

CITY- COUNTY

Task Force on Disabilities

October 18, 2021

Task Force Members In Attendance

City

Leah Northrop, Member at Large
Paul O'Hanlon
Mark Schmeler
Michelle Walker
Joe Wassermann

County

James "Chris" Noschese, Chair
Georgia Petropoulos, Cochair
John Tague, Treasurer
Cori Frazer
Sarah Goldstein

13th Member

Paul "Rich" McGann

Task Force Members Absent

City

Janet Evans

County

Karen Warman

Staff Present

Hillary Roman, City of Pittsburgh ADA Coordinator
Caylin Snyder, Allegheny County ADA Coordinator
Danielle Nicol, Dept of City Planning Communications Specialist

Welcome & Introductions

Chris Noschese called the meeting to order at 2:03 p.m. and welcomed all attendees. Task Force members introduced themselves.

Agenda

A. Minutes approval

- Rich McGann made a motion to approve the minutes from August's meeting. The motion to approve the minutes was seconded by Joe Wassermann and it carried unanimously.

B. Treasurer's report

- John Tague reported that the Task Force budget is in good standing. This year's expenses include \$1000 for the Annual Richard Meritzer Award. He added that

- there has been some confusion with the Center for Hearing and Deaf Services over payment for August's meeting over a \$500 invoice. John reported that even if that charge is valid, that leaves \$11,400 from the annual \$12,900 budget.
- He also reminded the group of the upcoming CLASS Community Heroes Dinner on Wednesday, October 27th. In the past, the CCTFD have purchased an eight-person table at the event for \$800 and John wondered whether this was something the group was interested in doing again.
 - Chris affirmed that he and his wife plan on attending. Michelle Walker and Rich are also interested in attending.
 - Joe made a motion to approve an expenditure of funds on the table for this event. Rich seconded the motion and it carried with one abstention from Paul O'Hanlon, as he is a member of CLASS's board.
 - John also announced that the Eradicate Hate Global Summit is happening this week. He proposed sending members of the CCTFD so long as the event itself is accessible; he is waiting to hear back from the organizers to find out. John received budget approval from the County for four members to attend. He noted that the timing has been slow, leaving only has a few days to finalize attendance.

C. New member introduction: Michelle Walker

- Chris introduced the newest CCTFD City member, Michelle Walker. Michelle talked about her background as a native Pittsburgher and member of the Deaf and hard-of-hearing communities. She relies on lip-reading and ASL. Michelle gave the group an overview of her work with the Deaf and hard-of-hearing communities via her business, Lend an Ear Consulting, where she bridges gaps by providing communication support and educational services.
- Michelle is a mobile service provider, going wherever she is called to be.
- The Task Force welcomed Michelle and noted her excitement to serve.

D. CCTFD employment project discussion with various guest speakers

- Caylin Snyder opened the discussion by providing background on the CCTFD employment project. The former County ADA Coordinator oversaw a one-time grant from the Allegheny Conference on Community Development to support disabled veterans' employment. Pursuant to the grant, the CCTFD is asked to use the funds for increasing employment for people with disabilities and veterans, thereby addressing the significant unemployment rate in Allegheny County among those groups.
- The Task Force formed an Employment Committee to strategize on the best use of this grant of just under \$6000. The CCTFD decided to gather feedback from several authoritative institutions, including OVR, United Way, and others. Guests from these organizations have joined the meeting today for this purpose.
- Megan Grabski from the United Way of Southwest PA introduced herself and discussed her work, which centers around helping employers better understand their role in increasing disability employment.
- Tom Armstrong from the University of Pittsburgh Office of Human Resources' Talent Acquisition Team introduced himself and his work. He is passionate about disability and veterans' employment rights and currently is responsible for diversity recruiting and transitioning.
- Beth Butler from Disability:IN introduced herself and her work with Megan at the Disability Inclusion Consortium, where local advocates pull together employers

- across the greater Pittsburgh area to increase awareness and education about disability employment.
- Dwight Boddorf, the Chief Veterans Officer for Allegheny County introduced himself and his work representing about 75,000 veterans in the county, which has one of the highest proportions of veterans. Among other duties, he works with veterans looking for job placement and advocates for more inclusive employment policy. Dwight commented that in addition to physical disabilities, veterans very often experience PTSD which can be a stigma among employers.
 - Rich asked whether he was seeing an increase among people with vision or hearing loss. Dwight responded that his department works with other state and federal agencies that offer benefits to people with vision and/or hearing loss. The Dept of Veterans Affairs offers a low vision clinic for veterans and the VA offers assistive devices and interpreters who are available for those seeking medical care. He added that they are seeing a higher percentage of veterans with hearing loss as a result of their service, however, the number of people serving is shrinking overall.
 - John asked the Chris and the Task Force whether the group was interested in using the grant to create a collaborative process with one of the agencies present, given the limited budget and capacity to take on a greater project as a task force.
 - Dr. Josie Badger introduced herself and discussed her professional foci on children with disabilities transitioning to adulthood and the legislative process in PA.
 - She discussed how her complex disability and need for 24-hour care means that she must maintain a low income to be able to obtain vital services she could not necessarily afford. Josie further illustrated how many people in the disability community are similarly concerned about losing their benefits with gainful employment.
 - OVR, for example, recently returned millions of federal dollars because they were not able to spend it on disability employment for a number of reasons, including the one she'd just outlined.
 - John asked for elaboration on the federal matching agreement with OVR. Josie responded that the federal government matches OVR's spending at a 3.8% rate in addition to the millions of dollars they give. This is one of the highest matching rates of any program at the state level.
 - Rich asked whether any of this money could be used to support those who are self-employed. Josie confirmed that it could.
 - Chris commented that sometimes people in the Deaf community don't want to have to go through OVR to obtain employment. Josie agreed that OVR shouldn't be necessary as a mediator for disabled job seekers and employers.
 - Caylin asked whether the group was interested in taking the project in an educational direction.
 - Michelle commented that social media education for employees, employers, and career centers is an important component.
 - Rich wondered whether more outreach should be done for those experiencing mental health disabilities. Caylin responded that there is a mental health task force at the County.

- Paul reminded the group that a lack of nighttime public transportation was a major limitation indicated on the survey the Task Force released over the summer. He added that there is still a lot of federal money that major service organizations, including the County Dept of Human Services, have been granted that could be used toward this end.
- Josie pointed out that the limited grant money likely prohibits a major transportation project. Given that fact, Josie suggests a partnership with United Way, Disability:In, or another agency to explore ways to help employers consider the disability population more strongly.
- She added that the group could also hold a virtual forum with one or several of the groups represented in the present meeting to connect employers to people with disabilities looking for jobs.
- Megan mentioned other organizations who work within disability spaces, including HERL, and Jewish Family Community Services—Community Able, who may be able to help. She also mentioned Erin Grim as a resource for helping younger folks with disabilities.
- Beth added the Innovation Lab, a program that connects employers and groups of people with disabilities, as a potential resource.
- John commented that he was interested in working in social media spaces and/or with the Innovation Lab.
- Sarah Goldstein said that her employer shares information about retaining social security benefits while working. She noted that her company could not advertise any information that is specific to Allegheny County.
- John asked whether the CCTFD had a Facebook page. Rich interjected that many people with disabilities, especially deafblind folks, don't know how to utilize social media platforms.

E. Events and announcements

- Hillary announced that the Penn Hills Advisory Council to the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission is looking for members of the disability community to serve. Interested parties should contact Ronald Saunders (contact information below).
- Rich informed the group of a public safety issue he recently encountered wherein an active shooter may have been present and the communication was not accessible. He remains concerned about the accessibility of emergency announcements.
 - Michelle underscored Rich's concern and offered to work with Rich on this issue.

Adjournment

Chris made a motion to adjourn, it was seconded by John and the meeting was adjourned at 4:02 p.m.

Relevant links and contact information:

- YouTube link with closed captioning: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G5BkSSvzy5Y>
- Tom Armstrong: Tom.Armstrong@pitt.edu / 412-648-8375

- Dwight Boddorf: Dwight.Boddorf@alleghenycounty.us
- Veterans Services: 412-621-4357
- Innovation Lab Tool Kit: <https://disabilityin.org/resource/innovation-lab-ilab-facilitator-toolkit/>
- Penn Hills Advisory Council to the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission:
Ronald Brooks Saunders, President
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