

Small Business & Disability Employment:

STEPS TO SUCCESS

A Pathway for Promoting Inclusive Workplaces



Steps
SMALL BUSINESSES
Can Take to Recruit and Retain
Qualified People with Disabilities



Steps
BUSINESS ASSOCIATIONS
Can Take to Help Employers Understand the
Value of Disability Diversity



About Small Business & Disability Employment: Steps to Success

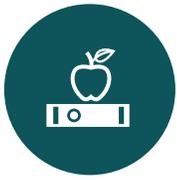
When it comes to doing business, a diverse team means more perspectives on how to confront challenges and achieve success. Although the term “diversity” is typically used in reference to differences in race or ethnicity, it actually encompasses an infinite range of experiences—including disability.

When it comes to ensuring a workplace inclusive of the skills and talents of people with disabilities, however, not all businesses may know where to start. *Small Business & Disability Employment: Steps to Success* provides a path, outlining various effective employment strategies and how different small businesses across the nation have put them into action. For those involved in business associations, such as chambers of commerce or Business Leadership Networks, this guide also describes strategies for engaging member organizations in the issue and raising awareness in their communities.

The *Steps to Success* were developed based on information gleaned from the Add Us In initiative sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy. Through this program, eight consortia across the U.S. piloted models for increasing employment opportunities for people with disabilities within small businesses, especially those in underrepresented and historically excluded communities. The need for such models was clear; despite being the nation’s major drivers of job growth, small businesses employ people with disabilities at a much lower rate than large businesses.

Each Add Us In consortium was required to include certain partners, among them business associations such as chambers of commerce or Business Leadership Networks. Due in large part to the inclusion of these partners, Add Us In brought to light many innovative and sustainable strategies that can be replicated by small businesses and business associations nationwide—in other words, the *Steps to Success*.

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Internships & Mentoring

Many businesses, especially small businesses, cite internships as an effective personnel strategy because they offer a way to both fill anticipated short-term staffing needs and evaluate potential staff for permanent positions in the future—especially those new to the workforce. Internships can also be an effective strategy for achieving disability diversity. In fact, research shows that employers who have internships for people with disabilities are 4.5 times more likely to hire a person with a disability than those who do not.

A related practice is workplace mentoring, which benefits workers with and without disabilities, not to mention their employers. Increasing numbers of employers are implementing formal or informal mentoring programs as a way to improve employees' supervisory skills and job satisfaction and promote a positive corporate image. Like internships, mentoring programs can also serve as an effective employee recruitment and retention tool by helping to identify future talent for the organization.



Want to Learn More?

The following resources can help small businesses connect with intern candidates and learn more about internships and mentoring programs for people with disabilities:

- [Workforce Recruitment Program for College Students with Disabilities \(www.wrp.jobs\)](http://www.wrp.jobs)
- [AskEARN.org: Recruiting Interns & Recent Graduates \(bit.ly/1gA5s9c\)](http://bit.ly/1gA5s9c)
- [AskEARN.org: Workplace Mentoring Primer \(askearn.org/pwm.cfm\)](http://askearn.org/pwm.cfm)
- [Disability.gov: Mentoring and Internship Programs \(1.usa.gov/1MkjOqi\)](http://1.usa.gov/1MkjOqi)
- [Inclusive Internship Programs: A How-To Guide for Employers \(1.usa.gov/1PkPZWE\)](http://1.usa.gov/1PkPZWE)

In Action

NEGRO LEAGUES BASEBALL MUSEUM

In July 2012, the Major League Baseball All-Star Game took place in Kansas City, Missouri, much to the delight of local merchants in the city's historic 18th and Vine entertainment district. The event brought legions of baseball fans into the area, many of whom were, not surprisingly, interested in visiting the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum. To assist in handling the expected increase in volume, the museum hired eight young people with disabilities as interns to staff positions such as greeters, ticket takers and gift-shop assistants. All of the interns were recent graduates of a multi-week career preparation program, called the Urban Career Academy. The Academy's curriculum focuses on "soft" skills, including customer service. The relationship proved mutually beneficial. The interns had to apply what they learned, while the museum's management found an innovative solution to its short-term staffing shortage.

CHILDREN’S MERCY KANSAS CITY

Through an innovative program called RISE (Reaching for Independent Successful Employment), Children’s Mercy Kansas City, a member of the Kansas City Business Leadership Network, helps ensure that its future workforce reflects the diverse community it serves, which includes many families with children with disabilities. The program allows young adults with disabilities age 18 and older the opportunity to rotate through a variety of roles across the hospital’s operations, focusing on tasks that may be better learned through on-the-job training instead of a classroom environment. The program was initially started for people who previously received care at the hospital but later expanded to include others. A complementary program called PAVE (Providing Accessible Volunteer Experience) provides an opportunity for youth with disabilities age 15 and older to explore the hospital workplace setting through volunteer activities such as escorting visitors, socializing with patients, providing office support and distributing donations. Furthermore, through partnerships with two local school districts, the hospital has a mentoring program for youth with disabilities transitioning out of special education programs and into the workforce.

WRITEAWAY COMMUNICATIONS

WriteAway Communications, an independent, certified Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT)-owned public relations firm in Sacramento, California, found that bringing on two summer interns with disabilities to handle some of the day to day tasks afforded its principals extra time to focus on growing their business. “We were really able to use the additional staff to help us continue growing, to do a better job for our clients that the two of us would have had the time and availability to do this summer, so for that reason I feel like it’s really been a good benefit,” said Bonnie Osborne, the firm’s owner.

AQUAS, INC.

When AQUAS, Inc., an information technology solutions provider based in Bethesda, Maryland, hired a summer intern with a disability, it quickly learned that doing so was a smart strategy for identifying future talent for the company. A federal contractor, AQUAS was connected with the intern through an innovative partnership between nonprofit TransCen, its local workforce investment board, the Hispanic Business Foundation, and the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. TransCen worked with AQUAS to understand the intern’s skill set and develop an internship experience that matched his interests and the company’s needs. The match was so successful that, at the end of the summer, AQUAS offered the intern a part-time job. Today, his responsibilities include installing and formatting computer programs and updating and repairing equipment. AQUAS is also supporting his pursuit of an advanced certification so that his skills can grow alongside the company. ●



Expressions of Commitment

Expressing commitment, both internally and externally, is one of the easiest ways to foster a disability-inclusive workplace. Examples include equal opportunity statements that specifically mention disability on company websites, statements by top company leaders, advertisements featuring people with disabilities, articles in employee newsletters about disability-related issues and more. Such simple strategies go a long way toward communicating an inclusive workplace culture that seeks the skills and talents of all applicants and employees.



Want to Learn More?

The following resources can help small businesses learn more about ways to express a commitment to disability inclusion:

- [AskEARN.org: Incorporating Disability Into Diversity Plans \(bit.ly/1N3ycVw\)](https://www.askearn.org/resources/1N3ycVw)
- [Business Strategies that Work: Communicate: External and Internal Communication of Company Policies and Practices \(bit.ly/1hya40q\)](https://www.businessstrategies.com/resources/1hya40q)
- [Partnership on Employment and Accessible Technology: Communicating Your Commitment to Accessibility: Tips for Employers \(bit.ly/1Nahumy\)](https://www.partnershiponemployment.org/resources/1Nahumy)

In Action

THOMAS HOOKER BREWERY

Thomas Hooker Brewery in Bloomfield, Connecticut proactively communicates its commitment to disability inclusion in a number of ways. In addition to statements on its website and other collateral materials, the brewery, as part of its involvement in the Connecticut Business Leadership Network, sponsored a “Best Practices and Brew Party” to encourage other local businesses to learn about how to integrate people with disabilities into their workforces and the benefits of doing so.

VERC ENTERPRISES

Residents of Massachusetts and Southern New Hampshire are likely familiar with the businesses that comprise VERC Enterprises—a family-owned chain of convenience stores, gasoline stations and carwashes that prides itself on customer service and a commitment to community. Reflecting this, the company has set an impressive goal: to comprise 20 percent of its workforce with individuals who have intellectual or developmental disabilities. It’s a commitment to disability diversity that VERC expresses proudly and publicly through a statement on its website and other proactive communications efforts, including a bylined opinion-editorial article in the Boston Globe. “When society takes the initiative in recruiting and hiring those with disabilities, it avails itself of a worker population that has proven to be exceedingly reliable, trustworthy, thorough and committed for the long haul,” wrote VERC President Leo Vercollone. ●

Steps *Small Businesses* Can Take to Recruit and Retain Qualified People with Disabilities



Partnerships

Finding qualified candidates with disabilities need not be challenging. Building relationships with various local recruitment sources, such as local vocational rehabilitation specialists, American Job Centers, disability service providers and other organizations is a key strategy. In many cases, such organizations can connect businesses with candidate databases or identify service providers in local communities to assist in identifying and training individuals for specific workforce needs.



Want to Learn More?

There are a number of resources small businesses can use to find partners and learn more about building effective partnerships with disability organizations, such as the following:

- [Disability and Veterans Community Resources Directory \(1.usa.gov/1f81e7C\)](http://1.usa.gov/1f81e7C)
- [American Job Centers/America's Service Locator \(www.servicelocator.org\)](http://www.servicelocator.org)
- [Directory of Centers for Independent Living Directory \(bit.ly/11CJWsE\)](http://bit.ly/11CJWsE)
- [Employment Networks \(www.chooseworkttw.net/findhelp\)](http://www.chooseworkttw.net/findhelp)
- [Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation/National Employment Team \(bit.ly/1f81kvX\)](http://bit.ly/1f81kvX)
- [Disability.gov: Recruiting and Hiring People with Disabilities \(1.usa.gov/1GRxdFv\)](http://1.usa.gov/1GRxdFv)

In Action

THOMAS HOOKER BREWERY

For several years, Thomas Hooker Brewery in Bloomfield, Connecticut has partnered with a local disability service provider to keep its bottling line hopping. This relationship has proven successful for both the brewery and the service provider, and today, workers with disabilities are an integral and expected part of the Thomas Hooker workforce.

LOCAL FAST FOOD FRANCHISE

A string of fast food outlets in Chicago has found an effective way to fill its staffing needs by partnering with a local charter school that serves a high number of students with learning disabilities. The Youth Connection Charter School, which has 20 locations across the city, trains the students in job readiness and a customized curriculum developed with the restaurant. It then provides job coaching and support during internships. More than 75 percent of the interns go on to become regular employees, with the school providing job coaching for an additional 90 days.

ILLINOIS TOLLWAY

The Illinois Tollway has found partnerships with disability service providers to be an effective means for recruiting employees for its customer service call center located on the campus of the University of Illinois at Chicago. Among these partners are the Chicago Lighthouse and Schwab Rehabilitation Hospital. The arrangement works well because the center was designed in collaboration with the Chicago Lighthouse with universal accessibility in mind, both in terms of physical and technological infrastructure.

MOHEGAN SUN CASINO

Mohegan Sun, a Native American-owned casino in Uncasville, Connecticut, has discovered a partnership with a local disability service provider to be an effective way to fill its diverse staffing needs. Working together, the casino and Community Enterprises, Inc. developed the Mohegan Sun Inclusion Academy to train job seekers for specific in-demand jobs, ranging from cashiers to cooks to valet dispatchers. Community Enterprises screens the applicants, many of whom are referred from the state's Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, and conducts three or four weeks of training in a classroom setting provided by the casino. Successful trainees then receive on-the-job support from a job coach for six weeks to ensure a smooth transition. More than 100 employees have come on board through the program. ●



Accommodations / Productivity Enhancements

All employees need the right tools and work environment to effectively perform their jobs. Similarly, people with disabilities may need workplace adjustments, or accommodations, to maximize their productivity. Having a clear process for requesting and providing accommodations is an easy step small businesses can take to send a clear signal about their commitment to a disability-inclusive workforce.

Whether they realize it or not, accommodations are something most employers provide—to employees both with and without disabilities—every day. They span the tangible, such as certain technologies or special chairs or desks, to the non-tangible, such as a flexible schedule or the opportunity to telecommute. Regardless, most accommodations are no or low cost, while yielding considerable direct and indirect benefits through increased retention and productivity.



Want to Learn More?

The following resources can help small businesses learn more about workplace accommodations for people with disabilities:

- [Job Accommodation Network \(JAN\) \(askjan.org\)](http://askjan.org)
- [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission: Small Employers and Reasonable Accommodations \(eeoc.gov/facts/accommodation.html\)](http://eeoc.gov/facts/accommodation.html)
- [Disability.gov: Accommodations and Supports on the Job \(1.usa.gov/1Tqzn5C\)](http://1.usa.gov/1Tqzn5C)

In Action

LOCAL FAST FOOD FRANCHISE

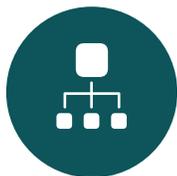
A fast food franchise in Chicago has found that a simple accommodation—a printed, picture-based “special needs” menu originally developed for customers with disabilities—helps interns with learning disabilities process orders more efficiently because they don’t need to memorize all menu options. Managers simply allow the students to keep the menu nearby while working the cash register. The restaurants provide internships for students with disabilities through an innovative partnership with the Youth Connection Charter School.

NGLCC AFFILIATE

In summer 2013, a National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce (NGLCC) affiliate in California hired two interns with disabilities. This was the first time the chamber, which doubled its staff with the addition of the two interns, had any employees with disabilities, and they found accommodations to be easier than expected. Desk layout was rearranged to create ease of movement for one of the interns who used a wheelchair.

THE PROSPECTOR THEATER

If you go see a movie at The Prospector Theater in Ridgefield, Connecticut, you'll find numerous employees with disabilities ready to serve you. An innovative program there is helping people with disabilities gain work skills—while helping the theater gain skilled workers. More than 60 percent of the theater's staff are people with disabilities. And the theater has trained its workers—who serve popcorn, make drinks and greet patrons as ushers—using a specialized process so they are better able to master their tasks. For example, depending on the learner, one can be trained to operate the popcorn maker in numerous ways, such as reading an instructional comic strip or viewing a video. ●



Workplace Flexibility / Customizing the Work Relationship

Today, more and more employers are learning that they don't have to do things the old fashioned way. To stay competitive, many are thinking outside the proverbial box to meet the diverse needs of individual employees. One increasingly popular strategy on this front is workplace flexibility—a practice that breeds employee loyalty and enables many workers to perform to their fullest potential.

Workplace flexibility takes many forms. For a new parent, it might mean a part-time work schedule. For a person with a mobility disability, it might mean telecommuting due to lack of accessible transportation. For a person with a chronic illness, it might mean an adapted schedule to manage medical appointments or medication administration. Regardless of the reason why, research shows that strategies such as telework and flextime contribute greatly to increased productivity—for all employees, including employees with disabilities.

While workplace flexibility is often associated with when and where employees work, it also covers flexibility of task. That can mean redefining or customizing an individual's job description to capitalize on their strengths so that they can best assist you in addressing your business needs. Again, this is a practice that can benefit all employees.



Want to Learn More?

There are a number of resources small businesses can use to learn more about workplace flexibility, such as:

- [ODEP: Workplace Flexibility Toolkit \(www.dol.gov/odep/workplaceflexibility\)](http://www.dol.gov/odep/workplaceflexibility)
- [ODEP: Flexible Work Arrangements \(1.usa.gov/1MocdZe\)](http://1.usa.gov/1MocdZe)
- [ODEP: Customized Employment \(1.usa.gov/1NqDIE8\)](http://1.usa.gov/1NqDIE8)
- [Families and Work Institute: Workplace Flexibility Among Small Employers \(bit.ly/1IZmBjj\)](http://bit.ly/1IZmBjj)
- [Families and Work Institute: 2014 National Study of Employers/Including the Talents of Employees with Disabilities \(bit.ly/1psRqEa\)](http://bit.ly/1psRqEa)

In Action

CHELINO'S MEXICAN RESTAURANT

Started in 1989 as an eight-table restaurant with five employees, Chelino's Mexican Restaurant has grown to include 13 outlets, including a tortilla factory and meat market, bakery and ice cream factory. Owner Marcelino Garcia—an active member of the Greater Oklahoma City Hispanic Chamber of Commerce—has overseen his business's growth with great pride and attributes much of his success to his employees, who now number more than 500. Among these are many people with

significant disabilities who hold a variety of roles mapped to their specific skill sets, including table bussing, food preparation and silverware rolling. Garcia works with disability service providers to customize these positions to people's strengths. Businesses have a lot to gain from being welcoming to people with disabilities, according to Garcia. "They're hard workers. They're on time. They're always responsible. If anyone comes and applies for a job with you and it is somebody with a disability, don't be afraid to hire them," he said. "You'll be happy to have someone with a disability working for you, and they will appreciate the opportunity to work with you."

OFFICE SOLUTIONS BUSINESS

An office solutions business that hired a summer intern with a disability found that workplace flexibility around task was key to his success in returning to work after several years out of the workforce. This intern, who was in his 40s, had experienced a traumatic brain injury, and certain tasks took him more time to complete. Recognizing this, his manager had him focus on accounting tasks that, while important, did not have a hard and fast deadline. He was able to work on these tasks for a short period every day, which proved mutually beneficial to both his manager's needs and the intern's work style.

PUZZLES BAKERY AND CAFÉ

Every day, Puzzles Bakery and Café in historic downtown Schenectady, New York serves up not only sandwiches, baked goods and soup to the city's hungry patrons, but also integrated employment and training opportunities for local residents with autism and other developmental disabilities. Key to the enterprise's success is matching each person's skills to the right job, ranging from customer service to food preparation and everything in between. For some employees, this customization process may involve job shadowing or internships to uncover strengths and interests. Puzzles also offers short shifts in order to facilitate employment opportunities for a wider range of people with special needs, both with and without disabilities.

GOOD REASONS DOG TREATS

Hudson Valley, New York-based Good Reasons is a non-profit dog treat company with a dual mission: to create delicious and healthy dog treats while providing employment and training for people with autism and other developmental disabilities in an integrated environment. Currently half of the company's 10 employees are people with developmental disabilities, and its parent organization, disability services provider Community Based Services, Inc., works closely to customize employees' job duties based on their particular strengths. The recipe seems to work; within one year of opening, Good Reasons dog treats were being sold in more than 40 regional supermarkets and veterinary clinics and 130 pet stores, as well as online. "All employees, regardless of abilities, come with their own set of challenges and needs. As long as there is flexibility on the part of the employer, it really is no different than hiring anyone else," says company CEO and dog lover Vicky Sylvester.



Return-to-Work / Stay-at-Work Strategies

When an unexpected injury or disability prevents an experienced, valued employee from working temporarily, employers may face difficult choices. Most want to do their best to support employees, and the reality is that training new workers costs time and money. Fortunately, employers can use a number of strategies to help valued employees stay at work or return to work following the onset of illness or disability. Often, just a few simple modifications to an employee's work environment, duties or schedule can facilitate their remaining a valuable member of the team. What's more, in many instances, work itself can play an important role in the recovery process—benefiting employee and employer for years to come.



Want to Learn More?

There are a number of resources small businesses can use to learn more about strategies for helping employees return to work following injury or illness, such as:

- [ODEP: Return-to-Work Toolkit for Employees & Employers \(www.dol.gov/odep/return-to-work\)](http://www.dol.gov/odep/return-to-work)
- [Job Accommodation Network: Return-to-Work Programs \(askjan.org/media/rtwprograms.html\)](http://askjan.org/media/rtwprograms.html)
- [AskEARN.org: Return to Work Resources \(bit.ly/1Pl8ydi\)](http://bit.ly/1Pl8ydi)

In Action

THE COMMUNICATION CENTER

The Communication Center, a media and presentation training firm based in Washington, D.C., understands firsthand that disability issues can affect anyone at any given time. That's why the small business takes a strategic approach to stay-at-work and return-to-work practices designed to help employees continue working in the event of an unexpected illness, injury or life event. For example, when one of the firm's most valuable consultants received a cancer diagnosis, management arranged for her to take unexpected leave to receive treatment, with the assurance that her job would be waiting for her when she returned. And once she was back on the job, the firm worked with her to customize a flexible work schedule that allowed her to manage her health needs. Another staffer was able to conduct a remote training session for a client while he was home recovering from hip surgery, all enabled by video chat technology. "Life happens, and we understand that," says Dean Jones, the company's president. "So if keeping a valuable employee on the job means customizing how and when they work, we're always prepared to do that." ●

Steps *Small Businesses* Can Take to Recruit and Retain Qualified People with Disabilities



Veteran Targeting

Across the nation, businesses of all sizes and in all industries are increasingly finding that military veterans—including wounded warriors—are a ready source of qualified candidates with the ability to get the job done. Veterans are known to be committed, team-oriented employees with transferable skills, real-world experience and the ability to adapt. So it is no surprise that many proactively recruit transitioning service members and veterans. Of course, some veterans may have service-connected disabilities, which may or may not be apparent, and there are a number of resources that small businesses can use to promote their success once on the job.



Want to Learn More?

There are a number of resources small businesses can use to learn more about targeting veterans, including veterans with disabilities, such as:

- Department of Veterans Affairs: Veterans Employment Toolkit (www.va.gov/vetsinworkplace)
- Veterans' Employment and Training Service: America's Heroes at Work – Veterans Hiring Toolkit (www.dol.gov/vets/ahaw)
- Veterans' Employment and Training Service: Hire a Veteran (www.dol.gov/vets/hire/index.htm)
- AskEARN.org: Recruiting Veterans (askearn.org/refdesk/Recruitment/Veterans)
- ADA National Network: Tips for Employers: Tapping into the Talents of Veterans with Disabilities (bit.ly/1L5XT15)

In Action

SAIL JADA CHARTERS

When Sail Jada Charters, an LGBT-owned enterprise in San Diego, hired several interns with disabilities in the summer of 2013, it benefited significantly from their skills in sales and marketing. One intern in particular, a veteran who was hired to assist with social media strategy, provided particular insight into the veteran market, which Sail Jada had been trying to break into given its location in San Diego and sailing's therapeutic value.

HALFAKER & ASSOCIATES, LLC

Dawn Halfaker understands the importance of hiring military veterans. As the CEO of consulting firm Halfaker & Associates, a woman-owned small business based in Arlington, Virginia, and as a disabled veteran herself, she actively advocates for the employment of returning service members. To help her company recruit qualified veterans, Halfaker works with the Wounded Warrior Project and Hire Heroes USA to identify candidates for job openings. Once on board, veteran hires are offered the supports they need, which can include accommodations, workplace flexibility and mentoring. "These people are resilient. They've been through challenging situations, and because they've had to push themselves, they are capable of overcoming hardships and adapting to new situations," says Halfaker. "These are the extraordinary kinds of people whom I want in my organization." ●



Disability Inclusion Training

Disability inclusion training is a step employers of all sizes can take to promote a disability-friendly workplace culture. What's more, it can assist in strengthening employees' abilities to serve customers or clients with disabilities, an important market segment. Examples include general training for all employees on disability etiquette and training for supervisors on workplace accommodations. The forum for such training may be simple, such as brown-bag lunches, to more sophisticated, such as online modules or formal curricula. Regardless, all convey a commitment to an inclusive workplace—and help employees understand their responsibilities in fulfilling it.



Want to Learn More?

There are a number of resources small businesses can use to implement disability-related training. Examples include the following:

- [Disability and Veterans Community Resources Directory \(1.usa.gov/1f81e7C\)](https://1.usa.gov/1f81e7C)
- [AskEARN.org: Customized Training \(askearn.org/form-requestTraining.cfm\)](https://askearn.org/form-requestTraining.cfm)
- [Job Accommodation Network: Disability Etiquette \(askjan.org/topics/disetiq.htm\)](https://askjan.org/topics/disetiq.htm)
- [Job Accommodation Network: Multimedia Training Microsite \(www.askjan.org/training/library.htm\)](https://www.askjan.org/training/library.htm)
- [Campaign for Disability Employment \(www.whatcanyoudocampaign.org\)](https://www.whatcanyoudocampaign.org)

In Action

TOAD&CO

Toad&Co, an outdoor clothing manufacturer based in Santa Barbara, California, has a long-standing commitment to creating employment opportunities for people with developmental disabilities. In 1997, it partnered with Search, Inc., a Chicago-based disability services provider, to found Planet Access Company (PAC), which at the time employed people with developmental disabilities to assist in producing a new product. As Toad&Co grew in size and scope, so did PAC, which today processes 100 percent of its inventory. Now, Toad&Co is using its experience to educate its nationwide network of retailers on how people with disabilities can also add value to their companies, from both a workplace and marketplace perspective. Working with JJ's List, another social enterprise of Search, Inc., it is rolling out a disability etiquette training program for store managers and employees on communicating and interacting with people with disabilities, whether as colleagues or customers. As part of this, all of Toad&Co's roughly 100 employees will also participate in the training in order to ensure its own employment and customer services practices are disability inclusive. ●



Accessibility

Clearly, a disability-friendly workplace is an accessible workplace. Today, most businesses understand the importance of physical accessibility, such as wheelchair ramps and accessible restrooms. But not all may understand the need to also build a “technology-accessible” workplace, where information and communication technology is accessible to all employees, and/or compatible with certain assistive technology devices. After all, accessibility should extend not only to a business’s physical structure, but also to its workplace technology products, website and online job application process. The key is to ensure doors are open, whether literally or virtually.



Want to Learn More?

There are a number of resources small businesses can use to learn more about workplace accessibility, both physical and virtual, such as:

- [Partnership on Employment and Accessible Technology: Accessible Technology Action Steps: A Guide for Employers \(peatworks.org/action-steps\)](https://peatworks.org/action-steps)
- [Partnership on Employment and Accessible Technology: TechCheck \(peatworks.org/techcheck/get-started\)](https://peatworks.org/techcheck/get-started)
- [Job Accommodation Network: Technology \(askjan.org/topics/tech.htm\)](https://askjan.org/topics/tech.htm)
- [AskEARN.org: Workplace Accessibility \(bit.ly/1gAhPIH\)](https://bit.ly/1gAhPIH)
- [Disability.gov: Making Technology Accessible \(1.usa.gov/1Pl9WMM\)](https://1.usa.gov/1Pl9WMM)

In Action

ILLINOIS TOLLWAY

Through its partnership with the University of Illinois at Chicago and the Chicago Lighthouse, the Illinois Tollway developed a universally accessible customer service call center in an unused facility on the campus of the University of Illinois at Chicago. The 22,000 square foot center occupies a former basement swimming pool area and employs roughly 200 people, many of whom are visually impaired and have other disabilities, including veterans. Using an accessible technology infrastructure, the center’s employees handle more than 10,000 customer contacts per day and process more than 25,000 toll and violation payments received by mail each month. ●



Transportation Considerations

Accessible and affordable transportation is a critical employment support, without which many people—both with and without disabilities—would not be able to work. By implementing job-related transit benefits and services, businesses both large and small can play an important role in advancing support for alternative transportation options and open doors to employment for a wider segment of their communities, including people with disabilities. What’s more, they can realize bottom line benefits through cost savings and an improved public image in an increasingly “green” society.



Want to Learn More?

There are a number of resources small businesses can use to learn more about transportation considerations for employees, including employees with disabilities, such as:

- [ODEP: Transportation \(www.dol.gov/odep/topics/Transportation.htm\)](http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/Transportation.htm)
- [Community Transportation Association of America: Transportation for Workers with Disabilities \(bit.ly/1PlaVg1\)](https://bit.ly/1PlaVg1)
- [Community Transportation Association of America: Transportation to Work: A Toolkit for the Business Community \(bit.ly/1f89zbt\)](https://bit.ly/1f89zbt)
- [Disability.gov: Transportation \(1.usa.gov/1h3nyRV\)](http://1.usa.gov/1h3nyRV)

In Action

ILLINOIS TOLLWAY

Although its universally accessible customer service call center is located in downtown Chicago, the Illinois Tollway requires all employees who work at it to attend a four-week training session in a suburb not easily reached by public transportation. To ensure that it can still employ individuals who cannot provide their own transportation during the training period, due to disability or any other reason, the tollway provided daily transportation from a central downtown location, thus eliminating a potential barrier to employment with the organization.

INTEGRATED SCIENCE SOLUTIONS, INC.

Integrated Science Solutions, Inc. (ISSi), a small, woman-owned science and engineering contractor based in Walnut Creek, California, has unlocked the numerous benefits of employee transportation incentives. The company provides its staff a variety of commuter benefits, including up to \$60 a month in transit subsidies as well as flexible work schedules and telecommuting opportunities. While all of these practices are recognized as exemplary practices for supporting employees who may have transportation challenges due to disabilities, they are valuable perks that can be enjoyed by all of ISSi’s workers, helping them achieve a better work-life balance while also doing their part to improve environmental air quality by reducing the number of cars on local roads. ●



Partnerships

Helen Keller once said, “Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.” It’s a sentiment that undoubtedly rings true in the area of workforce development, where strong community partnerships can be the key to helping small businesses recruit and hire people with disabilities.

Business associations are in a powerful position to help their small business members learn about exemplary disability employment practices and take steps toward hiring qualified individuals, especially at the local level. And partnerships and alliances often hold the key to success. For example, some business associations partner with other like-minded business groups (e.g., some chambers of commerce choose to partner with local Business Leadership Network chapters, which are non-profits that help businesses leverage disability inclusion in the workplace, supply chain and marketplace). Business groups can also form alliances with disability service providers, independent living centers or American Job Centers within their communities, which can serve as fruitful recruitment resources.

Once these partnerships are formed, business associations can perform a range of activities to promote disability inclusion by their members—from formal job placement programs to simple educational events and awareness building campaigns about disability inclusion.



Want to Learn More?

There are a number of resources business associations can use to find potential partners, such as:

- U.S. Business Leadership Network Affiliates Directory (www.usbln.org/affiliates.html)
- Disability and Veterans Community Resources Directory (1.usa.gov/1f81e7C)
- American Job Centers/America’s Service Locator (www.servicelocator.org)
- Directory of Centers for Independent Living Directory (bit.ly/11CJWsE)
- Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation/National Employment Team (www.rehabnetwork.org/customers-2/business/)

In Action

Collaborative partnerships were the cornerstones of the consortia that participated in Add Us In, an initiative sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy to identify and develop strategies to increase employment opportunities within the small business community for individuals with disabilities. The organizations involved found new ways to partner around workforce development for people with disabilities. Examples include a partnership between the nonprofit TransCen, Inc. and the Montgomery County, Maryland Hispanic Chamber of Commerce; and a consortium in Chicago that forged partnerships between local businesses and the city’s Schwab Rehabilitation Hospital and Youth Connection Charter School. Another alliance

between local chambers of commerce, workforce development groups and the Business Leadership Network in Kansas City led to the development of the Urban Career Academy, a soft skills and job preparation curriculum for youth with disabilities. All of these relationships yielded disability-related recruitment, skills training and job placement success for the groups involved. ●



Internship Programs

Small businesses are known for tapping into the value of interns, and research shows that employers who have internships for people with disabilities are 4.5 times more likely to hire a person with a disability than those who do not. However, many individual small business owners may not have the time to invest in seeking out interns or coordinating an internship program. With this in mind, business associations can serve an important role by taking on the necessary activities to connect their member businesses to interns with disabilities.

Such efforts can be as simple as directing members to recruitment sources such as the Workforce Recruitment Program, a free referral service that connects employers to qualified intern candidates with disabilities. Other business associations choose to partner with local service providers to host job fairs and job matching programs for student interns with disabilities, while others have gone as far as to sponsor their own internship programs, working to place interns with member businesses directly. Regardless of what form they take, such efforts can deliver a unique member benefit, while promoting a culture of disability inclusion in your local community.



Want to Learn More?

Pointing your members to the following resources can help them find and connect with interns with disabilities:

- [Workforce Recruitment Program for College Students with Disabilities \(www.wrp.jobs\)](http://www.wrp.jobs)
- [AskEARN.org: Workplace Mentoring Primer \(askearn.org/pwm.cfm\)](http://askearn.org/pwm.cfm)
- [National Collaborative on Leadership and Disability for Youth Internship Guide \(nclد-youth.info/Downloads/intern-guide-final.pdf\)](http://nclد-youth.info/Downloads/intern-guide-final.pdf)
- [National Business & Disability Council: Emerging Leaders Summer Internship Program for Students with Disabilities \(www.viscardicenter.org/services/nbdc/emerging-leaders/\)](http://www.viscardicenter.org/services/nbdc/emerging-leaders/)
- [Disability.gov: Mentoring and Internship Programs \(1.usa.gov/1MkjOqi\)](http://1.usa.gov/1MkjOqi)
- [Inclusive Internship Programs: A How-To Guide for Employers \(1.usa.gov/1PkPZWE\)](http://1.usa.gov/1PkPZWE)

In Action

Internship programs and job placements for youth with disabilities were running themes in the activities of several consortia participating in Add Us In, an initiative sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy to identify and develop strategies to increase employment opportunities within the small business community for individuals with disabilities. Examples include the Add Us In consortium in Kansas City, through which business associations partnered with community groups to develop the Urban Career Academy, a soft skills and job preparation curriculum for youth with disabilities. Another consortium in California featured the National Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce placing interns with disabilities in LGBT-owned businesses up and down the state. And New Jersey's Business Leadership Network, which is part of the state's chamber of commerce, created a curriculum to help train and place interns with disabilities in local businesses. ●



Events

As a business association, member education is likely to be a core part of your mission. You are therefore well positioned to help educate your member businesses on the value and benefits of fostering an inclusive, disability-friendly workplace. Many business groups offer such education in the form of events and professional development opportunities, such as the following:

- Classroom-style educational breakfasts or “lunch-and-learns”
- Networking events
- Webinars
- Online training modules
- Job fairs
- Disability mentoring days

There are a host of disability employment topics that can be covered during such events, which are easy-to-plan thanks to free content and training modules offered by numerous organizations. Potential topics for these events include:

- Disability Employment 101 & The Disability Dividend
- Communicating with Colleagues and Job Seekers with Disabilities
- The Value of Interns with Disabilities
- Understanding Workplace Accommodations
- Accessible Technology Considerations for Employers
- Inclusive Employment Strategies for Small Businesses
- Retention & the Value of Workplace Flexibility
- Increasing Your Eligibility for Federal Contracts by Hiring People with Disabilities: Understanding Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act
- Employer Tax Incentives for Hiring People with Disabilities

For a timely and relevant “hook,” you might consider hosting such events in October during National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM). Some business associations also choose to partner with other community organizations or service groups to co-host these types of events.



Want to Learn More?

The following resources may be helpful to organizations planning an educational event about disability employment practices:

- [Disability and Veterans Community Resources Directory \(1.usa.gov/1f81e7C\)](https://1.usa.gov/1f81e7C)
- [AskEARN.org: Customized Training \(www.askearn.org/form-requestTraining.cfm\)](http://www.askearn.org/form-requestTraining.cfm)

- [Job Accommodation Network: Disability Etiquette \(askjan.org/topics/disetiq.htm\)](http://askjan.org/topics/disetiq.htm)
- [Job Accommodation Network: Multimedia Training Microsite \(www.askjan.org/training/library.htm\)](http://www.askjan.org/training/library.htm)
- [Campaign for Disability Employment \(www.whatcanyoudocampaign.org\)](http://www.whatcanyoudocampaign.org)

In Action

Several of the consortia involved in Add Us In—an initiative sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy to identify and develop strategies to increase employment opportunities within the small business community for individuals with disabilities—held events to educate local businesses. These ranged from brown bag lunches to job fairs that connected businesses to qualified candidates with disabilities. One event in Bloomfield, Connecticut was co-sponsored by a member of the Connecticut Business Leadership Network, Thomas Hooker Brewing Company. The brewery, which employs numerous people with disabilities, hosted a “Best Practices and Brew Party” to encourage other local businesses to learn about integrating people with disabilities into their workforces and the benefits of doing so. Several consortia also hosted webinars on hot topics, such as meeting the disability hiring goals of Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act—something of particular interest to small businesses who want to go after federal contracts. ●

Steps *Business Associations* Can Take to Help Employers Understand the Value of Disability Diversity



Peer Leadership

In today's business world, immeasurable value is derived from peer-to-peer knowledge sharing. That's why networking opportunities and business leadership circles are so crucial, and why business associations play such a vital role in facilitating knowledge sharing among members.

Your organization can take that role a step further by connecting member businesses with other business leaders who have successfully hired and benefited from employees with disabilities. After all, hearing first-hand experiences and satisfied testimonials from other respected business leaders can serve as a powerful endorsement for proactively pursuing disability diversity.

As a first step, a business association might recruit two to three members as disability employment "champions"—employers that have had successful experiences recruiting, hiring and advancing employees with disabilities—and then ask those individuals to serve as points of contact for others interested in learning more. During National Disability Employment Awareness Month in October (or any other opportune time), you could host a meet-and-greet event to connect member businesses with those champions, and with other disability-related service providers. Other ideas include forming an advisory member committee, which functions much like an affinity group devoted to disability and diversity issues, or matching members with mentors who can help guide their disability inclusion efforts. Ultimately, the experiences of your designated champions can be featured in media and communications activities designed to raise awareness around the issue of disability employment.

In Action

Several consortia involved in Add Us In—an initiative sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy to identify and develop strategies to increase employment opportunities within the small business community for individuals with disabilities—leveraged the "business champion" model by encouraging seasoned local businesses to share their positive experiences related to disability employment. For instance, the Connecticut and Maryland consortia created Business Advisory Groups comprised of business champions with an interest in, knowledge of or expertise in disability employment. Further, the Connecticut Business Leadership Network enlisted one of its members, the Thomas Hooker Brewing Company, to host a "Best Practices and Brew Party" to encourage other local businesses to follow their lead on inclusive employment. And the business groups involved in the California Add Us In consortium recruited WriteAway Communications to appear in a promotional video documenting its positive experiences. "These businesses had great stories to share, and they wanted to shout it from the rooftops," said Sam McClure, Vice President of Affiliate and External Relations at the National Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce, a member of the California Add Us In consortium. ●



Leveraging Media

Communication is at the heart of every awareness raising effort—including campaigns designed to promote workplaces that are inclusive of people with disabilities. By leveraging new and traditional media, business associations can tell an important story about disability inclusion and shape the attitudes and behaviors of their member businesses for the better.

After pursuing the other engagement strategies described throughout the *Steps to Success*, your association should talk about it. Widely promote your commitment to disability employment, your members' positive experiences, your workforce development programs, and the topic in general through your organization's channels, and those of your partners. To start, you can:

- **Feature this *Steps to Success* tool in your magazine or newsletter** — Articles can inform your small business members about the *Steps to Success*, as well as specific ideas on ways members can implement relevant activities within their organization.
- **Feature the *Steps to Success* and related content in your social media activities** — Your organization's activities on the disability employment front provide an interesting hook for social media platforms, including Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter.
- **Post a *Steps to Success* web link** — A link on your Home page informs members and other visitors about information of interest to them while also helping to keep your website dynamic and up to date.
- **Distribute the *Steps to Success* in hard copy** — This website makes it easy to print and co-brand this *Steps to Success* toolkit. Simply add your organization's own logo/brand identity to the cover page, and print hard copies to distribute at conferences, member events and the like.

While efforts can be made at any time of the year, National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) offers a timely hook for engaging in proactive outreach. Ideas include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **Send a “President’s Message” or blog post about NDEAM** — Association leaders can take advantage of NDEAM to send a special e-mail to members encouraging them to participate and providing information about how they can do so. Alternatively (or in addition), NDEAM could be incorporated into speeches or the President's column in your organization's monthly publication.
- **Develop a disability employment webpage** — NDEAM is a great time to unveil a dedicated disability employment webpage for members listing tools and resources (including the *Steps to Success*) to help them understand related issues and implement steps to foster a disability inclusive workplace.
- **Distribute NDEAM posters** — In today's world of electronic communication, sending something useful and tangible to members can make an impact and reinforce the value of association membership. Associations can use the occasion of NDEAM to send their members a poster to hang in employee break areas or other locations that employees frequent to promote a positive, inclusive message.

- **Solicit an NDEAM proclamation** — Your organization and its partners can cultivate community-wide support for NDEAM by asking your mayor, governor or other official to formally proclaim the event. A template that organizations can easily customize is available to assist in soliciting such a proclamation.
- **Reach out to local media** — NDEAM presents an opportunity to increase your visibility through local TV, radio and print media. Ideas include writing an op-ed piece or letter to the editor about the value and talent people with disabilities have to offer in the workplace and community or encouraging local TV or radio news to run a feature on one or more of your members observing the month.



Want to Learn More?

The resources below can support business associations in their efforts to promote effective disability employment practices:

- [National Disability Employment Awareness Month Toolkit: Ideas for Associations and Unions \(1.usa.gov/1L647S8\)](https://1.usa.gov/1L647S8)
- [Campaign for Disability Employment Outreach Toolkits \(bit.ly/1Plc5Ix\)](https://bit.ly/1Plc5Ix) ●

