South Carolina Commission for the Blind

1430 Confederate Avenue  
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Meeting Minutes   
August 23, 2022

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

# Call to Order

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

# Present

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

# Adoption of Agenda

Mary Sonksen made a motion to accept the August 23, 2022, Agenda, revised to include the approval of the minutes for the August 8, 2022, and August 12, 2022, Special Called Meetings. It was seconded by Cathy Olker. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

# Public Comment

Regina Dunn expressed that she had some concerns with receiving services from SCCB. Commissioner Graham provided Ms. Dunn with her contact information to follow up on the matter.

# Approval of Minutes

Susan John made a motion to approve the July 26, 2022, minutes. It was seconded by Cathy Olker. The motion passed unanimously.

Mary Sonksen made a motion to approve the August 8, 2022, minutes. It was seconded by Cathy Olker. The motion passed unanimously.

Cathy Olker made a motion to approve the August 12, 2022, minutes as amended. It was seconded by Susan John. The motion passed unanimously.

# Commissioner’s Report

## Darline Graham reported:

Graduation was held for three Student Internship Program participants who interned with Able SC in Columbia, SC Works Chester County, and the Ernest E. Kennedy Center in Moncks Corner.

Working with the Board of Commissioners, a finalized pilot plan for an Intake Specialist and a Counselor Series Track for Vocational Rehabilitation and Older Blind counselors was completed. This will assist with recruitment and retention.

Work has proceeded on finalizing the agency Accountability Report and Budget Request for fiscal year 2024.

Staff have been preparing an AT Expo to be held in September, which is Workforce Development Month.

Several staff will attend and speak at the NFB State Convention on August 26-27.

New Employees – New employees Tonya Fleet, Administrative Assistant, and Thomas Smith, General Counsel, were welcomed to the agency.

# Finance Report

## Matt Daugherty reported:

Susan John asked if there was a percentage of the budget that can be carried over from the previous year. Mr. Daugherty said that it was 10% for the State Budget.

Dr. Johnson asked if the issues with funds listed in different categories had been addressed. Mr. Daugherty replied this was due to operating costs in one area needing to be distributed to other categories, and that had occurred.

State Budget – Agency spending is 9%. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) has utilized 9% of the budget, the Training Center 8%, Transition Services 6%, the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) 21%, Prevention of Blindness 4%, Older Blind 9%, Children’s Services 8%, and Administration 11%.

Federal Grants – The 2021 VR grant will be closed out in September; use of the 2022 grant will begin in earnest. The 2021 VR grant is 68% expended. The Pre-Employment Transition Services portion of the grant is 78% expended, the Older Blind grant is 88% expended, and the Supported Employment grants are 2% expended.

Mr. Daugherty explained that a new spreadsheet with a single line item for the Fort Jackson contract was included to prevent this amount from making the rest of the Budget Report harder to understand.

Capital Improvement Projects – Most projects are in Phase 2 design (such as the Building A Renovation and Campus Site Improvements) and the next step will be the bidding process. The biggest gap in time will come after the bidding process and before construction, while waiting for equipment to arrive.

# Human Resources Report

## Luis Mendoza reported:

The attorney position was filled, and the new attorney started in August.

Counselor positions – An internal offer was made to fill an Older Blind counselor position in Conway. The second round of interviews was completed for the counselor position in Oconee-Pickens. A VR counselor position in Conway will be reclassified to the new Intake Specialist. Applications are being reviewed for a VR counselor position in Charleston. An offer was made for the Older Blind counselor position in Charleston but was declined; the position was reposted and second round interviews are being conducted. Applications are being reviewed for the Older Blind counselor position in Rock Hill, the VR counselor position in Orangeburg, and the VR counselor position in Aiken. First round interviews are being conducted for the transition counselor position in Conway. There is a pending offer for the VR counselor position in Greenville.

Administrative Assistant positions – Second round interviews are beginning for the Columbia and Rock Hill administrative assistant positions.

Training Center – Adjustments were being made to the vocational instructor position; the person who retired from the position is filling in temporarily. Work proceeds on getting orientation and mobility positions classified as critical to be able to offer bonuses and competitive salaries. The residential facility supervisor position description is being revised prior to posting. Dr. Johnson asked why this position had been open since April. Mr. Mendoza responded that it was initially placed on hold until the VR Training Center manager could be filled so that person could hire the supervisor. Since the applicant declined the Training Center manager position, the decision was made to fill the residential facility supervisor position. Commissioner Graham added that Donna Earley was currently filling that role in a hybrid position.

A candidate was selected for the Licensed Practical Nurse position and should start by the end of the month.

State Human Resources approved the referral bonus which the Board approved last month, and an internal policy was created and approved.

Shifting duties of HR personnel to provide additional support to hiring managers has resulted in speeding up the interview process for candidates.

Employees are taking advantage of the new Fitness Center policy in Columbia. HR is exploring options with the YMCA to provide similar options for local offices.

Mr. Mendoza, Cathy Duncan, and other Charleston staff attended the SC Works Public Sector Career Fair.

# **Consumer Services Update**

## Karma Marshall reported:

Residential Program – There are 10 day students and 10 residential students. The Home Management Instructor will retire September 2, 2022. One Braille instructor is qualified to teach Home Management; schedules will be adjusted to ensure Home Management instruction continues to be provided. Assistive Technology instructors are at classroom capacity. The agency also contracts with services providers, such as the National Federation of the Blind of SC and the Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired, to provide training, either virtually or in a consumer’s community.

Orientation and mobility – The agency is discussing the need for, and shortage of, O&M instructors with the SC School for the Deaf and Blind Outreach. HR will attend a recruitment fair at Louisiana Tech, and Ms. Marshall and Donna Earley will tour the Louisiana Center for the Blind to observe instruction methods.

Summer Teen – A survey will be developed and sent to this year’s participants, plus their parents and guardians, to gather feedback for use in next year’s program. SCCB employment consultants will be brought in earlier to help develop work-based learning opportunities.

Braille Challenge – The Braille Challenge is tentatively scheduled to return to SCCB in February 2023. Students from across the state will participate in a competitive challenge based on their skill sets and literacy level.

Low Vision Clinics – Due to challenges with the office space in Charleston, the School for the Deaf and Blind agreed to host the Low Vision Clinic through the end of the year.

Partnerships – Ms. Marshall and Commissioner Graham will meet with Storm Eye Institute at the Medical University of South Carolina in September to discuss referral and partnership opportunities. They will also meet with the president of the School for the Deaf and Blind toward the end of September. Children’s Services Program Lead Rhonda Thompson will begin serving on the Advisory Council for Educating Students with Disabilities.

Student Internship Program – Ms. Marshall recognized the contributions of the employers who provided internship opportunities and how meaningful they were.

AT Expo – During Workforce Development Month in September, the agency will host an AT Expo to help employers understand the various types of assistive technology which individuals who are blind and visually impaired use to access information. Vendors will demonstrate low vision devices and representatives from Nephron Pharmaceuticals will speak about their partnership with SCCB.

Susan John asked if organizations share O&M instructors and Ms. Marshall explained that contract O&M instructors were used throughout the state, but a significant challenge was that the instructors are already employed full-time and may be limited to where and when they can travel to provide instruction. Ms. John asked what was involved in becoming an O&M instructor. Ms. Marshall said there are several programs around the country, many requiring a master’s degree, which incorporate O&M. Other locations offer a full O&M program.

Cathy Olker asked about the updates to the Consumer Handbook for the Summer Teen program. Ms. Marshall replied that the updates would be made once the survey feedback for the Summer Teen program was received.

Website Redesign

Mark Gamble reported:

The agency has been working with a web design company to create a new website featuring a clean, modern appearance, improved organization of information, improved accessibility, and a revised contact form.

A mockup of the new home page, menu system, examples of different types of content, and the new Contact Us page were demonstrated. The Staff Advisory Council provided ideas and information that was incorporated into the design. The goal is to have the new site ready to go live by the third week of September.

Susan John asked if people will be able to view the site in other languages and if consumers in the Training Center have been able to use it. Mr. Gamble replied that language translation would not be available initially. He said that consumers would be able to test the site once the next phase of site construction was completed. Dr. Johnson asked if employment opportunities and links to other agencies would be incorporated into the site and Mr. Gamble said they would.

# Old Business

None

# New Business

None

# Public Comment

None

# Executive Session

Chairperson Johnson called for a motion to go into Executive Session to discuss the Accountability Report, Budget Request, and personnel matters. A motion was made by Susan John and seconded by Cathy Olker. 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 to approve the 2022-23 Accountability Report. It was seconded by Cathy Olker. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

Cathy Olker made a motion to approve the 2023-24 Budget Request. It was seconded by Mary Sonksen. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

Susan John made a motion to approve the 2023 Planning Document for Commissioner Graham. It was seconded by Mary Sonksen. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

Mary Sonksen made a motion to cancel the September 27, 2022, Board Meeting. It was seconded by Susan John. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

Chairperson Johnson asked for a vote to approve changes recommended by the ad hoc committee to the Series Track for VR counselors and Older Blind counselors. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

# Future Board Meeting Schedule

October 25, 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 1:08 pm. A motion was made by Susan John and seconded by Cathy Olker. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

# Signatures

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Dr. Judy Johnson, Chairperson

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Cathy Olker, Secretary

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