

Employment First Strategic Plan

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Division of Services for People with Disabilities (DSPD)

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Context Statement

Employment First is an initiative that expects, encourages, provides, creates and rewards integrated employment for people with disabilities in the workforce at competitive wages. Employment is the first and preferred outcome for working age youth and adults with disabilities, especially for individuals with complex and significant disabilities for whom job placement in the past has been limited, or traditionally has not occurred.

Employment First is a national movement with policies, legislation and activity occurring in 32 states, including Utah where legislation passed in 2011 (HB240). In 2011, only 19% or less of people with intellectual or developmental disabilities served by state agencies worked in integrated, competitive jobs across the country.¹ In Utah, the number of individuals receiving supported employment services has declined significantly since 2008, with Utah's national ranking declining from seventh to twelfth.

¹ Adapted from *The National Report on Employment Services Outcomes*, versions 2009—2012, by the Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts, Boston.

Mission Statement

The *Employment First mission for DSPD* is—to ensure services offered by the Division of Services for People with Disabilities emphasize, promote, and support competitive, integrated and community based employment for people with disabilities.

Vision Statement

The *Employment First vision* is—every person who receives services from DSPD achieves his or her career possibilities.

Value Statements

We value:

- Development of knowledge, skills, and resources needed to make informed choices, exercise self-determination, and maximize self-sufficiency,
- Integrated, competitive and community based employment,
- Each individual for his or her unique strengths and abilities,
- An individualized approach to development of employment options (one person at a time),
- Partnership and coordination among DSPD stakeholders, and
- Changing cultures, beliefs and expectations to encourage full participation in the workforce by individuals with disabilities.

Strategic Issue Statements and Strategies

Strategic issue statements—are fundamental policy questions or critical challenges affecting the Employment First mission, values, mandates, product or service level mix, clients and stakeholders of any kind, costs, financing, structure, processes, or management. The four Employment First strategic issues are:

- *Stakeholder Education*
- *Financing and Contracting Methods*
- *Services and Service Innovation*
- *Performance Measurement*

Stakeholder Education

- How does the Employment First Task force increase understanding of the Employment First initiative among potential participants, employers, providers, and other stakeholders?
- In order to move ahead with the Employment First Initiative, it is necessary for the Employment First Task force to develop clear information on the goals and benefits of the Employment First initiative. There is a great need to educate stakeholders about current trends and recognized best practices and challenges in providing competitive and integrated employment to people with disabilities. Therefore, within Utah’s employment community, DSPD intends to increase understanding of the national movement, as well as opportunities for enhanced and expanded state and federal support of competitive and integrated employment.
- If accurate information is not provided about the goals and priorities of Employment First with stakeholders statewide, there is a risk of misinformation and inconsistent buy-in. Without stakeholder support, the realization of improved employment outcomes will be negatively affected.

Strategy—for the *Stakeholder Education* strategic issue:

- Coordinate the development of an outreach and training plan and materials that increase the understanding of the employment first initiative.

Financing and Contracting Methods

- How does the Employment First initiative impact financing and contracting methods?
- Funding methodologies need to be aimed at creating stronger outcomes when providing integrated employment supports. DSPD needs to remove or minimize barriers to competitive and integrated employment in the state's existing rate-setting and/or contracting policies/practices.
- If funding methodologies are not re-evaluated and restructured in a way to fund employment outcomes, change will not occur. Individuals will continue to be supported primarily in congregate programs and individualized, competitive employment will not be realized for individuals with disabilities that DSPD serves.

Strategies—for ***Financing and Contracting Methods*** strategic issue:

- DSPD will work to remove or minimize barriers to competitive and integrated employment in the state's existing rate-setting and/or contracting policies/practices, including service code descriptions.
- Develop funding methodologies which create and demonstrate stronger outcomes when providing competitive and integrated employment supports.

Services and Service Innovation

- How does the Employment First Initiative impact services and service innovation?
- DSPD will need to adjust its service delivery system and provide stakeholder support/alignment as it continues to transition to a more community based system. Existing community based efforts can be identified and used as potential models for other areas, such as rural or frontier areas, where integrated employment options are not available.
- If DSPD does not adjust its service delivery system and provide stakeholder support/alignment, increased employment outcomes will not be realized and the agency will not meet the requirements of the Employment First legislation.

Strategies—for ***Services and Service Innovation*** strategic issue:

- DSPD will develop a procedure, to be implemented by staff or contracted providers, to determine the skills, interests, and abilities of an individual to become successfully employed.
- Stakeholders will review and recommend revisions to the relevant Medicaid waivers to increase access and flexibility in service options to emphasize and encourage employment as a priority.

Performance Measurement

- How does the Employment First initiative/DSPD measure performance?
- DSPD needs to establish accurate ways to measure employment outcomes and set goals for overall employment performance. The current system allows for differentiated employment identification, but is not being utilized consistently. This data is needed to accurately measure the effectiveness of the initiative.
- If employment performance measurement strategies are not implemented, DSPD will not be able to set target goals and know if implementation strategies are effective or need to be revised. Without measuring employment performance and outcomes, DSPD will not have data to support efforts or document need for additional funds.

Strategy—for ***Performance Measurement*** strategic issue:

- Establish performance management measures that accurately reflect the effectiveness of the initiative, and develop and improve the metrics that will allow DSPD to collect and track data in USTEPS to report competitive and integrated employment and employment-related activities.