PLANNING PROCESS

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"As with any new initiative, it is important to ensure proper planning and alignment with business objectives. It is no different when starting a disability inclusion program. Proper planning will ensure effective implementation, program adoption, growth and expansion."

— Meg O'Connell, President, Global Disability Inclusion

In This Chapter

| Taking a long-term perspective and sample timeline | Assessing how a disability inclusion program fits into your site's goals | Building a team for success with internal and external partners |

Be prepared to be patient. Implementing a disability employment and inclusion hiring program takes time. Here is a sample implementation process timeline for a pilot program leading to national rollout.

Ultimately, the length of time to reach meaningful employment levels will depend on a range of factors including site complexity, scale and policies and procedures.

Click here to view a full-size, printable version of the Sample Implementation Timeline

1. BUY-IN

Secure senior leadership agreement to move forward with assessment (resources and concept). Ideally, buy-in includes:
- Operations person with direct CEO report
- HR and Talent Acquisition

2. ASSESSMENT

Review company policies, practices, programs and procedures:
- Workplace
- Workforce
- Marketplace

Understand what needs to change

Assess size of opportunity

3. PLANNING

Develop plan to address identified gaps:
- Resources needed
- Timeline
- Targets (milestones and outcomes)
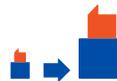- Project lead and sponsor

Approve the plan (head of operations)

4. PILOT ROLLOUT

Select pilot sites:
- Track progress against milestones and metrics
- Execute internal communications plan

Build local partnerships for local pipelines

Translate learnings into revised rollout plan

5. SCALE ROLLOUT

Implement internal communications for broader internal rollout (including goals, expectations, timeline, and marketing)

Same as pilot but execute plan for national rollout

6. STEADY STATE

Track, measure, report

Finalize ongoing structure and ownership

Implement external communications

PLANNING PROCESS

CEO Support Speeds the Process

The most effective compressor of timelines is senior management buy-in. The more visibility from your CEO, the quicker change occurs.

Assessing Site Impact

Having clearly defined the overall goals for your initiative, you will now want to assess how this will impact the site where you have chosen to begin your implementation.

Determine how a disability employment and inclusion program fits into your site's goals for hiring, production and value creation. For example, the site may want to:

- Increase the retention rate for certain positions or across a location
- Meet demand for a larger labor pool
- Reduce absenteeism for a department or location
- Lower recruitment costs for a facility or company

Evaluate available jobs and current openings based on a number of factors:

- Job title and description — technical and personal skills required
- Application and interview process
- Immediate supervision
- Organization of workplace, including employee non-work areas
- Safety
- Quality
- Communication styles

Determine whether current site staffing firms or contractors need assistance in understanding their role in ensuring the pipelines of talent include people with disabilities:

- Do they partner with local sources for talent with disabilities?
- Do they have resources and policies for reasonable accommodations?
- Do their staff members need training on recruiting and managing people with disabilities?

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Environmental and Job Analysis

As you start thinking about people with disabilities within the context of your broader employee population, consider:

Click to view the Environmental and Job Analysis Form

Diversity and Human Resource Goals

1. How many people do you hire per year, and what types of people do you look for?

2. What are your diversity goals in terms of hiring numbers, training and inclusion?

3. How do you recruit and who are your recruiting partners?

4. Where do you see the disability employment and inclusion program having the biggest impact in terms of your diversity and HR goals?

Employee Retention and Support History

5. What are your key strategies related to employee retention?

6. How do you support employees who may be struggling?

7. Have you made any reasonable accommodations in the past? If so, what were the supports and related performance concerns?

Incentive Planning

8. Do you tap into federal/state/local economic and workforce development incentives?

9. Do you pursue job training or other types of grants?

10. Do you collect Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC)?

11. How would the potential incentives you secure through your disability employment and inclusion program be most impactful?

PLANNING PROCESS

Building Your Team

Identifying the right internal and external people for your initiative's implementation team is critical for the success of the program.

Best practice internal governance structures typically have three distinct tiers for successful implementation:

- **Project Sponsor:** Ideally a C-level executive
- **Site Champion:** Ideally a senior site operations manager
- **Working team:** Pulled from relevant functions across the site(s) where the program is being implemented such as HR, Operations, Training, Diversity & Inclusion, Marketing, Communications, Safety, Workers Compensation, Return-to-Work, Information Technology, etc.

This is how that model *might* look in terms of responsibilities and recommended minimum time commitments — though, as always, it is important that you develop a structure that is best suited for your organization.
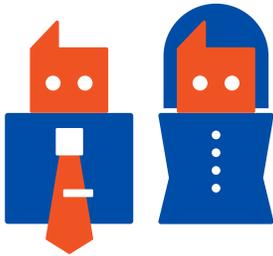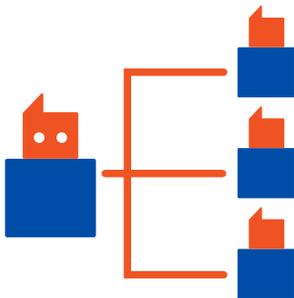
Project Sponsor

Two hours/month

Ideally C-level executive

Sets targets (i.e., disability inclusion percentage)

Actively and publicly sponsors initiative

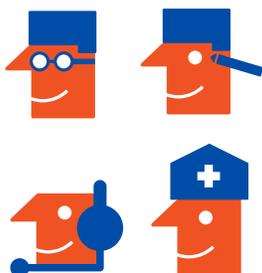Clears roadblocks (i.e., helps expedite changes)

Site Champion

Two hours/week

Site-level employee, preferably in a senior position within the site's operations line

Creates buy-in with management team and workforce

Brings together the work of the broader working team and pushes implementation agenda

Site Working Team

Five hours/week/person

HR, Operations, Accommodations, Diversity, etc.

Broader working team that makes operational decisions within their area to push implementation forward

Responsible for day-to-day workstream tasks including communications and other necessary work product

PLANNING PROCESS

Potential External Partners

Maximizing your success will likely include partnering with a number of external agencies. These include:

Local nonprofit service providers

There are likely several nonprofit service providers seeking to place people with disabilities into permanent positions in your area. These organizations can be encouraged and guided to form collaborative networks in which a single service provider acts as the primary point of contact between the site and their local network of providers.

National nonprofit partner(s)

On a larger scale, employers seeking to replicate national hiring initiatives may find it beneficial to work with a nonprofit partner that can manage the heavy lifting of implementation and local partnership building on the ground. Successful national initiatives have engaged a single nonprofit partner to act as a liaison with providers and government agencies on the ground, while also assisting in planning and coordination as the program grows. The Arc and Easter Seals are two examples of this kind of partner.

Vocational Rehabilitation

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is a federally funded work support and placement program that provides job training, on-the-job support and job placement to people with disabilities. In many cases, companies and local site staff may not come into contact with these agencies until after hiring has started. VR often refers its clients to local service providers who in turn take on responsibility for placing the client with a company in the community. However, in some cases, VR will directly place the applicant with a potential company. In addition, VR provides job coaches to individuals as well as groups of people with disabilities hired in the same location. Job coaches assist in a variety of tasks that may arise on the job and help provide support to new hires as needed, though not indefinitely.

Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR)

CSAVR is a network comprised of the 80 Directors that manage the VR programs in every state, Washington, D.C., and U.S. territories. CSAVR coordinates the following resources:

National Employment Team (NET):

The NET is a national team of VR Business Consultants that provide direct access to employment-ready candidates in the public VR system, and support disability employment specialists in providing services to these candidates. Designed in collaboration with business partners and supported by VR leadership, the NET provides business customers in every state, Washington, D.C., and U.S. territories with a range of services — from basic disability training for staff, to pre-employment support, to building a talent pipeline, to retention services, to diversity and compliance strategies, to a range of technical support.

Talent Acquisition Portal (TAP):

TAP is an online system which includes both a national pool of Vocational Rehabilitation candidates looking for employment and a job posting system for businesses looking to hire people with disabilities. TAP also supports Virtual Job Fairs that include candidates with disabilities from across the U.S.

PLANNING PROCESS

Potential External Partners (continued)
Disability employment and inclusion consultants

- Experts in the field can play a strategic consulting role in the planning and implementation phases of hiring initiatives, and be turned to for assessment needs and ongoing technical support. Disability employment and inclusion consultants may come from private firms, nonprofit partners or be provided by a funding organization, such as a foundation, that partners with consultants when funding company-specific national employment initiatives.

Facility Readiness

During your planning phase, you will want to ensure your facility is ready to allow your new employees to function at their best. Keep in mind that any needed modifications will only make the site better for all employees. Installation of automatic doors, for example, will make entering your facility easier for all employees. In addition to physical facility readiness components, it is important to think about information, communications and technology (ICT) readiness and accessibility. In many cases, addressing ICT accessibility concerns can be beneficial for all employees, not just employees with disabilities.

Click to view the Facility Checklist

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Sample Implementation Timeline

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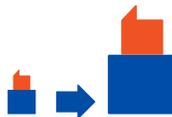- Project lead and sponsor

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Where do you see the disability employment and inclusion project having the biggest impact in terms of your diversity and HR goals?

EMPLOYEE RETENTION AND SUPPORT HISTORY

What are your key strategies related to employee retention?

Have you made any reasonable accommodations in the past?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

If so, what were the supports and related performance concerns?

How do you support employees who may be struggling?

INCENTIVE PLANNING

Do you tap into federal/state/local economic and workforce development incentives?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

Do you pursue job training or other types of grants?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

Do you collect Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC)?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

How would the potential incentives you secure through your disability employment and inclusion efforts be most impactful?

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Facility Checklist

Are there designated parking spaces for persons with disabilities that are close to the entrance of the worksite?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Is there a pathway without abrupt level changes or steps that leads from the parking area to the entrance?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If ramps are used to provide access, are they appropriately graded and are handrails provided?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Are the doors wide enough (36 inches) for people using wheelchairs?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Are they easy to open (e.g., not excessively heavy, with easily grasped handles, or automatic)?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Is the HR office in an accessible location?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Are pathways to the bathroom, water fountain, and public telephone accessible?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Can people with disabilities use them?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Are elevators accessible to all people with disabilities (e.g., control panels lower than 54 inches from the floor, raised symbols or numbers on the control panels)?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Is signage appropriate and accessible for people with visual, learning and cognitive disabilities (including the use of symbols and graphics)?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Does the emergency warning system include both audio and visual alarms?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Notes: