

**NEVADA STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL (N.S.R.C.)
STATE PLAN SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES**

Tuesday, September 16, 2025, at 1 pm

PHYSICAL MEETING LOCATIONS:

Vocational Rehabilitation

1325 Corporate Boulevard, Reno, NV 89502

&

Vocational Rehabilitation

3016 W. Charleston Blvd., Suite 210, Las Vegas, NV 89102

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

Raquel O'Neill (Chair)

Jack Mayes (Vice-Chair)

Robin Kincaid

Drazen Elez, VR Administrator

Cynthia Gustafson

Laura Thompson

Judith Swain

Sandra Sinicrope

COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT:

Dawn Lyons

Rebecca Rogers

Jennifer Kane

STAFF:

Stephanie Itkin, Deputy Attorney General

Brett Martinez, VR Deputy Administrator Operations

Sheena Childers, VR Bureau Chief

Lisa McCulloch, Quality Control Specialist II

Marla Robinson, Management Analyst IV

Matthew Dorangricchia, VR Northern District Manager

Jacqueline Quintero, Rehabilitation Technician III

Uriah Carter, Administrative Assistant II

Candyce Nakamoto, Business Process Analyst II

Sheila Rasor, Business Process Analyst III

GUESTS/PUBLIC:

Jamie Jaramillo, American Sign Language (ASL) Translator

Alefa Panama, ASL Translator

Allison Cyr, Market Decision Research

Candace Walsh, Market Decision Research

Julie Irish, DP Video

1. CALL TO ORDER, QUORUM CONFIRMATION, AND AGENDA POSTING VERIFICATION

Raquel O'Neill, N.S.R.C. Chair, called the meeting to order at 1:01 pm. Jenny Richter Livia, N.S.R.C. Liaison, conducted roll call. Council Members Dawn Lyons, Rebecca Rogers, Jennifer Kane were absent.

N.S.R.C. Liaison Richter determined a quorum was present and verified that the posting was completed on time in accordance with open meeting law. Mrs. Richter also established that the Deputy Attorney General, Stephanie Itkin, was in attendance as well as VR Staff.

2. FIRST PUBLIC COMMENT

Chair O'Neill opened the floor to public comments stating the limitations to each comment due to time constraints. Legal notice was read By N.S.R.C. Liaison Richter and provided meeting Phone and Zoom access.

No public comments were made by Northern or Southern locations or by Phone or online attendees, advancing the meeting onto the next agenda item.

3. VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SUCCESS STORIES

Chair O'Neill invited Sheena Childers, VR Bureau Chief, to present some success stories.

Ms. Childers introduced herself and mentioned she was expecting participation from two rehabilitation counselors, Margaret Cassanelli, who was unable to attend, and Cynthia Pate, whose presence could not be confirmed.

Matthew Dorangricchia offered to check on Cynthia's availability. Chair O'Neill suggested they could possibly add this segment later in the meeting if needed. Ms. Childers thanked the Chair before concluding this portion.

4. APPROVAL OF MAY 06, 2025, MEETING MINUTES

Chair O'Neill opened the floor for a discussion and to review the meeting minutes from May 6, 2025. It was asked if there were any changes or corrections needed.

Hearing none, Chair O'Neill asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Cynthia Gustafson, NSRC Council Member, made a motion to approve as presented. Jack Mayes, NSRC Vice-Chair, seconded the motion. All in favor, none opposed, motion carried.

5. APPROVAL OF JULY 09, 2025, STATE PLAN SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Chair O'Neill moved on to discuss and take possible action on the meeting minutes from the State Plan Subcommittee meeting held on July 9, 2025. Chair O'Neill asked if there were any changes or corrections needed.

Hearing none, Chair O'Neill asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Jack Mayes, Vice-Chair, made a motion to approve as presented. Judy Swain, NSRC Council Member, seconded the motion. All in favor, none opposed, motion carried.

6. APPROVAL OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE STATE PLAN SUBCOMMITTEE FOR PROGRAM YEAR 2026 & 2027 NSRC GOALS & INDICATORS

Chair O'Neill introduced Item 6 for discussion and possible action regarding recommendations for the 2026–2027 state plan. Chair O'Neill opened the Floor to Vice-Chair Jack Mayes to talk about the strategies and goals being provided.

Vice-Chair Mayes provided an overview of the materials in the meeting packets, noting that Tab 6, Part 1 includes proposed goals with detailed strategies, while Part 2 outlines the measurements and indicators being suggested to the full council. He explained that the subcommittee had reviewed prior documents, evaluated existing goals to determine whether to keep, update, or revise them, and examined the strategies attached to each goal. The second section focused on performance indicators, with acknowledgment of past challenges in maintaining and achieving goals. However, he noted that progress is being made, and momentum is building again. Vice-Chair Mayes concluded by inviting the Rehabilitation Division Administrator, Mr. Drazen Elez, to elaborate further.

Drazen Elez, Administrator, expanded on the discussion by noting that the subcommittee conducted a detailed, two-to-three-hour review of all goals, indicators, and strategies line by line. He expressed appreciation for the members' efforts in ensuring that the strategies remain relevant and aligned with current needs. Mr. Elez emphasized the importance of integrating new technologies, particularly artificial intelligence, into continuing education and counselor training. He highlighted that preparing staff to effectively use AI tools is essential to ensure that the workforce being trained can adapt to evolving industry demands and remain competitive in the changing job market.

Mr. Elez reviewed the first goal which is the number of competitive integrated employment outcomes, or job placements. Mr. Elez noted it is the only target not being met. He explained that placements have declined in recent years due to tightening job markets and the disproportionate impact on individuals with disabilities. Additionally, there has been a significant rise in new applications for services, over 221% since 2021, without an increase in staff. This has doubled

counselor caseloads, reducing the time available to assist each individual with employment. Mr. Elez highlighted a positive development: new state investment in vocational rehabilitation, supported by Governor Joe Lombardo and the legislature, which is expected to strengthen services and improve outcomes, though results may take several years due to training and onboarding timelines for new staff. The placement goals remain set at 550 for 2026 and 575 for 2027.

Mr. Elez outlined Goal 2, which focuses on increasing participation of students with disabilities in pre-employment transition services. He highlighted that this area has seen significant improvement and growth, with the program expanding from serving 393 students in 2021 to nearly 2,000 in 2024, with projections of approximately 2,100 - 2,200 students by the end of 2025. Mr. Elez clarified that the 2025 data is incomplete, which may cause the numbers to appear lower. The target set for 2026 is 2,200 students served, and 2,300 students served for 2027, with the expectation that these goals will not only be met but potentially exceeded.

Mr. Elez moved onto Goal 3, which focuses on increasing participation of potentially eligible students, those who show indicators of possibly qualifying for vocational rehabilitation (VR) services but have not yet gone through the eligibility process. The aim is to provide pre-employment services to this group, encourage applications from those who need services, and measure how many transition into becoming VR clients. Mr. Elez noted strong progress, with conversions rising from 147 students in 2021 to 905 in 2024. A new measure was also introduced to track the percentage of eligible students with disabilities who become VR clients, not just raw numbers. This addition will help assess whether the agency is effectively communicating the value of VR services and inform adjustments to internal processes as needed.

Mr. Elez presented Goal 4, which focuses on increasing participation and employment outcomes for supported employment (SE) consumers. He noted progress in both the number of open-case and employment outcomes, while acknowledging that these cases often require long-term engagement and post-employment support. A new measure was added to track both open and closed supported employment cases. Beyond the four goals, Drazen outlined three additional indicators: participation of targeted disability groups in VR services (with the addition of intellectual and developmental disabilities), monitoring average counselor caseload sizes to ensure manageability, and continuing the success of the 700-hour program. He highlighted that this program has made Nevada one of the state's top employers of individuals with disabilities, with the State of Nevada recognized as the leading employer of VR clients. Additionally, Mr. Elez noted that the recent In-Service conference, where awards were given for employers who had hired the most VR clients, the State of Nevada was the organization who had hired the highest number, receiving the award for a second time.

Vice-Chair Mayes closed the discussion by thanking Mr. Elez and his team for their extensive work in reviewing and refining the goals, emphasizing that the

subcommittee collaborated to ensure the goals are both measurable and realistic before opening the floor for committee input.

Chair O'Neill thanked Mr. Elez and the subcommittee for their work and opened the floor for Council discussion on the proposed goals before moving to a motion for approval.

Robin Kincaid, NSRC Council Member, voiced a concern regarding Goal 4, citing a discrepancy in supported employment caseload numbers noted in the May 6th meeting minutes, where figures of 81 and 86 were both reported. Discussion followed as members attempted to locate the reference.

Jenny Richter clarified that the discrepancy was due to a typo and that corrected numbers had been sent in a spreadsheet.

Mr. Elez suggested confirming the data with staff before finalizing Goal 4 and proposed moving forward with the other goals in the meantime. Chair O'Neill confirmed the issue would be revisited once verification was received and asked for any additional questions, before suggesting the group proceed to the next agenda item.

Tab 6 data was revisited later in the meeting, with Chair O'Neill returning the discussion towards clarifying data under Indicator 1, specifically regarding average case load size by bureau.

Mr. Elez began to explain the columns and confirmed the accuracy of reported numbers. After a question from Vice-Chair Mayes, Mr. Elez explained that the current numbers given for 2025 only covered 2 quarters due to working off of the Federal Fiscal year.

Council Member Kincaid questioned whether or not the column labeled as Goal was the sum total of Column 2 (Total Open SE Consumers) and Column 3 (SE Consumers Closed with an Employment outcome)

Sheena Childers, VR Bureau Chief, clarified that the Goal column was related to the total open SE Consumers Column. With a suggestion from Council Member Kincaid for clearer labeling of the goal columns. Mrs. Childers agreed to update the column titles to reflect better accuracy additionally she suggested adding a successfully closed case goal column.

Chair O'Neill noted that supporting documentation regarding Council Member Kincaid's question about whether or not the discrepancy addressed in the May 6th meeting minutes, had been sent and re-sent to Council members.

Following discussion, Vice-Chair Mayes moved to approve the goals and strategies with table revisions, seconded by Council Member Gustafson, and the motion carried unanimously.

7. 2026 NSRC MEETING SCHEDULE

Chair O'Neill moved the discussion to Agenda item 7 to discuss the propose Meeting Schedule for 2026. The Council reviewed and approved the proposed 2026 meeting dates, which include February 3rd, May 5th, September 1st, and November 10th, all meetings were scheduled at 1:00 PM.

A motion to approve the dates was made by Council Member Gustafson and seconded by Sandra Sinicrope, NSRC Council Member, with unanimous approval from the members. The meeting then proceeded to agenda item number 8.

8. ELECTIONS OF THE NSRC CHAIR & VICE-CHAIR FOR STATE FISCAL YEAR 2026 (JULY 1, 2025 – JUNE 30, 2026)

Chair O'Neill moved the discussion to agenda item 8. Council nominations were held for the Chair and Vice-Chair positions. Chair O'Neill expressed gratitude for the opportunity to serve as chair and announced she would not seek re-election. Members acknowledged her leadership and contributions over the past four years.

Nominations were then opened, with Raquel O'Neill nominating Jack Mayes for chair, he accepted, all Council members were in favor, none opposed motion carried. For Vice-Chair, Raquel O'Neill nominated Cyndy Gustafson, who accepted, the Council were all in favor, none opposed, and motion passed. Both newly elected Council members were congratulated, and leadership transition was formally noted before moving to agenda item 9.

9. 2025 NSRC ANNUAL REPORT FIRST DRAFT

Chair O'Neill proceeded to agenda item 9, focused on discussion and possible approval of the annual report draft. Chair O'Neill invited representatives from DP Video to present the first draft of the 2025 Annual Report; however, they were unable to make it to the meeting.

Mrs. Richter confirmed their absence and suggested reviewing the available materials in their place.

Chair O'Neill proposed moving forward with the first quarter satisfaction findings presentation before going back to Tab 9 when someone would be available to present. After attempting to return to Agenda Item 9 regarding the draft NSRC Annual Report. Julie Irish was invited to present but experienced audio difficulties,

as she was muted and unable to be heard. While efforts were made to resolve the issue, Chair O'Neill suggested moving forward temporarily while awaiting technical assistance from DP Video. After a 3rd attempt to reach DP Video, who was unable to resolve their audio issues, Chair O'Neill asked Drazen Elez to present the Annual Report.

Mr. Elez presented an overview of the 2025 Annual Report First Draft, noting that while much of the report layout remains consistent with the prior year, significant improvements were made to its organization to enhance clarity and flow. The report now begins with Council information and responsibilities, followed by agency data and performance results, mirroring the structure of the VR website. Updates include revised employer information, highlighting Walmart and the State of Nevada as currently the two top employers, along with details on business development activities, student services, camps, PACE lab installations, and the Nevada trip rollout. The report concludes with success stories, program outcomes, employee spotlights, legislative updates, and service maps by county and office location. Sheena Childers was invited to provide additional details as needed.

Ms. Childers recommended adding NSRC's goals and indicators to highlight the Council's priorities and measure progress, as this component was identified as missing.

Following discussion, Council Member Sinicrope moved to approve the draft report with the noted addition, and the motion was seconded by Council Member Gustafson. The motion carried unanimously, and Chair O'Neill thanked the group for their thorough work on the report.

10. CONSUMER SATISFACTION QUARTERLY RESULTS FROM MARKET DECISIONS RESEARCH

Candace Walsh, Market Decisions Research, presented the first trimester results – which covered January through April of 2025- of the 2025 Consumer Satisfaction Survey results for Nevada Vocational Rehabilitation (VR). The survey included 363 responses from general VR, 111 responses from youth in transition, and 13 responses from older individuals who are blind (OIB). Ms. Walsh stated that the number of responses from OIB continue to be lower than the other demographics which Ms. Walsh and others were attempting to remedy and raise that number through oversampling.

Ms. Walsh presented Cases by Length of time in Service, stating they tried to keep things at an even split. In trimester one, the number of those in service from IPE to 6 months was 165 completed, those in service for 6 to 12 months was 52 completed, those in service for 18+ months was 156 completed, and finally the number of closed cases was 114.

Ms. Walsh explained that the Consumer Satisfaction Survey was structured with core metrics that allowed Market Decisions Research (MDR) to look at trends over time and between groups. This would allow MDR and VR to focus on what was lacking while also being aware of what VR is doing well. These key measures and core metrics were broad strokes of the VR Consumer experience. Ms. Walsh began to present the results, which generally showed positive feedback, with domain scores stable in the 70s and 80s. Strengths included accessibility of VR offices with a score of 91, counselor interactions with a score of 85, and outcomes in meeting goals with a score of 83. Areas needing attention included overall satisfaction with a score of 72, communication with staff with a score of 73, and application process challenges with a score of 74. Feedback given by VR Consumers highlighted communication difficulties, paperwork burdens, and delays in services, though youth in transition reported higher satisfaction than other groups.

Council Member Gustafson noted lower satisfaction with process-driven aspects, such as applications and communications, but higher satisfaction with direct counselor interactions.

Ms. Walsh confirmed Nevada's results aligned with other states and agencies, referencing a comparative report with Massachusetts, Maine, and North Dakota.

Robin Kincaid voiced a concern about data showing only 30% of consumers had no problems, which Walsh clarified was a slide error when in fact 70% consumers had no issues, showing positive trends.

Mr. Elez requested the comparative report be distributed to the council, and Ms. Walsh agreed to send it to Jenny Richter. Additional clarification was provided on why only three states were included in the comparison. Chair O'Neill closed the item by thanking Walsh and the council for their thoughtful questions and feedback.

11. OTHER REPORTS

For Agenda Item 11, it was noted by Chair O'Neill that Kate Osti and Dawn Lyons were unable to attend and provide their reports. Chair O'Neill informed the Council that she had reached out to both, requesting written updates since this marks the second consecutive meeting without a report from the CAPS program. Chair O'Neill emphasized the importance of receiving updates and will await their responses. No new reports were available at this time. With ongoing technical difficulties preventing Julie Irish from presenting, the Council proceeded to Agenda Item 12 for division reports.

12. DIVISION REPORTS

Mr. Elez introduced the division reports, with Sheena Childers presenting key updates. She reviewed current VR program vacancy rates, noting an overall rate of 8.86% across the whole agency, which has improved since last quarter, with further decreases expected as new staff join VR and BSBVI. Performance goals for FFY 2025 Quarter 3 were discussed, including 342 clients successfully employed out of a goal of 575, strong participation in pre-employment transition services with a total of 1,565 students, which puts the agency on track to surpass the 2024 total of 1,958. Further, under goal number 3, there have been 887 transition student applications, well above the goal of 250. Goal 4, Supported employment cases, exceeded targets with 788 open cases and 82 successful closures. Data on targeted disability groups showed employment outcomes for individuals with mental health at a total of 26, blind/low vision with a total 35, and deaf/hard of hearing with a total 42. Information was referenced for Indicator 1, reporting included average caseload sizes of 98 for general VR and 60 for blind services. Ms. Childers continued onto Indicator 2, the 700-hour program, stating there were 22 active participants in the 700-hour program with 33 completions. This data means that 33 participants have achieved competitive integrated employment, while 22 have yet to be placed into a 700-Hour position with a state agency. Lastly, Ms. Childers provided an update on the number of fair hearing trials revealing that the low fair hearing rate was less than 1% (5 hearings from 2,914 participants served).

Mr. Elez reported on recent activities, highlighting the success of the In-Service event, which served as a reminder of the Council's mission and future goals. He noted a busy summer with 16 to 17 camps organized for students, ranging from overnight and specialized camps to employment-focused programs that benefited both students and their families. Additionally, the Summer Youth Internship Program successfully engaged 54 students in four-week paid internships across public and private sectors. Staff supported participants with soft skills, interview preparation, financial management training, and resume development to maximize the experience.

Mr. Elez emphasized the staff's efforts to design thoughtful, impactful programs, thanked Chair O'Neill, Council Member Sinicrope, and Council Member Lyons for participating at the In-Service conference, and expressed appreciation for everyone's contributions as preparations continue for the new school and federal fiscal year. Mr. Elez touched briefly on elements covered in the next pages of the document, referencing general VR performance, the overview of supported employment numbers, and information about the Business Development Team, among other things. Finishing with his report, Mr. Elez invited Ms. Childers to talk about important details he may have missed.

Ms. Childers noted that the draft Annual Report was largely complete but emphasized the importance of including NSRC's goals and indicators to better

reflect the Council's priorities and track progress toward VR program outcomes. She suggested these additions would fit best alongside the performance statistics section.

Chair O'Neill thanked her for the explanation and opened the floor for questions or discussion; none were raised.

A motion to approve the draft report as presented, with the noted addition, was made by Council member Sinicrope and seconded by Council member Gustafson. With no opposition, the Council voted unanimously in favor, and the motion carried. Chair O'Neill thanked the team for their work on the report.

13. COMMENTS BY THE COUNCIL

During the Council comments section, Chair O'Neill noted that follow-ups from the May 6th meeting had been addressed, with the only pending item being an update from Jennifer Kane on NTACTION:C for a future agenda. Chair O'Neill proposed creating Council subcommittees to enhance involvement, with ideas such as mentorship programs for clients, businesses, or advocacy efforts.

Council Member Sinicrope and Vice-Chair Mayes supported the idea, with Vice-Chair Mayes emphasizing the value of ongoing planning subcommittees, as recommended by the Technical Assistance Center (TAC), to strengthen council effectiveness and long-term planning.

Chair O'Neill and the Council agreed to add subcommittees as a future agenda item. Chair O'Neill also highlighted October as Disability Awareness and Disability Employment Awareness Month, noting events such as the White Cane Celebration on October 18th at Container Park and Disability Awareness Day on October 25th at Lorenzi Park.

Council Member Kincaid announced Nevada PEP's "I Care, We Care" anti-bullying campaign throughout October, encouraging messages of kindness. With no further comments, the Council proceeded to the next agenda item.

14. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Chair O'Neill opened the floor for the second public comments, Council Member Kincaid requested that the Client Assistance Program report and Nevada TRIP updates be included on the next meeting agenda.

Chair O'Neill confirmed outreach was underway and provided a detailed update on accessibility improvements to the Nevada TRIP website, including successful integration of screen reader compatibility, improved contrast for low vision users, and a customizable checkbox for screen reader navigation.

Council Member Kincaid added that Spanish and Tagalog translations had been launched, highlighting the importance of ensuring accurate character displays in different languages.

Chair O'Neill agreed that Nevada Trip should remain a continuing agenda item as it is being used across school districts.

Mr. Elez emphasized the broader significance of language accessibility, noting that beyond Spanish and Tagalog, the Council's website and forms have been translated into multiple additional languages, with further expanding options, including some African and Middle Eastern languages. He suggested providing a full list of available translations at the next meeting.

15. ADJOURNMENT

Chair O'Neill announced that this meeting of the NSRC is officially adjourned at 2:39 PM.

MEETING MINUTES SUBMITTED BY URIAH CARTER, AA II

EDITED BY: JENNY RICHTER LIVIA, NSRC LIAISON

Jenny Richter, N.S.R.C. Liaison

Approved By:

Jack Mayes, Chair