



Partners for Employment

FY26 Annual Report

July 2025 – June 2026



CENTER FOR
DEVELOPMENT
& DISABILITY

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Who We Are

Founded in 2013, Partners for Employment (PFE) is a statewide collaborative to improve competitive integrated employment for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. In keeping with New Mexico's Employment First policy, we believe people with disabilities should have the support to pursue a rewarding life in their community, including pathways to competitive, integrated employment. PFE provides training, resources, and technical assistance to agencies and individuals who are building their capacity to deliver high quality Supported Employment, Community Inclusion, and School-to-Work Transition Services.

Our partners include:

- The University of New Mexico Center for Development and Disability (UNM/CDD)
- New Mexico Health Care Authority/Developmental Disabilities Supports Division (DDSD)
- New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (NMDVR)

PFE is operated by UNM/CDD and funded by DDSD and NMDVR. UNM/CDD is New Mexico's University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD). There are 67 UCEDDs in total, one in every US state and territory. UCEDDs provide training, technical assistance, service, research, and information sharing to support individuals with developmental disabilities.

We advance promising practices for inclusive employment throughout New Mexico. We work to build the capacity of the following stakeholder groups:

- Individuals with disabilities
- Family members
- Providers/Vendors
- Guardians
- Advocates
- Case Managers/Consultants/Community Supports Coordinators
- Teachers/educators
- DDSD Staff and
- NMDVR Staff



The Partners for Employment (PFE) Steering Committee

Partners for Employment's work is guided by continuous input from the members of the PFE Steering Committee. The Steering Committee meets at least once every month to review progress on contract deliverables; to discuss issues and opportunities in New Mexico's supported employment and school-to-work transition systems; and to develop training projects.

PFE would like to thank the following FY26 Steering Committee members for their ongoing commitment to elevating the field of Supported Employment and School-to-Work Transition services in New Mexico.

New Mexico Healthcare Authority/Developmental Disabilities Supports Division (DDSD)

Christina Hill, Deputy Bureau Chief, Community Programs Bureau

Alix Dean, Statewide Community Inclusion/Supported Employment Lead

Lizette Lujan, Community Inclusion & Supported Employment Coordinator

Adam Shand, Advocate Trainer

New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (NMDVR)/Public Education Department

Kathy Abernathy, Rehabilitation Services Unit Staff Manager

Charlene Chavez, Statewide Transition Coordinator

Antoinette Holmes, Deputy Director of Rehabilitation Services Unit Statewide Programs

Monica Moya, Staff Development Trainer

Dominique Nunez, Supported Employment Coordinator

Jennifer Saavedra, Transition Program Manager

The Partners for Employment Team



Naomi Sandweiss Willie serves as PFE's Education and Outreach Manager. Prior to joining PFE, Naomi served as Executive Director at Parents Reaching Out (PRO) for seven years during which she was involved in a number of statewide initiatives for young people with disabilities. Previously, Naomi worked as a non-profit program manager, college career counselor, and ran youth-serving programs for UNM. Naomi holds an MA in Education.



Monica Elsbrock serves as a Program Manager for PFE's training initiatives. Monica has 35 years of experience working for individuals with disabilities as they build careers of their choosing. She has worked with some of the largest non-profits in the country, creating, implementing and managing Community Employment Programs. Monica has a BS from the University of New Mexico and is very happy to work at her alma mater.



Dolores Harden serves as a Program Manager for PFE's School to Work initiatives. Previously, Dolores was employed as Early Childhood Director at Parents Reaching Out. In addition, she has worked with various non-profit organizations in NM, serving as a Parent Representative on the NM IDEA panel, and as a Council Representative with NM DDC. A LEND Graduate, Dolores is now serving on Arc NM Board of Directors and the Navajo Nation Advisory Council on Disability as Secretary. Dolores has been involved in many initiatives on education, transition and employment in NM.



Alex Rios is a Training and Development Consultant for Partners for Employment. Alex has a Master of Public Health degree and is a Credentialed Employment Supports Professional (CESP). Alex has experience working as an employment consultant and in implementing Project SEARCH. She serves as New Mexico's statewide Project SEARCH Coordinator.



Amanda Cowan is a Training and Development Consultant with Partners for Employment. Amanda uses her background in critical intercultural communication to build inclusive and equitable practices in educational spaces. Amanda has led PFE's College of Employment Services and is PFE's liaison with the Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE) on the Credentialed Employment Support Professional (CESP) exam and certification process.



Jun Dai, B.M. Information Management & Information System, M.A. Family & Child Studies, joined the Partners for Employment team as an Education Specialist in October 2022. She is a Credentialed Family Life Educator (CFLA) and holds an Association of Community Rehabilitation Educator (ACRE) certificate. Jun works on projects related to school-to-work transition and supports all regions in New Mexico.



Deborah Lassiter is an Education Specialist with Partners for Employment. In her role, she works alongside PFE's College of Employment Services team. She previously worked at New Mexico Department of Health/Developmental Disabilities Support Division (DOH/DDSD). She has a BS in Psychology, certificates in ACRE, RBT (Registered Behavioral Technician), CRAFT (Community Reinforcement and Family Training), and CCSS (Comprehensive Community Supports Services).



Shiloh Burton is an Education Specialist with Partners for Employment, supporting the School-to-Work Transition Team and handling marketing and communications. They bring 16 years of experience as a CTE instructor in Arts, Media & Entertainment, and have worked with unhoused youth in San Francisco. Since moving to Albuquerque in 2022, Shiloh has held roles at the National Hispanic Cultural Center and the Department of Workforce Solutions. They hold a BA from Bard College, an MFA from San Jose State, and multiple certifications. Shiloh is passionate about social change, collective action and narrative sovereignty (storytelling).



Sophie Trusty is an Education Specialist with Partners for Employment, supporting the School-to-Work Transition Team. Sophie holds a BA from the University of New Hampshire, is a Certified Employment Support Professional, and holds a Secondary Vocational Technical teaching license from NMPED. She is passionate about expanding access to meaningful supports and opportunities for all individuals.



Carrie Walter, MEd, was the Family and Community Partnerships Division Director at the University of New Mexico's Center for Development and Disability. The division houses Partners for Employment, the Mi Via and Supports Waiver programs, and the library and Information Network at the center. Carrie has 30 years of experience supporting people with developmental disabilities at the county, state, and University levels.



Alma Gamboa, was an Education Specialist with Partners for Employment. She was part of PFE's College of Employment Services team. She previously worked for Albuquerque Public Schools as a Special Education teacher for 14 years. She has a BS in Education and an MA in Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling. Alma is committed to lifelong learning and empowering others through education, advocacy, and personalized support.



Master Training Plan

In 2018, Partners for Employment developed a Master Training Plan to address the diverse training needs of employment support professionals in New Mexico. In developing this training plan, which originally addressed fiscal years 2018 through 2020, Partners for Employment conducted extensive research of exemplary Supported Employment training programs across the country, including WISE and ICI at the University of Massachusetts Boston.

The plan was updated in FY21-FY23 to address how PFE would address learners' needs, instructional design methods, and how training would be evaluated to measure increased knowledge.

In FY24 and FY25, the plan was updated again to demonstrate projected timelines and training content for FY24 and FY25 contract deliverables.

As the Master Training Plan has unfolded and PFE's work has grown, we've gained a clearer picture of the areas in which its work of capacity-building takes place. In FY26, these include:

- Foundational Training and Certificates
- Continuing Education
- Networking and Information-Sharing
- School-to-Work Transition
- Online Resources
- Leadership Development

This remainder of this report will review FY26's work inside each of these domains.



Foundational Trainings

Introduction to Employment Services (IES)

IES was created by Partners for Employment in FY25 to address a growing need for “get-up and go” tools among family members, educators, employers, and others who are new to the field of Supported Employment or considering it as a career option. Prior to attending the 3-hour instructor-led training, participants are provided a link to view PFE’s “Introduction to Employment First” recorded training. This equips them with a foundational understanding of Employment First values. Then, in the instructor-led course, learners are given brief instruction and an accompanying tool for these on-the-job skills:

- Person-Centered Planning
- Building Relationships with Employers
- Supporting and Employee’s Job Placement
- Supporting an Employee’s Long-Term Success

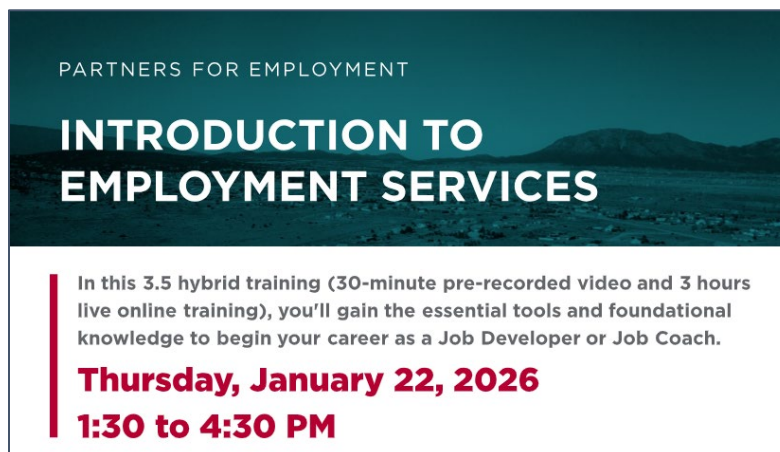


PARTNERS FOR EMPLOYMENT

INTRODUCTION TO EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

In this 3.5 hybrid training (30-minute pre-recorded video and 3 hours live online training), you'll gain the essential tools and foundational knowledge to begin your career as a Job Developer or Job Coach.

Wednesday, October 29, 2025
1:30 to 4:30 PM



PARTNERS FOR EMPLOYMENT

INTRODUCTION TO EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

In this 3.5 hybrid training (30-minute pre-recorded video and 3 hours live online training), you'll gain the essential tools and foundational knowledge to begin your career as a Job Developer or Job Coach.

Thursday, January 22, 2026
1:30 to 4:30 PM



In this 3.5 hour hybrid training (30-minutes of self-paced video modules/3 hours of live online classroom discussion), you'll gain the essential tools to begin your career as a job developer and job coach.

Or, if you're hearing about competitive integrated employment for people with disabilities for the first time and want to learn more, this training is a great place to begin!

In this course you will learn:

- How to implement a collaborative person-centered plan.
- How to identify and accurately report employment services for NMDVR.
- How to access future professional training and certification opportunities.
- How to partner with the unique supports of NMDVR, DDSD, and PFE.

In FY26, IES attendance raised to 60, a 44% increase over FY25 and was distributed as follows:

October 29, 2025	29 attendees
January 22, 2025	17 attendees
May 14, 2026	14 attendees

Satisfaction Survey Results of Participants FY26:

As a result of attending this training, I am able to:	Percentage that Strongly Agree or Agree
Understand and implement a person-centered plan	100%
Research job matches and communicate with employers on behalf of a job-seeker	100%
Support an individual's self-direction and belonging in their new job.	100%
Understand how to provide long term supports and create the steps of fading.	100%

College of Employment Services (CES)

CES is an Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators (ACRE) certified training that PFE first implemented during the summer of 2018 and will retire in the summer of 2026 when the NMACRE becomes operational. Since the first summer 2018 cohort, 655 individuals have participated in College of Employment Services training.

This online course was developed by the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) at the University of Massachusetts Boston. It consists of 11 self-paced online modules. From this base, PFE created a blended training that combines the online modules with 1-hour, bi-weekly online Zoom sessions that allow participants opportunities for group discussion and the practice of new skills. Over 16 weeks, learners participate in 8 hours of in person discussion in addition to 26.4 hours of online content, for a total of 34.4 hours of learning.

In FY26, 78 individuals completed all of the coursework for the CES Fall or Spring cohort compared to 63 finishers in the previous year. The biggest increases were seen in provider agency staff. The following table represents attendance and completion data comparing FY25 and FY26 CES cohorts across stakeholder groups.

Stakeholder Group	FY25	FY26
State Employees (DVR, DDSD, Workforce, other)	10	3
Provider Agency Staff	34	46
Employment Service Vendors/Independent Contractors	3	3
School-Based or Post-Secondary Employment Preparation Programs	9	12
Advocacy or Community Organizations	0	2
Family Members	0	1
Other	7	11
TOTAL	63	78

Satisfaction Survey Results for CES FY26 Cohorts:

The PFE Facilitators were:	Percentage that Strongly Agree or Agree
Knowledgeable in their topic/area.	100%
Responsive to participants' questions and needs.	100%
Well-organized.	100%
Able to present the material in an understandable way.	100%

Zoom Discussion Sessions:	Percentage that Strongly Agree or Agree
Gave me the opportunity to apply what I had learned in the online sessions.	100%
Helped me understand supported employment issues.	100%
Provided me the opportunity to have my questions answered.	100%
Provided me the opportunity to network and learn from my peers.	97%
Contributed to the overall success of the whole program.	100%

Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators (ACRE) Certificate

The Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators (ACRE) awards nationally recognized Certificates of Achievement to employment professionals. This certificate documents that the employment professional has satisfactorily completed a minimum of 40 hours of training or professional development provided by an ACRE-approved training resource. Partners for Employment offers ACRE-approved training via the College of Employment Services, followed by scholarship opportunities for individuals to pursue an ACRE certificate.

Individuals who utilize a PFE scholarship to pursue an ACRE certificate must then complete additional coursework to demonstrate a thorough understanding of Supported Employment best practices. Throughout this process, participants receive individualized technical assistance from PFE in setting up their account, accessing their coursework through a designated website, technical assistance in understanding their ACRE grades and submitting ACRE coursework, monthly progress reports, monthly question and answer sessions, and individualized assistance to understand the requirements for successfully obtaining an ACRE certificate.

In FY26 to date, 25 learners obtained their ACRE certificates. At the end of the fiscal year, New Mexico had a total of 359 professionals listed in the national ACRE certificate registry.

Specialized ACRE Instruction

In addition to offering CES, Partners for Employment offered specialized cohorts of CES/ACRE instruction in FY26. These were focused on NMDVR staff and staff of the Albuquerque Sign Language Academy (ASLA).

ASLA Spring 2026 cohort:

- 12 learners; 7 have earned ACRE certificate to date
- 100% have completed modules

New Mexico ACRE Curriculum

In FY24, PFE began a three-year process of designing and implementing its own 40-course hour ACRE curriculum. The curriculum incorporates all ACRE learning competencies and is structured around online/on-demand video modules, facilitator-led discussion sessions, and skill-based assignments. The course also prioritizes accessibility features for diverse learners, cultural competencies for New Mexico's diverse and rural regions, and connection to New Mexico resources.

In FY25, PFE (in conjunction with the wider UNM Center for Development and Disability), identified the Learning Management System (LMS) that will house the NM ACRE course and learner records. They also assembled course content, cataloguing it according to its ACRE competency, and organizing it into a syllabus. They also constructed an approach toward measuring learners' skills gains.

In the most recent year of course design, FY26, the course components were completed and built in Articulate, reviewed by partners and submitted for ACRE review and approval. The course is being imported into the Bright Space Learning Management System and a demo of functionality was presented to the partners in June 2026. It is anticipated that learners will be registered and participating in NM ACRE as of Fall 2026.



Credentialed Employment Support Professional (CESP)

Partners for Employment also provides scholarships for the Certified Employment Support Professional (CESP) examination for employment professionals in NM. This certification was established by the Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE) and is recognized as the national standard of knowledge for employment support professionals to demonstrate the skills and competence necessary to perform the requirements of the job. Partners for Employment provides scholarships to support the cost of examination fees. In FY 26, there are 24 CESP holders and two people who recertified their CESP credential.



Continuing Education

Monthly Training Series

In FY26, PFE partnered with WISE (formerly known as the Washington Initiative for Supported Employment) to host a monthly training series. The 9 trainings were led by WISE staff and enhanced by the local knowledge and experience of various Employment Specialists across New Mexico. This year’s theme was “Concept to Action.” The average monthly attendance was 44 participants.

The following table presents FY26’s training series and attendance numbers.

Series 1	Series 2	Series 3
September to November	December to February	March to May
<i>Job Development</i>	<i>Community Networking & Development</i>	<i>On the Job Support</i>
Average Attendance - 49	Average Attendance - 48	Average Attendance - 35



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PARTNERS FOR EMPLOYMENT

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TRAINING

Concept to Action: Job Development
Outside the Box and Beyond

PART 1

*Job Development
In the Box*

Tuesday, Sept. 16, 2025
10-11 AM

PART 2

*Job Development
Outside the Box*

Tuesday, Oct. 14, 2025
10-11 AM

PART 3

*Job Development
Beyond the Box*

Tuesday, Nov. 18, 2025
10-11 AM



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PARTNERS FOR EMPLOYMENT

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TRAINING

Concept to Action - On the Job Supports

PART 1

**On the Job Supports
In the Box**

Tuesday, March 17, 2026
10-11 AM MST

PART 2

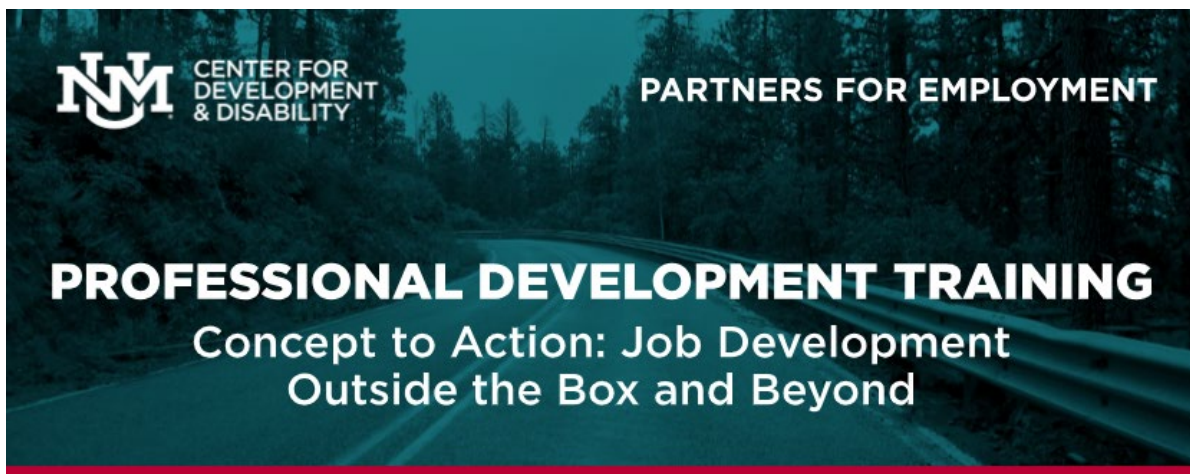
**On the Job Supports
Outside the Box**

Tuesday, April 21, 2026
10-11 AM MST

PART 3

**On the Job Supports
Beyond the Box**

Tuesday, May 19, 2026
10-11 AM MST



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PARTNERS FOR EMPLOYMENT

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TRAINING

Concept to Action: Job Development
Outside the Box and Beyond

PART 1

**Job Development
In the Box**

Tuesday, Sept. 16, 2025
10-11 AM

PART 2

**Job Development
Outside the Box**

Tuesday, Oct. 14, 2025
10-11 AM

PART 3

**Job Development
Beyond the Box**

Tuesday, Nov. 18, 2025
10-11 AM

Monthly Professional Development Satisfaction Survey FY26:

As a result of attending this training, I am able to:	Percentage that Strongly Agree or Agree
I have gained valuable knowledge and skills.	100%
There will be a positive impact on my professional work.	100%
Overall, I am satisfied with the session.	100%



Networking and Information-Sharing

Supported Employment Local Leaders

Partners for Employment facilitates the collaborative peer networking opportunities of employment providers to increase statewide capacity through ongoing peer networking and informational meetings. As more and more interagency meetings shifted to an online format in 2020-21, PFE shifted Supported Employment Local Leaders (SELL) meetings to an online, statewide format in FY22 to facilitate their accessibility to a wider audience. Statewide SELL meetings include local community agency providers, advocacy/family organization members, business representatives, and state agency partners.

PFE hosted five statewide SELL team meetings in FY26 with an average attendance of 48 people per meeting. The meeting content varied but included the following topics:

- Employer Misconceptions
- Self-Employment
- Innovative Practices
- Voices from the Field Panel

Below is a breakdown of dates and attendance.

- Sept. 18, 2025 - 56 attended
- Nov. 20, 2025 - 31 attended
- Jan. 8, 2026 - 53 attended
- March 19, 2026 - 51 Attended
- May 14, 2026 - 47 Attended

SELL Annual Satisfaction survey Results FY26:

As a result of attending this training, I am able to:	Percentage that Strongly Agree or Agree
Because I participated in SELL, I have gained valuable knowledge and skills.	96%
Because I participated in SELL, there will be a positive impact on my professional work.	94%

Partners for Employment Website

In FY26, Partners for Employment built upon the FY 25 revamp of its [Partners for Employment website](#) that prioritized a strong Employment First message, information about careers in supported employment, and a clearer organization of

Partners for Employment trainings and resources relative to a parent's or professional's role in supporting competitive, integrated employment for individuals with disabilities. The PFE website also hosts a dynamic training calendar featuring registration links to all upcoming, live PFE training events.

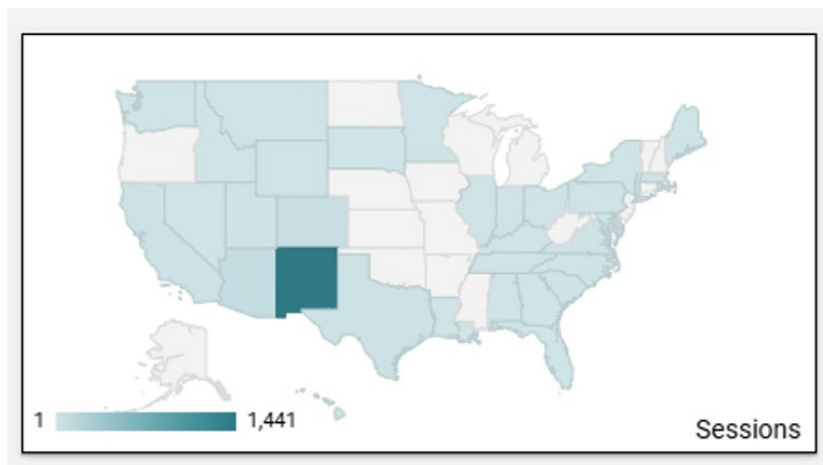
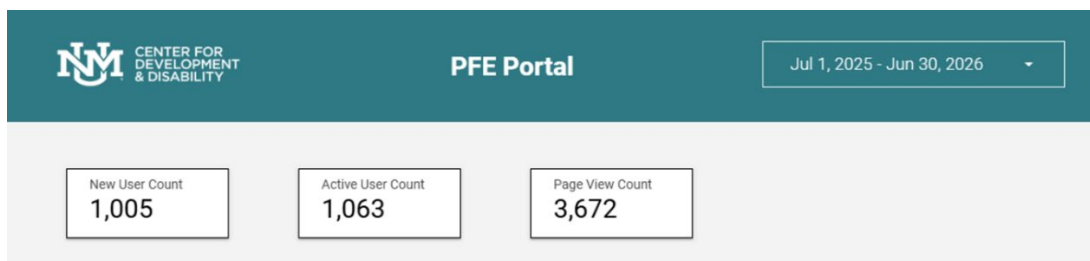
The following data reflects traffic on the Partners for Employment website in FY26:

- Total users: 3191
- New Users: 1959
- Engagement rate: 48.35%

Partners for Employment Training Portal

In FY 26, PFE added to the [PFE Training Portal](#) – an online, catalogued repository of all PFE recorded trainings and resources—which was launched in FY25. Whereas the PFE website is designed for a public audience who are perhaps discovering PFE and Employment First for the first time, the Training Portal is designed for stakeholders who are familiar with PFE offerings, and want to dig deeper into training offerings. A link to the Training Portal is built into the main PFE website. It's also accessible, without a password, on its own.

The following data reflects traffic to the PFE Training Portal in FY26 which reflects a doubling of new and active user counts from the previous year.



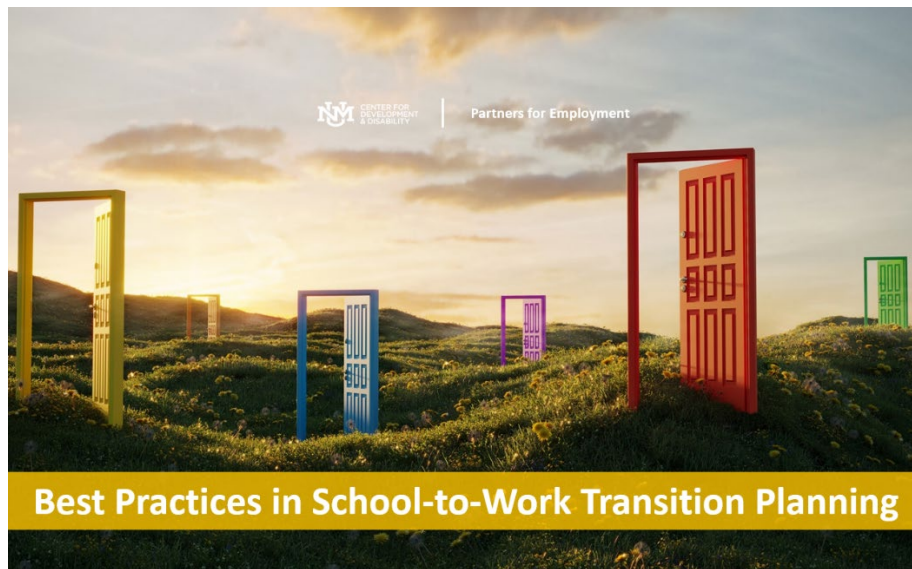
Training Resources

In FY26, PFE posted three new video trainings addressing issues in school-to-work transition:

- Supported Decision Making for Individuals with Disabilities
- Student Involvement in IEPs: A Person-Centered Approach
- Best Practices in School-to-Work Transition Planning

Each video is roughly 20 minutes long and combines instructional information with interviews featuring the lived experience of youth, family members, and professionals. In creating the videos, PFE consulted with representatives from the New Mexico Public Education Department, the New Mexico Developmental Disabilities Council, and with a 2025 trainee from New Mexico LEND.





PFE Newsletter

PFE produces a monthly newsletter distributed through Constant Contact. In FY26, the monthly newsletter's contact list maintained a steady number of 1700+ professionals and family members. The open rate for the newsletter increased to 39% over the course of FY26. The monthly newsletter is PFE's primary written communication to a wide stakeholder base of all upcoming PFE training events, online resources, and initiatives over the state and national level in support of Employment First.


Partners for Employment
 News, Resources, and Training Events
 August 2025

WELCOME BACK TO SCHOOL




As students across New Mexico return to school this month, now is the perfect time to register for the School-to-Work Transition Team's statewide meeting!

SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION TEAM STATEWIDE MEETING
AUGUST 27, 2:00-3:00 PM



[NDEAM Website](#)

New Mexico FINDER

In FY26, Partners for Employment continued to promote New Mexico Disability Resource FINDER at SELL and SWTT networking meetings. NM FINDER is a statewide directory of disability-related resources and events. Organizations and individuals are able to upload resources and events available in their local community and search for resources and events happening elsewhere in the state on behalf of job-seekers they serve.



School-to-Work Transition

School-to-Work Transition Team (SWTT) Meetings

In support of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act's (WIOA) mandate for coordinated services among agencies supporting transition age youth, Partners for Employment facilitates collaborative networking meetings for schools, state agencies, local provider agencies, advocacy organizations, civic group leaders, and business representatives who play a role in supporting youth with disabilities' transition to adulthood.

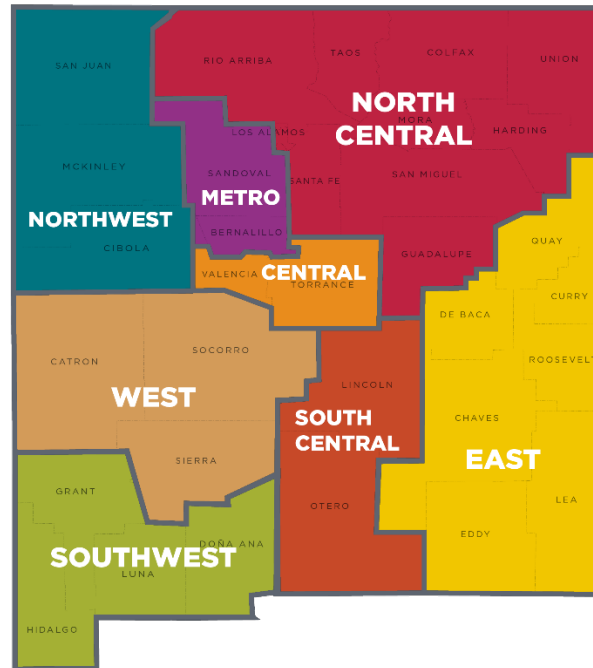
In FY26, PFE coordinated the meetings of eight regional School-to-Work Transition teams. PFE hosted one statewide meeting and over twenty-two regional meetings. The following list the attendance of these meetings.

Time	Participants
FY26 Statewide Kickoff Meeting	157
October 2025	147
December 2025	117
February 2026	129
April & May, 2026	101
Total	651

Topics addressed in FY26 meetings included but not limited:

- Post-Secondary Education
- Youth Transition
- Resume building
- Work Based Learning
- Supported Decision Making
- Student led IEPs and resources
- Best practices in transition planning
- NMPED Next Step Plan & Operation Graduation Resources

FY26 SWTT teams covered the following regions:



School-to-Work Transition Team Annual Satisfaction Survey Results	Percentage that Strongly Agree or Agree
Because I participated in SWTT, there's been a positive impact on my delivery of school-to-work transition services.	95%
Because I participated in SWTT, my understanding of agencies' different roles in supporting successful school-to-work transition has increased.	94%
Overall, I am satisfied with the information-sharing and collaboration provided by this School-to-Work Transition team.	95%

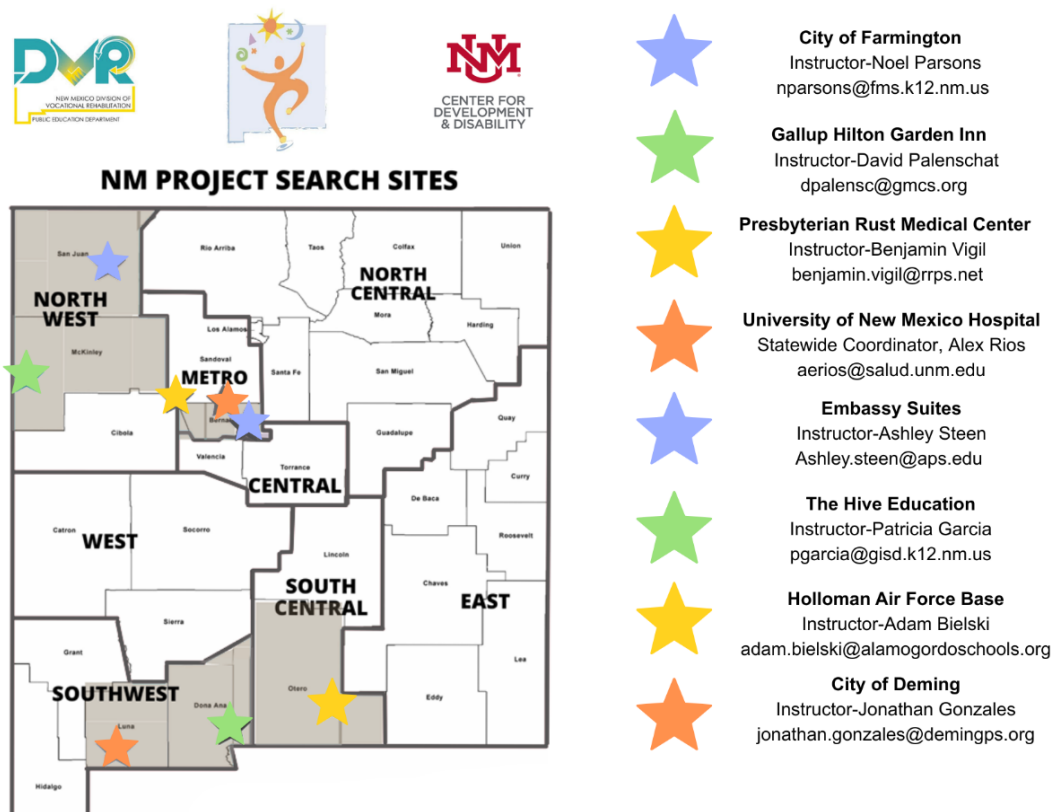
Project SEARCH

Project SEARCH is an internationally-adopted, evidence-based school-to-work internship model for youth with disabilities between the ages of 18 and 22. The program takes place at a host business and is a full collaboration of an interagency Steering Committee with representatives from a local school district, NMDVR, DDS, a local long term provider agency, the host business, and the UNM CDD. These agencies work together to provide workplace education and community-based support to students in three 10-week rotations over the course of the year. Students learn different employability skills in each rotation, with the overall goal of obtaining competitive employment by the end of the internship. In alignment with the Pre-

Employment Transition Service goals outlined by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Partners for Employment coordinates training and ongoing professional development in the Project SEARCH model for New Mexico's seven Project SEARCH teams. Partners for Employment also provides each team with technical assistance to establish internal processes, shared documents and resources, and a continuous plan for improvement.



Since its inception in 2014, 147 New Mexico Project SEARCH graduates have achieved competitive employment in their communities, working at least 16 hours per week, at or above minimum wage. New Mexico Project SEARCH teams have also received national awards, presented at statewide and national conferences, and contributed to national Project SEARCH work committees. In FY26, Deming became the eighth Project SEARCH site in New Mexico with the guidance of the PFE Project SEARCH staff.



Project SEARCH notable activities in FY26:

- Trained 14 new onsite team members including three new program instructors on roles and responsibilities, model fidelity, and use of program documentation.
- In collaboration with NMDVR transition leadership, co-created and delivered new standards and trainings for Project SEARCH provider agencies integrating Project SEARCH model fidelity, provider roles and responsibilities, and Project SEARCH National documentation streamlining standards statewide.
- Facilitated monthly steering committee meetings for 6 out of 8 teams.
- Successfully coordinated the first implementation year for the City of Deming Project SEARCH.
- Launched the first series of New Mexico Project SEARCH statewide newsletters.
- Launched first series of “Skills Trainer Collaboration Hour” focused on statewide collaboration between skills trainers regarding program best practices and roles/responsibilities.
- Coordinated communications and guidance between Office of Special Education, NM Public Education Department, and New Mexico Project SEARCH teams regarding graduation pathway changes and program eligibility.

PFE also created and shared Project SEARCH Newsletter to provide a valuable way to collectively share in each other’s successes and foster more site-to-site collaboration. In FY26, PFE joined the Office of Special Education Office Hour to share Project SEARCH in New Mexico.



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EMBASSY
SUITES

Project SEARCH New Mexico

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

Fall 2025

CULTIVATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF TALENT

Meet Our 2025-26 Project SEARCH Intern Cohort

We hope you enjoy these fun Fall updates from around the state as our Project SEARCH interns settle into their first internship rotations. The first two months of the program are filled with new experiences such as adapting to new coworkers and environments, learning new technology skills, navigating transportation, and uncovering new talents. Our Project SEARCH

interagency teams come together to leverage their services and supports to ensure the interns are successful in the program. It truly takes a village in Project SEARCH and we are grateful for each of our partners' unique and impactful contributions to making this program work in it's own unique way for our diverse communities across the state.



Project SEARCH Annual Satisfaction Survey Results	Percent that Strongly Agree or Agree
Increased my knowledge of how to support successful school-to-work transition	91%
Had a positive impact on my ability to support successful school-to-work transition	95%
Overall, I'm satisfied with the technical assistance I received.	95%



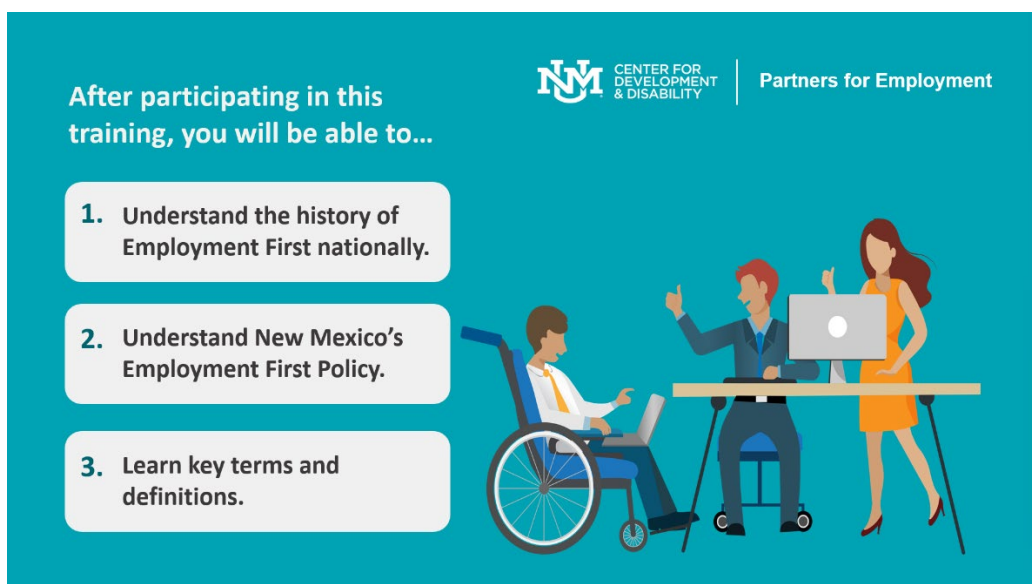
Online Resources

Online/on-demand trainings

During FY26, Partners for Employment offered the following trainings leading to a certificate of learning hours. In addition, some of the trainings provide a training without learning hours for the general public.

Employment First in New Mexico

Partners for Employment redesigned this recorded online training last year. The training is accessible through the Partners for Employment Training Portal as both a registration-based training leading to a certificate of learning hours, and as a training requiring no registration for the general learning public.



The infographic features a teal background. On the left, a white box contains the text "After participating in this training, you will be able to...". To the right of this box is a list of three numbered items: "1. Understand the history of Employment First nationally.", "2. Understand New Mexico's Employment First Policy.", and "3. Learn key terms and definitions." To the right of the list is an illustration of three people: a man in a wheelchair, a man in a suit sitting at a desk with a laptop, and a woman in an orange dress standing next to the desk. In the top right corner, there are logos for "NM CENTER FOR DEVELOPMENT & DISABILITY" and "Partners for Employment".

After participating in this training, you will be able to...

1. Understand the history of Employment First nationally.
2. Understand New Mexico's Employment First Policy.
3. Learn key terms and definitions.

NM CENTER FOR DEVELOPMENT & DISABILITY | Partners for Employment

Working with DDSD and NMDVR

This online training is available on demand via the Partners for Employment training portal. The training provides an overview of accessing supported employment services through the New Mexico Health Care Authority/Developmental Disabilities Supports Division and the New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. An online test and certificate of completion are available to those participants who register through Partners for Employment's registration and learning management system.

Social Security Benefits and Employment Training Series

Partners for Employment continued to offer this 5-part online/on-demand training series addressing common questions related to Social Security Benefits and employment. Each video is less than 15 minutes long and is designed to give teachers, counselors, case managers, employment specialists, and family members basic information to combat myths and connect to personalized Benefits services.

Part One: General Knowledge about Social Security Benefits

Part Two: Dispelling Myths about Social Security Benefits and Work

Part Three: Case Study: Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) Work Incentives

Part Four: Case Study: Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Work Incentives

Part Five: Getting Personal Social Security Advisement



CENTER FOR
DEVELOPMENT
& DISABILITY

Partners for Employment

Social Security Training Series



Part 1: General Knowledge about Social Security - Common Terms and Definitions

The Social Security Benefits and Employment Training Series is posted in the DDSD Training Portal and on the Partners for Employment website. This training is accessible through the Partners for Employment Training Portal as both a registration-based training leading to a certificate of learning hours, and as a training requiring no registration for the general learning public.

In addition to these five short recorded trainings, Partners for Employment offers twelve Social Security Benefits tip sheets on its website. Six of these tip sheets are available in both English and Spanish. In FY26, Partners for Employment reviewed these tip sheets, updating content to reflect Social Security Administration information as needed. Topics include:

- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)
- Social Security Benefits - Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
- Age 18 Redetermination for SSI
- Social Security Timelines
- 1619(b) Supplemental Security Income Work Incentive
- Student Earned Income Exclusion (SEIE)
- Ticket to Work

Community Mapping Training Series

This online training is available on demand via the Partners for Employment website. The training addresses person-centered planning, community inclusion, and tools to identify and pursue community-based interests in collaboration with individuals utilizing services. An online test and certificate of completion are available to participants who register through Partners for Employment's learning management system, and as a training requiring no registration for the general learning public.



Leadership Development

New Mexico Training Associates (NMTA)

New Mexico Training Associates (NMTA) is an initiative developed to identify, train, and catalyze the leadership of young career Supported Employment advocates and professionals in New Mexico. Qualified participants have either completed College of Employment Service training and/or received their CESP or ACRE credential; or have demonstrated sustained engagement in Partners for Employment (PFE) training and networking activities. Participants are paired with a mentor from the PFE staff who guides them in selecting a professional development exercise related to their professional interests and in developing a capstone training presentation which is given at the Partners for Employment *Reaching New Heights in Supported Employment conference*.

In FY26, the following individuals participated in PFE's NMTA program, representing a diversity of roles, geography and life experiences.

- **Onecimo Mirabal** - *Think Outside the Cubicle: Harnessing Creativity for Career Success*
- **Ben Vigil** - *Connecting the Community to Create Quality Employment Plans*
- **Evicta L. Harvey** - *Strategic Hiring and Inclusion Success/Strategic Fading*
- **Arlean Murillo** - *Seeds of change: How one vision grew into a movement for employment and inclusion in rural New Mexico*
- **Tammy Sexton** - *Designing Competitive Employment for Non-Apparent Disabilities - Practical Frameworks for Performance, Disclosure, and Retention*
- **Amelia-Ann Dickey** - *Customized Employment & Disability Advocacy: Real Life Stories Transformed into Training Tools and Techniques*



Between December and April, NMTA participants met regularly with their PFE staff mentors to hone and develop the trainings they presented at the *Reaching New Heights in Supported Employment* conference. Following the conference, their trainings are being recorded and will be posted on the PFE website.

In addition to presenting at the PFE conference, four trainees have or will be presenting at local or national conferences including the ***National APSE Conference***, ***Project SEARCH National Conference*** and ***New Mexico Pathways to Careers Summer Summit***.

Feedback from FY26 NMTA:

Thank you for helping me find my voice. I appreciate your time and support. NMTA helped me step into bigger spaces with confidence and helped me expand my voice and impact. This (APSE) was all made possible because of NMTA. - Tammy Sexton

NMTA FY26 has encouraged me to share my story of both my Advocacy journey as well as my Customized Employment journey. - Amelia-Ann Dickey

NMTA has empowered me to grow my network, enhance collaboration, and create more pathways to employment for the individuals I serve. - Arlean Murillo

Through the process of becoming an NMTA Presenter, I feel honored to be able to share my experiences and insights as a teacher and Project SEARCH Instructor on how community support impacts and creates meaningful employment opportunities for our students and individuals with IDD. - Ben Vigil

Reaching New Heights in Supported Employment Conference

PFE's seventh annual *Reaching New Heights in Supported Employment* conference took place April 9-10, 2026 in Bernalillo, New Mexico. Two hundred and ten (210) participants representing state agencies engaged in employment services, local provider agencies, advocacy organizations, self-advocates, and school districts attended the conference.

The conference was keynoted by Tiffany Yu, a self-advocate and founder of Diversability. An additional featured keynote was given by Adam Shand, a Self-Advocate and Advocate Trainer at DDSD.

Notable outcomes from the FY26 *Reaching New Heights in Supported Employment* conference included:

- Of the 210 individuals in attendance, 44% were first time attendees to the conference. 38% represented state agencies, 26% represented Employment Provider agencies or vendors, 21% represented school-based transition program educators, 4% were employers and 3% were parents or self-advocates.
- Breakout session presentations featured diverse regions, stakeholders, and issues in Supported Employment and School-to-Work Transition, including presentations from:
 - Santa Fe Department of Transportation
 - United Way of North Central New Mexico
 - New Mexico Public Education Department/Office of Special Education
 - Direct Service Providers, Project SEARCH staff who participated in the New Mexico Training Associate program

PowerPoint slide decks from all breakout sessions are available for download on the Partners for Employment website: [Click here](#)

Conference Satisfaction Survey Results	Percentage that Strongly Agree or Agree
Overall, the presenters at this conference were knowledgeable in their topic area.	100%
Overall, the presenters at this conference were responsive to participants' questions and needs.	100%
Overall, the presenters at this conference were well-organized.	100%
Overall, there will be a positive impact on my professional work.	100%

Comments about the conference from attendees:

"Great conference. Insightful discussions and conversations. Able to further network with colleagues in the field."

"I learned so much and can't wait to use the information in my job!"

"I think that the information was presented well and helpful."

PARTNERS FOR EMPLOYMENT
2026 REACHING NEW HEIGHTS
IN SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT CONFERENCE
 Beyond Barriers: Building Community Through Best Practices



DAY 1 – Thursday, April 9

	8:15-9:15	Registration Open & Breakfast	
JOINT SESSIONS	9:15-10:00	Welcome Antoinette Holmes , Deputy Director of Rehabilitation Services Unit Statewide Programs, New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Jennifer Zwally , Developmental Disabilities Supports Division Director, New Mexico Health Care Authority	Vista Grande Ballroom
	10:00-11:00	Keynote Speaker: Tiffany Yu, Founder of Diversability	
	11:00-1:00	Visit Resources Tables & Networking Opportunities	
	11:30-1:00	Lunch	
BREAKOUT SESSIONS	1:00-2:00	Seeds of Change: A Movement for Inclusion & Employment in Rural NM Arlean Murillo, Love of Rose 2026 New Mexico Training Associate (NMTA)	Sierra Blanca
		Designing Competitive Employment for Non-Apparent Disabilities Tammy Sexton, The Sexton Standard 2026 NMTA	Sacramento West
		DDSD Community Inclusion & Informed Choice about Employment Orlinda Charleston & Jaclyn Sanchez NMHCA/DDSD	Sacramento East
	2:00-2:15	Break	
BREAKOUT SESSIONS	2:15-3:15	Customized Employment & Disability Advocacy Amelia-Ann Dickey, Telos Community Inclusion 2026 NMTA	Sierra Blanca
		Graduation Pathways and Updates Office of Special Education New Mexico Public Education Department	Sacramento West
		Connecting the Community to Create Quality Employment Plans Benjamin Vigil, Rio Rancho Public Schools 2026 NMTA	Sacramento East
	3:15-3:30	Break	
JOINT SESSION	3:30-4:30	Success in Supported Employment & Transition: A Panel Discussion Featuring Providers, Employers, Self-Advocates, Students, Educators & NMDVR Representatives - Transitions Unit NMDVR	Vista Grande Ballroom

DAY 2 – Friday, April 10

	8:15-9:15	Registration Open & Breakfast	
JOINT SESSIONS	9:15-10:30	Featured Speaker: Adam Shand , NMHCA/DDSD Changing the Game of Employment Through Advocacy	Vista Grande Ballroom
	10:30-10:45	Break	
BREAKOUT SESSIONS	10:45-11:45	Think Outside the Cubicle: Harnessing Creativity for Career Success Onecimo Mirabal, Free Indeed LLC 2026 NMTA	Sierra Blanca
		Find Your Future: Lessons Learned from Coordinating Career Exploration Events for 8th Graders - Arge Flores United Way of North Central NM	Sacramento West
		From Experience to Opportunity: Identifying Transferable Skills in Rural Communities - Norma Amador & Maddie Carrell NMDVR	Sacramento East
	11:45-1:15	Lunch & New Mexico ACRE Activity	
BREAKOUT SESSIONS	1:15-2:15	When Supports Fade and a Roadblock Arises: What's Next? Evicta L. Harvey, 21 Century Care LLC 2026 NMTA	Sierra Blanca
		Reasonable Accommodations: Navigating the Process for Employees & Job Seekers - Business Outreach Unit NMDVR	Sacramento West
		Redefining Public Transit through Inclusion Andrew Baca, Transportation Services City of Santa Fe	Sacramento East
	2:15-2:30	Break	
JOINT SESSIONS	2:30-3:30	What's New from PFE	Vista Grande Ballroom
	3:30	Raffle & Conference Closing	

PARTNERS FOR EMPLOYMENT
2026 REACHING NEW HEIGHTS
IN SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT CONFERENCE
Beyond Barriers: Building Community Through Best Practices



KEYNOTE SPEAKER



Tiffany Yu is the CEO & Founder of Diversability, a 3x TEDx speaker, and the author of *The Anti-Ableist Manifesto: Smashing Stereotypes, Forging Change, and Building a Disability-Inclusive World*. She started her career at Goldman Sachs and was named to the 2025 Forbes Accessibility 100 List. At the age of 9, Tiffany became disabled as a result of a car accident that also took the life of her father.

FEATURED SPEAKER



Adam Shand is the Advocacy Trainer in the Training Knowledge & Management Unit (TKMU) for the Health Care Authority of New Mexico with the Developmental Disabilities Supports Division, bringing lived experience as a self-advocate with Cerebral Palsy. Adam always accredits his success to those who help make it possible like parents, family, friends, and circle of supports. Adams' biggest motivation to do the work he does has come from his family and friends.

2026 NEW MEXICO TRAINING ASSOCIATES (NMTA)

Amelia-Ann Dickey is a self-advocate and disability leader from Los Ranchos, New Mexico, who is passionate about empowering people with disabilities to use their voices and focus on their abilities. She serves in leadership roles with New Mexico Allies for Advocacy, Albuquerque People First, and the New Mexico Developmental Disabilities Council, and is an active trainer and advocate across the state.

Arlean Murillo is a bilingual educator and community leader dedicated to expanding opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities through education, advocacy, and employment services. She serves as Executive Director of Love of Rose LLC and founder of Love in Advocacy: Education and Employment Services, Inc., while also holding leadership roles with the Gadsden Independent School District Board of Education and several state and national organizations.

Benjamin Vigil is a veteran special education educator with 25 years of experience and currently serves as the Project SEARCH Instructor at Presbyterian Rust Medical Center, where he helps young adults with disabilities gain real-world work skills. A National Board Certified Teacher with a master's degree in education, he is also active in community service through leadership with Special Olympics New Mexico, youth athletics, and local nonprofit initiatives in Rio Rancho.

Evicta L. Harvey is a seasoned professional whose career spans military and federal service, private industry, nonprofits, social services, and academia, with a focus on supporting youth, seniors, individuals experiencing homelessness, and people with disabilities. Based in Las Cruces, New Mexico, she brings a global perspective and lifelong commitment to community impact, informed by extensive travel and diverse professional experience.

Onecimo Mirabal is a seasoned leader and community advocate from Los Lunas, New Mexico, with more than two decades of experience in developmental disabilities services, healthcare supervision, and nonprofit leadership. As CEO and Co-Founder of Free Indeed LLC and Lead Pastor of Freedom Worship Center, he is dedicated to strengthening his community through service, faith, and program development.

Tammy Sexton is a rehabilitation counselor, Army veteran, and founder of The Sexton Standard, a consulting practice focused on disability access, federal compliance, and trauma-informed reform across Texas and New Mexico. A Certified Rehabilitation Counselor with a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from the University of Texas at El Paso, she brings extensive experience in ADA coordination, employment support, and mental health response to advance equitable and accessible systems.

Overall Reach

In FY26, over one hundred thirty provider agencies, school districts, government agencies, advocacy organizations, colleges and universities, and employers attended Partners for Employment training events.

Provider Agencies:

21st Century Care, LLC
A Better Way of Living
A Step Above Case Management
Ability First
Absolutely You
Adelante Development Center
ARCA
Aspire Development Services
Best Buddies
CARC, Inc.
Center for Function Creativity
Collins Lake Ranch
Community Options, Inc.
Dungarvin
ENMRSH, Inc.
EnSuenos Y Los Angelitos
Excel Case Management
Free Indeed LLC
Heart & Soul
Independent Living Resource Center (ILRC)
J & J Home Care
LifeROOTS, Inc.
Love of Rose LLC
LSG & Associates, Inc
Mandy's Farm
Meaningful Lives
Mis Amigos Family Service
Nezzy Care
Peak Case Management
PMS Project Shield
Professional Case Coordination Services LLC (PCCS)
Ramah care services
RPB Family and Community
Safe Harbor, Inc
TAOS Inc.

Telos Community Inclusion
The Tungland Company
Tobosa Development Services
Unidas Case Management
Victory Life Services
Visions Case Management and Consulting
Zia Therapy Services

School Districts and Regional Education Cooperatives:

Alamogordo High School
Albuquerque Public Schools (APS)
APS - Bernalillo High School
APS - Cibola High School
APS - Community Transition Programs
APS - Manzano High School
APS - Transition Programs
APS - Transitions-Outcomes Coffee
APS - Atriscro Heritage Academy
Belen Consolidated school
Bloomfield Schools
Carlsbad High School
Carlsbad Municipal Schools
Cesar Chavez Community School
Central Consolidated Schools District
Central Region Educational Cooperative (CREC)
Clovis Municipal Schools
Deming School District
Farmington Municipal Schools
Gadsden Independent School District
Gallup-McKinley County Schools
Mescalero Apache School
New Mexico Academy for the Media Arts
Rio Rancho School District
Silver City High School
West Las Vegas Head Start
Western New Mexico University-Silver City

Government Agencies and Organizations:

Equus Workforce Solutions
Governor's Commission on Disability
International Boundary and Water Commission, Department of State
Jemez Vocational Rehabilitation Program

Los Lunas Community Program
Navajo Nation Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (NNOSERS)
New Mexico Commission for the Blind
New Mexico Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing
New Mexico Corrections Department
New Mexico Council of Administrators of Special Education
New Mexico Department of Justice
New Mexico Department of Workforce Connections
New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions
New Mexico Developmental Disabilities Council - Office of the Special Education
Ombud
New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (NMDVR)
New Mexico Governor's Commission on Disability
New Mexico Healthcare Authority / Developmental Disabilities Supports Division (NM
HCA DDSD)
New Mexico Public Education Department - College and Career Readiness Bureau
New Mexico Public Education Department - Office of Special Education (PED/OSE)
New Mexico Technology Assistance Program (NMTAP)
South Central Council of Governments (SCCOG)
Town of Taos, Youth and Family Center

Community Resources and Advocacy Agencies:

Arc of New Mexico
Assistance Dogs of the West
Education for Parents of Indian Children with Special Needs (EPICS)
El Paso Community Foundation
Future Focused Education
Guardian Angel
Health Action New Mexico
Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston
New Mexico Caregiver Coal
New Vistas
Parents Reaching Out
Rocky Mountain Youth Corp
San Juan Center for Independence
Special Olympics Internet
Youth Development Inc.

Employers:

Behavior Consultant-contract
City of Deming
City of Farmington

Clearly Clean Janitorial
Electronic Caregiver Inc.
Embassy Suites Hotel - Albuquerque
Hilton Garden Inn - Gallup
HIVE Education - Sunland Park
Holloman Air Force Base
Kodiak Gas Services
Laughing Turtles Soap Company
Little Angels Child Care
Meaningful Lives
Presbyterian Medical Services
Presbyterian Rust Medical Center
Santa Teresa Bumble Bee Learning Center
Springhill Suites Gallup
Sun Capital Hotels
University of New Mexico Hospitals

Self-Advocacy:

Griego Consulting-Self employment
Mastec Renewables
The Sexton Standard

Looking Ahead

In FY27, PFE will remain dedicated to continuously improving the training and resources we provide and elevating New Mexico's capacity to deliver high quality Supported Employment and School-to-Work Transition services. We are especially looking forward to offering New Mexico ACRE coursework and certification to the community.

CONTACT US

Email: CDD-PartnersForEmployment@salud.unm.edu

If you'd like to learn more about Partners for Employment, including ways to partner with us, here are a few ways to get in touch:

Visit PFE Website



Sign up for PFE Mailing List

