

**Kentucky Employment First Council**

500 Mero Street, 1st Floor NE

Frankfort, KY 40601

Toll Free: (800) 372-7172

Direct: (502) 782-3421

Email: Anu.kumari@ky.gov

Andy Beshear

Governor

Jamie Link

Secretary, Education and Labor Cabinet

Employment First Council

Employer Education and Engagement Committee

Meeting Minutes

September 02, 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, Christina Forster, Amber Johnson, Amanda Hutchison, Zachery Sappenfield, Deana Wilson Kimbler, Melissa Marvel, Terry Madden, and Laurie Mays

Members Absent

Rebecca Wilson and Susan Brown

Staff Present

Anu Kumari, Brooke McDaniel, Ryan Henson, and Kristen Beach

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 Discussion Update/Ideas

The committee received an update on the [Autism-Informed Employer \(AIE\)](#) series.

Key discussion points included:

- Episode 8 of the Autism-Informed Employer Series was released on August 19.
- Members were encouraged to view and share the video through personal and organizational social media channels.
- The next quarterly virtual discussion session will be held on [September 24, 2026, from 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m. \(EDT\)](#). At the time of the meeting, 22 participants were registered.
- Additional reminders and information about the September video will be shared once available.

Members were encouraged to continue submitting ideas for future AIE videos. Previous topics have included hiring, interviewing, onboarding, communication, and workplace belonging, with real-world workplace scenarios also identified as possible future topics.

The committee also discussed the upcoming documentary [The Fish Don't Care When It Rains](#) and the possibility of supporting or promoting a future screening or related event.

Revisit Training Innovation Project (TIP) Ideas

Christina Forster, representing the University of Kentucky Human Development Institute's [Training Innovation Project \(TIP\)](#), provided an update on ongoing TIP activities.

Key discussion points included:

The First TIP Virtual Summit will be held on September 22, 2026, from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. The summit will include presentations by Dr. Phil Brumro.

- Approximately 200 participants were registered at the time of the meeting.
- The summit will include project updates, evaluation information, content sessions, mini-sessions, and a panel discussion.
- Members were encouraged to promote the summit to rehabilitation professionals, service providers, employers, and business leaders.

Beginning in TIP Year 2 on October 1, Learn at Lunch sessions will be offered every other month. The tentative schedule and topics include:

- *November 17 – Reasonable Accommodations and the Job Accommodation Network*
- *January 19 – Progressive Employment*

- *March 16 – Disability Etiquette in Recruitment and Retention*
- *May 18 – Inclusive Job Descriptions, Part 1*
- *July 20 – Apprenticeships and Internships*
- *September 22 – Job Retention Strategies*

Speakers are still being identified for several sessions. Members were encouraged to recommend subject matter experts or potential speakers and submit additional TIP training ideas.

Annual Report Recommendation Discussion

The committee discussed potential content and recommendations for inclusion in the Employment First Council 2026 Annual Report. Members were encouraged to identify Employment First-related presentations, trainings, outreach, partnerships, employer engagement efforts, and other activities occurring across the Commonwealth.

Key discussion included:

- Edge Employment presented to the Regional Interagency Transition Team (RITT) on January 15, 2026, about Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) as a strategy to increase employment outcomes.
- Amber Johnson presented as a member of a three-person panel on “Creating a More Inclusive Workplace” as part of the Community Business Success Lunch and Learn Series held at the public library in Henderson and sponsored by the local Chamber of Commerce.
- Committee-supported activities, including the Autism-Informed Employer Series and Training Innovation Project, were identified for inclusion in the Annual Report.
- Members were encouraged to submit additional presentations, collaborative meetings, outreach efforts, and employer engagement activities that demonstrate the reach of Employment First principles across Kentucky.

Members were reminded that including member and partner activities is intended to demonstrate the broader reach of Employment First efforts across the Commonwealth.

Potential policy topics discussed included:

- Medicaid Buy-In and benefits-related barriers.

- Medicaid waiver funding and the potential impact of future funding reductions on employment supports.
- Use of consistent policy language with other councils, committees, or partner organizations when appropriate.

The committee noted that Annual Report recommendations should be based on established information, align with the Council's statutory charge, and avoid speculation. Members were also encouraged to provide brief examples or stories that illustrate how policies or services affect employment outcomes.

Additional Discussion

A member shared plans for an employer engagement event anticipated for October during National Disability Employment Awareness Month. The event would help employers review and strengthen their employment practices.

Potential focus areas include:

- Recruitment and job postings.
- Job descriptions and interview practices.
- Workplace accommodations.
- Onboarding and training.
- Accessibility, workplace culture, and psychological safety.

The event may also include an employer self-assessment or scorecard, along with low- or no-cost action steps employers can use to improve their practices.

The committee discussed potential collaboration with the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) to increase participation from human resources professionals and business leaders and possibly connect the event with continuing education opportunities.

The committee also discussed recruitment for Employment First Council business, industry, and labor representation. It was noted that the Council currently lacks representation in these areas and that some appointments remain pending. OVR staff have followed up and will continue monitoring appointment status.

Public Comments

- Mattingly Edge shared information about its [Gather for Good social event](#) scheduled for September 10 in Louisville. The event is free and open to the public.
- Zoom Group shared that the organization will celebrate its 40th anniversary on September 19 with an event at the Olmsted.
- Members were reminded of the TIP Virtual Summit scheduled for September 22.
- Members were also reminded of the Autism-Informed Employer quarterly discussion scheduled for September 24.

Adjournment

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

Next Meeting Date

Wednesday, October 7, 2026
1:00 pm- 2:00pm (EST)