

## **Top 10 Things to Know about WIOA and jobs for People with disabilities**

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) represents a paradigm shift in the how the workforce system does business. **Among the most important changes are those that now require the entire workforce system be accessible to people with disabilities.** From providing pre-employment training services or pushing for more competitive integrated employment, WIOA represents the intersection of hope and history for the 1 in 5 Americans who have a disability. **Out of the 21 million working age people with disabilities, approximately 300,000 young people with disabilities age into workforce each year.** Throughout this country, the professionals of the workforce now have the chance to help to empower these young people to get the skills and training they need in order to pursue the American dream, just like everyone else. Here are ten things that you should be thinking about:

### **1. Getting the language right.**

It's important to use respectful and appropriate language. Using the right language emphasizes that someone with a difference is a person first and that their disability isn't the only thing that defines them. [This is called "person first language"](#) and [it's the core of disability etiquette](#). The benefits of good etiquette go beyond simply helping people with barriers to work, it's at the heart of good customer service. There are [many free resources out there to help you learn how to use the right language](#) and how to communicate with job seekers.

### **2. Having the right data makes all the difference.**

Because WIOA puts an emphasis on performance metrics, having the right data is an essential to achieving improved employment outcomes for everyone you serve that has a barrier to work. Historically, workforce boards and agencies have focused on unemployment data and people not actively looking for work (which includes most working age people with disabilities) are not included in those data sets. As such, [it's important that you look at the workforce participation rate and not just the unemployment numbers](#). [There are many sources which provide the kind of data and detail](#) that you need to [connect people with disabilities with careers and opportunities in your state's economy](#).

### **3. New Rules, New Regulations, and New Opportunities**

One job sector that represents billions of dollars a year of business and continues grow in a dynamic way are federal contractors. [Thanks to changes to Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act](#), federal contractors now have new obligations to recruit, hire, and retain individuals with disabilities. These new regulations mean that these businesses have a 7% utilization goal for hiring people with disabilities in all job categories. [There are many resources out that can help you find out more about what federal contractors are doing business in your state](#).

### **4. Look at best practices for serving youth with disabilities**

While there are many challenges involved with empowering youth with disabilities, there are also many proven programs that have been achieving outstanding outcomes. Proven, cost-effective programs like [Project SEARCH](#) and [Bridges to Work](#) offer many valuable lessons about how to teach, train, and integrate young people with disabilities in to the world of competitive, integrated work. Learning from these programs can a biggest impact on your work.

## **5. Building trust, building partnerships**

Building partnerships and tearing down silos will be critical to successfully engaging with other elements and agencies of the workforce system. It's important that you get to know what programs other people in the system are proud of and what areas they are working to improve. Open communications, routine site visits, and sharing best practices are all conversations that should play out between programs under the different Titles of WIOA.

## **6. Partnering with the Employers and Business Leadership Networks (BLNs)**

Knowing best practices is the necessary first step but connecting with employers that have a need for talent and are hiring is the next big step. People with disabilities bring unique characteristics and talents to workplaces that can ultimately benefit the bottom line. To find employers who are eager to hire, you need to look no further than the US Business Leadership Network, a non-profit "that helps business drive performance by leveraging disability inclusion in the workplace." They recently release a [Disability Equality Index that assesses the inclusion and hiring efforts of major employers](#). USBLN also operates [a network of affiliates across the country that can be an incredible resource for your work](#).

## **7. Myths and Misconceptions of reasonable accommodations**

Employers may be apprehensive to hire somebody with a disability, presuming there will be significant costs for making reasonable accommodations to integrate someone into the workplace. However, [57% of reasonable accommodations are at no cost to the employer and the other 43% average \\$500, a cost that comes with tax incentives for the employer](#). There are many [free resources to ensure that employees can get the "productivity tools" they need to succeed](#).

## **8. Resources for serving people with disabilities. Don't Reinvent the Wheel**

While the employment rate for people with disabilities has much changed in the last twenty five years, there are a lot of resources that can help you get more people with disabilities into competitive, integrated employment. Best of all, many of these resources are free. Examples include the [Job Accommodation Network \(JAN\)](#), the [Office of Disability Employment Policy \(ODEP\)](#), [TapAbility.org](#), and [many others](#).

## **9. Assistive Technology**

Do you have a smartphone? Do you use Siri? If so, then you are already familiar with a tool that can be used to [empower people with visual and auditory disabilities to succeed in the world of work](#). [Speech to text software can help communicate by sending texts and responding to emails](#). These are all [examples of assistive technology](#) and [it will be critical for your work](#).

## **10. High expectations for people with disabilities to pursue the American Dream.**

For far too long, people with disabilities have faced prejudices and stigmas that have trapped those that do work into the "Three F's" of "Food, Flowers, and Filth." An essential opportunity created by the paradigm shift of WIOA is the opportunity to focus on [higher expectations for people with disabilities, especially youth](#). States now have the flexibility to focus resources on what works best – [early interventions](#), [inclusive internships](#), [connecting youth with apprenticeships](#), [job coaching](#) and other best practices.