

Inclusive Employer Handbook: Recruiting, Hiring, and Supporting Employees Learner’s Guide

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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 “Recruiting, Hiring, and Supporting Employees” which is the second 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 an 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.

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. In this second session of the handbook, these topics about recruiting, hiring, and supporting employees will be addressed:

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

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

Goals for Employing Individuals with Disabilities

The 2017 Kessler Foundation National Employment and Disability Survey revealed that of the employers who responded, 57 percent have goals for hiring qualified diverse individuals, but only 28 percent have goals for hiring qualified individuals with disabilities.

Studies show hiring and retaining individuals with disabilities strengthens the workplace through increased innovation and productivity in its workforce and positively impacts the bottom line. However, the unemployment rate for individuals with disabilities is more than double that for individuals without 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.

According to responses received for the Governor’s Inclusive Employer Award application, two employers reported having hiring initiatives that are company-wide across all their locations and in a variety of positions. Both employers emphasized these goals include entry-level positions and positions that have education or experience requirements.

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.

OOD Resource:

For more information on the business case for hiring qualified individuals with disabilities, view session one’s webinar “**Inclusive Workplace**” on the Inclusive Employer Handbook page of the [OOD website](#).

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.

Sourcing Qualified Candidates with Disabilities

An inclusive recruitment process requires being intentional about partnering with sources that include qualified candidates with disabilities. These sources may offer ways to support recruiting efforts and provide qualified candidates with disabilities for employers to consider. An example of this type of recruitment source are state vocational rehabilitation agencies. These agencies offer services to individuals with disabilities related to their employment goals.

Ohio’s state vocational rehabilitation agency is Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD). OOD empowers Ohioans with disabilities through employment, disability determinations, and independence. The agency partners with business, education, and non-profits to facilitate individualized employment plans for Ohioans with disabilities. OOD’s trained and professional staff help Ohio employers recruit and retain employees with disabilities.

Employers can enhance their recruiting efforts by becoming an Employer Partner with OOD. OOD’s Division of Employer and Innovation Services has a team of Business Relations Specialists (BRSs) who work to build employer partnerships to support job placement and retention of individuals with disabilities throughout Ohio. The BRS team is dedicated to working with employers to provide services to support their hiring needs and to build an inclusive workplace. These services include candidate sourcing, hiring events, employer spotlights, and disability etiquette and awareness training. To find your local BRS, go to pages 12-13 of this learner’s guide for a list with contact information and a service map. A link to information on candidate sourcing through OOD is provided in the OOD Resource box at the end of this section.

Disabilities Services Offices at Colleges and Universities

Employers who offer internships, apprenticeships, and entry-level professional jobs may consider partnering with offices at colleges and universities. The Disability Services Office, Career Services Office, and offices for specific academic departments can be a great resource for connecting with qualified students and graduates with disabilities for employers' open positions. The Ohio College2Careers (C2C) program is another source employers can consider for finding qualified talent for their open positions. The Ohio C2C program includes partnerships with 17 colleges and universities throughout Ohio to ensure students with disabilities have the support they need to complete their education, earn higher wages, and meet the demands of the labor market. A map of these colleges and universities can be found on page 14 of this guide. For more information on how to attract qualified talent from the Ohio C2C program, employers can contact their OOD BRS. OOD also has Career Development Specialists (CDSs) who work closely with the BRSs to connect students and graduates with disabilities with internships and careers with employers.

CDSs can also help employers develop inclusive internships in their workplaces. Several OOD Employer Partners work with their BRS and CDS to get information about the majors of students being served through Ohio C2C. The employers use that information to determine what areas of their workplaces will host interns. When the employers are ready to hire for the internships, they reach out to OOD and local universities for candidates. By partnering with OOD to structure these internships, the employers have a source to assist with the recruitment of qualified candidates who attend any college or university in Ohio.

Disability-Focused Hiring Events

Attending disability-focused hiring events is a great way for employers to reach more qualified candidates for their open jobs and meet their goals to hire individuals with disabilities. OOD offers a variety of options for employers to participate in hiring events. Several of our Employer Partners have worked with OOD to host virtual hiring events for their organizations. One of these employers who applied for the Governor's Inclusive Employer Award noted that they hired nearly 50 candidates per event.

OOD Resource:

For more information on how OOD can assist with recruitment of qualified candidates with disabilities visit the "**Candidate Sourcing**" page of the OOD [website](#).

For more information on the Ohio C2C program and creating an inclusive internship visit the "**Recruiting, Hiring, and Supporting Employees**" section of OOD's [Inclusive Employer Toolkit](#).

Right to Reasonable Accommodation

Employers can support candidates and employees with disabilities by making sure to communicate the right to reasonable accommodation (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.

Here is one example of an RA statement from the Job Accommodation Network (JAN) [website](#):

- “[Employer] is committed to the full inclusion of all qualified individuals. As part of this commitment, [Employer] will ensure that persons with disabilities are provided reasonable accommodations. If reasonable accommodation is needed to participate in the job application or interview process, to perform essential job functions, and/or to receive other benefits and privileges of employment, please contact [include name and/or department, telephone, and e-mail address].”

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.

In addition, it’s a best practice to provide training for all employees on the right to RA. This type of training is a customary part of most employers’ onboarding process and is recommended to be provided on an ongoing basis for all employees.

OOD Resource:

For information on the employer’s responsibility to provide reasonable accommodations, view OOD’s on-demand webinar **“The Employers’ ADA Handbook: Reasonable Accommodations and Undue Hardship”** on the employer’s page of the OOD [website](#).

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 reasonable accommodation.” In other words, essential functions are the critical job duties that must be completed to meet the job’s expectations and removal of these duties would “fundamentally change jobs.”

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 reasonable accommodations 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.

Identifying Essential Functions

The EEOC regulates and enforces Title I of the ADA and in its guidance offers employers factors and evidence that can be useful when determining a job’s essential functions. These are included on JAN’s [website](#) in the “Technical Assistance Manual for Title I of the ADA” with examples. JAN’s [website](#) also offers a resource called “Job Description Topics” which includes information on creating job descriptions and how to use a job analysis to determine a job’s essential functions.

Writing Essential Functions

Essential functions are most effective when written based on the outcome of the job task and in an inclusive way. The focus of an essential function should be on the purpose of the task and the desired outcome, rather than the customary way the job is performed. This is because there is often more than one way to perform a task. An individual with a disability may have a limitation with performing a task in the customary way it has always been done but can perform the task just as effectively another way, possibly through using a reasonable accommodation. Describing essential functions using inclusive language is another way to support the possibility of a job task being performed effectively in more than one way. HR Guide offers guidance on their [website](#) with examples of how to write outcome-based essential functions. PACE University has a chart on their [website](#) which describes physical demands using inclusive language.

Posting Essential Functions

The EEOC guidance states employers should examine their jobs to determine the essential functions before making recruitment efforts, conducting the hiring process, or making employment decisions. Including essential functions in job postings and on applications can result in expanding the pool of qualified candidates for employers to consider for their open positions.

Although employers are not required under the ADA to create job descriptions, employers often do, and it is a best practice to include the job's essential functions in these. Job descriptions prepared with essential functions can be used by applicants to determine whether they qualified for the job, by hiring professionals to create interview questions, by supervisors to measure work performance, and by human resources professionals during the interactive process to determine reasonable accommodations.

In addition, when onboarding new employees, providing a job description which includes the essential functions can help a new employee with a disability know whether they need a reasonable accommodation to perform the job. Remembering to include the reasonable accommodation statement informs them of how to make a request.

OOD Resource:

For more information on creating and using essential functions, view OOD's on-demand webinar "**Essential Functions in the Workplace**" on the employer's page of the OOD [website](#).

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.

Job Postings

How employers recruit for jobs in their advertisements, notices and postings will impact how many qualified candidates can access this information for consideration. Because candidates rely on the job's essential functions to determine whether they're qualified, it's important to include these in the job posting. Including equal employment opportunity and RA statements in your job postings help to

communicate you are an inclusive employer and care about what candidates with disabilities may need to access the hiring process. In addition, creating advertisements and postings that are accessible ensures all candidates can access the information to decide whether to apply for the job. Here are some examples of ways to make these accessible:

- Post job information in locations that are physically accessible,
- Establish accessible telecommunications, such as a telephone relay service, and
- Provide written information in alternative formats, such as large print or audio upon request.

According to responses received for the Governor's Inclusive Employer Award application, one employer reports they offer a dedicated support line for candidates to call for assistance with completing an online job application if needed.

Applications

Employers may have applicants apply for jobs through an online application system or in-person. It is a best practice to be intentional about making these processes accessible for candidates with disabilities. Here are some examples of how to make an online application accessible:

- Ensure the application site is accessible for a screen reader,
- Design hyperlinks with large graphics to provide additional space to activate the link,
- Create organized and uncluttered pages to support increased focus and concentration,
- Provide accurate captions for sounds and video,
- Design for keyboard navigation, and
- Allow sound, visual content, and time limits to be controlled by the applicant.

Some employers use online applicant tracking systems to automatically manage incoming applications and screen out applicants based on certain criteria. Employers are encouraged to permit hiring staff to override the system and select candidates who may have been automatically screened out when otherwise qualified.

It is a best practice to include an RA statement on the online application. Despite efforts to provide an accessible application process, there may be times an applicant needs to make a request for an accommodation. Providing an RA statement that is easy to find and directs applicants on how to make a request may increase the likelihood of qualified applicants applying for open positions. An RA statement may also convey to the applicant that diversity and inclusion are important to the employer.

When an applicant reports a barrier with an online application it can be helpful for employers to be prepared to handle a request for a reasonable accommodation. What reasonable accommodation an applicant will need is determined on a case-by-case basis through a collaborative interactive process. Here are some examples of reasonable accommodations:

- Allow an applicant to provide required information via e-mail, fax, telephone, or mail.
- Have print versions available that an applicant may pick up onsite in an accessible location.
- Provide written information in various formats, including large print, braille, or audio recording.
- If a telephone number is provided to call for information, establish an accessible option for deaf and hard of hearing applicants, such as a telephone relay service.

Interviews

Once a qualified applicant is identified, the preemployment phase begins. Title I of the ADA requires employers to base the pre-offer phase of preemployment on the applicant's ability to meet qualification standards and perform the job. Disability-related questions and medical examinations must wait until a conditional job offer is made and the post-offer phase of preemployment begins. These questions and exams must apply to all candidates who receive a job offer in the same job category. This difference between the pre-offer and post-offer phases is designed to prevent hiring professionals from screening out candidates due to a disability prior to evaluating their ability to perform the job. To adhere to these guidelines, here are some best practices for an accessible and inclusive interview process:

- Provide training for hiring professionals on:
 - Requirements of Title I of the ADA,
 - Disability etiquette and awareness,
 - Disability disclosure and confidentiality, and
 - How to address a request for a reasonable accommodation.
- Create protocols for hiring professionals to use during interviews:
 - Pre-written questions that focus on performing the job's essential functions and are not disability related, and
 - Instruction on when an interviewer may and may not ask a candidate to describe or demonstrate an essential function.
- Include an RA statement in the invitation for the interview:
 - Provide detailed information on the interview environment, whether onsite or virtual,
 - Be prepared to receive and facilitate reasonable accommodation requests, and
 - Create a list of vendors to contact if you receive a request for accommodations like sign language interpretation so these requests can be facilitated promptly.
- Plan for accessibility barriers that occur with virtual hiring platforms:
 - Determine if the hiring platform is accessible by a screen reader used by a candidate who is blind or has low vision,
 - Know that captions generated by artificial intelligence can cause errors that create an accessibility barrier; instead, consider real-time captioning by a trained stenographer for an interview or a sign language interpreter, and
 - Be aware that time limited, pre-recorded videos can sometimes present challenges due to certain disability-related issues; consider offering an extension of time for an individual with a disability to complete the pre-recorded video.

Onboarding

The purpose of the onboarding process is to smoothly integrate newly hired employees into their positions and the culture of the company. To ensure this process is smooth for employees with disabilities, reasonable accommodations may be needed. Employers are encouraged to review their onboarding process and consider these best practices:

- Assign an employee to oversee requests for reasonable accommodation to ensure the request is facilitated efficiently and that reasonable accommodations are in place for the first day of work.

- Educate the employees who facilitate reasonable accommodations for parking and facilities, information technology, security, and the workstation. Include education on confidentiality and how to respond to questions asked by coworkers.
- Include an RA statement in communications delivered to all newly hired employees regarding the activities included in orientation, the components of the work environment, and information about the job and workstation. This enables a newly hired employee with a disability to determine if a reasonable accommodation is needed. It also ensures the employee has the information needed to make the accommodation request.
- Become familiar with common solutions for RA requests:
 - Ensure electronic forms and intranets are accessible and be prepared to provide alternative ways to access the information,
 - Conduct onboarding in locations that are accessible,
 - Provide a qualified reader to read written materials,
 - Provide a qualified scribe to assist with completing forms or taking notes,
 - Use plain language that is clear, avoiding jargon and unnecessary information,
 - Provide a sign language interpreter,
 - Ensure training videos are captioned,
 - Permit the use of service animals,
 - Conduct in a quiet space free of distractions, and
 - Allow a job coach to be present.

Onboarding customarily includes communication about the policies and benefits that apply to all employees as a result of employment. Including training about policies and procedures pertaining to the right to reasonable accommodation and how to request an accommodation helps an employer to support new employees with disabilities. Being mindful to repeat this training periodically for all employees ensures employers are supporting employees with disabilities as well as employees without disabilities who may acquire a disability in the future.

Employers also provide information during onboarding about the benefits they offer all employees, including retirement and savings plans. To support disability inclusive benefits, employers may consider providing information on financial savings plans known as STABLE accounts that apply to employees with specific disabilities or employees with family members living with a specific disability. STABLE accounts are a powerful tool for people with disabilities to increase financial security and experience greater independence. STABLE accounts permit eligible individuals with disabilities to save a portion of their earnings which grow tax-free. This investment is not subject to federal income tax when monies are spent on Qualified Disability Expenses, which include items such as education, housing, transportation, healthcare, assistive technology, basic living expenses, and many other items. Employers can play a role in this important benefit for eligible employees with disabilities by helping employees to contribute to these accounts through payroll deductions. For more information, visit the STABLE Account [website](#). In addition to enabling access to STABLE accounts for employees with disabilities and employees with family members living with a disability, employers can further support this benefit by making an employer sponsored contribution to these plans.

To support employers in creating a hiring process and workplace culture that are diverse, inclusive of individuals with disabilities, and accessible, OOD's team of Business Relations Specialists (BRs) provide

a variety of disability awareness training offerings which can be customized. Here are examples of topics offered:

- **Disability Awareness** - a training designed for employers to examine personal attitudes and biases toward individuals with disabilities.
- **Invisible Disabilities** – an engaging session focused on the fears, myths and barriers often associated with disabilities that are not apparent, such as traumatic brain injury, mental health disabilities, and intellectual disabilities.
- **Hiring and Onboarding** - an interactive session focused on identifying and removing barriers in the hiring and on-boarding process to make it more accessible and inclusive for people with disabilities.

To find your local BRS, go to pages 12-13 of this learner’s guide for a list with contact information and a service map of counties in Ohio.

OOD Resource:

For more information on creating an accessible hiring process, view OOD’s on-demand webinar “**Inclusive Hiring: Applicants with Disabilities**” 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

Overview

- Accenture. “[Getting to Equal: The Disability Inclusion Advantage](#)”
- Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities. “[Inclusive Employer Handbook](#)”

Disability Employment Goals

- Accenture. “[Getting to Equal: The Disability Inclusion Advantage](#)”
- Society for Human Resource Management. “[4 Ways to Hire More People with Disabilities](#)”

Inclusive Recruitment Process

- Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion. “[Getting Started](#)”
- Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion. “[Recruit](#)”
- Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion. “[Resources for Finding Candidates with Disabilities](#)”
- Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities. “[About Us](#)”
- Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities. “[Candidate Sourcing](#)”
- Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities. “[Ohio College2Careers](#)”

- Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities. "[Recruiting, Hiring, and Supporting Employees](#)"
- Society for Human Resource Management. "[4 Ways to Hire More People with Disabilities](#)"

Right to Reasonable Accommodation

- Job Accommodation Network. "[Making a Statement – About Reasonable Accommodation and Equal Opportunity](#)"
- Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities. "[The Employers' ADA Handbook – RAs and Undue Hardship](#)"

Role of Essential Functions

- ADA National Network. "[What are the 'essential functions' of a job?](#)"
- HR Guide. "[Job Analysis: Job Descriptions](#)"
- Job Accommodation Network. "[Job Description Topics](#)"
- Job Accommodation Network. "[Technical Assistance Manual for Title I of the ADA](#)"
- Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities. "[Essential Functions in the Workplace](#)"
- PACE University. "[Americans with Disabilities Act Compliant Words for Job Descriptions](#)"
- U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. "[The ADA: Your Responsibilities as an Employer](#)"

Accessible Hiring Process

- Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion. "[Getting Started](#)"
- Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion. "[Recruit](#)"
- Job Accommodation Network. "[Incorporate Reasonable Accommodation Practices into Your Onboarding Process](#)"
- Job Accommodation Network. "[Job Description Topics](#)"
- Job Accommodation Network. "[Making a Statement – About Reasonable Accommodation and Equal Opportunity](#)"
- Northeast ADA Center. "[Small Business at Work Toolkit](#)"
- Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities. "[Candidate Sourcing](#)"
- Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities. "[Disability Education Resources](#)"
- Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities. "[Disability Etiquette Training](#)"
- Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities. "[Inclusive Hiring: Applicants with Disabilities Training](#)"
- Stable Account. "[Stable Account](#)"
- U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. "[Employment Tests and Selection Procedures](#)"
- U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. "[Enforcement Guidance: Disability-Related Inquiries and Medical Examinations of Employees Under the Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#)"
- U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. "[Enforcement Guidance: Preemployment Disability-Related Questions and Medical Examinations](#)"
- U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. "[Small Business Videos](#)"
- U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. "[The ADA: A Primer for Small Business](#)"
- U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. "[The ADA: Your Responsibilities as an Employer](#)"

- Voya. [“How employers can enable savings and enhance inclusion”](#)

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

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 - **Career Development Specialist:** Kris Wray
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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

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

 Colleges/ Universities

