

WSRC QUARTERLY MEETING MINUTES*Thursday, May 14, 2026**9:00am-3:30pm*

Members Present: Michele Stelovich, Council Chair, Labor Representative, Everett
Jennifer Bean, Council Vice Chair, Client Assistance Program, Bellingham
Jill McCormick, Parent Advocate Representative, Puyallup
Jennifer Tabiando, CRP Representative, Lynnwood
Liz Gallagher, Workforce Board Representative, Lakebay
Jana Finkbonner, Tribal VR Representative, Bellingham
Aimee Elber, Disability Advocacy Representative, Spokane
Alexandra Toney, OSPI Representative, Olympia
Matt Newton, Business Representative, Tacoma
Pablo Villarreal, DVR Interim Director, Ex-Officio, Olympia
Verena Strydom, DVR Counselor Representative, Ex-Officio, Kirkland
Katrina Simmons, Recipient of Services Representative, Tacoma

Members Absent: Noelle Green, Recipient of Services Representative, Olympia
Edward Nicholson, Business Representative, Vancouver

Council Staff: Shelby Satko, WSRC Executive Director, Olympia
Jolie Ramsey, WSRC Executive Assistant, Olympia

Visitors:

Aaron Dickson, Amber Steele, Amanda Gates-Portillo, Amber Geremia, Arnaldo Campos, Becky Gellerson, Cami Falcon, Christina Frye, Cody Cohan, Courtney Williams, Danielle Schrauth, David Hankinson, Dee Quintanilla, Deona Koberstein, Dorris Lontiong, Doug Burkhalter, E Garcia, Elizabeth Gordon, Hayley Dennison, James O'Brien, Jamie Rasmussen, Jeanese Hime, Jen Chong-Jewell, Julie Pollard, Kenneth Bryant, Laura F, Laurae MacClain, Lauren Peterson, Lucinda Heidel, Mandy Kipfer, Mari Heusman, Marge Llarenas, Mary Crago, Merriam, Michelle Simmons, Mina T, Mona Fuerstenau, Patricia Bustos, Philip Bradford, Rebecca Smith, Renee Silva, Rich Robinson, Rena Van Meter, Robb St. Lawrence, Ryan Welch, Sam Blazina, Sarah Lowes, Shawn Walsworth, Sonya Sanders, Tammy Bowen, Tara Zink, Trisha Bustos, Yvonne Bussler-White, Zandra Leitch

Call to Order— Meeting called to order at 9:02am by Michele Stelovich, Council Chair

Executive Committee

Motion: Approval of February 2026 quarterly meeting minutes

First: Jen Tabiando

Second: Jill McCormick

No edits, no abstentions. **APPROVED**

DVR Interim Director Updates

- Pablo Villarreal introduced himself, shared his vocational history.
- Vision for DVR
 - Continue being an employer of choice.
 - Elevate participant experience, steer them toward quality jobs, increase median wage, and improve business engagement.
- Organizational structure changes due to change in DVR Director.
- National and statewide issues affecting VR
 - Proposed budget cuts to the Client Assistance Program and Supported Employment. DVR would need to pay for Supported Employment with the VR grant. CAP would require a legislative decision package. RSA would need to change language to allow us to pay for CAP with the VR grant. Congress is working on appropriation requests for the upcoming fiscal year. DVR is required to have a CAP. DSB and DVR would need to find a way to fund CAP to stay in compliance.
 - DVR placement within DSHS
 - There has not been movement. We have no updates on changing federal designated entity. Perhaps after the mid-terms this may change.
 - The Center for Continuing Education in Rehabilitation (CCER) is closing
 - They have supported VR programs in region 10 for 40 years. This will have a big impact on technical assistance they have provided. Community of practice has been transitioned to local teams to manage.
 - Tribal VR relationships
 - Proposal made at the federal level to transfer Tribal VR programs to Bureau of Indian Affairs.
- Order of Selection updates
 - A workgroup met in late April to release some individuals off waitlist in early June. They will manage communication throughout the process and coordinate with IT.
 - Planning on releasing about 100 individuals statewide. Considering funding, office capacity, statewide caseload sizes as we release names. Names will be released based on application date, and priority service category one.
- Performance
 - Will continue monthly business reviews. Inviting supervisors to these meetings. Focusing on WIOA measures. Proposing to add a new position to this team.
 - WIOA Measures and negotiated rates
 - As long as DVR meets half of the goal, they pass. But RSA has changed the target. Now DVR must meet 90% of targeted services. If they fail two years in a row, RSA

will remove those funds from the governor's budget. These have been entered into our state plan and are awaiting approval.

- Liz Gallagher shared that the Workforce Board will monitor and collaborate with partners to ensure that staff are entering data into systems. The measures are data driven. The compliance nature of the job requires data entry. Will be very focused on quality data entry.
- Pablo will represent DVR on the Workforce Board.
- Priority of Service update
 - RSA has approved the DVR updated State Plan on the condition that DVR will update the Priority of Service categories to align with federal regulations.
 - Pablo was contacted by acting RSA commissioner, discussed going back to three categories, and the time and work needed to make changes. This will include policy changes, WAC changes, staff training, and IT reconfigurations.
 - The three categories will be: Most Significantly Disabled, Significantly Disabled, and Not Significantly Disabled.
 - All participants need to be released from category one before releasing category two. All in two before releasing three and so on.
 - A work group will be formed soon. Will include training team, policy, compliance, and WSRC.

Questions/Comments:

- DSHS Organizational Chart
 - Pablo is a direct report to the DSHS Secretary. Pablo also raises a question. What's not represented in the chart is Dana's position and Pablo's as interim. Dana will not dictate any decisions. Pablo does not report to Dana.
 - Pablo reviewed the TAC. There is allowance for consultation. Visually the org chart does not represent current structure. Pablo said he will continue to monitor as well. If DVR were to be put under DDA, this would be problematic from a funding standpoint. At this point, we do not report to DDA. Pablo reports directly to the DSHS Secretary. Pablo said he will continue to raise that question.
 - Council members spoke to the perception that DVR/Pablo is under DDA, where is the loyalty to customers. For example, when DVR was under Juvenile Rehabilitation.
- Interested in buildings data analytics for students/youth. What will the data help us measure and report out on?

Fiscal Updates

Federal budget

- Will be putting in a proposal for CAP.
- Discussed the formula grant that is used to determine disbursements.

VR Basic Support 2026

- DVR must meet the 15% Pre-ETS minimum and is on track to spend it in full by 9/30. Will return zero funds to the treasury. Received \$58.9 million.

Pre-ETS

- DVR met the target. Spending the 2026 grant currently. On track to spend \$1 million on Pre-ETS. The work is entered into case management system.
- Travel spending
- School to Work
- SFY 26 estimated spend
- CRP spend decreased 1%, Pre-ETS increased 1%

Questions/Comments:

- Jana: Shared her concern about the perception of CAP funding if DVR ends up paying for CAP, would they be a direct report? Who would have the authority and oversight of them? CAPs must be independent.
 - Discussion: CAP would propose a grant from DVR to remain independent. RSA would change regulations to allow for grant funds to pay for CAP. Fiscal would be mindful to maintain that separation.
- Why was there a decrease in program income? We had a lot of income.
 - Discussion: We got a ticket tracker and changes were made to SSA's rules about how many times you can submit/resubmit for reimbursements. The Ticket to Work team must be strategic. The decreased income had to do with the backlog.
- To fiscal: For the next meeting, could we see a breakdown in how much is spent on frontline staff in the salary and benefits category?

SeaTac Units Listening Session Highlights

- General themes
 - Satisfaction with caring staff
 - Respondents resoundingly reported that their counselors are friendly, kind, and show that they care.
 - Communication
 - Most participants expressed some frustration with counselors' delayed or lack of consistent communication; especially when there is a counselor change.
 - Shared quotes illustrating some positive feedback but mostly explaining how participants' emails and calls are not responded to for several days or not at all.
 - Counselors' understanding of disability impacts
 - In general, participants described a feeling that their counselor is knowledgeable, caring, and shows that they want to help them meet their goals.
 - Access to the SeaTac office
 - The office is easy to get to and the building is accessible.
 - A participant who needs to use a handicapped parking spot shared that the SeaTac building's parking lot does not have enough handicapped spots.

Region 2 Updates

- Staffing
 - Decline in recruitment needs.

- Currently hiring for only two VRCs, one in Mt. Vernon and Everett office.
 - SeaTac 1 supervisor position to be opened soon. Joanne is transferring to another DVR office. Interviews will be next week.
- Since order of selection, we caseload sizes have decreased in some offices more than others. VRCs are reporting being able to engage with participants a little more easily and focus on the counseling piece of their work.
- Working closely with CRPs on services. Seeing more challenges connecting with participants, due to waitlists at CRPs. Discussing median wage and hours.
- Great Workforce partnerships with North Seattle and Everett where staff are located at Work Source centers.
- Supervisors developing relationships with Work Sources in Bellingham and Mt. Vernon.
- Nick Michaels and Verena Strydom have been instrumental in developing Work Source relationships with Rainier Work Source.
- Pre-ETS- Contract \$8.2million for group Pre-ETS. The five RTCs in Region 2 work closely with them. We're now able to focus on quality services. Truly meeting the gaps that school districts are unable to provide. Looking at rural areas where contractors, others, have not been able to serve as much.
- Will discuss strategy and specific needs in region 2. Set those as a benchmark for the next contract period and make those requests to group contractors.
- Asking counselors to provide a Pre-ETS service to students so that when they do go on the DVR waitlist, that student will be eligible for Pre-ETS while on the waitlist.
- Highlight Ashley Schweiger, RTC: Today she is putting on a workshop at IKEA for area schools, highlighting that employer, helping bridge gaps educating employers to hire people with disabilities, and introducing students to a large employer. Empowering students to request reasonable accommodations.
- Relationships between RTCs and field offices: Large focus on RTCs is community engagement. We've seen a greater need and request for that engagement with our field offices. Each RTC has a specific day they're assigned to be in a field office.
- VRC float positions: We implemented this 3-4 yrs ago to support offices with high turnover, vacant caseloads, and coverage of caseloads when a VRC is on extended leave, i.e. In some ways, they do a case audit.
- Focusing customer service satisfaction: Reinforcing the value that we provide face-to-face meetings and interactions with participants. This prepares them for the real work world. Workforce trends show there are fewer fully remote positions.
- IPE updates: Waves updates have helped to reduce the screen time necessary to input an IPE in the system.
- Staff turnover is slowing down. Megan doing motivational interviewing training, as well as staff surveys to ask about work satisfaction.
- Labor market trends
 - Increase in unemployment across the board. North Puget Sound areas are more affected than south King County.
 - Industry shifts, and rising cost of living has forced some out of retirement, and others reentering labor market.
 - Seeing layoffs in tech industry due to AI. We're making sure that the jobs in their IPE area fit their interests and skills and align with the reality of the job market. The market is transitioning.

Questions:

- How has the challenging case protocol been affected?
 - Answer: They've only had one case so far.
- Regarding the safety concerns, what changes were made? Staff didn't feel safe, required safety plans, etc.
 - Answer: Closed the DVR office, relocated to SeaTac office. They will remain co-located until 2030, and then they will look at an office in south King County.
 - Participant safety: They have full-time security staff who can escort individuals to their car, etc.
- Is there outreach to outlying zip codes being done? For example, where the Kent office formerly served.

SeaTac Office Updates

- Nicole's unit
 - They are fully staffed currently, with an extra FTE. They have seven VRCs and four RTs. Manage 9 liaison roles to school districts and Tribal VR programs.
- Joanne's unit
 - SeaTac 1 is also fully staffed with six VRCs, three RTs, and a caseload carrying RT2. They have greatly helped with intakes, reducing time from application to intake. Office assistants support both units. Also have liaisons with school districts. Federal Way and Highline school districts. Doug maintains contact with Sea Tac airport. Job fairs, hiring events, and info to staff to connect participants to those jobs.
- As a result of being fully staffed
 - No more than five business days to get an intake scheduled.
 - Cases are being well managed, largely because there are no vacated caseloads.
 - Floats conduct case audits.
 - There are 713 open cases between both SeaTac units with an average caseload size of 98.
 - Developing a liaison role with DDA. It was born out of a place where a VRC saw a need to understand the waivers. Understanding the nuances between DVR and DDA services. Someone who can become a SME on DDA.
- Kenneth Bryant is serving the deaf/HOH community.
- Tribal /community relations
 - Kierstin VanderHoeven works with Muckleshoot Tribe. Recently attended a Tribal council meeting. She attended the DSHS Tribal relations meeting. Approval of DVR 7.01 plan. Identify ways to lead to more job placements.
- Business engagement
 - VRC attended an Auburn Work Source attended meeting to discuss collaboration, dispel myths about DVR, how to support severe mental illness and IDD, helped them feel more confident serving these populations. She plans on going regularly to continue supporting them and relationship building. Opportunity to develop a job club. Program where participants can get a free laptop upon completion.
- VRC working to mend relationships with Kent school district, developed a doc to help understand difference in transition services.
- VRC working with Auburn and Renton school districts. Transition liaisons providing a Pre-ETS service while they're on the waitlist.
- CSS improvement: having more manageable caseload size. Focusing on improving communication.

- VRC Danielle has implemented a peer mentorship among fellow staff members.
- Nicole Garner shared that they reviewed the listening session summary during a staff meeting. Discussed ways to improve communication.
- What is being done to improve or replace Waves? Pablo shared that negotiations are being made with our contract with WellSky. The Waves governance board continues to meet and conduct substantial, regular improvements to make the system more useable. We have also created outside tracking systems of all kinds to track various kinds of reports.
- Discussed possibly sharing the peer mentor program across program.

Success Stories from two former recipients of DVR services:

Arnoldo Campos shared his job search journey and being hired with DVR. He works as a full-time Office Assistant 2. He is a tremendous help and morale lifting addition to the SeaTac office.

Nicole Garner shared her story. After graduating college, she got a job as a temporary RT. She fell in love with VR. She later got a full-time RT position at the North Seattle WorkSource, then as a VRC and then as Supervisor.

Public Comment

- Rena Van Meter: As a CRP, it would be really beneficial to implement Discovery for new or returning participants. The one draw back of Discovery is the requirement to go into Customized Employment. Is there any way that DVR could adjust that rule? I personally have found that the more groundwork we lay upfront in getting to know a participant, has reduced the need to change job goals and has even shed light on supporting individuals to go to college/certificate program first instead of trying to find a job placement without the skills, experience or knowledge.
- Mona Fuerstenau: I polled our Job Development staff at Employer's Overload regarding Rena Van Meter's earlier comment About Discovery for new and returning participants and the requirement to go into Customized Employment. They are in agreement that the more work done upfront on Discovery the need to change job goals goes down or if more education for targeted skills, experience and knowledge is discovered it would be nice to be able to initiate it.

Wrap Up Discussion

- Liz Gallagher: Expressed how impressed she is with the SeaTac units, the heart they put into the work, the quality of services, turning things around after high staff turnover.

Meeting adjourned at 2:35pm

Link shared in chat:

<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/program-areas/cie/customized-employment>