Greetings Council,

I apologize for not being there in person today. My allergies have been brutal, and while not contagious, I don’t think anyone would appreciate me sneezing, coughing, and blowing my nose around you. My report this month will be quite a bit abbreviated from other months for that reason; however, I do have a number of important announcements to share.

Legislative Updates: State Appropriation Increase

We are excited to share that SSB received the $4,000,000/biennium increase to our state funds. This is an increase to our base, and it is not just one-time funds. As a result of this increase, we are able to meet our state matching requirements for our federal award without using dollars meant for our other programs, fill long-standing vacant positions, and increase staff in those areas our customers needs us the most.

Legislative Updates: Employer Reasonable Accommodation Program

We are also excited to share that SSB received $4,000,000 for the biennium to create the pilot Employer Reasonable Accommodation Fund. These are one-time funds that will allow us to determine if ERAF makes a positive impact on the hiring of people with disabilities. This program is set to launch by September 1st. We are currently working on hiring two temporary positions to implement it. In addition, we are beginning the development of the policies, procedures, forms, and website.

Ending Order of Selection

While there has not been a waiting list for services since September 2019, SSB’s VR program is still on an order of selection. Being on an order of selection means that at any time, we can institute a waiting list for service. State agencies who remain on OOS are reported to Congress via an RSA report. It is a list we don’t want to be on anymore. Therefore, today I am proposing our plans to end order of selection. We are on a great budget trajectory, especially given we just received an increase in our appropriation.

The process to end it is actually fairly straightforward. It requires us to do an amendment to our Combined State Plan, which does require public meetings and SRC-B involvement. We could do it one of two ways:

1. We can wait and do it as part of our new CSP; or
2. My preference is we initiate the amendment now with RSA, hold a public virtual meeting to solicit comments and thoughts, and be done with it by the end of the summer.

I will pause here to solicit any questions or comments from the Council.

DEED’s SFY24 OKRs

Our Department has established new OKRs that will go from July 1, 2023, to June 30, 2024. SSB will not be creating our own; however, we do have involvement in many of the areas, especially as it relates to the how people who are blind, visually impaired, and DeafBlind can help with the workforce shortage issues our state is experiencing.

The OKRs that we will all be focusing on are:

*OKR #1: Empower Minnesota to create an economy rooted in equity- across every race, identify, and ability.*

​​​​​​​Key Results:

1. For direct-to-business programs, implement standardized demographic questionnaire for economic development programs and align with demographic data collection for workforce development programs.​
2. For RFP partner programs, require RFP grant partners to identify the target groups they serve by assessing who their end-users are (following the OBF demographic categories to the extent possible) in order to convey the reach and impact DEED has on equity.​
3. Establish quarterly engagement plan for new Office of Public Engagement Director and Communications to meet with senior leadership about proactive outreach planning (program milestones, desired external footprint, tailored messaging, planning and execution).​
4. Enhance DEED employee awareness of language access responsibilities, resources, and requirements to translate and interpret information for customers. ​
5. Achieve and sustain a workforce that at least matches the representation of Minnesota’s diverse communities, specifically regarding race and ethnicity, by July 2024.

*OKR #2: Drive growth that puts Minnesota at the forefront of innovation in technology, high-tech manufacturing, and health & wellness.*

Key Results:

1. Increase the business development pipeline (creating, fostering, and retaining opportunities) in target sectors by 15%.
2. Establish at least seven new partnerships and collaborations between businesses, higher-ed institutions and other partners focused on target sectors.
3. Feature at least 25 businesses within target sectors in DEED events, press conferences, media opportunities, and promotional campaigns. ​
4. Increase participation (attendance, sponsorship, exhibitor) by 20% in the most important and relevant outreach channels (trade shows, events and meetings).

*OKR #3: Meet the moment for Minnesota’s historic workforce shortages, with collaborative efforts towards high-wage jobs with strong growth potential.*

Key Results:

1. DEED workforce programs will increase by 5% the number of participants they serve who come from Quartile 1 and 2 of the Social Vulnerability Index (SVI), which includes the most vulnerable populations and areas of the state.
2. 80% of Job Creation Fund/Minnesota Innovation Fund recipients hire at least 20% of participants from programs administered by Workforce Development and Workforce Services.
3. Improve and provide training to DEED staff, grantees, and Local Workforce Development Area partners on how to assist job seekers in learning more about and entering into Occupations in Demand and the Drive for Five sectors.
4. Through the workforce digital transformation project, implement system integration and technology recommendations that support DEED in creating a better customer experience for individuals and employers.

Projects and Notable News

*Community Partner Highlights*

The next Community Partners + SSB Staff Forum will be July 11th at 10 AM to 12 PM. A Gov.delivery notice with Zoom Link will be coming soon. At that meeting, we will be providing an update on the Employer Reasonable Accommodation Fund, as well presenting the updated employment training we will be offering to employment community partners.

An SSB Staff ATB Training Contract with Vision Loss Resources has been executed and 2 more contracts are near completion (vendor info still confidential).

There are 3 contracts being negotiated for ATB and Pre-ETS services.

There are 2 amendments being processed to add program specific language and additional ATB services.

There is 1 pending application.

The six-month posted RFP for Community Partners of ATB, Employment Services and Pre-ETS expires on June 30, 2023. Since there is a continued need for additional Community Partners, minor revisions and updates will be made and the RFP reposted for another six months.

The contract for Court Reporting expires June 30, 2023 and we have been preparing a Quick Call targeted solicitation which goes to a minimum of 3 vendors, one of which must be from the State’s directory of certified Targeted Group (TG), Economically Disadvantaged (ED), and Veteran Owned (VO) Vendors.

*Pre-ETS and Transition Quick Hits*

Summer is a time that many of our students are engaged with programs and work opportunities. There are 22 students going to STP, and many other students attending a variety of programs from our community partners.

*Business Enterprise Program Quick Hits*

BEP Elected Committee Chair Mike Colbrunn and BEP director John Hulet have started meeting with the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) to review current BEP policy and procedures and BEP Rule to identify opportunities for enhancement.

*Communication Center Technology Updates*

The state published a RFP, Request for Proposal, for recording software on our behalf in March. Aster delays, we finally got the results back. There was only one valid bidder, and we are in the process of scoring their submission. We do think it will meet our needs.

The Go Live date for moving the Braille Unit to our new software system, KLAS was May 10. For a number of reasons we had to postpone the implementation. We are working through a number of issues, and making progress, but a new date has not yet been set.

*Senior Services Unit Quick Hits*

* Aging Eyes position is permanent!
* Hiring soon for a second Rochester staffer
* On pace to serve more than 4,000 seniors
* Working with Senior Committee to plan a Possibilities Fair
* Barb is back to work part-time

*Workforce Development Unit Data Snapshot*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Data Set** | **Count/#** | **Date Range** | **Notes** |
| Applications Received for Services  | **233** | 7/1/22-Present | Number of new applications for VR services submitted this program year. |
| Individuals Being Served (**WDU** Open Cases) | **662** | As of Present | This is the current number of individuals who have an open case with us. |
| Applicants (**WDU** Pending Cases) | **9** | As of Present | This is the current number of individuals in application status who are awaiting an eligibility determination. |
| Successful Closures | **69** | 7/1/22-Present | A successful closure means the individual achieved competitive integrated employment and their case was closed. This is tracked by Program Year (July 1 to June 30). |
| Unsuccessful Closures  | **99** | 7/1/22-Present | Number of eligible individuals who were closed without a competitive integrated employment outcome. A unsuccessful closure occurs for a variety of reasons (no longer interested and cannot locate are the two main reasons). This is tracked by Program Year (July 1 to June 30). |
| Total Closures- Month (**May**) | **19** | 5/1/23-5/31/23 | Total closures last month (successful and unsuccessful). (**May**) |
| Applications Received- Month (**May**) | **18** | 5/1/23-5/31/23 | Number of new applications for VR services submitted last month. (**May**) |
| Average Caseload Size per Counselor **WDU** | **39** | As of Present | Lowest caseload is 19 (**Metro**) and highest caseload is 54 **(NC Region).** \*Caseload size includes pending and open cases.  |
| Average Length of Time Receiving VR Services | **Approx. 3 Years & 5 Months** |  As of Present | This is the average length of time current customers have been receiving services from SSB. |
| Average Cost per Client **WDU** | **$3,558.00** | PY 2022 (7/1/22-Present)  | Average cost per client served during PY-2022 |

*Metro Intake and Referral Information*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Data Set** | **Count/#** | **Date Range** | **Notes** |
| Cases opened and transferred (**WDU**) | **13** | 5/1/23-5/31/23 | This is the number of individuals determined eligible in the Metro and assigned to a counselor last month (**May**) |
| Pending Cases (**Metro Intake**) | **14** | As of Present | This is the current number of individuals who have completed Orientation & Intake and we are waiting on an application and/or eye report. |
| Incoming Cases (**Metro Intake**) | **4** | As of Present | This is the current number of incoming individuals who have not yet completed an intake.   |

Staff Updates

We are excited to announce that Brent Benson, one of our Metro VR-Techs, accepted the first job coach position. We are in the process of hiring two additional job coaches. Brent already has jumped into his new role and is assisting a student who is doing a janitorial work experience up in the Isanti area.It wasn’t anticipated a job coach would be needed, as the customer had a previous experience doing similar work. The employer has expressed some concerns, and it was determined a job coach would be beneficial. Local Community Partners weren’t available to support this so Brent was contacted.

We are working on hiring a few additional VR-Techs, including filling the vacancy left by Brent.

We are still working to hire the low vision trainer. This position was reposted recently.

We are posting an outreach coordinator position that will assist Lisa Larges in communications and outreach. They will also be responsible for coordinating the SSB’s portion of the WIOA Combined State Plan.

We will be hiring two temporary positions to support the Employer Reasonable Accommodation Fund, one program coordinator and one financial/administrative support.

We will be hiring an additional SSU specialist to serve the Rochester area.

We will be hiring a quality technician in Audio Services; this is Jeff Behl’s former position that we were unable to fill.

We will be hiring a broadcaster in RTB. This was a vacancy also left unfilled when Steve Adler retired.