

A Study of the Effectiveness of Sections 55-b and 55-c of the Civil Service Law

Prepared for:



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STATE OF
OPPORTUNITY

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A photograph of a man in a wheelchair working at a computer in an office. He is wearing a headset and looking at the screen. In the background, another person is visible working at a computer. The office has large windows and modern furniture.

A Study of Effectiveness of Sections 55-b and 55-c of the Civil Service Law

Executive Summary

Under Governor Kathy Hochul's leadership, New York has prioritized the creation of employment opportunities and support for New Yorkers with disabilities. As the state's largest employer, New York State is in a unique position to take the lead in creating employment and career opportunities for individuals. The New York State Civil Service Law authorizes the New York State Civil Service Commission to designate positions normally filled through competitive examination to be filled through the appointment of qualified persons with disabilities (55-b) and qualified veterans with disabilities (55-c). The 55-b and 55-c are existing programs through which New York can accomplish the goal of creating employment opportunities for New Yorkers and veterans with disabilities. The New York State Civil Service Law authorizes the New York State Civil Service Commission to designate up to 1,200 positions for persons with disabilities and 500 for veterans with disabilities. The program is administered by the Department of Civil Service (DCS).

"We are committed to making sure those with disabilities have fair and quality employment options in this state."¹

- Kathy Hochul, 2022 State of the State address

In an effort to better understand the efficacy of the 55-b/c programs, Governor Hochul signed legislation S.6276-A/A.7223 requiring the president of the Civil Service Commission to conduct a study on the employment of persons and veterans with disabilities by the state, and make recommendations as to whether the state needs to hire more persons and veterans with disabilities to fill positions created by sections in the civil service law.² The Civil Service Commission contracted with the Rockefeller Institute of Government to complete an assessment of the 55-b/c programs. This analysis has generated a number of key findings:

New Yorkers with disabilities who want to participate in the labor force are less likely to find employment.

Only 86.8 percent of New Yorkers with a disability who wanted to work were able to find a job compared with 95.1 percent of those with no disability. Individuals with disabilities face higher rates of unemployment and are less likely to find full-time employment (62.8 percent for individuals with disabilities vs 74.8 percent with no disability). In New York, 17.1 percent of workers with a disability are employed by the federal, state, or local government.

Nearly 4,000 New Yorkers have been granted eligibility for the 55-b/c program.

Individuals interested in seeking employment through the 55-b/c program must submit an application and provide documentation of their disability to confirm eligibility. Over the past six years, DCS has issued 5,832 letters of eligibility for the 55-b/c programs. The 55-b program averages 913 letters annually and the 55-c program issues an average of 230. The number of letters issued declined in 2020 and 2021 most likely due to COVID-19 disruptions. The most frequently identified disabilities were Mental Emotional Illness (34.1 percent), Orthopedic Impairment (19.0 percent), and Developmental/Mental (9.4 percent). Veterans were more likely to identify an orthopedic impairment compared to those issued 55-b letters.

Over 1,100 New Yorkers currently hold appointments through the 55-b/c program.

Letters of eligibility mean that individuals are eligible to apply for positions through the 55-b/c program; it is not a guarantee of employment. Between 2017 and 2021, 1,380 individuals secured appointments through the 55-b/c programs. Over half of these appointments were made by four agencies: the Department of Taxation and Finance (27.3 percent), Office of General Services (9.6 percent), Department of Education (9.1 percent), and Department of Labor (5.6 percent). The Department of Environmental Conservation and Division of Veterans Services have also made a large number of appointments of 55-c candidates.

Among the graded positions, the most common job grades are Salary Grade 6 (26.5 percent), 11 (12.7 percent), and 18 (8.7 percent). The grades correspond to different levels' required qualifications, job responsibilities, and pay. Nearly one third (29 percent) of appointments are made in non-statutory positions, which are not graded. The overwhelmingly most common job title groups are Office Assistant (27.7 percent) and Taxpayer Service (20.8 percent). The most common individual job titles are Office Assistant 1 (18 percent), Taxpayer Service Representative 1 (8.6 percent), Taxpayer Services Specialist Trainee 2 (5.2 percent), Office Assistant 1 (Stores/Mail) (4.5 percent), and Office Assistant 1 Keyboarding (4.3 percent). Of the job titles listed in appointments, 388 candidates or 28 percent were in positions designated as a "trainee."

Currently, 86 percent of positions designated for the 55-b program and 20 percent of 55-c positions have been filled.

Approximately 30 percent of people holding a letter of eligibility for 55-b have an appointment. The share of eligible veterans with letters with an appointment has averaged 12 percent over the last decade. Utilization of the 55-b/c program has been steady over that time.

The complete report provides a review of the 55-b/c programs and provides key statistics on the utilization of the program, including number of letters of eligibility issued and appointments. The report includes an overview of the state of employment in New York for individuals and veterans with disabilities. There is a description of the employment services and programs available for individuals and veterans with disabilities in New York and information on other civil service pathways to employment at the federal and local levels. The report concludes with policy recommendations for the Civil Service Commission to consider. These are based on review of other programs and interviews with key stakeholders.

Introduction to the 55-b/c Programs

In an effort to improve the employment opportunities for individuals and veterans with disabilities in New York, the New York State Civil Service Law authorizes the New York State Civil Service Commission to designate positions normally filled through competitive examination to be filled through the appointment of qualified persons with disabilities (55-b) and qualified veterans with disabilities (55-c). The New York State Civil Service Law authorizes the New York State Civil Service Commission to designate up to 1,200 positions for persons with disabilities and 500 for veterans with disabilities. The program is administered by the Department of Civil Service (DCS).

There are four pathways into state government employment. The vast majority of the state workforce (about 80 percent) are in competitive class positions. These are positions that require candidates to take and pass a test. Hiring agencies then use the list of passing candidates, in score order, to fill their open positions. Generally, people interested in pursuing a competitive class position in state service must take an open-competitive exam before applying for any opening. This is an exam that is available to the general public as long as the individuals meet the minimum qualifications for the job they are pursuing. These minimum qualifications to take the exam and apply for the position are based on the job and its duties. For example, the exam for Direct Support Assistant requires a high school diploma, equivalency, or a Direct Support Professional Certificate from an accredited organization. The minimum qualification for the Legal Specialties exam is a Juris Doctorate from an accredited law school.

Individuals participating in the open-competitive exam process do not need to be existing state employees. Therefore, these exams and corresponding jobs are considered an entry point into state employment. “Entry level” is the term used by DCS to designate jobs that can be filled with candidates who have completed the open-competitive exam process.³ Entry level does not refer to the educational level or professional experience required for the position.

The 55-b/c designation makes the applicant eligible to fill entry level competitive class positions as long as they meet the minimum qualifications and exempts them from the required exam. Once a 55-b/c candidate has a letter of eligibility, they may submit applications and be considered for entry level positions for which they meet the educational and professional qualifications. Examples of these entry level jobs commonly filled by 55-b/c eligible candidates are office assistant, taxpayer services assistant, program aide, and HR specialist. 55-b/c candidates also frequently enter as trainees.

The Four Pathways to New York State Service

Competitive Class Positions

80% of workforce

Positions require applicants to take and pass a test. Hiring agencies use a list of passing candidates, in score order, to fill vacancies. Most positions are competitive and there are minimum qualifications required to take exams.

Noncompetitive Class Positions

15% of workforce

Positions do not require a written test, but there is an examination of applicant qualifications against the needs of the position. Example: Mechanic

Labor Class Positions

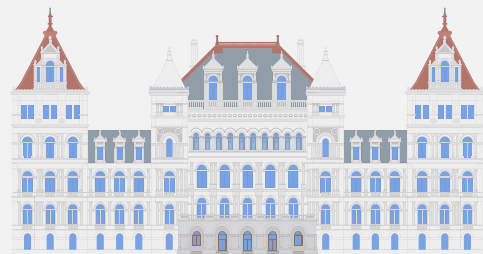
3% of workforce

Laborer positions used in a variety of agencies. They do not require a test but candidates must be physically able to perform the duties assigned. Example: Cleaner

Exempt Class Positions

2% of workforce

These positions do not require a test. Candidates are appointed by the Governor or the appointing authority. Example: Commissioner



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The 55-B/C Pathway to Employment

Eligibility

The programs are available to people with physical or mental disabilities who are otherwise qualified to perform the duties associated with the position. The Department of Civil Service's Employee Health Service office evaluates the degree of each applicant's functional limitations, restrictions, or need for special accommodation.

Application Process

Applicants for both programs must submit an application form (DPM-1) titled "Application for New York State Governor's Program to Hire Persons with Disabilities under Sections 55-b and 55-c of the Civil Service Law."⁴ Applicants must submit the following:

- **Completed DPM-1 Form.** The form collects contact information, inquires about the counties in which the applicant is willing to work, and current employment information. It also asks the applicant to certify that they are eligible for employment in the US. Additionally, information is collected related to military service, education, professional licensure or certifications, and employment or volunteer experience.
- **Physician's Questionnaire Form (DPM-60).** A form completed by the applicant's physician that provides an overview of the diagnosis, case history, current treatment, prognosis, and impairments.
- **Resume.**
- **Applicants for 55-c must provide information on their military service.** They can provide a copy of their Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty (DD-214) or a Letter of Release from the National Guard, which includes information on dates of service and condition of discharge. Candidates must affirm that their discharge was honorable. Veterans who have an Other-Than-Honorable Discharge due to the conditions laid out in the 2019 Restoration of Honor Act are also eligible for 55-c.⁵

Exceptions:

- Veterans with a disability rating of 10 percent or more are not required to submit a Physician Questionnaire form. Instead, they may submit their US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) rating decision letter that includes their rating and diagnosis.⁶
- Individuals with a learning disability must submit a copy of their psychological testing instead of the Physician's Questionnaire Form. This could include documentation from an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or a 504 Plan from an educational institution.
- Individuals who are legally blind may submit their certificate of legal blindness instead of the Physician's Questionnaire Form.⁷

Application Review

Applications are collected and reviewed by the Office of Diversity and Inclusion Management (ODIM). ODIM staff confirm the application is complete and verify the documentation provided.

Medical documentation is reviewed by the medical director or physicians on staff in the DCS's Employee Health Service (EHS) office. EHS staff review medical records submitted with the application but do not conduct physical examinations. The goal of the medical review is to determine if the identified conditions have an impact on the applicant's daily living. The EHS review of medical records generally takes between three to 10 business days dependent on staffing levels. The office approves most applications. A handful are returned requesting more information. The most commonly requested point of clarification is a more detailed explanation of any limitations identified in medical records.

ODIM may ask applicants to provide additional information, but eventually the vast majority of applicants are granted a letter of eligibility. Over the past five years, over 95 percent of applicants were granted letters of eligibility. Those that were not approved were due to insufficient information.

DCS periodically reviews the procedures and standards used to determine eligibility. DCS changed the medical standard for eligibility approximately five years ago. Previously, candidates needed to provide evidence that their medical condition impacted their ability to obtain and maintain gainful employment. This standard placed the onus on the individual to demonstrate the impact of a disability and served as a barrier to program participation. Now, EHS will recommend eligibility for a number of conditions for which the impact on quality of life for patients is independently documented.

Job Seeking

Once an applicant has been granted a 55-b/c letter of eligibility, they become 55-b/c program candidates making them eligible for employment. It is important to note that this eligibility letter is not an offer of employment and the candidate must apply for job openings that they are interested in and for which they meet the minimum qualifications. It is the equivalent to having received a passing grade on a civil service exam: it makes the applicant eligible for employment; it is not a job offer or guarantee of employment.

55-b/c Recruitment Resources Program Portal

In 2019, 75 percent of agencies reported utilizing the 55-b/c program. To facilitate the matching between state agencies and 55-b/c candidates, DCS created the 55-b/c Recruitment Resources Program Portal. Once candidates have received their 55-b/c letter of eligibility, they are encouraged to create and maintain a profile on the portal. The profile includes information on job preferences, including:

- permanent or temporary employment,
- full- or part-time employment,
- shift preferences,
- preferred location/county of employment, and
- type of position of interest (accounting, administrative, call center, etc.).

In addition, candidates are encouraged to upload a current resume that details professional experience. They can enter additional information on their qualifications, including:

- degree obtained and field of study,
- language fluency, and
- professional licenses and certification.

The portal is available to state agency human resources officers seeking to fill positions with 55-b/c applicants. These officers will search the portal for candidates that meet their required qualifications and reach out to potential applicants to ask if they are interested in applying for jobs. Approximately half of state agencies that hire through the 55-b/c program (54 percent) reported using the portal to identify qualified candidates. In 2022, representatives from 50 agencies across the state logged on to the portal and 18 of those have logged on at least 12 times. Discussions with agency HR officers revealed they utilize the portal to identify candidates when the list of exam eligible candidates is short or when relevant civil services exams are not offered frequently.

Approximately 70 percent of 55-b/c candidates create a profile upon receiving their letters. DCS staff in the 55-b/c program can assist candidates in the development of their profile. The 55-b/c eligible population faces barriers to digital accessibility and literacy, which may make it challenging to create the profiles. These barriers may keep as many as three in 10 of eligible candidates from seeking employment through digital means. It may also limit candidates who do create a profile from keeping them up to date.

Directly Applying for 55-b/c Eligible Jobs

Candidates with 55-b/c eligibility are encouraged to actively seek out employment opportunities. StateJobs.ny.gov is the website state agencies use to post job openings. Candidates can search vacancies including those in the competitive class for which they are eligible. The website allows users to narrow their search by agency, occupational category, region, and grade. All jobs posted will state if they will accept 55-b/c candidates. The information is presented under “minimum qualifications” on the ‘Job Specifics’ tab. The website allows for candidates to search the database of jobs recruiting 55-b/c candidates.

Hiring and Onboarding

Candidates provide a copy of their eligibility letters when applying for 55-b/c jobs. At that point, the agency's HR staff confirms that the candidate meets the qualifications for the job. The letter is filed and the application materials (without the eligibility letter) are forwarded to the manager who will be unaware of the 55-b/c status when reviewing candidates. The manager then reviews all of the applications and offers interviews to promising candidates for the position. Upon review of applications and interviews, the manager makes hiring recommendations and HR staff makes an offer.

Review of Current Utilization: Letters of Eligibility and Appointments

This section presents historical data on utilization of the 55-b and 55-c program over the time period 2004 through 2022 using data provided by DCS and the New York State Office of Information Technology Services (ITS). To gain an understanding of the individuals using these programs and the appointments secured, this report presents a detailed analysis of the letters awarded and appointments secured in the five most recent years (2017–21). The analysis examines the eligibility letters awarded over the period and then explores the appointments eventually secured by eligible candidates.

Historical Usage of the 55-b/c Program

Usage of the 55-b/c program can be tracked through the letters of eligibility awarded and the number of 55-b/c appointments. The active letters of eligibility represent the number of individuals who currently hold a letter of eligibility and can apply for positions available through the 55-b/c program. Letters of eligibility are valid for three years from the date of issue so the number of active letters in a year represents the individuals who obtained a letter in the past three years. The number of active letters have been relatively stable over the past decade. On average, there were 3,347 active 55-b and 888 active 55-c letters annually. Slightly lower numbers in 2022 were likely driven by a decline in letters awarded during the pandemic.

The number of total appointments represents the individuals currently holding a position through the 55-b/c program. The new appointments are the number of individuals who obtained employment in that calendar year. The number of new appointments made through the program rose dramatically in 2015 for both 55-b and 55-c. In the first 11 years, there were an average of 17 new 55-b/c appointments made annually. The average from 2015 through 2022 was 90.

While there has been growth in new appointments made annually, the total number of appointments has not meaningfully changed since 2004, averaging 1,145. This suggests growth in turnover for employees with 55-b/c appointments. Turnover can occur when an employee is promoted out of a 55-b/c eligible position, transfers into a different position without a 55-b/c appointment, or leaves state employment.

The utilization rate shows the percentage of the available 1,200 55-b and 500 55-c positions currently filled. Approximately 86.2 percent of the appointments available

TABLE 1. Historic Utilization of the 55-b/c Program (2004–22)

	Active Letters of Eligibility			New Appointments			Total Appointments			Utilization Rate	
	55-b	55-c	Total	55-b	55-c	Total	55-b	55-c	Total	55-b	55-c
2004	229	70	299	17	—	17	985	120	1,105	82.1%	24.0%
2005	734	184	918	18	1	19	1,042	125	1,167	86.8%	25.0%
2006	1,253	300	1,553	19	3	22	1,077	115	1,192	89.8%	23.0%
2007	2,024	411	2,435	17	1	18	1,076	109	1,185	89.7%	21.8%
2008	2,708	596	3,304	18	—	18	1,031	93	1,124	85.9%	18.6%
2009	3,209	823	4,032	11	1	12	1,072	110	1,182	89.3%	22.0%
2010	3,576	957	4,533	15	2	17	1,070	115	1,185	89.2%	23.0%
2011	3,530	1,046	4,576	17	—	17	1,089	109	1,198	90.8%	21.8%
2012	3,415	1,012	4,427	18	—	18	1,048	101	1,149	87.3%	20.2%
2013	3,328	930	4,258	22	—	22	1,021	103	1,124	85.1%	20.6%
2014	3,307	909	4,216	10	1	11	972	102	1,074	81.0%	20.4%
2015	3,302	892	4,194	78	10	88	1,008	104	1,112	84.0%	20.8%
2016	3,304	832	4,136	70	9	79	1,017	104	1,121	84.8%	20.8%
2017	3,329	785	4,114	88	12	100	1,013	109	1,122	84.4%	21.8%
2018	3,510	846	4,356	66	17	83	1,012	128	1,140	84.3%	25.6%
2019	3,581	941	4,522	103	16	119	1,040	116	1,156	86.7%	23.2%
2020	3,447	965	4,412	75	15	90	1,037	110	1,147	86.4%	22.0%
2021	3,292	922	4,214	50	13	63	1,030	109	1,139	85.8%	21.8%
2022	3,074	856	3,930	89	12	101	1,026	101	1,127	85.5%	20.2%

to individuals with disabilities and 21.9 percent of those available to veterans with disabilities have been filled. Approximately 30 percent of people holding a letter of eligibility for 55-b have an appointment. The share of eligible veterans with letters with an appointment has averaged 12 percent over the last decade.

Historical data can provide important context to understanding how utilization of the program has changed over time. In the remainder of the section, the analysis focuses on the demographic characteristics and employment details of those who have been awarded letters and secured appointments over the period 2017–21.

Letters of Eligibility

There were 5,832 55-b/c eligibility letters issued between 2017 and 2021 ([Table 2](#)). Nearly four in five of those letters (78 percent) are issued through the 55-b program and 20 percent awarded to veterans through 55-c. The number of letters issued per year was relatively stable between 2017 and 2019, with 1,300 to 1,500 letters issued annually. The number of eligibility letters awarded declined substantially in 2020 and 2021 to just over 700 letters issued per year. This trend was likely driven by the COVID-19 pandemic. The relative proportion of B and C eligibility letters has remained largely the same.

TABLE 2. Eligibility Letters Awarded by Year, by Program (2017–21)

Year	55-b	55-c	Unknown	Total
2017	1,234	267	15	1,516
2018	1,195	287	22	1,504
2019	1,001	318	52	1,371
2020	541	147	22	710
2021	595	130	6	731

SOURCE: Rockefeller Institute of Government based on analysis of Department of Civil Service data.

Utilization by Nature of Disability

People who receive 55-b/c eligibility letters apply for the program with a wide variety of disabilities both physical and mental (Table 3). The most common overall disability is Mental-Emotional Illness.” Thirty-four percent of people who receive an eligibility letter report a “mental-emotional illness” disability, 9.4 percent report a “development—mental” disability, 9.6 percent report a “learning disability,” and 8.3 percent report a “neurological impairment.”⁸ The most common type of physical disability is some type of “orthopedic impairment” (19 percent).

TABLE 3. Eligibility Letters by Disability Group, 2017–21

Disability Type (grouped)	Percent	Number
Alcohol/Drug Abuse	1.8%	106
Blind	3.5%	203
Blood Disease	0.7%	42
Cancer	0.6%	37
Deafness (All Types)	3.8%	223
Development—Mental	9.4%	548
Diabetes	1.8%	103
Digestive Disorder	0.9%	54
Extremities—Missing	0.6%	33
Heart Disease	0.7%	42
Kidney Dysfunction	0.5%	27
Learning Disabilities	9.6%	561
Mental—Emotional Illness	34.1%	1,990
Neurological (Any)	8.3%	486
Orthopedic Impairment (Any)	19.0%	1,108
Other (Reported As Other In File)	8.0%	467
Paralysis	1.3%	73
Respiratory Disorder	1.8%	107
Seizure Disorder	1.3%	78
Skin Disorder	0.2%	14
Speech Impairment (Any)	0.4%	22
Unknown	2.7%	156

NOTE: 14.8 percent of eligibility letters include multiple disabilities.⁹

SOURCE: Rockefeller Institute of Government based on analysis of Department of Civil Service data.

There are significant differences in the most common disability types reported by veterans who receive 55-c compared to civilians receiving 55-b eligibility letters ([Table 4](#)). Veterans with 55-c eligibility letters are 16 percentage points more likely to have an orthopedic impairment compared to people with 55-b letters. Additionally, veterans with 55-c letters are much less likely to have learning disabilities (12 percentage points), developmental disabilities (9.5 percentage points), or neurological disabilities (8 percentage points). These large differences are all statistically significant at the 1 percent level meaning they represent policy-relevant differences between the two groups and are not an artifact of the data sample. Other differences, even when statistically significant, between 55-b and 55-c letters of eligibility are less than 5 percentage points. One important additional distinction is that 12 percent of 55-c letters are issued to veterans with an unknown disability compared to only 0.4 percent of 55-b letters. This is because veterans with a Veterans Affairs (VA) disability certification of 10 percent or higher do not need to file the medical form documenting the nature of their disability.

TABLE 4. Eligibility Letters by Disability Group and B/C Classification, 2017–21

Disability Type (grouped)	55-b Letters	55-c Letters	Difference
Orthopedic Impairment (Any)	16.0%	31.7%	15.7% ***
Respiratory Disorder	1.6%	3.0%	1.5% ***
Skin Disorder	0.1%	0.6%	0.5% ***
Heart Disease	0.8%	0.4%	-0.4%
Kidney Dysfunction	0.5%	0.1%	-0.5% **
Extremities—Missing	0.6%	0.2%	-0.5% **
Speech Impairment (Any)	0.5%	0.0%	-0.5% **
Cancer	0.8%	0.2%	-0.6% **
Digestive Disorder	1.1%	0.3%	-0.7% **
Blood Disease	0.9%	0.1%	-0.8% ***
Paralysis	1.4%	0.4%	-1.0% ***
Seizure Disorder	1.6%	0.3%	-1.2% ***
Deafness (All Types)	4.1%	2.7%	-1.4% **
Alcohol/Drug Abuse	2.1%	0.6%	-1.4% ***
Diabetes	2.1%	0.4%	-1.7% ***
Mental—Emotional Illness	34.9%	31.9%	-3.1% *
Blind	4.2%	0.4%	-3.8% ***
Neurological (Any)	10.0%	2.1%	-7.9% ***
Development—Mental	11.4%	1.9%	-9.5% ***
Learning Disabilities	12.0%	0.3%	-11.7% ***
Other	7.4%	10.7%	3.3% ***
Unknown	0.4%	11.7%	11.3% ***

* = significant at .1 , **=significant at .05, ***=significant at .01

SOURCE: Rockefeller Institute of Government based on analysis of Department of Civil Service data.

Demographic Trends

People who receive 55-b and 55-c eligibility letters can self-report their demographic information, including race, ethnicity, and gender. Just over half (52.8 percent) of people with eligibility letters choose to disclose this information ([Table 5](#)). Of those who report their race and ethnicity, 21 percent are Black, 67 percent are white, and 7 percent are Hispanic. Additionally, of those who report their gender, 49 percent are women and 51 percent are men.

TABLE 5. Demographics of 55-b/c Letter Recipients, 2017–21

Demographics	Count	Share	Share of Reported
Race/Ethnicity			
American Indian/Alaskan Native	22	0.4%	0.7%
Asian/Pacific Islander	107	1.8%	3.5%
Black	664	11.4%	21.6%
Hispanic	221	3.8%	7.2%
White	2,066	35.4%	67.1%
Unknown Race	2,752	47.2%	—
Gender			
Female	1,630	27.9%	48.9%
Male	1,706	29.3%	51.1%
Unknown Gender	2,496	42.8%	—

SOURCE: Rockefeller Institute of Government based on analysis of Department of Civil Service data.

Location of Eligibility Letters

Applicants are required to list the counties across New York they are interested in working in. Eligibility letters are issued to individuals who are willing to work across New York ([Table 6](#)). At least 60 letters were issued to people who are willing to work in any New York county. There is a significant concentration of willingness to work in and around Albany, with 17 percent of letter recipients willing to work in Albany County, 13 percent in Rensselaer County, 13 percent in Schenectady County, and 9 percent in Saratoga County. Beyond the Capital Region, counties making up New York City, Long Island, and the Hudson Valley, are the geographic areas of greatest interest to applicants.

TABLE 6. Geographic Interest of Eligibility Letter Recipients, 2017–21

County	Count	Share	County	Count	Share
Albany	1,015	17.4%	Genesee	97	1.7%
Rensselaer	760	13.0%	Ontario	96	1.6%
Schenectady	735	12.6%	Cayuga	94	1.6%
Saratoga	579	9.9%	Oswego	92	1.6%
New York	483	8.3%	Sullivan	91	1.6%
Queens	384	6.6%	Broome	90	1.5%
Kings	359	6.2%	Essex	89	1.5%
Bronx	311	5.3%	Chenango	88	1.5%
Washington	299	5.1%	Livingston	86	1.5%
Nassau	283	4.9%	Delaware	84	1.4%
Suffolk	248	4.3%	Hamilton	84	1.4%
Westchester	241	4.1%	Otsego	84	1.4%
Richmond	190	3.3%	Wayne	84	1.4%
Dutchess	167	2.9%	Cortland	83	1.4%
Orange	166	2.8%	Franklin	82	1.4%
Rockland	163	2.8%	Orleans	81	1.4%
Columbia	159	2.7%	Seneca	81	1.4%
Onondaga	150	2.6%	Wyoming	81	1.4%
Erie	148	2.5%	Lewis	80	1.4%
Oneida	142	2.4%	Tompkins	79	1.4%
Putnam	141	2.4%	Chautauqua	77	1.3%
Greene	138	2.4%	Steuben	77	1.3%
Monroe	132	2.3%	Clinton	76	1.3%
Ulster	132	2.3%	Chemung	75	1.3%
Warren	130	2.2%	Jefferson	74	1.3%
Montgomery	120	2.1%	Allegany	73	1.3%
Fulton	115	2.0%	Tioga	71	1.2%
Schoharie	111	1.9%	Cattaraugus	70	1.2%
Herkimer	110	1.9%	St Lawrence	70	1.2%
Madison	105	1.8%	Schuyler	68	1.2%
Niagara	104	1.8%	Yates	66	1.1%

SOURCE: Rockefeller Institute of Government based on analysis of Department of Civil Service data.

Analysis of 55-b/c Appointments

Eligibility letters are the first step for 55-b/c applicants to find public employment in New York State government. Once they have acquired a letter of eligibility, individuals must apply for, interview with the agency, be offered, and accept an appointment. Of the 5,832 55-b/c eligibility letters issued from 2017 to 2021, 1,380 accepted offers of employment with a New York State government entity. Appointment levels were highest in 2017 at 400 and, much like the number of eligibility letters, fell dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic to 130 appointments in 2020 and 174 appointments in 2021. Veterans with 55-c eligibility are underrepresented in appointments compared to individuals with 55-b letters. While 20 percent of eligibility letters are issued to veterans, they represent only 11 percent of appointments.

TABLE 7. 55-b/c Appointments, 2017–21

Year	55-b	55-c	Unknown	Total
2017	360	37	3	400
2018	342	37	2	381
2019	241	39	15	295
2020	107	20	3	130
2021	155	19	0	174

SOURCE: Rockefeller Institute of Government based on analysis of Department of Civil Service data.

By Agency

55-b/c appointments are not evenly spread through New York State government. Over half of appointments were made by only four agencies, which are the Department of Taxation and Finance (27.3 percent), the Office of General Services (9.6 percent), the Department of Education (9.1 percent), and the Department of Labor (5.6 percent). Together these agencies employed 8.3 percent of the state workforce in 2021 suggesting they are super-users of the 55-b/c program. Examining recent 55-b/c appointments as a percentage of the agencies workforce shows that the Division of Veterans Services is another frequent user. The 17 individuals hired by the Division of Veterans Services through 55-b/c were the equivalent of 19.1 percent of the Division's total employment.

TABLE 8. Top Agencies for 55-b/c Appointments, 2017-21

Agency or Agency Group	Number of 55b/c Appointments	Share of 55-b/c Appointments	Total Agency Employment (2021)	Agency Share of 2021 Workforce	55-b/c Appointments As a Share of Agency Employment
Taxation and Finance, Department of	376	27.3%	4,495	2.9%	8.4%
General Services, Office of	133	9.6%	1,984	1.4%	6.7%
Education, Department of	125	9.1%	3,264	2.2%	3.8%
Labor, Department of	77	5.6%	3,572	1.8%	2.2%
Health, Department of	54	3.9%	5,309	3.6%	1.0%
Children and Family Services, Office of	51	3.7%	2,966	2.0%	1.7%
Financial Services, Department of	51	3.7%	1,297	0.9%	3.9%
Environmental Conservation, Department of	39	2.8%	3,266	2.2%	1.2%
DOCCS	37	2.7%	27,254	18.8%	0.1%
Civil Service, Department of	32	2.3%	1,232	0.2%	2.6%
Mental Health, Office of	31	2.3%	14,160	9.6%	0.2%
Comptroller, Office of	27	2.0%	2,830	1.9%	1.0%
OPWDD	26	1.9%	19,839	13.2%	0.1%
Motor Vehicles, Department of	25	1.8%	2,972	2.1%	0.8%
Temporary & Disability Assistance, Office of	24	1.7%	1,876	1.3%	1.3%
Transportation, Department of	24	1.7%	8,151	5.7%	0.3%
State University of New York	23	1.7%	81,532	11.7%	0.0%
Homeland Security and Emergency Services	22	1.6%	1,327	0.5%	1.7%
Veterans Services, Division Of	17	1.2%	86	0.1%	19.8%
Parks and Recreation, Office of	12	0.9%	3,002	2.1%	0.4%
Public Service, Department of	12	0.9%	471	0.3%	2.5%
State Insurance Fund	12	0.9%	2,029	1.4%	0.6%
Criminal Justice Services, Division of	11	0.8%	403	0.3%	2.7%

SOURCE: Rockefeller Institute of Government based on analysis of Department of Civil Service data.

NOTE: Agency employment data was collected from the New York State Workforce Management Report (2021).

Appointments made under the 55-c program were distributed slightly differently. The top four appointers of veterans under 55-c were the Department of Labor (15 percent), the Department of Environmental Conservation (13 percent), the Division of Veterans' Services (11 percent), and the Department of Education (9.2 percent).

TABLE 9. Top Agencies for 55-c Appointments, 2017–21

Agency or Agency Group	Count	Share
Labor, Department of	23	15.1%
Environmental Conservation, Department of	20	13.2%
Veterans Services, Division Of	16	10.5%
Education, Department of	14	9.2%
General Services, Office of	11	7.2%
Homeland Security and Emergency Services	7	4.6%
Children and Family Service, Office of	6	4.0%
Health, Department of	6	4.0%
Veterans Affairs, Division Of	5	3.3%
Transportation, Department of	5	3.8%

SOURCE: Rockefeller Institute of Government based on analysis of Department of Civil Service data.

By Nature of Disability

Appointments also differ by the nature of the disability. Reported disabilities are grouped into two general categories to provide some insight into how the program is being used. The first group is “brain-related disabilities,” which include mental-emotional illness, neurological impairment, learning disabilities, and developmental-mental impairments. The second group are all 55-b/c appointees who do not report any of those brain-related disabilities, which can include both physical impairments like orthopedic impairments or paralysis and chronic illnesses like cancer or kidney disease. Brain-related disabilities make up the majority of appointments ranging from 52 percent of appointments in 2020 to 64 percent of appointments in 2018. Overall, 60 percent of appointments involve at least one of these brain-related disabilities.

TABLE 10. Top Agencies for 55-b/c Appointments with Brain-Related Disability, 2017–21

Agency or Agency Group	Count	Share
Taxation and Finance, Department of	264	32.0%
General Services, Office of	76	9.2%
Education, Department of	72	8.7%
Children and Family Services, Office of	34	4.1%
Financial Services, Department of	30	3.6%
Health, Department of	29	3.5%
Civil Service, Department of	25	3.0%
Labor, Department of	25	3.0%
Mental Health, Office of	24	2.9%
Environmental Conservation, Department of	20	2.4%

SOURCE: Rockefeller Institute of Government based on analysis of Department of Civil Service data.

Agencies also vary in the type of disability reported by their 55-b/c appointees. The Department of Taxation and Finance disproportionately appoints people with brain-related disabilities and accounts for 32 percent of those appointments. The Office of General Services and the Department of Education are the next two largest appointers at 9.2 percent and 8.7 percent, respectively. These three agencies were also the largest employers of individuals with non-brain-related disabilities.

TABLE 11. Top Agencies for 55-b/c Appointments of Individuals With Non-Brain-Related Disabilities, 2017–21

Agency or Agency Group	Count	Share
Taxation and Finance, Department of	112	20.1%
General Services, Office of	57	10.3%
Education, Department of	53	9.5%
Labor, Department of	52	9.4%
Health, Department of	25	4.5%
Financial Services, Department of	21	3.8%
Environmental Conservation, Department of	19	3.4%
Children and Family Services, Office of	17	3.1%
Comptroller, Office of	14	2.5%
Temporary & Disability Assistance, Office of	14	2.5%

SOURCE: Rockefeller Institute of Government based on analysis of Department of Civil Service data.

Type of Job

Appointments in the 55-b/c program also vary by grade. Among the graded positions, the most common job grades are Salary Grade 6 (26.5 percent), 11 (12.7 percent), and 18 (8.7 percent). Salary grades 6, 11, and 18 are starting points for many New York State employees who are appointed through trainee positions. The grades correspond to different levels of educational backgrounds, experience, required qualifications, job responsibilities, and pay. Only 12.5 percent of 55-b appointments are made at the grade 18 level or above compared to 49.5 percent of the 55-c appointments. This difference is driven by the fact that 55-c applicants are in a later phase of their careers, having already completed years of military service, and have the experience required for positions at higher salary grades. Nearly one-third (29 percent) of appointments are made in non-statutory positions, which are not graded. This category encompasses a wide range of titles, including Parks & Recreation Aide, Assistant Attorney General, Educational Specialists, Thruway Maintenance Worker, and Resident Physician. The high percentage of non-statutory positions makes it difficult to quantify the quality of the jobs secured by 55-b/c candidates because they encompass both a wide range of positions and salary levels.

TABLE 12. 55-b/c Appointments by Job Grade, 2017–21

Job Grade	Job Rate CSEA/PEF (2022)	55-b Appointments	55-c Appointments	Unknown Appointments	Total	Share
6	\$41,018	344	20	2	366	26.5%
7	\$43,236	5	2	0	7	0.5%
8	\$45,518	1	2	0	3	0.2%
9	\$47,968	85	2	2	89	6.4%
10	\$50,628	1	0	0	1	0.1%
11	\$53,490	168	5	2	175	12.7%
12	\$56,324	3	2	0	5	0.4%
13	\$59,542	29	1	0	30	2.2%
14	\$62,806	91	6	1	98	7.1%
15	\$66,278	7	1	0	8	0.6%
16	\$69,882	19	14	0	33	2.4%
17	\$73,813	2	0	0	2	0.1%
18	\$77,912	70	47	3	120	8.7%
19	\$82,036	23	4	0	27	2.0%
20	\$86,140	2	1	0	3	0.2%
21	\$90,657	1	0	0	1	0.1%
23	\$100,342	3	2	1	6	0.4%
25	\$111,111	3	0	0	3	0.2%
26	\$114,393	2	0	0	2	0.1%
28	\$126,476	1	0	0	1	0.1%
61 (M-1)	\$108,342	2	0	0	2	0.1%
62 (M-2)	\$120,156	1	0	0	1	0.1%
Non-Statutory	—	342	43	12	397	28.8%
Total		1,205	152	23	1,380	

SOURCE: Rockefeller Institute of Government based on analysis of Department of Civil Service data.

There are also strong patterns in the types of positions to which 55-b/c eligible people are appointed. The overwhelmingly most common job title groups are Office Assistant (27.7 percent) and Taxpayer Service (20.8 percent). The most common individual job titles are Office Assistant 1 (18 percent), Taxpayer Service Representative 1 (8.6 percent), Taxpayer Services Specialist Trainee 2 (5.2 percent), Office Assistant 1 (Stores/Mail) (4.5 percent), and Office Assistant 1 Keyboarding (4.3 percent). Of the job titles listed in appointments, 388 candidates, or 28 percent, were in positions designated as a “trainee.”

TABLE 13. Most Common Job Titles for 55-b/c Appointments, 2017–21

Title	Count	Share
Office Assistant 1	247	17.9%
Taxpayer Services Representative 1	118	8.6%
Taxpayer Services Specialist Trainee 2	72	5.2%
Office Assistant 1 Stores/Mail	62	4.5%
Office Assistant 1 Keyboarding	59	4.3%
Taxpayer Services Specialist 1	51	3.7%
Licensing Services Clerk Trainee	37	2.7%
Taxpayer Services Specialist Trainee 1	37	2.7%
Administrative Assistant Trainee 1	32	2.3%
Business Services Center Representative 1	26	1.9%
Licensing Services Clerk	26	1.9%
Program Aide	23	1.7%
Veterans Benefits Advisor 1	18	1.3%
Contract Management Specialist Trainee 1	17	1.2%
Contract Management Specialist Trainee 2	14	1.0%
Labor Services Representative	13	0.9%
Labor Services Representative 1	13	0.9%
Payroll Assistant	13	0.9%
Alcohol & Substance Abuse Treatment Program Assistant	12	0.9%
Human Resources Specialist 1	12	0.9%
Senior Employment Security Clerk	12	0.9%
Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor	11	0.8%
Contract Management Specialist 1	10	0.7%
Human Resources Specialist Trainee 1	10	0.7%
Motor Vehicle Rep	10	0.7%

SOURCE: Rockefeller Institute of Government based on analysis of Department of Civil Service data.

Much like the differences in disability types and agencies of appointment, there are significant differences in job titles between 55-b and 55-c appointees. The top individual title for 55-c appointees is Veterans Benefits Advisor 1, which accounts for 12 percent of all 55-c appointments and is nearly twice as high as the next most common job title of Office Assistant 1.

State of Employment in New York for Individuals and Veterans With Disabilities

To better serve the employment needs for individuals with disabilities, policymakers must first understand the population of people with disabilities and how those with disabilities currently engage with this workforce. This section presents national and New York State data related to the demographics and employment of individuals with disabilities and compares them to workers without disabilities.¹⁰

Data Sources and Methods

In this brief, data is from the 2015–2020 American Community Surveys (ACS) as harmonized by IPUMS.¹¹ This data is representative at both the state and national level and all estimates are generated using ACS’s person weights, which indicate how many Americans each sampled individual represents. The sample is limited to working age adults—those 18 to 64—for a total sample of 11,146,461 surveyed individuals over six years, including 706,177 from New York.

For the purpose of this data brief, data is compiled for the years 2015 through 2020. The US Census Bureau has designated the 2020 weights developed for the American Community Survey as experimental. Census adjusted the weights to correct for COVID-19 and may need to revise these weights as additional information is collected. Because people with disabilities may be disproportionately affected by COVID-19, revisions for this population may be significant. For this reason, the 2020 numbers are designated as preliminary (p).

Three types of variables of interest are identified: demographics, including the type of disability reported, if any, in addition to age, gender, race, and ethnicity; housing and family characteristics, including household structure and amenities; and, finally, job and education characteristics, including educational attainment, wage and salary income, hours worked, employment status, and occupation or industry if employed.

While the ACS is not the most common survey employed to calculate employment and unemployment rates, because of its large sample size and broad questions, it is most appropriate to calculate characteristics of Americans with disabilities. Additional sources on the employment of people with disabilities include the Bureau of Labor Statistic’s Current Population Survey (CPS).

Disability Incidence and Demographics

In 2019, there were 1.1 million working age adults in New York State with a disability representing 9.2 percent of the population. Disability incidence among this age group is lower in New York than nationally (10.5 percent). Both the number and share of individuals with disabilities has remained relatively constant over the past five years.

TABLE 14. Disability Incidence for United States and New York Population (18–64), 2015–20

	United States			New York		
	Population	Population With a Disability	Share of Population with a Disability	Population	Population With a Disability	Share of Population with a Disability
2015	200,161,658	21,301,493	10.6%	12,626,500	1,143,349	9.1%
2016	200,347,839	21,685,373	10.8%	12,541,646	1,157,056	9.2%
2017	201,353,795	21,284,328	10.6%	12,535,667	1,145,623	9.1%
2018	201,486,951	21,004,315	10.4%	12,272,126	1,094,378	8.9%
2019	201,250,810	21,176,796	10.5%	12,140,097	1,112,232	9.2%
2020(p)	201,208,484	21,579,846	10.7%	11,973,583	1,093,233	9.1%

SOURCE: Rockefeller Institute of Government based on analysis of American Community Survey.

Disability Type

To assess disability type, the ACS asks households a series of questions. Respondents can answer one or more affirmatively. As a result, the sum of individuals across disability type will be a total greater than the number of individuals with a disability.

- **Cognitive Disability.** “Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, does this person have serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions?” (People 5 and older)
- **Ambulatory Disability.** “Does this person have serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs?” (People 5 and older)
- **Independent Living Disability.** “Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, does this person have difficulty doing errands alone such as visiting a doctor’s office or shopping?” (People 15 and Older)
- **Self-Care Disability.** “Does this person have difficulty dressing or bathing?” (People 5 and older)
- **Vision Disability.** “Is this person blind or does he/she have serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses?”
- **Hearing Disability.** “Is this person deaf or does he/she have serious difficulty hearing?”
- **Service Connected Disability.** This refers to a disability acquired during military service.

TABLE 15. Population (18-64) With a Disability and Incidence Rate by Disability Type, 2019

	United States		New York	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Cognitive	9,628,636	4.8%	497,415	4.1%
Ambulatory	9,635,775	4.8%	538,030	4.4%
Independent Living	7,784,674	3.9%	446,569	3.7%
Self-Care	3,700,672	1.8%	227,826	1.9%
Vision	3,954,484	2.0%	190,450	1.6%
Hearing	4,036,114	2.0%	174,306	1.4%
Service Connected	2,597,069	1.3%	59,130	0.5%

SOURCE: Rockefeller Institute of Government based on analysis of American Community Survey.

Among New York's working age population, the most commonly reported disabilities are ambulatory, cognitive, and independent living. The rate of incidence is lower in New York than nationally for all disability types except self-care. [Table 15](#) presents data for 2019, but the number and incidence rates are stable for the period 2015–19. Preliminary 2020 data shows a drop in population across all types in New York, but this may be revised upward as the data set is revised.

TABLE 16. Incidence Rate by Race/Ethnicity, 2019

	United States	New York
Black	13.5%	11.7%
American Indian	18.7%	15.7%
Asian/Pacific Islander	5.2%	4.8%
Non-Hispanic White	11.1%	9.2%
Hispanic	8.3%	9.7%

SOURCE: Rockefeller Institute of Government based on analysis of American Community Survey.

Both nationally and in New York, American Indian and Black residents are more likely to report at least one disability. The incidence rates for both groups are over 10 percent. Asian/Pacific Island individuals reported the lowest incidences of disabilities. The only racial/ethnic population in New York experiencing an incidence rate higher than the national average is Hispanic.

TABLE 17. Incidence Rate by Gender, 2015–20

	United States		New York	
	No Disability	Has a Disability	No Disability	Has a Disability
Male	89.2%	10.8%	90.9%	9.1%
Female	89.6%	10.4%	90.9%	9.1%

SOURCE: Rockefeller Institute of Government based on analysis of American Community Survey.

Educational Attainment and Wages

Educational attainment is an important indicator to track for matters related to employment. Higher levels of education mean a larger number of job opportunities, higher earnings, and improved job security. Nationally, individuals with a disability have lower levels of educational attainment than those without. Individuals with a disability are twice as likely to have not completed high school (19.9 percent with a disability vs. 10.0 percent without). While 32.4 percent of people without disabilities have completed a four-year degree or higher, the share of individuals with a disability is 14.2 percent.

Nearly one in four New Yorkers with a disability has not completed high school. The share of individuals in New York with a disability who have completed a high school education lags the national average by 2.1 percentage points. The 23 percent of individuals with a disability and without a high school degree in New York have more limited employment opportunities. According to the BLS, only 23 percent of jobs require no formal education credential and have an average salary of \$30,487 per year. By comparison, jobs that require a high school degree or GED have an average salary of \$45,765 per year.

TABLE 18. Educational Attainment for Individuals (18–64) With and Without a Disability, 2015–20

	United States		New York	
	No Disability	Has a Disability	No Disability	Has a Disability
Less Than High School	10.0%	19.9%	10.2%	22.7%
High School Diploma or GED	25.7%	34.6%	23.7%	32.5%
Some College	23.3%	23.5%	19.3%	19.2%
Associate's Degree	8.7%	7.8%	8.9%	8.5%
Bachelor's Degree	21.0%	9.7%	22.8%	11.1%
Graduate Degree	11.5%	4.6%	15.1%	6.1%

SOURCE: Rockefeller Institute of Government based on analysis of American Community Survey.

Living and Family Situations

Individuals with disabilities are less likely to be married than those without. They are also more likely to receive public assistance. In New York, 36.8 percent of individuals with a disability receive food stamps compared to 12.1 percent of individuals without. This 24.7 percentage point gap in New York is higher than the national gap (18.3 percent).

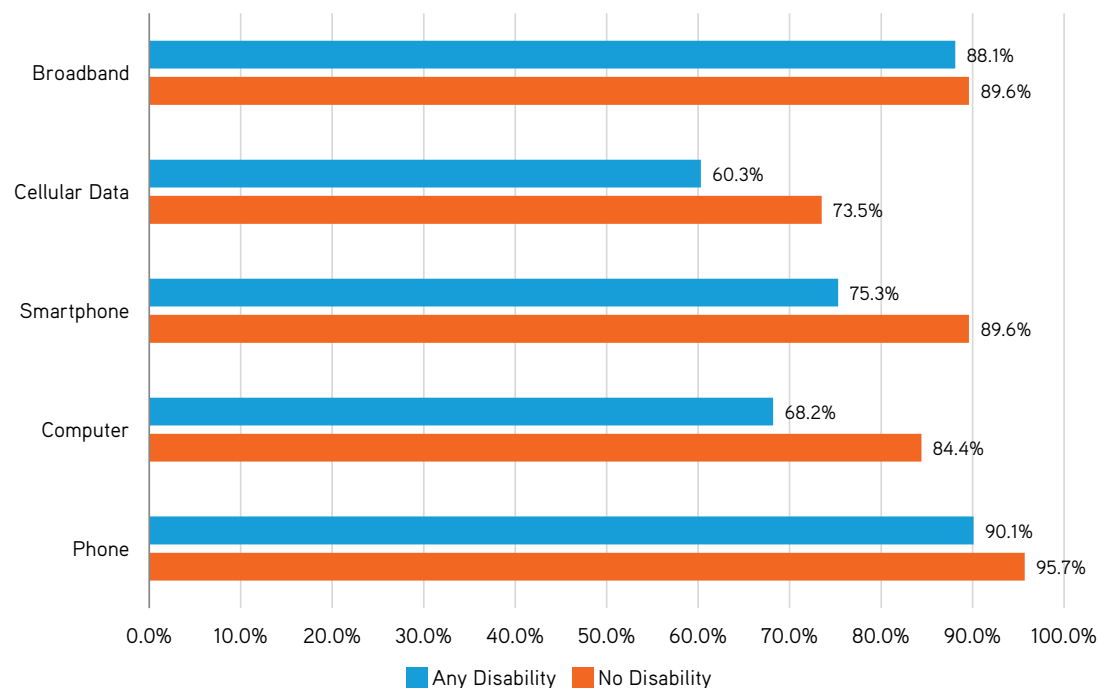
TABLE 19. Living Situations for People With and Without Disabilities, 2015–20

	United States		New York	
	No Disability	Any Disability	No Disability	Any Disability
Is Head of Household	44.3%	46.4%	43.2%	47.9%
Lives with Spouse	23.2%	16.0%	20.9%	13.6%
Lives with Parents	15.4%	16.3%	17.5%	16.4%
Is Married, Living Together	47.8%	33.9%	43.5%	28.9%
Is Divorced	9.8%	18.3%	7.7%	14.5%
Receives Food Stamps	11.0%	29.3%	12.1%	36.8%
Lives in Group Quarters	2.8%	6.4%	3.1%	8.0%
Access to Phone	95.7%	91.3%	95.7%	90.1%
Access to Computer	83.2%	68.4%	84.4%	68.2%
Access to Smartphone	90.6%	77.5%	89.6%	75.3%
Access to Cellular Data	75.8%	62.3%	73.5%	60.3%
Access to Broadband	86.5%	84.1%	89.6%	88.1%

SOURCE: Rockefeller Institute of Government based on analysis of American Community Survey.

Another key factor to note is that individuals with a disability are dramatically less likely to have access to a computer, smart phone, and cellular data. Computers are critical to engaging with the labor market. Job searches are conducted online, applications are submitted through websites, and many initial interviews are conducted through Zoom. When nearly a third of the population does not have access to a computer, they will face challenges in pursuing employment.

FIGURE 1. New York's Disability Digital Divide



Labor Force Participation of Individuals with Disabilities

To better understand the role workers with disabilities currently play in the national and New York State labor force, the labor force participation rate, employment rate, and the full-time employment rate provide key insights.

Labor Force Participation Rate

The labor force participation rate (LFPR) is the percentage of the population that is actively engaged in the labor force. Individuals can participate by either being currently employed or unemployed but seeking employment.

TABLE 20. Labor Force Participation Rate for Individuals (18–64) With and Without Disabilities, 2015–20

	United States			New York		
	No Disability	Disability	Gap	No Disability	Disability	Gap
2015	80.1%	39.1%	41.0%	79.5%	37.1%	42.3%
2016	80.4%	39.8%	40.6%	79.3%	36.8%	42.5%
2017	80.5%	40.4%	40.1%	79.8%	38.6%	41.2%
2018	80.8%	40.8%	40.0%	80.0%	37.5%	42.5%
2019	81.4%	41.9%	39.4%	81.2%	38.5%	42.7%
2020(p)	80.2%	43.1%	37.1%	78.7%	40.6%	38.2%

SOURCE: Rockefeller Institute of Government based on analysis of American Community Survey.

Nationally, approximately 80.6 percent of individuals without disabilities between the ages of 18 and 64 participated in the workforce. In New York, the labor force participation rate was 80.0 percent. The participation rate for individuals with disabilities was approximately half that of those with no disabilities both nationally and in New York. The average LFPR between 2015 and 2019 for individuals with disabilities was 40.4 percent nationally and 37.7 percent in New York State. Preliminary data for 2020 suggests that labor force participation had improved for individuals with disabilities in the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the data is subject to revision and should not be interpreted until finalized.

Disability advocates often consider the gap in labor force participation between those with and without disabilities. Nationally the gap is approximately 40.2 percentage points. The gap is wider in New York, averaging 42.2 percentage points between 2015 and 2019.

Employment and Unemployment Rates

The employment rate is the percentage of individuals who have elected to participate in the workforce who have a job. Between 2015 and 2019, 95.1 percent of 18–64-year-old workers without a disability were employed (94.9 percent in New York). As seen above, individuals with disabilities were less likely to participate in the labor force and those that did were less likely to be employed. Only 86.8 percent of New Yorkers with

a disability who wanted to work were able to find a job. This is lower than the national average of 88.0 percent for workers with a disability.

Between 2015 and 2019, the employment rate for individuals with disabilities had grown both nationally and in New York State. The increase over the five-year period outpaced that seen by individuals without disabilities. While preliminary data for 2020 suggested an increase in labor force participation for individuals with disabilities, their rate of employment declined.

TABLE 21. Employment Rate for Individuals (18–64) With and Without Disabilities, 2015–20

	United States		New York State	
	No Disability	Disability	No Disability	Disability
2015	94.2%	86.2%	93.9%	85.9%
2016	94.8%	87.4%	94.5%	85.7%
2017	95.2%	88.3%	95.0%	86.1%
2018	95.6%	88.7%	95.4%	87.8%
2019	95.9%	89.5%	95.9%	88.4%
2020(p)	93.8%	86.3%	92.2%	83.5%

SOURCE: Rockefeller Institute of Government based on analysis of American Community Survey.

The unemployment rate is the percentage of individuals participating in the labor force, but not currently employed. The unemployment rate for individuals with a disability is higher than for those without both nationally and in New York State. Using data from the ACS, the unemployment rate for individuals with a disability in New York ranged from 11.6 percent in 2019 to as high as 16.5 percent in 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic ended a multi-year decline in the unemployment rate for all workers. Over the six years in the study, the unemployment rate for individuals with a disability has been 7.2 percent higher than their peers without a disability nationally. The gap is higher in New York averaging 8.3 percentage points.

TABLE 22. Unemployment Rate for Individuals (18–64) With and Without Disabilities, 2015–20

	United States		New York State	
	No Disability	Disability	No Disability	Disability
2015	5.8%	13.8%	6.1%	14.1%
2016	5.2%	12.6%	5.5%	14.3%
2017	4.8%	11.7%	5.0%	13.9%
2018	4.4%	11.3%	4.6%	12.2%
2019	4.1%	10.5%	4.1%	11.6%
2020(p)	6.2%	13.7%	7.8%	16.5%

SOURCE: Rockefeller Institute of Government based on analysis of American Community Survey.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics also collects data related to labor force participation and unemployment. Once a year, they include a supplement in their Current Population Survey (CPS) to assess the status of individuals with disabilities in the labor force. BLS publishes an annual report titled *Persons with a Disability: Labor Force Characteristics* that provides national data on labor force participation, employment population, and unemployment rate.¹² The 2021 CPS survey also finds a large gap in labor force participation rates for individuals (16–64) with a disability (35.1 percent) and those with no disability (76.5 percent). The unemployment rate among workers with a disability was 10.8 percent, nearly double that of workers without a disability, 5.2 percent. While the CPS based data can be timelier, it uses a smaller sample size and does not publish data at the state level for persons with disabilities. For this reason, calculations are generated using the ACS data.

Full-Time Employment

Individuals with a disability are less likely to have a job that provides full-time employment. Full-time refers to people who usually work 35 hours or more per week. Between 2015 and 2019, 62.8 percent of individuals with a disability working in New York work on a full-time basis. This is 12 percentage points lower than New Yorkers without disabilities (74.8 percent), matching national trends for individuals with disabilities and without. In the years preceding COVID-19, the number of workers with a disability in New York working full time decreased.

TABLE 23. Full-Time Employment Rate for Individuals (18–64) With and Without Disabilities, 2015–20

	United States		New York State	
	No Disability	Disability	No Disability	Disability
2015	77.5%	68.2%	74.4%	64.3%
2016	77.8%	68.3%	74.5%	64.0%
2017	78.4%	68.6%	75.0%	62.2%
2018	78.8%	68.5%	75.3%	62.0%
2019	78.9%	68.9%	74.9%	61.6%
2020(p)	79.0%	69.9%	74.7%	64.4%

SOURCE: Rockefeller Institute of Government based on analysis of American Community Survey.

Employment by Disability Type

Employment indicators differ significantly by the type of disability. Veterans with a service-related disability are the most likely to be participating in the workforce. Nearly two-thirds of this population is either employed or seeking employment in New York. New York trails the national statistics slightly for veterans with a disability. Nationally 61.2 percent of the group is employed full time, while in New York only 56.6 percent of veterans with a disability have found full time employment.

Over half of individuals with hearing disabilities are participating in the labor force and employed both nationally (55.7 percent LFPR and 51.6 percent employment) and in New York (55.6 percent LFPR and 50.9 percent employment). A little fewer than half of individuals with visual disabilities are seeking employment.

Individuals with cognitive, ambulatory, independent living, and self-care disabilities are far less likely to participate in the workforce. Fewer than a quarter of workers in these groups are employed.

TABLE 24. Labor and Employment by Type of Disability: United States and New York, 2015–20

	In Labor Force	Employed	Employed Full Time
United States			
Cognitive	33.1%	26.9%	19.1%
Ambulatory	27.8%	24.3%	19.7%
Independent Living	21.1%	17.1%	11.8%
Self-Care	17.7%	14.9%	11.8%
Vision	47.7%	42.9%	34.5%
Hearing	55.7%	51.6%	43.9%
Service Connected	67.8%	64.4%	61.2%
New York			
Cognitive	30.6%	24.3%	15.8%
Ambulatory	26.8%	22.9%	17.0%
Independent Living	19.2%	15.2%	10.4%
Self-Care	17.5%	14.5%	10.8%
Vision	48.9%	43.8%	31.6%
Hearing	55.6%	50.9%	39.3%
Service Connected	66.0%	61.7%	56.6%

SOURCE: Rockefeller Institute of Government based on analysis of American Community Survey.

Nature of Work

This section examines the entities with which individuals with disabilities find employment and the occupations they are working in. The majority of workers in the US are employed by private companies, which is true whether or not an individual has a disability (68.5 percent without a disability, 66.4 percent with a disability). Individuals with a disability are slightly more likely to find employment in the nonprofit or public sector (24.0 percent) than their counterparts without a disability (22.4 percent).

In New York, 17.1 percent of workers with a disability are employed by the federal, state, or local government. Nearly one in 10 of these workers are employed in their local government. This is in contrast with the national average. Only 6.6 percent of workers with a disability are employed by local governments and this is only slightly below their counterparts without a disability.

TABLE 25. Sector of Employer

	United States		New York	
	No Disability	Any Disability	No Disability	Any Disability
Self Employed	8.8%	9.4%	8.8%	9.1%
Private Employment	68.5%	66.4%	64.8%	60.9%
Nonprofit Employment	7.9%	8.8%	10.4%	12.8%
Federal Employee	3.2%	3.9%	2.0%	2.4%
State Employee	4.4%	4.7%	4.3%	5.0%
Local Employee	6.9%	6.6%	9.5%	9.7%
Unpaid Family Worker	0.2%	0.3%	0.1%	0.2%

SOURCE: Rockefeller Institute of Government based on analysis of American Community Survey.

In addition to the public sector, New Yorkers with disabilities are more likely than others to be employed by the nonprofit sector than individuals without disabilities. Nonprofit employment is more prevalent in New York than nationally, and the difference is more pronounced for workers with disabilities. More than one in eight New York workers with disabilities are employed by a nonprofit. This could potentially include the disability service providers who operate social enterprises with the goal of creating employment opportunities for their clients and/or hire those with disabilities directly.

Industry of Employment

In New York, individuals with disabilities are employed across a wide range of sectors. [Table 26](#) presents the top 25 industries of employment for this section of the workforce. These 25 industries account for 59.24 percent of the employment for workers with disabilities in New York. New York's workforce is slightly more concentrated than the national workforce. Nationally, these industries account for 53.41 percent of employment of individuals with disabilities.

Nearly 40 percent of employment is concentrated in 10 industries. The largest single industry of employment is K-12 schools. This sector employs 6.22 percent of New Yorkers with a disability. Individuals with disabilities in New York are more likely to be employed in an education setting (K-12, higher education, child day care) than nationally (10.78 percent in New York vs. 8.43 percent in the US). And, 12.14 percent of New Yorkers with disabilities are employed in the healthcare sector (compared to 9.68 percent in US). New Yorkers with disabilities are, however, less likely to work in retail and accommodations than nationally (11.6 percent in New York vs. 13.1 percent in the US).

TABLE 26. Top 25 Industries of Employment Any Disability (18-64), 2015-20

Industry	New York Total	New York Share	United States Share
Elementary and secondary schools	138,152	6.2%	5.0%
Eating and drinking places	134,282	6.1%	6.9%
All construction	118,632	5.3%	6.6%
Health services	103,248	4.7%	3.4%
Hospitals	101,392	4.6%	3.8%
Social services	71,839	3.2%	1.8%
Colleges and universities	65,772	3.0%	2.3%
Grocery stores	60,074	2.7%	2.7%
Real estate, including real estate insurance	48,345	2.2%	1.5%
Justice, public order, and safety	40,773	1.8%	1.6%
Nursing and personal care facilities	38,473	1.7%	1.5%
Department stores	37,781	1.7%	2.2%
Child day care services	35,740	1.6%	1.1%
Services to dwellings and other building	34,102	1.5%	1.3%
Insurance	28,396	1.3%	1.4%
Bus service and urban transit	28,302	1.3%	0.4%
Legal services	27,907	1.3%	0.7%
Business services	27,185	1.2%	1.2%
Membership organizations	26,622	1.2%	0.7%
Residential care facilities, excluding nursing homes	26,451	1.2%	1.0%
General government	25,442	1.2%	1.0%
Miscellaneous entertainment and recreation	25,158	1.1%	1.3%
Trucking service	25,025	1.1%	1.9%
Computer and data processing services	23,051	1.0%	1.3%
Banking	22,937	1.0%	0.9%

SOURCE: Rockefeller Institute of Government based on analysis of American Community Survey.

Occupation

New York's workers with disabilities are employed in a wide range of occupations. [Table 27](#) presents the 25 most common occupations for these workers in New York State. These 25 occupations represent 45.0 percent of the New York workforce with disabilities and 41.9 percent of the national workforce with disabilities.

[Table 27](#) also provides educational requirements and average pay for each of these positions. The annual mean wage in New York is \$40,460 and only four of the 25 occupations earn annual mean wages above the state average; 38.2 of the 45.0 percent of the workforce represented in [Table 27](#) are in a job earning below the state average. These relatively low levels of earnings are primarily driven by education. Only five of the occupations listed require education beyond a high school diploma or equivalent. Higher education requirements lead to higher pay in the occupation. As noted in [Table 18](#), 55.7 percent of New Yorkers with a disability have educational attainment no higher than high school diploma or equivalent.

TABLE 27. Top 25 Occupations of Employment Any Disability (18-64), 2015–20

Occupation	Required Education	Annual Mean Wage	New York Total	New York Percentage	United States Percentage
Janitors and Building Cleaners	No formal education	\$38,820	90,090	4.1%	3.1%
Nursing, Psychiatric, and Home Health Aides	High school diploma	\$33,520	82,076	3.7%	1.8%
Cashiers	No formal education	\$31,580	56,323	2.5%	2.6%
Secretaries and Administrative Assistants	High school diploma	\$44,570	49,571	2.2%	1.8%
Chefs and Cooks	No formal education	\$36,830	48,268	2.2%	2.2%
Retail Salespersons	No formal education	\$36,560	47,617	2.2%	2.1%
Managers (including Postmasters)	Bachelor's degree	\$144,830	47,315	2.1%	2.4%
First-Line Supervisors of Sales Workers	High school diploma	\$54,060	43,742	2.0%	2.4%
Customer Service Representatives	High school diploma	\$45,410	40,599	1.8%	2.1%
Registered Nurses	Bachelor's degree	\$93,320	40,052	1.8%	1.5%
Personal Care Aides	High school diploma	\$33,520	38,781	1.8%	1.7%
Driver/Sales Workers and Truck Drivers	High school diploma	\$36,030	38,613	1.7%	2.6%
Laborers and Freight, Stock, & Material Workers	No formal education	\$38,990	37,435	1.7%	2.4%
Childcare Workers	High school diploma	\$33,060	37,158	1.7%	1.0%
Elementary and Middle School Teachers	Bachelor's degree	\$87,700	34,330	1.6%	1.5%
Stock Clerks and Order Fillers	High school diploma	\$35,620	32,923	1.5%	1.6%
Teacher Assistants	Some college, no degree	\$34,450	32,520	1.5%	0.8%
Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners	No formal education	\$40,290	30,813	1.4%	1.4%
Social Workers	Master's degree	\$73,710	29,513	1.3%	0.8%
Office Clerks, General	High school diploma	\$42,000	26,699	1.2%	0.9%
Construction Laborers	No formal education	\$60,410	24,009	1.1%	1.2%
Other Production Workers, Including Semi	High school diploma	\$37,490	23,611	1.1%	1.2%
Security Guards and Gaming Surveillance	High school diploma	\$41,810	23,461	1.1%	0.9%
Receptionists and Information Clerks	High school diploma	\$37,890	21,977	1.0%	0.9%
Waiters and Waitresses	No formal education	\$39,710	21,895	1.0%	1.2%

Earnings

In part due to this education gap, workers with disabilities earn less than other workers. On average, workers with a disability in full-time employment make \$13,000 less per year nationally and \$17,000 less per year in New York. Some of this is driven by lower hours—workers with disabilities work on average 36 hours per week in New York and workers without reported disabilities work 39 hours. When looking at imputed hourly wages based on total wage and salary income and typical hours worked, we find that workers with a disability make \$5 less per hour nationally and \$4 less per hour in New York.

TABLE 28. Earnings and Hours Worked, 2015-2020

	United States		New York	
	No Disability	Has a Disability	No Disability	Has a Disability
Full-Time Workers Annual	\$58,532	\$45,360	\$69,155	\$52,043
Imputed Hourly Wage	\$24.00	\$18.81	\$27.95	\$23.56
Typical Hours Per Week	39.9	37.6	39.4	36.3
Fewer than 15 Hours Per Week	2.9%	6.1%	3.1%	6.7%

SOURCE: Rockefeller Institute of Government based on analysis of American Community Survey.

These disparities in wages are not driven completely by education and hours. When comparing people with disabilities to those without in the same education category, disparities in imputed hourly wages exist for nearly every education category. Workers with disabilities have lower hourly wages nationally compared to their peers with similar education levels. The same is true in New York with one exception. In New York, workers with graduate degrees who have a disability on average report higher incomes than their peers who do not list a disability.

Veterans with Disabilities

There are approximately 2.6 million veterans (18–64) with service-connected disabilities in the United States and 57,000 in New York. This accounts for 1.3 percent of the population nationally and 0.5 percent in New York. A service-connected disability is defined as a disability, disease, or injury incurred or aggravated during active military service.

TABLE 29. Veterans With Service-Connected Disabilities, 2015-2020

	United States		New York	
	Total	Share of Population	Total	Share of Population
2015	2,230,201	1.1%	63,118	0.5%
2016	2,320,138	1.2%	61,242	0.5%
2017	2,394,207	1.2%	55,409	0.4%
2018	2,499,910	1.2%	59,405	0.5%
2019	2,597,069	1.3%	59,130	0.5%
2020(p)	2,595,798	1.3%	57,080	0.5%

SOURCE: Rockefeller Institute of Government based on analysis of American Community Survey.

There are 33.7 million veterans living in the US and 1.2 million in New York State. Approximately 7.7 percent of US veterans and 4.7 percent of New York veterans have a service-connected disability. Veterans with service-connected disabilities are more likely to engage in the labor force than other individuals with disabilities.

TABLE 30. Labor Force Participation for Veterans With a Disability, 2015-2020

	United States			New York		
	In Labor Force	Employed	Employed Full Time	In Labor Force	Employed	Employed Full Time
Without a Disability	80.6%	76.7%	63.1%	80.0%	75.9%	59.8%
Service-Connected Disability	67.8%	64.4%	61.2%	66.0%	61.7%	56.6%
With a Disability	43.1%	37.9%	29.5%	37.7%	32.7%	23.7%

SOURCE: Rockefeller Institute of Government based on analysis of American Community Survey.

Two-thirds of New York’s veterans with service-connected disabilities are participating in the labor force. The gap between veterans with service-connected disabilities and those without a disability is 14.0 percentage points, significantly smaller than the gap between those without and with a disability (42.3 percentage points). Veterans with disabilities participate in full-time employment at almost the same rate as those without a disability.

TABLE 31. Most Common Occupations for Veterans With a Service-Connected Disability

Managers, (including Postmasters)
Driver/Sales Workers and Truck Drivers
Police Officers and Detectives
Computer Scientists and Systems Analysts/Network systems Analysts/Web Developers
Security Guards and Gaming Surveillance Officers
First-Line Supervisors of Sales Workers
Registered Nurses
Janitors and Building Cleaners
Retail Salespersons
Human Resources, Training, and Labor Relations Specialists

SOURCE: Rockefeller Institute of Government based on analysis of American Community Survey.

Table 31 lists the 10 most common occupations held by veterans with service-connected disabilities. They are most frequently in management professions. Unlike individuals with other types of disabilities, these veterans also enter law enforcement or security professions. Many build on technical skills acquired in their service and find employment in fields related to information technology and healthcare.

New York's Employment Services for Workers with Disabilities

Several agencies in New York offer employment training, placement, and support services for individuals with disabilities. These programs partner with educational institutions, nonprofit organizations, and businesses across the state to create employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. These are the entities that individuals with disabilities who are hoping to enter the workforce most likely engage with for support.

This section provides an overview of other programs in New York State designed to improve employment outcomes for individuals with a disability. Promotion and expansion of the 55-b program will require promotional partnerships with organizations that match individuals with disabilities with employment opportunities. Understanding this landscape will help DCS identify potential partners and 55-b eligible employees.

Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies

Vocational rehabilitation agencies, often referred to as “VRs,” are managed by every state but are overseen by the federal government. VR agencies are designed to help people with disabilities meet career goals, from entry level to professional, and offer a wide range of supports. VR agencies work with participants to identify achievable career goals. They then connect them with the intensive training, education, and rehabilitation necessary to prepare them to enter the workforce. VR counselors also offer career preparation counseling and job placement assistance. VR support helps people with disabilities get jobs, whether the person is born with a disability, develops a disability, or becomes a person with a disability while working. VR agencies offer specialized programs for youth transitioning from school into the workforce. New York manages two VR programs:

- ACCES-VR is administered by the New York State Education Department. The Office of Adult Career and Continuing Education Services (ACCES-VR) offers vocational rehabilitation programs designed to assist individuals with a disability access training and find employment.
- The New York State Commission for the Blind (NYSCB), overseen by the New York State Office of Children and Family Services, works to enhance the employability and independence of people who are legally blind.

ACCES-VR

The largest program in the state, ACCES-VR works with students (participants enrolled in a secondary school 16–21 year old), youth (under 25 years old at time of application), and adults to identify and reach career goals. In program year 2021, ACCES-VR's 300 counselors worked with 68,477 individuals with disabilities across New York State.¹³ Nearly half of ACCES-VR's participants report cognitive disabilities (disabilities involving learning, thinking, processing information, and concentration) and a quarter report psychosocial disabilities (interpersonal and behavioral health

disabilities, difficulty coping). Over half of the population, 55.9 percent, that ACCES-VR works with is between the ages of 16 to 21 as students and young adults prepare to enter the workforce.

ACCES-VR's participants work with counselors to develop an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE), which eventually serves as the individual's roadmap to employment. Over the course of developing the IPE, the counselor and client review career choices, discuss responsibilities, and identify a vocational goal with consideration of labor market trends. VR counselors then assist in executing the plan by offering services and facilitating funds for training- and employment-related expenses:

- rehabilitation technology
- specialized transportation
- adaptive driver training
- training (vocational or college), including tuition, related fees, required textbooks
- tutor, reader, and note taker services
- youth services
- physical and mental restoration services
- medical care for acute conditions arising during the program
- modifications to homes, vehicles, and work sites
- job coaching
- occupational tools and equipment
- goods, inventory, equipment, and supplies for self-employment
- worker retention services, which assist employers with retaining valuable employees who have a disability or injury which impacts the ability to perform their jobs.

In addition, ACCES-VR assists in job development and placement. They have programs such as "Work Try Out" in which ACCES-VR reimburses an employer for wages for a limited period of time in order to give both the employee and employer an opportunity to assess whether the employee's skills match the job requirements. Similarly, the "On the Job Training" program reimburses an employer for wages for a length of time while the employee learns the position. ACCES-VR also work with employers and clients to identify occupational tools and equipment that allow the employee to be productive in the workplace.

For ACCES-VR to assist their clients, they must be familiar with the local labor market. ACCES-VR is organized into district offices and each office works with local school districts, community rehabilitation programs, the New York State Department of Labor, career centers, independent living centers, colleges and vocational schools, and the business community. They can play an important role in distributing information to individuals with disabilities, disability service providers, workforce developers, and employers.

In their most recent report, ACCES-VR reported matching over 8,800 participants with employment in integrated settings. These are people who stayed in a placement for at least 90 days. Approximately half of these employment placements were in state agency-managed business enterprises.

New York State Commission for the Blind

The New York State Commission for the Blind (NYSCB) offers vocational rehabilitation services to 4,500 New Yorkers who are classified as legally blind.¹⁴ Programs were offered through seven district offices in New York State.¹⁵

The NYSCB Vocational Rehabilitation Program offers counseling to assist New Yorkers who are legally blind and seeking or retaining employment.¹⁶ As with ACCES-VR, the clients create an IPE. They work with a VR counselor throughout the process as they develop the skills required to achieve employment. VR counselors help clients navigate the program, assess the participants abilities, interest, strengths, concerns, and any impediments to employment. VR can also point clients towards other medical and training resources they may need:

- social casework to address needs in understanding entitlements and benefits, compliance with medical treatment, establishment of social supports, and identifying barriers to work readiness;
- transportation, interpreter, and reader services;
- vocational assessment and training;
- orientation and mobility training;
- assistive technology, including evaluation of needs, purchasing/leasing of technology devices, and training/technical assistance.

In addition, the NYSCB VR services clients can be matched with other New York State Workforce Development Services, such as the New York State Adult Education Services program. NYSCB offers services, such as reader and interpreter services, and rehabilitation technology to supplement the ACCES services offered through the New York State Education Department.

Employment Networks (EN)

Employment networks are private and public organizations that offer career counseling and assistance with job placements. These organizations work with Social Security disability beneficiaries, ages 18 through 64, seeking to enter the workforce. Like the VR agencies, ENs offer career planning services. They work with clients to identify job leads and work with them to find appropriate placement. Once placed, ENs work to provide ongoing employment supports. As with a VR agency, they will also help clients manage their benefits to ensure that the employment situation maximizes their pay, social security, and health benefits.

In general, VR agencies offer a wider range of services related to transition into the workforce, including connections with training programs and support for veterans

and youth in transition. VRs are also better equipped to offer tuition support for postsecondary coursework and rehabilitation services. In some cases, clients of VR agencies transition to EN offices once they are more prepared to enter the workforce. The New York Employment Services System is the largest provider of EN services in the state.

New York Employment Services System

The New York Employment Services System (NYESS) was created to be a single point of entry for individuals with disabilities wishing to enter the workforce. NYESS, which is operated by the New York State Office of Mental Health, is designed to be a centralized point of contact to connect individuals with disabilities to employment-related services and supports. The system also works to match these clients with jobs in the New York State Job Bank. It manages a data warehouse of employment-related information that allows for the tracking of employment outcomes of New Yorkers with disabilities.

Individuals with disabilities aged 18-64 who receive benefits from the Social Security Administration are eligible to participate in the Ticket to Work program. NYESS supports a network of over 150 providers across the state that can work with Ticket to Work candidates. Through NYESS and the Ticket to Work program, these providers offer services, including:

- **Assessment.** Individuals are assessed for capacities and interests. Potential job sites are assessed for accommodations, access, and environmental factors. In addition, providers can set up job site assessments through shadowing, try-outs, and volunteer placements.
- **Job preparation.** Counselors work with individuals to assist in career exploration, resume writing, job interview practice, clothes shopping, mobility training, and commute training.
- **Job search assistance.** Assist with searching for employment opportunities, task analysis, applications and resumes, and interfacing with potential employers.
- **Training.** Individuals have access to life skills training, social skills training, money management, and job coaching. Employers are provided an orientation and training on preparing the workplace.

Other Agencies

Programs and supports for individuals with disabilities are distributed across New York State government. As a result, individuals with a disability seeking employment may reach out to one of several agencies in an effort to find assistance. This section highlights some of the programs and agencies that could be critical partners in engaging potential 55-b candidates.

New York State Department of Labor (NYSDOL)

In 2021, Governor Kathy Hochul announced a pilot program known as the New York Systems Change and Inclusive Opportunities Network (NY SCION).¹⁷ The program's mission is to improve participation of individuals with disabilities in the state's workforce systems and Career Pathways programs in a focus on improving employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

NY SCION builds on the state's existing programs, such as VR agencies and the Ticket to Work programs. It will expand the career services currently offered through the NYSDOL's New York State Career Center network to individuals with disabilities and build on existing networks for workforce development, education, and disability services to support and expand partnerships. To facilitate the program, NY SCION is funding Disability Resource Coordinators (DRCs) assigned to counties across the state. DRCs have been tasked with improving and supporting employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities by leveraging resources offered across multiple systems. They will ensure job seekers with disabilities have access to the career and training services offered through NYSDOL's Career Centers. They will also serve as a resource to partners in the workforce development system and providers that work with job seekers with disabilities through the creation of local networks, delivery of training programs, and advisement.

Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD)

The New York State Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) is the state agency responsible for coordinating services for New Yorkers with developmental disabilities. The agency connects New Yorkers with housing supports, day services, clinical supports, assistive technologies, and employment services. The agency directs people interested in employment and independent living to the ACCES-VR program. OPWDD also manages programs for Supported Employment (SEMP) that offers the support required to maintain a competitive job in the community. Workers with disabilities generally enter the SEMP program upon job placement and completion of the ACCES-VR program. OPWDD's Employment Training Program (ETP) funds internships in local businesses. OPWDD pays the participant's wages and offers supplemental training and job coaching that will improve the outcomes of the internship program and prepare the participant for full-time employment.

Office of Mental Health (OMH)

In addition to managing the NYESS website and system in partnership with NYSDOL, OMH funds programs to support adults with serious mental illness in seeking and maintaining employment. OMH recognizes that employment is a critical factor in improving the social determinants of health.¹⁸

Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA)

OTDA supervises the programs that provide assistance to New Yorkers, including Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP), Temporary Assistance (TA), Emergency Rental Assistance Program, and Child Support Services. New Yorkers with disabilities

work with OTDA to coordinate the benefits they receive from relevant programs. OTDA oversees the employment programs offered to recipients of SNAP and Temporary Assistance. Individuals with disabilities that receive these benefits could be eligible for supports from their local department of social services, including: transportation assistance, vocational education, job readiness and skills training, job research assistance, and work-related expenses.¹⁹

New York State Preferred Source Programs: NYSID and NYSPSP

New York State enacted the Preferred Source Law in 1945 to advance special social and economic goals for groups that are traditionally disproportionately underemployed.²⁰ Under the law, New York State agencies, public benefit corporations, public authorities, municipalities, and school districts are required to purchase preapproved products and services from preferred sources designated by the state. These purchases create meaningful employment opportunities for individuals who are legally blind and those with disabilities. In addition to employment, revenues generated through preferred source programs support training and vital services that in turn further increase independence. State and local government organizations that purchase through preferred source benefit from a simplified procurement process and are guaranteed that prices are no greater than 15 percent above the prevailing market rate. The two preferred source programs creating opportunities for individuals with disabilities are the New York State Industries for the Disabled and The New York Stated Preferred Source Program for New Yorkers who are Blind.

New York State Industries for the Disabled (NYSID)

NYSID works with 109 member agencies and 38 corporate partners to create employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities across the state. In 2019, NYSID's contracts employed 5,293 workers with a disability who earned \$71.4 million in wages. The bulk of NYSID's contracts provide services to state and local agencies, including janitorial, landscaping, document imaging, and management. Many of the social enterprises with NYSID contracts are managed by disability service providers who want to create employment opportunities for their clients. These organizations provide workforce training for workers with disability and often provide their first employment opportunity where they can learn to work in an integrated environment and prepare for future employment.²¹

New York State Preferred Source Program for New Yorkers Who Are Blind (NYSPSP)

NYSPSP has been authorized by the New York State Office of Children and Family Services to manage the program that creates employment opportunities for New Yorkers who are blind or visually impaired. NYSPSP offers a suite of selected services and products, including the management of call centers, transcription, mail services, warehousing fulfillment, and document scanning and destruction. NYSPSP works with its 11 affiliated agencies. Affiliated agencies are not-for-profit organizations serving and employing individuals who are blind or visually impaired. These agencies work to prepare their clients for integrated employment and often provide their first jobs.

Nonprofit Partners

In addition to public agencies across the state, there are a number of nonprofit organizations in the state that advocate for and support employment for individuals with disabilities. They conduct research, provide training to practitioners, and convene the complex network of providers serving individuals with disabilities in New York.

The Arc New York (thearcny.org)

Through chapters across the state, the Arc offers a range of services to New Yorkers with developmental disabilities and their families designed to help them reach their life goals. Arc chapters offer residential services, school programs, and day services. They also work with individuals with disabilities to develop skills required for workforce readiness and find competitive community-based employment.

Association of People Supporting Employment First (<https://apse.org/chapter/new-york/>)

An organization focused exclusively on facilitating the full inclusion of people with disabilities in the workplace and community.

Yang-Tan Institute on Employment and Disability (yti.cornell.edu)

WorkABILITY Innovation Lab (<https://workabilitylab.org/>)

Since the inception of the Yang-Tan Institute on Employment and Disability in 2015, it has funded innovations that foster greater self-determination, adaptive technology, and advancement of individuals with disabilities in growing industry sectors. The Institute partners with programs across the US to evaluate effectiveness and offer training on best practices. The WorkABILITY Innovation Lab advances fully integrated employment and inclusive workplaces for individuals with visible, invisible, and undisclosed impediments to employment.

MYPathNY.org

The University of Rochester Medical Center manages a website for young adults transitioning from school into the workforce. The resource is designed to connect students with supports including VR, services from OPWDD, and Medicaid. They give steps to prepare for employment that includes reaching out to apply for services and includes contact information and links to other resources. The site builds a to-do list. It then helps the user assess their work readiness by asking about interest in work, job experience, and whether they have completed important steps to prepare for a job search like having an email address/voicemail message. There are sections that get users to think about the types of jobs and independent life they would like to have. It encourages users to think about topics such as financial literacy and benefits managements.

New York Alliance for Inclusion and Innovation (<https://nyalliance.org/>)

NY Alliance represents New York's intellectual and developmental disabilities sector. Members include providers of community-based services for persons with disabilities, families/advocates/individuals, businesses, and nonprofits who support the purpose and mission, and care coordinators. NY Alliance offers education and training, and technical assistance and practice improvement to members in a wide variety of topics, including employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. They reach thousands of New York-based providers and professionals annually through webinars, conferences, and publications.

NYS CASE ([Nyscase.org](https://nyscase.org))

The New York State Consortium for Advancing and Supporting Employment (NYS CASE) provides training and assistance to employment service providers currently working with the ACCES-VR program. NYS CASE trainings provide information on innovative best practices on how to transition individuals with higher needs into the workforce. They currently offer five tiers of trainings: Employment Services Delivery, Advance Employment Services Practice, Employment Services Administration, Student and Youth Transition Services, and Employer Engagement.

New York's Employment Services for Veterans with Disabilities

Veterans and veterans with disabilities have access to a wide range of training, vocational rehabilitation, and employment placement programs offered by federal, state, and local governments and nonprofit organizations. These organizations assist veterans transitioning to civilian life, connecting them with critical resources in their communities. This section reviews some of these programs for veterans with disabilities seeking to enter private or public service employment. Some of these programs serve both veterans and veterans with a disability.

Veterans Temporary Hiring Program

In 2014, New York State created the Veterans Temporary Hiring Program to connect veterans and veterans with disabilities with employment opportunities in New York State government. Administered by DCS, the program can benefit disabled veterans by allowing them to apply for jobs within New York State agencies on temporary assignments while possibly being hired full-time, depending on the organization's needs and the member's work. Veterans create a profile on a portal that includes job preferences, academic and professional credentials, employment experiences, and job location preferences.

Agencies looking to hire temporarily can use the portal to identify potential candidates for review. Titles that are commonly filled through the portal include call center representatives, office assistants, highway maintenance workers, motor vehicles representatives, facilities operation assistants, and parks and recreation aides. The

veterans' portal can be an essential resource for potential 55-c applicants. It provides a list of veterans interested in pursuing state employment, a subset that may be eligible for permanent appointment through 55-c.

New York State Division of Veterans' Services

The Division is an advocacy agency for New York's veterans, active service members, and their families. Veterans benefits advisors work with veterans to connect them to the economic, medical, and social benefits and programs they are entitled to due to their military service. These advisors are essential resources for the state's veterans and work with them directly to navigate the myriad of educational programs, employment opportunities, healthcare, and housing services available to New York's veterans at the federal, state, and local levels.

Veterans with disabilities working with veterans benefits advisors can be connected to several resources, including:

- Veterans Readiness and Employment. A vocational rehabilitation program for veterans with service-connected disabilities administered by the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Through the program, veterans can receive vocational counseling, employment services, and access to training.
- State University of New York Systems Veterans Program was created to help veterans maximize their VA education and training benefits at one of SUNY's campuses.
- DCS. Advisors promote pathways for veterans with disabilities into public sector employment, including the 55-a program through local governments, 55-c for veterans with disabilities entering state service, and the additional civil service credits for disabled veterans participating in civil service examinations.
- NYSDOL employment services which are outlined below.

The Division of Veterans' Services leadership promotes the 55-c program heavily at outreach events for veterans and in its training for veterans benefits advisors working in the state, county, and city offices.

New York State Department of Labor (NYSDOL)

NYSDOL offers a number of programs to assist veterans and veterans with disabilities access training and connects with employment opportunities in the public and private sectors.

Local Veterans' Employment Representatives

Local veterans employment representatives (LVERs) are responsible for local business outreach efforts to promote hiring veterans in available positions. These activities include attending career fairs, connecting with local employment training partners, holding workshops for local businesses, and coordinating with other business outreach

activities. In addition, LVERs provide information on business incentives available to companies that hire eligible veterans, such as the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) and the Hire-A-Veteran Credit, both of which provide tax credits to businesses that hire eligible veterans. They can also work to connect businesses seeking to hire veterans with regional talent.

Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialists

Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program specialists (DVOPs) are disabled veterans who provide individual career services exclusively to veterans and eligible persons. These specialists are located in over 30 offices across the state to connect with veterans in their local communities and serve those most in need. Specialists work with clients to conduct a comprehensive assessment to identify the barriers to employment and develop individual employment plans. Specialists use a case management approach to provide consistent support and regular contact.

Specialists offer referrals to training and support services that will help the customer advance their employment plans. They also work with customers to maximize the benefits they are eligible for through their military service. Once the customer is job ready, specialists begin to work with a LVER to identify employment opportunities and work with customers to develop resumes and prepare for interviews.

New York City Department of Veteran Services (DVS)

Some local governments also maintain offices to assist veterans in their communities. The New York City Department of Veterans Services connects residents with resources in the city. In addition, veterans with disabilities can be referred to programs available through the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities. One such program is NYC: AtWork, which recruits, pre-screens, and connects New Yorkers with disabilities to jobs and internships with established business partners in the public and private sectors. Eligible candidates are encouraged to apply for city employment through the 55-c program.

Nonprofit Partners

A number of national organizations with a New York State presence assist veterans and veterans with a disability transition. These organizations connect their clients to programs and services where they are eligible. In addition, they may serve as partners in promoting New York State employment as an option for veterans with a disability.

FourBlock Career Readiness Program (<https://fourblock.org>)

The FourBlock Career Readiness Program is a nonprofit organization to assist veterans transitioning from military service to the civilian workforce. FourBlock is a national organization; however, there is a cohort located out of New York City that can benefit people residing in the state. This program is a curriculum-based assignment that allows people to attend classes and learn key elements to improve their success in the civilian sector. Upon completing this course, veterans are assisted in job searches and matched with appropriate organizations.

Paralyzed Veterans of America (<https://pva.org/>)

This program is a national veterans services organization that works with veterans of the armed forces who have experienced spinal cord injury or dysfunction. They offer a range of services, including medical support, home design, caregiver support, and career preparation and placement. In addition, the organization runs a vocational rehabilitation program and offers employment support. The PVA has four offices in New York State (Buffalo, Syracuse, Bronx, and New York City).

Workforce1 Career Center—Priority1 (<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/sbs/careers/veteran-services.page>)

The Workforce1 Career Center is a government organization that helps New York residents with resumes and building skills that benefit various fields of work within the state. This entity also connects people with employers when open positions are available. Within Workforce1 is the Priority1 department, which assists all veterans (wounded, disabled, retired, etc.) in translating their military experience to civilian jobs, connecting to employers, and learning other valuable tools and resources to improve their transition and quality of life.

VetConnectPro (<https://dvs.yourjobpath.com>)

VetConnectPro is not a physical location for assisting disabled veterans; however, it is a valuable tool to match veterans with available work within New York's public and private sectors. VetConnectPro was launched in 2021 and it has an abundance of utilizations, such as military-to-civilian experience translating features, job postings, civil service exams, and training opportunities. The difference between this site and other veteran-focused sites is that this is tailored specifically for New York State. Additionally, veterans can upload their resumes when they create a profile, and the database provides a more personal experience that will ultimately improve the likelihood of someone finding successful and lasting employment.

Other Civil Service Pathways to Employment

Individuals and veterans in New York interested in pursuing careers in public service have other pathways to public employment. The first is 55-a, which is the program created to promote the employment of individuals with disabilities in New York State at the local level. In addition, the federal government has worked in the past decade to improve the representation of individuals with disabilities in the federal sector. This section provides an overview of how programs at other levels operate.

55-a Program: New York's Local Government Employment Pathway

Local government employment in New York also requires candidates take and pass civil service exams. Each county is responsible for administering the civil service process for the county and all civil service divisions, including cities, towns, and

villages, school districts, and other special districts. The New York City Department of Citywide Administrative Services is responsible for the civil service administration New York City and its boroughs/counties.

Section 55-a of the New York State Civil Service Law allows qualified persons with a certified mental or physical disability to be hired into competitive civil service without having to take an exam. Local agencies use the 55-a program to fill positions in almost every field, including technical, professional, administrative, and clerical occupations. In general, any position that requires a civil service exam could also be filled by a 55-a candidate.

While 55-a/b/c all allow candidates with disabilities to be hired without taking a civil service exam, there are some key differences between the 55-a and 55-b/c programs. Candidates interested in pursuing employment with the state through 55-b/c must confirm their eligibility prior to applying for positions. They do this by filling out an application and providing medical evidence of their disability status.

Job Application

Candidates wishing to be hired with a 55-a exemption are required to apply for the job first. Applicants must request 55-a program consideration when submitting applications, resumes, and cover letters. The candidate does not need to submit any medical information relating to the disability, just a request for the exemption. If the applicant meets the educational/experience qualifications for the position, they will be selected to interview and potentially hired. Once the applicant has been offered a position by the local agency, they will work with the local civil service office to complete the internal 55-a program application process.

Program Eligibility

Candidates for the 55-a program must then be certified through the relevant vocational rehabilitation program (ACCES-VR or the NYSCB). The ACCES-VR or NYSCB program will review the submitted medical documentation and confirm the candidate has a mental or physical disability and will be capable of fulfilling the essential duties of the position satisfactorily. Over the course of the application review, ACCES-VR or NYSCB can recommend any reasonable accommodations.

Career Trajectory

Employees enrolled in 55-a are considered noncompetitive and do not hold permanent status because they have not taken a civil service exam. They must take and pass the civil service exam, reapply, and complete the probationary period to be able to be considered permanent. They must also take exams if they wish to pursue promotion.

Because the 55-b/c program confirms eligibility prior to applications for jobs, DCS can maintain a portfolio of individuals and veterans with disabilities eligible for state employment. Human Resources officers can access this portfolio and portal, and use it to recruit and fill positions with these candidates. Because the 55-a program does not verify eligibility until hiring, recruiting for these candidates can be more challenging.

Federal Recruitment and Retention

In 2010, President Obama issued Executive Order 13548 calling for Increase Federal Employment of Individuals with Disabilities.²² The order noted that as the nation's largest employer, the federal government was uniquely positioned to serve as a leader in the recruitment, integration, and retention of individuals with disabilities in the workforce. The order called for the development of recruitment and hiring strategies, designation of agency officials to enhance employment opportunities, and expanded utilization of Schedule A excepted hiring authority for persons with disabilities and other programs that promote recruitment, retention, and promotion.

The order set a target for federal hiring—100,000 people with disabilities over the subsequent five years. Over the five-year period, the number of individuals and veterans with a disability grew by nearly 77,776, expanding their representation in the federal workforce from 10.2 percent to 14.4 percent. Between 2010 and 2015, the federal government reported the hiring of 117,366 individuals with disabilities. Over 16 percent of new hires were individuals with a disability.²³ Of those hired in this time frame, 43.8 percent were veterans with a disability rating of 30 percent or higher.

Schedule A for Individuals with Disabilities

The Schedule A program was developed to increase the number of people with intellectual, severe physical, or psychiatric disabilities in federal service. Applicants with a disability may apply for a position through Schedule A and avoid the competitive hiring process. As a result, federal agencies are allowed to streamline the hiring of individuals with disabilities. Applicants that meet the eligibility and minimum qualifications of the position can be hired without competing with the general public. Employees hired through Schedule A are hired in “excepted service” and can be converted to “competitive service” after two years of satisfactory employment. Potential applicants are encouraged to identify opportunities they are interested in. The federal job search website designates positions for which Schedule A candidates will be considered. Applicants then include their proof of eligibility with their application materials.

The federal government also maintains a list of qualified Schedule A applicants that agencies can use to recruit candidates without issuing a job announcement.²⁴ To facilitate the recruitment of qualified individuals with disabilities, agencies have Selective Program Placement coordinators and/or Disability Program managers.²⁵ These professionals are responsible for developing and implementing outreach plans that build connections with the disability community. This includes educating applicants, organizations, and partners on the federal hiring process. These professionals also work with eligible job seekers to navigate the federal hiring process to find employment through the program that creates the best opportunity for them.

Usage of the Schedule A program grew after the issuance of the executive order in 2010. In 2010, 902 new hires were appointed through the Schedule A program, representing 0.1 percent of all new federal hires and 4.8 percent of new hires with a disability. By 2015, the number of hires onboarded with the Schedule A program

increased to 2,403 representing 1.7 percent of the recently hired federal workforce and 9.1 percent of new hires with a disability.²⁶

Employment of Veterans

The federal government offers multiple pathways to employment for veterans with and without a disability. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2020, federal agencies employed 329,180 veterans with disabilities. This represented 15.4 percent of the federal workforce. One in 10 federal workers was a veteran with a disability rating of 30 percent or higher. Federal agencies with the highest share of disabled veteran employment were Defense (24.6 percent), Veterans Affairs (16.7 percent), and Labor (13.5 percent).²⁷

Executive Order 13518, issued in 2009, created the Veterans Employment Initiative.²⁸ The order established an interagency council to develop a government-wide effort to increase the employment of veterans in the federal government through enhanced recruitment and training. The order led to the creation of the FedHireVets.gov website, which is a resource for all veterans seeking to enter federal service. The program also created Veteran Employment Program Offices within the agencies to work with veteran job seekers to find employment opportunities and help them navigate the application process.

For veterans interested in pursuing employment through competitive service, the applicants must meet the minimum qualifications. Upon meeting these qualifications, veterans will be given a preference. Nondisabled veterans receive a five point preference and veterans with a service connected disability or Purple Heart receive a 10 point preference. These points are added to the candidate's numerical score. Veterans with a disability rating of 30 percent are placed at the top of their category.

Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

This analysis of the 55-b/c program presented in this report was conducted using data on letters of eligibility awarded and appointments made through the 55-b/c program. The data suggest that the 55-b program is well utilized. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, DCS awarded over 1,000 letters of eligibility for the 55-b program annually. Preliminary 2022 data suggests applications are increasing and may soon reach pre-pandemic levels. Prior to the pandemic, the number of appointments made through the 55-b program averaged over 300 annually. The latest data suggest that the 55-b utilization is close to its cap. As of October 15, 2022, 1,134 of the 1,200 (94.5 percent) eligible positions were filled. In recent years, DCS has increased efforts to promote the 55-b program bringing new awareness and interest. In addition, this report includes recommendations that could further increase utilization. If recent and future initiatives are as successful as anticipated, interest in the program may exceed capacity. In addition, human resources staff within the agencies interviewed expressed interest in expanding hiring through the 55-b/c programs. They appreciated the flexibility it offered in particular for positions for which competitive exams are not offered frequently. Given increased interest in the program from eligible candidates and agency interest in hiring these candidates, **DCS should consider expanding the**

number of positions available to 55-b candidates.

Prior to the pandemic, under the 55-c program, there were an average of 290 letters of eligibility issued annually, with an average of 38 appointments each year. Currently, 104 of the 500 available 55-c positions are filled. It is worth noting that veterans with disabilities have multiple pathways into New York State employment. They are also eligible for 10 additional credits on civil service examination scores. **At this time, there does not appear to be a need for additional positions in the 55-c program.** Further study should be done to better understand the pathways into New York State employment utilized by veterans with disabilities.

In addition to the data analysis, researchers spoke with several stakeholders. This included human resources representatives from agencies who utilize the 55-b/c program for staffing and outside organizations who offer employment services to individuals and veterans with disabilities. Based on the analysis and these conversations, below is a series of policy recommendations that DCS may want to consider for expanding the reach of and improving the efficacy of the 55-b/c program.

Collecting additional data to understand 55-b/c usage:

1. At this time, no data was available to conduct an analysis of subsequent promotions for individuals initially appointed through the 55-b/c programs, and the HR professionals we spoke with do not track 55-b/c candidates after they have been hired. DCS should consider developing a framework for tracking the career trajectory of individuals hired through 55-b/c appointments. It could also be valuable to host discussions with current and former 55-b/c employees to better understand how their participation in the program impacted their career trajectories.
2. 55-b/c is only one entry point for individuals and veterans with disabilities into the state workforce. The federal Schedule A program was used by only one in 10 employees with a disability. It is likely that the number of state employees with a disability is significantly higher than those awarded a letter of eligibility. It could be valuable to understand its relative role.

DCS should consider comparing 55-b/c enrollment with data on disability status of all employees in the state workforce. As of 2022, state employees are invited (but not required) to submit form DPM-325, New York State Self-Identification of Employee Disability Status. In 2023, DCS will be introducing an updated DPM-100 form that will collect biographical and demographic data. The form has been expanded to also collect information on disability and veteran status. DCS will lead a statewide recanvassing initiative of the current workforce to allow them the opportunity to update these and other relevant demographic data points. The data collected in the canvassing effort can be cross-checked against the list of 55-b/c eligibility in an effort to better understand utilization of the programs.

3. The analysis suggests that veterans with disabilities are turning their 55-c eligibility letters into appointments at a lower rate than 55-b program participants. Further analysis of the 55-c eligible group is warranted to see

if they are pursuing different paths to employment. Many may choose to pursue exams and the additional credits they receive instead of using their 55-c eligible letters to secure appointment. It could be valuable to compare the utilization of the two programs to assess which is a more effective pathway into state service.

Feedback on Administration of the Program:

4. Multiple HR professionals reported using the portal to identify potential job candidates. In a survey of agency HR staff previously conducted by DCS, 54 percent of agencies reported using the portal to seek 55-b/c eligible candidates. However, DCS data on actual portal usage suggest the number is actually only 43 percent. A review of portal usage data shows growth in the frequency of use of the portal. Over the past six years, an average of 50 departments had at least one log-in to the portal. The total number of log-ins has increased from 260 in 2017 to 702 in 2022. The number of organizations that logged on regularly (at least 12 log-ins a year) grew from five to 18 over the same period.

All HR staff we spoke with expressed frustration with the portal. They found the information in candidate profiles to be incomplete, inaccurate, and out of date. Many candidates did not personalize their profiles to identify the geographies and nature of work they were actually interested in. In addition, many profiles had invalid contact information. HR officers suggested that candidates be prompted to fill out their profile and update it on a monthly basis. They also felt that more search features could be useful, including the ability to sort by the last date that candidates engaged with the profile.

DCS should conduct discussions with the portal's super-users, which could provide insights on how to improve efficacy of the system. Similarly, discussions with agencies that do not use the portal frequently could help identify barriers that HR teams face when using (or attempting to use) the system. Feedback from these discussions could help DCS identify steps to take to improve the usability and promotion of the tool.

5. Stakeholders and users of the 55-b program reported confusion in the period between the letter of eligibility and the job search. Additional engagement with 55-b candidates upon eligibility may assist them in creating profiles and starting job searches. One stakeholder noted that the key to engagement with the community they serve is repetition. They want to receive the same information multiple times in different formats. She suggested offering regular webinars of starting your 55-b job search and posting the closed caption videos on the website.

Strategies and partnerships for promoting the 55-b/c:

6. Statewide announcements have been successful in increasing awareness of, and driving applications for, the 55-b/c program. DCS may consider expanding partnerships with the governor's office, the chief disability officer, and other agencies to draw greater attention to the program.

7. New York offers multiple programs across several state agencies to assist individuals and veterans with disabilities in connecting with employment opportunities in the public and private sectors. The state employs disability resources coordinators and Disability Veterans Outreach Program specialists to work with individuals seeking employment. New York administers the federal Ticket to Work program through the New York Employment Services System. Individuals who would be eligible for the 55-b/c program could be seeking assistance from one or more of multiple state programs.

DCS has established partnerships with New York State vocational rehabilitation programs through which they provide training to counselors and individuals with disabilities. They work with other agencies and programs to promote 55-b/c to potential applicants. DCS could expand these partnerships to other agency programs and nonprofits who work with New Yorkers with disabilities to increase awareness of the program.

8. Individuals with disabilities face barriers in digital literacy and access. They are less likely to have the devices required to engage online and, in addition, many have difficulty reading material as a result of their disability. One of the challenges they face in job searching is the reliance of the program online platforms. DCS should review whether the materials provided relating to 55-b/c are in line with the best practices for document accessibility. Many websites targeting individuals with disabilities offer text, video tutorials with closed captioning, and ASL to help reach as broad an audience as possible. The New York State Preferred Source Program for New Yorkers who are Blind offers these services.
9. An individual who works with veterans identified two potential misperceptions in the community. First, some members of the veterans' community believe that a medical exam is required rather than VA documentation. In addition, the "entry level" terminology used by DCS implies low salary grade positions that will not reward veterans for their professional experience and educational achievements. Combined, they create a disincentive for veterans to participate in the program. Consider revisiting publicly available materials and outreach strategy to clarify.

Endnotes

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- 5 The Restoration of Honor Act was signed into law in New York State in 2019. Veterans who received an Other-Than-Honorable Discharge as a result of post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, military sexual trauma, sexual orientation, or gender identity are eligible to receive all state veterans benefits. (“Restoration of Honor Act,” New York State Division of Veterans’ Services, accessed December 15, 2022, <https://veterans.ny.gov/content/restoration-honor-act>.)
- 6 The VA assigns veterans with service related disabilities a disability rating based on the severity of the disability. It is a percentage that represents how much the disability decreases overall health and ability to function. More information on the ratings can be found here: “About the VA disability ratings,” US Department of Veterans Affairs, accessed December 15, 2022, <https://www.va.gov/disability/about-disability-ratings/>.
- 7 The Social Security Administration defines blindness as having central visual acuity for distance of 20/200 or less in your better eye with use of a correcting lens or having visual field limitation in your better eye, such as the widest diameter of the visual field subtends an angle of no greater than 20 degrees. (“What Is ‘Blindness’ for an Adult or Child?” US Social Security Administration, accessed December 15, 2022, <https://www.ssa.gov/ssi/text-eligibility-ussi.htm#blind>.)
- 8 Some people report multiple disabilities so these groups may overlap.
- 9 14.8 percent of eligibility letters include multiple disabilities according to our definition. This includes people with both physical and mental disabilities, for example “heart disease, mental - emotional illness” and those with multiple disabilities or disabilities with multiple types of classifications within the mental and physical categories, for example “neurological – developmental,” which is included as both neurological and developmental, which accounts for 44.5 of those with multiple disabilities and “Development - mental, neurological-developmental”
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- 11 Steven Ruggles, et al., *IPUMS USA: Version 12.0* [dataset] (Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V12.0>.
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- 13 *New York State Rehabilitation Council 2020-2021 Annual Report: Seeing the Light* (Albany: New York State Rehabilitation Council, New York State Education Department, 2021), <http://www.acces.nysed.gov/common/acces/files/vr/src-annual-report.pdf>.
- 14 Legal blindness is defined as visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye with best correction or a field of vision of 20 degrees or less. Those that are visually impaired but not legally blind may qualify for Job Save and Independent Living services.

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