

Virginia Board for the Blind and Vision Impaired Quarterly Board Meeting APPROVED Minutes

Date: December 16, 2025

Time: 11:00 AM – 2:00 PM

Location: 397 Azalea Avenue, Richmond, VA 23227 & Virtual via Zoom

Board Members in Attendance

Joseph Ashley-Vice Chair; Paul D’Addario-Chair, Michael Kasey-Secretary; Tina Egge, Tracy Bowdish, Suleiman Alibhai (virtually due to business conflict)

Board Members Not in Attendance

Kathyn Campbell

Guests

Bryce Lee, Optimal Services Group

Karen Logan, Optimal Services Group

DBVI Staff in Attendance

Jankail Allen, Director, Office of Strategic Initiatives; Rebecca Askew, Senior Policy Analyst; Deborah Collard, Senior Program Analyst ;Rachel Dancy, Executive Assistant; Wallica Gaines, Deputy Commissioner, Administration; Melissa Jackson, Financial and Risk Management Director; Matt Koch, Deputy Commissioner of Enterprises; Maggie Mills, Executive Assistant to Commissioner; Rick Mitchell, Commissioner; Justin Sheets, Assistant Director of Vocational Rehabilitation

Call to Order & Welcome

Chair D’Addario called the meeting to order and welcomed attendees. A quorum was confirmed. New Board members Dr. Alibhai and Tracy Bowdish were introduced.

Business Items

Approval of Agenda

Dr. Ashley moved to adopt the Agenda. Ms. Egge seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Approval of September 23, 2025, Meeting Minutes

Ms. Egge moved to approve the Minutes as presented. Dr. Ashley seconded the motion. Ms. Bowdish abstained as she was not present at the September meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment

None

Optimal Services Group

Karen Logan and Bryce Lee gave an update on the market and the DBVI/Board portfolio.

- The portfolio maintains an approximate 60% equity / 40% fixed income allocation, consistent with the Board-approved investment policy.
- As of the end of November, the portfolio value was just under \$7.6 million.
- Year-to-date portfolio performance was approximately 12%, reflecting strong growth over the past three years.

- During the year, the portfolio received a \$750,000 contribution and made approximately \$220,000 in grant distributions.
- The \$750,000 contribution has not been invested for the full year and is estimated to have earned approximately 7.5% since being added.
- The contribution is currently invested alongside the main portfolio but will be administratively separated for reporting and spending-policy purposes.
- The \$750,000 contribution is a restricted gift intended solely for the benefit of VRCBVI and is excluded from the endowment spending policy calculation used to determine annual grant funding..

Agency Reports

Commissioner Mitchell reported the passing of James Norman, Assistant Director at the Library and Resource Center (LRC).

The Commissioner reported that the Agency successfully navigated the recent federal government shutdown due to sufficient carryover funds. A continuing resolution is currently in effect through the end of January.

- The Agency is preparing for a new administration transition.
- The Commissioner confirmed that he is seeking reappointment.
- Agency leadership will meet with the incoming administration's policy team later in the week to discuss submitted questions and Agency priorities.
- Agency decision packages have been submitted to the Department of Planning and Budget (DPB).
- Proposed legislation remains under review in the Secretary's office.
- The Board previously requested the Agency submit a decision package for Super Summer Camp, historically supported by the Board at approximately \$50,000–\$55,000 annually.
- The Agency submitted a request for state funding; however, it did not advance from the Secretary's office.

Administration Division Update

Ms. Jackson presented an overview of the Agency's budget requests currently reflected in DPB's public system.

Three operating budget decision packages were submitted:

1. Conversion of Non-Classified to Classified Positions (Virginia Industries for the Blind – VIB)
 2. Emergency and Risk Management Program Support
 3. Increase in Maximum Employment Level (MEL).
- The Agency commissioned a feasibility study by GME to evaluate the transition of administrative services currently provided under a long-standing agreement with DARS.
 - DBVI clarified that the services under review for transition back to DBVI include: Procurement and General Services, Information Security, Human Resources, Payroll and fiscal services.

Ms. Jackson presented the Agency's capital budget request:

- A request was submitted to support renovations at VIB Richmond facility.

- A Facility Condition Assessment conducted in March 2025 identified critical life-safety, infrastructure, and accessibility deficiencies.:

Current facilities and capital activities include:

- Renovation design phases for the LRC and VIB Charlottesville
- Sidewalk and outdoor classroom projects
- HVAC/BAS system upgrades
- Elevator and gas line infrastructure replacements
- Approximately 100 monthly work requests managed by the facilities team.

Ms. Allen provided an overview of the Office of Strategic Planning.

Services Division Update

- Deputy Commissioner Malone submitted a written report, which was distributed to the Board in her absence.
- The Commissioner highlighted the Agency's Community Conversations, replacing the former "public meeting" model.

Enterprise Division Update

- Deputy Commissioner Koch reported that VIB received a new Navy mattress order for approximately 4,000 mattresses, with production scheduled between May and December.
- Federal government shutdown negatively impacted operations:
 - Retail and federal facilities closures reduced sales
 - Revenue currently approximately 20% below annual goals, though recovery is anticipated
- Virginia Enterprises for the Blind (Randolph-Sheppard Program):
 - Approximately 32 licensed vendors statewide
 - Vendors experienced an average 20% income decrease during the shutdown

Commissioner Mitchell reported success with a regional recognition approach rather than a single centralized event.

- Businesses and employees were recognized across multiple regions, including:
 - Amazon (Fredericksburg)
 - City of Norfolk
 - Commonwealth Attorney's Office (Salem)
 - Businesses in Southwest Virginia and the Staunton area

Working Lunch – Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA)

Justin Sheets, Assistant Director of VR, DBVI, shared a presentation (attached). Dr. Alibhai recommended exploring collaboration with the Virginia Optometric Association to:

- Offer continuing education (CE) opportunities focused on low vision services
- Increase awareness among optometrists of DBVI programs and service models
- Encourage more providers to offer low vision care statewide

*****Agency leadership welcomed the recommendation and agreed to have the Director of Low Vision Services follow up to explore feasibility and next steps.***

Old Business

Update on Restricted Items

Ms. Jackson provided an update regarding restricted funds tracked by DARS in QuickBooks. All tracked balances are already deposited in DBVI's existing financial accounts (e.g., Wells Fargo, LGIF).

- Continue reviewing historical records to confirm donor intent.
- Determine whether balances should remain designated as restricted.
- Develop and implement a clear policy governing acceptance and tracking of restricted funds going forward.

Deputy Commissioner Gaines reiterated that the QuickBooks restricted accounts are accounting mechanisms only and do not represent separate bank accounts or unaccounted funds.

- Ms. Jackson requested additional time to exhaust investigative efforts to locate documentation supporting donor-imposed restrictions.
- *****Ms. Jackson will report back at the March meeting with findings and a recommendation.***

Discussion: Revision of Grant Application and Report Format

The Board held a discussion regarding the Endowment Fund grant application process, prompted by experiences during the 2025 grant cycle.

The current application notice does not disclose:

- Total funds available
- Typical grant size
- Minimum or maximum award parameters

Emerging Consensus:

- Revise grant application instructions to:
 - Clearly state that grants are awarded from an endowment fund totaling a specified amount
 - Include a historical minimum and maximum range for typical awards
 - Add language noting that exceptions may be made under special circumstances.
- It was suggested to add a question to the application asking:
"If the amount awarded is less than the amount requested, what are your alternative plans to implement your initiative?"
- Board members agreed that applicants invited to present their proposals should have option to present in person or via Zoom.
- The Board concluded that awards can be provided to for-profit businesses as long as the services are valuable to clients, with appropriate safeguards for fund allocation.
- Board members confirmed updates to the instructions and application questions will be incorporated, including the new "Plan B" funding question.
- The report containing applicants' information in 2025 was produced in a spreadsheet format. It was agreed for future years, to add a notes column and also to produce the report in both the spreadsheet and Word formats to aid Board evaluation
- Members also discussed refining application questions to avoid repetitive responses, particularly regarding applicants restating the Board's mission.

- A suggestion was made to request specific examples of how the applicant's initiative advances the mission, rather than duplicating the mission statement.

*****Deputy Commissioner Gaines will modify the application instructions, incorporate the new questions, and adjust reporting tools based on Board feedback.***

- Feedback from previous applicants on the usefulness of interim reports and application clarity may be sought in the future but will not be prioritized at this time.
- Discussion addressed how long the Board is willing to fund an organization repeatedly.
- *****Board members agreed to discuss criteria for multi-year funding at the March meeting, including factors for scoring applications and evaluating complementary vs. duplicative services.***
- Board members found reports helpful for tracking progress but suggested adding a field to indicate the total grant amount received, to simplify evaluation.
- Discussion included potentially adjusting the report schedule in future cycles to better align with grant evaluation timelines.

Adjournment

Dr. Ashley moved to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Bowdish seconded the motion, and the meeting was adjourned.

Next meeting is scheduled for March 24, 2026.



Education • Employment • Independence

Review of DBVI's CSNA

December 16, 2025



Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment

- ▶ **The Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA)** is a federally required review that each state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agency must complete to evaluate how well it is meeting the needs of individuals with disabilities. It examines the availability, quality, and effectiveness of VR services, identifies gaps in service delivery, and informs the goals and priorities included in the State Plan.
 - **Frequency:** The CSNA must be conducted at least once every three years.

CSNA – A Planning and Assessment Tool

- ▶ Interviews, focus groups, and data collection related to employment, disability, business/industry, and resources within Virginia.
- ▶ Identifies unmet needs and gaps in service delivery for people with disabilities, which helps guide the agency to prioritize resources where they are most needed.
- ▶ Supports continuous improvement and compliance by analyzing service effectiveness and outcomes.

Key Recommendations

- 1. Expand Outreach to Underserved Populations.**
 - Continue and deepen outreach to Hispanic/Latino communities (e.g. partnerships with community organizations and hiring bilingual staff).
 - Monitor demographic shifts (growth of Asian and Salvadoran populations in Northern Virginia).
 - Maintain focused outreach to Deafblind individuals and those in rural locations.

Key Recommendations

2. Improve Accessibility and Presence Within the Workforce System.

- Provide ongoing training and support to Va. Workforce Connection staff on serving B/VI individuals.
- Position DBVI as an accessibility consultant to ensure AT is current and usable.
- Increase shared cases and collaboration with DARS.

Key Recommendations

3. Strengthen Community Rehabilitation Program Capacity.

- Conduct targeted recruitment of low vision doctors and assess reimbursement rates.
- Develop on-demand training for Employment Service Organizations (ESO's) to reduce turnover-related skill loss.
- Expand availability of Customized Employment (CE) providers, especially for individuals with secondary disabilities (ASD).

Key Recommendations

- ## 4. Enhance Youth and Transition Services.
- Expand innovative STEM, AI, and technology-focused training programs for students.
 - Increase peer mentoring opportunities for transition-age youth.
 - Expand access to AT and rehabilitation teaching services for youth in rural areas.

Key Recommendations

- 5. Increase Employer Engagement and Education.**
 - Continue to educate employers on the capabilities of individuals with blindness and vision impairments.
 - Expand customized training partnerships, internships, and work-based learning.
 - Provide ongoing disability etiquette, accommodation, and retention training for businesses.

Implementation of Recommendations

1. Demonstrated Progress in Targeted Outreach.

- Increased Hispanic referrals since the last CSNA, with documented growth in representation among DBVI participants.
- Dual Case Workgroup partnership with DARS, Virginia DeafBlind Project, and HKNC to enhance outreach and support for DeafBlind participants.
- Targeted internet ads and videos highlighting VR.
 - From October 1 – December 1:
 - 100,600 individual households reached.
 - Over 5,100 individuals visited the DBVI website; Spanish speakers were the second language to be chosen behind English.

Implementation of Recommendations

2. Strong Workforce System Partnerships.

- Active participation in the State Workforce Development Board and Virginia Works.
- Regular collaboration with Workforce Connection Centers through career fairs, workshops, and trainings.
- Accessibility consultation with businesses and community organizations through Rehab Technology department.

Implementation of Recommendations

3. Strengthening Provider Relationships.

- Low Vision directory and outreach to address shortage of low vision examiners.
- Provide training and on-site events for Employment Service Organizations (ESO's) to educate staff on employment related supports for blind and low vision career seekers.
- Working with DARS to strengthen opportunities for Customized Employment (CE) collaboration as well as dual-enrolled cases requiring additional supports.

Implementation of Recommendations

4. High Quality and Innovative Transition Services.

- Developed a peer mentoring program with VCU in response to the previous CSNA.
- Expanded use of social media and other virtual programming to engage with youth more effectively.
- Outreach by Pre-ETS Specialists in the schools and community.
- Significant increase in student programming:
 - 516 programs accessed by students in 2025; 264 delivered to parents.
 - In 2017 with the implementation of Pre-ETS under WIOA, 30 traditional student programs were accessed.

Implementation of Recommendations

5. Nationally Recognized Business Services.

- DBVI's BRU has received national recognition for innovative employer engagement.
- CVS/Aetna partnership for career skills lab – first cohort in January.
- Effective use of internships and paid work-based learning experiences that frequently convert into paid positions.
- All BRS staff with exception of the newest member are Windmills certified to provide disability etiquette to businesses.

CSNA Summary

- ▶ The CSNA concludes that DBVI is a **nationally recognized leader** in innovative student programming and business engagement (e.g., Aetna/CVS **customized training**), however, there are also gaps related to access and delivery of VR services which DBVI is working to address:
 - youth engagement (vs national VR average),
 - rural access,
 - DeafBlind interpreter availability,
 - mental-health comorbidity support and dual-cases,
 - and provider capacity (low vision doctors).