

Self-Direction Advisory Board Meeting Minutes
March 5, 2025; revised July 11, 2025 (cam)

Attendance: See attached.

Nancy Alterio called the meeting to order.

Jaclyn Grant completed the roll call.

Nancy asked for motions to accept the 12.4.2024 minutes

First Motion: Robin Foley

Second Motion: Liz Fahey

Motion passed unanimously.

Introductions: Ed Underwood is filling the family member vacancy. Jaclyn is replacing Liz Sandblom.

Guests: Jacob Schmidt, COO- Acumen; Elizabeth Kiefer, VP of Operations- Acumen

DDS Updates: Sarah Peterson, Acting Commissioner

- Many updates since December. Liz has accepted a job opportunity in the private sector. Colleen Mulligan is assuming the Acting Asst. Commissioner's role.
- We are joined by Acumen Leadership today- we will be receiving updates later in the agenda. Acumen and the Self Direction Team have been working together to address the concerns and transitional issues. Thank you for your feedback, expressing concerns and assisting us with resolution of the issues. Thank you to Jaclyn, John, Ed, Amy, and Julia for your work and dedication.
- Holly McCarthy has stepped into the Acting Director of Client Assessment Systems role, in addition to her role as the Director of Community Life and Engagement. Tim, Colleen and I spent time with Holly and her SISA Team in Shrewsbury to hear updates about their work. Many participants in the process have reported that they have learned much about the individual they are supporting/ their family member.
- Budget: the federal decisions may impact the dollars available. The House 1 budget looks like an increase for DDS, due to non- discretionary spending, however the budget is tight. DDS looking to implement policies to utilize our residential capacity better. Developing new programs for those aging into our system and those moving out of nursing homes. Working to develop new day programs and expand self-direction. Self-direction has grown over the past fiscal year. Prioritizing uses of assistive technology and developing new services for individuals with autism.
- Regarding the news out of Washington and how it impacts individuals with ID/D, I am maintaining frequent communication with my counterparts nationwide and working closely with other state agencies and our providers. Cuts to programs, such as SNAP, would be devastating. There are concerns that reductions in waiver revenue may impact services. DDS holding firm to the commitment to support individuals and families. Looking forward to hearing your input and thank you for your partnership and support.

Nancy Alterio- Executive Director DPPC, SDAB Chair

- Thank you to everyone who has served on the SDAB, the work is challenging. With Ed Underwood coming on to the Board, our last vacant seat is filled. Should we reach out to the Board members who have not attended for some time? Nancy opened the discussion to the next steps.

Questions/Comments:

- Discussion occurred regarding membership of the Board. Explore the reasons why some members do not participate. Location may be a barrier for transportation as the meetings are now in- person. Moving the location around the state was suggested as attending meetings in Waltham as a barrier for many. Although hybrid offered, it is just a call-in without a visual option. Can there be a better virtual system offered? Loss of interest? Polling Board members regarding interest and attendance, what does it mean to serve?
- It was suggested that basic attendance/ participation requirements be developed. Typically, this is completed via the development of a Board's by-laws. The SDAB currently does not have by-laws. Members expressed that basic expectations may be sufficient.
- Discussion also about making the meeting more meaningful.
- Outreach to members regarding their desire to serve.

Independent Facilitator: Robin Foley, Parent and Sub-Committee member

- The sub-committee is working on an IF option for families and individuals to hire someone to help them with their budget, hiring, and other activities. The group has been investigating what other states do- California, Pennsylvania, Michigan and Maine. Some use virtual training to certify an Independent Facilitator, others use a hybrid model. The sub-committee, like the Maine curriculum and model- virtual delivery, offers access 24/7 on demand to fit into a person's schedule. This curriculum also incorporated quizzes and knowledge checks, both felt to be necessary to assure the applicant has the necessary information.
- Moving forward- develop a training RFR. Jaclyn and her Team working on this now. The goal is to attract skilled vendors to assist with design and training. It is possible to use the state's LMS system to house this curriculum/ training once developed, track completion of the course, and maintain a qualified list of available IFs.
- Use of SharePoint site for families to view the qualified list and to have a link for those interested in taking the training and becoming certified.

Questions/Comments:

- How long will this take? Discussion occurred regarding the state procurement process. Will move as quickly as possible to post this RFR, review responses, and reach out to those who have the skillset for this training need.
- Will engage a vendor who can work with DDS and with the SDAB sub-committee to design the curriculum needed.
- This RFR will be useful for future DDS training needs.
- The law was passed in 2014- requirements for an IF were not outlined. If this process takes months/ years, can we just start with minimal qualifications and build in the curriculum and certification later? We are working as quickly as possible.

FMS Update: Jaclyn Grant, Director of Self- Direction Models

- Acknowledged the challenging transition with late staff payments, participants not in the DCI portal, training gaps.
- Positive development: implemented customer service agent availability for 1:1 booking opportunities with families and Employers of Record. Regional Managers have shared this out with Support Brokers.
- Development to come soon: DocuSign- a secure program for hiring and credentialing staff. Share a link with the staff member you want to hire. It eliminates paper packets and electronic packets shared and submitted by email.
- Training coming: Employer training in approving staff time and managing DCI. These are posted on the website, and the flyers have been shared out.
- Reconciling budgets: this is a work in progress.

Questions/ Comments:

Q: Expression of frustration with incorrect budget for family members. At this time, Ed shared a document he had prepared for the SDAB members. Participants have lost employees, very challenging. Portal is difficult to use- much more challenging than the previous portal. Changes in payroll approval have been confusing to end users.

A: Acumen response: Jake- appreciate the feedback. It is important we have this. We are dedicated to getting this to a smooth and steady state. In these transitions, we typically receive clean data- not achieved in this case and we needed to rebuild with the DDS budgets to set this up properly. Our goal is to get everyone set up in the system and to reconcile budgets. Overall communication is critical, and additional training is coming in March/ April. Take back this feedback to ensure configuring DCI to meet the needs and to be understandable.

Q: Can you explain the taxes taken out of employees check- the workman's comp, state unemployment costs are higher, and the training fee is new.

A: These are set on the state's claims. Workforce training is a Massachusetts tax. Guidance for unemployment tax comes out in early January, so was not available for employers before this. Will take this back for additional review with Tax Team.

The Path Forward: SIS-A Update: Holly McCarthy, Acting Director of Client Assessments

- Holly presented an update on the implementation of the SIS- A for the development of a budget allocation. Currently the Team has completed over 325 assessments with SD participants. Participants were randomly selected by HSRI and listed for completion. These are volunteer only, so it has been a challenge. Continuing to work on this.
- HSRI selected randomly traditional participants for participation in the volunteer SISA assessment. HSRI will use both the SD and the traditional assessments in their analysis for recommendations of a budget methodology for SD allocations.
- We have 11 assessors to date credentialed. The second cohort of 6 are finishing up their live training with AAIDD. Hiring for 2 additional program coordinator positions to organize, schedule, and track assessments.
- The Path Forward is now live on our DDS website on mass.gov

Questions/Comments:

- Discussion of the selection process and the difficulty scheduling given the 2–3-hour commitment. It was suggested to provide more detailed information on the purpose of these assessments and the good outcomes that will come from the budget allocation process established. Comments provided on the usefulness of the information in the Summary for planning.

Public Comment

Robert Beckett: The 2014 Real Lives Law established that all individuals participating in self-determination/self-direction have the right to retain an Individual Facilitator if they so decide. The Real Lives Law required that DDS publish regulations setting forth the minimum qualifications for Independent Facilitators and publish a list of qualified Independent Facilitators. Ten years later, in October 2024, DDS published regulations setting forth minimum qualifications. Despite the fact that the minimum qualifications set forth in the regulations do not require training, DDS has now decided training will be required prior to posting a listing of Individual Facilitators who meet the regulation requirements. The timeline for implementing such training is not apparent. In the meantime, individuals' participants in self-determination/self-direction continue to be denied the right to retain an Independent Facilitator. I urge SDAB, at its next meeting in June 2025 to recommend to DDS that DDS expeditiously implement the Independent Facilitator role as required by the Real Lives Law passed in 2024.

Deborah Flaschen: I find the SIS to be a useful tool. Clarification today was helpful about what the data is used for. It was a positive experience going through the process with my son and the resulting information was very useful. Many may not be willing to spend 3-4 hours participating, so would suggest when presenting it that this is a part of a process to bring positive change.

Nancy Alterio asked for a motion to adjourn.

First Motion: Robin Foley

Second Motion: Liz Fahey

Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Colleen Mulligan