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# A Guide to Hiring Women with Disabilities

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# A Guide to Hiring Women with Disabilities

## **Abstract**

[Excerpt] Census Bureau data from 2013 show that 12.6 percent of the U.S. population has some form of disability, although estimates of the proportion of the population living with a disability may vary depending on the definition of the term disabled. In 2014, working-age (16-64 years old) women with disabilities made up 1.5 percent of the workforce even though they were nearly 4 percent of the U.S. working age population. These women represent a critical source of untapped labor force talent. In 2014, seven in ten working-age individuals with disabilities were not in the labor force, compared with about two in ten working-age individuals with no disability. In addition to facing persistently low employment, women with disabilities often face difficulties accessing adequate housing, health and education; unequal hiring and promotion standards; and unequal pay.

## **Keywords**

women, disabilities, work, gender, pay equality, labor force participation, employment, hiring

## **Comments**

### **Suggested Citation**

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WOMEN'S BUREAU  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

# FACT SHEET

## A GUIDE TO HIRING WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES

### WORKING WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES

Census Bureau data from 2013 show that 12.6 percent of the U.S. population has some form of disability,<sup>1</sup> although estimates of the proportion of the population living with a disability may vary depending on the definition of the term disabled.<sup>2</sup> In 2014, working-age (16-64 years old) women with disabilities made up 1.5 percent of the workforce even though they were nearly 4 percent of the U.S. working age population.<sup>3</sup> These women represent a critical source of untapped labor force talent. In 2014, seven in ten working-age individuals with disabilities were not in the labor force, compared with about two in ten working-age individuals with no disability.<sup>4</sup> In addition to facing persistently low employment, women with disabilities often face difficulties accessing adequate housing, health and education; unequal hiring and promotion standards; and unequal pay.<sup>5</sup>

In recent years, a number of statutory and regulatory protections have helped mitigate the bias, outdated societal assumptions, and negative stereotypes that contribute to economic challenges facing disabled workers. In 1973, Congress passed the Rehabilitation Act (Rehab Act), offering the first federal legislation to protect the civil rights of people with disabilities.<sup>6</sup> The Rehab Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in programs conducted by Federal agencies, in programs receiving Federal financial assistance, in Federal employment, and in the employment practices of Federal contractors. Section 503 of the Rehab Act requires affirmative action and prohibits employment discrimination by Federal government contractors and subcontractors with contracts of more than \$10,000.<sup>7</sup> In 1990, Congress passed the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA ensures equal treatment and equal access for people with disabilities to employment opportunities in the private sector.<sup>8</sup> Under the ADA, businesses are required to provide reasonable accommodation that will assist in the performance of his or her job.<sup>9</sup>



Notwithstanding marked improvements around inclusion, opportunity, accessibility, and perceptions of disability in the U.S. since the 1970s,<sup>10</sup> the magnified challenges disabled women face have often been overlooked in interventions and initiatives aimed at improving labor outcomes.<sup>11</sup> Employers in the public and private sector are essential to ensuring these women have the opportunity to contribute to the growing economy and achieve financial security. The comprehensive application of promising practices and inclusive business strategies discussed below are among the first steps necessary to achieve improved labor market outcomes for women with disabilities. These employer-oriented improvements may facilitate meaningful, competitive, flexible, and integrated employment opportunities for women with disabilities.<sup>12</sup>



## THE BUSINESS CASE FOR HIRING INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

Despite being qualified, capable employees, individuals with disabilities are employed at much lower rates than individuals without disabilities. In 2014, the unemployment rate for working-age individuals with a disability was 13.9 percent, more than double the rate for persons with no disability at 6.0 percent.<sup>13</sup>

Employer misconceptions about the ability of individuals with disabilities and cost associated with the provision of accommodations may contribute to this disparity.<sup>14</sup> However, research has found that workplace accommodations not only entail minimal cost to the employer, but also positively impact the workplace in a variety of ways.<sup>15</sup> In fact, more than half of requested workplace accommodations cost businesses nothing to implement, while the rest generally fall below \$500.<sup>16</sup> Providing accommodations also results in greater worker retention, improved productivity and morale, reduced workers compensation and training costs, and improved company diversity.<sup>17</sup> In addition, a cost-benefit analysis of workers with disabilities in healthcare, retail, and hospitality found that participants with disabilities had lower absenteeism rates and longer tenures.<sup>18</sup> In the same study, across all sectors, participants with disabilities had nearly identical job performance ratings than those without disabilities and were described as “loyal,” “reliable,” and “hardworking.”<sup>19</sup>

Companies who hire individuals with disabilities may also be eligible for a number of tax benefits including the Disabled Access Credit, the Architectural Barrier Removal Tax Deduction and the Work Opportunity Tax Credit.<sup>20</sup> The Disabled Access Credit provides a non-refundable credit for small businesses that incur expenditures in providing access to persons with disabilities. The Architectural Barrier Removal Tax Deduction encourages businesses of any size to remove architectural and transportation barriers to the mobility of persons with disabilities and the elderly. Lastly, an employee with a disability is included as part of the “targeted group” for the Work Opportunity Tax Credit, which provides eligible employers with a tax credit of up to 40 percent of the first \$6,000 of first-year wages of a new employee.<sup>21</sup>

## PROMISING PRACTICES

Increasingly, employers have voluntarily implemented policies to remove a variety of employment barriers related to recruitment, retention, and advancement of people with disabilities. These practices have the potential to significantly improve employment outcomes among women with disabilities if (1) applied comprehensively, (2) measured regularly for results by disability and gender, and (3) adjusted as necessary to meet stated objectives.<sup>22</sup>

## PROMISING PRACTICES

RECRUITMENT	Demonstrate top-down commitment.
	Implement policies that focus on “ability” and aim to hire more people with disabilities.
	Conduct targeted outreach to attract qualified candidates with disabilities.
	Ensure job announcements are in formats that are accessible to job seekers with disabilities.
	Utilize inclusive language that encourages qualified individuals with disabilities to apply.
RETENTION	Provide an opportunity for applicants to request reasonable accommodation, if needed.
	Create on-boarding or orientation programs that include disability-specific information, such as reasonable accommodation procedures.
	Provide equal access to career development programs by ensuring events, materials, and classes are fully accessible and earmarking funds to provide disability-related accommodations if needed.
	Address unconscious bias and increase inclusivity through disability awareness and etiquette training.
	Develop workplace mentoring programs.
	Implement workplace flexibility programs including flexible start and end times, compressed work weeks, shift swaps, and telework.

**Source:** The White House “Recruiting, Hiring, Retaining and Promoting People with Disabilities,” February 3, 2015, [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/employing\\_people\\_with\\_disabilities\\_toolkit\\_february\\_3\\_2015\\_v4.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/employing_people_with_disabilities_toolkit_february_3_2015_v4.pdf).



## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> "Disability Characteristics: 2013 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates," United States Census Bureau, accessed June 30, 2015, [http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS\\_13\\_1YR\\_S1810&prodType=table](http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_13_1YR_S1810&prodType=table)
- <sup>2</sup> For the purposes of federal disability nondiscrimination laws, a person with a disability is typically defined as someone who (1) has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more "major life activities," (2) has a record of such an impairment, or (3) is regarded as having such an impairment. "Frequently Ask Questions," U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy, accessed June 12, 2015, <http://www.dol.gov/odep/faqs/general.htm#3>
- <sup>3</sup> Unpublished tabulations from the 2014 Current Population Survey, Bureau of Labor Statistics.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>5</sup> "Women and Girls with Disabilities," United Nations, accessed May 28, 2015, <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=1514>
- <sup>6</sup> 29 U.S.C. § 793
- <sup>7</sup> 41 CFR Part 60-741
- <sup>8</sup> 42 U.S.C. §§ 12101 et seq. Since 1994, title I of the ADA requires employers in the private sector with 15 or more employees to provide qualified individuals with disabilities an equal opportunity to benefit from the full range of employment-related opportunities available to others. It also applies to state and local governments, employment agencies, and labor unions.
- <sup>9</sup> The ADA permits employers to refuse to make requested accommodations if they would place an undue financial burden or an operational burden on the business.
- <sup>10</sup> Shapiro, J. (1993). *No pity: People with disabilities forging a new civil rights movement*. New York: Three Rivers Press.; Government Accountability Office. (1996). *People with disabilities: Federal programs could work together more efficiently to promote employment*. Rep No. GAO/HEHS-960126. Washington, DC: GAO.; Barnartt, S. N., & Scotch, R. (2001). *Disability protests: Contentious politics 1970-1999*. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.; Blanck, P. (2004). Americans with disabilities and their civil rights: Past, present, and future. *University of Pittsburgh Law Review*, 66, 687-719.; O'Reilly, A. (2007). *The right to decent work of persons with disabilities*. Geneva: International Labour Office.; Longmore, P. K. (2009). Disability rights movement. In S. Burch (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of American disability history* (pp. 280-285). New York: Facts on File, Inc.; National Council on Disability (NCD). (2010). *Equality of opportunity: The making of the Americans with Disabilities Act*. Washington, D.C.: National Council on Disability.; Nielsen, K. (2012). *A disability history of the United States*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- <sup>11</sup> "Women," Office of Disability Employment Policy, accessed July 1, 2015, <http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/women.htm>
- <sup>12</sup> Schur, L., & Kruse, D. (2008). *Best practices in employing people with disabilities: Case study data*. (Unpublished). New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University.
- <sup>13</sup> Unpublished tabulations from the 2014 Current Population Survey, Bureau of Labor Statistics.
- <sup>14</sup> "Exploring the Bottom Line: A Study of the Cost and Benefits of Workers with Disabilities," DePaul University and Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, accessed May 18, 2015, [http://bbi.syr.edu/assets/staff\\_bio\\_publications/McDonald\\_Exploring\\_the\\_Bottom\\_Line\\_2007.pdf](http://bbi.syr.edu/assets/staff_bio_publications/McDonald_Exploring_the_Bottom_Line_2007.pdf)
- <sup>15</sup> Loy, B. "Workplace Accommodations: Low Cost, High Impact," Job Accommodation Network, accessed May 18, 2015, <http://askjan.org/media/lowcosthighimpact.html>
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>18</sup> "Exploring the Bottom Line: A Study of the Cost and Benefits of Workers with Disabilities," DePaul University and Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, accessed May 18, 2015, [http://bbi.syr.edu/assets/staff\\_bio\\_publications/McDonald\\_Exploring\\_the\\_Bottom\\_Line\\_2007.pdf](http://bbi.syr.edu/assets/staff_bio_publications/McDonald_Exploring_the_Bottom_Line_2007.pdf)
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>20</sup> For more information on business strategies for disability inclusion, visit the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy resource page: <http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/employers.htm>
- <sup>21</sup> "Tax Benefits for Businesses Who Have Employees with Disabilities," Internal Revenue Service (IRS), accessed May 18, 2015, <http://www.irs.gov/Businesses/Small-Businesses-&Self-Employed/Tax-Benefits-for-Businesses-Who-Have-Employees-with-Disabilities>
- <sup>22</sup> Schur, L., & Kruse, D. (2008). *Best practices in employing people with disabilities: Case study data*. (Unpublished). New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University.



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