

Employment First: Frequently Asked Questions

[Kentucky Employment First law](#) states that “The General Assembly finds and declares that it is the policy of the Commonwealth of Kentucky that competitive integrated employment shall be considered the first and primary option for persons with disabilities of working age who desire to become employed.” You can [learn what Employment First means to Kentuckians](#) in this short video.

What Can it Mean for You?

Job Seekers with Disabilities

Caregivers/Guardians of Job Seekers with Disabilities

Disability Service Providers

Education Professionals

Employers

Job Seekers with Disabilities

What is Employment First, and how does it help me find a job?

Answer: Employment First, by law, sets the expectation that employment be the first and preferred option for individuals with disabilities. It works to increase the ways you can connect with resources, support, and training so you can find meaningful work in your community.

How do I start the process of finding a job?

Answer: If you want help finding a job, you can start by [contacting your local vocational rehabilitation agency](#), your case manager, or an employment service provider. They will guide you through an assessment of your skills, interests, and any support you may need to succeed in the workplace. [This guide can help step you through the process of getting help finding a job.](#)

What kind of support can I get while working?

Answer: It depends on the impact of your disability and what you need. You could receive help to figure out what you want to do, find a job, and learn how to do it. Someone may be able to help you find assistive technology or other things that help you do your job. These supports can be tailored to your needs and, if they include long-term support, can be adjusted over time as you become more independent. If you qualify for supported employment, [this guide can help you understand what to expect and how to select an employment provider that is a good fit for you](#)

Can I work and still receive disability benefits?

Answer: The answer is often yes, but it is important to talk to someone knowledgeable to understand how employment affects your specific situation. Wages impact public benefits such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) in different ways. You can ask your VR Counselor for help or contact a Benefits Counselor. [You can learn how to contact a Benefits Counselor in this resource.](#)

How can I be sure that my job is right for me?

Answer: Your VR Counselor or Employment Specialist will work with you to explore your interests, skills, and strengths to find a job that matches your preferences. It's essential to share your interests and needs when seeking employment, as this helps ensure you find a job that aligns with your passions and goals, because you have the right to pursue work that truly fulfills you.

Caregivers/Guardians of Job Seekers with Disabilities

What is Employment First, and how can it benefit Kentuckians with disabilities?

Answer: Employment First is a law that prioritizes competitive, integrated employment for individuals with disabilities. It ensures that people have access to the resources, training, and support they need to find and maintain meaningful jobs in the community.

What role, as a caregiver, do I play in helping Kentuckians with disabilities find employment?

Answer: As a caregiver, your insights are valuable in identifying strengths and interests that could lead to employment success. You can help by being involved in the planning process, advocating for the individual with disabilities' needs, and supporting them as they explore job options. By sharing what you know about the job seeker, you can help be sure they find a job that matches their skills, interests, and support needs.

What types of jobs are available for Kentuckians with disabilities?

Answer: Just like anyone else, people with disabilities can explore job opportunities across a wide variety of industries, including retail, hospitality, office administration, healthcare, and many others. Employment First works to increase connections between job seekers and businesses to better match skills and interests with local labor needs. By sharing what you know about the job seeker, you can help be sure they find a job that matches their skills, interests, and support needs. [Learn about others who have found a variety of jobs by watching these videos](#) or [read these supported employment success stories](#)

How will Kentuckians with disabilities be supported on the job?

Answer: Services may look different for each person based on what they are eligible for and what they need. Through the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, they may receive services such as job counseling, access to technology, and/or personalized support that provides training, assists with workplace accommodations, and offers ongoing support as needed. It can look different for each person, but it should fit one's choices and abilities. Support will change over time as the employee gains independence on the job. People with a significant impact of disability may be eligible for supported employment, providing more individual support. This page shares [information that may be helpful to you as your loved one navigates supported employment services](#)

Will Kentuckians with disabilities lose their benefits if they go to work?

Answer: Many individuals can work and still maintain their benefits during the transition to employment. Programs like [Social Security's Ticket to Work](#) offer incentives to encourage employment without immediately losing benefits. A benefits counselor can provide specific guidance. You can [find a benefits counselor on this Work Incentives Planning and Assistance \(WIPA\) flyer](#). You can find additional information at this [Disability Benefits website](#). It is important to remember that wages impact each benefit differently, so be sure to know what benefit(s) you receive when seeking answers to your own situation.

Disability Service Providers

What is Employment First, and how do we implement it in our services?

Answer: Kentucky's Employment First law prioritizes employment as the first option for individuals with disabilities who want to go to work. To implement this, your services should focus on sharing the possibility of finding a job with everyone you serve and ensuring appropriate goals and plans are set. You may offer employment services or connect people to agencies that provide this direct service. The important thing is to know that Employment First asserts that all individuals, including those with the most significant disabilities, are capable of obtaining competitive integrated employment and should have access to do so if they so choose.

How do we ensure that individuals receive the support they need for successful employment?

Answer: First, employment should be a stated goal for everyone interested in having a job. Typically, employment supports begin with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, and you can [help someone get a VR appointment](#) to begin the process. It is important that each person's strengths, interests, and support needs are thoroughly explored. This information should direct each person's job search, orientation and training, connections to natural supports and other accommodations, plus how you may offer support over time. If your agency provides employment supports, they can ask to be referred to you for this service. If you do not, they will

be connected with an employment provider in your area. Since you know the people you support well, whether offered by you or another agency, be sure to offer insight in the job search process to help them be successful.

What is involved in providing employment services?

Answer: Agencies typically partner with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. There are several vocational services you can provide through this partnership. [Pre-Vocational Services](#) may be helpful for some needing additional skills before going to work. Supported employment helps someone get a job and consists of: discovery (assessing the individual's skills, interests, and support needs), job development (connecting with potential employers), obtaining employment, and ongoing support (initial onboarding, gaining independence, and extended support). [You can learn how to apply to become an OVR provider.](#) UK - HDI's [Supported Employment Training Project offers free training and support](#) to help your staff learn how to do this work well.

How do we collaborate with employers to create employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities?

Answer: Network with local businesses and participate in business organizations. Build partnerships with local businesses or public entities to learn their hiring needs, provide education on workplace accommodations, and the benefits of hiring people with disabilities. This ongoing partnership offers both the employer and the employee potential support needed to maintain success. Some parts of the state have a [Coalition Forward](#) that connects employers and service providers. In Owensboro, the local Chamber partners with the [Inclusive Workforce Coalition](#) around disability and employment. Remember, you should be a critical partner in workforce development in your area, so find local opportunities and connect.

What resources are available to us as service providers?

Answer: There are many ways to get help to provide high-quality employment support. The [Office of Vocational Rehabilitation](#) is a partner in this work, and the [Supported Employment Training Project](#) offers resources, training, and technical assistance to answer your questions and help you support people well. This [quick video on Employment First](#) lists additional resources to help you and the business community increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Education Professionals

What is Employment First?

Answer: Employment First law sets competitive integrated employment as the first and preferred option for Kentuckians with disabilities who desire to become employed. Education professionals can help set this expectation by ensuring inclusion throughout education and

creating expectations that life after school will include employment, as it does for other students. This priority should be included in discussions around setting goals for transition into adulthood.

How do I assist students with disabilities prepare for employment?

Answer: You can assist by conducting assessments of their skills and interests, providing job readiness training, and connecting them with supported employment services that match their goals. You can use the UK-HDI [Transition Checklists](#) as a tool to think about how to build vocational inventories and skills across grade levels.

You can support transition by considering how to implement key pieces of the transition process within your curriculum around the five targeted areas of Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS): *Job exploration counseling, Work-based learning experiences, Post-secondary opportunities, Work readiness training, and Self-advocacy instruction*. This [Pre-ETS flier](#) can help you connect students with Kentucky's Vocational Rehabilitation system, and [this website can help you better understand Pre-ETS](#) and how they can benefit your students.

How can I promote Employment First with my students and their families?

Answer: Employment First requires prioritizing employment for individuals with disabilities. As an educator, this begins with maximizing inclusion efforts throughout the student's educational career and creating expectations that life after school will include employment, as it does for other students. You can start conversations around the job search process by sharing resources such as this on [How to Get Help Finding a Job](#) and the [Supported Employment Training Project's website for job seekers and families](#)

How can I effectively educate and guide the student and/or guardian to help them prepare for employment after high school?

Answer: Stay focused on building skills leading to employment and discussing employment from an early age within Admissions and Release Committee (ARC) meetings. Some suggestions for implementation include regularly including employment planning in conversations, offering age-appropriate career exploration within the classroom but also sharing information with the family and student, collaborating with vocational rehabilitation services, and supporting work-based learning opportunities.

Transition discussions should focus on offering integrated employment opportunities, ensuring access to employment supports as needed, and eliminating barriers that prevent individuals from working in their communities. The transition present levels section within the Individualized Education Program (IEP) should highlight students' interests and strengths. It should intentionally discuss key employability skill development areas such as social communication, self-advocacy, technology literacy, time management, and following workplace instructions.

Successful implementation requires coordinated efforts among special education teachers, general educators, school counselors, rehabilitation specialists, families, and community

employment providers. It may be helpful to share [resources that include ideas for families and students to think about employment](#) or to share examples of other people with disabilities who are successfully employed. Here are ways you can share [video examples](#) and [Supported Employment success stories](#)

Educators may also benefit from resources such as the [Kentucky Department of Education's Transition Resources](#), including information about KY Transition 360 and KY Transition 360 for Educators, and the [National Technical Assistance Center on Transition](#)

Employers

What is Employment First?

Answer: Employment First encourages businesses to consider individuals with disabilities in your recruiting and hiring. This opens up another pool of talent to help you scale up to meet your labor needs. Employment First works to increase employment opportunities, access to jobs, and fair wages for Kentuckians with disabilities. This effort brings together those looking for work with those who need good employees.

What are the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities?

Answer: Hiring individuals with disabilities can enhance workplace diversity, increase productivity, and improve employee morale. Additionally, you may qualify for tax credits such as the [Work Opportunity Tax Credit \(WOTC\)](#). If someone works with an Employment Specialist, that professional can also offer additional support in understanding your business needs, suggesting appropriate applicants, and assisting with training and retention.

What do I need to know about retaining employees with disabilities?

Answer: Employee needs will vary depending on the person. Some people will not need more than any other employee, and some may benefit from adaptations or accommodations such as adjustments to work schedules, job duties, or physical workspaces. Employment Specialists can help you identify and implement these things. [The Job Accommodation Network](#) is another useful resource. As with any employee, it is important to have clear lines of communication and provide ongoing feedback to increase retention and success on the job.

If you have questions about your rights and responsibilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act, you can contact the [Southeast ADA Center](#) for accurate and confidential information.

You can learn more about resources and ways to increase retention through webinars such as the [RETAIN Kentucky/Employment First series](#) for employers.

What can I do to attract applicants with disabilities?

Answer: You can ensure all qualified applicants can participate in your application process by checking that your [job descriptions are accessible](#) and [examining a few key things about your business](#). These small steps can increase access to the talent you need to run your business. Additionally, [these resources can help you create an inclusive workplace](#). You may also want to connect with the [Coalition Forward](#) if they are in your area; this group intentionally brings together businesses looking for employees and those who represent job seekers with disabilities. Either through this group or informally, connecting with providers of disability employment supports can be a great way to share about your company, culture, and labor needs in order to connect with people who could be a good fit for you and help fill your needs.