

EMPLOYMENT FIRST TASK FORCE

Expanding Employment Opportunities for Tennesseans with Disabilities

EMPLOYMENT FIRST STRATEGIC PLAN: 2015 – 2017

Mission: Create and expand opportunities for employment for all Tennesseans with disabilities.

Vision: People with disabilities have the same opportunities for employment as anyone.

Guiding Principles:

Employment First means that employment in the general workforce should be the first and preferred option for individuals with disabilities receiving assistance from publicly funded systems. As members of the Employment Task Force and a broader partnership dedicated to fulfilling the mission of the partnership, we are:

1. **Collaborative:** We seek to achieve collective impact through growing and sustaining a thriving collaboration in which we share a vision for change, a common understanding of the barriers to employment for people with disabilities and a joint approach to addressing those barriers through agreed upon actions. The collaboration is built on mutual respect and recognition for unique strengths, expertise and resources of each partner.
2. **Data-driven:** We agree on the ways success will be measured and reported, including ensuring that benchmarks and mechanisms are in place to collect and report data on the actions we take. We prioritize promising- and evidence-based practices to drive our actions.
3. **Person-Centered:** We approach strategies and actions with the underlying belief that employment outcomes are successful only when they are driven by the individual's needs and preferences. Likewise, the service delivery system is successful only if individuals and families are able to understand and navigate it.
4. **Focused on connecting workforce supply + employer demand:** We focus efforts on both sides of the workforce equation: preparing individuals for the workforce ("supply") and engaging the employers ("demand").
5. **Committed to long-term sustainability and culture change:** We believe that our success depends on our ability to transcend any one agency or partner and to advance a single statewide policy of Employment First for citizens with disabilities. The success of our mission depends on its ability to become an inherent part of life in Tennessee.

Strategic Goals:

- I. Align service delivery systems and strengthen coordination to increase employment opportunities for Tennesseans with disabilities.
- II. Build shared community commitment to "employment first" for individuals with disabilities.
- III. Increase the number of businesses and employers throughout the state who actively seek and hire individuals with disabilities.
- IV. Make Tennessee a model public sector employer through actions to employ more people with disabilities and through policy and regulatory change.
- V. Prepare students for employment throughout their education and connect them to essential services.

Goal I: Align service delivery systems and strengthen coordination to increase employment opportunities for Tennesseans with disabilities.

Three-year Metrics

- Core indicators for # of people with disabilities employed
- Employment rate for Tennesseans with disabilities as reported by the American Community Survey (ACS)
- Number of people with disabilities, and types of disabilities, served by key partners (DIDD, TennCare CHOICES, DMH, VR) who are employed
- Wages, hours and other characteristics of employment for people with disabilities (work towards capability to measure this system wide)
- Ability to clearly define and distribute the roles and responsibilities across the state agency partners

Three-year Strategies

- *Develop, refine and use a system to collect and analyze data for employment of people with disabilities in Tennessee.*
- *Set statewide benchmarks and evaluate progress.*
- *Identify and use promising and evidenced-based practices for systems change and collaboration, and in partner service delivery systems.*
- *Strengthen and sustain the Employment First Partnership as the organizational framework to ensure long-term impact.*
- *Formalize the relationships among public and private partners.*
- *Leverage the existing grant resources to inform the design of new programs.*
- *Document a clear delineation of state and local agency roles and responsibilities in planning, services, coordination targeted for helping consumers and families better understand state systems.*

2015 Objectives

- Inventory, incorporate and share all available data within an Employment First Partnership dashboard.
- Execute the MOU for youth by May 2015.
- Draft a section to include in the WIOA State Plan focused on persons with disabilities and incorporating the Employment First partners.
- Set a collective targeted employment rate for 2016 by Fall 2015.
- Inventory partner initiatives and practices (and indicate those that are evidenced-based and promising practices) by July 2015 and present to the Employment First Partnership at the November meeting for input and recommendations to support partners in determining what works.
- Evaluate the functioning of the Employment First Partnership each year.
- DIDD will share technical assistance from the U.S. Office of Disability Employment Policy with the Bureau of TennCare to help inform the design of a new, employment-focused program targeting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- TN DOL will collaborate with the TennesseeWorks team to host a series of employment focused Community Conversations that will inform the entirety of the State's efforts.
- Inventory, develop, and propose policies, regulations, and legislation annually to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Goal II: Build shared community commitment to “employment first” for individuals with disabilities.

Three-year Metrics

- Number of stakeholders and geographic origin of contacts on TN Works and other partner and state agency websites.
- Family expectations as measured by TN Works Family Expectation Survey
- General public attitudes as measured by Conversations that Matter
- Employer perceptions
- Number of Home and Community Based Providers (HCBP) supporting Employment First

Three-year Strategies

- *Develop and implement a statewide awareness campaign about the benefits of employing people with disabilities.*
- *Seek ongoing input from families and stay current in our understanding about what they want and need.*
- *Engage community and grassroots organizations on ongoing basis to learn from them and to encourage and support their work.*
- *Cultivate champions for Employment First including individuals and families, and business and community leaders.*
- *Develop effective communication tools and distribute materials and information to support individuals and families in securing employment.*
- *Coordinate linkage and messages among state agency websites.*
- *Host an annual Employment First Summit.*
- *Ensure mechanisms are in place to survey key stakeholders and to measure the effectiveness of our communication strategies.*

2015 Objectives

- Host six Community Conversations throughout Tennessee in 2015.
- Identify, recruit and support a cadre of leaders, employers and employees who will serve as champions for Employment First.
- Develop effective communication approaches (including distribution of existing materials to individuals and families) by November 2015.
- Develop a plan by December 2015 for capturing input/perceptions of employers.

Goal III: Increase the number of businesses and employers throughout the state who actively seek and hire individuals with disabilities.

Three-year Metrics

- Use of available data from the National Core Indicators and DIDD, DOL and VR systems (as applicable) for tracking the number of people with disabilities employed across the state as a baseline for setting future metrics related to the disability employment rate in Tennessee. If possible, drill down to also track by business and/or by types of businesses/industry sectors.
- Number of businesses by name or sector that employ people with disabilities (Note: initially, this data may only be available by population.)
- Number of Employer Outreach Initiative presentations and results from those presentations by TennesseeWorks partnership representatives
- Number of Project Search sites and Project Search affiliated businesses employing people with disabilities

Three-year Strategies

- *Develop and use a system to collect and analyze data for businesses employing people with disabilities in Tennessee.*
- *Develop a draft plan for review to establish local/regional single point of contact for employers using successful relationships developed by VR/Corporate Connections as a point of reference. (This was requested at every Community Conversation.)*
- *Identify the estimated current employment rate in Tennessee; set statewide benchmarks and evaluate progress annually.*
- *Develop a plan to support a robust business advisory council reviewing success of the Knoxville Business Advisory Council and other state Business Leadership Networks.*
- *Develop and implement an outreach plan focused on employment including a section of the TennesseeWorks website and Employer Outreach Presentations to employer groups across the state on the business case for employing people with disabilities.*
- *Establish additional employer partnerships including Project SEARCH transition programs in additional school districts and replications of the Walgreen's REDI and Distribution Center initiatives.*

2015 Objectives

- Take inventory, organize and regularly track available data related to businesses that employ people with disabilities (i.e. business name, business size, industry sector, etc.).
- Based on the collection of baseline data in 2015, set a collective target for total number of businesses that employ people with disabilities to achieve as an employment goal for 2016 and 2017.
- Present 75 Employer Outreach Initiative presentations to state and local employer groups.
- Start three additional Project SEARCH transition programs and at least two additional employer partnerships.
- Implement an employer information section of the TennesseeWorks website.
- Explore opportunities to develop a single point of contact for employers statewide.
- Develop training by November 2015 to educate corporate counsel about employment of people with disabilities.

Goal IV: Make Tennessee a model public sector employer through actions to employ more people with disabilities and through policy and regulatory change.

Three-year Metrics

- Agreement upon an appropriate legal measure of number of people with a disability hired and employed by the State (work with DOL to determine this measure)
- Number of State agencies that recruit/place people with disabilities, including students with a disability as interns
- Number of city/county governments that establish and achieve a hiring target for individuals with a disability
- Number of public education institutions who make the commitment to hire individuals with a disability

Three-year Strategies

- *Promote use of systematic approaches to hire and integrate people with disabilities by government entities.*
- *Engage the TN Department of Human Resources as a partner in making TN a model public sector employer.*
- *Recruit and support up to five communities (city, county governments) who volunteer to become model employer communities.*
- *Research and define appropriate metrics for the state employment rate.*
- *Identify, support and promote public sector employers who are already working towards meeting hiring goals.*

2015 Objectives

- Convene a meeting with the Commissioner of TN Department of HR in 2015 to discuss strategies to increase employment of people with disabilities by the State of TN.
- Invite up to five communities (with city/county government representation) by year-end to explore opportunities to become a model employer community.

Goal V: Prepare students in Tennessee schools for employment throughout their education and connect them to essential services.

Three-year Metrics

- Number of districts supporting students to pursue the Occupational Diploma
- Percentage of students with disabilities with a paid job in the community *during* high school relative to their peers without disabilities in the same community [from TLDS]
- Number of students with high school internships in the community
- Percentage of students with disabilities who have post-school transition goals addressing (a) postsecondary education and/or (b) integrated employment on their IEP
- Number of secondary education teachers participating in transition-related professional development
- Percentage of appropriate transition plans for youth with IEPs aged 14 and above including appropriate measurable post-secondary goals that are annually updated and based on age appropriate transition assessment, course of study, transition services, and transition measurable annual goals.
- Number of high schools in which vocational rehabilitation counselors and/or other adult agencies are present at transition planning meetings
- Percentage of youth who are no longer in secondary school, had IEPs in effect at the time they left school, and are (a) enrolled in higher education (b) competitively employed, and/or (c) in other postsecondary education or training program within one year of leaving high school [Indicator 14]

Three-year Strategies

- *Develop a statewide transition manual/guide that also includes practical guidance on preparing students for employment.*
- *Develop and carry out a strong plan for professional development that includes both live training and online resources.*
- *Design and share resources with superintendents and school administrators that enable them to see the importance of investing in transition in their schools.*
- *Showcase schools and programs in the state that are effective in connecting students to early work experiences.*
- *Develop and share resources that inform secondary educators about community services and supports available to their students during and after high school.*
- *Create resources for families that enable them to advocate for work-related experiences in the educational program of their son or daughter.*

2015 Objectives

- Embed a strong transition strand into the next Partners in Education (PIE) conference.
- Complete a statewide survey of secondary educators to identify critical training and resource needs.
- Identify a better pathway for communicating and sharing resources directly with educators working on employment (e.g., monthly Transition Blast).
- Refine the TennesseeWorks website to ensure it includes the right resources for educators.
- Continue to advertise the Occupational Diploma and support schools pursuing this with their students.
- Carry out a successful Think Employment! Summit for Fall 2015.