



Andy Beshear  
Governor

Jamie Link  
Education & 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 11<sup>th</sup> 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.

1. **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.

2. **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 11<sup>th</sup> 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.
- **KYRETAIN and Employment First: Employer Seminar Series**
  - 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 11<sup>th</sup>, 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 Recommendation

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)



**Administrator: Nanci Howard**

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