



Kentucky Employment First Council

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Employment First Council

Employer Education and Engagement Committee

Minutes

February 4, 2026

1:00 pm – 2:00 pm (EST)

Zoom

Meeting ID: 865 1127 0774

Member's Present

Council Chair Katie Wolf Whaley, Deana Wilson-Kimble, Susan Brown, Zachery Sappenfield, Dawn Rollins, Dorian Moe, Michelle Thrift, Deborah Minton, Bev Harp and Terry Madden

Member's Absent

Chair Merry Reid Sheffer, Laurie Mays, and Rebecca Wilson

Staff Present

Nanci Howard, Anu Kumari, Ryan Henson, and Betty Whittaker

Welcome | Introduction | Agenda Review

On behalf of the committee chair, Employment First Council Chair Katie Wolf Whaley welcomed attendees. Introductions were held. The agenda was reviewed and acknowledged.

Autism Informed Employer Series Discussion

This series provides employers with practical information to support hiring and retention of autistic workers. The Committee received an update on the Autism Informed Employer video series initiative.

Employment First Council and Innovative Supports for Autistic Workers Collaboration Employer Series – Episode One – “Why Hire Autistic Workers?”

Key highlights

- The Committee has been collaborating with [ISAW](#) to support the development of a series of 12 approximately two-minute videos.
- The first video and email were distributed to nearly 2,000 recipients and are available on a dedicated webpage developed through a partnership between the Employment First Council and ISAW.
- The Committee previously developed quarterly themes to support the series.
- Quarterly discussion webinars are planned in alignment with the series, with the first scheduled for March 26th. The session will focus on hiring-related topics and will include employers, employment specialists, and other stakeholders, with a facilitated discussion of hiring practices.

Some members reported not receiving the initial distribution email. The email system confirmed successful distribution; however, follow-up sharing occurred through:

- Social media posts (*including Facebook*)
- Direct video and webpage links
- Extended Employment First Council distribution lists

Members were encouraged to continue sharing materials through employer networks, newsletters, and social media platforms.

Engagement and Analytics Discussion

The committee discussed challenges related to engagement metrics, including:

- Lower than expected direct video view counts on Vimeo.
- Possible undercounting due to embedded viewing on social media platforms.
- Need to review Facebook analytics and platform insights to better measure reach and engagement.

Distribution and Scheduling

The committee discussed future release timing and agreed to aim for:

- Video distribution during the first week of each month, returning to the original planned timeline.

Additional Discussion

Partnership Opportunities – Training Innovation Project (TIP)

The committee discussed potential partnership opportunities with the [Training Innovation Project](#) (TIP), including:

- Co-hosting discussions and events.
- Cross-posting videos on TIP platforms.
- Providing logistical and technical support.
- Supporting facilitation of quarterly discussions.
- Co-branding considerations for outreach materials related to current and potential partnership efforts.

The committee expressed strong support for collaboration, recognizing alignment in goals related to employer education and competitive integrated employment.

Announcement - Upcoming Events

Save the date for the Workforce and Employer Engagement Summit (virtual), tentatively scheduled for September 22, 2026. Additional information will be shared when available.

Future Training/Lunch-and-Learn Revitalization

The TIP project is exploring relaunching a training series (*name TBD*), potentially beginning in April. Topics identified through training needs assessment include:

- Accessible workplace practices.
- Disability hiring myths and accommodations.
- Universal design and assistive technology.
- Competitive integrated employment fundamentals.
- Disability etiquette for employers.
- ADA and substance use in the workplace.
- Workforce retention and stay-at-work strategies.
- Trauma-informed workplaces.
- Youth and adult disability workforce pipelines.

Members were encouraged to suggest topics, presenters, or participate in planning. Deborah Minton (*University of Kentucky HDI*) is available for questions and collaboration, and contact information was provided.

Public Comments

None.

Adjournment

Employment First Council Chair Katie Wolf Whaley thanked everyone for their contribution and adjourned the meeting.

Next Meeting Date

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