



**MAYOR EMANUEL'S TASK FORCE ON  
EMPLOYMENT  
AND ECONOMIC  
OPPORTUNITY  
FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**





# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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**LETTER FROM THE CO-CHAIRS** **4**

---

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY** **5**

---

**RECOMMENDATIONS** **7**

---

**CONCLUSION** **16**



## LETTER FROM CO-CHAIRS



Dear Mayor Emanuel and Members of the Chicago City Council,

It has been nearly three decades since the passage of one of our nation's most significant civil rights laws, The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA has unlocked access to public transportation, restaurants, theaters, stores, recreation, government services, and communication for the deaf and hard-of-hearing. Despite significant advancements over the past 30 years, the promise of the ADA has yet to significantly address the high unemployment rate faced by too many Americans with disabilities.

In Chicago, 29.3 percent of working-aged adults with disabilities are employed, mirroring national statistics of 34.6 percent employment rate. People with disabilities are twice as likely as those without disabilities to live in poverty.

We thank you for your leadership to secure City Council approval of a 2017 resolution to address this employment gap through the establishment of the Mayoral Task Force on Employment and Economic Opportunity for People with Disabilities (Task Force). Since its launch on July 26, 2017, the 28th anniversary of the ADA, we have been working to develop a set of recommendations focused on four priority areas: removing barriers for prospective City employees with disabilities; facilitating greater collaboration between workforce agencies, employers and job seekers; increasing post-secondary education outcomes; and encouraging more entrepreneurs with disabilities to start and build their businesses. These recommendations were developed by local workforce and disability experts, employers and government officials resolved to determine how the City of Chicago can best address disability specific workforce barriers, enact realistic solutions and adopt best practices that can economically empower our residents with disabilities.

The Task Force is confident that a continued partnership between Mayoral and City Council leadership and the disability community will result in Chicago becoming a national leader on the employment of people with disabilities. We owe it to our residents with disabilities and the economic future of Chicago to ensure that our work fulfills the promise of the ADA: equal opportunity, independence and inclusion for all.

Sincerely,

Karen Tamley  
Commissioner  
Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities  
Co-chair

Robin Jones  
Director, ADA Great Lakes Center  
Co-chair

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Chicago has a longstanding commitment and demonstrated track record on disability rights and advancing accessibility and inclusion. Specific to the issue of employment, the City has tackled the dire need for employment and economic opportunity through both policy reform and service delivery. Some highlighted accomplishments include:

- Reforming the City's reasonable accommodation policy and procedures, allowing the City of Chicago to both better retain its employees with disabilities and create a more inclusive workplace
- Providing direct employment and job placement referral services to tens of thousands of residents with disabilities, including assisting hundreds to secure first-time employment
- Partnering with the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) to deliver job readiness skills, job shadowing opportunities and paid internships for thousands of high school students with disabilities
- Enhancing the City's Business Enterprises owned by People with Disabilities (BEPD) program by increasing incentives for prime contractors using BEPDs, and including the participation of service-disabled veterans.



The City must continue to do more to build on these accomplishments. Recognizing this need, Mayor Emanuel and Alderman Maldonado introduced and secured passage of a City Council resolution in 2017 to establish the Mayoral Task Force on Employment and Economic Opportunity for People with Disabilities (Task Force). The purpose of the Task Force is to advise the City on strategies to lower the high unemployment rate of Chicagoans with disabilities. Specifically, it was intended to recommend ways the City can both remove employment barriers and create new initiatives that could support job seekers and entrepreneurs with disabilities.

The Mayoral Task Force on Employment and Economic Opportunity for People with Disabilities was launched on July 26, 2017 and was comprised of twenty-five members representing workforce agencies, disability leaders, job seekers, employers and representatives from local and state government agencies. The Task Force defined four areas of focus and specific recommendations aimed at improving employment outcomes of people with disabilities. Those priorities and recommendations are:

### **PRIORITY 1: ENCOURAGING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT THROUGH ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

- Ensure that information and support regarding the BEPD program and other City business programs are accessible to potential entrepreneurs
- Increase the number of BEPD certified businesses through enhanced awareness, outreach and engagement
- Expand contracting opportunities for certified BEPDs
- Build the confidence and expertise of certified BEPDs to secure contacts

### **PRIORITY 2: ALIGN, ENHANCE AND PROMOTE COMPREHENSIVE JOB TRAINING AND PLACEMENT SERVICES**

- Create an online clearinghouse to facilitate city-wide employment systems and services for employers, workforce agencies and job seekers

- Facilitate greater awareness regarding the employment needs of people with disabilities through education and training
- Create an awareness campaign to make the case for employing people with disabilities
- Track, analyze and use data to create change

**PRIORITY 3: FACILITATE GREATER PARTICIPATION OF STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION FOR CAREERS**

- Provide comprehensive training to City Colleges of Chicago Career Services staff on career preparation and employment counseling for students with disabilities
- Collaborate with Chicago Community Colleges and employers to identify internships specifically for students with disabilities
- Identify partners to conduct research on the employment outcomes for secondary and post-secondary graduates with disabilities in Chicago

- Create a task force on transition services to improve outcomes for Chicago Public School students

**PRIORITY 4: EXAMINE CITY OF CHICAGO POLICIES THAT PROMOTE AND/OR DISCOURAGE EMPLOYMENT**

- Ensure people with all types of disabilities can equally access the City of Chicago’s employment opportunities
- Ensure all City of Chicago departments have a comprehensive understanding of the City’s reasonable accommodation policy and procedures
- Ensure that the City of Chicago job descriptions do not unintentionally screen out qualified candidates with disabilities
- Adopt best practices utilized by other cities and government agencies for employing people with disabilities





# RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS THE HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT RATE OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

## PRIORITY 1: ENCOURAGE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT THROUGH ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Entrepreneurship is an often overlooked option for people with disabilities who are seeking to improve their economic well-being. Many receiving employment related services are not provided with the choices or resources needed to help them start their own businesses. Yet, 2017 data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics<sup>1</sup> shows people with disabilities are more likely to be self-employed (10.6 percent) than the general population (6.2 percent). Entrepreneurship among this segment is of critical importance because, as their businesses grow, they have the potential to hire employees, thereby creating new jobs for people with disabilities across the city.

There is a disproportionately low number of known businesses that are owned by people with disabilities and licensed to operate in Chicago. Even fewer businesses are certified by the City of Chicago as a Business Enterprise owned by People with Disabilities (BEPD), compared to those certified as minority or women-owned business enterprises. The low number of businesses licensed and certified in the BEPD program, proportionate to the disability population, highlights the need for greater awareness, better coordination, and access to resources and supports. This can go far to ensure that businesses owned and operated by people with disabilities have equal access and opportunity to thrive in the vibrant business culture of Chicago.



### RECOMMENDATION 1: ENSURE THAT INFORMATION ABOUT THE BEPD PROGRAM AND OTHER CITY BUSINESS PROGRAMS ARE ACCESSIBLE TO POTENTIAL ENTREPRENEURS

- Ensure that all public information is accessible to people with disabilities. This includes but is not limited to making websites and electronic media accessible, providing timely written materials in accessible formats (such as Braille and large print), and securing sign language interpreters and captioners for meetings and trainings when needed
- The Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD) receives a federal grant from the Social Security Administration to assist Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Supplemental Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) beneficiaries who are on the verge of employment or newly employed. MOPD helps beneficiaries understand how their wages will impact their disability benefits. MOPD provides one-on-one and group counseling with the goal of supporting individuals with disabilities to gain competitive employment and reducing reliance on disability benefits. MOPD's Work Incentive Planning and Assistance project should target new and prospective entrepreneurs receiving SSI/SSDI benefits to inform them on how their wages may impact their benefits.

### RECOMMENDATION 2: INCREASE THE NUMBER OF BEPD CERTIFIED BUSINESSES THROUGH ENHANCED AWARENESS, OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

- The City of Chicago's Department of Procurement Services (DPS) oversees the certification process for disabled, minority- and women-owned businesses. The Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection (BACP) supports businesses to become licensed to operate in Chicago. The Task Force recommends that the two departments collaborate to deliver targeted "on-the-road"

<sup>1</sup>Bureau of Labor Statistics (21 June 2018). *Persons with a Disability: Labor Force Characteristics Summary, 2017*. USDL-18-1028.

- Starting a business
  - Attaining a business license
  - The BEPD certification process
  - Accessing bid opportunities
  - Accessing resources for building your business including utilizing the Neighborhood Opportunity Fund
- Peer support can be a powerful tool to encourage others to start their own businesses. DPS, together with MOPD, should develop information to enhance their reach to prospective BEPDs. Capturing video testimonials from current BEPDs about the value of certification can be an important way to encourage new disabled owned businesses to become certified. These videos should be placed on the BEPD webpage and should also include simplified information on the certification process and how to identify available City contracting opportunities. This information should also be made available in a text format that is printable for those without access to the website and be shown at in-person meetings and trainings.
  - Provide an “entrepreneurship” track at MOPD’s 2020 AccessChicago expo and continuously identify other opportunities to increase visibility, such as through City electronic billboards.

### **RECOMMENDATION 3: EXPAND CONTRACTING OPPORTUNITIES FOR CERTIFIED BEPDS**

While the City has a low number of BEPD certified businesses, even fewer are taking advantage of contracting opportunities either as a prime or sub-contractor. Reforms made in 2017 to the City’s BEPD program strengthened incentives for prime contractors to utilize disabled owned businesses on their projects. The Task Force recommends that the City take the following steps to ensure that certified BEPDs have expanded opportunities to secure City contracts:

- Conduct targeted outreach to prime contractors to make them aware of BEPD bid incentives
- Encourage City of Chicago Sister Agencies to adopt the BEPD certification

- Encourage BEPDs to become concessionaires at the O’Hare and Midway airports, as well as Navy Pier and McCormick Place
- Collaborate with the State of Illinois, Cook County and other certifying agencies to develop a reciprocal agreement with the City’s BEPD program

### **RECOMMENDATION 4: BUILD THE EXPERTISE OF CERTIFIED BEPDS TO SECURE CONTRACTS**

- Designate a point person at MOPD to provide entrepreneurs with disabilities with technical assistance in navigating resources and available opportunities
- Work with BACP to explore ways to identify licensed businesses that are owned by people with disabilities
- MOPD and DPS should develop a BEPD Mentor Program for entrepreneurs with disabilities that pairs a current certified business with a new or prospective business owner with a disability
- Encourage existing BEPDs and other entrepreneurs to complete the Small Biz Start-up Certification Program, a nine-course program that results in a certificate that can increase the credibility and visibility of the business
- Work with the private sector to establish an incentive program for prospective businesses to help launch their businesses





## **PRIORITY 2: ALIGN, ENHANCE AND PROMOTE COMPREHENSIVE JOB TRAINING AND PLACEMENT SERVICES**

Chicago's not-for-profit, corporate and government sectors offer a wealth of employment resources and opportunities for people with disabilities. Partnering with workforce development agencies that prepare job seekers for employment and companies actively seeking to hire Chicagoans will support the City of Chicago's efforts to decrease unemployment rates of people with disabilities. However, Chicago lacks a central coordination of services between employers, agencies and job seekers with disabilities. While many community-based organizations collaborate with the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD), Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS), and the Chicago Workforce Partnership in order to decrease the number of unemployed individuals, services must be strategically aligned to this population.

The City can play an integral role in facilitating greater coordination among existing organizations, systems and agencies to ensure that individuals are aware of employment opportunities and find ways to urge employers to increase their hiring rates of individuals with disabilities.

The Task Force puts forth the following recommendations to increase coordination among government, not-for-profit employment service providers and employers to support employment opportunities for job seekers with disabilities.

### **RECOMMENDATION 1: CREATE AN ONLINE CLEARINGHOUSE TO FACILITATE CITY-WIDE EMPLOYMENT SYSTEMS AND SERVICES**

There is no one source of information for job seekers with disabilities and employers seeking to hire people with disabilities. The City needs a centralized, multi-platform clearing house that contains information on job training, hiring events, employment-related legal information and supportive services. Employers need to be aware of the existing organizations, available

programs, and resources they need in order to create and develop their disability hiring strategy and work to comply with local, state and federal disability-related laws and regulations. An on-line clearinghouse of this type will serve not only the disability community but all Chicago workforce related entities.

The Task Force recommends that the web-based clearinghouse have three primary sections: one for job seekers with disabilities, another for employers and a third for workforce agencies, with each section providing relevant and useful information for that specific sector. The clearinghouse would be focused locally on Chicago, but could also serve as a model for information utilized by job seekers, employers and workforce agencies across the nation.

### **EMPLOYERS**

The clearinghouse would provide comprehensive information to employers on recruiting, hiring and retaining individuals with disabilities. This section would include employer's legal obligations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), information on complying with Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act, how to create a disability inclusive culture within their companies and resources for sourcing qualified candidates with disabilities.



## JOB SEEKERS

Job seekers with disabilities should be armed with information on their employment rights, including self-disclosure and reasonable accommodations. The clearinghouse should provide key resources for assistance with their job search, resume writing, interviewing skills and job training and placement services. The City should also consider using the clearinghouse to post open positions of employers committed to hiring people with disabilities.

## WORKFORCE AGENCIES

Workforce agencies are an important link between job seekers and employers. They should be able to access information via the clearinghouse on how to effectively serve individuals with disabilities and how to support businesses in their recruitment, hiring and retention of people with disabilities. This page should also have a calendar of events and trainings that are relevant to supporting the employment needs of people with disabilities.

### **RECOMMENDATION 2: FACILITATE GREATER AWARENESS REGARDING THE EMPLOYMENT NEEDS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES THROUGH EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

Eliminating fragmentation of services is critical to increasing employment opportunities for people with disabilities. This requires greater awareness and coordination of programs. To facilitate this, the Task Force recommends that the City, through MOPD, provide mandatory training (at least annually) for all workforce agencies. In order to establish a seamless



system, it is critical that all workforce agencies –not just those serving individuals with disabilities – be trained. The trainings should be offered in a variety of modalities (online, in-person and as a printed training manual) and should include modules designed to establish and evaluate cultural competencies of frontline staff to better serve job seekers with disabilities and the employers who hire them.

At a minimum, training topics should include disability awareness; rights accorded by the ADA and other disability laws; disability self-disclosure and reasonable accommodations; and national best and promising practices in employing people with disabilities.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS 3: CREATE AN AWARENESS CAMPAIGN TO MAKE THE CASE FOR EMPLOYING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

People with disabilities who are seeking employment may not know where to turn for support, resources or hiring opportunities. Similarly, many employers are unaware of resources offered within the City and, worst yet, may not see the disability community as a talent pipeline. Employers can be fearful of hiring people with disabilities believing that they may not be able to perform the job and often overlook the business case of a diverse workforce that includes people with disabilities. Accordingly, MOPD and the Chicago-Cook Workforce Partnership should coordinate an awareness campaign to highlight people with disabilities as an untapped source of skilled talent. That means emphasizing their abilities and making the business case for hiring people with disabilities.

The marketing efforts should target both job seekers and employers. The campaign should market the clearinghouse and include information regarding the availability of existing Chicago and Cook County hiring and retention incentives. The aim of marketing would be to eradicate stereotypes about people with disabilities in the workplace and highlight the evidence-based value of a diverse workforce that includes people with disabilities.

There are numerous examples of successful awareness campaigns across multiple platforms that can be



considered models. Successful examples include the video *What Can You Do?*, the website *Think Beyond the Label* and National Disability Employment Awareness Month events.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 4: TRACK, ANALYZE AND USE DATA TO CREATE CHANGE**

There is a lack of specific data regarding the hiring and retention of people with disabilities within the Chicago workforce. Valuable data on the effectiveness of the on-line platform can be collected and used to ensure that it remains relevant. In addition, data should be collected from various components of the workforce systems to support the efficacy and sustainability of

best practices as well as to establish a benchmark for the employment of people with disabilities in Chicago. The collected data should include, but not be limited to:

- Number of people with disabilities who are employed (part-time and full-time)
- Number of people with disabilities receiving employment services
- Number of people with disabilities employed through agency services
- Number of people with disabilities who complete training programs
- Employer hiring and retention data.



## PRIORITY 3: FACILITATE GREATER PARTICIPATION OF STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION FOR CAREERS

The Task Force explored the programs and services available to students with disabilities within the Chicago Public School System (CPS) and the City Colleges of Chicago (CCC). The following recommendations are put forth to enhance the quality of transition-related services available to students with disabilities to ensure they have an opportunity to maximize their potential for employment.

Youth and young adults of transition age<sup>2</sup> who receive special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004) should, as early as possible, be involved in planning for life after high school. The federal language uses the term child to mean individuals ages 3 to 21 and provides the following clarifying definition of whom the law applies:

*Child with a disability means a child evaluated in accordance with Sec. 300.304 through 300.311 as having mental retardation, a hearing impairment (including deafness), a speech or language impairment, a visual impairment (including blindness), a serious emotional disturbance (referred to in this part as “emotional disturbance”), an orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairment, a specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, or multiple disabilities, and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services.*



The effectiveness of any transition program and the success of a student is dependent upon the effective delivery of a coordinated set of services, which could include a student’s secondary education and continues through their involvement in post-secondary education, vocational training, and life skills preparation.

### RECOMMENDATION 1: PROVIDE COMPREHENSIVE TRAINING TO CITY COLLEGES OF CHICAGO CAREER SERVICES STAFF ON CAREER PREPARATION AND EMPLOYMENT COUNSELING FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students with disabilities often do not seek assistance from career counseling centers and disability services due to fear of disclosure, the negative stigma associated with disability, and concerns that professionals in those offices do not fully understand their disability needs and concerns transitioning to employment. In addition, students with disabilities do not participate in campus-based career counseling services as often as their peers without disabilities. The following steps are recommended to begin addressing this issue:

- Identify leaders within City Colleges to spearhead the project
- Review best practices in preparing students with disabilities for employment within a college setting
- Establish an advisory council to develop training curricula for staff. Potential partners may include: Department of Human Services Office of Rehabilitation, Rehabilitation Counseling Academic Programs, Disability: IN Chicagoland, Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities, Chicago-Cook Workforce Partnership
- Conduct training workshops for City College Career services staff and evaluate their effectiveness
- Explore formal certification for the training program.

<sup>2</sup>IDEA 2004 defines transition services as: “a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that: (a) is designed to be within a results-oriented process that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child’s movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, and community participation.”

It is believed that other area colleges and universities will follow their lead if City Colleges of Chicago becomes a model. Programs that should be explored representing best practices in this area include the DO-IT Scholars program at the University of Washington, which is a college preparation program for teens with disabilities and Kansas University's Career Services program which integrates disability services and career services in a self-empowerment model.

### **RECOMMENDATION 2: COLLABORATE WITH CITY COLLEGES OF CHICAGO AND EMPLOYERS TO IDENTIFY INTERNSHIPS SPECIFICALLY FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

Research has shown that those who had received a greater amount of career and employment assistance were more likely to be competitively employed<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, individuals who participated in on-the-job training, such as internships and part-time work, were more likely to experience positive employment outcomes than those who did not participate in those activities.

If the City Colleges of Chicago encourages employers to provide internships specifically for students with disabilities, this could help improve post-secondary employment outcomes. The following steps could support the implementation of this recommendation:

- Identify leaders within City Colleges to spearhead the project
- Develop partnerships with the Disability: IN Chicagoland Network, American Job Centers, the City and/or other employers
- Collaborate with interested employers to identify internship opportunities
- Utilize the internship opportunities offered by the Federal Government and on-the-job training programs offered by the Illinois Division of Rehabilitation Services
- Develop a communication plan to promote internship opportunities to students with disabilities at City Colleges

- Encourage students with disabilities to apply for internship opportunities being offered through their respective Career Services offices

### **RECOMMENDATION 3: IDENTIFY PARTNERS TO CONDUCT RESEARCH ON THE EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES OF POST-SECONDARY GRADUATES WITH DISABILITIES IN CHICAGO.**

The goals of the project would include conducting research to understand what does or doesn't work to inform policies to improve access to appropriate employment, boost employee retention, and enable career advancement for post-secondary students and recent graduates with disabilities.

The project findings focused on the employment of post-secondary graduates with disabilities should be disseminated to and used as guidance for post-secondary institutions, employers, and other agencies and organizations. The advancement of knowledge can improve best practices and service delivery by administrators and other professionals who advise students with disabilities on career advancement. In addition, greater awareness of the employment outcome experiences of the target population would assist employers with their focus of achieving full inclusion of individuals with disabilities in the workforce.



<sup>3</sup> Boutin, D. L., & Accordino, M. P. (2009). Exploring postsecondary education and competitive employment for people with mental illness. *Journal of Applied Rehabilitation Counseling, 40*(2), 13-21.



#### **RECOMMENDATION 4: CREATE A TASK FORCE ON TRANSITION SERVICES WITHIN THE CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOL (CPS) SYSTEM**

In 2018, CPS served over 22,000 transition-aged students with disabilities. In its 1997 reauthorization, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA '97) acknowledged that a primary purpose of the free appropriate public education guaranteed to children and youth with disabilities is to “prepare them for employment and independent living.”<sup>4</sup> Requirements were added in IDEA '97 to include transition planning in the individualized education programs of all secondary school students with disabilities beginning at age 14 (or earlier, if appropriate) in an effort to prepare them for the challenges of adulthood.

It is well documented that success in college equates to success in the workplace. Key to making the transition from high school to post-secondary education or career training and placement is the availability of services to students in their elementary and secondary education. Further study is recommended to examine the scope of transition services available to students with disabilities in the CPS system. The Task Force recommends a comprehensive review of all transition related services offered by CPS, including the existing relationships with the City Colleges, to ensure that students with disabilities are receiving transition services. The services must be relevant to their future employment and education goals, preparing them for entering the workforce, achieving independence and fully engaging in the communities where they live.

<sup>4</sup> IDEA '97 Final Regulations, Section 300.1 (a)



## **PRIORITY 4: EXAMINE CITY OF CHICAGO POLICIES THAT PROMOTE AND/OR DISCOURAGE EMPLOYMENT**

The City of Chicago has consistently sustained a workforce of over 33,000 employees and is one of the largest employers in the State of Illinois, making it ideally situated to become a national leader in employing people with disabilities. The Task Force recommends that it can substantially move towards this goal by:

- Looking inward at its current policies and practices that may unintentionally discourage people with disabilities from seeking and retaining employment; and
- Committing to increased hiring of people with disabilities by developing or adopting best practices of other state or municipal governments across the nation.

### **RECOMMENDATION 1: ENSURE PEOPLE WITH ALL TYPES OF DISABILITIES CAN EQUALLY ACCESS THE CITY OF CHICAGO'S EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

Like all employers in today's economy, the City of Chicago posts job openings and seeks job applications online using human resources software. Since this is the only port of entry for prospective candidates seeking positions at the City, it is critical that it be accessible to people with all types of disabilities, particularly those using assistive technology.



Over the years, extensive updates have been made to human resource software application systems to make it possible for blind individuals using screen readers to independently create accounts, search and apply for jobs by providing personal data, i.e., work experience, education, etc. Web accessibility trainings have also been provided to key Department of Human Resources (DHR) staff.

Yet, it is critical that the City engage in a continuous effort to review all employment related hardware and software to ensure it maintains compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the most current web accessibility standards. To this end, it is important that the City:

- Build its internal awareness around technology accessibility by training key staff within the DHR on the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 standards, including how to make content accessible; and
- Require that all City vendors providing new or updated employment related hardware and software to the City assure their products meet WCAG 2.1 web accessibility standards and have been user-tested.

One of the ways that the City encourages and supports job applicants is by making computers available to the public on the first floor of City Hall (Room 100). At this location there are accessible desks for individuals who use wheelchairs and a designated computer that is loaded with JAWS screen reading software for individuals who are blind. In order to better attract candidates with disabilities, it is recommended that DRH staff in room 100:

- Are trained annually on the location and functionality of the computer based accessible features
- Are trained on the City's reasonable accommodation policy and procedures for those needing additional assistance and make this information publicly available

- Ensure all accessible features are labeled so that people with disabilities are made aware of its availability
- Evaluate software and hardware periodically for needed updates
- Assess whether additional software should be purchased to serve a broader range of people with disabilities.

Overall, the City has procedures in place to make the application process accessible to all individuals who wish to apply for positions. However, strengthening oversight, staff training and public awareness can improve the experience for job applicants with disabilities and make the City of Chicago a more inclusive and attractive place to work.



**RECOMMENDATION 2: ENSURE ALL CITY DEPARTMENTS HAVE A COMPREHENSIVE UNDERSTANDING OF THE CITY’S REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION POLICY AND PROCEDURES**

The ADA prohibits discrimination against a qualified individual with a disability and requires employers to provide reasonable accommodations. A reasonable accommodation is a modification or adjustment to a job or the work environment that enables a person with a disability to enjoy an equal employment opportunity.

Reasonable accommodations ensure equal access to the application process, to the job itself in order to perform the essential functions, and to ensure employees can enjoy the equal benefits and privileges of employment. Examples of accommodations include adjustments to

the height of a desk for a wheelchair user, providing a sign language interpreter for a deaf employee to attend meetings, or modifying a work schedule so an employee can attend medical treatments. The provision of a reasonable accommodation is not only required by law, but is essential for creating a culture of workplace inclusion because employees can perform at their maximum potential.

The City of Chicago has made great strides to reform its reasonable accommodation policy and procedures. Two significant reforms include the creation of a full-time position located in DHR, solely dedicated to handling reasonable accommodation requests and the centralization of the City’s reasonable accommodation fund which has brought greater consistency and objectivity to the process.

To ensure that employees with disabilities are effectively accommodated when needed, the Task Force recommends that DHR together with MOPD develop an annual in-person training for all City departmental disability liaisons and hiring managers that includes:

- Employment provisions of the ADA, the Chicago Human Rights Ordinance and other applicable laws
- The City of Chicago’s reasonable accommodation policy and procedures for employees
- Disability awareness that includes how to appropriately interact or serve a person with a disability.

Furthermore, the Task Force recommends that a training be made available on the City’s intranet, in an on-line accessible format, that can be used as refresher training or when a department faces turnover of their disability liaisons or hiring managers. This will ensure that the City not only maintains compliance with the ADA, but also strengthens its retention of employees with disabilities. Additionally, an intranet-based training made available for all employees covering the basics of reasonable accommodations and request procedures would aid in furthering awareness across the workforce.

### **RECOMMENDATION 3: ENSURE THAT THE CITY OF CHICAGO'S JOB DESCRIPTIONS DO NOT UNINTENTIONALLY SCREEN OUT QUALIFIED CANDIDATES WITH DISABILITIES**

The main purpose of any job description is to outline the main duties and responsibilities required of a particular job. Extraneous or non-essential job duties unintentionally inserted into job descriptions can have an effect of screening out from consideration an otherwise qualified candidate with a disability. The ADA explicitly prohibits "employers from adopting selection criteria that screen out classes of individuals with disabilities unless job related."

One example may be boilerplate language included into all job descriptions requiring the applicant to lift a certain weight, stand for extended periods of time or have a driver's license to travel to work-related meetings. Yet, the actual essential functions of the job may not require these specific qualifications. Instead, allowing a different staff person to occasionally unload training materials from a vehicle, a cashier to sit on a stool instead of standing, or an employee to attend out of office meetings, regardless of the mode of



transportation, are all examples of how a job can still be performed with modifications not envisioned by the hiring manager.

The Task Force recommends that the City of Chicago determine an effective method to review its non-union job descriptions and make necessary modifications in order to ensure that qualified candidates with disabilities are not unnecessarily screened out from available positions. One method would be to train recruiters and hiring managers on how to develop screening questions that do not include extraneous requirements that are not relevant to performing the essential functions of the positions they are seeking to fill. Over time, the City would ensure that their job applications cast the widest net possible in seeking qualified candidates, including those with disabilities.

### **RECOMMENDATION 4: ADOPT BEST PRACTICES UTILIZED BY OTHER CITIES OR GOVERNMENT AGENCIES FOR EMPLOYING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES.**

The Task Force reviewed policies and practices of various state and local governments to identify innovative strategies for hiring employees with disabilities and creating more inclusive workplaces. It is recommended that the City of Chicago carefully examine some of these best practices (described below) and adopt strategies that have been used to increase the hiring and retention of people with disabilities.

- In 2017, the City of Cincinnati, by City Council ordinance, adopted a seven percent hiring goal for qualified people with disabilities, mirroring the 2014 rules for federal contractors under Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act. The city also established a voluntary self-identification program necessary to track progress towards the goal.
- The State of Maryland adjusted its hiring system by adding five points to the test scores of applicants with disabilities.
- The State of Louisiana enacted an executive order to create new internships and short-term employment opportunities for individuals with



disabilities. The state also increased training for human resources managers in order to recruit and retain employees with disabilities.

- The States of Vermont and Minnesota instituted trial work periods for candidates with disabilities that allowed them to demonstrate their qualifications and move into positions once they demonstrated proficiency in the job.
- In 2014, the United States Department of Labor amended regulations under Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requiring federal contractors to establish a seven percent utilization goal for qualified individuals with disabilities. It also requires federal contractors to invite applicants and employees with disabilities to self-identify, capturing data which can be useful for outreach and recruitment efforts.

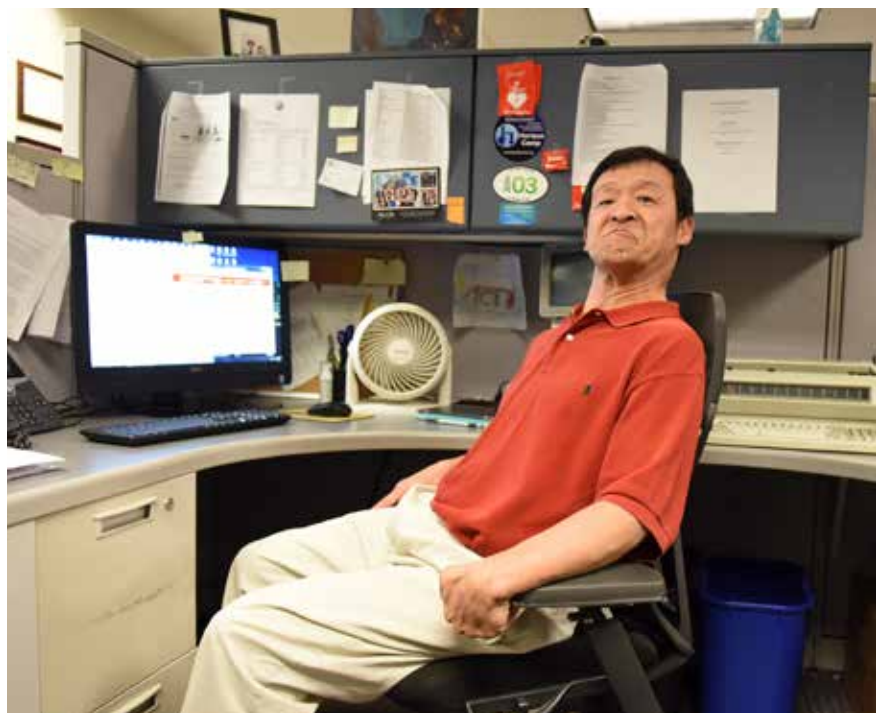
Other best practices reviewed include:

- Developing a “fast track” hiring initiative that could provide more accessible and open access to employment opportunities. For example, Schedule A is a special hiring authority used by federal agencies to hire individuals with disabilities non-competitively
- Establishing a strong “return to work” strategy for employees facing long-term absenteeism due to a disability
- Targeting recruitment of candidates with disabilities via disability community organizations, vocational rehabilitation, job centers as well as targeted web and social media sites.

## CONCLUSION

Meaningful employment is one of the most important issues facing Chicagoans with disabilities and is essential to the economic strength of our city. As such, it will require Mayoral leadership, departmental cooperation and strong support from Chicago’s disability and workforce organizations to advance the recommendations presented in this report. Our progress must be both assessed and documented, ensuring that we are held accountable for achieving the outlined recommendations. To that end, the task force should reconvene annually over the next five years to evaluate progress towards fulfilling these recommendations. It is also essential to present a formal status report annually to Chicago’s City Council, who was instrumental in establishing this task force.

Our city has a long history of advancing bold and visionary initiatives. Chicago will only be stronger, more inclusive and economically vibrant when we



remove the barriers that have kept too many of our residents with disabilities unemployed and living in poverty for too long. With open minds and collective action, we believe that over the next five years, we can become a model city where all of our residents have meaningful opportunities and pathways to prosperity.

# MAYOR EMANUEL'S TASK FORCE ON EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

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