

Issue: Recruiting and retaining individuals with disabilities isn't difficult, but lack of experience with this population can sometimes be a stumbling block for program managers.

Action: According to the U.S. Department of Labor, the following nine practices — presented in the form of questions to answer about your program — can help service programs successfully recruit and retain individuals with disabilities:

Make a management commitment to include individuals with disabilities among your stakeholders. Management commitment involves getting senior leadership to embrace disability policies, which will in turn ensure that the organization “walks the talk.”

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Are the commissioners, executive directors, and program managers dedicated to promoting disability-friendly service environments?
- Are written statements provided to all staff, members, and volunteers expressing these commitments?
- Do policies, procedures, and practices specifically mention the inclusion of people with disabilities in the programs?
- Do persons with disabilities serve as commissioners or advisory council members?
- Are service members and volunteers with disabilities included in annual or other progress reports?
- Are program and grantee staff members with disabilities employed at all levels, including senior management positions?
- Are your products or services marketed to individuals with disabilities?

Educate all staff, members, and volunteers on disability inclusion. Disability education dispels myths and enables all staff, members, and volunteers to make sound disability recruitment decisions.

Ask yourself:

- Do orientations involving new staff, members, and volunteers include disability awareness and sensitivity training?
- Are training materials available in alternate formats, such as large print, Braille, and captioning?
- Do employees, members, and volunteers with disabilities serve as mentors for those who do not have disabilities?

Provide ongoing information on disability inclusion. Continued educational opportunities enable staff, members, and volunteers to utilize pertinent disability information to resolve everyday family and work situations.

Ask yourself:

- Are staff, members, and volunteers familiar with legal responsibilities pertaining to disability?
- Is disability information provided routinely in the service program's newsletter or on the intranet?
- Are resources on disability issues readily available to help staff, members, and volunteers participate in service and volunteer projects?

Form a disability inclusion support group. Disability perspectives enable all staff, members, and volunteers to contribute their full potential to corporate success.

Ask yourself:

- Do staff, members, and volunteers with and without disabilities meet to discuss disability service and volunteering issues?
- Does this group have authority to make recommendations to management?
- Are all staff, members, and volunteers aware of this group and the contributions it makes to overall program success?

Ensure accessible facilities and services at programs and service sites. Accessible facilities and services are more useful for everybody.

Ask yourself:

- Are buildings, parking areas, public spaces, and communication systems accessible to persons with disabilities?

Accommodate applicants, members, and volunteers with disabilities. An open policy on accommodations allows candidates, staff, members, and volunteers with disabilities to demonstrate what they can do.

Ask yourself:

- Is there a line item in the program budget for accommodation expenses?
- Are applicants, staff, members, and volunteers informed that accommodations are available if necessary?
- Is the process to request accommodations readily known by applicants, staff, members, and volunteers?
- With permission, are member and volunteer success stories that demonstrate improved productivity based on provided accommodations shared with staff, members, and volunteers?
- Do program staff members routinely stay abreast of new developments in universal design and assistive technology?

Project a disability-friendly image to attract potential staff, members, and volunteers with disabilities. If necessary, approach a disability organization, such as the local independent living center, for assistance with advertising to people with disabilities.

Ask yourself:

- Are people with disabilities portrayed as positive and active members and volunteers?
- Do service recruiters target students with disabilities when making campus visits?
- Do recruiters search for resumes on disability-related websites?
- Are disability-focused publications targeted for the service program's advertising?
- Are recruiters (and other personnel responsible for establishing working relationships with community agencies) serving applicants with disabilities?

Recruit individuals with disabilities.

Ask yourself:

- Do recruiters regularly attend employment-related fairs for candidates with disabilities or target higher institutions of education with known populations of students with disabilities, such as Gallaudet University and the National Technical Institute for the Deaf?

Get out in your community.

Ask yourself:

- Are staff members encouraged to build relationships with disability-community service organizations?
- Do staff members make regular visits to high schools and community-based organizations to inform administrators, teachers, community leaders, and students with and without disabilities about volunteer and service opportunities?

Outcome: Paula Sotnik oversees the National Service Inclusion Project and has over 25 years of experience working as a director, curriculum developer, trainer, and diversity and disability specialist.

According to Ms. Sotnik, recruiting and retaining individuals with disabilities in service programs can lead to:

- Exposure and acceptance of diverse backgrounds and experiences
- Personal development and growth of all members
- Different leadership styles
- The ability to cast a wider recruiting net

Related Resources:

- National Service Inclusion Project
- Inclusive Outreach and Recruitment
- Inclusion Handbook: Inclusive Recruitment and Outreach
- Recruiting and Retaining Members with Disabilities

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