



Nebraska State Rehabilitation Council
500 S. 84th St., 2nd Floor PO Box 94987 • Lincoln, Nebraska 68509-4987

"A consumer-controlled council committed to ensuring quality rehabilitation services."

SRC Meeting Minutes

**Nebraska Department of Education 500 South 84th
State Board Room #101
Lincoln, NE**

Tuesday, October 1, 2024

10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Meeting was called to order at 10:02 a.m. by Christine Gaspari.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Ashley Altman, Jodi Bodnar, Gloria Eddins, Jana Egan, Christine Gaspari, Jason Gieschen, Matthew Kaslon, Todd Ludwig, Paulette Monthei, Scott Parrill, Terri Ridder, Lisa Kent-Scheer

MEMBERS ABSENT: Jordyn Brummond, Sharon Elliott, Catrina Gray, Alvin Parker

NEBRASKA VR STAFF PRESENT: Holly Enriquez, Lindy Foley, Angela Fujan, Kathy Lloyd, Mary Matusiak, Tobias Orr, Lupe Stevens

VISITORS: Mike Bursaw, Jessica Elsberry, Sue Gieschen, Philip Hazelteen, Kathy Lloyd, Heather Luebbe, Kadee Luebbe, Margie Propp, Ben Sparks

I. Approval of agenda

Gloria Eddins moved to approve the agenda as distributed; Matt Kaslon seconded the motion. Verbal vote was taken; motion passed unanimously.

II. Approval of prior meeting minutes

Matt Kaslon noted he was in attendance at the August meeting; he attended virtually. Gloria Eddins moved to approve the August minutes as changed; Jana Egan seconded the motion. Verbal vote was taken; motion passed unanimously.

III. Robert's Rules, meeting etiquette, and short break hourly (Chair)

Meeting procedures were mentioned; there were no questions.

IV. Introductions

Attendees introduced themselves.

V. Council membership:

- A. Potential members: Britany Hanks (Eaton), Mike Bursaw (West Pharmaceutical Services)
- B. New members: Alvin Parker (VR-Winnebago Tribe), Jordyn Brummund (NDE), Scott Parrill (Pizza Ranch), Terri Ridder (State Workforce Board), and Ashley Altman (NCDHH). Winnebago is grant funded and the location is very busy; Alvin will be here if his trip is funded. The other four new members are here.
- C. 2024 Terms ending: No one is ending their term in the first or second terms. Recruitment reminder: Individuals with disability needed. A cross-section of people of different ages is needed and appreciated. If you know of anyone, give their contact information to Angela. Four meetings a year: two in person, two virtual. The time commitment is not bad. Rules of the SRC mandate 51% of the members have a disability.

VI. Action

- A. Vote on 2025 SRC Meeting dates (first Tuesday of February, May, August, & October): Specifically, 2025 meetings next year will be February 2, May 6, August 5, and October 7.
- B. Follow up action items from last meeting: Jason Gieschen explained why he proposed reciting the Pledge of Allegiance at SRC meetings, including his personal beliefs and because it is recited on other commissions. As this can be contentious issue, secret ballots were cast. Eight (8) voted for, four (4) voted against; motion carried. The Pledge of Allegiance will be recited at the beginning of meetings.

VII. Discussion:

- A. SRC Annual Report (Angela)
Angela Fujan reminded everyone to get their reports to her by mid-November.
- B. Senator Outreach (Angela)
Angela explained we like senators to be aware of how Nebraska VR is funded. We want to be fully funded by state budget. It is almost 4/1 ratio: for every \$1 VR receives from the state, Nebraska VR receives \$4 from the federal government. In the last few years, the outreach has been done virtually because of the construction at the Capital. This outreach will need to be done by a side committee and we are recruiting from the group. VR staff cannot do the outreach as state employees cannot lobby another branch of state government. In the past, SRC members have gone around and met as many people in the Legislature as possible and have also sent thank you notes to their staff. This has proven effective. There will be two or three meetings coordinated by Sarah Chapin. The committee will be Paulette Monthei, Matt Kaslon, Lisa Kent-Scheer, and Todd Ludwig.

C. Member Feedback on Written Reports:

1. ATP (Tobias) – See written report.
 - Nebraska’s program is unique in its partnerships with other agencies for home modifications, client advocacy, loan programs, equipment reuse (AT for All).
 - Reuse events were held in July at Disability Pride in Lincoln and in Scottsbluff. Both were wildly successful. They are trying to make these annual events.
 - As ATP celebrates 35 years, their report includes all the logos they have used. Nebraska was one of the first assistive technology programs. In 35 years, they have done 10 to 12K home modifications and home assessments.
 - ATP has applied for a grant and is waiting to hear if they received it.
 - They are doing new waivers for TBI waivers.
 - Nebraska was one of three states approved for CAST grant, a technology grant.
 - Last year, ATP spent nearly all their allotted money.
 - ATP has an advisory council; Tobias has asked for members.

2. CAP (Jodi) – See written report.
 - CAP can get information and referrals to any individual with disabilities in Nebraska, including for Nebraska VR, the League of Human Dignity (LHD), the Independent Living Centers (ILC), the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI), and for Tribal VR in the Winnebago Tribe.
 - CAP has visited LHD offices in Lincoln and Norfolk and hopes to go to Omaha soon. They are hoping to collaborate more, as they did this summer with staff at Independence Rising in North Platte.
 - If you have any recommendations for additions to the Hotline for Disability Services, please contact Jodi.
 - Jodi discussed the CAP resolved/closed cases, all of which are discussed at length in the October report. In all four cases, all issues were resolved in the individual’s favor. Three of the cases were resolved with mediation or other methods of alternative dispute resolution; the fourth was resolved with short-term technical assistance.

3. Deaf & Hard of Hearing (Ashley) – See written report.
 - The Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NCDHH) Commission Board is doing a nationwide search for an Executive Director. They have contracted with Innivee Strategies for the search. They just released their job description for the position and the opening is on the State of Nebraska’s website.
 - Several local advocacy specialists are hosting awareness events over the summer and in the fall, including at zoos and baseball games.
 - Advocacy specialists worked with government agencies, including one with Douglas County Emergency Language Alert Network and Douglas County Health Department, World Speaks, and Restoring Dignity.

Another advocacy specialist was involved with Nebraska Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program with the Nebraska Broadband Office and National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) Office of Internet Connectivity and Growth (OICG) in Lincoln.

4. NSILC (Christine) – See written report.
 - NSILC quarterly meeting was last week. New officers are: Jody Faltys, Chair; Dea Henke, Vice Chair; and Chris Gaspari, Secretary/Treasurer. Robert Danner is helping with their website.
 - Trying to get some things taken care of that have been neglected. Membership recruitment efforts are ongoing. Two new members have been submitted to the Governor’s office for approval.
 - Operations Committee Meeting will be set within the next 30 days.
 - They applied for a grant from Creighton University; they await a decision.
 - NSILC 2025 meetings are scheduled for 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. on January 9, April 10, July 10, and October 9. Two meetings will be virtual and two will be in person.

5. Ombudsman (no report)

6. Nebraska Youth Leadership Council, aka NYLC (Kathy) – See written report.
 - NYLC is a statewide council for youth ages 14-24. Funding comes from partnering with Nebraska VR and Special Education.
 - Primary goal to gain skills and leadership. Youth who join want to tell others how NYLC has helped their self-advocacy. They travel the state promoting disability awareness and educating their peers on transition to college or work. They also spend a lot of time talking with each other: they have fun, discuss invitations they have received to speak with others. Kathy speaks highly of members and how much they grow and gain skills over the course of their time in NYLC, including the two members who attended today’s SRC meeting, namely Jessica Elsberry and Kadee Luebbe.
 - Jessica Elsberry was raised in Pierce and graduated from high school in 2019. She received her degree from Northeast Community College in 2021. Jessi now works at KLKN as a master control operator. This is her last year in NYLC as she is 23. The sidewalks in Pierce were not good, so Jessi did a whole presentation in front of city council about how bad their sidewalks were. They then fixed the sidewalks. When she accepted a job at KLKN in June 2021, the building was pretty accessible. The station has since fixed some things, such as their ramp and sidewalks, and they moved some switches. They are working on other stuff, such as an elevator. Jessi tells them what she needs and they give her what she requests including, recently, an ice maker. She is also involved in a Facebook group for her condition, which is pretty rare. Kathy said she and Jessi have become close since working in NYLC.
 - Kadee Luebbe is a new NYLC member who lives in Hordville. She likes meeting new people and has been to Aurora for ESU transition. Kadee

spoke about her life story and what she has achieved. She has collected contact info for other members and keeps the energy going. Her favorite thing about NYLC is how she has gained a lot of confidence. Kathy said of Kadee: "She is our cheerleader."

- Matt Kaslon, former member of the Council, said NYLC is life changing. He thanked Kathy for everything and said she is making role models.
- Lindy thanked them for coming and for their work and advocacy. She noted Nebraska was one of the first states to have an NYLC and noted it is good to see the growth and development.

C. Member Feedback on VR (Christine)

Group received positive response from a person whose child is now in Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) in Omaha. The person said they are happy with their child's counselor and how engaged they were.

Another person is using VR for herself for an underemployment situation after a layoff. That person is doing well.

D. Director Report (Lindy)

- National update: Over the last couple of months, VR agencies have engaged in a reallocation process when VR agencies send funds back to the Treasury which is a huge red flag to Congress. The returned funds then can be reallocated to other VR agencies. There were more monies requested by state VR agencies than were turned back to RSA. Nebraska VR is in a good place. Nebraska VR requested \$750K and we were allotted the entire amount. That is good news about our budget.
- Later this month, Lindy, Cathy, and Holly will attend the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) conference which is an opportunity to represent the state and to learn from other states while we are there.
- UNMC submitted a DIF grant proposal and was awarded the grant from the US Department of Education. UNMC is partnering w/ Nebraska VR to ensure individuals with disabilities between ages 14 and 24 have access to in-demand, good-paying jobs. It is a 5-year, \$9.9 million grant.
- As previously mentioned, there was a finding from DOJ involving individuals with serious mental illness about whether they have access to services. (The letter with the finding can be found on google.) VR is also included in those meetings because one way to help people be more independent is to help them work. Our role is to ensure that if someone is in a program during the day that they know about us. Nebraska VR is at the table to help figure out some of those solutions.
- Team Tours, which are meetings twice a year involving Nebraska VR administrators at each of the field offices and then with state office staff, are happening right now.
- NDE recently gave four Excellence in Leadership Awards and two of them were given to VR staff, namely Sarah Chapin and Tonisha Jorgensen.
- Leadership team has spent a lot of time making sure we understand the

needs of our staff. Cathy, Holly and Lindy have done about 60 stay interviews. We want to know what makes staff members stay and when was the last time they thought about leaving. Good news is they tell us what they want and what makes them stay.

- Nebraska VR has hired a lot of good staff in the last couple of years and now there are far fewer vacancies. We were up to 50 vacancies during Order of Selection (OOS) and now down to fewer than ten statewide. A question was asked about the location of the vacancies; Lindy explained these positions are not yet posted.
- Lindy gave special thanks to new member Terri Ridder and potential new member Mike Bursaw.
- Discussion followed about how difficult it is for people with disabilities to be able to afford conferences and travel. (This is reference to the National SRC Conference.) It is especially difficult for people on limited incomes to be able to afford flights and hotels up front for reimbursement later. Is there a way to make it so those expenses could be paid for up front, rather than needing to be paid via reimbursement? Are there other guidelines to follow? Perhaps we could go to the governor. Lindy will look into the options for that. She notes she is unaware of any process for that outside the reimbursement. Gloria said there may be a way to do direct billing of hotel. Per diem is the only option for food.

VIII. Working Lunch: Committee meetings and reports:

A. Client Services Committee (Open, Cindi is no longer with VR)

—The committee voted on a new chair due to the position being vacated. Lisa Kent-Sheer was voted to be the new chair.

—The committee reviewed the client satisfaction survey and raised questions about the number of completed surveys. There was a noticeable increase in responses after some VR staff who managed the surveys left their positions and those roles were not filled. Now, each office has at least one designated team member responsible for completing the surveys which likely contributed to the rise in participation

—The committee continued discussing the current survey which resets annually on October 1st. They proposed some modifications to the survey and suggested reviewing surveys from other states for potential question ideas. Some examples were shared during the meeting and will also be sent via email. A special meeting is scheduled for November 7th at 1:00 PM CT to review the survey for possible edits. This needs to be addressed promptly to maintain data integrity as VR prefers not to change questions mid-year. Committee members should consider what the SRC aims to learn from the surveys.

—Jodi will send out the Zoom invite for this meeting. (Sent 10/2/24)

—Holly will send the group samples of surveys from other states along with Nebraska VR's current survey for the committee to review. (sent 10/4/24).

—The committee would like to continue to explore options to survey more clients and how other states are doing this. Holly will be at CSAVR in October and will talk to some states to see what this looks like and report back at the next meeting.

B. Employer Services Committee (Todd)

—In attendance were Mary Matusiak (Nebraska VR), Jana Egan (Mutual of Omaha), Scott Parrill (Pizza Ranch), Terri Ridder (Franciscan Care Services), and Mike Bursaw (West Pharmaceutical Services).

—Introductions were made and committee members got to know one other, sharing our relationships with Nebraska VR and how we all first got involved.

—Discussed the role, structure, responsibilities, expectations, and goals of the Employer Services Committee.

C. Transition Services Committee (Gloria)

—The Transition Services Committee discussed State Plan Goal #2 to increase youth with disabilities awareness of Nebraska VR services. We discussed the need to find a way we can contact graduates 6-9 months after they graduate to remind them that VR employment services is available to them if they wish to apply. Usually by then the students have had a break in services and/or tried post-secondary training or employment on their own and may have come across some barriers that they were not able to see at the time they were told about services.

D. Executive Committee (Christine)

IX. Public Comment/Announcements

X. 1:00-2:00 The 2024 Disability Employment and Inclusion Awards