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

Meeting Minutes
June 22, 2021

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 1:30 pm. The meeting was conducted via Zoom Meeting software.

Present

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

Adoption of Agenda

Cathy Olker made a motion to accept the June 22, 2021 Agenda. It was seconded by Susan John. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment

None.

Approval of Minutes

Susan John made a motion to accept May 18, 2021 minutes. It was seconded by Mary Sonksen. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

Finance Report

Matt Daugherty reported:

* The agency utilized 92% of the state fiscal year budget.
* Administration utilized 87% of its budget.
* Rehabilitation Services utilized 93% of its budget.
* Region I utilized 79% of its budget.
* Region II utilized 99% of its budget.
* Region III utilized 89% of its budget.
* Business Enterprise Program (BEP) utilized 86% of its budget.
* The Training Center utilized 48% of its budget.
* Prevention of Blindness utilized 17% of its budget.
* Older Blind utilized 76% of its budget.
* Children’s Services utilized 85% of its budget.
* Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) utilized 94% of the required 15% for the 2020 grant.
* 100% of the Independent Living for Older Blind grant for 2020 had been utilized.
* The agency utilized 50% of the 2020 Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) grant, which included receipt of a $1 million re-allotment.
* The CARES Re-Imbursement for the agency was completed and would be shifting over to the Federal Financial Relief and Restoration payments for the Blind Licensed Vendors (BLVs).
* The State would allow agencies to carry forward 10% of the 2020 budget after meeting certain criteria.

A motion was made by Mary Sonksen to approve the financial report and seconded by Susan John. No discussion. The motion passed

**Human Resources Report**

Luis Mendoza reported:

* Four Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) positions remained opened, with offers being made.
	+ Selections for Conway and Charleston were made.
	+ The Charleston VRC will start in August due to the need to relocate.
	+ A vocational evaluator was scheduled to begin July 2, 2021.
* The custodial position at the Training Center was filled on June 17, 2021.
* The vacant position for training coordinator remains open.
	+ The vacant position for recreation specialist remains open.
	+ The Mental Health Counselor and Woodshop instructor positions remains open.
	+ The vacant O&M and nursing assistant positions will be advertised.
	+ The Region IV Director position is pending State Office of Human Resources approval.

Commissioner’s Report

Darline Graham reported:

* The Commissioner thanked several of the Board Commissioners for touring the SCCB campus on June 7, 2021.
* The Commissioner continued to communicate with the Governor’s office to seek appropriate candidates for the two remaining Board vacancies. Two vacancies were filled, and two Board Commissioners had been reconfirmed.
* Progress was being made to reopen the Training Center residential facility. A professional cleaning crew cleaned and disinfected rooms and bathrooms. New linens, refrigerators, washers, and dryers will be provided. The kitchen will be cleaned, disinfected and new equipment ordered prior to consumers returning.
* Several meetings, including the Quarterly Data Dashboard meeting, were held with the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) to review the agency’s data regarding Education and Training, Measurable Skills Gains, Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) and Exit data. Also, technical assistance on establishment projects and the prior approval process was received from RSA.
* Several team members worked on the Corrective Action Plan in response to the RSA Monitoring report. The plan addressed issues pertaining to the performance of Vocational Rehabilitation and Supported Employment services, and Financial Management, and was submitted on June 10, 2021. The Monitoring Report was confirmation that the agency was making progress.
* The House and Senate reached an agreement on the state budget, and it was submitted to the Governor. The final budget would be completed next week. The agency’s budget request included several recurring items and one capital request.
* The Commissioner attended the Quarterly Midlands Workforce Development Board meeting. Topics discussed included unemployment claims and businesses workforce needs.
* The Commissioner, Karma Marshall, and Kisa Grate met virtually with the VR Technical Assistance Center for Quality Employment located in Wisconsin. The opportunity was provided through a grant from the Department of Education and RSA. Training will be provided to staff through this partnership.
* The Commissioner attended the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation’s (CSAVR) Region IV Directors meeting. Several Southeastern states shared challenges, information, and best practices:
	+ Issues affecting service provision by telework, due to the pandemic.
	+ Decrease in referrals due to the pandemic.
	+ The spending of federal grant dollars since most organizations operated virtually for almost a year.
	+ The state directors were encouraged to reach out to the Deputy Director of the CSAVR who was preparing information to present to congressional members which would provide assistance for all VR programs across the nation to address challenges in spending due to the pandemic.
* Travel limitations for agencies were lifted, allowing travel to district offices to resume. The Commissioner would be visiting the offices previously not recognized for Employee Appreciation.
* This was the 13th year that college students and recent graduates would participate in the Student Internship Program (SIP), which offered them the opportunity to network and gain employment knowledge through an in-depth, hands on practical work experience. Program participants would intern at the following locations:
	+ ABC Academy in Saluda
	+ Richland County Public Defender’s Office
	+ Freeway Music in Columbia
	+ The Courage Center in Columbia
	+ The South Carolina Commission for the Blind
* Two consumers in the Building Readiness for Individualized Development of Gainful Employment (BRIDGE) program accepted employment as Call Center Customer Service Representatives and a third was scheduled for a second interview.
* The Summer Teen program began on June 21, 2021. Successful Transitions of the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) was instrumental in planning and operating the camp. The first week would be virtual and in-person events would begin on June 28.
* Children’s Camp, for ages 12 and under, hosted by NFB of SC, will be held June 26 – July 1, at Rocky Bottom Retreat and Conference Center of the Blind in Pickens County.
* A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed with the SC Commission for Minority Affairs was already proving to be beneficial:
	+ The agency’s Communications Director developed a one-page flyer providing information about SCCB services, and the Commission for Minority Affairs translated it into Spanish.
* The agency worked with the Department on Aging, DHEC, the NFB and other groups to host several helpful community events.
* Neil Dorsey retired after serving as a Braille Instructor. He was employed with the state of South Carolina for 35 years with 28 years being with SCCB and was thanked for his dedication and hard work to the state of South Carolina and SCCB consumers.
* Ten new employees and interns were welcomed to the agency with an in-person new employee orientation.

Communications Update

Mark Gamble reported:

* An individual could contact the agency with questions, suggestions, or concerns through the website or e-mail:
	+ On the website they could click the “Contact Us” link on any page, complete a short form, and submit it. A response would be sent within 24-48 hours.
	+ An email could be sent directly to publicinfo@sccb.sc.gov.
* A frequently asked questions page to address some of the most common questions relating to agency services will be added to the website.
* Under the Vocational Rehabilitation section, two PowerPoint trainings were added, along with corresponding desk references. Additional documents would be added as they were created. Under the Communications section, letterhead and memorandum templates were available for all offices.
* The staff directory continued to be a convenient way to locate phone numbers, offices, and job titles. New employees were added in a timely manner to ensure the information was always current.
* Two special vaccine clinics for individuals who are blind or have visual impairments were planned. The first clinic was held June 10, 2021, at the National Federation of the Blind in Columbia, and the second one will be held on Thursday, June 24, 2021, at the Association for the Blind in Ladson. The clinics resulted from a partnership between the Department on Aging, Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC), the National Federation of the Blind of South Carolina, the Trident area Agency on Aging, the Association for the Blind, and the South Carolina Commission for the Blind (SCCB). Information about the clinics was on the Intranet and the SCCB website.
* Kelli McAlhany joined SCCB as a summer intern working in the Communications Department. Kelly will assist in covering events such as Children’s camp, the Summer Teen Program, and the Student Internship Program. Stories from the events will be posted on the Intranet and website.
* The Communications Director and the Human Resources Interim Director worked with the University of South Carolina to have common intake forms translated into Spanish and converted into accessible PDFs.
* The Department on Aging reached out to SCCB to be a part of a grant opportunity that would provide support and resources related to COVID-19 vaccines and would primarily focus on access for seniors with disabilities.

Ombudsman Update

Mike Daniels reported:

* The role of the Ombudsman was to investigate concerns and complaints lodged by consumers. These will be documented in the agency’s case management system. After review, there will be a follow-up with the VRC and regional director to develop a plan to address and resolve the concerns.
* A consumer satisfaction survey was implemented:
	+ VR services received an 82% satisfaction rate for state fiscal year 2021.
	+ Older Blind (OB) services received a 100% satisfaction rate for the third quarter of state fiscal year 2021.
	+ The number of participants were 1,190 for VR, 406 for OB, 95 for Children’s Services (CS), and 22 for Prevention of Blindness.
	+ BRIDGE program participants were used to help increase the response rate.
	+ VRCs were complemented for providing services in a timely manner.
	+ When survey results indicated additional services were needed, this information was provided to the appropriate VRC.
* Challenges identified included:
	+ Managing consumer expectations.
	+ The Client Assistance Program (CAP) will be discussed with consumers who feel they are not receiving adequate services.
	+ The Ombudsman was working with CAP and the VR General Agency to collaborate and utilize best practices to ensure SCCB provides quality services in a timely manner.
* SCCB will attend a collaborative training session entitled “Cap and VR Moving Forward Together”.

VR Program Update

Felisa Massey reported:

* The agency will receive Intensive Technical Assistance from the Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center for Quality Employment (VRTAC-QE). This would be funded through a grant from the US Department of Education/RSA. Technical support and training would be appropriate for SCCB staff.
	+ Trainings will include Job Coaching, Outreach to Employers, Customized Training, and Self-Employment.
	+ Technical assistance will include plans for improving outreach services to South Carolina’s Hispanic population, and customized labor market information.
* The Summer Teen 2021 in-person sessions will be limited in attendance and conducted following all CDC guidelines. Twelve consumers will participate in Work Readiness and Independent Training conducted at the NFB’s Federation Center and eight consumers will participate in Work-Based Learning paid internships.
	+ Internships will be held at:
		- EdVenture Children’ Museum
		- Carolina Wildlife Center
		- SC State Library
		- YMCA.
* LaQuante Williams was welcomed as the new VR Transition Counselor serving the Upstate area and located at the South Carolina School for the Deaf and Blind in Spartanburg.

Old Business

None

New Business

None

Public Comment

* The following questions/comments were made:
	+ Should consumers with open cases be included in the Quality Assurance survey process and would this allow the agency to make sure all consumer needs are met in a timely manner during the VR process?
	+ Was the money recently sent to the Treasury Department money that was subsequent to the $2,300.00 received prior to the federal funds?
	+ What was the outcome of the Board members tour of the Training Center?
	+ Were any of the ten new employees that were hired blind?
	+ Are there any state and federal regulations that require a percentage of blind individuals be employed at the agency?
	+ What is the percentage of blind employees at the agency?
	+ Why is the Board mandated to have blind individuals serve but there is no mandate for the agency to hire a certain percentage of blind or visually impaired individuals?

Executive Session

Chairperson Johnson called for a motion to go into Executive Session to discuss a personnel matter. A motion was made by Susan John and seconded by Cathy Olker.

Chairperson Johnson reported that no action was taken during Executive Session.

Adjournment

There being no further business, Chairperson Johnson called for a motion to adjourn at 3:20 pm. A motion was made by Vice Chairperson Smith and seconded by Secretary Sonksen. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

Future Board Meeting Schedule

July 21, 2021
The meeting will be held in-person and via Zoom beginning at 11:00 am.

Signatures

Dr. Judy Johnson, Chairperson

Mary Sonksen, Secretary

Date