



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, Room #118, Lincoln, NE
Tuesday, February 4th, 2025
10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

The meeting minutes of the State Rehabilitation Council commenced at 10:03 a.m. By Christine Gaspari.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Ashley Altman, Jodi Bodnar, Jordyn Brummund, Gloria Eddins, Jana Egan, Sharon Elliot, Christine Gaspari, Jason Gieschen, Matthew Kaslon, Scott Parrill, Terri Ridder, Lindy Foley, Tobias Orr

MEMBERS ABSENT: Micheal Bursaw, Todd Ludwig, Alvin Parker, Paulette Monthei, Lisa Kent-Scheer

NEBRASKA VR STAFF PRESENT: Alexa Krueger, Lupe Stevens

NEBRASKA VR STAFF ABSENT: Holly Enriquez, Angela Fujan

VISITORS: Janel Sweley, Margie Propp, Frances Beaurivage

VISITORS NOT ATTENDING: Brad Murrens

I. Pledge of Allegiance

Jason Gieschen led the Council in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. Approval of agenda

Christine moved to approve the agenda. Matt seconded the motion.

III. Approval of prior meeting minutes

Christine moved to approve the October 2024 meeting minutes. Gloria seconded the motion.

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

Meeting procedures were mentioned. There were no questions.

V. Introductions

All members introduced themselves.

VI. Council membership

- A. Potential members: Janel Sweley (VR Rehabilitation Counselor), Alexa Krueger (SRC Recorder)
- B. New Members: Mike Bursaw (West Pharmaceutical Services)
- C. 2025 Terms ending:
 - On-going term ending: Mary Matusiak – Employer Committee Advisor
 - First term ending: January 2025: Catrina Gray; April 2025: Jason Gieschen, Matt Kaslon
 - Second term ending: None
 - Recruitment reminder: Individuals with a disability needed to maintain the 51% Council majority.

Tobias noted we can never have too many members for Council. Christine mentioned Council applications are needed. Lindy said there is a survey for Nebraska VR clients to apply for SRC. Gloria mentioned she could talk to Angela to reach out to potential members for recruitment. Lindy mentioned according to Federal Regulations, the majority of members must have a disability. Christine noted there are different events going on in the future where the SRC might be able to pass out to information to others about potentially joining the Council. Matt volunteered to sit at any tables for future events.

VII. Action

Follow-up to action items from last meeting:

- SRC member conference attendance funding consideration of state authorization or direct payment for member expenses rather than reimbursement (Lindy Foley)

Lindy discussed having access to P cards to help with hotels to attend conferences. She mentioned there is also the option to direct bill. Flights are already direct billed to the Department of Education.

Christine thanked Lindy for digging in and getting this information available to members.

- Senator Outreach (Angela Fujan)

Christine mentioned about possibly tabling this topic until Angela returns.

Alexa explained to members they were sent out an email on 1/30/2025 with a Senator Roster and Example. This information could be used to contact their Senators should they

wish to do so.

On 2/4/25, Lindy mentioned Sarah Chapin sent 3 Constant Contact emails to SRC members

- SRC Annual Report 2023-2024
- SRC Fact Sheet
- Job Seeker Brochure

Christine noted she thought speaking directly to the Senators might make even more of an impact. Christine said her prior experiences going in-person made a huge difference and Senators were much more receptive. Christine also brought up the point of sending thank you notes to all the Senators' support staff.

- Member pictures for SRC Annual Report

VIII. Discussion

A. Feedback on October's 2024 Disability Employment and Inclusion Awards (Angela Fujan)

Christine thought this was a great opportunity. Tobias thought there was a great turn out from all offices. Lindy mentioned there were five awards that were handed out. Staff members had the opportunity to take pictures with businesses. She feels this really helped gain a great deal of social media traction. Lindy mentioned the SRC will be using this same strategy next year as well. Lindy asked members at this point if they had any feedback to provide. Christine responded by saying she liked the idea of Nebraska VR going to different offices. She also thought it was a great opportunity for Nebraska VR to tell their staff members what they are doing well. It also shows staff are doing a great job to help others accomplish their vocational dreams. She also liked the fact that the client's family members could be there. All SRC members commented they liked the presentations took place at the Department of Education. Lindy said she will be giving this feedback to Sarah Chapin.

B. Member Feedback on Written Reports (10 minute limit for each):

1. ATP (Tobias Orr) - see written report

ATP is down one staff member but currently looking for an Education Specialist. They also currently have 97 service requests, but this number has tapered off since Covid.

Christine mentioned she reached out to the ATP Director to get assistance with her apartment. Enjoyed her experience working with ATP. The resource is out there and more people should know about it. She also mentioned the Technology

Applications have been simple to operate. She thanked Tobias for thinking outside the box to help her.

Tobias did mention one of the potential “cons.” is smart home technology works only if there is a help desk available or someone in the household who is good with technology would be able to help set it up.

2. CAP (Jodi Bodnar) - see written report

Jodi reported CAP is receiving more referral calls than complaint calls which is great news. This is typical. There are always more information and referral calls vs complaints. They are averaging 2.5 calls per day. However, when individuals call the hotline (CAP), they often haven’t talked to a live person on the phone. Clients state they leave voicemails for other agencies and often don’t receive a call back or conversations are very brief without advocacy. Callers to the hotline (CAP) express appreciation to CAP staff for taking the time to chat. CAP staff advocates and support clients by directly connecting them to agencies by use of conference call, when needed. CAP did trainings for 175 staff members in FY24. 21 clients have been served that had complaints, where communication problems were the most often complaint. Informal mediation was the primary method used by cap in resolving complaints. Clients receive a lot of information about services, but might be a little nervous to reach out. Most clients are in Lincoln and Omaha. This ratio is about 50/50 male to female and approximately 66% of cases are Caucasian. CAP has a goal of reaching out to more underserved communities. The Hotline for Disability Services is being shared which is good.

Gloria thought it was great the “feel” word was included for clients. Jodi wanted to see if more info was pulled on this, and survey could provide more information.

Lindy thought data would be good to adjust program if needed. Lindy expressed the need for some of the data type survey questions to be retained.

Jodi brought up the point that some the of information being asked on survey were duplications of data VR already collects and removed.

3. Deaf & Hard of Hearing (Ashley Altman) – see written report

Ashley mentioned Scottsbluff hired a new staff member, Tiffany Stone. There is the position of Information Officer now open. If anyone knows of someone who is interested in this position, they can pass along the information to them. There is also a new Executive Director, Kyle Miers who is starting in mid-February 2025 and they are looking forward to having them join the team. Christine asked Ashley if Kyle would be open to giving a presentation to SRC sometime in the future. Ashley said she would be happy to send Kyle an email to see if he is interested. Lindy said she

has had previous meetings with the NCDHH and would be happy to follow up with Kyle.

4. NSILC (Christine Gaspari) – see written report

Christine said this year is going to be a year of major changes. There is currently no Executive Director at this point in time. The NSILC is working on getting it advertised. It will be posted on the NSILC website. If anyone has suggestions on places to post, please let Christine know. The NSILC is also pursuing new members. Applications to become a member can be filled out online from the Governor's website. Christine asked members to suggest anyone they know who they feel will be a good fit. The NSILC is also working closely with other agencies to get into a more positive light. Christine thanked the Council for their support and guidance for getting things moving forward in a positive fashion.

5. Ombudsman (report only) – see written report

- no comments

6. Youth Leadership Council (report only) – see written report

Tobias mentioned they are always looking for new members.

C. Member Feedback on VR (Chair)

Matt talked about being put back into VR Services and says it's a huge honor to work with Nebraska VR again as a client. He mentioned his job he was currently holding went south. He's very glad to be working with Nebraska VR because they treat him like family.

D. Director Report (Lindy Foley)

Lindy gave all SRC members a quiz:

Question 1: How many VR staff are there employed across the state?

Answer: 224 staff for both Nebraska VR and ATP. There are 25.3 ATP staff members in total.

Question 2: What does WIOA stand for?

Answer: Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

Question 3: How many VR Field Offices are across Nebraska?

Answer: 12

Question 4: What does quality customer service look like to you?

Answers: There were a wide range of answers which included the following:

Respect, listening, honesty, open to thinking outside of the box, you help people with disabilities (whole picture), helps them in the workforce, and being open even if it's not popular. Lindy commented that it looked like there were a lot of different ways to help Council. This also helps with quality customer service.

Question 5: What is the one disability we are not the main contact for?

Answer: Blind and visually impaired.

Lindy mentioned there are 78 VR programs across the nation. Listening to the customer, showing empathy, and following up with customer is imperative. Lindy mentioned helping people stay successful and placed in right program is a big goal for Nebraska VR. Gloria said it's important for clients to feel capable and valued. Sue Gieschen (Jason's mom) also mentioned how important it is for clients to feel they are valued. Janel thinks it's important for Nebraska VR staff to remain diplomatic. She also mentioned how important it is for Nebraska VR counselors to remain calm when working with clients. Lindy thought this was a great point and mentioned people come to us because they are eligible for our services.

Lindy mentioned she and the two Assistant Directors, Cathy Callaway and Holly Enriquez, visit the Nebraska VR field offices twice a year for the "team tour". It is a time for giving state and national updates, staff to ask questions, and a call to action which gives us one vision and moving in one direction. This includes both an internal and external customer services in moving from 2024 to 2025. Having empathy, valuing one another, looking at all we need to do, and respecting our teammates. She also made it a priority to ask all offices about customer service.

Lindy also provided information to the Council on a national update. She explained every 4 years when there is a change in Administration, RSA will get a new Commissioner beings this is a presidentially appointed position. It is not a surprise Nebraska VR has to look at things and expect changes.

She did mention there have been concerns from staff members about a funding freeze at the federal level. At this point in time there is no significant update. She is busy working with the Nebraska VR fiscal team and Nebraska Department of Education. She will be continuing to keep eyes and ears open. She is also thinking about what a potential freeze on funds would look like. At this current point in time, there are enough funds to cover the freeze and it is business and usual. VR is working hard to prioritize payments which will now be held up unless given something very different than now. Will jobs be compromised? Probably not. But do have enough funds to cover in the interim.

Regarding VR's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policy Lindy met with the Staff Engagement Committee for questions recently. The committee brought up ICE and talked about this

could potentially affect student attendance. NDE is also looking at this across the state.

Lindy mentioned that she, Cathy, Holly are on their way to the CSA VR spring conference in Bethesda, Maryland in April. The focus for the conference is identifying success stories. They will be working with the Nebraska VR Marketing Team to share our client success stories. If one story is selected it will be seen at national level which is very exciting.

A question was posed by Matt if SRC members can attend the spring conference. Lindy mentioned it is best for SRC members attend in the fall.

Lindy also provided a state update. She reported there are two Program Director positions currently being filled. One is for a Business Services Program Director. Mary Matusiak resigned from this position. Interviews were held last Friday, January 31st. There were 19 applicants. Scott was a member of the interview team. Nebraska VR is also filling a Quality Assurance Program Director position. This was an internal position only. Nebraska VR received 13 applications.

Nebraska VR is also in the process of finishing up a state audit. As always, this is a good learning experience. Lindy said we are in the second year of a two-year legislative session.

LB336 is being tracked, language was brought forward from last session and are already doing things on creating a Task Force on Supported Employment.

Matt mentioned he was working with the DD Council. Lindy said DJ Plautz will be updating her on this.

Lindy also spoke of a Climate survey. Nebraska VR will be going through results. This survey is conducted once every 3 years. She will be sharing the survey results in the upcoming DIG meeting.

State Staff will be held in July in Kearney 2025 for all Nebraska VR and ATP staff. There will be lots of different sessions and national speakers.

Lindy will ask the State Staff Planning Committee if SRC members and State Board members are invited.

IX. Working Lunch: Committee meetings and reports:

A. Client Services Committee (Lisa Kent-Scheer)

Jodi reported satisfaction survey was in the reports. Questions were already added for last quarter: 1. I am satisfied with the service they received. 2. I was treated with courtesy and respect. 3. My needs were met quickly without interruptions. 4. I was able to share my thoughts and help make decisions about the services I received.

24 surveys were taken this quarter.

The committee will discuss if it is feasible for VR to include other status groups and will explore using a random sample that represents each status for FY26.

Tobias gave a big kudos to VR staff members and mentioned encouragement and support levels have gone up.

B. Employer Services Committee (Todd Ludwig)

Tobias reported that with Mary Matusiak leaving, the form for October award nominations will be reviewed. In July nominations will be reviewed. Award winners will be announced at the August SRC meeting. Awards will be presented in October.

C. Transition Services Committee (Gloria Eddins)

This group reported that it might be beneficial to add a teacher award (Special Education teacher or staff member) to the October Awards. All members expressed excitement for that idea.

There was also a great deal of discussion on how to change the teacher and parent mindset for thinking students with disabilities are unemployable. Some students think they aren't going to get into college or can't get a job, so why try. How can we change the mindset of parents and teachers who think these students are unemployable or can't get into school? Is there one trusted individual to help the student believe they can work or go to school? Students have no confidence. Members thought work shadowing and summer program opportunities might be a beneficial way to change this. Working in the summer to bring home a paycheck is empowering. Tobias commented the Nebraska VR Pre-Employment Transition Services team could be available to assist with this goal. Janel mentioned in Grand Island Pre-Employment Transition Services staff meet with adult program counselors for a warm hand-off of students. Christine emphasized she feels confidence needs to be instilled in people with disabilities. Lindy mentioned there is power for students to connect with the Youth Leadership Council. Janel mentioned sometimes losing SSI benefits might cause some parents to turn down services for their child. Independent living skills needs to be brought into the discussion. How can we connect businesses to schools? Scott mentioned he could find jobs for anyone in the restaurant business. When is the time period when we can change the mindset? Maybe 15-16 year olds.

Jordyn mentioned NDE has a Friday Blast for administrators and educators across the state to stay informed on current events (conferences, trainings, professional development) in special education. They would like to add more to the Friday Blast to highlight the good work from educators across the state. Members commented they thought it might be advantageous to include a few stories about Nebraska VR in this blast. This will be investigated. Jordyn mentioned Special Education is currently working on what is included in an IEP. She also informed the group 6 regional transition facilitators are putting together a Transition Summit in Lincoln on 2/25/25.

Has Nebraska VR worked with PTI to put out information? Yes we have.

D. Executive Committee (Christine Gaspari)

No report.

X. Public Comment/Announcements

Gloria announced Disability Pride is taking place on July 26th at Antelope Park in Lincoln. You can find more information on their Facebook page if interested in attending.

The next SRC Meeting is on Tuesday, May 6th at 10:00 am via Zoom.

Christine motioned to adjourn the meeting. Matt seconded.