



Empowering Jobseekers with Disabilities in New York City

respect
ability

FIGHTING STIGMAS. ADVANCING OPPORTUNITIES.

Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. BACKGROUND	2
3. BARRIERS	3
4. OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGE	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
5. OPPORTUNITIES, RESOURCES, AND BEST PRACTICES.....	10
6. FUTURE EFFORTS – PROMOTING INCLUSION ACROSS NYC’S NON-PROFITS	12
7. APPENDIX – NYC BOROUGH DATA TABLES.....	13
8. COMMON ACRONYMS.....	16
9. NYC ADVOCACY AND DISABILITY ORGANIZATIONS	18

Acknowledgments

We want to extend our deepest thanks to our partners who assisted with the creation of this. You are doing critical work serving people with disabilities in the complex, dynamic economy of New York City. We hope this toolkit empowers more people to ensure their diversity efforts include the one-in-five Americans with a disability, our nation's largest minority group.

Special thanks go to the New York Community Trust for the critical support for this project. It has been a pleasure to work with Rachel Pardoe and Irfan Hasan. Likewise, we are excited at the new opportunity to work closely with the New York Womens Foundation and their grantee to raise the visibility of disability issues across their grantmaking portfolio.

Likewise, we want to credit the staff and Fellows from RespectAbility for their time and effort on this guide. In terms of staff, Philip Kahn-Pauli is the primary author of this document, with editorial support provided by Lauren Appelbaum and Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi. Credit also goes to Debbie Fink and Elizabeth Jones for subject matter and editing expertise, to Ben Spangenberg for coordination of the Fellows and to Frank Anderson and Franklin Anderson for securing the grant to launch this project. Credit also goes to the following RespectAbility National Leadership Fellows for their time and effort on this toolkit. This document exists thanks to: Adrienne Baez, Stephanie Farfan, Molly Donald, Daniela Nieves, Mannela Ipparaguire and Christina Revilla.

RespectAbility Board of Directors / Advisors include our chairman Calvin Harris as well as Steve Bartlett, Vivian Bass, Linda Burger, Ollie Cantos, Eleanor Clift, Shelley Cohen, Judith Creed, Heidi Daroff, Randall Duchesneau, Andrew Egan, Gabrielle Einstein-Sim, Ronald Glancz, Rick Guidotti, Neil Jacobson, Janie Jeffers, Evelyn Kelley, Janet LaBreck, Dana Marlowe, Donna Meltzer, Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi, Jonathan Murray, Aaron Orlofsky, Gerard Robinson, Robert Schwartz, Dee Soder, Thomas Sweitzer, Steven James Tingus, Donna Walton and Delbert Whetter.

We also wish to acknowledge the vital contributions made some the agencies, organizations and providers we spoke with during this project. These groups include the following:

- CIDNY
- Best Buddies
- AHRC
- Rebuilding Together NYC
- The HOPE Program
- Per Scholas
- Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone
- The Alpha Workshops
- Brooklyn Chamber
- Center for Urban Community Services
- Catholic Charities
- Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD)
- CMP
- CEO
- Youth Action Programs and Homes Inc.
- Mosholu Montefiore Community Center
- St. Nick's Alliance
- YWLN - Young Women's Leadership Network
- District 75 – NYC Dept. of Education
- Borough of Manhattan Community College
- Mayor's Office for Workforce Development
- Easter Seals
- ECDO, Inc.
- Fedcap
- Grace Institute
- Manhattan Educational Opportunity Center
- Mildred Elley College
- NADAP Inc.
- ParentJobNet, Inc.
- STRIVE International
- The HOPE Program
- The Osborne Association
- The Fortune Society
- NYC Welcome Back Center
- Small Business Services

1. Introduction

New York City represents one of the biggest, most complex economies in the world. It is a hub for global enterprises, an engine of national economic growth and a metropolis that is home for millions of residents. Nearly a million people living with some form of disability call New York and its five boroughs home. According to the US Census Bureau, there are 948,000 New Yorkers with disabilities of all ages and 455,000 working-age New Yorkers with disabilities. Living amidst an engine of global growth, with complex and constant demands for workers, these New Yorkers face great challenges entering the workforce, earning an income and becoming independent.

According to new data, over 15,000 New Yorkers with disabilities entered the workforce last year. To put that in a comparative perspective, Washington State and Virginia residents with disabilities experience job gains in numbers comparable to New York city residents with disabilities. Overall, Floridians with disabilities experience the biggest jobs gains of any state, with more than 35,000 people with disabilities entering the workforce. Looking at the broader national context, New York City ranks below Florida and above New Mexico in terms of its disability employment rate. At the same time, more than half of the people with disabilities living in place like North Dakota, South Dakota and Minnesota have jobs.

These disparities also mean that focused effort, especially by the workforce system, can close the gap and empower more New Yorkers with disabilities into the labor market. That system can achieve even greater things for people with disabilities if we meet the barriers, challenges and opportunities identified in this report.

Funded by a grant from the New York Community Trust, RespectAbility has spent the last six months meeting working professionals in the City, researching patterns in disability data and assessing where great alignment can achieve greater results. RespectAbility, a nonpartisan nonprofit dedicated to advancing opportunities for people with disabilities, has been intimately involved with state level implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Since that time, we have leveraged our organizational experience to do a deep dive into the element necessary for communities large and small to achieve great things for people with disabilities. This report reflects what New York does well and what can change for the better.

We hope this report, and the resources it outlines, serves our partner in the workforce system to advance the incredible work they are doing every day to help marginalized individuals achieve a better future. This report is divided between several categories of information. First, we reflect on the critical barriers identified in our research and in conversation with local leaders in New York. Second, we reflect on challenges that can be answered by coordination and resources around best practices. Lastly, we document where there are greater opportunities to achieve a better future for New Yorkers with disabilities.

2. Background

To understand RespectAbility's interest and commitment to workforce development issues in New York City, it is important to take a few steps back in time to 2014. In 2014, a bi-partisan, bicameral consensus emerged around the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). This new law was nothing less than a paradigm shift in the how the workforce system does business. Among the most important changes are those that now require the entire workforce system be accessible to people with disabilities. From providing pre-employment training services or pushing for more competitive integrated employment, WIOA represented and continues to represent the intersection of hope and history for Americans who have a disability.

Over the past four years, the changes created by WIOA have begun to trickle down from the federal level to the state level and now down to the local and regional level. RespectAbility, as a national, nonpartisan organization, has been involved closely involved at every stage of that process. At the state level, we were the only national organization to review and comment on all 50 state plans required under this new law. Each review we conducted was dedicated to identifying gaps in the data being reviewed by states agencies and recommending best practices to empower more people with disabilities into the workforce.

Now, we have since focused our energy and expertise into examining how local communities can break down siloes, empower people with disabilities and meet the needs of employers. You can read about our work in California both in terms of outreach in Hollywood and empowering local leaders in Long Beach, California. Our organization has long had an abiding interest in New York City and its disability community. From having multiple board members living and working in the City to our past efforts around religious inclusion.

In 2017, as we were looking for communities to impact, we gravitated to New York. As one of the largest economies and largest urban populations of any community in the Union, the rest of our nation looks to the City for leadership. The New York City Workforce Board represents "largest Local Workforce Investment Area (LWIA) in the country." What you find is that New Yorks' disability community reflects the same challenges and opportunities facing the disability community writ large. Looking at the data, we find that only 32 percent of New York City residents with disabilities have jobs. When you look further at the data, there is a 41-point gap in the labor force participation rates between people with and without disabilities. Out of the 455,000 working-age New Yorkers with disabilities, 145,747 have jobs in the community.

Yet this disparity in economic opportunities comes amidst tremendous optimism. As recently reported by the [New York Times](#), "unemployment in New York City is at historic lows — falling to 4.1 percent in April, the lowest since the figure began being tracked." As captured by that same news story, the lack of job opportunities "it is far higher in the city's poorest neighborhoods." Overwhelmingly, New Yorkers with disabilities are among the poorest of the poor. Fully one in three New Yorkers with disabilities live in poverty with outcomes even worse for Hispanics and African Americans with disabilities.

How do we reconcile these disparities? How do we close these tremendous gaps between New Yorkers with and without disabilities? Our answer is the City's workforce system.

3. Barriers

Thanks to the financial support of the New York Community Trust, RespectAbility has systemically and directly reached out to dozens of workforce agencies, community programs and local leaders. In each circumstance, we have asked them for their insights, their ideas and their perspectives. Beginning with lists from the New York Employment and Training Coalition, the UJA-Federation of New York, the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities and IncludeNYC, our team visited programs, toured schools, called offices and interviewed professionals working on the ground in the City. Across these conversation, several key barriers emerged:

- **Between half and two-thirds of New York City based workforce programs are already serving people with disabilities, especially people of color with disabilities.** This was a critical finding as in previous years, before WIOA, workforce groups had no responsibility to serve job seekers with disabilities. However, they have not received dedicated training, professional development or have access to technical assistance on best practices.
- **Transportation is an unavoidable barrier to employment for far too many people with and without disabilities – 80 percent of NYC's subway stations —355 out of 472 stops—are inaccessible to people with physical disabilities.** This issue is well known, given the documented inaccessibility of much of the Subway system. Yet this also impact other low-income residents of New York who may not have reliable transportation to employment opportunities as well.
- **The City's education system is inadequately preparing students with disabilities, especially students of color with disabilities, for post-secondary success – only 45 percent of students with disabilities complete high school in NYC.** Many workforce agencies and community programs are compensating for the inadequate and ineffective education provided by New York City public schools.
- **To plan for and meet the needs of New York job seekers with disabilities, workforce professionals need localized data on disability, education and employment issues.** WIOA has put a strong focus on access to clear labor market information for purposes of planning and operations. However, stronger data points are needed if local providers are going to make an intentional commitment to better serve their clients with disabilities.
- **Myths, misconceptions and stigma around disability in the workplace are commonplace among many employers.** Many agencies are working hard to change the minds of their employer partners around hiring people with disclosed disabilities. Stigma remains a critical barrier to employment and needs to be addressed.
- **Workforce development professionals are eager to have opportunities to connect with their peers, learn about disability issues and share best practices.** An overwhelming majority of the staff that RespectAbility spoke with expressed a deep interest in having forums, programs or other learning opportunities to gain greater understanding of disability and workforce issues.

4. Opportunities for Change

Having gained great insights into the unique barriers impacting New Yorkers with disabilities and the workforce system, our team's researching efforts pivoted to exploring how to meet these specific challenges. Some of the barriers we discussed, such as education and transportation in New York City, are complex opportunities that need broad support to address. However, several key challenges are already being met by the City and others can be better addressed through cooperation across stakeholders. In reflecting on those challenges, we pose these questions:

- **For workforce programs already serving people with disabilities, what can you do to better meet the disability needs of your job seekers?** The first and foremost step in serving the needs of a job seeker with a disability is quite simple: "ask the person." Disability is a broad spectrum of issues, experiences and identities. There is no one right answer, but in general an individual knows their needs best and should be encouraged to share what those are.

A great resource for promoting programmatic accessibility and inclusion is the Employer Assistance and Resource Network (EARN). This website, supported by the Department of Labor and the Viscardi Center based in Albertson NY, is intended to offer businesses the resources they need to successfully employ people with disabilities. However, the [essential best practices](#) documented by EARN are highly applicable to any workforce program or agency. As a part of WIOA implementation, the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) has developed a comprehensive [accessibility resource guide](#) called "*Promising Practices in Achieving Universal Access and Equal Opportunity*." This guide, written to address the equal opportunity/non-discrimination provisions of WIOA, provide in-depth guidance on service delivery, providing accommodations, and implementation processes. If your organization is not yet familiar with the guide, it is an appropriate starting point for assessing your current efforts. Both resources reflect internally facing efforts that a program or agency can take to support job seekers with disabilities. However, external efforts are also needed.

To serve job seekers with disabilities, it is important that your organization, agency or program's website be welcoming to those with disabilities who might want to apply. Web accessibility is a complex topic. Groups such as the [World Wide Web Consortium's \(W3C\)](#) or [Accessibility Partners](#) can provide technical assistance on making websites accessible. However, there are simpler steps that can be undertaken to promote access. For example, a solid plurality of programs RespectAbility interviewed for this project use training videos as part of their curriculum. However, most of those videos also lack closed captioning of any kind. One of the principal ways of ensuring your website is accessible is by adding captions to all of videos. According to the [National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders](#), 37.5 million American adults aged 18 and over report some trouble hearing. According to the [Hearing Health Foundation](#), nearly 50 million Americans have hearing loss in at least one ear, including one in five teenagers. While it is far from perfect, YouTube adds rudimentary captions for free to all videos uploaded. However, having captioned videos directly on an official website shows the viewer that

there has been an effort to make program or pathway open to them. Lastly, ensuring that individuals with disabilities are listed among the clients you serve on your website is a sign that you are fully embracing the no-wrong-door approach of WIOA. Just as the [Workforce1 Centers](#) specifically mention individuals with disabilities as a group served, your agency ought to mention disability among other demographic factors, both on your own website and on membership directories such as that of NYCETC.

Very simple technology, such as free applications installed on a job seekers' smart phone can be a tremendous asset for addressing disability issues. As described by the organization [BEST \(Brain Education Strategies and Technology\)](#), "Smartphones" are "the brain prosthetic of the 21st century." This is especially critical for job seekers with invisible disabilities such as ADHD, Traumatic Brain Injury, or disorders that impact executive function. Many of these issues can impact how job seekers absorb and retain the skills, information and training that a workforce program provides. BEST offers a range of easy to use apps that can directly address things such as time management, focus or attention and other soft skills. [BEST](#) also offers a range of free online courses and trainings. Likewise the Partnership on Employment & Accessible Technology ([PEAT](#)) maintains a program called [TechCheck](#) that reviews the utility of free workplace apps.

It is especially worth noting the potential impact of such free tools on programs and agencies serving returning citizens. To step back to the broader context, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 32 percent of federal prisoners and 40 percent of people in jail have at least one disability. Using such sources and limited data, RespectAbility estimates that more than 750,000 people with disabilities are behind bars in America today. Extrapolating down to the local context, that means thousands of people who have served their time in jail and returning home to New York City have disabilities that can impact their successful reintegration in the community. These issues are especially critical, given how [the Mayor's Office](#) has put a high priority on re-entry services, reducing recidivism and connecting people to jobs. [Programs](#) such as Exodus, Second Chance Reentry, America Works, The Doe Fund, College and Community Fellowship, Fortune Society, Next Door Project, The Osborne Association and CEO have a critical opportunity to better meet the needs of the people that they now serve.

- **What can workforce agencies and disability advocates do to improve transportation options for New Yorkers with and without disabilities?** New York City has many famous qualities; from its grandiose skyscrapers to its daunting underground subway system. As thousands of people rely on the subways every day to commute from their homes to school, work, and other events, there is a certain population being left out of this commute. Wheelchair users find it particularly difficult to even enter the subways. Around 80% of subway stations do not have elevators available for both wheelchair users or those with other mobility issues that might make walking or climbing stairs difficult. Even in stations that have elevators available, many times these elevators are broken.

Lack of accessible public transportation is one of the key factors that prevent people with disabilities and others from low income communities from getting to work. NYC's subways are one of the main sources of public transportation. Recently, Disability Rights

Advocates has been joined by the U.S. Department of Justice in a [lawsuit](#) against for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) is aware of the significant barrier caused by the absence of subway station elevators. Undertaking a project to update all NYC subway stations to ADA standards is no small task, both financially and structurally.

In the meantime, workforce agencies can help in this situation by discussing ideas with authorities of local and state transportation departments or connecting with other organizations. Additionally, there are other ideas such as carpooling and apps like Access-a-Ride—a transportation service for people with disabilities. Additionally, workforce agencies may also partner with transportation programs and organizations such as Community Transportation Association, Federal Transit Administration, Project Action, and United We Ride. As a close piece of optimism on the transportation front, the MTA recently announced the hiring of its first ever “[accessibility chief](#)”, a valuable and significant step forward.

- **What is happening to students with disabilities in the City's education system? What can be done to improve outcomes for students with disabilities, especially students of color with disabilities?** Presently, New York City students with disabilities have a high school graduation rate of 44.8%. Minority students make up major percentages of the disability population, with 9,189 Latino students as the highest population of students with disabilities. African Americans are the second highest population at 8,719. In 2016, only 5,800 students with disabilities graduated a NYC high school out of the overall population of 58,848 graduates. In the same year, the drop out percentage for students with disabilities in NYC was 14.5%.

This in turn spurs a different pair of questions: Why are the graduation rates for students with disabilities so low? What is being done to improve graduation rates for students with disabilities in New York? In [testimony](#) previously submitted to the New York State Board of Regents, RespectAbility has discussed and debated several interrelated factors that directly impact graduation rates. The succinct answer to the first question involves such issues as absenteeism being common for these students due to their own health, risk of abuse at home (youth with disabilities are 3 times more likely to be a victim of abuse), lack of accommodation to their needs, inadequately trained teachers, and transferring students to other schools to maintain a school's reputation. In terms of the second question, the New York P-12 Education Committee has moved forward with an amendment to Section 100.5 of the Commissioners regulations relating to the Superintendent Determination Option for certain students with disabilities. Our organization disagrees and argues that lowering the bar or reducing requirements is not the best way to support the aspirations of students with disabilities.

As an alternative, we would propose a stronger focus on ensuring successful transitions from the world of school to the world of work for students with disabilities who are not diploma bound. School to work transitions are vital for the successful future of young adults with disabilities. 362,397 working age New Yorkers with disabilities have jobs out of the 1,098,072 New Yorkers with disabilities. Of those working, only 15,704 had just

graduated high school in 2015. New York has a large employment gap of 41.9% between people with and without disabilities in their current job market.

Programs like SEARCH and Bridges from School to Work are designed to prepare students with disabilities to have a job when they graduate. Programs like these have had great success with 78% of their students getting a job. There are SEARCH programs currently in NYC, but nowhere to the point of reaching the capacity to fully serve students with disabilities.

Within the City itself, there are efforts achieving great success for students with disabilities. We would invite attention to the [Young Women's Leadership Network](#) and their public charter schools. They are present nationwide and provide a unique learning style to prep students for college through missions, different types of assessments, and student performance goals. Kipp Harlem, has 19% of students with disabilities and an overall 97% of its students graduate the school. 91% of those who graduate will go to college. If NYC public schools focus on understanding the strategies used at schools like YWLN and programs like SEARCH, the graduation and employment rates for students with disabilities would steadily rise.

- **What data is available to provide agencies localized information on disability, education and employment issues?** The best source for up-to-date, reliable information is the United States Census Bureau, which gives critical statistics through the annual American Community Survey. Below are several key statistics specifically for each of New York's boroughs.

Manhattan: Currently, in the Manhattan borough, there are 81,607 working-age New Yorkers living with either a physical or cognitive disability. Of those potential labor force participants, 7,877 have a hearing difficulty (9.7%), 12,627 have a vision difficulty (15.5%), 36,030 have a cognitive difficulty (44.2%), and 40,480 have an ambulatory difficulty (49.6%)—with some New Yorkers having multiple types of disability. In racial terms, 22,151 Black, working-age Manhattanites have a disability, as well as 34,778 White, 442 American Indian or Alaskan, 4,787 Asian, and 35,127 Hispanics. Out of the 81,607 working-age New Yorkers with disabilities, only 23,528 New Yorkers with disabilities living in Manhattan have jobs, creating a disability employment rate of 28%.

Queens: In Queens, 105,219 working-age New Yorkers have a disability. 16,309 have a hearing difficulty (15.5%), 27,846 have a vision difficulty (26.5%), 35,094 have a cognitive difficulty (33.4%), and 52,840 have an ambulatory difficulty (50.2%). The racial breakdown of Queens shows that there are 24,436 Black, 43,093 White, 998 American Indian and Alaskan, 19,485 Asian, and 30,481 Hispanic working-age people with disabilities on the island of Queens. Out of the 105,219, only 40,134 New Yorkers with disabilities living in Queens have jobs. Queens has a disability employment rate of 38%.

Brooklyn: Brooklyn has 128,317 of working-age, disabled citizens: the largest number of any of the boroughs. Of those citizens, 17,984 have a hearing difficulty, 25,042 have a

vision difficulty, 51,743 have a cognitive difficulty, and 73,505 with an ambulatory difficulty—with some overlap. The racial breakdown of working-age Brooklyn residents with a disability is 48,951 White, 50,962 Black, 33,674 Hispanic, 10,281 Asian, and 402 American Indian/Alaskan. Out of the 128,317 of working-age, disabled citizens, only 40,357 New Yorkers with disabilities living in Brooklyn have jobs, resulting in an employment rate of 31%.

The Bronx: 118,237 working age people with disabilities live in the Bronx. 14,630 of those citizens have a hearing difficulty, 29,647 have vision difficulties, 52,654 have a cognitive difficulty, and 61,735 have an ambulatory difficulty. Some citizens have more than one disability, so there is some overlap in those statistics. The division of disability across racial bounds is 26,087 White, 41,663 Black, 70,442 Hispanic, 3,820 Asian, and 1,249 Alaskan/American Indian. Out of the total Bronx working age disability population, only 36,271 New Yorkers with disabilities living in the Bronx have jobs, creating an employment rate of 30%.

Staten Island: Staten Island has 21,860 working-age people with disabilities residing in the borough. The divide of the disabilities is such that 2,716 have hearing difficulties, 4,503 have vision difficulties, 7,754 have cognitive difficulties, and 11,845 have ambulatory difficulties. The breakdown of disabilities by race for working-age citizens in Staten Island is 16,712 White, 2,683 Black, 857 Asian, 4,088 Hispanic. (Note, there was no data on any Alaskan/American Indians living in Staten Island.) Out of that number, only 5,457 New Yorkers with disabilities living have jobs. Staten Island has a disability employment rate of only 25 percent.

On a related point it is also important consider the pipeline of youth with disabilities who are graduating, entering the workforce, going on to post-secondary opportunities or otherwise leaving the school system. As such, we want to conclude this section with some details on students with disabilities in the Class of 2017. In Bronx schools, 1237 graduates out of 3118 students with disabilities giving them a 39.7% graduation rate and a 18.7% drop out rate. In Brooklyn school, 1673 graduates out of 3583 students with disabilities. This means Brooklyn students with disabilities had a 46.7% graduation rate and a 12.7% drop out rate. Manhattan schools had a 48.8% graduation rate and 12.4% drop out rate for students with disabilities while only 1225 out of 2511 students with disabilities graduated with the diploma. Education outcomes are slightly higher in both Queens and Staten Island. Among Queens students with disabilities, 1436 out of 2859 students with disabilities graduated with a diploma putting them at a 50.2% graduation rate and a 11.5% drop out rate. Lastly, among the five borough of New York, Staten Island had the highest graduation rate for students with disabilities at 53.8%. However, the drop out for students with disabilities was 12.7% and only 519 out of 965 students with disabilities graduated.

- **What can be done to offer workforce professionals the opportunity to learn more about the intersection of disability and workforce issues?** For workforce professionals with a deeper interest in pursuing resources and information about disability and workforce issues, there are several different paths to pursue. First, there are a wide range

of free, online resources that can upskill some on the frontlines of New York City's workforce system. For example, the Department of Labor maintain a website called WorkforceGPS.org, an online resource destination for the American Job Center networks and other stakeholders. Their website contains a comprehensive archive of employment and training issues that impact people with disabilities as well as other barriers to employment. With over 7,000 registered users, this resource can connect professionals to others working on similar issues across the country. Similarly, disability organizations such as RespectAbility and the National Disability Institute's LEAD Center, offer an extensive range of free online education materials that can connect frontline professionals to subject matters experts. Both websites also document best practices being successfully implemented in other parts of the country beyond New York City.

Fundamentally, learning about the intersection of disability and workforce issues is a matter of systems change. Helping marginalized individuals achieve a better future, earn an income and become independent requires sustained change that goes beyond what any one person knows and can accomplish on their own. As such, there is a profound place for community-based efforts to improve outcomes and opportunities for New Yorkers with disabilities. Stakeholders interested and committed to the issues impacting New York's citizens with disabilities have an opportunity to learn from successful efforts to fight stigmas and expand opportunities. One such model that shows great promise across multiple issue domain is that of a Community of Practice (COP). Communities of practice, a [term first](#) defined in 2001, are groups of people who share a passion for something that they know how to do and who interact regularly to learn how to do it better. This model offers stakeholders the chance to build stronger professional connections by undertaking a joint learning journey on a topic chosen those stakeholders. The Department of Labor has had great success using this model in several areas of WIOA implementation. For example, the Employment and Training Administration maintains a [YouthBuild Community of Practice](#) (CoP) as a "shared electronic space where grantees can share and review documents, exchange ideas" around serving youth in workforce programs. Similarly the Office of Disability Employment Policy maintains a Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Program ([EFSLMP](#)) Community of Practice for state leaders committed to "full participation in integrated employment and community life" for people with disabilities. Likewise, RespectAbility is beginning to see similar results from a Community of Practice that our organization supports in [Long Beach, California](#). This COP has created community resource guides, forged new partnerships and enabled joint efforts to get more people with disabilities into the labor force. Such a model could offer New York based workforce professionals the chance to support their own success and achieve greater results for job seekers with disabilities.

Where can New York City-based workforce development professionals go to find more resources on disability or otherwise connect with local disability advocacy/service organization? MOPD maintains a thorough directory [of advocacy organizations](#) as well as [disability-specific resources](#). Likewise, [IncludeNYC](#) maintains a strong online directory for parents and children with disabilities, covering a wide range of topics including learning supports, family supports, advocacy and employment information.

5. Opportunities, Resources, and Best Practices

Having looked at barriers and challenges, it is appropriate to pivot to speak directly about opportunities. What opportunities are there for New York City's workforce system to serve job seekers with disabilities? Where can best practices align between growing sectors of New York City's labor market and the unique talents of people with disabilities? We offer our answers to these questions below.

First and foremost, it is valuable to recognize the unique advantages that New York City has over many other communities. The City may be complex and vast, but it has unique advantages that benefit its citizens with disabilities. Since 1972, the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities ([MOPD](#)) has been the disability community's voice in City Hall. MOPD's work cuts across all sectors and intersections between disability-specific issues, policies and practices. MOPD has a special focus on expanding employment opportunities through their NYC ATWORK initiative. This innovative public-private partnership is working hard to meet the needs of job seekers with disabilities directly, connect employers looking to hire qualified employees with disabilities and collaborate with agencies across the City. ATWORK is also closely connected to the vocational rehabilitation program of the City's workforce system.

Another tremendous asset in favor of New Yorkers with disabilities are the range of online resources offered by the City and subsidiary offices. For example, MOPD offers New Yorkers with disabilities connections to critical inclusion opportunities ranging from an online job board, information on housing access, connections to services, guidance on transportation, legal assistance, and recreational activities in the City. MOPD's [annual report](#), called *AccessibleNYC*, provides throughout summary of living and working in New York with a disability. Likewise, special credit goes to the City Health Department and their [Early Intervention Program](#). Few other communities can boast having information and resources for the families of children with disabilities readily [available online](#) and in non-English formats. Such resources speak to the capacity of the City to meet the increasing diverse community of New Yorkers with disabilities.

Likewise, the Mayor's Office of Workforce Development ([WKDEV](#)), the New York City Workforce Development Board and the Small Business Services ([SBS](#)) are well aligned around sector strategies. In the New York City [regional workforce plan](#), drafted and developed in 2016, the Board set clear targets around Healthcare, Technology, Industrial/Manufacturing, Foodservice, Construction and Retail. Carrying that work forward to the present, SBS has been undertaking training cohorts to target each of these sectors and ensure New York based employers have ready access to a pipeline of talented and work ready employees.

As reported at the most recent meeting of the NYC Workforce Board, the [Workforce1](#) Career Centers "directly helped connect job seekers to 12,844 jobs" with a "93%" rate of full time employment. However, it is worth noting that individuals with disabilities are a key priority under WIOA mandated performance metrics. This point is worth raising because of the old dictum that what gets measured, gets done. At present, there is limited, publicly available information regarding enrollment of job seekers with disabilities in NYC based WIOA programs. However, there are positive signs. Data reported by the Employment and Training Administration at the Department of Labor showed that WIOA title programs in New York state

served 38,682 individuals with disabilities. It is not hard to imagine that a significant segment of those were individuals with disabilities finding work in New York City. The Department of Youth and Community Development ([DYCD](#))'s Summer Youth Employment Program ([SYEP](#)) positively reported that 3,400 youth with disabilities participated in their 2017 program compared to the 2,663 that participated back in 2014. This issue of publicly reported outcomes could be a point of future partnership within the City's various workforce programs and City office. Promoting closer cooperation around vulnerable populations such as people with disabilities requires a strong leadership commitment and public accountability.

Returning to the key economic sectors, SBS is very much at the forefront of these efforts. In terms of Healthcare jobs, SBS has a strong commitment to training and partnership programs such as the New York Alliance for Careers in Healthcare ([NYACH](#)) and Bronx Community College. Likewise, Technology is a strong focus with partnerships connected through the City University of New York (CUNY) system such as the Tech Talent Pipeline ([TTP](#)) or the Bridge-to-Tech pre-training program. Likewise, Industry, Media, and Food Service have their own comparable training efforts under the leadership of SBS.

One of the crucial opportunities created by the paradigm shift of WIOA was to better align workforce training to growing sectors of state or local economies. Best of all, there are tremendous opportunities for best practices to align between growing sectors of New York City's labor market and the unique talents of people with disabilities. Such a commitment needs to be animated by a clear idea. That idea is that getting the right jobs for the right people with disabilities can and will benefit employers. Everyday workforce professionals and local leaders endeavor to make that idea a reality.

As such, RespectAbility offers the following best practices as models for future effort by the City's workforce system. There are clear opportunities in terms of technology, healthcare and hospitality jobs for New Yorkers with disabilities.

In terms of technology, the New York State WIOA plan clearly captured the reality of tech as a hub of NYC's economy. As they wrote back in 2016, the "thriving tech sector" supports "over 300,000 employees." That same workforce plan projected a nearly 40 percent growth in that employment sector, a trend that continues today. As such, New York based workforce programs have much to learn from examples such as [Specialisterne](#), [Microsoft](#) and [SAP](#). These companies have clearly demonstrated that people with disabilities such as Autism can have tremendous talents in technology.

Healthcare is a rapidly growing and critical segment of the New York City marketplace. One local area evaluation from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) in July 2017 reported that healthcare and social assistance, together with education, accounted for nearly 1 million jobs in New York City or 21 percent of all NYC-area jobs. People with disabilities can and should be part of the solution to this critical demand in the labor market. Models like Project SEARCH prove that youth with a diverse range of disabilities can become tremendously successful employees in these demanding career fields. Locally, [AHRC NYC](#) is the leading organization responsible for driving the success of Project SEARCH programs for young New Yorkers with disabilities.

SEARCH is a unique, employer driven transition program that prepares students with disabilities for employment success. This model has grown to more than 300 programs in 46 states and served nearly 3,000 youth in 2015. Among those young people, more than 78 percent found jobs. These are transformative results for a population that faces serious barriers to pursuing careers. These results also show how school-to-work transitions can create brighter futures for youth with disabilities. RespectAbility encourages all NYC based workforce professionals to seek out the opportunity to visit a SEARCH program locally. Under AHRC's local leadership, Project SEARCH has been steadily growing with new sites in [Queens, Manhattan and Staten Island](#). There is tremendous opportunity for further expansion in the future.

Lastly, hospitality is a [great job sector](#) where the skills and commitment of workers with disabilities match well with employer needs. In New York City, nearly half a million workers are employed. For a [hospitality employer](#), employees with disabilities are a [net benefit](#) because of typically lower turnover costs and higher retention rates.

6. Future Efforts – Promoting Inclusion Across NYC's Non-Profits

The challenges that impact job seekers with disabilities in New York City are opportunities that call for a "[systems change](#)" perspective. Organizations and leaders have many options to improve their individual efforts to empower New Yorkers with disabilities. However, if the City writ large is going to have a substantial impact on jobs for people with disabilities, then it is going to take a collective effort that cuts across existing policies, practices and systems.

RespectAbility's perspective on how to create and sustain that change goes back to the overall infrastructure of organizations serving marginalized or disenfranchised people with and with disabilities in New York City. The workforce system is part of broader and deeper infrastructure of non-profit organizations, human service groups and community providers serving millions of people annually. Many of these agencies are already serving New Yorkers with disabilities but would greatly benefit from a deliberate, intentional effort to adopt best practices around serving people with disabilities. Cooperation among stakeholders, strategic alliances and increased public awareness are the essential ingredients needed to make sure an effort a reality.

As such, there are several lines of efforts that RespectAbility believes will have a substantial impact on improving employment and educational outcomes for New Yorkers with disabilities. These lines of effort include:

- **Encourage more New Yorkers with disabilities to join nonprofit boards, join civic engagement organizations, participate in advocacy groups and/or run for public office.**
- **In-person and online educational opportunities for interested local leaders to expand their professional development around best practices on disability issues. Increase the number of NYC based workforce development agencies that explicitly serve people with disabilities, increase the number of videos with closed captioning, and increase the number of screen reader accessible features on the websites of New York City based groups.**

7. Appendix – NYC Borough Data Tables

Source: <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/searchresults.xhtml?refresh=t#none>

Working-age People with disabilities in Manhattan		
Type of Disability: *(Note there is some overlap between disabilities)		
All people with disabilities		81,607
Hearing Difficulty		7,877 (9.7%)
Vision Difficulty		12,627 (15.5%)
Cognitive Difficulty		36,030 (44.2%)
Ambulatory Difficulty		40,480 (49.6%)
Disability by Race	Number of People with Disability	Percentage of Racial Population with Disability
White	34,778	5.3%
Black	22,151	13.7%
Hispanic	35,127	12.4%
Asian	4,787	3.1%
American Indian/Alaskan	442	18.2%

Working-age People with Disabilities in Queens		
Type of Disability: *(Note there is some overlap between disabilities)		
All people with disabilities		105,219
Hearing Difficulty		16,309 (15.5%)
Vision Difficulty		27,846 (26.5%)
Cognitive Difficulty		35,094 (33.4%)
Ambulatory Difficulty		52,840 (50.2%)
Disability by Race	Number of People with Disability	Percentage of Race with Disability

White	43,093	7.5%
Black	24,436	9.0%
Hispanic	30,481	7.1%
Asian	19,485	4.8%
American Indian/Alaskan	998	17.5%

Working-age People with Disabilities in Brooklyn		
Type of Disability: *(Note there is some overlap between disabilities)		
All people with disabilities		128,317
Hearing Difficulty		17,984
Vision Difficulty		25,042
Cognitive Difficulty		51,743
Ambulatory Difficulty		73,505
Disability by Race	Number of People with Disability	Percentage of Race with Disability
White	48,951	6.9%
Black	50,962	9.3%
Hispanic	33,674	10.5%
Asian	10,281	4.7%
American Indian/Alaskan	402	8.0%

Working-age People with Disabilities in The Bronx	
Type of Disability: *(Note there is some overlap between disabilities)	
All people with disabilities	
118,237	
Hearing Difficulty	
14,630	
Vision Difficulty	
29,647	
Cognitive Difficulty	
52,654	

Ambulatory Difficulty		61,735
Disability by Race	Number of People with Disability	Percentage of Race with Disability
White	26,087	13.7%
Black	41,663	13.4%
Hispanic	70,442	13.8%
Asian	3,820	10.7%
American Indian/Alaskan	1,249	22.8%

Working-age People with Disabilities in Staten Island		
Type of Disability: *(Note there is some overlap between disabilities)		
All people with disabilities		21,860
Hearing Difficulty		2,716
Vision Difficulty		4,503
Cognitive Difficulty		7,754
Ambulatory Difficulty		11,845
Disability by Race	Number of People with Disability	Percentage of Race with Disability
White	16,712	7.6%
Black	2,683	8.5%
Hispanic	4,088	7.5%
Asian	857	3.2%
American Indian/Alaskan		

8. Common Acronyms

Acronym	Definition
AAC	Alternative Augmentative Communication
ABA	Applied Behavioral Analysis
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
ADD/ADHD	Attention Deficit Disorder/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
ADLs	Activities of Daily Living
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorders
AT	Assistive Technology
BD	Behavioral Disorder
BOE	Board of Education
CD	Cognitive Delay
CF	Cystic Fibrosis
COTA	Certified Occupational Therapist Assistant
CP	Cerebral Palsy
DB	Deafblind
DD/ID	Developmental Disability/Intellectual Disability
DOE	Department of Education
DoH	Department of Health
DS	Down Syndrome
EBD	Emotional Disturbance
ED	U.S. Department of Education
EHDI	Early Hearing Detection and Intervention Program
EI	Early Intervention
ESEA	Elementary and Secondary Education Act
FAPE	Free Appropriate Public Education
FAS	Fetal Alcohol Syndrome
FERPA	Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act
GE	General Education
GT	Gifted and Talented
HI	Hearing Impaired
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEE	Individualized Educational Evaluation
IEP	Individualized Education Program
IFSP	Individualized Family Service Plan
ITP	Individualized Transition Plan
LD	Learning Disability
LRE	Least Restrictive Environment
MD	Muscular Dystrophy
MD or MH	Multiple Disabilities or Multiple Handicapped
NCLB	No Child Left Behind Act (Elementary and Secondary Education Act)
O&M	Orientation and Mobility Services

Acronym	Definition
OCD	Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder
ODD	Oppositional Defiant Disorder
OHI	Other Health Impairment
OI	Orthopedic Impairment
OT	Occupational Therapist
PBS	Positive Behavioral Supports
PD	Physical Disability
PDD	Pervasive Developmental Disorder
PT	Physical Therapist
PTA	Physical Therapist Assistant
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
PwDs	People with Disabilities
RTI	Response to Intervention
SB	Spina Bifida
SE	Special Education
Section 504	Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act
Section 508	Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act
SED	Serious Emotional Disturbance
SI	Sensory Integration
SLI	Speech/Language Impairment
SLP	Speech/Language Pathologist
SLPA	Speech/Language Pathologist Assistant
SSDI	Social Security Disability Income
SSI	Supplemental Security Income
TBI	Traumatic Brain Injury
TDD	Telecommunication Devices for the Deaf
TS	Tourette Syndrome
TTY	Teletypewriter (Telephone System for Individuals With Hearing Impairments)
TWWIA	Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act
VI	Visual Impairment
Voc Ed	Vocational Education
VR	Vocational Rehabilitation
WIOA	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

9. NYC Advocacy and Disability Organizations

- Disabled in Action (DIA):
Post Office Box 30954
Port Authority Station
New York, NY 10011-0109
718-261-3737
<http://www.disabledinaction.org/>
- Guide to Independent Living
232 Third Street #D201
Brooklyn, NY 11215
718-596-7721
<http://welcometocup.org/Projects/MakingPolicyPublic/WhatDoesItMeanToLiveInMyOwnPlace>
- Center for the Independence of the Disabled in New York (CIDNY)
841 Broadway
Suite 301
New York, NY 10003
212-674-2300
- Harlem Independent Living Center
289 Saint Nicholas Avenue
Suite 21 Lower Level
New York, NY 10027
212-222-7122
<https://hilc.org/>
- Brooklyn Center for the Independence of the Disabled (BCID)
27 Smith Street
Suite 200
Brooklyn, NY 11201
718-998-3000
<http://bcid.org/>
- Bronx Independent Living Services (BILS)
4419 Third Ave # 2C
Bronx, NY 10457
718-515-2800
<http://bils.org/>
- Staten Island Center for Independent Living
470 Castleton Avenue
Staten Island, NY 10301
718-720-9016
www.siciliving.org/
- Self-Advocacy Association of New York State (SANYS)
500 Balltown Road
Building 12
Schenectady, NY 12304
518-382-1454
<https://sanys.org/>
- Sinergia
2082 Lexington Avenue 4th Floor
New York, NY 10035
212-643-2840
www.sinergiany.org/
- National Federation of the Blind of New York
Selis Manor
135 W. 23rd St.
New York, NY
(718) 567-7821
<http://nfbny.org/nyc>
- American Council of the Blind (ACB) New York Chapter
800-522-3303
<http://www.acbny.info/what-is-the-american-council-of-the-blind-of-new-york/>
- New York City Black Deaf Advocates Inc, Chapter 4
P.O. BOX 2135
New York, New York 10185
<http://nycbda.weebly.com/>
- National Alliance on Mental Illness NYC Metro
505 Eighth Avenue, Suite 1103
New York, NY 10018-4541
Administration: 212-684-3365
Helpline: 212-684-3264
<https://www.naminycmetro.org/>

- Disability Rights New York
25 Chapel Street, Suite 1005
Brooklyn, New York 11201
(518) 432-7861
www.drny.org/
- NY Connects
148 Martine Avenue
White Plains, New York 10601
(914) 813-6300
<http://www.nysrcr.org/ny-connects/>
- The Legal Aid Society
199 Water Street #6th
New York, NY 10038
(212) 577-3300
<https://www.legalaidnyc.org/>
- Law Help NY
c/o Pro Bono Net
151 West 30th Street
New York, NY 10001
info@NYLawHelp.org
<https://www.lawhelpny.org/>
- New York Legal Assistance Group
7 Hanover Square, 18th Floor
New York, NY 10004
212-613-5000
<http://www.nylag.org/>
- Legal Services NYC
40 Worth Street, Suite 606
New York, NY 10013
646-442-3600
<http://www.legalservicesnyc.org/>
- Hiscock Legal Aid Society
351 South Warren St.,
Syracuse, NY 13202
Phone: (315) 422-8191
<https://hlalaw.org/>
- NYC Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities
100 Gold Street 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10038
Phone: 311
www.nyc.gov/mopd
- Empire Justice Center Disability Advocacy Program
1 W Main St #200
Rochester, NY 14614
585-454-4060
<https://empirejustice.org/>
- Center for Disability Rights, Inc.
497 State Street
Rochester, NY 14608
TEL (585) 546-7510
<http://cdrnys.org/>
- Disability Rights Advocates
New York Office
655 Third Avenue, 14th Floor
New York, NY 10017
212- 644-8644
<https://dralegal.org/>
- Disabilities Network of New York City
121 Avenue of the Americas,
6th Floor
New York, NY 10013
212-925-6675 ext. 293
<http://dnnyc.net/>
- New York Medicaid Choice
1-800-505-5678
<https://www.nymedicaidchoice.com/>
- Adult Career and Continuing Education Services – Vocational Rehabilitation (ACCES-VR)
New York State Education Building
89 Washington Avenue
Albany, NY 12234
1-800-222-5627
<http://www.acces.nysed.gov/>
- New York State Developmental Disabilities Planning Council
NYS Developmental Disabilities Planning Council
99 Washington Avenue, Suite 1230
Albany, NY 12210
800-395-3372
<https://ddpc.ny.gov/>

- Office of Mental Health
44 Holland Avenue
Albany, New York 12229
Telephone: (518) 474-2413
<https://omh.ny.gov/>
- Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs
161 Delaware Avenue
Delmar, New York 12054-1310
518-549-0200
<https://www.ny.gov/agencies/justice-center-protection-people-special-needs>
- Office for the Aging
New York State Office for the Aging
2 Empire State Plaza Albany, NY
12223-1251
1-844-697-6321
<https://www.ny.gov/agencies/office-aging>
- Office of Children and Family Services
Capital View Office Park
52 Washington Street
Rensselaer, New York 12144-2834
518- 473-7793
<https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/default.asp>
- NYS Money Follows the Person (MFP)
155 Washington Ave., Suite 208,
Albany, NY 12210
(518) 465-4650
<https://ilny.us/programs/mfp>
- Northeast ADA Center
201 Dolgen Hall
Ithaca, New York 14853
1-800-949-4232
<http://www.northeastada.org/>
- NY Office for People with Developmental Disabilities
44 Holland Avenue, Albany, New York 12229
1-866-946-9733
<https://opwdd.ny.gov/index.php>
- People First - Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) Waiver
44 Holland Avenue
Albany, New York 12229
866-946-9733
https://opwdd.ny.gov/opwdd_services_supports/people_first_waiver/home
- Care at Home Medicaid Waiver for Developmentally Disabled Children
44 Holland Avenue
Albany, New York 12229
1-(866)-946-9733
https://www.health.ny.gov/publications/0548/care_at_home_dev_disabled.htm
- Bridges to Health (B2H) Home and Community-Based Medicaid Waiver Program for Children in Foster Care
44 Holland Avenue
Albany, New York 12229
1-(866)-946-9733
https://www.health.ny.gov/publications/0548/bridges_to_health.htm
- New York Developmental Disabilities Planning Council
99 Washington Avenue, Suite 1230
Albany, NY 12210
Main Phone: (800) 395-3372
<https://ddpc.ny.gov/>
- NY State Early Intervention Program (EIP)
Corning Tower, Room 287
Empire State Plaza
Albany, NY 12237-0660
518-473-7016
https://www.health.ny.gov/community/infants_children/early_intervention/

- AHRC New York City
83 Maiden Lane
New York, NY 10038
212-780-2500
<https://www.ahrcnyc.org/>
- NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
Office of General Counsel
42-09 28th Street, 14th floor
Long Island City, NY 11101
Phone: 311
<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/index.page>
- New York State Office of Mental Health
44 Holland Avenue
Albany, NY 12229
1-800-597-8481
<https://www.omh.ny.gov/>
- Mental Health Association of New York City
50 Broadway, Fl 19
New York, NY 10004
(212) 254-0333
<https://www.vibrant.org/>
- Mental Health Association in New York State
194 Washington Avenue, Suite 415
Albany, NY 12210
(518) 434-0439
<https://mhanys.org/>
- NAMI New York State
99 Pine Street, Suite 105
Albany, NY 12207
518-462-2000
<http://www.naminys.org/>
- Brain Injury Association of New York State
4 Pine West Plaza Suite 402
Albany, NY 12205
518-459-7911
<https://bianys.org/>
- New York State Homes and Community Renewal (HCR)
Upper Manhattan Borough Rent Office
Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Office Building
163 West 125th St, 5th Floor
New York, New York 10027
718-739-6400
<http://www.nyshcr.org/>
- Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Rental Assistance Programs
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th Street S.W., Washington, DC 20410
202-708-1112
https://www.hud.gov/states/new_york/renting/assistanceprograms
- NYC Housing Preservation and Development
94 Old Broadway, 7th Floor
New York, NY 10027
212-863-5030
<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/hpd/about/borough-service-centers.pag>
- NYC Housing Development Corporation
110 William Street
New York, NY 10038
(212) 227-5500
<http://www.nychdc.com/>
- NYC Housing Authority
478 East Fordham Road
1 Fordham Plaza, 2nd Floor
Bronx, NY 10458
718-707-7771
<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/nycha/index.page>
- New York State Affordable Housing Corporation (AHC)
<http://www.nyshcr.org/agencies/ahc/>
- NYHousingSearch.gov
704-334.-722
<http://www.nyhousingsearch.gov/>