



Employment First Briefing Document

Introduction

Employment First strategies consist of a clear set of guiding principles and practices promulgated through statute, regulation, and operational procedures. These practices target employment in typical work settings as the priority for funding. Employment First activities have occurred at both the national and state levels.

Employment First represents a commitment to the propositions that all individuals with disabilities: (a) are capable of performing work in typical integrated employment settings; (b) should receive, as a matter of state policy, employment-related services and supports as a priority over other facility-based and non-work day services; and (c) should be paid at minimum or prevailing wage rates.

On the national level, individual integrated employment has emerged as a policy priority, both in the disability arena and beyond. APSE, the only national organization exclusively focusing on integrated employment, has issued a series of policy papers emphasizing the importance of integrated employment, and has formally changed its name and logo to “Association of People Supporting Employment First.” The National Governors Association, under Governor Markel’s (DE) chairmanship, launched a blueprint for governors (entitled *A Better Bottom Line: Employing People with Disabilities*) to increase employment for individuals with intellectual and other significant disabilities. The Alliance for Full Participation, a coalition of disability advocacy organizations, established employment as the priority for their 2011 national summit, attended by over 1,250 people.

At the state level, Employment First policies are becoming increasingly prevalent. Many states are in the process of exploring, legislating, or implementing Employment First policies. At least 44 states have some form of Employment First initiative, including 32 that have formal policy action.

States vary in several ways: (1) the method of implementing Employment First: non-legislative (e.g., governor’s executive order, state policy) or legislation; (2) the focus of the initiative: cross disability or intellectual/developmental disability-specific; and (3) responsibility for implementation: e.g., assignment of a lead agency, members, and partners, or creation of a separate government agency or commission.

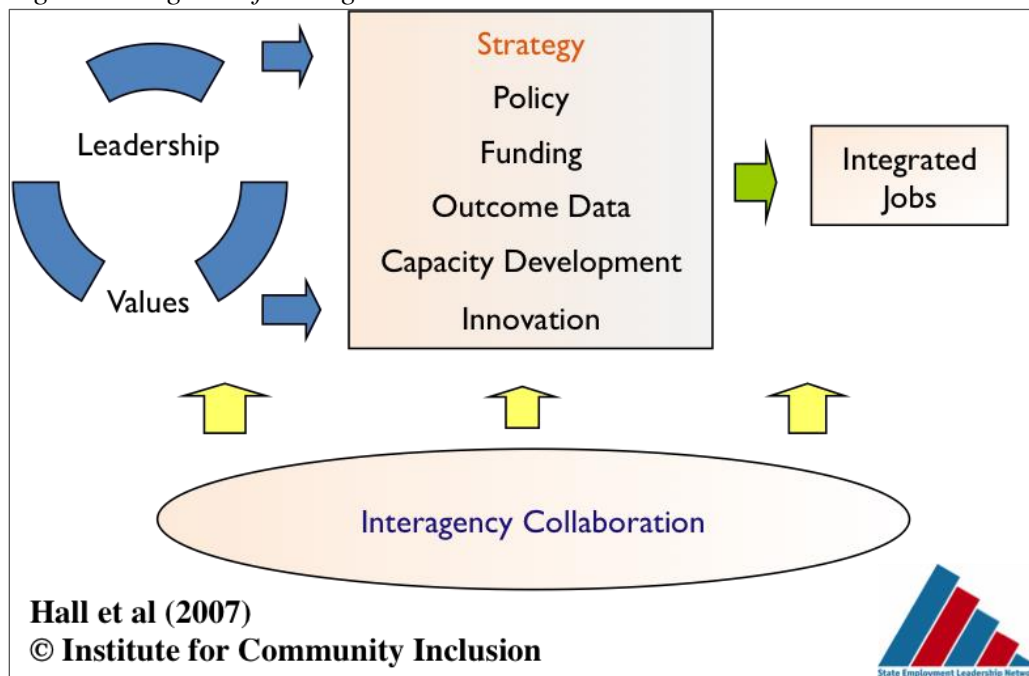
Why Collaborate for Employment First?

Employment First policies can make an important contribution to raising expectations, improving outcomes, and increasing self-sufficiency for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). However, research suggests that while the existence of a policy is important to provide a vision for practice and expectations, the existence of the policy by itself does not guarantee that more people with disabilities will become employed. More than a decade of research by the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) at the University of

Massachusetts Boston has found that employment outcomes only improve if policies and practices are realigned to support employment as the goal for all service recipients. Researchers from the ICI examined 13 state I/DD agencies that in 1999 reported more than 30 percent of individuals in integrated employment, and then conducted in-depth case study research in three states (CO, NH, and WA). This led to the development of a theoretical model (Hall, Butterworth, Winsor, Gilmore, & Metzel, 2007) that illustrates the common strategies and approaches found across states with high levels of integrated employment outcomes, and identifies seven characteristics of high performing states.

The High Performing States model (Figure 1) suggests that each element contributes to systems change: leadership, strategic goals and operating policy, training and technical assistance, interagency collaboration and partnerships, financing and contracting methods, services and service innovation, and performance management and data management.

Figure 1: High-Performing States Model



The High-Performing States Model provides states with a framework in which to strategically implement system changes to support individual integrated employment as an outcome of employment services. This model provides a format for identifying the critical components of states' Employment First agendas. There is no one-size-fits-all approach in Employment First implementation, but the High-Performing States Model identifies essential elements for success.



Table 1: Elements of High-Performing States

Element	Description
Leadership	Local and state-level administrators are clearly identifiable as “champions” for employment.
Strategic goals and operating policy	State mission, goals, and operating policies emphasize employment as a preferred outcome.
Financing and contracting methods	Funding mechanisms and contracts with providers emphasize employment as the preferred outcome.
Training and technical assistance	There is a sustained and significant investment in employment-related training and technical assistance.
Interagency collaboration and partnership	Through interagency agreements and relationships, provider collaboration, and outreach to stakeholders, employment is shared as a common goal.
Services and service innovation	The state I/DD agency works to create opportunities for providers, individuals, and families to make optimum use of the resources available for employment; includes disseminating information related to creative strategies to support individuals in employment.
Performance measurement and data management	Comprehensive data systems are used as a strategic planning tool to further the state’s goals of increasing employment.

Employment First and Florida: Working together to implement a high-performing employment system

For several years, many stakeholders in Florida have worked towards improving employment opportunities for all Floridians with disabilities. Their efforts coalesced around the Florida Employment First Executive Order. The executive order was signed by Governor Rick Scott on October 8, 2013. It formally defined employment as follows:

Integrated employment, including supported employment, customized employment, and self-employment, where an individual is paid by an employer at minimum wage or greater or receives earnings through one’s self-employment business, fully integrated in the community workforce, with a goal of maximum self-sufficiency.

Additionally, the executive order outlined how Florida agencies that support individuals with disabilities should implement a high-performing employment system:

- Identified employment as the most direct and cost effective way of achieving independence and self-fulfillment.
- Reaffirmed the importance of the recommendations of Governor’s Commission on Jobs for Floridians with Disabilities.
- Established the need for an interagency coalition to implement effective practices designed to culminate in employment in the community.



- Established the need for an interagency cooperative agreement to ensure long-term commitment to employment across all state agencies that support individuals with disabilities.

Two high-performing elements, collaboration and leadership, are cornerstones of Florida’s work to improve the number of Floridians with disabilities who are employed. In response to the executive order, three groups were developed to facilitate interagency collaboration and leadership across Florida:

(1) *The Employment Partnership Coalition*, with a membership of 60+ individuals representing agencies and organizations that provide services to individuals with disabilities, is working to coordinate and implement Florida's Employment First activities. This group meets on a quarterly basis.

(2) *The Employment First Collaborative Team* is a smaller working group of the Employment Partnership Coalition, and meets on a monthly basis. Members represent:

- Florida Developmental Disabilities Council,
- Governor’s Commission on Jobs for Floridians with Disabilities,
- Florida Department of Education, Division of Blind Services,
- Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services,
- CareerSource Florida,
- Florida Department of Economic Opportunity,
- Agency for Persons with Disabilities,
- Florida Department of Children and Families, Substance Abuse and Mental Health,
- Florida Department of Education, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation,
- and the Florida Association of Rehabilitation Facilities.

The collaborative team works together to:

- Write and implement interagency agreements,
- Develop and monitor strategic implementation action plans,
- Establish baseline data and targets for improvement, and
- Fully implement the executive order.

Examples of ways that the collaborative team has worked together to advance employment include:

- Employment First Interagency Collaborative Agreement
- Employment First Communications Plan
- Employment First Messaging Video



- Employment First Collaborative Training Initiative
- AbilitiesWORK Web Portal
- AbilitiesWORK Help Desk for Employers
- Getting the message and resources to the local level:
 - Grassroots group webinars
 - Self-advocate liaison group
 - Employment First Florida website; <http://www.employmentfirstfl.org/>
 - Community of Practice for Employment First Collaborative Pilot Sites
 - Documentation and dissemination of success stories
 - Development and dissemination of topical briefs

(3) *The Employment First Grassroots Group* is a way for Floridians to share their ideas and experiences about employment. The Grassroots Group is made up of people with disabilities and people who support them to improve employment opportunities. Current members include people with disabilities, self-advocates, teachers, family members, case managers, transition specialists, community rehabilitation providers, and government agency and organization staff members. Each meeting has a special topic and guest speakers. Topics have included state employment policies, internships and jobs for youth, transportation, and working with employers to help them hire more people with disabilities. All meetings are held online and by phone. To join the group call Sheila Johnson at 617-287-4367, or email her at sheila.johnson@umb.edu

Interagency Collaborative Agreement

The Employment First Executive Order mandated the development of an interagency cooperative agreement between key Florida agencies and organizations. The Employment First Interagency Collaborative Agreement was required to identify objectives that align with the elements of the High-Performing States Model (Hall et al., 2007).

http://www.employmentfirstfl.org/sites/employmentfirstfl.org/files/files/Interagency%20Cooperative%20Agreement_5_7_14.pdf

The signatory agencies to the cooperative agreement developed a Collaborative Strategic Action Implementation Plan. The plan uses the seven elements of high-performing states (Hall et al., 2007) to guide each agency's activities, and is intended to be updated annually.

[http://www.employmentfirstfl.org/sites/employmentfirstfl.org/files/files/3_Collaborative%20Strategic%20Action%20Implementation%20Plan_Final_4%2015%2014%20sgs\(1\).pdf](http://www.employmentfirstfl.org/sites/employmentfirstfl.org/files/files/3_Collaborative%20Strategic%20Action%20Implementation%20Plan_Final_4%2015%2014%20sgs(1).pdf)

Bringing Collaboration and Leadership to Scale Across Florida

In order to fulfill the Employment First Interagency Collaborative Agreement and ensure that all Florida communities can support their members with disabilities to obtain employment, the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council has contracted with the ICI to pilot and facilitate the development of local level employment collaborative teams. These teams will be comprised of



local members that are representative of the state level partnership and other employment stakeholders.

The goals of the pilot teams are to support the ongoing work of the state-level collaborative team, to ensure that interagency collaboration is brought to scale, and to ensure that local communities have similar opportunities to replicate the collaborations that have proven successful at the state level. For example, local teams will be supported to share resources and knowledge, engage in collaborative problem solving, and develop local-level plans to implement the expectations of the state-level collaborative agreement.

Pilot teams will be asked to develop a local-level strategic implementation action plan that supports the state's employment goals, and to participate in a community of practice on local community partnerships facilitated by the ICI. Selected project sites will learn about how interagency and intra-agency relationships impact the ability of communities and programs to design and implement effective employment services.

Additionally, local pilot sites will receive support to assess current levels of collaboration, recommendations on strengthening local collaboration, technical assistance to develop and implement a local-level strategic implementation action plan that supports the state's Employment First priorities, and the opportunity to interact with the other collaboratives through a community of practice.

The notice of opportunity to apply to participate as a pilot site was released in February 2015. In March 2015 the Miami-Dade, Nassau, Orange, and Osceola communities were selected as the *2015 Employment First Florida Interagency Collaborative Pilot sites*. Each pilot site includes local level representatives from the Division of Blind Services, Florida Department of Education; school districts' offices of Exceptional Education and Student Services; CareerSource Florida; Agency for Persons with Disabilities; Substance Abuse and Mental Health, Florida Department of Children and Families; and Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Florida Department of Education. Other partners vary across pilot sites but represent: supported employment provider agencies, self-advocacy and advocacy organizations, members of the Florida Association of Rehabilitation Facilities, Project 10 sites, Centers for Independent Living, health care organizations, assistive technology providers, adult learning centers, Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) Programs, Florida Consortium on Postsecondary Education and Intellectual Disabilities members, University Centers of Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, and post-secondary workforce training programs.

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