

Employment First Council
Working Meeting Minutes
August 27, 2019
200 Piedmont Ave.
Atlanta, GA 30334

Members Present:

Vice Chairman John Wells
Rossany Rios
Chairman Shawn Ryan
Eric Jacobson
David Ward
Brandt White
Wanda Gross
Todd Youngblood
Amy Riedesel
James Stinchcomb
Parker Glick

GVRA Executive Director Shawn Ryan called the meeting to order at 1:07 p.m. Roll was called.

Mr. Ryan briefly discussed recent events at GVRA, noting the issues facing the organization and the efforts being made to remedy those problems. This included the decision to contract with Accenture, a third-party group which works on organizational improvements. Mr. Ryan said that in improving GVRA, the mission of Employment First will be fulfilled, and that's his top priority. In the future, he said, there's a lot of promise both for GVRA and Employment First. He said he anticipates changes at the administrative level of GVRA within the next 12 months.

Discussion was had regarding next steps. Mr. Jacobson said that it would be important to note that the Council will be slowing down until GVRA makes the changes that are proposed, if that is the decision moving forward. Mr. Ryan said that GVRA's success relies on the success of its partners, and it is working as an organization to improve those relationships. Mr. Wells said the Council can in many ways play a part in helping facilitate the necessary changes at GVRA. Mr. Ward and Ms. Rios agreed that the Council still has much that can be accomplished.

Mr. Ryan recognized GVRA Legislative Liaison Charlie Miller. Mr. Miller went through Employment First legislation and laid out what requirements were contained therein, specifically noting the focus on training and transition into post-secondary institutions.

Mr. Ward presented on the training subcommittee. It was clear, he said, that organizations and individuals needing training first need to be identified, and that training should be uniform across the state. The subcommittee recommended streamlining training resources, creating certification standards and ensuring training alignment across providers.

Mr. White presented on the communications subcommittee. He said that in conversations with Mr. Wells, it became clear that more communication needs to take place between committees and that more efforts need to be made to communicate what the Employment First Council is all about.

Mr. Jacobson presented on the data subcommittee. The question, he said, is how do all the organizations establish a central repository for data. To establish this, he said, it's crucial that all data collection metrics are uniform across organizations. Mr. Ryan said that the improved collection and analysis of data will be a large first step towards better service of the disability community, and in a lot of ways, the collection of data will help identify potential blind spots as well. Mr. Jacobson broke down numbers from the Department of Education showing graduation and drop-out rates among the special education population.

As far as post-secondary education goes, Mr. Ryan said that there needs to be a greater focus on the technical college system, as it exists as an outstanding training tool to clients and individuals with disabilities across Georgia.

Mr. Wells said that the use of sub-minimum wage needs to be eliminated in Georgia, and that it stands as a barrier to full employment as a first option. In addition, he said, for anything to be successful, all organizations across the state need to be on the same page. Mr. Ryan said that provider training in the future could begin to bridge this gap.

Mr. Jacobson said that in looking at the October report, the Council may need to submit a placeholder until GVRA can fully implement the changes it has planned. Ms. Rios said that a significant report can still be produced prior to GVRA making those changes, and Ms. Riedesel agreed, saying that it's important to keep the initiatives of the disability community fresh in the minds of Georgia legislators. Mr. Stinchcomb suggested that the October report reflect the ramifications from the Governor's proposed cuts. Mr. Wells agreed, saying that the Council still has the opportunity to continue its mission despite hurdles being faced by individual agencies.

Mr. Jacobson volunteered to pull the subcommittee reports together to form the October report, and the Council agreed to move forward with this.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:58 p.m.