South Carolina Commission for the Blind
1430 Confederate Avenue
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Meeting Minutes
December 14, 2021

Notifications of all regular, called, or special meetings are compliant with the FOIA requirements, Section 90-4-80.

Call to Order

Chairperson Johnson called the meeting to order at 11:00 am. The meeting was conducted via Zoom Meeting software.

Present

Dr. Judy Johnson, Chairperson
Peter Smith, Vice Chairperson
Mary Sonksen, Secretary
Susan John
Cathy Olker
Darline Graham, Commissioner

Adoption of Agenda

Peter Smith made a motion to accept the December 14, 2021 Agenda. It was seconded by Mary Sonksen. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment

None

Approval of Minutes

Peter Smith made a motion to approve the October 26, 2021 minutes. It was seconded by Susan John. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

Finance Report

Matt Daugherty reported:

State Budget Report – SCCB is 42 % through State Fiscal Year 2022. Prevention of Blindness has used 19% of their budget, Vocational Rehabilitation has used 27%, and the Training Center has used 38%. This is due to vacancies and continuing difficulties with service delivery due to COVID. Overall, agency spending is at 38%.

Federal Grant Report – SCCB is in the carry-over year for Federal grants, and 58% through the total Period of Performance. The Vocational Rehabilitation grant is 26% expended and the required Pre-Employment Transition Services portion of that grant is 51% expended. The Older Blind grant is 60% expended, and the Supported Employment grant is 2% expended.

Human Resources Report

Luis Mendoza reported:

For November, the agency remained at 4 vacancies and has extended 3 offers for Management/Program Manager positions. Start dates for the Facilities Manager, Vocational Rehabilitation Lead, and Busines Services Director will be in December.

The Region I director position is in the second round of interviews. The Region IV Director position was readvertised pending revision to minimum requirements. It will be reposted within a few days.

Counselor positions remain at 3 vacancies. The Conway position was reposted, Florence has a counselor starting January 2, 2022, and the Greenwood counselor position is being relocated to the Oconee/Pickens area.

The counselor trainer position remained on hold pending reclassification based on the needs of the agency.

Administrative Assistant positions remain at 3 vacancies. There are two pending offers, and if accepted, they will be reflected on the December report.

Training Center vacancies remain at 5. Orientation and Mobility positions remain vacant and are currently being advertised. The braille instructor position was filled on December 6, 2021. The consumer Training Coordinator will be reclassified and filled internally. A temporary instructor for the vocational

instructor position has been hired. The person who retired from the position decided to return until the agency can locate a full-time instructor or until no longer needed.

Commissioner’s Report

Darline Graham reported:

Commissioner Graham and Luis Mendoza attended the Human Affairs Commission Virtual Meeting for Agency Heads. Information on community and race relations across the state was shared. Ways to improve agency efforts to ensure a diverse and inclusive work environment was also discussed.

Commissioner Graham and several Senior Managers attended the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation’s fall conference. Amazon spoke about the value of a diverse workforce (including hiring individuals with disabilities). Several states shared information on counselor recruitment, retention, and satisfaction practices. Many of the same staff also attended the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind virtual conference.

Commissioner Graham, Karma Marshall, Matt Daugherty, and Luis Mendoza traveled to the Charleston office to view flood damage and explore options for new leased space. Charleston staff have been teleworking since the flooding occurred. A selection for a new space has been made.

The agency is looking at the option of co-locating staff in SC Works in Clemson to provide services for blind or visually impaired individuals in Pickens, Anderson, and Oconee counties. This would align with the intent of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

The agency is exploring a potential training opportunity with Nephron pharmaceuticals that could provide basic foundational skills training for consumers. The agency is also in discussion with Clemson University Extension to provide a training opportunity for consumers to build wooden components used by beekeepers.

The agency is investigating how to streamline the current JAWS training to provide training efficiently and effectively to as many consumers as possible. The plan is to have six additional residential consumers in training after the holiday break and to reach “normal” capacity within a few months.

Elaine Robertson has worked with staff over the past few months to develop and deliver training to the Older Blind counselors.

The Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center on Quality Employment developed and delivered training to counselors and other staff on the topics of The State of the Science in Blindness, Rural and Remote Service Delivery, Transportation, Labor Market Analysis (specific to South Carolina), and Customized Training.

Commissioner Graham attended the Midlands Workforce Development Board meeting where Apprenticeship Carolina presented information on youth and adult apprenticeships.

Staff have been conducting interviews for the VR Program Lead, Facilities Manager, Braille Instructor, Business Services Director, Human Resources Manager, and Directors for Region 1 and 4. A Facilities Manager, Braille Instructor, Business Services Director, VR Lead, and four other positions have been selected and onboarded.

Capital Improvement Projects Update

Matt Daugherty reported:

The Combined State Plan, Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, and prior approvals from the Rehabilitation Services Administration have been completed to allow Capital Improvement Projects the agency has planned to proceed. The Campus Handrails project, the priority due to safety concerns is nearing completion. The Generator Replacement project and HVAC Replacement projects are in the design phase. The agency will soon start the design phase for the Building A Renovation, Campus Landscaping and Site Improvements, and the renovations of two canteens on the Capital Complex.

Older Blind Training and Combined State Plan Update

Karma Marshall reported:

There are opportunities to better align Older Blind (OB) to the VR processes to improve efficiency in referrals and service delivery. Rhonda Thompson and Elaine Robertson recently collaborated to develop and deliver case management and documentation training to OB counselors. A team worked to create and update OB forms in the AWARE case management system to help reduce manual processes and support improvements in the QA data validation audits of OB. Ms. Thompson will be reviewing the current OB policy and reach out to other national OB programs for input on creating a new policy that ensures compliance and adherence to federal regulations. The updated policy is planned to be in place by the end of March. The number of referrals and sizes of caseloads are being examined to determine if there are regions that have more referrals or cases, if some counselors have more efficient processes or case management styles that could benefit others, and if there a need for more intensive training for individual staff.

A team of SCCB staff has been working with the WIOA (Workforce Innovative Opportunity Act) Core Partner committee to provide agency specific updates to the Combined State Plan. A meeting was held with SCVRD staff to review the past two Program Years and develop combined projected goals for FY 2022 and FY 2023. SC DEW will finalize the updates and distribute the plan for public comments. After the Public comment period, SC DEW will submit the finalized plan to the Departments of Labor, Education and Health and Human Services for review.

Old Business

None

**New Business**

A recommendation was made to hold future Board meetings in the Conference Room located in the D building. A motion was made by Susan John and seconded by Mary Sonksen. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

**Public Comment**

None

**Executive Session**

Chairperson Johnson called for a motion to go into Executive Session to discuss a contract update. A motion was made by Peter Smith and seconded by Mary Sonksen. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

Chairperson Johnson stated that the members were out of Executive Session. No votes were taken during Executive Session.

Susan John made a motion that Commissioner Graham be allowed to seek a full-time attorney. It was seconded by Peter Smith. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

**Future Board Meeting Schedule**

January 25, 2022
The meeting will be held in person at 11:00 am in Building D conference room.

Adjournment

There being no further business, Chairperson Johnson called for a motion to adjourn at 1:13 pm. A motion was made by Susan John and seconded by Mary Sonksen. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

Signatures

 Dr. Judy Johnson, Chairperson

 Mary Sonksen, Secretary

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Date