South Carolina Commission for the Blind

1430 Confederate Avenue  
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Meeting Minutes   
January 25, 2022

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 11:02 am. The meeting was conducted in person and via Zoom Meeting software.

Present  
  
Dr. Judy Johnson, Chairperson  
Mary Sonksen, Secretary   
Susan John  
Cathy Olker  
Darline Graham, Commissioner  
  
Adoption of Agenda

Susan John made a motion to accept the January 25, 2022 Agenda. It was seconded by Mary Sonksen. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment

None

Approval of Minutes

Cathy Olker made a motion to approve the December 14, 2021 minutes. It was seconded by Mary Sonksen. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

Commissioner’s Report

Darline Graham reported:

The House Ways and Means Budget Hearing and the Executive Budget hearing had been held. $466,000 was requested for the Prevention Program and $127,000 was requested for Children’s Services. The Executive Budget for 2022/23 has been released and included the agency’s requests. The agency will be notified when the Senate Finance Hearing is scheduled.

The Foundation for the SC Commission for the Blind hosted the annual Legislative Breakfast on January 13. There were 155 attendees, with 26 representatives and 4 Senators. The breakfast allowed agency employees to have conversations with several Representatives and their staff. SCCB employees shared success stories and explained agency needs. Despite COVID concerns and early morning meetings scheduled for several Senators, the breakfast was a success.

The Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) will distribute rapid test kits to each agency. They will provide either employee self-administered or health nurse administered kits depending on each agency’s needs. SCCB will receive a limited number of kits. The agency continues to follow State HR and DHEC guidance regarding COVID. Staff and consumers are encouraged to wear a mask when in a group setting for their protection and protection of others. Staff and consumers are encouraged to stay home and get tested if they have symptoms.

Commissioner Graham and the Senior Managers are planning a day-long, in person strategic planning meeting to discuss agency goals and how to achieve those goals, including improvements to the website, filling more vacancies, providing additional staff training, plans to fill vacant Blind Licensed Vendor stands, and continuing to revise the agency’s VR program policies.

Finance Report

Matt Daugherty reported:

State Budget - The agency is 50% through the State Fiscal Year. The Vocational Rehabilitation 33%, Training Center 44% of the budget, and Prevention of Blindness has utilized 22%. The numbers are impacted by vacancies and continuing difficulties with service delivery due to COVID. Agency spending is on track at 50%.

Federal Grants - The agency is in the carry-over year for Federal grants and 63% of the way through the Period of Performance. The Vocational Rehabilitation grant is currently 23% expended, the Pre-Employment Transition Services portion of the grant is 99% expended, the Older Blind grant is 77% expended, and the Supported Employment grants are 2% expended.

Capital Improvement Projects - Federal funding has been approved and applied to projects; many can now move to final design and construction. The Campus Handrails project will be completed in March 2022. The Generator Replacement project will move into the pre-construction phase but will be delayed due to issues with obtaining heavy equipment. The project is scheduled for completion in August 2022. The HVAC Replacement project is in Phase II approval and should be in the final design phase by June 2022. The design phase for Building A Renovation has begun. The Campus Landscaping and Site Improvements project is moving into the final design phase. The renovation of two canteens on the Capital Complex will soon begin the initial design phase.

Human Resources Report

Luis Mendoza reported:

A Vocational Rehabilitation Lead, Facilities Manager, and a Business Services Director were hired in January. The Region I Director will begin on February 2 and an offer was extended for the Region IV Director. There are currently three vacancies for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRCs). One administrative assistant was hired for the Charleston office and one braille instructor was hired for the Training Center.

Eight positions were filled during the month of December even though December is typically a slow month for hiring. Positions filled included a Human Resources (HR) Manager and two temporary positions.

The HR Director and HR Manager are planning to attend a minimum of one career fair each month. A virtual career fair will be attended next week. Career Fairs at the University of South Carolina, Louisiana Tech, and Clemson University will be attended in-person.

Program Services Update

Karma Marshall reported:

The South Carolina Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Combined State Plan was submitted for public comments. The next step is for the partners to review the comments and make agreed revisions by January 28, 2022. The South Carolina Department of Employment and Workforce (DEW) will facilitate the work group and the final revision will be presented to all partners by February 18, 2022. Approval from the State Workforce Development Board will be requested by March 15, 2022, with the agency’s final submission to the Department of Labor/Department of Education (DOL/DOE) by March 18, 2022.

The VR Program lead has been reviewing the agency’s current VR policy, shadowing and meeting with VR counselors, and learning the AWARE case management system.

Karma Marshall and Esther Munoz met with the director of South Carolina’s Association of the Deaf (SCAD). Ms. Munoz will represent SCCB at all SCAD meetings. Ms. Munoz is also working with the Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) to determine what training will be beneficial to increase her understanding of the Deaf/Blind consumers and the services they need.

The Low Vision Coordinator presented a training on Low Vision Clinic (LVC) Fundamentals for all counselors.

The Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center – Quality Employment (VRTAC-QE) is providing intensive technical assistance and training to VR counselors. The next training on customized employment will be held in February.

Old Business

The Agency is in the process of placing a VR counselor in the Clemson SC Works location to serve the upper corner of the Upstate (the Pickens, Oconee, and Anderson area). Following the visit to SC Works in Clemson, it was determined that space was available for a full-time SCCB VR counselor to work there. Under WIOA, all mandated partners “cost share” through an Infrastructure Agreement (IFA) Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that is updated each year.  For the agency to locate a SCCB VRC at SC Works in Clemson, the location’s director updated the IFA/MOU with SCCB’s amount of “cost-sharing”, which was reviewed by the SCCB Finance Director, Procurement manager, and approved by the Commissioner. The SC Works Director then had each mandated WIOA partner review and sign the amended IFA. With this process complete, SCCB is recruiting for the VRC that will work from the Clemson SC Works location.

**New Business**

None

**Public Comment**

A question regarding vacant Business Consultant positions was asked and it was reported that Human Resources is in the final stage of updating those position descriptions and the agency would fill those vacancies as soon as possible.

In response to a question about which Low Vision Clinics were open, it was reported that there was an increase in the number of clinics held, but the agency had not reached 100%. As offices are relocated to new buildings, the agency will work toward opening all clinics.

**Executive Session**

Chairperson Johnson called for a motion to go into Executive Session to discuss a contract update. A motion was made by Susan John 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.

**Future Board Meeting Schedule**

February 22, 2022  
The meeting will be held in-person and via Zoom Meeting Software at 11:00 am in the 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