

# Disability Inclusion Commitments

Disability inclusivity is sometimes overlooked or overshadowed in broad diversity efforts. To change that dynamic, the Diversity Lab Disability Inclusion Advisory Group—highlighted on page 7—shared their insights, perspectives, and experiences to create a list of 10 actions law firms and legal departments can take to build and sustain a culture of inclusion for people with disabilities.

In addition to sharing this list with the legal community in late 2023 so everyone can benefit from this learning and adopt these actions, the Advisory Group is taking two important steps. First, quarterly knowledge-sharing forums will be hosted to share and amplify the stories of people with disabilities in law.

And second, in partnership with McDonald's Corporation, the [Diverse Leadership Directory](#) will be expanded in 2024 to include partners with disabilities from 350+ Mansfield law firms. The hope is to increase the visibility and inclusivity of disabled lawyers on client teams and as outside counsel leaders.

The list below is not in any particular order. Given that organizations are in varying stages of their journey to foster a culture of disability inclusivity, each organization should individually determine the order and number of commitments that they want to initiate.



## Establish a disability employee resource group.

Just as firms and organizations have created employee resource groups for various underrepresented populations, they should do so for individuals with disabilities. Employee resource groups are an important driving force to increase awareness and enhance policies and practices that affect disabled employees. They are also an important signal to employees that the firm or organization values employees with disabilities. Ask for and incorporate their advice on the commitments on this list.

### Helpful Resources on This Topic:

-  [Attorneys with Disabilities in BigLaw, Bloomberg Article](#)
-  [Disability:IN Toolkit for Creating Affinity Groups & Employee Resource Groups](#)




Examples of Law Firm Disability Affinity Group Announcements – [Reed Smith](#), [Dentons](#), [Sidley, Clifford Chance](#), and [Littler](#)

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### Conduct an annual survey for lawyers and business professionals to identify as having a disability.

On an annual basis, invite people to self-identify as an individual with a disability. Invite the disability employee resource group to review and provide feedback on the survey and corresponding communications, if desired.

#### Helpful Resources on This Topic:







-  [HR Analytical, Self ID Techniques](#)
-  [Communication Tools to Support Disability Inclusion](#)
-  [U.S. Government Contractor Rule with Overall Helpful Details](#)

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### Create opportunities for everyone in the firm to discuss their ideas and perspectives on inclusive actions and language related to disabilities.




Individuals with disabilities are not a monolith. Some have visible disabilities, and others have invisible disabilities. Some individuals prefer people-first language with the belief that we should place the person rather than their disability first as an identifier. Others suggest tackling any perceived stigmas straight-away by leading with their identity. We have intentionally used both language approaches – individual with a disability and disabled individual – throughout this list to recognize these varied preferences and experiences. Ask disabled individuals for their perspectives. Create space and opportunities for everyone in the organization to engage in regular conversations about inclusive language and other actions that we can all take as individuals and organizations to create a more open and welcoming environment for everyone, with a particular focus on individuals with disabilities.

#### Helpful Resources on This Topic:

-  [ABA Commission on Disability Rights](#)
-  [Deloitte: Creating a Better Work Environment for All By Embracing Neurodiversity](#)
-  [Accenture: Disability Inclusion Research Report](#)
-  [Ahead Statement on Language](#)
-  [Guidance on the Accessible Canada Regulations: Competing views on person-first language](#)
-  [The Law Society: D&Ictionary](#)

In addition to inviting discussions about inclusivity, change compliance language to inclusive language. Employee handbooks and documentation for job applicants often use needlessly cold compliance language that ends up discouraging many people from requesting the accommodations they need. Review and update documentation to incorporate welcoming and inclusive language.

#### Helpful Resources on This Topic:

-  [National Center on Disability and Journalism: Disability Language Style Guide](#)
-  [HR Drive: Don't forget people with disabilities in inclusive language efforts](#)
-  [Association for Talent Development: The Language of Disability in the Workplace](#)

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### Remove physical barriers for employees, clients, and other constituents to perform their jobs.

Many offices, both older and newer ones, were designed for nondisabled people. For example, entryways requiring people to walk up stairs, narrow aisles blocking wheelchair access, a lack of accessible restrooms, and elevator key pads without braille. Identify and remove physical barriers for employees with various disabilities.

#### Helpful Resources on This Topic:




-  [Inclusive Design Principles](#)

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### Remove digital barriers.

Inaccessible digital tools become barriers to disabled employees and clients: e.g., videos without captions exclude people with hearing disabilities and apps not programmed for screen reader compatibility exclude people with visual disabilities. The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) is a set of technical standards for making websites accessible for a variety of disability experiences. The WCAG is a good starting point, but accessibility is an ongoing process necessitating the creation of an internal digital accessibility expert role or partnering with an external accessibility consultant. Websites and apps should be coded for accessibility, inaccessible third party tools should be replaced with accessible ones, and policies should be in place to ensure newsletters, social media posts, and other communications are accessible.

#### Helpful Resources on This Topic:

-  [Web Accessibility Initiative, Training & Standards](#)
-  [The Hidden Image Descriptions Making the Internet Accessible, NYT Article](#)
-  [Berkeley Top Ten Tips for Website Accessibility](#)



## Ensure firm and client events don't exclude colleagues with disabilities.

Create and implement a plan to ensure firm and client events are accessible to disabled colleagues. The events coordinator should be trained to review venues for wheelchair accessibility, schedule sign language interpreters, arrange for print materials to be provided in accessible formats (e.g., braille, large print, screen reader-accessible files, webpages, and apps), and draft event invitations that clearly state who to contact to ask about disability accommodations. Prohibit outings that would prevent individuals with disabilities from participating fully, and if clients suggest such an outing, educate them on why such events are not inclusive and prohibited by the firm. When holding firm and recruitment events, support restaurants, vendors, and locations that are accessible.

### Helpful Resources on This Topic:

 [ABA Commission on Disability Rights, Successful Meetings and Events Toolkit](#)



## Infuse the culture with inclusivity for people with disabilities and reward individuals who do the work.

Ableism is the set of practices and beliefs designating disabled people as inferior to nondisabled people. While many people never mean to create barriers for disabled employees and clients, unintentional ableism is still ableism. Develop a more inclusive culture through regular anti-ableism training, bringing in disability justice speakers, and amplifying the voices of disabled employees and clients in internal and external communications. Recognize that people with disabilities are not a monolith, and do not assume that disabilities are always visible.

Addressing barriers takes time and energy, and unfortunately many organizations fail to recognize this work during performance reviews and other milestones. Disabled employees frequently find themselves being asked to shoulder more than their fair share of anti-ableist work. Create a program of incentives encouraging and celebrating employees who help make the organization more inclusive. Make sure to involve both attorneys and staff in training.

### Helpful Resources on This Topic:

 [Inclusion Blueprint: Law Firms Committed to Providing "Billable Credit" for DEI Efforts](#)

 [How a Values-Based Approach Advances DEI](#)






## Increase opportunities to hire disabled people.

With over 1.3 billion disabled people around the world, this is one of the largest untapped talent pools. Look for and expand talent pipelines by sourcing from organizations focused on people with disabilities. Create and implement a plan that amplifies recruiting practices for disabled attorneys and staff.

Commit to supporting disabled law student organizations. Supporting these groups is a great way to identify disabled students for consideration and create those connections during law school.

For legal departments looking for outside counsel, the Diverse Leadership Directory is an excellent resource for finding attorneys who have self-identified as disabled.

### Helpful Resources on This Topic:



-  [Why Hire Lawyers with Disabilities?](#)
-  [Deque: Tips for Accessible and Inclusive Hiring and Recruiting](#)
-  [EARN: Planning for Inclusive Hiring and Onboarding](#)



## Start a disability mentorship program.

Most professional workplaces have unwritten rules, and navigating those rules can be difficult for neuro-diverse folks and those struggling with anxiety and depression. Create an opportunity for mentors to volunteer to help bring clarity to the unwritten rules in the office, provide advice on career advancement, and be an ally in advocating for accessibility. Be sure to consider how this fits into firm mentorship generally, and consult legal counsel for strategic implementation.

### Helpful Resources on This Topic:



-  [Association of Corporate Counsel: Mentoring and Disability](#)
-  [Forbes: Hiring And Coaching The Neurodiverse: How To Provide Support In Your Organization](#)



## Add disability inclusion to the board's and/or management committee's agenda.

Culture change happens at the top. Firms and organizations should commit to provide the necessary resources for management to keep the interests of employees with disabilities top of mind when making management decisions.

### Helpful Resources on This Topic:

-  [Forbes: Six Key Character Traits of a Disability Inclusion Leader](#)
-  [Heidrick & Struggles: Disability and leadership: Engendering visibility, acceptance, and support](#)



## Create a centralized disability accommodations program.

Take steps to build a centralized disability accommodations process. Provide specialized training to the HR team and lawyers on how to manage accommodations requests and effectively engage in an interactive process with employees. This will help to destigmatize and standardize the disability accommodations process, while removing barriers to ensure that accommodations are provided consistently across the firm.

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