Recruiting Individuals with Disabilities and Protected Veterans

Why is it important to recruit and hire individuals with disabilities and protected veterans?

Harvard University is committed to enabling a broad community to participate in its education and research missions. In accord with this commitment and with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, we work to ensure equal access and provide appropriate accommodations and assistance for people with disabilities. Likewise, the University is similarly committed to ensure equal employment opportunity to protected veterans, in accordance with the Vietnam Era Veterans’ Readjustment Assistance Act, as amended (VEVRAA).

Disabilities
Significant new federal requirements regarding the employment of individuals with disabilities recently became effective, requiring documented affirmative action, recordkeeping, and analysis of effectiveness. The U.S. Department of Labor has established a 7% utilization as the goal for disability employment for all federal contractors. Employers now must undertake positive outreach and recruitment, document these efforts, identify problem areas, develop action-oriented programs to address underutilization, and implement alternate or additional outreach and programs to increase the numbers of individuals with disabilities in their workforce.

Protected Veterans
At the same time as the new regulations concerning individuals with disabilities, new regulations were also implemented including significant new requirements for protected veterans, including a 7.2% “hiring benchmark.”

Equally important, to access the widest pool of talent, we need to foster an inclusive and flexible work culture that considers the needs and potential of all employees and potential employees, including the more than one in ten Americans who have disabilities. By recruiting people with disabilities, we recognize that talent has no boundaries, that workforce diversity includes people of all kinds of abilities, and that those with disabilities are experienced problem solvers with a proven ability to adapt. Likewise, Harvard recognizes that our nation’s veterans bring an extraordinary array of skills and training to the workplace.

How to recruit individuals with disabilities

There is a wealth of resources available to help in recruiting people with disabilities. These include:

- The Employment Assistance Referral Network (EARN), a program of the Office of Disability Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor, [http://www.askearn.org/index.cfm](http://www.askearn.org/index.cfm) supports employers’ talent acquisition by assisting with recruiting, hiring, retaining and advancing qualified
individuals with disabilities through comprehensive online resources and links to community-based organizations serving job seekers with disabilities. EARN, a national service, makes it simple to locate applicants with disabilities for any type of position. When EARN receives a call from an employer who wants to recruit qualified candidates with disabilities, their staff records the job description and then locates local agencies that have contact with appropriate job candidates. Once these providers are identified, EARN calls the employer back. The employer receives the appropriate contact information and may call the designated agencies to connect with applicants. The local agencies do not receive your contact information; this allows you to be in control of the process.

- **The Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC)**, a state and federally funded agency that provides vocational rehabilitation services in Massachusetts. MRC’s goals include helping local employers find qualified workers to meet job requirements. In addition to placement services, MRC helps with on-the-job training, and even provides assistance during a new worker’s adjustment period: [http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/consumer/disability-services/vocational-rehab/ses/employer-services/](http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/consumer/disability-services/vocational-rehab/ses/employer-services/) (Phone: 1-800-245-6543).

- **The Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB)**
  Provides the highest quality rehabilitation and social services to individuals who are blind, leading to independence and full community participation. MCB accomplishes this critical mission by working in partnership with consumers who are legally blind, families, community agencies, health care providers, and employers. [www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/mcb](http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/mcb)

- **The NET: National Employment Team** [http://www.rehabnetwork.org/](http://www.rehabnetwork.org/), operated by the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR), provides employers with a single point of contact to qualified applicants with disabilities, and resources in the local, regional, and national marketplace. Vocational rehabilitation programs may also cover the costs of some employee accommodations.

- **“Disability Employment 101”** – a publication of the U.S. Department of Education - is a comprehensive analysis of hiring employees with disabilities that includes information about how to find qualified workers with disabilities, how to put disability and employment research into practice and how to model what other businesses have done to successfully integrate individuals with disabilities into the workforce. The guide provides information regarding Department-funded vocational rehabilitation agencies, Disability and Business Technical Assistance Centers (DBTACs) and Centers for Independent Living (CILs). It also includes checklists and various other resources: [https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/products/employmentguide/disabilityemployment101.pdf](https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/products/employmentguide/disabilityemployment101.pdf)

**Bring recent college graduates with disabilities on board**

- **The Workforce Recruitment Program** [www.wrp.gov](http://www.wrp.gov), a free recruitment and referral program under the Office of Disability Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor, which connects employers and postsecondary students with disabilities for internship opportunities, and recent graduates with disabilities for permanent employment. This program is administered by EARN (see above), which assists in matching these pre-screened, highly qualified students with private and public sector jobs.

  - If you have summer internship opportunities or entry-level positions available, please complete and submit the form at [http://wrp.jobs/employers/](http://wrp.jobs/employers/). EARN will provide you with resumes of qualified candidates within 3–4 business days.
Colleges and universities have coordinators of services for students with disabilities who can be helpful in recruitment and in making accommodations.

Recruit protected veterans and veterans with disabilities

The VA created a **Veterans Employment Toolkit for Employers**. This toolkit provides a variety of outside resources for employers, managers or supervisors, and human resource professionals, including information about PTSD and TBI. It also includes a link to Department of Labor’s America’s Heroes at Work site, which offers on-line trainings, webcasts, and presentations for employers and a Hiring Veterans Toolkit as well as a TBI, PTSD and Employment Training Tool. [http://www.va.gov/vetsinworkplace/resources.asp](http://www.va.gov/vetsinworkplace/resources.asp)

To reach out to veterans with disabilities, contact the Service Officer or Service Employment Coordinator at our local Veterans **Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment Service** [http://www.benefits.va.gov/vocrehab/index.asp](http://www.benefits.va.gov/vocrehab/index.asp)

A **“Disability and Veterans Community Resources Directory”** was recently created and made available to employers by the U.S. Department of Labor on its website: [http://www.dol-esa.gov/errd/resources.html](http://www.dol-esa.gov/errd/resources.html)

This is a non-exhaustive directory of groups and organizations that are available to provide assistance with training, recruiting, and hiring veterans and individuals with disabilities

Post to online job boards

These online job boards are geared towards job seekers with disabilities:

- **disABLED Person** [http://www.disabledperson.com](http://www.disabledperson.com)
- **GettingHired** [http://www.gettinghired.com](http://www.gettinghired.com)
- **Hire Disability Solutions** [http://www.hireds.com](http://www.hireds.com)
- **Ability Jobs**. Ability Jobs provides searchable resume and job postings capabilities for employers interested in recruiting candidates with disabilities. The database includes the resumes of tens of thousands of job seekers with disabilities, from entry level candidates to those with Ph.D’s. [http://www.jobaccess.org](http://www.jobaccess.org)
- **One More Way**. One More Way is an ‘open source’ employment initiative that provides a no-fee job board and information regarding job seekers with disabilities, and the programs that support them. [http://onemoreway.org](http://onemoreway.org)

The following job boards are geared specifically towards veterans with disabilities:

- **Job Opportunities for Disabled American Veterans** [http://www.jofdav.com](http://www.jofdav.com)
- **Hero 2 Hired** [h2h.jobs](http://h2h.jobs)
Selecting candidates for consideration: screening and interviewing

As you follow the general steps of selecting candidates for your open position, here are some tips to help include people with disabilities in your candidate pool and enhance your interviewing and selection process.

- **Recruit an inclusive interview team.** In selecting an interview team, consider including people who will bring diverse outlooks, and who are respectful of different cultures and characteristics. Recognize the potential to bring unintended biases to the process, and address this by having a clear and open discussion among team members before beginning the interview process.

- **Ensure effective communication with, and equal opportunity for, all candidates.** Contact the University Disability Services office for information on how to effectively accommodate a candidate with a disability: [http://www.accessibility.harvard.edu](http://www.accessibility.harvard.edu). See also the Toolkit sections on *Etiquette in interacting with people with disabilities* and *Interview accommodations for people with disabilities* (page 23).

- **Use the screening process to include rather than exclude candidates,** to avoid missing strong candidates. In reviewing qualifications, consider how each applicant might enhance diversity in the department and university-wide.

- **Avoid making assumptions about a disabled candidate’s ability to “feel comfortable”** on your team or in the position. Focus first on the candidate’s similarities to, rather than differences from, the way your staff and their colleagues and constituents approach their work. Next, consider whether the candidate’s differences matter to the work he or she would do, and how those differences might actually enhance your team and its efforts.

- **Avoid prematurely labeling one or more of your candidates as the “most promising”** until all candidates have been considered. This will help ensure that all qualified candidates receive equal consideration.

- **Prepare yourself with answers for questions that candidates with disabilities are likely to ask.** Job candidates with disabilities often ask important questions aimed at helping them determine whether an organization is truly inclusive and supportive, and whether they will be comfortable in a position. Be prepared to answer these commonly-asked questions:
  
  - How many people with disabilities do you have in your department/the FAS?
  - What accommodations are available for people like me?
  - How many people like me are in middle and senior management positions?
  - How many of the people like me are in professional or technical positions?
  - What are my chances for progressing/advancing my career here?
  - Do you have a formal mentoring program and/or career development programs for people like me and other diverse groups?
  - What does the FAS/ Harvard do in terms of community outreach efforts to partner with diverse groups?
  - Do you have employee affinity groups that focus on the needs of people like me and other groups?
  - Are managers trained to communicate with and manage diverse employees, including those with disabilities?
What initiatives has the FAS/ Harvard participated in regarding diversity?

Does the FAS/ Harvard have formal diversity initiatives and programs in place?

Even if a candidate does not ask these questions, you may volunteer information that may help persuade the candidate of your—and Harvard’s—sincerity in welcoming diversity, including diversity of abilities. FAS Recruitment Services can help you to answer questions and offer information.

- **Prepare yourself by learning about the candidate’s disability and its effects.** Before calling or meeting with a candidate who has a disability, you can gain an understanding of his or her situation by reading about the disability as it relates to the workplace. The website of the Job Accommodation Network (JAN), a program of the Office of Disability Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor, provides an A–Z overview of impairments [http://askjan.org/media/atoz.htm](http://askjan.org/media/atoz.htm) (from Addison’s Disease to Wheelchair Use), as well as accommodation ideas to help both you and the candidate feel comfortable.

- **Build a Pipeline**
  There are many tools that employers can use to build a pipeline of qualified employees with disabilities to fill their workforce. Internships, apprenticeships, job shadowing, and training programs are some of the methods to reach out to qualified persons with disabilities and give them a chance. Some excellent existing programs include the national **Workforce Recruitment Program** (see previous) for recruiting recent graduates and students with disabilities for internships or entry-level positions; our local **Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission** (see previous), and the local **Work Without Limits** network: [http://www.workwithoutlimits.org/employers](http://www.workwithoutlimits.org/employers).

**Etiquette in interacting with people with disabilities**

Many people worry about how to interact with people with disabilities, whether for fear of offending, ignorance of how to communicate, or other reasons. The JAN website includes a highly readable pamphlet on Disability Etiquette in the Workplace [http://askjan.org/topics/disetiq.htm](http://askjan.org/topics/disetiq.htm) which is useful at any time, but particularly when preparing to invite a disabled job candidate to come for an interview. The pamphlet offers tips on scheduling the interview, greeting the interviewee, and dealing with mobility, sensory, cognitive, and psychiatric impairments.

**Interview accommodations for people with disabilities**

Employers have an obligation to make reasonable accommodations to enable applicants with disabilities to participate in the interview process. Accommodations for interviews may include: an accessible interview location for people with mobility impairments, a sign language interpreter for a person who is deaf, a reader for a person who is visually impaired, and modified testing for a person with a learning disability.

For more information about making the job interviews accessible, and to make arrangements for accessibility options, please contact the University Disability Coordinator, disabilityservices@harvard.edu, 617-495-1859.

Additional ideas may be found in JAN’s A–Z overview of impairments [http://askjan.org/media/atoz.htm](http://askjan.org/media/atoz.htm)