

Application Report



Applicant Organization: AbilityFirst
Project Name: AbilityFirst Supported Employment Program
Application ID: [REDACTED]
Funding Announcement: DDS Employment Grant
Requested Amount: [REDACTED]

Project Summary: The project goal is to reduce barriers to, and expand opportunities for, competitive integrated employment (CIE) for Regional Center clients with I/DD. With extensive community and personal outreach, project staff will develop, strengthen, and sustain relationships with members of the business community to expand the pool of job opportunities for individuals with I/DD.

Authorized Certifying Official: [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
Project Director/Manager: [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
Project Manager/Coordinator: [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
Compliance/Fiscal Officer: [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Section Name: Applicant Eligibility

Sub Section Name: Applicant Information

1. Applicant Question: Organization Type

Check all that apply. If selecting "Other" please specify your type of organization.

Applicant Response:

- Regional Center Vendor
 - Department of Rehabilitation Vendor
-

2. Applicant Question: Description of Agency/Organization

Provide a brief description of the organization or group. You may add a website link for additional information.

Applicant Response:

AbilityFirst (www.abilityfirst.org) provides person-centered programs to help people with disabilities achieve their full potential throughout their lives. They empower children and adults to discover what is important to them and develop skills that are important for them to achieve their goals. Programs include community participation and skills development; camp; employment training and placement; support for college students; warm water aquatics; and two group homes

3. Applicant Question: Applicant in Good Standing

Is the applicant in good standing with the California Secretary of State, California Franchise Tax Board, and California

Department of Tax and Fee Administration? Please upload confirmation letter(s) or proof of good standing.

Applicant Response:

Yes

Attachment:



4. Applicant Question: Subcontractors in Good Standing

Are the applicant's subcontractors in good standing with the California Secretary of State, California Franchise Tax Board, and California Department of Tax and Fee Administration? Select "N/A" if you do not plan to use subcontractors for your project.

Applicant Response:

Not Applicable

Applicant Comment:

Not Applicable

Section Name: Grant Application

Sub Section Name: Proposal Summary

1. Applicant Question: Project Type

Choose one project type that best describes your activities.

Applicant Response:

Business Focused Practices

2. Applicant Question: Duration of Project

Choose the duration of your project, 12 months or 18 months.

Applicant Response:

18 months

3. Applicant Question: Regional Centers in Service Area

Identify the Regional Center(s) in the community to be served by this project. Select all that apply. For a regional center map, see [Attachment F](#).

Applicant Response:

- Eastern Los Angeles Regional Center
 - Frank D. Lanterman Regional Center
 - Harbor Regional Center
 - San Gabriel/Pomona Regional Center
-

4. Applicant Question: Counties Served

List the county or counties that the project will serve. Check all that apply.

Applicant Response:

- Los Angeles County
-

5. Applicant Question: City of Los Angeles

If your project proposes to serve the City of Los Angeles, list the zip codes your project will serve.

Zip code information for Los Angeles County can be found [here](#). If your project does not serve the Los Angeles area, select "N/A".

Applicant Response:

Cities served by ELARC, FDLRC, HRC, SGPRC

Los Angeles zip codes: 90004-7, 90010-23, 90026-36, 90038-42, 90044, 90046-48, 90050-51, 90053-58, 90060, 90063, 90065, 90069-72, 90074-76, 90078-79, 90084, 90086-88, 90093, 90096

6. Applicant Question: Collaborating Organizations or Other Entities

Does your project include partnerships with one or more organizations either as a co-applicant or subcontractor? If "yes", please upload a letter of support from each organization, that includes an explanation of their role in the partnership.

Applicant Response:

No

7. Applicant Question: Consultants and Trainers

Describe the qualifications of the consultant/trainer/training organization, including their subject matter expertise in competitive integrated employment for individuals with developmental disabilities. Describe their prior experience as a consultant/trainer, professional credentials, including names of other organizations/entities for whom they have provided consultation or training.

If question does not apply to your project, select "N/A"

Applicant Response:

Not Applicable

Applicant Comment:

Not Applicable

Section Name: Target Population

Sub Section Name: People Served

1. Applicant Question: Number of youth (under 18) with I/DD that will be served

Specify number of people to participate or be served by this project. If question does not apply to your project, select "N/A".

Applicant Response:

0

2. Applicant Question: Number of adults (18 and older) with I/DD that will be served

Specify number of people to participate or be served by this project. If question does not apply to your project, select "N/A".

Applicant Response:

150

3. Applicant Question: Number of family members that will be served

Specify number of people to participate or be served by this project. If question does not apply to your project, select "N/A".

Applicant Response:

0

4. Applicant Question: Number of professionals and staff that will be trained

Specify number of people to participate or be served by this project. If question does not apply to your project, select "N/A".

Applicant Response:

40

5. Applicant Question: Number of other individuals that will be served/trained

Specify number of people to participate or be served by this project. Please describe the individuals that will be served. If question does not apply to your project, select "N/A".

Applicant Response:

50

Applicant Comment:

50 representatives of businesses and employers will receive training.

6. Applicant Question: Ethnicity Group Served

Select the ethnicity group(s) the project will serve. For "Indian", "Pacific Islander", "Slavic" or "Other" use comment section to list specific groups.

- **"Indian"** includes: Indian (nationals of the present-day Republic of India), Bangladeshi, Nepalese, Pakistani, and Sri Lankan.
- **"Pacific Islanders"** includes: individuals whose origins are the original peoples of Polynesia, Micronesia, and Melanesia. Polynesia includes Guam, Hawaii (Native Hawaiian), Samoa (Samoan), American Samoa (Samoan), Tokelau (Tokelauan), Tahiti (Tahitian), Tonga (Tongan) and other Pacific Islands.
- **"Slavic"** includes: Russian, Ukrainian, and Belorussian (East Slavic), Polish, Czech, Slovak, and Sorbian (West Slavic), and Bulgarian, Serbian, Croatian, Macedonian, and Slovene (South Slavic).
- The **"other"** category includes ethnicities not specified in the ethnicity options.

Applicant Response:

- White
 - Pacific Islander
 - Korean
 - Japanese
 - Hispanic
 - Filipino
 - Chinese
 - African American
-

Section Name: Project Application

Sub Section Name: Project Application

1. Applicant Question: Project Abstract

Provide a clear and concise project summary that includes a defined target population, geographic area, and project design. Specifically describe what your project will accomplish and the intended impact it will have on the employment of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Applicant Response:

The project purpose is to reduce barriers and expand opportunities for competitive integrated employment (CIE), for Regional Center clients with I/DD. With extensive outreach and personal engagement, project staff will develop, strengthen, and sustain relationships with business community members to expand the pool of job opportunities for individuals with I/DD. The project will operate in Los Angeles County, specifically in the catchment areas of the Eastern Los Angeles, Frank D. Lanterman, Harbor, and San Gabriel/Pomona Regional Centers. AbilityFirst has existing vendor contracts with each of these entities.

With a customized curriculum, the project staff (Project Manager and Job Developer), under the direction of the AbilityFirst Associate Director of Supported Employment, will advocate for individuals with I/DD to foster equal access to CIE. Removing barriers to services, expanding pathways to success, empowering individuals to realize their full potential, and working toward full community participation, strengthen the quality of life for all residents and help to implement the vision of a just and equitable society for all.

The project focus is to become a tool to equip hiring managers to become champions in hiring people with I/DD into their workforces. Project activities will include 50 employer information sessions at various venues, including local chambers of commerce, job fairs, social clubs, industry associations, and individual contacts. Like all AbilityFirst activities, in-person events will comply with all applicable public health and safety protocols, such as masking or distancing. Outreach and advocacy will include resources for hiring managers and executives on interviewing and developing an inclusive, welcoming workplace for individuals with I/DD and other employees. We expect the project activities will lead to CIE for 50 individuals with I/DD with organizations that have participated in the outreach.

2. Applicant Question: Need for Project Question 1

Please describe the underlying problem, challenges, or issues that your project will address.

Applicant Response:

The project will address several barriers to CIE: more individuals are seeking diverse and interesting jobs; employers have limited awareness of prospective employees' capabilities; person-centered exploration and CIE require more interest- and skill-based opportunities. Individuals need more opportunities for CIE, and employers need motivated, skilled workers. Businesses often do not invest resources to equip their front-line supervisors to work successfully with people with disabilities.

3. Applicant Question: Need for Project Question 2

Provide facts or data to support the need for this project

Applicant Response:

People with I/DD want to work, earn money, and be part of the economic life of their communities. State policy is that opportunities for CIE shall be given the highest priority for working-age individuals with I/DD, regardless of the severity of their disabilities. Still, the employment rate for Regional Center clients statewide declined from 16% in 2019 to 13.5% in the first half of 2020. (dds.ca.gov/rc/dashboard/employment). In the Regional Centers to be served by this project, the average employment rate declined from 12.27% to 10.44%. As the economy recovers from the lingering effects of the pandemic, widespread news reporting documents employers' struggles to fill existing vacancies, in all job categories. Regional Center caseloads continue to increase (dds.ca.gov/transparency/facts-stats). In 2021, the number of people seeking employment services from AbilityFirst increased more than 20%, and placements by more than 70%, indicating the scope of the growing need for services.

4. Applicant Question: Need for Project Question 3

Describe how the project will involve and benefit participants who are from diverse backgrounds

Applicant Response:

Individuals to be served by the project come from economically, culturally, and socially diverse communities (ranging from East Los Angeles and the Pico-Union area of Los Angeles to Pomona and Long Beach). AbilityFirst reaffirmed its commitment to principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) for all individuals in 2021, with a goal of increasing access to services for individuals who have low incomes, come from diverse cultures, and speak languages other than English. In 2022-23 AbilityFirst is expanding supported employment services to reach individuals in East Los Angeles, Pico-Union, and Southeast Los Angeles. The project will increase their opportunities to obtain meaningful employment in their communities, a key tenet of person-centered programming. In 2021, 80% of supported employment participants were people of color. 80+% of AbilityFirst supported employment team members are bilingual and able to support individuals from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

5. Applicant Question: Approach Question 1A

For Business Focused Practices, Employment Preparation Services and Supports, Service Models for Individuals with High Support Needs, and Training and Implementation project types.

- Describe the objective for your project
- Describe the new or innovative methods and activities that will be used that correspond to the proposed objective and project type that:
 - Use innovative, evidence-based, best, or promising practices, services and /or supports
 - Promote increased and meaningful opportunities for participants to make an informed choice for career options and prepare for CIE
 - Are designed to achieve, maintain, or advance individuals with I/DD in competitive integrated employment
 - Are designed to be replicable
- Include how you used input from the community and/target population in the design of the project
- Describe any project deliverables

If your project is not Business Focused Practices, Employment Preparation Services and Supports, Service Models for Individuals with High Support Needs, or Training and Implementation, select "N/A".

Applicant Response:

The project is fully consistent with the goals of the Employment First Policy, and the expiring CIE Blueprint, and will build on our successful participation in the paid internship program. The project will strengthen informed choice with more and enhanced opportunities in underserved areas, with a goal of empowering individuals to explore their interests and goals and secure work in their communities. The project will develop collaborations with businesses and other employers to increase workforce preparation and employment opportunities, to increase employer success and employee satisfaction.

Program participants have extensive support needs, and with person-centered assistance and guidance they develop individualized, self-directed plans that reflect their outcomes, goals, and preferences. Supported employment services include high-quality interest exploration, job matching, access to openings that can be customized to individual needs, personalized interactions with hiring personnel, and support disability inclusion in workplace.

Through years of supporting business partners in the community we have learned that small family-owned entities do not have the capacity to invest time and resources to acquire training or experience in working with people with I/DD. This has long been a barrier when seeking community job opportunities for candidates. The trainings in this project will open the door to more small businesses, who represent a major source of jobs in the community.

The overarching goal of the project, and the supported employment program, is to empower participants to secure and retain CIE, working alongside nondisabled peers, in jobs that reflect their interests, goals, and vision of a life that has meaning and purpose for them. The vision of the project is to develop an outreach platform to connect more than 50 businesses with a cohort of eager and prepared workers, by helping employers learn about the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities, leading to a more diverse and inclusive workplace. Participants will continue to receive person-centered job and interest exploration, training, job search support, and comprehensive job coaching and case management, with a goal of 50 successful placements as a result of the project. The project is readily replicable.

6. Applicant Question: Approach Question 1B

For project type, Service Model Transformation

- A description of the transformation team that will be developing the action plan and includes representation by individuals with ID/D, family members, those who provide direct support, and other relevant community members (e.g., businesses, peer organizations, partnerships, etc.,)
- The objective and activities to be used in developing the action plan, including an outline of the areas to be addressed in the transformational planning and organizational change that will affect the CIE employment services.
- Include how you used input from the community and/target population in the design of the project?
- A detailed description of the planning process that will be used
 - Describe project deliverables
 - Describe how you plan to engage the regional center in the transformation plan

If your project type is not Service Model Transformation, select "N/A".

Applicant Response:

Not Applicable

Applicant Comment:

Not Applicable

7. Applicant Question: Sustainability Question 1

How will individuals served by the project continue receiving employment services and supports once the project has ended?

Applicant Response:

Under the existing AbilityFirst supported employment program model, personalized support – including job coaching, case management, and job development – is available for as long and as often as the individual chooses. After the project has ended, AbilityFirst staff will continue its advocacy and outreach work to remove barriers to employment for all individuals who want CIE. Any client who wishes to receive individualized employment placement services will meet with their support team every three months to review services level. During the meeting AbilityFirst team members will discuss any barriers and challenges to services so that all team members can continue to work toward the same goals.

8. Applicant Question: Sustainability Question 2

How will your project continue its work after the grant funding has concluded?

Applicant Response:

AbilityFirst has a comprehensive fundraising plan to ensure that we continue to secure the resources needed to address the growing needs of individuals with I/DD into the future, while mitigating financial barriers to attendance. Service fees from Regional Centers and Department of Rehabilitation cover only about 60% of supported employment program costs. In addition, a diverse revenue stream that includes individual and corporate donations, grants, special events, investment income, and other sources. Many businesses that employ supported employees also support fundraising campaigns and other events.

9. Applicant Question: Sustainability Question 3

Describe your plan to engage the regional center for future sustainability of the project and individuals served.

Applicant Response:

AbilityFirst has longstanding relationships with Los Angeles County Regional Centers, including staff participation on Vendor Advisory Councils. We will engage Regional Centers and agencies to share the learnings from this project. AbilityFirst will host café events with Regional Center stakeholders to gain feedback and share success stories. The café will extend speaking invitations to successful job seekers and employers who had positive experiences to promote and leverage relationships to potential employers. AbilityFirst will use the project to demonstrate to Regional Center the value of marketing and developing resources for business partners. We have long advocated for increased Regional Center funding for our programs.

10. Applicant Question: Organizational Capacity Question 1

Please include details about the history of the organization, its mission or purpose, summary of major programs, services and activities and details about how they tie to the target population. If from a large organization with multiple departments, provide a brief overview of entire organization and then focus on the department or program involved with this proposal. Describe any ongoing collaborative partners in your community.

Applicant Response:

AbilityFirst provides programs to help people with disabilities realize their full potential throughout their lives. Our person-centered programs empower individuals with autism spectrum disorders, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, and other intellectual/developmental and physical disabilities to discover what is important to them, and develop the skills that are important for them to achieve their goals.

Formed in 1926 to help children affected by the pre-vaccine polio epidemic, AbilityFirst pioneered some of the first community services in California for children with disabilities. Programs expanded to include services for adults as well as children, and support people with a broader range of disabilities. Major programs serve more than 1,700 individuals annually, and include community integration and skills development for children and adults, supported employment, manufacturing, camping, College to Career, warm water aquatics, social and recreational programs, and 2 group homes.

11. Applicant Question: Organizational Capacity Question 2

Describe your agency's experience supporting the proposed target population.

Applicant Response:

AbilityFirst has offered employment services for individuals with disabilities for more than 70 years. It was formed to help children with polio, and has served individuals with intellectual/developmental and physical disabilities for 96 years. Throughout that time, our primary focus has been on providing opportunity and choice for individuals with disabilities, to equip them to transform their lives. All programs are community focused and person-centered.

12. Applicant Question: Organizational Capacity Question 3

Describe employment (or other relevant services) you currently provide.

Applicant Response:

The supported employment program assisted ~400 older youth and adults in 2021, with CIE, internships and student work experience, job training, interest exploration and job search support. A manufacturing social enterprise provides employment, producing office supplies for sale to government agencies, providing contracted precision production and assembly services. AbilityFirst ExploreAbility and PossAbility programs provide community volunteer opportunities that enhance job readiness skills.

13. Applicant Question: Organizational Capacity Question 4

How will the grant help the organization/agency build expertise to support individuals with I/DD to achieve competitive integrated employment?

Applicant Response:

The project will develop written materials for businesses that will also be used for AbilityFirst staff recruitment and training. The project will serve as a launching pad for AbilityFirst to garner greater name recognition and become known to the business community as a placement agency of choice, leading to more placements and partnerships. We will share this expertise with Regional Centers and other service providers.

14. Applicant Question: Organizational Capacity Question 5

Describe your organization/ agency experience and current capacity to support grant-based activities and reporting.

Applicant Response:

AbilityFirst program, fundraising, and accounting staff has extensive experience with implementing new programs and grant administration and reporting. In addition to numerous private foundations, we have recently received provider relief funds from the US Department of Health and Human Services through the CARES Act and American Rescue Plan, as well as several HCBS Final Rule compliance grants through the Department of Developmental Services and Regional Centers.

15. Applicant Question: Engagement Plan Question 1

Describe how the organization/agency will recruit participants and/or families for participation in the project.

Applicant Response:

The supported employment program benefits from referrals from Regional Centers and the state Department of Rehabilitation (DOR). DOR provides employment, independent living, and advocacy services. Regional Centers coordinate service delivery (including supportive services, case management, transportation, etc.). This system of collaboration and referral maximizes choice and opportunities, coordinates services, and ensures program quality and accountability. We also receive referrals through outreach to participants and families who attend other AbilityFirst programs, and community resource fairs and other events. We will host workshops for prospective participants and their circles of support to discuss this project. We also expect to recruit new participants through the upcoming program expansion into underserved communities and neighborhoods.

16. Applicant Question: Engagement Plan Question 2

Describe how the organization/agency will collaborate with other groups, organizations, employers, and/or agencies to achieve the objective of the project.

Applicant Response:

AbilityFirst team members will develop relationships with business-related service organizations and chambers of commerce, and Pacific Gateway, in addition to continuing our ongoing outreach to prospective for-profit and nonprofit employers. AbilityFirst board and committee members will be asked to support the program by leveraging their own social and business contacts to assist AbilityFirst in cultivating business community members. The project will highlight the special benefits of supported employment services for employees and employers. With our focus on building a large pool of qualified job candidates, employers who work with AbilityFirst will have access to a pre-screened, highly motivated pool of talent from which to choose. Supported employment also includes ongoing no-cost job coaching support, job development, and often eligibility for business tax incentives.

17. Applicant Question: Engagement Plan Question 3

Service Model Transformation Projects must also include a plan to make two community presentations to key stakeholders and community members. The first presentation is to receive feedback about the proposed changes within the agency. The second community presentation is to present the completed action plan. Describe your plan for these two community presentations.

If your project is not Service Model Transformation, please select "N/A"

Applicant Response:

Not Applicable

Applicant Comment:

Not Applicable

18. Applicant Question: Project Activities

Clearly and specifically state how the schedule of activities demonstrates the steps that the project will take to achieve its stated objective and measures. See [Attachment H](#) for instructions on entering objective and activities into GrantVantage.

Applicant Response:

The schedule of activities documents the specific actions that will be taken to achieve the project goal to reduce barriers to, and expand opportunities for, CIE for Regional Center clients with I/DD. With extensive community and personal outreach, project staff will develop, strengthen, and sustain relationships with members of the business community to expand the pool of job opportunities for individuals with I/DD. The program will be administered by two new employees, the Project Manager, and a Job Developer, with oversight from the Associate Director of Supported Employment.

The project team will develop written training materials and information for business leaders and hiring managers. Participation in community organizations and individual contact will empower businesses to understand the benefits of hiring individuals with I/DD. The materials will also become part of the AbilityFirst staff training curriculum, so that other job developers and team members are also fully conversant in the diversity, equity, and inclusion goals. During the project term, at least 50 workshops and individual meetings will be held, leading to employment opportunities for 50 individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

19. Applicant Question: Project Data

Provide a clear plan of how data will be collected to track project objectives, activities and measures (e.g., what data collection tools will be used, who will collect, software used, who will summarize, etc.).

Applicant Response:

We analyze information and measure program effectiveness, efficiency, and levels of satisfaction regarding the provision of services. We conduct annual satisfaction surveys from each constituent group (program participants, families/caregivers, employers and contracting businesses, and referring agencies) in all of our programs. The supported employment program is accredited by CARF International (formerly the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities). Supported employment program goals and outcomes are established and measured in accordance with CARF standards. Data collected for this grant will include:

Outputs

1. Number of participants to participate in work experiences in CIE and where;
2. Number of businesses or organizations who received outreach contacts and type of business/industry;
3. Number of newly established relationships with businesses or organizations (2 or more meetings) and type of

business/industry;

Outcomes

1. Number of participants referred to a business that matches their employment goal;
2. Number of job interviews resulting from outreach
3. Number of participants hired for a job resulting from outreach

As well as individual participant outcome data and pre/post experience surveys as required.

20. Applicant Question: Budget Template and Narrative

Explain how the project budget is consistent with the stated project objective and activities, and clearly and concisely explain how the proposed expenditures support the overall project design.

Applicant Response:

The major expense of the project is the full-time Project Manager and Job Developer, whose expertise is critical to the success of the project. Personnel costs, [REDACTED] the Associate Director who will oversee the project, [REDACTED] Operating expenses include travel, office supplies and printing, telecommunications and computers, and memberships in organizations such as local chambers of commerce, APSE, and others), and [REDACTED] The total project cost [REDACTED]

21. Applicant Question: Budget Costs

Confirm that that budget does not include non-allowable costs or costs funded by other sources. See [Attachment D](#) for allowable and non-allowable costs.

Applicant Response:

I Confirm

Section Name: Proposal Certification

Sub Section Name: Certification

1. Applicant Question: Confirm Proposal Discussion with RC(s)

Applicants are required to discuss their proposal with each RC(s) service area to be served. Have you discussed your proposal with each RC you are intending to serve?

Applicant Response:

Yes

2. Applicant Question: RC Contact

Applicants are required to submit their application concurrently to the Department and to each RC(s) service area the applicant is intending to serve. State the name(s) of the contact person(s) at each RC you have discussed your proposal with.

Applicant Response:

George de la Loza, Employment Specialist - ELARC

Edith Hernandez, Chief of Consumer Services - ELARC

Melinda Sullivan, Executive Director - FDLRC

Pablo Ibanez, Community Services Director - FDLRC

Patrick Ruppe, Executive Director - HRC

Heather Diaz, Community Services Director - HRC

Lucina Galarza, Community Services Director - SGPRC

3. Applicant Question: Regional Center Service Provider

If you are a vendored regional center service provider, are you in compliance with [Welfare and Institutions Code Section 4652.5](#)?

If you are a not a vendored regional center service provider, please select "N/A".

Applicant Response:

Yes

4. Applicant Question: Confirm review of Standard Measures

DDS has developed standard project measures for each project type. Have you read the guidelines and agree to the standardized measures for your project type. See [Attachment C](#) for Standard Project Measures.

Applicant Response:

Yes

5. Applicant Question: Applicant Certification

By submitting this application, the applicant is certifying the truth and accuracy of the proposal. The applicant also certifies that if you have subcontracting organizations, each participating organization has reviewed your project and agrees to their assigned activities, measures, and the budget.

Applicant Response:

Yes
