

Information Center for Accessibility Needs (*iCAN*)

September 2010

Background and Objectives

- ▶ **Workforce of Tomorrow Initiative recommended the develop of an Information Center for Accessibility Needs to streamline solutions and assistance for employees with disabilities.**
- ▶ **The Internal Revenue Service has a number of disability program support components, many of which are considered to be best practices within the federal government. These components are distributed across the organization, creating challenges for managers and employees needing disability-related support.**
- ▶ **The AWSS Special Projects Office conducted focus groups to:**
 - Find out what common problems exist for employees who are disabled
 - Find out how these problems have been addressed
 - Increase employee awareness of the site and its potential
 - Gather usability/accessibility concerns
 - Disabilities covered: blind, low vision, deaf, hard of hearing, mobility impairment, loss of limbs, psychological, and cognitive

Detailed Findings – Finding Disability Information

- ▶ **Employees generally go to their managers when they have any need and do not generally try to find information themselves (“I wish I didn’t have to go through my manager to get my problems solved”)**
- ▶ **Many managers did not know what reasonable accommodation was until they received an employee with a disability**
- ▶ **Managers find it time consuming and often confusing to find the right reasonable accommodation process and other disability-related help (“Took hours to find up to date information on the Reasonable Accommodation process because the information was scattered in different places”)**
- ▶ **Real Estate gets many tickets about making buildings more accessible; however, it often takes a long time to make these changes and the changes are often expensive**
- ▶ **How to/ where to get Orientation & Mobility stuff that applies to work site. i.e., --how to get to the cafeteria, break room, rest rooms, etc.**
- ▶ **Profile of IRS building –especially for individuals who are going to a new locality.**

Detailed Findings – Other Noteworthy Feedback

- ▶ **Safety for employees with disabilities, particularly during emergencies, was a recurring theme among managers and employees**
- ▶ **Accommodating employees during travel was raised during several sessions**
- ▶ **Building accessibility and navigation were raised as problems in several locations**
- ▶ **Nightshift employees do not always have the same level of support available**
- ▶ **Employees who become disabled on the job need help with transitioning**
- ▶ **Managers are not always clear what conditions qualify as a disability**
- ▶ **Policies do not exist for wheelchairs and scooters. Employees are embarrassed by not being able to navigate work spaces and cubicle layouts in order to get back and forth to their desks.**

Observations and Conclusions

- ▶ **Managers and employees will use a Web site if it is user friendly; however, a live person is needed when the online help does not solve the problem; an escalation process is needed**
- ▶ **Managers and employees were enthusiastic about using discussion boards to solve problems across the enterprise with both groups expressing little or no concern about posting or responding to questions**
- ▶ **Employees would like to be empowered to resolve their own problems using a Web site like iCAN**
- ▶ **Some employees have difficulty bringing requests to their manager because the manager is insensitive to their disability and/or thinks they are just trying to get out of doing work**
- ▶ **Managers need a tool to save them time and to get issues resolved quickly so their employees can be fully engaged and productive**

Debi Babcock
Debra.e.babcock@irs.gov
(202) 622-8323