

STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

OCTOBER 28, 2025

ATTENDEES:

Cindy Kurtz-Hopkins
Diane Hernandez
Eva Castillo
Hugh Kelly
Kelsey Teeter
Krys Purcell
Linda Rouse (virtual)
Lisa Schneider (virtual)
Margee Woywood (virtual)
Pam Woelber
Richard Phelan
Susan Bunz
Victoria Keith
William Stumpf

IVRS SUPPORT STAFF:

April Stotz (virtual)
Ashley Banes (virtual)
Brandy McOmber
Director Beth Townsend
Eric Evans
Jeff Haight
Jesse Dougherty
Sandy Ostendorf
Tyler Hansen
Vienna Hoang
Wendy Solano

PUBLIC/GUEST:

Brooke Lovelace (virtual)
Dr. Allison Levine (presenter)
Gloria Van Rees, DOM (virtual)
Greg Bal
Michelle McNertney (presenter)

ABSENT:

Brandi Fitch

CALL TO ORDER

Castillo called the October 28, 2025, State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) meeting to order at 10:37 a.m.

QUORUM

A quorum was established at 10:39 a.m.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

Motion by Kelly, Second Phelan – approved agenda for October 28, 2025, meeting at 10:40 a.m.

APPROVAL OF JULY 2025 MEETING MINUTES

Motion by Phelan, Second Teeter – approved July 22, 2025, meeting minutes at 10:40 a.m.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None

STANDING COMMITTEE REPORTS

Outreach Committee (Hernandez)

- Discussed 2025 SRC Annual Report, including layout and content
 - Registered Apprenticeship for moving from a Job Coach to Employment Specialist
 - Highlighting a successful case where an individual was co-enrolled in Title I and VR services
 - Feature on an employer in Cedar Rapids highly involved in hiring persons with disabilities
- January 28, 2026, legislative reception event discussed
 - Combining efforts with other entities, including the DD (Developmental Disabilities) Council, Iowa APSE (Association of People Supporting Employment First), Disability Rights Iowa, University of Iowa, etc.
 - Some work being done the same day about the Work Without Worry Bill by Allies in Advocacy regarding access to Medicaid and working
 - Discussed giveaways for swag bags, as well as snacks and beverages
 - Next virtual planning meeting for the legislative reception is December 4th

VR Service Delivery Committee (Ostendorf)

- Reviewed Unified State Plan written for program years 2024-2027
 - Time for the two-year modification of the plan to provide updates from the core title programs on progress made towards the goals, economic conditions, new priorities established by the most recent CSNA (Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment) if applicable, and other changes that may have occurred since the original plan was written
 - The VR portion of the plan is almost 60 pages; reviewed each section
 - RSA (Rehabilitation Services Administration) provided guidance to VR to look at all areas, and updates were made to the entire plan
 - The VR plan includes two goal areas that align with the Governor's initiatives and the Workforce Development goal areas: referral and recruitment efforts to serve all individuals with disabilities, as well as placement incorporating the new Core 4 initiative
 - The State Plan requires assurances that outline coordination and collaboration of service delivery across the workforce system

Business Services Committee (Castillo)

- Discussed the businesses recently recognized by VR for NDEAM (National Disability Employment Awareness Month)
 - Related information can be found on social media sites
 - Shared flyers for business engagement and outreach to grow business leadership involvement in the SRC Business Services Committee
- Discussed various business sectors to strategically focus on where VR has numerous job candidates for placement (i.e. Information Technology), including developing more internship pathways for college students

RSB BUREAU CHIEF REPORT (Evans)

- Shared Mia Peterson Self-Advocacy Award recipient, Hugh Kelly, and appreciation for consistent involvement, input and advocacy for individuals with disabilities
- Local school plans are almost complete with high schools in all 99 counties
- Core 4 project
 - Bringing workforce partners together to assist VR job candidates in finding employment more quickly once they are job ready
 - Progress, feedback and areas for improvement are consistently monitored to make the necessary adjustments to the project
 - Currently creating a workshop to be provided in person in some centers for VR job candidates who are almost job ready
 - Feedback from job candidates includes feeling supported and heard, getting job leads timely and being pleased with the consistency of meetings and/or checking in
 - Receiving feedback from the employers who interview job candidates, assisting with coaching job candidates to improve interviewing skills
- NDEAM events around the state
 - Most local office events included collaboration with multiple Title partners, as well as businesses and other partners in the community
 - Employer panels discussed tax incentives, benefits of hiring persons with disabilities, and other topics of interest to businesses
 - Several areas were presented with proclamations by mayors or city council members

ADMINISTRATOR REPORT – TOWNSEND

- Federal shutdown
 - Continuing to monitor the situation, zero impact to Iowa VR and services continue to be provided as usual
 - RSA has been affected with mandatory furloughs of most staff
 - The option of moving RSA from the Department of Education to the Department of Labor at the federal level is still a possibility
 - Would align well with Iowa and the recent government realignment Iowa experienced
 - Positive change could include less oversight from RSA, allowing for more time to serve job candidates and less time spent on required paperwork
- Recent review of the VR program and how it operates
 - Evaluated staffing and caseloads in attempts to distribute work effectively and maximize capacity to deliver services
 - This month VR implemented re-classifications for 37 positions
 - Goal to find consistency within the divisions of IWD for those staff doing similar work, to be classified and paid at same rate
 - Will encourage staff from across divisions to function better as a team and create efficiencies
 - Forty individuals were notified of the layoff, of which three positions were no longer needed

- Most staff applied for the reclassified positions, interviews were conducted by VR, along with some IWD staff
 - Currently toward the end of the process making offers and getting staff back into reclassified positions
 - This has been a goal since VR came under IWD with the realignment; course correction was needed for the long term
 - Completely unrelated to the federal government shutdown, timing was coincidental
- NDEAM
 - The Governor loves to meet and greet and appreciated the opportunity to be involved
 - Photos were taken with all employers present at the proclamation
- VR Administrator position
 - The position will be posted nationally in November
 - Held off posting it to complete the reclassifications; want the individual selected to be in the best possible position to have a positive impact on the agency
 - Position will remain posted for 30 days, want to draw from a large pool of candidates
 - Goal is to have the new VR Administrator on staff by the end of December
- Iowa DOGE report
 - Workforce was one of the workgroups of the three DOGE committees
 - Extensive report in terms of recommendations made on how to streamline and improve workforce training in the state
 - If Governor adopts recommendations, it would be a great improvement to the program and the system
 - Historically in Iowa, training dollars go to the Department of Education and colleges through a formula, and it is used to provide tuition assistance to students, which cuts employers out of the process
 - The only program employers can access training dollars is the 260E program which has not been significantly updated since the 80s
 - Ten-year bonding program and only applies to industries that were relevant and viable in the 80s
 - For instance, Healthcare, one of the two largest industries in Iowa, is not eligible to participate in the program
 - DOGE recommendation is to sunset the 260 program and have workforce training dollars directly available to employers administered through IWD
 - Would like to look at how to use workforce training dollars to expand Registered Apprenticeship programs and opportunities in Iowa that could benefit VR job candidates
- Furloughed 67 employees from the unemployment tax side of IWD due to the federal shutdown
 - Will not impact ability to provide services or process and pay unemployment claims
 - No furloughs for VR

STATE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD (McNertney)

- Provided information about WIOA and the 4 Core Programs
 - Title I: Funding for training, education, and supportive services for adults, dislocated workers, and youth to address barriers to employment.
 - Title II: Provides adults with basic skills development, English language, and other skills to be successful members of the workforce
 - Title III (Wagner-Peiser): the public labor exchange system that matches qualified job seekers with quality jobs and employers to qualified candidates
 - Title IV (Vocational Rehabilitation and Department for the Blind): Provides services for individuals with disabilities so they can prepare for and engage in CIE (competitive integrated employment) or supported employment to reach self-sufficiency
 - The goal of all programs is to provide the skills, education and training needed to find employment
 - Co-enrollment in multiple programs is allowed and encouraged
 - Four Core programs, along with 17 other smaller programs are referred to as the workforce system (IowaWORKS System)
 - Connects businesses with job seekers
- State Workforce Development Board (SWDB)
 - Purpose: develop and continuously improve Iowa's workforce system
 - Role: the SWDB establishes the vision for full implementation of WIOA in the state and oversees local implementation of that vision
 - Ensure plan, policies, and strategies reflect the WIOA vision and are designed to develop the talent pipeline that meets the needs of businesses and supports community prosperity
- Currently going through a process of reviewing the committee structure (state and local) to determine changes needed
 - Proposal for reorganizing eight committees down to five committees
- Discussed the possibility of SRC members joining local disability access committees and time commitment to serve on the committee

NATIONAL DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS MONTH (NDEAM) (Hansen, Dougherty)

- Proclamation was signed by the Governor, surrounded by business personnel who received recognition from VR
- Theme: Celebrating Value and Talent
- Information shared about the webinars that occurred throughout the month to include over 300 participants - all webinars were recorded and will be posted on the VR website
- Discussed various local VR office events held throughout the state
- Shared list of partners and collaborators involved in coordination of the events

CSNA UPDATE (Dr. Levine)

- Draft of the executive summary report was shared, including data points

- Continuing to work on aggregating all data from the past three years (data collected 2022-2024)
- Will include specific recommendations based on the findings in the final report
- Final report will be shared and posted in December

LEGISLATIVE RECEPTION, DD COUNCIL MEETING (Castillo, McOmber)

- January 28, 2026, at 1:00 PM at the Rotunda (SRC meeting is the day prior)
- Will share information leading up to the event
- Would like to showcase success stories, legislators want to hear from individuals who have been served

UNIFIED STATE PLAN (McOmber, Ostendorf)

- Discussed earlier, VR to share draft once finalized

COMMITTEE REPORT/UPDATES

Financial Overview (Haight)

- Provided various statistics on first quarter of program year 2025
- Compared information related to the first quarter of program year 2024
 - FTE (full-time employee) numbers are lower
 - Already ahead of schedule on reaching pre-ETS (pre-employment transition services) target
 - Fewer successful and unsuccessful closures
 - No waiting list currently in effect for program year 2025
- Top service dollar increases work-based learning, job search, supported employment, maintenance, extended supports
- Top service dollar decreases: college tuition and fees, junior college, rehabilitation technology

Client Assistance Program (CAP) Update (Schneider)

- Discussed CAP's roll amid the current federal shutdown situation – no impact
- **Discussed interpreter services during client job interviews
 - VR agency is responsible for providing funding for interpreters during the receipt of a VR service
 - If not involved with VR, employer is responsible for interpreter funding

OTHER BUSINESS

- Picture taken of SRC members to use in SRC Annual Report
- Discussed services not being provided to Social Security Disability beneficiaries during the government shutdown

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting was adjourned at 1:23 p.m.

The next SRC meeting is January 27, 2026.

****Change of Meeting Minutes requested by Council on January 27, 2026:**

Presentation by CAP included materials not developed by Vocational Rehabilitation and doesn't necessarily follow VR guidance below.

Interpreter Services During Job Interviews: VR Agency Responsibility

Summary Statement

Federal regulations confirm that Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies—not potential employers—are responsible for funding interpreter services during job interviews when the activity supports the client's employment goal outlined in the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE).

Regulatory Basis

Interpreter services are a covered VR service under federal law when they support employment outcomes:

- 34 CFR §361.48(b)(18): Interpreter services are explicitly listed as a VR service to assist individuals in achieving employment.
- 34 CFR §361.45(c): Services must be provided in the individual's native language or mode of communication.
- Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by WIOA: VR agencies must remove barriers to employment, including communication access.

Scope of VR Responsibility

Interpreter services are VR-funded when the job interview is part of the VR-supported employment process. This includes:

- Interviews coordinated by the counselor
- Interviews initiated by employers after VR referral
- Interviews secured independently by the client, if the job search is part of the IPE

“Interpreter services... are provided to assist individuals in achieving an employment outcome.”

34 CFR §361.48(b)(18)

Coordination does not require direct scheduling. If the counselor identifies leads, supports applications, or prepares the client for interviews, the activity is considered VR-supported.

ADA vs. VR Agency Responsibilities

Interview Scenario	Interpreter Responsibility
Coordinated by VR counselor	VR agency
Initiated by employer after VR referral	VR agency
Secured independently by client, but part of IPE	VR agency
Unrelated to VR services or IPE	Employer (under ADA)

Common Misperceptions & Clarifications

1. “The employer is responsible under the ADA.”
 - ✓ True only if the interview is unrelated to VR services.
 - ✗ If the interview supports the IPE, interpreter services remain a VR responsibility.

2. “The client found the interview on their own.”
 - ✗ Coordination doesn’t require direct scheduling. If the job search is part of the IPE, VR is responsible.

3. “VR doesn’t have the budget.”
 - ✗ Interpreter services are federally mandated. Budget constraints don’t exempt compliance.

4. “This isn’t a VR service anymore.”
 - ✗ Job interviews are explicitly supported under VR services. Interpreter access is part of the employment journey.

Why This Matters

Clear guidance protects clients from delays or denials in their employment journey and ensures employers aren’t wrongly burdened. If the interview supports the client’s IPE, the VR agency is responsible for interpreter services—regardless of who initiates the interview.

Meeting minutes approved by the Council on this date: _____

Signed by SRC Chair – Eva Castillo _____