

# EARN

Employer Assistance and Resource Network



## Disability Is Diversity: Effective Hiring Practices for Federal Employers

A diverse workforce, including individuals and veterans with disabilities, not only assists in meeting Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) reporting requirements and executive commitments to the federal government as a model employer, it improves agency performance by diversifying skills and talents and ensuring that the federal workforce reflects the diversity of the American population.<sup>1</sup>

This research-to-practice brief first discusses diversity initiatives and requirements unique to the federal government. It then reviews relevant research to provide recommendations to federal employers in their continuing effort to recruit and promote employees with disabilities.

## Federal Diversity Initiatives and Requirements

The federal government has established the employment of individuals with disabilities in the federal workforce as a priority for over a decade. These disability employment goals are embodied primarily through Management Directive-715 and Executive Orders 13163 and 13548.

### Management Directive 715 (MD-715)

MD-715 requires that all federal agencies design model recruitment and hiring strategies for people with disabilities and implement programs to retain these workers. To ensure transparency and accountability, agencies must report on their progress in hiring people with disabilities, and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) posts the results of agencies' efforts online for public evaluation.

### Executive Order 13163 (EO 13163)

In 2000, President Clinton issued Executive Order 13163 to prompt the addition of 100,000 employees with disabilities to the federal workforce within five years. However, by 2010, employees with disabilities still only represented five percent of the nearly 2.5 million workforce and those with targeted disabilities (see Figure 1) constituted less than one percent. In light of the lack of gains in disability employment, in 2010 President Obama issued another Executive Order recommitting to compliance with EO 13163 and positioning the federal government as a model employer for individuals with disabilities.<sup>2</sup>

As a part of EO 13163, each agency was directed to prepare a plan to increase employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities at all levels and occupations within government. This included utilizing available hiring authorities, expanding outreach efforts, and accommodating individuals with disabilities.

## Targeted Disabilities:

Disabilities that the federal government, as a matter of policy, has identified for special emphasis.<sup>2</sup>

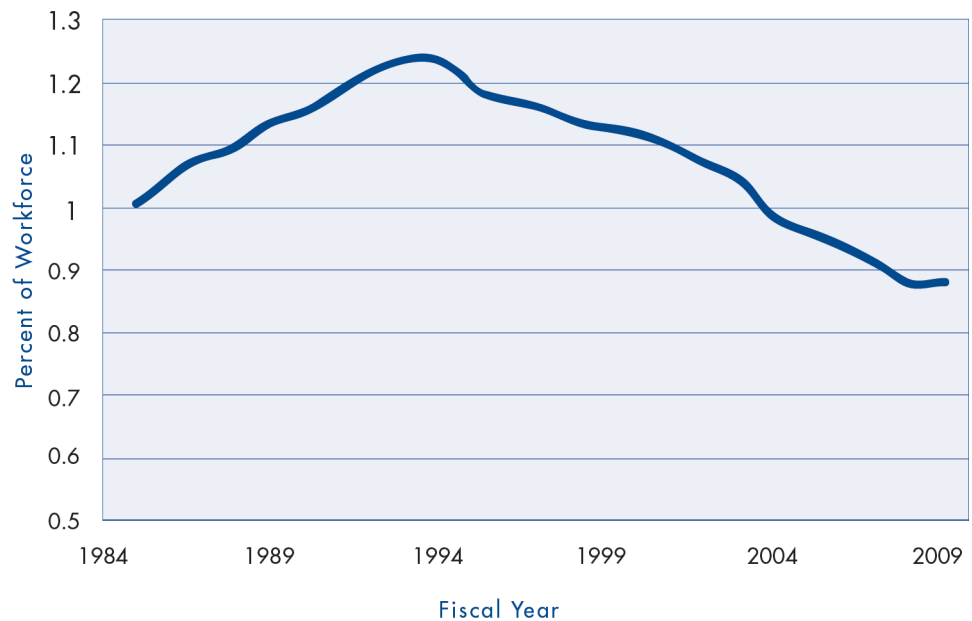
- Deafness
- Blindness
- Missing extremities
- Partial or complete paralysis
- Epilepsy
- Severe intellectual disability
- Psychiatric disability
- Dwarfism

### Executive Order 13548 (EO 13548)

Because few steps were taken to implement EO 13163, an Executive Order issued in July 2010 enforces greater compliance and accountability. This includes performance targets, numerical goals and sub-goals for individuals that have targeted disabilities. Consequently, executive departments and agencies must improve upon their efforts to employ workers with disabilities through increased recruitment, hiring, and retention.

The Director of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) is charged with designing model recruitment and hiring strategies for agencies and developing mandatory training programs for both human resources personnel and hiring managers on the employment of people with disabilities. OPM is also expediting the hiring process to fill vacancies within 80 days instead of 105 days.

## Permanent Employees with Targeted Disabilities in the Federal Workforce



**Figure 1.**

Permanent Employees with Targeted Disabilities in the Federal Workforce. <sup>1,3,4</sup>

### Other components of EO 13548 include:

- Designation of senior-level agency officials to be accountable for developing and implementing employment goals in recruitment, training, and advancement of individuals with disabilities, including targeted disabilities.
- Utilization of the Schedule A Hiring Authority and increased participation in internships, training, and mentoring programs for individuals with disabilities.
- Institution of a reporting system to track agency progress in implementation of objectives.
- Identification of effective strategies for provision of reasonable accommodations, access to appropriate accessible technologies, and accessibility of physical and virtual workplaces.
- Expansion of successful return-to-work and retention strategies.<sup>2</sup>

### Disability in the Federal Workforce

Despite MD-715 and EO 13163, targeted disability employment in the federal workforce has not increased substantially in the last decade.

There have been subtle changes in the diversity of the federal workforce overall, with a slight increase in the numbers of women and individuals of Hispanic/Latino and Asian descent. Employment of individuals with targeted disabilities, however, has declined steadily since the mid-1990s. This downward trend showed signs of leveling off between 2008 and 2009, but targeted disability employment rates are still well below the established goal of 2% of the federal workforce. <sup>1,3,4</sup>

### Diversity:

Top Performing Federal Agencies<sup>5</sup>

- Department of Veterans' Affairs
- Internal Revenue Service
- Navy
- Army & Air Force Exchange Service
- Patent and Trademark Office

### Achieving a Diverse Federal Workforce

There is great deal of variability among agencies in responding to federal diversity initiatives. DiversityInc, which collects and publishes diversity best practices, has recognized several federal agencies as diversity management leaders; others, however have made less progress in diversifying their workforce.<sup>5</sup> Many agencies continue to lag behind their private sector counterparts.

On average, federal agencies employ and recruit 10% fewer Blacks, Latinos and Asians and 25% fewer women than do the top 50 companies in DiversityInc's ratings. Participating federal agencies are, however, ahead of the curve in procurement dollars spent with minority and women-owned businesses.<sup>5</sup>

Federal agencies also have fewer active employee development programs than their private sector counterparts, with lower levels of participation in Employee Resource Groups and mentoring programs.

The expected surge in the retirement of federal workers over the next decade makes recruitment and development of new talent a critical objective for federal agencies. Recruiting managers will need to look for sources outside the traditional candidate pool, including traditionally underrepresented groups and individuals with disabilities. Diversity management will become ever more essential as it drives employee engagement and fosters productivity and innovation across all groups, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability and religion.<sup>5</sup>

## Equal Employment Opportunity Reports

Each year, the EEOC releases an annual report informing the President and Congress of the state of equal employment opportunity in the federal workforce. The 2009 report reveals both strength and room for improvement among agencies and agency leadership in areas of compliance, commitment and accountability.

- 96% of agencies provided their EEO staff with required training.
- Just 79% of federal departments and agencies submitted the required Management Directive-715 reports detailing agency employment by race, national origin, sex and disability.
- Only 61% of federal department and agency heads issued an annual written policy statement expressing their commitment to equal employment opportunity and a workplace free of discriminatory harassment.
- 74% of agency EEO directors report directly to their agency head.<sup>1</sup>

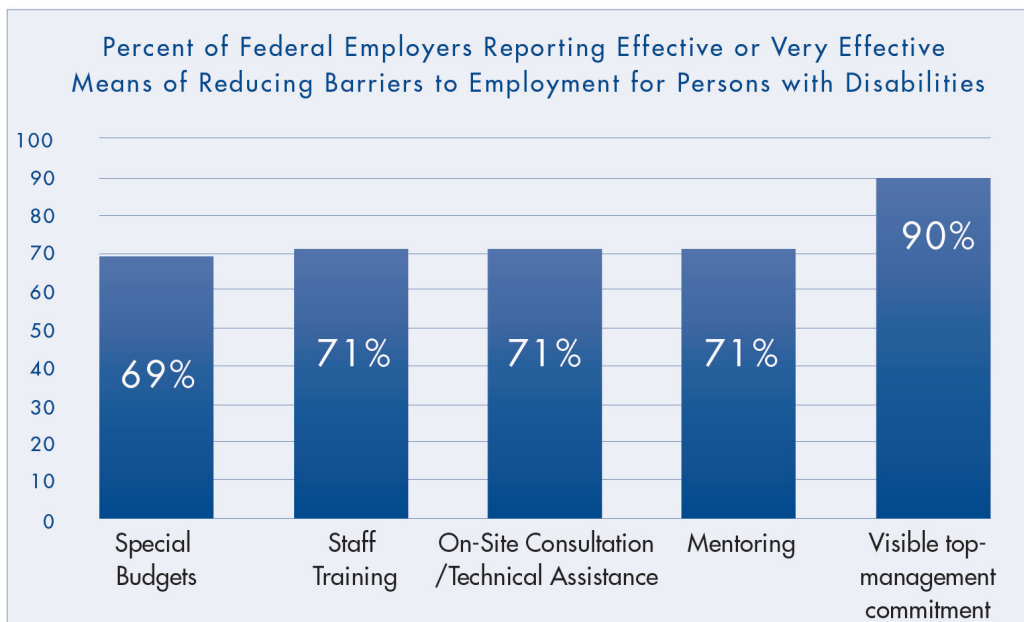
### Targeted Disability Employment:

Top Federal Agencies<sup>1</sup>

- Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
- Army & Air Force Exchange Service
- Social Security Administration
- Defense Finance and Accounting Service
- Department of the Treasury

## Federal Employer Policies and Practices

Federal employer policies and practices are critical to ensuring a diverse workforce. Research has identified areas of particular challenge for federal employers in hiring individuals with disabilities as well as key strategies in improving hiring and retention outcomes.



**Figure 2.**  
Effective Barrier Reduction  
Strategies for Federal Agencies.<sup>6</sup>

## Barriers and Strategies to Employing Individuals with Disabilities

In 2000, Cornell University conducted a survey of federal employer policies and practices in an effort to identify possible employment and advancement barriers for individuals with disabilities and strategies for reducing these barriers. Federal employers identified several practices as the most and least significant barriers to the employment of people with disabilities.<sup>6</sup>

### Reducing Barriers

Federal sector employers also identified several key strategies for reducing barriers to the employment of people with disabilities:

- Visible top management commitment to the employment of individuals with disabilities
- Staff training
- Mentoring
- On-site consultation or technical assistance
- Special budget allocations to reduce accommodation costs.<sup>6</sup>

### Significant Barriers<sup>6</sup>

- Lack of supervisor knowledge of how to make accommodations
- Attitudes or stereotypes among co-workers and supervisors towards persons with disabilities. Lack of employee experience
- Lack of requisite skills/training of the applicant or employee

### Not Significant Barriers<sup>6</sup>

- Cost of training
- Cost of supervision
- Cost of accommodations

## Increasing Recruitment of Individuals with Disabilities

A key aspect of improving the employment of individuals with disabilities in the federal sector is increased recruitment and hiring. To achieve a diverse workforce, federal agencies must capitalize on internship and mentoring programs, flexible hiring strategies, and marketing campaigns to expand their strategic human capital efforts.

### Internship Programs

There are several avenues through which federal employers can recruit qualified college students with disabilities, including non-competitive processes.

- **Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP)**

The Workforce Recruitment Program connects federal and private sector employers with current college students and recent college graduates with disabilities for summer internships and permanent employment. Participating students represent a variety of fields and attend 200 different colleges and universities throughout the United States. This program provides federal agencies and private employers with a referral and recruitment source for over 2200 students and recent graduates. More information is available for federal employers at: [www.WRP.gov](http://www.WRP.gov).

- **Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP)**

The Federal Student Temporary Employment Program allows agencies to appoint students at all levels to positions that may be unrelated to their fields of study. STEP employees are exempt from the usual competitive examination process and may be eligible for continued employment throughout their college career. For more information visit: <http://www.opm.gov/employ/students/intro.asp>

- **Student Career Experience Program (SCEP)**

The Student Career Experience Program allows agencies to appoint students to positions related to their field of study under excepted circumstances. After completing 640 hours of work within the SCEP program, students may be hired for a permanent po-

sition within 120 days of academic program completion and without going through the traditional hiring process. To learn more, visit: <http://www.opm.gov/employ/students/intro.asp>

### Schedule A Hiring Authority

The Schedule A Hiring Authority provides federal agencies, Selective Placement Coordinators, and Disability Program Managers with a tool to hire workers with disabilities quickly for both posted and non-posted positions. This Federal Hiring Authority can also assist agencies in meeting their hiring initiatives for targeted disabilities. The Internal Revenue Service has utilized this flexible hiring authority and instituted strategic marketing campaigns to recruit people with disabilities in advertisements in disability publications, which included current employees with disabilities. To learn more visit: [http://www.opm.gov/disability/appointment\\_disabilities.asp#6](http://www.opm.gov/disability/appointment_disabilities.asp#6)

### Veterans' Hiring Appointment and Hiring Authority

Veterans may also be hired through an expedited process, without competition, even before a job is posted. The Veteran's Recruitment Appointment and Hiring Authority, for veterans with a 30% or more disability rating, affords hiring managers the flexibility to appoint veterans to positions for which they are qualified. To learn more visit: <http://www.opm.gov/staffingPortal/Vetguide.asp#VRA-Authority>

### National, Regional and Local Outreach

Outreach to national, regional and local resources that represent candidates with disabilities is an effective way to ensure a good faith effort in recruitment and to receive technical assistance. These organizations could include: local vocational training schools, the student disability services departments of local colleges and universities, state and local vocational rehabilitation agencies, and independent living centers that offer recruitment services. Such outreach is essential to establishing a pipeline of potential diverse talent inclusive of workers with disabilities.

## Conclusion

The 21st-century economy demands a highly educated workforce equipped with the technology and skills to maintain America's leadership in the global marketplace. As the nation's largest employer, the federal government can become a model employer by increasing the employment of individuals and veterans with disabilities.

### Effective Practices for Federal Agencies

#### Workplace Culture

- Incorporate disability into the agency's diversity statement
- Increase supervisor knowledge of the employment of people with disabilities
- Increase top management commitment to the employment of people with disabilities
- Commit to accountability for recruitment and performance goals
- Provide diversity training for all employees
- Provide opportunities for mentoring and internships
- Establish Employee Resource Groups dedicated to disability issues

#### Recruitment

Utilize a variety of recruitment strategies, including:

- Internship programs: WRP, SCEP, STEP
- Schedule A Hiring Authority
- Veteran's Recruitment Appointment and Hiring Authority
- National, regional and local outreach to:
  - Colleges, Universities and Vocational Training Schools
  - Vocational Rehabilitation Programs
  - Independent Living Centers

## References

- <sup>1</sup> U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (2009). *Annual Report on the Federal Workforce for Fiscal Year 2009*. Retrieved from <http://www.eeoc.gov/federal/reports/fsp2009/index.cfm>
- <sup>2</sup> The White House. (2010). *Executive Order – Increasing Federal employment of individuals with disabilities*. Retrieved from [www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/executive-order-increasing-federal-employment](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/executive-order-increasing-federal-employment).
- <sup>3</sup> U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (2008). *Improving the Participation Rate of People with Targeted Disabilities in the Federal Work Force*. Retrieved from <http://www.eeoc.gov/federal/reports/pwtd.html#SecIIA>
- <sup>4</sup> U.S. Equal Opportunity Employment Commission (2009). *Government Wide Employment of Workers in the Federal Workforce*. Retrieved from [http://www.eeoc.gov/federal/reports/fsp2009/table\\_a\\_1.cfm](http://www.eeoc.gov/federal/reports/fsp2009/table_a_1.cfm)
- <sup>5</sup> DiversityInc. (2010). *The DiversityInc. 2010 Top Federal Agencies for Diversity*. Retrieved from <http://www.diversityinc.com/article/7320/>
- <sup>6</sup> Bruyere, S. (2000). *Disability Employment Policies and Practices in Private and Federal Sector Organizations*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, Program on Employment and Disability.

#### About this Series

*Disability Is Diversity* is part of a series of briefs presenting the practical implications of recent research in disability employment. Each brief focuses on a key issue for employers, presenting background, research findings and key recommendations.



## Disclaimer

The National Technical Assistance, Policy, and Research Center for Employers on Employment of People with Disabilities is funded by a cooperative agreement from the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy to Cornell University.

The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the U.S. Department of Labor. Nor does the mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply the endorsement of the U.S. Department of Labor.

## Employer Assistance Resource Network (EARN)

[www.AskEarn.org](http://www.AskEarn.org)  
855-Ask-Earn  
(855-275-3276) Voice/TTY

# EARN

Employer Assistance and Resource Network