

Board of SBVI Meeting Minutes
June 13, 2025 9:00 A.M.
Via Zoom with locations in Pierre and Sioux Falls

Members Present: Ronda Williams, Richard Crawford, Ryan Groeneweg, Deb Ver Steeg, Cherie Gerry, Allison White, Nichole Nelson, Kelly Deckert, Burdette Clifford, Mike Hommel, George Seamon, Carla Miller, Dana Stillman

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

Members Absent: Jeff Nelson, Pam Fischer, Felicia Alspach, Krystal Stuwe

Ryan Groeneweg, Chair, called the meeting to order. Introductions were made.

Richard Crawford made a motion to approve the agenda with the addition of Center for Disabilities' Run, Walk, & Roll event and funding request. Deb Ver Steeg seconded. Motion carried.

Deb Ver Steeg made a motion to approve the minutes from the March meeting. Nichole Nelson seconded. Motion carried.

Public Comments:

Deb Ver Steeg spoke to the Sioux Falls city attorney regarding transit not stopping at the Rehabilitation

Center for the Blind and Veterans Administration. She felt she got a cold reception.

Board Member Updates:

Ryan Groeneweg – Center for Disabilities’ Run, Walk, and Roll event is scheduled for September 20 at Elmwood Park. This year’s feature disability is Ushers Syndrome. It is a family-friendly event with a 5K, 10K, and Fun K. Ryan may be doing some promotional television ads. Volunteers from the running club may be available to assist blind/visually impaired runners using a tether. Ryan completed the application for funding. A sponsorship of \$500 will get your name/logo on the back of t-shirts. Richard Crawford made a motion for the Board of SBVI to sponsor \$500 toward the event. Deb Ver Steeg seconded. Motion carried. Ryan emailed the flyer with information to register. There is a fee for the 5K and 10K. Ryan asks to share this information. The flyer now has updated logo including a cane to represent blind and visually impaired.

George Seamon – The State Library is going through transition with the federal cuts. Federal documents and non-fiction books are being removed. The Braille and Talking Books Library received additional funding through American Printing House (APH) to provide educational documents.

Dana Stillman – She recently attended transition week and Youth Leadership Forum (YLF).

Nichole Nelson - Summer program is underway at the School for the Blind & Visually Impaired. The theme is Rodeo Round-up. Several students are attending this year. Students range in age for 3 to 21, with most being middle school age. One of the parents has started the Mina Lake outing day for students and their families. Pontoons, fishing, grilling, along with Game, Fish, & Parks staff providing education makes for a fun day.

Mike Hommel - He has been gardening and helping people the best he can.

Kelly Deckert – Kelly is a member of the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) Brookings Chapter which hosted the State Convention in April. It was a success. There are four NFB members attending the National NFB Convention in New Orleans. They also hosted an event for students at the Children’s Museum. He is also a member of the support group in Brookings. The group had six new people attend the last meeting. There is no virtual option yet, but it could be a possibility.

Richard Crawford – He also attended the State NFB Convention. Twenty-nine people were in attendance. He still helps with the Toy Lending Library where they make totes with educational games for parents to check out for children. He is promoting the 3D Art for the Blind display coming to the Washington Pavilion in March, April, and May of 2026. The cost for this project is \$38,000 so fundraising is taking place.

Cherie Gerry – She bought new Meta glasses which read things for you. It also describes a room, can call people, and reads handwriting. You can get them with a prescription and transition lens. She has been filling in as Rehabilitation Counselor in addition to her duties as Program Specialist at the Rehabilitation Center for the Blind since Kama took the Independent Living Older Blind Program Manager position until a new counselor is hired.

Carla Miller – SD Parent Connection is gearing up for a busy summer. October 9 is the Parent Resource Fair. Carla is also watching funding and has submitted grants.

Deb Ver Steeg – She is a member of South Dakota Association of the Blind. She is also member of support group that meets twice a month virtually. Those meetings have good attendance. The Book Club that she is a member is becoming popular. The American Council of the Blind (ACB) National Convention is being held virtually and in-person. Topics are federal legislation and funding.

Allison White – She represents the Client Assistance Program (CAP) on the Board and works for Disability Rights SD as an Advocacy Services Representative, with a focus on youth. They have three offices in the State. Calls to their office about youth are down since school is not in session. Cookouts in Kyle and Lower Brule were held. She attended the Autism conference.

Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC):

Ryan Groeneweg announced that SILC met on March 26th. The Board of Vocational Rehabilitation will need two appointments to replace Brooke Lusk whose term ends June 30th, and Cole Uecker who submitted his letter of resignation. Allison White is replacing Cole Uecker. Patty Kuglitsch has served the maximum terms on the SILC so waiting for new appointment to replace her. The Governors Awards nominations were due at the beginning of May. Champion of Independent Living Award nominations are due June 27th. The Public Awareness/Outreach/Advocacy/ Collaboration Committee is utilized to review the nominations. Fall Conference will be held October 14-16 in Sioux Falls. Dr. Lester will be presenting on personality disorders. The next SILC meeting is June 17.

Board Activities:

Governor's Awards – Cherie Gerry and George Seamon represent Board of SBVI on the Governor's Awards committee. They meet on June 24th to discuss the nominations received. Committee members agreed that it is fun to read through them, but a challenge to decide as all are deserving of the award.

National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) – This is held in October of every year with numerous events and activities around the state. Carla

Miller represents the Board of SBVI on the NDEAM committee. 2025 celebrates the 80th Anniversary. The ADA Celebration will be held in July at Levitt.

SBVI Program Updates:

Older Blind Independent Living – Kama Kwiecinski is the new Independent Living Program Manager, replacing Sandy Neyhart. She had the opportunity to train with Sandy prior to her retirement. Kama was previously the rehabilitation counselor at the Rehab Center. The CCTV Lease/Loan program has 194 units, 103 are loaned and 64 are leased for \$30 per month. Financial need determines whether clients loan or lease the machine. There is currently no funding available to purchase new machines for the program. Kama traveled to Rapid City and met with Dr. Bucknall who is a low vision specialist and refers several clients to the program. The Rehab Teacher from Rapid City was doing outreach at the Custer library. A patron overheard her conversation and knew someone with Foundation for Blind School in Phoenix who is looking for a resource in South Dakota. Older Blind Independent Living does not serve nursing home residents unless their goal is to return to their home or a less restrictive environment. They will train nursing home staff how to assist blind and low vision residents. Outreach is done at Assisted Living Centers and Senior Citizen Centers.

Rehabilitation Center for the Blind – April Schulte reported that Kathryn Fletcher has been hired as the Summer Intern at the Center. Marissa Mammenga has

been hired to replace Kama as the rehabilitation counselor. She will begin June 24. Four medical students trained at the Center. Transition week was held beginning of June. Focus of the week was helping students with visual impairments explore a wide range of future opportunities. Some highlights included a SDAB and NFB presentation, Dakota News Now media career visit, Augie Access session, Business Enterprise Program (entrepreneurship), Advocacy training with Parent Connection, Résumé/cover letter writing, mock interviews, Skills of Blindness & Employment classes, and Peer support. Students and staff attended a Community Training Event at the Washington Pavilion, where they experienced an art exhibit by Cham Phan, a visually impaired photographer. Following the exhibit, students had lunch at the Café and visited the Kirby Science Museum. These events allow students to apply the skills they're learning in real-world environments. The hands-on experiences build confidence and prepares them to transition back home and into the workforce. April has been working with Sioux Falls Transit regarding training new transit staff, safety sessions, and transportation challenges of SBVI clients. The March workshop topics included visual impairment aids, Braille, and leisure activities. Next workshop will be June 27. It will cover Ray-Ban Meta Glasses, iPhone accessibility, and screen readers. These workshops are recorded and will be posted on the Trainings & Workshops Web Page on the SBVI website.

Business Enterprise Program – Ray Tracy reported that there is progress at the Sioux Falls One Stop. Vending machines have been installed on the first floor of the

Children's Area, in Public Safety, and at the Hub on the third floor. The Hub Micro Market, featuring a variety of food and beverage options, is now fully operational. The cost of this project was around \$110,000.00. There are two machines that need repair, but they are intended for the VA Benefits office (a new location). In Aberdeen, the BEP/Project Skills collaboration for the school year has been completed. Students will be able to assist in June and July. This collaboration will begin in September again. Operations are running smoothly in Huron. There have been some repairs to machines. Pierre is still operating as before. Interstate Vending profits are average for this time of the year. For this contract year, the program has received \$84,425.00. This growth is a result of third-party vendors paying corrected remittances, which amount to approximately \$16,000. This performance is not guaranteed in the future. However, current monthly averages are still at or above the five-year average. Ray has begun business training for the Business Enterprise Program with one VR client from Sioux Falls and one from Rapid City.

Quality Assurance Program – Traci Lunzman informed the Board that Case File Review were held at the Rehab Center May 12-14. Twelve staff reviewed 108 cases. The days were productive filled with in-depth review, collaboration, and team building. Counselors asked questions, examined case situations, and supported one another. In the following weeks, counselors reviewed their outcomes, raised any disputes, and followed up with

their supervisors. She is compiling data from those disputes to finalize determinations. Identifying trends and training needs are the next steps. As of June 2, 2025, the VR Program is averaging 52 days from application to plan development this program year, which is a 29% decrease compared to the previous program year (July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024). Counselors have been focusing on rapid engagement. Youth Leadership Forum was held in Aberdeen, June 8–12, 2025, with 39 delegates attending. Traci attended on Monday and observed disability-specific breakout groups. The group representing blind or visually impaired individuals created a skit for the “Show Us Your Awareness” activity. The skit highlighted their vision loss, skills, abilities, and preferences for assistance. The final day concluded with the Richard L. Hicks Award Ceremony and Luncheon. Dana Stillman (Transition Specialist) and Adam Krumwiede (VR Counselor) were recognized for their impactful first-year contributions. It was inspiring to witness the delegates’ personal growth, confidence, and leadership development over the week. The SBVI All-Staff Training will be held July 29-31 in Sioux Falls. The agenda includes low vision trivia team building, history of SBVI, panel discussion, Jim Warne speaking on Cultural Sensitivity, phone apps, TAD/ICanConnect Program, and brain injury. It should be a fun, interactive, and informative training.

Election of Officers:

Ronda Williams oversaw the election of officers for Chair, Vice Chair, and Member-at-Large. Ryan Groeneweg is

interested in continuing as Chair. There were no other nominations from the floor. Deb Ver Steeg made a motion to cease nominations and vote on Ryan for Chair. Carla Miller seconded. Motion carried. Roll call voting was held, and Ryan was elected Chair.

Richard Crawford expressed interest in continuing in the Vice Chair position. There were no other nominations. Ryan Groeneweg made a motion to cease nominations and vote on Richard for Vice Chair. Kelly Deckert seconded. Motion carried. Roll call voting was held, and Richard was elected Vice Chair.

Richard Crawford nominated Carla Miller as Member-at-Large. Ryan Groeneweg seconded. Deb Ver Steeg nominated Cherie Gerry as Member-at Large. Nichole Nelson seconded. After discussion, Carla rescinded her nomination. Kelly Deckert made a motion to cease nominations. Richard Crawford seconded. Motion carried. Roll call voting was held, and Cherie Gerry was elected as Member-at-Large.

Director's Comments:

Membership/Nomination Update – Ronda Williams announced that the Board of SBVI is now a fully appointed Board. Allison White was appointed to replace Cole Uecker in April. Her role representing the CAP does not have a term limit. Nichole Nelson represented a Community Rehabilitation Program on the Board and has worked as a Transition Specialist at SD School for the

Blind & Visually Impaired and is now Director of Student Services. She has been a valued member of the board for six years, with her second 3-year term on the Board ending June 30, 2025. Dana Stillman is the current Transition Specialist with the SD School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and she is beginning her first term with the Board. Ronda Williams thanked Cole and Nichole for their years of service on the Board.

SD Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA)

– The federal government requires that a CSNA be completed every three years to review and assess agency needs. The results of the survey will help in defining and establishing goals. SBVI and DRS have contracted with Black Hills Special Services Cooperative to complete the CSNA. This will take approximately seven months to complete, but the consultant contract started June 1, 2025, and is effective for one year. The Board Chair will be involved, along with Division Directors, DRS Assistant Director and Division Quality Assurance staff.

DHS and State Government Updates – There has been increased scrutiny on potential fraud in state government. Senate Bill 62, which was passed by the legislature, establishes mandatory reporting requirements related to fraud and improper or illegal state employee conduct. It requires all supervisors to report to the Attorney General and State Auditor any conduct by a state employee that the supervisor has reasonable cause to suspect may be fraudulent,

improper, or illegal. The Governor's Office, Bureau of Human Resources, and the Attorney General's Office are working to develop additional guidance for supervisors regarding this new law and establishing a process for the required reporting. The key takeaway from this is that anytime a supervisor might suspect fraud, or improper or illegal activity within state government, they should be immediately raise the issue to their Division Director and DHS leadership.

There is also increased emphasis on expanding and strengthening internal controls. DHS Budget & Finance office will be leading this effort for the department, with support from the Bureau of Finance & Management. The Department created a new position in Budget & Finance that will focus specifically on internal controls. Michael Helgerson has been hired for this position.

The State Auditor's Office has also been applying increased scrutiny to all food purchases and some supply purchases within State government. All food and beverage purchases must get prior approval from the state auditor's office. State revenues have been declining and as a result, finances in DHS and in State government overall, are currently very tight. This past Legislative Session both the FY25 and FY26 DHS budgets were cut significantly. Fortunately, these budget cuts have not affected vocational rehabilitation programs and services, but it's created a situation where the Divisions now have very little flexibility within the budget. Unfortunately, state revenue projections have not been showing any signs of improvement, so budgets will remain very tight

for the foreseeable future. Further budget cuts are also a possibility.

SBVI budget totals over \$4.9 million and recently received an 11.3% increase in the vocational rehabilitation federal grant. SBVI meets monthly with the DHS budget & finance office, and they share a forecast document based on trending budget and expenditures. Prior to this increase, it was forecast that SBVI would only have 20.6% of the federal grant funds remaining in 2027. With the additional increase, they are now forecasting that SBVI will have approximately \$1.8 million in federal funds remaining at the end of the first year of the FFY 2027 grant. That's approximately 63.6% of that year's grant, much better than the 20.6% previously forecasted. Looking at SBVI expenditures 12-month average, in April 2022, SBVI spent \$232,686 per month on average. In April 2025, SBVI spent \$302,735 per month on average, a 30% increase from 3 years ago. Case numbers have not increased significantly, but costs have increased.

SBVI was put on a corrective action plan by RSA in June 2024 because in PY2022, there were twelve individuals that did not move into service status within the 90-day timeline or did not have an agreed upon plan extension. Upon doing some research, it was determined that many of the cases had completed a plan extension, but the electronic case management system didn't pull them into the federal report. The remaining cases were out of compliance. With small caseloads, just a few cases out of

compliance can quickly move the percentage below the 90% allowable compliance rate, and timeliness below 90% for two consecutive quarters is out of compliance with federal mandates. In response, SBVI updated policy on timeliness, now requiring SBVI staff to obtain supervisory approval before completing an eligibility extension or plan extension so the supervisor is aware and can provide support to improve timeliness. SBVI also provided an internal controls document to RSA to ensure SBVI is preventing timeliness noncompliance, and the case management system is accurately pulling information into the federal report before it gets submitted. SBVI also provided training to staff in April. Quarterly results received from RSA for the past year indicate 100% compliance with timeliness. RSA verified that SBVI has successfully completed the corrective action plan.

Region 8 administrators meeting will be held July 15-16 in Deadwood. This meeting includes vocational rehabilitation leadership from Utah, Colorado, Montana, Wyoming, North Dakota and South Dakota. This is a great time to network with surrounding states and the challenges they each face. There will be speakers and breakout sessions to discuss a variety of topics.

RehabACTion Fall Conference will be held October 14-16 in Sioux Falls. Dr. Gregory Lester will present on personality disorders, along with several other great

speakers. If Board members plan to attend, contact Becky to register and make arrangements.

The next Board meeting will be held on September 12, 2025, at the Sioux Falls One-Stop Center in the Department of Human Services conference room and via Zoom.

Ryan Groeneweg, Chair, adjourned the meeting.