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An i4cp Report

# The Inclusive Talent Pool:

*Employing People with Disabilities*

Featuring insights from:




In partnership with:

BEST BUDDIES







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**Anthony Kennedy Shriver**

Founder, Chairman & CEO  
Best Buddies International



## FOREWORD

As we celebrate the 30th anniversary of Best Buddies International, we recognize the tremendous progress made to advance our mission of inclusion for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). In addition to our thriving one-to-one friendship, integrated employment and leadership development programs, this year marks the introduction of a new inclusive living mission pillar; and within it a program that fosters an integrated experience for people with and without IDD to become active, contributing citizens who live independently in a dynamic environment where they can learn, grow, and thrive.

The collaborative community built through our Best Buddies Jobs Program in particular continues to grow. We are now in 24 cities in the U.S. and eight countries throughout Latin America, Europe, and Asia, and have enabled the placement of over 1,300

Best Buddies Job participants. Through this integrated employment program and the work of similar champions of inclusion, many new businesses and organizations are embracing a diverse workplace—and, in turn, are giving people with IDD the opportunity to make the same contributions and share the same benefits as all other employees.

I am thankful for our continued partnership with the Institute for Corporate Productivity (i4cp) as it reevaluates the employment landscape for people with IDD, tracking the progress that has been made and the areas for continued growth five years after its original study. When comparing the historical research findings to the current survey results, they found that the types of positions held by individuals with IDD are changing – with a noticeable increase in the number of people working in clerical and data entry jobs, as well as knowledge work, customer-facing roles, and management. These results reemphasize the fact that people with IDD are enormously talented, driven individuals who have the ability to positively contribute to the workplace when given the opportunity to do so.

Despite our accomplishments and growth over the past few years, we still have so much work to do. A staggering 81% of adults with IDD still do not have a paid job in the community, and 46% of those individuals who do not have a paid job want one. These statistics highlight the continued importance of our work and the i4cp study to create more meaningful employment opportunities for this untapped talent pool.

Best Buddies Jobs participants are contributing to the strength, prosperity, and well-being of their respective workplaces. At the same time, they are gaining financial independence—earning their own paychecks, paying taxes, and contributing to their communities.

I invite all industries worldwide to open up their hiring practices and consider how individuals with IDD can assist in growing revenue, increasing productivity, and improving company morale. Together, we can be a powerful advocate for change that benefits businesses, individuals and the community at large—one job at a time. Let's get to work!

With appreciation,

**Anthony Kennedy Shriver**



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# One in Five

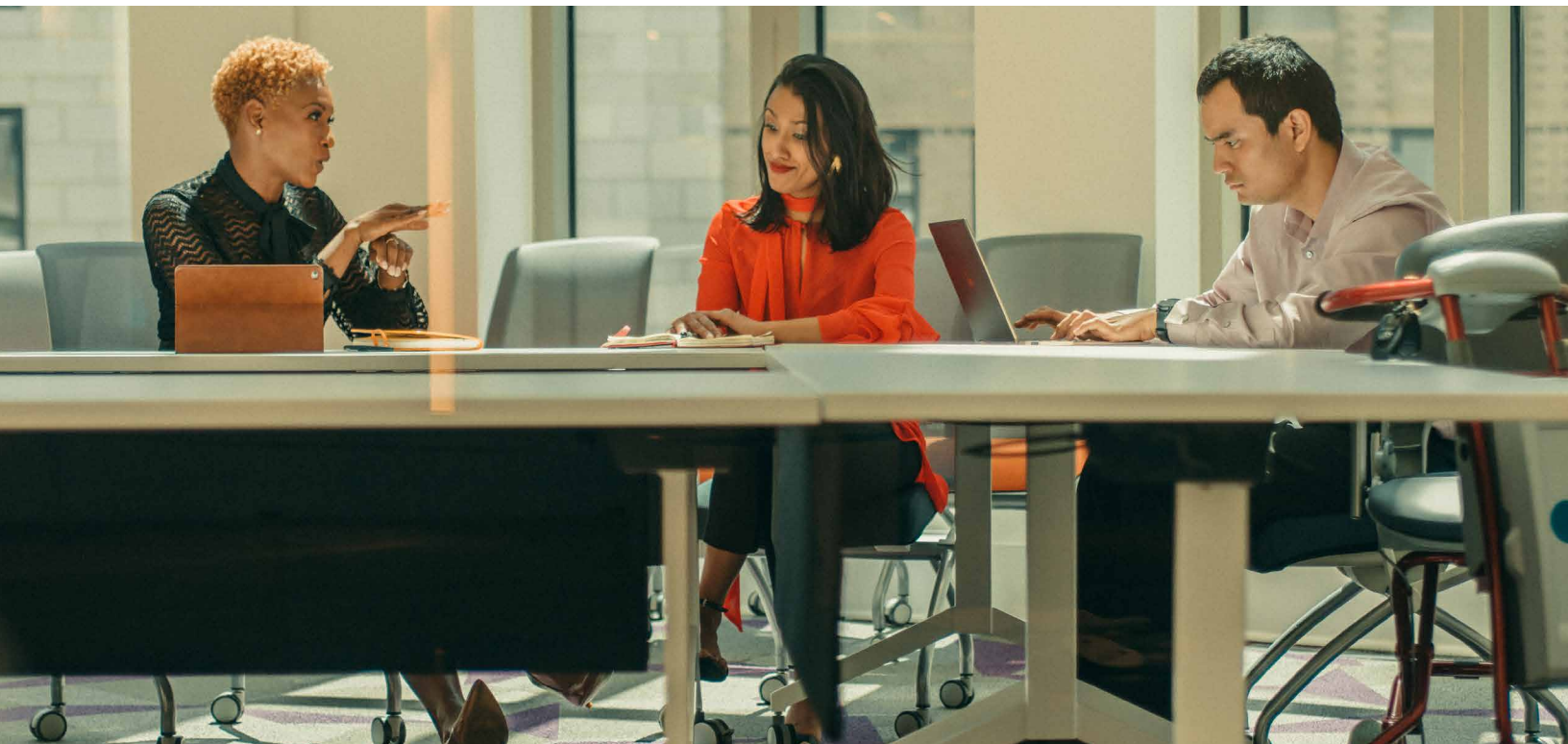
If you're sitting among a few of your colleagues as you read this, chances are one of you has at least one disability—and it may not be an apparent disability.

The number of people of working age in the U.S. who have a disability, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, is 53 million. That's one in every five Americans.

Yet the national unemployment rate for people with a disability (more than 30 million people age 16 and up) is nearly *twice* that of the broader population. It's a similar story worldwide.

High-performance organizations (defined by i4cp as those that outperform their counterparts in the areas of profitability, revenue, customer satisfaction, and market share) recognize that *disability inclusion* must be part of a holistic diversity and inclusion agenda—without it, all claims of having an inclusive culture ring hollow.

Also, as organizations increasingly integrate the concept of *belonging* into the diversity and inclusion conversation, acknowledging and working to destigmatize differences must be an integral part of this conversation, as should the goal of enabling equal access to employment opportunities to people with disabilities.





Taylor Mickelson, an information designer for Boeing's Manufacturing, Supply Chain & Operations organization, attends an online work meeting utilizing the services of interpreter Dave Morrison. To help Mickelson, who is deaf, participate in online meetings, Morrison joins her via video conferencing. Photo by Marian Lockhart



*“When we think about the fact that one in every five Americans of working age has a disability, if we are not creating an inclusive environment for people with disabilities, we are missing out and leaving potential on the table. And if we're not going out and actively recruiting and attracting people with different abilities and disabilities, we're missing out on an entire segment of talent.”*

**Sara Bowen**

VP, Global Equity, Diversity & Inclusion  
The Boeing Company



Understanding too that true inclusion impacts everything from consumer and employer brand, to innovation, organizational agility, performance, and productivity enterprisewide, leading organizations are broadening how they define their talent pools. And they are adjusting their strategies and approaches to sourcing, assessing, and hiring to reflect this broadened perspective. But this is just the starting point for making the workplace more inclusive of people with disabilities.

As the Institute for Productivity (i4cp) embarked on this new study, we built on the foundation of the key findings of our 2014 breakthrough study, [Employing People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities](#).

Produced in partnership with [Best Buddies International](#), a nonprofit organization dedicated to ending the social, physical, and economic isolation of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), the 2014 study explored the motivations and practices of organizations that employed people with IDD. The key findings of that study—which are consistent with the findings of this most recent iteration—were:

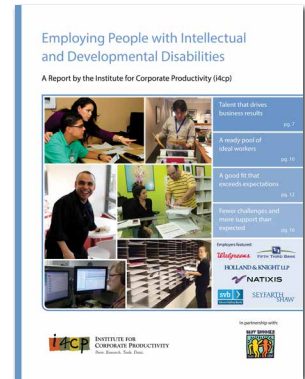
**High-performance organizations reported that they hired people with IDD for business reasons and were rewarded with business benefits.** Well beyond the practice being consistent with their organization’s values, the top drivers cited in 2014 by companies that employed people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities were supporting the talent acquisition strategy, finding good matches for open positions, and strengthening the organization’s culture. Resulting dividends reported included measurable or observable business benefits, the addition of highly motivated employees, demonstrating an inclusive and diverse culture that’s attractive to critical talent pools, and improving customer satisfaction.

**The profile of a worker with IDD read like that of an ideal employee.**

Descriptors of workers with intellectual and developmental disabilities by their employers included: *dependable, engaged, motivated, great attendance, attention to work quality, and highly productive.*

**Employers reported positive experiences that exceeded expectations.** Nearly three-quarters of those surveyed in 2014 said hiring workers with IDD had been a positive experience for their organizations. Further, nearly one-third said the experience had thus far exceeded their overall expectations.

**Challenges were fewer than expected and resources were greater than anticipated.** Employers reported experiencing minimal *actual* issues in contrast to *preconceived* concerns about the challenges of hiring employees with IDD, while supportive resources for successful placements—such as job profile analysis to determine fit, job coaching (onboarding/initial training support), and training for leaders and co-workers—were plentiful.



To read more, see i4cp’s report [Employing People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities](#)





Best Buddies Jobs Program participant Jorge Armando Alfonso works at Cosmos 100 Hotel in Bogotá Colombia.

**81%** of adults with IDD in the U.S. are unemployed today.



## Delivering Jobs

Through the [Delivering Jobs campaign](#), Best Buddies International seeks to ensure that individuals with IDD have the opportunity to earn an income of their own, work in an environment alongside others in their communities, and contribute their talent and gifts to the rest of the world.

In addition to revisiting these findings from our earlier research to get a sense of what's changed in the intervening years, this study, *The Inclusive Talent Pool: Employing People With Disabilities*, looks at the practices of organizations that employ people across an entire spectrum of abilities. The findings discussed in this study reflect data for organizations with 1,000+ employees unless otherwise noted.

### Top findings from our 2019 analysis:

- The roles in which people with IDD are employed have evolved over the past few years, with a notable increase in those in professional and knowledge worker roles.
- The *actual* challenges (versus preconceived) experienced by organizations that employ people with IDD have decreased from 2014 to 2019, while preconceived worries have shifted focus from concerns about the employee to the skills, experience, and training needed for hiring managers and supervisors.
- Benefits organizations realize from hiring people with IDD have increased, most notably in the areas of appealing to their talent pools and enhancing employer brand.
- The support survey respondents say their organizations would need in order to increase the number of employees with IDD have become more strategic and less tactical, to include the need for increased education for leaders and co-workers, and steps such as job analysis and deconstructing roles to determine appropriate tasks.
- Two thirds of respondents are currently engaging—or planning to within the next year—formally with community groups to build their recruitment pipeline for people with disabilities.

But while great strides have been made in employing people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, there is much work to be done.



## INTRODUCTION

# The Inclusive Talent Pool:

## *Employing People with Disabilities*

We are witnessing in real-time a broadening recognition of the value of diversity and inclusion on the part of the leaders of the world's foremost organizations. The case has been made—diversity and inclusion is good for business, good for the culture, and it plays a critical role in addressing the growing talent shortage. CEOs are increasingly acknowledging this publicly.

**CEO Action for Diversity and Inclusion**, a CEO-driven business commitment to advance diversity and inclusion in the workplace, which has collected pledges from over 800 CEOs and counting, is one example of this shift. Similarly, the **Valuable 500** is a global movement gathering pledges from companies and senior leaders committed to placing disability inclusion on their business leadership agenda.

Diversity and inclusion is good for business, good for the culture, and it plays a critical role in addressing the growing talent shortage.



And earlier this year, the Business Roundtable, a Washington, D.C.-based non-profit that represents the chief executives of close to 200 corporations, issued a pronouncement titled “[Statement on the Purpose of a Corporation](#),” asserting that corporations must redefine their purpose—one that emphasizes employee prosperity as much as shareholder profits. Signed by 181 of its members, the statement asserts that while each individual company serves its own corporate purpose, all share a fundamental commitment to all stakeholders:

“Americans deserve an economy that allows each person to succeed through hard work and creativity, and to lead a life of meaning and dignity. We believe the free-market system is the best means of generating good jobs, a strong and sustainable economy, innovation, a healthy environment, and economic opportunity for all.”



While all of that is good news, there remains a disconnect when it comes to the employment of people with disabilities—as we noted, most adults with IDD in the U.S. are unemployed. Yet at the start of 2019, the U.S. Department of Labor reported that the economy had 7.6 million unfilled jobs, but only 6.5 million people were looking for work—the 11th consecutive month that the number of open jobs was higher than the number of job seekers. That gap is continuing to widen, with serious and broad economic implications.

The scarcity of talent available to meet the needs of employers now and looking ahead is further underscored by a [survey](#) i4cp fielded in the fall of 2019. Of the nearly 550 respondents, only 11% overall reported that their companies currently have the talent needed to achieve their objectives both now and looking three years ahead to a “high” or “very high extent.” At the same time, *only 20% of those organizations* were looking to workers with disabilities to address their talent needs (falling to 12% that are looking to workers with IDD to meet talent needs) (i4cp, 2019c).

Only **11%**  
of organizations  
say they currently  
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both now and in  
the next three  
years.



On a positive note though, using i4cp's Market Performance Index<sup>®</sup>, our analysis found that those from high-performance organizations (HPOs) were **2.5x** more likely to say that expanding recruitment among underrepresented groups *to include those with disabilities* is a strategy they believe will help them meet their talent needs over the next three years. Though they were almost **3x** more likely to report that their companies are challenged in finding talent from underrepresented groups, this is likely because HPOs are more focused on this issue as a strategic business imperative than their lower-performing counterparts (LPOs).

This is in line with what we found in our 2014 research into organizations that employed people with IDD—leading companies reported finding good matches for open positions when they expanded their talent pools to include people with disabilities. Further, i4cp research has consistently shown that high-performance organizations are more likely to view acquisition of diverse talent as a strategic necessity.

*Part I of this report is a longitudinal look at how the data has shifted regarding employing people with IDD from 2014 to 2019.*

*Part II covers new questions we explored this year, with a broader look at trends and implications related to the employment of people with disabilities not exclusive to IDD.*

## Definition:

### Market Performance Index (MPI)<sup>®</sup>

This index defines high-performance organizations based on their self-reported multi-year performance in profitability, revenue, customer satisfaction, and market share.



## PART I:

# Recognition of the Value of Diversity & Inclusion is Clear



To read more, see i4cp's report [Culture Renovation: A Blueprint for Action](#).

The *why* of diversity and inclusion (D&I) is evident to most companies—two-thirds (66%) of survey respondents said that their organizations are addressing D&I because doing so aligns with their stated values or that it aligns with their overall business strategy.

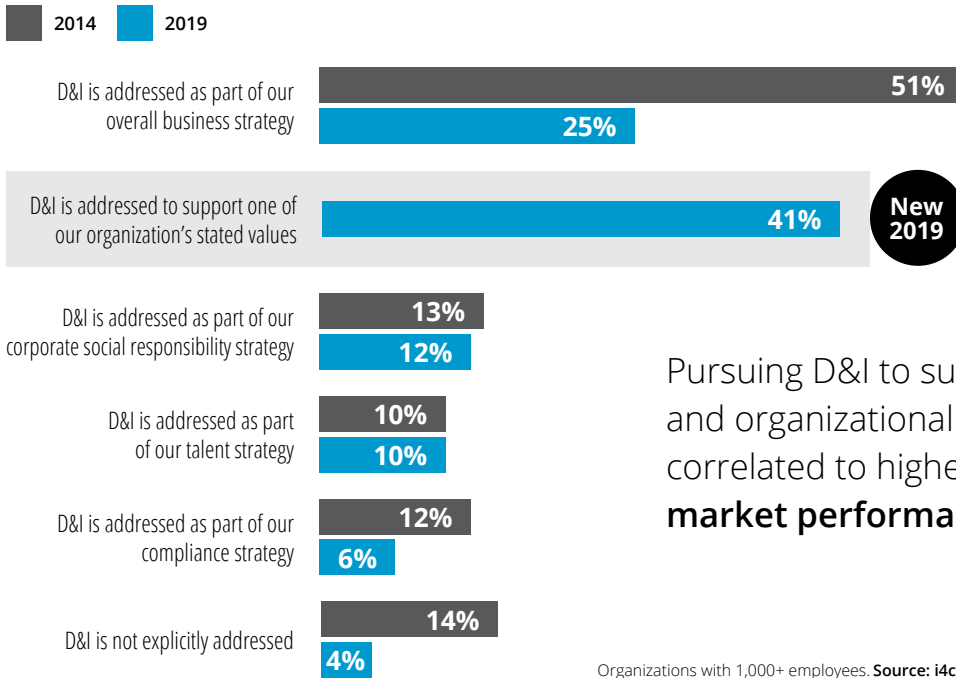
While there was a drop in responses related to D&I being addressed as a business strategy (from 51% to 25%) our analysis is that those organizations shifted their responses to align to a response option to this question that is new in the 2019 survey—that D&I strategy is tied to the stated values of the organization (41%).

These findings support those of the i4cp study, [Culture Renovation: A Blueprint for Action](#), in which 68% of survey respondents from more than 6,000 organizations indicated that their organization's culture was one that actively supported diversity and inclusion to a "high" or "very high" extent (i4cp, 2019a).

Another strong indicator is that over the past five years, our research has found that D&I has been moving decidedly away from a "check the box" exercise in compliance and corporate social responsibility (CSR). Five years ago, four in ten organizations indicated that it was viewed as part of CSR or compliance (or not addressed at all) and today, that figure is only about two in ten.



Please indicate the highest strategic level at which diversity and inclusion (D&I) is addressed in your organization.



Pursuing D&I to support business strategy and organizational values is significantly correlated to higher **engagement** and **market performance** ratings.

Organizations with 1,000+ employees. Source: i4cp

It's likely that as the economy remained positive and the wake of various social movements influenced the business environment, the foundation of most D&I initiatives has become less tied to concrete ROI metrics and more aligned to values, culture, employee engagement, talent brand, etc. While all of those imperatives overlap and influence elements of business strategy, survey respondents now view some aspects of D&I as more of a core values issue when given the option.

Basing a D&I program in business strategy and support for reflecting organizational values showed a strong positive correlation to higher market performance and engagement scores. This confirms previous i4cp research that found that D&I programs must be perceived as authentic and ingrained in the organization's thinking and behaviors in order to be effective.

To that end, it's important to note that organizations that employ people with disabilities report that the dividends are enterprise-wide, enhancing cultural competence and awareness. This helps to create vital conversations in the workplace that call attention to both conscious and unconscious bias and make progress toward reducing it.

D&I programs must be perceived as authentic and ingrained in the organization's thinking and behaviors in order to be effective.





Dudley Williams III is a Best Buddies Jobs participant in Boston, MA who works full-time for John Hancock in Sponsorship Marketing as a Marketing Coordinator.

## The Disconnect between Stated Strategy & Values and Efforts Related to Employing People with Disabilities



To read more, see i4cp's report [D&I Metrics: Survey Analysis](#).

i4cp's survey findings reflect a clear acknowledgement among executive leadership of the strategic importance placed on D&I. Given that nearly eight in 10 adults with IDD are unemployed, there exists tremendous opportunity for employers to support their D&I objectives by including the employment of people with disabilities as a core element of their overall talent management efforts.

Nearly half (49%) of those surveyed reported that their organizations currently employ people with IDD, and an additional 7% reported that there are plans to do so within a year. For these organizations, other i4cp research on [the metrics organizations track](#) to measure their diversity and inclusion efforts, found that 58% of the 300 professionals surveyed reported that they measure disability inclusion as part of their routine D&I metrics. And respondents from high-performance organizations were **1.5x** more likely to report this than their lower-performing counterparts (i4cp, 2019b).

However, 48% of respondents to this study said that their organizations do not have plans to recruit people with disabilities.



Five MOD Squadders who came to MOD Pizza through Best Buddies Jobs Program: Evan, California; Kelly, Indiana; Talisa, Illinois; Eric, California; and Jada, Illinois

This is a starting point for organizations. What we know from both the survey data as well as qualitative interviews i4cp conducted as part of this research is that specialized recruiting programs are important to the success of employing people with IDD. Further, a critical component of such specialized recruiting programs is forming a strategic partnership with outside organizations that provide vital assistance such as matching qualified individuals with IDD with employers, helping in the hiring process, and providing ongoing coaching and development support to both the employer and employees .

*“We partner with nonprofits that get people job ready. Not only is it a great pipeline for employees who fit with the MOD culture, but we also leverage their expertise to make us a better employer and help ensure that we are as inclusive as we can be.*

*We see benefit in partnering with various nonprofits that provide support to our Squad members [MOD employees], and we understand the vital role that job readiness programs play for MOD. Extra wrap-around services are so important. We know that Best Buddies provides the right kind of support and knows what it takes to be successful at MOD Pizza.”*



**Mary Douglas**  
Director, Community Engagement  
MOD Pizza





# The Benefits of Employing People with Disabilities Are Undeniable

## Holland & Knight



*"By hiring people from the Best Buddies Jobs Program, we bring a certain kind of difference to the workplace, where I think it shows the lawyers and the staff that it's not always and all about doing the work and bringing in the money."*

### Robert Friedman

Partner  
Holland and Knight



The benefits of employing people with disabilities go broad and deep.

Obviously, the employees benefit through integrated employment and competitive wages, but organizations also realize many benefits that exceed what they gain through other hiring initiatives. And in comparing the longitudinal data, we found that overall, the benefits to organizations as a result of hiring people with IDD have increased from 2014 to 2019.

We see clear upticks in inclusive cultures enabling employers to be more attractive to talent pools, enhancing their employer brand, adding highly motivated employees to their workforces, and improving support for employer recognition as employers of choice.

At Holland and Knight, LLP, the primary benefit is enhancement of company culture.

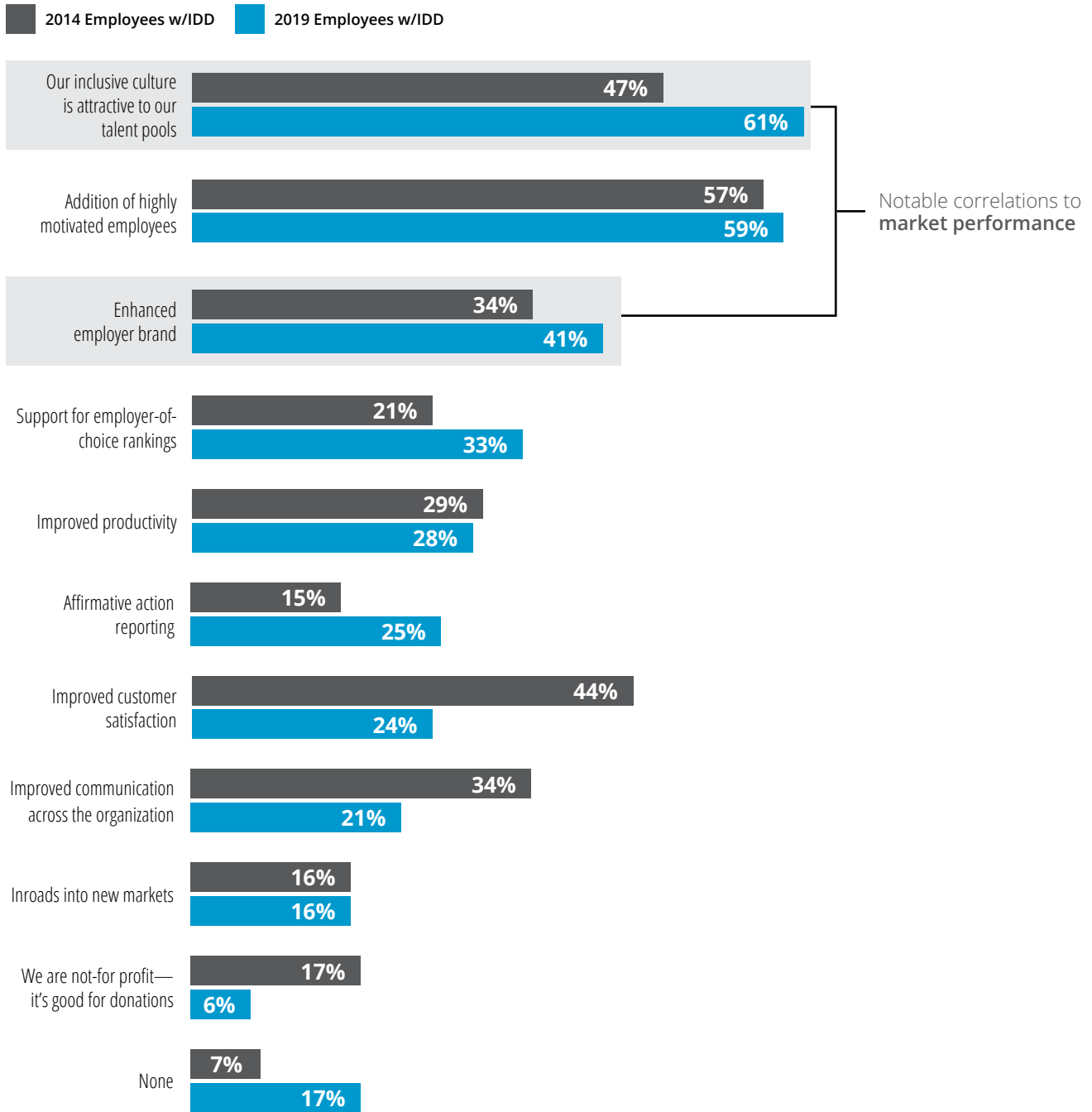
Partner Robert Friedman works with Barbara Torres, who was one of the first people with intellectual and developmental disabilities hired through the Best Buddies Jobs Program 25 years ago. Barbara, who was featured in the 2014 study, is still there today.



*Barbara Torres—one of the first hires made through Best Buddies Jobs—has worked at Holland & Knight for 25 years.*

"Lawyers and law firms are viewed as being all about working the client and making money. By hiring people from the Best Buddies Jobs Program, we bring a certain kind of difference to the workplace, where I think it shows the lawyers and the staff that it's not always and all about doing the work and bringing in the money. We're about more than that. We're about inclusiveness and we're about giving people opportunity and trying to knock down barriers—not being boxed in by what people consider to be limitations."

### Benefits of hiring people with IDD 2014 vs. 2019



Noticeable increase in cultural competence across the organization as a result of disability inclusion education (e.g., insights gained are applied across all differences such as race, gender, ethnicity, age, etc.



Organizations with 1,000+ employees. Source: i4cp





Wilson Yu fills an Amazon Prime order at the warehouse in SoDo. He is one of many who have found work with Amazon through Northwest Center since 2015. (Alan Berner / The Seattle Times)

## Holland & Knight



*"Giving opportunities to people who are traditionally underrepresented in the workplace is a big part of what diversity inclusion is all about."*

**Tiffani Lee**

Partner  
Holland and Knight



Partner Tiffani Lee agrees with Friedman, adding: "I also think that from a talent perspective or from the business perspective, it's an expanded talent pool. If you look more inclusively about who can do the job that you're hiring for—and you've benefited from having an extremely dedicated, hardworking, loyal, committed individual joining our workforce—I think it has sort of a ripple effect that is positive. Giving opportunities to people who are traditionally underrepresented in the workplace is a big part of what diversity inclusion is all about."

The addition of highly motivated employees to the team as a benefit of employing people with IDD, which increased slightly in this year's study, is playing out at Amazon every day.

At Amazon's sorting center in Kent, Washington, a 2015 pilot that employed workers with IDD went so well that the program expanded exponentially, with the placement of other workers with IDD in roles across multiple Amazon operations and facilities. Employees with IDD are working full-time jobs and earning at least minimum wage while being held to the same expectations as other employees. **Northwest Center**, the nonprofit organization that partnered with Amazon to place the employees, reported that after the first year the productivity rate of this group was 98% that of average, 37% better in regards to quality of work, had a perfect safety record compared with a 1.1% warehouse incident rate, and had better attendance than the general population (Romano, 2019).

# The Roles in Which People with IDD are Employed Are Evolving

Longitudinally, the types of roles that people with IDD are employed in are changing—there is a decided upturn from the 2014 study in the number of people employed in clerical and data entry jobs, as well as knowledge work, customer-facing roles, and management. There is also a slight decrease in the number of people with IDD being employed in roles such as custodial/maintenance work.

A wonderful example of this is Michael Dykman, a Best Buddies Jobs Program participant, who aspired to advance his career. Through assistance in résumé building, interview preparation, and coaching to help him progress toward his professional goals, he is now employed as Lab Services Technician at Genentech in South San Francisco.

*Michael Dykman, Lab Services Technician at Genentech in South San Francisco. For more go to: <https://bit.ly/2MJ9b6x>*



In contrast to 2014, people with IDD are **3x** more likely in 2019 to be employed as knowledge workers,

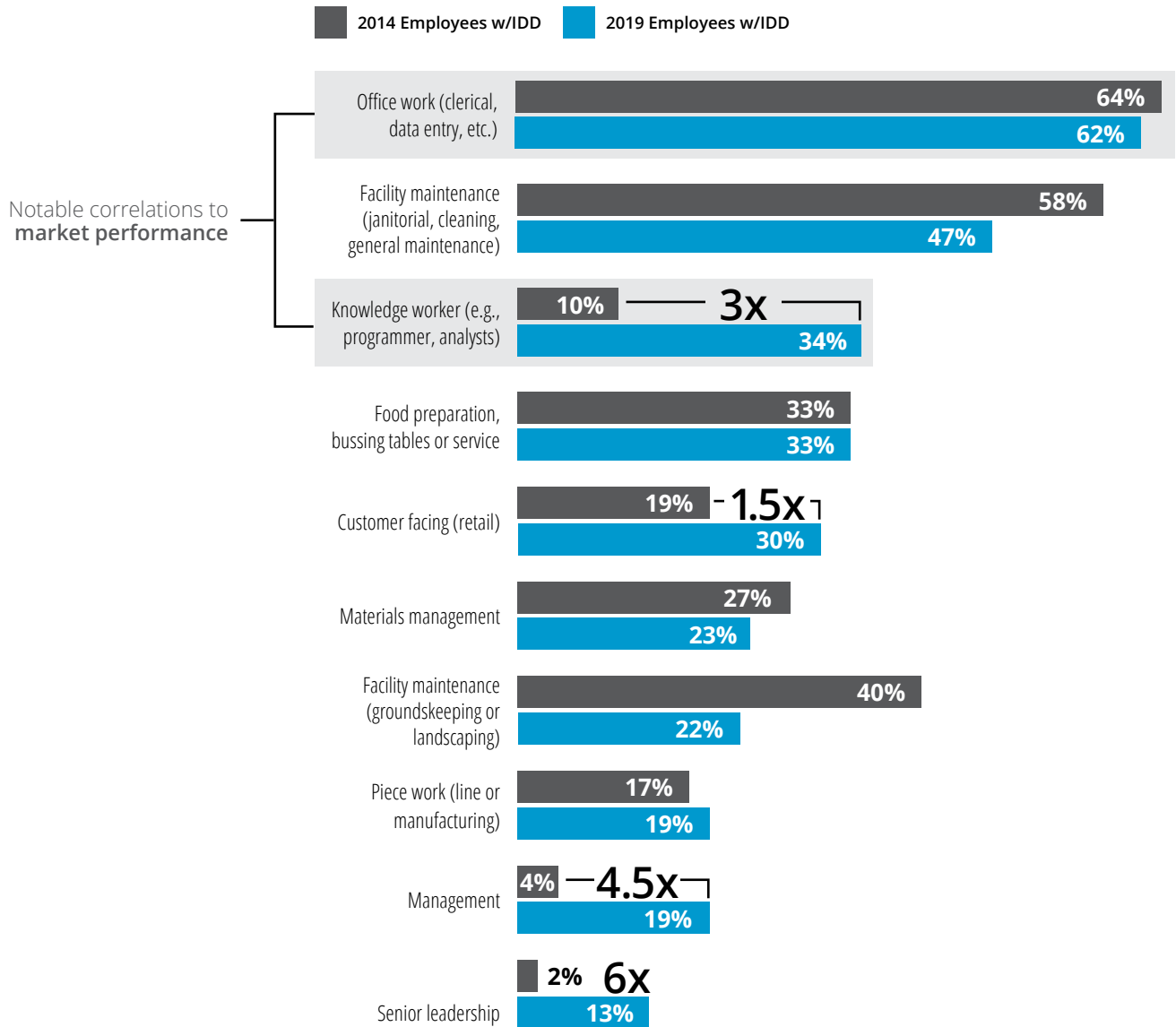
**1.5x** more likely to be in customer facing roles,

**4.5x** more likely to be in management roles,

and **6x** more likely to be in senior leadership roles.



Top 10 employment categories for people with IDD 2014 vs. 2019



Organizations with 1,000+ employees. Source: i4cp

Many factors have contributed to employees with IDD and other disabilities to be more fully integrated into the workforce and move into positions of more *meaningful* work (i.e., work they are interested in and find satisfying). Such factors include advocacy and public education efforts in business, communities, schools, through the entertainment industry, and more. And there seems to be more openness in the culture about discussing the many elements and nuances of ability, disability, and inclusion.



(From left) Wawa Director of Operations Jason Read, Tara Murphy, Patrick Murphy, Aleta Murphy, Eden Chief Development Officer Melinda Gorny McAleer, and Wawa Area Manager Daniel Holland present Wawa's \$100,000 donation benefiting supported employment efforts to Eden Autism on May 9, 2019.

# Wawa's Supported Employment Program Provides the Structure Needed to Succeed



**Marissa Martinelli**  
Store Operations Recruiting Lead  
Wawa, Inc.



Hiring people with different abilities to work in customer-facing roles is nothing new for convenience retailer Wawa, which began its [Supported Employment Program](#) in the early 1980s with the hire of an associate with autism in Princeton, New Jersey. Retired CEO Howard Stoeckel recounts in his memoir, *The Wawa Way*, that the young man who was hired (and is still employed at Wawa today) opened doors for other people with autism to enter the workforce.

Marissa Martinelli, store operations recruiting lead for Wawa in the southeast region, says that the positions she typically hires for as part of Wawa's Supported Employment Program range from food service to customer service, and facilities and stock management.

"We work very closely in partnership with the [Best Buddies Jobs Program](#) to ensure that we are making the right decisions and providing their program participants with every opportunity and resource they need to succeed as Wawa employees," says Martinelli.

Says Stoeckel about providing employment opportunities to talented individuals regardless of what some might consider disabilities: "At Wawa, we keep discovering new ways to support the people of our communities. We never intend to stop."





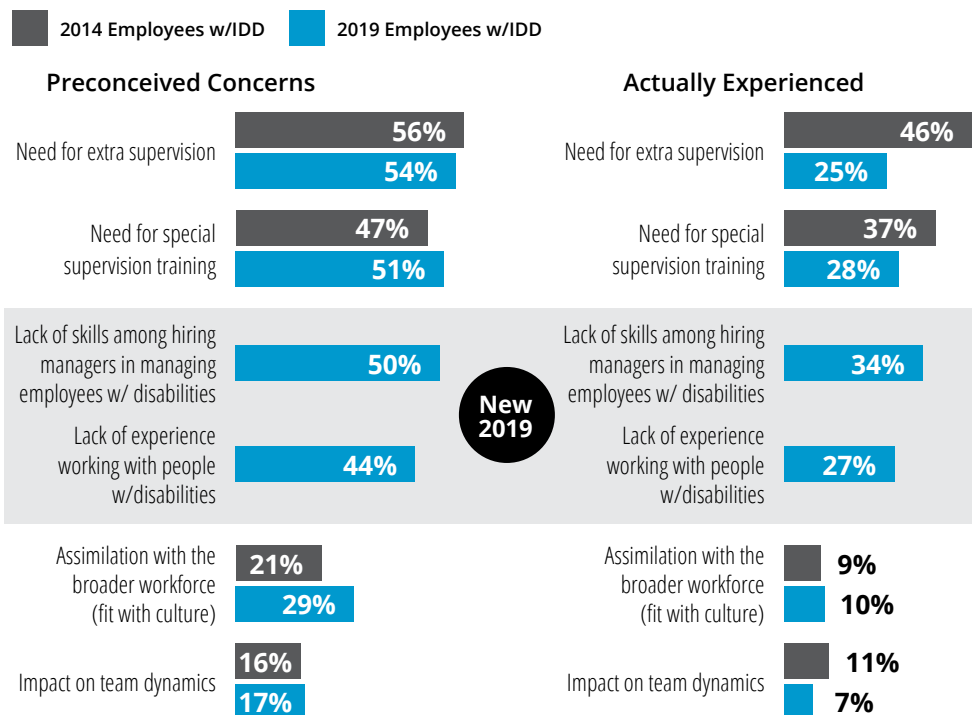
Best Buddies Jobs Program participant Brooke Abbott started working in Nashville, Tennessee as a Grand Ole Opry Concessions Hostess in October 2015.

# Reality Debunks Preconceived Ideas About the Challenges of Hiring People with Disabilities

Common preconceptions about hiring people with IDD typically fall into two distinct categories: potential challenges for the organizations and challenges for the employees.

But again this year, the study found distinct contrasts in the potential issues that concerned employers about hiring people with IDD and what they actually experienced.

## Organization focused challenges - Preconceived vs. Actual



Organizations with 1,000+ employees indicating high/very high extent. Source: i4cp

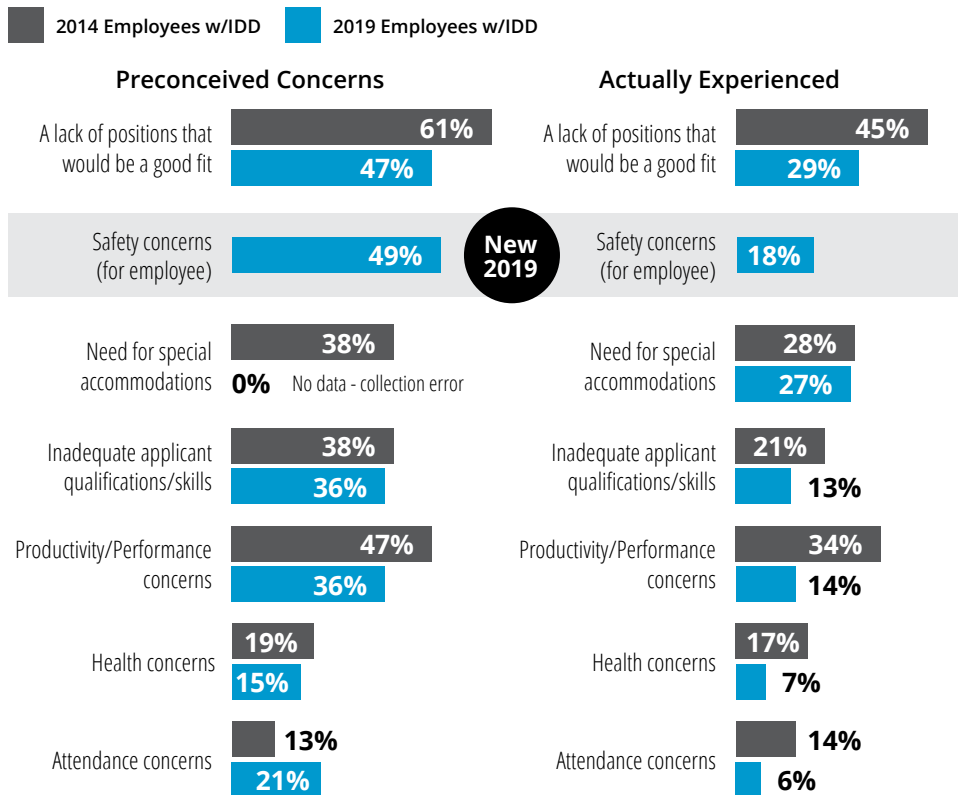
For example, fewer experienced a need for extra supervision of employees with IDD during both time periods, but almost twice as many reported this as a challenge they had in 2014 compared with 2019. What the data shows here is that organizations have opportunity to benefit greatly by providing skills training for hiring managers and those who will work directly with employees with IDD—a simple measure that can pay huge dividends.

Meanwhile, there were far fewer challenges for people with IDD in assimilating with the broader workforce both in 2014 and 2019, though anticipated challenge was greater in 2019. However, even among the two new answer options we added in the 2019 survey (*lack of skills among hiring managers in managing employees with disabilities* and *lack of experience working with people with disabilities*) the reality was much less of a challenge than the preconceived concerns.

Nearly every preconceived concern played out this way, including lack of positions that would be a good fit, need for special training, need for special accommodations, need for extra supervision, productivity/performance and safety concerns, etc.

Organizations have opportunity to benefit greatly by providing skills training for hiring managers and those who will work directly with employees with IDD—a simple measure that can pay huge dividends.

### Employee focused challenges - Preconceived vs. Actual



Organizations with 1,000+ employees indicating high/very high extent. Source: i4cp

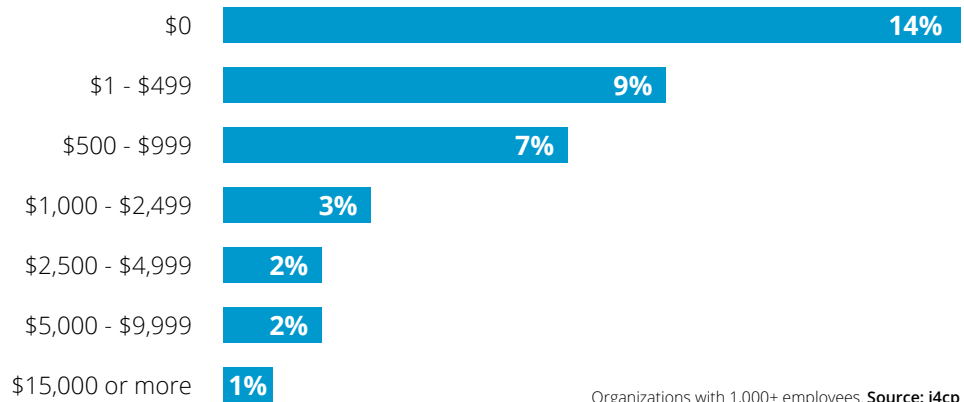


Employees with IDD are positioned to succeed when job fit and accommodations are carefully and thoughtfully determined by supported employment professionals.

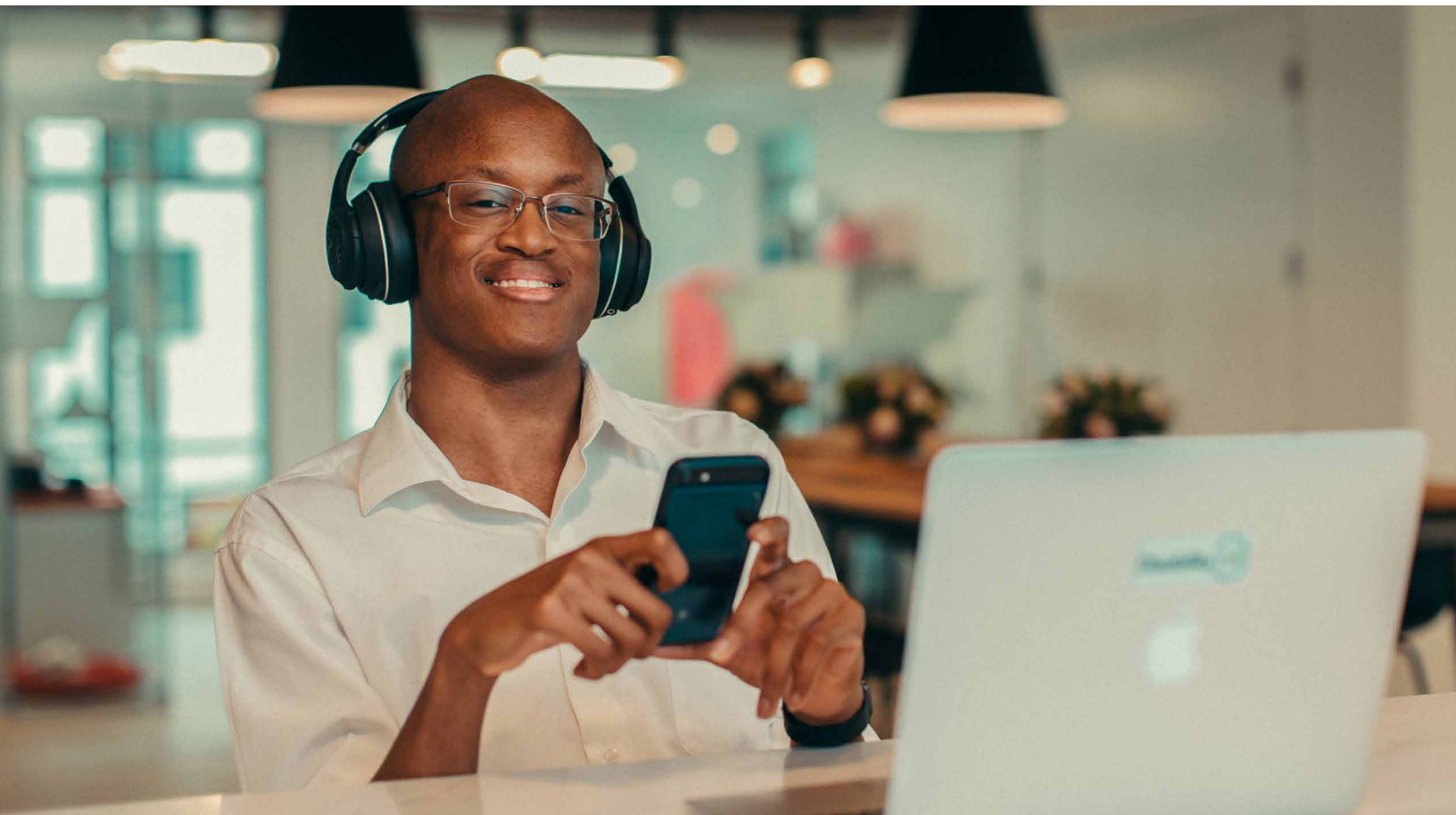
And in terms of opportunity, again, we see that employees with IDD are positioned to succeed when job fit and accommodations are carefully and thoughtfully determined by supported employment professionals.

Another preconceived concern about hiring people with IDD was the potential cost of accommodations for the employer—27% cited this, but a scant 9% of those that employ workers with IDD cited this as a challenge they have actually experienced.

Average cost (in USD) per FTE of accommodations for employees with intellectual and developmental disabilities (e.g., assistive technology, ergonomic equipment, workspace changes)



Organizations with 1,000+ employees. Source: i4cp





Another disability inclusion practice espoused by U.S.-based commercial real estate services firm JLL is inclusive design, which includes accessibility elements, ergonomic equipment and fixtures, varied spaces for different work preferences, and other enhancements that make the workplace welcoming to a broad talent pool.

## JLL Embraces PossABILITY Through Best Buddies Partnership

Programs that introduce employees with IDD into the workplace have strong correlation to market performance and while not yet widely adopted, is a practice we strongly recommend. The benefits are immeasurable in terms of positioning both the employer and the employee for success in the near and long-term.

Has your organization ever participated in a program designed to introduce workers with intellectual and developmental disabilities into your workplace (i.e., on-location work trials, job shadowing, internships, or long-term work exchanges)?



Organizations with 1,000+ employees. Source: i4cp

JLL Celebrates National Disability Employment Awareness Month with Best Buddies



<https://bit.ly/2lRwsBU>



**Kate Abbatacola**  
Employer Brand Manager  
JLL



**Kerry Lynch**  
Regional Facilities Manager  
JLL



This is certainly true at Chicago-based real estate services firm JLL (Jones Lang LaSalle), which has operations in over 80 countries and a global workforce of nearly 92,000. Not only is JLL working to create inclusive practices internally, it also supports its clients in doing the same.

Two years ago, JLL began a partnership with Best Buddies in Chicago through JLL's Business Resource Group (BRG), PossABILITY.

"I have a connection to Best Buddies—I've been involved with them since high school, so for me both personally and as an employee, I was very interested in bringing their Jobs Program to JLL," says Kate Abbatacola, Employer Brand Manager at JLL.

When Abbatacola began work on bringing the [Best Buddies jobs Program](#) into the Chicago office, she discovered that a colleague in New York was also working on a partnership in her location on behalf of a JLL client.

Her colleague, [Kerry Lynch](#), senior director, regional facilities manager at JLL had been approached by a JLL client about the possibility of working with the Best Buddies Jobs Program in 2016. Says Lynch:

"Our client knew about Best Buddies because one of their employees had a spouse who worked for them. It was great, because their desire to hire people with different abilities aligned with JLL's objectives of creating a more diverse and inclusive workplace. Having experienced personal trauma and a serious illness prior to 2016, I have always been thankful for the support and friendship of so many people, so the timing couldn't have been better. It was now my turn to pay it forward and help others.

We analyzed how we would roll this out, what roles and types of training would be available, how we would recruit, and how we would fund the program. We started with a pilot employing three individuals part-time, then evaluated the program and its benefits and looked at how we could expand it. From there, we went into the following year with a budget and a targeted approach. That involved looking at where our client was growing and had needs and how those aligned with where Best Buddies had a Jobs Program. A year later, we have eight full-time employees in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Boston who perform facilities management work at a technology company."

Says Abbatacola: "From there, Kerry and I have worked together to lead the charge to build awareness of Best Buddies and expand the program, working on multiple initiatives beyond the Jobs Program to include Ambassador Trainings [working with Best Buddies participants on honing public speaking and presentation skills]."



Lynch says that the true partnership Best Buddies offers to employers, and their supported employment approach, is the key to the success of JLL's goal to create a more diverse and inclusive workforce.

"I have found over time that it is often difficult for organizations with the best of intentions to figure out the right roles or launch jobs programs directly without the help of an external partner like Best Buddies."

The same holds true at MOD Pizza, where training provided to all employees reaps great rewards, says Mary Douglas, Director of Community Engagement:

"MOD partnered with Best Buddies to conduct a training for all of our leaders, which included disabilities defined, disability etiquette, and a labor industries video, among other topics. In turn, our field leaders shared the learning materials with their Squads [MOD Pizza employees] and emphasized MOD's values of inclusivity.

The best part is that all of the training and learnings from Best Buddies are transferable—it is helpful information for employing and serving any community. We will continue to lean into these areas of inclusion and belonging as it's one of MOD's top values."





## PART II

# Inclusive Workplaces are Barrier-free Zones

**75%** of respondents reported that their organizations currently employ people with disabilities (non-IDD).

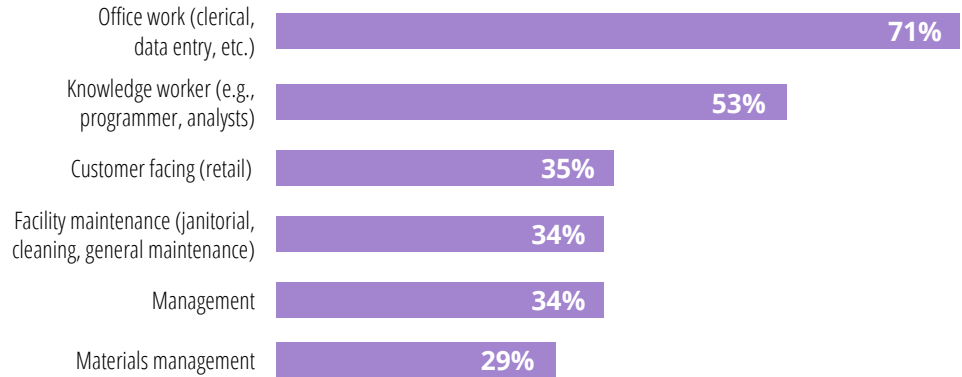
In addition to assessing the degree to which things have changed since we published our study on employment of people with IDD in 2014, in this year's research we looked broadly at *all dimensions* of disabilities. In particular, we focused on the actions employers are taking to attract and support talent with differing abilities.

Encouragingly, we found that 75% of respondents surveyed reported that their organizations currently employ people with disabilities (non-IDD) and doing so has a strong correlation to the engagement of the overall workforce.

The top reasons cited for employing people with disabilities (non-IDD) were: to support the diversity and inclusion strategy (74%), because it's viewed as the right thing to do (65%), and because it supports the company's culture (64%).

Rounding out the top reasons: it supports the corporate social responsibility strategy (56%), and because the organizations have found good talent matches for open positions (52%). And our analysis found that hiring people with disabilities to support the talent strategy (49%) has meaningful correlation to market performance. We also found that hiring people with disabilities because it's viewed as the right thing to do correlates to both market performance and engagement of the workforce—which is to say that it's likely that inclusive messaging is deeply embedded in the culture of these organizations and that the values of the organization are understood, perceived to be authentic, and underpin the D&I strategy in meaningful and demonstrative ways.

In terms of the roles in which people with disabilities (other than IDD) are employed, we found the most common were, respectively:



Organizations with 1,000+ employees. Source: i4cp

### Boeing: Deaf Workers Fly High



<https://bit.ly/31nOUIN>

Employing people with disabilities in both professional and leadership roles is definitely an indicator of a culture of inclusion. One example of this is The Boeing Company.

At Boeing's Everett Washington site, which is home to the largest manufacturing facility in the world (equivalent in size to 75 football fields) there are **no barriers to success for deaf employees**. Boeing's long tradition of inclusion is evident—one example: it's not all at all unusual for deaf supervisors to lead teams of hearing employees. Deaf professionals are employed in every aspect of airplane manufacturing, from mechanical engineering, to data analytics, electrical engineering, safety inspectors, and more.

*"We've seen great success when we bring in people with disabilities—and particularly people with apparent disabilities—into a team. We see improvements in attendance, morale, and engagement by everyone.*

*It's not just that we're bringing in talent we might have otherwise missed. It's not just that we're bringing in a different perspective that can spark innovation—we're actually changing the dynamic, the connectedness of the team, and boosting everyone's level of engagement."*

**Sara Bowen**

VP, Global Equity, Diversity & Inclusion  
The Boeing Company





# Preconceived Concern About the Cost of Accommodations Isn't Borne Out

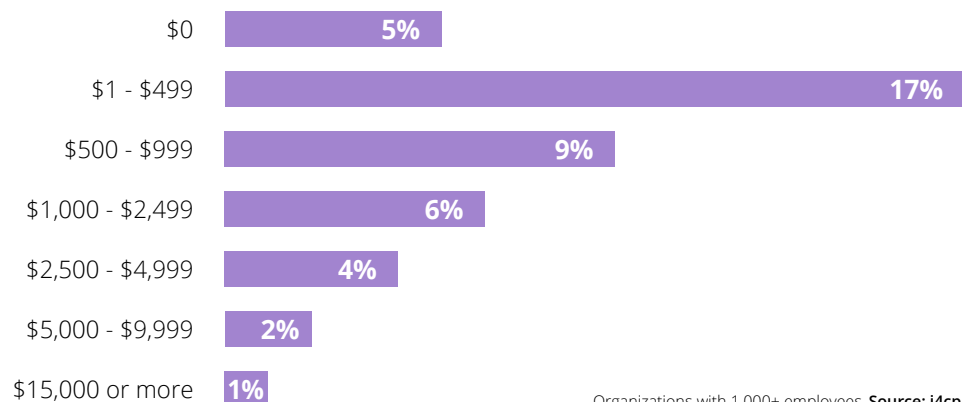
The cost of accommodations for workers with disabilities (non-IDD) very rarely exceeds \$500.

The potential cost of providing accommodations such as assistive technology or other equipment for employees with disabilities (non-IDD) was a preconceived challenge cited by organizations, albeit the numbers were relatively low—30% cited this concern in relationship to hiring workers with disabilities

In reality, those costs presented challenges in half that number—just 16% of organizations employing workers with disabilities reported that they had experienced this challenge.

Overall, the data found that the cost of accommodations for workers with disabilities (non-IDD) very rarely exceeds \$500.

Average cost (in USD) per FTE of accommodations for employees with disabilities other than IDD (e.g., assistive technology, ergonomic equipment, workspace changes)



Organizations with 1,000+ employees. Source: i4cp

Underscoring this point further is the experience of KellyConnect.

The **KellyConnect** virtual call center is a division of Kelly Services that has been around since 2010 and employs people with disabilities to work from home, providing tech support to Kelly clients 24-7.

Melissa Turansky, PHR Senior Director at KellyConnect says that for one of their largest clients, Kelly has over 6,000 virtual employees who are tied to the call center. Many of those employees have varying disabilities.

“We might have someone with a minor impairment, and then we have employees who have very significant disabilities, such as complete blindness, who work fulltime, 40 hours a week as call center agents. But we are able to accommodate. I would say our most expensive accommodation would be technology for those who have complete impairment from a visual perspective and that ranges about \$500. Anything other than that can almost always be solved very simply—costing zero dollars with simple adjustments like additional breaks or flexibility in work schedules.”

At Boeing, the creation of an accommodation fund has been a game-changer when it comes to addressing the cost concern, says Sara Bowen, VP of Global Equity, Diversity & Inclusion.

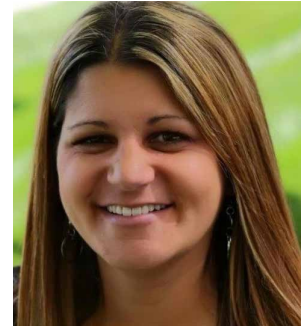
“We know that most people with disabilities don't require accommodations at all. When there is a requested accommodation, it is most often free, or the cost is under \$500.

One of the best pieces of advice I can give to other employers who want to move the needle on disability inclusion is to establish a centralized accommodation fund so that every manager and every candidate is on equal footing. It means that no manager has to choose between Employee A who has a disability and might bring an associated accommodation cost or Employee B who doesn't have a disability and therefore isn't going to bring that cost. An accommodation budget concern should never be a calculation in a hiring decision. It should be about who is the best person—who will add value to the team.”

The two most frequently cited challenges experienced by organizations that currently employ people with disabilities were need for special accommodations (33%), lack of skills among hiring managers in managing people with disabilities (30%) and lack of experience in working with people with disabilities (24%).

But 32% said that their organizations have not experienced *any* challenges in employing people with disabilities at all. Obviously, the issues most commonly experienced are ones that can be addressed through education and time.

**KellyConnect**<sup>®</sup>

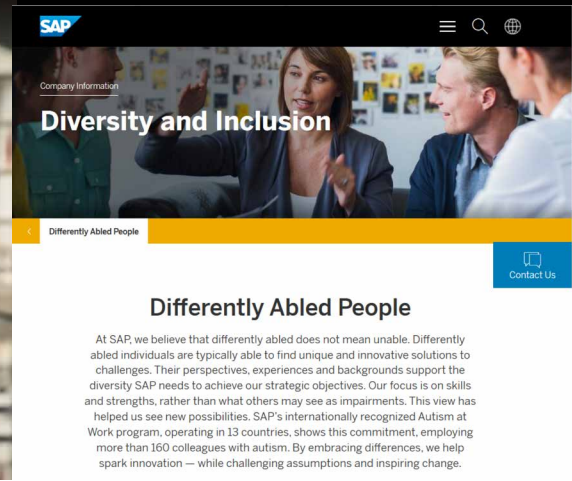


**Melissa Turansky**  
PHR Senior Director  
KellyConnect



*"Accommodation budget concern should never be a calculation in a hiring decision. It should be about who is the best person—who will add value to the team."*

**Sara Bowen**  
VP, Global Equity, Diversity & Inclusion  
The Boeing Company



# Taking Decisive Steps to Recruit People with Disabilities

While only **8%** of organizations currently ensure disability inclusion in the makeup of hiring panels, another **9%** plan to add this feature soon.

This practice has a strong correlation to **engagement** and **market performance**.

A few indicators we see that specialized recruiting programs designed to attract talent with disabilities will become more common is that 30% of the organizations we surveyed currently have such recruiting initiatives for people with disabilities other than IDD. Another 12% have plans to implement a program soon.

With a growing number of successful programs designed explicitly to attract candidates with autism, such as those currently in place at tech giants SAP and Microsoft, this is a trend that will likely gain traction and wider adoption in the near future.

Of course, critical elements to recruiting efforts are providing education to recruiters and hiring managers. Ensuring disability inclusion in the makeup of hiring panels is another emerging practice, which is currently in force at only 8% of organizations, but another 9% plan to add this feature soon.

While all of the practices we asked about in relationship to steps employers are taking to increase the number of people with disabilities that they are successfully hiring, we view the inclusion of people with disabilities on interview panels as a **next practice**, which i4cp defines as an emerging practice that is highly correlates to market performance but is not yet in wide adoption (but one that organization's ought to take a serious look at).

High-performance organizations are more likely to have disability hiring practices in place now (or plan to add them within a year), all of which show solid correlations to engagement and performance. This is especially true for those that have created dedicated inclusive hiring programs:

- **A combined 69%** currently (or plan to) partner with community organizations as a means to hire more people with disabilities.
- **A combined 50%** currently (or plan to) purposefully include images of people with disabilities on their career sites.
- **A combined 49%** currently (or plan to) add accessibility enhancements to their career portals.



Beyond targeted recruiting initiatives, we also found that high-performance organizations are proactive in adoption of an array of disability inclusion practices, including: partnering with community organizations that provide job placement and coaching, providing workforce education, promoting diversity inclusion throughout their supplier networks, leveraging their employee resource groups to enhance diversity and inclusion, and communicating their expectation that leaders role model advocacy and allyship.

Which of the following practices has your organization implemented/does it plan to implement in the next year to increase the number of persons with disabilities hired?



All practices that support increased hiring of people with disabilities have a strong correlation to higher overall engagement.

Notable correlations to market performance

Organizations with 1,000+ employees. Source: i4cp

# Inclusive Hiring Attracts More Talent —Sometimes Effortlessly

Among employers that hire workers with disabilities other than IDD, the top two benefits by far that were cited were that the inclusive culture is attractive to their talent pools (59%) and the addition of highly motivated employees (59%).

KellyConnect has found that simply hiring workers with disabilities has sparked its talent pipeline to the extent that there's no need to create a specific disability recruitment initiative. They have tapped a powerful talent pool the old-fashioned way—through social connections.

Says Melissa Turansky, PHR Senior Director:

“We have a great referral base of our current employees and I think it's because the word has spread through word of mouth that we hire and are able to really support people who have disabilities. Nearly all of our disability hires come to us through the normal channels. And with the recent addition of our visually impaired employees, their social networks have been also a very good source of referrals.”

This also speaks to the importance of *demonstrating* inclusion, which in turn fosters a sense of community and belonging, underscoring i4cp's research on the importance of creating and nurturing a workplace culture that promotes these virtues.

*“It's pretty incredible—the power of being able to employ people with disabilities. It's a wonderful story to tell. My advice to other companies is this: Embrace it. Take the time to see how easy it really is to accommodate workers with disabilities. What we have found is that some of these folks are the best, most dedicated employees we have. It's a win-win for the employee and the company.”*

**Melissa Turansky**

PHR Senior Director  
KellyConnect



# The Power of Highlighting the Stories of Employees with Disabilities

A third of survey respondents said that their organizations feature images and stories of people with disabilities on their career sites or in other recruiting materials. Another 17% plan to do so in the future—a practice that has positive correlation to both market performance and engagement. Going well beyond including images of people with disabilities on their career sites, some organizations enable employees with disabilities to tell their stories in their own words.

At United Parcel Service (UPS) stories of employees with disabilities are prominently featured on both the external-facing career portal and the UPS intranet. These inspiring stories of “UPSers” (as all employees are known), provide reinforcement of UPS’s commitment to inclusive hiring to colleagues, potential candidates, customers, and suppliers every day.



## Jen Pollreis: Super UPSer

Industrial engineer training supervisor Jen Pollreis is known as by her colleagues at UPS as a “**Super UPSer**”—her co-workers in Omaha, Nebraska look to her daily for her unique blend of leadership and motivation.

Pollreis lost her left leg in 2003 following a motorcycle accident, but becoming an amputee didn’t stop her from pursuing fitness, ultimately becoming both a certified personal fitness trainer and a competitive bodybuilder.

### Going to Extremes



<https://ourstories.ups.com/jen-pollreis/>



*"Whether it's personal fitness training or training for UPS, I'm always training somebody to be better."*

### Jen Pollreis

Industrial Engineer Training Supervisor  
UPS

"They have a disabled category for bodybuilding, but I absolutely refuse to go into it because I work just as hard if not harder than everybody with two legs, and I feel that way when I go into work at UPS.

I fell in love with the activity and the fact that we have specific methods to follow to properly load a package—they are the same methods I've used in training for 15 years—so whether it's personal fitness training or training for UPS, I'm always training somebody to be better."

Jen's colleagues say that she motivates everyone around her and pushes them to bring their very best to work each day. As her manager put it: "Someone will say: 'Wow, it's such had work, I don't think I can do it' and Jen will hike up her leg and say 'I have one leg and I can do it—so can you.'"

## Living Limitlessly at UPS: Jim Holland

Jim Holland is the Senior Director of IT Technical Services at UPS. He has been totally blind since the age of 12. His story is featured in the UPS series, "[Living Limitless](#)."

### Living Limitless



<https://ourstories.ups.com/jim-holland/>

*"I'd say the best way to keep moving forward is to one: have a positive attitude, and two: don't be afraid to embrace new things—new challenges."*

### Jim Holland

Senior Director, IT Technical Services  
UPS

Says Holland, who is also known to his colleagues as a Super UPSer: "First and foremost, I'm a numbers person. I process a lot of things from a digital perspective. I think of how things are broken down, how they work, and no pun intended, how I visualize the world around me based on that information we collected. UPS has been fantastic throughout my career with them. They never hesitated to ask: 'What do you need? We may not be fully aware of what you need, but let us know and we'll figure it out together.' What I do need is to be able to listen to my PC. If I go into my email and arrow down through it, it reads every line of the text in message to me."

Holland says that overcoming barriers to hiring people with disabilities has a lot to do with raising awareness of how some people frame their own perceptions of things.

"A lot of people's reactions to me at first are driven by the fact that they are picturing themselves in my position and they think 'well if I lost my sight, I couldn't do what he does.' But it's about overcoming those opinions people have of themselves that they project onto you to help them realize that there are ways to work around things that you may just not be aware of."

Holland's advice to others is simple but resonant:

"I'd say the best way to keep moving forward is to one: have a positive attitude, and two: don't be afraid to embrace new things—new challenges. It's better to say, 'you know what, I'm going to try this and if I fail, let's fail forward.'"

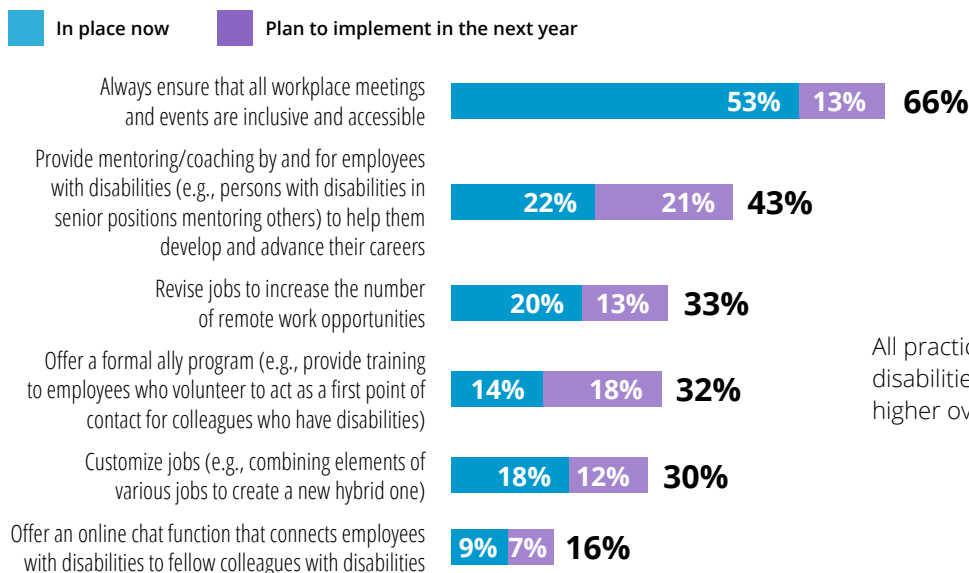


A customer places an order at Starbucks' first U.S. Signing Store in Washington D.C.

# Going Beyond Compliance to Enablement

Most organizations currently work to ensure that workplace meetings and events are inclusive and accessible to all—a combined 66% of larger employers have such policies in place or plan to within the year. But there's a lot of opportunity to do more in the forms of other types of support such as coaching and mentoring, job customizations, and enhanced flexibility in work arrangements.

Which of the following workplace practices has your organization implemented/does it plan to implement in the next year to provide support to employees with disabilities?



All practices that support employees with disabilities have a strong correlation to higher overall **engagement**.

Organizations with 1,000+ employees. Source: i4cp

Starbucks' signing stores employ both deaf and hearing partners, who are fluent in ASL.

As important as it is to ensure that workplaces are fully accessible, the same holds true for customers. At a Starbucks location in Washington, DC, every staff member is fluent in American Sign Language (ASL) and the store is tailored to a deaf clientele. It's near Gallaudet University, the world's only university designed specifically for those who are deaf.

Starbucks calls this "The Signing Store," and offers customers lots of ordering options from tablets that have been provided or through sign. The furniture in the store is lower to help with visibility, and surfaces have a matte finish to avoid glare. Starbucks' signing stores employ both deaf and hearing partners, who are fluent in ASL.

"This is a first for us, and though it's a mix of hearing, hard of hearing, and deaf partners, the common denominator is sign language, which puts everybody on an equal footing," said Starbucks accessibility manager Marthalee Galeota in a statement. "We think this store celebrates the culture of human connection on a deep level" (Purdy, 2018).

*Partners take an order at Starbucks first U.S. Signing Store in Washington D.C.*





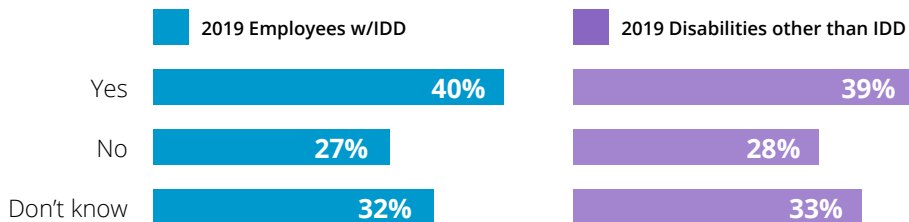


Located within Worldport, the main Air Hub for UPS's global transportation network, The Transitional Learning Center (TLC) at UPS began operations on September 14, 2014.

## UPS Delivers Skills Training: The UPS Transitional Learning Center (TLC)

Our research has consistently found that high-performance organizations are proactive in providing workforce education, promoting diversity inclusion throughout their supplier networks, making clear to leaders that there's an expectation of modeling as allies and advocates, etc. They also provide education to help prepare both the new employee and their teammates.

Has your organization ever participated in a program designed to introduce workers with disabilities into your workplace (i.e., on-location work trials, job shadowing, internships, or long-term work exchanges)?



Organizations with 1,000+ employees. Source: i4cp

At UPS, learning is an integral part of inclusive hiring, where the focus has evolved from corporate social responsibility to meeting strategic business needs.

**The UPS Transitional Learning Center (TLC)** in Louisville, Kentucky is a cooperative effort between UPS and the **Coalition for Workforce Diversity** to offer people with disabilities the experience of UPS jobs through onsite hands-on training. The collaboration has resulted in a program designed for people with a range of abilities, including those with Down syndrome, autism, and visual and hearing losses.

Located in the UPS Worldport facility, the TLC is an epicenter for advancing innovative solutions that connect people with disabilities to meaningful employment.

"The program continues to experience great success. UPS partnered with a local vocational organization and structured the learning center as a way of driving more inclusion within our communities," says Sue Schmidlkofer, Director of Global Diversity & Inclusion, UPS. "We're proud to provide an environment and culture that values every individual for their unique abilities and skills."

The TLC offers a two-week, pre-employment training program that is staffed and operated by UPS training supervisors as well as job coaches from the nonprofit organization, **Options Unlimited**.

Using a combination of classroom and experiential training in a simulated work environment, participants learn about job responsibilities, safety procedures, and soft skills.

Participants progress through the program in small groups. A combination of classroom and experiential hands-on training covers all UPS methods and procedures, as well as skills such as teamwork and stress management. Individuals can try various operational jobs—including loading and unloading feeders and containers, and inbound and outbound sorting roles—to determine interest and fit.

"Our transitional learning center allows us the time to focus on their abilities. This process allows us to place an individual in a position where they can grow and be successful," says Todd Coffey, training manager at UPS Worldport, which is the largest automated package handling facility in the world, processing nearly two million packages each day, increasing to more than four million during the December peak holiday shipping season.

Since the program began in 2014, TLC graduates have gone on to become "UPSers," and some have become trainers, who mentor new employees. So far this year alone, four employees in the program have been promoted into supervisor roles.

*"UPS partnered with a local vocational organization and structured the learning center as a way of driving more inclusion within our communities."*

**Sue Schmidlkofer**

Global Director of Diversity & Inclusion  
UPS



*"This process allows us to place an individual in a position where they can grow and be successful."*

**Todd Coffey**

Training Manager  
UPS



**Bryce Clayton** is a supervisor at UPS and a 2015 graduate of the TLC. He was interested in more than a job—he wanted a career. He saw that opportunity at UPS. Says Bryce:

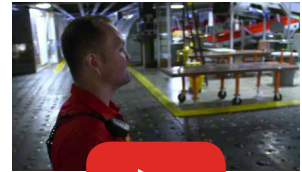
“I’ve always been the type of guy that if you doubt me in any way, I’m going to find some way to prove you wrong. The word ‘can’t’ is not in my vocabulary at all. My first job was a good beginning, but it was really not a place for me to move up. I really set my sights on UPS.”

Bryce aspires to become a manager at UPS and his colleagues say he is well on his way to meet his next goal.

*Bryce Clayton was hired by UPS, received his training and jumped right into his job responsibilities. Years later, he is a supervisor at the Worldport facility, UPS’s main air hub for global transportation.*



### Jobs That Know No Limits



<https://bit.ly/2MVBQFk>

In some organizations that have implemented inclusive hiring programs, it’s common to announce and explain the initiative to employees and introduce any community partners who may be coming in to help launch the program.

At JLL work sites where Best Buddies hires will be located, JLL shares background information about Best Buddies with employees and any other details they need to know, explains what they can expect and details how the program will impact day-to-day operations.



*"The training is important because it's uncharted territory for most people."*

**Kerry Lynch**

Regional Facilities Manager  
JLL

Says Kerry Lynch: "What employees will notice more than anything is an enhancement to the work site."

Abbatacola says that JLL also relies on the training Best Buddies provides to the team members on site who will interact the most with the employees coming in through their Jobs Program.

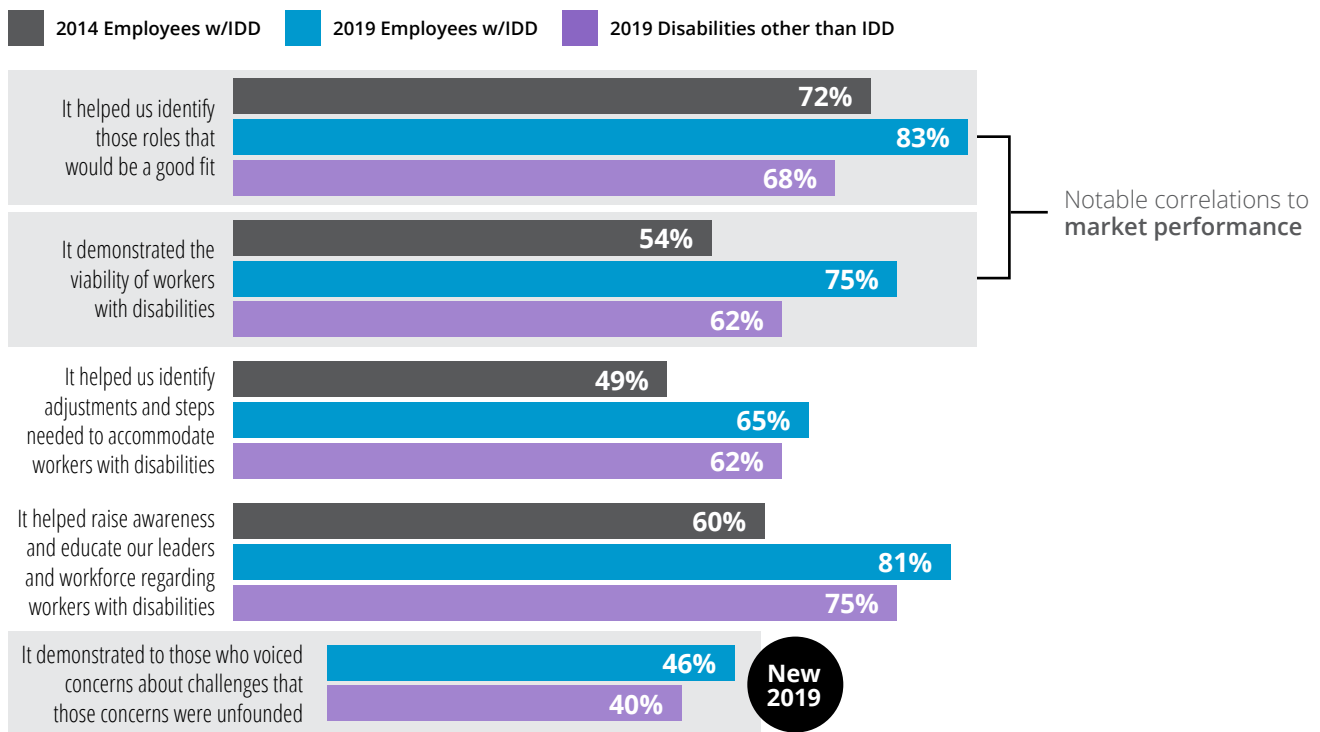
"This is a huge benefit of the relationship with Best Buddies—the partnership with JLL in terms of the consulting and support they provide. The Best Buddies team comes in to have conversations with managers and with the team, talk through potential scenarios, and provide coaching on when they should offer to help or how they should approach specific situations. It's very beneficial in preparing everyone for the partnership."

Lynch agrees: "The training is important because it's uncharted territory for most people. In the beginning it might not be clear what to say or not to say, what's acceptable or not. For instance, we don't refer to the employees as 'best buddies'—they're Best Buddies participants, but they are JLL employees. Best Buddies Jobs Consultants ensure that as employers we are prepared by providing sensitivity training."



Full backing of JLL’s leadership team is truly top-down—CEO Greg O’Brien penned an [article](#) published on LinkedIn about why he supports the Best Buddies Jobs Program and what it means to JLL, noting: “I’m thrilled about our plans to expand in the future. A workforce that offers a variety of perspectives and experiences is good for our people, our clients and our business—and it might just change your life like it changed mine.”

### What impact has the introductory program had on your organization’s views on employing workers with disabilities?



Organizations with 1,000+ employees indicating high/very high extent. Source: i4cp

At The Boeing Company, which has a number of deaf team members in the Boeing Commercial Airplanes division, the company provides training to employees to prepare them to work with teammates of differing abilities. Etiquette is an important component of this education, says Sara Bowen, VP of Global Equity, Diversity and Inclusion.

“It’s also helpful for everyone to be aware of the assistive technology their new team members may use and become acquainted with it,” Bowen says.



## Employee Resource Groups Fuel Disability Inclusion

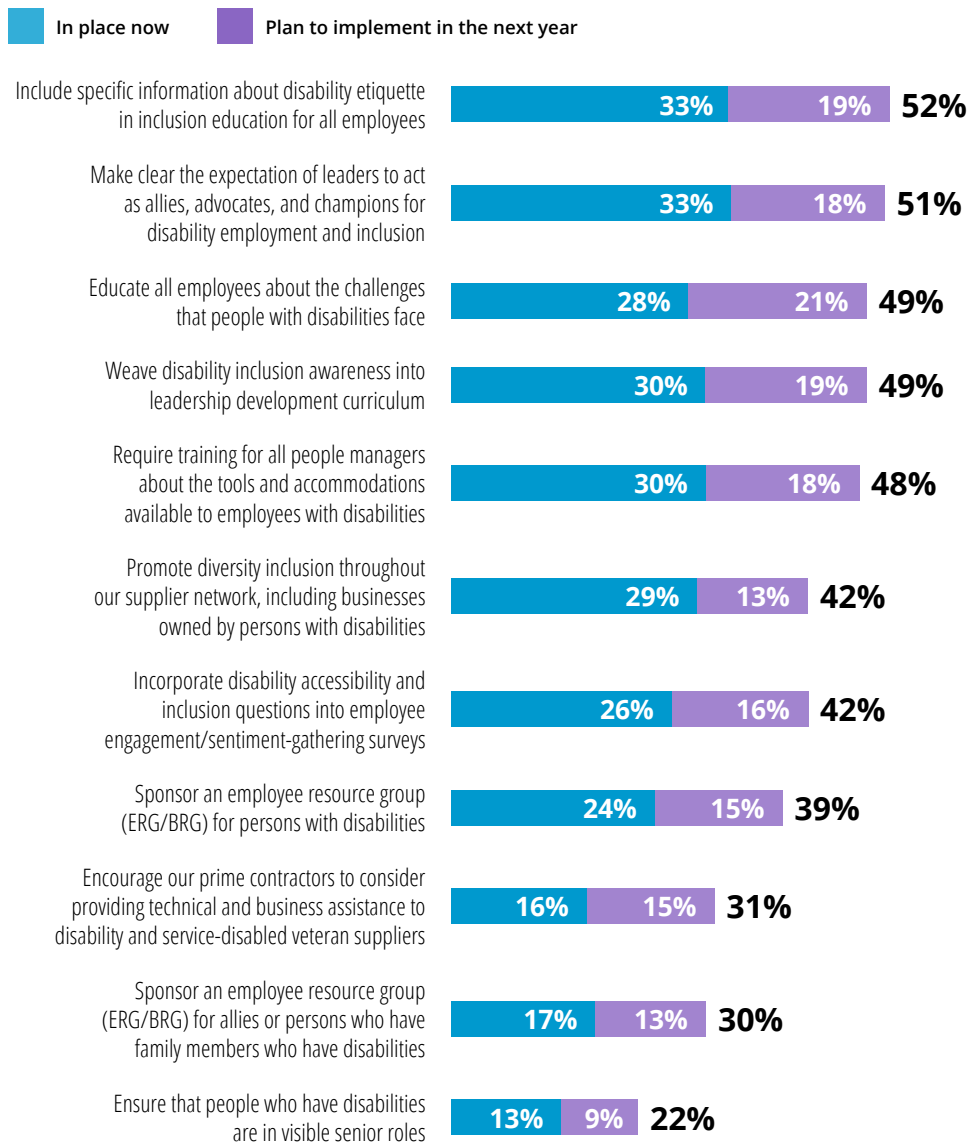
i4cp's research on the role and business impact of employee resource group and business resource groups (ERG/BRGs) found that participation in these networks greatly enhances both the organization's culture and the development of inclusive leaders—a critical element in developing and sustaining a healthy and agile culture (i4cp, 2018).

Sponsoring an ERG/BRG that provides support to individuals with disabilities and/or support for allies or employees who have family members with disabilities is a practice that isn't at all broadly adopted—just 24% and 17% respectively said that their organizations sponsor such groups as a way to enhance a culture in which people feel included. Yet doing so correlates strongly to engagement of the entire workforce, and it's an especially effective practice to foster an inclusive culture.





Practices that support a culture in which people with disabilities feel included that organizations have implemented or plan to implement in the next year



All practices that support a culture in which people with disabilities feel included have a strong correlation to **engagement**.

Organizations with 1,000+ employees. Source: i4cp



BNY MELLON



**Katie Damiani**

Managing Director  
BNY Mellon Wealth Management



High-performance organizations are **2x** more likely to purposefully include images of persons with disabilities on their career portals, and are **1.5x** more likely to have initiatives to make meetings and events accessible to all employees.

An ERG/BRG that supports people with disabilities and their allies has long been in place at global investments company BNY Mellon—for well over 20 years, in fact.

“Our HEART ERG—which stands for ‘helping each ability by respecting and teaching,’ is all-encompassing when it comes to disabilities. It’s not just for our employees who may have a disability—it’s also about helping them support their children, taking care of a family member, and also being involved and out in our communities. So, we do a great deal of work outside—almost as much as we do inside,” says Katie Damiani, Managing Director, BNY Mellon Wealth Management, and Global Co-Chair of HEART.

New York-based BNY Mellon also promotes its commitment to an inclusive working environment on its website’s career portal by clearly spelling out the organization’s dedication to increase awareness of the needs of those with different abilities:

*By driving internal visibility for employees with disabilities, we are better able to recognize the strengths of our diverse staff, raise awareness of workplace issues that affect people with disabilities, and provide a better onboarding experience for new employees with disabilities.*

The purposeful inclusion of persons with disabilities on a career portal is a practice that’s in place at only 31% of the organizations i4cp surveyed, though high-performance organizations are **2x** more likely to do so (37% vs. 17% of low-performance organizations).

HEART is actively contributing to a more inclusive culture at BNY Mellon. The group’s members worked closely with the Office of Diversity & Inclusion, Human Resources, technology, and communications to champion the use of real-time captioning for company webcasts, town halls, and large team meetings. HEART played a pivotal role in identifying, engaging, and testing prospective vendors and is supporting implementation of a new service that will make company events more accessible to all BNY Mellon employees. Initiatives to make meetings and events accessible to all employees is an inclusion practice adopted by 53% of our survey respondents and was **1.5x** more likely to be in place at high-performance organizations.

## About Best Buddies Ambassador Training:

*"The coaches taught me when to inflect my voice, when to pause, when to be energetic, when to be emotional. They taught me how to engage my audience. Most of all, they gave me the confidence I needed to get up here and speak in front of all of you now."*

**Jack Mayor**  
Best Buddies Global Ambassador

Jack Mayor, Best Buddies Leadership Conference



<https://bit.ly/2Bs4hp8>

Damiani says that BNY Mellon's HEART ERG began working with Best Buddies three years ago in Pittsburgh. There is a large HEART chapter there, which began with employees volunteering to assist Best Buddies participants through offering Ambassador training, which helps participants hone their public speaking and presentation skills. Other events that BNY Mellon sponsors and employee volunteers participate in include Best Buddies friendship walks, the annual **TasteBuds** fundraising event in Pittsburgh, the "Buddy Ball" (an inclusive prom), and the **Best Buddies Challenge**, a biking, running, or walking event held in Hyannis Port, MA.

BNY Mellon also encourages employees to volunteer by augmenting their individual contributions of time and resources. i4cp data shows that while 46% of organizations currently engage formally with community groups to develop a more inclusive recruitment pipeline, this practice is nearly **3x** more common in high-performance organization vs. their low-performing peers (49% and 17% respectively).

Says Damiani: "BNY Mellon matches our hours of volunteering, and if we fundraise, they match that as well. Best Buddies is getting not only our time, they're also getting the financial support, so through our HEART ERG and our work with Best Buddies, commitment to disability inclusion is a visible and meaningful focus."

High-performance organizations are **3x** more likely to engage formally with community groups to develop a more inclusive recruitment pipeline.





# How Microsoft's Disability ERG Supports and Inspires Potential Future Employees



The [disAbility Employee Resource Group](#) (ERG) at Microsoft represents employees with conditions such as hearing loss, blindness, visual impairments, ADD, mobility disabilities, and dyslexia. The ERG raises the visibility of people with disabilities and collaborates with Microsoft product teams to help design, develop, and build accessible, inclusive products. While a focus on tapping employees with disabilities to aid in product or service development is rarely this well-established, previous i4cp research has shown it to be one of the more impactful and engaging practices ways to draw on the diverse perspectives of ERG/BRG members.

The group also awards an annual scholarship to a high school senior who has a disability and plans to attend a vocational or academic college. The scholarship delivers on the mission of Microsoft's disability ERG to empower and enable people with disabilities. The renewable scholarship provides \$5,000 per year, up to \$20,000 total, which is paid through the Seattle Foundation to the recipient's school of choice .

*"This scholarship enables high school students with disabilities to go to college and target a career in the technology industry. In addition, we hope to contribute to increasing the pool of persons living with a disability enrolling in higher education and, in the long term, decrease the unemployment bias for this demographic."*

**Microsoft disAbility  
Scholarship website**

## Disability Inclusion in the C-Suite

The role of Chief Accessibility Officer is rare, but it's one that will likely become more popular in the future. While organizations such as Microsoft, IBM, and AT&T have created this C-level role, accessibility leadership is far more likely to be incorporated into diversity and inclusion or senior HR titles.

For example, PNC Financial Services Group has an executive in the role of VP of HR & Accessibility Officer. Our research found that while only 16% of respondents reported that their organizations currently have someone in a CAO role, 4% are currently considering it, and organizations that have recruiting programs in place dedicated to hiring people with disabilities are much more likely to have a CAO (23%).

The role not only helps to build and strengthen a more inclusive culture, attract more diverse talent, it also impacts the development of inclusive consumer products and service lines.

Making more accessible products isn't just about people with disabilities— inclusive features should work for everyone.

*Jenny Lay-Flurrie heads up Microsoft's accessibility innovations. Deaf from a young age after a bout of measles, Lay-Flurrie says disability has always been a vein in her life and she's used these experiences to promote a welcoming, collaborative space at Microsoft which has led to some incredible innovations.*





# Conclusion and Recommendations

Ensuring that disability inclusion is integral to D&I means that it's unmistakably articulated as part of the organization's core set of values.

The data is clear and it holds up year-over-year: Employing people with disabilities makes business sense. Inclusive organizations have more engaged workforces, are able to find good fits for open roles, and strengthen their company brand and culture by reflecting the values of the organization. They also attract talent with new perspectives and ideas, and create and sustain an environment in which everyone can do their best work. But increased awareness of the importance of disability inclusion is one thing—translating that insight to strategy and action is another.

Consider this: while diversity and inclusion is more top of mind in the workplace now than ever before, most organizations focus their efforts on gender, race, ethnicity, and orientation, but stop there.

Ensuring that disability inclusion is integral to diversity and inclusion means that it is unmistakably articulated as part of the organization's core set of values. It cannot be mandated—it must be modeled through consistent behaviors and practices.

This takes time and starts with setting the expectation that leaders model inclusive behaviors at all times. And leaders should ensure that hiring people with disabilities is an integral part of the diversity and inclusion strategy, which ties clearly to the overall strategy of the business.



While i4cp's point of view is that organizations should expect their leaders to act as allies/advocates for employees with disabilities, it's a practice currently in place at only a third of the organizations we surveyed, though nearly **2x** more likely to be seen in high-performance organizations.

For organizations that don't yet employ people with disabilities, the practices and examples outlined in this report can serve as a blueprint to get started. First, carefully and thoughtfully assess the capabilities and needs of the organization, starting with the why, how, and where of integrating people with disabilities into the workforce.

Some organizations may not be appropriate or ready for the integrated and supported employment programs shared by organizations in this report due to limitations such as size or location. In those cases, there are other ways to contribute to promoting and advancing disability inclusion in the organization as well as in the community. Initiatives such as unconscious bias or disability etiquette education for all employees are a start, and ones that will almost certainly enhance interactions with customer and partners, while acknowledging that most people are or will be impacted by a workplace disability at some point in their lives.

High-performance organizations are **2x** more likely to expect their leaders to act as allies/advocates for employees with disabilities.

## Before You Begin: Best Practice Advice From Your Peers



"Understand what your business needs and be really in tune with that because it's important to create a seamless process for the candidate. Providing education to everyone involved is so important, especially with your managers and assistant managers. Expectations and policies need to be clear and concise, and all employees need to be held to the same standards of professional behavior, including employees with different abilities. So, consistently share and reinforce best practices and expected standards so that no one feels slighted or treated differently in any way."



"It's important to approach a jobs program as a multiphase initiative. And don't go it alone. Find a community partner, start with a pilot, and scale from there."



"Marshal allies and advocates to push for the creation of a centralized accommodation fund that can be accessed by any business unit. By funding any accommodation needs from a centralized pot, financial concerns are removed from the equation for hiring managers."

Leverage your disabilities ERG members when auditing hiring practices and developing recruitment messaging.

### Inclusive hiring practices recommendations:

- Audit sourcing and hiring practices and policies to assess for bias and take corrective action to ensure disability inclusion.
- Develop guidelines to assist recruiters and hiring managers in understanding how and where bias creeps into the hiring process.
- Begin outreach early. Consider offering scholarships, summer internships, or apprenticeships to young people with disabilities.
- Ensure that disability inclusion is incorporated into all recruitment messaging to include the career portal and materials used in recruiting events at colleges and in the community. Approximately a third of survey respondents currently engage in these practices, with 17% planning to update their career portals and 20% planning to update event materials in the next year.
- Audit all of your social media content and consider how inclusive the messages and images are. Increase engagement with your consumer and talent brand by conducting an experience audit for both consumers and candidates with disabilities. Leverage your disabilities ERG members as advisors to create the audit, assess the feedback, and help make decisions about adjustments/accommodations.

### Ongoing practices to help build a culture of inclusion for employees with disabilities:

- Check in with your workforce: Include disability inclusion questions in employee engagement/sentiment gathering surveys and welcome input and ideas on what's working and what needs to be addressed. Currently only 22% of survey respondents incorporate disability accessibility and inclusion questions into employee engagement surveys, with another 15% planning to in the next year.
- Weave disability inclusion awareness into leadership development programs—a practice in place among 30% of survey respondents—and reinforce that employing persons with disabilities is part of the D&I strategy, which in turn supports the stated values and culture of the organizations. These practices have a positive impact on employee engagement, culture, talent brand, and market performance.
- Consider the disability inclusion metrics that can be tracked to help provide insight into the progress your organization is making, such as promotion rates and retention of employees with disabilities. Also consider current performance measures to ensure that bias isn't unconsciously applied in assessing the performance of employees with different abilities.

Only **30%** of organizations weave disability inclusion awareness into leadership development programs.



- Leverage the ideas of employees with disabilities to innovate and better serve both employees and customers with disabilities. Do this formally by creating internal partnerships between ERGs and product development, customer services, etc. For more on tapping into ERGs to foster innovation, see i4cp's study, [The Untapped Power of Employee Resource Groups](#).
- Encourage product design teams to work collaboratively with ERGs to ensure that disability inclusion is always a consideration in product and service design. Likewise, enhance product innovation and efficiencies by leveraging feedback from people with disabilities.
- Consider appointing a Chief Accessibility Officer (CAO) or a senior leader who is clearly functioning in this role and championing disability inclusion. If the CAO position isn't one that currently fits the needs of your organization, ensure there is a formal, visible individual responsible for disability inclusion who can tap into the insights and abilities of employees with disabilities. This person should monitor your talent pipeline and talent needs with an eye for making more job roles and task accessible to employees with disabilities.

Finally, it's important to keep asking questions.

## Questions that should consistently be asked:

- Are people with disabilities included?
- Is this (plan, product, project, etc.) inclusive and accessible?
- Do we have people with disabilities in visible leadership roles?
- What can we do to help drive change?



To read more, see i4cp's report [The Untapped Power of Employee Resource Groups](#).



## Appendix: Employer Resources



### The Able Trust

<http://www.abletrust.org/business-leader-info/employer-resources>

The Able Trust is a 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to creating successful employment opportunities for people with disabilities. It operates throughout Florida, and does its work through grant-making, public education, public relations, and policy recommendations.



### AbilityOne

[https://www.abilityone.gov/abilityone\\_network/employment.html](https://www.abilityone.gov/abilityone_network/employment.html)

The AbilityOne Program is the largest source of employment for people who are blind or have significant disabilities in the United States. More than 500 nonprofit organizations employ these individuals and provide quality products and services to the Federal Government at a fair market price.



### American Association for People with Disabilities (AAPD)

<https://www.aapd.com/advocacy/employment/>

A national cross-disability rights organization that advocates for full civil rights for Americans with disabilities. They are committed to ensuring that all people with disabilities have the right to equal opportunity, to be economically self-sufficient, and to earn and save without jeopardizing access to the services and supports that allow them to live and work independently.



### The Arc

<https://www.thearc.org/>

The Arc promotes and protects the human rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and actively supports their full inclusion and participation in the community throughout their lifetimes. This site maintains links to many additional employment resources.



### Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE)

<https://apse.org/>

A national non-profit membership organization with an exclusive focus on integrated employment and career advancement opportunities for individuals with disabilities.



### Best Buddies International®

<https://www.bestbuddies.org/>

Best Buddies International is a nonprofit organization dedicated to creating opportunities for one-to-one friendships, integrated employment, leadership development, and inclusive living for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). The Best Buddies Jobs Program secures jobs for people with (IDD), allowing them to earn an income, pay taxes, and continuously and independently support themselves.

## Creative Spirit

<https://www.creativespirit-us.org/>

Creative Spirit is a nonprofit organization devoted to creating integrated employment opportunities for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDDs) at the best companies in the world. We believe that hiring those with IDD is not charity, but a privilege. Research strongly supports the fact that hiring neuro-diverse employees drives better thinking and brings a new base of loyal, productive employees to an organization.



## Disability.gov

<https://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/disability.htm>

The U.S. federal government website for information on disability programs and services nationwide. This site maintains links to many additional employment resources.



## Easter Seals

<https://www.easterseals.com/>

A national non-profit organization that provides services, education, outreach, and advocacy so that people living with autism and other disabilities can live, learn, work and play in our communities. This site maintains links to many additional employment resources.



## Employment Alliance for People with Disabilities (EAPD)

<http://eapd.weebly.com/>

EAPD focuses on increasing employment opportunities for people with disabilities and empowering business performance by leveraging best practices in diversity and disability inclusion in the workplace, supply chain and marketplace.



## Employer Assistance and Resource Network (EARN)

<https://www.askearn.org/>

EARN's vision is to increase employment and workplace inclusion for people with disabilities by engaging and empowering employers to be leaders in this effort.



## Job Accommodation Network (JAN)

<https://askjan.org/>

The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) is the leading source of free, expert and confidential guidance on workplace accommodations.



## Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP)

<https://www.dol.gov/odep/>

ODEP is a non-regulatory federal agency that promotes policies and coordinates with employers and all levels of government to increase workplace success for people with disabilities.





## National Organization on Disability (NOD)

<https://www.nod.org/>

A private, non-profit organization that promotes the full participation and contributions of people with disabilities in all aspects of life. Focused on increasing employment opportunities for Americans with disabilities by working with leading employers and partners with educational and philanthropic institutions to pilot innovative approaches to disability inclusion, then scales these up into initiatives with even broader impact.



## Project SEARCH

<https://www.projectsearch.us/>

A business led, one-year high school-to-work transition program. Total workplace immersion facilitates a seamless combination of classroom instruction, career exploration, and hands-on training through worksite rotations. Project SEARCH's primary objective is to secure competitive employment for people with disabilities.



## RecruitDisability Job Board

<http://recruitdisability.org/>

Job seekers with disabilities can search for a job, post a resume, and get career news on this job board especially for people with disabilities. Employers and recruiters can also use the site to find qualified individuals with disabilities.



## Washington Initiative for Supported Employment (GoWise)

<https://www.gowise.org/>

Based in Seattle, Washington, GoWise has been promoting equitable employment for people with developmental disabilities through innovation, training and technical assistance for nearly three decades. GoWise is nationally recognized and provides training related to Employment First initiatives throughout the U.S.



## Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP)

<https://www.wrp.gov/wrp>

The WRP is a recruitment and referral program—managed by U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) and the U.S. Department of Defense's Office of Diversity Management & Equal Opportunity (ODMEO)—that connects federal and private sector employers nationwide with highly motivated college students and recent graduates with disabilities who are eager to prove their abilities in the workplace through summer or permanent jobs.



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## About the Study

This study is based on data gathered by i4cp in 2019 from an online survey of 446 participants, supplemented with qualitative interviews. The findings discussed in this study reflect findings for organizations with 1,000+ employees unless otherwise noted.

## About i4cp

i4cp is a research and advisory firm that discovers next practices in human capital. Our member organizations rely on i4cp to ensure that their efforts will make the greatest impact on the business today and in the future. Through superior research, peer collaboration, tools, and data, we provide insights that help organizations better anticipate, adapt, and act in a constantly changing business environment.

## About Best Buddies

**Best Buddies International** is the world's largest organization dedicated to ending the social, physical and economic isolation of the 200 million people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Their programs empower the special abilities of people with IDD by helping them form meaningful friendships with their peers, secure successful jobs, live independently, improve public speaking, self-advocacy and communication skills, and feel valued by society.

## Contributors

**Lorrie Lykins**, Vice President of Research

**Eric Davis**, Creative Director & Senior Editor

**Kevin Oakes**, CEO

**Kevin Martin**, Chief Research Officer

**Brian Points**, Data Analyst

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**David Quilleon**, SVP, Global Mission, State Development, and Operations,  
Best Buddies International

**Courtney K. Rogaczewski**, Sr. Director, Jobs, Best Buddies International

**Jessica Schwartz**, Sr. Director, Marketing, Best Buddies International

**Jack Mayer**, Global Ambassador, Best Buddies International

**Kate Abbatacola**, Employer Brand Manager, Jones Lang LaSalle (JLL)

**Kerry Lynch**, Sr. Director, Regional Facilities Manager, Jones Lang LaSalle (JLL)

**Robert Friedman**, Partner, Holland and Knight  
**Tiffani Lee**, Partner, Holland and Knight  
**Tina St. Germain**, Regional Manager of Human Resources, The TJX Companies  
**Marissa Martinelli**, Store Operations Recruiting Lead, Wawa  
**Katie Damiani**, Managing Director, BNY Mellon  
**Sue Schmidlkofer**, Global Director of Diversity and Inclusion, UPS  
**Melissa Turansky**, Director- Staff Management, Kelly Services/KellyConnect  
**Jennifer Dollar**, Senior Director, Business Process Enablement, Kelly Services  
**Sara Bowen**, Vice President, Global Diversity & Inclusion, The Boeing Company  
**Mary Douglas**, Director of Community Engagement, MOD Pizza  
**Heather Gloe**, Senior Manager II, Corporate Relations, Genentech  
**Taraneh Bastani**, Strategic Planning Advisor, Genentech

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**Kinneil Coltman**, VP, Diversity & Inclusion, Atrium Health  
**Rosanna Durruthy**, Head of Global Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging, LinkedIn  
**Andres Gonzalez**, M.Ed., CCDP/AP, VP, Chief Diversity Officer, Froedtert & Medical College of Wisconsin  
**Allison Green**, SVP, Chief Diversity Officer, Lincoln Financial Group  
**Dominica Groom**, VP, Diversity & Inclusion and Community Engagement, Freddie Mac  
**Melanie Harris**, Director of Global Diversity and Inclusion, Cox Automotive  
**Dessa Johnson**, Diversity & Inclusion Leader, ManpowerGroup  
**David W. Kim**, Head of Inclusion & Diversity, Gilead Sciences  
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**Le Joyce Naylor**, Chief Diversity & Inclusion Officer, The Cleveland Clinic  
**Ty Ondatje**, SVP, Corporate Responsibility and Chief Diversity Officer, Iron Mountain  
**Donna Pedro**, Chief Diversity Officer, Ogilvy  
**Darcy Pierson**, Chief Diversity Officer, Oshkosh Corporation  
**Christopher Rowland**, Chief Diversity Officer, ManpowerGroup  
**Lorie Valle-Yanez**, VP, Chief Diversity Officer, Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company







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