Members Present:
Rob Hobson, Chair; Carol Pankow, Director; Jeff Thompson Vice-Chair; James Baxter, Carolyn Cherry, Michael Colbrunn, Jennifer Dunnam, Catherine Golding, Steve Jacobson, Gloria LaFriniere, Catalina Martinez, Patricia McGee, Kristina Petronko, Ron Woelfel, Barb Ziemke

Members Absent:

SSB Staff:
Dave Andrews, Jennifer Beilke, Jon Benson, Brianna Holeman, Susan Kusz

Audience Present:
Byron Lee, Judy Sanders, Cody Beardslee, Ryan Strunk

MOTIONS and VOTE SUMMARY:
• Motion to approve the minutes of the October 4, 2018 meeting was made by Jeff Thompson and seconded by Steve Jacobson. Motion passed unanimously.
• Motion to approve the schedule second Thursday in February and first Thursday April, June, August, October and December was made by Steve Jacobson and seconded by Ron Woelfel. Motion passed unanimously.
• Motion to approve the new member orientation packet as amended was made by Pat McGee and seconded by Michael Colbrunn. Motion passed unanimously.
• A motion to approve the Work Plan was made by Michael Colbrunn and seconded by Pat McGee. Motion passed unanimously.
• A motion to approve the Report on Vocational Rehabilitation Program Effectiveness Review was made by Jeff Thompson and seconded by Catalina Martinez. Motion passed unanimously.
• A motion to approve the Annual Report was made by Jeff Thompson and seconded by Ron Woelfel. Motion passed unanimously.
• A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Jeff Thompson and seconded by Ron Woelfel. Motion passed unanimously.

COUNCIL ROLL CALL AND INTRODUCTION OF AUDIENCE:
Chair Rob Hobson called the State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (SRC-B) meeting to order and reviewed the agenda. Roll call was taken and council and audience members were introduced.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES:
Motion to approve the minutes of the October 4, 2018 meeting was made by Jeff Thompson and seconded by Steve Jacobson. Motion passed unanimously.

CHAIR’S REPORT:
Presentation of awards to Jennifer Dunnam and Steve Jacobson. Jeff Thompson presented Rob Hobson his award for service. The calendar for next year was set. Meetings will be held on the first Thursday every other month on the even numbered months except for February. The February meeting will be held on the second Thursday.

SSB DIRECTOR’S REPORT:
A special thanks to outgoing council members for their service. We have a transition in leadership across the state government. We have a new governor coming in and our commissioner is not reapplying. There has been talk of a federal shutdown. This will not impact SSB because our funding is secure in a bill that happened prior to September 30th.

A recent *Journal of Disability Policy Studies* article discussed a study that confirms findings from about 30 years ago that outcomes are better for people who are blind or visually impaired when they receive services from blind rehabilitation agencies that are separate from general vocational rehabilitation agencies. They recommend retaining separate VR agencies for blind and visually impaired consumers and strongly encouraged work experiences for consumers in VR.

Rulemaking – the kickoff meeting was spearheaded by Natasha Jerde. Some feedback on initial thoughts have been received from some stakeholders. More to come after the first of the year when the new administration and commissioner have had a chance to sign off on the process.

 Lease improvements to conference room A & B and the Braille unit are complete.

Radio Talking Book – The 50th anniversary celebration open house is January 25 and the council is invited.

Our listeners are telling us that they want more audio on demand and we are developing an app for that. We are shifting to more podcasts and hoping to stream material on Alexa so people can get RTB content on demand, instead of having to wait until it airs on the program schedule.

After the first of the year, there will be a few changes to make RTB most cost effective: no more overnight on-call staff and we will prerecord holiday programming. Stats for October and November: We recorded 36 books in these two months for a total of 10,520 pages.

Engineering - Our engineers do a great job. They upload books to BARD, keep all equipment maintained, and repair digital talking book and cassette players. They repaired 152 pieces of equipment in October and November and added 16 books to BARD. Also during these two months, there were 2,864 downloads of our books from BARD. Six percent of the books on BARD (the NLS online download library) are books we’ve produced here in the Communication Center.

Audio Services transcribed 12,435 print pages and circulated 1,261 pieces of equipment during October and November.

Braille is serving 31 students. Altogether, the 105 new braille titles they’ve transcribed and the titles purchased from others, equal 93,274 pages of braille provided to Minnesota students.

Dial-In News was accessed 1,145 times; NFB-NEWSLINE was accessed 82,945 times.
BEP - We now have a veteran who is operating some of the vending machines in the VA hospital. There are only four VA facilities in the U.S. that have a Randolph Shepherd vending operator in them because the VA has chosen to ignore federal law. Two vendors and our BEP director attended the National Association of Blind Merchants' BLST conference. The BEP policy and procedure manual has been updated and is pending federal review and approval.

WDU has had 12 successful closures to date and 10 people on the waiting list.

Financial update – in FFY18 we overspent our $4.8 million by about $600,000. We were able to cover that overage through program income we received from Social Security for successfully placing people into employment. Going forward we can't rely on that. We are now doing authorizations monthly and have seen a 36% reduction in authorizations. We have also suspended new referrals for customized employment until the vendors and staff are trained on how to comply with the new federal definition of customized employment. Vendor contracts are in the process of being amended to align with the federal grant management requirements, which includes the elimination of the cancellation fees. Customized employment training for vendors will begin in January.

We know officially/unofficially that we are going to be monitored this upcoming year by our federal partners. The Council will be very much involved in that monitoring process.

Senior Services - There is a support group that meets every other week for two hours for 12 seniors working with retired VA Advisor Director Brucie Hawkins. The Aging Eyes Initiative is on pace to serve over 800 seniors this federal fiscal year. We are training one or two staff in a long term care facility to identify people experiencing vision loss and to be able to help them. This will begin after the first of the year. Senior services served 1,893 customers in October/November.

Staff Updates
Lisa Henrickson, mail room specialist, will be retiring in February. Shane DeSantis is a new pre-employment transition counselor. Sheila Koenig has been reallocated to a Rehabilitation Specialist 3 position.

New Member Orientation Packet Task Force Report:
The new member orientation packet has been updated and revised. A motion to approve the new member orientation packet as amended was made by Pat McGee and seconded by Michael Colbrunn. Motion passed unanimously.

Work Plan Task Force:
Changes to the Work Plan were suggested so that years and dates align properly and the word budget replaces the term resource plan. Additionally, an annual review by the chair of member attendance and a review of the bylaws was added. A motion to approve the Work Plan was made by Michael Colbrunn and seconded by Pat McGee. Motion passed unanimously.

Needs Assessment Process:
The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) has affected how reporting takes place. The task force will be soliciting council members and committee chairs for input on what kinds of things should be included in the new comprehensive needs assessment over the next year. We will look at
the services provided and look at the current needs and try to identify the areas where we need to do something different or new.

**Report from Members Attending the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB) Convention in California:**
The conference was very educational, inspiring, helpful and even life changing. Our director is highly respected amongst her colleagues and we are very proud she represents our state. People from other states talked about some of the things that they do, especially for the transitional age. Some students are building robots and then run them through scenarios as if they were working for the CIA, FBI, or Homeland Security. It is interesting to see what the other states are good at as well as their struggles. We received a lot of really good feedback from the NCSAB conference. There was a session about data. Melinda Jane Kola, who is the data chief for RSA, and Rachel Anderson, technical assistant at the Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC), presented on using data for informed decision making. In a couple of states, the data shows significantly higher outcomes percentages for blind agencies versus general agencies that get into competitive, integrated employment. Average hours and wages for work are higher. We had the opportunity to meet with Johnny Collett, the assistant secretary of the Office of Special Education & Rehabilitation Services, Carol Dobak, acting commissioner for RSA, and David Steele, chief financial officer. We spoke with them about prior approval and 25 cost category areas and that we are asking for an exception. Since WIOA, there are now 40 agencies that are on order of selection. The Government Accountability Office just issued a report that said RSA needs to let states know what is allowable to spend money on.

**Report on Vocational Rehabilitation Program Effectiveness Review:**
We are required by law to conduct a review of the effectiveness of the services provided by State Services for the Blind, particularly the vocational rehabilitation program. There are several different parts to the review: the customer satisfaction survey, the discussion of the progress on the goals & priorities for FFY18, and the new performance indicators.

The customer satisfaction survey is now done annually. The same number of people are surveyed as annually but over a six month period, which was March through August 2018. Calling people for something that happened longer than six months ago may not be as reliable, since their recall is not as fresh.

The Consumer Satisfaction Index report covers a quarter on a rolling period of a year. The report shows satisfaction trended downward over time while the number of respondents went upward. The committee didn’t feel there was anything to read into this since the data is situated differently from the previous report. The report discusses the goals and priorities that were set for FY2018 and whether they have been met.

**Annual Report**
Under federal regulations SSB is required to have this published by the end of December and does need council approval. The format is the same from year to year with a letter from the chair and one from the director. We featured the consumer who came to speak to the council. It includes a repost from the various committees.

The focus of the report is that SSB applicants need to have an increased awareness of the vocational rehabilitation process, including their responsibilities and intent to achieve an employment outcome. The report is written from SSB’s point of view that individuals need to be tracked specifically from the beginning of their eligibility. We identified 52 individuals who received metro orientation for fiscal year
2018. Our analysis shows that 17 or 33 percent who applied for services were closed during the year. Numbers and reasons are: not interested, four; unable to locate, three; ineligible, four; other, six. Remaining 35 to learn who closed successfully versus those who do not and why.

Even with orientation, some individuals did not know if they really wanted to participate in the program until they actually participate. There are some who lose touch with us during rehabilitation. Ineligibility can be based on numerous factors but key are not meeting vision criteria or vision loss is not a barrier to employment. Others transfer to another agency, find employment before services are initiated, or do not have medical documentation to confirm their eye condition. Our conclusion is that meaningful analysis for outcomes is going to require more time as we follow these 35 individuals.

In the meantime, we are formalizing rules for orientation and in-take, piloting the required eye report accompanying the application before initiating eligibility, and refining the orientation information about services being reasonable and necessary.

COMMITTEE UPDATES:

Satisfaction and Goals & Priorities
Nothing to report.

Vendor Outcomes and Measures Committee
The latest survey report was sent out to the committee for the adjustment to blindness customer satisfaction survey. Four vendors made it into the survey this year. At least five responses and a 70 percent response rate are required for a vendor to be included. We did include one vendor that had five responses but not quite 70 percent. All were accessible technology vendors. The committee is looking to go to an electronic format that DEED will conduct. This would be less expensive and the surveys could then be done throughout the year instead of once a year. There are positives and negatives to conducting the survey electronically.

Minority Outreach Committee
We’ve discussed creating an elevator speech and business card. We are looking at tabling at 15 events in the upcoming year. We have reviewed our goals and priorities and developed a work plan for our committee. We have changed our meeting schedule to opposite months as the council.

The DeafBlind Committee
Nothing to report.

Senior Services Committee
We have been meeting with the support group from the VA that Brucie is facilitating. There is a second group that meets out in Bloomington.

Transition Committee
April 27, 2019 will be a Career Expo. There will be lots of tables filled with employed blind and visually impaired people who will speak with transition-aged students. We heard about WIOA and some changes that will impact counselors here. There is a recording about the Ins and Outs of SSI for Use with Vision Loss in partnership with State Services for the Blind with Minnesota Facility Law Center.

Communication Center Committee
We will be looking at what is involved in creating a braille textbook and getting a little bit into how charges are calculated because braille is fairly expensive. We will also be hearing about the final plans for the 50th anniversary of the Radio Talking Book.

**Employment Committee**
Nothing to report.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:**
A scholarship program of the National Federation of the Blind is open for the 2019 scholarship year for college-aged students. The minimum scholarship is $3,000 and the largest one is $12,000. Go to NFB.org/scholarships for more information. Please let eligible students know.

The American Council of the Blind of Minnesota is having their state convention on January 25 - 27 at the Doubletree Hotel. Go to acb.org/Minnesota for more information.

The National Association of Blind Students, NFB Minnesota, and NFB Illinois are planning a Midwestern student seminar from March 15 to March 17, 2019.

**ADJOURNMENT:**
Motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Jeff Thompson and seconded by Ron Woelfel. Motion passed unanimously.