

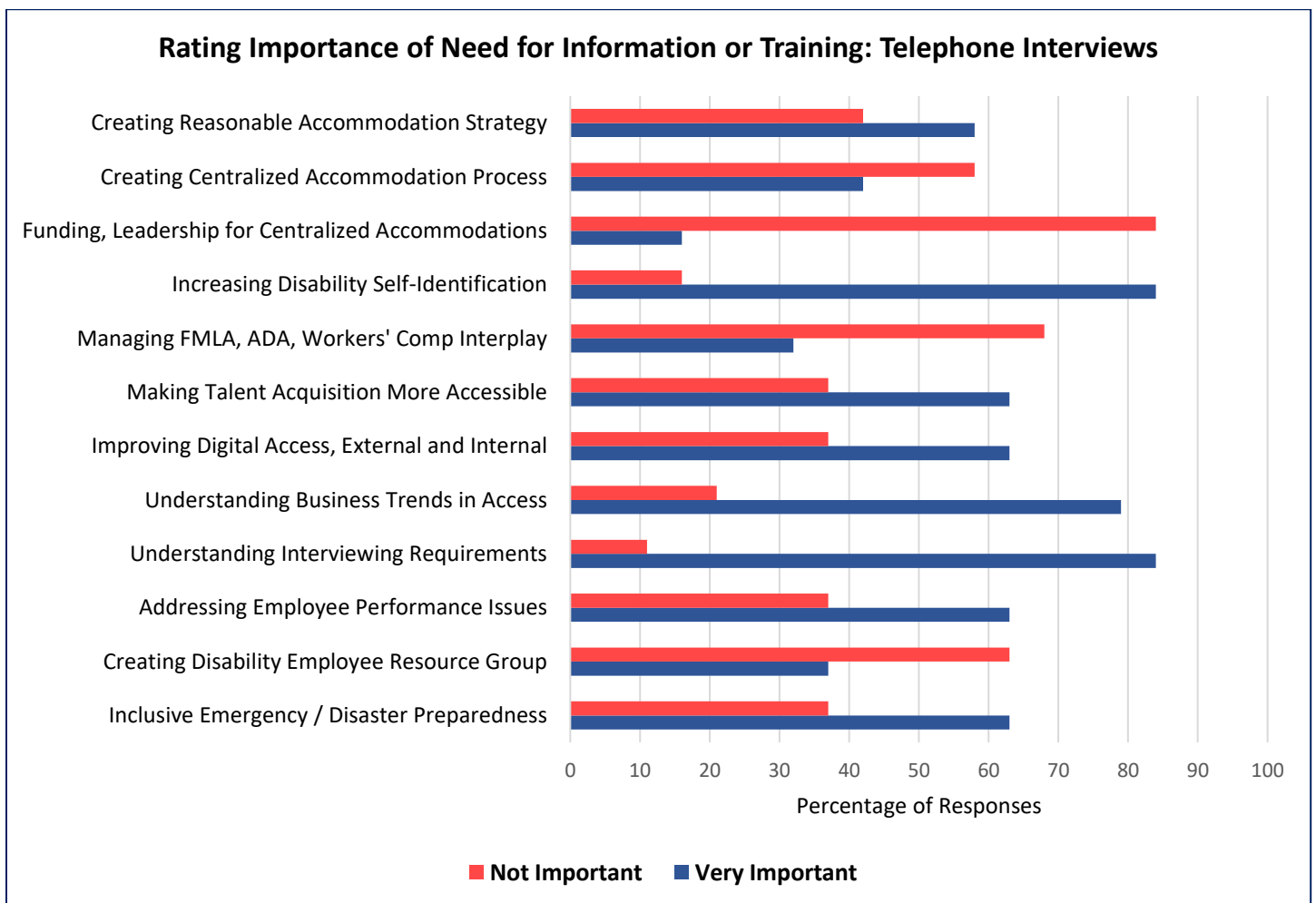
Speed Data: Employer Survey on Disability Inclusion

The Mid-Atlantic ADA Center, together with C5 Consulting, LLC, conducted a survey of employers in the Mid-Atlantic region to find out more about their practices and their needs related to recruiting, hiring, accommodating, and retaining qualified workers with disabilities.



Some employers responded through telephone interviews, and some responded via an online survey tool.

We found that many of the respondents were taking positive steps to include people with disabilities in their workplaces, yet still face challenges and need additional information, resources, and training to help them address those challenges.



Highlights of Findings

Areas rated as most important:

- Employers with federal contracts, who are required under Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act to engage in affirmative action and invite voluntary self-identification of workers with disabilities, want to find effective ways to increase this self-identification. Several respondents commented that some of their employees question the need to self-identify if they don't need accommodations, and others express concern that self-identification might lead to negative reactions from either co-workers or managers.
- Employers want more effective training on interviewing requirements and skills for their recruiters and hiring managers.
- Employers want more information on business trends in addressing access issues across organizations (digital, structural, policies, and procedures).
- Employers also expressed a high level of interest in information on how to
 - make their talent acquisition portals and processes more accessible,
 - improve digital accessibility across their organizations,
 - address employee performance issues, and
 - make sure workplace emergency and disaster preparedness planning includes and supports individuals with disabilities.

Areas employers rated as less important:

- Finding funding and generating leadership support for a centralized accommodation budget;
- managing the interplay of the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), the ADA, and workers' compensation laws;
- creating a disability-focused employee resource group (ERG); and
- creating a centralized accommodation process.

Many employers who rated "not important" the items related to centralized accommodation processes and employee resource groups commented that they already had these things in place.

Online Survey Results

Responses to the online survey were similar to those from the telephone interviews for half of the questions, but differed significantly in these areas:

- More online survey respondents rated "creating a centralized accommodation process" as very important (78% compared with only 42% of telephone interviewees).
- Fewer online survey respondents rated "increasing disability self-identification" as very important (50% compared with 84%).

- More online survey respondents rated “managing FMLA, Workers’ Comp, ADA interplay” as very important (75% compared with 32%).
- Fewer online survey respondents rated “improving digital access, external and internal” as very important (38% compared with 63%).
- Fewer online survey respondents rated “understanding interviewing requirements” as very important (50% compared with 89%).
- Fewer online survey respondents rated “addressing employee performance issues” as very important (43% compared with 63%).

Interestingly, the areas where responses from the two groups aligned most closely *and* were more often rated as very important were “understanding business trends in access” (79% of telephone respondents and 75% of online respondents rated this as very important) and “making talent acquisition more accessible” (63% of telephone respondents and 67% of online respondents rated this as very important).

Implications

More outreach and engagement with employers will be needed to better understand their diverse needs and interests related to employing workers with disabilities, but there are certainly indications that employers would generally welcome training, resources, and information about best practices to improve

- recruitment (including digital methods) and interviewing skills,
- reasonable accommodation processes, and
- planning for inclusive and supportive emergency preparedness in the workplace.

Employers who practice affirmative action appear to struggle with helping both workers with disabilities and their own representatives (such as recruiters and managers) understand voluntary self-identification. These employers express strong interest in data-driven training and resources to help them foster cultures where individuals with disabilities feel comfortable in self-identifying.

The high level of interest in understanding business trends in accessibility across organizations and industries may present both opportunities and challenges, as it may suggest cultivating collaboration both internally and externally to improve disability employment across the board.

Businesses have often engaged in such collaboration where they see the potential for shared benefit. There are a host of business organizations, from small local business associations to international alliances, that promote inclusive employment practices by offering businesses a chance to gain positive recognition through sharing their best practices and successful strategies. Supporting and

engaging with these efforts may be a way to increase opportunities for this kind of peer-to-peer sharing.

Similarly, promoting collaborative relationships between businesses and educational institutions, vocational rehabilitation agencies, and disability organizations may result in mutually beneficial outcomes.

“ ... supporting [reasonable accommodation] strategy can help increase opportunities for employment for those in the communities where we operate ... which in turn creates an additional pipeline of talent for our organization.”

~ Survey Respondent

Common Comments

In addition to the ratings, the surveys invited comments from respondents. Several included similar suggestions for training and materials that may be worth considering for further exploration and development. Employers see a need for

- guides, checklists, and videos that are short, simple, user-friendly, and emphasize practical skills; and
- activities or materials that help recipients identify and address unconscious personal bias or bias implicit in systems.

The survey results suggest that many employers in the region are already proactive about disability inclusion, and recognize the benefits it brings to their workplaces and communities. Yet they also realize there is more they can do to level the playing field for workers with disabilities.

We thank all the employers who took the time to respond to our survey and provide us with valuable information and suggestions.

**Mid-Atlantic ADA Center
TransCen, Inc.
www.ADAinfo.org
800-949-4232 (DC, DE, MD, PA, VA, WV)
301-217-0124**

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