

Wisconsin Rehabilitation Council

Full Council Meeting Minutes

August 21, 2025
9:00 A.M. – 2:00 P.M.

Microsoft Teams Meeting

[Meeting Link](#)

Meeting ID: 286 281 940 222 **Passcode:** XA3yS29u

To join by phone only, call (608) 571-2209 **Phone Conference ID:** 542 067 808#

WRC Members Present: Dick Straub, Alan Kaltenberg, Kyle Kleist, Michael Jackson, Gadeen Taylor-Duke, Rachael Fellers, Kathy Meisner, Jacci Borchardt, Jenny Felty, Jolene Wanek, Dr. Oyinkansola Owonifari, Natalia Graf

DVR Staff Present: Kay Olson, Tania Hanford, Allison Gordon, Deanna Krell, Anna Eggebrecht, Jennifer Bscherer, Alissa Braatz, Jenna Fogarty, Karla Opatz, Amy May, Tom Draghi

Guest Attendees: Nelsinia Ramos (applied for WRC vacancy), Ramsey Lee (public member), Angela Brenna (DHS Program and Policy Analyst), Zachary Davenport (DHS Program & Policy Analyst), ASL Interpreter

Roll Call and Introductions

- Call to order 9:03 a.m.
- Roll call

Announcements

- Meredith (DVR Administrator) is not present. Allison Gordon will facilitate. Liz Kennedy is on vacation.
- Addressed couple individuals needed to leave meeting early.

Quorum Check

- Quorum is met

Approval of Minutes – May 2025

- Kyle made a motion to approve the minutes. Oyinkansola made a motion to second. Minutes were approved.

Committee Updates and Committee Member Approvals:

Council Engagement Committee

- Jackie, committee met in June. Addressed standing agenda items. They don't have any current new members. Couple of members' terms expired at end of June. Governor appointment office has a temporary individual in place which has caused a backlog for re-appointment approval.
- Everyone who was up for re-appointment did go through in July. The new council members, recently appointed, are still going through onboarding and approval.
- Discussed how to make the Governor appointment process smoother for new council members; they are also working on putting together a flier to show the steps for joining the council and what the onboarding process looks like.
- New representative is Markus Watts, who is the business rep appointed. He is on a partial term.
- Dick noted Liz Kennedy was re-appointed to her role.
- DVR has not talked to the Governor's appointment office yet regarding next steps to assist with the process of onboarding going smoother but will follow up now that Liz Kennedy re-appointment has been completed.
- Individual submitted application for a Native American representative. Waiting for Governor's appointment office to review application.

Performance Measures and Quality Assurance Committee/Policy Review and Administration Committee

- These two subcommittees meet concurrently.
- Last meeting reviewed the Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) plan. Service provider qualification requirements were reviewed at a meeting in June. Discussed process concerns around training requirements for providers. The committee issued a provider survey; they got about 40% response. The results of this survey were calculated and provided to DVR.
- DVR addressed how the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) will be meeting to review survey results. Survey noted some important flexibility options and points to further discuss. SLT will review to finalize and notify providers.
 - WRC inquired about what flexibility options were noted. DVR mentioned grandfathering in staff with field experience, also.
- Meeting was scheduled for today, which was rescheduled due to the full council meeting.

Services to Business Committee

- Meeting regularly, most recently in July.
- Continue to review vacancies on the council for business reps.
- Reviewed DVR BSC outreach and interactions with business.
 - Recently connected with Walmart and SSM Health on a corporate level.
- October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month; DVR BSCs are working on events across the state related to this.

Executive Committee

- Includes all committee chairs and one 'at large' member.
- Most discussion is around planning next meeting and finding speakers or experts to report on issues discussed.
- They also get reports from each of the other subcommittees.
- Know DVR is managing budget issues.
- Discussed need for strategic planning, need to identify a person to lead a strategic planning experience. This is Heather Laakso; committee will meet and start planning to develop the strategic plan.

Strategic Planning

Heather Laakso, DWD Program & Policy Analyst

- <https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/dvr/partners/wrc/mission-vision-statement.htm>
- <https://wioa.wisconsin.gov/pdf/2024-2027-wioa-state-plan.pdf>
- <https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/dvr/policy-guidance/state-plan/pdf/wi-csna-report-2024.pdf>
- Inquired about timeframe around developing strategic plan. Also wondering if the meeting will be in person.
 - Likely doing meeting virtually. Dick noted he would like to advocate for the meeting to be in person and will take steps needed to assist this with happening. Even willing to have next quarterly meeting be virtual, which is usually in person, if they can have the strategic planning meeting in person.
 - Hoping to start the process this fall/winter 2025. Not sure of the exact timeline.
 - Allison, DVR, meeting scheduled Sept. 5 with Executive committee to review the vision and will likely identify more clear next steps and timelines. Also, this is more coming up with strategic goals moving forward, less than compiling a full plan.
 - Kyle asked if DVR consumers were going to part of the committee reviewing the strategic plan. Noted that we have a lot of data from the

CSNA; will likely use the data instead of having a consumer join the committee.

CSNA Presentation

Allison Gordon, DVR Deputy Administrator

- Reviewed the presentation.
- Note that DVR still has requirements to identify and serve underserved and unserved populations as part of our state plan. This includes training and collaboration efforts.
- WRC asked about DVR's current vacancy rate. DVR addressed how we are at about a 3% vacancy rate currently, which is standard for DVR.
- Discussed recruitment and retention of staff. Addressed DVR staff having the discussion of Vocational Rehab as a job goal for DVR consumers. This is an ongoing discussion. Different states have different requirements for VR staff. Also noted that UW-Stout has removed their in-person Vocational Counseling training program. This program is only available online now. Discussed other barriers in the field like testing and licensure requirements.
- Inquired about AI use with new Case Management system. DVR/DWD currently has restrictions on the use of AI due to security of data concerns. This is something the state is continuing to review and hoping to implement AI in the future.
- Asked about DVR further exploring other states addressing transportation barriers. DVR is continuing to review and explore this item.
- DVR shared link to Statewide Needs Assessment:
<https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/dvr/policy-guidance/state-plan/pdf/wi-csna-report-2024.pdf>

Public Comment

- Ramsey Lee encouraged DVR to attend various conferences coming up in the fall and asked if the CSNA document can be sent to him. He stated he has been involved with the WRC in the past and wants to be more involved again but he is happy to participate as a member of the public for now. He appreciates the work of the council. Kay let him know that he is eligible to re-apply as the bylaws state there is a one-year grace period he must wait. His one year has passed. Kay will email him the application information as well as the CSNA information he requested.

- Written comment and attachment from Kynesha Staten: "Dear Members of the Wisconsin Rehabilitation Council, I am writing to respectfully express concern about the ongoing lack of equitable access, support, and outcomes for minority and underserved individuals within the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), particularly in self-employment services. These disparities persist despite clear evidence and community feedback urging systemic reform.

Unequal Access and Systemic Gaps

Multiple sources — including the Project E3 Milwaukee Focus Group Report and DVR's public feedback sessions — have highlighted:

- Minimal support for Black and Brown DVR clients pursuing self-employment.
- A lack of trauma-informed, culturally competent counselor training.
- Barriers to accessing relevant coaching and entrepreneurial tools.

Another significant, yet often overlooked, area of exclusion involves individuals with **invisible disabilities** — including chronic illnesses, neurological disorders, mental health conditions, and non-apparent cognitive challenges. These disabilities are often misunderstood or minimized within DVR processes.

According to the Job Accommodation Network (JAN), over 60% of job accommodations involve non-visible impairments, yet DVR case planning often prioritizes visible or physically defined needs.

The result is that individuals with invisible disabilities may be:

- Misjudged as "not disabled enough" for enhanced DVR services.
- Denied flexible work pathways like self-employment that better fit their functional needs.
- Subjected to excessive documentation burdens or disbelief.

This compounds racial and socioeconomic barriers, especially for women of color navigating both disability stigma and systemic inequity.

Opportunities for Equitable Change

To ensure DVR fulfills its mission, I urge the WRC to recommend the following:

- **Prioritize equitable resource allocation** for underserved consumers, especially in self-employment.
- **Expand staff training** to include cultural humility and invisible disability awareness.
- **Fund specialized entrepreneurial coaching** led by relatable, community-based mentors.
- **Track disaggregated data** on service access and outcomes by race, gender, and disability type (visible vs. non-visible).

A Voice from the Community

I speak from experience. Self-employment offers a viable and empowering path — but only if the system recognizes the full spectrum of disability and the lived challenges that come with it.

I would welcome the opportunity to contribute to policy discussions, training development, or consumer advisory work to help DVR meet the needs of those it currently overlooks.

Thank you for your ongoing service. I urge the Council to take bold, measurable steps to improve access, dignity, and outcomes for all DVR clients — especially those navigating compounded forms of exclusion."

Overview of Dept. of Health Services (DHS) Councils

Zachary Davenport, DHS Program & Policy Analyst

Angela Brenna, DHS Program & Policy Analyst

- Reviewed several presentations.
- Dick asked how all these councils communicate and share information. Angela said creating this Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities (GCPD) would be a way for us to share updates, all in one place. They have a standing meeting every month, inviting councils to provide updates and information, then they bring this information back to their councils to share. It's a more efficient way to get information out accurately and timely.
- Allison asked how these participating councils were identified in the United Councils Workgroup. Angela said these councils are disability specific within their section of DHS.
- Dick asked if they are actively working to recruit more councils into this group. Angela shared this is a very new concept. The long-term goal is to bring more councils in, but for now, they are keeping it contained to the councils they support.
- Kyle confirmed the Independent Living Council is tied to DHS but not included in the GCPD. It is a separate Governor appointed committee.
- Kathy noted there are two other significant councils that relate closely to the WRC. The Council on Long Term Care and the IRIS Council. Supported Employment consumers transition from DVR funding to Long-Term Care funding once they are finished with DVR.

DVR Administrative Update

Allison Gordon, DVR Deputy Administrator

- Reviewed the presentation.
- Dick asked if there was an adequate state match for federal dollars in the Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) budget. Allison said we received a \$1.9 million dollar increase

for SFY26 and SFY27. We do not yet know what the federal award will be or when we will know.

- For Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) spending, as of today we have spent \$11.2 million. Plus, over \$1 million has been spent on staff time, dedicated to Pre-ETS services. As of today, we have spent \$12.5 million total on Pre-ETS.

Review Action Items and Identify Future Agenda Topics

- Annual Report Workgroup: let Kay know if you'd like to be a part of this workgroup.
- Dick is putting together a draft response for the public comment that was read today. He will send to DVR staff for review.
- Dick proposed utilizing the November full council meeting for strategic planning. He believes this meeting should be held in person, and others concur.
 - Kyle asked if our bylaws allow us to do this. Dick said our bylaws require us to have quarterly meetings, but they do not specify what happens during those meetings.
 - Kay mentioned a few standing agenda items we have for the November meeting; that could happen quickly at the beginning of this meeting if they chose to utilize this time for strategic planning. Those agenda items include:
 - 2026 meeting dates
 - UW-Whitewater report on sub-minimum wage
 - Potential brief DVR Administrator update

Adjourn

Alan motioned to adjourn. Rachael seconded. Motion passed. Meeting adjourned at 1:52

A Statement of Mission

The Wisconsin Rehabilitation Council, working on behalf of Wisconsin residents with disabilities, will review, analyze, and advise the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) regarding the performance of its responsibilities in providing quality services to persons with disabilities.