

Montana State Rehabilitation Council
January 29-30, 2026
Helena, MT
Meeting Minutes



Members and Staff Present: Rita Bransborg, Shannan Sproul, Joleen Weatherwax, Wayne Dagle, Anna Kamierowski, Amy Jamieson, Celina Cline, Aaron Shultz, Leah Zins, Heidi Gibson, Doug McElroy, Josh McDowell, Tara Barthel, Corinne Moore, Desiree Dean, Anna Gibbs, Allyson Talaska, Tammy Hogan, Connor Frakes, June Hermanson, Tammy Hickey, Vena Jean, Bonnie Kurien-Interpreter, Jamee Feuling-Interpreter **Online:** Gabrielle Broere, Marty Nolen, Desiree Johnson, Jade Fathollahi, Lacey Keller

Guests and Round Table Panel: Teal Klabo, Tara Bucy, John Peterson, Brian Burd, William Coggins, Melinda Cummings, Carlos Joaquin, Alex Pullen, Shanell Marshall, Cassandra Reddington & others **Online:** Tommy Roberts and others from MSU Billings

1/29 10:00 AM—New Member Orientation

11:00 AM--Welcome, Ground Rules, Mission Statements, and Introductions.

Meeting Minutes:

October Minutes with corrections--Motion to approve made by: Heidi Gibson, Second by: Wayne Dagle, Approved Unanimously.

11:25 AM--Announcements and Public Comments:

- Tommy Roberts was present from MSU Billings to inquire about some concerns. After lengthy comment, it was requested that he email the concerns to Chanda for further discussion.
- Heidi Gibson shared some information from the Montana Empowerment Center about 2 new handbooks that have been published. She shared that there are handbooks for everyone to take as well as flyers on upcoming workshops.

11:44 AM--Budget Report: Anna Gibbs reported on the budget with her usual slides and pie charts. The full report is available upon request. The Full Federal Grant funds are not yet known; only a portion of them are currently available and are significantly less than usual.

11:55 AM--VRBS Report: Allyson Talaska shared how the VR process works for clients with the new SRC members. She reported on the current staffing numbers statewide and shared the current positions that are open. Her report also included client numbers and caseload sizes for VR Counselors. Additionally, she shared information about Community Rehabilitation Providers. This report is available upon request.

12:10 PM - BLVS Report: Amy Jamieson presented the BLVS Report. In her report she shared information about the Skills Development Programs and the Adjustment to Blindness Program. This report is also available upon request.

12:15 PM - Pre-ETS Report: Tammy Hogan reported today. She began by describing the program to the new members. There are currently eight Pre-ETS Specialists across the state. Current programs include various camps, Montana Youth Transitions, and the Moving On project. CSAVR did a spotlight on Montana's Pre-ETS program. Tammy shared information about conference apprenticeships as well as Pathways to Paychecks. This report is available upon request.

12:25 PM - Extended/Customized Employment: Lacey was not available to report this time.

12:25 PM – Federal & State Reports: Chanda reported and this report is available upon request. The Federal budget is still pending. Several government programs have had an impact on the Vocational Rehabilitation budget. Chanda reported that Tribal VR services will be moving to the Department of Interior. At the time of this report, there was no word on the relocation of VR services and whether it would be placed under or next to the Department of Labor. RSA is still working and the Long-term Education funding is still active. As for the State of Montana, one of the primary projects is the 406 Jobs, more of which will be shared in tomorrow's session. Partnerships between VR Counselors and Employers are being developed further. In rural areas, new partnerships in healthcare are being developed with Tribal healthcare. The Disability Employment Summit will be held on May 13-15th this year. Chanda shared that there will be additional rate changes with CRPs this year as well. Reporting on the Order of Selection, Chandra shared there are currently 700 people on the waitlist and the closure of categories has not as of yet been as big of a cost in savings as anticipated. Therefore, closing Category 1 may be necessary. Further exploration of this will be addressed in coming months.

1:05-1:50PM – LUNCH

1:50PM—Member Moment: Today's Member Moment was given by Aaron Shultz. He has been on the Council for a year now. Aaron shared that he does the Honors Program at MSU-Billings. He has a passion for individuals with disabilities and began advocating for others due to his own disability.

2:00 PM—State Plan & Priorities 1-4 Presentation: This report was presented by Chanda, Anna, Allyson, and Tammy today. The State Plan documents are available upon request.

3:30 PM – Community Round Table: Today's guests included individuals from the State Workforce, area Educators, Vocational Rehabilitation personnel, Community Rehabilitation Providers, and more. Topics of discussion included education and students, legislation, Youth Transition Services, the Apprenticeship program, new procedures in Pre-ETS services, soft skills development, 406 Jobs, adult education, self-advocacy, virtual reality simulators, informational interviews, upcoming Job Fairs, and more.

Today's meeting concluded at 5:00 PM

1/30 8:30 AM – Ground Rules and Welcome

Members & Staff Present: Rita Bransborg, Shannan Sproul, Joleen Weatherwax, Wayne Dagle, Anna Kamierowski, Amy Jamieson, Celina Cline, Aaron Shultz, Leah Zins, Heidi Gibson, Doug McElroy, Joshua McDowell, Tara Barthel, Desiree Dean, Allyson Talaska, Connor Frakes, June Hermanson, Chanda Hermanson, Steve McCann, Bonnie Kurien-Interpreter, James Feuling-Interpreter **Online:** Gabrielle Broere, Marty Nolen, Desiree Johnson, Lacey Keller, Sarah Seltzer, Anna Gibbs, Corinne Moore, Tammy Hogan, Lacey Conzelman, Jade Fathollahi, Sami-Captioner

Committee Reports:

- **8:35 AM-Planning and Review:** Reported by Lacey Keller. Reports for this next year are in process with some new stories. New member to this committee is Tammie Hickey
- **8:40 AM-Education and Membership-Bylaw Committee:** Reported by Corinne Morre reported this committee did not have a meeting. She did share that the new members did receive their orientation packets. Corinne took this moment to share that since there are new members, we would be revising some committees.
- **Consumer Satisfaction & Needs Assessment:** Committee chair, Celina Cline sent out some recent survey results and that these are available upon request. She asked the council how we would like to proceed and what items they would like to know more about. Marty stated that he took the survey and found it user friendly and short. Upon reviewing some of the data from the survey, Lacey Keller said seeing the feedback from one consumer who took a call, that overall, the call was a good call and there were a good set of questions. She pointed out that the consumer said they felt “heard”. Celina said that Marketing Research will be presenting to the council again for more feedback and updates. Tara commented on the client totals vs the survey results seemed to be reasonable. Chanda stated that there were low scores on communication and staff expectations.
- **8:45 AM-Policy, Procedure, & Personal Development:** Reported by Allyson Talaska. Allyson shared their committee also did not meet. She did say that a lot of procedures are in the works but there is nothing new at this time. She shared the eligibility process through Big Sky Care Connect and the college success points. Federal regulations are that the payer of first resort for college books, etc. is the Pell Grant. Allyson also mentioned that college readiness is collaborating with adult education to see how they are setting people up for success and academic preparedness. Allyson shared some requirements for graduation rates and deadlines for submitting paperwork. She said that Counselors are

sharing the whole college process with consumers in an effort to avoid overspending in relation to tuition vs supplies. She shared old ways of things being done vs some new ways such as quality vs quantity, goal setting and strategies, and data collection vs pulling reports. Ultimately, the purpose of the counselor is to help clients find jobs and exploring secondary education is something that changes client outcomes. Pre-ETS will work with students to explore secondary education until it is time to move on to adult VRC for employment.

- **9:25 AM-Legislative:** June Hermanson reported that there has been no meeting as of this time. She said she hopes to start meeting soon. Topics will include an orientation for new members on the committee to learn about writing letters and giving testimony. June shared that the Olmstead plan was out and public comment has been done.

9:30 AM – Vote on Order of Selection-A vote was called for the closure of Category 1. Motion was given by Tammie Hickey and a Second was made by Lacey Keller. Voting results: 13 members stating Yes, and Zero members stating No. The motion passed unanimously.

9:35 AM- Future Meetings and Planning-Tentative Dates/Locations

Joint SILC/SRC April 29-May1, 2025 in Helena

August 6-7, 2025 in Browning

October 22-23, 2025 Virtual/TBD based on budget

Planning Roundtable Discussion- Inviting out of area participants, Industry leaders, gathering more survey results, include individuals within the disability community in each area, invitations to area employers, local Chambers of Commerce.

Next Member Moment-Joleen Weatherwax

Discuss and gain clarity on Term-limits-“consecutive” vs “lifetime” in the bylaws. What does the federal SRC statute say? If time in between terms, how long between terms/reapplying?

10:05-10:20 AM Break

10:20 AM – Presentation: Data Unit 2025 Analysis of Paid Services and Successful Exits-presented by Steve McCann. Steve shared with the council today about the 2025 data of outcomes from VR services. Most successful outcomes are from Extended Employment and Supported Employment services. This is primarily due to these consumers already being employed. He shared the data collected from those attending college compared to those engaged in employment and having training on the job. Steve showed us the average wage as being \$14 per hour. Those with transportation have higher odds of success in employment. He reviewed

various data and the return on investment in each category, being secondary education, on the job training, and apprenticeships. All of this data is available upon request.

11:00 AM-406 Job Initiative-Presented by Tammie Hickey and Chanda Hermanson. Tammie serves as the Director of the State Workforce Innovation Board for the Governor. Tammie shared that in “August 2024, the governor challenged the SWIB to modernize the Montana workforce system. That would do primarily two things. One, to address the chronic labor shortages in the state, and 2, to provide strategies that would bring state agencies together with the private sector to be more responsive to employers and employees”. She shared the initiative was an Industry and Employer led initiative. She said the “4” of the 406 initiative is there are 4 “pathways”: Careers, College, Entrepreneurships, and the Military. The goal of the taskforce is to increase apprenticeships by 50%. The “0” is Zero barriers and includes tearing down barriers and obstacles that keep people out of the workforce by addressing childcare, those in the justice system, and integrating AI, automation, and support for veterans. And lastly the “6” is the “boots to the ground” piece. It is getting work done through local businesses and partnerships through the six industries of Hospitality and Recreation, Healthcare and Health Careers, Finance and Professional Services, Education and Childcare, Construction, and Advanced Manufacturing and Computers. Chanda shared how this relates to the “Employment First” philosophy. She also shared the dates for the upcoming Town Hall meetings in February and April, along with the Disability Employment Conference in May. SRC members were encouraged to attend.

1/30 meeting concluded at 11:30 AM Motion to adjourn by Heidi Gibson, seconded by Doug McElroy, approved unanimously