



## Executive Summary

**Synopsis.** Kessler Foundation (Foundation), in partnership with the University of New Hampshire Institute on Disability (UNH-IOD), conducted the 2024 Kessler Foundation National Employment and Disability Survey: Hospitality Industry (2024 KFNEDS:HI). The aim was to investigate effectiveness of employer practices related to recruiting, hiring, and providing workplace accommodations within the hospitality industry. Supervisors provided information about the most frequently used employer practices, the effectiveness of these practices, as well as specific experiences utilizing these practices.

**Objectives.** To further improve the employment of people with disabilities, the Foundation and UNH-IOD have continued their survey series to inform and promote effective employer practices within the hospitality industry. The innovative design of the 2024 KFNEDS:HI sharpened the focus of previous KFNEDS supervisor surveys in three important ways:

- Focused on an industry where many people initially enter the workforce and obtain their first résumé entry—the hospitality industry
- Concentrated on practices central to the workforce entry of employees with disabilities—recruiting, hiring, and workplace accommodation practices
- Chronicled specific experiences of supervisors who successfully or unsuccessfully utilized these practices—collected information, findings, and recommendations directly applicable to supervisors

Furthermore, focusing on one industry allowed the KFNEDES:HI questionnaire to delve into important factors specific to the hospitality industry including (a) differences between front-of-house and back-of-house positions—where workers with disabilities may be concentrated in certain positions—and (b) differences between the food services sector and the traveler accommodation sector—each of which may have unique experiences implementing certain practices.

**Methods.** The 2024 KFNEDES:HI was conducted using common and replicable survey methods. From June 21, 2024, to July 13, 2024, the survey was incorporated into the Qualtrics Business-to-Business panel. A quota of about 800 respondents was sought based on cost and feasibility. Initially, 4,863 respondents ages 18 and older agreed to participate in the survey, based on consent procedures approved by the UNH Institutional Review Board. Among these 4,863 consenting respondents, 4,050 respondents (83.3 percent) were excluded because they did not match the inclusion criterion. The final sample consisted of 813 supervisors, ages 18 and older, working in the U.S. for companies in the hospitality industry that employed 25 people or more.

**Sample Characteristics.** The survey focused on examining the employment practices in the hospitality industry, specifically those in traveler accommodations and food services. Findings from the 2024 KFNEDES:HI describe the prevalent employment practices regarding people with disabilities in the hospitality industry. Most surveyed participants worked in the restaurant or food services segment of the industry. Businesses represented primarily operated under a franchise network or as a private corporation.

**Employer Practices.** Most of the companies represented in this survey had a process for requesting workplace accommodations (78 percent). Of the companies with a process, nearly 90 percent of supervisors reported that the processes were somewhat or very effective and somewhat or very easy for people with disabilities to use. Respondent supervisors generally felt somewhat or very confident in understanding the process (85 percent) and most reported experiencing training on how to provide workplace accommodation (67 percent). One-third of supervisors indicated that their companies had a centralized workplace accommodation fund. *Note: most workplace accommodations can be provided without any direct expense, and those that do involve a cost typically incur a one-time median expense of \$300* (Office of Disability Employment Policy [ODEP], 2023).

***Specific Employer Practices.*** Supervisors were asked to provide information on recruiting, hiring, and workplace accommodation practices utilized by their companies. The most-cited recruitment practices for employing people with disabilities included partnering with or seeking assistance from disability organizations and establishing internships and mentorship programs. In contrast, utilizing state vocational rehabilitation services (VR) was the least-cited practice or resource for hiring people with disabilities, even though respondents ranked utilizing state VR as the third most effective when used.

Workplace accommodations included flexible work schedules, building accessibility, and modified job duties. By far the most infrequently offered accommodation was remote or work-from-home options, which was not entirely surprising given the nature of jobs in the hospitality industry. Regardless, nearly half of all supervisors surveyed reported a moderate-to-large increase in the percentage of paid employees working from home, with even more supervisors expecting this percentage to increase in the coming years.

Additional patterns emerged when supervisors were asked about their detailed experiences with specific employees, including:

- Proactively recruiting people with disabilities resulted in more successful employees
- Promising avenues for proactive recruiting were identified as disability-related job fairs and partnering with or seeking assistance from disability organizations
- Workplace accommodations improved employee success. While workplace accommodations that helped adjust job duties and tasks were beneficial, workplace accommodations that assisted workers successfully perform tasks and duties were even more advantageous
- Barriers to providing workplace accommodations included perceptions of the high cost of accommodations, coworker attitudes, and complicated or no processes in place to request accommodations. These answers suggest the need for improved training on how to provide low-cost accommodations in the workplace

***Conclusion.*** Overall, the results of the 2024 KFNE:HI support the need for efforts to increase proactive recruitment, expand partnerships with disability organizations, enhance awareness of accommodation costs, and streamline accommodation processes. These efforts will benefit the hospitality industry and tap workers who are striving to work—people with disabilities.