Disability Inclusion Roadmap

Disability inclusion is a journey. Whether you’re at the very beginning or further along, this easy-to-follow guide can help your company take the next step.

NOD is here to help at every point along the way!

Editors’ Note: This short guide is intended to serve as an introduction to corporate disability inclusion; please contact us for more detailed information. Additionally, although the steps below build upon each other, this guide is not meant to be followed linearly. If you’re already at Step 3, start there. If skipping a step makes sense, then skip it! And if you have any questions about this guide, let us know.

Step 1: Know Yourself

The only way to grow your company’s level of inclusion is to know where you currently stand. For instance, do you know:

- Your company’s current self-identification (self-ID) rate\(^1\)?
- Whether your employee handbooks and references are accessible\(^2\)?
- Whether you have a formal, published accommodations policy?
- How many accommodations requests you’ve received? How many were fulfilled?

You’ll also need to identify opportunities and define clear goals. Inclusion goes well beyond hiring—you can increase your levels of accessibility, enhance your self-identification rates, increase your partnerships with disability-owned businesses, and so forth.

So how do you start answering these questions and identifying areas of inclusion that are ripe for growth and fit your business and community goals? Some actions to consider:

- Take NOD’s Disability Employment Tracker™: This free, confidential, in-depth review of your current disability inclusion programs and policies will show not just how your company is doing, but how your level of inclusion compares to 200+ other companies
- Disability Inclusion Accelerator™: After you’ve taken the Disability Employment Tracker, NOD can take you on a deeper dive of your data and help you mine them for

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\(^1\) A self-ID rate is the proportion of employees who report identifying as a person with a disability. According to NOD’s Disability Employment Tracker data, the national average rate is roughly 3.9%

\(^2\) Accessibility refers to the degree to which individuals with disabilities can utilize, access, or otherwise engage with physical or non-physical spaces, processes, and materials.
high-utility insights. NOD will then recommend next steps and best practices specific to your company’s needs to generate a clear, strategic plan for achieving your disability inclusion goals.

**Step 2: Build the Business Case**

Once you can clearly articulate your disability inclusion goals, you’ll need to **build a business case** to secure buy-in from senior leaders and across business units. Disability inclusion, as with any diversity segment, only works if the whole company is on the same page.

The business case might include:

- Inclusive policies and design benefit all employees and enhance their happiness, productivity, and longevity at work

- Improve product & service offerings as well as brand positioning to better tap the multi-trillion-dollar disability consumer market

[Click here for a more robust guide on the many bottom line benefits of disability inclusion](#), including in profitability, employee engagement and tenure, and other areas.

**Step 3: Align Leadership + Form Coalitions**

Now that you can clearly articulate the business case for improving your level of disability inclusion, it will be important to rally support from colleagues as well as senior leadership.

- Engage the appropriate employee network groups (ERGs/BRGs³) at your company and talk to your employees about what their interests and needs are. ERGs are a valuable sources of information, but also terrific for securing employee buy-in for key programs and policies. Don’t have a disability-focused ERG at your company? It’s never too late to explore forming one! [NOD can help](#).

- If you are a member of an ERG or other employee network, it can be immeasurably impactful to find an executive sponsor or other key internal advocate. These individuals can help boost the voice of your group within your organization and enhance your ability to secure resources for employees with disabilities.⁴

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³ Employee and Business Resource Groups (ERG or BRG, respectively) are typically self-directed, interest or demographic-specific groups within companies. Their authority and financing varies, but groups typically function to enable co-learning and advise leadership on matters relevant to groups’ interests (such as disability inclusion)

⁴ Want to reduce barriers to inclusion and gain executive support for your ERG? Check out this [helpful blog](#) from Getting Hired!
Step 4: Design Inclusive Policies

- Now that you’re having these important conversations with stakeholders, including HR representatives and senior leaders, it’s valuable to formalize decisions into policies and practices

- Policies should be standard enough to build culture and set expectations, but also flexible enough to accommodate your entire workforce

- Policies might cover things like flex-time, adaptable interview and candidate screening protocols, access to adaptive technology, or other matters

- Policies only work if people know them! Include policies in the appropriate employee reference materials, and alert stakeholders through internal communications channels

Step 5: Continue Building Your Culture

Because disability inclusion is a growing priority at your company, you have clearly developed a strong, inclusive, and forward-thinking culture. Way to go! But we can always do more to support the talented people we have now, and be more welcoming to jobseekers and people we’ll add soon.

It’s important that your company be in compliance with regulations, but culture is essential, too. There are many ways to signal that inclusion matters to your company, including:

- **Disability awareness and etiquette trainings**, which prepare all employees to interact with and be comfortable around each other, including embracing each other’s differences as strengths

- Formalize and actively publicize your workplace accommodations policies to destigmatize requests and encourage employees to ask for the support that they need

- Become members of inclusion and learning networks, like NOD’s Corporate Leadership Council. Membership generates visibility and goodwill for your company, and tells employees that inclusion is an area of emphasis

- Have leadership talk about their own disabilities, if appropriate. Such dialogue sends a very powerful signal to employees, job seekers, and consumers alike that it’s okay to talk about our challenges, ask for help, and support each other

- Highlight people with disabilities in your communications materials. It’s easy to do and sends a strong message! Better yet, [join the #LookCloser campaign](https://example.com) and be an official partner in advancing disability inclusion
Step 6: Get to Hiring + Empower the Folks You’ve Got

Now that you’re as strong culturally as you’ve been, it’s time to start bringing people in. And since you’ve reached this step, you may have found that it’s difficult to find candidates with disabilities. Your company may be regional or national, but hiring is a local challenge. As such, you’ll need to find trusted partners who can help source the right local candidates.

Once again, NOD can help.

In addition to hiring new candidates with disabilities, you likely already have more people with disabilities working for you than you realize. 1-in-4 Americans has a disability; that’s 25%. And yet, only 3% of the workforce identifies as a person with a disability. Either they don’t know they qualify, or they’re not telling you. Why does this matter?

- Increasing your self-ID rate will better position you to develop policies and procedures that work for ALL of your employees. Getting Hired explains why

- As a result, you’ll enjoy enhanced awareness of their needs, signal to jobseekers and consumers that yours is an inclusive environment, and earn public recognitions from the Federal Government and leading disability organizations like NOD

Step 7: Measure, Evaluate, Refine, Repeat

Inclusion is a journey that doesn’t end—there is no finish line. We can always strive to improve. To do so, we need to study what we’re doing: what’s working, what’s not, and what needs tinkering. So we’re back where we started; right where we’re supposed to be.

- This is why NOD’s Disability Employment Tracker is an annual survey. It’s intended to be completed every year
- Track your level of employee engagement and correlate it to your level of disability inclusion. You might find there’s a relationship...
- Continue to make the business case for inclusion. Find new areas towards which to strive. Maybe last year you focused on culture and self-ID rate, and this year is about hiring

There are no cookie cutter solutions. And if you know you want to do more but you’re not sure what (or you’re not sure how), the experts at NOD are always here to help.
About The Authoring Organizations:

The National Organization on Disability is a 36-year-old nonprofit organization which works with American corporations to advance their level of disability inclusion—whatever stage of the journey they are in. Think your company or a company you know could be more inclusive? **Contact us**! NOD’s team of disability inclusion experts is at your disposal.

Getting Hired also contributed to this *Disability Inclusion Roadmap*. Getting Hired, an Allegis Group Company, is a recruitment solution dedicated to helping inclusive employers and advocacy organizations hire professional individuals and veterans with disabilities. We provide employers with a full-service solution for attracting and retaining talent to meet their goals while also providing job seekers with a fully-accessible career portal and educational resources. **Contact us** to learn more about our partnership with NOD and to learn how our team can help you on your disability inclusion journey!