

Advancing Disability Inclusion in Very Small Businesses

National Online Dialogue and X Fireside Chat

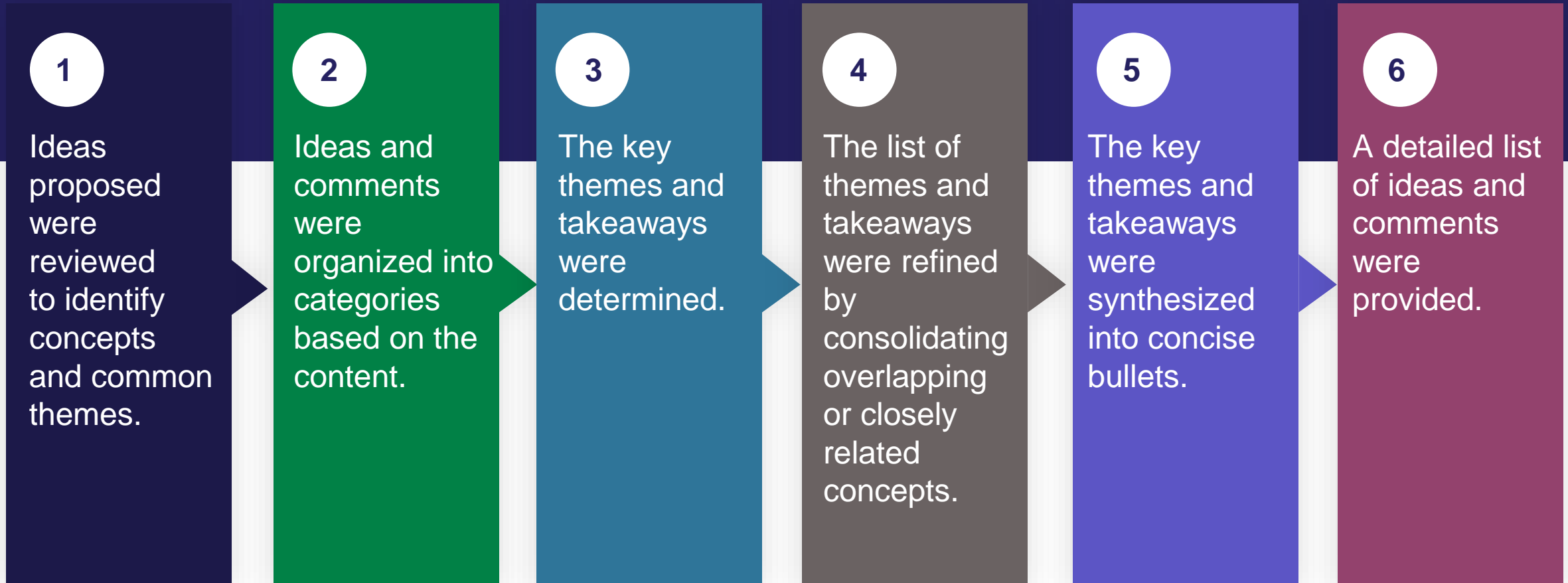
March 25 – May 13, 2024 (X Fireside Chat on May 2, 2024)



From March 25 to May 13, 2024, the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (DOL/ODEP) hosted the *Advancing Disability Inclusion in Very Small Businesses* national online dialogue. The online event gathered insights, experiences, and suggestions from a wide range of small business experts and interested members of the public—all designed to help DOL support small businesses with fewer than 50 employees in employing and retaining workers with disabilities, as well as disabled business owners and entrepreneurs. This report summarizes the dialogue process and metrics, highlighting key themes and takeaways gleaned from both the dialogue and companion X Fireside Chat.

Dialogue Process

ePolicyWorks employed a standard crowdsourcing methodology to identify key themes and takeaways from the *Advancing Disability Inclusion in Very Small Businesses* online dialogue. The process involved several steps.



Targeted Outreach

Email Metrics



19

Campaigns



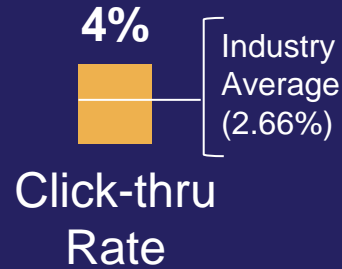
55,354

Delivered



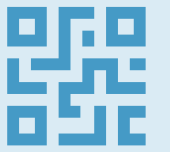
16,744

Opened



30%

Open Rate



179

QR Code Scans



451

Visits to the ePolicyWorks website during the dialogue

X Metrics

(throughout the dialogue, not including the X Fireside Chat posts)



22

Posts



965

Impressions



52

Engagements

LinkedIn Metrics



11

Posts



1,259

Impressions



66

Engagements

Targeted Outreach Groups

To ensure a wide range of viewpoints and experiences, DOL promoted the dialogue and X Fireside Chat through numerous channels and tactics. In addition, ePolicyWorks conducted its own outreach.

- Business schools at universities and colleges
- Disability advocacy organizations
- Economic development organizations
- Employer associations
- Main street coordinating programs
- Past ePolicyWorks dialogue participants
- Small business development centers
- Small business incubators
- Small business investors
- Small business national nonprofit organizations
- Small business specialists
- State and local government agencies
- State small business organizations
- U.S. Department of the Treasury's State Small Business Credit Initiative

Dialogue Metrics



1,153

Visits to the
Online Dialogue



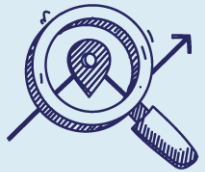
7,389

Page Views



122

Registrants



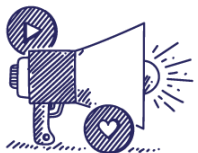
12

States Represented
*(includes District of
Columbia)*



47%

Contribution Rate
of Registrants



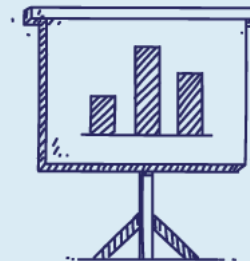
27

Resources Shared
(link)



05:56

Average Engaged
Session Duration



6.41

Average Page Views
per Engaged Session

Key Themes and Takeaways (1)



Accessible Technology

Ideas included:

- Utilizing financial incentives, subsidies, or regulatory enforcement to ensure accessible workplace technologies.
- Promoting resources to help procure accessible products.
- Demanding higher accessibility standards from vendors.
- Enhancing government policies for digital accessibility, including new vendor incentives.



Accommodations

Ideas included:

- Developing clearer regulations.
- Emphasizing the importance of low-cost, high-impact job accommodations, including remote work.
- Fostering agility in small businesses to adapt workplace policies and practices.
- Promoting workplace flexibility as a competitive advantage.



Assistive Technology

Ideas included:

- Promoting resources and educating employers on using technology to support disabled employees.
- Training employees with disabilities to navigate workplace challenges.
- Enhancing productivity through AI.
- Using AI to improve the onboarding and training process for disabled workers.

Key Themes and Takeaways (2)



Compliance

Ideas included:

- Developing strategies to help navigate self-identification issues while respecting privacy concerns.
- Strengthening enforcement and visibility of government compliance checks to ensure adherence to non-discrimination provisions.
- Promoting diversity in alternative dispute resolution (ADR) processes.



Employer Education

Ideas included:

- Increasing outreach and education to small business employers around the benefits of hiring disabled workers.
- Promoting state and federal resources on best practices for disability inclusion.
- Helping people better understand rights and responsibilities under various laws.
- Encouraging small businesses to implement Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) initiatives, with incentives for hiring DEIA consultants and coaches.



Entrepreneurship

Ideas included:

- Showcasing the talents of disabled entrepreneurs.
- Facilitating networking opportunities for disabled entrepreneurs.
- Supporting business readiness for government contracts.
- Creating grant programs and certifications specifically for disabled entrepreneurs.
- Expanding tax credits for disabled workers in the gig economy.
- Establishing state-level entrepreneur centers and incubators.

Key Themes and Takeaways (3)



Federal Government Support

Ideas included:

- Introducing incentives or subsidies to offset the costs of accommodations.
- Simplifying government paperwork and providing clearer guidance, especially for small business owners without in-house legal counsel.
- Updating existing policies to simplify business operations for owners with disabilities.



Financial Support

Ideas included:

- Providing financial assistance to cover initial hiring and onboarding costs such as training, workplace accommodations, insurance, and other associated expenses.
- Offering financial support in the form of grants, funding, and tax incentives to help small businesses afford supports for disabled workers.
- Ensuring that information about financial supports is readily available and accessible.



Veterans

Ideas included:

- Integrating small businesses into programs designed to support transitioning veterans, particularly those with disabilities.
- Emphasizing the benefits of hiring veterans in small businesses.
- Promoting employment as a solution to preventing veteran homelessness.
- Increasing awareness of the Vietnam Era Veterans' Readjustment Assistance Act (VEVRAA) among small business employers and veterans

Key Themes and Takeaways (4)



Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)

Ideas included:

- Tailoring services to engage small businesses.
- Fostering transparency.
- Building trust to encourage inclusive hiring practices.
- Supporting communication between VR agencies and small businesses to address accommodation concerns and enhance programs for disabled entrepreneurs.
- Proactively offering training sessions and regular follow-ups to improve outcomes for both job seekers and small businesses.



Workforce Development

Ideas included:

- Creating accessible, low-cost education and training programs to develop the skills of disabled people.
- Promoting partnerships to offer small business workers executive function skills coaching.
- Establishing a government-supported employment program to pre-vet disabled workers and ease their hiring process.

Ideas, Comments, and Likes

Top Ideas

Based on the number of likes.

- Create disability entrepreneur centers and incubators for disabled entrepreneurs
- Have the Small Business Administration certify disabled-owned small businesses

Top Trending Ideas

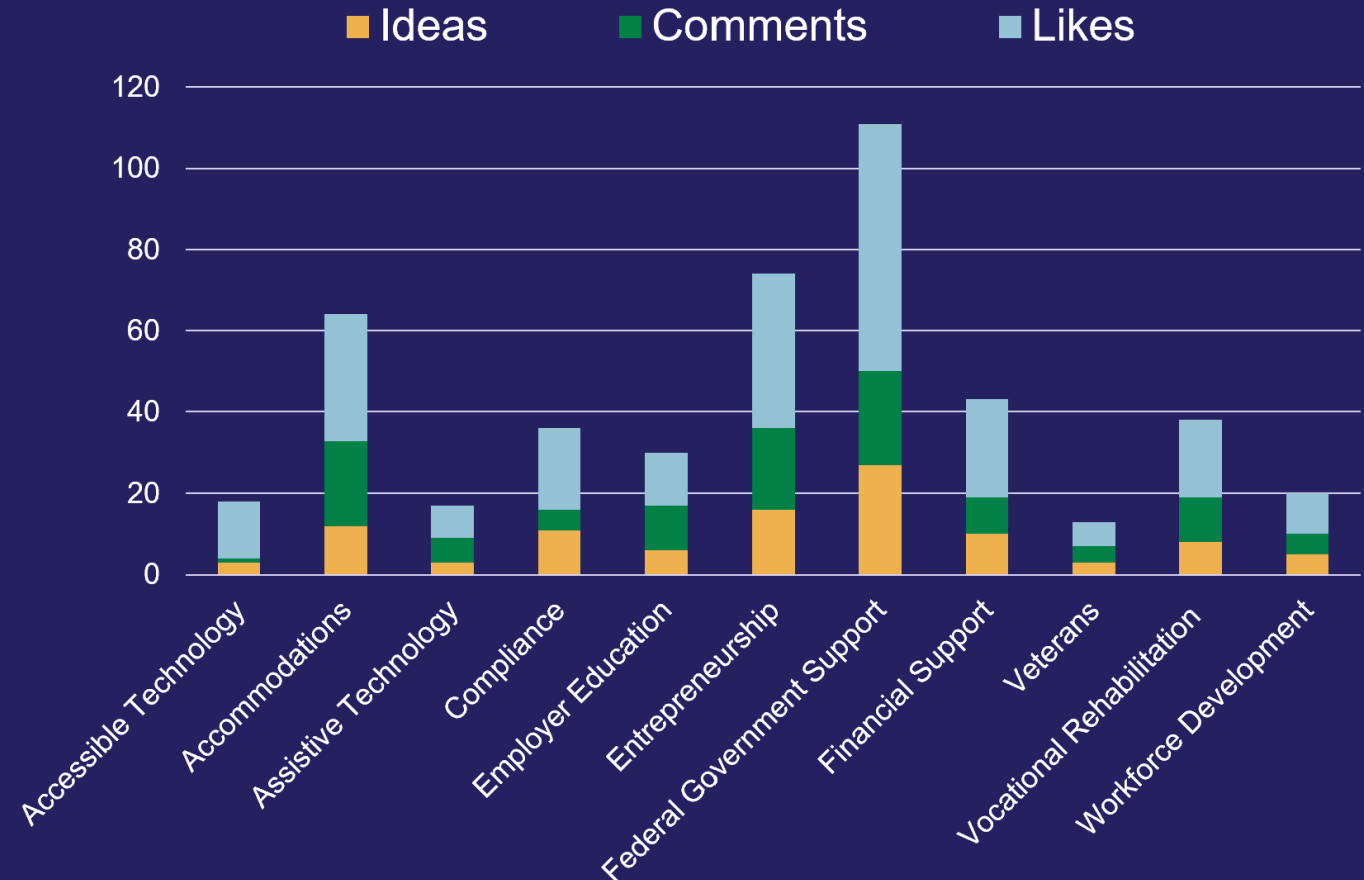
Based on the number of views, with more recent views weighted higher.

- Make the accommodations process easier and no or low-cost
- Remove barriers to Social Security work incentives

Most Active Idea

Based on the number of views, comments, and likes.

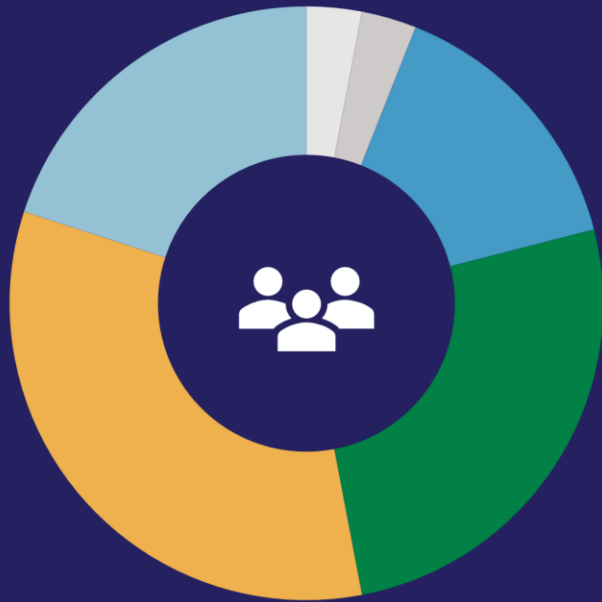
- Provide executive function coaching support for new small business employees



Want to see all ideas and comments submitted in the dialogue?
(link)

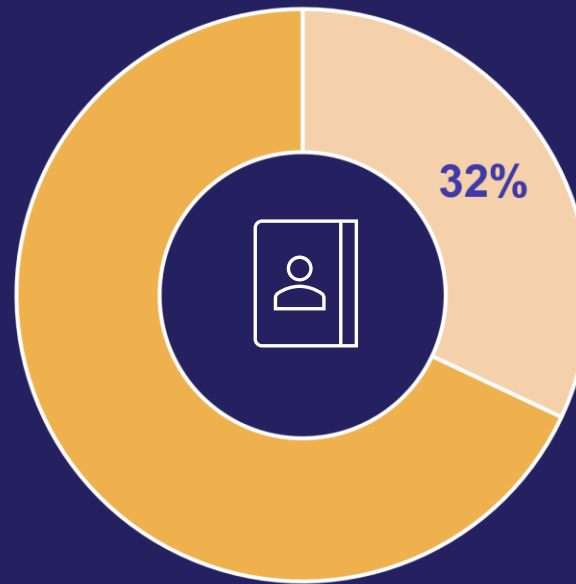
Participant* Metrics (1)

Constituent Group

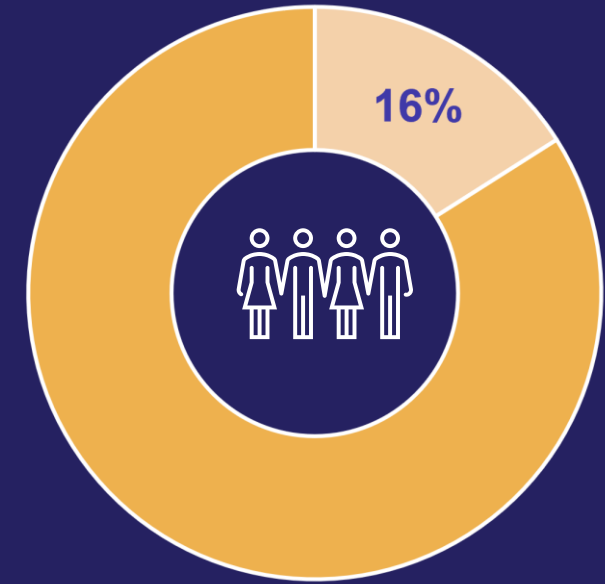


- Advocacy Organization - 3%
- Federal, State or Local Government Representative - 3%
- Entrepreneurs with Disabilities - 15%
- Service Providers (Including VR Agencies) - 26%
- Owners, Managers, or Employees at Very Small Businesses - 33%
- Other or None of the Above - 20%

Owners, Managers, or Employees of Very Small Businesses that Serve Historically Underrepresented Communities



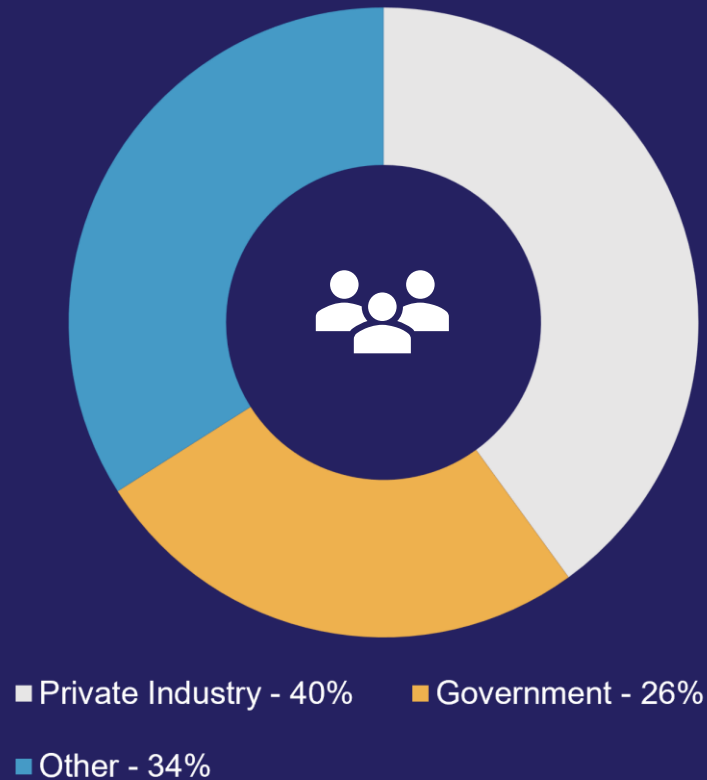
Disabled Owners, Managers, or Employees of Very Small Businesses



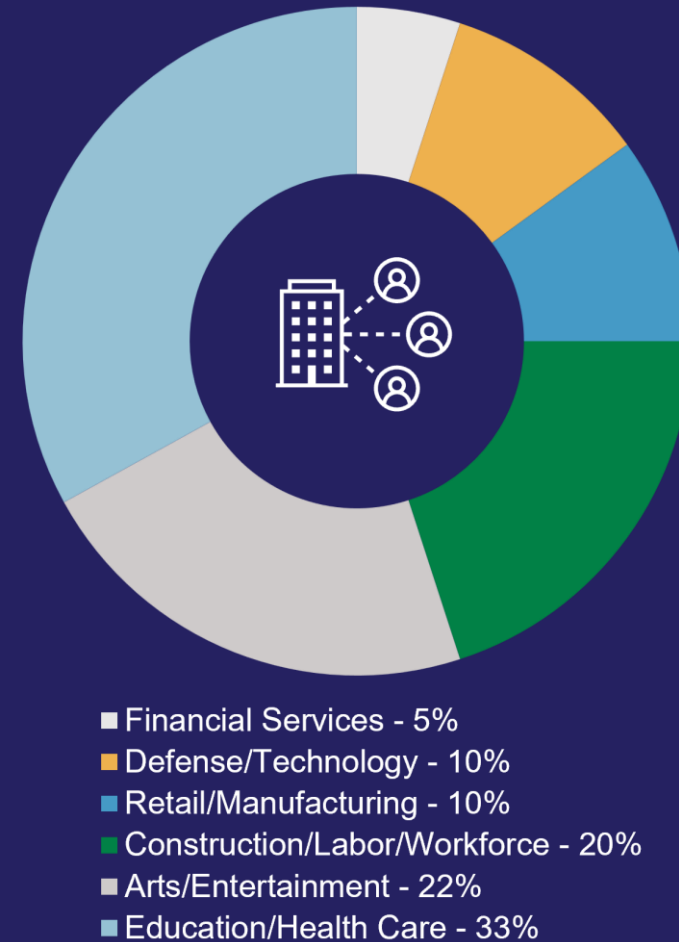
*Contributed an idea, comment, or like.

Participant* Metrics (2)

Private Industry or Government Represented



Breakdown of Private Industry



*Contributed an idea, comment, or like.

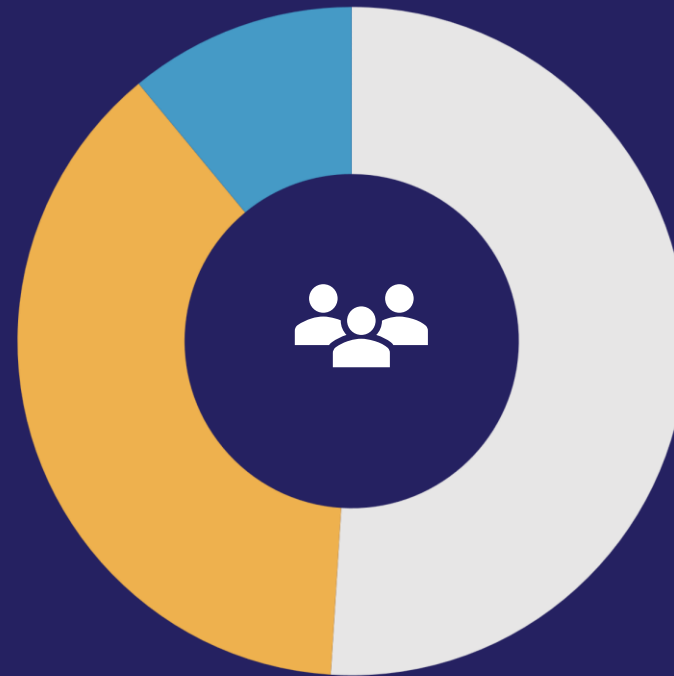
Participant* Metrics (3)

Community Type Represented



■ Rural - 23% ■ Suburban - 34% ■ Urban - 43%

Are you a person with a disability?



■ Yes - 51% ■ No - 38% ■ Do not wish to disclose - 11%

*Contributed an idea, comment, or like.

Advancing Disability Inclusion in Very Small Businesses X Fireside Chat Overview

May 2, 2024



Participants engaged in real-time, interactive discussions to share input and ideas on policies, practices, strategies, and approaches to enhance the inclusion of qualified workers with disabilities in small businesses.



The X Fireside Chat boosted engagement during the final week of the online dialogue before it was extended. Its promotions and posts encouraged participants to continue contributing ideas to the dialogue and comment on and like previously submitted ideas.

Featured guests and X Fireside Chat participants provided insightful responses to 11 questions. Here are the key themes and takeaways:

- **Motivations for Entrepreneurship:** Create initiatives that help disabled people overcome employment barriers, achieve financial independence, and leverage their unique skills.
- **Challenges:** Address financial constraints, enhance resource availability, streamline regulatory processes, and improve accessibility for disabled workers.
- **Retention Strategies:** Provide ongoing support and career development opportunities, foster an inclusive workplace culture, and utilize resources.
- **Recruitment Strategies:** Implement targeted outreach efforts, revise job descriptions to be inclusive, and build partnerships with community organizations.
- **Opportunities in Hiring:** Actively seek to hire disabled workers to benefit from their diverse perspectives and problem-solving abilities and enhance your company's reputation.
- **Hiring Challenges and Solutions:** Overcome accessibility issues and bias by providing reasonable accommodations, utilizing assistive technologies, and leveraging resources.
- **Onboarding Practices:** Ensure clear communication, establish mentorship programs, and offer structured training that caters to the individual needs of new hires.

X Fireside Chat Metrics

236

Engagements Received on Posts Shared by @ePolicyWorks

(clicks, reposts, replies, follows, likes, or post expansions)



4,202

Impressions Received on Posts Shared by @ePolicyWorks



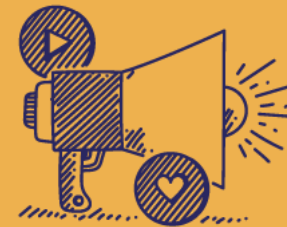
102

Posts with the #EPWChat Hashtag



6

Featured Guests



22

Resources Shared
(link)



Want to see the full X Fireside Chat? (link)