



Andy Beshear
Governor

Jamie Link
Education and Labor Cabinet Secretary

Kentucky Employment First Quarterly Council Meeting

Minutes

July 11, 2025

1:00pm – 3:00pm (EST)

Zoom/Virtual Format

Attendees:

Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, Morgan Turner, Vice-Chair, Amanda Owen, Bill Bates, Johnny Calles, Tal Curry, Jason Wheatley/Gretta Hylton Proxy, Cora McNabb, Lori Norton, Jeff White, Todd Coffey, Rebecca Wilson, Leslie Hoffman, Andrew Johnson, Robert Larry Taylor, David Allgood, Johnny Calles, and Merry Reid Sheffer.

Staff Attendees:

Nanci Howard, Anu Kumari, Ron O'Hair, Betty Whittaker, Susie Edwards, and Holly Hendricks.

Guests:

Ryan Bowman, Carmen Hancock, Amanda Hutchison, Melanie Lybarger, Zac Sappenfield, Shelly Durbin, Joann Wells, Lisa Carrico, Susan Brown, Melissa Marvel, and Johnny Collett.

Members Absent:

Jessica Beaven, Dawn Gardner, Frank Huffman, Jeff Edwards, Amanda Friend, Annette Jett, and Amy Luttrell.

Roll Call: Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (KYOVR) staff support, Anu Kumari, provided the roll call. A quorum was determined.

Welcome: KYOVR Administrator, Nanci Howard welcomed everyone to the meeting and agenda was viewed by all participants.

Staff Report

KYOVR Administrator, Nanci Howard provided the staff report and began by providing members with an update on council recommendations for appointment. She reported that all supporting materials were formally submitted through the appropriate channels on May 29, 2025. Twenty-six council members' terms will expire on October 3, 2025. She stated the hope is to receive the confirmation of appointments prior to the October 3rd date. She reiterated that current members are allowed to continue serving on the council until their successors have been officially appointed. She also extended her sincere appreciation to those who submitted applications, as well as to all current members for their continued service and steadfast commitment to the Council's mission.

Employment First Council five standing committees were highlighted. It was mentioned that these committee meetings are open to the public and include the following:

Advocacy and Education

Employer Education and Engagement

Provider Capacity

Public Policy

Transition

Guests interested in participating in committee work were encouraged to contact the respective committee chair or the Council Chair. The Council welcomes engagement from individuals with diverse expertise.

Nanci concluded her report by providing a formal demonstration of the Employment First Council's updated Dropbox platform. She began by reminding Council members that a shared Dropbox had previously been utilized for the storage and retrieval of

essential Council documents. She further noted that the platform has since been revised to include current and pertinent materials that support the Council's ongoing initiatives.

The primary objective of the Dropbox is to facilitate consistent and convenient access to all meeting-related documentation for Council members. She confirmed that access has been granted to all members. Any individuals experiencing technical difficulties or who have not yet received access are advised to contact staff support, Ms. Anu Kumari, for assistance.

The demonstration included an overview of the newly organized folder structure, which comprises the following categories:

- Quarterly Council Meetings
- Special Call Meetings
- Committee Meetings
- New Member Information
- Infographics
- Policy Recommendations
- Annual Reports
- Forms and Templates
- Resources

Approval of Minutes

Employment First Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, called the meeting to order.

The Chair called for a motion to accept the April 11, 2025, minutes as written. Council member, Cora McNabb made the motion to accept the April 11th, 2025, council minutes as written. Jeff White, second. No opposition or abstentions. Motion carried.

Chair Report

Employment First Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley provided the Chair report.

American Disabilities Act 35th Anniversary Celebration:

The Office of vocational Rehabilitation and Human Development Institute two council agencies represented on the council are partnering a virtual American Disabilities Act (ADA) 35th Anniversary Celebration. This celebration, scheduled for July 29th, will be a virtual, panel featuring individuals who have experienced the impact of the ADA. The importance of this event for gathering information and understanding the lived experiences of Kentuckians with disabilities, suggesting it as a valuable resource for the council's work.

Order of Selection (OOS):

As of May 14th, Kentucky OVR is in an Order of Selection. We have discussed this coming, in previous meetings, and you can find additional information on OVR's website. Several agencies represented here have been working to get accurate information out, to encourage people to apply and join the wait list, and to find alternative ways to access employment supports. Employment First remains the priority, at this point we need to help people gain employment even when OVR is not the primary service provider.

Additional updates include:

Employment First as a topic was invited to present at the Autism Educators Institute hosted by the Kentucky Autism Training Center.

Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) continues to expand its Transition 360 course offerings, with an emphasis on employment as a key part of transition planning.

Continued collaboration with the Project NEON Initiative continues, NEON efforts is providing training to VR counselors on how wages impact benefit employment for individuals with disabilities, addressing common misunderstandings and fears that hinder employment. Another NEON effort focuses on finding new and more effective ways to train providers in customized employment, aiming to reduce barriers for individuals with significant disabilities and promote their successful integration into the workforce.

The Chair concluded the report by thanking council members, staff, and guests for their continued dedication, and recognized those actively supporting committee work and the 'Employment First Mission.'

Election for Public Policy Committee Chair/ Legislative Liaison Discussion:

Employment First Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley informed the Council of the resignation of Diana Merzweiler, who served as Legislative Liaison and Chair of the Public Policy Committee. As a result, there are now vacancies for both the Public Policy Committee Chair and the Legislative Liaison positions. Chair Katie Wolf Whaley opened the floor for discussion and presented the option to hold a vote during the current meeting or defer the matter to a future meeting.

Council Chair Katie Wolf Whaley called for motion to table the discussion and election of both positions to the October meeting, allowing for further conversation and interest gathering. A motion was made by Rebecca Wilson to table the discussion and election of both positions to the October meeting. Johnny Callebs, second. No opposition or abstentions. Motion carried.

Chair Katie Wolf Whaley encouraged any interested Council members to reach out to either herself or KYOVR Administrator Nanci Howard for further discussion about the responsibilities.

Kentucky Chamber of Commerce Presentation

Ryan Bowman, Workforce Development Manager at the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce, provided an overview of the Chamber's strategic workforce initiatives aimed at increasing employment access for underrepresented populations across the Commonwealth.

The presentation highlighted several key programs administered through the Kentucky Chamber Workforce Center, which operates under the Kentucky Chamber Foundation.

Fair Chance Academy – Supports employers in hiring individuals from justice-involved and recovery communities, offering training, resources, and a cohort-based learning model.

Disability Hiring Academy – Encourages inclusive hiring practices and provides customizable tools for employers to integrate disability inclusion into existing workflows.

Military Hiring Academy – Helps businesses better understand and translate military skills into civilian roles, fostering veteran recruitment across Kentucky.

New American Hiring Workshop – Focuses on immigrant workforce inclusion, with targeted training for businesses in areas with growing immigrant populations.

Mr. Bowman concluded by acknowledging the ongoing collaboration between the Kentucky Chamber and Employment First Council members. Council members expressed appreciation for the presentation and interest in continued partnership and future engagement.

Committee Reports

Advocacy and Education

Committee Chair, Amanda Owen provided the report. She provided an update on the development of the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document. The primary objective of this initiative was to develop consistent, response for various stakeholder groups, include section were highlighted:

Employers

Educational Professionals

Job Seekers with Disabilities

Disabilities Service Providers

Caregivers/Guardians of Job Seekers with Disabilities

The initial draft of the FAQ document was reviewed by all Employment First Council Committees. The draft was also distributed via email, available in the drop box, and the link was shared in the chat.

The committee proposed that the council review and approve the content of the FAQ document. Once approved, the document will proceed to the next phase, which includes accessibility review, branding, and universal design compliance.

On the behalf of Advocacy and Education Committee, Council Chair Katie Wolf Whaley called for motion to approve the FAQ document as submitted to move forward for accessibility, branding and cabinet approval. A motion was made by Jeff White to accept the FAQ document as submitted to move forward for accessibility, branding and cabinet approval. Andrew Johnson and Merry Reid Sheffer second. No opposition or abstentions. Motion carried.

The next steps include accessibility review, branding, and submission for cabinet approval. Further updates will be shared as progress continues.

Employer Education and Engagement

Committee Chair, Merry Reid Sheffer, provided the report. The committee has been exploring collaboration with Bev Harp and the Innovative Supports for Autistic Workers (ISAW) training program. The plan involves adapting ISAW's comprehensive training into smaller, modular sessions to facilitate easier delivery. The committee aims to partner with state and local chambers of commerce to offer these trainings.

The proposed training sessions would be delivered quarterly or bi-monthly and focus on specific topics via short videos derived from the ISAW curriculum. These sessions would also incorporate facilitated discussions and Q&A opportunities involving community and business leaders. The existing RETAIN Kentucky webinar listserv will be utilized to invite participants and maintain engagement.

The committee's next steps include inviting representatives from the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce and other stakeholders to collaborate on developing a detailed plan and timeline for implementation.

Provider Capacity

Jeff White, Chair of the Provider Capacity Committee, provided an update on committee ongoing efforts. There were no action items at this time. The committee has initiated efforts to educate service providers on alternative funding mechanisms for supported and customized employment services. A preliminary review has yielded approximately eleven categories of potential funding opportunities that could be leveraged. The committee plans to develop a webinar or potentially a series of webinars to highlight these funding opportunities. The intent is to feature examples from providers currently utilizing these resources. The committee will be reaching out to these providers to request their collaboration in developing content and best practices for broader dissemination. Upcoming committee meetings are scheduled for September and November. Mr. White encouraged participation from stakeholders to contribute to the development of materials that will strengthen the provider network statewide.

Public Policy

Interim Chair Katie Wolf Whaley provided an update on the committee's ongoing efforts. There were no action items at that time. The committee's recent discussions primarily focused on changes in service delivery related to the current Order of Selection and the importance of communicating accurate, up-to-date information to stakeholders. The committee emphasized the need for both individuals and providers to understand the actual status of services, as opposed to misinformation that may be circulating.

Additionally, the committee received internal updates, including work being done on the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) guidance document.

The committee also continues to monitor developments related Project NEON ensuring that the committee is informed and prepared to offer support or recommendations as needed.

Transition

Tal Curry Chair of the Transition Committee provided the report. The committee focused on the transition resource sheet for students with disabilities aged 13 to 21. The resource sheet has been distributed and is being utilized; however, the original version was not fully accessible.

To address this, a QR code and a link to the Kentucky Advising Council's WordPress-based website which is screen reader compatible have been included at the top of the document to ensure accessibility. A small workgroup is expected to reconvene in August to begin planning for the next version of the transition resource.

There was no Transition 360 update at this time. No action items or review requests were presented. The committee has invited a representative from Waiver programs to participate in the next committee meeting to support ongoing discussions regarding Medicaid waivers.

Public Comment

No comment was addressed.

Adjournment

Council Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Council member, Tal Curry made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Amanda Owen, second. Motion passed and the meeting was adjourned. Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley thanked everyone for their contribution and adjourned the meeting.

Next Meeting

Date: October 10, 2025.

Time: 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm (EST)

Nanci Howard

Vocational Rehabilitation Administrator

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