

AWAY

TOPICS

Disability Inclusion
and International
Exchange
A Primer for Exchange
Professionals

A World Awaits You www.miusa.org/ncde



Young people with disabilities from the United States explore Madrid, Spain during a disability-focused leadership exchange program.

Disability is Diversity

When it comes to implementing international exchange programs, are you linking disability with diversity?

More than ever, people with disabilities are advancing their professional and personal goals by taking advantage of the same opportunities as non-disabled people – and that includes the broad range of experiences offered through international exchange.

Disability is an aspect of human diversity, representing the world's largest minority. And yet not only are people with disabilities underrepresented in many sectors of society (including international exchange), they are often underrepresented in the very efforts that specifically seek to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. Let's face it: DEI without disability is not DEI.

It's equally important to recognize that disability may be but one of many facets of a person's identity, intersecting with identities related to nationality, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, sexual orientation, cultural heritage, religion and more.

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**National Clearinghouse
on Disability and Exchange**



Abigail, an international exchange intern to Germany, takes in Berlin's vibrant street art.

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The best practices included in this issue of *AWAY Topics* are for international exchange professionals to encourage people with disabilities to take part in international exchange and to have successful experiences abroad.

This issue explores topics such as disability language, how to create cultures of inclusion, the basics of accessibility, disability disclosure, the legal aspects of disability, and more. It also mentions elements of the exchange program lifecycle such as recruitment, selection, orientation, being on assignment, monitoring, etc., as they pertain to people with disabilities. Treat this guide as a starting point in your own exploration in the field. It is not meant to provide comprehensive legal instruction or information. Rather, it offers foundational information paired with supplemental, embedded resources. Readers are encouraged to continue the conversation well beyond these pages.

As a project of the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), we at the National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange are committed to upholding the ECA Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) Statement which embraces disability identity as diversity.

By actively including disabled people in diversity initiatives, international exchange and education abroad professionals can offer these life-changing experiences to a broader population, and perhaps even build pathways for people with disabilities to seek international exchange careers for themselves. The world needs all its citizens involved.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 2021, President Joe Biden signed Executive Order 14035 formalizing that the A for Accessibility be included in all government efforts around Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEIA). This sets a standard for the nation to embrace and celebrate the full diversity of its people, especially in the workforce. The federal government is the nation's largest employer.

Disability 101: Talking About Disability

Language in the field of disability is constantly evolving and also varies from culture to culture. It is important to understand the key features of disability and to develop the knowledge and skills to talk about disability in an inclusive, positive manner. This will empower you to enter conversations with exchange participants with confidence and an openness to learn.

Learning Key Terms

Explore key terms in the disability field and how they relate to international exchange

- **Ableism:** How might social prejudice surrounding disability impact people considering international exchange?
- **Accessibility:** Can include physical accessibility, sensory accessibility, or cognitive accessibility. See page 6 for more.
- **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA):** A civil rights act protecting people with disabilities from discrimination, including in education.
- **Models of Disability:** Key frameworks for understanding disability, for example: rights-based model or social model vs. medical model or charity model.
- **Disclosure:** The act of sharing information about a disability with others. See pages 4-5 for more.
- **Reasonable Accommodation:** Any change that allows a qualified person with disabilities to participate.
- **Needs Assessment:** A conversation to determine the best course of action in providing reasonable accommodations.
- **Person First Language:** Language that centers the individual (example: “a participant who is blind”).
- **Identity First Language:** Language that centers disability identity (example: “a blind participant”).



What to Say

Build familiarity with some common disability terminology so you can move forward confidently in your conversations. Language should stay neutral, and ultimately, follow the disabled person’s lead and use the terms they choose.

- ✗ Avoid “special needs”
“handicapped person” or
“differently abled”
- ✓ Instead consider “disabled person”
or “person with a disability”
- ✗ Avoid “wheelchair bound”
- ✓ Instead consider “wheelchair user”
or “wheelchair rider”
- ✗ Avoid “falls on deaf ears” or
“acting crazy”
- ✓ Instead say what you mean!
Try “ignored” and “out of character”
- ✗ Avoid “normal”
- ✓ Instead consider “non-disabled”



[www.miusa.org/resource/tip-sheets/
respect/](http://www.miusa.org/resource/tip-sheets/respect/)

Creating Cultures of Inclusion

Creating a culture of inclusion at your institution or organization means that all community members feel supported in exploring their options, including international exchange. Be the international exchange provider that people seek out because you see what is possible when others see barriers. Unfortunately, many disabled participants have been discouraged from venturing abroad. Some advisors, although well meaning, may lack a comprehensive understanding of disability as well as the resources available to support disabled exchange participants. Ensure that systems are in place to hold people accountable for making these opportunities accessible for all.


Recruitment

Are you interested in more people with disabilities applying to participate in your international programs? Of course you are! There are many concrete steps you can take to encourage diverse applicants. Be mindful that disabled candidates have been historically excluded from similar programming in the past, and may have been told outright that international exchange isn't for them. State clearly that people with disabilities are encouraged to apply.

 www.miusa.org/resource/tip-sheets/recruiting/


Advising

We understand that international education professionals may feel some added pressure when advising people with disabilities. Our hope is to reassure you that the key to success for working with disabled participants is identical to working with their nondisabled peers: preparation. Gain confidence by building familiarity with key features and terminology related to disability.

 www.miusa.org/resource/tip-sheets/assessmentforms/

Ongoing Support

You've worked on recruitment strategies, have successfully updated your advising practices, and your exchange programs are well underway. What now? Keep an open mind and an open line of communication with your participants. Stay connected, revisit accommodations that are in place and identify any new issues and solutions. Ensure participants are aware of the resources available.

 www.miusa.org/resource/tip-sheets/campus-internationalization/

Encouraging Disclosure

Disclosure can be a key factor in an exchange participant's success. Be mindful that participants may require accommodations throughout all stages of the exchange lifecycle – this includes recruitment, application, interviewing, onboarding, and while abroad. While disclosure is not required, doing so can ensure accommodations are met. Have conversations in your organization early and often about how you are creating environments that encourage safe, empowering disclosure.

www.miusa.org/resource/tip-sheets/currenttrends/

It is important to acknowledge that not everyone will feel comfortable disclosing, not all people have access to diagnostic tools, while others may pursue self diagnosis.

How will you account for these participants?

Disclosure: The Details

Disclosure is the act of sharing information about a disability with others. At its core, it's a personal choice and often comes from a place of self advocacy. By conveying key information about disability related needs, these needs can then be met, and this information is treated with confidentiality.

Disclosure can look different for everyone but understanding some key next steps after learning about someone's disability can lead to long term success! Disabled people are more likely to self-disclose if they are assured that you or your organization welcome and accommodate all qualified applicants.



Study abroad student Jaelyn takes in snowy views of China from its Great Wall.



Examples of participant disclosure:

I'm having a hard time keeping up at the conference. I'm autistic and find the presentations are overwhelming.

Can I have an extension on this paper? I've had difficulty managing my anxiety in a new country and I don't think I can make my assignment deadline.

I really want to go on this tour but I'm concerned I might need assistance to participate.



Examples of provider responses:

Thank you for sharing this with me. I'm sorry to hear that you've encountered an obstacle, but I'm glad that we can start working to find a solution.

Are you familiar with our resources for people with disabilities?

Are you comfortable advocating for yourself directly, or would you prefer coordinating with a member of staff?

Have any methods worked for you in the past that you'd like to consider using here?

Yes, we can get you extra assistance with adaptive devices on uneven surfaces or extra staff to assist you. Let's also discuss ways to address if there are no accessible bathrooms.

Accessibility

There are many factors disabled people consider before safely and confidently going on exchange. And, in the disability context, available does not always mean accessible.

Ultimately program choice belongs to the individual. But exchange professionals are positioned to provide expert guidance to candidates identifying a program that fits their needs. You may remind applicants that while the choice is theirs, they are not alone in this decision process. Applicants should chat with peers, families, colleagues, as well as their trusted medical professionals and other pre-existing disability supporters.

Exchange providers should address each question one step at a time to assist people with disabilities in narrowing down the perfect exchange opportunity!

Not sure where to start? Email the NCDE team at clearinghouse@miusa.org for support.



Choosing a Program

Consider if the exchange environment is safe and welcoming from all facets of accessibility:

Physical accessibility

- Are there physical barriers for wheelchair users?
- How can these barriers be accommodated by using creative adaptive devices and/or programming?

Sensory accessibility

- Can someone sensitive to loud noises, bright lights, or with a scent allergy attend this activity?
- How can programming be modified to ensure someone with these concerns can be accommodated?

Cognitive accessibility

- Are materials available in a variety of formats and plain language well in advance?
- Are websites accessible to people with disabilities? Is there a clear, designated point of contact to address accessibility related concerns?

Accessibility Across Cultures

Accessibility looks different in different places. Physical environments and cultural expectations can impact participant perceptions of independence. Advise participants with disabilities on what cultural differences may come up and who they can talk to if they need to process it. Connect them with peers with disabilities, local or national disability organizations, or resources to learn more of what strategies may work as they adjust to the new culture.



www.miusa.org/resource/best-practices/scoutforaccess/

Complying with U.S. Laws

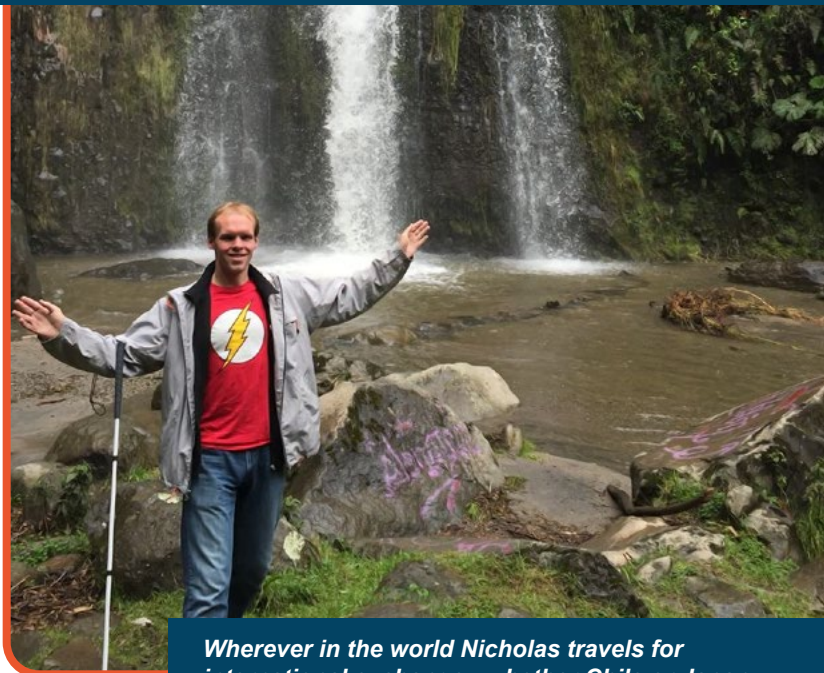
Many professionals in the international exchange field may not be aware of how the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act affect their programs. A common question asked is “What do I legally need to do?” Forward-thinking professionals focus on a culture of inclusion rather than fulfilling minimum requirements.

All aspects of an international exchange program that take place on U.S. soil are subject to the ADA and Section 504, including the application process, pre-departure orientations, and exchange program activities. Worldwide, U.S. federally-funded programs and activities must be open to people with disabilities and provide reasonable accommodations, when requested.

Regarding academic exchanges, the National Association of College and University Attorneys (NACUA) recommends that U.S. colleges and universities conduct their study abroad programs as if both the ADA and Section 504 of the 1973 U.S. Rehabilitation Act apply. This approach will both mitigate potential legal risks and also result in greater access to study abroad programs for students with disabilities.

“Public diplomacy is most effective when people of diverse backgrounds and perspectives participate in people-to-people exchanges and programs to promote mutual understanding.”

— *Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs Statement on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, & Accessibility*



Wherever in the world Nicholas travels for international exchange - whether Chile or Japan and beyond - he always tries to take in a waterfall!

Budgeting for Inclusion

If you're not already budgeting for disability inclusion, now is the time!

One of the biggest challenges for exchange professionals can be covering the cost of program accommodations for people with disabilities. Consider these best practices:

- Include a line item of 1% to 5% of the program's budget. Unused funds can be incorporated into other line items or put towards making programs more accessible.
- If an academic program, work with the disability services office to provide funds at least equivalent to the cost of on-campus accommodations as many people are already using accommodations or facilities on campus.
- People with disabilities may be using funds from vocational rehabilitation or the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program. Sometimes these funds can be used towards program fees or accommodations overseas.

“As a person with a physical disability, it never occurred to me as a college student to ever go abroad, or to even ask the question about study abroad. You’re blowing my mind that there are resources to allow students to do this! I teach international relations and comparative politics, and I am just beyond giddy that there are options for students, because that’s something that I personally never got to experience and certainly was never encouraged to do. So, I’m very excited. I just want to say thank you very much for the information.”

– Participant in webinar, “Disability Inclusion on Campus and in International Affairs,” presented by NCDE for the Council on Foreign Relations.

Connect with NCDE

Have questions? We are here to help! Visit our resource library which contains over 200 tipsheets, forms, and personal stories for more information about a wide range of topics, such as:

- Service animals abroad
- Medications
- Health insurance
- Equipment
- Reasonable Accommodations
- Personal Care Assistants
- Traveling with autism
- Managing chronic illness abroad
- Accessible applications

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Spread Disability Pride

Promote and engage in disabled joy year-round, and consider how to give these initiatives an international spin. For collaboration or cross-promotion opportunities, seek out the following disability resources in your community and beyond!

- Disability-related traditional and social media
- Disabled student organizations
- Disability resource centers
- Disabled employee resource groups
- Local, national, and international Disabled People’s Organizations
- Government organizations dedicated to disability rights and inclusion
- Disability Pride Month (July)
- International Day of Persons with Disabilities (December 3rd)
- National Disability Employment Awareness Month (October)



Contact Us

<https://www.miusa.org/ncde> | clearinghouse@miusa.org