

**NEVADA STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL (N.S.R.C.)
MEETING MINUTES**

Tuesday, February 6, 2024, at 9:00 am
Rehabilitation Administration
751 Basque Way, Carson City, NV 89706
&
Vocational Rehabilitation
3016 West Charleston Blvd. Suite 200, Las Vegas, NV 89102

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

Robin Kincaid
David Nuestro
Judy Swain
Austin Olson
Dr. Rebecca Rogers
Drazen Elez, VR Administrator – Non-Voting

COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT:

Raquel O'Neill
Sandra Sinicrope

GUESTS/PUBLIC:

Bill Heavilin, Nevada Disability Advocacy & Law Center
Candace Walsh, Market Decision Research

STAFF:

Chricy Harris, Deputy Attorney General
Mechelle Merrill, VR Deputy Administrator of Programs
Brett Martinez, VR Deputy Administrator of Operations
Sheena Childers, VR Bureau Chief
Faith Wilson, VR Quality Control
Jenny Richter Livia, N.S.R.C. Liaison
Marshal Hernandez, VR District Manager
Mat Dorangricchia, VR Northern District Manager
Trina Bourke, VR Southern District Manager
Sertram Harris, VR Administrative Assistant
Regina Higley, VR Administrative Assistant

1. CALL TO ORDER, INTRODUCTIONS, AND VERIFY TIMELY POSTING OF AGENDA

Robin Kincaid, Vice-Chair called the meeting to order at 9:00 am. Jenny Richter Livia, N.S.R.C. Liaison called the role.

Ms. Richter determined a quorum was present and verified that the posting was completed on time in accordance with Open Meeting Law.

2. FIRST PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Kincaid opened the floor to public comment.
No Public Comments were provided.

3. APPROVAL OF THE NOVEMBER 7, 2023, MEETING MINUTES

Ms. Kincaid asked the council for any modifications, changes, corrections to the November 7, 2023, N.S.R.C Meeting Minutes.

Austin Olson, NSRC Councilmember, made a motion to approve the minutes as written. David Nuestro, NSRC Councilmember, seconded the motion. All in favor, none opposed, none abstained, motion carried.

4. APPROVAL OF CHANGING THE TIME FOR N.S.R.C MEETINGS

Ms. Kincaid opened the floor to go over the dates and times of the new suggested time slots, along with making changes to the date of the September N.S.R.C. Meeting.

Drazen Elez, VR Administrator, mentioned the date would reflect the correct date as of September 10th meeting. The new meetings time suggested would start at 1pm, with the option to go back if the new time does not work.

Judy Swain, NSRC Councilmember, made a motion to approve the new time slot as well as making changes to the date of the September meeting. Austin Olson seconded the motion. All in favor, none opposed, none abstained, motion carried.

5. APPROVAL ON POLICY MANUAL CHANGES

Ms. Kincaid opened the floor to Sheena Childers, VR Bureau Chief and Faith Wilson, VR Quality Control on the changes made to the Policy Manual.

Faith Wilson, VR Quality Control, presented the following policy revisions and changes as follows.

Definitions on the Policy changes are straight forward and noted in the Summary of the Policy Changes. We are adding the following definitions:

- Client Assistance Program (CAP) – The CAP provides individual advocacy and legal representation, information and referral services, outreach, and education to vocational rehabilitation clients. CAP also provides information on Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) – An IPE is a written agreement between VR and an individual client outlining the roles/responsibilities of VR and the client, scope of services used to assist the client in obtaining employment, funding sources for the various VR services; and a projected timeline for training/other services, and employment.
- Individualized Written Independent Living Plan (IWILP) – An IWILP is a written plan that is developed by a client of the Older Individuals Who Are Blind program and a designated OIB staff person to determine independent living goals, services needed to meet those goals, and objectives of the services. The plan also explains dates of service, participation requirements, rights, and responsibilities.
- Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) – SSDI is an entitlement program that an individual can access if they have worked long enough and paid Social Security taxes on their earnings. The program pays benefits to adults and children who meet SSA requirements for a qualifying disability and have limited income and resources. Verified beneficiaries of SSDI are presumed to be eligible for VR services.
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI) – SSI provides monthly payments for people who are in special financial need, are disabled, or are older adults. Because this program is funded completely by general taxes, there are stringent requirements that one must fulfill in order to receive it. Children with disabilities or who are blind may also get SSI. Verified beneficiaries of SSI are presumed to be eligible for VR services.
- Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) – WOTC is a Federal tax credit available to employers for hiring and employing individuals from certain targeted groups who have faced significant barriers to employment. Employers may meet their business needs and claim a tax credit if they hire an individual who is in a WOTC targeted group, such as people with disabilities.
- New revisions we have added Examples and clarifications are noted as follows:

- Comparable Services and Benefits – adding Common examples include the PELL grant for post-secondary or other vocational training services, or Medicaid/Medicare for the diagnosis and treatment of impairments.
- Extended Employment – Clarification as: Extended Employment is not considered to be a successful employment outcome for the purpose of the VR program.
- Job Ready – Clarification as: Is when the participant has all the necessary training, hard and soft skills, and tools needed, with supports in place, to begin seeking employment in their chosen vocational goal.
- Legal Guardian – Clarification as: An individual who has the legal authority to act on behalf of a participant, such as a parent, a legal guardian, or one who has power of attorney. Adding – Any person appointed under NRS chapter 159.017 as guardian of the person, of the estate, or of the person and estate. A guardian is an individual who has the legal authority and duty to care for another person or property because of infancy, incapacity, or disability.
- Participant – Clarification as: According to CFR 361.150(a)(1), for the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program, a participant is a reportable individual who has an approved and signed Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) and has begun to receive services. Throughout the federal regulations, it cites “eligible individuals or, as appropriate, the individual’s representative.” In this manual, the agency utilizes the term “participant” with the assumption that it also includes the phrase “or, as appropriate, the individual’s representative.”
- Removal of the definition “Individual Who is Blind” as it is not necessary to define this disability, includes all disability groups, including blindness as a category.
- Assessment of Eligibility – Clarification by adding: In extenuating circumstances, the case manager and applicant may agree to an extension of time, if agreed to by all parties.
- Individualized Written Independent Living Plan (IWILP) – Clarification update as: IWILP timeframe to be developed within 45 days of eligibility determination versus 45 “business” days. This will increase plan development in a timelier manner. Addition to allow for an extension of time

for IWILP development in extenuating circumstances if agreed to by all parties.

- Closure Notices – Revision as: Written notification in their preferred mode of communication of their closure letter. As many OIB participants do not check or can't read their mail.

Ms. Kincaid discusses the need to clarify and make changes to Extended Employment, ensuring compliance with the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938. Extenuating circumstances and case closure timelines are also addressed..

Judy Swain made a motion to approve the Policy Manual Changes with the new minor edits provided by Ms. Kincaid. Austin Olson seconded the motion. All in favor, none opposed, none abstained, motion carried.

6. PRESENTATION OF FFY 2023 CONSUMER SATISFACTION SURVEY PROVIDED BY MARKET DECISIONS RESEARCH

Candace Walsh, Market Decisions Research presented the following PowerPoint with the results from the FFY 2023 Consumer Experience Survey Results.

CONSUMER EXPERIENCE SURVEY 2023 ANNUAL RESULTS

Covering General VR, Youth In Transition, And Older Individuals Who Are Blind

January 2024

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METHODS

Sampling – Who We Talked To

- Market Decisions Research (MDR) completed a total of 1,457 surveys in 2023.
 - General VR Consumers: 1,194
 - Youth In Transition Consumers: 204
 - Older Individuals Who Are Blind Consumers: 59
- These surveys were done with consumers with cases open during January 2023 to September 2023, or with cases closed within that time frame.
- Cases were further stratified by case benchmarks indicated by NV VR/OIB Program.
 - In Service IPE to 6 months
 - In Service 6 to 12 months
 - In Service 18+ months
 - Closed Cases

CORE METRICS SUMMARY

What are the VR Consumer Experience Core Metrics?

The core metrics are the broad measures of the VR Consumer Experience.

- Key measures of the consumer experience that can be compare across concept, across groups, and trended year to year.
- Allow comparison of results across VR agencies using similar metrics
- Some are domains, which are calculated by combining several questions.
- Others are individuals' questions.
- Nevada has 11 core metrics.
 - 6 Domains and 5 key questions

What are the Consumer Experience Core Metrics

- **Overall Satisfaction and Expectations:** A global measure of the consumer experience with Nevada VR/OIB Program.
- **Experience with Services Provided by VR:** This measure focuses on the services provided by the VR or OIB program and the range of services available in each program.
- **Experience with Staff and Counselors:** Consumer's experience working and interacting with Nevada VR/OIB Program staff and their counselors.
- **Communications with VR Staff:** This measure also looks at consumer interactions with staff but is focused specifically on communications between

the consumer and staff. That this is separate from other experiences with staff underscores the importance of communications in the way that consumers rate their experience with the Nevada VR/OIB Program.

- **Consumer Control and Involvement:** How consumers perceive their involvement in the process and control over the choices and goals.
- **Outcomes and Meeting Goals:** How well consumers perceive the services provided by Nevada VR/OIB Program help them meet their goals.

What are the Consumer Experience Core Metrics

- Would you tell your friends with disabilities to go to the Nevada VR/OIB Program for help? (Recommendation)
- Did you experience any problems with Nevada VR/OIB Program, or the services provided to you?
- The ease of the application process.
- The accessibility of the Nevada VR/OIB Program office for someone with your type of disability.

Calculation of the VR Consumer Experience Core Metrics

The consumer experience core metrics all use a common 0 to 100 scale.

- The most positive result is bound to 100.
- The least positive result is bound to 0.
- Each metric is the average of all scores.

The higher the score the more satisfied the consumer or the more positively they view their experience.

- A score of 100 represents an extremely positive experience among VR consumers.
- A score of zero implies an extremely negative experience.

NV VR/OIB Consumer Experience Core Metrics

Domain	Overall	General VR	Youth In Transition	Older Individuals who are Blind
Overall Satisfaction and Expectations	73	74	75	66
Experience with Services Provided by VR	74	74	76	64

Experience with Staff and Counselors	85	85	87	81
Communications with Staff	75	76	76	67
Customer Control and Involvement	77	77	79	71
Outcomes and Meeting Goals	79	78	83	77
Ease of the application process for VR services	76	77	73	60
Accessibility of the VR office for someone with your type of disability	87	88	88	72
Satisfaction with current employment	78	78	81	-
Would you tell your friends with disabilities to go to the VR program for help? (%yes)	90%	90%	89%	84%
Did you experience any problems with VR or the services they have provided to you? (%no)	72%	72%	73%	67%

GENERAL VR

Trends to Watch

Positive Aspects of the Consumer Experience

Most domains and individual question items remained relatively stable throughout 2023. A few trends are worth noting.

- Consumers reported experiencing problems mid 2023 (31%) at a level comparable to the end of 2022 (32%); however, this metric was improving by the end of 2023 (28%).
- Satisfaction with current employment has been unsteady and low throughout 2023 but appears to be rising in more recent measurements.
- The likelihood of recommending VR service was extremely high in 2021, dipped in 2022, and seems to be stabilizing in 2023 at a higher level (90%).

Consumers in service for up to 6 months tend to be more positive about the following aspects:

- Overall Satisfaction and Expectations
- Experience with Services

- Experience with Staff and Counselors
- Outcomes and Meeting Goals

Less Positive Aspects of the Consumer Experience

- The least positive general VR domains are Overall Satisfaction and Expectations and Experience with Services (both 74).
- Other less positive domains include:
 - Outcomes and Meeting Goals
- Those in-service 18 months or more are less positive about several domains and key outcomes. While they still report an experience that is positive overall, this group felt challenged by services to a greater extent than any other.

Nevada VR Consumer Experience Core Metrics for General VR – Trends

Domain	2022 T3	2023 T1	2023 T2	2023 T3
Overall Satisfaction and Expectations	71	74	72	76
Experience with Services Provided by VR	72	75	72	77
Experience with Staff and Counselors	86	86	84	87
Communications with Staff	72	75	74	78
Customer Control and Involvement	77	78	75	79
Outcomes and Meeting Goals	75	80	78	84
Ease of the application process for VR services	76	80	75	75
Accessibility of the VR office for someone with your type of disability	86	88	86	87
Satisfaction with current employment	82	79	71	79
Would you tell your friends with disabilities to go to the VR program for help? (%yes)	89%	89%	89%	90%
Did you experience any problems with VR or the services they have provided to you? (%no)	68%	74%	69%	72%

Problems Experienced

28% of consumers reported experiencing a problem with VR or the services they were provided.

- Of those experiencing a problem, 29% indicate that Nevada VR worked to resolve the problem.

- Problems center around communication with counselors and perceived time lags to get into the program.

Have you experienced any problems with VR or the services they have provided to you? (% No – Annual Data)

Period of Service	%
General VR	72%
IPE to 6 months in service	74%
6 to 12 months in service	67%
Cases open more than 18 months	71%
Closed Cases	73%

Types of Problems Experience by General VR Consumers

Type or Problem or Issue	% Experiencing
Counselor did not return calls, emails or follow up	14%
Better communication needed	10%
Counselor was not helpful or supportive	9%
Time lags to get into the program	9%
Listen to customer, understand needs, wants, ability	8%
Received no help in reaching plan or goals	8%
Long time to get things going, process slow	8%

FEEDBACK FROM GENERAL VR CONSUMERS

Consumer Feedback

- Consumers were asked to provide additional feedback If they reviewed a not positive in their assessment. This included those who said:
 - They were not satisfied with VR,
 - VR did not meet expectations, or
 - They disagreed that VR helped or met their goals, they did not feel welcome, they found something difficult, they did not find VR accessible.
- Feedback was collected throughout the survey in response to 21 questions.
- Consumers could provide more than one response to a question and may have been asked to respond to more than one question.
- The following table summarizes the most common responses from 766 consumers that provided additional feedback. This is 64% of interviewed general VR consumers.

Consumer Feedback

Consumer Feedback	%
Better communication needed	29%
Counselor did not return calls, emails or follow up	23%
Received no help in reaching plan or goals	15%
Counselor was not helpful or supportive	15%
Needed help in filling out forms	13%
Forms and paperwork hard, complicated	12%
Slow approval process, waiting for help	12%
Staff did not return calls, emails or follow up	12%

EMPLOYMENT AND JOB SATISFACTION

Job Satisfaction

78% of employed consumers are satisfied with their job.

**Thinking about your current job, how satisfied are you with what you are doing?
(%Satisfied – Annual Data)**

Period of Service	%
General VR	78%
6 to 12 months in service	72%
Cases open more than 18 months	70%
Closed Cases	80%

Employment

53% of General VR consumers are working.

Finally, these few questions ask about what you are currently doing. Are you currently....? (2023 Annual Data)

Employment	%
Working full time, that is, more than 35 hours per week	24%
Working part time	29%
Currently looking for a job	29%
Keeping house	29%
In school or receiving job training	20%
Currently unable to work	14%
Volunteering your time	12%

Job Satisfaction

Why are you not satisfied with your current job? (2023 Annual Data)

Job Satisfaction	%
Not a career move, only temporary job	28%
Dissatisfied with aspects or parts of job	21%
Job is physically demanding	19%
Need a job aligned with skills, training	13%
Low pay, does not meet financial need	13%
Unpleasant work environment	13%

YOUTH IN TRANSITION

Trends to Watch

Positive Aspects of the Consumer Experience

Younger consumers, typically those who are 25 years old or younger, tend to be far more positive about their experience with VR and VR services. They are more satisfied with the following.

- Overall, their experience with VR and VR services
- Information they were provided regarding their choices.
- Communication with their counselors and VR staff, receiving prompt responses, and finding it easy to get in contact with their counselors.
- The amount of control and involvement they have over their VR experience and feeling that their opinions and ideas were considered.
- Satisfaction with job development services they received and reaching their goals.
- All domains, with the exception of overall satisfaction and ease of the application process, have been trending up throughout the year.

Trends to Watch

Less Positive Aspects of the Consumer Experience

- Least positive domains are Ease of the Application Process (73) and Overall Satisfaction and Expectations (75).
- Declining Domains (two or more consecutive trimesters)
 - Ease of the Application Process
 - Overall Satisfaction and Expectations
 - Recommend VR (75% in T1 dropped to 70% in T3 of 2023)

Nevada VR Consumer Experience Core Metrics for Youth In Transition – Trends

Domain	2022 T3	2023 T1	2023 T2	2023 T3
Overall Satisfaction and Expectations	79	75	74	74
Experience with Services Provided by VR	79	74	77	77
Experience with Staff and Counselors	86	86	85	88
Communications with Staff	83	71	76	77
Customer Control and Involvement	81	77	78	82
Outcomes and Meeting Goals	84	87	83	83
Ease of the application process for VR services	75	72	77	71
Accessibility of the VR office for someone with your type of disability	85	85	87	93
Satisfaction with current employment	86	66	78	86
Would you tell your friends with disabilities to go to the VR program for help? (%yes)	90%	91%	87%	90%
Did you experience any problems with VR or the services they have provided to you? (%no)	80%	75%	72%	70%

Youth In Transition Services

- A series of questions was asked to assess the use of special services targeted toward youth in transition.
 - Almost all those receiving these services found them valuable.

Youth In Transition Services	% Receiving Service	% Finding the Service Valuable
Workplace readiness to help get ready for the challenges of work	61%	99%
Job exploration counseling or career counseling	58%	98%
Counseling on opportunities to attend college, learn a trade, or get a professional certification after high school	57%	96%
Work based learning experiences including a job, internship, or volunteering	54%	97%
Instruction in self-advocacy to help you live the life you want including peer mentoring	56%	100%

Problems Experienced

- 27% of youth consumers reported experiencing a problem with VR or the services they were provided.
 - Of those experiencing a problem, 26% indicate that Nevada VR worked to resolve the problem.

Did VR work to solve this problem? (% Yes – Annual Data)

Period of Service	%
Youth In Transition	26%
IPE to 6 months in service	23%
6 to 12 months in service	49%
Cases open more than 18 months	34%
Closed Cases	0%

Types of Problems Experienced by YIT Consumers

Type or Problem or Issue	% Experiencing
Counselor was not helpful or supportive	19%
Counselor did not return calls, emails or follow up	14%
Better communication needed	12%
Nothing achieved, VR not effective	9%
Received no help in reaching plan or goals	8%
Staff did not return calls, emails or follow up	7%
Long time to get things going, process slow	7%
Listen to customer, understand needs, wants, ability	7%

FEEDBACK FROM YOUTH IN TRANSITION

Consumer Feedback

- Consumers were asked to provide additional feedback when they were not positive in their assessment. Those who provided feedback were respondents who said:
 - They were not satisfied with VR,
 - VR did not meet expectations, or
 - They disagreed that VR helped or met their goals, they did not feel welcome, they found something difficult, they did not find VR accessible.
- Feedback was collected throughout the survey in response to 21 questions.
- Consumers could provide more than one response to a question and may have been asked to respond to more than one question.

- The following page summarizes the most common responses from 125 consumers that provided additional feedback. This is 61% of youth in transition consumers.

Consumer Feedback

Consumer Feedback	%
Difficulties with paperwork and forms, need help in completing forms, need alternate formats	57%
Issues communicating with staff or counselors, difficulty reaching staff or counselors	57%
Waiting to receive services, have not received services	20%
Needed more support or services, had to fight to obtain services, needed more guidance	18%
Needed more information about programs and services, did not provide enough information	17%
VR program was not effective in helping customer or helping customer meet goals	13%
VR counselors or staff was unprofessional, rude, did not care	13%
VR counselors or staff did not provide the help I needed, broke promises, customer had to do all the work	12%
Needed more help finding work, need to help customers find work, customer had to find a job on their own	8%
Other	10%

OLDER INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE BLIND

Trends to Watch

Positive Aspects of the Consumer Experience

OIB program consumers report overall positive experience, but not as positive as they have been in the past or when compared to other groups.

- The most positive part of their experience is working with OIB program staff and counselors.
- Other positive areas include:
 - Outcomes and Meeting Goals
 - Customer Control and Involvement
- Aspects that worked well were a continuation of the previous year's trends, including the following.
 - OIB consumers received needed equipment.
 - Some consumers felt the entire program worked well for them.

- Communication and accessibility of their counselor was good.

Trends to Watch

Less Positive Aspects of the Consumer Experience

- Ease of the Application Process
- Communication with Staff
- Experience with Services Provided
- Overall Satisfaction and Expectations

Common reasons for dissatisfaction include:

- Difficulty with paperwork and needing either assistance or alternative formats to complete paperwork.
- Issues communicating with staff and the need for more thorough and timely communications.
- Needing more support or services in general. Accessing services felt like a fight and OIB consumers need more guidance.

What consumers see as challenges:

- Personal barriers, like being independent and coping with disability, are challenges frequently mentioned by OIB consumers.
- Accessing transportation poses a challenge.
- Communication was mentioned as a challenge throughout the OIB experience.

Nevada VR Consumer Experience Core Metrics for Older Individuals Who Are Blind – Trends

Domain	2022 T3	2023 T1	2023 T2	2023 T3
Overall Satisfaction and Expectations	79	54	71	74
Experience with Services Provided by the OIB program	79	50	70	70
Experience with Staff and Counselors	86	74	84	86
Communications with Staff	83	56	70	76
Customer Control and Involvement	82	63	72	79
Outcomes and Meeting Goals	83	70	82	78
Ease of the application process for OIB program services	71	61	62	54
Accessibility of the OIB program office for someone with your type of disability	62	73	70	78

Would you tell your friends with disabilities to go to the OIB program for help? (%yes)	83%	83%	87%	84%
Did you experience any problems with the OIB program or the services they have provided to you? (%no)	83%	63%	74%	56%

Problems Experienced

- 33% of consumers reported experiencing a problem, the least of any population.

Have you experienced any problem with VR or the services they have provided to you? (% No)

Period of Service	%
Older Individuals Who Are Blind	66%
IPE to 6 months in service	60%
6 to 12 months in service	60%
Cases open more than 18 months	77%
Closed Cases	68%

Types of Problems Experienced by OIB Consumers

Type or Problem or Issue	% Experiencing
Counselor did not return calls, emails or follow up	25%
Counselor was not helpful or supportive	19%
Had to leave multiple messages before getting a call back	12%
Counselor would not listen, dismissed concerns	12%
Received no help in reaching plan or goals	12%
Better communication needed	7%
Calls, mail not returned for days, weeks, had to wait too long for return call	6%

Percentage among those experiencing a problem. N=16

FEEDBACK FROM OLDER INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE BLIND

Consumer Feedback

- Consumers were asked to provide additional feedback when they were not positive in their assessment. Consumers who were not satisfied had the following to say.
 - They were not satisfied with the OIB program.

- The OIB program did not meet expectations.
- They disagreed that the OIB program helped or met their goals, they did not feel welcome, they found something difficult, they did not find the OIB program accessible.
- Feedback was collected throughout the survey in response to 21 questions.
- Consumers could provide more than one response to a question and may have been asked to respond to more than one question.
- The following page summarizes the most common responses from the 52 consumers that provided additional feedback. This is 90% of OOIB consumers.

Consumer Feedback

Consumer Feedback	%
Difficulties with paperwork and forms, need help in completing forms, need alternate formats	60%
Issues communicating with staff or counselors, difficulty reaching staff or counselors	51%
Needed more support or services, had to fight to obtain services, needed more guidance	27%
Waiting to receive services, have not received services	27%
VR counselors or staff did not provide the help I needed, broke promises, customer had to do all the work	25%
VR counselors or staff was unprofessional, rude, did not care	21%
Needed more information about programs and services, did not provide enough information	19%
VR program was not effective in helping customer or helping customer meet goals	18%
Needed specific equipment or adaptations	15%

CONCLUSIONS

Positive Consumer Experience

Consumers remain positive about their VR/OIB program experience.

- The most positive aspects of the consumer experience is working with staff and counselors and accessibility of the program office.
- The YIT population report a more positive experience than other populations.
- Those in service IPE to 6 months among General VR and Youth are more positive than other service phases.
- By region, rural consumers and those in the North are more positive about their experience than in the South.

Areas of Focus for Quality Improvement

- While no longer the least positive domain, communication is the primary subject of quality improvement feedback.
 - True of all three service populations
 - There has been in an increase of those reporting problems in all service populations.
- Consumer feedback focuses on staying connected and the time it takes to contact their counselor:
 - Issues communicating with staff or counselors, difficulty reaching staff or counselors.
 - Changing counselors, switching too much, causes problems.
 - Difficulties with paperwork and forms
 - VR Counselors or staff did not provide the help needed.
 - Waiting to receive services.
- Among suggested improvements:
 - Better communication in general.
 - More open communication with clients, more follow-up.
 - Provide more information about services.

Areas of Focus for Quality Improvement

In addition to basic communication issues, customers mention specific challenges they experienced with receiving services.

- Common feedback includes:
 - Process of seeking employment
 - Personal barrier, being independent, coping with disability.
 - Communication in general
 - Lack of communication
 - Transportation
 - Delays in service
 - Application, acceptance, getting started.

Areas of Focus Quality Improvement

Core areas to monitor and improve.

- While still largely positive, more consumers reported experiencing problems in 2023. The issues are primarily with **staff and counselors**.
 - Domain dipped in T2 but has improved in all service populations in T3.

- OIB were most likely to experience a problem.
- **Ease of the application process** is also declining for all groups and remains one of the more negative aspects of the experience.
- Youth and General VR are more likely to **recommend the VR program** compared to this time last year.

Moving Forward

- Data collected will continue in three Trimester data collection periods.
 - January – April
 - May – August
 - September – December
- Data collection will still be primarily handled by telephone.
 - Consumers will be invited to complete the survey online.
 - We predict telephone surveys will continue to be the primary format for data collection.
 - This population has consistently had a higher telephone response rate.
- Initial efforts to complete the survey will be done by telephone, followed by:
 - Email reminders to those with available and valid emails.
 - Consumers may request an email invitation to the online survey.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Mechelle Merrill, VR Deputy Administrator of Programs, questioned the data about the answer for clients unable to work. Ms. Merrill mentioned data collection and the online survey as to why there is not more data collected due to the online issues.

Ms. Walsh mentioned there are multiple-choice answers, and that was the response clients gave to the answer, and no explanation was given as to why. The question will be looked at to modify it and get a deeper look into the responses. Ms. Walsh mentioned that phone surveys have always worked the best. Online surveys are accessible but still have fewer responses. We have been trying to

brainstorm on how to get more use of online. They feel that VR clients want to share their experiences and want to be heard.

Drazen Elez, VR Administrator, mentioned the splendid work Market Decision Research does on the surveys, by getting us the data to work on the policies and procedures to put in place to improve the VR experience. The FFY 2023 number of surveys completed was 1,500, which was 40% of the clients we serviced in the fiscal year, as we serviced 3,400 clients. The satisfaction rate among youth is great for being a government agency, speaks to what we are doing in the program.

Ms. Walsh mentioned online surveys are sent to the clients who ask to receive them via email, and all clients that have an email address are sent the online survey. Each client is attached to a PIN number when sending the survey. There is no access to the survey for anyone to take online.

7. OTHER REPORTS

Ms. Kincaid opened the floor for information presented by Bill Heavilin, Nevada Disability Advocacy & Law Center

Mr. Heavilin, NDALC, reported Jack Mayes retired from the agency with a new Executive Director Laura Good Devereaux. Last fiscal year, from October 2022 to the end of September 2023, Client Assistance Program (CAP) had 65 information referrals; 26 were related to Vocational Rehabilitation, and 31 were information to Title 1 of the American with Disabilities Act, employment section of the ADA. 1 person wanted information about CAP and 5 people inquired about Independent Living Programs.

We also look at any issues, problems, or concerns about the Independent Living Programs funded under the REA Act. A total of 15 cases are short-term cases involving communication issues or reestablishing communication with the program. The majority of the calls we received for VR were for communication issues or to reestablish communication with their counselor to help them along in their process to meet employment goals. We serve clients in the VR program with their Protection Advocacy for Beneficiaries who receive SSI or SSD.

Ms. Kincaid mentioned the Council is here to welcome Ms. Good Devereaux and for Mr. Mayes to have an enjoyable retirement. Thanked Mr. Heavilin for his updates.

8. REHABILITATION SERVICES ADMINISTRATION (RSA)

Ms. Kincaid opened the floor to Mechelle Merrill, VR Deputy Administrator of Programs, to go over the Technical Assistance Circular letter received from RSA.

Ms. Merrill mentioned that the RSA sends out the Technical Assistance Circular at random, and moving forward, the information will be presented at the NSRC Council Meetings at a request from vicechair Ms. Kincaid. The most recent circular is RSA-TAC-24-01. The subject matter is Promoting Meaningful and Sustained Engagement of Individuals with Disabilities in the State Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program. This letter is a best practice pointer for VR agencies and has more suggestions than anything else. Faster is better when it comes to VR services. Meaningful and sustained engagement is for us getting in contact with our clients as quickly as possible.

As you can see on the report from Market Decision Research, that is always a challenge, and not just for our agency. The requirement for contact is every 90 days to once a month in the Nevada VR program. Counselors are required to reach out to clients every month. Engagement is something we can always do more of from the perspective of the participant. We are doing our best to meet this goal. Optimizing program visibility is a point made in the letter, which we took to heart with our rebranding of the website at vrnevada.nv.gov.

The website is more responsive in searches, as well as having greater respect from using a dot-gov website domain. Along with having a presence on Social Media platforms, both things have optimized the visibility of our program. We have an Annual Strategic Planning for the purpose of transparency. We have also held Town Hall Meetings virtually and in person to gather feedback and inform the community. The Town Hall meeting notes, and the Strategic Plan are on the vrnevada.nv.gov website. They talk about engaging early and often, which is part of our Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) program. We have a multitude of services we provide to students with disabilities, in addition to the five required Pre-ETS. The use of Job Shading through Virtual Explore through the State of Nevada Department of Education.

We have purchased licenses for every student with disabilities in Nevada to use this program to help them to understand every job they can think of they may want to pursue after graduation. It gives them the outcomes in relation to education, what is expected to perform the job, wages to expect, and job market openings in the field if the student wishes to pursue them. The State of Nevada Department of Education is pushing this firmly in their schools to the teachers at the allocated levels. We conduct Summer Camps and Interim Session camps, interim session camps, and summer youth internship camps for youth adults to receive opportunities for employment. Practical Assessment of Exploration (PACE) labs exist for youth to try firsthand if they like completing the task for the job that they may choose.

We have updated all of our local education agreements and our Statewide Education Agreement. The letter mentions streamlining the application and initiating the engagement process. Our website is open 24 hours a day to take

those applications, along with a human you can call and talk to receive help and guide an individual through the application process. We do not have an orientation requirement; it is a suggestion.

The Technical Assistance Circular from RSA has items to consider implementing. We are doing a strong job and already have things in place that are in the letter. We will present any circular letters from RSA to the Council as we receive them at the NSRC meetings.

Ms. Kincaid thanked Ms. Merrill and mentioned that the RSA circular is considered a best practice for VR programs and that we would like to take into consideration the use of their requirements to improve the responses to the applicants. The applicants are always looking for a way to achieve financial independence, and we should have timely responses to assess them.

9. **DIVISION REPORT**

Ms. Kincaid opened the floor for the Division Reports.

Sheena Childers, VR Bureau Chief, reviewed the staff vacancies and reported a combined BSBVI and VR vacancy rate of 14.69%. There are 11 positions vacant for counselor positions, mainly in the south in the VR program. We have 4 counselors starting before the end of February. We received one Fair Hearing request dated January 17, 2024.

NSRC Goals and Indicators. Time indicators from October 1, 2023, through December 31, 2023, first quarter of the Federal Fiscal Year 2024. These are the newly established Goals and Indicators.

Goal #1 Increase Number of Competitive Integrated Employment Outcomes.

FFY 2024, Clients Closed with an Employment Outcome is 114, Goal is 550. We are moving along, however down a little bit in this quarter.

Goal #2 Increase Participation of Students with a Disability in Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). Including Outreach activities to provide Pre-ETS to students with disabilities.

FFY 2024, Potentially Eligible & Eligible Transition Students that receive Pre-ETS Services is 421. Goal To Be Determined.

Goal #3 Increase Participation of Potentially Eligible Students with A Disability in VR Services. This is a look at our conversion rate. They are students known to the VR program but have not applied for services to become VR clients.

FFY 2024, Total Transition Student Applications 190, Goal is 250.

Goal #4 Increase Participation of Supported Employment (SE) Consumers in VR.

FFY 2024, Total Open Supported Employment consumers is 523, Supported Employment Consumers Closed with an Employment Outcome is 22, Goal is 475.

Goal #5 Increase Participation of Targeted Disability Groups in VR Services.
How we are servicing different disability groups with services and employment outcomes.

FFY 2024, Clients with a Mental Health Disability Who Closed with An Employment Outcome is 28, Clients Who Are Blinded or Visually Impaired Who Closed with An Employment Outcome is 5, Clients Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing Who Closed with An Employment Outcome is 16.

Indicator #1 Average Caseload size of Bureau

FFY 2024, Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR) is 71, Bureau of Services to the Blind and Visually Impaired (BSBVI) is 56.

Indicator #2 700 Hour Program

FFY 2024, Number of active participants in the 700-hour program is 7, Number of participants completed the 700-hour program and achieved competitive integrated employment is 11.

Ms. Kincaid mentioned concerns over not meeting the goals since there were changes made to the goals as the way the goals are reported, and not meeting the new goals set pertaining to Goal #4 and how many months are left remaining in FFY2024.

Ms. Childers mentioned her concerns for Goal #4 would be with Supported Employment Consumers Closed with an Employment Outcome. I would look at tracking our progress and achieve more than what we achieved last FFY 2023, closures were 130. In terms of this quarter, we are down in this first quarter, but we need to look at the reasons, including the onboarding of Supportive Employment Counselors with the staff being on probationary status. In terms of how much time we have remaining in FFY, is 9 months. We have more than 6 months to catch up. The other goal of concern would be Goal #1 we are behind in pace. This is a call to attention to the Managers in the program to be moving clients in their status and closure if appropriate. We will do okay with the Pre-ETS goals. The other goal would be the 700-Hour Program getting clients coded and onto an active employment program.

Ms. Kincaid mentioned that Goal #2 has a goal number to be determined and has concerns why this is not set. Still voiced concerns over Goal #4 and the numbers.

Ms. Childers mentioned that the goal is to increase consumer participation in VR. The goal is accurate. Program Managers are more concerned with the outcomes,

and we are already exceeding your goal with clients participating in services. The next step is getting them employed in meaningful employment opportunities.

Mechelle Merrill, VR Deputy Administrator of Programs, provided information on the Disability Innovation Fund (DIF) Grant with the Department of Education and the Nevada Trip Program. Nevada received a \$10 million grant. We are building an interactive, comprehensive website and calling it the Nevada Trip: A Trip of a Lifetime. It will help students and their circle of supporters understand the transition process and options in Nevada. A contract has been signed by all parties, and is with DP Video, and is pending the Board of Examiners approval, upon approval we will collaborate with them to develop the website, which is one of the bigger components of the project. We are looking forward to telling you much more when we get started. Everyone is frustrated with the pace of getting started due to the many layers of approval. It is taking a while to get started.

Ms. Kincaid mentioned the disability community would be excited about having a new tool to use to teach parents and youth about the Journey they are going to begin when they exit their high school and move on to their post-secondary services. This is a collaboration with the Department of Education, Vocational Rehabilitation and Independent Living Council, and Nevada PEP and any anyone else missed mentioned "Thank you." Would like to see it as a standing item.

Brett Martinez, VR Deputy Administrator of Operations, addressed the Maintenance of Effort (MOE) Letter received from FFY 2023. As of September 2023, just under \$350,000 was captured. This loss didn't impact the agency as we typically spend 65-70 percent of our Federal Award and return the unused funds back to the Rehabilitation Administration Services (RSA). In FFY 2023 we returned \$10 million of the \$31.7 million federal funding we received. The loss was due to reduced COVID-19 services and lower expenses. It's expected that other states have also experienced financial impacts. The MOE looks at FFY 2020 losses, and we anticipate a \$1.3 million loss for 2021, we usually bear more than that without affecting agency operations. We can carry out our activities.

Mr. Elez mentioned that, as stated in the Maintenance of Effort Letter, we will see a reduction in our Federal Grant as pending. As a State Agency we are provided with the appropriate match to draw down the grant we are awarded. Typically, VR Nevada has not been able to draw down the entire fund as we have not had the appropriate match from the state. As the grant is being reduced, it is not impacting our budget.

Ms. Kincaid questioned the types of notifications, as one dated June 12, 2023, regarding funds for Pre-ETs which were not spent. Which I think is different than

the Maintenance of Effort Letter. The letter dated June requires a corrective action plan. Ms. Kincaid wanted clarification on the letter and the action plan in place.

Mr. Martinez provided information on the Corrective Action Letter related to Pre-ETS from RSA regarding the 15% of grant funding to be used to provide Pre-ETS services. So far, we have not spent 15% on Pre-ETS, so RSA sent a letter stating we have to get to 15%. A quarterly response letter was sent out to RSA with the corrective action plan. We aim to be at 15.5% in the first quarter for Pre-ETS spending. We are doing well at the moment. We implemented Virtual Job Shadow in the PACE labs, and Marshal Hernandez is the head of a dedicated Pre-ETS team. There is a big focus on Pre-ETS and getting to the 15%; we are doing everything possible to get there. It's still unknown what the ramifications will be if we don't get there by the end of this FFY. We are currently working on the achieving the target of the action plan for the Pre-ETS program.

Mr. Elez mentioned we have been reporting to the council on the 15% expenditure as well as the pace at which we are getting there. During COVID, we lost a significant amount of our Pre-ETS service delivery done through a third-party service. We had cooperation arrangements with the different school districts as well as the colleges. Clark County School District was our main delivery of Pre-ETS in the south. During the time of COVID, we have lost this ability and access to the students. It is still a struggle today in Clark County to serve students.

We have established a good relationship in the rural area and the north to provide some Pre-ETS in the schools. We are marginally present in Clark County. We are trying to expand services in Clark County to serve students with disabilities. The Letter is paired with the RSA Monitoring, which was mentioned to the council in the summer of FFY 2023 about the periodical auditing RSA does about every 5 years. They were here for about one week, auditing records, interviewing staff, and reviewing policies and procedures. They were going through a great deal of information during their audit. We are expecting to receive that report in the next month. Then, when we receive the report, we will set an item on the agenda to go over the findings, along with the plans to address them.

Going over the TAC today, RSA is flexible on some of the services provided. When it comes to the audit items, they are not approaching those items in the same way. There is an increase in focus from the staff on collecting a great deal of information from the clients, which is a request from the RSA. The people collecting the information are in the direct line of helping the clients. We must balance the need for compliance with the requirements of the program according to the FFY requirements rules and the problematic data collection. The agency must meet all of the federal, as well as state, requirements. The collection of the reports is called RSA 911, and there are over 550 data collection points we report on a monthly

basis to the RSA. For each of those 550 points, VR reported on over 3,400 individuals. There is a great deal of data collection, which is helpful and assists us in making more informed choices and decisions for the program.

VR had its first statewide Town Hall Meeting in November 2023, which was well attended. We had invited multiple stakeholders and public members and shared information. The feedback we received was positive, and we are looking to use it in our Strategic Plan we do once a year. The direction we are heading in and those projects that have priority. Feedback included timelines for applications, developing IPE's, inquiries about the 700-hour program, and other suggestions. The reports are on the vrnevada.nv.gov website.

DIF Grant gov website. The report is under the News tab on the website titled Town Hall Meeting Notes.

Mr. Elez reviewed the Strategic Plan for FFY 2024 on the vrnevada.nv.gov website.

Priority # 1 Develop VR (VR, BEN, BSBVI, OIB) Staff

We have implemented Supervisory Leadership Training. This is to help our leaders lead their teams and ensure their outcomes. The Implementation of YesLMS VR Staff Training with our first Statewide Onboarding Training on January 16, 2024. Centralized training from multiple locations with the use of other state resources to facilitate staff training on an accessible platform.

Priority # 2 Modernize and Innovate

DIF Grant was added and reviewed by Mechelle Merrill. We are developing a payment card program. The VR Program in California works well in procuring goods for clients using a payment card program. This will give clients more choices during their time in service with us. Implement a Consumer Portal for VR's Client Management System. Counselors only have access to our client management system, called AWARE. We are looking into the clients having access to their case in the system to help look up information about their case, or update their contact information. We are Hoping to roll it out by this summer; we will notify the council of the progress.

Priority # 3 Improving Client Experience

Implementing Disability Benefits (DB) 101 to continuously improve the client experience. We have had procurement challenges for funding, and the timeline was delayed. Develop & Implement Parent Academy for Families of Transition Age Students and Youth. We have worked with the University of Nevada, Reno and parents and guardians of family members transitioning from education to the VR

program. There is a change in how services are given, and we feel they need to be trained and learn from the experiences of others who have gone through the process. Understanding as to what they would be able to expect, and the services we are able to provide is crucial.

Ms. Merrill mentioned that, the feedback received from families is that the K-12 Education system is based on an Entitlement System; and mentally going from that to the VR program, which is an eligibility-based system, is taxing on the families. Entitlement system in K-12 recognizes whoever is in the student support system as a given measure. As in the VR program itself, it does not recognize the support system unless the individual brings the family into the VR program with them, if they are minors. It is a vastly different mindset for the families and the guardians, as they are no longer included in the decisions. In the family's words, they are being left out. We never looked at the perspective of the family until we were shown and informed of the family's perspective. We are working with Diana Forkelson and the University of Reno Nevada, ENSD to create a program for everyone in the equation to have a better understanding of the process and what to expect from the changes from the Entitlement system in the schools, to the eligibility system of the VR program. We are hoping to have this in the schools as part of the Pre-ETS services to eliminate the fears of the students and their families and help with the transition process. VR is excited about this strategy.

Mr. Elez followed up by the following:

Priority # 4 Improving Performance Outcomes

Expansion of the Employer Recognition Initiative to highlight Disability-Inclusive Businesses last year was the first year we gave awards to businesses hiring individuals with disabilities as a high percentage in their workforce. The state of Nevada is the number one employer that hires individuals with disabilities. Sephora warehouse, located in Las Vegas, is the second highest employer hiring individuals with disabilities in Nevada. We are hoping for the branding of this program to be implemented with other employers in the state.

Priority # 5 Expanding Pre-ETS Services

We are expanding the Pre-ETS Services; this has been a key focus for the past three years. We are focused on meeting these requirements and expanding the program with the number of students we serve.

We also have an archive section to review the previous Strategic Plans. Mr. Elez thanked all of the VR staff in the program. We are currently seeing historic levels of individuals seeking out our services and an interest in our agency. We are looking into how we can best respond to the increase, and how we can make it

easier for prospective clients to apply for services. We have redesigned our application process from 8 or 9 pages down to 8 or 9 multiple-choice questions. We tried to remove barriers for people to apply online.

We have gone from one to two weeks for paperwork to be completed to start services, and with the use of technology, we now have 85% of the paperwork completed in the first two hours of applying for services. We are removing barriers in the internal processes with the policies and procedures we follow, and then adjusting them to make it easier for clients and staff. We are using a great deal of social media to advertise the program. We have clients' stories about their experiences in VR on the website. We have improved signage across our buildings, and staff are using our brand to set us apart and make VR recognizable.

The NSRC has helped spread the message of VR programs to others in the community, as well as the services that we offer and can provide. Our agency is under pressure due to the increased number of applicants applying for services. We are working our best to serve clients within the appropriate timeline. We are providing high-quality levels of customer service due to the high percentage of satisfaction noted in the Customer Survey data of 75 to 80%. We are looking for a solution to provide for the increased number of applicants and also to increase the satisfaction with services provided for short-term and long-term goals. We will provide information at the next NSRC meeting for these solutions we come up with and accompany them with necessary data and numbers.

We will also have the LCB Audit and the RSA Audit findings at the next NSRC meeting, as well as the Pre-ETS Letter. We apologize if we have missed anything in the meetings, as we are under pressure with a great deal of work ahead of us and the growth the agency is experiencing.

Ms. Kincaid mentioned clients through NVPEP are strongly encouraged to ask about the need for Pre-ETS in the schools. At one point, we were giving out a contact name and number for a staff member from VR. Is there a new contact name and number we can give to parents and schools for Pre-ETS Services? The goal is to get the students to receive the Pre-ETS services. They have also had complaints about educators not receiving calls back for services.

Mr. Elez thanked NVPEP about the Pre-ETS for the services. We are working on brochure information cards to be sent out to schools. We will send information to NSRC members to hand out as well. Marshal Hernandez is the new District Manager Transition Coordinator. You can contact him for assistance at Phone number 702-486-7985 or by email at M-HERNANDEZ@DETR.NV.GOV. We have been able to add positions to this program through state legislation and are working to fulfill the department's mandate.

Ms. Merrill thanked Ms. Kincaid for encouraging to ask for Pre-ETS and for her to pass on the Pre-ETS email address as PRE-ETS@DETR.NV.GOV to ask for services. The email box is monitored and checked, and they will always have a response.

Mr. Elez mentioned on the [Home - VR Nevada \(nv.gov\)](http://Home-VR.Nevada.nv.gov) website that there are specific tabs for students, parents, and educators. This is a suitable place to get any information to use before we get any handouts completed.

10. COMMENTS BY THE COUNCIL

Ms. Kincaid opened the floor for comments or future agenda items.

Ms. Kincaid requested a summary on the Corrective Action Letter for the Pre-ETS, an update on the Maintenance of Effort Letter, update on the LCB Audit Report and the Monitoring of Determination Letter if available.

11. SECOND PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Kincaid opened the floor for public comment.
No public comments were received.

12. ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Kincaid asked to adjourn the meeting.
The meeting adjourned at 11:18 AM.

Minutes submitted by: Regina Higley
Edited By: Jenny Richter Livia

Jenny Richter Livia, N.S.R.C. Liaison

Approved By:

Robin Kincaid, Vice-Chair