

**Kentucky Employment First Council**

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Andy Beshear

Governor

Jamie Link

Secretary, Education and Labor Cabinet

Employment First Council Executive Committee Meeting Minutes

July 21, 2026

2:00pm – 3:00pm (EST)

Zoom

Meeting ID: 893 5811 3905

Members' Present

Employment First Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, Vice-Chair, Jeff White, Legislative Liaison, Andrew Johnson, Merry Reid Sheffer, Tal Curry, and Shelly Durbin

Members' Absent

Amanda Owen

Staff Present

Nanci Howard and Anu Kumari

Welcome

Employment First Council Chair Katie Wolf Whaley welcomed attendees, and the agenda was reviewed and acknowledged by all.

Annual Report Presentation

KYOVR Administrator, Nanci Howard, presented an overview of the 2026 Employment First Council Annual Report planning process, including the report timeline, objectives, framework, key considerations, and the process for developing committee recommendations and annual report content.

Key Deadlines:

- Mid-July – Preparation and planning for the Annual Report.
- Early August – Executive Committee brainstorming session.
- Early September – Executive Committee progress update.
- Late September – Complete Annual Report draft.
- September 30 – Distribute the draft Annual Report to the full Council with meeting materials.
- October 10 – Present the draft Annual Report to the full Council for review and potential approval.
- October 13 – Submit the draft through the appropriate Cabinet review process.
- December 1 – Submit the final Annual Report to the Governor's desk.

Annual Report Template Review and Discussion

KYOVR Administrator, Nanci Howard, presented the draft template for the 2026 Employment First Council Annual Report and noted that it followed the format used in previous annual reports. The proposed structure included the Chair's message, council overview, legislative charge, committee activities, recommendations, partnerships, accomplishments, goals, and appendices.

The committee supported continuing to organize the report by legislative charge, noting that this format effectively reflected the council's statutory responsibilities. The committee also discussed the placement of the section addressing employment disincentives and agreed to maintain the existing format for consistency with prior annual reports.

Annual Report Topics for Consideration and Discussion

The committee discussed several topics for potential inclusion in the 2026 Employment First Council Annual Report and identified items for further committee discussion.

- **Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS):** Members discussed current Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) policies and service limits as a potential topic for future committee discussion. No recommendation was made.
- **Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) New Case Management System:** Members discussed the OVR case management system, including opportunities

to improve provider communication and coordination. It was determined that further discussion on this topic was needed.

- **Project NEON:** Members discussed documenting Project NEON milestones and accomplishments and aligning Project NEON initiatives with the appropriate legislative charge and committee for inclusion in the Annual Report.
- **Medicaid Waiver Reimbursement Rates:** Members discussed recent Medicaid waiver rate increases, subsequent rate adjustments informed by the independent rate study, remaining funding gaps, and provider workforce challenges. It was determined that further discussion on this topic was needed.
- **Cross-Council Collaboration:** Members discussed opportunities to collaborate with other statewide councils and commissions, including the HB 144 Commission, and the potential for aligning future employment-related recommendations, as appropriate.

Activities for Inclusion in the Annual Report:

- **Autism-Informed Employer Series:** Include the Autism - Informed Employer (AIE) Video Series by identifying each video by title, summarizing its topic, and highlighting its contribution to advancing Employment First awareness through accessible educational resources.
- **TIP Training Partnership:** Include the Council's partnership with TIP by highlighting the TIP Train Lunch & Learn Series, identifying each session by title, recognizing Council member presenters, including Merry Reid Sheffer and Laurie Mays, as applicable, and summarizing the educational topics presented.

Additional Discussion

The committee discussed the council's current Strategic Plan, noting that it concludes in 2026, and requested clarification regarding the process, timeline, and responsibilities for developing the next Strategic Plan.

Action Item

- KYOVR Administrator, Nanci Howard, will continue preparing the 2026 Employment First Council Annual Report, schedule the next Executive Committee meeting to review the draft, and seek clarification regarding the

process, timeline, and responsibilities for developing the Council's next Strategic Plan.

- Employment First Council Vice Chair, Jeff White, will review Project NEON initiatives, align each initiative with the appropriate committee and legislative charge, and provide updates for inclusion in the 2026 Annual Report.
- Committee members will submit additional accomplishments, presentations, partnerships, activities, and recommendations for consideration in the 2026 Annual Report.
- Employer Education and Engagement Committee Chair, Merry Reid Sheffer, will provide additional information regarding the proposed Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) recommendation to support discussion by the Public Policy Committee.
- Public Policy Committee Chair, Andrew Johnson, will include the proposed Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) recommendation as a discussion item at an upcoming Public Policy Committee meeting to determine its alignment with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) State Plan, Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) guidance, and applicable federal and state requirements.
- The committee will coordinate with representatives from the HB 144 Commission to explore opportunities for aligning employment-related recommendations across councils, as appropriate.

Adjournment

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

Next Meeting Date

August 2026 - To be determined. The meeting date and details will be forthcoming.