

PA State Board of Vocational Rehabilitation

Virtual Meeting via AT&T Conference Line

Minutes of Quarterly Meeting

December 3, 2020

9am – 12:10pm

State Board Members Present

Jerry Oleksiak	Jennifer Christman	Peg Monaghan
Mary Brougher	Liza Conyers	Donald Rhoten
Joe Drenth	David Mann	
Michael Kiel	Theo Braddy	

OVR Staff Present

Shannon Austin	John Miller	Jack Hewitt
Cheryl Novak	Doug Rand	Susan Storm
Lee Ann Stewart	Beth Ann Fanning	Kathy Fogel
Rod Alcidonis	Kimberly Gerlach	Andy Wagner
Melissa Hawkins	Russ Goddard	Susan Jares
Jill Moriconi	Jamie Luthy	Jess McDade
Ralph Roach	Jim Marker	Stephanie Perry
Kim Robinson	Lori Mutchler	

Others Present

Jennifer Berrier	Janet Fiore	Lori Burrus
Matt Seeley	Randy Loss	Chelsea Lutts
Steve Pennington	Lionel Waritay	Joe Michener
Passle Helminski	Keith Williams	Janetta Green
Heather Snyder	Anne Carlton	J. Schley
Beth Harris	David Dulaney	Mike Grier
Nichole Wade	Heather Hogan	
Rebecca Nice	Dawn Daignault	

Public Agenda

Welcome & Opening Remarks – Jerry Oleksiak, Secretary, Labor & Industry

- Roll call

Action Items

Approval of Agenda

- MOTION to approve agenda
- Ms. Brougher moved; Mr. Kiel seconded
- All in favor, none opposed
- Motion carried

Approval of Meeting Minutes – September 17, 2020

- MOTION to approve minutes
- Mr. Braddy moved; Ms. Brougher seconded
- All in favor, none opposed
- Motion carried

Approval of 2021 meeting dates and locations

- Motion to approved meeting dates for 2021
- Mr. Drenth moved; Ms. Christman seconded
- All in favor, none opposed
- Motion carried

Public Agenda

Secretary's Remarks – Jerry Oleksiak

- Sec. Oleksiak will be retiring on December 4, 2020. Recap of his tenure with L&I and OVR. Thanks and appreciation offered.
- Introduction of Acting Secretary Jennifer Berrier, currently Deputy Secretary for Safety and Labor Management in L&I.

Executive Director's Remarks – Shannon Austin

- Ms. Austin offered positive remarks and appreciation to Sec. Oleksiak for his support of OVR.
- OVR received approval to open the Order of Selection (OOS) again and 3,538 individuals will proceed from the wait list. OVR staff have successfully assisted 1,633 individuals with finding employment in 2020. Ms. Austin complimented OVR staff for their dedication to helping customers find employment opportunities during the pandemic.
- OVR is still experiencing a hiring freeze. OVR continues to work closely with the Secretary of L&I and Deputy Secretary O'Brien to get key positions filled.

- Informational training sessions were recently held related to the RSA Monitoring Report. In addition, OVR has received the final monitoring report from RSA. Some areas in the findings include timeliness for eligibility and Individual Plans for Employment (IPE), timeliness in submitting reports, pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS), fiscal accountability. A meeting is scheduled for next week between OVR and RSA to review the proposed corrective action plan. Ms. Austin explained that OVR has already put together sub-groups to deal with specific areas of the findings and is already 70-80% ahead in dealing with these issues. Ms. Austin credits OVR staff who have already put in internal controls, trained staff, updated policy, worked with WIN-TAC, put Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in place with Dept. of Ed to work with students. Per Ms. Austin, RSA will give OVR a timeline for when progress needs to be demonstrated. OVR is also bringing in outside consultants for “process mapping,” and looking at analytics to help us understand how to better capture data.
- OVR is also working with Ellen Strom, Chief Accessibility Officer for the Commonwealth. Ms. Strom is a “team of one” and OVR is supporting her because this is also our space to support accessibility within the Commonwealth. OVR is working with her to develop a case for the importance of accessibility and to try to get a licensing agreement in place to purchase a more accessible virtual platform. OVR is hoping to minimally provide justification to use Zoom for employees who have daily barriers to employment through technology. Accessible technology is important to perform the essential functions of their jobs.
- OVR is working closely with Carole Clancy, Bureau of Special Education (BSE). OVR didn’t just want an MOU, but wanted it to be intentional and in partnership with BSE. Per Ms. Austin, there is a strong workgroup in place supporting this effort.
- Measurable Skill Gains - OVR is required to meet six Common Performance Measures. OVR used to just focus on getting people to work, but WIOA changed all that. OVR is looking at how to strengthen the performance measure requirements and is determined to make sure right data is captured and that staff are trained as needed. Recently, OVR was able to problem solve and fine tune how data was captured to make sure only those customer cases that count toward the denominator are calculated. This practice allowed OVR to meet our measurable skill gain goal (20%) for 2020.
- A few of the OVR priorities include increasing communication, continuity of services, making sure services are being delivered in timely fashion, staff support, self-care, and training. The COVID taskforce just wrapped up and these priorities are a few things OVR will continue to assess and identify where improvements may be needed in order to be more efficient and make sure staff have the necessary tools to deliver services to customers.

- Soon you'll see a roll-out from the OVR communications team who are developing an OVR newsletter to better tell OVR stories. The expectation is that this newsletter will give a big picture view of who OVR is, and who our partners are.
- Within Bureau of Central Operations (BCO), there are several divisions working on standard operating procedures (SOPs) and putting together Innovation & Expansion contracts for transition services. OVR wants to make sure to work with providers during this time to develop opportunities. In addition, OVR is taking another look at provider rates, and looking at disparity/impact across the state. OVR is also looking at how other states are working with providers and for best practice ideas.
- Onboarding of new staff and development is important at OVR. OVR is working with a consultant for training on Servant Leadership. Sue Storm, Regional Manager, and Stephanie Perry, BVRS Bureau Director, are working together to put together a nuts and bolts training for DAs/ADAs. This may include training on fiscal management, how to manage a budget, physical environment considerations to run an office, office closing procedures, hiring process to on-board staff, health and safety needs, and how to on-board providers.
- OVR is working with Carol Clancy, BSE, and Philadelphia School District to meet the needs of the 60K students in that area who have IPEs. OVR Central Office is working with local DAs in the area to bring a rapid response team into the schools to access and expand services that are being delivered in that area and looking at ways to make the process more efficient. There will be staggered training over the next four months with school administrators to inform them of OVR, and to promote the importance of the parent release form that is needed to implement services to students.
- Ms. Austin and Jeremiah Underhill have been asked by CSAVR to be co-leads on the Veterans Network and to help revise it. Mr. Underhill is passionate about services for veterans and will try to bring his leadership to the national level to connect the VA and VR system to see how OVR can best serve veterans.
- Questions:
 - **Mr. Kiel** asked if, regarding the RSA monitoring report, there is software out there that may help with documentation. Ms. Austin answered that some offices have good best practices, and we plan to train and address timeliness issues with staff. OVR will train on the best way to get medical documents and work with CWDS to get prompts to address some issues. Trying to get some systems in place. The hope is that when we begin to remove barriers, we'll address the timeliness issues.
 - **Mary Brougher** stated that she is grateful for the work OVR is doing in the digital space for accessibility. Acknowledged how our lives have changes; some

other states are making strides in this area and shared appreciation for OVR embracing this important work.

Stakeholder Reports

Statewide Independent Living Council – Matthew Seeley

- Thanked the Secretary for his service to L&I and stated that he appreciates that Sec. Oleksiak was approachable.
- The SILC is working with the CILs and the legislature. Mr. Seeley has heard from Pittsburgh and Philadelphia CIL employees that the relationship with their local OVR is not great. Mr. Seeley shared that these CILs tend to work with private employment agencies instead of OVR. Mr. Seeley asked for Ms. Austin's assistance to do some outreach to those offices to strengthen those relationships. Ms. Austin agreed with the request and the importance of strengthening the partnership and to work alongside each other.

PA Rehabilitation Council – Passle Helminski

- Ms. Helminski thanked the Secretary for his active listening skills.
- The PaRC held their last quarterly meeting on November 18, and Ms. Helminski provided a brief update from the meeting.
- The PaRC is working on developing their federal position papers as well as increasing social media efforts for outreach and advocacy.
- They recently decided to revisit the Citizen Advisory Council (CACs) process again and encourage the OVR DAs to help identify potential candidates since their memberships are down.
- The PaRC annual report will be sent to the printer around December 13 and out to the public by the end of December.
- Nine individuals have been nominated for PaRC membership and these names have been submitted to OVR for approval.
- Ms. Helminski also provided a brief presentation to the Workforce Development Board (WDB) seeking their partnership, but so far no one has shown interest.
- The next PaRC quarterly meeting will be held virtually again and will be announced on their Facebook page.
- Ms. Helminski also informed everyone that there are new federal regulations announced for traveling with services dogs. Personal emotional support dogs will not be treated the same as certified service dogs for air travel.

Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing – Melissa Hawkins

- Sec. Oleksiak shared news that there was an outstanding article in Penn-Live which featured the work done during COVID by Ms. Hawkins and her department. He

described them as “unsung heroes.” A copy of the article was sent by email to members of the Board during the meeting.

- Ms. Hawkins responded by saying the sign language interpreters deserve all the credit. They show up every day and work hard, and she was the behind the scenes.
- All employees of ODHH are still in telework.
- The State Registered Interpreter list is being updated in December. There will be a test in January 2021 to open the opportunity for more deaf certified interpreters in PA. According to Ms. Hawkins, it’s a very important service that is used in the courts and hospital settings.
- Ms. Hawkins and team recently created a video on voting and demonstrated how to make the polling places accessible. This was shared publicly, and they have received multiple phone calls that allowed them to help promote accessibility.
- Next plan is to develop and share a video focused on face coverings and demonstrating how to manage this in the deaf-blind world. In this video they hope to explain the mandates and what is allowed or not allowed.
- Ms. Hawkins also thanked Sec. Oleksiak for being down to earth, sharing her enjoyment of Bruce Springsteen music, and being approachable.

Client Assistance Program – Steve Pennington

- Mr. Pennington acknowledged Sec. Oleksiak’s retirement and offered his appreciation.
- Mr. Pennington appreciates the level of detail in the OVR report and said that OVR has become much more transparent over the past year. He believes Ms. Austin and staff are doing all they can to improve programming.
- He expressed his thought that OVR must develop a separate monitoring process to focus on quality assurance improvement. The US Dept of Ed, Office of Inspector General, along with technical assistance from RSA, describe in the report that OVR is an agency that has struggled to have adequate internal controls and an adequate case service system, and have performance indicators that are not reliable.
- In addition, he mentioned that OVR lacks a long-term financial system. The 2019 monitoring report also reveals long-standing issues with the OOS, transition services, services to those who are blind, and the older blind. Per Mr. Pennington, there is a need for clarification of the OVR Board’s role in the VR program.
- Mr. Pennington stated the problems with the OOS go back 15 years, to when RSA said OVR needed to revise their OOS. He also shared that, “to be fair, all states have struggles with the same issues.”
- CAP’s recommendation is that OVR develop an internal monitoring process to focus on quality assurance. Mr. Pennington said he plans to develop a written brief and will share this with L&I, OVR, Workforce, and stakeholders.

- Ms. Austin thanked Mr. Pennington for his honesty and acknowledged that it's an accurate assessment. She said that OVR has had systemic issues related to strategic planning and program monitoring. She identified that one area of focus is doing re-structuring in our Central Office for data, as well as internal and external quality assurance. According to Ms. Austin, RSA has said it is not enough that OVR work with providers but must also be able to identify issues and offer technical support. Per Ms. Austin, strategic planning must be at the forefront, and mentioned that the OVR Executive Team is looking to put in place a structure and framework for cross program accountability.

Topics for Discussion

RSA Monitoring Report – Shannon Austin

- Ms. Austin offered to answer any questions from the Board related to the monitoring report.
- Acknowledged that OVR knew there were long standing systemic issues that would be revealed in the monitoring report. Ms. Austin talked about the need to do a re-assessment and make sure the right people are around the table. She explained that it's not enough to change something, but important to find out what the impact will be and who will be impacted. In terms of communications within OVR, internal controls have been put in place, and the same with policy.
- Mr. Braddy asked if it is a greater problem for staff to get medical records during COVID and how this affects eligibility decisions. Ms. Austin responded by saying OVR understands the pandemic is problematic, but counselors do have the ability to put time extensions in place when they can't meet eligibility. One of the things OVR will continue to do moving forward is developing the data sharing agreements with OLTL and ODP. These organizations may already have records that could be helpful to OVR staff in determining eligibility more quickly. According to Ms. Austin, the MOUs and LOUs strengthen best practices.
- Mr. Mann thanked Ms. Austin for her leadership and asked how OVR can do better to make data-driven decisions in delivering on the mission. He asked if the finding on eligibility decisions was a surprise to OVR. Ms. Austin responded that OVR is also assessing the CWDS case management system and has found that this system has barriers to extracting data. Mr. Mann spoke directly to Sec. Oleksiak and asked for support at a higher level since it is a problem and important that OVR be able to access data quickly.
- Ms. Conyers also spoke in support of Mr. Mann's point. She explained her experience having similar issues with the PA Dept. of Health and suggested that the problem needs to be addressed at a higher level. Ms. Conyers asked if there are other states that have better systems for best practices as a starting point. She also asked if there

is anyone engaged with following the upcoming changes to the reauthorization of WIOA. Sec. Oleksiak explained that James Martini, Director of the Workforce Development Board, is overseeing the State Plan process. He is working closely with Sheila Ireland and Ms. Austin to keep them informed on the WIOA reauthorization. Ms. Austin shared that OVR has internally been looking at other systems and explained that she takes advantage of speaking with other state administrators anytime the opportunity is presented. She explained that she recently spoke to other state administrators about our Daily Activity Reports (DAR).

- Mr. Drenth said he is hearing there is room for improvement and feels that business sense can be applied. He explained he recently finished a business degree program and has learned a lot that he feels can be useful to OVR. He explained that if data can't be extracted quickly, the state must make a change in its system from a business point of view to make sure deliverables are on track. Sec. Oleksiak responded that a strategic plan was developed a year ago within L&I when Matt Flinner was hired. He explained that this was shortly before COVID struck and although it was a challenge, Mr. Flinner is doing an excellent job getting the strategic plan in place and using Lean principles. Mr. Flinner is working very closely with OVR. Sec. Oleksiak suggested that it would be great to have Mr. Flinner do a presentation on Lean for a future Board meeting to show what OVR is doing.
- Ms. Brougher shared that she would be happy to participate in any workgroup OVR might consider related to technology since her work through Bender Consulting is focused on using technology to train students with disabilities.

Update on OVR Policy Workgroups

- **Transition/Pre-ETS**, Kim Robinson, Division Chief, Transition Services
 - The MOU with Dept of Ed has been signed by all parties. A training and communication plan are in draft status as part of an interagency workgroup. The plan is to develop a tool kit using joint guidance on when to invite OVR to IEP meetings, and how to prioritize meetings to get maximum participation. Also included in the tool kit will be charts and tools to compare IDEA and WIOA, Pre-ETS and career and education work. The goal is to break down the MOU for professionals, parents and families. In addition, marketing materials will also coincide with the tool kit, and include infographics on how students can get involved with Pre-ETS. A March 1, 2021 rollout is anticipated.
 - The MOU formally outlines OVR and Dept, of Ed expectations. What's new in the MOU is that OVR can initiate supported employment services with students six month prior to their graduation date. Also included is the fact that LEAs will not be permitted to contract for services with agencies offering sub-minimum wage.

- OVR will begin contributing to the secondarytraining.org site that is currently being maintained by PaTTAN. A plan is in place to make this website more robust. A joint letter is being developed between Ms. Clancy and Ms. Austin to support the initiative and to partner to develop mini videos or commercials that will be on this website. Some marketing materials will be in the CWDS system within the CareerLink system that is consistent with what is on the secondary transition site.
 - Ms. Robinson provided a high-level overview of the Transition policy. She explained there is a labor management workgroup developed to revise the policy. The workgroup is working aggressively to get information into a format to be able to present this policy to the Board and PaRC soon, with an anticipated rollout in the spring.
 - The Transition policy has not been updated since WIOA passed but has been looked at multiple times. Most recently reviewed by RSA and WINTAC with recommendations.
 - Mr. Pennington stated that, looking at community providers, WIOA has requirements that any policy address nature and scope of services. He asked if this will be included, as well as legal and regulatory requirements that transition must follow. After some discussion, Mr. Pennington decided to contact Ms. Robinson after the meeting to talk in more detail. He explained that WIOA requires Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) be included in the transition process along with an explanation of how they will be used in the process. Mr. Pennington wants to make sure all the legal requirements are covered. Sec. Oleksiak said that either Cathy Lantzy or Beth Harris can also get involved in this discussion.
- **Vehicle Modification**, Kimberly Gerlach, VR Specialist
 - The workgroup convened in January 2020 and has been meeting monthly. Driver services have been inserted into the policy since OVR didn't have this as part of the prior policy. Ms. Gerlach explained that the workgroup wanted to bring a draft to State Board in 2020, but the new goal is March 2021. She also explained that her role is changing within OVR and that Tara Okon will be taking over as lead for this workgroup beginning January 1, 2021.
 - **Supported Employment**, Doug Rand & Beth Ann Fanning, VR Specialists
 - Ms. Fanning explained the current policy is four years old and there is a great group of participants on the workgroup to revamp it. They have cross representation between BVRS and BBVS. Mr. Rand explained the revisions began with input from internal and external stakeholders, OVR staff, and

providers. He shared that OVR continues to offer ongoing webinars and informal surveys. They have been meeting with the workgroup to fix issues identified. The goals are to simplify the service options, emphasize the best service options for customers, address assessment of customers, highlight the importance of customer job stability to be Leaner, and to measure a customer's level of stability on a job. The workgroup hopes to have a finalized draft by January 2021 and present the draft to the PaRC and Board sometime between January and March 2021 for implementation in June. Mr. Rand noted the timeline will be important because changes will need to be added into CWDS.

Public Agenda

OVR Bureau Director Reports

Hiram G. Andrews Center – Jill Moriconi, Director

- Ms. Moriconi thanked Sec. Oleksiak for his support of the Center.
- She explained that during the pandemic, HGAC had 177 students enrolled for the fall semester. There were challenges since they had to limit to single occupancy dorm rooms at 50% occupancy rate. With the increase in COVID cases throughout the fall, they decided to allow students to return home at Thanksgiving holiday and complete the final three weeks of classes remotely.
- Fortunately, HGAC reports zero positive COVID cases at the Center and believes this is because of the mitigation efforts that had been successfully in place.
- 41 students will be graduating from HGAC in December. The new term starts January 4, 2021 and currently, they expect students to return in person.
- HGAC has a new Director of Education, Jim Thomas. They have been looking at outcomes and recently decided to close the Business Retail and Drafting programs because they were underperforming. Ms. Moriconi explained they have a plan in place to teach out the students currently enrolled and focus on supporting those programs that are performing well. They have recently added a core math program, and plan for career prep to be integrated into all HGAC programs. In addition, they are looking to increase stackable credentials and measurable skill gains programs.
- They are also looking at their placement efforts and expanding this department to collaborate with OVR district offices and help to place students into employment.
- Mr. Kiel asked what the Center is doing to make sure they are catering to students' strengths. Ms. Moriconi responded by explaining that as a vocational school, much of the instruction is hands on, and a smaller percentage is academic, which does make it difficult to provide instruction remotely. They want to get the students back in the building safely and are planning for additional externships in the community.

BVRS – Stephanie Perry

- Ms. Perry spoke about compliance and implementing corrective action plans as related to the RSA monitoring report. She explained that BVRS is currently 77% compliant and has seen increases, with some DOs improving more quickly than others. They are striving for 90% compliance. Many of the offices already have 80% compliance or higher.
- In terms of staffing, there continues to be an increase in staff vacancy rates. Currently, 564 positions in BVRS are filled, with 101 staff vacancies. Hattie McCarter works regularly with HR and will resume recruitment efforts once the hiring freeze has been lifted.
- Each district office has a critical function team with a few employees who are going into the district office site to handle mail, provide customer relations, process purchase orders, etc.
- District office highlights were provided. BVRS is a little behind on goals. Approximately 1,781 individuals have been placed in employment. BVRS is at 33% of the goal for the year.
- Ms. Perry highlighted a customer success case and explained it is the story of an individual with a hearing impairment who successfully obtained employment with the Social Security Administration as a result of OVR Business Counselors' collaboration with the local district office. OVR also has a collaboration with Hyman Charter School and OVR was able to get on-the-job training for three OVR youth customers. This resulted in two of the customers getting permanent part-time positions because of collaboration with workforce.
- Ms. Conyers asked if it is still impossible to hire interns for spring semester. Sec. Oleksiak explained this is strictly budgetary related, and while OVR did advocate, we'll have new information when we can.

BBVS – Rod Alcidonis

- BBVS is recently focused on a new initiative known as Strive On. BBVS started working on this in July 2020 since they couldn't provide in-person summer academies. They hope to initiate this program in March 2021. The goal is in keeping with the intention to create vocational paths for students, so they have options, and to make sure Pre-ETS are being leveraged. The general idea is to expand imaginations.
- Orientation & Mobility Specialists and Visual Rehabilitation Therapists are the only staff not yet providing services because most of their work is done in the field. They are hopeful that, considering COVID, procedures can be developed to provide limited services to college students, job jeopardy services, and services to others who are in the process of securing employment.

- A decision has been made to indefinitely suspend the ILOB workgroup to give an opportunity to look at all programs holistically. Mr. Alcidonis will be working with his team to look at allocating resources where they are most needed across the state.
- The BEP program had a change in leadership. Ally Wullbrandt recently left OVR and the new acting director is Josh Smith.
- There has been a reactivation of the Advisory Board for the Blind. The first planning meeting is scheduled to take place on December 7 at 10am to reactivate the group and reestablish leadership.
- Mr. Braddy commented that he is disappointed the SSP program wasn't mentioned in the Executive Director report, especially since there were public comments made at the last meeting. Mr. Braddy stated that we can't overlook this underserved population. Mr. Alcidonis responded and explained that it is a high priority, and an initiative OVR has been working on since September. Mr. Alcidonis said he wants to get this right and explained they are actively working on this program. Mr. Braddy mentioned the services for deaf-blind will end in December, and he hopes that something goes out to the public soon, so these services don't end. Mr. Alcidonis explained the program being considered by OVR is not the same as the existing SSP program but is targeted to those individuals who are employed or seeking employment. Mr. Braddy explained he is pushing OVR to advocate for this population to continue to receive SSP services as they currently exist. Ms. Austin also commented that OVR is very committed to work with the deaf-blind population and wants to partner with the field so services are available to those who do not have employment as a goal. She further explained that OVR had to move away since the SSP did not match up with the OVR funding stream which is employment related.

BCO – Ralph Roach, Acting Bureau Director

- General update has been provided in the written report.
- Three primary content areas in the RSA monitoring report include performance of State VR and Supported Employment program, eligibility, and the case-management system. He explained that BCO will be working with Mr. Alcidonis' and Ms. Perry's teams to develop policies and procedures to move the program into a healthier and more robust place.
- Mr. Roach is currently meeting with all division chiefs. A focus is on the monitoring report response development.

Public Comment

- Sharon Behun asked an SSP program question: "Has anyone had the opportunity to review the fee code that has previously been put in place?" Mr. Alcidonis responded and said OVR is looking at the entire program but not individually into the fee code.

Closing Remarks – Jerry Oleksiak

- Sec. Oleksiak thanked everyone for attending and for the kind words and well wishes toward his retirement.

Adjournment

- MOTION to adjourn
- Mr. Braddy moved; Mr. Kiel seconded.
- All in favor, none opposed.
- Motion carried.
- Meeting adjourned at 12:10pm.

Next Meeting: March 11, 2021, virtual meeting