**Workforce Recruitment Program: Employer Webinar Transcript**

**January 29, 2020**

**Frances Vhay:** Hello everyone and welcome to our Workforce Recruitment Program Federal Employer webinar. We are so glad to have you. My name is Frances Vhay and I am here with Lauren Karas, we manage the program here in Office of Disability Employment Policy at U.S. Department of Labor.

**Lauren Karas:** Thank you, Frances. Hello everyone. We are going to start with an overview of the WRP and I will be covering that section and Frances will be discussing strategies for how to best utilize WRP at your agencies and then she will provide an overview of the WRP website and provide a demonstration for you. And then it will turn back to me and I will go over some success stories and next steps and then we will wrap it up with a Q&A presentation.

So, to start off what is the Workforce Recruitment Program? It's a free recruitment and referral program that connects current college students, graduate students, recent graduates who have disabilities to federal employers such as yourselves and these college students and recent grads are eager to demonstrate their skills and abilities in the workplace through summer or permanent employment.

The program is actually a jointly managed program between us at the Office of Disability Employment Policy here at the Department of Labor in Washington, D.C. In collaboration with the Department of Defense, the program itself has been around for a while. It actually started in the 1970s by the Department of the Navy and was expanded to be a federal wide program in 1995. We have been a pretty long-standing program in federal government.

So, what does the database offer you as an employer? So, as I mentioned the database is comprised of college students and recent graduates who are looking for summer or permanent employment, all of the candidates are schedule A eligible which means they can be hired under the schedule hiring authority and we will get into more detail about how you can utilize schedule A later on in the presentation. Candidates are available nationwide and in a wide variety of career fields. We will give a breakdown of some of the areas of expertise and skill sets that our candidates possess later on. You get direct access to candidate information which includes a resume and transcripts, year-round. This information is posted on an annual basis each December so as you may be aware we launched our database recently in mid-December of 2019.

And we also just wanted to note that for any interns that you bring on with WRP or interns that you hire, you can utilize the Computer Electronic Accommodations Program or CAP which is a program within DOD and they will help provide any electronic equipment that WRP interns may need for the duration of their internship. We thought it would be helpful to orient you all to how our overall process works. And how WRP operates on the annual schedule. Students and recent graduates apply online, all of our processes are done utilizing the WRP website. They apply online in the fall and they work with their disability and career services offices during the fall semester to help get ready and prepared and get their application materials in the WRP database in the fall. So then, this past fall we had trained volunteer recruiters from federal agencies remotely interview the candidates at the various college campuses during October and November. Then essentially we take all this information and publish it in a database every December. This database is available to you as federal employers on a year-round basis, you can register any time. The database is refreshed annually so the database you are currently seeing will be active for one year and then we will publish a new one the following December.

So, why utilize WRP, how can it help you and how can it work for you? As federal employers? First and foremost we like to think that by utilizing the WRP you can increase your talent pool and diversify your workforce by hiring qualified candidates with disabilities. You can also fill a wide range of positions like I mentioned on the previous slide, these candidates represent a wide range of skill sets so we have stem students, business students, law students, healthcare professionals, etc. We do have everyone from first semester freshman all the way through to your doctoral candidates and those candidates that have recently obtained a postsecondary degree of some sort and are eager to begin their federal careers and would be looking for permanent positions as well. And the last point here, by hiring a WRP intern or candidate for your agencies, you are hoping to contribute to your agency's overall future and bringing new talent into the federal workforce.

Currently we have over 1860 students in the database from 325 schools, nationwide. We do have a large number of veterans, a little bit more than 10% of our database is actually comprised of veterans with disabilities. As you can see, we have stem majors, healthcare professionals, law students, doctoral candidates, etc. You can really find a wide variety of candidates through our database with the skill sets that your agency needs in the positions they are looking to fill. With that, I am going to turn it over to Frances and she is going to get into some strategies for how to best use WRP at your respective agencies. Take it away.

**Frances Vhay:** Thanks, the first strategy we want to mention is engaging your agency management and leadership. We think this is a critical one, we have seen in many cases when agencies are able to make leadership aware of WRP and make sure they have an understanding of the program and encourage its use, it's really just helps spread the word about WRP throughout the agency. Leadership by an is a key, if you are a leader in your agency or can speak with leaders in your agency about the program, that can make a big difference in spreading the word.

Also, establishing a regular outreach strategy using existing resources within your agency is important. So that might be something like a newsletter or HR email that goes out regularly and webpages you have related to disability or hiring in the federal government, making sure WRP is present on those. If there is a relevant press release or other information, we certainly recommend making sure that you discuss WRP on your agency internal website and things like that. Honestly we find repetition and making sure it is not just brought up once but got up frequently in your hiring resources, it is a great way to spread the word about the WRP. Another option we want to mention is developing and utilizing a centralized fund or WRP hires. If it's in line with your agency strategy for other summer student programs, it can be helpful if you are able to establish a fund, a small fund, that is specifically for WRP interns that are brought on. Hiring for permanent positions, that is something agencies should have the budget for in general. That is definitely something to consider. If you are in a position to be able to do that, we want to mention that for the Department of Defense and FDIC, they currently do have a centralized fund and if you are in one of those agencies, that is a resource that you do have access to. But also that is not the only way you can bring on candidates.

Obviously even centralized funds have limits and so we do continue to encourage you to use other strategies, as well. If you have a centralized fund or not there are a lot of different ways to bring on participants, especially if you have openings for permanent positions in your agency. And can consider a WRP candidate to fill some of those roles. And this is one of our favorites. Communicating success stories throughout your agency. If you are able to bring on a WRP candidate and if you can profile them or open to having their stories shared, it is a great way to promote WRP and demonstrate to others in your agency that it is effective. We also think it's important to make sure you are talking about success stories, not just from a Canada perspective but the employer's perspective.

One agency we know that does this successfully is the defense logistics agency. They will do profiles of candidates in their line, newsletter, a series of YouTube videos about the advantages of using the WRP and so this might be a couple ideas that can be a great resource for you and your agency. The other thing we want to emphasize is please be sure to share your success stories with us here at the Department of Labor. And if there are ways we can help in spreading the word or getting the word out about a success story at your agency that is related to WRP, please let us know. That is one area where we are focusing effort this year is trying to learn about and share new success stories of the program because we hear a lot about them in different agencies but sometimes there may not be a formal story or way the word is getting out.

So, some additional strategies to consider is to incorporate the WRP into your agency recruiting and hiring strategy. Just making sure if you have a series of HR trainings or procedures, setting goals for the year, particularly hiring goals around hiring people with disabilities or other diverse groups, making a golfer saying our agency would like to bring on X number of candidates this year, could be a great way to set and spur rations and make sure those involved in hiring at the agency are aware of that goal and working towards it. We really recommend seeking out managers who would benefit from staff support, either in the summer or other times of your or those who you know are looking to fill a permanent position. And making sure they are aware of WRP and if you are involved in hiring, working with them to consider candidates or doing searches on the website.

We really recommend concentrating on mission critical areas for both internship and permanent positions. Our candidates are highly qualified, and we have a lot of recent graduates and are prepared for substantial and meaningful work. We recommend you think critically the agency need support. This might seem like obvious ones but our candidates went through the interview process, we highly recommend conducting interviews before bringing them on while they did the interview to do the database portion, they didn't do it for a specific position. We want to make sure the candidates you are looking at are a good fit for the specific position or role within the agency. We wanted to touch on the schedule A hiring authority. -- It's a hiring authority that can be used to bring on individuals with disabilities into federal government positions. Positions where you are using it where you don't need to be publicly posted although they can be.

You should make sure that you are following the schedule A regulations, we have a link with more information about that from the EEOC at the bottom of the page. It is called the ABCs of schedule a and a resource that, there are a few different versions, one for hiring managers, one for disability program managers, one for HR professionals, it is really useful to take a look at that if you have not. And we did just also want to mention that you can utilize the WRP with other hiring authorities.

As Lauren mentioned if you are bringing on a veteran with a disability that is in the database, you might be able to use of veterans hiring authority or preference and then you could also reach out to candidates and recommend that they apply to a pathway position through USA jobs so you could also reach out to a candidate you think would be a good fit and say you should consider looking at this link and apply through the platform. In terms of how to use schedule A with WRP, the way that we generally recommend is managers have an open position or internship opportunity, any federal employee can search the database for schedule A eligible candidates.

So prior to doing that, managers should know what competencies and qualifications the candidate they are looking for should have. And they should make sure they are speaking about the essential functions of the position. They should then either convey that to someone or do the search themselves.

The three scenarios we usually see in terms of using the database are either a hiring manager is conducting the search themselves, they may have asked another staff person or federal employee to do that search on their behalf and then provide them with some resumes to review. Or it might be human resources staff, EEO staff, Selective Placement Coordinator or disability program manager that is conducting those searches. We see all types of federal employees utilizing the database but those are the most common scenario. So, once the search has been conducted, before you begin interview or hiring process, make sure you are following your agency's procedures in that regard.

When you reach out to the individual about having an interview, you can just reach out to them directly, the candidates have applications and resumes which will show you in a little bit in the system and it will have their contact information including an email, phone number, that is available to them and so you can reach out to them directly and let them know you would like to interview them for a particular position. Once you have done the interview process, you are prepared to make a job offer, make sure you are coordinator with the agency that you are following those procedures. We want to remind you all that each agency is responsible for the hiring process just like any other higher. That is done at your own agency level.

We hear anecdotally, quite frequently about folks that have gotten several opportunities through the WRP and employers don't always report that information to us. While I am sure a lot of you report, if you do not or having trouble with that, please let us know we are happy to coach you through the process and make sure the hire has been accounted for the program. In terms of how you can use the website, again anyone with a federal email address can register for an account in the database. You can search on a wide variety of criteria including things like degrees, majors, job focus, location preference, keywords and technical skills, it is really straightforward to view later and report hires.

If you register by going to WRP.gov, we are going to be demonstrating that for you here. One thing we are excited to be announcing as we have a new website, we just launched this to federal employers in December so it is Brand new, new look and feel and enhanced functionality for our users. I do want to mention that the recommended browser for the new website, Google Chrome and Firefox Microsoft edge usually works as well. One thing I will say is you have some compatibility issues if you are using Internet Explorer. If you have a different browser available to you, we highly recommend using a different browser, you will get a notice if you try to put the website up in Internet Explorer, a different browser would be preferred, we want to make sure we are emphasizing that so that you are able to use the website to its fullest extent and the least amount of interruption.

Again, we really recommend reporting your hires to us and we wanted to leave it on that note. And now I'm going to turn it back over to Lauren to talk about a few of our WRP success stories.

**Lauren Karas:** Thanks, Frances. You will see on this slide, our first featured success story is Sarah Fernandez. She was a law school graduate or is a law school graduate, the University of its. School of Law. She had the opportunity to intern at the national Council of disability, she was then offered a full-time position as the EEOC and she is currently an equal opportunity specialist at DHS. We chose Sarah to highlight the diversity of candidates that we have in our database, she is a law student. She had a couple opportunities through WRP, has some internships and was able to transition to full time employment. And is really blossoming in her career.

Our next success story is Vivian. Vivian obtained a Masters from the University of Maryland University College. She participated in the WRP over four different summers, actually. She had the opportunity to intern at a couple of different places for two summers, she interned with the Washington headquarters service at the Department of Defense. And then also interned with the Defense logistics agency. Two other summers. So currently, she was able to transition from full-time employment with the Defense logistics agency and worked in their multimedia office.

For those of you who may not be aware, I myself am a WRP success story. I like Vivian had the opportunity to intern at a couple of different places over two summers with WRP, one at the Department of Labor and at the Department of Veterans Affairs and I was fortunate enough to transition to a full-time permanent position with the VA after I completed an internship with them, I worked in the EEO and HR offices before transitioning over to Department of Labor and coming to help manage the workforce recruitment program, it has been a real honor and privilege for me to be able to help manage the program and help other candidates with disabilities into federal service. It is near and dear to my heart.

We wanted to take a little bit of time and talk through college recruitment and our processes and what that looks like. We are always looking for more schools to participate in the WRP and our school registration will open this April. So, if you have suggestions for universities that you would like to see participate in WRP that don't already do or don't know about it, please email us at the email address on the screen, if you have a name of the person at the University, typically someone in disability or career services, it doesn't necessarily have to be in one of those offices, please email us with that information and we would be happy to put them on our email list for when registration opens in April.

We wanted to wrap up this presentation talking a little bit about ADA 30. This month the Office of Disability Employment Policy launched a year-long celebration of the 30th anniversary of the Americans with disabilities act. We are really excited about this, it will be a year-long celebration and even though the actual anniversary is in July, there have been events throughout the year and it is going to tie into national disability employment awareness month. The theme for this celebration is increasing access and opportunity. We do have a webpage on our website, specifically devoted to talking about ADA 30, it is still, some stuff is being added but what will be there is a calendar of events happening, a 30 year timeline, how you can celebrate the ADA, etc. We are really excited about that. Keeping in line with this, if you would like to have staff come present or trained staff on the WRP or dissipate in your ADA 30 celebration, we would love to do so and of course we can come anytime throughout the year or do webinars, it doesn't have to be strictly in celebration of ADA 30 but we want to offer that and you can email us at [wrp@dol.gov](mailto:wrp@dol.gov) reach out to us at if you are interested in having staff present or trained your staff on the WRP specifically.

On this last slide, before we jump into the question and answer portion of the call, you will see our website which is [www.wrp.gov](http://www.wrp.gov) if you have specific questions related to the Department of Defense related to their funding and how that process works for DOD agencies, our colleagues over there also have their own email which is [osd.wrp@mail.mil](mailto:osd.wrp@mail.mil) and that is in the PowerPoint presentation. As well as information relating to the computer electronic accommodations program within DOD.

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