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Employment First Council

Employer Education and Engagement Committee

Meeting Minutes

May 06, 2026
1:00 pm – 2:00 pm (EST)
Zoom
Meeting ID: 865 1127 0774

Members' Present

Employment First Council Chair Katie Wolf Whaley, Rebecca Wilson, Zachery Sappenfield, Amanda Hutchison, Christina Forster, Dorian Moe, and Deborah Minton

Members Absent

Merry Reid Sheffer, Susan Brown, Laurie Mays, and Deana Wilson-Kimble

Staff Present

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

Welcome | Introduction | Agenda Review

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

Autism-Informed Employer Series Progress Update

An update was provided on the progress of the Autism-Informed Employer (AIE) video series and related activities.

Key Highlights:

- Four videos have been released.
- A fifth video was expected to be released in mid-May.

The current series focuses on hiring practices, including:

- Episode One – “Why Hire Autistic Workers?”
- Episode Two – “What to Expect in the Interview.”
- Episode Three- “Interview Tips.”
- Episode Four- “Sensory Needs of the Autistic Worker.”
- Episode Five- “Focused on the social needs of autistic workers and inclusive workplace practices.”

A production delay related to changes in recording support was discussed; however, work on the May and June videos continued. Amanda Hutchison volunteered to assist with voice narration for upcoming videos. Scripts for future recordings had already been prepared to maintain the planned release schedule. The committee also encouraged continued sharing of the videos through newsletters, social media, and other communication channels. Members were encouraged to reach out regarding the status of upcoming video releases for future communications or newsletter distributions.

The committee received an update regarding the first quarterly virtual discussion session held on March 26, 2026. Members reported strong participation with nearly 100 registrations and nearly 60 attendees representing employers, workforce professionals, service providers, and community partners. The session was well received, and the format, which included video highlights, informational slides, and open discussion, supported engagement and meaningful conversation.

The committee also shared that the next quarterly discussion session was scheduled for June 25, 2026, from 12:00pm - 1:00pm (EST). [Registration](#) and outreach efforts for the upcoming session were discussed.

Update on Partnering with the Training Innovation Project (TIP)

Christina Forster from the HDI evaluation team provided an update regarding ongoing collaboration with the [Training Innovation Project \(TIP\)](#) and upcoming training opportunities.

It was reported that the next TIP “Learn at Lunch” entitled “ [Why Competitive Integrated Employment Matters to Business: The Bottom Line: Learn at Lunch](#)” session was

scheduled for May 19, 12:00pm – 1:00pm (EST), presented by Employment First Council member, Merry-Reid Sheffer. Currently, it was reported there were nearly 32 registrants. Additional outreach has recently been distributed through HDI and the TIP listserv to encourage continued participation.

The committee also discussed the first TIP Community of Practice session held in April 2026, which nearly 18 participants attended. The next TIP Community of Practice session, [Communities of Practice: Training Innovation Project](#), was scheduled for June 23, 12:00 pm – 12:30 pm (EST).

An upcoming presentation entitled, [Setting the Record Straight About Hiring and Retaining Disabled Workers: Debunking Myths A TIP Master Class](#) will be held on June 24, 2026 from 2:00pm – 3:00pm (EST) presented by, Dr Phillip Rumrill, PhD, CRC

An announced upcoming Learn at Lunch session focused on disability and unemployment topics on June 16, 2026. More information will be provided as available.

Plans for a business needs survey were also discussed and is intended to gather feedback from employers and businesses regarding workforce and disability employment needs. It was reported that the survey was expected to be distributed the following week and encouraged committee members, other committees, and partner organizations to share the survey through their professional and provider networks to support participation and outreach efforts. The committee also discussed continued collaboration and support for identifying future presenters and training topics.

Public Comments

None.

Adjournment

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

Next Meeting Date

June 3, 2026

1:00 pm- 2:00pm (EST)