



OFFICE OF THE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

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ACQUISITION
AND SUSTAINMENT

MEMORANDUM FOR COMMANDER, UNITED STATES CYBER
COMMAND (ATTN: ACQUISITION EXECUTIVE)
COMMANDER, UNITED STATES SPECIAL OPERATIONS
COMMAND (ATTN: ACQUISITION EXECUTIVE)
COMMANDER, UNITED STATES TRANSPORTATION
COMMAND (ATTN: ACQUISITION EXECUTIVE)
DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE ARMY
(PROCUREMENT)
DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE NAVY
(PROCUREMENT)
DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE
(CONTRACTING)
DEFENSE AGENCY AND DOD FIELD ACTIVITY DIRECTORS

SUBJECT: 2021 National Disability Employment Awareness Month and the AbilityOne®
Program

Each year, the President signs a proclamation in observance of National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM). This year's Federal NDEAM theme, "America's Recovery: Powered by Inclusion," focuses on an inclusive recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic by providing full access to employment and career opportunities for individuals with disabilities, who have historically experienced the lowest employment rate of any segment of the U.S. labor force.

Observed each October, NDEAM is a chance to recognize the talents and skills of the workers in the AbilityOne Program, which is the largest source of employment for individuals who are blind or have significant disabilities. The AbilityOne employees are a vital segment of our defense workforce and contribute to military readiness in many ways, to include: producing uniforms worn by our Armed Forces, operating more than 150 Base Supply Centers, providing food services at base installation dining facilities, performing administrative contract closeout services, and proudly cleaning the Pentagon Memorial Chapel.

The Department of Defense (DoD) continues to be the lead customer of the AbilityOne Program, procuring more than \$2.1 billion of products and services in FY 2021. Today, nearly 35,000 individuals who are blind or have significant disabilities perform work on DoD contracts with 500 community-based nonprofit agencies (NPAs) across the country. Approximately 7,000 veterans work at the AbilityOne NPAs, including 3,000 wounded, ill, or injured veterans who fill direct labor jobs. In addition, AbilityOne NPAs employ 4,000 veterans working in indirect labor positions, including supervisory and management roles.

The DoD contracting and purchasing workforce supports the AbilityOne employment mission through the procurement of products and services in compliance with the Federal

Acquisition Regulation (FAR) subpart 8.7. Since the beginning of the pandemic, DoD contracting professionals have processed 899 contract actions valued at \$84 million with the AbilityOne NPAs. These companies increased surge capacity to manufacture and deliver critical products and maintain essential services to support the ongoing COVID-19 national emergency response. An AbilityOne participating NPA increased production of hand sanitizers from 1.2 million bottles annually to 13 million. Employees who are blind and visually impaired, or who have significant disabilities, are sewing and delivering high-demand Personal Protective Equipment items, such as masks and gowns. AbilityOne workers continue to be on the front lines of defense to keep buildings and military hospitals clean and operational.

The acquisition workforce is critical to expanding business with the AbilityOne Program by identifying new product lines and services to add to the AbilityOne Procurement List. There are a number of recommendations implemented by the 898 Panel on DoD and AbilityOne Contracting Oversight, Accountability, and Integrity, which will assist the acquisition workforce in doing business with the AbilityOne Program.

- During NDEAM last year, DoD established an AbilityOne Representative (ABOR) Program. Over the past year, the Component ABORs have been developing strategic plans based on a data driven approach and a procurement pledge for growth in AbilityOne Program participation. The ABOR Program was recognized as one of ten initiatives implementing Executive Order 13985, “Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government” in the Defense Equity Team report to the White House, “Department of Defense 200-Day Equity Assessment Progress Report, Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities.”
- In the area of training, DAU is deploying a comprehensive update to the Continuous Learning Module (CLM) 023, “DAU AbilityOne Training,” by the end of October. Contracting professionals and ABORs are encouraged to complete CLM 023 to meet continuous learning requirements. Additionally, the U.S. AbilityOne Commission is developing several training documents and information sheets targeted to meet the varying needs of customers. It is anticipated these training aides will be posted to the AbilityOne and DAU websites by May 2022.
- An update to the Procurement List Information Management System has resulted in detailed information available on AbilityOne products and services, and an improved Procurement List search function for customers.
- On August 11, 2021, the final rule for the FAR, Section 508-Based Standards in Information and Communication Technology (ICT), was published in the Federal Register to align FAR language to the updated accessibility standards issued by the U.S. Access Board. Consistent with FAR Subpart 39.2, which implements section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, requirements and contracting officials should review solicitation documents to confirm that the section 508 standards are appropriately considered and clearly stated in ICT

acquisitions. It is critical that the total acquisition workforce comply with the accessibility requirements of section 508 in order for employees who are blind or visually impaired to work in knowledge-based jobs. Section 508 information and training may be viewed at <https://www.section508.gov/>.

During NDEAM, we express appreciation to the AbilityOne employees for their dedication to meeting DoD mission needs. I also commend the DoD contracting workforce and ABORs for their leadership in facilitating new prime contract opportunities with the AbilityOne Program. Through our team effort, veterans and individuals who are blind or have significant disabilities will have a greater opportunity to work, lead independent lives, and contribute to the economic strength at the national, state, and local levels.

My senior staff lead for AbilityOne procurement policy is Ms. Susan Pollack who may be contacted at 571-309-8525 or susan.w.pollack.civ@mail.mil.

Sincerely,

John M. Tenaglia
Principal Director,
Defense Pricing and Contracting