

Implementation Guide

Employment First, person-centered planning and informed choice (June 17, 2016)

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance for professionals (also referred to as facilitators) to support informed choice for employment.

The Minnesota Departments of Education, Employment and Economic Development and Human Services (MDE, DEED and DHS) have developed this operational framework to help people plan for work. Consider this guide as a “living document”. It will be revised as local agencies use it and develop best practices.

Background

Minnesota is committed to ensure people with disabilities and/or mental illness have opportunities to make informed choices in all areas of their lives, including work.

Minnesota adopted Employment First as a policy in 2014. It calls on MDE, DEED and DHS to define, implement and document a process to ensure all people with disabilities have the opportunity to work in competitive, integrated employment.

MDE, DEED and DHS are responsible to

- Implement the employment framework
- Report on employment outcomes to the public
- Document that each person has tools and experiences to make an informed choice.

Competitive, integrated employment

The [Minnesota Employment First Policy \(PDF\)](#) and the [Minnesota Olmstead Plan \(PDF\)](#) define competitive, integrated employment. In short, it means a person:

- Earns at least minimum wage but not less than the customary wage
- Has the opportunity for interactions with co-workers without disabilities, customers and/or the public
- Receives benefits from his or her employer that are the same or similar to workers without a disability
- Receives his or her wages from an employer that is not his or her service provider. The person also may be self-employed
- Works full- or part-time, with or without supports.

Roles

For the purpose of this document, we define the following:

Person: The person receiving services who is at the center of the planning process. He or she:

- Decides whom he or she wants to have as part of the planning team.
- May choose to co-facilitate or designate a family member or friend to assist with facilitation.

Facilitator(s): The person(s) who guides the discussion. He/she:

- Is a professional who leads a planning process
- Writes any form of support plan in a way that results in informed choice for the person.
- Can be an assessor, case manager, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor, educator or mental health practitioner.
- Cannot have a financial stake in decisions about services that support work.

How Employment First, person-centered planning and informed choice work together

To help a person explore employment, the facilitator must understand how Employment First, person-centered planning and informed choice work together.

Employment First

Employment First is a set of values that supports employment as the first and preferred outcome for all working-age people with disabilities, including people with complex and significant disabilities. As policy, Employment First states all people with disabilities can work, want to work and can achieve competitive, integrated employment.

Person-centered planning

Person-centered planning helps a person to set goals and develop action steps that enhance his or her quality of life. These practices help the person to connect to opportunities in the community and build relationships with others. Control over decisions rests with the person you serve as a facilitator. When support planners incorporate Employment First into person-centered planning, employment becomes a strategy to help the person achieve what is important to and for him or her. Person-centered planning may occur within different settings (schools, Vocational Rehabilitation, counties, etc.) and may use different tools for exploration (IEP, MnCHOICES, etc.).

Informed choice

Informed choice is the result of using the person-centered planning approach. When a person makes an informed choice, he or she has the opportunity to explore and understand:

- All options
- Ways to overcome barriers
- Potential risks and benefits of decisions.

When a person prepares to make an informed choice, options are not limited to disability-specific programs. Rather, the person and facilitator explore community resources and supports and experience-based opportunities. For a current definition of informed choice, see the [Minnesota Olmstead Plan \(PDF\)](#)

Framework overview: Key points to remember

Facilitators should to remember the following as they work with people to achieve informed choice for employment. Facilitators should incorporate these [BestPractices.pdf](#) as well.

Prepare yourself

- Your expectations and attitude matter: High expectations and a belief that a person can work are one of the greatest factors in whether a person works, regardless of disability or mental health diagnosis.
- Use the tools and resources in the [DB101 Informed Choice Toolkit \(PDF\)](#) to help you address concerns, engage people and help them progress along the employment path. (We have embedded links to related documents from the toolkit into this framework).

Meet people where they are

The person's employment goals and preferences change over time. The person's goals and preferences should guide the person-centered employment planning process. Think about what information the person needs at each stage.

1. Working	Working and does not want change
2. Work Change	Working but wants a change (e.g., more hours, more money, different type of work)
3. Searching	Actively looking for work (<i>includes people currently not working but want to start looking for work</i>)
4. Preparatory	Taking steps toward work (discovery, training)
5. Contemplative	Thinking about working
6. Pre-contemplative	Not interested in working right now

For more tips, see the [DB101 Interviewer Companion Guide \(PDF\)](#) and the [DB101 Guide to Meet People Where They Are \(PDF\)](#).

Ensure informed choice

If a person decides he or she does not want competitive, integrated employment, you must ensure that it is an informed choice. This means you:

- Help the person makes a decision based on all relevant information about his or her situation
- Effectively address the myths about employment and barriers to achieving goals
- Offer experience-based opportunities.

Documentation

Document the following in the person's records. The person may share information with others as appropriate:

- The person's goals related to employment
- The plan to address questions or concerns about work if the person has them. (This should include any concerns about the impact of work on benefits, plans to address those concerns and experiences offered to make decisions)
- When and how follow-up about employment choices will occur.

Implementation steps

These steps are a guide to help a planner facilitate opportunities for employment and informed choice during person-centered planning. The conversation with the person will set the direction, so don't think of this as a checklist. Rather, use it as a starting point to address and think about important topics.

For a more information and resources, see the [DB101 Informed Choice Toolkit \(PDF\)](#).

Step 1: Engage and discover

Facilitate a strengths-based discussion with the person about interests, skills and abilities. Most importantly, you want to determine the "whys" behind the person's answers. To do that, inquire about the following:

- Strengths, interests and preferences

Figure out:

- What motivates the person
- What excites him or her
- What skills he or she has (Your role is to help people recognize their skills)

- Big thinking

Figure out:

- What are the person's hopes and dreams

- What needs does the person have regarding money
- What strategies does he or she need to get money

Remember:

- Even an "impossible" dream holds important clues to a person's interests and needs
- People are more open to working with you when you pay attention to their dreams

See [DB101 Build Your Dream Guidance \(PDF\)](#) for more help on thinking big

- Perspective and perceptions about work (where is he or she on the employment path?)

Ask:

- Where the person works and for whom he or she works
- What he or she likes or does not like about it
- If the person has worked before if not working now.

Identify and consider:

- Options and benefits of being an employee of a local business.

- Questions, concerns and fears

When people with disabilities consider work as an option, some common areas of concern come up.

Make sure to address worries about whether he or she:

- Will lose disability benefits.
- Be able to find transportation to and from work.
- Will stay safe in the community.
- Encounter a lack of supports or resources.
- Not have the skills or productivity to find or keep a job.
- Feel uncertain about his/her limited experiences with work and what is possible.

Step 2: Plan

Help the person develop an action plan to achieve goals. Consider what is needed to move a person along the employment path.

- Does the person want to start a job search? If the person wants a job or a different job, include employment as a goal in the plan and identify next steps for a job search.
- Does the person need help exploring possibilities and developing a vision for work? If so, consider ways that the person can learn more about work,

General information

- Identify concerns and explore possible solutions
- Gather information about benefits of working in integrated settings
- Attend a workshop or training about benefits and/or work place supports
- Identify resources, informal and formal that can help the person meet his or her goals.

Understand benefits and work

- Use [DB101](#). It's an online resource to learn about benefits and planning for work (e.g., estimator session, creating a MYDB101 account, get a benefits lookup, review information and "Try-It" tools).
- Use the DB101 talk to an expert option call the Disability Linkage Line at 1-866-333-2466 to get answers or help with planning

Understand services, supports, accommodations

There are services and supports that can help. Consider the following:

- Assistive technology
- Job accommodations
- Training/education
- Supported employment
- Work incentives.

For more information on available resources, see the [DB101 Services and Supports Guide \(PDF\)](#)

Explore work opportunities

You can help the person learn about work through experience-based opportunities when you:

- Meet with people who work in integrated settings or in fields of interest
- Use informal community networks to uncover or create opportunities
- Offer the individual's family, if appropriate, opportunities to meet with families of other people with disabilities who are work and receive services in integrated settings
- Adopt principles in the [DB101 Work Experience Guide \(PDF\)](#)

Step 3: Implement and follow- up

Support the person to implement the plan and achieve his or her employment goals.

Implement at a pace that fits the person. For many who are interested in a job search, moving relatively quickly can be an effective strategy to capitalize on motivation.

Roles and responsibilities

The plan should include the roles and responsibilities to follow up and support the person.

Person-centered planning

The facilitator must use person-centered planning. It emphasizes the use of informal supports whenever possible. The facilitator should:

- Help the person overcome barriers and modify goals as needed
- Regularly check in as agreed upon in the plan. (It might make sense to do this more frequently at certain times, for example at the start of a new job)
- Plan team meetings to review the plan and evaluate progress toward the goals on a reasonable schedule (e.g., twice a year).

People who choose not to work

If a person chooses not to work, review that decision with the person periodically. Discuss work and ways to address barriers that might have existed in the past.

If, at any point, a person says he or she wants employment, initiate a meeting to plan for work as soon as possible. The person should not have to wait for his or her next scheduled meeting.

The facilitator will use good judgment about how extensive the follow-up and reconsideration should be, depending on what the person says about his or her desire to work and the information and experience that has been provided previously.