

**We Hire Ability Employer Recognition Program:
Extend to Year-Round Recognition Cycle
Discussion Paper**

Background

In October 2019, the Texas Workforce Commission’s (TWC) three-member Commission (Commission) approved the creation of an enhanced employer recognition strategy, the We Hire Ability employer recognition program, to acknowledge employers for their partnership and commitment to an inclusive workforce and to encourage adoption of similar practices among other employers in the same industry or community. Similar to the Texas HireAbility campaign, We Hire Ability is intended to raise awareness among employers and increase the hiring of individuals with disabilities. The program will build a community of employers that can learn from one another and demonstrate how other businesses adopt effective practices for attracting, hiring, retaining, and advancing individuals with disabilities throughout Texas. Through positive peer engagement, We Hire Ability employers can influence industry peers by sharing effective practices and demonstrating the benefits resulting from inclusive workplaces.

Employers may nominate themselves or be nominated by Local Workforce Development Boards (Boards), local Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) management, or a local mayoral or county committee that works in partnership with the Texas Governor’s Committee on People with Disabilities.

To qualify for recognition, employers must attest that 10 percent of their Texas-based employees are individuals with disabilities and that these individuals are working in competitive integrated employment (CIE). To meet CIE criteria, employees with disabilities must be working:

- at minimum wage or above;
- in a position typically found in the community;
- as part of an integrated work unit in which they work alongside nondisabled peers; and
- full- or part-time, with part-time being at least 15 hours per week.

We Hire Ability partnering employers are also encouraged to share their disability initiatives, including examples of how the employer recruits and hires individuals with disabilities and the employer’s strategies to create inclusive workplaces that support the retention and advancement of employees with disabilities.

Discussion

Word of the new program continues to build since its launch in April 2021. TWC-VR staff members have distributed messaging to system partners, Boards, and other VR staff to promote awareness among employer audiences and stakeholders. Promotion of We Hire Ability has included a statewide press release and a series of social media posts distributed throughout each of the agency’s social channels. Additionally, a GovDelivery email announcement was sent to more than 17,000 subscribers.

Efforts will continue to raise awareness about the recognition program, including through promoting We Hire Ability employers’ best practices through company profiles and additional We Hire Ability promotions and employer resources. Another opportunity to raise awareness is through a co-branded promotional graphic featuring We Hire Vets and We Hire Ability. Other future promotional activities may include participating in an awards ceremony; appearing in an

1 announcement video; authoring byline or profile articles; making presentations at relevant
2 conferences; and participating in webinars, online national dialogues, and additional outreach to
3 other employers.

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5 **Issue**

6 On March 23, 2021, the Commission approved a biennial recognition cycle for We Hire Ability
7 to allow staff to build the program and identify and partner with employers. This cycle included
8 a defined six-month nomination period. The Commission provided direction to staff that a
9 defined nomination period may unnecessarily limit opportunities for employers to receive the
10 We Hire Ability recognition. It was suggested that consideration be given at a later date to open
11 the nomination period to accept nominations year-round. An open nomination cycle will provide
12 an ongoing opportunity for employers to be nominated and recognized, particularly as the We
13 Hire Ability program continues to gain momentum.

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15 **Decision Point**

16 Staff seeks direction on moving from a defined nomination period to a year-round nomination
17 period for the We Hire Ability employer recognition program.