

Knocking Down Barriers for the Disability Workforce

Accessibility means making every reasonable effort to ensure people with disabilities can work effectively and productively in the workplace. That includes both facilities and all electronic materials. Web accessibility, for example, ensures people with disabilities can equally perceive, understand, navigate, contribute to, and interact with web sites and tools. Unfortunately, we have a long way to go in this area. In addition, many of today's Human Resource practices, processes and tools put some people with disabilities at a disadvantage when applying and competing for a job. On May 18th, [MITRE](#) joined [Capital Factory](#) in their [Accessibility in Tech Summit 2021](#) to start knocking down some of these barriers.

The Summit, sponsored by Microsoft, brought together diversely-abled leaders, entrepreneurs, and allies in tech who support and invest in diversity and inclusion. After Microsoft's opening remarks, Carol Glazer, President of the National Organization on Disability, gave a keynote talk focused on the following: "We need to stop seeing disability as a weakness needing charity, and rather see it as a talent in need of opportunity."

The keynote was followed by two panels: Panel on Accessibility in Design; and Panel on Accessibility in Human Resources and Hiring. Panel members included: Jen Smith, Microsoft; Wendy Fox, LogMein; Melissa Dobbins, Career.Place; and Teresa Thomas, MITRE.

Thomas leads MITRE's [Neurodiversity Program](#) seeking to recruit, hire, and develop neurodivergent employees—a population with atypical neurological development, including individuals with autism, ADHD, and dyslexia—for cybersecurity positions and other high tech roles.

The panel on Accessibility Design explored and discussed challenges and solutions related to Web technologies and the user experience for people with disabilities, and the importance of designing inclusively from the beginning. The Panel on Accessibility in HR and Hiring focused on the many aspects of creating and maintaining a truly accessible workplace and culture.

The Accessibility in Tech Summit is part of Capital Factory's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) strategy to increase diversity in the tech community across six focus areas: women, people of color, Latinos, LGBTQ+, veterans, and accessibility. Founder and CEO of Capital Factory Joshua Baer kicked off the summit with these comments, "Capital Factory is committed to increasing diversity in the entrepreneurial community and making our community a welcoming and inclusive environment. We know diverse and inclusive teams perform better. The data shows they are more successful and produce bigger returns."

The Summit concluded with a startup showcase pitch competition with an award of \$10,000 legal services provided by Baker Botts. The startups were judged on the overall quality of the pitch; the overall strength of the value proposition; attractiveness to the market being served; the overall strength of the business model; and the overall timing of the pitch. [Wheel the World](#) won the pitch competition with their company helping find and book accessible places to stay, things to do, and multi-day trips in hundreds of destinations with detailed information about accessibility and an experienced customer support. The other startups pitching were [ROBOKIND](#) and [UpBrainery](#).

The Summit brought thought leaders from across the country to offer their best thinking around the issues that support and embrace a more inclusive culture. The Summit raised awareness about some important barriers people with disabilities face, including user experience and technology design, hiring, and employment. The Summit offered sound solutions and resources for employers and employees to reference.

A video of the summit can be found here: [Accessibility in Tech Summit 2021](#).