STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

JULY 28, 2026

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
Brandi Fitch
Cindy Kurtz-Hopkins (virtual)
Diane Hernandez
Hugh Kelly
Katrina Webbeking (virtual)
Kelsey Teeter
William Stumpf

IVRS STAFF:
Amy Markham
Brandy McOmber
Carlos Vela
Jeff Haight
Jesse Dougherty
Kelli Hugo
Mary Jackson
Sandy Ostendorf
Wendy Solano

PUBLIC/GUEST:
Mari Brown (virtual)
Kayla Pfau (virtual - Presenter)

ABSENT:
Eva Castillo
Margee Woywood
Krys Purscell
Pam Woelber
Susan Bunz
Victoria Keith

CALL TO ORDER

In Chair Castillo's absence, Stumpf called the July 28, 2026, State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) meeting to order at 10:35 a.m.

QUORUM

Quorum was not established today. July 28, 2026, Adoption of July 28, 2026, agenda and Approval of April 28, 2026, meeting minutes will occur at a future meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None

STANDING COMMITTEE REPORTS

Outreach Committee (Hernandez)

- Reflected on past legislative receptions and noted how combining reception efforts with other organizations has worked well. Also recognized the lack of

targeted, meaningful engagement with legislators and knowledge of clear "asks".

- Discussed proposed strategy to gather stories from constituents across the state, including photos and short statements about how VR and/or rehabilitation services helped them. These stories would become individualized materials provided to legislators to make the outreach more personal and compelling.
- The concept to connect VR's priorities directly to the committees each legislator serves on to make requests more relevant might increase the chances of meaningful support.
- To make material creation manageable, the group suggested developing templates that contain blocks for constituent stories, committee-specific talking points, and general information. Assembling these modular pieces would make it feasible to create individualized materials without rewriting everything from scratch.
- There was general agreement that more proactive outreach was needed to make the event impactful.

VR Service Delivery Committee (Stumpf)

- Reviewed and discussed how policy changes a year ago have impacted current VR expenditures for post-secondary, rehabilitation technology and self-employment service categories, as well as the impact on job candidates.
- Discussion held on the unusually high number of self-employment cases in Iowa compared to other states. Staff shared that regional partners were surprised at Iowa's caseload, and speculated that strong success stories may inspire more people to pursue self-employment through VR.
- The new case management system was mentioned, noting concerns but also recognizing benefits. They reviewed the timeline, emphasizing that only a few SRC meetings remain to align policies with the new system.

Business Services Committee (Castillo**)**

- No new updates at this time. Need the new member appointments to add members to this committee.

RSB BUREAU CHIEF REPORT (Jackson)

- Staffing changes were shared.
    - Des Moines Area Office 1 supervisor was filled by Vienna Hoang, formerly the CRP Workforce Program Coordinator. Position will be backfilled.
    - Des Moines Area Office 2 supervisor position closed yesterday. Interviews will take place next week.

    - Katrina Webbeking, counselor on the statewide team, filled the vacant CAP position. Lewis Litzel, counselor in Waterloo, filled the role on the statewide team. Waterloo counselor position will be backfilled.
- Summer Pre-ETS programming is currently underway with 39 programs across the state. Programs will wrap up mid-August. Fitch shared more detail during presentation held later in the meeting
- Client Assistance Program: bureau chiefs have been meeting with Webbeking, establishing a working relationship and reviewing processes between the two entities.
- Pathways to Success is a four-session workshop designed for job candidates to learn about AJC resources, soft skills, job search techniques, and interviewing prior to writing their individual employment plan with VR.
    - The model uses a cohort approach with VR and AJC staff jointly supporting participants, and feedback from the pilot sites has been positive.
    - Materials and instruction are broken down intentionally to a level the JC can better understand.
    - Workshop intended to make job candidates more comfortable accessing and understanding all services at the AJC.
- VR staff along with other divisions of Iowa Workforce Development will have a booth at the Iowa State Fair. Council members encouraged to stop in.

ADMINISTRATOR REPORT (McOmber)

- Staffing changes have resulted in leadership concentrating efforts on training new members of the state-level team. As a result, refresher training for all Planning & Development Team (PDT) members is occurring on topics such as internal controls, federal regulations and legislation.
    - Carlos Vela from the Ames Area Office filled Hoang's previous role as the CRP Workforce Program Coordinator.
    - The Policy Workforce Program Coordinator role was filled by Ashley O'Leary from the Cedar Rapids Area Office.
    - Germán Ortiz was hired as our fiscal analyst. He begins August 10th and will provide final approval on finances.
    - Justin Clark, counselor from Davenport was promoted to Training Specialist 2, replacing April Stotz. He has already made strong progress toward enhancing new staff training, including developing in-person training components.
    - Rehna Lensch from the Atlantic office has accepted the Administrative Assistant position supporting state-level staff. Her work will also include document accessibility and CRP contract support.

    - The Project Director role of the SWTCIE grant was recently vacated, and Sandy Ostendorf is serving as Interim Project Director. The Special Programming Workforce Program Coordinator position covering that work will be posted publicly soon and will be a permanent role with VR, supporting statewide initiatives beyond the duration of the grant.
- Listening Tour Summary and Division Improvements
    - The VR Executive Leadership Team (ELT) has developed a plan of action from the feedback received during the listening tours. Implementation of the plan is underway.
    - Internal newsletter from the Division Administrator is created each month providing updates and transparency as requested in the tour.
    - The team is focused on reducing the administrative burden for staff by allowing staff to provide input for the new case management system. Feedback is being implemented within design of the system.
    - Improving staff support and recognition and incorporating more opportunities for input in decision-making is occurring.
        - Leadership is involving supervisors at the local level for office changes and moves. Office staff have requested to provide input as well.
        - The first step in this process is touring facilities in local areas with Department of Administration Services (DAS) personnel. The number of participants allowed is limited per DAS policies which is out of VR's control.
        - DAS has standards they follow for cubicle space and other office details which limit VR input in that process.
        - Once the specifications and costs are reviewed and approved, local staff will have the opportunity for more input for the shared space.
- ELT is planning a retreat to engage in focused strategic planning. Additional retreats for Supervisors and PDT will be scheduled to allow for collaboration, alignment, and professional development across leadership teams.
- An additional opportunity for a legislative reception has become available due to several community resource programs (CRPs) reaching out to VR with efforts to support the program. Goodwill of Central Iowa is hosting their own legislative event.
    - They have interest in partnering with other CRPs, and the DD Council has agreed to join this effort.
    - Their purpose is to invite legislators and highlight the value proposition of the VR Program.
    - McOmber encourages SRC members to get involved and participate.

PRE-ETS SUMMER PROGRAMMING UPDATE (Fitch)

- A PowerPoint overview was shared to highlight Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) summer programming statewide.
- Programming is offered through area offices and contracted partners (TAPs, PTCs, etc.).
- Each office provides summer activities to high school students with barriers, focusing on meaningful career exploration.
- Programming is built around 5 core services to support workplace readiness, independence, postsecondary planning, self-advocacy, career exploration, and real-world engagement.
- Staff noted strong student gains in confidence, peer interaction, and awareness of career pathways.
- Although 14 offices exist, collaboration with schools, employers, and community groups enables broad statewide reach.
- Summer programming serves over 1,000 students annually with daily participation ranging from 1–40 students depending on schedules and barriers.
- Examples of summer activities include business and college tours, career readiness camps, and hands-on skill building with employers.
- Highlights from specific locations were shared.
- Key outcomes include:
    - Students frequently begin unsure about employment; summer activities significantly improve self-advocacy, goal setting, career interest and readiness.
    - Hands-on activities connected to real-world work tasks.
    - Improvement of soft skills and learned workplace behaviors; camps consistently remain most impactful experience with the VR program
    - Strengthening community connections and creating future opportunities for students.
    - Relationships with businesses help create future opportunities.

LOCAL SCHOOL PLANS (Fitch)

- The local school plans (LSPs) lay out a roadmap of what services will look like in each high school and who will provide them, as well as identifying and filling gaps in services. The teams review data to determine what things are working, where improvements can be made, and opportunities for growth.
- This is an annual requirement for each high school partnering with VR to outline roles, responsibilities, and plans for transition services.
- The plans are intended to reduce duplication and enhance collaboration among schools, AEAs, VR, Department for the Blind, other Title programs, and contracted programs.

- The template is updated each year to support continuous improvement and clearer data reporting.
- Collaboration and the responsibility of all entities to come together and build the plan
- Key Components of the LSP.
    - Meeting attendees and roles of each (facilitator, note-taker, scheduler, etc.).
    - Verification that all required partners are involved.
    - Data reporting:
        - Number of students with IEPs, 504 plans, potentially eligible or VR-eligible.
        - Vision service needs.
        - Contracted program involvement (e.g., TAP, PTC, etc.).
    - Discussion of barriers, successes, areas for growth.
    - Access and referral processes for students, including specifics for 504 coordination.
    - Breakdown of Pre-ETS service responsibilities across partners.
    - Summer programming planning and transportation considerations.
    - Communication methods and distribution of finalized plans.
- Templates and examples were shared.

DIF GRANT UPDATE (Ostendorf)

- Previous project director left; Ostendorf takes Interim Director role and is spending time learning the role.
- DIF focuses on Customized Employment (CE) and Individual Placement & Support (IPS) using fidelity-based models.
- Beginning the final year of service delivery; evaluation follows in an additional year.
- Main priority: determining sustainability of CE and IPS once grant funding ends.
- Evaluation is ongoing with surveys from: Participants, guardians, providers, and VR counselors.
- Challenge: national evaluation ends data collection prematurely due to RSA contract structure.
- Case Management System funded by DIF will feature a vendor portal for improved efficiency and collaboration.
- DB101 benefits website is currently developing youth content expansion and Spanish-language implementation; future funding is needed.
- The Registered Apprenticeship Program has enrolled the first participant; working on implementation and growing state job coaching capacity.

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY (Hugo)

- Provided overview of the AT program, definitions, services, and timing of AT exploration.
- Shared workflow: Exploration → evaluation (as needed) → acquisition → follow-up → reassessment.
- Emphasized:
    - Collaboration with Easter Seals (state AT lending library).
    - Using SETT framework (Subject, Environment, Task, Tools).
    - Prioritizing low-tech options when appropriate.
    - AT examples including apps, adaptive devices, communication tools, accessibility settings.
- Discussed the growing role of AI in task initiation and drafting assistance.
- Shared ongoing DIF project work includes statewide AT training needs assessment.

CSNA (COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE NEEDS ASSESSMENT) AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY (Pfau)

- Current customer satisfaction survey is outdated; redesign needed to better support CSNA and state plan priorities.
- New subcommittee will form to guide survey redevelopment.
- Suggested timeline: draft ready by next SRC meeting.
- Key goals: improve clarity, relevance, domain-specific questions, accessibility, and utility for decision-making.
- Next steps: members wishing to participate in subcommittee should connect with Pfau.

COMMITTEE REPORTS / UPDATES

Financial Overview (Haight)

- Eligibility determinations increased from previous year.
- Rehab rates decreased.
- Personnel expenses decreased.
- The number of full-time employees (FTEs) decreased.
- Successful closures increased.
- Unsuccessful closures increased with top reasons being “No longer interested” and “Unable to contact.”
- Number of job candidates with an authorization decreased, notably due to policy changes.

CAP UPDATE (Webbeking)

- Webbeking is new to the CAP position as of June 5th; have received several requests from VR area offices to provide presentation on CAP services.
- CAP transitioned to Aging and Disability Services.
- Have 12 active cases; common issues involve AT and postsecondary policy changes.
- Outreach presentations underway statewide.
- Accessibility improvements being made to CAP forms.

OTHER BUSINESS

- New legislative appointment noted: incoming senator has vocational rehabilitation background.
- Brain Injury Alliance workshops announced (emotion management in the workplace), with flyers distributed.

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 2:02 p.m.

The next SRC meeting is October 27, 2026.

Meeting minutes approved by the Council on this date: _____

Signed by SRC Chair – Eva Castillo _____