



State Rehabilitation Council Quarterly Meeting January 25, 2022 | Meeting Minutes

Present

Council Chair Janice Carson, Council Vice-Chair Darin Lindig, Tim Blonsky, Randi Cole, Jami Davis, Jane Donnellan, Pam Harris, Christine Meeuwesen, Ron Oberleitner, Nathan Ogden, James Pegram, Danielle “DR” Reff, Stephanie Taylor-Silva, Sarah Tueller, and David White.

Guests

Lori Gentillon, Hannah Liedkie, Kean Miller, and Teresa Pitt

Absent

Ramona Medicine Horse and David “Max” Maxwell

Welcome & Introductions

Council Chair Janice Carson called the meeting to order and welcomed Council Members. Members and guests were asked to introduce themselves and state their role on the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC). The agenda was reviewed.

Approval of Minutes – October 25, 2021

The approval of Minutes has been tabled to the next scheduled SRC meeting.

Fiscal Update

Kean Miller, IDVR Financial Manager, presented the SRC Quarterly Report for Federal Fiscal Year 2022 and reported no expenditures occurred in the first quarter. The IDVR Quarterly Budget to Actual Report for Fiscal Year 2021 as of December 31, 2021, which is compared to 2020, was reviewed. Kean explained spending in each category is doing better than in 2020.

- 56.73% of the general fund has been spent, 100% of the rehabilitation program income has been spent, there is a requirement to spend it first.
- 38% of the federal grant has been expended, which is about the same as last year.
- The miscellaneous fund shows that 26% has been expended.

Kean reports that they are currently spending in the 21 Grant and the miscellaneous fund to meet our match for the first year. We are also completing the spend on the 21

Grant. When Luma is launched July 1, 2022, the 21 Grant will be shut down and we will start over with the basic 22 Grant. The strategy is to make sure the Pre-ETS funding is on the 22 Grant so the entire grant can be utilized.

Council Chair Carson asked what the anticipated balance of the 21 Grant that will not be moved over will be. Kean explained that it has to be in relation to Pre-ETS spending and that summer spend is higher due to the amount expended for work-based learning experiences held during the summer. It is difficult to predict what the balance will be but the plan is to have the summer spend come from the 22 Grant. There has been an increase in spending of Pre-ETS funding, which is a positive thing.

Agency Update

Jane Donnellan, Administrator for the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, presented the agency update.

Agency Concerns

Ms. Donnellan noted the 2022 Legislative Session began on Monday, January 10, 2022. The IDVR budget was presented on January 24, 2022 and included adjustments that are required by the State. There was one line-item budget request specific to The Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (CDHH) requesting one position for a program specialist to provide greater outreach to the deaf and hard of hearing community.

Ms. Donnellan informed members of IDVR's contribution to proposed legislation for the Extended Employment Services (EES) program. The proposed legislation would transfer EES to the Health & Welfare Medicaid Division.

She then shared some of her testimony for the Change in Employee Compensation Committee. Ms. Donnellan focused on discussing the high staff turnover and the need to better compensate state employees to retain qualified staff. She highlighted a recruitment effort with additional incentives that was unsuccessful in attracting new staff.

Tim Blonsky mentioned that he has some perspective and has contacts with people in other parts of the country. He stated that Idaho Business for Education and the Workforce Development Council have talked with the State of Idaho, Division of Human Resources to see if apprenticeship can be integrated into the state system to recruit within the state.

Ms. Donnellan continued to explain how the agency has adapted to work efficiently even with staff vacancies. She stressed the importance of the being able to maintain

staffing in support of the Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) program, as federal funds to support IDVR are highly dependent on the management of this specific program. Jane welcomed thoughts and ideas on the topic.

Stephanie Taylor-Silva stated that she would be open to have further conversation with Ms. Donnellan in regard to this topic. As a state employee with the Department of Corrections, she has seen the same types of challenges with recruitment and retention. **Ms. Donnellan** invited those who may be interested to have a more specific, in-depth conversation on this topic.

Teresa Pitt, Planning and Evaluation Manager at IDVR, mentioned that Idaho's unemployment rate is currently 2.4% and the lowest it has been since 1976; this also influences hiring trends. **Kean Miller**, Financial Manager at IDVR, clarified the agency is only able to provide additional incentives where appropriate because of salary savings from vacant positions.

Chairperson Carson asked if Ms. Donnellan could address the impact to Idahoans if the agency is not able to maintain staff. **Ms. Donnellan** stated there are two reasons the agency would go on Order of Selection; if the agency did not have financial resources to provide all the services that are required of all eligible individuals and if there was not enough staff to support the individuals applying for VR services. She noted these two reasons are not a concern because there has been a decline in applicants for VR Services, even prior to COVID. She did note she has been collaborating with the Chief of Field Services to develop an outreach plan with the intent to ensure the agency is reaching all the individuals who may need VR resources.

To close, Mrs. Donnellan shared she has engaged with the Anti-Human Trafficking Coalition and the VA Vocational Rehabilitation program to broaden contact with potential customers.

Ron Oberleitner commented this is an opportunity to say what the typical VR counselor role would be to take in possibly new clients. He inquired if the agency could align with job placement companies in Idaho that are doing similar things for candidates as they are reaching out to businesses. He provided an example of a temporary employment agency being aware of the services so they could make referrals. Providers can take on some of the counselor roles as they are seeing those people on a regular basis.

Ms. Donnellan replied stating there are parts of the VR job that could not be passed on to other entities. When it comes to the Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs), one of the areas that can be addressed is how to strengthen relations. She clarified the

agency hired a CRP Manager to evaluate how improvements can be made to support the CRPs. She also mentioned at least 25% of IDVR customers use CRP services. She further stated they will evaluate the concept of collaborating with placement agencies.

Outreach

Mrs. Pitt began discussion on outreach and noted when the agency was engaged with Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) on monitoring, one of the conversations was regarding outreach. She explained that in 2020, letters inquiring if employment assistance was needed were sent to customers whose cases had been closed in the prior year. RSA responded by asking if expanding the outreach to customers who have disengaged was something that had been considered. In January 2022 over 400 letters were sent out to reengage individuals who were in need of VR services. One person applied for services, which may have been a result of that outreach. Mrs. Pitt confirmed they would continue to use this strategy. **DR Reff** inquired about the ratio between VR counselors and customers are at the current time. **Mrs. Pitt** explained the ratio varies, but averages between 60 and 90 cases per counselor.

CRP Interim Rate Increase

Ms. Donnellan reported VR providers in the community are also having difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified staff. In December a letter was sent to all CRPs offering an increase in salary by \$2.00 per hour, expiring June of 2022. She clarified not all providers agreed to the interim rate increase, but most did. The rate increase will be reevaluated at a later time to see if it had a positive effect.

Pam Harris stated that the employees in her company was thrilled to have the \$2.00 an hour raise. She said it is discouraging when companies don't pay better for the work being done, as it is very challenging.

Vice Chair Lindig asked if the agency can provide wages to customers during the first month of employment while they are learning their jobs. **Mrs. Pitt** explained there are paid work experiences for students and will be extended to adults in the future.

Tim Blonsky stated that when he was in Connecticut as a CRP, they were able to integrate where 100% of wages were paid during the training period. It should be possible for Idaho and this possibility should be evaluated further.

Mrs. Pitt also mentioned Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) as an incentive for employers, which the agency provides verifications for. **Mr. Blonsky** explained WOTC may be beneficial to smaller businesses, but it would not be something a larger corporation would buy into.

Vice Chair Darin Lindig asked if this is decided on a case-by-case basis and if the strategy is to incentivize the employer or the customer. **Ms. Donnellan** responded there are various nuances involved. On the job training benefits both the employer and the customer because the customer is able to work in a field they are interested in but may not have skills for. It helps the employer with that cost because they are getting paid for that additional training that they otherwise would not have had. In the end, the employer may be a good match with an individual to become a permanent employee. **Mrs. Pitt** further commented that it has the potential to “opens the eyes” of those employers who may have “pre-conceived” notions or myths about employing individuals with disabilities.

Apprenticeship Coordinator

Ms. Donnellan informed members the agency is recruiting for an Apprenticeship Coordinator made possible by a grant. MiKayla Cobler, Business Relations Manager with IDVR, will oversee the position. The agency hopes to use this position to allow opportunities for individuals with good paying jobs and benefits. Ms. Donnellan expressed she hopes to retain the position after the grant period expires.

Tim Blonsky mentioned that he has been proactive in education as to what apprenticeships means and would like to share information about that as IDVR moves towards the apprenticeship program. He plans to meet with MiKayla to discuss a database system that could assist the efforts. **Ms. Donnellan** responded it would be beneficial to collaborate with other agencies including ICBVI, etc.

DR Reff asked if someone would be able to get an apprenticeship within a law office. **Mr. Blonsky** shared there are over 1,231 apprenticeship opportunities available, however, it is industry driven. **Council Chair Carson** said she is excited to see the employer engagement work and VR counselors growing their skills in that area.

James Pegram shared that in many cases in manufacturing the apprenticeship jobs are skilled trades that have a longer training period. He stated that historically, employers haven't done a great job of forecasting replacement of positions such as mechanics, electricians, boiler, and refrigeration technicians and what the turnover will be in future years. There could be numerous employers involved in utilizing the talent pool that comes from these successful apprenticeship programs. **Mr. Blonsky** also mentioned that people can earn a significant wage through the skilled apprenticeship programs. Additionally, approximately 92% of employees across the nation stay with employers they have completed apprenticeships with.

RSA Monitoring

The draft monitoring report from RSA has been received. IDVR staff will review the report and respond within 15 days to suggest edits, review for accuracy and/or dispute any of the findings. Further details will be provided as the agency progresses through the review of the report.

COVID Protocol

The agency has adopted guidance from the CDC to reduce the transmission and risk of COVID-19 outbreaks in the workplace. These efforts are expected to last through January 2022 at a minimum.

CSAVR Conference

The CSAVR Conference will be virtual again this year. The dates for those general sessions are Tuesday, April 12 through Thursday, April 14, 2022. All SRC members are invited to the opportunity to participate if interested.

The Combined Annual Report

The SRC and VR Combined Annual Report is now available, and a hard copy will be mailed to the members. It is posted on the [VR website](#).

VR Success Story

There is a new Success Story included in the member packet to highlight another successful individual who is working as a peer mentor.

SRC Resource

Emily Carlisle, SRC Secretary, is working on developing a SharePoint site dedicated to the SRC Members and their engagement in the Council

IDVR Portion of the State Plan

Teresa Pitt reported that the draft State Plan is out for public comment and the VR Portion of the State Plan will be presented later this afternoon. She clarified that Wendi Secrist will talk about the overarching combined stated plan, which should help members have a better understanding of the intersection between our program specific state plan and how IDVR fits under the workforce system in Idaho. Members of the SRC have some responsibilities to review and provide input. Teresa explained Matt Markve, Program Analyst and herself have been meeting with the workforce partners since September every couple of weeks to collaborate and discuss the combined state plan.

Benefits Planning

IDVR has engaged in two different contracts for Benefits Planning services. Benefits

planning services are now being provided throughout the entire state. As of January 1, 2022, all vendors are operating under the same contract for all regions. Over 150 benefits analysis have been conducted. **Mrs. Pitt** anticipates the Benefits Planning program will continue to improve and provide more services.

Policy Changes

Janice Carson was informed that minor changes to the policy manual have been implemented and became effective January 1, 2022. The two changes were vetted with RSA.

1. **Release of medical information to the VR customer** - The policy now reads *“A customer case record contains information from a variety of sources. Customers can request this information in writing, and it will be provided, except in the following cases: Medical, psychological or other information that IDVR believes may be harmful to the customer. This information may not be released directly to the customer but must be provided to the customer through a third party chosen by the customer”*.

Note: The change made was in the last sentence where it used to say *“may be provided the to the customer through a third party”* now reads *“must be”*.

2. **Duration of Residency** – Although IDVR does not have a duration of residency requirement, the language within the policy indicated although there is not a duration of residency requirement to apply for IDVR services, the applicant must be living in the state, which contradicts having a residency requirement. On page 2, The Purpose in General Requirements, the policy will now read, *“Eligibility will be determined without regard to sex, race, creed, age, color, national origin or type of disability. Additionally, there is no duration of residency requirement to apply for services. Applicants must be available, present in the state of Idaho and legally able to work in the United States”*.

In addition, there were some internal procedures that had very similar wording, which were changed to read, *“Any individual who is legally eligible to work in the United States is present in the state of Idaho and available to participate in the IDVR process, has the right to apply for services”*.

DR Reff asked how VR would contact someone who didn't have residency or didn't have a phone. **Mrs. Pitt** explained a customer would not have to have a phone because they could come into the office to receive services. The customer can attend

appointments, receive letters, possibly communicate through email and having a phone is not a requirement. Definition of present in the state of Idaho was discussed.

Recess

The council recessed for lunch at 11:45 a.m.

Wendi Secrist – Executive Director, Workforce Development Council

Mrs. Secrist presented a familiarization briefing for the members so they could become more knowledgeable of the Workforce Development Council (WDC). She shared that in 2017, Governor Otter set up the Workforce Development Task Force to evaluate how Idaho's workforce development systems and research how investments were being made. The Workforce Development Council initially served as an advisory board to the Department of Labor. Membership consisted of individuals from education, directors of Commerce and Labor, career technical education and coordinated efforts throughout the state to help prepare people for the workforce.

IDVR Portion of the Combined State Plan

Council Chair Carson requested SRC members review the required sections and provide feedback to her by February 4th. The SRC will be provided with the PowerPoint Presentation that provides page numbers and notes regarding the input by IDVR. **Mrs. Pitt** noted March 15, 2022 is the deadline for the State Plan.

Member Updates

Members shared updates of their personal progress and work in the community.

Adjourned

Prepared by Wendy Page and Council Secretary, Emily Carlisle