**Virginia Board for People with Disabilities**

**Advocacy, Outreach, and Training (AOT) Committee Meeting Minutes**

***June 12, 2019***

**Committee Members Present:**

Alexis Nichols (Acting Chair)

Allison Coles-Johnson

Ethel Parris Gainer

Jocelyn Kilgore

Sarah Kranz-Ciment

Rachel Loughlin

Eric Mann

Alexis Nichols

Caroline Raker

Alexus Smith

**VBPD Staff:**

Heidi Lawyer

Nia Harrison

Benjamin Jarvela

Penni Sweetenburg-Lee

Megan Weems

Evette Wingfield-Woodley

**CALL TO ORDER:** Ms. Alexis Nichols, the Vice-Chair, called the meeting to order at 9:16 a.m. and informed the committee she would be directing the meeting in Mr. Matthew Shapiro’s absence.

The Chair called for a **MOTION** to approve the minutes from the March committee meeting. Ms. Jocelyn Kilgore made a **MOTION** to approve. Ms. Caroline Raker **SECONDED** the **MOTION**. The **MOTION** carried unanimously and the March meeting minutes were approved as written.

**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE UPDATE:** The Chair gave an overview of the Executive Director’s report and other issues discussed at the Executive Committee meeting, including special initiatives/legislative and policy work, committee involvement, Board member attendance, grant reviews, training and alumni, Board administration, and programs. Mr. Benjamin Jarvela, Communications Director, highlighted the importance of potential changes to Committee structures and responsibilities that will be discussed and decided at the summer Executive Committee orientation meeting (date to be determined).

**Annual Evaluation Results for Alumni Development Program (ADP):** Ms. Nia Harrison, Director of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, introduced herself to the Committee. Ms. Harrison explained that the intent of the program was the engage the alumni of the Board’s training programs and join everyone together to participate in grassroots advocacy efforts. Ms. Harrison discussed the results of the alumni survey that was conducted after the third year of the program. Dr. Penni Sweetenburg-Lee, Director of Training and Alumni Development, commented on the efforts of the Training Programs staff who, throughout the year, continued to develop the chapter structure/organization, developed an operational manual, and held an ADP Officers Retreat to try and structure the level of involvement of the officers. Mr. Eric Mann asked whether the chapter meeting information was available to share with the Board and the public to encourage people other than solely alumni to attend the events. Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee explained that in the planning retreat a yearly calendar of events was developed and was made available on the Board’s website and Facebook. Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee expressed her hope that, going into the fourth year of the program, the Board staff will be more significantly involved in planning and implementing advocacy events rather than having the volunteer alumni plan the events and that the calendar would be shared with ADP members and Board members.

Ms. Harrison continued with the analysis of the number of meetings and advocacy activities as had been discussed in previous meetings. She discussed issues with retention of alumni participation, including the Board’s focus on advocacy activities, federal regulations disallowing expenditures for food and drink which discouraged some members which affected members with a strong interest in socialization. Ms. Harrison noted that the total participation at the chapter meetings decreased but participation increased for the planned awareness activities. She also noted that the return rate of participants varied between years two and three, but participation remained consistent. Mr. Mann asked whether the staff had other indications of what affected the participation/retention rates. Ms. Harrison noted that about half of the members every year are new alumni and half are returning alumni and that it had been easier to engage new graduates than those who had graduated many years ago. Committee members questioned whether the alumni graduation year had been noted in terms of alumni engagement. Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee commented that there had been an intentional shift, made by staff, to target newer program alumni (graduation years 2011-2018). She further discussed the program successes in third year and emphasized the choice to focus more on advocacy activities than chapter meetings or awareness activities.

Ms. Harrison continued to review challenges and possible solutions, including: reliance on busy volunteers, unmet participant needs/interests, limited, program lack of), focus on awareness activities, lack of program identity, and onerous documentation requirements. With respect to the latter, Ms. Harrison noted that they could eliminate one survey but that the remaining documentation was needed in order to obtain needed federal performance data. She noted that where possible these requirements would be streamlined. Ms. Harrison commented that while conducting surveys, several alumni noted that the advocacy interests did not align with their personal interests. Training Programs staff noted that dissemination of information was an issue as past dissemination had focused on transmitting information only to Chapter leaders, as was, direct input from members at large. Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee noted that the staff is considering an advisory council that includes a wider range of alumni members and possibly Board members to facilitate ongoing conversations. Ms. Lawyer noted that these shortcomings are not a result of staff who have worked extremely hard and exhibited a true passion and commitment to the program. Ms. Caroline Raker asked what the original goal of the total alumni engagement was in the beginning of the program. Ms. Harrison explained that it was roughly estimated that there would be 150 active participants at the end of the first five years of the program.

Ms. Harrison made note that the percentage of alumni who responded to the annual survey, was overall consistent, however, based on federal performance measures the Board only met three of the five requirements for self-advocates and two of the six requirements for family members at this point. She noted however that it was still possible to meet the five-year targets.

Ms. Harrison then discussed program expenditures. Ms. Sarah Kranz-Ciment asked how many total participants were being targeted annually. Ms. Harrison explained that roughly 60 alumni participants were being targeted each year per the state plan requirements. Dr. Sweetenburg Lee noted that the budget included funds for reasonable accommodations such as personal care attendants, specialized transportation, interpreters, respite as needed, etc. necessary for alumni to participate. Ms. Kranz-Ciment noted that the budget was approximately $1,000 per individual. Ms. Kranz-Ciment asked if the budget would be increasing in the hopes of increasing the number of program participants. Ms. Heidi Lawyer, Executive Director, explained that the upcoming strategic planning retreat would inform the program’s movement forward including how to address specific challenges regarding participation and retention and gauge alumni interest in continuing the program as is or in a different form. She noted that with the consensus of the Committee, Board staff would plan to carry forward the ideas discussed and make an assessment at the end of year 4 regarding the program’s future. She noted that this year’s budget was unpredictable because of the changes.

Ms. Sarah Kranz-Ciment questioned whether the ADP could be a partnership with other advocacy organizations versus the time, money, and effort that is being spent by the Board. Ms. Lawyer and Dr. Sweetenburg reported on past strong efforts to work with advocacy organizations and that the goal was always coordination and collaboration. However, alumni also wanted to be recognized as part of their own effort. For example, the Board collaborated with the Arc of Virginia for DD Advocacy day and program alumni were all thought to be representing the Arc. Ms. Lawyer noted that collaborative efforts would continue and that while alumni cannot speak on behalf of the Board (as some have requested), staff would look into better public identifying of the ADP, including a potential name change that is more understandable by the public and things like scarves or hats. She reiterated that if the ideas implemented in Year 4 were not successful, it would be the committee’s role next year to reassess the efficacy of the program and how/whether it should continue.

Ms. Kranz-Ciment asked about the increased efforts made to have the chapters meet virtually. Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee noted that staff had made all efforts possible to make the chapter meetings digitally accessible, including trainings conducted by Mr. Jarvela. Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee commented that a majority of alumni explained that their interest in participation was directly related to the socialization aspect and not necessarily directly related to program efforts. Ms. Allison Coles-Johnson commented that the socialization aspect of the organization provides as opportunity to build the relationships and to feel a part of the group as a whole, which then motivates alumni to then work together to achieve advocacy goals. Ms. Lawyer agreed but noted that the Board cannot fund “social activities.” Ms. Coles-Johnson noted that training program alumni who are current Board members cannot serve as officers for ADP chapters, but suggested ex-Board members serve as mentors to the chapters (as a liaison who take ownership for communicating between chapters and the Board). Ms. Kilgore agreed with Ms. Coles-Johnson on the connective identity of the program alumni, but commented that the training program alumni are the ones who need to be driven and motivated by the goal of the program, not just staff. Ms. Kilgore asked if it was possible to develop a fellowship between the older alumni and the current program participants.

Ms. Harrison discussed the noted program successes that came as a result direct feedback from alumni and chapter co-chairs, including the greater focus on advocacy activities and the participation levels increased with the shift in focus. She stated that participants agreed that the shift focus to activities helped foster better social connections amongst the chapter members. Discussion ensued. Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee noted that the Board was also implementing a change to this year’s PIP curriculum to include a skill building sessions (such as letter/petition writing) and that PIP will ensure that ADP is infused throughout the PIP program vs. at the end. She noted that the effort to intermingle the PIP and ADP would allow for a more seamless transition from participants to alumni.

Ms. Lawyer asked the Committee if there was consensus with the staff moving forward with the described plans. The committee members noted that there was and they thanked the Training program staff for their hard work and commitment to the program. Mr. Mann asked about receiving the Board meeting packets even sooner, to allow Board members more time to familiarize themselves. Ms. Lawyer explained that Board staff made the packet available as soon as possible so that there would be sufficient time to review committee materials.

**Training Programs Update:** Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee commented that the preparations for the 2019-2020 Partners in Policymaking program are underway. Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee highlighted several the upcoming Training Program events and encouraged Committee members to attend, including the PIP Capitol Day at November 2, 2019, at 10 a.m. at the Patrick Henry Building and the PIP Graduation ceremony, will be held at the Holiday Inn in Norfolk on April 4, 2020, at 10 a.m. Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee discussed the upcoming ADP Strategic Planning Retreat on August 2 and 3, 2019 to discuss the development of the program on a whole. Board members who are Training Program alumni are encouraged to attend and contribute.

**Event Support Applications:** Mr. Jarvela explained the first of the two Event Support Applications received and noted that if the committee chose to fully fund both events, the Board would not go over the $10,000 annual budget for Event Support Applications. The first event was from Centra and ID/DD Community Collaborative of Lynchburg, Virginia for a Person Centered Thinking Training on July 17 and 18, 2019. Mr. Mann recommended including, assuming approval of the application, having at least one to two Board members attend the event and report back to the committee in September. Mr. Mann made a **MOTION** to support the application at the full request of $1,800. Ms. Kilgore **SECONDED** the **MOTION**. The Chair called for a vote and the **MOTION** carried.

Mr. Jarvela explained the second event application from the Virginia Advocates United Leading Together (VAULT) for the 2nd Annual ADA Pride Day in RVA, Sat August 3rd 11-3, rain date August 10th for $1,500. Mr. Jarvela commented that the Board has funded this event in the past and detailed previous funding instances. Ms. Lawyer noted the need to emphasize the limitations with regards to state and federal spending allowances. Ms. Lawyer recommended that if the Committee chose to fund, they only fund the allowable expenses (i.e., no food/drink or entertainment). Discussion ensued. Ms. Raker made a **MOTION** to fund at $750 based on Board staff approval of the proposed event budget in the application. Ms. Ethel Parris Gainer **SECONDED** the **MOTION**. Following discussion, the Chair called for a vote. The **MOTION** carried unanimously.

**Event Support Application Changes:** Mr. Jarvela opened the discussion of changes to the Event Support procedures and application. In response to the Committee’s specific recommendations in the March meeting, Board staff revised both documents. Changes include: an updated listing, within the *Procedures for Requesting Event Support* document, of the types of events that do not assist the Board with fulfilling its mission as Virginia’s DD Council, and an update to the *Application for Event Support* document which now includes a section for the applicant to complete regarding the involvement of people with developmental and other disabilities in the planning and implementation of the event and a section requiring that the applicant demonstrate adherence to cultural diversity principles

Ms. Krantz-Ciment asked why the diversity factor was limited to the range of disability-specific inclusion but included “cultural diversity.” Ms. Alexus Smith noted that there are always people who will fall into multiple protected classes. Discussion ensued. Ms. Lawyer recommended that if the Board does not want to specify individual classes they could consider including “a commitment to cultural diversity and minorities.” The Chair agreed that the term “cultural diversity” encompassed all protected classes. Ms. Raker asked whether the language potentially limited the applicant pool. Mr. Mann commented that this could become a slippery slope in terms of how the Board captured the correct demographics of those who are organizing and planning the events. Ms. Parris Gainer commented that the language/verbiage needs to be a highlighted piece of the application as a way to encourage organizations to consider this before they requested funds. Mr. Mann made a **MOTION** to approve the changes pending a change to the verbiage to include examples of all of the protected classes. Ms. Parris Gainer **SECONDED** the **MOTION**. Discussion ensued. Ms. Kranz-Ciment abstained. The **MOTION** carried.

**Virginia Department Of Elections Post-Event Report:** Mr. Jarvela gave a report on the Virginia Department of Elections (VDOE) Voter Accessibility Event. Mr. Jarvela noted that Board staff provided disability sensitivity training to the VDOE staff prior to the event. There was significant media coverage to help highlight the event. VDOE estimated roughly 500 people came through the event and roughly 60% of the participants were self-advocates. Mr. Jarvela highlighted that several voting machine vendors were there providing individual demonstrations. Ms. Lawyer commented that she attended and felt that it was well organized and successful. Ms. Coles-Johnson asked about the participation numbers and whether they had been expected to be lower based on capacity. Mr. Jarvela replied that the Department of Elections had smaller numbers based on the event being held in the middle of the week.

**Communications Update:** Mr. Jarvela provided an update on the Communications department activities including: social media analytics, the 2018 PPR annual report was released, the 2019 Assessments have gone to print and that the Board members will receive copies of each in the mail in July. There were copies of the social media analysis, as well as copies of the 2018 Annual Report Highlights document made available to AOT members. Mr. Jarvela noted that based on time, members should reach out to him regarding any questions.

**ADJOURNMENT:** The Chair called for any other business. Hearing none, the Chair adjourned the meeting at 11:31 a.m.