

Accessing social entrepreneurship: Perspectives of people with disabilities and key stakeholders

Since there are not enough fulfilling employment opportunities for people with disabilities it is becoming more common for them to be self-employed, which means they make their own jobs, or to be social entrepreneurs, opening small businesses that are creative and help improve society. People with disabilities who are social entrepreneurs are important because they often are successful enough to create job opportunities for other people, including other people with disabilities, which helps grow the economy. It is also important to have social entrepreneurs with disabilities because their experiences with disability will help them make innovative businesses that create change. This brief describes needs, barriers, and opportunities for people with disabilities to be involved in social entrepreneurship with answers from social entrepreneurs with disabilities and important stakeholders.

Barriers that make social entrepreneurship harder for people with disabilities:

- Lack of information and education about business
 - Trouble getting resources
 - No business training
- Hard time getting access to money for business
 - Fear of losing important benefits and medical coverage
 - Trouble getting loans because of short work or credit history
 - Many entrepreneurs with disabilities had to use their own money to start their business

Facilitators that make social entrepreneurship easier for people with disabilities:

- Informal networks (family, friends, business partners, and community) can help provide information, motivation, and support
- Mentors with disabilities who have experience with social entrepreneurship can help with business information and can help with connections to clients, buyers, and investors
- Examples of formal networks: state vocational rehabilitation; DisabilityWorks and the Entrepreneurial Center at the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce; the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities; and, Small Business Development Centers.

It is important for people with disabilities to be social entrepreneurs so they can have meaningful job opportunities, help create jobs for other people, and help create change that improves society.

Recommendations so more people with disabilities can become social entrepreneurs:

- Business training, both general and specific
- Education about the Americans with Disabilities Act, general legal protections and regulations, and public benefits
- More money for social entrepreneurship for people with disabilities
- More role models and mentors with disabilities who have social entrepreneurship experience

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