Putting Research into Practice:
Online Outreach Strategies for Attracting Job Seekers with Disabilities

Introduction

Many employers are actively seeking to recruit people with disabilities to increase disability representation in their workforces. Today, much of this outreach is happening online. The way organizations approach online recruitment can greatly impact their ability to attract qualified applicants. Targeted outreach to disabled people holds the promise of expanding the pipeline of candidates. However, to do so, organizations need to evaluate all elements of their online recruitment strategy for accessibility and appropriate messaging. These elements include corporate career pages, social media outreach, virtual career fairs, and application software.

Accessible and targeted online outreach signals to jobseekers with disabilities that a company may be a good fit for them. As such, companies that use this strategy may attract more qualified candidates with disabilities.¹

EARN researchers surveyed more than 800 people with disabilities to learn how they respond to different types of online outreach. The survey was developed based on an extensive review of corporate online outreach platforms, relevant academic literature, and the results of focus groups conducted with job seekers with disabilities as well as employers interested in hiring people with disabilities. The survey asked respondents about what approaches they use to search for jobs online, which elements of an employer’s career page made the biggest difference in deciding to apply, and what their experience was being asked to self-identify as a person with a disability.

Through this effort, the team identified several promising practices and strategies that may improve online outreach to disabled job seekers.

Encouraging Job Seekers with Disabilities to Apply

EARN’s research indicated that when searching for jobs, disabled job seekers use approaches similar to job seekers without disabilities. Survey respondents reported frequent use of job posting websites (including those that target candidates with disabilities), social media platforms, and virtual career fairs. As employers develop messaging to encourage job seekers with disabilities to apply, mainstream job posting websites and social media are important places to highlight their commitment to disability hiring and inclusion.

Once job seekers with disabilities identify a position they are interested in, they often look at information about the company to decide whether or not to apply. Survey results indicate that:

- 63.0% “often” or “always” go directly to the employer’s online career web pages.
- 42.7% search social media platforms (e.g., LinkedIn, Facebook) for the employer.
- 45.5% use outside websites (e.g., Glassdoor.com) to understand how current employees feel about working for that employer.
- 46.4% “often” or “always” look for an employer’s disability-inclusive messaging when deciding to apply for a position.

These findings suggest that career pages and social media messaging provide excellent opportunities to make a good impression on job seekers—and to feature disability-inclusive content.

Organization career pages are the most common place that survey respondents look for information about a specific company. Job seekers with disabilities report that seeing these specific elements on an organization’s web page help them make up their minds to apply.

- 50.3% Information about flexible work arrangements
- 44.8% An explanation of work-life balance programs
- 39.8% A clear explanation of the accommodations request process for applicants
- 39.7% Information about disability within diversity and inclusion statements
- 37.0% Public information on the organization’s disability-focused hiring programs

To encourage job seekers with disabilities to apply, employers should consider including these elements on their career web pages. Employers should also consider that some elements of employer career web pages are more important to specific groups of people. Women and racial/ethnic minority members are more likely to report increased interest in a company that describes its flexible work arrangements and work-life balance programs. People who report their disability is “very obvious” to others are more likely to say that seeing a diversity and inclusion statement that includes disability and a description of the employer’s flexible work arrangements increases their interest to apply.
Encouraging Self-Identification

Over eighty percent (81.4%) of respondents report that they have “always” or “sometimes” been asked to complete a self-identification form in their recent job applications. Of those, 54.2% “always” identify as a person with a disability and 42.1% said that they “sometimes” do.

Below are some strategies identified in the survey that may encourage self-identification:

- **41.0%** Include information about available flexible work arrangements in the recruitment process
- **31.8%** Highlight work-life balance programs on the company website
- **35.6%** Feature a diversity and inclusion statement or other information that includes disability awareness on career web pages and in social media content
- **30.5%** Provide information on disability-focused hiring programs

Applicants may feel more comfortable disclosing or self-identifying because this information may indicate that disability inclusion is a priority for the organization.

Removing Online Barriers

Digital accessibility and accommodations need special attention during recruitment and hiring. To ensure applicants can access your online recruitment processes, be sure to:

- **Ensure** company career web pages meet or exceed web accessibility standards, such as the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)](https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG21/), to improve applicant access.
- **Provide** obvious, easy-to-find information on requesting accommodations.
- **Provide** options for multiple modes of communication with recruiters (e.g., instant chat, email, etc.).
- **Provide** closed captioning and audio descriptions for all recruiting videos and media content.
- **Evaluate** the use of [artificial intelligence (AI)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artificial_intelligence) in the recruiting and hiring phases to ensure that criteria do not inadvertently screen out people with disabilities.
- **Ensure** that modes of communication meet the needs of applicants with disabilities (e.g., video relay services (VRS), screen reader accessible electronic communications).
- **Consider** the accessibility of the organization’s entire online presence, including choices of third-party job boards and host sites for virtual career fairs.
Related EARN Resources

• Online Recruitment of and Outreach to People with Disabilities: Research-Based Practices
• Encouraging Applicants with Disabilities: Job Descriptions and Announcements
• Disability Outreach and Inclusion Messaging: Assessment Checklist for Career Pages
• Company Website Disability Inclusion Messaging: Observations of Job Seekers with Disabilities
• Planning an Accessible Career Fair or Hiring Event
• Inclusive Branding and Messaging

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