



ADA Live! Episode 120: Federal Government Schedule A Program and Hiring Workers with Disabilities

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Sandy Williams: Hi, I'm Sandy Williams.

Laura Taylor: Hi, I'm Laura Taylor and you're listening to ADA Live!

4 Wheel City: Yo. All right. Let's roll. Let's go.

Pamela Williamson:

Hello everyone. On behalf of the Southeast ADA Center, the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University, and the ADA National Network. Welcome to ADA Live! I'm Pam Williamson, the assistant director of the Southeast ADA Center. Listening audience, if you have any questions about the Americans with Disabilities Act or ADA, you can use the online form anytime at adalive.org, or you may call the Southeast ADA Center at 404-541-9001. All calls are free and confidential.

In this episode of ADA Live!, we discuss the federal government program that is in place to recruit and hire employees with disabilities. This is known as the Schedule A Hiring Authority, and this program allows federal agencies to hire qualified employees with disabilities. Schedule A Hiring applies to all federal positions, from clerical staff to attorneys. Our guests today come to us from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, also known as the CDC. They're located in Atlanta, Georgia.

Our guests are Laura Taylor, the CDC Disability Program Manager within the Office of Equal Employment Opportunity and Workplace Equity's Affirmative Employment Program Team, and Sandy Williams Supervisory Human Resources Specialist and the CDC Selective Placement Coordinator. Laura and Sandy, welcome to the show.

Laura Taylor:

Hello.

Sandy Williams:

Thank you. Good morning, everyone.

Pam Williamson:

I've got a question to get us started here. According to the information published in May 2023 by the General Services Administration, more than 4 million Americans, including more than 2.1 million federal civilian employees, work for our federal government, both at home and overseas. Because the federal government is the country's largest employer, it must be an example of employment policies and best practices that promote America's ideal of equal opportunity for everyone, including workers with disabilities.

Laura and Sandy, we thank you for being our guests on the podcast today, and you're here to talk about the non-competitive federal government hiring of people with disabilities. Laura, what is Schedule A and why was it created?

Laura Taylor:

Well, Pam, historically, there has been underrepresentation of persons with disabilities employed in the federal government. There were government regulations and executive orders that have been established to promote the hiring and retention of individuals with disabilities, and they charged the federal government to be a model employer with respect to the employment of individuals with disabilities. Now, the Schedule A Hiring Authority, it is a mechanism for hiring persons with disabilities.

The term Schedule A, it's just a short way of describing the federal law found under 5 CFR, or Code of Federal Regulations, 213.3102(u). It is a non-competitive hiring authority that gives federal agencies an option to forego the typical application process and hire individuals with disabilities directly into the workforce. This is a potentially quicker, more streamlined hiring path. Individuals that are hired under Schedule A, they receive what's called an accepted service appointment to a position that is typically in the competitive service.

If individuals are interested in working for the federal government and they have an intellectual, severe physical or psychiatric disability, they can consider applying under Schedule A. It is designed to remove barriers and increase employment opportunities for these individuals.

Pam Williamson:

Wow, that is a lot of excellent information in a short amount of time. Let's talk a little bit more about what you do, because you have a unique position at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Can you tell us more about it?

Laura Taylor:

Sure, Pam. Thank you. I am the CDC Disability Program Manager within the Office of Equal Employment Opportunity Workplace Equity's Affirmative Employment Program Team. Now, I know that's a mouthful. In accordance with federal regulations, federal agencies are required to have special emphasis programs and special emphasis program managers. The disability program manager, or what we call DPM for short, is one of these required roles.

As the disability program manager, my role is to help agency management meet its affirmative employment responsibilities to ensure employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. I serve as a resource for employees, managers, and leaders within CDC and the community at large. I work to increase awareness, provide training, build partnerships, and help to promote equal opportunity, also to identify and eliminate discriminatory practices and policies.

One of our major focuses is ensuring, like you mentioned earlier, that we are a model employer for people with disabilities creating a welcoming and accessible environment.

Pam Williamson:

Well, Laura, that's very encouraging. I'm so glad to know that the CDC and federal government has disability program managers such as yourself in place to be able to look at these issues. Now, I know we have one of your colleagues on the line with us today. Sandy, what is your role at CDC?

Sandy Williams:

I am Sandy Williams. I am the CDC Selective Placement Program Coordinator and Supervisory Human Resource Specialist and Special Hirings Program Team Chief within the Human Resources Office at the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. I oversee the administration of the special hirings programs, which are management programs established to promote equal opportunity in the hiring and advancement of underrepresented groups, such as Schedule A persons with disabilities programs and veterans programs.

In addition, I provide guidance to employees, leadership, and work in partnership with Laura and the EEO office facilitating forums to inform and educate the CDC community on the persons with disabilities programs.

Pam Williamson:

Thank you, Sandy, for explaining more about what you do. Can you now tell me what steps a person with a disability must take to use a Schedule A to get a federal job?

Sandy Williams:

Pam, this is a great question. First, the individual should create a USAJOBS account, then prepare their application materials. Start with a resume that provides thorough and accurate details that describes their abilities and qualifications. The USAJOBS website has a template for resumes called Resume Builder that can be used to create a resume. This guides the individuals through the process of building a federal resume with the necessary information. Please note, a federal resume tends to be longer and more detailed than a private sector resume.

Individuals can tailor their resume to demonstrate how their skills match the job qualifications listed in the vacancy announcement of the position they are seeking. As an alternative, individuals can upload an existing resume directly onto USAJOBS. Individuals may need to prepare other documents as required by the job vacancy, such as a cover letter or transcripts from their high school or college. For some positions, they may need to complete an occupational questionnaire, which is a series of yes, no and/or multiple choice questions.

This helps the agency determine whether an applicant has the necessary skills and experience for the position. It is important to read job announcements carefully. Applications will be considered incomplete if all of the required documentation or any required questionnaires are not submitted or completed. An incomplete application would not be accepted for consideration. Next, the individual needs to obtain their Schedule A documentation.

To apply using Schedule A, they would need to submit documentation that proves they have an intellectual, severe physical or psychiatric disability. The good news is that the Office of Personnel Management has extended the list to 99 disabilities which qualify for Schedule A. The documentation is referred to as proof of disability documentation or a Schedule A letter. This documentation simply lets the agency know that the individual is eligible to apply using the Schedule A Hiring Authority. It is advisable to have this letter ready before the individual applies under Schedule A.

The individual can request this documentation from their doctor, a licensed medical professional, a licensed rehabilitation professional, or any federal, state, District of Columbia or US territory agency that issues or provides disability benefit. The proof of disability documentation needs to specify that the individual is eligible to apply using Schedule A. It does not need to detail their specific disability, medical history, or need for accommodation. Please be aware that some agencies may request additional documentation as proof of disability.

Once the individual completes their resume and supporting documents, they are ready to apply for the job. They may start by applying for the position online through the USAJOBS website or the specific federal agency's website. They should do this as soon as they find a position for which they are interested in applying. Some agencies will only accept a limited number of applications. Also, every job posting will only accept applications for a specific amount of time, usually called a closing date. Therefore, it is important that individuals apply as quickly as possible.

When individuals apply online, make sure to follow the application instructions in the job posting. In addition, CDC and federal agencies are able to review Schedule A applicants when individuals upload their resume in the federal US jobs system located at USAJOBS and make their resume searchable. By making the resume searchable, the resume can be viewed by all federal agencies in the agency talent portal which is linked to USAJOBS.

Pam Williamson:

Wow, that's a lot of information, but I think we can bullet down to three things. Let me know if I'm right here. First of all, a person should go to usajobs.gov. Secondly, either upload a resume or use the Resume Builder that is on USAJOBS to make sure that it's thorough and has the details needed. And then third, provide the required disability documentation. Does that sound about right?

Sandy Williams:

That sounds about right.

Pam Williamson:

All right, very good. Well, Laura, we're going to turn it back to you because we know the federal government wants more people with disabilities in federal jobs and they especially want more representation from people with these targeted disabilities. Tell us more. What are targeted disabilities?

Laura Taylor:

Okay, Pam. Targeted disabilities generally are the most severe forms of disabilities, and they're listed on the government standard Form 256 for self-identification of disability, or it's sometimes called SF 256. Now, this form can be found on the opm.gov site. And as Sandy mentioned, the list of disabilities has extended to 99 types on the form.

Some of the listed targeted disabilities are developmental disabilities such as autism spectrum disorder, traumatic brain injury, blindness or serious difficulty seeing even when you're wearing glasses, intellectual disabilities, significant psychiatric disorders, and for example, that could be bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, post-traumatic stress disorder or PTSD, or major depression, just to name a few.

Federal agencies must adopt employment goals for individuals with disabilities and individuals with targeted disabilities and meet a number of other requirements that are designed to improve the recruitment, hiring, retention, and advancement of individuals with disabilities in the federal workforce. It actually calls for a 12% representation of people with disabilities in the federal workforce. And as part of that 12%, it calls for 2% representation of individuals with targeted disabilities.

Pam Williamson:

Laura, thanks so much for explaining targeted disability. I had no idea it was so broad, so I'm really glad to hear that the federal government is looking at this in such a broad way. We appreciate the information that Laura and Sandy have provided at this time. ADA Live! listening audience, if you have questions about this topic or any other ADA Live! topic, you can submit your questions online at www.adalive.org or call the Southeast ADA

Center at 404-541-9001. And now a word from this episode sponsor, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, also known as CDC.

Voice-Over:

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CDC, a major operating component of the Department of Health and Human Services, is the nation's leading science-based, data-driven service organization that protects the public's health. For more than 75 years, they have put science into action to help children stay healthy so they can grow and learn, to help families, businesses and communities fight disease and stay strong, and to protect the public's health.

CDC offers exciting and dynamic opportunities in public health with global impact. Examine how you can use your talent, training, and passion to help CDC continue as the world's premier public health organization. Please visit www.cdc.gov for more information.

Pam Williamson:

Welcome back, everyone. I'm Pam Williamson with the Southeast ADA Center. Our guests are Laura Taylor and Sandy Williams with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, also known as CDC, located in Atlanta, Georgia. We have been talking about the federal government Schedule A hiring program as a faster way to hire qualified workers with disabilities. We know Schedule A is non-competitive, but does submitting a job application under schedule a guarantee that a person with a disability will get the job?

Sandy Williams:

Pam, this is Sandy Williams. No. Applying under Schedule A does not guarantee the applicant will be given a position or selected for a position. Applying under Schedule A can be a great way to get a federal job, but individuals still must qualify for the position and compete with other eligible applicants. Federal agencies hire people using many options, so applying under Schedule A does not guarantee an individual a job.

Pam Williamson:

Thank you, Sandy, for explaining that information. Now, Laura, you told us that people with disabilities who want to apply for federal jobs under Schedule A should apply on the USAJOBS website. To have an equal opportunity to apply, some applicants will need accommodations or modifications to the application process because of their disability. How does a person with a disability request an accommodation during the application process?

Laura Taylor:

Pam, there are no specific or magic words a person with a disability must use to request an accommodation during the application process. An applicant with a disability may make a simple verbal or written statement or someone else might make a request on their behalf. That could be someone such as a family member, a friend, a health professional, or other representative to indicate that they're seeking a change or an adjustment in any part of the application or hiring process in order to be considered for a job because of a medical condition.

Also, there is not a requirement to cite the regulations or say the Americans with Disabilities Act or ADA or use the phrase reasonable accommodation. A request for accommodation can be made to an HR staff person, the hiring manager, the EEO Office or the Equal Employment Opportunity Office, the disability program manager, the selective placement program coordinator, the reasonable accommodation office, or individuals designated by an agency to receive requests or oversee the reasonable accommodation process.

Also, within CDC job announcements on USAJOBS, there is a CDC help desk number and an email that can also be utilized. That number is CDC help desk phone number 770-488-1725, or you can email A as in hotel, R as in Romeo, C as in Charlie, and S as in Sierra @cdc.gov. Examples of an applicant request for a reasonable accommodation are assistance with filling out the job application, requesting a sign language interpreter to assist during the interview process, a reader to assist with a written exam. They may even need a specific type of job schedule if selected for the position.

There are numerous types of accommodations that individuals with disabilities can request. I always say, when in doubt, ask. Feel free to reach out to the agency and ask questions. Sometimes applicants are not aware they may need a reasonable accommodation until they have more information about the job, its requirements, and the work environment. Some applicants choose to inform an employer during the application process after they better understand the job and its requirements, while others, they choose to wait until they have a job offer.

Pam Williamson:

Really it comes down to if you think you need an accommodation, ask, and there are multiple ways to do that. Is that accurate?

Laura Taylor:

Absolutely. That is accurate.

Pam Williamson:

Wonderful, wonderful. Well, Sandy, let's turn back to you for a moment. Many jobs require new employees to work under a policy called a probationary period. This is a trial for a new employee, usually one to six months. Do employees hired under Schedule A have a probationary period.

Sandy Williams:

That's an excellent question, Pam. Employees hired under Schedule A, we refer to it as a trial period and not a probationary period. Such individuals may qualify for conversion to permanent status after two years of satisfactory service. The trial allows the hiring manager to evaluate a new employee's performance and conduct to determine whether their continued employment is in the best interest of the individual and the agency.

Also, I would like to add, agencies are strongly encouraged to make permanent appointments unless there is a compelling reason to do otherwise. However, the Schedule A appointing authority can be used to make a temporary appointment or a time

limited appointment when the duties of the position do not require it to be filled on a permanent basis.

Pam Williamson:

Thank you, Sandy, for explaining more about the probationary period. We've actually gone over a lot of information in a short amount of time today. Where can our listeners go to learn more about Schedule A?

Laura Taylor:

Pam, there are a lot of different resources and places where people can go to learn more about Schedule A. You can look at the US Office of Personnel Management Federal Hiring Authority Resource Center. You can also read about Schedule A posted in the resources section of the Workforce Recruitment Program managed by the US Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy and the US Department of Defense website, which is www.wrp.gov.

I mentioned OPM, but there's also a link that's called getting a job on opm.gov or go to USAJOBS individuals with disability section. And then last, EEOC also has a posting. And when I say EEOC, I mean the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has a posting called the ABCs of Schedule A on their website as well.

Pam Williamson:

Well, that is a lot of great information, and we will have these and other resources available on a resource sheet that accompanies the program. Now, Laura and Sandy, you've talked with us about Schedule A employment program, and we thank you for that. Do you have any final thoughts to share with us today?

Sandy Williams:

Pam, this is Sandy, and thank you for having Laura and myself this morning. I would like to add that CDC uses numerous hiring flexibilities, including Schedule A, to hire persons with disabilities and provide opportunities for career advancement. We encourage

individuals interested in working for the federal government to use the resources shared today to obtain information about the opportunities that are available.

Laura Taylor:

Pam, this is Laura Taylor. In closing, I'd like to say that although there are many federal regulations that require federal agencies to improve efforts in the recruitment, hiring, advancement, and retention of individuals with disabilities, this work is important not only because of regulatory requirements, it is important because it is the right thing to do.

As the CDC's Disability Program Manager, I am committed to fostering a culture of disability inclusion and recognize the value that people with disabilities bring to our team and dedicated to ensuring equal opportunities for all. I want to thank you for having Sandy and I here with you today.

Pam Williamson:

Well, Laura and Sandy, we thank you for being with us today and sharing all of this information about Schedule A. Now, listeners, we thank you for joining us for this episode where we learned more about the Schedule A Hiring Authority, which is the federal government's program for hiring workers with disabilities. You can access all ADA Live! episodes with archived audio, accessible transcripts and resources on our website at adalive.org, adalive.org.

You may also listen to the SoundCloud ADA Live! channel at soundcloud.com/adalive and download ADA Live! to your mobile device in your podcast app by searching for ADA Live! If you have questions about the Americans with Disabilities Act, we encourage you to use the online form anytime at adalive.org or contact your regional ADA Center at 1-800-949-4232. All calls are free and confidential.

ADA Live! is a program of the Southeast ADA Center, the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University, and a collaboration with the Disability Inclusive Employment Policy Rehabilitation Research and Training Center. Our producer is Celestia Ohrazda with

Cheri Hoffman, Mary Morder, Marsha Schwanke, Chase Coleman and Barry Whaley. Our music is from 4 Wheel City, The Movement for Improvement.

In recognition of the 50th anniversary of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Southeast ADA Center has a virtual interview series featuring leaders of the disability rights movement who advance the calls of equal rights through their tireless work. Listen and learn more at the series website, section504at50.org. We also invite you to tune in to our companion podcast, Disability Rights Today, for an in-depth discussion on important court cases that shaped disability rights and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Learn more and listen at disabilityrightstoday.org. We'll see you on the next episode.

4 Wheel City:

They watching. They don't want us be part of the city, man. They put all these steps, man. All these curbs we can't get over. All these inaccessible stores. 4 Wheel City. They don't want us here. We'll survive and we're going to make our own place. Our own world. The 4 Wheel City-

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