



# Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC)

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## OVR Policy & State Plan / Customer Satisfaction Committee Minutes for September 26, 2023

### Members Present (P)

### Not Present (NP)

Lynn Heitz (P)  
Susan Tomasic (P)

Michelle Paonessa (NP)  
Jessica Keogh (NP)

Julia Grant Barol (P)  
Paul Fogle (P)

**Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) Staff Present:** James Whitonis, Cheryl Novak, Chris Harbert, Audrey O'Connor

**Project Staff Present:** Chris Todd

### CALL TO ORDER

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

### ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA

There were no additions.

### APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA AND PAST MINUTES

***MOTION was made by Ms. Julia Barol to accept today's agenda and past meeting minutes. Ms. Susan Tomasic seconded the motion. All were in favor.***

### DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION ITEMS:

#### OVR Updates

#### Description A of the 2024-2028 State Plan

#### Description C of the 2024-2028 State Plan

- Mr. James Whitonis provided updates for drafts and next steps of Description (a) and Description (c) of the 2024-2028 State Plan. Further action from the Council is not required unless members had additional requests or recommendations. Originally the Public Comment was scheduled for October but will now be held in November 2023 due to need for additional preparation. This November Public

Comment period will consolidate that process with the Workforce Development Public Comment of the Combined State Plan. Yesterday, September 25, 2023, Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) distributed their training video for the new State Plan outline a link to the information was shared in the comments. [WIOA Unified and Combined State Plan Training for Program Year 2024 - YouTube](#). Public Comment will be held virtually through Zoom. During the Public Comment period OVR will be collecting comments and questions. Responses to the questions and comments will not be made during the meeting. All Council members interested in attending the Public Comment meeting are more than welcome and will have access to the meeting link. All Public Comments will be compiled and shared with the Council.

## Discussion of Committee Goals

- Members reviewed the Committee Goals document. Ms. Heitz explained that Goal #1 is in regard to hiring practices. The person that gave a report at the most recent State Board meeting was invited to attend a Committee meeting to explain the procedures that a person with a disability would go through to get their application to Civil Service to determine eligibility for an interview. They were not available to attend but responses to questions from the Committee were provided as follows:
  - If a person has a disability how do they get in touch with a disability recruiter?
    - Interested applicants may contact the Office of Administration at 717-787-7811 or Telephone Relay Service 711 - or by submitting the Employment Contact Us Form found at the following link: [Employment Contact Us Form · Starter Portal \(powerappsportals.us\)](#). This information is made available on the [www.employment.pa.gov](http://www.employment.pa.gov) website.
  - Is the process the same for a person with a disability as a non-disabled person?
    - Yes, The Commonwealth is an equal employment opportunity employer and is committed to a diverse workforce. The Commonwealth values inclusion as we seek to recruit, develop, and retain the most qualified people to serve the citizens of Pennsylvania. The Commonwealth does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religious creed, ancestry, union membership, age, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, national origin, AIDS or HIV status, disability, or any other categories protected by applicable federal or state law. All diverse candidates are encouraged to apply.
    - This information is made available on the [www.employment.pa.gov](http://www.employment.pa.gov) website and on each job application.
  - For someone looking to obtain employment with the Commonwealth, what does the current hiring process look like?
  - The below link provides overview for the initial application process. After the below process is completed, timelines and processes of recruitment, selection and placement vary from one Commonwealth Agency to another. [How to Apply Applying to a Vacancy \(pa.gov\)](#).

- Ms. Heitz explained that the contact form provided is not accessible for screen readers and that a person that is blind or has a visual impairment cannot submit the form. A phone number and email address are provided on the webpage, but the form should be accessible as well. Inquired how the Committee would feel about having Ms. Ellen Strom, Chief Accessibility Officer, PA Office of Administration to the next Committee meeting. Will continue to check the other links provided and is concerned about the accessibility of the entire hiring process.
- Members agreed on inviting Ms. Strom to a Committee meeting and that further discussion would be necessary regarding the lack of accessibility of the form and process.
- Ms. Heitz inquired if the Council has a representative on each OVR workgroup including Audiological Services and Employment Supports.
- Ms. Barol explained that she and Mr. Andrew Pennington are on the Employment Supports workgroup. They will be invited to attend workgroup meetings once they reconvene. They are not part of meetings for the initial development of the OVR policy.
- Ms. Novak explained that someone from the Council, Board, CAP, and any other stakeholders involved is assigned to each workgroup that is created to review policy revisions. Ms. Michelle Paonessa is on the workgroup for the Audiological Services.
- Ms. Heitz explained that for Committee Goal #4, members provided recommendations in regard to the Customer Satisfaction Survey in the draft of Description (a) of the State Plan. Inquired what can be done to increase the accessibility of the surveys.
- Mr. Ralph Roach can be invited to the next Committee meeting to further discuss topics regarding the improvement of the Customer Satisfaction Surveys.
- Ms. Barol explained that she agrees that accessibility should be a priority, that the Committee should discuss this further with those from OVR involved in the survey process, and that recommendations have been made in the past in regard to the survey and she is not sure on best ways to move forward with implementing those. The method being used to get the responses needs to be looked at further.
- Members agreed that recommendations have been made within the Council's input of the State Plan and during past Committee and Council meetings regarding the surveys, but further discussion is necessary. The lack of response rates from OVR customers continues to be a problem.
- Regarding Committee Goal #5, the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) is on a 3-year cycle. The State Plan is amended every 2 years. The new CSNA cycle began in March 2023 and was delayed due to procurement issues. The current cycle will end in 2026 and a concurrent cycle will begin to ensure there are no further delays during the next cycle.

### **Schedule next meeting**

- There was not availability for October. Members agreed to poll for a meeting for November 1, 2023, and follow up as needed.

### **Adjourn**

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