

# Guidance for Employers to Promote Disability Inclusion in the Workplace

Creating a workplace that promotes disability inclusion is about more than hiring people with disabilities. Disability inclusion, like any other inclusivity initiative, needs to be practiced holistically, from hiring and recruitment to culture and management practices, along with opportunities to develop new skills, advance, and succeed. Adopting disability inclusion in the workplace can lead to a stronger workforce and an expansion of the talent pool. It's also good for business – companies that practice disability inclusion are twice as likely to have better shareholder returns than companies who lack a strategy.



While many companies who value disability inclusion have good intentions, it can be challenging to operationalize policies and shift workplace culture. AARP has collaborated with Disability:IN to develop this helpful overview to assist employers as they aim to create more inclusive workplaces for people with disabilities.

## Hidden in Plain Sight

Many workers feel reluctant to share with employers and colleagues that they live with a disability, and this creates the perspective that disabilities are less common than they truly are. In fact, the opposite is true; according to the CDC, 1 in 4 adults live with a disability, and a 2017 study found that among white collar workers, 33% reported having a disability, though, only 3.2% reported sharing that with employers.

Creating more inclusive workplaces is an ongoing process and may sometimes feel overwhelming. Below, you can learn more about some best practices for employers to incorporate disability inclusion into their day-to-day activities and company culture.

## Creating a Culture of Inclusion

The first step to promoting and committing to disability inclusion for many companies is to create a culture of inclusion.

### Share a company-wide written statement of commitment to Diversity & Inclusion that's inclusive of disabilities



A good first step to changing company culture is to share a company-wide statement acknowledging that disabilities are an element of workplace DEI practices. This step would be the first of many to help a company embrace disability inclusion within the company and serve the external customer base.

### Start an officially recognized disability focused Employer Resource Group (ERG) or Affinity Group



ERGs and Affinity Groups are employee led groups whose aim is often to foster greater Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion within the company. These groups can provide support and advocacy for those with disabilities, ensuring all team members can innovate and participate in their own unique ways.

# Promoting Inclusion in Hiring and Recruiting

One of the most important actions that companies can take to become more inclusive is by re-visiting their hiring and recruitment practices to ensure they are accessible for all and attract people with disabilities.

## Broaden Your Talent Search



Companies that improve their inclusion of people with disabilities are more likely to have better shareholder returns. Specific approaches to inclusive hiring practices will vary from company to company, but to get started, companies should consider working with organizations that can help with hiring and recruiting such as Disability:IN, and the Employment Assistance Referral Network (EARN).

## Review Any Hiring Software for Accessibility Issues



If you use applicant tracking software or use a vendor or recruitment agency that does, make sure you review all steps in the application process to ensure online accessibility for applicants with disabilities. In addition to the existing standards for online accessibility, take note of other ways applicants with disabilities could be disadvantaged, such as timed tasks, video interviews, or gamified assessments.

# Leading By Example

Changes to company culture and diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives start at the top. That is why it is crucial for employees and potential customers to see company leaders embracing and promoting disability inclusion.

## Publicly support Disability Inclusion at the Executive Level



Public support from C-Suite level executives can send a positive message to staff, clients, and the public that your company embraces disability inclusion. This could be in the form of a public statement on your website, an internal letter to staff, or a blog post to announce your support.

## Ensure your Diversity Council includes disability



Ensuring that your Diversity Council is inclusive of disability will help your company prioritize and amplify disability related efforts organized by the company. Also, the council would provide a voice to those living and working with disabilities, to ensure that your efforts meet the needs of employees.

# Putting Accessibility into Practice

There are important steps every company can take to put accessibility into practice. By making the workplace accessible to all, employers let employees know that their needs are recognized.

## Develop a disability accommodation policy

Employers can develop accommodation policies inclusive of disabilities to ensure that support networks are available and accessible. An updated accommodation policy would help employees with disabilities access the tools and resources needed to grow within the company. This toolkit provides insights for employers to develop accommodation policies.



## Re-evaluate emergency preparedness plans to ensure they are accessible to all



Check to make sure that all emergency preparedness plans are accessible for employees with disabilities. Make sure that all employees can safely evacuate the workplace in the event of an emergency by facilitating evacuation drills to test your evacuation process.

## Establish programs to help employees understand how to address the needs of the disability community

To better understand the disability community, employers can develop programming directed to the needs of this community. This programming should provide staff with proactive opportunities to both learn more and positively interact with the disability community.



Adding disability to your company's inclusive framework **is good for business**. Disabilities are far more common than we realize, and we can never be sure of who is excluded when we don't promote disability inclusion. It demonstrates to staff, stakeholders, and local communities that your company is committed to **inclusivity for all**.