

Minnesota Employment First Policy

Adopted by the Olmstead Subcabinet on September 29, 2014

Policy Statement:

Employment First means raising the expectation that all working age Minnesotans with disabilities can work, want to work, and can achieve competitive integrated employment; and each person will be offered the opportunity to work and earn a competitive wage before being offered other supports and services.

Introduction:

The State of Minnesota is committed that all Minnesotans including those with disabilities have a wide range of employment opportunities within the general workforce. The Minnesota Employment First Policy guides state agencies in their planning, decision making, implementation, and evaluation of services and supports for Minnesotans with disabilities to make employment the first and expected option considered. The Minnesota Employment First Policy provides state agencies with:

- A clear statewide vision supporting transformational change and a long-range goal of working-age youth and adults with disabilities participating in the workforce at levels similar to their peers who do not have disabilities
- A guiding vision to increase public and business expectations about employing the abilities and capacities of all people with disabilities to work in the right job with the right level of support
- A policy framework that guides present and future decisions related to people with disabilities who receive public services
- Guidance to provide clarity on how this policy will be applied across state agencies
- Instruction to act to develop and implement plans to ensure the Employment First principles and informed choice are integrated into new and existing employment-related policies, services and supports for people with disabilities.

Vision, Values and Guiding Principles:

Vision

The Employment First Policy envisions a future where all people with disabilities can achieve competitive, integrated employment. Competitive employment means:

- Full-time, part-time, or self-employment with and without supports
- In the competitive labor force
- On the payroll of a competitive business or industry

- Pays at least minimum wage, but not less than the customary wage and level of benefits paid by the employer for the same or similar work performed by workers without a disability.

This policy increases options and choices for people with disabilities by aligning policies, funding practices and collaborative efforts among state agencies. This will help people who choose to work to enter an integrated, competitive workforce or become self-employed.

Values

Three core values ground the Minnesota Employment First Policy. These core values reflect that people with disabilities, including people who have complex and significant disabilities:

- Want to work
- Can be competitively employed or self-employed, earning at least the minimum wage and benefits
- Should be fully integrated physically, functionally and socially within the workplace.

Guiding Principles

1. Integrated, competitive employment is the first and expected service option.
2. Employment is prioritized as an outcome of services and supports.
3. Employment and support services are grounded in informed choice practices, which include but are not limited to:
 - Community-based experiences on which to base decisions
 - Knowledge about the potential impact of employment on their quality of life
 - Information and support to understand their options related to employment
 - Understanding of how work affects public benefits and resources so that work can be part of the plan without fear of losing essential benefits.
4. Individuals with disabilities have increased control and direction over services and supports.
5. Effective interagency coordination will be demonstrated in the delivery of innovative employment, education, and support services, and improved employment outcomes.
6. State agencies will be accountable for monitoring and reporting progress and for establishing interagency quality assurance procedures.

Call to Action: Implementation Requirements for the Minnesota Departments of Education, Employment and Economic Development, and Human Services

1. State agencies are required to use these guiding principles to develop agency plans for transformational changes in the provision of employment services and supports for people with disabilities, including:
 - Identification and provision of supports and services to achieve employment
 - Incorporation of additional standards that adhere to Employment First principles into regulations, quality assurance, and agency program monitoring

- Expansion and promotion of the use of promising and best practices for employment supports.
2. The Minnesota Departments of Education, Employment and Economic Development and Human Services (MDE, DEED and DHS) must define, operationalize, and document a process to ensure a person-centered approach and informed choice is used without conflicts of interest or bias to work. Informed choice must include community exploration and experienced-based opportunities.
 3. After an informed choice process has been followed and if a person chooses not to work, then, documentation will be maintained by the appropriate agency of the reason(s) for the decision. This will help MDE, DEED and DHS determine what, if any, changes are necessary to address barriers to employment that resulted in the choice not to work. People with disabilities may choose to reconsider their decision at any time. Additionally, MDE, DEED and DHS must establish a process to regularly review with the person his/her decision regarding work and any options to address barriers that may have existed in the past.
 4. MDE, DEED and DHS will work together to align programs, funding and policies to support people with disabilities to choose, secure and maintain competitive and self-employment, including:
 - Provision of information, technical assistance and training opportunities to adopt policies and promising processes that improve the employment outcomes of working age youth and adults across educational and adult service systems
 - Incentives for innovation that increase competitive employment in the general work force
 - Expanding the flexibility in funding and services to increase competitive employment outcomes.
 5. MDE, DEED and DHS must develop uniform data collection and reporting procedures, and make public data that documents implementation of the Employment First Policy, including outcome measures.

Successful implementation of this policy will be demonstrated by increased competitive employment of persons with disabilities in the most integrated community work setting.

“The opportunity and freedom for meaningful choice, self-determination, and increased quality of life, through: opportunities for economic self-sufficiency and employment options; choices of living location and situation, and having supports needed to allow for these choices.” ---Subcabinet Vision Statement – MN Olmstead Plan (p. 21 plan version with proposed modification July 10, 2014).

Olmstead Plan Employment Goal: People with disabilities will have choices for competitive, meaningful, and sustained employment in the most integrated setting (p. 40 of July 10, 2014 plan version)

Minnesota will adopt an Employment First Policy and use these principles in service design and delivery... By September 30, 2014, the state will adopt an Employment First Policy (page 42 of the July 10, 2014 plan version, Employment Section under Action two: Align policies and funding)