

# State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind

March 14, 2025

Seattle, Washington

Attendance – all members attended via videoconference

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**Council Members Present:** Andy Arvidson, Bill Dowling, Julie Harlow, Julie Brannon, Liz Stewart, Michael MacKillop, Jen Bean, Christopher Zilar, Sara Logston, Shawnda Hicks, Kristen Geary

**Council Members Absent:** Kris Colcock, Kara Thompson, Larry Watkinson, Cathy Wilson

**Staff and Visitors Present:** Meredith Stannard, Yvonne Verbraak, Tricia Eyerly, Joe Kasperski, Damiana Harper, Lisa Wheeler, Mary Craig, Doug Berkhalter, Sophie Watson, Marcy Carpenter, LaDell Lockwood, Nikkie Brueggeman, Crissy Urban

Call to Order and Agenda Review: Andy Arvidson, Chair

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Meeting was called to order at 9:00 AM. All parties on the call introduced themselves for the record. Meredith and Yvonne reviewed Zoom protocols for asking questions and accessible commands. Meredith reviewed the agenda for today's meeting.

Review dates for the 2025 SRCB Meetings

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June 13, 9am – 12pm via Zoom; September 12, 9am – 12pm via Zoom; December 12, 9am – 12pm via Zoom.

Approval of September 2024 Minutes

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Christopher moved and Bill seconded to accept December 2024 SRC Meeting Minutes. Motion passed.

Executive Director's Report: Michael MacKillop

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Michael welcomed everyone to the SRCB meeting and Pi Day with a lighthearted mention of Marci Carpenter's Pi Day joke that led him to thoughts of blackberry pie. Michael reflected on the fifth anniversary of the COVID lockdown and the emotions surrounding it. The recollections of the early days of the pandemic, the questions and difficult decisions about shutting down, ending programs, and sending students home. Michael saw the pandemic as a challenging but formative time as he

began as the new director. He acknowledged the effects of the pandemic and lockdown are still being felt today, and emphasized the good things learned and the resilience developed as a result. Compared to the current time of uncertainty to the early days of the pandemic, it is hoped that the strength and resilience gained will help navigate the current challenges.

The National Federation of the Blind-Washington State (NFB) was attended. Kris Colcock, Vice Chair, led a workshop focusing on career paths of individuals who are blind, showcasing how they got to where they are. Kris had seven presenters, whose stories were unique and inspiring. Michael praised the supportive environment and good conversations and expressed appreciation to the consumer organizations and NFB. NFB moved the state convention to March instead of October to avoid too many events in one month.

As of January 15<sup>th</sup>, Washington state has a new governor, which has been a positive experience for Michael, who was reappointed as director and is scheduled for a confirmation with the Senate in two weeks. In Michael's experience in being in the governor's small cabinet, he noted the governor has strong priorities. One priority is improving the customer experience across state agencies, ensuring services are provided effectively, efficiently, and smoothly. A self-survey was conducted to assess how well the customer feedback is integrated into DSB. The survey was conducted by the governor's office to gather information from all state agencies to determine where the gaps are in customer experience.

Another focus area is Executive Order 25-03, which is focused on improving the process and timing for issuing certificates and licenses. Initially, Michael didn't think this executive order applied to DSB, however, it was realized that DSB's process of issuing certifications of eligibility does fall under the scope of the Executive Order. This executive order aligns with DSB's focus and the process changes that are being implemented, including reducing the time between application and eligibility as much as possible. There is strong support from the governor's office regarding the value of DSB as a standalone agency. Michael has communicated the benefits of DSB remaining separate from larger agencies like DSHS, emphasizing how DSB can be more customer-focused and effective on its own. Despite concerns voiced at the NFB conference, Michael has been reassured that the governor's office does not want to consolidate DSB with other agencies and doesn't see a benefit in doing so. The governor's office has also been supportive of addressing federal changes.

The governor has asked every state agency to propose a 6% reduction in their budget due to a state revenue shortfall. DSB's vocational rehabilitation program is 78% federally funded and 22% state-funded. State funds are required to obtain federal dollars through a matching system. The more state funds available for matching the more flexibility there is in using federal funds. If there are more state funds beyond the match requirement, it gives DSB flexibility to address emergent needs. The proposed 6% budget reduction does not affect staffing. DSB is a small agency and losing positions would be a challenge at this point. To minimize the impact, DSB shifted state dollars toward federal funds, meaning federal funds are now being used where state funds were previously being spent. DSB reassessed some BEP (Business Enterprise Program) projects and decided that the costs outweighed the funds allocated. As a result, some of this money was returned to the state.

Christopher asked for clarification on what the match requirement is.

Michael responded that 22% of federal funds must be matched by the state with the general example that for every \$100 in federal funds DSB receives, the state must contribute \$22 to fulfill the match requirement.

DSB proposed reductions to the state funds allocated for the Independent Living-Older Blind program. The state had provided additional funds in the previous biennium to increase vendor fees and bring on more vendors and resources. The State Office of Financial Management noticed these funds weren't being spent as expected, which was because it took time to ramp up the program. Kim Canaan has been working diligently to recruit new providers and raise the fee schedules for current providers, acknowledging the rising cost of living. DSB recognizes that these funds will likely be needed, but due to current circumstances, they need to return the funds for the time being. DSB is committed to using social security reimbursements to make up for the funds, shifting these reimbursements to Independent Living.

In addition to the state budget cuts, DSB is facing its own budgeting challenges. DSB did not receive the expected 7% cost-of-living increase from the federal government, which impacted their grant funding last year. Costs have increased by about 12% and DSB is serving more customers, leading to higher spending. DSB saw higher than anticipated spending in October through December, with a dip in January and more typical spending in February and is closely tracking spending to ensure it doesn't continue to exceed expectations. DSB negotiated a new split of the state VR grant, increasing their share from 16% to 18%, helping to cushion the budget tightness. To manage the reduction in state funds, DSB did not want to let any staff go and have delayed the hiring of two new positions; one in social media and one in fiscal management, for at least two years. As these are new positions, there is no impact on current staff.

DSB is also finding ways to reduce state spending by shifting funds to federal dollars. One strategy is reducing or eliminating cancellation fees, which are state-only funds that cannot be used for matching federal dollars. Liz Tunison and the contracts team are working with vendors to reduce these fees by including a requirement for vendors to give a reminder call 1-2 days before appointments; hopefully reminding customers with time management challenges to remember their appointments, ensuring services are received and reducing unnecessary cancellation fees.

DSB is exploring ways to find alternative funding sources to cover necessary services and items for customers, known as "comparable benefits". For higher education, many customers are eligible for Washington's Basic Grant program, which can cover full tuition, reducing the financial burden on DSB. There are ongoing discussions about finding other systems to help share or fully cover necessary costs. The challenge is balancing budget cuts with the need to provide all necessary services for customers, especially when resources are limited. Unlike personal budgets, vocational rehabilitation programs cannot delay providing necessary services, even in times of financial constraint. If something is essential for a customer to achieve their goal, it must be provided, even if it is costly. Another option, provided to vocational rehabilitation agencies under the Rehab Act, is a process known as "order of selection". This is a waitlist system used when resources are limited. Those who are eligible for services must wait for services if there are not enough

resources to serve everyone immediately. It can take six months to set up the process and another year before savings are realized. Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), the general agency in Washington State, is starting or will soon start its own order of selection process due to projected resource shortages. DSB will be closely monitoring spending to determine the best course of action, possibly working towards an order of selection. In preparation, Washington Administrative Codes (WAC) 67-25-183 and 67-25-193 regarding order of selection need to be revised. The current system may not meet the requirements for federal approval. DSB has not been in order of selection since 2020 and has not been a priority until now. Revisions will go through the policy committee to make necessary changes, essential for starting the process with federal partners.

Congress has a continuing resolution in place, allowing temporary funding for government services until an official budget is passed. DSB is still working with last year's grant, enabling services to continue beyond March 14<sup>th</sup>. There are no layoffs or shutdowns, and funding is stable for now. However, extended continuing resolutions could become problematic.

The current administration is considering dismantling the Department of Education, where the Rehabilitation Services Administration is currently housed. This brings up concerns about the future of vocational rehabilitation. The Rehabilitation Act predates the Department of Education (created in 1979), so the act itself is unlikely to be affected by changes to the department. However, if the Department of Education is dismantled, vocational rehabilitation may move to the Department of Labor, potentially under the Office of Disability Employment Policy. This move would align with vocational rehabilitation's focus on workforce and disability employment. The Rehab Act's core mission, values, and services (e.g., serving underserved customers in culturally relevant ways) are protected and would require an act of Congress to change. There is uncertainty about the inclusion of vocational rehabilitation and independent living programs in the proposed congressional budget. DSB is advocating to maintain formula grants (instead of block grants) and to ensure cost-of-living adjustments for continued services to customers.

Julie Harlow stated people are anxious about whether an executive order could rescind laws like the Rehabilitation Act, despite it being in place since 1920. Some believe it could be overturned, while others think it would require a Supreme Court battle to protect funding. Is there any truth to this?

Michael answered stating that it's difficult to predict future actions. However, there was an executive order to freeze all grants, but it was rescinded by the end of the day, showing that executive actions can be reversed. Changes to the Rehabilitation Act would require Congressional action, not an executive order. The Rehab Act is standalone legislation and only Congress has the authority to amend it. If an executive order were issued attempting to alter the Rehab Act, it would likely lead to litigation.

Julie Harlow stated she appreciates Washington state's focus on looking out for constituents and clients and acknowledges the difficulty of balancing potential funding cuts while still providing essential services.

Michael responded that the goal is to maintain services despite federal funding cuts. Due to the Hatch Act, Michael cannot advocate or lobby for anything, he is only able to educate but added that the SRC and consumer organizations can have a role in lobbying.

Christopher Zilar echoed Michael's points about funding concerns and emphasized the sensitivity and understanding needed regarding the funding differences between State and Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation programs. State programs rely on formula funding, while Tribal programs are funded through discretionary grants. Discretionary funding creates a greater level of vulnerability for Tribal programs compared to state programs, which creates additional concern and uncertainty of funding at the Tribal level due to the reliance on discretionary dollars.

Michael thanked Christopher for highlighting the difference between State and Tribal funding. He also stated his appreciation for Governor Ferguson's commitment to supporting Tribal programs and guidance for state agency directors and cabinet members to seek ways to support vulnerable Tribal programs. There's a desire to see Tribal programs funded through formula grants and the current five-year grant cycle is challenging due to its uncertainty and limited duration.

Jen Bean shared that CAP (Client Assistant Program) is funded through a formula grant. There has not been a cost-of-living increase in CAP funding; over the last 10 years, the increase has only been about 1%. The President's previous budget proposed an increase for CAP, but did not materialize due to VR programs spending their money. CAP did receive a supplemental grant that offered some flexibility. CAP supports the Tribal programs and the addressing of the inequities in grant funding. WSRC (Washington State Rehabilitation Council) focused heavily on advocating for Tribal program funding disparities last year. Jen thanked Michael and Dana for their support in advocating for Tribal programs at higher levels.

Michael thanked Christopher and Jen for their contributions to the discussion on funding and added that the Independent Living-Older Blind grant also does not receive a cost-of-living increase and has remained static for decades. The number of people over 55 with acquired visual disabilities is increasing, but funding has not kept up with the growing need. Despite limited funding, Kim Canan and her team, along with other providers, have continued to deliver services based on a budget from 20 years ago.

There is a state hiring freeze due to a state revenue shortfall, however, DSB is exempt from the hiring freeze for positions that provide direct customer service. DSB has several vacancies for Vision Rehab Specialists, providing services like orientation and mobility, home management, and low vision with openings in Vancouver and Yakima. A floating VRS position has been filled, based in the Tacoma office, but available to support needs statewide. The individual hired for this position knows of colleagues who may be interested in filling the remaining positions. There is also a recruitment out for the Seattle front desk. DSB has instituted an internship for the Seattle front desk as well, with students from the Orientation and Training Center filling the position. Daniel, the third intern, is currently working solo at the front desk and doing a great job. There are also open positions for Pre-ETS (Pre-Employment Transition Services) and Self-Employment Trainers that are actively being recruited.

There has been a 24% increase in customers exiting Independent Living services compared to last year, as well as an increase in the number of unhoused people that are being served. DSB's Independent Living programs are performing phenomenally well compared to national standards:

- 96% satisfaction rate for those receiving assistive technology (AT) services from DSB, with clients reporting improved functional capacity (national average: 84.8%).
- 95% of DSB customers reported an increased ability to engage in daily life (national average: 84%).
- 95% reported increased confidence to maintain their living situation (national average: 92%).
- 93% of DSB customers reported an increased ability to maintain a healthy diet and exercise, improving their physical health.

Despite these successes, there is still a waitlist in King County, which is frustrating for the customers. Kim, Sophie, and the team are exploring ways to address the waitlist, such as offering remote services for those whose needs don't require in-person visits and connecting customers to remote trainers to help with devices like iPads and computers. Michael highlighted a story in the SRCB Quarterly report about Vivian, who was able to access old photos through a magnifier and read again with a book reader.

The SRCB Quarterly report showed that there was an increase in referrals:

- 52 more people requested information for themselves
- 32 more people requested information for a friend or a relative
- 77 more people requested information for a patient or a client

That is 161 people who received information and hopefully applied for DSB services. The increase in referrals is likely due to the website's customer-focused approach. LaDell Lockwood's efforts to make the website more navigable and responsive to customer needs were specifically acknowledged. In Vocational Rehabilitation, planned services were up by 50 from the previous year and the average hourly wage increased to \$38.33, up by \$7 per hour. Diverse job opportunities include interpreters, mental health counselors, OSHA specialists, safety and health specialists, survey researchers, and educational administrators. The educational administrators are from Bellevue College, University of Washington, and Shoreline Educational Service District.

32% of those exiting with a career were over the age of 55. Nationally, it's uncommon for vocational rehabilitation programs to focus on individuals over 55, but DSB supports it. People over 55 often want to continue working, whether full or part time, despite changes in vision or other challenges. One example mentioned is a DSB customer who is 77 years old who made the necessary changes to continue their counseling business. The customers are listened to, encouraged and supported in continuing their career or pursuing a new one, rather than assuming work is no longer a viable option because of age. People in other states are surprised by the high percentage of clients over 55 who successfully found jobs.

Christopher Zilar added many of the individuals who work within the Spokane Tribe are over 60 years old, with one customer on his caseload is 83 years of age. Christopher brought up SCSEP

(Senior Community Service Employment Program), a federally funded program that focuses on seniors but does not have the expertise in disability services and asked if any DSB staff have heard of or have used this program.

Michael appreciated the focus on providing vocational services to individuals beyond retirement age and stated DSB has interacted with SCSEP through the Workforce Centers on the west side but was currently unable to speak of any individual caseload or how active DSB is in utilizing the program.

There have been a lot of changes within DSB with additions of a training team, quality assurance team, business relations staff, and intake specialists who are vocational rehabilitation counselors. Last year it was realized that it was taking too long from the initial call from the customer to them receiving their first service. Currently, 180 days are allowed by law. The focus is to reduce the lag time, ensuring customers get to services as quickly as possible. Intake services were shifted away from counselors to intake specialists, where they gather all the information necessary to determine eligibility and then schedule an eligibility meeting with a counselor within two weeks. This change has reduced wait times, but it was realized there was a need for the intake specialist to have a counselor mindset to delve into the individual's situation and avoid assumptions about age or path to services. Two vocational counselors have been hired to take on the full intake process; they will conduct the intake, make the eligibility determination, and set them up with a counselor to begin conversations about vocational goals and plan creation. Counselors now handle eligibility based on their observations, determine if a disability exists, eliminating delays from waiting on external evaluations and additional medical documentation. Previously, eligibility could be delayed for 30-60 days waiting for eye doctor reports.

Julie Brannon asked if the intake is done over the phone or another way, how is the observation done?

Michael replied that it can be done in person or Zoom or by phone. We are able to determine eligibility based on counselor observation of a disability and functional limitations due to disability, which often can be identified through conducting interviews and asking questions of the individual.

In the past, traditional assessments took months to prepare to determine adaptive technology and vocational pathways to find the "perfect pathway". Many customers have had a recent vision change and may have a more limited view than if they were to start experiencing the possibilities through technology such as JAWS (Jaws Access With Speech) or magnifiers. Shifting the strategy to focus on creating short-term, achievable plans rather than lengthy assessments; set clear vocational goals and prioritize what can be done now with flexibility to adjust as progress is made. The plan can be continuously revised based on small successes and ongoing changes. This is a radical change for counselors who were taught to do extensive assessments and write lengthy reports before developing a plan. The new approach integrates assessments directly into the plan and allows it to evolve as the person progresses. As customers gain new skills, their options and goals may change, requiring the need for a flexible and adaptable plan instead of a rigid one that often leads to customers leaving before achieving their career goals, as the pathway no longer fits

their needs. There is a focus on regularly updating the plan based on customer progress and changes with weekly discussions with counselors to review how the process is evolving and improving; what is working, not working, and how is the new process being communicated to the customers.

Customers report they appreciate having clear goals about what they are doing and where they are going. They find it motivating and manageable to work on one achievable goal at a time and after achieving that one goal, they can move forward with the next goal. Counselors are also embracing the new approach, which is helping get people into services more quickly once eligibility is determined. The new process allows the customer to better understand the context of what they need to learn as they build new skills, reducing fear and increasing openness. The waiting period has been reduced from months down to 30 days with the desire to reduce that even further from eligibility to the time the first service is received. The focus is on customer-centered, real-time, and manageable goals-breaking things down into smaller steps. Some staff who were initially resistant are starting to realize this change is permanent and cannot be avoided. This has been encouraging. While there are many other ideas for change, the current focus is on milestone planning. The goal is to ensure that everyone understands how crucial this change is and to avoid overwhelming staff with too many new processes.

Michael attended the graduation ceremony at the Orientation and Training Center two weeks ago, describing it as a fabulous experience filled with love, truth, personal development, and meaningful conversations from peers, family, and the graduates themselves. One graduate shared their initial reluctance to use the training shades as they wanted to rely on their residual vision. The training shades help people not use their residual vision; to rely more on other senses, audio, haptic, or tactile cues. Over time, they came to realize the importance of training with the shades and now feel confident in their ability to perform tasks, even at night. Michael invited members to attend future graduation ceremonies.

The East Region developed and hosted a successful coffee outreach program, with 22 attendees ranging from people new to DSB services and those who were already working. There were guide dog users sharing insights on the pros and cons of using guide dogs, discussions with members of consumer organizations and the benefits of being involved such organizations. The program will be recreated in Yakima. Donna Elkins and Lena Norton from the Spokane office have been instrumental in organizing these events.

AT (Adaptive Technology) Specialists are working on creating guidelines around Artificial Intelligence (AI). The project will cover:

- The risks and benefits of AI
- The current tools integrated into existing assistive technologies
- Ways AI can assist in areas like job interviews, job readiness, and life skills

Zack Abernathy and Roberto Cordero are leading this project and should have a finished product within a couple of months.



## Presentation: BEP Updates: Lisa Wheeler

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Lisa introduced herself as the Assistant Director at DSB who oversees the Business Enterprise Program (BEP). BEP has been undergoing significant revisions over the last several years, with the final phase of the rebuild in its last few months. In 2021, a funding request was made to the legislature for a remodel and refresh of several BEP sites on the Capitol Campus in Olympia as well as other sites throughout Washington state. The request was successful, securing multi-million-dollar funding for the project. The project includes capital upgrades, such as construction and equipment updates that are costly and extensive. With the scale of the project, the decision was made to hire a project manager to oversee the rebuild. Dana Whitford from Integrated Solution Group (ISG) has been leading the rebuild efforts over the past four years. The rebuild is expected to be completed by the end of June.

The Office Building 2 (OB2) Café and the Dome Deli on Capitol Campus have been fully remodeled and re-visioned as part of the BEP rebuild. The remodel introduced grab-and-go options for customers, including micro markets that offer fresh food solutions; something new to the BEP program that wasn't available before. Previously, the vending options were limited to dry goods and often contracted out to third parties, but the goal of the rebuild was to offer more contemporary food services, especially fresh options. The traditional café model had been the main focus of BEP for years, but it was realized it was becoming outdated. The goal of the rebuild was to shift towards grab-and-go solutions and aimed to help current vendors update their equipment and menus to reflect this shift to modern, more convenient food service models. The pandemic's impact and the change in workforce trends accelerated the need for these updates, with fewer workers coming into the buildings.

Plans to remodel the Natural Resources Building café had to be put on hold due to budget constraints. Although funding was initially awarded, the cost estimates for the project exceeded what was financially possible. Instead of a full remodel, there will now be vending options, including micro markets, in the building, offering solutions that state workers will appreciate along with the other existing cafes on campus. The Pritchard building is scheduled for a remodel next year, adding another food service solution on Capitol Campus.

Other areas of focus for the rebuild and revision are the Criminal Justice Center building in Burien, the Naval Shipyard in Bremerton, equipment updates in Snohomish and Clark County sites, and remodels at the Jackson Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse in Seattle. Jim Hemmen has been providing excellent leadership with experience in food services, guiding the program through its rebuild and reimagining food services to contemporary solutions. Julia Longacre and Kephraan Mason, Program Specialists, have been supporting Jim through the rebuild. They have contributed to program enhancements, including contracts revision, synthesizing of documentation, updating contracts and procedures; in addition to working with Lisa and Jim on strategic development of new opportunities and how to recruit new VR customers into the program. Meetings are held monthly. A quarter-by-quarter plan focuses on completing the rebuild of current sites and shifting attention to expansion efforts. DSB is bringing on a new position, Self-Employment Training Coordinator, to support BEP vendors and VR customers seeking entrepreneurial opportunities.

outside of BEP. It is a hybrid position for the Workforce Initiatives. The job posting went out recently. Information on pursuing vending through BEP and opportunities for career seekers interested in self-employment have been updated on DSB's website. Vendor committee information is now available upon email request rather than being posted publicly online. The vendor committee has been highly involved in all updates, and the BEP team has excelled in communication, engagement, and collaboration with them. There is strong energy and commitment to expanding opportunities for future recruitment and younger entrepreneurs.

There is uncertainty in regards the Randolph-Sheppard Act and BEP as changes are happening daily. Currently BEP vendor sites in federal buildings are not on any closure lists for the remainder of the year. The Region 10 General Services Administration Liaison (covering Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington) has been let go. It is unclear if that position will be backfilled and the BEP team is working to find a new point of contact. It was learned that some of the Randolph-Sheppard attorneys who supported the program and legal amendments were also let go. BEP continues to stay connected through regular BEP director's calls, where information is shared state by state.

Andy Arvidson asked if there was a proposed timeline for training new entrepreneurs in the BEP program?

Lisa stated she is currently working with Jim, Julia, and Kephra to refresh the BEP training checklist and curriculum. The training modules include courses on small business ownership and specific BEP-related courses offered through the Chicago Lighthouse. Training can take up to six months to complete the courses, followed by the on-the-job assessments specific to different sites. BEP is currently working on revising those and is in communication with counselors about upcoming opportunities. For example, there are potential opportunities at the Olympic Peninsula Vending and Federal Aviation Administration site, pending a review of how many people will return to that location. As training takes time, counselors and customers will be consulted to assess fit before moving forward, if interested, candidates will be moved forward to begin the training process. There are no new sites available at the moment, but a few are in the works. BEP is focusing on micro market vending through strategic planning, encouraging people to consider BEP and to get connected to training. Vendor retirements are expected in the next several years, leading to great opportunities to offer.

Julie Brannon asked how many new sites are anticipated and how the training process works, considering there may be a waiting period for a site.

Lisa replied that the BEP program involves working towards a goal that is not always clear or definitive. This has always been the case for those interested in BEP, they must go through a bidding process and only licensed vendors are eligible for site consideration. The process works for those who are motivated and know that BEP is the right fit for them, but the uncertainty may not be suitable for everyone.

Shawnda Hicks shared her excitement about hearing about opportunities on the Olympic Peninsula, as the area lacks resources and support and offered to support facilitating connections with vendors in the area.

Lisa expressed appreciation for Shawnda's offer of support.

Christopher Zilar shared his experience working with marginalized populations, noting they are more likely to pursue self-employment than non-marginalized groups populations. Christopher noted that while most of his caseload consists of individuals interested in self-employment, only one in ten are mentally prepared for the extensive work and challenges the process requires before being approved for self-employment plan, with the remaining opting for a regular job instead.

Lisa stated the team is working to create a more rigorous screening as part of the revision of the BEP curriculum. Emphasis is placed on the stamina and determination required for being a business owner, as well as the organizational and communication skills involved. Questionnaires are used early in the process to ensure candidates fully understand what they are committing to, and that they are ready to be all-in. BEP has brought on new vendors that have self-employment expertise as consultants, providing guidance about the refreshing of the curriculum. Lisa expressed optimism about bringing in strong new candidates based on the curriculum improvements and the new expertise being brought to the program.

### **Executive Committee Report: Andy Arvidson**

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The executive committee meets monthly to discuss a variety of topics. Recently, topics have included budget updates, hiring freezes, challenges with government layoffs, growth and development of BEP, Deaf/Blind Consortium, and customer satisfaction. Invitations to the monthly meetings have been extended to Lisa Wheeler, Jim Hemmen, and Damiana Harper. The committee works to ensure that the quarterly meetings are informative and up to date, covering relevant topics to ensure what is being done is appropriate in nature and meets customer needs.

### **Policy Committee Report: Jen Bean**

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Jen reminded everyone that she and Kris Colcock have switched committees. Kris Colcock is now the chair of the Customer Satisfaction committee, focusing on deaf-blind listening sessions, partnered with the Executive Committee. The first meeting was spent getting to know each other, areas of expertise, and why everyone joined the SRCB. First priority is reviewing and giving feedback on the DSB Quarterly Reports, which will be the focus of the meeting in April. Michael wants to know what is helpful and useful to ensure the effort put into the reports is worthwhile. The committee also wants to review the Self-Employment Policy to see if there are any suggestions for improvement. There is expectation of potential policy recommendations from the work of the deaf-blind listening sessions and the deaf-blind consortium as well as possible work - related to order of selection.

### **Membership Committee Report: Julie Brannon**

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Julie Brannon and Meredith Stannard have been working on the code of conduct request from the Executive Committee. After reviewing documents already available, to include the Governor's

Handbook on Councils (2013), it appears a lot of the bylaws were derived from the handbook. Both the Governor's Handbook and the SRCB bylaws have substantial enforcement mechanisms, addressing concerns like attendance and governance. The Governor's Handbook has clear information to follow the handbook as the overall guide. The Membership Committee is currently at a standstill and seeking feedback on whether to:

- Link the code of conduct content in existing documents
- Separate the code of conduct into its own document

Jen Bean thanked Julie and mentioned having a busy week but plans to review the work soon to provide feedback as an executive committee member; however, as a general council member suggested having a one-page summary with key points and a link for easy reference.

Julie B. asked for clarification.

Jen stated all the relevant information on one sheet, including guidance from the bylaws, and a link to the complete bylaws as a reference.

Julie B. mentioned the Governor's Handbook and the National SRC Pamphlet should be added to the onboarding packet.

Julie H. clarified Jen's idea further as creating a bulleted document with links to the larger more detailed documents, also suggesting creating a document with key bullet points to highlight what new members need to know about conduct and common issues that arise (e.g., things frequently misunderstood).

Julie B. mentioned creating a concise document wouldn't be difficult since the material already exists; the tough part is incorporating suggestions directly into the document. She also emphasized the importance of reminding members about the code of conduct during meetings.

Meredith suggested consolidation of the documents could be very useful, acknowledging a succinct version would require more time and effort.

Julie B. agreed with Meredith and mentioned they would create a deadline as the March deadline was too rushed.

Andy agreed with the idea of creating a single document with bullet points and expressed support for moving forward.

## Customer Satisfaction Committee Report: Kris Colcock

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Julie Harlow filled in for Kris Colcock as she was attending PNWAER (Pacific Northwest Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired). Listening sessions are being planned for September with discussions around how to get started and how to handle the process, considering different experiences and knowledge.

Andy Arvidson asked about involving the executive committee members in the listening sessions.

Julie clarified that the focus this time was more on participant comfort.

Jen Bean added that one of the next steps is that Kris is to work with her committee and report back to the Executive Committee. Collaboration with DSB for scheduling and interpreters needed. Jen volunteered herself to help write the report after the sessions rather than participate in them.

### Wrap-up/Meeting Adjourned

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Andy expressed confidence that DSB and SRCB are in a good place, largely due to strong grants from the state budget. The Independent Living program has improved and is now in a better position than in previous years. Andy gave praise for everyone working together to meet the needs of customers and prioritize their satisfaction.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:19 am.