

# Building Inclusive Teams

## Hiring Individuals with Developmental Disabilities

A Guide For Employers



# DIFFERENT. NOT LESS.

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# UNDERSTANDING DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

Developmental disabilities is a group of conditions that arise during the developmental period, typically before the age of 22, that can cause physical, learning, language, or behavioral impairments. These disabilities may affect a person's ability to function independently in everyday life, and the impact can vary from mild to severe.



## Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

A neurodevelopmental condition that affects social communication, behavior, and sensory processing. People with autism may have difficulty understanding social cues, engaging in conversations, or tolerating changes in routine.

## Down Syndrome

A genetic disorder caused by the presence of an extra chromosome 21, leading to developmental delays, intellectual disability, and sometimes physical health issues. People with Down syndrome often have strong social skills but may face challenges with speech, memory, and learning.



## Intellectual Disabilities

These involve limitations in intellectual functioning (such as reasoning, problem-solving, or learning) and adaptive behavior, which includes daily life skills. Communication, social interaction, and independent living skills may be affected.



## Cerebral Palsy

A group of disorders that affect movement, balance, and posture due to damage that occurs to the developing brain, most often before birth. Though primarily physical, cerebral palsy can sometimes co-occur with intellectual or developmental disabilities.





# UNDERSTANDING DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

## Abilities Vs. Challenges

These disabilities may affect communication, learning, and social interactions by creating challenges in understanding language, following instructions, interpreting social cues, or adapting to new environments.

By focusing on abilities and accommodating challenges as needed, people with disabilities can thrive in employment.



## Project Independence

At Project Independence, our experienced staff works with employers to match the right person to the right job and then help provide the right supports like reasonable accommodations, clear communication, and tailored training.

With structured supervision and an inclusive work environment, people with developmental disabilities can absolutely contribute meaningfully, demonstrating loyalty, dedication, and unique strengths to their employers.

## Project Independence Supported Employment Management Team



Carla Compton  
Job Developer



Emily Miller  
Area Manager



Jesus Martinez  
Senior Job Coach

[www.ProIndependence.org](http://www.ProIndependence.org)



# BENEFITS OF HIRING PEOPLE WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

#1

## Inclusivity Can Boost Employee Morale

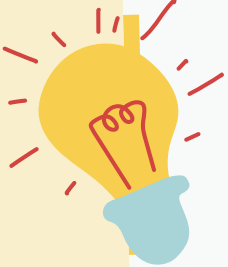
An inclusive workplace that values diversity fosters a culture of acceptance, empathy, and respect. This sense of inclusion can result in a more engaged, motivated, and loyal workforce.



#2

## Diverse Skill Sets and Unique Strengths

People with developmental disabilities have a wide range of skills and abilities, and their skill sets are unique to each person. Many skills, like attention to detail, a high level of focus on specific duties, and unique problem-solving approaches, are easily transferable as job skills.



#3

## Demonstrate Social Responsibility

Showcasing your company's dedication to equality and inclusion reflects well on your corporate branding and can attract socially conscious customers and partners.

GO  
TEAM!

#4

## Increased Loyalty & Retention

Employees with developmental disabilities often demonstrate high levels of loyalty and commitment to their roles. Many stay with employers for longer periods, reducing turnover and lowering recruitment and training costs.

# BENEFITS OF HIRING PEOPLE WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES



## Steven N.

Steven is a courtesy clerk at a local Pavilions, 13 years and counting! He is very polite and very helpful to the customers. What he enjoys most about his work is the interaction with the customers and that they know him

13 YEARS



## John B.

John has been working at Fletcher Jones for the last 30 years! He loves working with his job coach at Project Independence and he loves working with his friends John and Alfonso and keeping customers happy!

30 YEARS



## Sharon O.

Sharon has worked at Albertsons for her entire career, almost 20 years. Sharon is looking forward to her retirement soon but will miss her store with all her friends and colleagues. Sharon's supervisor Vicky says Sharon is a wonderful person and a hard worker.

20 YEARS

**Ben's bright spirit has affected all my employees. I didn't realize that hiring Ben would affect all of us and how we not just treat each other but how we treat our customers.**

-- Allen Store Manager,  
Home Depot, Santa Ana



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# CALIFORNIA BENEFITS

Yes, employers in California who hire individuals with disabilities can access several benefits, including tax incentives, financial support, and assistance programs designed to encourage inclusive hiring practices. Here are some key benefits available:



## Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC)

The WOTC is a federal tax credit available to employers who hire individuals from targeted groups, including people with disabilities. Employers can claim a tax credit of up to \$2,400 per eligible employee, depending on the individual's hours worked and wages earned.

## Disabled Access Credit

This federal tax credit is available to small businesses that incur expenses to provide access for individuals with disabilities. Employers can receive a credit for costs associated with making their facilities more accessible or accommodating employees with disabilities.





# CALIFORNIA BENEFITS

## California Employment Training Panel (ETP)

Employers in California can apply for funding through the California ETP, which provides financial support for employee training programs. The ETP offers additional funding for companies that hire and train employees with disabilities, helping them enhance the skills of their workforce.

## On-the-Job Training (OJT) Reimbursement

California employers may be eligible for OJT reimbursement. On-the-job training (OJT) is a program that allows employers to hire and train new employees on the job, and may last 3–6 months. Employers can receive up to 50% of the new employee's wages to help offset the cost of training and lost productivity. A WIN WIN for everyone.

## State Tax Benefits

California offers state tax incentives to employers who provide accommodations for workers with disabilities. Employers can deduct the cost of modifications made, from \$1,200 to \$9,600, to accommodate employees, such as specialized equipment or workplace adjustments.

## Other Resources

Work Opportunity Tax Credit

California Employment Training Panel

California Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities

Employer Assistance Resource Network (EARN)

Project Independence Supported Employment Services

## Project Independence

Project Independence has been working with people with disabilities since 1977, and we have placed over a thousand people with disabilities in jobs throughout Orange County.

We partner with employers to match great applicants with great jobs.





# ADA CONSIDERATIONS

The **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** is a landmark civil rights law enacted in 1990 to prohibit discrimination against individuals with disabilities in various areas of public life, including employment, education, transportation, and public accommodations. The ADA ensures that people with disabilities have the same rights and opportunities as everyone else, promoting equal access and inclusion in society.

Title I of the ADA specifically addresses employment, requiring employers with 15 or more employees to provide equal opportunities for qualified individuals with disabilities. This includes hiring, firing, promotions, job assignments, and other aspects of employment. Employers are prohibited from discriminating based on disability and must ensure that their workplace policies do not unfairly disadvantage individuals with disabilities.



## Reasonable Accommodations

A key component of the ADA is the concept of reasonable accommodations, which refers to modifications or adjustments to the work environment that enable a qualified individual with a disability to perform the essential functions of a job.



Improved Job Satisfaction for employees with developmental disabilities.



Stronger Employee Retention / Reduced Turnover Rates



Compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act



## LARGEST MINORITY GROUP

People with disabilities form the largest minority group in the United States, and the ADA protects approximately 61 million Americans.

# ADA CONSIDERATIONS

## Examples of Reasonable Accommodations

### MODIFIED WORK SCHEDULES

Employees with developmental disabilities may benefit from flexible or modified work hours. For example, some individuals may perform better with a later start time or shorter shifts, allowing them to manage fatigue or other health-related needs. Employers can accommodate this by adjusting work schedules without impacting overall productivity.



#### SHARON

Sharon's employer modified her work schedule so that she works 4 hours a shift so that she doesn't get too tired. They also give her shifts in the middle of the day so she's not riding the bus at night.

### ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Technology can play a crucial role in supporting employees with developmental disabilities. For instance, speech-to-text software, screen readers, or communication devices can assist employees with language or communication challenges. Similarly, task management apps or timers can help employees with time management or staying organized.



#### RYAN

Ryan cannot read so his supervisor writes down on his name tag his login information and password so he can check his work schedule on the computer using a screen reader.

### TASK RESTRUCTURING

Employers can adjust job tasks to better suit the abilities of an individual with a developmental disability. For example, removing non-essential tasks that may be difficult for the employee or reassigning them to another position that better fits their strengths are practical ways to support their success.



#### BEN

Ben has bad knees. As going up and down stairs is painful, his employer changed his work tasks so he doesn't empty the trash upstairs.



#### DREW

Drew deals with anxiety issues that sometimes last for a month at a time. When this happens, his employer scales way back on hours until he's in a better place.

### Project Independence JOB COACHING

Project Independence provides job coaches who can offer guidance on task completion, social interactions, and adapting to the workplace culture, gradually reducing their involvement as the employee becomes more confident and independent.

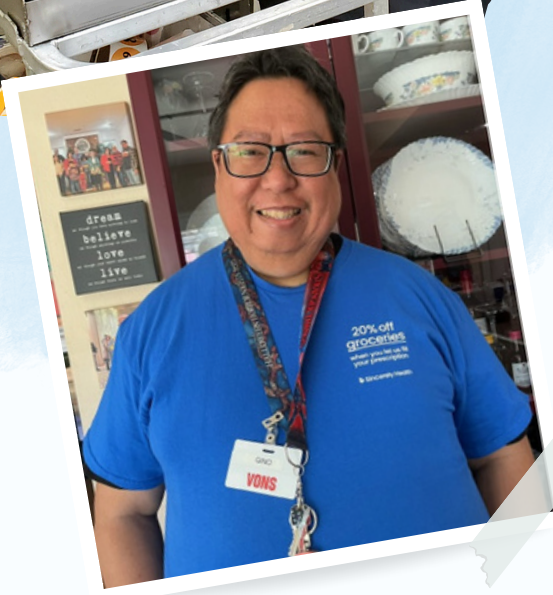
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# JOB MATCHING AND ROLE CUSTOMIZATION

Job matching and role customization are essential when hiring people with developmental disabilities because they align an individual's strengths, skills, and abilities with the specific requirements of a job.

This tailored approach ensures that both the employee and the employer benefit from the working relationship, promoting a successful and productive work environment.



## Job Matching

Job matching involves assessing the individual's capabilities and interests to identify roles where they can excel. This process helps avoid placing someone in a position where their challenges may hinder their performance, while also tapping into their unique strengths. For example, individuals with strong attention to detail may thrive in roles that require precision and focus, while others with excellent social skills may excel in customer service roles.

## Role Customization

involves modifying a job's tasks or responsibilities to better fit the individual's abilities. This could include breaking down complex tasks into smaller steps, adjusting work hours, or providing specific tools and resources to support their performance. These modifications make it easier for employees to meet expectations and achieve success, fostering confidence and independence.

# JOB MATCHING AND ROLE CUSTOMIZATION



## Enhance Productivity

By focusing on job matching and role customization, employers can maximize the potential of their employees with developmental disabilities.

It not only enhances productivity but also reduces turnover by placing individuals in roles that suit them well.

This approach demonstrates the employer's commitment to inclusion and diversity, creating a more supportive workplace culture for all employees.

## The Project Independence Difference

### The Best Job Matches

Project Independence has successfully matched over 1,000 people with developmental disabilities to the right jobs and employers in Orange County. We are successful because we:

- We conduct comprehensive assessments that focus on the individual's abilities, interests, strengths, and preferences.
- We work with employers to tailor the job responsibilities to the individual's unique abilities.
- We build strong, ongoing relationships with employers who are open to creating inclusive workplaces.
- We help employers assess the workplace to ensure appropriate accommodations can be made.
- We provide continuous support through job coaching and follow-ups after the hire.



# EFFECTIVE TRAINING AND SUPPORT

## USE SIMPLE, CLEAR INSTRUCTIONS

Clear, concise communication is crucial when training employees with developmental disabilities. Avoid using jargon or overly complex language, and break tasks down into manageable steps.

## ALLOW EXTRA PROCESSING TIME

Some employees with developmental disabilities may need additional time to process information. Be patient and allow pauses in the conversation to give them time to absorb and respond. Avoid rushing them, as this can lead to confusion or frustration.

## MINIMIZE DISTRACTIONS

Individuals with autism may have sensory sensitivities to loud sounds, bright lights, or crowded environments. Communicate in a calm, quiet space if possible, and be aware of how environmental factors might affect them.

## OFFER HANDS-ON LEARNING

Practical, hands-on training is often more effective for employees with developmental disabilities. Allowing them to actively engage with tasks rather than just observe makes learning more tangible and memorable.

## Effective Onboarding

Effective onboarding and training strategies for employees with developmental disabilities are essential for setting them up for success in the workplace. A thoughtful approach can help employees feel confident, supported, and integrated into their roles.



**Support Makes Ability Shine**



# PROVIDING EFFECTIVE TRAINING AND SUPPORT

## LEVERAGE VISUAL AIDS

Visual aids, such as diagrams, flowcharts, or videos, can be powerful tools for reinforcing verbal instructions. Many individuals with developmental disabilities are visual learners, and visual representations can help them understand concepts or processes more effectively. Written checklists, color-coded charts, or picture-based instructions can also be helpful in guiding them through tasks.

## REPETITION AND PRACTICE

Repetition is a key component in reinforcing learning. Provide opportunities for the employee to practice tasks multiple times, offering constructive feedback along the way. Consistent repetition not only builds confidence but also ensures that the individual fully grasps the task at hand. Periodic refresher training can also reinforce skills over time.

## POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

Recognizing and celebrating achievements, no matter how small, encourages employees to continue their efforts and enhances self-esteem.

## REGULAR FEEDBACK

Providing consistent, constructive feedback helps employees understand what they are doing well and where they can improve. It also ensures that expectations are clear and that any misunderstandings about tasks or responsibilities are promptly addressed. For employees with developmental disabilities, regular feedback reassures them they are on the right track and helps build their confidence.



# ADDRESSING WORKPLACE CHALLENGES

Managing potential challenges for employees with developmental disabilities, such as sensory sensitivities or difficulty with social interactions, requires thoughtful and inclusive strategies. Employers can provide support without stigmatizing the employee by adopting a proactive and respectful approach.



## ADDRESSING SENSORY SENSITIVITIES

Many people with developmental disabilities experience heightened sensitivity to lights, sounds, or physical stimuli. To manage this, employers can offer accommodations such as **noise-canceling headphones, providing a quieter workspace, or using softer lighting**. Flexibility in allowing short breaks to step away from overwhelming environments can also be beneficial.



## SUPPORTING SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

Employees with developmental disabilities may find social situations, such as group meetings or casual conversations, challenging. Employers can help by fostering a work culture that is patient and inclusive, encouraging co-workers to be understanding can ease these challenges. Assigning a **workplace mentor or buddy** can also assist in social integration without placing undue pressure on the employee.



## AVOIDING STIGMA

The key to providing support without stigmatization is privacy and respect. Employers should avoid singling out the employee or making accommodations overly visible to others. Frame accommodations as part of a company-wide commitment to diversity and inclusion, ensuring that every employee has what they need to succeed. By **normalizing support measures for all employees**, employers can create an environment where assistance is seen as a positive part of workplace culture, rather than something tied specifically to a disability.





# ADDRESSING WORKPLACE CHALLENGES



## UNDERSTANDING INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

Employers may struggle to fully understand the unique needs and abilities of employees with developmental disabilities. Provide clear communication, individual assessments, and guidance from job coaches to identify how best to support each individual.

## How We Can Help

### ***At Project Independence our Job Developers:***

- Evaluate the skills, interests, and needs of individuals with developmental disabilities in our supported employment program.
- Work with local employers to meet their employment needs by matching job openings with the skills and interests of our supported employment clients.

### ***At Project Independence our Job Coaches:***

- Assist clients during their initial work experience, offering guidance and support to help them adjust to the workplace environment and meet job expectations.
- Act as a bridge between clients and employers and provide additional support as needed to ensure long-term success in their roles.

## Contact Us

Carla Compton  
Job Developer  
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**[www.ProIndependence.org](http://www.ProIndependence.org)**



I really like the Project Independence program and job coach. I have worked with coaches from other agencies before and I'm always impressed with the support Project Independence offers.

-- Cezar, Albertson's Supervisor



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# DISABILITY AWARENESS AND EDUCATION

This	Not This
Person with a disability	The disabled, handicapped
Person without a disability	Normal person, healthy person
Person with a developmental disability	Retarded, slow, simple
Person who is hard of hearing	Hearing impaired, suffers from a hearing loss
Person who has a communication disorder	Mute, dumb
Person with a behavioral disability or mental health disability	Insane, crazy, psycho
Person who uses a wheelchair	Wheelchair-bound
Person with a physical disability	Crippled, lame, invalid
Person with multiple sclerosis or person with cerebral palsy	Afflicted by MS or CP victim
Accessible parking or bathrooms	Handicapped parking or bathrooms
Person of short stature	Midget
Person with Down syndrome	Mongoloid
Person who is successful, productive	Has overcome his/her disability, is courageous

## Staff Training

Offer training for all staff to raise awareness about developmental disabilities, addressing misconceptions and encouraging empathy. This helps create an understanding environment where differences are respected.

### Person-first Language

**Person-First Language:** This type of language emphasizes the person first, not their disability. Disabilities can be seen as part of someone's identity, but it's not their entire identity. You would say "people with disabilities," instead of "disabled person" and "people with autism" instead of "autistic person."

### Understanding Hidden Disabilities

Many disabilities, such as mental health conditions, chronic illnesses, or learning disabilities, are not immediately visible.



**A LEADER KNOWS THE WAY, GOES THE WAY AND SHOWS THE WAY**

--John Maxwell

# DISABILITY AWARENESS AND EDUCATION

## Challenging Stereotypes & Bias

Address common stereotypes and myths about disability, and discuss how to challenge unconscious bias in the workplace. Here are some of the stereotypes, biases, or misconceptions about people with developmental disabilities:

#1

People with developmental disabilities are incapable of working or being independent.



*In reality, with the right support, people with developmental disabilities can work, live independently, and contribute meaningfully to society.*

#2

People with developmental disabilities lack intelligence or the ability to learn.



*While some individuals may have learning challenges, people with developmental disabilities can learn, grow, and excel with tailored education and support.*

#3

People with developmental disabilities are always happy or childlike.



*There's a stereotype that individuals with developmental disabilities, particularly Down syndrome, are always happy or childlike. In reality, they experience a full range of emotions, just like anyone else.*

#4

People with developmental disabilities are a burden on society.



*People with developmental disabilities contribute positively through work, volunteering, and community engagement when given opportunities.*

#5

People with developmental disabilities can't make decisions for themselves.



*Most people with developmental disabilities are fully capable of making decisions about their lives when given the right tools and support.*

#6

People with developmental disabilities all have the same needs and challenges.



*People with developmental disabilities are diverse, have varying strengths, challenges, and needs. A one-size-fits-all approach is not appropriate, and each person should be treated as an individual.*

#7

People with developmental disabilities can't have meaningful social connections.



*People with developmental disabilities form friendships, romantic relationships, and meaningful social connections.*

#8

People with developmental disabilities don't contribute to the workplace.



*Many employers wrongly assume that employees with developmental disabilities are less productive or can't contribute. In reality, many are hardworking, dependable, and can be valuable team members when accommodated appropriately.*

# PRE-HIRING CHECKLIST

for Employers Hiring People with Developmental Disabilities



## REVIEW JOB DESCRIPTIONS

- ☐ Clearly define the essential functions of the job.
- ☐ Ensure job descriptions are inclusive and avoid unnecessary requirements that could exclude individuals with developmental disabilities.
- ☐ Include a statement encouraging individuals with disabilities to apply.

## EVALUATE APPLICATION PROCESS ACCESSIBILITY

- ☐ Ensure the online application process is accessible to individuals with disabilities (e.g., screen reader compatibility, alternative formats).
- ☐ Offer alternative methods for submitting applications (e.g., in-person or over the phone).
- ☐ Provide clear instructions and assistance options during the application process.



## TRAIN HIRING MANAGERS

- ☐ Provide disability awareness and sensitivity training to hiring managers.
- ☐ Educate managers on interviewing best practices for candidates with developmental disabilities.
- ☐ Highlight the importance of focusing on candidates' abilities and strengths, rather than limitations.

## CREATE INCLUSIVE INTERVIEW PRACTICES

- ☐ Use structured interview questions that focus on specific skills and job functions.
- ☐ Consider alternative interview formats, such as skills-based assessments or job trials, to better assess abilities.
- ☐ Provide clear instructions and expectations for the interview process in advance.

## PREPARE FOR ACCOMMODATION REQUESTS

- ☐ Establish a process for responding to accommodation requests during the hiring process.
- ☐ Be ready to offer accommodations for the interview, such as extended time, modified formats (e.g., working interviews), or sensory-friendly environments.





# PRE-HIRING CHECKLIST

Continued

## EVALUATE PHYSICAL ACCESSIBILITY OF HIRING LOCATIONS

- ☐ Ensure interview spaces are physically accessible (e.g., ramps, elevators, accessible restrooms).
- ☐ Provide a sensory-friendly environment (e.g., reduced noise, appropriate lighting) if needed.
- ☐ Include a statement encouraging individuals with disabilities to apply.

## REVIEW LEGAL OBLIGATIONS

- ☐ Familiarize the hiring team with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and state-specific laws.
- ☐ Ensure all job postings and recruitment practices comply with disability rights laws and nondiscrimination policies.

## ENGAGE WITH DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

- ☐ Consider job fairs or outreach programs targeting individuals with developmental disabilities.
- ☐ Partner with local disability employment agencies, such as vocational rehabilitation programs or supported employment services, to connect with qualified candidates.

## PLAN FOR INCLUSIVE ONBOARDING

- ☐ Develop an onboarding plan that accommodates various learning styles (e.g., visual aids, hands-on training).
- ☐ Identify potential reasonable accommodations that may be needed during onboarding and training.

## FOSTER AN INCLUSIVE WORK CULTURE

- ☐ Ensure your company culture supports diversity and inclusion.
- ☐ Communicate the company's commitment to hiring and supporting employees with disabilities.

