Hiring and Placement Practices for Individuals with Disabilities within the STEM Workforce

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The NASA Vision
To improve life here,
To extend life to there,
To find life beyond.

The NASA Mission
To understand and protect our home planet,
To explore the universe and search for life,
To inspire the next generation of explorers
... as only NASA can.
NASA Field Centers

18,600 civil servants and thousands of contractors in the private sector.
NASA Skill Competency

- **Information Technology**: Computer Science, Computational Scientists, Computer Engineering;

- **Science and Math**: Applied Optics, Chemistry, Physics, Materials Science, Mathematics;

- **Business**: Accounting, Business and Public Administration, Economics, Finance, Logistics, Management Information Systems

Challenges to Students with Disabilities in STEM Fields.

- Limited exposure to role models of engineers and scientists with visible disabilities.
- Lack of a support system for assistive technology and alternative techniques specific to a disability.
- Lack of encouragement from school personnel when considering technical fields during career exploration.
- Limited mentoring and professional development relating to a disability.
NASA’s Ideal Pipeline to Employment

**K-12 Education Programs**
- Earth Science Camp – Middle School
- Reach for the Stars - Middle School
- Rocket-On - Middle to High School
- Youth Slam - Middle to High School
- STEP-UP - High School

**Transition Programs**
- High School / High Tech EXCEL

**NASA Employment**
- Civil Service
- Contractor

**University Programs**
- ACCESS
- Workforce Recruitment Program
General Program Structure

- Student programs range in length between 4 to 10 weeks
- Students are expected to participate in general intern activities (i.e. speakers, presentations)
- Each student is required to present projects to student program managers in preparation for presentation to center manager and outside guests
Selection Process

- Each student is selected based on their talent and interest in STEM fields
- Placements are made in collaboration between the student, mentor, program manager, and with input from outside sources (teachers, VR counselors, parents, etc.)
  - Consideration is made for work environment.
  - Accessibility
  - Receptive mentors
Learning as a Cohort

- Students with disabilities participate in bi-weekly seminars on professional development, philosophy relating to disability.
  - Topics Include:
    - Reasonable accommodations
    - Disclosure
    - Attitudes about disability in the workplace
    - Social aspects
- Upper-level students participate as mentors to younger students during activities, launches, and informal communication.
Follow-up and Retention

- Students are connected to their NASA Space Grant consortiums, chapter affiliates, other NASA Centers within their region, and alumni email listserv.

- For K-12 students, consultation with school guidance counselors and teachers to maintain an elevated level of enthusiasm for STEM subjects.
Collaborative Partnerships

- Relationship created with personnel in human resources, office of education, equal opportunity, local contractor association, and engineering directorates to encourage continue internship and employment opportunities for students with disabilities.

- HR specialist and managers are encouraged to utilize Schedule A Hiring Authorities
Helpful Resources

Internal Resources to NASA

- **Centralized Funding for Reasonable Accommodations:**
  - Interpreter, Reader, and Scribe Services
  - Funding for Assistive Technology not funded through CAP
  - Accessible Facilities Management
  - Accessible Campus Shuttle

- **People with Disabilities Advisory Committee:**
  Represents employees with disabilities across the center and agency from various disciplines.
Helpful Resources

External Resources:
• Computer Electronic Accommodations Program (CAP)
• Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP)

Community Based Organizations:
• American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS)
• National Federation of the Blind (NFB)
• University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES)
• Worcester County Economic Development
• Maryland Institute for Space Technology
• Easter Seals of Delaware
• Maryland Department of Rehabilitation Services
• Maryland HAWK Corporation