



Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC)

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OVR Policy & State Plan / Customer Satisfaction Committee Minutes for March 20, 2023

Members Present (P)

Not Present (NP)

Lynn Heitz (P)
Julia Grant Barol (P)
Paul Fogle (P)
Laura Princiotta (P)

Michelle Paonessa (NP)
Susan Tomasic (P)
Andrew Pennington (P)

Robert Wallington (NP)
Jessica Keogh (NP)
Lorie Brew (P)

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) Staff Present: James Whitonis, Cheryl Novak, Lee Ann Stewart, Ryan Hyde, Tracie Maille, Marci Katona, Dawn Sokol

Project Staff Present: Chris Todd, Michelle Gerrick

Interpreters Present: Ashley Shenk

CALL TO ORDER

This meeting was conducted through Zoom. Ms. Lynn Heitz called the meeting to order at 2:30 PM.

ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA

There were no additions.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA AND PAST MINUTES

MOTION was made by Ms. Julia Barol to approve today's agenda. Ms. Susan Tomasic seconded the motion. All were in favor.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION ITEMS:

Discussion of Description (I) of the 2024-2028 State Plan

- Mr. Jim Whitonis reviewed a draft of Description L of the 2024-2028 State Plan and highlighted a small change that now lists the exact renovations for the Hiram G Andrews Center in Goal number 4. Goal number 1 is to increase integrated employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. This is a very similar goal

from the last plan, only the sub goals underneath it has been updated and include utilize transportation services, increase VR services for the blind and visually impaired, promote accessibility and technology, expand training for Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) and increase services for customer with mental health disabilities.

- Ms. Julia Barol inquired if there was a way to be more specific with those goals to include for example, increase Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services and outcomes for the blind and visually impaired by X percent. This would provide something to strive towards so that there would be markers to determine if the goal is being met along the way.
- Mr. Ryan Hyde stated that in the past Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) would coach OVR on the goals to keep them specifically broad, meaning that the goals could state a specific population directly but not include at this level the exact intervention as this would allow for the agency to be flexible and creative in their implementation.
- Ms. Barol and Ms. Lynn Heitz stated that it is important to have a benchmark included in the goal and provided the example of increasing programs for blind, visually impaired, and those with a mental health diagnosis by 20%.
- Mr. Paul Fogle inquired if that benchmark would include open cases, closed cases, successful employment, or another permanent benchmark.
- Ms. Barol stated the revision could include for example, Increase VR services and outcomes for the blind/visually impaired by 20% based on job placement outcomes. Inquired what data is available or being collected regarding sub-goal number 3 promote accessibility and technology. Inquired how many employers have been counseled on workplace accessibility and identify how to increase or promote those customers and business accessibility and technology option. Members inquired about accessibility services being provided, collecting data, and developing a baseline of data regarding accessibility and technology.
- Mr. Hyde reported that they would be able to track how much accessible technology was purchased. The goal is much broader and includes communicating with employers, communicating within the state system, universal design of websites and applications. Workforce Development developed a study of digital/internet access in the state. The Accessibility Expert does consult with Office of Administration and provides introductory consulting on accessibility standards. Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) toolkit is used to identify accessibility at CareerLinks and other employers and is more geared toward physical than technology accessibility. Reported that RSA prefers that goals are kept broad and do not include percentages.
- Mr. Andrew Pennington inquired if including percentages or a specific baseline would prohibit many more activities/services from fitting within that language. Inquired

about what 20% improvement is based upon and being measured against. Inquired if 20% is a realistic goal. Inquired if that would narrowly define or prohibit planning based solely upon placement outcomes. Stated that Federal performance indicators already capture measurable skills gains along with other quarterly data.

- Ms. Heitz inquired if data is reported as combined between Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (BVRS) and Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services (BBVS) and shared concerns about the difficulty in determining what jobs blind customers obtain and maintain.
- Mr. Hyde reported that reporting to RSA is combined. They receive one report of all disability types. Disability type and case IDs associated with each bureau is included in the data received.
- Members provided discussion regarding the inclusion of specific percentages within the goals and its impact upon services, what the many factors of the percentages would be based upon, establishing a baseline, and how it would be measured.
- Mr. Hyde stated that staff understand the suggestions and will work on adjusting goals based upon discussion. Reported that the State Plan is a large document and that this particular section (Description L), RSA has provided guidance in the past to keep the goals specifically broad and suggested holding a second meeting with PaRC members to discuss further.
- Ms. Barol suggested including a little more targeted specificity when expansion or increasing of services is mentioned.
- Mr. Hyde reported that RSA will probably kick back some goals that include specific percentages and prior to their next meeting will provide members previous goals that RSA requested be modified to understand what was expected and agreed to by RSA.
- Mr. Whitonis reviewed the remaining goals and sub-goals of the Description L draft, agreed to provide previous State Plan goals with members for comparison prior to the next meeting, will provide information on how data is collected on the RSA report, will work with PaRC staff to schedule another meeting with the Council and OVR Leadership to continue to review the Description L draft, and reported that we should have a draft in place sometime between beginning of April and early May.

Adjourn

MOTION was made by Ms. Julia Barol to adjourn. Ms. Susan Tomasic seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned.