

Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Program Professional Standards Committee

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, March 29, 2023, 10:30 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Tuckahoe – Henrico Public Library
1901 Starling Drive
Henrico, Virginia 23229

Members Present:

Angela Blount, Associate Director, Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance
Judy Castelee, Executive Director, Project Horizon
Cori Davis, Program Director, Bedford Domestic Violence Services
Elvira de la Cruz, Chief Executive Officer, Latinos in Virginia Empowerment Center
Shel Douglas, Director, Fauquier County Social Services
Nancy Fowler, Program Manager, Office of Family Violence, DSS
Tamy Mann, Director, Giles County Victim/Witness Assistance Program
Jennifer Quitiquit, Director, Chesterfield County Victim/Witness Assistance Program
Heather Sellers, Director, Bedford County Victim/Witness Assistance Program
Shelley Strain, Executive Director, Eastern Shore Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Kristina Vadas, Manager of Victims Services, DCJS

Members Absent:

Leonard Hall, Jr, Director, Millstone International Logistics
Teresa McKensie, Assistant Director, Radford/Floyd Victim/Witness Assistance Program
Ellen Wheeler, Assistant Director, Project Horizon

Professional Standards Team Members Present:

Amber Stanwix, Professional Standards Coordinator, DCJS
Andrea Sutton, Professional Standards Consultant, DCJS

Members of the Public Present:

Cherelle Cotton, ARPA Grant Administrator, DSS
Avery Harper, Domestic Violence/Housing Advocate, Phoenix Project
Sheree Hedrick, Executive Director, Hanover Safe Place
Lisa Herbaugh, Children's Project Coordinator, The Laurel Center for Intervention
Cindy Marzullo, Development Director, The Laurel Center for Intervention
Jana McDermott, SV/DV Fund Contract Administrator, DSS
Faith Power, Executive Director, The Laurel Center for Intervention
Laura Beth Weaver, Executive Director, Women's Resource Center of the New River Valley

Welcome & Remarks

The meeting started at 10:45a.m. Representatives from DCJS began by introducing themselves and explaining their roles in the Professional Standards process. The members of the Committee then introduced themselves; and the members of the public followed.

Kristina Vadas then led a brief discussion about community concerns regarding the makeup of the Committee. Under *Virginia Code § 9.1-116.3*, the members of the Committee are required to be “leadership staff of local sexual and domestic violence programs”. Several members of the Committee do not meet this requirement, although many of those members do have extensive backgrounds working with local sexual and domestic violence programs. In addition, the makeup of the Committee is required to “take into consideration racial and ethnic diversity and shall be representative of regional and geographic locations of the Commonwealth”. This requirement also does not appear to be met.

A Committee member then added that she has heard concerns from various members of the sexual and domestic violence (SDV) community regarding the makeup of the Committee. As a member who was involved in the initial drafting of the Professional Standards, she referred to the point that the accreditation evaluation is supposed to be a peer-reviewed process. She raised the question whether the process can be considered peer-reviewed when several of the Committee are not working with local sexual and domestic violence agencies, and thus are not peers of that community.

The group was open to this discussion and agreed to bear this feedback in mind moving forward. The Professional Standards Team also agreed to continue providing any comments that they hear from the SDV community to the Committee.

Review of Current By-laws

Amber Stanwix reviewed the by-laws currently governing the Professional Standards Committee. She informed the Committee that the current by-laws were drafted in 2016 and reference the Committee duties and responsibilities, membership requirements, and quorum requirements as they existed prior to 2021. She also discussed the need for the election of a Committee Chair and Vice-Chair.

During this discussion, a Committee member raised the question of whether the by-laws could be amended to address the concerns of the SDV community regarding the Committee membership. The group then had a conversation about possible changes that could be made to the by-laws, including limiting the voting rights of those who are not leadership staff of sexual and domestic violence programs. Several Committee members and the members of the Professional Standards Team expressed concerns with this idea. The group agreed to make this an action item for discussion at a future meeting.

Election of Committee Chair and Vice-Chair

After a brief discussion, Judy Castele was elected as the Chair of the Committee. Elvira de la Cruz was then elected as the Vice-Chair of the Committee.

Legislative Changes Impacting the Professional Standards Committee

Amber Stanwix reviewed two legislative changes that impact the Professional Standards Committee. The first was House Bill 2137 from 2021. This bill was responsible for the changes to the makeup of the Committee that were discussed earlier in the meeting. In addition, the bill created specific duties and responsibilities for both the Committee and DCJS. Finally, this bill stated that a majority of the voting members of the Committee would constitute a quorum. Due to the changes in membership requirements, Committee responsibilities, and quorum requirements, Amber Stanwix informed the Committee that the by-laws were revised, and the new version would need to be adopted.

She also discussed a second bill, House Bill 444, which was enacted in 2022. This bill created a new section under the Virginia Freedom of Information Act to allow for all-virtual public meetings and remote participation by members, provided that certain conditions are met. Amber Stanwix informed the Committee about the requirements of the bill, one of which is that the Committee must adopt a policy prior to having an all-virtual meeting or utilizing remote participation.

After this presentation, Shel Douglas moved that the revised by-laws be adopted. This motion was seconded by Elvira de la Cruz; and the updated by-laws were duly adopted by the Committee.

Shel Douglas then moved that the Policy on Participation of Professional Standards Committee Members in Meetings by Electronic Means Pursuant to Virginia Code § 2.2-3708.3 be adopted by the Committee. Elvira de la Cruz also seconded this motion; and the Policy was duly adopted by the Committee.

Review of Professional Standards Manual and Procedure Documents

Amber Stanwix and Andrea Sutton presented a brief overview of all the Professional Standards. They then reviewed the procedure documents that have been created to explain the processes used during the application period, how accreditation recommendations may be approved, and how appeals operate.

A Committee member asked why nonprofit agencies are required to pay \$150 to apply for accreditation. She raised concerns that the cost may be prohibitive for some agencies. Kristina Vadas, as well as some former Committee members who were present, informed the Committee that the purpose of the fee was to create a sense that the agency was buying in to the process. In addition, the former Committee was seeking to align the Professional Standards accreditation process with other accreditation processes in the Commonwealth, such as the law enforcement accreditation process.

This sparked a conversation about whether the \$150 was enough to create the sense of buy-in. Some Committee members who have engaged with the application process stated that they did not recall paying the fee, and therefore the amount might not be sufficient to create a sense of urgency in following through with the process. However, they did state that, while the financial investment may not be large, the significant investment of time could be a motivating factor.

On the other hand, there were concerns that the fee, as well as any of the costs of complying with the Standards, could be too much for many nonprofit agencies and might discourage agencies from applying. This is particularly true because there is currently no funding tied to accreditation. Therefore, there is no specific financial benefit to becoming accredited. The Committee then discussed different ways to potentially tie the accreditation to funding, but it was agreed to table that conversation to a later date.

A Committee member also inquired about how much information is shared under the peer-reviewed process and if the amount of information shared might make agencies uncomfortable. She also expressed concerns that the Committee and the Standards have become too restrictive. A member of the public also asked if agencies would be able to see the accreditation recommendations before they were presented to the Committee and if agencies would be able to sign off on any recommendations.

Amber Stanwix and Andrea Sutton explained that, as the Professional Standards Team, they are responsible for reviewing all information and that only a summary would be presented to the Committee. This triggered a lengthy discussion regarding how the actions of the Professional Standards Team may be monitored in the future. Concerns were raised about the potential for unqualified agencies to be accredited and the loss of institutional knowledge should the current Professional Standards Team leave DCJS. The group agreed to add this question to the list of action items.

A Committee member also raised concerns about the provisional status recommendation. She questioned the purpose and wondered if it was too lenient in terms of qualifications. Provisional accreditation is granted to agencies that do not have 100% compliance but who do offer the core services. These services must include a hotline, provisions for emergency housing, and emergency accompaniment for victims of sexual and/or domestic violence. A former Committee member stated that this status was created to get agencies in the door. The agency would then be required to develop a plan of action describing how the agency would comply with all unmet criteria. The Professional Standards Team would then work with the agency as it worked on the plan of action and keep the Committee updated as to the progress.

Finally, the group had a lengthy discussion about the approval process, particularly why the documents state that a vote only needs to be by a majority of those present and voting. Amber Stanwix pointed out that this language is also in the by-laws. Kristina Vadas informed the Committee that the purpose of this language was so that if Committee members had to step out if their own agency was being discussed, the Committee would still be able to hold a vote even

without a quorum. This sparked further questions regarding whether members with agencies under discussion must physically leave the room or if they just must abstain from voting. It was agreed that this question would be added as an action item.

Lunch

The Committee broke for lunch at 12:30p.m. The meeting resumed at 1:33p.m.

Review of Professional Standards Application and Site Visit Checklist

Amber Stanwix and Andrea Sutton presented a brief overview of the current application for accreditation, as well as the site visit checklist. They informed the group that both documents are available on the Professional Standards website so that agencies can review them at any time.

Discussion Regarding Post-Accreditation Actions

As no agencies have been accredited yet, there is currently no process for notifying agencies about accreditation status decisions. Andrea Sutton and Amber Stanwix informed the group that a letter would be drafted to each agency notifying them of the decision of the Committee. However, they raised the question as to who should sign the letter.

The Chair opened this question up to the group. After some discussion, it was suggested that the Chair of the Committee and the Manager of the Victims Services Team at DCJS would sign.

Shel Douglas moved that the signing authority be given to the Chair and the Manager of the Victims Services Team with DCJS. This motion was seconded by Cori Davis, and the motion was duly adopted by the Committee.

Description of Accreditation Process to Date

Andrea Sutton and Amber Stanwix then offered a presentation on the current state of the accreditation process. They described how many agencies had applied during the first two rounds of the application process and what the review status was for those agencies. They then discussed their plan to open a third round for applications beginning with accepting Organizational Self-Assessment Summaries in July and then accepting applications in mid-August through September. Finally, they informed the group that they would like to use the second and third meetings of the year to review accreditation status recommendations, and then use the fourth meeting to discuss potential changes to the Professional Standards.

A Committee member requested further information as to how the recommendations to the Committee would be presented. The Professional Standards Team responded that the recommendation would consist of information about the agency, any highlights, any issues that were discovered in terms of the meeting the Professional Standards, the accreditation recommendation, and any optional or soft recommendations. A member of the public asked

how an agency would know what the status recommendation would be. Other members of the public, as well as several Committee members, expressed similar questions.

This generated a lengthy discussion regarding how much information agencies should receive prior to the recommendation to the Committee. The Professional Standards Team informed the Committee that, in their opinion, agencies should be aware of what the recommendation will be due to the ongoing communicative nature of the accreditation process. After much discussion, the Committee determined that it would be best to send a final letter to agencies prior to the meeting in which its status would be discussed informing the agency that the Team is closing the application process, requesting any final materials, and providing a date 30 days prior to the meeting by which those materials must be submitted. Finally, the Committee requested that the Team send a letter to all agencies notifying them of the date and time that their accreditation status recommendation will be heard by the Committee.

In response to a question from a Committee member, the Team also informed the group that they will revisit agencies if an issue has arisen between the first site visit and the status recommendation presentation. They provided an example of an agency with an Executive Director who departed. The Team would then revisit the agency to ensure that the transition to a new Executive Director was going smoothly. It was recommended that the Team create a procedure document laying out the steps the Team will take if a follow-up visit is deemed necessary. This was added to the list of action items.

A further question posed by a Committee member was whether the Committee would have enough information to make an informed decision regarding accreditation status. The group discussed their role in contrast to that of the Professional Standards Team. Kristina Vadas reminded everyone that the purpose of having the Professional Standards Team was to create a team of individuals with the sole task of evaluating agencies under the Standards. Having two people also limits the potential for bias, as does having the Team work with DCJS and therefore not be affiliated with any particular agency. The Team also urged the Committee to allow the process to move forward as it has been established and use that opportunity to identify any areas that may need to be modified, including how the Committee is informed.

Other questions were asked regarding the reviews of the agencies, particularly how the Professional Standards Team can collect information as to how agencies are viewed by their communities. One Committee member asked if the Team contacts organizations with whom an agency may have a Memorandum of Understanding. The Team responded that this is not currently a part of the process.

Finally, a Committee member asked whether having one meeting to discuss any edits to the Professional Standards would be sufficient. The Professional Standards Team assured her that any revisions to the Professional Standards would be an ongoing process and that multiple meetings would be utilized.

Public Comment

The members of the public had no additional comments.

Closing Remarks

The meeting adjourned at 2:53p.m.

Action Items

- Presentation on the Freedom of Information Act
- Develop a procedure document laying out the steps that the Professional Standards Team will take should a follow-up visit be deemed necessary
- Should members of the Committee who are not leadership staff of sexual and domestic violence programs be able to vote on accreditation status recommendations?
- Should Committee members be allowed to remain in the room when their agency's recommendation regarding accreditation status is being discussed?
- Should there be a process by which the records of the Professional Standards Team are audited? If so, who would be responsible for that?
- Should accreditation under Professional Standards be tied to grant funding in some way? If so, how?

Future Meetings

- May 9, 2023, 10:30a.m. to 4:00p.m., Glen Allen – Henrico Public Library
- July 12, 2023, 10:00a.m. to 4:00p.m., Virtual Meeting
- September 2023, TBD