



Kentucky Employment First Council

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Employment First Council

Employer Education and Engagement Committee

Meeting Minutes

April 1, 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, Rebecca Wilson, Down Rollins, Deana Wilson-Kimble, Zachery Sappenfield, Amanda Hutchison, Dorian Moe, Deborah Minton and Bev Harp, and Terry Madden.

Members Absent

Susan Brown

Staff Present

Nanci Howard, Anu Kumari, Kristen Beach, and Ryan Henson

Welcome | Agenda Review

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

Autism Informed Employer Series Progress Update

Bev Harp provided an update on the progress of the Autism-Informed Employer (AIE) video series and related activities. It was reported that the series continues to move forward as planned and remains on schedule.

Key Highlights:

- Three videos have been released
- A fourth video is expected in the coming week

The current series focuses on hiring practices, including:

- Episode One – “Why Hire Autistic Workers?”
- Episode Two – “What to expect in the interview.”
- Additional content focused on general hiring and interview guidance for employers

It was also reported on the first quarterly virtual discussion session held on March 26, 2026. Nearly, 60 participants attended, and the session was well received. The format, which included video highlights, informational slides, and open discussion, supported engagement and meaningful conversation.

Additional updates included:

- Increased outreach and visibility of the series, including social media sharing and positive feedback from external partners.
- A small increase in newly identified autism-informed employers following the discussion session.
- Planned upcoming video topics, including sensory support needs, movement needs, and social needs of autistic workers, followed by communication-focused topics.
- The next quarterly discussion session was identified for June 25, 2026

Suggested topics for future development included:

- Universal design in the workplace
- Natural supports for employees
- Self-advocacy strategies
- Disclosure and non-disclosure considerations
- Employer approaches to accommodations

An update was also provided on evaluation efforts, with approximately 15 evaluations completed and additional responses expected. Results will be shared once finalized to inform future planning and improvements.

Update on Partnering with the Training Innovation Project (TIP)

Deborah Minton provided an update on the Training Innovation Project (TIP), noting that feedback and ideas from previous discussions had been compiled and shared with project partners. TIP staff were actively reaching out to individuals and organizations to coordinate and schedule upcoming activities and presentations.

The committee was informed of an upcoming “Lunch and Learn” session scheduled for April 21, 2026, at 12:00 PM (EST), featuring a presentation by Matthew Shaughnessy on “*Enabling Employment Opportunities with Immersive Technology.*”

Additional discussion included potential topics and presenters for the TIP series, including:

- Project SEARCH (*with a recommendation to involve KYOVR Staff Betty Whitaker*)
- Healthcare as a rehabilitation partner and major employer (*Deborah Minton*)
- Empowering employees with disabilities (*Zachery Sappenfield*)
- The business case for hiring and retaining qualified people with disabilities (*Laurie Mays & employer partner- KY Chamber*)
- Services available from state VR to support businesses and employees and their employees (*Ryan Henson*)
- Competitive integrated employment: A Primary from business (*Merry Reid Sheffer*)
- Occupational Therapy, driver training, and autism+ Interactions with law enforcement (*Becky Wilson’s Daughter*)
- DMV accommodation (e.g., written test options, reader support, extended time)

The committee emphasized the importance of continued collaboration and leveraging shared expertise to support employment outcomes.

Additional Discussion

Upcoming Meeting Announcement:

The following upcoming meetings and engagement opportunities are available. Members and stakeholders are encouraged to participate and share these opportunities within their networks.

- Employment First Council Quarterly Meeting: Friday, April 10, 2026 | 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM (EST) Hybrid format (in-person at the Mayo-Underwood Building, Frankfort, Kentucky.
- Autism-Informed Employer (AIE) Quarterly Discussion: The next quarterly discussion session is scheduled for June 25, 2026.
- Training Innovation Project, “Lunch and Learn” Session: Tuesday, April 21, 2026 | 12:00 PM (EST).

Public Comments

None.

Adjournment

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

Next Meeting Date

- Wednesday, May 06, 2026
- 1:00 pm- 2:00 pm (EST)