



Kentucky Employment First Council
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Employment First Council Executive Committee Meeting Minutes

June 18, 2026
3:00pm – 4:00pm (EST)
Zoom
Meeting ID: 846 2844 7176

Members' Present

Council Chair Katie Wolf Whaley, Vice-Chair Jeff White, Legislative Liaison Andrew Johnson, Amanda Owen, Merry Reid Sheffer, and Shelly Durbin

Members' Absent

Tal Curry

Staff Present

Nanci Howard and Anu Kumari

Welcome

Employment First Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, welcomed attendees and officially called the meeting to order.

Committee Reports

Advocacy and Education Committee

Amanda Owen, Chair of the Advocacy and Education Committee, provided an update on Committee's work. The committee reported ongoing efforts to improve access to

Employment First resources and information. Updates included completion of the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) webpages with improved navigation and audience-specific sections, continued development of educator-focused newsletter content, and the collaboration with the Transition Committee on resource distribution and outreach.

Work is also underway to update the Employment First overview sheet with current information and a QR code linking to the FAQ webpages.

The committee additionally discussed the potential development of a video series highlighting employment success stories and Employment First resources.

Employer Education and Engagement Committee

Merry Reid Sheffer, Chair of the Employer Education and Engagement Committee, provided an update on the committee's work. The committee reported the release of the sixth [Autism-Informed Employer video](#) and announced the upcoming quarterly Autism-Informed Employer discussion session scheduled for June 25.

The discussion sessions provide an interactive opportunity for participants to review video content, ask questions, and engage in conversation. To encourage open dialogue and participation, the sessions are not recorded.

The committee continues to support employer education through the Autism-Informed Employer initiative and its partnership with the Training and Improvement Project (TIP), including presentations on Competitive Integrated Employment and Employment First principles.

Public Policy Committee

Andrew Johnson, Chair of the Public Policy Committee, provided an update on the committee's work. The committee reported that the previous meeting was canceled due to a lack of agenda items and the guest speaker's unavailability.

Discussion focused on OVR's Order of Selection, implementation of the new case management system, Project NEON activities, federal IEP guidance, Medicaid-related issues, and the July 1 transition to the OVR new case management system. The committee continues monitoring federal IEP guidance. Members were also informed that no volunteers responded to the request to participate in an IEP Workgroup and the initiative has been placed on hold.

Provider Capacity Committee

Shelly Durbin, Chair of the Provider Capacity Committee, provided an update on the committee's activities. The committee received updates regarding Project NEON.

The committee continues working toward finalizing the webinar for providers with a goal of finalizing the series October 2026.

Additional discussion focused on provider capacity and the potential impact of proposed Medicaid reimbursement rate reductions on providers and employment services. Members acknowledged the uncertainty surrounding these developments and agreed to continue monitoring the situation as additional information becomes available.

Transition Committee

On behalf of Tal Curry, Chair of the Transition Committee, Council Chair Katie Wolf Whaley provided an update on the committee's ongoing efforts. It was reported that the committee continues working on resource distribution plans and outreach efforts to increase awareness of Employment First resources among stakeholders. No additional updates were provided.

Annual Report - Upcoming Planning Meetings

KYOVR Administrator Nanci Howard presented an overview of the timeline for developing the 2026 Employment First Council Annual Report. Planning meetings will be held following the July council meeting and throughout late July, August, and September.

Committee Chairs will be asked to provide activities, accomplishments, and recommendations for inclusion in the report. The goal is to present a draft report to the Council in October for review, feedback, and potential approval prior to finalization and submission.

Nanci also discussed transitioning the annual report tracking spreadsheet to a shared document to allow committee members to directly contribute information throughout the report development process and noted that she will continue coordinating with committee leadership in the coming months.

Finalized Agenda for July 10, 2026, Quarterly Meeting

Discussion was held regarding the finalization of the agenda for the July 10, 2026, Employment First Council Quarterly Meeting. The committee reviewed the draft agenda and

discussed the inclusion of the Rooted and Rising presentation by Elizabeth Kries, a Medicaid waiver rates update, and an Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) update regarding the Order of Selection and Case Management System implementation.

Discussion also included potential presenters for agenda items. Jeff White will follow up with Kathy Larza regarding the Medicaid Waiver Rates update, and the Administrator of the council will consult with OVR Executive Director, Cora McNabb, to provide the OVR Order of Selection update.

Following discussion, the proposed agenda was accepted by all.

Additional Discussion

- Committee discussed proposed Medicaid reimbursement rate reductions and their potential impact on providers, employment services, and long-term supports.
- An update was discussed regarding a recent House Bill 144 Commission meeting, during which recommendations related to Employment First were discussed.
- Members discussed Project NEON activities and the implementation of OVR's new case management system, including the upcoming transition period associated with the new system rollout.
- Members emphasized the importance of continuing to monitor policy and funding developments that may affect Employment First initiatives.
- The committee was reminded that the Employment First Council Quarterly Meeting is scheduled for July 10, 2026, from 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM ET at the Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, Room 136 CE, 1st Floor, 500 Mero Street, Frankfort, KY 40601.

Public Comment

None.

Adjournment

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

Next Meeting Date

Thursday, September 17, 2026

3:00 PM – 4:00 PM (EST)