

# Conclusion: A Story of Mutual Success for Employers and People with Disabilities

At a time when the employment rate for people with disabilities is unacceptably low, this study describes a dynamic between employers and a diverse array of workforce suppliers that, if nurtured, can result in large numbers of people with disabilities having expanded employment opportunities. A broad range of America's leading companies view people with disabilities as a valuable resource in meeting their needs for reliable, skilled employees, and they are *recruiting* them.

This report shows what works when organizations identify a source of good jobs at an established employer. This opportunity acts as a powerful incentive to spur successful, sustainable, and trusted partnerships. By seeking these opportunities, workforce and human services agencies that understand the employers' business case can build their capacity and serve their job-seeking clients more effectively. By building relationships with more employers, public agencies and private nonprofit organizations can learn more about how to work successfully with a range of employers. A number of these practices have been identified in this report.

In this difficult economic era, when both U.S. and global businesses are scrambling for new advantages, new markets, and business models that will make them more competitive, this report demonstrates that a wellspring of talent and enormous human resource assets are to be found within our own communities. As demonstrated in the stories in these profiles, people with disabilities are abundantly capable of meeting a range of employment situations and helping any firm be competitive and profitable. By training and hiring this talented resource, with the assistance of trusted partners in the community, employers can sharpen their competitive edge.

The profiles in this report document initiatives to employ people with disabilities driven by active, engaged employers that have found it advantageous to collaborate with trusted organizations to understand their business needs, and assist them in finding the right talent at the right time. The report finds that:

- These profiles involve an impressive list of America's leading companies and equally impressive nonprofit and public agencies;
- These employers respond to a business case, and their partners understand this dynamic; and
- These employers are motivated, first and foremost, by a need for qualified and reliable employees, and their partners understand and respond to that need.

## Conclusion: A Story of Mutual Success for Employers and People with Disabilities

In each of the cases pro led, employers receive assistance from one or more organizations acting collaboratively that help the employers to recruit, hire, train, and support employees with disabilities. These organizations, whether acting singularly or as a network, address fears employers have about needing to arrange and coordinate services and supports from organizations and systems whose mission it is to help people with disabilities get to work and keep working. In most cases, these efforts evolve into full, collaborative partnerships. Simply put, the broad range of employers in this report want to recruit employees with disabilities and the collaborations supporting these initiatives have provided a range of needed services and supports that make it easier for them to do so. There is a will and a way. The pro les present successful strategies for fully including people with disabilities in America's workforce.

The pro les highlight important lessons for policymakers, practitioners, and employers. These are presented through four *Ready and Able* findings.

### ■ **Employers respond to a business case for employing people with disabilities**

The pro les show a broad range of employers and employment arrangements that have demonstrated that hiring people with disabilities brings value and productivity to the workplace, and contributes to a firm's bottom line. Employers' appreciation of the value of employees with disabilities, including the types of jobs that they can do, grows with experience. Further, employers report that the accommodations made for people with disabilities benefit all workers. People with disabilities are as much a part of America's talent pipeline as any worker without a disability. The experiences noted in these pro les only confirm this conclusion.

### ■ **Innovative collaborations with and between workforce-supplying organizations enable employer efforts to recruit, hire, train, and support employees with disabilities**

The pro les show that partnerships and collaborations between trusted partners are important to achieving employment gains for people with disabilities. The report shows varied types of collaborations and partnership arrangements that work with employers to recruit, hire, train, and support people. Some are created to support a single company and some serve multiple firms. Some are coordinated by a broad range of entities, including service providers, business associations, school systems, universities, and staffing companies. Other entities foster new collaborations based on employer needs. A frequent refrain heard from the employers interviewed was "we couldn't have done it without them."

### ■ **Collaborations ensure that workers are qualified and productive**

The pro les show partner organizations handling screening for employers to assure that qualified applicants meet employer needs, and public, nonpro t, and for-pro t organizations work side by side with employers to mutually develop training programs to teach people with disabilities the skills for jobs and positions in need by employers. In addition, the pro les highlight the benefits of providing people with disabilities with

## Conclusion: A Story of Mutual Success for Employers and People with Disabilities

opportunities for trying out jobs through vehicles such as internships. The feedback from employers indicates that employees with disabilities meet or exceed the performance of co-workers who do not have a disability.

### ■ **Successful collaborations nurture and reward continuous leadership**

The profiles highlight “champions” from employers who set expectations and who either had (or developed) a commitment to diversity and disability employment goals and who reached out to organizations for assistance. Likewise, each of the collaborations has a coordinator and a group of leaders who responded to the opportunity to meet employer needs through the employment of people with disabilities.

## Implications for the Future

This study concludes that the future is bright, but challenging, for the expansion of employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Current strategies in disability employment, workforce development, and economic development systems must change in order to better incentivize, support, and sustain employers and job seekers in these opportunities. A core element of state and community efforts to employ people with disabilities should be the establishment of partnerships and collaborations between disability service organizations, the workforce development system (including employment and training entities and postsecondary institutions), business-serving associations, and economic development agencies. A key question to ask is: How will your organization respond if an employer such as Walgreens calls?

### *For State and Local Policymakers:*

- Develop strategies for proactively reaching out to employers and responding to employers who want assistance in the recruitment of employees with disabilities. These strategies should look at the situation from the *employer point of view* and make it *easy* for the employer to work with the public sector and provider organizations.
- Make workforce training programs more universal and integrated, with inclusive access and services that benefit job seekers with a wide range of learning styles, languages, educational levels, and abilities.

### *For Disability Service and Workforce Development Organizations:*

- Develop strategies such as co-operative education, internships, and apprenticeships that give employers experience employing people with disabilities and that can serve as a vehicle to better prepare people with disabilities for skilled, career ladder positions.

## Conclusion: A Story of Mutual Success for Employers and People with Disabilities

- Foster collaborative relationships among workforce-supplying organizations (e.g., public agencies, nonprofit organizations, K-12 schools, and postsecondary institutions) that make it easier for employers or employer organizations to work with publicly funded programs.

### *For Business-Serving Organizations and Employers:*

- Recognize that people with disabilities can be a valuable resource to meet employer needs for reliable, skilled employees. The broad range of employers that benefit from the collaborations covered in this report believe they are getting a “leg up” on their competitors by recruiting people with disabilities to meet their workforce needs.
- Look to engage in partnerships with responsive workforce development, disability service organizations, and other agencies to recruit, hire, train, retain, and support employees with disabilities.