



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.

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| 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 |

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| 2:10pm | Committee Reports/Recommendations | Committee Chairs |
| | 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 | |
| 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

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