

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
DEPARTMENT ON DISABILITY SERVICES**



<b>POLICY</b>	
Department on Disability Services	Subject: Employment First <i>Policy</i>
Responsible Program or Office: Department on Disability Services	Policy Number: <i>2014-DDS-EMPL-01</i>
Date of Approval by the Director: December 19, 2014	Number of Pages: 6
Effective Date: December 22, 2014	Expiration Date, if any: N/A
Supersedes Policy Dated: <i>N/A</i>	
Cross References, Related Policies and Procedures, and Related Documents: Mayoral Proclamation, "District of Columbia and Employment First State" (October 18, 2012); Standard Operating Protocol, DDA and RSA Coordination of Services	

**1. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this policy is to establish Employment First as a priority and guiding philosophy for people with disabilities who receive services from the Department on Disability Services ("DDS" or "Agency"), consistent with Mayor Vincent C. Gray's October 18, 2012, proclamation of the District of Columbia as an Employment First State. In its current context, "Employment First" refers to the philosophy that all people, regardless of disability, prefer and are capable of individual integrated employment according to each person's interests, preference and informed choices.

**2. APPLICABILITY**

This policy applies to all services administered by the Department on Disability Services, the Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) and the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA).

**3. AUTHORITY**

The authority for this policy is established in DDS as set forth in D.C. Law 16-264, the "Department on Disability Services Establishment Act of 2006," effective March 14, 2007 (D.C. Official Code § 7-761.01 *et seq.*).

#### 4. RESPONSIBILITY

The responsibility for this policy is vested in the Director, DDS. Implementation for this policy is the responsibility of the Director, DDS, and the DDS Deputy Directors for DDA and RSA.

#### 5. TERMINOLOGY

- A. **Competitive integrated employment** is defined in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (“WIOA”) as full- or part-time work in the competitive labor market performed in an integrated setting, for which a person with a disability is compensated at a rate that is at least the federal, state or local minimum wage (whichever is highest) and is at least the customary wage and level of benefits paid by the employer for the same or similar work done by people without disabilities. Additionally, the work is in a setting where people with disabilities work alongside other employees who do not have disabilities with the same opportunities to participate in all activities in which employees without disabilities participate. (29 U.S.C. § 404(5) *et. seq.* For additional information, WIOA is available online at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-113publ128/pdf/PLAW-113publ128.pdf>)
- B. **Customized employment** is defined in WIOA as “competitive integrated employment, for an individual with a significant disability, that is based on an individualized determination of the strengths, needs, and interests of the individual with a significant disability, is designed to meet the specific abilities of the individual with a significant disability and the business needs of the employer, and is carried out through flexible strategies” (29 U.S.C. § 404(7)). The Office of Disability Employment Policy’s defines Customized Employment as a universal strategy designed to personalize the employment relationship between an employer and employee to meet the needs of both.
- C. **Self-employment** is defined as earning income directly from one’s own business, profession, or trade; and not as an employee of a business owned by someone else, the goals of which include economic self-sufficiency and independence.

#### 6. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- A. People with disabilities, including those with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD), offer skills and talents, want and deserve the opportunity to work and have the desire to work, earn competitive wages, and contribute to their workplaces, their families, the economy, and their communities.
- B. All people, regardless of their disabilities or the severity thereof, should be afforded the opportunity to pursue competitive employment.

- C. For businesses to thrive and communities to prosper, it is vital for all working age residents to be active members of the workforce.
- D. Employment increases overall community involvement and support as a result of work relationships and social interactions. When people with disabilities are employed, they benefit directly and have a positive impact on the economy and community by paying taxes on their earned wages, purchasing goods and services, increasing their standard of living, and becoming economically self-sufficient.
- E. People with disabilities are a largely untapped resource for employers and the community, representing a valuable business solution to meet the demands of an aging and retired workforce.
- F. Employees with disabilities may require assistance and support to ensure job success, much like everyone else. People who want to work should have access to necessary supports in an integrated setting so they can contribute and succeed in the integrated workplace.
- G. Employers, family members, colleagues and other community members are capable of providing the necessary supports and assistance for a person to achieve and maintain employment success, supplemented as necessary by paid staff and services.
- H. Employment First is predicated on a framework that supports independence, productivity, integration, and employment that is based on people' unique strengths, interests, abilities, and informed choice.

## **7. POLICY**

It is the policy of DDS:

- A. That every working-age individual with a disability who enters the Agency's service delivery system shall be presumed to prefer and be capable of individualized competitive integrated employment on a long-term basis in the community over other less integrated alternatives;
- B. That competitive integrated employment in the community shall be the first and preferred post-education outcome for people with any kind of disability and the goal for youth transitioning from school services;
- C. That staff shall provide all people who are applying for or receiving services and supports with complete and accurate information on the range of services, supports and options to guide their informed choice;
- D. To offer high quality supports and service delivery that are coordinated and comprehensive, that support people with disabilities to obtain, maintain, retain or advance in competitive integrated employment;

- E. To encourage, maximize, and build on the existence and potential of natural supports and family in the development, implementation, and maintenance of a plan for employment;
- F. To provide wrap around supports, as appropriate for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities that receive services from DDA, who are working on a part-time basis and may want to supplement their time through other supported activities (and, as much as possible and desired, these other activities should reflect how other adults spend their time when they are not working (e.g., volunteer work, recreation, pursuit of individual interests));
- G. To work in partnership with public and private partners to create pathways to employment and opportunities for co-enrollment in services to increase community employment opportunities for people with disabilities, for which multiple agencies can braid and share resources;
- H. To educate community members and policy makers on the value and benefit of employment through sharing data and success stories, while advocating for equal opportunities and fair treatment in the workplace to increase expectations, shatter stereotypes, and create a better understanding about the employment potential of people with disabilities;
- I. To develop and sustain mutually beneficial partnerships with potential employers, District agencies, advocacy groups, and area nonprofit organizations to support and further coordinate Employment First efforts, with collaborations to include an open and ongoing exchange of ideas and initiatives and where possible, the braiding of funds and resources, as well as cross-training of staff (and, as needed, DDS staff will support people to access services and supports outside of DDS);
- J. To enhance community capacity and access to quality employment services through community training and technical assistance;
- K. To use labor market information on high demand occupations and related training opportunities, while developing partnerships leading to meaningful engagement with employers and the business community, to guide the development of workforce initiatives, training, supports, incentives and employment opportunities;
- L. To identify and address areas where additional options, services, incentives, and supports are required to assist people with disabilities to obtain community-based, competitive employment;
- M. That, to the extent possible, all services provided to assist people with disabilities to prepare for competitive integrated employment be provided in an integrated setting alongside people without disabilities; and
- N. To promote policies, practices procedures, or funding structures that incentivize individualized competitive integrated employment while identifying and phasing out

or eliminating other policies, practices procedures, or funding structures that disincentive or discourage people with disabilities from individualized competitive integrated employment.

## 8. STANDARDS

- A. RSA and DDA shall have a system of effective cross referrals and ongoing coordination, for people that are eligible, and desire additional supports and services. To maximize available employment services and supports, people that are eligible shall be encouraged to receive services from both administrations concurrently or sequentially.
- B. DDS shall work collaboratively with other District agencies to establish a system-wide focus that sets high expectations for youth and adults to work, earn the customary rate for their work, and contribute to their communities. Such a vision is achieved through shared values and goals, coordinated services and active partnerships and agreements with the other Agencies resulting in effective referrals and services that lead to competitive integrated employment options.
- C. DDS shall engage a person's network in the development of employment opportunities and creative solutions to address barriers to employment (*e.g.*, family members, friends, former employers or co-workers, other community connections, etc.).
- D. For people DDA supports, on-going career planning shall be addressed in the Person Centered Planning Process using Discovery or other forms of person-centered vocational assessment so that career and career advancement opportunities are explored on a regular basis. If a person is served by both DDA and RSA or with another partner, these plans should be coordinated and reflect the person's interest and career goals. Information gained from the Discovery process or other assessments, or the use of other Person Centered Thinking tools shall be used to guide and inform the development of the Person Centered Employment Plan, Individual Plan for Employment and/or the Individual Service Plan.
- E. DDS shall utilize best and emerging employment practices such as customized employment and Individual Placement and Support (IPS) strategies and techniques that match the needs of the employer to the skills and interest of the person, and provide supported employment as needed.
- F. DDS supports people with disabilities who are receiving services from DDA and/ or RSA, who have expressed an interest in exploring employment with vocational assessments, training and educational opportunities, work incentives and benefits counseling including information on the Ticket to Work program, self-employment exploration, supported employment, work experiences, internships, on the job training, volunteer work, and other initiatives that enable them to explore career interests, options and skills development. These activities should be connected to

their employment goal and reflected in the Individual Plan for Employment and Individual Service Plan.

- G. Recognizing that connecting a person with a long-term career in a field of his or her choosing is often a multifaceted, time intensive process, DDS staff shall exercise resourcefulness, creativity, patience, attention to detail, and perseverance in connecting people with individualized competitive integrated employment.
- H. DDS shall monitor and track the number of people who are successfully connected with individualized competitive or integrated employment and shall set annual benchmarks and goals in this area.



Laura L. Nuss, Director



Approval Date