

February 16, 2024

Greetings!

I'd like to thank all of the Employment Service Organizations (ESOs), Advocacy Organizations and other stakeholders who have participated in the **Virginia Employment First Advisory Group**. We have seen many exciting changes since the inception of this group to include new services and service definitions under the waiver, a semi-annual data report that has received 100% participation from employment service organizations, family listening sessions that identified areas for growth and improvement, and training tools for support coordinators and families. We are proud of what you have contributed to these efforts and of what we have been able to achieve in the areas of data management, policy enhancement, education & training, and membership. Our successes could not have been accomplished without you!

For those who have not yet had the opportunity to join the Employment First Advisory Group (E1AG), this letter also serves as an open invitation to connect with this dynamic group of people and have your voices heard. As the facilitator of E1AG, I am reaching out to you, personally, in hopes that you will seriously consider membership.

The purpose of the Employment First Advisory Group (E1AG) is to provide input, feedback, and recommendations on DBHDS' efforts to increase community based, minimum wage or higher, integrated employment opportunities for people with disabilities. E1AG has been an essential part of DBHDS' implementation of the Employment First Initiative by assisting with coordination across state agencies.

The Employment First Advisory Group is a cross-disability employment first group. Currently we need members representing person with lived experience with developmental disabilities or behavioral health support needs, family members of individuals with lived experience, and employment service organizations serving individuals.

We are very excited about the opportunity to bring on board, both experts in the field of employment services for people with disabilities, as well as advocates for empowerment. Our intent is to gather a group of effective stakeholders who are representative and reflect diversity across a number of factors including geographical areas, organizations and affiliations.

If you are interested in becoming a member, please complete the attached application and return it to heather.norton@dbhds.virginia.gov. As we are restructuring we are asking all current members and new members to reapply. We are looking for 3 self-advocates, 3 family members, and 2 employment service organization members.

Because everyone is so busy, it is important to note the commitment required of this work. The E1AG meets every other month (February, April, June, August, October, December) on the 3rd Wednesday of the month from 10am -2pm. We will begin meeting in person with a Teams Link.

Applications will be due March 1st by close of business. If you would like to join the meeting on February 21st **Join on your computer, mobile app or room device** [Click here to join the meeting](#) prior to applying, please feel free. We will also be in person at 8004 Franklin Farms Dr, Richmond, VA

Let us optimize our coordinated efforts to make a difference.

Best Wishes,

Heather Norton
Assistant Commissioner