



Kentucky Employment First Council
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Andy Beshear
Governor

Jamie Link
Secretary, Education and Labor Cabinet

Employer Education and Engagement Committee

November 13, 2025

1:00pm – 2:00pm

Zoom

Meeting ID: 863 9806 2295

Members Present

Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, Todd Coffey, and Rebecca Wilson

Members Absent

Committee Chair, Merry Reid Sheffer, Dawn Gardner and Jessica Beaven

Staff Present

Nanci Howard, Betty Whittaker, and Anu Kumari

Staff Absent

Dena Wilson-Kimbler and Kristen Beach

Guest(s) Present

Kimberly Wickert, Melanie Lybarger, Kitty Zachery, and Susan Brown

Welcome/Announcements

Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, conducted the meeting as proxy to Committee Chair, Merry Reid Sheffer. Katie welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced a new

employee with the Supported Employment Training Project (SETP), Melanie Lybarger. The agenda was then reviewed by all participants.

Project NEON Update

Administrator, Nanci Howard, provided an update on Project NEON (National Expansion on Employment Opportunities Network).

She announced that the Project NEON application was submitted on November 6th, 2024, and the agency has requested the maximum 300 hours of technical assistance. She announced this would be the third consecutive year the agency has applied for the grant and the chosen Core States will be announced on November 27th, 2024. She stated the application included language to continue existing projects as well as the development and implementation of new projects involving benefits counseling.

Annual Report Update

Administrator, Nanci Howard mentioned that the 2024 Employment First Council's Annual Report is progressing through the necessary channels and reported only minor changes from the Education and Labor Cabinet.

Kentucky RETAIN Update

Kimberly Wickert provided an update on Kentucky RETAIN. She reported on the November 12th, 2024 series, which featured Bev Harp and Laura Butler discussed respectful language specific to disability. Kimberly reported the event had a strong turnout, with 114 registrations and 78 attendees. She announced the upcoming December presentations, including one presentation provided by Kitty Zachary and Susan Brown on how employers can use the coalition to recruit workers. She continued to announce, in January, Kelly Burke from Humana will discuss trauma-informed care leadership in the workplace. Kimberly also mentioned a discussion with Rachel Prestenbach regarding CRC credentials, noting that a minimum of one hour is required for CRC credit, and suggested they may not pursue this at the moment due to the current momentum with 45-minute sessions.

Kentucky RETAIN Coalition Expansion Update

Kitty Zachary and Susan Brown were invited to provide updates on the Coalition's expansion. Kitty shared a map of Kentucky that highlighted the four, new Coalition sites for the year. Kitty explained the expansion goals include providing consistent access to

resources and employment across all regions of Kentucky, ensuring balanced participation from employers, service providers, and vocational rehabilitation, and allowing local autonomy for each coalition. Kitty reported on each region below and provided specifics of each Coalition's progression and goals.

Northern Kentucky

Northern Kentucky's Coalition last meeting had 30 attendees, including eight employers. The meetings are held in person at the Florence Government Center, RM. C 8100 Ewing Blvd, which has been well-received. The meetings in Northern Kentucky began September 11, 2024 are scheduled for the second Wednesday of each month from 9:00am to 10:00 a.m. The local advisory board has been established, consisting of interested parties who are eager to participate. Louisville Kentucky meeting following hybrid format after Covid. They have people In-Person option and zoom also, currently they have 20 to 30 people in person and online 50 to 70 people.

Council Member, Todd Coffey inquired about job placements resulting from the coalition's efforts, noting that there had been one placement so far. Kitty Zachary indicated that they are still in the early stages and expect more placements as the coalition gains traction.

Eastern Kentucky

Morehead is preparing to kick off its coalition with the Chamber of Commerce in January 2025, with plans to hold regular in-person meetings starting in February 2025 from 9:00am – 10:00am. Kitty reported that no location has been discussed at this time. She announced she will be meeting with the Chamber of Commerce in November to discuss possible locations. She stated the local board for Morehead includes Ron O'Hair KYOVR CRP/SE Branch Manager, Mark Poston, CRP Consultant, Kaitlyn Paschall, and LeeAnn Creech of Amazing Opportunities Kentucky, potentially along with others, to ensure broad community representation.

Southern Kentucky

In the South region, the Somerset Coalition OVR district office is set to hold its meetings on the second Thursday of each month, starting February 13th. These meetings will be hybrid, allowing for both in-person and virtual attendance, and are scheduled during lunchtime from 12:00 to 1:00 PM or 12:00 to 1:30 PM. The location is still being finalized, with the Center for Rural Development in Somerset being a

potential venue. The advisory committee for Somerset currently includes several service providers. Notable members include Angela Hutchinson from Adanta, Brandy Eads from Adanta, Jamie Bell from Adanta, Melinda Worth from Schulz Consulting, Dorraine Hacker from Horizon Health, and James Graves from ABA. Melinda Worth also participates in Louisville meetings due to her work in both areas. The OVR representation includes Kelly Osborne Branch Manager in Somerset office, Alice McClard in south region, Alisha Bolin employment specialist for Somerset, and Gloria Gibson is CRP consultant for the South region, who are all actively involved in the Somerset coalition.

Western Kentucky

The final coalition for the year is located in Henderson OVR office, with its first meeting scheduled for January 17th. These meetings will occur on the third Friday of each month from 9 AM to 10 AM and will be held in person. The Henderson Community and Technical College is being considered as a meeting space, as the VR office is located there.

What Can Employment First Committee Members Do to Help?

Kitty Zachery and Susan Brown encouraged the Employment First Committee members to support the committee's initiatives in various ways, including sharing information on social media platforms like LinkedIn, and Facebook. Kitty mentioned that Susan Brown has been updating the coalition's online presence, and support in spreading the word would be beneficial and requested committee members to provide three employment leads from their networks to help identify potential employers in the regions.

Monthly events include workshops for service providers and employers. The "JustUS League" meetings for service providers focus on practical employment information, offer a space for informal problem-solving and sharing success stories. These meetings occur on the first Friday of each month from 12 PM to 1 PM.

The Employer info sessions, moderated by Susan Brown, are typically held on the last Friday of the month, with adjustments made for the holiday schedule in November and December. The November employer info session will focus on resources for deaf consumers, responding to inquiries from employers about available services. These sessions aim to foster connections between existing and new employers, encouraging mentorship and sharing of best practices regarding hiring individuals with disabilities. The coalition's promotional materials, including a brochure and a map detailing the

statewide expansion, will be shared with committee members at a later time. They are encouraged to sign up for the monthly newsletter, which will include regional updates starting January 1. Applications for new coalitions will open on July 1 for the 2025-2026 period, with the goal of establishing the current four coalitions by the end of June.

Committee Response

Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley suggested reaching out to Jessica Beaven a member of the Employment First Council who is an employer in Henderson, KY. She has shown interest in sharing information and could be a valuable contact for networking with other business owners in the area. KYOVR Staff Support, Betty Whittaker raised the possibility of using Morehead State University as a meeting location, particularly their library, which has hosted events in the past. There is a need for additional providers in the Morehead area, and the local VR office may have a list of potential contacts. Committee Members also included a discussion about the regional workforce development conference held in Morehead, there was at least one session specifically on disability and employment. It was said that the Northeast Kentucky Regional Workforce Conference was in Morehead of last spring. Jason Sloan, the director of the Rowan County Chamber, was identified as a potential contact for further collaboration.

Katie Wolf Whaley stated there would be a standing agenda item for 2025 Annual Report recommendations and all committee agendas moving forward.

Adjournment

Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley and Administrator, Nanci Howard thanked everyone for their contribution and adjourned the meeting

Next Meeting Date

Employer Education & Engagement Committee Meeting
December 11, 2024
1:00pm – 2:00pm EST