Turning Insight into Practice

An Implementation Playbook for the Work Ahead

Disability:IN

How to Use This Guide

This playbook serves as a practical implementation resource for organizations working to advance disability inclusion and accessibility in measurable, sustainable ways. Disability:IN developed this guide using real-world practitioner insights to offer frameworks, tools, and materials and guidance leadership to move work forward inside complex, matrixed environments.

Use this guide to:

- Translate learning into clear proposals or pilots for leadership
- Equip managers, ERG leaders, and functional teams with ready-to-use tools
- Pressure-test ideas before scaling them enterprise-wide
- Support cross-functional alignment across HR, Talent, Marketing, Operations, and Facilities, and more.

> **❗ Tip:** We recommend starting with one or two sections most relevant to your current priorities, rather than attempting to implement everything at once. Start building progress through focused, repeatable action and then expand over time.

How this Guide is Structured

Each section aligns to a core topic area and includes:

- ▶ **What Practitioners Actually Did:** Concrete actions taken inside organizations
- ▶ **Practical Tools You Can Reuse:** Templates, checklists, and outlines you can adapt
- ▶ **Focused Actions:** Realistic steps to help you move from intent to implementation

Get Started →

Core idea: Momentum is created when learning translates into sustained action tied to core business strategy rather than one-off initiatives.

What Practitioners Did

How practitioners moved from inspiration to execution in large, complex organizations:

Anchor disability inclusion to business priorities. Rather than launching new programs, teams tied accessibility and disability inclusion to core KPIs and value drivers across the enterprise such as workforce strategy, productivity, risk management, customer experience, or operational efficiency.

Used existing governance structures. Teams reviewed progress through standing forums (business reviews, operating committees, HR leadership meetings) instead of creating new oversight bodies.

Design for consistency. Focus on repeatable practices (processes, policies, metrics) with shared education and responsibility across teams. Teams leveraged micro-learnings, storytelling, and events to encourage continued education and buy-in.

Normalize accessibility from the start. Make captioning, multiple formats, and flexible participation the default expectation across meetings, communications, and events by writing it into Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)/process docs, workflows, and Quality Assurance (QA) checklists. This ensures that responsibility is shared across teams.

Defined ownership early. Leaders assigned clear accountability to a function or decision-maker, not just an advisory role.

Practical Tools to Leverage

Momentum-to-Action Proposal (Outline)

Use this outline to translate insight into a focused leadership conversation.

Business Challenge:

What problem is the organization already trying to solve?

Disability Inclusion Lever:

Where does disability inclusion or accessibility remove friction or risk?

Proposed Action:

What will change in practice (process, programs, policy, or behavior)?

Budget:

What is the budget or resourcing pathway?

Executive Sponsor:

Who is a leader with decision making power or influence to help you move this work forward?

Owner:

Who is accountable for implementation? Would it be led by one champion, driven by a team, or a cross-functional effort?

Define 1–2 success indicators that show progress

> ❗ *Tip:* Not sure where to start? Select one insight or action from the section above that aligns to an active business priority at your company. Make your case even stronger by including proof points such as those from **Disability:IN's Data & Insights**.

Designing Disability Inclusive Talent Strategies Across Regions (1 of 2)

Core idea: Hiring qualified talent with disabilities gains traction when organizations design for skills, flexibility, and local context while maintaining consistent global principles.

What Practitioners Did

Concrete steps practitioners used to move from intent to scalable hiring practices across regions.

▶ **Rebuilt roles around essential skills.** Teams stripped job requirements down to what was truly needed to perform the role, removing legacy credentials and unnecessary physical or time-based expectations.

▶ **Balanced global consistency with local execution.** Organizations set enterprise-wide hiring principles, provided trainings and ongoing support resources to hiring teams, then empowered regions to adapt sourcing and accommodations based on local realities such as regional laws, labor markets, or cultural norms/attitudes.

▶ **Designed hiring flexibility upfront.** Teams built accommodations into the hiring process from application through onboarding, rather than handled reactively. Leaders created multiple entry points (internships, apprenticeships, referrals, returnships) to widen access to the broadest pool of qualified talent.

Practical Tools to Leverage

Disability-Inclusive Job Description Checklist

Use this checklist to review new or existing job descriptions before posting. Teams have used versions of this checklist to reduce unintended barriers and improve candidate experience without changing role expectations.

✓ **Role Clarity**
- Define core responsibilities clearly and tie to outcomes rather than dictating how the work must be performed.

✓ **Language and Assumptions**
- Avoids physical, stamina, speed, or sensory assumptions (e.g., "must lift," "fast-paced," "excellent hearing", "must be able to sit or stand").
- Avoids vague culture-fit language that may exclude qualified candidates.
- Uses clear, plain language that is easy to understand.
- Allow room for language to be adapted for regional legal or cultural context.

✓ **Accessibility and Accommodations**
- Includes a clear statement that accommodations are available throughout the hiring process an provides a contact or process for requesting accommodations.
- Describes flexibility where possible (schedule, location, work methods).

✓ **Skills and Qualifications**
- Essential requirements are separated from preferred qualifications and clearly marked as such.
- Include degree requirements only when legally or functionally required.
- Values transferable skills and equivalent experience explicitly valued. Years-of-experience requirements reviewed for necessity.

⚠ *Tip:* Not sure where to start? Audit one high-volume role and remove non-essential requirements that may inadvertently exclude disabled candidates. Partner with regional teams to map local disability employment resources and referral pipelines. Leverage resources such as [Disability:IN's Resume Database](#) to discover qualified talent with disabilities.

Core idea: Disability ERGs deliver sustained value when they are clearly scoped, structurally supported, and connected to business priorities.

What Practitioners Did

How practitioners evolved ERGs from well-intentioned communities into durable, influential parts of the organization.

> ▶ **Clarified the ERG's role in the organization.** Leaders updated the ERG's charter and goals to reflect current business priorities. This shifted the group from broad awareness-raising to a focused mandate tied to employee experience, talent outcomes, consumer insight, and business risk or opportunity.

> ▶ **Formalized governance and decision rights.** Leaders established clear sponsorship, escalation paths, and feedback loops, which reduced burnout.

> ▶ **Planned for sustainability.** Teams established leadership terms, succession planning, escalation paths, and realistic scopes helped ERGs maintain momentum over time.

Practical Tools to Leverage

ERG-Leadership Alignment Brief

This brief reflects how ERG leaders successfully translated employee insight into leadership-ready conversations. It is designed to create clarity, focus, and forward movement. Use this as a 1–2 page document or 3–4 slide brief when engaging executive sponsors, HR, or business leaders.

1 What we're hearing from employees

Pull directly from ERG conversations, listening sessions, or engagement surveys.
- Patterns or themes
- Where employees experience friction, exclusion, or inconsistency
- Where progress has already been made

Tip from practitioners: Focus on repeat signals over anecdotes. Leaders respond more effectively to trends than isolated examples.

2 Why this matters to the business

Translate employee insight into business-relevant implications.
- Talent attraction, retention, or engagement risks
- Manager capability or consistency gaps
- Operational or reputational considerations

Tip from practitioners: Frame this as risk mitigation or performance improvement instead of awareness building.

3 What support or alignment is needed

Be explicit about where leadership clarity or support matters.
- Decisions outside of the ERG's scope
- Resources, visibility, or sponsorship required
- Policies or processes that need review

4 What the ERG will do vs. influence

Set realistic expectations to prevent scope creep.
- Actions the ERG will lead or pilot
- Areas where the ERG will advise or provide feedback

5 How teams will share progress

Define simple, sustainable communication.
- Update cadence (quarterly, biannual)
- What success signals/KPIs will be reported

! *Tip:* Not sure where to start? A modern ERG has clear purpose, sustainable leadership, defined influence, and a credible role in shaping employee experience and organizational decision-making—leverage Disability:IN's ERG/BRG Toolkit for in-depth, practical guidance.

Core idea: Disability-inclusive marketing is most effective when accessibility is embedded into strategy from the start and when authentic representation is prioritized in creative development.

What Practitioners Did

How practitioners moved from intention to execution by changing how marketing work is planned, reviewed, and approved.

▶ **Planned for accessibility from the start.** Teams integrated accessibility requirements into creative briefs so they shaped concepts, formats, and production decisions early.

▶ **Shifted representation norms.** In creative or storytelling, disabled people were depicted as customers, employees, and leaders in everyday contexts—not framed through inspiration or exception-based narratives.

▶ **Built accountability into workflows.** Teams reviewed accessibility alongside brand, legal, and risk checks before launch, rather than retrofitted afterward. Leaders educated their teams on accessibility practices and encouraged shared ownership amongst individual contributors.

Practical Tools to Leverage

Accessibility Checklist for Creative Briefs and QA

Use this section as a standard insert in creative briefs, agency SOWs, or internal QA reviews.

✔ Alt text is written for all images and graphics

✔ Captions and/or transcripts are required for all video and audio content

✔ Video descriptions and/or audio descriptions are included for all video content

✔ Plain language is used where possible; jargon is minimized

✔ Text is legible, high-contrast, and readable at smaller sizes

✔ Motion and animation can be paused by the user

> ❗ *Tip:* Accessibility improves clarity and reach for all audiences, not just disabled audiences. When content works without sound, sight, or speed, it works better overall. Not sure where to start? Explore Disability:IN's suite of resources on disability inclusive marketing & communications.

Creating Accessible Workplaces for Hourly Employees (1 of 2)

Core idea: Accessibility for hourly workers depends on practical, frontline-level design. Many effective accommodations for hourly employees are low-cost operational changes, but they require clarity, trust, and manager confidence to implement consistently.

What Practitioners Did

How practitioners addressed the realities of hourly work: fixed schedules, physical environments, limited autonomy, and high manager influence.

▶ **Focused on operational barriers first.** Teams examined schedules, task design, equipment, and communication methods rather than starting with formal accommodation policy.

▶ **Enabled frontline supervisors.** Organizations gave managers clear guidance and processes on what they could approve independently and when to escalate, reducing delays and inconsistency.

▶ **Tested solutions on the floor.** Teams piloted adjustments during live shifts to ensure they worked in real conditions, not just on paper.

▶ **Centered worker input.** Employees closest to the work helped identify barriers and validate solutions.

Practical Tools to Leverage

Frontline Accessibility & Accommodation Playbook (Outline)

A concise, manager-facing playbook is the most effective resource for hourly environments. Frontline teams rarely use long policy documents on the floor.

What this playbook should include:

Common accommodation types for hourly roles (scheduling, task modification, equipment, sensory supports) based upon your workforce's needs or most-common requests.

What supervisors can approve on their own vs. when to escalate.

Guidance and language examples on handle accommodation conversations respectfully and efficiently.

Clear contacts for support and escalation.

Why this works: Practitioners found that giving supervisors practical guidance reduced hesitation, improved consistency, and increased trust among employees.

> ❗ *Tip:* Not sure where to start? Map the workday for one hourly role, from start of shift to end. Identify friction points related to physical space, sensory input, communication, or scheduling and engage supervisors and workers to validate where barriers exist. Then, pilot adjustments during active shifts and gather feedback. Document what works in a short, accessible playbook.

Space to Breathe: Building and Managing Sensory Rooms at Work (1 of 2)

Core idea: Sensory rooms are valuable resources for all employees. They are most effective when they are introduced as a practical workplace support and are planned intentionally, governed clearly, and normalized as part of how work gets done.

What Practitioners Did

How practitioners moved from interest in sensory spaces to sustainable implementation that employees actually use and trust.

▶ **Started with need, not novelty.** Teams positioned sensory spaces as tools for regulation, focus, and recovery rather than wellness perks or special accommodations.

▶ **Used existing space creatively.** Teams repurposed underutilized rooms and piloted low-cost solutions before investing in permanent builds.

▶ **Set expectations early.** Teams set clear guidelines for use, access, and maintenance to prevent confusion, misuse, or stigma.

▶ **Normalized use across roles.** Leaders reinforced that sensory spaces support performance and well-being for many employees, not just a few.

Practical Tools to Leverage

Sensory Space Implementation Timeline Template

A phased timeline that helps organizations move deliberately from exploration to adoption.

Phase 1: Identify the Need (0–30 days)
- Gather employee input on sensory and environmental challenges
- Identify roles or environments where regulation support is most needed
- Align on purpose (focus, decompression, recovery, regulation) and communications plan
- Establish success indicators and set a frequency for reporting and refinement

Phase 2: Pilot the Space (30–60 days)
- Select the space—either an existing room to repurpose or a new build
- Introduce adjustable elements (lighting, seating, sound control)
- Draft simple usage guidelines and signage

Phase 3: Enable and Normalize (60–90 days)
- Communicate purpose and expectations clearly
- Train managers on how to support and encourage use without stigma
- Collect feedback on usability and impact

Phase 4: Sustain and Improve (Ongoing)
- Refine design and guidelines based on feedback
- Clarify ownership for upkeep and governance

> **!** **Tip:** Not sure where to start? Identify one space that could be piloted with minimal investment. Work with your ERG or partnership organizations like Disability:IN to gather feedback and insights on what to prioritize in the design.

Supporting Employees with Non-Apparent Disabilities

Core idea: Supporting employees with non-apparent disabilities and chronic illness requires trust-centered systems, flexible work design, and manager capability.

What Practitioners Did

Addressing invisible barriers that are often missed by traditional accommodation models.

▶ **Designed support without requiring disclosure.** Organizations designed policies and practices that emphasize flexibility and choice, reducing pressure on employees to repeatedly explain or prove their needs. When flexibility is treated as a standard way of working, employees are more likely to seek support before issues escalate.

▶ **Shifted manager behavior first.** Organizations trained managers to respond to support needs with curiosity and support, rather than diagnosis or skepticism.

▶ **Simplified accommodation pathways.** Reducing steps, approvals, and documentation improved access and consistency.

▶ **Normalized variability.** Leaders acknowledged that capacity can fluctuate day to day, especially for employees managing chronic conditions. Flexible schedules, remote work, and task modification benefit many employees.

Practical Tools to Leverage

Neuroinclusive Human Capital Management Framework

This evidence-based framework for **neuroinclusive human capital management** drives agility, productivity, and long-term business value. Use this resource to:

> Identify work conditions that create friction or variability in performance

> Design work environments and performance expectations that support varied cognitive needs

> Embed flexibility and autonomy into work design beyond accommodation requests

> Integrate this work into onboarding, manager training, performance reviews, and talent mobility conversations

> *Practitioner insight:* Training managers on these skills reduced escalation, improved consistency, drove productivity and increased trust.

> ⊙ *Tip:* Not sure where to start? Add non-apparent disability guidance to manager toolkits or training. Start with 2-3 specific actions and scale from there. Plus, identifying an internal leader or champion to support this work can help build buy in and adoption across the organization.

Maintaining Momentum

PAIRING INSIGHT WITH MEASUREMENT

Many organizations use implementation guides like this alongside benchmarking tools to track progress and sustain momentum over time. The Disability Index® is designed to help businesses do exactly that.

The Index is the most trusted third-party benchmark for global disability inclusion in business—providing companies with a confidential, objective, and data-driven way to understand their current state and identify where to focus next.

Organizations strengthen long-term impact when they combine practical action with measurement. disability inclusion efforts remain aligned to business outcomes, operational realities, and long-term goals.

DISABILITY INDEX™

Explore the Disability Index

Your Partner for Disability Inclusion in Business

Disability:IN is the leading nonprofit resource for business disability inclusion worldwide. Disability:IN partners with leading companies and drives progress through initiatives, tools, and expertise that deliver long-term business impact.

Are You IN?

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