



Andy Beshear
Governor

Jamie Link
Education and Labor Cabinet Secretary

Employment First Council Executive Committee Meeting

Minutes
March 20, 2024
3:00pm – 4:00pm

Chair Members Present

Katie Wolf Whaley, Council Chair and Transition Committee Interim Chair
Diana Merzweiler, Legislative Liaison, Public policy Committee Chair
Merry Reid Sheffer, Employer Education and Engagement Committee Chair
Jeff White, Provider Capacity Committee Chair
Amanda Owen, Advocacy and Education Chair

Members Absent

Morgan Turner, Vice-Chair

Council Member Guest

Tal Curry, Council Member

Staff Present

Nanci Howard, Vocational Rehabilitation Administrator
Anu Kumari, KYOVR Administrative Specialist Senior
Betty Whittaker, KYOVR Staff Assistant

Welcome

Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, welcomed everyone to the meeting. Katie officially called the meeting to order, confirming that they had a quorum for the Executive Committee. She outlined the agenda, which included discussing the 2025 Annual Report recommendations, finalizing the April 11th full council meeting agenda, and reports from each committee Chair.

Project NEON Update

KYOVR Staff Assistant, Betty Whittaker, shared an update on Project NEON activities. She stated Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation was awarded 200 hours that must be used by August 2025. Two milestones were highlighted.

Build capacity to provide Customized Employment in Kentucky:

Ron O'Hair, KYOVR Supported Employment/CRP Branch Manager and Katie Wolf Whaley, Employment First Council Chair, will work with Subject Matter Experts (SMEs), Karen Lee and Tricia Jones Parkin on this initiative. Betty announced there will be 120 hours allotted.

Milestones include:

- Create a customized employment process.
- Review the current CIE process used by vocational rehabilitation.
- Create a Fidelity tools.
- Review current CIE training provided by Human Development Institute.
- Create a rate system to support customized employment services, training and outcomes.

Create the capacity to increase SSDI and SSI benefits support for OVR:

Donna Osburn, KYOVR Social Security Administrator will be involved with the SSI and SSDI work with SME, Michael Dalto. Betty announced there will be 80 hours allotted.

Milestones include:

- Customize and deliver basic training on SSDI and SSI work incentives for OVR. OVR's platform YESLMS' will be used for this training
- Research and advise OVR and other Kentucky partners on how to improve Kentucky's Medicaid Buy-In Program. Robby Barbieri in Tennessee is receiving support from Annette Shea, a national Buy-In Expert. It was mentioned that Adam Hailey, legislative support from Goodwill Industries and Jeff White will be great resources for this goal.
- Customize and deliver "Why on earth should I work my way off SSDI?" Training for benefits planners.
- Customize and deliver training on Kentucky state specific benefits for benefits planners.

Election of Transition Committee Chair Discussion

Employment First Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley stated Tal Curry has expressed interest in becoming the new chair of Transition Committee. The Executive Committee will hold a vote at the Full Council Meeting on April 11, 2025.

Committee Reports

Advocacy & Education

- Amanda Owen, Chair Advocacy and Education Committee, provided an update on the committee's work on the FAQ document. She stated the local Special Education Director, Carrie Wedding, also reviewed the document to provide her input.
- Administrator, Nanci Howard confirmed the FAQ document was on all committee agendas for their individual review. The full Council also received the link to the document.
- Chair, Amanda Owen suggested meeting with Employment First Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, to finalize the FAQ document before presenting it to the full Council. It was suggested that Katie and Amanda would meet with other interested individuals to review the document and update language. The document would then be sent back to each committee for their review before the document is presented to the full Council. Each Chair of the Executive Committee present agreed. After content approval, the main focus will be on formatting and accessibility.
- KYOVR Administrator, Nanci Howard offered assistance with meeting logistics and providing other materials to council members.

Provider Capacity

- Jeff White, Chair of the Provider Capacity Committee, provided an update on the committee's work. Jeff reported an increase in provider activity, including both waiver and non-waiver and increase in productive communication between vocational rehabilitation counselors and providers.
- He briefly discussed the Medicaid Buy-In and its importance in the work of Project NEON and in collaboration with Amy Luttrell and the Workforce Innovation Board. He emphasized a team-oriented strategy incorporating job training, counseling, and resource access to secure long-term employment.
- Employment First Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley suggested discussing the increase in vendor applications at the next committee meeting before the April 11th full council meeting.
- The Provider Capacity Committee will meet before the quarterly council meeting in April and will discuss trends (e.g., vendor applications) and report their information to all council members in April.

Employer Education & Engagement

Merry Reid Sheffer, Chair, Employer, Education and Engagement Committee provided an update on the committee's work.

She announced the committee reviewed the "employer" section of the FAQ document.

Merry Reid Sheffer connected Kimberly Wickert at KYRETAIN with Sarah Dixon from Unified Sign and Design, who recently hired a customized role candidate. Merry also linked Kimberly Wickert with Ben Harris (Summit Academy career teacher) to facilitate internships for students with disabilities.

Merry highlighted the Disability Hiring Academy with the committee and explored supporting the academy with provider voices or job candidate testimonials. Council member Amanda Owen was on the planning committee and can connect Merry Reid Sheffer to the organizer.

Council Chair Katie Wolf Whaley mentioned that Callie Miracle, of the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce Foundation who helped organize the event, will present on it at the July 11th, 2025 meeting. The Chamber of Commerce is designated, in the Employment First legislation, to have a seat on the Council. However, when their last representative resigned his seat, it has gone unfilled as we wait appointments.

Public Policy

Diana Merzweiler, Chair, Employer, Public Policy Committee provided an update on the committee's work.

- Chair Diana Merzweiler inquired about the status of a federal bill McGarvey, aimed at promoting disability-owned businesses and Managed Care Organizations (MCOs) bill and referenced HB9 and HB695 related to managed care organizations. Provider Capacity Committee Chair, Jeff White discussed upcoming Medicaid waiver changes for managed care organizations bill, noting they are likely separate from current legislation.
- Jeff highlighted a modification to non-medical emergency transportation in the legislation. He plans to meet with Justin Jeter for clarification and proposed future discussions with him for clarify implications of non-medical emergency transportation legislation.
- Chair, Diana Merzweiler will raise transportation and federal bill topics at the next committee meeting for council consideration; no immediate full council action assigned.

Transition

- Interim Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley stated that the workgroup for the IEP Guidance document have begun committee meeting.

Action Items for Full Council

Election of Transition Committee Chair:

The Executive Committee nominated Tal Curry. The council will vote on his appointment at the April 11, 2025, Full Council meeting.

Letter of Support:

Employment First council Executive Committee approved a letter of support on March 6, 2025 for the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) entrepreneurship grant, which aims to enhance agency competency in supporting consumer business ventures. The letter will be included in the council email reminder along with additional meeting details.

Finalize Agenda Items for April 11, 2025, Quarterly Meeting

The following agenda was finalized by the Employment First Council Executive Committee.

| | | |
|--------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1:00pm | Welcome/Staff Report | Nanci Howard, OVR Administrator |
| 1:05pm | Roll Call | Anu Kumari, Admin. Spec. Senior |
| 1:15pm | Approval of January 10, 2025 Minutes | Katie Wolf Whaley, Chair |
| 1:20pm | Chair Report | Katie Wolf Whaley, Chair |

| | | |
|--------|--|-------------------------------|
| 1:30pm | Election for Transition Committee Chair | Katie Wolf Whaley, Chair |
| 1:40pm | Employment First: The Disability Perspective | Amanda Friend, Council Member |
| 1:55pm | Committee Reports/Recommendations | Committee Chairs |
| | Advocacy and Education – Amanda Owen | |
| | Employer Education and Engagement – Merry Reid Sheffer | |
| | Provider Capacity – Jeff White | |
| | Public Policy – Diana Merzweiler | |
| | Transition – Interim Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley | |
| 2:50pm | Public Comment | Guest(s) |
| 3:00pm | Motion to Adjourn | Katie Wolf Whaley, Chair |

2025 Annual Report Recommendations

Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley stated that committees have been gathering items for the annual report throughout the year. Katie and KYOVR Administrator, Nanci Howard thanked everyone for including these to the agendas, which will assist in compiling the written report at the end of the year.

Board and Commission Vacancies and Application

- KYOVR Administrator, Nanci Howard will provide a detailed update on application collection, outlining next steps for Governor submissions and vacant role recruitment.
- Nanci Howard offered to send a PDF version of the application to the Executive Committee.
- Nanci Howard will follow up on identifying committee members are interested in leadership positions.

Public Comment:

No public comment addressed.

Adjournment:

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

Next Meeting:

- June 19,2025
- 3:00pm to 4:00pm (EST)



Kentucky Employment First Executive Committee Meeting

Minutes

June 18th, 2025

3:00pm – 4:00pm (EST)

Chair Member Present:

Katie Wolf Whaley, Employment First Council Chair and Public Policy Committee Interim Chair

Merry Reid Sheffer, Employer Education and Engagement Committee Chair

Jeff White, Provider Capacity Committee Chair

Amanda Owen, Advocacy and Education Chair

Staff Present:

Nanci Howard, Vocational Rehabilitation Administrator

Anu Kumari, KYOVR Administrative Specialist Senior

Members Absent:

Morgan Turner, Vice-Chair

Tal Curry, Transition Committee Chair

Welcome:

Employment First Council Chair Katie Wolf Whaley welcomed attendees and officially called the meeting to order. The agenda was reviewed by all participants.

Election- Public Policy Committee Chair and Legislative Liaison:

Chair Katie Wolf Whaley announced that council member, Diana Merzweiler, had submitted her resignation from the Council and from her role as Chair of the Public Policy Committee and Legislative Liaison. These positions are now vacant. Executive Committee members were invited to consider potential candidates for nomination. Nominations will be taken at the July full Council meeting.

Committee Reports:

Advocacy and Education Committee

Committee Chair Amanda Owen provided an update on the committee's work on the FAQ document. She stated that all suggested edits and comments on the FAQ document have been addressed and incorporated, except for those pertaining to the education section. She noted that Katie's comments in that section were retained, and the updated FAQ link was re-sent in preparation for the current meeting. The next committee meeting is scheduled for July 2, 2025, at which time further discussion and decisions are expected in regard to the education section of the FAQ document. Amanda stated this section is the only section that needs reviewed once more. It was suggested that the current draft be forwarded to educational professional, Sara Tinker for review. The committee agreed the remaining FAQ sections are ready for pre-approval and formatting. If feedback on the education section is delayed, the finalized sections will move forward, with education content added later.

Employer Education and Engagement Committee:

Merry Reid Sheffer, Chair, Employer, Education and Engagement Committee provided an update on the committee's work. The committee met on June 11, 2025. Bev Harp presented her "Innovative Supports for Autistic Workers" employer training. With the conclusion of the partnership with RETAIN Kentucky, the committee is exploring new initiatives to continue employer engagement efforts.

Committee plans include supporting the ISAW initiative. The committee plans to develop short informational videos for employers regarding hiring individuals with Autism. These videos can be used 30-minute virtual "lunch-and-learn" sessions, each followed by a Q&A with Bev and other stakeholders. Committee members will assist with facilitation, introduce the sessions, and share information about the Employment First Council. Feedback would be gathered via SurveyMonkey, and the RETAIN Kentucky listserv would be used for outreach and promotion. The committee also intends to collaborate with the Kentucky Chamber to promote the event. As ISAW is a project of HDI, this would represent a significant cross-agency partnership. The committee will invite representatives from the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce and the Coalition for ISAW to explore this collaboration further. It was suggested to invite Laurie Mays and Callie Miracle to join upcoming committee meetings. Merry Reid Sheffer reported meeting with Laurie Mays to offer the committee as a resource for the next Disability Hiring Academy. The committee hopes to support planning in August 2025 by reviewing the curriculum and providing employer-employee pairs for the lunch session.

Provider Capacity Committee:

Jeff White, Chair of the Provider Capacity Committee, provided an update on the committee's work. The committee has focused on sustaining progress during the Order of Selection period and addressing challenges related to service access and funding. Key discussions included the need to

explore private pay structures and alternative funding options for individuals without traditional supports, particularly those with ABLE accounts.

Jeff White reported a significant increase in coordination of funding requests. He noted that many providers were turning to waiver funding or state general funds as alternatives. He clarified that state general funds are managed through Comp Care agencies, which must elect to offer supported employment services in order to utilize those funds.

To promote awareness of available funding mechanisms, the committee proposed developing a webinar or informational product covering ABLE accounts, access to state general funds, private pay options, and grant funding opportunities. Jeff White offered to consult with David Wheeler of BHDID, who oversees the state general funds, and explore his participation in a future committee meeting. The committee also expressed concern about low awareness of Kentucky's Employment First Law, particularly among case managers and providers. Jeff White noted that despite upcoming changes to SCL and Michelle P. regulations, most case managers remain unaware of the law's requirements. He emphasized that the law passed in 2022 applies to all individuals with disabilities of working age (14 and older), including youth served through DCBS and waiver programs.

Amanda Owen expressed interest in attending the next Provider Capacity committee meeting. KYOVR Administrator, Nanci Howard will send her the next Provider Capacity Committee meeting invitation.

Public Policy Committee:

No report was addressed.

Transition Committee:

No report was addressed.

Finalize Agenda Items for April 11, 2025, Quarterly Meeting

The following agenda was finalized by the Employment First Council Executive Committee.

| | | |
|--------|---|---|
| 1:00pm | Welcome/Staff Report | Nanci Howard, OVR Administrator |
| 1:05pm | Roll Call | Anu Kumari, Admin. Spec. Senior |
| 1:15pm | Approval of April 11, 2025, Minutes | Katie Wolf Whaley, Chair |
| 1:20pm | Chair Report | Katie Wolf Whaley, Chair |
| 1:30pm | Public Policy Committee Chair Discussion | Katie Wolf Whaley, Chair |
| 1:40pm | Legislative Liaison Discussion | Katie Wolf Whaley, Chair |
| 1:50pm | Kentucky Chamber of Commerce Presentation | Callie miracle, Workforce Center Director |

| | | |
|--------|--|--------------------------|
| 2:10pm | Committee Reports/Recommendations Advocacy and Education – Amanda Owen Employer Education and Engagement – Merry Reid Sheffer Provider Capacity – Jeff White Public Policy –Interim Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley Transition – Tal Curry | Committee Chairs |
| 2:50pm | Public Comment | Guest(s) |
| 3:00pm | Motion to Adjourn | Katie Wolf Whaley, Chair |

Action item

- Katie Wolf Whaley will forward the current FAQ draft to Sara Tinker for review and input on educational language. Deadline; prior to the July committee meeting.
- Prepare for a potential vote on the FAQ document.
- Explore the development of a webinar for providers focused on alternative funding strategies to support sustained employment services.
- Share updates on the Employer Engagement Committee’s quarterly initiatives as ongoing action items.
- 2025 Annual Report: Committee members were encouraged to share any additional activities or accomplishments, or updates to ensure inclusion in the annual report.

2025 Annual Report Recommendations:

It was recommended highlighting one issue identified among DCBS youth and case managers regarding the Employment First policy. AETNA invited a representative of the Emp.1st Council to deliver a presentation explaining the principles of Employment First. The Council provided a direct presentation, which was recorded to allow for continued distribution and broader outreach.

Additional Discussion:

Additional discussion surrounding effective communication regarding order of selection and potential policy changes was held.

Public Comment

No comment was addressed.

Adjournment

Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley thanked everyone for their contribution and adjourned the meeting.

Next Meeting

Date: September 18th, 2025.

Time: 3:00 pm to 4:00 pm (EST)

Nanci Howard

Vocational Rehabilitation Administrator

Education and Labor Cabinet, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

500 Mero Street • 1st Floor SE • Frankfort, KY • 40601

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

Created by:

Anu Kumari

Administrative Specialist Senior

500 Mero Street • 1st Floor SE • Frankfort, KY • 40601

Direct: (502) 782-1409 • Email: anukumari@ky.gov



Kentucky Employment First Executive Committee Meeting

Minutes

August 8th, 2025

1:00 pm – 2:00 pm (EST)

Chair Member Present:

Katie Wolf Whaley, Employment First Council Chair and Public Policy Committee Interim Chair
Morgan Turner, Vice-Chair
Amanda Owen, Advocacy and Education Chair
Merry Reid Sheffer, Employer Education and Engagement Committee Chair
Jeff White, Provider Capacity Committee Chair
Tal Curry, Transition Committee Chair

Staff Present:

Nanci Howard, Vocational Rehabilitation Administrator
Anu Kumari, KYOVR Administrative Specialist Senior

Welcome:

Employment First Council Chair Katie Wolf Whaley welcomed attendees and officially called the meeting to order. The agenda was reviewed by all participants.

Discussion of Certificates of Appreciation:

The Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation's Administrative Specialist Senior, Anu Kumari, drafted a Certificate of Appreciation to recognize departing Employment First Council members.

The certificate, which includes the Council Chair's signature, will be printed on high-quality paper, professionally framed, and presented to the members. Council members reviewed and approved the design, expressing unanimous support with no objections.

Annual Report Brainstorming Presentation and Discussion:

The Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Administrator, Nanci Howard, presented the 2025 Annual Report brainstorming session, outlining objectives, timelines, key considerations, the report framework, main content, potential enhancements, and each committee-specific recommendation.

Key Deadlines:

- Mid-July – Preparation and planning for the annual report
- Early August – Brainstorming session with the Executive Committee (EC)
- Early September – Progress check with EC
- Late September – Completion of report draft
- September 30 – Draft report sent with meeting materials to the full Council
- October 10 – Presentation to the full Council for review and potential motion to approve
- October 13 – Move through appropriate Cabinet channels for review and/or edits
- December 1 – Final report on the Governor's desk

Items to include in the annual report:

Employer Education and Engagement Committee:

- Chair Merry Reid Sheffer presented to the Louisville Society for Human Resource Management on Customized Employment: A Strategy for Engaging Hidden *Workers* on July 8, 2025.
- In 2024, Chair Merry Reid Sheffer and Employed Self-Advocate Graham Maupin presented on Customized Employment and Employment First initiatives with ODEP and Econsys at the TASH Conference in New Orleans, LA.
- Chair Merry Reid Sheffer is scheduled to present on the State Activities to Fund and Support Customized Employment panel at the Customized Employment Symposium hosted by Econsys in Denver, CO, on August 26, 2025.
- Coalition Forward and the Coalition for Workforce Diversity were mentioned as potential partnerships. Northeast Kentucky Workforce Development Conference (*Morgan Turner, Vice Chair, and Katie Wolf Whaley, Council chair designed for or focused on employers.*

Provider Capacity Committee:

- Caroline Wheeler and Jeff White presented at least 10 different sessions on DB101, focusing on the impact of wages on benefits.
- The Provider Capacity Committee has had initial discussions regarding the development of a training series geared towards exploring alternative funding sources.
- New SETP staff were hired at the direction of previous councils in an attempt to increase provider capacity across the state.

Transition Services:

- The Department of Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities', Office of Autism has incorporated Employment First principles into their strategic plan.

Ms. Howard encouraged the committee chairs to review their recommendations and provide feedback. She will share the brainstorming presentation with committee members to facilitate their review and gather additional input. The committee will continue its discussion at the next meeting.

Public Comment:

No Public comment addressed.

Adjournment:

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

Next Meeting

Date: September 12th, 2025.

Time: 8:00 am to 9:00 am (EST)

Nanci Howard

Vocational Rehabilitation Administrator

Education and Labor Cabinet, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

500 Mero Street • 1st Floor SE • Frankfort, KY • 40601

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

Created by:

Anu Kumari

Administrative Specialist Senior

500 Mero Street • 1st Floor SE • Frankfort, KY • 40601

Direct: (502) 782-1409 • Email: anukumari@ky.gov



Andy Beshear
Governor

Jamie Link
Education and Labor Cabinet Secretary

Executive Committee

Minutes
September 12th, 2025
9:30 am – 10:30am (EST)

Attendees:

Katie Wolf Whaley, Jeff White, and Tal Curry

Members Absent:

Merry Reid Sheffer, Morgan Turner, and Amanda Owen

Staff Attendees:

Nanci Howard, Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Administrator, Anu Kumari, Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Administrative Specialist Senior

Welcome:

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

Annual Report Update and Discussion:

The Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Administrator, Nanci Howard, provided an update on the progression of the report. The following suggestions were made to the annual report by present committee members.

- The mission statement was included in the memorandum section.
- Table of Contents will be updated when final draft is ready for Cabinet review.
- The letter from the chair section will be included at a later date.
- Order of Selection numbers will be updated prior to submission to the Cabinet.
- Jeff White will double check the language regarding the 1915c Home and Community Based Waiver regulatory recommendations and the draft MOU language.
- More information was added to the benefits' trainings in conjunction with Project NEON as well as KY RETAIN.
- Check on MOU information.
- ISAW also receives DBHDID funding was included.

The committee convened and agreed to work on the annual report and report back to discuss the progress on September 18th.

Public Comment:

No public comment addressed.

Adjournment:

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

Next Meeting

Date: September 18, 2025

Time: 3:00pm to 4:00pm (EST)

Administrator: Nanci Howard

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

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

Created by: Anu Kumari, Administrative Specialist Senior

Education and Labor Cabinet, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

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

Direct: (502) 782-1409 • Email: anukumari@ky.gov

Executive Committee Minutes

September 18, 2025

3:00pm – 4:00pm (EST)

Zoom

Members Present

Katie Wolf Whaley, Morgan Turner, Jeff White, and Tal Curry

Members Absent

Amanda Owen and Merry Reid Sheffer

Staff Present

Nanci Howard and Anu Kumari

Welcome, Introductions and Agenda Review:

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

Action Items for October 10, 2025 Quarterly Meeting Agenda

The committee reviewed the draft agenda. The following action items were determined:

- Development of an MOU for adult supported employment was included on the agenda.
- Elections for the Legislative Liaison and Public Policy Chair are included on the agenda.
- Council Chair will include in the Chair report:

- Names of those individuals who will no longer be serving on the council.
- A brief reminder that members seeking consecutive terms may continue serving until new appointments are made.
- The Council Administrator will reach out to council member, Lori Norton, to ask if she will present on recent IPS research. Confirmation is requested by October 1st.
- Committee members will reach out to the Department for Behavioral Health, Department of Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities staff to confirm a presentation for the October 10th quarterly meeting. Confirmation is requested by September 30th.

Annual Report Update and Review

- Edits from the Executive Committee will be received by September 24th.
- Once the Executive Committee reviews and includes their edits, the Council Administrator will provide a clean draft to all council members prior to the October 10th quarterly meeting for their feedback.
- The Council Administrator will prepare the appendix for the annual report with member names & affiliations and meeting dates/times to document council activity.
- The goal is to submit the final report on November 1st.

Additional Items

- A follow-up on accessibility and the Transition Resource document was recommended.
- Katie Wolf Whaley will follow up with Cora McNabb regarding the FAQ document status and ongoing outreach to address remaining concerns.

Public Comments

None.

Adjournment

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

Next Meeting Date

January 2026

To be determined



Kentucky Employment First Council
500 Mero Street, 1st Floor SE
Frankfort, KY 40601
Toll Free: (800) 372-7172
Direct: (502) 782-3421
Email: Nanci.Howard@ky.gov

Andy Beshear
Governor

Jamie Link
Secretary, Education and Labor Cabinet

Employment First Council

Executive Committee Meeting Minutes

December 18, 2025
3:00pm – 4:00pm (EST)
Zoom
Meeting ID: 813 3637 2992

Members Present

Katie Wolf Whaley, Jeff White, Merry Reid Sheffer, and Tal Curry

Members Absent

Amanda Owen

Staff Present

Nanci Howard and Anu Kumari

Welcome | Agenda Review:

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

Appointment Update

An update was provided regarding recent council appointments. A total of twenty (20) appointments were initially made, with one subsequent resignation, resulting in nineteen (19) current council members.

The current council membership includes:

- Two (2) continuing members
- Eight (8) newly appointed members
- Ten (10) reappointed members

In addition, it was noted for context that eight (8) individuals were not appointed. Newly appointed and reappointed members will receive a formal welcome communication, along with approved council documents and meeting information. Orientation will be scheduled and conducted after the January 9th quarterly meeting. New and returning members will be listed on the introductory slides and shown prior to the start of the quarterly meeting in January.

Elections Discussion

The committee discussed the election process as officer terms conclude at the end of the current council term. In accordance with the council's bylaws and governing procedures, elections will be held at the January 9, 2026, council meeting.

Positions in the election include:

- Chair,
- Vice Chair,
- Legislative Liaison, and
- Committee Chairs.

Members may self-nominate or be nominated during the meeting. Current officers will continue to serve until elections are completed, and newly elected officers will assume their roles following the election process. All elections will be conducted in accordance with Robert's Rules of Order, as outlined in the council's bylaws.

Committee Reports

Advocacy And Education Committee

On behalf of the Advocacy & Education Committee, Council Chair Katie Wolf Whaley reported on the committee meeting focused on the dissemination of the Employment First Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), both as a comprehensive document and as audience-specific materials.

Employer Education and Engagement Committee

Merry Reid Sheffer, Chair of the Employer Education & Engagement Committee, provided an update on the committee's work. The committee reported progress on a new partnership with Innovative Supports for Autistic Workers (ISAW) to launch an employer-focused education initiative beginning in January 2026.

The initiative will include:

- Monthly email communications featuring brief, two-minute educational videos focused on autism and employment
- Quarterly virtual employer gatherings to support learning, discussion, and topic development.

This initiative is intended to build on prior employer engagement efforts and expand outreach through partner networks and social media channels. No action items or votes were requested at this time.

Public Policy Committee

No report was addressed.

Provider Capacity Committee

Jeff White, Chair of the Provider Capacity Committee, provided an update on the committee's work and reported progress on the development of a webinar planned for 2026. Committee members confirmed that the webinar content has largely been prepared; however, scheduling will be deferred until an approved presentation template is obtained.

It was noted for a co-branded, accessible presentation template that aligns with Employment First Council and Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) branding requirements. Accessibility considerations will be addressed prior to finalizing the webinar materials. Once the appropriate template is received and approvals are confirmed, the committee will proceed with final formatting and scheduling.

Transition Committee

No report was addressed.

Annual Report Update

The report is currently under external review, and the agency is awaiting approval.

Finalized Agenda for January 09, 2026, Quarterly Meeting

The following agenda was finalized by the Employment First Council Executive Committee.

| | | |
|--------|---|--|
| 1:00pm | Welcome/Staff Report | Nanci Howard, OVR Administrator |
| 1:05pm | Roll Call | Anu Kumari, Admin. Spec. Senior |
| 1:15pm | Recognition of New Membership | Katie Wolf Whaley, Chair |
| 1:20pm | Approval of October 10, 2025 Minutes | Katie Wolf Whaley, Chair |
| 1:25pm | Chair Report | Katie Wolf Whaley, Chair |
| 1:35pm | Autism Works Study Presentation | Lori Norton, Council Member |
| 1:45pm | Training Innovation Project (TIP) – Employer Engagement Strategies | Kathy Sheppard-Jones, UKHDI Project Director |
| 1:55pm | Committee Reports/Recommendations <i>Advocacy and Education – Amanda Owen</i> <i>Employer Education and Engagement – Merry Reid Sheffer</i> <i>Provider Capacity – Jeff White</i> <i>Public Policy –Interim Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley</i> <i>Transition – Tal Curry</i> | Committee Chairs |
| 2:25pm | Employment First Council Elections <i>Council Officers</i> <i>Chair, Vice-Chair, and Legislative Liaison</i> <i>Committee Chairs</i> | Council Members |
| 2:50pm | Public Comment | Guest(s) |
| 3:00pm | Motion to Adjourn | New Council Chair |

Announcement

An announcement was shared regarding Edge of Employment’s recent submission of a memorandum of acceptance with Bullitt County Public Schools to begin providing Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) during school hours. With this addition, services will now be available in Oldham County, Bullitt County, and Jefferson County. The program will support students *ages 14 to 21* with disabilities through career exploration, workplace readiness, and related services. Additional details regarding participating schools will be shared as they become available.

Public Comment

None.

Adjournment

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

Next Meeting Date

TBD (To be determined)