

This brief is the second in a series focusing on Employment First implementation as it relates to one of the seven elements within the High-Performing States in Integrated Employment model<sup>1</sup>. It examines the background of circumstances under which Employment First efforts began in seven states, and introduces each state's values, mission, and goals around increasing employment opportunities for people with disabilities. States may use the lessons in this brief to develop an Employment First policy, or to evolve existing efforts.

## Introduction

For more than a decade, many states have been developing policies that prioritize integrated employment as the first choice and preferred outcome for individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities (IDD). Collectively, these actions have been united under the framework of Employment First, a commitment by states and state IDD agencies to the propositions that all individuals with IDD (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<sup>2,3</sup>.

Each state has determined the priorities and scope of its Employment First policy. As states undergo implementation, it is important to understand their efforts at stakeholder engagement. For the purposes of this brief, stakeholders include individuals with IDD, family members, educators, employers, service providers, other state agencies, and policy-makers.

## Where the findings came from

The Institute for Community Inclusion framed the data collected on states' efforts to implement Employment First according to the High-Performing States in Integrated Employment Model, which sets out the key elements to effective employment systems change. While the model is comprised of seven individual elements (see Table 1), a change in one of the elements should influence and impact changes in each of the other elements. In this way, the model helps to explain the overall depth and scope of states' integrated employment improvement efforts.

This brief looks at the interagency collaboration and partnership element in depth. Interagency partnership and collaboration includes interagency agreements and relationships, provider collaboration, and outreach to stakeholders to ensure that integrated employment is a shared goal.

Case study data was collected for a subsample of seven states: Connecticut (CT), Delaware (DE), Kansas (KS), Minnesota (MN), Missouri (MO), Tennessee (TN), and Washington (WA). These states were selected because they represent a wide range of implementation strategies, not necessarily because they were experiencing high rates of integrated employment.

<sup>1</sup>Hall, A. C., Butterworth, J., Winsor, J., Gilmore, D., & Metzler, D. (2007). Pushing the employment agenda: Case study research of high performing states in integrated employment. *Intellectual and developmental disabilities, 45*, 182–198.

<sup>2</sup>Kiernan, W. E., Hoff, D., Freeze, S., & Mank, D. M. (2011). Employment first: A beginning not an end. *Intellectual and developmental disabilities, 49*, 300–304.

<sup>3</sup>Rogan, P., & Rinne, S. (2011). National call for organizational change from sheltered to integrated employment. *Intellectual and developmental disabilities, 49*, 248–260.

**TABLE 1: ELEMENTS OF HIGH-PERFORMING STATES IN INTEGRATED EMPLOYMENT MODEL**

<b>Leadership</b>	Local and state level administrators are clearly identifiable as “champions” for employment.
<b>Strategic goals and operating policy</b>	State mission, goals and operating policies emphasize employment as a preferred outcome.
<b>Financing and contracting methods</b>	Funding mechanisms and contracts with providers emphasize employment as the preferred outcome.
<b>Training and technical assistance</b>	There is a sustained and significant investment in employment-related training and technical assistance.
<b>Interagency collaboration and partnership</b>	Through interagency agreements and relationships, provider collaboration, and outreach to stakeholders, employment is shared as a common goal.
<b>Services and service innovation</b>	The state IDD 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.
<b>Performance measurement and data management</b>	Comprehensive data systems that are used as a strategic planning tool to further the state’s goals of increasing employment.

## Findings

Findings showed that states engaged stakeholders (1) as they developed Employment First policy, and (2) as they implemented Employment First policy.

### Engaging Stakeholders During Employment First Development

*States engaged stakeholders in Employment First policy development by mapping out a timeline to gain support, as well as researching challenges and expectations.*

Minnesota’s Employment First Coalition held a series of four summits in the years leading up to the adoption of the state’s policy. The Coalition was formed as an outgrowth of a series of summits that gathered together different stakeholder groups, including service providers, advocates, workforce development professionals, state agency staff, researchers, employers, and individuals and families. The Coalition offered a platform to identify needs, define Employment First, establish policy goals, and determine next steps to gain support.

### Engaging Stakeholders During Employment First Implementation

*As a first step to implementation, states engaged stakeholders to explain the newly developed policy and generate local support.*

In Delaware, once the bill to enact Employment First was passed, IDD agency staff met with a wide range of constituents to provide information about the goals of the bill and what the intended outcomes would be for individuals with disabilities, providers, and employers. In particular, efforts were made to educate facility-based employment support providers in order to not only assuage their fears, but also to provide reassurance that they would be supported to transition their service model to one focused on integrated employment.

*States created work groups and steering committees comprised of stakeholders to monitor policy implementation.*

In Connecticut, the Developmental Disability Services (DDS) department hosts an Employment Steering Committee (ESC) comprised of consumers, family members, providers, DDS staff, and other participants from the Department of Education, Department of Rehabilitation Services, the Developmental Disability Council, and the Association of Providers in Supported Employment. The ESC meets at least quarterly to discuss the division’s employment goals and monitors progress towards them.

*States engaged stakeholders to clarify understanding, shift expectations, and build a coalition.*

In Missouri, the state IDD agency has used a series of strategies including “tip sheets” for families, individuals, and service coordinators; trainings for businesses, school, service coordinators, and community

rehabilitation providers; webinars on new waivers services and the employment policy; and regional specialists who provide training and technical assistance to school personnel, individuals, and families.

TennesseeWorks, a collaboration of state agencies, parent support organizations, disability nonprofits, and employment-related agencies, supported Community Conversations (World Café style events) in six cities. At these events, employers, civic leaders, individuals with disabilities, and family members gathered to discuss community-based solutions to the high unemployment rate of people with disabilities. TennesseeWorks also gathered information from a survey of at least 1,000 families about their expectations around employment of their members with disabilities and their knowledge of employment-related services.

An important theme of both the surveys and the Community Conversations was the need for more education for families around employment options and services, and education for employers and others around supporting people with disabilities at work. In addition to identifying additional capacity-building needs, the events also built a coalition of stakeholders invested in Employment First.

## Lessons Learned

Stakeholder engagement during the development and implementation of Employment First is important for improving employment services and outcomes for individuals with IDD:

- Stakeholder coalitions can help the IDD community to learn about the reasons Employment First is being pursued, clarify expectations, describe the ways in which integrated employment can improve individuals' lives, and provide a platform for feedback about their hopes and concerns and the types of services and supports required to make Employment First a reality.
- Stakeholders can have a role in planning and monitoring state- and local-level Employment First goals and activities to ensure that all geographic areas of the state have the knowledge necessary to improve employment outcomes.
- Stakeholder engagement strategies can generate support for the Employment First policy, and can build a coalition of those invested in the establishment of high-quality systems of support.

## Conclusion

Each of the seven states depended upon stakeholders to strengthen and influence Employment First policy development, or to oversee and participate in implementation efforts. Active engagement of a broad range of stakeholders can ultimately improve the system's ability to provide high-quality employment services, and to create investment in the shared goal of facilitating employment-related systems change.

### ACCESS TO INTEGRATED EMPLOYMENT

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