

# **Employment First (Act 36 of 2018)**

Interagency Priorities and  
Recommendations – Updates and  
Progress

## **Annual Report**

Office of the Governor

January 11, 2023

## Table of Contents

Employment First at a Glance.....	3
Employment First Policy – Act 36 Background .....	3
Values .....	3
Impact of COVID-19 .....	4
3-year Plan Progress .....	4
2022 Key Highlights.....	4
Employment First Policy Priorities .....	7
Early Childhood – Setting the Stage.....	7
Engaging parents and families .....	7
Increasing early intervention services in integrated settings.....	7
School Age – Preparing for Transition.....	8
Establishing postsecondary plans for pathways to employment .....	8
Connecting to transition activities for future education & employment.....	9
Increasing workforce participation and training upon graduation .....	12
Working Age Adults – Participating in CIE.....	14
Connecting people to individualized employment services .....	14
Enhancing supports and decreasing reliance on sheltered employment.....	18
Improving workforce system collaboration and employer engagement .....	19
Advancing inclusivity in commonwealth employment.....	22
Increasing Labor Force Participation Rate for people with disabilities .....	22
Looking Forward – Developing an Updated Framework .....	23
Appendix A – Websites and Additional Resources .....	25
Appendix B – State-Level Framework .....	26

# Employment First at a Glance

## Employment First Policy – Act 36 Background

All individuals should have the opportunity to pursue and participate in employment that leads to a positive sense of self and family-sustaining wages. Pennsylvania is committed to supporting jobseekers in finding pathways to work in environments that are safe, inclusive, and that also provide competitive income. This includes a commitment to supporting employers, as well, in enhancing their inclusive hiring and retention practices so that the diverse workforce can experience all the benefits that work brings. By equipping workplaces with the tools to accommodate the varying needs of workers, a vibrant economy is maintained, as more Pennsylvanians are connected to meaningful work.

In 2016, in alignment with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Governor Wolf issued an Executive Order establishing Employment First policy in Pennsylvania to support people with disabilities in pursuing, securing, and maintaining competitive, integrated employment (CIE). Two years later, the Employment First Act, [Act 36 of 2018 \(Act 36\)](#), permanently established the policy making CIE the first consideration and preferred outcome of publicly funded education, training, employment and related services, and long-term services and supports for individuals with a disability.

Act 36 created the Governor’s Cabinet for People with Disabilities and the Employment First Oversight Commission to ensure implementation of this policy through strong interagency collaboration and stakeholder engagement. The Act required the Governor’s Office to submit an initial [three-year plan](#) to the General Assembly, outlining recommendations and strategies to implement the Act and ensure individuals with disabilities have opportunities to achieve economic independence through CIE. The Act also requires the Governor’s Office and the Commission to submit annual reports.

## Values

Several core values continue to be embedded throughout state agencies’ Employment First implementation:

**Person-centered:** Each person is a unique individual with their own interests, strengths, and abilities with the power to take an active role in the planning process, services, and opportunities that are most meaningful to them. This is represented in each agency’s individualized and person-centered planning.

**Holistic:** Individuals are part of their families and communities, so services are provided with recognition that an individual’s circumstances must be considered and that barriers may need to be addressed for effective service delivery and attainment of desired outcomes.

**Equitable:** Services are delivered with a focus on equity for everyone, regardless of race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, and disability, so that everyone has access to opportunities.

**Collaborative:** Partnership and meaningful stakeholder engagement are at the forefront of service delivery by agencies in state, federal, and local government. The Employment First policy is informed by insight and feedback from advocates who are experts in the field, providers who work directly with customers each day, and the individuals who are directly receiving services.

**Data-informed:** Data is collected and used to help monitor progress on achieving outcomes, identify areas of success and opportunity, and inform decision making in policy and programming. Data is available to the public to ensure transparency and active collaboration in advancing goals.

## Impact of COVID-19

The first year of the pandemic introduced challenges to employment for all populations as businesses and communities faced an unprecedented crisis. Many businesses closed, and many people, particularly those with underlying health conditions, were unable or hesitant to pursue services or employment due to fear of contracting the virus. The second year of the pandemic saw progress in businesses reopening, people returning to jobs, and the implementation of new service delivery strategies. However, some pandemic challenges continued to exist, and notable shifts in the workforce started to emerge.

Throughout 2022 and in the coming years, the impact of the pandemic will continue to be seen in various ways and must still be considered in evaluation of program outcomes. However, evolving developments in service delivery, technology integration in the workplace, industry needs, and how people are approaching their career pathways all offer a critical opportunity to reexamine our vision and goals for state services and workforce development.

## 3-year Plan Progress

The initial 3-year plan required by Act 36 included a significant number of priority areas and recommendations, with the primary purpose of embedding Employment First CIE policy into daily operations across agencies. Last year's January 2022 annual report highlighted various ways in which policy integration advanced since Employment First was initiated, such as:

- Establishment of leadership structure through the Governor's Cabinet for People with Disabilities and the Employment First Oversight Commission;
- Inclusion of Employment First in written policy documents, trainings, and materials across various agencies;
- Development of Memorandums of Understanding across agencies to increase coordination of services; and
- Availability of public facing information and data through various reports and websites:
  - [Employment First website](#)
  - [Employment First data dashboard](#)
  - [We Can Work](#)
  - [PA Transition Resources](#)

This January 2023 annual report provides a final update under the Wolf Administration. Main changes to the report include the addition of 2022 data and Key Highlights.

## 2022 Key Highlights

State agencies continued to provide robust services while also seeking opportunities for innovation throughout 2022. Highlights for 2022 include:

### **\$14 million federal grant to advance CIE**

In fall of 2022, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) applied for and received a \$14 million Disability Innovation Fund (DIF) grant from the Rehabilitation Services Administration. The intent of this grant is to help individuals who are considering or currently participating in subminimum wage employment to transition to competitive integrated employment. The grant proposal (“Project InVest”) was developed in collaboration with the Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) and was competitively selected to focus on building supports around an individual, their family, and the employer. This is a 5-year grant that will create opportunities in six locations throughout the commonwealth starting in Philadelphia and a rural area in year two.

### **Office of Administration Accessibility Center for Excellence**

In 2022, the Office of Administration (OA) expanded its focus on inclusive employment through the Accessibility Center of Excellence. The Center identified accessibility champions across the organization to help spread awareness and best practices; purchased an unlimited user enterprise license of Fusion (JAWS, ZoomText) to be used as an accommodation and testing tool, and created an internally-facing knowledge repository that employees can use for self-service of accessibility information. In addition, the Center established the following roles:

- Accessibility Lead to manage the enterprise accessibility testing toolkit and training platform.
- Accessibility Lead to add accessibility requirements to procurement initiatives and processes.
- Accessibility Testers to test the commonwealth’s public presence and employee-facing applications.

### **Summer Internship Program relaunch and expansion**

The Commonwealth Summer Internship Program offers internship opportunities for college students with disabilities at a variety of commonwealth entities. After being paused due to the pandemic, OVR and the Office of Administration (OA) collaborated to offer 30 students internships in 2022 at sites in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Johnstown, and Harrisburg. This is the first year of expansion into several new sites, and the program is expected to grow in 2023.

### **Benefits Counseling under Community Health Choices**

Many people who are receiving benefits through the Department of Human Services (DHS) have questions or concerns about impact of competitive wages on their benefits and health care services, many of which may be necessary to support their ability to work. After receiving approval from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), DHS will be able to start offering benefits counseling to its Community Health Choices (CHC) participants without first requiring a referral to OVR. The goal of obtaining this approval was to make this essential service more accessible in a timely manner to support informed decision-making regarding employment goals and services.

### **Competitive Integrated Employment Grants**

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) Bureau of Special Education (BSE) awarded CIE grants to local education agencies (LEAs) to establish or expand CIE programming for youth with disabilities. Through this annual grant program, schools offer CIE programming to prepare students for employment including employment assessments, job shadowing, career counseling, mentorships, mock interviews, self-advocacy, work-based learning experiences, and more. During 2022, a total of 15 LEAs participated, and 385 students were engaged in CIE grant-funded activities.

**Connecting for Employment (multiagency effort)**

In an effort to solidify the three prongs of support for people with disabilities during the transition years, BSE, OVR, and ODP established the Connecting for Employment initiative. This initiative sets the conditions for the field-level providers to collaborate and innovate to create equitable seamless practices at the regional level. Last year was the kickoff with the preparation of basic level training videos for all providers to ensure solid understanding of the mission of the three agencies and the supports that can be woven together. Pennsylvania's Secondary Transition Roadmap and video series is now available here: <https://www.pasecondarytransition.com/connecting-for-employment>.

# Employment First Policy Priorities

The policy priorities section focuses on a set of core areas from the 3-year plan to identify progress and areas of opportunity. The areas of focus in this report look at key efforts over this past year, as well as priority areas informed by feedback from the Governor’s Cabinet and the Employment First Oversight Commission.

*Note: After an updated case management system for Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) was implemented in 2021, OVR discovered that the data migration to the new system may have caused some errors resulting in underreporting. OVR is working to resolve these issues and ensure that all data are captured and properly reported.*

## Early Childhood – Setting the Stage

### Engaging parents and families

A first step in improving employment outcomes for people with disabilities is setting expectations, providing information, and changing the culture so that families and individuals know that future education and employment pathways are available. Agencies that engage with families and children at a young age have taken steps to enhance parent and family trainings and materials establishing this approach.

- The Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) provides trainings on inclusion and Early Intervention (EI) services, and has developed models on best practices. Since 2018, the number of families participating in or planning EI training has more than doubled.
  - 2020-21: 93 families participated in EI training; 376 families were involved in planning.
  - 2021-22: 161 families participated in EI training; 272 families were involved in planning.
- ODP and OCDEL continuously integrate the [Charting the LifeCourse](#) principles into service delivery systems by providing access to resources and trainings. ODP collaborates with the PA Family Network (PAFN), which includes Family Advisors across the state, and Self Advocates United as part of the Supporting Families Initiative to support this work.
- The Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH) established language in grant agreements that promotes pathways to employment for children and youth with special care needs.
- OVR provides regular outreach to parents and families through Early Reach Coordinators and Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors.

### Increasing early intervention services in integrated settings

Early Intervention ensures that children birth to five with developmental delays or other established factors that put them at risk of substantial delay have the best chance for healthy development by offering a range of developmental and social-emotional services. Services can be provided in the home, in a community-based setting, or at a specialized facility.

This priority focuses on providing services in the home or community, where the child is actively engaged with others and is considered an integrated setting. OCDEL publishes data in the annual State Interagency Coordinating Council report and to the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs.

- 2020-21: approximately 57,500 children participated in the Preschool EI program
- 2021-22: approximately 59,106 children participated in the Preschool EI program.

*Table 1 - Early Intervention Measures Percentages 2018-2022*

<b>Early Intervention Measures</b>	<b>FY 2018-19</b>	<b>FY 2019-20</b>	<b>FY 2020-21</b>	<b>FY 2021-22</b>
<b>Percent of infants and toddlers (birth to 3) receiving EI services in home and community settings</b>	99.92%	99.86%	99.92%	99.96%
<b>Percent of preschool children (ages 3-5) that have access to Early Childhood Education (ECE) and receive the majority of their services in ECE</b>	64.32%	60.98%	55.87%	56.99%
<b>Percent of preschool children that receive the majority of their services in the home</b>	5.63%	8.83%	12.35%	11.38%
<b>Percent of preschool children that receive their services in a specialized classroom</b>	30.05%	30.19%	31.78%	31.63%

## School Age – Preparing for Transition

*Note: Additional transition activity data, including Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS), is documented in [quarterly reports](#) required by the Work Experiences for High School Students with Disabilities Act ([Act 26 of 2016](#)).*

### Establishing postsecondary plans for pathways to employment

The PDE Bureau of Special Education (BSE) works collaboratively with educators, schools, OVR, ODP, and other stakeholders to ensure students have access to quality and meaningful education, supports, services, and opportunities. Secondary Transition Coordinators at all 29 Intermediate Units (IUs) are trained to educate and support schools with implementing career readiness indicators with students with disabilities. During SY 2021-22, approximately 279,219 special education students attended school districts; 20,424 special education students attended brick-and-mortar charter schools; and 13,803 special education students attended cyber charter schools. PDE has a robust training plan for secondary transition that includes resources for students, families, and educators, such as:

- The [Secondary Transition website](#) for students and parents;
- [Transition Tidbits](#), a free monthly subscription regarding transition opportunities;
- Annual professional development for educators focused on the state Academic Standards for Career Education and Work, career readiness indicators, and PA Employment First;

- The Community of Practice 2021-22 state plan emphasizing person-driven planning (PDP) by creating a webinar series on PDP and supportive family, professional and youth toolkits; and
- Train the Trainer for Secondary Transition IU Training & Consulting Specialists for Transition Discoveries and grants for LEAs to implement Transition Discoveries locally.

For students eligible to stay in school from age 18 through age 21 under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and state law, PDE partners with agencies and stakeholders to adopt policies and promote practices emphasizing educational programming based in the community and prepares students to work and function in a community setting. Nearly 5,500 students with disabilities remain in school each year through age 21. In response to the pandemic, Act 66 of 2021 and Act 55 of 2022 allowed 21-year-old students eligible under IDEA to remain in school for one additional school year. Approximately 600 eligible students remained enrolled for the 2021-22 year, and another 400 students elected to remain enrolled for 2022-23.

- **Middle school support:** PA’s six-year initiative *Middle School Success: The Path to Graduation* (P2G) program provides professional development for schools and helps regional teams identify middle school students with emotional behavioral disorder who may be off-track for graduation. Local leadership teams use attendance, behavior, and course performance data to identify and implement academic and behavioral Evidence Based Practices aligned to the SSIP Coherent Improvement Strategies (i.e., Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Family Engagement, etc.).
- **Educator professional development:** Training and technical assistance provided to schools emphasize the importance of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) being grounded in practices that provide community opportunities, work-based opportunities, and independent living, with the least amount of supports necessary for success. Nearly 150 LEAs engaged in this professional development and improved practices in 2021.
- **Collaborative IEP development:** OVR staff attendance at IEP meetings help support a comprehensive transition plan and connection to resources for student work experiences and future employment pathways. According to July 2021-22 transition data, an estimated 125,488 students with IEPs between the ages of 14 and 21 are eligible for transition and Pre-ETS. While OVR cannot attend every IEP meeting, staff attend whenever possible.

*Table 2 - Total Number of IEP Meetings Attended by OVR Staff*

Year	SFY Q3	SFY Q4	SFY Q1	SFY Q2
2021	2,257	1,526	1,127	2,687*
2022	2,396	1,206	1,008	1,907

## Connecting to transition activities for future education & employment

BSE and OVR work together to support students’ participation in work activities and to track work-based learning and paid work experiences. WIOA places significant emphasis on the provision of these services to students and requires that OVR set aside at least 15% of its federal funds to provide Pre-ETS to all eligible or potentially eligible students. In addition, ODP ensures that 100% of individuals with

intellectual disability/autism age 21 and graduating have the opportunity to access waiver services which include employment support. Schools are required to make students aware of available services when they exit and are encouraged to connect students to services long before graduation. To support the monitoring of transition activity progress, in July 2021, PDE added several specific Employment First focused questions to their data collection.

*Table 3 - 2020-2022 Data Points for Student Employment Transitions*

Data Points	2020-2021 (First year of revised data)	2021-2022
Number of students who have a transition plan as part of the IEP	114,383	123,483
Number of students who have an outcome goal of competitive integrated employment	78,674	89,885
Number of students participating in a competitive integrated paid work experience	9,387	8,974
Number of students participating in individual job coaching services funded by the school in a paid work experience	9,810	7,598
Number of students who, upon exiting high school, were employed in a competitive integrated setting	13,814	14,775

- Competitive Integrated Employment Grants:** CIE grants improve CIE outcomes for youth with disabilities by providing virtual and in-person work experiences, such as job shadowing, internship/practicum, cooperative education programs, apprenticeship, community-based work programs, and service learning (unpaid), with job coaching as appropriate, for youth with disabilities with preference for students at-risk of dropping out and/or youth who have difficulty obtaining employment, independently. Funding can be used to establish sites that can serve as models for community-based competitive employment for youth with disabilities and support partnerships between OVR, County/Community-Based Behavioral Health, the Office of Intellectual Disabilities, Centers for Independent Living, and other disability-specific support.
- Pre-Employment Transition Services Participation:** OVR took several steps to increase Pre-ETS during COVID, including virtual programming; introducing a new Youth Ambassador program to hire students to work as self advocates in their communities; making it easier to access Supported Employment services as a student; and, introducing an initiative to develop work experiences with colleges and universities. In 2021, OVR created two Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Specialist positions to develop partnerships with employers who will provide work-based opportunities to students with disabilities.

Table 4 - 2021 Pre-ETS Related Services

2021 Pre-ETS Related Services	SFY 20-21 Q3 (Jan-Mar)	SFY 20-21 Q4 (Apr-Jun)	SFY 21-22 Q1 (Jul-Sep)	SFY 21-22 Q2 (Oct-Nov)
Counseling on Postsecondary Training Opportunities	884	988	472	643
Instruction in Self-Advocacy	950	801	668	999
Job Exploration Counseling	1245	1,215	616	1,148
Work Based Learning	500	737	911	636
Workplace Readiness Training	2013	1,673	594	1,389
<b>Total Number of Unique Students Receiving Services</b>	<b>4,095</b>	<b>4,005</b>	<b>2,393</b>	<b>3,447</b>

Table 5 - 2022 Pre-ETS Related Services

2022 Pre-ETS Related Services	SFY 21-22 Q3 (Jan-Mar)	SFY 21-22 Q4 (Apr-Jun)	SFY 22-23 Q1 (Jul-Sep)	SFY 22-23 Q2 (Oct-Dec) Preliminary
Counseling on Postsecondary Training Opportunities	832	800	939	928
Instruction in Self-Advocacy	685	444	1,200	1,346
Job Exploration Counseling	1,218	988	1,169	1,570
Work Based Learning	566	687	1,656	1,060
Workplace Readiness Training	1,670	1,251	1,150	1,782
<b>Total Number of Unique Students Receiving Services</b>	<b>3,636</b>	<b>3,075</b>	<b>4,250</b>	<b>4,785</b>

- **Summer programming:** Over the last decade, OVR in partnership with PDE has partnered with various entities to develop and offer summer programming opportunities, such as the Junior Summer Academy.
  - The MY Work program, launched in Pittsburgh in 2016, allows students with disabilities to participate in a paid work experience with a local municipality during the summer. This initiative is now being implemented statewide, and OVR was also able to offer over 300 students with disabilities paid work based learning opportunities during the summer of 2022 and is looking to expand this program to additional sites and more students for summer 2023.

- OVR also developed a summer program called Summer Postsecondary Experience that connects students to colleges and universities.
- Finally, OVR hosted the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Summer Academy at the Hiram G. Andrews Center this past July for 11 students. OVR is planning the 2023 Deaf and Hard of hearing and Blind and Visual Impairment Summer Academies at Penn State University Park.

## Increasing workforce participation and training upon graduation

Participating in comprehensive IEP planning and transition services ideally leads to CIE or enrollment in postsecondary education and training upon graduation. Below are several measures related to this outcome. Additional information, including may be found in the [Act 26 reports](#) and [Data Dashboard](#).

*Table 6 - Act 26: Job Referrals Made to Employers by OVR on behalf of students (2021)*

2021	SFY 20-21 Q3	SFY 20-21 Q4	SFY 21-22 Q1	SFY 21-22 Q2
<b>Total Number of Job Referrals</b>	833	926	1,074	594

*Table 7 - Act 26: Job Referrals Made to Employers by OVR on behalf of students (2022)*

2022	SFY 21-22 Q3	SFY 21-22 Q4	SFY 22-23 Q1	SFY 22-23 Q2
<b>Total Number of Job Referrals</b>	682	623	1,420	Not Yet Published

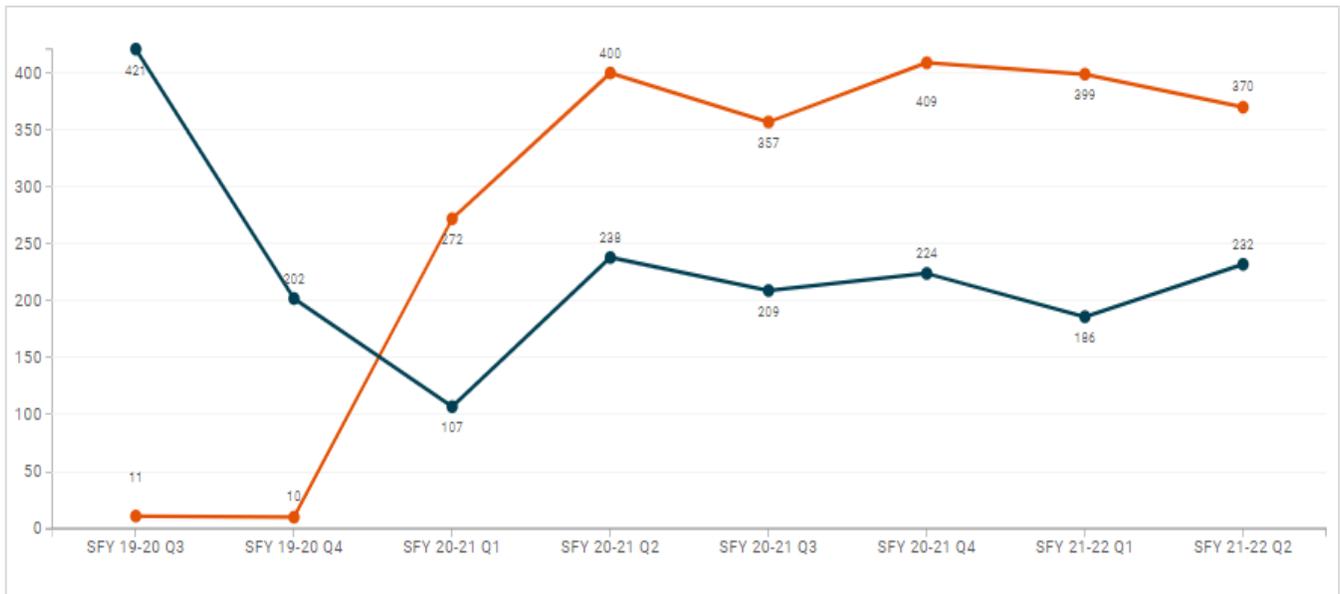
*Table 8 - Act 26: Students with Disabilities who entered CIE within 3 months of Graduation*

Year	SFY Q3	SFY Q4	SFY Q1	SFY Q2
2020	11	10	272	400
2021	357	409	399	370
2022	389	341	457	Not Yet Published

*Table 9 - Act 26: Students with Disabilities who entered CIE while OVR customers*

Year	SFY Q3	SFY Q4	SFY Q1	SFY Q2
2020	421	202	107	238
2021	209	224	186	232
2022	243	193	312	Not Yet Published

Figure 1 - [High School Students with Disabilities Who Enter Competitive Integrated Employment within 3 Months of Graduation](#)



- **Comprehensive Transition Programs (CTPs):** CTPs are one- or two-year college-based certificate and credential programs for young adults with intellectual or other developmental disabilities who are not otherwise able to meet eligibility criteria to enroll in a traditional postsecondary degree program. OVR provides financial aid for CTPs; ODP covers Education Support services to assist with tuition costs when other resources are not available. In 2015, Millersville University, one of the universities in the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, received federal funding to collaborate with PSU Harrisburg and Mercyhurst University and others to build the PA Inclusive Higher Education Consortium to serve young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Additional information is needed to understand current participation and progress of CTP enrollment and completion, in addition to other postsecondary enrollment measures.
  
- **Hiram G. Andrews Center (HGAC):** The mission of the HGAC is to offer nationally recognized, accredited postsecondary education, preemployment transition, and support services to customers as they determine and pursue individualized goals of employment and independence. Programs and services are available to the public and to individuals with or without disabilities. On average, the HGAC serves 1,300 people per year with evaluations, disability supports, and a variety of other services, and approximately 180 students graduate from the Commonwealth Technical Institute (CTI) located at HGAC.

  - Employment Rates: 74-84%, average annual range for 2017-21 (all CIE)
  - Hourly Starting Wage: \$12.30-\$15.32, average annual range for 2017-21
  - Employer Satisfaction Rates: 83-95%, average annual range for 2017-21

## Working Age Adults – Participating in CIE

### Connecting people to individualized employment services

Several state agencies coordinate and fund services for working age adults to support CIE goals.

- **Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR):** OVR provides vocational rehabilitation services to help people with disabilities prepare for, obtain, or maintain employment. Counselors are available to conduct interviews, assist customers in developing vocational goals, and organize a variety of services. An Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) is developed which establishes vocational objectives, services, providers, and responsibilities. Services include but are not limited to: counseling and guidance, diagnostic services, assessments, information and referral, job development and placement, and personal services such as readers or sign language interpreters which come at no cost to the individual.

*Table 10 - OVR by the Numbers*

Measure	PY 2017-18	PY 2018-19	PY 2019-20	PY 2020-21	PY 2021-22
<b>Individuals Engaged with OVR</b>	72,334	69,421	54,549	45,535	50,299
<b>New Applicants</b>	21,065	19,904	12,060	9,693	19,166
<b>Individuals Placed in Employment</b>	7,885	7,485	6,953	4,773	5,374
<b>Average Hourly Wage</b>	\$13.28	\$13.84	\$14.11	\$14.61	\$16.20

- **Office of Developmental Programs (ODP):** ODP serves individuals with an intellectual disability or autism. ODP provides services that support an individual to obtain and maintain employment, in accordance with the [Everyday Lives](#) framework, which includes employment considerations. Each individual enrolled with ODP has an Individual Support Plan (ISP) developed using person-centered planning. Employment goals include specific activities such as exploring CIE, updating hours of employment, changing jobs, or career advancement. These services are funded by Medicaid, which is required to be a last-dollar payer source. If comparable services are available through other means, they must be provided first. Several measures have indicated an increase since 2018.

Table 11 - ODP Employment Services Measures

Measure	As of 12/31/20 18	As of 12/31/20 19	CY 2021 Q1*	CY 2021 Q2	CY 2021 Q3	CY 2021 Q4	CY 2022 Q1	CY 2022 Q2	CY 2022 Q3
Number of people ages 18-64 enrolled with ODP with an Employment Goal on their ISP	13,052	13,505	13,787	13,878	13,669	13,736	13,788	13,902	13,850
Number of people ages 18-64 enrolled with ODP with CIE	6,470	7,136	6,745	7,057	7,537	7,720	7,829	8,101	8,133

\*data reporting transitioned to a quarterly basis

Table 12 - Number of People Enrolled with ODP Reporting Self-Employment

Year	Number of People Enrolled with ODP Reporting Self-Employment
2018	333
2019	333
2020	209
2021	350
2022	402

\*data compiled from ad hoc request

Table 13 - Authorized Benefits Counseling Services in ODP

Year	Authorized Benefits Counseling Services in ODP
FY 2019	100
FY 2020	163
FY 2021	272
FY 2022	365

\*data compiled from ad hoc request

- Office of Long-Term Living (OLTL):** OLTL’s Community HealthChoices Waiver Program serves older Pennsylvanians, individuals with a physical disability, and some other disability types. CHC provides services that support an individual to obtain and maintain CIE. Each individual has a Person-Centered Service Plan (PCSP) directed by the participant. CHC offers participants access to five specific employment services: Benefits Counseling, Career Assessments, Job Finding, Job Coaching, and Employment Skills Development Services. Services are currently coordinated through three CHC Managed Care Organizations (MCOs). These services are funded by Medicaid, which is required to be a last-dollar payer source. If comparable services are available through other means, they must typically be provided first.

Table 14 - OLTL Employment Services Measures by MCO and Year (AHC/KF)

Measures	2020	2021	2022^
<b>HCBS Participants Age 21-64</b>	30,455	32,361	33,258
<b>Goal on PCSP (count)</b>	532	582	499
<b>Goal on PCSP (percent)</b>	1.75%	1.8%	1.5%
<b>Authorization (count)</b>	51	63	50
<b>Authorizations (percent)</b>	0.17%	0.19%	0.15%
<b>Employed (count)</b>	299	330	340
<b>Employed (percent)</b>	0.98%	1.02%	1.02%
<b>Confirmed CIE (count)</b>	241	303	315
<b>Confirmed CIE (percent)</b>	0.79%	0.94%	0.95%

All percentage calculations are based on "HCBS Participants Age 21-64" as denominator  
 Source: Ops 22 and Standard CHC Enrollment Reports for CY2020,2021, and Jan-June 2022^  
 \*indicates data is suppressed due to figure less than 11

Table 15 - OLTL Employment Services Measures by MCO and Year (PHW)

Measures	2020	2021	2022^
<b>HCBS Participants Age 21-64</b>	12,420	10,542	9,408
<b>Goal on PCSP (count)</b>	209	279	116
<b>Goal on PCSP (percent)</b>	1.68%	2.65%	1.23%
<b>Authorization (count)</b>	11	24	*
<b>Authorizations (percent)</b>	0.09%	0.23%	*
<b>Employed (count)</b>	19	86	95
<b>Employed (percent)</b>	0.15%	0.82%	1.01%
<b>Confirmed CIE (count)</b>	18	84	94
<b>Confirmed CIE (percent)</b>	*	0.80%	1.00%

All percentage calculations are based on "HCBS Participants Age 21-64" as denominator  
 Source: Ops 22 and Standard CHC Enrollment Reports for CY2020,2021, and Jan-June 2022^  
 \*indicates data is suppressed due to figure less than 11

Table 16 - OLTL Employment Services Measures by MCO and Year (UPMC)

Measures	2020	2021	2022^
<b>HCBS Participants Age 21-64</b>	14,776	15,786	15,753
<b>Goal on PCSP (count)</b>	61	213	464
<b>Goal on PCSP (percent)</b>	0.41%	1.35%	2.95%
<b>Authorization (count)</b>	102	118	30
<b>Authorizations (percent)</b>	0.69%	0.75%	0.19%
<b>Employed (count)</b>	73	113	214
<b>Employed (percent)</b>	0.49%	0.72%	1.36%
<b>Confirmed CIE (count)</b>	*	46	119
<b>Confirmed CIE (percent)</b>	*	0.29%	0.76%

All percentage calculations are based on "HCBS Participants Age 21-64" as denominator  
 Source: Ops 22 and Standard CHC Enrollment Reports for CY2020,2021, and Jan-June 2022^  
 \*indicates data is suppressed due to figure less than 11

Table 17 - Benefits Counseling Services

Benefits Counseling Services	2021	2022 <sup>^</sup>
Authorized HCBS – Benefits Counseling	27	28
Comparable services in Referred to Employment Service – Other	268	135
Comparable Benefits Counseling Counts Submitted by MCOs	252	969 <sup>^^</sup>

Source: Ops 22 and Standard CHC Enrollment Reports for CY 2021 and Jan-June 2022<sup>^</sup>.

<sup>^^</sup> In 2022 a new category was added to OPS-22 to capture additional Comparable Benefits Counseling activity MCOs are undertaking with participants.

- Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS):** OMHSAS supports counties in delivering employment services among various other mental health and substance abuse supports. As of 2021, OMHSAS began requiring employment services data to be included in annual county reports, including the number of individuals who have received supported employment services that lead to CIE. The first reports with this new information were provided in July 2021. OMHSAS continues to work with counties to submit the requested data.

These services are funded by the DHS Human Service Block Grant (HSBG), also known as base dollars. Annually, each county mental health office (CMHO) independently determines the ongoing need to use base funding for employment supports to assist individuals with serious mental illness (SMI). Due to various collaborations with agencies such as OVR and Workforce, some CMHOs rely on these vocational partners’ financial resources instead of using base dollars to fund employment supports. [County Mental Health Plans can be reviewed for their supported employment on the DHS website.](#)

- High quality service providers:** Employment services require specialized knowledge. There must be adequate capacity to meet demand for the various services provided through state agencies, and those services must be provided by trained and qualified individuals.

Table 18 - Certification Completions

Certification Completions	FY 2019-20	FY 2020-21	FY 2021-22
Persons who completed certification in Discovery (ODP/Temple Agreement)	37	14	27
Persons who completed certification in Customized Employment (ODP/Temple Agreement)	8	20	17
Persons who completed certification in Systematic Instruction (“Intentional Teaching”) (ODP/Temple Agreement)	11	21	9
Persons who completed certification in College of Employment Services’ (CES) ACRE-approved training	561	193	150

Table 19 - Enrolled Providers Offering Benefits Counseling (2019-2022)

Enrolled Providers that Offer Benefits Counseling	2019	2020	2021	2022
ODP	7	N/A	46	50
OLTL	N/A	15	21	37

Table 20 - Credentialed Providers (2020-2022)

Credentialed Providers	2020	2021	2022
Total number of Certified Employment Support Professionals (CESPs)	202	207	184
Total number of OLTL credentialed employment service provider entities	75	84	92

## Enhancing supports and decreasing reliance on sheltered employment

Employment First policy is focused on supporting individuals with disabilities in attaining employment in workplaces with a diverse workforce and competitive wages and benefits. Some individuals with disabilities are employed in sheltered work environments with subminimum wages. An important objective of Employment First is to continue to implement Section 511 of WIOA (which is intended to limit the payment of subminimum wage to people with disabilities using special wage certificates under Section 14c of the Fair Labor Standards Act) to support individuals receiving services in sheltered work who want to pursue CIE. Using a person-centered approach, OVR provides career counseling sessions to individuals in sheltered workshops on the benefits of CIE and how to use OVR services.

Table 21 - OVR 511 Report

OVR 511 Report SFY 2021-22 to date	SFY 20-21	SFY 21-22
511 Sessions Conducted	1,056	315
Session Attendees	3,762	1,787
Number of Attendees Interested in OVR Services	128	115
Median Hourly Wage of 511 Customers placed into Competitive Integrated Employment	\$7.50	N/A

In addition, ODP and OVR jointly contracted with nationally-recognized experts to hold provider transformation leadership “boot camp” sessions that provided training to help providers of facility-based services transform their business model to one that supports CIE. In 2021, ODP and OVR funded another round of training and technical assistance for facility-based providers on business model transformation. Executive leadership from 23 Community Participation Support providers attended a free three-day training that was conducted by three nationally-recognized experts. Fifteen providers that attended the training were selected to participate in regional learning collaboratives facilitated by a national expert to assist providers in developing and implementing a plan to take concrete and

targeted measures to make the transformation. The regional collaboratives have been meeting regularly in the fall and winter of 2021.

## Improving workforce system collaboration and employer engagement

The [state WIOA plan](#) outlines the goals and activities for the workforce system so that Pennsylvanians can access a one-stop system of coordinated employment and training services at their local PA CareerLink® office or on the PA CareerLink® website. The plan includes federal core partners (including OVR), state required partners, and local partners. Many people with disabilities who enter the workforce system are receiving services through OVR, while others may not be; the need for OVR services by people with disabilities varies. Efforts should continue to be made within the workforce system to ensure collaboration between partners to advance inclusive environments and services, and co-enrollment in applicable services when appropriate.

- **PA CareerLink® office accessibility:** Over the past years, OVR started conducting accessibility reviews of PA CareerLink® offices. While these were on pause during the pandemic, OVR has now completed reviews of the 51 *comprehensive* PA CareerLink® offices and provided recommendations to the facilities on how to be more accessible to individuals with disabilities. Reviews of *affiliate* PA CareerLink® sites will begin in 2023. OVR continues to work with partners at PA Workforce to continue this effort and expand services to people with disabilities.
- **Training for WIOA partner programs:** The WIOA state plan includes a goal to increase training to all front-line staff on available program offerings to allow for informed internal and external referrals to additional services and facilitate serving the holistic needs of the customer.
- **Employer support and engagement:** OVR supports local business services staff membership and the participation of local chambers of commerce and Society for Human Resource Management organizations. The OVR Business Services Division is fully staffed and provides consultive services to OVR offices and employers regarding how to engage with OVR and onboard new employees with disabilities. The Business Services Division focuses on creating employment opportunities, establishing Work Based Learning Experiences, pre-apprenticeships, apprenticeships, and other employment opportunities.
- **Workforce system Participation (PYS 2018-2021):** The following graphs show the number and percent of participants in several core and partner WIOA programs who self-identify as having a disability.

*Note: The full display of the following images can be found on the [data dashboard](#).*

Figure 2 - Individuals with a Disability who Receive Services from PA CareerLink® Workforce Programs

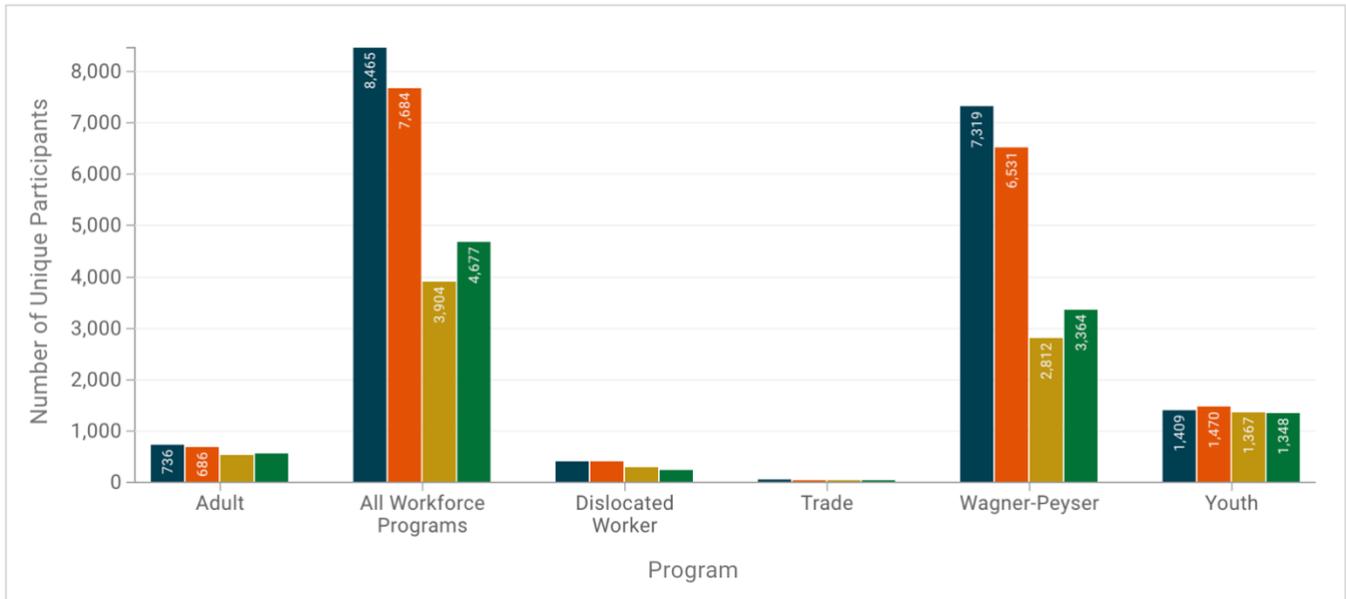


Figure 3 - Percent of Individuals with a Disability who Receive Services from PA CareerLink® Workforce Programs

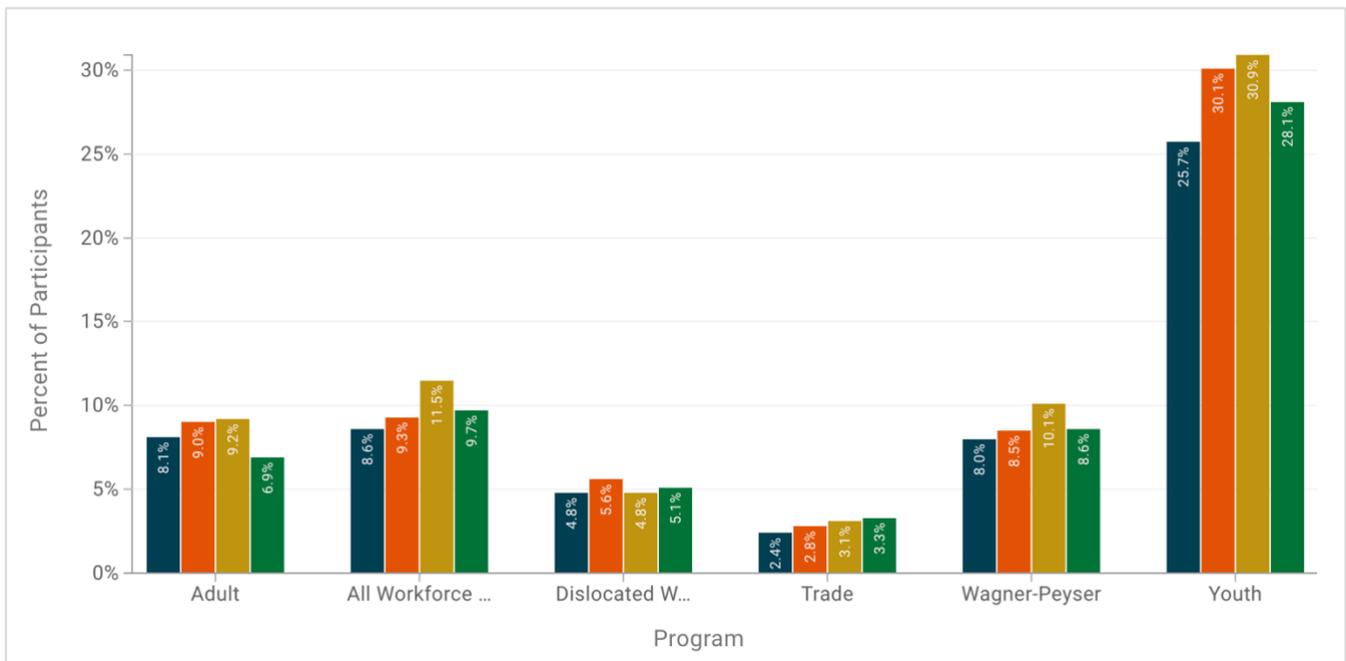


Figure 4 - Employment Outcomes of Individuals who Completed PA CareerLink® Workforce Programs

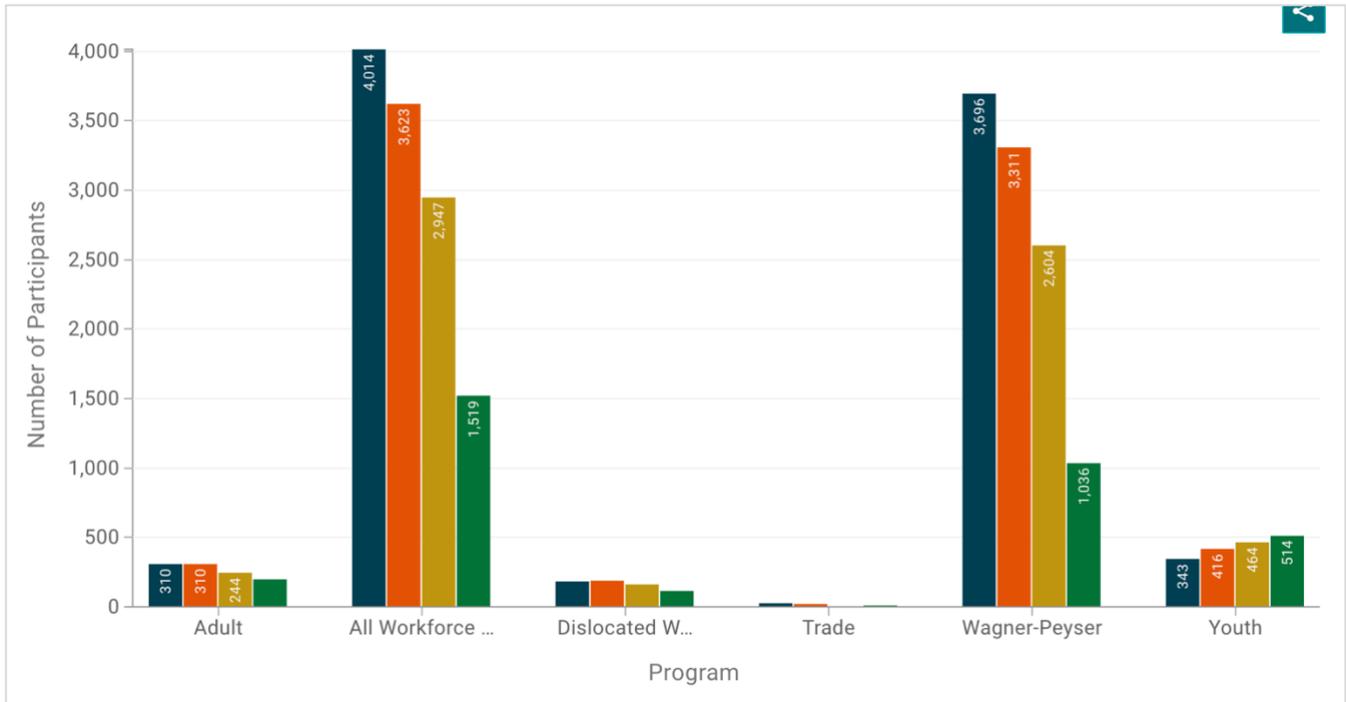
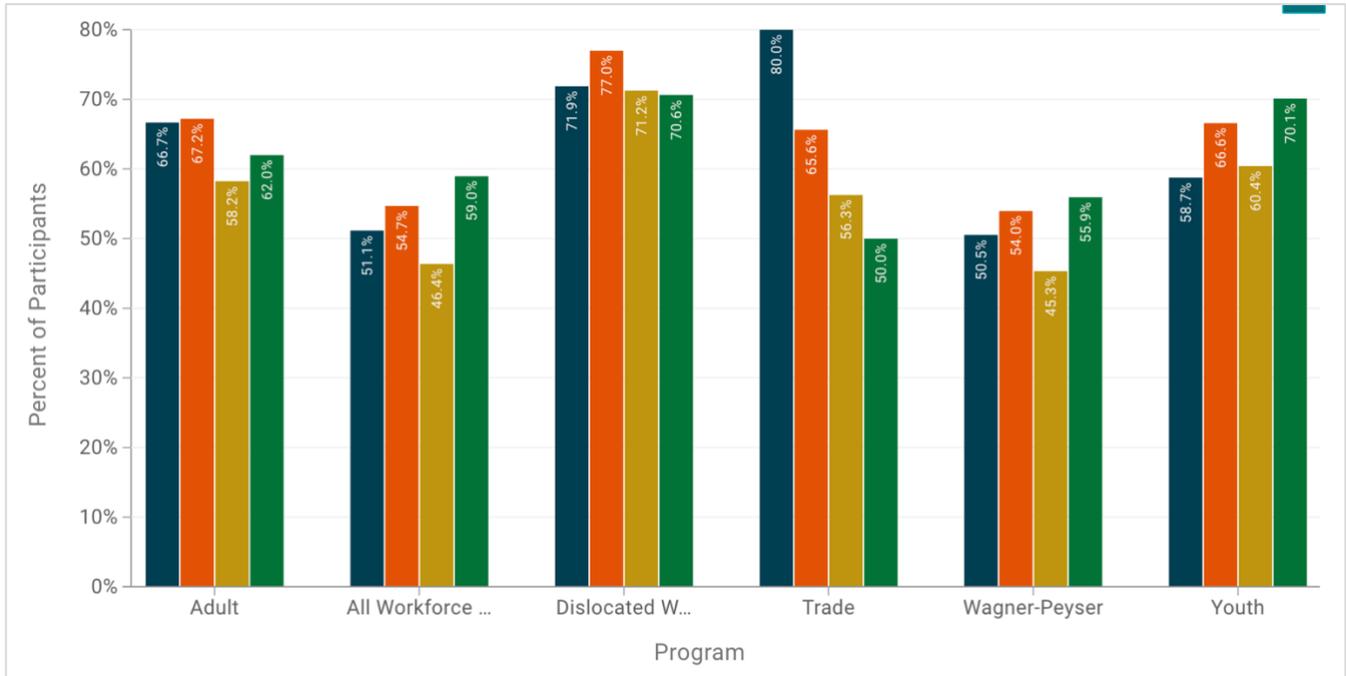


Figure 5 - Employment Outcomes Percent of Individuals who Completed PA CareerLink® Workforce Programs



## Advancing inclusivity in commonwealth employment

With nearly 70,000 employees, the commonwealth is Pennsylvania's second largest employer. The commonwealth has taken several steps to lead by example and to be an employer of choice through advancing inclusive workplace practices and reducing barriers. The Office of Administration's (OA) Employment First Steering Committee meets throughout the year to assess progress in hiring and retention to increase hiring and support of people with disabilities. In addition, the Disability Recruiter continues to connect and network with various organizations and schools to advertise open jobs and recruit job candidates with disabilities. Notable efforts in 2022 include:

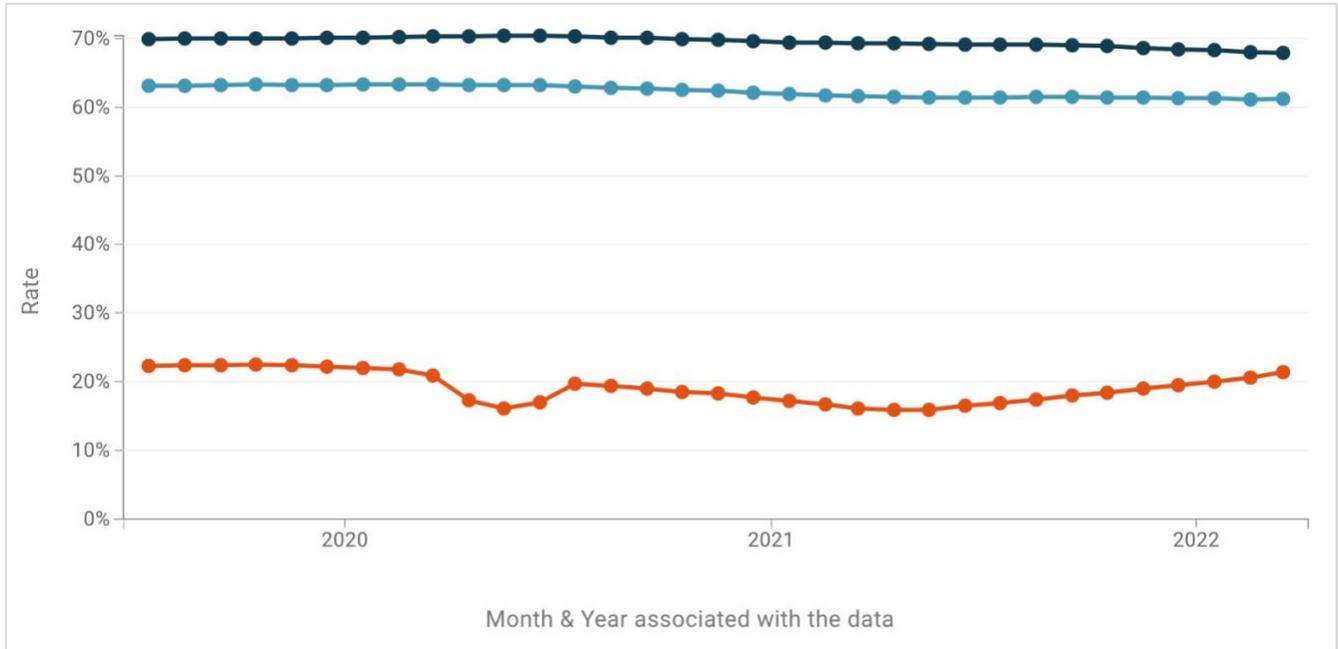
- **New hiring data collection:** Effective November 2020, job applicants can choose to self-identify as having a disability. This helps inform and assess the effectiveness of commonwealth recruitment efforts for people with a disability.
  - Preliminary data from November 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021 tentatively indicated that 8% of applicants who completed an employment application identified as a person with a disability.
  - During SFY 2021-22, 6% of hired applicants participating in the survey (including internal and external candidates) voluntarily identified as having a disability. OA also added self-identification to the commonwealth's online onboarding program effective June 2021. For SFY 2021-22, 5% of the onboarded new hires participating in the survey voluntarily identified as having a disability.
- **Customized employment pilot:** OA and OVR continue to pilot the application of customized employment concepts within state government. Several positions were identified to develop a customized job description. As of January 24, 2022, The Department of Revenue hired an Employment First worker to perform tax processing work in a permanent, full time role. OVR continues to work with OA on expanding this concept and creating other opportunities within the commonwealth.
- **Expansion of internship program:** The successful internship program which started in 2018 and served 18 students was on pause in 2020 and 2021, but resumed in 2022 with 30 interns in Philadelphia, Harrisburg, and Pittsburgh. OVR and OA plan to replicate this program again in 2023 and will also include Johnstown.
- **Accessibility Center for Excellence:** OA established the Accessibility Center for Excellence which includes the Chief Accessibility Officer in addition to several newly created positions (as mentioned in the 2022 Key Highlights section of this report). A FUSION license is now available for unlimited users that gives employees access to JAWs, ZoomText and FUSION (combined screen reader/magnifier) as an accommodation and a testing tool.

## Increasing Labor Force Participation Rate for people with disabilities

The Labor Force Participation rate includes people who are currently working and those who are actively looking for work. The participation rate for people with disabilities falls significantly below the participation rate for people without disabilities. All Employment First efforts are geared towards increasing the labor force participation rate of people with disabilities through various efforts. These

data are Pennsylvania-specific and are sourced from the U.S. Census' Current Population Survey (CPS). *Specific percentages and additional information can be found on the data dashboard.*

Figure 6 - [People with/without Disabilities Participation Rate shown with PA Total Labor Force Participation Rate](#)



## Looking Forward – Developing an Updated Framework

In reviewing the 3-year plan and subsequent annual reports, the Cabinet determined that many of the recommendations and associated goals were either met, integrated into day-to-day operations, were actively in progress, or were no longer primary areas of focus. The Cabinet committed to utilizing time in 2022 to evaluate progress, revise program outcome goals, and develop an updated recommendation framework for 2023 and beyond. Two experiences over the past year largely informed the development of a new framework for state-level advancement of Employment First priorities:

### 1. Employment First Oversight Commission (EFOC) Engagement

Each year, the EFOC is tasked with developing its own annual report to gauge progress on the goals and recommendations it has put forward to measure Employment First outcomes. The development of SMART goals is challenging, particularly for Employment First which covers multiple program areas within multiple state agencies, each of which may be governed by a different set of laws, regulations, policies, and processes. A small workgroup of EFOC members and agency staff met for a series of sessions in the Spring of 2022 to review the EFOC's goals together, allowing agencies to better understand the intention of the goals, and the EFOC to better understand the data and considerations agencies have shared over the past several years. While

the primary purpose of the workgroup sessions was to support the EFOC as they continue to meet their requirements under Act 36, the sessions also provided a chance to reflect on shared priority areas that could inform an updated set of recommendations from the Cabinet.

## **2. Summer Planning Sessions**

With the 3-year plan period coming to a close, the Cabinet also engaged the Office of Performance Through Excellence (OPE) to facilitate a multiday planning session to support Employment First efforts. Employment First leaders from agencies represented on the Cabinet convened in person for a collaborative discussion focused less on the daily tasks of their agencies and more towards the high-level outcomes desired in an effort to support people with disabilities. OPE utilized an iterative process of gathering input and reflecting together as a large group to identify a collective statewide vision and mission for Employment First. From there, the group identified priority areas of focus. Small groups representing each of the areas brainstormed outcomes and data sets that could potentially show progress on those outcomes.

The framework, found in Appendix B, serves as a state-level overview and recommendation for what Employment First efforts aim to accomplish, including major focus areas, related goals, and associated broad outcomes. The framework can be used as a guide for further developing agency-specific efforts, and for reporting specific initiatives leading to the overall mission and vision of Employment First in Pennsylvania.

# Appendix A – Websites and Additional Resources

## **I. Employment First Policy and Related Plans**

- a. [Act 36 of 2018](#)
- b. [Act 26 of 2016](#)
- c. [Act 36 Three-Year Plan](#)
- d. [WIOA Combined State Plan \(2020\)](#)

## **II. Reports and Data Dashboard**

- a. [Employment First Policy Page on the Department of Labor & Industry Website](#)
- b. [Employment First Data Dashboard](#)
- c. [Employment First Data Dashboard – OVR Page](#)
- d. [Act 26 Reports \(Transition Activities\)](#)

## **III. Employment and Supportive Services Information**

- a. [We Can Work Page on the Department of Human Services Website](#)
- b. [Secondary Transition Website](#)
- c. [Connecting for Employment Video Series and Roadmap](#)
- d. [ODP Everyday Lives Framework](#)
- e. [Charting the Lifecourse Framework](#)
- f. [Employment First for Individuals with Disabilities \(pa.gov\)](#)
- g. [Employment First for Employers](#)
- h. [Employment First for Providers](#)

## Appendix B – State-Level Framework

# **Employment First (Act 36 of 2018)**

Statewide Strategic Framework

And Recommendations

Office of the Governor

January 11, 2023

## Table of Contents

Employment First Overview.....	29
Advancing Competitive Integrated Employment.....	29
Strategic Planning.....	29
Employment First State-Level Framework Snapshot .....	30
Employment First State-Level Framework .....	31
Mission.....	31
Vision .....	31
Core Values .....	31
Employment First Policy Priorities.....	32
Focus Area One: Families and Communities .....	32
Focus Area Two: Vocational Partners.....	33
Focus Area Three: Employers.....	34
Focus Area Four: Individuals with Disabilities .....	35
Outcome Measures .....	35
Additional Recommendations and Looking Forward.....	36
Appendix A – Outcome Measure Brainstorming (by area of focus) .....	37

# Employment First Overview

## Advancing Competitive Integrated Employment

Pennsylvania is committed to ensuring that employment initiatives and workplace environments embrace inclusivity and diversity in support of a healthy, vibrant economy for all. For individuals with disabilities seeking meaningful work, this commitment is secured in Pennsylvania law through Act 36 of 2018 that designates competitive integrated employment (CIE) as the first and preferred outcome of publicly funded education, training, employment and related services, and long-term services and supports available. Also known as the Employment First policy, Act 36 charges relevant state agencies with providing services that connect individuals with differing intellectual or physical abilities to empowering and diverse workplaces. As a result, state programs and services across multiple agencies have been implemented to support a seamless transition to integrated employment opportunities with fair wages and inclusive practices.

## Strategic Planning

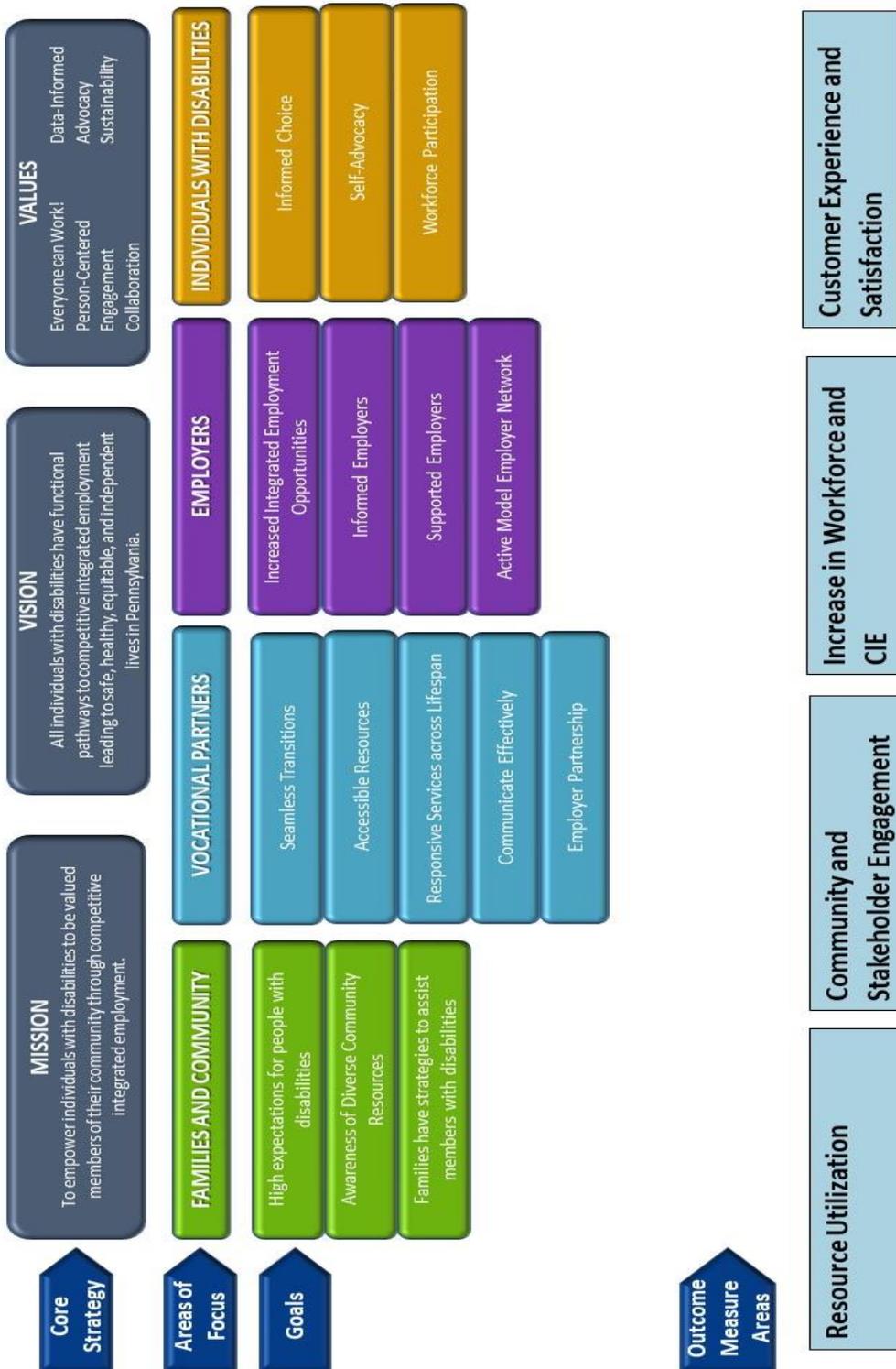
The Governor's Cabinet for People with Disabilities released [interagency priorities and recommendations in 2018](#) in accordance with Act 36 that served as the initial three-year plan to firmly establish Employment First policy across agency services and to guide programmatic developments to advance CIE. Annual reports, found on the [Employment First website](#), have captured core areas of progress that have been made since that time.

While many of the original recommendations from 2018 continue as foundational priorities of Employment First, the Cabinet recognizes the unique era of post-pandemic employment and the continuously evolving nature of workforce development, both of which call for ongoing evaluation and strategic planning updates. In the summer of 2022, Employment First leaders from key state agencies convened to review the initial plan, evaluate work to date, and re-establish the vision of Employment First in PA.

The group conducted planning sessions to develop an updated state-level framework - building on the strengths of the original plan as well as recommendations from the Employment First Oversight Commission - to guide Employment First efforts going forward. In collaboration with the Governor's Office of Performance through Excellence, the group utilized an iterative process to identify a collective mission, vision, and values as initiatives are implemented and as needs evolve. The resulting framework also includes four main area of focus, broad goals and recommendations, and proposed outcome measure areas. These framework components provide a foundation that agencies can use to guide their programming efforts and which the future administration can build upon.

# Employment First State-Level Framework Snapshot

## RESULTS EMPLOYMENT FIRST



# Employment First State-Level Framework

## Mission

The mission is what state agencies aim to achieve on a daily basis through employment service delivery and implementation.

*Employment First efforts shall empower individuals with disabilities to be valued members of their community through competitive integrated employment.*

## Vision

The vision depicts the outcomes achieved that indicate attainment of the core mission of Employment First.

*All individuals with disabilities have functional pathways to competitive integrated employment leading to safe, healthy, equitable, and independent lives in Pennsylvania.*

## Core Values

Several core values inform the perspective and work of the state agencies charged with implementing Employment First priorities.

**Everyone Can Work!:** We believe every person has unique skills, experiences, and abilities that will enhance their lives and the community through competitive integrated employment.

**Person-Centered:** Keep the unique strengths, experiences, and choices of individuals at the forefront, empowering them to drive our work.

**Engagement:** Continuous process of sharing information, learning, and allowing feedback to inform our work.

**Collaboration:** Ensure an integrated, seamless system of support for all customers by leveraging interagency and community partners.

**Data-Informed:** Develop policies, services, and investments to have a positive impact based on information from multiple data sources.

**Advocacy:** Shift outdated mindsets and systems to ensure individuals with disabilities are seen as active community members and partners.

**Sustainability:** Our efforts, services, and investments create long-lasting systemic change and continuous support.

# Employment First Policy Priorities

## Focus Area One: Families and Communities

### **1.A. Cultivate high expectations for people with disabilities**

A first step in improving employment outcomes for people with disabilities is setting expectations and changing the culture so that individuals, their families, and the broader community know that education and employment pathways are available and attainable for people with a range of abilities. As individuals with disabilities navigate various systems, there should be an expectation of positive outcomes involving competitive integrated employment as part of an everyday life.

### **1.B. Increase awareness of diverse community resources**

Many resources exist to support individuals with employment goals. Individuals and their families must be aware of and know how to navigate these local resources available to eliminate barriers and support CIE. Agencies should identify effective outreach efforts to date, explore innovative strategies to reach people where they are, and ensure they have outreach processes with a focus on resource awareness.

Transportation resources, Benefits Counseling services, and Medical Assistance for People with Disabilities have emerged as priority areas of focus for resource awareness. For example, all 67 counties have a shared ride door-to-door service at a free or reduced cost, captured by [an interactive transit map](#) compatible with a variety of accessibility devices. [The Persons with Disabilities Program](#), in particular, was created with a primary goal of transporting people to integrated employment. In 2021, Governor Wolf signed Act 69 expanding MAWD eligibility. L&I's website for [Employment First](#) and the DHS [We Can Work](#) website include links to information and resources. Education and outreach on these resources is essential.

### **1.C. Equip families with strategies to assist family members with disabilities**

As individuals with disabilities navigate various service systems leading to meaningful employment, Pennsylvania does not want to lose sight of supporting family members who may be integral to the person's success. Families should be made aware of resources available to help educate them about their family member's disability, as well as the pathways available to postsecondary education and CIE. Relevant trainings that incorporate models on best practices should be made available to families interested in learning more about how they can support their family member or access services.

A key example is the integration of the [Charting the LifeCourse](#) principles into service delivery systems by providing access to resources and trainings for families impacted by disabilities. Expanding the educational opportunities available to families across the state can both clarify myths and also instill a greater sense of confidence in supporting their family member in attaining inclusive employment.

## Focus Area Two: Vocational Partners

### **2.A. Facilitate seamless transitions**

Given the many variables that impact an individual's career path over the lifespan, individuals may be served by multiple systems that may be housed in separate agencies and offices. This dynamic can result in multiple phone calls, varying rules and responsibilities, and a disjointed experience. To increase access and improve customer experience, the Cabinet recommends explicit strategies that incorporate collaborative planning and warm introductions between service providers to provide individualized wrap-around support to each customer.

### **2.B. Ensure resources are accessible**

The Cabinet recommends partnering with providers to ensure accessibility standards are met, both for physical locations as well as relevant materials and technology platforms. Resources should also be available in locations that reach the populations who can benefit; this could include locations such as healthcare offices, education settings, and county assistance offices. A focus should be placed on reaching rural communities that may lack broadband access or typical supports found in more populous areas.

### **2.C. Responsive services across the lifespan**

The Employment First Cabinet aims to set expectations and prepare individuals for inclusive education and employment starting with early childhood through adult life. No matter the age of entry to vocational services, responsiveness of providers in a timely manner is a key priority. Part of improving service delivery and responsiveness includes ensuring adequate quantity of qualified staff available to meet demand. State agencies and external partners both experience staffing challenges that must be addressed to improve the customer experience. An analysis of provider need across the state could be conducted on a regular basis to identify where resources may most be needed and to either reallocate or invest in resources in those areas.

The Cabinet also recommends examining process improvements that can be made to resolve any administrative barriers customers experience in accessing the services requested. State agencies charged with implementing Employment First should make specific process improvements to improve the data sharing and communication between offices to further expedite service delivery and improve customer experience.

### **2.D. Communicate effectively**

As the Commonwealth implements person-centered employment services, communication between partners and with the participant drives the success in timely delivery of services and attainment of CIE. An individual's point of entry in the service delivery system may evolve toward specialized areas that are offered by different community organizations or offices in state agencies. The partnerships between service providers should include timely, thorough, and on-going communication to ensure that customer needs are prioritized. Improved communication between internal and external service providers helps alleviate the burden customers may experience with having to repeatedly discuss their situation with several entities to receive the service(s) being requested.

### **2.E. Strengthen provider-employer partnerships**

Successful employment services should ultimately lead to a job with an inclusive employer. While employment service providers help people prepare for and maintain meaningful employment, the direct connection to and participation of employers is a critical element of robust workforce efforts. Providers can connect with employers to learn about their workforce needs, while helping employers connect to potential job candidates. They can also provide education about accommodations and other support and resources available, including clarifying myths about employing people with disabilities and highlighting the benefits. Agencies can provide support to providers for connecting with employers or create incentives for providers to partner directly with employers who are committed to inclusive hiring.

## Focus Area Three: Employers

### **3.A. Increased integrated employment opportunities**

The move away from sheltered workshops that pay subminimum wages requires there to be ample job opportunities with employers who offer employment that meets CIE criteria. The integrated employment opportunities that currently exist should be expanded to encompass a wide scope of job types and proximity to jobseekers across the state. The Cabinet is committed to employing programs and technical assistance to create more integrated environments for individuals with disabilities to call their workplace. By doing so, we can continue decreasing the number of individuals participating in sheltered workshops and increasing competitive, integrated employment outcomes.

### **3.B. Informed employers**

For integrated employment to be the standard outcome and for more employers to ensure inclusive practices in their daily operations, employers need to be informed about inclusive hiring practices and supportive policies and processes that can help their workforce thrive. Employers should also be aware of the technical assistance and support available to meet these goals. The Cabinet recommends establishing a communications plan or campaign to inform employers about resources to assist them in supporting their workers with varying abilities.

### **3.C. Supported employers**

As employers become aware of the resources available to them, they should also be able to report a sense of confidence in having what they need to successfully hire and support a diverse workforce. Continuous feedback loops should be open so employers can communicate needs or additional areas of support, and agencies have easy access to provide updated resources, examples of best practices, or other important materials that may support employers.

### **3.D. Active model employer network**

Many employers do an excellent job at integrating inclusive practices in their daily operations so all workers feel supported and productivity is maximized. Development of a model employer network, based on a set of established criteria, could facilitate peer-to-peer support and encourage other employers to get involved. The state should also continue its own efforts to meet model employer criteria.

## Focus Area Four: Individuals with Disabilities

### 4.A. Informed Choice

The individuals that seek and access employment services are the top priority in making sure there are functional pathways to employment. The Cabinet places a high level of importance on making sure individuals are appropriately informed about the range of services and programs that are available to support pathways to employment. Simultaneously, it's also important to support each customer's right to choose the path to competitive integrated employment that suits their unique situation and preferences.

### 4.B. Self-Advocacy

Individuals are the experts in their lived experience and in determining the most helpful forms of support for their needs. Employment services should include coaching or training to empower participants in identifying their needs and in confidently taking an active role in their employment planning. The Cabinet also recommends that more outreach with the field be conducted to ensure that the voices of individuals with disabilities are regularly incorporated into planning processes.

### 4.C. Workforce Participation

The success of Employment First efforts hinges on the impact they have on competitive integrated employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities statewide. The Cabinet aims to connect more individuals with disabilities to integrated employment opportunities with family-sustaining wages, resulting in a growth in the labor force participation rate. The public-facing data dashboard on the Employment First website will show a year-to-year comparison of the workforce participation rate to evidence the growth and meet this goal.

## Outcome Measures

Outcome measures are indicators of how progress is being made towards the goals. *Appendix A* contains brainstormed lists developed in the planning sessions that may offer specific opportunities for measuring progress. Many of the proposed measures that were captured under each area of focus may address multiple goals across focus areas, such as labor force participation rate. At a statewide level, to reduce duplication, these outcome measures can be reorganized into the following four categories:

1. **Resource Utilization:** This category includes indicators that may show if individuals, families, providers, and employers are actively using resources. These indicators speak to goals of ensuring resources are available, accessible, and that stakeholders are aware of them.
2. **Community and Stakeholder Engagement:** This category includes indicators that may show levels of system engagement across system partners.
3. **Increase in Workforce and Competitive Integrated Employment:** This category includes indicators that show levels of participation in economic activity and other traditional employment information such as wages.
4. **Customer Satisfaction:** This category includes indicators that show how customers utilizing services feel about their experience and if they are receiving good customer service within their relevant service pathway. Because employment participation is an individual journey, these

measures are important to understand if a participant feels they are getting value out of their services, making it more likely to continue with services or even recommend them to others.

## Additional Recommendations and Looking Forward

In addition to the goals and recommendations listed above, the Cabinet has additional recommendations pertaining to the process of ongoing advancement of Employment First:

1. **Continuous engagement with the Employment First Oversight Commission to determine shared priorities and goals:** the Commission, established under the Act, is composed of external experts who provide additional insights from a variety of perspectives that help inform and guide the work of the Cabinet.
2. **Use and expansion of the Employment First Data Dashboard:** the Employment First data dashboard was developed to increase access and transparency to data showing participation of people with disabilities in employment services and in CIE. Agencies should ensure a process that includes regular updates to the dashboard, and strategic additions of data elements.
3. **Continued communication to the field:** While the Cabinet's oversight is specific to agencies under the Governor's jurisdiction, Act 36 applies to a wide variety of organizations. Efforts should continue to share information with providers and encourage services aligned with Employment First requirements.

The Cabinet for People with Disabilities integrates the perspectives of program experts, external partners, and relevant data into the development of programs and services aimed at meeting individualized needs and goals. The core values of Employment First are interwoven throughout daily agency processes and the development of long-term goals that address gaps and disparities. Since there are many stakeholders with a vested interest in Employment First, the Cabinet ensured that the four focus areas of the strategic framework capture the populations involved in various facets of employment services and support. Under each focus area, key goals are noted to depict what the Cabinet hopes to achieve in supporting the providers and customers leading to supportive, competitive integrated work environments.

# Appendix A – Outcome Measure Brainstorming (by area of focus)

## Focus Area One: Families and Community

- Increase in labor force participation
- Increase in job satisfaction
- Family sustaining wages and benefits
- Increase in jobs obtained in high demand fields
- Increase in utilization of existing programs and successful outcomes
- Increase in number of informational materials distributed – include tracking Career Link access with site links
- Culturally competent and accessible resources in multiple languages and locations
- Disaggregated data showing populations reached, particularly those underserved
- Creation of opportunities for families to access information
- Implementing home visitors, mentorship models for early intervention
- Equip families with how to communicate with disabled family members (some way to measure)
- Utilization of transportation services requested by family members (other services beyond transportation)

## Focus Area Two: Vocational Partners

- Ultimate measure of success is subcategories of individuals in CIE
- Number of trips for employment service measured in transportation space
- Number of services rendered
- Customer satisfaction – individuals and employers
- Length of time from referral of service to employment
- Number of people accessing services
- Number of providers

### **Focus Area Three: Employers**

- Number of individuals with disabilities that are employed
  - Newly hired or increase
  - Number of employers using public financial support (Tax Credits)
- Number of Model Employers in the Network (employer support)
  - Industries participating... which are missing
- Number of employers engaged
  - Web hits?
- Increased labor force participation rate for individuals with disabilities
- Increased ROI for Employers
  - Recruitment and time to hire
  - Retention, productivity
  - Partner supports
  - Satisfaction survey
- Number of business/employers served through OVR/PA CareerLink®

### **Focus Area Four: Individuals with Disabilities**

- People are aware of resources, pathways, and benefits of work
- Web clicks, social media
- Number of trainings
- Customer satisfaction surveys
- Materials in plain language
- Number of customer contacts
- Increase use of services and resources
- Increase goals on plans within programs
- Survey
- Active participation and confidence to lead services and ask for help/accommodations
  - Number of accommodations
    - Could start internally with PA
  - Increase in service participation
- Number of resources to help improve self-advocacy efforts
- Number of customer-initiated contacts (calls received)
- Engagement with Advocacy Groups
- Labor Force Participation Rate Increase individuals with disabilities (number of people working or looking for work)
- Employment Rate (number of people actually working)
- Average wages
- People transitioning from sub-minimum wage to CIE
- Post-secondary educational opportunities/number of participants in post-high school training or schooling