

**State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), December 6-7, 2022, Quarterly Meeting  
Albany Hilton Garden Inn – Albany Medical Center**

**Topic/ Key Points**

**Day 1 Call to Order (Present):** Lorie Boyd, Pam Brehm-Bisaillon, Naomi Brickel, Megan Brown, Sebastian Chittilappilly, Joseph Delgado, Melinda Dolezal, Alan Gallagher, Valerie Gambino-Carelli, Peter Herrig, Jenny Hutkowski, Julia Kelly, Anthony Morano, Hillary Nichols, Evelyn Pugh, Jennifer Semonite, Brenda Shannon, Andy Sink, Robert Statham, Toni Sullivan, Ellice Switzer, Diane Woodward

**Excused:** Ceylane Meyers-Ruff, Linda Schramm, Connie Glover, Nancy Grant, Kathleen Grosvenor

**Absent:** None

**Guests/Public:** None

**Day 2 Call to Order (Present):** Lorie Boyd, Pam Brehm-Bisaillon, Naomi Brickel, Megan Brown, Joseph Delgado, Melinda Dolezal, Alan Gallagher, Valerie Gambino-Carelli, Nancy Grant, Peter Herrig, Jenny Hutkowski, Julia Kelly, Ceylane Meyers-Ruff, Anthony Morano, Hillary Nichols, Evelyn Pugh, Jennifer Semonite, Brenda Shannon, Andy Sink, Robert Statham, Toni Sullivan, Ellice Switzer, Diane Woodward

**Excused:** Sebastian Chittilappilly, Connie Glover, Kathleen Grosvenor, Linda Schramm

**Absent:** None

**Guests/Public:** Kim Hill, Kimberly Buchan

**Review of the agenda:** Ellice Switzer

**Additional agenda items:** None

**Review and approve September 2022 minutes:**

- Minutes reviewed. No abstentions. All voted in favor of approval.

**Public Comment:**

- None

**Election of Officers:**

- Elections of officers held.
- Joseph Delgado was elected as Chair.
- Hillary Nichols was elected as Vice-Chair.
- All voted in favor of approval, no abstentions.

**Interagency Updates:**

**Advisory Council on Postsecondary Education for Students with Disabilities:**

The Advisory Council on Postsecondary Education is committed to providing support at the college level and shared there are approximately 86,000 college students with disabilities in New York State.

- The Advisory Council discussed high school student exit summaries. The purpose of the student exit summary is to provide the student with a written report that includes essential information to consider, as the student transitions from secondary school.
- Work is being done on identifying best practices when completing student exit summaries, including providing the most updated and relevant information on individual student abilities, skills, needs, and limitations. Additionally, the Advisory Council is discussing the possibility of

recommending increasing uniformity in the information provided on the student exit summaries and including information on available postsecondary (adult) resources.

SRC Question/Comment:

The use of ACCES-VR self-advocacy services through Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) are one method to increase student's skills in attaining the services they need as they transition from high school. Teaching self-advocacy in 9<sup>th</sup> grade is suggested.

ACCES-VR Comment/Response:

Self-advocacy is a critical area, and ACCES-VR agrees with starting the teaching of self-advocacy at a younger age. This would allow for skills to be incrementally developed and supported.

SRC Question/Comment:

Can Pre-ETS be provided in college?

ACCES-VR Comment/Response:

Yes, for students up to the age of 22. Pre-ETS are for students with disabilities up to the age of 22 in secondary or postsecondary education programs including college, vocational training, etc.

SRC Question/Comment:

There are some areas in the education system which lack knowledge of employment opportunities and the expectations of employment outcomes in the community. How can ACCES-VR better educate the schools?

ACCES-VR Comment/Response:

ACCES-VR works closely with school districts and their staff to provide education on the expectation of competitive, integrated employment as an employment outcome. In addition, Family and Community Engagement (FACE) Centers offer trainings, resources, and referral services to promote meaningful change within the educational system, and ACCES-VR has partnered with them to share information about services.

**Technology Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities (TRAID):**

- The TRAID staff are working with more schools to provide devices to help students in classroom settings, including the Colonie and Mayfield School Districts.
- TRAID continues collaborating with the NYS Department of Labor's System Change and Inclusive Opportunities Network (SCION) project.
- TRAID staff at AIM Independent Living Center in Corning provided trainings on reasonable accommodations and the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) to the SCION Disability Resource Coordinators.
- The TRAID Directors' Meeting was held in October and featured an assistive technology device showcase providing staff the opportunity to share their experiences and feedback on using the latest technology.
- Since January 1, 2022, TRAID has provided:
  - 74 demonstrations for ACCES-VR customers
  - Provided 239 loans of 393 different devices
  - Purchased 356 devices for individuals

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

- Disability Rights New York (DRNY) has been developing a rebranding logo, website, and new brochures. New materials are anticipated to be distributed in 2023.
- The work of the Committee on Advancing Racial Equity (CARE) continues.
- In October, DRNY held a roundtable panel with DRNY staff to increase awareness regarding employment and advocacy opportunities for individuals with disabilities.
- Staff are all still working remotely. Offices are open for in person meetings by appointment only.

**Office of Mental Health (OMH):**

- OMH is a finalist in an Office of Disability and Employment Programs (ODEP) grant called Advancing State Policy Integration for Recovery and Employment (ASPIRE). The Office of Mental Health, the Department of Health, and ACCES-VR are partners in this grant application. The purpose of the grant is to support and expand Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) for individuals with a mental health diagnosis using the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model. Initial conversation with OMH have focused on providing services to a subset of underserved populations.
- The intent of the ASPIRE grant is to provide selected states with tailored and targeted technical assistance to integrate state policy, program, and funding infrastructures to support the expansion of evidence-based employment services for people with a mental health diagnosis.
- OMH and ACCES-VR are developing a joint guidance memo on ACCES-VR Supported Employment and OMH extended employment options. It is anticipated this will inform and increase awareness and knowledge for both ACCES-VR and OMH staff as well as their vendors.
- OMH and ACCES-VR have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for a data sharing agreement to operationalize Partnership Plus and the Ticket-to-Work program. Additionally, OMH is working with the Commission for the Blind to expand their MOU in this area.

SRC Question/Comment:

How is OMH conducting outreach to Schools?

OMH Comment/Response:

This question will be taken back to subject matter experts at OMH, and an answer will be provided to the SRC.

SRC Question/Comment:

Will the memo with ACCES-VR better education people on extended services to address the higher level of supports persons with mental health conditions may require?

OMH response:

The joint guidance memo is to clarify how to transition from Intensive ACCES-VR Supported Employment to Ongoing Integrated Supported Employment (OSIE) and Ongoing Rehabilitation and Support (ORS) through Personalized recovery Oriented Services (PROS) under OMH services.

SRC Question/Comment:

Are ACCES-VR and OMH tracking unsuccessful closures for individuals who need a higher level of support?

OMH response:

There is an Individual Placement and Support (IPS) team that can assist in addressing increasing connections to support services and increase employment outcomes. Additionally, OMH has hired two new staff to assist PROS staff on employment related issues.

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

- No update, the membership subcommittee is actively working on recruiting representation for this constituency.

**New York State Commission for the Blind (NYSCB):**

- NYSCB is preparing to launch a new assistive technology contract. Anticipated launch date is January 1, 2023.
- Almost all of the field offices are fully staffed and backfilling Central Office staff is now the focus.
- It is anticipated the new case management system will be launched in 2023.
- Business Enterprise programs based off the Randolph Shepherd Act which allow legally blind people to run newsstands and stores in state office and government buildings have seen a decline in patronage. As a result, the Commission is focusing on expanding this program.
- Almost close to pre-pandemic employment numbers, and the Commission will continue to work to increase employment outcomes.

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

- In September, the Board of Regents announced the Blue-Ribbon Commission will address graduation measures, graduation pathways, and provide recommendations. The Blue-Ribbon commission is comprised of approximately 40 individuals representing various stakeholders, judicial districts, and students, including students with disabilities and English language learners. Members will include educators, administrators, researchers, school counselors, professionals from business and higher education, parents, and students.
- In November a report was developed under a grant from the Department of Education, through the Office of Program and Grantee Support Services (PGSS), within the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE), by the Region 2 Comprehensive Center at WestEd. The report presents the findings of a literature review, a state and international policy scan, and a summary of stakeholder feedback.
  - The report's findings will inform the work of the Blue-Ribbon Commission on Graduation Measures to provide recommendations to the Board of Regents.
  - Additional information on the report may be accessed at: [Graduation Requirements and Measures: A review conducted for the New York State Board of Regents and the New York State Education Department](#)

**New York State Department of Labor (DOL):**

- The implementation of NY SCION - Systems Change and Innovative Opportunities Network program continues. Currently SCION is comprised of 24 Disability Resource Coordinators (DRCs). It is anticipated that by the beginning of 2023 an additional DRC will be hired.
  - In NYC, DOL has partnered with Mayor's office and is working toward onboarding four additional DRCs. Additional updates to be provided in March 2023.
  - Since the beginning of the SCION initiative DRCs are either currently or on their way to becoming credentialed benefits advisors, serving the state in various catchment areas, engaging with other workforce partners, and have provided direct interventions to 330 individuals.
  - Trainings to DRCs on available OPWDD services are ongoing.
  - Additional resources and information on SCION and the Disability Resource Coordinator may be accessed at: <https://dol.ny.gov/career-services/career-services-for-persons-with-disabilities>
- DOL is working on updating the Prime Objective booklet. This resource guide is designed to help make entering the workforce as successful as possible for job seekers with convictions.

**SRC Question/Comment:**

Are DRCs trained on Plans to Achieve Self-Support (PASS)?

**DOL Response:**

Yes.

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

- Work continues on the legislation passed to provide OPWDD funding to train businesses on hiring people with disabilities.
- Progress is being made on OPWDD's strategic plan in supporting people in person-center and innovative ways, strengthening the workforce, and improving the service system across the state; including additional funding for employment services to increase Competitive Integrated Employment through community work.
- A Request for Application (RFA) was issued for specific vocational training at colleges to teach skills related to labor markets. The grant will fund classes and provide community work vocational experiences.
- A stakeholder group has been established to evaluate the Pathway to Employment program, identify best practices to strengthen the program and service delivery, and focus on increasing Competitive Integrated Employment outcomes.
- OPWDD is partnering with ACCES-VR on the Disability Innovation Fund (DIF) Program on Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment (SWTCIE) grant.
- Interagency collaboration is underway between ACCES-VR and OPWDD to increase the coordination and accessibility of services.
- Post-COVID pandemic employment numbers have increased yet are still short of pre-pandemic numbers. Agencies are reporting people do not want to return to work.

SRC Comment:

Among the State partners there are many intersecting employment services. When organizations representing different constituencies are developing business partnerships and developing jobs, a best practice is to know that business are seeking qualified employees and not that they will know the differences in the funding of employment services (OMH, OPWDD, DOH, the Commission for the Blind or ACCES-VR). As such, it is important to have consistent, high-quality employment supports regardless of what funders is providing the services. There are existing training materials on the services each agency provides, and it is suggested the SRC identify if they may be able to be adapted to SRC needs in the future in support of consist education on employment of people with disabilities. Additionally, a roundtable discussion among agencies that intersect with employment is proposed for a future agenda item.

ACCES-VR Response:

Opportunities for future discussion on the intersection of services makes sense.

SRC Question/Comment:

Can you clarify what the funding is for from the RFA?

OPWDD Comment/Response:

New York State funding is being allocated for this grant. OPWDD is releasing a Career-Specific Vocational Training Request for Applications (RFA) for the purpose of awarding one or more contracts for the provision of career-specific vocational training for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). To effectively and efficiently deliver this career-specific vocational training to a significant number of people with I/DD, OPWDD is encouraging service providers to work together as a group for the benefit of the individuals they serve. Information may be accessed at:

<https://opwdd.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2022/12/career-specific-vocational-training-rfa.pdf>

**Presentation: Employment Priorities of the Office of the Chief Disability Officer**

**Kimberly Hill, NYS Chief Disability Officer**

- In February of 2022 the Office of the Chief Disability Officer was established.
- The office has four staff who work with members of the Governor's Executive Chamber.
- The goal of this office is to:
  - Establish New York as a model for inclusivity, integration, and accessibility by ensuring all State policies, programs, and activities meet the needs of all people with disabilities by setting employment as a priority.
- Strategies to accomplish this goal are:
  - Increase the employment rate for individuals with disabilities within government through increasing opportunities within the 55-B program.
  - Evaluate and recommend solutions to barriers such as home-care needs, housing, and transpiration.
  - Coordinate the State's implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
  - Serve as the Chair of the Most Integrated Settings Coordinating Council (MISCC).
  - Re-establish the work of the Employment First Initiative by collecting baseline data to guide and inform decisions.

**ACCES Updates: Ceylane Meyers-Ruff, Deputy Commissioner**

Linda Schramm is in Washington DC participating in a training for a Rehabilitation Administration Service (RSA) initiative.

**Media Campaign:**

- Adult Education and ACCES-VR are in the process of engaging in an educational media campaign. Adult Education’s media campaign is anticipated to launch by the end of 2022. ACCES-VR anticipates launching their media campaign in the Spring or Summer of 2023.

SRC Question/Comment:

Will the campaign address how high schools may obtain information about testing accommodations for the high school equivalency exam?

ACCES-VR Comment/Response:

The media campaign is focused on general information. However, if information is needed to assist individuals in requesting accommodations, they may access the HSC webpage to connect to the GED portal. They will need to set up an account and submit a request for accommodations. If they need assistance obtaining documentation, ACCES-VR may be able to help.

**Staff Updates:**

- In November the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Internship (VRCI) program took effect. ACCES-VR can now hire candidates as employees prior to the completion of their master’s program. The VRCI program is intended to provide graduate students with work assignments that give them opportunities to participate in vocational rehabilitation counselor activities. The candidates may receive compensation for their work while receiving supervised field experience to meet the requirements of their vocational rehabilitation master’s program.
- At the management level District Office Manager titles were added to offices that did not have them before as a Regional Coordinator acted as the District Office manager. Now each District Office will have a dedicated manager.
- Central Office has back filled positions in the Training Unit.
- Central Office will be restructuring assignments with the onboarding of new staff and in preparation for the implementation of the Disability Innovation Fund - Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment (SWTCIE) grant.

**AWARE Case Management System Update:**

- All aspects of the User Acceptance Training (UAT) have been completed including:
  - The external interfaces in the State Financial System (SFS), vendor portal, and the Department of Labor (DOL) wage exchange.
- Aware will provide a feature that allows District Offices to see real-time contract utilization.
- In February 2023 Aware will be piloted in 5 District Offices (Hauppauge, Queens, Southern Tier, Malone, and Rochester). During pilot, everything that happens in CaMs, the current case management system, will be duplicated in Aware to test both the system and the processes

- It is anticipated that in the beginning of April 2023 ACCES-VR will go-live with the Aware case management system.
- Statewide training began in November 2022 with train-the-trainer sessions. Training for all staff is ongoing. Training on the vendor portal for CRS 2.0 vendors, sign language vendors, and Pre-ETS potentially eligible vendors is forthcoming.

**Disability Innovation Fund - Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment (SWTCIE) Update:**

- Fourteen (14) states were awarded the grant. The purpose of the grant is to increase the opportunities for competitive, integrated employment for students/youth with disabilities, and adults, who are seeking or contemplating subminimum wage employment and/or assisting those in subminimum wage employment to participate in competitive, integrated employment.
- In October 2022 ACCES-VR held an initial meeting with the six counties (Nassau, Suffolk, Erie, Monroe, Wayne, Cortland) in New York selected to pilot the program. The pilot will concentrate on two cohorts, including students with disabilities ages 14-21 considering subminimum wage employment, and individuals of any age already in 14c settings earning less than minimum wage.
- Initial planning meetings with RSA and Mathematica took place from October through December 2022.
- Linda Schramm is leading the project. In addition, a project manager will be hired, and each District Office will have a staff person dedicated to the project.
- It is anticipated staffing details and the details of single source contracts will be established in the beginning of 2023.
- Targeted hiring of these staff is anticipated to start in March 2023 and be completed by the end of Summer 2023.
- It is projected the project will kick-off in late Summer 2023.
- Initially, the focus will be on individuals currently earning subminimum wage and collecting data on these individuals.

SRC Question/Comment:

How long is the RSA grant?

ACCES-VR Comment/Response:

This is a five-year grant which runs from October 2022 through September 2027.

**Core Rehabilitation Service Contract (CRS) Update:**

- Work continues on the Request for Proposal (RFP) for the new contract including evaluating and developing a contract amendment methodology so vendors will not be penalized for circumstances beyond their control.

SRC Question/Comment:

Will the new contract be implemented on time in 2024?

ACCES-VR Comment/Response:

Yes, the new contract is anticipated to be on time.



SRC Question/Comment:

Are there dedicated staff to monitor vendor performance and contract utilization?

ACCES-VR Comment/Response:

Yes, there are many staff responsible for vendor evaluation and the monitoring of contract utilization including Directors of Counseling, Regional Coordinators, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and the Quality Assurance Unit.

SRC Question/Comment

How is ACCES-VR attracting new vendors and existing vendors for the new contract?

ACCES-VR Comment/Response:

ACCES-VR is always seeking to attract qualified vendors. Areas under evaluation are the vendor reimbursement rate and increasing the level of oversight and accountability through clarifying contract language around roles and responsibilities.

**Adult Education Updates:**

- In November, all the Adult Education programs from across the state and ACCES-VR met and discussed barriers impacting both programs' customers:
  - Absence from the workforce for a length of time, unmet literacy needs, living in poverty, those with disabilities.
- To leverage opportunities for cross collaboration among programs, ACCES-VR and Adult Education are working on establishing a "warm handoff" between the program areas. The universal referral for WIOA state partners has been developed and it is anticipated it will be utilized with Adult Education programs to implement a more seamless referral system among all WIOA program areas.
- Additionally, a presentation about available apprenticeships was shared and it is anticipated that in January 2023 a presentation and information on these apprenticeship opportunities will be provided for ACCES-VR staff.

SRC Question/Comment:

Are there educational and employment supports available for students enrolled in, and for graduates of, apprenticeship programs?

ACCES-VR Comment/Response:

Yes, ACCES-VR has educational supports and employment supports for students participating in apprenticeship programs.

**High School Equivalency (HSE) Update:**

- The implementation of GED exam test sites continues. No additional updates.

**Bureau of Proprietary Schools (BPSS) Update:**

- Ongoing work continues reviewing schools, approving curricula, and licenses. No additional updates.

## **Presentation: Order of Selection Metrics**

**Diane Woodward, LMSW** *Coordinator of Workforce Development Strategies*

The presentation provided an overview on Order of Selection.

### Reason for Order of Selection:

Under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies must be able to provide a full range of services to eligible individuals. There is no one indicator that triggers a State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Agency to provide services under an Order of Selection. When a VR agency does not have sufficient resources to serve all individuals who are eligible, the state VR agency must establish priority categories for serving individuals. ACCES-VR is not in an Order of Selection; however, it does have a policy in place for such an occurrence.

### Process to Determine if an Order of Selection is Needed:

During the current Federal fiscal year and preceding Federal fiscal year, the State VR Agency determines if:

- A full range of services are available for eligible individuals.
- Referral forms are widely available throughout the State.
- Outreach efforts are being conducted to identify and serve individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved by the VR system.
- There are delays, through waiting lists or other means, in determinations of eligibility, development of Individualized Plans for Employment (IPEs), or the provision of services for eligible individuals.
- Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) performance measures are reviewed.
- ACCES-VR is evaluating the number of applicants, the timeliness of processing applications and establishing Individualized Plans for Employment (IPEs), and the case load size of each vocational rehabilitation counselor as required under the federal guidelines.
- Fiscal resources to maintain the VR program are evaluated including ensuring there is evidence a full range of services have been provided, the State match to the Federal contribution has been met, the 15% reserve for Pre-Employment services is met, and the Supported Employment program is funded.

ACCES-VR continues to not elect to use an Order of Selection and the SRC Quality Assurance subcommittee continues to work together with ACCES-VR to provide feedback on Order of Selection processes.

### **SRC Business:**

#### **Executive Committee Report:**

- No updates.

#### **Membership Committee Report:**

- The membership committee began the year with six members. Throughout the year, two members needed to leave the SRC, and two additional members' terms will end in 2023.
- The membership committee will need new members in 2023, including a Chair and Co-chair.

- In 2022, six new members for the 2023-2025 term were selected to serve on the SRC. Each member represents a diverse constituency, including current or former ACCES-VR customers, individuals who are blind, individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, individuals with mobility issues, and individuals who represent business and industry. Additionally, Megan Brown's two terms end December 31, 2022. Her vacancy has been filled, ensuring representation on the SRC from the NYSED Office of Special Education.

**Business Engagement Committee Report:**

- A Chair and Co-Chair will need to be elected, as current members' terms are ending in 2022.
- New members are needed, as there is currently a majority of non-voting members on the committee.
- The committee is discussing work for next year. Topics under consideration include economic development and how it may intersect with ACCES-VR, to provide guidance on increasing successful employment outcomes.

**Quality Assurance Improvement (QAI) Committee Report:**

- Currently there is not a large body of work for the committee. The Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment will be a focus for the committee in 2023.
- Andy Sink will Chair the committee and Naomi Brickel will Co-Chair.
- In 2023, Naomi is interested in being on the Pre-ETS ad-hoc committee.
- New members will be needed in 2023.

**Annual Report Committee Report:**

- Work continues on developing and implementing timelines to request input from all SRC members for the annual report. It is recommended that each quarter, reminders be made for work being done, progress on initiatives and collaborations among State partners, and other stakeholders be submitted to the committee.
- Methods for creating an informative, interesting, and inviting report to inform the public of the work of the SRC, ACCES-VR and to provide links to resources and employment supports is under consideration. Additionally, a revised annual report template is under consideration and the possibility of compensating artist for their work when they submit their pieces to the SRC is being discussed.

**Recognition of Members Leaving the SRC:**

Ellice Switzer and Megan Brown, long time SRC members, have completed two three-year terms on the SRC. Thank you for your service, dedication, and expertise.

**4.2 Recommendations:** None

**Old Business:** None

**2023 Proposed Meeting Dates:**

- March 21-22, 2023
- June 6-7, 2023
- September 13-14, 2023
- December 5-6, 2023