

# Tennessee Employment First Task Force

## Mission

Create and expand employment opportunities for all Tennesseans with disabilities

## Vision

People with disabilities have equal access to employment opportunities

## Executive Order No. 28

An order establishing the Tennessee Employment First initiative to expand community employment opportunities for Tennesseans with disabilities

## Goals

- 1) Align service delivery systems and strengthen coordination to increase employment opportunities for Tennesseans with disabilities (*#Data #Coordination #WIOA #Policy #Legislation #Workforce*)
- 2) Build shared community commitment to Employment First (*#Self-Advocates #Families #Community #Communication*)
- 3) Increase the number of employers that hire people with disabilities (*#Businesses*)
- 4) Make Tennessee state government a model employer of people with disabilities (*#Government #Leadership*)
- 5) Prepare students for employment and post-secondary success (*#Education #Transition*)

Goals	Objectives	Strategies	Responsible Parties
1) Align service delivery systems and strengthen coordination to increase employment opportunities for	Collect, analyze, and integrate employment data of people with disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain employment data dashboard on TennesseeWorks website with regularly updated data from public and private sources, which may include but is not limited to: DIDD, DHS/VR, DOL, TennCare, DOE, Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, DMHSAS, TEAM (Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model) TN, Health, Children’s Services, TennCare, Treasury, Project SEARCH, etc.</li> <li>• Explore the possibility of integrating additional data sources into the Tennessee Longitudinal Data System (TLDS)</li> <li>• Continue exploring ways to maximize use of TLDS data</li> <li>• Set statewide metrics, goals, and benchmarks for longitudinal employment rates. Evaluate progress regularly.</li> <li>• Utilize data (e.g. from DOE student data) to make decisions and plan for services in other agencies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data workgroup</li> <li>• Vanderbilt Kennedy Center</li> <li>• Respective state agencies</li> </ul>

<p>Tennesseans with disabilities  <i>(#Data #Coordination #WIOA #Policy #Legislation #Workforce)</i></p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyze available data (e.g. Easy IEP, Indicator 13, and Indicator 14) to answer important key questions related to the quality of transition assessment, planning, and services.</li> </ul>	
	<p>Assess impact of interagency MOUs that promote employment for people with disabilities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess impact of MOUs regularly (e.g. through quarterly presentations/updates from involved agencies) including tracked indicators/outcomes and qualitative observations. MOUs to be assessed include, but are not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth Transition</li> <li>VR/TennCare (ECF CHOICES)</li> <li>VR/DMHSAS (IPS)</li> <li>VR/DIDD (Supported Employment)</li> <li>VR/DOLWD (employment data sharing)</li> <li>VR/TDOC (Day Reporting Community Resource Centers)</li> <li>VR/DOE (pre-employment transition services)</li> </ul> </li> <li>Add Department of Health and TennCare as signatories to the Youth Transition MOU</li> <li>Clearly delineate state and local agency roles and responsibilities in planning, services, and coordination, and clearly communicate to help individuals and families better understand state and local systems</li> <li>Explore the development of a universal form/plan built around the individual</li> <li>Utilize customer survey data to assess the efficacy and alignment of local service delivery systems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employment Roundtable</li> <li>Respective state agencies</li> </ul>
	<p>Track implementation and impact of WIOA Combined State Plan sections focused on people with disabilities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Revisit WIOA combined state plan (e.g. presentation by DOL at the Employment Roundtable) to ensure agencies are aware of progress, challenges, and agency roles/responsibilities</li> <li>Strengthen partnership and collaboration between DOL and entities that have a disability focus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>VR</li> <li>DOL</li> <li>Employment Roundtable</li> </ul>
	<p>Propose policies, regulations, legislation, and funding that increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue educating and advocating for the passage and expansion of Supported Decision Making Legislation</li> <li>Educate stakeholders (e.g. self-advocates, families, educators, medical practitioners, judges, etc.) about supported decision making options for people with disabilities</li> <li>Propose legislation and/or seek state/federal funding to support a career ladder strategy for staff who work for provider agencies</li> <li>Pursue additional funding for Individual Placement and Support (IPS)</li> <li>Explore additional strategies to increase the penetration rate of IPS statewide</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policy workgroup</li> <li>Advocacy organizations</li> <li>State agencies (as appropriate per funding/lobbying requirements)</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pilot strategies to effectively support individuals with dual diagnosis (IDD + behavioral health diagnosis) in the workplace</li> <li>• Explore and implement strategies to reduce the use of sub-minimum wages, under 14(c) certificates, for people with disabilities</li> </ul>	
	Assess the impact of the Employment and Community First CHOICES program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue reporting on ECF CHOICES outcomes, including additional data fields (e.g. wages, industries, demographics of employed individuals, etc.)</li> <li>• Continue implementing communication strategies to ensure ECF CHOICES information is available and consistent for all stakeholder groups.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TennCare</li> <li>• Individuals/Family Workgroup</li> <li>• Communications workgroup</li> <li>• Advocacy organizations</li> </ul>
	Explore workforce strategies to promote recruitment, retention, and development of disability service professionals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review promising practices nationally</li> <li>• Share information about new initiatives in Tennessee to provide training at community colleges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TennCare, VR, DIDD, and other state agencies as appropriate</li> <li>• Provider workgroup</li> </ul>
<p><b>2) Build shared community commitment to Employment First (#Advocates #Families #Community #Communication)</b></p>	<p>Cultivate Employment First champions across Tennessee, including individuals and families, community leaders, public officials, schools, private citizens, and other organizations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue hosting self-sustaining Think Employment! Summit(s) and consider holding regional summits vs. one statewide summit</li> <li>• Host Community Conversations across Tennessee and share results</li> <li>• Complete and share findings from employer expectation survey</li> <li>• Develop and implement a statewide awareness campaign about the benefits of employing people with disabilities</li> <li>• Implement strategies to recognize businesses that employ people with disabilities</li> <li>• Continue expanding Way2Work and other video series showcasing people who are in competitive, integrated employment and/or volunteer opportunities. Target videos strategically to different areas of need and stakeholder groups (e.g. self-advocates, business leaders, self-employment, etc.)</li> <li>• Maintain updated content for the resource web page on the TennesseeWorks website</li> <li>• Convene the Employment First Communications Workgroup quarterly to coordinate strategies for materials and information to support individuals and families in securing employment.</li> <li>• Continue #HireMyStrengths campaign and consider expanding to a year-round campaign wrapped around other events (e.g. Disability Day on the Hill, PIE Conference, etc.)</li> <li>• Consider using “education ministries” model through faith communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individuals/Families Workgroup</li> <li>• Employer Workgroup</li> <li>• Provider Workgroup</li> <li>• Communications workgroup</li> <li>• DOE</li> <li>• DIDD</li> <li>• VR</li> <li>• Vanderbilt Kennedy Center</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure parents/caregivers have access to information regarding respite and other related services</li> <li>• Continue outreach and education about importance of benefits counseling and available resources</li> </ul>	
	<p>Improve and expand communication channels to individuals with disabilities and their families</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuously seek input from families and stay current in our understanding about what they want and need</li> <li>• Engage community and grassroots organizations regularly to learn from them and support their work</li> <li>• Effectively distribute materials/information to support individuals and families in securing employment</li> <li>• Ensure resources appear in format(s) that are accessible to individuals and families</li> <li>• Coordinate linkage and messaging across state agency websites</li> <li>• Survey key stakeholders to measure the effectiveness of communication</li> <li>• Continue biweekly blog on TennesseeWorks about issues important to families around employment, independent living, policy, etc.</li> <li>• Raise awareness among individuals and families about ABLE TN and ECF CHOICES</li> <li>• Use existing forums (e.g. Arc Family Forums, Family Coalition meetings, etc.) to discuss employment topics with families</li> <li>• Use existing forums (e.g. DIDD regional focus groups, TennCare advisory groups, etc.) to discuss employment topics with individuals with disabilities</li> <li>• Implement communication strategies to ensure stakeholders are aware of AJC services</li> <li>• Create resources for families to advocate for work-related experiences in the educational programs of their children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communications workgroup</li> <li>• Individuals/Families Workgroup</li> <li>• Provider Workgroup</li> <li>• DOE</li> <li>• Vanderbilt Kennedy Center</li> <li>• DOL/AJCs</li> <li>• VR</li> </ul>
<p><b>3) Increase the number of employers that hire people with disabilities (#Businesses)</b></p>	<p>Cultivate Employment First champions among business leaders across Tennessee</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognize businesses and individual business leaders that who hire people with disabilities (e.g. Governor’s Award)</li> <li>• Seek opportunities to present the "business case" for employing people with disabilities (available on the TennesseeWorks website)</li> <li>• Share the Employer Outreach Initiative (EOI) materials in the TennesseeWorks website employer section</li> <li>• Explore training programs that help businesses assess needs, tasks, and opportunities within their company</li> <li>• Use available data from ECF CHOICES, VR, DMHSAS, DIDD, etc. to identify businesses that hire people with disabilities and approach them about becoming part of the broader Employment First movement. Tap into the experiences and expertise of these businesses to continue refining our</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employer Workgroup</li> <li>• Provider workgroup</li> <li>• Policy Workgroup</li> <li>• VR, DOL, and other state agencies as appropriate</li> </ul>

		business engagement practices.	
	Establish baseline and set goals for the number of Tennessee businesses that employ people with disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a system to collect and analyze data about businesses that employ people with disabilities in Tennessee</li> <li>• Establish relationships with Workforce 360 (ECD) and American Job Centers (AJCs) at the local level</li> <li>• Increase awareness and use of AJC system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data workgroup</li> <li>• Employer workgroup</li> <li>• DOL/AJCs</li> </ul>
	Create and expand partnerships with existing workforce initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider implementing strategies to establish local/regional “single points of contact” for employers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employer workgroup</li> <li>• DOL, VR, and other state agencies as appropriate</li> </ul>
	Create additional partnerships between employers and school transition programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish additional employer partnerships, (e.g. Project SEARCH, Walgreen’s REDI, Sam’s Club/Waves training program, etc.)</li> <li>• Use DOE modules content to meet professional development needs of transition stakeholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DOE</li> <li>• Employer workgroup</li> <li>• Provider workgroup</li> <li>• VR</li> </ul>
<b>4) Make Tennessee state government a model employer of people with disabilities (#Government</b>	Develop initiatives that increase internship and employment opportunities for people with disabilities within Tennessee state government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage the TN Department of Human Resources as a partner in making TN a model public sector employer</li> <li>• Work with the Commissioner of TN Department of HR on the possibility of expanding internships and employment opportunities within state government</li> <li>• Continue conversations with TN state parks systems about of hiring people with disabilities</li> <li>• Tennessee Leadership Academy for Excellence in Disability Services (LAEDS)</li> <li>• Explore how lessons/practices learned at the state government level may be applicable to local/county governments.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy Workgroup</li> <li>• DD Council</li> </ul>

<p><i>#Leadership)</i></p>	<p>Create toolkit that serves as a resource for TN communities to work towards becoming a model public sector employer of people with disabilities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify and support communities (city/county governments) that want to become model employer communities</li> <li>• Define characteristics of successful model public sector employers</li> <li>• Explore the possibility of using/adapting the public toolkit for private businesses</li> <li>• Exchange best practices with employer engagement group (i.e. which best practices are relevant for public and private engagement)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy workgroup</li> <li>• DD Council</li> </ul>
<p><b>5) Prepare students for employment and post-secondary success (#Education #Transition)</b></p>	<p>Expand use of Transition TN among educators and other stakeholders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highlight various TransitionTN resources and lessons through Transition Tennessee listserv</li> <li>• Encourage school districts in need of assistance to access TransitionTN as the first step in taking a proactive approach to improving student outcomes</li> <li>• Develop regional communities of practice (CoP) and leverage the resources in TransitionTN as a means to support the CoPs</li> <li>• Ensure students have access to information that lists and explain all options/programs available upon exiting the school system.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DOE</li> <li>• VR</li> <li>• Communications workgroup</li> </ul>
	<p>Educate stakeholders on diploma options and assess impact</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Start a study of the new diploma options (e.g. occupational and alternate academic diploma), their implementation, and their impact on student outcomes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DOE</li> <li>• Communications workgroup</li> </ul>
	<p>Provide technical assistance and coaching for transition professional development modules</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement and evaluate a plan for professional development that includes both live training and online resources through Transition Tennessee.</li> <li>• Develop a “talking points” series that focuses on superintendents, school administrators, and other professionals that importance of investing in transition and employment</li> <li>• Showcase schools and programs in the state that are effectively connecting students to early work experiences.</li> <li>• Establish baselines and measure outcomes for transitional professional development modules</li> <li>• Develop a set of district and school level reflection tools addressing best and recommended practices in transition and employment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DOE</li> <li>• Communications Workgroup</li> </ul>

	Increase work-based learning opportunities for transitioning students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increase paid work opportunities for students while they are still in school</li><li>• Continue to recruit WBL Coordinators to serve on the WBL Leadership Council and train additional WBL coordinators across the state</li><li>• Develop regional communities of practice (CoP) with a goal of determining how to increase WBL in local school districts</li><li>• State agencies representatives to participate on Business Advisory Committees for Project SEARCH, Next Steps, IDEAL, etc.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• DOE</li><li>• DOL</li><li>• VR</li></ul>
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