



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

Kentucky Employment First Council Quarterly Meeting

Minutes

October 10, 2025

1:00 pm – 3:00 pm (EST)

Zoom

Members Present

Interim Chair, Jeff White, Katie Wolf Whaley/Proxy Carolyn Wheeler, Amanda Owen, Amy Luttrell, Bill Bates, Johnny Callebs, Tal Curry, Cora McNabb/Proxy Susie Edwards, Rebecca Wilson, Leslie Hoffman, Andrew Johnson, Merry Reid Sheffer, Robert Larry Taylor, David Allgood, Johnny Callebs, Jeff Edwards, and Staci Cain/Proxy Joann Wells.

Guest Present

Ann Hollen, Kate Dean, Bailee Jones, Marym Martin, Brettam Hensley, Lindsey Pridmore, Vanessa Rose Garangnani, Jennifer Hart, Samantha Jacobs, Sydne Taylor, Mcline, Melaine Lybargar, Amanda Hutchison, Andi Atha, Courtney Blocker, David Potter, Haley Gossett, Carrie Wedding, Amber Coleman, Jourdan Collins, Melaine Tyner Wilson, Shelly Durbin, Metzinger Taylor, and Zac Sappenfield

KYOV Staff Present

Nanci Howard, Holly Hendricks, Anu Kumari, Kristen Beach, Jonathan White, and Ron O'Hair

Members Absent

Gretta Hylton, Lori Norton, and Frank Huffman

Welcome | Agenda Review

Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Administrator, Nanci Howard, welcomed attendees. The agenda was reviewed and acknowledged by all participants.

Roll Call

Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Administrative Specialist Senior, Anu Kumari, provided the roll call. A quorum was determined.

Staff Report

KYOVR Administrator, Nanci Howard, provided the staff report.

A. Council Appointment Updates

- Appointment recommendations were submitted through the appropriate channels and remain under review at Boards and Commissions. Appointments have not been received as of 10.10.2025.

Council Member Terms and Voting:

- Twenty-six (26) terms expired on October 3, 2025. Members shall serve a three-year term and, pursuant to statute/bylaws, continue to serve until their successors are appointed; duly appointed members retain voting rights and count toward quorum until replaced or they resign.
- Those who are unable to attend meetings, are encouraged to consider sending a proxy. As per council bylaws, proxy members may vote.

Recognition of Departing Members:

Departing members were recognized and certificates of appreciation will be mailed to individuals who no longer serve on the council.

- Jessica Beaven
- Todd Coffey
- Amanda Friend
- Dawn Gardner
- Annette Jett
- Diana Merzweiler
- Morgan Turner

B. Committee Participation & Upcoming Meeting Schedule

The Employment First Council maintains five standing committees. Meetings are open to the public:

- 1) Advocacy & Education Committee:
 - November 7, 9:00–10:00 a.m. (EST)
- 2) Employer Education & Engagement Committee:
 - November 12, 1:00–2:00 p.m. (EST)
 - December 10, 1:00–2:00 p.m. (EST)
- 3) Provider Capacity Committee:
 - October 21, 2025, 2:00–3:00 p.m. (EST)
- 4) Public Policy Committee:
 - October 16, 2025, 9:00–10:00 a.m. (EST)
- 5) Transition Committee:
 - November 20, 2025, 9:30–10:30 a.m. (EST)

Individuals interested in joining a committee should contact the respective committee chair or the Council Chair. The Council welcomes diverse expertise, and all meetings are open to the public

C. Employment First Council Contact & Website Update

- A new email inbox has been established: employmentfirst@ky.gov, monitored daily; routed to appropriate staff/committees.
- The Employment First [webpage](#) is updated regularly (monthly or as needed). Both links were provided in the meeting chat. Members and the public are encouraged to report any errors or needed updates to staff promptly.

D. Annual Report — Review & Update

KYOVR Administrator, Nanci Howard, presented a draft of the annual report and highlighted its key elements.

- The Executive Committee met on August 8th and September 12th to assist with compiling the report.
- A draft of the annual report was distributed to Council members via email prior to the meeting for their review and feedback.
- A brief update was presented by KYOVR Administrator; feedback was received.

On behalf of the Executive Committee, Council Interim Chair Jeff White moved for the approval of the format and foundational content of the Employment First Council draft annual report, pending the collection of additional data and final approval of the complete document. As the motion originated from the Executive Committee, no second was required. No opposition or abstentions. No further discussion. Motion carried.

Approval of Minutes

Interim Chair Jeff White called the meeting to order and called for a motion to accept the July 11, 2025, minutes as written.

Council Member Amanda Owen made the motion to accept the July 11, 2025, council minutes as written. Andrew Johnson, second. No opposition or abstentions. Motion carried.

KYOVR Order of Selection (OOS) Update

On behalf of the Executive Director of the Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR), Cora McNabb, the Deputy Executive Director, Susie Edwards, provided an update on OVR's Order of Selection

Current Status

- There are no changes to OOS at this time; all categories remain closed.
 - OVR is working with fiscal staff on the federal year-end closeout.

Waitlist Overview

- At this time, the waitlist includes 3,542 individuals.
 - This total includes approximately 800 individuals who transitioned to the waitlist when OOS was implemented and were in application status without an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE).
- Approximately 97% of individuals on the waitlist fall within category one and two.

Regulatory Updates

- OVR staff are updating the OVR's administrative regulations and the Policy and Procedure Manual.
- Preliminary policy updates have been submitted to legal for review and integration of recommended edits.
- The plan is to file the regulation as an emergency regulation to allow immediate effect upon filing.

She concluded her report by opening the floor for questions; none were raised.

Interagency MOU- Adult Supported Employment

A formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) among the following Cabinet and agency partners was discussed.

- Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR)
- Kentucky Department for Medicaid Services (DMS)
- Kentucky Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities — Division of Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities (DBHDID/DDID)
- Division of Adult Guardianship, Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS)

The goal of the MOU focuses on the provision of Adult Supported Employment services. The existing MOU between the Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities— Division of Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities, was originally executed in July 2012.

The new MOU will be process-focused, formalizing current interagency collaboration and clarifying the primary barriers affecting waiver participants' opportunities to enter the workforce.

On behalf of the Executive Committee, Jeff White moved that the Kentucky Employment First Council endorse in principle the negotiation of a formal Memorandum of Understanding between the Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Kentucky Department of Medicaid Services, the Kentucky Department of Behavioral Health, Developmental, and Intellectual Disabilities – Division of Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities, and the Division of Adult Guardianship within the Cabinet for Health and Family Services to establish a formal collaborative framework to enhance competitive integrated employment outcomes through the coordinated delivery of adult Supported Employment services. As this motion originates from a standing committee, no second is required. No opposition or abstentions. No further discussion. Motion carried.

1915 (i) RISE Initiative Presentation

Ann Holland, Executive Advisor and Program Director at DBHDID, provided a concise overview of Kentucky's 1915(i) Initiative, RISE (Recovery, Independence, Support,

Engagement), serving adults with serious mental illness. She noted that 1915(i) is not a waiver, has no slots or waitlist, and bases eligibility on functional need rather than institutional level of care. Services include universal case management, tenancy supports, in-home independent living supports, supervised residential care (up to three individuals per home), assistive technology, medication management, non-medical transportation, planned respite, and IPS-supported education and employment. She shared 1915 (i) RISE Initiative Fee Schedule and [Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities](#) webpage with the council members.

“Never Too Early” Presentation

Kate Dean, Director of Community-Based Partnerships and Strategy with Child Care Aware at the University of Kentucky Human Development Institute, provided a presentation entitled the “Never Too Early” initiative. She provided an overview of efforts to introduce career awareness and foundational work-readiness skills in early childhood (ages 3–5) through intentional inclusion and play-based learning in childcare settings. She noted that year one delivered four trainings reaching approximately 100 parents and providers; based on feedback that families of very young children with disabilities face competing demands, year two shifted to provider-focused training and technical assistance, supported by HDI’s [Checklist](#) for a “Bright Future” resources spanning ages 3–5 through young adulthood. The 2025 schedule includes four live virtual sessions marketed to more than 2,000 childcare programs statewide, with 220+ registrants to date and strong initial satisfaction; the team aims to deliver hands-on classroom technical assistance in at least three to five sites.

Committee Reports

Advocacy and Education Committee

Committee Chair, Amanda Owen, provided an overview of the Committee’s work. The Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) resource is completed and currently under review; the Committee is awaiting feedback prior to release. Recent discussion focused on a distribution strategy to ensure active use beyond website posting, including targeted outreach to teachers and employers, integration of a QR code linking to the FAQ within the Council’s standard Supported Employment flyer, and deployment of the flyer/QR at conferences, exhibit tables, and partner events. The objective is to maximize accessibility and adoption of the resource across stakeholder groups once finalized.

Employer Education and Engagement Committee

Committee Chair, Merry Reid Sheffer, reported that following the conclusion of the RETAIN Kentucky Project, the Committee partnered with the University of Kentucky Human Development Institute on the Innovative Supports for Autistic Workers (ISAW) initiative led by Bev Hart. ISAW's existing three-hour employer training is being repackaged into two-minute topical videos distributed monthly, with a quarterly virtual gathering for recipients to address questions regarding the content. Distribution will leverage the Kentucky Chamber, regional chambers, and the Coalition for Workforce Diversity, utilizing the RETAIN attendee list and HDI's and CRP list to expand reach. The first video is scheduled for October 22 at 12:00 p.m. (EST), followed by releases in November and December, with the first virtual gathering in January.

Provider Capacity Committee

Committee Chair, Jeff White, provided an overview of the Provider Capacity Committee's ongoing activities. He announced the exploration of the Expansion of Potential Employment Service Funding Sources. Two Webinars were originally planned for October and/or November. This project will be forthcoming due to scheduling issues. The webinars will include the following topics:

- Becoming an Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Vendor
- Obtain Certification as a 1915 (C) Waiver Provider
- Seeking Funding through State General Funds
- Become an I-RISE Provider
- Become an employment network (Ticket to Work)
- Develop a relationship with local school districts
- Applying for funding through Special AD Valorem (Mental Health/ intellectual disabilities) Tax Districts.
- Seek funding through grants and philanthropy- United Way/Private Foundation/Corporate Sponsorship
- Develop a fee schedule for private pay service
- Utilizing Able Account to fund employment Services
- Building stronger Employer Relationships / Assisting in taking advantage of tax incentives
- Initiate your own fund development opportunities
- Increasing numbers of waiver participants are continuing to access supported employment services utilizing Medicaid funding. We are beginning to plan the

process that will need to be followed to transition these persons to OVR funding when it becomes available.

Public Policy Committee

Jeff White provided an overview of the Public Policy committee's work.

- The committee delayed electing a new chairperson and Legislative Liaison until the slate of officers is voted upon in early 2026.
- The committee also suggested a revision to the Employment First Council bylaws to clarify the role of the legislative liaison and is working on the language.

Transition Committee

Transition Committee Chair, Tal Curry, provided an overview of the Transition Committee's work.

- The Committee discussed ongoing Transition 360 education efforts and plans to collaborate with Jason Wheatley and KDE to ensure Council input is reflected in statewide transition resources.
- The IEP review updates working group will reconvene with additional education professionals to advance recommendations.
- Transition Resource Sheet developed in coordination with the Kentucky Advisory Council on Autism, the Council's Transition Committee, and the State Advisory Council for Exceptional Children; the document is prepared for submission to the Cabinet for Health and Family Services for approval, with status updates to be provided at the next meeting.

Announcement(s)

Employment First Council Interim Chair Jeff White shared that the Kentucky APSE Conference is scheduled for December 8–9, 2025, in Elizabethtown, KY. For more information, a [link](#) was shared.

Public Comments

None.

Adjournment

Employment First Interim Chair Jeff White called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. **Council member Tal Curry made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Andrew Johnson was second. Motion passed, and the meeting was adjourned.** Interim Chair Jeff White thanked everyone for their contribution and adjourned the meeting.

Next Meeting Date

January 9, 2026

1:00 pm- 3:00 pm (EST)

Location and Zoom meeting information will be forthcoming.