



Andy Beshear
Governor

Jamie Link
Education and Labor Cabinet Secretary

Advocacy and Education Committee

Minutes

February 7, 2024
9:00am – 10:00am
Zoom
Meeting ID: 879 7222 9865

Members Present:

Chair, Amanda Owen, Jeff Edwards, Diana Merzweiler, Morgan Turner, Amanda Friend and Bill Bates

Members Absent:

David Allgood

Staff Present:

Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (KYOVR) Administrator, Nanci Howard, KYOVR Administrative Specialist, Pepper Caudill and KYVOR Manager, Michelle Cobb

Guest(s) Present:

Interpreter, Tara Eversole, Interpreter, Lisa Amstutz, Kaitlyn Paschall, Tracy Belfield and Sharelle Williams

Welcome, Introductions and Agenda Review:

Administrator, Nanci Howard began the meeting and introductions of attendees were given. She then provided the group with an update of Project NEON, as requested by Chair, Amanda Owen.

Chair Report:

Chair, Amanda Owen began by providing a recap of the Committee's goals and explained that this would be a working meeting. KYOVR Staff, Pepper Caudill shared the committee's previous meeting [minutes](#) into the chat for all to review. Administrator, Nanci Howard suggested that the group should reach out to Katie Wolf Whaley for slides regarding Employment First to add to their power point presentation. Amanda Owen stated that she would reach out to Katie to request this information.

Dropbox and Resources of Five Categories:

Discussion was held regarding the resources that the group had already categorized, and the Dropbox account where this information was presently being kept. KYOVR Staff, Pepper Caudill shared the [Resources-Dropbox Link](#) in the chat, for the group to review. It was discussed and decided that the five categories of information (Employers, Guardians-Parents, Professionals-Educators, Providers and Self-Advocates) would be divided amongst the committee members. Each member would be responsible to review for accuracy the information that had already been submitted to the Dropbox and add any information that could be gathered. Member, Diana Merzweiler and Guest, Kaitlyn Paschall volunteered to oversee the Guardians-Parents category. Member, Bill Bates volunteered to oversee the Professionals-Educators category. Member, Jeff Edwards and Member, Amanda Friend volunteered to oversee the Self-Advocates category. Member, Morgan Turner stated he would attempt to assist in overseeing Self-Advocates but admitted that his plate was already full. Chair, Amanda Owen volunteered to oversee Employers and Providers categories.

Mock Flyer and Email Verbiage for Five Categories:

Chair, Amanda Owen screen shared the [A&E Mock QR Code Mock Flyer](#) with the group which was approved by the Full Council at the October 13th, 2023 Quarterly Meeting. She then screen shared a mock introductory email containing verbiage targeted to each of the five category audiences and explained that the mock flyer could be attached to these email(s) and then disseminated to the public. There was review and discussion amongst the group developing this process. Amadna Owen stated that she would send the introductory email verbiage to the group for further review and suggestions. Once this was done, the mock email will be presented to the Council for approval to begin disseminating the information to the five targeted audiences. Administrator, Nanci Howard stated that KYOVR has a contact list of Special Education Educators across the state that she would share with the group. Nanci also mentioned that Jason Wheatley is proxy representative for Employment First Council Member Gretta Hylton and he would be a great resource for sharing this information. It was confirmed by KYOVR staff that Jason Wheatley is presently receiving Employment First Council emailed correspondence.

Power Point:

Chair, Amanda Owen began discussions of how the committee would develop the power point. It was decided that the power point should mimic the mock email verbiage and include a reference to “untapped resources” and “empowering others”.

Closing Statements:

Chair, Amanda Owen stated that she would share resources with the group via emailed links and requested that the members engage in actively participating in developing the resources independently because the committee will only be meeting once per quarter. Amanda Owen stated that she and her team would work on creating the power point slides once the Committee has provided feedback and suggestions regarding the resources she plans to share. She requested that Committee Members continue to work on overseeing and contributing to the five categories of information currently residing in the Dropbox account. KYOVR Staff shared the Committee’s next meeting [date](#) of 05/01/2024 in the group chat and stated that the “warehouse” of resources presently being kept on the Dropbox account was in process of transferring to the KYOVR website [Employment First Page](#). It was requested that Committee Members review their respective categories and provide feedback as soon as possible as the transfer was due to take place within the coming work week. The [website link](#) was provided to the Committee in the group chat.

Future areas of focus:

- Amanda Owen stated that she would reach out to Katie Wolf Whaley to request Employment First Power Point Slide information.
- Each member would be responsible to review for accuracy the information that had already been submitted to the Dropbox and add any information that could be gathered. Member, [Diana Merzweiler](#) and Guest, [Kaitlyn Paschall](#) volunteered to oversee the Guardians-Parents category. Member, [Bill Bates](#) volunteered to oversee the Professionals-Educators category. Member, [Jeff Edwards](#) and Member, [Amanda Friend](#) volunteered to oversee the Self-Advocates category. Member, [Morgan Turner](#) stated he would attempt to assist in overseeing Self-Advocates but admitted that his plate was already full. Chair, [Amanda Owen](#) volunteered to oversee Employers and Providers categories. It was requested that Committee Members review their respective categories and provide feedback as soon as possible as the transfer from [Dropbox](#) to [KYOVR Website](#) was due to take place within the coming work week.
- Amadna Owen stated that she would send the introductory email verbiage to the group for further review and suggestions. Once this was done, the mock email will be presented to the Council for approval to begin disseminating the information to the five targeted audiences.
- Administrator, Nanci Howard stated that KYOVR has a contact list of Special Education Educators across the state that she would share with the group.
- Chair, Amanda Owen stated that she would share resources with the group via emailed links and requested that the members engage in actively participating in developing the resources independently because the committee will only be meeting once per quarter.
- Amanda Owen stated that she and her team would work on creating the power point slides once the Committee has provided feedback and suggestions regarding the resources she plans to share.

Next Meeting Date:

Friday, April 12th, 2024

1:00pm – 3:00pm

Hybrid Format

Location: TBD

500 Mero Street • 4th Floor NE • Frankfort, KY • 40601

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Andy Beshear
Governor

Jamie Link
Education and Labor Cabinet Secretary

Advocacy and Education Committee

Minutes

August 7, 2024

9:00am – 10:00am

Zoom

Meeting ID: 879 7222 9865

Passcode: 499069

Attendees:

Nanci Howard (Vocational Rehabilitation Administrator)
Amanda Owen (Chair)
Bill Bates (Council member)
Michelle Cobb (Staff Support)
Tracy Belfield (Additional Member)
Susan Brown (Additional Member)
Morgan Turner (Council Member)
Amanda Friend (Council Member)
Andrew Johnson (Council Member)
Tia Henson (ASL Interpreter)
Anu Kumari (Administrative Specialist Senior)

Members Absent:

David Allgood (Council Member)
Jeff Edwards (Council Member)

Welcome:

Administrator, Nanci Howard, welcomed everyone to the meeting and provided a brief update on the Project NEON (National Expansion on Employment Opportunities Network).

Introductions/Announcements:

Chair, Amanda Owen welcomed everyone, and participants introduced themselves and their roles. The agenda was reviewed by all participants. Administrator, Nanci Howard provided an introduction of the new employee, Anu Kumari, who will assist with Employment First Council duties and correspondence.

Overview of Current Progress:

Chair, Amanda Owen provided an update on the committee's progress:

- Resources have been compiled and are available on the Employment First [website](#).
- A flyer with a QR code linking to resources has been created and approved by the full council. This document has been distributed to the full council several times and is entitled, "Employment First in Kentucky". Participants were encouraged to distribute to their networks.
- Draft email templates for educators and employers have been developed but need approval.

Brainstorming Session: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

The committee discussed potential FAQs for different audiences (parents, educators, self-advocates, employers, and providers). The following were questions discussed by the committee to include in the FAQs document.

Parents	Educators	Self-Advocates	Employers	Providers
Where do I start? Direct them to the Employment First website and local vocational rehabilitation centers.	How do I explain Employment First in an IEP meeting? Provide a concise explanation and link to resources.	Where do I start? Similar to parents, direct them to the Employment First website and local vocational rehabilitation centers.	How do I support and accommodate individuals with disabilities? Link to resources like the Employer Lunch and Learn series.	Tabled. Will be discussed at next committee meeting.
How can my child keep their benefits while working? Provide links to resources like DB101 and local benefits analysis	What should I communicate if an OVR rep is not present? Share a flyer or video summarizing OVR services.	How can I keep my benefits while working? Provide links to benefits analysis resources.	Where can I learn more about inclusive workforce policies? Provide links to the Employment First	

services.			website and other educational resources.	
<p>Are there success stories I can refer to? Link to the Employment Files on YouTube and other success stories from the</p>	<p>How does Employment First support post-secondary education? Link to resources and programs that support post-secondary</p>	<p>What skills or programs can help me prepare for employment? Link to relevant curriculums and programs like LEND.</p>	<p>How does Employment First benefit my business? Explain the business advantages of hiring individuals with disabilities.</p>	

Transition Committee.	education for students with disabilities.			
	Why is it important to update the 504 plans? Explain the significance of a current 504 plan and the differences between IEPs and 504 plans.		How can I access this untapped workforce? Provide guidance on connecting with vocational rehabilitation centers and other resources.	
	What are the compliance requirements and the vision for Employment First? Outline the basic compliance and the broader vision.			

Action Items:

- Amanda Owen to compile the FAQs into a Google Doc and share it with the committee for edits.
- Committee Members to review and edit the Google Doc by September 15th.
- Amanda Owen to send out draft email templates for review and approval.
- Nanci Howard to include the Employment First flyer in the email templates.
- Amanda Friend to provide resources for employers and educators regarding accommodations and interpreters.
- Tracy Belfield suggested collaborating with KDE representatives regarding 504 and IEP inquires. She suggested asking KDE representatives about the significance of a current 504 plan and the differences between IEPs and 504 plans.

Agenda Items for next meeting:

- The committee aims to finalize the FAQs and email templates by the next meeting in November.
- Chair, Amanda Owen will present the drafts to the Executive Committee for feedback before the Employment First Council meeting.

Adjournment:

Chair, Amanda Owen and Administrator, Nanci Howard thanked everyone for their contributions and adjourned the meeting.

Highlights:

Introduction of new staff member Anu Kumari.
Progress update on resources and email templates.
Detailed brainstorming session on FAQs for different audiences.
Action items assigned with a deadline for review and edits.
Next meeting scheduled for November 6, 2024.

Next Meeting:

Date: November 6, 2024
Time: 9:00 am to 10:00 am

500 Mero Street • 4th Floor NE • Frankfort, KY • 40601
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Andy Beshear
Governor

Jamie Link
Education and Labor Cabinet Secretary

Advocacy and Education Committee

Minutes

November 6, 2024
9:00am – 10:00am

[Zoom Link](#)

Meeting ID: 879 7222 9865
Passcode: 499069

Attendees:

Amanda Owen (Committee Chair)
Katie Wolf Whaley (Council Chair)
Bill Bates (Council member)
Jeff Edwards (Council Member)
Amanda Friend (Council Member)
Michelle Cobb (Staff Support)
Tara Eversole (ASL Interpreter)
Lisa Amstutz (ASL Interpreter)
Nanci Howard (Vocational Rehabilitation Administrator)
Anu Kumari (Administrative Specialist Senior)

Members Absent:

David Allgood (Council Member)
Morgan Turner (Council Member)
Andrew Johnson (Council Member)
Tracy Belfield (Additional Member)
Susan Brown (Additional Member)

Welcome:

Chair, Amanda Owen welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Announcements:

Administrator, Nanci Howard shared the following announcements:

Project NEON:

(National Expansion on Employment Opportunities Network): The Project NEON application would be submitted before the November 7th deadline. Nanci announced the agency would be requesting the maximum of 300 hours for various projects.

Standing Agenda Item:

Nanci informed the committee members there would now be a standing agenda item entitled, "2025 Annual Report 2025: Recommendations".

Annual Report Approval:

Nanci announced the Annual Report is at the Cabinet and progressing nicely, with only minimal changes noted. She does not foresee any issues with the report at this time.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Chair, Amanda Owen discussed the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) template, which had been sent out previously for review and feedback. The committee members were encouraged to open the Google document in real-time for collaborative review. She emphasized the importance of focusing on the top five questions that self-advocates with disabilities may have and providing clear, helpful answers. The goal is to create a tool that helps self-advocates understand common questions and direct them to resources.

Chair, Amanda Owen shared a [Link](#) to the FAQ document. She expressed her gratitude for the opportunity to share the document and suggested starting with the top five questions for self-advocates. The committee members then discussed the appropriateness of the questions and whether any additional questions should be added or modified.

Self-Advocates with Disabilities:

What is Employment First, and how does it help me find a job?

Answer: Employment First, by law, sets the expectation that employment be the first and preferred option for individuals with disabilities. It works to increase the ways you can connect with resources, support, and training so you can find meaningful work in your community.

Committee Members' Suggestions

Chair Amanda Owen suggested adding a question about job rights and reconsidering the phrasing of questions related to employment. The conversation then shifted to the terminology used in the questions, particularly regarding the distinction between supported employment specialists and other service providers.

The committee members agreed that the FAQ should be broad enough to cover various types of support available to individuals with disabilities, rather than focusing solely on supported employment. Chair, Amanda Owen acknowledged the challenge of addressing a wide range of needs within the Employment First framework. The committee members emphasized the importance of providing clear, accessible guidance without overwhelming the document with excessive detail. There was a consensus to keep the five questions broad to avoid confusion and provide a practical starting point for self-advocates.

The committee members then began reviewing the answers to the first two questions and agreed that they were generally satisfactory but might need slight adjustments addressed.

How do I start the process of finding a job?

Answer: If you want help by finding a job, you can start by [contacting your local vocational rehabilitation agency](#) or an employment service provider. They will guide you through an assessment of your skills, interests, and any support you may need to succeed in the workplace.

Committee Members' Suggestions

The committee members continued discussing the phrasing of the second question regarding employment service providers. Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley suggested simplifying the language by removing the term "supported" from "supported employment service providers." The committee members also considered including information about Community Mental Health Centers (CMHCs) and their role, with the goal of making the language more inclusive and less focused solely on intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

What kind of support can I get while working?

Answer: It depends upon the impact of your disability and what you need. You could receive job coaching, on-the-job training, assistive technology, and/or ongoing support to help you succeed. These supports can be tailored to your needs and, if they include long term support, can be adjusted over time as you become more independent.

Committee Members' Suggestions

The committee members discussed whether to include Community Mental Health Centers (CMHCs) in the conversation about employment services. The discussion highlighted the complexity of navigating employment services and the need to provide clear guidance for self-advocates. Committee members emphasized the importance of offering multiple resources for self-advocates seeking employment support, with a focus on directing them to the appropriate resources without causing confusion.

The committee members discussed whether to define different types of resources specifically for self-advocates or to keep the document broad. The consensus leaned toward maintaining a broad approach, with the understanding that more specific resources could be developed later if needed.

Can I work and still receive disability benefits?

Answer: The answer is often yes, but it is important to talk to someone knowledgeable to understand how employment affects your specific situation. Wages impact public benefits such as SSI and SSDI in different ways. You can ask your VR Counselor for help or contact a Benefits Counselor.

Committee Members' Suggestions

Chair Amanda Owen was asked about the placement of a section on requesting help from a Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) counselor, noting that it should come after determining eligibility. The discussion highlighted the importance of creating an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) before accessing benefits counseling services. There was a belief that a benefits analysis could be obtained prior to establishing eligibility, which may help individuals decide whether to continue pursuing their goals within the program. It was acknowledged that the availability of benefits counseling may vary, so the committee members aimed to keep the guidance general rather than overly detailed. Committee members also discussed the wording of the fourth question on benefits counseling, emphasizing the need to provide accurate information.

There was a suggestion made to clarify the answer to the question about benefits and employment to reflect the variability in individual circumstances. The committee members considered whether to include specific programs like Ticket to Work in the FAQ, discussing the pros and cons of adding such details. The decision was ultimately made to remove references to Ticket to Work to keep the document focused and manageable. The committee members agreed to adjust the wording of the answer to reflect that eligibility for benefits can vary based on individual circumstances.

How can I be sure that my job is right for me?

Answer: Your employment team/resource providers will work with you to explore your interests, skills, and strengths to find a job that matches your preferences. It is important that you share your wants and needs in a job.

Committee Members' Suggestions

The committee members moved on to question number five, which addresses the language used regarding supported employment teams and resource providers. There was some uncertainty about whether this question was appropriate or if it might delve too deeply into specifics. The discussion emphasized the importance of empowering individuals to seek jobs that align with their interests, rather than merely accepting available positions. The goal is to educate individuals about their rights to pursue fulfilling employment.

Caregiver/Guardian

What is Employment First, and how can it benefit Kentuckians with disabilities?

Answer: Employment First is a policy that prioritizes competitive, integrated employment for individuals with disabilities. It ensures that individuals with disabilities have access to the resources, training, and support they need to find and maintain a meaningful job in the community.

Committee Members' Suggestions

The committee members acknowledged the need to refine the language in the document to ensure it is accessible and easily understood. They recognized that not everyone has the opportunity to explore different jobs through internships or trial placements, leading to a consensus that this aspect may not be relevant for all individuals. The committee members decided to revisit this topic at a later time.

What role do I play in helping Kentuckians with disabilities find employment?

Answer: Your insights are valuable in identifying strengths and interests that could lead to employment success. As a caregiver or guardian, you can help by being involved in the planning process, advocating for the individual with disabilities' needs and supporting them as they explore job options.

Committee Members' Suggestions

The committee members focus shifted to questions tailored for guardians, with an effort to maintain consistency while adapting the questions to meet guardians' needs. The committee expressed uncertainty about whether the questions fully address the concerns and needs of guardians.

Agenda Items for next meeting

Administrator, Nanci Howard will schedule upcoming meetings before December and will send out a Doodle poll to confirm the next meeting date.

The committee members will continue to review and add comments to the Google Doc and agreed to keep refining the FAQs document, focusing on clarity and accessibility. Chair, Amanda Owen will update the FAQ document based on the discussion point.

Closing Remarks

The Committee members expressed gratitude for the collaborative effort and the progress made during the meeting.

The meeting concluded with a reminder to review the document and provide additional feedback.

Adjournment

Chair, Amanda Owen and Administrator, Nanci Howard thanked everyone for their contributions and adjourned the meeting.

Next Meeting

Date: To be determined.

Administrator: Nanci Howard

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Created by: Anu Kumari, Administrative Specialist Senior

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Andy Beshear
Governor

Jamie Link
Education and Labor Cabinet Secretary

Advocacy and Education Committee

Minutes

November 19, 2024

9:00am – 10:00am

[Zoom Link](#)

Meeting ID: 879 7222 9865

Passcode: 499069

Attendees:

Amanda Owen (Committee Chair)
Katie Wolf Whaley (Council Chair)
Jeff Edwards (Council Member)
David Allgood (Council Member)
Michelle Cobb (Staff Support)
Tracy Belfield (Additional Member)
Susan Brown (Additional Member)
Nanci Howard (Vocational Rehabilitation Administrator)
Anu Kumari (Administrative Specialist Senior)

Members Absent:

Morgan Turner (Council Member)
Andrew Johnson (Council Member)
Amanda Friend (Council Member)
Bill Bates (Council member)

Welcome

Chair, Amanda Owen welcomed and Administrator, Nanci Howard everyone to the meeting. The agenda reviewed by all participants.

Announcements

Administrator, Nanci Howard shared the following announcements:

Project NEON:

(National Expansion on Employment Opportunities Network): She said the Project NEON application was submitted on November 6th and the announcement for the Core States will be revealed on November 27th.

Annual Report Approval:

She announced the Annual Report was submitted on October 30th and has been steadily moving through the Cabinet process. She had no further update at this time.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Committee Chair Amanda Owen discussed the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) template with the committee. She clarified the goal of the committee was to finalize the FAQ document to present to the full council in January 2025. A discussion followed regarding whether the draft needed to be sent for accessibility and visual review before presenting it to the council. Administrator Nanci Howard clarified that while a draft can be submitted for feedback, the final version must be reviewed by the cabinet. The committee discussed the following sections regarding the FAQ document.

Service Provider Supporting Individuals with Disabilities:

What is Employment First, and how do we implement it in our services?

Answer: Employment First statute prioritizes employment as the first option for individuals with disabilities. To implement this, your services should focus on helping clients explore their interests, employment goals, providing job development, and

offering ongoing support like job coaching and skills training. Employment First asserts that all individuals, including those individuals with the most significant disabilities, are capable of full participation in Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) and community life.

Committee Members' Suggestions

Susan Brown from the Coalition for Workforce Diversity discussed the importance of incorporating Employment First principles into the document. Committee members discussed using "Employment First" instead of "initiative" in the statement. This change was made in the FAQ documents. It was agreed that it was an important point to be made. The APSE definition of Employment First was used as an example. Michelle Cobb, staff support, asked if it was ok to use. Chair of the Council, Katie Wolf Whaley, said she doesn't think APSE would be opposed. A sentence was included; "Employment First "asserts" that all individuals including those with significant disabilities are capable" and discussed. "Statute" information was also included.

How do we ensure that individuals receive the support they need for successful employment?

Answer: Thoroughly explore each individual's strengths, needs, and interests. Provide personalized job supports, workplace accommodations, and regular follow-ups to monitor progress and adjust support as needed.

Committee Members' Suggestions

Committee member, Tracy Belfield, raised the issue of on the school end of it, it is very individualized assessments and if the committee start linking resources, individuals may think these are the only assessments. Discussion was held regarding terminology to use. Suggested language included, "conduct exploration" instead of "assessment" and "job support" instead of "job coaching". The question about follow-ups in the Vocational Rehabilitation process was discussed between Chair of the Council, Katie Wolf Whaley, and staff support, Michelle Cobb. Michelle Cobb stated counselors should definitely be doing follow ups until the consumer is 100% ready to go.

What is involved in providing employment supports?

Answer: Agencies typically partner with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. Services usually include discovery (assessing the individual's skills and interests), job development (connecting with potential employers), obtaining employment, and ongoing support (initial onboarding, gaining independence and extended supports).

Committee Members' Suggestions

Committee members considered whether this question should be rephrased to focus on the different types of and different ways to provide support services rather than stages. Katie Wolf Whaley, Chair of the Council, asked Council Member, David Allgood, if someone came to CAL and wanted help finding a job what would they do as a service provider supporting people with disabilities? Mr. Allgood stated they are not doing a lot of employment and making many referrals to OVR. Katie asked if the committee wanted to address agencies that do some supported employment. There is a consensus that the document should guide providers on how to offer employment supports rather than detailing specific stages. Committee members discussed the need for clarity on eligibility for employment supports and the importance of not overwhelming potential providers with too much information. Committee suggested to reframe the question to focus on what is involved in providing employment supports, with a draft response provided to guide the discussion. The conversation moved to the inclusion of resources available for providers, emphasizing the need to guide them on where to start. The committee members discussed the potential for embedding [Link](#) to relevant resources, including vocational rehabilitation services and training programs.

How do we collaborate with employers to create opportunities for individuals with disabilities?

Answer: Network with local businesses and participate in business organizations, such as a local Chamber of Commerce or Coalition for Workforce Diversity. Build partnerships with local businesses or public entities, provide education on workplace accommodations and the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities, and offer ongoing support to ensure the success of both the employer and employee.

Committee Members' Suggestions

The next question addressed collaboration with employers to create opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Committee members agreed on the importance of this question and discussed how to broaden the response to include networking with local businesses and public entities. Committee members suggested to include resources such as local Chambers of Commerce.

What resources are available to us as service providers?

Answer: The [Office of Vocational Rehabilitation](#) is a partner in this work. There are also supports to help agencies become a provider and learn how to offer employment supports, and a wealth of resources to support you in providing quality supports to job seekers.

Committee Members' Suggestions

Committee Chair, Amanda Owen, asked the committee what type of resources providers could receive to begin providing services. Some resources suggested were, the South ADA, UKHDI, Vocational Rehabilitation, the Employment First website resource page and, the Employment First video. The committee reviewed the resources on the website together. Committee member, Jeff Edwards, suggested thinking about case managers as they read the document as well. A link to OVR and SETP was included to the answer as well as the Employment First resource page.

Educational Professionals

What is Employment First, and how does it impact my work as a professional in this field?

Answer: Employment First statute prioritizes competitive integrated employment as the first option for individuals with disabilities. Education professionals can help set this expectation by ensuring inclusion throughout education and creating expectations that life after school will include employment, as it does for other students. This priority should be included the discussion around setting goals for transition into adulthood.

Committee Members' Suggestions

Committee members focused on how employment first impacts professionals in schools. Committee Chair, Amanda Owen, stated this document would be used by educators in the field and stressed the importance of clarity. Legal requirements may be asked by teachers stated Amanda Owen and said this may be important to educators in the know what is Employment First and what are the legal requirements. Committee member, Jeff Edwards, mentioned that opportunity to become integrated begins with the school systems and the document needs to be a part of that message to ensure children are not segregated. Committee members agreed that transition should be a focus in the documents. Tracy Belfield said that transition goals are a requirement and there is focus on jobs but also focus on general life skills as well and that decision is left up to the IEP team.

How do I assist individuals with disabilities in preparing for employment?

Answer: You can assist by conducting assessments of their skills and interests, developing individualized employment plans, providing job readiness training, and connecting them with supported employment services that match their goals.

You can think about how to implement key pieces of the transition process within your teaching & INSERT 5 parts of Pre ETS.

Committee Members' Suggestions

Committee discussed Pre-ETS and the barriers faced for educators. It was suggested to include language regarding the five different Pre-ETS areas, such as, advocacy, work-based learning experiences, etc. UKHDI [checklists](#) were shared with the committee members as a resource as well as the videos entitled [Employment Files](#). There was some discussion on reaching out to KDE.

What are the requirements of the Employment First policy?

Answer: Employment First requires prioritizing employment for individuals with disabilities in all state-funded services. This means offering integrated employment opportunities, ensuring access to job coaching, and eliminating barriers that prevent individuals from working in their communities.

Committee Members' Suggestions

It was mentioned that Allison Johnson and Jason Wheatley, who is the proxy for Gretta Hylton, has been involved with committee work. It was suggested to reach out to KDE in regard to IEP input. Larry Taylor is also a good contact to reach out to as well and also serves on the Employment First Council. Chair, Amanda Owen will consult with Larry Taylor from KATC, Allison Johnson from KDE and Jason Wheatly from KDE to refine the language regarding legal requirements, particularly concerning IPEs transition services.

How can I educate employers about hiring individuals with disabilities?

Answer: Provide employers with information on workplace accommodations, tax incentives, and the benefits of a diverse workforce. Offer training on disability awareness and supported employment and serve as a liaison between the employer and the individual to ensure a smooth transition.

Committee members will finish discussing the FAQ document at a later meeting in December.

Agenda Items for next meeting

Administrator, Nanci Howard will schedule upcoming meetings before December and will send out a Doodle poll to confirm the next meeting date.

The committee members will continue to review and add comments to the Google Doc and agreed to keep refining the FAQs document, focusing on clarity and accessibility.

Chair, Amanda Owen will update the FAQ document based on the discussion point.

Chair, Amanda Owen, will consult with Larry Taylor from KATC, Allison Johnson from KDE and Jason Wheatley from KDE to refine the language regarding legal requirements, particularly concerning IPEs transition services.

Closing Remarks

The Committee members expressed gratitude for the collaborative effort and the progress made during the meeting.

The meeting concluded with a reminder to review the document and provide additional feedback.

Adjournment

Chair, Amanda Owen and Administrator, Nanci Howard thanked everyone for their contributions and adjourned the meeting.

Next Meeting

Date: December 9, 2024
Time: 9:00am to 10:00am

Administrator: Nanci Howard
500 Mero Street • 4th Floor NE • Frankfort, KY • 40601
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Andy Beshear
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Education and Labor Cabinet Secretary

Advocacy and Education Committee

Minutes

December 09, 2024

9:00am – 10:00am

[Zoom Meeting Link](#)

Meeting ID: 862 9399 6153

Passcode: 702611

Attendees:

Amanda Owen (Committee Chair)
Jeff Edwards (Council Member)
Morgan Turner (Council Member)
Megan Coleman (Committee Member)
Amanda Friend (Council Member)
Tara Eversole (ASL Interpreter)
David Allgood (Council Member)
Tia Henson (ASL Interpreter)
Nanci Howard (Vocational Rehabilitation Administrator)
Lisa McKinney (Staff Assistant)

Members Absent:

Andrew Johnson (Council Member)
Katie Wolf Whaley (Council Chair)
Tracy Belfield (Additional Member)
Susan Brown (Additional Member)
Bill Bates (Council member)

Welcome

Chair, Amanda Owen welcomed everyone to the meeting. The agenda was reviewed by all participants.

Review FAQ Google Doc

Committee Chair Amanda Owen discussed the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) template with the committee. She stated she would like a rough draft presented to the Council on January 10th during the quarterly meeting. She continued to state that the goal for the meeting would be to finish the Educational Professionals section as well as the Employer section of the draft.

Educational Professionals

How can I effectively educate and guide the student and/or guardian to help them prepare for employment after high school?

Answer: Begin by educating both the student and guardian about the employment process, opportunities, and potential challenges they might face (Plans for transportation & Benefits). Offer resources such as workshops, brochures, or consultations that explain the transition from school to work.

This starts with the question of “what do you want to be when you grow up” and asking it, from a young age, as we do all students. Encouraging interest, noting skills and, broadly thinking about what a good life will be after high school.

Committee Members’ Suggestions

Committee member, Jeff Edwards, questioned whether the group should move the second paragraph to the beginning of the answer. He explained conversations should begin regarding employment. Jeff stated conversations of “what do you want to be when you grow up?”, begin earlier than high school. He stated he believes early and repetitive conversation about employment instills that expectations in both the student and families that they can choose employment and further their education after high school.

Chair Amanda Owen asked if the committee could reference resources such as workshops, brochures, or consultations. She suggested adding website links to the Employment First website page and Vocational Rehabilitation and made a note on the FAQ document to reference those links.

Employers

What is Employment First, and how does it affect my hiring process?

Answer: Employment First encourages businesses to consider individuals with disabilities for competitive, integrated employment. As an employer, you can benefit from hiring a diverse workforce, accessing tax incentives, and receiving support from employment specialists who help integrate individual into your team.

Committee Members' Suggestions

Committee member, Jeff Edwards, agreed with the language of question one. Using the language "What is Employment First?", instead of using "What is the hiring process?", was suggested by Jeff. He continued to say that some employers might ask "what are the benefits to my company?". Committee Member, David Allgood agreed. It was determined by the committee to include a link to details about to benefit from hiring individuals with disabilities. Committee member, Amanda Friend, suggested linking <https://askjan.org/> as a resource.

How do I provide reasonable accommodations for employees with disabilities?

Answer: Accommodations can include adjustments to work schedules, job duties, or physical workspaces. Employment specialists can help you identify and implement accommodations that allow employees to perform their job duties effectively.

Committee Members' Suggestions

Chair, Amanda Owen, stated she considered defining what a "reasonable" accommodation would be for employers. Committee member, David Allgood asked, "would it be beneficial to include that accommodations are at times no cost to you

[employer] and inform them of resources available?”. Chair Amanda Owen took note of the comment.

What support will I receive if I hire someone with a disability?

Answer: You will have access to job coaching service, which provide on-the-job support for both you and the employee. Job coaches work with you to ensure the employee can meet your expectations while fostering their independence.

Committee Members’ Suggestions

Chair Amanda Owen asked committee members for assistance with this question as she is coming from a Supported Employment mindset. She wondered if it needs to be changed completely or removed. Committee member, Jeff Edwards, stated that he agrees with Amanda regarding the question. Megan Coleman with the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) Administrator and committee member, asked if this was only about supportive employment? Amanda Owen stated this resource trying to create is more representing anyone with a disability. She explained the idea behind the FAQ document. Megan stated and said not everyone who has a disability will have a job coach. Amanda Owen stated she agreed and needs to be all inclusive. Amanda Friend said that a lot of times individuals with disabilities go out and find jobs on their own, so how does the committee explain that? Chair, Amanda Owen, agreed and reiterated the need to change the question. Committee member, Megan Coleman, stated instead of the question stating, “what support will I receive...” that maybe it could state, “what support is available...?” She suggested linking some of those resources in the document.

What are the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities?

Answer: Hiring individuals with disabilities can enhance workplace diversity, increase productivity, and improve employee morale. Additionally, you may qualify for tax credits such as the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) for hiring individuals from certain target groups. Including people with disabilities.

Committee Members’ Suggestions

Committee agrees to keep this FAQ and answer stated as is.

How do I ensure a smooth transition for an employee with a disability?

Answer: Work closely with the supported employment team to understand the employee's needs and strengths. Provide clear communication, reasonable accommodations, and ongoing feedback. The employment specialist will help ensure the employee is fully integrated into your workforce.

Committee Members' Suggestions

The Committee changed the answer to the following:

Provide clear communication, reasonable accommodations, and ongoing feedback. Work closely with the supported employment team to understand the employee's needs and strengths. Employment Services could be a reasonable accommodation through OVR if the needs is there to support retentions and success long-term.

The committee agreed to send the rough draft to Executive Committee for approval to send to the full council meeting on January 10th, 2025. No discussion. She encouraged members to continue to use the Google Doc to include resources and link to them in comments.

Next Steps:

Send the FAQ document to Executive committee for review and approval prior sending to full council meeting on January 10th, 2025.

Adjournment

Committee Chair, Amanda Owen, thanked everyone for their contribution and adjourned the meeting.

Next Meeting:

TBD

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