

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

December 12, 2023
11:00 am – 2:00 pm

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

Board Members in Attendance

Joseph Ashley, Bonnie Atwood, Robert Bartolotta, Paul D’Addario-Chair, Garren Shipley

Board Members Absent

Mazen Basrawi, Ken Jessup-Vice Chair

Guests in Attendance

Bryce Lee, The Optimal Service Group
Karen Logan, The Optimal Service Group
Olu Rosanwo, The Optimal Service Group (virtually)

DBVI Staff to the Board

Pam Cato, Deputy Commissioner for Services; Wallica Gaines, Deputy Commissioner for Administration; Melissa Jackson, Financial and Risk Management Director; 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 September 26, 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. Optimal Services Group shared options on spending plans regarding the offering of grants. A presentation on Developing Investment Strategy was shared. Endowment fund is \$5.7M as of last week. As of January 1, 2023, the Endowment Fund was \$5,437,986, and at the Board’s June 2023 meeting the Board approved grants totaling \$278,251.

Public Comment

D.E. Andrews joined virtually with no public comment.

Agency Reports

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

Ms. Jackson provided a brief history of the Endowment Fund.

Ms. Mills will follow up on required report submissions from grantees advising Board what grant funds have been used for since the Endowment funds were provided.

Deputy Commissioner Koch reported that the Enterprise Division is working on the annual federal report for its program operating under the Randolph-Sheppard Program. The numbers need to be further reviewed, but the median annual earnings across its 35 private citizens operating businesses in the program will be higher than last year's \$67,000.

Virginia Enterprises for the Blind (VEB) has 38 highway rest area vending operations in partnership with the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT). The contract is coming up for renewal through a third-party supplier, Canteen Group. A one-year contract extension has been requested by the Virginia Department of General Services (DGS) due to staffing constraints.

Two weeks ago, Pepsi announced a change in their service model which could decrease VEB's revenue about \$500K/year of annual revenue of \$1.8 million. Pepsi had been providing direct services; however, soon VEB will have to load and manage machines which could impact the program.

The Virginia Industries for the Blind (VIB) Annual AbilityOne Report was submitted to the federal government. The biggest metric to reach is employment for people who are blind. VIB reached higher than it has in recent years with 79% of its front-line employees being comprised of people who are blind against a requirement of 75%.

Commissioner Mitchell signed a contract for a new Enterprise resource planning application called Odoo. Enterprise now needs an implementer for the software.

VIB enjoyed its best sales to the federal government on record. Federal customers are the primary customer of VIB with 85-90 % of its sales. With new product lines like furniture and food service supplies VIB had its best year on record with sales up 47% to \$6.2 million. Total federal sales through retail and customer service were \$11.6 million in federal fiscal year 2023 – highest ever and up 40% YOY.

Commissioner Mitchell reported on the Services Division in Deputy Commissioner Cato's absence. Last week several staff attended the NICE National Conference for Cybersecurity Educators in Arizona. DBVI presented with Palo Alto Network and Cyber.org highlighting the cybersecurity and

robotics academy that DBVI has held for the last several years. The global head of training for Palo Alto spoke about what true integration looks like in the workplace, and DBVI was highlighted.

The National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB) Conference was held in Savannah, GA, early November, and DBVI was recognized for several of its programs in the field of blind rehabilitation.

DBVI is now working on its Combined State Plan. Its goals were approved and will finish draft by January 19. The entire State Plan will be available for public comment.

DBVI's rehabilitation teaching program received an older blind grant. DBVI's rehabilitation teaching program is recognized nationally as a strong older blind program. In September, DBVI requested to receive technical assistance with its policy manual for that program, removing whatever is not required which will help expedite services.

Working Lunch – Board Orientation Endowment

The Optimal Service Group gave Board members an orientation of their services and the Endowment Fund.

Unfinished Business

Second Reading - Bylaws Amendment

At the last Board meeting the change to bylaws regarding electronic participation had its first approval. The Board had its second reading at the December 12 Board meeting in accordance with its bylaws. This change reflects how people can attend meetings virtually in accordance with the Board's Electronic Participation Policy. Dr. Ashley moved to accept the revised bylaws. All were in favor.

Legislative Event – Budget Proposal

Ms. Atwood reported now is not the ideal time to have a legislative event as most legislators are new and occupied. A budget should be established at some point to be set aside for the purpose to get legislators familiar with what is accomplished at DBVI.

Location of March 2024 Meeting

Most of the videoconferencing has been installed at DBVI's Charlottesville, VA, facility but not fully functioning yet. The March 2024 Quarterly Board Meeting will be held at the Charlottesville location unless that equipment is not ready.

New Business

Orientation Practice

Ms. Atwood recommended a Board session devoted to Board ethics and parliamentary procedure. Ms. Atwood moved to have the Chair appoint a committee to research and report back on how an Orientation Session could look. *Mr. Bartolotta volunteered to research this item along with Ms. Atwood as a low-level consultant.*

Other Business

RFP Process

Dr. Ashley recommended and volunteered to look at the Board Grant Request process and to make it easier to review and to hold grantees accountable. *Deputy Commissioner Gaines will create a template form to upload to the DBVI Board website page.*

Adjournment

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