

## **Ability Indiana Opportunities for Employing Hoosiers with Disabilities**

The Ability Indiana Committee, through the Central Coordinating Agency, creates a partnership among the public and private sectors to enhance employment and training opportunities for Indiana's citizens with disabilities. This coordinated effort provides an opportunity for individuals to achieve greater self-worth and esteem, improved economic independence and social inclusion, while the state realizes a savings through its investment in its citizenry.

### **Background on the Ability Indiana Program**

The Ability Indiana Program was established in 1976 as a means to provide sustainable, fulfilling employment to individuals with disabilities. By partnering with Certified Ability Indiana Organizations around the state, the program provides quality goods and services to state and local governments at reasonable prices. Every purchase provides the opportunity of employment for individuals with disabilities.

Indiana Code (IC 5-22-13) requires State Agencies to purchase supplies and services from a qualified Ability Indiana Program Vendor without advertising or solicitation. If an Ability Indiana Program organization cannot meet the specifications or provide the supply or service at a price within 10% of fair market price, the state agency may then put the solicitation out for bid.

If the State Agency issues a solicitation for a consolidated purchase containing items that are produced by a qualified Ability Indiana Program organization, the Agency must either require the vendor to purchase these items through the Ability Indiana Program or establish scoring standards that gives the Ability Indiana Program organization an opportunity to compete for the business.

Under the Ability Indiana Program Law, local government entities may bypass regular procurement practices and purchase through the Ability Indiana Program without bidding.

### **Ability Indiana Program Benefits to the State**

Governor Holcomb and Lieutenant Governor Crouch have made employment a top priority for their administration. Ability Indiana supports this initiative. In November, Governor Holcomb said, "With nearly 29,000 new jobs announced this year and one million expected over the next decade, we must act now to ensure Hoosiers have the skills they need to secure good jobs and succeed in our growing economy..." Too often, the people with disabilities are overlooked when it comes to employment. Ability Indiana organizations provide the work experience and skill-based training to allow its employees to be responsive to the needs of the State, municipalities, as well as private industry.

Governor Holcomb also stated, "In 2018, I will remain sharply focused on building our workforce and...I look forward to working closely with state lawmakers and other stakeholders in the year ahead to advance this plan." Ability Indiana appreciates the Governor's commitment to building opportunities for the entire Hoosier workforce.

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According to the 2017 Annual Disability Statistics Compendium, 73.1% of Hoosiers with intellectual and developmental disabilities are unemployed. This number is staggering in comparison to the May 2018 statewide unemployment rate of 3.2%. Based on this data, Indiana is not a state that works for everyone.

From June 2017 to May 2018, the employees in the Ability Indiana program worked 193,215 hours. The average hourly wage for an employee producing products was \$10.36 and \$9.37 for employees providing services. In SFY 2018, the projected program sales are \$13,508,372.90. While this is a huge accomplishment, we know the program can do more to decrease the unemployment rate for Hoosiers with disabilities.

Aside from the mission of providing employment for Hoosiers with disabilities, there is also a cost-saving component. Many times an Ability Indiana organization can provide a product or service at a lower cost than other vendors. In addition, by allowing the State and local governments to bypass the costly procurement process, it allows for faster acquisition of products and services, higher efficiency, and less time spent by government staff to execute the process, thus allowing the State to redirect fiscal resources elsewhere.

Lastly, the goal for the program is to encourage people to achieve competitive, integrated employment. In 2017, the Indiana General Assembly passed Senate Enrolled Act 390, an Employment First initiative. The initiative states that Indiana believes the first choice of employment should be above minimum wage, and in the community, among a diverse workforce. The goal of the Ability Indiana program is the same – to provide people with employment opportunities and to transition from employment with Ability Indiana organizations to jobs with community employers that complement their skills and abilities and pays them a competitive wage.

### **Recommendations for State agencies:**

Increased sales in products and services from state agencies and local governments, resulting in job opportunities and growth for Hoosiers with disabilities

- Provide an incentive for State vendors to employ people with disabilities by providing additional points in the procurement process.
- Implement a requirement that all State Agencies must purchase products and services from the program in the amount of 3% of their total annual spend.
- Give vendors additional points for subcontracting to an Ability Indiana provider, similar to the practice for MWBE businesses. This would allow Ability Indiana to get involved in larger contracts that cannot be staffed by Ability Indiana employment center employees alone.
- Eliminate the addition of similar Ability Indiana products on Quantity Purchasing Agreements (QPAs). This would increase program purchases, and ultimately employment opportunities for people with disabilities.
- Encourage the Governor to appoint a representative from a Certified Ability Indiana Organization to his Workforce Cabinet.
- Allow Ability Indiana staff to present to State Agency Purchasers during all training opportunities.
- Require that all state facilities and grounds be cleaned and maintained by employees of Certified Ability Indiana Organizations. In the event an organization is not geographically

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able to provide janitorial and grounds keeping services, the State may enter into a competitive bid process at that time.

### **Ability Indiana's Commitment to Growing Employment Opportunities for Hoosiers with Disabilities**

The Ability Indiana Program continues to grow as organizations and program staff increase government entities' knowledge of the program. Program staff is meeting directly with State agencies, City government officials, and local town councils to raise awareness of the products and services provided in the program. In addition, quality assurance is very important to ensure that agencies are return customers with the organizations. Ability Indiana staff works closely with customers to provide inspections, analyze satisfaction survey results, and respond to concerns expressed by agencies.

Regarding the changing needs of government, organizations in the program are exploring business development opportunities to be responsive to customers. By reaching out directly to government agencies to assess their needs, the program can grow and diversify the products and services available in order to employ more people.

### **Recommendations for Growing Employment Opportunities for Hoosiers with Disabilities through the Ability Indiana Program:**

- The State is encouraged to consider instituting tax credits for hiring people with disabilities.
- Skills Enhancement Funds (SEF funds) should be directed to businesses to support training of current employees in the proper interaction with fellow employees with disabilities. Funds could also be used to upgrade the skills of individuals with disabilities so they may advance in their career, obtain new opportunities, and increase their wages.
- The Indiana Economic Development Corporation can require cities and counties in the Regional Cities Initiative Program to meet specific metrics in hiring and employing people with disabilities in their communities in order to draw down matching State funding.
- The Indiana Economic Development Corporation can provide a list of Indiana employers who hire people with disabilities.
- WorkOne offices can provide trainings for employers on accessibility and accommodations for employees with disabilities, including training on the proper interaction with a person with a disability and person-first language.
- The State can provide tax credits to reimburse companies for accommodations to work stations, equipment, or facilities in order to employ a person with a disability.

### **Conclusion**

The 1102 Task Force has the unique opportunity to look at the disability service industry as a whole and set a trajectory for the near future. Employment for Hoosiers with disabilities is one aspect of living a high-quality life. Ability Indiana has worked for over forty years to provide employment options to the unemployed and underemployed. INARF urges the Task Force to carefully consider the many opportunities afforded for people through the Ability Indiana Program.