

# State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind

September 10, 2021

Seattle, Washington

**Note:** Minutes revised on February 9, 2022. Clarified statement on page 4, underlined.

Attendance – all members attended via videoconference

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***Council Members Present:***

Cathy Wilson, Christopher Zilar, Jacob Kamaunu, Jerri Clark, Jen Bean, Julie Brannon, Kristin Geary, Linda Wilder, Michael MacKillop, Sean McCormick, Sheila Turner, Steve Fiksdal

***Council Members Absent:***

Chris Alejano, Corey Grandstaff, Kim Conner, Marci Carpenter

***Staff and Visitors Present:***

Meredith Stannard, Yvonne Grimes, Tricia Eyerly, Jeannie Brown, Lisa Wheeler, LaDell Lockwood, Kim Canaan, Alice Klein, Alco Canfield, Humberto Avila

Call to Order and Agenda Review: Julie Brannon, Chair

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Meeting was called to order at 9:08 AM. All parties on the call introduced themselves for the record. Julie reviewed the agenda for today's meeting. Meredith and Yvonne reviewed Zoom protocols for asking questions and accessible commands.

Approval of June 2021 Minutes:

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Linda moved and Steve seconded to accept the June 2021 SRC Meeting Minutes. Motion passed.

Proposed 2022 SRC-B Meeting Dates: Julie Brannon

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Proposed continuing with 2<sup>nd</sup> Fridays quarterly for 2022, which are the following dates: March 11, June 10, September 9, and December 9. Christopher moved and Jen seconded to accept the proposed dates. Motion passed. Yvonne will submit 2022 dates to the State Register in December.

## Acting Director's Report: Michael MacKillop

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Michael made a Native land acknowledgement. He also acknowledged that tomorrow is the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. He stated how grateful he is for everyone's continued good health and their attendance at the meeting.

DSB continues to deal with the Pandemic and all that entails. It has slowed down re-opening of DSB offices which was going to be mid-August; and the Governor's vaccine mandate affects employees and vendors of the State as a condition of continued employment. Proof will be required as of October 18<sup>th</sup>. There is an Exemption and Reasonable Accommodation process available; DSB has had ten exemption requests made, five for religious reasons, and five for medical. Some of the requests were incomplete and rejected for that reason. Direct service positions would be very challenging to accommodate if an exemption is approved. This adds more stress to all employees and especially Michael as people's livelihoods will be impacted, and then the possible impact on staffing.

Jen commented that she appreciates agencies are being given as much time as they have to plan for possible outcomes to the mandate. She's had discussions with DVR supervisors and managers and some of their staff have already resigned.

The state employees' union for represented employees did come to an agreement with the State on the vaccine mandate process; covering vaccine validations, exemptions, and reasonable accommodations.

The mandate impacts vendors and contractors with any in-person or on-site services. Need proof submitted by October 18<sup>th</sup> or will have to end contracts. There is no exemption or reasonable accommodation process. Could re-open or re-negotiate if contractor gets vaccinated after the deadline. DSB has around 140 contracts, plus BEP operators. DSB is acting as the middle man between the government building and the BEP vendors who are considered state contractors.

Christopher asked if testing multiple times a week is an option to not being vaccinated? Michael said that is not available as an option for State workers and contractors.

Jen affirmed it will apply to Client Assistance Program (CAP) contractors and vendors also.

SRC members also fall under the vaccine mandate, even though all meetings are virtual now. Can accept exemption requests and reasonable accommodation is available, same as staff. Proof is due by September 13<sup>th</sup>, and Meredith will collect the information from members.

Fully vaccinated is currently defined as the full course of shots per the manufacturer of the vaccine. The mandate could include proof of booster in the future, it's unknown at this time.

Opening of DSB offices to the public has been postponed to October 18<sup>th</sup>, and in-person services continue in the meantime but there is a psychological impact of having "open" doors. Considering shrinking the open to the public hours for offices to Monday to Thursday 8am-4:30pm. That allows

staff to have one full day to telework, and to have more time to focus on administrative tasks that need to be completed.

Julie asked what is the impact to the OTC? Michael said no impact at this time, just fewer people in the office on Fridays.

Jen asked if staff will telework just one day. Michael said it's dependent on the job tasks and duties, telework is still considered part of commute reduction efforts.

Steve asked if this change means going to a 5-day week? Michael said not necessarily, the four-ten hour shift schedule will continue. The shortened office hours will give admin staff time to work on tasks during the day when the office is not open to the public.

Alco asked if the OTC is still not in person? Michael said that is correct, there are no residential students and it won't happen until later in the Fall at the earliest. The mask mandates in place will apply, currently not requiring vaccines. This is still being looked at to determine the best course for everyone's safety.

All OTC classes are continuing and are successful, but not ideal. Participants need hands-on training, social connections, independence, etc. Remote services would never take the place of in-person learning when it's safe to do so. Making it work, and the OTC staff is doing a phenomenal job. Have had several students graduate after only attending the OTC remotely and they feel very confident in their skills.

Budget-wise, the agency is doing okay. Strategic initiative includes getting to a place of financial stability. It's a challenge to achieve since the VR Grant is a formula grant. WA has a higher per capita income so it gets less grant money than some other states the same size. We've always been able to get the state match for the federal dollars. Many states are capable of receiving more funds if they get the state match but are unable to capture it. These unclaimed funds are then put up for grabs to states who can match with more state dollars. DSB has been able to do that a couple of times in recent years. This year, Michael thanked Jeannie Brown for identifying where DSB had enough unspent state dollars to receive \$2.4M in unclaimed grant funding. This is a relief. While there has been reduced spending the past year due to COVID, there will likely be an influx of applicants who have not been seeking services and it's comforting to have a little cushion to meet that future need. Michael really dislikes being in Order of Selection and having a Wait List, and would prefer to not have to use those options for controlling spending.

Social Security reimbursements are based on when a participant gets a job and it's a well enough paying job that they can get off of Social Security Disability and live on their own income. Social Security will reimburse entities that have spent money helping the participant. DSB has received \$376k in the past year which is a testament to DSB's counseling services and quality outcomes.

BEP was able to secure \$196k for vendor relief from RSA. DSB has made a supplemental budget ask for an overhaul of the Business Enterprise Program. Successful BEP operators in the current model only have a 7% profit margin, adding a food truck it can go up to 13%, and adding a micro

market it can go up to 20%. The total ask is for \$8.5M over four years to revamp every vendor location. The average operator income in 2018 was \$55k, in 2020 it was \$20k and primarily COVID relief funds, not actual income.

DSB applied for a demonstration project grant from RSA. It's for \$11 million over five years and would start in October. Thought notice would have been received by now. It would be used to hire staff to really look into what DSB needs to do to support future participants with IT positions. What is happening in the workplace? What are the trends? How does DSB need to pivot to assist participants find and get these jobs? Really working on honoring that strategic goal of financial stability, and to grow and add to our services.

Jen wanted to acknowledge the work that DSB is doing, really sees DSB taking it to the next level.

Michael shared that in the agency's conversation with RSA federal partners looking at the quarterly data it was observed that the breadth of DSB's outcomes are phenomenal. The quality and variety of employment outcomes are much more widespread and salaries are higher than other VR agencies in the country. It shows DSB really believes in its participants' abilities.

Independent Living (IL) applications have gone up 30% in the past year. This is great to see some rebound from the pandemic. It's known that there needs to be more outreach to increase applications. Great to see IL be able to put more focus on handheld devices.

VR numbers are pretty static. Know there is a need for continued services to participants that is not happening. Hopeful that they will return after COVID threat lessens.

Youth Services Virtual Summer Program has had lower attendance in virtual workshops. Could be Zoom fatigue after spending the past school year online as well. Have been able to offer a number of virtual student internships that worked out really well. Virtual experiences still lack certain things such as peer to peer support, social connection, independence away from family, etc. DSB has seen one benefit of remote programming, which is being able to connect with students not just in the state but around the country.

Staff turnovers continue, with several pending retirements before the end of the year. This is not unique to DSB, cohorts across the U.S. report the same thing. The OTC Administrator position is still open, and Michael asked SRC members to help spread the word if they know anyone interested and qualified.

## State Plan, Michael MacKillop: SRC Responsibilities for the SRC section of the State Plan and the SRC Annual Report

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Discussed the process for the SRC portion of the State Plan. The SRC adds recommendations, comments on DSB goals, what DSB is or is not doing, etc. Then DSB adds a response to each item. Michael went over DSB's strategic goals, and they are in the document sent out to the SRC.

Discussed the SRC contributions needed for the Annual Report due to the RSA at the end of December. Yvonne went through the sections of the report and what is needed from whom. These items include a letter from the SRC Chair, a list of agenda items covered in the year, any specific committee comments or accomplishments for the year, and picking survey quotes to include.

There was a question about when the \$2.4M will be received. Michael said it has been received and will be able carry it over.

DSB Executive Team had a great community meeting with the consumer organizations. There were 30+ attendees. Had a discussion on tech needs for participants and remote employment; and what community resources are available to all people who are blind or have low vision.

### **Program and Evaluation Committee Report: Jen Bean, Chair**

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Jen officially became the new CAP Director effective August 1<sup>st</sup>. She has really appreciated all of the support that has been shown for Jerry and his family, and for herself.

Committee members are: Kim Conner, Sheila Turner, Jacob Kamaunu, and Kristin Geary

This committee has following up on recommendations from the previous committee chair. They will be proposing two changes to the SRC By-laws: change the name of this committee to Customer Satisfaction Committee to accurately reflect its mission to focus on customers; and to move responsibility for the Annual Report either to the Executive Committee or to all Committees. Going forward they plan to read the by-laws carefully to understand what are their responsibilities and to set their next priorities.

### **Policy Committee Report: Steve Fiksdal (standing in for Marci Carpenter, Chair)**

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Committee members are: Steve Fiksdal, Chris Alejano, Sean McCormick, and Cathy Wilson

This committee has also been going over the by-laws to understand their duties. One item listed is for this committee to be engaged and/or included with internal DSB work groups. Have heard that DSB will be looking at revising the self-employment process, in light of Mark Adreon's retirement, and would like the SRC to be included.

Julie asked if the SRC has previously been involved with DSB work groups before? Steve said yes. A decade ago they were included in the agency's strategic planning retreat on the future of DSB and its priorities. Michael said more recently the SRC was included with the Order of Selection discussions.

### **Membership Committee Report: Linda Wilder, Chair**

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Committee members are: Jerri Clark, Andy Arvidsen, Corey Grandstaff, and Christopher Zilar

This committee has had an exciting last year and filled all open positions on the Council! Linda's happy that the new members are a diverse group, and all seem to be excited and engaged. They have scheduled quarterly committee meetings the month before the quarterly SRC meetings.

Watching the member list for expirations coming up this year and next. Quite a few appointments expire next year, and they want to work on staggering the terms more. This committee has been trying to accomplish this for the last couple of years, but the Boards & Committees' person in the Governor's office has changed several times, and it still needs to get done.

Have looked at the By-laws for the membership committee to understand their responsibilities. In addition to finding members for the SRC, this committee ensures that every member feels heard and included in the Council, and any member can go to this committee if there's an issue that needs to be addressed. Another aspect is ensuring that reasonable accommodations are met and at their meeting that included a discussion about using self-description at meetings. How important is it to the SRC members who are blind to have descriptions of meeting participants? Lastly, they discussed being responsible for Council training, including leadership training; for example, to help members feel confident about moving into a Chair or Vice-Chair position.

### **Executive Committee Report: Julie Brannon, Chair**

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Julie reminded the Council that elections for Chair and Vice-Chair will take place at the December SRC meeting. Anyone who is interested in running for either position can let Linda know, and she'll pass names on to her committee. Both Julie and Linda are interested in running for their positions again. Meredith will send out an email to the full Council about emailing her if they want to run, and then she'll pass the names on to Linda.

Steve said that in the past the SRC had used a nominating committee for the election, that includes members who are not going to run. He suggests this process be re-evaluated and added to the By-laws. Linda said that ultimately the Membership Committee is responsible for how the election is run, and she is willing to recuse herself from voting on an election process this year since she is also a candidate. Christopher said he will write up a proposed protocol for future elections and share with the committee.

### **Due Date Reminders: Julie Brannon**

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Julie reiterated that the due date for feedback on the State Plan is November 1. She recommends looking at previous State Plan that was sent with meeting materials. Committee chairs are to relay the process to their committee members for sending in their feedback. Each chair will compile and forward the feedback to Julie. She and the Executive Committee will write up and send to Michael.

## Discussion and Vote on Using Self-description at SRC Meetings: Julie

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This is commonly being done on current Zoom meetings. Julie said WCB ran an informal poll on the question of making it a required protocol, and the response was overwhelmingly to the negative.

Michael shared a couple of documents on this topic with Jerri, one from Youth Services and one from Disability Inclusion Network (DIN).

Jerri offered these three points to consider, pulled from her research:

1. No physical self-descriptions needed for everyone in the meeting
2. Identify yourself by name when you're speaking, and your role/title when appropriate
3. Provide visual descriptions for presentation materials/slides and any context/props/self-description relevant to a presentation's content and the speaker's vantage point

Jerri moved to adopt these items as protocol at SRC meetings, and Linda seconded the motion. Motion carried.

Julie shared that the Executive Committee meets with the DSB Executive Team every six months. The SRC Chair and Vice-Chair meet with Michael and Meredith prior to each SRC quarterly meeting for discussion and agenda development.

Julie asked for all committees to send her their scheduled dates for meetings in 2021 and 2022.

## Public Comment

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There were no public comments offered.

## Wrap-Up

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Jacob asked if anyone knows of TVIs looking for work, there is only one TVI at his local school district, Bethel, and they're overwhelmed. Some suggestions offered were the EVE listserv, WCB, and NFBW. Julie will follow up with Jacob after the meeting.

Jerri mentioned that PAVE advocates for families of students who are not being supported the way they should on their IPEs; and can be involved from the aspect of helping families and educating them to advocate for the underserved student's rights.

Linda said she would like to have the SRC Constituent Spotlight again on future agendas. She mentioned that both the WCB and the NFBW virtual conventions are coming up at end of October and beginning of November. Both Linda and Julie recommend attending one or both conventions to learn more about the blindness community that this Council supports. Lastly, Linda encouraged Council members to suggest ideas for agenda items and/or guests they'd like to hear from.

## SRC 2021 Meeting Schedule

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Friday, December 10<sup>th</sup>

All meetings scheduled on Zoom from 9:00am – 12:00pm unless otherwise communicated.

### Meeting Adjourned

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Linda moved to adjourn and Christopher seconded. Motion carried. Meeting was adjourned at 11:45 AM.