

Don't overlook people with disabilities in your DE&I efforts

It's time for employers to recognize the vital contributions that people with disabilities have on America's economy.

By **Kevin Lynch** | October 28, 2021



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If it wasn't clear before, the past year and a half solidified the idea that inclusivity in the corporate world doesn't just happen. It takes conscious, continuous effort on behalf of employers. This is even more true when building an inclusive workplace for people with disabilities.

National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) is the perfect time for employers to consider how our world has changed in recent years and how to create workplaces that are more inclusive than they were in the past. NDEAM highlights the importance of ensuring that people with disabilities have full access to employment, whether a business is embracing telework or inviting employees back to the workplace. It's time for employers to recognize the vital contributions that people with disabilities—including people who are blind or visually impaired—have on America's economy.

Despite being eager and qualified, many people who are blind or visually impaired still struggle to find jobs. A recent survey (<https://www.nib.org/global-survey-offers-insight-on-employment-trends-of-people-who-are-blind/>) sponsored by National Industries for the Blind (NIB) shows the barriers people who are blind or visually impaired face to gainful employment. Of the 2,428 people who are blind or visually impaired surveyed from around the world, 59% reported being employed at the time of response. That means 40% are not working, a rate more than four times the current unemployment rate in the U.S., even though 61% possess an undergraduate or postgraduate degree and 70% are interested in finding a new job.

The study's findings show that not only are people who are blind or visually impaired interested in building a career, they are also well-educated, well-prepared, and ultimately well-suited for the workforce. However, they are often excluded from job opportunities because of the misconceptions employers have around hiring people who are blind or visually impaired.

Additionally, it's important for employers to be aware that hiring people who are blind or visually impaired can actually strengthen an organization's productivity and innovation. A recent study by McKinsey (<https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/why-diversity-matters>) showed that companies with strong DE&I policies and practices are 35% more likely to outperform their competitors.

So how do we make the workforce ready for job seekers who are blind or visually impaired? And what can companies do to improve their DE&I efforts to strengthen their hiring practices for people who are blind or visually impaired? The first step is making employers aware of the most popular tools that people who are blind or visually impaired rely on every day. People who are blind or visually impaired turn to hiring managers and onboarding teams to implement simple changes to help create more inclusive environments, such as making accessible technology available.

Many employers often don't consider people who are blind or visually impaired when hiring because they think it's too difficult to accommodate them in the workplace. In reality, it's not difficult or expensive at all. Enterprises like NSITE (<https://nsite.org/>) can help with onboarding and providing guidance every step of the way to ensure that finding the right employee-employer match is as smooth and seamless as possible. Also, people who are blind and visually impaired already have access to many accessibility tools such as smartphones with built-in accessibility features that can assist them when they're at work. It's essential for employers to educate themselves about the relatively small, cost-effective steps they can take to empower people who are blind to navigate and fully participate in the workplace.

Companies want to give everyone an equal chance at success, and NDEAM is a timely opportunity to put that goal into practice. Look for advice from organizations and individual advocates for people with disabilities. Find resources that can help connect your business with job seekers who may be blind, visually impaired, or veterans with disabilities.

By creating inclusive workplaces and prioritizing DE&I efforts, businesses can open the door for people with disabilities, including people who are blind, to build successful careers. Businesses have the power to enable families to live a life of personal and economic independence. NDEAM is a chance for employers to create environments where everyone can succeed and realize their American Dream.

Kevin Lynch is president and CEO of National Industries for the Blind (<https://www.nib.org/>).