

Minutes
SRC-DBVI Meeting
Sept 16, 2015
1:00 - 4:00
Frances Perkins C.R.
DOL Augusta

SRC Members Present: Kathy Despres, SRC-DBVI Chair/CAP advocate; Nancy Moulton, Education Services for Blind and Visually Impaired Children; Scott Murray, SRC-DBVI Admin. Assistant; Cheryl Peabody, ACB Maine; Sue Fairfield, MPF Rep; Annette Tillsley, DBVI VR counselor; Lynn Merrill, PTGDU; Michelle Mason, VA Healthcare System/Blinded Veterans Advocacy; Jenny Ardito, C.A.R.E.S/CAP advocate

SRC Members On Phone: Walter Voitasek, Deaf-Blind rep; Brad Strause, AlphOne, Kelly Osborn, Executive Director Goodwill Workforce Services; Darcy Gentle, Native American VR; Carrie Brooker, DBVI-VR counselor

SRC Members Absent with Notice: Chris Boynton, Maine State Library;

Members of the Public Present: Jim Phipps, Shannon Burns, Mary Beth Walsh, Rosemary Houghton, Carolyn Bebee, [missed name] Walton, Nancy Peavey, Jim Phipps

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Members of the Public On phone: Leon Proctor, Coretta Tremblay, Nancy Matulis, Gene Monahan, Leanne Nelson, Carson Wood, Mark Tardiff, Mel Clarridge, Esther Ireland, Mary Ellen Frost, Pauline Lamontagne, Leona McKenna-Shea, Jeffery Meadows; Paul Boucher; Dionne Lyons; Patty Sarchi, Kathy Taylor, Riley Guthrie, Judy Wolffe, Steve Freeman, Tim Small, Roger Cousins

Guests: Julie Rabinowitz, Director of Policy, Operations, and Communication for DOL Commissioner's office; Karen Fraser, acting BRS Director; Marilyn Leimbach, Deputy Director of Security and Employment Service Center for DAFS; Paul Cote, Assistant DBVI Director

I. Call to Order: Meeting called to order at 1:03.

Carrie mentioned that Andrea Bickford unable to attend and wanted audio recording of the meeting. Will contact Scott.

2. Approval of Meeting Minutes: Lynn moved to approve minutes of July meeting, Walter seconded; no discussion. All in favor; Cheryl abstained.

Lynn moved to accept minutes from 9/8 emergency meeting, Nancy seconded. All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.

3. Response to Questions Posed to BRS:

Julie R started with assurance that 100% goal to continue all services and choice per RSA. Problems developed over years, partly due to federal and state fiscal year offset and, how match and reallocation are used, as well as cuts due to sequestration--gaps usually don't align but they did this year. Now looking at FFY '16 carry-over, will leave funding gap, could be as much as \$500K. All options being looked at.

Karen Fraser then gave response to each of the categories of questions posed:

1. Historical: Issues: Discovered in late June during projections for next year. Carryover funds had usually been available but this year there were funding cuts and lower reallocation availability. Meetings then set up with commissioner and DAFS, began identifying corrective options. More discussions on tap with DBVI and RSA team.

2. Presenting issue: DBVI staff in touch with clients and providers re: service reductions--all services needed for IPEs will be provided. Clients with homemaker (HM) and competitive goals will continue to be served until WIOA regs out, hoping to have transition time for them if HM becomes disallowed--big concern long term.

3. Procedural: DBVI director works with DAFS to develop and monitor budget monthly, plus quarterly (or more often) review by DOL Commissioner and BRS Director. DBVI budget not in the purview of SIQA director. RSA fields DBVI fiscal reports twice a year. Note: Due to turnover, DBVI was without a DAFS analyst for 12 of the last 18 months; BRS was without a director for about 8 months during same period. Also, general fund and federal fund have been treated as PRT silos, but will be combined going forward.

4. Reallotment: Two largest line items are case services and payroll, reallocation used to case services regularly--can be spent on any Title I activity, amounts vary, need to be dedicated to short-term activities, not operational costs. FFY15 was first year DBVI unable to finish FY without using reallocation, which brought issues to light.

5. Central Office: No date set for John McMahon's return. Karen Fraser will be acting director in the interim.

6. Consolidation: DOL not in process of consolidating DBVI and DVR, but all solutions considered. Service provision by qualified staff is a priority but if consolidation considered it will be in line with RSA. Issues taken very seriously, input has been very helpful.

7. Contracts: Start with RFP, need statewide coverage, so we use fee-for-service (FFS) and contract services. DBVI will looking at costs of services provided at immersion center as well to determine what is most cost-effective. Case costs expected to improve.

8. Immersion Center: Current contract with Iris is for \$1,489,102 for FY 2016 for both VR and IL. No case service dollars diverted, Center construction funded by dedicated grant.

9. Client Choice: Cornerstone of VR and DBVI will always adhere to this practice. Ongoing challenge is to recruit/retain qualified staff, DBVI and others. May include participation in cost of services as allowed by regulations (i.e. if client opts for more expensive out-of-state education.)

10. SRC Not Informed: Reason unknown, BRS admits error. Going forward, SRC will be informed and asked for input: re: role of developing state plan, etc., will work to improve data and seek representative to participate at initiatives.

Karen will send text of summary to Scott for distribution to the group.

Kathy then reminded group of council recruitment needs, both for full council and subcommittees, and stressed that SRC membership not a requirement for subcommittee participation.

(Michelle Mason arrives)

4. SRC Member Questions/Comments

Karen and Julie then fielded questions from SRC members. Karen clarified "client contribution," gave example of someone choosing out-of-state college, can't require contribution, but we can ask. Julie gave background on other options considered and factors involved: WIOA mandates, alignment ensuring consistency of outcome measures, forced review of services--homemaker no longer funded from VR funds--causes budget challenge. Still want to serve that population, PR work is raising awareness, timing not optimal. All options on table, have to cut things we can't pay for, possibly cuts in staff, contracts--not funding vacant positions, administrative consolidation, etc. Kelly asked about co-enrollment--already being looked at, a few clients already being served by both DVR and DBVI.

Kathy mentioned that both SRCs will overlap for upcoming annual training to talk about WIOA, is concerned about how long it takes for rules to come out (current estimate is 1/16, but it took 3 years last time) Some WIOA changes already in force: i.e. 15% requirement for pre-employment services. People concerned about homemaker going away. Proposed timeframe is 6 months after rules come out, but people will be allowed to finish their plan.

Julie reminded that state plan still required on time across all agencies receiving funds--DOL has not been flexible on date. Kelly asked how a DBVI-DVR consolidation could be done w/o hurting non-DBVI clients (DBVI tends to get people into plan faster) Karen reminded that it has to be under 90 days no matter what.

Karen clarified that any consolidation plans would be about support functions only, not direct service. Julie confirmed the recognition of the importance of "bottom level" blindness needs. Brad feels blindness professionals needed at leadership level.

Some areas can be streamlined, goal is to put the most money into client services. Lynn asked that the idea of "levels" not put blindness services at the "bottom." Julie suggested "field staff," and "administrative functions" as more appropriate to describe different functions.

Kathy still unclear why budget problems went so long undetected and how to fix? Julie cited service center approach re: two silos "combined" (state and federal), sometimes DBVI spends more to boost to match draw; if flexibility is "being used hard," it can be harder to track. Marilyn added that alignment between state and federal funds is supposed to be evenly disbursed throughout the year, but not easy to monitor.

5. Public Comment:

Comment was then open up to public on phone, multiple simultaneous responses resulted in system disconnect at 2:05. After re-establishing session Mel Clarridge expressed his relief at new that no consolidation planned, and to hear of the department's understanding of specialized skill-set for blindness services, and he offered ACB's assistance with correcting problems.

Carson Wood then made a plea for clear, structured description of how funds flow and all the rules and forces that influence that; is somewhat skeptical of initial answers from DOL/BRS. What's best for people is more important than what's best for budget.

John Stirwald added that getting budget and spending to line up "is ancient history," i.e. 40% of DVR budget spend in Q1, but it worked out. Julie clarified

that in some cases we have to pay certain costs up front. Carolyn Bebee added that main impact is at client level, missing staff at admin levels, insufficient/inaccurate info, need to get a handle on it, also asked about homemaker (HM) status. Karen clarified that when WIOA passed, HM not allowed in VR, but key is how it is carried out. Proposed rules give 6 months to transition away--may not be enough time, many have written of their concerns. Just because rules are changing doesn't mean services aren't needed. May need conversation w DHHS, but need rules first.

On choice, DRC is critical element. What is reasonable cost? Some combinations more efficient/cost effective than others. How will consumer have real opportunity for choice? Karen cited some conversations around that. Sometimes there is no choice--services need to be available statewide. New immersion center enhances choice.

Kathy recounted client visit that brought problem to light. Need more/better communication--could have prevented current situation. Clients don't always know CAP is there. Julie added that DOL favors open collaboration--tri-commissioner collaborative-monthly meetings.

Jim Phipps followed up with thanks to DOL/DBVI reps' quick response, and then further clarified immersion center expense: For SFY '16 Iris entered \$1.619M contract with DBVI, then was asked to propose reductions of ~\$100K, which they did by shifting costs within program--DBVI pays only a portion of program costs, Iris pays "contribution" and costs were shifted to that with hope of recovering costs from out of state clients. Program is designed to serve max of 12 clients and DBVI has expressed interest in filling 6 slots for those 48 weeks, 50% of program cost can be recouped that way. Contract amendment has been signed for reduction. Housing is built into costs, as are all elements, works like community-based program, but includes direct service plus housing/food training materials. Iris to buy property for lodging. In response to question, Jim cited cost increase from '15 to '16 of about \$115K, with current budget at \$1.489M (last year was \$1.375M)

Jim added that cost of renovating building not relevant to program costs, all were paid either with combined funds from fundraising and federal match with help from DBVI. Fed regs call it a grant, but it's not.

Kathy still concerned about IPE cuts. Karen committed to deliver agreed service on agreed IPEs, no need for order of selection; well-developed process in place. Brief discussion of use of title I funds only for competitive goals, Kathy asked for number, Brenda is working on it.

Jim revisited discussion of WIOA mandate for 15% of VR funds for transition-age youth; DBVI already exceeds this so this can't be blamed for budget problems. Karen mentioned that Karen Wolffe's CSNA work was finalized in August, DBVI added 14 apps from youths with disabilities. Kathy noted DBVI's citation by RSA in 2011, transition numbers a little low. Julie cited Department's pushback on the since not all states are the same; Maine is an older state and still aging, will impact DBVI budget. Need caution though on restrictions on 15% how it can be spent.

(Break 3:00 – 3:05).

Upon reconvening, roll call taken again:

On Phone: Brad Strause, Leon, Jen Ardito, Leanne Nelson, Patty Sarchi, Pauline Lamontagne, Roger Cousins, Carrie Brooker, Esther Ireland, Kathy Taylor, Judy Wolffe, Steve Freeman, Riley Guthrie, James Howard, Tim Small, Leona McKenna, Paul Boucher

Meeting reopened with questions about what kind of data we want, who is working on transition, when will we know what new service delivery will look like. Need to formalize work groups -- Act and proposal have been read, still many people pushing back. Kathy cited ongoing history of complaint from RSA regarding HM, feels SRC should work on it, but concerned that she is terming off. Suggestions were to develop a plan/vision, group classes, look at other states, maybe hire a consultant, form work group, get stakeholders and SILC involved. Jim volunteered to join or appoint staff to. Kathy mentioned upcoming training, possibly quarterly review, Karen has planning tool to offer. Willing to train SRC on it so workgroup is productive.

Karen invited to training 10/21-22 and to ongoing SRC meetings, will check schedule. Kathy clarified joint day (invite SILC) good time for Karen to talk about any overlap of function at admin level. Word choice for changes discussed, Karen prefers "restructuring/realignment" rather than "consolidation." Karen added that SRC agenda should include Marilyn quarterly for reporting, rather than SRC member at administrative meetings at BRS, admitted that learning curve since June has been steep, asked how SRC looks at finances of a state agency, Kathy will inquire at National, already talked to Bud Lewis. Lynn added that SRC meets every 2 months with Director's report that includes finances.

In response to Walter's question, Karen replied that she could only share that John M is on administrative (i.e. paid, with benefits) leave as per HR, no return date set, no other info can be shared--confidential. If any info becomes public, Karen will share with group.

In response to question from Nancy M, Paul gave background on how 15% set-aside can be used.

Discussion ensued about new member Jan Breton of DOE, hoping to get her to fall training, Kathy will contact.

Kathy then summarized the meeting's major concerns: HM closure, financial, realignment, transition. Jim added Commissioner's policy for discretionary funding, thinks SRC needs better understanding--RSA and Commissioner's view of re-allotment funding differ, concerns exist about Title I funding getting cut, but probably not in 2016, an election year, should add to agenda for DBVI-specific training day.

6. Adjournment: Walter moved to adjourn, Lynn seconded, all in favor, motion carried unanimously, meeting adjourned at 3:55.