

# Work Matters

A Framework for States on Workforce Development for People with Disabilities

## What is the Work Matters Policy Framework?

[\*Work Matters: A Framework for States on Workforce Development for People with Disabilities\*](#) offers state legislators 13 broad policy options, as well as real-life examples of innovative programs and policies, that states have successfully implemented to build strong, inclusive workforces. *Work Matters* is a culmination of intensive deliberation and research conducted by the National Task Force on Workforce Development for People with Disabilities. The Task Force was convened by the Council of State Governments (CSG) and the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) as part of the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy's (ODEP) State Exchange on Employment and Disability (SEED). *Work Matters* represents a commitment from the National Task Force to develop bi-partisan and state-driven policy options that are actionable and have broad appeal to a wide number of stakeholders. Each policy option contains a number of sub-options, suggested strategies and state examples that offer state policymakers an exceptional degree of customizability in considering disabilities employment policies.

## What is the National Task Force on Workforce Development for People with Disabilities?

Convened in 2016 by NCSL and CSG and co-chaired by Governor Jack Markell (DE) and Senator Beau McCoy (NE), the Task Force was an opportunity for state leaders to explore key issues around the employment of people with disabilities, identify themes, and develop policy options for consideration by states. Each subcommittee was composed of 10 to 12 state policymakers and four to six non-voting external advisors representing the private sector, key stakeholders, and/or academia. The Task Force oversaw the work of four subcommittees focusing on policy areas impacting the employment of people with disabilities, including:

- Career Readiness & Employability;
- Hiring, Retention, & Reentry;
- Entrepreneurship, Tax Incentives, & Procurement; and
- Transportation, Technology, & Other Employment Supports.

## What is the State Exchange on Employment & Disability (SEED)?

Launched in late June 2015 by ODEP, SEED is a collaboration with state intermediary organizations, including NCSL, CSG, Women In Government (WIG) and National Governors Association (NGA), to help state policymakers effectively address policy barriers that may hinder the employment of people with disabilities. Through these partnerships, the SEED collaborative is dedicated to ensuring that state policymakers have the tools and resources they need to address employment barriers for people with disabilities. SEED's goals are to foster a nationwide workforce more inclusive of people with disabilities and expand the capacity of state intermediary organizations to offer disability employment policy and subject-matter expertise.

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### Work Matters Guiding Principles:

The following represent key ideas that were embraced by the subcommittees and helped inform the examination of policy barriers and development of the policy options.

- Disability is a natural part of the human experience that in no way diminishes one's right to fully participate in all aspects of community life.
- Disability can develop at any point during an individual's lifetime and have varying impacts.
- Successful disability policy embraces the "nothing about us without us" principle.
- People with disabilities are underutilized in our workforce and frequently experience social and economic disadvantage.
- People with disabilities have valuable and unique contributions to make - disability inclusion boosts the bottom line.

### Work Matters Policy Themes:

The following represent common aspects of the policy options developed by the subcommittees and are included for consideration in disability employment policymaking, which states might look to during innovation efforts beyond the Work Matters framework.

- Leading by example and "walk the talk" – ensure that state agencies become model employers and use state financial resources to support model employers in the private sector.
- Including external and internal focus on disability awareness, including disability etiquette, in all state government policies, programs, practices, and disability employment initiatives.
- Adopting robust reporting requirements, including establishing performance goals, metrics for measurement and data collection processes, to help inform policymaking.
- Increasing coordination, blending and braiding of services and funding across agencies and levels of government to ensure successful employment of people with disabilities.
- Requiring accountability from the highest levels of government.
- Including *universal design* principles, which seek to ensure accessibility and usability to the greatest extent possible for all people, in the earliest development phases of all state government policies, programs, and practices, rather than retrofitting the policy after the fact.
- Identify low hanging fruit - policy and program efforts that have significant impact and are relatively easy to implement, including (but not limited to):
  - Identifying existing state programs and systems that can be easily adapted to include people with disabilities;
  - Adopting best practices and lessons learned from similar state initiatives targeting other underserved populations to inform initiatives for people with disabilities;

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- Extending diversity and inclusion (affirmative action) policies applicable to race, national origin, and gender to include disability for state agencies and businesses contracting with state government; and
- Using existing mentorship models to connect business champions supporting disability employment with employers interested in beginning disability hiring initiatives.

### Work Matters Policy Options:

- **Laying the Groundwork:** consists of policy issues that communicate state-level commitment to supporting workforce development and employment access and opportunity for people with disabilities.
  - 1. States as Model Employers.** States are encouraged to be model employers of people with disabilities, enacting policies that increase disability inclusion in the civil-sector workforce and serving as an example for private-sector employers to follow.
    - A. Use formal mechanisms to enact policies committing states to be model employers of people with disabilities.
    - B. Create infrastructure (e.g., cabinet-level position, interagency working group) and strategic plan to maximize the likelihood that employment-related and other issues affecting people with disabilities are addressed by government agencies at the earliest stages of policy development, design, implementation and evaluation.
    - C. Adopt workforce analyses and hiring goals for people with disabilities comparable to those applicable to race, national origin and gender.
    - D. Adopt hiring systems, including fast-track hiring systems.
    - E. Adopt policies and procedures to facilitate advancement and retention.
    - F. Implement Stay-at-Work, Return-to-Work programs, policies and practices for state employment.
    - G. Provide training and information to state personnel.
  - 2. Capacity of Private and Nonprofit Sector.** States can build capacity of private- and nonprofit-sector employers to engage in disability inclusion efforts. States can adopt policies that incentivize hiring of workers with disabilities and provide financial supports and technical assistance.
    - A. Provide technical assistance to and engage with businesses interested in employing individuals with disabilities.
    - B. Develop (or use existing) databases of persons with disabilities looking for employment.
    - C. Extend diversity and inclusion (e.g. affirmative action) policies for state government contractors, including requirements to prepare plans that include utilization analysis and goals applicable to race, national origin and gender, to include disability.
    - D. Expand and improve self-identification practices to ensure accurate counts of people with disabilities.

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- E. Explore convening a task force or summit bringing public and private interests together to discuss state disability employment issues. Utilize the task force or summit as an opportunity to identify business champions
- F. Explore coordinated strategies to support business hiring efforts, lessen administrative burdens, and engage in education and outreach to increase resource utilization.
- G. Use tax incentive policies to encourage businesses to increase disability inclusion.
- H. Explore tax credits for employment supports like physical building barrier removal, workplace accommodations, technology, transportation and child care.

**3. External and Internal Focus on Disability Awareness.** States are encouraged to have an external and internal focus on disability awareness, including disability etiquette. In developing awareness around disabilities, the focus should be cross-disability and include both visible and non-obvious disabilities.

- A. States are encouraged to have an external and internal focus on disability awareness
- B. Training and certificate programs for all those in public and private sectors who work with children, youth and adults with disabilities should require disability-related professional development elements.

**4. Interagency Coordination and Collaboration.** States can implement policies that optimize resources and services through interagency coordination, collaboration and blending/braiding of funding, and implementation of robust performance measures.

- A. Support policy alignment, collaboration, coordination and braiding/blending of funding and services across all relevant state systems to facilitate competitive integrated employment for individuals with disabilities, including individuals with the most significant disabilities, through Employment First initiatives adopted through legislation and/or executive orders
- B. Enhance cooperation and collaboration among state human resources and state agencies that work with people with disabilities by formalizing partnerships
- C. Expand and improve community linkages among organizations engaged in increasing employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.
- D. Facilitate collaboration and coordination between federal, state and local educational agencies and state vocational rehabilitation programs, job training, workforce development systems, etc., regarding the design and implementation of career readiness and career development programs, ensuring they are person-centered and disability-inclusive (taking into consideration local control in some states).

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- E. Support existing job coach programs and identify funding sources for expanded supports for traditional employee placements and entrepreneurial efforts.
  - F. Develop an accessible one-call, one-click system within state governments to offer information and resources to assist and match people with disabilities with appropriate transportation and other services.
  - G. Establish or improve reporting mechanisms to measure success of program(s) and drive quality improvement.
- **Preparing for Work:** consists of policy issues related to providing education and vocational training opportunities for youth and young adults with disabilities.
    - 5. Education and Career Readiness.** States can promote education and career readiness policies and strategies that expect and prepare all youth, including those with disabilities, to enter the workforce.
      - A. Promote comprehensive education and career development plans that capitalize on youths' skills, abilities, and career and academic goals.
      - B. Include youth with disabilities in a sustained, meaningful manner in the career readiness and development process, beginning at an early age.
      - C. Strengthen the capacity of education and career development professionals to design and implement evidence-based, inclusive programs and strategies.
    - 6. Skill Development and Job Exploration.** States can facilitate skill development and job exploration opportunities, such as work-based learning, for youth and young adults, including those with disabilities, that align with education and career development planning and meet businesses' predicted workforce needs.
      - A. Expand the availability of inclusive work-based learning experiences where eligibility is not contingent on enrollment or participation in an educational program or institution.
      - B. Facilitate collaboration between state and local educational, workforce development and vocational rehabilitation agencies to provide a wide range of integrated work-based learning experiences for youth with disabilities including paid internships, and leverage funding to pay for training/learning experiences or to reimburse businesses for associated costs.
    - 7. Family Engagement.** States can promote meaningful family engagement throughout the education and career development process for youth and young adults, including those with disabilities.
      - A. Encourage the development and adoption of comprehensive training for parents and families that provides them with the appropriate knowledge to support youth with disabilities in navigating the education and career development process.

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- B. Afford families, including families with children with disabilities, opportunities to serve as advisers in the design of career and workforce development programs and strategies.
  - C. Engage families in education and career development planning to increase their capacity to better assist youth in navigating the career development process and maximize learning opportunities.
- **Getting to & Accessing Work Opportunities:** consists of policy issues ensuring that spaces, services and technologies facilitate equal access to work opportunities.
    - 8. **Transportation.** States are encouraged to ensure that transportation is widely available, reliable, affordable and accessible to people with disabilities in order to support access to the workplace.
      - A. States are encouraged to adopt policies that prioritize transportation options that are reliable and accessible for individuals with disabilities, as well as alternative strategies that address and mitigate challenges for people with disabilities.
      - B. States should encourage businesses to use government incentives and programs to offer shuttles and other transportation options for employees.
    - 9. **Information and Communication Technology.** States can adopt policies that support accessibility in the workplace, particularly related to accessible information and communication technologies, or ICT, and assistive technologies.
      - A. Encourage employers to take steps to level the playing field for employees with disabilities by ensuring the adoption of accessible ICT technology and supporting the use of assistive technology including, but not limited to, personalized assistive technology.
      - B. Elevate the importance of accessibility as a primary policy and program consideration in the design, development and procurement of technology systems. Where technical standards for accessibility do not exist, adopt user-centered functional performance criteria for all disability types.
      - C. Ensure that higher education curricula for technology, engineering, design and architecture include principles of accessibility, universal design, and inclusive information and communication technologies.
      - D. Create procurement policies that ensure that all resources, services, products and technologies acquired by state and local governments are fully accessible. States should consider giving a competitive advantage to bidders who can show an implemented company accessibility policy related to their offerings and solutions.
    - 10. **Built Environment.** States can enact policies that support worker access to the built environment, including housing, public transportation, infrastructure and physical design.

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- A. Enact policies that facilitate complete streets, livable communities, mixed-use development, transit-oriented development, shared mobility, mobility on demand, travel demand management and “*Smart Cities*” in order to reduce barriers to accessibility and promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in travel.
- B. Enact programs to provide assistance to households that include people with disabilities in making physical and technological modifications to their homes in order to improve accessibility and promote working at home.
- **Staying at Work:** consists of policy issues providing employers with tools to retain and advance workers when injury, illness or a change in disability status occurs.
  - 11. **Stay-at-Work (SAW) Programs.** States can develop policies to support employee retention in the event of injury, illness or a change in status of an individual’s disability. Stay-at-work and return-to-work policies can support all workers as they continue in their careers and as new challenges present themselves.
    - A. Adopt SAW/RTW programs in the private and public sectors.
    - B. Help businesses and individuals with disabilities navigate the complexities of benefits.
    - C. Explore opportunities to supplement existing financial incentives to target disability employment supports.
  - **Supporting Self-Employment & Entrepreneurship:** consists of policy issues supporting access and opportunity for new and existing business owners with disabilities.
    - 12. **State Workforce Development Systems.** States are encouraged to ensure that state workforce development systems support entrepreneurship and self-employment as viable employment options for people with disabilities.
      - A. Formalize entrepreneurship and self-employment as a viable employment strategy for individuals with disabilities in state workforce service delivery.
      - B. Through education and outreach, position entrepreneurship and self-employment as possible career strategies for individuals with disabilities.
    - 13. **State Procurement, Certifications, and Financial Incentives for Disability-Owned Businesses.** States can include disability-owned businesses in targeted state procurement, certification and financial incentive policies.
      - A. Explore opportunities to support disability-owned businesses through existing procurement and contracting systems.
      - B. Establish a fast-tracked certification process for disability-owned businesses to gain access contract/vender opportunities and take advantage of procurement goals.
      - C. Explore tax and financial incentive structures to support disability entrepreneurship start-up and/or growth.