



January Grassroots Group Summary

Employment First Grassroots Group Meeting: Updates from Tallahassee

Suggested Audience: Individuals and Family Members

Summary

In this presentation, we heard from Diane Vacca and Vicki Underwood from the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity. The presenters walked us through how to use the [Unique Abilities Partner Program](#). They explained how to nominate "businesses that are committed to providing career and financial opportunities to individuals with unique abilities and to assisting organizations that support them." They also showed us how to find businesses that have been selected in a specific community.

We also heard from Jan Pearce from the Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation about the implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Ms. Pearce specifically discussed Section 511 of WIOA, and opportunities for individuals who earn less than minimum wage.

What is the Unique Abilities Partner Program?

The Florida Unique Abilities Partner Program recognizes businesses that are committed to providing career and financial opportunities to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and to assisting organizations that support them. Participating businesses demonstrate their dedication to strengthening communities and the economy by helping these Floridians with untapped talents become more independent, and by partnering with other businesses, organizations, and state resources in this endeavor.

- **Fostering Independence:** The program strengthens Florida's economy and workforce by giving a talented but untapped group of Floridians who want to work more opportunities to do so.
- **Reducing Unemployment:** The program helps reduce unemployment among those who are willing, ready, and able to contribute to our workforce by raising awareness about the economic and social benefits of employing these individuals.

- **Connecting Businesses:** Participation in the program opens the door for businesses to network and partner with each other, fostering new opportunities and collaborations.
- **Leading Responsibly:** Participating partners send a strong message of social responsibility to their communities, and to current and prospective customers.

What is the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)?

You can find out more about WIOA here: <https://www.doleta.gov/wioa/>

What is Section 511?

Section 511 of WIOA puts new requirements on the payment of subminimum wages for individuals with disabilities, and establishes expectations for informed choice.

Learn more here:

<https://www.dol.gov/odep/pdf/WIOALimitationsUseOfSubminimumWage.pdf>

What this program and this law mean for individuals and families

The Unique Abilities Partner Program shows individuals and families what businesses are good places for people with disabilities to work. This could be important in finding work for family members with disabilities.

Section 511 of WIOA is important because it provides additional opportunities for individuals and families to learn about and experience community employment without having to make a formal change to their service plan.

How can I contact the presenters?

For questions about the Unique Abilities Partner Program:

Diane Vacca: Diane.Vacca@deo.myflorida.com

Vickie Underwood: Vickie.Underwood@deo.myflorida.com

For questions about WIOA/Section 511:

Jan Pearce: jan.pearce@vr.fldoe.org

For more questions about the Grassroots Group series, please contact:

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