

NEVADA STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL (N.S.R.C.)
MEETING MINUTES
Tuesday, May 9, 2023, at 9am

Rehabilitation Administration
751 Basque Way, Carson City, NV 89706
&
Vocational Rehabilitation
3016 West Charleston Blvd. Suite 200, Las Vegas, NV 89102

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

Raquel O'Neill
Alex Goff
Judy Swain
David Nuestro
Jack Mayes
Robin Kincaid
David Fisher

COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT:

Austin Olson
Rebecca Rogers
Sandra Sinicrope

GUESTS/PUBLIC:

Dora Martinez, member of the public
Dawn Lyons, Executive Director, Nevada Statewide Independent Living Council / NV SILC
Autumn Blattman, Aging Disability Services Department
Kelcy Meyer, Aging Disability Services Department
Stephen Cohen, member of the public

STAFF:

Chricy Harris, Deputy Attorney General
Javier Fernandez, VR Liaison to NSRC
Drazen Elez, VR Administrator
Sheena Childers, VR Bureau Chief
Mechelle Merrill, VR Deputy Administrator of Programs
Brett Martinez, VR Deputy Administrator Operations
Mat Dorangricchia, VR Northern District Manager
Sertram Harris, VR Administrative Assistant
Marshal Hernandez, VR Manager
Trina Bourke, VR Southern District Manager

1. **CALL TO ORDER, INTRODUCTIONS, AND VERIFY TIMELY POSTING OF AGENDA**

Raquel O'Neill, Chair called the meeting to order at 9:04 a.m. Javier Fernandez NSRC Liaison called the roll.

Mr. Fernandez determined a quorum was present and verified that the posting was completed on time in accordance with Open Meeting Law.

2. **FIRST PUBLIC COMMENT**

Raquel O'Neill opened floor to public comment.

Dora Martinez voiced concerns over the VR Accessible website the focus mode is not in line with the headings. When filling out the forms it does not fill in the appropriate lines you are trying to fill in. Also, audio descriptions on the videos would be easier for people to help navigate through the website.

Raquel O'Neill mentioned VR is aware of the issue and is working on the issue. Ms. O'Neill asked for further assistance with accessibility issues from Ms. Martinez for individuals with blindness.

3. **APPROVAL OF THE FEBUARY 7, 2023, MEETING MINUTES**

Ms. O'Neill asked the council for any modifications, changes, corrections to the February 7, 2023, Meeting Minutes.

Jack Mayes made a motion to approve the minutes as written. David Nuestro seconded the motion. In favor was Raquel O'Neill, Judy Swain, David Nuestro, Jack Mayes, Robin Kincaid, Alex Goff – abstained, motion carried.

4. **ELECTION OF THE NSRC CHAIR & VICE CHAIR FOR TERM JULY 1, 2023, THROUGH JUNE 30, 2024**

Ms. O'Neill asked Drazen Elez to lead the election for the NSRC Chair and Vice Chair positions and voting.

Drazen Elez, VR Administrator mentioned the election for the next NSRC Term is July 1, 2023, through June 30, 2024. Mr. Elez asked for nominations for the NSRC Chair position. Alex Goff nominated Raquel O'Neill for the Chair position. Mr. Elez asked for vote, all in favor, none apposed, motion carried.

Ms. O'Neill accepted the position. Mr. Elez congratulated her and welcomed the opportunity to work with her for another year on the NSRC.

Mr. Elez asked for nominations for the Vice Chair position. Alex Goff asked to be nominated for Vice Chair pending no other nominations. Mr. Fernandez mentioned Mr. Goff's term is ending on September 30th and will need to be reappointed prior to when to stay as the elected chair if voted into position. Chircy Harris proved information as to Mr. Goff needing to keep Council informed on his appointment status to the NSRC Council. Mr. Goff motioned he would remove his nomination for another member on the council to take his position in the election. Mr. Elez asked for any other nominations – none obtained. Mr. Elez asked for vote, all in favor, none apposed, motion carried. Mr. Elez congratulated Ms. O'Neill and Mr. Goff to another year as Chair and Vice Chair to the Council.

Ms. O'Neill thanked the Council for voting and entrusting them to the important work being done with VR. To keeping up with the good work being done to continue to progress and elevate to the everchanging world and workforce.

5. **VOLUNTEERS FOR THE STATE PLAN SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING SCHEDULED FOR TUESDAY, JULY 11, 2023, AT 9 AM TO REVIEW/REVISE THE FFY24 & FFY25 STATE PLAN GOALS, STRATEGIES AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES (OCT. 1, 2023, THROUGHT SEPTEMBER 30, 2025).**

Ms. O'Neill asked for volunteers for the Subcommittee as important role to assist in making changes to goals in VR.

Mr. Elez mentioned we are in the development of the State Plan for the next Biennium. We are working with the Governor's Workforce Development Board. The goal with the board is to ensure Nevada has a unified plan. For the plan to be able to be executed and not just written down. Nevada Workforce is going in the same direction, they have the same diverse workforce and changing economy. As new industries are brought into Nevada, we have a plan on capitalizing on that and individuals with disabilities are participants in the new jobs. Our goals are to continuing elevating on Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) in Nevada and the services we provide. Removing obstacles and Red Tape with the unnecessary procedures that exist in the state for all VR systems.

Ms. O'Neill again asked for volunteers to help with the State Planning. Jack Mayes offered his Agency to be part of the State Plan subcommittee. Robin Kincaid offered to be part of the State Plan Subcommittee. Ms. O'Neill asked for guidance from Javier Fernandez on who leads the Subcommittee Meeting. Mr. Fernandez mentioned that The Vice Chair of NSRC historically runs the State Plan Subcommittee and who reviews the goals, strategies, and performance measures for the next two Federal Fiscal Years. Vice Chair is Alex Goff he would be the lead for this meeting. The Subcommittee will bring to the NSRC Meeting in September the edits, updates, and revisions of the goals for the NSRC Council to vote on during the September Meeting. Nonmembers are allowed to participate and have input on the edits to the goals. Public members who showed interest in attending and being part of the Subcommittee were Dawn Lyons, Sheena Childers, Stephen Cohen, Mechelle Merrill, David Nuestro and Raquel O'Neill all volunteered for the State Plan Subcommittee.

6. **SUGGESTIONS FROM THE COUNCIL FOR THE 2023 NSRC ANNUAL REPORT**

Ms. O'Neill opened the floor for any suggestions for the Annual Report.

Mr. Mayes suggested focusing on the recovery after COVID and the efforts going on with services like Pre-ETS and other programs effected to the recovery efforts. Highlighting some of the efforts would be helpful.

Ms. O'Neill recommended to Council in other state provided recommendations and there are presented in the Annual Reports. Would like to present to VR what as a Council they feel they did well and what they would like to see more focused on in the year setting the tone and the larger voice of the community with disabilities. She feels this would benefit everybody involved. Would like the Council to participate with her on this report letter. The Annual Report is part of the RSA requirements.

Mr. Mayes mentioned he feels the Annual Reports are outdated and need to be updated. Would like to see me interactive.

Chricy Harris, VR DAG gave instruction on the follow up of have a discussion about the Annual Report and the guidance to the updating of the Annual Report.

Mr. Mayes offered the suggestions be added to the next meeting as an Agenda Item at the next NSRC Meeting, Alex Goff seconded the motion.

Mr. Elez mentioned the revision of the report from last year and that this year will be more of a digit version of the Annual Report with more videos and more interactive for the materials in the report. The goal is to grow and evolve with the social media and the trends moving forward with he trends at the time.

7. **OTHER REPORTS**

Jack Mayes, Executive Director of the Nevada Disability Advocacy and Law Center (NDALC) will report on updates from the Client Assistance Program (CAP). No significant issues since last quarter to share. Agency has been very busy with the Legislation and the failure of the 700 Hour Program. Mr. Mayes mentioned he is retiring with his agency and will focus on Policy work and focusing on advocacy work in a different way.

Ms. O'Neill thanked him for his years of service and looking forward to his advocacy work ahead.

Alex Goff congratulated Mr. Mayes and mentioned he is looking forward to working with him in his advocacy work as well.

Dawn Lyons, Executive Director of the Nevada Statewide Independent Living Council (NSILC) reported on updates from their last meeting. NSILC finalized their Fiscal Budget Plan through 2024. Looking forward to

a training session with Mechelle Merrill for the ASL video version for the VR website and will have posted on their NSILC website. SILC budget will be a stand only budget approved during the Legislative Session. SILC will be working on a training for what the Olmstead Plan is will be available in the future since it is not well known by the public. Training for School Administration on the bullying issues towards students with disability and financial disparities, to ensure School Administrations understand the issues and needs of the students with disabilities to ensure they are not being bullied. There is an upcoming meeting to go over the Nevada Pathways to Partnership Grant with the conversation to the feasible ways to take advantage of the program funding. Legislative Subcommittee is coming up and are focusing on many bills coming up. SILC accepting Leadership Applications due to current leader is leaving them, position is part-time and pays well.

Ms. O'Neill questioned on bullying is a very important and would like to know how this is going to be addressed and thinking it might be for the workplace as well.

Ms. Lyons mentioned they do not have a Plan of Action sorted out yet, but they are focusing on getting out an Informational Article to get the initial conversation started. SILC will follow up during their next board meeting to go over their findings.

Ms. O'Neill asked about more information on the Nevada Pathways to Partnership and who the different state agencies are working together and was looking for a link to find more information about the grant. Ms. O'Neill asked about the Leadership position and how to get people with disabilities to apply.

Ms. Lyons provide the information to contact and how to apply for the position.

9. **EDUCATION ON ACCESSIBILITY OF DOCUMENTS AND FORMS**

Drazen Elez, Rehabilitation Administrator went over strategies with the limitations of not having an excessive of state funding for tools and resources to train staff on how to create fully accessible documents and forms for our clients. The trainings staff receive is limited to the program and the technical knowledge staff may have. Throughout the agency many different individuals are creating the documents we do not have set individuals creating the documents, the task has been difficult. Researching companies that are out there that provide specific training programs that would train staff in ADA Accessible Forms is not locally available. During the search we did not find too many, and the ones we found are not able to accomplish what we are looking for in a training program for staff. We take our search nationwide and found Deborah Stage, who is a national expert in developing fully accessible documents and in 508 Compliance Training and developing materials for the agency. Currently, we are in a contract stage for the services this individual provides. The services will include in person training as well as video trainings for new staff to watch and learn. We are striving to be the agency in the state that has all documents fully accessible to their clients. Materials and training are to start in the next 3 months for staff. We are excited about the elevation in the continued process as to better serve the clients of VR.

Ms. O'Neill thanked Mr. Elez for the swift response for the issue about the accessibility of the forms to help individual with disabilities to be able to navigate through the VR process in being able to fill the forms out on their own. She is pleased VR found an individual qualified to fulfill this requirement and is looking to hearing the outcomes in future meeting as the process moves forward.

Mr. Elez mentioned the first step to fill out the application is very simple and has changed to ask for basic information when applying for services online. The individual once set up for intake the confidential information would be gathered from the client to eliminate the client having to share personal information to others for applying for services.

8. **OVERVIEW OF RSA AUDIT FOR 2023**

Mr. Elez reviewed the process for the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) is part of the U.S. Department of Education and is the oversight agency for Nevada VR. Currently, they are conducting a

monitoring audit of the state VR agency. During February they asked for materials for their initial audit of policies and procedures. In June they will conduct onsite visits and may reach out to NSRC members for their input on how VR is doing. During this monitoring they are focusing on fiscal, focusing on the maximizing the VR Grant funds Nevada is receiving funds for the individuals with disabilities. This is a formula grant with 78.7% of funding is Federal money 21.3% is state money is matched by General State funding. We do not have sufficient nonfederal funding to match federal funding. Nevada has not been able to expend the federal funding for a while. Out of the \$30 million dollars we received from Federal funding the state only uses about \$21 to 22 million of the funding. Pre-ETs services require 15% of Federal funding we have in the past struggled with this. This year we should be close to the requirement with the materials for use in schools and efforts with Summer Camps for the youth with disabilities. RSA will be working with DETR Fiscal to make sure all of the Feral regulations are in line and matching up.

Ms. O'Neill thanked Mr. Elez for the information and the items that the RSA will be focused on along with the information the RSA will be looking for while meeting with council members.

Mr. Mayes commented that the RSA reached out to NDALC with a list of questions they will be asking and that they were in line with Mr. Elez's information about the funding expenditures.

10. **CAREER, COUNSELING, INFORMATION AND REFERRAL (CCI&R) UPDATE ON THE PROGRAM**
Sheena Childers, VR Bureau Chief, provided an update on the request of the CCI&R program the numbers are always fluctuating. As of July 1, 2022, to May 5, 2023, 391 individuals receiving CCI&R services had received subminimal wage jobs. Of those none of them became VR clients. We have in mind that we can do to as incentives to use apply for services. We plan on providing better presentations for individuals to want to apply for services. As an update for the same time period, we provided Subminimum Wage Certificate of individuals underage of 25, working in jobs paying less than minimum wage was a total 24. The lower the number means that individuals are looking for Competitive Integrated Employment opportunities.

11. **DIVISION REPORT**
Mr. Elez provided information on the Budget Subcommittee a few weeks ago, the budget was approved the final approval will be in the next meeting. The funding approval will help with the Disability 101 website getting off the ground and operational. The website will be beneficial for clients with disabilities in knowing how their benefits would be affected by employment, relating to pay and or services interrupted to make an informed decision. Nevada has struggled to provide this information to clients. This website will be available to all individuals not just to VR clients. All individuals would create a profile and log in to receive the benefit information they are looking for. This is the first step to provide appropriate benefit counseling to clients. We are helping by early fall of 2024 the website will be up and running. We have been approved 3 full Transition Coordinators for the Pre-ETS program. We also, asked for 2 Internal Job Developers positions. Summer Camps are coming up, 5 weeks program for youth to inter at various employers. Currently, we have 40 employers for this year's camps. We have had success in the past and have had employers and the Governor Sisolak attend last years and handed out the Awards Banquet.

Mechelle Merrill, VR Deputy Administrator, meet with Julie Bowers Executive Director with Department of Education for Inclusive Education on Friday April 28th for a preliminary discussion for grant opportunity. The Pathway to Partnership Grant has required partners which include VR, Department of Education, and Centers for Independent Living. This is important, as this is the first time SILC is a mandatory partner in the grant. VR does not have the fiscal staff, nor grant writers to support the grant management on its own. Department of Education has the fiscal staff and the grant writers to support the management. Second meeting was held on May 1st with ADSD, Center for Independent Living and others and listened to the willingness and opportunities for the grant. Federal Grant funding is from \$4 to \$10 million depending on the request and what we build and what we ask for. We are going to start meeting to create the project and

funding we are going to ask for including services for transitional youth with disabilities. We will be working quickly on the request the deadline is June 4th. We are looking to the sustaining the program after the grant funds are gone to keep the program amazing. Keeping the project going is 50% the challenge to get it going. We are excited to work with Dept of Ed. and the others to try to get this grant for Nevada.

Sheena Childers, VR Bureau Chief reviewed the **vacancies throughout the state**. Since last meeting in February, we have a total of 16 hire/separations. We have had 9 staff separation's and 7 staff new hires. One individual was a new hire and separation in the same pay period. Currently, VR has 3 counselor and 2 technician's vacancies in the North, 7 counselors and 2 technician's vacancies in the South. We currently have a total of 10 recruitments on going, 6 are for counselor and 2 are for technicians. We are moving quickly in the recruitment process to fill our vacancies.

Current caseload size as of the end of March in VR and BSBVI we have actively open in the programs are 2949. Average caseload size is 78. Caseload sizes are currently trending down slowly. In March we had 281 new cases since the Pandemic began.

NSRC Goals and Indicators. Time indicators from October 1, 2022, through March 31, 2023, which is the second quarter of the Federal Fiscal Year.

Goal #1 Increase Number of Successful Employment Outcomes. At the end of the second quarter, we have achieved 263 successful employment outcomes. Our goal is 550 we are about halfway there.

Goal #2a Increase Participation for Students with a disability in VR Transition Services. Total Transition Student Applications is 366 our goal is 250 students. We have surpassed our goals already halfway through the year.

Goal #2b Increase Participation and Increase Successful Outcomes of Students with a disability in VR Transition Services and Post-Secondary Education. Column A Transition Students with an Employment Outcome is 79. Column B Transition Students with Postsecondary Education is 48. Column C Total of Measurable Skill Gains for Open cases is 300. Column D is Total Number of Measurable Skill Gains for Closed cases is 56. Columns E, all columns added together the total is 483 our goal is 300. We have already surpassed this goal as well.

Goal #2c Increase Participation and Ensure Students with a Disability receive Appropriate Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). Column A Potentially Eligible Transition Students that receive Pre-ETS is 330. Column B Transition Students with a VR case that received Pre-ETS is 231. Total to date is 561 with our goal for this year 750 which we will easily meet this goal with the upcoming camps for the summer.

Goal #3a Increase Participation of Supported Employment Consumers in VR. Column C which is division of Column A Total Open Supported Employment Consumers (466) by Column B Total Open Non-Supported Employment Consumers (2337) equals 20% with our goal of 35%. We have a little bit to go on this goal.

Goal #3b Increase Successful Outcomes of Supported Employment Consumers in a Competitive, Integrated Setting. Column A Supported Employment Consumers Closed with an Employment Outcome of 59 with our goal of 100 clients to be closed successfully. We are at 60% of our goal.

Goal #3c Increase Successful Outcomes for Students with a Disability Who are also Supported Employment Consumers in Competitive Integrated Setting - Outcomes. We are focusing on Column D Students with a Disability and Who are also Supported Employment Consumers Closed with an Employment Outcome 30. Column E Students with a Disability (Not Supported Employment Consumers) Closed with an Employment Outcome 49. Dividing Column D by Column E we have 61%, are goal is 40%.

We have exceeded this goal.

Goal #4 Collaborate with other Resources to Support Participants with Mental Health Disabilities to Obtain and Maintain Successful Employment. Column A we have 173, Column B we have 93. Are percentage in this goal currently 35% with our goal of 45%. We have a bit to go on this goal.

Goal #5 VR Staff Retention Efforts as a Reflection of Employee Satisfaction & Positive Work Culture. We currently have 45 VR counselors, 33 Rehabilitation Technicians with a total of 78 across the state. 0 retirements, 10 transferred to another agency or resigned. With average tenure of less than 1 year with a negative turnover rate of 13%. This is down from last Federal Fiscal Year. We did have a VR Counselor Appreciation Day in March and Administrative Assistance Day in May and hope the turnover rate will go down.

Ms. O'Neill asked about Reaching Out Collaborations for mental health, is VR doing anything for Mental Health Awareness Month.

Ms. Childers offered that there are brochures in the schools and on social media for content in support of Mental Health Awareness.

Ms. O'Neill commented on the Mental Health issues since the Pandemic is more talked about and out there more than before. Questioned the turnover and reason behind them.

Ms. Merrill commented on the employees are shopping around more and looking for the before paying options and we are losing a lot of employees.

Ms. O'Neill mentioned we need to work towards next legislation and looking towards the trends of the Vocational Rehabilitation master's degrees and keeping staff.

Ms. Merrill reported **Fair Hearing** update – No New Fair Hearings Request.

12. **COMMENTS BY THE COUNCIL**

Ms. O'Neill asked for any comments from the council or, future agenda items to be discussed. September draft for Annual Report and looking forward to July Subcommittee agenda items are set.

13. **SECOND PUBLIC COMMENT**

Ms. O'Neill opened floor for a second public comment session.

Mr. Elez thanked Jack Mayes for all of his support and help over the years working with VR clients. Mr. Elez congratulated Javier Fernandez for his promotion within the agency. He has done a great job with NSRC and looking forward to his expertise in his new position in VR.

Ms. O'Neill thanked Javier for his calm, organization, and helpfulness to the NSRC Council.

Ms. O'Neill made public announcement for first Blind Connect Job Fair for blind to low vision individuals on May 17th. The fair is being called Flipped Job Fair will have multiple employers, and resources available. The keynote speaker from the U.S. State Department will be Mariyam Cementwala Chief Advisor to The Secretary of The State. More information will be on Blind Connect website.

N.S.R.C. Meeting Minutes
May 9, 2023

14. **ADJOURNMENT**
Meeting adjourned at 10:59 a.m.

Edited By:

Regina Higley

Regina Higley, (Interim) N.S.R.C. Liaison

Approved By:

Raquel O'Neil

Raquel O'Neill, Chair