South Carolina Commission for the Blind

1430 Confederate Avenue  
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Meeting Minutes   
February 22, 2022

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 11:00 am. The meeting was conducted in person and via Zoom Meeting software.

Present  
  
Dr. Judy Johnson, Chairperson  
Peter Smith, Vice Chairperson  
Mary Sonksen, Secretary   
Susan John  
Cathy Olker  
Darline Graham, Commissioner  
  
Adoption of Agenda

Cathy Olker made a motion to accept the February 22, 2022 Agenda. It was seconded by Mary Sonksen. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment

Mr. Thomas Hodge shared his experiences with SCCB. Mr. Hodge is currently pursuing a master’s degree from Coastal Carolina University and looking to achieve more degrees. Mr. Hodge stated that SCCB has always been there to provide resources that were needed and very much appreciated, with minimum out-of-pocket expenses. He thanked Commissioner Graham, Susan John, and Kelly Jochim.

Approval of Minutes

Susan John made a motion to approve the January 25, 2022 minutes. It was seconded by Mary Sonksen. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

Commissioner’s Report

Darline Graham reported:

The agency held the quarterly data dashboard meeting with the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) to review agency performance data that goes back to Program Year 2020. The data includes education, measurable skills gain, pre-employment transition services, employment outcomes, and more. These meetings allow the agency and RSA to identify areas of strength and areas needing improvement. The agency also reviewed its current 911 report data, which RSA uses to create the data dashboards. The in-depth internal review of eligibility determination, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act performance measures, VR program expenditures, and more allows the agency to check for accuracy and identify strengths and areas for improvement prior to submission to RSA.

The Commissioner spoke to the House Judiciary Sub Committee about Bill S 430 which will allow Commission Board meetings to be held when needed, whether it be monthly, bi-monthly, or quarterly. S 430 was approved by the House Judiciary subcommittee and will be heard by the full Judiciary committee.

Ryan Skinner, Business Services Director, is working with Elaine Robertson and other staff to make sure the agency’s BEP training and vacant stand bid selection process are streamlined while following regulations that are specific to both.

The agency’s Senate Budget hearing will be scheduled in March. The agency is requesting $466,000 in recurring funds for the Prevention of Blindness program and $127,000 in recurring funds for Children’s services.

An in-person strategic planning meeting was held with Senior Managers, Regional Directors, and Program Leads. Everyone agreed that the restructuring plan has helped build a more cohesive team with improved service delivery. The team noted that the intranet is a helpful internal communication tool but would like more information to be available on it. The team plans to meet next month to continue working on the strategic plan.

Finance Report

Matt Daugherty reported:

State Budget - The agency is 58% through the State Fiscal Year. Vocational Rehabilitation has utilized 38% of the budget, the Training Center 50%, Transition Services 57%, the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) 62% (due to equipment orders and purchases), Prevention of Blindness 23%, Older Blind 59%, Children’s Services 61%, and Administration 62%. Agency spending is on track at 54%.

Federal Grants - The 2020 Grant has been closed out. 31% of the 2021 Grant has been spent, but due to COVID will take time to level out. The agency is in the carry-over year for the 2021 Federal grant and 63% of the way through the total Period of Performance. The Vocational Rehabilitation grant is currently 31% expended, the Pre-Employment Transition Services portion of the grant is 99% expended, the Older Blind grant is 88% expended, and the Supported Employment grants are 2% expended.

Capital Improvement Projects - The Campus Handrails project is in the construction phase and will be completed next week. The Dennis Canteen and Wade Hampton Canteen are in the initial design phase. Design ideas for renovations in Building A are in the review process. The HVAC Replacement and interior lighting project has been held up partially because of funding and ability to get the equipment. Pre-construction should begin July 15, 2022. Before the project can move forward, the Treasurer’s Office must determine how funding can be moved between SCCB and the Department of Administration (DOA) since DOA is doing the construction. The window security project is in the review process.

Human Resources Report

Luis Mendoza reported:

An Administrative Assistant for the Columbia office was hired in January. The Region 1 and Region 4 Director positions were filled on February 2, 2022. There are four counselor positions and two Administrative Assistant vacancies plus four vacancies at the Training Center.

Luis Mendoza and Brandi Brooks visited Louisiana Tech University and met with students and faculty to discuss SCCB’s mission and job opportunities. They also visited the Louisiana Center for the Blind and met with the Executive Director and consumers to discuss the Orientation and Mobility apprenticeship program. The agency’s need for Orientation and Mobility Instructors was also discussed. Plans were made to continue conversations with consumers who would soon graduate from the program.

Mr. Mendoza and Ms. Brooks also attended the Veterans Career Fair, a Health Fair, and a career fair at the University of South Carolina. Information was shared about the internship program that the agency will host in the summer.

The agency began using Wonderlic, an assessment program to measure cognitive ability, motivation, and personality. Assessments are tailored to job positions and will assist in determining suitability for positions. The tool will also help hiring managers determine the best candidate for a position.

Program Services Update

Karma Marshall reported:

The agency is implementing Phase 2 of our safe return policy by doubling capacity in the residential facility to two consumers per suite. Consumers will still be one to a room but will share a bathroom. One barrier to increasing capacity has been the number of consumers on the waiting list for the Functional Assessment. The Functional Assessment is a prerequisite for consumer participation in the Adjustment to Blindness program. Consumers participate in one week of classes to allow each instructor to assess the need for each service/class and the projected level of functioning. If recommended by the instructors, the consumer begins the Adjustment to Blindness program immediately following the Functional Assessment.

Commissioner Graham, Karma Marshall, and Jenny Bond met with Dr. William Oliver, Low Vision Clinician, to discuss ways to improve consumer experiences with the Low Vision Clinic.

Transition counselors, the VR Program lead and Regional Directors will attend the annual Vision Summit on March 4. The Vision Summit is an opportunity for SCCB to participate in a conference that directly addresses education of blind and low vision students in the state and allows staff to meet and network with Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVIs).

SCCB will bring the Summer Teen program back to the Columbia campus. In 2020 the program was held virtually and in 2021 services were provided by Successful Transitions. SCCB appreciates the work that Successful Transitions did with the virtual program during the pandemic. This year, Successful Transitions will assist in providing programming and pre-employment transitions services. Dr. Thomas Madura and his STEM Career Exploration Lab will return for this year’s program. SCCB was part of the pilot programs for the STEM Career Exploration Lab in 2017 and 2018, which supports teen interest in STEM fields and explores science through tactile learning experiences. Commissioner Graham, Niki Outen and Karma Marshall met with Dr. Madura and learned that the program has expanded to include opportunities for TVIs to participate in a workshop in March at the Washington State School for the Blind. Selected South Carolina TVIs will learn how to replicate aspects of the program with students throughout the state to ensure the program continues to grow. The tentative dates for Summer Teen are June 6 through July 1, 2022.

Communications Update

Mark Gamble reported:  
  
The Intranet, an internal communications resource and information hub for staff, continues to see increased use. It provides success stories, resources, benefit information, updates on programs and procedures, downloadable PowerPoint trainings and support documents, information about new hires and retirements, and a staff directory.

After discussing revisions to the agency website with staff who use assistive technology to access the site, the recommendation was made to start from scratch and develop a new site that follows modern best practices and web standards and that is fully accessible. Mr. Gamble is exploring commercial options such as using Squarespace or Wix, that offer easy to use tools for building and maintaining websites, as well as NIC South Carolina, which provides web development and other services to state and local government agencies.

**Old Business**

The Agency has received and distributed all COVID tests provided by SC DHEC. More are expected to be provided when available.

**New Business**

None

**Public Comment**

None

**Future Board Meeting Schedule**

March 22, 2022  
April 26, 2022  
May 24, 2022  
  
The meetings will be held in-person and via Zoom Meeting Software at 11:00 am in the Building D conference room.

Adjournment

There being no further business, Chairperson Johnson called for a motion to adjourn at 12:24 pm. A motion was made by Susan John and seconded by Mary Sonksen. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

Signatures

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Dr. Judy Johnson, Chairperson  
  
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Mary Sonksen, Secretary  
  
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