South Carolina Commission for the Blind

1430 Confederate Avenue  
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Meeting Minutes   
September 24, 2024

Notifications of all regular, called, or special meetings are compliant with FOIA requirements, Section 90-4-80.

# Call to Order

Chairperson Susan John called the meeting to order at 11:04am. The meeting was conducted via Zoom Meeting software.

# Present

Susan John, Chairperson  
Cathy Olker, Secretary  
Dan Hanfland, Board Commissioner

Mathias Chaplin, Board Commissioner

Darline Graham, SCCB Commissioner

# Adoption of Agenda

Dan Hanfland made a motion to accept the September 24, 2024, Agenda. It was seconded by Mathias Chaplin. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

# Public Comment

None

# Approval of Minutes

Cathy Olker made a motion to accept the July 12, 2024, minutes. It was seconded by Mathias Chaplin. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

# Commissioner’s Report

## Darline Graham reported:

The agency’s Annual Accountability Report was submitted ahead of schedule. The report provides the General Assembly with an update on the agency’s accomplishments in the past year. The report also contains the agency’s strategic plan. An update on the agency’s progress towards completing the 2025 strategic plan will be provided at the next Board meeting. The Annual Accountability Report also helps with the agency budget request. This year the agency is not asking for additional state support. After receiving funds to support the Older Blind program, the agency will take FY25 to fully evaluate program and infrastructure needs.

The agency is also in the process of reviewing and possibly revising various state statutes and regulations that apply to SCCB and that are extremely outdated. Since many date back to the 1970s, the agency wants to ensure that they fully align with federal regulations. This would help to better provide efficient quality services that meet consumer’s needs. For example, the current regulations outline in great detail how certain training is to be provided to consumers who are interested in self-employment, such as requiring only classroom instruction, thus limiting our ability to offer virtual training options when needed.

Regional Directors, Leads, and members of the Executive Leadership Team are revising planning documents for all positions, ensuring the duties are accurate and that success criteria are measurable.

On August 17, Commissioner Graham and Carol Anderson spoke at the annual National Federation of the Blind (NFB) of South Carolina State Convention. They shared updates, successes, and networked with consumers and others in the community.

White Cane Awareness Day is recognized every October 15. SCCB has an event planned in Columbia and one in Myrtle Beach. In Columbia, consumers will participate in a State House Scavenger Hunt as part of their O&M training. At Grand Park in Myrtle Beach, the agency has planned activities such as bingo and craft creation for students and Teachers of the Visually Impaired. SCCB staff will provide demonstrations to attendees of how a white cane may be used. They will also have vision simulator glasses that attendees can use to understand various visual impairments. NFB of SC will host a White Cane Safety Walk followed by a lunch and learn at the Federation Center on Kilbourne Road on October 15. During the lunch and learn, SCCB’s O&M Lead will display different types of canes and discuss their use.

September is Workforce Development month. Commissioner Graham and several staff attended the Workforce Development Symposium on September 12. Information was shared on how to grow a stronger, more skilled workforce. The event allowed staff to network with other organizations and businesses.

The email notification, something individuals can sign up for on the website, is ready. The new system will showcase success stories and events that will be happening around the state.

The HVAC installations in Buildings B, C, and D have been completed and all inspections have been passed, allowing residential consumers to return to the training center. The HVAC project for Building A has started. The Executive Leadership Team, Finance Team, and most of the Leads have temporarily relocated to the Department of Employment and Workforce. Most staff that provide direct consumer services will remain on the main campus to better serve our consumers.

Staff from the VR Technical Assistance Center - Quality Management will visit to work with finance and other staff on fiscal planning and forecasting.

New employees John Kennedy, System Administrator; Tennia Walker, VR Program Coordinator; and Kendal Jackson; Accounts Payable, were welcomed.

# Finance Update

## Kenneth Burton reported:

State Budget – As of August 31, 2024, the agency was 17% through the state fiscal year, with agency’s overall spending at 16%. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) has utilized 19% of the budget, the Training Center 10%, Transition Services 11%, the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) 18%, Prevention of Blindness 17%, Older Blind 14%, Children’s Services 12%, and Administration 21%.

Federal Grants – The agency is 95% through the total period of performance for the 2023 grant cycle. The agency has utilized 100% of the VR general use portion of the grant, 100% of the portion set-aside for the provision of pre-ETS (pre-employment transition services), and 100% of the Older Blind grant.

The agency is 46% through the total period of performance for the 2024 grant cycle. The agency has utilized 17% of the VR Grant, 20% of pre-ETS, 100% of the Older Blind grant, 0% of the Supported Employment grant, and 0% of the Supported Employment grant (Transition).

The Fort Jackson funds were received and disbursed accordingly. Overall, SCCB spending is on target with the budget, and there are no current concerns.

# Human Resources Update

## Luis Mendoza reported:

# The agency currently employs 91 full-time employees (FTE). Including temporary and contract employees, the total workforce is 104. The agency currently has a turnover rate of 13%. The agency is in the process of implementing a new Performance Matrix that will begin October 1.

The Annual Affirmative Action Report will be submitted to the General Assembly by the end of October. This report will be used in determining the agency’s equal opportunity attainment rate.

The Human Resources (HR) team, in partnership with State HR, has developed a new performance review policy and launched a performance management program. SCCB is one of the first agencies to adopt the new system, with the launch occurring October 1. This system will include updated performance standards for all positions.

Last fiscal year, the HR team visited 20 schools and organizations across South Carolina and North Carolina for outreach and recruitment, including events hosted by NFB, Clemson University, Winthrop University, Midlands SC Works, and CEPI University.

# Project Update

During testing and balancing of the Columbia HVAC project it was discovered that a portion of the send and return loop piping had been reversed from a previous HVAC installation, which impacted heating for several air handlers across the campus. Deficiencies in the existing duct smoke detectors were also found. All issues have been resolved, the final inspection conducted, and a certificate of occupancy issued.

The construction contract for Building A renovation was awarded to Gilliam and Associates, who will serve as the General Contractor. Construction on building A is scheduled to begin September 30, 2024.

# Facilities Update

The agency ended its Facilities Management contract with the Department of Administration at the beginning of Fiscal Year 2025. All building systems are now maintained and repaired in-house by the SCCB Facilities Department or through third-party vendors when necessary. This includes system inspections such as generators, fire safety devises, HVAC, boiler, backflow prevention devices, elevator recall, sprinkler systems, general plumbing, and electrical maintenance. Landscaping and groundskeeping will be maintained by SCCB Facilities.

The Facilities team successfully relocated about 50 employees due to the Building A project, including those returning to Building C (after the HVAC project completion) and those temporarily reporting to leased space at the Department of Employment and Workforce (DEW). In addition, Facilities assisted in the disposal of documents no longer required to be stored. More than six tons of documents were shredded in the last two months.

# Information Technology Update

The IT department has been working to improve agency technology systems to make them more efficient and secure. The agency’s internet capacity was doubled, allowing staff to work more efficiently and deliver better services to our consumers. Network and server systems were also upgraded to handle daily workloads more effectively. In addition, the agency is working with the state’s IT security team to develop stronger security policies.

Options for a new help desk ticket system are being explored to help improve the efficiency of the IT department.

A System Administrator to support the agency’s AWARE case management system was hired. The agency is also in the process of hiring a Business Analyst who will work closely with the System Administrator. These roles will help provide better support to staff.

# **Consumer Services Update**

## Carol Anderson reported:

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Lead co-presented at the Association of Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER) International Conference on July 27, 2024.

On August 19, 2024, SCCB’s first consumer completed the training from Network System Integration and Test Environment (NSITE) as a Sourcing Specialist. NSITE is an organization focused on connecting employers with talented and dedicated people who are blind or visually impaired. They offer a variety of programs and experiences that allow participants to achieve certifications and credentials that will benefit them in the workforce. A Sourcing Specialist identifies, evaluates, and selects suppliers for goods and services that businesses need. The Sourcing Certification program is a 12-week, instructor guided, online training program that provides training needed to enter a career in sourcing for individuals who are blind and visually impaired. Upon successfully completing the course, the individual will receive eight weeks of professional sourcing work experience, research and identify potential candidates, share findings with recruiters, and observe and contribute to a full recruitment lifecycle.

The Prevention of Blindness (POB) program is currently assisting 104 individuals with sight saving procedures. This is a 67% increase from the previous state fiscal year.

The Independent Living Program Lead met with a representative from the Institute of Child Success to learn about additional resources available for children who are blind or visually impaired. This resulted in an invitation to an event to learn more about upcoming early childhood initiatives in South Carolina.

The Program Lead for Prevention of Blindness, Children’s Services, and the Older Blind programs met with a Prisma Health Senior Care PACE (Programs of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly) program representative to discuss a partnership with SCCB to serve older individuals in South Carolina. The PACE program provides all-inclusive care, including transportation, for individuals 55 years of age and older, with offices located in Greenville, Columbia, and Chapin.

Seven SCCB students attended the National Federation of the Blind National (NFB) Conference in Orlando, Florida in July.

Eight SCCB students participated in Summer Teen Extended Week 1, focusing on independent living skills. Six students participated in Summer Teen Extended Week 2, focused on performing arts. The programming was for students 18 years and older.

Ten students participated in the Summer Teen Work Track. The most exciting work experience was at the South Carolina Military Museum where a student who is in the ROTC program at school, completed a weekend of basic training in addition to his work at the museum. Other worksites included the Salvation Army Store, Able SC, Legislative Services IT Department, and the Talking Book Library. Below are a few of the comments received from employers and students.

**South Carolina Military Museum:** “The student was a true pleasure to work with. He was on time (or early) for work every day and brought a ‘ready to work’ attitude with him. Thank you for affording us the opportunity to work with him.”

**Legislative Services:** “All members of the IT hardware team, including myself, expressed how much we enjoyed working with the student.”

**Student comments:**

“I liked the place that was picked for the work experience.”

“Showed me skills I did not know I had. I loved my job!”

Seven students participated in the NFB State Conference held in Columbia on August 17, 2024.

SCCB concluded summer activities with a LIFE (Living Independently and Future Endeavors) Summer Program housed at the South Carolina School for the Deaf and Blind in Spartanburg. Seven students participated in the program, which was geared towards upcoming 9th through 12th graders. At the beginning of the week students selected a career and were given an annual income and a monthly budget. Throughout the week they were required to pay bills, daily expenses (food/gas), and handle emergency situations (plumbing issues, etc.). Meal planning, budgeting, kitchen safety, meal preparation, etc., was part of the experience. Students were also responsible for completing household chores that included cleaning the kitchen, bathroom, bedroom, and living area. Financial literacy sessions were provided by Founders Bank, including topics on banking, credit scores, building credit, etc. Students also explored housing/apartment options and visited a realtor at an open house session. A tour of Wofford College was provided. Students ended the week by utilizing the public bus transportation system to travel to a designated location and using an Uber to return to the campus.

A Business Administration student at Horry Georgetown Technical College completed his internship at Tidelands Health and is working in the Human Resources Department, participating in recruitments and HR meetings.

A Health/Nutrition student at Lander University completed her internship at Greenwood County First Steps and is assisting with developing health education materials, organizing health events, and assisting health officials to set-up vision and hearing screenings for local daycares.

A Childcare/Early Education student at Spartanburg Community College completed her internship at Busy Town Childcare, Inc.

SCCB’s assistive technology staff are increasing the number of offsite assessments, equipment deliveries, and setups across the state. The goal is to provide services in the environment where the consumer will use the adaptive equipment (worksite, home, or business location).

**Communications Update**

Mark Gamble reported:

A form was added to the home page and news sections of the agency website so that individuals can easily sign up to receive email notices about SCCB success stories and upcoming events. A brief explanation was provided of how information would be collected using the form. A description of the email notices was also provided. The agency expects to send out one notice per month. Information in the notices will link back to the agency website. SCCB Board Commissioners will be set up to receive the notices automatically. Mr. Gamble also provided a summary of the consumer success story that will be included with the first email notice.

# Old Business

None

# New Business

None

# Public Comment

# Future Board Meeting Schedule

November 26, 2024 (Virtual)

11:00 am

# Adjournment

There being no further business, Chairperson Susan John called for a motion to adjourn at 12:09 pm. A motion was made by Dan Hanfland and seconded by Mathias Chaplin. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.