



Kentucky Employment First Council

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Employment First Council

Provider Capacity Committee

Minutes
May 5, 2026
2:00pm – 3:00pm (EST)
Zoom
Meeting ID: 849 2541 6136

Members' Present

Employment First Committee Chair Shelly Durbin, Council Chair Katie Wolf Whaley, Council Vice Chair Jeff White, Susan Brown, Joann Wells, proxy for Leslie Hoffmann, Carmen Hancock, Alisha Clark, Stephanie Miller, Cathy Anderson, Zac Sappenfield, Lisa Carrico, and Amanda Hutchinson

Members' Absent

Cora McNabb, Leslie Hoffmann, and Lori Norton

Staff Present

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

Welcome | Agenda Review

Employment First Committee Chair, Shelly Durbin, welcomed attendees. The agenda was reviewed and acknowledged by all participants.

Update on Project NEON

Committee Member and Council Vice Chair, Jeff White, provided an update on Project NEON. Kentucky currently has 13 primary collaborators participating in the project and has

been awarded 550 hours of technical assistance support, including dedicated hours focused on data analysis and evaluation.

Key priority areas:

Addressing the Impact of Wages on Benefits

Efforts focused on examining the impact of wages on benefits and increasing understanding of state-specific benefit programs, including SNAP and KTAP, to support comprehensive benefits planning and training opportunities. The work group is led by Donna Osburn, with subject matter expert Michael Dalto.

Established Data Collection and Analysis Practices to Inform Future Decisions

Project NEON resources would be utilized to assess statewide data needs, evaluate current and previous initiatives, and identify opportunities to improve employment outcomes and service delivery across systems. The work group is led by Jeff White, with subject matter expert Jessie Oettinger.

Successful Implementation of Kentucky's I-RISE Initiative and its Integration

The I-Rise initiative continued to expand, with participants beginning to access services. Additional technical assistance opportunities related to housing supports were also identified to further strengthen the initiative. The work group is led by Lori Norton, with subject matter expert Karen Lee.

Ensuring the delivery of High-Quality Employment Services

Updates were provided regarding customized employment training and provider capacity efforts focused on expanding access to high-quality employment services and improving training accessibility statewide. The first pilot cohort was underway and scheduled to conclude at the end of June, with plans to evaluate and refine future implementation efforts. The workgroup is led by Katie Wolf Whaley, with subject Matter expert Trica Parkin Jones.

Increase the knowledge base of Case Manager and Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor

The workgroup continued developing training opportunities for case managers and counselors by using strategies to improve communication, increase system understanding, and strengthen coordination of services for individuals utilizing employment and long-term support programs. The workgroup is led by Carolyn Wheeler.

Indications from Waiver Provider Survey

The committee presented an overview of the waiver provider employment survey and noted that the data was compiled using information submitted by case managers and that the findings should be viewed as indicative trends due to some inconsistencies and incomplete data.

Key survey findings included:

471 waiver participants were working in workshop settings utilizing 14(c) subminimum wage certificates, with average weekly hours ranging from 12 to 13 hours. Under Non-Competitive Integrated Employment.

636 individuals were engaged in workshop and enclave employment settings, including approximately 211 individuals earning subminimum wages. Under Non-Competitive Integrated Employment.

822 individuals were participating in competitive integrated employment, including 478 individuals receiving supported employment services and 344 individuals working without formal supported employment supports.

The survey also identified 173 individuals actively working toward employment through supported employment services. It was noted that the survey reflected higher levels of competitive integrated employment participation than previously identified through traditional reporting methods.

The committee discussed the importance of improving statewide employment data collection and utilizing survey data to identify geographic areas with high demand for employment services and provider capacity needs across Kentucky.

Order of Selection Update

Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (KYOVR) staff provided clarification and responses regarding waitlist.

Question: *When will they begin removing people from the waitlist?*

Answer: Eighty-four individuals were removed from the waitlist and placed into accepted status on May 1. The agency would continue monitoring spending on a weekly basis, and additional individuals would be removed from the waitlist as funding becomes available to serve them.

Question: *How will the order of people be determined?*

Answer: Individuals would be removed from the waitlist beginning with Priority Category 1. Within Priority Category 1, individuals would be served in chronological order based on the date of application.

New applicants determined eligible, including those in Priority Category 1, would continue to be placed on the waitlist, as OVR is not fully opening Priority Category 1 at this time but instead serving individuals who have been waiting the longest.

Question: *How will consumers be contacted and how long will they wait before moving to someone else?*

Answer: Individuals would be contacted by their counselors using their preferred method of communication and would be asked to contact their counselor to begin development of their Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). Individuals would have 90 days to develop the IPE unless an extension was agreed upon.

Counselors do not have the authority to move on to another individual, and the agency would continue monitoring spending and notifying counselors when individuals are approved to move from the waitlist into accepted status. Individuals who do not respond would receive written notice and appeal rights prior to case closure after 90 days.

Question: *How will regional counselor workloads and service coordination be managed as individuals begin moving from the waitlist into active services?*

Answer: Staffing, management, and service capacity considerations would continue to be monitored closely, and adjustments may be necessary to ensure individuals receive appropriate services and support.

The committee recommended members to continually encourage individuals and families to monitor all communication methods from KYOVR for updates related to waitlist.

Provider Webinar Status

The committee provided an update on the Provider-Focused Webinar initiative. Content and information were received for all identified webinar topic areas. The presentation development is currently underway. Several presenters were finalizing slides and materials for inclusion in the webinar package prior to the approval process and release.

Topics needed by Providers

The committee invited and encouraged providers to share feedback, identify training needs, and suggest topics for future discussion. Members also encouraged continued provider participation and collaboration to support employment services across Kentucky.

Resources available for Providers

The committee shared several training and resource opportunities available to providers.

Information included:

[The SETP Professional Learning Community](#) (PLC) is currently accepting applications for the 2026–2027 year and will hold one cohort for Employment Specialists and one cohort for Managers. Applications will remain open through June 8.

[Visible Voice: Mental Wellness Strategies for Residential and Community Providers Working with Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing Individuals](#). May 19, 1:00 E. Hosted by Merge. CEUs for Deaf, Blind trainings are available

The Autism-Informed Employer (AIE) short video series was developed through the Employment First Council Employer Education and Engagement Committee, which provides brief informational resources that can be shared with employers to support autism-informed employment practices.

Transition, pre-ETS, and parent education resources are available to support providers, students, and families in employment planning and career development activities. A resource titled “As a Person with a Disability, [You Can Get Help Finding a Job](#)” was highlighted as a useful tool for middle school, high school, and Pre-ETS transition activities.

The committee emphasized the importance of ongoing provider training and encouraged providers to participate in available statewide professional development opportunities.

Public Comments

None

Adjournment

Employment First Committee Chair Shelly Durbin thanked everyone for their contribution and adjourned the meeting.

Next meeting

June 16, 2026
9:00am – 10:00am (EST)