>> DEBBIE FINK: Hi, welcome to our timely webinar, federal hiring of career civil servants with disabilities. Before we get started with this great program, I do want to take a moment to pause and to acknowledge what we all witnessed take place yesterday on our capitol. It -- we need time to process the emotions that we are experiencing and I just want to recognize that. RespectAbility, this morning, put out a very clear announcement, denouncing any and all such violence and behaviors, there's no space for this in our nation as we move forward. You can find the statement in our social media. Okay. So my name is Debbie Fink, and I am a white woman with long brown hair and glasses and my pronouns are she, her, hers. I'm so excited for today. And before we get started, and turn it over to Lou Orslene of ODEP, the Office for Disability Employment Policy of the Department of Labor, I want to go over some accessibility tips that will be placed in the chat box as well. For starters, if you need -- if you're going to use the ASL interpreter, use the gallery view, click on the grid icon in the upper right corner of your Zoom box. For the PowerPoints, for the ASL interpreter, use the side by side viewing. If you are using the captioning, look at the bottom of your computer screen and click on the CC and the captioning will be there. And we'll periodically add these accessibility tips to the chat box. So now, we are going to enjoy a short video that really brings voice to employees with disabilities.

VIDEO

>> DEBBIE FINK: So RespectAbility. I want to say as the director of community outreach and impact for RespectAbility, that I really had the greatest honor to get to know our panelists that are going to bring you such incredible information today. So now, with this, at this point, I turn it over to Lou, who is the director for the employer and workplace policy team within ODEP at the Department of Labor. Lou has really an incredible resume, and you can see the highlights that will be put in the chat box right now. To learn more about him, and Lou, at this point, take it away.

>> LOUIS ORSLENE: All right. Thanks very much, Deb. Thanks very much for the introduction, and just so everyone at the whole RespectAbility team knows that really appreciate the leadership demonstrated by today's webinar. As we are on the cusp of a new presidential administration, I believe really today, the information that we share, the insights that we share, cannot be more timely or important. As Deb said, I'm Lou Orslene, director of the employer workplace team at the department of labor's office of disability employment policy, which is quite a mouthful there. I'm a white middle aged man with round glasses and just so that you know, I'm a person who has a disability and who's really been impacted from a very early age in terms of disabilities, and this, you know, experience as many of you have had, really has fueled my passion for seeking solutions to the long-standing challenges that people with disabilities face in seeking life sustaining work. And that's kind of what we're talking about today, right? Work in the federal sector, which is life sustaining. So it's really my pleasure and my honor to the moderate today's webinar, with Alison, Kendra and Ollie, three seasoned and outstanding civil servants with decades of federal service working on issues of disability. Someone once said, civil servants are the Vanguards of society. This webinar is designed specifically to encourage each of you to consider being a vanguard by working on behalf of all of the American people through federal service. As we have just seen in the RespectAbility's public service announcement, the tide is and has been turning really for sometime now. And it's increasingly accepted that disability is an asset in the workplace. We know your voice, your lived experience, your expertise spurs innovation, and results in many other benefits in the workplace. We also know that civil servants with disabilities inform federal policies, programs and initiatives, to ensure these are inclusive of people with disabilities. No doubt you'll hear this again from our other speakers, but I just want to note here that the Federal government continues to work to reflect all of America. This is echoed in the hiring goals of many federal agencies. Agencies are striving to achieve 2% of their workforce being people with targeted disabilities, and 12% being people with disabilities. So really, for all of you, for each of you, this is where the opportunity really lies. Now, none of us on this panel can promise that the hiring process will be perfectly smooth and will be challenge-free, sometimes it's complicated-complex. But with the information that we impart on you today, you know, we think that with a little bit of finesse, a little bit of diplomatic assertiveness, if there such a phrase, that you'll -- we can all benefit from your passion, your unique perspective, and your skills at overcoming the many challenges that life has thrown your way. All of these qualities, we believe, I believe I can speak for everybody on this panel, you know, all of these qualities are really essential for being empathetic and effective civil servants and I'll end this morning or this afternoon, actually, with a quote Debbie offered during our last-minute exchanges before the webinar. It's important that all we work together towards creating a more perfect union and a more inclusive America. With that said, let me introduce our keynote speaker today. Alison Levy is manager of the U.S. Department of Transportation's disability resource center. Alison's impressive bio, as with all of our bios will be placed in the chat box underneath each others. While I've been aware of Alison's exceptional contributions over the years, and there's been many times when our paths have crossed, this is the first time working with Alison and I'm delighted to do so. So I really appreciated this opportunity. And look forward to Alison's insights. Alison, I'll turn it over to you.

>> ALISON LEVY: So thank you, Lou for that very warm introduction, I'm very honored to be part of this group of folks today and helping to share information with you in the audience. And hopefully, we'll give you tips and strategies that will help you become employed in federal service. If you're currently in federal service, hopefully some of these tips might help you advance as well. So with that, let's get started. Next slide, please. So I wanted to give you a quick update, some regulations were passed back in 2017, EEOC issued a final rule which strengthened affirmative action of people with disabilities in federal service. And the highlights of those are listed on this slide and hopefully you'll have access to these slides as well. I'm not going to read each of these slides as we move forward but really want to kind of give you some high-level insight and feedback from my perspective. I am a middle-aged female, white, I have long blonde hair and wear glasses. I'm a person with disabilities from birth. And actually, I'm in fourth generation hard of hearing in my family, it's a dominant trait. So I have been trying to accommodate my hearing loss, which has been progressive since birth. And have other disabilities I've acquired along the way. I'm sorry, back to the affirmative action and section 501 rule, I just want to bring your attention to two things, one, with affirmative action, that Lou just touched base on, and if you move forward to the next slide, you'll see a little breakdown on what that is. So instead of hiring goals, which has been the norm in the past, we now have workforce composition goals. This means that we have goals to make sure that all of the folks in our workforce at all grade levels - that means all levels of employment, from entry-level to mid level, to senior level, including senior executive service, we are working to ensure that 12% of our employees are people with disabilities and that 2% are people with targeted or more severe disabilities. And as you use the slides that are being distributed, you'll have a hyperlink to what that list of targeted disabilities is. So this is an important change. Instead of just clicking a box and trying to make sure we have a certain number of people with disabilities that we're hiring, we want to make sure we're retaining this talent as well. So let's move forward to the next slide and you'll get a better idea of what I'm talking about. First of all, not only are we looking at bringing in more people, and retaining people, we want to make sure that we're advancing people with disabilities. So this final rule, also includes two important points. That agencies provide sufficient opportunities for employees with disabilities to advance. And second, to make sure that we have specialized training and mentoring programs for people with disabilities. This has never been done before. At least not in the legal standpoint. Next slide, please. So if you take a step back, we've actually moved to an era in which we're taking a more wholistic approach. We want to make sure that the people that we're hiring stay in federal service, stay in our agencies. And have careers, not just jobs. We want to make sure -- and this slide, let me describe to you, is really a cycle of the employment experience that everyone goes through. We go through recruitment and hiring, we have work inclusion and productivity, we have a stage of training and advancement. We want to retain people and we want them to refer other qualified or highly talented individuals to come work in federal service. So we want to make sure that throughout this whole employment life cycle, that we are including people with disabilities, and that the experience is accessible. Next slide, please. So many folks have heard of schedule A, and if you haven't I'll describe more about it. Basically it's a rule that allows us to hire people with significant or severe disabilities into federal service, without competition. We call it a noncompetitive hiring flexibility. No vacancy announcement is required. We can use schedule A to promote and actually lateral people within federal service as well. There's a link on this slide to some sample schedule A letters that are posted to the office of personnel management's website. If you've never used schedule A or don't have a letter yet that shows that you're qualified for this noncompetitive hiring option, you can use the examples posted on the OPM website and just share it with a medical provider or perhaps a service provider such as a vocational rehabilitation counselor. And they'll complete a letter for you that you would submit along with your resume or application for any federal job. For more tips and details about using schedule A, the equal employment opportunity commission has issued schedule A brochures and fact sheets called the ABCs of schedule A for various folks who need to know more about that hiring option and so that hyperlink is also provided in this presentation. Next slide, please. So who is eligible? I touched base on that a little bit. Really, there's three broad categories of people with disabilities who are eligible for schedule A hire, the first category is a person with an intellectual disability. This could be someone who has a learning disability or a cognitive issue, we're seeing more people with traumatic brain injury, either they've survived a stroke or perhaps they've actually experienced a brain injury who might fall into this category. There are also people with a severe disability, a physical disability, or a sensory disability. So a person who may have limited use of their arms or legs, a person with paraplegia. This also includes people who are Deaf or have a severe hearing loss. People who are blind or who have low vision may also qualify under that particular category. And the last category is people with a psychiatric disability. This could be a person with anxiety, depression, any of those other areas where psychiatric disability comes into play. Now, just a little tip for you. When you apply for a job, the hiring manager should never see your schedule A documentation. That should stay in human resources and it's usually the HR specialist managing the opportunity, filling -- helping the manager fill the vacancy, who sees that documentation and they basically just check the box and know that you're qualified for schedule A hiring. Next slide, please. So I'm going to really just bring things down to a very basic level and give you a few tips on getting started in searching for your federal job and launching your federal career. First, you'll want to identify what job occupation series are you in? You wonder what does that mean? It's kind of a long word. Basically, you want to identify the areas in which the types of jobs that you want to apply for, that you're qualified to do. And the hyperlink that's provided in this slide will bring you to the office of personnel management's website, where they maintain a full list and descriptions of the different job occupations that we fill in federal service. It may sound a little bit complicated but believe me, this step will help you really hone in on your strategic job search in Federal government. So when you've identified that, you also want to identify your pay grade level. If you've never worked in federal service previously, you'll want to try and look at the highest salary or pay that you've received to date. And you can go to this hyperlink in this slide, where there's a link to the pay tables at again, OPM, office of personnel management, find where you have previously, you know, your highest pay that you've received on that chart. And it will identify the level, the pay grade level that you may qualify for. And perhaps, the next pay level above that. So make sure you obtain your schedule A documentation, you want to have a copy of that so you can send it forward with your resume, via email or upload it to your profile on USAjobs. And that's the last tip I have for you. Make sure you set up an account on USAjobs, upload your resume or use the resume builder within the USAjobs.gov website. And upload your schedule A letter. Next slide, please. There are other ways to go into federal service. There's some other strategies and one of those that I wanted to highlight today is not well known. But if you're a recent graduate, perhaps you haven't had an internship before and maybe you don't have a lot of work experience, or perhaps you're in mid career, and you've changed your career path and maybe gotten some additional training or education. Unpaid work experience is a program available through vocational rehabilitation services. So if you're a current client of vocational rehabilitation, or VR services, you can ask your VR counselor about essentially being a volunteer intern in a federal agency. This would give you the opportunity to develop some network of folks who you know, where you would like to land a permanent job, and it would give you the opportunity to get some experience, if you need additional training, say, specialized federal training workshop, it could be incorporated into your individualized rehab plan. And your VR office might actually pay for that, which is another bonus for any manager who may be considering you for a job opportunity. So consider the unpaid work experience. If you are a current VR client, you might want to mention it, if you're in a position where you could perhaps volunteer with a federal agency, for a couple of months. Depending on your state, they may call this something different, but again, it's a way to get your foot in the door, show that you can do the job, network a bit and get some more work experience to build your resume. Next slide, please. Another option, if you're a current or recent student, is the workforce recruitment program, otherwise known as WRP. This website is WRP.gov. It is an annual database of over 2,000 current students and recent graduates who have been prescreened by federal employees, federal recruiters, and each person has a profile with their -- most likely a schedule A letter, with their resume, and a summary of their skills and rating of how the interviewer rated them. This program is highly marketed to federal agencies to try and bring in more junior talent or new talent into federal service. If you are currently a student or a recent grad, I encourage you to visit this website and find out how you can be included in next year's round of the students and recent grads in the database. Next slide, please. More and more agencies are establishing departmental or agency-wise secretarial level internship programs. In the past, there are a lot of different internship programs, there still are a number that are specialized in each agency. But generally, there's been a push towards a departmental or agency-wide program. At Department of Transportation, where I work, there is the secretarial internship program we call SIP. And this also is for current students and recent graduates. And there a legal requirement for us to post this opportunity on the USAjobs website. So once you set up your profile at USAjobs, you can also set up a search option, if you're a current student or recent grad. And it will actually make you aware of the job vacancy announcement when it comes up for the student internship opportunities. If you're interested in working for US Department of Transportation, we do anticipate the summer opportunity to be posted in late January or early February. So I encourage you to visit the website, the USA jobs website and apply for the student opportunities. They're often called pathways program opportunities as well. Next slide, please. I also wanted to give you just three key names of people who can support you in pretty much every federal agency. Within HR, there's a person called the selective placement program manager. It's basically a long name or a long title for an HR specialist who is assigned to help with recruiting people with disabilities and helping to assist managers and encouraging them to hire more people with disabilities in their agency or office. The second point of contact I want to raise -- make you aware of is the disability program manager. Usually, they're based in the civil rights office at the agency. They generally oversee the reasonable accommodation process and policy. So if you have questions about reasonable accommodations, you can look at an agency website for the disability program manager contact. At the U.S. Department of Transportation, we're really fortunate to have a fantastic office and yes, I'm biased. [ LAUGHTER ] Called the disability resource center. We are seeing some other agencies that also have a centralized office, that provides reasonable accommodation and supports to applicants and employees with disabilities. And at DOT, it's the disability resource center. So as you go through the slides that are sent to you, these are all hyperlinks to the contacts in DOT to support your efforts in landing support -- landing a job within Department of Transportation. But do know that these resources are available in other federal agencies as well. Next slide, please. So just a little bit about my office. We do provide the full range of four core services to help ensure that we are supporting employees from the point in which they're being recruited to the point in which, you know, we want people to advance and we want to retain them. We also do some education and outreach to folks throughout the Department of Transportation to try and make sure that the managers and employees understand how disability is really part of diversity and how including everyone makes for a better workplace. Next slide, please. And I just wanted to leave with our contact information to make sure if you have any questions about employment at DOT, and as you're applying for jobs, and perhaps being hired into our department, you have a contact for requesting reasonable accommodations. And with that, I'll turn things back over, I believe we're saving Q & A for a later time. Back over to you, Lou.

>> LOUIS ORSLENE: All right, thank you very much, Alison. That was just an excellent, really look at all of the various pathways for launching the federal career, I really appreciate it. So comprehensive.

>> ALISON LEVY: Thank you.

>> LOUIS ORSLENE: So let me introduce our next speaker today, Ollie Cantos. Ollie is the vice chair of RespectAbility, an attorney, and a long time career civil servant. Again, just so you know, all of the bios, including Ollie's now, will be found below Alison's bio in the chat box. Ollie and I have worked together intermittently for the past couple of decades, we've had some great opportunities to work together. I've always respected his work, he has such a deep understanding of the issues faced by people with disabilities and of course, an incredible personal story. So with that, I'd like to thank Ollie for being here, his long time service in the civil -- I welcome him, I look forward to his comments.

>> OLLIE CANTOS: Thank you Lou so very much. The admiration is mutual and good morning or afternoon to all of you. I am a Filipino American, middle aged man, and my photograph shows me dressed in a dark suit and dark tie with a flag in the background and I self-identify as a person who is blind. Over the next ten minutes or so, I'm going to be talking about the most comprehensive document that we know of that will be distributed within the next several weeks pertaining to employment of people with disabilities. And it literally covers everything from the beginning of the employment process all the way through the point of hiring, so with that, I'm going to ask that Jake can read the steps that are outlined in this document, and then I'll be talking about it further after that point. Jake?

>> ERIC ASCHER: Before we get to that, sorry to interrupt, but I see that our ASL interpreter has dropped off, so I want to make sure that we're being considerate of people who are relying on the ASL interpreter and we're going to hopefully wait a few seconds, I think, to see if they can come back in.

>> DEBBIE FINK: So in that event, why don't we take a question or two that did arrive, while we wait to continue our formal discussion. One question came up was, are all of the jobs in the federal Government full time jobs or are part-time jobs available? Alison, do you want to take that?

>> ALISON LEVY: Sure. Absolutely. I'll try and sign for myself if that's okay. [ LAUGHTER ] It's a little bit tough to [unintelligible] -- but I'll try to fill in the blanks. So I would say that most positions are full time. If they're not, it will show that on USAjobs. But because positions are really valuable to managers, they tend to want to fill it full time. So I just -- for your information.

>> DEBBIE FINK: Great. And as we wait, Alison, thank you for stepping in with the ASL. Can you also please -- I have another question, while we wait. Okay?

>> ALISON LEVY: Uh-huh.

>> DEBBIE FINK: Given the often delayed response times associated with USAjobs vacancies, is there a process or particular contact in each agency for more streamlined consideration of people with disabilities?

>> ALISON LEVY: So I should have been trying to interpret while you were saying that, but I'll try and summarize the question now. The question is, is there a better streamlined shorter way to hire people with disabilities instead of on USAjobs.gov. And the answer is yes, Schedule A allows managers to hire people without even posting the job announcement on USAjobs. So technically, if you have a connection with someone in federal service, remember, I mentioned the selective placement coordinator, in HR, for each agency, that point of contact should be able to help with connecting qualified applicants with disabilities with potential hiring managers. So that person is really your key contact. I can be honest with you, very often, that point of contact is also very overwhelmed with their regular responsibilities of managing HR work. And often their second responsibility is to help with recruiting people with disabilities. So the reality is if you know someone, perhaps already in an agency, who's doing the work that you're interested in also doing, it really is beneficial to network and communicate with that individual if you know of any managers who may be hiring or who are doing the work that interests you, I would encourage you to connect with that person and maybe schedule an information interview and ask for just 15 minutes of time, so you can interview them and learn more about what kinds of responsibilities or experience they want in any potential hires. So there are different ways you can be creative and try and make connections that may become job opportunities later and again, if you have a schedule A letter, you have the option to be hired without even waiting for a job to be posted on USAjobs and that makes the process faster for the hiring manager.

>> DEBBIE FINK: That's great, thank you, Alison, can you please share --

>> ERIC ASCHER: Sorry to interrupt again. Gabe's back in, he's joining by phone. I'm going to ask him to start his video.

>> DEBBIE FINK: Alison, thank you for stepping in there.

>> OLLIE CANTOS: Thank you so much Eric. And so at this juncture, I would like to ask Jake to read the 11 steps that are covered in the document that will be released in several weeks and then we'll continue at that point.

>> JAKE STIMELL: Thank you, Ollie. So I will read these 11 steps, which Maya will also be posting in the chat. Step number one, learn about how best to work with people with different types of disabilities. Step number two. Enhance understanding of employment related and other civil rights laws. Step number three. Determine the extent to which it is possible to receive services through vocational rehabilitation. Step number four. Make use of the assessment tools that will help refine career trajectory and strengthen confidence through exposure to successful role models. Step number five. If on a college or university campus, bridge the gap between the career placement office and the office for students with disabilities. Step number six. Increase exposure to career options, through facilitating job shadowing and hands on career exploration. Step number seven. If on federal Government assistance, learn about long-standing and emerging work incentives to facilitate greater economic independence. Step number eight. Evaluate opportunities to work for the federal Government, either as an employee or as a federal contractor. Step number nine. Investigate nonprofit private sector or entrepreneurship possibilities and focus on benefitting businesses by providing them with important resources about which they may not yet know. Step number ten. Increase placements through professional networking. Step number eleven, help ensure retention by instituting and or utilizing general workplace benefits and job accommodation possibilities. I will now throw it back to Ollie.

>> OLLIE CANTOS: Thank you, Jake, very much. Because of the limited time here, I just wanted to go over some general principles and invite you to a webinar whose information will be described later, and this is really an exciting opportunity for all of us to share. Long have I said for the past 30 years, as part of the disability rights world, that we have got to break down the silos that divide us all over the place, there's nonprofit organizations, for-profit entities, as well as Government agencies, at the local, state and Federal levels, there are people who focus on those serving physical disabilities, psychiatric disabilities, intellectual disabilities, and learning disabilities, and yet, they don't all necessarily know what the others are doing. And so back in 2007, I set out to centralize all of the information that I knew of and could find in order to take people step by step so that if they did not know what employment resources were available in different sectors, or if they wanted to start and build their own businesses, that they would have an opportunity to do that. And as a result of that effort, where the document has been released from time to time, what began in 2007 and what has since been released several times, is -- has been an updated document that has a number of resources that cover all of these areas. And what has resulted by this point and by what is to be put out soon, is that there are literally 300 resources that are in one document. And this is important. Because if you are -- those of you who are on the webinar today, if you are a job seeker, looking to find employment, or if you are a student looking for internships, or if you want to move into the entrepreneurial space, or if you support individuals with disabilities through your various organizations that you work for, this is the one central document that puts all of it into one location. And better still, we're going to be covering all of these 11 steps over an extended webinar that will be coming up and some of the highlights with that will also entail discussion of people who may be on Government benefits. A significant fear that some people have is that they're afraid of potentially losing their SSI or SSDI. But what we will go through during the webinar as well as what you will see in the released document is an exact way to show you numerically how you can retain the government benefits that you need and how you can still go to work and be productive economically, and pursue your dreams in that regard. I literally will be providing you with the exact formula of how to calculate your benefits as well as how and where to place your earnings so that you may continue to receive eligibility for those benefits while ultimately, to the extent desired, weaning off of benefits, if that is a goal that people would like to have. There are also other aspects of this that are of support to families. Because as Alison has already mentioned, there are opportunities for students through the IEP process to incorporate internships with the Federal government. And she also brought up individual learning plans which are in existence actually in 33 states but yet through the IEP process, nationally, there's a way to avail themselves of that. And for those who are already in the workforce, or who want to go to the -- join the workforce, within these various sectors, the wonderful opportunities that exist are just unbelievable in terms of the fact that there are literally hundreds of places where you can go for internships, to learn about resumes, to learn about government benefits and how they interact. There are also efforts that are documented in there about how to incorporate transition to adulthood, how do you advance, what is the language that is important in this context here for schedule A letters that Alison also brought up earlier, as well as what are effective practices serving different disability constituencies, including people from the different populations that I mentioned earlier. And so for the -- in the interest of time, I want just simply to invite you to participate in that webinar and when you attend, you will get this full document that will have all of these resources and when you receive these resources, I invite you to share that document far and wide to every person within the disability community seeking economic empowerment. Because when you do, you will also be helping to join efforts to make a broad-based and lasting difference in people's lives, because finally, at long last, the information and resources are all in one place, so you don't have to go all over the internet to try to find out what you can, and through this approach, you actually will be able to walk through with the steps that Jake has read, you'll be able to go step by step, by step, to helping you to advance and with that, I will now turn over time back to Lou.

>> LOUIS ORSLENE: Great, thanks very much, Ollie. What a great recipe for people with disabilities, really, to find their life's work. And this is going to be a very valuable document, I can't wait until it's released and that we can push it out to others, just excellent advice, no doubt for the viewers that we have today, too. So thank you very much, Ollie. Our final speaker is Kendra Duckworth Shock who serves as the program disability manager -- I'm sorry, disability manager for the equal opportunity policy office of the Department of Air Force. Kendra and my relationship really goes back about 20 years. She and I served as consultants for the job accommodation network. Kendra was my team lead, and mentor for many years. So she and I have a really good deep relationship and I always appreciated that. Again, Kendra's impressive bio can be found underneath Ollie's in the link in the chat box. With that, thank you very much, Kendra, for your service, and I'll turn it over to you.

>> KENDRA DUCKWORTH SHOCK: Great, thank you Lou. Although I refuse to admit that I'm a middle aged white female, I think you can figure that out based on Lou's introduction of me, but I'm an individual with a visual disability, I've been the disability program manager for the department of the Air Force for over eight years, and in those eight years, we've been able to implement numerous initiatives and policies to improve the employment and advancement of individuals with disabilities within the department of the Air Force. And I just would like to highlight three of those, just to invite individuals online to consider employment with the Department of Defense, and specifically, the department of the Air Force, so the first initiative that Air Force implemented over eight years ago was we established what we call the Air Force disability barrier analysis working group. And this is a working group made up of five teams, for individual groups of people that was established as a result of an MD-715 report where we had underrepresentation of certain groups of individuals within the department of the Air Force. One of those are individuals with disabilities. So I am the co-lead for the disability action barrier analysis working group. And in the last eight years, we've been able to implement policies that have identified barriers to the employment, advancement and development of individuals with disabilities within the Air Force. One of our major accomplishments was to establish centralized funding specifically for individuals with disabilities to obtain reasonable accommodations, so that they can benefit from training and development programs throughout the Air Force. A barrier that had been identified was that individuals with disabilities weren't being selected for training and development and career development programs because of lack of knowledge and information about reasonable accommodations. So we established centralized funding specifically to provide reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities so that they can participate in those career development opportunities. One of the other things that we've done most recently is we've established what would be called I guess in private industry as an employee resource group, since we're the Department of Defense, we call it a mission resource group. Because everything is about our mission. So we've established a Facebook group for the Air Force disability action team, that enables individuals, anywhere, you don't have to be a member of the Department of Defense, you don't have to be an employee of the Air Force, you just -- if you're interested in what individuals with disabilities are thinking about and doing and talking about, within the department of the Air Force, you can join this Facebook group. We have only been established for about two months, so we're still working on implementing our strategic plan but the main goal of this resource group is to provide mentorship for individuals with disabilities, not just within the Air Force, but within the Federal government and specifically the Department of Defense. So I believe we've provided the link for our Facebook group. I invite all of you to come and join us and engage in conversations regarding employment of individuals with disabilities. And finally, the most exciting thing that we've been able to implement recently is what we call a schedule A repository for the Department of Defense. We've talked a lot about schedule A and I think the one thing that we need to note is that schedule A is a tool that hiring managers can use to bring individuals into the Federal government non-competitively, and I say that with quotation marks, because even though it's possible to directly appoint somebody into a position using schedule A, at least it's been my experience with the Federal government that that doesn't happen directly, very often. More likely what happens is that individuals with disabilities may have to compete with other individuals with disabilities for those positions. So what I've done in my eight years in Air Force, specifically, is to try to encourage managers to use schedule A as a hiring authority. It's not a mandate and there's no requirement that says managers have to use schedule A. But we certainly are encouraging them to do that and one way to do that is to make sure that individuals who are using schedule A are provided to hiring managers and that they're qualified and they're appropriate referrals for the job. So what we have done is issued on an Air Force website -- AirForceCivilianCareers.com, and there's a link on the chat box, where you can go and you can submit your resume and your documentation for positions that you have applied for on USAjobs. And then that information is provided directly towards -- to the civilian personnel offices who are managing those positions that you may have applied for. So right now, we're trying to input people into this repository, so we're trying to build up the number of applicants within this repository. The most exciting thing about this repository was back in October of this year, the department of the Air Force's main manpower and reserve secretary issued a memorandum to all directors within the Air Force to say, one, that civilian personnel officers will refer all qualified schedule A applicants from this repository to hiring managers for positions that they are qualified for and that you meet the requirements for. And also, hiring managers are required to interview at least one schedule A applicant that is referred to them for each position that they have open. So I'm very excited about this initiative because it helps get individuals through the door as a -- as I've been a selective placement program coordinator in the past and I get a lot of inquiries from individuals stating, you know, I keep getting referrals but I never get an interview. So I'm hopeful that this will help managers understand that by interviewing individuals with disabilities, they'll realize that they are capable and qualified to perform these jobs that we have vacant. So in the interest of time, I'm not going to go into any further detail, the links are available, also my contact information is available, and I'm happy to respond to any questions that individuals may have. If you want to send them directly to my email address. And with that, Lou, I'll turn it back over to you.

>> LOUIS ORSLENE: Great, thanks very much, Kendra, so appreciate it. And this is the first of me hearing many of the programs that you've been responsible for launching over at Air Force and I'm just delighted to hear. And hopefully these can be models and replicated throughout other agencies in the Federal government. So fantastic, thank you very much. So now, let's open the forum up for Q & A, just to let everybody know that you can -- submit these through a Q & A box or through the chat box. I see the first question that has come up here, how many openings does the federal Government have each year? Does anyone -- I don't know that answer, does anyone -- any of our speakers have any approximations of that?

>> KENDRA DUCKWORTH SHOCK: I would think that the number is in the thousands, I mean, the federal Government is one of the largest employers in this country. So I think that there's a lot of opportunities there for individuals with disabilities.

>> LOUIS ORSLENE: And I'll just add to that as well, as we all know, many baby Boomers are retiring, so I -- you know, I can only imagine that that number would go -- would keep going up for some time, I know for several years yet, before the baby Boomers are really all through and into the retirement system. So we have a few other questions here. And I'm going to start off with Ollie, I'm going to ask you this one. When do I become a full time permanent employee under schedule A?

>> OLLIE CANTOS: Well, there's -- when people are appointed under schedule A, they're in for a two-year probationary period and then at that point or -- they can then transfer into more permanent status, and Alison knows this extremely well. And the wonderful thing here with regards to this is, especially when looking at how schedule A works, once people are appointed through schedule A, it's critical to also build networks with other people within the agency in order to build the relationship, as well as to make sure to document your accomplishments along the way in preparation for the justification that will be used later for moving you into permanent status. And during the probationary period, that's still especially at the beginning, it's still essentially equates to an at-will situation where you don't have stability in terms of being able to stay in the Federal government, but as time progresses, that changes. And Alison, I'm sure you can build upon that.

>> ALISON LEVY: Yes, you did a great job, Ollie, thank you. I guess it's a great opportunity to really emphasize that asking for reasonable accommodations as early as possible is really important, especially when you're hired under schedule A. Because there is that two-year period of time when as Ollie said, you could be separated or, you know, asked to leave federal service at-will. So it's really crucial that you stay on top of what your needs are, ask for those accommodations after you receive your job offer, find out who your point of contact is for establishing your accommodations and consider how quickly -- ask a lot of questions about how quickly you can get that software on your computer or that assistive technology in your office or connected to your computer, maybe even before you decide what day you're starting in your new job, I think that will be really important to starting off on the right foot in your new position.

>> KENDRA DUCKWORTH SHOCK: Alison, if I can just add to that, I think it's especially important -- I apologize, I just came back from vacation -- [ LAUGHTER ] -- it's especially important that Veterans, if you have been hired to a federal job under a Veterans preference, especially disabled Veteran, it's important for you to identify your needs for reasonable accommodation early on. Don't assume that because you were hired using a disabled Veterans preference that the reasonable accommodation coordinator or the disability program manager is aware of your need for reasonable accommodations or even that you have a disability. That information is not shared with your manager or your supervisor. So it's important for every individual to take responsibility for their reasonable accommodation needs and make those needs known to the appropriate person within that agency.

>> LOUIS ORSLENE: Thanks very much all three of you, really appreciate those responses. Very comprehensive. I'm going to combine a couple of questions, and we're going back to the schedule A hiring authority. And people are asking, again, you know, how does it start? Who do I contact? What's the initial process? Can someone field that?

>> KENDRA DUCKWORTH SHOCK: Well I can get us started. And Alison has laid out the steps in her slides, but especially for the Department of Defense agencies, there is a list of all of the selective placement program coordinators on the OPM's disability website. So that's a great place to start. Once you have your schedule A letter in hand and you know what jobs you're applying for, you can reach out to that individual selective placement program coordinator and let them -- ask them what is -- what is that agency's process for hiring individuals under schedule A? I think what's the most difficult part of schedule A for individuals applying for positions is that every agency has their own process. It is not standardized through the federal Government. So it's important to reach out to those individuals within the agencies that you're applying to make sure that you know what their process is.

>> LOUIS ORSLENE: Thank you, Kendra, I think that gets to the heart of this question, that each agency does have their own process, so that one has to learn that and go through that process. I'm rather new to the federal service coming in late in my career, and there's a question that I'm not familiar with, but with this program, but they're asking is this program the same as 55-B/C program? Is anyone familiar?

>> ALISON LEVY: I'm not familiar with that.

>> KENDRA DUCKWORTH SHOCK: No.

>> OLLIE CANTOS: I'm not either.

>> LOUIS ORSLENE: Okay.

>> OLLIE CANTOS: But if anyone wants to -- the schedule A citation, I think it's CFR section 213.3102 part U.

>> LOUIS ORSLENE: Great, thanks very much, Ollie. I'm kind of thinking we have time probably for one other question. Let me just ask that of Alison. We have a question here, should I use schedule A more than once? What are the pros and the cons?

>> ALISON LEVY: Oh, good question. You can use schedule A as many times as you like. I was hired into federal service back in 2000 using schedule A. And I've moved around in federal service using it as well. So you can use it as many times as you want. The same letter can be good for years and years. They never expire, because your disability doesn't expire, right? Just know that each time you use schedule A, you will need to go into that two-years of accepted service or the probationary period that Ollie described. And then you will be converted after evidencing that you've completed your -- you've met your job responsibilities for two years and you get moved over back into competitive services. This doesn't affect your benefits, it doesn't affect retirement plan or the years of service that you have. It's just merely a tool that you can use to move around within Federal service and I would encourage you to do as long as you're comfortable. I think once you're in Federal service, I would encourage you to try and compete for jobs. Just use your discretion in terms of whether or not you're willing to take a little bit of a risk to be in noncompetitive service for two years over and over and over again. Because you are a little bit vulnerable to being removed if you're not able to do your job. So I would -- I would say you can use it multiple times, but be a little bit prudent about how you use it once you're in federal service. [Crosstalk]

>> OLLIE CANTOS: Just real quick. In some agencies, it suggests that you apply both for competitive and noncompetitive service so you can be considered twice. So that's just something.

>> ALISON LEVY: Absolutely.

>> OLLIE CANTOS: That's something that needs to be taken into consideration, as well.

>> ALISON LEVY: Absolutely.

>> LOUIS ORSLENE: Thanks very much for that Ollie. Thank you very much. You know, I'm certainly -- on behalf of everyone, of all of us, thanks very much for attending the webinar today. Much appreciated. Thank you very much for the speakers, insights, and experiences. This webinar was certainly chock-full of information to help you launch your federal career. And back to you, then, Deb.

>> DEBBIE FINK: Thanks to everybody for joining. First, a big thank you to Lou and Kendra and Alison and Ollie, really a round of applause for what you brought to our audience. I just want to say, everybody, get out and start that application process. Right? You should be energized right now, and we need you at the table. We need you to bring your whole selves to help us work towards a more inclusive America and more perfect union. So everybody, please, stay safe in 2021. Stay well. Stay masked, stay socially distanced.

>> OLLIE CANTOS: Deb, the webinar announcements, too.

>> DEBBIE FINK: The webinar announcements are in the chat box, please join us for our next two webinars, thank you Ollie. The one we hosted about Ollie is on February 10th, Wednesday, same time. The road to economic self-sufficiency, a comprehensive step by step guide for students, job seekers, entrepreneurs and their allies. And if you don't want to wait that long, then join us in January, January 11th, Monday, same time, for a webinar entitled Poll Driven Messaging to achieve positive change for people with disabilities, and we're talking about doing a next step to this webinar with these great panelists. And once again, thank you to the civil service that each and every one you on the panel has been providing our nation. Go get them, start that application process and please keep us posted, let us know how it goes.