Approximately 56.7 million Americans live with a disability and a significant percentage of these individuals continue to have difficulty finding, securing and retaining employment, despite the unemployment rate hovering at a 50-year low. National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) highlights the expertise and skill sets people with disabilities possess and the vital role they play in America’s economy.

On Oct. 1, President Donald Trump recognized National Disability Employment Awareness Month, highlighting the work of the State Exchange on Employment and Disability initiative (SEED). The presidential proclamation affirms the administration’s commitment to increasing employment opportunities and fostering inclusive workplaces for people with disabilities and the important role SEED plays in furthering these goals.

“Through the State Exchange on Employment and Disability initiative, we are helping states develop, implement and promote policies to improve workforce inclusion for persons with disabilities, including veterans with service-related disabilities,” Trump said.

SEED is a collaborative project administered by the Office of Disability Employment (ODEP) within the U.S. Department of Labor that ensures state policymakers have the resources and tools necessary to develop and utilize effective state-based policy solutions for disability-inclusive workforce development. As SEED partners, the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) The Council of State Governments (CSG), and Women in Government work to assist state legislators in identifying and effectively addressing policy barriers to the employment of people with disabilities. This year, SEED efforts included the establishment of a Future of the Workforce Task Force and the convening of a Western States Policy Meeting addressing barriers to employment for people with disabilities.

The NDEAM 2019 theme, “The Right Talent, Right Now,” encourages employers to adopt policies and practices that facilitate the recruitment, hiring and retention of people with disabilities.

States are in a strong position to create tailored solutions to the economic challenges within their communities, and SEED works to provide effective support to these efforts. In 2018, SEED engaged with legislators, executive personnel and stakeholders from 29 states, offering policy assistance and subject matter expertise. SEED partners also author and publish a wide variety of written resources such as issue briefs, population reports and toolkits for stakeholders interested in disability employment issues.

In addition to the SEED project, ODEP leads a number of initiatives and opportunities to support disability employment, including their Resource Toolbox, which assists organizations in planning and implementing NDEAM activities. The Department of Labor created the following list for state policymakers in order to advance the spirit of the National Disability Employment Awareness Month:

- Take Your Legislator to Work Day (experience the power of community-integrated...
Employment by shadowing an individual with a disability

- Legislative Disabilities Awareness Day (explore bills that will help improve disability employment outcomes)
- Create an NDEAM proclamation or statement
- Sign ‘State as a Model Employer’ executive orders (governors can sign executive orders to examine state policies and create task forces)
- Participate in the Campaign for Disability Employment’s photo-sharing campaign [15] on social media
- Create a display of positive messages
- Educate staff members
- Feature NDEAM in social media activities
- Issue an NDEAM press release
- Post an NDEAM web link

NCSL, CSG and the rest of the SEED team will continue to provide technical assistance and support to states looking to advance employment for people with disabilities. State policymakers and stakeholders are invited to engage with SEED project partners and join in celebrating the value of workers with disabilities across the country.

Saige Draeger of the National Conference for State Legislatures contributed to this blog.

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