



**Andy Beshear**  
Governor

**Jamie Link**  
Education and Labor Cabinet Secretary

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## **Employer Education and Engagement Committee**

Minutes  
April 9, 2025  
1:00pm – 2:00pm  
Zoom Only

### **Members Present:**

Chair, Merry Reid Sheffer, Amanda Hutchison, Deana Wilson Kimbler, Kimberly Wickert, Rebecca Wilson, Zachary Sappenfield and Aaron Poynter.

### **Members Absent:**

Dawn Gardner and Jessica Beaven, Katie Wolf Whaley, Todd Coffey, and Becky Wilson.

### **Staff Present:**

Nanci Howard, KYOVR, Administrator, Kristen Beach, KYOVR Assistant Director, Betty Whittaker, KYOVR Staff Assistant and Anu Kumari, KYOVR Administrative Specialist Senior.

### **Welcome:**

Chair, Merry Reid Sheffer welcomed everyone to the meeting. Introductions were held. The agenda was reviewed by all participants.

### **Announcements:**

KYOVR Administrator, Nanci Howard announced and shared information about the upcoming office of vocational rehabilitation order of selection public hearing.

- Date: April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2025.
- Topic: Order of Selection categories.
- Sessions: Two Session- (Morning session and an evening session).
- Time: 10:00–10:30 AM EDT and 6:00–6:30 PM EDT.
- Format: Hybrid via Zoom.
- Platform:
- Morning Session- [Meeting ID: 871 0116 9402](#)
- Evening Session- [Meeting ID: 840 7235 5077](#)

She encouraged participants to check the KYOVR [Website](#) for more information under the heading “Order of Selection.”

## Kentucky Chamber of Commerce Disability Hiring Academy:

Chair, Merry Reid Sheffer reported on the Disability Hiring Academy organized by the Kentucky Chamber. The Employer Education and Engagement Committee aimed to support existing projects.

Their strategy involved promoting Employment First initiatives through social media and partner outreach.

Merry shared that her meeting had connected Amanda Owen with Laurie Mays at the Kentucky Chamber, during which she learned about several hiring academies, including:

- Multiple Hiring Academy
- Second Chance Employment
- Veterans Hiring Academy
- Disability Hiring Academy

Merry shared Laurie Mays prospective regarding the Disability Hiring Academy. The Academy’s primary audience included community businesses, employer attendees, and human resources professionals, rather than service providers.

They had discussed potential future collaborations, including:

- Providing Laurie Mays access to providers to review curriculum.

- Connecting her with employees and employers to discuss training and retention strategies

Laurie Mays had planned to begin organizing the next Disability Hiring Academy in August 2025 and intended to reach out to the committee at that time.

Laurie had highlighted the success of a panel featuring employees with disabilities and their employers, who also facilitated collaborative discussions.

Chair Merry Reid Sheffer opened the floor for questions, comments, and additional input regarding the Disability Hiring Academy. No questions, comments, or suggestions were presented by the committee.

## **RETAIN Kentucky Partnership Updates:**

### **Upcoming April Webinar:**

Chair, Merry Reid Sheffer requested an update on the RETAIN Kentucky Partnership. Kimberly Wickert provided the update and stated that the Kentucky Employment First Council and RETAIN Kentucky had jointly presented the Employer Seminar Series.

Topic: RETAIN Kentucky & Employment First presents: Employer Strategies for Recruitment and Retention.

- Date: April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2025
- Time: 12:00- 12:45pm ET
- Speakers: Sarah Dixon, Unified Sign and Designs
- Focus:
  - Strategies to recruit an inclusive workforce,
  - Ways to retain employees,
  - Success stories.
- Registration [Link](#) was provided.

Kimberly noted that RETAIN services were ending on April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2025. She offered to share her documented processes including recruiting presenters, setting up meetings, obtaining slide decks, and preparing marketing materials with the Employment First Council and Katie Wolf Whaley to help ensure a smooth transition.

Chair, Merry inquired about document processes related to employer engagement webinars and potential interest from other organizations.

Kimberly mentioned that early discussions with Katie Wolf Whaley and suggested the Supported Employment Project as a possible support partner.

She emphasized the voluntary of the Employment First Council members existing workloads. Kimberly Wickert committed to exploring additional potential partners and reporting back to the committee.

Merry Reid Sheffer expressed confidence in identifying new partners and highlighted upcoming presentations, including Sarah Dixon on customized roles and another by Sherry Glenn from Brown-Forman. She reviewed the project's success and invited updates or new ideas from Kimberly Wickert and Betty Whittaker.

## Brainstorming for Future Projects Discussion:

Chair, Merry Reid Sheffer discussed with committee about the Brainstorming for future project including support for the Advocacy and Education Committee's FAQ handbook. She encouraged suggestions for supporting other committees' projects or exploring innovative collaborations with external agencies, while acknowledging the constraints of volunteer time.

## 2025 Annual Report Recommendations:

Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Administrator, Nanci Howard, requested recommendations for inclusion in the 2025 Annual Report. Chair, Merry Reid Sheffer, suggested incorporating the KY RETAIN webinar/seminar project. She proposed that the committee could support the initiative by participating in a curriculum review or by facilitating connections for the Disability Hiring Academy, scheduled for August 2025. She acknowledges that the initiative was still in process.

## Additional Announcements:

Chair, Merry Reid Sheffer inquired about upcoming events from other participants organizations.

## Supported Employment Training Project

Committee Member, Amanda Hutchison shared a supported employment training project. She provided a [link](#) to a newly launched book club focused on "*Demystifying Disability*" highlighted the committee features includes welcoming environment and the flexibility for participants to join at any time or read at their own pace.

Committee Member, Zachary Sappenfield shared upcoming "Nuts and Bolts" classes were mentioned, and he offered to share the [registration link](#). He briefly described with committee about the focus of the "Nuts and Bolts" classes. Which covered various

aspects of supported employment, including supported employment services and social role valorization. He noted that the recordings were available on the STEP website.

KYOVR Administrator, Nanci Howard reminded council members about the availability of Employment First infographics and tabletop banner, offering them to anyone in need for upcoming events.

## Upcoming Job Fair:

Committee Member, Deana Wilson Kimbler announced upcoming commonwealth of Kentucky's Virtual Job Fair.

- Date: April 16th, 2025
- Time:
  - 10:00 A.M. – 11:00 A.M. - Veterans & Military Families
  - 11:00 A.M. – 1:00 P.M. - Open to All Job Candidates
- Host: The Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Features:
  - An exclusive opportunity to connect with multi-sector employers such as Humana, Nucor Tubular Products, Starbucks, the University of Kentucky, others as well as job seekers from across the Commonwealth.

She shared the event link with committee members.

Future virtual job fairs will take place on the third Wednesday of each month in 2025. Upcoming dates are:

- May 21, 2025
- June 18, 2025
- July 16, 2025
- August 20, 2025
- September 17, 2025
- October 15, 2025
- November 19, 2025
- December 2025 – no virtual job fair

## Public comment:

No comment addressed.

## Next Meeting:

Date: May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Time: 1:00 pm to 2:00 pm

Administrator: Nanci Howard

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Created by: Anu Kumari, Administrative Specialist Senior

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