

**State Rehabilitation Council**  
Quarterly Meeting  
June 17, 2021  
Virtual Meeting-Minutes (**DRAFT**)  
SRC Meeting 10 am

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**I. Call to Order/Introductions/Roll Call**

Meeting called to order at 10:05am

**Members Present:**

Sarah Michaud, Chair  
Tracy Agiovlasis, Vice Chair  
Bernadine Chavez  
Guy Surdi  
Keith Maes  
Paula Seanez  
TJ Chester  
Yolanda Montoya-Cordova

**DDS Staff:**

Charles Hamlin- DDS Administrator

**DVR Staff:**

Dan Drury, Interim DVR Executive Director  
Nash Sisneros, Interim DVR Administrative Director  
Alicia DeVargas, RSU Executive Secretary & Admin Assist  
Robert Cardon, DVR Chief Financial Officer

**All Others:**

Jennifer Salazar- DVR Attorney (absent)  
Leslie Garcia- DVR Paralegal

**II. Action Items**

**A. Approval of Agenda**

Bernadine Chavez moved to approve agenda.  
TJ Chester seconds  
Unanimously approved.

**B. Approval of Minutes**

Yolanda Montoya- Cordova moved to approve minutes.  
Tracy Agiovlasis seconds  
Unanimously approved.

**C. 121 Report- Paula Seanez**

**D. DVR Directors Reports**

- I. Interim Agency Director- Dan Drury
- II. Chief Financial Officer-Robert Cardon
- III. RSU Administrator-Nash Sisneros
- IV. DDS Administrator- Charles Hamlin

**E. SRC Chairpersons' report- Sarah Michaud**

**F. Committee Reports**

- I. Legislative and Outreach Committee- Bernadine Chavez
- II. Membership, Training and Awards Committee- Tracy Agiovlasis
- III. Transition, State Plan and Outcomes-TJ Chester

**G. Old Business**

**H. New Business**

- I. SRC Awards
- II. Discussion regarding return to in-person meeting

- III. Client satisfaction Survey and Needs Assessment Project
- IV. NCSRC Update- Bernadine Chavez
- V. Public Discussion re: Highlighting employers working with people with disabilities
- I. Comments from Audience
- J. Information on Next Meeting
- K. Adjournment

### **III. 121 Report – Paula Seanez**

All three tribal programs submitted their grant applications on October 1, 2021, for funding for the next five years. Thanks to Dan Drury, Interim DVR Executive Director, for submitting a letter of support for the Navajo Nations. Tribal programs grant applications have been reviewed, but there is no update on awardees, yet. There are a couple of Tribal programs in South Dakota who did not submit application date timely. It is unfortunate that tribal programs must compete against each other for support. There is not a formula RSA uses to fund tribal programs. Met with Corrine Wiesenthal, June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021; She provided an update, advising that they hope to complete and announce the awards prior to September 30, 2021. Tribal VR is trying to prepare, as the last Cycle was not funded until Sept 30. The meeting with Ms. Wiesenthal (held on 6/14/21) was regarding no cost extension requests that tribes have remaining budget balance. The deadline to submit these extension requests are due on June 15, 2021; Tribal VR and Jemez completed this.

Jemez Pueblo remains closed; tentatively plans to reopen July 9, 2021. April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021, staff began returning to the office. All staff are currently in office, serving clients. Jobs are becoming available, thus working with a Job Developer/Coach, who is reaching out to employers and participants, to reestablish employment goals, experience, and IPEs. There is one new vacancy- Vocational Rehabilitation Technician, that will be advertised next week. Currently has the following vacancies: (2) Voc. Rehab. Counselors, (1) Coordinator, (1) Job Coach, (1) Job Developer and (1) Voc. Rehab. Tech. Pueblo members who are fully vaccinated are allowed to leave. Those who are not vaccinated, are allowed to leave the pueblo once a week on Mondays/ Tuesdays/Wednesdays. Jobs are becoming more available; thus Jemez VR Job Developer is complaining a new list of work sites, and Resources. Under the Health & Human Services, hired a new director- Victoria Acosta; (Jemez VR is under this program).

Laguna Pueblo remains closed. Laguna VR continues to serve clients on an appointment only basis. Staff have been completing a lot of professional development and online training. All staff are fully vaccinated. Laguna Job Developer and Job Coach are working with counselors with contacting consumers and employers on a bi-weekly basis. Pueblo is running into some challenges because clients do not have a current reliable transportation, as the tribal shuttle is not running.

Navajo Nation are back in the office and working with consumers. Continue to work with Northern Arizona University- Institute for Human Development on job development, job placement, training; University is developing a curriculum. Keith Maes provided some resource to Navajo Nation VR. Staff received Mental Health First Aid; one-day training provided by Southern University. There is hope to continue to work with this university in the future. Thank you, Keith for sharing resource information. Navajo Nations, wants to continue to work around professional development and staff to be able to work with consumers related to their mental wellness and well-being. Nations did submit grant application, and are also submitting carryover budget. VR reached out to Charlene Chavez, DVR Transition Coordinator, as Nations would like to use carryover funds for transition services in the Farmington/Shiprock area. Nations is now working with Charlene on this project. The State of New Mexico Department of Education (NMPED) issued a large amount of funds to be used on youth employment. Navajo Nations received this grant. However, VR is not administering these funds, it is being administered by the Department of Youth. VR will be working with the department on developing worked based learning experiences, ensuring VR consumers can participate.

With The Recovery Act money, it can't be applied to everything, but are looking to expand services. Navajo Nations is fully staffed at this time; however, has one counselor retiring. NNVR is looking at succession planning, and looking to fill position, soon. Caseloads are slowly increasing through outreach efforts. Priority has been working with existing consumers and getting their IPEs established.

### **IV. DVR Directors Reports**

- A. Agency Director – Dan Drury (Interim. Exec. Director)

NMDVR is planning for re-entry, beginning July 12, 2021 (ending July 20, 2021), with priority to staff who work directly with clients. NMDVR is providing reentry training, prior to staff coming back to the office. Staff will be in office a minimum of 3-days and 2-days telework (if requested). Staff with communication problems, connectivity problems will be working from the office 5-days a week, or according to alternative work schedules. Reentry includes supervisory staff, important for them to have management support in office. Reentry is starting gradually with small offices to larger offices, affording IT time to facilitate connectivity, troubleshoot issues, etc. Participants will be seen on an appointment basis. Clients, vendors, visitors, and employees will be required to sign-in using Dr. Owl (online or hard copy). NMDVR is requesting, clients come alone without additional family, as it poses office and distance challenges.

NMDVR has concluded interviews for Rehabilitation Service Unit Administrator (RSU- Admin.) and will be making a decision next week. NMDVR is going through applications for the Administrative Service Unit Administrator (ASU- Admin); interviews will be held the last week on June. Looking to hire these positions by or in July.

NMDVR is having great success with the Western New Mexico University accelerated class for licensure. It is allowing for hiring of other people that are VRCs and VRTs, supporting and filling vacancies. NMDVR launched updated website. DVR partners, statewide councils, etc., are prominently displayed. Website's new look and organization is cleaner, easier to use.

NMDVR is working on the Order of Selection waitlist down. The fact that staff are getting licensure now, this will support consumers better. Staff onboarding are aware that they will be going through the licensure process and will need to obtain licensure within their first year of employment.

NMDVR's RSA Monitoring responses were submitted in early June. The RSA final report will be published by RSA within 45 days. DVR is aware that there will be corrective actions needed; DVR is active working to resolve some of the findings. Working with RSA have been a instructive process. RSU has been diligent in writing new internal controls, new processing and procedures for services and tracking these. ASU has done a good job in stating to move processes forward. After RSA publishes the report, DVR will be able to provide them all the corrective actions. One of the concerns found was withing the Pre-ETS contracts. To which DVR responded with a temporary suspension to those contracts, provided addendums approved through the contracts team (following RSA guidance). The purpose of this, was to review what DVR was paying for. It was noted that contractors were invoicing for administrative costs, not chargeable to the 15% Pre-ETS, thus DVR and contractors had to revise the payment organization. Revision was needed to ensure payments and which funds these will be appropriated from. Due to the changes with the contracts, moving forward these pre-ETS contracts were extended through December, affording DVR time to be proactive with contracts. Instead of looking at what contractor will offer DVR and looking more at what DVR needs; later going out for an RFP. Goal is to hire more counselors, and relay less on outside services.

## **B. Chief Financial Officer- Robert Cardon**

DVR has concluded external state audit. There were minor findings in the Building Leasing Contracts, to which have been addressed. ASU is implemented a better tracking procedure and payment reconciliation method. All leases have been converted and now monitored electronically, as COVID has made it challenging to have paper documents. Another finding with signatures on grants; DVR must obtain approved and proper signatures on all applications used. One of the applications missed a deadline because of improper signature. There was also a document that was attached to an email that required a wet signature. Since then both these issues have been addressed with DocuSign. It has been accepted by SSA and RSA; DFA is also accepting signatures via DocuSign. ASU is working on policy revisions, procedures and enhance internal control to ensure funds are paid properly, per the RSA monitoring. Procedure on contracts and invoices needed to be invoices, as invoices were not specific on the work, i.e. pre-ETS invoices need to identify and separate pre-ETS services and administrative cost, in compliance with the law and ensure the proper charges to the correct funding source. Additionally, to ensure that the certifications on the invoice are accurate and reviewed properly.

DVR just finished wrapping up the legislative session for this year. Last year DVR had some cuts, the executive recommendation was to cut general funds by 5%; DVR was able to negotiate some smaller cuts. DVR ended up taking small cuts to the general fund, which impacted RSU. Also, affected was the Independent Living Program. DVR is fortunately able to work with these cuts as they were not significant because FY 20 had a budget increase. Fy21, DVR went from a 19-million-dollar budget from a 17-million-dollar budget. During the legislative session, it was recommended to take half-million cut to RSY program and \$100,000 cut to DDS. DVR was able to successful in restore budget,

after countless meetings. DVR was able to sustain general funding (same as FY20). There was a 1.5% pay increase that will be awarded to state employees. A 2.4% pay increase to Frontline works, which mostly impacted RSU. ASU is now working to on the FY22 budget and closing out FY21. ASU currently has two positions vacant and looking to fill, including Budget and Grant Manager. There are challenges with positing positions, as it delays a little through DFA and SPO. However, now that the hiring freeze is lifted, it should be a quicker position. ASU is working diligently to ensure that they are meeting federal requirements and monitoring funds appropriately. ASU has until the end of the Federal Fiscal year, to meet certain requirements and funds. Thus, are looking to hiring more staff, and extending RSU Pre-ETS contracts through Dec 2021.

### C. RSU Administrator – Nash Sisneros

(Alicia DeVargas, RSU Exec. Sec. & Admin Assist to report out on behalf of RSU Administrator)

Nash Sisneros is the newly appointed Interim RSU Administrator, Nash is out of the office and unable to attend the meeting. RSU Vacancy rate is at 22%, this is due to retiring staff. Over the last 3 months, there has been roughly about 6 staff who have retired. RSU is working diligently with HR to get these positions posted from the moment of notice of the vacancy. Several positions have are sitting with SPO for approval to post.

RSU has started a collaboration partnership with Western New Mexico University to provide an 8-week fast-track Rehabilitation Counselor Certificate program, to support RSU staff with licensure issue. This program was designed specifically for NMDVR, it entails 15 credit hours of rehabilitation counselor curriculum. Currently, there are 16 staff who have been pulled of their caseloads and entered into this program. DVR is footing the bill for the education for these staff members, allowing them to complete course work during Business hours. Both WNMU and NMDVR have been extremely committed to the success of the program and it staff. WNMU is providing weekly progress reports and addressing any concerns of staff in the course work or technical issues. There are currently 16 staff who are enrolled in the program, statewide. Upon successful completion, staff will receive a Certificate of Completion-Rehabilitation Counseling. This certificate will meet NMPED licensure requirements, allowing these staff to obtain full licensure. With this licensure it will allow for more pre-ETS services- aiding in the support to meet the 15% pre-ETS requirements; this will also assist in more effective and comprehensive planning/IPEs for consumers.

RSU is completing its responses to the RSA Monitoring. Some of these corrections including the revision or development of PPI (Policy Procedure Instructions) like job aids, to various job duties. Development of Internal Controls, and policies. RSU has been working with RSA to ensure the corrective action meets their recommendation and federal/state regulations.

RSU's order of selection waitlist has grown by 50 individuals from the last quarterly meeting RSU has noticed a trend of hesitancy across consumers. Services are down moderately, as consumers have expressed hesitancy to enter the workforce during a pandemic, and hesitancy on vaccination. This has greatly impacted how and what types of plans are developed, and services rendered. RSU is hopeful that with the newly licensed staff, this will increase services rendered. RSU is tentatively planning to drop people off the OOO waitlist mid-august, pending the successful completion of the Licensure program; currently there are 724 individuals on the waitlist. RSU is also tentatively planning for an influx of client interest and application, as the state is reopening, and school begins to start up again in the Fall.

### D. DDS Administrator- Charles Hamlin

Currently have and working toward 147 FTEs. In July, DDS will be creating an additional 22 FTEs that will be added. Currently have 89 staff members, 19 Medical consultants; total vacancies are 58. This does include 25 total vacancies that are actively being recruited and will be filled before August. Fiscal year hiring this has been an unprecedented year for New Mexico DDS. Mr. Hamlin has advocated strongly-New Mexico DDS needs additional hires to meet workload needs to serve the citizens of New Mexico. FSA allocated 51 hires to New Mexico DDS, which is more than double what received in one fiscal year prior. DDS has built 14 hires; and are in active recruitment process. Difficulty thus far has been finding qualified candidates to apply for these jobs. With the recent changes that have happened, DDS starting to see additional applicants or more highly qualified applicants; and are anticipating fulfilling that hiring allocation.

DDS new hires begin an internal training over the course of a year. However, are assigned cases typically within the first 2 weeks, and gradually grow from there. It is anticipated that by their third quarter, they will be producing work at a rate that DDS will start to feel the impact for the clients. In

terms of workload planning, DDS has identified that with the hiring authority, they will be on par and not need additional assistance (outsourcing) by October. This is with the assumption that DDS will have qualified candidates that are filling positions. DDS is working to fill 39 entry level positions. Thanks to NMDVR HR for all support.

Fiscal FY 20, successfully transitioned to a new case processing system. NMDDS is one of 6 programs nationwide to make this transition, during a pandemic year. In monthly and quarterly budgets for SSA, DDS fiscal manager has been under the 5% variance in budget projections. NMDDS is the leader among the region nationally in budget forecasting and projecting. DDS has trained and hired four new examiner classes in FY20, completely due in a virtual setting; total of 36 people boarded in FY20. During FY 20 and FY 21, DDS has expanded, addition three additional teams of adjudicators, hiring three supervisors, a manager, and full-time DDS trainer.

DDS is on pace to meet FY21 workload targets; adjusting where needed to ensure success through pandemic. DDS continuing to work on culture shift, with 80% of staff having a year of less of experience; that number is expected to jump higher. Now, is the time to where DDS can establish what they want to look like as an agency. DDS is prompt as handling complaints and issues with phone calls and voicemails. DDS management has implemented a 24-hour voicemail return call rule. Staff are being held accountable for their actions and job duties.

As of June 11, 2021, DDS has already completed 71% of the fiscal year, receiving more than 16,000 claims and clearing more than 13,000. Initial claim disposition is slightly above 8000+; Reconsideration claim disposition is 1200+; disability reviews 700+; Pre-hearings 96. These numbers and staff allocated; budget & resources issues had have put DDS on pace to meet workload targets at 71% of the year. NMDDS continues to be a leader nationally in accuracy; this means that work being produced is at the highest accuracy.

#### E. SRC Chairperson's Report – Sarah Michaud

Over the last couple months, have been working closely with Alicia and Alexa at NMDVR, regarding the restructure of the SRC. How to move forward with public notices, handling the minutes and the open meetings act with Alicia. Working with Alexa, on the internal and external newsletters, routinely communicating about any news the SRC may have to share. This truly highlights the partnership. Briefly meet with Nash Sisneros, to provide her information on the role of the SRC. Have been tracking and looking for opportunities for the SRC to participate on a state and federal level.

### VI. Committee Reports

#### A. Legislative and Outreach Committee – Bernadine Chavez

The SRC has decided to send annual report to key legislators, with the support of DVR.

#### B. Membership, Training and Awards Committee – Tracy Agiovlasis

SRC Awards received triple the nominations. Big thanks to Alexa Henry, for her assistance. Next year, would like to have presentation to be first on the agenda. Training available through the National Council of the SRC. Tracy will send out zoom invites to members. Have connected with Melissa Salazar from the governor's office, regarding membership. Definitive on 2 terms, no more than 3 years tops. Governor's office plans to renew everyone automatically. If the governor's office have not contact, please let Tracey new. New recruits- Delores Harden (Pro), Gail Erhardt (Best Buddies), Chris Boston (CEO-Fresco), Michael Lujan (Pecos/Las Vegas Forest Rangers office), Maida Hershel (Adelante IT), Marlencia Chee (Jemez VR), CeBecca (PED-Parent liaison); working on connecting with a representative at Restoration Pizza.

#### C. Transition, State Plan and Outcomes Committee – TJ Chester

Previously discussed coordinating with state agencies on the state plan; suggest adding this to the agenda following quarterly meeting. Would like to start planning on coordinating the annual report. Next meeting date, committee would need to decide on what will have to be on the next annual report. State Plan is due October 30. (This is up for modification.)

Invitation of membership to this committee has been extended to Dan Drury.  
Dan Drury accepts invitation.

VII. Old Business

None

VIII. New Business

A. SRC Awards Presentation

The following have been recognized for the diligence, dedication, going above & beyond, and outstanding performance with NMDVR and commitment to working with persons with disabilities.

Congratulations to VRT Patricia Sainz, VRC Kayla Damron and Business Partner: Michael “Mike” Lujan and Staff at the Pecos/Las Vegas Ranger District Santa Fe National Forest.

B. Discussion regarding returning to in-person meeting

Hybrid model suggestion (in-person for those who can attend, and those cannot, attend virtually) Challenges with continuing on-line, people paying attention, ability to raise hand and comment, engagement, and space. Suggestion to wait until the state opens, and monitor Covid restriction impacts. Next meeting will be virtual; will discuss again at the following quarterly meeting.

C. Client Satisfaction Survey and Needs Assessment Project

Team has been working diligently on this. Working on getting a contractor in place. Keith to review survey, upon completion, Berna to send out to council for review and comment.

D. NCSRC Update- Bernadine Chavez

Still awaiting to find out if there will be an in-person CSAVR, tentatively in Savannah, Georgia. There is possibility there will be a NCSRC. RSA has decided to redo the modules, previously would receive a certificate of completion. Some of the SRCs have written in these certificates into there bylaws. SRC encourages NMDVR to purchase guides for the SRC. The coalition and RSA partnership coming. August 11, 2021, training person provide on: what is the role of the CAP person? How to work with the (CAP and the SRC). Late June training provided on how the VRC agencies can work together with CAP services.

E. Public Discussion re: Highlighting employers working with People with disabilities

Request to seek representatives of the community itself, in the areas that need to be built up and represented. Does anyone have thoughts? How can this help membership committee to reach out to business. Suggestion: Consideration block of time for the meetings to accommodate members schedules; Resource entity partnerships

IX. Comments from Audience

None

X. Information on Next Meeting

September 16, 2021 10am SRC Meeting

XI. Adjournment

1:43PM

Paula Seanez motions to adjourn ; Dan Dury Seconds

*If you need a language translator or you are an individual with a disability who is in need of a reader, amplifier or any other form of auxiliary aid or service to participate in this meeting, please contact Diane Mourning Brown at the telephone number(s) listed below. Public documents, including the agenda or minutes can be provided in various accessible forms. For additional information, contact Diane Mourning Brown. Telephone numbers: 1-800-224-7005 or 505-954-8500.*

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(Note: the SRC attempts to follow the order of items listed on the agenda; however, it should be noted that the order of specific items is tentative and may vary from the date of the printed agenda.)

