



UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
Washington, DC 20415

The Director

Thursday, May 4, 2000

MEMORANDUM FOR: Heads Of Executive Departments And Agencies

FROM: Janice R. Lachance DIRECTOR

Subject: Adding Talent: Hiring and Promoting People with Disabilities in the Federal Government

This is a new era in the quest for talent. Our Government should reflect the rich diversity of America and provide opportunities to persons of all backgrounds, origins, and abilities. It is essential that we use the resources, talents, and skills of one of the country's untapped resources, people with disabilities.

Background

On March 13, 1998, the President issued Executive Order 13078, Increasing Employment of Adults with Disabilities which established a Presidential Task Force on Employment of Adults with Disabilities. The Task Force's mission is to create a coordinated and aggressive national policy to increase the number of gainfully employed adults with disabilities. To make the Federal Government a model employer of people with disabilities, the President asked Federal agencies to review their programs and policies affecting the employment of people with disabilities and take immediate action.

Last October, the President released a landmark plan, "Accessing Opportunity: The Plan for Employment of People with Disabilities in the Federal Government" and its companion employment guide. OPM developed both documents to provide agencies detailed resources as they recruit, hire, train, and promote people with disabilities. The President directed Federal agencies to implement the plan and use it to both further the representation of people with disabilities and meet their workforce planning needs. We must attract candidates with disabilities from inside and outside the Federal Government. From students to managers and supervisors and senior executives, we must explore ways to recruit from all sources when filling positions.

How to Make It Happen

Many departments and independent agencies are motivated to remove barriers and increase their participation in special recruitment and hiring initiatives as well as developmental opportunities. While we have made substantial progress toward inclusion, we must make better use of hiring authorities, resources for accommodating people with disabilities, and FTE flexibility.

To hire people with disabilities, Federal departments and agencies can use any of the many hiring authorities listed in Attachment 1.

- One authority allows you to convert an employee to the competitive service by using a program designed to help qualified physically impaired persons obtain employment in positions which are consistent with their level of skills and abilities, at grades GS 1-15 or under the Federal wage system (5 CFR 213.3102(u)).
- Another authority allows you to hire a disabled person on a temporary basis for short term appointments not to exceed 120 days (5 CFR 213.3102(i)(3)).
- The Student Educational Employment Program allows for hiring of students attending any accredited high school, college, or vocational/technical school year round. Under this flexible hiring program, students can be appointed to temporary positions or a work study (cooperative education) program. The work study program provides eligibility for conversion to permanent employment upon successful completion of educational and program requirements (5 CFR 213.3202).

In addition, OPM recently proposed regulations that will provide individuals with psychiatric disabilities the same opportunity for conversion into the competitive civil service as employees with other disabilities. We plan to issue final regulations in the summer of 2000.

For permanent and summer recruitment purposes, we recommend use of the Workforce Recruitment Program sponsored by the President's Committee for the Employment of People with Disabilities and the Department of Defense. It is a resource for employers nationwide to identify qualified temporary and permanent employees from a variety of fields. Its database contains the resume of more than 1,200 students and recent college graduates with disabilities. Attachment 2 provides more information about the program.

To help accommodate people with disabilities, several Governmentwide resources are available. For instance:

- The Department of Defense's Computer/Electronic Accommodations Program (CAP) provides an extensive resource directory which is accessible on their web site at tricare.osd.mil/cap/resources/resources.htm.
- The President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities offers a free resource of up-to-date information about accommodations networks, devices, and strategies. The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) may be accessed by telephone at 1-800-526-7234 or at janweb.icdi.wvu.edu/english/homeus.htm.

Agencies should not consider FTE limitations a barrier to hiring people with disabilities. The FTE policy, as published in the President's Budget, is to provide agencies with flexibility to hire the right numbers of staff to meet program requirements. This policy, which was promulgated by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), has been in place for several years. Among other things, it allows agencies to participate in special hiring initiatives, such as those focused on summer jobs and students with disabilities.

As Federal employers, we must ensure that people with disabilities are made aware of, and have an equal opportunity to compete for, managerial and executive training or other career development opportunities. In addition, we must review career development and related programs to ensure that no barriers exist for people with disabilities.

Start This Summer

We applaud those agencies that have already made hiring students with disabilities a priority. OPM's own target is to ensure that at least 10 percent of all summer hires (regardless of the hiring program) are people with disabilities. We challenge you to do the same.

OPM will continue to provide training, technical assistance, and advice to help you understand the Plan, become familiar with the many options available to you, and carry out your responsibilities. Attachment 3 provides information about our next workshop to help agencies implement the plan, which will take place on May 15, 2000.

As President Clinton said: "If America is to continue to grow and prosper, if we are to lead the challenging global economy of the 21st century, we cannot afford to ignore the talents, energy, and creativity of the 54 million Americans with disabilities." Let us work together to make the Federal Government not just the Nation's largest employer, but its model employer.

If your staff has any questions, they may call OPM's Office of Diversity on (202) 606-1059.

cc: Directors of Personnel
Directors of EEO/Civil Rights