



Kentucky Employment First Council
500 Mero Street, 4th Floor NE
Frankfort, KY 40601
Toll Free: (800) 372-7172
Direct: (502) 782-3421
Email: Nanci.Howard@ky.gov

Andy Beshear
Governor

Jamie Link
Secretary, Education and Labor Cabinet

Employment First Council

Employer Education and Engagement Committee

Meeting Minutes

March 4, 2026
1:00 pm – 2:00 pm (EST)
Zoom
Meeting ID: 865 1127 0774

Members' Present

Committee Chair Merry Reid Sheffer, Council Chair Katie Wolf Whaley, Laurie Mays, Zachery Sappenfield, Michelle Thrift, Amanda Hutchison, and Terry Madden.

Members Absent

Rebecca Wilson, Deana Wilson-Kimble, and Susan Brown

Staff Present

Nanci Howard, Anu Kumari, and Ryan Henson

Guest(s) Present

Deborah Minton and Bev Harp

Welcome | Introductions | Agenda Review:

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

Autism Informed Employer Series Discussion

The committee received an update on the Autism-Informed Employer (AIE) video series, a collaborative initiative of the Kentucky Employment First Council and Innovative Supports for Autistic Workers (ISAW).

The series includes short informational videos designed to promote the Autism-Informed Employers training and encourage dialogue among employers and employment support providers on increasing employment opportunities for autistic individuals.

Key Highlights:

- Two videos have been released
- A third video was expected to be released within the following week

The current video series focuses on hiring practices, including:

- [Episode One – “Why Hire Autistic Workers?”](#)
- [Episode Two – “What to expect in the interview.”](#)

Committee members shared positive feedback and noted that the short format made the content easier to share with employers and community partners.

The committee also discussed the upcoming Autism-Informed Employer quarterly discussion session scheduled for March 26, 2026. The session will include a brief overview of the video content and encourage interactive discussion among providers, employers, and other stakeholders.

To date, over 60 participants registered for the discussion session. Members were encouraged to:

- Invite employer and community partners to attend
- Share potential questions or discussion topics in advance
- Promote the videos through newsletters, professional networks, and social media

Partnering with the Training Innovation Project (TIP)

Deborah Minton provided an update on the [Training Innovation Project](#) (TIP) and shared that the TIP needs assessment survey recently closed. The survey received approximately 585 responses nationwide, and the project team is currently analyzing the results. The information gathered will help guide future training priorities and identify areas of interest for providers and employers.

The upcoming “Learn at Lunch” webinar series will replace the previous “Lunch and Learn” sessions conducted through the RETAIN project. The TIP team is currently planning sessions through September and is seeking input on priority topics.

Committee members reviewed a list of potential training topics and discussed several areas of interest, including:

- Competitive Integrated Employment: A Primer for Businesses
- Healthcare organizations as rehabilitation partners and major employers
- Services available from State Vocational Rehabilitation agencies to support businesses and their employees
- The business case for hiring and retaining qualified people with disabilities
- Understanding, supporting, and empowering employees with disabilities
- Learning from employees with disabilities

Members also noted that healthcare organizations hosting Project SEARCH programs, such as UK Healthcare, St. Elizabeth Healthcare, and Baptist Health, could be potential partners or speakers for future sessions.

The committee discussed scheduling for the webinar series and noted that sessions had historically been held at 12:00pm (EST). Committee members indicated that noon remains a convenient time for most participants.

A question was also raised regarding whether the Learn at Lunch sessions may offer continuing education credits (CEUs) for providers. It was noted that the project team is exploring options, including:

- Micro-credentialing opportunities
- Potential ethics credit hours for Certified Rehabilitation Counselors (CRCs)

Additional updates will be shared once the needs assessment analysis is completed and the Learn at Lunch schedule is finalized.

Additional Discussion

Community Updates

KYOVR Staff Support Ryan Henson shared information about a recent community event in Henderson, where Elevate partnered with the local Chamber of Commerce to host a breakfast event highlighting the employment of individuals with disabilities.

The event featured a panel of local employers who discussed their experiences hiring individuals with disabilities and addressed common misconceptions about disability employment.

Announcement

An upcoming Champions Breakfast fundraiser hosted by the Kids Center for Pediatric Therapies in Louisville, KY, is scheduled for March 25. The [registration link](#) was provided. The event will feature a keynote speaker who previously received therapy services as a child and is now employed at the organization as an adult.

Upcoming Meetings

- Employment First Council Quarterly Meeting – Friday, April 10, 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM Eastern.
- Autism-Informed Employer Quarterly Discussion Session – Thursday, March 26, 2026, 12:00 PM Eastern. The [registration link](#) was provided.

Public Comments

None.

Adjournment

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

Next Meeting Date

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