

Board of SBVI Meeting

March 20, 2026

Via Zoom with In Person Location in Sioux Falls

Members Present: Ryan Groeneweg, Deb Ver Steeg, Jeff Nelson, Cherie Gerry, Dana Stillman, Carla Miller, Ismael Collazo, Cole Uecker, Richard Crawford, Felicia Alspach, Ronda Williams

Members Absent: Krystal Stuwe, Burdette Clifford, George Seamon, Pam Fisher, Mike Hommel

Others Present: Becky Blume, Traci Lunzman, Ray Tracy, April Schulte, David Woodruff, Kama Kwiecinski

Ryan Groeneweg, Chair, called the meeting to order.

Cole Uecker made a motion to approve the agenda with the change to move Carla's report earlier in the agenda. Ismael Collazo seconded. Motion carried.

Deb Ver Steeg made a motion to approve the minutes from the December meeting. Ismael Collazo seconded. Motion carried.

Public Comments: None

Board Member Updates:

Richard Crawford – The 3D art exhibit is at the Washington Pavilion. There has been good traffic and good reviews.

Please go see it if you can! National Federation of the Blind (NFB) state conference will be held April 24 and 25 in Brookings. Rich would like to thank the Board of SBVI and the Center for Disabilities for the donations for the art exhibit.

Carla Miller – Parent Connection is offering webinars on a variety of topics including IEP, behaviors, and transition. There is also a class for teachers to learn more about how to help families. These webinars have been well received. National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) committee met to review the applications for funding. Carla informed the Board that 11 communities requested funding for speakers, banquets to recognize local businesses and individuals, and training. \$49,606 was requested and \$46,356 was approved. The funding comes from Board of VR, Statewide Independent Living Council, and Board of SBVI. There are also in-kind donations from community and other sponsors.

Cole Uecker - Disability Rights SD spent a lot of time at the Capitol during the legislative session. Bills regarding the voting device removal did not make it through committee. They also followed Senate Bills 81 and 82 regarding service animals. With nicer weather, Disability Rights SD will be doing more community events. Cole initiated meetings with the Attorney General's office regarding the Texas vs. Kennedy case (504).

Cherie Gerry - Interviews for transition week were recently completed. Up to twelve students can attend transition week June 7-11 at the SD Rehabilitation Center for the Blind in Sioux Falls. Self-advocacy is a topic the students want to learn about. One student attended a tour and informed others about her experience, then they also received a tour of the Center.

Deb Ver Steeg - The SDAB annual auction is taking place on Saturday, along with ten other states. Last year South Dakota raised \$800 to help fund programming and activities.

Ismael Collazo - STEM to You is a day of forensic science for students with blindness and low vision, scheduled for July 18th at the Children's Museum in Brookings. NFB State Convention is April 24 and 25 in Brookings. There will be dancing lessons and a DIY demonstration by Lowe's. Ismael is working on a date during the summer for the School for the Blind to take students to the Children's Museum to play with Boy Scouts. He wants to remind everyone of the 3D Art exhibit at Washington Pavilion. He mentioned the Texas vs. Kennedy case and was recently in Washington DC to support legislation and visited with SD representatives.

Jeff Nelson - He no longer operates EROS cafeteria. He has the vending at the One-Stop, and is expanding product lines and getting selections of product people are requesting.

Dana Stillman – The School for the Blind has been busy. They are gearing up for graduation.

Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC): Ryan Groeneweg reported that the SILC met in December, and the next meeting is March 25th. Independent Living Choices is one the Centers for Independence in the state and they provide independent living services in about 80% of state, but the funding does not match that. The SILC is drafting the State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL) for timeframe of 2028-2030. Over 2,000 individuals took part in National Disability Employment Awareness Month activities in October 2025. Call for nominations for Governor's Awards have gone out and due date is May 1. Fall Conference is October 13-15, 2026, in Deadwood.

SBVI VR Case File Review: Traci Lunzman reported on the Case File Review results. SBVI uses the review as a quality assurance tool. There were 124 cases randomly selected open and closed cases. Twelve staff reviewed the cases, including six counselors, three SDRC staff, Ronda, and Traci. It was conducted virtually February 2-6. An initial meeting was held online prior to review, with an ongoing group chat through the process, and a meeting at the end of the week, also held virtually. The results were strong. Reviewer feedback included positive comments. The program is performing very well, and compliance is good. David and Traci will travel to field offices to discuss results with counselors and offer additional training where needed.

Governor's Awards: Call for nominations has been sent out with due date of May 1st. This event is sponsored by Statewide Independent Living Council, Board of Vocational Rehabilitation, and Board of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired. Nominations include a one-page nomination form and two letters of recommendation. The nomination categories include Distinguished Service, Outstanding Individual with a Disability, Outstanding Employee with a Disability, Outstanding Small Employer, Outstanding Large Employer, and Outstanding Public Employer, and Outstanding Transition Services.

Disability Day at the Capitol: Deb Ver Steeg and Ismael Collazo and his daughter represented the Board of SBVI at Disability Day on February 24. Several legislators stopped by the booth and there was high energy and lots of visitors to the booth. Ray Tracy, BEP Program Specialist, helped set up the table and had annual reports and brochures available.

Program Updates:

Quality Assurance – Traci Lunzman: The Quality Assurance Program Specialist reported stable VR program activity, with applications ranging from 29–43 per quarter in PY2025 and 26–31 in PY2026 to date, and approximately 280–300 individuals served consistently. Closures remained steady at 24–37 per quarter in PY2025 and 30–33 in PY2026, with success rates improving from 40–55% to 50–59%. A total of 36 successful employment closures were

reported for PY2026 to date, with placements across a variety of occupational sectors. Wage data shows an average of \$30 per hour (\$59,000 annually), though this is influenced by a high-income outlier (\$200,000 quarterly earnings); adjusted averages are approximately \$22 per hour (\$38,000 annually), with most wages falling between \$15–\$20 per hour. Timeliness measures remain strong, with eligibility completed in an average of 19 days after application and plans developed within 29 days after eligibility determination. Overall time from application to plan improved to 48 days, down from approximately 79 days in 2024, reflecting continued process improvements.

Vocational Rehabilitation – David Woodruff: Jesse Abernathy is the new hybrid VR Counselor and Rehabilitation Teacher in Pierre. Jesse is licensed as a Certified Social Worker and originally from South Dakota having served in human services and helping professions for most of his adult life, most recently as a Supervisory Social Worker with the Bureau of Indian Affairs in both South Dakota and California. He's completed his formal training and has begun meeting with clients independently. Jesse has taken the initiative to set up some job shadowing opportunities with some of the more experienced VR Counselors and IL Teachers in the Rapid City and Aberdeen offices. He's already well-connected with many of the communities in his territory, which has helped him acclimate to his new role quickly. David will work with Jesse on exploring the procedure for obtaining his Certification from the Commission on Rehabilitation

Counselor Certification. This method may require him to take a few specific courses to prepare for the exam but would significantly shorten the process for becoming a certified rehabilitation counselor.

Rob Jonas covers the Southeast Territory, including Yankton and Vermillion. He obtained his CRC Certification back in 2024 and has been a great help to the Division as a senior counselor, taking a role in helping train and support newer staff.

JoLynn Pichinte continues to work on obtaining her master's degree in vocational rehabilitation counseling and will take the CRC exam shortly after completion of the program. She covers the territory near Huron and Mitchell and has been working on reaching out to many of the smaller communities nearby. Her 3-year anniversary with SBVI will be in June.

Adam Krumwiede is also in the Master's degree program with SDSU in Brookings and is following a similar path to JoLynn. He's been able to squeeze in a few extra classes. Adam's territory includes Brookings, Madison, and the surrounding area. He will be reaching the 3-year mark with SBVI this July.

Mike Webb continues to work out of the Aberdeen office and is our longest-tenured Senior VR Counselor and continues to maintain his CRC. This June will mark 28 years with the State of SD! Mike has also been utilizing his

experience to help support some of the newer staff with a variety of policy and procedure questions. Mike has a very large territory that includes Watertown and stretches all the way to Corson County.

Kim Smith will be at 3 years with SBVI on April 24th and she has been a valued State Employee for a little over 11 years. Her knowledge of Department of Labor policies and procedures has really helped her, and the other counselors better understand opportunities for partnership under WIOA. Kim started her master's degree at SDSU with the ultimate goal of obtaining her CRC and becoming a Senior VR Counselor.

Matt Markve came to SBVI from the Idaho Division of Vocational Rehabilitation with extensive experience within the VR field from a quality assurance and administrative standpoint. He has had his CRC for years and was hired as a Senior VR Counselor. He has brought a depth of knowledge and experience along with him and has been adjusting well to the role of a VR Counselor.

Counselors are hard at work supporting their transition-aged students with a variety of services and supports for the remainder of the school year and into the summer. The Transition Services Liaison Project's (TSLP) Youth Leadership Forum conference relies heavily on referrals from VR Counselors, as does the SD Rehabilitation Center for the Blind's Transition week. The deadline for applications for both have passed and Counselors are

currently working on supporting TSLP and SDRC staff through the interview process for both. Typically, this involves the TSLP representative and the VR Counselor sitting down with the student for an interview to help determine appropriate selections.

David has been learning Microsoft Power BI for reporting purposes. He is also working on reviewing the possibility of repurposing outdated items that were purchased for VR clients for IL clients who may need them.

Richard Crawford brought to the Board's attention that the Sertoma Club can sometimes help with hearing aids for deaf or deaf/blind. Ismael also mentioned that attendees at a Watertown support group meeting stated that they did not know of the Braille and Audio Reading Download that the Accessible Library Services program offers. Rehabilitation Teachers commonly offer to assist individuals in completing the application for this program. David and Kama will visit with staff who cover the Watertown area.

Independent Living Older Blind – Kama Kwiecinski: The annual RSA-7-OB federal report has been submitted. In FFY 2025, the program served 380 individuals. South Dakota exceeded both federal targets and national averages in every performance category, with outcomes at 99.39% for assistive technology compared to 81% nationally, 100% for independent living and adjustment training compared to 81%, 99.41% for ability to engage in daily activities compared to 83%, and 98.82% for

confidence in maintaining independent living compared to 90%. These outcomes reflect strong service delivery and the direct impact of Rehabilitation Teachers in helping individuals remain independent in their homes and communities.

Year-to-date for FFY 2026, IL has served 298 individuals, with 222 currently receiving services. SBVI received 112 new referrals, with at least one referral coming from every county in South Dakota. DakotaLink recently presented to staff about technology updates and their low-interest Assistive Technology Loan Program, which helps individuals access higher-cost equipment. The TAD Program Coordinator also provided TelTex training and a BlindShell demonstration is scheduled for this month's staff meeting. These trainings ensure Rehabilitation Teachers stay current on available devices and can assess and recommend the most appropriate solutions. Consumer Satisfaction Survey results further reinforce the program's impact, with an average rating of 3.8 out of 4. Feedback consistently highlights the professionalism, patience, and effectiveness of Rehabilitation Teachers, along with the program's role in helping individuals maintain independence at home. Rehab Teachers and the Program Manager have presented on services at peer support groups, assisted living facilities, and with local providers. Dr. Welke is now providing Low Vision exams in Rapid City and Spearfish. There are currently 191 CCTVs in the Lease/Loan program, with 58 leased and 97 on loan. Several of these machines are more than 10 years old. The Program Manager is developing a

funding proposal to replace outdated equipment to maintain a high-quality inventory and ensure consumers have access to current technology.

Rehabilitation Center for the Blind – April Schulte: Chad, Center O&M Instructor, has officially passed his certification exam and is now a Certified Orientation & Mobility Specialist. Marissa, Center Counselor, has officially passed her clinical exam through the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) and is now a Certified Social Worker in Private or Independent Practice. Lily Holtman has been hired as the Summer Intern at the Center. Her first day will be May 26. She is working toward a Bachelor of Arts degree in Social Work and minor in American Sign Language from Augustana University. She has a lot of experience working with youth in various settings and this will be a benefit in assisting with Transition Week.

Eighteen Augustana students who are going to college to become interpreters toured the Center. They were currently learning about deaf/blindness. April and staff hosted an activity at the SPED Conference - *Vision Through Touch: The Blindfolded Acrylic Pour*. The SD Lions Foundation will be touring the Center soon. Dr. Wenande agreed to sign another one-year contract to provide low vision clinic, so Center Manager has submitted the contract and is waiting for approval. Students volunteered at Feeding America and also visited the 3D Art exhibit. Staff continue to work with city of Sioux Falls regarding accessibility concerns on the transit app. Transition week is May 31-June 4.

Business Enterprise Program – Ray Tracy: Sioux Falls now has two separate vending locations, the SD 1 Stop and EROS. Jeff manages the vending and micro market at the

One-Stop. A new location at the VA Community Based Outreach Clinic in Rapid City has been created and a new vendor has been trained. Aberdeen, Huron, and Pierre locations remain steady. The Interstate vending performance is average for this time of the year. A potential BEP vendor will be assessed at the Rehab Center beginning in mid-April.

Director's Report – Ronda Williams:

Board Nomination/Solicitation Process - SBVI sent out nomination applications to stakeholders for four board positions whose terms are expiring June 30, 2026. As a reminder, board members can participate for two three-year terms, but their second term is not automatic. The Governor's office wants to receive multiple nominations for the same position when possible, so there is choice. Nominations will be sent to the Governor's office for approval soon.

2026 Legislative Session Update - Legislative session occurred between January 13th and March 12th. Veto day is March 30. Providers and state employees will receive a 1.4% increase. Three bills regarding open meeting laws were signed by the Governor. SB 46 requires that the meeting agenda must list all items to be considered during the meeting and must be described in sufficient detail to reasonably inform the public of official business. SB 47 lists allowable reasons why a Board or Council can go into executive session. SB 48 clarifies that a board or council's agenda must be posted at least 72 hours prior to the start of the meeting. Ronda believes that Board of SBVI already

meets these laws. Bills related to service animals include SB 81 which clarifies the prohibition on injuring or harassing a service animal. SB 82 is an Act to prohibit the misrepresentation of an animal as a service animal and to provide a penalty, therefore.

State Plan Update - The 2024-2028 Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act Combined State Plan is a four-year plan spanning July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2028. Midway through the State Plan cycle, specific sections must be updated, such as the State Rehabilitation Council Input, and update on the 3-year Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment. This updated information was submitted prior to March 3rd deadline, and the SBVI is now waiting for approval from Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). RSA published the Program Year 2024 WIOA Performance Assessment Results for the VR program. This report includes performance for every state and shows how states performed based on the RSA's Statistical Adjustment Model. RSA's adjustment factor is added to the negotiated level to arrive at the adjusted level, and then the indicator score is the actual performance divided by the adjusted level. WIOA performance indicators include Employment rate – 2nd quarter after exit, exceeding adjusted level at 100.3%, Employment rate – 4th quarter after exit, below the adjusted level by 94.6%, Median earnings (2nd quarter after exit), below the adjusted level by 90.2%, Credential attainment (percentage of participants in an education program who attain a recognized credential or diploma) exceeding the adjusted level at 128%, Measurable skill

gains, also exceeding the adjusted level at 122.5%. Ronda anticipates that SBVI will be negotiating with RSA soon to set negotiated levels for performance indicators for PY 26 and PY 27. Once approved, these negotiated levels will then be added to the WIOA state plan.

Status of the Federal VR program - VR agencies get their federal grant funds from the Rehabilitation Services Administration, within the US Dept of Education. The US Department of Education is exploring relocating Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, where RSA is located, to another department. Proposed options are the US Dept. of Health & Human Services and US Dept. of Labor.

The VR program has been fully funded for FFY 2026, with a cost-of-living adjustment of 2.57% increase from FFY 2025.

Department of Human Services Update - The department has been focused on legislature and the DHS budget this quarter. Barb Abeln, Director of SDDC, will be retiring in June 2026. Jessica Spencer was hired to replace Barb beginning in June. Jessica is currently a Special Projects Specialist for DHS Secretariat.

Department of Legislative Audit is conducting an audit of the VR program. If the state expends \$500,000 or more in federal funds within a fiscal year, it must undergo a Single Audit. This audit verifies that federal funds are used in compliance with applicable laws, regulations, and grant

terms. The audit is still in process and SBVI hasn't received a final report.

The next Board meeting will be Thursday, June 25, 2026. Discussion was held about the Department of Human Services no longer maintaining paid Zoom licenses next year. Instead, meetings can be held using Microsoft Teams. The Board agreed to utilize Teams for those attending virtually and a link will be sent out closer to the date of the meeting.

Ryan Groeneweg adjourned the meeting.