

Social entrepreneurship as an employment pathway for people with disabilities:

Exploring political, economic, and cultural factors

Social entrepreneurship is when the goal of a business is not only to make profit but also to create social change. Social entrepreneurship is good for the economy by bringing new ideas; it is also a way for people to enter the labor market, the system of employers and jobs.

The unemployment rate for people with disabilities is very high and many of the people with disabilities that are employed work in segregated settings like sheltered workshops that do not take advantage of all their skills or pay them very well. There needs to be more opportunities for people with disabilities to be employed and develop their skills.

Entrepreneurship can allow people with disabilities to be more independent, and to set their own schedule. We need to find a way for people with disabilities to do social entrepreneurship that encourages interdependence and recognizes the ways society makes things more difficult for people with disabilities. For this reason, this brief describes a study that asked social entrepreneurs with disabilities and key stakeholders about factors that provide equal opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in the labor market.

Government can help entrepreneurs with disabilities have equal opportunities by:

- Providing incentives, and tax credits and deductions
- Helping with funding
- Having education and training programs
- Requiring a certain percent of government business go to businesses owned by people with disabilities
- Changing policy to promote equal access and opportunities
 - Making sure those starting a business do not lose their benefits while they are transitioning

For equal opportunities for entrepreneurs with disabilities it is important for funders to:

- Realize that people with disabilities face extra disadvantages and can have more access needs
- Not assume they know about a person's business ability based on their disability

Culture also plays a large role in opportunities because:

- It promotes negative stereotypes and incorrect ideas about disability
- Negative ideas about disability can lead to people with disabilities not being taken seriously as real business owners

Social entrepreneurship isn't for everyone. It also isn't very practical until political, economic, and cultural issues are changed. It is also important that the potential of self-employment or starting a business not mean social support and welfare programs are removed. However, social entrepreneurs with disabilities can serve as a new source of innovation that the economy needs. One way to change these views is to share success stories about social entrepreneurs with disabilities.

Parker Harris, S., Renko, M., & Caldwell, K. (2014). Social Entrepreneurship as an Innovative Pathway to Employment for People with Disabilities: Exploring Political-Economic and Socio-Cultural Factors. *Disability & Society*, 29(8), 1275-1290.



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