

**Arizona Governor's Council
on Blindness and Visual Impairment
Annual Report 2019 - 2020**



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
Amy Porterfield, Vice-Chair
Allan Curry, Secretary
Ted Chittenden
Ed Gervasoni
Donald Porterfield
Bea Shapiro
George Martinez
Nathan Pullen
Mike Gordon
Jim LaMay
Janet Fisher
Annette Reichman
Kristen Mackey
David Steinmetz
Terri Hedgpeth
Michael Bailey

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

To assure that the specialized needs of Arizonans who are blind continue to be addressed effectively, the Governor's Council on Blindness and Visual Impairment (GCBVI) met with and advised the Governor's Representatives, Arizona Legislators, and agency management regarding issues important to blind seniors, students, parents of blind children, working-age customers of Arizona Vocational Rehabilitation Services, blind entrepreneurs, and persons with combined hearing and vision loss.

In support of Arizona Rehabilitation Services Administration, the GCBVI advised the agency on policy and participated on hiring interview panels to enhance the accuracy in assessing the best possible candidates to fill DES/RSA counselors and manager positions.

In public policy, our members advocated for protections in the best interests of children parented by blind individuals or children who could be parented by blind individuals through the establishment of procedural safeguards that require adherence to the ADA and respect for the due process and equal protection rights of blind parents or prospective blind parents in the context of child welfare, foster care, family law and adoption. Our members campaigned for additional support services that would empower deaf/blind students and seniors to participate more fully in their communities.

Our members assisted in streamlining and improving education service delivery by the Arizona State School for the Blind and many other Arizona school districts to blind, low vision, and deaf/blind students and their parents.

GCBVI Committee Chairs have recruited new members from the community to serve with us in fulfilling our mission. We have recruited three new, experienced, and eager individuals for the Governor to appoint to our council.

We continue to seek input from across the state regarding unmet blindness needs and the system improvement opinions of blind and visually impaired Arizonans. Please continue to share your concerns and triumphs with us by attending our meeting and providing public comment or by providing your input via email at GCBVI@azdes.gov. We expect the year 2021 will bring us more opportunities to positively influence the lives of blind Arizonans.

Bob Kresmer

Chairman, Governors Council on Blindness and Visual Impairment

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 committee members. This year a new Regional Program Manager was hired to oversee all SBVID operations and staff. Two new Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) field supervisors and many new vocational rehabilitation counselors were also added to the team. Collectively, we served over 1,000 clients in the last Program Year.

We were honored to host the E75 conference once again. This is a conference to highlight the abilities of employees that are blind or visually impaired. In partnership with the Employment Committee of the GCBVI, we had over a hundred participants this year including staff of SBVID, employers and clients.

In March of this 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 Operators. Over 50 clients were successfully employed this year with an average hourly pay rate at \$19.00 an hour which is well over the state and national minimum wage.

The Business Enterprise Program (BEP) continued their service to blind operators throughout the state this year as well. Throughout the pandemic 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.

The Older Blind Independent Living Program also continues to serve the older individuals who are blind throughout the state of Arizona. We have been innovative in our efforts to serve clients virtually including a new virtual low vision assessment that has been used to evaluate the magnification needs of our clients. 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 and the American Council of the Blind.

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 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.

Committee Reports

Assistive Technology Committee

During 2019 and 2020, the AT Committee presented at the Vision Rehabilitation and Assistive Technology Expo (VRATE), addressing the need for worksite evaluation in the workplace. Currently, the committee is working on compiling a survey in conjunction with the Education Committee. This survey was sent to teachers of the visually impaired (TVIs). The purpose of the survey is to compile a variety of assistive technology topics that they would like to learn. Also, we are asking some of these teachers to participate by being one of the presenters in the workshop. With the results from the survey, a virtual workshop will be conducted this fall using Zoom. We hope this workshop will be successful and beneficial for these teachers.

Committee Members

Beatriz Shapiro, Chair
Sue LeHew
Ed Gervasoni
Nathan Pullen
Mark Nelson
Terri Hedgpeth

Independent Living Committee

Background Information

The Older Individuals Who Are Blind (OIB) program are under the auspices of the Arizona Rehabilitation Services Administration, assisting individuals who are blind and visually impaired to achieve their goals for independent living. Individuals eligible for the program are 55 years of age or older whose visual impairment limits their ability to be independent. OIB services may include Rehabilitation Teaching, Orientation and Mobility Instruction, and Orientation and Adjustment to Blindness.

Committee Purpose

The committee collects and analyzes data regarding service statistics and outcomes. It makes recommendations for improvement of efficiency and

effectiveness of current program. The committee is also actively involved in matters concerning citizens needing services and in the delivery of services throughout the state of Arizona.

Committee Accomplishments

The committee identified systemic changes in the Independent Living (IL) Program, which was affecting the ability to provide services in a timely manner. The following recommendations were forwarded to the Executive Committee of The Governor's Council on Blindness and Visual Impairment, which formed a special committee for Independent Living representatives of Arizona Rehabilitation Services Administration, and community providers who are involved in the provision of IL services.

Concerns Raised by the Committee

1. Previous history of staff providing services vs. the current amount of vacancies in state employee positions (ILB).
2. Difficulties relating to individual consultants utilized in rural areas and newer requirements of insurance coverage.
3. Funding history and need for rate increases for community and individual consultant providers. When was the last historical increase?
4. Suspension of under 55 ILB funding and no restoration of funding for individuals needing these services.
5. The inability to provide community outreach promoting ILB services to the largest segment of blind and visually impaired population needing services:
 - a. Younger individuals identified through educational services
 - b. Middle aged individuals through vocational rehabilitation services and employers
 - c. Older individuals left to their own resources

The special ILB committee (Executive Committee, Community Providers, etc.) continues to meet and attempt to wade through these issues. While there are issues to be brought forward related to funding, the COVID-19 pandemic has further complicated the issues.

Committee Goals for the Next Year

The Independent Living Committee will continue to collaborate with the other GCBVI committees, Arizona Rehabilitation Services Administration, community provider of services and consumers throughout Arizona in both the promotion and effectiveness of ILB services. When appropriate we must also create legislation and community awareness of the need for greater funding.

Committee Members

Jim La May, Chair
George Martinez
Karla Rivas-Parker
Tom Simmons
Katie Gomez
Virginia Thompson
Frank Vance

Public Information Committee

The past year saw changes in the makeup of the Public Information Committee as one member departed, and two members were added. In addition, positive changes were made to our website, and we expanded our involvement with social media platforms. Prior to the onset of COVID-19, we were promoting the GCBVI at several events attended by primarily the blind and visually impaired community and their supporters.

Dan Martinez, the committee's long-time editor and former chair, retired from this position at the end of 2019. While he will be missed, we added Dr. Dean Colston, an excellent writer and editor in his own right, and Michael Bailey, who lives in Cottonwood, to the committee membership. In May 2020, Ted Chittenden announced that he was leaving the GCBVI after 10 years, but he would stay to assist the committee as a community member. In June, Mr. Chittenden announced that his replacement as committee chairperson beginning on January 1, 2021 would be David Steinmetz, a relatively new GCBVI member with a lot of promise.

In July of 2019, the committee learned that the proximity searching ability on the EYEKNOWAZ website had been temporarily disabled due to a new policy at Google regarding payment for this service. In early September, proximity searching was restored with an overall monthly limit installed that would greatly reduce the chances of having to pay Google for the use of this service.

Activity on the website had decreased to an all-time low in February of 2020, but with new promotion, it started to come back in March. The committee also undertook the task of making sure all website information was up to date. This is a project that is still underway as of June 30, 2020.

Facebook participation remained low throughout most of this period. However, Dean Colston, with the committee's blessing, undertook 1) the creation of a LinkedIn page for the council; and 2) links to the Facebook page from the LinkedIn page to encourage those who signed in to the LinkedIn page to also follow us on Facebook.

Through the end of 2019 and the early months of 2020, the Public Information Committee participated in several events geared towards the blind and visually impaired to help publicize the council. These included the AZTAP conference on July 15 and 16, 2019, the National Federation of the Blind of Arizona (NFBA) convention on August 30, the White Cane day celebration hosted by the Phoenix Veterans Hospital on October 17, the VRATE conference on November 15 and 16, and the E75 meeting sponsored by the Employment Committee on February 19, 2020. The emergence of COVID-19 in March 2020 and its subsequent effects on interpersonal behavior brought an end (at least temporarily) to conference participation. For example, AZTAP cancelled its 2019 conference planned for the first week of July, and VRATE cancelled its in-person event scheduled for November, although it was still pursuing a possible online meeting as of June 30, 2020. Because of the nature of COVID-19, it is likely that there will not be any in-person public events that the council will be participating in until a vaccine is developed to prevent this disease.

Nevertheless, it has been a successful year for the Public Information Committee, and with our growing on-line presence, next year promises to be just as successful.

Committee Members

Ted Chittenden, Chair
Janet Fisher
Michael Bailey

David Steinmetz
Dean Colston

Education Committee

The GCBVI Education Committee has been working toward several goals in 2020.

- The consistent application of the Arizona Braille law to ensure effective Braille teaching is offered in all counties in Arizona.
- Research and study for identifying appropriate certification and continuing education criteria for specialized teachers of blind and visually impaired students.

- Developing recommendations for the inclusion of relevant stakeholders in the governance of Arizona State Schools for the Deaf and Blind.
- Studying the relevant rank of blind and visually impaired students in required Arizona high-stakes testing, compared to standard students' scores.
- In conjunction with community stakeholders, the GCBVI Education Committee will develop surveys, gather stakeholder input and formulate policy and practices recommendations to share with the Governor, Legislature, and the relevant state agencies in the year 2020 that best serve persons who are blind and the community.

Committee Members

Bob Kresmer, Chair

Lisa Jackson

Lisa Yencarelli

Ed House

Jared Kittelson

Doris Woltman

Julie Urban

Employment Committee

During State Fiscal Year 2020, the GCBVI Employment Committee continued our work toward the mission of the council. We discussed ways to address council priorities that resulted from previous strategic planning actions, which were assigned to this committee. We have continued community outreach to promote our 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, we have engaged in the following five activities:

1. The GCBVI Employment Committee met regularly to discuss committee business.
2. We successfully honored three Arizona employers at our 5th Annual E75 Diversity Builders Awards Breakfast, which took place in February at Ability 360's Conference Center.
3. We held a follow-up E75 webinar featuring AFB President Kirk Adams, providing information on employment resources to employers and job seekers.
4. Committee members presented information on networking skills to job seekers and participated in resume reviews at the NFBAZ conference.
5. We planned a joint presentation at the upcoming VRATE conference, in conjunction with the AT committee.

The GCBVI Employment Committee is honored to serve the Council. We 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
Jordan Moon

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

Deaf-Blind Issues Committee

The GCBVI Strategic Plan gives the Deaf-Blind 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:

Ed Gervasoni, Chair

Mary Hartle

Megan Mogan

Sue Kay Kneifel

Steve Wilson

Larry Rhodes

Cindi Robinson

Jonathan Pringle

Virginia Thompson

Carmen Green

Success Stories

Foundation for Blind Children



Story 1

Bobbie is a fifteen-year-old living with Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI). This condition is caused by damage to the visual part of the brain. The eyes can see, but the brain cannot interpret what is being seen.

As a baby, Bobbie and his family participated in the Foundation for Blind Children's early intervention program. When he turned three, he began attending public school, but he stayed connected to FBC by participating in SHARP (sports, habilitation, arts, and recreation program).

Bobbie has participated in SHARP for several years, but when he first started the program, he was quiet and shy. He did not interact with his peers. Regular attendance at SHARP has helped him make friends and socialize in the program and at school.

SHARP has also helped him improve his self-advocacy skills. In fact, this year, Bobbie advocated for himself by rescheduling his regular speech therapy appointment to a weekday after school. He did not want the appointment to interfere with his ability to participate in SHARP activities on the weekend.

These skills will be an important asset for Bobbie in the future when he needs to advocate for his needs at college or with an employer.

Story 2

Ethan is a champion—he never gives up and his family will never give up on him. Ethan was born addicted to drugs. He weighed 1 pound, 2 ounces (no more than a water bottle) and was diagnosed as “failure-to-thrive.” But his foster parents were not going to accept that conclusion.

At three months old, they knew his eyes were not well. After a cataract surgery, Ethan was inconsolable. The nurse asked for Ethan’s mom (usually in a foster situation, they call for the “foster parents,” but never “mom”). She held him close and he instantly calmed. At that moment, she knew they needed to adopt this little boy.

After multiple surgeries, he lost his left eye. But that never slowed him down. FBC provided the support Ethan’s family needed to advocate for him. Through home visits, his mom learned how to help him feel his way through the first few years of life. When he turned three, Ethan began preschool at FBC. During that time, mom continued to get help with teaching techniques as well as advice on how to prepare a home for a boy with low vision.

After only one year, Ethan was ready for public school. But his first-grade teacher quickly noticed that he was having a hard time finding his chair in class. Ethan was diagnosed with retinal folds and required surgery. When the doctors told his mom that his retina could not be re-attached, she immediately turned to FBC for advice.

It was agreed that Ethan would come back to FBC to learn braille in preparation for the future. Ethan loves his teachers and is happy to be reunited with his preschool friends. His mom says that every time he sings a new song, she realizes that they made the right choice.

Because of the Foundation for the Blind Children and the love of Ethan’s family, he is now running and jumping—being a little boy. He even played t-ball last spring! Maybe he will grow up to be a baseball player, a teacher, or a doctor? We all have big dreams for Ethan—our champion.

His future is bright. Because of you, Ethan and his family have the tools, resources, and support to face whatever challenges come their way.

Thank you for helping Ethan succeed!

Foundation for Blind Children Adult Services

After retiring from 30 years of driving for UPS, Mr. Torrey-Bey was diagnosed with a substantial visual impairment. As a result, he was referred to Foundation for Blind Children (FBC) to have a low vision examination. In the process of that evaluation, he was informed about the comprehensive rehabilitation training services available at FBC for those interested in returning to work. He then applied for VR services and was referred to FBC to participate in those services. Through the comprehensive rehabilitation training, he was able to gain the skills he needed to obtain and maintain employment. Today, he continues to be successfully employed as a home health aide.

The Arizona Business Enterprise Program (BEP)

Linda completed the BEP training program. After becoming a licensed operator, she was able to begin directly managing a successful vending route in West Phoenix. Recently, she was able to secure a concession contract and is now also operating a busy vending franchise at a city of Phoenix Aquatic Center during the summer months. The BEP provided training that allowed her to learn both vending and food service operations. This prepared her to operate a successful business and allowed her to live independently.