Grantee Innovation Spotlight
Employer Summit

About This Series

The Administration on Disabilities (AoD) Disability Employment Technical Assistance Center (DETAC) *Grantee Innovation Spotlights* showcase innovative practices implemented by AoD grantees to advance competitive, integrated employment and economic outcomes for individuals with disabilities. The *Spotlights* highlight replicable, scalable programs, outcomes, and lessons learned to inform AoD grantees and partners. Visit the DETAC website to access the full collection of *Spotlights*.

Program Overview

About Centers for Independent Living (CILs)

CILs are local, community-based nonprofits providing in-person support to help people with disabilities thrive and live independently. Visit the Administration for Community Living (ACL) CIL webpage to learn more.

Able South Carolina (Able SC) is a disability-led, consumer-controlled, community-based, cross-disability nonprofit organization. As a federally funded CIL, Able SC offers core services to 23 counties in the Midlands and Upstate regions of the state of South Carolina, in addition to leading statewide employment initiatives and advancing systems change efforts nationally and internationally. In 2016, ACL awarded a Partnerships in Employment Systems Change grant to Able SC, which supported the launch of a statewide employment initiative, Hire Me SC, and the Employer Summit. The Summit, an annual one-day conference, brings together business managers, executives, human resources professionals, service providers, and community partners to strengthen South Carolina's workforce and economy by improving employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. Participants learn strategies for recruiting, hiring, retaining, and supporting career advancement of employees with disabilities, hear directly from speakers with lived experience, including business leaders with disabilities, and explore accessible and inclusive employment practices. The event also models accessibility through accommodations, captioning, sign language interpretation, and accessible communications.

The summit fosters a business-to-business space for peer-support and strategic networking where employers can build new and deepen existing partnerships, as well as connect with service providers and individuals with lived experience. In response to participant feedback and evolving workforce needs, Able SC has adapted the Summit over time, including adding a dedicated service provider track in 2025. The track includes sessions tailored specifically for service providers, while also creating intentional opportunities for employers and providers to come together and learn from one another. Through its partnership with the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) established in 2017, Able SC offers eligible professionals the opportunity to receive SHRM or Human Resource Certification Institute (HRCI) credits for participating. SC SHRM also promotes the Summit and provides a complimentary vendor table at its annual conference.

Outcomes and Impact

Over the past decade, Able SC's Employer Summit has grown into a sustainable employer engagement initiative that attracts approximately 100 participants annually. Since introducing registration fees in 2017, Able SC has diversified the Summit's funding through sponsorships, vendor fees, and in-kind support. Sponsorship revenue has increased approximately 700 percent since 2017, helping sustain and expand the event over time. Able SC has also strengthened partnerships that support the Summit's success. South Carolina businesses such as Dominion Energy and Michelin have contributed event space, printing services, photography, video production, and other in-kind support. The South Carolina Department of Employment and Workforce has further expanded the Summit's reach by serving as a sponsor, presenter, and outreach partner to workforce system stakeholders, including American Job Centers.

Able SC collects feedback on the Summit through a satisfaction survey. Participants have reported applying lessons learned from the Summit within their organizations, including reviewing hiring practices, and reassessing job posting requirements (e.g., degree requirements). Participants also highlighted the value of learning directly from people with disabilities and hearing practical examples from employers that have implemented strategies to advance competitive, integrated employment.

Recommendations on How to Replicate and Scale in Your State

Organizations or states seeking to replicate and scale this approach can consider the following strategies:

- Establish sustainability early by developing varied revenue streams, such as sponsorships, vendor fees, registration fees, and in-kind contributions
- Build relationships with businesses, workforce organizations, state agencies, and community partners that can contribute funding, event space, expertise, services, and other in-kind support.
- Proactively engage individuals with disabilities as planners, presenters, and subject matter experts.
- Model accessibility throughout event planning, communications, and delivery.
- Create opportunities in your state for employers, disability service providers, and workforce partners to learn from one another through both tailored and shared learning experiences.
- Adapt event content and formats based on participant feedback and emerging workforce needs across your state and communities.

Resources

- **Able SC Resources**
  - Able South Carolina Website
  - Hire Me SC Statewide Employment Initiative Website
  - Employer Summit Webpage
- **ACL Resources**
  - ACL Centers for Independent Living Webpage
  - ACL Disability Information & Access Locator (DIAL) Website

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