

Board of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR)
Wednesday, September 3, 2025

Quarterly Meeting Held Via Zoom and DHS Hillview Plaza/Conference Room

9:00 AM - New Member Orientation was held prior to the quarterly meeting. Those in attendance included Eric Weiss, Tana Zwart, Jonathan Englund and Colette Wagoner. Topics reviewed included an organizational outline, i.e., federal and state entities involved with the vocational rehabilitation agency (VR), what VR services consist of and Board related information (composition, responsibilities, staff support agreement, and member manual).

10:00 AM – BVR Quarterly Meeting: MEMBERS PRESENT: Jonathan Englund, Chris Olson, Betsy Drew, Tana Zwart, Sherry Van Liere, Vicki Stewart, Michael Kokesh, Jolleen Laverdure, and Eric Weiss. **MEMBERS ABSENT:** Julie Johnson Jennifer Trenhaile, Shawn Lyons, Kara Schweitzer and Eric Larson. (Allison White resigned from her position effective September 1st, which created a vacancy on the Board). **OTHERS PRESENT:** Cole Uecker, Bernie Grimme, Jessica Sehnert, Kim Ludwig, Sylvia Buboltz, Dan Rounds, Katie Gran, and Colette Wagoner. The interpreter was Julie Paluch.

OPENING ACTIONS: Jonathan Englund, Chairperson, called the meeting to order and invited everyone to introduce themselves. A quorum was present. Review & Approval of Agenda: **MOTION TO APPROVE THE AGENDA AS DISSEMINATED – MADE (M), SECONDED (S) AND CARRIED (C).** YEAS: Betsy, Michael, Sherry, Vicki, Chris, Jolleen, and Tana. NAYS: None.

Review & Approval of Meeting Minutes: Jonathan asked for changes/additions to the Board's June 26, 2025, meeting minutes and the Executive Committee meeting minutes from August 13. There were none. **MOTION TO APPROVE THE BVR'S JUNE MINUTES AND THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES AS DISSEMINATED, MSC.** YEAS: Betsy, Michael, Sherry, Vicki, Chris, Jolleen, and Tana. NAYS: None.

PUBLIC COMMENT: There was no comment(s).

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Vicki provided an update on the ADA events held in Sioux Falls in July. There was standing room only for the Lunch and Learn event with the topic of ADA, Access, and Employment, with over fifty attendees. The ADA Festival was held at the Levitt at the Falls with over 3,900 attendees held on Saturday night and it received very positive feedback.

REVIEW OF STATE'S OPEN MEETINGS LAWS: The Board conducted its annual review of South Dakota's Open Meetings Laws as required by Senate Bill 74. The review involved examining the informational brochure from the South Dakota Attorney General's office, which was shared with all members before the meeting.

During the meeting, Colette presented an overview of the laws, covering key points such as the need for advance notice, rules for public participation, proper meeting recordings, and the difference between official meetings and executive sessions. She also outlined the six legal reasons for holding closed sessions, record-keeping responsibilities, and how to report violations. Eric affirmed that similar reviews would continue at future fall BVR meetings and expressed confidence in the board's ongoing compliance with the laws.

DIVISION OF REHABILITATION SERVICES (DRS) DIRECTOR'S COMMENTS & UPDATES: Eric presented data on applications, eligibilities, and caseloads, noting steady increases since the pandemic. He discussed the 2025 Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Grant, which received an 11% increase. However, he noted this brings challenges related to the required state matching funds and maintenance of effort requirements.

Eric also explained the reallotment process and recent budget requests, highlighting ongoing uncertainty in federal funding and the potential impact on VR services in South Dakota. The reallotment process occurs each August, during which states either relinquish or request funds. Last year, the Division requested \$400,000 through the reallotment process and relinquished \$200,000 in Supported Employment (SE) funds. This year, the Division did not request additional funds and relinquished only \$100,000 in SE funds.

A few months ago, the U.S. Department of Education's budget request proposed eliminating funding for several programs—for example, reverting to the 2024 VR funding level, as well as cutting the Client Assistance Program, Supported Employment (SE) grants, training programs, and Protection and Advocacy of Individual Rights programs. However, at the end of July, the Senate Appropriations Committee released the FY 2026 appropriations bill, which restored funding to these programs. We will continue to monitor developments and expect more clarity in the coming months.

Eric referred to the [Annual Disability Statistics Compendium](https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED673281.pdf) and noted the most recent copy is available now. You can a copy of the compendium at: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED673281.pdf>. Eric shared that South Dakota ranked first in the percentage of people with disabilities employed, with a rate of 61.1%, and

noted the state has the smallest gap between employment rates for people with and without disabilities.

DRS VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM INITIATIVES: Kim Ludwig, Business Specialist, presented updates on quarterly virtual training sessions for businesses, titled "Morning Blend Employer Disability Solutions," which began in July with sixty participants and will continue in October with a focus on mental health disabilities. Feedback from the July session sought information on short term disability, how to write job descriptions, additional training on the ADA, and more information on mental health topics. The next session will be held on October 22nd featuring Jana Burke as the presenter.

Kim shared examples of supports provided to state government entities, employees and businesses, which included sharing of resources i.e., DakotaLink, Job Accommodation Network (JAN). VR services were explored in various stages of employment i.e., employee application for VR services and other supports explored to include the use of Project Skills.

VR Program Satisfaction and Performance: Morgan Beckman, Quality Assurance and Support Specialist, presented the consumer satisfaction survey results for the VR program. The client satisfaction surveys measure client satisfaction at various stages of the VR process, with most questions scoring over 90%. Six questions are asked per survey. Questions gauge the client's satisfaction with their participation in the planning and implementation of their individualized plan for employment, satisfaction with the suitability and quality of the services they received, interactions with providers and VR program staff; and satisfaction with their services and overall involvement in the VR program. The last two surveys offer multiple choice questions versus rating questions. The Division will take a closer look at the questions resulting in less than a 90% rating and explore options to improve results, i.e., training on IPE development, utilizing more consumer friendly terms/language, provision of informed choice options, contacting the Client Assistance Program, use of due process, and ensuring references to specific programs are being utilized.

Jessica Sehnert, reviewed the 6 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) performance indicators, noting that while some measures came in under negotiated levels, others exceeded expectations, particularly in credential attainment and measurable skill gains. The summer target review identified improvement in specific areas: eligibility extensions, IPE signature dates matching, measurable skills gains documentation, and employment verification documentation in the casefile. The Division is watching issues that were identified this year to include verification of social security benefits, eligibility certificates signed and in file director, benefits counseling dropped below 90% for the first time, and there was a temporary dip in recording

completion dates for measurable skill gains. Areas of concern remain with financial need documentation, Project Skills reporting (receiving reports) equipment accountability and repossession agreement being completed and documentation for Plans for Sustaining Employment. Jessica reassured members that the Division is consistently meeting or exceeding expectations, but there are areas to focus on for improvement.

Bernie spoke about the Fall Conference on October 14-16 in Sioux Falls and noted the members who have registered to date include Jonathan, Shawn, Vicki, Jennifer, and Eric. There is still time to register. State Plan: Bernie disseminated a one-page outline for Draft State Plan items. The outline highlighted the items that need to be updated during the second year of the four-year State Plan. In the past, items were reviewed by the Board's Consumer Services Committee. It was agreed to have this committee review draft items prior to having items presented to the full board. Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment. The Division has contracted with Black Hills Special Services Cooperative, with Dr. Ryan, to work on the needs assessment. The contract also involves the Division of Service to the Blind and Visually impaired. The scope of the needs assessment targets 7 areas: persons with disabilities; persons with the most significant disabilities; persons of minority groups; persons who are unserved and/or underserved; individuals served through other components of the workforce system; and youth and students served through pre-employment or other transition programs. The contractor is currently reviewing current and older data and conducting interviews with partner agencies. Bernie will speak with Dr. Young about presenting information to the board during the December meeting.

TRANSITION SERVICES LIAISON PROJECT: Dan Rounds presented an overview of the Transition Services Liaison Project (TSLP), highlighting its mission to improve and expand high school transition options and services for students with disabilities in South Dakota. He described various activities and events conducted by the project, including technical assistance, training, resource sharing, and youth development programs. Dan also explained the project's staff structure, funding sources, and collaboration with schools, families, service agencies, and post-secondary institutions. More time was utilized to explain what the Youth Leadership Forum, Catch the College Wave and Let's Talk Work are.

BROOKINGS DISTRICT OFFICE OVERVIEW: Sylvia Buboltz, VR District Supervisor, provided an overview of the Brookings district's operations, and staff. This district office is made up of three office locations, including the Brookings, Watertown Huron offices. These offices serve a total of thirteen counties and thirty-three school districts. She noted the partner agencies and community support providers that staff work with in each area. She noted some of the challenges, highlighting successes like the Project Search program and collaboration with local schools.

STATEWIDE INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL (SILC) UPDATE: Eric provided an update on the SILC explaining that the state receives Independent Living (IL) funds from the Administration for Community Living (ACL), and each state is required to have an established SILC. The SILC is responsible for developing and monitoring the State Plan for Independent Living.

The SILC met on June 17th and agenda items included updates from the Division on the status of the Centers for Independent Living (CILs), consumer satisfaction survey update, status of CIL contracts, CIL quarterly report information, and CIL updates on their activities and staffing levels. The SILC hosted Rhonda Erickson, who provided information on ABLE accounts. The presentation included information on eligibility, advantages of having an ABLE account, impact on benefits, and enrollment. The next meeting will be held on September 30th.

Eric displayed the state's Boards and Commission's website, demonstrated how to access the BVR and SILC pages, and how to find meeting related information (agendas, membership listings, meeting information). The state's boards/commission's website is located at <https://boardsandcommissions.sd.gov/>.

BVR STAFF UPDATE: National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM), Earlier this year, eleven communities received a total of \$48,575 in funding to support local NDEAM events. These funds are provided through contributions from the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC), the Board of Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Board of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired.

Most communities are finalizing details, with a few locking in details of speaker and topics. A comprehensive listing of events is being finalized and will be shared with board and council members. Members are encouraged to attend local events where possible.

So far, five speaker contracts have been finalized, with two more nearing completion.

Governor's Awards: The recipients of the Governor's Awards have been announced, and the awards ceremony will be held on Wednesday, October 8, 2025, at 11:00 AM (Central Time) in the Capitol Rotunda on the second floor in Pierre. A post ceremony event will follow at the Capitol Lake Visitor's Center

The Seven Recipients are:

Jim Hoxie, Spearfish: Outstanding Individual with a Disability

Shawn Lyons, Pierre: Outstanding Employee with a Disability

Eagle Butte Co-op Association, Eagle Butte: Outstanding Small Private Employer

Ken's SuperFair Foods, Aberdeen: Outstanding Large Private Employer
City of Belle Fourche, Belle Fourche: Outstanding Public Employer
Steve Hilton, Piedmont: Outstanding Transition Services Award
Sandy Neyhart, Sturgis: Distinguished Service Award

SD Public Broadcasting will livestream the ceremony. Once we have the link, it will be forwarded to members, otherwise it can be found online at: <https://www.sdpb.org/>.

Budget: Support services for the Board and SILC are provided through an agreement between the Division and Black Hills Special Services Cooperative. The current contract started January 1st and will end on December 31st. This budget runs on the calendar year, with an option to renew with four (4) one-year extensions.

The budget pages disseminated via email show expenditures through the month of July. There have been minimal expenditures for the BVR, the only expenditure to date was the Zoom subscription renewal, which was a shared cost with the SILC. Most expenditures will come, with expenses related to the Governor's Awards Ceremony, NDEAM and member expenses related to attending the Fall Conference.

OTHER BUSINESS: There was no other business.

CLOSING ACTIONS: Future Agenda Items: Jonathan encouraged members to pass along agenda items or topics of interest to staff. Next Meeting: a doodle poll will be disseminated to identify a date in December. Adjournment: Jonathan asked if there were any objections to adjourning the meeting, there were none. The meeting ended at 12:40 PM