

Kentucky Employment First Council

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Secretary, Education and Labor Cabinet

Employment First Council Employer Education and Engagement Committee Meeting Minutes

December 10, 2025
1:00 pm – 2:00 pm (EST)
Zoom
Meeting ID: 851 4762 5002

Members Present

Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, Amanda Hutchinson, Zachery Sappenfield

Members Absent

Chair Merry Reid Sheffer, Melissa Marvel, and Aaron Poynter

Staff Present

Anu Kumari, Kristen Beach, Betty Whittaker, and Deana Wilson-Kimbler

Staff Absent

Nanci Howard

Guest(s) Present

Bev Harp, Innovative Supports for Autistic Workers (ISAW)

Welcome | Agenda Review:

Employment First Council Chair Katie Wolf Whaley welcomed attendees on behalf of the Committee Chair. The agenda was reviewed and acknowledged by all participants.

ISAW Update and Discussion

The Committee discussed continued collaboration with the University of Kentucky Human Development Institute (HDI) through the Innovative Supports for Autistic Workers (ISAW Pro) initiative. Key elements include:

- ISAW will continue developing 2-minute employer-focused videos designed to promote inclusive hiring and employment practices.
- Videos will be distributed monthly to the Employment First and RETAIN email lists.
- Quarterly drop-in discussion sessions will accompany the video series to support deeper engagement.
- HDI will oversee email distribution and host the virtual sessions using Campaign Monitor and Zoom.

Draft Introductory Email Review

The committee reviewed the introductory email prepared by Bev Harp, which included:

- An overview of the 2-Minute Autism Informed Employer (AIE) video series,
- Information on HDI's long-form online training course (3+ hours),
- Topic previews of upcoming video.

Additional Updates:

- *Episode 2* is currently in voice production, and *Episode 3* is nearing completion.
- Bev Harp is recreating the project's master plan to support coordinated implementation.

Funding & Staffing

- The Committee noted that HDI's TIP grant may support email distribution costs and potentially provide staffing assistance for hosting the quarterly sessions.
- Funding and staffing arrangements are still being clarified, and additional information will be provided as details are confirmed.

Timeline Adjustments

- The originally planned release date for the first video was *November 19*, but it did not occur.
- Committee approved a revised launch timeline beginning in *January 2026* to avoid holiday conflicts. Members confirmed support for the updated timeline.

Introductory Email Requirements Discussion

The Committee confirmed the following updates for the introductory email:

- The timeline and schedule will be updated to reflect the 2026 launch.
- References indicating that ISAW is funded by the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation will be removed to ensure compliance with Employment First Council communication requirements.
- The collaboration will be accurately described as between:
 - *Human Development Institute*
 - *Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation*
 - *Kentucky Office on Autism*
- The email will include a hyperlink to HDI's Autism Informed Employers online training module.
- The Committee agreed that this email will serve as the official introductory communication once required language updates are completed.

Quarterly Discussion Session Scheduling

The Committee identified “*March 24 at noon*” and “*March 26 at noon*” as the proposed dates for the first quarterly discussion session.

Session format:

- A 45-minute Lunch & Learn session
- Aligned with the first three monthly ISAW Pro videos
- Katie Wolf Whaley will confirm the final scheduling and hosting availability with:
 - *Merry Reid Sheffer (Committee Chair)*
 - *Nanci Howard (Council Administrator)*
 - *The HDI staff member assigned to support hosting*

Communications and Outreach Strategy

- The first video in the ISAW Pro series will be distributed after January 5, including the Zoom registration link for the March discussion session.

- Committee members and partners will disseminate the series across established networks, including:
 - *Kentucky Department of Education (KDE)*
 - *Kentucky Chamber of Commerce*
 - *Kentucky Autism Training Center (KATC)*
 - *Commonwealth Council on Developmental Disabilities (CCDD)*
 - *National Partnership for New Americans (NPNA)*
 - *Community Rehabilitation Programs*

The series launch will also be highlighted at the upcoming Employment First Council Quarterly Meeting.

Additional Discussion

The Committee discussed the status of Employment First Council appointments. It was noted that Council terms related to gubernatorial appointments concluded in October. In accordance with the guidance of state boards and commissions, agency representatives may continue serving until reappointments are finalized, while individuals appointed by name require formal reappointment to continue in service. The Committee noted that the Governor's Office has contacted some individuals; however, the full membership roster has not yet been finalized. The upcoming Council meeting is expected to proceed pending confirmation of appointments. Positive engagement from a Kentucky Chamber of Commerce representative, including participation in Kentucky APSE activities and support for inclusive workforce initiatives, was also noted.

Public Comments

None.

Adjournment

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

Next Meeting Date

- February 04, 2026
- 1:00 pm- 2:00 pm (EST)