Edmund G. Brown Jr.,

Governor

State of California

Health and Human Services Agency

Department of Rehabilitation

721 Capitol Mall

Sacramento, CA 95814 Blind Field Services

BLIND ADVISORY COMMITTEE (BAC)

MEETING MINUTES

March 1, 2013

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE**

* Bryan Bashin, Chair (via teleconference)
* Shannon Dillon, (via teleconference)
* Margie Donovan, Vice Chair (in person)
* Donna Pomerantz, (in person)
* Don Queen, (via teleconference)
* Bill Takeshita, (in person)
* Jeff Thom, (in person)
* Michael Thomas, (in person)
* Robert Wendt, (in person)
* Mary Willows, (via teleconference)

**Committee Members Absent**

* Roy Harmon

Members of the public IN ATTENDANCE, who announced themselves (Participant call-in number, and the pass code for teleconference were provided);

* Sherry Raceler, (in person)
* Ken Metz, (via teleconference)

**STAFF PRESENT**

* Suzanne Chan, Operations and Accountability Officer (in person)
* Brian Connors, Advisory Committee Analyst, Specialized Services Division (SSD) – in person
* Peter Dawson, District Administrator, Blind Field Services (BFS) - via teleconference
* Elena Gomez, Assistant Deputy Director, SSD - in person
* Rosa Gomez, Administrator, Orientation Center for the Blind (OCB) - via teleconference
* Jay Harris, Administrator, Older Individuals Who Are Blind (OIB) - in person
* Juney Lee, Chief Deputy Director (in person)
* Bill Moore, Deputy Director, Vocational Rehabilitation Employment Division - in person
* Pat Santillanes, Deputy Director, Vocational Rehabilitation Policy and Resources Division - in person
* Joe Xavier, Deputy Director, SSD - in person

**CALL TO ORDER**

* Mr. Bashin called the meeting to order. There were 12 members present, which constituted a quorum.
* In carrying out the Governor’s Executive Order B-6-11, two options were offered to participate in the meeting:

1. Attend in person at Central Office in Sacramento, or

2. Attend via teleconference at the designated locations.

**Approval of October 3, 2012 BAC Meeting Minutes**

* Ms. Donovan moved, and it was seconded by Mr. Thom to approve the October 3, 2012 minutes. The motion carried unanimously.

**New BAC Member Introductions**

* Mr. Takeshita (service provider representative), Mr. Bashin (re-appointed National Federation of the Blind of California (NFBC) representative) and Ms. Willows (NFBC representative) introduced themselves as the new and re-appointed BAC Members.

**Election of BAC Chair**

* Mr. Queen facilitated the nomination and election of a new BAC Chair. Ms. Donovan and Mr. Bashin were nominated from the floor. Mr. Bashin was elected Chair with a 6-5 vote.
* Mr. Bashin facilitated the nomination and election of a new BAC Vice Chair. Ms. Donovan and Mr. Queen were nominated from the floor. Mr. Queen declined the nomination. Ms. Donovan was elected Vice Chair by acclamation.

**DOR and Specialized Services Division (SSD) Program Updates**

* Mr. Xavier congratulated the newly elected BAC Chair and Vice Chair and expressed appreciation for the dedication and service provided by ex-Members, Jay Allen and Serena Olsen.
* Ms. Lee gave an update on the current DOR budget and how the recent Federal budget cuts will impact DOR’s budget by $5 million. She also stated that there would be a reduction in Federal grants. Ms. Lee also commented on DOR’s 50th Anniversary and current initiatives, including the State Plan public hearings in April, enhancements to the case management system, roll-out of new Microsoft Windows and Office software, and implementation of other customer service efficiencies.
* Mr. Moore announced the formation of a newly developed Customer Service Unit, developed with an emphasis on quality and follow up on consumer and external partner concerns.
* For action: Ms. Donovan requested the number of currently employed BFS clients on the list of 400 consumers on the EDD wage abstract list. DOR will present this at the next BAC meeting.
* For action: DOR will provide the BAC with the phone number of the new customer service line when it becomes available.
* For action: DOR will provide the BAC with information and data on standards and indicators.
* Mr. Xavier continued his presentation, including the following updates:
  + Janet LaBreck has been nominated for Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) commissioner. If appointed, 3 of the last 4 commissioners will have come from the blind community.
  + Several key DOR staffing appointments were announced.
  + RSA conducted an onsite monitoring of Business Enterprises Program (BEP) in January. Recommendations and observations were made with no findings identified. A report will be issued in coming months.
  + The RSA reports for BEP and Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) Program were submitted to RSA on time and reading of them is encouraged.

**Vocational Rehabilitation Modernization (VR Mod) Project Update**

* Ms. Santillanes gave an update on the VR Mod Project. Highlights included:
  + a background and overview of the program;
  + new, changing and phased out staffing roles; and
  + current and future training plans.

**Vendor Utilization Management (VUM) Project**

* Ms. Chan gave a presentation on the VUM Project, which will re-examine DOR’s uniform rate structure, supply and demand, solutions and gaps, invoicing and payment processes, performance reporting, and outcomes. Highlights included:
* a project background, timeline and update;
* DOR applied for and was selected for Federal funding to participate in a research study relating to State VR agency practices.

**Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) Program Funding Distribution Models**

* Mr. Xavier gave a background on the policy discussion surrounding the development of an OIB grantee funding model that equitable and consistent.
* Mr. Harris presented grantee funding models #1 through 6 for the BAC’s consideration. (Models 1-3 were presented at the last BAC meeting.) Questions and issues for the BAC to consider included:
  + If DOR does not fund all counties, which counties will not be funded?;
  + Establishing a service area as a county; and
  + Criteria to Fund New Service Areas, including base, geography and population.
* There was general consensus to fund grantees, based on criteria that include a base with geography weighted at 15% and population weighted at 85%.
* Mr. Xavier stated that a discussion on the following issues should take place at a later time/meeting:
  + 1. How many agencies will be funded within each catchment area;
    2. How can counties be incentivized to provide services in unserved and underserved areas; and
    3. Should Year 2 and 3 funding be adjustable based on Year 1 grant expenditures by each agency?

**Orientation Center for the Blind (OCB) Advisory Committee**

* There was a committee discussion on considering the statutory formation of an OCB Advisory Committee. Issues included the restrictions on discretionary expenditures, what role they would have and what their purpose would be.
* Mr. Xavier presented the concept of creating this advisory committee to the California Council of the Blind (CCB) and the NFBC, at their recent state conferences. He has not heard any feedback from either group since then. Mr. Thom reported that CCB Members, attending the CCB Conference, felt that the advisory committee would have a role to play, particularly if OCB alumni were part of the committee.
* Members expressed their opinions regarding why an OCB Advisory Committee would be a valuable organization to form. Many felt that this committee could provide more guidance to DOR than the BAC could without a standing OCB Advisory Committee. Mr. Xavier will take all comments under advisement when making a decision whether or not to form a committee.

**Assistive Technology (AT) Assessment Services**

* Mr. Xavier led a discussion about the purchase of AT assessment services for consumers, namely issues surrounding the State Price Schedule (SPS). He commented that there is an inherent conflict between the organization that provides an assessment/evaluation and the vendor who sells the product. DOR conducted an analysis, based on case services records of assistive technology assessments. Data was broken down by region.
* Mr. Dawson explained the disparity between AT assessments throughout the State, including assessment trends and average cost per assessment. BFS Managers are looking at ways to create a uniform process for AT assessments.
* Ms. Willows stated that DOR should not to discuss this topic at a BAC meeting while the CSUN Technology Conference was taking place, because individuals who had discussed this issue with DOR in the past (namely vendors) were not present for this meeting.
* Motion: Ms. Willows made a motion to request that the AT assessment agenda item should be tabled until these individuals can attend the BAC meeting. Ms. Donovan seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously with one abstention.
* Mr. Xavier explained that the purpose of this agenda item discussion is to determine: 1) When should assessments should be done? 2) What should assessments look like?, and 3) What variables should the BAC look at when evaluating the assessment process?. Ms. Donovan commented that, even though unintentional, this meeting was scheduled at the same time as the CSUN Technology Conference, which prohibited valuable stakeholders (i.e., AT vendors) from discussing the topic at the meeting.

**Future meetings**

* There was a discussion and decision on the process to schedule future meetings and determine specific future meeting dates.
* Motion: Ms. Donovan made a motion to maintain the previously agreed upon 2013 BAC meeting dates (August 14 and November 20). Ms. Donovan seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**Beneficial Statistics for the BAC to Receive Routinely**

* There was continued discussion, from the October 3, 2012 BAC Meeting, leading to decisions on the content and frequency of beneficial data to be provided to the BAC in the future.
* Ms. Gomez explained that the following reports, as requested by the BAC, are included in the meeting packet:
  + Report on long-term high cost cases;
  + Report on employment outcomes achieved by consumers who are blind or visually-impaired.
* A narrative of these reports, identifying trends and patterns, is also included in the meeting packet. Ms. Gomez gave a short summary of these narratives.
* Mr. Bashin commented that data should be provided in a historical context, particularly data on competitive closures. This will show the long-term trends in the data. He felt the disaggregation of occupational classifications was valuable.
* For action: The BAC requested the following reports be sent to members annually, in the fall, and at least 10 days prior to the respective meeting:
* Report on number of annual competitive closures (including number of hours worked and weekly wages) covering the past 5 years;
* Report on SSI/SSDI status at case closure;
* Report on employer-provided health benefits to 26 closures;
* Report on number of plan changes per consumer and time between changes;
* Report on long-term, high cost cases;
* Report on the disaggregated data of blind and visually impaired consumers in the RSA 911 Report;
* Report on the relationship between 26 closures and service provided to consumer (DOR will present a report concept at the next meeting); and
* Report on number of homemaker cases.

**DOR Requiring Forms only in Print (Annual Update Form)**

* Ms. Gomez gave a presentation on the accessibility of DOR forms and options for fill and complete forms and forms that require a wet signature. DOR looked at all (approximately 15) forms that a consumer may be required to complete. Currently, all these forms are available in MS Word and/or PDF formats, except for the Child Provider Form. DOR is currently attempting to make this form accessible.
* Mr. Xavier explained that providing the ability to save PDF forms creates a licensing/cost issue for DOR. Until a more cost-effective or technically-advanced option becomes available, consumers will need to complete and print this form (without saving).
* Ms. Gomez explained that the Annual Review form is not a form that a consumer is required to complete. She requested that Ms. Donovan share information about a similar form that she was unable to complete/save in the past.
* For action: Mr. Thom requested that DOR Regional Supervisors require all counselors to inform consumers that online forms are available to them, in addition to hard copy formats.
* For action: Ms. Donovan requested that availability of accessible forms be included in the next BFS supervisor training.
* Ms. Gomez stated the DOR is in the process of looking into e-signature options, in an effort to move toward a paperless organization.

**NEW BUSINESS**

* For action: Ms. Donovan commented that, last summer, several vendors were not paid to participate in the BEP Summer Intern Program. The vendors were told, after the program was completed, that they would not be paid. Mr. Dawson and Mr. Xavier will discuss this after the meeting and report back at the next meeting, including an overview of current student programs.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

* Mr. Metz commented that several consumers in the Los Angeles area have tried to get cases opened or re-opened, and the consumers never received a call back. Additionally, he stated that, in one case, a counselor refused to assist in the completion of a form. He feels that DOR needs to make sure counselors are doing their job, as it relates to these issues. Mr. Thomas responded that CAP is currently reporting these instances to the DOR on a regular basis. Mr. Metz will contact his local Client Assistance Program (CAP) office, as advised by Mr. Thomas.

Meeting adjourned.

**MOTIONS:**

* Request that the AT assessment agenda item should be tabled until these individuals can attend the BAC meeting.
* Maintain the previously agreed upon 2013 BAC meeting dates (August 14 and November 20).

**FOR ACTION:**

* Ms. Donovan requested the number of currently employed BFS clients on the list of 400 consumers on the EDD wage abstract list. DOR will present this at the next BAC meeting.
* DOR will provide the BAC with the phone number of the new Customer Service Unit line when it becomes available.
* DOR will provide the BAC with information and data on standards and indicators.
* The BAC requested the following reports be sent to members annually, in the fall, and at least 10 days prior to the respective meeting:
  + Report on number of annual competitive closures (including number of hours worked and weekly wages) covering the past 5 years;
  + Report on SSI/SSDI status on case closure;
  + Report on employer-provided health benefits to “26 closures”;
  + Report on number of plan changes per consumer and time between changes;
  + Report on long-term high cost cases;
  + A report on the disaggregated data of blind and visually-impaired consumers in the RSA 911 Report.
  + Report on the relationship between “26 closures” and service provided to the consumer (DOR will present a report concept at the next meeting); and
  + Report on the number of homemaker cases.
* The BAC requested that DOR Supervisors require all counselors to inform consumers that online forms are available to them, in addition to hard copy formats.
* The BAC requested that availability of accessible forms be included in the next BFS supervisor training.
* Last summer, several vendors were not paid to participate in the BEP Summer Intern Program. The vendors were told, after the program was completed, that they would not be paid. Mr. Dawson and Mr. Xavier will discuss this after the meeting and report back at the next meeting, including an overview of current student programs.