



Employment Brief

Employer Perspectives on Increasing Employment Opportunities for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders with Disabilities

Prepared in collaboration with TransCen, Inc.

National Technical Assistance Center

www.ntac.hawaii.edu
Tel: (808)956-3648
Fax: (808)956-5713
Tty: (808)956-2890

Mission:

To increase employment opportunities for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders with disabilities nationwide.

Based at:

University of Hawaii
at Manoa, Center on
Disability Studies

In collaboration with:

Hawaii Centers for
Independent Living

Hawaii Vocational
Rehabilitation and
Services for the Blind
Division

Funded by:

U.S. Department of
Education
Rehabilitation Services
Administration

Introduction

The Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) population is one of the fastest growing minority groups in the United States. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2002, 12.5 million AAPIs lived in the United States, comprising 4.4 percent of the civilian, non-institutionalized population (Reeves & Bennett, 2003). By the year 2050, this population is expected to increase to 35 million, or 9 percent of the U.S. population (Park & Starbuck, undated). The U.S. Census Bureau also estimates that 16.9 percent of Asians ages 16 to 24 and 21.0 percent of Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islanders ages 16 to 64 who lived in this country in 2000 had some type of disability (Waldrop & Stern, 2003).

Like other individuals with disabilities, many AAPIs with disabilities want to work and are able to work, but find it difficult to obtain and retain meaningful, competitive employment. In addition to challenges related to disability, AAPIs often face language and cultural obstacles that impede their ability to work. For example, AAPIs tend to look first to family members and relatives, rather than professionals, for assistance and are reluctant to seek support from authority establishments, such as state vocational rehabilitation agencies (Park & Starbuck, undated).

To explore some of these issues, in September 2003, the National Technical Assistance Center to Increase Employment Opportunities for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders with Disabilities convened a one-day National Summit in Washington, D.C. The National Summit agenda included a panel discussion by three distinguished employer representatives who presented their perspectives and recommendations for increasing employment among AAPIs with disabilities. The panelists described their organizations' experiences with hiring persons with disabilities, discussed significant issues facing minorities with disabilities in the United States during the next 10 years, and recommended changes needed to improve employment outcomes for minority groups with disabilities, particularly AAPIs with disabilities. This information brief summarizes the panelists' remarks and recommendations.

Educate Employers That Hiring Persons with Disabilities Makes Good Business Sense: When he founded McDonald's Corporation in 1955, Ray Kroc established the philosophy that McDonald's Corporation is not a hamburger company that sells food to people, but a people company that sells hamburgers. "Take good care of those who work for you, and you will float to greatness on their achievements," Kroc said. This people-oriented philosophy is evident in McDonald's solid history of diversity, including the company's McJOBS program, which is designed to train and promote employment of persons with mental and physical disabilities.

The AAPI Employer Panel

Kevin Bradley, Director of Diversity, McDonald's Corporation, Oak Brook, Illinois

Kevin Bradley leads McDonald's Corporation's external initiatives in the Asian-American and disability communities, and provides internal support and consultation in the areas of diversity employment, diversity councils, and workplace accommodations for persons with disabilities. He also serves as an internal resource to the McDonald's Asian Employee Network and the McDonald's Operators Association in the area of diversity. Mr. Bradley is former chair of the Employer Subcommittee of the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities and is a member of the Illinois Business Leadership Network's Executive Committee and several Asian-American organizations' business advisory councils.

Daniel Woody, Human Resource Manager, Wu Yee Children's Services, San Francisco, California

Daniel Woody manages human resources services at Wu Yee Children's Services, a non-profit agency established in 1977 to provide child and family services to immigrants and other low-income families throughout San Francisco. Mr. Woody has 10 years of experience in the disability and human resource fields. His work has included directing employment programs for adults with disabilities in

McDonald's Corporation executives believe that hiring persons with disabilities makes good business sense because doing so can increase a company's financial success, reflects Kevin Bradley, who directs the company's diversity initiatives. "We are in this for money. We don't think hiring people with disabilities is the right thing to do, we believe it's the smart thing to do to increase (an organization's) bottom line," he says.

John Yeh, president of Viable Technologies, Inc., adds that jobs are created by employers—that employers are the ones who must "make things happen" for persons with disabilities. Therefore, it is important for disability service providers to educate employers about the value of hiring persons with disabilities, including AAPIs. "Employment of persons with disabilities is a win-win situation for employers, persons with disabilities, and service providers," he says.

Bring Employers to the Table

Having good communication skills and needed employment skills will be critical for AAPIs with disabilities during the next five to 10 years, Bradley notes. It is often challenging for persons with disabilities to find or keep gainful employment, but cultural and language barriers compound the situation for AAPIs with disabilities. To help overcome these barriers, creative solutions should be explored. For example, partnerships involving the local AAPI community, service providers, and the business community can be formed to help ensure that Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders with disabilities are not left behind.

Importantly, service providers must proactively "bring employers to the table" to discuss employment of persons with disabilities, including AAPIs. Without involvement of and communication with employers, "you're preaching to the choir" and will not be able to increase employment opportunities for AAPIs with disabilities, Bradley says. "The challenge is to find creative ways to get employers in the room."

Recognize and Respect Culture

The panelists agreed that employers and service providers working with AAPIs with disabilities must recognize and respect this population's culture and traditions. In addition, AAPIs with disabilities must be able to demonstrate their employment strengths and capabilities in the American work world.

"Our culture is really humble and quiet, but we need to show that we can be good leaders and contribute to the world of work," comments Yeh, who speaks from personal experience about the employment obstacles faced by AAPIs with disabilities.

Yeh points out that language and communication skills are important work assets, but for many minority workers, including AAPIs, they are weaknesses. In addition to being able to communicate on the job, AAPIs must be able to communicate to prospective employers that they have the skills employers need.

Daniel Woody of Wu Yee Children's Services adds that efforts to develop support services for AAPIs with disabilities must recognize the family orientation embedded in AAPI culture. His experience has shown that the AAPI community is very family-focused, not individual-focused, which requires a service model that

educates and involves both persons with disabilities and their families. However, many contemporary disability employment programs focus on the individual and exclude the family.

Present the Business Case

Employers have jobs available, but are currently doing “so much more with fewer people,” often finding it difficult to commit the time and resources needed to focus on job carving and other activities that could benefit persons with disabilities, Bradley reflects. Therefore, it is important for disability service providers to proactively learn about employers and the jobs they have available, and to reach out to establish relationships with employers, particularly human resource professionals. Just as importantly, service providers must present the business case for employing persons with disabilities by demonstrating that job seekers with disabilities are assets who can help employers meet financial goals, not people who come “with hat in hand.”

Yeh contends that many human resource professionals do not know how to identify and recruit a diverse workforce that includes persons with disabilities. Therefore, disability service providers should help educate human resource professionals about strategies and resources for hiring persons with disabilities. Woody adds that initiating dialogue with an organization’s chief executive officer or executive management team can also open corporate doors and secure companies’ interest in hiring AAPIs with disabilities.

Develop Strong Partnerships in AAPI Communities

Woody believes that AAPI employment opportunities could be increased if individualized employment plans were developed in tandem with businesses and disability service providers in AAPI communities. He also recommends that partnerships of service providers, businesses, and local AAPI community leaders be established. Such partnerships could identify needs not being met by the current service delivery model, develop outreach and support strategies, and identify job opportunities in communities where AAPIs reside.

“The AAPI community is very tight-knit and is an underutilized resource,” Woody says. If service providers tapped into that resource and worked closely with businesses that are loyal and dedicated to that community, better employment outcomes for AAPIs with disabilities would result. He also notes the importance of service providers looking beyond the traditional service provider perspective to focus on providing individualized support. For example, job carving should be presented as a strategy for increasing the productivity of employees.

Take Advantage of Technology

Yeh forecasts that the next 10 years will bring a rapid increase in technology-based employment, which holds promise for persons with disabilities, including AAPIs. Technology can open doors for this population, including opportunities for home-based employment. For example, using new technology, voice transcribers employed by his company are able to work at home and do not require transportation to work, even if they live in remote areas.

the San Francisco Bay area and providing human resource expertise to non-profit and for-profit organizations. He has consulted with large companies to determine their business needs and how persons with disabilities can meet those needs, and has helped tailor jobs to enable persons with disabilities to be productive employees.

John Yeh, President, Viable Technologies, Inc., Potomac, Maryland

John Yeh is president of Viable Technologies, Inc., which uses remote technology to offer affordable, real-time transcription services to students who are deaf or hard of hearing, and chairman of WebbyNation, Inc., which specializes in media, Internet, and wireless services. A native of Taiwan, he has been a resident of the United States since 1962. Mr. Yeh has been deaf since birth and has firsthand experience with the employment obstacles faced by AAPIs with disabilities. After receiving his master’s degree from the University of Maryland, he was unable to find employment, but through hard work and perseverance he built a highly successful company, Integrated Computer Systems. Sixteen years later, he sold the company to CACI International and founded Viable Technologies, Inc.

Woody agrees that technology can help open doors, but cautions that it can be a double-edged sword for persons with disabilities. Technology can level the playing field, but it also limits the availability of entry-level and manual jobs. Partnerships with community colleges and vocational–technical schools could help provide needed technology training to help alleviate this concern.

Summary

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are a diverse population of more than 12 million people who represent many different origins, languages, cultures, and lengths of residence in the United States. Many AAPIs with disabilities want to work and are able to work, but face obstacles related to disability, as well as language and culture. Employers, disability service providers, and AAPI communities can work together to increase employment opportunities for AAPIs with disabilities. Employers recognize that persons with disabilities, including AAPIs, are an important group of prospective employees who can help companies succeed financially. Many employers need information about how to access and work with the AAPI disability community, but lack the time and resources needed to do so. Disability service providers can play a key role by proactively reaching out to employers, presenting the business case for hiring AAPIs with disabilities, and promoting strong partnerships among service providers, businesses, and AAPI communities.

Resources

US Chamber of Commerce Center for Workforce Preparation:
www.uschamber.com/cwp

National Technical Assistance Center for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders with Disabilities, Center on Disability Studies, University of Hawaii at Manoa:
www.ntac.hawaii.edu

Office of Disability Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor: www.dol.gov/odep

U.S. Business Leadership Network, U.S. Chamber of Commerce: www.usbln.org

References

- Park, H., & Starbuck, D.E. (Undated). Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. National Technical Assistance Center to Increase Employment Opportunities for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders with Disabilities, Information Brief 1(1). Available at: www.ntac.hawaii.edu/products/products.htm
- Reeves, T., & Bennett, C. (2003). The Asian and Pacific Islander Population in the United States: March 2002. U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Report P20-540. Available at: <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/asian.html>
- Waldrop, J., & Stern, S.M. (2003). Disability Status: 2000. U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Brief C2KBR-17. Available at: <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/disable/disabstat2k.html>

Who Are Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders?

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, “Asian” refers to persons having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent. They include, for example, those who have roots in Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam. The term “Pacific Islander” refers to individuals having origins in the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands.

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are a diverse population that includes many groups with different languages, cultures, and lengths of residence in the United States. Some Asian groups, such as the Chinese and Japanese, have lived in the United States for generations. In contrast, the Hmong, Vietnamese, Laotians, and Cambodians are relatively recent immigrants.

Source: Reeves, T., & Bennett, C. (2003). The Asian and Pacific Islander Population in the United States: March 2002. U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Report P20-540. Available at: <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/asian.html>.

