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# Arizona Employment First: Moving Forward in Community

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August 11, 2025

# Agenda

- ❖ AZ Employment First overview
- ❖ Explore the themes from Employment First feedback opportunities
- ❖ Discover how Arizona Employment First will move forward
- ❖ Learn how you can join the movement



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# AZ Employment First Overview



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# AZ's Employment First Project

- Vision: employment is the first and preferred option for all individuals with disabilities.
- We are committed to move Employment First principles from theory to action
- Dismantle barriers, amplify strengths, and promote a diverse workforce.
- Ensure that every individual can contribute to and thrive within their community, making employment not just an aspiration, but a reality for all.



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# AZ Employment First Implementation Strategies

Collaboration

Data-Driven  
Decisions

Building

Communication



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# Community Feedback Process

- July Topics & Tactics Focus Group
- Survey for Topics & Tactics Attendees
- Questions:
  1. What would success look like, for you or your community, if Employment First worked the way it should?
  2. Can you share a story or example of when someone in your community wanted to work but ran into challenges?
  3. If we could only focus on one thing over the next year to improve employment outcomes, what should it be and why?



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# Exploring the Themes



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# Overarching Themes Across All Questions

- Employment First awareness
- System alignment & coordination
- Policy & structural change
- Earlier transition planning & employment expectation
- Supports for families
- Increase inclusive opportunities
- Employer engagement & education



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# Q1 Themes (What would success look like?)

- Belief that people can succeed in CIE
- More collaboration across all systems
- Alignment in supports from VR & DDD
- Fewer congregant programs
- All people have equal opportunities
- Employers hire inclusively
- Accessible transportation
- Myths about benefits dispelled



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# Q2 Themes (Examples of challenges)

- Service gaps between VR & DDD
- Limited individualized supports
- Transition services start too late
- Job seekers lack advocacy skills
- Limited knowledge of Customized Employment practices
- Parental fears about benefits loss
- Transportation barriers



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# Q3 Themes (One focus for EF)

- Coalition-building across stakeholders for increased collaboration
- Consistent messaging from all systems and organizations
- Effective communication between VR, DDD, schools, and providers
- Customized employment opportunities
- Employer education on inclusive hiring
- Equitable opportunities for all in employment services



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# What are People Saying about Employment First?

- ❖ “All people having the opportunity for Competitive Integrated Employment.”
- ❖ “If the family had more effective supports, I believe they could have navigated the system better.”
- ❖ “People basically need to see it to believe it.”



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# Moving Forward in Community



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# Moving Forward in Community

- Technical assistance and guidance to all partners
- Community engagement and outreach
- Employer engagement
- Training & events
- Resource Development
- Employment First Advisory Workgroup



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# Next steps for Employment First

- Continue to receive feedback from the community to guide Employment First strategic planning
- Collaboration with all stakeholders and all communities to drive systems change
- Increase availability of training for community
- Support partners to embed Employment First principles
- Share success stories to drive change



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# Employment First Belongs to the Community!



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# Join the Movement!

- Engage in monthly Employment First: Topics & Tactics sessions
- Reach out for training or technical assistance for your team
- Ensure your organization or entity is following Employment First best practices and principles
- Support job seekers who want to work!
- Be an Employment First champion!



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# Move Forward with Us!

- Visit the Sonoran Center Employment First page – <https://sonorancenter.arizona.edu/azemploymentfirst>
- Join monthly Employment First Topics & Tactics – <https://sonorancenter.arizona.edu/events/employment-first-topics-tactics>
- Join Arizona APSE – <https://www.azapse.org/>



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