



Andy Beshear
Governor

Jaime Link
Education and Labor Cabinet Secretary

Employer and Engagement Subcommittee Meeting Minutes

February 14, 2023
1:00pm – 2:00pm
1525 Bull Lea Rd.
Lexington, KY 40511
Meeting ID: 874 8568 3616

Members Present: Merry Reid Sheffer, Michael Rimer, Rebecca Wilson, Todd Coffey and Dina Klimkina (departed early).

Members Absent: Jessica Beaven, Cora McNabb, Zach Morgan, Dawn Gardner.

Staff Present: Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (KYOVR) Administrator, Nanci Howard, KYOVR Employer Services Branch Manager, Deana Wilson-Kimble, KYOVR Assistant Director Department of Workforce Development, Kristen Beach.

Staff Absent: None

Public Present: None

Welcome, Introductions and Agenda Review:

KYOVR Administrator, Nanci Howard, welcomed those in attendance to the Employer Education and Engagement subcommittee meeting. A roll call was taken, and introductions were held by subcommittee members and staff. A quorum was established. Nanci Howard shared the agenda with the attendees via screenshare and verbally summarized the information in addition to giving a brief historical overview of the subcommittees previous work and encouraged members to actively engage in their role as subcommittee members. Mrs. Howard gave examples of items that the subcommittee may discuss in the meeting and turned the meeting over to the Chair, Merry Reid Sheffer.

Chair Report: Merry Reid Sheffer brought to attention a project called Guidepost for Employers, in which Dina Klimkina had mentioned in the meeting chat feature and requested as to any input, the other subcommittee members might have. Merry Reid Sheffer confirmed that the meeting was being recorded for reference purposes and Nanci Howard confirmed this, as well as stating that she is working on a drop box project so that the meetings can be more easily shared and accessed by the council members. Nanci indicated that this is a work in progress and there was not specific date mentioned as to when this project would be complete however it was noted that this was an active

priority. Merry spoke about Edge Employment and Mattingly Edge programs and what their focuses were as it pertains to disabled peoples. She also spoke about “customized employment” and her passion for the program. She explained the differences between customized employment and supportive employment. Merry then turned the floor over to the rest of the subcommittee for further discussion.

Subcommittee Discussion:

Rebecca Wilson recommended training on disabilities and training etiquette for employers to be more successful in making a positive impact on the matter.

Michael Rimer shared his experience with employer training sessions and indicated that it was a positive experience which resulted in 8% of Amazon’s 2022 new hires being of the disabled demographic. Rebecca and Michael shared additional comments regarding career coaches and revamped accommodations processes as good ideas to explore.

Nanci Howard suggested a “lunch & learn” webinar or other training opportunities to reach managers or HR employers.

Merry thanked Nanci and stated her intention to determine where overlapping concerns of the subcommittee may lie in order to establish a clear path of what the subcommittee’s passion(s) may be so that a plan of action could be brought forth for consideration.

Kristen Beach suggested a quarterly training to establish a consistent resource available to employers.

Todd Coffey stated that he would like to see data in order to determine where help is needed. He indicated that his team underwent and continues to undergo on a quarterly basis, inclusion training with particular emphasis on individuals with disabilities as well as some departments participating in follow up trainings. He stated that he would like to replicate a similar model and develop a plan that is customized to the individual needs of each location, statewide. Todd stated that there is an evident disconnect between the schools and the already in place Vocational Rehabilitation programs. Todd believes this gap could be bridged with data review but also mentioned that there is no way to tell how large the gap is at this time because of the lack of data tracking.

Nanci Howard spoke about the Transition Subcommittee and recommended for the Employment and Engagement subcommittee to collaborate with them on the matter of the students and positive outcomes.

Todd Coffey stated that he is aware of the desire of other subcommittees to have a cross functional dynamic.

Merry Reid Sheffer agreed that a collaboration with the Transition Subcommittee was a good idea and stated that she recognizes an overlapping interest and priority of the Employment and Engagement subcommittee to be as follows; 1, hiring and mid-level managers and 2, lunch & learn or info sessions. She suggested a solution of having a lunch & learn series for mid-level or direct managers and asked subcommittee members if this was something that they wanted to move forward with in creating a motion. Merry also indicated that if subcommittee members did agree to move forward on this suggested motion, they would need to develop an agenda for what the trainings would entail and whom to partner with for support to get started.

Michael Rimer asked if there would be a panel from mid-level managers that are talking about best practices from employers’ perspective. He agrees there is a huge benefit to the lunch & learn series. Merry thanked Michael and asked him which info sessions that he or his colleagues may have found helpful in his internal trainings with Amazon. Michael Rimer stated that his team is working on communicating the highlights for the new hire onboarding process with management or teams is proving to be helpful.

Rebecca Wilson stated that she noticed a rigid or strict hiring process among employers that may eliminate some of the people that would be good employees and she posed the question of how the subcommittee could appeal to those employers to be more proactive in negotiating within this matter

as it would be more beneficial to them.

Todd Coffey stated that this is a staffing solution with potential state and federal benefits and that's how the subcommittee needs to sell it. He discussed the unique challenges that are posed with airport staffing and the strict requirements as it pertains to prior legal troubles among potential job applicants. Todd also spoke about educating employers of the benefit of offsetting hiring costs as well as updating training procedures to better accommodate disabled persons. He discussed building a data base in order to facilitate employers finding professionally qualified job seekers that may have a disability and are presently in the market.

Rebecca Wilson spoke about tying all of this into a compliance training/requirement or equity and inclusion training for employers.

Todd Coffey spoke about the benefits of statewide training. He mentioned the possibility of tying it into tax incentives as a Quid Pro Quo to encourage employers. Todd also spoke about the challenges of highly qualified disabled persons primarily being offered lower responsibility positions and the employers seemingly shutting those individuals out of jobs they are better suited to, simply because of their disability limitations.

Merry Reid Sheffer asked the subcommittee if they could come back in March and discuss further details of what the lunch & learn series will entail regarding creating a schedule depicting each subcommittee member hosting a meeting as well as the possibility of leaving a meeting open for a mid-level manager team to give a presentation of their experiences as it pertains to the project. She confirmed the remaining 15 minutes of the underway meeting deadline and offered for further discussion amongst the other members. Under the presumption that the subcommittee decides to move forward with the lunch & learn series, Merry asked each of the subcommittee members to describe how they wanted to use their 30-60 minutes and what they would want to talk about during those meetings and if there were any other resources that could be introduced to employers.

Michael Rimer stated he would love to center his training around Amazon's accommodation process. He believes this process to be very streamlined and he believes many people could benefit from this information. Michael mentioned that although he could present the information, he would rather reach out to one of his internal accommodation specialists or disabilities program manager to see if they could give a brief verbal presentation. Michael brought up a point that Todd had mentioned earlier in discussions, regarding job fairs. He mentioned that October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month and suggested working with Kentucky Career Centers around the state to plan a statewide career fair or similar joint venture for that month.

Todd Coffey expressed his liking of the job fair idea and spoke about the Coalition for Workforce Diversity having multiple targeted job fairs and the details of what those job fairs entail. He spoke about the challenges faced by employers when employees can only work a reduced hours week as it pertains to Social Security limitations. Todd mentioned he would like to have a specialized administrator come into the job fairs to relay explicit information to employers of what can be done to recruit these groups of applicants.

Rebecca Wilson spoke about her experience with WIPA Grant, the value of training employers and employees in understanding work incentives and the obvious benefits of people going to work. She also suggested that she could share information about WIPA in a lunch and learn series.

Kristen Beach spoke about the DB101 website and the benefits of sharing that information or providing a tutorial pertaining to that website. Todd Coffey asked where he could find the DB101 website. Kristen Beach mentioned that the website is "Disability 101", and it serves as a calculator. Todd Coffey and Kristen Beach discussed the proper search criteria for locating this website through the internet. Kristen Beach stated she would get the exact web address and share that information with Nanci Howard so that the information could be further shared throughout the subcommittee. She also gave a brief history of the website's function and mentioned that it was a tool provided through the Social Security Administration. Merry Reid Sheffer and Rebecca Wilson discussed the benefits of WIPA as it relates to job candidates versus employers.

Kristen Beach spoke about job seekers and employers working together towards job seekers working a reduced hours schedule and keeping their benefits.

Merry Reid Sheffer talked about working towards dispelling myths or barriers surrounding benefits recipients and their ability to maintain employment. She also discussed integration of the workplace and hiring incentives that can appeal to the employer. Merry discussed etiquette and the possibility of monthly or bi-monthly meetings that could culminate to an event in October. She suggested the subcommittee think of the ways to promote etiquette as part of the proposed lunch & learn series in hope to eliminate the “avoidance” that seems to overshadow this matter. Merry brought up Michael Rimer’s suggestion to bring in his internal accommodation specialist and asked if Todd Coffey would be able to provide a similar presentation from the Coalition for Workforce Diversity’s perspective or how to make data work in his favor, something he mentioned throughout the meeting. Todd Coffey stated that he would bring in his manager from the Coalition to speak and Merry Reid Sheffer expressed her approval of that idea and made some suggestions as to topics that Todd Coffey’s team could discuss in their lunch & learn series presentation. Todd Coffey and Merry Reid Sheffer discussed the state’s request to replicate the Coalition throughout the state and the challenges posed therein due to the diversity of the state’s demographic, varying employment opportunities and unique needs of each.

Merry Reid Sheffer directed her discussion to Rebecca Wilson they discussed Rebecca’s ideas regarding etiquette and the range of disabilities being included in her lunch & learn presentation. Rebecca mentioned that she believed Vocation Rehabilitation representative would be better suited to present the information.

Kristen Beach stated that she believes Katie Wolf Whaley’s husband, Barry has done an “ADA 101” presentation in the past and it could be tailored to be more of an “etiquette” type of presentation. However, she did ask for input from Nanci Howard and Deana Wilson Kimbler to correct her if she was wrong in her statement stating that she did not recall whether anyone has provided a training on etiquettes “in a while”. Merry Reid Sheffer and Kristen discussed planning/presenting challenges and ways that the subcommittee could work together to support one another in overcoming said challenges.

Merry Reid Sheffer asked the subcommittee to consider how many sessions they wanted to present, the responsible member for each and the deadlines for checking in on them. She asked Nanci Howard whether this would be an appropriate topic for March’s meeting. Nanci confirmed and assured Merry that she would be working closely with her to develop that agenda item.

Merry Reid Sheffer and Nanci Howard expressed their excitement and gratitude for the team’s passion and participation in the discussions.

Nanci Howard asked whether the subcommittee would like to discuss a meeting to be scheduled for March. Merry Reid Sheffer expressed she would like that and asked the other subcommittee members if there was any opposition to that.

Kristen Beach mentioned that she added the DB101 website into the meeting chat portal for anyone who was interested. She also explained that the website could be used to access other states information as well.

Merry Reid Sheffer mentioned that Tuesday March 14th would be the next meeting option and asked Nanci Howard to confirm the date of the next scheduled council meeting. Nanci remarked the next Council meeting date as Friday, April 14th. Merry asked the subcommittee if there was any opposition to the subcommittee scheduling their next meeting to Tuesday, March 14th at the same time. Todd Coffey expressed that the 1:00PM time frame poses a conflict in his schedule. There were some comments regarding an earlier timeframe being the solution. Merry suggested noon to 1:00 PM as the proposed meeting time and everyone agreed to this time. Merry confirmed with Nanci that a motion was not necessary for this matter and Nanci confirmed. Todd Coffey requested that the meeting be scheduled from 11:30 – 12:30 as to better suit his scheduling conflicts. Merry stated this was acceptable and asked Nanci if this was also suitable to her schedule as well. Nanci confirmed and mentioned that she would send the meeting invitation to all subcommittee members for Tuesday, March 14th from 11:30-12:30. She also stated that she would be working with Merry to develop an agenda to send out to the group as well as the underway meeting minutes. All participants thanked each other, and the meeting was ended.

Issues identified:

- Avoidance of disabled persons limitations rather than negotiation of such.
- Dispelling myths or barriers surrounding benefits recipients and their ability to maintain gainful employment.
- Appealing to employers as to the benefits of hiring disabled persons and the staffing solutions it poses.
- Disconnect between the schools and the Vocational Rehabilitation programs.

Future Areas of Focus:

- Subcommittee to consider how many sessions they wanted to present in the Lunch & Learn Series, the responsible member for each meeting and the deadlines for checking in on them.
- Culminate to an event (job fair) in October (National Disability Employment Awareness Month).

Action Items:

No motions were made during the meeting.

Next Meeting Date:

Tuesday, March 14th, 2023
11:30pm – 12:30pm
Hybrid Format
Location: TBD

500 Mero Street • 4th Floor NE • Frankfort, KY • 40601

Toll Free: (800) 372 - 7172 • Direct: (502) 782-3421 • Email: Nanci.Howard@ky.gov