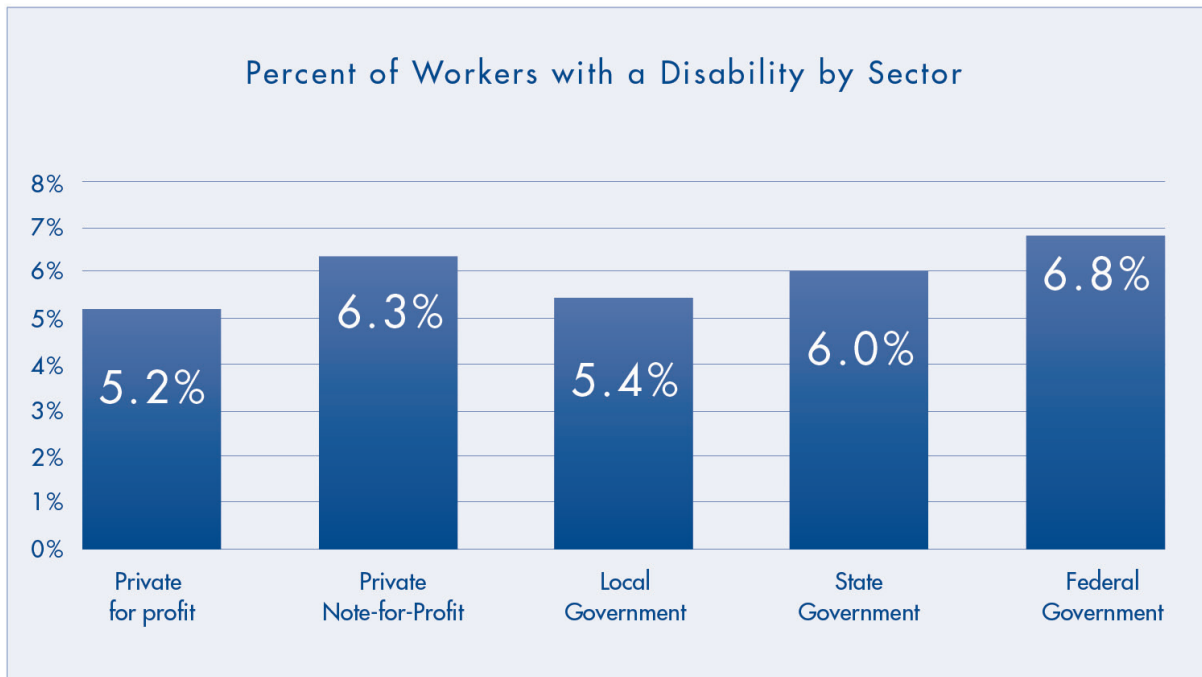


Figure 1.

Percent of Workers with a Disability by Sector²

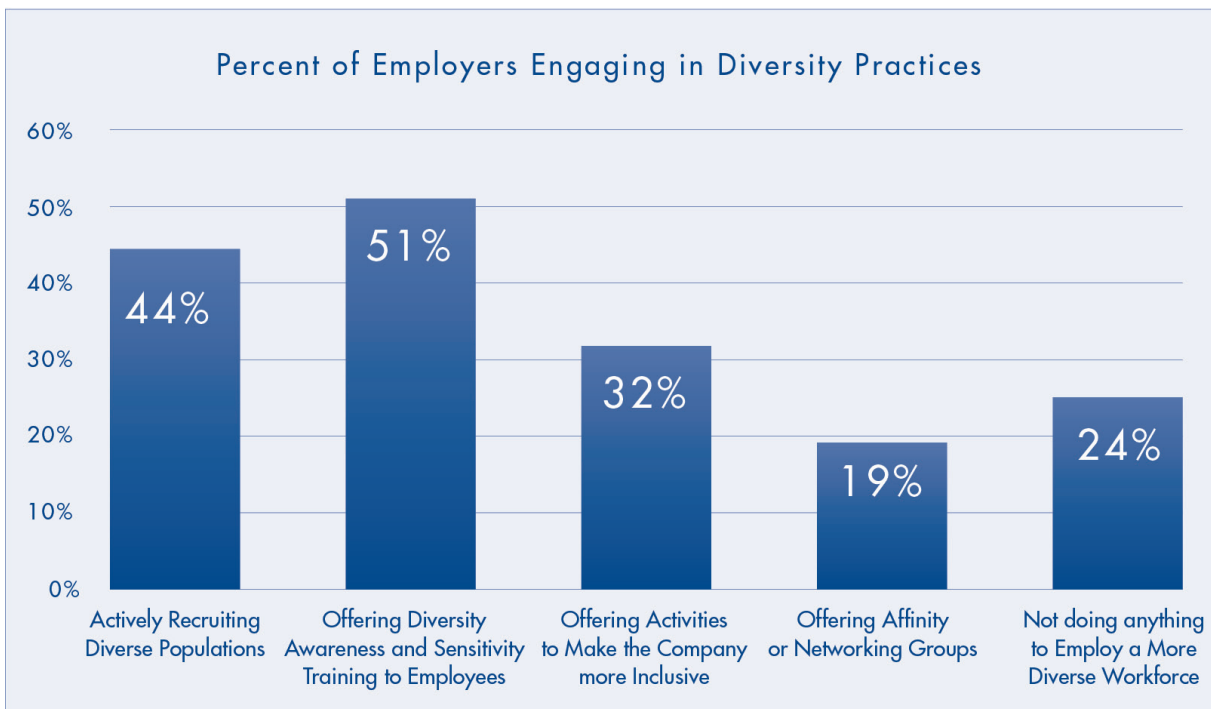


Figure 2.

Percent of Employers Engaging in Diversity Practices³

Among these broad areas of key policies and practices there are several specific factors that are of special significance for disability inclusion.

- **Managers play a critical role.** Managers' diversity behaviors and relationships with employees are directly related to employees' perceptions, engagement and satisfaction. Better relationships and more inclusive manager diversity practices are correlated with increased workplace satisfaction and reduced perception of negative workplace treatment.
- **An inclusive work environment must be pervasive.** Inclusive practices and policies matter to employees with and without disabilities. Such practices are related to higher levels of psychological empowerment, perceived organizational support, and less conflict among all employees, not just those with disabilities.
- **Disability should be a part of organizations' diversity statements.** An important part of creating an inclusive workplace is establishing a clear organizational commitment to disability issues. Such statements are related to high levels of job satisfaction among employees.
- **Accommodations benefit everyone.** Accommodations, such as flexible scheduling and tele-commuting, are helpful for all employees, not just those with disabilities. Organizations committed to inclusive practices can expand their use of such accommodations to create a culture of responsiveness.
- **Human Resources must engage in equitable treatment of all employees.** Human Resource departments play an important role in ensuring a fair and level playing field for all employees. The more fairly employees with disabilities perceive their treatment by HR to be, the greater their organizational commitment, job satisfaction, citizenship behaviors, and the lower their turnover intentions.

Key Disability, Diversity and Inclusion Policies and Practices ^{1,4,5,6}

Strong Recruitment, Training and Advancement Options

- Targeted recruiting of people with disabilities
- Manager education and training on disability
- Targeted career advancement opportunities for employees with disabilities
- Training opportunities that are equitably available and accessible to employees with disabilities
- Mentoring and coaching opportunities that are made available to employees with disabilities

Strong Corporate Culture

- Top management commitment to hiring people with disabilities.
- Available disability networks / affinity groups
- A diversity policy which includes disability

Effective Accommodations-Related Policies and Practices

- Established procedures for disability accommodations
- Centralized sources of funding for accommodations
- Organizational record-keeping on accommodations
- Universally-designed accommodation policies
- Available return-to-work / disability management services

Creating an Inclusive Workplace

The adoption and implementation of disability diversity and inclusion practices should be consistent across departments and at all organizational levels. Below are key steps that employers generally, and human resource professionals and managers more specifically, can take to increase their organizations' inclusion of employees with disabilities.

Recommendations for Employers

- Communicate a top management commitment to the hiring and equitable treatment of people with disabilities
- Include disability in the diversity and inclusion agenda (including but not limited to adding disability as a stated goal of the formal diversity policy or annual report)
- Assess the organization's climate for inclusion and address weaknesses
- Build cultural factors into performance management at the organizational and individual levels
- Articulate the value and return on investment of accommodations and leverage "in-house" expertise for accommodations
- Provide central accommodations funds and implement a structured process for requesting accommodations
- Provide support for disability affinity groups
- Educate and train employees and managers around disability issues
- Collect data related to disability

Recommendations for Human Resource Professionals

- Implement effective communication strategies regarding the organization's commitment to diversity issues and equitable employment
- Create mentoring opportunities that include people with disabilities
- Include disability in diversity initiatives
- Conduct trainings for managers regarding disability
- Include diversity and inclusion effectiveness in supervisor job descriptions and performance management expectations
- Implement effective accommodation policies and practices
- Use disability affinity groups to recruit employees with disabilities and to acquire information on accommodations
- Focus on targeted recruiting and training of employees with disabilities

Recommendations for Managers

- Recognize that manager behavior powerfully influences the experience of employees with disabilities and the behavior of others toward co-workers with disabilities
- Show respect for employees requesting accommodations, as perceptions of managerial respect are a key predictor of employee workplace engagement
- Trust your judgment and act on any concerns you have related to discrimination against employees with disabilities
- Create an inclusive decision-making environment and reduce conflict and discrimination by encouraging a workplace that values diversity
 - o Acknowledge and respect all team members
 - o Promote cooperation
 - o Be flexible

Conclusion

Effective workplace inclusion practices can impact business' bottom line by increasing employee job satisfaction, productivity and commitment to the organization and by reducing turnover intention. Creating an inclusive workplace for individuals with disabilities includes ensuring that organizational structures, values, policies and day-to-day practices create a culture that values the contributions of all employees. Managers, human resource professionals and employees at all levels have a role in creating and sustaining a culture of inclusiveness for employees with disabilities.

References

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- ⁶ Government Accountability Office. (2005). *Diversity Management: Expert-Identified Leading Practices and Agency Examples*. Washington, DC: GAO.

About this Series

Implementing Inclusive Employment is part of a series of briefs presenting the practical implications of recent research in disability employment. Each brief focuses on a key issue for employers, presenting background, research findings and key recommendations.



Disclaimer

The National Technical Assistance, Policy, and Research Center for Employers on Employment of People with Disabilities is funded by a cooperative agreement from the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy to Cornell University.

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