



LOUISIANA BOARD OF SOCIAL WORK EXAMINERS BLUE RIBBON PANEL

Report of Findings and Recommendations

September 2014

Background

In July 2013, the Louisiana Board of Social Work Examiners (LABSWE) contracted with SSA Consultants (SSA) to conduct an organizational assessment and provide a report of findings and general recommendations to improve the operations of the LABSWE.

SSA conducted a satisfaction survey with a sample of current licensees as part of the assessment. There are approximately 8,000 social workers and the LABSWE staff selected a random sample of 500 social workers to participate in the satisfaction survey, a sample size of 6%.

The LABSWE Licensee Satisfaction Survey had a total of 137 respondents (out of 500 potential respondents), which is a 27.4% response rate. In SSA's survey experience, this is a solid rate for this type of survey, and would provide useful insight to the LABSWE staff and Board members.

One part of the survey requested respondents to rate the LABSWE's performance of their five core statutory functions. The LABSWE received low ratings in three of the five areas and SSA recommended additional investigation by the Board. Specifically, SSA recommended a Blue Ribbon Panel be convened to help with that investigation.

The Board accepted this recommendation and agreed to convene the Blue Ribbon Panel to investigate the low scores. LABSWE leadership – Lisa Lipsey and Judy Haspel – and Emily Efferson, Board Administrator, identified potential Panel members and collaborated with SSA to outline the Panel process.

The Formation of the Blue Ribbon Panel

The LABSWE Blue Ribbon Panel was convened in April 2014 with five members from the social work community. The panelists were:

- Walter Fahr
- Edgar Guedry
- Hermann Moyse, III
- Jane Smith
- Lacey Tillotson

Panel Meetings

The LABSWE Blue Ribbon Panel met four times from April to August 2014. All meetings were held at the LABSWE office for two hours each meeting. The four meetings were held on the following dates:

- April 21, 2014
- May 12, 2014
- June 30, 2014
- August 25, 2014

Charter Statement

The Panel adopted the following Charter Statement at their first meeting.

The LABSWE Blue Ribbon Panel will investigate licensee satisfaction issues relative to the five core statutory functions of the Board, with particular attention to the three lowest rated functions identified in the 2013 Licensee Satisfaction Survey Report:

Please rate the LABSWE's performance for each of these general duties:	
Statutory Function	Rating Average
Establishing qualifications and procedures for licensure and continued competence, including supervised practice and continuing education requirements	1.68
Issuing licenses to qualified individuals	1.71
Establishing standards of practice and ethical conduct for social workers	1.55
Conducting hearings on charges calling for disciplinary action	3.45
Administering funds for the training and education of social workers	4.10

Respondents rated the statutory function on a five-point Likert scale where 1 = Very Poor, 2 = Poor, 3 = Fair, 4 = Good, 5 = Very Good.

Low satisfaction scores justify additional investigation by the Board to determine what licensee experiences, understandings, and/or perceptions are producing dissatisfaction with core functions. The goal of the Blue Ribbon Panel is to develop a report of its findings and recommendations to the Board.

LABSWE Blue Ribbon Panel Satisfaction Survey

After reviewing the sample survey conducted by SSA as part of its organizational assessment project, the Panel requested a larger satisfaction survey be conducted, which would be open to all licensees. The Panel made slight modification to the sample satisfaction survey. SSA, with the assistance of the LABSWE Administrator, conducted the satisfaction survey and developed a survey report for the Panel.

A copy of the survey is included with this report as Appendix A. The Panel encourages the Board members and staff to review the 2014 LABSWE Blue Ribbon Panel Satisfaction Survey included with this report.

Findings and Recommendations

The 2014 LABSWE Blue Ribbon Panel Satisfaction Survey provided the Panel valuable insight into the needs and concerns of respondents. Some ideas raised by respondents would require more research and possible changes to the Practice Act, which the Panel recognizes should not be done haphazardly. Two such areas of interest were moving to a 2-year renewal cycle like some states have done, and the possibility of a “retired” licensure status for those who are no longer practicing.

The LABSWE Blue Ribbon Panel formulated the following five recommendations for the Board to consider as it continues its mission to safeguard the public health, safety, and welfare of the people of the state against unauthorized, unqualified, and improper practice of social work.

1. Improve the LABSWE Website

The survey results indicated the current website does not meet licensee needs, functionally or aesthetically. The Panel recommends the LABSWE invest in a site that can better serve current licensees, new graduates, out-of-state social workers moving to Louisiana, and the public. The website should promote ease of information and accessibility.

The short-term recommendation to address the immediate need is to reorganize and update the information on the current website which appears out of date and hard to navigate. The long-term recommendation (and the ideal investment) is a new website build which would have greater functionality, better utilization of technology, and present a more modern design.

The following are examples of website improvements:

- Aesthetically pleasing with a present-day feel
- Improved organization, structure, and navigation
- “Contact Us” option to select email recipient such as Administrator or Board Chair and to select the type of email request (potential options include complaint, CEU question, renewal question)
 - Create auto-response acknowledging email receipt
- A user account system for licensees
 - New applications
 - Renewal applications
 - CEU real time tracking
 - Electronic renewal reminders
- Information on potential licensing exam resources
 - Note – this is envisioned as a resource (information only) page, not the Board providing educational opportunities themselves nor endorsing one provider over another
- Information on CEU opportunities
 - Note – this is envisioned as a resource page with links to Board identified continuing education pre-approval organizations
- Explanation of Board processes (such as responding to questions)

2. Increase Communications with Licensees

The survey results highlighted a need for increased and improved communication between the Board and the licensees as there are several areas of confusion for licensees including the role of the Board, its operations, and the Practice Act with the accompanying rules and regulations.

In addition to an improved website, other options for increased communications include the distribution of a newsletter to licensees. The Panel recommends an electronic, quarterly newsletter – although the opportunity to request a paper version should be offered. The newsletter could be integrated with the website to create an electronic archive as a reference for licensees. Potential newsletter topics include:

- Explanation of Practice Act, rules and regulations, and role of the Board
- Difference between the Board and professional associations

- Developments in the profession
- Frequently asked questions
- New graduate policies
- Endorsement issues and challenges
- Current issues and trends in the profession that are of importance to social workers

The Panel also recommends the Board regularly conduct licensee satisfaction surveys to understand licensee concerns and needs.

3. Create Culture of Customer Service Excellence

The Panel recommends the Board create a culture of customer service excellence in its operations, Board members, and staff. With this type of culture, there is a focus on continuous improvement, efficiency, and transparency to licensees and the public. The recommendations for website improvements and increased communication with the licensees are both examples of customer service excellence. Additional examples recommended to the Board include:

- Training for Board members and staff
 - In-services focused on business etiquette, time management, and conflict resolution
 - Board member orientation
- Increasing transparency and access to the Board
 - Publishing minutes from meetings
 - Streaming Board meetings
 - Clarification of Board process and opportunities for improvement

4. Improve Continuing Education Information

Continuing education units (CEUs) were an area of concern identified in the survey responses by the Panel. One of the concerns is the confusion respondents have regarding the Board's role in CEUs and the CEU process.

The Board identifies continuing education pre-approval organizations who in turn approve CEU's for organizations that provide learning opportunities to licensees. The Board allows licensees to utilize a mix of live and online training opportunities, and there are different types of CEUs approved (clinical, ethics, and general). The continuing

education pre-approval organizations may also provide CEUs. The Board's role should be clarified to give licensees a clearer picture of the CEU process and requirements.

Another concern related to CEUs cited in the survey pertains to the CEU opportunities themselves – the geographic location diversity, frequency of offerings, delivery method, and topic area. The Board should work with its continuing education pre-approval organizations to ensure a variety of opportunities exist to meet licensee needs. Additionally, the Board should assess the increasing role of online learning and its role in CEU allocation.

The Panel also recommends the LABSWE website have a page listing all continuing education pre-approval organizations with links to their websites to make it easier for licensees to find CEU opportunities. The LABSWE website should also include information on becoming a provider and creating a formal study group.

5. Foster Professional Relationships

The Panel recommends the Board foster relationships with key stakeholders, social work-related professional organizations including student organizations, and Louisiana's schools of social work. Fostering these relationships will increase opportunities to provide education about the Board, its role, and the responsibilities of a licensed social worker working in Louisiana. Educational opportunities include regional meetings to meet Board members, presentation to student organizations about licensure process, identification of a liaison within the schools of social work to disseminate information, and partnering with associations to provide educational sessions.

Conclusion

The LABSWE Blue Ribbon Panel believes the five recommendations will be of assistance to the Board as they guide the organization. The Panel would also like to express its gratitude to the Board members and staff as they fulfill the Board's mission to safeguard the public health, safety, and welfare of the people of the state against unauthorized, unqualified, and improper practice of social work.

Appendix A

LABSWE 2014 Licensee Satisfaction Survey