They May Not Be in the Office, But They Are Working:
Keeping Disabled Librarians in the Workforce with a Work-from-Home Initiative

By The
Hypothetical Western Maryland Library
123 Main Street
Western, MD 12121
555-555-5555
sbaldwin@washcolibrary.org

_____

Samantha Baldwin
Librarian

**Overview and Executive Summary**

      The Hypothetical Western Maryland Library (HWML) is seeking a grant from the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation in order to kickstart their work from home option for librarians and staff with disabilities. HWML serves a rural community of approximately 25,000 people an hour away from Baltimore. Aligning with the Foundation's Initiative for access to jobs in rural communities, HWML's project will make jobs more accessible to people with disabilities. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, only 19.3% of people with disabilities were employed in 2019 (2020). In order to accomplish this, HWML needs funding to create an inventory of home office supplies including laptops and wi-fi hotspots. With this inventory, HWML can launch an optional work from home program as a reasonable accommodation where HWML will supply the necessary office supplies.

**Problem Statement**

      According to Oud (2019), 3.7 percent of librarians in the United States and 5.9 percent of librarians in Canada have at least one disability (p.169). In Washington County, Maryland, a neighboring county of HWML, 12 percent of people under the age of 65 years have a disability (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Like librarians of different races and sexualities, librarians with disabilities bring unique perspectives to the workplace. The American Library Association has several pages and articles dedicated to diversifying libraries racially, but the importance of hiring disabled librarians is only mentioned briefly in the "Library Services for People with Disabilities Policy:"

ALA must work with employers in the public and private sectors to recruit people with disabilities into the library profession, first into library schools and then into employment at all levels within the profession. Libraries must provide reasonable accommodations for qualified individuals with disabilities unless the library can show that the accommodations would impose an "undue hardship" on its operations. Libraries must also ensure that their policies and procedures are consistent with the ADA and other laws...All graduate programs in library and

information studies should require students to learn about ... the needs of people with disabilities both as users and employees, and laws applicable to the rights of people with disabilities as they impact library services (American Library Association 2006).

From her study, Oud also notes that "people mentioned a wide variety of ways that they felt their disabilities helped them in their jobs, including increased empathy for others, being more patient and understanding supervisors, the ability to bring their experiences with and knowledge of disability to improve job responsibilities like reference and instruction, and the ability to think creatively and strategically" (p.187). Despite these reported contributions, when surveyed, many reported " a wide range of difficulties associated with cultural assumptions about disability and the competitive workplace" (p.176). One way to create a better work environment for our disabled librarians is by giving them the option to work in an entirely different environment altogether, free from the barriers that exacerbate their disabilities—their home.

**Technical Approach**

Work-from-home, or telecommuting, is defined as "a work practice that involves members of an organization substituting a portion of their typical work hours (ranging from a few hours per week to nearly full-time) to work away from a central workplace—typically principally from home—using technology to interact with others as needed to conduct work tasks" (Allen et. al., p.44). Without the use of technology, telecommuting would be nearly impossible because it would be very difficult to communicate effortlessly during the workday or work with documents on the same network. In order to implement a work from home policy at our library, HWML first needs an inventory of home office supplies employees can use at home.

**Budget and Cost Proposal**

To build this inventory, HWML is requesting $5,997 to purchase laptops, wi-fi hotspots and data, headsets, and a Nord VPN subscription to cover the expenses for the first year of the program. NordVPN is the most important technology on the list because it will keep our data safe, even when staff are working from home.

| Technology | Quantity | Unit Price | Cost for 1 year (before tax) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Laptops | 3 | $1,500 | $4,500 |
| Wi-fi Hotspot | 1 | $20 | $20 |
| Wi-fi Data | 14GB/month | $80/a month | $960 |
| Headsets | 3 | $23 | $69 |
| NordVPN | 1 | $108/a year | $108 |

Total: $5,657
After Tax: $5,997

**Project Schedule**

Once this inventory has been built, administration can begin allowing librarians and staff with disabilities to request to work from home as a reasonable accommodation. With the help of Human Resources, technology needs will be assessed, and if the staff member needs any of the technologies from the inventory, that item will be checked out to them. The laptops, headsets, and hotspot, will be available on a first come, first serve basis. Not every staff member will need these items. We will recommend that any staff member working from home take a laptop, however, since it is important to use a separate computer than one's personal computer for work. Anyone wishing to work from home, who does not have internet access will be provided with a Wi-fi hotspot.

**Evaluation**

Evaluations will be conducted every three months after an employee begins a work-from-home regimine. These evaluations will be conducted by their immediate supervisor. This evaluation should be no different than the yearly work evaluation given to employees each year, but should specifically focus on the quality of work completed at home and attendance at home. The goal for our employees with disabilities is that working from home will increase their attendance and productivity. The test period for this program will be one year. If unsuccessful, subscriptions to NordVPN and the wi-fi hotspot will be cancelled after the first year. Laptops and headsets can be repurposed for other library uses.

**Qualifications**

Hypothetical Western Maryland Library has a diverse team of librarians and staff, including the principal investigator of this grant, Samantha Baldwin. She takes particular interest in the project as a member of the disabled community, and believes that having the option to work from home will lead to more librarians with disabilities staying in the workforce: "When I'm having flare ups, it's hard for me to be in the office, but I know I can still work. If I had the option to work-from-home, I wouldn't miss as much work as I do." Miss Baldwin will guarantee that the funds provided by The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation will go entirely into funding a successful work-from-home initiative for librarians and staff like her.

Works Cited

ADA. (2000). A Guide for People with Disabilities Seeking Employment.

Allen, T., et. al., (2015). How Effective is Telecommuting? Assessing the Status of Our Scientific

    Findings. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest. 16*(2), 40-68.

Oud, J. (2019). Systematic Workplace Barriers for Academic Librarians with Disabilities.

    *College & Research Libraries*. 169-194.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2019, July 1). U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Washington County,

    Maryland.