

Center, Institute, or Bureau (CIB) Annual Performance Statement`
2025-2026

Name of CIB: University of Memphis Institute on Disability (UMID)
Website URL: <https://www.memphis.edu/umid/>
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Professor and Director, College of Education

Leadership Team

Patrick J. Krolík – Co-Director, TigerLIFE and CCTP Program Implementation, and IHERS Editorial Leadership
Brandon Porter – Coordinator of Campus and Transition Programs, TigerLIFE
Jerrica Lindsey – Internship and Job Specialist Lead
Early Smith – Instructor
Sarah Tune – Instructor
Justice Okupo – Instructor
Kay Churchill Reeves Curriculum Designer
Patrick Vanderpool – Lead Social Advocate and Student Support
Seth Jackson – Social Advocate and Student Support
Martha Ponce – Social Advocate and Student Support
Safiyyah Sharrief—Vocational and Transition Support – Job Placement Specialist
Xinhua Yu – Associate Professor; Quantitative and Epidemiological Research Leadership
Jun Cai – Research Associate
Jayasimha Reddy Tippireddy – Research/Data System Analyst
Sushmitha Nandiki—Research Coordinator/Research Administration Post Award

University of Memphis Institute on Disability (UMID)

MISSION STATEMENT

- UMID advances equitable transitions from secondary education to inclusive postsecondary education, competitive integrated employment, independent living, and fuller community participation for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and other disability populations through innovative services, interdisciplinary education, and evidence-based research.

VISION STATEMENT

- UMID envisions a learning and service community in which people with disabilities are fully included, supported by person-driven systems, and empowered to achieve measurable educational, health, employment, social, and quality-of-life outcomes.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Person-Driven Systems Perspective

- We utilize a person-driven systems perspective to maximize educational, health, social, family, employment, and financial outcomes for people with disabilities and those who support them in an ever-changing global environment.
- We create and leverage innovative and interdisciplinary programs, services, and research with the community, public, and private partners.
- Employ the Systems Approach to Life Transitions (SALT) to coordinate educational, health, social, family, employment, financial, and independent living outcomes.
 - Promoting access to higher education and career development.
 - Advocating for community-based services
 - Enhancing the overall quality of life for individuals with disabilities and their families.
- Develop innovative and interdisciplinary programs, services, and research in collaboration with community, public, private, and institutional partners.
- Promote equitable access to inclusive postsecondary education, career development, competitive integrated employment, and community-based services.
- Advance evidence-based practice, measurable outcomes, universal design for learning, supported decision-making, and the disability rights principle of “Nothing About Us Without Us.”

Sustainable and Systemic Impact

- Translate practical program results into sustainable institutional practices, scalable technology-supported resources, professional training, and system-level improvements for individuals, families, employers, and communities.

Table 1

Research Budget Information

Funding Source / Initiative	Award Amount	Funding Period	Status / Principal Use
Project FIRST (H263C190015)	\$2,236,756	Oct. 2019– Dec. 2025	Concluded: research, personnel, five Canvas training modules, analysis, publications, and dissemination.
DDA FY27 Innovation Grant	\$20,000	July 2026–June 2027	Recommended for award: enabling technology, job coaching, implementation, and independence-focused supports.
DDA TN BELIEVE renewal	\$124,394	July 2026 – June 2027	Pending formal contract execution, competitive integrated employment, direct services, and vocational staffing.
BRIDGE Innovate TPSID	\$1,860,000	Oct. 2026 - Sept. 2031	Pending / in development: Multi-institutional inclusive higher education expansion.
Tennessee DVR CRP Agreement	\$145,000	July 2025–June 2027	Vocational assessment, job development, coaching, placement, benefits counseling,

Funding Source / Initiative	Award Amount	Funding Period	Status / Principal Use
			assistive technology, and employer consultation.

PERFORMANCE NARRATIVE

Overview and Purpose

The University of Memphis Institute on Disability (UMID) was founded in 2007 and is situated in the Dean's office in the College of Education at Ball Hall on the University of Memphis main campus. UMID administrative offices are currently located on the Park Avenue campus and operate as the preeminent disability-focused research, education, and service institute in the Midsouth region. UMID's overarching mission is to further close the gap between secondary education and inclusive, gainful employment for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and other disability populations through the creation and dissemination of innovative, interdisciplinary programs, services, and evidence-based research developed in collaboration with community, public, and private sector partners. The institute employs a person-driven Systems Approach to Life Transitions (SALT) designed to enhance measurable outcomes across education, health, employment, and overall quality of life.

UMID is organized around three core programmatic pillars: the Research Unit, the Community Services Unit, and the Career Development and Transition Programs Unit. The primary populations served by the institute include individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, neurodiverse young adults, secondary students receiving pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS), and families, educators, and employer partners engaged in the broader disability services ecosystem of the Greater Memphis and West Tennessee region.

The Institute's flagship inclusive higher education program, TigerLIFE, an acronym for Tigers Learning Independence, Fostering Employment and Education, serves young adults aged 18–29 with intellectual and developmental disabilities and has been the programmatic anchor of UMID's transition and career development work since its founding in 2013. TigerLIFE is the largest and most ethnically diverse inclusive higher education program for individuals with IDD in the State of Tennessee, aligned with the national Think College framework and the federal TPSID (Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities) model of best practices.

Of particular significance for the 2025–2026 reporting period, UMID has pursued and is actively advancing a new five-year TPSID grant application to the U.S. Department of Education, designated BRIDGE Innovate, which seeks to expand TigerLIFE's reach to Southwest Tennessee Community College, Wilberforce University (a Historically Black College and University), and Lambuth Campus, thereby establishing a multiinstitutional, regionally comprehensive model of inclusive higher education that reflects the demographic, geographic, and institutional diversity of West Tennessee and the Mid-South. Presently, UMID is also undertaking efforts to develop a Disabilities Education/Employment Support portal (DESP) as part of the multipronged efforts. This centralized, cloud-integrated platform is designed to further close the gap between secondary education and gainful employment by creating a unified digital ecosystem for students, families, educators, and employer partners. DESP will facilitate data-driven skills training and customized vocational pathways, leveraging advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence and virtual

reality to enhance life skills development and workplace readiness. Ultimately, the portal will serve as a scalable, accessible resource to accelerate equitable workforce participation and support the transition to independent living for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities across the Greater Memphis and West Tennessee regions.

Research Unit

UMID engages with an interdisciplinary faculty team from the various University of Memphis departments, including counseling, psychology, education research, public health, behavioral analysis, and social work. In addition, we are actively engaged with local, regional, national, and international affiliates in our pursuit of understanding disability constructs and vocational rehabilitation. Our goal is to advance quantitative and qualitative research on disabilities and vocational rehabilitation. These areas of study are guided by the following principles: the Person-Driven Systems Perspective and a focus on Systemic and Sustainable Impact. The interdisciplinary research team comprises faculty, vocational experts, consultants, and graduate students who are young researchers seeking experience in writing grants, conducting research studies, and publishing research in peer-reviewed journals. Current funded external grant projects include federal TIPSID BRIDGE-INNOVATE, Tennessee Believes (Extension), and an interagency contract with the State of Tennessee, as well as DDA Innovative from the State of Tennessee, detailed later in the report.

The Community Service Unit

Provides all elements of support to help clients become independent and successfully employed and retain employment through the Institute's vocational services as a State of Tennessee (TN) Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Community Rehabilitation Provider (CRP) through letters of agreement (LOA). UMID has maintained its CRP status since 2014 under these LOAs, which UMID secures in contractual agreements with the State of Tennessee to provide services. In Fall 2025, UMID and the State of Tennessee entered into a two-year interagency agreement that ran concurrently. The interagency agreement includes Pre-employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS), designed to educate secondary school students. It offers five critical areas of workforce readiness services, outlined in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014, including job shadowing, work-based learning, workforce readiness, self-advocacy, and post-secondary transition counseling; vocational assessments for all VR clients; job coaching; and workforce readiness for VR clients. Under the continued contract to provide services for TN VR clients, UMID has grown its interagency service contract budget, initially budgeted at \$98,000, to a 20252026 budget of \$145,000. UMID provides services in Fayette, Madison, and Shelby counties in West Tennessee by maintaining a TN Certified staff. UMID will investigate providing additional services in the greater Mid-South region and will continue to focus on serving clients with intellectual and developmental disabilities, as this is our area of expertise.

Career Development and Inclusive Higher Education (IHE) Transition Programs Unit

The Tigers Learning Independence Fostering Education and Employment program (TigerLIFE) is a postsecondary education program that requires four semesters of instruction, culminating in a completion award in Career and Community Studies. The TigerLIFE program began in January 2013 and is a two-year career development and transition program for 18–to 29–year–old students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). It provides an inclusive college campus

experience and offers individualized programs of study in academic, social, vocational, and independent areas.

At the heart of TigerLIFE is a person-driven planning model that uses the Systems Approach to Placement. Participation in the TigerLIFE program enables students to pursue their education beyond high school, thereby increasing their employment opportunities. TigerLIFE is a federally recognized Comprehensive Transition Program (CTP) through the Department of Education. The University of Memphis Institute administers the TigerLIFE program for individuals with disabilities (UMID), which helps people with intellectual and developmental disabilities find meaningful and lasting employment. TigerLIFE students will receive the five Pre-ETS transition services in a collegiate atmosphere. The students gain valuable social interaction, leading to a successful transition to employment and community independence. The TigerLIFE program systematically assesses students' academic, career, technical, independent living, and social skills. Based on this, a person-driven plan is created to align with students' goals for transitioning into gainful employment and leading a more fulfilling life.

The College Campus Transition Program (CCTP) is the second transition program UMID is proud to support through an MOU, first negotiated in the 2011-2012 academic year. It is a partnership program with the Memphis-Shelby County Schools (MSCS) Department of Exceptional Children. CCTP is a comprehensive, certified program for motivated young adults with documented intellectual and developmental disabilities, aged 18–22. CCTP is a transition program that allows students enrolled at local MSCS schools to participate in the CCTP program, which is housed within UMID. CCTP programming is similar to the Pre-ETS training for its students, with the goal of employment at the end of the semester. CCTP was inaugurated in the fall of 2011 and will be in its twelfth year come the fall of 2024.

Since the inception of the TigerLIFE and College Campus Transition Programs, the TigerLIFE program has had over 332 students complete it, while 127 students have successfully completed the CCTP program. UMID based its success on data collected from the two programs. CCTP graduates maintain an average 81% successful employment rate 90 days to one year after completion. While TigerLIFE has maintained an average 70% successful employment rate, 120 days to one year after completion.

Participation, Reach, or Scope of Work

Total number served: During the 2025–2026 reporting period, UMID served an estimated 250 or more individuals across its three programmatic units: CCTP, TigerLIFE, and Pre-ETS. The TigerLIFE Inclusive Higher Education Program enrolled and served its current cohort of students with intellectual and developmental disabilities, while the Vocational Unit delivered Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) to more than 185 secondary students, a 16% increase over the prior year's total of 160. The College Campus Transition Program (CCTP), administered in partnership with Memphis-Shelby County Schools, continued serving secondary students with disabilities in its fifteenth year of continuous operation.

Number of programs, services, and events: UMID operated across a minimum of five distinct programmatic tracks during this reporting period, including: (1) the TigerLIFE Inclusive Higher Education Program (over 46 currently enrolled); (2) the College Campus Transition Program (CCTP) (15 currently); (3) Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) delivered to secondary students across Memphis, Shelby County, and Fayette County (over 186); (4) Vocational Assessment and Job Placement Services for both enrolled program participants and outside

referrals from the Tennessee State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency; and (5) the Research Unit's ongoing scholarly publication, data dissemination, and in-service training activities. A landmark innovation introduced during this period was the inaugural TigerLIFE on-campus residential pilot program, launched in the summer of 2025, which represented the first time in the program's history that TigerLIFE students were accepted for and resided in on-campus university housing. Another landmark innovation was the introduction of TigerLIFE AfterHours for a selected number of TigerLIFE students to be fully integrated into the extracurricular social and academic enrichment activities on-campus and off-campus. The TigerLIFE AfterHours event serves more than 20% of students each week, Monday through Thursday from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Geographic reach

UMID's services extended across the Greater Memphis metropolitan area, Shelby County, and Fayette County (Western TN, Arkansas, and Mississippi) for vocational and transition programming. Research dissemination activities, in-service training modules, and publications reached audiences at the national and international levels. The BRIDGE Innovate expansion initiative, currently under development, is designed to extend UMID's direct service reach to multiple new institutional and geographic contexts across West Tennessee, including the Southwest Tennessee Community College service area and the Wilberforce University community in Ohio.

Trend (increase/stable/decrease)

The overall scope and volume of UMID's service delivery is trending upward, with a significant documented increase in Pre-ETS and TigerLIFE participation specifically.

Brief interpretation

UMID's programmatic reach expanded substantially during the 2025–2026 academic year, most notably within the Vocational Unit, which served more than 185 secondary students through pre-ETS, representing a 16% increase over the prior year. The TigerLIFE program graduated twenty students and maintained its sustained 70% job placement rate. These trends reflect deliberate investment in community partnerships, renewed interagency agreements, and the deepening of existing collaborations with Memphis-Shelby County Schools and the Tennessee Department of Vocational Rehabilitation.

The consistent and measurable growth in individuals served, program offerings, geographic reach, and scholarly output across the 2024–2025 and 2025–2026 reporting periods reflects the successful execution of UMID's strategic expansion agenda, the deepening of its community and institutional partnerships, and the sustained commitment of its leadership and staff to advancing equitable access to postsecondary education and competitive integrated employment for individuals with disabilities in the Mid-South region and beyond. The 2026–2027 year is anticipated to sustain and build upon this upward trajectory, particularly with the launch of TigerLIFE's inaugural on-campus residential pilot program.

Table 2***Expansion Table***

Area of Expansion	2025–2026	2026–2027
Pre-ETS Participation	Delivered Pre-ETS to over 185 secondary students, representing a 16% increase.	Expanding Pre-ETS participation beyond the 2025–2026 baseline of 185 secondary students through strengthened partnerships with Memphis-Shelby County Schools and the Tennessee Department of Vocational Rehabilitation.
TigerLIFE Residential Status	Launched the inaugural TigerLIFE on-campus residential pilot program in the summer of 2025, allowing students to live in university housing.	Evaluating and strengthening TigerLIFE’s inaugural on-campus residential pilot, using student outcomes and feedback to guide the future expansion of inclusive university housing opportunities.
Extracurricular Integration	Introduced TigerLIFE AfterHours, fully integrating over 20% of students into extracurricular social and academic enrichment activities weekly from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.	Expanding TigerLIFE AfterHours and increasing the percentage of students participating in weekly campus-based social, academic, and enrichment activities beyond the current 20% participation level.
Institutional Expansion	Advancing the BRIDGE Innovate TPSID grant to expand inclusive higher education to Southwest Tennessee Community College, Wilberforce University, and Lambuth Campus.	Continuing implementation of the BRIDGE Innovate TPSID initiative and deepening partnerships with Southwest Tennessee Community College, Wilberforce University, and the Lambuth Campus to broaden inclusive postsecondary education throughout the midsouth region and beyond.
Technological Infrastructure	Undertaking the development of the multipronged Disabilities Education/Employment Support portal (DESP).	Advancing the Disabilities Education/Employment Support Portal toward implementation as a coordinated platform for disability education, postsecondary transition, and competitive integrated employment resources and supports.
State Funding & Recognition	Formally recommended as one of six statewide recipients for the State of Tennessee Department of Disability and Aging (DDA) FY27 Innovation Grant	Pending final award, implementing the FY27 DDA Innovation Grant to expand program capacity, strengthen statewide partnerships, increase visibility, and support long-term program sustainability.
Vocational Partnerships	Successfully negotiated and executed a two-year extension of the CRP contractual agreement with the Tennessee Division of Vocational Rehabilitation	Implementing the renewed two-year CRP agreement, deepening coordination with the Tennessee Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and sustaining TigerLIFE’s 70% job placement rate while expanding competitive integrated employment opportunities.

Outcomes and Impact

The most compelling evidence of UMID's programmatic impact during the 2025–2026 reporting period is found at the intersection of its three core units, each of which generated measurable, documented outcomes that directly address the Institute's core mission.

Within the TigerLIFE Inclusive Higher Education Program, twenty students completed the full program during the 2024–2025 academic year and entered the workforce as program graduates, continuing TigerLIFE's sustained 70% competitive job placement rate, a metric that compares extraordinarily favorably with national employment statistics for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, among whom unemployment and underemployment remain at crisis levels. Cumulatively, TigerLIFE has produced more than 328 graduates since 2015, each of whom has completed a 60-hour curriculum resulting in a Completion Award in Career and Community Studies and has been supported through a structured transition to employment and greater

independent living. The 2025 inaugural on-campus residential pilot further expanded the program's scope and ambition, marking a transformative moment in TigerLIFE's institutional history and signaling the University of Memphis's deepening commitment to full campus inclusion for students with IDD.

Within the Vocational Services Unit, the delivery of Pre-employment Transition Services to more than 185 secondary students, a 16% increase over the prior year's total of 160, represents a dramatic expansion of UMID's reach into the pipeline of young people with disabilities transitioning from secondary school into postsecondary education and employment. This expansion is directly attributable to the strengthened Memorandum of Understanding with Memphis-Shelby County Schools and the deepened partnership with the Tennessee Department of Vocational Rehabilitation. The renewal of the CCTP MOU further institutionalized a partnership that has now been providing workforce readiness skills to secondary students with disabilities for 15 consecutive years, making it one of the longest-standing and most consistently productive disability focused schoolwork partnerships in the state.

Within the Research Unit, the 2025-2026 period saw the publication of three peer-reviewed articles and two additional press manuscripts focused on the multicultural and socioeconomic dimensions of disability and workforce participation, contributing meaningfully to the national evidence base on equitable vocational rehabilitation outcomes. The institutionalization of five in-service training modules on the University of Memphis Canvas Learning Management System represents a lasting infrastructure investment that ensures the knowledge generated through UMID's federally funded research will continue to benefit practitioners and stakeholders long after the active grant period concludes.

Grants

The most significant grant development activity of the 2025–2026 reporting period is UMID's active pursuit and advancement of the BRIDGE Innovate TPSID Grant application to the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. This proposed five-year initiative seeks federal funding to develop, implement, and evaluate an expanded model of inclusive higher education across multiple institutions in West Tennessee, including Southwest Tennessee Community College, Wilberforce University (a Historically Black College and University), and Lambuth Campus. The BRIDGE Innovate application represents the next generation of UMID's federally supported inclusive higher education work, building directly upon the programmatic foundation, evidence base, and institutional relationships established through the preceding TPSID funding cycle.

Of equally significant distinction during this reporting period, the University of Memphis — through UMID has been formally recommended for contract award under the State of Tennessee Department of Disability and Aging (DDA) FY27 DDA Innovation Grant, as communicated by Contracts and Grants Director Eli Rousey in the official Notice of Intent to Award dated April 20, 2026. This recommendation places the University of Memphis among a distinguished and selective cohort of six statewide recipients, alongside Community Network Services, East Tennessee State University's Center of Excellence in Early Childhood Learning and Development, Millar Rich, Orange Grove Center, and the South-central Area Agency on Aging and Disability. The DDA Innovation Grant represents a critical infusion of state-level investment in UMID's innovation agenda and further affirms the Institute's standing as a premier disability services organization

within Tennessee's broader disability and aging services ecosystem. Additionally, UMID concluded the final year of Project FIRST (H263C190015), a six-year federal grant totaling \$2,236,756, by successfully completing all final objectives and milestones. UMID faculty have also actively pursued competitive grant funding through the National Science Foundation and other federal and philanthropic sources in support of STEM-focused inclusive education and workforce development initiatives.

Grant One: Project FIRST (Concluded)

Funder Name: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs

Award Amount: \$2,236,756

Funding Period: 2019–2025 (six years)

Purpose: Project FIRST (H263C190015) was designed to investigate inclusive transition models, develop and disseminate tools and resources to improve diverse participation in postsecondary settings, and replicate UMID's best practices in providing Career Development and Transition Programs through agency partnerships in the Memphis/Shelby region and West Tennessee.

Use of Funds: Personnel support for faculty, research associates, and program staff; development and delivery of five institutionalized in-service training modules at the University of Memphis Canvas LMS; data collection, analysis, and peer-reviewed dissemination of findings on multicultural and socioeconomic factors in disability and workforce participation.

Impact Statement: Project FIRST concluded its sixth and final year with all primary objectives achieved, including the publication of five peer-reviewed and in-press articles, the institutionalization of training resources on the university's LMS platform, and the generation of an enduring evidence base on vocational rehabilitation outcomes for individuals with disabilities from multicultural and socioeconomically diverse backgrounds.

Grant Two: Tennessee Department of Disability and Aging (DDA) FY27 Innovation Grant)

Funder Name: State of Tennessee, Department of Disability and Aging (DDA) FY27 DDA Innovation Grant

Award Amount: \$20,000

Funding Period: FY2027 (anticipated)

Purpose: The DDA Innovation Grant is a competitive, statewide grant program administered by the Tennessee Department of Disability and Aging designed to fund innovative projects that advance the quality, accessibility, and effectiveness of services for individuals with disabilities and aging populations across the State of Tennessee. On April 20, 2026, the State of Tennessee issued its official Notice of Intent to Award, formally recommending the University of Memphis through UMID as one of six recipients statewide selected from a competitive field of respondents. This recommendation reflects the State's recognition of UMID's demonstrated capacity for innovation, its proven track record in disability services and inclusive education, and its alignment with the DDA's strategic priorities for advancing community inclusion, employment, and quality of life for Tennesseans with disabilities.

Use of Funds: Specific programmatic activities and budget allocations will be confirmed upon formal contract execution. UMID anticipates directing DDA Innovation Grant resources toward initiatives that advance competitive integrated employment, inclusive postsecondary programming, and community-based transition services for individuals with intellectual and

developmental disabilities in the Greater Memphis and West Tennessee region consistent with the core mission and strategic priorities of the Institute via the utilization of a virtual reality platform. The theoretical justification aligns with the System Approach for Life Transition(SALT).

Impact Statement: The DDA Innovation Grant award recommendation represents a landmark recognition of UMID's statewide leadership in disability innovation and positions the Institute as a formally designated partner of the State of Tennessee in advancing the next generation of disability services. It also meaningfully strengthens UMID's funding diversification strategy by establishing a direct state-level funding relationship that complements and reinforces the Institute's existing federal grant portfolio. The University of Memphis is honored to be among the select group of organizations statewide recommended for this distinction, and UMID looks forward to the formal contract execution process and the subsequent launch of DDA-supported innovation activities.

Grant Three: BRIDGE Innovate TPSID Grant (Pending / In Development)

Funder Name: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSID)

Award Amount: To Be Determined (pending application review and award notification)

Funding Period: Anticipated 2026–2031 (five years)

Purpose: The BRIDGE Innovate grant seeks to develop, implement, and evaluate an expanded model of inclusive higher education for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities across multiple institutional settings in West Tennessee, including Southwest Tennessee Community College, Wilberforce University (HBCU), and Lambuth Campus, guided by the TPSID Absolute Priority framework and the institutional accreditation standards established by the Inclusive Higher Education Accreditation Council (IHEAC).

Use of Funds: If awarded, funds will support program development and staffing at each partner institution, curriculum design aligned with the Comprehensive Transition Program (CTP) requirements, external evaluation activities, outreach and recruitment, and the development of sustainable institutional infrastructure for inclusive higher education at each partner site.

Impact Statement: The BRIDGE Innovate initiative represents UMID's most ambitious and transformative expansion to date, with the potential to extend access to high-quality, federally recognized inclusive higher education to students with IDD across multiple underserved institutional and geographic contexts — including an HBCU partnership that would mark a landmark moment in the national effort to address the intersection of race, disability, and educational equity.

Grant Four: Tennessee Believe Grant Program (Extended and Current)

Funder Name: State of Tennessee, Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD) Tennessee Believe Grant Initiative

Award Amount: As documented in the original grant award instrument executed between the University of Memphis Institute on Disability and the Tennessee Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

Funding Period: The Tennessee Believe Grant operated within a defined grant period that concluded during the 2025–2026 reporting cycle, with all programmatic objectives, deliverables, and financial reporting requirements fulfilled in accordance with the terms and conditions of the original award agreement.

Purpose: The Tennessee Believe Grant was established to advance employment outcomes and community integration for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities across the State of Tennessee, consistent with the Employment First and Community First policy frameworks that guide Tennessee's disability services infrastructure. The grant supported the development and implementation of evidence-based employment support models, person-centered planning protocols, and community-based transition services designed to increase competitive integrated employment (CIE) rates among Tennesseans with IDD.

Use of Funds: Grant funds were used to support direct employment services, including individualized job development, job coaching, workplace accommodations assessment, employer education and engagement activities, and the provision of wraparound supports that facilitate sustained employment retention. Additionally, funds supported personnel costs for vocational specialists, data collection and outcome tracking systems, and the development of partnership infrastructure connecting UMID's vocational programming with regional employers, community rehabilitation providers, and the Tennessee Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

Impact Statement: The Tennessee Believe Grant enabled UMID to meaningfully expand its capacity to serve individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities through structured employment pathways, contributing directly to the Institute's sustained 70% competitive employment placement rate for TigerLIFE program graduates. The grant facilitated the placement of program participants in community-based employment settings across the Greater Memphis region, with documented wage and hour outcomes exceeding state averages for individuals with disabilities in comparable employment categories. The successful conclusion of the Tennessee Believe Grant further strengthened UMID's institutional relationship with the Tennessee Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities and affirmed the Institute's standing as a premier provider of employment-focused disability services within the state's broader workforce development and disability services ecosystem. The programmatic infrastructure, employer partnerships, and evidence-based practices established through Tennessee Believe funding will continue to inform UMID's employment services delivery model in subsequent fiscal periods, ensuring that the grant's impact extends well beyond the formal grant period.

Grant Five: Tennessee Believe Grant Program (Renewal)

Funder Name: State of Tennessee, Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD) Tennessee Believe Grant Initiative

Award Amount: \$124,394 plus addendum of \$60,000.

Funding Period: The Tennessee Believe Grant operated under a defined grant period that concluded during the 2025–2026 reporting cycle, with all programmatic objectives, deliverables, and financial reporting requirements fulfilled in accordance with the terms and conditions established in the original award agreement.

Purpose: The Tennessee Believe Grant was established to advance employment outcomes and community integration for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities across the State of Tennessee, consistent with the Employment First and Community First policy frameworks that guide Tennessee's disability services infrastructure. The grant supported the development and implementation of evidence-based employment support models, person-centered planning protocols, and community-based transition services designed to increase Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) rates among Tennesseans with IDD.

Use of Funds: Grant funds were utilized to support direct employment services, including individualized job development, job coaching, workplace accommodations assessment, employer education and engagement activities, and the provision of wraparound supports that facilitate sustained employment retention. Additionally, funds supported personnel costs for vocational specialists, data collection and outcome tracking systems, and the development of partnership infrastructure connecting UMID's vocational programming with regional employers, community rehabilitation providers, and the Tennessee Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

Impact Statement: The Tennessee Believe Grant enabled UMID to meaningfully expand its capacity to serve individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities through structured employment pathways, contributing directly to the Institute's sustained 70% competitive employment placement rate for TigerLIFE program graduates. The grant facilitated the placement of program participants in community-based employment settings across the Greater Memphis region, with documented wage and hour outcomes exceeding state averages for individuals with disabilities in comparable employment categories. The successful conclusion of the Tennessee Believe Grant further strengthened UMID's institutional relationship with the Tennessee Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities and affirmed the Institute's standing as a premier provider of employment-focused disability services within the state's broader workforce development and disability services ecosystem. The programmatic infrastructure, employer partnerships, and evidence-based practices established through Tennessee Believe funding will continue to inform UMID's employment services delivery model in subsequent fiscal periods, ensuring that the grant's impact extends well beyond the formal grant period.

Publications/Presentations

During this reporting period, the University of Memphis Institute on Disability (UMID) achieved a significant institutional milestone through the establishment and launch of the journal titled *Inclusive Higher Education and Rehabilitation Science* (IHERS). This accomplishment was formalized through an Open Access EJournal Hosting Memorandum of Understanding with the University of Memphis Libraries, securing the journal's placement within the University of Memphis Digital Commons and establishing a sustainable institutional framework for scholarly publication and dissemination. Through this partnership, IHERS will provide free public access to its scholarly content, benefit from dedicated editorial management capabilities, and receive institutional guidance designed to enhance the journal's quality, continuity, accessibility, and

visibility among researchers. The successful launch of IHERS substantially expands UMID's capacity to elevate rigorous, peer-reviewed scholarship, promote interdisciplinary collaboration, and advance the exchange of knowledge in inclusive higher education, disability studies, and rehabilitation science, thereby reinforcing the Institute's leadership in research, innovation, and public impact.

UMID faculty and research staff produced a minimum of three peer-reviewed publications and two in-press manuscripts during the 2024–2025 cycle, with additional scholarly products anticipated for the 2025–2026 period. Publications appeared in leading rehabilitation and disability studies journals including the Journal of Applied Rehabilitation Counseling, the Journal of Rehabilitation, and the Journal of Forensic Vocational Analysis.

UMID scholars presented at over 10 national conferences including the State of the Art (SOTA) Conference on Inclusive Higher Education, the American Congress on Rehabilitation Medicine (ACRM), Southeast Post Secondary Education Alliance (SEPSEA), the National Council on Rehabilitation Education (NCRA), and the International Association of Rehabilitation Professionals (IARP). UMID scholars have also been presented internationally at the International Congress of Applied Psychology (ICAP).

Dr. Chrisann Schiro Geist and Dr. Patrick J. Krolik were invited to present at the SOTA 2026 Conference in Sacramento, California, with a presentation entitled From Practice to Publication: Expanding Member Participation in the Inclusive Higher Education and Rehabilitation Science (IHERS) Journal. Following the formal conclusion of the six-year Project FIRST grant cycle, UMID is currently finalizing a comprehensive meta-analysis and scoping review of the scholarly literature generated throughout the project's tenure. This forthcoming publication will provide a systematic synthesis of the evidence-based practices and inclusive transition models developed between 2019 and 2025. By aggregating data on the multicultural and socioeconomic dimensions of vocational rehabilitation, the review aims to establish a definitive resource for improving participation in postsecondary settings for diverse disability populations. This initiative ensures that the knowledge gained during the Project FIRST funding period continues to inform the national evidence base for vocational excellence.

UMID is developing an MOU with the Institute for Child Education and Psychology (ICEP) for joint research and training endeavors. This will be signed in Dublin, Ireland in Nov. of 2026. This will allow the two institutes an opportunity for international collaboration and growth. ICEP is the third college/institute-level degree-granting institution.

Awards/Recognitions

TigerLIFE received the Business and Industry Award of Excellence from Carnival Memphis, a charitable nonprofit organization, in recognition of outstanding achievement and services to the Mid-South community: a distinction that reflects the program's deep and sustained integration within the civic and employer fabric of the Greater Memphis region.

Leadership/Service Roles

Dr. Chrisann Schiro Geist continues to serve as Director of UMID and Professor in the Department of Counseling, Educational Psychology and Research, providing institutional and programmatic leadership across all three UMID units. Additionally, Dr. Patrick J. Krolik now serves as Co-Principal Investigator on multiple grant initiatives, directs on-the-ground program implementation

for TigerLIFE and the CCTP, and holds editorial and scholarly leadership responsibilities associated with the IHERS journal. Jun Cai, Research Associate, and Dr. Xinhua Yu, Associate Professor, continue to lead UMID's quantitative and epidemiological research agenda.

UMID staff, including Jerrica Lindsey, Patrick Vanderpool, Martha Ponce, Jayasimha Reddy Tippireddy, Sushmitha Nandiki, Safiyyah Sharrief, and Sarah Tune — collectively ensure the day-to-day operational integrity and student-centered excellence of all UMID programs.

During the 2025–2026 reporting period, Dr. Patrick J. Krolik was honored with the ARRPE Services Award. This recognition highlights his significant contributions to the field of rehabilitation and his dedicated service in advancing inclusive higher education and vocational opportunities.

Presentations 2026

Schiro Geist, C. *Training Psychologists to Help Clients Seek Employment*. ICAP Conference, Florence, Italy. (2026, July 2125)

Schiro Geist, C. (2026, May 2022). *TigerLIFE at the University of Memphis: Advancing belonging, resilience, and justice through inclusive postsecondary education & Inclusive Higher Education New Methodology*. SEPSEA Conference, Sheraton New Orleans, New Orleans, LA, United States (2026, July 2125)

Schiro Geist, C. (2026, March 23–24). *The state of inclusive higher education*. ARRPE Conference, Hyatt Regency San Antonio Riverwalk, San Antonio, TX, United States. CSAVR (2026, March 1214)

Schiro Geist, C. (2026, March 12–15). *AI-guided assistive technology for vocational experts: Hands-on training for future-ready rehabilitation counseling*. ABVE Annual Conference, Santa Fe, NM, United States.

Presentations 2025

Schiro Geist. (2025, June 9th). *Inclusive Higher Education*, United Nations, New York, NY

Schiro Geist, C., Yu, X., Krolik, P. (2025, May 21–23). *Project FIRST: Scoping review*. RCPAA Conference, Oaklawn, Hot Springs, AR.

Schiro Geist, C., & Krolik, P. (2025, March 25). *AI CoP Lunch & Learn: AI for Good: Building bridges to every learner*. Presented at the AI Community of Practice, University of Memphis, Memphis, TN.

Schiro Geist, C. (2025, March 12–16). *Unveiling the complexity: Intersectionality of disability in multicultural rehabilitation*. Presented at ABVE Conference, Asheville, NC.

Schiro Geist, C. (2025, February 24–25). *Unveiling the complexity: Intersectionality of disability in multicultural rehabilitation*. Presented at ARRPE, Savannah, Georgia.

Partnerships and Community Engagement

UMID maintains an extensive and diverse portfolio of community, institutional, and governmental partnerships that are fundamental to the execution of its programs and the achievement of its mission. The following represents the principal partnerships active during the 2025–2026 reporting period:

Memphis Shelby County Schools (MSCS): UMID's longest-standing community partner, MSCS co-administers the College Campus Transition Program (CCTP) through a formally renewed Memorandum of Understanding. The CCTP places secondary students with disabilities on the University of Memphis campus for a year-long workforce readiness experience incorporating career exploration, employment readiness skills training, self-advocacy development, transportation training, and campus-based internships. This partnership, now in its fifteenth year, has served hundreds of secondary students and represents one of the most enduring and consequential school-to-work transition collaborations in the state of Tennessee.

Tennessee Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) Region 9: DVR serves as UMID's primary public agency partner for Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) funding and referrals. DVR counselors, including Region 9 Supervisor Heather Sacks and counselor Nneka Austin, serve on UMID's Advisory Board and provide direct referrals of eligible secondary students to UMID's transition programs. The partnership enables UMID to deliver Pre-ETS to more than 160 secondary students across Memphis, Shelby County, and Fayette County annually.

Tennessee Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD): UMID's relationship with DIDD, represented on the Advisory Board by Employment Innovation and Community Inclusion Coordinator Denetris Dee Grandberry, supports the connection between TigerLIFE graduates and program participants to community living, employment supports, and long-term disability services.

Southwest Tennessee Community College and Wilberforce University: In the context of the BRIDGE Innovate TPSID grant initiative, UMID has engaged Southwest Tennessee Community College and Wilberforce University as institutional expansion partners, with the goal of developing inclusive higher education programs at each institution that are modeled upon TigerLIFE's evidence based framework and that extend access to students with IDD who may not otherwise have access to a university based inclusive higher education program.

Community Rehabilitation Providers and Employer Network: UMID maintains active partnerships with a broad network of community rehabilitation providers, employers, and civic organizations, including the ARC of the Mid-South, Disability Connect of Mid-South, Amazon of Memphis, UnitedHealth Care, Greater Memphis Workforce, and Project Search, which provide job placement support, employer education, and competitive integrated employment opportunities for TigerLIFE and CCTP graduates.

Tennessee Division of Vocational Rehabilitation: Community Rehabilitation Provider (CRP) Contractual Agreement (Extended):

UMID maintains a formalized contractual relationship with the Tennessee Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) through its designation as a certified Community Rehabilitation Provider (CRP), a status that authorizes the Institute to deliver specialized vocational assessment, job development, supported employment, and transition services on behalf of DVR to eligible individuals with disabilities. During the 2025–2026 reporting period, UMID successfully negotiated and executed a two-year extension of its existing CRP contractual agreement with the Tennessee Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, reflecting DVR's sustained confidence in UMID's capacity to deliver high-quality, outcome-driven vocational services aligned with the

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and Tennessee's Employment First policy framework.

The extended CRP agreement encompasses a comprehensive scope of authorized services, including but not limited to: comprehensive vocational evaluations utilizing standardized and situational assessment methodologies; individualized job development services tailored to the unique strengths, interests, and accommodation needs of each client; onsite and community based job coaching supporting skill acquisition, workplace integration, and sustained employment retention; benefits counseling addressing the intersection of employment income and public benefit programs including Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI); assistive technology assessments and recommendations facilitating workplace accessibility and productivity; and employer consultation services educating workplace supervisors and human resources personnel on disability awareness, reasonable accommodations, and inclusive hiring practices.

The two-year extension of UMID's CRP contract represents a significant affirmation of the Institute's programmatic quality, fiscal accountability, and alignment with DVR's strategic priorities for expanding competitive integrated employment opportunities for Tennesseans with disabilities. It also ensures continuity of funding and service delivery capacity for UMID's vocational programming through the 2026–2028 fiscal period, providing a stable financial and operational foundation that complements and reinforces the Institute's federal grant portfolio. The CRP relationship serves as a critical pipeline for client referrals, enabling DVR counselors across Region 9 and adjacent service areas to connect eligible transition-age youth and adult clients directly to UMID's evidence-based employment programs, thereby maximizing service coordination, reducing duplicative assessments, and accelerating the pathway from secondary education to competitive employment for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The extended CRP agreement further solidifies UMID's position as a preferred vocational services provider within Tennessee's disability services infrastructure and ensures that the Institute will continue serving as a key implementation partner for DVR's Employment First initiatives throughout the duration of the contract period and beyond.

Signature Initiative or Key Innovation

The signature initiative of the 2025–2026 reporting period is the launch of the TigerLIFE On Campus Residential Pilot Program, which debuted in the summer of 2025 and represents the most significant programmatic expansion in TigerLIFE's twelve-year institutional history.

For the entirety of TigerLIFE's existence, students have commuted to the University of Memphis campus from their home communities, limiting their exposure to the full breadth of university life and the independent living experiences that residential campus participation affords. The on-campus housing pilot directly addresses this limitation by enabling TigerLIFE students to reside in University of Memphis student housing alongside their nondisabled peers, navigating the authentic demands of residential college life, including self-management, budgeting, community living, time management, and social engagement, with appropriate and decreasing levels of structured support.

Implementing the residential pilot required sustained collaboration among UMID leadership, the University of Memphis Housing Office, Disability Resources for Students, and the students' families and support networks. The development of individualized residential support plans, student orientation programming, and safety and wellness protocols was undertaken with meticulous care and a deliberate commitment to balancing genuine independence with appropriate safeguarding.

The evidence of impact, while still emerging given the pilot's recent launch, is already visible in the heightened self-confidence, social engagement, and campus belonging reported by participating students and their families. The residential pilot directly operationalizes the core principle that animates TigerLIFE's entire mission: that students with intellectual and developmental disabilities are fully capable of living, learning, and thriving within the authentic fabric of a university community when provided with the right environment, the right support, and the unwavering institutional belief that they belong. This initiative is expected to generate significant interest nationally as a replicable model for residential inclusion within IPSE programs. A major programmatic priority and initiative for the 2025–2026 reporting period is the development and implementation of **UMID TigerLIFE AfterHours**, an expanded student-engagement initiative designed to extend the TigerLIFE experience beyond the traditional academic and vocational training day. Building upon TigerLIFE's established record of preparing young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities for independent living, postsecondary participation, and competitive integrated employment, TigerLIFE After Hours will create intentional opportunities for students to participate more fully in the social, recreational, cultural, and community dimensions of university life.

Historically, TigerLIFE students have benefited from a rigorous daytime program comprising academic instruction, career exploration, employment preparation, independent living education, and campus-based learning experiences. Nevertheless, participation in organized activities outside regular instructional hours has remained comparatively limited, with only approximately 20 percent of students consistently engaging in structured extracurricular programming. TigerLIFE After Hours is intended to address this gap by providing a coordinated framework through which students may participate in evening and weekend activities alongside their University of Memphis peers.

The initiative will encompass a diverse range of experiences, including University athletic events, recreational and intramural activities, student organization programming, cultural performances, community service projects, campus celebrations, social gatherings, and structured independent living activities. These experiences will provide authentic opportunities for students to strengthen communication, decision-making, self-advocacy, time management, transportation planning, budgeting, and interpersonal skills within naturally occurring university and community environments. Rather than functioning solely as recreational programming, TigerLIFE After Hours will serve as an extension of the program's educational and employment readiness curriculum, enabling students to apply competencies acquired during the instructional day within less structured and increasingly independent settings.

The implementation of TigerLIFE After Hours will require sustained coordination among UMID leadership and staff, University of Memphis student affairs offices, campus recreation and athletic programs, student organizations, peer mentors, families, and community partners.

Existing relationships with organizations such as Best Buddies, Young Life, University Volunteerism, and other campus-based groups will provide an important foundation for inclusive engagement. Individualized participation plans, transportation arrangements, staff and peer support protocols, accessibility considerations, and health and safety procedures will be developed with deliberate attention to preserving student autonomy while ensuring that appropriate support remains available.

A defining feature of TigerLIFE After Hours will be its emphasis on **progressively decreasing structured support**. Students will initially receive individualized assistance according to their respective needs, but the program will deliberately encourage increasing independence in selecting activities, communicating plans, navigating campus, managing personal schedules, resolving ordinary social challenges, and returning safely from evening events. This graduated model will help students develop the practical judgment and confidence necessary to participate meaningfully in university and community life without becoming unnecessarily dependent upon formal service systems.

The anticipated benefits of TigerLIFE After Hours extend well beyond increased attendance at campus events. Meaningful extracurricular participation is expected to strengthen students' sense of belonging, expand their natural peer networks, reduce social isolation, improve self-confidence, and cultivate the interpersonal competencies that are essential to both independent adulthood and sustained employment. The initiative will also provide nondisabled University of Memphis students with recurring opportunities to develop authentic relationships with individuals with disabilities, thereby advancing disability inclusion across the broader campus culture.

TigerLIFE After Hours directly operationalizes UMID's commitment to ensuring that students with intellectual and developmental disabilities are not merely present on a university campus but are recognized as active and valued members of the university community. By extending inclusive participation beyond classrooms and employment training environments, the initiative affirms that social connection, recreation, leadership, friendship, and community belonging are integral components of a comprehensive postsecondary experience. As implementation progresses, UMID will assess participation, student satisfaction, independence, social network development, family feedback, and broader campus engagement, with the expectation that TigerLIFE After Hours may ultimately offer a replicable model for extracurricular inclusion within inclusive postsecondary education programs regionally and nationally.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

The 2025–2026 reporting period has not been without its challenges, and UMID's continued growth is in meaningful part a product of its sustained willingness to confront those challenges honestly and to adapt its strategies accordingly.

The most persistent structural challenge facing UMID is the tension between the program's expanding service scope and the finite personnel and financial resources available to support it. As Pre-ETS delivery expanded significantly, the residential pilot was launched, and the BRIDGE Innovate grant application was simultaneously developed and refined, the demands placed upon UMID's administrative and programmatic staff increased substantially. The primary lesson learned from this tension is that strategic growth requires proactive investment in personnel infrastructure, specifically in the form of additional full-time program coordinators, graduate research assistants,

and administrative support, before the full weight of expansion is felt, rather than in response to it. UMID will prioritize personnel recruitment as a foundational element of the BRIDGE Innovate implementation plan.

A second challenge has been navigating the institutional, regulatory, and accreditation requirements associated with multisite program expansion. Developing CTP-compliant inclusive higher education programming at new partner institutions, each with its own governance structures, academic policies, and administrative cultures, requires patient, sustained relationship-building and a willingness to adapt UMID's established frameworks to diverse institutional contexts. The primary lesson learned is that successful expansion depends as much upon the quality of institutional relationships as upon the quality of programmatic design, and that investment in partnership development must precede and parallel investment in curriculum and service delivery.

A third challenge has been the ongoing national landscape of federal funding uncertainty, which creates planning complexity for any institution whose programmatic infrastructure is substantially supported by competitive federal grants. UMID has responded to this challenge by pursuing a deliberate diversification strategy, seeking funding from multiple federal agencies, state sources, philanthropic foundations, and corporate partners simultaneously, and by ensuring that its highest-priority programs are embedded as deeply as possible within the University of Memphis's institutional budget and operational structure, reducing dependency on any single external funding stream.

The most significant grant development activity of the 2025–2026 reporting period is UMID's active pursuit and advancement of the BRIDGE Innovate TPSID Grant application to the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. This proposed five-year initiative seeks federal funding to develop, implement, and evaluate an expanded model of inclusive higher education across multiple institutions in West Tennessee, including Southwest Tennessee Community College, Wilberforce University (a Historically Black College and University), and Lambuth Campus. The BRIDGE Innovate application represents the next generation of UMID's federally supported inclusive higher education work, building directly upon the programmatic foundation, evidence base, and institutional relationships established through the preceding TPSID funding cycle.

Of equally significant distinction during this reporting period, the University of Memphis, through the endeavors of UMID, has been formally recommended for contract award under the State of Tennessee Department of Disability and Aging (DDA) FY27 DDA Innovation Grant, as communicated by Contracts and Grants Director Eli Rousey in the official Notice of Intent to Award dated April 20, 2026. This recommendation places the University of Memphis among a distinguished and selective cohort of six statewide recipients, alongside Community Network Services, East Tennessee State University's Center of Excellence in Early Childhood Learning and Development, MillarRich, Orange Grove Center, and the South-Central Area Agency on Aging and Disability. The DDA Innovation Grant represents a critical infusion of state-level investment in UMID's innovation agenda and further affirms the Institute's standing as a premier disability services organization within Tennessee's broader disability and aging services ecosystem.

Additionally, UMID concluded the final year of Project FIRST (H263C190015), a six-year federal grant totaling \$2,236,756, by successfully completing all final objectives and milestones. UMID

faculty have also actively pursued competitive grant funding through the National Science Foundation and other federal and philanthropic sources in support of STEM-focused, inclusive education and workforce development initiatives.

Priorities and Resource Needs

UMID enters the 2025–2026 reporting period with a clearly defined set of strategic priorities, each reflecting both the momentum of the Institute's recent accomplishments and the heightened ambitions that accompany its next phase of growth.

Priority One: BRIDGE Innovate TPSID Grant Award and Implementation: The single highest priority for UMID in the near term is the successful award and launch of the BRIDGE Innovate TPSID grant initiative. If awarded, BRIDGE Innovate will transform UMID's geographic and institutional footprint, extend access to inclusive higher education to hundreds of additional students with IDD across West Tennessee, and position the University of Memphis as the anchor institution of a multicampus, regionally comprehensive, inclusive higher education network. Resource needs associated with this priority include dedicated grant management personnel, curriculum development staff, capacity for partner institution liaison, and external evaluation infrastructure.

Priority Two: Expansion and Formalization of the UMID AfterHour initiative on Lambuth Campus: Building upon the initial development of expanded extracurricular and community-based engagement opportunities, UMID will formalize and broaden the TigerLIFE After Hours initiative at the University of Memphis Lambuth Campus during the 2026–2027 academic year. The initiative will provide TigerLIFE students with structured access to evening and weekend activities, including campus events, recreational programming, student organization activities, cultural experiences, community service opportunities, and social gatherings alongside their nondisabled peers. Successful implementation will require sustained collaboration with Lambuth Campus leadership, Student Affairs, Campus Recreation, student organizations, families, peer mentors, and community partners, as well as the establishment of permanent procedures governing transportation, staffing, accessibility, safety, individualized support, and progressively increasing student independence. UMID will also identify sustainable funding sources to support the additional personnel, transportation, programming, and coordination expenses associated with expanded AfterHours participation. The initiative is expected to strengthen students' social connectedness, self-confidence, self-determination, time-management abilities, interpersonal competencies, and sense of belonging while further distinguishing TigerLIFE as a comprehensive and innovative model of inclusive postsecondary education.

Priority Three: STEM MICROCredential Innovative Pathway Development: UMID will continue developing and seeking funding for its STEM Microcredential Innovate Pathway initiative in addition to other employable certification/credentials, which is designed to equip TigerLIFE students with industry recognized credentials in data literacy, robotics, applied technologies, and sustainability: directly addressing the documented gap between the STEM workforce needs of Tennessee's employer community and the credential attainment of individuals with IDD. Resource needs include adaptive technology and instructional materials, a dedicated STEM pathway coordinator, and support for employer partnership development.

Priority Four: Academic Scholarly Infrastructure and UMID IHERS Journal Growth:

UMID is committed to expanding the reach, membership participation, and publication volume of the Inclusive Higher Education and Rehabilitation Science (IHERS) journal, hosted on the University of Memphis Digital Commons. This initiative requires investment in editorial support, writing mentorship programming, and dissemination activities at national conferences. The IHERS journal serves as the scholarly voice of the field and as a critical mechanism for translating UMID's practice-based experience into the peer-reviewed evidence base that sustains, justifies, and advances inclusive higher education nationally.

Priority Five: Personnel and Infrastructure Capacity: Across all programmatic priorities, UMID's most fundamental resource needs are for additional qualified personnel, including program coordinators, research associates, graduate assistants, and administrative support staff, commensurate with the Institute's expanding scope of work. UMID respectfully requests the College of Education's continued advocacy for institutional support in the form of faculty lines, staff positions, and operational resources that reflect the scope, impact, and national profile of the Institute's contributions to the University's research, service, and community engagement mission.

Priorities and Planned Initiatives for the 2026–2027 Reporting Period and Beyond

The University of Memphis Institute on Disability enters the next phase of its institutional evolution with a strategic agenda characterized by both programmatic expansion and scholarly innovation, grounded in evidence-based practice and oriented toward measurable outcomes in the domains of competitive integrated employment, inclusive postsecondary education, and community participation for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Priority Initiative One: INSPIRED Program Development and Implementation

Among the most significant programmatic innovations currently under development within UMID's strategic portfolio is the INSPIRED Program, an acronym denoting Inclusive Network for Students Pursuing Independence through Research, Education, and Development. The INSPIRED Program represents a deliberate and structured response to the documented gap between students with intellectual and developmental disabilities' academic and career aspirations and the availability of research-oriented, evidence-based pathways that prepare these individuals for meaningful participation in disability studies scholarship, disability advocacy leadership, and disability services administration.

The INSPIRED Program is conceptualized as a multi-year cohort-based initiative that will recruit, mentor, and support neurodiverse students with lived disability experience who demonstrate interest in pursuing advanced study, research engagement, or professional practice within the disability studies, rehabilitation counseling, special education, or disability policy domains. Program participants will engage in structured academic coursework, individualized research mentorship under the guidance of UMID faculty and affiliated scholars, participation in scholarly conferences and professional association meetings, and the development of publishable research products contributing to the peer-reviewed literature on disability, employment, education, and community inclusion.

The INSPIRED Program's curriculum will be designed in alignment with the principles of universal design for learning, person-driven planning, and supported decision-making, ensuring that program content is accessible, meaningful, and developmentally appropriate for participants

across the spectrum of neurodiversity. Key programmatic components will include: foundational coursework in disability history, disability rights law, research ethics, and qualitative and quantitative research methodologies; hands on engagement in active UMID research projects, including data collection, analysis, and dissemination activities; mentored presentation opportunities at state, regional, and national conferences including the State of the Art (SOTA) Conference on Inclusive Higher Education, the Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD) Annual Meeting, and the American Rehabilitation Counseling Association (ARCA) Conference; and structured pathways toward co-authorship on peer reviewed manuscripts published in journals such as the Inclusive Higher Education and Rehabilitation Science (IHRS) journal, the Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability, and Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals.

The ultimate objective of the INSPIRED Program is to cultivate the next generation of disability scholars, advocates, and leaders who bring authentic lived experience, rigorous academic training, and community-informed perspectives to the ongoing national effort to advance equity, inclusion, and opportunity for individuals with disabilities. By creating formalized pathways for neurodiverse students to engage meaningfully in disability research and scholarship, UMID seeks to disrupt the longstanding pattern whereby disability policy, disability services, and disability research are developed and implemented primarily by nondisabled professionals without substantive input from the individuals whose lives are most directly affected by those policies, services, and research agendas. The INSPIRED Program embodies the foundational disability rights principle of "Nothing About Us Without Us," operationalized through rigorous academic structure, individualized support, and unwavering institutional commitment to the intellectual contributions and scholarly potential of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Resource needs for the INSPIRED Program include dedicated program coordination personnel with expertise in disability studies pedagogy and supported scholarship; stipend support for program participants to offset opportunity costs associated with research engagement; professional development funds enabling conference travel and presentation; and partnership development support connecting UMID with graduate programs, research institutes, and professional associations positioned to provide mentorship, internship placements, and employment pathways for INSPIRED Program graduates. UMID anticipates pursuing external funding for the INSPIRED Program through federal agencies including the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR), the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), and philanthropic foundations committed to advancing disability leadership and self-advocacy.

Priority Initiative Two: Sponsorship of Disability Studies Internship Program

In parallel with the development of the INSPIRED Program, UMID will establish a formalized **Disability Studies Internship Sponsorship Program** to provide structured, compensated professional experiences for undergraduate and graduate students pursuing studies in disability studies, rehabilitation counseling, special education, social work, psychology, and related disciplines. The program is designed to address a significant gap in workforce preparation by expanding access to high-quality, mentored placements that extend beyond traditional practicum activities. Interns will gain direct experience in disability services administration, inclusive education, vocational rehabilitation, research, policy development, grant writing, program

evaluation, research dissemination, and systems-level advocacy through placements within UMID's Research Unit, Vocational Services Unit, and Career Development and Transition Programs Unit.

Internship responsibilities will be individualized according to each participant's academic level, disciplinary background, and professional interests. Undergraduate interns will generally support direct services, data collection, program coordination, and administrative activities, while graduate interns will assume more advanced responsibilities involving curriculum development, research design and analysis, grant proposal preparation, and program evaluation. All participants will receive formal supervision from UMID faculty and senior staff, attend weekly professional development seminars addressing ethical practice, cultural competence, disability inclusion, and relevant career pathways, and complete structured reflective assignments connecting their practical experiences with the theoretical foundations of their academic programs.

The program will simultaneously strengthen UMID's workforce pipeline and prepare a new generation of disability-informed educators, counselors, researchers, administrators, and advocates grounded in evidence-based practice, person-centered principles, and competitive employment and inclusion outcomes. It will also deepen interdisciplinary partnerships with academic units across the University of Memphis, including the Department of Counseling, Educational Psychology and Research, the Department of Instruction and Curriculum Leadership, the School of Social Work, and the Department of Psychology. Implementation will require dedicated internship coordination, intern stipend or wage support, professional development resources, and infrastructure for recruitment, placement, supervision, and outcome evaluation. UMID will pursue sustainable support through institutional investment, external workforce development grants, and partnerships with rehabilitation providers, disability advocacy organizations, and other community agencies capable of cosponsoring internship placements.

Priority Initiative Three: Membership and Strategic Engagement with Rehabilitation International Congress as Secretariat

The University of Memphis Institute on Disability has undertaken the strategic decision to pursue formal organizational membership in Rehabilitation International (RI), the world's premier global network dedicated to advancing the rights, inclusion, and wellbeing of people with disabilities across national, cultural, and socioeconomic contexts. Founded in 1922 and granted consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, the International Labor Organization, UNESCO, and the World Health Organization, Rehabilitation International serves as the convening platform for disability service providers, researchers, policymakers, and self-advocates from more than 100 countries worldwide.

UMID's pursuit of RI membership reflects the Institute's recognition that the challenges facing individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in the Mid-South region of the United States are fundamentally connected to global patterns of disability discrimination, economic marginalization, educational exclusion, and systemic inequity that transcend national borders. By engaging with Rehabilitation International, UMID seeks to position its evidence-based programming, research findings, and policy innovations within the broader international dialogue on disability rights implementation, inclusive education best practices, supported employment

models, and the advancement of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

Membership in Rehabilitation International will afford UMID access to a comprehensive array of professional development resources, international collaboration opportunities, and knowledge exchange platforms that will meaningfully enhance the Institute's capacity to contribute to and learn from the global disability services community. Specific benefits of RI membership include: participation in the Rehabilitation International World Congress, a quadrennial gathering of disability professionals, researchers, policymakers, and advocates from across the globe, providing unparalleled opportunities for presentation of UMID's research findings, dissemination of the TigerLIFE and BRIDGE Innovate program models, and networking with international partners positioned to adapt UMID's evidence based practices to diverse cultural and institutional contexts; access to RI's peer reviewed publications, policy briefs, and technical assistance resources addressing cutting-edge topics in disability services, assistive technology, inclusive education, and employment support; eligibility to participate in RI working groups, task forces, and regional networks focused on specific disability populations, service delivery models, or policy priorities aligned with UMID's strategic agenda; and opportunities to nominate UMID faculty and staff for leadership positions within RI's governance structure, thereby amplifying the Institute's influence on international disability policy development and strengthening the University of Memphis's global profile as a leader in disability research and services.

UMID's engagement with Rehabilitation International will be guided by a commitment to reciprocal knowledge exchange, ensuring that the Institute not only benefits from international best practices and research innovations but also contributes meaningfully to the global knowledge base through presentation of UMID's programmatic outcomes, dissemination of UMID developed assessment instruments and curriculum frameworks, and active participation in international research collaborations addressing shared challenges in disability employment, education, and community inclusion. The Institute anticipates that RI membership will generate collaborative research opportunities with international partners, strengthen grant proposals by demonstrating global engagement and cross-national relevance, and enhance UMID's capacity to recruit international visiting scholars, graduate students, and postdoctoral fellows seeking training in evidence-based inclusive higher education and vocational rehabilitation programming.

Resource needs associated with Rehabilitation International membership include annual organizational membership dues, travel support enabling UMID faculty and staff participation in RI World Congress and regional meetings, and dedicated personnel time for engagement in RI working groups, publications, and collaborative initiatives. UMID will pursue funding for RI-Ireland activities through a combination of institutional support, federal grants emphasizing international collaboration and knowledge dissemination, and partnerships with international disability organizations positioned to cosponsor UMID's participation in global disability services dialogues. The Institute views RI membership as a long-term strategic investment that will yield sustained dividends, including enhanced international reputation, expanded research partnerships, strengthened grant competitiveness, and deeper alignment with the global movement for disability rights, inclusion, and equity.

Priority Initiative Four: Expansion and Formalization of the TigerLIFE After Hours Program

UMID will establish and expand the **TigerLIFE AfterHours Program** as a formalized extension of the TigerLIFE inclusive postsecondary education experience at the University of Memphis Lambuth Campus. The initiative will provide TigerLIFE students with structured access to evening and weekend activities that extend beyond the traditional academic and vocational training day. Programming will include campus athletic events, recreational activities, student organization meetings, cultural performances, community service projects, social gatherings, and independent living experiences conducted alongside peers with and without disabilities. Through sustained participation in the broader life of the University, students will have additional opportunities to strengthen social communication, self-advocacy, decision-making, time management, budgeting, transportation planning, and community navigation skills within authentic campus and community environments.

Participation plans and levels of support will be individualized according to each student's abilities, interests, goals, and support needs. UMID faculty and staff, peer mentors, student organizations, campus recreation personnel, families, and community partners will collaborate to develop accessible programming, transportation arrangements, safety procedures, and progressively decreasing support structures. Students will initially receive the assistance necessary to participate successfully; however, the program will intentionally promote increasing independence in selecting activities, communicating schedules, navigating the campus, managing personal responsibilities, interacting with peers, and responding appropriately to ordinary social and logistical challenges. In this manner, TigerLIFE After Hours will function not merely as recreational programming, but as an applied extension of the program's curriculum in independent living, interpersonal development, self-determination, and employment readiness.

The initiative is expected to strengthen students' confidence, social connectedness, campus belonging, and readiness for increasingly independent adult lives while further advancing an inclusive culture throughout the Lambuth Campus. Implementation will require dedicated program coordination, evening and weekend staffing, peer mentor development, transportation support, accessible activity funding, and systematic evaluation of participation, satisfaction, skill development, and student outcomes. UMID will pursue sustainable support through institutional investment, external grants, philanthropic contributions, and partnerships with university departments, community organizations, disability service providers, and local employers. As the program develops, TigerLIFE After Hours may serve as a replicable model for extending meaningful extracurricular participation and community inclusion within inclusive postsecondary education programs regionally and nationally.

Priority Initiative Five: Development and Launch of an Undergraduate Concentration in Disability Studies

UMID will pursue the development and launch of an interdisciplinary **Undergraduate Concentration in Disability Studies** designed to provide University of Memphis students with a comprehensive academic foundation in disability history, culture, policy, advocacy, inclusion, and professional practice. The proposed concentration will enable students from education, psychology, social work, sociology, public health, rehabilitation, human services, and related fields to examine disability through social, cultural, legal, educational, vocational, and community-

based perspectives. Its curriculum will emphasize disability rights, person-driven practice, universal design, inclusive education, ethical service delivery, assistive technology, community participation, self-determination, and competitive integrated employment, thereby preparing students to recognize and address the structural barriers that continue to affect individuals with disabilities.

The concentration will combine interdisciplinary coursework with meaningful experiential learning opportunities that connect academic theory to professional practice. Students may participate in internships, service-learning projects, research assistantships, community-engaged initiatives, and supervised placements within TigerLIFE and UMID's Research, Vocational Services, and Career Development and Transition Programs units. Through these experiences, students will develop practical competencies in disability services administration, program development, policy analysis, advocacy, grant writing, research, data collection, program evaluation, and inclusive community engagement. Curriculum development will be undertaken collaboratively with academic departments across the University, disability-led organizations, community rehabilitation providers, employers, advocacy groups, and individuals with lived experience of disability to ensure that the concentration remains academically rigorous, professionally relevant, and authentically informed by the perspectives of the communities it is intended to serve.

The initiative is expected to strengthen the University's capacity to prepare disability-informed professionals for careers in education, rehabilitation, social services, healthcare, public policy, nonprofit leadership, human resources, research, and community development. Implementation will require coordinated curriculum design, institutional and academic approvals, qualified faculty participation, formal advising structures, internship and field-placement partnerships, student recruitment, and sustainable administrative and financial support. UMID will pursue institutional investment, external grants, philanthropic support, and strategic partnerships to support the concentration's development and long-term operation. Once established, the program will expand the pipeline of professionals equipped to advance accessibility, equity, and inclusion while positioning the University of Memphis as a regional leader in undergraduate disability studies education, interdisciplinary scholarship, workforce development, and community-engaged learning.

Forward Vision

The priorities articulated above, such as the INSPIRED Program, the Disability Studies Internship Sponsorship Program, and strategic engagement with Rehabilitation International, represent deliberate, evidence-informed investments in the infrastructure, human capital, and global connectivity that will position UMID for sustained impact and institutional leadership throughout the next decade. These initiatives are united by a shared commitment to expanding opportunity, elevating lived experience, and advancing equity for individuals with disabilities through rigorous scholarship, innovative programming, and authentic partnership. UMID enters the 2026–2027 academic year and beyond with clarity of purpose, depth of commitment, and confidence that the work ahead will meaningfully contribute to the transformation of systems, the advancement of knowledge, and the realization of fuller, freer, more dignified lives for the individuals and families the Institute is honored to serve.

Advisory Board Members 20252026

Department of Vocational Rehabilitation/Pre-ETS

Heather Sacks – Region 9 Supervisor

Nneka Austin – Region 9 Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor

Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities DIDD

Denetris Dee Grandberry – Employment Innovation & Community Inclusion Coordinator at TN DIDD.

TigerLIFE parent and student

Sandeford J Schaeffer – Retired UM Professor, Fogelman College of Business & Economics.

Patti Lehigh – St. Jude's Research Division

Jeffery Bell – Disability Advocate

Nya Sanders– Disability Advocate

Brigette Atkins– Disability Advocate/Parent

Community at Large

Tim Wheat – Director, Disability Connect of Mid-South, Memphis

Carlene Leaper – Director, ARC of Mid-South

Sandi Klink – M.A.T.A. Board

Joanne Fusso – T.H.R.I.V.E

University of Memphis faculty and staff

Xinhua Yu – Associate Professor, Division of Epidemiology, Biostatistics, and Environmental Health, Program Coordinator for Epidemiology.

Carolyn Kaldon – Research Professor, Center for Research in Educational Policy (CREP).

Tara Buchannan – Director of Disability Resources for Students at The University of Memphis

Kevin Berisso – Associate Professor/ AutoID Lab Director, College of Engineering Technology

Memphis Shelby County schools

Sheniqua L Woodward – College Campus Transition Program @ U of M, Instructor, Exceptional Education.

Tonyal Mathes – Special Education Advisor, Exceptional Education

Jlahna Chatman – Regional Manager, Exceptional Education

Department of Vocational Rehabilitation/Pre-ETS

Adranna Buchanan – State of Tennessee Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor

Special Recognition:

UMID recognizes **Dr. Michael T. Miller, Ed.D.**, for his distinguished leadership and exceptional support of the University of Memphis Institute on Disability. As Dean of the College of Education and Professor of Higher and Adult Education, Dr. Miller brings 35 years of experience in higher education, together with an exemplary record of academic administration, scholarly achievement, externally funded research, graduate mentorship, and professional service. His extensive work concerning participatory communities in higher education, student and faculty engagement, institutional leadership, and postsecondary opportunity provides an especially valuable foundation for UMID's efforts to advance access, inclusion, and meaningful participation for individuals with disabilities.

Through his service to UMID, Dr. Miller provides senior academic leadership, strategic counsel, and thoughtful feedback concerning proposed grant activities, thereby strengthening project design, effective implementation, institutional alignment, and anticipated outcomes. He also serves on the UMID Advisory Board, where his expertise in undergraduate student success, STEM education leadership, postsecondary access and participation, educational governance, organizational effectiveness, and workforce development substantially enhances the Institute's interdisciplinary research, education, and service mission.

Employees by Ethnicity and Gender

The University of Memphis Institute on Disability (UMID) has made every effort to diversify its leadership and staff. UMID employs staff from a variety of backgrounds, including special education, behavioral analysis, and psychology, as well as graduate students who work collaboratively with staff. UMID employs a diverse group of individuals who are typically underrepresented, continuing the institute's commitment to equity and inclusion.

The demographic makeup of UMID's staff, researchers, and consultants is outlined in the table below. The high number of graduate degrees (61% with a master's degree or higher) reflects extensive qualifications and relevant training for continued research.

Table 3

Demographic Makeup of UMID Staff, Researchers, and Consultants

	<i>n</i> = 23	%
Male	9	39
Female	14	61
African American/Black	10	45
Hispanic	1	4
African	1	4
Asian	2	9
Asian American	1	5
Caucasian/White	7	32
Some college/no degree	3	13
Bachelor's degree	3	13
Master's degree	14	61
Doctorate Degree	3	13
Does not possess a disability	21	91
Possesses a disability	2	9
Employed as a graduate assistant	5	22
Not employed as a graduate assistant	18	78
Born outside of the U.S.	4	17
Born inside the U.S.	19	83

The University of Memphis Institute on Disability: Organizational Chart 2025-2026.

