



Kentucky Employment First Council

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Employment First Council

Employer Education and Engagement Committee

Meeting Minutes

July 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, Rebecca Wilson, Zachery Sappenfield, Amanda Hutchison, Beth Potter, Deana Wilson Kimbler, and Deborah Minton

Members Absent

Laurie Mays

Staff Present

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

Welcome | Introduction | 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 Debrief

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

Key Highlights:

- The sixth video has been released.
- Two quarterly discussion sessions have been held:
 - First quarterly discussion: approximately 60 participants.
 - Second quarterly discussion: approximately 20 participants.

The 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 – Social needs of autistic workers
- Episode Six – Sensorimotor Needs of the Autistic Worker

The committee agreed to continue holding the discussions without recording them so employers can ask questions and share ideas openly. Participants at the discussion received presentation materials featuring workplace scenarios related to the social, sensory, motor, and communication needs of autistic workers. Members noted that the series is promoted through a mailing list of more than 1,600 people and on social media.

The next quarterly discussion is planned for September 24, 2026, and registration information will be shared once it is confirmed.

Training Innovation Project (TIP) Ideas and Discussion

Beth Potter from the University of Kentucky's Human Development Institute's evaluation team provided an update regarding ongoing collaboration with the [Training Innovation Project \(TIP\)](#) and upcoming training opportunities.

- Learn at Lunch: *Strengthening the Workforce: The Business Case for Hiring and Retaining Qualified People with Disabilities* is scheduled for July 21, 2026, from 12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m. EDT, presented by Johnny Collett and Larry Mays.
- Talk with TIP: *Driving Employment Outcomes Through Innovation and Partnership*, a four-part listening and strategy series, begins August 5, 2026, from 12:00 p.m. – 12:30 p.m. EDT, presented by Christina Espinoza.

- The next Community of Practice session is scheduled for August 25, 2026, from 12:00 p.m. – 12:30 p.m. EDT.
- Three Community of Practice sessions have already been held with participation from across the nation.
- The TIP Master Class presented by Philip Rumrill was well attended with approximately 84 participants.
- TIP staff continue planning Learn at Lunch sessions
- More activities begin in October.
- The upcoming TIP Virtual Summit is scheduled for September 22, 2026.

Members were invited to recommend future presentation topics, including;

- Social Role Valorization
- Customized employment
- Vocational rehabilitation services for employers and employees
- Other presentations that support Employment First initiatives

Annual Report Recommendation Discussion

The committee recommended highlighting the following activities in the Employment First Council Annual Report:

- Autism-Informed Employer Series, including six educational videos and two quarterly discussion sessions.
- Continued support and promotion of the Training Innovation Project (TIP), including Learn at Lunch sessions, Communities of Practice, and Talk with TIP events.
- Presentation at the National Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE) Conference, where nearly 105 attendees participated in the employer engagement breakout session highlighting Kentucky's Employment First practices.
- Presentation on customized employment at the Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Joint Districts Meeting.
- Presentation on supported employment at the Northern Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation.

- Participation in the Henderson Coalition Forward *"Say Yes to Success"* breakfast in Henderson, including promotion of the Autism-Informed Employer Series and Employment First resources.
- Employer outreach efforts, including engagement with Owensboro Health, to increase employer engagement and expand Employment First partnerships.
- Continue strengthening coordination with regional employment coalitions by inviting Amber Johnson to participate in the Employer Education Committee and support Coalition Forward efforts in the Henderson/Owensboro region while maintaining collaboration with coalition partners in Somerset, Morehead, and Northern Kentucky.

Public Comments

- The Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation's new case management system, with implementation expected in mid-July and additional functionality planned for future phases.
- Committee Chair Mary Reid Sheffer shared a proposal to host an Employer Appreciation/Employment First Awards Luncheon to recognize employers and promote Employment First. She invited committee members interested in partnering at the event to contact her.
- Members discussed the Medicaid waiver rate reduction and its potential impact on providers.

Announcement

The Employment First Council Quarterly Meeting is scheduled for July 10, 2026, from 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM ET. Location: Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, Room 136 CE, 1st Floor, 500 Mero Street, Frankfort, KY 40601.

Adjournment

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

Next Meeting Date

Wednesday, August 5, 2026
1:00 pm- 2:00pm (EST)