

Talent Matters:
Fostering Disability-Inclusive Outreach & Recruitment Strategies
June 30, 2016
Participant Questions & Panelist Responses

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Q: I believe VR professionals and Business Professionals come from different core precepts (e.g., Voc Rehab: disability is a fact of life; fix the environment not the person. Employers are focused on making money, saving money and increasing operational efficiency). How can VR professionals make the leap to understand and value employer business objectives?

Q: Does NET provide accessibility assessments of websites?

Q: I am an EEO specialist in a federal agency, and we recruit individuals with disabilities as well as individuals with targeted disabilities. Is there anything different or additional that you would recommend for how/where we should reach out and recruit?

Q: How can we market disabled candidates as qualified and marketable? Most of the time, what I get from candidates is, "I want a job."

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EARN

Q: What is a Business Resource Group?

A: Business Resource Groups (BRGs) are internal organizational structures within individual businesses designed to address the unique needs and issues of today’s diverse workforce. Also known as Affinity Groups or Employee Resource Groups (ERGs), they are found in 90 percent of Fortune 500 companies and are gaining additional business support across the country. These groups offer employees an opportunity to network, address common issues and concerns, and receive support from those who share similar backgrounds, experiences or interests.

To learn more about how BRGs/ERGs are considered an exemplary practice that businesses can leverage to foster a culture of, check out this EARN resource: [Fostering Disability-Inclusive Workplaces Through Employee Resource Groups](#).

KATHY WEST-EVANS, Director of Business Relations, Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR)

Q: This one is for all of the speakers. Have any of you gone to businesses to speak with HR professionals about the benefits of recruiting/hiring individuals with disabilities (almost like an educational workshop)?

A: Yes, not just HR professionals but a variety of individuals within businesses. Remember, business is not just an employer; you need to understand the company across business lines if you are going to facilitate a change in the culture that supports the hiring, promotion and retention of individuals with disabilities. A key point is to make sure that disability is part of the diversity and inclusion strategy of a company. Diversity, including disability, is an important link to the business case. This is where the focus on the relationship with business is so important—build the relationship and the trust.

Most businesses will tell you, “We just don’t know what we don’t know,” and developing the trust allows you to open the dialogue and address any misperceptions, fears or stereotypes. I think we all can agree that the “attitudinal barriers” continue to be the biggest issue for candidates with disabilities. We have to open the dialogue without the fear of retribution, legal action or negative PR. The goal of the NET/VR is to bring talent,

resources and solutions to business. For more information on the NET/VR visit:
<http://www.rehabnetwork.org/customers-2/business/>.

Q: I believe VR professionals and Business Professionals come from different core precepts (e.g., Voc Rehab: disability is a fact of life; fix the environment not the person. Employers are focused on making money, saving money and increasing operational efficiency). How can VR professionals make the leap to understand and value employer business objectives?

A: By understanding and operationalizing the dual customer strategy. VR works with a large talent pool. The goal is to develop career plans with these individuals. Business has the opportunities and needs the talent that VR and their partners support.

Understanding business and their employment needs helps VR better prepare candidates for careers; not just the skill sets but the work environment. As a VR counselor, my strategy was to “begin with the end in mind.” The more that is known about an industry and business, the more effective the career plan. Understanding the employment needs of business also allows a better “fit” for the employee and the employer. At the end of the day, the goal is connecting the talent to the employment need and supporting the employer-employee relationship. Relationships with business allow VR and their community partners to support a broad range of career and employment strategies. Effective long-term business relationships are built on trust and mutual benefit.

Q: Does NET provide accessibility assessments of websites?

A: If we have staff, AT specialists or consultants available in the local area, the NET/VR can provide that support to business. We also coordinate with our national partners, like RESNA and JAN.

Q: I am an EEO specialist in a federal agency, and we recruit individuals with disabilities as well as individuals with targeted disabilities. Is there anything different or additional that you would recommend for how/where we should reach out and recruit?

A: The NET is working with a number of federal agencies and actually has an MOU in place with the USDA and their largest sub-agency, the Forest Service. The USDA has trained our team on the employment needs of their various sub-agencies, the hiring process, how to write a federal resume and other tips, as well as working to connect our team with their various regional representatives. They are also streaming their positions onto the Talent Acquisition Portal (TAP) (TapAbility.org) where they have direct access to candidates. TAP is led by the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation and NET in partnership with disABLEDperson, Inc., and includes both a national talent pool of VR candidates looking for employment and a job posting system for businesses looking to hire individuals with disabilities. There are other examples of partnerships with federal agencies as well.

The NET is certainly open to discussing a strategy that would be effective for your agency. Send me an email at kwest-evans@rehabnetwork.org or give me a call at 301-519-8023.

Q: How can we market disabled candidates as qualified and marketable? Most of the time, what I get from candidates is, “I want a job.”

A: Don't market the disability. Teach candidates to be able to articulate their skills, abilities and experience. Prepare effective resumes, practice the interviewing process and get them invested in their own employment. Help them look beyond the job and to the longer term career and independence. Business partners can be helpful here too; with good relationships, they will often provide mock interviews, allow a candidate to job shadow, provide a mentorship opportunity, internship/on-the-job training or other strategies that support the individual as they look at employment and career options.

DEBRA RUH, CEO, Ruh Global Communications

Q: This one is for all of the speakers. Have any of you gone to businesses to speak with HR professionals about the benefits of recruiting/hiring individuals with disabilities (almost like an educational workshop)?

A: I have spoken to HR groups all over the world. These workshops have been in-person trainings, seminars, webinars, tweet chats, podcasts and blended approaches that are both online and instructor-led. The sessions have been held by governments, non-profits, NGOs, United Nations Agencies, Employer Groups like USBLN or Affiliate BLN's, SHRM events, Voc Rehab programs and large employers like Accenture, Microsoft or IBM, all of which are creating programs to speak directly to HR professionals. This is a critical step since they are the direct connection to employment. It is also critical that these programs be geared to the HR professionals with employer language, employer best practices, risks analysis and resources. Many programs have been created and taught, but there is still a need to hold more of these programs. I believe many HR professionals are still confused by some of the moving parts of recruiting, employing, onboarding, accommodating, training and retaining employees with disabilities. I am seeing a good trend—Voc Rehab or Service Providers providing employer and HR Professional training for the entire HR lifecycle as it relates to employing and retaining persons with disabilities. It is critical that this training include actual business leaders and employers to have the best impact.

Q: What do you recommend saying or highlighting instead of “it is the right thing to do”?

A: I focus on the business case and a measureable disability inclusion roadmap instead of “It is the Right Thing to Do.” The business case has to include the risks and rewards

associated with including persons with disabilities in the workforce. I also consider the business footprint in these business cases and the Disability Inclusion roadmap. For example, does the business have employees only in the U.S. or in other countries? Does the business have employees in multiple states in the U.S.? Has the employer created a plan (or roadmap) to consider the HR lifecycle, enterprise risks (i.e., ICT accessibility, employment goals or quotas) and other areas like accommodations, future of work, branding, thought leadership and corporate social responsibilities? Has the business considered the right partners? Is the business measuring their employment and retention programs? What are their competitors doing in this space? Competitive advantage is a huge conversation for employers. It is also critical to get all levels of the business engaged in the conversation, from the C Suite and Board of Directors throughout the entire enterprise—this is not just a topic for HR Professionals.

Q: Instead of saying "not true," for those negative employer concerns, do you have some hard data (numbers) we can offer employers to ease their fears about hiring people with disabilities? I'd like to be able to offer statistics, but don't know where to get them.

A: Excellent question. We must have the data for businesses to take us seriously. I am a statistical packrat—I track best practices stats nationally and globally to help create the business case for clients. We cannot just say, “Do not be afraid.” We have to ground our examples with stats, measureable metrics, risks and rewards, and business examples that include employment outcomes.

For more about the employer perspective, check out my new book published by G3ICT, “Tapping Into Hidden Human Capital: How Leading Corporations Leverage Multiple Abilities in Their Workforce.”

KATHERINE MCCARY, President, C5 Consulting, LLC

Q: This one is for all of the speakers. Have any of you gone to businesses to speak with HR professionals about the benefits of recruiting/hiring individuals with disabilities (almost like an educational workshop)?

A: Yes, as an educational consulting firm, this is the central part of our mission at C5. We also present at local, regional and national employer conferences and offer national webinars.

Additionally, we lead two BLNs (DC and Silicon Valley) whose mission is to educate employers. The DC Metro BLN holds monthly employer training at member locations as well as a national webinar series geared to business. Check out DCMetroBLN.org and sign up for news. Feel free to share with others!

Q: It is okay to say “see and watch” to someone who is blind or visually impaired. They do use the same language as everyone else.

A: We have to be careful about accidentally creating barriers between candidates with disabilities and the employers. It is fine for employers to use the words “see” or “watch” around individuals that are blind or have vision loss. Blending sensitivity training into other training can be helpful for employers and give them a safe place to ask “sensitive” questions. It is also nice to have B2B (Business to Business) conversations so employers can ask each other these sensitive questions. When I train, I include these issues in the training because many people want to understand the complexity of the issues.

Q: Instead of saying "not true," for those negative employer concerns, do you have some hard data (numbers) we can offer employers to ease their fears about hiring people with disabilities? I'd like to be able to offer statistics, but don't know where to get them.

A: There is much research out there concerning these stats. Here are just a few:

- U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy Website: [DOL.gov/ODEP](https://www.dol.gov/ODEP)
- National Disability Institute's Real Economic Impact (REI) Network: [RealEconomicImpact.org](https://www.RealEconomicImpact.org)
- Job Accommodation Network (JAN): [AskJan.org](https://www.AskJan.org)
- Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN): [AskEARN.org](https://www.AskEARN.org)
- U.S. Business Leadership Network: [USBLN.org](https://www.USBLN.org)
- National Organization on Disability (NOD): [NOD.org](https://www.NOD.org)
- The Yang-Tan Institute (formerly the Employment and Disability Institute) at Cornell University ILR School: [YTI.Cornell.edu](https://www.YTI.Cornell.edu)
- ADA National Network: [ADAInfo.org](https://www.ADAInfo.org)

Also, you don’t say, “not true” to employers; you let them hear from other employers who have benefitted from including individuals in their workforce.

Q: There are a ton of companies trying to make money by providing you with individuals with disabilities. What do you think are the best two to three direct hiring sources for an employer?

A: I would dispute that there are many private sector companies doing this.

I suggest the best way to find talent is to engage with many community partners through an Employee Resource Group. Brand your company to market to this talent, make sure the talent acquisition portal is accessible, as well as your website, partner with up and coming talent by forming partnerships with colleges’ and universities’ career and disability services offices, pursue internships through the Workforce Recruitment

Program (wrp.org) and Emerging Leaders (Viscardi Center), AAAAS, etc. In order to retain individuals with disabilities in the workforce and attract, retain and promote talent- this requires a major culture shift with leadership, education, partner pipelines and accessibility.

In order to attract seasoned professionals with disabilities, you need to brand yourself in order to attract candidates from other organizations and become known in the community as a disability inclusive organization. This talent rarely needs a vendor to support them in a career switch or return to work. If the organization is seeking a particular skill set, there are professional organizations such as Society of Physicians with Disabilities, Chemists with Disabilities and more. You just need to "google" to find them.

Hiring happens locally, but if you want to consider some best in class talent vendor portals on a national basis, my go-to first is [Getting Hired](#). The [Sea Glass Group](#) operates mostly in the Chicago area.

Q: What do you recommend saying or highlighting instead of "it is the right thing to do"?

A: It's the Smart Thing to do for Business Success.
