

**Kentucky Employment First Council**

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Employment First Council

Provider Capacity Committee

Minutes

July 28, 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, Alisha Clark, Stephanie Miller, Lisa Carrico, Susie Edwards, Dev Davison, and Amanda Hutchinson

Members' Absent

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 Employment First Council Vice Chair Jeff White provided an update on Project NEON, reporting that all five workgroups are actively meeting and making progress on their assigned initiatives.

Addressing the Impact of Wages on Benefits Workgroup

The Addressing the Impact of Wages on Benefits Workgroup continues developing Kentucky-specific benefits planning resources to assist benefits planners in supporting informed employment decisions. Completed modules include:

- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- Unemployment Insurance
- Workers' Compensation

Future work will focus on development of a Medicaid Buy-In module.

Established Data Collection Initiative

The statewide employment census conducted this spring established baseline employment data. Future data collection will transition from case managers to employment providers to improve the accuracy and reliability of employment reporting.

Key updates included:

- Two annual provider survey periods will be implemented, consisting of a two-week survey in the fall and a two-week survey in the spring.
- Survey results will be used to develop statistically representative employment data for the waiver population.
- Additional coordination with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) will occur once its case management system is operational to ensure employment data is integrated across systems and to reduce duplicate reporting.

1915(i) RISE Implementation Workgroup

1915(i) RISE Implementation Workgroup, led by Lori Norton, continues implementation planning. Annie Lawrence of the National Disability Institute (NDI) serves as the workgroup's Subject Matter Expert (SME), providing expertise on integrating new services. The team's initial initiative is to develop tools to improve stakeholders' understanding of how the funding process is coordinated.

Expanding Knowledge Base Workgroup

The Expanding Knowledge Base Workgroup, led by Carolyn Wheeler, continues developing educational resources and tools designed to increase the knowledge of case managers, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) counselors, providers, and other stakeholders regarding employment services and the Coordination of Funding process. Annie Lawrence also serves as the workgroup's Subject Matter Expert.

New Customized Employment Project Workgroup

Employment First Council Chair Katie Wolf Whaley provided an update on the Customized Employment Workgroup, reporting the successful completion of Kentucky's 25-week pilot customized employment training program, which combined online coursework, live instruction, mentoring, and practical application with individuals receiving services.

Based on participant feedback, training materials and documentation have been revised to better align with Kentucky's service delivery model while maintaining national customized employment standards. Project NEON subject matter experts will review the revised materials before being presented to OVR leadership. The next customized employment training cohort is anticipated to begin in January 2027.

State Employment Leadership Network (SELN) Update

Jeff White provided an update on Kentucky's participation in the State Employment Leadership Network (SELN), noting that the initiative is intended to strengthen provider capacity and expand competitive integrated employment opportunities across the Commonwealth through technical assistance and collaboration with partner states.

Employment census data presented included:

- 471 individuals participating in sheltered workshop settings, including 211 earning subminimum wages under 14(c)).
- 165 individuals earning at least minimum wages in enclave/group employment.
- 344 individuals receiving long-term supported employment services while maintaining competitive integrated employment.
- 478 individuals employed in competitive integrated employment without active provider supports.

It was also reported that 1,268 individuals are currently in the supported employment pipeline, including 173 individuals receiving person-centered job selection or job development services and 1,095 individuals who have expressed an interest in employment but are not currently receiving employment services.

Additional discussion focused on geographic distribution analysis needs, workforce shortages, provider recruitment and retention challenges, rural service delivery, administrative barriers, and potential strategies to strengthen Kentucky's supported employment system. Jeff noted that Kentucky's participation in SELN remains in the early stages and encouraged committee input as the initiative progresses.

Committee questions and answers:

Question: *A committee member asked whether employment goals are established through employment providers.*

Answer: It was explained that employment goals are developed through the person-centered planning process, with providers, case managers, and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) working collaboratively to support individuals in achieving competitive integrated employment goals.

Question: *A committee member asked whether the initiative was specific to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).*

Answer: It was clarified that the initiative is not limited to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and is intended to support a broader population served through Kentucky's employment service system.

Resources for Providers

Committee member Lisa Carrico provided an overview of technical assistance available through the Supported Employment Training Project (SETP), including:

- One-on-one provider support
- Job development assistance
- Documentation support
- Program management assistance
- Group trainings
- Annual supported employment informational sessions for day training programs
- Guidance on the Coordination of Funding process

Committee member Amanda Hutchinson highlighted Learning Management System (LMS) training opportunities, including the Employment Retention course, SETP 101 Refresher, Documentation and Descriptive Writing course, and customized training developed to meet provider needs.

Provider Webinar Update

Committee Chair Shelly Durbin reported that the Funding Sources Webinar is in the final stages of development. The webinar will include information regarding:

- Becoming an Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) vendor
- Waiver provider certification

- State general funds
- Individual Placement and Support (IPS)
- Ticket to Work revenue
- Partnerships with local school districts
- Development of private-pay fee schedules

The webinar is expected to be submitted to the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) for review, with a target completion date of October 2026.

2026 Annual Report Recommendations/Activities

KYOVR Administrator Nanci Howard provided an update on development of the 2026 Employment First Council Annual Report. She reported that the Executive Committee held its initial planning meeting on July 21, 2026, and is continuing to identify committee recommendations, activities, and accomplishments for inclusion in the report.

Committee members were encouraged to submit recommendations, activity updates, Presentations, supporting documents, and other relevant materials.

A draft of the annual report is expected to be presented to the full Council during the October quarterly meeting for review prior to submission to Cabinet Communications.

Public Comments

Employment First Council Chair Katie Wolf Whaley shared provider feedback regarding the new Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) Manual, noting that a provider requested clarification on language encouraging CRPs to diversify funding sources rather than rely solely on Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) funding.

Adjournment

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

Next meeting

September 08, 2026
2:00pm – 3:00pm (EST)