

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:

- United States Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP): <http://www.dol.gov/odep/>
- Job Accommodation Network (JAN): <https://askjan.org/>
- Job Accommodation Network (JAN) Searchable Online Accommodation Network (SOAR): <http://askjan.org/soar/disabilities.html>
- Basic ADA Regulations and Technical Assistance Materials: <http://www.ada.gov/ta-pubs-pg2.htm>
- U.S. Department of Justice: Meeting on a Level Playing Field: <http://www.ada.gov/business/accessiblemtg.htm#accesmtgplc>
- ODEP Ideas for Employers and Employees: <http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/ndeam/employers.htm>
- ODEP Ideas for Federal Employees: <http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/ndeam/agencies.htm>
- ODEP Ideas for Disability-Related Organizations: <http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/ndeam/disability.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 Preparing the Workplace for Everyone: A Framework of Emergency Preparedness: <http://www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/ep/preparing2.htm>
- ODEP National Disability Employment Awareness Month: <http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/ndeam/>
- Employer Assistance and Resource Network (EARN): Resources to Help Employers Hire and Retain People with Disabilities: <http://www.askearn.org/index.cfm>
- 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>
- People First Language, from the Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities: <http://www.txddc.state.tx.us/resources/publications/pfanguuage.asp>
- 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
- US Business Leadership Network: <http://www.usbln.org/>
- Workforce Solutions: <http://www.wrksolutions.com/jobs/individualsdisabilities.html>
- Business Strategies That Work: A Framework for Disability Inclusion: <http://www.dol.gov/odep/pdf/BusinessStrategiesThatWork.pdf>
- Employer Assistance and Resource Network: A Toolkit for Employee Resource Groups (ERG): http://askearn.org/docs/ERG_Toolkit.pdf
- 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: Building an Inclusive Workforce Desktop Reference: <http://promotions.usa.gov/odep/20100727.pdf>
- What Can YOU Do Outreach Toolkit: <http://www.whatcanyoudocampaign.org/blog/index.php/toolkit/>
- 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/>
- US Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP): <http://www.dol.gov/odep/>
- 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.thinkbeyondthelabel.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>
- US Chamber of Commerce: http://www.uschamber.com/sites/default/files/reports/Disability_final_v2.pdf

***This document is available to download in a Word or PDF format at:

http://governor.state.tx.us/disabilities/awards/employment_awards/