

Employment & Inclusion Conference 2026:

The Power of Expectations

March 24, 2026

9:00 AM

Keynote Presentation

The Power of Expectations An Explosion of Expectations: Designing a Future Where Work Actually Works

Despite decades of innovation in employment services, outcomes for people with disabilities have remained stubbornly unchanged. At the same time, expectations for work, inclusion, and economic participation are rising across society. Employment systems are now being asked to support outcomes that many people were never meaningfully prepared for—or invited into—along the way.

This keynote explores what happens when our aspirations for employment outpace the expectations embedded in our systems—and why closing that gap requires more than better tools, stronger motivation, or one more promising program. Drawing from real-world practice and system-level insights, the session examines how early assumptions, limited exposure, and uneven access quietly shape what later feels possible in adulthood.

During the session, we'll consider the full employment ecosystem—individuals, practitioners, organizations, and funders—to better understand how expectations are formed, reinforced, and translated into real opportunity. The question isn't whether expectations should rise, but how they can be supported early, consistently, and across systems.

Future-oriented and grounded in practice, this session invites participants to rethink how expectations—and opportunities—are built over time, and what it would take to design employment pathways that truly work for everyone.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this keynote, participants will be able to:

1. Recognize how expectations—often formed early and reinforced over time—shape access to opportunity and influence employment outcomes later in life.
2. Reframe persistent employment challenges as issues of system design and alignment, rather than individual readiness or effort.



Beth Keeton is a nationally recognized leader in disability employment whose work has shaped both practice and systems in Customized Employment for nearly three decades. She has played a leading role in advancing evidence-based practice, including championing the creation of the Customized Employment Fidelity Scales. Beth's current work focuses on supporting states to strengthen employment systems using the GHA-developed Customized Employment Blueprint alongside fidelity measures. She is the co-author of *Making Self-Employment Work for People with Disabilities*.

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