

Inclusive Employer Handbook: Accessibility Hour Learner’s Guide

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Presented by:

Name: Dustin Schwab
Title: Career Development Specialist

Julie Zeigler Wood, OTR/L, ADAC
Worksite Accessibility Specialist
Occupational Therapist Registered/Licensed
ADA Coordinator

Office: 614-813-4649
Email: Dustin.Schwab@ood.ohio.gov
Website: www.ood.ohio.gov

Office: 614-205-5898
Email: Julie.Wood@ood.ohio.gov
Website: www.ood.ohio.gov

Overview

Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD) supports employers in creating workplaces that are diverse and inclusive of employees with disabilities. One way OOD does this is through providing consultations and training on Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), worksite accessibility, reasonable accommodations, and disability inclusion. This learner’s guide is a reference companion for the webinar titled “Accessibility Hour” which is the fifth in the five-part series “Inclusive Employer Handbook”.

The inspiration for this series comes from the criteria used in the Governor’s Inclusive Employer Award. Moments after taking the oath of office, Ohio Governor Mike DeWine signed Executive Order 2019-03D, which established Ohio as a Disability Inclusion State and a Model Employer of Individuals with Disabilities. To reinforce his commitment to Ohioans with disabilities, H.B. (House Bill) 110 included presenting the Governor’s Inclusive Employer Award during October’s National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) to employers who meet the criteria for having a workplace inclusive of individuals with disabilities. OOD determined the criteria for the award in alignment with its Inclusive Employer Toolkit: Inclusive Workplace; Recruiting, Hiring, and Supporting Employees; Workplace Accommodations; and Workplace Accessibility.

The “Inclusive Employer Handbook” is an educational series focused on supporting employers in creating and sustaining workplace cultures that are diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible. This series can serve as a guide for employers to begin or continue their journey in fostering a disability-inclusive workplace. In this fifth and final session of the handbook, these topics will be summarized:

- Inclusive Workplace,
- Recruiting, Hiring, and Supporting Employees,
- Workplace Accommodations, and
- Workplace Accessibility.

The information included is for educational purposes, is not an exhaustive list, and is not intended as legal advice.

OOD Resource:

For more information, view “**Employer Awards**” on the employer’s page of the OOD [website](#).

Inclusive Workplace

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 61 million adults in the United States (US) live with a disability, which is approximately one in four adults. There are benefits for employers who embrace hiring and supporting individuals with disabilities and fostering disability-inclusive workplace cultures. These can include increased morale, improved productivity, and greater profit margins.

An inclusive workplace is one where employers recognize the value of diversity and the unique skills and perspectives each employee brings to the organization. By valuing diversity, employers may foster a culture where all employees are comfortable being themselves at work and feel valued for their

contributions. Creating an inclusive workplace often goes beyond an employer's responsibilities under Title I of the ADA and results in a workplace where all employees feel they belong and are a part of the culture.

Investing in an inclusive workforce also gives employers a competitive edge. According to the Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN), employees with disabilities have skillsets as diverse as employees without disabilities and strengthen the workplace by offering a variety of perspectives for problem-solving, innovative thinking, and performing work.

A report released by Accenture in 2018 indicated that employers who implement best practices for hiring and supporting employees with disabilities "consistently outperform their peers, including having, on average, 28 percent higher revenue, double the net income, and 30 percent higher economic profits." One reason may be attributed to employees with disabilities remaining on the job longer which reduces turnover costs. In addition, studies show employing individuals with disabilities leads to improved productivity, increased morale, and greater diversity in the workplace.

To tap into increased innovation, improved productivity, a better work environment, and increased market share, employers are encouraged to embrace best practices for creating a disability-inclusive workplace.

Here are items to consider for fostering an inclusive workplace:

- Formalized commitment,
- Engagement with external organizations,
- Internal resources to support inclusion, and
- Disability awareness training.

Formalized Commitment

Employers who are successful in fostering inclusive cultures often have a formalized commitment to hiring and supporting individuals with disabilities and disability inclusion in the workplace. There are many ways to commit to disability inclusion, both internally and externally, to create this culture and achieve workplace goals for diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility.

In its resource titled "Expressing a Commitment to Disability Inclusion," EARN provides strategies employers can use to express their commitment. Here are some examples:

- Communicate formal statements of commitment to disability inclusion,
- Include disability in diversity policies and activities,
- Post equal employment opportunity (EEO) statements,
- Post reasonable accommodation (RA) statements,
- Distribute employee newsletters including disability-related topics,
- Include images of individuals with disabilities in marketing materials, and
- Share the business case for employing individuals with disabilities.

Examples from the Governor's Inclusive Employer Award Applications

According to responses received for the Governor's Inclusive Employer Award application, employers reported making these efforts toward fostering an Inclusive Workplace:

- Making a formal commitment to hiring individuals with disabilities across job types and locations that includes a numeric goal.
- Communicating a mission to hire individuals with disabilities and tracking how many new hires have a disability.
- Establishing a vision to create a culture where individuals with disabilities are embraced as valuable members.
- Creating formal policies to address a commitment to supporting the needs of employees such as equal employment opportunity, diversity and inclusion, and providing RAs.
- Educating employees on all policies related to diversity, equity, and inclusion and RAs through access to information on the intranet for all employees and through online training for new employees.
- Requiring all employees to take training on diversity, equity, and inclusion which addresses topics like preventing harassment and discrimination, ADA and leave, and an overview of inclusion.
- Providing human resources (HR) information online for employees with ways to connect live with an HR professional or to send a message to ask questions related to policies, and includes instruction on how to request an RA.
- Highlighting employees with disabilities who voluntarily share their story at town hall meetings and in company newsletters.
- Sharing a video during onboarding that describes how the employee resource group promotes awareness of disabilities.
- Including images of and stories from individuals with visible disabilities in recruitment and general marketing materials.

Engagement with External Organizations

Employers can gain valuable insights on disability inclusion by recognizing the best practices implemented by other businesses and through participation in activities provided by organizations focused on disability. These external resources can inform the efforts employers make to hire and retain individuals with disabilities and create disability-inclusive cultures in the workplace.

There are a variety of ways employers can gain information from external resources. Here are some examples:

- Benchmark disability efforts against peers,
- Participate in events and community activities focused on disability, and
- Partner with Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities.

Examples from the Governor's Inclusive Employer Award Applications

According to responses received for the Governor's Inclusive Employer Award application, employers reported making these efforts toward fostering an Inclusive Workplace:

- Participating in benchmarking by completing the Disability Equality Index assessment,
- Providing education for other employers through a community partner to address best practices for hiring and supporting employees with disabilities,
- Offering coaching sessions for adults and youth with disabilities to provide guidance on writing resumes and interviewing effectively, and

- Working with community partners for pre-employment training and job fairs, and to connect with qualified candidates with disabilities for open positions.

Internal Resources to Support Inclusion

Inclusive workplaces require planning and ongoing effort to foster a culture where employees feel comfortable to be themselves, offer their unique contribution, and ask for what they need.

There are many ways employers can dedicate internal resources to build and promote a disability-inclusive culture unique to their workplace. Here are some examples:

- Dedicate a staff position, role, or team to manage disability-inclusion efforts,
- Create an employee resource group focused on disability, and
- Form a diversity committee for or in support of employees with disabilities.

Examples from the Governor's Inclusive Employer Award Applications

According to responses received for the Governor's Inclusive Employer Award application, employers reported making these efforts toward fostering an Inclusive Workplace:

- Operating an employee resource group focused on disability that:
 - Contributes to disability training in the organization, contributes to disability-inclusive hiring events, and includes active leadership support,
 - Aims to foster a workplace culture where all employees can thrive by providing education on disability inclusion to increase awareness and acceptance,
 - Focuses on creating a safe workplace, provides education and awareness, and partners with various units in the organization to impact the culture of the business,
 - Includes employees with disabilities, employees with family members with disabilities, and employees who are interested in disability-related topics and provides education, hosts events, and advocates for disability inclusion,
 - Strives to create awareness of workplace accessibility,
 - Provides support for employees with disabilities and employees with family members with disabilities, and
 - Meets regularly to address and eliminate barriers present in all work areas;
- Observing events like National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) by providing a series of webinars for staff with discussions on employment; and
- Requiring all employees to take training on diversity, equity, and inclusion which addresses topics like preventing harassment and discrimination, ADA and leave, and an overview of inclusion.

Disability Awareness Training

Participating in disability awareness training in the workplace can help all employees feel more confident and comfortable when communicating and interacting with individuals with disabilities. This training can help hiring professionals and supervisors to become aware of any personal biases they have towards individuals with disabilities, help them feel more comfortable when conducting an interview or managing employees, and help them to understand that behaviors such as lack of eye contact or a flat affect (lack of emotional expression) can be a characteristic of certain types of disabilities. OOD offers disability awareness and disability etiquette training for employer partners at no-cost.

Examples from the Governor’s Inclusive Employer Award Applications

According to responses received for the Governor’s Inclusive Employer Award application, employers reported making these efforts toward fostering an Inclusive Workplace:

- Providing disability awareness training to employees and leaders,
- Hosting a private social networking platform which includes disability-related information posted weekly on topics like disability awareness, and
- Providing annual education and awareness through their diversity program that is offered annually for all employees.

OOD Resource:

For more information, view OOD’s on-demand webinar “**Inclusive Workplace**” on the employer’s page of the OOD [website](#). Additional resources are available in the “**Inclusive Employer Toolkit**” on the employer’s page of the OOD [website](#).

Recruiting, Hiring, and Supporting Employees

Investing in an inclusive workplace gives employers a competitive edge. Recruitment efforts that are inclusive of people with disabilities give employers access to a greater pool of talent, skills, and innovative thinking in its candidates. Reports show that employers who hire and support employees with disabilities experience higher revenues and greater profit margins.

Here are items to consider for recruiting, hiring, and supporting employees:

- Goals for Employing Individuals with Disabilities,
- Inclusive Recruitment Process,
- Right to RA,
- Inclusive Essential Functions, and
- Accessible Hiring Process.

Goals for Employing Individuals with Disabilities

Employers who are intentional about recruiting, hiring, and supporting individuals with disabilities are more likely to attract more qualified candidates, including candidates with disabilities, and increase their chances of hiring the best individuals for their open positions.

Employers who establish disability employment goals, establish ways to track these goals, and embrace disability-inclusive practices may benefit from the advantages that come with a diverse workforce that includes employees with disabilities.

Examples from the Governor’s Inclusive Employer Award Applications

According to responses received for the Governor’s Inclusive Employer Award application, employers reported making these efforts toward Recruiting, Hiring, and Supporting Employees:

- Making a formal commitment to hiring individuals with disabilities across job types, settings, and locations,
- Identifying a numeric goal for hiring individuals with disabilities, and

- Tracking how many individuals with disabilities are hired.

Inclusive Recruitment Process

One way employers can be intentional about hiring qualified candidates with disabilities is to establish inclusive recruitment processes or strategies. These efforts can include being proactive to source qualified candidates with disabilities, sharing openings with colleges and universities, and participating in disability-focused hiring events.

Examples from the Governor's Inclusive Employer Award Applications

According to responses received for the Governor's Inclusive Employer Award application, employers reported making these efforts toward Recruiting, Hiring, and Supporting Employees:

- Working with community partners and disability-related agencies:
 - To connect with qualified candidates with disabilities for open positions,
 - For job fairs, pre-employment training, and workshops,
 - To establish internships for individuals with disabilities that can lead to full-time employment, and
 - To provide tours of the worksite for better understanding of job demands and work environment when connecting qualified candidates for open positions;
- Partnering with OOD to host virtual hiring events throughout the entire state,
- Posting job openings on disability organizations' websites,
- Establishing relationships with disability services offices at universities and colleges to recruit for internships and post-degree career opportunities, and
- Requiring all recruiting professionals to attend several diversity-themed career events annually.

Right to RA

Employers can support candidates and employees with disabilities by making sure to communicate the right to RA under Title I of the ADA. Employers may establish a process or strategy to ensure this is achieved. One strategy includes the development and communication of an RA statement. This statement informs applicants and employees of the right to RA and how to request one.

An RA statement should be included in key locations such as job descriptions, job postings, application forms (both online and in-person), RA policies, employee handbooks, company intranets, and in invitations to events such as interviews, onboarding, meetings, trainings, and conferences. Including an RA statement in these locations can send the message to candidates and employees that an employer cares about what individuals with disabilities need in the workplace.

Examples from the Governor's Inclusive Employer Award Applications

According to responses received for the Governor's Inclusive Employer Award application, employers reported making these efforts toward Recruiting, Hiring, and Supporting Employees:

- Inviting individuals with disabilities on the career website to contact HR if an RA is needed to access the hiring process,
- Posting an RA statement on the career website which includes an email address and a hotline as ways to communicate a request,
- Posting information on Title I of the ADA and related policies in onsite locations,
- Including an RA statement at the beginning of an application,

- Informing of the RA process during onboarding for all employees,
- Posting information on the right to RA in job postings, on job applications, with job duties, in annual meetings, and during trainings, and
- Including a career support line on the online career site for candidates to call and receive assistance with completing the online application.

Inclusive Essential Functions

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) defines essential functions as “the basic job duties” an applicant or employee with a disability “must be able to perform, with or without RA.”

Essential functions are a valuable tool in an inclusive workplace. They have a role in the hiring process and during employment. Many applicants rely on essential functions to decide whether they’re qualified for the job. Essential functions can also inform the questions asked in an interview, be useful when evaluating job performance, and help determine appropriate RAs during the interactive process. How essential functions are described can increase the possibility of jobs being performed in more than one way. This can lead to employers attracting more candidates for open jobs and retaining talented and qualified employees. For these reasons, it is important to have a process or strategy for identifying a job’s essential functions, describing them inclusively, and posting essential functions in key locations.

Examples from the Governor’s Inclusive Employer Award Applications

According to responses received for the Governor’s Inclusive Employer Award application, employers reported making these efforts toward Recruiting, Hiring, and Supporting Employees:

- Reviewing job descriptions to ensure qualification standards are job-related and do not unfairly impact individuals with disabilities,
- Reviewing job duties with candidates during the interview process and confirming they can perform these duties, with or without an RA, and
- Describing essential functions in job descriptions and reviewing during training.

Accessible Hiring Process

Attracting qualified talent for open positions is key to employers finding the right candidates for their jobs. An accessible hiring process ensures qualified candidates with disabilities can access job postings for open positions, complete the application, and participate in interviews and onboarding.

To support employers in creating diverse, inclusive, and accessible hiring processes and workplace cultures, OOD’s team of Business Relations Specialists (BRSs) provide a variety of customizable disability awareness training offerings.

Examples from the Governor’s Inclusive Employer Award Applications

According to responses received for the Governor’s Inclusive Employer Award application, employers reported making these efforts toward Recruiting, Hiring, and Supporting Employees:

- Providing RAs for the hiring process and to perform the job,
- Permitting job coaches in the hiring process and training for a new position,
- Ensuring the online career site is accessible for individuals with disabilities, such as being compatible with speech recognition software,
- Providing an accessible computer onsite for the hiring process,

- Ensuring worksites are accessible to public transportation,
- Providing orientation and mobility training during onboarding for individuals who are blind or have low vision,
- Providing several options for applying for a job, such as completing an online application, scanning a code, delivering a resume onsite, and applying through text message or social media,
- Implementing a hiring process that permits candidates to apply in a variety of ways, including an onsite application, an online application process, verbal application, or through a telecommunications device for the deaf,
- Communicating with candidates in a variety of ways, such as through in-person communications, email, phone conversations, virtual meetings, and text message,
- Providing mentors for all new hires during onboarding and focus groups to facilitate communication during training to identify areas of improvement for all employees,
- Providing sign language interpreters during all phases of the hiring process, when needed, and
- Performing an annual review of the online career site's accessibility to ensure it meets the needs of all candidates.

OOD Resource:

For more information, view OOD's on-demand webinar "**Recruiting, Hiring, and Supporting Employees**" on the employer's page of the OOD [website](#). Additional resources are available in the "**Inclusive Employer Toolkit**" on the employer's page of the OOD [website](#).

Workplace Accommodations

Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires covered employers to provide RAs to qualified applicants and employees with disabilities (when needed) to access equal employment opportunities and participate in work-related activities.

Many employers have embraced these benefits and feel empowered to go beyond just meeting their responsibilities under Title I of the ADA when employing individuals with disabilities and creating inclusive work cultures. OOD is here to support employers by addressing best practices and providing resources.

Here are items to consider for providing workplace accommodations:

- Interactive RA Process,
- Funding,
- Confidentiality, and
- Training.

Interactive RA Process

When providing accommodations, the ADA requires employers to engage in an informal process, known as the interactive process, with the applicant or employee making the accommodation request. The interactive process helps both parties to better understand what is needed and how to identify an effective solution. Employers are not required under the ADA to create a formal process for providing RAs, but it is a best practice. To support receiving and facilitating requests for accommodations,

employers may consider establishing a formal process, assigning responsibility for facilitating the process, and creating forms to document the process. It can also be helpful for employers to be aware of external resources available for identifying effective RA solutions.

Examples from the Governor's Inclusive Employer Award Applications

According to responses received for the Governor's Inclusive Employer Award application, employers reported making these efforts toward providing Workplace Accommodations:

- Utilizing a centralized accommodation process which includes a dedicated team to facilitate the process with managers and employees,
- Establishing a formal RA process which describes the interactive process and identifies roles and responsibilities,
- Utilizing a third party to facilitate requests for RAs,
- Assigning a process for employees to appeal denials of accommodation requests or accommodations that are implemented and not effective, which includes a designated and trained committee to facilitate the appeal,
- Creating forms for employees to complete to supplement the RA process,
- Being proactive to establish a partnership with a provider of sign language interpretation for ease of implementation when requested during the hiring process or for work, and
- Engaging with community partners to remain current with types of RAs to provide effective solutions.

Funding

One way employers can plan for the cost of RAs is to create a budget. This could be a department budget or an organization-wide budget. To decide how much to allocate, an employer could review what they've previously spent on accommodations through the years and average these costs. Tracking accommodations will help employers to address trends, understand commonalities amongst accommodations, and be better prepared to provide future accommodations.

Another way employers can plan for the cost of providing RAs is through creating a centralized accommodation fund (CAF). A CAF is an "enterprise-wide" fund for purchasing RA products and services. This streamlined approach for purchasing accommodations can eliminate the concern hiring managers and supervisors have that the cost of an accommodation will come from their department's operating budget. It can also help to make the process of procuring and providing accommodations more consistent across an organization.

Examples from the Governor's Inclusive Employer Award Applications

According to responses received for the Governor's Inclusive Employer Award application, employers reported making these efforts toward providing Workplace Accommodations:

- Planning for the purchase of technological programs and services to provide items like speech dictation software, screen magnifiers, and low vision keyboards when needed.

Confidentiality

During the interactive process, all personal and medical information obtained must be kept confidential. This includes information received through accommodation requests, discussions, disability-related inquiries, medical examinations, and documentation. It is helpful for employers to know the criteria for

protecting this confidential information and have a policy or procedure to ensure this protection is enforced.

The EEOC criteria for confidentiality are provided on its [website](#) in the guidance titled “The ADA: A Primer for Small Business.” This guidance indicates that medical information that is obtained and recorded should be kept in separate medical files apart from general personnel files, whether stored in physical filing cabinets or in electronic databases.

At times, coworkers may ask their supervisors about the RAs they notice a colleague receiving. Because the ADA prohibits employers from disclosing an employee’s disability, the supervisor is not permitted to tell the coworker the colleague has a disability or is receiving an RA. Instead, what the employer may consider is providing training for supervisors on confidentiality guidelines and how to respond to these types of questions.

Examples from the Governor’s Inclusive Employer Award Applications

According to responses received for the Governor’s Inclusive Employer Award application, employers reported making these efforts toward providing Workplace Accommodations:

- Securing confidential information apart from general employee information,
- Establishing a confidential tracking system in HR to document approved RAs along with the request, the time period the accommodation is needed for, and pertinent follow-up information, and
- Ensuring that necessary communications with supervisors about RAs do not include confidential information related to the disability and the need for the accommodation.

Training

Employers can support their efforts to foster an inclusive workplace and adhere to their responsibilities under Title I of the ADA by providing training for all employees and supervisors. These efforts can be further supported through policies or procedures that describe the group(s) to receive training, the information to be addressed, and the specific times to deliver training, such as during onboarding, and on a regular basis.

A best practice is to be proactive and provide training for all employees on the laws the employer is required to follow, including the right to RA for qualified employees with disabilities. This training is recommended to initially be offered to new employees during onboarding and then on an ongoing basis to all employees.

It is important to also provide training for supervisors and managers on RAs. Research shows that employees are more likely to request an accommodation from their supervisor than someone in HR. Supervisors can contribute in an important way to the employer’s process for identifying, implementing, and monitoring RAs.

It is also important to train staff who assist with implementing RAs, such as IT professionals or facilities staff, of the confidentiality rules related to RAs and how to respond to questions when they receive them.

Examples from the Governor’s Inclusive Employer Award Applications

According to responses received for the Governor’s Inclusive Employer Award application, employers reported making these efforts toward providing Workplace Accommodations:

- Delivering training to leadership focused on best practices for working with individuals with disabilities and fostering an inclusive workplace,
- Requiring mandatory training on RAs for all managers which includes how to recognize a request for an accommodation, information on the interactive process, and resources from external entities,
- Providing all new managers with training on HR fundamentals which addresses how to recognize a request for an RA and how to follow up on these requests,
- Providing supervisors with an online, interactive training on disability fundamentals which addresses disability awareness, disability etiquette, disability disclosure, RAs, and how to make meetings and events accessible,
- Requiring managers to repeat training related to RAs on an annual basis,
- Providing training for new employees on Title I of the ADA and RAs that is supplemented with an employee handbook which addresses a variety of ways to request an accommodation, and
- Providing training for all employees on Title I of the ADA, the RA policy, and any updates, and is intentional to schedule this training near the anniversary of the ADA in July.

OOD Resource:

For more information, view OOD’s on-demand webinar “**Workplace Accommodations**” on the employer’s page of the OOD [website](#). Additional resources are available in the “**Inclusive Employer Toolkit**” on the employer’s page of the OOD [website](#).

Workplace Accessibility

Creating a workplace that is accessible for as many people as possible can help employers attract qualified candidates, increase productivity on the job, retain and advance experienced employees, ensure important information is conveyed, and expand their customer base. Employers who are intentional about creating an accessible hiring process and workplace can foster an inclusive workplace culture.

Here are items to consider for providing workplace accommodations:

- Know the Accessibility Guidelines,
- Assess the Work Environment,
- Remain Current with Accessibility,
- Utilize an RA Statement,
- Offer Accommodations for All,
- Provide Training, and
- Consider a Centralized Fund.

Know the Accessibility Guidelines

An accessible environment can lead to equity for qualified individuals with disabilities competing for open positions, excelling in job performance, and advancing in their careers. Creating and maintaining an accessible workplace begins with knowing the current accessibility guidelines and best practices for the built environment, the digital environment, and communications. An accessible workplace includes the hiring process, performing work, and accessing information.

The built environment includes components like parking, entrances and exits, accessible routes, common areas, work areas and surfaces, signs, and emergency systems. The digital environment includes components like websites and intranets, virtual platforms and multimedia, and online forms and documents. Communications can be direct and indirect and include items like job postings, websites and intranets, emails, social media, training, policies, forms, and documents.

Addressing these in policies and procedures can serve as a starting point for making the workplace accessible for as many people as possible.

Examples from the Governor's Inclusive Employer Award Applications

According to responses received for the Governor's Inclusive Employer Award application, employers reported making these efforts toward fostering Workplace Accessibility:

- Ensuring new facilities are designed according to accessibility guidelines,
- Utilizing an accessible design when adding new buildings, like ensuring classrooms are on one level, entrances are free of steps, braille signage is posted to mark offices and classrooms, and the usage of a portable wheelchair lift for ceremonies,
- Being intentional to add accessibility components to remodeled areas of the physical location, like adding elevators, additional accessible parking spaces, and accessible signage,
- Ensuring emergency systems include an audio and visual alert,
- Creating a website and intranet that is compliant with the web content accessibility guidelines,
- Utilizing software to make an online learning platform accessible,
- Ensuring communications are provided a variety of ways, like in-person meetings, one-to-one communications, posters, emails, text messages, and electronic slide shows,
- Creating communications posted throughout the workplace that include written information, visual information, and graphics,
- Being proactive to train hiring managers and employees on American Sign Language to facilitate inclusive conversations,
- Establishing alternative ways to communicate by providing a telecommunications device for the deaf and mobile devices with apps for communication, and
- Conveying announcements and important information through department meetings with written handouts, postings on bulletin boards, and broadcasts on televisions in employee break areas.

Assess the Work Environment

Employers can progress with creating accessible workplaces by assessing the status of their current environment. This helps employers identify where they are and prioritize next steps. One way to ensure progress with accessibility remains a priority is to include a requirement for assessing accessibility in policies and procedures.

Examples from the Governor's Inclusive Employer Award Applications

According to responses received for the Governor's Inclusive Employer Award application, employers reported making these efforts toward fostering Workplace Accessibility:

- Incorporating accessibility into a technology review which addresses hardware, software, telecommunications, and web accessibility, and then generates a checklist with key categories to further evaluate, such as screen reader compatibility, keyboard navigation, captioning, and color contrast,
- Encouraging all employees to use the Accessibility Checker built into Microsoft 365 applications,
- Administering manual testing of planning systems after conducting automated testing to fix any context-specific errors that may have been overlooked,
- Facilitating an accessibility committee made up of a cross section of departments to regularly monitor barriers in the workplace and take steps to remove these, including reviewing requests for RAs to further identify barriers present,
- Testing digital content through a centralized support center with trained staff,
- Reviewing the online career site on an annual basis to ensure accessibility for all candidates including addressing color, layout, alternative text for visual content, and captioning for audio content, and
- Reviewing worksites quarterly for accessibility and collaborating with employees on needed accommodations.

Remain Current with Accessibility

Fostering an inclusive and accessible workplace requires ongoing effort. Beyond knowing the accessibility guidelines and assessing work environments, inclusive employers are intentional about remaining current with accessibility. Employers can prioritize this by creating a policy and/or procedures to take action to identify the most recent guidelines and best practices. To remain current, employers can periodically review available guidance, participate in external training, and consult with subject matter experts. Several organizations offer newsletters, webinars, informational resources, conferences, networking opportunities, and consults related to workplace accessibility and inclusion.

Examples from the Governor's Inclusive Employer Award Applications

According to responses received for the Governor's Inclusive Employer Award application, employers reported making these efforts toward fostering Workplace Accessibility:

- Participating in a local ADA committee that focuses on raising awareness of inclusion,
- Ensuring policies are updated with current compliance information through employee resource groups, legal professionals, and HR professionals,
- Participating in an external webinar with a community partner focused on how to incorporate accessibility within diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts,
- Working with an external provider to ensure the website meets the latest accessibility guidelines, and
- Monitoring updates to ADA through the compliance department and informs the company of any changes.

Utilize an RA Statement

Creating an accessible work environment may result in a workplace culture where everyone can participate, and everyone feels included. However, barriers may remain in the hiring process, in

performing work, and in accessing the benefits of employment. Because of this, an RA statement should be included in key areas.

Examples from the Governor's Inclusive Employer Award Applications

According to responses received for the Governor's Inclusive Employer Award application, employers reported making these efforts toward fostering Workplace Accessibility:

- Directing candidates viewing an online application site to a recruiting hotline and email address to request an RA, when needed,
- Offering an employee reporting site which outlines how to request an RA, and
- Including an RA statement on all job postings.

Offer Accommodations for All

To further support an inclusive workplace that meets the needs of all employees, employers may consider creating a policy and/or procedures to provide certain accommodations for all employees when requested. This allows employers to create a list of items that can be provided quickly without requiring an individual to disclose a disability and participate in the formal RA process. A preapproved list of items may include things like ergonomic keyboards and mice, ergonomic chairs, sit/stand workstations, live captioning for large meetings and presentations, noise cancelling earbuds, and flexible schedules.

Examples from the Governor's Inclusive Employer Award Applications

According to responses received for the Governor's Inclusive Employer Award application, employers reported making these efforts toward fostering Workplace Accessibility:

- Providing sit-stand desks and magnified computer screens routinely to employees without requiring participation in the interactive process,
- Instructing employees through virtual resources on proper ergonomics for performing work and setting up workstations,
- Ensuring communications are available in multiple formats, such as written, electronic via email, and through sign language interpretation,
- Equipping workstations with standing desk options, chairs for short breaks, and ergonomic workstation setup,
- Providing just-in-time sign language interpretation and in-person and remote captioning when needed, without requiring participation in the interactive process,
- Providing on-demand visual interpreting tools, like Aira, at all properties for applicants and team members at no cost,
- Including access to a mindfulness app through the employee assistance program at no cost, and
- Reviewing accommodations provided through the interactive process to determine when providing these accommodations to all employees will be beneficial, such as making training materials available in print, audio, and in an electronic book reader such as Kindle.

Provide Training

One important way to ensure an accessible workplace is to make accessibility a priority for all employees when planning events, creating communications and invitations, designing physical and digital workspaces, and starting projects. This ensures accessibility is addressed from the onset and is not an afterthought.

To support all employees in successfully implementing accessibility, provide training on the importance of inclusion in the workplace, disability basics and common workplace barriers, ways to make the built environment accessible, how to conduct accessible virtual meetings, and how to create accessible documents.

Examples from the Governor’s Inclusive Employer Award Applications

According to responses received for the Governor’s Inclusive Employer Award application, employers reported making these efforts toward fostering Workplace Accessibility:

- Providing resources on a designated accessibility intranet page with information on how to host accessible events in-person and virtually, how to create accessible web content, and how to ensure content is accessible using existing tools, and
- Offering a monthly newsletter for managers which highlights accessibility tips for the workplace, such as the Accessibility Checker included in Microsoft 365 applications.

Consider a Centralized Fund

The Federal government’s strategic plan to advance DEIA in the Federal workforce includes an accessibility roadmap which suggests Federal employers evaluate the need for a centralized fund to both improve accessibility and provide accommodations.

Funding a budget for workplace accessibility will be unique for each employer. Employers who hire people with disabilities and/or remove barriers to improve the physical accessibility of their work environments may be eligible for tax credits and deductions, such as the Disabled Access Credit, the Barrier Removal Tax Deduction, and the Work Opportunity Tax Credit.

Employers often have budgets for purchasing technology to support their organization’s operations. A best practice is to ensure the procurement process addresses accessibility from the start. This could include creating a policy and/or procedures that requires employees who are responsible for making these purchases to include accessibility as a core component of the decision-making process.

Examples from the Governor’s Inclusive Employer Award Applications

According to responses received for the Governor’s Inclusive Employer Award application, employers reported making these efforts toward fostering Workplace Accessibility:

- Requiring accessibility components when selecting new technology for the workplace, and
- Ensuring all new software and computer programs purchased are accessible for individuals who are blind or have low vision.

OOD Resource:

For more information, view OOD’s on-demand webinar “**Workplace Accessibility**” on the employer’s page of the OOD [website](#). Additional resources are available in the “**Inclusive Employer Toolkit**” on the employer’s page of the OOD [website](#).

Conclusion

OOD appreciates your interest in identifying solutions and resources to support a workplace that is diverse and inclusive of employees with disabilities. Each employee with a disability, each employer, and

each workplace is unique and because of this, the effective strategy to create a work environment that is accessible and inclusive will be unique. We hope the information shared in this learner’s guide and webinar are helpful in supporting your efforts.

Resources

Inclusive Workplace

- Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities. “[Inclusive Employer Toolkit](#)”
- Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities. “[Inclusive Workplace](#)”

Recruiting, Hiring, and Supporting Employees

- Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities. “[Inclusive Employer Toolkit](#)”
- Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities. “[Recruiting, Hiring, and Supporting Employees](#)”

Workplace Accommodations

- Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities. “[Inclusive Employer Toolkit](#)”
- Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities. “[Workplace Accommodations](#)”

Workplace Accessibility

- Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities. “[Inclusive Employer Toolkit](#)”
- Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities. “[Workplace Accessibility](#)”

OOD's Business Relations Team – see map on final two pages

- **Jon Hackathorn, Manager, Ohio Vocational Apprentice Program and State of Ohio Agencies**
 - **Phone:** 614-306-1744
 - **Email:** jon.hackathorn@ood.ohio.gov
- **Cynthia L. Crews, Business Relations Specialist in Southwest Ohio**
 - **Phone:** 513-309-5140
 - **Email:** cynthia.crews@ood.ohio.gov
 - **Counties served:** Adams, Brown, Butler, Champaign, Clark, Clermont, Clinton, Darke, Fayette, Greene, Hamilton, Highland, Logan, Madison, Miami, Montgomery, Preble, Shelby, Union, and Warren
 - **Career Development Specialist:** Dustin Schwab
 - **Colleges/Universities served:** Central State University, Miami University, University of Cincinnati, Wilberforce University, and Wright State University
- **Michael Hoag, Business Relations Specialist in Northeast Ohio**
 - **Phone:** 216-210-7584
 - **Email:** michael.hoag@ood.ohio.gov
 - **Counties served:** Ashtabula, Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, Medina, Portage, and Summit
 - **Career Development Specialist:** Kris Wray
 - **Colleges/Universities served:** Cuyahoga Community College, Kent State University, and The University of Akron
- **Kelly Jordan, Business Relations Specialist in Southeast Ohio**
 - **Phone:** 614-204-4951
 - **Email:** kelly.jordan@ood.ohio.gov
 - **Counties served:** Athens, Delaware, Fairfield, Franklin, Gallia, Hocking, Jackson, Lawrence, Meigs, Monroe, Morgan, Perry, Pickaway, Pike, Ross, Scioto, Vinton, and Washington
 - **Career Development Specialist:** Dustin Schwab
 - **Colleges/Universities served:** Columbus State Community College, Ohio University, and The Ohio State University
- **Ron Klonowski, Business Relations Specialist in East Central Ohio**
 - **Phone:** 330-312-4051
 - **Email:** ronald.klonowski@ood.ohio.gov
 - **Counties served:** Ashland, Belmont, Carroll, Columbiana, Coshocton, Crawford, Guernsey, Harrison, Holmes, Jefferson, Knox, Licking, Mahoning, Morrow, Muskingum, Noble, Richland, Stark, Trumbull, Tuscarawas, and Wayne
 - **Career Development Specialist:** Dustin Schwab, Kris Wray
 - **Colleges/Universities served:** Central Ohio Technical College, Stark State College, and Youngstown State University
- **Michelle Rinehart, Employer Services Manager covering Northwest Ohio**
 - **Phone:** 614-961-0179
 - **Email:** michelle.rinehart@ood.ohio.gov
 - **Counties served:** Allen, Auglaize, Defiance, Erie, Fulton, Hancock, Hardin, Henry, Huron, Lorain, Lucas, Marion, Mercer, Ottawa, Paulding, Putnam, Sandusky, Seneca, Van Wert, Williams, Wood, and Wyandot
 - **Career Development Specialist:** Kris Wray
 - **Colleges/Universities served:** Bowling Green State University, Lorain County Community College, and The University of Toledo

Business Relations Specialists:

Northeast Area

Michael Hoag
14650 Detroit Avenue, Ste. 200
Lakewood, OH 44107
michael.hoag@ood.ohio.gov
216-210-7584

Northwest Area

Jill Simpson
5241 Southwyck Blvd., Suite 200
Toledo, OH 43614
jill.simpson@ood.ohio.gov
419-277-4894

Southeast Area

Kelly Jordan
4300 E. Broad Street, Ste. 200
Whitehall, OH 43213
kelly.jordan@ood.ohio.gov
614-204-4951

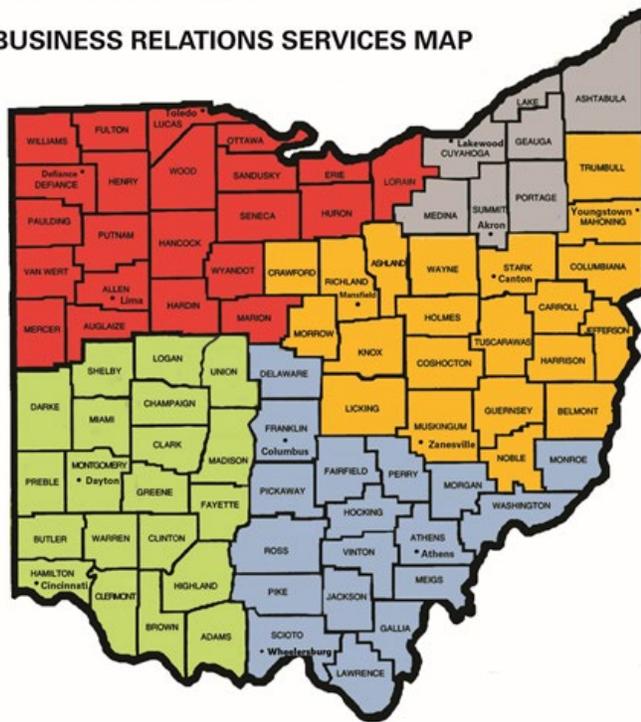
Southwest Area

Cynthia Crews
Centennial Plaza III
895 Central Avenue, 7th Floor
Cincinnati, OH 45202
cynthia.crews@ood.ohio.gov
513-309-5140

East Central Area

Ronald Klonowski
816-30th Street, NW
Canton, OH 44709
ronald.klonowski@ood.ohio.gov
330-312-4051

BUSINESS RELATIONS SERVICES MAP



Business Relations and Career Development Specialists Map

Business Relations and Career Development Specialists:

Northeast Area

Michael Hoag - BRS
 Kris Wray - CDS
 * Cuyahoga Community College
 * Kent State University
 * The University of Akron

Northwest Area

Jill Simpson - BRS
 Kris Wray - CDS
 * Bowling Green State University
 * Lorain County Community College
 * The University of Toledo

Southeast Area

Kelly Jordan - BRS
 Dustin Schwab - CDS
 * Columbus State Community College
 * Ohio University
 * The Ohio State University

Southwest Area

Cynthia Crews - BRS
 Dustin Schwab - CDS
 * Central State University
 * Miami University
 * University of Cincinnati
 * Wilberforce University
 * Wright State University

East Central Area

Ronald Klonowski - BRS
 Kris Wray - CDS
 * Stark State College
 * Youngstown State University
 Dustin Schwab - CDS
 * Central Ohio Technical College

 Colleges/ Universities

