

State Rehabilitation Council Quarterly Meeting
January 24, 2023

Virtual Meeting

Location: Len B Jordan Building, 650 W State St., Boise, ID

Present

Janice Carson - Chairperson	Ramona Medicine Horse
Darin Lindig – Co-Chairperson	Nathan Ogden
Tim Blonsky	Ron Oberleitner
Randi Cole	Mark Reinhardt
Diana Colgrove	Sarah Tueller
Jami Davis	Jane Donnellan
Nancy Grant	David White
Pam Harris	Council Secretary, Wendy Page
Max Maxwell	

Absent

Stephanie Taylor-Silva, James Pegram

Guests

IDVR Planning and Evaluation Manager, Teresa Pitt; IDVR Fiscal Manager, Rhonda McFarland; IDVR Field Services Chief, Darrell Quist

WELCOME

Chairperson Janice Carson called the meeting to order and reviewed the agenda.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION

Tim Blonsky made a motion to approve the Minutes. **Mark Reinhardt** seconded the motion, and the Minutes were approved unanimously.

FAIR HEARING OFFICERS

The Code of Federal Regulations 361.57 (f) ii, specifies that the SRC responsibility includes involvement in the process for selection of fair hearing officers. In 2022, the Idaho State Legislature passed HB629 which created the Office of Administrative Hearing to have consistency among

state agencies on how fair hearings are conducted.

There will be fair hearing officers that will work directly with agencies related to the agency's specific needs. Darrell Quist IDVR Field Services Chief explained that there are three mechanisms in place. There was a question as to whether the tribes are included in this process. IDVR Administrator, Jane Donnellan will research this topic further but believes that this applies to state agencies only. She explained that Tribal VR could be a resource for fair hearing officers.

Informal Review - Informal reviews are a process conducted by a regional manager, where the individual can present information. The manager reviews case record makes an assessment and applies agency policy in making a decision.

Mediation – A mediation officer provides mediation services between the two parties. Either party can withdraw from the process at any time.

Fair Hearing – A formal process which would be equivalent to a court proceeding. The fair hearing officer presides over the hearing and makes the final decision. Testimony is provided and would include cross examination from the agency's attorney. An attorney can represent the individual.

Nancy Grant explained that the Client Assistance Program (CAP) will step in any time there is a grievance with VR. When the client is reporting a meritable issue, it will be investigated and when determined as meritable, they will take the case. Dispute resolution at the lowest possible level is the objective.

Ms. Grant expressed that it is important that Tribal VR has a due process similar to the state agency process.

Mr. Quist further explained that eligibility, service delivery issues and case closure are appealable topics. There are topics that would not be included in the scope of the three processes, which could include disputing the office they are being served by or the counselor handling the case.

IDVR's interest is in serving individuals with disabilities. If a case closure has been appealed and the closure reason was related to lack of customer

responsibility, the agency would consider reverting the case closure to continue services expediently.

Teresa Pitt, the Planning and Evaluation manager for IDVR provided an explanation that fair hearings are reported to RSA in an annual report. Ron Oberleitner suggested that the SRC be notified when a fair hearing has been scheduled.

The fair hearing is confidential between the individual and the agency. Jane Donnellan explained that themes can be discussed but specific case information cannot be discussed publicly and historically has been related to service delivery.

Sarah Tueller suggested that fair hearing rulings be posted publicly to establish how previous hearings have set a precedent for future reference.

Ms. Pitt explained that due process is detailed within policy and rule, which is posted on the agency's website. A statistical report is provided to the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) but it is uncertain if the report is accessible for public posting. A consult with RSA to get guidance on this will be necessary to before a decision is made on the suggestion.

It was noted that fair hearing number is low compared to the number of individuals served. Mr. Quist explained that there is a national network of fair hearing officers, which are typically attorneys and agrees that the national percentage is low.

There was discussion related to agency protocol for situations where a customer has expressed issues about service delivery. The first step may include making a referral to (CAP) or if it can be resolved at the counselor level, that is the preferred method. It was explained that the VR customer is reminded throughout the process of their right to advocacy through the CAP program.

MOTION

Ron Oberleitner made a motion to approve the Office of Administrative hearings for the purpose of the agency's fair hearing process. **Max Maxwell** seconded the motion. The motion carried with no abstentions.

CSAVR CONFERENCE OVERVIEW

Tim Blonsky shared about his experience in attending the NCSRC/CSAVR conference. He learned a lot throughout the conference and the overall idea was for council members to consider what they can do collectively to promote VR. Some councils have meetings that can last a couple of days. Some states have a SILC council member who serve on the SRC rather than a SILC staff member. Some state councils are more involved than just the quarterly meetings. There are situations where council meetings will last for several days.

Mr. Blonsky also shared with other state councils that Idaho has a position that focuses solely on Apprenticeships. The overall theme was how can council members emphasize the validity of VR. Tim stated that having a council member attend the next conference would be beneficial.

Teresa Pitt shared her experience at CSAVR conference. The overall themes were around the three strategic objectives. Presentations were shared with council members.

The main topics included:

Recruitment and Retention

Program Efficiencies

Marketing of the VR Program

Congress has an interest in the VR program because of the decrease of individuals served as well as the amount of money being reverted.

RSA presence was noticeable throughout the conference, which is not typical. An explanation was provided indicating that agencies that are reverting money will trigger an RSA monitoring session.

Darrell Quist mentioned that along with looking at efficiencies there was a focus on counselors being counselors rather than just data collectors. Chairperson Janice Carson emphasized the importance of focusing on recruitment and retention of counselors.

AGENCY REPORTS

The agency report was presented by Jane Donnellan. The CSAVR Spring Conference will be held April 15-19, 2023 and will be a continuation of the

Fall Conference. They will continue review of the three initiatives and innovative practices during the conference as well as how to have those conversations related to the intersection of fiscal and program services.

SRC members are encouraged to attend the NCSRC and CSAVR conferences that are held simultaneously. The IDVR executive leadership team will be attending the spring session.

The legislative session began January 9, 2023. The governor focused on education, teacher salaries, training which would look at accessing a scholarship program and be managed under the Workforce Development Council.

Safety and health within communities is a big focus as well. If support and services necessary for individuals with disabilities. The governor's recommendations are available on the governor's website.

Budget Line Items that will be presented to JFAC will include three FTE's for business relation positions. This would enhance the services that VR provides to employers.

Additional non-federal monies for match. 21.3 nonfederal match requirement is what is needed. The agency is asking for \$31,900 for purposes of federal match.

The Council for the Deaf and Hard also has a budget line item for IDVR is scheduled to present to the Joint Finance and Appropriation Committee (JFAC) on February 6, 2023. Jane met with various members of JFAC over the last few weeks and met with a representative of the house who has a child who has received VR services who shared about their experiences through the process.

Chairperson Janice Carson stated that reaching out to your legislators is extremely important as council members can educate about the VR program. Information was provided to the council members previously that provides a guide and a handout.

CRP's an interim rate increase, as of February 1, 2023 the rate will increase to \$54 per hour. There is a methodology for determining that rate, however it is anticipated that the interim rate will help with the costs of staff retention.

There is currently an underfill position entitled VRS. A bachelor's degree is required with the objective of obtaining certification as a VR counselor within five years. The salaries for both the counselor and specialists are very low in comparison to positions of lesser requirements. The entry level wage has been increased to \$22 per hour for VR specialists and \$25 per hour for VR counselor positions. The governor has recommended a 4% increase in state employee salaries this year.

Fiscal Report - Rhonda McFarland, IDVR Fiscal Manager, provided the fiscal update. The SRC were provided with two reports.

Quarterly Budget to Actual Report by Fund - State Fiscal Year expenditures in this report for the past quarter are compared with the same timeframe as the previous fiscal year. Expenditures are at 48.11%, which is timely as the objective is to be at 50% at the half-way point. This is an improvement from last year. The increase is due to trustee and benefits, which includes customer services. The number of services provided to students has increased.

The basic grant for FFY 21 does not reflect any changes since the last review by the council. The basic 21 grant is completed. The basic 22 grant, which was partially reallocated previously. The funds must be expended by September 30, 2023.

IDVR has met the federal match. A refund was received, which affected the match amount, showing that amount to be in the negative. This will be corrected before the final report is submitted.

The red number shows that we have expended more than 15% of the expenditures for Pre-ETS, which meets the requirement. The 23 Grant is now being expended. An estimation of 18 million is represented. The grant has increased by 9.3%. A decision will need to be made in July as to the amount of funds that will be re-allotted once again.

The SRC budget was also presented, which reflected the costs from the SRC October 2022 meeting.

Planning and Evaluation – Teresa Pitt shared that the RSA Monitoring is now officially complete. The agency has satisfied the findings. Details

related to the findings can be provided to council members again upon request.

Benefits planning has been provided to VR customers for the last couple of years under a contract. It has been a formalized process where there is an invitation to bid process. There is a need for more benefits planners as vendors have not been able to increase the number of certified benefits planners to the level where service provision is meeting the needs of the customers. The Division of Purchasing can provide an exemption, which allows the agency to bypass the request for bid process through a service agreement that will allow us to use more vendors for benefits planning. This will only be offered to individuals who are certified.

A service agreement will allow the agency to use planners without having to initiate a contract. Janice reminded the council that benefits planning is a service that was established as a priority by the state rehabilitation council.

Benefits planning is only available to customers that receive social security benefits due to a disability.

The Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA), which is contracted through San Diego State University. The council has assisted in development of the surveys. The surveys will be launched the week of January 30th. Just under 14,000 surveys will be distributed. The focus groups are a part of the CSNA assessment. Rachel Anderson will be the facilitator for the focus groups, which will consist of SRC members, Wednesday, February 22, 2023 1:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. Council members were asked to volunteer for the focus groups and can indicate their desire to participate to Teresa Pitt. There will be specific focus groups that will include SRC members such as the department of education, IPUL and CAP.

The plan is to focus on a higher level of employer participation through surveys rather than focus groups due to the low participation in previous focus groups. Again, council members are being asked to distribute the surveys within their work environments and communities. Focus groups with IDVR staff have been held and the main need that has been communicated is the expansion of technology.

FIELD SERVICES

There are currently four counselor vacancies statewide. Two of the vacancies are Pre-ETS counselor positions. New strategies are in place for recruitment of bachelor level students. Staff turnover has reduced in comparison to last year. Current strategies are in place for replacement of the Region 5 manager position that was vacated earlier last year.

A higher number students with disabilities are being served as well as those VR customers receiving general VR services.

SRC MEMBER REPORTS

Co-Chairperson Darin Lindig – Darin reports that he has reached out to his local legislators and has a meeting set up. The Spectrum Success program, which is a neurodiversity focused strategy. They reach out to universities who then reach out to individuals on the autism spectrum for internships. They have a large number of applicants in comparison to the number of available placements, so it has become very competitive, however individuals are encouraged to apply.

They also conducted a simulation to identify what an individual who relies on captioning experiences. This helped staff to understand where they could improve their interactions on virtual platforms.

David White – David made comments relating to how staff turnover has an impact on customer service delivery. He is currently training a newly hired VR Specialist.

Jami Davis – The State Independent Living Council have been meeting with legislators focusing on the Health and Welfare and JFAC Committee members. Contribution rates for ABLE accounts have increased to \$17,000 for 2023. Effective January 1, 2026 the age to open an ABLE Account will go from 26 years of age to 46 years of age. The federal report has been submitted after a month of technical issues.

They have completed the requirements of their state plan by conducting Town Hall sessions. They have a significant amount of data that will be processed with the assistance of Boise State University. There were a significant number of written comments in the survey responses.

Ron Oberleitner - Ron focuses a lot on autism. Stanford had a well-attended conference that focused on neurodiversity and vocational rehabilitation opportunities. Autism X Reality Institute has developed a virtual reality prototype that McDonald's Corporation is interested in to assess an individual's abilities to work in the restaurant as well as training prior to hiring them onsite. Ron would like to see VR involvement in the implementation of this type of technology and provide expertise.

Mark Reinhardt – Mark has created a PowerPoint presentation to train CRP's on how to properly coach people on the autism spectrum in a professional manner. Mark met with his legislative representatives to address the training issues with CRP's. They have explained that the Executive Branch oversees that responsibility. Mark has been reading the federal regulations and will be meeting with Jane Donnellan for further clarification. Mark will be making a presentation at the next SRC meeting.

Sarah Tueller – The Idaho Parents Unlimited (IPUL) focus is on transitioning individuals to adulthood and VR. The Work of Art dates for spring have been set. More details can be accessed on the IPUL website, or by contacting a VR Counselor or Heather at ipul.idaho.org.

They continue to monitor the legislature actions particularly related to children's mental health/behavioral health, education as well as the roll out of the end of the Medicaid health emergency funding.

They are gearing up for Tools for Life. They present to parents on on having high expectations when you don't know what to expect as they transition into adulthood. Workshop Trainings will be provided to the Coeur d' Alene tribes specifically addressing IEP's and VR services. Ms. Tueller will be transitioning her son into adulthood in the next several months.

Pamela Harris – would like to thank VR for the interim rate increase. VR is providing training to CRPs, and she has staff that will be attending. She reviewed the ACRE curriculum on their website and requested that encouraged council members to review the certification criteria.

Ms. Harris met with a special education professor to set up a work experience with students for the summer. She is beginning to plan for her retirement in the next few years.

Diana Colgrove – Diana recently met the local Project Search and presented on behalf of local business hiring graduates. The big feedback from parents was regarding the shortage of job coaches and transportation to their jobs. The problem is especially significant for employees hired to work nights and weekends.

Chairperson Janice Carlson - Janice is the Director of the Idaho Assistance Technology project, which is housed at the Center on Disabilities and Human Development. She focuses on assistive technology and reports providing training to VR staff at the annual in-service where they shared and demonstrated assistive technology.

The 17th annual Tools for Life Conference is planned for March, which is an assistive technology conference for secondary students with disabilities. The conference is a great collaboration between multiples agencies and the university including IDVR.

Janice completed the writing of an Agri Ability Grant with the Idaho University Extension Program that is focused on employment for farmers and ranchers in Idaho that provides assessments and training and technical assistance for injuries and conditions that present barriers.

Max Maxwell – Max is a VR counselor with the Veteran Readiness and Employment Program and reports that through the PACT Program has displayed a 40% increase, which has increased the wait times for applicants. The agency has increased case file review across the US. They no longer require a master's degree in vocational rehabilitation counseling in the hiring process. Social workers and non-related degrees will be considered for counselor positions, which they anticipate will address the staffing issues they are having.

Randi Cole – Randi reports that the newly elected State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Debbie Critchfield, has assumed her role within the State Department of Education (SDE). She has established priorities that align with the work in special education including vocational rehabilitation. The state superintendent wants to strengthen the CTE programs. Ms. Cole collaborates closely with Alison Lowenthal Transition Manager for IDVR, as well as with the CTE staff so students have access to programs. They continue to collaborate with the State Board of Education as well.

K12 Workforce Program Specialist is a new position that was created within the state department. Ms. Cole has met with the new specialist and will work to strengthen relationships with the State Board and IDVR.

Nathan Ogden – Nathan shared that his group is finishing preparations to meet with legislators. He continues to offer his assistance to VR with legislation objectives and policy implementation.

Mr. Ogden communicates regularly with the director of the Department of Parks and Recreation as they continue to plan development of parks that are accessible.

He spoke with a state representative who offered help in the work that he does. He learned from her about opportunities during legislative session that are provided for the public to get up and speak about their passions. Nathan will reach back out and get additional information.

Ramona Medicine Horse attended a keynote conference in Tulsa that was very beneficial. She has a couple of staff members that are attending Northwest Indian College pursuing their degrees. She often encourages staff to continue their education.

They have a job fair scheduled for March 28, 2023. They will be hosting it at the Sho-Ban hotel and casino. They typically have 40-50 employers that participation as well as approximately 450 job seekers. The annual report has been submitted and their budgets are inline. The Memorandum of Understanding between the tribe and VR needs to be reassessed. It was mentioned that VR can conduct outreach to students with disabilities within the tribe to provide Pre-ETS.

The next scheduled meeting of the SRC is scheduled for Tuesday, April 25, 2023 in Boise. The meeting was adjourned.