

AbilityOne Promotion and Outreach Guide

For Nonprofit Agencies



From
Awareness
To Job
Opportunity.



AbilityOne® Program Overview	3
A Brief History of AbilityOne	6
AbilityOne Promotion	7
Event Hosting	9
Sample AbilityOne Customer Appreciation Day Agenda	10
Communications and Public Relations	11
Your Key Message Makes a Difference	12
How to Work with the News Media	13
Who to Contact and How to Reach Them	15
Customizable Templates and Documents	18
Sample Press Release	20
Sample Letter to the Editor	21
Sample Media Alert	22
Sample Proclamation	23
Government Advocacy and Outreach	24
Citizen Engagement is Powerful	25
Encourage Support of the AbilityOne Program	30
Sample Thank You Letter	32
Sample Memorandum of Support	33
Sample Secretary’s Announcement	24
Questions and Answers	35
AbilityOne Program Fact Sheet	38

OVERVIEW

The Chance to Work Can Change a Life.

At the **AbilityOne® Program**, we know first-hand that the chance to work can change a life. Everyday, we see Americans who are blind or have significant disabilities prove to themselves and others that they are able to fulfill their potential and work toward independence. The **AbilityOne Program** provides employment opportunities to tens of thousands of Americans who are blind or have significant disabilities. More than 600 participating, community-based nonprofit agencies from across the country train and employ these individuals with disabilities.

But there are hundreds of thousands of Americans who are blind or have significant disabilities that are still waiting for their chance to work. That's why building awareness of the Program is so crucial to its success. And that's why we're asking our partners in opportunity to help us raise awareness through their public relations, public policy and marketing efforts. Join us in building awareness, so we can help build more fulfilling lives.

Purchasing Power, Empowering People

The largest single source of jobs for individuals with disabilities in the United States, employing more than 50,000 people with significant disabilities, the **AbilityOne Program** delivers quality products and services to the Federal government at a fair market price. The Program uses the purchasing power of the Federal government to buy products and services from community-based nonprofit agencies nationwide.

The AbilityOne Program is the largest single source of jobs for people who are blind or have significant disabilities in the United States.

WHAT WE PROVIDE

AbilityOne nonprofit agencies around the country employ people who are blind or have significant disabilities and supply a wide array of high-quality products and services, including:

- Administrative support
 - Aircraft and vehicular equipment and supplies
 - Contact center services
 - Contract closeout services
 - Detergents
 - Document imaging
 - Fleet maintenance service
 - Food service
 - Full facility maintenance
 - Landscaping and grounds maintenance services
 - Laundry services
 - Mail center operations
 - Medical and dental supplies
 - Military and civilian clothing
 - Office supplies under the SKILCRAFT® brand
 - Order processing
 - Paints
 - Secure document destruction
 - Supply chain management
 - Surgical items
 - Total facilities management
- ...and more

Federal and state governments are saving more than \$33 million a year through the AbilityOne Program.

OUR VALUE

The AbilityOne Program provides a cost-effective way to help people who are blind or have significant disabilities to become tax paying citizens, and achieve greater independence.

Our employees can:

- Become indispensable employees
- Reduce their dependence on government support and become taxpaying citizens
- Enjoy fuller participation in their communities
- Transfer their new skills into other public and private sector jobs
- Gain self-esteem and confidence
- Improve their overall quality of life

The AbilityOne Program also benefits local communities, the Federal government and the American taxpaying public:

- Thousands of people who might otherwise be solely dependent upon public assistance become taxpaying citizens.
- The Federal government enjoys great value by receiving quality products and services at fair prices.

Freedom of choice and self-reliance are important objectives for all individuals. Independence gives birth to confidence; it raises self-esteem. The thousands of people who are blind or have significant disabilities depend on the **AbilityOne Program** not only for their livelihood—but for their dignity. Please join us in promoting awareness of this important program—and help to fulfill the potential of thousands of your fellow citizens—by not only providing hope for a better future, but by providing the means to make it happen.

TIME FOR ACTION. A Brief History of AbilityOne

1938

The Wagner-O'Day Act, under which the **AbilityOne Program** resides, is enacted by Congress and signed into law by President Roosevelt. This act permits agencies serving people who are blind to sell products like brooms and mops to the government. This legislation uses the purchasing power of the government as a catalyst for sustaining and expanding employment opportunities. The law also requires that at least 75 percent of a participating organization's direct labor employees be people who are blind.

The Wagner-O'Day Act establishes a committee appointed by the President of the United States—The Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled (formerly known as the Committee on Purchases of Blind-Made Products)—to oversee the Program. It authorizes a central nonprofit agency to facilitate the distribution of orders and perform other related functions.

A group of representatives from 20 agencies in 11 states begins meeting at the American Foundation for the Blind soon after the law was passed. As a result of these meetings, NIB was created and subsequently authorized as the Program's first central nonprofit agency by the Committee.

National Industries for the Blind (NIB) is incorporated as a private, nonprofit organization. NIB is the first of two central nonprofit organizations designated by the Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled to facilitate the Program.

1971

The Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act is expanded when Senator Jacob Javits leads an effort to permit people with significant disabilities to participate in the Program. The Javits Amendment also expanded the Act to include the provision of services to the Federal government.

Senator Jacob Javits and a coalition of agencies serving people with a range of significant disabilities spearhead efforts to expand the Wagner-O'Day Act. The agencies included Goodwill Industries International, the National Easter Seal Society, the American Rehabilitation Association, The ARC, the United Cerebral Palsy Association and the International Association of Jewish Vocational Services. The expanded Javits-Wagner-O'Day (JWOD) Act (41 U.S.C. 46-48c) permits nonprofit agencies serving people with significant disabilities to participate in the Program and authorizes the agencies to provide not only supplies, but also services to the Federal government.

1974

NISH—Creating Employment Opportunities for People with Significant Disabilities is established to support the expanded Javits-Wagner O'Day Program. NISH is the second of two central nonprofit organizations designated by the Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled to facilitate the **AbilityOne Program**. NISH's objective is to create employment opportunities for people with significant disabilities by securing Federal contracts for its network of community-based, nonprofit agencies.

2001

Procurement Champions Program is established to recognize Federal government employees who provide outstanding support of Javits-Wagner O'Day Program.

2002

The Javits-Wagner O'Day Program commences surge support during Operation Iraqi Freedom and the Post Major Combat Phase.

Congressional Champions Program established to recognize senators and representatives who demonstrate outstanding support of their constituents with disabilities and the Javits-Wagner O'Day Program.

2006

The Committee votes to change the name of the Program from Javits-Wagner-O'Day to **AbilityOne**. This name change allows the Committee to harness the abilities of thousands of people who have disabilities and reflects all the people who make the Program possible.

2011

The Committee changes its operating name to **U.S. AbilityOne Commission™**.

TODAY

The AbilityOne Program is administered by an independent Federal agency—the U.S. AbilityOne Commission and supported by NIB and NISH. There are 15 Committee members, including 11 senior Federal executives, a majority of whom are procurement officials, and four private citizens who are advocates for people who are blind or have significant disabilities.

October is **National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM)** and provides a great opportunity to share success stories about your employees, products and services, and so much more.

This toolkit is meant to provide you with ideas for implementing NDEAM celebrations and year round activities in order to enhance visibility of your agency in your community, ultimately resulting in job creation. We encourage you to provide us feedback on the toolkit – let us know what tools you found useful and what items you might like to see added. And don't forget to share with us what you did for NDEAM and what the results were. We love to hear about best practices from which the entire **AbilityOne® Program** can benefit.

We know the **AbilityOne Program** enables thousands of Americans who are blind or have significant disabilities fulfill their potential. And we know the **AbilityOne Program** offers quality products and services to Federal customers at a fair market price. But thousands of people and organizations are simply not aware of the Program or the amazing stories behind it. They don't know that tens of thousands of people who are blind or have significant disabilities are working toward their independence every day and that thousands more have already become taxpaying citizens. We invite you to help us spread the word about the **AbilityOne Program**—today and all year long. We invite you to use your talents and abilities to help raise awareness of this incredible program. Together, we can fulfill the promise of job opportunity and change lives for the better.

In an effort to promote the **AbilityOne Program** to our partners, our employees and our Federal customers at government agencies and military installations across America, we have compiled some information about hosting events and activities, leveraging local news media and other ways to raise awareness of the **AbilityOne Program**.

- ✓ **Educate the general public**, local businesses, civic leaders, strategic partners, potential customers, potential employees and the media—year-round—about the purpose, capabilities and benefits of the **AbilityOne Program**.
- ✓ **Host a tour/open house** of your local nonprofit agency.
- ✓ **Invite local and state dignitaries**, media, and business and community leaders to attend.
- ✓ **Use AbilityOne resources**, including videos, brochures/publications and speakers. All are available free of charge from NISH (see contact information on page 9).
- ✓ **Invite Federal officials and customers** to meet your staff and learn more about your capabilities.

- ✓ **Speak with your local media** outlets to obtain public service time [radio] or space [local base newspaper or business journal].
- ✓ **Create a self-advocate group**, organizing people with significant disabilities to learn the skills needed to advocate for your agency's needs. (Self-advocates starter kits available through NISH)
- ✓ **Plan an "AbilityOne Customer Appreciation Day"** at your Federal customer's location.
 - **Present certificates** or other items of recognition to the Secretary, Commanding Officer, Procurement Executive, Contracting Officer, Purchase Card Coordinator or other appropriate Federal official in honor of their support.
 - **Contact the agency or installation Public Affairs Office** to provide coverage of the presentation for agency/base newspapers and magazines.
 - **Sample agenda** included on page 10.
- ✓ **Send thank you notes** to your Federal customers during this special month.
- ✓ **Invite a locally elected public official** to give a speech at your facility.
- ✓ **Host an AbilityOne Vendor Fair** to showcase your AbilityOne product and service capabilities. Invite your Federal customers and other local AbilityOne-participating nonprofit agencies to attend and/or exhibit.
- ✓ **Celebrate significant milestones by hosting special events** such as business anniversaries, as well as business achievements and accolades, including new contract signings, awards, new strategic partners, civic initiatives and ground breakings at your contract site or home office.
- ✓ **Send a letter** to the supervisors of the contracting officers and/or purchase card holders who are strong supporters of the **AbilityOne Program**. Recognize them for their efforts to create employment opportunities for people who are blind or have significant disabilities.
- ✓ **Recommend a Federal customer, Senator or Representative** to NISH to be named an "AbilityOne Champion" and host an event if/when the nominee is inducted.
- ✓ **Create a Mentoring Program** with a local business or organization. The mentoring program would help link employers interested in hiring people with disabilities with job-seekers and help provide them with hands-on career exploration, on-site job shadowing, and ongoing mentoring, which could lead to future employment opportunities.

- ✓ **Sponsor or co-sponsor local events** to raise awareness about the **AbilityOne Program**, such as a lecture series, film screenings or community clean-ups.
- ✓ **Send digital photos** with captions to local media after events for publications; look for photo opportunities with elected officials or other VIPs.
- ✓ **Send your YouTube videos** and photos of your AbilityOne events and activities to nish_communications@nish.org to be posted on the AbilityOne YouTube channel.

HOT TIPS FOR EVENT HOSTING

- ✓ **Write** and distribute a Media Alert. Notify the media of the date, time, location and purpose of your event. Include the names of any special guests, such as the mayor or governor. (Guidelines for preparing Media Alerts are included in this kit.)
- ✓ **Follow** all the recommended guidelines for securing pre- and post-event media coverage. (Guidelines are included in this kit.)
- ✓ **Link** your website to the AbilityOne website (www.AbilityOne.org) and/or design a page of your own, listing ways your agency supports the **AbilityOne Program**.
- ✓ **Hang** posters and decorate bulletin boards with **AbilityOne Program** information.

For help in planning your own AbilityOne Celebration Activities, please contact nish_communications@nish.org or 571-226-4660.

Sample AbilityOne Customer Appreciation Day Agenda



(To be sent on your agency letterhead)

Agenda

October XX, 20XX

Opening Program

20XX Disability Employment Awareness Month Celebration

Order of Program

11-11:10 a.m.

Welcome and Opening Remarks

[Representative from Host Agency]

11:10-11:15 a.m.

Introduction of Keynote Speaker

11:15-11:40 a.m.

[AbilityOne Employee's Name], AbilityOne Speakers Bureau

11:40-11:45 a.m.

Introduction of NISH Staff Speaker

11:45 a.m.-12:05 p.m.

AbilityOne Program Overview, Special Award and Recognition

NISH Staff Speaker

12:05-12:20 p.m.

Question and Answer Period

12:20-12:30 p.m.

Closing Remarks

[Representative from Host Agency]

MAKING HEADLINES

Hosting events and activities can help you gain media coverage. The **AbilityOne Program** has prepared Sample Communications Tools, so you'll be ready for every media opportunity that can help you disseminate your message.

- ☑ Hold ribbon-cutting ceremonies and other events that celebrate new contracts, anniversaries, and awards presentations. If the media does not attend, take photos and send them along with a press release immediately following the event.
- ☑ Develop feature stories that showcase the **AbilityOne Program** and its economic and social impact on the lives of people who are blind or have significant disabilities in your region.
- ☑ Write stories that spotlight your agency and its recent successes.
- ☑ Identify public policy makers who support the **AbilityOne Program** and invite them for a publicized visit.
- ☑ Recognize and celebrate local AbilityOne Champions.

TOGETHER, WE CAN RISE TO THE CHALLENGE!

As the resident expert on the issue of creating job opportunities for people who are blind or have significant disabilities, you are a valuable source to your local news media.

Together, We Can Raise Awareness about:

- The **AbilityOne Program**.
- Your agency.
- The benefits of employing individuals who are blind or have significant disabilities.
- Your expertise as the leading educational resource.
- The support provided by your Federal customers.

The attached materials are designed to help you use your expertise to become an effective resource for the media. By doing so, you will almost certainly bring more exposure to your organization, raise public awareness of the **AbilityOne Program** and educate your community about the critical need to provide more employment opportunities for people who are blind or have significant disabilities.

YOUR KEY MESSAGE MAKES A DIFFERENCE

The Key to Creating Awareness and Fulfilling Potential

Key messages are the core of what you communicate to the news media. Consider keeping a library of key messages specific to your agency. You can begin to build this key message library by answering the following questions in one or two sentences.

- What does your community need to know, believe and care about to become engaged with your organization and the issue of employment for people who are blind or have significant disabilities?
- What obstacles or misconceptions must you overcome to engage the community?
- What needs to happen, or what do people need to do, to meet your organization's goals or have an impact on your business and work with people who are blind or have significant disabilities?
- If people did what you wished, how would things be different at your agency?

Facts and Figures/Key Messages

People who are blind or have significant disabilities are the largest untapped labor force in the United States. Nearly 80% of these individuals do not have jobs.

The AbilityOne Program:

- Is the single largest employer in the United States of people who are blind or have significant disabilities.
- Develops and delivers quality employment opportunities for people who are blind or have significant disabilities.
- Employs tens of thousands of people who are blind or have significant disabilities.
- Collaborates with its Federal customers to satisfy their needs with quality products and services at a fair market price.
- Leverages a national network of nonprofit agencies to develop and expand the array of solutions it provides to Federal customers.

- Provides everything from SKILCRAFT® office products to Fleet Management Services to Secure Document Destruction.
- Meets industry standards and certifications such as ISO 9000, Joint Commission and ASHES.
- Operates at nearly 1,000 locations representing 40 government agencies nationally; including operation of 145 base supply stores.

HOW TO WORK WITH THE NEWS MEDIA: “Dos & Don’ts”

Every time you talk to a reporter, you have an opportunity to increase awareness of the **AbilityOne Program**.

Do: Keep it Simple

- Never assume reporters and their audience have the same level of understanding as you do about your workplace or the **AbilityOne Program**.
- Always shorten your messages to the simplest communication possible.

Do: Build Relationships

- Let reporters hear from you regularly to help establish a relationship and credibility.
- Make a list of local reporters to contact.
- Write or call them to introduce yourself and your organization.
- Follow up periodically to provide updates on issues.
- Give them a heads-up on a story that may be breaking locally or in DC.
- Suggest story ideas.

Do: Familiarize Yourself with the News Outlet BEFORE Making Contact

- Journalists appreciate that you’ve taken time to review their work.
- Ensure that your story idea falls into their area of expertise.

Do: Use News “Hooks”

- Information becomes more enticing with a “news hook.” National Disability Employment Awareness Month in October, the anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and “Celebrating the **AbilityOne Program**” are good news “hooks.”
- Human interest stories also make great news hooks—and they abound at the **AbilityOne Program**. Always get permission from the required party, before telling their story publicly.

Do: Use Pictures

- Action photographs of your employees on the job add story appeal.
- If possible, advise the media outlets that digital photography is available via email upon request. (Note: Given the prevalence of computer viruses, most newsrooms won’t open unsolicited email attachments.)

Do: Respond Quickly to All Media Inquiries

- This is a requirement for good relationship with reporters.
- Gauge the nature of their request and the timetable for addressing it, if you choose to participate.

Do: Volunteer to Get Additional Information Reporters Need

- If general industry or agency information is requested, offer to make a few calls and see if you can find it. Or suggest other organizations and resources that the reporter can tap into, such as NISH.

Do: Be Available

- Always leave a contact number via email or voice mail so you can be reached at any time.

Don’t: Use Industry or Technical Jargon or Unexplained Acronyms

Don’t: Bother Reporters “On Deadline”

Don’t: Speak “Off the Record”

- When speaking with media, everything you say is on the record. Make sure to only to discuss topics you are comfortable speaking publicly about.

Don't: Use "No Comment" to answer a Question

- Instead, explain why you cannot comment, for example: "I cannot speak for that group, but our own position is..."

Don't: Ask Reporters to See Copies of Their Stories in Advance

GET CONNECTED! **Who to Contact and How to Reach Them**

Creating and Maintaining Contact Lists

Step 1

- Research the media outlets in your marketing using electronic and printed media resources and reference materials. Most publications have websites with editorial staff listings and contact information to help you find the contacts you need.
- In a pinch, you can simply search online, call each outlet, and ask who would be the correct reporter or editor to contact about stories relating to the employment of people who are blind or have significant disabilities.

Step 2

- Create a news media contact database, which includes an up-to-date list of editors, reporters and producers from local and regional broadcast, print and online media outlets.
- Keep your database current.
- Reporters and editors change jobs frequently, so updating and maintaining your database regularly is crucial.

What Should my Contact List Include?

- ☑ Type of media (newspaper, newswire, magazine, radio, TV, Internet, etc.)
- ☑ Contact title (reporter, editor, producer, etc.)
- ☑ Contact name
- ☑ Phone number (main phone number for the organization and the direct telephone—if available—of the individual contact)
- ☑ Email address
- ☑ Website of organization
- ☑ Notes:
 - When is the contact on deadline?
 - What days and hours does the contact work?
 - How does the contact prefer to receive information—mail or email?
 - When did you last talk on the phone?
 - When did you last send the contact media information?

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
1	Outlet	Type of Media Outlet	First Name	Last Name	Title	Phone	Fax	Email	Website of Outlet	Notes:
2	New York Times	Daily Newspaper	Bob	Jones	Features Writer	(212) 967-6543	(212) 345-6789	bob.jones@nytimes.com	nytimes.com	contact via email
3	About.com	Online	Rebecca	Smith	Business Editor	(202) 123-4567	(202) 7654-321	rsmith@about.com	about.com	Wrote recent story on people with disabilities. Spoke with on May 3, 2011. Interested in receiving more info.
4	Reuters	Wire	Lindsay	Silver	Business Editor	(646) 876-5432	(646) 234-5678	lindsay.silver@reuters.com	reuters.com	
5										

How to Make Contact

Reporters' preference for contact varies. During your contact with reporters, ask for their preference and if necessary follow up by phone. Include the reporter's contact preference in your media contact database. **Never assume that faxing or emailing information alone is enough. Follow up by phone within 24 hours** after distributing your media materials.

Making the Most of Media Events

The first rule concerning media events or news conferences is: "DON'T ABUSE THEM!" Hosting too frequent or inconsequential news conferences will cause reporters to shy away from attending your next media event.

Both the location and timing should make life easy for the reporter. Hold your event early in the day to give reporters time to prepare a piece that could be for the evening news or the next day's newspaper. By starting early, you increase the chance of seeing your story run on one of the state or national newswires (e.g.: the Associated Press) or through Internet media outlets during the day (which may prompt phone calls from news outlets that failed to attend your event).

Many newswire services have “daybooks” that list significant daily local news at least a day in advance. If you’re planning a media event, be sure to get listed on the daybook by sending your media alert a week in advance and then following up with a phone call two days before the event to confirm your alert will be listed.

For televised news, outdoors is the ideal location. Special attention should be paid to “setting the stage” and providing interesting images such as an AbilityOne logo on the podium or backdrop.

If logistics favor an indoor news conference you will need:

- ☑ A quiet room large enough to handle the number of reporters you expect
- ☑ A podium or center stage area with a public-address system, if the room is large
- ☑ A media table with information and a sign-in sheet for reporters
- ☑ Adequate, well-spaced seating with a wide area behind and on the sides to accommodate camera equipment
- ☑ Electrical outlets for radio and TV equipment
- ☑ Internet access for computer connection
- ☑ Press kits. Have your press kits available at the sign-in table even if you are doing online press kits, as reporters still need hard copies of basic information

Special Events, Special Coverage

Events designed around a public activity, for example, a one-day open house of your facility, provide an opportunity for education, media coverage and attracting new business. It also gives you a platform to discuss the [AbilityOne Program](#), the barriers people who are blind or have significant disabilities face in securing steady employment, and the jobs provided by your Federal contracts.

Your Online Newsroom

Be sure to set up a “newsroom” on your website. It should contain copies of all news releases, as well as information about who reporters should contact for information or interviews.

NEWS YOU CAN (REALLY) USE: Customizable Templates and Documents

The **AbilityOne Program** has made it easy to get involved with raising awareness about our mission—and yours. We have developed documents for you to use that answer many of the questions a reporter is likely to pose about your agency, as well as various templates, such as news releases, media alerts and more.

**A sample of each of these documents is included.
You may also find them online at: www.nish.org/ndeam.**

If you require further assistance with modifying the documents or template, please contact nish_communications@nish.org or 571-226-4660.

Media Alerts

A media alert (also called a media advisory) is used when there is an immediate event you would like to announce to the press. It outlines the most compelling points to draw media to cover that event. An alert should be short and the information should be bulleted, covering the five W's (who, what, when, where, and why).

Letters to the Editor

A well-reasoned, carefully written Letter to the Editor can be very influential in shaping public debate and raising awareness about your organization's point of view. Before writing a letter to the editor, call the editor or go to the website, to check requirements for how to submit and see if it will be considered for publication. Get instructions about length and other submission criteria.

The letter to the editor should:

- Be substantial, thoughtful and focused.
- State the letter's purpose in the first one or two sentences.
- Include content that is short and to the point.
- When submitting a letter to the editor, include phone and an email address where the writer can be reached.

News Release

If you are hosting an event, you should send out a Media Alert before, and a news release after the event.

Whenever possible, you should:

- Include key messages
- Provide a high-resolution photograph with caption
- Create a provocative headline
- Include a “colorful” quote in the second or third paragraphs
- Provide as many answers as possible to logical questions about who, what, when where, why and how

Social Media Release

In addition to the traditional news release, today many organizations are creating social media press releases. A social media press release makes your news searchable and allows you to share content via various social media sites, including Facebook and Twitter.

- Search engine optimize the release by including key search terms in the headline and strategically repeating them in the body of the release.
- Post the release on your website and a link to the release on any social media pages your agency may have, such as Facebook or Twitter
- Post the release on PitchEngine – a social media platform that helps optimize your content for the web and allows you to include images, video and links.

Print and Web Banner Ads

If you are interested in using print ads, please contact the Marketing Communications department at 571-226-4660 or nish_communications@nish.org.

Radio Public Service Announcements (PSAs)

PSAs should be sent to your local radio outlets with a one-page letter requesting airtime. Send different versions of the radio script so that the station can choose which version best fits its programming and timing needs.

(To be sent on your agency letterhead)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: [Contact name/title]

Phone: [Phone number]

Email: [Email address]

[Agency name] Honors [Employee name] in Celebration of National Disability Employment Awareness Month and the AbilityOne Program

[City, State] [Date of release]— Celebrating the observance of October as National Disability Employment Awareness Month, [Employee name] was honored today by [Agency name] for [his/her] professional accomplishments as part of the AbilityOne® Program.

[Insert quote from agency executive about honored employee.]

The AbilityOne Program is the largest source of employment for people who are blind or have significant disabilities in the United States and is a cost effective way to empower many of these individuals to achieve greater independence by reducing dependence on government support and joining the ranks of taxpayers. However, people who are blind or have significant disabilities remain one of America's greatest untapped labor resources, with nearly 80 percent of this population without employment.

The AbilityOne Program develops and delivers employment opportunities that provide individual choice, equitable wages and benefits, upward mobility and personal satisfaction for more than 50,000 people who are blind or have significant disabilities. These individuals are employed by a network of over 600 nonprofit agencies that provide a wide array of quality products and services at a fair price to Federal customers. People with disabilities at these agencies are working on projects in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and Guam.

In [Name of city/town where agency is located], [Insert number] people who are blind or who have significant disabilities are benefiting from training and work experience at [Name of agency]. For example, [Name of employee] has been employed at [Name of agency] for [Insert number] years as a [Title/position].
[Insert quote from agency employee.]

Through the AbilityOne Program, in the last fiscal year, individuals in [State name] earned approximately [Insert number from the Statistics by State chart from the NISH Annual Report – located on the left column of nish.org extranet.] in wages and benefits that helped them enjoy greater personal and financial independence.

ABOUT THE AbilityOne PROGRAM: In 1938, Congress passed the Wagner-O'Day Act, establishing a Federal market for products made by individuals who are blind. In 1971, the Act was amended by Sen. Jacob Javits to include products and services provided by people with a wide range of significant disabilities and became known as the Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act. The AbilityOne Program is a coordinated effort on behalf of the U.S. AbilityOne Commission™, National Industries for the Blind (NIB) and NISH—Creating Employment Opportunities for People with Significant Disabilities. Through the AbilityOne Program, people who are blind or have significant disabilities have the opportunity to enjoy full participation in their communities and can market their AbilityOne skills into other public and private sector jobs.

For more information about AbilityOne, please visit www.AbilityOne.org.

Sample Letter to the Editor



(To be sent on your agency letterhead)

[Date]

[Name of editorial page editor]

[Name of publication]

[Address]

[City, State, Zip Code]

Dear [Insert Editor's Name]:

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month and the perfect time to celebrate the AbilityOne® Program. The AbilityOne Program is the largest source of employment for people who are blind or have significant disabilities in the United States and is a cost-effective way to empower many of them to achieve greater independence by reducing dependence on government support and joining the ranks of taxpayers. However, people with significant disabilities remain one of America's greatest untapped labor resources, with nearly 80 percent of this population without jobs.

The AbilityOne Program develops and delivers employment opportunities that provide individual choice, equitable wages and benefits, upward mobility and personal satisfaction for more than 50,000 people who are blind or have significant disabilities. These individuals are employed by a network of more than 600 nonprofit agencies that provide a wide array of quality products and services at a fair market price to Federal customers. People with disabilities at these agencies are working on projects in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and Guam.

Since [Year your agency was established], [Insert the name of your agency] has been providing vocational training and employment for people who are blind or who have significant disabilities. Currently, [Number of people employed on AbilityOne projects] are working on AbilityOne projects in [Name of your geographical region]. These AbilityOne employees are working at [List where the AbilityOne projects are and what product or service is being provided].

In 1938, Congress passed the Wagner-O'Day Act, establishing a Federal market for products made by people who are blind. In 1971, the Act was amended by Sen. Jacob Javits to include products and services provided by people with a wide range of significant disabilities, and became known as the Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act, under which the AbilityOne Program resides. Through the AbilityOne Program, people who are blind or have significant disabilities receive rehabilitation, training and job coaching through qualified community-based nonprofit organizations such as [Your agency name]. The results are customized solutions for the Federal Government, including our U.S. Armed Forces, and increased financial security and personal independence for thousands of people with disabilities.

Sincerely,

[Name/Signature Block]

(To be sent on your agency letterhead)

[Date]

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: [Contact name/title]

Phone: [Phone number]

Email: [Email address]

[Agency name] Honors [Employee name] in Celebration of National Disability Employment Awareness Month and the AbilityOne® Program

WHAT: [Name of agency] will honor the professional accomplishments of [Employee name]. [He/she] has been employed at [Name of agency] for [Insert number] years as a [Title/position]. Members of the media are invited to attend this special event, take photographs or videotape, and conduct interviews. (Include the names and titles of any public policy makers or local celebrities who will be there for the celebration.)

WHO: [Your agency executive] and [Local public policy maker] will recognize [Employee name].

WHEN: [Date and time of event]

WHERE: [Location of event]

WHY: October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month and the perfect time to recognize the AbilityOne Program. Providing employment to more than 50,000 individuals, the AbilityOne Program is the largest source of employment for people who are blind or have significant disabilities. The employment opportunities made possible through the AbilityOne Program equip people who are blind or have significant disabilities with the skills and training necessary to earn equitable wages, benefits and greater independence. Because of the job opportunities created by [Name of federal customer] through the AbilityOne Program, [Employee Name] is gainfully employed, earning wages and benefits that will help [him/her] to lead a more independent life and reduce [his/her] need for other government benefits.

DETAILS: Visit www.AbilityOne.org for more details about the AbilityOne Program.

CELEBRATING THE ABILITYONE PROGRAM DURING NATIONAL DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS MONTH

AbilityOne Week

WHEREAS, the AbilityOne® Program provides more than 50,000 people who are blind or have significant disabilities with rehabilitation, training and job coaching necessary to receive good wages and benefits and gain greater independence and quality of life; and

WHEREAS, the AbilityOne Program empowers people who are blind or have significant disabilities and rely heavily on social support programs; and

WHEREAS, through the AbilityOne Program, community-based nonprofit organizations such as **[Your agency name]** provide employment opportunities to people who are blind or have significant disabilities while providing a wide array of quality, products and services to the Federal Government at a fair price; and

WHEREAS, by employing people who are blind or have significant disabilities, the AbilityOne Program is able to help these individuals enjoy more fully participation in their communities, market their AbilityOne skills into other public and private sector jobs, and create and sustain employment opportunities; and

WHEREAS, in **[Insert City/State name]** the **[Insert the name of participating organization(s)]** provide(s) employment opportunities and training for **[Insert number of people employed]** people who are blind or have significant disabilities, enabling them to lead more productive and meaningful lives, provide support for their families and develop skills necessary for long-term employment; and

WHEREAS, **[Insert City/State name]** recognizes the important contributions of [Insert your organization] to [Insert City/State name] and its citizens;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, [Name of Mayor/Governor], Mayor/Governor of [Insert City/State name], and on behalf of [Insert City/State name], do hereby proclaim [dates], as;

AbilityOne Week

in [Insert City/State name] and hereby commend all persons who are committed to and work toward enhancing employment opportunities for people with who are blind or have significant disabilities.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Seal of [Insert City/State name] to be affixed this [Insert date] 20__.

[Name of Mayor/Governor]—Mayor/Governor

MAKE YOUR MARK ON PUBLIC POLICY

The AbilityOne® Program was established by Federal law, and it can be improved by the same legislative process. Establishing relationships with your public policymakers is crucial to the success of the AbilityOne Program.

Our elected leaders must be made aware of how the AbilityOne Program benefits people who are blind or have significant disabilities. If you are not sure who your Federal policymakers are, go to www.congress.org and enter your zip code—it is that easy.

If some of your AbilityOne employees or board members live or work in other congressional districts, you may want to contact these Members of Congress as well.

Reach Out, Reap Rewards

Guidelines for reaching out to your congressional leaders.

- ☑ Encourage employees and their families to exercise their right to vote.
- ☑ Maintain the relationship with your legislators by providing them with updates and information on your issues and accomplishments.
- ☑ Invite senators and representatives to tour your AbilityOne contract site, attend special ceremonies celebrating new contract awards or building dedications at the contract site or speak at an awards ceremony honoring employees or staff.
- ☑ Arrange for all appropriate public policymakers to receive your newsletter, news releases, annual report and other mailings.
- ☑ Photograph policymakers when they attend your events and use them in your newsletters, news releases, annual report and other publications. It's a good idea to send extra copies of your publication, in which you include your policymaker's photo, to his/her district office.

Influence Congress through...

Personal contact • Staff contact • Telephone contact • Email contact

Form a working relationship with your public policy maker. Public policymakers believe in public service and want to help, but they look to you as a constituent to tell them what you need.

- ☑ Attend your senators' and representatives' periodic "town meetings" in your home state.
- ☑ Arrange an annual meeting—at least—with your public policymakers and staff at their home district offices to update them on your activities.
- ☑ When you make contact or schedule a tour, be sure to inform the NISH Government Affairs team so they can provide information on recent contact with the Member, provide assistance to you, and follow up.
- ☑ Don't forget your local and state legislators, governor, mayor, state representatives and city council members.

CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IS POWERFUL

How to Communicate with Congress: The Write Stuff

Communicate with representatives and senators in their Washington, DC, offices via email. Letters sent via U.S. Postal Service can be delayed for weeks due to the increased security procedures. Keep your letter to one page and focus on one issue at a time.

- ☑ Note the specific name and number of the bill, law, resolution or program you are referencing in your letter or other communication.
- ☑ Explain the basis for your expertise and interest in the issue. Use personal letters with personal anecdotes.
- ☑ Ask for specific action: to co-sponsor a bill, vote for or against specific legislation, introduce a bill, to write a letter, or some other action.
- ☑ Use facts and case studies showing consequences for your lawmaker's district and constituents.
- ☑ Encourage or facilitate your employees with disabilities and their families to write or meet with your lawmaker(s).
- ☑ Be polite but persistent with follow-up letters or phone calls to the legislator's staff.

Note: Each constituent contact is presumed to represent at least 20-30 other people who feel the same way but didn't write or phone. A mere 10-15 letters on an issue could sway an undecided lawmaker.

Check Your Network for Political Contacts

Talk to people in your network to discover how many have ties to lawmakers. You will be surprised to find there are quite a few...and they may be happy to approach your lawmaker with a concern that affects the good work your organization performs in your community.

Scheduling a Tour with a Member of Congress

Your member of Congress will most likely be in his or her home district—especially during an election year—during the congressional recess times. Consider scheduling a meeting with them and a tour for them at your facility or at the location of your AbilityOne contract in honor of National Disability Employment Awareness Month.

Your Initial Visit

Generally, a staff member in the district office is responsible for planning the member’s schedule while he or she is home from Congress. Members are in the home district for a week near Federal holidays such as Presidents’ Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day and Columbus Day. In addition, they are in their home districts during the entire month of August and on most Mondays and Fridays. These “district work periods” allow them to meet with constituents, and you may be able to personally meet with the member.

If a meeting with the Member of Congress is not possible, it is equally beneficial for you to meet with a key staff member. Their time is often scheduled far in advance, so make an initial appointment in the district office and ask for several possible dates for the tour.

KEY MESSAGES:

- Tell the dilemma and personal side of your own story.
- Let Congress know about AbilityOne Program success stories in your community.
- NISH—Creating Employment Opportunities for People with Significant Disabilities can only be an effective legislative force with an active and attuned grassroots affiliate network. Don’t worry if you’re not (yet!) the best-connected constituent, keep working to develop closer relations with your legislators.

Invite your elected official to tour your site

Follow your visit to the district office with a formal letter of invitation including date, time and place. Make sure the logistics (i.e. directions, time) are clear and concise. Congressional staff usually brief members prior to an event, so provide this information to them in advance.

It is best to invite only one elected official at the same time (i.e. if a Member of Congress is scheduled for a tour, do not invite the governor to attend at the same time).

If possible, invite him or her to present a certificate or award to your “Employee of the Year,” a ribbon-cutting ceremony for a new site or renovation, or something special that will better justify the tour.

Indicate the amount of time you would like for the tour. Keep in mind that other constituents also want to meet with this legislator, so do your best to keep the tour less than an hour. After the letter has been sent, follow up with a phone call to the scheduler for an answer. Most members review invitations with their schedulers on a weekly basis to determine which invitations to accept. Your polite persistence will also indicate your enthusiasm for the tour.

Prepare a profile of your agency

When you have a confirmed date and time, make sure you disseminate information about your organization and the AbilityOne Program to your local media at least a week in advance.

Include economic and community-impact information, such as number of employees, unique services you provide to your employees, total sales, and total wages paid to people who are blind or have significant disabilities.

Describe the AbilityOne manufacturing or services facility, its operation, the number of employees and other important background information. The above information is also excellent to include in a Press Kit or Information Packet.

There is nothing more important to ensuring a Member of Congress understands your agency and AbilityOne than having them see both, first hand at your agency.

Getting Ready for the Tour

- ✓ Set aside an hour for the tour.
- ✓ Inform your employees of the date and time, particularly if a presentation of some type is planned.
- ✓ Inform NISH Government Affairs of the planned tour so that we can assist.
- ✓ Once you receive confirmation that a tour is on the schedule, contact the local media and invite them to attend.
- ✓ Arrange for a professional photographer to be on hand. The photos can be sent to the media as well as sent to the member's office with a follow-up thank you letter.
- ✓ Discuss notifying the press with the Member's staff. They may wish to issue a news release indicating the time and place of the tour. If not, you can still send a short news advisory to the City Desk editor for newspapers and assignment editors for local TV or radio stations.

Note: Even if there is no initial media interest, you can still send photos and news releases to them after the tour along with a story about your agency. The media may use the information at a later time or follow up with you to pursue another story idea. NISH can help.

Conducting the Tour

- ✓ Try to make your agency tour stand out with special touches such as a banner, poster, lapel pins, buttons or other signs of welcome.
- ✓ Make your explanation of what takes place in your agency simple and concise.
- ✓ Brag, as long as it's true.
- ✓ Emphasize positive items of interest, such as an innovative safety program, low error rate, special services to employees, end users of your products or other items that will make your agency stand out.
- ✓ Remember to introduce and involve your staff and employees with the tour.
- ✓ Have an employee demonstrate his or her job and explain the procedure to the member.
- ✓ Involve employees as much as possible and remember that their personal story is the most powerful tool you have.

- ☑ Do not use the tour as a heavy lobbying opportunity. Treat the Member of Congress as an honored visitor. Just seeing the day-to-day operations and meeting your employees will ensure that the member will have a new appreciation and understanding of the **AbilityOne Program**. Anticipate any questions the member may have about your facility and be prepared to answer those questions or know who might have that answer.
- ☑ After the tour, have the member speak at a membership or employee meeting or present an award to your “Employee of the Year.” At a minimum, thank the member for visiting and offer to serve as a local advisor on issues that affect people who are blind or have significant disabilities.

Follow-Up

- ☑ Send a brief thank-you letter along with any photos and media clippings you may have.
- ☑ If there was no media coverage, send the editor of your newspaper a brief write-up and a photo of your Member of Congress touring your facility.
- ☑ If you have an in-house newsletter, send a copy of the article covering the tour to your Member of Congress.
- ☑ Remember to inform the NISH Government Affairs staff of the tour so they can follow up.

ENCOURAGE SUPPORT OF THE ABILITYONE PROGRAM

AbilityOne Congressional Champion Program

Becoming an AbilityOne Congressional Champion is probably the most important step elected officials can take toward effective representation of constituents who are blind or have significant disabilities. Members of the House and Senate can become AbilityOne Champions and join a national effort to ensure employment opportunities will continue to grow and thrive in the future.

Participation as an AbilityOne Congressional Champion may include one or more of these activities:

- Support nonprofit agencies and NISH in pursuing and expanding new employment opportunities for persons with significant disabilities or who are blind;
- Support legislation and funding that directly affect Federal and state programs for persons with significant disabilities or who are blind;
- Assist with local or state issues that may impact nonprofit agencies within state or district; and
- Defend against potential threats to the AbilityOne Program or Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act.

NISH recommends that every AbilityOne Congressional Champions complete a straight forward, four-step process:

1. Visit with nonprofit agency representatives within specific district or Washington, D.C. office.
2. Tour your agency's AbilityOne manufacturing or service contract site(s).
3. Certify that the office supports the Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act by using AbilityOne services or products in Washington, D.C. or district office.
4. Complete one of the following actions of communication on behalf of the AbilityOne Program: press conference statement; Congressional Record statement; or a similar communication.

For more information on AbilityOne Congressional Champions, contact NISH Government Affairs at 571-226-4660.

Memorandum of Support

A Memorandum of Support for the AbilityOne Program stresses a Federal agency's commitment to the AbilityOne Program and educates Federal personnel about their responsibilities under the Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act. It also reminds Federal personnel of the quality products and services they are already receiving under the AbilityOne Program.

While the sample provided on page 33 focuses on the October observance of National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM), a Memorandum of Support for the AbilityOne Program can be issued any time of the year to raise Federal employees' awareness of the Program's benefits.

Secretary's Announcement

An announcement from a Federal agency's Secretary during National Disability Awareness Month shows a high level of support for the AbilityOne Program and educates a large number of Federal employees about their purchasing and procurement responsibilities under the Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act. For more information about products and services that are contracted by a specific agency, contact NISH Communications at nish_communications@nish.org or 571-226-4660.

Sample Thank you Letter



(To be sent on your agency letterhead)

[Date]

(Name of Representative)

(Address of Representative)

(City, State and Zip Code)

Dear [Name of Representative]:

On behalf of the employees and staff of the (Insert name of agency), I want to thank you for making time in your busy schedule to visit us on (date of visit). Everyone enjoyed the opportunity to meet you, and we appreciate your commitment to your constituents who are blind or have significant disabilities.

As you saw firsthand, the AbilityOne® Program, is a win-win for everyone involved. It provides job training and employment opportunities to people who are blind or have significant disabilities while providing quality, on-time products and services to the Federal Government at a competitive price.

I know that time in your home district is extremely limited. We appreciate that you visited (Name of your agency) so you could see for yourself who we are, what we do and how employment of people who are blind or have significant disabilities impacts our entire community.

Enclosed are some photos we took during your visit with us as well as some media clippings. We will also send you the article that will be published in our organization's next newsletter. If I can be of assistance, in particular when the Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act or other issues affecting people who are blind or have significant disabilities are before you in Congress, please don't hesitate to contact me any time.

Sincerely,

[Name/Signature Block]

Sample Memorandum of Support



Memorandum for: See Distribution

Subject: The AbilityOne® Program

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month, and the perfect time to celebrate the AbilityOne Program. Currently providing more than 50,000 employment opportunities, the AbilityOne Program is the largest single source of employment for people who are blind or have significant disabilities. As a result of this extraordinary socioeconomic program, a national network of nonprofit agencies provides Federal customers with a wide array of quality products and services, while allowing thousands of people who are blind or have significant disabilities to lead more productive and independent lives, pay taxes, help support families and join in the American work experience.

The AbilityOne Program is administered by an independent Federal agency, the U.S. AbilityOne Commission™, in partnership with two national nonprofit organizations, National Industries for the Blind (NIB) and NISH—Creating Employment Opportunities for People with Significant Disabilities. NIB and NISH assist more than 600 community based nonprofit agencies across the nation in their efforts to employ people with significant disabilities on Federal contracts under the AbilityOne Program.

This important socioeconomic procurement initiative provides the [Name of Federal agency] acquisition workforce with a unique opportunity to help provide employment for nearly 80% of the Americans who are blind or have significant disabilities without jobs. I urge you to learn more about the national AbilityOne Network (**www.AbilityOne.org**) and to find ways that the program can assist us in meeting our needs for quality products and services. In particular, Government Purchase Card users should always buy items furnished by the AbilityOne Program before considering other commercial sources.

The AbilityOne Program also performs a wide range of professional and business support services. Currently, [Name of Federal agency] has contracted to AbilityOne-participating agencies for [Name of services – NISH can provide this information]. The AbilityOne Program also has the capability to provide a variety of other services, such as contract management support services, secure document destruction, custodial services, secure mail/digital document services, administrative services, vehicle maintenance and management, switchboard and call center operation, and warehousing/distribution.

Products available under the AbilityOne Program include a wide range of office supplies, cleaning products, hardware items, medical/surgical products and textiles. These items are distributed through www.AbilityOne.com; the GSA Advantage and GSA Global Supply online shopping services (www.gsaadvantage.gov, www.gsaglobalsupply.gov); the Defense Logistics Agency EMALL; military base supply centers; and authorized commercial distributors. For more information about AbilityOne supplies or distributors, visit the Program's website, www.AbilityOne.org.

Please contact Stephanie Lesko of the AbilityOne Program staff at (703) 603-2146 or events@AbilityOne.gov if you would like additional information, including catalogs and videos. You may also call to arrange for an AbilityOne briefing or to suggest new products or services you may wish to procure through the AbilityOne Program.

[Name/Signature Block]

FEDERAL AGENCY SECRETARY'S ANNOUNCEMENT

Celebrate the AbilityOne® Program during National Disability Employment Awareness Month!

For most [Name of Federal agency] employees, October heralds the beginning of a new fiscal year.

However, it is also National Disability Employment Awareness Month, the perfect time to celebrate the AbilityOne Program. Under this Program, products and services purchased by [Name of Federal agency] and other Federal agencies currently generate jobs for more than 50,000 people who are blind or have significant disabilities.

I am especially proud of our agency's efforts to provide employment and training opportunities for people who are blind or have significant disabilities through our support of the AbilityOne Program. I ask all [Name of Federal agency] employees to help increase the number of supported individuals by identifying more contracting opportunities with the AbilityOne Program.

The AbilityOne Program provides employment opportunities in local communities nationwide for people who are blind or have significant disabilities and do not have a job. AbilityOne was created by Congress to help alleviate this employment inequity and has become the largest single source of employment for Americans who are blind or have significant disabilities, by identifying Federal contract work to be performed by these individuals.

The major challenges to productive employment of qualified people with disabilities are attitudinal barriers and false assumptions about what people can and cannot do. What people with disabilities CAN do is be productive. Your efforts to develop awareness and to educate our workforce about this important issue will help ensure [Name of Federal agency] makes an important contribution toward fulfilling America's promise to people with disabilities.

The AbilityOne Program is a cost-effective way to help people who are blind or have significant disabilities to achieve greater independence and provide the Federal Government with a quality source of products and services. AbilityOne Program employment enables many individuals to reduce dependence on government support, join the ranks of taxpayers and contribute to the Federal Government's critical missions.

Please learn more about the important role you can play in the AbilityOne Program at www.AbilityOne.gov and make a special effort to show your support as the AbilityOne Program celebrates National Disability Employment Awareness Month throughout the month of October.

[Name/Signature Block]

Where does the AbilityOne Program reside?

The Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act, which governs the AbilityOne® Program, appears in Title 41 of the United States Code, Sections 46 through 48c (41 U.S.C. 46-48c). The U.S. AbilityOne Commission™, an independent Federal agency, administers the AbilityOne Program. To carry out its mission, the Commission works closely with National Industries for the Blind (NIB) and NISH—Creating Employment Opportunities for People with Significant Disabilities to assist the more than 600 community-based nonprofit agencies that obtain Federal contracts through the program.

Is the AbilityOne Program necessary in light of the 1990 ADA Act?

While the landmark 1990 enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act legislation assures basic civil rights for people with disabilities, including the provision of reasonable accommodations by employers, it does not assure jobs for people with disabilities who want to work. The AbilityOne Program was created for just this purpose—to help create employment opportunities for people who have significant disabilities and decrease the nearly 80 percent of this population without jobs.

What types of wages do AbilityOne employees earn?

On AbilityOne product contracts, employees are paid based on the prevailing industry wage for a specific locality. On AbilityOne service contracts, employees are paid in accordance with the Service Contract Act (SCA). AbilityOne wages allow for many people who are blind or have significant disabilities to live more independent lives. Some AbilityOne participating nonprofit agencies hold special certificates issued by the Department of Labor to pay employees a commensurate wage (a percentage of the prevailing wage) based on employee productivity.

Some disability advocates are critical of the AbilityOne Program, saying the Program does not do enough to assure that employees who are blind or have significant disabilities are not segregated from others without disabilities. How would you respond to this statement?

It is important to note that a federally mandated 75 percent ratio on a contract does not dictate a work environment. Most AbilityOne contracts and the AbilityOne employees who are blind or have significant disabilities who perform them are located at government buildings and military bases in hundreds of communities across the country. While it is true that AbilityOne work may be performed by groups of employees who are blind or have significant disabilities, the majority of work environments utilized through AbilityOne contracts promote integration with non-disabled Federal coworkers, customers and other government contractors.

It is also crucial to understand why employees with disabilities choose to work at jobs supported by AbilityOne contracts. Reasons stated by employees recently surveyed include the high rate of pay, the lack of other employment opportunities for persons who are blind or have significant disabilities, the employment supports and job accommodations offered by the local nonprofits participating in the AbilityOne Program, and the relative stability of an AbilityOne job. If these jobs were not available through the AbilityOne Program, they would be performed by other Federal contractors who would not have an obligation to hire, train and support the over 50,000 persons who are blind or have significant disabilities working at AbilityOne jobs.

Shouldn't people with disabilities compete for jobs in private industry just like anybody else?

They can and they do. An important aspect of the AbilityOne Program is that it provides real job training for people who are blind or have significant disabilities. This job training provides greater opportunity for people to transfer the skills they have acquired into private sector employment opportunities; however, competition for jobs grows every day and private industry is not effectively providing employment opportunities for people who are blind or have significant disabilities. If private industry had demonstrated its collective will to employ people with disabilities over the years, laws such as the Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act and the ADA would not have been necessary and we would not be continuing to experience a staggering unemployment rate for people who are blind or have significant disabilities.

Can you cite some specific successes of the AbilityOne Program?

In California, more than 3,000 people are employed in nonprofit agencies participating in the AbilityOne Program. That figure alone would be attractive to any economic development official. Coupled with the fact that these employees earn in excess of \$52 million per year, you have a very

real success story. In Texas, over 4,000 people who are blind or have significant disabilities work on AbilityOne contracts and earn more than \$56 million annually. Even in a smaller state such as Wisconsin, over 1,200 people are working on AbilityOne projects earning more than \$21 million a year. The real successes, however, are in the individual lives of the AbilityOne employees. Visit an AbilityOne qualified nonprofit agency in your community today. There you will find out firsthand how the AbilityOne Program and community nonprofit agencies are changing lives right in your own neighborhood.

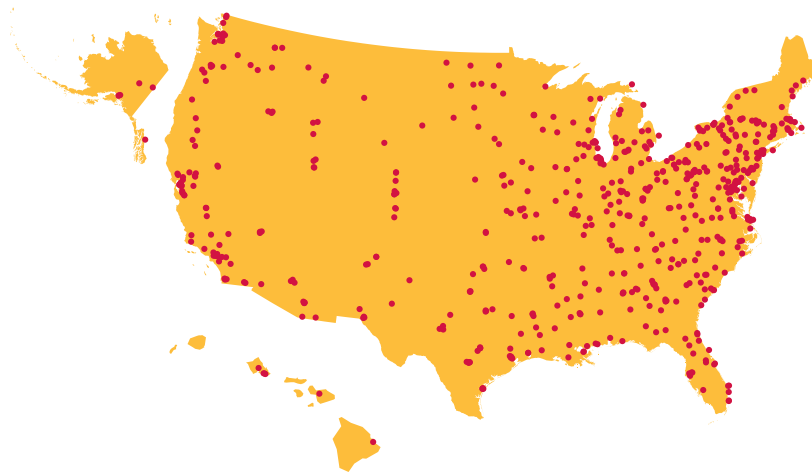
Do agencies associated with the AbilityOne Program only service Federal agencies and departments?

Not at all. In fact, community nonprofit agencies with AbilityOne contracts are encouraged to pursue contracts with state and local governments as well as commercial contracts in the private sector. Community nonprofit agencies contract with major corporations such as 3M, Boeing, General Motors, American Honda, Northern Telecom, Toro and Rockwell International, among others. For these and other private corporations, employees provide the full range of product and service offerings, including technical services such as micrographics, subassembly, recycling, fleet maintenance services and secure document destruction. Remember, the mission of the AbilityOne Program is not to limit but rather to expand the training and employment choices for people who are blind or have significant disabilities.

How do National Industries for the Blind (NIB) and NISH assist nonprofits with the AbilityOne Program and the employment of persons with disabilities?

NIB and NISH are central nonprofit agencies designated by the U.S. AbilityOne Commission™ to support nonprofit agencies that participate in the AbilityOne Program. NIB and NISH provide employment opportunities for people who are blind or have significant disabilities by procuring Federal contracts for services and goods that are fulfilled by a network of nonprofit agencies. NIB and NISH support the NPA network as well as Federal customers by providing business development and contract management assistance, engineering and technical assistance, legislative and regulatory guidance, professional training, and communications assistance.

- AbilityOne employs more than 50,000 Americans, 3,000 of whom are veterans
- AbilityOne is facilitated through a network of over 600 community-based nonprofit agencies



- Represents nearly \$3 billion of products and services purchased by the Federal Government
- Operates at nearly 1,000 locations representing 40 government agencies nationally, including operation of 145 base supply centers
- The average hourly wage for an AbilityOne employee was \$11.46 per hour, compared to the Federal minimum wage of \$7.25.