HIGHLIGHTS OF A FORUM

Participant-Identified Leading Practices That Could Increase the Employment of Individuals with Disabilities in the Federal Workforce

What Participants Said

Participants said that the most significant barrier keeping people with disabilities from the workplace is attitudinal, which can include bias and low expectations for people with disabilities. According to participants, there is a fundamental need to change the attitudes of hiring managers, supervisors, coworkers, and prospective employees, and that cultural change within the agencies is critical to this effort.

Participants identified practices that agencies could implement to help the federal government become a model employer for people with disabilities. Participants reached the following conclusions:

1. Top leadership commitment is key to implementing and sustaining improvements. Unless top agency officials are committed, improvements will not happen.
2. Accountability is critical to success; goals can help guide and sustain efforts and should be reflected in human capital and diversity strategy plans.
3. Regular surveying of the workforce on disability issues provides agencies with important information. Participants suggested that surveying be implemented at all stages of the employment life cycle.
4. Better coordination could help improve employment outcomes, as coordination within and across agencies is critical.
5. Training for staff at all levels can disseminate leading practices throughout the agency. This provides agencies the opportunity to communicate expectations regarding the implementation of policies and procedures related to improving employment of people with disabilities.
6. Career development opportunities inclusive of people with disabilities could facilitate advancement and increase retention. Participants suggested that agencies offer details, rotational assignments, and mentoring programs that are fully accessible to all employees.
7. A flexible work environment can increase and enhance employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Participants emphasized telework as a key component, as well as flexible work times and job sharing.
8. Centralizing funding at the agency level can help ensure that reasonable accommodations are provided. Participants stated that effective centralized funds should include accountability, flexibility, and universal availability.

Although forum discussion focused on practices agencies could implement, participants also noted the need for model policies and guidance from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). This is consistent with the July 2010 executive order that directs OPM to work with other agencies to design model recruitment and hiring strategies for individuals with disabilities.