

Executive Summary

People with disabilities can work and want to work. Given the growing body of evidence that demonstrates that workers with disabilities meet or exceed the job performance of co-workers without disabilities, the continuing high unemployment rate and low labor force participation rate of people with disabilities deprive the nation of a valuable pool of talent. Increasing the employment of people with disabilities produces significant benefits to the economy, the nation, and people with disabilities themselves.

The National Technical Assistance and Research (NTAR) Leadership Center at Rutgers University chose to address this issue by conducting research on employer and market-driven initiatives to recruit, hire, train, and retain people with disabilities. Using a case study approach, NTAR Leadership Center researchers selected 13 diverse examples from around the nation of partnerships — between employers and trusted workforce intermediaries — with a track record of helping employers recruit, hire, train, and retain employees with disabilities. Over the course of six months, researchers conducted in-depth research and interviewed and visited leaders and practitioners at the heart of these business-public collaborations. The goal of this research was to identify successful elements of these strategies and offer lessons that can be learned by employers and employer organizations, workforce development and disability service organizations, and federal, state, and local policymakers.

While each partnership has its own distinctive qualities, NTAR Leadership Center researchers found several overall themes, identified as key *Ready and Able* findings:

- **Employers respond to a business case for employing people with disabilities.** Employers believe that people with disabilities who possess the skills needed for the job add value to the employer and positively affect the “bottom line.” Successful experiences with qualified workers with disabilities increase the employer’s willingness to expand employment opportunities. Because employers tend to listen to each other, business-to-business marketing of the value of employing people with disabilities is most powerful.
- **Innovative collaborations with and between workforce-supplying organizations enable employer efforts to recruit, hire, train, and support employees with disabilities.** Employers do not want to have to maintain relationships with many varied workforce-supplying organizations — they find it daunting to learn the intricacies of the workforce and disability service worlds. Accordingly, they prefer a single point of contact to coordinate needed assistance and supports they require to recruit and hire. In some cases, intermediaries organize and coordinate supports and provide technical assistance on workforce issues, including disability-specific issues.
- **Collaborations ensure that workers are qualified and productive.** Many effective projects feature internships and mentorships, encouraging hands-on guidance and work experience. Others provide opportunities for workers to earn credentials and degrees for jobs with good wages and benefits, or offer access to career ladders, workplace training,

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and skills. Needed supports and accommodations are provided to enable employees to be successful once on the job.

- **Successful collaborations nurture and reward continuous leadership.** Leaders in the partnerships studied showed a willingness to develop, coordinate, nurture, and manage the collaboration.

The chapters in this report are organized to highlight different partnership models.

Chapter 1, “Challenging the Conventional Wisdom: National Employer Collaborations” profiles two large global companies that organized local partnerships with service agencies to support disability employment initiatives.

The first profile describes how *Walgreens* established a corporate goal of having 30% of the workers in its new distribution centers be people with disabilities, with a focus on people with intellectual disabilities. The profile further describes how the company established effective partnerships with state and community agencies in South Carolina and Connecticut and exceeded its goal at its two new distribution centers in Anderson, South Carolina and Windsor, Connecticut.

The second profile provides an overview of the *Lockheed Martin* Seamless Transition Apprenticeship Program to recruit and train injured veterans for career path jobs in supply chain management and information technology. The success of this effort is the result of the company’s innovative collaborations with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Walter Reed Army Medical Center, and the Wounded Warriors advocacy group.

Chapter 2, “Winning Together: A Sector Strategy Model” features a profile of an intermediary that focuses on a particular sector.

This chapter describes the *International Association of Jewish Vocational Services’* Financial Career Pathways project. Building on a partnership developed by its Los Angeles affiliate with six banks, the Association coordinated an effort among three of its affiliates to serve as intermediaries between job seekers with disabilities and banks in their regions. The project served 145 individuals with disabilities.

Chapter 3, “Preferred Solutions: How Job Brokers for People with Disabilities Meet Employer Needs” features two profiles of staffing companies that coordinate outreach and disability services in order to provide multiple employer customers with qualified employees with disabilities.

The first profile examines *GoodTemps*, a staffing agency operated by Goodwill Industries of Greater New York and Northern New Jersey. GoodTemps maintains relationships with a long list of local service provider agencies from which it recruits job seekers with disabilities to meet its employer customers’ workforce needs. GoodTemps places more than 2,000 people each year; approximately 60% are individuals with disabilities.

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The second profile describes the *Manpower Inc.* TechReach program in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Manpower partnered with employers, the workforce system, the vocational rehabilitation agency, and the local community college to recruit and train people with disabilities to respond to a business need for skilled employees for electronic assembly.

Chapter 4, “Career Tracks: Placing Skilled College Students and Graduates with Disabilities through Partnerships between Employers, Colleges and Universities, and Intermediaries” profiles three organizations that support nationwide networks of employers to recruit college graduates with disabilities.

The first profile describes the National Business and Disability Council’s *Emerging Leaders* program, which partners with businesses to help them find outstanding talent while also considering diversity and inclusion in their hiring practices. The program provides paid summer internships for highly qualified undergraduate and graduate students with disabilities at major employers throughout the nation.

The second profile examines the *Career Opportunities for Students with Disabilities* program, a national association comprising over 600 colleges and universities and nearly 300 national employers. The program promotes coordination between campus career and disability services offices and serves as a recruitment hub for college students with disabilities for collaborating universities and employers throughout the United States.

The third profile describes *Lime Connect*, a nonprofit organization that connects undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students to major companies in the United States and Canada. Corporate partners work with Lime Connect to source talented students with disabilities for full-time, internship, and co-op opportunities.

Chapter 5, “Bridging Workforce Gaps: Hiring People with Disabilities through Local and Regional Collaboratives” features three profiles of local organizations that assist multiple local employers to recruit, hire, and retain employees with disabilities.

The first profile describes the Supported Employment Network led by the *New Bedford, Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce*. The Chamber serves as an intermediary between local service provider agencies and over 250 employers to meet the workforce needs of member employers and provide opportunities for good jobs for people with disabilities.

The second profile features the *Start on Success* program operated by the Pittsburgh Public School System in partnership with the workforce system, the vocational rehabilitation agency, and local employers. The program provides paid internships for high school students with disabilities at collaborating employers and offers a pipeline of skilled employees to meet workforce needs.

The third profile describes *Project SEARCH*, which was started at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital and has been replicated across the nation to solve workforce problems through recruitment of employees with disabilities. A core element of the program’s model is

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partnerships with local school districts and service providers to recruit, train, and support employees for skilled jobs.

Chapter 6, “Catalysts: Business-Affiliated Organizations Leading Disability and Employment Partnerships” profiles two organizations that foster partnerships between service providers and employers seeking to employ people with disabilities.

The first profile describes *disabilityworks*, a joint initiative of the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce, the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, and the City of Chicago. The organization serves as a hub linking business, nonprofit, and community partners with the goal of expanding employment opportunities for people with disabilities while meeting workforce needs.

The second profile features the *Oregon Business Leadership Network*, which, until it closed in April 2010, was an employer-led organization that provided Oregon businesses with networking opportunities, education, and resources to effectively increase understanding and awareness of disability issues in the workplace. The organization used an economic development approach for a myriad of nationally recognized activities and partnerships, all directed toward assisting employers in finding talented individuals with disabilities for their workforces.

Conclusion

A growing number and a broad range of America’s leading companies view people with disabilities as a valuable source for meeting their needs for reliable, skilled employees. The *Ready and Able* research concludes that the future is bright, but challenging, for the expansion of employment opportunities for people with disabilities. A core element of state and community efforts to stimulate the employment of 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 to support employers in recruiting, hiring, training, and retaining employees with disabilities.