

MINUTES OF MEETING
BOARD OF GEORGIA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES
HELD
WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2012
AT
TWO PEACHTREE STREET
ATLANTA, GEORGIA

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Sandy Adams
Marsha Farrow
Robert Green
Louise Hill
Greg Kirk
Fay Loggins
Amy O'Dell

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:

Jimmy DeFoor
Don Parks

Ms. Louise Hill, Vice Chairperson, called the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Services (GVRS) Board meeting to order at approximately 1:00 pm and welcomed everyone to the meeting. Ms. Hill explained that Chairman Jimmy DeFoor expressed his regrets for not being at the meeting, but he plans to be at the Board meeting in January.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A motion was made by Sandy Adams and seconded by Faye Loggins that the minutes of the November 7, 2012 meeting be approved. There being no questions or discussion, the motion was passed unanimously by the Board.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Mr. Schmieg began his report with the most pressing issue that has been on the Board's agenda for several months.

Federal VR Grant

Our FY13 federal VR grant was issued by Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) as high risk with a special condition after the previous department failed to provide to RSA eight fiscal reports for federal FY 2011 and FY 2012 when they were due. The special condition is that GVRA will not be able to draw down any federal funds for the period of October 1, 2012 to September 30, 2013, until this agency can provide assurances to RSA that GVRA has sufficient matching funds for that grant.

As of October 1, 2012, the VR Program has been operating only on state funds, which had to cover the entire cost of VR Program, staff, contractors, providers and case service for all the consumers that the program serves. GVRA has been working as aggressively as possible with the prior department, the Governor's Office, the Office of Planning and Budget and RSA to get this situation resolved.

Last Friday, December 7, Mr. Schmieg submitted a formal letter to RSA Acting Commissioner Edward Anthony, requesting that RSA remove the special condition. The letter was submitted because the prior department had submitted all eight reports. The letter stated that GVRA does have sufficient matching funds available since the prior department did have adequate match for federal money it spent during federal FY 2011 and FY 2012.

On Monday morning, December 10, Mr. Schmieg received a call from David Steele, Budget Director of RSA. Mr. Steele had reviewed the request letter over the weekend and the numbers look perfect. Mr. Steele said he would approve the request at his level and then pass it on for legal review at RSA.

On Tuesday, December 11, Mr. Schmieg received an email from Mr. Steele stating that he needed a letter providing assurance that GVRA has sufficient matching funds for the federal FY 2013 VR grant. Mr. Schmieg forwarded the assurances immediately. The letter to Acting Commissioner Anthony gave assurance that the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Services Board and the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency will draw down only those federal funds for which GVRA has adequate matching funds. As of this date, Mr. Schmieg is waiting on a response from RSA that it has accepted the reports from the prior department and has removed that special condition to allow GVRA to draw down the federal funds for FY 2013. Mr. Schmieg continued by stating that he will keep everybody informed.

The Governor's Office and the Office of Planning and Budget have been very supportive, and Mr. Schmieg plans to thank them officially. There have been lots of calls from consumers, providers and legislators. We will issue a letter to our legislators and senators, so they can give out accurate information to constituents.

A packet of information was distributed to the Board members prior to the beginning of the meeting. Mr. Schmieg then discussed the contents of the packet with the Board.

Services Update

Mr. Schmieg stated we have been working on an Agency Strategic Plan as well as Programs' Strategic Plans.

TEAM 26 (Total Employment for American Military) is an initiative to improve services to Veterans. The number 26 represents successful closure with employment in the VR Program. An event is taking place tomorrow, December 13, with approximately 100 veterans and about 35 employers.

Mr. Schmieg continued with the VR grant by stating that Georgia has not been able to match the full federal grant. For the past couple of years, funds have been sent back to RSA and distributed to other states that could have been used to serve Georgians with disabilities. Georgia clearly does not enough match money in our state appropriation for VR to match the full amount of the federal grant. The following are some opportunities with other agencies.

- Department of Education (DOE) – A significant amount of high school students are having difficulty with transitioning from high school to work. Mr. Schmieg is scheduled to meet with the Director of Special Education to discuss this issue and perhaps access some DOE state funds to draw down additional match.
- Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) – Mr. Schmieg has a meeting with Commissioner Frank Berry in January. Our agency has an opportunity to partner with DBHDD to do some supported employment and customized employment. Both models have been shown to be successful with employment.
- Department of Correction (DOC) – A meeting is scheduled with the Commissioner of Correction. Georgia's prison population has convicted felons with disabilities who have a lot of strikes against them when they try to find employment. This population has difficulty with transitioning from prison to work. Hopefully, partnering with this agency will help GVRA draw some additional federal funds.
- Provider Partners – Mr. Schmieg is impressed with private and not for profit providers. Several of them have approached GVRA about how they can help to draw down more funds. All the ideas will be reviewed as GVRA's goal is to increase the ability to draw down the entire VR grant for this fiscal year.

Mr. Schmieg conducted seven VR listening sessions around the state and invited the VR field staff to attend. We asked questions such as: how could we make your job better; how could we make you feel more valued; how could we improve the program. Mr. Schmieg received an amazing volume of comments. The most shocking comments were made about GVRA Logo. At every session, staff stated the logo was offensive and does not accurately reflect people with disabilities or the mission of the agency. Mr. Schmieg was very surprised by the negative comments. Mr. Schmieg brought this information to the Board's attention because the logo selection was a mistake and it needs to be revisited.

Mr. Schmieg then introduced a new way the Board can receive information about GVRA programs, which was suggested by Keith Horton, Deputy Director. Mr. Schmieg asked the Board to consider for future meetings to invite a staff person to present program information. He thinks it is important to hear about the programs from the staff persons who are working in the frontlines.

Operations Update

Mr. Keith Horton gave an update for the last six months of the "Stand Alone" agency. He acknowledged the Department of Human Services (DHS) and Department of Labor for their support. Mr. Horton gave a brief status report on the following agency functions: Human Resources, Facilities, Information Technology, Finance, Budget and Contracts.

- Human Resources (HR) – An organizational structure has been developed to support GVRA staff. The structure is a hybrid of existing employees as well as six additional hires. HR structure is anticipated to be in place either February or March.
- Facilities – This function is currently supported by DHS, and will be a structure of existing employees as well as two additional hires. Once the leasing and risk management employees are hired, we will be able to perform all the functions that are necessary to ensure our facilities infrastructure is taken care of.
- Finance, Budget and Contracts – Jimmy Wilson is currently performing an analysis to determine the positions and structure necessary to support GVRA.
- Information Technology – There is a MOU with DOL in place to support GVRA. We are meeting with the CIO on a monthly basis to discuss how to break apart different items to be truly independent in order to seek out the technology for GVRA. Mr. Horton also mentioned staff has been working with Georgia Technology Authority (GTA) to develop a website that will truly represent GVRA.
- Co-locations – Mr. Horton referred to the handout and explained which co-locations GVRA has already vacated, and which co-locations are being worked on in order to yield some cost savings.
- Badges, Signage and Supplies. There is a moratorium on printing of badges until we get the logo straightened out. We are working on the signage to ensure the proper name is displayed at program offices.

Mr. Schmieg thanked Mr. Horton for his presentation. Mr. Schmieg then made a formal request that the Board go into Executive Session before concluding their Board meeting to discuss: 1) the hospitals at Warm Springs, 2) VR budget and 3) personnel issues at Disability Adjudication Services (DAS).

SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS

The Board invited partners of GVRA to enhance its communication and knowledge in order to better serve Georgians with disabilities. Ms. Hill introduced Ms. Pat Puckett of the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC).

- Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) – Ms. Pat Puckett, Executive Director, began by explaining how Independent Living was started by six to eight young men in California. It is an organization for people with disabilities working together to remove barriers and to provide support and services to one another. There are eight Centers for Independent Living within Georgia. All centers must provide information referral, independent skills training, advocacy and peer support.

GVRA has a formal relationship with the SILC. At the end of the presentation, Mr. Schmieg suggested to the Board to consider a member working with him and Ms. Puckett to create a formal relationship between the Board and the SILC, and bring some recommendations back to the Board. Ms. Marsha Farrow suggested Faye Loggins. Mr. Loggins agreed to work with Mr. Schmieg and Ms. Puckett.

- State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) – Ms. Linda Shepard was unable to attend this meeting, but an invitation will be extended to her to make a presentation at another Board meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Hill then introduced John Weatherford who addressed the Board on behalf of the Georgia Radio Reading Service (GRRS). GRSS is the only radio reading service in Georgia and reaches approximately 16,000 listeners. Since this organization started, the budget has been decreasing. Positions have been eliminated and salaries as well as benefits have been reduced or eliminated for remaining staff. For the first time in its history, GRRS implemented an online donation program as well as a car donation program. Mr. Weatherford appealed to the GVRS Board for funding to help continue this operation.

Ms. Hill thanked Mr. Weatherford for his presentation and stated that the Board will take his request under advisement.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Hill asked for a motion to have the Board go into executive session. A motion was made by Greg Kirk, seconded by Marsha Farrow and unanimously passed.

There being no further public business to discuss, the Board meeting was adjourned at approximately 2:40 pm.

The audience vacated the Board room, and the GVRS Board went into executive session. The topics discussed were:

- Hospitals at Warm Springs
- VR Budget
- Personnel Issues DAS

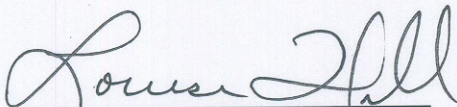
THE NEXT MEETING

The next Board meeting will be on Wednesday, January 9, 2013 in Bainbridge, GA.



Marsha Farrow, Secretary

APPROVED:



Louise Hill, Vice Chairperson