



Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) Handbook

The purpose of this handbook is to provide guidance on the formation/maintenance of a local Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) within each OVR District Office (DO). The District Administrator is responsible to develop and support their CAC.

Introduction

The mission of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) is to "assist Pennsylvanians with disabilities secure and maintain employment and independence."

OVR is a part of the PA Department of Labor and Industry and is governed by both the federal Rehabilitation Act and the state Vocational Rehabilitation Act. It is funded with both federal and state funds. OVR is administered by an Executive Director and policy is established by the PA Vocational Rehabilitation Board after input is sought from the PA Vocational Rehabilitation Council.

At OVR, a significant emphasis is placed on the provision of vocational rehabilitation services to eligible customers with disabilities to result in employment, yet OVR administers other valuable programs as well, including Blindness & Visual Services, Independent Living for Older Blind program, Business Enterprise Program, Centers for Independent Living, Statewide Independent Living Council, Assistive Technology, and the Office of Deaf & Hard of Hearing.

OVR has a central office in Harrisburg and district offices (DO) at fifteen locations. Vocational rehabilitation services are provided at all 15 locations, and blindness and visual services are provided at 6 of those locations.

OVR's district offices support persons with disabilities; determining their eligibility for OVR services, conducting vocational and other assessments, and developing individualized plans to support their goal of securing or maintaining employment and/or living an independent life. The district offices collaborate and/or develop local-level agreements with other public and private agencies such as CareerLinks®, school districts, county human service agencies, community-based service providers, etc.

OVR also includes a state-owned and operated vocational training and education facility in Johnstown known as the Hiram G. Andrews Center (HGAC). HGAC provides a comprehensive program of services featuring the integration of education on campus at the Commonwealth Technical Institute (CTI), counseling, evaluation, and physical restoration in a barrier-free environment. CTI is accredited by the Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges (ACCSC) and is licensed by the PA Department of Education State Board of Private Licensed Schools. While the majority of a student's time and attention is focused on education and training, job skills are also a large part of the learning experience. Additionally, a continuum of support services ranging from vocational evaluation and career exploration to independent living skills combines to offer our students the skills they will

need to live, work and contribute in the community. This variety of services also enables the individual to examine personal behavior and make positive changes in preparing for entry-level employment. The CTI@HGAC campus, which is completely barrier-free, covers 12 acres under one roof.

Having citizen involvement and stakeholder input into OVR services not only makes sense but is required by the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. At the state level, the Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC), comprised of customers, employers, service providers, and consumer advocates informs policy making in Harrisburg. At the district office level, CACs inform activities and innovation locally so that OVR can be as effective as possible pursuing its mission and meeting customers' needs (individuals and local employers).

Purpose of a CAC

The primary purpose of a CAC is to provide relevant, region-specific input to the district office so that opportunities to achieve the OVR mission are maximized. For example:

- a. Types, amount, and scope of OVR services – assess and evaluate
- b. Quality of customer service
- c. What do individuals need locally? What do employers need locally?
- d. Input on proposed OVR policy changes and new programs
- e. Develop positive relationships between OVR and other stakeholders

Make-up of a CAC

A CAC should have representation of all OVR stakeholders. Stakeholders include but are not necessarily limited to the following:

- People with disabilities (current or former customers preferably)
- Family members of people with disabilities
- Local employers or organizations representing local employers
- Local disability advocacy organizations (Centers for Independent Living, UCPs, Arcs, etc.)
- Higher education
- Secondary education (general / special education, Intermediate Units)
- Post-secondary training and technical schools
- OVR service providers

DO staff should determine the size of their CAC and how many representatives of each category should serve. This is not about votes or quotas; rather, the goal is to have adequate representation of stakeholders so that complete and informed input can be offered to the district office. Disability, gender, racial-ethnic, age, geographic, and cultural diversity are important to ensure that worthwhile input is garnered.

Keys to Success

It is the responsibility of each DA to have a well-functioning CAC in place. In DOs in which BVRS and BBVS are co-located, those DAs should collaborate and have a single CAC if feasible. However, given the geographic size differences between BBVS and BVRS DO districts, having a single CAC for both offices may not make sense.

CAC members are appointed by the DA with the presumptive concurrence of the OVR Executive Director. Should there be any question regarding the suitability of a potential member, the Executive Director reserves the right to approve or disapprove CAC membership. The DA or their representative will attend each CAC meeting.

For ease of operations, each local CAC should establish procedures that make sense for their CAC. It is up to the DA and its CAC members to determine how the CAC will be administratively supported.

Suggestions:

- A meeting time that promotes good attendance should be determined by the CAC – in some instances, early morning meetings before normal business hours may work. In other instances, a working lunch or evening session will be most accommodating to the CAC members.
- CAC members are volunteers, and so their time should be respected. The length of a CAC meeting should be kept to 1 or 2 hours. Keep agendas concise and focused on action, presentations, and the provision of input rather than committee reports.
- The structure of a CAC should be kept informal, but selecting a chairperson and a secretary could make the CAC function effectively.
 - o Chairperson: preside at meetings, plan agendas and meeting arrangements in cooperation with the district administrator
 - o Secretary: record and distribute meeting minutes/summaries.
- The CAC should meet at least once each quarter.

- CAC expenses, such as meeting notices, distribution of minutes, water or coffee, modest food items for working lunches, parking, and other related meeting expenses are allowable expenses to be paid by the district office (follow L&I policies). Effective March 1st, no travel reimbursements for lodging, subsistence, mileage or rental car reimbursements will be allowed for CAC members unless such expenses are associated with mitigating a disability-related barrier to attendance. (To ease travel costs, consider holding the CAC meeting at a location central to the CAC members in the geographic region. Accommodations should be made to permit individuals to participate via conference calls to accommodate travel/transportation challenges.)
- All CAC meetings should be held at accessible locations and all handout material should be made in accessible formats.

Before & After CAC Meetings

Meeting notices, including date, location, time, etc., and meeting agenda should be available to the public and at a minimum be posted on the PA Rehabilitation Council website before a meeting is held. (*send to Pam Brauchli – she will forward to PaRC staff*)

After a meeting is held, meeting summaries and/or minutes should be posted on the PA Rehabilitation Council website (*send to Pam Brauchli – she will forward to PaRC staff*).

DAs should ensure that CAC input that is relevant to the activities or decision making of OVR central office is conveyed to Harrisburg in a timely manner.

Suggested CAC Activities

The list is not all-inclusive and CAC members will probably discover additional activities relevant to their own region.

- A. Determine if the CAC make-up is complete; does it have all stakeholders represented?
- B. The first task of a CAC is to enable all members to become familiar with the OVR mission, programs, policies, district office personnel, and procedures, including eligibility determination, services provided, case closure criteria, OVR jargon, etc.
- C. To gain insight into problems and ideas for OVR program or procedural changes, the CAC may meet with or survey current and past OVR customers to discuss their experiences and gather their suggestions for solutions to problems they may have encountered.

- D. The CAC may arrange for presentations from local employers, organizations serving people with disabilities, or education agencies to discuss ideas on how OVR might interact with them to improve employment and independent living opportunities for customers.
- E. The CAC may meet with groups of people with disabilities to gather information on problems they face in daily living. This may identify possible impediments to employment of people with disabilities in their area which OVR could work to remove.
- F. Conduct public and community awareness activities.
- G. Plan and present some informational programs to transition-age students and their family members, school guidance counselors, and groups of people with disabilities and support groups to promote OVR's transition to work/transition to adult independent living services.
- H. Place an emphasis on engaging local employers or business organizations that represent employers so that the value OVR can provide employers in terms of providing pre-screened, pre-qualified applicants, along with ADA accommodations and follow-up technical assistance can be made known to local employers.
- I. Gather information and suggestions by meeting with customers, consumer groups, and/or doing outreach and develop reports and recommendations on how to improve OVR services or remove barriers to employment in the community to be presented to OVR and PaRC.
- J. CAC members are encouraged to attend OVR statewide meetings; (e.g., PaRC, State Board meetings) as often as possible and to keep informed about their activities through minutes of these organizations. Travel expenses for attendance at such meetings would be the responsibility of the traveler.
- K. CACs may invite local legislators to attend meetings so they can be informed about employment and independent living services available to their constituents with disabilities through OVR.

Questions about this handbook should be directed to OVR Central Office – Division of Policy, Planning & Evaluation. This handbook will be revised as needed. Revised: March 2013.

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