State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind

June 13, 2025

Seattle, Washington

Attendance – all members attended via videoconference

Council Members Present: Kris Colcock, Cathy Wilson, Christopher Zilar, Jen Bean, Julie Brannon, Julie Harlow, Kara Thompson, Kristin Geary, Larry Watkinson, Shawnda Hicks, Michael MacKillop

Council Members Absent: Andy Arvidson, Bill Dowling, Liz Stewart, Sara Logston

Staff and Visitors Present: Meredith Stannard, Yvonne Verbraak, Joe Kasperski, Damiana Harper, Lisa Wheeler, Mary Craig, Doug Burkhalter, Sophie Watson, Marci Carpenter, LaDell Lockwood, Kim Canaan, Shelby Satko, Alco Canfield, Randy Tedrow, Sara Edick, Eric Wharton, Kelsi Phares, Crissy Urban

Call to Order and Agenda Review: Kris Colcock, Vice Chair

Meeting was called to order at 9:00 AM. All parties on the call introduced themselves for the record. Meredith and Yvonne reviewed Zoom protocols for asking questions and accessible commands. Meredith reviewed the agenda for today's meeting.

Review dates for the 2025 SRCB Meetings

September 12, 9am – 12pm via Zoom; December 12, 9am – 12pm via Zoom.

Approval of March 2025 Minutes

Christopher moved and Jen seconded to accept March 2025 SRC Meeting Minutes. Motion passed.

Executive Director's Report: Michael MacKillop

Michael wished a Happy June Birthday to those celebrating this month. Shelby Satko was highlighted on becoming the president for the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils. Michael noted how critical advocacy is for vocational rehabilitation programs nationally and how the SRC is the strongest advocacy voice.

Shelby Satko was invited to speak briefly about her new role and vision. Shelby stated the National Coalition Board is actively engaged and concerned about current challenges and there is an upcoming board meeting to discuss the organization's approach moving forward. The Coalition hosts two conferences a year to promote professional development and provide peer support as well as exploring how to leverage this network to the highest potential. The coalition is also staying connected with SRCs across the country, VR Directors, CSAVR (Council State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation) Leadership, and APSE (Association of People Supporting Employment First). Everyone was encouraged to stay informed and engaged, particularly with APSE as they are doing outstanding VR work.

Michael recently attended a conference put on by CANAR (Consortia of Administrators for Native American Rehabilitation) that was hosted by the Spokane Tribal Vocation Rehabilitation (TVR) program. Christopher Zilar, an SRC member, played a key leadership role in organizing the event and the conference exceeded expectations. Michael learned about new legislation around background checks useful for DSB's HR team, gained a deeper understanding how Tribal VR programs can deliver culturally relevant services in ways state VR programs cannot and can operate under different guidelines even while borrowing from state VR structures. Tribal VR programs can still offer post-employment services similar to how state VR programs used to do; however, TVRs do not have the capability to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) and are looking to partner with state VR programs to support early career exploration for tribal youth.

Christopher Zilar stated in addition to Michael, Damiana and Shelby were also at CANAR, adding valuable perspectives and diversity of experience. CANAR is the Tribal Vocational Rehab version of CSAVR. It is structured uniquely in that the first day breakout sessions are by peer roles to allow peers to share challenges and successes experienced in the Tribal VR world.

Keynote speakers, entertainment, and activities were culturally centered and well-received. The theme, "Strength of the Salmon: Navigating, Adapting, and Thriving in Adversity," was chosen for its deep cultural significance to nearly all Washington tribes and resonated with the entire planning committee.

Lastly, Christopher mentioned that CANAR's board began collaboration with CSAVR months ago and are strategizing on ways to collaborate messaging to Congress.

Michael said it was a wonderful opportunity and recommends attendance at future CANAR conferences.

Michael talked about the two recent Director's videos where he spoke with staff recognized at this year's All Staff. He encouraged Council members to watch the videos. Due to CANAR being in Spokane, Michael was able to spend some time at the Spokane office and experience the atmosphere and praised the positive culture and passion of the Spokane team.

From the quarterly report, the Independent Living program saw a 20% increase in customers this past quarter. Additionally, there's an increase in people identifying as having multiple disabilities and as minorities. The stories in the quarterly report highlighted a 25-year-old with retinitis pigmentosa who initially lacked confidence in their ability to work or attend school, was connected with peer mentors and received support for food preparation and orientation and mobility training. They then gained self-belief and a new vision for employment through independent living. Then there is the 72-year-old that was provided AT in kitchen skills, electronic magnifiers, and now able to get their medical necessities. In vocational rehabilitation, there is a 20% increase in applicants from 2024 and there are 70% more people in plans compared to the same quarter last year. 23% of individuals who exit with their career goal achieved are over age 55. Success stories from the South region showcase a wide range of careers: Paraeducator, Accessibility Tester, Kitchen Design Center Worker, Assistive Technology Instructor, Mental Health Administrator, and Floral Clerk. Committee feedback was received, and the plan is to streamline data presentation in the next quarter while continuing to include relevant stories and key information.

Federal performance measures apply to DSB and DVR (Division of Vocational Rehabilitation) together as a single state entity. DVR (DSB's sister agency) is a part of the Department of Health and Social Services and manages 10,000-12,000 cases per year compared to DSB's 1,200. Their volume means DVR data has significant impact on the overall state performance results. Performance areas measured federally include:

- Measurable Skills Gains (MSG) – e.g., passing grades or program completions
- Credential Attainment toward a career goal
- Employment in the 2^{nd} and 4^{th} quarters after exit
- Median Wage

The state of Washington is exceeding almost all measures; however, DSB is performing very well across all categories. DVR recently implemented a new customer service management system, which made it difficult to extract pertinent data. Measurable Skills Gains is the one area still showing slightly below target, but with DVR actively mining and refining their data, they remain confident the final numbers will meet or exceed the required percentages.

DSB performs exceptionally well on the median wage measure and stands out among agencies nationwide. DVR focuses on supporting individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Many in this community work part-time or reduced hours, which significantly lowers the overall median wage reported. Despite the lower median wages, DVR has received national attention for supporting this community as 83% of the community is employed. The median measure may fall below target but it reflects the support DVR has for that community and will be a part of the discussions with the federal partners. Additionally, Washington state has eliminated sub-minimum wages, and DVR has successfully transitioned individuals formerly in sub-minimum wage roles into competitive, integrated employment.

Significant reorganization, revisioning, and process changes are taking place within DSB, particularly within vocational rehabilitation. DSB transitioned from multi-year plans to smaller achievable milestones that lead toward the bigger career goal. Continued work is needed to refine the new model to build consistency across teams with the different specialist roles evolving to support smaller, more focused goals, improve collaboration with VR counselors, and communicate services and outcomes in new, more effective ways. A pilot in the South Region focused on redefining the specialist roles has recently concluded, and a statewide rollout of lessons learned will begin soon.

DSB’s All Staff took place in May during which employees identified communication and collaboration as top priorities. Despite the surprising feedback, as the agency has received feedback that both areas are strengths for the agency, the real insight is that staff want stronger inter-team and cross-program communication. Positive feedback has been received about improved communication from leadership in the forms of interim newsletters, the Director’s videos, and emails. There’s a strong focus on communicating strategy and direction clearly and consistently.

Efforts are underway to understand how programs and teams intersect with the aim to free up counselors’ time for core responsibilities, enable more frequent and meaningful customer engagement, and allow counselors to focus more on guidance and relationship building.

Milestone planning is helping DSB stay focused on clear, short-term goals. It provides more time for conversations between counselors and customers about progress and next steps. The early stages of onboarding a new customer involve a significant workload. To address this, an Intake Specialist position was created. This role is staffed with VRC4 level staff who are experienced in pulling the information needed; ensuring the counselors can trust the handoff, not have to redo any of the work, know where the gaps are, and begin the conversations with the customers. Eric Wharton and Kelsi Phares are the VRC4s that have taken on the Intake Specialist position.

At All Staff, Michael committed to no major changes for now, unless something external needs to be addressed. The priority is to strengthen the changes already in motion to build consistency, practice the new approach, and making this the new way of business.

The shift in vocational rehabilitation is challenging for counselors as it requires a mindset change from how services were historically delivered. Previously, DSB’s approach was process-led and now it’s becoming individual-led, with the customer leading the way. While change takes time, the direction is positive and promising.

The BEP Rebuild projects are nearing completion and the scale of upgrades has been phenomenal. These improvements have positively shifted vendor perspectives, opening possibilities for service delivery, and exploring more flexible and efficient ways to meet evolving customer needs. A key challenge remains at BEP facilities on Capitol Campus. Due to the pandemic, those buildings were emptied, and in-person staffing has not returned to expected levels. Hybrid work has proven effective for many state agencies and as a result, the customer base for traditional cafeteria-style operation is no longer there to be profitable.

Robert Ott operated the Chin Don Café at OB2 (Office Building 2) for about a year and a half with a fully refreshed cafeteria and updated equipment. The Dome Deli in the Legislative Dome was also successfully managed during the legislative session. Micro markets are available post-session to meet the needs of the fewer personnel in the capital. Pre-pandemic, there were about 1200 staff onsite and now there are around 300. This drastic reduction in the onsite workforce has made a traditional cafeteria model unsustainable. Despite BEP coaching and operational support, Robert Ott concluded the location was not profitable enough to continue. The future of the OB2 café space is under consideration as to what the next iteration will be.

The Justice Training Center is undergoing a transition due to a retirement. Significant work has been completed, remediating water damage and installation of new equipment. A new candidate, Shannon Warnke, has been selected. She was formerly with the Labor and Industries site that also faced a significant decline in onsite staffing and customer traffic. The Justice Training Center has a more consistent and predictable customer base.

The Navy Bean at the Naval Shipyard also had a retirement and the new BEP Vendor, Patricia Maloney, will now be the operator. The site is undergoing some remodeling and refreshing, the permitting is still in process, and no official reopening date has been confirmed.

One of the sites in Seattle, operated by Jim Janney, has had some robbery and vandalism. However, other BEP sites are performing exceptionally well. The next strategic focus for BEP is exploring statewide expansion, to include vending routes, increasing the reach of micro markets, and developing new strategies to engage new VR customers. BEP is also looking at innovative vending possibilities, which include non-food vending solutions as seen in places like Japan.

The Pre-ETS and Birth through 13 conference, Stronger Together, was a highly successful conference with 120 attendees. Bringing together families, youth with visual disabilities, and service providers with the intent to break down the silos, improving awareness of available resources, and building stronger partnerships across the support network. The conference included sessions co-developed with youth mentors, reflecting the real interests, needs, and priorities of young individuals with visual disabilities.

The annual summer youth programs are set to begin, with Youth Employment Solutions 1 (YES 1) serving youth ages 14 to 16, and Youth Employment Solutions 2 (YES 2) providing a 6-week, on-site work experience in Seattle for students ages 16 to 18, and the LIFTT program. These programs continue to expand cross-state collaboration, with the Oregon Commission for the Blind, by including Oregon students when space allows. Governor Ferguson highlighted the cross-agency collaboration as something he admires and promotes and is one of Governor Ferguson’s key priorities. These collaborations, especially those that bring together students from both Oregon and Washington, create richer, more diverse experiences by encouraging interaction beyond students' immediate peer groups.

Robert Hardy is serving in the new position of Accessibility Coordinator. He provides detailed assessments of the digital materials and web pages for accessibility, supports internal staff, and engages with other state agencies to improve accessibility state-wide.

The Business Relations team is partnering with Adaptive Technology (AT) Specialists and WorkSource, ensuring trainings and services at one-stop WorkSource centers are accessible to blind customers. Additionally, the WorkSource application process is also being reviewed for accessibility. The focus is to ensure blind customers have equitable access to the same resources as the general public.

DSB and DVR recognize that Tribal VR programs receive limited funding and worked together to secure funding for the Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation programs and the 29 federally recognized tribes in Washington State. The goal is to provide resources to support more tools and skills that lead to employment for individuals with disabilities that have tribal affiliation. The amount of $1.2

million over the next two years ($600,000 per year) will be open for the 29 Federally recognized tribes in Washington to apply for and DVR is leading the way in managing and distributing these funds equitably among the tribes. Michael expressed appreciation for the work Joe Kasperski did with OFM (Office of Financial Management) to help them understand the importance and impact of supporting tribal communities.

In April, while Michael was in Washington D.C. for a conference, he and Dana Phelps (DVR Executive Director) conducted education and outreach on Capitol Hill, informing congressional offices about the challenges of the recission of the Cost-of-Living Adjustments (COLA) in 2024 and 2025. This resulted in a $360 million cut nationwide, $1.2 million of which directed DSB directly. Two weeks later, the COLAs were restored in the 2026 budget announcement.

Some agencies may not have the required state match funds to access their share of federal dollars. As a result, a significant amount of funding could become available through the federal reallotment process. States that do have the necessary match can request a portion of those unused funds. DSB does have the match funds and could ask for up to $5 million and will know by the end of August what was granted as the process takes place in July and August.

The President and Dept. of Education proposed budgets have been released. First it states VR will be fully funded but then also proposes a mandatory funding change starting in 2026, which would roll funding back to 2024 levels. DSB is currently experiencing challenges with a 20% increase in both applications and inflation and a 6% reduction in state funding. Current funding will likely hold through July 2026; however, if the proposed budget goes through, DSB will most likely need to move into an Order of Selection and use a wait list.

When a wait list starts, services for individuals already in plans must continue at full levels. It then takes about a year of having a waitlist in place before any cost savings are realized.

Additional challenges with the proposed federal budget are the unfunded mandates being proposed for VR agencies. An example is funding for CAPs (Client Assistance Programs) have been zeroed out nationwide, yet federal law still requires states to maintain CAPs and agencies are expected to fund them with already reduced budgets. Additionally, Technical Assistance Centers (TACs) are at the end of their five-year grant cycle and the proposed budget does not include funding them. These centers are essential for:

- Understanding VR regulations
- Modernizing service delivery
- Improving customer focus
- Implementing quality employment and transition services

Without federally funded TACs, VR agencies would need to purchase training and technical assistance independently to maintain compliance and cover these costs out of already reduced budgets.

Supported Employment grants would be zeroed out for DVR and Washington State in general. These funds are vital for DVR to provide long-term job supports without drawing from core VR funding. Now those services must come from an already reduced grant. Additionally, proposed

Medicaid work requirements and cuts in wrap-around services may cause a sharp increase of individuals seeking DVR services. However, DVR won't have the funds to serve them.

The justification used in the federal budget proposal was that, in 2024, most states returned unspent funds. This ignores the lingering impact of the pandemic, when participation and service demands were low as many individuals avoided community engagement for health and safety reasons. Just as demand is starting to increase, there will be less monies.

Congress has suggested that when states return unused federal VR funds, it signals a lack of need. In reality, VR has both a match and a maintenance of effort requirement where states must contribute matching funds and maintain funding levels. Many states cannot meet these requirements, limiting their ability to access all available federal dollars. The federal allocation formula doesn't always reflect actual state needs. Some states receive more than they can draw down into their state while other states may get a smaller percentage than is actually needed.

In early 2025, Governor Ferguson asked agencies to return any unspent funds to help address the state budget shortfall. DSB identified $500,000 from the National Resource Building project that could be returned, as the actual project bids far exceeded the available funding of $1.8 million and required a revision of the plan. Unfortunately, the $500,000 was mistakenly withdrawn from DSB's general fund and not the intended restricted capital fund. This means there is less money in the general fund where DSB has discretion on how to spend it. Conversations with the OFM Budget Analyst and the Governor's office confirmed there's no short-term remedy other than reapplying for it in the supplemental budget this fall. There have been assurances this won't be counted against DSB in future budgeting due to the error being on the legislative side.

The Washington Talking Book and Braille Library has also been hit with both state and federal cuts. DSB was intending to provide support and now can no longer do so. While BEP (Business Enterprise Program) projects remain unaffected because the services are completed, DSB is still managing a few outstanding bills. Possibly delaying payment on those until July 1st, but otherwise the agency is solid.

Christopher Zilar stated that underspending is a significant issue in TVR programs with staffing vacancies as a major factor. He asked if this was also true for DSB or DVR.

Michael clarified DSB itself does not have an underspending issue and more funds are needed. DSB previously renegotiated the split in the state grant to get two percent more and even requested and received additional dollars through reallotments in the past couple of years. However, DVR did return funds in one instance in the past. Also, VR programs only have two years to spend grant funds where Workforce Innovation Opportunity Partners have three years.

Christopher added Tribal VR programs are only required to provide a 10% match and, in some cases, request less if financial need is demonstrated. Tribes are allowed to use in-kind contributions as match. For example, he explained that one of their program's buildings is donated rent-free by the tribe and the estimated rental value of the space is counted as 100% of their match. Christopher asked if the state is allowed to do that type of creative matching.

Michael confirmed that state VR programs must provide a 22% match. This match must come from actual monetary expenditures on VR services; the funds don't have to be from the state directly, but must be actual cash spending, not in-kind support.

Alco Canfield asked why the times are different between DVR and DSB in terms of spending money, why do they have three years, and we only have two?

Michael apologized for any confusion and clarified that DVR and DSB both have the same two-year timeline to spend federal funds. The three-year allowance applies to Workforce partners under the Department of Labor, not to DSB or DVR under the Department of Education.

Marci Carpenter reflected positively on the Stronger Together Conference highlighting the peer mentors that not only helped to plan the agenda but helped to run it as well. Marci stated she made great contacts and was very impressed with how the event was presented and organized.

Michael thanked Marci and stated he is really proud of that achievement.

Sara Edick stated she has a positive problem; she's been offered a job with Pierce County and is needed to start within a couple of weeks. Given the urgency and the current budget challenges, she wanted to know: How does DSB handle quick job placements when services or equipment might be needed quickly?

Michael clarified budget constraints are a larger, long-term issue and do not impact current clients who are already in plan. If managing fiscal shortfalls becomes necessary, DSB would create a waitlist, but that will not impact current customers. There is guidance and emphasis for staff to look for any other resources that are available to help stretch DSB's funds where possible. Michael encouraged Sarah's self-advocacy and congratulated her on her new job opportunity.

Presentation: DSB's New Intake Procedures: Eric Wharton and Kelsi Phares

Eric Wharton and Kelsi Phares shared the new intake and eligibility process that began on April 1st. This process is designed to speed up access to services, improve customer experience, and provide a more personalized and efficient approach to referrals and eligibility. They share the responsibilities, rotating days to answer phone calls, manage web inquiries, and process faxed referrals from doctors or other agencies. Kelsi and Eric handle the initial intake for both VR for individuals seeking employment and the Independent Living (IL) program (run through the University of Washington) for those not pursuing work. The goal is to determine eligibility within 10 days. Most eligibility is based on functional limitations with the need to request medical records only if absolutely necessary. The customer's case is managed through intake and eligibility, including:

- Data entry into Aware
- Gathering I-9 documentation
- Requesting any supporting records needed

Once eligibility is confirmed, customers are assigned to a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) based on ZIP code or availability. There is a dedicated Intake Team phone number as well as a separate fax number for medical records. IL referrals can be sent to the University of Washington the same day of the intake call. If an in-person appointment is requested outside of Seattle (Kelsi) or Spokane (Eric), the intake is referred to a local VRC for completion.

Julie Brannon asked whether Eric and Kelsi are handling just intake or if they are still managing a regular case load as well.

Eric confirmed they carry cases only through eligibility and then pass the customers to local VRCs for long-term support.

Kelsi added that their role is short-term and focused entirely on helping individuals get eligible quickly, with services transitioning as soon as the milestone is reached.

Kris Colcock asked if having experience as VRCs helps with the intake process versus the previous process?

Kelsi confirmed it absolutely has. Having experienced counselors allows for deeper conversations from the first contact. Previously, Rehabilitation Technicians did intake, and while well-intentioned, some referrals may not have been the most accurate. Now, when callers say they "can't work," Kelsi and Eric can explore whether barriers (e.g. assistive technology, training) are the actual reason and guide them toward VR when appropriate.

Julie Harlow asked about how orientation is handled, and whether clients fully understand the services available.

Kelsi explained that during eligibility meetings, they give general overviews of services, including rights, responsibilities, CAP (Client Assistance Program) information, and their eligibility letter.

Julie also asked how well the hand-off process is working for counselors.

Kelsi stated the team is still adapting but the intake and handoff process is showing positive results. The handoff meetings between the intake specialists and the counselors are helping counselors save time and focus more on the customer. Since April 1st, 176 referrals across VR and Independent Living have been processed. This number excludes phone calls for general inquiries or non-referral-related services. There is also a noticeable increase in calls and web inquiries.

Kris asked if 176 referrals are a typical number.

Eric confirmed the recent increase in volume and attributed this to societal changes and reduced funding for public programs, which is contributing to increased need.

Larry Watkinson asked how a new client is connected to their counselor, specifically if there is a three-way meeting with the Intake Specialist, counselor, and customer.

Kelsi stated the customers do not participate in the internal handoff meetings; these are brief and designed solely to update the counselor on intake findings.

Damiana Harper commented that yes, 176 referrals are considered higher than average. There is an increased urgency for individuals to connect with services, possibly due to statewide and national funding uncertainties.

Additionally, Damiana added that for about a year and half, Rehabilitation Technicians (RT) rotated through the Intake Specialist role. While this met the agency's need at the time, RTs often lacked the counseling background necessary to gather the in-depth information needed. This sometimes resulted in VRCs having to follow up with customers for missing details. With VRCs in the Intake Specialist role, it allows for a more thorough intake interview and a smoother transition for the customer. Though intake won't be a standard duty for all VRCs going forward, it is important that all VRCs understand the intake and eligibility process and are prepared to conduct intakes if needed (e.g., for in-person intakes). Going forward, all new VRCS, whether new to the field or new to DSB, will spend time with the Intake Specialist to become well-versed in intake procedures.

Kara Thompson, a VRC in the Vancouver office, shared her personal experience with the new intake process and how it has impacted her work. Kara recently met with Kelsi to discuss a new customer prior to the transition. She stated the initial meeting with the customer was significantly shorter as the intake information was already gathered, no need to repeat baseline questions, and she could focus more on the customer's goals and barriers. Kara expressed appreciation of the new process, feels it is powerful and effective, and is optimistic about its continued development and refinement.

Meredith expressed excitement about the new process and offered kudos to the team for the positive changes and outcomes.

Christopher requested email contact information to follow up with Kelsi and Eric for deeper insights.

Michael also expressed that he is overjoyed that the strategic vision and the actual vision aligned.

Executive Committee Report: Kris Colcock

Kris shared that Andy Arvidson will not seek reappointment to the SRCB after his term ends due to health concerns and needs to focus on his well-being. Andy will attend committee and Council meetings as he is able. Andy has been leading the executive meetings, usually held on the first Tuesday of each month. The purpose of the executive meetings is to discuss updates from the various committees and Michael provides updates on DSB activities. The most recent meeting included budget updates from Jen Bean and Michael, explaining potential impacts with the proposed budget.

Policy Committee Report: Jen Bean

At Michael's request, the committee reviewed the quarterly reports from DSB. The committee felt overall there was too much information and recommended bullet-points with hyperlinks to full details. The customer success stories were favored and highlighted as the most impactful and how it connects the data and the outcomes. Data and program updates, such as IL, BEP, OTC, Business Relations) were seen as overwhelming, with suggestions to present data annually and spotlight one program per quarter.

Concerns were raised about confidentiality with business names and job titles and recommended generalized data summaries (e.g., number of people employed, weekly hours, pay range). A quarterly employer spotlight was proposed; hearing from the employers about how easy it is to accommodate folks with visual impairments and how they partnered with DSB.

Regarding the budget data, the two preferred methods were either presented at the quarterly meetings or shared as a separated budget update.

Looking ahead, the committee will focus on reviewing self-employment policies and the BEP program, with plans to compare approaches between DSB and DVR to identify best practices. Jen met with Lisa Wheeler and Carl Peterson with DSB, who are in the process of updating DSB's self-employment policies and procedures and anticipates being ready to share these updates in October.

Kris asked if Jen is still looking at self-employment and BEP separately or is she going to try and find policy that overlaps everything.

Jen stated the committee plans to review both separately, while also identifying overlaps or differences as they emerge with an emphasis on not undermining the BEP process.

Jen expressed her gratitude for the leadership and collaboration of Michael and Dana Phelps and how valuable their respect is for CAP's (Client Assistance Program) external and neutral role.

Funding uncertainty and potential program changes are creating concerns across CAP programs. Washington CAP is considered to be well-positioned due to strong working relationships and unlike many other CAPs housed within larger disability rights organizations, Washington CAP leadership is directly involved in operation and financial planning. When Jen followed up with CAP national technical assistance, they were surprised that discussion around funding impacts had already started in Washington.

In Washington, Disability Rights Washington oversees the key protection and advocacy programs funded by federal disability grants. Like CAP, these programs face proposed cuts, with funding potentially shifting to state control.

Washington has been recognized for valuing CAP's external structure and taking an aggressive, proactive approach during uncertain times. Jen said she is deeply grateful for the strong partnership with DSB and DVR as they are committed to helping people, following the law, and working collaboratively with CAP. This relationship leads to quicker case resolutions and better outcomes for customers.

Lastly, Jen added that being external allows CAP to be seen by customers as a neutral and trusted resource, strengthening its effectiveness. Advocacy remains a central part of CAP's role. Michael and Dana are open to feedback, the hard questions, suggestions, and even pushbacks, recognizing that it is an essential part of CAP's role. This creates a strategic, symbiotic relationship that not all VR leaders across the country fully understand or appreciate.

Membership Committee Report: Julie Brannon

Julie identified four positions that will need to be filled: Andy's and Larry's positions, a BEP position, and WASILC (Washington State Independent Living Council). Randy Tedrow has expressed interest in the BEP position, and with his retirement, Julie will follow up about potential role options.

Julie emphasized the importance of understanding term timing, that term end dates are based on position terms, not personal start dates. More updates will come after due dates and current openings are reviewed. It is encouraged for those whose terms are up in September to reapply if interested and anyone not planning to reapply to please notify Julie Brannon.

Customer Satisfaction Committee Report: Kris Colcock

The committee has been working diligently figuring out listening sessions for individuals who identify with having both a vision and hearing loss, including those who identify as deaf-blind. With the help of Kara Thompson and Julie Harlow, a questionnaire and survey were developed. Once it was reviewed and refined with feedback from the Executive committee, a final version was sent to Yvonne Verbraak for distribution. The survey will be sent to approximately 59 participants via preferred communication methods (email, braille, etc.). Participants can complete the survey anonymously or opt into the listening sessions scheduled to begin in September. There are five dates on hold for the listening sessions at the OTC in Seattle. Based on feedback, additional sessions may be offered in Eastern Washington. The overall goal is to ensure all DSB customers are being effectively served and their needs fully met.

Sarah Edick asked how to sign up for the upcoming survey.

Kris and Yvonne confirmed that the survey is not live yet but will be sent out soon. If Sarah meets the criteria, she should be on the distribution list.

Listening sessions will involve council members only and not VR counselors to ensure a safe, open environment. Emphasis was placed on maintaining confidentiality and participant comfort.

Sarah Edick shared that her medical clinic lacks a coffee shop and asked BEP could help fill that gap.

Lisa explained that because the clinic is not a federal or state building, it doesn't qualify for BEP priority, but there still may be opportunities to explore and offered to follow up with Sarah to discuss further.

Wrap-up/Meeting Adjourned

The meeting was adjourned at 11:48 am.