

**1. What is the Chicagoland Business Leadership Network (CBLN)?**

The CBLN is a business-to-business association promoting disability inclusion in the workplace, supply chain and marketplace. It supports businesses in their roles as employers, buyers and sellers of goods and services and as corporate citizens. The CBLN partners with higher education, government and the service-providing community to create a pipeline of qualified talent for in-demand occupations and a marketplace where employees, customers and disability-owned businesses play a vital role in business success. Through education, mentoring and networking, the CBLN works to remove the stigmas surrounding the employment of people with disabilities, connecting employers to effective programs, best practices and supports to enable positive outcomes.

**2. When did it start?**

A CBLN formerly was housed at the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce and was supported almost exclusively through government funding to the disabilityWorks program. The government funding was not renewed several years ago, and the program was discontinued.

In 2013, the Chamber was approached by a number of business and civic leaders who urged the Chamber to consider involvement with a renewed effort. Chamber President/CEO Theresa Mintle embraced the initiative, and agreed to provide significant in-kind resources, including dedicated personnel, office space, etc. The Chamber Foundation secured a philanthropic grant from the Searle Funds at the Chicago Community Trust. Last October, nearly 200 individuals representing over 50 businesses and organization attended a kickoff for the reactivated CBLN.

**3. Who operates the CBLN?**

The CBLN is an approved affiliate of the U.S. Business Leadership Network, and operated as a program of the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce Foundation, acting as fiscal agent for the CBLN. This allows the CBLN to take advantage of the Foundation's 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status, as well as alleviating the need for a separate not-for-profit corporation. The CBLN will be governed by its own Board of Directors, composed of designated employees of the member businesses.

**4. Why is the CBLN important?**

This initiative seeks to address the high unemployment of people with disabilities. Nationally, there are almost 1.5 million people with disabilities in the US who are currently unemployed and are looking for work. At least one in 10 people in Illinois has some kind of disability and only 36% of working-age Illinois residents with disabilities are employed.

**5. How is it funded?**

The Chamber was successful in obtaining a generous grant from the Searle Funds of the Chicago Community Trust for start-up expenses. Going forward the sustainable model to fund the reactivated CBLN relies on business support. Additional support is needed to successfully re-establish the CBLN.

**6. Why should a business get involved with the CBLN?**

It makes good business sense!

- People with disabilities represent such an untapped labor pool. In the general U.S. population, 54 million people have a disability; in Illinois, that number is nearly 650,000. In Illinois, only 36% of people with disabilities aged 18 – 64 are employed, compared to 75% of people without disabilities.
- People with disabilities get the job done and they stay on the job. They have equal or higher performance rates than those without disabilities, and fewer workplace accidents. Workers with disabilities are less likely to resign and move onto another job and have the lowest attrition rates of any employee group.
- People with disabilities motivate other employees and establish a positive company image.
- People with disabilities represent \$1 trillion in purchase power. Marketing research shows that families with one or more persons with disabilities are significantly more likely to do business with a disability-friendly company, and consumers, with and without disabilities, are more likely to buy from those companies.
- In addition, there are tax credits and tax incentives for hiring individuals with disabilities.

**7. Who are your partners?**

To date, the CBLN has received Sustaining partner commitments from Comcast and University of Phoenix, and Charter commitments from Deloitte, KPMG, Manpower and Northern Trust. Additional commitments are pending. The Chamber Foundation as fiscal agent continues to provide critical in-kind resources and start-up support, and acts as the fiscal agent.

**8. What will the CBLN do?**

The CBLN will serve as an employer-to-employer network of small, medium and large employers to share best practices. It will provide a forum for employers to keep current on useful resources, developments and information and work collaboratively on common issues. In addition to business-to-business networking, it will provide invaluable outreach and education, encouraging personnel policies that include people with disabilities and hiring practices that target candidates with disabilities. It will provide access to community based resources and a robust disability talent pool. The data and evidence collected by the CBLN will address and refute commonly expressed myths and concerns associated with employing people with disabilities.

**9. How can my company get involved?**

Companies can currently join as a Charter or Sustaining member. During this 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the Americans with Disabilities Act, we are looking to secure 25 partners at the Charter (\$10,000 single year) and Sustaining (\$15,000 payable over 3 years) level. The goal is to raise at least \$150,000 by the ADA anniversary date in July, and an additional \$100,000 by year end.

Companies who join at the Sustaining partner level are entitled to a seat on the Board of Directors during the period of their support. Sustaining and Charter members will be receive complementary passes to education and training seminars (including the upcoming “Opportunity Summit” in November), as well as enjoy the benefits of networking with other employers.

**10. Does the CBLN focus only on the City of Chicago?**

No, the CBLN will serve the entire Chicago metropolitan area including Cook, Lake, McHenry, Kane, DuPage, and Will counties. Any business is eligible to join.

**11. Why should employers participate?**

The business community needs qualified workers to fill its changing job requirements. Many employers today are unable to find qualified job applicants through their normal channels of recruitment. Employers participating in the CBLN respond to this need by exploring methods to more effectively recruit, market and hire the talents of job applicants with disabilities.

Hiring individuals with disabilities can save money for taxpayers. The U.S. spends billions each year on benefits to people who, in most cases, would rather have the respect, friendships and income that jobs and careers bring.

**12. How do I sign up?**

Contact Ann Kisting at the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce Foundation at 312-494-6747 or email at [akisting@chicagolandchamber.org](mailto:akisting@chicagolandchamber.org)