National Organization on Disability
Invest In Ability
To Ensure No Human Potential Ever Goes To Waste

A Letter from the Chairman & President

When the National Organization on Disability was founded in 1982, it was the first organization in the United States to represent every person with a disability, regardless of particular needs or circumstances. To have a disability in America is to belong to a large extended community — one out of every five of us fits the description — that includes immense diversity, but also common threads of shared experience.

So from the beginning, NOD was a link, a bridge-builder dedicated to removing the separations that fence people off from the wider community. And today, we focus the whole of our energy on eliminating the most wasteful and isolating of all those barriers: the artificial gulf that keeps tens of millions of people out of the productive workforce.

Fortunately, employers have enormous incentives to find, train, welcome, retain, and promote new sources of talent. And the disability workforce may well be the richest talent pool still broadly untapped — ready, willing, and most of all, able to supply the dedication and ingenuity that will fuel the workforce of the 21st century.

NOD therefore works with employers to supply whatever help is needed to understand where the missed opportunities lie, to find the right people to fill the gaps, and to ensure that those employees have the means to excel.

With tools and services like NOD’s unique Disability Employment Tracker,™ the Disability Inclusion Accelerator,™ and an array of advice and consulting — all of it described more fully in the following pages — we offer the most complete, custom-suited suite of professional services for employers
dedicated to assembling a diverse and effective workforce. Each of these is rooted in extensive data and analysis, ensuring that every service is market-tested and data-driven.

We also serve as a communication channel among employers, and a link between employers and the country’s best disability service providers. NOD’s Corporate Leadership Council is a network for the companies and executives committed to disability inclusion. Our Leading Disability Employer Seal annually recognizes the companies who do it best — and spotlights the smart practices that make them leaders.

Most of all, NOD is committed to a simple but profound mission: to ensure that no talent, no ability, no human potential ever goes to waste, and that everyone who aspires to contribute and achieve will be part of a labor market and a society that values their ability, welcomes their energy, and rewards their dedication to excellence.

- Tom Ridge, Chairman & Carol Glazer, President

**Every Talent, Every Skill, Every Ability**

For American business, the quest for talent — the most gifted, the most driven, the most committed — has become the defining challenge of the 21st century. The massive wave of baby boom retirement, plus the surge of competition for skills, creativity, and loyalty, has created a shortage — not just of workers, but of the best workers, the ones who imagine, persevere, overcome challenges, and exceed expectations.

Yet strangely, major segments of corporate America continue to overlook a pool of available employees who excel in just these ways. People with disabilities spend their lives ignoring discouragement, persisting through setbacks, solving problems, and finding creative routes around obstacles. They are a rich supply of talent, ready to be tapped, at a time when talent is at a premium.

This fact is more than field-tested: the employers who do hire from this pool consistently rank employees with disabilities among their best, most dedicated workers, with some of the lowest rates of turnover. Furthermore, surveys confirm that customers tend to favor companies that make the effort.

And yet, barely one-fifth of people with disabilities have found a job.

Something is wrong. A critical connection is being missed — at enormous cost in individual lives, in productivity, and in the corporate bottom line.

This failure to employ the majority of a ready and able workforce is even more troubling for business now, when a recent rule requires federal contractors to show measurable progress toward filling 7 percent of their jobs, at all levels, with employees with disabilities. For businesses covered by this rule — which together employ one in four American workers — missing out on the disability labor force will be costly both in productivity and in regulatory compliance.

Admittedly, finding the right workers in any labor pool — especially one not yet fully familiar to many employers — may demand some skills and types of effort that are out of the ordinary. For that, the National Organization on Disability — for 35 years the nation’s preeminent link between people with disabilities and the wider world of employment, independence, and community — offers companies a complete set of solutions.
NOD is the national leader in helping business tap the disability labor force. We don’t just analyze, advise, and assess; we make the journey with companies, from initial exploration through stage after stage of improvement, all the way to success.

NOD is a partner to business, to education and service organizations, to government, to philanthropy, and most of all, to the tens of millions of people with disabilities eager to work and ready to take a full and equal role in our national progress. Our strength derives from our mission, from the extent and quality of the professional services we offer employers, from our personal experiences of disability, and from the leadership we mobilize to ensure that people with disabilities enjoy full opportunity for employment, enterprise, and earnings, and that employers know how to make the most of their talents.

Our Mission
The National Organization on Disability is a labor-market leader with a mission: to break down the wall that separates the abilities and aspirations of 57 million Americans from the avenues of opportunity, achievement, and fulfillment that come from productive employment. We help America put ability to work.

It’s a steep challenge. Today, just 20 percent of people with disabilities are in the labor force. Among the rest of the population, the percentage is more than three times higher. More than two-thirds of people with disabilities are living in poverty, a rate almost twice as high as for everyone else. People with disabilities are far more likely to struggle financially, close to twice as likely to forgo needed health care, and more than three times as likely to generally feel unsatisfied with their lives.

A rewarding job at a fair wage may not eliminate all these disparities — but it goes a long way.

For us, and for the donors and foundations who generously support us, the labor market is not just an exchange-place for employers and employees. It is the gateway to individual accomplishment and independence. We have focused our entire mission on achieving equity in the labor market, because
that is where ability contributes to national prosperity, to business success, and most of all, to personal satisfaction, independence, and growth.

It’s the force of this mission that makes us a decisive voice in national policy on disability in the workforce. That’s what made it possible for NOD to play a pivotal role in the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990. It’s what gave us the credibility in 2013 to advance more workable disability-hiring requirements for federal contractors, resulting in changes that are more focused on results than red tape.

And it’s our mission that makes us more than an adviser to corporations or a bridge between employers and disability service providers — though we’ve excelled in those roles and are committed to doing even more. We provide those services because, for NOD, every unused talent is a promise unkept, a hope defeated — because, in the labor market, as in every aspect of life, it’s ability that counts.

Professional Services
NOD is a social enterprise that speaks the language of business and of disability. We understand performance. We are at home with metrics, we think with data, and we know firsthand the management techniques that turn good intentions into efficient, durable solutions.

What we know about disability in the American labor market comes not from theory or conjecture, but straight from employers — in the form of solid, continuously updated data.

It starts with our Disability Employment Tracker™, a free, confidential survey that lets companies assess their disability employment practices and compare them with those of other employers — both the average and the very best. Not only does using the Tracker provide a company with a benchmark of its
performance, it also incorporates that company’s data, anonymously, into the growing database on industry practices nationwide. So the information flows both ways: companies learn how they are doing and how they can improve, based on real-world data, and with every additional company using the Tracker, the national database grows richer and more powerful. It now contains extensive data on more than 200 employers with an aggregate workforce of over 5,100,000 people.

But that’s just the diagnostics. Armed with information from the Tracker, NOD works side-by-side with management to identify needs and opportunities and chart a path to improvement. Our Disability Inclusion Accelerator™ turns an in-depth analysis of the Tracker results into a customized action plan for raising performance and getting the best results for the company and its employees. The plan starts with some quick wins, and proceeds upward to medium and long-term actions tailored to each business.

The service can then move on to higher levels, where NOD helps assess current practices in greater depth and assembles a full program and implementation plan that incorporates the best practices in the marketplace. We can help develop talent pipelines in targeted locations, connecting employers with the most outstanding recruitment and training programs and services in each area. NOD offers a complete assortment of specialized consulting services, including disability awareness and etiquette training, to meet each company’s particular needs. Altogether, our work has directly resulted in jobs for over 1,000 Americans with disabilities, and we’ve delivered disability inclusion and etiquette training to more than 2,000 managers and co-workers.

We’re continually updating and enriching our professional services, as our data and experience grow. For example, we are piloting a Campus to Careers initiative, designed to help companies attract graduating college students with disabilities. Given that the federal disability hiring target applies to every level of personnel, employers tell us they’ve been particularly challenged to fill mid-level positions requiring a college degree. And job-seekers with disabilities say the same thing: Only 25 percent of college graduates with disabilities have a job, compared with 76 percent of others. This is clearly a gap that needs to be filled, and one on which we’re determined to make a difference.
Leadership

The goal of putting every ability to work isn’t unique to NOD nor is it reserved to disability organizations. It’s a calling to everyone — business, government, civil society, and philanthropy — acting together. Our mission therefore

Includes building partnerships, coalitions, and forums where the best minds and the most committed leaders can work together, support one another’s progress, and help us spread the word.

At NOD, the most concrete expression of that vision is our corporate leadership council — a network of executive and human-resource leaders in companies dedicated to disability inclusion. Members share insights on trends in disability employment and experience with techniques for hiring, onboarding, retention, and advancement. They benefit from inside access to NOD’s expertise, including learning forums, webinars, and one-on-one fast-track consulting with our employment experts. They become adept at promoting inclusion within their own companies and among their peers in business. And they gain national recognition as leaders in the top tier of companies that seek out and nurture talent from people of every kind of ability.

Once a year NOD recognizes outstanding employers with our Leading Disability Employer Seal™. This public, annual recognition is designed not only to applaud those companies that are leading the way in disability hiring, but also to encourage others to consider the many benefits of making an inclusive workforce a priority. The selection is data-driven — informed by measures of performance and standards collected in the Tracker.

But far beyond the circle of committed employers, and even beyond the boundaries of private industry as a whole, NOD’s dedication to communication and advocacy for employees and job-seekers with disabilities is at the core of who we are. Because of our relationships with business and the media; the trove of information in our databases; our decades-long relationship with foundations, workforce development and other leading disability organizations; and our influence in Washington and state capitals nationwide, NOD’s voice for disability employment is widely recognized, highly respected, and deeply credible.

And our message — the message of the companies we support, of our partner organizations and service providers in the field, and of 57 million Americans with disabilities — is reaching a more receptive audience, at a time of more urgent need, than ever before. The message is that the talent America demands is right in front of us — ready, willing, and most of all, able to supply the dedication and ingenuity that will power the workforce of the 21st century.

Together, we can put to use the energies of every person in this country — every talent, every skill, every ability — and ensure that everyone has a full and equal chance to play a part in our national progress.
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