

*Dispelling Myths of An Untapped Workforce*

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**A Study of Employer Attitudes Toward  
Hiring Individuals with Disabilities**

Funded By



Florida Governor's Alliance for the  
Employment of Citizens with Disabilities

*Milbank Foundation  
for Vocational Rehabilitation*

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# A STUDY OF EMPLOYER ATTITUDES TOWARD HIRING INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

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# Foreward

People with disabilities represent a largely untapped labor pool for employers today. Yet despite laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act, the unemployment rate for citizens with disabilities remains at a staggering 65% nationwide. Florida is home to over 2 million people with disabilities, of which more than five hundred thousand still remain jobless. Many job seekers with disabilities feel that employers' attitudes and misconceptions are the major barriers that keep them from working. And employers today who do hire people with disabilities often consider these employees some of the most loyal and hardworking members of their workforce.

This research report, *A Study of Employer Attitudes Toward Hiring Individuals with Disabilities*, provides information about perceptions employers in Florida have about working with people with disabilities, as well as the challenges they face in recruitment, developing policies and finding support systems.

The Able Trust worked in collaboration with the Florida State University and Florida Chamber of Commerce to develop this document in hopes of seeking out methods to break down the barriers between job seekers with disabilities and employers, and help these individuals become productive workers in our society. The Able Trust appreciates the Milbank Foundation for Vocational Rehabilitation, New York, for co-funding this study.

The Able Trust, also known as the Florida Governor's Alliance for the Employment of Citizens with Disabilities, is a public-private partnership foundation that provides employment support to Floridians with disabilities through grants programs and public awareness activities. The Foundation also serves as the statewide sponsor of the Florida Business Leadership Network, a membership group of employers seeking to receive information and resources to help recruit, hire and advance workers with disabilities.

Economists and others inform us that, due to the retirement of baby boomers and other reasons, there will be a serious shortage of qualified employees in the near future; persons with disabilities can fill this gap.

The Able Trust hopes you find this report informative, and looks forward to developing projects in Florida to continue to educate the business community about the valuable, yet untapped labor pool of people with disabilities.



Florence Bonsuk  
Chair, The Able Trust

# Executive Summary

In February 2003 The Able Trust, also known as the Florida Governor's Alliance for the Employment of Citizens with Disabilities collaborated with the Milbank Foundation for Vocational Rehabilitation to conduct a study of business employers in Florida concerning their policies, practices, and attitudes related to hiring persons with disabilities. The Able Trust contracted with the Center for Information, Technology and Evaluation Services (CITES) of Florida State University to conduct the study. The general objective of the study was to identify obstacles that prevent employers from recruiting and hiring individuals with disabilities and the resources needed to address perceptions of these obstacles.

A sample of businesses was obtained from three databases constructed by the Florida Chamber of Commerce (Chamber): (a) Members, those businesses that are already Chamber members, (b) Prospects, those businesses interested in becoming Chamber members, and (c) Suspects, those businesses that are neither Chamber members nor prospective members. Databases for Chamber members and Prospects were combined and e-mail messages delivered to 3,030 businesses in the combined category requesting that they respond to a Web-based version of the survey. Non-Chamber businesses were sent 2,324 printed surveys by U.S. mail and 140 were returned for a return rate of 6.0%. The response rate for the total sample was 5.7% (306 businesses). Low response rates are common for surveys of employers of workers with disabilities, and generalizations to populations of employers are questionable. Thus, while this study can provide only tentative conclusions about employer policies, practices, and attitudes, comparisons with results from other studies can aid in the interpretation.

The results of the survey are presented for the total sample and for Chamber and non-Chamber groups. Observed differences between the two groups could be due to the different delivery media (Web-based and print) used, rather than, or in addition to, other causes. The pattern of results, however, suggests that Chamber membership is a major explanatory factor. Major outcomes of the study follow.

## Business and Respondent Characteristics

The respondents of the survey included businesses from 48 Florida counties. The businesses that responded tended to employ fewer than 200 employees. The primary activity of the responding businesses was service (37.0%), with production companies as the second most numerous (22.2%). Approximately three-fourths of the respondents classified themselves as having responsibility for hiring and supervising employees with disabilities.

## Experience of Businesses with Employees with Disabilities

Awareness. Approximately one-third of all respondents reported being highly aware of disability issues. Chamber members indicated a higher level of awareness than non-Chamber Members. The two groups agreed that persons with behavioral disabilities were the most difficult of all categories to accommodate on the job.

Number of Employees with Disabilities. Approximately 80% of the businesses in the total sample said that they employed one or more persons with disabilities; 70% reported hiring between 1 and 15 employees. Approximately 40% of all respondents did not anticipate hiring any persons with disabilities within the next two years, and 12.8% of Chamber members, as opposed to only 4.8% of non-Chamber members, anticipated hiring 3 or 4 employees with disabilities within that time frame.

### **Formal Policies Concerning Employees with Disabilities**

Fifty percent of the respondents stated that their business has a formal policy for hiring persons with disabilities. More Chamber businesses (56.0%) have formal policies for hiring persons with disabilities than do non-Chamber businesses (42.8%).

Of the businesses that responded, Chamber businesses are more likely than non-Chamber businesses to have attempted to hire persons with disabilities in the past (68.5% vs. 56.2%). Only 29.9% of all businesses in the total sample have policies that commit them to actively recruit persons with disabilities. However, 81% of all businesses in the sample have policies that commit them to help temporarily disabled workers return to work. Approximately 83% of the businesses in the total survey sample have policies that guarantee disabled workers equal opportunities for career development and advancement.

### **Informal Business Policies Related to Employees with Disabilities**

Beliefs of the respondents concerning implementation of their business policies toward disabled workers show differences between Chamber and non-Chamber businesses to be negligible.

Over 50% of the total sample believes that their companies do a good job of providing adequate accommodations, matching jobs and abilities, creating a disability-friendly work environment, and handling termination of workers with disabilities when necessary. Finally, they also agree that hiring workers with disabilities is good for public relations.

Only 24.8% of the total sample indicated that their businesses do a good job of recruiting individuals with disabilities and only 34.7% indicated that their businesses provided disability awareness or sensitivity training to all employees.

### **Accommodations Made for Employees with Disabilities**

Over 50% of the total sample of businesses have modified existing facilities or work schedules and restructured job requirements to accommodate workers with disabilities. Fewer than 50% have adjusted or modified qualification examinations or provided qualified readers or interpreters for workers with disabilities. More Chamber than non-Chamber businesses have modified equipment or devices for use by workers with disabilities; also 26.8% of Chamber members versus 18.2% of non-Chamber members have adjusted or modified training materials.

## **Familiarity with Programs or Agencies Related to Employees with Disabilities**

A lack of familiarity with several state and national agencies and programs related to individuals with disabilities was found among respondents. Exceptions included employers having “some” or “a great deal” of familiarity with Welfare to Work, School-to-Work training programs, One-Stop Career Centers, Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and Department of Veterans Affairs.

Chamber members displayed greater familiarity with most programs or agencies than did non-Chamber members. More non-Chamber than Chamber members responded “not at all” for each program or agency, while more Chamber than non-Chamber members responded “some” or “a great deal.”

## **Perceptions of Characteristics of Employees with Disabilities**

The survey contained 10 positively worded items (e.g., “Employees with disabilities are dependable workers”) and 6 negatively worded items (e.g., “Employees with disabilities require excessive amounts of supervision”) to determine employer perceptions of employees with disabilities. Over 60% of the respondents agreed with 8 of the positive items. About 50% agreed with the other 2 positive items; however, over 40% of respondents gave neutral responses to them.

Several negative items received large numbers of “neutral” responses from the total sample. More non-Chamber members than Chamber members selected “neutral” in response to “Employees with disabilities are absent from work too often” and “Employees with disabilities quit their jobs too often” (48.5% of non-Chamber members compared to 33.1% of Chamber members). A slightly higher percentage of Chamber than of non-Chamber members disagreed with the statement “Employees with disabilities require excessive amounts of supervision.”

## **Relationships Between Business Characteristics and Employer Perceptions of Employees with Disabilities**

Positive and negative attitude scales were formed by summing separately the 10 positive and 6 negative attitude items. Relationships between these scales and 6 business characteristics were studied. A strong relationship between positive attitudes and business size was found. Businesses that had formal policies for hiring persons with disabilities had stronger positive attitudes than businesses that did not.

The presence of disabled employees in the business was moderately related to positive attitude scale responses. Both Chamber membership and respondent experience with hiring and supervising employees with disabilities were weakly related to responses on a positive attitude scale.

Responses to the negative attitude scale were moderately related to the size of the business and the absence of employees with disabilities. Non-Chamber membership expressed more negative attitudes toward employees with disabilities. However, the relationships found here were relatively weak.

Respondents for smaller businesses expressed both more positive and more negative attitudes concerning employees with disabilities than did larger businesses. A negligible relationship was found between type of business and both positive and negative attitude scales.

## Conclusions

The overall results of this survey illustrate that the practices, policies, and attitudes of Florida's employers towards workers with disabilities are generally positive. Recommendations for action stem from three general findings: differences seen between Chamber and non-Chamber groups, employer's lack of awareness of disability issues and resources, and employer attitudes toward individuals with disabilities.



# Section One: Introduction

## Overview

In February 2003 The Able Trust, also known as the Florida Governor’s Alliance for the Employment of Citizens with Disabilities, contracted with the Center for Information, Training, and Evaluation Services (CITES) of Florida State University (FSU) to conduct a study of business employers in Florida concerning their attitudes and practices in hiring persons with disabilities. Toward that end, a survey was sent to Florida businesses to explore employers’ attitudes on that subject. The objective of this study is to determine why employers do not recruit and hire individuals with disabilities and what resources are needed to remedy the problem. The study is divided into four sections: *Section One* explains the purpose and provides background information; *Section Two* describes the methods used in the survey; and *Section Three* presents survey findings and interprets them in light of the study’s objectives. *Section Four* draws conclusions and recommends ways to distribute information and resources to businesses to increase hires of individuals with disabilities. Furthermore, recommendations are made for a follow-up evaluation study.

## Background

Over the last 30 years, a great deal of attention has been paid to increasing the employment of Americans with disabilities. National policy changes, including the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, the 1997 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998, and the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act (TWWIIA) of 1999, have attempted to recognize and guarantee that individuals with disabilities have the right to work. However, a recent study by NOD/Louis Harris (2000) found that over two-thirds of Americans with disabilities are not employed. In Florida (Census 2000), out of nearly 2 million individuals of working age with disabilities (21-64 years of age), only 58% are employed (see Table 1).

Table 1. Florida Disability Status (Census 2000, Summary File 3)

Disability Status of the Civilian Noninstitutionalized Population		
	Total	Percent
Population 5 to 20 years	3,264,015	100.0
With a disability	284,514	8.7
Population 21 to 64 years	8,746,066	100.0
With a disability	1,914,507	21.9
Percent employed	58.3	(X)
No disability	6,831,559	78.1
Percent employed	74.9	(X)
Population 65 years and over	2,720,127	100.0
With a disability	1,075,545	39.5
Total population (5 to 65+)	14,730,208	100.0
Total population with a disability	3,274,566	22.2
Total population with a disability employed	58.3	(X)

The ADA established current governmental policy regarding individuals with disabilities and their place in society. Apart from the general provisions that guarantee protection against discrimination (including employment-related discrimination), perhaps its most important feature was the introduction of the concept of "reasonable accommodation." Reasonable accommodation called not only for increasing physical accessibility but also implied accessibility in accordance with the ADA's greater mandate of societal accessibility for individuals with disabilities.

According to ADA guidelines, employers must ensure reasonable accommodations to employees with disabilities. This generally involves the construction or enhancement of physical features in the workplace (such as ramps or parking spaces) to facilitate accessibility for both employees with disabilities as well as the public at large. Research on the costs of such accommodation borne by employers indicates that they are generally low. Yet, perceived high costs of accommodation have been cited as one of the main concerns of employers regarding the hiring and employment of individuals with disabilities (Unger, 2002a; Dixon, Kruse, & Van Horn, 2003).

A wealth of studies has examined costs and other factors related to the employment of individuals with disabilities. Several have examined employer attitudes, which have been found to be influenced by a number of factors (Unger, 2002a). For example, favorable attitudes towards individuals with disabilities tend to be found among employers with previous experience working with employees with disabilities, employers in large companies, women employers, and employers with at least a postsecondary education (Levy, Jessop, Rimmerman, Francis, & Levy, 1993; Unger, 2002c; McFarlin, Song, & Sonntag, 1991). There are inconsistencies among attitudes, however, depending upon the type of disability the employee has and how severe it is. In a survey of employers regarding work performance and work personality factors (Johnson, Greenwood, & Schriener, 1988), researchers noted that employers had more positive attitudes towards employees with physical disabilities and less positive attitudes towards employees who had both mental and physical disabilities. In relation to employees with psychiatric disabilities, Diksa and Rogers (1996) noted that employers express varying levels of concern depending upon previous experience with employees with disabilities, the type of industry they work in, and the existence of a written policy regarding employees with disabilities. Other researchers, however, found favorable attitudes towards the employment of individuals with severe disabilities (Levy et al., 1993) and towards the employment of developmentally disabled workers in the food service industry (Gruenhagen, 1982; Marcouiller, Smith, & Bordieri, 1987).

A comprehensive study conducted in 2002 by researchers at the Virginia Commonwealth University and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce explored employer attitudes towards employees with disabilities. The study surveyed human resource professionals and front-line supervisors in 43 predominantly larger businesses (>1000 employees) that knowingly employed individuals with disabilities or had been recognized for having disability-friendly work cultures. Although human resource professionals reported strong organizational commitment towards accommodating and retaining workers with disabilities as evidenced through general ADA compliance and widespread existence of management training programs with disability components (85%), less of an organizational commitment was found in the areas of recruitment, hiring, and career development for employees with disabilities. Human resource professionals also had limited awareness of the wide variety of programs for promoting employment of individuals with disabilities (Unger, Wehman, Yasuda, Campbell, &

Green, 2002). Supervisors reported being generally satisfied with the work performance of employees with disabilities, although supervisors who had personal experience working with employees with disabilities tended to be less satisfied. Supervisors overall rated the work performance of employees with functional limitations less favorably, indicating that accommodation of employees with very severe disabilities may be problematic (Unger, 2002b).

Virginia Commonwealth University researchers also surveyed human resource professionals and front-line supervisors regarding employer knowledge and utilization of disability resources and workplace supports (Unger et al., 2002; Unger & Kregel, 2002). Most supervisors (60%) and human resources professionals reported a high level of confidence in their ability to meet the support/accommodation needs of employees with disabilities, although only a minority (23%) of supervisors had direct authority to do so. Human resources staffs were the main source of support (85%) for the disability concerns of most organizations. Both human resources professionals and supervisors indicated that a variety of accommodations were available, and that costs were not prohibitive.

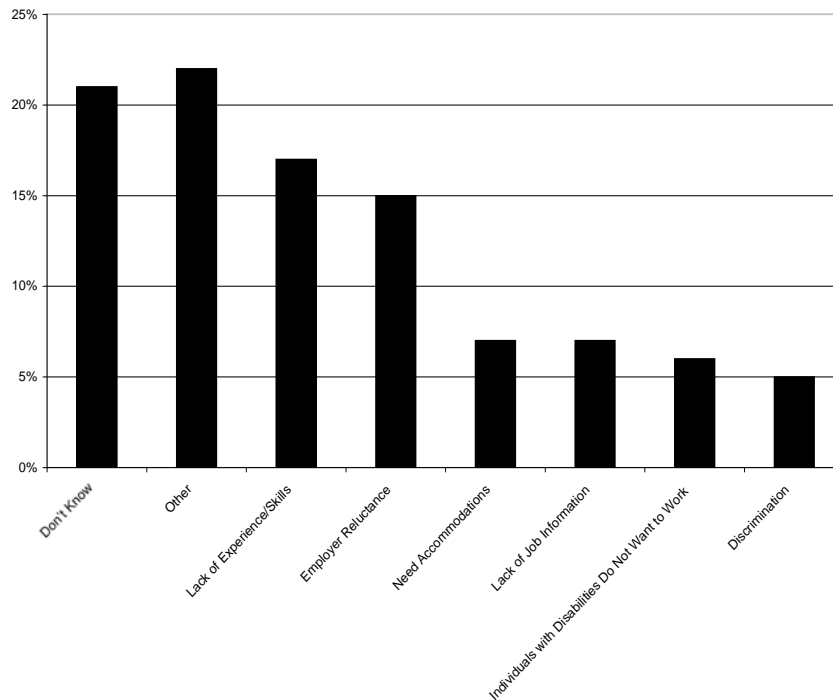
In a recent study conducted by State University of New Jersey at Rutgers, representatives of 501 businesses throughout the United States were surveyed concerning barriers to employment and accommodations for individuals with disabilities (Dixon, Kruse, & Van Horn, 2003). One striking finding was that only 26% of employers reported having at least one employee with a disability. Seventeen percent of employers surveyed said lack of experience and skills is the greatest barrier to employment for individuals with disabilities, while 15% said employer reluctance is the greatest barrier (see Figure 1 for more details).<sup>1</sup>

Only 40% of employers were found to have provided training related to accommodating employees with disabilities. More than half of the companies with 25 or more employees (52%) provide training (companies that employ people with disabilities were more likely to provide training).

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<sup>1</sup> Note that study researchers (Unger et al., 2000) also found that the most significant barriers for employment for individuals with disabilities reported by human resources professionals were lack of related experience, lack of skills, and lack of education/training.

Figure 1. Employment Barriers



Source: Dixon, Kruse, & Van Horn, 2003.

The majority of employers surveyed in the Rutgers study felt that their workplaces are accessible to individuals with disabilities. Employer barriers (self-reported) included unfamiliarity or discomfort with workers with disabilities (10%), employees with disabilities unable to perform work required (32%), and fear of costs of accommodations (40%). Yet, 73% reported that their employees with disabilities did not require accommodations, and 61% said that average costs of accommodation were \$500 or less (29% said \$100 or less). Employers have made attempts at increasing accessibility; 70% had changed their company's Web site; 49% made recruiting and interviewing locations more accessible; 11% developed recruiting methods and advertising to target individuals with disabilities; and 12% changed job applications or tests.

In regard to future policies related to employees with disabilities, Rutgers researchers found general support for federal initiatives designed to increase the employment of individuals with disabilities (e.g., tax incentives). Unger (2002c) sees evidence of a paradigm shift; rather than solely concentrating on increasing disability hires (securing employment for individuals with disabilities), disability advocates are including a focus on sustaining and maintaining employment (e.g., continued integration of workplace supports).

## **About The Able Trust**

The Able Trust, also known as the Florida Governor's Alliance for the Employment of Citizens with Disabilities, is a public-private partnership foundation established by the Florida Legislature in 1990. Its mission is to be the leader in providing Floridians with disabilities fair employment opportunities through fundraising, grant programs, public awareness, and education.

The Able Trust makes grants to Florida nonprofit agencies and individuals with disabilities. These grants support a diversity of projects including job skills training, supported employment, employer outreach and other activities leading to employment. The Able Trust awards approximately \$2 million in grants each year, and the positive impact of the Foundation's grants program has been felt by people with all types of disabilities, in both rural and urban areas throughout the state.

In addition, The Able Trust sponsors several programs to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities, educate employers and prepare young adults for life beyond high school. The Florida Business Leadership Network is a free employer membership group that provides business with resources and information to include people with disabilities in their business practices. The Youth Leadership Forum brings high school students with disabilities together for a unique, career and leadership training conference each summer. The High School/High Tech program is a career development program that prepares high school students with disabilities for post-secondary education and careers in science, technology, engineering and math.

When people with disabilities in Florida have programs like those supported by The Able Trust, the successes are overwhelming.

## **Purpose**

In February 2003 The Able Trust, in collaboration with the Milbank Foundation for Vocational Rehabilitation, contracted with CITES to conduct a study of employer attitudes.

The purpose of the study was to describe (a) the demographic and respondent characteristics of the businesses that returned a survey constructed by CITES to explore employers' attitudes toward individuals with disabilities, (b) experiences of businesses with employees with disabilities, (c) formal and informal business policies related to employees with disabilities, (d) accommodations made by businesses for employees with disabilities, (e) familiarity of businesses with programs or agencies related to employees with disabilities, and (f) perceptions of respondents of characteristics of employees with disabilities. Another purpose was to assist in the development of strategies to increase disability hires.

## Section Two: Methods

### Sampling

The sample of Florida businesses was drawn from databases obtained from the Florida Chamber of Commerce (Chamber). The Chamber annually updates and categorizes Florida businesses into three databases: Members, Prospects, and Suspects. The Suspects database contains all Florida businesses minus current Members and Prospects. As businesses begin to show interest in becoming Chamber members, they are moved into the Prospects database. If they become Chamber members, they are moved into the Member file.

### Survey Instruments

CITES project staff, in collaboration with The Able Trust and the business community, constructed *A Survey of Employer Attitudes Toward Hiring Individuals with Disabilities* instrument (Appendix A). To ensure input from the business community in the design of the survey, a seven-member statewide Business Advisory Coalition (BAC) was formed.

The intent of the survey instrument was to explore attitudes of employers towards the hiring and retaining of individuals with disabilities. Here is a summary of the questions and the information solicited:

- The first questions asked for demographic information from the recipient, including business location, number of employees, principal activity of business, recipient's position/level in the business, and personal knowledge of disability issues.
- Next was a series of questions concerning the business's policies towards recruiting, hiring, and retaining employees with disabilities, and a series of questions concerning types of disabilities found among employees.
- Two questions followed concerning accommodations for employees with disabilities.
- The final three questions used Likert-scale response structures to determine the recipient's knowledge and awareness of disability programs and services, business policy concerning employees with disabilities and employer-employee with disabilities relations, and employer perceptions of employees with disabilities. Please see Appendix B for items included in the survey.

After initial development, business advisory coalition members and project staff pilot-tested the survey instrument and were asked to provide feedback and comments regarding both survey content, design, and user friendliness. The survey instrument was then revised according to the suggestions received from coalition members and project staff.

### Survey Dissemination

The Employer survey (Appendix A) was disseminated in two forms, print (hard copy) and via the Internet (electronic). A total of 5,732 businesses sampled from the Suspects, Prospects, and Members databases were asked to participate in the survey.

### **Print (Non-Chamber Members)**

A total of 2,581 businesses were sampled from the Suspects database (out of a total population of 19,191). Using names and addresses derived from the Suspects database, these businesses were mailed a print (hard copy) version of the survey instrument on April 7. Members of the Suspects sample were sent a survey with a cover letter containing information about the project, confidentiality issues, a date by which to return the surveys (May 30), and CITES staff contact information. Similar information was included in the instructions on the front of each survey instrument.

Print survey recipients were asked to mail their completed surveys by May 30 using the preaddressed, postage-paid envelopes contained in their packages. Follow-up letters were sent on May 1 to encourage recipients to complete and return their surveys if they had not already done so, or to contact CITES if they needed more information or materials. Two hundred and fifty-seven print surveys were returned by the postal service as undeliverable.

### **Internet (Chamber Members)**

On May 7 and 8, respectively, e-mails were sent to 2,122 businesses from the Prospects database and 1,029 businesses from the Members database. The e-mails contained a link to the Web version of the survey instrument and asked them to participate. Also included in the e-mail was information about the project, confidentiality issues, a closeout date for the Web site (May 30), and CITES staff contact information. Similar information was included in the instructions on the front of the Web version of the survey instrument. Eighty-six e-mails from the Prospects database and 35 e-mails from the Members database were returned as undeliverable. A follow-up e-mail was sent to the Prospects and Members samples on May 15 that encouraged recipients to participate in the survey, if they had not already done so, or to contact CITES if they needed more information or materials.

### **Analysis**

To facilitate the data analysis process, all data were entered into SPSS computer files. Each survey was examined for completeness before being entered, and all files were double-checked for errors. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, and multiple response) were run on each SPSS file. Chamber member responses were compared with non-Chamber member responses, and an analysis of relationships between business characteristics and employer perceptions of employees with disabilities was made. Findings from these analyses are presented in the following sections.

## Section Three: Results

### Response Rates

Of the original 5,732 surveys sent out, 378 surveys were returned as undeliverable. Of the 5,354 surveys that were delivered, 306 usable instruments were returned for a 5.7% response rate. The delivered Suspect group (n=2,324) returned 6.0%, 140, with 0.09% of the original sample undeliverable. The combined delivered Member and Prospect groups (n=3,030) returned 166, or 5.4%, with 0.04% of the e-mails not delivered.

Unger (2002a) reviewed 24 studies of employers' attitudes toward individuals with disabilities and found that regional sample response rates for mail surveys ranged from 6.2% to 61%. For national samples, response rates ranged from 6% to 38%. Unger (2000a) also reported that telephone and interview surveys tend to produce greater response rates than mail surveys, but often they do not. For example, Unger, Wehman, Yasuda, Campbell, and Green (2002) queried an unstated number of businesses concerning their willingness to participate in a study of employers of disabled persons. Seventy-six businesses committed to participate but only 43 (56.58%) actually cooperated in the structured telephone interview. Reasons cited by nonparticipants included ". . . the inability to secure approval from the organization's legal department, limited organizational resources to devote to collecting the information, and concerns regarding the time it would take to complete the survey" (p. 21).

Diksa and Rogers (1996) conducted telephone interviews with a sample of businesses in one county in Massachusetts. Their sample consisted of 373 respondents. They reported that 57 employers explicitly declined to participate. The overall refusal rate was 15%. "Reasons for not responding to the survey included (a) the respondent was too busy, (b) participation was against company policy, (c) the survey addressed too sensitive a topic . . ." (p. 35). Levy et al. (1993) mailed surveys to 7,676 of approximately 27,000 companies doing business in New York state. Nine hundred and seventy-six were returned as undeliverable and 418 (6.2%) were completed and returned. Levy et al. (1993) concluded,

The data are considered as illustrative of possible trends among employers rather than as definitive or generalizable to the larger population of employers. However, the obtained study group is larger than most of the employer attitude studies in the literature (with a few exceptions) and large enough (N=418) to allow examination of possible subgroup differences among employers that may provide insight for program development for rehabilitation professionals. The assessment was made that these preliminary data are valuable if limited. (p. 50)

Similarly, the data provided in the present study can only yield tentative generalizations about employer attitudes and practices in Florida. Comparisons of the results of this study with those of earlier ones may assist in interpreting current results.

### Business and Respondent Characteristics

The results of the survey are presented in terms of the total sample and of Chamber (Members and Prospects) and non-Chamber (Suspects) groups. It should be noted that the survey was presented to Chamber and non-Chamber groups in different ways: Web-based versus print. Thus, observed differences between the two could be due to the medium of survey presentation rather than, or in addition to, other causes.



The pattern of results, however, suggests that group membership is the major explanatory factor. Throughout this section, adjacent response categories for certain items have sometimes been combined, for example, “agree” and “strongly agree,” in order to clarify results.

Table 2 presents the background characteristics of respondents and their businesses. The first section of the table shows the numbers and percentages of responding businesses grouped according to location in the chamber of commerce regions. The number of counties varies among the regions, with the Northwest having the most (23) and the Southeast and Southwest having the least (5 each) (Appendix C). However, the total number of respondents in each region is more reflective of its population density than of the number of counties it contains or the size of its geographic area.

Chamber and non-Chamber respondents were fairly evenly distributed in 4 of the 6 regions, with percentages varying less than 10 points between the two groups. The two regions where distributions were most discrepant were the Northwest, where the percentage of Chamber members was more than twice that of non-Chamber members responding (18.8% and 9% respectively), and the West Central region, where the opposite distribution pattern was found (33.1% non-Chamber and 23.3% Chamber respondents).

A greater percentage of Chamber than non-Chamber businesses reported having 200 or more employees (33.2% versus 15.8%). Most (61.6%) of the businesses in the total sample employ between 10 and 199 people. The largest percentage of companies (37.0%) in the total sample is service oriented. Companies engaged in production (e.g., agriculture, manufacturing, construction) are the second most numerous (22.2%).

Table 2. Business Characteristics and Respondent Job Status

Responding businesses grouped by Florida Chamber of Commerce regions						
Region and Number of Counties	Chamber*		Non-Chamber**		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Northwest - 23	18.8	26	9.0	12	14.2	38
Northeast - 12	10.1	14	8.5	11	9.3	25
West Central - 12	23.3	32	33.1	43	28.0	75
East Central - 11	18.1	25	16.9	22	17.5	47
Southwest - 5	5.0	7	7.7	10	6.3	17
Southeast - 5	24.6	34	24.6	32	24.6	66

<i>How many people does your business employ?</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Less than 10	15.7	26	10.1	14	13.1	40
10-199	51.2	85	74.1	103	61.6	188
200-500	16.3	27	7.9	11	12.5	38
More than 500	16.9	28	7.9	11	12.8	39

Table 2 (continued). Business Characteristics and Respondent Job Status

<i>Choose the category that best describes the principal activity of your business or profession.</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N4
Arts and Entertainment	.6	1	2.3	3	1.3	4
Education	5.5	9	4.5	6	5.1	15
Information and Support	12.7	21	4.5	6	9.1	27
Production	23.0	38	21.2	28	22.2	66
Sales	4.8	8	10.6	14	7.4	22
Service	35.2	58	39.4	52	37.0	110
Other	18.2	30	17.4	23	17.8	53

<i>Are you a member of senior management with the responsibility for developing policies and practices related to employees with disabilities?</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Yes	84.3	140	90.6	125	87.2	265
No	15.7	26	9.4	13	12.8	39

<i>Are you a human resources professional?</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Yes	40.6	67	44.5	61	42.4	128
No	59.4	98	55.5	76	57.6	174

<i>Do you have the responsibility for hiring or supervising employees with disabilities?</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Yes	74.5	123	79.3	107	76.7	230
No	25.5	42	20.7	28	23.3	70

\*Chamber and prospective members \*\*Non-Chamber (Suspect) members

Respondents were asked if they were senior management, human resources professionals, or supervisors of employees with disabilities. Most respondents (80.4%) answered more than one of the three relevant questions affirmatively. Presumably the reason is that in small- and medium-sized companies many individuals necessarily assume more than one role. Approximately 86% of the total sample classified themselves as senior management as well as one or both of the other job categories; 76.4% classified themselves as having responsibility for hiring and supervising employees with disabilities in addition to responsibilities related to one or both of the other two categories. Only 7 respondents reported filling the supervisory position only. Eleven reported being human resources professionals as well as supervisors, and 215 individuals responded that they were human resources professionals with both management and supervisory responsibilities.

## Experience of Businesses with Employees with Disabilities

Table 3 shows that Chamber and non-Chamber respondents differed in their awareness of disability issues. More Chamber members indicated a high level of awareness (36.7%) than non-Chamber members (26.3%). The two groups agreed that persons with behavioral disabilities were the most difficult of all categories to accommodate on the job. Forty-three percent from both groups listed behavioral disabilities as the most difficult to accommodate, 23% listed cognitive disabilities, and 21% listed sensory as the most difficult.

Approximately 80% of the businesses in the total sample said that they employed 1 or more persons with disabilities, with 70% reporting that they employed between 1 and 15 such persons. Approximately 40% of each group did not anticipate hiring any persons with disabilities within the next 2 years; however, 12.8% of Chamber members did anticipate hiring 3 or 4 such persons as compared to only 4.8% of non-Chamber members.

Table 3. Experiences of Businesses with Employees with Disabilities

<i>How would you describe your awareness of disability issues?</i>						
	Chamber*		Non-Chamber**		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Low	7.2	12	17.5	24	11.9	36
Medium	56.0	93	56.2	77	56.1	170
High	36.7	61	26.3	36	32.0	97

<i>Approximately how many employees at your site have one or more disabilities of any kind?</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
None	19.7	31	18.8	25	19.3	56
1-15	69.4	109	70.7	94	70.0	203
16-50	6.4	10	6.8	9	6.6	19
More than 50	4.5	7	3.8	5	4.1	12

<i>Approximately how many persons with disabilities do you anticipate hiring within the next two years?</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
None	39.0	55	41.3	43	40.0	98
1 or 2	39.0	55	43.3	45	40.8	100
3 or 4	12.8	18	4.8	5	9.4	23
5 or more	9.2	13	10.6	11	9.8	24

Table 3 (continued). Experiences of Businesses with Employees with Disabilities

<i>In your opinion, which of the following disabilities is the most difficult to accommodate? Select only one.</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Behavioral Disability	46.1	71	38.7	46	42.9	117
Cognitive Disability	20.8	32	26.1	31	23.1	63
Medical Disability	1.3	2	0	0	.7	2
Neurological Disability	5.8	9	5.8	7	5.9	16
Physical Disability	8.8	12	5.0	6	6.6	18
Sensory Disability	18.2	28	24.4	29	20.9	57

\*Chamber and Prospective members \*\*Non-Chamber (Suspect) members

Several items in the survey (13-18) are not included in the results because they were not answered by up to 62% of the respondents. Apparently respondents lacked the information to be able to answer these items. See Appendix A to view these items.

### Formal and Informal Policies Concerning Employees with Disabilities

Employers were asked a series of questions about their policies regarding employees with disabilities. Fifty percent stated that their business did have a formal policy for hiring persons with disabilities. Table 4 shows that more Chamber businesses (56.0%) have formal policies than do non-Chamber businesses (42.8%) and that Chamber businesses are more likely than non-Chamber businesses to have attempted to hire persons with disabilities in the past (68.5% vs. 56.2%). However, only 29.9% of all businesses in the total sample have policies that commit them to actively recruit persons with disabilities.

Eighty-one percent of all businesses in the sample have policies that commit them to help temporarily disabled workers return to work. Approximately 83% of the businesses in the total sample have policies that guarantee disabled workers equal opportunities for career development and advancement.

Table 4. Formal Business Policies Related to Employees with Disabilities

<i>Does your business have a formal policy for hiring persons with disabilities?</i>						
	Chamber*		Non-Chamber**		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Yes	56.0	93	42.8	59	50.0	152
No	44.0	73	57.2	79	50.0	152

Table 4 (continued). Formal Business Policies Related to Employees with Disabilities

<i>Does your organization's policy contain a commitment to help workers who are temporarily disabled to return to work?</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Yes	82.4	136	79.3	107	81.0	243
No	17.6	29	20.7	28	19.0	57

<i>Does this policy also commit the business to actively recruit persons with disabilities?</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Yes	30.1	49	29.8	39	29.9	88
No	69.9	114	70.2	92	70.1	206

<i>Does this policy guarantee disabled workers equal opportunities for career development and advancement?</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Yes	85.6	137	80.3	102	83.3	239
No	14.4	23	19.7	25	16.7	48

<i>Has your business attempted to hire persons with disabilities in the past?</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Yes	68.5	111	56.2	86	67.0	197
No	31.5	51	34.8	46	33.0	97

\*Chamber and prospective members \*\*Non-Chamber (Suspect) members

Beliefs of the respondents concerning the implementation of their business policies toward disabled workers are shown in Table 5. Differences between responses of Chamber and non-Chamber businesses were negligible. Only 24.8% (agree plus strongly agree) of the total sample indicated that their businesses do a good job of recruiting individuals with disabilities and only 34.7% (agree plus strongly agree) indicated that their businesses provided disability awareness or sensitivity training to all employees.

Table 5. Informal Business Policies Related to Employees with Disabilities

<i>Our business does a good job of promptly providing adequate accommodations for workers with disabilities.</i>						
	Chamber*		Non-Chamber**		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Strongly Disagree	1.2	2	1.5	2	1.4	4
Disagree	2.5	4	2.3	3	2.4	7
Neutral	27.3	44	33.1	44	29.9	88
Agree	46.6	75	49.6	66	48.0	141
Strongly Agree	22.4	36	13.5	18	18.4	54

<i>Our business does a good job of handling termination of workers with disabilities when necessary.</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Strongly Disagree	0	0	.8	1	.3	1
Disagree	1.3	2	2.3	3	1.7	5
Neutral	38.1	61	38.0	49	38.1	110
Agree	42.5	68	46.5	60	44.3	128
Strongly Agree	18.1	29	12.4	16	15.6	45

<i>Our business does a good job of recruiting individuals with disabilities.</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Strongly Disagree	4.4	7	3.8	5	4.1	12
Disagree	19.5	31	16.8	22	18.3	53
Neutral	47.8	76	58.8	77	52.8	153
Agree	23.9	38	16.8	22	20.7	60
Strongly Agree	4.4	7	3.8	5	4.1	12

<i>Our business does a good job of matching jobs and abilities for employees with disabilities.</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Strongly Disagree	2.5	4	1.5	2	2.1	6
Disagree	5.6	9	4.5	6	5.1	15
Neutral	33.1	53	37.9	50	35.3	103
Agree	44.4	71	43.2	57	43.8	128
Strongly Agree	14.4	23	12.9	17	13.7	40

Table 5 (continued). Informal Business Policies Related to Employees with Disabilities

<i>Our business provides disability awareness or sensitivity training to all employees.</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Strongly Disagree	3.2	5	2.3	3	2.8	8
Disagree	26.1	41	26.0	34	26.0	75
Neutral	36.3	57	36.6	48	36.5	105
Agree	23.6	37	29.8	39	26.4	76
Strongly Agree	10.8	17	5.3	7	8.3	24

<i>Our business strives to create a disability-friendly work environment.</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Strongly Disagree	2.5	4	.8	1	1.7	5
Disagree	2.5	4	7.5	10	4.8	14
Neutral	29.2	47	30.1	40	29.6	87
Agree	46.6	75	51.2	68	48.6	143
Strongly Agree	19.3	31	10.5	14	15.3	45

<i>Our business believes that disabled employees are valuable members of the workforce.</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Strongly Disagree	1.2	2	0	0	.7	2
Disagree	2.5	4	0	0	1.4	4
Neutral	11.8	19	15.2	20	13.3	39
Agree	52.2	84	57.7	76	54.6	160
Strongly Agree	32.3	52	27.3	36	30.0	88

<i>Our business believes that hiring disabled employees is good for public relations.</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Strongly Disagree	3.1	5	0	0	1.7	5
Disagree	8.8	14	6.1	8	7.6	22
Neutral	35.6	57	42.0	55	38.5	112
Agree	38.1	61	42.7	56	40.2	117
Strongly Agree	14.4	23	9.2	12	12.0	35

\*Chamber and prospective members \*\*Non-Chamber (Suspect) members

## Accommodations Made for Employees with Disabilities

Table 6 shows that over 50% of the total sample of businesses have modified existing facilities to make them readily accessible (58.1%), restructured job requirements (50.2%), and modified work schedules (64.9%) to accommodate workers with disabilities. Fewer than 50% have adjusted or modified qualification examinations (12.5%), or provided qualified readers or interpreters (29.0%) for workers with disabilities. More Chamber than non-Chamber businesses (42.8% vs. 31.7%) have modified equipment or devices for use by workers with disabilities and 26.2% of Chamber members versus 18.2% of non-Chamber members have adjusted or modified training materials.

Table 6. Accommodations Made for Employees with Disabilities

*Have you made any of the following accommodations for employees with disabilities?*

<i>Modified existing facilities to make them readily accessible.</i>						
	Chamber*		Non-Chamber**		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Yes	59.2	93	56.7	72	58.1	165
No	40.9	64	43.3	55	41.9	119

<i>Restructured job requirements.</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Yes	52.9	81	46.8	59	50.2	140
No	47.1	72	53.2	67	49.8	139

<i>Modified work schedules.</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Yes	66.5	103	63.1	82	64.9	185
No	33.5	52	36.9	48	35.1	100

<i>Modified equipment or devices.</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Yes	42.8	65	31.7	39	37.8	104
No	57.2	87	68.3	84	62.2	171

<i>Adjusted or modified qualification examinations.</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Yes	12.2	18	12.8	15	12.5	33
No	87.8	130	87.2	102	87.5	232



Table 6 (continued). Accommodations Made for Employees with Disabilities

<i>Adjusted or modified training materials.</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Yes	26.2	39	18.2	22	22.6	61
No	73.8	110	81.8	99	77.4	209

<i>Provided qualified readers or interpreters.</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Yes	28.8	42	29.3	36	29.0	78
No	71.2	104	70.7	87	71.0	191

\*Chamber and prospective members \*\*Non-Chamber (Suspect) members

### Familiarity with Programs or Agencies Related to Employees with Disabilities

Employers were asked to indicate their familiarity with several state and national agencies and programs. A lack of familiarity was found among respondents in regards to their knowledge of most; exceptions included employers having “some” or “a great deal” of familiarity with Welfare to Work, School-to-Work training programs, One-Stop Career Centers, Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and Department of Veterans Affairs.

Chamber members displayed a greater familiarity with most programs or agencies compared to non-Chamber members. More non-Chamber members responded “not at all” for each program or agency than Chamber members. Similarly more Chamber members responded “some” or “a great deal” than non-Chamber members. Exceptions included the Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation for which 18% of non-Chamber members responded “a great deal” compared to 16.4% of Chamber members, and Disability and Business Technical Assistance Centers (DBTACs) for which non-Chamber members had a slightly higher percentage of “a great deal” responses (3.8% compared to 3.1% of Chamber members). See Table 7 for more information.

Table 7. Familiarity with Programs or Agencies Related to Employees with Disabilities

*How familiar is your business with the following programs or agencies? Select the appropriate response.*

<i>Employer Assistance Referral Network</i>						
	Chamber*		Non-Chamber**		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Not at all	44.0	70	62.9	83	52.6	153
Some	41.5	66	27.3	36	35.1	102
A great deal	14.5	23	9.8	13	12.4	36

Table 7 (continued). Familiarity with Programs or Agencies Related to Employees with Disabilities

<i>Welfare to Work</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Not at all	25.0	40	48.5	64	35.6	104
Some	48.0	77	34.8	46	42.1	123
A great deal	26.9	43	16.7	22	22.3	65

<i>School-to-Work Training Programs</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Not at all	25.6	41	32.6	43	28.8	84
Some	48.1	77	48.5	54	48.3	141
A great deal	26.3	42	18.9	25	22.9	67

<i>Supported Employment</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Not at all	56.3	90	72.5	95	63.6	185
Some	32.5	52	22.1	29	27.8	81
A great deal	11.3	18	5.3	7	8.6	25

<i>One-Stop Career Center</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Not at all	37.5	60	61.1	80	48.1	140
Some	28.1	45	19.8	26	24.4	71
A great deal	34.4	55	19.1	25	27.5	80

<i>Job Accommodation Network</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Not at all	67.9	108	81.8	108	74.2	216
Some	25.6	41	14.4	19	20.6	60
A great deal	6.3	10	3.8	5	5.2	15

<i>Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Not at all	40.9	65	46.6	62	43.5	127
Some	42.8	68	35.3	47	39.4	115
A great deal	16.4	26	18.0	24	17.1	50

Table 7 (continued). Familiarity with Programs or Agencies Related to Employees with Disabilities

<i>The Able Trust/Business Leadership Network</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Not at all	66.0	105	78.6	103	71.7	208
Some	25.2	40	18.3	24	22.1	64
A great deal	8.8	14	3.1	4	6.2	18

<i>Work Opportunity Tax Credit</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Not at all	46.9	75	57.9	77	51.9	152
Some	40.0	64	33.8	45	37.2	109
A great deal	13.1	21	8.3	11	10.9	32

<i>Disabled Access Tax Credit</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Not at all	61.0	97	71.4	95	65.8	192
Some	32.7	52	24.8	33	29.1	85
A great deal	6.3	10	3.8	5	5.1	15

<i>Tax Deduction to Remove Transportation and Architectural Barriers</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Not at all	70.3	111	82.6	109	75.9	220
Some	26.6	42	16.7	22	22.1	64
A great deal	3.2	5	0.8	1	2.1	6

<i>Department of Veterans Affairs</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Not at all	20.3	32	32.6	43	25.9	75
Some	55.1	87	46.2	61	51.0	148
A great deal	24.7	39	21.2	28	23.1	67

<i>Disability and Business Technical Assistance Centers (DBTAC)</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Not at all	71.7	114	78.6	103	74.8	217
Some	25.2	40	17.6	23	21.7	63
A great deal	3.1	5	3.8	5	3.4	10

Table 7 (continued). Familiarity with Programs or Agencies Related to Employees with Disabilities

<i>Office of Disability Employment Policy</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Not at all	61.6	98	72.5	95	66.6	193
Some	34.0	54	23.7	31	29.3	85
A great deal	3.4	7	3.8	5	4.1	12

\*Chamber and prospective members \*\*Non-Chamber (Suspect) members

### Perceptions of Characteristics of Employees with Disabilities

The final section of the survey instrument asked employers to respond to a series of statements dealing with perceived attributes of employees with disabilities. The majority of employers agreed or disagreed where expected in regard to positive and negative attributes. Several items, however, received a large number of “neutral” responses (from both Chamber and non-Chamber members), including lack of necessary training, worker’s compensation and accommodation costs for employees with disabilities, employee flexibility in adapting to work, and employee punctuality. This suggests uncertainty regarding these attributes.

More non-Chamber members than Chamber members selected “neutral” in response to “Employees with disabilities are absent from work too often” (47.4% of non-Chamber members compared to 35.2% of Chamber members) and “Employees with disabilities quit their jobs too often” (48.5% of non-Chamber members compared to 33.1% of Chamber members). A slightly higher percentage of Chamber members (53.5%) than non-Chamber members (47.9%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, “Employees with disabilities require excessive amounts of supervision.” See Table 8 for more details.

Table 8. Perceptions of Characteristics of Employees with Disabilities

The next group of statements describes attributes of employees with disabilities. Select the response that most accurately describes your level of general agreement with each statement.

<i>Employees with disabilities produce an adequate quantity of work.</i>						
	Chamber*		Non-Chamber**		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0.7	1	0.3	1
Disagree	2.5	4	3.0	4	2.7	8
Neutral	24.4	39	24.6	33	24.5	72
Agree	59.4	95	63.4	85	61.2	180
Strongly Agree	13.8	22	8.2	11	11.2	33

Table 8 (continued). Perceptions of Characteristics of Employees with Disabilities

<i>Employees with disabilities produce an adequate quality of work.</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0	0	0
Disagree	0.6	1	1.5	2	1	3
Neutral	23.1	37	26.9	36	24.8	73
Agree	63.1	101	64.2	86	63.6	187
Strongly Agree	13.1	21	7.5	10	10.5	31

<i>Employees with disabilities are able to perform their work tasks safely.</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Strongly Disagree	0.6	1	1.5	2	1.0	3
Disagree	1.9	3	3.0	4	2.4	7
Neutral	23.9	38	27.1	36	25.3	74
Agree	59.7	95	63.9	85	61.6	180
Strongly Agree	13.8	22	4.5	6	9.6	28

<i>Employees with disabilities often lack necessary job training.</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Strongly Disagree	5.0	8	1.5	2	3.4	10
Disagree	28.9	46	29.9	40	29.4	86
Neutral	35.8	57	38.8	52	37.2	109
Agree	28.3	45	23.9	32	26.3	77
Strongly Agree	1.9	3	6.0	8	3.8	11

<i>Employees with disabilities work well as team members.</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0	0	0
Disagree	1.3	2	1.5	2	1.4	4
Neutral	28.3	45	34.3	46	31.1	91
Agree	58.5	93	55.2	74	57.0	167
Strongly Agree	11	19	8.6	12	10.6	31

Table 8 (continued). Perceptions of Characteristics of Employees with Disabilities

<i>Employees with disabilities require excessive amounts of supervision.</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Strongly Disagree	6.3	10	3.8	5	5.1	15
Disagree	47.2	75	39.1	52	43.5	127
Neutral	36.5	58	44.4	59	40.1	117
Agree	9.4	15	11.3	15	10.3	30
Strongly Agree	0.6	1	1.5	2	1.0	3

<i>Employees with disabilities are able to profit from on-the-job training.</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0	0	0
Disagree	0	0	0.7	1	0.3	1
Neutral	15.6	25	224	30	18.7	55
Agree	66.3	106	67.2	90	66.7	196
Strongly Agree	18.1	29	9.7	13	14.3	42

<i>Employees with disabilities are dependable workers.</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0.7	1	0.3	1
Disagree	1.3	2	0.7	1	1.0	3
Neutral	22.5	36	30.6	41	26.2	77
Agree	53.8	86	56.0	75	54.8	161
Strongly Agree	22.5	36	11.9	16	17.7	52

<i>Employees with disabilities require accommodations whose costs are too great.</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Strongly Disagree	7.5	12	5.2	7	6.5	19
Disagree	40.6	65	42.5	57	41.5	122
Neutral	43.1	69	42.5	57	42.9	126
Agree	6.9	11	9.0	12	7.8	23
Strongly Agree	1.9	3	0.7	1	1.4	4

Table 8 (continued). Perceptions of Characteristics of Employees with Disabilities

<i>Employees with disabilities increase workers' compensation costs.</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Strongly Disagree	8.8	14	5.2	7	7.1	21
Disagree	37.5	60	39.6	53	38.4	113
Neutral	45.0	72	47.0	63	45.9	135
Agree	6.3	10	7.5	10	6.8	20
Strongly Agree	2.5	4	0.7	1	1.7	5

<i>Employees with disabilities exhibit flexibility in adapting to the demands of their work.</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0	0	0
Disagree	5.0	8	3.0	4	4.1	12
Neutral	44.4	71	52.6	70	48.1	141
Agree	42.5	68	41.4	55	42.0	123
Strongly Agree	8.1	13	3.0	4	5.8	17

<i>Employees with disabilities have the capability to advance in our business.</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Strongly Disagree	0.6	1	1.5	2	1.0	3
Disagree	1.9	3	1.5	2	1.7	5
Neutral	21.9	35	36.6	48	28.5	83
Agree	63.7	102	51.1	67	58.1	169
Strongly Agree	11.9	19	9.2	12	10.7	31

<i>Employees with disabilities are absent from work too often.</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Strongly Disagree	10.1	16	4.5	6	7.5	22
Disagree	50.3	80	43.6	58	47.3	138
Neutral	35.2	56	47.4	63	40.8	119
Agree	4.4	7	4.5	6	4.5	13
Strongly Agree	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 8 (continued). Perceptions of Characteristics of Employees with Disabilities

<i>Employees with disabilities quit their jobs too often.</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Strongly Disagree	13.1	21	6.8	9	10.3	30
Disagree	51.2	82	43.2	57	47.6	139
Neutral	33.1	53	48.5	64	40.1	117
Agree	1.0	3	1.5	2	1.7	5
Strongly Agree	0.6	1	0	0	0.3	1

<i>Employees with disabilities are punctual.</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0	0	0
Disagree	1.3	2	1.5	2	1.4	4
Neutral	41.5	66	46.3	62	43.7	128
Agree	49.7	79	46.3	62	48.1	141
Strongly Agree	7.5	12	6.0	8	6.8	20

<i>Employees with disabilities come to work appropriately dressed and groomed.</i>						
	Chamber		Non-Chamber		Total	
	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N
Strongly Disagree	0.6	1	0	0	0.3	1
Disagree	1.3	2	1.5	2	1.4	4
Neutral	31.9	51	41.4	55	36.2	106
Agree	56.3	90	51.9	69	54.3	159
Strongly Agree	10.0	16	5.3	7	7.8	23

\*Chamber and prospective members \*\*Non-Chamber (Suspect) members

### Relationships Between Business Characteristics and Employer Perceptions of Employees with Disabilities

The literature on employer attitudes toward employees with disabilities contains information about how business and respondent characteristics are related to perceptions of employees with disabilities. These characteristics include (business) company size, principal activity of the company, existence of a formal policy for hiring persons with disabilities, number of employees with disabilities working for the company, and respondent responsibility for hiring or supervising employees with disabilities. Although previous studies have not addressed Chamber membership as an important business characteristic in this context, it was seen as important in this study and added for these analyses.



In order to study these relationships, attitudinal survey items reflecting business and respondent perceptions of employees with disabilities were grouped into positive and negative scales by summing the item responses for each respondent. Survey item numbers for the positive scale were 50, 51, 52, 54, 56, 57, 60, 61, 64, and 65. Item numbers for the negative scale were 53, 55, 58, 59, 62, and 63. (See Appendix A.)

Item responses for the six characteristics were each divided into two categories as follows:

1. Business size, Less than 200 versus 200 or more
2. Principal activity, Service versus Others
3. Existence of a formal policy for hiring persons with disabilities, Yes versus No
4. Responsibility for hiring or supervising employees with disabilities, Yes versus No
5. Number of employees with disabilities, 1 or more versus None
6. Chamber of Commerce membership, Chamber versus Non-Chamber.

The relationship between each of the six characteristics and both positive and negative scales was studied by computing means, standard deviations, and effect sizes (ES) for Chamber and non-Chamber groups. Effect sizes quantify the strength of a relationship and are computed by obtaining the difference between the means of the two categories for a given characteristic and dividing the result by the standard deviation of the total sample. A rule of thumb is that effect sizes below .30 are indicative of weak relationships, those between .30 and .50 show moderate relationships, and those above .50 indicate strong relationships.

Table 9. Relationships Between Business and Respondent Characteristics and Positive and Negative Attitudes Toward Employees with Disabilities

Size of Business					
	Positive Attitudes			Negative Attitudes	
	Less than 200	200 or more	Less than 200	200 or more	
Number of cases	213	74	214	74	
Mean	39.89	36.70	15.84	14.39	
Difference between means	3.19		1.45		
Standard deviation	4.97		3.24		
Effect size	.64		.45		

Principal Activity of Business				
	Positive Attitudes		Negative Attitudes	
	Service	Other	Service	Other
Number of cases	106	181	106	182
Mean	37.57	37.49	15.41	15.50
Difference between means	.07		.08	
Standard deviation	4.97		3.23	
Effect size	.01		.02	

Table 9 (continued). Relationships Between Business and Respondent Characteristics and Positive and Negative Attitudes Toward Employees with Disabilities

Existence of a Formal Policy for Hiring Persons with Disabilities				
	Positive Attitudes		Negative Attitudes	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Number of cases	147	139	148	139
Mean	38.98	36.01	14.85	16.11
Difference between means	2.97		1.26	
Standard deviation	4.98		3.24	
Effect size	.60		.39	

Respondent Responsible for Hiring or Supervising				
	Positive Attitudes		Negative Attitudes	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Number of cases	215	67	217	66
Mean	37.88	36.82	15.54	15.14
Difference between means	1.06		.41	
Standard deviation	4.89		3.24	
Effect size	.22		.13	

Number of Employees with Disabilities				
	Positive Attitudes		Negative Attitudes	
	1 or more	None	1 or more	None
Number of cases	227	47	225	50
Mean	37.94	35.47	15.31	16.56
Difference between means	2.47		1.25	
Standard deviation	4.95		.3.18	
Effect size	.49		.39	

Chamber of Commerce Membership				
	Positive Attitudes		Negative Attitudes	
	Chamber	Non-Chamber	Chamber	Non-Chamber
Number of cases	157	130	157	131
Mean	38.12	36.79	15.17	15.82
Difference between means	1.34		.65	
Standard deviation	4.97		3.24	
Effect size	.27		.20	

The data in Table 9 show a strong relationship (ES .64) between positive attitudes and business size and a moderate relationship (ES .45) between negative attitudes and business size. Respondents for smaller businesses (fewer than 200 employees) expressed both more positive and more negative attitudes concerning employees with disabilities than did larger businesses.

Differences between positive and negative attitudes in service businesses and all other businesses were negligible (ES .01 vs. .02). Businesses that have formal policies for hiring persons with disabilities have stronger positive attitudes (ES .60) than businesses that do not have such policies. Businesses with no hiring policies expressed more negative attitudes than those with policies. A weak relationship was found between positive attitudes (ES .22) and respondents who hired and supervised employees with disabilities. The relationship between these respondents and negative attitudes was 13.

More positive attitudes were found in responses of businesses with one or more employees with disabilities than in those for businesses with none. The reverse was found for negative attitudes, with more negative attitudes being expressed by businesses that had no employees with disabilities than by those with at least one. The relationships related to this characteristic were moderately strong (ES. 49 and .39, respectively).

Relatively weak relationships were found between attitudes expressed by businesses that are and are not members of chambers of commerce (ES .27 and .20, respectively). However, Chamber members expressed more positive attitudes than nonmembers, and nonmembers expressed more negative attitudes than Chamber members.

## Discussion

The results of this study are in considerable agreement with the findings of previous research on employer characteristics and their practices and attitudes toward employment of persons with disabilities. Not all of the variables included in earlier research projects were used here, but a unique variable, chamber of commerce membership, was included in this study. It was anticipated that businesses that were members of the Chamber might be more sensitive and well-informed about the nature and attributes of employees with disabilities than non-Chamber businesses.

There are more businesses that are Chamber members than nonmembers in the Northwest region of the state; fewer businesses are members in the West Central region. There is no immediately apparent reason for these imbalances but because Chamber membership is a potentially important variable in disability research it might be of interest to determine the sources of these discrepant figures.

In a review of literature, Unger (2002a) found that in research conducted prior to the passage of ADA larger businesses reported more favorable attitudes toward employees with disabilities than smaller ones. No such relationship was found after the passage of ADA. In the current study, a greater number of respondents for smaller than for larger businesses agreed with more items indicating positive attitudes. However, as a group, they also agreed with more items expressing negative attitudes. This finding may not be as contradictory as it seems because of the possibility that respondents for smaller businesses have more direct contact with, and therefore more specific knowledge of, both positive and negative aspects of employment of persons with disabilities. Nevertheless, all businesses in the sample expressed generally favorable attitudes toward employees with disabilities.

Unger (2002a) found that employers in the social services had fewer concerns about hiring persons with disabilities than employers in other businesses. In the current study the service category encompassed all service industries, so these results are not comparable to those of Unger (2002a). No relationship between the service category and favorable or unfavorable attitudes was found.

Over three-fourths of the respondents claimed to have experience in hiring and supervising employees with disabilities in addition to having other responsibilities as senior managers and human resources professionals. Only weak relationships between respondent roles in hiring and supervising and positive and negative attitudes were found. On the other hand, businesses that employed one or more persons with disabilities reported more favorable attitudes than did businesses with no employees with disabilities. Fewer negative attitudes were expressed in businesses with one or more employees with disabilities. These results point to the possibility that experience with employees with disabilities gives employers a positive picture of their job performance and other attributes and that certain widely-perceived barriers to employment of persons with disabilities may not present as many difficulties as perceived by employers prior to experience with their implementation. These results support the findings of Unger (2002a) that respondents with previous experience with workers with disabilities have more favorable attitudes toward them.

Unger et al. (2002) indicated that not much is known concerning how aware human resources professionals are of resources available "to assist employers with identifying and supporting people with disabilities in their workforce" (p. 16). The larger percentage of Chamber members indicating a higher level of awareness of disability issues than non-Chamber members found in the present study may be due in part to direct or indirect efforts of the Chamber to keep businesses informed on this topic and/or to the fact that forward-looking, socially aware businesses tend to become Chamber members.

Sixty-seven percent of the total sample said that they had attempted to hire persons with disabilities in the past, a result reasonably consistent with the 60% reporting that they planned to hire one or more persons with disabilities during the next two years. More Chamber than non-Chamber members had attempted prior hirings; however, 12.8% of Chamber members did anticipate hiring 3 or 4 such persons as compared to only 4.8% of non-Chamber members.

When asked which of the disabilities was most difficult to accommodate in the workplace, respondents in the total sample in this study ranked behavioral, cognitive, and sensory disabilities ahead of medical, neurological, and physical disabilities. This finding is consistent with the reports of Unger (2002a) and Johnson et al. (1988) that employers had more concerns about hiring persons with mental or emotional disabilities than about hiring those with physical disabilities. However, both Gruenhagen (1982) and Marcouiller et al. (1987) found that managers of food service workers rated the performance of mentally retarded workers as satisfactory or above average.

Large majorities of respondents in the current study say their companies have policies for helping workers who are temporarily disabled return to work and for guaranteeing workers with disabilities equal opportunities for career development and advancement. About one-third said their companies had policies that required active recruitment of workers with disabilities and more Chamber than non-Chamber members said their companies had formal policies for hiring persons with disabilities. Unger et al. (2002) found that their respondents strongly agreed that the policies of their organizations committed them to return employees to work who had been temporarily disabled. They were " . . . somewhat less certain that the policies reflected an attempt to attract applicants with disabilities or to provide workers with disabilities opportunities for career development and advancement" (p. 19).

Diksa and Rogers (1996) found that employers with policies toward hiring persons with disabilities were less hesitant about hiring people with disabilities than were employers without such policies. Levy et al. (1991) found that businesses with such policies were more likely to have hired one or more persons with disabilities than were companies without hiring policies.

The current survey contained a series of eight items that requested respondents to evaluate some of the policies and practices of their businesses with regard to employees with disabilities. A majority of respondents agreed that their businesses were doing a good job in policies or practices in six of the items (e.g., matching jobs and abilities for employees with disabilities). Fewer than one-half agreed that their businesses did a good job of recruiting individuals with disabilities or providing disability awareness or sensitivity training to all employees. These results are consistent with the findings of Dixon et al. (2003) who found that about one-half of the companies in their sample who employ persons with disabilities provided training of any kind to their employees about working with individuals with disabilities. Unger et al. (2002) also reported that fewer than one-half of their sample said that disability awareness or sensitivity training was available to all members of their companies. They did find, however, that over three-quarters of their sample had diversity management training programs, with most of these containing a disability component.

Findings of previous studies (Unger & Kregel, 2002) indicate that although employers believe they have both the abilities and resources to accommodate the needs of workers with disabilities, they may not be aware of workplace supports available to assist them in this endeavor. Unger (2000b) reported that "employers are not unwilling or unable to provide workplace accommodations, but they may not (a) be aware that the accommodation need exists, (b) know how to best assist individuals with disabilities in identifying and developing workplace accommodations, and (c) be able to formulate some type of workplace accommodations that might address the individual's needs" (p. 48).

She concluded that despite these problems, employers are able and want to provide workplace accommodations for workers with disabilities by utilizing existing employer resources.

The results of this study are in general agreement with these findings, showing that more than 50% of the respondents had modified existing facilities, restructured job requirements, and/or modified work schedules to accommodate workers with disabilities. These accommodations are those that appear to require few or no resources beyond those existing in the workplace and that have minimal, if any, additional cost. Findings of other investigators (Dixon et al., 2003) showed that more than half of the companies they interviewed said that most accommodations cost less than \$500 and about one-fourth said that the cost was less than \$100. In addition, they cited a report by the Job Accommodation Network (JAN) that indicated that for every dollar spent on accommodations a business received 28 dollars in benefits. A smaller percentage (37.8%) of companies in the present study reported having modified equipment or devices, and a much lower percentage (12.5%) of respondents had modified examinations or training materials or provided readers or interpreters accommodations that might well involve external resources or greater cost or for which there is less demand. The general lack of familiarity of companies in the present study with knowledge of programs or agencies related to hiring and supporting employees with disabilities bears out the earlier finding that employers may not have information needed for optimal accommodation of employees with disabilities.

In a related study, Loprest and Magg (2001) asked persons with disabilities about the kinds of workplace accommodations they needed in order to be effectively employed. Accommodations perceived as being needed by the highest percentages of their survey population were those most likely to be made available through use of existing resources (e.g., accessible parking, ramps, or handrails). Accommodations that involve higher costs (technical devices, readers/interpreters) were mentioned by much smaller percentages of respondents.

Unger et al. (2002) found that human resource professionals were very familiar with agencies or programs that make contact with businesses (e.g., vocational rehabilitation and supported employment) but less familiar with agencies or programs that give technical assistance at a greater remove to businesses in dealing with persons with disabilities. Approximately 50% or more of the respondents in the current survey said they knew nothing about 10 of the agencies or programs listed. Approximately 50% or more of the respondents said they knew some or a great deal about 4 programs: Welfare to Work, School-to-Work, Florida Division of Rehabilitation, and Department of Veteran Affairs.

Attitudinal barriers that may keep people with disabilities from being employed have been the subject of a number of studies. Unger (2000a) found conflicting results in the studies she reviewed. In general, studies whose respondents had previous experience in supervising or managing employees with disabilities were less concerned about hiring them and had more favorable impressions of workers with disabilities. Unger et al. (2002) found that of several aspects related to hiring persons with disabilities, human resources professionals were most concerned about coworkers' perceptions of the work performance of workers with disabilities and the provision of accommodations for them. More recently, Dixon et al. (2003) found that none of the barriers to employment they investigated were endorsed by more than a third of their respondents. In the current study, items dealing with positively stated attributes (e.g., employees with disabilities are dependable workers) were, with few exceptions, endorsed by two-thirds or more of the respondents. Neutral responses rarely exceeded 25%. Negatively stated items (employees with disabilities require accommodations whose costs are too great) were rarely endorsed by more than 10% of the respondents, but the percentage of neutral responses for each of these items was approximately 40%.

A small number of respondents added unsolicited comments to various items throughout the survey. The content of these comments ranged from explanatory:

- *"Our business . . . requires strong, healthy people due to the amount of physical activity—this limits our ability to hire those with disabilities."*
- to defensive comments:
- *" . . . we do not consider disability to be 'a disability—everyone is equal."*
- *"My company would readily hire disabled persons . . . "*
- *"I disagree with the way these questions are slanted."*

CITES project staff also received several phone calls from sample members. In addition to being simply information-gathering calls, some of these calls had content similar to that found in the survey comments described above.

Relationships between selected business characteristics and employer perceptions of employees with disabilities were studied by separately summing survey items that indicated positive and negative attitudes toward workers with disabilities and relating these sums to the business characteristics. The resulting effect sizes quantified the strength of relationships. Effect sizes were strongest between positive attitudes and both smaller businesses and businesses with formal policies for hiring persons with disabilities. They indicated less strong, though noteworthy, relationships between negative attitudes and smaller businesses. Effect sizes between negative attitudes and businesses with formal hiring policies were weaker but still indicative of a real effect.

Moderately large effect sizes were found for relationships between the number of workers employed and both positive and negative attitudes. The finding that businesses with one or more employees with disabilities had more positive attitudes and weaker negative attitudes than those with none is reinforced by these measures. Effect sizes between the principal activity of the business and whether the survey respondent was responsible for hiring or supervising workers with disabilities were weak, as were those between attitudes and chamber of commerce membership. However, in view of other results of this study, this last characteristic seems to be worthy of further study.

## Section Four: Conclusions

The overall results of this survey present generally a positive picture of the practices, policies, and attitudes of Florida's employers toward workers with disabilities. The low response rates in this study and many others found in the literature, however, raise the possibility that findings are biased in the sense that non-responders may have more negative attitudes and less favorable policies than responders. Three general findings are particularly noteworthy: differences between Chamber and non-Chamber groups, employer's lack of awareness of disability issues and resources, and employer attitudes toward individuals with disabilities.

### Chamber vs. Non-Chamber Groups

Many differences between Chamber and non-Chamber groups indicate that the Chamber group is more sensitive to the needs of disabled workers and possibly to the advantages of hiring them. Chamber members appeared to have a greater level of awareness of disability issues (including more familiarity with disability programs and services) and have more experience dealing with employees with disabilities (more Chamber businesses had formal disability hiring policies and have made accommodations for employees with disabilities).

### Lack of Awareness about Disability

A major finding of the study was the lack of knowledge among employers, both about disability issues and the disability resources available to businesses. A stunning *two-thirds* of employers were found to be not highly aware of disability issues; half have no formal policy for hiring individuals with disabilities; only 25% feel they are recruiting well; and only 35% have disability training programs. Moreover, the majority of employers showed a lack of familiarity with agencies and programs related to individuals with disabilities (especially those that provide financial assistance).

### Attitudes Towards Employees with Disabilities

The study also found that businesses employing individuals with disabilities had more positive attitudes towards them. Businesses with formal disability policies also tended to have more positive attitudes towards individuals with disabilities. Conversely, businesses with no employees with disabilities and businesses with no formal disability policies tended to have more negative attitudes toward individuals with disabilities.



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