

ANNUAL REPORT

NEVADA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION COUNCIL

FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR 2002

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INTRODUCTION

In the 1998 Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Nevada is entrusted with the establishment of a State Rehabilitation Council (termed the Vocational Rehabilitation Council), which works both as a partner with and as an advisor to publicly funded vocational rehabilitation programs. In Nevada, vocational rehabilitation services are coordinated by the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR) and the Bureau of Services to the Blind and Visually Impaired (BSBVI), bureaus of the Rehabilitation Division; the Division itself a part of the Department of Employment, Training & Rehabilitation (DETR).

The Vocational Rehabilitation Council is to prepare and submit an annual report after the close of each federal fiscal year. 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.

VISION AND GOALS OF THE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION COUNCIL

The Vocational Rehabilitation Council envisions itself as a source of policy and philosophical direction for the primary service providers of employment-related disability services in Nevada. The Council has adopted two broad work functions:

Advocacy & Marketing. This function recognizes the need for adequate financial and staff resources to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities and employers to have increased influence and to enhance cohesion, development and planning in the vocational rehabilitation programs themselves. Such resources are necessary to pursue an activist partnership with the Nevada Rehabilitation Division and with other councils in order to improve services to individuals with disabilities who are or may become clients of the vocational rehabilitation programs.

Oversight. Provision of oversight and direction to the vocational rehabilitation programs seeks to ensure client satisfaction, effectiveness and efficiency of the programs, guidance regarding the use and allocation of vocational rehabilitation staff members and financial resources as well as efficacy of the State Plan for vocational rehabilitation services.

Chairman Focus. Council chairman William Bauer focused the Council on direct vocational rehabilitation issues, stating that one role of the Council is to look at Nevada's vocational rehabilitation program and help fine-tune it, such as through regular meetings and in instruments like needs assessment/satisfaction surveys and the Council's annual report.

Most Council members present favored maintaining time and focus on transition students.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION COUNCIL STRATEGIC PLAN

The table on the two pages following outlines the Vocational Rehabilitation Council's Strategic Plan, which is based on federal regulations and is consistent with the Council's vision as well as the functional goals it has identified for itself.

**NEVADA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION COUNCIL
STRATEGIC PLAN - Table 1**

FUNCTIONS	SCOPE OF WORK	STAFF ROLE	COUNCIL ROLE	TIMELINE
Review, analyze and advise the Division about its performance related to eligibility, services and employment outcomes.	Written and verbal performance reports on standards and performance indicators	Bureau Chiefs prepare and Council liaison distributes	Review and discuss	Quarterly
Develop, agree to and review goals and 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
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
Advise Department of Employment, Training & Rehabilitation, Rehabilitation Division regarding vocational rehabilitation activities.	Joint discussion with DETR, Division, Council	Staff updates Council at VRC meetings	Provide input to DETR and to Division reports	Ongoing
Review & analyze the effectiveness of and client satisfaction with: DETR functions; Nevada JobConnect sites; VR services provided; other public/private entities; employment & benefits outcomes.	Needs assessment-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
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	After end of each federal fiscal year

FUNCTIONS	SCOPE OF WORK	STAFF	COUNCIL	TIMELINE
Coordinate and establish working relationships with other Councils:	Representation at meetings	Staff liaison advises Vocational Rehabilitation Council members of meetings	Coordination of activities through designated representatives	Ongoing
State Independent Living Council and centers for independent living	Same	Same	Same	Same
Advisory panel for IDEA	Same	Same	Same	Same
Developmental Disabilities Council	Same	Same	Same	Same
Mental Health Planning Advisory Council	Same	Same	Same	Same
State Workforce Investment Board	Same	Same	Same	Same
Perform such other functions consistent with VR regulations, comparable with other Council functions and determined to be appropriate.	As identified	Support for functions	Identify other functions	Ongoing

In Federal Fiscal Year 2002, the Vocational Rehabilitation Council operated within the context of its vision and developed goals. It consists of work functions, responsible parties, and timelines as identified in the table and, to a lesser extent, other state or local projects that complement the federally-defined work model. This report gives attention to the agencies with which it has had direct interaction: the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Bureau of Services to the Blind & Visually Impaired.

ASSESSMENT OF PERFORMANCE OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAMS

Service Satisfaction. The Council had questioned some results and methodology of a previous satisfaction survey/needs assessment and asked to hear a presentation on such surveys.

A representative of the Bureau of Research and Analysis of the Department of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation met with the entire Council to discuss the prior survey and general methodology. The presentation stimulated discussion which authorized a member of the Council and the Council's Liaison to visit the Cannon Center for Survey Research at the University of Nevada Las Vegas.

Discussion there focused on survey question content, question interpretation, question arrangement, and on consumer rating of services identified in the questions. Discussion also focused on sampling, validity of responses, interpretation of results, and other items that would help make data more scientific and valid.

It was anticipated that the Council could use the satisfaction survey to learn what problems exist with the vocational rehabilitation programs, then recommend policy changes so that supervisors and rehabilitation counselors could solve the identified problems and set up incentives for quality outcomes.

The Cannon Center for Survey Research was again utilized for the Satisfaction Survey and was charged with gathering data that would give a more accurate picture of client satisfaction, employer satisfaction and other data. The new survey was accomplished, and its results were presented to the Council after the fiscal year ended.

The Council also heard a presentation from the administrator of Nevada's Employment Security Division regarding its labor information studies and the possibility of blending the two surveys in the future. The idea was to reduce the number of government surveys received by local employers. No immediate action was taken by the Council.

COUNCIL ACTION TO IMPROVE PERFORMANCE

Performance Indicators. The Council requested that the Division track closures with employment outcomes that ended in sheltered employment and those that ended in competitive employment. The purpose of this recommendation is that when figures are presented to the Nevada State Legislature at budget time, the number and percentage of successfully employed people (both sheltered and competitive) resulting from vocational rehabilitation services will be seen as higher than successful closures meeting only the federal definition, as the federal definition does not include individuals who achieve sheltered employment. Members also asked if the Division can track if successfully closed clients remain employed for eighteen months, if they have additional service needs during that time period, and if they have health benefits. Another inquiry concerned whether the

Division can add a measurable performance outcome, such as a qualitative improvement increase that is statistical measure (e.g., 5%).

Three members of the Council participated in meetings of the Rehabilitation Division to develop the Division's strategic plan.

Examination was made by the Council regarding: time elapsed from the date a person inquired about potential receipt of services until an Intake Interview was done (normally one week to a month); time elapsed from Intake Interview to eligibility determination (60 days maximum unless the rehabilitation counselor and the client agree to an extension); time elapsed from eligibility determination to when service begins (varies by client need); number of clients in a rehabilitation counselor's caseload (it was done by a hand count).

The Council requested and received information on the term: "Order of Selection".

The Council asked about marketing vocational rehabilitation to more potential consumers. The Rehabilitation Division responded by saying that if the Council and vocational rehabilitation programs pursue marketing to generate additional requests for service, a waiting list is likely to develop and an Order of Selection likely would be created. The action, according to the Rehabilitation Division, would reduce the total number of clients and types of clients served.

Transition Cases. The Council in FFY 2002 reaffirmed its desire for improvements in transition services for individuals with disabilities who are making the transition from the public school system to the world of work.

Council members spent considerable time questioning Rehabilitation Division staff members about the sufficiency of professionals to serve transition students in the southern part of the state. The Rehabilitation Division assured the Council that the number of rehabilitation counselors currently on board could meet the needs of expected applicants - basing its estimate on requests from school districts for assistance. Some Council members challenged the report because only high school seniors seemed to be receiving vocational rehabilitation attention.

Concerned Council members stated that the number of vocational rehabilitation applicants needing transition services was lower than number of students in special education and that the number should be similar. Even though the numbers were not similar, the Rehabilitation Division was able to show that vocational rehabilitation applicants needing transition services tended to be higher than the number of individuals who were referred to the agency, thus indicating independent application not dependent upon referral by schools.

The Council opted to learn more about potential numbers of vocational rehabilitation applicants from a sub-committee (the Transition Forum), which was authorized by the Council. The sub-committee's purpose was to gather representation from different agencies associated with adults and with disabled youth and to inform parents about services and service providers, especially vocational rehabilitation.

It was expected that the sub-committee would provide the Council and the Rehabilitation Division with direct client and partner input about transition services and other vocational rehabilitation services with an eye to help the Division ensure that vocational rehabilitation services are provided in accordance with law and regulations. The sub-committee was expected to review rehabilitation counselor practices with clients, review policies, and review consumer input into systems change. It hoped to stimulate community collaborations and new

funding sources to create improved services for students with disabilities attempting transition from school to work.

A series of monitoring questions was listed as the sub-committee's first study activity.

The forum, through the Council, requested from the Rehabilitation Division – data that answers:

- 1) Time elapsed from the date an individual inquires about vocational rehabilitation services until an Intake Interview is completed;
- 2) Time elapsed from time of Intake Interview to eligibility determination; and
- 3) Time elapsed from eligibility determination to when service begins; and
- 4) The number of clients in a rehabilitation counselor's caseloads.

With respect to case closures, the Transition Forum asked:

- 1) The definition of the meaning of successful closures;
- 2) A copy of what, in federal law, defines successful case closure;
- 3) A copy of performance indicators that show targets and results for successful closures in the vocational rehabilitation programs.

COUNCIL ACTION TO IMPROVE THE VISIBILITY OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

Brochure. The Vocational Rehabilitation Council designed and had printed a brochure, which described vocational rehabilitation and its advantages to prospective employers of individuals with disabilities. The brochure was provided to Council members and to each vocational rehabilitation office in the state for dissemination. Within two months the bureaus requested a second printing, thus indicating acceptance of the brochure and its use.

Compact Disc. The Council spent considerable time studying the feasibility of publishing a CD that could be distributed to employers so that such employers could become more familiar with vocational rehabilitation. After several presentations and Council-wide discussions, the idea was shelved.

Website. A further outreach activity discussed, but not yet realized, is the development of a one-stop Website of programs and agencies in Nevada for individuals with disabilities. A fundamental problem yet to be resolved is whether the Council's budget can sustain the startup and maintenance of the Website.

OTHER COUNCIL CONCERNS

Medicaid Buy-In. Although not directly connected with the vocational rehabilitation program, there was much discussion regarding a state Medicaid Buy-In effort. The idea included those interested in the Social Security Administration's Ticket to Work Advisory Board. The conception was to develop a program in which individuals with disabilities may enter or re-enter the workforce and purchase Medicaid coverage on a sliding scale basis. The idea also might include a buy-in for employed individuals with disabilities. Some Council members advanced the idea that the Council go on record as supportive of the Medicaid Buy In, and the Council did so.

Legislative Committee. The Council set up a legislative committee which included one state legislator so that the Council could keep abreast of pending legislation. The Nevada Legislature meets every other year. The next legislative session begins in January of 2003. Rehabilitation Division staff members were asked to assist the committee develop bullet points or position papers and develop readable and understandable one-page summaries for legislators.

Annual Report. As a part of its approval of the State Plan for vocational rehabilitation services members of the Council asked that the Council's 2002 annual report include a recommendation that the vocational rehabilitation program track whether:

- 1) Clients with a successful employment outcome have retained such work for as long as 18 months;
- 2) If they have health benefits; and
- 3) If they have additional service needs during that time period.

The Rehabilitation Division answered that, after such a recommendation is made, the item should be added to the Division's strategic plan.

COLLABORATION WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Consistent with federal regulations, the Vocational Rehabilitation Council has made regular efforts toward partnering with the Designated State Unit. For example, prior to full Council consideration of changes to the Client Services Policy and Procedures Manual and to the State Plan, Council representatives have been involved in discussions leading to proposed changes. Moreover, the Council has undertaken efforts to promote the vocational rehabilitation program. A Council committee also continues to explore the feasibility of a statewide Website regarding services for disabled individuals, including institutions associated with employment. The Council also has been centrally involved in triennial needs assessments and in employer and consumer satisfaction surveys with vocational rehabilitation services, spending a share of its budget on these surveys. Another example is that the Council invited constructive review from entities outside the Rehabilitation Division about satisfaction survey objectives, design, goals and interpretation of results. Partnering also is demonstrated by the Division's invitation to Council members to attend a number of trainings for VR program staff.

The Vocational Rehabilitation Council has attempted to coordinate activities with those of other councils within the State of Nevada. As a standing item, the Council has on its meeting agenda reports by the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC), Developmental Disabilities Council, Workforce Investment Board, State Department of Education-IDEA, mental health advisory agencies and, on occasion, the Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities. The latter entity has cooperated with the VRC on two of the promotional efforts identified above.

CONCLUSION

This Vocational Rehabilitation Council annual report gives attention to recent or potential performance of the Nevada Rehabilitation Division's vocational rehabilitation programs, namely 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. There are areas of concern and areas in which improvement can be made, however, which have been addressed in this report.

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.