

**Nebraska Business Enterprise Program
Blind Licensee Committee Meeting Minutes**

Via Telephone Conference Call
Pursuant to Executive Order #20-03
Signed on March 17, 2020 by Governor Pete Ricketts

April 10, 2020

Meeting called to order by Chairperson Sandy Alvarado at 10:02 a.m.

Board Members in Attendance:

Chairperson Sandy Alvarado, Secretary Andrea Chizek, and Board Members Chris Nolan and Alex Curtis

Blind Licensees and Trainees in Attendance:

Jason Thompson, Jim Jirak, Ronnie Kellogg, Atty Svendsen, Wiley Elmshouser, Antonio Aguilar, Tracy Bradley, Miguel Rocha, Jeremy Richey

NCBVI Staff in Attendance:

Executive Director Carlos Servan, Deputy Director of Services Carol Jenkins, NBE Staff Dave Robinson, Newly Hired NBE Staff Eric Buckwalter, and Omaha District Supervisor Nancy Flearl

NCBVI Board of Commissioners in Attendance:

Vice Chairperson Robert Newman

Guests in Attendance:

Bob Welch

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 Newsline® and Radio Talking Book. The notice was sent to the NCBVI.Everyone Email List.

Approval of Minutes:

A motion was made by Andrea to approve the minutes from the meeting on November 21, 2019 as distributed. Chris seconded it. Motion passed.

NBE Committee Chairperson Report: (Presented by Sandy)

It's been a very confusing and scary time since last time we gathered. I have been working closely with our SLA to find out ways to help out all of you in our program. I visited with Carol about higher allowances for drivers/readers. We had several discussions about what we can do with set-aside to possibly help out. We had many emails and phone calls with Terry Smith to help us understand what we can do and understand how the unemployment filing will work. I also participated on a phone call

with Blind merchants to help us understand the ever changing government assistance offerings.

SLA report: (Presented by Carol)

Vending Sites Update

Department of Corrections

The Department of Corrections vending machine installation project was completed the week of March 24, 2020. This 94 vending machine project over 12 different locations was a very large undertaking, but everyone (i.e. The Department of Corrections, NCBVI, Greater America Distributing, Valley Vending Services, Advanced Breakroom, and such) worked well together to make it as successful as possible. Everyone involved was very pleased with the level of coordination, communication, procedures, and hard work, which made it a success.

Nebraska State Building Division

NCBVI is still in permit negotiations with the Nebraska State Building Division. Carol Jenkins has worked with Nebraska State Risk Management and has obtained a group general liability insurance policy for the NBE program, which lessens the cost of insurance for vendors. Carol is now working to get the vendors under NCBVI's Worker's Compensation policy to once again lessen the costs for vendors. This is the portion of the permit still being negotiated with the State Building Division. The Worker's Comp policy is now in the draft stage of the process where all of the details are being negotiated for accuracy. Once a permit has been fully executed, Carol will set up a training for relevant NCBVI staff, NBE Staff, and licensees who will be responsible for carrying out the permit.

Nebraska Department of Transportation

Carol has been working with the Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) on negotiating new rates for utilities for each rest area along the interstate. Currently, interstate rest area utilities are \$35 for one machine, \$45 for two machines, \$65 for three machines and \$80 for four machines per each rest area. Carol is working to negotiate a flat rate of \$35 per month for each rest area regardless of the number of machines. NCBVI is waiting on NDOT legal department to determine if everything meets state and federal laws for the highway system. Carol will provide more information as it becomes available.

US StratCom Cafeteria

The US StratCom cafeteria has been closed since March 23, 2020 due to COVID-19. This will be continued to be evaluated.

NBE Licensee Update

The NBE program had one licensee leave the program to pursue employment in another state, which allowed another licensee to take on a vending facility. The NBE Program also has one new trainee who took over a vending site for a licensee who retired. There are currently 14 licensed blind vendors operating vending facilities with one new trainee in the NBE program operating a vending facility.

Vending Site Complaints

The categories of complaints that have come in to NCBVI this quarter have been as follows: vendors having expired products and having machines not properly stocked. This is a reminder that NCBVI has all of the contracts with the various owners of facilities, and licensees are representing themselves, other licensees, other blind consumers, and NCBVI statewide.

Additional Information

COVID-19 Agency Support

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, NCBVI is supporting blind vendors who re-open their vocational rehabilitation (VR) case or already have an open VR case with NCBVI in the following ways:

1. Beginning in March 2020, no set-aside will be collected. NCBVI will keep monitoring the situation and will notify blind vendors when set-aside will resume.
2. Support for re-start up product for first fill once social distancing is over. There will be no support for current product or on-going product during social distancing.
3. Support for one month of paying for a reader/driver not to exceed \$12 per hour. All necessary logs/timesheets and paperwork need to be submitted for this to happen.
4. Support for up to three months of NDOT interstate and USSTRATCOM Vending facilities for utility payments. These are the only vending sites required to pay utilities.
5. Support for up to three months of group general liability insurance assistance if and only if it is truly needed. NCBVI strongly prefers deferring payment to NCBVI if you can't pay it because the deadline is September 30, 2020. Please speak with Dave or Carol about insurance assistance only if it is needed and can't be paid by September 30, 2020.
6. The possibility of a Fair Minimum Return is being explored and researched. Information is being gathered and collected.
7. Beginning in March 2020, money owed to the agency for past-due set-aside, NDOT utilities, re-payments, late fees, and any other past-due reason will be deferred until social distancing is over. The funds owed to NCBVI still needs to be paid back to the agency, but after social distancing is over, NCBVI will notify those who this applies to.
8. P&Ls and all proper, complete, and necessary documentation is still postmarked and due by the 20th of the month.

To be eligible for any of the above support, you must have an open case with the agency to request and/or receive any support. For questions and assistance with services, please call NCBVI at 402-471-2891.

NBE Coordinator Position

NCBVI is happy to announce that Eric Buckwalter has been hired as the new NBE Coordinator. Eric will begin his new position with NC BVI on April 27, 2020.

NBE Vendor and NCBVI Staff Training

NCBVI is once again looking at training for blind vendors and agency staff on vending machines and such. However, NCBVI is not sure what this will look like at this time due to other NBE priorities.

Operator Agreements and Fixed Assets

Dave has been working on updating NBE fixed assets statewide. Once Dave has an accurate list of NBE fixed assets, Dave will update each licensee's operator agreement, which will include the newly approved RSA (Rehabilitation Services Administration) operator agreement, for signatures.

Looking Ahead

NCBVI has no plans to expand the NBE Program at this time. However, NCBVI will continue to work on previously agreed to projects for the NBE Program such as the new Veteran's Administration buildings in Lincoln and Omaha. NCBVI has set aside some reallocation funds to purchase new vending machines for some current locations where machines need replaced. NCBVI will also be purchasing credit card readers for all new and existing vending machines where appropriate and allowable. These upgrades will be mandatory because research has shown credit card sales account for over half of all sales for vending facilities. New vending machines and credit card readers for new and existing machines will begin to happen once the Corrections project is complete. In addition, NCBVI is still looking into the accessibility of Cantaloupe software for inventory management for vending facilities.

Update on Licensees and new Trainee(s):

Outlined above in the SLA report

Update on Profit and Loss Reports: (Presented by Dave)

Dave reported the majority of the licensees are getting their paperwork submitted in a timely manner. There are a couple of individuals that he is still working with to get proper documentation from. Dave works one on one with everyone to get their paperwork turned in on time. Also remember, you don't have to pay set-aside for March 2020, but Dave still needs to see your set-aside amount on your paperwork.

Discuss Training for Next Quarterly Meeting:

A discussion was held on various topics. It was decided the topic for our next training will be on taxes.

New Business:

1. Agency support for vendors affected by COVID-19:

Outlined above in the SLA report. If you have any questions, please call NCBVI for assistance.

2. Driver/Reader Allowable Deduction:

The allowable amount for the driver/reader deduction for the profit and loss report is now \$12.00 per hour.

3. NBE Committee Vice Chairperson Vacancy:

Chris has volunteered to fill in as the temporary vice chairperson until new elections are held to fill the committee vacancy.

4. Fair Minimum Return:

Sandy discussed fair minimum return and other possible options for set-aside to help vendors. A motion was made by Andrea to approve the use of set-aside funds for a one-time payment for the purpose of sick pay for \$500.00 per vendor operating a site due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was seconded by Chris. Motion passed.

Set Date for Next Quarterly Meeting:

Chris made a motion to have the next meeting on Friday, June 26, 2020 in Lincoln Nebraska at 10:00 a.m. Andrea seconded it. Motion passed.

Date: Friday June 26, 2020
Location: Lincoln, Nebraska
Facility: Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Time: 10:00 a.m.

Adjournment:

Andrea made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Alex seconded it. Motion passed.

Adjournment Time: 1:42 p.m.

NBE Training:

Customer service training was presented by Melissa Smith, a blind vendor in Tennessee. She presented a lot of valuable information through interactive discussions on customer service to make our businesses successful. She used the acronym called CAFÉ. The “C” stood for customers, the “A” stood for accountability, the “F” stood for fun, and the “E” stood for excellence.

Licensees and Trainees in Attendance for Training:

Sandy Alvarado, Andrea Chizek, Chris Nolan, Alex Curtis, Jason Thompson, Ronnie Kellogg, Atty Svendsen, Wiley Elmshouser, Antonio Aguilar, and Jeremy Richey