

Kentucky Employment First Council

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Jamie Link

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Employer Education and Engagement Committee

Minutes

October 8, 2025

1:00 pm – 2:00 pm (EST)

Zoom

Members Present

Merry Reid Sheffer, Rebecca Wilson, Zac Sappenfield, Dawn Rollins, and Terry Madden

KYOCR Staff Present

Nanci Howard, Anu Kumari, Kristen Beach, and Betty Whittaker

Guest(s) Present

Bev Harp, Innovative Supports for Autistic Workers (ISAW)

Welcome | Introduction | Agenda Review

Employment First Employer Education and Engagement Committee Chair, Merry Reid Sheffer, welcomed attendees. Introductions were held, and the agenda was reviewed and acknowledged by all participants.

ISAW Update and Discussion

The committee discussed continued collaborative efforts following the conclusion of the KYRETAIN project and emphasized supporting existing initiatives rather than duplicating efforts. The primary focus was on the Council's developing partnership with Bev Harp on the ISAW project, which will include quarterly gatherings and short educational videos for employers.

The Committee also noted upcoming opportunities such as the KYAPSE Conference scheduled for December 8–9, 2025, in Elizabethtown, KY.

The Committee discussed the following ways to further promote the series.

- The KYRETAIN email list serve will be a starting point for distribution.
- Access to the series will be provided to the Community Rehabilitation Provider (CRP) mailing list.
- Additional outreach will be extended to:
 - Kentucky Chamber of Commerce
 - Coalition for Workforce Diversity
 - Autism-Friendly Business Initiative (AFBI)
 - Kentucky SHRM and Louisville SHRM
 - Lexington SHRM Contact
 - St. Matthews and Oldham County Chambers
 - Louisville Independent Business Alliance (LIBA)
- The group also reviewed logistics such as scheduling, survey distribution, interpreter availability, and reservation coordination with Brandon Cannada from UKHDI.

Update from Bev Harp:

Bev Harp, Project Director at the Human Development Institute, presented the completion of the first Two-Minute Autism-Informed Employer video titled “*Why Hiring and Accommodations Matter*.” The video highlighted hiring autistic workers, emphasizing reliability, attention to detail, and workplace inclusion.

Video Format & Purpose:

- Each video will be approximately two minutes long and adapted from HDI’s Autism-Informed Employer online course.
- The videos will serve as concise educational “teasers” directing employers to the full training available at HDI Learning.org.

Upcoming Video Topics:

- Quarterly theme: Hiring and Interviewing
- Two videos on interviewing practices (to be released in November and December)

Distribution Schedule:

- October 22, 2025 – First video release (Bev will submit one week prior for review)

- November 19, 2025 – Second video release
- December 17, 2025 – Third video release
- All videos will be distributed on *Wednesdays at noon* to maximize engagement.

Quarterly Gathering:

- A virtual employer engagement session is planned for January 14, 2026, at noon, pending confirmation of Brandon Cannada's availability.
- The gathering session will provide employers an opportunity to discuss video topics, ask questions, and share best practices.

Survey and Registration:

- Draft survey and registration materials were reviewed.
- Members supported including pre-/post-knowledge questions, open-ended feedback, and resource links (Council and HDI webpages) rather than direct marketing prompts.
- The HDI Qualtrics platform will be used for registration and post-attendee surveys.

Interpreter Accommodations:

- KYOVR Division Director Kristen Beach advised scheduling ASL interpreters by request, through the registration process.
- A cut-off date for interpreter requests will be the registration form.
- Bev Harp will confirm HDI's standard process for accommodation requests.

Committee Feedback:

- Members provided positive feedback on the video's clarity, relevance, and data-driven messaging.
- The two-minute format was recognized as concise, engaging, and effective for employers.

Next Steps with ISAW:

Email Distribution:

- Bev Harp will consult with HDI to determine the appropriate formatted mass email distribution platform.

Quarterly Gathering:

- Plan logistics and agenda for virtual gathering.

- Continue identifying future quarterly video topics based on survey feedback and employer interest.

Other Focus Items:

- Video Production: Complete and submit the next two videos on interviewing and onboarding for upcoming releases.
- Approve email content and format prior to the October 22 distribution.

2025 Annual Report Update

Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Administrator, Nanci Howard, reported that the draft 2025 Annual Report has been circulated for review. Members are encouraged to submit feedback by October 10, 2025, prior to Cabinet approval. The report highlights the Council's accomplishments and will be presented for content approval during the upcoming quarterly Council meeting.

Public Comments

None.

Adjournment

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

Next Meeting Date

- November 12, 2025
- 1:00 pm- 2:00 pm (EST)