

Frequently Asked Questions About the JWOD Program from the Community Perspective

INTRODUCTION

When promoting the Javits-Wagner-O'Day (JWOD) Program to the public, you may be asked a variety of questions. The following are some of the most commonly asked questions with answers about the JWOD Program from a community perspective.

What is the Javits-Wagner-O'Day (JWOD) Program?

The Javits-Wagner-O'Day (JWOD) Program provides employment opportunities for nearly 40,000 Americans who are blind or have other severe disabilities. The JWOD Program uses the purchasing power of the federal government to buy products and services from participating, community-based nonprofit agencies dedicated to training and employing individuals with disabilities. The Javits-Wagner-O'Day (JWOD) Act appears in Title 41 of the United States Code, Sections 46 through 48c (41 U.S.C. 46-48c).

A coordinated effort on behalf of the Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled (the federal agency that oversees the Program), National Industries for the Blind (NIB) and NISH—Creating Employment Opportunities for People with Severe Disabilities, the JWOD Program provides people who are blind or who have other severe disabilities the opportunity to acquire job skills and training, receive good wages and benefits and gain greater independence and quality of life. Through the JWOD Program, people with disabilities enjoy full participation in their community and can market their JWOD-learned skills into other public and private sector jobs.

What are the advantages of the JWOD Program?

The JWOD Program is a unique program that not only benefits people who are blind or who have other severe disabilities, but also makes economic sense for the American taxpaying public. There is a great value to the American taxpayer base since thousands of people who might otherwise be solely dependent upon public assistance instead are taxpaying citizens within their communities. For the federal government, there is great value in the quality of products and services that are available at competitive prices from JWOD producing nonprofit agencies across the country.

For JWOD employees who are blind or who have other disabilities, the benefits in terms of self-esteem, value to the community, increased independence and value to their employers are beyond measure.

Is the JWOD Program really necessary in light of the 1990 enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)?

Yes. The landmark ADA legislation assures basic civil rights for people with disabilities, including the provision of reasonable accommodations by employers. While it is already making a difference in the lives of people with disabilities, it does not assure jobs for all people with disabilities who want to work. The unemployment rate among such individuals remains exceedingly high. Moreover, the vast majority of people with disabilities employed under the JWOD Program are currently not capable of competitive employment. Consequently, they are not currently in a position to benefit from the ADA's reasonable accommodations provision. It is

expected, however, that many JWOD employees will obtain work skills as a result of their JWOD jobs and therefore, be able to take advantage of opportunities made available because of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

What types of wages do JWOD Program employees earn?

On JWOD product contracts, employees are paid based on the prevailing industry wage for a specific locality. On JWOD service contracts, employees are paid in accordance with the Service Contract Act (SCA). As of FY 2002, the average hourly wage for a JWOD employee was \$8.23 per hour (with some JWOD employees earning as much as \$10 to \$14 per hour) compared to the federal minimum wage of \$5.15 per hour. JWOD wages allow many people who are blind or have other severe disabilities to live more independent lives. Some JWOD-participating nonprofit agencies hold special certificates issued by the Department of Labor to pay employees a commensurate wage (a percentage of the prevailing wage) based on employee productivity.

What types of jobs are people with disabilities performing for the federal government?

Nonprofit agencies around the country that employ people who are blind or who have other severe disabilities are supplying a wide array of high-quality products including office supplies using the SKILCRAFT® brand, military clothing, detergents, paints and surgical items to name just a few. In the services category, JWOD employees can be found working in such areas as landscaping, building maintenance, food service, mail center operations, laundry services, order processing, administrative support, document imaging and a myriad of other services. In short, JWOD employees are meeting the needs of government agencies for products and services as diverse as the agencies themselves.

Sometimes I hear others in the disability community criticizing the JWOD Program, calling it “segregated employment.” What do you say to them?

Some think of the JWOD Program as being synonymous with the old “sheltered workshop model,” which it is not. The truth is, most JWOD Program jobs, nearly 80 percent, are in “integrated settings” at federal agencies, on military bases and in our communities—where people with disabilities work side by side with others who do not have disabilities. The JWOD law requires that at least 75 percent of the direct labor in a participating nonprofit agency be performed by people who are blind or severely disabled. Thousands of people choose JWOD jobs and are paid either prevailing wages or at rates commensurate with their productivity. Jobs that are in what some might call “factory settings,” are providing job opportunities that nonprofit agencies and the people they serve may not otherwise have. There are more than 600 qualified nonprofit agencies that provide JWOD job training and employment for people who are blind or who have other severe disabilities. There are hundreds more nonprofit agencies that look to the JWOD Program to support their local vocational mission but are not producing under the Program. In the final analysis, many thousands of people with disabilities depend on the Program for their livelihood and their ability to live with dignity in their communities. Choice is the ultimate objective for every American, whether we have a disability or not. People deserve choice in everything from where to spend their money, to where they live, to where they work.

Can't people with disabilities compete for jobs in private industry just like anybody else?

They can and they do. An important aspect of the JWOD Program is that it provides real job training for people who are blind or who have other disabilities. This job training provides greater opportunity for people to transfer the skills they have acquired into private sector employment opportunities. However, competition for jobs grows every day and private industry is not effectively providing employment opportunities for people who are blind or who have other severe disabilities. If private industry had demonstrated its collective will to employ people with disabilities over the years, laws such as the JWOD Act and the ADA would not have been necessary and we would not be experiencing a 70 percent unemployment rate within this segment of our society.

Can you cite some specific successes of the JWOD Program?

Certainly. For example, in California more than 2,200 people are employed in nonprofit agencies participating in the JWOD Program. That figure alone would be attractive to any economic development official. Coupled with the fact that these employees earn in excess of \$19 million per year, you have a very real success story. In Texas, more than 2,900 people who are blind or who have other severe disabilities work on JWOD contracts and earn a little over \$19 million annually. Even in a smaller state such as Maryland, more than 2,000 people are working on JWOD projects earning almost \$17 million a year.

The real successes, however, are in the individual lives of the JWOD employees. Contact a JWOD qualified nonprofit agency in your community and go visit. There you will find out first hand how the JWOD Program and community nonprofit agencies are changing lives right in your own neighborhood.

Do agencies associated with the JWOD Program only service federal agencies and departments?

No. Community nonprofit agencies around the country contract with major corporations such as 3M, Boeing, General Motors, American Honda, Northern Telecom, Toro and Rockwell International, among others. For these and other private corporations, employees provide the full range of product and service offerings including such technical services as micrographics, sub-assembly, recycling, and data entry. Remember, their mission is to train and employ (and often provide housing and transportation) to people who are blind or who have other severe disabilities in their communities.

How do NIB and NISH assist nonprofits with the JWOD Program and the employment of persons with disabilities?

NIB and NISH are committed to helping their associated agencies succeed in providing employment opportunities to individuals with severe disabilities. Among many other services, NIB and NISH offer their agencies assistance on product and service contract development and management, legislative and regulatory issues, communications and public relations, information technology, engineering and technical support, workforce development concerns, and an extensive professional training program.

Fiscal Year 2002 Facts About JWOD

The Javits-Wagner-O'Day (JWOD) Program is providing employment for thousands of people who are blind or who have other severe disabilities throughout the United States. The following FY 02 data show the contributions that the JWOD Program has on the lives of people with disabilities.

CRPs with JWOD Projects: **609**

JWOD Employees with Disabilities: **38,882**

JWOD Direct Labor Hours: **33.9 million**

JWOD Wages Earned: **\$279.2 million**

Average JWOD Wage: **\$8.23/hour**

FY 02 JWOD Sales: **\$1.5 billion**

JWOD By State

State	JWOD Workers	JWOD Wages	JWOD Sales
Alaska	182	1,549,365	4,972,396
Alabama	635	4,745,267	22,282,121
Arkansas	209	1,579,528	8,913,435
Arizona	659	3,273,096	13,501,371
California	2,141	21,799,000	96,144,125
Colorado	886	3,916,999	13,528,813
Connecticut	573	1,410,111	9,759,856
District of Columbia	328	5,027,823	15,500,108
Delaware	33	187,425	957,528
Florida	1,910	13,660,586	56,625,603
Georgia	976	7,594,510	27,970,953
Guam	20	131,027	272,867
Hawaii	316	2,100,197	8,934,445
Iowa	156	541,644	1,442,104
Idaho	675	5,373,719	15,324,674
Illinois	1,160	10,945,613	36,630,067
Indiana	408	1,545,626	22,175,888
Kansas	236	1,887,445	33,338,983
Kentucky	928	4,873,365	21,008,094
Louisiana	709	4,592,320	24,752,493
Massachusetts	390	2,969,088	9,494,413
Maryland	2,547	19,902,321	84,702,138
Maine	254	1,284,495	30,560,011
Michigan	955	7,245,525	42,356,133
Minnesota	566	3,570,153	25,875,924
Missouri	542	2,765,074	25,236,873
Mississippi	468	3,799,552	17,276,360
Montana	325	400,616	3,526,717
North Carolina	1,569	12,056,201	110,751,871
North Dakota	298	1,131,317	3,631,665
Nebraska	239	1,072,484	7,608,727
New Hampshire	48	130,406	279,545
New Jersey	377	3,326,508	13,414,867
New Mexico	351	2,868,536	8,501,778
Nevada	167	2,020,867	6,995,469
New York	2,198	18,509,492	70,912,788
Ohio	858	6,433,758	28,222,735
Oklahoma	594	3,129,631	15,760,817
Oregon	311	2,848,541	7,285,409
Pennsylvania	1,423	4,610,968	25,281,150
Rhode Island	293	2,122,569	4,937,485
South Carolina	1,072	4,254,241	13,797,145

South Dakota	245	1,743,459	6,499,920
Tennessee	473	2,824,666	45,390,826
Texas	4,087	31,341,869	238,668,577
Utah	215	2,140,967	6,827,152
Virginia	2,558	22,605,497	83,005,683
Vermont	7	66,104	278,091
Washington	1,070	8,474,740	36,320,914
Wisconsin	946	3,629,053	50,841,724
West Virginia	247	2,796,986	7,030,230
Wyoming	49	375,960	948,685
Total	38,882	279,186,311	1,466,257,747

JWOD Contact Information:

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