South Carolina Commission for the Blind

Business Enterprise Program

Committee of Blind Vendors

May 4, 2018 Quarterly Meeting Minutes

Committee Members Present:

Belinda Banks, Member At Large

Joe Urbanek, Charleston District Representative, Chair

Ruby Bryant, Florence District Representative, Vice Chair

Lonnie Hart, Columbia 1 District Representative

Maguya Walker, Columbia 2 District Representative

Olivia Messer, Greenville Spartanburg District Representative

Agency Staff Members Present:

Bea Belton Columbia 2 District Counselor

Vernette Brown Greenville Spartanburg Counselor

Brittany Fulton BEP Trainer

Angela Galloway Florence District Counselor

Marcellous Primus Acting BEP Director

Angela Skinner Columbia District 1 Counselor

The meeting was called to order at 1:28 PM by Chair, Joe Urbanek. Joe stated that the meeting location and time moved because of construction at the administration building.

Harold Anderson opened the meeting in prayer.

Roll Call of Elected Committee by Joe Urbanek. All members were present except Belinda Simon.

Next was roll call on the gallery.

Explanation of minutes:

Joe explained that there are no minutes for the last meeting since there was not a secretary. He believes he has found someone to be the secretary and that the minutes are being recorded and will be shared with the secretary upon being hired.

First was a BEP training update from Brittany.

Brittany Fulton stated that there will be a class starting in August. Currently there is one student who will start on August 20th but possible that three more students may be enrolled before the class starts. A question was asked about age restrictions. Joe stated that students must be 18 to get licensed by federal law but there is no cap on the age a person can be to get licensed.

Brittany stated that she would like to look at the possibility of charter a bus to go to BLAST and asked to reach out to the vendors for a count of people, so they could get an idea of the cost. The bus is not set but they are looking for the best option and would be available to any vendor who wants to go. It would leave from Columbia so any vendor wanting to ride the bus would need to get transportation to Columbia.

BLAST is November 13-16, 2018 in San Antonio, TX. Registration is $200 up to July 13th and then goes up to $300 after that date. Joe believes the hotel is $149 per night.

Joe asked how many people are currently in training. Brittany stated that one consumer from the last class is currently a temporary at the Department of Revenue. The other consumer is about to start her level 3 training at the Department of Transportation.

Kurt brought up about participation using scholarship programs for someone who does not make enough money to pay to attend blast. Joe stated that anyone wanting to pursue a scholarship to attend Blast would need to get with the state president and go through Nicky on the national level. It is not up to the agency will not pursue the scholarships for individuals to attend. He also asked if you were not a member of the federation would you be disqualified, Joe sated that he can’t say it would automatically disqualify you, but it certainly wouldn’t help your case as true to most organizations.

Next was District updates:

Kim Spears reported on the Charleston District – Kim said the vendors in Charleston are going strong and keeping their times and days that they are required to be at their stands. The agency is in the process of transferring new machines to the locations who have old machines and need to be updated. A new vendor – John Sanders – has taken Stand 2 the Orangeburg vending route. He is a license 4 vendor and is doing very well. Kim stated that 2 stands will be out on the bid line soon.

Angela Galloway reported on the Florence District – Angela mentioned that the district lost Jerry Tenant from stand 69, who passed away suddenly last month. His daughter is still running the Watery River correction institution; however, it has been put on the bid line. Roxy has been awarded stand 84 and will move into that stand next week.

Angie Skinner reported on Columbia District 1 – Johnny Williams will be retiring the end of July. Savanna River Site will be going up for bid in a couple of months. Since, Roxy is leaving so Strom Thurmond will be available.

Bea Belton reported on Columbia District 2 – Stand 35 is on bid line but only one bidder for that location. Stand 45 is the Department of Revenue is still being run by a trainee, Neva Fletcher. She is doing a great job.

Vernette Brown reported on the Greenville Spartanburg District – stand 16 Greenville Law Enforcement Center is available to bid on, stand 48 Landrum welcome center will go on bid by June 30 as Clarence Johnson will be retiring, stand 60 Blacksburg Welcome Center is available and has been on bid line several times and looking at making it a 3rd party vending facility since no one seems interested in bidding on it.

Anderson district is growing – it has 2 new sites and looking to add another site around end of month

Greenville district meeting to be held in Spartanburg. More information to come. Vernette will be sending out the agenda within a week or so.

There was discussion about putting Blacksburg and Anderson together instead of putting a 3rd party in Blacksburg. Vernette doesn’t think one person would want both welcome centers because of the hours.

Next was the Agency Report:

Marcellous reported that the next welcome center scheduled for remodel is Dillon. Parks recreation and tourism contacted the agency to say that Breaking ground is supposed to take place in the next 90 days. He will meet with Angela Galloway to look at logistics and find a place to move the current vending to a temporary location while remodeling is done.

2 welcome centers have been renovated –

Fort Mill Welcome Center- Southbound 77 (stand 74) – Beverly Anderson is the vendor

 Hardeeville Welcome Center- Northbound 95 (stand 89) – Franklin Mack is the vendor

The agency is still heavily involved in the pursuit of 2 military dining operations. One of those is the US Marines contract which is a multistate contract between South Carolina, North Carolina and Virginia. A couple of vendors participated on the fly in in Washington dc to try and get information, make a good showing of blind vendors and make contacts. It was stated that there is no more information, we are just waiting on a decision to be made.

Nutrition care contract – fighting that fight for a couple of years. Still waiting on an indicator as to when we can go to court to have the case heard. Supposed to hear something by first of June. The US army continues to file motions to dismiss the complaints against it, the attorney (Peter Nolan from San Antonio, TX) says that we are coming to the end of their ability to request dismissal.

Still have 2 positions in BEP that we are trying to fill –

Accountant Physical Analyst position – only had 1 applicant the first time but the state recommends we have 3 applicants before we close it. If no more apply we have the option to move forward with the one applicant.

Vend Tech position – only had 1 applicant so it has been put back out and they also recommend that you have 3 applicants. This has not closed yet. Kurt was in this temporary position, but we have been approved to make this a permanent position.

Training recruitment issue – Britany and counselors are doing a good job of trying to identify perspective trainees to identify some new people to come in to the program. We had a meeting with Kyle Walter in VR to talk about how to train the VR counselors to know what a good vendor would be so when they come across someone how shows good potential they will know. Elaine and Brittany done a great job on a presentation and there was good feedback and questions from the VR counselors.

Next Marcellous gave the Financial report –

Federal fund has a balance of $3, 002.80

State fund - $203,720.61 of that state fund the vendor portion is $10,124.25

In reserve is $120,711.95

Marcellous stated that this is the report received from finance.

Kurt made comments about the percentages of the state fund and vendor portion. Joe asked if there is a separate fund for DOC. Marcellous answered that the state funds are primarily the DCO funds and that federal is small commission from 7 post offices and SRS.

Discussion about next annual meeting:

There was discussion among committee members and vendors present about whether to have it February 22-23, 2019 or March 1-2, 2019. Joe mentioned that they choose this time of year because its slow season for most people and hotels are easier to get. The agency will look at those dates.

Joe mentioned that this is the 2nd or 3rd year there has been no air conditioner, open doors and that it really isn’t a good location. Joe asked if they would be forced to continue having meeting there or if they would be able to look at other locations based on previous situations. Based on previous situations and discussions, Marcellous stated that they could make the request. Joe suggested that they look at hotels in the area. Joe stated that there is also a question about fire capacity for the 3 rooms that are used.

Next was a product update given by Melanie from Vendor Supply:

Melanie stated that Mars candy only wants them to start purchasing the new non-coded candy because Mars feels like only non upc coded candy goes in vending machines. The bar-coded candy will still be produced but only for stores. There is concerned about how those who use dexing will scan their products. The candy without upc is currently about 3 cents cheaper per unit. There are 10 items that are being produced without a upc code.

Melanie confirmed that Costco has done away with Mars single serve candy and that Sam’s Club will follow suit. Joe mentioned that he suspects that Mars is dictating the decision instead of Sam’s. Ruby said that she sent Melanie a list of items that she carries. Melanie said that at Vendor Supply they simply don’t have the room to expand to the number of different candy selections carrying both individual boxes and cases, but they will do what they can.

There was a lot of discussion among Melanie, the committee and the gallery about the candy options, sizes and varieties. Joe asked about nutrition information on the coded vs the non-coded. Melanie stated that both would have the nutrition.

There was discussion about dates on Frito Lay chips and Melanie said that she thinks they can swap boxes if a smaller operator needs a little longer date to be able to sell the whole case of chips. She explained that the warehouse workers don’t know how much an operator can sell but Melanie knows that better and operators should contact Melanie with issues about dates on chips.

Next was the Committee Report.

Joe stated that the refund cards need some changes. The new card should have the current address of the commission because there is no longer a PO Box. The print needs to be closer to the top, so all the information will fit on the card.

Joe mentioned the possibility of the state paying for cell phones for consultants. Some consultants don’t want to give out their personal cell phone numbers, which is understandable. Marcellous said that they had looked into it before and could look into the cell phones again.

There has been a recommendation that new and existing consultants go to the Louisiana Center for Training for 2 weeks for attitude, philosophy and expectation on what blind people can do. Kyle Walker wants to consider it for VR counselors as well. All the instructors at the center are blind so the training is very extensive, and the expectations are higher for what blind people can do. There was a good bit of discussion about the training both for it and against it. Marcellous stated that he is all for as much training as they can get for counselors but there has not been a decision made on what that training is yet.

Repair calls need to all go to one central location and there also a form needs to be filled out and mailed to the counselor in that district. This will keep the counselors updated as to what is going on in their district as far as machine problems and repairs. One counselor stated that it was done this way in the past and she would like to see it go back to this.

Jimmy from the gallery stated that they want to have minutes and need to have them on the computer, so they can be read to them. Marcellous updated the gallery and committee that they are currently working on hiring a secretary to send out minutes to the committee and vendors. There was a lot of discussion about the minutes for committee meetings and workshops. Ruby stated that once a secretary is hired, they will gladly email minutes to anyone who wants them.

Bid notices have figures about the take home pay for a stand. Joe stated that the vendor does not get to take the amount that is stated. You have to take into account that at least 25% of the number stated will have to be taken off for federal taxes and social security.

A manual has gone to RSA and the commission has been asked to do a calling post to let vendors know that they need to request but this was denied. Anyone who wants a copy of the manual needs to email the commission and request one. The manual is a proposed draft and will not be ready for about a year. There was a discussion about passing the manual through legislative and about bypassing quorum of vendors.

Joe mentioned interviews having a set schedule for interviews so that there would be certain days that everyone would know when an interview can be scheduled.

Joe also suggested doing away with “I recommend”. The committee would like to see facts laid out and maybe just say statement of performance instead.

Next quarterly meeting is set for August 31, 2018.

Meeting adjourned.