

Oregon Commission for the Blind
Regular Meeting – July 30, 2021 - 1:00 pm
Approved Minutes

CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Chair Scott McCallum called the meeting to order at 1:05 pm via Zoom.com for a regular meeting of the Oregon Commission for the Blind. Members in attendance were:

Scott McCallum
Michael Babcock
Nadeera Broome
Vivian Carlile-Smith
Dr. Christie Closson
Laurel Hudson and Lillian Goodman were absent.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – June 4, 2021 (Action Item)

Chair McCallum asked for a motion to approve the June 4, 2021, meeting minutes. Commissioner Christi Closson made a motion to approve the minutes, as written, Commissioner Nadeera Broome seconded, and the motion passed.

AUDIENCE INTRODUCTION

Each audience member introduced themselves.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment was submitted.

REVIEW OF SUMMER WORK EXPERIENCE PROGRAM (SWEP) 2021

Angel Hale reported on the 2021 SWEP Program's performance, joined by the SWEP counselors and four SWEP students.

This year's program provided services in both the Portland and Salem areas, as well as the third community-based track. Many experiences were delivered remotely, but we were pleased to resume the work experience component, which was offered both virtually and in person.

Students received instruction in techniques of daily living, living with blindness, use of technology, meal preparation, and independent living skills. SWEP students participate daily for five weeks, and between the instruction they receive and their work experiences, they invest a lot into their futures.

There were returning employer partners such as OMSI, where some students worked, but OMSI offered mock interviews, and tours on topics from the making of fossils to the Virtual Dinosaur Tour.

Two students from both the Salem and Portland programs represented students, reporting their experience to the commissioners.

The Salem students led, presenting their reports first.

Kennedy went first and described their summer work experience packaging candles and working with their job coach Tiffany and employer Camelia. This summer, they enjoyed cooking (especially the Angel Food biscuits) and learning about self-awareness, and the congeniality of establishing friendships with others in their cohort.

Samuel, the second participant from Salem, shared what he liked most: First, that he enjoyed his job coach, Jonathan. Secondly, he liked working with his employer, the City of Portland, where he tested documents for accessibility. And third, he was glad to be doing the job of document accessibility testing. Accessibility testing evaluates documents for being able to be read by both nonvisual readers, so uses technology to assess links, headings, and tables. Samuel reports he is interested in choosing a career in this field.

Samuel mentioned that he enjoyed the Virtual Dinosaur Tour at OMSI, the mock interviews, and the techniques of daily living classes with OCB Rehabilitation Instructor Kevin from our Salem office.

The Portland SWEP students reported on their experience:

Ram, a 2021 David Douglas High School graduate, was our third presenter. Ram was employed in a child development daycare helping Kate and Janet, his employer and classroom teacher, respectively. He helped plan the daily activities, and he engaged the children in play and conversations. His favorite thing about SWEP was the cooking – making spaghetti – and spending time and playing games with the friends he met here.

Our last presenter was Anna, who told us that her job, this year, was a perfect fit, making it her favorite part of SWEP. Anna worked for Self-Enhancement Inc. as an art instructor, creating lessons and providing instruction to two classrooms of students. The company she worked for was “really great,” and she enjoyed the chance to connect with fellow Sweppies. Anna also enjoyed the Living with Blindness class and having an opportunity to hear what others have experienced.

Director Hale added that all four of the Portland cohort had graduated from high school this year. Ram, for one, was sometimes late to class because he was so dedicated to his work and it bumped up against his SWEP class times, causing him literally to have to run to class.

Salem and Portland’s cooking curriculum differed in that the Salem class had a single ingredient that they learned to cook three ways, while the Portland class’s focus was to prepare meals and feed their families.

Commissioner McCallum challenged the Sweppies to a question: If there was one thing *besides meeting in person* that the board could add to SWEP, what would that be?

Samuel suggested emphasizing the opportunities for either virtual or an in-person job as a way to interest more Oregonians.

Ram mentioned that he would appreciate the addition of more fun group activities.

Anna agreed with Samuel’s and Ram’s suggestions but told commissioners that it was a hard question because it had been such an especially good year.

Commissioner Babcock asked Samuel if his accessibility testing relied on particular guidelines. Samuel replied that it did not, at first, but that he had learned more of those from his employer and job coach as his skill level increased.

Chair McCallum agreed that document accessibility has been receiving a lot of attention in State government, and that it is a viable career choice.

Commissioner Nadeera Broome congratulated the students for the work they had done this summer.

Commissioner Christy Closson also congratulated the students and thanked them for appearing today.

Commissioner Vivian Carlile-Smith asked Ram what age groups he had worked with. Ram replied that the groups changed every week, but that he mostly worked with second graders.

Kennedy, unfortunately, had technical difficulty so couldn't rejoin the conversation, but Chair McCallum encouraged them to reach out to him through their counselor if they had feedback or suggestions.

Director Hale acknowledged her staff and those who were brought in to work alongside them. The students have had a high impact from their experience working with the team.

Director Johnson acknowledged Angel and her team for a second year of challenging circumstances of the pandemic. They certainly had a team approach, bringing in community partners, Spanish language and sign language interpreters for the celebrations today. SWEP has been an engaging experience for our students and employers and has shown the passion and commitment that our staff have to demonstrate such resiliency under very challenging circumstances.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

Executive Director Dacia Johnson presented the Executive Director report.

DONATIONS AND FINANCIAL REPORTS

CFO Kat Martin presented the Donations and Financial Status Reports.

These financial summaries are based upon activity through the end of May 2021.

Bequest and Donations Fund Statement: The cash balance, as of May 31st, was \$348,517.

As a costs savings measure to reduce our general fund obligation, the Legislature directed OCB to use a portion of donations to match the salary expense of one transition counselor. There is no remaining obligation to this special project and the unobligated donations balance is equivalent to the cash balance in the fund.

Financial Status Report: We project expenditure of all General Fund monies by June 30, marking the end of the biennium; Other Fund is projected to be under budget by \$788K; and Federal Fund under budget by \$2.8M. We project the Agency will be 13% under budget at the close of the biennium, \$3.6M less than the legislature approved for our use in 2019-21.

OCB's final Legislatively Approved Budget (LAB) for 2021-23 is with Governor Brown, awaiting signature.

There were no questions.

CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM UPDATE STATUS REPORT

Director Johnson discussed the case management system progress. The Go-Live date in mid-October is rapidly approaching, and the team has been meeting deliverables. The current case management system will be shut down October 1, followed by data conversion (expected completion Oct. 15), with the new Aware system launch October 18. Robust testing and extensive staff training will take place during the first half of October.

FEDERAL UPDATE

There has been some action regarding new Presidential appointments in the Department of Education which oversees the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). We await appointment of the RSA Commissioner by the new Administration.

The two-year spend period for the federal fiscal year (FFY) 2020 grant will run out at the end of September. We anticipate we may be short meeting the 15% expend required for Pre-Transition Youth Services. Much of the expense for this program occur during the Summer Work Experience Program (SWEPE), and usually includes expenses for residency in college dorms, independent living training, job coaching, and the wrap-around services delivered to youth in the Portland, Salem and community-based programs. The COVID-19 pandemic prevented in-person participation, in turn reducing the program expenditures considerably. By not meeting the 15 percent requirement for FFY 2020, we may receive a penalty that reduces a future year award.

This problem is not unique to Oregon but is being experienced by Vocational Rehabilitation agencies across the U.S. who are working hard, as a group, to generate Congressional support for financial relief.

COVID-19 EMERGENCY UPDATE

The Governor's Executive Orders regarding the pandemic have all been lifted. As of June 30, our offices remain closed to the public, and services are being delivered by appointment without any health-related restriction. Staff continue telecommuting to the maximum extent possible, but we have allowed them to come to the office to work and pick up supplies, meet with clients (by appointment), and perform necessary tasks.

The Governor has reinstated an indoor mask requirement for businesses and offices to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 delta variant.

At this time, we anticipate the official reopening of state government will be September 1 and the requirement for staff to telecommute will be rescinded, prompting a return to regular staffing and open hours.

Work Re-imagined: A task force has been formed to consider aspects of the combination of work performed from home (telecommuting) and being present in the office or fixed workspace. Composed of 40 individuals (agency directors, human resource professionals, and agency staff), this group looks at

the elements of the state government’s workforce, how work is conducted, and encourages possible solutions to blend remote and in-person work assignments.

We are holding conversations at the team level to gather staff input about what the future of remote work may look like.

There may be efficiencies we can gain being flexible about where the work is performed. Our internal measures assess the degree of outcomes and direct service and reflect our commitment to be available and accessible to the maximum extent possible to Oregonians who are blind. This will be the lens through which our future workplace model is reflected.

OLD BUSINESS

APPR COMMISSION BEST PRACTICES SURVEY RESULTS

Director Hale reported that the Best Practices Survey was completed by the commissioners in August. The results were unanimous that we had met all of the best practices for the report. A preliminary report was provided, in advance, and a final report will be presented at the October meeting. There were no questions.

BUSINESS ENTERPRISE PROGRAM UPDATE

Eric Morris presented an update on the Business Enterprise Program (BEP).

State government is beginning to reopen, and many municipalities and counties have already begun re-opening on a limited basis. Currently, six vending facilities have opened, all of them on a limited basis due to staffing still being reduced because of the pandemic.

We discussed resuming the self-service initiative rollout in September at the recent Business Enterprise Consumer Committee (BECC, Elected Committee) meeting, deploying new vending machines to vendors.

Silver Falls Café – This is a new venture for BEP, serving customers in a state park. June’s gross sales surpassed June 2019’s revenue by 41%. We anticipate Silver Falls July performance to be 25% over its July 2019 totals.

Chair McCallum commended Director Morris and the commission for BECC’s active participation and remarking that, listening to the meeting, it sounds like a more collaborative and positive relationship. Also, in listening to the (BECC) meetings, he’s overheard that building occupants, while working fewer days in the office, may be revising habits and eating out more often than pre-pandemic levels, which could be reveal a business opportunity.

Commissioner Babcock asked Director Morris if OCB is exploring alternative locations at this time, or if individual vendors are looking at what options they may have? Director Morris replied that we are taking a harder look at this. Morris speculated that other agencies are assessing how they’re running their operations, causing some to be more open to new operating ideas.

NEW BUSINESS

OVERVIEW OF 2021-23 LEGISLATIVELY APPROVED BUDGET

Executive Director Johnson reviewed the 2021-23 budget which was recently approved by the Legislature, pending during the final auditing process:

General Fund: \$5,658,523 (down 11%)
Other Fund: \$1,079,323 (down 47%)
Federal Fund: \$17,612,064 (down 7%)
Positions: 69 (66.42 FTE)

The reduction of Other Funds was brought about, primarily, due to the increase of the General Fund. Although the General Fund appears decreased, once the cost of the Case Management System Update was removed (which was primarily General Fund), the replacement of the Third-party Cooperative Agreements funds brought about an increase in General Fund.

This represents the most significant change in our budget. Preemployment transition services agreements were financed by advancing funds based on estimated expenses for NW Regional ESD and Portland Public Schools. Under the new plan, they will provide services, and we will reimburse them based on actual cost.

STATE PROCUREMENT CARD (SPOTS) AUDIT RESULTS

Clay France presented a report on the State Procurement Card (SPOTS) Audit. Only one finding was reported: Following termination of one employee cardholder, the SPOTS account wasn't closed for 14 days which represents some risk to the Agency. The Agency is drafting a procedure to follow when employee cardholders terminate employment.

Commissioner Carlile-Smith asked who had possession of the card after the employee left. France answered that the card had been turned in to the SPOTS coordinator who shredded the card, but the account should have been closed at the same time.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Pursuant to ORS 192.660(2)(i) this meeting or portions thereof may be held in Executive Session to review and evaluate the employment-related performance of the Executive Director.

The meeting was reconvened at 2:42 pm.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Chair McCallum adjourned the meeting at 2:42 pm.