



New Regulations for Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

Section 503 of the [Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#) is designed to prevent federal contractors from discriminating against individuals with disabilities in employment. Although Section 503 has been in place since the 1970's, it was largely unenforced, contributing to the staggering unemployment rate for people with disabilities we see today. As of March 24, 2014, [new regulations published by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs \(OFCCP\)](#) regarding the implementation of Section 503 have taken effect. These changes are designed to hold federal contractors to a higher level of accountability in achieving employment goals for individuals with disabilities. The new regulations:

- Set in place a 7% utilization goal for employment of individuals with disabilities. Federal contractors who do not meet this number are not subject to sanctions or fines. Instead, the 7% serves as a goal for businesses to meet, and fosters increased accountability across companies.
- Require contractors to invite both applicants for a position as well as current employees to voluntarily self-identify as a person with a disability. This will allow for data on how effective a contractor is in reaching individuals with disabilities, while also improving self-identification rates across the board.
- Require contractors to maintain data relative to their practices in recruiting, hiring, and retaining individuals with disabilities. This will allow OFCCP to have the necessary information to assess the effectiveness of section 503 ruling in promoting its goals of increasing employment outcomes of people with disabilities.
- Meet the requirements of the ADA Amendments Act by revising the definition of "disability" and certain nondiscrimination provisions.

With this new rule taking effect, OFCCP anticipates a large amount of outreach from federal contractors to organizations that assist in finding employment for people with disabilities. To assist with this, they have developed a directory to connect contractors with these organizations. Directions on how to be included in this directory are found online on OFCCP's website at <http://www.dol-esa.gov/errd/index.html#search> under *Procedures for Getting on Referral List*. DD Councils looking to connect more people with developmental disabilities with employment opportunities should take advantage of this new demand to connect individuals with employment outcomes. Federal contractors may include large businesses with locations across the country and organizations such as the DD Councils will be critical in ensuring the desired effect of the new Section 503 regulations.