



DISABILITY INCLUSION TOOLKIT

In all employment settings, a diverse workforce means more perspectives on how to face challenges and achieve organizational success. Although the term “diversity” is typically used in reference to differences in race or ethnicity, it actually encompasses an infinite range of differences—including disability.

When it comes to ensuring a workplace inclusive of the skills and talents of people with disabilities, however, not all NILG members may know where to start. The *NILG Disability Inclusion Toolkit* provides a path, addressing 8 important topics and outlining a range of effective strategies that employers, including federal contractors and sub-contractors can use to effectively recruit, hire, retain, and advance skilled workers with disabilities. Employers who adopt these practices will foster a disability-inclusive work culture throughout their organizations.

The information in this toolkit will be updated periodically, and ILG partners and constituents are highly encouraged to suggest additional resources to add, especially as they relate to disability inclusive policies and practices in action at their own companies.

To get started, choose a topic below.

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The *NILG Disability Inclusion Toolkit* is an outcome of NILG’s Alliance with the U. S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP). Through this Alliance, NILG works with ODEP to promote the recruitment, hiring, retention, and advancement of individuals with disabilities, including veterans with disabilities, with members including federal contractors and sub-contractors through outreach, education, and technical assistance activities.

The material and information contained in this toolkit is for general information purposes only and is not designed to take the place of NILG member legal counsel or guidance.

Federal Disability Laws

Although the value of fostering a disability inclusive culture is about more than compliance, it is important for the federal contractor community to be familiar with various federal disability nondiscrimination laws that may apply to their companies. These include:

- The [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#), one of the nation's most comprehensive pieces of civil rights legislation, the ADA was signed into law on July 26, 1990. It prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability and guarantees that people with disabilities have the same opportunities as everyone else to participate in the mainstream of American life, with each of five titles addressing different aspects. Title I focuses on employment. In addition to prohibiting discrimination, Title I requires covered employers to provide "reasonable accommodations" to qualified job applicants and employees with disabilities. A reasonable accommodation is defined as any change or adjustment to a job, work environment, or the way things are usually done that would allow an individual with a disability to apply for a job, perform job functions, or enjoy equal access to benefits available to other employees.
- The [Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act \(ADAAA\) of 2008](#), which became effective on January 1, 2009, and its implementing regulations made a number of significant changes to the ADA. Among these is a requirement that courts interpreting the ADA and related laws focus on whether the covered entity has discriminated, as opposed to whether the individual seeking protection has an impairment that meets the technical definition of the term "disability." The ADAAA retains the basic definition of "disability" as an impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a record of such an impairment, or being regarded as having such an impairment; however, it changes the way that the statutory terms should be interpreted.
- The [Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as Amended](#) prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in programs conducted by federal agencies, in programs receiving federal financial assistance, in federal employment and in the employment practices of federal contractors. The standards for determining employment discrimination under this law are the same as those used in Title I of the ADA. Of particular interest to the federal contractor community is Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act, which covers entities receiving federal contracts.
 - [Section 503](#) prohibits employers with federal contracts (or subcontracts) that exceed \$15,000 from discriminating against applicants and employees with disabilities and take affirmative steps to hire, retain and promote qualified individuals with disabilities. In 2014, updates to Section 503 strengthened these affirmative action requirements, creating, for the first time ever, measurable goals. They also set a requirement that covered employers invite applicants and employees to self-identify as people with disabilities.

- The [Family and Medical Leave Act \(FMLA\)](#) covers private-sector employers with 50 or more employees in 20 or more workweeks in the current or preceding calendar year, including a joint employer or successor in interest to a covered employer. It provides eligible employees of these covered employers up to 12 workweeks of unpaid, job-protected leave in a 12-month period for specified family and medical reasons, among them the employee's own serious health condition.
- The [Vietnam Era Veterans' Readjustment Assistance Act \(VEVRAA\)](#) requires employers with federal contracts or subcontracts that exceed \$150,000 to take affirmative action to employ and advance in employment specified categories of veterans and prohibits discrimination against such veterans. These categories include disabled veterans (in addition to recently separated veterans, Armed Forces Service Medal veterans, and Active Duty Wartime or Campaign Badge veterans).

Resources

- The [ADA National Network](#) provides information, guidance, technical assistance and training on all titles of the ADA, including Title I (Employment). Services are tailored to meet the needs of business, government and individuals at local, regional, and national levels.
- The [Disability Nondiscrimination Law Advisor](#) helps employers determine which federal disability nondiscrimination laws apply to their business or organization and learn their responsibilities under them.
- The [Family and Medical Leave Act \(FMLA\) Advisor](#) helps employees and employers understand their rights and responsibilities under the FMLA.
- The [Job Accommodation Network \(JAN\)](#) provides extensive technical assistance on the reasonable accommodations provisions of the ADA.
- [A Guide to Disability Rights Laws](#), published by the U.S. Department of Justice, is a user-friendly guide to the ADA and related disability rights legislation.
- [ADA.gov](#), a comprehensive site from the U.S. Department of Justice, has information, resources, and technical assistance materials on all aspects of the ADA and ADAAA, with links to the various agencies that have enforcement responsibilities.
- The U.S. [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission](#), the agency responsible for administering the ADA's employment provisions, provides [regulatory guidance and technical assistance](#) on all aspects of the law related to employment.

- [**Employer Assistance Resource Network on Disability Inclusion \(EARN\) Laws & Regulations**](#)

EARN provides information on disability employment laws, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Vietnam Era Veterans' Readjustment Assistance Act of 1974, the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993, Workers' Compensation, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014, and even a link to [Tax Incentives](#).

Disability Training & Technical Assistance

Federal contractors and sub-contractors can tap a wide range of training and technical assistance materials to educate companies' leadership and employees about the importance of and strategies for fostering a disability-inclusive work culture. These include:

- The [Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion \(EARN\)](#) offers training on a range of disability inclusion topics via webinars and customized programs.
- The [Job Accommodation Network \(JAN\)](#) offers a [monthly webcast series](#) on a range of topics related to accommodations for individuals with disabilities. It also provides a series of ["Just In Time" online training modules](#), each of which can be used by employees individually at their computers or incorporated into larger training efforts. One of the newest tools is JAN's [Workplace Accommodation Toolkit](#).
- The [Campaign for Disability Employment](#) is a multi-faceted outreach initiative that provides a range of materials employers can use for workplace-based training activities, including public service announcements with accompanying discussion guides and posters.
- [National Disability Employment Awareness Month](#), held each October, offers an opportune time to educate about a company's commitment to disability inclusion and celebrate the many contributions of its employees with disabilities.
- [Business Strategies that Work: A Framework for Disability Inclusion](#) identifies promising employment policies and practices for recruiting, hiring, retaining, and advancing qualified individuals with disabilities. It also has an [Accompanying Research and Resource Compendium](#) and [Rack Card](#).
- [Building an Inclusive Workforce: A Four-Step Reference Guide](#) to recruiting, hiring and retaining employees with disabilities outlines four simple steps to increase workforce inclusion, complete with web links to resources available to help organizations benefit from the talents of individuals with disabilities.
- A [Disability Video](#) created by the DC Government shows people with and without disabilities in work-related and social settings and provides tips on how to interact.
- [Disability Inclusion](#) resources from Ernest Young offers practical tips for making your workplace more inclusive of individuals with disabilities, as well as those from all other diversities.

- The [**Employer Toolkit**](#) from the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University helps employers with inclusive culture, policies, practices, management, hiring, retention, accommodation, and advancement of individuals with disabilities.
- [**Communicating With and About People with Disabilities**](#) provides suggestions on how to relate to and communicate with and about people with disabilities.
- The [**National Study of Employers**](#), published on October 1, 2014, by the Families and Work Institute (FWI) and the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) offers key disability employment policy recommendations for employers.

Accessibility

Clearly, a disability-inclusive workplace is an accessible workplace. This inclusion applies to not only physical accessibility, such as wheelchair ramps, braille signage, and accessible restrooms, but also digital accessibility, where information and communication technology is accessible to all and/or compatible with assistive technology devices. The key is to ensure doors are open, whether literally or virtually. Resources include:

Digital Accessibility

- The [Partnership on Employment and Accessible Technology \(PEAT\)](#) is a multi-faceted initiative to foster collaboration and action around accessible technology in the workplace. It offers a range of resources to assist employers, including:
 - [TechCheck](#) helps employers self-assess their current technology accessibility practices and identify ways to strengthen them.
 - [TalentWorks](#) helps employers and human resource managers ensure their eRecruiting technologies are accessible to all job seekers—including those with disabilities.
 - [Accessible Technology Action Steps: A Guide for Employers](#) provides a step-by-step primer for employers on accessible workplace technology.
- [How People with Disabilities Use the Web](#) describes tools and approaches that people with different disabilities use to browse the Web and the design barriers they encounter.
- [Getting Started with Web Accessibility](#) provides guidelines and resources to help make the Web accessible to people with disabilities.
- [Social Media Accessibility Tips](#) includes information on what content managers need to know as well as myths about social media accessibility.
- [Web Accessibility](#) from the Job Accommodation Network (JAN) provides many web accessibility tools, including web accessibility assessment and accessible online job application assistance.
- [WebAIM's WAVE 3.0](#) is a tool to help determine whether or not your site or multimedia products are accessible (and to what extent).

Physical Accessibility

- [A Guide to Planning Accessible Meetings, Events & Conferences](#) offers practical guidance from a host of meeting planning professionals and subject-matter experts.
- [Equal Access Universal Design of Physical Spaces](#) provides a checklist for designing spaces that are welcoming, accessible and usable in campus facilities from the Do It program at University of Washington.
- [How to Make Presentations Accessible for All](#) provides guidance on how to make presentations, talks, meetings and training accessible to all of your potential audience, including people with disabilities and others.

Internships & Mentoring

Many companies use internships to fill short-term staffing needs and evaluate potential future staff—especially people who may be new to the workforce. Internships can also help increase disability diversity. In fact, research shows that employers who have interns with disabilities are 4.5 times more likely to hire a person with a disability. A related practice is mentoring, which can also support disability inclusion as well as improve employees' supervisory skills. Resources include:

- The [Inclusive Internship Guide](#) assists public and private employers of all sizes to learn about the benefits and logistics of facilitating internship programs that attract all young adults, including those with disabilities.
- [Entry Point](#), an internship program with the American Association for the Advancement of Science, identifies and recruits students with apparent and non-apparent disabilities studying science, engineering, mathematics, computer science, and business for internships and co-op opportunities.
- [Workforce Recruitment Program \(WRP\)](#) is a resource through which private businesses and federal agencies nationwide can identify qualified interns as well as summer and full-time candidates from a wide range of professional fields. Applicants are highly motivated postsecondary students and recent graduates with disabilities.
- [Disability Mentoring Day](#) is a national effort coordinated by the American Association of People with Disabilities the third Wednesday of October every year to promote career development for students and job seekers with disabilities through hands-on career exploration and ongoing mentoring relationships.
- [Tips for Mentoring a Student Intern Who Has a Disability](#) is a fact sheet that provides guidance on mentoring interns with disabilities.
- [Career Opportunities for Students with Disabilities \(COSD\)](#) - COSD offers many opportunities to connect with higher education professionals, other employers and college students with disabilities. Support of COSD can be accomplished through monetary or in-kind donations. COSD provides corporate sponsors with a customized value-added benefit in return for their corporate support through a number of products, services and events. COSD is part of the National Organization on Disability's (NOD) Campus to Careers Innovation Team, along with the University of Massachusetts Medical School's Work Without Limits, and The Coca-Cola Foundation.

- [Rising Leadership Academy](#) - This Rising Leadership Academy is a free two-day networking and career readiness opportunity for college students and recent graduates with disabilities. This academy takes place in conjunction with the USBLN Annual Conference. During the Rising Leadership Academy, students experience cutting-edge educational sessions and exciting interactive programming with high-profile speakers. Students also participate in numerous networking opportunities, including exclusive facilitated networking sessions that connect Rising Leaders to representatives from USBLN member companies/businesses—many of which are federal contractors.
- [The Gallaudet Internship Program](#), a federally chartered private university for the education of the Deaf and hard of hearing located in Washington, DC, is a resource where employers can find and recruit Gallaudet students and alumni for internships and jobs within an organization.
- [National Institute Technology for the Deaf](#), is one of nine colleges of Rochester Institute of Technology, providing employers co-op and graduate students that are well trained, highly skilled candidates, that are ready to work.

Community Outreach

Partnering with local disability and workforce development service providers is a key strategy for increasing disability inclusion. In many cases, such organizations can connect companies with job seekers with disabilities directly or provide access to candidate databases. They may also provide ongoing supports that can assist in effectively bringing people with disabilities on board—and ensuring their success for years to come. Resources for identifying potential partners include:

- [American Job Centers](#) (AJCs) centralize local employment and training services under one roof to help people both with and without disabilities prepare for and obtain employment. Funded by the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration and overseen by regional Workforce Investment Boards, AJCs also help businesses recruit job candidates and can be valuable partners to employer interested in diversifying their workforce with qualified people with disabilities.
- The [Centers for Independent Living \(CIL\) Directory](#) assists employers and others to locate CILs in their communities. CILs, community-based, cross-disability nonprofit agencies operated by people with disabilities for people with disabilities, provide an array of services, including related to employment. As such, they can be effective partners to employers seeking to recruit people with disabilities. CILs can also advise on employment supports, such as transportation and technology that may impact an employer's ability to hire, retain, and advance people with disabilities.
- [Employment Networks](#) are private organizations or public agencies that have agreed to provide employment services, vocational rehabilitation services, and other types of support to beneficiaries with disabilities under the Social Security Administration's Ticket to Work Program. Employers can contact one or more Employment Networks in their area to let them know they are interested in employing people with disabilities and discuss the skills they need.
- The [Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation/National Employment Team](#) is a nationwide network of business consultants that serve as employers' points of contact for vocational rehabilitation (VR), the primary system of services and resources that specifically addresses the employment needs of individuals with disabilities. The NET specializes in serving VR agencies' business customers, working to ensure their workforce needs and expectations are understood and met.

- The [Department of Veterans Affairs \(VA\), Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Service](#) helps employers across the country fill workforce needs with trained, educated, and experienced disabled veterans. It provides recruitment assistance based on employers' specific qualification requirements, and candidates are skilled and pre-screened. Through the service, employers also gain access to resources to assist with recruitment, retention and succession-planning strategies.

Inclusion across the Lifecycle

Disability inclusion is about more than hiring people with disabilities; it is also about retention and advancement including strategies to retain workers who acquire age-related disabilities. Below are resources to assist with fostering inclusion throughout the employment lifecycle:

Hiring

- The [Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion \(EARN\)](#) is a free resource for employers seeking to recruit, hire, retain, and advance qualified employees with disabilities. It offers a range of resources on inclusive policies and practices.
- [TalentWorks](#) is a tool from the Partnership on Employment and Accessible Technology (PEAT) that assists employers and human resources (HR) professionals make their eRecruiting technologies accessible to all job seekers, including those with disabilities.
- [Workforce Recruitment Program \(WRP\)](#) is a resource through which private businesses and federal agencies nationwide can identify qualified interns as well as summer and full-time candidates from a wide range of professional fields. Applicants are highly motivated postsecondary students and recent graduates with disabilities including veterans.
- [Project SEARCH High School Transition Program](#) is a unique, business-led, one-year, school-to-work program that takes place entirely at the workplace, combining classroom instruction, career exploration, and hands-on training.
- [Employing People with Disabilities: Practices and Policies Related to Recruiting and Hiring Employees with Disabilities](#) highlights research commissioned by and conducted in collaboration with Cornell University's ILR School Employment and Disability Institute. Nearly two-thirds (61%) of organizations include people with disabilities explicitly in their diversity and inclusion plans and 58% indicate training HR staff and supervisors on effectively interviewing people with disabilities. Nearly one-half (45%) of organizations found that training HR staff and supervisors on interviewing people with disabilities to be very effective in the recruitment or hiring of people with disabilities.
- [Do Ask, Do Tell](#) is a report developed by The Conference Board with support from the Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN). It explores research related to disability disclosure in the workplace and identifies strategies for encouraging it in the context of Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act.

- The [Disability Inclusion Starts with You Video](#), developed by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP), explains why federal contractors ask job applicants and employees to voluntarily self-identify as a person with a disability and the important role doing so plays in ensuring equal employment opportunity.
- The [Work Opportunity Tax Credit \(WOTC\)](#) is a federal tax credit available to employers that hire individuals from certain target groups (including individuals with disabilities). Other [Tax Deductions and Incentives](#) may also be available to private employers that make structural adaptations or other accommodations for employees or customers with disabilities.

Retention/Advancement

- [A Toolkit for Establishing and Maintaining Successful Employee Resource Groups](#) helps employers develop or enhance disability-related Employee Resource Groups (ERGs). ERGs—which can be related to any number of common experiences—are found in 90 percent of Fortune 500 companies.. NILG members already participating in this practice include:
 - [Verizon](#)
 - [GE](#)
 - [Microsoft](#)
- The [Stay-At-Work/Return-To-Work Fact Sheet](#) explores strategies for keeping at or returning to work employees who experience unexpected illness or disability, as do various [Return-to-Work Resources](#) from the Job Accommodation Network (JAN). [Successful Return-to-Work Programs](#) benefit both employees and employers, including an estimated \$8-\$10 savings for every \$1 invested in such programs.
 - [MetLife](#)
- The [Return-to-Work Toolkit](#) helps both employers and employees understand the return-to-work process and provides resources to assist getting employees back on the job quickly and smoothly.
- The [Workplace Flexibility Toolkit](#) provides a wealth of information on a universal strategy that can meet the needs of employers and their employees by examining the time (when), location (where) and manner (how) in which an employee works. Related resources include the [Flexible Work Arrangements Fact Sheet](#) and [Business Case for Workplace Flexibility](#).

- [**Employer Strategies for Recruiting and Retaining People with Disabilities and Veterans**](#) offers answers to frequently asked questions about hiring people with disabilities, including disabled veterans, and ensuring their success once on board.
- Resources on [**Aging**](#) from the Job Accommodation Network (JAN) can assist in developing strategies for retaining the talents of older workers who may develop disabilities as they age.

Accommodations

All employees need the right tools to perform their jobs. Similarly, people with disabilities may need workplace adjustments, or accommodations, to maximize their productivity. Such accommodations may be tangible, such as certain technologies or special chairs or desks, or non-tangible, such as a flexible schedule or option to telecommute. Regardless, most are no or low cost, while yielding considerable benefits through increased retention and productivity. Resources include:

- The [**Job Accommodation Network \(JAN\)**](#) offers free, expert, and confidential consultation on workplace accommodations, the Americans with Disabilities Act and other disability-related legislation. Specific resources of interest to higher education institutions include:
 - [Occupation and Industry Series: Accommodating Educators with Disabilities](#)
 - [A to Z of Accommodations and Disabilities](#)
 - [SOAR \(Searchable Online Accommodation Resource\)](#)
 - [Workplace Accommodations: Low Cost, High Impact](#)
 - [Employers' Practical Guide to Reasonable Accommodation Under the Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#)
 - [Workplace Accommodation Toolkit](#)
- [**Employer-Provided Leave and the Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)**](#) provides answers to common questions to assist employers and employees understand circumstances when leave may be a reasonable accommodation under the ADA.
- The [**Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs \(OFCCP\) Pocket Card**](#) is a resource for employees that explains the process for requesting a reasonable accommodation.

Accountability & Assessment

The adoption of disability inclusive policies and procedures is essential, but ultimately, a higher education institution must take steps to ensure their effective implementation. Several self-assessment tools are available that colleges and universities can leverage to benchmark their efforts and measure progress overtime. In addition to providing valuable information about areas for improvement, participation in these tools can help demonstrate a good faith effort to achieve disability inclusion goals.

- The [Section 503 Self-Evaluation Compliance Tool](#) is an online, confidential tool developed by the U.S. Business Leadership Network (USBLN) that allows federal contractors and sub-contractors to conduct an initial baseline assessment and then track progress over time.
- The [Disability Employment Tracker](#), sponsored by the National Organization on Disability, helps employers, including but not limited to federal contractors and sub-contractors, confidentially assess their disability hiring efforts across six key areas.
- The [Disability Employment Index](#) is a benchmarking tool jointly sponsored by the American Association of People with Disabilities and the U.S. Business Leadership Network (USBLN) that offers employers the opportunity to receive an objective score on their disability inclusion policies and practices.
- [Monitoring Reasonable Accommodations](#) from the Job Accommodation Network (JAN) offers tips for employers to follow to monitor the effectiveness of workplace accommodations and provides a sample form to assist in doing so.
- [TechCheck](#) is a tool from the Partnership on Employment and Accessible Technology (PEAT) that helps employers self-assess their current technology accessibility practices and identify ways to strengthen them.