>> Debbie Fink: Greetings! Welcome to RespectAbility's timely webinar: How to Join the Biden-Harris Administration or a key commission. My name is Debbie Fink and I am the director of community outreach and impact with RespectAbility. Before i turn it over to Janet LaBreck, today's awesome moderator and a vice chair of our board of directors, I want to cover a few housekeeping tips. Led by diverse people with disabilities and allies, RespectAbility knows that people with disabilities and their families have the same hopes and dreams as everyone else. Representation in government is key. A link about us is in the chat box. Today we have live captioning and ASL interpreters and screen reader availability to maximize this experience so all are included. To view ASL interpreters, use the gallery view. Click on the grid icon in the upper right corner of your Zoom window. To view interpreters during the PowerPoint, watch in side by side view. For captions, click at the bottom of your computer screen on CC to view those captions. For those of you watching on Facebook Live, accessibility features are enhanced on Zoom, which you can access via the events section of the respectability.org website. A full transcript is also available via the web and will be posted following the event. The link is now being put in the chat box. For more descriptive information on the panelists' background, that link is also going into the chat box right now. That completes our housekeeping, so I now turn the zoom room over to Janet LaBreck. Janet, take it away.

>> Janet LaBreck: Thank you so much Debbie for the introduction and thank you for the housekeeping issues as well. Good afternoon everyone. As Debbie mentioned, my name is Janet LaBreck, and I'm happy to be here with you this afternoon to share important information. RespectAbility is proud to host today's webinar, and we're going to be showcasing Mark Hanis, and Mark is from the organization Inclusive America and he's also the co-founder. Sabrina Joy Stevens is also joining us this afternoon, and Sabrina is from the democracy -- of the Color of Change. Amy Hinojosa is president and CEO of MANA. And then Courtney Lamendola is from Represent Women. And then we have Zeke Stokes who is joining us today as well, who's a former chief program officer at GLAAD. As we start, I would like to welcome Mark to present some information and context for today's webinar. And then after that, what we'll do is we'll ask each panelist to respond to some questions. And then following that, we will be asking you as the attendees to present some questions, so that you can feel free -- if you're thinking about specific questions, you can add those questions into your chat box for later. So Mark, I'm going to start with you, first of all. Thank you and welcome to our program this afternoon and thank you also for your leadership. Would you like to begin your presentation?

>> Mark Hanis: Sure thank you so much for having me on. It's great to partner with RespectAbility. I'm going to now share my screen. I'm showing a PowerPoint slide or a Google Slide which is available -- the link should be made available in the Zoom chat room, if you want to reference it at the same time or later. So as a quick additional housekeeping item, all the organizations on this call are presenting this as purely educational, informational purposes. In no way, in no regard are we promising or endorsing or any other formal activity within or on behalf of the Biden-Harris transition or the incoming administration. We're just strong advocates for there to be a more representative administration, but we don't have any explicit ties to the transition or the incoming administration. With that in mind, there are four phases, of which two have already passed, when people are thinking about how to increase their odds to join an administration. There's obviously building the relationships with the primary -- during the primary with the campaigns, and the general election. And now we're in the remaining 40+ days of the transition. And then soon, on January 20th at noon, there will be the new administration. And so this is where the Biden-Harris administration have already announced a few of their nominees, as you may be aware, from the cabinet level. They've also named a few members -- around 500 or so -- from their agency review teams. All of this is publicly available on build back better, which I will provide the links at the end of this. And then starting on January 20th, all of that will transition to USAJobs.gov. And to be clear, what we're going to talk about today mostly is about the political appointees. And in the future on January 7th, RespectAbility will be hosting another webinar on the civil or career service. So those are the two pieces of how you can serve an administration. What -- as I mentioned to you is -- we'll delve deeper into today on the political appointees. As you can see on this list, there are different types of political appointees. Generally there are those who have a full-time job, it's their primary job, primary source of income. They're working a minimum of 40 hours a week. And there are different types - those that require senate confirmation, those that don't. And different types of schedules - there's the career -- which again, January 7th, you should join again for that webinar. And then at the bottom you'll see that there's political appointments that require either Per Diem or no compensation. And that's also known as serving on commissions or boards, and I've listed a few examples, not an exhaustive list, of all the different types of boards and commissions people can join. All of these are hosted in this resource called the plum book - that's the informal name. It's also known as the United States Government Policy and Supporting Positions. And you can access all these 4,000+ positions on the internet, and I can share a link also at the end of the slide. On the next slide -- oops, there we go. So there's a little over 4,000 positions. As you can see, the ones that I mentioned -- this is sort of the general breakdown. The majority of them are under schedule c, that do not require senate confirmation. That comes next. And then you can see the non-career senior executive positions, and then all the other appointments, especially on the boards and commissions. Not all governments and agencies -- there's approximately 15 departments and agencies -- not all of them have the same number of these types of political appointments and positions. So you can see in this pie chart the distribution of them. The independent agencies like the FEC, FCC, those hosts hold a lot of the positions. But when you think of the traditional departments and agencies, it's the State department, because not only do they have all the Secretary, Deputy Secretary, Assistant Secretaries, but they have all the ambassadors to every country and other organizations. And those all are political appointed positions. And that's why the State department takes a bulk 11 percent of the political appointed positions. So how do you improve your chance? So now that the campaign is over, just so you know in case you want to join in future cycles, becoming a donor, writing op-eds in favor of the campaign, that's all helpful. But now that the campaign is already -- the election is over, the big four things that you need to keep in mind is to make sure all your paperwork is in order. And that means pay your taxes, and make sure all your legal issues -- even if you may have had some legal issue in the past, it's really important to be honest about it. Lying about any previous legal infraction, down to parking tickets as Janet has mentioned to me earlier, will get noted. Specifically for those positions that require security clearance, everything and anything is on the table, so just make sure all your records are being captured, everything is in order and when you do have the opportunity to engage, you're being very honest about it. A lot of these positions, the sequence matters. So you have to be very flexible, because it could be that they're appointing certain positions in certain orders or the Senate is deciding to vote or vote out of certain positions in different committees in different orders. So being flexible and patient are the top two criteria in terms of your approach to these positions. Unfortunately many, if not all of these positions is more about who you know than what you know. Obviously you need to be competent and qualified, but once those two criteria are met you really need to be a good networker. And so having relationships or building relationships with members of Congress and their staff, donors, past donors to the campaigns, career servants and other appointees very much helps. Lots of people are applying for these slightly over 4,000 positions, so having more friends and allies, which other speakers will talk more about, is really important. So going into more detail, an amazing resource is an organization called the Partnership for Public Service. And this diagram of the six steps of what one needs to take once you start getting more and more serious about these positions really helps. So again, as I mentioned, getting all your information ready so you're not looking about when you traveled when or which parking ticket you had to pay, or argued about not having to pay. You want to get all that ready. You want to have your resume as up to date as possible. And then begins the interview process with the Office of Presidential Personnel. Unfortunately in D.C. we reverse the order. It's called PPO inside D.C. And then there are various forms that you need to start filling out: the SF-86, SF-85, and you want to make sure that you get all of those. You can download them and start filling them out or looking at the types of questions in advance. They will depend on which positions you're looking for, which ones require security clearance will obviously go into more detail. And then you want to have that back and forth with the different departments and agencies or boards and commissions. Those that then require Senate confirmation, you will then be working more and more closely with those Senate offices. And hopefully, many of you on this call will get that appointments and be able to take that Oath of Office. Going into more of that specific, there's a helpful checklist just to make sure that everything is in order. A lot of people may not realize it's a privilege, it's an honor to serve the American people, and there's a lot of benefits and joy that comes from that. But there's a lot of in-depth vetting that you need to go through, and some people don't want to go through that extensive vetting process. So you need to make sure that this intensive process is of interest to you. So going through your financial, employment, other conflicts of interest is very important. Making sure you abide by the ethical restrictions -- lobbying is the most common one. If you have lobbied, you want to make sure that you've been able to capture all that information effectively. The financial considerations -- a lot of people in the private sector take a pay cut to work in jobs in government. The salaries are all publicly available, they're all listed in the plum book, but that's a serious consideration. And then post-employment restrictions. Some employers may not hire someone immediately out of government, or may have different restrictions depending on the different jobs you've had in government. Or government may have some restrictions on types of jobs you're able to do once you leave government service. So all of these are very important for you to take into consideration. In terms of what makes a good political servant, as you've heard before, being patient and being flexible are huge, very very important. Being a networker is also in the top three things. There's the mantra of "personnel is policy" so you want to win over as many allies and advocates as you can. Being a team player is also really critical. As you've noticed already with the Biden-Harris transition team, they often announce people in groups, because it's a very team oriented sector. Very very few times will you be the only person working on a product, on a memo, on a decision. It's very collaborative. The other big thing for some people that might be a difference is there's very little administrative support, so you will oftentimes be doing your own printing, copying, scheduling, picking up the phone calls. So that's another consideration to have. The main HR department for the U.S. government is called the Office of Personnel Management, or OPM. And they have a lot of information on their websites. And they grade every position in government according to a ladder called the GS schedule. So it's GS-7 through 9 for recent college graduates. As you have more work experience, you're starting to look at the GS-13 to 15. And those who are executive leaders go above that into non-career Senior Executive Service. So the President of the United States gets paid, I think, a little over four hundred thousand dollars, so don't expect to be making any more than the President of the United States as just a guide. In terms of additional resources, here are some general ones. The primary portal right now for getting a job in the new administration is buildbackbetter.com/join-us. They have a lot of information, a lot of different boxes to check if you're interested. That will convert on January 20th to just being usajobs.gov. You can even go to that portal now just to explore what it looks like and how to navigate it. A lot of people are saying it could be much more user friendly which everyone agrees. There's the plum book resource, which I include the link there, and then there's the Partnership for Public Service. They have a great sub site called "Presidential Transition Ready to Serve" with additional resources. They have a really good podcast, in case anyone loves a podcast, called the Transition Lab. And then there's a Center for Presidential Transition, in case you're curious on any historical approaches to the presidential transition. It's a very exciting time and very unique for a large institution to transition four to five thousand jobs in less than 100 days. So this is a very unique moment in American history. To end up, this is a last slide with more specific information should you have -- be you want to tie into more groups with specific demographic affinities. There's a people with disabilities site, black talent initiative, proyecto20 from Unidos and a coalition of groups. AAPIs, LGBTQ, women and general progressives. So all these links are available on the PowerPoint slide or Google slide deck, which you can access later. I think that is it. Janet, back to you.

>> Janet LaBreck: Great. Thank you so much Mark, that was fantastic. Lots of information there for everyone. And I think at this point it's a good opportunity to also just confirm that although we're talking specifically today about presidential appointments and boards and commissions, that there are also some great opportunities for career level positions, as you did mention, Mark, during your presentation as well. And those are equally important positions for people to take into consideration. If this is not a strategy that you would like to do in terms of going through the appointment process. So Mark, thank you so much. And I think I'll start with you, Mark, as well and I think that the audience might be interested -- from your perspective, what does the Inclusive America actually mean to you as it pertains to our topic today?

>> Mark Hanis: Yeah. Great question. So as to tie into your other point, the Federal government is the largest employer -- over two million people. So it's helpful to keep in mind perspective that for today, we're talking about these four thousand, which is just a tiny sliver of the overall over two million people who work in our Federal government. In terms of our perspective for Inclusive America, we think about two goals. One is we want to reach parity at every level, so we look at the U.S. Census on who makes up the American people. And as a representative democracy we should see as close to that -- or ideally above some of that because there's many groups that have been historically excluded -- to be represented at every level of government, from Cabinet all the way down to schedule C for the purpose of political positions. The other goal is we want to break glass ceilings. For many many years, for centuries, many positions have only been held by, as Susan Rice used to call it, male, pale, from Yale. The traditional profile has tended to be heterosexual able-bodied white men from coastal or elite institutions serving in government, usually with a law degree background. And we think that America is much richer and we benefit from having a more inclusive group of policy makers to lead to more inclusive policies. So we want to break those glass ceilings. And we look -- so if let's say we want parity at the ambassadorship, that's great. But there's certain positions we've never had a woman in, for example, to Germany, to Israel, to Spain, Russia, Turkey, China. So not just having 50.8% women ambassadors, we want to see those specific positions break those trends of just having white men.

>> Janet LaBreck: Absolutely. Great, thank you so much. I'm going to move along now to Courtney. And Courtney, perhaps you'd like to share what an inclusive America looks like in terms of your constituency and governmental representation?

>> Courtney Lamendola: Thank you very much Janet. So to start off, as a member of the research team at Represent Women, a non-profit research based advocacy group that focuses its work on the best practices for advancing women's representation and leadership in the United States, I'll acknowledge that I'm representing women in the broadest sense possible. So when we're talking about an inclusive America, we would expect that women of all backgrounds and identities would be just as likely as men to enter and remain in politics at all levels of office, from the local level all the way up to the highest levels of the Executive Branch. Unfortunately we are still very far from reaching this goal. Our research has shown that in both elected and appointed office, women are severely underrepresented, and women of color, women with disabilities, young women and others are even less likely to enter or remain in politics. And this is a great challenge for us to try to come together and solve. So as far as we're concerned at Represent Women, this is a failure of our system. Through all the work that many of our allies have contributed to, we know that there's an ample -- there are ample resources available for any individual who's considering or interested in running for office or vying for one of these appointed positions we're talking about today. And we support every effort to create a pipeline of well-prepared candidates who are trying to enter these offices. But more needs to be done to also reckon with the rules, systems and norms that govern opportunities for individual women in politics. So at Represent Women, this means advocating for recruitment targets for PACs and political parties to support women who run, fair election systems like multi-winner ranked choice voting so more women win, new legislative services such as child care access or proxy voting that'll improve the odds of being able to serve effectively once elected, and finally gender inclusive rules and norms for appointed positions so more women lead. So as far as gender balanced appointments go, in our call for the incoming administration to take this opportunity to put women into the highest levels of leadership possible, there are two key avenues that we are pursuing. First and presently, we're interested in the role that key decision makers have, from the steering committee members, to hiring managers, to the most senior members of the transition team and ultimately President-Elect Joe Biden, to ensure that they're being as intentional as possible through the candidate review process and putting women in visible positions of power. Our goal is for leaders to challenge the norms about what leadership looks like by making a genuine effort to review and nominate women for senior leadership positions. And by placing women in positions of power, we can begin to undo some of the most harmful narratives about women being unable or unlikable or less than qualified to lead. Examples in the United States and internationally have shown that women in positions of power have proven themselves more than capable leaders when facing the pandemic, so we strongly urge President-Elect Biden and the transition team to continue to appoint women positions of power, especially those from historically underrepresented groups, in the new administration. Through this process we hope to redefine the American public's collective expectations for effective leadership, create a new baseline of what is the minimum level of inclusion that we are willing to expect for future administrations, and ultimately lower barriers to entry to political office for future generations of American women. Pivoting from the role of leaders to our second path to parity, I'll briefly touch on how we should consider adopting new formalized rules to diversify the interview requirements, or ensure that there's a more diverse team involved in the hiring process from the start, as a matter of a norm, an actual rule that we will follow in the future, instead of something that is done as a courtesy or a one-off basis depending on who happens to have been elected to power. Because in order for us to break free of having to have this conversation from scratch every four to eight years, I think that we at Represent Women think it's really important to kind of reckon with the systems that are put into place, and think through what strategies we can put in that kind of mirror the best practices we've observed from different parts of the United States to different countries around the world that stand to create systems that are more fair for women entering politics at every available level. Through this process, we really hope to see some measurable change. And again, we're really just working on kind of improving the baseline that we have currently seen, and creating a new platform on which we can demand better and hope better of future generations. So, the Biden administration so far has shown good faith on its promise to include a variety of voices in both the transition process and their staff picks and nominees to date. At Represent Women, and I myself personally, I certainly hope that we will continue to see this moving forward if we are to really achieve a more inclusive America.

>> Janet LaBreck: Thank you so much. That is absolutely inspirational, and I think that a lot of us agree here as well that you can't have a government that does not represent the people that it serves. So thank you very much for your thoughts. We're going to invite Sabrina - what does an inclusive America look like from your agency's perspective, as well as your constituent perspectives?

>> Sabrina Joy Stevens: Sure. So for folks who have just joined, I'm Sabrina Joy Stevens, she/her, and I'm a campaign director for democracy at Color of Change. So Color of Change is the nation's largest online racial justice organization. And so we exist to center the the needs and experiences of black people in order to eliminate the rules, both unwritten and written, in society that hold black people back. Because we know that those solutions will drive all society forward. And so for us, an inclusive America really is one where all of us are truly included, where all of us are seen and heard in society. And particularly for us, we're looking at are black folks being meaningfully included at all levels of government, because we know that the history of this country is such that when we are being held out of these positions, as we have been for so many decades, what happens is that we end up with all of the different problems that we've all been experiencing and seeing, especially this year in particular, being put into very stark relief. Our communities not being taken care of, our communities not being responded to, in moments of crisis and on an everyday basis. And so it's really important to us to see that we are fully and fairly represented at all levels of government so that we can finally start to end a lot of these problems that have plagued our society from the beginning. There's really no need for us to continue to live under these conditions we can all really do a lot better. And so for us, what we're really -- I think a lot about is how that you know what -- how much better off we all are when everyone is really represented. So when people, particularly the folks who are signing up for webinars like this, when when we all really think about what is it that we have to contribute and to share on behalf of our communities, and for the entirety of society really thinking about making sure that everyone has a fair chance to do that, because we are all so much better off when we get the full insight, the full experiences, the full talents that every single type of person in this country has to offer. And so it's really just incredibly crucially important that people really do look at every single opportunity. A lot of folks when we think about ways to make a difference or make a contribution, there are so many roles that are very visible, very specific, very high level politician and political roles, as well as other roles of being prominent advocates being prominent cultural contributors to our society. But not very many people think about these other positions, especially in our Federal government, which have so much impact over the lived experiences of millions of us across the country. And so really thinking about the different commissions, the different agencies that are represented in these roles, both the political roles as well as the career positions which are so much more numerous. And think about a lot, how do we get more black people, more people with disabilities, more people of different gender identities, so many different types of people into these roles that really do the the nitty-gritty, day-to-day work of carrying out the policies that really do run our country. So I think it's really important that we continue to have these kinds of conversations and that we really start to give people actionable resources like we're doing today, to make sure that they have the chance to really bring their gifts into service. For so many people this is a really an incredible way to make an impact, and I'm really glad that so many people are starting to think more about this.

>> Janet LaBreck: Thank you so much. I appreciate your thoughts on that as well and very important comments as well. Okay, so are we ready for Zeke?

>> Zeke Stokes: Thank you so much, and thank you for those comments just now. So I'm super excited to be with all of you today and it's so gratifying to see so many people signed up to learn more about this. It really is one of the most important things that we as Americans can do to help this new administration become successful is offer ourselves up for public service. I was the chief programs officer at GLAAD for five years and I got to work with Jennifer and the team at RespectAbility in the early days of the formation of the organization. And I just want to send a shout out to them for conducting this webinar today, and for the extraordinary work that you all have done in a really short period of time to ensure that everyone is seen and heard in the media, particularly in Hollywood. At GLAAD, we are part of a large coalition of LGBTQ organizations that have really coalesced under a single organization housed at the victory institute called the Presidential Appointments Initiative. This was actually begun prior to the election of President Obama as an effort to bring together and really streamline the efforts of LGBTQ people to receive appointments in the new administration. And it's been extraordinarily successful - over 30 organizations in our coalition, organizations that do work in the LGBTQ space, have come together to do this. And the results from the Obama administration really are quite impressive. You saw that 4500 number of positions that are available during an administration. President Obama appointed 300 openly LGBTQ people to those positions while he was president, including Eric Fanning, who you may remember as the first openly gay Secretary of the Army. Raffi Freedman, who was the LGBTQ liaison from the White House, and then a trans woman of color, Amanda Simpson at the Department of Defense, who was the first openly transgender appointment there ever in history. So there's real impact to be had here. And I think one of the things that's so great about this call today is that marginalized groups are coming together in a really intersectional way to have this conversation. When I think about what happened on November 3rd - and I don't say this to be partisan, it's just a mathematical fact - it was the coming together of women and LGBTQ people and people of color and people with disabilities and other marginalized groups -- they gave Joe Biden and Kamala Harris their victory. So it only makes sense that we would be an equal player, a full player, a full participant in this new administration. And so I would love to encourage folks to go to victoryinstitute.org, where you can submit your resume if you're an LGBTQ person looking for an appointment in this administration, and get involved in the process. It really is just that easy. And Barney Frank, the great LGBTQ congressman from Massachusetts, used to say if you're not at the table, you're on the menu. And we have a historic opportunity to be at the table like we've never been before. President-Elect Biden has committed not only to having the most diverse administration in the history of this country, but having the most LGBTQ people in his administration ever. And so we have an opportunity to present qualified people to do those jobs, to do the work of moving this country forward, and as he likes to say, building back better. So thank you for convening this call today, and thank you for being a part of it, and we look forward to your questions.

>> Janet LaBreck: Yes, thank you so much. Amy, go right ahead. Please feel free to share your thoughts with regard to what an inclusive America looks like for you.

>> Amy Hinojosa: Thank you so much Janet, and thank you to you and Debbie and the entire team at RespectAbility for holding this forum. I'm really honored to be here. As Janet mentioned, my name is Amy Hinojosa. I'm the president and CEO of MANA, a national latina organization. We're the oldest and largest hispanic women's organization in the country, with a chapter and an affiliate network across the country that's dedicated to leadership development, community service, education and advocacy on behalf of latina women, girls and families across the country. And so for us, as we start to think about the people that we want to see in positions of trust in our government, who can really be focused on the equity that our communities deserve. As we're talking about all of the the massive work that the Federal government does, we're all really focused on making sure that diversity and diversity of thought are at the table in all these high level discussions. And so for me, if I'm looking at it from an advocate standpoint, I can point and -- if you're someone at home who's listening to the conversation on the webinar, where would you even start, right? Where would I even start if I look at the the gigantic book that is the plum book? If you've ever seen it in print, it's a huge tome. If I -- as a Latina advocate with that hat on, what I would be looking for for example is someone at the Department of Labor who has expertise in wage and hour issues, because Latinas still remain among the lowest paid. We still only make 54 cents on the dollar for every dollar that a white male earns each and every year. So it takes latinas almost two years to catch up to what their white male counterparts earn in one year. So if I'm looking at a major issue and we want someone at the table who understands that and can be effective in that position, that's where I would want someone. I would also look, as we're looking at the roll out of vaccines to combat the COVID-19 virus, the coronavirus, I would look to someone at the FDA in the office of women's health to understand that women are the gatekeepers for families, and as women go, so do their families. And so if we're talking about how we need to speak to communities and serve communities, we need to make sure that someone's in that position to understand the nuances and the cultural implications. And not just for latinos, but across the board to serve all underserved communities. So what we're looking for are people who have these cultural competencies to really serve in these positions with a broader world view. Mark mentioned in his presentation the conversation about being a professional networker, as being a real skill set to getting into a Presidential administration. I would add that that extends not only to folks who would work in the administration in those political spheres, but I would also say that it extends outward into the community. Because organizations like mine, like MANA, we certainly want to make sure that we are helping locate candidates and helping to support candidates who want to get in these positions within an administration. So I would definitely say to look to the organizations that you are affiliated with, that are -- if you are a Latino or Latina who wants to look at these positions, to look to these organizations to support you and write letters of support or endorsements. We also belong to the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda which is the roundtable of the 40 most influential national hispanic organizations in the country. And to have support like that behind your candidacy is really powerful. And it also provides you with an advocate sort of as an outside game to the inside networking game that you're already working through to be able to gain one of these positions. But you know - and I think that -- the last thing I'll say before I turn it back over is to never underestimate the value of civil service. And I know that there's going to be a follow-up webinar to talk specifically about career service in the Federal government. And despite the hate and the vitriol and all the things that you hear sometimes in the public discourse, I just want to remind everyone that some of the most honorable and exceptional professionals that I've ever known in my life, in my career, have been Federal public servants. And so as someone mentioned earlier, this is a high calling to serve your country, and serve your government, and to serve your community. And so if you wonder why you have to jump through all the hoops of the security clearances, this is why. And so we look forward to being there with you, to helping you through the process and and supporting your candidacy in any way that we can as advocacy organizations.

>> Janet LaBreck: Thank you so much Amy for your remarks and for your encouragement as well. Thank you all for your comments, for your encouragement, and at this point we would like to invite you, the attendees, to ask questions of our panelists as we are coming towards the end of the presentation today, and would like to open the Q&A boxes for questions that you may have of our panelists.

>> Eric Ascher: So one question is was there a discussion on reasonable accommodations for senior government staff or advisors? How would we undo barriers to employment for persons with disabilities?

>> Mark Hanis: This is Mark with Inclusive America, I can take a first cut if you'd like. So the Federal government, by law, should be an equal opportunity employer. However there are many positions that are not accommodating as much as they should be. And this is part of what all of our organizations and others are working towards making sure that government is providing a more inclusive workspace. And so that's a work in progress. There's -- from an executive order that we're working on, there's also legislation and memos that we're trying to make sure that the Biden-Harris administration take under consideration to signing or passing so that government is a more inclusive workspace. But it should. It claims and aspires to. There are several examples where it's falling short from that.

>> Janet LaBreck: Thanks Mark, and this is Janet. I will add to that as well, in that I think it's important also to recognize that there are many opportunities in federal government that certainly encourage people with disabilities to apply, and that there have been focused opportunities for the government to recruit individuals specifically who have disabilities to join agencies. And while it's not a centralized process, I wish it were, certainly an executive order helps to really strengthen that. There was an executive order in the Obama administration and we were doing really great with that. Certainly the economy has a lot to do with that. And unfortunately for people with disabilities or people who come in to the system last, oftentimes when when the economy collapses then that has an impact as well. But I also want to speak also to accommodations for people with disabilities, because that is really critical. And as a person who's blind myself, when I was in federal government, obviously accommodations played an important role in allowing me the opportunity to do my job. But agencies typically have a process in place for individuals to get that support. I would encourage anyone who is thinking about either career service or as an appointment -- as a political appointee in the administration that you be very upfront about what accommodations you might need so that the coordination can happen very early on in the process, so that by the time you enter into government as a career employee or as an appointee, that all of those issues are at the forefront or have preemptively been able to coordinate as you're coming in to federal government. So it's really about communication and making sure that you are clear about what your own accommodation needs are as well, because the agencies will accommodate.

>> Eric Ascher: Okay. Lots of other questions in the chat. I'm not sure we're going to get to all of them but I will try my best to get to quite a few of them. How do we increase representation in the incoming administration for qualified people with disabilities -- with invisible disabilities or non-visible disabilities? They make the majority of people with disabilities in the country.

>> Janet LaBreck: Amy or Courtney, anyone like to take that?

>> Amy Hinojosa: Sure. I think my first recommendation to anyone would be to go for it, right? Put yourself out there to get into federal government service. And I think that the other piece of it really is to network and to reach out to these organizations that are on the call here and to see how they can be supportive of your efforts, right? Because I think that As much as we would love to say that we have existing pipelines for our constituencies, this really is an exercise for all of us in casting the widest net possible. And so in doing that and putting the message out as far and wide as we can, what that requires on the other end is for folks to really put themselves out there. If this is service that they really want to do for our government, then you need to take the first step and then build out from there. And these organizations are at the ready to help you in that effort.

>> Eric Ascher: Okay. I have another question. So for someone without security clearance who has never worked with the federal government, how easy or difficult is it to join the administration? What's the best way to go about joining?

>> Janet LaBreck: Mark do you want to--

>> Mark Hanis: Sure. So as an example, I joined the government without ever having a security clearance before, and eventually got it. It's not a very speedy process, it matters on how many other people they're processing at the time. So usually the people have never had security clearance versus those who have had it at the beginning of administration tend to take a little bit longer. But there's nothing that should prevent you from being able to go through that process. So there are people who have never served in government, never had the clearance and are successful at getting those positions. You should just look through the Plum Book. It's the best resource, it's not the most user-friendly, it's a PDF or text file. I know they're trying to make it even more user-friendly. And so that's the best place to see which positions require which clearances. And then the links that I mentioned, the forms, the SF-86 is the most common form that one needs to fill out to get security clearance. It's pretty lengthy, it'll ask you every place you've traveled, every person you've met on every travel, all your family members. It can take a long time to fill out, so if that's something that you're interested in, it doesn't prevent you -- again, lots of people have done it -- but just be prepared to spend a lot of time going through every trip you've ever been to and recalling who you've met.

>> Janet LaBreck: And this is Janet. I just want to just add to that Mark if you will as well. You know, once you receive a security clearance, it isn't that you have that security clearance automatically for your entire tenure in your position. Those security clearances, depending on the role that you're serving in federal government, require a refresh also. And that sometimes you have to go back annually, and you may go through an expedited process for that, for refreshing that security clearance, but it depends on your role that you're actually handling. And the other issue around the security clearances as well is that if you're, for example, obligating grants on behalf of the federal government within a federal agency, the security clearances are very different because you're actually obligating lots of money to states. So it depends on what your role is in federal government with regard to your security clearance and your security clearance process as well.

>> Mark Hanis: 100% agree and there's different types of security clearance. Sometimes there's secret, there's top secret, there's additional, so it is a bit more nuanced. But yes, don't treat every type of clearance as the same.

>> Eric Ascher: So, related to the Plum book, there are two questions that I've seen that are -- where do you start with the Plum book if you don't understand all the terminology? Is there a guide to the plum book?

>> Mark Hanis: There is in the table of contents and at the end. It's sort of -- at the beginning it breaks down what all the different acronyms are. It's -- in some cases, people see it as an education or an introduction to Washington, D.C., which is in a sea of acronyms. Lots of people will just call it DOD instead of Department of Defense. And so unfortunately in the Plum book, to better understand which positions require Senate confirmation like "SC" it mentions in the Plum book, and which ones are full-time or part-time. So that should all be within the Plum book. Otherwise, Google I would say is sometimes the fastest way if I don't know what an acronym is. Even when I was working in government, I could type it and 99.9% of the time Google would spit out what the acronym meant.

>> Janet LaBreck: And this is Janet, absolutely right Mark. The federal government has more acronyms than I have ever seen in my entire life. And it is incredible -- there is an absolute learning curve in terms of not only what the acronym is, but how it applies to the work that you're doing, and the agencies and other partners that you will interface with as well. So it is important to understand those acronyms. If you're not clear about them, you can always reach out to the agencies, or look up what that agency actually does as well. And I want to just raise a point that someone put in the chat, and want to thank them for putting it in and that is -- going back to the disability question -- that the government does have Schedule A process for individuals who are coming in to career positions as well, into Federal government. And you can apply for that Schedule A process. And that sort of separates you from the pile of other candidates. And it in no way guarantees that you are going to have that job or you're going to be the hired candidate, however, it does alert to the agency that based on what the job is and what their needs are in terms of hiring in federal government, that it is a consideration for that agency to look at Schedule A candidates who are qualified to fit that role. So it's important to take advantage of that Schedule A process. It is very helpful.

>> Eric Ascher: So our leader Jennifer asked us in the chat, can one of you talk about reference letters and what the networking is for? What is your ask and where do references get sent?

>> Amy Hinojosa: I think I can take the first stab at that one. So reference letters or endorsement letters, those are often for if we're talking about Senate confirmed positions. So when those letters are generated, those are then sent to the committees and the folks who are taking up the issue of the appointment, right? So those letters are sent to Congress. I think that there is another option. So in the same way that you would have a letter of recommendation if you were applying for another job, that's also something that's applicable that you could submit as part of your application package. So depending on the level - if you're talking about Senate confirmed, then those obviously go to the Hill. But then they could also be added to an employment package. And then of course organizations can't just endorse strangers, right? So what's going to happen during that process is you're probably going to be asked at least for your resume and CV, and then some sort of narrative about why you want the position that you're seeking, what your connection is to the community that you're asking for an endorsement from. And so you really want to make sure that there's a connection there, right? And that the endorsement is one that is a natural one and that should be supported.

>> Janet LaBreck: And this is Janet. I also want to add that it's also important to reach out to those organizations where you've done community work yourself. If you've been advocates, if you've done some specific work within your State, to make sure that you're promoting yourself in a way that is consistent with who you are as an individual, your accomplishments, your goals and objectives. Make sure that you're clear about those, but also make sure that people who you're networking with -- if you're reaching out to your state representatives or your congressional officials for support, you should actually make sure that they have that information about you as an individual, your accomplishments, organizations that you've worked with. And so it's really important to not be shy about highlighting all those accomplishments. They do become important to understanding who you are as an individual and the leadership qualities that you would bring to this role.

>> Zeke Stokes: This is Zeke. I'd love to add something to that, if you don't mind, and that is that this can all sound very daunting and sort of overwhelming if you're interested in applying for something. But I will tell you - don't ever assume that the job is already taken or they've already got somebody ready for that position. I was on the phone with someone earlier today actually who's going for a really big job in the new administration and it's looking like she's the only person who really wants this job that would sort of fit the narrative of the kind of candidate that's qualified for it. So I think the first best thing you can do is just get your name in the ring and start working from there if you're truly interested, because you never know how big or small the pool of potential candidates and interests may be for a particular position.

>> Mark Hanis: Can I -- this is Mark Hanis with Inclusive America. Great point with Zeke, and I think other people might assume that they've got the job, and so they move, they quit their existing job, they bring their families over, and it's not over until that document is finalized. So whether you've got it or you think someone else has got it, just be patient. Make sure that the process plays itself through and everything is gone through successfully before you adjust your life for that new -- hopefully that new position.

>> Janet LaBreck: Yes. And this is Janet as well. Someone just asked the question - when should we submit applications and the applications. You should be doing your applications now -- the transition teams are out working with the agencies now. They're looking to first understand what the work is within the agencies in Federal government. But the other work is going on to be looking at candidates as well. So you should be getting your materials together, and I can't emphasize what Mark just said enough in terms of understanding that you don't have the position until all your paperwork is signed off on and you are sworn in to your actual position. So I want to just emphasize that, because it is really important for people to not make those kinds of moves like moving your family or terminating your job because you've moved along in the process. And I think it's also important to mention that this process is not a straight line. There are many stops and then there's many gos in this process, and that depending on what's going on politically, depending on how many candidates there are applying for your particular position depending on organizations that are advocating for those positions, it really is a process that is not a steady line. So people shouldn't get discouraged about that. It's just good to know that you should be thinking about that, and understand that it's not like your regular employment situation when you're applying for jobs.

>> Debbie Fink: Well I want to thank you, Janet. You've been an amazing moderator. And I want to thank Mark Hanis from Inclusive America, Sabrina Joy Stevens from Color of Change, Amy Hinojosa from MANA, Courtney from Represent Women, and Zeke Stokes, formerly of GLAAD. We really want to thank you all for bringing your expertise to this forum. It shows, we have all learned, that the work lays ahead to really create an inclusive America. And we want to really emphasize for all of you, please come back and join us on Thursday January 7th for part two to this fabulous webinar, which is really going to focus on federal hiring of career civil servants.