

**State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)
June 25-26, 2025, Quarterly Meeting
Hilton Garden Inn – Troy, New York**

Topic/ Key Points
<u>Day 1 Call to Order – Present:</u> Marilee Boylan (Remote), KerryAnn Buchanan, Frank Falatyn, Bin Feng, Devin Fernandez, Emily Foss, Alan Gallagher, Valerie Gambino-Carelli, Jenny Hutkowski, Dawn Kalleberg, Kenneth Klassert, Mary Lafrance, Adella Lin-Kravitz, Ryan Lynch, Tonya Robinson-Mayer, Robert Statham, Toni Sullivan, Jeffrey Tamburo, Tonia Weichmann, Stephanie Woodward, Melinda Dolezal, Amanda Hladik, Julia Kelly, Ceylane Meyers-Ruff, Linda Schramm, Sheena Bassett, Lorie Boyd, Jumoke Branco, Pam Brehm-Bisaillon, Vanessa Raville, Julianne Venneman, Caitlin Ohlson <u>Excused Day 1:</u> Naomi Brickel, Talanda Jackson-Franklin, Meesha Johnson, Brenda Shannon <u>Absent Day 1:</u> <u>Guests/Public Day 1:</u> David Morgan (Remote), Ryane McAuliffe Straus
<u>Day 2 Call to Order – Present:</u> Marilee Boylan (Remote), KerryAnn Buchanan, Frank Falatyn, Bin Feng, Devin Fernandez, Emily Foss, Alan Gallagher, Valerie Gambino-Carelli, Jenny Hutkowski, Dawn Kalleberg, Kenneth Klassert, Mary LaFrance, Adella Lin-Kravitz, Ryan Lynch, Tonya Robinson-Mayer, Robert Statham, Toni Sullivan, Jeffrey Tamburo, Tonia Weichmann, Stephanie Woodward, Julia Kelly, Linda Schramm, Sheena Bassett, Lorie Boyd, Jumoke Branco, Pam Brehm-Bisaillon, Vanessa Raville, Julianne Venneman, Caitlin Ohlson <u>Excused Day 2:</u> Ceylane Meyers-Ruff, Naomi Brickel, Melinda Dolezal, Amanda Hladik, Talanda Jackson-Franklin, Meesha Johnson, Brenda Shannon <u>Absent Day 2:</u> <u>Guests/ Public Day 2:</u> Ryane McAuliffe Straus
<u>Review of the agenda:</u> Toni Sullivan
<u>Review and approve March 5-6, 2025 minutes:</u> March 5-6, 2025 minutes reviewed. Tonya Robinson-Mayer motioned to approve. Robert Statham seconded. All voted to approve.
<u>Public Comment</u> No public comment.
<u>Additional Agenda Items:</u> None
<u>Presentation:</u> <u>Due Process</u> <i>David Morgan, Manager of Quality Assurance & Monitoring Unit, ACCES-VR</i> <i>Sheena Bassett, Senior Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, Service Delivery, ACCES-VR</i> Due Process is a customer protection supporting informed choice in vocational rehabilitation services and person-centered planning. It is the mechanism for resolution of disputes between the customer and the state vocational rehabilitation agency, and includes mediation, fair hearings and support from the Client Assistance Program. The presentation outlines the seven types of complaints which may be filed against the state agency, steps involved in each method of resolution, and general data regarding due process for the past several years.
<u>Presentation:</u> <u>ACCES-VR's Portion of the PY 2024-2027 NYS WIOA Combined State Plan Two-Year Modifications</u>

Linda Schramm, Assistant Commissioner of ACCES

Julianne Venneman, Manager of Policy, Training and Interagency Collaboration

- ACCES-VR participates in the two-year modification of the WIOA Combined State Plan as a required partner (Title IV) and the State Rehabilitation Council plays a significant role in the Modification. ACCES-VR is asking for assistance from the Council in both designing and contributing to the Public Input Opportunities to be held at the end of 2025. ACCES-VR outlines the five current priorities:
 - improve the quality of ACCES-VR Services,
 - increase services to target populations: students with disabilities, unserved and underserved groups,
 - increase the percentage of individuals who obtain a recognized postsecondary credential, effectively serve businesses, and
 - increase the employment rate and earnings for individuals with disabilities served by ACCES-VR.

ACCES UPDATES

Ceylane Meyers-Ruff, Deputy Commissioner

Linda Schramm, Assistant Commissioner

Office of Special Education and ACCES (OSEA)

- One year has passed since the restructuring began to merge The Office of Special Education and ACCES to create OSEA. The unit will officially be known as OSEA and takes effect in January 2025; there was firm consensus from the start neither unit would absorb the other. A vision is beginning to develop for OSEA because the Commissioner of Education wanted a seamless transition to OSEA and areas of collaboration between the two units are beginning to be identified. Currently, the beginning and the end of the educational journey are a focus. Early intervention for individuals with disabilities in pre-kindergarten and creating more opportunities for these children is very important. Transition to ACCES from schools after graduation is also a critical area for identifying challenges.

Conference on High School Transformation

- New York attended the conference on High School Transformation with states such as California, Indiana, Kentucky, Missouri and Washington. There is a focus on transitioning to a single diploma for all students, and a need to focus on what this means for individuals with disabilities, as well as adult learners. Moving to competency-based assessments should be a benefit for individuals with disabilities. ACCES-VR would like the SRC members to begin thinking about the effects of this change.

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) Summit

- ACCES-VR held several Pre-ETS summits, meeting with both staff and vendors with a focus on ways to better engage with all customers, particularly students with disabilities. The rules and federal regulations regarding Pre-ETS and serving students with disabilities is very different than serving adults, and ACCES-VR was pleased to hear everyone's input.

Corrective Action Plan

- ACCES-VR had a monitoring visit from Rehabilitation Services Administration last year. The draft report was issued, ACCES-VR identified any errors in the report, and a certain amount of time is allowed for ACCES-VR to prepare a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) to address the findings in the report. RSA typically provides a template for the CAP to ACCES-VR ahead of the deadline. The deadline was approaching, and the Assistant Commissioner emailed RSA to request the template and was told it would be sent soon. Several days later, ACCES-VR received an email saying RSA had created the CAP and approved it. The first quarterly report will be due on July 1st.

- Data validation is an area where ACCES-VR can improve. Written controls are available for staff to follow when entering information into Aware, before the data is reported to RSA, and all the information must be verified before it is submitted, which takes considerable staff resources. ACCES-VR was focused on the need to make data-driven decisions before the visit and has begun to make changes to improve this area. There is a pilot project to have staff scanning information into Aware. The Quality Assurance Unit and Data Unit have developed an online targeted review form, to begin a data feedback loop which will allow ACCES-VR to see in which areas staff need to improve their understanding of how to enter and record data in Aware to accurately reflect customer outcomes.
- Timeliness in reporting is an area where ACCES-VR can improve. Currently, ACCES-VR relies on a vouchering system from vendors, and maintaining positive relationships with vendors is key to this. Improving vendor understanding of timeliness and accuracy in billing is also critical to timely reporting. Many vendors have very good ideas, so ACCES-VR is considering holding vendor focus groups to share information and identify how to work directly with vendors to better support them.
- Contract management, Monitoring and Oversight is also very important. RSA found some issues with Pre-ETS vouchers and agreements, so ACCES-VR is looking at adding internal controls regarding forming contracts, to ensure only allowable costs are included and create an approval process.

Federal Changes

- The federal budget process for the current year began in October 2024, and the budget was not on time. There have been continuing resolutions, but they expire as of June 30, 2025. There is no information on what will occur at that time. A new budget must be passed, beginning July 1, 2025 (to end on June 30, 2026). ACCES-VR did receive all its funding for 2025. As the budget reconciliation process continues, cuts to certain programs may be included, such as Medicaid, supported employment, Adult Education, CAP, etc. It is too early to know which programs will lose funding or the amount of the change in funding. There is a large amount of advocacy underway for all these programs, and information on that will be shared.

SRC Partnership and Recommendations

- The SRC contains many individuals who bring a diverse set of skills, talents, perspectives and experiences to the Council. It is important for new members to transition when they join the Council from their personal experience with ACCES-VR to a representative of a specific seat for the entire state of New York. The lens is different, and it is important to consider what it means to be an SRC member and the role of the Council in its relationship to ACCES-VR.
- Changes in the federal budget and funding cuts to certain programs mean ACCES-VR will rely on the SRC for advice, recommendations and input. If ACCES-VR needs to prioritize services, and decisions need to be made, the SRC can help inform priorities and how best to deliver services to all customers.
- A recommendation was made from the SRC to the ACCES-VR, and it referenced several areas of note:
 - Fiduciary Responsibility- fiduciary usually references finances, which is not part of the role of the SRC;
 - Public Hearings- fine as a recommendation, but there is a specific role/place for these;
 - Date to Respond- unable to respond by date given because there are questions about the recommendation.
- Discussing the recommendation for transparency and there is a process for recommendations to occur but everyone should be updated on that process; ACCES-VR

wants to be proactive on sharing where the SRC can be helpful and lend expertise. ACCES-VR will be looking for feedback on the following:

- Participant Involvement Policy
- Order of Selection Policy
- Significance of Disability Policy
- Federal Regulations regarding Order of Selection
- Order of Selection is a comprehensive process, used to prioritize the delivery of services when there are not sufficient resources to serve all eligible individuals. Whether or not New York State enters order of Selection, updating the policy and understanding the regulations is important, and it is important to share with the SRC so it can make informed recommendations.

SRC Comments/Questions:

Comment: Really appreciate the measured way you communicated everything occurring at the federal level.

Answer: Thank you.

Question: Is the 2026 Federal Budget considering eliminating Supported Employment services?

Answer: Yes

Question: ACCES-VR mentioned assisting High Schools with transitions for student with disabilities. I think of High School as training for individuals who are college bound and Career Technical Education as training for those who are job bound.

Answer: From ACCES-VR's perspective, we are considering all students with disabilities, and that means we need to serve those who want college and those who want to go directly to jobs. We are having conversations about making Career Technical Education available for all students; sometimes we hear CTE is not safe for students with disabilities, but all means all. Whatever support we can offer for students with disabilities, we need to offer, so they can have all the same options as students not with disabilities.

Question: The Pre-ETS Summits were wonderful; it is obvious a lot of time and effort went into them. Many vendors are talking about struggling to connect with ACCES-VR—would you consider having some young people do a panel and participate in the next summit? It could be valuable to hear directly from students with disabilities; they might be able to address questions and provide a perspective ACCES-VR staff cannot.

Answer: Yes, ACCES-VR has discussed that. There is a Youth Engagement Transition Initiative (YETI) in each state, and ACCES-VR has thought about perhaps engaging the YETI here to participate in something similar. The TAYS staff has also had similar ideas, so ACCES-VR is going to explore that further.

Interagency Reports:

American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services (AIVRS):

- Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation (TVR) is excited to announce its upcoming 24th Annual disABILITY Awareness Day to be held on Thursday, August 7, 2025 from 10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m. at the Teionkwarihwaienawa:kön (Community Services Building).

- If you are interested in registering for our event, please use this link: [24th Annual disABILITY Awareness Day Event Registration](#). The deadline to register is Monday, July 28, 2025 at 5:00pm.

Technology Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities (TRAID):

- TRAID collected the following data for ACCES-VR activities between 10/1/2024-6/24/2025:
- 161 loans of 212 devices
- 19 demonstrations
- Cost savings of \$14,753.16
- 50 devices added to the inventory
- TRAID participated in the Association of People Supporting Employment First APSE Annual Conference and presented on assistive technology and accessibility for job seekers. Staff from the Long Island TRAID Center provided an overview to the Training & Accessibility Assistance Workgroup (TAAG) on what an ideal assistive technology evaluation looks like, and how staff can assist with the process. TRAID will be providing a presentation at the NYS Library for *A Library Accessibility Day of Learning* on July 9, 2025.

Disability Rights New York/Client Assistance Program/Protection & Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security (DRNY/CAP/BAPSS):

- The Client Assistance Program at Disability Rights New York is continuing to serve clients of ACCES-VR and The New York State Commission for the Blind. Since the last SRC meeting, Disability Rights New York has received calls from clients seeking assistance on self-employment issues, transportation funding, financial needs review help, and college and/or other training support from ACCES-VR. Disability Rights New York is currently focusing on their outreach efforts across the state tabling at as many events as possible to ensure that we are spreading awareness for such wonderful programs that are available to support individuals with disabilities.

New York State Office of Mental Health (OMH):

- No update.

New York State Independent Living Council, Inc. (NYSILC):

- This spring brought significant transition for NYSILC. In April, our Executive Director Denise Dinoto stepped down to focus on her health. We are heartbroken to share Denise passed away on June 8, 2025. Denise was a passionate advocate and dedicated leader in the disability rights movement, and her legacy continues to guide our work.
- Following her departure, NYSILC launched a search for a new Executive Director. After a thoughtful and inclusive process, the Council voted to approve a new Executive Director on June 6, 2025. We will officially announce the new Executive Director this week. Our incoming Executive Director brings a strong track record of leadership and impact in the disability community, and we are excited for the vision they will bring to NYSILC. Read a letter from the new Executive Director here: <https://nysilc.org/news/current-news/291-a-welcome-letter-from-nysilcs-new-executive-director>.
- Additional updates:
 - NYSILC shared ACCES-VR's SRC member recruitment information through the Independent Living Center (ILC) network to help boost outreach.
 - NYSILC is also currently recruiting new Council members. Applications are open through July 1, 2025, and we encourage SRC members and ACCES-VR partners to share this opportunity with their networks.

- NYSILC is partnering with the New York Association on Independent Living (NYAIL) for a statewide conference this September focused on leadership, advocacy, and innovation in the disability rights space. This will be a great opportunity for ACCES-VR participants to engage in advocacy workshops and explore employment opportunities in the independent living field.
- The term of the current liaison to the SRC from NYSILC ends next year, so we are also beginning the process of identifying the next NYSILC member to serve as the Council's representative to the SRC. The appointment process can take time, so we are working proactively to ensure a smooth transition.
- NYSILC is grateful for our continued partnership with ACCES-VR and remains committed to advancing leadership and opportunity for disabled New Yorkers across the state.

New York State Commission for the Blind (NYSCB):

- NYSCB has a new residential contract set to take effect on July 1, 2025. NYSCB continue to utilize many residential programs in New York and other states. These have been vital in the training of our participants and have led to successful outcomes.
- NYSCB is in the process of creating an Order of Selection (OOS) Policy in the event we need to pursue this process due to lack of fiscal and/or staffing resources. This is in draft currently and will be reviewed by the NYSCB State Rehab Council, RSA and OCFS for final approval. NYSCB is hopeful not to enter OOS, but wants to be prepared in the event it is needed.

New York State Education Department- Office of Special Education (OSE):

- Office of Special Education has released new resources to assist committees on special education in making decisions about a student with a disability's eligibility to participate in the New York State Alternate Assessment.
 - [Eligibility Criteria for Participation in the New York State Alternate Assessment \(NYSAA\) Policy Brief](#)
 - [New York State Alternate Assessment \(NYSAA\) Decision-Making Tool](#)
 - [New York State Alternate Assessment \(NYSAA\) Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- The Office of Special Education continues to work closely with ACCES-VR on expanding the implementation of Pre-ETS across the State. Collaborative meetings are occurring regularly and informational and training resources for school districts are under development.
- The Commissioner's Advisory Panel for Special Education Services (CAP) will be seeking new members. Please visit the [CAP website](#) for more information.

New York State Department of Labor (DOL):

- No update.

New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD):

- The new Pathway to Employment regulations effective 4/1/25 and administrative memo effective 4/24/25 include the following streamlined content and new features. The new regulations allow for 425 hours or 12 months (prior was 278 hours or 12 months) and an extension if needed but must remain within the lifetime limit of 556 hours and 24 months. The new ADM eliminates the limit on indirect services hours which ultimately reduces administrative burden. Pathway to Employment requires at least 3 community vocational experiences, now with a minimum of 30% of total service time in community vocational experiences when the person is enrolled in the service 100 hours or more. Providers are required to complete and submit a Pathway to Employment Career, Vocational and Transition

Plan which summarizes the discovery and learning and makes recommendations as to next steps such as referral to ACCES-VR or OPWDD employment and vocational services.

- OPWDD is pleased to announce that a two-year funding contract for a newly developed Community Engagement and Career Planning for Day Habilitation staff and management training has been approved and allocated. OPWDD's current training partner, Eleversity, will launching the new live web-based trainings in June 2025.
 - The purpose is to train day habilitation services management and staff to teach interpersonal skills, safety skills, build independence, and increase community engagement to better prepare people for work.
 - The training will also feature examples of people with a variety of skills and abilities who are working and their road to success.
 - Management and staff will learn about the various employment and vocational services options offered by ACCES-VR and OPWDD, and how to transition people to these services in a timely manner.
 - Currently, day habilitation agencies have challenges freeing staff up from direct supports to attend new trainings. OPWDD is developing strategies to incentivize sending staff to trainings and developing executive leadership training with the remaining funding allocated to this project.
- ACCES-VR, NYSCB and OPWDD have established an interagency partnership in response to the Federal Joint Communication to State and Local Governments dated August 3, 2022, which addresses "Resource Leveraging & Service Coordination to Increase Competitive Integrated Employment for Individual with Disabilities".
- The shared goals include:
 - Increase coordinated efforts between our agencies to customize services and resources for success employment outcomes
 - Improve transitions between agencies
 - Implement best practices and new projects
- Each agency has designated representatives to support job seekers with disabilities to receive effective, efficient, and seamless government-funded services. Agency representatives have met on three occasions to build relationships, establish process, and develop a secure platform to track, triage and respond to requests for concurrent services/funding. Additional district-specific meetings have been held to exchange information and resources, provide coordinated technical assistance, and respond to requests for concurrent services.
- Service providers/vendors were informed of this new initiative during two Leadership Conferences hosted by OPWDD in November 2024. Agency representatives have since received several inquiries which has enabled the group to test and refine the established process. A shared communication platform is in development.
- The agencies will revisit the established processes when the updated Memorandum of Interagency Agreement (MOIA) is adopted, and the Employment First Implementation plans are implemented.
- OPWDD and Eleversity recently hosted an "Best Practice" session that featured the Small Business Development Centers (SBDC) project funded by the Council on Developmental Disabilities that trains people interested in self-employment about planning, researching and starting a business. The target audience were supported employment providers.

- The NYS Center for Disability Entrepreneurship at the Farmingdale State College SBDC will continue to offer their “IS ENTREPRENEURSHIP FOR YOU?” online seminar for people with disabilities until the grant period ends on 12/31/25. Employment Support Professionals are also invited to attend the sessions with the people they support. The project also includes linking people with their regional SBDC’s for additional technical assistance and educating the Small Business Development Centers (SBDC) on resources to support entrepreneurs with disabilities after the grant period has ended. For more information on the project:
- <https://cdd.ny.gov/entrepreneurship-people-developmental-disabilities>
- OPWDD’s presentation also featured introductory information about how OPWDD and ACCES-VR services may be available to support a person starting a small business. The session included other resources and regulations related to self-employment.
- In acknowledgment of the importance of the voices and experience of those who receive services from OPWDD and their families, OPWDD has revitalized the Office of Advocacy which reports to the Commissioner’s Office. This office is led by Director of Advocacy Lisa Salamy who began the position on February 10.
- The Office of Advocacy currently has two components, The Advocacy and Peer Support Unit which consists of 5 Peer Specialists and 1 Individual and Family Advocate and overseeing the contract for the Independent Ombudsman Program.
 - Peer Specialist will:
 - Advocate alongside off and behalf of people who receive services;
 - Strengthen the capacity of self-advocates and the self-advocacy community to represent their own interests; educate people about civil rights; and,
 - Ensure that decision-makers consider the perspectives of people with lived experience by participating in staff training, providing input on policies, and procedures, and working with OWPDD leadership.
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SRC Business:

Committee Reports

Executive Committee Report:

- The Executive Report Committee reviewed the Recommendation form and is asking for suggestions or changes to the form by the next meeting in July.

Annual Report Committee:

- The Annual Report Committee will be collecting the responses submitting using the new survey form regarding committee accomplishments and success stories. For clarification, the Annual Report Committee discussed the different between accomplishments and success stories, and decided the accomplishment is focused on specific efforts where the success story is focused on the outcome.

Business Engagement:

- The Business Engagement Committee had a committee member meet with Joseph Tedesco, Manager of Business Relations and Independent Living at ACCES-VR regarding internship opportunities. The committee was unable to submit the accomplishments and success story form for annual report, so they will need to follow up.

Membership:

- The Membership Committee created a new PowerPoint for New Member Orientation, updated the Application and set aside specific dates to conduct interviews of applicants in August.

Pre-ETS:

- The Pre-ETS Committee reviewed the Recommendation form and think the committees should utilize their liaisons as part of the process. They submitted the accomplishments and success story form for annual report.

Quality Assurance Improvement:

- The Quality Assurance and Improvement (QAI) Committee made a recommendation to ACCES-VR and believe it went smoothly.
- The Committee also believes individuals should be encouraged to make public comment. There are several changes suggested, including extending the time for public comment, clearly indicating the date, time and Zoom link for public comment directly on the SRC webpage, increasing the length of each comment allowed (change from two to five minutes), including information to request reasonable accommodations, and allowing individuals to public comment with pre-registering in advance.
- The Committee requests the SRC be directly involved in the procurement process for the needs assessment.
- The Committee reiterates its desire to hold listening sessions.

Question: Can the Committee put these suggestions in an email to the ACCES-VR administrative liaison so they can be attended to individually and any follow up needed to implement the change can be discussed?

Answer: Yes, the Committee will send an email.

Motion to adjourn: Frank Krotschinsky. Second: Valerie Gambino Carelli.

Old Business: None

**Next Meeting September 3-4, 2025
Hilton Garden Inn, Troy, New York**