

**Arizona Governor's Council
on Blindness and Visual Impairment
Annual Report 2020 - 2021**



Ensuring the Specialized Needs of Blind and Visually
Impaired Arizonans are Addressed Effectively

Supporting and Supported by

Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA)

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), Business Enterprise Program (BEP)
Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) Program

Arizona Department of Economic Security
Your Partner for a Stronger Arizona

GCBVI Council Members

Bob Kresmer, Chair
David Steinmetz, Vice-Chair
Amy Porterfield, Secretary
Ted Chittenden
Donald Porterfield
Bea Shapiro
George Martinez
Nathan Pullen
Mike Gordon
Janet Fisher
Annette Reichman
David Steinmetz
Terri Hedgpeth
Michael Bailey
Kristen Mackey

GCBVI Mission:

“To provide the leadership, advocacy, and guidance that promotes opportunities for Arizonans of all ages who are blind or visually impaired that result in increased dignity, respect and independence

GCBVI Vision

“Create, foster and sustain a climate of opportunity where all Arizonans who are blind or visually impaired are able to direct their own lives and reach their personal chosen goals and objectives”

GCBVI EXECUTIVE ORDER 92-15:(Supersedes Executive Order 86-15)

WHEREAS, blind and visually impaired persons are an integral and growing part of our community; and

WHEREAS, there are many organizations in the public and private sectors which serve the special needs of these Arizonans; and

WHEREAS, various cooperative activities among these organizations have demonstrated a commitment to coordinate their efforts and to eliminate duplication and gaps; and

WHEREAS, establishment of a Governor's Advisory Council has been identified as the most effective approach to accomplishing these goals.

NOW THEREFORE, I, Fife Symington, Governor of the State of Arizona, do hereby create a new Executive Order for the GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON BLINDNESS AND VISUAL IMPAIRMENT and delineate herein its purpose, structure, and function.

PURPOSE. The Governor's Council on Blindness & visual Impairment was established to provide a mechanism to ensure that the specialized needs of blind and visually impaired Arizonans are addressed effectively.

STRUCTURE. The Council shall consist of twenty (20) members appointed by the Governor and shall meet at least once each calendar quarter; the term of office of the members shall be three years.

A. Fourteen (14) of the members shall be consumers (i.e., blind or visually impaired individuals or parents/guardians thereof). Three of the members shall be appointed from the Arizona Council of the Blind; three of the members shall be appointed from the National Federation of the Blind of Arizona; three of the members shall be appointed from the Blinded Veterans Association; one of the members shall be appointed from the Arizona Association of Parents of the Visually Impaired, and four shall be appointed as consumers-at-large.

B. Six of the members shall be representatives of the general community including business, government, employers, and advocates.

C. There shall be four non-voting members who shall serve as ex-officio members. The members shall be:

The manager of Services for the Blind & Visually Impaired in the Department of Economic Security.

The Superintendent of the Arizona State School for the Deaf and Blind.

The Chief Librarian for the Arizona Department of Library, Archives and Public Records, Arizona State Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped.

A representative of a private non-profit agency that provides services to the blind and visually impaired.

D. The Council shall encourage broad participation by other organizations and individuals interested in blind and visually impaired Arizonans to develop and periodically review and recommend goals and objectives to meet the needs of this specialized population. These goals and objectives shall be based on identified needs and shall be designed to cover gaps in existing services.

3. DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES. The Council shall:

A. Advise and assist the Governor, the Legislature, and all State agencies providing services to blind individuals, in matters concerning blindness and visual impairment.

B. Submit to the Governor and the Legislature by September 1 of each year, a comprehensive Annual Report on the Council's activities, accomplishments, and recommendations; submit other reports as deemed advisable; conduct periodic statewide conferences to address issues and exchange information.

C. Review and make recommendations, when necessary, on plans and strategies for meeting the needs of blind and visually impaired Arizonans statewide.

D. In cooperation with all related organizations, conduct a comprehensive program of professional and public education to heighten awareness of the capabilities, potentials, and needs of blind and visually impaired persons.

E. Monitor programs and services for blind individuals to encourage efficient and coordinated use of resources in the provision of services.

4. ADMINISTRATION. The Council shall be located within the Office of the Governor. Staff and administrative support shall be provided by the Department of Economic Security.

5. COMPENSATION. The Council members shall receive no compensation but shall be entitled to reimbursement of travel and per diem expense according to State policy.

6. EFFECTIVE DATE. This order shall become effective immediately.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused to be affixed on the Great Seal of the State of Arizona.

GOVERNOR

DONE at the Capitol in Phoenix this twenty-ninth day of May in the Year of Our Lord One Thousand Nine Hundred and Ninety-two and of the Independence of the United States of America the Two Hundred and Sixteenth.

About EYEKNOWAZ <https://eyeknow.az.gov>

EYEKNOWAZ has been developed as a directory of resources and services for individuals with vision loss or combined hearing and vision loss and for the community. Listings in the directory are categorized by interests and needs to connect users with organizations providing services and information. This directory is not comprehensive, nor do listings imply endorsement or evaluation of programs in any way.

Please send all questions, comments, and suggestions for resources to GCBVI@azdes.gov.

This website is supported by the [Arizona Governor's Council on Blindness & Visual Impairment](#), with assistance from [Arizona Department of Economic Security's Rehabilitation Services Administration](#) and [Arizona Secretary of State](#).



Message from the Chair

Bob Kresmer

The Council (GCBVI) was very concerned with the effects of the Corona Virus pandemic on the blind and visually impaired residents of Arizona. The council engaged in efforts to make this population of blind students, adults, parents of b/vi children, educators, and seniors aware of the state and county resources for vaccination, and the regulations and policies that would affect their daily lives.

Several of the council appointees retired from their voluntary service, and the Governor made several three – year term appointments this year. The GCBVI attempts to recruit new members with expertise and experience in many areas of direct relevance to our blind population such as education, employment, training, and advocacy.

The GCBVI monitors and advises state agencies that serve the blind such as the Arizona State Schools for the Deaf and Blind, Arizona Vocational Rehabilitation Services, and the public and private contractors that provide the services that are administered by state agencies.

The Council looks forward to another year of reaching out to the blind and visually impaired Arizona residents, the Governor and legislators, and the providers of specialized services.

GCBVI's Advisory Role

- Assures that feedback and advice reflect the views and experiences of people who are blind
- Is a public information and referral source on blindness and deaf blindness
- Fosters client empowerment in the provision of services
- Ensures the policies, practices, services, and marketing activity of the state of Arizona reflect the views and respect the dignity of people who are blind

GCBVI Strategic Direction

- Supporting the highest quality service delivery for blind and deafblind Arizonans
- Cultivating resources for blind and deafblind Arizonans
- Developing effective communication with stakeholders
- Promoting the growth and development of the Council

Message from the SBVID Program Manager

Brian Dulude

The past year has seen some successes and outstanding commitment from clients, Services for the Blind Visually Impaired and Deaf (SBVID) staff, and the GCBVI council members. This year, a new VR Supervisor position was established to cover the Northern Arizona offices including Flagstaff and Prescott. Many new vocational rehabilitation counselors were also added to the team. Collectively, we served over 1,000 clients in the last Program Year.

In March of last year, the national pandemic required that staff begin working remotely and we quickly shifted to providing virtual services. We have remained actively working with our VR clients, older blind participants, and Business Enterprise Program operators. This year, due to the continuing pandemic, only 38 clients were successfully employed with an average hourly pay rate of \$19.00 per hour, well above the state and national minimum wage.

The Business Enterprise Program continued its service to blind operators throughout the state this year as well. Through thoughtful restructuring of funds within the budget, we were able to offer support payments to operators through the pandemic. The program continues to seek out new business opportunities. Through an appropriation in federal law, operators were also able to be compensated for losses they incurred during last year's pandemic.

The Older Blind Independent Living Program also continues to serve the older individuals who are blind and visually impaired throughout the state of Arizona. We hired a new Program Manager, Rehabilitation Technician, and Purchasing Technician. Teachers continue to work with clients and provide them with the rehabilitation teaching that they need in their home and through virtual technology.

We are proud to have developed an orientation for the vocational rehabilitation program that has the support of counselors, vendors, and the GCBVI. During this orientation, clients are introduced to the comprehensive blindness programs that are contracted with the state. VR clients are also introduced to an assistive technology vendor, the GCBVI, and consumer organizations including the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) and the American Council of the Blind (ACB).

Although the nation is going through a pandemic and Arizona has moved to a virtual platform, it is important to remember that services to the individuals we serve are available. Vocational Rehabilitation clients can still seek help in finding employment. The Business Enterprise Program operators can continue to receive the services they need to remain in business. Older blind individuals can still receive the help they need to remain independent and self-sufficient. We look forward to the next year and what we can accomplish together.

Client Success Stories

CG

CG is a 46-year-old male with diabetic retinopathy who is in the Arizona Vocational Rehabilitation program. He had received instruction in multiple areas for complete independence including daily living skills, accessible technology, Braille, and supportive education. CG excelled within all areas and was hired on as a Program Coordinator for Disability Services at Arizona State University. He is now helping other individuals with disabilities reach their goals for independence, so the student has now become a provider himself.

Ms. J

Ms. J is a 73-year-old woman who currently resides in a house in southeast Tucson. According to her case file, she was diagnosed with glaucoma some years ago, and had recently retired here in Tucson where she was raised. At the time of her assessment, Ms. J had experienced a significant drop in vision due to an infection in her eyes which left her with only light perception.

At the time of her assessment, Ms. J had several concerns. In the area of communication, she was having difficulty with tasks such as knowing the time and tracking her appointments and using her cell phone. In the area of home management, she was having difficulty with cooking activities. And, in personal management, Ms. J was having trouble distinguishing between her medications, managing her money, and identifying and reading mail. Furthermore, Ms. J was also interested in using her computer again, and while in training, became interested in meeting other visually impaired individuals.

To address her communication needs, Ms. J was provided training in the use of a talking clock and digital recorder to manage her appointments. Additionally, she was provided extensive instruction in the use of an iPhone utilizing VoiceOver, which allowed her to manage her calendar, text, and call individuals; use a variety of apps for reading her mail and other documents; and keep up with her email and other communications. In the area of home management, she received instruction in adaptive methods for performing food preparation activities such as pouring, measuring, using the stove top and oven, and using a talking bar code reader for labeling and identifying foods and her medications. Within the area of personal management, Ms. J received training in the use of a talking money identifier, as well as instruction in the use of several apps on her phone that allow her to read mail and other documents. Finally, Ms. J also acquired a computer from an organization called Computers for the Blind and was provided instruction in how to use a screen reader to perform tasks such as creating and editing documents, using the internet, and checking her email.

As a result of training, Ms. J indicated she feels increased independence and that she has control of her life again. Beyond this, she has also become involved in several consumer groups and is also on the board of a local support group for blind individuals. While her training is complete, Ms. J will undoubtedly continue to grow and learn as she mentor's others within the blindness community.

GC

GC is a 68-year-old father of 5 who lives for the Green Bay Packers and his duties as a Deacon of his church. He has combined glaucoma and macular degeneration. GC is also a widower and lives alone so he benefitted from independent skills training even though his children were always close at hand. As GC increased his skills, he was proud to show them off at family gatherings. GC shared his ability to identify currency once he received his bill identifier from the Department of the Treasury, and the ability to recognize colors with the use of his color identifier. And though he had always made a point of avoiding the kitchen, GC proudly prepared a dish for his family's holiday feast using his newly acquired nonvisual skills. GC had increased his independence and was able to organize and identify his medications without needing his daughter to do it for him. The one thing that GC was most happy about was the receipt of the Ruby video magnifier which he could use to follow along in church and even create his own lessons for the congregation when called upon to do so. He was also thrilled with the provided filter tints when he looked at the television and was clearly able to see that the grass was green on the field. Even though his vision was not improved enough to identify the team players, he felt he could watch the football games with confidence that his team was winning since all he could see was green and he just 'knew' it was for the Packers.

JM

JM is a 67-year-old retired Registered Nurse and EMT who has Retinitis Pigmentosa. This is a genetic condition that has affected many members of her family, all of whom, except for JM, had lost their vision early. JM was aware of some accommodations and available resources due to her family's situation. However, she was able to learn more tips to retain her independence now that her vision was decreasing. She was provided with various devices and tools to assist with accessibility in the home as well. What benefitted her the most, however, was learning Braille. JM quickly excelled from the initial introduction through instruction on reading, writing with a Perkins Braille writer (which was provided to her) and use of a slate and stylus. She was able to independently label things within her home and kitchen, locate public bathrooms, find elevator floors, and room numbers, and follow Braille recipes. JM continued learning with the Hadley Institute and often received materials from both the public library and the National Library Service for the Blind. The most important thing that came from her newfound Braille literacy is that she was now able to correspond with family members as they were all Braille readers and writers. JM's skills came later in life but being able to write a letter to her sister or receive a birthday card with an added Braille note from her nephew was exciting to her as it opened a whole new world that had previously been cut off from her.

LE

Going blind can be a challenging time in a person's life filled with many emotions ranging from fear and anxiety to acceptance and optimism. Luckily, as LE, a 70-year-old female of Northern Arizona learned, our state offers a fantastic program to provide the training needed to retain the independence for individuals who are blind or losing their vision. LE, after losing her vision, was referred to the ILB Program in 2020 and began working with her instructors to learn the skills she would need to live a happy and independent life.

LE made great advancements with the use of technology. She had never used a smart phone prior to working with ILB instructors and was hesitant to learn such an intimidating device as a newly blind user. She worked with her technology instructor to determine which smart phone would meet her needs and proceeded to make the purchase and take the plunge. LE quickly embraced her new iPhone and learned how to set reminders for medications and appointments, add contacts, create, and send email messages, use a money identifier app, and many other useful applications for daily tasks. She then proceeded to learn to use the phone to take photos of her mail and have it read aloud to her. She then learned how to use an application to identify products in her pantry and cupboards which led to independence in the kitchen and opened a new world of cooking without vision. LE has embraced her new technology and continues to learn new skills every day!

Committee Reports

Assistive Technology Committee

The Assistive Technology (AT) Committee had planned to provide to teachers of the visually impaired (TVI) a training on how to use different virtual platforms to teach students participating in school from home. A survey was conducted to get feedback from the teachers on what was needed to teach assistive technology. Unfortunately, there was not a good response from the teachers. The AT Committee then decided to table this project to a later time.

The AT Committee participated in the VRATE conference of November 2020. The AT Committee did a presentation on the topic of Virtual Meetings and on a New Norm for Job Interviews. The purpose of this presentation was to teach VR clients on how to conduct themselves interviewing for a job via Zoom, Google meet, WebEx, etc. The presentation was well received by the audience.

Currently, the AT Committee is working on a podcast project in conjunction with the Arizona Talking Book Library to provide blind and visually impaired individuals with information on how to register and access Braille and Audio Reading Download (BARD). Besides BARD, the podcast will be providing information on a variety of assistive technologies and resources for the blind and visually impaired patrons. This project will be conducted via Sun Sounds of Arizona as a podcast, that will be aired monthly. The AT Committee hopes that this project is successful and that the podcasts will continue regularly into the future.

Committee Members

Beatriz Shapiro, Chair
Sue LeHew
Bob Kresmer
Nathan Pullen
Mark Nelson

Independent Living Committee

The Independent Living (IL) Committee began the year with the retirement from the council and IL Committee Chair, James LaMay, which became effective in September 2020. George Martinez took over the chairmanship of the committee that month, but he retired from the council in December for health reasons. At council chairman Bob Kresmer's request, Ted Chittenden agreed to serve as Chair of the IL Committee in January of 2021.

In March of 2021, the committee met and voted on how a proposed additional \$500,000 for Independent Living training should be spent. The committee members agreed that 50% of the funds should be spent to support training for those 55 years of age and older and 50% should be used to support training for those 54 years of age and younger. At the May meeting, the committee agreed to begin a work group to determine how the VR program could provide additional support for blind and visually impaired clients that could work around restrictions created by the ongoing Covid-19 virus.

As the result of comments made at the May Full Council meeting, members of the committee participated in a conference call in June with Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and the Department of Economic Security (DES) about the proposal to increase the IL training budget by \$500,000. This was a proposal that had not gone through the governor's budget process so the GCBVI and its committees could not recommend it. In addition, at this meeting, it was learned that the administrative structure for supporting under 55 independent living training programs had been removed after the passage of the update of the Workforce and Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) at the Federal level which included percentage spending requirements by rehabilitation agencies on those seeking vocational rehabilitation versus those seeking only independent living training. As of June 30, 2021, the state legislature had passed a final state budget, but it wasn't known then whether the full budget request for VR had been granted.

The IL Committee's goals for the next year seem clear. We must 1) continue to support efforts to keep the IL training programs fully funded for the blind and visually impaired populations 55 years of age and older; 2) seek a means to provide IL training for blind people 54 years of age and younger who are not seeking employment at this time; and 3) seek ways to make IL services available throughout the entire state and not just Phoenix and Tucson. The committee looks forward to meeting these challenges.

Committee Members

Ted Chittenden, Chair
Brian Dulude
Katie Gomez
John McCann
Steve Tepper
Frank Vance

Public Information Committee

The Public Information Committee is responsible for publicizing the work of the GCBVI both internally and externally, overseeing the EyeKnow.AZ website, and preparing the council's annual reports. Because of restrictions created by the COVID-19 virus, there were no outside events where committee members left their homes during the reporting period. The GCBVI, however, was present via Zoom as an exhibitor at the National Federation of the Blind of Arizona (NFBA) convention in September; the White Cane Day event sponsored by the Phoenix Veterans hospital in mid-October; and the VRATE conference held in November. Unfortunately, while many people attended these conferences, few stopped by and chatted with the exhibitors, including the GCBVI. Hopefully, as more people get vaccinated and the pandemic eases, members of this committee and the rest of the council will be able to attend events in person once again.

The big news out of the committee was the changing of the guard. In December of 2020, Ted Chittenden stepped down as committee chair and was replaced by David Steinmetz. Though Mr. Chittenden still sits on the Public Information Committee, he is now Chair of the Independent Living (IL) Committee (see preceding report.)

The EyeKnow.AZ website is still operational, but the number of visitors continues to remain small. Increasing traffic to the website will be one of the committee's goals for next year. Another will be increasing membership. With the departure of Dean Colston in May of 2021, the committee is now down to three regularly attending members, and all currently serve on the council. We must also seek new ways to get the message about the committee and council to other blind, visually impaired, and DeafBlind folks in the face of COVID-19 restrictions. The committee is sure that it can meet these challenges.

Committee Members

David Steinmetz, Chair
Janet Fisher
Michael Bailey
Ted Chittenden
Dean Colston

Education Committee

The Education Committee of the GCBVI was very engaged in the situation that public and charter schools, colleges and universities, and their administrators confronted because of the pandemic.

The Education Committee convened information gathering virtual meetings and disseminated the information to the decision makers, students, parents, and teachers of blind and visually impaired students.

We are looking forward to the 2021-2022 school year and the real possibility of returning to face-to-face education.

Committee Members

Bob Kresmer, Chair

Lisa Jackson

Lisa Yencarelli

Ed House

Jared Kittelson

Doris Woltman

Julie Urban

Employment Committee

The GCBVI Employment Committee will continue to work toward the mission of promoting the E75 initiative: Eliminate, Employ, Empower, to support the up to 75% of individuals who are blind or visually impaired and unemployed or underemployed. To that end, the committee has started planning for a virtual E75 event in Spring.

The GCBVI Employment Committee is honored to serve the Council and will continue to create opportunities to advocate for the rights of Arizonans who are blind or visually impaired.

Committee Members

Nathan Pullen, Chair

Terell Welch

Bea Shapiro

David Steinmetz

Reggie Laister

Legislative and Public Policy Committee

The GCBVI Strategic Plan gives the Legislative and Public Policy Committee many goals on which it must take the lead. These goals include the following:

- Ensuring that funding for VR services is available through all possible methods.
- Making sure that all blind Arizonans who want them are receiving VR services and that the comprehensive blindness skills training programs are available to all blind consumers.
- Revising SBVID best practices with collaboration from the GCBVI and other blind stakeholders.
- Ensuring that funding for independent living training for blind and visually impaired seniors is both increased and sustained.
- Establishing and maintaining funding for independent living training for blind and visually impaired persons under the age of 55 who are not necessarily looking to return to the workforce.

Committee Members:

Amy Porterfield, Chair
Donald Porterfield
Bob Kresmer
Allan Curry
Ted Chittenden

DeafBlind Issues Committee

The GCBVI Strategic Plan gives the DeafBlind Issues Committee goals to complete which include:

- ILB (Independent Living Blind) Services to all populations are universally available statewide.
- SSP (Support Service Providers) services to deaf-blind Arizonans are sustained across the state.
- Best practices are established and implemented for ILB consumers who are deaf/blind.

Committee Members:

Mary Hartle
Megan Mogan
Sue Kay Kneifel
Steve Wilson
Larry Rhodes
Cindi Robinson
Jonathan Pringle
Virginia Thompson
Carmen Green