Disability Employment Initiative

Why the initiative…

To thrive in the competitive international marketplace, employers need access to a diverse pool of qualified job applicants. These federal grants expand that pool and show our commitment to creating career pathways and employment opportunities that result in economic self-sufficiency for people with disabilities.

— Secretary of Labor
Thomas E. Perez

The unemployment rate of Americans with disabilities has steadily increased for decades. In short, hundreds of thousands of potential workers with disabilities have been unable to find employment, increasing their need for government benefits and limiting their ability to be economically self-sufficient and participate in their communities like their employed counterparts. In recent years, our public workforce system has been more systematically addressing this issue. Through a variety of pilot programs, our public workforce system has identified many promising practices for enhancing its capacity to better serve persons with disabilities and offer career pathway opportunities that provide entry to the middle class.

These successful strategies provide great potential to assist unemployed and underemployed Americans with disabilities in finding gainful employment to improve their quality of life, reduce their need for supplemental government supports and, ultimately, allow them to strengthen and improve our workforce by becoming a more active part of it. The DEI, along with similar initiatives, supports these efforts by refining and replicating promising practices throughout our public workforce system.

The DEI Design

The DEI comprises three primary components: cooperative agreements, technical assistance to the grantees and the public workforce system, and evaluation of the grantees' activities to measure their outcomes and impact on both the individuals and the system. The goal of the DEI is to improve the education, training, and employment opportunities and outcomes of youth and adults with disabilities who are unemployed, underemployed, and/or receiving Social Security disability benefits.

It improves coordination and collaboration among employment and training programs, across multiple service delivery systems, at state and local levels, and builds effective community partnerships that leverage public and private resources to better serve individuals with disabilities and improve their employment outcomes.

A joint effort of the Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration (ETA) and Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), the DEI brings together local, state and Federal agencies, as well as community-based agencies and organizations to achieve its goals. Of particular note, the DEI requires that its grantees participate in the Social Security Administration's (SSA) Ticket to Work Program to improve the coordination of services to customers of the public workforce system who also receive SSA disability benefits.

Since 2010, four rounds of projects have been funded for three-year periods. Round One (nine) in 2010 at $22 million; Round Two (seven) in 2011 at $21 million; Round Three (seven) in 2012 at $20 million; and a fourth round (eight) funded in 2013 at $18 million. Each grant is designed to implement successful strategies to promote the employment of either adults or youth with disabilities.

For More Information

For more information about the DEI, visit https://disability.workforce3one.org/page/tag/dei_project and http://www.dei-ideas.org.

The DEI "will improve the accessibility and accountability of the public workforce development system for individuals with disabilities [and]…continue promising practices implemented by disability program navigators, including effective deployment of staff in selected States to…better serve individuals with disabilities and improve employment outcomes.

— The Appropriation Committee Senate Report 111–66 on H.R. 3292

DEI Grantees

* Alabama (Round 4)
* Alaska (Round 1 and 4)
* Arkansas (Round 1)
* California (Round 2)
* Connecticut (Round 4)
* Delaware (Round 1)
* Florida (Round 3)
* Hawaii (Round 2)
* Idaho (Round 4)
* Illinois (Round 1 and 4)
* Indiana (Round 3)
* Iowa (Round 3)
* Kansas (Round 1)
* Louisiana (Round 3)
* Maine (Round 1 and 4)
* Massachusetts (Round 3)
* Minnesota (Round 3)
* New Jersey (Round 1)
* New York (Round 1 and 4)
* Ohio (Round 2)
* Rhode Island (Round 3)
* South Dakota (Round 2)
* Tennessee (Round 2)
* Virginia (Round 1 and 4)
* Washington (Round 2)
* Wisconsin (Round 2)

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