



**ABLE - A Federal Workforce Disabilities Education Initiative
2022 SFEB Associates Project**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Seattle Federal Executive Board (SFEB) Associates Program provides federal employees the opportunity to develop leadership competencies through a variety of experiential learning tasks over the course of two years. The main component of the Program is a year-long group project initiated and led by Associates that is designed to meet the following four criteria:

1. Contributes to Associate leadership and learning
2. Adds value to the federal community
3. Adds value to the wider community
4. Feasible within the Program's resources

This year's project was selected through a consensus-based decision-making process in which 12 project proposals were evaluated by the Associates. The Associates reached a consensus on the project idea during the February Associates meeting and the topic was refined further at subsequent meetings. The selection was presented to the Executive Leadership Council in June 2022. The project's focus is to further hiring people with targeted disabilities efforts within the federal workforce. In March 2022, the Associates formed a project work group consisting of two Project Managers and three sub-teams, each with a Team Lead. The Associates hired the Washington Initiative for Supported Employment (WISE) to advise on the project. The target date to complete the project was set for October 2022, to correspond with National Disability Employment Awareness Month. The Associates decided, through consensus, to name the project Achieve Build Learn Experience (ABLE) and established the following:

Vision Statement: To connect job seekers who have targeted disabilities with Federal hiring managers by building opportunities, facilitating learning experiences, and providing resources.

Mission Statement: Organize and implement events that bring together Federal hiring managers and job seekers with disabilities to learn, connect, and empower.

Goals: Prepare three events: first teaching Federal employees about hiring people with targeted disabilities; second bringing Federal hiring managers together with job seekers with targeted disabilities for mock interviews; and third to facilitate job shadows between Federal agencies and people with targeted disabilities.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The project that was ultimately selected was pitched by Heidi Scheibner, a second year associate in the program. The original plan was to prepare a three day event held over non-consecutive days that would allow federal employees that influence hiring to learn about hiring people with targeted disabilities, then experience in-person mock interviews with

job seekers who have targeted disabilities, and finally to facilitate job shadows between job seekers and federal agencies.

The educational day was initially intended to be a prerequisite for federal employees to participate in the later events. The idea would be to overcome obstacles to allow for the idea of hiring people with targeted disabilities.

The logistics team set out to plan the location for the first two aspects of the project. Quite a few locations were toured to determine the best location to house the presentation for Learning Day and facilitate the mock interviews. The marketing team created a logo and materials to advertise the events. The community outreach team planned the event speakers as well as coordinated with the federal agencies to invite attendees.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

The project was managed by two SFEB Associates, Cathy Laetz and Heidi Scheibner. The Project Managers were responsible for determining the best way to divide and assign project planning tasks and responsibilities to the remainder of the Associates. They created three project teams, each team in charge of a different central component of the project: Marketing, Outreach, and Logistics. Associates self-selected into these groups and chose Team Leads. The Team Leads were responsible for delegating tasks, keeping the team on track with the greater project schedule, and communicating any questions or concerns to the Project Managers. Team Leads and Project Managers met on a weekly basis.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

1. Project Team Roles and Responsibilities

Project Management:

Cathy Laetz

Heidi Scheibner

Role	Major Tasks Completed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible for overall management of project planning, execution, budget, scope management, and risk management • Create Project Teams, and ensure that teams have clearly delineated and assigned roles and responsibilities • Have authority to direct and delegate tasks to teams and Team Leads • Serve as primary points of contact for the project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tracked and monitored overall Project progress and performance • Tracked and monitored performance of tasks and responsibilities by teams and Team Leads • Reported project status and other updates to Associates, Advisors, and ELC • Liaised with event stakeholders (panelists, keynote speakers) to streamline communication

Outreach Team:

Lindsay Vanover - Team Lead

Mary Winsor

Kayleigh Somers

Role	Major Tasks Completed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research and network with potential speakers and nonprofit supported employment agencies • Responsible for distributing all event marketing materials to federal employees in order to encourage registration and event attendance • Serve as point of contact for potential attendees who have questions or concerns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified and scheduled four different subject matter experts to give presentations during Learning Day • Coordinated four different supported employment agencies to network with attendees during the workshop piece of Learning Day • Created and distributed event marketing email, and monitored Associates email to address questions or concerns

Notable Accomplishment:

“The community outreach team was diligent in identifying the right speakers to capture the interest of all of the event attendees. The engagement from the audience on the day of the event confirmed that the proper presenters were selected.”

-Lindsay Vanover (Community Outreach Team Lead)

Marketing Team:

Ebonee Blair - Team Lead

Rachelle Martz

Annabelle Kim

Role	Major Tasks Completed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop all marketing materials (branding, logo, flyers) to be distributed to federal employees • Post event materials to SFEB social media accounts • Design and procure event related merchandise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Created a suitable and engaging project Title and Logo and designed marketing flyers • Consistently updated SFEB Associates social media accounts to spread event information • Designed and procured event T-shirts for Associates to wear during Learning Day • Created a post-event toolkit including resources covering project topics to distribute to attendees and upload to SFEB website

Notable Accomplishment:

“The team wanted to highlight the ‘able’ part of the word *disable*, which led us to the acronym ABLE. We wanted to emphasize that although people with disabilities face challenges, they also have unique abilities that are beneficial to the workforce. In designing the logo, we agreed that the design must resonate well with our audience. A logo that is simple but memorable; meaningful but practical; and effective at communicating the intended message.”

- Rachelle Martz (Marketing Team Logo Designer)

Logistics Team:

Leanna Temple - Team Lead

Jeremy Mott

Andrea Diangco

Role	Major Tasks Completed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan and organize logistics and details surrounding event day, including venue selection, tech set up, refreshments, etc. • Create documentation that detail the order of events during learning day, responsibilities of Associates during event day, and a contingency plan in the case that the event could not be held in-person • Determine what software and equipment would be used for registration, audio, visual, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selected venue (NOAA Sandpoint Auditorium) after touring several options • Procured a videographer/photographer to capture Learning Day event • Created and distributed a Day-Of Plan, including an event agenda and a task list of responsibilities for all Associates during Learning Day • Created and published registration website for attendees to be able to sign up to attend the event and provide Associates with information prior to attending

Notable Accomplishment:

“Selecting the venue for the event was one of the first tasks my team tackled. We considered a variety of factors including the convenience of the location, security concerns, accessibility, cost, and overall suitability/feel of the venue space. Our team toured several different facilities before deciding on the NOAA Auditorium at Sandpoint. The NOAA venue ended up being a perfect fit for the needs of our event, and our team is proud of the work we put in to ensuring the event was held at the right location”
 - Leanna Temple (Logistics Team Lead)

2. WISE Partnership

At the start of the project, the Project Managers created a partnership with the Washington Initiative for Supported Employment (WISE), which is a local organization that is actively fostering employment opportunities for people with developmental disabilities. Through this partnership with WISE, the group of Associates was able to receive top tier training from subject matter experts, create connections with supported employment professionals, and utilize the large pool of resources that WISE had already accumulated. Jaimie Laitinen, the Director of Training at WISE, worked closely with our Project Managers and Team Leads to plan and execute our project event, and Susan Harrell, the Assistant Executive Director of WISE, was one of the four session speakers during our Learning Day event.

3. Basecamp Project Management Tool

This project management tool was chosen by the PMs in conjunction with our partnership with WISE. Basecamp helped minimize unnecessary email traffic and served as a repository of all project materials and communication. It helped us: (1) plan the project goals and objectives; (2) organize each teams' work into manageable sections; (3) allowed the associates to see what is coming due; (4) ability to assign tasks; and (5) create a channel where associates can collaborate and share information across teams.

SCOPE MANAGEMENT

Over the course of the year, the scope of this project changed significantly, as the Associates adapted to different circumstances and developed a path forward. The initial project scope/goal is detailed below, as well as the changes that were made throughout the project planning process.

Project Goal: Prepare three events: first teaching Federal employees about hiring people with targeted disabilities; second bringing Federal hiring managers together with job seekers with targeted disabilities for mock interviews; and third to facilitate job shadows between Federal agencies and people with targeted disabilities.

Learning Day

- Provide Federal Hiring Managers with learning experiences related to hiring people with disabilities during an in-person educational event
- Lecture format with several different speakers/presentations
- Question and Answer panel
- Presentation Topics include:
 - Schedule A hiring process
 - Etiquette - how to best support people with disabilities through your actions and words
 - Workplace accommodations
 - Supported employment agencies
 - Additional resources

Mock Interviews

- Provide in-person interviews
- Allow for immediate feedback
- Create connections between job seekers and employers

*The Associates voted to eliminate the mock interviews component of the project in June 2022 due to staff and time constraints.

Job Shadows

- Provide real life experiences
- Create connections
- Identify ways to perform accommodations

*The Associates voted to eliminate the job shadows component of the project in August 2022 due to time constraints.

In order to maintain an interactive aspect of the project, the Associates shifted the scope of the Learning Day event to include a ‘workshop,’ which allowed attendees to network with several different supported employment agencies.

RISK MANAGEMENT

The Associates cohort faced significant risks and challenges throughout the lifespan of this project. Some were able to be mitigated and/or rectified, and others were not. It was an ambitious decision to host an in-person event after almost three years of virtual workplace meetings and events due to the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the greatest risks that the project team faced was a lack of interest/turn-out for an in-person event. This risk factor and several others made for a challenging and rewarding event planning experience. The potential risks described in the table below touched the work of all three teams, and the PMs and Team Leads actively worked toward minimizing them.

Risk	Potential Impact	Mitigation Strategy
COVID-19 Safety	Exposing Associates, advisors, and attendees to COVID-19 and associated health risks.	Monitoring of COVID-19 infection rates. Contingency Plan created by the Logistics Team, in case of high local COVID rates.
Lack of interest/Unclear scope and goals	Misalignment of scope and priorities internally could adversely impact marketing and event turnout	Internal collaboration and consultation with WISE counterparts/subject matter experts
Travel to event location	Low turnout Schedule issues	Government building selected as venue, centrally located in Seattle Start time later in the morning
Inadequate advertising/marketing	Low turnout Reaching the ‘wrong’ audience	Targeted marketing strategy and widespread distribution of marketing materials
Technology failures	Bad quality audio or video during event presentations would detract from event	Testing and troubleshooting technology before event Backup audio/visual options

Unavoidable/Unforeseen Challenges

- Associate shift of focus (losing Associates to other commitments, shifting teams, etc)
 - Addressed by shifting the scope of the project, as detailed in the Scope Management section of this report.
- Last minute change of presenter due to unforeseen circumstances
 - Addressed by identifying several potential candidates for speakers who would be available and comfortable being added to the agenda on short notice.
- Low interest in an in-person event due to scheduling, COVID-19 risks, etc.
 - Addressed by adapting our marketing strategy and intentionally selecting a venue that would allow for social distancing and convenient access.

SCHEDULE MANAGEMENT

One of the many challenges the associates faced, early on, is schedule management. Each team set their own milestones and schedules without realizing its direct effect on the other teams' timeline/schedule. To mitigate this, a project schedule was developed, clearly identifying each team's tasks, milestones, and target completion dates. Having a project schedule helped Associates to prioritize tasks accordingly, allowing each team to focus on specific tasks based on their priority. The schedule encouraged efficient tracking of workflow and accomplishments, as the Associates used the tool to view completed tasks from other teams and/or project managers. It was also through schedule management that the Associates determined the Job Shadow part of the project is no longer feasible, scaling the project down and diverting our efforts to Learning day.

QUALITY MANAGEMENT

SFEB Associate projects must address four primary criteria. In framing the project through its ultimate execution, the Associates ensured that it satisfied:

1. Contributing to Associate leadership and learning

The project's contribution to Associate leadership and learning was substantial and twofold. First, the planning, organization, and execution of the project provided for deep exposure to topical, practical aspects of how individuals with disabilities fit within the federal government and wider society. Throughout the project year, Associates participated in formal training at our monthly Associates meetings and thought-provoking discussions during our consensus decision making process surrounding a variety of inclusion issues and challenges.

Additionally, the complexity of planning and implementing an event in a collaborative group setting contributed significantly to Associate leadership and learning. Associates were given focused roles that allowed experiential growth, translatable to practical expertise within various federal positions held by Associates.

2. Adding value to the federal community

The value of the project to the federal community was underscored by the signing of Executive Order 14035 in June of 2021 which included substantial executive branch guidance and established DEI initiatives as priorities in the federal government. This project added value to the federal government by:

- a) Providing federal participants targeted, high-quality exposure and training on the topics of Leveraging Schedule A Hiring Authority and Supported Employment. For participants who were federal hiring managers or HR professionals, these sessions were a demonstration of concept and effect of engaging, substantive presentations and workshops devoted to specific topics.
- b) Utilizing the connectedness of the SFEB, the project was able to bring together participants from 13 federal agencies in the greater Seattle area to engage in discussions around federal agencies hiring individuals with disabilities, including, recruitment, outreach, hiring strategies and supported employment efforts.
- c) Because not everyone who registered could attend and, in order to collect and share the resources discussed and generated, the Associates assembled an A.B.L.E Learning Day toolbox from the event. This toolbox contains the presentation slides from each presenter, valuable resources and links from each of the supported employment agencies who were onsite for the interactive workshop, and an edited and closed-captioned recording of the event. We hope this toolbox will give federal agencies the jumping off point to have in depth conversations about disability hiring in the federal workplace and how we can make a difference moving forward.

3. Adding value to the wider community

Part of the early notions of the project was that the federal government should aspire to reflect the people it serves. The Associates agreed early on, from the consensus decision to pursue the project, that a federal government that strives toward diversity, equity, and inclusion goals is one that more accurately reflects its society. This would include hiring individuals with disabilities and providing an environment where they are able to thrive and truly feel included and fully supported.

A more representative federal government workforce better serves the wider community via an improved responsiveness to diverse needs. To the extent that this project provided a collaborative forum to discuss disability hiring in the federal workplace, the project added value by helping to improve the way federal agencies interact with, represent, and potentially hire individuals with disabilities.

4. Feasibility within the program's resources

After some significant changes to what we initially thought the project might be (a multi-day event with each day focusing on learning or application/experience), the project was feasible within the constraints of the program resources. We came to the

realization that what would work best in today’s post-COVID pandemic world would be a safe and engaging half-day learning event.

The Associates were able to fully leverage the experience and knowledge of WISE (Washington Initiative for Supported Employment) to facilitate a successful event and learn exactly what it takes for an event like this to come together. We also utilized a new project management database called Base Camp which helped us all stay on track, informed and on the same page. Both of these invaluable resources helped enrich our project and contributed to its success.

EVALUATION AND FEEDBACK

The participants were asked to complete surveys before and after the presentation. The questions were rated on a scale of 1-5, 1 indicating strongly disagree and 5 indicating strongly agree.

1. I am aware of the term ‘targeted disabilities’.
2. I feel prepared to hire and support an employee with a targeted disability.
3. I know how to reach out to supported employment agencies.
4. I am familiar with the Schedule A hiring process.

Prior to the event, the majority of our participants did not understand the term “targeted disabilities”, did not feel prepared to hire and support an employee with a targeted disability, and did not know how to reach out to a supported employment agency. By the end of the program, participants indicated that they have a greater understanding of the questions that were asked of them.

Before...

24% were aware of the term ‘targeted disabilities’

18% felt prepared to hire and support an employee with a disability

18% knew how to reach a supported employment agency

47% were familiar with the Schedule A Hiring Process

After...

94% were aware of the term ‘targeted disabilities’

82% felt prepared to hire and support an employee with a disability

82% knew how to reach a supported employment agency

94% were familiar with the Schedule A Hiring Process

The following quotes are responses from the last post-survey question, “What actions do you feel empowered to take after today’s event?”

- “Look into my agency’s policies around Schedule A and encourage hiring managers to use it.”
- “Think of job duties that can be grouped together to support diversity.”
- “To find out how to bring in a job coach for employees with disabilities and hiring more individuals with disabilities.”
- “The knowledge obtained today will be used to assist staffing initiatives and advocate for using Schedule A.”
- “To reach out to supported employment agencies.”

Overall, it seems as though A.B.L.E was a success with making hiring officials reflect on hiring future employees with targeted disabilities. They made connections with supported employment agencies that can assist them with the process and they have a better understanding of how Schedule A can be used for their hiring practices.

LESSONS LEARNED

Inclusive hiring of individuals with disabilities is a topic many hiring managers and HR professionals lack training and knowledge in but are definitely open to

When one of our presenters, Kelly Barrie, went through her presentation, there was a strong sense that many of those in attendance had very little knowledge on Schedule A Hiring Authority or how they could leverage it to their benefit – including meeting agency disability hiring requirements, while also hiring qualified individuals. When Kelly went over the benefits of utilizing the Agency Talent Portal on USAJobs, even some of our SFEB executive leadership advisors had never heard of it. This was a strong indicator that many federal agencies don’t know how to use the tools they currently have access to in order to hire qualified individuals with disabilities.

There were a multitude of questions during and after Kelly's presentation and they were all insightful and thoughtful. It was almost as if Kelly had opened the door to this magical thing called Schedule A Hiring Authority and everyone in attendance just wanted to ask a few questions before walking through the door. This gave us hope that the path forward with federal disability hiring would be a better one.

In today's post-COVID pandemic world, in-person events can be challenging to plan and low attendance concerns are valid

Executing a quality in person event and not knowing whether people will actually show up is daunting. The preparation logistics involved with in-person events of this project's scale are challenging, as is the timing and organization precision required during the event. Looking back, we should have incorporated more preparation meetings or run throughs of the actual presentations and schedule for the day of. If we had, we would have been able to ensure our presenters topics were all unique with limited to no overlap. We had two presenters who had put together very similar presentations and one speaker had to pivot last minute, but she did so adeptly.

However, in preparation, one thing we did do right was assigning specific tasks for the day of the event to all the associates. Everyone had a part to play, everyone came together, and the day went off, mostly, without a hitch. However, one can never prepare for how the 5 freeway will cooperate the day of an in-person event! We ended up having to start our event about twenty minutes later than we anticipated, but we quickly pivoted and shifted timing for all the presentations and still ended up wrapping up on time.

Project execution is most effective in a deliberative, collaborative spirit--with good communication between Project Managers, Team Leads, and individual Associates.

There are multiple project management paths to success. The PMs approach organized the Associate teams in a milestone-based, specialized way. Individual selection into teams was voluntary, and anticipated workload over the course of the project was discussed at the onset. Each team knew what they would be responsible for before, during and after the project. It was up to each of the Team Leads to keep their teams informed and on track with project goals.

However, project efficiencies afforded by specialization entailed some limits to situational awareness of general project progress at times on the part of Associates. This method of project organization had its drawbacks. Some Associates expressed a preference for being more involved with more aspects of the project, rather than focusing on a particular element, while others expressed an overall lack of clear communication and direction. In the end, and regardless of organizational structure, this project succeeded due to the persistent cooperation of all Associates in an environment of trust. The lesson is that communication is paramount to all members of a team feeling involved and connected and can help alleviate concerns and frustration.

Associates came to the project with varying levels of directly applicable leadership experience and skills

Overall, the project allowed Associates to address individual blind spots and discrepancies. Though some Associates favored a more generalist approach over teaming along task specialization, the division into Logistics, Outreach, and Marketing teams was intentional: with the hope that Associates might either volunteer to leverage known strong suits or consciously choose a team in which they might develop nascent skills. In any case, the structure was intended to foster Associate opportunities to shine, learn, and grow.

While the logistical project workload ebbed and flowed across teams as milestones were completed, Associate exposure to subject matter was constant and helpful throughout the year. At the monthly Associates meetings, we often took advantage of the training time we had available and had trainers or presenters on project relevant subject matter. These presentations included invaluable information from WISE on how previous events with our scope and subject matter have done in Washington state as well as training on how to utilize Base Camp and all its functionality to stay organized, informed and on target.

APPENDIX A: Participant Survey Feedback and Metrics

Pre-Event Questions:

Please answer the following questions prior to your participation in today's learning day.

Questions 1-4 should be answered on a scale of 1-5, with 1 indicating strongly disagree and 5 indicating strongly agree.

Questions	1	2	3	4	5	Total Answers	Disagree (1-2)	Agree (4-5)
1. I am aware of the term 'targeted disabilities'.	5	6	2	2	2	17	65%	24%
2. I feel prepared to hire and support an employee with a targeted disability.	3	5	6	2	1	17	47%	18%
3. I know how to reach out to supported employment agencies.	5	6	3	2	1	17	65%	18%
4. I am familiar with the Schedule A hiring process.	3	3	3	6	2	17	35%	47%

Post-Event Questions:

Please take a moment to consider the topics discussed and anything you learned during today's event. Answer the following questions regarding your post-event knowledge.

Questions 1-4 should be answered on a scale of 1-5, with 1 indicating strongly disagree and 5 indicating strongly agree.

Questions	1	2	3	4	5	Total Answers	Disagree (1-2)	Agree (4-5)
1. I am aware of the term 'targeted disabilities'.	5	6	2	2	2	17		94%
2. I feel prepared to hire and support an employee with a targeted disability.	3	5	6	2	1	17		82%
3. I know how to reach out to supported employment agencies.	5	6	3	2	1	17		82%
4. I am familiar with the Schedule A hiring process.	3	3	3	6	2	17		94%

APPENDIX B: Cost Report

Description	Unit Price	Total
Consulting Fee: April – July		5,875.00
Consulting – WISE (Event Support, coordination, outreach, communications, project meetings) – 8hrs	140.00/hr	1,120.00
Video filming (8hrs)	140.00/hr	1,120.00
Keynote Presentation – Ivanova Smith	500.00	500.00
Consulting – 2hrs	140.00/hr	240.00
Video closed captioning (in-place of ASL interpreter)		798.00
Food		322.00
T-shirts		240.45
Printing		18.00
TOTAL		\$10,233.45
BUDGET		\$15,000.00

APPENDIX C: Learning Day Event Photos





