

# AVIT Meeting Minutes – March 8, 2022

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## **In attendance:**

Cyral Miller, Chair, Central TX Professionals for VI  
Emily Coleman, Secretary  
Mary Ann Siller, Treasurer  
Chris Tabb, TSBVI, and TAER O&M  
Susie Welsh, DBMAT  
Neva Fairchild, AER President/AFB  
Peggy Garrett, TX ACB President  
Kathi Garza, associate member  
Dr. Rona Pogrud, TTU/TAER Past-President/ TUPVI  
Nicholas Trotter, TEA  
Juanita Barker, TWC  
Lee Sonnenberg, All Blind Children of TX  
Matt Daw, Sight Savers America  
Karissa Sanchez, HHSC  
Linda Jordan, associate member  
Kate Borg, TSBVI Outreach  
Jennifer Bailey, DBMAT  
Dr. Carolyn Carman, Envision Dallas

*Note: there is an acronym list at the end for help in following these notes!*

**Cyral Miller called the meeting to order on ZOOM at 10:03 a.m.**

## **Approval of minutes**

Cyral called a vote for approval of minutes and Mary Ann Siller motioned and Chris Tabb seconded and all approved of the December 2021 minutes.

## **Treasurer's Report**

Mary Ann Siller emailed our Treasurer's report this morning. Our current balance is \$3769.97 with no deposits or withdrawals to report.

## New Business

Cyral shared she is continuing to follow up with NFB and NFB Texas to determine if there is a comparable version of the national "BRITE Act " being proposed in Texas. No word has been received yet. The Act can be found [here](#).

## Agency/Organization Updates

### ***TEA, Nicholas Trotter***

Since the last AVIT meeting, it has been fairly quiet at TEA related to vision education. TDB certification test development continues. The Network is developing an O&M module course for the near future targeting administrators outside of the field of blindness education. Question regarding if TVIs have to take the Reading Academies has been discussed and only the "teacher of record" for students in K-3 need to take the academies per HB 3. Outside of those teachers, the district can make the determination. Finally, the grant cycle for the network is underway for next year.

### ***TSBVI, Emily Coleman & Kate Borg***

We continue to work through our strategic planning in preparation for our legislative appropriations request for the next legislative session. Our top priority identified was recruitment and retention with a focus on funding pay increases for direct care staff and requesting additional funds for the university programs. In addition, we'd like to grow Outreach programs and focus on student evaluation and identification. We also identified a need to prioritize the promotion of student independence and empowerment, which isn't necessarily a funding need, but a strategic priority to improve student outcomes.

Campus events leading into spring include our SCASB track meet in Mississippi, Prom, Graduation in May, Spring Break next week, and our Spring Play, "The Lion King, Jr." Given TSBVI was fully funded for summer programs during the 87th legislative session, STP is busy planning for summer students with over 250 applicants. We're hoping for four full weeks of summer learning. Unfortunately, the week planned for Goalball had to be canceled due to the low number of applicants, but we're hoping to revisit next year.

Kate shared that Outreach had a successful Texas Focus Conference in February, focused on policy, procedure, and best practices, with about 400 in attendance. Outreach has two positions open for educational consultants. You can find more information here; <https://www.tsbvi.edu/current-positions-available>. Seeking ideas for supporting child find around Texas, which may transition to an AVIT ask down the road.

### ***TWC, Juanita Barker***

Staff are 100% back in the community in schools and homes. Criss Cole is fully open and we're glad to be able to deliver in-person services again. TWC has established contracts with outside providers including Perkins School for the Blind and World Services for the Blind. TWC is also looking into Deafblind service providers.

***Dr. Carolyn Carmen, Envision Dallas***

Envision Dallas purchased a new facility in the Dallas area being renovated now which will allow them to expand services. They have about 150 persons who are B/VI working at Envision Dallas. Dr. Carmen is the new Medical Director and their goal is to concentrate and expand the services role. Sponsoring the Envision University “Grand Rounds” on April 21st. Her lecture focus will be on blindness and total vision loss. Golf tournament coming up April 25th at Cowboys Golf Club.

***Neva Fairchild, AFB and AER President***

AFB Leadership Conference is happening in person May 2-3 in Arlington, VA. Blind Leaders program meeting 3 days prior – Early, mid, and late career (training and mentors). More at: [afb.org/blindleaders](http://afb.org/blindleaders). Recruiting now for 3rd cohort. Vision loss adult workgroup: helping HHSC to help older people who are blind access services. Hoping to increase the effectiveness of the website and efforts to help people know what services and options are available. Ex: created a new tips sheet which is in review that is designed to be distributed to nursing homes, long term care facilities, etc to let them know etiquette and do’s and don’ts.

The AER Executive Director position has been posted. Application closes on March 21st. AER conference will be held July 20-24 in St. Louis. Registration will open soon. AER Personnel Prep Division webinar yesterday shared information about recruitment. The most recognized way to get into our field is to hear about our work through a friend, colleague, or acquaintance highlighting the importance of sharing what we do whenever we can, e.g., “*Share your passion!*”

***Family Lynx, Barbara Knighton (emailed update on 3/7/22)***

Family Lynx has just released a new campus tour video. Please go to [www.TSBVI.edu](http://www.TSBVI.edu) to tour the Sites and listen to the Sounds of our beautiful campus. We have recently started a monthly Resource Round Up email sharing valuable resources and information with families. If you would like a copy of the email please let us know. We are currently focusing on transition to adulthood during our monthly family meetings. Last month we hosted TXP2P and discussed guardianship and their Pathways to Adulthood program. This month we will be talking about transition services and the EXIT program. In April Renee Parker with Shredding On the Go will be speaking about entrepreneurship for your child with disabilities. In May Haley Greer with DRTX will be speaking about SSI and ABLE accounts. We are currently helping with in-person tours for prospective families. We will be helping with creating an awesome prom experience for the students. Contact Family Lynx at [familylynx@tsbvi.edu](mailto:familylynx@tsbvi.edu).

***Texas University Professionals in VI (TUPVI) - TTU update, Rona Pogrud***

TTU is halfway through their OSEP Personnel Prep Grant, Project INVITE; training TSVIs and COMS with a focus on neurological visual impairment (NVI)/cortical visual impairment (CVI). First cohort is finishing in Summer 2022. Cohort two has been accepted to begin in June 2022 with seven individuals from Texas. Search in process for a new faculty member at TTU in VI

and O&M; search has been narrowed to three finalists. The Reach Across Texas program has a May 1st deadline to apply for summer. For those working with an emergency certification in the fall they need to apply ASAP. Rona is receiving the AFB Corinne Kirchner Research Award at the Leadership Conference in May based on articles written on the VISSIT in partnership with Shannon Darst and Michael Munro. TAER conference coming up at the end of this month in Round Rock, TX.

SFASU is currently on Spring Break.

***AER O&M Division and TAER, Chris Tabb***

AER Executive Director search is continuing and open to applicants through March 21st. TAER Conference is right around the corner. Awards for the O&M Division and AER open as a whole and encourage people to nominate those who you know are excelling. SWOMA is being planned for an in-person event in Round Rock this year. The session proposal window is open now through March 28th.

***Matt Daw, Sight Savers***

Sight Savers provided equipment in the Austin/San Antonio area for about 40 individuals and 16 students in Houston. Has received funding for the Dallas area and the Rio Grande region. After Feb 2023, will be back in West Texas. Matt provided a list of their active counties via email.

***DBMAT, Suzie Welch***

Planning a meeting with Senator Cornyn to request additional spots within the DBMD waiver. Family Camp is looking to be virtual this year and DBMAT is planning a virtual celebration on Helen Keller's birthday in June. Cyral mentioned that AVIT has supported advocacy for waiver spots in the past and if DBMAT provides us with materials, we can vote to provide support for DBMAT's legislative priorities.

**Note: This is the process for AVIT activity across all member organizations - any group can bring forward a proposal, and if we get a unanimous positive vote from member organizations, AVIT will mobilize to take action.**

***HHSC - BCP, Karissa Sanchez***

Brain Injury Awareness Conference:

<https://register.gotowebinar.com/register/6845089224334775566>

<https://register.gotowebinar.com/register/7988263558361477392>

Office of Disability Prevention for Children Statewide Conference:

<https://register.gotowebinar.com/register/3402962519329089291>

Jobs webpage: <https://hrportal.hhsc.state.tx.us>

There is a new ILS Program Report:

<https://www.hhs.texas.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ils-legislative-report-dec-2021.pdf>

Contact information:

Policy Specialist, Karissa Sanchez [Karissa.sanchez@hhs.texas.gov](mailto:Karissa.sanchez@hhs.texas.gov)  
BCP Program Manager, Joan Cooksey [joan.cooksey@hhs.texas.gov](mailto:joan.cooksey@hhs.texas.gov)  
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North Field Manager Kathalene Gale [kathalene.gale@hhs.texas.gov](mailto:kathalene.gale@hhs.texas.gov)

Cyral asked the question if the ILS report breaks out info for clients who are blind/vi. Karissa stated that yes, it can be broken down by disability (VI/DB).

### ***Peggy Garrett, TX ACB***

Participating in the leadership meetings with national ACB, and working to advocate on a federal level. Statewide, still involved with voting issues. Several people had serious issues (machines, training of poll workers). Getting ready for the state convention in Austin; August 25-28, with exhibitors and sessions. Hoping to be in person. Will let us know exact dates and sessions. Annual scholarship is open and applications will close on June 15th—for any TX student who is legally blind with a GPA of 3.0. Youth Advantage program; for students age 13-17, hoping to be in person—more info forthcoming.

### ***Lee Sonnenberg, All Blind Children Texas***

ABC TX is a non-profit providing grant funding to TSVIs and O&Ms across the state. Their Executive Director, Gloria Bennett, has retired/resigned. Lee is serving as interim until a new ED can be hired. ABC is excited to see an increase in grant requests and they will be rolling out a second grant program this spring/summer for students who just graduated from high school. This will be an independent living grant/scholarship. Students can use the funding to go to college, university, or community college or move out on their own. Lee's email is [lee.sonnenberg@gmail.com](mailto:lee.sonnenberg@gmail.com).

## **Discussion/Announcements**

Cyral reminded everyone to share if they have an initiative for which they would like to solicit AVIT support. Please reach out to Cyral - [cyralm@gmail.com](mailto:cyralm@gmail.com), Mary Ann - [dmasiller@sbcglobal.net](mailto:dmasiller@sbcglobal.net), or Emily [colemane@tsbvi.edu](mailto:colemane@tsbvi.edu) as needed.

## **Future Meeting Dates:**

The next meeting date is Tuesday, June 14th on Zoom. AVIT meetings are from 10-12.

Chris Tabb motioned to adjourn the meeting and Kathi Garza seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 11:19 a.m. by Cyral Miller.

*Minutes respectfully submitted by Emily Coleman.*

## **A. Acronyms!**

There are a lot of shortcut acronyms used in these notes. Here's a handy cheat sheet:

AVIT - Alliance of and for Visually Impaired Texans

BCVDDP (or BCP) - Blind Children's Vocational Discovery and Development Program (aka Blind Children's Program), now housed at HHSC

CEC - Council for Exceptional Children

CILS - Center for Independent Living Services

COMS - Certified orientation and mobility specialist

CVI - Cortical Visual Impairment

DB - Deafblind

ESC - Education Service Center

FAQ - Frequently Asked Questions

HHSC - Health and Human Services Commission

HR - human resources (personnel)

IL - independent living programs

IT - information technology (technology services)

NFADB – National Family Association for Deaf-Blind

NVI - Neurological visual impairment (often referred to as CVI)

OIB - Older Individuals who are Blind

O&M – orientation and mobility

RCT – Rehabilitation Council of Texas

SFA or SFASU – Stephen F. Austin State University

SSP - Support Service Provider

STP - Short Term Programs at TSBVI

TDB - Teacher of students who are Deafblind

TEA - Texas Education Agency

TSBVI - Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

TTU – Texas Tech University

TUPVI – Texas University Professors in Visual Impairment

TWC - Texas Workforce Commission

TWS - Texas Workforce Solutions

VR - vocational rehabilitation

WIOA - Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, the legislation that governs much of the vocational rehabilitation moneys from the Federal government