South Carolina Commission for the Blind  
1430 Confederate Avenue  
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Meeting Minutes  
December 15, 2020

Notifications of all regular, called, or special meetings are compliant with the FOIA requirements, Section 90-4-80.

Call to Order

Chairperson Johnson called the meeting to order at 1:32 pm.

Present

Dr. Judy Johnson, Chairperson, via Zoom  
Peter Smith, Vice Chairperson, via Zoom  
Mary Sonksen, Secretary, via Zoom  
Catherine Olker, via Zoom  
Susan John, via Zoom  
Darline Graham, Commissioner, via Zoom

Adoption of Agenda

Chairperson Johnson made a motion to accept the December 15, 2020 Agenda. It was seconded. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment

None.

Introduction of New Board Members

Catherine Olker, Third Congressional District.  
Susan John, Seventh Congressional District.

Approval of Minutes

Chairperson Johnson made a motion to accept the November 17, October 20, September 15, August 18, July 21, and June 16 minutes. It was seconded. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

Finance Report

Matt Daugherty reported:

* The agency had utilized 40.27% of the State fiscal year budget.
* Administration had utilized 43.5% of its budget.
* Rehabilitation Services had utilized 78.55% of its budget, which included contracts for the entire year.
  + Region I had utilized 34% of its budget.
  + Region II had utilized 44% of its budget.
  + Region III had utilized 40% of its budget.
  + Ellen Beach Mack Rehabilitation Center for Employment and Independence had utilized 24% of its budget.
* Prevention had utilized 6% of its budget.
* Older Blind had utilized 34.5% of its budget.
* Children’s Services had utilized 40% of its budget.
* Business Enterprise Program (BEP) had utilized 43% of its budget.
* Training and Employment had utilized 36% of its budget.
* The 2019 Federal Grants had been closed out.
* Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) had met the 2019 Grant and 64.67% of the 2020 Grant had been utilized.

**Human Resources Report**

Wanda Miller Reported:

* A bonus for recruiting and referral continued to be offered to agency staff.
* A contingent offer process had been put in place to allow supervisors to offer a job after interviewing a candidate and after provisional approval following a conference with the Commissioner.
* A virtual on-boarding platform had been designed to enhance recruiting and the orientation process. The process was accessible though NEOGOV, an application system for processing candidates. An Accessible Landing page had been developed to enable the agency to connect and communicate with new hires early in the hiring process. These measures would allow:
  + Accelerating on-boarding process.
  + Assigning tasks and tracking completion of tasks.
  + Reinforcing important agency information.
  + Showcasing the agency’s culture.
  + Scheduling follow-up meetings to measure engagement and address any concerns up to 120 days of employment.
  + The future addition of training modules.
* Caseload Technician position descriptions had been revised.

**Commissioner’s Report**

Darline Graham reported:

* 2020 had included the 100th Anniversary of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program, the 30th Anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the 75th Anniversary of the National Disability Employment Awareness.
* In January, the National Federation for the Blind annual legislative breakfast had been held.
* In February, the South Carolina Commission for the Blind (SCCB) had partnered with the South Carolina School for the Deaf and Blind to hold the 2020 Braille Challenge.
* In March, SCCB had worked with the Blind Licensed Vendors (BLV) to host the annual Business Enterprise Program Licensed Vendors conference.
* In March, the annual Vision Summit, hosted by the South Carolina Vision Partnership, had been held. SCCB was one of four founding partners of the Education Partnership.
* The Commissioner and several Senior Managers had attended regional meetings in Greenville, Charleston and Rock Hill.
* In March, SCCB had formed a task force to implement a telework plan due to COVID-19. The team developed a telework policy, a training resource page, and distributed laptops and cell pones to most agency employees.
* In April, teleworking had been fully implemented, ensuring consumers would continue to receive quality services.
* The Communications Department and Safety Team members had developed a Safe Return Plan.
* During April and May, the agency had the State Fiscal Year 2018 Statewide Single Audit.
* A virtual meeting with the Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC) had been held to assist the agency in making improvements and updates to policies and procedures and the development of training for staff.
* In May the agency had held its first ever Virtual Employee Appreciation Celebration.
* In June, the agency had received personal protective equipment (PPE) in preparation for Phase 2. Phase 2 encouraged agencies to bring more employees back to the workforce on a rotational basis.
* In June, the agency had met with Alliance to explore new AWARE modules that could assist with the Business Enterprise Program and Quality Assurance.
* SCCB was one of 10 agencies chosen by George Washington University to participate in Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) 101 Training. The online, self-paced training focused on core components and practices of the rehabilitation process, emphasizing key changes passed under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). The agency will have access to these resources until June of 2022, for staff development.
* From June 8 to July 31, the agency had held a Virtual Summer Teen program through a partnership with Successful Transitions.
* In June and July, the agency had completed the State Fiscal Year 2018 Agreed Upon Procedures audit.
* In July, the agency had entered Phase 2 of the Safe Return Plan and a checkpoint had been developed to ensure everyone’s safe return.
* The number of virtual workshops for consumers had been increased from one per week to three times per week to ensure quality services continued to be provided and consumers remained engaged.
* Face-to-face services had been provided when needed.
* In August, the agency had submitted the State Plan. The SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats), had been utilized to develop the agency’s Strategic Plan and to complete the Accountability Report which was submitted in September.
* The Older Blind Program had hosted two virtual Senior Camps.
* In September, the agency had begun meeting three times per week, at least two hours per day, with the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) for the Monitoring and Technical Assistance Review. The monitoring process concluded on November 2, 2020, with a total of 17 sessions over 34 hours. The resulting report would be used to help develop a corrective action plan, make programmatic improvements, and build on the agency’s Strategic Plan.
* In October, the agency had held a virtual open house attended by more than 100 individuals. Along with the South Carolina General Rehabilitation Department, the agency had participated in a National Showcase hosted by Mark Schultz, RSA Commissioner and acting Assistant Secretary for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. The showcase allowed the agency to highlight the BRIDGE program, Virtual Summer Teen and Senior camps, and the Ellen Beach Mack Rehabilitation Center for Employment and Independence workshops.
* The agency had presented requests at the Executive Budget Hearing, which included salary adjustments, capital projects, Prevention Services and Older Blind Services.
* In November, the agency had submitted the RSA 425 and 911 reports, made upgrades to the Case Management System (AWARE), and conducted the State Fiscal Year 2019 Single Statewide Audit.
* In November, the BRIDGE program had recognized four consumers who successfully completed the pre-apprenticeship program.
* Several senior managers and staff had participated in the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) Fall Virtual Conference, during which they received information on virtual service delivery, diversity and inclusion, agency measures, and many other helpful topics.
* The Diversity and Inclusion committee had met and discussed how the agency could create a more diverse and inclusion environment. The agency’s goal was to become a leader in diversity and inclusion.
* The Commissioner, several Senior Managers and other supervisors had attended an on-site four-day Supervisory Training hosted by State Human Resources. Topics covered had included interviewing, performance reviews, and disciplinary actions.
* The Quality Assurance Director had met with Regional Directors to review compliance reports.
* Over the past year, substantial progress had been made in re-building the agency’s Finance department. Positions filled included an Operations Director, Grants Budget Manager, Grants Budget Accountant, and Accounts Payable Supervisor. This would allow the agency to bring financial services back in-house from the Department of Administration. The agency had been working to ensure all contracts and agreements were up to date and in compliance, including lease agreements.
* A welcome had been extended to the two new Board members.

**Children’s Services, Older Blind Program, Prevention of Blindness and Low Vision Clinic**

Rhonda Thompson reported:

* The 2021 Braille Challenge would take place virtually.
* Children’s Services had increased referral sources and further developed partnerships with Vision Instructors.
  + The agency had been planning the next workshop for children and parents in collaboration with the National Federation of the Blind’s (NFB) Successful Transitions.
  + The Winter edition of the Children’s Services newsletter had been developed.
* The Older Blind Program had served nearly 550 consumers in the Federal fiscal year.
* Two virtual camps for older blind consumers had been offered, one in the Spring and one in the Fall.
* A Prevention of Blindness Coordinator had been hired.
* Planning had begun to offer limited Low Vision Clinic (LVC) services in January 2021, with two Low Vision Specialists assisting twice each month at the Columbia location. Work with the community Low Vision Specialist would also continue.
* The LVC Coordinator, along with Dr. Bill Oliver, had provided two virtual workshops on anatomy of the eye and low vision devices.

Diversity and Inclusion, and Recruitment

Luis Mendoza reported:

* The Diversity and Inclusion committee aimed to establish an inclusive environment where, regardless of differences, everyone would feel appreciated and respected, fulfill their potential, and help the agency achieve its goals. The committee had drafted a definition of diversity and inclusion, a vision statement, and set goals for the future. The committee defined diversity and inclusion as “recognizing individual differences while valuing everyone’s contributions and ideas to build a collaborative workforce.”

Roll Call of Participants

Mark Gamble reported:

* 68 participants were present.

Old Business

None.

New Business

None.

Public Comment

Contact information for Board Members was requested.

Adjournment

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned at 2:25 pm. by Chairperson Johnson. A motion was made to adjourn, seconded and unanimously passed.

Future Board Meeting Schedule

January 19, 2021  
February 16, 2021  
March 16, 2021

Signatures

Dr. Judy Johnson, Chairperson

Mary Sonksen, Secretary

Date