

Employment First means that having a job in the community should be what we expect and plan for people with developmental, intellectual, and other disabilities. It is a national movement and many states have changed their policies, services, and systems to align with Employment First principles. The Idaho Employment First Consortium has adopted this Employment First Message and Values:

**“All Idahoans with disabilities
have the right and responsibility to work
and contribute to their community.”**

A Positive Vision for Idaho

- All communities expect people with disabilities to work
- Everyone can work and there is work for everyone
- Full employment results in higher quality of life and strong economy for Idaho
- People have equal opportunity for meaningful work and career growth
 - ...they are supported and accommodated in the workplace
 - ...they are empowered to contribute to their community and the community values that contribution
 - ...they have the opportunity for advancement, responsibility, and a fair/equal wage
 - ...they have the opportunity, training, and support to realize financial self-sufficiency

Right now in Idaho 67.4% of working-age adults (16-64) are employed compared to only 24.8% of working-age adults who have an intellectual disability. Only 41% of students who receive special education services are enrolled in post-secondary education or competitively employed one year after leaving high school (Idaho Dept. of Education 2010 Post School Outcomes census survey). Many people with disabilities who want to work are not able to for various reasons including public and employer misperception about the talents and skills of people who have disabilities and what they can bring to enhance their business.

The Idaho Employment First Consortium was established in April 2012 and is supported by the Idaho Council on Developmental Disabilities for the purpose of improving how employment services and systems work in Idaho so that people with developmental disabilities are able to reach their career goals. It includes representatives from state agencies, advocacy organizations, service providers, parents, and self-advocates.

Key Objectives:

- Increase the number of individuals with developmental disabilities working in community employment
- Increase the number of employers hiring individuals with disabilities
- The state of Idaho will officially adopt and support, through policies and funding, an Employment First philosophy
- Increase the employment rate of young adults with disabilities completing high school
- Increase in the number of individuals using work incentives
- Increase in the number of employers creating internships and mentorships

Many strategies will be used to reach these objectives including educating the community, providing training for support professionals, build awareness with employers, ensure employment goals are included in transition planning for youth, implement customized employment practices and promote self-employment opportunities.

In addition to the Employment First Message developed by the Idaho Consortium the group has defined common values that we will use as a basis for future policy development and systems change.

What we value for individuals, in our communities, and supported in Idaho systems and policy:

Accessibility – a person has what they need in the workplace to be successful in their job

Accountability – everyone owning one's own actions

Career Growth - opportunity for advancement, responsibility, training, and more pay

Civic Contribution – being involved in the community in ways that benefits individual members and the community as a whole

Community Employment – work in the local community at businesses, organizations, and self-employment that is outside of a facility that provides work services.

Creativity – having the opportunity to express unique ideas and talents

Customized Supports – what a person needs to effectively do a job

Dependability – having the opportunity to be a responsible worker for a responsible employer

Diversity is Valued in the Workplace - employers recognize and value the varied abilities of all people

Equal Opportunity for Paid Employment - the same chance as anyone else to have a job where a paycheck is earned

Fair Wages – same wages as those without a disability earn doing that job

Flexibility – employers are flexible in their hiring practices and open to workplace accommodations. Employees have different options in work schedules and tasks and are willing to adapt to the needs of the employer and workplace.

Integrated Workplace – working alongside co-workers with and without disabilities

Interdependence – all parts working together to provide employment and support for one another

Internship – a formal program to provide practical experience for beginners in an occupation or profession.

Natural Support in the Workplace – support that comes from a person's supervisor, co-workers, friends and family. Having training, materials, and equipment that are available to anyone in the workplace.

Meaningful Work – a job where the worker is valued (paid) and able to accomplish something that is important to herself/his self

Quality

- a job or kind of work that makes the best use of talents and skills
- work by employees that satisfies employer's needs
- high level of commitment and work ethic to do your job well

Relationships – having the opportunity to build relationships in the workplace and community

Self Directed – a person making decisions for their own life, being self-determined and able to advocate for himself/herself in work settings and the community.

Self reliant/self-sufficient/ competence – a person has the resources, knowledge and skills to take care of him/herself and his/her responsibilities

Self Worth – having an opportunity to use skills/abilities for work and not being limited by others' vision

Valued – not being singled out based on disability but viewed as a valuable employee for the work done

Employment First Principles and Values

The national movement of Employment First includes many different initiatives, policy development, and systems change efforts that align with Employment First principles. Those principles are built around the core idea that we expect, encourage, develop, create, and reward integrated employment in the workforce...

- at minimum or competitive wages and benefits;
- as the first and preferred outcome of working age youth and adults with disabilities;
- including those with complex and significant disabilities who have had limited or no job placement in the past.

Leaders in the movement have encouraged groups and individuals to embrace the following values:

- Look for competence and ability in each individual rather than focus on what is wrong;
- Help people become part of their community;
- Include and prioritize natural supports to solve issues rather than over-focus on professional and system solutions;
- Customize supports that each individual wants and needs rather than labeling people, grouping them together, and offering a program that is based on the label;
- Use the principles of immersion and social inclusion to provide supports, accommodations, and training in the workplace where skills are expected to be used.