

SRC Meeting – April 18, 2024

Missoula, MT

In Attendance: Morgan McQuillan, Darrel Hannum, Tammy Hogan, Gabrielle Broere, Lacey Keller, Brook Hodge, Brian Tocher, Joleen Weatherwax, Corinne Moore, Tommy Roberts, Doug McElroy, Celina Cline, Marcy Roberts, Anna Gibbs, Allyson Talaska, Shannon Mackey, Eva Belatski, Jennifer Owen, Chanda Hermanson, June Hermanson, Sarah Seltzer, Barb Lowney, and Lacey Conzelman

Introductions

Tommy indicated he had previously volunteered to share the meeting minutes obligation with Kendra but has decided that is not the best use of his skill set. Moran volunteered to do minutes for today's meeting.

Lacey Keller shared with the group that tonight and tomorrow at Montana Tech in Butte, Ability Montana is hosting a "Lets Talk" event at 6:30pm. She explained this is an opportunity for individuals with disabilities to be able to work together to write and develop and share their story of their experience as an individual with disability. This is Ability's 3rd year doing this performance and she asked that, "If you know people who live there, please share that information. It's really, really powerful and has done a lot for that community."

Lacey Keller also shared that Ability Montana has stated a podcast called "Disability Voices."

Member Moment – Barb Lowney

Barb shared she knew nothing about the SRC when she joined, but her friend encouraged her to apply, so she did. "Here I am." She indicated she grew up in Butte with six sisters and brothers as the middle child and the only Deaf person in her immediate family. She stated she does not know how she became Deaf. Barb noted she got her VoTech certificate in data entry, and then worked for a power company for a short time. Currently, she lives in Missoula and volunteers for Meals on Wheels in her community and "I love it!"

Committee Updates

Planning and Review – Marcy Roberts, Chair

Planning and Review committee met prior to this meeting. The committee read and scored all the stories submitted for Case of the Year and one story per category was chosen to be showcased in the 2024 Governor's Report. Now that the stories have been selected, the committee will move on to completing the rest of the content for the

annual report. Marcy noted that the committee also needs to review the scoring rubrics and possibly make some adjustments. Lastly, the Planning and Review committee has made some proposed updates to the standing agenda items listed on the SRC website.

Education and Membership – Corinne Moore, Chair

Education and Membership committee met at the beginning of the week. Corinne created an updated orientation packet for new SRC members that was shown on screen while Corinne explained the contents. It was also emailed out to everyone. Corinne asked that everyone take some time to review it after this meeting and provide feedback directly to her. Corinne also mentioned that there are 2 advocacy vacancies and 1 business/labor vacancy on the council currently.

Consumer Satisfaction and Needs Assessment – Celina Cline, Chair

Consumer Satisfaction and Needs Assessment committee met prior to this meeting. Celina reported that the committee is working with VRBS to follow State Procurement rules to hire a contractor to create and disseminate a new consumer satisfaction survey. VRBS staff attempted a sole-source procurement but it did not advance. As such, VRBS staff are now attempting to submit the consumer satisfaction survey in the form of Task Order to the State of Montana Master Contractors to see if any of them are interested in taking on this project.

Policy, Procedure, and Personnel Development – Brook Hodge, Chair

Policy, Procedure, and Personnel Development committee met in advance of this meeting. The committee discussed 4 VRBS cases that are currently with the Client Assistance Program (CAP) for various reasons, including one client who wants a different counselor due to a disagreement and personality conflicts and a couple clients who have concerns their counselors are not responding to or providing services to them in a timely manner. Brook indicated the committee has also discussed continued emphasis on improving recruitment and retention activities for VRBS staff, reviewed recently published VRBS procedures, and ways to effectively support offices that are not fully staffed. There was discussion on what the program is doing to recruit such as advertising on Hand Shake and with Rehabilitation Services Administration and what the program is doing to retain such as increasing wages, allowing telework, and early team building and engagement work with new hires.

Update from Chanda Hermanson, VR Director

The Human Services Executive Director position, that's the position formerly held by Erica Johnston, Chanda's supervisor, remains vacant.

There has been some reorganization at the Director level withing DPHHS:

- The former Deputy Director moved over the Public Health and the Deputy Director for DPHHS is vacant and recruitment is in process.
- There is a new Director of Human Resources. He comes to us from the Department of Corrections, so he is familiar with state government and policies and practices.
- DPHHS has also hired and created a new Office for Analytics and a Chief Analytics Officer, Paul Belotti, was hired. He created the same office in Public Health and Human Services in Oregon. Chanda said, "I met with him earlier this week... and he will be creating a whole Analytics team." He uses what is called "machine thinking," a type of artificial intelligence to complete analytics.

Darrel and Chanda are working on partnering with the State facilities that work within individuals 55 and older who are fall patients. "We know that if you are age 55 or older and you are falling, there's a great likelihood that's actually causation is your vision." BLV could provide vision assessments and other services to support these individuals. Paul, Chief Analytics Officer, had some great ideas to help us get the data to back up what we are talking about and put the whole picture together.

Additionally, Paul is going to assist Chanda and Darrel with getting data to support diabetic retinopathy project.

The national budget has finally passed. VRBS has been managing off continuing resolutions for the majority of this federal fiscal year. The Vocational Rehabilitation grants were all flat funded this year. As such, the Council of State's Administrators on Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) is working on drafting a letter for our lawmakers to inform them that flat funding is fine for this year, but we can't lose our cost-of-living increases that we typically get to support the program. There would be some consequences if flat funding continues moving forward.

The WIOA State Plan was submitted in March. This committee assisted with that, so thank you! The "Big Submitter," our friends at the Department of Labor, have started to get corrections on their sections from their federal partners. VRBS leadership has been working with them on the components of their sections which require input, edits, and additions from VRBS. The Vocational Rehabilitation portion of the WIOA State Plan has been reviewed by Montana's RSA liaison, and now has been submitted to the RSA unit chief for another review. VRBS will get notification of our corrections and get to work on our edits and revisions.

Chanda shared her screen to show the Common Performance Measures section of the VR Portion of the WIOA State Plan. She explained the percentages that VRBS and RSA agreed to for each of the 6 common performance measures.

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	55.2%	55.2%	55.7%	55.7%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	45.5%	45.5%	45.7%	45.7%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$3550	\$3550	\$3560	\$3600
Credential Attainment Rate	28.6%	30.0%	29.3%	31.0%
Measurable Skill Gains	49.4%	56.3%	50.0%	57.0%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹

RSA previously had all the VR programs across the US split up into regions and Montana was in Region 8. Federally, those regions were eliminated about 15 years ago, however as a group of state VR administrators, we will function within our regions. Region 8 consists of Colorado, Utah, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, and Wyoming. This year, Montana is hosting the Region 8 Leadership Team Meeting on May 7 and 8 in West Yellowstone. There are some wonderful speakers coming and everyone is looking forward to this meeting.

Montana VRBS has a somewhat formal/informal partnership with the Harken Institute. Tom Harken was a lawmaker from Iowa that is a founding father of the Americans with Disabilities Act. He was also instrumental in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, specifically Title 4 (Vocational Rehabilitation) and Section 511, related segregated employment settings. He has a brother with a significant disability and through his work, developed The Harken Institute at Drake University, a bipartisan institute for public policy and citizen engagement. Competitive Integrated Employment is one of their priorities at the Harkin Institute and their leaders will be coming to our Disability Employment Conference in Great Falls May 14-16. They will present to Montana businesses and employers about the value of hiring people with disabilities and how that's really a driver in business performance and profitability. Then, in June, VRBS staff will meet virtually with Harken to talk more about the value proposition of disability employment.

Montana is currently in the executive planning process (EPP) and VRBS is moving forward with a policy proposal around eliminating subminimum wage 14c certificate use in Montana. The EPP process is long, and this is the first step of many. While we are moving forward with that, it doesn't mean that's what we will be working on in January. I have gotten some emails already from people that are frustrated that the segregation and subminimum wage issue are being separated and not combined and that they, as disability advocates, will not be supporting sub-minimum wage stand-alone bills. They are separate issues but combined and together. It gets complicated. These conversations are so good, so we are excited to see what we can do. VRBS' partners at Medicaid are very open to talking about the segregated issues in this state and working with us to advance that into some type of transition plan. Not sure if the legislative setting is the place they want to get that done when they can do that internally.

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month. I am sure you are all aware of that, and we usually have something going that month to recognize that. The 3rd Tuesday of October, for over a decade, has been recognized through the National Department of Labor, ODEP, as National Disability Mentoring Day, and it's a day in which there is an opportunity to celebrate and create energy around mentoring opportunities for youth with disabilities and having them match up with businesses and employers in their community and give them different opportunities, such as work site tours, job shadows, paid work experiences, that type of thing. Montana used to celebrate that in coordination with the Montana Youth Transition Project and North-Central Independent Living Services. This year, VRBS is going to launch Disability Mentoring week to revitalize and enhance what VRBS had previously done. A steering committee for this project has been developed and the first meeting is tomorrow with partners from apprenticeship, job corps, labor, the independent living centers, OPI, teachers, and the Rural Institute among others to start planning. If any SRC members want to be involved in that, let Chanda know.

The Council of State Governments has a project with the National Department of Labor called the Center for Advancing Policy on Employment. So, the Center for Advancing Policy on Employment (CAPE) is a youth program, serving people under age 24, a project for Council of State governments. They have invited Montana to start developing policy, to do more work around the transition system, and to improve and advance our work around pathways for youth with disabilities. We have accepted and are very excited for this two-year project.

Lastly, Montana has been designated as a "Tech Hub." VRBS is prioritizing how to engage with the Tech Hub and all the systems around it to make sure that the people we serve have those opportunities and that we are doing that in collaboration with

everybody else. Some places where the job seekers would possibly get employment would be like autonomous vehicles, national defense, infrastructure security, wildfire response, critical resource management, precision agriculture, integrated industrial equipment, etc. VRBS' starting point is to learn, as leaders, how to inform our staff and how to pull this into career counseling sessions? It is likely that VRBS leadership will be meeting with MSU to learn more about the training opportunities, so we make sure we are explaining it properly to our clients. There are also opportunities to be serving the businesses involved too.

Budget Report from Anna Gibbs, Operations Bureau Chief

See General Budget Report and SRC Expense Report attachments for details.

VRBS Hiring Update, Sarah Seltzer

In Billings, VRBS is currently recruiting for an administrative support supervisor and a vocational rehabilitation counselor position.

In Butte, VRBS has a counselor supervisor vacancy.

In Great Falls, BLV has a vision rehabilitation therapist vacancy.

In Havre, a background check is being processed for an applicant for the administrative support position. If all goes well, that position will be filled.

In Helena, VRB is recruiting for a rehabilitation technician.

VRBS has 61 positions that could potentially be in a training assignment. Currently, there are 33 of those 61 positions in a training assignment. In May, 7 of those 33 individuals in training positions are graduating from their training programs.

Lead VR – Celina Cline

Celina has been participating in Lead VR through the University of Arkansas. The objective of Lead VR is to improve and increase leadership skills within VR organizations from the bottom up. Celina explained that for Lead VR there are 8 sessions that members participate in with other individuals from VR programs across the US and you are assigned a team and final project to work on and complete with your team. There is a formal presentation of the final project. Celina is working with a team from Arkansas.

General VR Update, Brook Hodge

VRBS counselor supervisors and leadership staff recently completed a Supervisor Retreat at Fairmont Hot Springs in March. The theme of the retreat was Change Management. Brook reminded SRC members that there are monthly virtual All Staff Trainings that SRC members are welcome and encouraged to attend as well as Coffee

Chats on new and updated procedures/policies. Lastly, the field is working on a couple of pilot projects. In Billings and Missoula, they are working on implementing IPS with the legacy IPS programs in Montana, Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch and Mountain Home Montana. In Billings, the VR office is pilot in Big Sky Net where the Billings field office has direct access to a database of recent medical records to allow eligibility to be determined more quickly.

Blind and Low Vision Update, Darrel Hannum

Darrel shared that 3 of 4 of his counselor supervisors have less than one year of experience so he is really prioritizing connecting them to resources in their areas including community management team and JSEC meetings as well as other resources. He hopes that these connections will allow them to also spread the work about BLV and the services offered.

Darrel continues to work with Montana School for the Deaf and Blind (MSDB) to assist and provide recommendations on how to better prepare their graduates to transition to employment.

Darrel reminded the SRC that in the 2023 legislative session BLV was given \$100,00 in appropriation for technology and equipment, which is a great thing. However, BLV also needs to have staff to be able to train clients on the technology and equipment.

Darrel continues to manage the contract with MSU-Billings Center for Inclusive Education for Benefits Planning. There have been approximately 90 referrals that have gone through that program. Additionally, there is a staff internal to DETD who has completed benefits planning certification who has piloted 3 referrals for the program.

Darrel and Jacob, Business Services Specialist, attended National Council for State Administrators of Blind (NCSAB) in Bethesda and this year there was a strong focus on the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) which is one of the programs Montana has recently brought in-house and is working to rebuild and expand. Jacob and Darrel will be attending additional training on BEP as it becomes available.

NCSAB announced they have new mentoring program that they are going to be rolling out where they will pair seasoned directors with newer ones. Darrel plans to apply for that opportunity.

Regarding Business Services, Darrel reiterated that the 2nd Disability Employment Conference is happening May 14-16 at Great Falls College. Cheri continues to work with Great Falls College on customized training, particularly around welding. There is going to be an additional course for structural welding, starting June 25 that goes through August. Another customized training opportunity is through the dental assistant program which starts in August and will end in December. Lastly, CDL

training is offered on a monthly basis. Additionally, the Business Services team is working with the City College in Billings to identify more of their training programs to tap into customized training opportunities for VRBS clients.

Cheri, Business Services Specialist, continues to mine our data and look for clients that have a job goal that matches opportunities that are given to us regularly by employers. When Cheri finds a match, she then attempts to connect the counselors and supervisors of offices to ensure to the clients are aware and they are applying, especially for opportunities such as internships for engineering or any of those careers that require internship hours.

As Brook mentioned, VRBS recently facilitated a supervisor retreat and a major discussion topic at the retreat was self-employment. There was some really great discussion with our supervisors around the self-employment team and the processes clients and counselors go through to complete self-employment goals. VRBS Leadership is currently responding to those discussions and making changes to streamline processes and create better communication between staff.

Pre-Employment Transitions Update, Tammy Hogan

Pre-ETS Bureau is working to put some systems in place in that area to help students with applications. Staff has been very, very busy with our Pre-ETS contracts. We have worked with schools and contract with them for services.

We also have some new Pre-ETS CRP providers in Great Falls area. We continue to recruit new CRPs as we can where there is a need for those services.

Also, I wanted to talk about our kids' summer camps. I know Lacey sent all those out to you guys. I know we talked about them last time as well. We do really, really need some referrals.

We have started our STEM Career Camp, give students a chance to learn about STEM careers. It is really, really cool. That's in Great Falls, June 24-25.

I will now go into our Pre-ETS dashboard. If you look at those percentages, probably the lowest of the percentages is the work-based learning experiences, which we really feel is an important opportunity for students to participate in. So just to let you know that Chanda and I are doing what's called a work-based learning collaborative.

We, our mission really is to make sure that our students have a chance to participate in those work-based learning opportunities that are already in place, in high school, and make sure that we are taking advantage of those kinds of opportunities.

We worked with the WIOA Youth demonstration project and OPI, and we presented information to the foster care providers. We did a WIOA youth connections presentation.

We shared Pre-ETS information with resource families in our newsletter.

The good news I did want to share is we have actually achieved a goal. End of June, we did look at a baselining, and our report shows 22 more students, which is 5 more than before.

Extended Employment and Customized Employment Update, Lacey Conzelman

Extended Employment is a program that is fully funded through state general funds. EE has receives a little over \$1 million a year to fund long-term employment supports for individuals exiting VRBS who do not have another option for long-term funding. At present, EE is serving around 230 clients and spending it full budget plus some. As such, we have instituted a waiting list for EE services. While individuals are waiting for EE, they remain open in VR with VR providing those supports until EE becomes available. VR can pay for those supports for up to 24 months for adults (25+) and 48 months for youth (through age 24). Additionally, Lacey is working on moving some individuals in the EE program over to other funding options (i.e. Medicaid Waivers) if they are available to those individuals and identifying who could “graduate” from EE.

Chanda has submitted a EPP asking for additional EE funding to support the EE capacity we currently have. This is just a proposal, so we will have to wait and see what happens. There is potential for all of you SRC members to go to legislative you advocate for additional EE funds depending on how things go.

We are serving about 230-some clients in the EE program currently, and in this fiscal year, which goes on a state fiscal year, so July 1 to June 30, we have already spent about \$900,000 of that \$1 million.

Cheri, Business Services Specialist is the Customized Employment Lead. She has partnered with the State of Minnesota Vocational Rehabilitation program and received their in-house Customized Employment training curriculum. Cheri has worked to adjust it to fit what is done in Montana and has submitted it to ACRE for certification. That was recently approved by ACRE and Cheri is working with Darrel and Chanda on the next steps to implement this new training.

Planning for Next Meeting – Discussion led by Lacey Keller

The next SRC meeting will be in Dillon on Thursday August 8th and Friday August 9th.

Lacey Keller will work on getting Ability Montana staff to attend the roundtable discussion.

Marcy asked if Corinne could facilitate a new member orientation the hour before the meeting starts on Thursday August 8th. Discussion was had and Corinne agree to work on arranging something for the 30minute time frame right before the meeting starts (9:30am-10am) in a location separate from the SRC main meeting location to minimize disruption. Corinne indicated she would plan do orientation using the new packet she has created.

Lacey asked the group if they should focus on reviewing the bylaws or reviewing the orientation at the next meeting. The group agreed to do orientation in August and bylaws in November.

The group then reviewed the list of standing agenda items that are supposed to be covered at the August meeting. Goals Priorities and Strategies presentation by staff is on the list for the summer meeting. The group discussed the massive amount of content that presentation has and agreed to go over the whole thing at the August meeting and then plan to review one goal per quarterly meeting moving forward since the current VRBS strategic plan has 4 goals. The group agreed to an hour for Lacey to go over the strategic plan as a whole.

Chanda suggested inviting the Tech Hub to present at the next meeting in August or a later meeting. Jennifer agreed to arrange a presentation. Lacey Keller asked for a 30 minute presentation from the Tech Hub and Jennifer agreed she could make that happen.

Chanda mentioned that she and Tommy had spoken and thought that the SRC might be interested in figuring out ways to support things VRBS has submitted for EPP. Chanda suggested maybe writing a letter to the Director in support of the proposed EPPs.

Marcy suggested possibly moving this task into one of the existing committees, such as Planning and Review.

Corinne indicated that when she attended the NCSRC last year, she learned that some SRCs have a specific committee for legislative items. She shared that those committees do various things set goals and tasks, hand out informational flyers to local legislators, testify during session, etc.

Marcy suggested this could be a good stand alone committee for June Hermanson, new SILC representative on the SRC, to lead as she is well versed in the SILC and their legislative agendas and has a long history of legislative advocacy as it relates to people with disabilities.

June said she liked the idea of having a stand alone legislative committee so there is an ongoing process of preparing and prioritizing for session and then participating in session and so on.

The group agreed to proceed with developing a legislative committee and June agreed to spearhead the effort.

Morgan McQuillian agreed to do the member moment at the August meeting.

NCSRC Experience in Bethesda – Tommy Roberts.

Tommy described his experience at NCSRC and stated, “I got a lot of valuable knowledge.” He asked Lacey Conzelman to share screen with the NCSRC website pulled up while he showed the group some valuable resources available to all. “Overall, it was a great, great conference... I highly recommend all SRC members to go to one of these conferences. I learned a lot. I am very grateful and thankful that you guys sent me there.”

Corinne asked if anyone was interested in going to the next NCSRC meeting in Seattle in October. No one responded in the meeting, but she asked that if anyone was interested to reach out to her directly with their interest.

SRC Roundtable Discussion

Meeting Commenced at approximately 2:15pm.