

The Autistic People of Color Fund



Autism, Race, and Employment

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In 2022, the Autistic People of Color Fund (The Fund) expanded its mission to include policy and advocacy alongside its primary goal of supporting autistic people of color (POC) through our microgrant program. We understand acutely the economic injustices that our community faces— injustices that arise from the cumulative effects of oppression and marginalization. We believe that both direct aid and wider-ranging policy work can lead to more fulfilling and meaningful lives for our communities.

To determine our policy priorities, we distributed a survey in early 2022 to find out what mattered most to autistic people of color. Employment was near the top of the list, as well as housing, food justice, education, and healthcare. You can see an overview of these priorities in our 2022 Community Priorities Policy Report. After the release of our report, we decided to publish a series of policy briefs based on our respondents' policy priorities. In early 2023, we released our Food Justice and Housing briefs, which you can see on our website.

This policy brief, which focuses on autism, race, and employment, includes the results from our survey alongside empirical research, qualitative studies, and other policy briefs. We hope that activists, policymakers, and advocates can use our data to design and implement policies that protect the rights of autistic people of color in the working world.



*The Autistic People
of Color Fund*

Introduction: Why talk about autism, race, and employment?

In the United States and elsewhere, our social safety nets are limited, and we must therefore provide for ourselves through our labor. But because we face discrimination for both our race and our disability, we are less likely to be employed than our white autistic counterparts. This economic injustice prevents us from saving for the future, earning fair pay for our work, and being treated equitably by our white and nonautistic counterparts. Our exclusion from the competitive, integrated job market increases our risk of poverty, homelessness, hunger, and other forms of suffering.¹ Financial stress, moreover, is a risk factor for suicide, and autistic people have a higher likelihood of dying by suicide than our nonautistic peers.²

These disparities spurred us to produce this report about the challenges we face on the job market—and ways that we can combat them. To learn more about the experiences of autistic people of color in the workplace, we released a survey in the summer of 2022.

Note: Because we're based in the United States and are most familiar with U.S. laws and policy, our data and recommendations reflect that. Moreover, the vast majority of our respondents were U.S.-based. But as we expand our reach, we plan to include more data about international laws and policies in future publications.

Part 1: The Autism and Employment Survey

In August 2022, we released a survey asking autistic people of color about their employment experiences, including the hiring process, the accommodations they sought at work, and their formal educational experiences, if applicable. We also asked them some basic demographic questions, including their race, gender, location, educational background, field of study, and any disabilities they had other than autism. We distributed the survey on social media, including Twitter and Facebook,

1 Ward, A. (2022, January 21). The Right to Adequate Housing: Disabled Individuals in the United States. *Immigration and Human Rights Law Review*. <https://lawblogs.uc.edu/ihr/r/2022/01/21/the-right-to-adequate-housing-disabled-individuals-in-the-united-states/>

2 Mathieu, S., Treloar, A., Hawgood, J., Ross, V., & Kólves, K. (2022). The Role of Unemployment, Financial Hardship, and Economic Recession on Suicidal Behaviors and Interventions to Mitigate Their Impact: A Review. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 10. <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpubh.2022.907052>; Cohut, M. (2020, September 8). Financial hardship is a top risk factor for suicide attempts. *Medical News Today*. <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/financial-hardship-is-a-top-risk-factor-for-suicide-attempts>; Ehrenreich, B. (2008, July 29). Suicide Spreads as One Solution to the Debt Crisis. *Alternet*. https://www.alternet.org/2008/07/suicide_spreads_as_one_solution_to_the_debt_crisis/; Rodgers, J., Jachyra, P., & Cassidy, S. (n.d.). Autistic people are six times more likely to attempt suicide – poor mental health support may be to blame. *The Conversation*. Retrieved 22 August 2022, from <http://theconversation.com/autistic-people-are-six-times-more-likely-to-attempt-suicide-poor-mental-health-support-may-be-to-blame-180266>

for two months before we closed it to responses in October 2022. Fifty-eight people responded to the survey, including one ineligible respondent, resulting in usable data from 57 respondents. More detailed information about the survey is available in Appendix C.

Part 2: Employment Barriers and Policy Solutions

DISPARITIES IN EMPLOYMENT RATES

Research has consistently shown that disabled people of color, including autistic people, have lower employment rates than white people with disabilities. According to a Drexel University study, young autistic adults in the United States were less likely to be employed in their twenties (58%) than people with other disabilities, including learning, emotional, and speech disabilities (90%) and intellectual disabilities (74%).³ The racial disparities in this study were stark. Although 66% of the young white adults with disabilities worked, only 37% of Black and 34% of Latino/Latinx/Latine young adults were employed. A meta-analysis in *Current Psychiatry Reports* reported that in five studies, researchers found that young autistic adults of color were less likely to have full-time jobs than young white autistic adults.⁴ In the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' (BLS) Current Population Survey of 2022, the unemployment rate for white people with disabilities was 6.6%; in contrast, the rates were 9.3% for Latino/Latinx/Latine disabled people⁵, 12.3% for Black disabled people, and 6.8% for disabled Asians.⁶

Surprisingly, our survey respondents' employment rates were higher than the average among disabled people of color (and disabled people generally), including autistic ones. In the United States, only 21.3% of the disabled population are employed, compared with 65.4% of their nondisabled counterparts. Our sample size of 57 may not be representative of the national population of autistic people of color, largely because many disabled people are retired or cannot work and must receive financial support from the state, family, or the community.

Among the participants who chose single answers for our employment question, 65% said that they had a full-time, part-time, or freelance position, and only 8% said that they were out of work.

3 Roux, A. M., Shattuck, P. T., Rast, J. E., Rava, J. A., & Anderson, K. A. (2015). Employment Outcomes of Young Adults on the Autism Spectrum. Retrieved 23 July 2022, from <https://drexel.edu/~media/Files/autismoutcomes/publications/LCO%20Fact%20Sheet%20Employment.ashx>

4 Eilenberg, J. S., Paff, M., Harrison, A. J., & Long, K. A. (2019). Disparities Based on Race, Ethnicity, and Socioeconomic Status Over the Transition to Adulthood Among Adolescents and Young Adults on the Autism Spectrum: A Systematic Review. *Current Psychiatry Reports*, 21(5), 32. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11920-019-1016-1>

5 Referred to as "Hispanic" in the survey.

6 Statista Research Department. 2023, November 3.. Employment rate of persons with a disability in the United States in 2021, by race. Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1245158/us-employment-rate-disabled-persons-race/>

Participants' higher employment rates may be attributable to their higher-than-average educational attainment, both compared with disabled adults and the general U.S. adult population. Education is strongly linked to employment outcomes.⁷ In the United States, only 18% of disabled people over the age of 25 have a bachelor's degree or higher, whereas 58% of our participants had a bachelor's degree or higher.⁸ Among the general population, about 31% of adults in the United States have a bachelor's degree.⁹ (Our sample also included participants from Australia, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Canada, and Spain, but our respondents were overwhelmingly U.S.-based.)

This strong tilt toward autistic people with a high level of formal education may also be connected to our distribution methods: for the widest reach, we used social media sites like X (formerly known as Twitter) and Facebook. X users are more likely to have at least a bachelor's degree (42%) than the general U.S. population (31%), and about three-quarters (73%) of U.S. adults with at least a bachelor's degree use Facebook.¹⁰ (Meanwhile, 64% of adults with a high school diploma or less use the site.¹¹) It is also probable that existing research studies on autism and employment may oversample autistic people who are not in the workforce. Another factor could be our reliance on a written survey, which will not include autistic people who cannot read or struggle to do so, or people who cannot access or afford the internet. Although we would have liked to conduct in-person interviews, our organization is small and does not yet have the funding, time, or other resources to conduct a wide-ranging in-person qualitative research project.

HURDLES FOR JOB-SEEKERS

For many autistic people of color, employment discrimination starts long before a hiring decision. Job searching—visiting job boards, submitting résumés and cover letters, filling out application forms, waiting for callbacks, and conducting interviews—is grueling for most, but implicit and explicit biases embedded throughout the process can make it excruciating. A majority of our survey respondents said that they experienced difficulties being hired because of their autism or race. Sixty percent said that it was harder for them to get hired as people of color, 34% said maybe, and 6% said no. Meanwhile, three-quarters said that being autistic made it more difficult to be hired, while 18% said

7 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Office of Occupational Statistics and Employment Projections (2022, September 8). Employment Projections: Education pays. U.S. Department of Labor Statistics. <https://www.bls.gov/emp/chart-unemployment-earnings-education.htm>

8 Postsecondary National Policy Institute (2022). Students with Disabilities in Higher Education. Washington, DC: Postsecondary National Policy Institute. <https://pnpi.org/factsheets/students-with-disabilities-in-higher-education/>

9 Wojcik, S. & Hughes, A. (2019, April 24), Sizing Up Twitter Users. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2019/04/24/sizing-up-twitter-users/>

10 Wojcik, S. & Hughes, A. (2019, April 24), Sizing Up Twitter Users. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2019/04/24/sizing-up-twitter-users/>; Gramlich, J. (2021, June 1). 10 Facts about Americans and Facebook. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/06/01/facts-about-americans-and-facebook/>

11 Gramlich, J. (2021, June 1). 10 Facts about Americans and Facebook. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/06/01/facts-about-americans-and-facebook/>



Racism and Ableism in the Hiring Process

Racism and ableism frustrate applicants' efforts to find meaningful work. In both cases, hiring managers allow their stereotypes—whether recognized or not—to influence their decisions. Highly qualified applicants are eliminated from the process because they have the “wrong” names, arrive to interviews with mobility devices, have work or volunteer experiences that draw attention to their race or disabilities, look like less attractive candidates because of a biased algorithm, show nonstandard body language, or are simply interpreted as a “bad fit” because of their culture or disability. We hope to draw attention to these practices to encourage employers, as well as researchers who study disability and employment, to learn more about these forms of discrimination and combat them.

maybe and 7% said no.

Racism

The hiring process is riddled with racism, both explicit and implicit. Résumés that racialize an applicant as Asian or Black are less likely to receive callbacks than candidates with white-coded names.¹² White applicants receive about 24% more callbacks than Latino/Latinx/Latine ones.¹³ In an NPR poll, one-third of Indigenous people said that they experienced discrimination when

12 Kang, S. K., DeCelles, K. A., Tilcsik, A., & Jun, S. (2016). Whitened Résumés: Race and Self-Presentation in the Labor Market. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 61(3), 469–502. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0001839216639577>; Nunley, J. M., Pugh, A., Romero, N., & Seals, R. A. (2014). An Examination of Racial Discrimination in the Labor Market for Recent College Graduates: Estimates from the Field. Auburn University Department of Economics Working Paper Series.

13 Quillian, L., Pager, D., Hexel, O., & Midtbøen, A. H. (2017). Meta-analysis of field experiments shows no change in racial discrimination in hiring over time. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 114(41), 10870–10875. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1706255114>

applying for jobs, though another study of Indigenous- and white-coded résumés found no significant difference in callback rates.¹⁴ To increase their chances of being hired, some people of color remove jobs and volunteer experience that might reveal their racial or ethnic background, such as leadership in a historically Black fraternity or volunteering for a Southeast Asian activist organization.¹⁵ Others anglicize or “whiten” their names to increase the likelihood that potential employers actually read their résumé.¹⁶ Of the respondents who answered the survey question “Do you feel that you have a hard time getting job interviews because of your race?”, 37% said that they did, 45% said maybe, and 18% said they did not.

Discrimination need not be overt, either. Some employers run credit checks to determine whether someone will be a good employee and less susceptible to extortion, which can be indirectly discriminatory when people of color and disabled people are more likely to have financial difficulties that lead to poor credit.¹⁷ Further compounding the problem, people of color are more likely to have poor credit than white people, even after controlling for income and other variables.¹⁸ Despite the frequent use of credit scores in hiring, however, studies have shown that credit scores do not determine someone’s ability to perform well on the job.¹⁹ Some jurisdictions, like New York City, have sharply restricted the use of credit scores in hiring, though this practice is not yet widespread.²⁰

14 Brewer, G. L. (2017, November 18). As Native Americans Face Job Discrimination, A Tribe Works to Employ Its Own. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2017/11/18/564807229/as-native-americans-face-job-discrimination-a-tribe-works-to-employ-its-own>; Button, P., & Walker, B. (2020).

Employment Discrimination against Indigenous Peoples in the United States: Evidence from a Field Experiment. *Labour Economics*, 65, 101851. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2020.101851>

15 Kang, S. K., DeCelles, K. A., Tilcsik, A., & Jun, S. (2016). Whitened Résumés: Race and Self-Presentation in the Labor Market. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 61(3), 469–502. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0001839216639577>

16 Kang, S. K., DeCelles, K. A., Tilcsik, A., & Jun, S. (2016). Whitened Résumés: Race and Self-Presentation in the Labor Market. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 61(3), 469–502. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0001839216639577>

17 Association for Psychological Science. (2015, August 11). Credit Screenings Lead to Unfair Hiring. Association for Psychological Science - APS. <https://www.psychologicalscience.org/news/minds-business/credit-screenings-lead-to-unfair-hiring.html>

18 Association for Psychological Science. (2015, August 11). Credit Screenings Lead to Unfair Hiring. Association for Psychological Science - APS. <https://www.psychologicalscience.org/news/minds-business/credit-screenings-lead-to-unfair-hiring.html>; Traub, A. (2013). Discredited: How Employment Credit Checks Keep Qualified Workers Out of a Job. Demos. https://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/Discredited-Demos_0.pdf

19 Association for Psychological Science. (2015, August 11). Credit Screenings Lead to Unfair Hiring. Association for Psychological Science - APS. <https://www.psychologicalscience.org/news/minds-business/credit-screenings-lead-to-unfair-hiring.html>

20 Traub, A. (2015, July 9). The Progressive Victory You Haven’t Heard Of: NYC’s Ban on Employment Credit Checks. *The American Prospect*. <https://prospect.org/api/content/7e724413-877f-51bc-bd7f-943ea748f8ba/>

Ableism

Like people of color, disabled people experience stereotyping, exclusion, and marginalization during the job search. For instance, interviewers may wrongly assume that visibly disabled people are unqualified or incompetent, especially if candidates arrive at an interview using a cane, walker, or other mobility aid or assistive technology like an AAC device.²¹ Some autistic people struggle with interviews, even if they would do well on the job.²² Interviewers may view autistic people's nonstandard body language as signs of dishonesty, disrespect, lack of interest, or disengagement. Some autistic interviewees may also struggle with abstract questions that focus more on the ability to adhere to expectations of neurotypical social performance than the ability to do the job.²³ Phone screenings may exclude Deaf and hard-of-hearing applicants who need to read captions, lip-read, or use a sign language interpreter.²⁴ Some companies, including AstraZeneca, use artificial intelligence-based games to assess candidates, and some of these programs may inadvertently exclude or artificially downrate disabled people.²⁵



One of our survey respondents said that they encountered difficulties during the hiring process because of **“culture fit’ which [is] just an acceptable way to be exclusionary. I never knew if it was culture for real or just that I was disabled or Black.”**

21 Brown, K. et al. (2009). Doing disability: disability formations in the search for work. *Sociological Inquiry*, 79: 1, 3-24. DOI: 10.1111/j.1475-682X.2008.00269.x

22 Mamun, A. A., Carter, E. W., Fraker, T. M., & Timmins, L. L. (2018). Impact of Early Work Experiences on Subsequent Paid Employment for Young Adults With Disabilities. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, 41(4), 212–222. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2165143417726302>; Sparrow, M. (2018, February 27). Why Is the Autistic Unemployment Rate So High? *Thinking Person's Guide to Autism*. <https://thinkingautismguide.com/2018/02/why-is-autistic-unemployment-rate-so.html>

23 Hire Autism. (n.d.) Interviewing autistic candidates. Hire Autism. Retrieved 23 July 2022, from <https://www.hireautism.org/resource-center/interviewing-your-applicant-with-autism/>

24 Morris, A. (2019, January 12). Deaf and Unemployed: 1,000+ Applications But Still No Full-Time Job. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2019/01/12/662925592/deaf-and-unemployed-1-000-applications-but-still-no-full-time-job>

25 Wall, S., & Schellmann, H. (2021, July 21). Disability rights advocates are worried about discrimination in AI hiring tools. *MIT Technology Review*. Retrieved 28 August 2022, from <https://www.technologyreview.com/2021/07/21/1029860/disability-rights-employment-discrimination-ai-hiring/>

A slight majority of our survey participants (55%) said that being autistic lowered their chances of being called for an interview, whereas 17% said it did not and 30% said they were uncertain.

Workplaces that focus on “cultural fit”—often a veiled way of describing a racially, religiously, or ethnically homogeneous community—are likely to exclude applicants who come from different socioeconomic, racial, or cultural backgrounds than the existing makeup of a particular workplace.²⁶ Since it is difficult to prove discrimination before someone is hired, employers can easily reject autistic candidates by saying that they are “not a good fit.”

Some companies may even offer interviews to marginalized people to meet diversity quotas without intending to hire them afterward, as Wells Fargo did for several years.²⁷

In our survey, participants told us about some of the difficulties they encountered during the hiring process (reponses are edited for clarity and consistency):

“ Respondents on Their Difficulties during the Hiring Process

“I went to a women’s college and am perceived as a masculine trans person, so my résumé outs me. I had an offer rescinded during the pandemic after successfully completing 3 rounds of interviews and receiving a start date because I could not work in person as an immunocompromised high-risk individual and submitted medical documentation for a work-from-home accommodation.”

“About ten years ago, when I was interviewing for a music teacher position, the administrator who interviewed me (a Black woman), after I told her about my difficulties in my high school student teaching experience, told me that the students would ‘eat [me] alive,’ that she preferred ‘a Black man’ who was able to take a firm approach, and that I’d fare better in a suburban school district. During this interview process, I also briefly saw a former college-mate who at one time made things difficult for me.”

“They didn’t like my lack of eye contact or asked vague questions that I answered ‘wrong.’”

“One summer I had three final interviews and didn’t get any of those positions. Not knowing why my qualifications were fine, but I was failing face-to-face, led me to seek diagnosis.”

“Eye contact can be very difficult for me. Additionally I ask a lot of questions which seems to be a turn-off. Plus my tone and body language can hinder me as employers think I’m being rude or nonchalant, but that’s just how I am.”

“I’m pretty sure my last name was enough for me to never get calls or interviews.”

“It is difficult to fit into social criteria for job interviews.”

“I have to mask for every single job I have had aside from the one mentioned above. When I don’t mask, people look at me funny. When I’ve disclosed being autistic, many places didn’t call back after having shown initial interest before they knew. I think they believed an autistic person couldn’t do well in the service industry.”

**All responses are edited for clarity and consistency.*

26 McDonald, A. (2021, June 1). The Racism of the ‘Hard-to-Find’ Qualified Black Candidate Trope. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_racism_of_the_hard_to_find_qualified_black_candidate_trope

27 Flitter, E. (2022, May 19). At Wells Fargo, a Quest to Increase Diversity Leads to Fake Job Interviews. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/19/business/wells-fargo-fake-interviews.html>

Respondents shared a variety of suggestions to make the hiring process more accessible for autistic people:

Intentional hiring practices

Numerous respondents said that workplaces should make conscious efforts to hire autistic people of color, including being explicitly supportive of racial inclusion, seeking racially diverse applicant pools, and avoiding stereotypes.

- “Explicitly stating that you care about autistic employees’ needs and perhaps have a segment in new (or added for already-hired employees) employee training videos and handbooks. Speak on the vast ways autistic people exist and behave and are a benefit to the workplace. List different ways you’re able to accommodate a variety of needs. Offer these things plainly and clearly, as opposed to expecting them to be asked for.”
- “Be explicit in their support of racial inclusivity, including in their job descriptions.”
- “This should be obvious, but seek BIPOC applicants. Have BIPOC interviewers so the hiring decisions are not made by exclusively white people.”
- “Don’t be racist, Islamophobic, or antisemitic and pass up people just because of their name. Don’t hire people as the token representation. Use racially sensitive and inclusive language in your website. Show dedication to fighting racism and training employees to be antiracist.”
- “Have candidates reviewed by more than one person they’ll be working with. Deidentify and separate application components. I have seen the hiring process from the other end at some places, and I’m surprised by how biased it is based on ‘fit.’ This strikes me as similarity and interpersonal liking more than measurable criteria, and it makes inclusion impossible. Do not hire people of color to tokenize them and provide them with poor mentorship. Too often in academia, I see people interested in work informed by their racial or ethnic background, whose advisors are ill-equipped to help them reach their professional goals. Inclusion and retention are important—if turnover rate is higher for people of color, that is a sign to me that inclusion is not important to that workplace.”

Transparency

Some survey respondents thought that the application process should be more transparent by being clear about an organization’s cultural expectations, using accessibility statements, and avoiding racially biased algorithms.

- “Transparent application processes that describe what the ‘culture’ is so I can decide if it’s a good fit for me. Accessibility statements.”
- “Get rid of algorithms that are biased against people of color.”

Accessible interviewing

Participants said that they wanted the interviewing process to be more accessible. They offered a variety of concrete solutions to the problem, including written responses to interview questions; easier access to reasonable accommodations; and technical interviews that focus on candidates' qualifications, rather than their ability to demonstrate neurotypical social skills.

- “Easier access to reasonable accommodations that do not cause undue hardship to the employer. For example, extra time on interview assessments.”
- “No performative interviews. Technical interviews.”
- “Allow people applying to submit written responses, or at least give you a copy of the interview questions ahead of time; that would really help with anxiety and brain fog during the interview.”
- “Allow for competency checks that prove the candidate’s ability to perform the job. Do not dismiss AAVE [African American Vernacular English] as ignorant and allow a candidate to genuinely express themselves in an interview without judging.”
- “Stop pressuring use of photos on LinkedIn. Ensure diversity in management and the board of directors and throughout the organization.”

DISCRIMINATION ON THE JOB

Many people in dominant or privileged groups view the workplace as a meritocracy, where the most competent rise to the top regardless of their background. But meritocracy is a well-documented myth. Like other social and economic organizations within oppressive systems, the working world is tainted by racial bias, segregation, and systemic inequity.

Autistic people, regardless of race, frequently encounter invidious stereotyping in the workplace. We are often assumed to be technological geniuses, weird loners, or Rain Man-esque savants with only one skill, despite the diversity of autistic people’s presentations, skills, and interests.²⁸ An entire industry of autism-specific job placement programs, such as Specialisterne, specialize in placing autistic people in technical jobs like quality testing and software development. Even in conventional workplaces, autistic people may be pigeonholed into assignments that emphasize repetitive or menial tasks, regardless of a specific autistic person’s aptitudes or interests, under the assumption that we are more likely to enjoy or tolerate that kind of work than our nonautistic counterparts.

Despite these stereotypes, however, we are a heterogeneous population with heterogeneous skills and interests. Some autistic people are mathematical whizzes or programming prodigies, whereas others

28 Sparrow, M. (2018, February 27). Why Is the Autistic Unemployment Rate So High? *Thinking Person’s Guide to Autism*. <https://thinkingautismguide.com/2018/02/why-is-autistic-unemployment-rate-so.html>

struggle with mathematics and excel in writing, painting, or graphic design.²⁹ Some autistic people are introverted and prefer work with minimal interpersonal interaction, but others are highly social and prefer work with substantial interpersonal interactions. Some autistic people do enjoy repetitive work or tasks perceived by others as menial, while others prefer a high degree of variability and complex processes on the job. Our survey respondents reflected that wide range of interests and preferences. Of the 39 participants who shared their areas of study at college or university, 30 (77%) studied only humanities or social sciences, and 7 (18%) studied STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields. Two (5%) studied both humanities and STEM subjects.

Autistic people of color face the dual impact of racial discrimination in the workplace along with ableist discrimination. Although racial discrimination in the workplace is illegal in the U.S. under the Civil Rights Act of 1964, it is rampant. In 2021, 42% of Black employees, 26% of Asian employees, and 21% of Latino/Latinx/Latine employees said that they encountered mistreatment at work in the past five years, compared with just 12% of their white counterparts.³⁰ In our survey, 63% of respondents said that they experienced racial discrimination at work, while 12% said they did not and 25% said they were uncertain. U.S. law—especially as encoded in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act—prohibits discrimination against job applicants and workers with disabilities, but the law is inconsistently enforced, can require litigation, and can be skirted through “at-will” employment policies that allow companies to fire workers for arbitrary reasons. Moreover, despite over thirty years since the ADA’s passage, disabled people are still more likely to be unemployed than the general population. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the 2022 unemployment rate for disabled people (7.6%) was more than double that of nondisabled people (3.5%).³¹

Discrimination because of combined racial and disability stereotyping and prejudice is harder to measure.

Reporting discrimination, even because of one protected class alone, is no easy feat. When workers want to resolve grievances on the job, the onus is on the employee to prove discrimination through a formal complaint, which can be an arduous process. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), which enforces the Civil Rights Act’s employment provisions, is short-staffed and provides limited protection to workers who want to sue their employers for discrimination.³²

29 McGrath, J. (2019, April 3). Not all autistic people are good at maths and science – despite the stereotypes. *The Conversation*. <http://theconversation.com/not-all-autistic-people-are-good-at-maths-and-science-despite-the-stereotypes-114128>

30 Smart, T. (2021, May 24). Report Finds Racism Prevalent in the Workplace. *U.S. News & World Report*. <https://www.usnews.com/news/national-news/articles/2021-05-24/report-finds-racism-prevalent-in-the-workplace>

31 US Department of Labor Statistics (2023, February 23). Persons with a Disability: Labor Force Characteristics Summary. <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/disabl.nr0.htm>

32 Jameel, M. (2019, February 28). Workplace discrimination is illegal. But our data shows it’s still a huge problem. *Vox*. <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2019/2/28/18241973/workplace-discrimination-cpi-investigation-eeoc>



Respondents on Their Difficulties at Work

“My university does not have a disability office for employees. I was mocked by the ADA person, denied written communication when I specifically requested it, and denied WFH [work from home] accommodations despite it being written into my employment offer and having three separate clinician letters and sufficient grounds. I also have experienced harassment from my coworkers about my neurodivergence.”

“A previous CEO I worked under enjoyed screaming and being insulting. I don’t do well with confrontation, so I shut down and couldn't speak at all. I would cry at times or walk away from my desk area to cool down or turn off the lights in my office. His method of communication was very rough for me and I got anxiety and selective mutism when cornered by him.”

“[I] was fired from my last job. Got really sick and tried to bring in my medical paperwork. I was told by my boss that they had seen me sick so [they] didn’t need my paperwork. Later I was told that I was fired for taking multiple days off consecutively without medical paperwork on file.”

Additionally, 63% of people who file complaints about racial, gender, or disability discrimination with the EEOC ultimately lose their jobs, even though retaliation for filing a discrimination complaint is also illegal.³³

When the EEOC does find in favor of a worker, it may enter into a settlement with the employer that does not necessarily clarify or create requirements for other employers regarding similar practices.

Workers from marginalized populations, including disabled and BIPOC workers, are more likely to encounter roadblocks to their professional advancement than their white and nondisabled peers.

Respondents also described how employers could better support them on the job:

- “More productive conversations about types of feedback received (instead of using one or two words to describe a person, provide examples or scenarios to provide constructive feedback).”
- “Listen to us when we request a reasonable accommodation. Don’t gaslight the employee.”
- “A lot of places would need to rework how they approach employment and specific job duties from the ground up. We need to have an easier time getting accommodations with supervisors that are appropriately trained on how to work and respect people with disabilities. The ability to work from home should always be the standard (when possible). Job facilities should be made more sensory friendly. Security should be given extensive training on racial profiling. Managers need to be trained on racial power dynamics, and how that might impact their relationship with subordinates, as well as how their workers might be put at risk in interacting with others.”
- “Providing reasonable accommodations such as keeping writing as the preferred method of communication, ability to dim lights, ability to keep sensory items or comforts in their workspace, modification of work schedule, modifications for workspaces such as a sit–stand desk.”

INACCESSIBLE WORKPLACE PRACTICES

Although a specific job or workplace may be free of overt discrimination, managers and other organizational leadership can still institute practices and policies that inadvertently marginalize autistic people and reinforce ableist prejudice in the workplace.

For instance, many autistic people benefit from explicit instructions that leave limited room for misinterpretation. Clear instructions also benefit all employees and may function as a tool of universal design. Nonetheless, some managers can confuse their employees because they decline to provide clear instructions or respond to requests for clarification. Likewise, “team-building” exercises that rely on a nonautistic understanding of social norms and cues can also contribute to an inaccessible

33 McCann, C., Tomaskovic-Devey, D. T., & Swerzenski, J. D. (2021, July 13). 63% of workers who file an EEOC discrimination complaint lose their jobs. *The Conversation*. <http://theconversation.com/63-of-workers-who-file-an-eoc-discrimination-complaint-lose-their-jobs-163048>

and inequitable workplace. These activities may be fulfilling for many nonautistic, white, and middle-class workers, but they can be stressful and isolating for autistic, working-class, and BIPOC workers when not designed in access-centered and culturally responsive ways.

Additionally, employer-wide policies such as limitations on paid sick time, pay parity policies that do not account for the added cost of living with a disability, or telecommuting policies that discourage hybrid and remote working arrangements can all have an adverse effect on autistic and other disabled people, especially autistic people of color. These policies are often applied in a superficially equal way, but they may pose a hidden threat for marginalized workers when equal treatment results in disparate outcomes. Autistic people are more likely to live with other chronic physical and mental health conditions that necessitate extra time off to attend to health needs. Relatedly, people with disabilities on average must earn at least 28% more than otherwise similarly situated nondisabled people to maintain the same standard of living.³⁴ Finally, many autistic and other disabled people wish to work from home to minimize the stress of navigating a neurotypical and abled-centric environment, just as many people of color have preferred remote working arrangements to minimize the impact of accumulated racial stress.³⁵ Others require remote work because they remain at higher risk for severe illness from and complications of COVID-19, especially with substantially decreased or eliminated public health precautions. Meanwhile, employers that provide no opportunity for in-person or shared workspaces can also contribute to systemic inequity for workers who cannot afford a private and safe working space at home, or who have greater psychosocial needs for in-person interaction.

SUBMINIMUM WAGE AND SHELTERED WORKSHOPS

As disability justice advocates, we oppose all forms of labor exploitation, especially of people who are subject to multiple forms of discrimination and marginalization at once. Unfortunately, there are two kinds of exploitative labor practices targeted specifically at disabled people: the subminimum wage and sheltered workshops. These practices are enshrined in U.S. federal policy through Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act and often co-occur. Instead of being paid fairly and working alongside their nondisabled counterparts, disabled workers in these environments are segregated and paid a pittance—and racism merely compounds the problem. For instance, a 2002 study found that Black disabled workers receiving Vocational Rehabilitation services were disproportionately more likely to be directed toward supported or segregated employment than their white counterparts: work with a

34 Goodman, N., et al. (2020). The Extra Costs of Living with a Disability in the US: Resetting the Policy Table. <https://www.nationaldisabilityinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/extra-costs-living-with-disability-brief.pdf>

35 Tomczak, M. T., Mpofo, E., & Hutson, N. (2022). Remote work support needs of employees with autism spectrum disorder in Poland: Perspectives of individuals with autism and their coworkers. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(17), 10982. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph191710982>; Robinson, E.S. (2022, April 3). Of course many people of color prefer remote work. It helps dodge office weirdness. *Los Angeles Times*. <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2022-04-03/work-from-home-race-office>; Future Forum Pulse (2022). Leveling the playing field in the hybrid world. Future Forum Pulse. <https://futureforum.com/research/>

paid job coach, work crews, sheltered workshops, or work enclaves for disabled people.³⁶

Subminimum Wage

The U.S. Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, §14(c), allows employers to receive special certificates permitting them to pay disabled workers hourly wages well below the minimum, including at rates as low as cents per hour.³⁷ This practice is known as “subminimum wage” or “commensurate wage.” According to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, employers who use §14(c) certificates “[limit] people with disabilities participating in the program from realizing their full potential while allowing providers and associated businesses to profit from their labor.”³⁸ Thirteen states have banned the practice, but subminimum wage is still legal in the remaining 37.³⁹ Disability rights organizations like the Autistic Self Advocacy Network and the National Down Syndrome Society oppose the subminimum wage.⁴⁰ On the other hand, some chapters of The Arc—a national organization focused on people with intellectual and developmental disabilities—operate work programs using §14(c) certificates.⁴¹ In fact, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, including autism, comprise the majority of subminimum wage workers ostensibly receiving “prevocational services” in sheltered workshops.

These subminimum-wage programs span multiple states, including Alabama, Connecticut, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania.⁴² Many of these §14(c) certificates were issued in 2022, meaning that the subminimum wage is alive and well in many states.⁴³

36 Olney, M.F., Kennedy, J. (2002). Racial disparities in VR use and job placement rates for adults with disabilities. *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*, 45(3), 177–185. doi:10.1177/003435520204500307

37 U.S. Department of Labor. (n.d.). Subminimum Wage. U.S. Department of Labor. Retrieved 21 August 2022, from <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/special-employment>

38 U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (2020). Subminimum Wages: Impacts on the Civil Rights of People with Disabilities. U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. <https://www.usccr.gov/files/2020/2020-09-17-Subminimum-Wages-Report.pdf>

39 Association of People Supporting Employment First. (2022, June 27). State Legislation Watch (2021). Association of People Supporting Employment First. <https://apse.org/state-legislation/>

40 Ne’eman, A. (2016, March 31). Hillary Clinton wants to end the loophole that lets disabled workers earn less than the minimum wage. *Vox*. <https://www.vox.com/2016/3/31/11337758/clinton-disability-minimum-wage>

41 U.S. Department of Labor. (2022, April 1). 14(c) Certificate Holders. U.S. Department of Labor. <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/workers-with-disabilities/section-14c/certificate-holders>

42 U.S. Department of Labor. (2022, April 1). 14(c) Certificate Holders. U.S. Department of Labor. <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/workers-with-disabilities/section-14c/certificate-holders>

43 <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/workers-with-disabilities/section-14c/certificate-holders>

Sheltered Workshops

Jobs that pay subminimum wages not only underpay disabled people but also segregate people with disabilities from the general population. Many employers that use §14(c) certificates operate sheltered workshops.⁴⁴ Sheltered workshops prevent people with disabilities from interacting with nondisabled workers, pay workers insultingly low wages, and devalue their labor. At Lafayette Work Center in Manchester, Missouri, for instance, disabled workers make less than \$5,000 a year, whereas the CEO receives nearly \$200,000 a year in salary and benefits.⁴⁵ Furthermore, these segregated jobs have not materially increased the employment rate among autistic people or other people with disabilities.⁴⁶

As autistic people of color, we oppose all forms of segregation, including sheltered workshops. People with intellectual and developmental disabilities, including autistic people, should have the opportunity to work alongside people without disabilities with fair compensation, and policymakers must acknowledge this by abolishing the subminimum wage and sheltered workshops in their states—and implementing job-placement programs that match the desires and needs of disabled people seeking employment.⁴⁷

REENTRY AFTER INCARCERATION

We call for a radical rethinking of how society supports formerly incarcerated people who are looking for employment after they reenter mainstream society. Although all formerly incarcerated people face employment difficulties after release, this is especially apparent for people who experience multiple forms of marginalization at once.

The effects of systemic racism, including the school-to-prison pipeline and racial profiling, have placed people of color at a greater risk of incarceration than their white counterparts.⁴⁸ Like other

44 National Disability Rights Network (2011). *Segregated & exploited: the failure of the disability service system to provide quality work*. Washington, DC: National Disability Rights Network.

45 Laird, S. (2022, January 23). Sheltered workshops a ‘godsend’ for some, exploitation to others. *Columbia Missourian*. https://www.columbiamissourian.com/news/state_news/sheltered-workshops-a-godsend-for-some-exploitation-to-others/article_10c7c63e-7ad3-11ec-8c6f-7b207ba99e4a.html

46 Winsor et al. (2017). *StateData: The National Report on Employment Services and Outcomes 2016*. Boston, MA: The Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts Boston; Cimera, R. et al. (2012). Do sheltered workshops enhance employment outcomes for adults with autism spectrum disorder? *Autism*, 16: 1, 87–94. DOI: 10.1177/1362361311408129

47 Winsor, J., Timmons, J., Butterworth, J., Migliore, A., Domin, D., Zalewska, A., & Shepard, J. (2021). *StateData: The National Report on Employment Services and Outcomes Through 2018*. Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts Boston. https://www.thinkwork.org/sites/default/files/files/state_data_2021_F.pdf

48 Nellis, A. (2021). *The Color of Justice: Racial and Ethnic Disparity in State Prisons*. The Sentencing Project. <https://www.sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/The-Color-of-Justice-Racial-and-Ethnic-Disparity-in-State-Prisons.pdf>

formerly incarcerated people reentering the community, autistic people of color are at high risk of experiencing social ostracization, discrimination, and rejection because of their disability, race, and criminal record. Although there is little data about this specific population, generalized data about race, disability, and incarceration suggest that the combined experiences of racism and ableism can worsen reentry outcomes.

Race plays a substantial role in who is incarcerated. According to the Sentencing Project, Black people are around five times more likely than white people to be incarcerated in state prisons, and Latino/Latinx/Latine people are 1.3 times more likely than white people to be incarcerated in state prisons.⁴⁹ Disability, too, has an outsized influence on incarceration rates. In a study from 2014, researchers found that about 4% of incarcerated men were autistic, which is twice the currently estimated national rate of autism in the general population.⁵⁰ People with psychosocial disabilities are also overrepresented in juvenile detention facilities and prisons. About 20% of people in jails and 15% of people in state prisons have a psychiatric or psychosocial disability such as bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, major depression, or schizoaffective disorder.⁵¹ Moreover, about 85% of youth in prison qualify for special education services.⁵²

Regardless of racial background or disability, formerly incarcerated people struggle to reenter mainstream society—and that struggle includes searching for employment.⁵³ Over 27% of formerly incarcerated people are unemployed.⁵⁴ Criminal records also reduce the likelihood that a candidate will be contacted for an interview by 50%.⁵⁵

49 Nellis, A. (2021). *The Color of Justice: Racial and Ethnic Disparity in State Prisons*. The Sentencing Project. <https://www.sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/The-Color-of-Justice-Racial-and-Ethnic-Disparity-in-State-Prisons.pdf>

50 Hess, P. (2020, November 11). Autism behind bars. *Spectrum*. <https://www.spectrumnews.org/features/deep-dive/autism-behind-bars/>

51 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2022, March 2). About Criminal and Juvenile Justice. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. <https://www.samhsa.gov/criminal-juvenile-justice/about>; Carroll, H. (2016). Serious Mental Illness Prevalence in Jails and Prisons. Treatment Advocacy Center. <https://www.treatmentadvocacycenter.org/evidence-and-research/learn-more-about/3695>

52 National Council on Disability (2015). *Breaking the School-to-Prison Pipeline*. Washington, DC: National Council on Disability.;

53 Butler, L., & Taylor, E. (2022, April). A Second Chance: The Impact of Unsuccessful Reentry and the Need for Reintegration Resources in Communities. Community Planning Dispatch. https://cops.usdoj.gov/html/dispatch/04-2022/reintegration_resources.html

54 Butler, L., & Taylor, E. (2022, April). A Second Chance: The Impact of Unsuccessful Reentry and the Need for Reintegration Resources in Communities. Community Planning Dispatch. https://cops.usdoj.gov/html/dispatch/04-2022/reintegration_resources.html

55 Coloute, L., & Kopf, D. (2018, July). Out of Prison & Out of Work: Unemployment among formerly incarcerated people. Prison Policy Initiative. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/outofwork.html>

Fortunately, there are ways to support formerly incarcerated or justice-involved autistic people of color. For example, policymakers can create or improve reentry programs that provide people with skills that prepare them for the working world, fund and support college-in-prison programs, or implement policies that allow people to expunge nonviolent or old offenses from their criminal records. In 2022, the White House issued a policy brief outlining some steps policymakers can take to further support those transitioning from prison to the community, including tax credits and subsidies for companies hiring formerly incarcerated people, training and education programs, job search support, union membership, apprenticeships, and continuing support after reentry.⁵⁶

Policy Recommendations

In this section, we offer a set of policy recommendations that will mitigate the effects of systemic ableism and racism on employment, including addressing worker–management relationships, the hiring process, reentry after incarceration, and on-the-job supports. These proposals are a form of “universal design.” Although they are intended to specifically address the accumulated effects of centuries of entrenched ableism and racism, they will benefit all autistic people, all other disabled people, and all people of color in the workplace. When we call attention to the voices and experiences of those of us who have felt the impact of systemic marginalization, we also call attention to everyone else harmed by existing practices and policies.

PREPARING AUTISTIC PEOPLE OF COLOR FOR THE WORKFORCE

Policymakers

- Start or bolster initiatives designed to improve autistic people’s employment outcomes. These initiatives can take multiple forms, including apprenticeships, state-sponsored internships, or Job Corps-style programs for autistic and other disabled young adults.
- Pass legislation that establishes and funds employment training programs for autistic youth and adults.

Teachers and School Officials

- Encourage students to pursue career paths that match their skills and interests, rather than those associated with autistic stereotypes or racialized ones.
- Incorporate job skills training in middle and high school curricula for all students, whether disabled or not.

⁵⁶ The White House (2022). *Incarceration to Employment: a comprehensive strategy to expand employment opportunities for formerly incarcerated persons*. The White House. Retrieved from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Incarceration-to-Employment-Strategy.pdf>

- Include representatives from Vocational Rehabilitation offices (or an equivalent agency) in meetings with students and parents a few years before they finish school (which may vary based on region or the student’s needs; in a lot of U.S. school districts, students may stay until the age of 22 if they need extended services).

IMPROVING THE HIRING PROCESS

Policymakers

- Create and fund a national job program—a racially inclusive and accessible Works Progress Administration—that guarantees work to those who need it. Autistic people of color who struggle to find work on the open market, but who are otherwise skilled and ready to work, will benefit.
- Create incentives (tax breaks, subsidies) for companies to hire autistic adults.
- The federal government, as well as state and municipal governments, should follow the lead of New York City by passing the Equal Employment for All Act and restricting the use of credit checks in hiring.

Employers

- Invest in workplace diversity programs that encourage companies and organizations to hire, promote, and retain people from marginalized backgrounds. These programs should be led by people of color, disabled people, and others who have experienced systemic discrimination.
- Train hiring managers in antiracist practices, reasonable accommodations, and accessibility for autistic interviewees.
- Consider waiving or abolishing credit check requirements for positions that don’t involve personally using a credit card, since poor credit scores often arise from financial difficulties, rather than personal irresponsibility.

Service Providers

- Encourage employers to use interviewing strategies that are more accessible to autistic people, including “working interviews,” in which people demonstrate the skills they would use on the job.
- Compile lists of vetted organizations known to be autistic-friendly and antiracist.
- Offer assessments of existing practices and trainings on improved accessibility and civil rights practices to partnering employers and job training sites.

MATCHING AUTISTIC PEOPLE OF COLOR TO SUITABLE JOBS

Policymakers

- Encourage Vocational Rehabilitation staff, American Job Centers, transition specialists, and private employment consultants to help autistic people at all educational levels find jobs that match their interests and career goals.

Employers

- Capitalize on an autistic person's individual strengths and interests. Some of us are speed readers, others are quick at adding, whereas others are efficient at data entry. And still others have strong memorization skills or (despite stereotypes) are good at interacting with people and managing conflict.
- Work with employees and service providers to use customized employment strategies that tailor job duties to match autistic people's skills and interests while meeting the organization's needs.

Service Providers

Work with employers to customize jobs for autistic people that can fill specific niches that organizations are looking for. These jobs should be in the community alongside nondisabled workers, not sites that are specifically for autistic people and segregate them from the general public.

HELPING AUTISTIC PEOPLE OF COLOR TRANSITION TO COMPETITIVE, INTEGRATED EMPLOYMENT

Policymakers

- Protect people on Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability Income from losing their benefits—including health insurance—if they have part-time jobs in the community.
- Pass the Transition to Competitive Integrated Employment Act and abolish the subminimum wage as authorized by §14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act. The subminimum wage should also be banned for tipped workers.
- Support Employment First policies and practices that prepare disabled people for fully integrated work in the community that pays them fairly.

Service Providers

- Create employment programs and strategies for autistic people that will acknowledge the heterogeneity of our skills and reject one-size-fits-all notions of what an autistic worker can do
- Close sheltered workshops and replace them with integrated work programs that pay all

employees a living wage.

SUPPORTING AUTISTIC PEOPLE OF COLOR ON THE JOB

Employers

- Support programs that make work accessible for autistic and other disabled people, including customized employment.
- Understand that autistic people may have multiple neurodivergent conditions at once, including Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity) Disorder.
- Make it a standard practice for all employees—disabled or not—to share access needs as comfortable, discuss communication styles, and explore other ways that they can be supported at work.
- Allow downtime during work that isn't limited to circumscribed breaks.
- Create intentional space for downtime during conferences, retreats, and similar work events.
- Allow employees to install accessibility-related software on their work computers if it's not a security or liability problem.
- Close the loopholes in “at-will” employment policies that allow employers to dismiss workers for arbitrary reasons, which are often ways to disguise discrimination that targets protected classes.
- Include a bring-your-own device (BYOD) option for autistic workers who are not handling sensitive data or specialized company software. The familiarity of a personal device may help workers focus on their job. (Conversely, some may benefit from using a company device instead of a personal one in a workplace that is predominantly BYOD.)
- Use clear, direct feedback about employees' performance instead of having them draw inferences from subtle cues, which may be difficult for many autistic people.
- Shift from hour-based work to deadline-based work. This may help autistic people focus on outcomes rather than trying to fill time.
- Build connections between workers that don't rely on traditional “team-building” exercises.

Service Providers

- Develop job-matching and apprenticeship programs that pay a living wage for people with disabilities and offer accessible work environments.
- Train workplaces and Vocational Rehabilitation providers about the intersection between autism

and race.

Policymakers

- Adopt policies that benefit workers, including paid leave, tax measures that benefit autistic people of color, the inclusion of the Disability Employment Incentive Act (S. 630/H.R. 3765) to any Congressional tax legislation package, and the inclusion of people with disabilities in government contracts.
- Improve protections for workers filing complaints against discriminatory employers.

PROVIDING FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO AUTISTIC JOB-SEEKERS OF COLOR

Policymakers

- Ensure that unemployment insurance programs provide benefits to people with disabilities who have had to quit their job, but have since received support that allows them to work.
- Develop programs that provide immediate financial assistance to disabled people who are out of work and are either ineligible for unemployment insurance benefits or need more support than unemployment insurance benefits can provide.

Service Providers

- Support community funds and mutual aid projects that support disabled people, including ours.
- Help unemployed or underemployed autistic people receive public assistance, such as unemployment insurance or state cash assistance.

SUPPORTING AUTISTIC PEOPLE OF COLOR WHO ARE REENTERING SOCIETY FROM PRISONS, JAILS, OR HOSPITALS

Service Providers

- Support comprehensive reentry programs for people recently discharged from prison, jail, psychiatric hospitals, and other restrictive settings. These programs should include job skills training (e.g., mock interviews, résumé workshops, cover letter workshops), clothing closets or vouchers for interview clothes, connections to Vocational Rehabilitation offices, advice on explaining criminal records, links to resources like One Stop Career Centers, and direct job placement.
- Create or support programs that prepare people for successful reentry outcomes, including college-in-prison programs. An example of these programs is Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison, an organization in New York State that offers incarcerated people the chance to work toward a bachelor's degree in prison—and eventually prepare for reentry. Participants in Hudson

Link's program have a vastly lower recidivism rate—the rate at which people are sent back to prison after being released—than the general prison population.⁵⁷

SUPPORTING EMPLOYERS OF AUTISTIC PEOPLE OF COLOR

Employers

- Acknowledge National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) and hold events that draw attention to the experiences of disabled workers. Be sure to focus on the intersections between disability and race.

Service Providers

- Provide trainings for employers about how disability and race intersect. These trainings should be led by autistic people of color with experience in the workplace. Our definition of “experience” is broad and includes full-time jobs, part-time jobs, freelancing, and contract/gig work.
- Hold focus groups or other kinds of studies to find out what employers in various sectors and geographic areas know—or don't know—about autism in the workplace.
- Create easy-to-understand materials—e.g., brochures, flyers, and explanatory websites—that describe how autism can manifest itself on the job and how managers can support their staff at work.

Conducting Research on Autism, Race, and Employment

- Conduct quantitative and mixed-methods studies that oversample autistic POC, especially from racial or ethnic groups that are underdiagnosed.
- Learn more about the intersection between autism and race by conducting qualitative research: e.g., interviews, focus groups, essay submissions. Researchers can use thematic analysis to identify common patterns in autistic POC's employment experiences.
- Consider including underrepresented groups even among autistic POC, such as those who are incarcerated or formerly incarcerated, in your research.
- Work with autistic POC to develop research protocols on autism and employment that capture participants' views in sensitive, thoughtful ways.
- Create memoranda of understanding between businesses and schools to help place autistic people in suitable jobs.

⁵⁷ Hudson Link (n.d.). About Us. Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison. <https://hudsonlink.org/about/>

Appendices

A stylized graphic of a hand in a dark purple color, holding a teal pen. The hand is positioned on the left side of the page, with the pen pointing towards the right. The background is a solid teal color.

Additional Resources
Survey Questions
Survey Data

A stylized graphic of a hand in a light teal color, holding a dark teal pen. The hand is positioned in the top right corner of the page, with the pen pointing towards the bottom left. The background is a solid teal color.

Appendix A: Additional Resources

[Association of People Supporting Employment First \(APSE\)](#): APSE is the “only national membership organization to focus exclusively on inclusive employment and career advancement opportunities for individuals with disabilities.”

[EARN \(Employee Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion\)](#): EARN is a comprehensive guide for employers about workplace accommodations, including myths and facts about workplace supports. EARN has a page specifically for [supporting neurodivergent workers](#).

[Job Accommodation Network \(JAN\)](#): JAN provides concrete advice on accommodations for disabled people, including a section dedicated to the needs of autistic employees. Although much of the content is focused on the United States, the accommodations listed can work for people in other places as well.

[ThinkWork](#): Housed at the University of Massachusetts Boston’s Institute for Community Inclusion, ThinkWork conducts research on employment for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), collects case studies, and provides information for employers.

Appendix B: Survey Questions

1. How would you describe your race or ethnicity? (short answer)
2. How would you describe your gender? (short answer)
3. Are you autistic? (multiple choice)
 - a. Yes, professionally diagnosed
 - b. Yes, self-diagnosed or identified
 - c. No
 - d. I think I might be autistic, but I’m not sure
4. Do you have any other disabilities? (multiple choice)
 - a. Yes

- b. No
5. If you said “yes,” you can tell us more about your disabilities if you want. (short answer)
 6. What country do you live in? (short answer)
 7. Are you currently employed? (checkboxes)
 - a. Yes, I have a full-time job
 - b. Yes, I have a part-time job
 - c. Yes, I have multiple part-time jobs
 - d. Yes, I’m a freelancer or contractor
 - e. No, I’m unemployed
 - f. No, I’m a full-time student who doesn’t work
 - g. No, I’m unable to work because of my disability
 - h. No, I’m a stay-at-home caregiver
 - i. Other
 8. If you answered “other,” you can explain your choice. (paragraph)
 9. If you’re employed, what field do you work in. For example, you can say “retail,” “academia,” “nonprofit,” or “corporate.” (short answer)
 10. What is the highest level of education you’ve completed? (multiple choice)
 - a. Didn’t complete high school
 - b. High school, GED, or high school equivalency
 - c. Some college/university (didn’t graduate)
 - d. Associate’s degree
 - e. Bachelor’s degree
 - f. Some graduate school

- g. Master's or professional degree (e.g., JD, MPA, MA, MS)
- h. Doctorate/PhD
- i. Multiple graduate degrees

11. If you went to college, what did you study? (short answer)

12. Do you think that it's been harder for you to get hired as a person of color? (multiple choice)

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Maybe

13. Do you think it's been harder for you to get hired as an autistic person? (multiple choice)

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Maybe

14. Can you describe a time when hiring went well, and why? (paragraph)

15. Can you describe a time when you faced difficulties during the hiring process, and why? (paragraph)

16. Do you feel that you have a hard time getting job interviews because of your race? (multiple choice) (a) Yes (b) No (c) Maybe

17. Do you feel that you have a hard time getting job interviews because you're autistic? (multiple choice) (a) Yes (b) No (c) Maybe

18. Can you describe a time when you faced difficulties at work, and why? (paragraph)

19. Have you ever been fired from a job? (multiple choice) (a) Yes (b) No

20. Have you ever quit a job because you thought you were going to be fired? (a) Yes (b) No

21. Have you ever been promoted at work? (a) Yes (b) No
22. Have you ever received a raise? (a) Yes (b) No
23. Have you ever managed people at work? (a) Yes (b) No
24. Have you ever experienced autistic burnout at work? (a) Yes (b) No
25. Have you ever been unable to leave a job because you needed the healthcare benefits?(a) Yes(b) No
26. Have you been unable to apply for a job because you feared losing current government benefits? (a) Yes (b) No
27. Are there ways that employers can make applying for jobs more accessible for autistic people? (paragraph)
28. Are there ways that employers can make applying for jobs more racially inclusive? (paragraph)
29. Can you think of ways that employers can support autistic people of color in the workplace? (paragraph)
30. What barriers do you feel you encounter as an autistic person of color that white autistic people or nonautistic people of color may not face? (paragraph)

Appendix C: Survey data

A note on data: Thanks to nearest-integer rounding, our percentages may not add up exactly to 100. Since many questions were optional, many percentages are based on the number of people who actually responded to those questions, which in some cases was a smaller number than the entire group.

Autism Diagnosis

Our survey was open to both professionally diagnosed and self-diagnosed autistic people. Although many surveys include only formally diagnosed autistic people, we decided to include self-diagnosed autistic people because of the economic barriers to receiving an autism diagnosis, especially in adulthood. A slight majority of our respondents were professionally diagnosed.

- Thirty respondents (58%) were professionally diagnosed.
- Nineteen respondents (37%) were self-diagnosed or self-identified.
- Three (6%) respondents said they might be autistic but weren't sure. We included these respondents alongside the autistic ones, since many autistic adults may recognize the traits in themselves but are hesitant to self-identify or self-diagnose.

Race and Ethnicity

Survey participants reported a wide range of racial and ethnic identities, including African American, Ethiopian, Burmese, Khmer, Arab, Chinese, Latino/a/x/e, and Muscogee. Black, Asian, and mixed-race groups made up the majority of our respondents. We had one ineligible respondent.

- Fourteen (29%) of our respondents identified their race as Black, African American, or African Caribbean. Two of these Black respondents also reported white ancestry (2%). Ethnic backgrounds among our Black participants included African American, Ethiopian, Afro-Latino, African Arab, and Black British.
- Seventeen (35%) respondents identified their race as mixed-race, multiracial, or biracial.
- Ten (20%) respondents identified their race as Asian. Our Asian respondents came from multiple ethnic backgrounds, including Chinese, Burmese, Filipino/Filipina/Filipinx, South Asian, Khmer, Southeast Asian, and East Asian.
- Four respondents (8%) identified their race/ethnicity as Hispanic, Latino/Latina/Latinx/Latine, or Chicano/a/x/e.
- One respondent reported their race/ethnicity as Indigenous (2%), though some multiracial respondents also included Indigenous backgrounds, including Melungeon and Muscogee.
- One respondent chose “other” for their race (2%).

Gender

Our respondents were primarily women and nonbinary people. Over half said their gender was something other than male or female, including nonbinary, genderfluid, agender, gender-resistant, and other.

- Twenty-one (40%) identified as nonbinary or nonbinary trans.

- Fifteen (29%) identified as female.
- Six (12%) identified as male.
- Six (12%) respondents chose “other.”
- Two (4%) identified as genderfluid.
- Two (4%) identified as agender or gender-resistant.

Other Disabilities

The vast majority (85%) of our respondents reported having another disability or health condition in addition to being autistic.

- Sixteen (30%) reported having multiple physical and psychosocial disabilities. Respondents’ conditions included attention-deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD), diabetes, Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, polycystic ovarian syndrome, fibromyalgia, arthritis, hard of hearing, hearing loss, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and complex PTSD, lupus, chronic fatigue syndrome, bipolar disorder, schizoaffective disorder, postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome (POTS), endometriosis, psoriasis, chronic pain, generalized anxiety, major depression, ankylosing spondylitis, and irritable bowel syndrome.
- Fourteen (27%) respondents left their answers blank.
- Ten (19%) reported having ADHD.
- Nine (17%) reported having physical disabilities, but didn’t report any mental health disabilities.
- Two (4%) reported having mental health and physical disabilities.
- One (1%) reported having PTSD, but no other disabilities other than autism.

Location

Our respondents were overwhelmingly based in the United States, though we also had submissions from Canada, the United Kingdom, Spain, Ireland, and Australia.

- Forty-four (85%) of our respondents lived in the United States.

- Four people (8%) were in Canada.
- The United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, and Spain each had a single respondent (8% total)

Employment Status

Most of our respondents were employed at the time they took the survey, and nearly half worked full-time.

- Twenty-three respondents (47%) had full-time jobs.
- Four respondents (8%) were unemployed.
- Four respondents (8%) had part-time jobs.
- Three respondents (6%) were not working because they were stay-at-home caregivers.
- Three respondents (6%) were full-time students without jobs.
- Three (6%) were freelancers or contractors.
- Two respondents (4%) had multiple part-time jobs.
- Two respondents (4%) said they were unable to work because of their disability.
- Four respondents (8%) chose multiple answers. For example, one respondent was a full-time graduate student with a part-time job.

Professional Fields

Our respondents worked in a wide range of fields, including biotechnology, healthcare, corporate law, academia, administration, retail, primary and secondary education, social work, the fine arts, marketing, publishing, food service, disability, state government, residential care, logistics, and library work.

Educational Attainment

About 9 out of 10 participants had at least some college or university education.

- Seventeen respondents (33%) had a bachelor's degree.
- Fourteen respondents (27%) had some college or university education, though they had not completed their degrees.

- Eight (15%) respondents had a master's or professional degree (e.g., master of social work, juris doctor, master of science, master of arts).
- Three (6%) respondents had a high school diploma, GED, secondary education credential, or other high school equivalency.
- Three (6%) participants had an associate's degree.
- Three (6%) participants had a doctorate degree.
- Two (4%) had some graduate education, but they had not completed their degrees.
- One (2%) participant did not complete high school.

Fields of Study

Respondents studied a variety of subjects in college and university, including psychology, computer science, social work, English, biology, economics, graphic design, East Asian studies, sociology, rhetoric, physics, human development, Chinese, Japanese, special education, journalism, business, education, library and information science, critical mental health studies, music education, animal sciences, art history, architecture, LGBTQ+ studies, communications, electrical engineering, and pharmacy. Social science fields, such as sociology and psychology, were especially common.



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