Employment First Steering Committee Agenda with Notes
November 16, 2026 at 2pm CT
https://kansas.zoom.us/j/85898033401?from=addon
Meeting ID: 858 9803 3401 Passcode: 1234

2:00 – 2:05pm – Welcome!

2:05 – 2:10pm – Introductions via Chat

- What is your role (provider, government, grant partner, self-advocate, family member, etc.) and organization you represent
- Chat will be saved and used for reference when compiling meeting notes

2:10 – 2:15pm – Kansas Employment First Phase 2 Project Recap, Evan Dean
Funded by KDADS, KUCD working alongside WISE and ICI
Building and expanding capacity for competitive integrated employment through mentorship, TA, data collection, Kansas ACRE 100
January 2026 to December 2026, 7 providers with 7 CIE job goals,

2:15 – 2:45pm – Kansas Employment First Project Highlight: Easter Seals Midwest

- Adam, Abbie, Clay, Marion
- Sharing outcomes and success stories along with experiences
- ESMW mission statement – Empower, Connect, Innovate, Advocate
    - Adding two additional counties to SE Kansas service
- Longstanding history of providing comprehensive employment services, including EF designation in MO
- Lots of growth in MO after 10 years experience, now adding KS to their service area
- Barriers in SE Kansas include rurality, new to area (1 year of team) – currently supporting 70 clients across KS and MO
    - Expanding further
- This project has been a reminder of ESMW priorities and philosophy. Valuable to evaluate through the entire organization as they serve the bi-state area and part of IL. Kansas has been more extensive process than with EF in MO.
- Regional Observations – Need for continuing education and greater standardization of VRC trainings
- Individualized services is ESMW approach, some challenges with KS VR waiting and creating bottleneck issues, roadblocks. Learning to navigate this system.

- More than just getting them a job, but increasing employment skills and confidence, big picture thinking of their full future employment
- Example of young employee with accommodation of adapted technology to serve and scoop ice cream!
- Partnering employers with ESMW, support those businesses as they support us
- Grassroots approach to building services and employer connections through KS

Group questions:

- Evan – Could you give us an example of how you aligned your philosophy and priorities with Employment First in Kansas?
    - The value of work, what it does for the individuals. Continuum of employment services starting with pre-employment, exploration, overcoming barriers including expectations and individual preferences
    - I don't know if it drastically changed how we interact with our board, but it was a reminder to hold employment high
    - Hoping to transition those they support in other services who have sheltered work as they have done in the past but have not during this project timeline.
    - Service definition is employment is CIE, have transitioned those out as challenging and changing attitudes of families and individuals. Often guardian-led decision into sheltered work.
- Craig – Any takeaways that your organization or staff came away with after going through Kansas ACRE 100?
    - Marion was able to get refreshed on job carving, a lot of tips brought to team on job carving, utilizing those tips. Job carve at least 1 job a month per ESP. Customized employment is becoming more secure for the indivduals, employers loving it. President of YMCA thanked ML for placing an individual with them in a "perfect placement."
    - Feedback for DCF and VR in Kansas – need to be some uniformity in training from office to office as far as the VRC. Oftentimes there's role reversal of teaching authorizations from provider to VRC.
        - Building partnership with VRCs has been amazing, talking about programs and authorizations that can be provided to be able to support the individuals with the best quality of service. Allowing vocational assessments, job carving.

Chat comments:

- Robyn - Love the mission moment stories!
- Craig - If Easter Seals Midwest would be interested in hosting Disability Mentoring Day event(s) in SE Kansas, please feel free to contact me craig.knutson2@ks.gov
- Evan - Love the use of adapted technology!!!
- Erin - I came in late. What is your coverage area in Kansas?
    - NEKS: Atchison, Douglas, Johnson, Leavenworth, Miami, Shawnee, and Wyandotte

SEKS: Cherokee, Crawford, Labette, Montgomery, Expanding to Bourbon County.

- Sherry - In working in MO & KS, are there barriers that exist in KS that you do not have in MO?
    - No intake meeting for all team members to determine best services for the individual then authorization when VR services. Getting authorization with minimal information then on ESMW to reach out and connect. Unlike in MO where there's an established, interagency intake meeting. That has been a barrier.
- Dan Decker - It would very interesting to me to know who of the VRCs (region/office) you have worked with that didn't understand some of the available services that can be provided. Also curious on how the timeline is working in terms of referral to authorizations. There are a bunch of questions around the "intake meeting". This isn't the process according to policy.
    - Adam, can pull and send details on VRC
    - Abbie, one of the barriers or cause is reality of the turnover of VRC position – some are learning alongside us
    - Timeline – ESMW sends referral and often authorization at the same time. ESMW signs to say yes to work with individual. Now ESMW expectation to make first point of contact. Initially emailing/contacting referral, asking them to mail or email. Getting lost. Now setting up initial meeting, bringing consent packets.
- Erin Sanders-Hahs - Are you open to partnering with KS State agencies beyond VR?
    - The more partners in the community, the more likely we will all get successful outcomes for the folks we support.
- Sherry - Are you considering moving farther West, such as Sedgwick County?
    - Looking at office spaces in two regions – NE Kansas and Pittsburg, KS
    - Olathe, KS space in pending, hoping next calendar year to grow there

2:45 – 3:15pm – Grant Partner Updates

- Robyn from Wise
    - Cohort sessions – cultural change/ everyone is job developer, CIE strategic planning/sustainability after project, informed choice
    - Remaining – celebration, share your big wins
    - 8 from 14(c) into CIE, 6 from Tier 1 support level
    - Total of 60 CIE jobs so far, goal was 49 total!
    - More organizations transitioning from 14(c) to CIE in this phase, more organizational change needed in this phase of the project. Takes a different timeframe, more factors that play into these outcomes
        - A lot of growth for Phase 1 providers after the 12 month mark, it takes time to make big changes
    - Update line graph with legend, color updates if able

- Allison from ICI
    - Data collection
        - John Shepard, Jean Winsor managing data collection piece for ICI
        - John provided updates – October data collection is underway. Two providers have provided data entry. Reporting deadline is 12/15 for this period. We have updated the data display page that can be shared with the Steering Committee – not available yet for public share (Allison shared link with the group, will not put into notes until public share – message Hannah (ksemployment1st@ku.edu if need link)
        - Next meeting, John can walk everyone through this page to share data in Kansas
    - Employment First Leadership team – representatives from the state agencies that support EF. Meet monthly, report to governor's sub-cabinet on employment and disability.
        - Working groups starting to get underway
        - Developing a data dashboard with folks from each state agency to present a snapshot of data from each of the state agencies. Workign with Lisa Mills as part of the NEON group.
        - Funding working group as well
- Doug and Hannah from KUCD
    - Doug – Training and TA Center, Kansas ACRE 100
        - Cohort 3 through December 2026, current enrollment 29
            - Time comment
            - Job turnover/change
            - Kansas Works Workforce Centers – 13 individuals in current cohort, 3 benefits planners. Awesome to see their involvement.
        - Registration for January 2027 course begins today 11/16
        - Shared provider occupations for who is getting these trainings
        - Shared map that shows all counties except 10 (ESMW serves Atchison) – big impact statewide, in contact with Brown County Kansas, US — Counties — Ultimaps
    - Hannah – Dissemination – sharing employment success stories on FB
    - Bryan/Liz – Sharing success stories is much needed!
        - Sharing Employer success stories
        - See themselves in these success stories
        - Dispelling myths, sharing what can be done
        - Share the good stuff, share thanks to those working with people with disabilities – also utilize peer pressure – good for the company

3:15 – 3:45pm – Questions and discussion from Steering Committee

- Tammy T – Great advice on directions in rural KS
    - ESP with Healthy Blue – covers all of Kansas, also a rural focus – how to get services to rural areas in Kansas
    - Really tiny towns in small counties.
        - Who to refer the members to?
        - What resources can I share?
    - Spoken with Abbie from Easter Seals MW
    - Any advice? Transportation?
        - Bryan Wilson – What's my circle around me? Hour and half? Everyone goes to town for something. What's my next best close option?
            - Worried about those areas losing their assets, valuation decreasing. Southeast and Southwest. Those leaving the areas for more/higher opportunity areas
        - Liz – shadow those from VR counselors, benefits planners from KDHE to learn a lot about rural
        - Robyn – the few businesses that are there, talk to those business leaders about their vendors, supply chain, businesses behind the business
            - Side hustles that need somebody

3:45 – 3:50pm – 2027 Proposed Meetings

- Second Wednesday of the month, quarterly
    - Wednesday February 10, 2027 at 2pm CT
    - Wednesday May 12, 2027 at 2pm CT

Link to Steering Committee materials:

Employment First Steering Committee | Kansas University Center on Disabilities

If you have any questions, please email ksemployment1st@ku.edu