Research brief: Facilitating self-identification in federal contractor workplaces

Under Section 503 regulations that went into effect March 2014, employers who are federal contractors or sub-contractors must offer applicants the opportunity to self-identify at pre-offer, post-offer, and employees an opportunity at least once every five years.

Data collection on disability is designed to help organizations understand the effectiveness of their outreach and recruitment efforts and measure progress toward the 7% utilization goal of people with disabilities across job groups. However, to get to accurate workforce statistics, individuals with disabilities must voluntarily report that they have a disability on the self-identification form.

In a survey of federal contractor representatives conducted in fall 2017 by Cornell University, self-identification was the most frequently mentioned challenge in implementing Section 503 regulations for respondent organizations (n=235). This informational brief describes the efforts of survey respondents to promote self-identification.

Most respondent organizations are using the self-identification form to collect data on disability status (90.4%), and most of those collecting data have integrated the form into their HR or other appropriate system (95.9%). Many organizations struggle to get employees to respond to the self-identification form; a third of the Section 503 Survey respondents indicated that only 30% or fewer of their employees have completed the form. About 15% of organizations surveyed had met the 7% utilization goal, while almost half reported a self-identification rate of 2% or less.

The most common practice that respondents reported using to facilitate disability self-identification was making the self-identification form available when employees update personal information, with 57% offering this option. Next most common was annual communication to encourage self-identification (52%) and communication from organizational leaders (41%). Several less frequent practices, including conducting a formal self-identification campaign (29%), spotlighting successful employees with disabilities (19%) and making self-identification part of the annual open enrollment process (16%) were rated as somewhat more effective than the more common practices.

For more information on this topic, and to access the full report go to: (https://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/edicollect/1361/).
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