

**ANNUAL REPORT**  
**NEVADA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION COUNCIL**  
**FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR 2000**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In the 1998 Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, states are entrusted with the establishment of a State Rehabilitation Council (in Nevada termed the Vocational Rehabilitation Council, or VRC), which works both as a partner with and as an advisor to publicly funded vocational rehabilitation (VR) programs. In Nevada, these programs consist of the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR) and the Bureau of Services to the Blind and Visually Impaired (BSBVI).

As further stated in the Proposed Rules to implement the VR programs (*Federal Register*, February 28, 2000), the Council is to prepare and submit to the Governor and to the Secretary no later than 90 days after the end of the Federal fiscal year an annual report. The report will address the status of vocational rehabilitation programs operated within the State and will be available to the public through appropriate modes of communication. To that end, the balance of this report is written, with attention focused on BVR and BSBVI.

## II. VISION AND GOALS OF THE VRC

Nevada's VRC sees itself as the primary source of policy and philosophical direction for service providers and consumers of employment-related disability services in Nevada. More specifically, since shortly before the 1998 Amendments were promulgated, the Council adopted two broad work functions, which tend to converge with Council functions in the Proposed Rules:

**Advocacy & Marketing.** This function recognizes the need for adequate financial and staff resources to meet the needs of consumers and employers, to have increased influence, and to enhance cohesion, development and planning in the VRC itself. Such resources also are necessary to pursue a positive and activist partnership with the Nevada Rehabilitation Division and with other councils in order to improve services to people with disabilities served by the Division.

**Oversight.** The provision of oversight and direction to the VR programs seeks to ensure client/consumer satisfaction, effectiveness and efficiency of the VR programs, guidance regarding the use and allocation of vocational rehabilitation staff and financial resources, and efficacy of the State Plan.

## III. VRC STRATEGIC PLAN

The table on the next two pages outlines the Council's Strategic Plan which, though based on federal regulations, is consistent with the Council's vision and the functional goals it has identified for itself over the past two years.

**NEVADA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION COUNCIL  
2000-2001 MASTER PLAN**

<b>FUNCTIONS</b>	<b>SCOPE OF WORK</b>	<b>STAFF ROLE</b>	<b>COUNCIL ROLE</b>	<b>TIMELINE</b>
1. Review, analyze & advise the Division about its performance related to eligibility, services & employment outcomes.	Written and verbal performance reports on standards and performance indicators	Bureau Chiefs prepare and Council liaison distributes	Review and discuss	Quarterly
2. Develop, agree to, and review goals & priorities in the State Plan.	Division & Council jointly discuss goals & priorities and develop initiatives in State Plan	Present Division's goals and priorities and prepare a written summary.	Help to develop & initiate ideas to include in State Plan, and provide input	Annually
3. Evaluate the effectiveness of the vocational rehabilitation programs and submit reports of progress.	Joint report with Division	Council & Division decide on content. Division staff draft & submit the report	Review of draft	Annually in June
4. Advise DETR and Division regarding VR activities.	Joint discussion with DETR, Division, Council	Staff updates Council at VRC meetings	Provide input to DETR and to Division reports	Ongoing
5. Review & analyze the effectiveness of, & consumer satisfaction with: DETR functions; VR clients visited (one-stops & ESD); VR services the Division provided; other public/private entities; employment & benefits outcomes	Consumer satisfaction surveys and reports.	Bureau of Research & Analysis conducts survey and delivers written and oral report to the Council	Council chooses type of survey process and reviews survey findings	Annually, to the extent feasible
6. Prepare & submit an annual report on the status of the vocational rehabilitation programs to Nevada Governor and to the Secretary of Education	As stated in function	Prepares written report	Provide guidance, comments, and approval of report	December each year

<b>FUNCTIONS</b>	<b>SCOPE OF WORK</b>	<b>STAFF</b>	<b>COUNCIL</b>	<b>TIMELINE</b>
<b>7. Coordinate and establish working relationships with other Councils:</b>	<b>Representation at meetings</b>	<b>Staff liaison advises VRC members of meetings</b>	<b>Coordination of activities through designated representatives</b>	<b>Ongoing</b>
<b>a. State Independent Living Council (SILC) and Independent living centers</b>	<b>Same</b>	<b>Same</b>	<b>Same</b>	<b>Same</b>
<b>b. Advisory panel for IDEA</b>	<b>Same</b>	<b>Same</b>	<b>Same</b>	<b>Same</b>
<b>c. Developmental Disabilities Council</b>	<b>Same</b>	<b>Same</b>	<b>Same</b>	<b>Same</b>
<b>d. Mental Health Planning Council</b>	<b>Same</b>	<b>Same</b>	<b>Same</b>	<b>Same</b>
<b>e. State Workforce Investment Board</b>	<b>Same</b>	<b>Same</b>	<b>Same</b>	<b>Same</b>
<b>8. Perform such other functions consistent with VR regulations, comparable with other Council functions and determined to be appropriate.</b>	<b>As identified</b>	<b>Support for functions</b>	<b>Identify other functions</b>	<b>Ongoing</b>

In the year to which this annual report pertains, the Council made clear its vision and goals by the development of a 2000-2001 Master Plan. It consists of work functions, responsible parties, and timelines as identified in the table and, to a small extent, other state or local projects that complement the federally-defined work paradigm. This annual report (function #6) gives specific attention to the agencies with which it has had direct interaction, the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Bureau of Services to the Blind and Visually Impaired.

#### IV. ASSESSMENT OF PERFORMANCE OF VR PROGRAMS

- A. Service Satisfaction.** *Results from a 1999 statewide comprehensive needs assessment, written into a final report in 2000, identified both needs and the level of satisfaction of employers, consumers and counselors with the VR programs. The level of satisfaction was generally positive, but areas for improvement were noted.*
1. **Employers.** Based on answers to needs assessment questions from employers and their relationship with the VR programs, there appears to be opportunity to expand employment opportunities with other employers in regard to employment for consumers with disabilities. Sixty-eight employers in the Las Vegas-Henderson and Reno-Carson City areas responded to the survey, employers that have had contact with one or more of the following programs: BVR, BSBVI, Partnership with Nevada Industries program (funded by BSBVI) and Project With Industry program (funded by BVR). Thirty-one respondents had used one of these programs, but 37 were not known to have used any of them. Of employers experienced with the VR programs, 62 percent reported very good experiences with VR counselors, 28 percent reported their experiences average, and 10 percent not very good. Slightly less than 50 percent of employers knew they could request that a VR counselor help them determine what changes were needed at the employment site to enable the hiring of people with disabilities, and 77 percent desired further information about hiring people with disabilities. In summary, where contacts had occurred, employers reported positive attitudes about VR programs. Beyond them, it seems that there is ample opportunity for the VR programs to make further inroads with employers.
  2. **Consumers.** Based on 522 responses to 539 individuals contacted (both cases closed and cases still open throughout Nevada), the VR programs rated high for overall quality of services received. However, consumer satisfaction with respect to specific components of the programs was mixed. The consumer sample contacted represents a little under 20 percent (approximately 2,700) of all consumers served in state fiscal year 1999 (July 1998 – June 1999). On the positive side, 73 percent of BSBVI consumers rated the quality of services received as “excellent” or “very good,” 10 percent “average” and 17 percent “not good” or “poor.” For BVR consumers, the figures were 80 percent, 12 percent and 8 percent respectively. Eighty-eight percent of BSBVI clients and 90% of BVR clients would recommend the VR programs to other people. Speed of service delivery (“quickly”) received high ratings (75 percent each) in BSBVI and in BVR. Consumers’ ratings of counselor assistance resulted in “excellent” or “very good” for 67

percent of individuals counseled by BSBVI and 73 percent of consumers counseled by BVR.

However, both BSBVI and BVR received low marks when consumers were asked if the counselors helped them find satisfactory work: 25 percent for BSBVI and 26 percent for BVR. The other responses were “not yet” or “no.” Moreover, 52 percent of BSBVI clients and 36 percent of BVR clients believed that they could use more VR programs assistance in helping them with their job or with helping them find a job. These results may point out differences in client perceptions and expectations of the VR programs in contrast to the reality of what those programs are supposed to accomplish, i.e., assistance with the development of job and interview skills rather than finding clients a job. The question asked of consumers needs to be reviewed and probably rewritten for the next comprehensive needs assessment, to clarify these differences and to generate what likely would have been a more accurate response in regard to satisfaction.

3. Counselors, Rehabilitation Technicians and Job Developers. Forty-six employees in these classifications were interviewed, about 80 percent of positions staffed at that time. Those responding tended to be upbeat and positive. Ninety-three percent of them, for example, believed they were helping place disabled individuals in employment consistent with their strengths, resources and abilities. Some counselors, however, believed that job placement could be more successful if good and reliable transportation was available to consumers and if better trained job developers and placement specialists were available. The next most frequently cited items to abet job placement were increased funding for the VR programs and more staff to reduce caseloads.

The employees overwhelmingly liked their jobs and had an optimistic attitude. A frequent comment was that “we try hard and think that the services we are providing are excellent.” A number of staff also remarked that they found their jobs satisfying and enjoyed working in a professional environment with so many caring, diligent co-workers. Staff members also were positive in regard to the Client Assistance Program (CAP). Thirty-two of 33 respondents who had involvement with CAP said they were satisfied with assistance received. They cited that the program is run objectively and fairly, that communication is facilitated and that solutions are offered.

Twenty-five respondents were situated in co-located offices and expressed support for co-location with other Department of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation (DETR) employment programs with one notable exception. It was that co-location compromised the ability to talk confidentially with consumers.

Some employees cited improvements that could be made to improve work satisfaction. One idea was the need for improved communication with other DETR employees. Another was the need for improved communication between upper level management within the Rehabilitation Division/VR programs and the counselors and rehabilitation technicians. Finally, to help improve work performance some respondents identified the desire for updated training on current assistive technology and equipment, more

counselors and smaller workloads, and better publicity and outreach to help others understand the VR programs.

**B. Performance Measures.** *Statistical measures the VR programs are responsible to report tend to color the VR programs favorably, but the measures must be viewed with caution.* Another means of evaluating the VR programs is by statistical indicators of performance. Some derive from federal sources, others at the State of Nevada level. Such indicators consist of actual performance compared against a predetermined target that serves as the goal to be achieved. These indicators are useful to a point. One problem is that some may be easily attainable, but others may be impacted negatively by shortfalls in staffing or funding. Another problem is that indicators are subject to change, due to decisions that occur external to the VR programs, such as at the national or state legislative levels, one result being to break down continuity in indicators year-to-year. With these warnings in mind, the following items are discussed.

1. The combined vocational rehabilitation programs (BSBVI and BVR). For the 1997-1998 federal fiscal year time period, Nevada ranked at the top in the Rehabilitation Services Administration's Region IX (consisting of a group of western states and territories) in regard to federal performance measures. Although the time period precedes by one or two years the other indicators that will be discussed below, federal fiscal years 1997 and 1998 are useful for stage setting. Federal authorities established six fundamental indicators. Of those six, three were regarded as primary. For a state to "pass," it was required to meet or exceed two of the three primary indicators and four of the six (see Appendix I for the indicators). Of the entities in Region IX, Nevada ranked highest, with only one "failing" mark each year of the six annual measurements (indicator 2, on percentage with an employment outcome). Nevada ranked slightly better than Arizona and Guam. Trailing in order were Hawaii, California, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth Northern Marianas Islands. Comparisons to other regions are not immediately available.
2. Bureau of Services to the Blind and Visually Impaired. Different programs subsumed under BSBVI show mixed results for the time period July 1999 – June 2000. Given the caveat just suggested about the reliability of performance indicators, those associated with BSBVI's **basic VR funding base** reveal that three target indicators were not met in state fiscal year (SFY) 2000. The average number of clients served per counselor was 87 (target 100). The average number of applicants to the program was 185 (target 250). The number of clients determined eligible was 154 (target 180). But the percent of clients achieving competitive employment was 61 percent (target 55 percent). In **the Life Skills Training program** the average number of clients served per counselor and the total number of applicants per year were below projections, but the projected number of individuals diverted from requiring institutional/dependent care per year (60) was nearly met (59). With the **Older Blind Independent Living** program projections were exceeded. The average number of clients served per counselor was above target, the number of new applications was hugely above target (275 compared to 170), and the number of individuals diverted from requiring institutional/dependent care was nearly double (92) the projection of 50.

3. Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation. Of ten BVR indicators, seven were met or exceeded in SFY 2000 and three were slightly below projections. One of the useful indicators was average hourly earnings at closures for individuals with competitive employment outcomes. The target was \$8.50/hour but in SFY 2000 the actual amount was \$8.91, forty-three cents more than in SFY 1999. Another useful indicator was the percentage of clients eligible for services who achieved a successful employment outcome. The result was 35% in SFY 1999 and 36% in SFY 2000, each above target. A different and interesting indicator is the percent of all clients served who are from ethnic minority populations. The target of 24 percent was met. And in SFY 2000, the percent of satisfied clients was tabulated as 89 percent, above the projected 85 percent. This satisfaction level mirrors the results of the comprehensive statewide needs assessment figure (section IV, A, 2 above). Barely missing projections in SFY 2000 were number of clients determined eligible for service, number of clients achieving successful employment, and percentage of successful closures with competitive employment outcomes.

## V. ASSESSMENT REGARDING POSSIBLE IMPROVEMENTS IN THE VR PROGRAMS

- A. **Staffing.** *The Council is concerned that there may not be enough counselors to adequately serve disabled Nevadans.* The Council regularly hears that VR counselors have very high caseloads, both by historical standards in Nevada and in comparison to other states. A recent study, for example, revealed that Nevada BVR counselors have the fourth highest caseload in the United States. Whereas BSBVI's average caseload at a point in time has tended to be relatively level at 65 consumers per counselor, BVR counselors have had an average 110-125 cases per counselor at a point in time. For BVR counselors, sometimes this average has been exceeded. In both programs, the total number of cases handled by a counselor each year is substantially higher than the average numbers.

Caseloads have been impacted in the long run by Nevada's rapid population growth, by literally no increases in the number of counselors to handle the increased number of consumers, and by staff turnover. Nevada's growth rate is projected to continue leading the nation, and with it one expects even higher caseloads per counselor if no new positions are created. Given the increased caseloads per counselor, particularly in the BVR program, Council members have expressed support for full funding (federal formula and state matching fund monies) of all requested positions.

- B. **Transition Students.** *The Council wants improvements in transition services for high school students.* On June 30 the Council heard that many disabled students receive no employment-related experience until the senior year. It should begin earlier. VR has a large part to play because it understands the relationship between people with disabilities and employment. Transition training should address inter-personal skills, time management skills, and more, to help prepare people for employment and/or further education. Parents should know about employment opportunities, about agencies that serve children, and about summer programs to help prepare students for employment.

At its September 2000 training, the Council further discussed and strongly supported the creation of new transition counselor positions, particularly in Clark County. The additional counselors would improve the counselor-to-student ratio and would provide more timely and improved service, notably to students in their junior and senior years. The Council was particularly interested in securing new State of Nevada match dollars that would be used to apply for annual federal redistribution funds, i.e., funding beyond the normal federal funds allocated. The Council's goal was \$1 million in new state and federal funds combined for additional counselors and case service dollars.

A Council committee was created to work in tandem with another entity, such as the PTA, to identify an entity qualified to organize a public forum that would bring parents, teachers, students and VR together. The purpose is to improve communication and understanding regarding transition issues.

- C. Funding of the VR Programs.** *The Council has been concerned about the adequacy of funding for Nevada's vocational rehabilitation programs.* Distinct from the financial aspects regarding transition students, but taking into account the discussion above (item **A, Staffing**), it is apparent to the Council that Nevada's VR programs could be more effective if professional staff were more "plentiful" and had more case service dollars at their disposal. When the percentage increase in consumers who enter an individualized plan of employment exceeds the percentage increase in funding from state and federal sources, both counseling time and financial support available to consumers are pinched.

The Council, therefore, was encouraged at its December 1 meeting. The Administrator of the Designated State Agency and Director of the Designated State Unit announced that top priority had been given in the upcoming biennial budget to full funding of state match by the State of Nevada Legislature. Moreover, vacancy (salary) savings would not be expected in regard to counselor positions. This policy change could impact favorably on the counselor to consumer ratio because the counselor positions could be filled promptly.

- D. Accounts Payable.** *The Council has learned about unusual delays in payments to vendors.* If the normal turnaround time from receipt of an invoice to payment of it is two or three weeks, some vendors to the Council and to the VR programs have experienced exceptionally long delays—from a month to several months. The cases tend to involve services performed rather than office supplies, billing claims from other state agencies, etc. This not only leads to frustration with service providers, and staff who are involved, but also could cause some vendors to discontinue service to the VR programs and clients. The Administrator of the Division has looked into such problems and has reported that the situations associated with the cases have been resolved.

- E. Streamlining Services.** *The Council supports staff efforts and monetary expenditures that can be reasonably expected to increase the efficiency of, and service by, VR counselors.* In recent years improvements have been made in the VR programs with respect to paperwork reduction, the hiring of rehabilitation technicians (to relieve counselors of some "routine" work activities), the creation of job placement "teams" to improve service and employment outcomes, and improved counselor competencies.

Despite these gains, caseloads remain high, and there are mitigating steps that may be taken. One is to procure and implement an electronic case management system as a means to improve work performance and accommodate increasing numbers of clients. Nevada is one of the few states still linked to an old (approximately 30 years old) mainframe system that frequently breaks down and is not efficient by contemporary standards. Council members from private businesses were particularly interested in a new system which, although initially costing perhaps \$800,000, has the potential to relieve counselors of some clerical activities and inefficiencies. Another mitigating step is to continue implementing one-stop service co-locations with other State agencies involved in job training and development consistent with provision in the Workforce Investment Act. Other steps include work restructuring, the hiring of interns, and the employment of a qualified grant writer to obtain untapped funding to assist the VR programs.

- F. Council Initiatives.** *The Council has been working on two items that it believes will be useful for VR programs recognition, publicity and outreach.* Although the Division recently developed a brochure that is a useful overview of the VR programs, the Council is working on another one that is more “quick hitting,” concise, and visually appealing to business readers, who are the intended target. One of the Council’s business members has been centrally involved in the brochure’s development. The other Council project is an approximate 15-minute videotape on Nevada’s VR programs, again aimed at how the VR programs can be useful to Nevada businesses. The intention is that the video also will be useful at parents groups, transition education settings, state meetings or conferences, and so on. Each is being discussed and developed with representation from the business community, the principal targets of these publicity efforts.
- G. Innovation and Expansion Grants.** *Basic grant funds also are available to entities that want to try new approaches to meet the needs of consumers or employers, to augment services where current funds fall short of those needed, or for other novel approaches that may lead to successful employment outcomes.* In federal fiscal year 2000, the Council approved funding for three such projects that, to date, have not realized their potential.

The first grant was conceived to encourage employment opportunities for adults in rural economies, where economic decline has been prevalent because of adverse effects from mine closures and other problems. Although applications were taken, none met the standards required for award and implementation. The second grant was to promote the organization of business and work experiences for high school students in rural communities. Two projects in Pershing County schools were funded, resulting in direct work experience for students in the first project and the procurement of a copier to assist the schools-to-careers program in the second. A third innovation and expansion fund grant approved by the Council was for disabled high school students in rural or metropolitan areas, to enable them to gain business skills and work experience prior to graduation. In federal fiscal year 2000, no projects were approved under this grant.

## V. CONCLUSION

This Vocational Rehabilitation Council annual report gives most attention to the performance of the Nevada Rehabilitation Division's vocational rehabilitation programs, i.e., the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Bureau of Services to the Blind and Visually Impaired. Based on the statistical and qualitative data available for Council review, the programs generally appear to perform well, based on federal and state standards. This assessment is made on the basis of data reviewed, including comparisons to programs outside Nevada. There are areas of concern and areas in which improvement can be made, however, which have been addressed in this report. "Pro" and "con" examples of Nevada's State VR programs follow:

### A. Pros.

1. In 1997 and 1998 Nevada ranked high in its region in regard to national performance measures. In the Council's 2001 annual report it would be desirable to see how Nevada compares to all states and territories of the United States.
2. The number of successful competitive employment closures (consumers employed 90 days or more following receipt of services from the VR programs), continue to increase, from 546 in 1996 to over 900 in 1999 and 2000.
3. Average hourly earnings at closure for BVR clients in state fiscal year 1999 were \$8.48 and in SFY 2000 were \$8.91. The national mean at closure two years ago was \$7.56/hour. In FFY 1997 Nevada ranked second best nationally in terms of median income.
4. The percentage of clients satisfied with VR services received is high.
5. VR program services appear to be reaching the ethnically diverse population of Nevada, as witnessed by 24% of those services going to minority populations. In the 2001 annual report a breakdown of populations served would be useful.

### B. Cons.

1. Job retention over time is below national standards. For example, a Rehabilitation Division study showed that, in Nevada for fiscal year 1996, about 68% of cases successfully closed found consumers still employed two months after closure. For fiscal year 1997 the figure was 66%, for fiscal year 1998 the figure was 71%, and for fiscal year 1999 the figure was 87%. These figures compare to national figures of 78% in 1996, 81% in 1997 and 84% in 1998. Nevada clearly trailed national standards in 1996-1998, but the trend was one of improvement, and the Division will not be satisfied until further improvement is made.
2. The percentage of VR consumers satisfied with their employment outcomes was only 25-26%, clearly suggesting their desire for more VR assistance that would help consumers with their job or in finding a better job..
3. Many employers do not know about or understand the VR programs, which suggests a great opportunity for outreach to businesses to inform them about BVR, BSBVI, their grantees and associates.

The Council herein submits this report to the Governor of Nevada, Kenny Guinn, to the Rehabilitation Services Administration, to the Nevada Rehabilitation Division, and to the State's public archives for review and filing consistent with federal and state rules and procedures. Comments may be submitted to the Vocational Rehabilitation Council's staff liaison, c/o Nevada Rehabilitation Division, 505 E. King Street, Room 502, Carson City, Nevada 89701-3705.