



The Relationship between Federal Agency Disability Practices and Employee Outcomes

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 Cornell University. For more information, visit [AskEARN.org](https://www.assume.org). Preparation of this item was fully funded by the United States Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy in the amount of \$8,000,000 (four-year total grant amount) under Cooperative Agreement No. OD-33975-19-75-4-36. This document does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Labor, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.

Researchers at Cornell University conducted a study to understand how diversity practices in federal agencies are related to outcomes for employees with disabilities. The study examined the relationship between agency practices and outcomes among 59 federal parent agencies between 2004 and 2015. Researchers clustered 29 similar policies/practices into nine categories. They looked at the proportion of policies/practices within each of the following categories to determine if having more practices in place would correspond with better employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities and higher representation in employment:

- Sufficient staffing and budget for equal employment opportunity (EEO) programs
- Trend analysis (by race, gender, role, compensation, etc.)
- Direct supervision of EEO director by agency head
- Sufficient resources for barrier elimination
- Managerial accountability
- Schedules for conducting barrier analysis
- EEO director involvement
- Disciplined managers for discrimination
- Timely complaint response process

Three of the practice clusters were shown to result in improved participation outcomes:

- 1 Sufficient staffing and budget for EEO programs
- 2 Trend analysis
- 3 Direct supervision of EEO director by agency head

Improving labor market outcomes for individuals with disabilities should not stop at getting them in the door at lower levels within the organization. People with disabilities also need to be hired across the organization's structure and be given opportunities for advancement. The following is a description of "practice clusters" which were related to improved disability inclusion or employment in an agency.

Sufficient staffing and budget for EEO programs

Authority and funding by the EEO director to ensure implementation of action plans to improve EEO program efficiency and eliminate identified barriers.

Sufficient personnel resources for the EEO program to ensure that agency self-assessments required by EEO Management Directive 715 (MD-715) are conducted annually and to maintain a complaint processing system.

Sufficient resources to enable the agency to conduct a thorough barrier analysis of its workforce, including adequate data collection and tracking systems.

Funding secured to ensure publication and distribution of EEO materials (e.g., harassment policies, EEO posters, reasonable accommodations procedures, etc.).

Central fund or other mechanism to ensure funding supplies, equipment, and services necessary to provide disability accommodations.

Trend analysis

Workforce profiles conducted by race, national origin, sex, and disability.

Major occupations analysis conducted by race, national origin, sex, and disability.

Grade level distribution conducted by race, national origin, sex, and disability.

Compensation and reward system conducted by race, national origin, sex, and disability.

The effects of management/personnel policies, procedures, and practices conducted by race, national origin, sex, and disability.

Supervision of EEO director by agency head

EEO director is under the direct supervision of the agency head.

EEO director/officer is under the immediate supervision of the lower level component's head official (for example, does the regional EEO officer report to the regional administrator?).

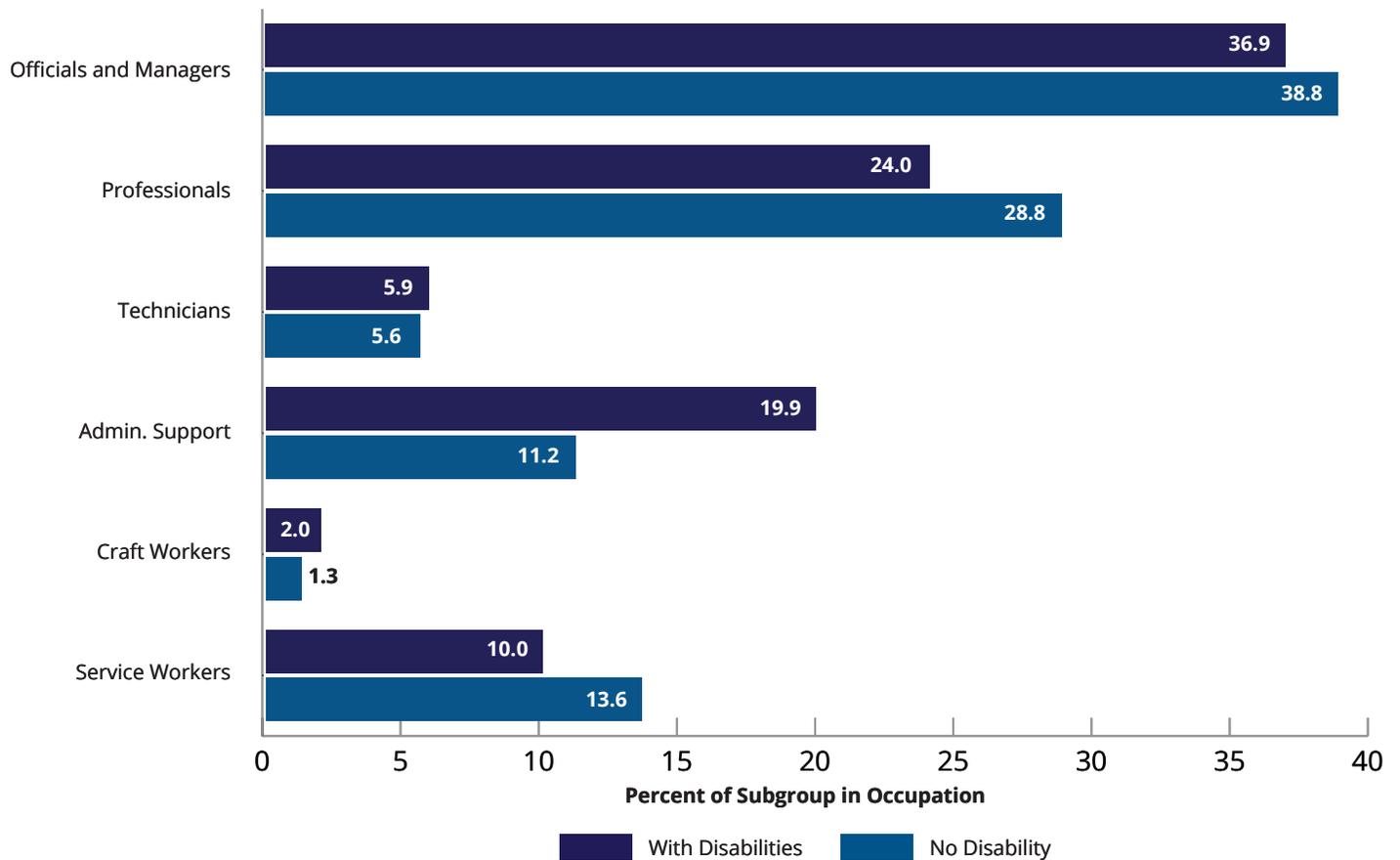
Researchers conducted focus groups to gather more information about practices leading to better outcomes. During the focus groups, federal agency management offered facilitators and barriers to effective practice implementation:

"...It may be a little difficult to fully focus on [trend analysis] when other priorities pull more of your time, your resources... so anywhere where they're performing trend analysis, it means they are already putting resources and thought and investment in the civil rights programs."

"... in the case where [direct supervision of EEO director by agency head] was a priority ...I just saw a tremendous difference in the messaging...for culture of inclusion in diversity."

Individuals with disabilities have a higher level of representation in the federal workforce compared to the private sector. While the Federal Government has made strides to show that it can be a model employer for individuals with disabilities by increasing representation, there remains room for improvement in the distribution of individuals with disabilities across the employment and compensation structure. The share of the workforce with a disability decreases as the grade level increases. Disability representation has though increased for all grade groups since 2012. That said, individuals with disabilities are disproportionately in low grade, and thus low paying, positions.

Distribution of Federal Workforce by Disability Status



Research Derived From:

- von Schrader, S., Shaw, L., Colella, A., & Brummond, K. (2020). Connecting Employer Practices to Disability Employment Outcomes: Lessons from the Federal Sector Workplace [PowerPoint presentation]. EEOC Excel Training Conference, virtual. <https://eetraining.eeoc.gov/profile/web/index.cfm?PKwebID=0x2547b105&varPage=location>
- Enayati, H., von Schrader, S., Erikson, W., & Bruyere, S.M. (2019). Minimizing discrimination and maximizing inclusion: lessons learned from the federal workforce and federal subcontractors. In *Employment and disability: issues, innovations and opportunity*. Champaign, IL.

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