

APPROVED MINUTES

Virginia Board for the Blind and Vision Impaired
DBVI Headquarters
397 Azalea Avenue, Richmond VA 23227
March 21, 2023

Board Attendees

Bonnie Atwood; Robert Bartolotta; Mazen Basrawi – Chair (attended virtually from Arlington, VA, due to medical reason); Deborah Helms (attended virtually from Roanoke, VA, due to medical reason); Ken Jessup

Members of the Public

Paul D'Addario
Jessica Saleeby

DBVI Staff to the Board

Pam Cato, Deputy Commissioner for Services; Wallica Gaines, Deputy Commissioner for Administration; Melissa Jackson, Financial and Risk Management Director; Matt Koch, Deputy Commissioner of Enterprises; Maggie Mills, Executive Assistant to the Commissioner; Dr. Rick Mitchell, Commissioner.

Guests

R. Bryce Lee, Managing Director – Investments – The Optimal Service Group
Jeff Rakes - Investments – The Optimal Service Group

Public

Jessica Saleeby

Call to Order & Welcome

Chair Basrawi called the meeting to order and welcomed the members in attendance.
A quorum was not met.

Business Items

Introductions

A roundtable of introductions was conducted.

Consent of Agenda

The agenda was followed as presented.

Consent of December 13, 2022, Meeting Minutes

The Minutes of the December 13, 2022, Board Meeting will be approved at the June 2022 Board Meeting.

Investment Report

The Optimal Service Group (OSG) reviewed DBVI's investment portfolio to date which has been in a long-term asset allocation since December 2021. ***Ms. Gaines will provide Chair Basrawi with the sum of funds that has been deposited in the Endowment Fund this year.*

Public Comment

None.

Agency Report

Commissioner Mitchell and the Deputy Commissioners gave a report on highlights in their Divisions.

Deputy Commissioner Gaines introduced Melissa Jackson, DBVI's new Financial and Risk Management Director.

Ms. Gaines reported on the status of the Library Resource Center (LRC) renovation project and the Charlottesville VIB facility. There are not adequate funds to do a complete renovation at the VIB Charlottesville location.

Recruitment for a Facility Services Director has begun.

DBVI's Communications Director has been working on a project to create a set of videos the Agency can use in multiple ways on DBVI's website and on social media platforms. They will be housed on YouTube. These videos will display the services provided by DBVI.

Deputy Commissioner Cato reported on the status of several Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) positions highlighting the following:

Domonique Lawless has been hired as Director of Low Vision and Orientation and Mobility Services. Justin Sheets is the new Assistant VR Director. Caren Phipps, Director of Services for Children and Youth, is retiring May 1. Caren is on Leave until May 1, so Ms. Cato will be handling Ms. Phipps' responsibilities until that position is backfilled. Recruitment for the Director of Rehabilitation Teaching and Independent Living is still underway. Roanoke Regional Manager, Ben Bowman, is also retiring in the near future.

The Staunton Regional Office is still undergoing repairs due to the December flooding of the leased office space. There is no estimated date of employees returning to the office yet. Services have continued, nevertheless.

Pre-ETS had its annual Townhall in January. There were 65 attendees via Zoom asking questions about DBVI events. Program details such as the summer LIFE Program, Leap into Linux, Blind Design, JMU Success, Android Answers, Financial Literacy, Cyber Warrior, Careers in Action, and the IT Credential Fair were shared.

Blind Design is a collaboration with Virginia Tech March 29 – April 2. It is an immersive design workshop led by faculty and students at the School of Architecture and Design. Students have opportunities to design buildings, create 3D models, listen to guest lectures, and tour and

experience the college campus.

Ms. Cato attended the OIB (Older Individuals who are Blind) Managers' Program in Georgia March 13 – 16 and networked and was exposed to many ideas.

DBVI submitted a proposal to present about its work with CYBER.ORG and Leap into Linux which was approved. Pre-ETS and Career Pathways Coordinator Tish Harris and Director of Vocational Rehabilitation and Workforce Services, Megan Hall will be presenting with partners at CYBER.ORG.

Deputy Commissioner Koch reported on recruiting efforts. VIB has been increasing awareness about the jobs available. Virginia Voice is now airing a weekly announcement of the job opportunities. VIB is still using recruiting sites such as NSITE and NFB.

Mr. Koch reported that students and staff from the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind visited the VIB Charlottesville facility to see the types of careers available there, while also experiencing some hands-on work at the facility.

VIB is reintroducing its Trainee Program in an effort to make its jobs better known to individuals DBVI serves.

On March 23 at noon Mr. Koch and Tina Hawley-Blount will be interviewed on Emerge Radio to share what VIB has to offer.

Deputy Commissioner Koch reported on the financial status of VIB and shared some new product lines it has to offer.

VIB is working with Cox Cable regarding call center opportunities and Dominion Power regarding contract close-out opportunities.

VEB has been awarded and will assume food service operations at Fr. Lee on April 1 after a prolonged arbitration with the Army.

VIB will be holding a two-day Strategic Planning Session March 29 and 30 at DBVI Headquarters to look ahead at the next five years at VIB.

National Industries for the Blind has a lawsuit against GSA for failing to comply with JWOD. VIB and DBVI are not in the lawsuit but will be impacted by the lawsuit.

The Commissioner reported on the success that DBVI and the Enterprise Division experienced participating in the Richmond Flying Squirrels Block Party at The Diamond on March 4. Over 60+ vendors set up to interact with the expected 2,500 guests. Those that visited the DBVI tents had the opportunity to learn about services offered to individuals who are blind or vision impaired; they learned about the jobs we offer, and the quality products and services offered through Virginia Industries for the Blind. Visitors also had an opportunity to assemble a four-piece flex pen while simulating blindness by wearing a giveaway sleep mask.

Unfinished Business

Status of Reestablishment of Finance Committee

No update on the status of the reestablishment of the Finance Committee, other than Melissa Jackson should be included when it does start up again.

Next Meeting – June 27, 2023 – Location

The Charlottesville VIB facility will not be able to accommodate a virtual meeting until September. The location of the September Board Meeting will be decided on and voted on at the June Board Meeting.

New Business

Proposal for Legislative Event

A proposal to hold events to invite and expose Legislators to DBVI services and budget concerns was shared. It was recommended to include this topic on the June Board Meeting agenda for further discussion.

FOIA Amendment – Vote

This item will be voted on at the June Board Meeting.

Grant Proposals

***Deputy Commissioner Gaines will post the updated grant proposal guidelines on the DBVI website.*

Other Business

Board Secretary Bonnie Atwood reminded the Board that the Bylaws are a legal document. Ms. Atwood requested a Bylaws review at the June Board Meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 2:15 pm.

Next Meeting June 27, 2023