

APPROVED MINUTES
Virginia Board for the Blind and Vision Impaired

September 26, 2023
11:00 am – 2:00 pm

Location: Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI)
397 Azalea Avenue
Richmond, VA 23227

Board Members in Attendance

Joseph Ashley, Robert Bartolotta, Paul D’Addario-Chair, Ken Jessup-Vice Chair

Board Members Absent

Bonnie Atwood, Mazen Basrawi

Guests in Attendance

Bryce Lee, The Optimal Service Group
Jeff Rakes, The Optimal Service Group

DBVI Staff to the Board

Pam Cato, Deputy Commissioner for Services; Wallica Gaines, Deputy Commissioner for Administration; Matt Koch, Deputy Commissioner of Enterprises; Maggie Mills, Executive Assistant to the Commissioner; Dr. Rick Mitchell, Commissioner

Call to Order & Welcome

Chair D’Addario called the meeting to order and welcomed the members in attendance. A quorum was met.

Business Items

Introductions

A roundtable of introductions was conducted.

Consent of Agenda

Mr. D’Addario moved to approve the agenda as presented, and the motion passed unanimously.

Consent of June 27, 2023, Minutes

The Minutes were approved without objection. Minutes were accepted for filing.

Investment Report

The Optimal Service Group (OSG) reviewed DBVI’s investment portfolio to date which has been in a long-term asset allocation since December 2021. It was recommended by Optimal Services Group that before DBVI offers grants next year it considers developing a spending plan. *Optimal Services Group will provide data at the December 12, 2023, Board Meeting that can be used to create a spending plan regarding offering grants.*

Public Comment

None

Agency Reports

Commissioner Mitchell and the Deputy Commissioners gave a report on highlights in their divisions.

Commissioner Mitchell shared that on this day in 1973, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was passed. Commissioner Mitchell addressed the potential federal government shutdown. He advised that the agency has reviewed its funds and will be fine should this take place; the agency can continue its services.

Commissioner Mitchell and Deputy Commissioner Pam Cato will be conducting virtual Listening Sessions with the six regional offices over the next six months. The first two sessions are being held October 3, 2023, for the Norfolk area. Clients have been invited to discuss what DBVI is doing well and what issues the agency can improve.

On September 25, 2023, the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioners participated in a call with the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) regarding last year's performance data as an agency. The data indicates that the agency continues to grow in some areas, and in some areas, it held steady even with the significant staff changes and bringing on new staff particularly in the Services area.

Deputy Commissioner Koch reported that Virginia Industries for the Blind (VIB) sales are high/best in a decade with Base Supply Centers (BSC) up 49% year-over-year (YOY) for the last three months. All federal sales up 40% YOY. Net operating cash today is growing past \$11MM. All VIB revenue up 20% YOY. Expenses also up 22% YOY. Income up 3% YOY. On target with budget. Overall employment steady near 160 employees. Two internal employees were promoted this month; both are individuals who are blind. VIB has a new Contract Management Support (CMS) contract at Ft. Belvoir. CMS Richmond staff will be transitioning to Ft. Belvoir.

Matt had a meeting with the Office of Refugee Resettlement, a national program to help refugees integrate into the United States. He discussed how DBVI can assist those individuals who are blind.

As a result of the VIB Trainee Referral Policy that was recently revived, VIB has its first trainee visiting Ft. Gregg-Adams BSC next week thanks to the referral from the Roanoke regional office. Due to a Fairfax regional office referral, an individual will be visiting Ft. Belvoir BSC for an interview opportunity.

The Strategic Planning process has been completed for VIB.

Virginia Enterprises for the Blind (VEB) is waiting on funding news for Ft. Eustis. New opportunity in Yorktown with Coast Guard to manage 23 food service attendants. Revenues coming back as federal employees return to the office. Matt had a visit to Pentagon this month. Four vendors at that location had best months ever. Total annual sales roughly \$20MM. Median income last federal fiscal year was \$67K (up from \$44K in 2021). New Micro Market with VCCS as a pilot. Strategic Plan under development.

Matt will be hosting a visit to the Vice Chair of the National Council on Disability. The Council makes recommendations to the President and Congress on policies affecting Americans with disabilities.

Deputy Commissioner Cato reported on recruiting efforts for a Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Specialist and VR Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) Specialist which are both new positions, as well as recruiting for positions in the Norfolk regional office.

The Careers in Action event is scheduled for October 13-15, 2023, in Williamsburg, VA, where students attend with parents and learn about careers in the hospitality industry. The Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired (VRCBVI) will hold its annual Family and Friends Day October 14, 2023.

Pam Cato and Commissioner Mitchell will be attending the National Federation of the Blind of Virginia (NFB) State Convention scheduled for November 2 – 5, 2023, in Williamsburg, VA. DBVI will be holding a Public Meeting in conjunction with this convention on November 3 at 5 pm.

DBVI staff will be attending the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) Fall Conference which is held October 28 - November 1, 2023, and the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB) Fall Conference, held November 1- 3, 2023, both in Savannah, GA.

The Social Security Vocational Rehabilitation Cost Reimbursement Program allows VR state agencies to recoup some of the funds they spend providing services to individuals in the Commonwealth. Due to staff efforts, DBVI hit a milestone this year. For the federal fiscal year so far, the agency recouped \$2.3MM.

The Rehabilitation Teaching & Independent Living (RT/IL) and Older Individuals Who Are Blind (OIB) Program applied and was selected to receive intensive assistance from Mississippi State University. The kick-off meeting is this Thursday, followed by an assessment period and then 12-18 months of intensive assistance.

Deputy Commissioner Gaines reported on the new structure of DBVI's Facilities Department. In the past DBVI has had contracted Security for the campus. The agency recently received funding to hire Security as staff; unfortunately, recruiting has been a challenge.

Under the Capital Program, several large projects are currently underway including the renovation of the Library Resource Center (LRC) and VIB Charlottesville plant.

Deputy Commissioner Gaines reported on the recently created Communications Department including its robust video project recording information from various DBVI locations that demonstrate the work of the agency. DBVI is heavily involved in marketing its services through newsletters, social media, and outreach events. Photos of the Board members will be taken today following the meeting to upload to the Board page on DBVI's website.

Melissa Jackson is DBVI's new Financial and Risk Management Director. DBVI is recruiting for a Fiscal Analyst and Procurement Officer.

DBVI has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) which allows DBVI to utilize staff and services of DARS for Human Resources, Fiscal and General Services responsibilities. The MOU is currently undergoing its annual review.

New Business

Reports from Grantees

Currently those applying for grants from the Board are required to submit a report on what was done with the funds received the previous year. The deadline to submit this report has been June 30. Dr. Ashley motioned to change the June 30 deadline to June 1 to coincide with the grant applications deadline, and, in addition, require a status report of how funds are being used to be submitted before the December Board meeting each year. This change to the grant application process will begin with awards that are given in 2024. All were in favor.

Review of DBVI's College Sponsorship for In State and Out of State

Deputy Commissioner Cato reviewed DBVI's policy change to sponsor some of its students' college expenses.

Unfinished Business

Electronic Participation Policy

Previously, the Board amended its bylaws on March 22, 2022, to include Section 4: Member Participation by Electronic Means in Article VI: Conduct of Business. This change to the bylaws was made to allow electronic participation as permitted in [§ 2.2-3708.2](#) of the Code of Virginia. At that time this section required the body to adopt a written policy allowing for and governing participation of its members by electronic means. The Board amended the bylaws to establish the policy.

Since that time the Code of Virginia has changed regarding electronic participation in meetings. The Board wishes to adopt a policy outside of its bylaws. Mr. Bartolotta motioned to adopt the policy as distributed via email prior to the Board meeting. All were in favor.

Bylaws Amendment

The change to bylaws regarding electronic participation had its first approval, the Board will consider again at the December Board meeting in accordance with its bylaws. *****Dr. Ashley motioned to change the bylaws with a vote at the December Board Meeting. All were in favor.***

Status of Grant Disbursements

Deputy Commissioner Gaines reported that all grants have been disbursed except Super Summer Camp.

Legislative Event – Budget Proposal

Mr. Jessup reported there is no update to provide. *****He will meet with Dr. Ashley and Bonnie Atwood and will make presentation at the December Board Meeting.***

Location of December 2023 Board Meeting

The December 12, 2023, Board Meeting will be held at DBVI headquarters in Richmond. Tentatively, the March 26, 2024, Board Meeting will be held at VIB Charlottesville location.

Adjournment

Dr. Ashley motioned to adjourn the meeting. All were in favor.