Above and Beyond: Employment Practices
Texas Governor’s Committee on People with Disabilities

Suggestions for creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for ALL people to help make your business or service stand out

Recruiting and Hiring:

- Post job announcements on accessible Internet job boards, magazines, newsletters and other disability-related publications, including job posting sites specific to veterans with disabilities

- Join employer networking groups, such as the US Business Leadership Network or one of its local affiliates, that recognize and promote best practices in hiring people with disabilities

- Regularly participate in job fairs focused on people with disabilities, sponsored by such organizations as Workforce Solutions, local Mayor’s Committees on People with Disabilities, etc.

- Forge a partnership with Local, State, and Federal entities, such as the Texas Department on Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS), the US Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), the Employment First Task Force, the Job Accommodation Network (JAN), the Employer Assistance and Resource Network (EARN), etc. (See Resource Listings below)

- Display universal access symbols in all job postings to indicate the company’s openness to qualified applicants with disabilities

- Use high-profile wording to advertise your company as an Equal Opportunity Employer in all print and electronic materials; suggested wording from the EEOC is: "We are an Equal Opportunity Employer. We do not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, color, sex, age, national origin or disability."

- In all job postings, include clear information on the essential functions of the job to ensure that applicants know what would be expected of them if they are hired

- Provide application materials in various formats (braille, large print, electronic)

- Work with local high schools, community colleges and other local institutions of learning that offer programs specific to students with disabilities

- Connect with internship and recruitment programs designed exclusively for students with disabilities, such as the Workforce Recruitment Program for College Students with Disabilities (WRP), Project SEARCH, and others (See Resource Listings below)
• Work with local, State, and Federal veterans’ associations and support groups to recruit veterans with disabilities; develop specific and targeted strategies for recruiting, hiring, and integrating veterans with disabilities

• Include people with disabilities on the recruitment team

**Interviews and Training:**

• Make sure the interview location is fully accessible, and be familiar with directions to and within the facility (parking, restrooms, etc)

• Provide training to all who are involved in the interview process on People First language and disability etiquette

• Set up an on-site training room to simulate the actual workplace

• Speak directly to the interviewee, not to an attendant or interpreter who may be there to provide assistance

• Work with local disability organizations to set up practice interviews, both to help the applicant learn skills and to provide a way of identifying potential candidates for open positions in the company

• Adopt a formal training program on how and why to hire people with disabilities, and distribute it to all employees responsible for recruiting and/or interviewing applicants

• Encourage managers and supervisors to approach ALL employees and job candidates with an open mind about abilities and strengths

• Provide Leadership Training courses for all employees and encourage people with disabilities to participate by having training materials available in various formats, honoring accommodations requests, etc

• Take new hires on a tour of the facility where they will be working, and be receptive to feedback about any accessibility concerns they may have

**Workplace Environment and Team Building:**

• Require disability etiquette training to all staff and new hires, including information on People First language, basic ADA regulations, etc; include information on “invisible disabilities,” such as mental illness and chronic health conditions, as well as temporary disabilities

• Train all HR staff on basic American Sign Language and offer ASL classes during work hours to other interested managers and staff

• Consider full accessibility when planning staff meetings; include accessible seating at tables and sufficient aisle width for people who use wheelchairs; offer alternate formats for meeting documents; clear obstructions on the way into and out of the meeting space; incorporate audio
description if videos are used in the meeting; if the meeting is off-site, consider accessible parking and entrance routes; announce the meeting in time for accommodation requests to be made in advance; if a podium or microphone are part of presentations, ensure that access to the equipment is universal (lower podium for a person who uses a wheelchair, lapel microphone for a person with limited arm or hand mobility, etc)

- Schedule occasional recreational activities in which ALL employees can participate in some capacity; make sure all activities outside of work take place in an accessible environment

- Ensure that all managers have a list of suggested resources for disability questions, accommodation requests, etc

- Sponsor and participate in activities hosted by local disability organizations, such as Special Olympics, Easter Seals, Goodwill Industries, etc. (See Resource Listings below)

- Create an advisory team in the workplace to be available to discuss and make suggestions on workplace disability issues; include employees with and without disabilities

- Remember to have specific plans in place for emergency evacuation for all employees, including those with disabilities; keeping in mind legal confidentiality issues, make sure that specific disability needs are sufficiently planned for in the case of evacuation or shelter-in-place scenarios; if an employee uses a service animal, include planning around the animal’s needs as well

- Provide information about the site’s emergency preparedness planning in various formats to ensure fully inclusive instructions

- Encourage any employee with a disability or access or functional needs to be registered with the State of Texas Emergency Assistance Registry (STEAR), ensuring that emergency responders have access to that information

- Stage occasional mock emergency evacuation drills to keep all employees, including those with disabilities, aware of what to consider in the case of an actual emergency; encourage feedback from employees with disabilities to improve evacuation plans

- Give employees plenty of advance notice about mock emergency evacuation drills to avoid possible anxiety and encourage awareness of accommodation needs

- Consider establishing a scholarship program for employees who want outside training to increase their skills

- Stay in touch with all employees abilities and interests to be sure they are matched with appropriate workplace opportunities

- Assign new employees with disabilities a Job Coach or a Mentor when appropriate
• Offer support services to employees, such as helping veterans with disabilities apply for their benefits, housing contacts for those who might be homeless or interested in more independent living, etc

• Sponsor a “Sign of the Day” activity to teach all employees one valuable ASL word

• Create an Employee Resource Group (ERG), an internal organizational structure to address specific needs of people with disabilities

• Plan occasional field trips for management teams to disability-related sites, such as Lighthouse for the Blind, Goodwill training facilities, certified suppliers owned by people with disabilities, and other businesses that hire and train people with disabilities frequently

• Regularly review your company’s policies to ensure they convey a commitment to an inclusive workplace culture; be open to suggestions for improvement

• Offer an option of business cards in braille for all employees

• Maintain a dedicated email address to receive input on all accessibility issues

• Support service dog training on-site

• Facilitate a service dog relief area for employees using a service dog

• Research suppliers for your business who regularly employ people with disabilities and who are certified through the US Business Leadership Network (USBLN) and contract with them for essential supplies

• Host frequent “brown-bag” lunches to talk about disability issues in the workplace, disability etiquette, etc; consider inviting a speaker from a local disability organization

• Publish articles in the company newsletter recognizing contributions of employees with disabilities

• Spotlight various events in history that focus on people with disabilities and their contributions to society; ideas for the project can be found on the Department of Labor’s website, or on ODEP’s Disability History page, or on the Disability History Museum website, or on the Texas Governor’s Committee on People with Disabilities’ website

• Have in place a system for all employees to identify barriers and concerns without fear of reprisal, as well as a way to provide the information anonymously

• Include photos of employees with visible disabilities in consumer or promotional advertising when employees in general are represented; also include photos of employees with visible disabilities in internal publications

• Stay in contact with employees who may be out of the office for extended periods due to a disability, keeping them in the loop and maintaining their relationship with coworkers.
• Consider offering transportation option to employees with disabilities who cannot drive, such as carpooling, a company van service, etc
• Emphasize benefits of the Buddy System for safety and efficiency when lifting, climbing ladders, etc
• Encourage all employees to maintain a Fragrance-Free environment
• Ensure that there are plenty of accessible parking spaces to accommodate employees, customers and visitors at all times
• Maintain a dedicated email address to receive input on accessibility issues
• Make sure that all rooms and facilities have good ventilation and indoor air quality

Innovative Accommodations:
• Provide company cell phones for text messaging between employees with hearing impairments and others in the workplace or for apps that help provide access to helpful information
• Recognize innovative accommodation ideas monthly, quarterly, or annually with an awards presentation program
• Establish a Disability Accommodation Fund to pull together budget money and donations for accommodations that may go above and beyond those required by law
• Host an on-site accommodation store to make readily available such items as low-vision aids, talking clocks, etc
• Conduct occasional surveys to learn what types of accommodation ideas staff, management and customers can suggest
• Offer ergonomic and adjustable office chairs to accommodate various positions for employees with neck, back, shoulder and lower extremity impairments
• Print out color-coded large documents or manuals for employees with reading disabilities to assist in the navigation through the text
• Assign a knowledgeable person or team for assessing, evaluating, and providing accommodations in the best and most efficient manner
• Use Environmental Sound machines (also known as Sound Conditioners) to reduce overstimulation from background noise for employees prone to distraction or stress
• Inform all managers and employees that they may contact the Job Accommodation Network (JAN) to receive confidential and free advice, as well as technical assistance on accommodations
• Create an online system to track accommodations in order to document their efficiency and successful use
- Make sure all employees know who to contact for a request for accommodations
- Look into sign language software for basic communication between supervisors and employees who are deaf or hard of hearing

Technology in the Workplace:
- Establish a network of Information Technology (IT) professionals, Human Resource staff, managers across divisions, etc, to ensure fully accessible Internet and Intranet services, as well as fully accessible print and electronic documents
- Assign a Chief Accessibility Technology Officer
- Assess your current technology in the workplace to understand where you might make improvements, along with information on tools to help with that improvement. A simple guide to checking workplace technology accessibility, called TechCheck, can be found on the Partnership on Employment and Accessible Technology (PEAT) website
- Design your business’s website so that it prominently features international disability symbols and promotes its disability-friendly atmosphere
- Cultivate relationships with developers of accessible technology software to test their products and to ensure continued product compatibility
- Post a link on your website during October to the main National Disability Employment Awareness Month website
- Post the company’s policy statement involving inclusion practices and innovative accommodations, recruitment and hiring initiatives, and targeted internship and mentoring programs
- Evaluate the accessibility of internal information and communication technology (ICT) on a regular basis with automated accessibility testing tools and by evaluating comments from users
- Compare available hardware and software, as well as technology equipment providers, to ensure your workplace technology provides the maximum benefit for the best cost; examples can be found on the Partnership on Employment and Accessible Technology (PEAT) website
- Explore your web accessibility by using evaluation tools provided by the Web Accessibility Initiative
- Provide vibrating or visual alerting devices for employees who are deaf or hard of hearing to notify them of incoming phone calls, reminders for scheduled meetings, emergency alerts, etc.
- Make talking calculators and talking tape measures available for employees with visual disabilities
- Offer an employee with dyslexia or other learning disability a Reading Pen that can scan a word or line of text, read it aloud and display a definition
• Provide outsourcing guidelines to all suppliers and business partners and establish clear procurement policies to ensure that contracts and communications between the organizations will be fully accessible.

• Install Anti-Glare/Radiation filters for fluorescent lights and computer screens which reduce eyestrain, fatigue and headaches for employees who are sensitive to light.

• Implement Voice Shadowing using Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) software to provide a verbatim transcript of meetings in real time for employees who are deaf or hard of hearing.

• Consider the various styles of alternative keyboards for employees with mobility impairments or those with joint pain associated with repetitive hand movement.

• Investigate and install appropriate various adaptive office equipment, such as copiers with braille label kits, remote user interfaces and angled consoles; coin and currency sorters and counters; remote-controlled window blinds; slant boards for pads and books; alternate keyboard layouts (such as the Dvorak System) for one-handed use; writing aids, such as pencils with large diameters; touch screens or voice recognition software; etc.

• Use internal organization-wide communication to foster awareness, acceptance, and support among all levels of staff, as well as awareness of the available accessible technology.

• Maintain an ongoing connection with the accessible technology community to ensure that relevant new devices and innovative technology can be put into place in a timely manner; examples might include a monthly Tech Lunch informal gathering of professionals in the field of accessible technology, or online forums such as those available on the Partnership on Employment and Accessible Technology (PEAT) website.

• In an industrial environment, install strobe lights on indoor on-coming vehicles to alert workers who are deaf or hard of hearing.

**October’s National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) ideas:**

• Order and display both National and State NDEAM Posters throughout the workplace, including public areas, to raise awareness.

• Freshen up bulletin boards in break areas and other common spaces to post positive messages about your company’s commitment to diversity; the annual NDEAM Theme can be a good starting point (ex: “What Can YOU Do?”)

• Display artwork by employees and interns with disabilities in the break room and other common areas.

• Display short essays by employees with disabilities in public areas, allowing them to tell their stories and highlight their accomplishments.
Include social media in your observance of NDEAM; sample postings and tweets can be found on the ODEP website

Issue an NDEAM Press Release highlighting your focus on hiring and including people with disabilities during October

Participate in Disability Mentoring Day, a career development opportunity for youths with disabilities, on the Third Wednesday in October; ideas and information for implementing an event are available from the American Association of People with Disabilities

Request an NDEAM Proclamation from the Mayor or the Governor to display and to present at any NDEAM activities you are hosting; to request a Proclamation from the Texas Governor’s Committee on People with Disabilities, phone 512-463-5739 or email GCPD@governor.state.tx.us

Sponsor a poster contest among employees (and perhaps include family members as well), using the current year’s NDEAM theme

Send out an organization-wide message from the CEO or leader of your business recognizing NDEAM and the contributions of employees with disabilities

Resources and Reference Notes:

- Job Accommodation Network (JAN): https://askjan.org/
- Job Accommodation Network (JAN) Searchable Online Accommodation Network (SOAR): http://askjan.org/soar/disabilities.html
- U.S. Department of Justice: Meeting on a Level Playing Field: http://www.ada.gov/business/accessiblemtg.htm#accesmtingplc
- ODEP Ideas for Employers and Employees: http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/ndeam/employers.htm
- ODEP Ideas for Associations and Unions: http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/ndeam/associations.htm
- ODEP Ideas for Educators and Youth Service Professionals: http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/ndeam/educators.htm
- ODEP National Disability Employment Awareness Month: http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/ndeam/
- Texas Workforce Commission (Hiring and Recruiting): http://twc.state.tx.us/customers/bemp/recruiting-hiring-resources.html
- Employment First Task Force (Hiring and Recruiting): http://www.dads.state.tx.us/providers/supportedemployment/pi/index.html
- Disability Etiquette, from Easter Seals: http://www.easterseals.com/site/PageServer?pagename=ntl_etiquette
- Disability: Dispelling the Myths: http://www.ncsu.edu/dso/general/disability_myths.pdf
- Workforce Solutions: http://www.wrksolutions.com/jobs/individualsdisabilities.html
- To order National NDEAM Poster (FREE): http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/ndeam/resources.htm#Poster
- To order Texas State NDEAM Poster (FREE): http://governor.state.tx.us/disabilities/ndeam/ndeam_poster/
- ODEP Sample Social Media messages: http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/ndeam/
- Sample NDEAM Participation Press Release: http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/ndeam/resources.htm#PressRelease
• Disability Mentoring Day information from AAPD: http://www.aapd.com/what-we-do/employment/disability-mentoring-day/
• Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS): http://www.dars.state.tx.us/
• Partnership on Employment and Accessible Technology (PEAT): http://peatworks.org/
• Web Accessibility Initiative: http://www.w3.org/WAI/ER/tools/
• Equal Employment Opportunity Commission: http://www.eeoc.gov/
• ADA National Network: http://adata.org/
• US Access Board: http://www.access-board.gov/
• Universal Access Symbols (Downloadable version): https://www.graphicartistsguild.org/tools_resources/downloadable-disability-access-symbols
• Workforce Recruitment Program for College Students with Disabilities: http://www.dol.gov/odep/wrp/
• Think Beyond the Label: http://www.thinkbeyonddethelabel.com/Default.aspx
• Emergency Evacuation Plans: https://askjan.org/media/emergency.html
• State of Texas Emergency Assistance Registry: http://www.txdps.state.tx.us/dem/stear/local.htm
• Project SEARCH: http://www.projectsearch.us/
• Special Olympics Texas: http://www.sotx.org/
• Easter Seals: http://www.easterseals.com/
• Goodwill Industries: http://www.goodwill.org/
• Lighthouse for the Blind: http://www.lighthouse.org/
• “Sign of the Day” from Signing Savvy: http://www.signingsavvy.com/signoftheday

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