



MINNESOTA STATE GOVERNMENT DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT STUDY

PRIMARY RESEARCH FINDINGS

Qualitative research interviews, conducted by
MarketResponse International, March 2024

For the Minnesota Governor's Council on
Developmental Disabilities. (Project 2527)



This report is amended with findings from a pilot quantitative survey completed in September 2024, among hiring managers and supervisors with the Minnesota Department of Administration.

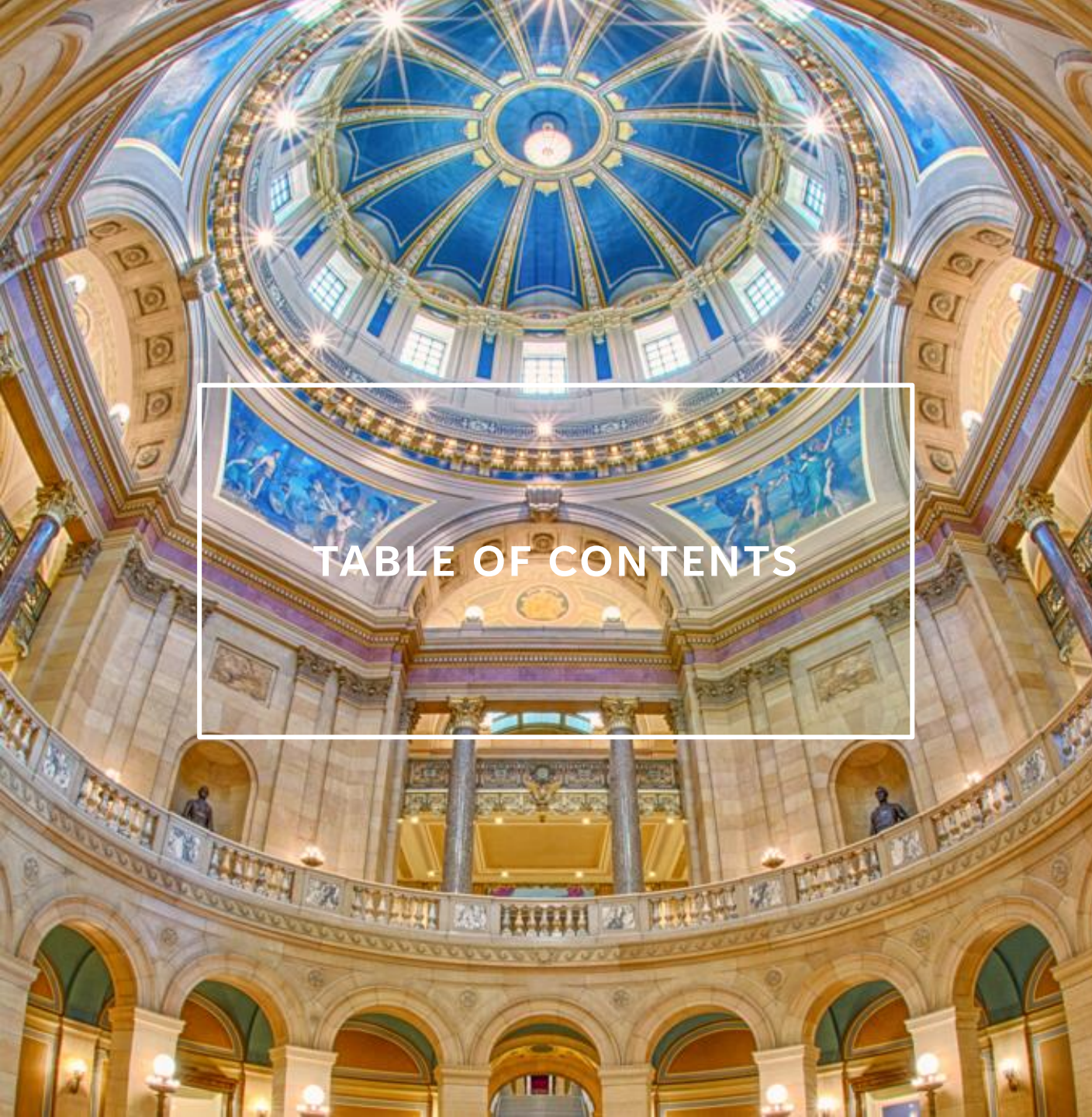


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Research Overview	3
Research Objective and Method	4
Qualitative Research Methodology	5
Benefits of employing people with disabilities	7
Challenges to expanding disability employment	11
Connect 700	12
Perceptions	14
Experiences	15
Challenges and Limitations	16
Developmental Disabilities	19
Employment Recommendations	20
Summary of Recommendations	25
Appendix	26

RESEARCH OVERVIEW



Study Regarding Employment Opportunities for People with Developmental Disabilities

In 2023 MarketResponse International completed qualitative and quantitative research among Minnesota companies regarding employment of people with developmental and other disabilities.

Now in 2024 the employment study was replicated with a focus on the challenges and opportunities for employment of people with developmental and other disabilities in state government.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHOD



The status and progress regarding Governor Tim Walz’s 2019 executive order 19-15, which established a goal to raise disability representation in the state's workforce from 7% to 10%.

- Attitudes towards including people with disabilities in the State’s workforce
- Status, progress, and attitudes towards the Connect 700 Program
- Attitudes and perceptions regarding the current status and future potential for employment of people with developmental disabilities.

Qualitative Research Method

A total of 26 in-depth interviews, each taking 45-60 minutes to complete, were conducted using a web-based audio-visual platform, enabling virtual face-to-face interaction between the interviewer and respondents. All interviews were transcribed and summarized with help from an AI analytics program.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The 26 qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted among the following 3 segments to gather knowledge and experiences regarding the hiring and employment of people with disabilities:

DEED-VRS (n = 15)	Contractors (n = 4)	State Agency Hiring Managers (n = 7)
<p>People at the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development's Vocational Rehabilitation Services support disability hiring and advancement within State Government agencies.</p> <p>They have a unique vantage regarding the needs, challenges, barriers, benefits and importance of hiring people with disabilities that they hear from government employers and within their own agencies.</p>	<p>Contractors who specialize in assisting individuals with disabilities in securing and maintaining employment, including community rehabilitation programs, day training and habilitation programs, and employment network service providers.</p> <p>These subject matter experts are an important resource that connect job seekers looking for employment with state government agencies who are hiring.</p>	<p>Hiring managers from various Minnesota State government agencies provided their perspectives and experiences of hiring and employing individuals with disabilities. Minnesota State agency hiring managers are significantly responsible for following and executing mandates regarding the employment of people with disabilities.</p>

Seven of the participants identified as a person with disabilities, and provided insights into their hiring, onboarding and employment journeys with Minnesota state agencies.

PRELIMINARY QUANTITATIVE INSIGHTS

This qualitative report is amended with findings from a pilot quantitative survey among hiring managers and supervisors from the Minnesota Department of Administration.

The findings from this quantitative survey should not be considered as representing the Minnesota State government as a whole, as it was limited to only one of the over two dozen Executive Branch agencies.

The Department of Administration is a core central service agency serving the Governor, legislature, state agencies, local governments, and the public. Its mission is to provide leadership, innovation, solutions, and support to help its partners succeed. That mission is achieved by focusing on partner service and satisfaction; agency culture; diversity, equity, and inclusion; sustainability; technology optimization; and stewardship positioning the Department for the future.

The purpose and benefit of effective centralized core administrative services is to achieve better value for state agencies by leveraging economies of scale, ensuring open and fair competition, reducing risk, and promoting success through standardized processes.

Most respondents were Managers or Supervisors	n=56
Manager	46%
Supervisor	38%
Senior Leader	13%
Human Resources	2%

Varying levels of involvement in hiring decisions	n=56
I am the primary, ultimate decider on hiring decisions	29%
I share decision authority with one or more others	48%
I provide input and recommendations	18%
I'm really not involved in hiring processes or decisions	5%

BENEFITS OF EMPLOYING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES



Achieving Governor Walz’s 2019 Executive Order to increase employment of people with disabilities, from 7% to 10% of state government employees, would provide benefits to the employed individuals, as well as, to the State.

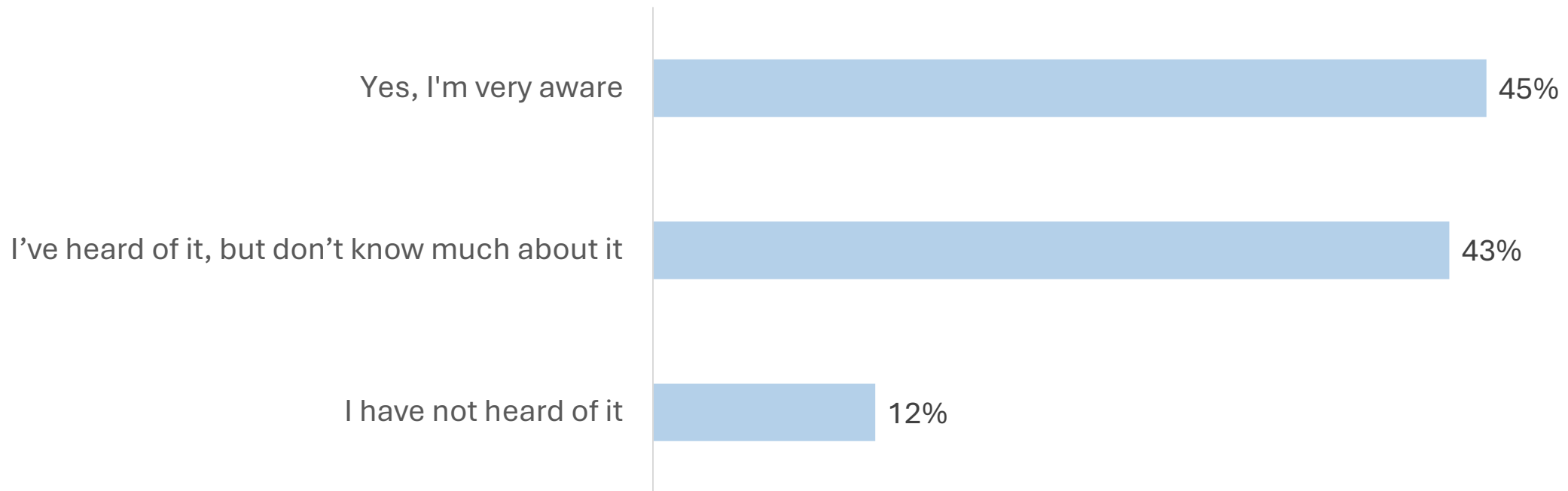
Benefits People With Disabilities, and the State

- Opens up new employment **opportunities for people with disabilities**
- It’s **good for the economy** to employ people who would otherwise not be working
- Provides the State with an additional **talent pool of potential employees**
- **Diversity** of the State’s workforce better matches the populations they serve
- **Higher retention rates** are experienced among state employees with disabilities
- People with disabilities bring **new perspectives and abilities** to the State’s workforce

AWARENESS OF EXECUTIVE ORDER 19-15

While most of the hiring managers and supervisors from the Minnesota Department of Administration are aware of executive order 19-15, 45% of them say they are ‘very aware,’ and an almost equal percent say they ‘don’t know much about it.’ Twelve percent have not heard of this executive order.

In 2019 Governor Walz signed executive order 19-15, which established a goal to raise disability representation in the state’s workforce. Were you aware of that executive order?

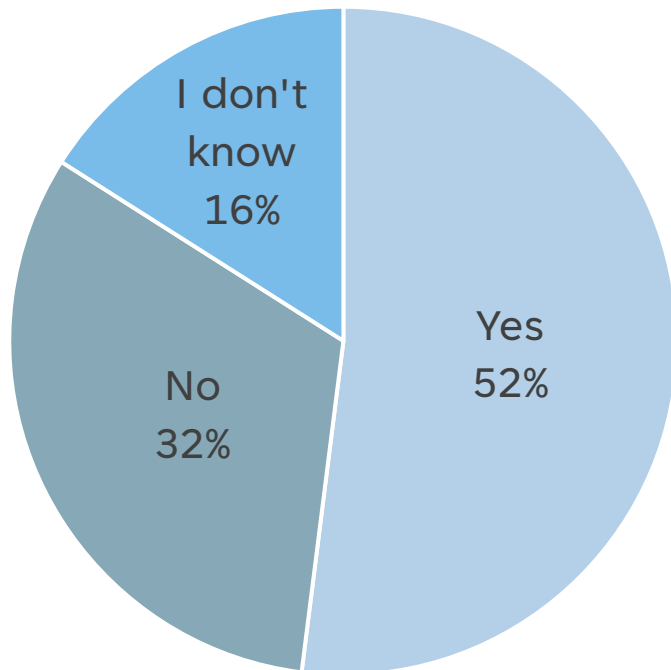


HIRING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

About half (52%) of hiring managers and supervisors from the Minnesota Department of Administration have been involved in the process of interviewing a person with a disability. Eighty percent are open to hiring people with disabilities, but only 11% are actively seeking to hire people with disabilities.

Have you ever been involved in the process of interviewing a person with a disability for a potential hiring by your agency?

Sample size: n=56



In your experience, which of the following statements best describes your agency's approach to hiring, or considering hiring, individuals with disabilities? (Sample size: n=56)

We actively seek people with disabilities	11%
We are open to hiring individuals with disabilities, if the right opportunity presents itself	80%
Regardless of whether we've hired persons with disabilities in the past, we are probable less likely than other state agencies to consider hiring persons with disabilities in the future	0%
I don't know	9%

BENEFITS of employing people who are deaf and hard of hearing:

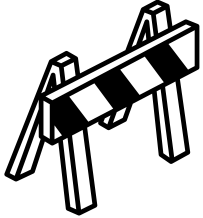
Incorporating individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing into state agencies enhances diversity, and fosters exposure to different perspectives and communication styles, ultimately promoting a more inclusive and considerate environment.

- Hiring individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing **adds diversity** to the agency workforce
- Exposure to different communication styles, perspectives, and experiences **enriches the environment**
- It **encourages creativity** and visual thinking among hearing employees.
- Slowing down communication benefits both deaf and hearing individuals, promoting **better understanding and inclusivity**
- Encouraging turn-taking and maintaining eye contact **improves communication effectiveness** in group settings, benefiting all participants

“Encouraging turn-taking and even raising hands in group conversations can benefit everyone, not just those who are deaf. When there's overlap in conversation, information gets missed.”

CHALLENGES to expanding disability employment

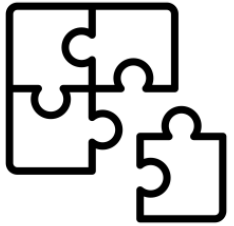
BARRIERS to increasing employment of people with disabilities in state government need to be overcome.



- lack of disability awareness and training,
- unwelcoming work environments
- lack of support and accommodations

“It's my disability that affects me the most. But it's people around me who make it difficult for me to live life, it's not because of my disability.”

SOLUTIONS:

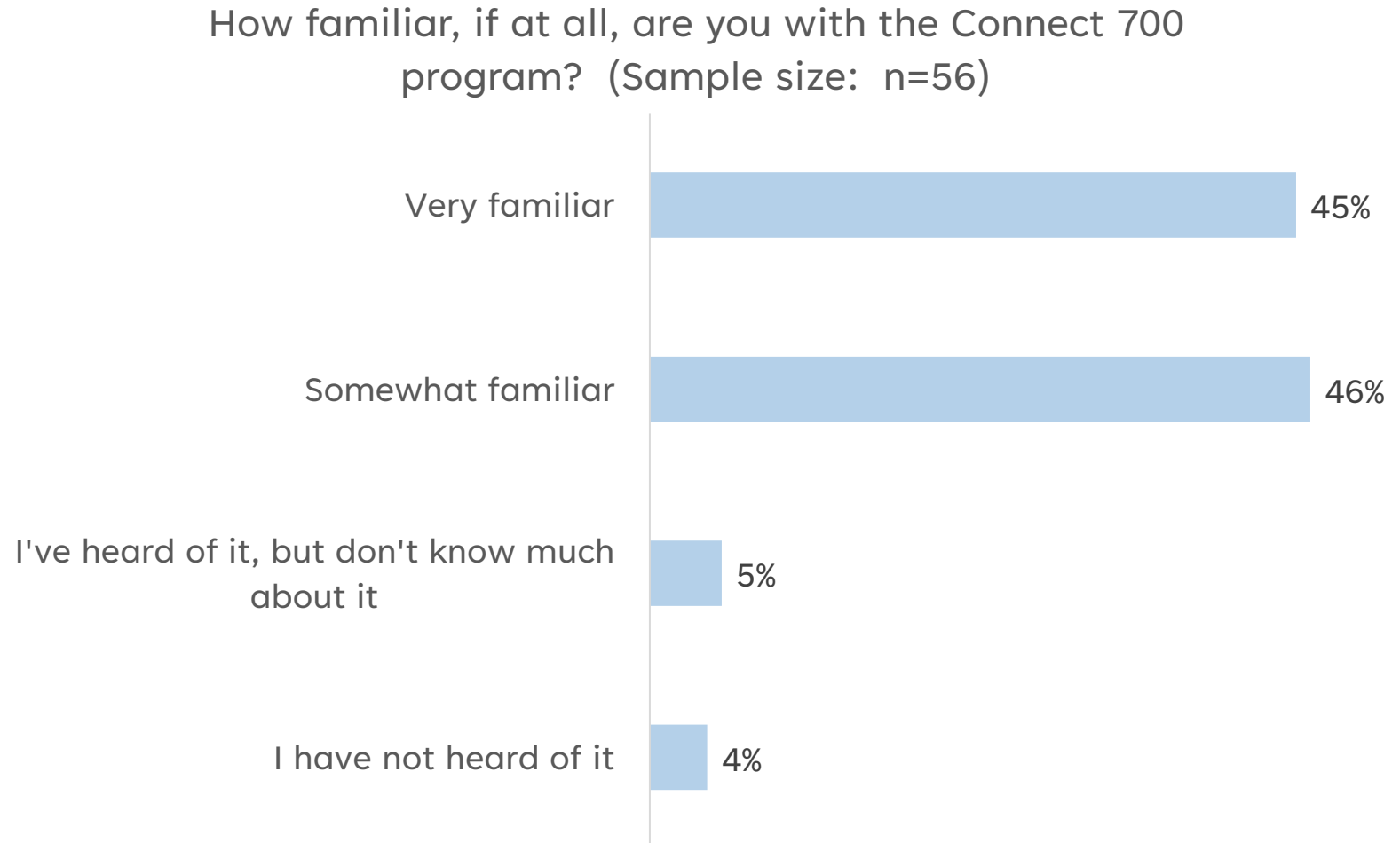


- Continuous promotion and training for leadership and staff, regarding the benefits of employing people with disabilities in State agencies.
- Leadership commitment to:
 - valuing diversity and disability inclusion,
 - foster an inclusive and welcoming workplace culture,
 - emphasizing abilities over disabilities.
- Ensure proper onboarding, training, and support are provided when hiring people with disabilities, so they are set up for success.

WHAT IS CONNECT 700?

- An alternative path to gainful employment for individuals with disabilities who may experience barriers in competitive hiring processes
- Allows individuals with certain disabilities to demonstrate their qualifications in a pre-probationary, trial-work opportunity
- An alternative to the traditional, competitive hiring process
- The pre-probationary program allows hiring managers up to 700 hours to assess a candidate's ability to perform work on the job.

Ninety-one percent of hiring managers and supervisors from the Minnesota Department of Administration are familiar with Connect 700, though 45% say they are 'very familiar.'



WHO IS ELIGIBLE?

Individuals who seek employment with the State of Minnesota, whom:

- Meet the minimum qualifications for the position;
- Have a disability that may inhibit them from demonstrating their skills and abilities in standard competitive hiring processes;
- Apply for job opportunities with the State and submit a Connect 700 Proof of Eligibility Certificate



AN AFFIRMATIVE ACTION METHOD for hiring more people with disabilities

“If they apply to the Connect 700 program and we feel that they demonstrate in the interview that they meet those minimum requirements, **we are obligated to bring them in** and allow them that 700 hours to show that they meet the minimum requirements and can do the job.” (Hiring Manager)

Perceptions of the Connect 700 program were generally positive among Vocational Rehabilitation Services providers, as well as hiring managers.



“I think it’s a wonderful program. It serves as a great opportunity for people to show and have their skills shine, as well as a chance to just show what they can do.”

(VRS Counselor)

“It gives opportunities for individuals with disabilities who may have not been considered otherwise. In that sense, it's really good.” (Hiring Manager)

“Going through a regular interview process can be extremely stressful, and this program provides support for (people with disabilities) to be successful in interviews.” (VRS Counselor)

Positive experience with an employee who was hired through Connect 700.

“Even though the employee had some challenges in aspects of the job related to his disability, (the manager) worked to put systems in place to support him, like having him communicate key information in writing since he was a strong writer. The employee is still working there successfully. If you work with him and then create a system that helps him in that regard, then he was ok.” (Hiring Manager)

HOWEVER, in spite of best efforts, sometimes things do not work out – which can be a traumatic experience for both the manager and employee.

One hiring manager described an unsuccessful experience with an employee hired through Connect 700 who had significant organizational challenges due to his disability, which affected his ability to do the job responsibly. **Despite investing significant time trying to create systems to help the employee** organize and manage his responsibilities, the issues persisted to the point of becoming a liability. Ultimately, they had to let the employee go, which was painful since the employee thought he was doing good work.

Not all managers are adequately trained or fully comply with the C700 program requirements.

“Some managers do not fully understand the program. HR Resources could remind the managers about the process and the timelines of the **forms that need to be filled out every two weeks**, because I know that some managers don’t fill out the forms in a timely manner, or at all.”

Importance of filling out the bi-weekly forms

“The forms are very important to set up goals for the individual employees and make adjustments on-going as needed. Without that feedback:”

- We don't know how they're doing
- The person doesn't know how well they're doing or where they need to improve
- It's hard for the employee to then really improve upon their skills, or know whether they're improving
- We won't know what other job opportunities we can put them in, based on their skill set
- It’s a barrier because it impedes the process, impedes the growth of the person.

Some hiring managers believe there needs to be a clearer process for screening out some candidates from entering the C700 trial period.

- When the 700-hour trial-period is over and the candidate is not hired, **it's seen as time wasted**, and that the managers were hindered from filling that vacancy months earlier with a more qualified person.

“The impact is it delays us getting somebody into the role that can do the job and move forward. Hiring at the state can be a very lengthy process anyways. So, if you have somebody who was brought into this (C700) program and then doesn't succeed, it pushes it back even further.” (Hiring Manager)

- Belief that the C700 program allows some candidates who clearly cannot do the job.

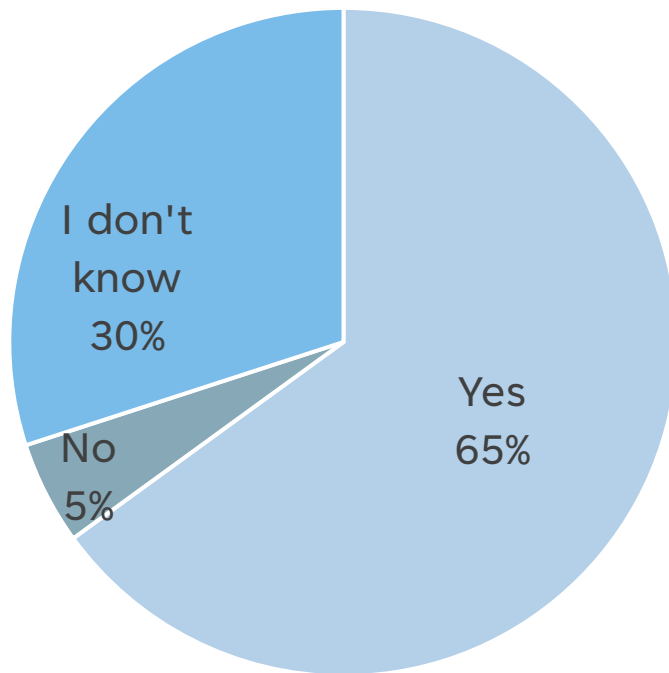
“I don't know what it looks like, but I feel like there probably is a better process on the front end to make sure that we're pairing people up with roles that they can be successful at.” (Hiring Manager)

USE AND IMPRESSIONS OF CONNECT 700

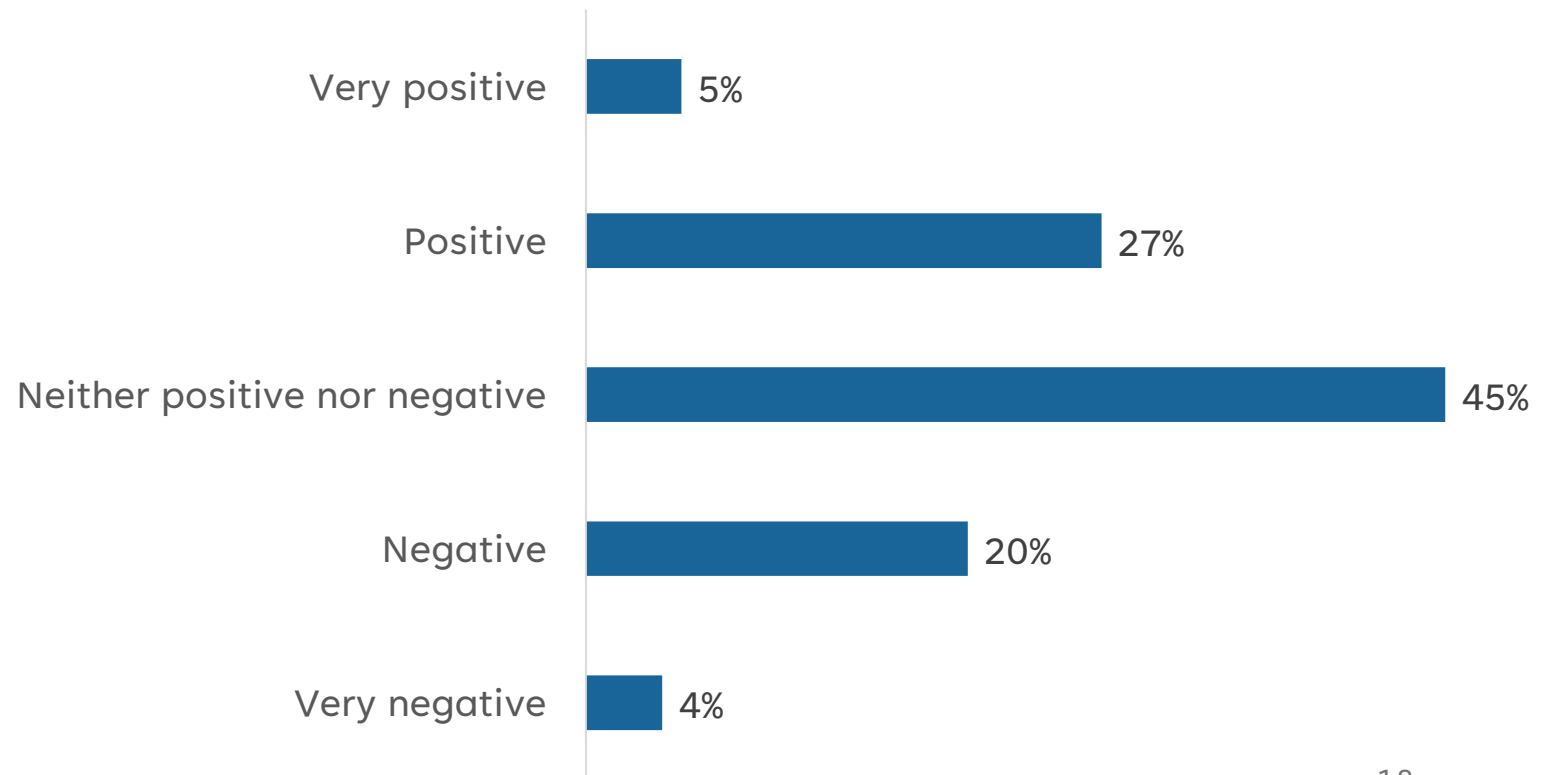
Two-thirds (65%) of hiring managers and supervisors from the Minnesota Department of Administration believe that a person with a disability has been hired at their agency location using the Connect 700 program. However, less than one-third of respondents (32%) have an overall positive impression of the program.

Has a person with a disability ever been hired at your agency location, using the Connect 700 program?

Sample size: n=56



Based on your own experiences, or anything you may have seen or heard, what is your overall impression of the Connect 700 program? (Sample size: n=56)



Respondents were read this statement:

I want to focus for a moment on people with developmental disabilities, which refers to individuals with a severe, chronic disability from birth; manifested before age 22; attributable to a mental or physical impairment or a combination of mental and physical impairments; need for services, supports or assistance of lifelong or extended duration that is individually planned and coordinated. Approximately 1.58% of Minnesotans have a developmental disability.

Most respondents assumed the level of employment of people with developmental disabilities was very low compared to total disability employment.

DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES – Employment recommendations

Most believed the State should do more to find employment for more people with developmental disabilities, and offered these suggestions:

- **Create more flexible job opportunities, part-time positions and ways to split up job duties to better accommodate people with developmental disabilities.**

“The Supported Work program aims to provide opportunities for people with more severe disabilities, but still needs more preparation before it will be functional. So that's what we're currently trying to do.” (MMB)

- **Address concerns over losing benefits.**

“Some people with disabilities rely on government benefits and are afraid to earn too much income and lose those benefits.” (VRS Manager w/ disability)

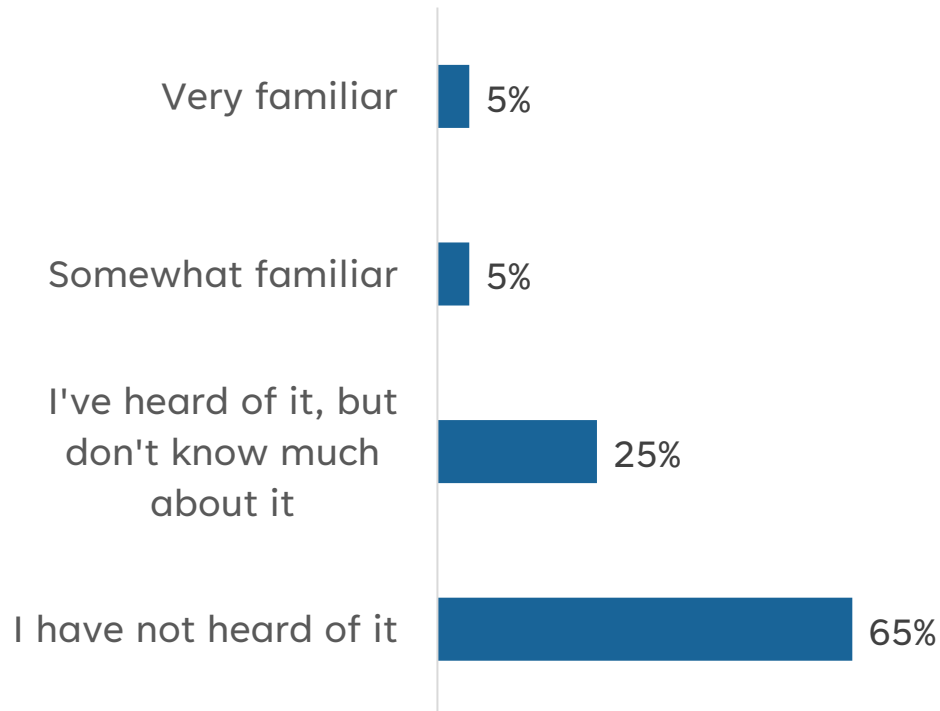
- **Make the website friendlier and simplify the application process.**

“The current online application process is complex and challenging to navigate. Hiring processes need to be more accessible and accommodating for people with disabilities. Websites and paperwork create barriers.” (VRS Manager w/ disability)

SUPPORTED WORK PROGRAM IMPRESSIONS

Two-thirds (65%) of hiring managers and supervisors from the Minnesota Department of Administration have not heard of the Supported Work Program. Based on a brief description, most (59%) believe the state should move forward with the program. (2023 Legislative revisions to the Supported Work Program have not yet been made.)

How familiar are you with the State's Supported Work Program that is currently under development?
(Sample size: n=56)



Sample size:
(n=56)

Do you think the State should move forward with development of the Supported Work Program?

What is the likelihood that your agency would want to take advantage of the Supported Work Program and hire individuals with developmental and other disabilities?

Response	Percentage	Percentage
Definitely yes	25%	13%
Probably yes	34%	31%
Not sure / might or might not	36%	49%
Probably not	4%	5%
Definitely not	2%	2%

DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES – Employment recommendations

- **Increase disability awareness and education across all levels of state agencies to breakdown stigma and misconceptions.**

“I think agency leaders, from commissioner down to office directors, they themselves should take some sort of training courses to help them understand why there is Connect 700, and why people with disabilities have a harder time and struggle more to find a job, compared to others.” (VRS Counselor)

- **Better training and education for hiring managers.**

“There is need for more education and disability one-on-one training, where hiring managers learn about different disabilities, accommodations, and on supporting employees with disabilities.” (VRS Manager w/ disability)

- **More training and education is needed on what the C700 program is, how it works, and its benefits.**

“Connect 700 has helped some get state jobs, but support and culture varies greatly by agency.”
(VRS Counselor w/ disability)

“I don’t think people know about it. It needs to be advertised more.” (VRS Counselor)

“I’m provided with some reading material which I’ve read, but I’ve never been through or offered any formal training on the C700 program. More background information would help hiring managers explain the program to others in their area, and to new hiring managers.” (Hiring Manager)

- **Ensure needed accommodations are provided as quickly as possible.**

“Reasonable accommodations are sometimes not provided in time for the employee to demonstrate they can perform the job duties during the trial period.” (VRS Counselor)

“Give them the supports that are appropriately tailored to individual needs.” (VRS Counselor)

- **Make a concerted effort to place more people with developmental disabilities into positions that match their abilities.**

“There are companies out there that help people with developmental disabilities find jobs. I think we need to be reaching out to those companies and trying to find the people who can be paired up into the right roles.

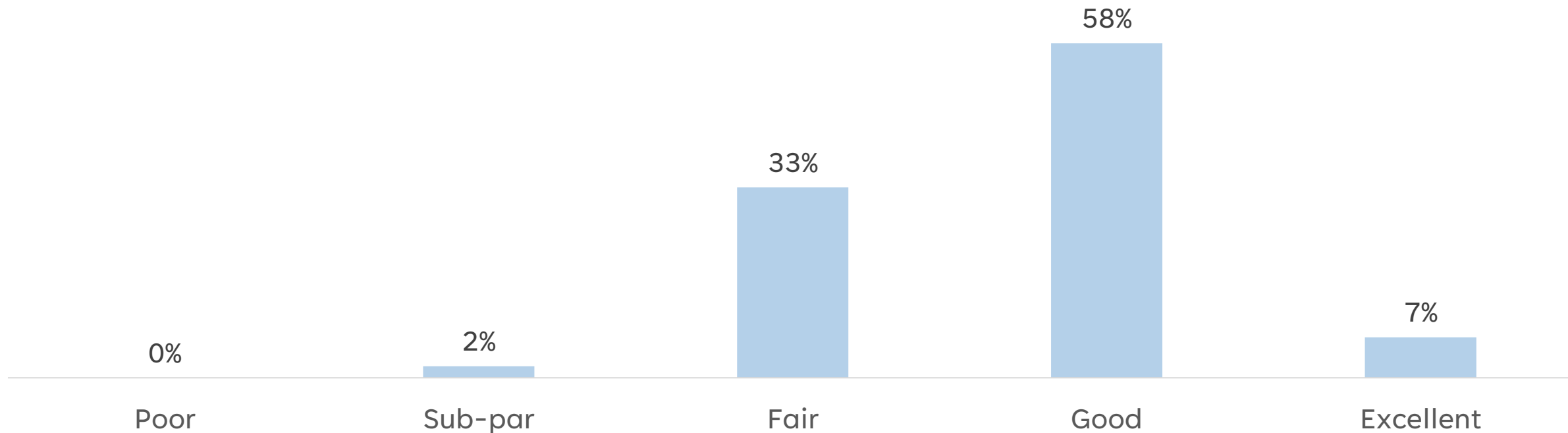
We should not just say that the program exists, but actually actively go out and try to fill the roles.”

(Hiring Manager)

MINNESOTA DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT PERCEPTIONS

Two-thirds (65%) of hiring managers and supervisors from the Minnesota Department of Administration have positive impressions of the State's efforts to enhance employment opportunities for people with disabilities, with 58% giving the State a 'Good' rating, and 7% giving an 'Excellent' rating.

The State of Minnesota has a vested interest in improving job opportunities for people with disabilities. From your experiences, and anything you may have read, seen, or heard, how would you rate the State of Minnesota as a whole, on its efforts to enhance employment opportunities for people with disabilities?



SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- Create more flexible job opportunities, part-time positions and ways to split up job duties to better accommodate people with developmental disabilities.
- Address concerns over losing benefits
- Make the website friendlier, and simplify the application process
- Increase disability awareness and education across all levels of state agencies to breakdown stigma and misconceptions.
- Better training and education for hiring managers
- More training and education is needed on what the C700 program is, how it works, and its benefits.
- Ensure needed accommodations are provided as quickly as possible
- Make a concerted effort to place more people with developmental disabilities into positions that match their abilities.

APPENDIX



Connect 700 sets up a separate applicant pool for people with disabilities. Applicants are required to meet the minimum qualifications but get priority consideration.

- The Connect 700 interview focuses strictly on the **posted minimum qualifications** to prevent discrimination.
- After being hired, Connect 700 **employees get 700 hours to demonstrate they can do the job** with reasonable accommodations.
- Managers are required to **meet with C700 candidates every two weeks**, to have a dialogue regarding the candidate's needs, performance, and other issues which may be affecting their work experience.
 - Feedback forms must be completed by the manager and submitted to MMB for review and assistance, as needed.



The typical hiring process involves reviewing resumes, conducting panel interviews with multiple candidates, justifying the selection decision, extending a job offer, and onboarding the new hire. This process can take 4-6 months.

For C700 candidates, the process is different. If a current employee bids on an open position, the hiring manager must interview them first before reviewing other candidates. If the hiring manager does not select the bidding C700 candidate, they have to justify why.

Instead of a formal interview, hiring managers conduct an informal "meet and greet" with C700 candidates. They are not permitted to ask C700 candidates the same interview questions as other candidates. After the meet and greet, references are checked and a decision is made whether to hire the C700 candidate.

So the C700 program impacts the hiring process by requiring hiring managers to treat C700 candidates differently, not allowing a formal interview, requiring justification if not selected, and giving bidding C700 employees priority over outside candidates. This creates additional steps and complexity in the hiring process.

SUPPORTED WORK PROGRAM 2023 New language

43A.421 SUPPORTED WORK PROGRAM. Subdivision 1. Program established.

Active positions within agencies of state government may be selected for inclusion for a supported work program for persons with significant disabilities.

A full-time position may be shared by up to three persons with significant disabilities and their job coach.

The job coach is not a state employee within the scope of section 43A.02, subdivision 21, or 179A.03, subdivision 14, unless the job coach holds another position within the scope of section 43A.02, subdivision 21, or 179A.03, subdivision 14.

All classified supported work job postings need to link to the overview and application process for the supported work program.

Subd. 2. Responsibilities.

- a) The commissioner is responsible for the administration and oversight of the supported work program, including the establishment of policies and procedures, data collection and reporting requirements, and compliance.
- b) The commissioner or the commissioner's designee shall design and implement a training curriculum for the supported work program. All executive leaders, managers, supervisors, human resources professionals, affirmative action officers, and Americans with Disabilities Act coordinators must receive annual training regarding the program.
- c) The commissioner or the commissioner's designee shall develop, administer, and make public a formal grievance process for individuals in the program.

THANK YOU!
from your
MarketResponse team

TOM PEARSON, Managing Director
t.pearson@marketresponse.com

SUSAN McCULLOUGH, Sr. Research Director
s.mccullough@marketresponse.com

DEREK PEARSON, Sr. Research Consultant
derek.pearson@marketresponse.nl

LYNN SCHREIFELS, Sr. Research Manager
l.schreifels@marketresponse.com

