

Oregon Commission for the Blind
Regular Meeting – October 1, 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
Lillian Goodman
Laurel Hudson

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – July 30, 2021 (Action Item)

Chair McCallum asked for a motion to approve the July 30, 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.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

Executive Director Dacia Johnson presented the Executive Director report.

NATIONAL DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS (NDEAM) MONTH

Celebrated each year in October, Governor Brown has issued a proclamation based on this year's theme "America's Recovery: Powered by Inclusion." The proclamation acknowledges the disproportionate impact from the COVID-19 pandemic that has been experienced by disabled individuals, who have lost employment more often than other workers.

Director Johnson acknowledged the Agency's focus that Oregonians who are blind may continue to contribute to and participate in the workforce and remain engaged in their communities – despite the challenges imposed on all of us by the pandemic. The Agency appreciates staff members who are enduring all of these circumstances and continue to provide exemplary services to Oregonians who are blind.

Chair McCallum added that White Cane Awareness Day, also, is October 15.

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: Our cash balance in the fund as of June 30, 2021, was \$350,187 and \$329,382 at August 31, 2021. Our unobligated donations balance after this adjustment is \$329,382.

Financial Status Report: The Agency budget for 2019-21 was \$27,433,585. Based on actual transactions for the 24 months ended June 30, 2021, combined with encumbered amounts at year-end, the biennium closed out with General Fund underspent by \$137, Other Fund under \$747 thousand and Federal Fund under budget by \$2.5 million.

In total, the Agency concludes Biennium 19-21 under budget by 11.7% which is \$3.2M less than what the legislature had approved for our use in the period. Categories where material variances existed include:

- Total personal services under budget by 7% or \$1.1M.
- Services & Supplies under by 27% or \$2.3M of which \$1.76M relates to Business Enterprise Program vending machines we had spending authority to acquire but, due to the pandemic, no ability to procure and deploy.
- Capital Outlay under budget by 56% or \$24K.
- Special Payments for the biennium were \$4.9M which was 5.8% or \$286K under budget.

OCB's legislatively approved budget for 2021-23, including end of session adjustments for statewide service charges, is \$24,349,910, 69 positions and 66.42 full-time equivalents (FTE).

Based upon two months of activity through August 2021, should constraints on our ability to provide direct services continue, a variance representing an underspend of 17.5% of our Legislatively Approved Budget would exist.

Chair McCallum asked if the underspend on the basic services, 7.4 percent, was shared by other states' vocational rehabilitation programs? Ms. Martin replied that most of our variance was due to vacant and unfilled positions. Director Johnson added that, during the first year of the pandemic, we were unsure if the Legislature would direct us to reduce or curtail services so we did not fill positions until directed that we could move ahead.

There were no questions.

CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM UPDATE STATUS REPORT

Director Johnson discussed the case management system progress. The project is on time and on budget. September 30 was the final day to transact activity in our old system. The new Aware system will begin operating, after two weeks of data conversion and testing, October 18.

Angel Hale, Director of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, described the system in terms of accessibility after specialized training for staff who use adaptive technology, and told us it is regarded more accessible than our prior case management system. The Aware system's online software is provided by Alliance Enterprises and is currently in use by 37 states' vocational rehabilitation agencies.

FEDERAL UPDATE

Director Johnson mentioned the Senate Appropriations to increase the Federal Debt Ceiling, and that it would not impact the Agency. Fortunately, September 30, the House and Senate approved the Extending Government Funding and Delivering Emergency Assistance Act which continues funding at the 2021 FFY levels if the FY2022 appropriations bill has not been enacted.

There has been no movement regarding appointment of an RSA commissioner, the presidential appointee who will oversee the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) under the U.S. Department of Education.

We continue working to receive flexibilities regarding our federal awards for 2021. Our Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) requires that 15% of the federal grant be spent for youth services. The COVID-19 pandemic greatly impacted our Summer Work Experience Program two summers in a row, eliminating elements such as live-in accommodations for students, transportation, orientation and mobility training, in-person job coaching, onsite work experiences, and extra-curricular participatory events

The federal grant requires a 15 percent minimum spend on specific services under Pre-ETS. Flexibility allows one additional year for spending to meet the 15% level, which we nearly met last month for the 2020 period. However, we did not begin to spend 2021 until today, the first day of the flexibility period. Being unable to spend down this surplus may eventually require us to return funds to the grantor and to the U.S. Treasury.

Many state Vocational Rehabilitation and blind agencies are experiencing the same problem, and Congress is the sole entity that holds authority to enable broader flexibilities.

Commissioner Babcock asked Director Johnson to define Pre-ETS, and explain where the 15 percent funds need to be spent. Director Johnson described Pre-Employment Training Services as services for high school-age youth and teach self-advocacy, career preparation, job-related skills, and provide training services. Consider the in-person costs of the SWEP program compared with the scaled-back virtual program of the past two years where we've realized a lot of savings but not spent the 15% minimum specified by the grant.

REOPENING STATE GOVERNMENT

The re-opening date for State Agencies has been extended to January 3, 2022. Services continue to be delivered by appointment, and our offices are otherwise closed to the public.

STATE GOVERNMENT'S VACCINE MANDATE

Governor Brown's Executive Order 21-29 (August 13, 2021) requires that all Executive Branch employees must be vaccinated or otherwise qualify for limited exceptions by October 18, 2021. Employees must

submit their vaccine records information or meet requirements to apply for a religious or medical exemption.

In our confidential HR system, Workday, employees will first acknowledge their acceptance of the policy, then provide data regarding their vaccination dates and lot numbers, and provide a copy of their proof of vaccination.

Chair McCallum asked if we anticipate the possible loss of any employees as a result of the mandate. We do not anticipate that any staff members will be unable to meet the mandate's requirements and thus be separated from the organization.

Commissioner Carlile-Smith asked whether the employee could simply show the card to the Agency. Director Johnson described their card and the adhesive labels that show the date each vaccine was administered and the lot number(s) of each dose, and that it is this information the employee must be enter into the HR system. The third step is to upload a picture of the card's front and back for verification. Confidentiality of the material is such that, at Agency level, we will not be able to access the employees' vaccine documentation.

The Executive Order will also require the Agency to obtain attestation that our contractors and their employees have also received the vaccination or meet the requirements for exception.

Chair McCallum asked, and Director Johnson reiterated that this will be far reaching so as to apply to the BEP vending facility managers (VFM) and their employees and subcontractors.

Chair Babcock asked how the proof of vaccination is managed for VFMs and contractors. Director Johnson replied that the VFMs and subcontractors will complete and submit an attestation form certifying that they have met the vaccine requirements. The forms have been sent to VFMs and the approved subcontractors, and each VFM will be responsible for themselves and their employees, as well as their subcontractors and subcontractors' employees.

NEW BUSINESS

AGENCY SERVICE DELIVERY UPDATE

Each of the program directors delivered an update on their respective programs, addressing:

- How services are being delivered.
- How we determine in person/by appointment services vs. virtual.
- Challenges presented by the pandemic.
- Opportunities presented by the pandemic.
- Recognition of the teams for during this challenging time.

Presentations we made by:

Angel Hale – Vocational Rehabilitation

Angel Hale – presented on behalf of Jonathan Scrimenti, Orientation and Career Center for the Blind

Malinda Carlson – Independent Living Services

Eric Morris – Business Enterprise Program

Commissioner Broome asked if the Center’s technology classes are all online now. Director Hale replied that they have been online and that the training center continues to adapt their methods to maintain safe distancing alongside supporting efficient skills improvement. Some personal training has also been provided around the state, when possible.

Commissioner Carlile-Smith asked Eric Morris how many managers are able to enter their facilities. Director Morris answered that some managers have worked through the whole pandemic, and that five facilities are open at this time.

AGENCY WORK REIMAGINED FRAMEWORK

Executive Director Johnson told the board about the steps the Agency is taking to integrate continued telework, to some degree, for our staff. Our goal is to identify the work tasks that may be completed anywhere, whether at the office, in the field, or in an employee’s home workspace and to continue to permit remote work to the maximum extent possible. This effort was initiated at the Governor’s office with a task force made up of leaders from more than twenty agencies and areas of state government. Their recommendations will guide agencies, and we have formed our own task force to form procedures to allow equitable documentation and consideration of these requests as they come in from employees. Several state processes are at play such as Workday, and the State automobile policy. It makes sense that we would “reimagine” the way we deliver services, as well, as we consider new ways to deploy our staff. The Labor Agreement contains information, as well, and that priority must be integrated into any plans the state finally executes. We will ensure that our mission to serve Oregonians who are blind is maintained, or strengthened, while we make these changes.

There were no questions.

STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS FOR 22-25

We are preparing to begin our strategic planning process for the 2022-25 period. This project is undertaken every two years to develop a plan and schedule for the coming three-year period. After nearly two years of pandemic thinking, we are again planning long term outcomes, the basis of these will be guided by the Commissioners over our next few meetings.

OLD BUSINESS

BUSINESS ENTERPRISE PROGRAM UPDATE

Vending Service Initiative – The self-service initiative is again the main focus of the program, working to get VFMs back into the process of selecting locations and developing plans to deploy the fifty vending machines for each facility.

We are hearing that VFMs are hesitant to return to working, but also hearing from building staff, building management and our partners in those buildings that they will want services when workers return.

Chair McCallum asked if there would be any VFMs who would not have access to 50 machines because their facility is still closed? Director Morris explained that most vending routes have multiple locations

they may choose from, and a greater issue is selecting the optimal, most lucrative locations (and leaving the others to subcontractors).

Because some routes' incomes have eroded during the pandemic, some routes will be combined to create a larger opportunity for individual VFMs.

Reorganizing Operations – The pandemic accelerated the conversion to micro-markets from café-type food service operations. This allows resale of fresh “grab-and-go” items without requiring the concentration of staff and resources of a café. Several locations are being converted to micro-markets.

Reopening Public Buildings – January 3 is still the date we anticipate the State of Government office buildings will reopen to the public. Multnomah County plans to reopen operations October 18. Federal agencies and buildings have implemented a vaccine mandate, so we are working to remain flexible as various landlords reopen their buildings.

REVIEW OF ANNUAL PERFORMANCE MEASURE PROGRESS REPORT

Angel Hale reported the results of the Annual Performance Measure Progress Report. There were no questions.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Chair McCallum adjourned the meeting at 3:00 pm.