



# 2025 SPRING NCSAB IN-PERSON CONFERENCE

*Conference Theme: "How to Thrive and Strive in 2025"*

Hyatt Regency Bethesda

One Bethesda Metro Center

7400 Wisconsin Ave, Bethesda, MD 20814

**APRIL 9 – 11, 2025**

**Draft Agenda (Subject to Change)**

*All times are Eastern*

## **WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9, 2025**

- 8:00 am** NCSAB Exhibit Hall (*Regency Foyer*).  
NCSAB Registration (*Regency Foyer*).
- 9:00 am** CSAVR / NCSAB General Session #5 – Fiscal Management.
- 10:00 am** Networking Break.
- 10:30 am** CSAVR/NCSAB General Session #6 – RSA.
- 11:30 am** CSAVR Closing Session.
- 11:45 am** CSAVR Adjourns.
- Lunch (*On Your Own*).



**1:30 pm – 1:45 pm**

**NCSAB Opening, Welcome and Meet the New State Directors (Regency Ballroom I/II).** Join us for our opening welcome session, where we recognize new state directors and attendees and get a conference overview.

**Presenter:** Dorothy Young, Director, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind, Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services and NCSAB President

**1:45pm to 2:15 pm-**

*A Look at the Data. This session will provide attendees with the latest data on performance measures and employment outcomes for blind agencies.*

*Presenter: Michael Quinn, Data Unit Chief, Department of Education Rehabilitation Services Administration*

**2:15 pm – 3:00 pm**

**Policy Update with Catriona Macdonald. (Regency Ballroom I/II).** A comprehensive update on federal policies, legislative developments, and efforts impacting vocational rehabilitation and services for individuals who are blind or have low vision.

**3:00 pm – 4:00 pm**

**Kids Like Me Bookshelf: Using Generative AI and Real-Life Models to Boost Self-Determination in Transition-Age Clients (NIDILRR). (Cabinet Judiciary).**

*There are almost no role model stories for BVI individuals. In 1974, Kenneth Jernigan, then president of the National Federation of the Blind, noted how blindness is completely misrepresented in literature. Jernigan declared that “it is up to blind individuals to shape their literature.”*

*Imagine a virtual library where teens and young adults with vision impairments can see their own potential reflected in real-life success stories co-authored by inspiring BVI role models and enhanced with the power of Generative AI. In this session, we’ll introduce the groundbreaking “Kids Like Me Bookshelf” (KLMB), developed with funding from NIDILRR, and share how it is transforming self-*



*determination skills (self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-advocacy) among BVI teens and young adults.*

*We'll explore how Phase 1 successfully showcased stories from luminaries such as former AFB CEO Kirk Adams and pioneering blind adventurers, and how teens reported feeling more confident about their life journeys after reading these first-person narratives. Then we'll unveil Phase 2, which brings a new web-based AI "ghostwriting" tool that any VI "storyteller" can use to craft their own "role-model" story for BVI teens and young adults to read. These stories will be combined into the KLMB library, and we will be providing this story collection to agencies and schools.*

**Presenter:** Marty Schultz, President, ObjectiveEd

**4:00 pm – 5:00 pm**

## **NCSAB Breakout Sessions**

### **Breakout Room 1 – Transition & Employment**

#### **Session Title: Oklahoma BEST-STEP**

*Oklahoma Rehabilitation Services' Building Employment Skills for Today and Summer Transition Employment Program helps youth with disabilities ages 16-21 years gain meaningful summer work experience, while improving employment readiness skills. Learn more about this five-week, two-part career planning and paid on-the-job free summer job training program.*

#### **Presenters:**

- *Renee Sansom Briscoe, Oklahoma DRS Transition Coordinator*

### **Breakout Room 2 – Technology & Independent Living**

#### **Session Title: Technology: Using AI for Agency Staff**

*Join this session to learn how the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind is using Artificial Intelligence. They will share how agency staff are using an AI service to enhance their work. The session will conclude with a discussion about how AI products are being used by*



*blind and low vision participants for employment and independent living tasks.*

**Presenters:**

- *John Oliveira, Commissioner, Massachusetts Commission for the Blind*
- *Steve Akerman Jr., Moden Technology Executive, Outlook Insight LLC*
- *Fred Jones, Director, Vermont Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired*
- *Shirley Robinson, MS, CRC, Blind Services Coordinator, Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency*

**5:30 pm - 7:00 pm NCSAB Welcome Reception & Exhibitor Showcase – “How to Thrive and Strive in 2025.” (Cabinet/Judiciary).** *Kickoff your NCSAB conference experience with a Welcome Reception, where you’ll catch up with industry colleagues, make new friends, and create connections. Make sure to attend this valuable networking event, where conference exhibitors will also share special presentations.*

**THURSDAY, APRIL 10, 2025**

**8:00 am**                      **NCSAB Registration Opens.**

**NCSAB Exhibit Hall Opens.**

**NCSAB General Session and Exhibitor Showcase with Dorothy Young, NCSAB President. (Regency Ballroom I/II).**

**8:30 am - 9:15 am**                      **Unlocking Opportunities: Maximizing Federal VR Funding Through Community Reinvestment Act Investments. (Regency Ballroom I/II).** *This session will highlight how North Carolina's Division of Services for the Blind and Florida Division of Blind Services successfully leveraged Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) investments to expand funding*



*opportunities and enhance workforce development initiatives through strategic partnership. Attendees will learn how CRA contributions can serve as a funding mechanism, unlocking federal matching dollars to support training, employment, and financial empowerment services for individuals with disabilities. The presentation will walk through North Carolina and Florida's experience, including securing CRA investments that generated additional federal match for each agency. Projects related to Digital literacy and CompTIA certifications will be highlighted. Participants will gain practical insights into engaging financial institutions, meeting state matching requirements, and replicating these strategies to drive employment outcomes within the disability community.*

**Presenters:**

- *Cynthia Speight, Director, Division of Services for the Blind, North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services*
- *Robert L. Doyle III, Division Director for the Florida Department of Education's Division of Blind Services*
- *David Leon, SVRA Technical Assistance Liaison, VRTAC-QM Community Reinvestment Act Special Project, National Disability Institute*

**9:15 am – 10:00 am**

**Creating Pathways to Employment: The Success of the Ablr Works Program. (Regency Ballroom I/II).** *This session will highlight the impact and success of the **\*\*Ablr Works\*\*** program in empowering individuals who are blind or visually impaired to gain meaningful employment. We will focus on the importance of training, collaboration, and customized support in achieving positive outcomes for individuals who are blind or visually impaired. Additionally, we will share the results of our collaboration with the North Carolina Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) and the tangible impact this partnership has had in improving employment outcomes.*

**Presenters:**

- *John Samuel, CEO, Ablr*



- *Logan Passey, Job Developer, Ablr*

**10:00 am – 10:30 am**      **Networking Break & New Directors Forum**

**10:30 am – 11:15 am**      **Randolph-Sheppard Update. (Regency Ballroom I/II).** This session provides a timely update on developments in the Randolph-Sheppard Act cases and trends, including the impact of recent governmental reorganizations.

*Presenter: Andrew Freeman, Esq., Brown, Goldstein and Levy*

**11:15 am – Noon**      **Randolph-Sheppard Contracts. (Regency Ballroom I/II).**

*Presenter: Patricia Dickerson*

**Noon – 1:30 pm**      **NCSAB Committee Working Lunch Breakout Sessions.**

- **NCSAB Technology Committee. (Regency III Meeting Room).**
- **NCSAB Transition Committee. (Regency Annex Meeting Room).**
- **NCSAB Employment Committee. (Susquehanna/Severn Meeting Room).**
- **NCSAB Independent Living/Older Blind Committee. (Regency IV).**
- **NCSAB Randolph-Sheppard Committee. (Diplomat Meeting Room).**

**1:30 pm – 2:15 pm**      **Career Quest: Achieving Great Outcomes with the Blind. (Regency Ballroom I/II).** This presentation focuses on meaningful opportunities that result from partnerships between the National Federation of the Blind and state blindness agencies. We also review the 15+ year history that the Federation has related to autonomous vehicles, the policy perspectives agencies for the blind can bring to these conversations and discuss innovative ways Avs can enhance employment outcomes. This session also shares information on technology advocacy and the growing work of AI.

*Presenter: Anil Lewis, Executive Director of Blindness Initiatives, National Federation of the Blind*



**2:15 pm – 3:00 pm**

**Getting Job Seekers in Front of Employers - And Getting Them Hired! (Regency Ballroom I/II).** *This session will provide insights, strategies, and practical takeaways on how to organize and implement a successful Virtual Reverse Job Fair. Topics will include:*

- *Recruiting and educating employers on hiring individuals with visual impairment*
- *Vetting and preparing job seekers to confidently pitch their skills*
- *Marketing and communications planning to ensure strong participation*
- *Video clips from the Visions of Employment Webinar with employer testimonials*
- *Follow-up strategies and data collection to track progress and success*
- *Planning committee structure, costs, and logistics*

**Presenters:**

- *Carol Cullins, Employment Services Supervisor, Massachusetts Commission for the Blind*
- *Daniel Martin, Employment Services Specialist, Massachusetts Commission for the Blind*

**3:00 pm – 3:45 pm**

**Technology Skills and Career Success. (Regency Ballroom I/II).** *In today's digital age, technology is essential to every aspect of our daily lives. For individuals who are blind or visually impaired, the ability to engage with technology is not just a matter of convenience but a gateway to professional opportunities. The number of workplaces requiring technology skills is projected to grow from 50% today to 75% by 2030. Additionally, roles in the technology sector are growing from 6 million jobs in 2024 to 7.1 million jobs in 2034. This presentation aims to emphasize the importance of strong technology*



*skills for blind and visually impaired individuals, the growing demand for digital accessibility experts, and the pivotal role organizations like the Carroll Center for the Blind play in empowering individuals to succeed in the technology-driven job market.*

**Presenters:**

- *Brian Switzer, Program Manager of Accessibility Technology, Training and Research, Carrol Center for the Blind*
- *Billy Parker, Workforce Development, Carroll Center for the Blind and ServiceSource*
- *Dina Rosenbaum, Chief Program Officer, Carroll Center for the Blind*

**3:45 pm – 4:00 pm**

**Networking Break.**

**4:00 pm – 5:00 pm**

**5 Cs of Employee Engagement: Connect. Care. Contribute. Coach. Celebrate: How to Thrive and Strive in 2025. (Regency Ballroom I/II).** *“Always treat your employees exactly as you want them to treat your best customers.” - Stephen Covey \*\* In this session, we will be offering tools and resources for engaging employees and for enhancing and supporting your agency’s strategies for retaining and engaging VR staff.*

- *Overview of successful training curriculum and strategies.*
- *Strategies for making employees feel appreciated and valued.*
- *Participate in activities designed to improve connections, create a culture of belonging and inclusion, and boost morale.*

*Get tools and resources and a how to guide for implementation of activities with your team members.*

**Presenters:**

- *Dr. Robin Freeman, Director, UA CURRENTS*
- *Dr. Bernice Davis, Executive Director, New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired*





**5:00 pm**                      **Adjourn for the Day**

**FRIDAY APRIL 11, 2025**

**8:00 am**                      **NCSAB Executive Committee Meeting - Committee Members Only. (Congressional Meeting Room).**

**NCSAB Registration. (Regency Foyer).**

**NCSAB Exhibit Hall. (Regency Foyer).**

**9:00 am – 9:30 am**                      **NCSAB Business Meeting and Committee Reports. (Cabinet Judiciary).**

**9:30 am – 10:30 am**                      **Panel Discussion on programs that support our specialized field**

**10:30 am – 11:30 am**                      **Autonomous Vehicles Industry Association. (Cabinet Judiciary).** *This session discusses the use of autonomous vehicles by persons who are blind or have low vision and shares how autonomous vehicles can create or support potential employment outcomes for people with disabilities.*

**Presenter:** *Jeff Farrah, AVIA CEO*

**11:30 am – Noon**                      **Closing Session. (Cabinet Judiciary).**

**Presenter:** *Dorothy Young, Director, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind, Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services and NCSAB President*

**Noon**                                      **Conference Adjourns**