

Nebraska Business Enterprise Program
Nebraska Blind Licensees Committee Meeting Minutes

Scheduled: State Office Building, 1313 Farnam St., Omaha, NE 68102

Held Virtually via Conference Call

Pursuant to Executive Order 20-36 signed by Governor Pete Ricketts on November 25, 2020

December 4, 2020

Meeting called to order by Chairperson Sandy Alvarado at 10:03 a.m.

Board members in attendance:

Chairperson, Sandy Alvarado; Vice Chairperson, Chris Nolan; Secretary, Andrea Chizek; and Board Members, Alex Curtis and Atty Svendsen.

Blind Licensees and Trainees in Attendance:

Jeremy Richey, Jason Thompson, Jim Jirak, Ronnie Kellogg, Wiley Elmshouser, Antonio Aguilar, and Tracy Bradley.

NCBVI Staff in Attendance:

Executive Director, Carlos Serván; Deputy Director of Services, Carol Jenkins; and NBE Staff Members, Eric Buckwalter and Dave Robinson.

Guests:

Bob Welch and Mark Bulger

Logistics:

A copy of the Nebraska Open Meeting Act was available. The Notice of the Meeting was published in the Lincoln Journal Star, on the NCBVI Website, NFB Newslines[®] and Radio Talking Book. The notice was sent to Commission Staff, Commissioners, and NBE Licensees.

Presentation on Workers Compensation:

Nathan Kathol and Markie Davis from IMA presented on worker's compensation insurance. Allen Simpson from the State of Nebraska was also present. A motion was made by Atty to accept the Workers Compensation premium to be paid through our set aside funds and all the extra funds to be paid as well. Alex seconded it and this motion passed.

Approval of minutes:

Motion was made by Chris to approve the minutes from the meeting on September 18, 2020 as distributed. Atty seconded it. Motion passed.

Committee Chair Report: Presented by Chairperson Sandy Alvarado

Our SLA has been very busy this past quarter. I have had many conversations with Carol, Eric, and Dave.

Allowable Deductions:

Carol, Eric, Dave, and I took time to make some changes to our allowable deductions due to some new situations with needs for the pandemic. This form will be voted on later in our meeting.

Probations:

I had a conversation with Carol about the probation rules and presented some suggestions. The results will be explained later in the agenda.

Support Group:

I think our group has been useful for the most part. I have asked Dave to observe if reports are better than in the past as far as timeliness and asked him if I could help with anyone he felt may need some assistance with proper documentation or anything else. I have worked with a couple of licensees.

New Site Bids:

I had a couple of conversations with our SLA when an opportunity for a new site was available. They contacted me to let me know about this location and how they wanted to present it to us. I spoke to them about how I felt it wasn't fair for all and they took my thoughts and points into consideration and changed the way they sent out the final bid.

RSVA Sagebrush Training:

The RSVA Sagebrush training will be held virtually in 2021. The dates are February 15 through the 18th. The cost is \$35 if you register before January 1 and will go up to \$50 if after that date. Financially this is a great deal. You can stay home and not have to get out of your warm cozy bed if you want to. Dave has forwarded these announcements a couple of times so look back in your emails. You also can deduct this cost on your profit and loss.

National Association of Blind Merchants:

Holiday mixer, December 18th from 5:00 – 6:30 PM EST (4:00 – 5:30 Central). This is a Zoom format and I have sent the information to Dave for him to please share with all. This is a free event. The special guests are Mark Riccobono, President of the NFB and Grammy award winner "Bowlegged Lou" Lucien George.

SmartTouch and BIOPROTECT:

Eric sent out an email yesterday sharing that these products are now available in some local businesses. We are grateful to him for sharing this information. Read your emails for the details or visit with him.

Training Topics:

I have received a couple of suggestions and we can follow up with these when choosing topics and perhaps times for our quarterly meetings for 2021.

Elections:

Start thinking about May, elections for committee members will happen soon. If you wish to become a part of this committee and help steer us into the future consider running when the announcement comes out.

Share Positive Note:

I received several emails from a gentleman who had a bad experience with one of my machines. The first email made me think he was a big old grumpy pants. I replied to his email with curtesy and respect and apologized for the inconvenience and asked what specifically my machine did or didn't do that way I will have an idea on how to fix the possible mechanical issue. The second email I received was in a much more congenial tone. He thanked me for apologizing and explained what happened. I thanked him for the information and worked out a time that both he and I would be at the building. It took a couple of weeks since I try to work when there aren't very many people in the building. I kept him in the loop as to

when I would be there and if I had left messages to him with no responses. Once I finally met up with a coworker of his to refund his money I followed up with an email letting him know who I gave his refund to. His coworker had informed me the gentleman was quarantined because his wife was tested positive for COVID. I sent him a message wishing for a minimal symptoms and a healthy recovery for his wife. He turned from a “Mr. Grumpy Pants” to a very respectful person in the tones of his emails. This is the importance of positive customer service in written as well as in person.

SLA Report: Presented by Eric Buckwalter

Vending Site Updates:

Nebraska Department of Transportation:

Credit card readers have been installed on the rest areas in the western part of the state. Work continues to install credit card readers on rest areas in the eastern and central part of the state. This work is scheduled to be completed by the end of the year.

US StratCom Cafeteria and Vending:

Cafeteria services continue to be offered in accordance with what is allowed within StratCom COVID-19 restrictions and policies. Vending services continue as well.

Nebraska State Patrol:

Work continues to establish vending services at the new Nebraska State Patrol building in northeast Lincoln. It is expected that this site will be operational by late 2020 or early 2021.

DHHS-Omaha:

Work continues to develop NBE’s first micro market site a DHHS building in Omaha. This site has been awarded to a blind vendor.

NBE Licensee Update:

Currently, there are 14 licensed vendors operating facilities. There are two trainees in the vending program.

Vending Site Complaints:

Vending site complaints that have come into NCBVI this quarter include reports of vendors not returning customer contacts about money lost in machines and complaints about untidy vending areas. NBE Vendors are reminded that NCBVI holds all of the contracts with various facilities, and licensees are representing themselves, other licensees, other blind vendors, and NCBVI statewide.

Additional Information:

Credit Card Readers:

NBE staff and its contractor(s) continue to work on installing credit card readers on machines across the state; where allowed and applicable. It is the goal to have all credit card readers installed by early 2021. There has been some delay in this project due to COVID-19.

Seed Cashless Plus:

NBE continues to explore a possible trial of the Seed Cashless Plus vending management tool. Seed Cashless Plus allows vendors to track inventory and other aspects of their machines remotely. Credit card readers need to be installed before a trial can take place. Two vendors have been identified to run this possible trial.

Worker's Compensation Group Policy:

Carol Jenkins continues to work with Nebraska Risk Management to explore having the blind vendors have a NBE group Worker's Compensation policy to once again lessen the costs for blind vendors. There will be a presentation on Worker's Compensation during the NBE Meeting on 12/4/2020.

Operator Agreements:

NBE is working to update licensee Operator Agreements, which will include the newly approved Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) operator agreement. These will be distributed to vendors for signatures.

Looking Ahead:

With the purchase and installation of new machines, NBE staff will be placing an emphasis on clean, well maintained, and properly faced machines. Training on these items will be provided on an as needed basis.

NBE Staff are working on creating a NBE Handbook.

Update on Licensees and New Trainee(s):

Presented above in the SLA report.

Update on Profit and Loss Reports: Presented by Dave Robinson

Dave has seen a lot of improvement. He is still working with a few individuals to clean up their paperwork. Also to make sure you check your documentation before you send it to Dave. It is very important that you get in all of your documentation in on the 20th.

New Allowable P & L Deductions:

The list of allowable deductions for the P&L is kept short to keep deductions equal for all vendors to make set aside as fair as possible for everyone. P&L deductions are not the same as IRS deductions for your business. NCBVI reserves the right to request additional documentation for any allowable deduction on the P&L.

Insurance for Vending Facility:

NCBVI will pay for the first year of insurance for new vendors. After the first year, it is the vendor's responsibility. All vendors must provide NCBVI with a copy of their current insurance to keep on file. The federal government requires each vendor to have insurance. In addition, vending in State Buildings is governed by additional State of Nebraska insurance requirements, which must be followed.

Product and Supply Costs:

Products are items eligible for re-sale in vending machines, micro-markets, and cafeterias. Items eligible for re-sale in vending machines must be individually wrapped and include the ingredients and nutrition facts. Supplies are things needed in order to keep your micro-market, cafeteria or vending machine clean, running properly, and necessary for products sold. Due to COVID-19, personal protective equipment (PPE) items are an allowable deduction.

Delivery and/or Shipping Charges:

Delivery charges may include shipping & handling, delivery fees, additional taxes or fees charged for product or equipment necessary for the vending facility, and shipping charges for parts exchanged with NCBVI for the vending facility.

Internet and Phone Expenses:

These expenses are the basic phone and basic internet or those necessary for the vendor's business. The maximum allowable deduction is \$200 per month. An itemized phone bill, internet bill, and such must be included in the P&L to verify cost.

Vending Route Expenses:

Mileage:

The mileage rate is the standard rate established annually by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). The IRS mileage rate includes vehicle maintenance, gas, and such. To verify the current IRS rate, go to <http://www.gsa.gov>. Vendors are required to keep a mileage log and submit the mileage log along with the P&L. Only work-related mileage is an allowable deduction. If you have questions on how to keep a mileage log, please contact NBE Staff.

Reader and Driver:

Driver and reader time is only allowable for work-related functions. The following conditions must also be met: The vendor must pay at least the current minimum wage in Nebraska. To review the current minimum wage, go to <http://www.dol.gov> and go to the Minimum Wage Laws for the State of Nebraska.

Driver and/or Reader wage deductions for the P&L may be up to \$12 per hour. If you choose to pay a driver or reader more than \$12 per hour, the additional wages cannot be deducted on the P&L. Vendors are required to keep a Driver and Reader log and submit the log along with the P&L. If you have questions on how to keep a driver and reader log, please contact NBE Staff.

Vehicle and Trailer Rental Expenses:

Vehicle and trailer rental expenses may include renting a vehicle and/or trailer to purchase large quantities of product, move cafeteria equipment, other large equipment needing to operate a vending facility that does not fit in a standard vehicle, and such. This includes the other taxes and fees that accompany renting a vehicle and/or trailer. Vehicle and/or trailer rental expenses need to be requested in writing and approved in advance.

NBE Licensee Committee Meeting Transportation Expenses:

Vendors can write off mileage and driver time from when they leave home and when they return home for attending the quarterly NBE Licensee Committee meetings. Personal stops are not an allowable deduction.

Annual Membership and Certification Fees:

This is only one annual membership to Sam's Club, Costco, or related wholesale store. Certification fees may include annual food handler permit costs when they are necessary for the operation of a vending facility or cafeteria, and any other necessary licenses or certifications to operate a vending facility or cafeteria.

Telemetry, Credit Card, and Cashless Fees:

This includes the monthly fee for each telemeter along with credit card or cashless transaction fees if applicable.

Postage and Mailing Expenses:

This is actual cost of mailing P&L statements, set-aside, Department of Transportation (DOT) and U.S. StratCom utility payments to NCBVI. Please note that scanning and emailing P&L statements and itemized receipts and/or invoices are an acceptable form of submission as well as online banking to have checks directly sent to NCBVI from your bank. Please write what the check is for in the "Memo" line of the check.

Product Losses:

Product losses are only deductible due to government shutdown, or issues beyond the blind vendor's control. If you have questions about when this may occur, please contact NBE staff.

Upgrade and Replacement of Equipment

Upgrading and replacing equipment refers to the personal technology and/or equipment that is not state property, which is necessary to operate a business. This may include purchasing, replacing, and upgrading a computer, software, apps, adaptive technology, and such. This is not repairs nor installation costs. The maximum allowable deduction is \$200 per year. An itemized receipt must be included in the P&L to verify cost.

Alex made a motion to accept these deductions, Chris seconded it and the motion passed.

Operator's Agreement: Update was presented by Dave Robinson.

All of the Operator's Agreements are being worked on and he will be sending them out soon for everyone to sign.

Vending Machine and Credit card Installation:

Update presented above in the SLA report.

Seed Cashless Plus:

Update presented above in the SLA report.

Unincurred Business Expenses:

Discussion was held about this topic. Contact Eric if you would like to learn more about how unincurred business expenses can help your business.

Covid-19 Related Issues Update:

The SLA will help as much as they can and give us support throughout this time. At this time there is no financial support available.

Length of Disciplinary Probation:

Discussion was held about this topic. Carlos Serván explained the reasoning behind the length of the probation period. The length of disciplinary probation is six months, with extensions if necessary.

Discuss Training for Next Quarterly Meeting:

Discussion was held about various topics. At our next meeting we will have a training about USA Technology which is the program that runs our credit and debit card readers on our machines. Alex made a motion to have the next meeting about USA Technology, Andrea seconded it and the motion passed.

Set Date for Next Meeting:

Chris made a motion to have the next quarterly meeting on March 5, 2021 in Lincoln NE at 10:00 a.m.
Alex seconded it and the motion passed.

Date: March 5, 2021

Location: Lincoln, Nebraska

Time: 10:00 a.m.

Adjournment:

Andrea made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Atty seconded it, the motion passed.

Adjournment time:

1:05 p.m.

Training Session:

A training session was held on money management.

Attendance for Training:

Sandy Alvarado, Andrea Chizek, Alex Curtis, Atty Svendsen, Jason Thompson, Jim Jirak, Jeremy Richie, Ronnie Kellogg, Chris Nolan, and Antonio Aguilar.