

Georgia Employment First Council

On May 8, 2018, the state of Georgia manifested its intent to facilitate and promote the participation of Georgians with disabilities in gainful employment by creating the Georgia Employment First Council. Among other duties, the Council is charged to:

Review and make recommendations in a biannual report to the Governor and the General Assembly with regard to issues and necessary steps surrounding the adoption and implementation of the Employment First Policy.

March 2019 Report

Assembled by the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency

Introduction

What is Employment First?

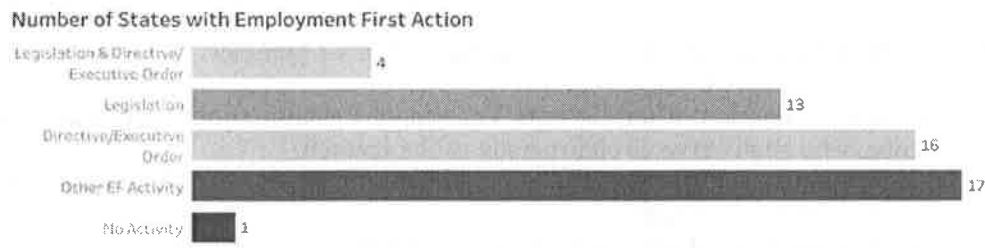
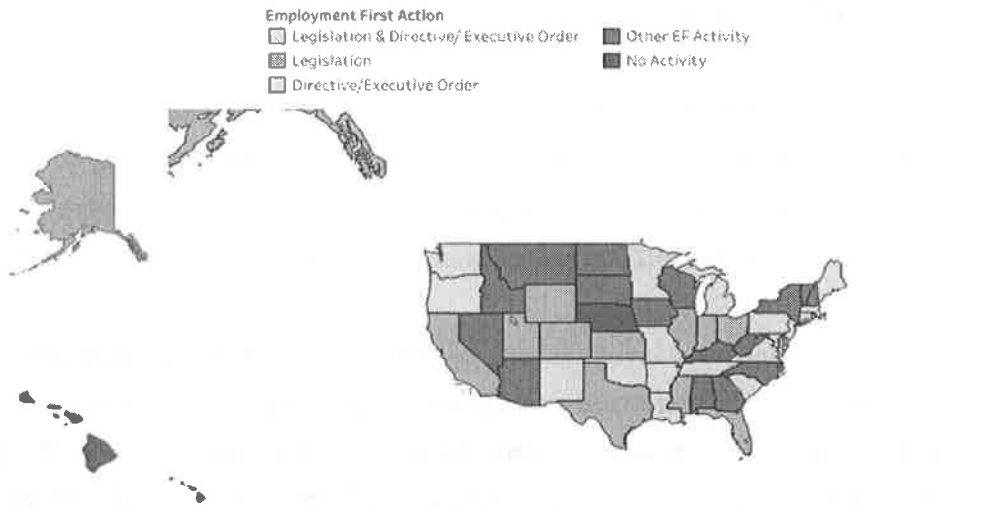
Employment First is a growing national and state-level movement that has emerged over the last decade centered on the premise that all citizens, including individuals with significant disabilities, are capable and deserving of opportunities for meaningful employment and fair wages. Among the core tenets of this movement is the idea that employment in integrated settings within the community should be the priority service option for people with disabilities and that ensuring gainful employment should be a priority focus of publicly funded programs and services for people with disabilities.

Under the banner of *Employment First*, states are taking proactive steps to increase the workforce participation rate of their working-age residents with disabilities by putting in place policies and programmatic strategies to ensure gainful employment is expected first and supported first. The objective is that each person with a disability has the opportunity to find and keep gainful employment that matches their skills and abilities with businesses who need those skills and abilities.

As highlighted in the “Employment First Across the Nation” graphic to follow, some form of *Employment First* action is occurring across the country in 49 of 50 states.



Employment First Across the Nation



By Derek Nord, Indiana Institute on Disability and Community (Indiana Univ.) & David Hoff, Institute for Community Inclusion (UMass Boston)
 Key source document: Hoff, D. (Feb. 2017). *Employment First Resource List*. SCUN Working Document.

Figure 1

Georgia Employment First Council

Council Formation

After seeing the progression throughout the country and seeing the measurable impacts from the other states, the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency spearheaded a legislative effort to establish *Employment First* in Georgia.

The bill was drafted with the intent of bringing interested parties to the table. The Council filled its membership with state agencies in the mental health, educational, rehabilitation, and labor fields. Furthermore, the bill included representatives from Georgia residents related to the disability community in order to have a full representative body on the *Employment First Council*.

Council Purpose and Structure

The Employment First Act states the purpose of the council:

The General Assembly finds and declares that competitive integrated employment, including self-employment, in the general workforce is the first and preferred option in the provision of publicly funded services for all working age citizens with disabilities, regardless of the level of disability.

As defined by the Act, “competitive integrated employment” means work, including self-employment, in the labor market performed on a full-time or part-time basis in a setting in which an individual with a disability interacts with individuals without disabilities in all aspects of the job function and for which such individual with a disability is compensated at or above the level of salary and benefits paid by the employer for the same or similar work performed by individuals without disabilities.

The *Employment First Georgia Council* shall be composed of 14 members as follows:

1. The executive director of the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency or his or her designee, who shall serve as chairperson of the council;
2. The Commissioner of the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities or his or her designee;
3. The Commissioner of Labor or his or her designee;
4. The Commissioner of the Technical College System of Georgia or his or her designee;
5. The Chancellor of the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia or his or her designee;
6. The State School Superintendent or his or her designee;
7. The executive director of the Georgia Council for Developmental Disabilities or his or her designee;
8. A representative of an association or other organization of community rehabilitation providers that assist individuals with disabilities³ in overcoming barriers to employment;
9. A representative of an association or other organization that provides supported employment and non-employment day services to individuals with disabilities;
10. A representative from the business community;
11. An individual with an intellectual or developmental disability;
12. An individual with a physical disability;
13. An individual from the mental health community; and
14. A family member of an individual with a disability.

Benefits of the Council

The *Employment First* Georgia Council will be an asset for Georgia due to the coordinated effort the Council will bring to all the various agencies, providers, employers, and individuals. The council will be able to study the current landscape in Georgia by listening to experts and engage with individuals and private employers and everyone in between. The beneficiaries will be people with disabilities, employers, taxpayers, families, and communities.

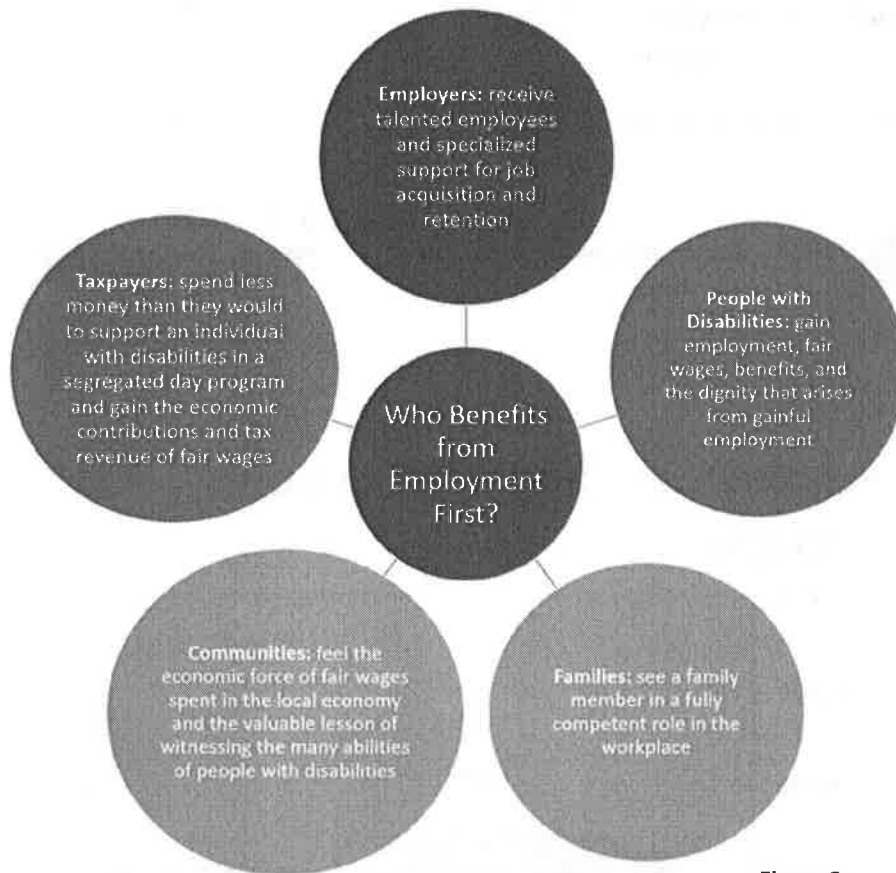
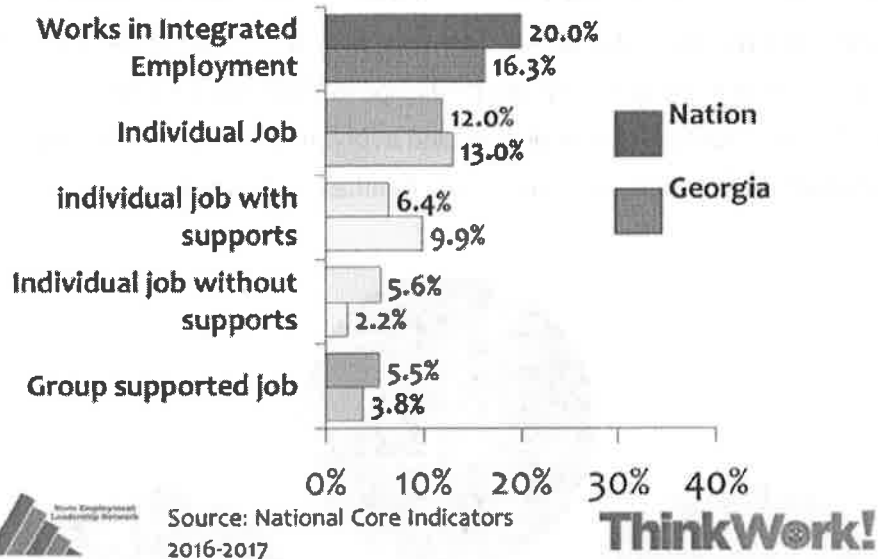


Figure 2

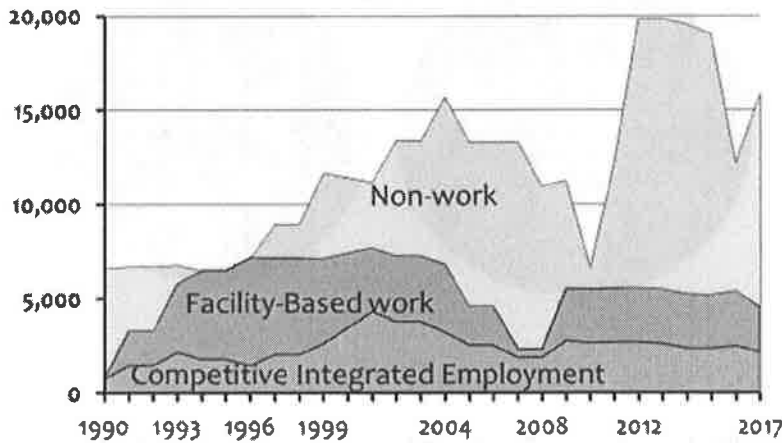
The following graphs identify the engagement and the employment placement of Georgian's with disabilities compared with the nation. Georgia's *Employment First* Council is working to increase the number of Georgians with disabilities in competitive integrated employment.

Works in Competitive Integrated Employment



Graph 1

Employment and Day Supports Georgia



Source: ICI National Survey of State IDD Agencies

ThinkWork!

Graph 2

Council Goals

In order to create an effective Council and to be in a position to provide guidance and potential legislative changes to the General Assembly and the Governor, the Council has set some small but meaningful goals for its first year.

1. The Council is compiling a database of all the funding attached to *Employment First* related matters.
2. The Council is determining all the programs, agencies and other organizations that play a part in *Employment First* related matters.
3. The Council has begun to document the actual experience of individuals with physical, intellectual, developmental, sensory or mental health impairment who apply for services or help with the above mentioned state agencies with the goal of creating a better and more effective experience for both the individual and the state.
4. The Council has been dutifully exploring all the agreements, memorandums of understanding, and other engagements of the represented state agencies with each other and with other providers.

The Council's primary objective for its first year is to develop a comprehensive picture of where Georgia currently stands in terms of *Employment First*. Subsequently, the Council will next engage in thoughtful analysis to develop policy proposals for Georgia to consider to achieve higher competitive integrated employment for Georgians with disabilities.

Commonly Used Terminology

- “Disability” means a permanent physical, cognitive, or behavioral condition that significantly limits one or more functions of daily living.

Ga. Code Ann. § 49-9-50

- “Employer” means a person or governmental unit or officer in this state having in his, her, or its employ 15 or more individuals or any person acting as an agent of an employer.
- “Individual with disabilities” means any person who has a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more of such person's major life activities and who has a record of such impairment. The term “individual with disabilities” shall not include any person who is addicted to the use of any drug or illegal or federally controlled substance nor addiction to the use of alcohol.
- “Labor organization” means an organization of any kind; agents of such organization; an agency or employee representation committee, group, association, or plan in which employees participate and which exists for the purpose, in whole or in part, of dealing with employers concerning grievances, labor disputes, wages, rates of pay, hours, or other terms or conditions of employment; or a conference, general committee, joint or system board, or joint council so engaged which is subordinate to a national or international labor organization.
- “Major life activities” means functions such as caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, and working.
- “Persons” means one or more individuals, partnerships, this state, municipalities or other political subdivisions within the state, associations, labor organizations, or corporations.
- “Physical or mental impairment” means:
 - ◊ Any physiological disorder or condition or anatomical loss affecting one or more of the following body systems: neurological, musculoskeletal, special sense organs, respiratory (including speech organs), cardiovascular, reproductive, digestive, genitourinary, hemic and lymphatic, skin, or endocrine; or
 - ◊ Intellectual disabilities and specific learning disabilities.
- “Substantially limits” means that the impairment so affects a person as to create a likelihood that such person will experience difficulty in securing, retaining, or advancing in employment because of a disability.
- “Unfair employment practice” means an act that is prohibited under this chapter.

Ga. Code Ann. § 34-6A-2

Georgia Employment First Council Membership

Officers

Shawn Ryan, *GVRA Executive Director/Chairman*

John B. Wells III, *Family Member of an Individual with a Disability/Vice Chairman*

Members

Tim Evans, *Georgia Department of Labor*

Parker Glick, *Physical Disability representative*

Eric E. Jacobson, *Georgia Council of Developmental Disabilities*

Dr. Conrado Marion-Landais, *Business Community representative*

Paula Poulicek, *Georgia Department of Education*

Amy R. Reidesel, *Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD)*

Rossany Rios, *Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG)*

James Stinchcomb, *Mental Health Community representative*

David C. Ward, *Community Rehabilitation Provider representative*

Brandt White, *Intellectual Disability representative*

Dr. Felita T. Williams, *University System of Georgia*

Todd Youngblood, *Day Services Provider representative*

Executive Director/Chairman:

Shawn Ryan

Shawn.Ryan@gvs.ga.gov

Attorney/Report Contact:

Michael Huening

Michael.Huening@gvs.ga.gov

(404) 780-6765

Legislative Liaison:

Charlie Miller

Charlie.Miller@gvs.ga.gov

(404) 780-6864

