



Steps to Getting Started with Disability Inclusion

One of the most frequently asked questions we get about disability inclusion is, “How can I get started?” If you are new to disability employment and inclusion it can seem like a daunting task. So, we are simplifying our top 10 list of what to do, and how to get started.

- 1. Understand people with disabilities can be a viable part of your workforce.** First, you have to change the way you think about people with disabilities. And that starts with breaking the assumptions that people with disabilities can’t work, and should not be part of a workforce. 1 in 5 people is an individual with a disability. So, chances are in your workplace you are already working with or for people with disabilities. People with disabilities are engineers, truck drivers, and CEO’s. So, Step 1 – stop thinking people with disabilities can’t work.
- 2. Decide what you want your program to be, what will it look like, what will make it unique to your company?** The saying is, “If you don’t know where you are going, any road will take you there.” Starting with a goal and a vision is the best place to start. Whether you are going big or starting small – know what you want to accomplish and what success will look like for your company.
- 3. Conduct an audit of existing disability initiatives. Where are you? Where should you be?** A baseline is critical. You have to know where you are so you can help define where you want to go. There are several external tools to assist companies in assessing your current state. You can use the National Organization on Disability’s [The Tracker](#), Cornell University’s [BenchmarkAbility](#), or DisabilityIN’s [Disability Equality Index](#).
- 4. Identify opportunities to bring candidates with disabilities into your workforce.** Hire based on your business needs. Many people think hiring a person with a disability is a charitable endeavor, but it is not. It is about satisfying the needs of your business.



5. **Identify partners who will help supply talent with disabilities.** Sourcing talent with disabilities can be challenging. But many local and national resources exist to help you find people with disabilities to do your jobs. You can access organizations like Goodwill, the Arc or state vocational rehabilitation system. And if you use a temp agency or head hunters, make sure you tell them you want them sourcing from organizations that help people with disabilities become employed.
6. **Set goals for hiring people with disabilities.** Whether you will hire 30 people or 300, we recommend starting with a 10% goal and finding people with disabilities to fill your open positions.
7. **Establish Internal Champions/Stakeholders – supporters who will help answer questions and communicate information to leaders.** Champions within the organization can be a critical component to ensuring success of your program. They can answer questions, eliminate misunderstandings and help advocate for more champions.
8. **Train your staff.** It will be important to train your teams as you start a new initiative. There will be questions, and even some concerns. So it is important to address those early and let team members know what the program is and what it is not --- e.g. addressing a business need vs. “giving back to the community”. Then as your program advances look for opportunities for ongoing training --- such as including disability awareness training in your onboarding processes, training for mentors or work buddies, etc.
9. **Don’t be afraid to make mistakes.** No new initiative goes off without a hitch. So, be prepared you will make mistakes and pivot just as you would any other project. A mistake does not signal failure, it signals an opportunity to do things better.
10. **Track and Measure progress.** It will be important to measure your progress against your goals. You should assess not only hiring outcomes, but community partners, training, and activities of your champions. Reviewing your program holistically will help you identify more opportunities to grow and expand.