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Why is Microsoft interested in Supported Employment?

Microsoft's mission is to empower every person and every organization on the planet to achieve more. We are committed to enabling employment diversity and inclusion at our company, and beyond.

Microsoft has a strong history of partnering with government institutions and charitable organizations to enrich communities and provide opportunities for underserved populations. Our Supported Employment program supports this goal. Before this initiative to expand Supported Employment, opportunities began, 28 Supported Employees were working for Microsoft and Microsoft Real Estate & Facilities vendors on the Redmond Washington campus. As this program has developed, the number of individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities (I/DD) working on Microsoft's North American campuses has expanded to over 200 employees.

Also, the high rate of unemployment among people with disabilities played a role in our decision to develop the Supported Employment Program. [US Department of Labor statistics](#) in 2017, show:

Labor Force Participation

- People with disabilities: 21.0%
- People without disabilities: 68.3%

Unemployment Rate

- People with disabilities: 7.6%
- People without disabilities: 3.7%

With our corporate headquarters in Redmond, Washington, and hundreds of contracted vendor employers providing services across our many campus locations, it was clear that Microsoft had tremendous potential to provide employment opportunities for a significant number of people with I/DD.

What are the key attributes to a Supported Employment program?

- **Commitment.** It is important to identify "why" you are getting involved in a Supported Employment program, and what you want to achieve and set goals and appropriate resources for success.
- **Strong partnerships.** Build and nurture strong partnerships with employment agencies, employers and local government offices. Through these strong partners, you will source

qualified candidates for positions that create meaningful opportunities for employment and overcome systemic barriers to employment.

- **Change management.** Aligning employers, hiring staff, managers and supervisors as well as co-workers is critical to the program's success. Strong buy-in, training, and celebration will help bring employers into alignment.

What are the benefits to the workplace of a Supported Employment Program?

- An increase in diversity, empathy and morale in the workplace.
- A higher rate of worker retention among employees with disabilities than among those who do not have a disability.
- An increase in creativity and innovation, as supervisors and co-workers assist Supported Employees in adapting tasks and duties.
- For more benefits, see the <why section>.

What are the costs of setting up a Supported Employment Program?

The costs are not extensive and are controllable according to the goals set and the program structure. At the Microsoft RE&F program, our costs include a dedicated resource to oversee the program. Responsibilities include periodic trainings, collecting data, working with the vendors and the agencies, keeping current on legislative impacts, in addition to creating advocacy opportunities and marketing materials.

What size program should we create at our company?

Our advice is to start small, identify the right jobs for the right people and let it grow from there.

What population of Supported Employees is the primary focus of the Microsoft RE&F program?

The primary focus of this program is to provide opportunities for Microsoft Real Estate & Facilities (RE&F) vendors to employ people with intellectual/developmental disabilities (I/DD). People with I/DD often need initial and long-term job training and support from their selected coaching agency to secure and maintain meaningful employment with opportunities for career growth and progression.

Who are the primary partners in the Microsoft RE&F Supported Employment Program?

Our primary partners are 13 employment agencies and 9 vendors.

Our 13 employment agency partners serve individuals with I/DD in the counties in western Washington state. Government-funded employment agency coaches assist people with I/DD prepare for, secure and retain employment. Based on an individual employment plan, the coach

is a resource to the employee and to the employer as the individual learns the tasks of their job. The coach can also help the employee and employer resolve workplace issues as they arise.

- AtWork! www.atworkwa.org
- Cares of Washington www.caresofwa.org
- Highline ACHIEVE ces.highline.edu
- IKRON www.seattle.ikron.org
- Mainstay www.mainstay.org
- Northwest Center www.nwcenter.org
- PROVAIL www.provail.org
- Puget Sound Personnel www.pspwork.com
- Trillium www.trillium.org
- University of Washington Employment Program <http://uwep.washington.edu/>
- Vadis www.vadis.org
- Washington Vocational Services www.wvs.org
- Work Opportunities www.workopportunities.org

Our 10 employer partners are vendors of services to Microsoft Real Estate & Facilities, in Redmond, Washington. Supported Employees work for our employer partners. Some vendors, such as Compass Group, also work on Microsoft's North American Field Sites, and are participating in the Supported Employment program in in Las Colinas Texas, Fargo North Dakota, Charlotte North Carolina, Mississauga Canada, and Reno Nevada.

- CBRE <https://www.cbre.us/>
- Compass Group <http://www.compass-usa.com/>
- Corporate Care <http://www.corporatecare.com/>
- Davidson-Macri Sweeping <http://www.davidsonmacri.com/>
- MV Transportation <https://www.mvtransit.com/>
- Northwest Landscaping Services <http://nlswa.com/>
- Novitex <https://www.novitex.com/>
- SBM <http://sbmmanagement.com/>
- Suddath <https://suddath.com/>
- Zee Medical <https://www.zeemedical.com/>

What kinds of jobs are available?

The following are some examples of jobs filled by Supported Employees with Microsoft's vendor partners:

- Dining Room Attendant
- Warehouse Assistant
- Event Services Greeter
- Transportation Ambassador

- PC Recycling Assistant
- Receptionist
- Space Reset Specialist
- Human Resources
- Landscaping Specialist

Who pays the Supported Employees and their coaches?

Coaches work for employment coaching agencies, which are usually non-profits funded by government entities. In Washington, the primary government funders are the Department of Social and Health Services, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and county Divisions of Developmental Disabilities.

Supported Employees are paid by their employer. The expectation is that vendors will hire Supported Employees within existing labor budgets within the Real Estate and Facilities scope. Vendors hire Supported Employees for roles that they need to fill.

Employers do not pay a fee to the coaching agencies.

What is an intellectual/developmental disability (I/DD)?

Different laws define I/DD in different ways. Under a Washington law* [RCW 71A.10.020\(5\)](#), the definition of a developmental disability is:

A disability attributable to:

- Intellectual Disability;
- Cerebral Palsy;
- Epilepsy;
- **Autism; or
- Another neurological or other condition similar to intellectual disability.

which:

- Originated before the individual attained age eighteen;
- Continued or can be expected to continue indefinitely, and
- Results in substantial limitations to an individual's intellectual and adaptive functioning.

*Each state is likely to have its own specific definition and laws for I/DD

**As part of Microsoft's commitment to diversity in the workforce, our innovate [Autism Hiring program](#) recruits individuals with Autism to our engineering teams .

Who is eligible to receive Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) services?

Under [WAC 388.891.1000](#) (a Washington State code), a person is eligible for DVR services if they:

1. Have a physical, mental or sensory impairment that results in a substantial impediment to employment,
2. Require vocational rehabilitation services to get or keep a job, and
3. Are capable of working as a result of receiving VR services.

What role does the Washington State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) play in Supported Employment?

As one of the primary funders of vocational services for individuals who require supported employment, DVR assists the individual, their family, and the Community Rehabilitation Program determine the best vocational goal for the individual, that meets their unique abilities and interests. A Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor will coordinate needed assessment services, assistive technology needs, and will then fund Intensive Training Services so that the individual receives any needed on-site training to meet employer expectations and become stable on the job. The DVR counselor will then coordinate the transition from DVR funded services, to a long-term support provider.

How can the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation move an applicant quickly through their eligibility process?

An applicant can wait 3-6 months to move through the typical DVR process of application, eligibility screening, vocational assessment to a plan for employment. However, DVR can “fast-track” the application process and reduce the turnaround significantly. In most cases, with effective collaboration and communication with Community Rehabilitation partner programs, DVR can get the needed services in place before the individual starts their first day of employment.

What is the best way to engage the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation as a partner in a Supported Employment Program?

DVR is committed to supporting all individuals with disabilities who have the potential to benefit from supported employment. Reach out to your local DVR office and ask for the Business Specialist for your area to discuss potential services.

Does Microsoft create jobs for Supported Employees?

No, Microsoft looked at existing roles where employees were needed and focused on filling them with supported employees. Employees are paid the rate associated with the position itself; they are not underpaid.

Who identifies the opportunities for Supported Employment?

Job opportunities are collaboratively identified by the vendor employers and the program manager.

The traditional model of supported employment job development calls for a coach to work with the employer in customizing a job to a particular candidate. However, at Microsoft RE&F, we flipped that model on its head. We partnered with our vendor employers and challenged them to look at open roles and opportunities with a lens of “could this role be filled by an individual with an I/DD?” As opportunities were identified, the program manager shared job requisitions with all employment agency partners to bring forward their best candidates.

How do employers find the right employees for the positions?

Coaching agencies are our partner for sourcing candidates whose skills and interests are a good fit for vendors’ positions and teams. Coaches provide individualized services to their participants. They learn about their participants skills and interests, and assist them with resume building, in addition to applying and interviewing for jobs.

How did Microsoft RE&F select coaching agencies to partner with?

Microsoft RE&F conducted a quality-driven selection process to identify agencies that provide job coaching and other long-term support to the Supported Employees. See the RFI Tool and Analysis for further detail.

These agencies provide Supported Employment services to adults with I/DD and other disabilities. Thirteen King County coaching agencies are participating on the Redmond, Washington Microsoft campus. See above for a list of participating coaching agencies.

How do job seekers with I/DD find out about Supported Employment opportunities with Microsoft RE&F vendors?

When a vendor has a job opening for a Supported Employee, the program manager notifies the coaching agency partners. The agencies determine which individuals are best suited and qualified for the specific job opening, and assist those individuals with applying, interviewing, onboarding and ongoing job coaching.

Are there barriers to full-time employment for people with I/DD?

Individuals with disabilities may receive federal SSI and Medicaid benefits, which have income thresholds. This means that if a person earns more than the allowed threshold, they will lose their benefits. While full-time employment may be challenging, part-time employment may be a better fit for individuals who wish to preserve federal benefits.

Coaching agencies may be able to provide information about the impact of employment income on benefits.

Benefits planners with knowledge about federal benefits and the impacts of earned income may be available in your area.

Are there increased safety concerns with Supported Employees?

There are no increased safety concerns with Supported Employees as long as proper analysis of the tasks involved in a job, and the proper fit between the job and the employee's skills are aligned. If safety concerns are identified, the employer may modify the tasks or provide accommodations to the employee.

How do Supported Employees get to work?

In Redmond, Washington, Supported Employees use a range of transportation options to get to work. In addition to carpooling with family, some employees use fixed route public transportation, and those eligible use door-to-door shuttle service provided by public transit.

Various difficulties with transportation and long commutes continue to present barriers to employment for some individuals. We are discussing alternative transportation ideas as we work on improvements to the program.

What about career progression?

Career progression for Supported Employees is a focus of our planning efforts moving forward. One of our vendor partners, Compass Group, is exploring the idea of creating a culinary skills program for their employees.