



Kentucky Employment First Council

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Employment First Council Executive Committee Minutes

December 19, 2024

3:00pm – 4:00pm (EST)

Zoom

Meeting ID: 897 5416 6949

Members Present

Merry Reid Sheffer, Amanda Owen, Jeff White, Katie Wolf Whaley, Morgan Turner, and Diana Merzweiler

Members Absent

Jessica Beaven and Frank Huffman

Staff Present

Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (KYOVR) Administrator, Nanci Howard and KYOVR Staff Assistant, Betty Whitaker

Staff Absent

Anu Kumari, KYOVR Administrative Specialist Senior

Guest(s) Present

N/A

Welcome, Introductions and Agenda Review

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 upcoming Annual Report and content from each committee.

Project NEON

Nanci Howard, OVR Administrator, announced that she received notification from Jeffrey Carpenter with EconSys on the awarded hours for Project Neon. The Council originally asked for 300 hours; however, the Council was designated 200 hours. The next steps will be to decide on the Subject Matter Experts (SME) that the Council will want to work with going forward on this Project and to set up teams by February 1, 2025. The announcement about the awarded hours didn't occur until yesterday afternoon so Nanci will move forward with recommendations from the Public Policy Committee and the Council. One SME that has been recommended is Michael Dalto, who has been working with the Public Policy recommendations. Jeff White stated that Michael Dalto has also been involved in the new Tennessee Medicaid Buy-In. Nanci will be working with Jeffrey Carpenter for a letter of commitment and Jeff White moving forward with recommendations from the Public Policy Committee. Katie questioned whether the three areas of support for this year's Project Neon would change moving forward with the new designation of less hours. Nanci will meet with Cora McNabb, Executive Director, for clarification and will update the Council. Merry Reid Sheffer questioned whether more than one SME can be used. Nanci clarified that the Council has worked with several SMEs in the past, including Steve Blanks, Karen Lee, and Trisha Jones Parkins. The Committee members agreed that working with the same SME's may be beneficial since work and recommendations have been made by these SME's.

Annual Report

Nanci reported that the Employment First Council's Annual Report was sent to the Council on December 16, 2024, and has been submitted and received by the Governor's Office. Nanci thanked everyone for their contributions and assistance with the Annual Report.

Committee Reports

Jeff White, Chair, Provider Capacity Committee, stated that there are no action items from the Committee for the Executive Committee. However, Jeff stated there are many things going on with the Committee such as increasing the number of OVR providers and waiver providers for supported employment. Jeff stated there has been some regulatory recommendations made that may go forward that would change some of the requirements for waiver providers that would require that waiver providers be approved as OVR providers. Another effort is a refinement of coordination of services processes. Jeff reported the Committee is also paying more attention to the quality of services and wrap-around services. The Committee is looking at employment in a more holistic fashion. The Capacity Map has been revised and there will be changes to the map as additional providers are added. Amanda Owens asked what metrics were used to create the capacity map and determine how the categories of services were determined and rated. Jeff White stated that it was determined by the Vocational Rehabilitation counselors who work directly with the providers on an on-going basis and factored in the waiver provider usage. The map does not include IPS.

Merry Reid Sheffer, Chair, Employer, Education and Engagement Committee, stated that the last meeting had to be cancelled and she was unable to attend the previous meeting. Merry stated the Coalition for Workforce Diversity presented at the last meeting to share some of their expansion plans into different regions in Kentucky and how they are strengthening efforts and partnerships with RETAIN Kentucky with the employer seminar series lunch and learn seminars which are going strong. Merry stated she is working on what the Committee has the capacity to give that would be helpful for employers and asked for any suggestions and recommendation this Committee may have. There are no action items for the full Council.

Diana Merzweiler, Chair, Public Policy Committee, stated that one item that may be presented to the full Council could be a draft document that would address the Medicaid buy-in situation. Two issues were explained; an eligibility issue and an interpretation issue between waiver documents and regular Medicaid documents. Jeff White stated the buy-in is an opportunity for consumers with higher incomes to be able to pay a premium to retain Medicaid services after they reach a certain income level. This is intended to be a work incentive in Kentucky.

Diana stated fellow council member, Amy Luttrell, of Goodwill Industries, is compiling research. The Committee's goal is to get the issue of consumers losing their waivers in front of the Legislators in the upcoming session and include personal stories of consumers that have been affected. Diana stated that the Committee may have a draft document to provide to the full Council if time permits. Diana stated that future items are with KDE. More information is needed to move forward with this Transition 360 training module. The second item is to provide policy language for the IEP guidance document. The Committee is gathering information to draft some language and may need an Ad Hoc Committee with people who have deep education experience in the IEP process to assist with this draft.

Katie stated that Amy Luttrell has been very involved in other types of benefit cliff issues and how these issues keep people out of the workforce. Katie stated there may be a document provided to full Council but otherwise, the Executive Committee may need to approve a document to be shared with the Council submitted by the Public Policy Committee.

Jeff stated he received the advisory report from the benefits cliff group that he will share with Katie and Nanci. Jeff stated it can be share with the full Council. He stated the report does not focus on people with disabilities and gets very deep into childcare which is the most significant benefits cliff in Kentucky. Jeff stated there is a desire to extend this report and action items to include people with disabilities.

There was no Transition Committee representative on the meeting to report to the Committee. Katie stated she has been working with the Committee on stories. Another issue is how to infuse the idea and priority of Employment First into their transition 360 curriculum and then look at the IPE guide which cross both the Public Policy Committee and Transition Committee.

Amanda Owen, Chair, Advocacy Committee, stated that the Committee is actively working on a document of FAQ's as it pertains to different targeted audiences to determine what are the top questions an employer would ask and then provide the answer as an employment specialist. The goal is to get employers down a pathway that allows them to obtain the information they need. The document has been shared in Google Drive to the Committee so that recommendations can be made directly to the document. Amanda stated the FAQ needs to be reviewed by the Committee before it goes to the full Council. She stated that the document will not be ready for the full Council in January so will seek input for approval at the April meeting. Katie suggested that the FAQ document could be sent to each Committee for review and input. Amanda

wants the document to be useful and be utilized. Katie suggested that this FAQ document could be added to all of the Committee's next meeting agendas for review and discussion and the Committee Chairs agreed. The Committee is trying to keep the document brief. Amanda thanked the Committee for any feedback they can give.

Finalize Agenda Items for January 10, 2025

Katie stated that every Committee will give a report as done at all meetings. Two presenters who are Council members will be sharing what their representation means to Employment First.

The presenters for January 10 will be as follows:

Employment First: The Provider Perspective, Amanda Owen
HB 214: "The Frank Huffman Act" & Employment First, Frank Huffman

Amanda asked about how to present Committee reports to the Council. Katie stated that in addition to action items that it would be good to bring up items that will be provided for further review and input. Committee Chairs could also provide a brief update on what Committees are working on that may be presented to the Council at a later date.

Nanci stated she can obtain a list of SMEs within a EconSys Portal and can provide that list to the Council.

Katie asked about the time frame for using the designated hours from NEON. Nanci stated the 200 hours must be used by August 31, 2025, with hopefully a start date of February 1, 2025. She said she will know more in the future to share with the Council.

Nanci will be sending the following information to Council members.

Agenda
Minutes
Committee packets with agendas and minutes
Annual Report
News Release and HB 214 for Frank Huffman's presentation.

If anyone has any other information, please get that to Nanci as soon as possible. She would like to send out the materials on December 26.

Outreach Materials for Employment First Council

Administrator, Nanci Howard announced the availability of outreach materials for Employment First, including a floor banner, tabletop banner, and tablecloth and checkout system for these materials is being developed to facilitate their use by council members for promoting Employment First initiatives.

Adjournment

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

Meeting dates for 2026 will be forthcoming.