# Strategic Plan Book – Arizona Employment First JOBS (Job Opportunities Build Success)

## Vision:

Competitive employment is the preferred daily activity for all working age Arizonans who have disabilities

## Guiding Principles:

* The current low participation rate of people who have disabilities in the workforce is unacceptable. Access to “real jobs with real wages” is essential if people who have disabilities are to avoid lives of poverty, dependence, and isolation.
* All working age people who have disabilities can participate in jobs that provide for meaningful work, with pay at or above minimum wage, benefits, and opportunities for integration with other workers.
* As with all other individuals, employees with disabilities require assistance and support to ensure success on the job and should have access to succeed in the workplace.
* All people, regardless of disability, have the right to pursue the full range of available employment opportunities and to earn a living wage in a job of their choosing, based on their talents, skills, and interests.
* Outreach efforts should include diverse populations statewide*.*
* Policies and practices should be conducive to the employment of people who have disabilities in general and Employment First principles in particular.
* Benefits counseling should be available to all people who have disabilities who want to work so that they understand the options available to them*.*

## What is Employment First?

* Employment First encompasses the belief that community-based, integrated employment should be the primary day activity for working age youth and adults with disabilities.
* It supports an overarching goal that eligible persons with disabilities will have access to integrated work settings most appropriate for them, including the supports necessary to help them succeed in the workplace.
* Employment First does not mean employment only and does not deny individual choice.
* Employment First does not eliminate service options currently available but is intended to increase employment opportunities.

## Why Employment First in Arizona?

* In 2012, only 20% of people in the DDD system receiving day services were in integrated employment.
* In 2012, only 14% of DDD funding spent on day and employment services went to integrated employment.
* People who work have a higher quality of life, greater community participation, and are more likely to make their own choices in life.
* New regulations from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid, Department of Justice and the Department of Labor are requiring states to prioritize integrated services for everyone who has a disability.

## Who is Involved in Arizona Employment First?

* Advocates
* Educators
* Employers
* Employment Service Provider Agencies
* Family Members
* State Agencies:
* Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System
* Arizona Department of Economic Security/Division of Developmental Disabilities & Rehabilitation Services Administration/ Vocational Rehabilitation Arizona
* Department of Education/ Exceptional Student Services
* Arizona Department of Health Services/ Division of Behavioral Health Services Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council
* University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities
* Youth and Young Adults

***“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” — Margaret Mead***

## Six Key Directions

1. Foster and maintain COLLABORATION in order to increase the competitive employment of people who have disabilities

Strategy: #1: State level collaboration

Strategy #2: Local level collaboration

1. Increase AWARENESS of the potential of people who have disabilities and ADVOCATE for their competitive employment

Strategy: #1: Education for people who have disabilities

Strategy #2: Education for families

Strategy #3: Education for employers

Strategy #4: Education for those who provide support

Strategy #5: Public awareness

1. Prepare YOUTH for competitive employment, especially in high potential employment sectors and including self-employment

Strategy: #1: Education/support for youth, starting early and continuing through adulthood

Strategy #2: Education/support for families

Strategy #3: Education/support for those who prepare youth for employment

1. Foster JOB creation, hiring, retention, promotion, and self-employment

Strategy #1: Technical assistance and other supports for employers

Strategy #2: Incentives for employers and those who contribute to job development, retention, and promotion

1. Create and promote POLICIES that lead to the successful employment of people who have disabilities

Strategy #1: Identify and communicate Employment First policy benefits

Strategy #2: Identify and address policy barriers; build on policies that have worked

Strategy #3: Research, propose, and implement new policies that support the successful employment of people who have disabilities

Strategy #4: Incorporate Employment First into state plans and protocols

Strategy #5: Establish a service delivery model that facilitates transition to competitive employment

1. Foster the development of employment-focused SUPPORTS

Strategy #1: Provide education and ongoing professional development

## Key Directions & Strategies by Major Actions

### Key Direction 1) Collaboration

* 1. Strategy: State level collaboration — Major Actions
     1. Create a statewide alliance with shared goals and measures of success
     2. Explore creation of an infrastructure to support Arizona Employment First
     3. Continue the Arizona community of practice on transition
     4. Collaborate with those working on Employment First nationally and in other states
     5. Provide regular updates on what is going on nationally and in Arizona
  2. Strategy: Local level collaboration — Major Actions
     1. Create local alliances with shared goals and measures of success

### Key Direction 2) Awareness and Advocate

* 1. Strategy: Education for people who have disabilities — Major Actions
     1. Develop and provide audience-specific advocacy education using a peer approach
     2. Identify champions
     3. Reach out to under-represented groups and areas
  2. Strategy: Education for families — Major Actions
     1. Develop and provide audience-specific advocacy education using a peer approach
     2. Identify champions
     3. Reach out to under-represented groups and areas

2.3 Strategy: Education for employers — Major Actions

* + 1. Develop and provide audience-specific advocacy education using a peer approach
    2. Identify champions
    3. Reach out to under-represented groups and areas

2.4 Strategy: Education for those who provide support — Major Actions

* + 1. Develop and provide audience-specific advocacy education using a peer approach
    2. Identify champions
    3. Reach out to under-represented groups and areas
    4. Include a wide variety of professionals who support people with disabilities

2.5 Strategy: Public awareness — Major Actions

2.5.1 Identify champions

2.5.2 Reach out to under-represented groups

2.5.3 Include a wide variety of professionals who support people who have disabilities

### Key Direction 3) Youth

* 1. Strategy: Education/support for youth, starting early and continuing through adulthood — Major Actions
     1. Create a pathway to employment, including post-secondary education
     2. Engage self-advocacy organizations in education and support
     3. Promote use of planning tools and other promising practices for all ages
     4. Provide opportunities for work experience, promote career exploration
     5. Promote use of benefits counseling
  2. Strategy: Education/support for families — Major Actions
     1. Promote use of planning tools and other promising practices for all ages
     2. Provide opportunities for work experience, promote career exploration
     3. Promote use of benefits counseling
  3. Strategy: Education/support for those who prepare youth for support — Major Actions
     1. Promote use of planning tools and other promising practices for all ages
     2. Provide opportunities for work experience, promote career exploration
     3. Promote use of benefits counseling

### Key Direction 4) Jobs

* 1. Strategy: Technical assistance and other supports for employers — Major Actions
     1. Make presentations on hiring opportunities, benefits of hiring, available incentives, and untapped resources for employers
     2. Identify champions in high potential employment sectors
     3. Utilize a peer approach
     4. Provide diversity training for co-workers
  2. Strategy: Incentives for employers and those who contribute to job development, retention, and promotion — Major Action
     1. Create incentives for employers and those who contribute to job development, retention, and promotion

### Key Direction 5) Policies

* 1. Strategy: Identify and communicate Employment First policy benefits — Major Actions
     1. Identify current Federal and State policies that can support hiring, retention, and promotion of people who have disabilities
     2. Communicate with employers about how hiring, retention, and promotion of people who have disabilities contribute to compliance with policy mandates

5.2 Strategy: Identify and address policy barriers; build on policies that have worked —Major Action

5.2.1 Identify policies that represent a barrier, policy gaps, promising approaches to addressing these, and policy partners who can help

5.3 Strategy: Research, propose, and implement new policies that support the successful employment of people who have disabilities — Major Action

* + 1. Identify current Federal and State policies that can support hiring, retention, and promotion of people who have disabilities

5.4 Strategy: Incorporate Employment First into state plans and protocols — Major Action

* + 1. Identify State plans and protocols that can support hiring, retention, and promotion of people who have disabilities

5.5 Strategy: Establish a service delivery model that facilitates transition to competitive employment — Major Action

5.5.1 Establish the State of Arizona as a model employer, promote among other governmental jurisdictions

### Key Direction 6) Supports

6.1 Strategy: Provide education and ongoing professional development — Major Actions

6.1.1 Create a cadre of qualified employment support professionals, identify or develop curricula and implement certification and ongoing professional development for job coaches and job developers, link credentials to rates

6.1.2 Using a peer approach, provide training and technical assistance to service providers re: transition of business practices, share promising practices

6.1.3 Identify and share models for supporting transition from school to employment for/with youth, families, schools, State agencies, and employers

## What Success Looks Like

* There are measurable increases in employment of people who have disabilities within the general workforce, earning minimum wage or higher with benefits.
* Greater opportunities exist for people who have disabilities to pursue self-employment and the development of microenterprises.
* Employment is the first and preferred option when youth who have disabilities are exploring and setting their life goals.
* People who have disabilities are employed within the general workforce, regardless of the severity of disability and assistance required.
* Youth who have disabilities have the independent living skills required to pursue employment and the work experiences that are typical for their age group.
* Employers universally value people who have disabilities as an integral part of their workforce and include them within general recruitment and hiring efforts as standard practice.
* People who have disabilities have increased incomes, financial assets, and economic wealth.
* People who have disabilities have greater opportunities to advance their careers by taking full advantage of their individual strengths and talents.
* Funding is sufficient so that quality services and supports are available as needed for long-term employment success.
* People who have disabilities have a regular opportunity to revisit their employment choice.

## Next Steps

Implementation of the Arizona Employment First Plan will require the active and ongoing involvement of a variety of stakeholder groups, including youth and adults with disabilities, advocates, educators, employers, employment service provider agencies, family members, State agencies, University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, policymakers, and potential funders. Many of the partners who helped to develop the plan have been providing and will continue to provide support for staff time and various administrative functions required to develop and implement the plan. It is likely that changes in State policies and procedures will be needed. It is anticipated that some level of additional funding will be needed to support the collaborative work and that there may be opportunities for partner organizations to jointly fund some functions. Resources needed to support implementation will be further explored by stakeholders who become involved in the statewide and/or local alliances that are expected to emerge.

## Evaluation Measures

There will be progress reports posted online throughout the implementation process. Process measures corresponding to the various Key Directions, Strategies, and Major Actions in the plan will be identified and tracked, e.g., collaborative partners involved in implementation of the plan, educational events for various audiences, technical assistance provided to employers, policies changed/developed, professional development activities designed for employment support professionals.

Additionally, there are some overarching outcome measures that will be monitored, if and when reliable and valid data become available. These include:

* Percentage of working age adults with disabilities who are competitively employed;
* Percentage of competitively employed working age adults with disabilities retained for a specified period of time; and
* Percentage of competitively employed working age adults with disabilities who are promoted.

If possible, the data will be reported by age, gender, and disability. Baselines will be established.

Currently there are some sources that provide partial data, including the Arizona Department of Education’s Statewide Post School Outcomes (PSO) Survey, which tracks the status of a sample of youths one year after they leave school. Additionally, outcomes are tracked by both the Division of Developmental Disabilities and the Rehabilitation Services Administration for persons whom they serve. These sources do not capture the total population of working age adults with disabilities but will serve as a starting point.

A work group will be convened to identify and/or plan for the development of data sources for these measures. The data plan will address where and how the data will be captured and who will collect, analyze, and report the data. The group may also be charged with identifying additional Employment First process and outcome measures.

## Generally Accepted Definitions

**Competitive Employment —** Employment in the community, full-time or part-time, paid at minimum wage or higher, with wages and benefits equal to those without disabilities performing the same work.

**Customized Employment —** Competitive integrated employment for an individual with a disability, including someone with a significant disability, that is based on an individualized determination of the strengths, needs, and interests of the individual and meets the business needs of the employer, carried out through flexible strategies.

**Group Supported Employment —** A group service for individuals with disabilities providing continuous paid supports in a supervised community integrated employment. Participants are paid sub-minimum, minimum and/or prevailing wages in accordance with State and Federal labor laws by the employment service agency contracted to provide the on-site supervision.

**Integrated Employment —** Work in a community setting where individuals with disabilities interact with others without disabilities to the same extent as anyone working in that setting.

**Job Coaching —** A time-limited service that provides regular contacts with a competitively employed individual with disabilities and/or with their employer to help the employee develop the specific on-the-job skills necessary for successful employment including: positive work-related habits, attitudes, skills, and work etiquette directly related to their specific employment, as well as assisting the member to become a part of the informal culture of the workplace.

**Micro-Enterprises —** Small businesses owned by individuals with disabilities who have control and responsibility for decision-making and overseeing the business, with accompanying business licenses, taxpayer ID, other than Social Security numbers, and separate business bank accounts. They may be considered integrated competitive employment.

**Self-Employment —** An employment setting in which an individual works in a chosen occupation, for profit or fee, in his or her own small business, with control and responsibility for decisions affecting the conduct of the business.

**Sheltered/Center-Based Employment —** This is a service provided in a non-community integrated, supervised work environment where participants with disabilities engage in work and work-related activities. Participants are to be involved in gainful work and supported in developing skills, abilities, and behaviors that will enable them to transition into more integrated employment settings. Participants are paid sub-minimum, minimum and/or prevailing wages for all compensatory work in accordance with State and Federal labor laws.

**Supported Employment —** Community integrated employment that includes the provision of ongoing supports, both formal (employment provider, technology, etc.) and natural (co-workers, friends, family) based on the person’s needs to ensure on the job success.

## How to Join Arizona Employment First

If you wish to assist with implementation of Arizona Employment First, please provide your contact information - name, title, organization, email, and telephone number to Susan Voirol, Phoenix Program Manager, Sonoran UCEDD, [svoirol@email.arizona.edu](mailto:svoirol@email.arizona.edu). Website: [AZEmploymentFirst.org](http://AZEmploymentFirst.org).

## Arizona Employment First Core Team Members

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***“The only place success comes before work is in the dictionary.” — Vince Lombardi***