

**Alaska Work Matters Task Force
Core Topic Areas**
Possible Recommendations in blue

Proposed Task Force Vision:

Alaskans with disabilities have the capacity to become employed and the citizen right to equal access to employment.

Proposed Task Force Mission Statement:

Employment is a way for Alaskans with disabilities to become economically self-sufficient, live independently, have equity of opportunity, and full participation in their community resulting in meaningful lives of their choosing.

**Proposed Common Definition of a Successful Employment Outcome
for Alaskans with Disabilities:**

- Competitive and Integrated Employment (CIE)
- At least part time or greater hours in gainful activity
- Receiving above minimum wage / comparable to rate paid to other workers without disabilities
- Receiving same level of benefits as other workers without disabilities in similar positions
- Working alongside other workers without disabilities
- Able to advance the career ladder like other workers without disabilities in similar positions
- Commensurate employment for individuals with or without disabilities as available in their communities

Proposed Recommendation Report Goal:

1. “Identify potential areas of **greatest impact**, including strategies that if accelerated, or barriers that if eliminated, would lead to the **greatest advancements** toward achieving the goals of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility for applicants and employees with disabilities.” – White House DEI Memo aka Magic Wand

2. Identify implementors for recommendations.

Core Topic #1: Private Sector: Building the capacity of the private sector to enhance employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities

- Business Engagement Services Team (BEST)

Possible recommendation: Provide centralized expertise by establishing regional disability employment state agency collaborations to support better implementation of services and policies.

- Federal contractor outreach

Possible recommendation: Use EARN to help educate contractors on benefits of employing individuals with disabilities, to reach the 7% utilization goal.

- Job Fairs

Possible recommendation: Continue virtual job fairs / in-person when able; explore reverse job fair option.

- AVTEC (Alaska Vocational Technical Education Center)

Possible recommendation: Consider more promotion of alternative to TABE test for AVTEC.

- Apprenticeships/Internships

Possible recommendation: Consider educating staff and Alaskans about apprenticeships, who can apply, and what job sectors they might be focused on.

Possible recommendation: Environmental scan for current apprenticeships/internships for accessibility and marketing strategy enhancement for individuals with disabilities.

- Supporting disability-owned and disabled veteran-owned businesses through procurement and contracting systems

Possible recommendation: Increase awareness of state contracting preferences for disability- and veteran-businesses (i.e. PSA/flyer or other awareness campaign strategies).

- State contractor utilization goal (similar to the federal government)

Possible recommendation: State of Alaska institutes a similar utilization goal as the federal government for its contractors (7% utilization goal).

- Implementing stay-at-work and return-to-work policies and programs for individuals who become ill, or injured on or off the job

Core Topic #2: State as a Model Employer of individuals with disabilities

- Awareness/utilization of DVR Provisional Hire

Possible recommendation: State could explore a DVR provisional hire % goal in its state hiring per Department. This could include robust awareness and utilization training for state hiring managers.

Possible recommendation: Trust beneficiaries hiring goal; consider flexibility in SOA PCNs.

- Centralized accommodation fund exploration

Possible recommendation: State of Alaska explores instituting a centralized accommodation fund, mirroring many aspects after the success other states have seen in this type of fund.

- Accessibility of SOA online platforms

Possible recommendation: Standardize website (and documents which will be posted) accessibility training for state staff across departments so there is a consistent accessible online presence for the State of Alaska.

- Disability policy expertise at the table (nothing about us without us)

Possible recommendation: High level staff responsible for keeping disability and employment at the forefront of state government efforts (this could be cabinet level or within the DOL Commissioner's office).

Possible recommendation: Long-term commitment to facilitate a robust network of stakeholders working towards furthering employment in Alaska (i.e. such as long-term commitment by the Trust for the BEE initiative).

Possible recommendation: Share Employment First report submitted to the Trust by DOLWD, DEED, and DHSS, with the Governor's Office via an annual meeting.

- Implementing stay-at-work and return-to-work policies and programs for individuals who become ill, or injured on or off the job
- Personal Care Attendant Services available for employees with the most significant disabilities

Core Topic #3: Employment Services and Supports

- Individual Placement and Supports (IPS) model

Possible recommendation: Increase awareness / increased resources to expand the IPS model. Increase awareness of the IPS model by educating decision makers on the uniqueness of the model and how it is different than the traditional vocational model. Sustainability could be addressed by making this a billable service under DBH / Medicaid.

- Establishing Employment First initiatives recognizing that work in the general workforce (competitive, integrated employment) is the first and preferred outcome in the provision of publicly funded services and supports of all working age individuals with disabilities, including individuals with the most significant disabilities

Possible recommendation: State agencies conduct a review relating to how employment for individuals with disabilities is listed in policies, procedures, and regulation and tag those areas to include qualifiers such as describing that the desired outcome is competitive integrate employment (CIE).

Possible recommendation: Increase utilization of employment focused peer support (Individual Placement and Support (IPS)) and other supported employment programs are enhanced by including Peer Support Specialists. As vocational mentors or coaches, peers offer pre- and post-employment support individually and in groups. While the goal of IPS is to help people find competitive employment immediately, participants benefit from complementary peer services to promote vocational recovery. Peer support is beneficial before, during, and after a job is secured.

Possible recommendation: Increase awareness and utilization of peer-to-peer employment support options.

Possible recommendation: Repeal subminimum wage law (14c) to complement the regulation already repealed in this area.

Possible recommendation: Enhance HCBS to ensure supported employment services fully enable employment goals to be realized for Alaskans with waivers (ex: supported employment could be provided in a community which is not the recipient's community of residence, et al).

Possible recommendation: Enhance supported employment services should continue to be addressed to include fading employment supports based on individual skills and needs with continued

access to long-term supports still available; alignment with DD Shared Vision i.e. career advancement and/or 'meaningful lives of the person's choosing'; employment services provided at the recipient's home i.e. self-employment or subsistence and/or at-home teleworking support; waiver flexibility for personal care services for employment; and continued inclusion of transportation to work

Possible recommendation: Enhance data reporting for Employment First Reporting (i.e. development of meaningful employment data indicators, creation of a data dashboard updated annually to best ensure quality of outcomes). Per the Institute for Community Inclusion 2014 report, it could be recommended to collect individual level data from agencies / departments.

Possible recommendation per ICI on data collection:

- Work setting/type (e.g., individual integrated job, group supported job, self-employment, subsistence employment)
- Average hours worked in a given period (monthly is probably best)
- Weekly or monthly gross income over that same period
- Employment, not job, retention in a quarter and year (i.e., days or weeks working in the community in the time period even if the person changed jobs)
- Consider: Source of paycheck, eligible for paid time off

Possible recommendation: Standardize DOLWD to include disability as a variable.

Possible recommendation: Publish annual Employment First reporting online; white paper / summary / bullet points in plain language.

- Improving transportation policies to address transportation options that are reliable and accessible for individuals with disabilities

Possible recommendation: DOT website section developed for Alaskans with disabilities with a strong focus on accessibility and resource linkages statewide to accessible transportation options. Website section could include an easily identifiable hot button from the main DOT webpage for maximum accessibility.

Core Topic #4: Prepare for Work and Transition

- Designing Youth Transition programs providing career development, work-based learning experiences, and parental involvement

Possible recommendation: consider exploring transition competencies as part of SPED teacher certification; formal endorsement; transition coordinators.

Possible data recommendation: IDEA indicator 14 data pulled annually to determine outcomes of youth with disabilities exiting high school. Data could be added to a data dashboard.

- Enhancing rural traditional skill development such as subsistence, self-employment, etc.

Possible recommendation: State agencies work together to share traditional transition skill curriculum, with DEED hosting a section on its website for these types of resources. Agencies working collaboratively to compile best resources for this area and raise community awareness of the resources.

Possible recommendation: Increase awareness of the diversity of what successful outcomes look like statewide for Alaskans with disabilities. Subsistence is a successful employment outcome for DVR; promote common understanding of successful employment outcomes amongst state agencies, focused on a commensurate life experience/employment outcome for someone with a disability in a given region as for someone without a disability in a given region realizing that employment outcomes in urban Alaska will look vastly different for rural and remote Alaska).

Possible recommendation: consider commitment to increase state agency collaborations with TVR; seek guidance from established DVR MOA / MOUs.

- Senior employment initiative

Possible recommendation: Increase awareness of state resources to support senior employment such as the MASST program, et al.

Possible recommendation: Educate the ADRCs on where seniors who desire to work can go to receive services within the state system.

Possible recommendation: Develop & fund marketing materials that can be sent to the 41 Senior Centers Statewide to promote senior employment.

Possible recommendation: Explore funding through the Trust to establish senior employment grants to the largest senior centers in the state to create employment specialists (3 to 5).

Possible recommendation: Consider a formalized process to address seniors served through the MASST program that may be eligible for DVR services. DVR funds can be used to fund training such as the basics of computer skills.

Possible recommendation: Formalize the use of a senior score card to measure overall performance in increasing employment outcomes for seniors.

- **At-risk youth initiative**

Possible recommendation: Create a Standing Committee (SC) that will meet by phone or in person every six months. The following representation of operational managers will be attending this meeting with the goal of combining services to obtain better outcomes in the employment of At-Risk-Youth:

- Office of Children Services/Independent Living Program (OCS)
- Division of Employment & Training Services (DETS)
- Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR)
- Alaska Workforce Investment Board (AWIB)
- Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ)
- University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA)
- Alaska Vocational Technical Education Center (AVTEC)
- SILC / ILC

Possible recommendation: Maximize youth grants/funding within the state system (DOLWD, DHSS, DEED) and measure success through the implementation of At-Risk-Youth scorecard.

Possible recommendation: Take the current non-permanent positions (3) assigned/funded by DOLWD for the At-Risk-Youth Initiative and make them permanent with the understanding employment numbers will go up.

Possible recommendation: Create a new referral framework (centralized form) to be used by all relevant divisions to create a seamless system whereby everyone is working together to improve employment outcomes.

Possible recommendation: Develop and finalize a Youth Survival Guide (YSG) in collaboration with United Way 211, DDRCs, and the ADRCs.

Core Topic #5: COVID-19

- Telework

Possible recommendation: Policy guidance throughout the State of Alaska includes ADA / reasonable accommodation details as being a justified reason why telework should be utilized.

Possible recommendation: Ensure that supported employment services can be used at home to support someone needing HCBS to telework.

- Health and Safety Planning

- Funding unable to be utilized due to the pandemic; need for carryover flexibilities

- Policies inclusive of mental health

Possible recommendation: Survey for gaps in regional services; consider investing in expansion of SDS / DBH providers that provide employment – offer short-term grants to enable agencies to restructure resources and focus on employment.