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President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities' Annual Conference Evaluation Task Force -Research Update-

Introduction

The President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities' Annual Conference Evaluation Task Force was charged with assessing the impact of participation in the 1997 and 1998 Annual Conferences on the employment of people with disabilities. The Task Force sought to determine the Annual Conference's impact on the employment of people with disabilities, as well as on a range of issues affecting access and opportunity in employment for Americans with disabilities. The role of this Task Force is particularly important given the historic significance of the Annual Conference to the American disability community. Indeed, Americans with disabilities constructed much of the ideological foundations of the modern disability rights movement during their participation in the PCEPD's Annual Conferences during the 1960's and 1970's.¹ The Annual Conference continues to serve as a valuable opportunity for advocates to network and exchange information around issues that are critical to the employment of people with disabilities. The results of the Annual Conference Evaluation Task Force's analysis must ultimately be interpreted within this historical and institutional context.

Methods

In order to evaluate the impact of participation in the Annual Conference on the employment of people with disabilities, a questionnaire was developed by the Task Force as our primary research instrument. A subsequent interview schedule was developed to supplement our quantitative analysis with participants' qualitative accounts of the impact of the Annual Conference.

The Annual Conference questionnaire was designed to answer the following questions: 1) Who attends the Annual Conference?; 2) Why do they attend?; 3) What is the impact of the Annual Conference on the employment of people with disabilities?

The questionnaire, accompanied by a letter from Chairman Coelho, was mailed to a sample of 990 individuals who attended the 1997 Annual Conference. 359 questionnaires were completed and returned, for a response rate of 36.3%. This high response rate, in and of itself, demonstrates a high level of cohesiveness among those who participate in the Annual Conference and other PCEPD activities; it suggests that those affiliated with the PCEPD value this relationship and consider the role and impact of the Annual Conference to be

¹Scotch, Richard. 1984. *From Good Will Civil Rights*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

significant issues. A data set was created from the responses to this questionnaire and utilized in this preliminary analysis.²

Analysis & Results

Table of Respondents by Constituency Group³

Constituency Group	n
People with Disabilities	128
Employers	134
Educators	74
Disability Service Providers	82
Rehabilitation Professionals	74
Organized Labor	24
Other	94

Descriptive statistics performed on the data indicate that 36.7% of respondents are people with disabilities and 37.3% are employers. This comparatively high response rate among employers demonstrates their commitment to the PCEPD, to promoting employment opportunities for people with disabilities, and their interest in issues related to the Annual Conference.

Dimensions of Conference Participation

Respondents almost unanimously expressed agreement with statements describing the positive effects of Conference participation on issues related to the employment of people with disabilities. Indeed, on 10 of 13 questionnaire items designed to measure the impact of Conference participation on the employment of people with disabilities, 85% or more of respondents expressed agreement that their participation in the Annual Conference positively impacted upon dimensions of the employment of people with disabilities. The following represents a summary of the perceived impact of Conference participation on selected

²Assistance in data entry and analysis was provided by *The Consult-Ability Group, Ltd.*, a consulting firm that conducts market research for companies seeking to tap into the purchasing power of people with disabilities as a consumer group.

³Constituency categories were not mutually exclusive (*i.e.* a respondent could indicate that they were both an employer and a person with a disability). Therefore, the sum total of constituency groups exceeds this analysis' N of 359.

dimensions of the employment of people with disabilities:

*95.2% of respondents agreed (57.3% strongly agreed) that their participation in the Annual Conference led to the hiring and promotion of people with disabilities;

*92.7% of respondents agreed that their participation in the Annual Conference improved business' understanding of their obligations to people with disabilities under the ADA;

*95.2 of respondents agreed that their participation in the Annual Conference gave them a greater sense of being a part of the disability community;

*90.4% of respondents agreed that their participation in the Annual Conference gave them a better understanding of the mission of the PCEPD.

Impact on Employers

Employers' responses to questions regarding the impact of their Annual Conference participation suggest that their experience with the Annual Conference significantly affected their employment practices. Indeed, 46.3% of employers reported that their participation in the Annual Conference contributed to the hiring of at least one person with a disability at their firms. Similarly, 59.4% of employers reported that their participation in the Annual Conference resulted in the modification or change of at least one personnel policy or hiring practice.

Reasons for Annual Conference Attendance

Quality workshops, disability rights education, and information on how employers could enhance job opportunities for people with disabilities were cited as the most important reasons for attending the Annual Conference. Indeed, 89.3% of respondents ranked "attending workshops on employment-related issues" among their top 3 reasons for attending the Annual Conference; 52.1% cited this as their most important reason. 70.% of respondents ranked "to learn about the civil rights of people with disabilities" among their top 3 reasons for attending the Conference. Finally, 74.1% of respondents ranked "learn how employers can enhance job opportunities for people with disabilities" among their top 3 reasons for attendance. In contrast, visiting the host city (6.1%), renewing acquaintances with friends and colleagues (11.5%), and acquiring job-seeking skills (17.2%) were the attendance reasons ranked least frequently among their top 3. These results suggest that conference attendees are more concerned with substantive elements of Conference participation than with Conference amenities.

Satisfaction with the Annual Conference

In order to measure different constituencies' satisfaction with the Annual Conference, the scores for the approval of different dimensions of the Conference were used to generate a "Conference Satisfaction Scale." Our analysis indicates a small, yet significant difference in the levels of satisfaction with the Annual Conference by constituency group ($F=8.50$, $p=.00$). This difference seems to be explained by the difference in satisfaction scores for employers and people with disabilities, who seemed to be most satisfied with the Conference, and the scores for rehabilitation professionals and service providers, who were less satisfied with the Annual Conference.

Summary & Plans for Further Research

This preliminary analysis suggest that respondents perceive their participation in the Annual Conference as having a significant impact upon the employment of people with disabilities. The Task Force has begun its second wave of data collection. Questionnaires have been distributed to 1998 Conference participants and continue to be returned to the PCEPD offices at a high rate. We should be able to offer a comprehensive comparative analysis of respondents' experiences with the 1997 and 1998 conferences for the next Executive Committee Meeting.

APPENDIX

PARTICIPANTS' APPROVAL OF DIMENSIONS OF THE PRESIDENT'S COMMITTEE'S 1997 ANNUAL CONFERENCE - SUMMARY STATISTICS

Variable Name	n	Mean	Median	Mode	St.Dev.	1 ⁴	2	3	4
Hire & Advance	249	3.60	4.00	4	.67	6 (2.4%)	6 (2.4%)	94 (37.9%)	142 (57.3%)
Perception	326	3.16	3.00	4	.85	12 (3.7%)	60 (18.4%)	118 (36.2%)	136 (41.7%)
Business & ADA	332	3.37	3.00	3	.64	2 (0.5%)	22 (6.5%)	158 (47.5%)	150 (45.2%)
Purchasing Power	294	3.18	3.00	3	.72	6 (2.0%)	36 (12.2%)	152 (51.7%)	100 (34.0%)
Assistive Technology	338	3.54	4.00	4	.65	6 (1.8%)	12 (3.6%)	114 (33.7%)	206 (60.9%)
Part of Community	334	3.65	4.00	4	.61	6 (1.7%)	6 (1.7%)	90 (25.2%)	242 (70.0%)
Advocate for PwD	322	3.35	3.00	4	.73	6 (1.9%)	30 (9.3%)	132 (41.0%)	154 (47.9%)
PCEPD Mission	334	3.33	3.00	4	.75	12 (3.6%)	20 (6.0%)	148 (44.3%)	154 (46.1%)
Projects of PCEPD	334	3.23	3.00	3	.74	8 (2.4%)	38 (13.8%)	158 (47.3%)	130 (38.9%)
Networking	320	3.40	4.00	4	.70	2 (0.6%)	32 (10.0%)	104 (32.5%)	182 (56.9%)
Civil Rights	272	3.25	3.00	3	.66	2 (0.7%)	28 (10.3%)	142 (52.2%)	100 (36.8%)
Job or Promotion	154	2.95	3.00	3	.73	2 (1.3%)	36 (24.7%)	78 (50.6%)	36 (23.4%)
Job Seeking Skills	170	2.76	3.00	3	.68	4. (2.4%)	62 (30.6%)	94 (55.3%)	20 (11.8%)

⁴The values 1-4 represent the degree of support for statements describing the positive impact that participation in the Annual Conference has had on issues related to the employment of people with disabilities. A score of "1" indicates little support for the notion that the Conference has had a positive impact on employment, while a score of "4" represents strong support for this notion.

My experiences at the Annual Conference contributed to the hiring of at least one person with a disability at my place of employment.

Yes	No	I don't know	Total
46.3% (74)	30.0% (48)	23.8% (38)	100.0% (160)

My experiences at the Annual Conference resulted in the modification or change of at least one personnel policy or practice.

Yes	No	I don't know	Total
59.4% (126)	23.6% (50)	17.0% (36)	100.0% (212)

Please rank, from 1 to 7, in order of importance, the reasons you attend the Annual Conference.

-RANK-

Variable Name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
Visit Conference's Host City	8 (2.7%)	2 (0.7%)	8 (2.7%)	14 (4.7%)	54 (18.1%)	78 (26.2%)	134 (45.0%)	298 (100.0%)
Renew Acquaintances with Friends & Colleagues	8 (2.7%)	10 (3.4%)	16 (5.4%)	34 (11.4%)	86 (28.9%)	116 (36.9%)	28 (9.4%)	298 (100.0%)
To Network with Colleagues	38 (12.0%)	26 (8.2%)	60 (19.0%)	126 (39.9%)	48 (15.2%)	10 (3.2%)	8 (2.5%)	298 (100.0%)
To Attend Workshops on Employment-Related Issues	174 (52.1%)	75 (22.8%)	48 (14.4%)	14 (4.2%)	6 (1.0%)	6 (1.0%)	7 (1.0%)	334 (100.0%)
Learn of Civil Rights of People with Disabilities	56 (16.9%)	98 (29.5%)	80 (24.1%)	48 (14.5%)	24 (7.2%)	18 (5.4%)	8 (2.4%)	332 (100.0%)
Acquire Job-Seeking Skills	12 (4.1%)	16 (5.5%)	22 (7.6%)	28 (9.7%)	60 (20.7%)	46 (16.9%)	106 (36.6%)	290 (100.0%)
How Employers Can Enhance Job Opportunities	80 (24.1%)	86 (25.9%)	80 (24.1%)	42 (12.7%)	20 (6.0%)	12 (3.6%)	12 (3.6%)	332 (100.0%)

APPROVAL OF CONFERENCE DIMENSIONS BY CONSTITUENCY GROUP

Analysis of Variance

Indep. Variable		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig. (p < .05)
Constit. Group	Between Groups	22.556	9	2.506	8.499	.000
	Within Groups	7.007	26	.295		
	Total	30.222	35			

Summary Statistics

Constituency Group By Approval of Conference Dimensions

Constituency Group	n	Mean	Standard Deviation
People with Disabilities	112	27.30	2.96
Employers	56	27.96	3.30
Service Providers	30	25.67	4.34
Organized Labor	22	26.73	2.96
Educators	6	26.67	1.03
Rehabilitation Professionals	2	25.00	1.03