

North Los Angeles County Regional Center
Community Relations Committee Meeting Minutes
January 21, 2026

Present: Jeremy Sunderland, Cathy Blin, Nicholas Abrahms, Laura Monge, Jennifer Koster, Jacquie Colton, Lety Garcia, Sharon Weinberg, Juan Hernandez, Sharon Weinberg – Committee Members

Executive Director Angela Pao-Johnson, Deputy Director Evelyn McOmie, Executive Administrative Assistant Lindsay Granger, Silvia Renteria-Haro, Chris Whitlock, John Van De Riet, Belinda Abatesi, Sarah Yap – Staff Members

Guests:

Absent: Jason Taketa, George Alvarado, Curtis Wang, Jennifer Koster

1. CALL TO ORDER

There being a quorum present Jeremy Sunderland called the meeting to order at 5:13 p.m. Jeremy Sunderland reminded members to identify themselves prior to making a motion and reviewed the NLACRC Board of Trustees Civility Code.

2. COMMITTEE MEMBER ATTENDANCE

3. AGENDA

Absent objection the agenda was approved as presented. Motion carried.

4. PUBLIC INPUT – AGENDA ITEMS

There was no public input regarding the agenda.

5. CONSENT ITEMS

A. Approval of Minutes of the November 19, 2025, Community Relations Committee Meeting

M/S/C (Sharon Weinberg/Nicholas Abrahms) On a motion made by Sharon Weinberg, seconded by Nicholas Abrahms, it was resolved to approve the November 19, 2025 meeting minutes. Motion carried.

6. COMMITTEE BUSINESS

6.1 Discuss Legislative Breakfast Workgroup 2026

Following approval of consent business, Jeremy Sunderland, committee co-chair, introduced committee business item A. Chris Whitlock, public information manager, provided an overview of plans for the 2026

Legislative Breakfast. A workgroup will be formed, and an interest form will be distributed by Board Support to identify participants, with a limited number of members able to join.

The Legislative Breakfast is anticipated to take place during the California Legislative Summer Recess, tentatively between July 3 and August 3, 2026. The workgroup will determine the specific date and time within that window.

Topics for the Legislative Breakfast will be developed by the workgroup in collaboration with the Consumer Advisory Committee (CAC), similar to the successful approach used for the prior town hall.

Jeremy Sunderland noted that because the event will occur after July 1, it will fall in the next committee year, and membership continuity should be considered when forming the workgroup. Chris Whitlock acknowledged this consideration and confirmed it will be addressed.

No action was required at this time.

6.2 Update on Jynny Retzinger Community Service Award 2026

Chris Whitlock provided an update on the Jynny Retzinger Community Service Award. Nominations are currently open, with a submission deadline of March 1. The nomination link has been shared through the NLACRC website, social media platforms, and the “News You Can Use” communications to encourage broad participation.

Chris noted that following the March 1 deadline, the committee will review the nominations and determine which to advance to the Board for consideration. In response to a question from Cathy Blin regarding the number of submissions received to date, Chris indicated that a small number of nominations may already be underway and that an update on submission numbers will be shared at a future meeting.

ACTION: Chris Whitlock to report the number of Jynny Retzinger Community Service Award nominations received at the next committee meeting.

6.3 List of NLACRC Community Events (Options for Community Engagement for the Board of Trustees)

Deputy Director Evelyn McOmie presented a list of upcoming community outreach and support group events scheduled from February through May, offering engagement opportunities for members of the Board of Trustees. The calendar includes a mix of in-person, virtual, and hybrid events and was color-coded to reflect the format of each group.

Evelyn McOmie noted that it would be beneficial for approximately two to three board members to attend each event, though participation by fewer or additional members is acceptable. To streamline coordination, Board Support will distribute the event list to board members via email, allowing individuals to indicate which events they would like to attend outside of the meeting. Participation levels may be reported at a future meeting.

Jeremy Sunderland clarified that these outreach opportunities are intended for the full Board of Trustees, not only committee members, and agreed that the information should be shared with the entire board. The item was presented as informational and aligned with prior board discussions regarding community outreach. No formal action or vote was required.

In response to questions, Evelyn McOmie provided additional details regarding event locations, formats, dates, and times for specific support groups. Evelyn McOmie indicated that the version shared with the full board will include event times and Zoom links where applicable. Evelyn McOmie also confirmed that

virtual meetings are moderated by staff and facilitators, and that board members may coordinate in advance if they wish to participate in presentations, Q&A, or smaller group discussions during events.

The outreach calendar will continue to be updated and expanded as additional community engagement opportunities arise.

ACTION: Board Support to email the community outreach event list to all members of the Board of Trustees.

ACTION: Committee members to review the list and indicate which events they are interested in attending.

ACTION: Staff to coordinate with support groups in advance if board members plan to attend, present, or participate in discussions.

ACTION: Staff to continue updating and expanding the outreach calendar as additional opportunities arise.

7. **ACTION ITEMS**

There were no action items.

8. **REPORT OUTS**

8.1 **Legislative Update**

Belinda Abatesi, Public Information Legislative Specialist, provided a high-level legislative update, beginning with an overview of the Governor's proposed 2026–27 State Budget released on January 9. The proposed budget includes \$348.9 billion in total spending, supported by higher-than-projected revenues. For the Department of Developmental Services (DDS), the proposal includes \$21.1 billion in funding to serve an estimated 527,000 individuals.

Belinda Abatesi highlighted key funding and policy updates, including a net \$2.4 billion increase in Medi-Cal funding due to federal cost shifts, with anticipated enrollment reductions over time as eligibility and work requirements change. CalFresh funding is proposed to increase by \$383 million, and IHSS funding totals \$33.4 billion to support more than 875,000 recipients statewide, with potential access impacts beginning in FY 2027–28. An additional \$560 million is redirected to affordable housing programs.

Belinda Abatesi reviewed the state budget timeline, noting the May Revision as the next major milestone, followed by legislative approval by June 15 and gubernatorial signature by June 30, with possible delays.

Belinda Abatesi also reported on recent and upcoming policy changes, including the ABLE Age Adjustment Act, which expands ABLE account eligibility from age 26 to 46, increases annual contribution limits to \$20,000, and allows additional earnings for eligible working individuals. An eligibility quiz is available and may be shared.

Updates were provided on the Department of Rehabilitation's implementation of an Order of Selection beginning February 1, prioritizing services based on disability severity due to increased demand and limited resources.

Additional updates included a 2.8% increase in SSI payments, upcoming CalFresh and Medi-Cal work requirement timelines, and changes to Medi-Cal asset limits and enrollment policies. A newly introduced bipartisan bill aimed at improving interactions between law enforcement and individuals with disabilities through the use of a visual "blue envelope" was also noted.

Belinda Abatesi reminded members that all previously tracked legislative bills took effect on January 1 unless otherwise specified and clarified that bills not signed by the Governor may still become law. Upcoming legislative events, advocacy opportunities, and key state calendar dates were reviewed, including bill deadlines and community advocacy tools such as ARCA's Voter Voice campaign.

ACTION: Lindsay Granger and Belinda Abatesi will send requested materials to committee members.

8.2 **Social Media Update**

John Van de Riet, Public Information Supervisor, provided a social media performance update, reporting follower growth across all platforms between October and December. Growth was noted on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, X (Twitter), Threads, and YouTube. John Van de Riet explained that engagement metrics typically decline in December due to seasonal trends and described a strategic shift toward fewer, higher-quality posts to increase engagement rather than focusing on volume.

John Van de Riet reviewed engagement data for Facebook and Instagram, including post views, interactions, and posting frequency, noting a reduction in flyer-based posts and an increased focus on more engaging content.

Jeremy Sunderland raised the idea of exploring incentives or giveaways to encourage greater engagement. John Van de Riet indicated that similar strategies have been used successfully in past roles and noted that feasibility within Regional Center guidelines would need to be reviewed.

Angela Pao-Johnson discussed the ongoing shift in social media strategy toward more engaging formats, including video content, podcast clips, testimonials, and interactive posts that invite audience responses. Angela Pao-Johnson emphasized increasing awareness of existing content such as podcasts and consumer stories and reducing reliance on text-heavy flyers.

John Van de Riet shared ideas for increasing engagement, including posting short video clips, asking questions to encourage interaction, and highlighting human-centered stories. John Van de Riet confirmed that YouTube content exists and could be leveraged more broadly across platforms, subject to appropriate permissions.

Laura Monge asked about the use of Instagram Reels and suggested that short, video-based content may be more engaging for younger audiences. John Van de Riet responded that Reels are planned for increased use in 2026 and noted coordination with the DEIB department to capture community-based content.

Jeremy Sunderland suggested featuring short interviews or testimonials from board members and advisory committee members to add a more personal and relatable element to social media content. John Van de Riet agreed and indicated that this approach aligns with planned strategies.

At the request of Angela Pao-Johnson, John Van de Riet agreed to prepare a future report analyzing which types of posts and topics generate the highest engagement.

ACTION: John Van de Riet to prepare and present a future report analyzing social media engagement trends, including which types of posts and topics generate the most interaction.

ACTION: Staff to continue shifting social media strategy toward more engaging, human-centered content, including video, podcast clips, testimonials, and interactive posts.

ACTION: John Van de Riet to explore the feasibility of engagement incentives or giveaways, consistent with Regional Center guidelines.

ACTION: Staff to increase use of short-form video content, including Instagram Reels, in 2026.

ACTION: Staff to coordinate with the DEIB department to capture community-based photos and videos for social media use.

ACTION: Board and advisory committee members may be contacted to participate in short interviews or testimonials for social media content, subject to interest and permissions.

8.3 Self-Determination Program Report

Silvia Renteria-Haro, Consumer Services Director, provided a brief update on the Self-Determination Program. As of January 1, there are 686 participants enrolled in the program. Silvia Renteria-Haro noted that the information mirrors the report previously presented to the Board of Trustees and did not repeat detailed data.

Silvia Renteria-Haro reported that new 2026 Self-Determination Program implementation contracts are in place. These contracts support individuals interested in transitioning into the program through several services, including individualized coaching, group coaching, and community trainings.

Individualized coaching is the most frequently used service and supports participants who do not have an independent facilitator. Contracts are in place with Accolates for Achievement, Claudia Cares, and Help Grow. Group coaching services are provided through the Autism Society of Los Angeles. Community trainings will be offered in partnership with Disability Voices United and the Self-Determination Institute.

Silvia Renteria-Haro also noted that an SDP support group meets on the first Wednesday of each month from 4:30 to 6:00 p.m. and is facilitated by the Self-Determination Institute. Additional information, including contracted service providers, is available on the NLACRC website.

8.4 2nd Quarter Disparity Committee Report Out

Sarah Yap, Consumer Services Director, provided highlights from the Disparity Committee for the second quarter covering October through December 2025. The committee welcomed two new organizational members: Creative Minds, a

North Los Angeles County Regional Center vendor, and Multivium, a nonprofit organization that develops accessible and inclusive creative arts programming for children with disabilities in the Santa Clarita Valley.

The committee met in October and November and did not meet in December. During the quarter, discussion focused on developing measurable outcomes and metrics to track the impact of the committee's efforts to reduce disparities. Priority areas of interest included Self-Determination Program outreach and access to social recreation opportunities across all valleys.

The next Disparity Committee meeting is scheduled for Thursday, February 12, from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. via Zoom.

8.5 Semi-annual Consumer Diagnostic Report

Evelyn McOmie, Deputy Director, presented the Semi-Annual Consumer Diagnostic Report, located on the final page of the meeting packet. The report reflects continued quarter-to-quarter growth across all three NLACRC offices.

The data is broken down by developmental disability, office totals, and overall growth. Evelyn McOmie noted that the regional center continues to experience steady growth, consistent with long-term trends.

As of the end of December, the total number of individuals served was 43,232, representing Status 1 and Status 2 individuals over the age of three.

8.6 2nd Quarter Intake Data by Location Report

Evelyn McOmie presented the Second Quarter Intake Data by Location Report, which summarizes intake assessments exceeding 120 days and 142 days. Evelyn McOmie reported that for five consecutive months, beginning in August, there have been no intake assessments exceeding 142 days, representing continued improvement in intake processing timelines.

The report also reflects a reduction in assessments exceeding 120 days. Evelyn McOmie attributed this progress to targeted hiring efforts to increase assessment capacity, as well as improved scheduling, noting that some delays are related to family availability or cancellations.

The data illustrates intake volume trends by month and by office. San Fernando Valley and Santa Clarita Valley intake assessments are combined, as all assessments for those regions are conducted through the San Fernando office. Antelope Valley totals are shown separately.

No questions were raised.

8.7 Semi-annual Consumer Competitive Employment Report

Evelyn McOmie presented the Semi-Annual Consumer Competitive Employment Report, which shows a continued upward trend in the number of individuals participating in competitive employment and earning wages at or above minimum wage. Evelyn McOmie noted that progress has been steady and reflects sustained efforts rather than short-term fluctuations.

Evelyn McOmie explained that the increase is supported by targeted outreach, consistent information sharing, and an emphasis on employment conversations with individuals of working age. The report includes detailed breakdowns by office location, employment placement type, residence type, ethnicity, and age group, providing additional context on employment access and outcomes.

No questions were raised.

8.8 Semi-annual Social Recreation, Camp & Non-Medical Therapies Services Report

Evelyn McOmie presented the Semi-Annual Social Recreation, Camp, and Non-Medical Therapies Services Report. The report provides a comparison of utilization and expenditures across multiple fiscal years, including fiscal years 2023–24, 2024–25, and early data for 2025–26.

Evelyn McOmie explained that the data reflects claims submitted and paid through various monthly state claim periods and noted that claims may continue to be submitted retroactively, which can result in ongoing adjustments to reported totals. Differences across monthly claim periods reflect cumulative billing activity through each reporting month.

For fiscal year 2024–25, total expenditures for social recreation services were reported at approximately \$10.49 million as of the November state claim. Evelyn McOmie noted that this amount may increase as additional claims are processed.

The report indicates continued utilization of social recreation and related services by the community, with year-over-year increases in payments over the past two and a half fiscal years.

No questions were raised.

9. BOARD MEETING AGENDA ITEMS/ACTION ITEMS

- At the next board meeting, the committee report out will include opportunities for board members to participate on the outreach events discussed earlier in the meeting.

10. ANNOUNCEMENTS / PUBLIC INPUT / INFORMATION ITEMS

There was no public comment.

11. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Executive Finance Committee will be March 18, 2026 at 5:00 p.m.

12. ADJOURNMENT

On a motion made by Nicholas Abrahms, seconded by Cathy Blin, it was agreed that there was no further business to transact; the meeting adjourned at 5:58 p.m.

DISCLAIMER

The above minutes should be used as a summary of the motions passed and issues discussed at the meeting. This document shall not be considered a verbatim copy of every word spoken at the meeting.



Submitted by:
Lindsay Granger
Executive Administrative Assistant – Board Relations Liaison