

**South Dakota Board of Service to the Blind and
Visually Impaired
June 25, 2026 9:00 a.m.
Via TEAMS and in-person location in Sioux Falls
Quarterly Meeting Minutes**

Members Present

Ryan Groeneweg, Deb Ver Steeg, Cherie Gerry, Dana Stillman, Carla Miller, Ismael Collazo, Cole Uecker, Richard Crawford, Felicia Alspach, Ronda Williams, George Seamon, Burdette Clifford, and Mike Hommel

Members Absent

Krystal Stuwe and Pam Fisher

Others Present

Becky Blume, Traci Lunzman, Ray Tracy, April Schulte, David Woodruff, and Kama Kwiecinski

Call to Order

Chair Ryan Groeneweg called the meeting to order.

Approval of Agenda

Deb Ver Steeg moved to approve the agenda. Felicia Alspach seconded the motion. Motion carried.

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

Deb Ver Steeg moved to approve the minutes of the March Board meeting. Carla Miller seconded the motion. Motion carried.

Public Comments

Deb Ver Steeg shared concerns raised by the American Council of the Blind (ACB) regarding recent federal discussions surrounding Section 504 and community integration. She noted ACB's concern that changes in federal priorities could reduce emphasis on community-

based services for older adults and individuals with disabilities.

Cole Uecker provided clarification regarding the U.S. Department of Justice memorandum related to enforcement of the Olmstead decision and community integration protections. He explained that while the memorandum signals a change in federal enforcement priorities, it does not change existing law, federal statute, or the Olmstead decision itself. He encouraged continued advocacy and communication with federal representatives regarding the potential impact of these policy shifts on individuals with disabilities.

Ismael Collazo reported that the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) plans to issue a national press release following its National Convention on July 9 after adoption of a national resolution by its state affiliates. He indicated that advocacy materials and talking points will be distributed to assist individuals in contacting members of Congress. Deb Ver Steeg noted that ACB may also consider similar advocacy efforts following its national convention.

Deb Ver Steeg also inquired about the proposed transition of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) from the U.S. Department of Education to another federal agency. Cole Uecker indicated that the anticipated changes appear administrative in nature and are not expected to result in immediate operational changes at the state level. Ronda Williams noted that additional information would be provided during the Director's Report.

Board Member Updates

Ismael Collazo reported that South Dakota's first STEM to You program will be held on July 18 at the Children's Museum. The forensic science-themed event will provide

nonvisual STEM activities for blind students, including DNA extraction and substance identification activities. Three students have registered to participate so far.

He also reported on accessibility inquiries regarding a newly released insulin pump controlled entirely through a smartphone application. In addition, he announced plans to organize a town hall meeting for blind and disabled individuals with state legislators later this summer.

Cherie Gerry reported on the successful completion of Transition Week held during the first week of June. Nine students participated, including three students who are blind.

Participants toured several businesses and educational institutions, including Amazon, Southeast Technical College, and Vance Thompson Vision. Parent Connection presented on self-advocacy, and students participated in team-building activities, including tie-dye t-shirt projects supported through donations from the National Federation of the Blind of South Dakota and the South Dakota Association of the Blind.

Cherie noted that severe weather during the week unexpectedly provided students with practical experience navigating emergency procedures using orientation and mobility skills.

She also announced development of a new instructional course, Skills to Pay the Bills, designed to strengthen workplace readiness through instruction in communication, problem solving, interpersonal relationships, workplace expectations, and other employability skills.

Dana Stillman, Transition Specialist based in Aberdeen, provided an overview of her role at the SD School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. She described her role in

assisting students with visual impairments beginning at transition age of 14 through collaboration with SBVI, the South Dakota School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, local school districts, and community partners. Services include participation in Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings, transition planning, resource coordination, advocacy, and referrals to vocational rehabilitation services.

During the past year, nine high school students were referred to SBVI for vocational rehabilitation services. Dana also participated in SBVI Transition Week and the Youth Leadership Forum, where she promoted opportunities for youth with disabilities. She shared several successful transition outcomes and discussed the importance of statewide collaboration among service providers.

Chair Ryan Groeneweg encouraged Dana to consider presenting at the South Dakota Special Education Conference.

Carla Miller announced formation of the South Dakota Youth Engagement Council (YEC), consisting of five young adults with disabilities representing communities across the state. The Council's purpose is to promote youth leadership, peer support, and engagement opportunities for youth with disabilities. Members recently presented at the Youth Leadership Forum in Aberdeen.

Carla also announced several upcoming outreach events:

1. Parent Connection Resource Fair at Rushmore Mall in Rapid City on August 1.
2. Sioux Empire Area Transition Fair in Sioux Falls on September 8.
3. Development of an additional resource fair in the Aberdeen area.

Updates will be posted through Parent Connection's communication channels.

George Seamon highlighted the State Library's participation in the Braille Institute Summer Reading Program, featuring the Beam into the Badlands Soundscape experience. The program includes narrated audio experiences, accessible park brochures available through BARD, tactile maps, and downloadable 3D printing files related to Badlands National Park.

Board members discussed the increasing use of 3D printing technology to create tactile educational materials for individuals who are blind or visually impaired. George noted that many public libraries now provide access to 3D printers and printable files, making tactile resources more widely available.

Ryan Groeneweg announced that the Center for Disabilities' annual Run, Walk, and Roll event will be held in September. Additional event information will be distributed as details become available. This year's event will emphasize early intervention services.

Statewide Independent Living Council

Ryan Groeneweg provided an update from the June 23 meeting of the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC).

The Council reviewed annual performance information for the state's two Centers for Independent Living: Independent Living Choices in Sioux Falls and Western Resources for Independent Living in Rapid City. Independent Living Choices continues to offer Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) throughout multiple South Dakota communities during the summer months. Additional initiatives include its annual Harley-Davidson motorcycle raffle fundraiser, Youth Hunt

program for youth with disabilities, and Operation Helpful Smile fundraising partnership with Hy-Vee stores.

The Council also continues development of the next State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL), which is scheduled for submission in spring 2027.

Officer elections were held, with current officers remaining in their existing leadership roles. CJ Moit concluded six years of service on the Council upon completion of her term.

SBVI Policy Updates

Ronda Williams reminded Board members that one of the Board's statutory responsibilities is to review, analyze, and advise SBVI regarding policies affecting eligibility, the scope and effectiveness of services, and the Division's performance of its responsibilities. Five policy revisions were presented for Board review, including three joint DRS/SBVI program guides and two SBVI-specific program guides.

Applicant Availability for Assessment

The Board reviewed revisions to the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Applicant Availability for Assessment Program Guide. The revisions clarify when an individual is considered to have submitted an application for VR services consistent with federal regulations.

The updated policy expands the methods by which an individual may apply for services, including written, verbal, telephone, email, virtual, and One-Stop Center referrals. The policy also clarifies that applicants must be available to participate in the eligibility assessment process. Examples of individuals who would not be considered available include those who are incarcerated, prohibited by court order from contacting SBVI or DRS, or individuals who are not present in South Dakota and have no plans to return.

Additional revisions clarify the federal requirement that eligibility determinations be completed within 60 days unless an approved extension is granted.

Board members discussed telephone applications and the information required for an application to be considered complete.

Residency Requirements

The Board reviewed revisions to the Residency Program Guide. The updated policy clarifies that applicants are not required to maintain a permanent South Dakota residence and recognizes circumstances in which individuals may receive vocational rehabilitation services from multiple state VR agencies or Tribal VR programs when services are coordinated and not duplicated.

Outdated language regarding census and per-capita residency requirements was removed. Additional revisions reflect current organizational structure by removing references to the former Assistant Director position and clarifying that applicants must be legally authorized to work in the United States when employment is the intended vocational outcome.

Examples of interstate collaboration were discussed, including partnerships with neighboring states to ensure individuals receive the most appropriate rehabilitation services.

Employment Specialist Provider Standards

The Board reviewed revisions to the Employment Specialist Provider Standards Program Guide.

The revised policy updates procedures for approving employment service providers and expands opportunities for qualified providers to deliver vocational rehabilitation services throughout South Dakota, particularly in rural communities.

The policy identifies three categories of approved providers:

1. Accredited community rehabilitation providers;
2. Client-certified providers, including qualified individuals identified by clients to provide limited job coaching or follow-along services; and
3. Private for-profit providers approved through an application process.

The revisions eliminate the annual Request for Proposal (RFP) requirement for certain providers and replace it with an application process designed to improve efficiency while maintaining provider qualifications and service quality. Board members discussed the previous RFP process and its relationship with DRS contracting procedures.

Free Tuition Policy

The Board reviewed revisions to SBVI's Free Tuition Program Guide. The revisions clarify SBVI's interpretation of South Dakota's Free Tuition Law as a comparable benefit under federal vocational rehabilitation regulations. Individuals receiving post-secondary training through institutions governed by the South Dakota Board of Regents are expected to utilize the Free Tuition Law before SBVI funds tuition costs, unless doing so would delay services or interfere with achievement of the individual's employment goal.

The policy further clarifies that technical colleges, private colleges, and out-of-state institutions are not covered under the Free Tuition Law and remain subject to SBVI's financial needs assessment.

Board members discussed the history of the Free Tuition Law, including previous legislative efforts to expand eligibility for online coursework, and noted that individuals with qualifying visual impairments may receive verification from SBVI to utilize the benefit from the Board of Regents.

Depreciation of Low Vision and Computer Equipment

The Board reviewed a new program guide establishing procedures for the transfer of depreciated assistive technology and low vision equipment.

Under the new policy, repossessed equipment purchased through the Vocational Rehabilitation Program that has depreciated to a value of zero after three years may be transferred for use within the Independent Living Older Blind (ILOB) Program.

The policy supports expanded use of available assistive technology resources while maximizing limited Independent Living funding. DakotaLink will continue to manage equipment inventory and repossession, while Independent Living staff may request available equipment to redistribute to eligible consumers. The Board also noted that donated equipment in good working condition may continue to be accepted for redistribution.

Board Action

Following completion of the policy review, Deb Ver Steeg moved that the Board acknowledge it had sufficiently reviewed all five policies, had been provided the opportunity to ask questions, and accept the policies as presented. Richard Crawford seconded the motion.

During discussion, Cole Uecker noted that the three joint DRS/SBVI policies could undergo minor language revisions during review by the Board of Vocational Rehabilitation. He asked how those potential edits would affect the Board's approval.

Following discussion, Deb Ver Steeg amended her motion to acknowledge that the Board had completed its review of the five policies, had been provided an opportunity to ask questions, and understood that minor, non-

substantive revisions may occur before final approval in coordination with the Board of Vocational Rehabilitation.

The amended motion was accepted and Motion carried.

Board Activities/Committees

Governor's Awards

George Seamon reported that the Governor's Awards Committee received 34 nominations across seven award categories. Committee members noted the high quality of nominees and the difficulty in ranking candidates. The committee will meet to finalize recommendations for submission to the Governor for approval.

National Disability Employment Awareness Month

Carla Miller reported that funding for National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) activities has been approved. Planning continues for October events as previously discussed by the Board.

SBVI Program Updates

Rehabilitation Center for the Blind

April Schulte, Rehabilitation Center for the Blind Manager, provided an update on activities at the Rehabilitation Center for the Blind. There have been no major staffing changes. Laurie Megard, Communications and Braille Instructor, announced her retirement effective October 8.

Recent outreach activities included tours for Career Advantage staff and the South Dakota Lions Foundation. As a result of the Lions Foundation visit, staff are collaborating on development of a mentorship program for Center students.

The Center's Assistive Technology Instructor recently provided virtual digital accessibility training to 154

faculty members at South Dakota State University. Training focused on screen reader technology and digital accessibility principles. Feedback from participants was positive and highlighted increased awareness of the importance of accessible instructional materials.

Orientation and Mobility services continue to expand throughout the state. The Center's Orientation and Mobility Instructor recently traveled to western South Dakota to provide services to eight consumers and may continue providing outreach services in underserved areas.

Center staff also participated in the South Dakota Optometric Society Spring Convention to increase awareness of SBVI services among eye care professionals. During the event, staff met Dr. Adam Bleeker, who will join Ophthalmology Limited in Sioux Falls later this year. Staff noted that Dr. Bleeker previously participated in a Rehabilitation Center training experience while attending medical school in 2021. The Center hosts four medical students every year.

Specialty Fridays will launch this fall, allowing individuals with vision loss to schedule focused one-on-one training with multiple instructors and the Low Vision Clinic in a single visit. A video has been developed to raise awareness of this new resource:
<https://youtu.be/LMACF0V6X9E>. A flyer advertising Specialty Fridays will be shared once it is completed.

Updated Rehabilitation Center signage has also been installed to correct and update Center information.

To support community-based instruction, a state-issued mobile phone was assigned to the Home Management Instructor, allowing improved communication during

training activities and access to assistive technology applications.

Due to increasing demand for Braille services, staff are developing a Braille Services Program Guide outlining procedures for requesting Braille production and establishing criteria for determining whether requests can be completed internally or outsourced.

Independent Living Older Blind Program

Kama Kwiecinski reported on Independent Living Older Blind (ILOB) program activities. Program staff participated in the National Federation of the Blind state conference April 24-25 in Brookings, SD, providing information regarding Independent Living services and receiving several referrals from attendees.

Kama also attended the National Older Individuals Who Are Blind (OIB) Program Managers Conference in Dallas, Texas May 12-13, 2026. The conference emphasized increased federal attention to OIB programs. South Dakota currently exceeds all four required federal performance indicators.

During the second quarter (January-March), the program served 226 individuals statewide, received 41 new applications, completed 11 plan reviews, and closed 54 cases. Forty-three case closures resulted in successful outcomes.

Following recent staff retirements and resignations, rehabilitation teacher territories have been reorganized. The previous hybrid counselor/ rehabilitation teacher positions have been eliminated, and rehabilitation teachers will assume expanded geographic coverage. Kim Smith held a hybrid caseload and is transitioning to a full-time Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor position.

To date, recruitment efforts for two vacant rehabilitation teacher positions generated twelve applications.

SBVI renewed its three-year agreement with DakotaLink to administer the CCTV Program. The program currently maintains 191 closed-circuit television units, including leased units, loaned equipment, and inventory available for future placement or repair. Because many units were purchased between 2014 and 2016, a proposal has been submitted requesting funding to replace aging equipment.

Consumer satisfaction surveys for the second quarter averaged 3.59 on a four-point scale with a 53 percent response rate.

Staff continued statewide outreach through presentations to the Coalition on Aging, the Rapid City Public Library, peer support groups, the South Dakota Optometric Society, and Barrier Awareness Day activities in Aberdeen. A consumer success story demonstrating the impact of Independent Living services was also shared.

Vocational Rehabilitation Program

David Woodruff reported that the recent counselor territory restructuring was designed to maintain existing community partnerships while ensuring statewide coverage of every county. Territory adjustments were made to balance workloads and improve long-term service continuity.

Several counselors are currently pursuing Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) certification. Counselors also participated in Transition Week and the Youth Leadership Forum to support transition-age students.

Staff continue development of Power BI dashboards that will improve monitoring of case activity, documentation requirements, timelines, and performance indicators. Counselors also received a presentation from the Blind Institute of Technology regarding employment resources available to consumers.

Business Enterprise Program

The Business Enterprise Program (BEP) celebrated the 90th anniversary of the Randolph-Sheppard Act, recognizing its longstanding role in supporting entrepreneurial opportunities for individuals who are blind.

Ray Tracy reported program updates including:

- Expansion of vending operations at the Sioux Falls One-Stop Center, including exploration of coffee service.
- Successful completion of probation by the new EROS facility vendor, allowing full operation of the business.
- Continued training of a vendor at the Veterans Administration facility in Rapid City.
- Notification from the General Services Administration regarding potential Business Enterprise opportunities at the Rapid City Federal Building and Courthouse.
- Resolution of vending machine challenges related to humidity in Huron.
- Temporary relocation of vending machines at the Pierre Health Laboratory during remodeling.
- Continued monitoring of Interstate vending operations due to increased fuel costs, with expectations for improved summer travel activity.

Quality Assurance and Training

Traci Lunzman reported several quality improvement initiatives currently underway. Consumer Satisfaction Surveys will soon include a QR code to improve

accessibility and increase participation. The Rehabilitation Center's Assistive Technology Instructor will evaluate the survey for accessibility and provide recommendations to improve usability for individuals with varying levels of vision loss.

Development of Power BI dashboards continues and will provide counselors and supervisors with improved access to real-time performance information, workload management, and compliance monitoring.

All SBVI staff are scheduled to attend Mandatory Reporting Training, presented by the Division of Long-Term Services and Supports, in July. The training will focus on recognizing and reporting suspected abuse, neglect, exploitation, and other mandatory reporting responsibilities.

The annual SBVI All-Staff Training will be held August 4–6 in Sioux Falls. Training topics include caregiver burnout, orientation and mobility best practices, rehabilitation assessments, low vision technology, and emerging retinal treatment research. The primary objective is to strengthen collaboration across SBVI programs.

Vocational Rehabilitation program performance for the third quarter included:

- 35 new applications received.
- 26 eligibility determinations completed.
- Services provided to 257 individuals.
- 10 successful employment outcomes.
- 14 non-rehabilitated closures following receipt of services.

The quarterly employment success rate was 42 percent, consistent with the current national Vocational Rehabilitation average. Staff noted that quarterly

outcomes fluctuate based on the timing and complexity of case closures and should be evaluated over multiple reporting periods.

Election of Officers

Ryan Groeneweg passed the virtual gavel to Ronda Williams to speak on behalf of the Executive Committee. Board of SBVI officer positions consist of Chair, Vice Chair, and Member At Large. Ronda introduced the proposed slate of officers as Ryan Groeneweg as Chair, Richard Crawford as Vice Chair, and Cherie Gerry as Member At Large. Each have indicated an interest in continuing to serve as officers. Ronda emphasized that additional nominations can be made from the floor, noting that each position will be taken one at a time.

Ronda started with the position of Chairperson, calling for further nominations for the Chair position in addition to Ryan Groeneweg two times. Hearing none, Richard Crawford made a motion to cease nominations. Cole Uecker seconded. Roll call voting was held, and Ryan was unanimously elected Chair.

Ronda moved onto the position of Vice Chair, calling for further nominations for Vice Chair position in addition to Richard Crawford two times. Hearing none, Deb Ver Steeg made a motion to cease nominations. Felicia Alspach seconded. Roll call voting was held, and Richard was unanimously elected Vice Chair.

Ronda moved to call for further nominations for the position of Member-At-Large position in addition to Cherie Gerry two times. Hearing none, Felicia Alspach made a motion to cease nominations. Deb Ver Steeg seconded. Roll call voting was held, and Cherie Gerry was unanimously elected as Member-at-Large.

Ronda thanked the new officers for their willingness to serve on the Executive Committee and encouraged other members to consider these roles in the future, noting that elections are held annually. The virtual gavel was passed back to Ryan Groeneweg as the Chair.

Closing Actions

The next meeting was scheduled for Thursday, September 17, 2026, via TEAMS and in-person location at the Sioux Falls One Stop.

Ryan adjourned the meeting with no objections.