

Rehabilitation Council of Texas (RCT)
May 5-6, 2022
Hybrid Meeting 101 E. 15th Street, Austin, TX 78778 and
via Zoom

Council Members Present:

Michael A. Ebbeler Jr., Chair, Houston
Lisa Cowart, Vice Chair, Sour Lake
Chris Baird, San Angelo
Glenda Born, Austin
Amanda Bowdoin, Forney
Jennifer Clouse, Temple Virtual
Michele Dobbins, LaPorte
Cheryl A Fuller, Austin
Lindsey Geeslin, Lorena Virtual
Gennadiy Goldenshteyn, Dallas
Bobbie Hodges, Fort Worth
Lisa Maciejewski-West, Horseshoe Bay
Joe Powell, Irving
April Pollreisz, Amarillo
Emily Robinson, Pflugerville
Rodrick Robinson, McKinney
Karen Stanfill, Houston
Dr. James Williams, Leander

Council Members Absent:

Elizabeth Kendell, San Antonio
Abdi Warsame, Wylie

TWC Employees Attendance:

Chairman Bryan Daniel, Commissioner Aaron Demerson, Angela Bazaldua, William Belz, Matt Berend, Kimberly Berry, Shelly Caillouet, Rae Champagne, Heather Cooke, Rani Davis, Maria Freed, Julia Foree, Lisa Givens, Lisa Godwin, Cindy Geisman, Julie Gunter, Susanna Holt, Dennis Kutach, Laura LaCour, Christy Lerche, Anna Lee, Susan Lindsey, Tammy Martin, Bonnie

Martin-Hudson, Scott McCune, Cassandra Medrano, Molly Meyer, Geoffrey Miller, Asha Mookala, Brian Owens, Melinda Paninski, Elsa Y. Perez, John Pewitt, Daniel Prado, Summer Robinson, Glenda Rodriguez, Audra Ressel, Belinda Salazar, Aissa Salazar, Jonas Schwartz, Ed Serna, Traix Shaw, Chris Speckhard, Laike Todd, Margie Trevino, Amanda Williams, Sue-Ellen Woodlief,

Public Attendance: 58

Welcome

- The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. by Michael A. Ebbeler, Jr., Chair.

Chairman Bryan Daniel, TWC Chair and Commissioner Representing Public

- Addressed the council.

Ed Serna, TWC Executive Director

- Addressed the council.

VR Division Report and Performance Update Cheryl A. Fuller, TWC VR Division Director and Geoffrey Miller, Manager of VR Program Reporting and Analysis

- General Updates
 - CSAVR Spring 2022 Conference
 - Implementation of RSA 107 Monitoring Report, Corrective Action Plan
 - 87th Texas Legislature, Implementation Update
 - SB 50, directs Health and Human Services Commission to establish rules and a process that ensures Medicaid waiver participants who want competitive integrative employment can achieve the goal.
- Combined State Plan Goal Areas: Update on Success Measures
 - Six Goal Areas

- Improve provider recruitment, retention, and support. Table: Statewide Service Provider Activity Rates. Success will be measured by:
 - An increase (accounting for seasonality) in the percentage of active VR service providers and total number of available providers:
 - statewide:
 - by integrated service area (VR region): and
 - by RSA service type category.
- Streamline VR policy, processes, and tools to facilitate timely service delivery. Table: State wide Median Days from Initial Contact to Participation and Statewide Participant Creation Rate. Success will be measured by:
 - A decrease (accounting for seasonality) in median time from initial contact to participant status in the VR program; and
 - An increase (accounting for seasonality) in the percentage of those determined eligible who move into an individualized plan for employment (IPE).
- Recruit and retain VR Staff. Success will be measured by
 - A decrease in annual (SFY) turnover rate
 - An annual (SFY) increase in the proportion of Qualified VR Counselors (QVRC).
- Improve and develop additional user-friendly resources to maximize customer choice. Success will be measured by
 - An increase in the proportion of SSI or SSDI customers who receive benefits counseling or counseling on work incentives
 - An increase in the percentage of customer's indicating they agree (that is, responding "yes") that they have input in choosing service providers in the quarterly customer satisfaction survey (Westat).

- Improve VR staff knowledge and system capacity to enhance service delivery to customers. Success will be measured by
 - An increase in the percentage of customer's indicating they agree (that is, responding "yes") that VR staff provides the guidance the customer needs in the quarterly customer satisfaction survey (Westat).
 - An increase in the percentage of customer's indicating they agree (that is, responding "yes") that the counselor maintains communication with them regarding the process of their case in the quarterly customer satisfaction survey (Westat).
 - An increase (accounting for seasonality) in VR engagement rate (that is, arranged, provided, or purchased VR/Pre-ETS/CCRC services; counseling and guidance; started or amended plan; employment (90-day clock); successful closure; or enrollment in education/training).
- Increase and enhance partnerships with employers to 1) better understand employer needs when hiring people with disabilities and working with VR, and 2) build awareness about the benefits of hiring people with disabilities to increase employment opportunities for VR customers. Success will be measured by:
 - An increase in the number of employers participating in disability awareness and inclusion activities, including through the Texas HireAbility and We Hire Ability campaigns
 - An increase in the number of employers participating in training and work-based learning opportunities for students and adults.
- Combined State Plan Goal Areas, Update on Implementations of Strategies
 - Goal Area One Strategies: Recruit/Retain/Support Providers
 - Streamline vendor requirements, processes, procedures, and documentation. Partially Complete
 - Ensure that payment rates are competitive and equitable. Partially Complete

- Strengthen provider recruiting efforts. In Progress
- Enhance provider support and training. In Progress
- Ensure that internal systems for provider identification by a VR Counselor are useful, current, and accurate. Partially Complete
- Goal Area Two Strategies: Streamline Processes, Systems, Forms
 - Streamline or redesign policy, procedure, forms, and approval processes to improve ease of navigation and application for VR staff. Partially Complete
 - Facilitate coordination of services with providers and improve responsiveness to customers. In Progress
 - Improve workflow processes and business systems to improve timeliness, efficiency, and consistency of VR service provision. In Progress
- Recruit and Retain VR Staff.
 - Identify and implement strategies to improve staff recruitment and retention, including options for remote work, opportunities for professional development, staff recognition, and other activities that promote a positive, engaging work environment. In Progress
 - Redesign training and resources for new counselors and new rehabilitation assistants. In Progress
 - Establish management development training, specific to VR program management, for new, current, and aspiring VR managers. In Progress
- Goal Area Four Strategies: Maximize Customer Informed Choice.
 - Provide training and resources for VR staff on labor market information and tools. Partially Completed
 - Develop and enhance tools to aid VR staff and customers in the identification of available providers. Partially Completed
 - Update training, tools, and policies related to work incentive programs and benefits counseling and provide user-friendly resources and/or fact sheets to help customers make decisions. In Progress
- Goal Area Five Strategies: Improve VR Staff Expertise and Systems Capacity
 - Provide additional training and resources for VR staff to strengthen and increase expertise and specialization in

- serving customers with specific disabilities and those with multiple disabilities. In Progress
- Develop, pilot, and replicate innovative approaches to implementing the VR process, including standardized workflow and new methods for deploying staff and resources that maximize staff capacity and expertise. In Progress
- Enhance and increase training for Transition VR Counselors and other VR Counselors with school assignments regarding services to students with disabilities, including pre-employment transition services. In Queue
- Review TVRC and VRC capacity and structure and adjust as necessary to strengthen capacity to serve students with disabilities. In Queue
- Provide training, tools, and resources to assist staff with implementing process improvements, including standardized workflow. In Progress
- Enhance options for remote service delivery. In Progress
- Goal Area Six Strategies: Increase and Enhance Employer Partnerships
 - Continue and expand efforts to raise awareness among employers of the benefits of hiring people with disabilities and the services available through TWC/VRD to support them. In Progress
 - Implement and expand employer partnerships that increase employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities through training and work-based learning opportunities for students and adults with disabilities. In Progress
- Update on FY 2022 Operating Budget and Expenditures
 - Cheryl Fuller provided a high overview of the TWC VR Operating Budget Total \$274,822,034
 - Salaries & Wages (includes Employee Benefits) \$114,414,775
 - Travel \$2,418,993
 - Operating Expenses \$9,953,374
 - Client Services \$148,034,891

- Ad Hoc Updates and Reports (Spreadsheet VR Exiter Comparative Wage Analysis for RCT) Geoffrey Miller provided reports, charts, graphs, and tables
 - Wage comparison for VR Customers with earnings of all Texans

Public Comment was given by

- Keisha Rowe

Dyslexia presentation given by Michelle Reeves, State Dyslexia Coordinator TEA

U.S. Department of Education Notice Inviting Applications for FY2021 Disability Innovation Fund,

Cheryl Fuller, VR Director

Cindy Geisman, VR Program Specialist

Lucy Gafford, Director UNT

- The Public Disability Innovation Fund Program is provided by the consolidated appropriate act of 2020. It is created by Congress and allows the federal oversight agency, rehabilitation services institution in the U.S. Department of Education to use funds that remain after the annual reallocation process.
- Focus is for VR to be able to work together with partners to find the opportunities for people making subminimum wage, minimum wage in Texas to move into competitive integrated employment, over people contemplate going into subminimum wage to instead choose a path to prepare for competitive integrated employment.
- Total available is \$167 million. RSA is anticipating 12-18 awards. So, the average award would be just under \$9 million with a range from \$3.5 million to just under \$14 million
- Focus areas are: Essential Workers, Green Jobs, Home and Community based service workers, Arts, and Transportation Industry, Related Industry Workers and Field Initiated.

Commissioner Aaron Demerson, Commissioner Representing Employers

- Addressed the council.

RCT Member Training, Preparing for Strategic Planning, Jennifer Clouse

- RCT Strategic Planning at Morgan's Wonderland in San Antonio, TX July 13, 2022.
- Facilitators are Pat Tomlinson and Tom Jennings
- Gave an overview of what to expect at the Strategic Planning Session.

RCT Committee Reports

- Policy, Procedure & Personnel Development, James E. Williams Jr.
 - Policies
 - Discussion on RSA prohibition of contributions from SSI recipients.
 - Discussion regarding issues for medical consultant or Director of VR, providing VR services.
 - Approvals for services and provider payments were discussed.
 - Comprehensive System of Personnel Development
 - Mr. McCune talked about recruitment and retention being a priority
 - Turnover rate prepandemic was 14%. It has since decreased to 6%.
 - Discussed improvement in retention, increase starting salary for new employees, budget and merit raises.
 - University programs for rehab and offering paid internship with benefits for students exiting the master's program.
 - Assistance for VR caseloads, contracting with performers to help caseload coverage.

- Incentives for increases for Ras if they obtain a bachelor's degree.
 - Adjust training from three separate training to a one week extensive training.
 - Standards for providers training was discussed
 - No IHO to review. Selection of IHO officers RCT input.
- Customer Satisfaction and Needs Assessment, Gennadiy Goldenshteyn, Chair
 - Reviewed SFY Q2 2022 VR Customer Satisfaction Survey Results (Jan-Mar 2022) and SFY Q2 2022 VR Performance Update
 - Reviewed benchmarking results of choice, satisfaction, and survey methods. Continue to look at both customer satisfaction and survey and performance in parallel.
 - Customer satisfaction responses are back to the 2019 prepandemic level.
 - Discussion on Informed Choice
 - Recommend leaving the survey process as it is while until contract with Westat expires. Once new contract in place review the number of questions. Suggest may ask five questions at different intervals throughout the process.
 - Discussed TWC VR adding a portal for customers to engage with counselor. Maybe a chat feature for basic questions.
- Education and Membership, Lindsey Geeslin, Chair
 - Membership – Karen Stanfill has applied for reappointment. Two vacancies to fill and candidates have been identified and they have submitted their application.
 - Training for future RCT meetings – Committee Members have been assigned to follow up and secure presenters for upcoming meetings. ADA Disability, Accessibility and New Construction.
 - Joe Powell will roll out the mentee match program. Mentorship program.
 - RCT Chair and Vice Chair elections will take place next meeting.

- RCT Member recruitment is an ongoing process to provide a pool of applicants to fill vacant positions as they come up. If you have a recommendation please inform Lindsey so she can reach out to them and provide the application process.

CSAVR Conference Report from RCT Members

- Dr. James Williams
 - VR Staff Retention. We can't focus on just recruitment; we must talk about retention.
 - Networking with other states VR.
- April Poillreisz
 - Hearing and sharing with other state's process and achievements. Hearing actual testimony of VR customers and their success especially in the Arts area.

Liaison Reports The full reports are included in the binders. Each representative will give an update.

- Client Assistance Program (CAP), Karen Stanfill
- Community Rehabilitation Provider (CRP), Bobbie Hodges
- Partners Resource Network (PRN), Lisa Cowart
- State Independent Living Council (SILC), April Poillreisz
- Texas Education Agency (TEA), Emily Robinson No written report was provided
- Texas Workforce Investment Council (TWIC), Lindsey Geeslin

Council Business

- New Council Business
 - Approve February minutes, RCT Chairman Michael Ebbeler asked for approval of February minutes as recorded. With no edits being noted February Minutes were approved by the RCT Chairman Michael Ebbeler under unanimous consent.
 - FY22 Budget \$58,350. The current balance \$52,483.70

- FY23 1st Quarterly Meeting discussion. Meeting will be held in San Antonio TX on Friday October 28. All RCT Members will be invited to attend NCSRC/CSAVR/NCSAB in person or virtually.

Adjourn