

**South Dakota Board of Service to the Blind and
Visually Impaired
Quarterly Meeting Minutes
September 17, 2026, 9:00 a.m.
Via TEAMS and in-person location in Sioux Falls**

MEMBERS PRESENT

Ryan Groeneweg, Deb Ver Steeg, Cherie Gerry, Dana Stillman, Krystal Stuwe, Cole Uecker, Ronda Williams, George Seamon, Burdette Clifford, Mike Hommel, and Lourdes (Bing) Ecklund.

MEMBERS ABSENT

Carla Miller, Ismael Collazo, Richard Crawford, and Felicia Alspach

OTHERS PRESENT

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

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Ryan Groeneweg called the meeting to order.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Deb Ver Steeg made a motion to approve the agenda with the revision to move the action items to 10 a.m. time slot. George Seamon seconded the motion. Motion carried.

APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES

Deb Ver Steeg moved to approve the minutes of the June Board meeting. Dana Stillman seconded the motion. Motion carried.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Deb Ver Steeg will be traveling to Morristown, New Jersey for 28 days to receive her guide dog.

BOARD MEMBER UPDATES

Krystal Stuwe – No update at this time.

Dana Stillman – The School for Blind and Visually Impaired hosted Family Fun weekend on July 24 and 25. Theme was Game On – Challenge Accepted. Seventeen students and their families attended. She attended Transition Summer Institute and connected with special education teachers. Met with outreach consultants at the professional development days at school. Discussion was held about who handles what age. Outreach consultants cover birth to 14 years, Dana covers transition age of 14-21, vocational rehabilitation counselors get involved around age 18. The team works together to help clients. She was also part of a meeting with Post-Secondary Disability Coordinators from all universities. Discussion was on emotional support animals and artificial intelligence (AI). She advocated for visually impaired students with the use of AI and explained how it might be needed to help with reading. There are 27 students enrolled at the school. She announced that a student is participating in the North Central School for the Blind track and field meet in Columbus, OH. Special Olympics bowling will be starting soon. Dana has been traveling for outreach to western South Dakota schools.

Deb Ver Steeg commented that emotional support animals are not considered service animals.

Krystal Stuwe asked about AI and how to use it responsibly. Students with disabilities need accommodations and faculty needs to respect that. She also asked about a listing of employers who support students with visual impairments and other disabilities. She commented that parents need to be involved.

George Seamon – represents Department of Education and works at State Library. Accessible Library Services (ALS) held a social, like a book club. ALS staff attended a conference where they learned what is happening with talking books. American Printing House, which is where they get the resources, emailed a picture of student using the periodic table in Braille. Staff are signing up new patrons. There is a new studio in Huron.

Cole Uecker – He is with the client assistant program. All staff and annual board meetings were held recently. He is finalizing fiscal year activities and working on Partners in Policymaking which will be the 35th year starting in November. He has been working with mental health but always looking for opportunities to help people with visual impairments. If you know of anything Disability Rights South Dakota should participate in or contribute to, please let Cole know.

Mike Hommel - Still having health issues but was able to do some gardening.

Deb Ver Steeg – South Dakota Association of the Blind (SDAB) members participated in the American Council of the Blind (ACB) national convention either in-person or virtually. The SDAB convention will be held September 18-20 in Aberdeen.

Cherie Gerry – Tentative dates for transition week are June 6-10, 2027, just waiting to confirm dorm availability. Cherie has been working with April on low vision clinics. There will be no low vision clinics in October or November. She has been training new Rehabilitation Teachers. She and Mary Carrell have been facilitating peer support. The summer intern position will be posted soon and will close in January.

Lourdes (Bing) Ecklund – This is her first meeting. She is honored to give back to the agency that helped her.

Ryan Groeneweg – Center for Disabilities recently held the annual Run, Walk, and Roll event. This year's focus was on early intervention. Last year it focused on Usher's Syndrome. Ryan did several interviews for TV. Event revenue helped support the 3D Art display that Richard Crawford was successful in bringing to the Washington Pavilion. Special Education conference is scheduled for March 23-24 in Rapid City at the Monument. A call for presentations will be sent out in the near future.

STATEWIDE INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL

Ryan reported that there has been no SILC meeting to report on since the last Board of SBVI meeting.

BOARD ACTIVITIES

The Governor's Awards is scheduled for October 1st at 11 a.m. in the Capitol Rotunda. A reception will be held immediately following at the Visitor's Center. George Seamon and Cherie Gerry are representatives on this committee. The categories include Outstanding Individual with a Disability, Outstanding Employee with a Disability,

Outstanding Small Private Employer, Outstanding Large Private Employer, Outstanding Public Employer, Outstanding Transition Services Award, and Distinguished Service Award. Board of SBVI has been asked to sponsor \$1,500 for the Governor's Awards. George made a motion to support Governor's Awards in the amount of \$1,500. Deb Ver Steeg seconded. Motion carried. Board members can attend the Governor's Awards ceremony, and travel expenses will be reimbursed.

George and Cherie reviewed nominations in June. Uncertain on number of nominations, but there were several pages of supporting documentation to read through. If Krystal Stuwe is interested in serving on the Governor's Awards committee, George will step down.

NATIONAL DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS MONTH (NDEAM)

This year's theme is Celebrating Value and Talent. The NDEAM requests for proposals were submitted in December. The committee evaluates these proposals. Carla Miller is currently the Board of SBVI representative on this committee. Eleven communities were approved for \$46,356 in funding for planned events. The Board of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC), the Board of SBVI, and Division of Rehabilitation Services support NDEAM activities. This year, the SILC voted to contribute less due to additional State Plan development activities. It is requested that the Board of SBVI contribute \$6,500 toward NDEAM events. Deb Ver Steeg made a motion to support the NDEAM in the amount of \$6,500. George Seamon seconded the motion. Motion carried.

A list of events will be compiled and sent to Board members in the near future. Director, Ronda Williams, encourages Board members to attend events in their area.

Carla Miller was not in attendance, but if she no longer wishes to remain on the NDEAM committee, George Seamon would be interested.

PROVISION OF SERVICES POLICY DRAFT –SEEKING INPUT

Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) has been selected to be monitored by the Rehabilitation Services Administration in 2027. They are involved in a monitoring community of practice and getting assistance from the VR Technical Assistance Center to prepare for the monitoring. SBVI is not on the list to be monitored in 2027 or 2028.

DRS recognized the need to develop a more formalized policy on out-of-state services as they prepare for the monitoring visit. The policy is being developed to formally document and establish consistent policy regarding the provision of services to individuals outside of South Dakota, particularly those pursuing post-secondary education and will apply to both the Division of Rehabilitation Services and Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired. Ronda reviewed the policy in the meeting and Board members can offer input on the policy until October 30, 2026.

OPEN MEETINGS LAW REVIEW

SDCL Ch.1-25 requires that official meetings of public bodies must be public, and advance notice is to be given

of such meetings. Open meetings laws apply to all public bodies of the state and its political subdivisions. Agendas should be posted in a location the public can view at least 72 hours before a meeting. Proposed agendas are also required to be posted on <http://boardsandcommissions.sd.gov>. Public bodies are required to provide time on their agenda at every official meeting for public comment. Boards are now required to review open meeting laws annually and document the review in the Board meeting minutes.

The Board of SBVI follows the requirements and timelines of the open meeting laws.

FALL CONFERENCE

Fall Conference will be held in Deadwood October 13-15. The theme is Raising the Stakes – Advancing Employment and Independence for All. Board members are welcome to attend and expenses will be covered. Becky or Ronda need to be notified by October 1 if any Board members are interested in attending.

SBVI Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselors will attend a mandatory pre-conference on the morning of October 13. The topic is “The Dollars and Sense of VR: Strengthening Fiscal Decision-Making for Field Staff.” VR counselors make spending decisions every day—but those decisions carry real fiscal, compliance, and programmatic consequences. This session will bring fiscal concepts out of the abstract and into real-world practice, helping field staff understand their role as stewards of public funds.

Krystal Stuwe notified members of Technical and Entrepreneurship at Northern State University. There is monthly education on how to build a business. She will send more information.

She also asked about Braille tutoring. She was advised that Hadley provides Braille tutoring, and she was advised to look into Specialty Fridays at the Rehabilitation Center for the Blind.

SBVI PROGRAM UPDATES

Independent Living Older Blind –There were two Rehabilitation Teacher vacancies this summer, one in Rapid City and one in Aberdeen. Justin Ward was hired for the Rapid City position in July. He has completed his orientation, training at the Rehabilitation Center, and field shadowing with experienced staff. Samuel Johnson began his employment this week in Aberdeen. He will serve the north-central portion of the state, including the Pierre/Ft. Pierre area, after completing the same structured onboarding process.

Since October 1, 2025, the IL program has received 635 referrals and currently has 376 individuals actively enrolled in services. Consumer satisfaction remains one of the program's strengths, with the most recent Consumer Satisfaction Survey indicating an average score of 3.59 out of 4, with a 53 percent response rate. That improved from 3.42 out of 4 and a 40 percent response rate during the same period last year.

Outreach also remained strong as staff presented at peer support groups, connected with eye-care providers and aging-service partners, participated in disability and

community events, and worked with advocacy groups and Lions Clubs to increase awareness of services.

In 2025, 166 participants used the CCTV Lease Loan Program. SBVI received approval to purchase 18 new machines this year and is now budgeted to renew ten percent of the inventory annually to offer clients upgraded equipment and surplus outdated inventory.

Kama has been focused on improving the program's infrastructure which includes strengthening staff training, creating clearer guidance for travel and reporting requirements, reviewing and updating policies and processes, and improving consistency in how staff complete functional assessments, deliver services, and complete documentation. These efforts support the quality of the services currently provided and make the program more sustainable as staff change over time. Overall, the IL program has remained stable through several staffing transitions, continues to receive strong feedback from participants, and is positioned to improve service consistency and statewide access as new Rehabilitation Teachers move into their roles.

Vocational Rehabilitation - David Woodruff, VR Supervisor, is out on extended leave but will return on Oct. 5. Ronda has been providing supervision of staff, with assistance from certified rehabilitation counselors. She meets with counselors bi-weekly to review case work and provide guidance on client situations. She will travel to Rapid City next week to meet with staff and participate in a peer support group in Rapid City.

Since the last Board meeting, there has been a change to the hybrid counselor/teacher positions in the rural areas of the State. SBVI staff providing services to two separate groups that have separate policies, timelines and program emphasis has been very challenging. With high turnover in the Pierre area, and lack of applicants, this change away from hybrid positions will allow the field staff to focus more fully on the needs of either older adults seeking independent-living services or individuals pursuing employment goals.

Recently, Bureau of Human Resources and Administration (BHRA) looked at Rehabilitation Counselor and Sr. Rehabilitation Counselor position duties and responsibilities and identified that they should be moved up to a higher pay grade, including raises.

SD Rehabilitation Center for the Blind – There have been quite a few staffing changes since the last board meeting. Dana Konzem is the new Senior Secretary, starting September 14. She previously worked as the Community Outreach Director at the Sioux Falls Area Humane Society. Following Laurie Megard's retirement in October, Mary Carrell will be the Communications/Braille Instructor. Heidi Evilsizor will begin September 24 as the Home Management Instructor. She currently operates a small business, Gear is Joy, where she creates gear for guide dogs. Camille Uecker accepted the Social Worker (Center Counselor) position. She is a licensed social worker with a Bachelor of Arts in Social Work and Psychology from Concordia College. She is also fluent in American Sign Language and has personal experience supporting individuals who are deafblind and individuals with other disabilities. Her start date is September 24.

Laurie Megard will be retiring October 8th after 35 years of dedicated service.

Katy Manke is officially a Certified Assistive Technology Instructional Specialist for Individuals with Visual Impairments (CATIS), the only individual in South Dakota with this certification. She presented to the Brookings low vision peer support group about Rehabilitation Center services, staff roles, and referral options. The Assistive Technology Instructor provided individual assistance with smartphone accessibility features.

The Center hosted a Chamber of Commerce ribbon-cutting ceremony on August 27, to recognize 20 years at its current location and 20 years of Chamber membership. The event was a great success!

Specialty Fridays has officially started, and the link to the video was shared. <https://youtu.be/LMACF0V6X9E>

Business Enterprise Program (BEP) – Vending repairs have been ongoing in all locations. Ray has been traveling to Aberdeen to restock machines on a regular basis as the temporary vendor is no longer there.

Ray and Traci have been working on a vendor review process. This will become official after discussing with vendors at the annual meeting in November.

Crane, the vending machine vendor, has a new refurbished program. Ray will be looking into this program as refurbished machines are about half the cost of new. Crane will also purchase old machines to refurbish.

BEP is working with General Services Administration for a permit for the Rapid City Federal Building. He is also working on getting machines for the Veterans Affairs benefits office in Sioux Falls. Interstate highway vending income is lower but expected.

Discussion was held on vending machines being accessible. Seeing AI on phones and Meta glasses are helpful. For blind individuals, restocking machines with Braille and bump dots are useful. A new technology is AI Coolers. Customer is only charged for what is removed from the cooler and the vendor can monitor sales on a cell phone.

Quality Assurance/Training - The 2026 SBVI All-Staff Training was held August 4-6 at the Sioux Falls One Stop. The Planning Committee consisted of a VR Counselor, an Independent Living Blind Rehabilitation Teacher, a Rehabilitation Center for the Blind Teacher, and SBVI leadership staff. This representation proved to be successful due to the different perspectives from staff who provide services directly to clients every day and helped develop an agenda that reflected the interests and training needs of staff across SBVI. Staff recognition for longevity and other awards was also held. Surveys were sent after the training, and feedback was very positive and suggestions for future trainings were received.

Results of the Consumer Satisfaction Survey and the Year End Report will be shared at the December meeting.

DIRECTOR'S COMMENTS

DHS/SBVI Updates - The Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services office (OSERS) staff relocated to Health and Human Services as part of the interagency agreement moving special education functions out of the Education Department. They physically moved to their new offices on Sept. 10.

At that same time Kelly Rogers, who has led the U.S. Department of Education's OSERS since May, announced her resignation to staff on September 9, effective September 11. Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education Kirsten Baesler began serving as Acting Assistant Secretary for OSERS effective Monday, September 14. With the interagency agreement, SBVI continues to maintain state liaisons within RSA.

Department of Human Services (DHS)– Shawnie Rechtenbaugh, DHS Department Secretary, visited the Rapid City and Sioux Falls offices this summer. She met with staff at the Sioux Falls One-Stop as well as the Rehabilitation Center for the Blind. Discussion was on transportation/state cars and accessibility of state software. Shawnie didn't have a specific goal in mind with these meetings but wanted to get out and meet with staff as it had been a while since she had the opportunity to do this. She is planning to travel to the Aberdeen office in the future.

South Dakota Association of the Blind (SDAB) –April, Traci, and Ronda will present on SBVI topics, updates, new technologies at the SDAB convention in Aberdeen on September 18-19. SBVI attends both blind organization conventions annually.

The next Board meeting is scheduled for Tuesday,
December 8, 2026, at 9:00 a.m.

Ryan Groeneweg, Chair, adjourned the meeting.