

RETAIN Webinar

Making RETAIN Timely: Capitalizing on National Disability Employment Awareness Month and Other News Hooks

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Transcript:

Slide 1:

Hello, everyone, and welcome to today's RETAIN TA webinar, "Making RETAIN Timely: Capitalizing on National Disability Employment Awareness Month and Other News Hooks"

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My name is Greta Menard. I'm a communications consultant with Concepts, Inc., a communications firm based in Bethesda, Maryland that has worked with ODEP on a number of communications, branding, and outreach projects over the years. Our team is very excited to be working with the American Institutes for Research technical assistance team on RETAIN.

It's likely that many of you listening today have worked with me or my colleagues in some capacity already. Because as you may recall, we are partnering with AIR to provide RETAIN awardees with *communications-related* TA designed to complement your pilot work.

And today, we're going to talk about some upcoming opportunities to amplify your RETAIN communications efforts—first and foremost, National Disability Employment Awareness Month which is coming up in October.

Before we get started, I want to cover a couple of housekeeping matters and set the stage.

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So let's begin with some brief notes about RETAIN, just to ensure that all of you are in the right place!

As you surely are aware, the Retaining Employment and Talent After Injury/Illness Network—or RETAIN—is a joint initiative led by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy, or *ODEP*, and funded by ODEP in partnership with the Employment and Training Administration and the Social Security Administration.

And, as you all know, through the cross-sector, collaborative work of eight state teams, RETAIN is focusing on an important dimension of disability employment: stay-at-work/return-to-work strategies.

It's about helping people who become ill or injured during their working years to remain in the labor force.

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Today's session is one of many in the RETAIN TA webinar series. We hope you've had a chance to join some of the past webinars. If not, you can access RETAIN TA's archived webinars in the Multi-Media section of the RETAIN Online Community, commonly referred to as "the ROC."

The webinars are designed to provide information for RETAIN states and their partners on topics specific to SAW/RTW and their demonstration projects.

Webinar topics are driven by the needs of the states and explore subjects that are significant components of successfully planning and implementing SAW/RTW efforts.

They range from broad overviews to in-depth exploration of specific strategies.

Now, because today's webinar is a recorded session, we are not able to facilitate live Q&A like some of our other webinars. But our team welcomes your questions after you watch this, and I encourage you to get in touch with me directly at any time. (My contact information is listed at the end of the presentation.)

And with that, let's get started!

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Well today, we're here to talk about using *timeliness* as a news hook to enhance the communications and outreach you conduct on behalf of your RETAIN demonstration project.

But what exactly is a news hook?

Some of you may know, but for those unfamiliar, the "hook" is that critical piece of newsworthy information that will capture the attention and interest of both the news media and their audiences.

In other words, when pitching the media, it's that special something that makes your story relevant *now*. A news hook can be thought of as a key angle that "hooks" a reporter's interest. We also sometimes consider them, a "hook" on which you "hang" your story.

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Now, there are a number of news hooks to keep in mind when trying to capture the attention of a media target, or any audience for that matter. These include:

- Timeliness (that is, is your story current?)
- Proximity (is it happening near me, in my backyard?)
- Magnitude (is this a big issue?)
- Impact (is this something of great importance that will affect me or my loved ones?)
- Conflict (is there a narrative to the story, with protagonists and antagonists? Something that will entice my readers or viewers?)

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But today, we're here to talk about the first one on that list: **Timeliness**.

Because all of you are in an excellent position to use the media's existing attention on key events to infuse messages about your RETAIN program—and there are some particular opportunities right around the corner.

Now, many of you tuning in today may be saying to yourself, “is this topic really relevant to my RETAIN project right *now*? I'm not doing media outreach yet. We're just getting our pilot off the ground.”

And we completely hear you on that. But rest assured you're in the right place. Even if you're not conducting media outreach about RETAIN in the traditional sense, you are engaged in recruitment and partnership brokering and other programmatic activities that involve communications, awareness building, and persuasion. So the information we're going to cover today can be applied in a number of ways, we promise!

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So let's talk about one major, relevant national event coming up that you can use as a RETAIN news hook. And that is National Disability Employment Awareness Month, also known as NDEAM.

Observed every October, NDEAM celebrates the contributions of workers with disabilities and educates about the value of a workforce inclusive of their skills and talents.

Every year, there is an NDEAM theme, and this year's is “The Right Talent, Right Now.”

NDEAM is managed at the national level by ODEP, however, we like to say that its true spirit lies in the many creative observances held at the grassroots level across the nation every year. And that's where you come in. We'll get to that in a moment.

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So how did NDEAM get started? Well, clearly, people with disabilities have been contributing to our nation since its very beginnings. But, the first official effort to recognize this began in 1945.

That year, President Harry S. Truman approved a Congressional resolution declaring the first week in October “National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week.” In 1962, the word “physically” was removed to acknowledge the employment needs and contributions of individuals with *all* types of disabilities. Then, in 1988, Congress expanded the week to a month and changed the name to what it is today.

When ODEP was established in 2001, it assumed responsibility for the annual observance. And as part of this, each year, ODEP works closely with its partner organizations, including those representing employers, people with disabilities and their families, and government agencies to develop the annual theme and assist organizations in participating. This includes designing and distributing an official NDEAM poster.

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And here on this slide is this year's NDEAM poster, which is available in both English and Spanish. It features a diverse array of images of people with disabilities in various workplace settings.

Displaying the NDEAM poster is one of the most popular ways individuals and organizations show their support for NDEAM. You can download and print it, or you can order free copies via the NDEAM website which we'll talk more about in a moment.

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So, as we mentioned, the beauty of NDEAM is that it's a national campaign, but its tentacles reach into states and localities far and wide. We would assume that many of your organizations probably observe and celebrate NDEAM already in some way, and ODEP offers numerous tools to help you do so.

The NDEAM website (dol.gov/ndeam), is a gateway to ordering NDEAM materials, and to find inspiration for ways you can participate.

There's a "31 days of NDEAM" slideshow featuring one thing you can do each day of October to celebrate the month, as well as a list of NDEAM ideas for:

- Employers
- Educators and youth services professionals
- State governors, legislators, and other policymakers
- Associations and unions
- Disability related organizations; and even
- Federal agencies

So from the website, if you click on one of those audiences, you'll see a list of ideas for ways to capitalize on NDEAM.

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The ideas listed there really run the gamut. They include:

- Posting an NDEAM web link
- Issuing an NDEAM press release
- Soliciting an NDEAM proclamation by your mayor or governor
- Holding an NDEAM breakfast or brown bag lunch
- Featuring NDEAM in your newsletter and social media activities
- Distributing and displaying NDEAM posters

And, of course, so much more. Those are just a few of the more popular ideas. The best part is that ODEP offers ready-to-publish language that you can cut, paste, and customize for your own needs. So

think sample tweets, drop-in newsletters articles, press release templates, and things like that. So they make it really easy to observe and support NDEAM.

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And that brings us to RETAIN. We want to encourage you to view NDEAM as an opportunity to amplify and enhance your outreach efforts around RETAIN.

Now again, you may not be engaged in traditional media outreach right now, so you'll surely want to revisit this opportunity maybe next year when you have success stories and tangible RETAIN pilot results to promote to news outlets. But in the near term, you can certainly use NDEAM to educate your stakeholders on the fact that, in the workplace, acquired injuries and illnesses are in fact disability-related issues.

This can be a nuanced message with some of your target audiences, of course. Because many people with acquired illnesses and injuries may not identify as people with disabilities the same way that others do. So therein lies an opportunity for you to show them that things like Americans with Disabilities Act protections, workplace accommodations, and other disability employment-related strategies apply to them.

That's a message you can help employers understand, as well—that part of fostering a disability-inclusive workplace, during NDEAM and all year long, means supporting workers who may face injuries and illnesses, too. After all, they represent "The Right Talent, Right Now," and it pays to implement strategies to help retain your top talent.

Similarly, healthcare providers can be reminded of *their* important role in the SAW/RTW triad during NDEAM, and every day.

In short, NDEAM can be used to help your stakeholders understand the broader, more inclusive definition of disability. And this could be a compelling theme for any article, op-ed, news story, or recruitment message you may want to pitch, using NDEAM as a timely hook.

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So, as October approaches, now really is a great time to start plotting your NDEAM strategy. It might mean doing something specific with regard to RETAIN, or it could mean finding out what your organization and your partners are doing for NDEAM and then looking for ways to attach RETAIN to those activities.

Again, dol.gov/ndeam is a great starting point to get your creative juices flowing.

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Of course, NDEAM is not the only national observance you can use as a news hook. There are dozens of awareness months, days, and weeks—everything from Thyroid Disease Awareness Month, to Earth Day, to Older Driver Safety Awareness Week. The list seems to go on forever. Many, if not most, of these

observances would be a stretch for RETAIN-related outreach. But there are several that have a legitimate connection you can leverage. Some examples include:

- National Public Health Week in April
- Occupational Therapy Month in April
- Occupational Health Nurses Week, also in April
- Mental Health Month in May
- National Prevention Week in May (since we know some of your pilots are focused on substance abuse)
- National Small Business Week in May (small businesses being an important employer target)
- Global Accessibility Awareness Day in May (This one is focused on accessible technology, which is a key accommodation issue for many people with disabilities)
- National Safety Month in June
- The anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act in July (our team used this as a news hook on a number of ODEP projects recently)
- National Recovery Month in September
- Labor Day in September, given the employment angle. (You'll see ODEP and DOL's Office of Public Affairs doing a lot of communications this Labor Day, as you can imagine.)
- National Family Caregivers Month in November
- And Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) Awareness Month in November. (We know that some of your pilots are focused on this condition.)

This is just a sampling. We have a larger list of national observances that we'll be posting in the Communications Corner of the ROC. But you can see how wide and varied these opportunities are.

Often, tying your program to one of these observances can be really simple. We're not talking about huge campaigns. It can be as simple as writing a social media post or a blog with a tie-in to the national event. An example might be, "This week is Occupational Health Nurses Week, a time to celebrate the important role that occupational health and other providers play in helping people return to the workforce following illness or injury. Our RETAIN program is focused on this issue...etc., etc." – and you can build from there.

Most of the observances we just rattled off feature websites that are similar in nature to ODEP's NDEAM toolkit, so Google them, check them out, get creative, and look for ways to make your RETAIN outreach efforts timely.

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The last thing I want to talk about today is another ODEP-funded awareness building initiative, the Campaign for Disability Employment, or CDE. And we're highlighting the CDE today because of its direct relevance to RETAIN and SAW/RTW.

The CDE is a collaborative effort among several disability and business organizations that is working to shape positive attitudes about disability and employment.

It's built around a multi-faceted campaign called "What Can YOU Do?" that features a series of PSAs and coordinating media products, all designed to promote positive employment outcomes for people with disabilities. These products and positive messages are encouraging businesses and others to recognize the value that individuals with disabilities bring to the workplace, and the benefits that come with full inclusion.

The CDE has released four powerful PSAs have aired more than 325,000 times on television and radio stations nationwide, earning more than \$64 million in donated airtime. All of them can be downloaded from the CDE website, along with other tools and tangible ideas for supporting the Campaign's goals.

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But the big reason we're highlighting the CDE today, is because, last year, when ODEP had the opportunity to produce its fourth PSA, it decided to focus the piece on SAW/RTW issues. And so was born the "Working Works" PSA, which we hope some of you have seen on your local TV stations already. It's airing now nationwide, and you can, of course, view and share the video online, as well.

Through the voices of several individuals, the "Working Works" PSA explores the many reasons people work, including after injury or illness. The PSA's four primary cast members include Major League Baseball great Cal Ripken, Jr. and three other individuals who worked with their employers and healthcare professionals to make a plan to stay at or return to work following illness or injury. They are real people, not actors, and their stories really emphasize the importance of working together on effective stay-at-work/return-to-work strategies.

Now, as with all of the CDE's PSAs, "Working Works" is accompanied by a range of supporting materials including posters featuring images of the cast members, and a discussion guide you can use to facilitate dialogues about the PSAs themes among employers, co-workers, and healthcare professionals.

And one especially compelling spin-off product is a series of "meet the cast" videos that explore the SAW/RTW journeys of the people featured in the PSA. These are short, impactful videos that truly bring the issue of RTW to life through the personal experiences of the cast members.

And as you can imagine, ODEP wants to encourage you to share and use these tools to educate your target audiences and further the spirit of RETAIN.

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These are some of the "Working Works" posters, and you can see how nicely they dovetail with your RETAIN work. One of them features a photo of a woman with a spinal cord injury with her occupational therapist that says, "I'm employed today, because we worked together." Another, shows a gentleman in a woodshop with a hand injury. His quote says, "I got back to work, so I can keep contributing, keep earning, keep *working*." Another shows a gentleman with his service animal. He happens to be an Army veteran with PTSD, and his poster says, "It wasn't a matter of *if* I could go back to work, it was a matter of *when* and *how*."

There are more posters on the CDE website, including some with Cal Ripken, Jr., and one poster in Spanish. So please, check them out, order them, and consider using these collateral materials and videos as RETAIN outreach tools. And that's a perfect segue to the next slide.

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So, as the campaign says, "what can you do" to capitalize on the CDE?

Well, first, you can visit the CDE website and explore its tools and resources, and while you're there, scroll to the bottom and subscribe to the CDE's e-mail updates to stay abreast of what's happening with the campaign.

You can also issue a CDE supporter press release and get your organization listed on the CDE's "Supporter" web page. There's a fill-in-the-blank press release template right on the CDE's website that you can adapt and issue to show your support.

You can also post the "Working Works" PSA on your RETAIN website, and use the PSA and "Meet the Cast" videos in your RETAIN training efforts. The discussion guide has a great list of conversation starters to help you.

Worth pointing out is that the "Meet Chanelle" video is particularly relevant to RETAIN since it features the story of Chanelle Houston, a woman with a spinal cord injury sustained in a car accident, as well as interviews with her employer and an occupational therapist about the importance of collaborative SAW/RTW strategies. So it's right on point when it comes to RETAIN.

And, of course, you can order and display "Working Works" posters and follow the CDE on social media.

And that can be really key to what we're talking about today. Following the CDE on social media and via its e-mail subscription service is a great way to capitalize on CDE-related news hooks. For instance, when you see the CDE promoting a new product, event, or effort, you can share or retweet that item and mention your state's RETAIN efforts in the process.

It's all about looking for outreach opportunities and milestones in the disability employment and healthcare spheres, and finding ways to attach RETAIN messaging in a timely way.

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And that brings me to the end of today's presentation. I know it was a swift, high-level look at key outreach opportunities, and that it barely scratches the surface. But I hope it assists you in preparing for the upcoming NDEAM festivities, while inspiring you to look for new, creative, and timely ways to raise awareness about your RETAIN programming.

As we mentioned, I hope you'll contact our team directly with any questions you may have. You can engage Concepts by emailing me, Greta Menard, at gmenard@conceptcommunications.com and by emailing RETAINTA@air.org. Just be sure to always copy your AIR state liaison in your correspondence.

And we have just one more request—and that is to let us know if and how you capitalize on NDEAM, the CDE, and other observances. It's really helpful to ODEP and to us as we work to keep track of NDEAM events and observances across the nation, and it also positions you and your pilot for further amplification since ODEP, the CDE, and others may want to cross promote what you're up to through other communications channels.

In closing, please look out for some materials synthesizing key points from this presentation in the RETAIN Community of Practice, and remember to check out dol.gov/ndeam and WhatCanYouDoCampaign.org.

We appreciate you tuning in today, and we look forward to working with you on RETAIN. Thank you!