South Carolina Commission for the Blind

Business Enterprise Program

Committee of Blind Vendors

August 31, 2018 Quarterly Meeting Minutes

Committee Members Present:

Belinda Banks, Member At Large

Joe Urbanek, Charleston District Representative, Chair

Olivia Messer, Greenville Spartanburg District Representative, Vice Chair

Lonnie Hart, Columbia 1 District Representative

Maguya Walker, Columbia 2 District Representative

Agency Staff Members Present:

Brittany Fulton, BEP Trainer

Vernett Brown, Greenville Spartanburg Counselor

Kim Spears, Charleston Counselor

The only announcement is to please turn phones off, if you receive a call and you must take it, please step out of the room.

Next was roll call on the gallery. All elected committee members were present.

Approval of minutes

Joe explained that we now have a secretary. If you did not receive the minutes and would like to, get in touch with your counselor.

Left off agenda – election of vice chair to take Ruby’s spot. Motion was made to nominate Olivia Messer. It had a second. With no oppositions, the motion was passed unanimously so the newly elected Vice Chair is Olivia Messer.

First on the agenda is Wayne Dye with NReach.

Wayne joined the committee via telephone, so he could explain what the service is.

NReach is an accessibility company that uses blue tooth beacons to help blind individuals receive information that you otherwise wouldn’t get. It helps in the area of describing the business and the products or services you offer. It can give hours of business, menus, specials that you are offering, even where the restrooms are located and so much more, basically anything you want people to know about your business. Your website, Facebook page or other social media can be linked to your beacon. It is available on both Android and Apple. It sends notifications out once you are in range of the NReach Beacon. NReach staff handles the programming of the beacons and sends you all of the materials as well as advertising stickers you will need. The range that a beacon can reach is up to 200 yards.

Pricing:

One Location - One Beacon. There is a one-time activation fee of $25 and then $100 per year.

Three Locations - Three Beacons. There is a one-time activation fee of $50 and then $200 per year.

Six Locations - Six Beacons. There is a one-time activation fee of $75 and then $300 per year.

Everything is included that you need. Batteries only need to be replaced every 2 to 3 years. NReach will monitor the beacons and can send you a notification when the batteries are getting low. They have the ability to know if something is wrong with a beacon and if one fails, they will send a new one at no additional charge to you.

In a nutshell the NReach Beacon is a way for blind and visually impaired to pull in the information that sighted people have accessible to them. It is a way to directly market to a customer base that you otherwise may not be able to reach.

Patricia asked if the notification is audible. Wayne said that yes, a notification will say NReach location found and the name of the business. You would then click the notification to go to the information about that business.

If anyone would like to find out more or if you would like to speak with someone about NReach you can visit their website at [www.nrea.ch](http://www.nrea.ch)

You can reach Wayne at 706-829-7369 or email him at [James@nrea.ch](mailto:James@nrea.ch)

Next was Karen Crieer - Program manager of the South Carolina ABLE Savings Program   
  
ABLE (Achieving A Better Life Experience) ACT is a federal act that was passed in 2014.  It amended the federal tax code to create a tax-exempt savings account for people with a disability. Assets in an ABLE account do not affect the eligibility for SSI and SSDI programs.   
  
The SC State legislature passed the bill in 2016 and it is administered by the state Treasurer’s office. Today they over 400 accounts. Ohio was the first state to the ABLE program.   
  
Eligibility requirements are that you must have a disability onset prior to the age of 26 and be a resident of South Carolina.

You must also meet 1 of these 3 criteria:

* Be blind or disability and draw SSI or SSDI
* You have a condition on the SSA Compassionate Allowances Condition list
* You self-certify

These accounts are not based on income or assets.  If you are going to self-certify, you to go to the Blue Book for Adults, in Section 2.0 on the SSA website.  ABLE accounts are owned by the person with the disability. Earnings are tax exempt on a federal and state level as long as you use them on qualified disability expenses.  Once your account balance gets to $100,000, your SSA benefits will be suspended, but not terminated.  You can have only one ABLE account per person.  
  
Qualified Disability Expenses are Assistive Technology, Care of a service animal, Food, Clothing, Housing, Education, Medical, Financial, Legal and Transportation   
  
If you use the money on a non-qualified expense, you will pay tax on the earnings and a 10% penalty.  You have to have $50 to open the account.  The max you can contribute is $15,000 if you do not work and $27,000 if you work.   
  
To enroll, go to [www.scable.org](http://www.scable.org/)  
  
Must be at least 18 years or older or have a parent or guardian do it.   
  
There are some small monthly fees.  
  
You can call 1-800-429-1653 for more information. The hours are 9 A.M. - 8 P.M.  
  
Karen Crieer’s email is [Karen.crieer@sto.sc.gov](mailto:Karen.crieer@sto.sc.gov)

BEP training update from Brittany.

Brittany Fulton stated that there are currently 3 people in training. They are West Columbia - Adam Bradley, Anderson – Charlena Trusty, Florence – Jameica Cooper

Ace is coming up in Myrtle Beach at the Kingston Plantation. The vendor cost is $99, guest is $50.

BLAST is November 13-16, 2018 in San Antonio, TX. Registration is $225 up to October 13th and then goes up to $250 after that date.

Other tools besides shows. There is the Small Business Association (website [www.sba.gov](http://www.sba.gov)) and South Carolina Business Development Center ([www.scsbdc.com](http://www.scsbdc.com)). They have classes and education updates and training.

If you need to take ServSafe test, Brittany is available for that on Mondays before 11am and on Fridays after 12pm.

Next was District updates:

Kim Spears reported on the Charleston District –

Kim stated that Stand 106 - Joint Base Charleston – had been out for bid. Janice Smith was awarded this stand. She is very excited and looking forward to working the stand at Joint Base Charleston.

Kim asked that when you give your counselor the hours that you work it would be very helpful, if you would call as a courtesy and let your counselor know if you will be out. She stated that this would be helpful because they have shown up to check in with a manager at a stand during the hours they were supposed to be there, and the manager was not present.

Vernett Brown reported on the Greenville Spartanburg District –

Beverly Anderson is working on her level 4 license.

Vernett stated that they still have too many full-time vendors in the area who are working double facilities and they are trying to get that number down.

The facilities being worked by those vendors are Blacksburg, Greenville Law Enforcement Center, York Route, and Anderson Route.

No other consultants were present at the meeting to give updates on their area.

There is not an Agency Report because Marcellous has been out of the office. Joe asked if anyone had questions, but none were asked so Joe moved on to the next topic on the agenda.

Joe will ask that Marcellous email the agency and financial report when he gets back into the office.

Discussion about next annual meeting:

Joe asked if the agency would help with securing the hotel and food. \_\_ stated that she was willing to help with that. There was discussion about meals. Joe mentioned that the only negative comment about the hotel from last year was the noise from the street.

Joe asked if there are any committee members that would like to serve on the planning committee for the annual meeting. With no other committee members wanting to serve on this committee. Olivia and Joe will be the committee members to help in the planning.

Joe asked the vendors to let them know what they did and didn’t like about the conference last year and what you would like to have at the conference this year. Harold and Sara volunteered to serve on the planning committee. This makes it so that we will have two committee members, two vendors and two staff members.

The dates they are looking at for the conference are February 22-23, 2019 or March 1-2, 2019.

Next was the Committee Report.

Joe talked about a meeting the committee had with Marcellous that they would like the agency to look at and come to an agreement about.

First, there was discussion about repair calls going directly to main office in Columbia, South Carolina and not to the local offices. The reason is because the consultants are in the field and don’t get the information in a timely manner and if they are on vacation no one is reached. If it goes to Columbia office, it will get there in a timelier manner. There also needs to be a repair form developed that will be approved by the committee. The form would state what machine needs the repair and what the repair issue is. The form will be so that all counselors be on the same page. It would also be available online so that the counselors have the same form.

Next Joe mentioned the scheduling of interviews. This is for both those who serve on the panel and those interviewing. We talked about having it as the 2nd and 3rd Tuesday and Wednesday of the month be used for interviews. This way people would always know when interviews will occur so that schedules can be made around a set time. If you have an interview, you must show up other than an emergency. Some suggested other ways to interview such as skype, zoom or other apps that allow face to face interviews. There was a lot of discussion for and against about this topic from committee members and from the gallery. Joe had to end the discussion and move on because of time but stated they would go back and look at the options and discuss it some more. Joe stated the committee will go back and look at this since there were so many concerns about it.

The agency letter of recommendation to be changed to letter of performance. The information currently there will stay, it would only change the wording of the letter so that your performance dictates promotions. The interview will factor in. There was discussion about seniority points

Next, we talked about the possibly that the agency buy counselors cell phones to use in the field. The reason for this is so they can be reached if they are out in the field. With a phone provided by the agency, it is not a problem to give the number out. This is important because you cannot force them to give out their personal cell phone numbers.

On bid notices, the bid currently lists the managers total net earnings. The problem is that people get stuck on that number. We propose that figure stay on the notice but that a second number be provided that is 25% lower to account for self-employment taxes, social security, gas, any other expenses that aren’t taken out prior to that net income figure.

We talked about points at the annual meeting. We feel you should have at least attended the district meeting to get your point. It is not right for you to show and not attend a meeting, leave and still get the point or for you to show up after lunch and still get a point.

Next Joe mentioned price increases for prisons. The prices have not been increased for 6 or 7 years. The agency is already looking into this.

Next up, we would like the annual meeting to be moved to a hotel because for the past few years the air conditioning system has not been working properly. The logistics of getting people there and back will be better. We also need to look at the fire code requirements.

We could not schedule the next quarterly meeting without first checking with Marcellous but the date we are looking at is November 9, 2018. There was discussion about why the committee couldn’t just set the date. Joe stated he sets the dates according to when is best for everyone to make sure the staff and vendors can come. It was stated that they also have to consider when the board room is available for meetings because others use the room.

Joe asked if there are any questions or comments from the gallery.

Someone stated that transportation for visually impaired people is sometimes difficult and there is nothing you can do about transportation. Then someone mentioned that maybe if there are issues where someone can’t make their interview that there be a possibility to swap days or times with someone else who is interviewing. Joe stated that the committee would look at the issue.

Joe said that if you have something you would like on the agenda, call him or another committee member and let them know. The committee is there to serve and represent the vendors.

Meeting adjourned.