

The *ABCs* of **SCHEDULE A**

For Service Providers



**Helping Your
Clients Obtain
Federal
Employment**

INTRODUCTION

Are you a career counselor? Do you work in disability student services? Are you a vocational counselor or vocational rehabilitation professional? Are you an employment navigator? Do you work in any capacity to assist individuals with disabilities obtain meaningful employment? **If so, this guide is for you! The federal government wants you to know how to help your clients get in our doors!**

This guide will educate all types of service providers about a special hiring authority – Schedule A – which is used in the federal government to quickly bring individuals with disabilities on board. This guide will show you, step by step, how to work with your local federal agencies to successfully place your clients with disabilities using Schedule A.

So what is Schedule A?

Schedule A is a special hiring authority designed to help federal agencies meet their affirmative action obligations regarding individuals with disabilities. Schedule A is different than the traditional, and often time consuming process used to hire people into federal service. Schedule A makes it easier and faster to hire, and is just for people with disabilities.

Why do you need to know about Schedule A?

You need to know about Schedule A because federal opportunities await your clients! The federal government has a wide variety of available jobs and is actively seeking qualified applicants with disabilities to fill those jobs.

The federal government, our nation's largest employer, hires talented people for careers in a variety of fields, including:

- ❖ Accounting
- ❖ Clerical
- ❖ Food Service
- ❖ Information Technology
- ❖ Legal
- ❖ Maintenance
- ❖ Science
- ❖ Technical Writer/Editor
- ❖ ... and many more!

With so many opportunities, it is crucial that you and your client do not overlook the possibilities of federal employment. Service providers who know the basics of Schedule A, and can use it effectively, can assist clients to become gainfully employed as federal workers.

This brochure gives you the basics of using the Schedule A hiring authority, answers the most frequently asked questions concerning the use of Schedule A, and provides resources that will help you use this powerful employment option more effectively.

So read on!

This guide provides answers to most of your questions about using Schedule A to get your client through the federal hiring process.

THE ABCs

A If you have a client who is interested in working for the federal government, the first task (for you and/or your client) is to identify open positions that fit the person's knowledge, skills, and experience.

Most federal vacancies are advertised on the USAJOBS Web site found at www.usajobs.gov. This is the federal government's official site for job information and includes over 16,000 job postings. Through this site, anyone can search for openings in a particular field, city, or agency, or all three. Individuals can also sign-up for e-mail alerts, notifying them about job openings by type of job, agency, and/or geographic area. Those without access to the Internet or who need additional assistance can call 202-606-2525. There is also an Automated Telephone System that can be reached at 703-724-1850 (Voice) or 978-461-8404 (TTY).

Be mindful that not all agencies use USAJOBS to announce job vacancies. So, it is important to check specific agency Web sites for additional information on employment opportunities if you and your client have a particular agency in mind. A listing of agency sites can be found at www.usa.gov.

B Once a job vacancy has been identified, the next step is to prepare the job application.

For most of your clients, this typically will mean creating a resume. For assistance with creating a resume, please use the Resources page at the end of this guide. There is also a resume builder on the USAJOBS site.

In addition to the resume, many (if not most) federal vacancy announcements ask for other documents to be submitted as part of the application package. Therefore, it is imperative that both your client and you **read all job announcements very carefully**. Make sure your client has all the documents required (such as a writing sample or college transcript, for example), as the application may be rejected without them.

In addition to the typical application materials mentioned above, to be considered for a Schedule A appointment, an applicant will also be required to submit proof of his/her disability. Though disclosure of one's disability in order to get a job is not typical, it will be required for a Schedule A appointment. The Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act both provide persons with disabilities protections against being compelled to disclose the existence of a disability, but because Schedule A is only available to individuals with disabilities, individuals have to prove they have a disability to be eligible. Proof of disability will typically come in the form of a letter. Such a letter simply needs to say that your client has a severe disability. Your client can get this letter from:

- ❖ a doctor,
- ❖ a licensed medical professional,
- ❖ a licensed rehabilitation professional (which may mean you!), or
- ❖ any federal, state, District of Columbia, or US territory agency that issues or provides disability benefits.

The letter does NOT need to detail your client's medical history or need for an accommodation. The simpler the letter is, the better.

THE ABCs

In addition to the “proof of disability,” the Schedule A regulation also requires that your client be certified as job ready. So what does it mean to be job ready?

Although the Schedule A regulation uses the term “Certification of Job Readiness,” this certification does not need to be a formal *certificate*, in the traditional sense.

Job readiness can be certified in a number of ways:

- ❖ An agency can (and should) review your client’s resume and references to determine whether s/he is “ready” for the position s/he is applying for, to certify job readiness;
- ❖ Job readiness can be determined by any of the entities listed above that can provide proof of disability (including potentially you!). In addition to the entities available for providing proof of disability, other entities can help you and your client with the certification of job readiness. The following entities can certify job readiness: a licensed career counselor, a public or private vocational rehabilitation counselor, a Veterans Administration (VA) counselor, or Social Security or other disability benefits staff. To locate a vocational rehabilitation counselor in your area, go to www.jan.wvu.edu/cgi-win/typequery.exe?902 for a complete listing. If your client is a veteran, a listing of VA centers and hospitals can be found at the www.va.gov Web site. If you are a veteran with a disability rating of 30% or more, you may also be eligible to apply under special veterans’ hiring programs; and
- ❖ In lieu of a job readiness certificate, an agency can also bring a Schedule A applicant on-board as a temporary employee, in order to determine job readiness on-the-job. Once an agency is satisfied that the new employee (your client) meets the needs of the job, the position can be converted from temporary to permanent.

Ultimately, there are no hard and fast rules when it comes to job readiness. The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) offers no official certification forms for use with Schedule A hiring, but sample certifications can be found in the following presentation: www.rehabnetwork.org/busrel/doc/NETCast_Oct_2007/NETCast_Oct_2007_Virginia_VR.ppt. Hiring agencies are free to decide for themselves who is a good fit for their open position(s).

And, if you are the person who will be certifying your client's job readiness, it is important for you to be flexible and to understand that "certification of job readiness" in the Schedule A world is not the same as it is in the vocational rehabilitation world. The key is flexibility. If your client has worked before, then s/he is likely to be job ready. If your client has not worked before but has been successful in school, then s/he is also likely to succeed in the workplace. This is the extent of the analysis required when thinking about job readiness for Schedule A purposes.

C **Once your client's resume and references are in order, s/he has obtained the proof of disability letter, and has all the other required application materials ready to go, the next step is to apply for the job.**

Before your client actually submits the application, it may be helpful to contact the Disability Program Manager (DPM) or Selective Placement Coordinator (SPC) at the relevant federal agency. You (or your client) can find the appropriate person or office by either using the contact information included in the vacancy announcement itself (all announcements include a phone number or e-mail address to be used for questions) or by searching a directory of SPCs maintained by the OPM. The directory can be found at http://apps.opm.gov/sppc_directory/, but please note

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that it is not always accurate. Additionally, not all agencies have a DPM or SPC, so you (or your client) may need to speak with an HR professional within the agency instead. When contacting a federal HR professional concerning possible employment opportunities, explain you are referring to Schedule A for *persons with disabilities*. Several regulations are generically referred to as “Schedule A.” Schedule A regulations cover more than just persons with disabilities. Moreover, if your client is a veteran, you both may want to contact a VA counselor for additional information and options. No matter what, be prepared to put some time and effort into finding the correct person or persons that can help you and your client.

Job seekers may think it appropriate to have a parent or Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor contact federal agencies on their behalf. Managers are likely to be unimpressed with this approach. Thus, job seekers should not do this unless it is absolutely necessary as an accommodation. If this accommodation is not truly necessary, then your client should take control of his/her career search him/herself.

Once you reach an agency official who can assist you, ask him/her for guidance on the best way to proceed with applying for the identified vacancy using the Schedule A hiring authority.

Please note that not all agencies utilize Schedule A specifically. Some may have other hiring flexibilities similar to Schedule A in place to increase the representation of persons with disabilities, so inquire with the agency if this becomes an issue. The agency official can work with you and your client to make sure the resume/application is processed correctly.

Your clients also can apply for federal jobs online, directly through the USAJOBS Web site, or the specific federal agency’s

Web site. If this is the chosen route, applicants must make sure to follow the application instructions exactly as given in the job posting. When your client submits his/her application online, s/he can indicate that they wish to be considered for a Schedule A appointment to the position. Indeed, some agencies encourage applicants to first apply for a position through the regular vacancy announcement (on USAJOBS or the agency's Web site) AND THEN follow-up with the SPC/DPM or appropriate office. So, you and your client should be diligent about following the process outlined by the agency.

Once the application package has been submitted, there is nothing left to do but wait. If the agency is interested in your client as a candidate for the open position(s), it will contact him/her for interviews or more information. If the agency finds your client to be the person they want to hire, s/he will be offered the position. If proof of disability has not already been requested, then the request will likely come at this point – the offer stage.

As a general tip, if your client is offered a federal employment opportunity, always encourage him/her to ask for the offer of employment in writing. The person extending the offer – typically an HR specialist – should be able to clearly explain the offer and answer any questions you or your client may have. If an offer of employment is accepted and your client believes s/he will need an accommodation to perform the job duties, encourage your client to give the agency reasonable notice, so that the agency can have what is needed on his/her first day.

That's it!

If you still have questions, check out the Frequently Asked Questions section for answers.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q. What is Schedule A?

A. The federal government has special hiring authorities for people with disabilities. Schedule A is one of these. It helps individuals with disabilities to get, keep, and advance in federal jobs that are matched to their skills and abilities. By utilizing Schedule A to fill a vacancy, an agency can avoid using the traditional, and sometimes lengthy, competitive hiring process. A person is eligible for a Schedule A appointment if s/he has a severe physical or mental disability.

Q. How does one prove eligibility for Schedule A?

- A.** In order to receive a Schedule A appointment, a person must:
- ❖ be qualified for the job s/he is applying for – *i.e.*, have the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform the required duties;
 - ❖ demonstrate “proof of disability”; and
 - ❖ be job ready.

Proof of disability can be satisfied with a simple letter stating that the applicant (your client) has a severe disability. One can get this letter from a doctor, a licensed medical professional, a licensed rehabilitation professional, or any entity that issues or provides disability benefits. The letter does NOT need to detail a person’s medical history or need for an accommodation. The simpler, the better.

Like proof of disability, job readiness also can be satisfied in a number of ways. The first and best way is for an agency to review your client’s resume and references to determine whether s/he is “ready” for the position s/he is applying for, to certify job readiness. Another way to satisfy the job readiness requirement is to have the person who drafts the proof of disability letter to also certify job readiness. Saying something as simple as, “Jane is likely to succeed in an office environment,” is sufficient. The important thing to remember is that there is tremendous flexibility here. Hiring agencies are free to decide for themselves who is a good fit for their open position(s).

Q. My client found a job vacancy s/he is interested in applying for and wants to use Schedule A. Now what? And who can help?

- A.** Once resume, references, and proof of disability are in order, it is time to apply. You and/or your client should reach out to the appropriate person within the agency for assistance in applying. The DPM or SPC at the agency where your client wants to work should be able to help, **but be prepared to put in some time and effort to find the correct person that can help.** If your client is a veteran, you both may want to contact a VA counselor.

Your client may apply online through the USAJOBS Web site or the specific federal agency's Web site. Make sure the application instructions given in the job posting are followed. Your client should be able to indicate that s/he wishes to apply under Schedule A through the online application.

Q. Is there a probationary period with a Schedule A appointment?

- A.** Yes. Depending on the type of appointment, the probationary period can last up to two years. During probation, Schedule A employees are held to the same performance standards as all other employees.

Q. Are agencies required to use Schedule A?

- A.** No. An agency can choose to use the traditional competitive process to fill its job vacancies, or they can choose to use the non-competitive Schedule A hiring authority.

Q. If my client is eligible for a Schedule A appointment, is s/he guaranteed a job?

- A.** No.

Q. Is there a quick reference guide like this for my client?

- A.** Yes! In fact, the ABCs of Schedule A have been written for several different audiences. The five guides, including this one, are:

- ❖ The ABCs of Schedule A for Applicants with Disabilities,
- ❖ The ABCs of Schedule A for the Disability Program Manager and/or Selective Placement Coordinator,
- ❖ The ABCs of Schedule A for the Hiring Manager, and
- ❖ The ABCs of Schedule A for the Human Resource Professional.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The guide for individuals with disabilities is perfect for your clients. Have them read it while you read this one, so that both of you understand how Schedule A works within the framework of the federal hiring process. Moreover, if you and your client turn out to know more about Schedule A than the agency you reach out to (it happens), use one of the above guides to educate the agency officials you encounter and bring him/her up to speed. Then you can get him/her to work for you and your client!

Q. If I encounter an agency official who is not sold on using Schedule A, how can I encourage him/her on behalf of my client?

A. What employers care about most is the bottom line. Schedule A can have an effect on the bottom line because it is a huge time-saver in the typically lengthy hiring process. Let the official know that using Schedule A allows federal agencies to hire a person with a disability **without posting or publicizing a vacancy, or clearing “surplus employee” lists.**

Additionally, as a service provider, it will serve you well to be familiar with and able to talk about all the reasons employers should be working to hire individuals with disabilities, including the “business case” for hiring individuals with disabilities. First, hiring people with disabilities can help a federal agency meet its legal obligations. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the U.S. EEOC **require** federal agencies to promote the hiring and advancement of individuals with disabilities. Moreover, Congress has called for the federal government to be the model employer. According to the EEOC, the federal government has not met this challenge with regard to people with disabilities. For more information, go to www.eeoc.gov/initiatives/lead/why.html.

In addition to meeting legal obligations, federal agencies can benefit because people with disabilities make great employees. Studies show employees with disabilities have invaluable experience and bring high levels of productivity to the workplace. Employees with disabilities also tend to have lower absentee rates and higher rates of retention. You can find more information at www.earnworks.com/docs/DePaulStudyExecutiveSummary.pdf.

Higher employee retention rates save employers money by reducing lost time, as well as replacement and retraining costs. More information is available at www.earnworks.com/employers/businesscase/reduce.asp.

Q. How can I best leverage my knowledge of Schedule A to increase opportunities for my clients?

- A. First, you can make sure your clients are ready by (a) helping your clients review their resumes to determine whether they have the required qualifications, (b) getting their certifications prepared, and (c) considering with them whether accommodations might be needed. Second, get your client ready for an interview! Third, you should work to develop a working relationship with your local federal employers. Get to know the agencies, what they do, and what the “mission-critical” occupations are within each agency. Get to know the HR professionals and recruitment staff, and encourage them to reach out to you with their job vacancies before beginning the competitive hiring process. Schedule A works best when there is regular communication between you, the service provider, and the DPM/SPC or HR staff at your local federal agency. When you keep agency officials informed about the availability of your job-ready clients, agency officials are more inclined to keep you in the loop about upcoming vacancies. So reach out and talk to them!

Note: The quickest way to end this two-way communication with an agency contact is for you to put forth a client for a job for which the client is not qualified. DPMs and SPCs rely on service providers to assist them in getting *qualified* folks in the door. Don't taint that relationship by submitting the application of someone who is not.

Q. What follow-up support should I provide?

- A. Service providers who want to maintain good relationships with local employers know that providing follow-up support is very important, and the same applies when working with local federal agencies. Service providers should provide all the support necessary to ensure the placement is a success, including checking on the effectiveness of any accommodations provided, offering to review job performance to address problems early on, and serving as a resource for any other issues that arise with the client's placement.

RESOURCES

RECRUITMENT/HIRING

ABILITYJobs and JobAccess – This organization enables people with disabilities to post their resumes for potential employers to view and to browse job opportunities posted by employers. The Web site also includes information about the ADA and reasonable accommodations. For more information, see www.jobaccess.org.

CareerOneStop – The CareerOneStop Web site, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor, provides a variety of services to employers and job seekers. The site also offers information about other service provider locations relevant to employment, training, and economic development. Visit www.careeronestop.org for more information.

eSIGHT.org – eSIGHT is a cross-disability online community addressing disability employment issues. Explore all that this community has to offer at www.esight.org.

GettingHired.com – This free national network provides a jobs database and other services to people with disabilities and the employers who hire them. Further information is available at www.gettinghired.com.

WRP – The Workforce Recruitment Program is a recruitment and referral program that connects federal sector employers nationwide with highly motivated postsecondary students and recent graduates with disabilities who are eager to prove their abilities in the workplace through summer or permanent jobs. Students represent all majors and range from college freshmen to graduate students and law students. A searchable database is available through the WRP Web site. **Colleges and universities, if you are not signed up to be a stop on the WRP recruiting tour, you should be!** Further information can be found at www.wrp.gov.

For Veterans with Disabilities – There are numerous organizations and agencies that exist to assist veterans with disabilities find and maintain employment. The following is a sample of useful resources to keep handy:

- ❖ The U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) Veterans Employment & Training Service www.dol.gov/vets/welcome.html
- ❖ Hire Heroes www.hireheroesusa.org
- ❖ Wounded Warriors Project www.woundedwarriorproject.org

Advocacy Groups – There are several different advocacy groups that also serve as excellent resources for recruiting and hiring individuals with disabilities. The following is a sampling of those resources:

- ❖ American Association of People with Disabilities www.aapd-dc.org
- ❖ American Council of the Blind www.acb.org
- ❖ Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation www.rehabnetwork.org
- ❖ Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Government www.dhhig.org
- ❖ National Council on Independent Living www.ncil.org

Federal Resources – There are numerous federal programs designed to meet the needs of people with disabilities in finding employment. The following is a non-exhaustive list of programs/resources:

- ❖ The Office of Personnel Management’s “Disability Site” www.opm.gov/disability
- ❖ The U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy www.dol.gov/odep
- ❖ The federal government’s one-stop Web site for people with disabilities, their families, employers, veterans and service members, workforce professionals, and many others. www.disability.gov

ACCOMMODATIONS

CAP – There is a wonderful federal program housed within the Department of Defense. The Computer/Electronic Accommodations Program (CAP) provides assistive technology and services to people with disabilities throughout the federal government FREE OF CHARGE! That means you can tap this resource for help in accommodating an employee with a disability. CAP will do the needs assessment, buy the needed technology, train the employee on how to use it, and follow up with updates. All you have to do is ask! (**Note:** Before contacting CAP directly, check with the DPM or SPC, as they may already have a relationship with CAP.) Additional information can be found at www.tricare.mil/cap.

JAN – The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) represents the most comprehensive resource for job accommodations available and is a terrific and easy-to-use resource. This free consulting service is designed to increase the employability of people with disabilities. JAN provides individualized worksite accommodation solutions, as well as information on job accommodations and related subjects for employers and people with disabilities. Further information can be found at www.jan.wvu.edu.



U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

1-800-669-4000 / TTY 1-800-669-6820

www.eeoc.gov