

AGENCY NAME:	South Carolina Commission for the Blind		
AGENCY CODE:	L240	SECTION:	39

AGENCY'S DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The mission of the SC Commission for the Blind (SCCB) is to provide youth and adults who are blind or low vision with quality individualized vocational rehabilitation services, independent living services, and prevention-of-blindness services leading to competitive employment and/or social and economic independence.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services

SCCB's Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program assists eligible consumers to find, maintain, or regain competitive integrated employment. VR accomplishes this by providing individualized services to consumers to help them achieve employment outcomes that align with their capabilities through informed choice.

In state fiscal year (SFY) 2025, SCCB's VR program saw 489 new applicants for services and served 1,344 consumers. The average salary for consumers in competitive integrated employment was \$31,000, the average hourly earnings grew to \$18.38 per hour, and the average hours worked per week is 31. Types of competitive integrated employment consumers have entered range from lawyer and nurse practitioner to mental health counselor and athletic trainer.

Competitive Integrated Employment

Quarter	Average Wage	Average Hours Worked	Average Salary
SFY25 Q1	\$15.63	30	\$24,383
SFY25 Q2	\$21.93	32	\$36,492
SFY25 Q3	\$16.76	29	\$25,274
SFY25 Q4	\$20.63	35	\$37,547

Highest Hourly Wages

Job Title	Hourly Wage
Nurse Practitioners	\$55.00
Insurance Claims and Policy Processing Clerks	\$43.00
Lawyers	\$40.77
Musicians and Singers	\$37.00
Mental Health Counselors	\$35.59
Managers, All Other	\$33.65

The VR program achieved several important goals this year in policy, procedure, and staff training. The leadership team incorporated feedback from the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) and Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center for Quality Management (VRTAC-QM) into the previously drafted 32 VR policies. The need for additional policies was identified and five new VR policies were also drafted; they are being sent to RSA and VRTAC-QM for feedback. All policies were reformatted into a standard, accessible format and assigned reference numbers.

Several procedures were revised and/or developed for the VR program over the past year. Notably, a new process for consumers interested in self-employment was developed and implemented to assist them in making informed choices about self-employment as a potential career path. SCCB will continue to monitor the new process over the next year and identify staff training needs. Additionally, training on Trial Work Experiences (TWE) and Accurately Entering Referrals was provided to all VR staff.

Providing ongoing training for staff remains a top priority for SCCB. The Consumer Services Department hired a Training Coordinator to assist with identifying training needs and developing/presenting trainings to staff. This

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individual works closely with program leads and will play an integral role in providing training to VR staff on the new policies and the procedures as they are developed and revised for efficiency.

The Consumer Services Lead oversaw a project to develop “VR 101” training modules in partnership with the George Washington Center for Rehabilitation Counseling Research and Education. The result of this year long collaboration is a series of modules that will assist with onboarding and educating new VR Counselors on the VR process throughout the lifecycle of a case to ensure quality VR service provision throughout the state.

In SFY 2025, SCCB’s Statewide Benefits Counselor completed the Community Work Incentives Coordinator (CWIC) training and began providing benefits counseling to VR applicants and consumers. By having its own in-house CWIC, SCCB will efficiently provide benefits counseling services to consumers to assist them in making informed choices about their employment.

Youth Services

To increase collaboration between the Children’s and Transition Services programs, the Transition Services Lead now oversees both programs as the Youth Services Lead. Over the past year, the Youth Services Lead worked with both Children’s and Transition Services Counselors to ensure eligible consumers who are aging out of the Children’s Services Program are informed of and encouraged to apply for VR Transition Services to limit gaps in service delivery. Children’s and Transition Services Counselors work together to coordinate the application and eligibility determination process for Transition Services to ensure a smooth transfer process.

The Youth Services Lead also partnered with the South Carolina School for the Deaf and the Blind (SCSDB) to coordinate the annual Braille Challenge for students in 1st through 12th grade at Segra Park. SCCB staff presented to parents during the event on SCCB’s services and programs.

Children’s Services

The Children’s Services Program continued to serve youth ages 3 to 12 who are blind or low vision. The Children’s Services Counselors partner with local education agencies, educators, and Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments (TVIs) to ensure needed accommodations are provided to children who are blind or low vision under Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). As a result, in SFY 2025 SCCB served 82 consumers through this program.

The Youth Services Lead hosted monthly check-in meetings with Children’s Services Counselors to staff cases and provide guidance. During these meetings, staff also reviewed current Children’s Services policies and procedures. The Youth Services Lead gathered counselor feedback to begin developing needed updates to the policies and procedures.

Transition Services

Support for youth ages 13-24 who are blind or low vision is essential for their success in school, daily life, and the workforce. The Youth Services Lead hosted monthly check-in meetings with Transition Services Counselors to staff cases and provide guidance on both Transition Services and Pre-Employment Transition Services (pre-ETS) cases. During these meetings, training was provided to staff on regulations pertaining to students with disabilities, and SCCB has seen significant improvements in the accuracy of its data on students with disabilities who are receiving pre-ETS.

In February 2025, SCCB partnered with the National Federation of the Blind of SC’s (NFBSC) Successful Transitions to send five students to the Washington Seminar Career Quest Program in Washington, DC. Students participated in a variety of pre-ETS activities throughout the weekend including self-advocacy, work

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readiness training, and job exploration. SC was the first state to have participants in this national pre-ETS program.

Throughout the year, SCCB Transition Counselors met quarterly with SCSDB Job Coaches to discuss the progress of students completing Work-Based Learning Experiences (WBLEs) and coordinate new pre-ETS for eligible students. These quarterly meetings helped increase communication between SCCB and SCSDB staff and improve referral development. SCCB Transition Counselors also visited SCSDB to meet with consumers in person to discuss potential pre-ETS and develop steps towards employment after high school graduation.

SCCB and SCSDB hosted a one-week camp in July 2024 where students explored future careers, toured a college campus, and practiced workplace readiness skills such as budgeting, cooking, cleaning, and orientation and mobility. In June 2025, SCCB and SCSDB co-hosted an additional one-week camp where students learned self-advocacy and received workplace readiness training through adaptive sports from Strive4You, an SCCB partner.

In addition, SCCB hosted its three-week annual Summer Teen program at the University of South Carolina Aiken’s (USCA) campus. Twenty-four consumers from across the state participated in the residential programming. In the work track, eleven students participated in WBLEs at worksites such as the Aiken County Public Library, ACTS Resale Store, and USCA. Fourteen students participated in independence track programming.

Week one of the independence track featured Filling Your Transportation Toolbox, a program that teaches older students (ages eighteen through twenty-one) orientation and mobility skills. Students planned activities and travelled throughout the Aiken, Columbia, and Augusta areas using various modes of transportation (such as ride share and public transportation). This program was presented by Dr. Penny Rosenblum, Vision for Independence LLC, and Dr. Tina Herzberg, USC Upstate.

Week two featured Ready! Set! Go!, a program designed to teach younger students (ages thirteen to seventeen) foundational orientation and mobility skills. Students planned activities and travelled throughout the Aiken and Columbia areas using various modes of transportation (such as ride share and public transportation). This program, presented by Dr. Penny Rosenblum, Vision for Independence LLC, and Dr. Tina Herzberg, USC Upstate, prepares students to participate in the more advanced Filling Your Transportation Toolbox Program.

Week three featured WaterViz, a program that uses the water cycle to help students learn to understand data and represent it using art and music. Students had the opportunity to visit Swan Lake Iris Gardens’ Braille Garden in Sumter. WaterViz was presented by Dr. Tina Herzberg, USC Upstate, and Mary Robbins, SCSDB.

The Youth Services Lead continued strengthening partnerships by attending South Carolina Endeavors for Transition Resources and Interagency Collaboration’s (SCENTRIC) monthly team meetings with representatives from other SC state agencies who serve transition age youth to coordinate transition services. The SCENTRIC team attended the annual Transition Alliance of South Carolina (TASC) conference, and the Youth Services Lead made valuable connections with Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments (TVIs), special education teachers, and administrators across the state. The Youth Services Lead was selected as a delegate from the SCENTRIC team to attend the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: The Collaborative’s (NTACT:C) Capacity Building Institute (CBI) to help set goals for the provision of transition services to youth in the state of SC. The Youth Services Lead meets monthly with NTACT:C to discuss continued improvement of SCCB’s Transition Services.

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Business Enterprise Program

In coordination with SCCB’s VR staff, the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) Director and Lead updated the training for consumers to become Blind Licensed Vendors (BLV). The updated training incorporates twelve online modules from Chicago Lighthouse’s Business Enterprise Program Licensee Training in addition to specific training on SC BEP procedures, laws, regulations, and hands on training. The updated training will ensure newly licensed BLVs are fully prepared to successfully operate their own vending stands.

The BEP Director oversaw the effort to develop a strategic plan for the BEP with the Elected Committee of Blind Vendors. The strategic planning process, through active participation, helps ensure a commitment to shared priorities for the BEP.

SCCB is committed to increasing the average vendor earnings of BLVs in SC and worked to improve stands across the state by removing machines with low sales and foot traffic and consolidating certain locations. Continued improvements to vending stands include implementing card readers at all SC Department of Corrections locations, benefiting both BLVs and customers.

SCCB continued to expand its Micro Markets to stands across the state. The micro market at the SC Department of Education opened July 1, 2024, and since then, SCCB opened two more at the State Capital complex resulting in a total of four micro markets on the state house grounds (and a total of eight statewide). SCCB already expects to implement an additional four micro markets over the next year.

Ten vendors continue to successfully operate the Fort Jackson military dining stand; this is the first BEP stand in the US with more than four vendors. Setting an innovative example for other states to follow, SCCB continues to be a nationwide leader for this type of vending stand model.

Training Center Services

SCCB’s residential Training Center in Columbia continued to provide high quality training programs to consumers across the state. The center provides adjustment to blindness and job readiness classes that cover topics such as Braille, accessible keyboarding, Job Access With Speech (JAWS), ZoomText, orientation and mobility (O&M), and home management.

SCCB hired a new Training Center Director with a background in education. Over the year, the curriculums for Braille, keyboarding, JAWS, ZoomText, O&M, and home management were updated to include new standards and learning objectives. Each course now incorporates a standard pre- and post-assessment. Additionally, curriculums for new cell phone accessibility training and job readiness classes were developed and SCCB expects to pilot these classes over the next year.

The need for O&M instruction combined with a national shortage of O&M instructors continues to be a challenge. SCCB strengthened its partnership with USC Upstate’s new O&M program by hosting two interns this year. Additionally, an existing SCCB employee earned their Certified Orientation & Mobility Specialist (COMS) credential during the past year. SCCB now has two COMS and hopes to hire more as its partnership with USC Upstate’s program grows. Additionally, SCCB began hosting group O&M classes for Older Blind consumers to help them learn foundational skills and serve consumers more efficiently.

Older Blind Services

The Older Blind program continues to serve the most consumers of any SCCB program. In SFY 2025, SCCB served more than 1,700 Older Blind consumers (about a 20% increase, or 300 more than SFY 2024). Between SFY 2022

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and 2026 SCCB saw a 100% increase in its Older Blind consumers and estimates serving over 2,000 consumers in SFY 2026. While federal funding for the Older Blind program has historically been low, SCCB greatly appreciates the general assembly providing additional state funds and two full time employee (FTE) positions for the Older Blind program. SCCB utilized the funds and positions to provides additional services for the increased number of Older Blind consumers.

Older Blind Consumers Served

Number of Older Blind Cases	State Fiscal Year (SFY)
1,720	2025
1,447	2024
1,202	2023
661	2022

Older Blind consumers (those who are 55 and older and not seeking employment) may receive services such as low vision assessments, assistive technology assessments, orientation and mobility training, and adjustment to blindness skills training. To identify appropriate independent living aids and assist them in maintaining independence in their homes, consumers may receive services from SCCB’s Low Vision Clinic. In SFY 2025, more than 230 Older Blind consumers received low vision services at the over 78 clinics that were held.

The Consumer Services Lead reviewed existing policies and procedures for the Older Blind program with the Older Blind Counselors. Counselors suggested revisions and the policies and procedures are currently being updated. SCCB expects to complete the policies over the next year.

The Consumer Services Lead held monthly check-in meetings with Older Blind Counselors to staff cases, provide guidance, and provide training. Training topics included federal reporting requirements and home management basics. SCCB developed home management demonstration kits for counselors to take to consumers’ homes for assessments. Consumers will be able to try basic home management devices and tools in their homes to determine which ones are the best fit to assist them in achieving their independence goals. Once the kits are deployed to regional offices and counselors are trained, this will increase the efficiency of service provision for Older Blind consumers.

The Consumer Services Lead continued to collaborate with the Older Individuals Who are Blind Technical Assistance Center (OIB-TAC), attending the Older Blind Program Manager meeting in February to discuss best practices for working with Older Individuals who are blind and low vision.

Prevention of Blindness Services

The need for Prevention of Blindness services continues to grow. The Prevention of Blindness Program successfully assisted 103 eligible South Carolinians in maintaining or improving their vision during the past fiscal year (an increase of 60% from SFY 2024).

Prevention of Blindness Consumers Served

Number of Consumers Whose Vision Improved or was Maintained	State Fiscal Year (SFY)
103	2025
62	2024
26	2023
21	2022

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Prevention of Blindness Coordinators promote eye health and care in addition to arranging time-sensitive preventative eye care treatments and sight-restoring procedures for consumers (i.e., Corneal Cross-linking for Keratoconus, retinal detachment repair, and cataract surgery). SCCB greatly appreciates the general assembly's continued support of the Prevention of Blindness program.

Quality Assurance

The Quality Assurance (QA) team ensures high quality service provision and compliance with laws, regulations, policies, and procedures by conducting regular reviews of case compliance metrics across all SCCB programs. During SFY 2025, weekly reviews of eligibility determination and plan development timeliness were sent to supervisors to review. As a result of these reviews, staff training needs were identified and the Consumer Services department provided training to counselors; SCCB obtained a 100% timeliness rate for determining eligibility within 60 days of application and for developing Individualized Plans for Employment (IPE) within 90 days of eligibility determination for VR cases.

QA conducted quarterly reviews of open educational goals, credential attainments, and measurable skill gains to ensure proper documentation for federal reporting. Over the next year, QA expects to continue these reviews. Also, training on educational goals, credential attainments, and measurable skill gains will be provided to VR staff as a result of QA reviews.

Over the next year, QA expects to continue conducting consumer satisfaction surveys and implement quarterly reviews of VR cases in *employed* status. This will lead to streamlined procedures and increased efficiency in serving consumers.

Administration

Rehabilitation Technology

In spring of 2025, Assistive Technology (AT) and Low Vision Clinic (LVC) staff were combined into the new Rehabilitation Technology department under the leadership of the Director of Administration. This has led to streamlined procedures and increased efficiency in serving consumers. In partnership with the IT department, an inventory management procedure was developed and implemented for the AT staff (and is currently being developed for LVC staff).

During SFY 2025, AT staff conducted 212 AT assessments in consumers' homes, communities, and/or at worksites. Providing assessments in the environment(s) in which each consumer will use the technology enables AT Consultants to better make recommendations that will address each consumer's individual needs. The AT staff plans to continue conducting onsite assessments and, through updated procedures, expects to decrease the number of days it takes a consumer to receive AT items.

In spring of 2025, SCCB identified an existing staff member to assist the LVC Coordinator. The new LVC Specialist will help increase SCCB's capacity to conduct additional low vision assessments and provide additional training and low vision devices to consumers over the next year.

In SFY 2025, AT staff provided demonstrations of the latest AT devices to SCCB staff. Over the next year, the Rehabilitation Technology department will continue providing quarterly demonstrations to SCCB staff on the latest devices available to SCCB consumers; this will increase collaboration among departments and staff's knowledge on the devices consumers are using or may benefit from.

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Human Resources

Human Resources (HR) continued to work to retain current staff and fill vacancies with qualified candidates. The agency ended SFY 2025 with 97 full time employees (FTEs) and a 28.9 percent turnover rate. SCCB’s retention rate among new hires is 92 percent.

HR staff attended more than eleven career fairs in SFY 2025, including events at Clemson, The Citadel, SC State, Benedict, Winthrop, and the National Federation of the Blind, broadening applicant pipelines. Throughout the past year, SCCB continued growing its internship program. During SFY 2025, SCCB hosted seven interns from colleges and universities across the state for orientation and mobility, VR counseling, IT, Communications, and the Training Center.

The agency again increased its Equal Employment Opportunity goal attainment rate from 91.9 percent to 95.9 percent, the highest in the history of the agency. SCCB was ranked eleventh out of seventy-nine state agencies for its SFY 2025 Equal Employment Opportunity rate.

Leadership staff updated all position descriptions for their respective departments using SMART standards. A new universal performance-management program utilizing the updated positions descriptions went live on October 1, 2024. SCCB was among a select few agencies to pilot this new performance-management program. Supervisors began conducting mid-year performance reviews to reinforce expectations for their employees.

Key vacancies were filled, including the Assistant Facilities Manager, System Administrator, Attorney, Training Center Director, Regional Director, and Procurement Manager. HR, with guidance from the Commissioner and Executive Leadership, created key positions utilizing existing FTEs to improve service delivery and administration. These included a Planning and Reporting Director, Consumer Services Training Coordinator, Business Analyst, Training Center Lead, Training Center Program Coordinator, Administrative Assistant Lead, Youth Services Lead, and Consumer Services Lead.

As a part of retention strategies, SCCB promotes ongoing training and learning for its staff on both national and state levels. Several staff members attended leadership trainings. SCCB had staff members participate in both the Associate Public Manager (APM) and Certified Public Manager (CPM) programs offered through the Department of Administration. Additionally, staff attended several conferences including but not limited to the annual University of South Carolina’s (USC) Assistive Technology Expo and the annual California State University Northridge’s (CSUN) Assistive Technology conference.

Facilities

Capital improvement projects at the Columbia campus continued throughout SFY 2025. The Columbia campus HVAC update reached substantial completion, and two HVAC/EPA-certified technicians were hired, adding in-house expertise which will reduce reliance on outside vendors. Additionally, the Building A renovation project advanced to seventy five percent completion and the Facilities department successfully relocated more than fifty employees (due to this project) without service disruption. Wiring for the agency-wide camera and access-control upgrade was completed, paving the way for modernized security across the campus. The Building A renovation project remains on schedule for completion in September 2025.

Safety procedures and evacuation plans were updated for the Columbia campus and SCCB district offices. A new fire monitoring panel and additional emergency lighting were installed at the Columbia campus to ensure compliance with safety codes. These measures help to promote the safety of our staff, visitors, and consumers.

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During SFY 2025, facilities completed all scheduled preventive maintenance on time. The BEP vending team completed forty-eight machine repair work orders. They also launched customer-service initiatives such as standardized core locks and follow-up calls. The team installed vendor preferred, accessible coin mechanisms and bill validators to streamline cash handling and rest area/welcome center vending stand repairs and lighting upgrades. Two training sessions were conducted on vending repair and preventative maintenance. These trainings were attended by BEP maintenance staff and Facilities maintenance staff for cross-training and to ensure optimal coverage for BEP operations.

Information Technology

Throughout SFY 2025, the Information Technology (IT) team facilitated several initiatives resulting in financial savings and increased efficiency. The department migrated all staff phones to a new service provider, resulting in an estimated annual savings of about \$45,000.

The bandwidth on the Columbia campus was increased, while unified Wi-Fi was extended to every remote office. Ongoing collaboration and planning with Segra and SC Department of Technology Operations brought a dedicated fiber line to the Columbia campus, which will more than double the bandwidth and reduce carrier costs. Additionally, Sharp multifunction printers were deployed agency-wide, enabling secure scan-to-e-mail functionality while also improving accessibility to blind or low vision employees.

The IT team also partnered with AT to redesign the assistive-technology workflow, reducing delivery time to consumers from forty-five days to just five for in-stock devices. IT also worked with AT to develop a standard imaging solution that will accelerate laptop deployment for consumers. Additionally, IT built a standard image for computers in the Training Center to make system upgrades more efficient and reduce downtime for consumer training.

New, streamlined procedures for system upgrades to the agency’s case management system were developed and implemented. The case management system received a major upgrade with zero downtime, providing staff with faster searches and improved reporting.

Finance

Throughout SFY 2025, the Finance Director collaborated with VRTAC-QM and consumer services staff to draft updated grants management policies. This resulted in improved communication between program staff, QA, and finance, helping ensure correct fiscal coding of transactions.

SCCB identified a current employee to move into the Administrative Assistant Lead position. This individual is crucial in ensuring communication occurs regularly between finance and Administrative Assistants around the state who are primarily responsible for SCCB’s purchasing process to ensure compliance with state and federal regulations and requirements.

SCCB developed a new Purchase Card manual, which was approved by the State Fiscal Accountability Authority (SFAA). SCCB also obtained additional consumer lodging and food purchase cards to improve service delivery.

SCCB is grateful to SFAA for approving a procurement exemption for goods and services purchased for consumers. This greatly increased the efficiency of service delivery for SCCB’s consumers. Additionally, several process improvements were made to the purchasing process to improve efficiency while ensuring compliance with both state and federal regulations and laws.

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Communications

SCCB continues to improve public awareness of the agency. During SFY 2025, the Communications department developed five new one-page educational flyers to help staff promote the agency at community events and to potential consumers. The Communications department also updated the agency website information to align with the flyers. New agency branding was developed and will be implemented on the website along with additional new materials over the next year.

Risk Assessment and Mitigation

If due to unforeseen circumstances, SCCB was unable to accomplish its goals and objectives, this would significantly impact the consumers served by the agency. South Carolinians who are blind or low vision would not be able to receive the individualized vocational rehabilitation services, independent living services, and prevention-of-blindness services that are needed to help them achieve competitive integrated employment and/or social and economic independence. As a result, these individuals may become more reliant on other forms of government assistance not specialized in serving individuals who are blind or low vision.

To mitigate effects on consumers, SCCB may obtain outside guidance from RSA, which under the US Department of Education, provides guidance to assist agencies in providing vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities. SCCB may also obtain guidance from RSA grant funded technical assistance centers. It is important to note that RSA and the technical assistance centers can only provide SCCB with guidance.

While there are workforce development and agency partners that help SCCB fill gaps and provide additional resources to consumers, SCCB is the primary agency that specializes in serving individuals who are blind or low vision. Community partners such as the National Federation of the Blind of South Carolina, Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired South Carolina, Able SC, Lions Vision Services, Lighthouse for the Blind, and others may be able to provide consumers with some of the assistance they need. However, it is important to note that many of these organizations have limited resources.

The General Assembly can help the agency address issues before they become a crisis by providing appropriate match funds to ensure the agency can receive the full amount of its federal grant funding, providing supplemental funding for programs when federal funding is limited (such as Older Blind), and continuing to recognize the need for and fully fund and support Children’s Services and Prevention of Blindness (which are both one hundred percent state funded programs).

To reduce risk and improve its ability to achieve its mission in providing high quality, individualized services for individuals who are blind or low vision, SCCB is always assessing the effectiveness of its program and administrative procedures. SCCB is implementing a staff appreciation program and updating new hire training to increase staff retention. Program Leads meet with staff regularly to identify and resolve concerns and issues. SCCB also maintains strong relationships with its assigned RSA state liaison and the technical assistance centers and seeks their guidance as needed.