



Employment First Florida Success Stories: Employment Services

Florida's plan for state agencies to enhance employment opportunities for people with disabilities

The Employment First Florida Success Stories Series highlights examples of innovative employment services, creative state agency employment practices, and individual employment success stories in Florida. The series is a product of the EmployMe1st project, a joint project of the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston, and the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services.

Description of the practice: The Florida Department of Management Services (DMS) serves as the business arm of Florida state government by providing workforce and business operational support to Florida's state agencies, also known as the State Personnel System (SPS). One of DMS' nine divisions, Human Resource Management (HRM), serves the SPS by providing lawful, effective, and efficient human resource programs and services that attract, develop, retain, and reward a high-performance workforce. One of the ways HRM supports the SPS is by providing training, templates, roundtable discussions, and other resources that assist state agencies in their efforts to recruit and retain ethnic minorities, women, veterans, and individuals with disabilities.

Since the adoption of Florida's Employment First policy in 2016, people with disabilities are officially one of these population groups, and agencies are required to remove any restrictions to potential qualified candidates with disabilities competing for open positions. HRM has set forth an enterprise (cross-agency) approach to promote the employment of individuals with disabilities, which includes detailed procedures to enhance the inclusiveness of people with disabilities.

HRM worked in collaboration with several state agencies and community organizations to develop strategies geared toward increasing the employment and retention of individuals with disabilities. The workgroup consisted of the Department of Education's Divisions of Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind Services, the Agency for Persons with Disabilities, the Department of Economic Opportunity, the Executive Office of the Governor and community partners such as the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, the Florida Alliance for Assistive Services and Technology, Respect of Florida and the Able Trust.

The groups work focused on internships, on-the-job training, mentoring, unpaid work experience and situational assessments. Also, the workgroup addressed issues surrounding

training, funding reasonable accommodations, access to appropriate technologies and accessibility of physical and virtual workplaces.

HRM used information gathered from the workgroup and other sources to develop training programs for human resource professionals and hiring managers on hiring, retaining and including individuals with disabilities and created a website containing resource materials for use by the agencies. The division also trained SPS agency human resource professionals on the development of affirmative action programs and provided a guide in the form of an enterprise plan for agencies to use as a resource in the development of their agency specific plan to promote employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

The enterprise plan offers detailed guidance in carrying out four major goals: (1) increasing the recruitment of people with disabilities; (2) increasing retention and development of employees with disabilities; (3) facilitating the return to work of employees who have acquired a disability through illness or injury; and (4) ensuring management accountability for employment of individuals with disabilities.

Many different activities are suggested relating to each goal. The suggested steps for completing each of these activities are carefully laid out. Each activity is also assigned at least one management-level individual responsible for completing it, a timeframe for carrying it out and expected performance outcomes. Although many activities are assigned ultimately to each agency's Equal Employment Opportunity officer and other managers, it is frequently expected that these managers will reach out to employees at other levels to communicate the agency's efforts to employ and retain individuals with disabilities and enroll everyone in reaching the agency's goals.

The DMS is firm in communicating that a commitment from the management level of each agency is critical to the accomplishment of these goals. The fourth and final goal - to ensure management accountability - illustrates this commitment from upper levels in the agency. The activities for this goal focus on designating a senior-level official at each agency to ensure that agency hiring goals are met; ensuring that managers are educated about arranging for job accommodations; and addressing accessibility through policies to improve access to physical spaces and training and advancement programs.

Lessons learned:

Agency plans were finalized in January of 2017. HRM predicts that it will be at least a year before data will be available to share about what the impact of the plan has been on employment for people with disabilities with the state of Florida. While the data is not available this soon after implementation, the requirement that each state agency develop and implement an affirmative action plan to recruit and retain individuals with disabilities has triggered critical conversations regarding how to remove perceived barriers of employing those

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with disabilities and an increased awareness and appreciation of how employing individuals with disabilities improves the workplace. Meanwhile, the hope is that the plan will spur increases in employment at the state level and serve as a model for Florida's other sectors to enhance employment opportunities as well.

For more information, visit the [DMS](#) website.

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