



2026 Montana Disability Employment Summit

Ensuring Montana's Industry has the Talent Needed to Compete in the Global Economy

DAY 1: Wednesday, May 13, 2026

- 1:00-1:15 **Opening Remarks and Event Overview**
- Lieutenant Governor Kristen Juras
- 1:15-2:30 **Value Proposition of Disability Employment**
- The Harkin Institute will set the stage by showcasing the value proposition of disability employment – broad nature of disability leads to skilled teams, strong and resilient cultures, greater innovation, access to more loyal customers and lucrative markets
 - Ashlea Lantz, The Harkin Institute
 - Robert Ludke, The Harkin Institute
- 2:35-3:30 **Fireside Chat: Disability Employment and the Economy of the Future**
- Moderator: Ashlea Lantz, The Harkin Institute
 - Presenter: Steve Sukup, President and CEO at Sukup Manufacturing Co
- 3:30-3:45 **Break**
- 3:45-5:00 **Navigating Workplace Accommodations** – Presenter: Hannah Olsen, CEO, Disclo
- A presentation about how executives can design and implement workplace accommodations that go beyond legal compliance and instead create best in class teams that drive long-term value creation
- 5:30-8:30 **Business Connections and Networking Reception** – Downstairs at the Helena Brewhouse



DAY 2: Thursday, May 14, 2026

8:30-9:30 The Value Proposition of Apprenticeships

- Keely Cat Wells, Making Space

9:30-10:30 Pathways to Paychecks: 406 JOBS

- A student-led panel discussion about youth transitioning into employment across Montana's six high demand industries
 - Andrew Lowney, MT VR Pre-ETS Specialist (moderator)
 - 5 student panelists, TBD

10:30-10:45 Break

10:45-12:00 Disability and Innovation: Entrepreneurs Leading the Way

- A panel conversation about the unique entrepreneurial journeys of Montanans with disabilities
 - Cheri Reed-Anderson, Montana VR (moderator)
 - 3 Montana entrepreneurs

12:00-12:30 Lunch & Networking

12:30-1:30 Lunch & Unlocking Potential: Employment 1st and The 406 Jobs Plan

- Panel discussion led by members of the Employment 1st Working Group and persons who have transitioned from segregated to community employment
 - Chanda Hermanson, Montana VR (moderator)
 - Crystal Armstrong, Workforce Services Administrator, Department of Labor and Industry
 - Cassie Wick, Ability MT
 - Jean and Jordan Schroeder

1:30-2:30 Bridging Ability and Opportunity Through Apprenticeship



- A conversation about what is apprenticeships, new apprenticeships in Montana, how does a person request accommodation in an apprenticeship and the relationship with VRBS and Apprenticeship.
 - Presenters:
 - Glen Disque, Registered Apprenticeship Specialist
 - Cheri Reed-Anderson, Montana VR

2:30-3:30 **Disability Employment: A Panel Conversation with Employers**

- A conversation about how employers are employing persons with disabilities and reaping the rewards
- Possible panelists:
 - Hannah Olson (moderator)
 - Daniel Allen, State of Montana
 - Lexy Malchow, State of Montana
 - John Lytle, General Manager, DoubleTree Hotel
 - Katie Verdeber, Silverman Law Firm
 - Brett Weinsch, 1889 Coffeehouse

3:30-3:45 **Break**

3:45-4:45 **Montana's Recovery Friendly Workplace Initiative**

- A presentation about how Montana's Recovery Friendly Workplace Initiative is spurring employment opportunities across the state
 - Shannan Sproull, Recovery Friendly Workplace Initiative

4:45-5:00 **Thank You and Closing Remarks**

- Chanda Hermanson, Montana VR