

# Tying Business Practices to HR Outcomes:



NOD Employment Tracker™ Findings

# Forward

When looking at corporate workforce goals today, it is encouraging to hear businesses say they are committed to equity and inclusion. We see many examples of how they are making significant efforts and investments to be more open in recruiting a diverse workforce. Certainly presenting a reason for cautious optimism.

Yet at the same time company leaders are committed to diversity programs and vow to make meaningful change, we also find significant gaps when it comes to boosting their disability workforce inclusion.

The results from our report, *Tying Business Practices to HR Outcomes: NOD Employment Tracker Findings*, show that in some areas, companies are actually slipping backwards when it comes to hiring, self-ID and keeping employees with disabilities.

In much of the talk about greater company inclusion, disability continues to face unintended discrimination by diversity leaders and top executives. It has been too easy for companies to shine a light on their diversity successes while ignoring any strategy to increase employment of people with disabilities.

At the National Organization on Disability and DiversityInc., we know how work cultures change for the better with disability diversity. People with disabilities are an untapped resource for many companies and can provide an addition of dedicated and capable employees. And because of the pandemic, we have all learned what people with disabilities have been telling us for decades: with the right accommodations, they can do their jobs remotely.

The NOD Employment Tracker ranks organizations in six disability and veterans inclusion categories. Each company receives a scorecard that shows their improvements and regressions based on their

performance and how they stack up against other companies.

This is all important information for human resources departments. A big difference with the latest Employment Tracker from previous years is that for the first time ever in the disability field, we are able to connect specific employment practices with HR outcomes. We can look at self-ID rates, recruitment practices, promotion and identification of high potential talent with disabilities and see the measurement a company's diversity. We also can look at how companies are using technology to be inclusive.

For example, the self-ID rate of companies that scored at the top of the Tracker – and make disability recruitment a priority -- was 51% higher than all other participating companies. This highlights a gap in outcomes that can be traced back to specific practices.

Progress overall, however, has been moderate in recent years. We continue to see only a slow trickle in the pipeline of college students with disabilities being recruited by businesses. Many reasons exist for this outcome. We also have lost ground on workers' willingness to disclose a disability to their employers.

All of the data points in the whitepaper make the Employment Tracker even more necessary and attention to the results all the more critical.

We hope you will take away valuable information from this report and find it useful for considering the changes needed to increase employment and retention of workers with disabilities.

– Carol Glazer  
President, National Organization on Disability

# Tracker Findings Identify Room for Improvement

**At a time when companies are investing in diversity programs as part of their ESG efforts, and attempting to make significant change, gaps remain between companies' diversity efforts and those related to disability workforce inclusion.**

Despite the continued prevalence of remote workplaces that have leveled the playing field for many people with disabilities during the pandemic, data obtained from more than 200 companies completing the National Organization on Disability's (NOD) Employment Tracker™ ("the Tracker") in 2021 shows that progress on disability inclusion has been slow in recent years. In many cases, most notably in workers' willingness to disclose a disability to their employers, corporate America has actually lost ground.

In this whitepaper, we'll lay out how the Employment Tracker™ works, highlight metrics that tell the story of what disability employment currently looks like, assess the workforce experiences

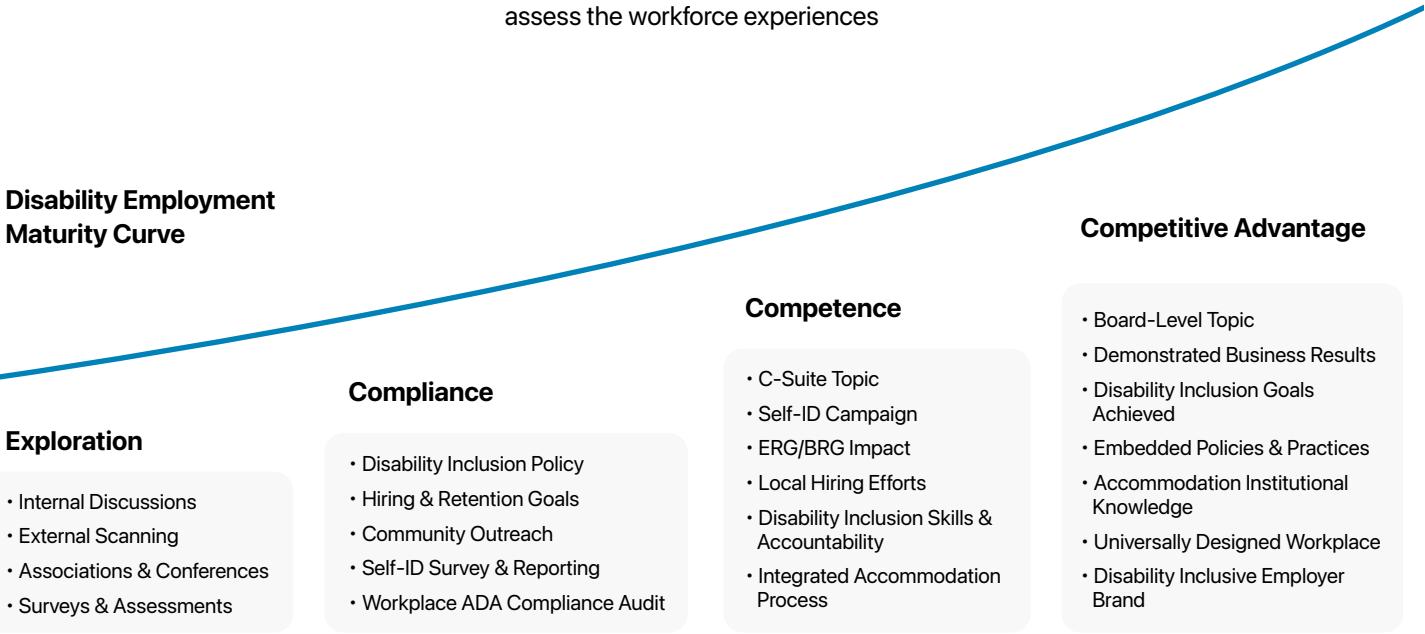
of employees with disabilities and look ahead to the practices that will help companies become employers of choice for people with disabilities.

## Background

Each year, NOD releases the Employment Tracker™, a survey designed to help companies assess where they are on inclusion of employees and veterans with disabilities in their workforce.

The 2021 edition revealed important insights into how companies can tap into this important talent segment and make dramatic improvements in their disability workforce inclusion.

### Disability Employment Maturity Curve



# About the NOD Employment Tracker™

**Nine years ago,  
the NOD Disability  
Employment  
Tracker™ was  
created to help  
companies assess  
and improve their  
disability workforce  
inclusion practices.**

The free, confidential benchmarking assessment has traditionally provided companies with a tool that measures their performance on several aspects of disability and veteran workforce inclusion. Upon completion, each company taking the survey receives a scorecard that benchmarks its performance against the other 200+ companies, and against companies scoring in the top quartile. Top quartile companies are those companies with the greatest rate of adoption of effective disability inclusion business practices.

With 228 companies filling out the survey in 2021, representing every industry sector, the Tracker is an important means of not only determining companies' individual

performance against others, but also for understanding trends in the field as a whole. The Tracker also tracks each company's year over year progress. Each year, NOD revises the survey to reflect practices that have been broadly adopted across all industries, and those that are emerging as the most effective in getting results<sup>1</sup>.

**Since inception, more than 500 companies with aggregate workforces of 15 million have submitted the survey to NOD.**

The 2021 Employment Tracker™ is different from previous years' surveys in that for the first time ever in the disability employment field, we are able to tie specific employment practices to HR outcomes such as self-ID rates and recruitment, promotion and identification of high potential talent with disabilities. The overall goal of the Tracker in all years has been to set new standards for disability workforce inclusion and give companies a roadmap for their workforce strategies

Companies answered over 100 questions in six key categories of workforce inclusion.

## Six Categories of Workplace Inclusion

1. Strategy
2. Culture and Climate
3. People Practices
4. Talent Sourcing
5. Talent Outcome Metrics
6. Workplace Tools & Accessibility

To administer the survey and analyze results, NOD works with Talmetrix, a company that specializes in employee feedback and analytics.

## HR Outcomes Tracked

1. Self-ID Rates
2. Job Applicants
3. New Hires
4. Retention
5. Promotion
6. High Potential Employees
7. Employees in Management Roles

1. In 2022, 210 companies completed the Tracker in time to qualify for the DiversityInc and NOD Leading Disability Seal.

# Disability in the DEI Landscape

There is perhaps no more telling data point from the 2021 Tracker than this: only **48%** of participating companies tracked one or more of the new HR outcomes for employees with disabilities; in contrast, **86%** of participating companies track the same metrics for other diversity segments.

## Self-ID Rates

The holy grail of disability inclusion is self-ID rates. Not only are federal contractors—which employ 25% of America's workforce—required to track and report self-ID rates, the rates also provide a barometer of how inclusive a company's culture is and whether employees possess the trust and psychological safety to "come out" with a disability.

### Psychological Safety:

**The belief that your environment is safe for interpersonal risk-taking. It consists of beliefs concerning group norms – what it means to be a member of that group.**

In today's workplaces, trust and psychological safety

**are critical to success not only for DEI efforts, but in hiring, retaining and promoting the entire workforce.**

Put simply, the only way to truly ensure that a company is doing everything it can to be inclusive of people with disabilities is to accurately document, track and understand the number of employees that identify as having a disability. As obvious as that may seem, the 2021 Tracker revealed that only **76%** of all companies who participated track self-ID rates<sup>2</sup>. That means **24%** still don't know how well they are doing with this vital data point.

At some companies, self-ID campaigns are considered an important part of the effort to drive up self-ID rates, but Tracker data over the years show that these campaigns are not successful in the absence of other visible measures to support the hiring and promotion of employees with disabilities. Furthermore, these campaigns might actually backfire if not built on a foundation of trust.

In 2021, self-ID rates dropped **11%** across the companies that participated in the Tracker survey in 2020<sup>3</sup>. There may be outside influencing factors driving employees to reconsider self-identifying. The pandemic, for example hit people with disabilities harder in the early months of the crisis, where 1 million people with disabilities lost their jobs.

This fact, combined with an unpredictable workplace, the great resignation and the stigma associated with disability, certainly have had an impact. As stated earlier, trust and psychological safety must be present in order for people to feel comfortable in sharing this information.

The self-ID rate for top quartile companies was 51% higher than all other participating companies, showcasing a gap in outcomes that can be traced back to specific practices.

Top Quartile Companies'  **↑51%** > Other Companies'



2. In 2022, 72% of companies only track self-ID as the talent metric for employees with disabilities. Less than in 2021.  
3. In 2022 we continue to see the decline in self-ID rates as the rate dropped 15%.

## Overall Performance and Self-ID at a Glance


 All Companies  
 Companies in Top Quartile  
 Your Company



Powered by  
**talmetrix**

**NOD Leadership Council**

*Take a deeper dive into your scorecard*

NATIONAL ORGANIZATION ON  
**DISABILITY**

### Example Scorecard

There are three categories of inclusive practices that most highly correlated to improving self-ID rates. They were:



#### Strategy:

How disability is embedded in a company's business processes and external communications.



#### Talent Sourcing:

How a company uses disability service providers as talent sourcing agencies and tracks performance.



#### People Practices:

Disability training, mentoring programs, and inclusion of disability as a segment in employee surveys.

# Inclusive Practices that Drive Self-ID



## Strategy

Administer surveys on employees' beliefs and attitudes and analyzes the results for employees with disabilities

Improve disability inclusion by implementing a comprehensive disability strategy

Consider disability inclusion when spending corporate philanthropy dollars

Track the ratio of applicants with disabilities to all job applicants

Track the ratio of applicants with disabilities hired to all new hires



## Talent Sourcing

Recruiting materials both highlight employees with disabilities, and are available in accessible formats

Provide candidates the opportunity to self-identify during the recruiting process

Train recruiters to find and administer the company's accommodation process

Hire candidates with disabilities from community partners

Implement an application system that is compliant with both **Section 508** and Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)



## People Practices

Require staff members to take part in annual disability trainings that are also available in accessible formats

Hold staff members accountable for their adherence to disability and inclusion policies

Implement a formal mentoring program specifically for employees with disabilities

Schedule lunch-and-learns focused on disability awareness

Annually review the benefits package with a focus on disability

Take action to retain employees who age into disability

### Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973:

A regulation that requires U.S. federal government agencies to develop, use and maintain information technology that is accessible to people with disabilities.

# Measurement Matters

The practices most highly correlated with self-ID rates also link to other HR outcomes, including the following:  
(Note: less than 50% of companies track these measures for disabilities)

## HR Outcomes

- ▶ Percentage of new hires with disabilities
- ▶ Rate of job applicants with disabilities
- ▶ Identification of high potential employees with disabilities
- ▶ People with disabilities in Management roles

Finally, it's noteworthy that companies which track at least one of these other metrics besides self ID have 3x the self-ID rate of companies that track only self-ID. Companies in the top quartile for performance in the Tracker measure 8-of-11 metrics on average<sup>4</sup>.

Is it possible that simply measuring these things and setting goals around them

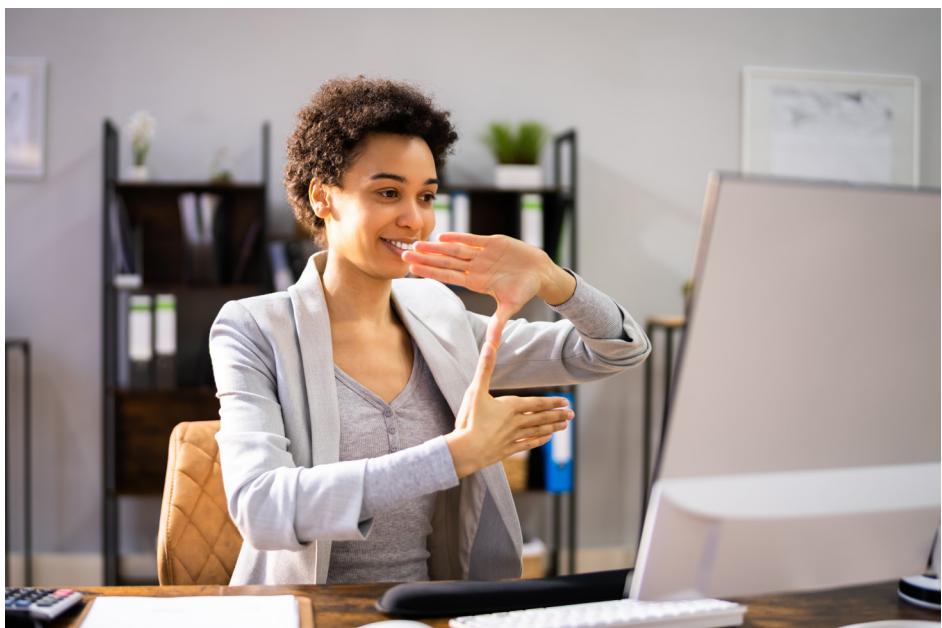
influences culture? The fact is, yes. Culture is nothing more than an idea or an illusion until something lends it the necessary credibility to make it feel real.

But measuring alone does not get the job done. For the less than 60% of companies that track turnover of people with disabilities (PwDs), it's not encouraging that those companies that do track it are averaging a 40% turnover rate of PwDs. Thus, even when companies are successful at recruiting jobseekers with disabilities, they are not necessarily succeeding at retaining them. This bears further probing.



Carol Glazer,  
President of NOD

**"While the simple act of measuring does not in itself actually produce higher self-ID rates, it does reveal the value a company places on getting better at disability workforce inclusion. Employees notice those visible signs of their employer 'walking the talk!'"**



4. Tracking the employment lifecycle for other underrepresented populations is a priority over tracking disability inclusion metrics. 74% track DEI vs. 43% tracking the same metrics for disability in 2022.

# Getting it Right

When we look at what companies are measuring, it's often a variety of practices that drive successful outcomes. The question becomes not just "Do you account for disability in your recruiting?", but "What do your recruiting efforts for PwDs look like on a more granular level? What actions are you taking to drive improvement? How does that add up to something that can be put in an executive scorecard?"

Like the way some diversity programs seek to increase their recruitment of Black employees by recruiting from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and using diversity-focused job boards, companies that bring their application systems into compliance with Web Content Accessibility 2.0 or 2.1 Guidelines (WCAG) and commit philanthropic spending to organizations that support PwDs have a higher rate of job applicants that are PwDs<sup>5</sup>.

## Where We Are Today

The last two years have been an unprecedented time for employers and employees alike. With social

unrest, a pandemic and the **Great Resignation**, there have been a variety of challenges for employers to navigate. At a time when many went in search of talent and looked to slow the alarming employee turnover rates their organizations were experiencing, many neglected to see the disability community as priority, either in their DEI practices or overall view of the talent landscape.

**The Great Resignation describes the record number of people leaving their jobs since the beginning of the pandemic, deciding life work balance is more important than returning to the workplace.**

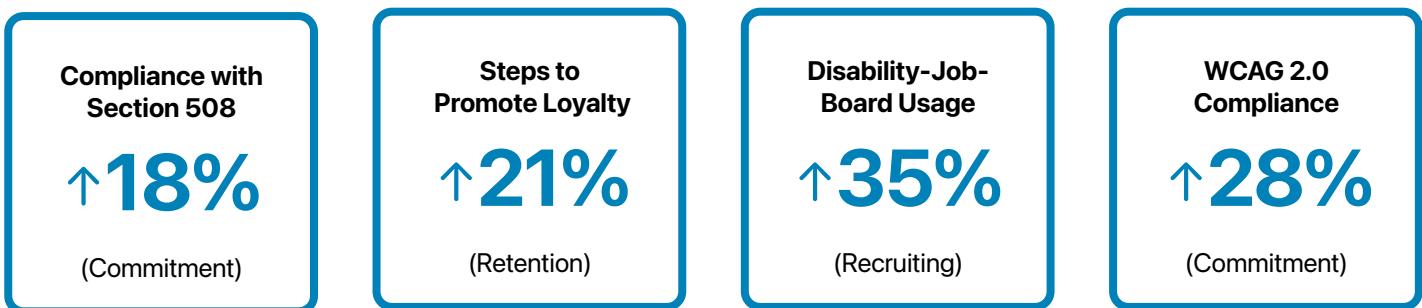


5. Leading business practices of creating a disability specific mentoring program, having a C-level leader disclose their disability and accessibility and accommodations continued to be strong influences for success in 2022.

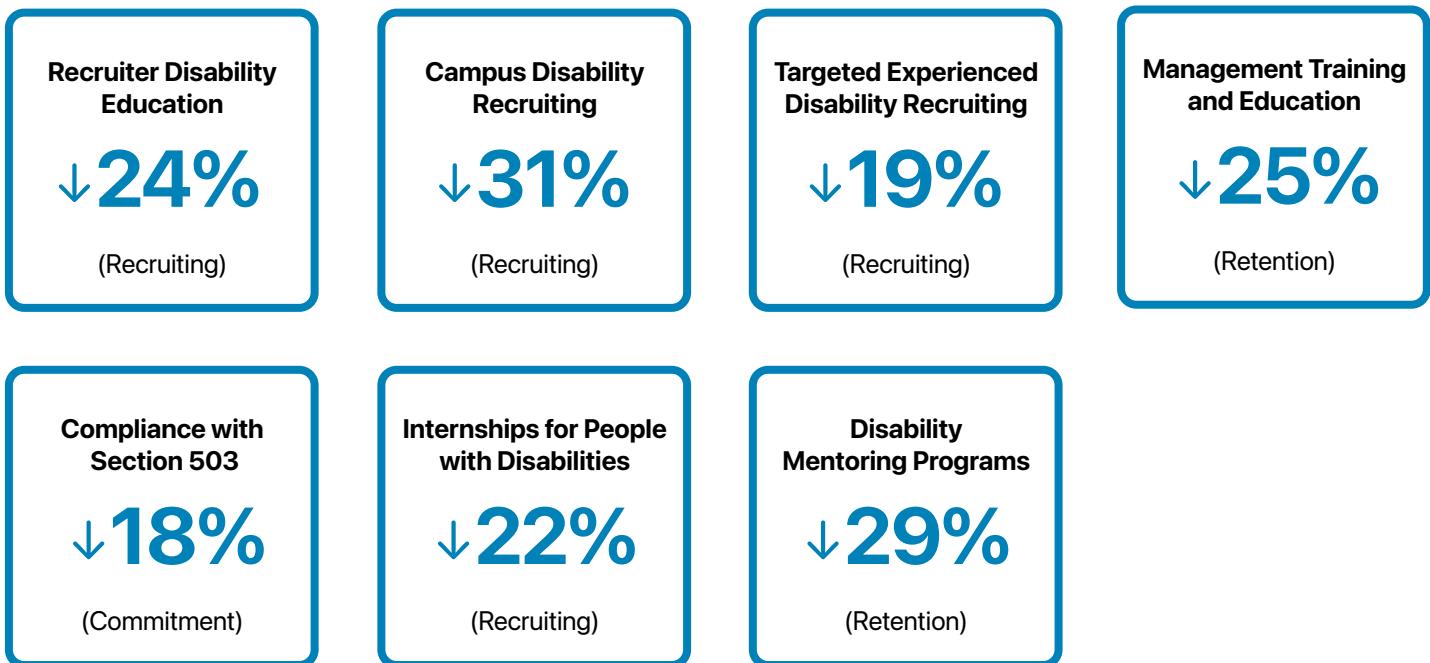
# Year Over Year Trends

Data from the 2021 Tracker show areas where disability employment practices have improved, and where they've regressed since 2019.

## Improvements



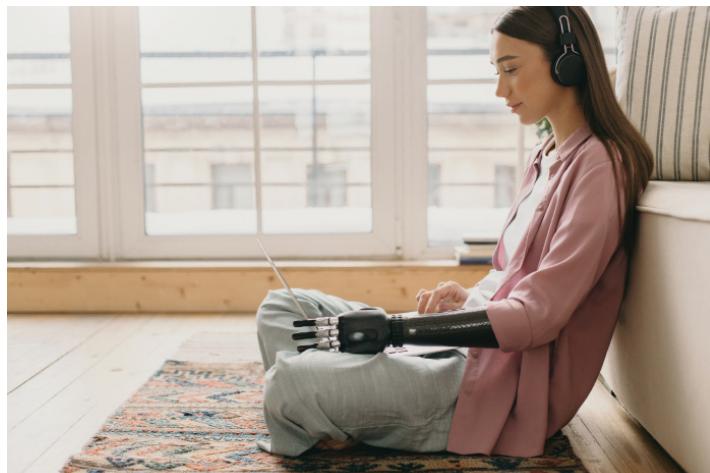
## Regression<sup>6</sup>



6. 2022 continued to see a drop in companies providing professional development for employees, decline in recruiting students with disabilities as part of their campus recruitment strategy and a decrease in compliance with Section 503.

# Recruiting

In gauging success at getting applicants with disabilities, certain recruiting practices have fallen by the wayside. In the previous graphic, recruiter disability education, campus disability recruiting, targeted experience disability recruiting and internships for PwDs are all noted as being in decline. Below we outline the impact of each on the desired result of attracting applicants with disabilities.



## Campus Disability Recruiting:

Where companies meet potential candidates early in their careers is vital in creating trust and the development of employer brands. Numerous surveys show that diversity and inclusion across all underrepresented groups is important particularly among Millennial and Gen Z workers.

## Internships for PwDs:

Shows investment in the start of employees' careers and developing talent from the pool of candidates who are PwDs.

## Targeted Disability Recruiting:

A subset of the larger disability category which recognizes that qualified individuals with certain disabilities face more significant barriers to employment than people with a broader range of disabilities.

## Recruiter Disability Education:

Impacts how recruiters reach and communicate with prospects .

Almost all companies in the top quartile track the number of new hires with disabilities while 70% of all companies do so. Meanwhile, only 53% of all companies in the Tracker measure the progress they're making on job applicants with disabilities, compared to 75% of companies in the top quartile. What this shows is a lack of depth in the thinking around disability recruiting, as it's unrealistic to expect more new hires with disabilities if you're not also tracking the number of job applicants with disabilities<sup>7</sup>.

7. 2022 top quartile companies continue to lead in tracking candidates with disabilities through the employment lifecycle.

The data show a correlation between philanthropic spend on organizations that support PwDs also playing a role in driving job applicants with disabilities.

## **Companies that have dedicated staff acting as disability champions and recruiters who understand how to administer accommodation processes, perform better when it comes to attracting applicants with disabilities.**

When it came to practices that led to new hires, there was crossover that also drove applicants. Companies that shine when it comes to new hires also completed disability inclusion assessments, had onboarding materials in accessible formats, and work with community partners to source candidates with disabilities<sup>8</sup>.

# Promotions

Promotion of people with disabilities is a key measurement of people development practices and naturally drives better rates of retention of PwDs. Among all companies who participated in this year's tracker, the average percentage of promotions for

employees with disabilities was 9.2%.

Unsurprisingly, companies that were effective in creating formal mentoring programs for employees with disabilities and ERGs specific to people with disabilities fare better than those that don't. Only around 3% of people who identify as having a disability participate in a mentoring program. Those companies showed better results in promotions.

Successful companies also had senior leaders who promoted disability inclusion and were able to track the percentage of employees who have a disability by job group and title.

Leading companies don't just measure promotions, however. They also measure the percentage of promotions into management roles are PwDs.

Practices that correlated to better performance here included having a disability strategy based on policies, processes, resources, and accountability for leaders.

"While our goal has been to change the hearts and minds of employers and our non-disabled peers, as we see from the Tracker, policies, process, resources and accountability all add up to a more effective strategy," said Felicia Nurmsen., Managing Director of Employer Services at NOD.

**NOD Leadership Council members outperform non-members each year. In 2021 member self ID rate was 11% higher than non members.**



8. This success continues in 2022 with overlap in attracting and employing candidates and using community partners to hire employees with disabilities.



Felicia Nurmsen,  
Managing Director  
of Employer  
Services, NOD

**"Simply put, you can't scale hearts and minds, you can scale improved policies & processes and hold people accountable to those new policies."**

Companies leading on promotions of people with disabilities in management positions also have senior leaders who are open about their own disabilities. They also conduct disability education and awareness programs on a regular basis and diligently act to retain employees who age into disability, understanding that **83%** of all people with disabilities acquired that disability as a result of age, illness or injury and **74%** of people with disabilities have non-visible disabilities.

## Retention

Of the key areas that companies are measuring, retention is one that illustrates just how far companies have to go to win the war for talent within the disability community. Of the 228 companies that participated in the tracker, only 59% track turnover. Among that 59%, the average turnover of PwDs

is 40%. Now consider that this is just a sample size of the overall picture for employment of PwDs and that this is among companies that are actually tracking the loss of PwDs. What you see is a worrisome picture.

Retention as a metric is essentially an examination of employee sentiment and talent mobility. If this data were to tell any story, it's largely that problems exist all along the talent life cycle for keeping people with disabilities engaged<sup>9</sup>.



Carol Glazer,  
President of NOD

**"We know from employee engagement surveys that people with disabilities are the least engaged among all of the diversity segments."**



9. Retention begins at recruitment, with leading practices in websites accessibility (company website, application process, onboarding etc.), awareness of accommodation process and that process is efficient and effective, according to our analysis.

The gap between people with and without disabilities around questions such as having a say on what happens to the company or being consulted when important decisions are made, there's a double-digit percentage gap between the two.

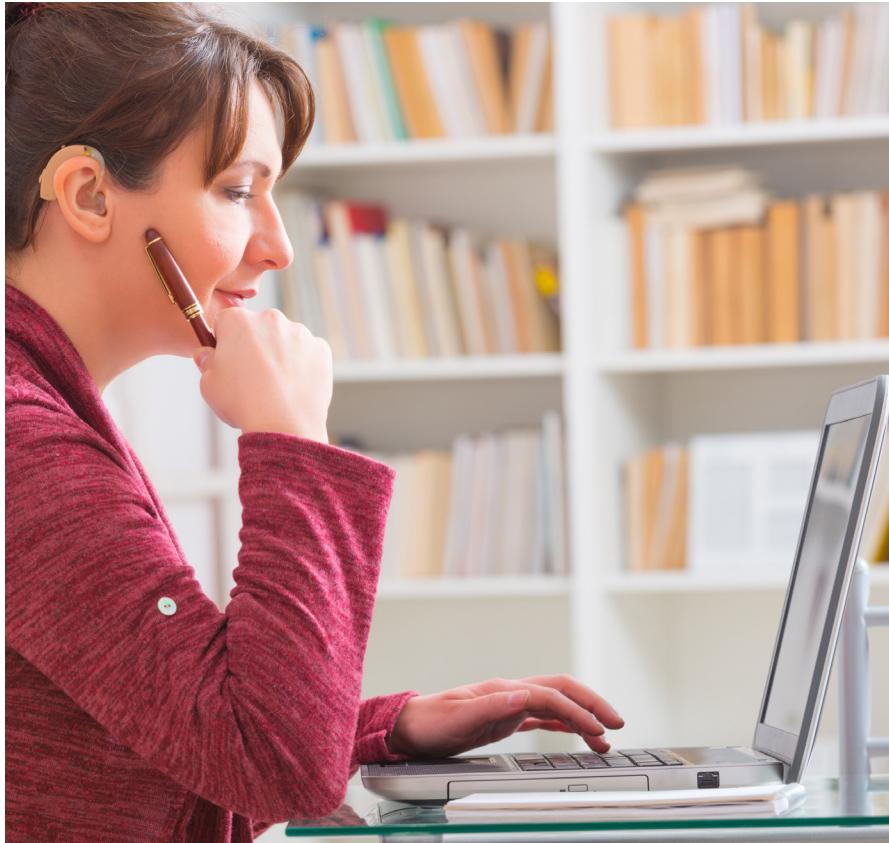
When you examine the metrics, it's not hard to understand why PwDs might feel disengaged. This is particularly the case when looking at the 29% decline in mentoring programs for employees with disabilities and the 25% decline in management training and education. This shows a lack of investment in those employees.

If retention is to be addressed and ultimately, have a positive influence on the overall picture of disability employment, these key areas cannot continue to be neglected. We know from supplemental engagement surveys that the manager is a key figure in the relationship employees with disabilities have with their employer and that they go to their managers with concerns and aspirations. Most do not go to HR for their accommodation needs or career aspirations. Regardless of where they go for this support, surveys show that the experience they are having is not a good one.

**The situation is not much better for the companies that are measuring retention. When we consider the turnover rate of 40% for companies averaging 27% hiring of people with disabilities, what we see is a proverbial leaky bucket in which companies are expending a great deal of effort to bring in talent from this community, only to watch those people leave at a ratio greater than what they can acquire for that talent demographic.**

## What's Going Right

While there is a great deal of work to be done, in part because of a loss of progress since pre-pandemic times, the news is not all discouraging. When we consider how and where companies are looking for disabled talent, one encouraging sign is that 72% of companies are now hiring candidates with disabilities from job boards that are specific to people with disabilities.



That is a 35% increase from the number of companies doing the same in 2019, showing an increased willingness to meet people where they are.

Previously, we mentioned how companies who take action to accommodate employees who age into disability perform better on retention. This is one area that has seen greater adoption in recent years, with 77% of companies doing so in 2021. That's a 21% increase over the same metric in 2019 and has the potential to help companies move the needle on disability employment if other key practices are embraced<sup>10</sup>.

Finally, more companies have come into compliance with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 than ever before. This regulation requires U.S. federal government agencies to develop, use and maintain information technology that is accessible to people with disabilities. In 2021, 95% of participants in the tracker reported being in compliance, up from 77% in 2019.

Between 80 and 90% of companies that participated boast compliant intranets, recruitment tools and sites and accessible facilities that follow guidelines set in place by the Americans with Disabilities Act. As we know, compliance is the minimum and while it is laudable companies are making

an investment in compliance with these requirements, we know that does not always lead to usability. We need to see more companies moving toward making the user experience a pleasant one.

## Looking Ahead

In 2022, the tracker has new additions to the questions as the reality of the pandemic and the way it has changed our working lives have created new concerns for companies and employees alike. Participants will notice an increased focus on mental health and disability, with questions that separate mental health from other disabilities. This is important since our country is facing a mental health crisis. Specifically, how employees answer the following questions is an area of interest.

**Do senior leaders promote mental health initiatives through the promotion and attendance of mental health events, town hall meetings and content devoted to mental health?**

**Does the company have a staff member or leader responsible for serving as a mental health ambassador?**

**Are managers and supervisors required to take part in annual mental health awareness training?**

What the answers reveal is not only a window into the organizational approach to mental health, but how likely the organization is to hold managers and leaders accountable around issues of mental wellness in the workforce and workplace<sup>11</sup>.

Additionally, the encouraging statistics around Section 508 compliance do not mean that the job of accessibility is done. For example, while progress is being made, how accessibility remains a priority across the entirety of the employee lifecycle remains in question<sup>12</sup>.

As efforts continue to evolve, questions moving forward in the tracker survey will reflect a deeper dive into digital accessibility and advanced digital accessibility practices<sup>13</sup>.

To examine how this is being approached, questions participants will have to answer include:

**Does the company require vendors to follow accessibility best practices as part of its contracting processes?**

**Does the company have a digital accessibility strategy?**

10. NOD Leadership Council members outperform all companies in investing in education, supporting existing employees, hiring people with disabilities.

11. 2022 mental health questions show leaders are communicating about mental health in the workplace. An encouraging statistic shows 73% of top quartile companies have a mental health ambassador.

12. Companies completing the Tracker for more than one year show greater progress in testing accessibility with team members with disabilities.

13. 2022 Companies are making strides with digital accessibility policies, and requiring vendors to provide an accessible/user friendly experience.

# Conclusion

In summary, what we learned in the 2021 Tracker is that several companies are implementing business practices that work, as well as tracking the lifecycle of employees with disabilities. Self-ID remains an important metric to track and understand. Without it, companies do not have the insight of their overall employee population, and how people with disabilities are represented in the workplace.

**For companies who performed in the top quartile of the tracker, it's not a case of a finish line being in sight, it simply means they're performing better in the war for disability talent than others, many of whom are performing quite poorly.**

Companies, however, must look at more than just self-ID to have the best understanding and awareness of how candidates are attracted, hired and developed within their workforce. What we learned is that while companies may be successful in attracting employees with disabilities, the data tells us

most do not have a solid strategy to ensure those employees are retained and have equal access to promotional opportunities once hired. They are not looking to identify employees from this population as "high potentials" and we have seen a decline in companies empowering our non-disabled peers, managers and leaders with education that goes beyond disability etiquette.

Accomplishing disability inclusion goals will continue to be an evolving process. The data we have collected from the Employment Tracker over 9 years has shown how much progress has been made and our data analysis has been enhanced each year to reflect that progress. Our ability to tie HR outcomes to business practice now allows companies to understand what is driving success as well as if and how their employees with disabilities are advancing.

There is no perfect score and should not be – perfect scores are a disincentive to continuous improvement and the teams responsible. More work needs to be done as we look to create systemic change and companies need meaningful metrics as well as

the commitment to use the data to hold themselves and their leaders accountable.

By focusing strictly on the work place we believe the Tracker and data collected through it are key to achieving that change.



Felicia Nurmsen,  
Managing Director  
of Employer  
Services, NOD

**"Creating an equitable and inclusive work environment is no more difficult when looking at people with disabilities than it is for any other diversity segment, it simply has not been prioritized or committed to in the way that it has for other demographics."**



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