



Kentucky Employment First Council
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Employment First Council

Employer Education and Engagement Committee

Meeting Minutes

January 7, 2026
1:00 pm – 2:00 pm (EST)
Zoom
Meeting ID: 865 1127 0774

Members Present

Chair Merry Reid Sheffer, Amanda Hutchinson, Zachery Sappenfield, Melissa Marvel, Dawn Rollins, and Terry Madden

Members Absent

Katie Wolf Whaley and Aaron Poynter

Staff Present

Nanci Howard, Anu Kumari, and Betty Whittaker

Guest(s) Present

Deborah Minton, Human Development Institute, University of Kentucky

Welcome | Agenda Review:

Employment First Committee Chair Merry Reid Sheffer welcomed attendees. The agenda was reviewed and acknowledged.

ISAW Update and Discussion

The Committee received an update on the Innovative Supports for Autistic Workers (ISAW) initiative led by the University of Kentucky Human Development Institute (UKHDI), in collaboration with Bev Harp. The initiative focuses on supporting employers in implementing practices for autistic workers.

ISAW Monthly Communication Update

- ISAW will partner with the committee to release monthly employer-focused emails.
- Each email will include a two-minute video from Bev Harp.
- Content will primarily target employers and will initially focus on interview and hiring practices.
- The first email is planned for release in January, with additional emails scheduled for February and March.
- Emails will be distributed on Wednesday each month
- Wednesday, January 21, 2026 identified as the proposed launch date for the first email.

ISAW Quarterly Gathering Planning

- Quarterly interactive gatherings will accompany the monthly email series.
- Sessions will emphasize discussion, questions, and engagement.
- Two potential dates were discussed for the first gathering:
 - Tuesday, March 24
 - Thursday, March 26
- The gathering is anticipated to be held as a lunch-time session.
- A registration form will be included with email communications to identify any accommodation requests.

ISAW Website Discussion

- ISAW videos and related materials may be hosted on the HDI website to allow for timely updates.
- The Employment First website may include links to ISAW resources as a gateway for additional information.
- The importance of ensuring full accessibility of all materials was emphasized.

ISAW Outreach and Promotion

- Members discussed sharing ISAW information through organizational communication channels, including newsletters, email lists, and social media.
- Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram were discussed as potential platforms for sharing event and resource information.

Additional Discussion

Announcement - Upcoming Events

The following upcoming events and activities were announced:

- The Employment First Council Quarterly Meeting will be held on Friday, January 9, from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. (EST) in a hybrid format, with in-person attendance at the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet, Conference Room C-117, Frankfort, and a virtual option is available.
 - A presentation on the TIP Project will be provided during the meeting.
 - A presentation on the Autism Works Study is also included during the meeting.
- A presentation to the [Regional Interagency Transition Team](#) is scheduled for Thursday, January 15, at 10:30 a.m., focusing on Pre-Employment Transition Services.
- An organizational announcement was shared regarding *Mattingly Edge's Annual Beignet Bash*, scheduled for Tuesday, February 17, at 5:00 p.m., at Old Louisville Brewery.

Council Membership Update

An update was provided regarding Employment First Council membership and recent appointments. An Executive Order has been received with 18 appointed/reappointed members. One individual resigned.

In accordance with statutory requirements, members who were not reappointed shall continue to serve until their successors are appointed. There are 23 active council members with 5 vacancies. Staff continue to work with Cabinet Leadership on other needed appointments.

Members were advised that applications for remaining vacancies should not be solicited at this time pending further guidance from Cabinet leadership.

Public Comments

None.

Adjournment

Employment First Committee Chair Merry Reid Sheffer thanked everyone for their contribution and adjourned the meeting.

Next Meeting Date

- Wednesday, February 4, 2026
- 1:00 pm- 2:00 pm (EST)