



Empowering Abilities, Embracing Inclusivity

**NEW JERSEY STATE AS A MODEL EMPLOYER
BIANNUAL REPORT
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Executive Summary

The State of New Jersey recognizes that persons with disabilities are an underrepresented and untapped segment of the labor pool for consideration in public employment. As New Jersey's largest employer, the State as a Model Employer (SAME) program was established to promote the awareness of persons with disabilities as a valued employee resource and to attract, engage, and retain people with disabilities in the State workforce. In accordance with the SAME program, State Executive Branch agencies are removing barriers faced by persons with disabilities in the application and appointment process to State jobs. State agencies are also creating mechanisms consistent with the SAME program to increase advancement and retention rates for persons with disabilities employed in the State workforce. The aim of the SAME program is to raise awareness of employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, remove barriers to the hiring process, and increase retention rates for persons with disabilities employed in the State workforce.

This report details recruitment initiatives and challenges faced by State agencies implementing the SAME program. State agencies are actively engaging in recruitment strategies like collaborating with external organizations, revising job postings to include SAME program information, and improving accessibility for individuals with disabilities in the recruitment process. Challenges identified include delays in the hiring process, issues with interview procedures, and incomplete applications. Recommendations to address these challenges involve streamlining the application process, improving communication, and raising awareness about the SAME program.

State agencies reported expanding outreach and engagement with disability advocacy groups, modifying online portals for self-identification, and addressing the lack of demographic information. Strategies for attracting, training, and retaining SAME program applicants vary among agencies, including job postings, career fairs, telework opportunities, and collaborations with disability advocacy organizations.

Furthermore, the commitment of various agencies to foster diversity, equity, and inclusion is evident. Many agencies have long-term plans to continue their efforts in promoting inclusivity, focusing on ongoing growth and development through training, partnerships, and the adoption of inclusive practices.

Moreover, this Report addresses the challenges facing the employment of individuals with disabilities in New Jersey. These barriers range from specific job requirements to skill demands, along with issues related to disclosing disabilities. To overcome these barriers, increased flexibility, raised awareness, and targeted outreach efforts are crucial for ensuring inclusivity within the workforce. Quantitative data will be provided as the SAME program progresses.

Employment Barriers for People with Disabilities

The Report outlines diverse challenges hindering the employment of individuals with disabilities in New Jersey. Barriers include firm job requirements such as typing tests which can be stressful to SAME program applicants, specific skill demands, and issues related to disability disclosure. Overcoming these barriers necessitates heightened flexibility, increased awareness, and targeted outreach to foster inclusivity in the workforce.

Disqualification Reasons for SAME Applicants

Applicants within the SAME program encounter disqualification due to various reasons such as, incomplete applications, document submission issues, concerns about salary, lack of interest, and failure to meet job requirements. Agencies are required to provide different formats to assist applicants who are differently abled.

Efforts to Increase SAME Employees

Agencies are actively engaged in diverse recruitment strategies, such as, promoting the SAME program at job fairs and events and training the applicant interview panel. Accessibility enhancements and inclusive practices are being utilized to expand employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Collaborations with external organizations and adjustments to recruitment processes reflect a commitment to inclusivity. Examples of these are as follows:

Department of Environmental Protection:

1. Trained Human Resources personnel and managers on the SAME program.
2. Modifying its interview panel members.
3. Training on the SAME program and disability awareness/sensitivity.
4. Encouraging and support the creation of a disability employee resource group.

Retention Rates of SAME Employees

With only five SAME program applicants hired between January and June 2023 (Office of Information Technology-1, New Jersey Economic Development Authority-1, Department of Environmental Protection-1, Civil Service Commission-2), the retention rates of the four reporting agencies are at 100% during this period.

Plans for Expansion in the Next Reporting Period

Agencies plan to extend outreach, allocate resources, and prioritize education, accessibility, and inclusivity in the upcoming period. Collaborative outreach, inclusive culture initiatives, and adaptive recruitment practices are key strategies. It is encouraged that agencies consider

budgeting for the SAME program, inclusive of administrative/staffing, promotional events to expand the initiatives and purpose of the program.

Recommendations for Legislation

Various agencies suggest legislative changes, emphasizing the need for flexible work options, facility accessibility improvements, streamlined administrative processes, increased funding, and changes in self-identification processes to create a more inclusive environment for individuals with disabilities.

Set forth below are the recommendations from various State agencies for legislative change on specific areas of the SAME program. The recommendations provide valuable insights into making New Jersey's programs and institutions more inclusive and accessible for individuals with disabilities.

The New Jersey Department of Human Services highlights the importance of flex schedules and remote work options, recognizing the need for accommodating diverse work arrangements.

New Jersey City University emphasizes the significance of investing capital funds in improving the accessibility of older buildings and facilities.

Kean University suggests shifting reporting from quarterly to biannually to streamline administrative processes.

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection underscores the need for dedicated funding for the SAME program, focusing on hiring, recruitment, and training.

Rowan University's insight highlights the importance of increasing awareness about the SAME program to attract a more diverse pool of candidates.

Additionally, it is recommended that a "Self-Identification" form be utilized for people with disabilities to attest to instead of the current Schedule A or Schedule B letters, as these letters appear to be a barrier for an applicant who does not have enough time to apply and make an appointment to obtain a letter from their doctor.

The goal of 7% of SAME program employees by each agency should be discussed, and may be different by each agency, due to their staff totals.

A "Self-Identification" form should be opened for applicants to state the types of accommodations they will need at the interview and hiring process.

Conclusion

As the SAME program is in its earliest stage, more time is needed for a comprehensive analysis of the progress of the program.

There is a clear indication that State agencies are committed to implementing various outreach methods and in engaging dedicated staff in promoting and encouraging the SAME program. However, each agency should implement comprehensive strategies to educate job seekers and employees of the availability of the SAME program. For instance, agencies with satellite or branch offices can display posters promoting the SAME program. It is also highly encouraged that each agency's website advertises and promote the SAME program, along with outreach to the public and other organizations throughout New Jersey.

It is highly recommended that agencies to increase SAME messaging via social media and digital marketing. The Civil Service Commission will continue to rotate information about SAME on its social media platforms, web page, and in person events.

Through each agency's efforts, it is anticipated that the SAME program will benefit the delivery of public services in New Jersey by tapping into the talents possessed by this underrepresented segment within New Jersey's State workforce.

Introduction

The New Jersey State as a Model Employer (SAME)

The New Jersey State as a Model Employer program “SAME” is an initiative aimed at promoting inclusive and equitable employment practices for persons with disabilities within the State government of New Jersey. Founded on the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion, this program strives to recruit this underrepresented and untapped segment of the labor pool for consideration in public employment.

At its core, the SAME program is a response to the need for a more inclusive and representative workforce. New Jersey recognizes the importance of fostering an environment where all individuals, regardless of their background, abilities, or disabilities, have equal opportunities for meaningful employment and career advancement. By championing the SAME program, the State aims to lead by example in promoting workforce diversity and accessibility.

The Department of Agriculture, for example, leverages partnerships with educational institutions and utilizes platforms like Handshake and College Central websites to reach potential SAME program applicants. State agencies including the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development, the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, and the Casino Control Commission collaborate with organizations such as the Commission for the Blind, American Legion, and Career Opportunity Development Inc. These partnerships enable the agencies to share job opportunities with external stakeholders and disability advocacy organizations to attract more SAME program applicants.

The program’s commitment to inclusion is evident through its concerted efforts to hire and support individuals with disabilities. The SAME program seeks to eliminate barriers to employment and provide reasonable accommodations that enable individuals with disabilities to thrive in their roles. Moreover, it serves as a catalyst for changing perceptions surrounding disability in the workplace, emphasizing the value of diverse perspectives and talents.

Through strategic partnerships and initiatives, the SAME program is actively engaged in raising awareness about the benefits of inclusive employment practices. It is not only a symbol of the State’s dedication to equity and diversity, but also a beacon of hope for individuals seeking meaningful careers in an environment that values their unique contributions.

While the SAME program shall be implemented by each State agency the Civil Service Commission (Commission) continues to promote and highlight the SAME program to the residents of New Jersey.

The Commission made presentations or discussed the SAME program at following events between January 1, 2023 and June 30, 2023:

01/24/23	Police Advisory Board Meeting
01/24/23	Fire Advisory Board Meeting
01/31/23	New Jersey Association of Counties
02/08/23	New Jersey Firemen’s Mutual Benefits Association Conference
03/07/23	2023 NJ State Police Benevolent Association Mini Convention
03/16/23	Diversity Council Meeting
03/20/23	Department of Labor & Workforce Development Visit
03/21/23	New Jersey Fraternal Order of Police Mini Convention
03/23/23	Meeting with Police Benevolent Association Council
03/30/23	Department of Health Visit
04/03/23	Meeting with CWA Representatives
04/27/23	Rowan University - Diversity in Law Enforcement Forum
05/09/23	Newark Board of Education Visit
05/19/23	Department of Human Services Visit
05/31/23	Department Of Transportation Training Center Grand Opening
06/01/23	Professional Fire fighters Association of New Jersey Annual Leadership Conference
06/06/23	Motor Vehicle Commission Visit
06/14/23	New Jersey State Job Fair West Windsor
06/23/23	East Orange Pride Celebration

The Civil Service Commission also advertised the SAME program via:

1. The New Jersey Transit’s bus and station advertising. This encompassed advertising on 138 busses, at the following counties, notably:

-  Burlington
-  Camden
-  Mercer
-  Middlesex
-  Essex

2. Digital marketing of the SAME program was promoted via NJ Transit’s electronic boards at the following train stations:

-  Hamilton
-  Metro Park
-  Montclair University
-  Newark Penn Station
-  Princeton Junction
-  Trenton
-  Newark Broad Street

Purpose, Scope, and Reporting

In accordance with P.L. 2021, c. 465, the SAME program shall be implemented by each State agency. “State agency” means any State department, and any authority, commission, office, department, division, bureau, board, or any other agency or instrumentality thereof, including institutions of higher education.

The purpose of the SAME program is to increase awareness of employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, provide appropriate avenues and remove barriers to the application and hiring process, and create mechanisms to increase advancement and retention rates for persons with disabilities employed in the State workforce. Each State agency is required to provide sufficient and qualified staff and sufficient resources and funding for the SAME program, including, as appropriate, the appointment of a disability program manager, selective placement program coordinator, and stay-at-work and return-to-work coordinator. The Affirmative Action Officer of each State agency shall oversee the SAME program for that State agency.

At a minimum, and as appropriate, the SAME program shall:

- (1) review existing recruitment, hiring, advancement, and retention policies and procedures applicable to persons with disabilities, including an analysis of barriers to employment.
- (2) establish goals for the hiring and recruitment of persons with disabilities, maintain records of the progress towards achieving and maintaining the established goals, and maintain and report on demographic data related to disability status for applicants and employees.
- (3) use fast track hiring and advancement authority that permits State agencies to consider disability status during the hiring and advancement process.
- (4) establish mentoring, internship, or similar work-based learning experiences for persons with disabilities.
- (5) provide an opportunity for a qualified individual with a disability to request a mandatory interview, which shall be kept confidential and separate from the agency employment applications.
- (6) include a centralized accommodation program to consolidate subject matter expertise necessary to assess, evaluate, and implement effective and meaningful accommodations and funding streams for accommodations.
- (7) establish a recruitment and referral program that connects the State agency with college students and recent graduates with disabilities.
- (8) utilize web-based application portals that are accessible to and usable by persons with disabilities.

(9) provide for quarterly progress reports and a biannual report the Governor and the Legislature to include:

1. Ongoing barriers to employment;
2. Progress made towards increasing the number of persons with disabilities employed by the State and each State agency;
3. Retention rates of persons with disabilities employed by the State and each State agency; and
4. Plans for expanding and improving employment opportunities in the upcoming year.

While this is the first biannual report for the SAME program, it is important to note that the evaluation and input from all reporting agencies contributed tremendously to the data gathered during this period. The report consists of extensive information, since the program is in its earliest stage and the insights given can guide the SAME program to become successful as it progresses, to add value to the State of New Jersey, its stakeholders, and for the purpose of which it was created.

The initial report by State agencies was due to the Commission on September 25, 2023, with two additional extensions, with the final due date on October 13, 2023.

The following agencies responded to the SAME program data requirements:

-  New Jersey Educational Facilities Authority
-  Department of Agriculture
-  State Commission of Investigations
-  State Parole Board
-  Department of Labor & Workforce Development
-  Department of Human Services
-  Office of the Secretary of Higher Education
-  Office of Information Technology
-  Department of Community Affairs
-  Public Employment Relations Commission
-  Office of the Public Defender
-  Department of Education
-  Casino Control Commission
-  Department of Banking and Insurance
-  Board of Public Utilities
-  Department of Corrections
-  Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency

-  Department of Health
-  Economic Development Authority
-  New Jersey City University
-  Kean University
-  Department of Children and Families
-  Department of Environmental Protection
-  Stockton University
-  Rowan University
-  Civil Service Commission
-  The College of New Jersey
-  Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs
-  Department of Transportation
-  Governor's Office

Challenges and Progress Made on Workforce Diversity and Inclusion of SAME Applicants.

The data reveals a diverse range of approaches employed by different agencies to address the varying challenges related to workforce diversity and the inclusion of SAME program applicants. While some agencies are confronted with issues such as the limited number of SAME program applicants, others grapple with difficulties associated with the disclosure of disabilities and a lack of candidates showing interest in their programs. These challenges are by no means uniform across all agencies.

What emerges from the data is a strong commitment to awareness and education, with several agencies actively engaging in training and education initiatives to enhance diversity and inclusion. This includes training for Human Resources personnel, managers, and employees, as well as participation in relevant webinars and summits. Furthermore, agencies are taking steps to promote collaboration with external organizations or government entities. For instance, they are working closely with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services and veterans' organizations to create opportunities for underrepresented individuals. This is further evident by Stockton University's partnership with the Greater Egg Harbor Regional School District, and the Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs collaboration to host career events and job fairs with VFW, American Legion, Jewish War Veterans, Disabled American Veterans, Wounded Warriors Project, Vietnam Veterans of America, as well as various NJ agencies that support disabled persons.

Additionally, a focus on accommodation is evident. Agencies are making efforts to ensure that their application processes and job postings are accessible and inclusive. In some cases, this involves revising application forms to indicate the need for specific accommodations.

The data also reflects a commitment to monitoring and tracking progress. Some agencies are putting measures in place to track the progress of their diversity and inclusion initiatives. This includes monitoring SAME program employees and assessing the effectiveness of their efforts.

One agency noted the existence of societal stigmatism around disclosing a disability in the workplace, indicating a broader societal challenge that extends beyond individual agencies.

Despite the challenges they face, many agencies express a strong commitment to continuing their efforts. This includes posting positions to attract a larger pool of eligible applicants, advancing initiative goals, and educating hiring managers about diversity programs. There is a recognition of the ongoing need for concerted efforts to create more inclusive workplaces.

Recruitment Initiatives and Events for SAME Hiring

The data received highlights a diverse array of recruitment initiatives and events employed by various State agencies as part of the SAME program. Agencies are actively engaging in multiple recruitment strategies to attract SAME program applicants, including collaborating with external organizations, participating in career fairs and job fairs, and revising job postings to include SAME program information. Agencies are also revising application forms to indicate required accommodations, and using video call interviews with sign language translators. Additionally, agencies are focused on raising public awareness by using various communication channels such as websites, public-facing documents, and job postings.

Collaboration with disability advocacy groups is another notable strategy, where agencies are forming partnerships with local organizations to increase the pool of SAME applicants and retain employees with disabilities. Several agencies are actively measuring the success of their recruitment initiatives by conducting reviews to assess the effectiveness of their advertising avenues. Moreover, inclusivity in hiring is emphasized, with agencies integrating the SAME program into their hiring processes and asking applicants to disclose if they are applying through the SAME program. Links to reasonable accommodations policies are provided in job postings, ensuring clarity for applicants.

Diverse advertising and promotional efforts are undertaken to reach out to a wide range of potential SAME program applicants, including advertising on diversity websites and attending career fairs. Agencies are also participating in job fairs and events where the SAME program is identified, allowing them to engage directly with potential applicants. Some agencies leverage online resources, such as the Civil Service Commission's website, to promote the SAME program job openings. Lastly, the commitment to web accessibility standards, as mentioned by the New Jersey Economic Development Authority, underscores the dedication to ensuring that online content is accessible to individuals with disabilities. These insights collectively reflect a proactive approach to diversity and inclusion in the workplace across a variety of State agencies implementing the SAME program.

Challenges on Hiring and Recommendations

The insights set forth below highlight the importance of streamlining the SAME program application process, improving communication with applicants, raising awareness about the program, and implementing changes to online portals to enhance the recruitment and hiring of SAME candidates while ensuring a fair and inclusive process.

The data received reveals several challenges faced by various State agencies in the context of the SAME program during the hiring process. Common challenges include delays in hiring due to the additional time required for SAME program. Remote working option has been modified for employees to telework instead of being unable to drive.

gram parameters and issues related to SAME program applicants not timely providing all the required documents. Furthermore, some agencies, such as the New Jersey State Parole Board, encounter limitations in the availability of civilian positions that align with SAME program criteria, emphasizing the need for a more comprehensive approach.

The interview process presents another challenge, as noted by the Department of Labor & Workforce Development which encountering issues during SAME program candidate interviews. To address these challenges, recommendations include offering tips and techniques for interviewing SAME program candidates and outlining post-recruitment compliance actions to identify barriers to employment. Clarity and understanding of the mandatory nature of interviews are also noted, as some hiring managers are confused about this requirement.

Moreover, there are concerns about the lack of demographic information, which can hinder the accommodation process, as highlighted by the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education. Agencies like the Casino Control Commission have grappled with difficulties in identifying SAME applicants through their online portals. To address this, they recommend modifying online portals to allow applicants to self-identify through the SAME program.

Incomplete applications pose another challenge for several agencies, emphasizing the need for timely submission and follow-up with applicants to ensure that all necessary documents are received. Lack of awareness about the SAME program within the target community is an issue for some agencies like Rowan University, and recommendations include launching informational campaigns to raise awareness among potential beneficiaries.

Additionally, difficulties in interfacing with the SAME program webpage on the Civil Service Commission website and tracking systems have been reported by Stockton University. Their recommendation is for applicants to apply through the university's tracking system for easier reporting.

The Department of Environmental Protection recommends collaboration with disability-serving and disability advocacy organizations to promote diversity and inclusion, and to allowing the SAME program applicants to voluntarily disclose hidden disabilities during the interview.

In addition, challenges, such as missed deadlines and a lack of interest in applying through SAME program, have been observed by The College of New Jersey. It also emphasizes the importance of timely removal of job postings to prevent confusion among applicants.

These insights collectively underscore the need for a more streamlined and efficient SAME program application process, improved communication with applicants, increased awareness about the program, and necessary adjustments to online portals to enhance the recruitment and hiring of SAME program candidates while ensuring a fair and inclusive process.

Accommodation and Accessibility

The information collected reflects a commitment by various State agencies to provide accessible and inclusive work environments. Measures range from physical accommodations to the use of technology, flexible work arrangements, and specialized equipment to ensure that employees with disabilities can work effectively and comfortably. It is evident that these agencies are striving to create accessible workplaces that cater to the diverse needs of their employees.

The data showcases the commitment of several State agencies to accommodate and ensure accessibility for individuals with disabilities within the workplace. Notable measures include the New Jersey State Parole Board's installation of a "hands-free" entrance door at its central office, improving physical accessibility. The Office of the Secretary of Higher Education has taken a multifaceted approach, conducting disability surveys for agency personnel, and enhancing communication through closed captions in Zoom staff meetings, thereby making information more accessible for employees with hearing impairments.

Virtual interviews, offered by various agencies like the Casino Control Commission and Rowan University, contribute to enhanced accessibility by allowing candidates to participate in interviews remotely. The Department of Banking and Insurance extends accommodation by enabling employees to telework for a significant portion of their workweek, providing flexibility that caters to the needs of those who may face challenges with commuting or working in a traditional office setting.

The New Jersey Economic Development Authority prioritizes flexibility in remote work arrangements and offers wellness rooms while also addressing specific needs through specialized seating configurations and customized equipment placement. The Department of Children and Families goes a step further, providing a wide range of accommodations, from pedal extenders to American Sign Language interpreters, to address the diverse needs of its employees.

Accessibility is further emphasized by Stockton University, which maintains a dedicated page on the Americans with Disabilities Act and accommodation within its Office of Human Resources. Lastly, the New Jersey Civil Service Commission conducts interviews via Microsoft TEAMS, facilitating accommodations for candidates with disabilities, and makes best efforts to provide accommodation based on individual needs. These insights collectively reveal the dedication of these agencies to creating inclusive and accessible work environments, ensuring that employees with disabilities can work effectively and comfortably while addressing their unique needs.

Engagement of State Agencies

The data shows the diverse approaches that various State agencies in New Jersey have adopted to address the training, development, and retention of SAME program applicants. Many agencies, such as the New Jersey Educational Facilities Authority and the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, rely on job postings on the Civil Service Commission's website to ensure visibility for job opportunities. Inclusivity in job postings is emphasized by agencies like the State Parole Board, Department of Human Services, and Department of Community Affairs, where SAME program information is consistently included in all job postings.

The Department of Labor and Workforce Development takes a comprehensive approach, utilizing various methods that encompass posting SAME program jobs on different platforms, conducting career fairs, providing information to the counselors in the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, and conducting outreach activities to community organizations and schools. This multifaceted strategy aims to reach a wide range of potential SAME program candidates and promote inclusivity in the hiring process.

Telework opportunities, a crucial aspect of accommodating individuals with disabilities and promoting work flexibility, are offered by the Office of Information Technology. Collaborative efforts with local disability advocacy organizations are evident at the Casino Control Commission, where the workforce culture is described as inclusive, welcoming, and supportive, contributing to staff retention.

Several agencies, such as the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities, focus on training tools and resources to educate hiring managers about the SAME program, emphasizing the importance of awareness, and understanding. They also make use of various platforms for posting SAME program job openings, increasing their reach.

Accessibility measures are a priority for the New Jersey Department of Corrections, with a focus on accessible parking and work locations, creating a barrier-free work environment. The New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency publicizes SAME program information on job postings and at job fairs to attract potential applicants. The New Jersey Economic Development Authority modifies job applications to identify SAME program eligibility and encourages self-identification of people with disabilities. They also include SAME program language in job descriptions and postings on the Civil Service Commission website.

In higher education institutions like Stockton University and Rowan University, a combination of recruitment initiatives and professional development opportunities is employed to attract a diverse pool of applicants and enhance employee engagement while reducing turnover. Additionally, the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs has demonstrated its commitment to an inclusive workplace by instituting a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Office and assigning a dedicated personnel assistant to assist with SAME program recruitment efforts.

These insights collectively illustrate the commitment of these agencies to creating inclusive, accessible, and supportive work environments for the SAME program applicants.

Challenges and Suggestions for the Development, Retention, and Advancement of Individuals with Disabilities.

The challenges and suggestions for the development, retention, and advancement of individuals with disabilities within various State agencies in New Jersey, as highlighted below, reveal a commitment to creating inclusive and supportive work environments.

The New Jersey State Parole Board faces logistical challenges due to numerous work locations, which may impact accessibility. To address this, a focus on maintaining consistent accessibility standards across locations is crucial.

The Department of Labor and Workforce Development recognizes the importance of training and skill development, with specific programs to address challenges like performance barriers and resume writing.

The Casino Control Commission has opted to provide remote work options to accommodate employees who may be unable to drive, contributing to their retention and advancement.

The Department of Environmental Protection emphasizes equal training opportunities and suggests the development of a structured mentorship program for SAME employees. It is important to note that each State agency can implement individual programs based on their agency's needs.

The New Jersey Civil Service Commission calls for more formal training for managers and supervisors to ensure inclusivity and fairness for employees with disabilities.

Lastly, the New Jersey Department of Transportation faces challenges related to self-identification of disabilities and may benefit from fostering a culture of openness to encourage self-identification and appropriate accommodations.

These insights collectively reflect the dedication of the agencies in addressing the implementation challenges to support more inclusive workplaces and the well-being of individuals with disabilities in the workplace.

Opportunities and Resources for Advancement

Various State agencies in New Jersey are actively implementing initiatives to support the career advancement of individuals with disabilities. The Department of Labor and Workforce Development, for instance, offers 100% tuition reimbursement to all employees with two higher education institutions, unlimited training access, and Lunch & Learn sessions focused on diversity and inclusion, recruitment, and training. This encourages skill development and fosters a culture of learning and growth.

The Office of Information Technology is committed to providing individuals with disabilities the same career opportunities as everyone, emphasizing inclusivity. The Casino Control Commission explores mentorship and coworker assistance initiatives, offering valuable support for career development. Other agencies, such as the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities, the New Jersey Department of Health, and the New Jersey Economic Development Authority, offer opportunities, accommodations, and support for career advancement, contingent on budget and resources.

NJCU provides training to university employees to educate employees on both how to be proactive in providing reasonable accommodations and the need to manage interviewer biases in selection processes so that individuals with disabilities will have equal access to advancement. These trainings will promote and encourage internal promotion for people with disabilities, creating opportunities for advancement within the organization. Kean University provides employees with free access to LinkedIn Learning courses, enhancing professional development and career growth. Rowan University offers leadership development opportunities, LinkedIn Learning, and the Rowan Training Portal to individuals with disabilities, supporting their career advancement. The College of New Jersey highlights the promotion of individuals with disabilities within the organization, reflecting its commitment to inclusive career advancement.

The Department of Environmental Protection has integrated the SAME program into the hiring and interview process and is modifying training for interview panelists to include disability awareness and sensitivity modules, fostering a more inclusive hiring and advancement process.

The New Jersey Civil Service Commission encourages all employees to utilize available training opportunities and the Tuition Assistance program to facilitate career development for all employees. The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs encourages all employees, including those with disabilities, to actively engage in career advancement opportunities, fostering a culture of growth and development.

These initiatives collectively demonstrate a commitment to creating inclusive and equitable career pathways for individuals with disabilities.

Proactive Approach to Expand Outreach

Many New Jersey State agencies are actively collaborating with various disability organizations to attract and retain individuals through the SAME program. The New Jersey Educational Facilities Authority partners with the Office of Diversity and Inclusion to enhance their efforts in this regard.

The Department of Agriculture, for example, leverages partnerships with educational institutions and utilizes platforms like Handshake and College Central websites to reach potential SAME program applicants. State agencies including the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development, the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, and the Casino Control Commission collaborate with organizations such as the Commission for the Blind, American Legion, and Career Opportunity Development Inc. These partnerships enable the agencies to share job opportunities with external stakeholders and disability advocacy organizations to attract more SAME program applicants.

In addition, various agencies participate in job fairs and recruitment events to actively engage with potential SAME program applicants. For example, the New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency, the Department of Children and Families, and the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs collaborate with organizations such as the American Association of People with Disabilities and Disabled American Veterans to advertise positions under the SAME program. Reporting agencies also posts the SAME program positions on the Civil Service Commission website to reach a broader audience. Stockton University reviews job descriptions and engages in partnerships with organizations like the Greater Egg Harbor Regional School District.

Furthermore, several State agencies are collaborating with the Civil Service Commission and the Department of Labor and Workforce Development to promote the SAME program and its initiatives. The New Jersey Department of Transportation, for instance, partnering with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, the Katzenbach School, and LinkedIn, while the Civil Service Commission advertises through New Jersey Transit, targeting specific counties and utilizing digital advertising at train stations.

These collaborative efforts reflect an engagement to expanding the reach of the SAME program and creating more opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

Fostering Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Several agencies, such as the New Jersey Educational Facilities Authority and the Department of Agriculture, plan to expand outreach efforts and seek more inclusive and diverse workforces over the next few years. The State Commission of Investigations expresses its intention to create a more diverse workforce in the long term. Meanwhile, the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development is actively engaged in various initiatives to promote employee development and engagement over time.

The Office of the Secretary of Higher Education emphasizes aggressive promotion of diversity, equity, and inclusion as part of their agency values, demonstrating a long-term commitment to fostering an inclusive work environment. The New Jersey Board of Public Utilities is dedicated to continuing advertising and training in line with the SAME program, showing an ongoing focus on diversity and inclusion.

The New Jersey Economic Development Authority is focused on supporting employee networking groups, partnering with various organizations, and training managers on the SAME program. This approach is geared towards improving hiring practices and employee satisfaction in the long term.

At Stockton University, investments in accessibility and assistive technologies illustrate a commitment to ensuring an inclusive environment. Their use of the SAME program language and participation in recruitment events reaffirm their focus on long-term inclusivity.

Rowan University is collaborating with employees requesting disability accommodations, showcasing a commitment to long-term inclusivity. Moreover, the collaboration of the New Jersey Civil Service Commission with other agencies suggests a long-term commitment to working towards a more inclusive workforce.

The College of New Jersey is committed to a more visible and purposeful recruitment approach, focusing on strengthening recruitment efforts and promoting diversity and inclusivity in the long term. The New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs plans to promote the SAME program in recruitment efforts, reflecting dedication to the program's goals and a long-term commitment to inclusivity.

The New Jersey Department of Transportation is hosting awareness events, filling key positions, and partnering with other agencies to ensure equal treatment for the SAME program candidates.

These initiatives highlight their dedication to inclusivity, equality, and accessibility in the long run.

Financial Overview and Budget Allocation

The SAME legislation underscores the critical importance of agencies dedicating ample resources and funding to ensure the program's success. Central to this initiative is the implementation of a centralized accommodation program, aimed at consolidating experts essential for assessing, evaluating, and effectively implementing accommodations. Such a program not only streamlines the accommodation process, but also ensures the availability of appropriate funding streams to facilitate meaningful adjustments in the workplace.

The following responses are from various reporting offices, underscoring the fundamental necessity for robust support and central mechanisms to uphold the principles of inclusivity and accessibility within the State's workforce.

The Office of the Secretary of Higher Education and the Office of Information Technology (OIT) intend to budget appropriately for disability programs and initiatives, ensuring financial support for these efforts.

The Office of the Public Defender plans to consider initiatives for the future, although specific budget details are pending.

In 2023, the Department of Education allocated \$30,796.91 for disability programs in its fiscal budget. In its 2024 budget, as of the reporting due date, the spending for these programs was \$2,895.00.

The Casino Control Commission adjusts its funding based on an ongoing assessment of needs and has made changes to ensure accessibility and inclusion.

While no specific budget allocation is mentioned, the Department of Banking and Insurance spent approximately \$15,000.00 from January 1, 2023, to June 30, 2023, to accommodate employees' needs.

The New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency allocated \$14,000.00 for disability programs and initiatives. The New Jersey Department of Health is committed to budgeting accordingly for disability inclusion programs and initiatives.

The College of New Jersey allocated \$300,000.00 for disability programs in its budget. The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs plans to allocate appropriate funding for disability programs and initiatives.

These financial allocations and plans indicate an obligation to promoting disability programs and accessibility, with varying budget sizes and approaches across the agencies.

Responses to Reporting Requirements and Legislative Recommendations

Ongoing Barriers to Employment for People with Disabilities

The New Jersey Department of Agriculture encounters obstacles due to the specific educational and skill requirements for many of its positions, some of which are physically demanding. The State Commission of Investigations has struggled with posting SAME program positions, while the New Jersey State Parole Board's limited civilian positions pose challenges.

The Department of Banking and Insurance finds it hard to fill positions due to skill set requirements, incomplete applications, and specific qualifications. The New Jersey Economic Development Authority offers specialized roles, creating barriers for those without the necessary skills.

Kean University emphasizes the importance of voluntary disability disclosure as a barrier for understanding and providing accommodations. The Department of Children and Families faces a lack of interested candidates and positions that are difficult to accommodate.

The Department of Environment Protection's STEM positions are challenging to fill, often requiring specialized qualifications and remote work locations.

Stockton University's requirement for disability disclosure on applications may deter candidates. Rowan University grapples with nondisclosure of disabilities, making accommodation provision complex. The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs faces barriers due to the physical demands of its positions.

These challenges encompass recruitment difficulties, qualification requirements, and a lack of disability disclosure, highlighting the need for increased flexibility, awareness, and targeted outreach to enhance the inclusion of people with disabilities in the workforce.

Reasons why SAME Applicants are Disqualified for Employment

Many SAME program applicants are disqualified from employment for various reasons across different agencies.

These reasons primarily revolve around:

- Lack of skillset or education, leading to disqualification
- Incomplete applications.
- Failure to provide required documentation.
- Applicants choose to withdraw or decline the position due to salary concerns.
- Lack of interest by the SAME applicant
- Not meeting the minimum job requirements.
- Missing resumes or proof of documentation.
- Failing to pass the required performance test.

Overall, these disqualifications are based on the specific job criteria and qualifications.

Efforts, Progress and Plans Towards Increasing SAME Employees

Agencies in New Jersey are making concerted efforts to enhance employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

For example, the New Jersey Educational Facilities Authority demonstrates compliance with the SAME program and provides training on anti-discrimination and diversity.

The New Jersey Department of Agriculture plans to expand its network of organizations to broaden outreach, while the State Commission of Investigations received clarity on posting jobs in the SAME program.

The New Jersey Department of Human Services focuses on tracking SAME program applicants and accommodating individuals.

The Office of the Secretary of Higher Education emphasizes inclusive recruitment and agency awareness.

Various agencies, such as the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, the Casino Control Commission, and the Department of Banking and Insurance, actively pursue diverse recruitment efforts. Some have adjusted interview panels or documentation requests to ensure inclusivity, like the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities.

The New Jersey Economic Development Authority updates application verbiage, while New Jersey City University enhances campus accessibility. Additionally, Rowan University promotes trust in the SAME program's efficacy. Lastly, the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs looks beyond disabilities to value skills and expertise.

These endeavors reflect a variety of efforts for diversity and inclusivity, as agencies strive to make their workplaces more accessible and diverse.

Retention Rate of SAME Employees

While this report is in the initial six months, the retention rate of the five agencies that hired through the SAME program within this period remains at 100%.

As additional agencies employ more SAME program applicants, the program will hopefully improve as the program progresses with time and after adjustments and changes are made.

Plans for Expanding and Improving Employment Opportunities in the Next Reporting Period/Year

The agencies' plans for expanding and enhancing employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities in the upcoming reporting period reflect a multifaceted approach.

Many agencies are committed to collaborative outreach by partnering with community-based organizations and vocational rehabilitation services, demonstrating a focus on reaching a wider audience.

Additionally, some agencies emphasize budget allocation to support disability programs, highlighting the importance of resource commitment. Education and awareness initiatives are evident, with a focus on tracking applicants and ensuring accessible accommodations.

Several agencies also aim to foster an inclusive culture and offer adaptive recruitment practices.

Despite budget constraints, some agencies recognize the need to overcome challenges in promoting employment opportunities for SAME program applicants.

In summary, these plans underscore a holistic approach that encompasses collaboration, budgeting, education, accessibility, and inclusivity, all aimed at achieving the goals of the SAME program.

Recommendations for Legislation

Set forth below are the recommendations from various State agencies for legislative change on specific areas of the SAME program. The recommendations provide valuable insights into making New Jersey's programs and institutions more inclusive and accessible for individuals with disabilities.

The New Jersey Department of Human Services highlights the importance of flex schedules and remote work options, recognizing the need for accommodating diverse work arrangements.

New Jersey City University emphasizes the significance of investing capital funds in improving the accessibility of older buildings and facilities.

Kean University suggests shifting reporting from quarterly to biannually to streamline administrative processes.

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection underscores the need for dedicated funding for the SAME program, focusing on hiring, recruitment, and training.

Rowan University's insight highlights the importance of increasing awareness about the SAME program to attract a more diverse pool of candidates.

Additionally, it is recommended that a "Self-Identification" form be utilized for people with disabilities to attest to instead of the current Schedule A or Schedule B letters, as these letters appear to be a barrier for an applicant who does not have enough time to apply and make an appointment to obtain a letter from their doctor.

The goal of 7% of SAME program employees by each agency should be discussed, and may be different by each agency, due to their staff totals.

A "Self-Identification" form should be opened for applicants to state the types of accommodations they will need at the interview and hiring process.

The SAME program should not only be for "severely disabled" people but individuals with a disability.

Legislation should ensure that all SAME program employees be given additional time for their performance and provide timely feedback on any improvement plans if necessary. All good faith efforts are made to ensure that employees succeed at their place of employment or transferred to an agency more suitable after assessment by a job coach from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services.

These recommendations collectively reflect a devotion to fostering an inclusive environment and show that New Jersey is dedicated to supporting individuals with disabilities.

Recommendations for Further Outreach

While it is important to note that agencies are making good faith efforts for the implementation and progress of the SAME program, the listed information may be beneficial to incorporate for additional progress.

Postings on the following websites, to name a few:

- Each agency's website
- Civil Service Commission's website - [Civil Service Commission \(nj.gov\)](https://www.nj.gov/civil-service/)
- abilityJOBS - <https://abilityjobs.com/>
- Handshake - <https://joinhandshake.com/>
- disABLED persons - <https://www.disabledperson.com/>
- The American Association of People with Disabilities - <https://www.aapd.com/>
- Project HIRED - <https://www.projecthired.org/>
- Recruit Disability - <https://www.recruitdisability.org/>
- JobTarget - <https://www.jobtarget.com/>
- Diversityjobs - <https://www.diversityjobs.com/>

Varies activities by each agency:

- Hosting and or collaborating with other agencies with job fair events.
- Creating posters for distribution to all field office locations
- Distributing flyers electronically to agency staff for their information and forwarding
- Attending conferences to be more informed on how to advance the SAME program.
- Collaborating with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services for assistance and guidance
- Collaborating with disability groups in recruitment efforts and retention
- Providing mandatory sensitivity training for all staff on disability and SAME employees in the workforce

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Allison Chris Myers – Chair, CEO, NJ Civil Service Commission
Rose-Clair M. Dunbar – Executive Assistant to the Chair, CEO*