

# Promoting Employment for People With Disabilities Through Statewide Coordination

## Governors Guide

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## **Executive Summary**

Expanding access to education, training, and high-quality employment opportunities for people with disabilities has long been a bipartisan priority for Governors. The COVID-19 pandemic has posed many new barriers and challenges for workers with disabilities and has also amplified and accelerated many trends previously affecting the future of work and workers. Meanwhile, the expansion of telework and a heightened awareness around workplace safety as a result of the pandemic pose opportunities to explore new ways to expand inclusivity in the workforce. As Governors lead their states through recovery, they should ensure workforce recovery efforts--and the workforce system more broadly--are deliberately inclusive of people with disabilities.

To support states in promoting employment for people with disabilities throughout recovery and beyond, the NGA Center for Best Practices hosted a virtual action lab series throughout May 2021. At this action lab, state teams engaged in peer learning and action planning to incorporate disability employment as a priority in their state's recovery efforts and workforce development system. At the convenings, state teams learned how other states successfully implemented policies that increase disability employment, then engaged in facilitated action planning. Through the action planning process, each team developed plans to better coordinate services across their state to support workers with disabilities. The action lab was centered around four key objectives:

- Understanding the role of the disability employment ecosystem in supporting economic recovery and preparing for the future of work.
- Defining a successful disability employment ecosystem and measuring key outcomes.
- Coordinating efforts to support positive employment outcomes for people with disabilities.
- Ensuring sustained progress in expanding high-quality employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

This guide describes how Governors can – through a collaborative planning process – convene key stakeholders to accomplish each of these objectives and provides examples of state actions that may serve as best practices. Appendix A provides an action planning template key stakeholders can use to guide the collaborative process described in this guide. This guide and action planning template are intended to assist governors and other key stakeholders as they engage in sustainable statewide coordination to achieve the four key objectives outlined above, as well as improve employment opportunities and outcomes for people with disabilities.

## Introduction

Expanding access to education, training, and high-quality employment opportunities for people with disabilities has long been a bipartisan priority for Governors.<sup>[1]</sup> Enabling greater labor force participation, mitigating accessibility issues, partnering with industry, and holding the state to act as a model employer were priorities for Governors and state policy makers prior to the pandemic, and remain so now. In fact, priorities have evolved to place greater emphasis on diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility in economic recovery and growth by focusing on addressing trends that have been amplified and accelerated by the pandemic.

The pandemic-induced recession of 2020 had a devastating effect on the economic well-being of those who face numerous barriers to employment. Evidence from prior recessions makes clear that people who have a disability are likely to be disproportionately impacted by economic downturns. For instance, during the Great Recession, Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) applications increased by 28 percent, with an estimated one-quarter of this historically large increase was attributable to the recession. A large share of applications were approved, suggesting many workers with a disability left the labor force because of the recession, despite being able and willing to work. The pandemic recession poses other unique challenges as well. Those infected by COVID-19 may have long-term chronic conditions that may qualify them for disability benefits or supports in the future, putting an even greater demand on these programs and services. Taken together, this suggests there is a small but critical window of opportunity to connect people with training and resources before they become discouraged and permanently disconnected from the labor market.

The impact of the pandemic on the labor force is only one factor impacting the employment and opportunity outlook for people with disabilities. The pandemic has also amplified and accelerated many trends previously affecting the future of work and workers. These trends may disproportionately affect many who have historically faced significant barriers to employment, including people with disabilities, and compound the economic hardship brought about by the pandemic. As uncertain as the long-term impact of these trends may be, many of them also provide new opportunities for people with disabilities if governors, policymakers, and industry are able to leverage them strategically.

The following trends offer strategic opportunities:

- The trend toward more **remote work and virtual education and training** offers a cost-effective approach for businesses rethinking place-based productivity and training. These trends also offer workers with disabilities more opportunities to access, enter, and be retained in good jobs.<sup>[2][3]</sup>
- The trend toward **demand-driven skills training models**, such as work-based learning, transitional jobs, and short-term, non-credit coursework, increase opportunities for labor market participation for people with disabilities and promote

inclusive workplaces through competitive integrated employment (CIE) pathways.<sup>[4][5]</sup>

- The trend toward **on-demand work (gig work)** offers opportunities for additional income to subsidize wage and salary employment, helps promote entrepreneurship, and enables flexibility to tailor employment to individual needs, such as flexibility in work schedules and access to assistive technology, for people with disabilities who choose to work as independent contractors.<sup>[6]</sup>
- The trend toward **automation**, and adoption of technology more broadly, will likely provide more opportunities for workers and job seekers with disabilities to access and engage in new forms of training and employment opportunities. For example, augmented reality and collaborative robots may be able to facilitate new forms of training that are aligned with in-demand competencies and skills.<sup>[7][8]</sup>

This new post-pandemic and accelerated future of work environment underscores the urgency of creating a transformative and comprehensive education and workforce development policy agenda. Governors and state policy makers must understand these impacts on people with disabilities and ensure the economic recovery is inclusive of workers and job seekers with a disability. It also offers an opportunity to encourage employers to develop practices that increase access, raise awareness, and create more inclusive training and employment opportunities. Effective partnerships between state education and workforce development systems and private sector partners can help mitigate the uncertainty of the future of work, as well as increase labor market participation and attachment and develop programs informed by in-demand competencies and skills. While state education and workforce systems have taken unprecedentedly swift action to mitigate the disruptive impact of the pandemic, more work remains to better enable an inclusive recovery and economic growth for people with disabilities.

**Strategies states can use to leverage current trends and the momentum of economic recovery include:**

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring quality, consistent, and sustainable employment opportunities and protections for people with disabilities.</li> <li>• Transitioning to more dynamic remote work and distance learning capabilities.</li> <li>• Heightening awareness about workplace health, wellness, safety and reasonable accommodations for all workers.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engaging industry, businesses, and employers as partners to raise awareness about diversity, equity, inclusiveness, and accessibility in the workplace and to lead in developing programs for high-demand jobs.</li> <li>• Improving mechanisms for workers and businesses to access supportive services resources, including assistive technology and mental health services.</li> <li>• Developing a strategy for coordinating efforts across state agencies that ensures all recovery efforts, growth strategies, and policies are inclusive of people with disabilities.</li> </ul> |
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## Action planning to establish sustainable statewide coordination that promotes disability employment

Throughout May 2021, the NGA Center for Best Practices hosted a virtual action lab series on establishing sustainable statewide coordination to promote disability employment. This series invited Governors to assemble teams of key stakeholders to collaborate around ways to leverage the trends noted above to promote employment opportunities for people with disabilities throughout economic recovery and beyond. Through this series, state teams engaged in peer learning and action planning to incorporate disability employment as a statewide priority throughout the workforce system. Teams from six states - **Kansas, Maryland, Montana, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee** – participated in this action lab series. Each team included at least one representative from the Governor’s office, one representative of the state’s vocational rehabilitation agency, and up to four representatives from other entities that play a significant role in the state’s disability employment ecosystem.



The action lab series was an opportunity for state teams to learn how other states have been successful in implementing policy to support disability employment, and these teams engaged in facilitated planning conversations on improving coordination across their state to support people with disabilities. This series served as a critical opportunity for participating states to bring together key stakeholders who do not always have the chance to work collaboratively but who each play a critical role in promoting disability employment in their state.

### **Governor’s Role in Aligning the Disability Employment Ecosystem**

Governors can use their leadership to bring often siloed, disjointed systems and stakeholders together to develop a shared vision for the future and engage in strategic planning and coordinated implementation toward that vision. As a best practice, state action planning, and more formal strategic planning, should be inclusive of people with disabilities across state programs and policy, and should leverage resources and partnerships across the state in a way that is inclusive and supportive of people with disabilities. All states can benefit from creating intentional spaces for key stakeholders in the disability employment ecosystem to convene and discuss how they can more strategically coordinate their efforts to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

## Key Stakeholders in the Disability Employment Ecosystem

Each state has a unique set of stakeholders and stakeholder relationships that impact the promotion of disability employment. This guide will refer to all those entities who are leaders in promoting disability employment in any given state as **key stakeholders**. In many states, these stakeholders include the Governor’s office, Vocational Rehabilitation agencies, workforce agencies, workforce boards and human services agencies. In some states, other key stakeholders may include education agencies, community colleges, prominent employers or other community partners. While these key stakeholders do not necessarily work together on a day-to-day basis, they can each maximize their capacity to support people with disabilities if they make an intentional effort to work together to identify and address the most pressing challenges within the disability employment ecosystem.

This guide describes how Governors can convene key stakeholders to work through a similar process. Appendix A provides an action planning template key stakeholders can use to guide the various stages of discussion laid out in this process. This guide goes in-depth on each of the four key objectives outlined in the template. Each section of this guide includes several sub-sections that describe action steps states can take to make progress toward each objective.

Objective	Action Step
Understanding the role of the disability employment ecosystem in supporting economic recovery and preparing for the future of work.	Identifying Strengths and Assets
	Identifying Core Challenges
Defining a successful disability employment ecosystem and measuring key outcomes.	Setting Clear Objectives
	Determining Relevant Metrics
Coordinating efforts to support positive employment outcomes for people with disabilities.	Identifying Intervention Strategies
	Designating Lead
	Establishing Timeline
Ensuring sustained progress in expanding high-quality employment opportunities for people with disabilities.	Establishing Systems and Governance Structures for Sustainable Coordination
	Identifying Strategies to Gain Broader Buy-In and Support

The objectives outlined are intended to direct key stakeholders toward developing a state workforce system that promotes disability employment in a coordinated and comprehensive way. The objectives outlined are closely aligned with the four phases of the roadmap featured in NGA’s [State Guide for Preparing the Future Workforce Now](#). This type of action planning process can be adapted and applied to guide states toward transformational change in other critical policy areas.

## **Understanding the role of the disability employment ecosystem in supporting economic recovery and preparing for the future of work**

Key stakeholders have the opportunity to create a workforce system that effectively prepares people with disabilities to succeed in high-demand, high-quality work opportunities today and in the future. To accomplish this, state leaders must first develop a clear understanding of the current ecosystem that supports people with disabilities and the role each entity in that ecosystem plays in the broader workforce development system. This includes understanding the array of programs and services provided through various entities as well as the funding streams that support those activities. This baseline understanding allows state leaders to effectively assess strengths that can be leveraged and weaknesses that may need to be addressed to create systemic change.

### **Identifying Strengths and Assets**

To foster highly effective interagency coordination that promotes disability employment, lead entities in the disability employment community should be involved in the process of mapping the current landscape of the disability employment ecosystem. Key stakeholders should collaborate to develop as complete an understanding of the current disability employment system as possible, answering the following questions:

- Who are leaders in the disability employment ecosystem?
- Who are all of the stakeholders in the disability employment ecosystem?
- What are the relationships between these stakeholders like?
- What are the key programs and services that currently promote disability employment? Which state agency or department is responsible for each of these?
- What funding streams currently support disability employment?
- Which components of the current system excel? What does that look like?

### **Disability Employment Stakeholders Typically Include:**

- Workers and jobseekers with disabilities and their families (when appropriate)
- Governor's office
- Employers
- Employee resource groups on disability
- Centers for independent living
- Vocational rehabilitation
- Community service providers
- State workforce agency
- State and local workforce boards
- American Job Centers
- State human services agencies, including Medicaid, intellectual and developmental disabilities, mental health
- Community colleges and Disability Services Offices in institutions of higher education
- Worker's compensation agency
- Disability advocacy organizations and non-profits

### **Federal funding streams that support disability employment and training in many states include:**

- [Title I of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act \(WIOA\)](#)
- [Title I of the Rehabilitation Act \(Vocational Rehabilitation Program\), as amended by Title IV of WIOA](#)
- [Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act \(Perkins V\)](#)
- [Temporary Assistance for Needy Families \(TANF\)](#)
- [Ticket to Work](#)
- [Disability Employment Initiative](#)
- [Retaining Employment and Talent after Injury/Illness Network \(RETAIN\)](#)
- [State Apprenticeship Expansion, Equity and Innovation Grants \(SAEEI\)](#)
- [Work Opportunity Tax Credit \(WOTC\)](#)
- [Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services Employment Initiative](#)

### **Identifying Core Challenges**

A strong foundation for system change will rely not only on an understanding of what the current system looks like, but also how it works. Key stakeholders should understand the current outcomes achieved by the workforce system for people with disabilities and the factors that contribute to those outcomes.

Key stakeholders should look across the workforce system to identify which components are successfully serving people with disabilities and where the system may be falling short, considering the following:

- What barriers do people with disabilities face in achieving success in employment?
- What barriers does the workforce system face in properly serving people with disabilities?
- What are the weaknesses of our current system? What are the consequences of those weaknesses?
- Overall, how well is our system preparing people with disabilities for existing employment opportunities?

This assessment may be used to identify opportunities to take meaningful action for system improvement. Understanding how the workforce system serves people with disabilities, including the system's current strengths and weaknesses, will help the state identify where they may be best positioned to act and the types of challenges that action could address.

**Governors can be critical catalysts of opportunities for key stakeholders to come together to assess the current state of disability employment efforts and identify opportunities for improvement.**



### **Alaska: Work Matters Task Force**

In February 2021, the [Alaska Governor’s Council on Disabilities & Special Education \(GCDSE\)](#) and the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (AMHTA) established the Alaska Work Matters Task Force with strong support from Governor Mike J. Dunleavy. The Task Force includes representatives from relevant state agencies, private sector employers and private citizens with disabilities. Through 2021, the Task Force will undertake a review and analysis of existing policies, practices, and procedures, existing barriers, and existing workforce utilization data regarding the employment of people with disabilities in the State of Alaska. By February 2022, the Task Force will document the findings of their review and analysis and prepare a report that includes recommendations for policies, practices, and procedures to improve employment opportunities and outcomes for individuals with disabilities. These recommendations should help to the state maximize the utility of relevant funding streams and implement policy that ultimately leads to improved employment outcomes for people with disabilities.



### **Kansas: Employment First Oversight Commission**

In Kansas, since 2011 the [Employment First Oversight Commission](#) has submitted an annual report to the Governor, identifying concerns of Kansans with disabilities and recommendations for both legislative and policy solutions. The commission is comprised of policymakers and leaders from key community partners appointed by the Governor and by the state legislature. At least eight other states have formed similar delegations to assess and make recommendations as to how their governors and legislatures can promote [Employment First](#) as a statewide approach to serving people with disabilities.

*“[Employment First](#) is a framework that for systems change that is centered on the premise that all citizens, including individuals with significant disabilities, are capable of full participation in integrated employment and community life.”*

*– U.S. DOL Office of Disability Employment Policy*

## **Defining a successful disability employment ecosystem and measuring key outcomes**

Before working to determine what strategies the state should implement to address each challenge, key stakeholders should have a common understanding of the indicators of success. This includes identifying key outcomes that should be achieved and strategies to measure progress toward those outcomes.

### **Setting Clear Objectives**

Once the state has a clear understanding of how their workforce system currently serves workers with disabilities, key stakeholders should work together to decide what an *ideal* system would look like. In doing so, they should take into account both how a successful system would operate and what outcomes it would yield. Key stakeholders should consider:

- What are the characteristics of a workforce system that successfully serves people with disabilities?
- What outcomes would be achieved in a workforce system that successfully serves workers and jobseekers with disabilities? For employers? For the state?

By answering these questions, key stakeholders can establish objectives that their state should work toward. They should identify some objectives that can be achieved within a relatively short time period (e.g., less than six months) and other objectives that will take longer to achieve (e.g., six months to several years). Key stakeholders should work together to prioritize objectives that will address the challenges they determined they are best positioned to address. Key stakeholders should commit to creating strategies to make progress toward each of these priority objectives.

### **Determining Relevant Metrics**

To measure progress, key stakeholders should determine specific metrics that would indicate success and develop a plan to collect data against those metrics. Key stakeholders should also set a timeframe within which they intend to hit target benchmarks. Some objectives may lend themselves well to being measured by concrete, numerical metrics while others may require a more subjective evaluation to measure progress. Either way, key stakeholders should consider how they can collect and analyze relevant information to track progress toward objectives and inform continuous improvement. Key stakeholders should be conscious of what data sources they will need to use and what they will need to do to access them. In some cases, it may be necessary to establish data sharing agreements or launch new data collection initiatives in order to access and compile all necessary information.

Examples of metrics key stakeholders may choose to measure in their state include:

Metric	Sample Target
Unemployment Rate	The gap between the unemployment rate for those with a disability and those without will decrease by 50% over the next 5 years
Wages	The median hourly wage for workers with disabilities will increase by 15% over the next 5 years
Measure of Collaboration	Relevant state agency staff at a decision-making level consistently participate in regularly scheduled meetings
Access to Services	Increase engagement such that 80% of unemployed workers with disabilities engage in training and employment support services

**Several states have set goals geared toward expanding employment opportunities for people with disabilities within state government and paired their goals with specific metrics against which to measure their progress.**



### **Illinois: Online Work Disability Survey**

The Illinois departments of Human Rights, Human Services, Central Management Services, the Interagency Committee on Employees with Disabilities and other state agencies conduct an [ongoing online work disability survey](#). Through the survey, employees with disabilities self-identify in order to identify underutilization of supported employment services and inform emergency procedure plans.



### **Kansas: Collection of Baseline Data**

In 2010, former Kansas Governor Mark Parkinson signed [Executive Order 10-10](#), requiring state agencies to collect and report baseline data on disability employment within the state and collaboratively develop a shared vision to promote competitive employment opportunities for people with disabilities. The order also required that agencies measure progress by annually reporting on the numbers of people with disabilities employed by each agency and their fiscal impact on the state.



## Minnesota: State Hiring Target Metrics

In 2019, Minnesota Governor Tim Walz issued [Executive Order 19-15](#), with the objective of making Minnesota an Employment First state. This executive order requires the executive branch to make efforts to comply with affirmative action practices and set a specific goal of having 10% the workforce being people with disabilities. The directive also requires quarterly reports to the governor on hiring progress in the executive branch, and that [governmentwide statistics](#) on employment for individuals with disabilities be posted publicly online. Minnesota is achieving progress in reaching this goal through its Connect 700 Program. This program is an alternative, non-competitive path to a state career for people with certain disabilities. For some individuals, traditional interviewing, assessment and selection methods may not accurately measure their skills and abilities to perform required job responsibilities. The Connect 700 program is a pre-probationary trial work program for up to 700 hours so participants can demonstrate that they can successfully perform the job.



## Pennsylvania: Employment First Target Metrics

Pennsylvania's [Employment First Oversight Commission](#), established through [Act 36 of 2018](#), is an independent commission tasked establishing measurable goals and objectives, tracking progress, and outlining recommendations for the state's implementation of Employment First priorities. Examples of goals set by the Commission in their 2019 annual report to the Governor and General Assembly include:

- By 2022, 30% of working age individuals (18-64) who are on an intellectual disability or Autism waiver will have Competitive Integrated Employment, jobs that offer workers with disabilities competitive pay, benefits and opportunities for advancement as compared to workers without disabilities.
- By 2022, 3000 more individuals on an intellectual disability or Autism waiver will be receiving employment services.

The Commission's [2020 report](#) noted measured progress toward each of these goals over the project year.

## **Coordinating efforts to support positive employment outcomes for people with disabilities**

Once key stakeholders have collaboratively set clear, achievable and measurable objectives, they should begin to identify concrete ways to engage all stakeholders to work together toward achieving them. While there are many individual actions agencies can take to improve how they promote employment opportunities for people with disabilities, state efforts will be more effective if they take on more comprehensive and coordinated approaches together. This may involve building upon programs and structures that are already in place, or intentionally designing new initiatives to address the state's objectives. These strategies should engage key stakeholders and coordinate development of inclusive policy and programs across various systems, programs and funding streams.

### **Identifying Intervention Strategies**

As key stakeholders work to identify strategies that will enable their state to achieve their objectives, they should consider:

- What ongoing efforts could be built upon or scaled to work toward this objective?
- How could this objective be tied to the state's broader workforce development efforts?
- Which entities within the state are particularly well positioned to take the lead on making progress toward this objective?
- How could employer partnerships be leveraged to make progress toward this objective?

### **Designating a Lead and Establishing a Timeline**

Once key stakeholders have agreed on a course of action, they should decide the lead entity or individual on each activity and the timeline for completion. Although this work will be most effective if it is highly collaborative, having a designated lead helps to create accountability in moving this work forward. The lead should be responsible for coordinating between all stakeholders, clearly communicating the responsibilities of each stakeholder and ensuring work is being done within the agreed upon timeline.

**Many states have governance structures in place that facilitate collaborative and streamlined service delivery and policy implementation.**

#### **Montana: Disability Employment and Transition Services Division**

Montana's [Disability Employment and Transition Services Division](#) facilitates statewide partnerships to ensure that all Montanans have access to the training and resources necessary to gain fulfilling employment. Key partners include the state's Vocational Rehabilitation program, community rehabilitation providers, WIOA Title I providers, and Montana's K-12 education system. To further support this effort and ensure stakeholder alignment, the state's Vocational Rehabilitation program contracts with community rehabilitation providers and school districts to deliver training and employment services to

*Montana, continued*

customers. This statewide provider network is well-established and there is a deep understanding about serving those with disabilities, as these service providers are well trained and provide holistic and comprehensive services based on the breadth and depth of their knowledge.

 **Tennessee: Employment First Task Force**

In 2013, former Tennessee Governor Bill Haslam signed Executive Order 28, establishing the Tennessee Employment First Initiative and launching a cross-disability Task Force charged with increasing community employment opportunities and improving employment outcomes for Tennesseans with disabilities. The Governor's [Employment First Task Force](#) initially convened in 2014, and since then this diverse group of stakeholders has made significant progress in building relationships with the understanding that better relationships lead to programs working better. The Task Force includes nine state agencies, self-advocates who receive employment services, provider agencies, parent-advocates, and other community stakeholders. Five workgroups have formed out of this Task Force to further Employment First initiatives with an emphasis on provider and community partners, families and youth, agencies and policymakers, communications, and mental health. As a result, Tennessee has been able to create a unified network for employment advocacy and advancement.

 **New Jersey: Career Pathway Partnership for Employment Accessibility**

The New Jersey Career Pathway Partnership for Employment Accessibility (CPPEA) aims to apply a coordinated systemic approach to encourage career pathway inclusion for people with disabilities. This developing model includes coordinated program recruitment and outreach services to VR eligible individuals and employers, pre-enrollment services, benefits counseling, career pathway pilot navigation support teams and placement services for internships, pre-apprenticeships, registered apprenticeships, and competitive-integrated employment. CPPEA serves to enhance awareness and participation of public sector employers in the State as a Model Employer effort and promote ongoing enhanced employer engagement and alignment with county colleges. Core members include the New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Office of Employment Accessibility Services, Division of Workforce Development from the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development, the New Jersey Division of Developmental Disabilities, the New Jersey Council of County Colleges and other community partners.

## **Ensuring sustained progress in expanding high-quality employment opportunities for people with disabilities**

No single policy, program or initiative will address all the challenges people with disabilities face in preparing for, entering, and maintaining employment. To ensure continued progress toward their objective, key stakeholders should establish systems to promote better, ongoing coordination between their agencies to start making progress toward their key objectives, identify opportunities for continuous improvement and gain sustainable buy-in from all stakeholders.

### **Establishing Systems and Governance Structures for Sustainable Coordination**

Efforts to promote disability employment should be well established enough within the state and integrated into the workforce system such that they can withstand political and staff turnover and evolving state priorities. As key stakeholders work toward establishing the structures necessary to ensure this type of ongoing coordination and engagement, they should consider these questions:

- What systems could be established to promote better, ongoing coordination between our agencies to start making progress toward this objective?
- What other agencies or organizations should be engaged in ongoing coordination efforts in this area?
- Which entities are best positioned to serve as stable champions for this work through political transitions?

### **Identifying Strategies to Gain Broader Buy-In and Support**

With the right governance structures in place, disability employment should be a part of every workforce development conversation and policy decision in the state. This type of intentional coordination should promote policies and programs that support the unique needs of people with disabilities as well as ensure all policies and programs are inclusive of this group across all state entities and community partners. The result should be iterative, continuous improvement in serving people with disabilities and their related employment outcomes. Disability employment should become an ongoing, statewide priority. Key stakeholders should consider these questions:

- How can key stakeholders message the enduring value of ensuring disability employment is considered a central component of the state's broader workforce development efforts?
- How can key stakeholders elevate disability employment as a priority for stakeholders who have not historically been involved in the disability employment ecosystem?

**Some states have established permanent institutions that facilitate this type of ongoing coordination across the state and promote opportunities and equity for people with disabilities broadly, including via employment and training.**

### **Maryland: Department of Disabilities**

In 2004, the [Maryland Department of Disabilities](#) (MDOD) was established, making Maryland the first and only state to create a cabinet-level cross-disability policy agency. MDOD is charged with coordinating and improving the delivery of services to individuals with disabilities. MDOD annually develops and executes the Maryland State Disabilities Plan, which measures programs and services serving people with disabilities. The Secretary, as head of the Maryland Department of Disabilities, sits on numerous advisory councils and task forces to represent the disability perspective. The [Maryland Commission on Disabilities](#) (MCOD) serves as the advisory body for the Maryland Department of Disabilities. MDOD improved the COVID-19 outcomes for people with disabilities by partnering with state agencies on all pandemic response and recovery efforts.

### **Washington: Governor's Committee on Disability Issues & Employment**

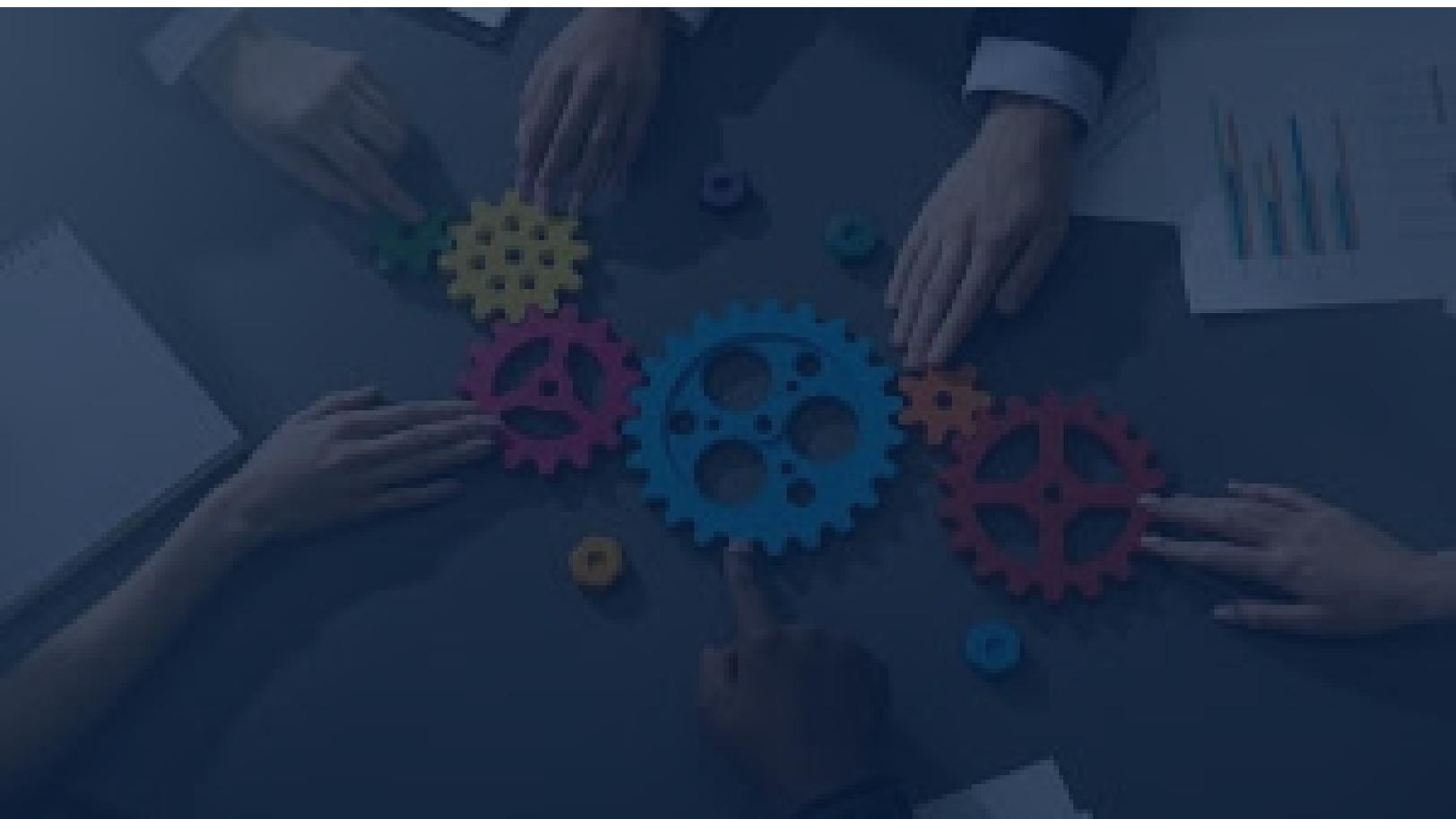
The Washington [Governor's Committee on Disability Issues & Employment](#) was established in 1987 via Executive Order by former Governor Booth Gardner. The Committee advises the Governor and the Legislature on disability issues, generates local action, and initiates projects to address specific issues. The Committee also provides training and assistance to individuals and organizations statewide, from conducting workshops and conferences to publishing disability-related materials.



## Conclusion

People with disabilities are a critical segment of the workforce, and their success benefits not only the workers and their families, but also the employers they work for and their communities more broadly. While people with disabilities face many barriers to entering and maintaining high-quality employment, **Governors can continue to lead in addressing this issue by guiding collaboration among key stakeholders.** Through this collaboration, key stakeholders can implement coordinated and sustainable approaches to connecting people with disabilities in their state with the training, services and supports they need to succeed and thrive.

*This resource was prepared by Madelyn Rahn, policy analyst, and Loren Shimanek, senior policy analyst, with direction and review provided by Rachael Stephens, director of the NGA Center for Best Practices Workforce Development and Economic Policy program. The authors also thank SEED partners, including those at the Office of Disability Employment Policy and Concepts, Inc., for their review of this resource prior to publication.*



## State Team Action-Planning Template: Establishing Sustainable Statewide Coordination to Promote Disability Employment

### Understanding the Role of the Disability Employment Ecosystem In Supporting Economic Recovery and Preparing For the Future of Work

#### Strengths and Assets

Who are leaders in our state’s disability employment ecosystem?

Who are all of the stakeholders in the disability employment ecosystem?

What are the relationships between these stakeholders like?

What are the key programs and services that currently promote disability employment? Which state agency or department is responsible for each of these?

What funding streams currently support disability employment?

Which components of the current system excel? What does that look like?

#### Core Challenges

What barriers do people with disabilities face in achieving success in employment in our state?

What barriers does the state workforce system face in properly serving people with disabilities?

What are the weaknesses of our current system? What are the consequences of those weaknesses?

Overall, how well is our system preparing people with disabilities for existing employment opportunities?

<b>Defining A Successful Disability Employment Ecosystem And Measuring Key Outcomes</b>		
<b>Strengths and Assets</b>	<b>Short Term</b>	<b>Long-Term</b>
<p>What are the characteristics of a workforce system that successfully serves people with disabilities?</p> <p>What outcomes would be achieved in a workforce system that successfully serves workers and jobseekers with disabilities? For employers? For the state?</p> <p>Which of these outcomes may be achieved in the short-term? Which may take longer?</p>		
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Metrics</b></p> <p>How will we know that we have achieved this objective?</p> <p>What metrics can we use to measure success of this objective?</p>		

<b>Coordinating efforts to support positive employment outcomes for people with disabilities</b>				
<b>Intervention</b>	<b>Short-Term Win</b>	<b>Long-Term Strategy</b>	<b>Short-Term Win</b>	<b>Long-Term Strategy</b>
<p>What ongoing efforts could be built upon or scaled to work toward this objective?</p> <p>What policies could be implemented to achieve this objective?</p> <p>Which entities within the state are particularly well positioned to take the lead on making progress toward this objective?</p> <p>How could employer partnerships be leveraged to make progress toward this objective?</p>				
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Lead</b></p> <p>Which agency or other entity should be responsible for overseeing this effort?</p>				
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Timeline</b></p> <p>When will this effort be carried out?</p>				

<b>Ensuring sustained progress in expanding high-quality employment opportunities for people with disabilities.</b>		
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Systems for Sustainable Coordination</b></p> <p>What systems could be established to promote better, ongoing coordination between our agencies to start making progress toward this objective?</p> <p>What other agencies or organizations should be engaged in ongoing coordination efforts in this area?</p> <p>Which entities are best positioned to serve as stable champions for this work through political transitions?</p>		
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Strategies to Gain Broader Buy-In and Support</b></p> <p>How can we message the enduring value of ensuring disability employment is considered as a central component of the state’s broader workforce development efforts?</p> <p>How can we elevate disability employment as a priority for stakeholders who have not historically been involved in the disability employment ecosystem?</p>		

## Sources

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