



Add Us In
Merging Diversity and Disability
into Business Opportunity

Add Us In National Diversity Forum

August 4, 2011
Ronald Reagan Building & International Trade Center

Event Report

**U.S. Department of Labor
Office of Disability Employment Policy**

Acknowledgements

The Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) would like to thank all of the individuals who contributed to this report. To Day Al-Mohamed, Jennifer Kemp, Laura Ibañez, Taryn Williams, and Maria Town, thank you for sharing your expertise and valuable insights for this project. ODEP is especially grateful to Becky Skipper, Greta Menard, Wendy Qin, and Jackie Scott for your dedication to ensuring that multiple perspectives were reflective in this final report.

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Executive Summary

Add Us In is an initiative sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) designed to identify and develop strategies to increase employment opportunities within the small business community for individuals with disabilities. Included within the small business community are targeted businesses that are owned and operated by minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals; women; veterans; and people with disabilities.

To support the initiative, ODEP convened a National Diversity Forum on August 4, 2011 from 8:30 am to 4:00 pm at the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center in Washington, D.C. The Forum was designed to continue a national discussion about the implications of Add Us In started at the initiative's Expert Strategy Meeting held in February 2011, and participants explored how Add Us In can benefit individuals with disabilities, small businesses, targeted communities and the economy as a whole.

One of the high-priority goals of the Add Us In Initiative is to create business engagement models that can be replicated on a national scale. Related to this is the companion goal of building national and local networks of experts skilled in connecting small employers with the underutilized talent pool that people with disabilities comprise.

More than 110 thought leaders participated in the National Diversity Forum, representing a diverse cross-section of stakeholders including local and national chambers of commerce; disability and minority advocacy groups; local workforce development agencies; private businesses; and various U.S. government departments and agencies. These subject matter experts gathered to explore and collaborate on key business strategies to help make disability part of overall workforce diversity and to begin creating a national network of Add Us In stakeholders. During the registration and networking portion of the National Diversity forum, the first four Add Us In grantee organizations each displayed posters that illustrated their work in action.

The National Diversity Forum was framed around a four-part structure:

1. An introduction to the Add Us In initiative and a plenary presentation on current data relating to demographics and business growth detailing the "why" behind the initiative;
2. A first round of breakout sessions representing the Demand side of the labor market – employers;
3. A second round of breakout sessions representing the Supply side of the labor market – job seekers and employees; and
4. A participatory dialogue with the Assistant Secretary of Labor for Disability Employment Policy at the end of the day to highlight key experiences and information of note.

This report is designed to capture highlights from the National Diversity Forum proceedings and advise consortia members and other stakeholders on issues and opportunities to keep in mind while moving forward. In addition to summarizing the event's presentations and dialogues, it outlines key points for each session and intersecting themes that emerged as barriers to the employment of people with disabilities by small businesses, along with possible action steps for addressing them. Broadly, these key points and intersecting themes fell into four policy strategy areas: 1) Business, 2) Accommodations, 3) Partnering and Collaboration, and 4) Education/Youth. These four policy strategy areas provide the framework around which the action steps were identified.

Action Steps

Action steps identified under each of these four policy strategy area include the following:

Business

- Explore and execute new and improved outreach tactics to reach small businesses with messaging about the disability dividend and teach strategies for implementing diversity/disability employment practices.
- Pursue partnerships with people and groups outside the disability community to reach new audiences.
- Leverage testimonials from small, minority-owned businesses that have experienced the benefits of disability/diversity hiring and supplier diversity programming.
- Seek opportunities to bring large businesses with a track record of success in disability employment together with small businesses through business-to-business peer counseling or mentorships or information exchanges.
- Work to infuse disability employment issues into business school curricula.
- Work to simplify the administrative hassles of pursuing hiring incentives.
- Shift small businesses' perception of hiring incentives from one of charity to one of economic opportunity.
- Educate employers about tax incentives, which can offset the cost of accommodations such as the Small Business Tax Credit and Architectural/Transportation Tax Deduction.
- Explore the possibility of adding a disability-owned designation to SBA's 8(a) program.
- Promote the U.S. Business Leadership Network's (USBLN) Disability Supplier Diversity Program, to increase both the number of certified businesses and the number of businesses working with them.

Accommodations

- Simplify accommodations processes so that they are not perceived as a burden to employers or employees with disabilities.

- Educate individuals with disabilities and workforce development and vocational rehabilitation service providers on how to discuss accommodations in the context of productivity.

Partnering and Collaboration

- Educate congregations/faith-based organizations on the role they can play in hiring people with disabilities and making job connections for their members with disabilities.
- Explore the possibility of grant programs through DOL's Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships to increase organizational capacity to improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities from diverse populations.
- Educate families on the role they play in setting work expectations among youth with disabilities, making job connections and providing employment supports once they are grown.
- Ensure that related activities use messaging that considers cultural perceptions of disability.

Education/Youth

- Expand professional development opportunities for mainstream and special education teachers and other youth service professionals to improve their credentialing and skills in setting expectations for employment as well as promoting self-awareness and career exploration among students with disabilities.
- Work to Change current practice so that youth are exposed to work experiences and vocational rehabilitation earlier (in middle school or prior) and ensure these experiences incorporate entrepreneurship.
- Expand the reach of Disability Mentoring Day by weaving in cultural competencies.
- Seek participation of minorities within disability programs such as internship programs.
- Expand the reach of Project SEARCH and implement efforts to ensure it incorporates students from diverse populations.
- Expand opportunities for youth service provider professional development.

Next Steps

In addition to the rich dialogue that transpired at the National Diversity Forum, the event itself was a milestone, marking the first time DOL/ODEP convened thought leaders from so many perspectives to specifically explore the intersection between disability, diversity and small business.

As mentioned in the previous section, the key points and intersecting issues identified during the National Diversity Forum provide a framework of action steps for ODEP and the Add Us In initiative, especially as the first four grantees move into their second years and the second round of grants are implemented. Translated into concrete action steps, they can also serve as

a useful guide in evaluating the success of the grant program and ODEP's overall efforts to further integrate disability into diversity in the context of business.

Next steps may include the following:

- Share the report with participants and other key stakeholders, as well as relevant ODEP and DOL personnel involved and/or interested in the Add Us In initiative.
- Map out the relevant federal agencies whose missions and activities relate to key issues and gather their leaders for a high-level strategy meeting to discuss and tweak recommendations in the context of current plans and priorities.
- Facilitate ongoing dialogue between event participants to encourage the continued sharing of ideas and experiences around the topics discussed. This sustained dialogue could be achieved virtually through use of ODEP's ePolicyWorks online workspace.
- Hold a series of small follow-on working meetings, each focused on one of the policy strategy areas as a way to flesh out corresponding recommendations and develop implementation plans.
- Publish a series of articles or blog posts based on the intersecting themes.
- Incorporate identified action steps into ODEP's strategic planning process.
- Prepare and share a year-out follow-up report noting progress made on action steps.

Background

The U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (DOL/ODEP) is the Federal Government's leading center of expertise on the employment of people with disabilities. As part of DOL's focus on expanding opportunities for all Americans, ODEP works to influence national policy and promote effective workplace practices that ensure today's workforce is inclusive of all people, including people with disabilities. Add Us In, an initiative sponsored by ODEP, is one of the agency's key efforts in this arena.

The Add Us In initiative is designed to identify and develop strategies to increase employment opportunities within the small business community for individuals with disabilities. Included within the small business community are targeted businesses that are owned and operated by minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals; women; veterans; and people with disabilities.

Small business is the engine of U.S. economic growth, and the data on minority business growth shows that minority-owned and operated firms are a significant contributor to the long-term health of the nation's economy. Over the past 10 years, minority-owned businesses have grown at approximately double the rate of all firms in the U.S economy. *(Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Minority Business Development Agency. (2006). The state of minority business enterprises: An overview of the 2002 survey of business owners.)*

Given this level of growth in the small business community, one of the high-priority goals of the Add Us In initiative is to create business engagement models that can be replicated on a national scale. Related to this goal is the companion goal of building national and local networks of experts skilled in connecting small employers with the underutilized talent pool that people with disabilities comprise.

Add Us In is also exploring strategies to promote systems change within the workforce development system to increase the capacity of the small business community to hire people with disabilities. Inciting such systemic change will involve identifying research areas, developing policies, building relationships and promoting exemplary practices.

Through the Add Us In Initiative, ODEP awarded grants to four consortia in September 2010. These consortia are led by four regional grantees and comprise representatives from small businesses, workforce development, diversity, disability and youth organizations who live and work in diverse communities. These grantees and their areas of emphasis are:

1. The Integrated Recovery Network leads the Los Angeles, California consortium and targets former gang members and individuals recently out of jail who have disabilities.
2. The WorkPlace, Inc., leads the Southwest, Connecticut consortium and is working to engage in changing the culture of the workforce development and vocational

rehabilitation systems to better accommodate and serve LGBT job seekers with disabilities.

3. The Institute for Human Development at the University of Missouri Kansas City is leading the Kansas City, Missouri consortium whose work focuses on ensuring career opportunities, including opportunities for urban African American youth with disabilities.
4. The University of Oklahoma is leading the Four Corners, Oklahoma consortium which seeks to impact all populations, including: minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities; women; tribal populations, and people with disabilities.

During the NDF, the availability of funds for a second round of grants under its *Add Us In* initiative was announced, and following an open solicitation period, four additional consortia were added to the effort, bringing the total number of *Add Us In* grantees to eight. Information about these additional grantees, as well as more information about the NDF and other *Add Us In* activities, is available on the ODEP website at www.dol.gov/odep/addusin.

Discussion Summary

The National Diversity Forum was hosted by ODEP Assistant Secretary Kathy Martinez. Opening remarks were delivered by the Honorable Hilda L. Solis, U.S. Secretary of Labor, and Margot Dorfman, CEO of the U.S. Women's Chamber of Commerce.

Secretary Solis noted her agency's commitment to helping all Americans find jobs in today's challenging economy, including people with disabilities. She reminded the audience that Americans with disabilities are able to make enormous contributions to our economic recovery. She recognized that small business leaders want to hire the best person for the job regardless of their disability status, but they need further information about effective strategies to do so.

She stated that the focus of the event was to create a winning blueprint for disability hiring in the small business sector, and that this was in part achieved through collaborative networks, moreover she urged the creation of new partnerships with to help small businesses expand their capacity to hire and retain outstanding workers who happen to have a disability.

She also announced that DOL was soliciting a second round of grants under the Add Us In program, whereby three additional consortia will join the initiative.

Ms. Dorfman discussed the power of the women-led economy, which is bringing women together to transform their position as a leading industry and market force around the globe. The U.S. Women's Chamber of Commerce encourages members to buy first from women-owned firms, to buy second from women-friendly firms and to not shop at businesses that routinely discriminate. Drawing connections to Add Us In, Ms. Dorfman noted that similar sentiments can be promoted regarding disability - to purchasing from and empowering our communities.

Ms. Dorfman made a point that this is an issue that impacts all groups and all communities. Women, minority, veteran, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals can all relate and respect the challenges of segregation and impediments people face in securing economic advancement; and that to achieve progress it is critical to work together, leveraging combined skills and assets.

To support such joint action, she announced that the Women's Chamber will be promoting news about Add Us In through a dedicated Web community.

Following these opening remarks, the program continued with a series of plenary and breakout sessions, each of which featured panel presentations and question-and-answer periods.

Trends in Small Business Growth, Demographics and Disability

Key Points:

- Over the past 10 years, minority-owned businesses have grown at approximately double the rate of all firms in the U.S. economy.
 - Diverse and inclusive organizations typically outperform homogeneous organization.
 - Disability can lead to innovation because people with disabilities must continually think creatively about how to solve problems and accomplish tasks.
 - It is prudent for employers to:
 - Recruit the best talent, whatever the package.
 - Provide access to tools, resources and career opportunities to enable the employee to do his or her best.
 - Educate everyone in order to build an inclusive and welcoming environment.
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The first plenary featured a panel of experts who provided context on small business growth as well as diversity and disability demographics. Panelists included Ivonne Cunarro, U.S. Department of Commerce Minority Business Development Agency; Terry McMenamin, U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Division of Labor Force Statistics; and Eric Peterson, Society for Human Resource Management.

Discussion focused on the changing U.S. labor force, which is adjusting as a result of unprecedented demographic shifts. Specifically, growth of the overall labor force is slowing;

There were 5.8 million minority owned businesses in 2007, they generated about \$1 trillion in gross receipts, and they employed 5.8 million workers. If you include the owners, that becomes a total of 12 million people.

- Ivonne Cunarro, *Minority Business Development Agency*

however, this is not consistent among all demographic groups. Growth that does occur is expected to be among minorities. At the same time, over the past 10 years, minority-owned businesses – those owned by women and racial and ethnic minorities – have grown at approximately double the rate of all firms in the U.S. economy.

The Minority Business Development Agency was established to foster the growth and expansion of minority owned firms including access to capital, access to contract, access to markets, and also strategic business consulting. From 50 locations around the country they helped these firms grow in size, scale and capacity. Research presented showed that minority firms have grown five times faster than non-minority owned; however, gross revenues are not growing at the same pace. However, minority firms are growing employment opportunities at

a rate higher than non-minority firms. This may be because of higher loan denial rates and rejection fears among minority-owned firms. Despite having lesser access to capital, , minority-owned firms create jobs with just \$50,000 in financing as compared to non-minority firms which required about \$95,000 in financing. This would indicate that minority firms, with adequate access to capital; would then be able to create more jobs and help lift the economy.

A diverse and inclusive organization will always outperform a homogeneous organization where everyone is the same. If you have ten people sitting around a table and they're all trying to come up with an answer to a problem and they all look the same, act the same, come from the same place, went to the same school and got the same degree, they're going to come up with an answer that any one of them could have come up with on their own. But if you have a table filled with different people from different backgrounds and experiences and degrees, and they're going to come one a solution that not one of those people could have come up with by themselves.

- Eric Peterson, Society for Human Resource Management

A key component when looking at business hiring practices is ensuring there is a strong case for hiring and retaining people with disabilities. The historical trend (anecdotally) is that when considering disability, the perspective is to look at a particular job candidate and compare them to persons without disabilities, focusing on what they cannot do. Presenters urged the creation of a culture of inclusion in an organization, where people could relate to each other as whole human beings, and suggested that there is a value proposition brought by the job candidate with a disability.

Also discussed was the concept of workplace accommodations,

explaining that employers provide them to all employees – they simply do not realize it. Accommodations are not cost prohibitive and impact the retention and the turnover rate in a company, leading to a more successful business practice. Studies showed that with reasonable accommodations, individuals with disabilities would actually meet or exceed the performance standards as compared with the larger population.

Major themes around accommodations were: to recruit the best talent, whatever the package; to ensure diversity allowing for the greatest problem-solving flexibility to enable the employee to do his or her best by providing access to tools, resources and career opportunities; to plan for career development and advancement; and to educate everyone in order to build an inclusive workplace.

This session also walked the audience through the results of the Summary of Labor Force Characteristics of People with Disabilities, a 2010 study conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. According to this research, the proportion of the population employed in 2010 – the employment-population ratio –was 18.6 percent among those with a disability. The employment-population ratio for persons without a disability was 63.5 percent. The ratios in

2010 for both persons with and without a disability were lower than those recorded in 2009. And the unemployment rate of persons with a disability was 14.8 percent in 2010, higher than the rate for those with no disability, which was 9.4 percent.

Pathways to Disability Hiring: Transferable Practices

Key Points:

- Diversity exists because people are diverse but inclusion is a choice, and one that sets the tone for the whole organization.
 - One of the key mechanisms for fostering inclusion of people with disabilities is for employees to engage with people with disabilities.
 - Small business owners may have neither the capacity nor the time to specifically target different communities. Thus, increased awareness of opportunities, networks and incentives is critical for small businesses that may not have the resources to seek supports for disability hiring on their own.
 - In addition to lack of awareness of programs and incentives, some businesses, especially small businesses, perceive that burdensome restrictions make disability hiring difficult.
 - Disability-owned business certification is a key element of infusing disability into corporate diversity efforts.
 - Accommodations can be addressed via creativity as much as cost.
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Following the plenary session, participants attended breakout sessions. The session entitled, “Pathways to Disability Hiring: Transferable Practices,” examined the best practices and strategies currently in place for hiring people with disabilities within businesses of varying sizes. It explored how strategies may differ between businesses based on size, structure and industry.

The session was facilitated by Odunola “Ola” Ojewumi, an American Association of People with Disabilities Intern with a placement in the White House. Panelists included Will Banks and Willie Davis of Matrix Systems & Technologies, Inc.; Jill Houghton of the U.S. Business Leadership Network (USBLN) and Catharine McNally of Keen Guides, Inc.

Inclusion is something that is a choice. We make a choice whether to be inclusive and it sets the tone for the whole organization—not to just respect diversity, but to include people with disabilities, not just in the workplace, but in the marketplace.

- Jill Houghton, U.S. Business Leadership Network

Opening comments addressed the key difference between diversity and inclusion – diversity exists because people are diverse but inclusion is about choice. In April 2011, the USBLN, and the U.S. Chamber of

Commerce released a new publication, *Leading Practices on Disability Inclusion*, which highlights successful strategies that can be used by businesses to create a more inclusive workplace, marketplace and supply chain. USBLN has committed to creating a similar version

of the publication next year focused on the small business audience. It was also highlighted that a key mechanism to being inclusive for people with disabilities is simply engagement.

However, it was also noted that disability hiring incentives amongst USBLN members were highly underutilized because they were perceived as administratively burdensome, and that most businesses did not see a return on their investment. In addition, the complexity of the systems operated as a disincentive, resulting in the programs not having the intended impact on disability hiring.

Also discussed was USBLN's new certification program, which is the nation's first and only national certification for disability-owned businesses, and that attendance at national minority supplier events is critical as it operates as a point of entry to small business and entrepreneurs. Session panelists urged both private and public entities interested in supplier diversity to consider disability-owned companies. USBLN's certification program for disability-owned businesses was offered as a strategy to aid in these supplier diversity efforts.

Presenters also shared experiences as small business owners. They explained that even though a company would like to target and hire more people with disabilities, small business owners have neither the capacity nor the time to specifically target different communities, identify individuals with disabilities, and connect them with opportunities in their firms. Rather, a small

I don't feel 100 percent comfortable asking a big company to provide CART. I have that challenge. How can I make communication in business meetings as accessible as possible without coming across as a burden upon somebody else? I want to be proactive. I want to continue to breakdown stereotypes that working with people with disabilities is difficult.

- Catharine McNally, Small Business Owner

business's first priority, is getting business. As a related frustration, small business owners applying for loans through the Small Business Administration, mentioned that the application does not acknowledge their status as a person with a disability; thereby limiting their opportunities for expansion.

They also noted challenges around investor perceptions with regard to funding companies owned and operated by people with disabilities

and also working with disability-owned and operated companies, specifically when asking for accommodations such as CART service and other assistive technologies. As a result, it is often necessary to be creative such as by conducting conference calls via video conference.

The use of technology and a global workplace; telecommuting, increased access; and an open and encouraging environment can act as a subtle reinforcement and support a willingness to accept disability as a part of diversity within a business. Panelists also offered the observation that the creation of some kind of initiative or fund that would allow for a person with a

disability to get funding for the accommodation, and therefore they are not burdening a company may be particularly helpful, especially in the private sector.

Stories from Small Businesses with Effective Disability Hiring Practices

Key Points:

- Businesses should have a diversity and inclusion policy in place that is a living document with formalized approaches for gathering input from staff and holding managers and leaders accountable.
 - Small businesses and entrepreneurs respond well to and typically respect other small businesses and entrepreneurs.
 - Businesses make accommodations for employees all the time but may not realize it. For example, they may accommodate smokers because they cannot smoke inside; they may accommodate short or tall people by having machines at a wide range of heights.
 - The CEO or leader, the controller or whoever in the organization regardless of size is most likely to understand financial motivations and benefit, and managerial staff.
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This breakout session aimed to offer a clear picture of disability hiring in small businesses from a practical perspective. It was moderated by Anupa Iyer, an American Association of People with Disabilities Intern with a placement at Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law/American Association of People with Disabilities. Panelists included Rhonda Griffin of Pest Free Maintenance, Inc.; Michael Pearson of Union Packaging; and James Rodriguez of BAE Systems.

The panel began by discussing the hiring of people who have traditionally been overlooked. One employer cited his key strategies as to finding talented, good employees – some of whom have disabilities, and partnering with community groups, such as the Marriot Foundation Bridges to Work Foundation, which vets youth and prepares them for the workforce by teaching soft skills. He explained that when a company is looking for reliable talent, it can reduce its recruiting costs and cut-down on the time it takes to hire someone by leveraging these kinds of partnerships.

Another employer partners with Pennsylvania State University, the Resources for Human Development Office and the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. The program hires and trains ex-offenders to be pest control specialists and boasts a 70 percent success rate. She explained that all businesses have the challenge of hiring and retaining loyal people, and some of the more desirable job candidates with better credentials are not always considering work in small businesses. One of the greatest advantages of hiring ex-offenders is that they are appreciative of having a job. They are energetic, creative thinkers and problem solvers. The VERA Institute of Justice's report entitled Closing the Gap: Using Criminal Justice and Public Health Data to Improve the Identification of Mental Illness states that throughout the United States, people with mental health illnesses are overrepresented in the criminal justice system. Research indicates that 15 percent of male jail inmates and 31 percent of female jail inmates

have mental illnesses, which include depressive and anxiety disorders. Employers advised small businesses to leverage programs provided by state and local governments that can connect them with job seekers who have disabilities, and advise them on pursuing tax incentives.

In addition the importance of implementing solid diversity and disability policies in one's business, and fostering a two-way street where employees can request what they need to do their job effectively was also stressed. This required open discussions with supervisors and of proactive leadership to drive acceptance and get staff to understand the value proposition before them.

This is particularly important for veterans. Many veteran employees are wounded warriors who may need simple workplace accommodations, but they are also superb employees. But there is significant stigma associated with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which can only be addressed through education among company leadership, HR management and co-workers around hidden disabilities. . Workplace accommodations are critical and most are low or no cost, and many help everyone in the office. It was also highlighted that employers should be proactive in professional career development—it is more than just about hiring, but about careers.

For veterans, it was also explained that it may be beneficial to recruits veteran job candidates early – sometimes in the hospital following a return from deployment – so that they can get the wounded warriors employed before they have a chance to become unemployed.

Further discussion touched on people's personal experiences with disability and how they make a difference in shaping attitudes and actions.

Diversity Dollars: Why Small Businesses Should Engage Diverse Communities

Key Points:

- Companies marketing to people with disabilities can reach as many as four in every ten customers. Corporate America, including small businesses, would benefit from assessing this market. Some of the most common questions from business are about clarity and productivity.
 - With regard to accommodations, small businesses make accommodation decisions at a different level than larger employers—the CEO or president is much more involved in small businesses.
 - With regards to perceived barriers to employment for people with disabilities, there is no statistically significant difference between large and small employers.
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This breakout session explored key concepts to help businesses understand the importance of disability hiring and how to apply these practices to small businesses. It was facilitated by Rohmteem Mokhari, Family Project Assistant at the Human Rights Campaign. Panelists included Susanne Bruyere of the National Employer Technical Assistance, Policy and Research Center at Cornell University; and Dara Baldwin of the National Council on Independent Living (NCIL).

The first issue raised was why disability should be addressed within the diversity paradigm and the value to businesses of an inclusive workforce, from both a productivity and marketing perspective. To provide context, the panel shared statistics on the disparate labor force rates of people with and without disabilities and the consequent income gaps. In addition, panelists talked about demographic shifts that predict a significant aging of the workforce, creating an imperative for employers to understand how to accommodate older workers.

Data specific to small businesses included findings that the most common accommodation needed by employees with disabilities was flexibility with human resource policies. Furthermore, within small businesses, accommodation decisions are more likely to be made by managers/directors and presidents/CEOs, not just HR staff, highlighting a critical need for clearly articulated, top-level commitment to an inclusive workplace culture.

During this session, participants were also introduced to NCIL, which works to advance independent living and the rights of people with disabilities through consumer-driven advocacy. This mission can be seen in the context of U.S. population growth over the past two decades by race and ethnicity, which indicates an increasingly diverse America. Disability cuts across all of these diverse segments, and to ensure a broad reach, NCIL has emphasized collaboration. One such collaboration is a partnership, funded through a grant from the Kellogg Foundation,

among national disability rights organizations to promote cultural competency around disability. One major outcome of this partnership was the Disability Community Resolution on Diversity and Cultural and Linguistic Competency, through which disability organizations can pledge to engage diverse communities and include them in their advocacy efforts. Another major outcome was Cultural and Linguistic Competence Assessment for Disability Organizations, a cultural competency self-assessment tool for disability organizations (www.gucchdgetown.net/nccc/clcado/nccc_clcado_guide.pdf).

The question-and-answer portion of this session addressed strategies small businesses could use to recruit job seekers with disabilities, including partnerships with community organizations and the VR system and offering internships. Another issue discussed was the need to promote the benefits of disability-owned businesses; USBLN's Disability Supplier Diversity Program was referenced as a good step toward this. The need for VR counselors and workforce development professionals to be more fluent in the language of business, in particular small business, was also identified.

Perspectives on Diversity and Improving Employment Opportunities

During the lunch hour, attendees reconvened for a plenary session featuring several federal Assistant Secretaries who offered their perspectives on diversity (including disability) and improving employment opportunities. The session featured a discussion between Assistant Secretary Alexa Posny, Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S. Department of Education; Assistant Secretary Kathy Martinez, ODEP, U.S. Department of Labor; and Deputy Assistant Secretary Roberta Gassman, Employment and Training Administration (ETA), U.S. Department of Labor.

Deputy Assistant Secretary Gassman began by discussing ways that ETA fosters inclusiveness and brings groups together to address disparities in employment between people with and without disabilities. She mentioned some of ETA's formula programs, special programs and One-Stop Career Center programming. In particular, she highlighted the Disability Employment Initiative (DEI), which makes more than \$20 million available to take us to a new level of best practices for disability employment and training. She also explained that a key part of achieving economic success is having talented people to employ, and that can happen when we focus on skills, innovations and new technologies. She highlighted the Job Corps and Apprenticeship youth training programs as being steps in the right direction.

Assistant Secretary Posny focused on the education topic and explained that the system is failing if we are not effectively educating young people with disabilities and preparing them for work. She noted that we should aim for universal design in learning so that we take into account the abilities of every child. Vocational rehabilitation counselors need to start working with parents and kids in middle school so that we are preparing them for careers before high school. Several Department of Education programs focus on these issues. Assistant Secretary Posny said that nearly 60 percent of students with disabilities in the educational system are in general education 80 percent of the day. So the greatest responsibility for teaching kids with disabilities lays with general educators, not special education teachers. Further, 88 percent of kids with disabilities are not going on to college. She noted that we need to enforce laws that are already out there, provide technical assistance, remove barriers and increase access to college for young people with disabilities.

Assistant Secretary Martinez said that she is enamored with the Job Corps program, because it is crucial for people with disabilities, and others, to see themselves doing jobs in programs that are not "special disability programs." She then turned the discussion toward her vision for increasing the employment of people with disabilities in small businesses, including those owned by minorities. Assistant Secretary Martinez also noted that small businesses can suffer from false belief that they do not have to think about disability if they have 15 employees or less.

From Classroom to Career

Key Points:

- The primary purpose of adult education is to improve the basic skills of adults for the purposes of employment, employability and self-sustaining wages.
 - Common core standards should be developed for college and career readiness and aligned with what youth need to move into postsecondary education successfully.
 - There is a need for sound and measurable postsecondary goals based upon age appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment and, where needed, independent living skills.
 - There are a lot of young people that front-line workforce professionals know have disabilities that are not documented.
 - Mentoring, internships and job shadowing (including within small businesses) are effective in helping youth attain needed soft skills.
 - Partnerships within communities are critical to bridging services and wrapping them around youth.
 - There is a critical need for youth service provider professional development.
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This breakout session examined the issue of transition for all youth, including youth with disabilities from diverse communities, and its impact on obtaining and retaining competitive employment. It was facilitated by Alex Watters, who is an American Association of People with Disabilities intern at the U.S. Department of Education. Panelists included Quardricos Driskell of the YouthBuild program; Cheryl Keenan of the Office of Vocational and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education; Marlene Simon-Burroughs, Ph.D. of the Office of Special Education

Twenty-six percent of students with disabilities do not finish high school. However, 53 percent of students want competitive employment, 50 percent want to live independently and 47 percent want to attend college.

- Marlene Simon-Burroughs, Ph.D. of the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education

Programs, U.S. Department of Education; and Sherry West of the Employment and Training Administration, U.S. Department of Labor.

The panel opened with a discussion of the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, a freestanding title within the Workforce Investment Act that helps uneducated or undereducated youth age 16 to 24.

The program aims to improve the basic skills of adults to make them employable and self-sustaining, and the initial focus was to get people to the point of high school completion through the General Education Diploma (GED). However, the concept that the GED is a terminal

goal needs to be rethought. Today, it is not enough for youth to reengage solely for a GED since it and high school diplomas both lead to low wage jobs. It was also suggested that programs produce credentials and connect to the sectors and job economies in local areas. The panel also noted that the movement of states embracing the Common Core Standards for College and Career Readiness is highly relevant for adult education. Career pathways were also discussed in conjunction with noting the difficulties of keeping youth engaged in training programs. Specifically, silo programs that teach skills need to be rethought and streamlined, that successful engagement comes from the integration of skills, that job training and college preparatory activities lead toward credentials that matter.

Discussion continued about the Individuals with Disabilities Act's (IDEA), transition services requirement that helps students with disabilities improve academics and functional achievement based on the child's individual needs, strengths and preferences, community experiences and development. Some states start transition planning when kids are age 14, stressing the importance of having age appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment and, when appropriate, independent living skills. Data compared between 1987 and 2007 shows that today's students are more likely to be at the typical grade level for their age and have an increased ability to meet academic expectations. They are also much more likely to finish high school, although nearly half still remain behind their current grade level and struggle to meet academic expectations.

The audience learned about DOL's Division of Youth Services which provides preparation for work, educational goals, support systems and mentoring. The division offers a year-round program for youth dropping out of school in order to catch those who are at risk of slipping through the cracks. About 14 to 15 percent of these youth have documented disabilities; however, many more youth have disabilities that have not been documented. An enormous number of participating youth have learning disabilities or mental health issues.

The YouthBuild program provides concentrated services to at-risk youth. For many young participants in the program, it is not just disability that is a factor in their lives. It is also other circumstances that are going on in their family setting. The YouthBuild program places students with disabilities in jobs and helps low income students transition from the academic arena to job placement. YouthBuild offers case management, home visitation, substance abuse counseling, career development, internships, job shadowing programs and more. One panelist works specifically in the Latin America Youth Center, Youth Build Public Charter School in Washington, D.C.'s Columbia Heights neighborhood. He explained that 49 percent of students there are African American, one percent are African, and 50 percent are Hispanic. Some of the students' disabilities range from bipolar disorder, dyslexia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and some other undiagnosed disabilities.

YouthBuild is a strong proponent of mentorships and internships, and Mr. Driskell noted that small businesses can get involved by offering these internships. The latter portion of the panel discussed the challenge of cultural competency. In certain cultures, a disability is a stigma, and

sometimes an individual's support system does not want to recognize or does not know how to address that the student has a disability.

The question-and-answer period explored these issues further and highlighted the need for stakeholders and service providers to work together better and communicate. The workforce development system and other partners need to pool resources and have the skills and abilities to serve youth in need.

Culture and Identity Intersections

Key Points:

- Cultural linguistic competence is the capacity to function effectively as a professional or organization to meet the needs of customers or constituents.
 - Cultural competence improves rehabilitation outcomes for individuals with disabilities across multiple measures.
 - Stigma reaches across identity categories and impacts employment statistics through employees who choose not to disclose disabilities or access accommodations.
 - The primary barrier for workers is not physical but structural and attitudinal.
 - In one Native American community, the use of elders as mentors for people with disabilities has proven effective, along with collaboration between systems.
-

This session explored issues surrounding identity for individuals with disabilities from diverse communities and how it may impact access to vocational rehabilitation and employment opportunities. It was facilitated by Andraéa Lavant from the Institute for Educational Leadership. Panelists included Dr. Fabricio Balcazar of the University of Illinois at Chicago, Dr. Margaret Price of Spelman College and Amanda Race of the Tanana Chiefs Conference Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation Program in Alaska.

The panel opened with the discussion of disability identity theory and cultural competency in the context of two research studies. The first, referred to as “The Bullet Project,” explored the outcomes of 22 individuals, primarily African-American males, with violently acquired spinal cord injury (VASCI), six of whom were trained to become peer mentors, and 16 of whom were mentees with newly acquired disabilities. Conclusions were that participants with successful goal attainment required significant professional guidance, support and a strong understanding of their cultural histories, needs and challenges, and that young men with VASCI can benefit from programs, but traditional delivery approaches such as mailings and scheduled appointments may not be effective. The second study explored whether cultural competency truly improves rehabilitation outcomes for individuals with disabilities from diverse backgrounds through a meta-analysis of 22 randomized controlled trial studies that met certain inclusion criteria. Results indicated an overall positive effect of culturally adapted rehabilitation interventions.

Following from there, this session discussed the concept of “essential functions” and how they play out relative to people with mental disabilities (Note: for the purposes of the discussion the speaker noted that she uses “mental disabilities” as an umbrella term to indicate any deviance of behavior, speech or appearance attributed to an imagined difference of the mind). Her interest in the topic stems from her personal experiences, which led her to write *Mad at*

School: Rhetorics of Mental Disability and Academic Life. This book explores the boundaries between disability and mental illness in higher education and how practices could be changed to better accommodate mental disabilities. A central theme is “kairotic” spaces, which she argues are prevalent in academia and many other workplace settings. Derived from a classical Greek word roughly translated as “opportune or appropriate,” the term refers to spaces, literal or figurative, that pair spontaneity with high levels of professional impact. Examples include meetings, conferences, classrooms, interviews, job fairs and social gatherings. These spaces heavily reflect and require people to conform to social norms, but for a person with a mental disability, for example, autism, they may be hard to navigate. Yet, fluency in such spaces is necessary for professional success, to the exclusion of many.

The session continued introducing participants to the Tanana Chiefs Conference Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation Program (TCC-TVR), which works to advance employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities within the context of tribal, cultural and traditional values of a consortium of 42 interior Alaska villages spread out over 235,000 square miles. Of the villages covered, only nine are accessible by road; the others must be reached by air or water, depending on the season. The economy is heavily reliant on subsistence work, such as hunting and fishing, and seasonal employment. Unemployment and poverty rates are high. The TCC-TVR model is culturally appropriate and in fact serves only natives (non-natives in covered villages receive services from the state VR program). For example, TVR counselors travel to consumers’ homes to better understand their resource challenges, and village elders and other community members are recruited to serve as mentors and job trainers. In delivering its services, the TCC-TVR collaborates with a range of organizations. It also engages in outreach through educational forums, articles, presentations and materials dissemination.

The question-and-answer portion of this session addressed the unique needs of people with violently acquired disabilities and whether there might be quantifiable benefits to society as a result of eventual elevation of their status. Further discussion revolved around the lack of cultural understanding or outright racism as a barrier, with several participants noting that stigmas can be very cultural and that views of disability and people with disabilities vary greatly among different ethnic and racial populations.

Community and Family Support as a Catalyst for Employment

Key Points:

- Community- and faith-based organizations are trusted institutions that tend to know the needs of their local community and often have a close link to local small businesses.
 - Community and faith-based organizations are multi-service organizations, which can be flexible in meeting both individual and employer needs, and are often well-positioned around other supportive services.
 - Congregations may need to be educated about disability issues, including disability employment issues, in the same manner as employers. Furthermore, community- and faith-based organizations are employers and can serve as role models to small businesses in employing people with disabilities.
 - In some communities, a less formal job club structure offers an alternative to traditional sector-based strategies.
 - Families are an essential element of this employment support system, and parents should convey messages of expectation and responsibility from an early age.
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This break-out session examined the role of community supports, including families, faith-based organizations and neighborhood organizations, in the successful employment of people with disabilities.

The session panelists for this session included Cathy Healy of the Parent Educational Advocacy Training Center; Gary Shaheen of Start-Up NY; Ben Siegel of the Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, U.S. Department of Labor; and Ginny Thornburgh of the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD).

The panel was kicked off with a discussion of the key role that community organizations play in helping people with disabilities succeed. The four Add Us In consortia all have a community or faith-based organization at the forefront. Community organizations are well-positioned to help connect the dots around employment for several reasons. First, they are trusted and familiar institutions in the community. Second, it is their job to know the needs of their local communities, in particular the local small businesses community; and third, they are multi-service organizations designed to be flexible and nimble. They can adjust program offerings in order to meet the needs of community members.

From an employment perspective, community organizations can be quite helpful. They know their neighbors and have a finger on the pulse of local employment opportunities. They do a lot of work with small businesses in their neighborhoods, especially in communities in low-income urban areas. They also provide important services in terms of assisting small businesses

in doing screening and assessment for job candidates, in helping small businesses develop customized training programs. They offer case management, often for people with disabilities, and they are involved in training, occupational skills development, soft skills development and more. They are also experts in supportive services such as clothing, transportation, food assistance, housing, etc. Finally, they educate small businesses on tax credits and can help them apply for these and other opportunities.

One of the newest models for increasing employment as opposed to the more traditional sector-based strategy is the less formal job club structure. Job clubs are volunteer driven support groups where unemployed people come together and expand their own professional networks by connecting with other folks, and then linking up with employers.

The panel enlightened the audience on the Start-Up program, a demonstration project funded by ODEP in late 2006. The program provides technical assistance and disseminates resources nationally to individuals interested in pursuing self-employment. Start-Up has provided training to hundreds of people with disabilities, and 60 small businesses have emerged. The program has a four quadrant approach, which addresses Self Employment Business Planning; Financial Literacy and Asset Development; Leveraging New Resources; and Work Incentives Planning. A new, positive approach the program has taken to involves interviewing and engaging people with disabilities, and rather than asking people about their physical limitations on the job, Start-Up program managers ask about their hopes, dreams and goals for employment. In addition, people with disabilities are asked whether they want a wage job, or to start their own business – a question that participants say they are seldom asked.

Discussion continued, highlighting the role that parents play in setting expectations and helping children with disabilities become successful adults. Families are all different, the final panelist explained, and we must honor the various contributions that families make to young people with disabilities. Most families want their child to grow up, get a job and move out. And when youth with disabilities reach the adult stage, families do not always continue to see themselves

If every faith-based organization in the U.S. helped just one person with a disability get hired, more than 400,000 people would join the job market.

- Ginny Thornburgh, American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD)

as a resource. They step back when their child becomes self-determined. However, parents often have to continue to be a service provider for children with disabilities, even when they are grown. They can teach them soft skills, provide transportation and leverage their personal networks to help them find jobs.

The panel closed with a focus on faith-based organizations and the role they can play in disability employment. A current effort is taking place to get congregations to sign a statement of solidarity around disability. No matter what religion they practice, most congregations need to be educated about disability

issues the same way employers do. The session explored the idea of congregations considering inserting employment into their mission statements, and starting to host employment support groups for job-seeking members where connections can be made with other congregation members who might be hiring. Further, because congregations employ people, from ordained leaders and educators, to support staff and maintenance workers, they should consider hiring people with disabilities into these positions.

Dialogue and Intersecting Themes

The final session of the National Diversity Forum was an interactive dialogue between audience members and ODEP Assistant Secretary Kathy Martinez. Participants discussed the themes that emerged in the various breakout sessions, and ways to take action.

Participants raised a number of issues concerning diversity, small businesses and disability employment. These issues related to challenges on the employer side of the spectrum (i.e., the demand side) as well as challenges facing the population of employees with disabilities (i.e., the supply side). Many supply side issues specifically addressed “pipeline” challenges concerning youth with disabilities and their readiness for the workforce.

1. Lack of Disability Knowledge Among Small Businesses

Numerous speakers and attendees noted that many small businesses may not be familiar with the business case for hiring people with disabilities and may not feel compelled to consider the disability community in their hiring or diversity practices. Further, many of the small businesses that actually do want to hire people with disabilities claim that they do not know where to find qualified candidates or how to go about starting a disability hiring program. It was noted that service providers interested in reaching small businesses must be fluent in “the language of small business.”

2. Lack of a Human Resources Function

Speakers pointed out that many small businesses do not have a dedicated HR function, so they lack awareness about diversity programs, disability hiring, etc. In other words, “they do not know what they do not know” and can ignore disability issues in general. For this reason, small business leaders and upper level managers are often more likely to be making decisions about hiring and accommodations. So a clearly articulated, top-level commitment to an inclusive workplace culture is necessary.

3. Misconceptions About Workplace Accommodations

Participants noted that small businesses may be fearful of the concept of “accommodations,” believing (incorrectly) that workplace supports are expensive and complicated to implement. They may not understand that they already provide accommodations to all of their employees and that most accommodations are low cost or no cost. Furthermore, many are unaware of services to assist, such as the Job Accommodation Network (JAN).

4. Impressions of Hiring Incentives

It was noted that small businesses may believe that hiring incentives (i.e., tax credits, the Ticket to Work program, etc.) are too complicated to pursue. Focus groups conducted by one organization in California showed that small businesses found the paperwork burdensome and daunting. In addition, some indicated that they were too afraid to call the government for help with tax incentive paperwork, but they were willing to work with independent agencies that do case work related to incentives.

5. The Need for Personal Connections to Disability

Some attendees believed that, if small businesses want to be inclusive, they should actively engage with people with disabilities and benefit from personal experiences. Specifically, businesses should be emotionally connected to the disability community and actually experience a co-worker with a disability who raises the bar for other employees in the workplace. Only by having that first-hand experience will the abstract concepts of “return-on-investment,” “loyalty” and “increased morale” really click for them. Disability needs to be perceived as something that affects all businesses.

6. Lack of Disability Knowledge Among Faith-Based Organizations

One panelist explained that congregations happen to be employers, and they should be educated about the role they can play in disability employment. Congregations hire ordained leaders, administrative staff, maintenance people and more and could consider hiring people with disabilities into these positions. Furthermore, they can help make connections between congregation members who may be hiring and people with disabilities.

7. Lack of Designation as Disability-Owned Businesses

People with disabilities can and should start their own businesses, and entrepreneurs with disabilities can benefit from supplier diversity programs that position them as preferred vendors. However, when applying for a small business loan, there is no official way to note one’s status as a disability-owned business (unless one is a disabled veteran). Also, data on disability-owned businesses is not collected. Further, large businesses that seek out suppliers with disabilities (such as accessibility testers) do not always know where to find them. Fortunately, the USBLN’s new certification program for disability-owned businesses can help businesses promote this designation and benefit from supplier diversity efforts.

8. Fears of Requesting Accommodations

Some participants noted that people with disabilities are afraid to request workplace accommodations because they do not want to be a burden to their employers or clients or be seen as “difficult” employees. One speaker expressed her wish for more programs that deliver accommodations through grants, so that there are no added costs for employers.

9. Cultural Issues and Disability

Many discussed the cultural intersection with disability that needs to be addressed (i.e., shame and emasculation in the certain communities, high incidence of disability for people of color, etc.). In order to get through to these diverse communities, disability organizations and service providers need to be culturally competent and broader in their outreach. Furthermore, cultural competence goes beyond an understanding of racial and ethnic values to encompass individuals’ socio-economic status and home and community environments.

10. Earlier Exposure to Work Experiences and Vocational Rehabilitation

Many speakers and attendees noted that young people with disabilities should be exposed to work experiences and VR much earlier in their lives, perhaps in middle school or even elementary school. Mentorships, career days, field trips and internships were cited as best practices that should occur more often. They help develop soft skills and responsibility in all youth, including those with disabilities, and set their expectations for work and career.

11. Disconnect Between Special Education and Vocational Rehabilitation Systems

Speakers identified many issues related to the early education of youth with disabilities. For instance, 88 percent of young people with disabilities do not go on to college, perhaps because there is a lack of understanding of how special education and the VR systems are interconnected. VR professionals do not always integrate and involve themselves in the lives of the students they consult with, so many young people with disabilities do not feel prepared for work life once they leave the special education system.

12. Skills of Special Educators and Mainstream Educators

Speakers pointed out that the greatest responsibility for teaching kids with disabilities lies with general educators, not special education teachers, since youth spend more time in mainstream classrooms than special education classrooms. Further, while “A” students and “D” students receive lots of attention, students with disabilities are often in the middle of the pack and fall through the cracks. Some attendees questioned whether there should be more credentialing for teachers so that all are prepared to serve students with disabilities and set expectations for employment.

13. The Role of Families in Setting Expectations

Many participants noted that families are one of the most important components in preparing a pipeline of qualified employees with disabilities. Parents and family members often have to continue to be a service provider for kids with disabilities, even when they are grown. They can teach them soft skills, provide transportation and leverage their personal networks to help them find jobs. Messages of expectation and responsibility start at home and should be reinforced from an early age.

Key Points and Intersecting Themes: From Policy to Action

The key points during each session at the National Diversity Forum and their intersecting themes broadly fell into four policy strategy areas:

- Business
- Accommodations
- Partnering and Collaboration
- Education/Youth

Using a stepped approach, these four policy strategy areas provided a framework around which action steps were identified, using key points and their intersecting themes as a bridge. It is important to note that there is some overlap between the policy strategy areas, particularly as they break down into specific action steps.

Table No. 1: Policy Strategy Areas to Intersecting Themes

| Intersecting Themes | Policy Strategy Areas | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|------------------------------|-----------------|
| | Business | Accommodations | Partnering and Collaboration | Education/Youth |
| Lack of Disability Knowledge Among Small Businesses | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| Lack of a Human Resources Function | ✓ | | | |
| Misconceptions About Workplace Accommodations | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Impressions of Hiring Incentives | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| The Need for Personal Connections to Disability | ✓ | | | |
| Lack of Disability Knowledge Among Faith-Based Organizations | | | ✓ | |
| Lack of Designation as Disability-Owned Businesses | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| Fears of Requesting Accommodations | | ✓ | | |
| Cultural Issues and Disability | | | ✓ | |
| Earlier Exposure to Work Experiences and Vocational Rehabilitation | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Skills of Special Educators and Mainstream Educators | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| The Role of Families in Setting Expectations | | | ✓ | ✓ |

Table No. 2: Policy Focus Areas to Key Points

| Policy Strategy Areas | Key Points |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Business | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The CEO or leader, the controller or whoever in the organization regardless of size is most likely to understand financial motivations and benefit, and managerial staff. • Companies marketing to people with disabilities can reach as many as four in every ten customers. • It is critical to support small businesses so they have adequate access to capital; this will create more jobs and help lift the economy. • Small business owners have neither the capacity nor the time to specifically target different communities. Thus, increased awareness of opportunities, networks and incentives is critical for small businesses that may not have the resources to seek supports for disability hiring on their own. • Small businesses and entrepreneurs respond well to and typically respect other small businesses and entrepreneurs. • Disability-owned business certification could be a key element of infusing disability into corporate diversity efforts. |
| Accommodations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is prudent for employers to provide access to tools, resources and career opportunities to enable the employee to do his or her best. • Accommodations can be addressed via creativity as much as cost. • Businesses make accommodations for employees all the time, but may not realize it. For example, they may accommodate smokers because they cannot smoke inside; they may accommodate short or tall people by having machines at a wide range of heights. • With regard to accommodations, the most common for small businesses related to flexibility and HR policy. A difference between large and small businesses is who makes accommodations decisions—the CEO or president is much more involved in small businesses. • Some of the most common questions from business are about clarity and productivity. • Stigmas reach across identity categories and impact employment statistics through employees who choose not to disclose disabilities or access accommodations. |
| Partnering and Collaboration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community- and faith-based organizations can be trusted institutions that know the needs of their local community and often have a close link to local small businesses. • Community and faith-based organizations are multi-service organizations, can be flexible in meeting both individual and employer needs and are often well positioned around other supportive services. • Congregations may need to be educated about disability issues, including disability employment issues, in the same manner as employers. Furthermore, community- and faith-based organizations are employers |

| | |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | <p>and can serve as role models to small businesses in employing people with disabilities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In some communities, a less formal job club structure offers an alternative to traditional sector-based strategies. • Families are an essential element of this employment support system, and parents should convey messages of expectation and responsibility from an early age. |
| Education/Youth | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The primary purpose of adult education is to improve the basic skills of adults for the purposes of employment, employability and self-sustaining wages. • Common core standards should be developed for college and career readiness as a concept and assessing it for alignment with what youth need to move into postsecondary education successfully without going into developmental education. • It is important to integrate different skills into pathway programs that actually accelerate learning • There is a need for sound and measurable postsecondary goals based upon age appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment and, if needed, independent living skills. • There are a lot of young people that front-line service providers know have disabilities that have not been documented. • Mentoring, internships and job shadowing (including within small businesses) are particularly effective in helping youth attain needed soft skills. • Partnerships within communities are critical to bridging services and wrapping them around youth. • There is a critical need for youth service providers' professional development. |

Table No. 3: Policy Focus Areas to Action Steps

| Policy Strategy Areas | Action Steps |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Business | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore and execute new and improved outreach tactics to reach small businesses with messaging about the disability dividend and teach strategies for implementing diversity/disability employment practices. • Pursue partnerships with people and groups outside the disability community to reach broader audiences. • Leverage testimonials from small, minority-owned businesses that have experienced the benefits of disability/diversity hiring and supplier diversity programming. • Seek opportunities to bring together large businesses with a track record of success in disability employment with small businesses through business-to-business peer counseling or mentorships or information |

| | |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | <p>exchanges.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work to infuse disability employment issues into business school curricula. • Work to simplify the administrative hassles of pursuing hiring incentives. • Raise awareness of assistance available to help small businesses pursue perception of the purpose of hiring incentives from one of charity to one of untapped talent and economic opportunity. • Educate employers about tax incentives, such as the Small Business Tax Credit and Architectural/Transportation Tax Deduction, which can offset the cost of accommodations. • Promote Disability Supplier Diversity Program, to increase both the number of certified businesses and the number of businesses working with them. |
| Accommodations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplify accommodations processes so that they are not perceived as a burden to employers or employees with disabilities. • Educate individuals with disabilities and workforce development and vocational rehabilitation service providers on how to discuss accommodations in the context of productivity. |
| Partnering and Collaboration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate congregations/faith-based organizations on the role they can play in hiring people with disabilities and making job connections for their members with disabilities. • Explore the possibility of grant programs through DOL's Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships to increase such organizations' capacity to improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities from diverse populations. • Educate families on the role they play in setting work expectations among youth with disabilities, making job connections and providing employment supports to these individuals once they are grown. • Ensure that related activities use messaging that considers cultural perceptions of disability. |
| Education/Youth | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand professional development opportunities for mainstream and special education teachers and other youth service professionals to improve their credentialing and skills in setting expectations for employment as well as promoting self-awareness and career exploration among students with disabilities. • Work to Change current practice so that youth are exposed to work experiences and vocational rehabilitation earlier (in middle school or prior) and ensure these experiences incorporate entrepreneurship. • Expand the reach of Disability Mentoring Day by weaving in cultural competencies. • Seek participation of minorities within disability programs such as internship programs. • Expand the reach of Project SEARCH and implement efforts to ensure it incorporates students from diverse populations. • Expand opportunities for youth service provider professional development. |

Next Steps

In addition to the rich dialogue that transpired at the National Diversity Forum, the event itself was a milestone, marking the first time DOL/ODEP convened thought leaders from so many perspectives to specifically explore the intersection between disability, diversity and small business.

As mentioned in the previous section, the key points and intersecting issues identified during the National Diversity Forum provide a framework of action steps for ODEP and the Add Us In initiative, especially as the first four grantees move into their second years and the second round of grants are implemented. Translated into concrete action steps, they can also serve as a useful guide in evaluating the success of the grant program and ODEP's overall efforts to further integrate disability into diversity in the context of business.

Next steps may include the following:

- Share the report with participants and other key stakeholders, as well as relevant ODEP and DOL personnel involved and/or interested in the Add Us In initiative.
- Map out the relevant federal agencies with missions and activities that relate to key issues and gather their leaders for a high-level strategy meeting.
- Facilitate ongoing dialogue between event participants to encourage the continued sharing of ideas and experiences around the topics discussed.
- Hold a series of small follow-on working meetings, each focused on key strategy areas as a way to flesh out corresponding recommendations and develop implementation plans.
- Publish a series of articles or blog posts based on the intersecting themes.
- Incorporate identified action steps into ODEP's strategic planning process.
- Prepare and share a year-out follow-up report noting progress made on action steps.
- Prepare and publish a year-out follow-up report noting progress made on identified action steps.