



Idaho State Rehabilitation Council QUARTERLY MEETING MINUTES

Holiday Inn Airport Conference Center, Boise, Idaho
October 29, 2024

Note: Meeting was streamed through virtual platform to allow for public viewing.

The meeting was called to order, attendees and guests were welcomed and the agenda was reviewed.

Council Members Present:

Tim Blonsky, Council Chair/Disability Groups Representative

Diana Colgrove, Council Vice Chair/Business, Industry & Labor Representative

Mark Reinhardt, Former VR Recipient Representative

David “Max” Maxwell, Veterans Administration Disability Groups Representative

Jami Davis, State Independent Living Council Representative

Luke Rose, Business, Industry & Labor Representative

Nancy Grant, Client Assistance Program Representative

Stephanie Taylor-Thompson, Former VR Recipient Representative

Clay Long, Workforce Development Council Representative

Ex officio members

Judy B. Taylor, IDVR Interim Administrator

Absent:

Angie Tuft, Business, Industry & Labor Representative

Danielle Larsen, Community Resource Programs (CRP's) Representative

Janice Carson, Disability Groups Representative

Jeff DeForest, Business, Industry & Labor Representative

Randi Cole, State Department of Education Representative

Linda Thomas, Parent Training & Information Center

Feather Holt, Idaho's Native American Tribes

Kent Ireton, Pre-ETS Counselor Representative

Guests:

Darrell Quist, IDVR Field Services Chief

Linda Brown, IDVR Fiscal Officer

Matthew Markve, IDVR Planning & Evaluations Manager

Desiree Brown, IDVR Program Specialist Technician

Steven Snow, CDHH Executive Director

A quorum was established.

Committee Meeting

The Executive Committee and Planning, Policy and Program Effectiveness Committee met to review sub-committee work.

Committee Meetings will now be called workgroups. To create structure, an agenda and an official report will need to be provided to the council. It was explained that a quorum is seven or more members within a workgroup or council according to the State Rehabilitation Council By-laws.

Judy B. Taylor, IDVR Interim Administrator suggested that the Planning, Policy and Program Effectiveness Committee should be a separate workgroup that comes together on an Ad Hoc basis and the Executive Committee should be made up of the elected members since the workgroup reviews sensitive information.

The council was informed that when a quorum of council members are present, it must be a public meeting, and open meeting laws must be followed.

The council members present expressed agreement to having work groups separate from the scheduled quarterly council meetings to allow members to interact more efficiently.

Meeting Minutes

The July 23, 2024 Meeting Minutes were reviewed.

Motion: Stephanie Taylor-Thompson made a motion to approve the Minutes as written. David “Max” Maxwell seconded the motion. The motions carried unopposed.

Review and acceptance of Committee chairs and members

Motion: Clay Long made a motion to accept the Committee Chairs and members as proposed. Lucus Rose seconded the motion, which passed without objection.

Committee Reports to Council

Annual Report

Matt Markve, Planning & Evaluation Manager and Desiree Brown, IDVR Program Specialist Technician presented new information on the 2024 Combined Annual Report for council consideration. SRC members will see the new changes in the final draft of the report in November.

Council members made suggestions for edits.

Motion: Mark Reinhardt made a motion to approve the Annual Report with proposed modifications. Jami Davis seconded the motion, which carried without objection.

Data Response Report

The SRC Quarterly Data Responses were reviewed. Council members were asked if there was additional data they would like to review during the quarterly meetings.

There was concern over a comment within the survey responses related to the accidental release of a report directly to the customer outside of a secured file share. The follow-up to the customer was explained to the council. It was explained that if the customer is not able to access computer applications, another method to provide records would be provided.

There was a question related to the number of employees serving customers. It was explained that the agency currently has a hiring freeze due to the agency's financial situation and additional positions from the current structure cannot be justified at this time.

Order of Selection

Judy B. Taylor, IDVR Interim Administrator presented an update on the agency's Order of Selection entitled "Path to the New Normal". The intent is that the agency will not return to the way business was done in the past but

rather a more effective strategy moving forward.

Key items reviewed included:

- The State Plan Amendment was accepted by Rehabilitation Services Administration and on September 9, 2024, the agency implemented Order of Selection. Under Order of Selection, IDVR is only serving customers with an active current Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). 3,625 customers were currently being served under an active IPE and will continue to be serviced through the length of their plan. Those individuals who had been determined eligible at time of implementation were placed on a waitlist. There are currently 636 eligible customers on the waitlist as of October 23, 2024. To be added to the waitlist, customers must be determined eligible for services.
- Since September, \$600,000 has been spent on services.

IDVR received \$10 million non-cognizable reallocation of Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2024 dollars with the appropriate spending authority. IDVR has submitted a State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2025 supplemental budget request for \$3 million state match dollars. Ms. Taylor will present the financial need to the Joint Finance and Appropriations Committee (JFAC) during the legislative session.

The governor of the State of Idaho approved emergency funding authority needed to match the federal allotment.

Every year, state funds are needed to match the federal funds.

- Once the agency is able to start providing services to individuals on the waitlist, those with the most significant disabilities would be served as the first priority, based on the date of application. For example, if 20 individuals applied on a specific date, they would all be moved off the waiting list at the same time. A first in, first out mechanism is in place in accordance with the State Plan.

Linda Brown, IDVR Financial Officer reported the federal award is typically around \$26 million and the state match dollars are appropriated at \$5.2 million. There are enough state funds to match that appropriation. There

have not been any previous requests for an increase in state appropriations in recent years.

A council member asked where the agency stands financially at this time. Ms. Taylor explained that with the funds that were received, IDVR has the means to continue serving individuals that are currently receiving services under an IPE. The anticipation is that the funding will not be in the negative as the new fiscal year approaches.

When asked if the federal funds were being used to replace vacant positions, Ms. Taylor responded that positions that are deemed necessary are being filled and raises are given to those who are performing additional work but not all vacancies are being filled to preserve cost savings. Additional specific information can be provided at the next meeting.

Team members are the agency's most important resources and there is a desire to retain those resources and as caseloads reduce, reassessment of duties will be conducted to ensure that customers continue to be served.

A council member expressed that counselors are feeling overwhelmed and overworked and barely treading water based on the information being received. It was explained that reduced resources are common within Order of Selection.

Matt Markve, IDVR Planning and Evaluation Manager, shared data showing that the volume pressure has been reduced under Order of Selection. Tim Blonsky, Council Chair expressed that the council needs to continue focus of the salaries of IDVR employees in upcoming meetings.

IDVR Financial Update

The SRC budget for 3rd and 4th quarters were presented. The total percent expended for the Federal Fiscal Year 2024 was 92.6%. There has been some cost savings due to SRC member conference attendance and travel being suspended.

Linda Brown, IDVR Financial Officer presented the IDVR Quarterly to Actual Report by Fund Report. The SFY 2025 General Fund has 2.77% remaining but federal funds will be used when the General Fund has been fully expended. The \$10 million dollars received from RSA was not included in the report because it was received after September 30, 2024.

The IDVR Quarterly Budget to Actual Report by Fund was explained.

A council member asked what costs are being cut and where the money is being spent. Ms. Taylor responded that within the 3rd week of June, all non-essential team member travel and education was canceled. In addition, there is a hiring slow down, capital spending has been slowed down, salary savings from open positions helps provide the necessary funding. The most impactful spending cut has been by not serving new customers and ensuring that necessary services and proper documentation is in place.

It was explained that Darrell Quist, Field Services Chief has a workgroup of individuals within the agency that are assessing the use of office spaces. The Preston office is being closed as general customers were not being served from that location. Space consolidation review will continue.

Strategic Discussions

Traditional and PreETS Spending Strategy

Judy B. Taylor, IDVR Administrator shared that when the Workforce and Innovations Opportunities Act (WIOA) was implemented, the Council was not provided with the opportunity to provide input on how to strategize Pre-employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) services to fulfill the federal requirement requiring VR agencies to expend 15% of their budget. The importance of why serving students is so important and effective.

State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2022, 2023, 2024 budgets were revisited from the last SRC meeting in July. The data shown in SFY 2024 budget shows that IDVR cannot actively serve 5,400 customers.

Advice is being requested from the council to help IDVR delegate how to split funding between Pre-ETS and traditional services.

Council member comments included the following:

- The percentage of funds being spent to serve students is higher than what it should be and what is required.
- Since the data is not showing a high number of referrals from education, it was recommended that summer programs be reduced as they reflect a large percentage of the expenditures.

- Students could begin their education at community schools and trade schools rather than the higher levels of education until the student has made their final career choice.
- Summer work programs can help students identify interests and disinterests. By not having those experiences, students wouldn't have the opportunity to identify whether their career choice was appropriate for their interests. Work experiences provide the job experience that is needed to prepare students for their career choices.
- Realistic expectations should be placed on VR customers as far as the assessment process and prioritization of their desired employment based on the skills they may already have.
- Communication has been that Pre-ETS success is transitioning the student into the traditional VR program. Money invested in Pre-ETS continues into the traditional side.
- Counselors need to engage with customers to find quality jobs rather than menial type work.
- Communication to parents of students should be provided so they are aware of the summer work experience options.
- The agency needs to provide the opportunity for informed choice and meaningful service provision and consider dignity of risk.
- The Field Services Chief and the Pre-ETS Transition Manager should be present to explain where the successes are before discussions about how the money is being spent are considered.
- There have been some successes in the services provided around the state. Services need to be provided to students and adults. If there are things being seen that are successful on the program side with costs, there could be mechanisms that can be used statewide rather than re-inventing them.
- Increasing collaboration with other states was suggested.
- In order to ensure informed choice, there needs to be documentation as to what a specific job entails, and the financial portion costs would be to complete their education. The agency could pay a portion of the costs and have the expectation that the customer would pay the remainder of the cost.

Matt Markve, IDVR Planning and Evaluation Manager explained that comparable benefits are a part of the process currently. The council has been provided the opportunity to have input into the financial participation

process. There has been comments from IDVR team members that have also included those type of concerns related to how much the agency is paying towards specific services. He reminded that the council is the body that sets the gauge. The financial participation calculator was reimplemented after being suspended earlier in the year. The financial participation process is limited to specific services and is set at 300% of poverty guidelines. RSA required the agency to set the participation level at 95%. Services cannot be reported to RSA as being provided if the customer is paying 100%.

It was reiterated that for the next meeting, the council members would like to see data around how much is spent around the components of the Pre-ETS program, what measures have been taken and data showing what the savings has been and dates of the programs as well as how students participate within the Pre-ETS program.

Ms. Taylor has asked the council members to provide more specific information related to numbers. It was emphasized that they need to hear a formal recommendation based on reporting from the field service leadership.

The agency was asked to provide the counselor to customer ratio per office and the breakdown of expenditures for the most significantly disabled for Pre-ETS, and whether the outcomes of those PreETS cases can be reported.

It was explained that there are no Pre-ETS group services that are being provided specifically to individuals with most significant disabilities. The agency would have to collect data differently than what is being done currently to provide that information. This will be considered further on how those areas can be assessed. (Pre-ETS team members can provide better information and data.)

The council was informed that they will have the opportunity to provide the agency with guidance before decisions on how funds are to be expended moving forward.

Rate Analysis Presentation:

A contract template based on federal guidance will be developed moving forward, will outline the federal requirements in which vendors would need

to meet the compliance requirements. Extended services requirements will be included in the process.

The Public Consulting Group (PCG) was hired through a competitive bid process. The Division of Purchasing awarded the contract to PCG who conducted a cost methodology rate study including the following:

- Develop rate methodology
- Research industry standards
- Analyze CRP costs
- Peer-state review
- Best practices
- Develop rate recommendations
- Projected fiscal impact to IDVR

There were 33 Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs) invited to participate in the initial survey in which, 11 participated.

The study scope of service rates were calculated based on CRP revenue/expense, personal roster, and time study data. The goal was to ensure costs included are reasonable (per 2 CFR 200.404) and CRP payments consist of efficiency, economy and quality care.

The rate foundation aligns cost of service delivery, CRP data including direct and indirect costs such as salaries of staff providing VR services, tax and fringe, operating costs, organizational indirect costs.

Total Service hours were calculated on case management data, average data from CRPS, and multiple fiscal years to total to the average unites per service (includes 14% indirect costs).

The OCG Rate Recommendations calculations are based on cost study, market salary research, IDVR feedback, and peer state research.

Flat fee rates, milestone rates and hourly rates were recommended. CRPs proposed service cost increase is expected to increase 46%.

A PCG Recommendation Implementation Plan:

- Establish feedback loop
- Consider phase-in rate increases
- Policy enhancements & CRP contracts
- Provide Transparency
- Establish CRP staff qualifications
- Consider external factors for setting/adjusting rates
- Explore value-based payments
- Explore incentive payments
- Monitor CRP costs and milestone data
- Regular rate study intervals.

CRP representatives have expressed concerns with the proposed implementation plan.

The Stakeholder Workgroup will identify challenges, priorities such as service in rate adjustment, rate structure, value-based & incentive payments, and certification & credential requirements. The group structure consists of CRPs, (Non-profit, for profit, and independent), two SRC members, one Client Assistant Program (CAP) member, one Developmental Disability Board member, one person with a disability, and key IDVR team members.

The PCG Rate Analysis Report is posted to the IDVR website.

Council members expressed recommendations that the workgroup should consider, which included career pathway strategies and quality placements into jobs that are substantive and providers who focus on the deaf individuals.

Chairman Tim Blonsky made a recommendation that the Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing should be included in the structure of the work group.

The council was reminded that the more that the agency pays providers, the smaller number of people that can be served, however retaining the providers is crucial for providing services to the customers.

Rural Transportation

Rural transportation is a big issue in Idaho. The goal is to identify the challenges and begin research to resolution.

When a customer is receiving support from a Medicaid funded agency, they will often times have transportation to work, however family members also are required to provide transportation, which can have a significant impact to families. Rural areas don't have a lot of options for employment, requiring individuals to commute outside of the community.

Not all families have the means to provide the support they need, which can result in individuals with disabilities, not having the opportunity to work.

Having transportation resources is crucial for success.

Transportation in the evenings is more challenging.

Ms. Taylor shared strategies that the Commission for Aging is using in facing the challenges of transportation for aged individuals.

Transportation for an applicant or participant can be provided within the federal regulations in support of a service. Collaboration among agencies is necessary to resolve the problems. However, there are limits of when transportation is available.

Presentation – Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Steven Snow is a former recipient of VR services and serves as the Executive Director of the Council of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

Mr. Snow presented information related to the culture of deaf individuals, disability awareness and the preconceptions of society that impact employment opportunities for deaf individuals.

The competitive advantages, challenges and barriers, reasons for students dropping out of school were included in the presentation.

Idaho no longer has a Rehabilitation Counselor for the Deaf.

Quality of Rehabilitation Services for Deaf Clients

- Inadequate interpreter access: Shortages can hinder communication and reduce trust.
- Limited resources: Few specialized training programs, particularly in technical fields.
- Data: Only 1 in 3 deaf VR clients report that their communication needs are understood.

When VR agencies operate under Order of Selection, individuals with the most severe disabilities receive priority, often leaving deaf individuals on waiting lists or unable to access services at all. Mr. Snow explained the various negative impacts to students in post-secondary education and the need for communication support should prioritize deaf individuals.

It was explained that there is a history of trust issues with Vocational Rehabilitation. In conclusion, Mr. Snow asked the council to consider:

- Emphasizing the importance of specialized services to improve outcomes.
- Address the impact of Order of Selection and trust issues by ensuring timely and culturally competent services.
- Aim to enhance the quality and accessibility of rehabilitation services to foster better support and trust.
- Updating the policy on using certified sign language interpreters being required.

Member Updates

Lucas Rose, would like to continue meeting in person.

Nancy Grant, explained that one of the many rights that they provide advocacy for includes voting. If there are individuals who have barriers to voting at the polls, they can contact Disability Rights Idaho at 208-336-5353 and they will provide assistance.

Clay Long, Career Technical Education (CTE) has just finished their annual report and he will provide a copy to council members.

Diana Colgrove, provided a reminder of confusion among parents when it relates to services for students. She is disappointed in the limitations around travel from the agency, which has affected the ability to have town hall type meetings. She shared issues that her daughter experiences due to lack of transportation, as she relies on her parents to provide her transportation to work. She would like to continue collaboration to develop solutions related to transportation.

Mark Reinhardt, has been researching neurodivergence and employment. The research he reviewed was in the UK, where they have guidebooks for employers. He can provide a copy to anyone that would like one. He will be graduating with a second Associates degree in sociology next year.

Tim Blonsky, has been participating in data collection events related to American Sign Language for eventual use in technology, where individuals will be able to sign in to Amazon and use AI for a specified period of time. Tim will be involved in the demonstration of the technology. In his consulting business he has had the opportunity to provide professional development in companies such as HP. He is excited about the upcoming technology.

Fair Hearing Report

IDVR is required to report to the council and RSA the results of fair hearings on an annual basis. Darrell Quist, Field Services Chief, reported that there was one Fair Hearing held during the course of the year. The agency's decision to decline service was upheld. A customer requested a Pre-ETS service but was not currently enrolled as a student in a qualifying education program. VR found that the customer was no longer eligible to be serviced as a student. It was remanded back to the agency by the fair hearing officer for VR to determine if the service could be provided as a youth service. In reviewing Idaho rule the use of a vendor that does not have the required accreditation is prohibited. The service could be provided by a Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) accredited vendor within the state, however the customer has chosen not to pursue that option.

Other Business

IDVR has budgeted for SRC travel, however there are council members who have suggested the possibility of reducing travel to reduce agency

costs.

The majority of the council members would like to meet in person and will continue to do so with the virtual hybrid option for attendance.

The next meeting will include review of the Open Meeting Law, preparation for legislative communication and review of the Bylaws, and continued discussion of PreETS expenditures. Eligibility Determination review will be considered by the Policy, Procedures and Program Effectiveness Committee at the next scheduled committee meeting.

The next State Rehabilitation Council meeting is scheduled for January 28th, 2025, in Boise at the Holiday Inn – Boise Airport.

Without objection, the meeting was adjourned.