

Mentoring as a Disability Inclusion Strategy

A mentoring program is a talent-development and retention strategy, one that uses the organization's human resources to improve employee satisfaction, develop leaders and teach new skills. Mentoring is also an effective tool for increasing and shaping inclusive culture.

Traditionally defined, mentoring means a one-on-one relationship through which a senior-level person (the mentor) motivates and supports the personal or professional development of a more junior person (the mentee). Today, however, mentoring has evolved to also include a variety of models, including virtual, peer, reverse-and-flash programs. And, in many organizations, "mentoring cultures" are being established to encourage "natural mentoring" to occur without specific program parameters.

A Diversity Best Practices survey found that 70 percent of companies surveyed offered formal diversity mentoring programs.¹ In the disability inclusion space, more and more employers are coordinating or participating in mentoring programs to improve recruitment, retention and advancement of individuals with disabilities, facilitating their success during their early years with an organization.

Ready to implement effective mentoring strategies to impact your disability inclusion outcomes? The Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN) recommends the following steps:

ADOPTING A MENTORING CULTURE IN YOUR ORGANIZATION

- ➔ Conduct a needs assessment
- ➔ Lay the groundwork and set the program objectives
- ➔ Align the mentoring program with organizational goals, strategies and mission
- ➔ Develop the mentoring program
- ➔ Train the participants
- ➔ Develop a mentoring program roadmap
- ➔ Gain senior leadership support
- ➔ Recruit a program manager
- ➔ Create a steering committee – or enlist an Employee Resource Group (ERG) to lead the effort

IMPLEMENTING SUCCESSFUL MENTORING STRATEGIES

- ➔ Create, and update as needed, an individualized mentoring plan
- ➔ Complete a professional or personal assessment
- ➔ Conduct interviews with other mentors
- ➔ Define professional development goals
- ➔ Develop a professional development plan
- ➔ Attend professional networking or learning activities
- ➔ Submit feedback and progress updates to appropriate staff

MENTORING AS A DISABILITY INCLUSION STRATEGY

A mentoring program can have a positive impact on an organization, improving employee retention and engagement, and enriching workplace culture. It can also serve as an organizational strategy towards disability inclusion and diversity success.

MENTORING PROGRAM EXAMPLES AND RESOURCES

Cultivating Leadership: Mentoring Youth with Disabilities

Background from the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP).

www.DOL.gov/odep/pubs/fact/cultivate.htm

Toolkit for Establishing and Maintaining Successful Employee Resource Groups

A publication from EARN.

www.AskEARN.org/wp-content/uploads/docs/erg_toolkit.pdf

Disability Mentoring Day (DMD)

Coordinated by the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD), this large-scale national effort takes place the third Wednesday of every October. Employers may participate in DMD and also consider using October, National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM), to launch a mentoring program. www.AAPD.com/disability-mentoring-day

Disability:IN Mentorship Exchange and Talent Accelerator

Disability:IN's Mentorship Exchange is a six-month career mentoring opportunity that links at least 200 college students and recent graduates with disabilities to business professionals from Disability:IN partner companies.

The Disability:IN Talent Accelerator is a free two-day networking and career readiness opportunity for college students and recent graduates with disabilities, which takes place in conjunction with the Disability:IN Annual Conference.

<https://disabilityin.org/what-we-do/nextgen-leaders/>

Pearson Mentorship Program for Students and Young Professionals with Disabilities

Hosted by Pearson and the National Federation of the Blind, this program provides guidance, support and advice from experienced Pearson professionals working in a variety of legal-related positions to students and recent graduates who are blind or have low vision.

<https://www.pearson.com/corporate/news/media/news-announcements/2017/08/pearson-announces-expansion-of-mentorship-program-for-students-a.html>

National Disability Mentoring Coalition

Brings together more than 60 organizations focused on improving the awareness, quality and impact of mentoring for youth and adults with disabilities. Members include nonprofits, employers, higher education institutions, foundations and government agencies.

<https://ndmc.pyd.org/>

MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership

Aims to fuel the quality and quantity of mentoring relationships for America's young people and to close the mentoring gap for the one in three young people growing up without this critical support.

<https://www.mentoring.org/>

The Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN) is a resource for employers seeking to recruit, hire, retain and advance qualified employees with disabilities. It is funded by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy under a cooperative agreement with The Viscardi Center. For more information, visit AskEARN.org.

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