

**Rehabilitation Council of Texas (RCT)
August 4-5, 2022
Hybrid Meeting 101 E. 15th Street., Austin TX 78778 Room
244 and via Zoom**

Council Members Present:

Michael A. Ebbeler Jr., Chair, Houston
Lisa Cowart, Vice Chair, Sour Lake
Abdi Warsame, Wylie Virtual
Mark Baird, San Angelo
Glenda Born, Austin
Amanda Bowdoin, Forney Virtual
Jennifer Clouse, Temple
Michele Dobbins, LaPorte Virtual
Cheryl A Fuller, Austin
Gennadiy Goldenshteyn, Dallas Virtual
Bobbie Hodges, Fort Worth Virtual
Lisa Maciejewski-West, Horseshoe Bay
Joe Powell, Irving
April Pollreisz, Amarillo
Rodrick Robinson, McKinney
Karen Stanfill, Houston
Elizabeth Kendell, San Antonio Virtual
Dr. James Williams, Leander Virtual

Council Members Absent:

Lindsey Geeslin, Lorena
Emily Robinson, Pflugerville

TWC Employees Attendance:

Chairman Bryan Daniel, Commissioner Aaron Demerson,
Commissioner Julian Alvarez, Angela Bazaldua, Jessica Belanger,
William Belz, Matt Berend, Kimberly Berry, Karen Brajcki, Shelly
Caillouet, Rae Champagne, Heather Cooke, Kandace Decker,
Lance Foss, Lisa Godwin, Cindy Geisman, Tasheara Jennings

Gobert, Lauren Hargrove, Carey Hajovsky, Jamie Haywood, David Johnston, Dennis Kutach, Laura LaCour, Christy Lerche, Anna Lee, Susan Lindsey, Bonnie Martin-Hudson, Scott McCune, Geoffrey Miller, Sylvia Miller, Asha Mookala, Brian Owens, Francis Oyelowo, Melinda Paninski, Elsa Y. Perez, Alejandro Perez, Daniel Prado, Andrew Ramirez, Summer Robinson, Audra Ressel, Belinda Salazar, Aissa Salazar, Jonas Schwartz, Ed Serna, Chris Speckhard, Michelle Szumski, Rikka Weintraub, Sue-Ellen Woodlief, Kelly Yarbrough, Laura York

Public Attendance: 83

Welcome

- The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. by Michael A. Ebbeler, Jr., Chair.

Recognition of RCT Members Terming Out

- Commissioner Aaron Demerson recognized Michael A. Ebbeler, Jr., Lisa Maciejewski-West, Bobbie Hodges, and Elizabeth Kendall and read the Governor's Certificate.

Aaron Demerson, Commissioner Representing Employers

- Addressed the council and recognized terming out RCT Members.

Chairman Bryan Daniel, TWC Chair and Commissioner Representing Public

- Addressed the council and recognized terming out RCT Members.

Ed Serna, TWC Deputy Executive Director

- Addressed the council and recognized terming out RCT Members.

Julian Alvarez, Commissioner Representing Labor

- Addressed the council and recognized terming out RCT Members.

VR Division Report and Performance Update Cheryl A. Fuller, TWC VR Division Director and Geoffrey Miller, Director of Operational Insight

- General Updates
 - CSAVR Strategic Priorities and Plans for Fall Conference
 - Implementation of RSA 107 Monitoring Report, Corrective Action Plan – almost complete.
 - 87th Texas Legislature, Implementation Update
 - Rider 48 attached to TWC’s Budget requiring a report on apprenticeship and internship opportunities for people with disabilities. Due October 1st, the draft is being worked on.
 - Introduced Jamie Haywood, Division Director for Program, Policy and Support
 - SB 50, directs Health and Human Services Commission to establish rules and a process that ensures Medicaid waiver participants who want competitive integrative employment can achieve the goal.
- Combined State Plan Goal Areas: Update on Success Measures
 - Six Goal Areas
 - Improve provider recruitment, retention, and support. Table: Statewide Service Provider Activity Rates. Success will be measured by:
 - An increase (accounting for seasonality) in the percentage of active VR service providers and total number of available providers:
 - statewide:
 - by integrated service area (VR region): and
 - by RSA service type category.
 - Coming Soon contractor engagement rate
 - Streamline VR policy, processes, and tools to facilitate timely service delivery. Table: State wide Median Days from Initial Contact to Participation and Statewide Participant Creation Rate. Success will be measured by:

- A decrease (accounting for seasonality) in median time from initial contact to participant status in the VR program; and
- An increase (accounting for seasonality) in the percentage of those determined eligible who move into an individualized plan for employment (IPE).
- Recruit and retain VR Staff. Success will be measured by
 - A decrease in annual (SFY) turnover rate
 - VRDS pre-pandemic had a turnover rate of 14.7% during the recovery benchmark for performance in SFY2019. In Q3 SFY2022, TWC/VRD had a year-to-date turnover rate of 10.5%.
 - The Q3 SFY year-to-date turnover rates from the VR regions ranged from 8.2% in Region 1- Panhandle/West Texas to 14.9% in Region 2- DFW/Texoma.
 - An annual (SFY) increase in the proportion of Qualified VR Counselors (QVRC).
 - Pre-pandemic in SFY2019, VRD had 75% of counselors identified as meeting CSPD requirements and considered as Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (QVRC).
 - In Q3 SFY2022, VRD had 422 counselors that were considered QVRC, 66% of 643 filled counselor positions.
- Improve and develop additional user-friendly resources to maximize customer choice. Success will be measured by
 - An increase in the proportion of SSI or SSDI customers who receive benefits counseling or counseling on work incentives
 - I|3 comprehensive quarterly report on benefits counseling. As of July 14, 2022:
 - 10,491 open cases involve SSI/SSDI recipients
 - 3,751 (or 36%) list benefits counseling on IPE

- 76% of open cases may require updates to more accurately capture SSI/SSDI data.
 - A redesign of the SSA screen in ReHabWorks has been initiated.
- An increase in the percentage of customer's indicating they agree (that is, responding "yes") that they have input in choosing service providers in the quarterly customer satisfaction survey (Westat).
 - Overall Open 67.4%, Overall Closed 66.1%, BVI Open 61.7%, and BVI Closed 54.9%
 - Looking at rewording the question and being focused on are you satisfied with your provider.
- Improve VR staff knowledge and system capacity to enhance service delivery to customers. Success will be measured by
 - An increase in the percentage of customer's indicating they agree (that is, responding "yes") that VR staff provides the guidance the customer needs in the quarterly customer satisfaction survey (Westat).
 - Overall Open 83.2%, Overall Closed 81.9%, BVI Open 78.3%, and BVI Closed 76.7%
 - An increase in the percentage of customer's indicating they agree (that is, responding "yes") that the counselor maintains communication with them regarding the process of their case in the quarterly customer satisfaction survey (Westat).
 - Overall Open 77.3%, Overall Closed n/a, BVI Open 72.1%, and BVI Closed n/a
- An increase (accounting for seasonality) in VR engagement rate (that is, arranged, provided, or purchased VR/Pre-ETS/CCRC services; counseling and guidance; started or amended plan; employment (90-day clock); successful closure; or enrollment in education/training).
 - Comparison was given for Q2 2018-2022 of active participants, All Participants, and Engagement Rate.

The rate has increased from 2018 68.29% to 2022 74.26%

- Increase and enhance partnerships with employers to 1) better understand employer needs when hiring people with disabilities and working with VR, and 2) build awareness about the benefits of hiring people with disabilities to increase employment opportunities for VR customers. Under Construction Success will be measured by:
 - An increase in the number of employers participating in disability awareness and inclusion activities, including through the Texas HireAbility and We Hire Ability campaigns
 - An increase in the number of employers participating in training and work-based learning opportunities for students and adults.
- Combined State Plan Goal Areas, Update on Implementations of Strategies
 - Goal Area One Strategies: Recruit/Retain/Support Providers
 - Streamline vendor requirements, processes, procedures, and documentation. Partially Complete
 - Ensure that payment rates are competitive and equitable. Partially Complete
 - Strengthen provider recruiting efforts. In Progress
 - Enhance provider support and training. In Progress
 - Ensure that internal systems for provider identification by a VR Counselor are useful, current, and accurate. Partially Complete
 - Implementations of Strategies
 - Standards for Providers Chapter 3 review completed with provider feedback to identify and recommend solutions to most burdensome requirements. Target completion is January 2023.
 - Comprehensive Rate Review procurement of vendor complete, pending contract execution by September
 - RASCI in development to designate regional staff to support provider recruitment
 - New provider orientation has been updated. Recorded version available when revised SFP Chapter 3 is published.

- Pilot completed to test survey designed to collect information from providers on counties served for update to ReHabWorks
- Goal Area Two Strategies: Streamline Processes, Systems, Forms
 - Streamline or redesign policy, procedure, forms, and approval processes to improve ease of navigation and application for VR staff. In Progress
 - Facilitate coordination of services with providers and improve responsiveness to customers. In Progress
 - Improve workflow processes and business systems to improve timeliness, efficiency, and consistency of VR service provision. In Progress
 - Implementations of Strategies
 - Procurement for vendor to support VRSM redesign is nearing completion. Contract anticipated by September.
 - As of July 2022, VRD has reduced **71** pages of forms following redesign of Supported Employment, Pre-ETS, Project SEARCH, and Assistive Technology Services (SFP Chapter 9) forms
 - A staff/provider workgroup is working on streamlining self-employment forms. This project will be expanded to include a review of policy and processes.
 - Review of medical services approvals is underway
 - 9th quarterly VRD/Provider meeting July 19, 2022
- Recruit and Retain VR Staff.
 - Identify and implement strategies to improve staff recruitment and retention, including options for remote work, opportunities for professional development, staff recognition, and other activities that promote a positive, engaging work environment. In Progress
 - Redesign training and resources for new counselors and new rehabilitation assistants. In Progress
 - Establish management development training, specific to VR program management, for new, current, and aspiring VR managers. In Progress
 - Implementations of Strategies

- VRD collaborated with TWC Human Resources to participate in the Texas Internship Challenge, a recruitment strategy for future VRCs and RAs
- Collaboration with five Texas rehabilitation counseling programs, led by VRD and the University of North Texas. Outreach/recruitment materials. Feb. 2023 Forum
- On March 1, VRD career ladders were expanded to include a senior-level Rehabilitation Assistant (RA), VR Counselor (VRC), Unit Support Coordinator (also a VRC), and Regional Program Specialist, supporting retention of tenured and skilled staff
- VRD developed a retention strategy to provide temporary caseload management and customer service support while vacant VRC and RA positions are being filled, reducing additional workload on remaining staff
- VRD began developing the scope, methods and timeline for a division-wide staff recognition strategy to support staff and increase retention
- Procurement for computer-based training (online) library for VR staff complete, contract in development. Target rollout FY 2023 to support professional development.
- VR-specific management development training launched August 1, with second cohort launching August 15, conducted by UA CURRENTS
- Supervisory Leadership Academy for staff currently in a supervisory role
- Pathways Leadership Academy for non-supervisory staff interested in pursuing leadership roles in VR
- Goal Area Four Strategies: Maximize Customer Informed Choice.
 - Provide training and resources for VR staff on labor market information and tools. Partially Completed
 - Develop and enhance tools to aid VR staff and customers in the identification of available providers. Partially Completed
 - Update training, tools, and policies related to work incentive programs and benefits counseling and provide user-friendly resources and/or fact sheets to help customers make decisions. In Progress

- Implementations of Strategies
 - Provider Locator Tool enhancements in discussion with I|3
 - Benefits Counseling Services for VR Customers
 - An open enrollment solicitation to recruit additional providers was posted on June 30, 2022
 - A new Standards for Providers chapter on benefits planning published on July 1, 2022
 - To further expand capacity to provide benefits planning, VRD has requested to hire up to four certified benefits planners to provide benefits counseling services to VR participants.
 - A new ReHabWorks financial screen has been developed to improve completeness of data entry on SSI/SSDI benefit amounts. Rollout early 2023.
- Goal Area Five Strategies: Improve VR Staff Expertise and Systems Capacity
 - Provide additional training and resources for VR staff to strengthen and increase expertise and specialization in serving customers with specific disabilities and those with multiple disabilities. In Progress
 - Develop, pilot, and replicate innovative approaches to implementing the VR process, including standardized workflow and new methods for deploying staff and resources that maximize staff capacity and expertise. In Progress
 - Enhance and increase training for Transition VR Counselors and other VR Counselors with school assignments regarding services to students with disabilities, including pre-employment transition services. In Progress
 - Review TVRC and VRC capacity and structure and adjust as necessary to strengthen capacity to serve students with disabilities. In Queue
 - Provide training, tools, and resources to assist staff with implementing process improvements, including standardized workflow. In Progress
 - Enhance options for remote service delivery. In Queue
 - Implementations of Strategies
 - Expanding and supporting specialization:

- Deaf and Hard of Hearing Training Workgroup. GCPD SME reviewing drafts and providing support and guidance. Rollout Fall 2022.
 - Brain Injury Community of Practice virtual training conference in October 2022.
 - Office of Blind Services is planning a statewide training conference for staff who serve customers who are blind or visually impaired. January or February 2023.
- Three innovative staffing projects are scheduled to launch in FY 2023. Each will test new methods for staffing the VR process.
- VRD is collaborating with I|3 on development of a caseload capacity model
- Enhancing and expanding training and cross-agency collaboration to serve students with disabilities:
 - Building Capacity for Working with Younger Students
 - Fostering Transition Initiative
 - Fostering Transition Initiative
- Two teams focused on strategies to automate manual processes, leading to a reduction of multiple manual referral forms to a single form that will be pre-populated in ReHabWorks (rollout 2023)
- Launch of process improvement model to reengage inactive customers
 - Developed and piloted by the VR Supervisor Community of Practice
 - Data tool, RASCI matrix, Weekly Staffing Agenda, Enhanced Strategies Checklist. Intranet page containing short training videos and resources. 10 virtual training sessions conducted to date
- Goal Area Six Strategies: Increase and Enhance Employer Partnerships
 - Continue and expand efforts to raise awareness among employers of the benefits of hiring people with disabilities and the services available through TWC/VRD to support them. In Progress
 - Implement and expand employer partnerships that increase employment opportunities for individuals with

disabilities through training and work-based learning opportunities for students and adults with disabilities. In Progress

- Implementations of Strategies
 - Raising Awareness:
 - 2022 HireAbility Employer Forum and Lex Frieden Employer Awards Ceremony. Houston. October 6, 2022. In collaboration with the Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities, DisabilityIN, Lex Frieden, Workforce Solutions Gulf Coast.
 - Expanding employer partnerships that increase employment opportunities through training and work-based learning:
 - 2022 Summer Earn and Learn,
 - Skills to Employment Projects
 - Project SEARCH
 - 2,362 VR adult and youth customers participated in work-based learning in Q3
- Update on FY 2022 Operating Budget and Expenditures
 - Cheryl Fuller provided a high overview of the TWC VR Operating Budget Total \$274,745,229
 - Salaries & Wages (includes Employee Benefits) \$114,416,699
 - Travel \$2,418,993
 - Operating Expenses \$9,874,646
 - Client Services \$148,034,891
- Ad Hoc Updates and Reports (Including Customer Satisfaction Survey Results) Geoffrey Miller provided reports, charts, graphs, and tables
 - Wage comparison for VR Customers with earnings of all Texans
- Cheryl Fuller and Geoffrey Miller offered to the RCT to provide and present a deeper dive into the performance metrics and measures once a year at one of the quarterly meeting. This would allow more time to focus on the Ad Hoc Reports.

Public Comment was given by

- Mack Marsh
- Lance Foss
- Britni Miles

RCT Strategic Planning Report

- Was held in San Antonio July 13, 2022, Planning Committee consisted of Karen Stanfill, Elizabeth Kendell, Lisa Cowart, and Jennifer Clouse. The meeting was facilitated by Patricia Tomlinson and Tom Jennings. They are both on the SRC for New Jersey and 35+ years of VR experience. Progress on the committee goals will be reported out during the committee meeting report.
- Cheryl Fuller
 - The RCT member identified responsibilities and set goals related to Federal Mandate and RCT Bylaws. This will ensure the council is meeting all duties under the law and how we can partner with the council.
- Karen Stanfill
 - Committee met regularly to plan for this meeting.
 - Meeting was facilitated by Patricia Tomlinson and Tom Jennings
 - Read and understand Roles and Responsibility Federal Mandate, RCT Bylaws and Committee Responsibilities.
 - Possible changes in RCT Bylaws were identified
 - Policy, Procedures and Personnel Development Committee identified seven goals for FY23.
- Joe Powell
 - Membership and Education identified six goals for FY23.
- Gennadiy Goldenshteyn
 - Customer Satisfaction and Needs Assessment identified six goals for FY23.

VR Project Updates, Cheryl Fuller, VR Director

- National Strategic Priorities

- 1st Priority attract and retain VR professionals
- 2nd Priority redesign and streamline internal processes
- 3rd Priority increase public awareness of the VR Program
- State Projects
 - Region 2 to pilot the outsourcing of VR process from application to eligibility recommendations to all VR counselors to focus more time on thing that only a counselor can do.
 - Region 4 to pilot the Indiana Model, counselors and rehabilitation assistants (RA) are assigned to one or two parts of the VR process instead of carrying out the entire process.
 - Region 6 to pilot a specialized RA model with the goal to improve expertise, accuracy and speed in purchasing.
 - Karen Stanfill asked time frame for these projects, answer 12-18 months
 - Bobbie Hodges ask Mrs. Fuller to address the process regarding provider payment. The specialized RA pilot does that give them the expertise /knowledge to more timely process invoices and payments and to insure everything is accurate. We also had a Rapid Improvement Process training last year that focused on the invoicing process. They have some great suggestions on automating some of the steps, so they move faster. Some of these steps are included in the redesign of the case management system. There is another project slated for FY23 for additional work in this area. The provider complaint process will be live in a matter of days. This will provide a consistent way to document and receive these complaints with specifics which will allow us to resolve the issue quicker. Providers can reach out the Andres Ramirez, they can email me or Tammy Martin.
- Disability Innovation Fund Grant
 - Focus on assistance to those earning subminimum wage to move into competitive integrated employment
 - VR has applied for this grant

- VR to partner with HHSC and TEA to build a stronger partnership to serve people with most significant disabilities. Met on June 30 and identified a subgroup of staff that are subject matter experts to work on a plan. Will meet again in September.
- ReHabWorks rollout August 2023.

RCT Committee Reports

- Customer Satisfaction and Needs Assessment, Gennadiy Goldenshteyn, Chair
 - Discussed FY2023 Strategic Planning Committee Goals and Activities
 - New 2023 goal: consider satisfaction drivers and current dissatisfiers of employers to provide more opportunities for VR customers:
 - Begin by utilizing the TWC-VR Business Relations team insights
 - Add Business Relations team representative to the CSNA Committee
 - Reviewed and discussed SFY Q3 2022 VR Customer Satisfaction Survey Results (April-June 2022) and SFY Q3 2022 VR Performance Update
 - Strong RFP with consideration for omnichannel administration, minor revision suggested
 - 9/1/22 posting, with target contract award on 1/1/2023
 - Westat to manage Q4 2022 and Q1 2023 surveys under existing contract extension, with new contract awardee to cut in starting Q2 2023 survey
 - In general, customer satisfaction responses are continuing to revert to 2019 (pre-pandemic) levels.
 - Signs of recovery from COVID seen in both Customer Satisfaction and Performance data.
 - CSNA Planning process outline and CSNA timeline

- Leverage virtual format from 2020 (Zoom link + dial-in)
- VR staff to address specific concerns via q & a chat or off-line
- Send Survey Monkey with Townhall survey questions to all registered
- 5 sessions
 - Two evening, one morning, one midday, and one weekend
 - Where feasible, utilize VR offices across the state to provide computer access to those needing it.
- Review and refresh 2020 script to align with latest priorities
- Spanish translation
- Timeline
 - Nov: Finalize content
 - Jan: Begin advertising and publicity efforts/leverage Lisa Givens
 - Feb: Initiate advertising and publicity efforts
 - Systemic follow-ups including reminders one monthly and one weekly reminders
 - Mar: Rehearsals
 - April/May: Session held
- Discussed Customer Satisfaction Survey vendor RFP
- Policy, Procedure & Personnel Development, Karen Stanfill, Chair
 - Focused on goals identified during strategic planning session.
 - Improve (Decrease) the purchasing and approval processes. Specifically looking at approval time for surgery, self-employment, and vehicle modifications. The agency already has some method in place and are looking into this. They will share with us at the next meeting.

- Increase employment retention. The agency will provide an analysis from two years back and compare that to one year back when some changes were made requiring obtaining a master's degree.
- Identify VR services and processes to develop consumer guides. First step to identify what is already available.
- Identify and utilize consumer and subject matter experts as needed to review proposed policies.
- Improve provider engagement. Dr. James Williams will be the lead.
- Improve communication with TWC legal department in posting and selection of IHO's. Work with TWC, and RCT member to distribute these announcement through their distribution list.
- No IHO to review. Report for the year 13 appeals filed, five were resolved informally, two were resolved with the mediator, two were not resolved and closed because person didn't show up to the hearing.
- Education and Membership, Joe Powell
 - The committee met last month as a commitment to meet once in between the quarterly meetings.
 - Discussed the committee goals that set at the strategic planning session.
 - Membership – Four members will term out in October. Bobbie Hodges has kept in touch with the appointments office to insure new applicants have been identified.
 - Training for future RCT meetings – Asked that RCT members suggest topics of interest. New Member Orientation will be help prior to the February 2023 meeting if new appointments have been made.
 - Mentorship program, each committee was asked to identify a mentor from their committee by September 1, 2022.

Elections for RCT Chair and Vice Chair

- Candidates for RCT Chairman
 - Lisa Cowart
 - Gennadiy Goldenshteyn
 - Dr. James E. Williams Jr.
- Candidates for RCT Vice Chairman
 - Gennadiy Goldenshteyn
 - Dr. James E. Williams Jr.
 - Amanda Bowden
 - Emily Robinson
- Election Results
 - RCT Chairman for FY23 Gennadiy Goldenshteyn by majority
 - RCT Vice Chairman for FY23 Dr. James E. Williams Jr. by majority

Liaison Reports The full reports are included in the binders.

Each representative gave an update.

- Client Assistance Program (CAP), Karen Stanfill
- Community Rehabilitation Provider (CRP), Bobbie Hodges
- Partners Resource Network (PRN), Lisa Cowart
- State Independent Living Council (SILC), April Poillreisz
- Texas Education Agency (TEA), Emily Robinson
- Texas Workforce Investment Council (TWIC), Lindsey Geeslin

Council Business

- New Council Business
 - RCT Chair and Vice Chair Election for FY23 Results
 - Chair Gennadiy Goldenshteyn (majority vote)
 - Vice Chair Dr. James E. Williams Jr. (majority vote)
 - Approve May minutes, RCT Chairman Michael Ebbeler asked for approval of May minutes as recorded. With one edit being noted May Minutes were voted on and approved by the RCT Chairman Michael Ebbeler.

- FY22 Budget \$58,350. The current balance \$44,375.87, Strategic Planning total expensed \$5,879.91
- An Ad Hoc Committee was formed: Strategic Planning FY23 Planning Committee, Dr. James E. Williams Jr. will chair along with 2-3 members. Michelle Dobbins volunteered, will need a few additional members. Please include Lisa Godwin on this committee as a nonvoting member.
- FY23 1st Quarterly Meeting discussion. 1st San Antonio TX on Friday October 28 looking at Hotel and San Antonio TWC Office for space and hybrid needs. 2nd February 2-3 (SILC joint meeting? April Pollreisz suggested maybe even invite Governors Committee for People with Disabilities), 3rd May 4-5 Austin, 4th November 2-3 Austin? October?
- Action Item to form an Ad Hoc Committee to Review RCT By Laws for changes identified in the Strategic Planning Session.
- Adjourn