



**Interview with Susanne Bruyère
Director, Employment and Disability Initiative
Cornell University**

[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the NTAR Leadership Center, helping state leaders help adults with disabilities to employment and better economic opportunities through collaboration, innovation, and change.

[Laurie Harrington] Welcome to "Research in Brief," a feature podcast of the NTAR Leadership Center. I'm your host, Laurie Harrington. As director of the Employment and Disability Institute, Susanne Bruyère is responsible for the strategic and financial direction of a multi-million dollar research, training, technical assistance, and information dissemination organization devoted to improving employment outcomes and inclusive communities for people with disabilities. Professor Bruyère is also currently project director and a co-principal investigator of numerous research efforts focused on employment, disability, non-discrimination, and disability employment policy funded by numerous federal agencies. Dr. Bruyère is also the Associate Dean of Outreach in the Cornell University ILR School. As associate dean of outreach, Dr. Bruyère contributes to the development of the school's vision and mission as well as to the strategic, programmatic, and administrative priorities for the school. She's responsible for leading the public relations, communications, and marketing functions of the school, promoting visibility for the school's outreach activities, and proactively seeking new clients and new external sources of funding for the outreach and research activities of the school. Thank you for being with us, Professor Bruyère. Can you please describe the Employment and Disability Institute and say a little bit about its history and mission?

[Susanne Bruyère] The grant that was awarded to Cornell University in, at the end of September, is a National Technical Assistance Policy and Research Center for employers on employment of people with disabilities, and the Center was awarded September 30th, and October 1, we began the Center in full force. And it's a one-year project with hope to, four additional years of funding.

[Laurie Harrington] What do you hope to accomplish with the Employment and Disability Institute? What would you consider the big victory to come from your Center?

[Susanne Bruyère] Well, what, what we ultimately hope for is that we will be creating informational products and providing technical assistance support and new information and guidance as we go along that address any employer concerns and provide needed information to improve employment hiring and retention and advancement of people with disabilities in both the private and the federal sector workplace.

[Laurie Harrington] How does the Employment and Disability Institute interact with the USBLN and state BLNs, if at all?

[Susanne Bruyère] Well, let, let me first say that although this grant was awarded to Cornell University, our application very clearly was a partnership. It was, it is a consortium of several



organizations, many with direct links to businesses, and those are as the one you mentioned, the U.S. Business Leadership Network, but also Altarum Institute, the Institute for Educational Leadership in Washington, D.C., the Conference Board out of New York City, the National Business and Disability Council, the Cornell University Center for Advanced Human Resource Studies, the AFL CIO Center for Green Jobs, and Rutgers University Heldrich Center. And several of these organizations, like the B.L.N. that you just inquired about, certainly have members who are employers. The B.L.N. is probably the most organized organization that we're working with where employer interests are concerned in that they actually do have chapters in various states. So in that regard, it is a very grassroots-oriented kind of organization.

[Laurie Harrington] Who is the audience for the Employment and Disability Institute? Is it employers, service providers, people with disabilities?

[Susanne Bruyère] At our center, we really are focused on employers. The, the name is true to its mission. We, we see ourselves as an information dissemination, outreach, technical assistance support for employers. To the extent that this information can inform the work of service providers, who do hope that they'll access it because we think a greater understanding of what employer's information needs are and how to respond to those needs and provide appropriate support is probably a critical element for community service providers and state VR agencies. So we, we certainly hope that service providers will also avail themselves of the information, but we will be designing information, gathering, you know, gathering focus from the, the employers themselves in terms of what we see as the key issues to address, and we will be really looking to employers to guide our efforts to find out what is needed and, and to help us design informational products that directly respond to their needs. So they will very much be our partners in identifying what the key issues are as well as designing the products to meet the information needs that they are telling us that they have. They are our focus.

[Laurie Harrington] How does the Employment and Disability Institute engage employers and get them interested in what your Center is providing?

[Susanne Bruyère] Well, the, in the, strategically, we felt that the, the, the way to be most efficient in doing this is to engage partners who have direct access to employers, and so that is why we have the partner organizations that we have. This is an efficient way for us to quickly get a litmus on issues that we are trying to refine our understanding of. Whether that be hiring practices or retention practices, you know, emerging new initiatives around leave policies that might be innovative. They are, they will be our source of information about what the issues are as well as identification for best practices. So we will go to our partner organizations, both ask them what they're hearing from their members but also engage their members directly through focus groups, you know, calls to advisory, working with advisory committees for each of these key employer organizations. That'll be our first step for sure.

[Laurie Harrington] Based on your early work so far, what's the number one concern of employers right now?



[Susanne Bruyère] I think there, there are certainly several. I think that employers want to know how to network with places where they can get information about qualified individuals with disabilities. There still seems to be a gap between employers' needs, and in that regard, in terms of tapping labor pools and, and being networked in their own respective communities. So we are refining our, our networks and our understanding about that to try to be able to target more specifically how to connect employers who have these needs with specific community providers, but also more generally, you know, what is good practice. You know, employers are interested in what are effective practices to, to recruit and retain people and, and how to troubleshoot particular problems when they arise. So we will, you know, be, we, certainly there's plenty of information out there. We will be coalescing that information, putting it in a repository on our website so it's easily accessible and where there aren't available products, we'll be creating them. We also know there are other policy-related issues that are of interest to employers, and we will also be looking to gather information that will be, can be distilled and shared with employers about policy issues. And we know one is certainly health care reform. That will be an initiative on down the line that we work with.

[Lori Harrington] Thank you, Dr. Susanne Bruyère, for speaking with us today. I've been talking today with Dr. Susanne Bruyère, director of the Employment and Disability Institute and Associate Dean of Outreach in the Cornell University ILR School. This is Laurie Harrington for "Research in Brief" with the NTAR Leadership Center. For more information about the NTAR Leadership Center and its research activities, visit www.ntarcenter.org.

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