

# South Dakota



## State Rehabilitation Council Annual Report 2021

**South Dakota is ranked among the top five states in the nation in the employment rate of individuals with disabilities.**

**South Dakota was 3rd in the nation at 52.1%; compared to the national average of 38.8%.**

**Annual Disability  
Statistics  
Compendium (2020)  
Disability Statistics  
& Demographics**



SD State Bird/Photo courtesy of SD Tourism

**South Dakota Motto:  
Under God, the People Rule**

# **Letter from the State Rehabilitation Council**

*To the Honorable Governor Kristi Noem and RSA Commissioner Carol Dobak,*

**On behalf of the Board of Vocational Rehabilitation, South Dakota's State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), I am pleased to present to you our 2021 Annual Report. It shares highlights from the vocational rehabilitation (VR) program which provides services and supports to individuals with disabilities as they prepare for and engage in meaningful employment. This report also highlights the work of the Board during the past year.**

**We have successfully pivoted to hosting online meetings utilizing Zoom dating back to March 2019 due to COVID-19. Discussions and presentations during the Board meetings have centered around how various agencies, programs, providers, and individuals with disabilities have adapted throughout the pandemic. We are grateful and want to acknowledge the flexibility of staff and their commitment to ensuring the continuation of quality services.**

**This report includes stories of individuals with disabilities who utilized vocational rehabilitation services to achieve their goal of competitive, integrated employment. It includes photos of the 2021 Governor's Awards recipients. These pictures reflect individuals with a variety of backgrounds, experiences, abilities, and interests with a shared desire to obtain competitive integrated employment along with employers who have been supportive throughout the process. The stories and pictures speak to our strength and adaptability in overcoming the odds. We persevere!**

**We look to the future as we continue working in partnership with the VR program to create a service delivery model that is responsive, welcoming, adaptable, and efficient for both individuals with disabilities, employers, and businesses. We thank you for continued support and belief in a statewide workforce inclusive of all individuals.**

**Respectfully,**

**Cole Uecker  
Board Chairperson**

**Cc: Board members  
Jason Hunter, RSA's SRC Liaison (Email Copy)  
Christyne Cavataio, RSA Liaison (Email Copy)**

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## **Board of Vocational Rehabilitation**

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The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is established and meets the criteria set forth in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. SRCs are the consumer voice for the VR program.

The SRC has federally mandated membership requirements that include a broad range of stakeholders to ensure that various constituencies have a voice in the conduct of the VR agency.

SRC members represent a broad array of partners such as employers, parents, educators, community rehabilitation programs, and other stakeholders in the VR program.

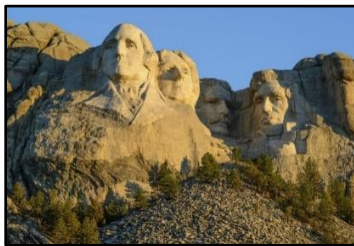
SRC members reinforce the value that individuals with disabilities are able to achieve quality employment outcomes and become self-sufficient.

In **South Dakota** -  
the SRC is known as the  
***Board of Vocational  
Rehabilitation (Board)***.

**Section 105 of the Rehabilitation Act (as amended) requires consumers, advocates and other representatives of individuals with disabilities to participate in the administration and oversight of a state's VR program.**

### **The Board:**

- ❖ *Provides guidance to and works in partnership with South Dakota's general Vocational Rehabilitation agency – the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS).*
- ❖ *Plays a significant role in ensuring that the VR program remains responsive to the needs of those served and operates effectively.*
- ❖ *Works with DRS to develop policies, plan activities, evaluate program effectiveness and carry out other functions related to the vocational rehabilitation program.*



Mount Rushmore - Photo courtesy of SD Tourism

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## Board of Vocational Rehabilitation

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The relationship between the Board of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Division of Rehabilitation Services is a partnership. This partnership is focused on ensuring that eligible individuals receive appropriate, timely and effective vocational rehabilitation services. The provided services are designed to support the individuals served reaching their career goals in successful integrated employment within communities of all sizes throughout South Dakota.

Board Membership	
Cole Uecker, Chairperson Pierre	Brad Konechne, Vice Chairperson Brookings
Kevin Barber, Member-At-Large Sioux Falls	Jolleen Laverdure Lower Brule
Chris Olson, Madison	Beth Schiltz, Pierre
Lisa Merchen, Spearfish	Vicki Stewart, Sioux Falls
Jennifer Trenhaile, Yankton	Jonathan Englund, Black Hawk
Joe Vetch, Summerset	Brooke Lusk, Pierre
Bill McEntaffer, Pierre	Peter Bullene, Watertown
Eric Weiss, Pierre	

The role of the SRC is clearly outlined under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Workforce Investment & Opportunity Act of 2014, addressing these areas:

- ✓ Eligibility & Order of Selection (OOS)
  - ✓ Extent, Scope, & Effectiveness of Services
  - ✓ Functions affecting individual achievement of employment outcomes
  - ✓ Applications, reports, and evaluations
  - ✓ Develop, agree to, & review state goals and priorities
  - ✓ Evaluate effectiveness of VR program & submit progress reports to the Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA).
  - ✓ Evaluate effectiveness of VR program & submit progress reports to the Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA).
  - ✓ Advise & assist in the preparation of the State Plan portion of the Unified State Plan, & Amendments: applications, reports, needs assessments and evaluations.
  - ✓ Participate in Statewide Needs Assessment every 3 years.
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## Board of Vocational Rehabilitation

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The Governor of each State must submit a Unified or Combined State Plan to the Secretary of the US Department of Labor that outlines a four-year strategy for the State's workforce development system. South Dakota has elected to submit a Unified State Plan. The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services Portion of the Unified State Plan must include descriptions and estimates to include the input of the State Rehabilitation Council. Among other required components it must identify the goals and priorities to carry out the VR and Supported Employment programs that were jointly developed and agreed to by the State VR agency and the State Rehabilitation Council.

### **The final implementing regulations for the VR program under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) strongly adhere to three goals:**

- 1) Align the VR program with the workforce development system;
- 2) Strengthen VR's focus on competitive employment; and
- 3) Expand VR services to students and youth with disabilities.

### **Goals in the VR Section of the Unified State Plan**

**Goal 1:** Students and youth will enter their adult lives capable of self-advocacy with sufficient experience to make choices about work and career, being appropriately supported and living as independently as possible.

**Goal 2:** DRS will facilitate the development of a strong statewide community with partnerships with workforce systems, businesses, State Government, tribal systems, schools, service providers and service organizations.

**Goal 3:** DRS clients will have access to transportation services needed to obtain and maintain employment.

**Goal 4:** The VR Service delivery system will result in enhanced earnings, employee benefits, retention, and career advancement for DRS clients.

**Goal 5:** DRS clients will have the skills, motivation and supports necessary to make an informed choice for successful daily living, employment, money management, personal and work relationships.

### **South Dakota Workforce Report 2020**

SD's labor force participation rate was 68.9% in 2020.

SD's participation rate of 68.9% is the fourth highest rate of all states and the District of Columbia.

In 2020, 64.6% of the state's young population (age 16-24 years) were in the labor force, compared to the national rate of 53.9%.

SD Depart. of Labor & Regulation  
SD Workforce Report 2020  
Labor Market Information Center

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## **Board of Vocational Rehabilitation**

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The Board's commitment to represent persons with disabilities and other stakeholders statewide is supported by hosting meetings in communities throughout the state. The Board ensures that all meetings are held in either accessible locations or utilizing a virtual platform that provides multiple means of access (computer, phone, support for closed captioning) in addition to recording the meeting and making it available. This has allowed the Board to continue operating in the safest manner possible during these very unpredictable times.

### **Quarterly Meetings**

**December 17, 2020**  
**Via Zoom/virtual platform**

**March 25, 2021**  
**Via Zoom/virtual platform**

**June 29, 2021**  
**Via Zoom/virtual platform**

**September 9, 2021**  
**Via Zoom/virtual platform**

Members were polled regarding what platforms they were utilizing and what was most comfortable. Consensus from all members led to the use of Zoom during the pandemic. All meetings were held in compliance with federal and state open meeting laws. The public is invited to provide input during the "public comment" period of each meeting. Time is also utilized during some meetings to meet with identified groups to hear about what is working well and what can be improved upon.

Each meeting contains standing agenda items such as the Director's Report, Quarterly Data Updates, Vocational Rehabilitation Initiatives, Business Specialist Report, VR Program Initiatives, SILC Report, and Board Staff Report.

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The Board bid farewell to one member this reporting period. Kristi Allen was honored with a gift from the Suzie Cappa Art Center for her service and commitment to advancing employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Thank you - Kristi!





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## **Board of Vocational Rehabilitation - Quarterly Meeting Highlights & Division of Rehabilitation Services Accomplishments**

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ANNUAL REPORT: The Board drafts and finalizes a report on an annual basis. This report is due to the Governor and the RSA Commissioner by the end of December.

LOCAL PUBLIC TRANSIT PROVIDERS: Transportation has been recognized in the statewide needs assessment as a consistent need. It is a goal of the Board and Division to learn more about transit services and promote transportation in rural areas. The Board hosted dialogue with the Brookings and Pierre transit providers and to learn about their coverage areas, ridership, protocols implemented due to COVID, and challenges unique to each area. Dialogue included the need for open and continuous communication and problem solving.

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**Between July 1, 2020 and June 30, 2021, the Division received a total of 1,485 applications:**

- ✓ 1,315 individuals were found eligible for services;
- ✓ Average age of applicant was 32.6 years of age;
- ✓ Average amount of time from application to eligibility was 27.6 days.

<b>Race of VR Applicants</b>	<b>% of Applicants</b>
White	74%
American Indian or Alaska Native	14%
Black or African American	3%
Two or more races	7%
Asian	1%
Did not self-identify race	1%

**This table reflects data from VR applicants between July 1, 2020 and June 30, 2021.**

### **SERVICES CONTINUED**

Division staff adapted to every extent possible during the pandemic – taking new applications remotely, obtaining signatures electronically, and providing services through secure videoconferencing software.

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## **Board of Vocational Rehabilitation - Quarterly Meeting Highlights & Division of Rehabilitation Services Accomplishments**

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DISTRICT OFFICES: Overviews of the Yankton, Brookings, Aberdeen, and Sioux Falls district offices were provided during this reporting period. Overviews included office and satellite office locations, staff in each office, counties and school districts served, partner agencies to include the American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services (AIVRS). Members met a variety of staff and posed questions unique to those offices and territory served.

POST SECONDARY OUTCOMES INDICATOR 14 SURVEY RESULTS: Information on the post high school outcomes survey conducted for the 2018-19 school year was presented. The survey examines the percent of youth who are no longer in secondary school, had Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) in effect at the time they left school, and were enrolled in:

- higher education;
- higher education or competitively employed;
- higher education or in some other postsecondary education or training program; or competitively employed in some other employment within one year of leaving high school.

There was a substantial increase in the number of Native American respondents who enrolled in higher education compared to the previous year. Overall response rate was consistent with last year's. This is noteworthy given that respondents were contacted during the pandemic. The findings reported a relatively high overall engagement rate.

### **Post-Secondary Outcomes Survey Respondents Report Contact with Agencies:**

- **81% Division of Vocational Rehabilitation**
- **31% Division of Developmental Disabilities**
- **31% Disabled Student Services (College)**
- **9% Mental Health**
- **2% Yes, but didn't know the name of the agency**
- **6% Another agency**

STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK: The Office of Special Education approached the Board during the September meeting seeking feedback for establishing new survey intervals and baselines for target 2024-25 school year.

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## Board of Vocational Rehabilitation - Quarterly Meeting Highlights & Division of Rehabilitation Services Accomplishments

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UPDATES ON VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM INITIATIVES: Members were informed of the following items and invited to participate on a number of the initiatives.

- ❖ Proposal to establish or expand the 18-21 transition programs - fifteen organizations submitted responses to this request. Of those approved, three had to cancel due to the lack of interest and some were rescheduled to obtain more attendees. A total of ten camps were held offering students with disabilities exposure to pre-employment transition services: job exploration, soft skills development, self-advocacy, work based learning and independent living skills.
- ❖ Virtual transition programs – updates provided by VR staff and Transition Services Liaison Project staff. Activities continued to be carried out e.g., Let's Talk about Work, Transition Workshops, Catch the Wave. Virtual programs offered in addition to some face-to-face options for events.
- ❖ Griffin-Hammis and Associates project - provides a training program for service providers. This supports providers convening virtually to discuss common barriers/issues/solutions, in an environment among peers with skilled facilitation. Dialogue included COVID 19, billing and documentation, job development, carving, job site analysis. This was expanded to include training for managers and supervisors to better evaluate quality outcomes for placements.
- ❖ Division issued a Request for Proposal to establish four Employment Specialist Coordinator positions to increase provider capacity. Responsibilities will include coordination of services, job development/ coaching, provide outreach to employers, increase consumer choice, targeting very rural areas. The expectation is to have a contract in place the next reporting period.
- ❖ Summer Transition Placement - a pilot program was started June 2021 for students with disabilities wanting summer employment. Hours worked are not figured into the 250 hours maximum for Project Skills placement. These placements allow students to explore different experiences, build soft skills and the work experience can be independent of the employment goal. The Board fully endorses efforts allowing students to gain a variety of work experience.

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Type of Support	% at Application	% at Closure
Personal Income	36%	72%
Public Support	20%	22%
Family and Friends	40%	5%
All other sources	4%	1%

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**Primary Support at Application vs. Primary Support at Closure**

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## Board of Vocational Rehabilitation - Quarterly Meeting Highlights & Division of Rehabilitation Services Accomplishments

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**MANAGEMENT SYSTEM:** The Division purchased a management system to allow the storage of videos and trainings. The Division is developing a “New Counselor Training” module and other trainings for specific needs. A trainee can watch a video, complete assignments, and/or participate in group discussion. This system will be utilized with board member orientation, providing access to modules, i.e., History of VR allowing them to complete it at their own pace.

**TRAININGS:** WINDMILLS trainings were co-facilitated by the Division, Business Resource Network and Workforce Diversity Network of the Black Hills staff. Attendees included: Board members, VR staff, providers, SHRM managers, employers/business community. The Division also partnered with SD Retailers Association and Rocky Mountain ADA Center to host training sessions. Topics included disability etiquette, stereotyping and impact on employment related decisions, reasonable accommodations, and mental health.

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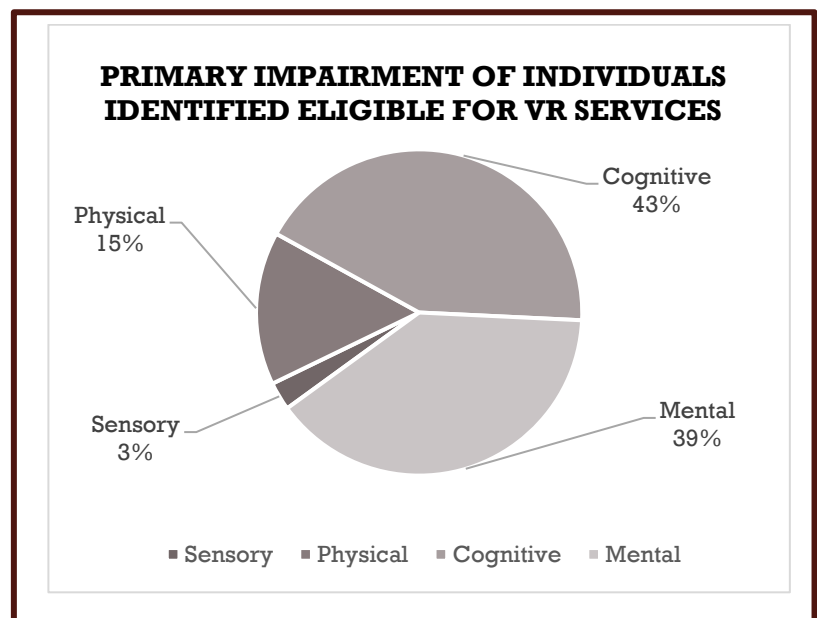
The pie chart reflects the impairment of category of individuals eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services.

**Cognitive Impairment:** intellectual disabilities, borderline intellectual functioning, specific learning disabilities, ADD and Autism.

**Mental Impairment:** depressive/mood disorders, anxiety disorders, autism, schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders, personality disorders.

**Physical Impairment:** accident/injury, physical disorders/conditions, arthritis, and rheumatism, cause unknown, amputations.

**Sensory Impairment:** congenital condition or birth injury, cause not specified, accident injury, physical disorders/conditions.



The Division of Rehabilitation Services helps people with disabilities to obtain or maintain employment, economic self-sufficiency, personal independence, and full inclusion into society.

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## **Board of Vocational Rehabilitation - Quarterly Meeting Highlights & Division of Rehabilitation Services Accomplishments**

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WORKGROUPS: The Division and Board seek opportunities to increase interactions with business partners. Division staff collaborated with SD Retailers Association in developing training on specific topics identified by the retail industry. To date specialized training has been offered on customer service/disability etiquette and service animals. The Board supports efforts that help gauge activities and related work in meeting performance measures for providing services and supports to businesses.

APPEALS PROCESS: Members were apprised of three requests on appeals with the Vocational Rehabilitation program. All three individuals had an administrative review. One individual ended their review while two individuals continued with their appeal to a Fair Hearing. One appeal had the final decision from the Fair Hearing ruling in favor of the Division. This decision was shared with the Board of Vocational Rehabilitation.

FALL CONFERENCE “100 YEARS OF PARTNERSHIP” was held virtually and supported breakout sessions, virtual booths, and networking. Sessions included ethics/ethical dilemmas, hidden addictions, file documentation, fidelity thinking, customized job development; in addition to Independent Living (IL) topics: understanding hoarding behavior/strategies to support clients, and adverse childhood experiences. Members are encouraged to attend the annual Fall Conference.

SERVICE RATES PROGRAM GUIDE: This program guide was updated and finalized this period. It set guidance for rates for providers to bill the agency. Dialogue included rate setting methodology, increasing rates due to inflation, and increases related to unique circumstances. The Board supported a 25% incentive rate to reduce provider staff turnover for providers working after hours and weekends.

### BUSINESS RESOURCE NETWORK AND WORKFORCE DIVERSITY NETWORK OF THE BLACK HILLS.

Organizational overviews were provided to include board of directors, websites, trainings, and partnerships. Each works with different provider groups in their region, i.e., Sioux Falls SHRM, Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, Disability Awareness Commissions, Mayors Committee, Black Hills Badlands Tourism Association, and Economic Development. Dialogue highlighted businesses biggest priority areas and concerns; questions about employees working from home; how to retain valuable employees, and the impact of COVID.

*Discovery –*  
Is the foundation of Customized Employment, which is proven Evidence-Based Practice.

The methodology enables individuals, who have typically been left out of options for competitive integrated employment to self-determine and choose the path their career will take.

This model is based on the guiding principle of Zero Exclusion, i.e., no one is excluded from working.

Disability Employment  
TA Center

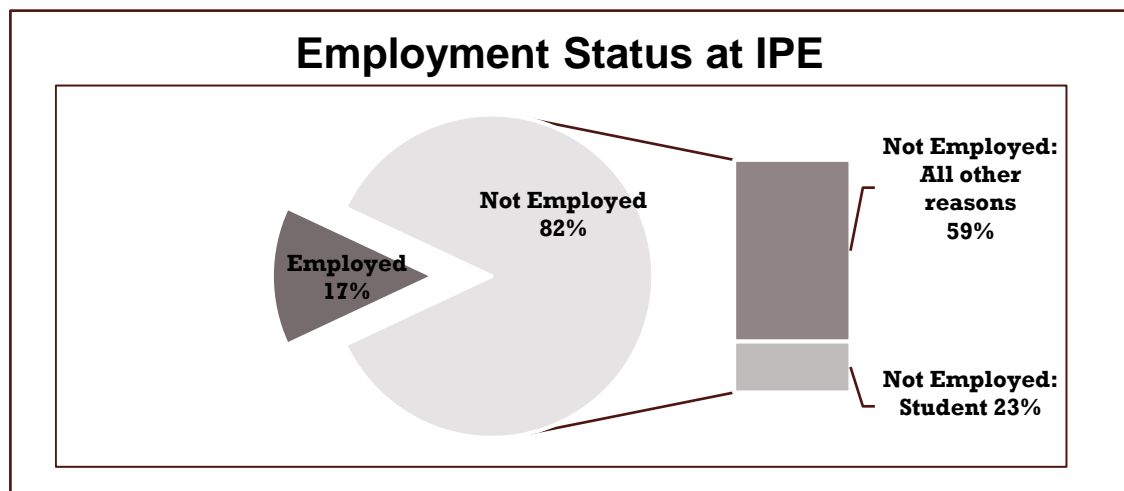
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## Board of Vocational Rehabilitation - Quarterly Meeting Highlights & Division of Rehabilitation Services Accomplishments

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When eligibility for VR is determined, the client and counselor identify and agree on an employment goal and develop a detailed plan of services to achieve that goal, known as an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE).

The Division of Rehabilitation Services completed 2,782 plans for employment. The average amount of time from eligibility to IPE was 53 days. The data comes from initial plans completed between July 1, 2020, and June 30, 2021.



\*Other for 1% includes self-employment, sheltered employment and supported employment in competitive integrated employment.

Barriers to Employment for individuals eligible for VR Services between July 1, 2020 and June 30, 2021. (Completed at IPE)	% of Yes Responses
Low income	31%
Long-term unemployment	16%
Basic skills deficient/low levels of literacy	14%
Ex-offender	9%
Homeless individual or runaway youth	3%
Single Parent	3%
Cultural barriers present	2%
English language learner	2%
TANF exhausted or never received	2%
Foster Care Youth	1%
Migrant Farm Worker	<1%
Displaced homemaker	<1%
Seasonal Farmworker	<1%

***Committed  
to  
enhancing  
the quality  
of life of  
people  
with  
disabilities***

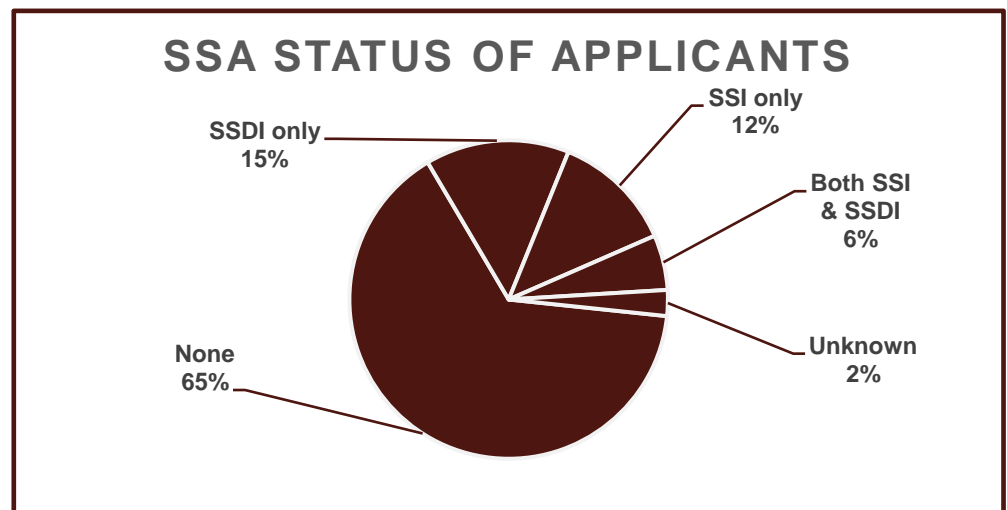
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## Board of Vocational Rehabilitation - Quarterly Meeting Highlights & Division of Rehabilitation Services Accomplishments

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SOUTH DAKOTA BENEFIT SPECIALISTS NETWORK: The Board learned about changes to the benefit specialists' network that provides planning and guidance to SSI and SSDI beneficiaries. Previously, Social Security Administration (SSA) funds were awarded to individual states, now SSA will release funds to a consortium of states. South Dakota is in a consortium with North Dakota, Montana, and Idaho.

*SSA funding will be utilized to fund a half time FTE in SD to work with individuals who are NOT VR recipients.*



The SD Benefits Specialists will continue to provide services - to recent or current VR clients – through financial support from the Division.

Trained Benefit Specialists offer guidance through the following services:

- ✓ **Information and Referral**
- ✓ **Benefits Analysis**
- ✓ **Work Incentives Planning**
- ✓ **Benefits Managements**

The Board fully endorses the Division's efforts to provide financial support to enable the SD Benefit Specialists' Network to continue working with VR recipients.

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BUSINESS SPECIALIST UPDATES: Members learned of the transition of information from the Ability for Hire website to the Division's website. The Board and Division want to ensure employers and businesses have continued access to information and resources. Quarterly newsletters and flyers are also being developed to increase public awareness of VR services throughout the state. The flyers will be distributed to healthcare facilities, community organizations and businesses throughout the state. These items will include contact information for local VR offices and outline how to apply for services.

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## Board of Vocational Rehabilitation - Quarterly Meeting Highlights & Division of Rehabilitation Services Accomplishments

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*Many job seekers experience one or more barriers to employment during their careers.*

*This makes finding or keeping a job more difficult, but not impossible.*

*Some barriers are temporary and easier to address than others.*

### DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND REGULATION (DLR)

UPDATE: staff spoke to programs during the June meeting. This happened after the Governor announced that SD terminated its participation in the following programs:

- ✓ Federal Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC) program.
- ✓ No longer issuing supplemental \$300 weekly payments to claimants under the Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC) program.
- ✓ Federal Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) program.

SD DLR offices are open to support those returning to the workforce with less than 2,000 individuals on benefits. DLR is working with Department of Corrections, Department of Social Services, and Department of Education to explore

avenues to reach potential new hires. And, DLR has funds to support youth ages 18 – 24, to provide training or provide paid work experiences. DLR staff work to identify workers, wages, assistance with paying for costs associated with daycare, transportation, and/or rent in some situations.

CASE FILE REVIEW: A review was conducted with a total of 354 VR cases randomly selected and reviewed. The review focused on application, eligibility, Individual Plan for Employment (IPE), services provided and case closure. Any area with a percentage of less than 90% was identified as needing improvement. Dialogue regarding the findings included changes to the review process and the case file review instrument, clarification in policy/training, and areas that require additional conversation.

PROJECT SEARCH UPDATES: A total of 31 students participated in the program last year, with SDSU/Brookings being the only site that allowed students to complete their internships. It was reported during the June 2021 meeting that all Project SEARCH sites will welcome students back in August. Location restrictions vary with mandatory mask wearing and/or vaccination requirements for student participation. Two of the five Project SEARCH sites presented overviews of their programs this period. This included the Aberdeen St. Luke's Hospital and Brookings/SDSU sites.

WIOA requires VR to set aside 15% of their federal funds to provide "pre-employment transition services" to Students with Disabilities who are eligible or potentially eligible for VR services.



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## Board of Vocational Rehabilitation - Quarterly Meeting Highlights & Division of Rehabilitation Services Accomplishments

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PROJECT SKILLS UPDATE: There was a decrease in student participation last year, but now the Division is seeking a return to pre COVID numbers. This program runs October 1<sup>st</sup> through the end of September. The Board is looking forward to things returning to normal, especially for students with disabilities returning to work and gaining valuable work experience.

CASE SCENERIO: A VR participant was invited to speak to the Board about his involvement with VR and services received. Kody's mom agreed to speak on his behalf because he did not want to miss work!

Kody is a high school student with a disability and has been on an IEP since the age of four. His mom spoke about his likes/dislikes and how his disability impacts functional limitations. She described him as a very hard worker with a mind that goes 100 miles a minute.



*"It is a very good program and without it, I wouldn't have had the opportunity to learn what I have and been able to work at these places."*  
~Kody

*"Kody lucked out for being able to have a couple of great bosses, gaining a lot of hands-on experience and enjoying going to work. Thank you - Heidi and Derick Richter."*  
~Kody's mom

Kody had no idea of what he wanted to do until he started high school and was introduced to the machinery/mechanics class. Kody and the VR counselor explored his interests, and an opportunity was identified. He participated in Project Skills and was offered a work experience position with Richter's Tire and Alignment. This experience led him to think about diesel mechanics. Kody told his family that without this experience he would never have considered post-secondary education.

*Project Skills – A paid work experience for high school students with disabilities – a collaborative effort between VR and school districts or educational cooperatives.*

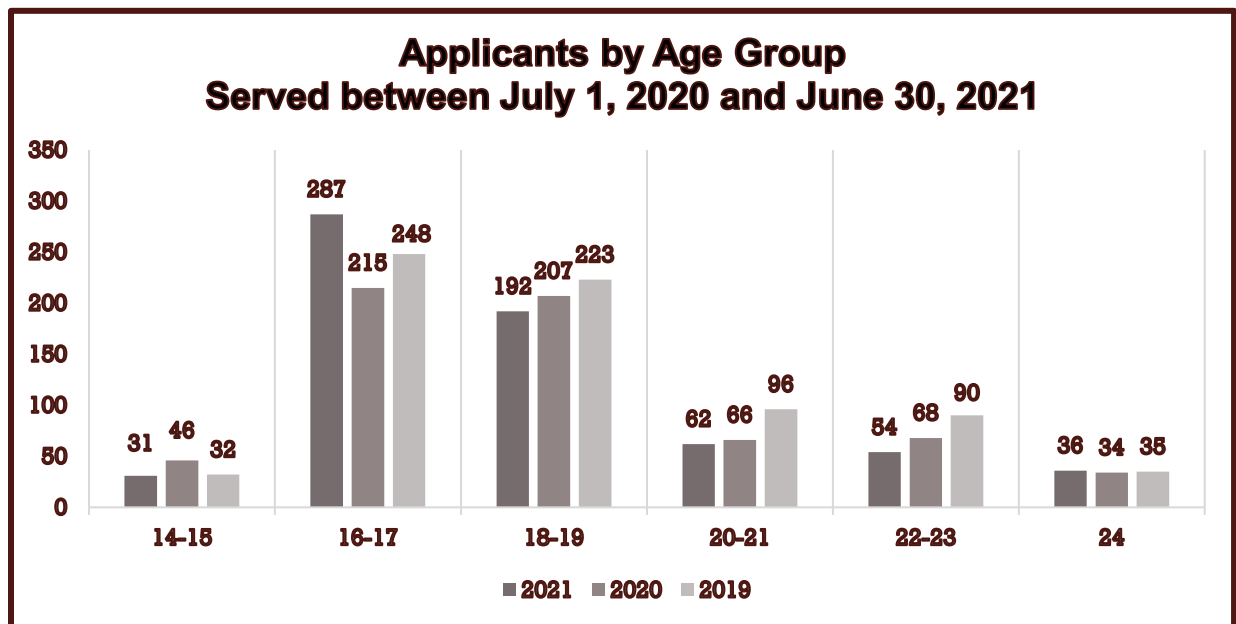
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## Board of Vocational Rehabilitation - Quarterly Meeting Highlights & Division of Rehabilitation Services Accomplishments

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The Division of Rehabilitation Services found **594 youth** eligible for VR services between July 1, 2020 and June 30, 2021. Youth with disabilities are considered anyone between the ages of 14 and 24 with a disability. The Division received 663 applications from youth with disabilities. The average amount of time from application to eligibility was 32.3 days. The primary impairment of youth eligible for services: cognitive (60%), mental disabilities (33%), physical (4%), and sensory (3%).



The Division served 1,892 youth and completed 1,588 plans for employment for youth with disabilities.

**Services  
for  
Youth**

Most Common Planned Services for Youth	
Counseling and Guidance	97%
On the Job Training	32%
Project Skills Wage and Benefit	30%
Follow Along Services	19%
Job Coaching Services	15%
Job Placement Package	1%
Employment Service	11%
Evaluation-Situational Assessment	10%
Employment Experience Wage & Benefit	9%
Benefit Specialist Services	8%

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## Board of Vocational Rehabilitation - Quarterly Meeting Highlights & Division of Rehabilitation Services Accomplishments

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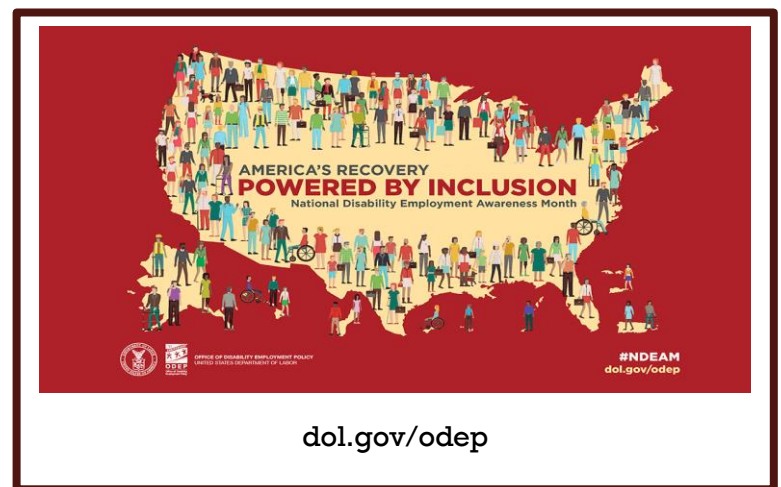
**TRANSITION SERVICES LIAISON PROJECT (TSLP) OVERVIEW:** This project is a result of a systems change grant. Its purpose is to improve and expand high school transition options and services for students with disabilities. Updates were provided on services and activities, i.e., Youth Leadership Forum, Catch the Wave, Let's Talk about Work, Regional Transition Forums, Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) and Monitoring Indicator 13 workshops. This project continues to grow and expand in efforts of providing technical assistance and follow-up in different capacities supporting "systems change" for youth with disabilities.

**BOARD SUPPORT AGREEMENT:** Staff support for the Board of Vocational Rehabilitation and Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) is provided through an agreement with Black Hills Special Services Cooperative. Staff support is supervised and evaluated by the Board and SILC leadership or the Board/SILC as a whole.

**BOARD NOMINATION PROCESS:** The Board and the Statewide Independent Living Council disseminated a joint solicitation packet to individuals and organizations representing a broad range of individuals with disabilities seeking nominees to fill pending vacancies. Nominations are forwarded to the Governor for review and consideration of appointment.

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**NATIONAL DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS MONTH (NDEAM).** The 2021 NDEAM theme was *America's Recovery: Powered by Inclusion*. NDEAM is led by the US Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), but the true spirit lies in the observances held at the grassroots level across the nation. South Dakota communities conducted activities to celebrate the contributions of workers with disabilities and educate the public about disability employment issues.



*"America's Recovery: Powered by Inclusion"* reflects the importance of ensuring that people with disabilities have full access to employment and community involvement during the national recovery from the pandemic.

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## Governor's Awards

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The Governor's Awards ceremony is annual event that celebrates accomplishments and contributions of employers, people with disabilities, and others who are making a difference in communities throughout the state.

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### **Outstanding Employee With A Disability**

Recognizes an employee with a disability in recognition of outstanding achievements in competitive, integrated employment.

**Eric Larson, Menno.** Worked at Wells Fargo for ten years; obtained his property and casualty license and life and health license and started his own business. He is now self-employed as an insurance agent. He operates "Larson Insurance of Menno". His business is thriving and growing due to his perseverance and commitment to independence and self-sufficiency.

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### **Outstanding Individual With A Disability**

Recognizes an individual with a disability for outstanding achievements in promoting employment opportunities for others with disabilities.

**Mark T. Sternhagen, Brookings.** Studied electronic communications, information technology and industrial safety; taught for over 30 years at SDSU. A leader and campaigner for civil rights. Serves on local and state committees/councils; led efforts to ensure the community and SDSU campus were in compliance with the ADA and Civil Rights legislation. He is involved with local, national, and international efforts to eradicate polio. Author of two books and leads the "What if it was Me" campaign.



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### **Outstanding Transition Services Award**

Recognizes an individual or organization (public or private) for extraordinary contributions to developing and providing a program to assist students with disabilities as they transition from school to adult life.

**Cindy Bierman, Mitchell.** A special education teacher with the Mitchell School District. She provides the foundation for her students to succeed after high school, and has the ability to communicate, inspire, and motivate students. Her skills, knowledge, and enthusiasm make the difference when working with students.

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## Governor's Awards

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### Outstanding Employers – Small, Large, and Other/Any Size

Recognizes private employers (non-government) and employers in categories of government (local, county, state) or educational (school district, university, or college) for outstanding achievements in improving employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

#### Outstanding Private Employer (Small Employer)



**TMA of Mitchell** is an automotive business that supports situational assessments, job coaching, and reasonable accommodations. TMA supports a family type environment, provides natural supports, and works with community partners. Jose Rincones, owner of TMA, and his team set the example of how others should be treated. TMA looks for demonstrated skills and strengths in their employees and puts them in a position to succeed.

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#### Outstanding Private Employer (Large Employer)

##### **MasterBrand Cabinets/StarMark Cabinetry of Sioux Falls.**

StarMark has a truly inclusive workplace and culture. They actively recruit employees with disabilities, provide disability awareness training to all employees, and provide advancement opportunities for employees with disabilities. MasterBrand Cabinets/StarMark Cabinetry partners with vocational rehabilitation and other agencies to find employees that have helped to make the company successful



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#### Outstanding Employer – Other/Any Size Category

**Brown County Register of Deeds of Aberdeen.** Together as a department and with the support and direction of Roberta Nichols who is the elected Brown County Register of Deeds, all employees treat one another as a team. Leadership promotes diversity and inclusion within the department by encouraging and recognizing the attributes of each employee. The Brown County Register of Deeds department received this award because they recognize the benefits that employees with disabilities bring to their workforce.

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## Governor's Awards

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### Distinguished Service Award

Recognizes an individual or organization for extraordinary contributions in advancing the empowerment and employment of people with disabilities.

**Vicki Nelson, Sioux Falls.** Has worked for the SD Division of Rehabilitation Services for over 25 years. She works to ensure that individuals who are receiving VR services are given the best opportunity to find employment that they are happy with. She inspires staff and encourages top-notch customer service.

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**These awards recognize South Dakota businesses, individuals with disabilities, and other South Dakotans for their contributions toward the employment of people with disabilities.**

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## Division of Rehabilitation Services Accomplishments

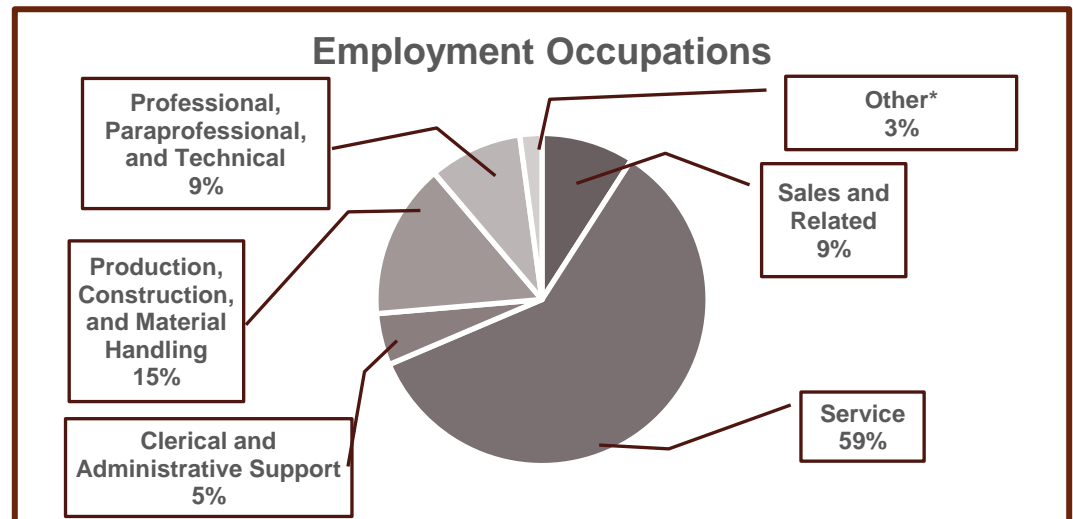
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The Division assists individuals with disabilities to obtain or maintain employment, economic self-sufficiency, personal independence, and full inclusion into society. The Division has twelve offices across the state and offers a variety of services to people with disabilities. Individualized services are offered to assist people with significant disabilities to get and keep employment compatible with their disability.

### Employment & Closure

Data comes from cases closed successfully rehabilitated between July 1, 2020 and June 30, 2021.

These are common closure types consistent with Tourism and Agriculture being two of South Dakota's top employment industries.



\*Other: includes the following: agricultural, forestry, fishing and related, and managerial, and administrative.

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A VR case can be closed as successfully rehabilitated after the individual maintains stable employment for 90 days. Between July 1, 2020 and June 30, 2021, the Division closed 1,571 VR cases. The average case length across all closures was about 12 months.

### Section 511 Reviews

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act requires vocational rehabilitation agencies to conduct periodic reviews of individuals with disabilities working for less than minimum wage. In South Dakota, more than 1,000 individuals fit under this requirement when this law went into effect (2016). The Division meets with these individuals and provides them with information, career counseling, and referrals.

The Division of Rehabilitation Services completed reviews on the following number of individuals.

State Fiscal Year (July 1 to June 30)	Number of Individuals
SFY 2021	182
SFY 2020	443
SFY 2019	617
SFY 2018	807
SFY 2017	916

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## Division of Rehabilitation Services Accomplishments

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Medical Insurance	% at Application	% at Closure
Medicaid	22%	20%
Both Medicaid & Medicare	14%	15%
Medicare	8%	9%
No Insurance	22%	14%
Private Insurance Employer	3%	20%
Private Insurance Other	23%	17%
Public Insurance Other	4%	2%
State or Federal ACA	7%	>1%
Two or more sources	3%	3%

**Medical Insurance at  
time of Application vs.  
Time of Case Closure**

## Most Common Job Titles Per Employment Category

Employment Category	Common Job Titles
Agricultural, Forestry, Fishing, and Related	Farmworkers, Landscaping and Groundskeeping, Pesticide Handlers
Clerical and Administrative Support	Receptionists/Information Clerks, Data Entry, Shipping/Receiving/Inventory Clerks
Managerial and Administrative	General Manager, General/Operation Managers
Production, Construction, and Material	Production Helper, Laborers/Freight Workers, Construction, Cleaner of Vehicles/Equipment
Professional, Paraprofessional, and Technical	Business Operations Specialists, Accountants/Auditors, Teaching Assistance, Social/Human Service Assistance
Sales and Related Occupations	Shipping/Receiving Inventory Clerks, Sales and Related Workers, Retail Salesperson, Cashier
Service Occupations	Service, Food Preparation, Janitors/Cleaners, Child Care, Healthcare Support

## Consumer Satisfaction Survey

To ensure that the VR program is meeting the needs of those who receive services as well as to provide the highest level of service as possible, the Division in collaboration with the Board of Vocational Rehabilitation conducts an ongoing satisfaction survey.

Four survey instruments are utilized targeting consumers at different stages of the VR process. Each survey contains six questions targeting satisfaction with informed choice, services, employment outcomes and unsuccessful closures. Individuals are randomly selected to receive a survey each quarter depending upon where the client is in the VR process. Individuals can provide their responses online, through a toll-free number, or return the postcard. Majority of responses reflect responses falling into the strongly agree and agree with satisfaction of services. This item is monitored and updated as needed.

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## **Board of Vocational Rehabilitation Seeks Public Input**

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The Board is committed to hearing from the public on matters relating to the provision of vocational rehabilitation services in South Dakota under the Division of Rehabilitation Services. Consequently, all regular and special Board meetings are announced in advance, open and accessible to the public.

The Board also holds public hearings and forums as they deem them necessary. These, too, are announced in advance, open and accessible to the public.

All meetings are called by the Board Chairperson, in cooperation with DRS and Board staff, as stipulated in the bylaws.

If you wish to let the Board know your thoughts on the provision of vocational rehabilitation services, you may reach them in the following ways:

Phone: 605.494.3613

Write: Board of Vocational Rehabilitation  
221 South Central Ave, Ste 33  
Pierre, South Dakota 57501

Attend: Meetings – copies of agendas can be obtained by contacting Board staff at the above phone number or by going to the State of South Dakota Boards and Commissions portal at: <http://boardsandcommissions.sd.gov/>

At this site you may also access additional Board information such as member listing and past meeting minutes. If you are interested in becoming a member of the Board, a nomination form is also available, or you may request it from Board staff or DRS.