**Rehabilitation Council of Texas (RCT)**

**February 6-7, 2025**

**101 E. 15th Street**

**Austin, TX 78778**

**Room 244**

**In person and via Zoom**

Day 1: [https://youtu.be/V5xRdmh1cMY](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fyoutu.be%2FV5xRdmh1cMY&data=05%7C02%7Clisa.godwin%40twc.texas.gov%7Cafe89063bdee4cb7ae8f08dd4c787f0a%7Cfe7d3f4f241b4af184aa32c57fe9db03%7C0%7C0%7C638750802601945064%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJFbXB0eU1hcGkiOnRydWUsIlYiOiIwLjAuMDAwMCIsIlAiOiJXaW4zMiIsIkFOIjoiTWFpbCIsIldUIjoyfQ%3D%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=pyHLtiytufKwcRUTWGTYiEMFIm3QPPsMPL77FjNZlmM%3D&reserved=0)

Day 2: [https://youtu.be/2ayefrdEeio](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fyoutu.be%2F2ayefrdEeio&data=05%7C02%7Clisa.godwin%40twc.texas.gov%7Cafe89063bdee4cb7ae8f08dd4c787f0a%7Cfe7d3f4f241b4af184aa32c57fe9db03%7C0%7C0%7C638750802601965597%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJFbXB0eU1hcGkiOnRydWUsIlYiOiIwLjAuMDAwMCIsIlAiOiJXaW4zMiIsIkFOIjoiTWFpbCIsIldUIjoyfQ%3D%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=kLSayih5eemsdSxUZmGUOXaW%2FZBqnTFLkpT8ouFpleA%3D&reserved=0)

**Council Members Present**

Gennadiy Goldenshteyn, Chair, Dallas (Virtually)

Peggy Schmidt, Vice Chair, Lucas

Glenda Born, Austin

Mark Baird, San Angelo

Jennifer Clouse, Temple

Norine Gill, Taylor Lake Village (Virtually)

Kiffany Jefferson, Rowlett (Virtually)

Michele Norris, LaPorte (Virtually)

Emily Robinson, Pflugerville (Virtually)

Jordan Smelley, Burleson

Karen Stanfill, Houston

Michele Harper, San Marcos

Shannon Rosson, Bedford

Erica Kress, Aubrey

Tammy Martin, Pending appointment

**Council Members Absent**

Daniel Solcher, Allen

Melva Henderson, Dallas

**TWC Employees Attendance as Panelist:**

Melinda Paninski, Scott McCune, Christopher Speckhard, Christy Lerche, Jamie Haywood, Jonas Schwartz, Sara Weems, Daniel Prado, Shelly Caillouet, Kelly Yarborough, Tony Lawrence, Meredith Stephens, Amber Cook, Noemi Rodriguez, Ed Serna, Michael Britt, Lisa Godwin, Karen Hess, Eyse Luke, Juanita Barker

**TWC Employees Attendance non-Panelist: 57**

**Public Attendance: onsite 2, Virtual 58**

**Thursday, February 6, 2025**

**Welcome:** Chairman Gennadiy Goldenshteyn opened the meeting.

**New RCT Members Welcome and Introductions:** Gennadiy Goldenshteyn welcomed new members Shannon Rosson, Erica Kress, and Melva Henderson.

**TWC VR Budget Update and Order of Selection Prep Plan:**

* **Budget:** Scott McCune presented budget data, noting increases in expenditures from Q1 2022 to Q1 2025. He addressed TWC-VR's supplemental request and exceptional items to meet projected needs. The funding request form process involves management, regional offices, and Deputy Regional Directors. It was discussed communication between Austin and every region regarding the budget. Current venues for messaging include communities of practice, monthly manager calls, quarterly all-staff meetings, weekly news briefs, and monthly meetings between budget analysts and regional management. Ideas to improve communication included personal contact in the field, and the budget analysts meeting with the staff.
* The current status of a state of having access to federal funding for VR, and how a mandated program is impacted differently than a program that is not mandatory
* **Order of Selection:** Tammy Martin outlined the agency's preparedness for implementing an order of selection if supplemental funding is not received. They are ensuring the case management system (RehabWorks) has the functionality, draft policies are in place, a combined State Plan amendment is being developed, and staff training has been conducted. It was clarified that customers are notified of their classification at the time of eligibility, and if an order of selection is implemented, they are placed on a waitlist.

**VR Division Report:**

* **Vision and Priorities:** Tammy Martin outlined her vision and priorities as the new VR Division Director, focusing on staff development, exceptional customer service, and full integration into the workforce system.
* **Organizational Strategy Alignment:** She emphasized the importance of organizational strategy alignment with the agency, state, and federal mandates. The RCT's role in alignment is to advise on how VR policies align with community and employer needs, monitor progress using data, and advocate for strategic improvements.
* **Goal Updates:** Specific updates were provided for the following goals:
	+ **Goal 1: Recruiting and Retaining VR Staff** Comprehensive review and redesign of the initial training for new VR Counselors, new rehabilitation assistants and new VR Supervisors. This three-phased approach aims to streamline training and bolster staff confidence. The re-designed training and workbook will roll out in May of 2025. There was an update on the number of counselors who have attended the new counselor training. A mandated four-course curriculum series that new counselors are required to take: VR historical foundation, VR process and fundamentals, VR quality documentation, and VR introduction to services.
	+ **Goal 1.6:** Continuing and expanding the use of communities and peer support. The VR supervisor’s community of practice, VR manager community of practice, brain injury community of practice, VR administrative supervisor's community of practice, and a VR unit support coordinator's community of practice.
	+ **Goal 2: Improving Provider Recruitment** is to be updated, at the February 26th quarterly call.
	+ **Goal 3: Streamlining Policy, Processes, and Procedures** Self-employment work group to reengage. The division plans to reengage the self-employment work group in Spring of 2025. There are plans to improve workflow processes and business systems. VR services advisor, data on customer’s disabilities.
	+ **Goal 4: Improving Customer Informed Choice:** ongoing training on how to use TWC's labor market information website, benefits information. Regional benefit specialist provide different services. Continuing the workforce collaboration and service coordination.
	+ **Goal 5:** Improving Staff Knowledge and System Capacity, Peer specialist training will be held. Update on the Deaf and hard of hearing training work group is in the works.
	+ **Goal 6:** Increase and Enhance Partnerships with Employers.
	+ Melinda Paninski discussed the intake and referral system pilot with four centers across the Gulf Coast and Texoma board, training on utilizing Work in Texas to refer over to VR for co-enrollment services and rehab to refer people to the workforce system.

**TWC Executive Director Remarks and TWC Update:** Ed Serna discussed the agency's appropriations request for the upcoming biennium. He noted TWC's reliance on federal funding and the importance of exceptional items, particularly for VR. Public testimony is anticipated, with customers potentially raising concerns about service delays and counselor contact. He stressed that the agency strives to address customer needs despite workforce challenges.

**State Plan Process and Alignment throughout the year:** Jamie Haywood took the discussion around the process, and how the CSNA, statewide assessment, which is every three years, and how the combined state plan is every four years, and the two-year modification.

**VR Performance Update:** Christopher Speckhard and Geoffrey Miller presented performance data, covering:

* Goal 1 (Recruit and Retain Staff): Turnover rate of 2.6% in Q1, with regional variations.
* Goal 2 (Improve Provider Recruitment): Activity rate of 38% in Q4, with increases in active and available providers. Contracted provider activity rate was 52%.
* Goal 3 (Streamline Policy, Processes, and Procedures): Median days to participant creation increased to 111, but the number of new participants has also increased. Participant creation rate remained steady at 86-87%.
* Goal 4 (Improve Customer Informed Choice): Benefits counseling rate for SSI/SSDI eligible participants improved to 86-90%. Customer satisfaction with information received was slightly down.
* Goal 5 (Improve Staff Knowledge and System Capacity): Customer satisfaction with support from VR staff remained stable overall.
* Engagement Rate: Has remained at about 70%, but there has been an increase in the number of participants during that quarter.
* Work based learning opportunities: There may be seasonality of that. The number of students and adults referred to work based learning fluctuates.
* Updates to a specific request for data regarding folks with Traumatic Brain injury, Stroke, and Spinal Cord injury.

**PCG Rate Study Implementation Update:** Jamie Haywood gave an update on the PCG study on provider rates, and the plan for rate phases, $13.5M, in SFY 2026, $26.5 million for SFY27, and $5.0M in SFY28.

**Public Comment:** No one provided public comment.

**Recess for the day**

**Friday, February 7, 2025**

**Welcome and Introductions:** Chairman Goldenshteyn welcomed everyone.

**Best Practice/Project Highlight From Austin Region 3:** Tony Lawrence, Region 3 Director and Kelly Yarborough, Deputy Director presented initiatives within their region to invest in talent and enhance staff capabilities. The presentation covered:

* **Team Building Initiative:** In all the different units, there are different supervisors and leaders. The goal is the team is united and the members get the tools they need to be supported. There is work for the regional support manager. There are two days of the Parker Team Player. People are challenged to come up with solutions. People got together as a staff, those that were not familiar with other staff, and had an open forum to ask questions. Goal is to build relationship with staff where they feel comfortable talking with each other, get help from each other, talking with the resources and regional state offices and empower them to know what to do when they're faced with a situation.
* **Regional Orientation Initiative:** This is a mandatory training, in person. So, there is a training for people to address burning questions, what they are going to do at the regional office. The regional staff comes to talk about their skills, and how they can assist. Each year, the staff must take this training. We work with the staff to identify their needs. It also includes benefits of working for the state, making it a good place to stay.
* **Regional Mentoring Initiative:** Navigator coordinates, to set schedule. The managers and VRT are given an action to complete. The mentoring is done with staff that is implemented. The new staff gets an evaluation from this. This helps in building that trust for the staff in helping build a process. The schedule of this program is 2 times and is a cohort so now the supervisors are not impacted. But you need to know the language used to help. Then the Navigator runs through and assess. The results have been said to get information they did not know about.

**Customized Employment Services: Status and Path Forward:** Jaime Haywood said that they're trying to improve the employment of people. Objectives of this program: The service's systems have to be innovative, also we want the person to have skills to implement. Working with San Diego state, they had research that said: Provider needs and qualifications, policies practice used. In that program, they've identified the gaps. Next steps include procuring training/credentialing systems, credential verification portal, technical assistance and resource development, and communication plan.

**Self-Employment Services:** Jamie Haywood spoke about efforts to create a simplified and enhanced process. The goal is streamlined and enhanced process. The plan has more simple policies, procedures and forms. VR staff, are going to talk about these policies in the spring. They'll also be working with those that specialize in these too. We are going to look at what data is needed, what the evaluation needed are.

**Update on VR Outcomes for Blind or Visually Impaired Customers:** Chris Speckhard and Juanita Barker addressed a trend of decline over the past several years. 80% of the leading is visual, that the diagnosis that happens later

* Texas has the resources
* There's the ability to help and with their process
* Texas Blind premium
* They do have some new staff.

**Liaison Reports – Full reports are included in the binder**

* **Client Assistance Program (CAP): Karen Stanfill**
	+ CAP is fully staffed with a new advocate in Houston, Shea Young Huey.
	+ Karen and a cosupervisor met with state office leadership to discuss systemic issues, including VR Budget, IPE signatures, Ticket to Work Program promotion, customized employment and the maintenance rate.
* **Community Rehabilitation Provider (CRP): Peggy Schmidt**
	+ The next statewide provider meeting is scheduled for February 26, 2025.
	+ She met with regional CRP representatives and forwarded their concerns to Mr. Ramirez to inform the meeting agenda. Key provider concerns included:
		- Some reports of counselors indicating a lack of funds until March. Director Martin clarified that providers should engage with offices and management to correct this.
		- Requests for review of job placement service policies, particularly the lack of billing for initial meetings if the customer doesn't continue with training.
* **Partners Resource Network (PRN): Shannon Rosson**
	+ PRN has been very busy offering a variety of services, including:
		- 151 parent services workshops/webinars, providing information and referral 42,255 times, and technical assistance 1,187.
		- Three regional symposiums and a Spanish conference in Houston.
		- 6,243 youth services, including virtual hangouts and 96 youth trainings, plus two youth conferences.
		- 179 collaboration activities and 54 memberships on advisory councils.
	+ Upcoming initiatives include statewide trainings, a Spanish conference in San Antonio, regional symposiums, and youth conferences.
* **Texas Education Agency (TEA): Emily Heise**
	+ TEA released its annual report and noted a 130% increase in special education evaluations since 2012-2013.
	+ Applications are open for the Parent-Directed Special Education Services (PDSES) grant program, offering $1,500 to eligible students in Texas public schools grades K-12, receiving special education services with the caveat that they do not accept and use both SSES and PDSES.
* **Texas Workforce Investment Council (TWIC): Michele Harper**
	+ The December TWIC meeting included briefings on:
		- Evaluation of the Texas Workforce System's 2024 accomplishments and outcomes.
		- The Council's 2024 Annual Report.
		- Apprenticeship in Texas: A Work-Based Learning Profile.
		- Adult Education in Texas: A Demographic Study.
		- Overview of adult education and literacy programs from TWC and Austin Community College.
	+ The next TWIC meeting is scheduled for March 14th in Austin.

**Committee Reports**

* **Executive Committee: Gennadiy Goldenshteyn, Chair**
	+ The major action was rebalancing the committee memberships to address evolving needs and the inclusion of new members. The goal was to strengthen the Customer Committee and ensure continuity across all committees.
* **Policy, Procedure & Personnel Development: Karen Stanfill, Chair**
	+ The VR agency has implemented a voluntary exit interview for departing staff. Initial data analysis will be shared with the committee.
	+ The temporary employment program for RAs and counselors is almost fully staffed, providing support for casework.
	+ Counselor vacancies have declined slightly.
	+ The committee requested data on the number of jobs offers declined due to salary.
	+ The pilot program for providers to submit invoices to a shared regional mailbox will be rolled out statewide to improve invoice processing.
	+ The committee reviewed four hearing officer decisions, noting two cases where services were terminated after an appeal had been filed, and recommended that policy be reinforced with staff.
* **Education and Membership: Emily Heise, Chair**
	+ Two council members will be termed out, Jennifer Clouse on October 29, 2025, and Chairman Gennadiy Goldenshteyn on October 25, 2025, and recruitment for replacements is underway.
	+ Three members (Daniel Solcher, Peggy Schmidt, and Karen Stanfill) are eligible to reapply for a second three-year term.
	+ New members Erica Kress and Melva Henderson were onboarded.
	+ A discussion on the new process for appointing a new chair and vice chair is expected in May.
	+ The committee went to the American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities conference in November to exhibit. They will be attending again, as well.
* **Customer Satisfaction & Needs Assessment: Peggy Schmidt, Chair**
	+ The committee reviewed customer satisfaction survey results for the first quarter of FY25 and plans to further analyze the phrasing of certain questions to ensure data accuracy.
	+ They're also going to be getting with the regional staff for information
	+ The committee will further discuss the approach to surveys and the presentation of survey outcomes to the full council at their next meeting.
	+ The customer chair has made a point to look at these to make sure things do run well.

**Council Business**

* October/November meeting minutes were approved. Motion made by Karen Stanfill and 2nd by Peggy Schmidt.
* 2025 meeting locations and dates were announced: May 1st and 2nd in El Paso, August 7th and 8th at Chris Cole in Austin. Late fall will be Corpus Christi or Galveston, somewhere to follow the TWC Workforce.
* RCT Budget Report: Lisa Godwin reported the RCT budget balance.

**Public Comment:** No public comment was provided.

Adjourn