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

Meeting Minutes
April 20, 2021

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

Call to Order

Vice Chairperson Smith called the meeting to order at 1:31 pm. The meeting was conducted via Zoom Meeting software.

Present

Peter Smith, Vice Chairperson
Mary Sonksen, Secretary
Catherine Olker
Susan John
Darline Graham, Commissioner

Adoption of Agenda

Secretary Sonksen made a motion to accept the April 20, 2021 Agenda. It was seconded by Catherine Olker. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment

None.

Approval of Minutes

Susan John made a motion to accept March 16, 2021 minutes. It was seconded by Catherine Olker. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

Finance Report

Matt Daugherty reported:

* The agency had utilized 67% of the state fiscal year budget.
* Administration had utilized 73% of its budget.
* Rehabilitation Services had utilized 90% of its budget.
* Region I had utilized 67% of its budget.
* Region II had utilized 82% of its budget.
* Region III had utilized 72% of its budget.
* The Rehab Center had utilized 40% of its budget. The amount was low due to the closure of the Center during the pandemic.
* Prevention of Blindness had utilized 13% of its budget.
* Older Blind had utilized 61% of its budget.
* Children’s Services had utilized 70% of its budget.
* Business Enterprise Program (BEP) had utilized 72% of its budget.
* Training and Employment had utilized 63% of its budget.
* Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) had utilized 91% of the required 15% for the 2020 grant.
* 97% of the Independent Living for Older Blind grant had been utilized.
* Spending against the Supported Employment grant was showing progress.
* The agency had utilized 40% of the 2020 Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) grant, which included receipt of a $1 million re-allotment.

Facilities & Operations Report

Matt Daugherty reported:

* A new position had been created for a procurement manager and would be posted soon.
* The accounts payable supervisor position would be filled soon.
* The Florence District Office had moved to a new location.
* The Conway District Office would move to a new location by the end of May.
* The Rehab Center dormitory would be ready for residential consumers by the end of May or the first of June.
* The Board Room would be ready for in-person meetings for the May 18 meeting.
* Other projects included a new generator and new lighting around the campus to ensure safety of consumers and staff.
* The IT Department had been updating phones, internet systems and digital faxing, and was continuing to issue laptops for staff.

**Human Resources Report**

Wanda Miller reported:

* Changes to the Human Resources (HR) reports that were requested in the previous meeting had been completed.
* The Caseload Technician position name had been changed to Administrative Assistant. All Administrative Assistant positions had been filled.
* The Rehab Center position titles would be different moving forward.
* Training and Employment (T&E) and the Rehab Center had been merged into one program. Recruitment and re-classification of vacant positions would continue.
* Reclassification could take 3 days or longer depending on position and specific information needed pertaining to duties and responsibility.
* Commissioner Graham would discuss the concerns about vacancies at the Rehab Center during Executive Session.

Commissioner’s Report

Darline Graham reported:

* All staff had returned to the office per the guidance provided by the Governor and State Human Resources. A few exceptions had been made to address COVID-19 quarantine and other serious circumstances.
* A meeting with the South Carolina Commission for Minority Affairs had been held. The agency signed a MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) to strengthen the partnership and allow both agencies to work together to provide information regarding agency services when conducting outreach in South Carolina’s minority communities.
* The agency’s Intranet had been implemented. The purpose of the Intranet was to improve internal communication by having a central location for recent announcements, forms, documents, a staff directory, and other helpful resources.
* On March 24, Commissioner Graham attended the State Workforce Development Board meeting. A presentation was made by Dr. Laura Ullrich about the South Carolina Economic Outlook and focused on the impact the pandemic had on South Carolina’s businesses and economy.
* Kisa Grate’s role had expanded to include the supervision of the Rehab Center. Several meetings had been held to discuss how to safely reopen the center. Arrangements had been made for a through cleaning, repairs, replacement of linens and mattresses, and ordering new furniture in preparation for consumers to return.
* A limited number of residential consumers would return later in the spring. The agency would begin with a small group to ensure a safe reopening.
* Jennifer Bazer, President of the National Federation of the Blind and Successful Transitions, had been working with agency staff to plan this year’s Summer Teen Program, which would begin the week of June 21. Two tracks would be offered, one that would prepare students for future internships and the second that would provide students with an internship experience. The summer program would combine virtual learning and face-to-face activities. Activities would be designed to provide students with skills or knowledge in self advocacy, critical soft-skills, confidence-building, and post-secondary exploration. The first week of the summer program would be virtual for both tracks. Weeks two through five would be held during the day at various locations in the Columbia area. Week six would be a graduation retreat held at Rocky Bottom Retreat and Conference Center in Pickens County. Ms. Bazer had stated that there would be a limited number of participants this year and that all Center for Disease Control (CDC) and American Camp Association guidelines for COVID-19 would be followed to ensure the safety of staff and students.
* Several members of the Senior Management team had attended the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation’s (CSAVR) semiannual conference. The Spring conference offered information including national legislative updates and how to leverage business partnerships with State Workforce Development Boards.
* On April 14, Commissioner Graham had met with Governor McMaster to discuss some of the agency’s challenges and its progress. The Governor appreciated the quality services provided to consumers and was very supportive of the agency’s mission.
* The Draft RSA (Rehabilitation Services Administration) Monitoring Report had been received. The report covered years 2017, 2018 and 2019. The agency had 15 business days to provide a response regarding any inaccuracies, respond to findings, or request technical assistance. After the agency submitted a response, a final report would be received several weeks later. The report showed that progress had already been made and was a validation that the agency had moved in the right direction.
* Zunaira Wasif, former Director of the agency’s Vocational Rehabilitation program, had resigned for a new opportunity. Karma Marshall would be serving as Interim Director. Felisa Massey would cover Region I and Region II while Karma served in the Interim Director role.
* Loretta Clayton and Harold “Gene” Speer had retired. Due to COVID-19 guidelines the agency was not able to have a face-to-face celebration. The two were wished the very best and thanked for their service to the agency and citizens of South Carolina.
* Several retirees who had returned to the agency (some in a part time capacity) had decided to leave. They included Juan Sims, Dorothy Johnson, Harvey Studstill and Dorothy Threatt. Commissioner Graham thanked them again for their dedicated service.
* Commissioner Graham announced the retirement of Wanda Miller, Human Resources Director, and Beatrice “Bea” Belton, Business Enterprise Consultant. Ms. Miller had served as the agency’s Human Resources Director for 13 years. Luis Mendoza would serve as Interim Human Resources Director. Bea Belton spent her career with the agency working in the Business Enterprise Program, assisting blind licensed vendors to become entrepreneurs.

Quality Assurance Update

Michael Daniels reported:

* In January, Quality Assurance (QA) had launched a Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and Older Blind (OB) Satisfaction Survey for open consumer cases in State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2020. One hundred seventy-five (175) VR surveys had been mailed, with 25 responses returned. This was a 14% response rate, with an 82% customer satisfaction rate. Two hundred seventy (270) OB surveys had been mailed, with 89 responses returned. This was a 33% response rate, with an 82% customer satisfaction rate.
* Customer Satisfaction surveys would be sent out on a quarterly basis.
* Consumers in the Building Readiness for Individualized Gainful Employment (BRIDGE) Pre-Apprenticeship program would begin conducting surveys by phone to increase the response rate. This training would enhance the consumer’s learning through a work experience that could lead to competitive employment.
	+ The 6-8 week paid training would incorporate work readiness development, job shadowing, and a Job Club experience to provide consumers with skillsets that would meet specific needs of industries and align with the consumer’s vocational goals.
	+ During the previous two quarters (October 2020 – March 2021), 48 consumers exited the program into competitive employment, earning an average of $15.59 per hour, working an average of 32 hours per week.
* The QA department was continuing to work on completing all other program reviews by April 30, in preparation for the RSA-911 Case Services Report due on May 15, 2021.

Training Update and Social Security Reimbursement Update

Elaine Robertson reported:

* Work had begun to identify and prioritize training for VR and support staff.
* On March 18, all VR counselors, QA staff, and supervisors had completed the Measurable Skill Gains training.
* The Social Security Administration (SSA) had processed clearance for the agency to access the Ticket to Work Portal. This would enable the agency to submit data files quarterly for milestone reimbursements as well as cost reimbursements. Milestone reimbursements would be paid for each eligible consumer who began work and earned a minimum of $910 per month, and less than what SSA considered to be Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA). For consumers that received benefits due to blindness, SGA would allow $2,190 per month. If a consumer’s wages were below SGA, the agency could not request cost reimbursement and previously would receive nothing. However, because the agency would be able to submit the data files every quarter, payments of $1,495 for each eligible consumer could be received. The payments would continue as long as the consumer’s Ticket to Work remained assigned to the agency. For cost reimbursement, a consumer would have to earn above SGA for a minimum of 9 months. SSA could limit reimbursements if, for example, the consumer’s case had been open for several years and the agency supported college and possibly graduate school.
* To be eligible for Ticket to Work, a consumer must receive SSI or SSDI and must assign their ticket to the agency.
* The first cases had been submitted in February and the agency would receive reimbursements within a few months. The agency currently had $900,000 in pending reimbursement claims.
* The agency would be able to choose how to utilize funds received through the Ticket to Work program.

Old Business

None.

New Business

None

Public Comment

None

Executive Session

Vice Chairperson Smith called for a motion to go into Executive Session to discuss a personnel matter.

Vice Chairperson Smith reported that no action was taken during Executive Session.

Adjournment

There being no further business, a motion was made by Susan John to adjourn at 3:03 pm, seconded by Ms. Olker. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

Future Board Meeting Schedule

May 18, 2021
June 22, 2021

Signatures

Dr. Judy Johnson, Chairperson

Mary Sonksen, Secretary

Date