



Kentucky Employment First Council

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Employment First Council

Provider Capacity Committee

Minutes

March 24, 2026

2:00pm – 3:00pm (EST)

Zoom

Meeting ID: 849 2541 6136

Members' Present

Employment First Vice Chair Jeff White, Susan Brown, Joann Wells, Leslie Hoffmann, proxy Carmen Hancock, Alisha Clark, Melissa Marvel, Zac Sappenfield, Lisa Carrico, and Amanda Hutchinson

Members Absent

Shelly Durbin, Katie Wolf Whaley, Cora McNabb, and Lori Norton

Staff Present

Ron O'Hair, Eric Barth, Nanci Howard, and Anu Kumari

Welcome | Introduction | Agenda Review

On behalf of the Committee Chair, Council Vice Chair Jeff White welcomed attendees. Introductions were made. The agenda was reviewed and acknowledged by all participants.

Project NEON Update and Kick-Off Information

The committee received an update on Project NEON. Kentucky was selected to participate in the latest phase of Project NEON, reflecting continued success in

advancing Employment First initiatives. Kentucky was awarded 550 hours of subject matter expert (SME) technical assistance annually for three years. A total of six states and the District of Columbia were selected through a highly competitive process.

Work will be organized into initiative-based teams to address key priority areas. These include:

- **Addressing the Impact of Wages on Benefits**
Review of Kentucky’s Medicaid Buy-In program and exploration of strategies to better support employment as a pathway to independence, including development of benefits-related training resources.
- **Established Data Collection and Analysis Practices to Inform Future Decisions**
Development of a comprehensive statewide system to track and evaluate Employment First outcomes across working-age individuals, including those with IDD, serious mental illness, substance use disorders, and co-occurring conditions.
- **Successful Implementation of Kentucky's I-RISE Initiative and its Integration**
Expansion of provider participation through outreach and recruitment efforts, as the program currently lacks an established provider network. This team will be led by Lori Norton.
- **Ensuring the delivery of High-Quality Employment Services**
Continued advancement of customized employment practices and alignment with evidence-based service delivery. This effort will be led by Katie Wolf Whaley, with continued collaboration from subject matter expert Tricia Parkin Jones and staff support, including Ron O Hair and Eric Barth.
- **Increase the knowledge base of Case Manager and Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor**
Increased knowledge and awareness among case managers and vocational rehabilitation counselors regarding available services and systems. This team will be led by Carolyn Wheeler.

Work will begin following confirmation of assigned subject matter experts.

SELN and Project NEON

The committee received an update that Kentucky will initiate membership in the State Employment Leadership Network (SELN) effective July 1. This initiative will support the state in strengthening data systems and improving employment outcomes.

Initial efforts will focus on developing a data management and analysis system for

individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, with plans to expand to additional populations over time.

The committee noted that this effort will support ongoing, data-driven decision-making. Regular data collection and reporting will be implemented to maintain an up-to-date understanding of employment outcomes.

Update on Waiver Employment Survey

The committee received an update on the Waiver Employment Survey, conducted to gather baseline data on employment outcomes for waiver participants.

The survey collected information on employment status, wages, hours worked, and interest in employment.

Key purposes of the survey include:

- Identifying the number of individuals currently working and their employment characteristics.
- Determining how many individuals express interest in employment but are not yet working.
- Analyzing geographic trends by county to better understand service demand; and
- Examining provider capacity needs.

This data will support the identification of service gaps and address provider capacity needs across the state. Additional data was collected on individuals participating in day training programs, as well as those earning subminimum wages.

The preliminary observations indicate a continued decline in subminimum wage participation. Data will inform future planning and support ongoing efforts to improve employment outcomes statewide.

Provider Webinar Update

The committee received an update on the webinar series. Series planning is underway for a provider-focused webinar designed to increase awareness of opportunities to diversify and strengthen provider funding streams.

The webinar will include information on multiple pathways for providers to expand services and funding, including:

- Becoming an Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) Vendor
- Obtain Certification as a 1915 (C) Waiver Provider
- Seek Funding through State General Funds
- Becoming an I-RISE provider
- Become an employment network (Ticket to Work)
- Develop a relationship with local school districts
- Develop a fee Schedule for private pay services
- Utilizing ABLE accounts to fund employment services

Development of the webinar materials is nearing completion. The webinar will be approximately 90 minutes in length, recorded, and made available for future use once it is accessible for public distribution.

Public Comments

None

Adjournment

Employment First Council Vice Chair Jeff White thanked everyone for their contribution and adjourned the meeting.

Next meeting

May 5, 2026
9:00am – 10:00am (EST)