

# Florida's Employment First Multi-Agency Long-Term Communications Plan

October 2014

This is a long-term communications plan as part of Florida's Employment First Initiative to advance employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. The plan was recommended by the Governor's Commission on Jobs for Floridians with Disabilities and adopted by the Employment Partnership Coalition, a collaborative group consisting of state agencies and organizations serving persons with disabilities. The purpose of the plan is to assist state and community partners in effectively communicating with employers to improve their perceptions and address other barriers confronting persons with disabilities. This long-term plan is intended to accomplish three objectives:

- 1) Increase employment opportunities for persons with disabilities by motivating employers to hire;
- 2) Promote a consistent message of awareness among employers about the value persons with disabilities bring to the workforce; and
- 3) Inform employers about the resources that are available to assist with their hiring needs, including the Abilities Work Web Portal and Help Desk.

These objectives were incorporated into the Employment First Initiative Interagency Cooperative Agreement, which was signed by nine state agencies and organizations (referred to as "Partners") and took effect July 1, 2014, and will be carried out in accordance with other collaborative initiatives to ensure a long-term commitment to improving employment outcomes of persons with disabilities over the next five years. This communications plan consists of the following sections designed to assist the Partners and other organizations:

- **The Message** –promoting a **consistent message** that resonates with employers and highlights the abilities individuals with disabilities bring to their workplace
- **The Delivery** – using tools to **deliver** this message to employers
- **Measurement and Evaluation** – **measuring** the success of these efforts.
- **Sustainability of this Communications Plan** – **sustainability** will be ensured through the Employment First Interagency Cooperative Agreement

## The Message

**Principle Message:**

Florida

# Abilities Work!

The principle message is simple, positive, and easily remembered. It gives employers a reason to hire people with disabilities, not just a command or plea for them to do so. Barriers to employment confronting persons with disabilities represent lost opportunities for employers looking for talent as part of their workforce. By focusing on the many benefits individuals with disabilities offer Florida's

economy, the principle message helps employers recognize why it is in *their interest* to hire individuals with disabilities, rather than simply telling them they should.

The message also advances the Abilities Work Web Portal and Help Desk. The Web Portal will be on the Employ Florida Marketplace website, which supports the state’s workforce system administered by the Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO). The Help Desk will offer a toll-free number administered by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and will be staffed by individuals who will respond to employer inquiries.

### **Supporting Messages:**

Abilities Work is the principle message; however, “Floridians with Disabilities Get the Job Done” may be used as a supporting message. This message was strongly supported by employers and persons with disabilities through pilot testing. This will largely be promoted through the use of success stories told by employers to illustrate the principle message, and inform employers where to find resources that can meet their hiring needs. This can be accompanied by the following supporting messages:

- Persons with disabilities, like everyone else, have innate abilities, skills, and qualities to contribute to our workforce and communities.
- Florida is focusing on the individuals’ abilities – not disabilities – and how those abilities can be matched with employers’ needs.
- Several employers in the state have shared the benefits and positive experiences that resulted from hiring individuals with disabilities. Success stories will be compiled and used to demonstrate these positive experiences.
- Information and resources are readily available throughout the state to assist employers in recruiting, hiring and retaining qualified candidates with disabilities:
  - Florida recently created the Abilities Work Web Portal for employers to easily access information and resources that can assist in meeting their hiring needs. This resource can be found at: **[INSERT WEB ADDRESS HERE]**
  - Resources available through the portal will provide valuable information related to recruitment, hiring procedures, accommodations, benefits, assistive technology, internships, and other related topics to help employers.
  - The Abilities Work Help Desk is staffed by professionals who will assist employers in finding qualified job seekers with disabilities and providing employment-related information. The Help Desk can be reached at: **[INSERT 800# HERE]**
- Job developers directly and indirectly representing a variety of state agencies and other organizations across the state are working together to match employer needs with qualified job seekers.

Success stories will **show**, not just **tell**, how Floridians with disabilities get the job done. While many misperceptions are centered around ADA compliance, added costs, or increased risks, the stories can address those concerns by showing how other employers have successfully overcome such fears and concerns. The success stories will also promote persons with disabilities as *individuals* (not as a group), and show how their unique strengths and talents have contributed to the workplace.

# The Delivery

This communications plan consists of a two-track method of delivering these messages to employers. Both tracks use a focused approach to target employers in several ways, and serve as a communications “toolkit” for the Partners and other organizations to use in their interactions with employers and business organizations.

## Track 1: Broadcast to Employers

This track provides for long-term identification and development of a variety of communication tools to reach employers on a wide scale. Many of these tools will be linked to the Abilities Work Web Portal to provide helpful information to employers. This track suggests use of multiple strategies to connect with the broad employer audience.

- Promotion of the Abilities Work Web Portal
  - The Partners will assist with developing, reviewing and promoting helpful information, including resources such as answers to frequently asked questions (FAQs), videos, links to other campaigns, contact information for local CareerSource centers, and the toll-free number to the Help Desk as part of their collaborative efforts. In some cases one entity may take the lead; in others multiple team members may assist.
  - The Partners will consider inviting trade groups and disability-related agencies and councils to include a link to the Abilities Work Web Portal on their individual websites, including, but not limited to, the Chamber of Commerce, the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), Associated Industries of Florida (AIF), Florida Retail Federation (FRF), The Able Trust, and the state Partners. This may easily be accomplished through development of a collaborative memorandum.
  - The Partners will develop a template that will provide general information on the Abilities Work Web Portal and Help Desk to ensure a consistent message among various agencies to promote this resource to employers when applicable.
- Presentations to business organizations and trade groups
  - The Partners will encourage their staff and providers who provide presentations to employers to target business associations, such as the Chambers, AIF, FRF, SHRM, Rotary, Kiwanis, Civitan, and other industry groups, to deliver these messages to a large and diverse employer audience.
  - The Partners will develop a presentation package that can be used by job developers, agency employment staff, and others with responsibility for conducting presentations to business organizations and trade groups.
    - The presentation should be developed in a manner that can be adjusted to the audience and time allotted for presenters.
    - This may also provide an opportunity for employers involved in these organizations to share their positive experiences working with persons with disabilities. Presenters may build methods into their presentation to solicit success stories and positive experiences that can be shared with the Partners for future use.
- News articles and op-ed pieces for media circulation
  - Partners are encouraged to consider writing and posting articles in newspapers, journals, and other business publications to reach employers through these respective venues.

- These articles may be developed collaboratively or independently.
    - These articles should be considered for circulation through social media outlets (discussed below).
  - Partners or their front-line staff who present at business organizations are encouraged to request opportunities to post articles in their newsletters or other publications.
- Printed material
  - Palm cards, brochures, flyers and other handouts should be developed to support the principle message and provide useful information, such as a link to the Abilities Work Web Portal and Help Desk phone number. This may be accomplished through work of the Employment First Collaborative Team and communications sub-committee or independently by Partners.
    - These resources may be disseminated by external affairs, communications and employment related staff among the Partners and other organizations, including their providers.
- Leverage universities, colleges and career and technical education centers
  - The Partners will reach out collaboratively to student disability services and placement offices as a venue to reach employers who are recruiting students for specific fields. This may be accomplished through development of a collaborative memorandum.
    - The Partners will encourage universities, colleges and career and technical education centers to communicate to employers about the abilities of students with disabilities during recruiting fairs, or individual recruiting requests from employers.
- Social Media Strategy
  - Presenters, employment specialists, communications departments, and other Partner staff will be encouraged to promote these messages through social media outlets, such as Facebook and Twitter, to reach employers who have an active presence in this arena.
  - Content is king – the more interesting, pithy or compelling the message is, the more likely it will be shared or retweeted organically. For example, presenters may tweet before and after their presentation to the Chamber, sharing about the experience, thanking them for the opportunity to present, engaging in dialogue, etc.
  - Using email alerts (such as Google and Twitter), Partner staff may find and share interesting stories, articles or other posts that reinforce the principle message through retweets or reposts. Hash tags may be used to organize several tweets around this effort, such as #AbilitiesWork.
  - The Partners are encouraged to use existing social media accounts of organizations participating in these efforts to provide hash tags, links and other information to help carry out this strategy.
- Press Releases
  - The Partners' communications departments will be encouraged to promote the messages through press releases highlighting success stories, both from the business perspective and individual's perspective when possible. They will tell a human story that everyone can relate to.
  - The Partners may also encourage employers to send out press releases about their efforts to hire people with disabilities and positive outcomes from the hiring efforts.

## **Track 2: Direct to Employers**

This track will support the local agencies and provider organizations that provide direct services to job seekers with disabilities to incorporate these strategies into their everyday communications with employers. Job developers should be encouraged to share how the abilities and skills of the individual match with the expectations of the job. This will reinforce the intent to understand the needs of the employer and how the job seeker's abilities can meet those needs.

### **Delivery of Messaging:**

This plan identifies two major groups who will be primarily responsible for delivering both tracks to the employer community: 1) the state agencies and their field staff who have responsibilities for interacting with employers; and 2) the front-line providers of service, including community provider organizations that assist job seekers with disabilities in securing employment.

The Partners' staff and organizations or front-line providers of services, including those with communication roles, will be encouraged to use the consistent messaging methods identified in this long-term communications plan. Critical personnel will include those with the following responsibilities:

- Developing and providing employer presentations
- Developing and posting or disseminating all forms of media related to the employment of individuals with disabilities
- Developing and providing non-paid and community-based vocational education and training, including internships
- Assessing, matching and developing jobs for individuals with disabilities in the community
- Placing, training and providing ongoing support to individuals with disabilities in the community

### **Training and Technical Assistance on Employer Outreach Efforts:**

The Partners will inform their state, regional, and local staff as well as community provider organizations and providers of contracted services of Florida's Employment First efforts and how they can get involved in these activities. The suggestions for messaging should easily be incorporated into existing training and technical assistance for staff with training and technical assistance responsibilities related to employment, particularly those with marketing and job development responsibilities.

## **Measurement and Evaluation**

It is difficult to attribute any change in the employment rate of persons with disabilities as a result of a specific effort or efforts, such as the Employment First movement or the related communications strategies. Realizing these challenges, the Partners will concentrate on a compilation of data (directly or indirectly related to these activities) to make certain observations. These data sources may include:

- Labor market statistics to examine the workforce participation and employment rates of persons with disabilities
- Data captured by the Florida Education and Training Placement Information Program (FETPIP) to track the progress of employment outcomes of persons with disabilities over a period of time (longitudinal data), and identify variables<sup>1</sup> that contribute to those outcomes (such as educational programs, certain job development/matching services, public assistance, etc.)

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<sup>1</sup> FETPIP collects follow-up data on individuals who have exited the K-20 Education system and/or have completed a work training program in the state. This information is collected through a "record linkage" technique that

- Additional long-term and direct data that may be captured by the Employment Partners, including data sources used by each Partner for annual reporting.

In addition to these sources, the Partners will use the following metrics to evaluate the communications activities outlined in this plan:

- Abilities Work Web Portal and Help Desk analytics
- Post-implementation evaluation of trainings and provisions of technical assistance
- Communication materials created and distributed to implement this plan
- Anecdotal information from employers obtained by agency field staff and provider organizations.

## **Sustainability of this Communications Plan**

The Partners signed the Employment First Initiative Interagency Cooperative Agreement in May of 2014, which is a five-year commitment among nine state agencies and organizations effective July 1, 2014 to improve the employment outcomes of persons with disabilities. The objectives of this communications plan were incorporated into the Interagency Cooperative Agreement, and the activities outlined in this plan will accompany the implementation of Florida's Employment First Initiative.

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combines individual identifiable data from numerous sources (using Social Security numbers), and is used to generate aggregate statistics that illustrate the experiences of student groups or participants after exiting a program.