



Andy Beshear  
Governor

Jamie Link  
Education & 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 7<sup>th</sup> 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:

### 1. 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.

**2. 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).

**3. 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.

**4. 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.

**5. 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

### 1. 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.

### 2. 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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