



# BEYOND ACCESS

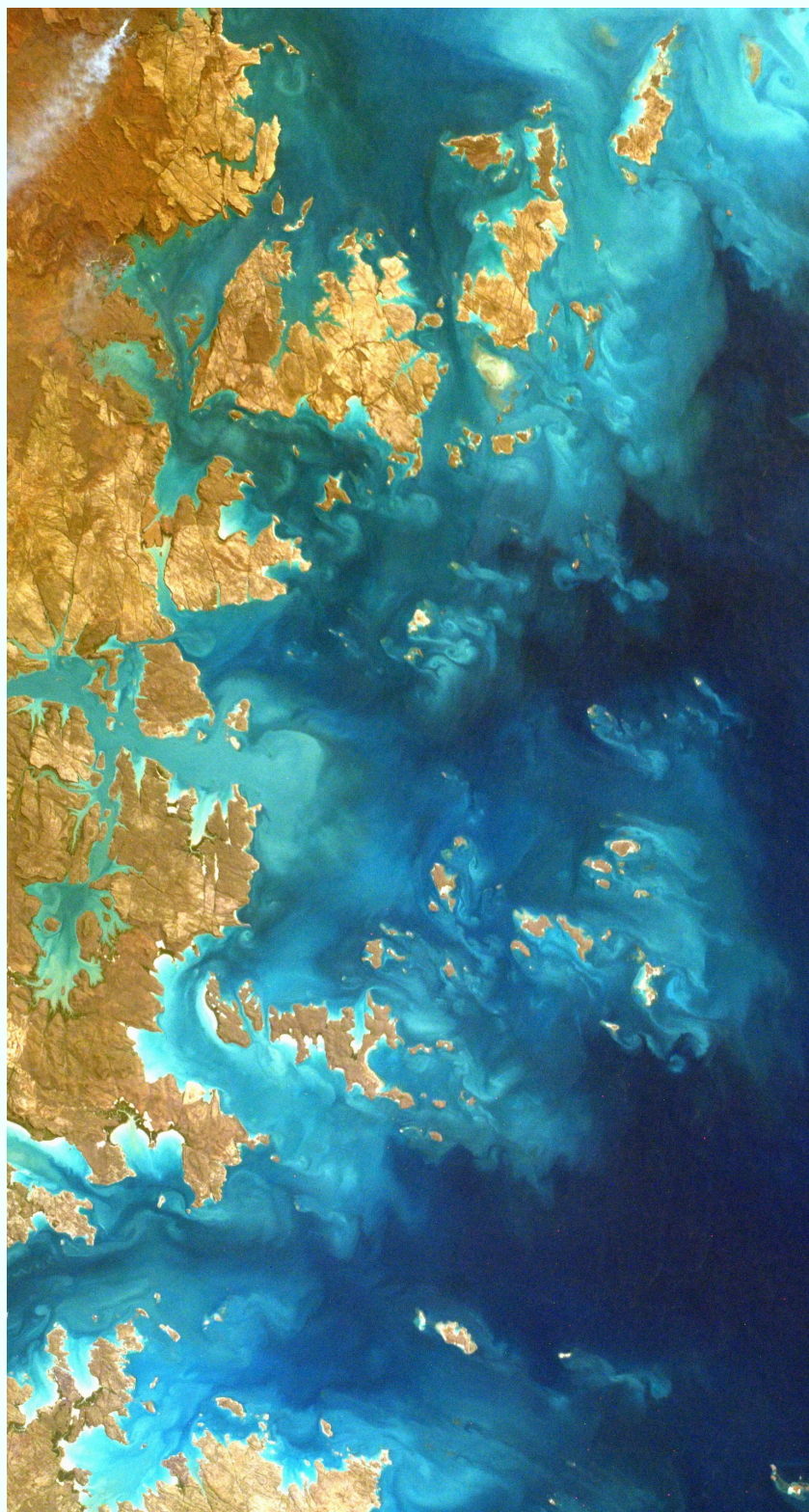
GUIDE TO WORKPLACE  
DISABILITY INCLUSION

*Ability Enabled*

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# WHO WE ARE

Click to stay connected with us



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AbilityEnabled.com

Ability Enabled is a team comprised of students and recent graduates of Emory University. We are dedicated to helping employers and employees navigate the disability inclusion process.

The idea was initially inspired by the experience of Eboni Freeman, one of the co-founders. During her internship at a large technology company, it took 3 human resource representatives 3 weeks and more than 30 emails to move from accommodation requested to accommodation received. She decided to team up with Zhaohan (Amanda) Li, Yunqiao (Lily) Xu, and Isadora Martins to understand the magnitude of the problem of workplace disability inclusion and how Ability Enabled could help.



# The Journey to a More Inclusive Workplace



"BRINGING UP THE FACT YOU HAVE A DISABILITY, AUTOMATICALLY MEANS YOU HAVE TO EXPOSE SOMETHING THAT OTHER PEOPLE SEE AS WEAKNESS."

- SOFTWARE ENGINEER INTERN AT A S&P 500 TOP PERFORMER

People with Disabilities (PWDs) account for 12.8% of the U.S. population. Many PWDs are unemployed or underemployed. In 2017, the employment-to-population ratio for working age PWDs (30.8%) is less than half of that for people without disabilities.

After conducting 120+ conversations with PWDs, hiring managers, Human Resource professionals, and diversity consultants, our team learned the needs of both employers and employees, and that Eboni is not alone in her frustration with the complex process of requesting assistive software and hardware.

To solve this problem, Ability Enabled plans to launch a software tool to discover, request, process, and track disability accommodations (please see our animated product demo video (<http://bit.ly/AbilityEnabledCartoonExplanation>)).

#### Sources:

The U.S. Census Bureau

[https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?\\_af=ACS\\_15\\_1YR\\_S1810&prodType=table](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?_af=ACS_15_1YR_S1810&prodType=table)



**"IT IS SO IMPORTANT TO ENABLE  
PEOPLE TO USE THEIR ABILITIES  
AND TALENTS TO SUPPORT  
THEMSELVES. "**

*- DR. TEMPLE GRANDIN*

## OUR GOALS

By crafting this guide, we hope to promote disability cultures and help readers without previous knowledge to understand concepts essential in workplace accommodation and disability inclusion. The guidebook is the first step towards helping more employers and employees with the disability accommodation process. We are so grateful for all the support from Emory University, Atlanta entrepreneurship community, our advisors, 122 interviewees, and all the people who sent us their well wishes.

The information in this guidebook is for general guidance and is not intended as a substitute for legal or medical advice. Any actions taken using advice from the guide will be at the reader's liability.

Identifying details in the interview quotes have been changed to protect the privacy of the interviewees. Material in this guidebook, including text, images, and video, is protected by copyright. It may not be copied or transmitted in any way except for your own personal, non-commercial use. Prior written consent of the copyright holder must be obtained for any other use of the material.

Dear readers, we cannot wait to hear from you – feel free to email us at [AbilityEnabled@gmail.com](mailto:AbilityEnabled@gmail.com) if you have any questions, comments, or other feedback.

Thank you!

Yours sincerely,  
Ability Enabled Team



# Why you would want to read this guide

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*"The study results consistently showed that the benefits employers receive from making workplace accommodations far outweigh the low cost. "*

*-- Report by Job Accommodation Network (JAN)*

During interviews with 1,188 employers of various sizes and industries, the Job Accommodation Network (JAN), a service of the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy, found that workplace accommodations positively impact the workplace in many ways, such as retaining valuable employees, improving productivity and morale, reducing training costs, lowering absenteeism, and improving company diversity.

Beyond these direct benefits, there are also many indirect benefits for providing reasonable accommodations, such as the Curb-Cut Effect.

The curb-cuts on the sidewalks are so common that you may not notice them very often. The designs—originally for wheelchair users—helped everyone; whether you were a parent pushing a stroller or a traveler dragging your suitcase — curb cuts have indirectly and directly aided you.

The Curb-Cut Effect can be summarized as investment in one group that provided substantial benefits to all groups. This well-adopted concept in universal design could also be helpful in thinking about workplace accommodations because providing PWD with support could increase teamwork efficiency as well as improve overall productivity and morale.

The purpose of this guidebook is to help managers and co-workers better communicate with and support employees with disabilities.

#### Sources:

1. Study conducted by JAN  
<https://askjan.org/media/downloads/LowCostHighImpact.pdf>
2. Stanford Social Innovation Review on Curb-Cut Effect  
[https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the\\_curb\\_cut\\_effect](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_curb_cut_effect)



# So... what is a disability?

As defined by the ADA, a disability is a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity, such as walking, seeing, hearing, learning, breathing, caring for oneself, or working. With the examples provided by the United Spinal Association, an individual with a disability is a person who:

- Has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. For example, a person living with a spinal cord injury or who is blind.
- Has a record of such an impairment. For example, a person who has recovered from cancer or who has a history of being institutionalized for illness.
- Is regarded as having such an impairment.

While the ADA does not offer a list of covered disabilities, some well-established examples covered by the law include but are not limited to spinal cord injury, blindness, hearing impairment, epilepsy, HIV infection and AIDS, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, emphysema, cancer, dyslexia, organic brain disorder, cognitive impairment, and depression.



#### Sources:

1. Photo by rawpixel [https://unsplash.com/photos/IJFnMSGY\\_bM](https://unsplash.com/photos/IJFnMSGY_bM)
2. United Spinal Association [https://www.unitedspinal.org/pdf/understanding\\_the\\_ada.pdf](https://www.unitedspinal.org/pdf/understanding_the_ada.pdf)
3. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Website <https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/publications/fs-ada.cfm>





**"But you  
look just  
fine."**

- *10 Things NOT to Say to Someone with Invisible Disabilities* by Molly's Fund

# Most Common Invisible Disabilities

Invisible disability is a physical, mental or neurological condition that limits a person's movements, senses, or activities that is invisible to the onlooker. Because these symptoms are invisible, it often leads to misunderstandings, as well as false perceptions and judgments.

The following information about the most common invisible disabilities is extracted from JAN:

## **Chronic pain**

Pain signals that keep firing in the nervous system for weeks, months, even years such as headaches and low back pain.

## **Attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)**

A persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity that interferes with functioning or development, including inattention, over-activity, and/or inability to organize oneself and tasks.

## **Epilepsy**

A chronic, neurological condition characterized by recurrent seizures.

## **Lupus**

A chronic, autoimmune disease that causes inflammation of various parts of the body.

## **Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**

An anxiety disorder that can occur after someone experiences a traumatic event that caused intense fear, helplessness, or horror.

## **Arthritis**

Inflammatory and noninflammatory diseases that affect the body's joints, connective tissue, and other supporting tissues such as tendons, cartilage, blood vessels, and internal organs.

## **Bipolar Disorder**

A brain disorder marked by periods of elevated mood (mania), and prolonged periods of sadness and hopelessness (depression).

### Sources:

1. Photo by Timon Studler, <https://unsplash.com/photos/ABGaVhJxwDQ>
2. 10 Things NOT to Say to Someone with Invisible Disabilities by Molly's Fund <https://www.kaleidoscopefightinglupus.org/invisible-illness-but-you-look-so-good/>
3. Invisible Disabilities Association <https://invisibledisabilities.org/about/aboutida/>  
Job Accommodation Network (JAN) <https://askjan.org/media/epilepsy.html>



# WHAT IS A REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION?

One employee with a disability (EWD) who works in a Fortune 50 company shared two pieces of advice for others EWDs regarding asking for accommodations. "First, it is never too late to ask for accommodation. It is worse when your disability negatively impact your performance. Second, think about [your community] as well. If you suffer from back pain, it is okay to ask people to help you reach that box without discussing your disabilities in details. However, it may not be wise if your primary job function is stacking boxes."

The ADA defines a "reasonable accommodation" as "efforts that may include, among other adjustments:"

- Making the workplace structurally accessible to people with disabilities
- Restructuring jobs to make best use of an individual's skills
- Modifying work hours
- Acquiring or modifying equipment or devices
- Providing qualified readers for the blind or interpreters for the deaf

However, if a disability prevents an employee from doing the essential functions of the job, they are not legally protected under the ADA.

#### Sources:

United Spinal Association

[https://www.unitedspinal.org/pdf/understanding\\_the\\_ada.pdf](https://www.unitedspinal.org/pdf/understanding_the_ada.pdf)



# People First Language

ABILITY ENABLED

8

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## PEOPLE FIRST LANGUAGE

## LANGUAGE TO AVOID

**Person with a disability**

The disabled, handicapped

**Person without a disability**

Normal person, healthy person

**Person with an intellectual, cognitive, developmental disability**

Retarded, slow, simple, moronic, defective or retarded, afflicted, special person

**Person with an emotional or behavioral disability, person with a mental health or a psychiatric disability**

Insane, crazy, psycho, maniac, nuts

**Person who is hard of hearing**

Hearing impaired, suffers a hearing loss

**Person who is deaf**

Deaf and dumb, mute

**Person who is blind/visually impaired**

The blind

**Person who has a communication disorder, is unable to speak, or uses a device to speak**

Mute, dumb

**Person who uses a wheelchair**

Confined or restricted to a wheelchair, wheelchair bound

**Person with a physical disability**

Crippled, lame, deformed, invalid, spastic

**Person with multiple sclerosis**

Afflicted by MS

**Person with epilepsy or seizure disorder**

Epileptic

**Person with cerebral palsy**

CP victim

**Accessible parking or bathrooms**

Handicapped parking or bathroom

**Person of short stature**

Midget

**Person with Down syndrome**

Mongoloid

**Person who is successful, productive**

Has overcome his/her disability, is courageous

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Use people first language such as “people with disability” instead of “disabled people” because a disability is not the only aspect of a person's identity.

Please keep in mind that individuals with disabilities could have a preferred way to be addressed, so when you are unsure, maybe observe and listen to the language they use or ask for clarification :)

Source:

CDC [https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/pdf/disabilityposter\\_photos.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/pdf/disabilityposter_photos.pdf)



**"AS A FEDERAL CONTRACTOR, YOU SHOULD ASPIRE TO HIRE 7% OF PWD IN ALL FUNCTIONS. IF YOU'RE SHOWN TO TRY TO MEET THAT, YOU'RE LOOKED UPON FAVORABLY TO GET CONTRACTS. "**

*- Global Talent Intelligence leader of a Fortune 500 conglomerate*

## HOW TO SUPPORT EWD

# 01 MEASURE

1. Define disability

2. Allow discrete reporting options (anonymous and non-anonymous version)

3. Encourage self-definition

- permanent vs. temporary
- physical vs. mobility vs. neurological
- intermittent vs. chronic
- progressive vs. stable
- visible vs. invisible



**”[A PLACE] WHERE DISABILITY IS RECOGNIZED AND TALKED ABOUT AS ANOTHER ASPECT OF THE WORKPLACE. IT WOULDN’T FEEL LIKE COMING OUT OF THE CLOSET; IT WOULD BE SOMETHING I COULD CASUALLY MENTION”**

*- Software Engineering intern at one of Fast Co.’s World’s Most Innovative Companies*

## HOW TO SUPPORT EWD

### 02 ASK

1. Set up favorable conditions for people to “come out” as soon as possible
2. Openly discuss what terms should be off limits
3. Offer creative ways for collaborative inclusion like hack-a-thons for disrupting the hidden office disability barriers
4. Encourage water cooler conversations through your actions not just through posters or memos. Find suggestions for accomplishing this in the resources section at the end of the guidebook.

**”[MY ROLE IS TO] HELP ALL OF OUR EMPLOYEES HAVE A WONDERFUL EXPERIENCE WORKING WITH [REDACTED], UNDERSTAND PROGRAMS WE OFFER, HELPING WITH ABILITIES AND DISABILITIES.”**

*- Head of Global Benefits at a winner of the Digital Leaders 50 Award*

## HOW TO SUPPORT EWD

### 03 OFFER

1. Make it easy to request accommodations
2. Adopt feedback methods for continuous improvement
3. Move slowly toward office-wide accommodations and away from individual accommodations
  - i. For motor skill impairments, the following accommodations may be helpful:
    - a. Alternative computer input devices, such as speech recognition
    - b. Hands-free telephone with a speaker and/or headset
    - c. Brief but frequent breaks
  - ii. For difficulties with social interactions or speaking, the following accommodations may be helpful:
    - a. Provide advance notice of topics to be discussed at meeting
    - b. Allow written responses in lieu of verbal ones
    - c. Allow telecommuting and email communications instead of face-to-face and telephone interactions



# Summary – How to Support EWD

Individual requests for accommodations should not be completely eliminated but by moving toward an office-wide model you gain these benefits:

- Economy of scale
- Equality of support
- Ease of approval and distribution

Proactively ask for forgiveness.  
Disability inclusion can be a messy science.

You probably won't get it right the first time, but getting started is a courageous act that helps your employees bring 100% of themselves to work.

So now you've successfully read the support section! You learned how to support your employees with disabilities by measuring, asking, and offering useful resources. Now it's time to transition into Checklists for Navigating Reasonable Accommodations: Onboarding and Continued Inclusion.



# Checklists for Onboarding

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*"I mean everyone struggles with onboarding, especially when you have a disability... I felt it more because I couldn't see."*

*--Product Marketing Manager at a Glassdoor Top 50 Places to Work company*

## **Develop Accessible and Flexible Policies and Procedures**

1. Have someone accountable for accommodations who has knowledge, influence, and authority to help with the discovery, tracking and processing of accommodation requests.
2. Have a pre-approved list of disability accommodations that are easy to provide and have been found to be effective within the organization- for example, standing desks, balance ball chairs, and text-to-speech phonesets.
3. Explain what information must be provided and which forms must be completed for an accommodation to be implemented.

## **Train All Managers and Supervisors to Recognize and Respond to an Accommodation Request**

1. If there is any doubt about whether a request was made, managers and supervisors should consult with the person or persons responsible for accommodations.
2. If the organization has an appointed accommodations case manager, the individual should be notified. If managers and supervisors are responsible for processing accommodation requests, they should be trained. No matter what, always respond quickly to an accommodation request and keep all necessary parties informed about the status of the requests.
3. Keep in mind that all documentation that contains medical information must be maintained in a confidential manner.

## **Have a Process for Determining Effective Accommodations**

1. Identify the barriers to job performance by consulting with the employee to learn the employee's precise needs and abilities.  
  
Don't get mad if employees don't know what they need yet, they're new!
2. Explore the types of accommodations that would be most effective  
  
If possible, it's better to solve the root problem rather than the symptom. If sensory overload is the big challenge, it may be better to find a quiet space in the office where the employee can control the lights and sound level rather than passing on a voucher to get headphones.



# Checklists for Continued Inclusion

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*"It becomes a working dialogue with check-ins & edits."*

*-- Hospitality employee for regional food services chain, responding to question about what the perfect accommodation process looks like.*

## **Monitor and Update Accommodations**

Once an accommodation is in place, a monitoring and updating procedure should be established. For example, equipment-based accommodations, may need periodic maintenance.

Above all, maintain and update your lines of communication!

## **Train New Managers and Supervisors**

New managers and supervisors need to be trained on the policies and procedures for reasonable accommodations to avoid negatively impacting employees with accommodations.

## **Aim to develop an effective feedback loop with regularly updated questions**

Continuously seek and respond to feedback about how your employees want to be communicated with and assisted

**Please see the next page for sample forms regarding a template for processing accommodations and establishing a manual feedback loop**



## ADA Accommodations:

### Template for Interactive Process- Case Managers

*To be a shared document between employee and accommodation case managers*

Employee Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Employee ID Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Employee Division: \_\_\_\_\_ Employee Location: \_\_\_\_\_  
Process Assisted by: \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_  
Additional Participants: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Section 1- The Accommodation Request

Date Received: \_\_/\_\_/\_\_ |

Accommodation Suggestion is Pre-Approved by HR: Yes/No

Method of Request (online form, in person, etc.): \_\_\_\_\_

Accommodation Category: Audio Visual Tactile Sensory Other

#### Section 2- Additional Documentation

Is Accommodation Potentially Detrimental to the Office: Yes/No

If yes, has Medical Documentation been provided: Yes/No

If Medical Documentation has been provided, date: \_\_/\_\_/\_\_

#### Section 3- Discussion

Accommodation Suggestion (Employee): \_\_\_\_\_

Accommodation Analysis and Counter-suggestion (if any, by Case Manager): \_\_\_\_\_

Accommodation Determination:

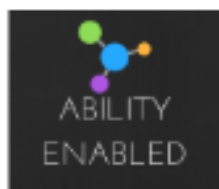
Accepted-immediately Accepted-further conversation

Not Accepted- further conversation

Decision and reasons: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_





## Section 4- Implementation

Time Range for Implementation: \_\_/\_\_/\_\_ - \_\_/\_\_/\_\_

Point of Contact Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Point of Contact Email: \_\_\_\_\_

If equipment or software was provided, was the employee trained in the use of that equipment or software? Yes/No

Does the employee report that the training was sufficient to meet his/her needs? Yes/No

If a service (e.g., interpreter, reader, CART) was provided, does the employee report that the service is meeting his/her needs? Yes/No

Who is responsible for arranging the service? Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_/\_\_/\_\_

*If applicable, explain how accommodations have enabled the employee to improve his/her performance/conduct.*

Explain: \_\_\_\_\_

What difficulties, if any, does the employee experience when engaging/using accommodations (i.e., equipment does not work, scheduling needs not met, harassed by management, etc.)?

Explain: \_\_\_\_\_



Current accommodations have been found to:

- " Be effective for the purpose
- " Require adjustments
- " Be ineffective for the purpose
- " Require additional accommodations to be effective

The employee should:

- " Maintain accommodations "as is"
- " Continue with current accommodations but with adjustments
- " Discontinue current accommodations
- " Receive alternative accommodations

Explain: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

If new or additional accommodations are required, does equipment need to be ordered or a service purchased? Yes/No

If yes, who will order, \_\_\_\_\_? Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_/\_\_/\_\_

Will training be required? Yes/No

If yes, who will provide the training? Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_/\_\_/\_\_

If accommodation maintenance is required, when will it occur?

Date: \_\_/\_\_/\_\_

### Section 5- Follow Up

Follow-up within 5 days after implementation; Date: \_\_/\_\_/\_\_

Effectiveness of Accommodation: 5 (Very Helpful) 4 3 2 1 (Not Helpful)

Follow-up within 30 days after implementation; Date: \_\_/\_\_/\_\_

Effectiveness of Accommodation: 5 (Very Helpful) 4 3 2 1 (Not Helpful)

Areas of Improvement: \_\_\_\_\_





### **Section 6- Future Improvement**

Ease of Communication:

5 (Very Easy) 4 3 2 1 (Not Easy)

Ease of Accommodation Implementation:

5 (Very Easy) 4 3 2 1 (Not Easy)

Areas of Improvement for our Accommodations Process: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### **Signatures**

Employee: \_\_\_\_\_

Case Manager: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Participants: \_\_\_\_\_

**We found the following resources below via Internet searches and recommendations from diversity consultants whom we have interviewed. We hope this section helps readers grow in their disability inclusion efforts. These resources provide regulations and compliance details when employers begin navigating disability inclusion. They also provide information on how to promote diversity inclusion from perspectives of both professionals and employees with disabilities.**

### Websites

InclusionClearinghouse.com provides extensive information on opportunities and activities for inclusion.

ClearTalents.com allows employees to create personal profiles with their disability information. Employers are able to log in and view this content.

CommitToInclusion.org provides campaigns about disability inclusion and helpful guidelines on promoting disability inclusion.

DisabilityEqualityIndex.org provides a list of benchmarks for companies that want to be deemed "best places for people with disabilities to work."

### Online Courses

E-courses by the Corporation for National and Community Service are 15-20 minutes in length and a great place to find answers to some of the most common disability-related questions. Options include:

- Modern Disability 101
- Creating a Welcoming Environment
- Making Reasonable Accommodations
- Designing Your Own Disability Engagement Plan

Art Beyond Sight: disability awareness training contains accessibility skills and assistive technology

### Articles

Leading Practices on Disability Inclusion by US Business Leadership Network

Americans With Disabilities: 2010 by Matthew W. Brault

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Article 1 – Purpose

Disability Inclusion Topic Guide by Brigitte Rohwerder (GSDRC, Institute of Development Studies)

### Books

Fundamentals of Disability Inclusion: Unveiling Stereotypes, Unleashing Opportunities by Linda Fitzpatrick

This book focuses on disability sensitivity with topics including hearing, vision, mobility impairments, and hidden disabilities (ex: learning disabilities, autism).

Understanding Disability: Inclusion, Access, Diversity, and Civil Rights by Paul T. Jaeger

This book focuses on the lives of disabled individuals and the social roles of disability from the perspectives of people with disabilities. It also addresses issues of accessibility to information and communication technologies.

### Blogs

Blog by people with disabilities.

Blog by Christopher Coleman, who is a professional in disability inclusion.



**Photos by WOCinTech and Tamaricus Brown.**

**ALL THE  
RESOURCES  
HAVE LINKS  
ATTACHED,  
SO JUST CLICK!**





# CLOSING REMARKS

Click to stay connected with us



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This guidebook provides a general overview of how to support employees with disabilities as well as disability inclusion with a special focus on navigating reasonable accommodations.

Our upcoming product, Enabled, will make accomplishing the suggestions in this guidebook easy. Enabled will automate the discovery, tracking, and processing of workplace disability accommodations while generating analytic reports and recommendations for increased disability inclusion. Until that day, please continue to reference this book and send us your brilliant ideas and questions for the second edition which will be released soon!



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