



GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL  
ON DISABILITIES &  
SPECIAL EDUCATION

# Workforce Survey Results: State of Alaska as a Model Employer of People with Disabilities



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## Executive Summary

As part of its long-term strategy to be a model employer of people with disabilities, representatives from the State of Alaska Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education (the Council), Division of Personnel and Labor Relations, and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation designed and conducted a survey of state employees in autumn of 2011. Specifically, the survey gauged the representation of employees with disabilities within state government, accommodations and concerns, and suggestions on how to make state workplaces more accessible, inclusive, and productive.

As qualified state employees are hired with or acquire disabilities, they may need support from many people to ensure they can work to the best of their abilities. This summary report does not attempt to identify all best practices, but respondents' input did provide recommendations that point to areas that may facilitate the State becoming a model for the employment of individuals with disabilities. The vast majority of respondents' recommendations fell in three primary areas: Training; Work Flexibility; and Workplace Accessibility, which are listed below. By far, the most feedback fell into the category of Training.

- Training
  - Manager and supervisory ADA training so that reasonable accommodation requests by employees with disabilities are handled effectively.
  - All employees need ADA training to understand their rights and responsibilities under the ADA.
  - All employees need training on disability awareness and etiquette to promote an inclusive work culture.
- Work Flexibility
  - Variable work schedules
  - Job sharing options
- Workplace Accessibility
  - Work station ergonomics
  - Modern office furniture
  - Accessible parking
  - Clear hallways and pathways of travel and clutter free workspaces

The workgroup recognizes the state's ongoing efforts to improve its workplaces for employees with disabilities and seeks to continue its coordination with state agencies to promote promising and emerging practices. As agencies incorporate inclusive practices, equal employment opportunities will be enhanced for all Alaskans.

## Methodology

The workgroup developed the survey using SurveyMonkey, a web-based survey tool, and the Council's Executive Director distributed the survey via e-mail to all state employees. The e-mail indicated to employees that the survey was brief, voluntary, and confidential. The survey was conducted over a 24-day period, with one reminder e-mail halfway through the collection period. For the purposes of this survey, respondents were asked if they met the definition of a "person with a disability" under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Amendments Act of 2008, which ensures the term "disability" is broadly construed as: (1) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; (2) a record of such an impairment; or (3) being regarded as having such an impairment. All survey questions were optional, therefore, the total number of respondents may differ by question. Due to survey tool rounding methodology, total percentage does not always add to 100.

## Results and Key Findings

The Council received 4,547 responses, with a response rate of 25 percent (based on average monthly employment of 18,337). 16 percent (n = 728) of respondents indicated having a disability, which is similar to the U.S. Census data collected in 2010. 54.6 percent of respondents who identified themselves as a person with a disability indicated that

they received reasonable accommodations on the job (n = 377). Of the employees with disabilities who requested job accommodations the majority (56.3 percent) indicated that they did not have a problem (n = 171).

## Responses and Recommendations

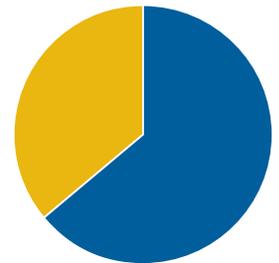
The following pages provide response summaries, a brief discussion, and recommendations from respondents to further the State as a Model Employer of People with Disabilities.

### SURVEY RESULTS - DEMOGRAPHICS

#### GENDER

Of the 4,539 respondents, 64% (n= 2,906) were female, and 36% (n= 1,633) were male.

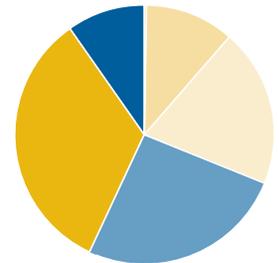
■ Female	64%
■ Male	36%



#### AGE RANGE

Respondents were asked their age range. Of the 4,538 respondents, 33.2% (n= 1,507) were between the ages of 50-59 years old, 26.1% (n= 1,183) were between the ages of 40-49 years old, 19.7% (n= 895) were between the ages of 30-39 years old, 11% (n= 501) between the ages of 20-29 years old, 9.7% (n= 440) were age 60 years or older, and less than one-percent (1%) were under 20 years old (n= 12).

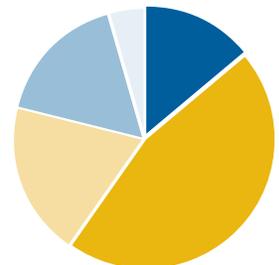
■ Under 20 yrs old	<1%
■ 20–29 years old	11%
■ 30–39 years old	19.7%
■ 40–49 years old	26.1%
■ 50–59 years old	33.2%
■ 60 years or older	9.7%



#### JOB TYPE

Respondents were asked their job type. Of the 4,530 respondents, 45.7% (n= 2,072) described their job type as “professional,” 19.2% (n= 869) of respondents described their job type as “para-professional or technical,” 16.7% (n= 758) described their job type as “clerical,” 14.1% (n= 637) described their job type as “managerial,” and 4.3% (n= 194) described their job type as “Labor, Trades, Crafts.”

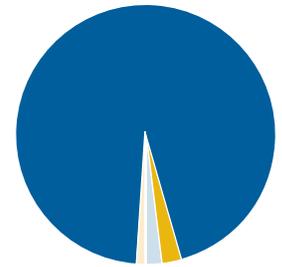
■ Managerial	14.1%
■ Professional	45.7%
■ Paraprofessional/ Technical	19.2%
■ Clerical	16.7%
■ Labor, Trades, Crafts	4.3%



## EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Respondents were asked about their employment status. Of the 4,547 respondents, 95.6% (n= 4,346) described themselves as a “full-time employee,” 2.5% (n= 115) described themselves as a “seasonal employee,” 1.7% (n= 78) described themselves as a “non-permanent employee,” and 1.3% (n= 61) described themselves as a “part-time employee.”

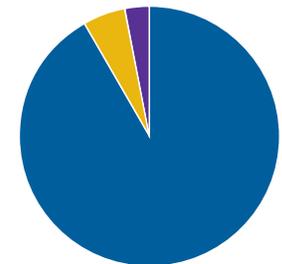
PT Employee	1.3%
FT Employee	95.6%
Seasonal	2.5%
Non-Perm	1.7%



## AGENCIES OR BRANCH OF GOVERNMENT

Of the 4,420 respondents to this question, 91.7% (n= 4,053) work for the executive branch, followed by 5.5% (n= 241) for the judicial branch and 2.9% (n= 126) for the legislative branch.

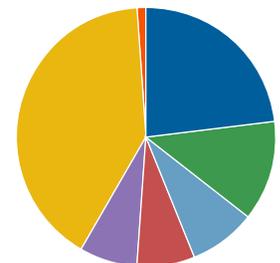
Executive	91.7%
Judicial	5.5%
Legislative	2.9%



## DEPARTMENT OR BRANCH OF GOVERNMENT

Respondents were asked to indicate the department where they work. Of the 4,476 responses, the majority of respondents, 23.5% (n= 1,052) work for the Department of Health and Social Services, followed by the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (12.6%, n= 566), the Department of Labor and Workforce Development (8.2%, n= 365), the Department of Fish and Game (7.5%, n= 335), and the Department of Administration (7.1%, n= 316). The remainder of the respondents (41%) described themselves as working for one of the 14 remaining agencies. Less than 1% (n= 28) responded as “other.”

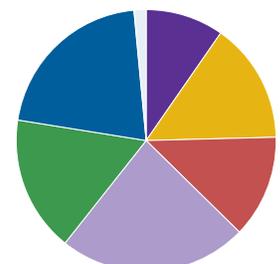
DHSS	23.5%
DOTPF	12.6%
DOLWD	8.2%
DFG	7.5%
DOA	7.1%
Remaining Agencies	41%
Other	1%



## LENGTH OF SERVICES

Respondents were asked their length of service to Alaska state government. The majority of respondents have worked for Alaska state government 5-10 years (23.4%, n= 1,045), followed by 15-30 years (21%, n= 941), 10-15 years (16.8%, n= 752), 1-3 years (14.9%, n= 666), and 3-5 years (12.7%, n= 569). 9.7% (n= 434) have worked one year or less. 1.5% (n= 66) have worked for Alaska’s state government more than 30 years.

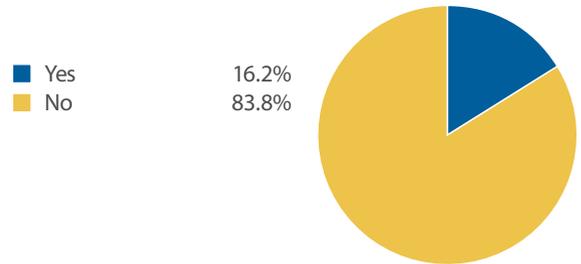
1 year or less	9.7%
1-3 years	14.9%
3-5 years	12.7%
5-10 years	23.4%
10-15 years	16.8%
15-30 years	21%
Over 30 years	1.5%



## DISABILITY STATUS

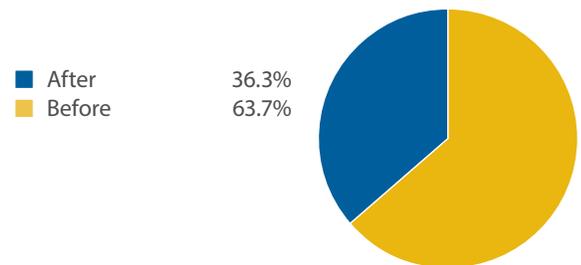
### DISABILITY STATUS

Respondents were asked if they have a disability under the definition of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). 16.2% (n= 722) of employees reported that they have a disability. 83.8% (n= 3,725) of employees reported that they do not have a disability.



### ONSET OF DISABILITY

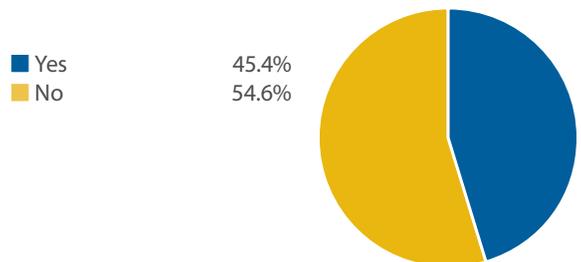
Respondents who reported having a disability were asked if it started before or after their service with the State of Alaska. Of the 689 respondents who reported having a disability, the majority (63.7%, n= 439) reported that their disability began before they started working for the State of Alaska. Largely, the remainder of respondents (36.3%, n= 250) reported that their disability began after they started working for the State of Alaska. Although only individuals who indicated having a disability were directed to this survey question, three respondents indicated that they “do not have a disability” (n= 3) and were not included in the analysis for this question.



## JOB ACCOMMODATIONS

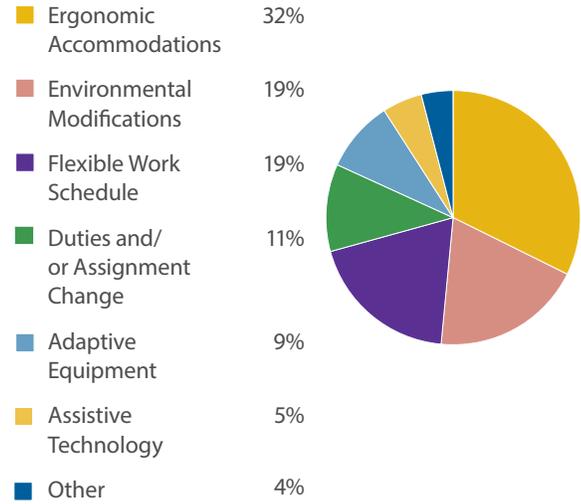
### JOB ACCOMMODATION REQUESTED

These adjustments are often called “reasonable accommodations” under the ADA and referred to as “job accommodations” in this survey. Respondents who reported having a disability were asked if they requested that the State change or modify their workspace, equipment, work schedule, work tasks, responsibilities, or any other changes because of their disability. 45.4% of respondents (n= 313) reported that they requested job accommodation(s), whereas 54.6% of respondents (n= 377) reported they did not.



## DESCRIPTION OF JOB ACCOMMODATIONS

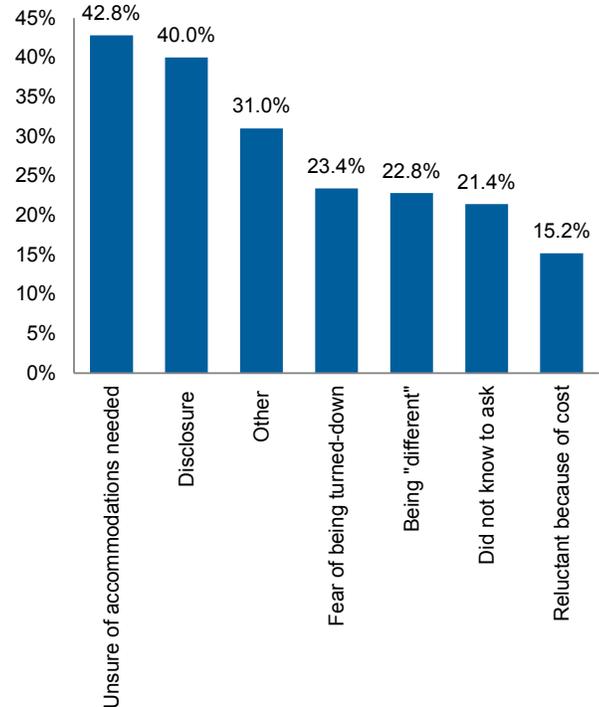
Respondents were asked about job accommodations provided by the state. Some respondents received multiple accommodations and are represented in multiple categories. Of the 246 respondents, 32% (n= 98) received ergonomic accommodations such as a stand-up work station, customized desk or a customized chair. 19% (n= 60) of respondents received an environmental modification such as noise cancelling ear phones or different lighting in their workspace. Another 19% (n= 60) of respondents were granted a flexible work schedule. 11% (n= 35) of respondents indicated that their duties and/or assignments had been changed. 9% (n= 29) of respondents received some type of adaptive equipment, such as a telephone headset extension. 5% (n=17) of respondents received assistive technology, such as voice recognition software. 4% (n= 14) of responses were classified as “other.” An example of job accommodations included in the “other” category were asking co-workers to assist in reaching items that were located above their head, taking part in additional trainings that are not normally made available, and providing a secure storage location for medication and snacks.



## REASONS FOR NOT REQUESTING JOB ACCOMMODATIONS

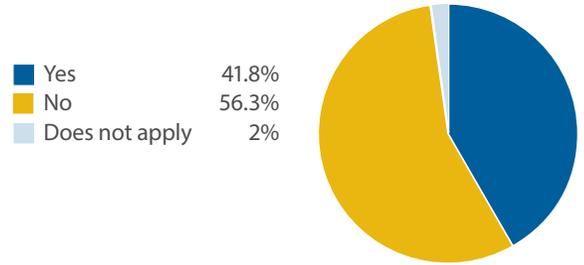
Respondents were able to choose reasons for not requesting job accommodations. Reasons provided on the survey included: cost, disclosure of disability, fear of being thought of as “different” by co-workers, fear of being turned down, not knowing he or she could ask for job accommodation(s), being uncertain about accommodation(s) needed, and/or “Other.”

42.8% reported that they were unsure about accommodation(s) needed (n= 62). 40% were reluctant to disclose a disability (n= 58). 31% reported “Other” (n= 45), specifying reasons such as fear of losing their job and/or hostility from co-workers and supervisors. 23.4% of respondents reported fear of being turned down (n= 34). 22.8% reported fear of being different from their co-workers (n= 33). 21.4% reported they did not know to ask for job accommodation(s) (n= 31), and 15.2% reported cost (n=22). Respondents were able to select more than one category.



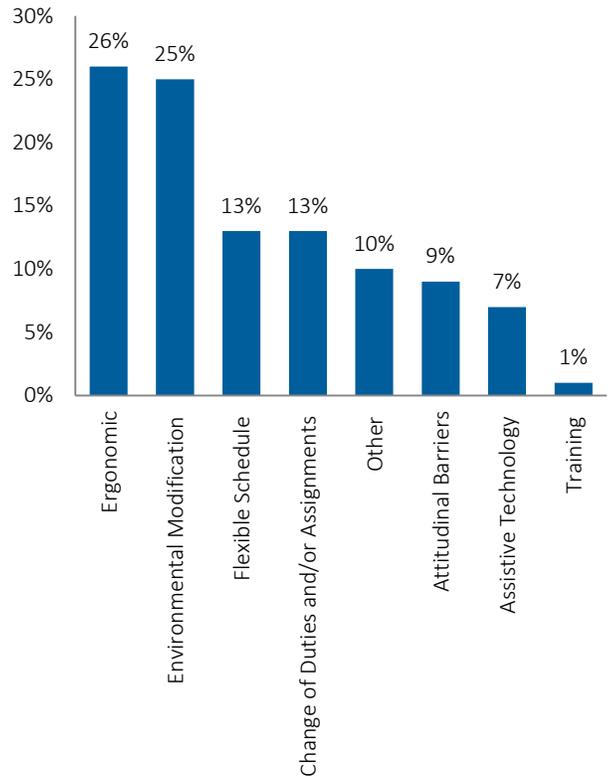
### JOB ACCOMMODATION REQUESTS

Of 304 respondents, 56.3% indicated that they did not have a problem requesting an accommodation (n= 171). 41.8% indicated they did have a problem when requesting an accommodation (n= 127). Although only individuals who requested a job accommodation were directed to this survey question, 2% indicated that they “do not need any job accommodations” (n= 6).



### JOB ACCOMMODATIONS UNFULFILLED

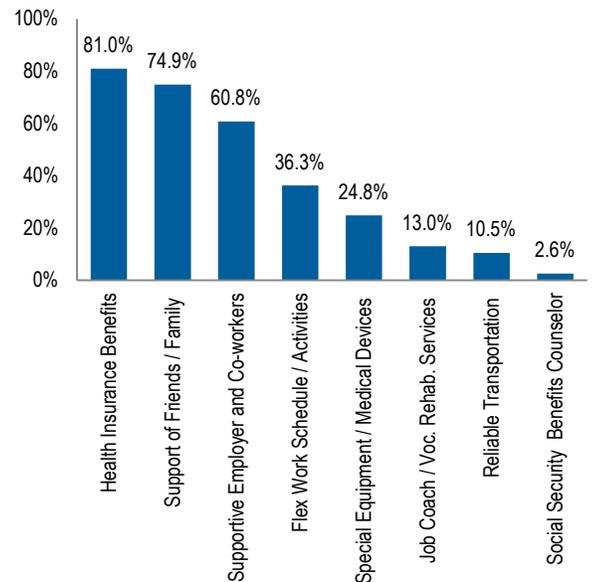
119 respondents answered the question “if you had trouble getting an a job accommodation what accomodation did you feel you needed but did not get?” Respondents provided open-ended comments and their responses were grouped into common themes. Responses included: 26% ergonomic accommodation (n= 33), 25% environmental modification (n= 31), 13% change of duties and/or assignments (n= 16), 13% flexible schedule (n=16), 9% attitudinal barriers from co-workers and supervisors (n= 12). 7% assistive technology (n= 10); and 1% additional training (n= 2). 10% “other” (n= 13) respondents said they had to wait too long to receive their accommodation.



## RETURNING TO WORK OR MAINTAINING A JOB

590 respondents indicated whether the following supports helped them return to work and/or maintain their job. Respondents were able to select more than one category.

- Health Insurance Benefits - 81% (n=496)
- Support from Friends and Family - 74.9% (n=452)
- Supportive Employer and Co-Workers - 60.8% (n=372)
- Flexible Work Schedule or Activities - 36.3% (n=218)
- Special Equipment or Medical Devices - 24.8% (n=148)
- Job Coaching or Other Vocational Rehabilitation Service - 13% (n=76)
- Reliable Transportation - 10.5% (n= 62)
- Social Security Work Incentives (Benefits) Counselor - 2.6% (n=15)



## DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this survey was to assist with establishing 1) a baseline of information on the employment of people with disabilities within state government and 2) a model workplace for all state employees, especially those with disabilities. The State as a Model Employer Workgroup consists of members from the Division of Personnel and Labor Relations, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Americans with Disabilities Act Compliance Program, and the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education. These entities have been working together to improve policies and practices that affect the recruitment, hiring, retention, and promotion of individuals with disabilities in state government.

This survey revealed that approximately 16 percent of those who responded to this survey have a disability. This result is similar to the 18 percent figure reported by the 2010 U.S. Census for the civilian non-institutionalized population (the ADA and Census definitions are similar as well). Whether employees have a disability at the time of hire or acquire a disability while in state service, it is important to establish practices that support their inclusion. This will add value to the state's workforce by enhancing employee productivity and improving public responsiveness.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FROM SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Over 400 people responded to the question: Do you have any ideas about what the state could do to create a more supportive or healthy environment for employees with disabilities? The responses fell in five primary areas: Training; Work Flexibility; Workplace Accessibility; Recruitment and Retention; and Healthy Workplace. Respondents provided the following recommendations, listed from most popular to least:

## RECOMMENDATIONS, CONTINUED

- Training
  - Manager and supervisory ADA training so that reasonable accommodation requests by employees with disabilities are handled effectively.
  - All employees need ADA training to understand their rights and responsibilities under the ADA.
  - All employees need training on disability awareness and etiquette to promote an inclusive work culture.
- Work Flexibility
  - Variable work schedules
  - Job sharing options
- Workplace Accessibility
  - Work station ergonomics
  - Modern office furniture
  - Accessible parking
  - Clear hallways and pathways of travel and clutter free workspaces
- Recruitment and Retention
  - Better recruitment of qualified individuals with disabilities
  - Support services for employees with disabilities
- Healthy Workplace
  - Health insurance benefits
  - Promote healthy work environments with natural light
  - Sponsor employee wellness activities like walking or fitness breaks

## CONCLUSION

Incorporating promising practices in reasonable accommodation will ensure all state employees have the opportunity to perform to the best of their abilities. By improving the State of Alaska as a Model Employer of People with Disabilities, Alaskans can be confident that state government is committed to being more inclusive, accessible, and productive.

Special thanks go to state employees who responded to this survey, workgroup members for their dedicated efforts, Millie Ryan, former Executive Director of the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education, and the Office of Governor Sean Parnell for its support of this project to make the State of Alaska a Model Employer of People with Disabilities.



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April 2013