



BPP Disability Inclusion Guide



Australian Government

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade



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Welcome to the BPP Disability Inclusion Guide, designed to help businesses integrate disability inclusion into their operations effectively.

This guide highlights the benefits of disability inclusion and provides practical steps for implementation across a business.

Understanding disability inclusion



What is disability?

Disability refers to physical, mental, cognitive or sensory impairments which, in interaction with other barriers, may hinder a person's full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.¹

People with disabilities may have diverse impairments, experience diverse barriers and have diverse identities. A common misconception is viewing disability as solely a medical issue rather than recognising the societal barriers that contribute to exclusion.

What is disability inclusion?

Disability inclusion means ensuring that people with disabilities have equal opportunities to participate in all aspects of life, including employment, education, and community activities.

It involves removing barriers and making reasonable accommodations to enable full participation. Reasonable accommodations focus on making necessary and appropriate modifications and adjustments without imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, to ensure that persons with disabilities can interact with all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with others.²

Consultations with people with diverse disabilities (for instance, people with physical, psychosocial, intellectual and sensory impairments) and organisations representing people with disabilities are essential in identifying barriers and enablers to ensure participation and equal benefit.

¹ United Nations, "United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities," 2006, https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convention_accessible_pdf.pdf.

² International Labour Organization, "Guide for Business on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities," www.ilo.org, August 22, 2017, <https://www.ilo.org/publications/guide-business-rights-persons-disabilities#:~:text=Developed%20jointly%20by%20the%20UN.>

Relevance to businesses



One in six of people globally have a disability.³ Together with their friends and family, they have a spending power of \$13 trillion.⁴ The International Labour Organisation calculates that excluding people with disabilities costs countries 3-7% of annual GDP.⁵

Research has found that discrimination against people with disabilities restricts business from accessing the productive potential, talents, contributions, and purchasing power of a significant part of the population.⁶ As most people will experience a disability at some stage in their life, even if temporary, due to injuries, illnesses, or other life events, businesses are better off

being prepared to respond to and accommodate disabilities.⁷

Businesses that embrace disability inclusion are generally more innovative, have improved employee morale, and access to a broader talent pool. A 2018 study by Accenture found that companies that champion disability inclusion achieve, on average, 28%

higher revenue and a 30% higher profit margins than their peers.⁸

These accommodations do not need to be complex or costly. According to Job Accommodation Network, just over half (56%) of accommodation costs tracked between 2019 and 2023 cost nothing to implement.⁹

Anti-discrimination

International commitments to human rights, together with anti-discrimination laws in local jurisdictions play a crucial role in promoting disability inclusion.

These laws often mandate that employers must provide equal opportunities and reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities, ensuring they can participate fully in the workforce without facing discrimination.

However, not all jurisdictions/countries have fully inclusive anti-discrimination laws, and in some cases have no legislation. This lack of legal protection can pose challenges for individuals with disabilities.

In regions where legal protections are less established, businesses can lead the way by adopting best practices from international standards and working closely with Organisations of People with Disabilities (OPDs). This proactive approach not only supports the rights and well-being of people with disabilities but also positions businesses as pioneers of inclusivity in their markets.

³ World Health Organization, "Disability and Health," WHO (World Health Organization: WHO, March 7, 2023), <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/disability-and-health>.

⁴ Katy Talikowska, Silja Baller, and Fernando Alonso Perez-Chao, "Driving Disability Inclusion Is More than a Moral Imperative – It's a Business One," World Economic Forum, December 18, 2023, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/12/driving-disability-inclusion-is-more-than-a-moral-imperative-it-s-a-business-one/>.

⁵ T Sebastian Buckup, "The Price of Exclusion : The Economic Consequences of Excluding People with Disabilities from the World of Work | International Labour Organization," www.ilo.org, December 14, 2009, <https://www.ilo.org/publications/price-exclusion-economic-consequences-excluding-people-disabilities-world>.

⁶ Laura Sherbin et al., "DISABILITIES and INCLUSION US FINDINGS," 2017, https://www.talentinnovation.org/_private/assets/DisabilitiesInclusion_KeyFindings-CT1.pdf.

⁷ World Health Organisation, https://www.who.int/health-topics/disability#tab=tab_1

⁸ Getting to Equal: The Disability Inclusion Advantage," Accenture, 2018.

⁹ Job Accommodation Network, "Benefits and Costs of Accommodation," [askjan.org](https://askjan.org/topics/costs.cfm), 2024, <https://askjan.org/topics/costs.cfm>.

Three types of disability inclusion in business



Customer



Employee



Supplier

Customer

People with disabilities represent a large portion of those seeking high-quality services and products. Within the US, people with disability represent the third largest market segment.¹⁰ This market size more than doubles when you consider family, caregivers and those who prioritise goods and services that are inclusive of people with disabilities.¹¹

Universal design

Universal design refers to the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialised design.¹²

Implementing universal design principles can benefit businesses by making products and services accessible to a wider audience, as well

as increasing customer satisfaction and loyalty. Working with diverse user groups, including people with different types of disabilities to test and refine the design to ensure it meets the needs of all users.

If a product, service or environment is accessible and convenient, everyone benefits.



An accessible pathway or ramp designed to accommodate individuals with disabilities, ensuring ease of mobility and inclusion. Photo credit: Vergani Fotografia

¹⁰ Michelle Yin et al., "A Hidden Market: The Purchasing Power of Working-Age Adults with Disabilities," April 2018, <https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/Hidden-Market-Spending-Power-of-People-with-Disabilities-April-2018.pdf>, pg. 8

¹¹ Yin et al., "A Hidden Market", pg. 8

¹² Centre for Excellence in Universal Design, "About Universal Design," Centre for Excellence in Universal Design, n.d., <https://universaldesign.ie/about-universal-design>.

Universal design is good design



There are **seven principles** of universal design.¹³



Equitable use

The design is useful and feasible for people with all abilities.



Flexibility in use

The design accommodates a wide range of preferences and abilities.



Simple and intuitive use

The design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or concentration level.



Perceptible information

The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user.



Tolerance for error

The design minimises the consequences or issues from accidental or unintended actions.



Low physical effort

The design can be used efficiently and comfortably, with minimal fatigue.



Size and space for approach and use

Appropriate size and space are provided for the use regardless of user's body size, posture, or mobility.

More information on principles and guidelines can be found on the [Centre for Excellence in Universal Design webpage](#).

¹³ Centre for Excellence in Universal Design, "About Universal Design,"

Customer inclusion

Benefits



Buying power and community influence

Brands which promote disability-inclusive products and supply chains can benefit from the spending power of people with disabilities and their families. Products and services catering to people with disabilities also often attract customer segments experiencing temporary constraints such as injury, poor health, or isolation.



Customer engagement

A survey commissioned by the Marketing Anthropology found that 66% of consumers will purchase goods and services from a business that features individuals with disabilities in their advertising. 78% will purchase goods and services from a business that takes steps to ensure easy access for individuals with disabilities at their physical locations.¹⁴



Customer satisfaction

Inclusive practices lead to higher customer satisfaction and loyalty. Customers who feel their needs are met are more likely to return and recommend the business to others.




Increased profits

Inclusive design and accessibility can attract new customers and retain existing ones.

Does your business support customer inclusion?



Ask yourself the following questions about your business's approach to disability inclusion for customers and use the practical measure suggested to develop an action plan to support a more inclusive workplace.

QUESTION	ACTIONS
 <p>Are your external communications, and marketing materials accessible</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide information in multiple formats. This can include offering materials in braille, large print, or audio formats• Use clear language, provide captions and transcripts for video and audio• Ensure that websites meet accessibility standards (i.e. contrast between text and background and plain fonts)<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Do not provide content only in PDF format – these are difficult for screen-readers to read. If you include a PDF also have a word or web version• Use image descriptions (alt text)• Ensure that all the content on your website can be navigated by keys on the keyboard (i.e., it does not require a mouse).

¹⁴ Michelle Yin et al., "A Hidden Market: The Purchasing Power of Working-Age Adults with Disabilities," April 2018, <https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/Hidden-Market-Spending-Power-of-People-with-Disabilities-April-2018.pdf>.

QUESTION	ACTIONS
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test the accessibility of your website • Use inclusive marketing strategies that represent people with disabilities. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ This can involve featuring people with disabilities in advertisements and ensuring that marketing materials are accessible
 <p>Is your building accessible?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure your bathrooms are accessible • Avoid constructing temporary displays or stacking goods in a manner that obstructs aisles • Ensure that buttons and handles are reachable by people in a wheelchair • Provide signage for people with a disability accessing or using the premises
 <p>Are your customer service practices inclusive and non-discriminatory?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess your current customer base to better understand their needs to ensure your products and services are inclusively designed • Provide regular training and resources to employees in customer facing roles in providing accessible and inclusive customer experiences • Offer a mix of contact options including social media, email, chat or instant messaging, text messaging, video calls, telephone calls and post • Seek customer satisfaction feedback from customers with disabilities
 <p>Are your events accessible?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure there is clear, simple, and visible signage to direct people • Ensure the venue is set out so people with disability can move around freely • When setting up seating arrangements, allow people with disability a choice of seating • Ensure that all material is provided in a format accessible to people with disabilities, particularly if there is a PowerPoint presentation.

Employee

Inclusive employment practises provide opportunities for people with disability to access “decent work” that is “...opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for all...”¹⁵

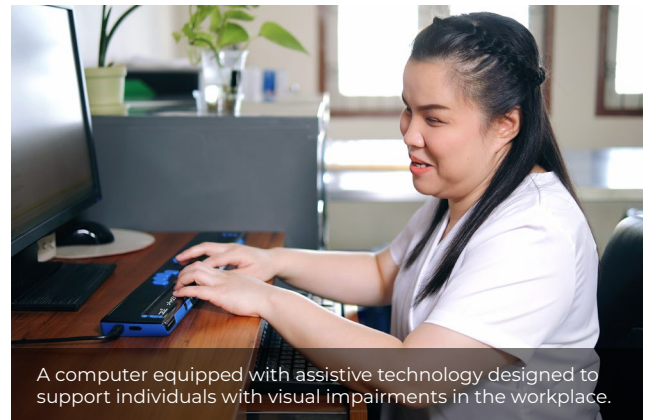
Improving inclusion for workers with disabilities can increase the available pool of talent; increase productivity; and gain insights into broader market segments and their needs; whilst enabling pathways to formal and stable employment for workers with disabilities.¹⁶

Barriers to employment

It is common for people to hide their disabilities in the workplace. One reason may be a fear of discrimination or stigma. They worry that their colleagues or employer will view them differently or treat them unfairly if they reveal their disability.

Another reason people hide their disability or hesitate to apply for a job is a lack of accommodation or support. They may feel that their workplace is not equipped to understand their needs, or they may be concerned that they will be seen as a burden if they ask for accommodations. A lack of accessible recruitment practices, accessibility of buildings and communication processes can prevent someone from applying for a job or disclosing their disability.

It is essential for employers and colleagues to be open to discussing accommodations and ensuring that the workplace is inclusive and accessible for all employees regardless of whether people disclose their disability.



A computer equipped with assistive technology designed to support individuals with visual impairments in the workplace.

Employee inclusion

Benefits



Accessing untapped talent

Recruiting from a bigger pool of candidates allows employers to access more candidates with broader potential and more capability. People with disabilities must negotiate barriers every day, which can in turn create more resilient and innovative workers and problem-solvers.

¹⁶ Accenture, “GETTING to EQUAL: THE DISABILITY INCLUSION ADVANTAGE,” April 2018, <https://www.accenture.com/content/dam/accenture/final/a-com-migration/pdf/pdf-89/accenture-disability-inclusion-research-report.pdf>.



Enhanced productivity

People with disabilities often have valuable skills. Some have high levels of concentration, tolerance for repetition and attention to detail, all of which contribute to business efficiency – fewer mistakes, and better outcomes. Indeed, research has found that HR managers who accommodated employees with disabilities rated 72% of these employees' performance as average, above average, or excellent.¹⁷



Loyalty and reliability

People with disabilities are often highly motivated and less likely than others to seek other jobs. Research has indicated that employees with disabilities stay in their roles on average four months longer than those without disability.¹⁸



Increased employee satisfaction

Businesses that employ people with disabilities report high employee satisfaction ratings. Staff turnover is reported to be lower by up to 30% when a well-run disability community outreach program is in place.¹⁹



Leadership and reputational advantage

Businesses that live up to their values and responsibilities create strong brands that impress buyers and consumers. One study found that 92% of consumers have a more favourable perception of businesses that hire people with disabilities.²⁰



Safer workplaces

Workplaces accessible to people with disabilities are safer for everyone to use, more organised, efficient, and productive.



Innovation and responsiveness

Open-minded businesses with diverse workforces are more likely to be agile and innovative, and thus attract more business.

Does your business support employee inclusion?



Ask yourself the following questions about your business's approach to disability inclusion for employees and use the practical measure suggested to develop an action plan to support a more inclusive workplace.

Please note that the first step in improving your workplace accessibility is engaging and communicating with any existing employees with disabilities on how to create a more inclusive workplace. Wherever possible, also collaborate with organizations of people with disabilities to create a more supportive workplace environment.



¹⁷ Barbara A. Lee and Karen A. Newman, "Employer Responses to Disability: Preliminary Evidence and a Research Agenda," *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal* 8, no. 3 (September 1, 1995): 209–29, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02627842>.

¹⁸ Job Access, "The Compelling Case for Disability Employment in Australia," March 2023, https://www.jobaccess.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/03_2023/The%20compelling%20case%20for%20disability%20employment%20-%20JobAccess%20research%20-%20March%202023%20%28v2%29.pdf.

¹⁹ Job Access, "The Compelling Case for Disability Employment in Australia"

²⁰ Gary Siperstein et al., "A National Survey of Consumer Attitudes towards Companies That Hire People with Disabilities," 2006, <https://worksupport.com/documents/romano%5Fsiperstein.pdf>.

QUESTION	ACTIONS
 <p>Does your workplace raise awareness about disability and actively foster a culture of inclusion?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observing local days of disability and raising awareness of disability in the workplace • Supporting internal groups that provide a platform for employees to engage management on inclusive practices, policy concerns and celebrating diversity • Providing onboarding training that highlights anti-discrimination and active inclusion practices for people with disabilities • Including disability inclusion case studies in existing training • Offering webinars, podcasts or events to educate team members on specific conditions, such as strokes or mental health
 <p>Is your digital information and communications accessible?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use clear language, provide captions and transcript for video and audio • Ensure that websites meet accessibility standards (i.e. contrast between text and background and plain fonts) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Do not provide content only in PDF format – these are difficult to read by screen-readers. If you include a PDF also have a word or web version • Use image descriptions (alt text) • Ensure that all the content on your website can be navigated by keys on the keyboard (i.e., it does not require a mouse). • Make technical support available for consumers who need assistance using your website via online chat, phone, or email. • Test the accessibility of your website • Use the built-in Microsoft Office accessibility checker on all documents
 <p>Is your workplace flexible to support people with disabilities?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow or create a policy on reasonable accommodations to support employees with disabilities in the workplace • Offering flexible hours and remote working options • Offer alternative ways for people to contact you (e.g. email, Teams, video call, phone call) • Ensure confidentiality of personal disability-related information, including requests for reasonable adjustments
 <p>Do your recruitment processes actively encourage candidates with disabilities and invite requests for adjustments?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Including statements of support during recruitment processes, such as people with disabilities are encouraged to apply • Actively invite candidates to request adjustments throughout the online application process, at phone screen, and when organizing interviews and testing or assessment

QUESTION	ACTIONS
<p></p> <p>Are you aware of the accessibility of your workplace premises and progressing in improving its accessibility?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be aware of any national accessibility standards that apply to your building • Undertake an accessibility audit with an organisation for people with disabilities or diverse people with disabilities and accessibility professional to identify barriers in the workplace and potential solutions. • Develop a plan for monitoring and maintaining workplace accessibility • Some practical adjustments for ensuring the physical accessibility of your workplace can be found on the Australian Human Rights Commission webpage.
<p></p> <p>Is your technology accessible?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allowing access to AI tools. For example, using AI to help describe the surroundings for people who are visually impaired or using it to create transcripts for live meetings • Ensure people have access to the accessibility features of tech platforms. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ For example, Microsoft Teams provides closed captioning and an Immersive Reader functionality to support people with dyslexia • Investing in assistive technology where possible. This can include vision, hearing, speech, and mobility assistance. More information on assistive technology can be found on the NDSP website.



A set of symbols accompanied by Braille text is displayed on a specially designed sign located near a building's entrance, ensuring an accessible and inclusive environment for individuals with disabilities. Photo credit: Malazoniia.

Supplier

Creating a diverse and inclusive supply chain is not only a socially responsible practice but can also be a strategic business move. Supplier inclusion involves seeking out and engaging with suppliers who are owned and run by individuals from traditionally underrepresented groups, including people with disabilities.²¹

Supplier inclusion

Benefits



Reflects the diversity of a business's customer base

Inclusion programs can create links with minority populations, including communities of people with disabilities, who are actual or potential customers.²²



Fuels innovation

Through diverse suppliers, companies gain access to new ideas that align with their customer base helping to drive innovation and growth.²³ They can introduce new products and services that cater to a wider audience, boosting the business' competitive edge.



Enables access to new markets

Partnering with diverse suppliers creates new market opportunities and reflects the diversity of the customer base. This can lead to increased market share and customer loyalty.



Secures supply chains

People with disabilities are often highly motivated and less likely than others to seek other incomes sources. Therefore, partnering with people with disabilities as suppliers can expand your supply base and increase its quality and reliability.

Does your business support supplier inclusion?



Ask yourself the following questions about your business's approach to disability inclusion for suppliers and use the practical measure suggested to develop an action plan to support a more inclusive workplace.

²¹ Nanette Goodman et al., "Disability Inclusion in Corporate Supplier Diversity Initiatives," Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation, April 5, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10926-024-10190-2>. pg. 1

²² Goodman et al., "Disability Inclusion in Corporate Supplier Diversity Initiatives", pg. 4

²³ Goodman et al., "Disability Inclusion in Corporate Supplier Diversity Initiatives", pg. 4

QUESTION	ACTIONS
 <p>Are your supplier procurement processes inclusive and accessible?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish regular consultations with Organisations of People with Disabilities to gather feedback and improve supplier diversity practices • Actively seek out and engage with suppliers who are owned and run by people with disabilities. • Ensure that tender processes are inclusive by providing information in accessible formats and helping with the application process if needed. • Create mentorship programs that pair diverse suppliers with experienced business leaders to help them navigate challenges and grow their businesses. • Implement feedback mechanisms that allow diverse suppliers to provide input on the procurement process and suggest improvements.
 <p>Are your supplier criteria inclusive of diverse business ownership?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure your supplier evaluation criteria include points for diverse ownership, particularly for disability-owned businesses. • Maintain a database of certified diverse suppliers and regularly update it to include new businesses. • Include language in Requests for Proposals (RFPs) and Requests for Quotations (RFQs) that encourage submissions from disability-owned businesses.
 <p>Is your communication with suppliers accessible?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use accessible platforms for all communications, ensuring that suppliers with disabilities can engage fully. • Ensure all communications are in clear and plain language, avoiding jargon and complex terms. • Provide multiple communication channels (e.g., email, phone, video conferencing) to accommodate different needs).

Resources

- Centre for Universal Design - <https://universaldesign.ie/>
- Creating an accessible and inclusive workplace - includeability.gov.au
- Disability inclusiveness in the workplace – Benefits from an employee perspective - Diversity Inclusion Belonging - health.nsw.gov.au
- Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO)
- DFAT Accessibility Design Guide: Universal design principles for Australia's aid program
- Development for All 2015-2020: Strategy for strengthening disability-inclusive development in Australia's aid program
- Disability inclusion in the DFAT Development Program Good Practice Note

Support from BPP



For support in improving gender equality and disability inclusion in your operations, reach out to BPP for further guidance and resources.



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