

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

Tuesday, February 7, 2023, at 9am

Rehabilitation Administration
751 Basque Way, Carson City, NV 89706
&
Vocational Rehabilitation
3016 West Charleston Blvd. Suite 200, Las Vegas, NV 89102

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

Raquel O'Neill
Judy Swain
Rebecca Rogers
David Nuestro
Jack Mayes
David Fisher
Sandra Sinicrope
Austin Olson
Robin Kincaid

COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT:

Alex Goff
Tucker Morgan

GUESTS/PUBLIC:

Steven Cohen, member of the public
Candace Walsh, Market Decisions Research
Dawn Lyons, Executive Director, Nevada Statewide Independent Living Council / NV SILC
Emma Schmid, Blind Connect Intern
Cynthia Hoff, member of the public
Lenny DeForge, member of the public
Warren Wheatley, member of the public
Kenya Ramirez, member of the public
Tina Ochoa, member of the public
Yossi Globman, member of the public
LaTonya Walker, member of the public
Orlando Johnson, member of the public
Michelle Albrecht, member of the public
Sandy Bassett, member of the public

STAFF:

Chricy Harris, Deputy Attorney General
Javier Fernandez, VR Liaison to NSRC
Drazen Elez, VR Administrator
Mechelle Merrill, VR Deputy Administrator of Programs
Brett Martinez, VR Deputy Administrator Operations
Sheena Childers, VR Bureau Chief
Mat Dorangricchia, VR Northern District Manager
Trina Bourke, VR Southern District Manager
Laura Fink, VR Counselor
Laura Thompson, VR Counselor
Araceli Pyper, VR Technician
Sertram Harris, Administrative Assistant
Regina Higley, Administrative Assistant

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

Raquel O’Neill, Chair called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. Javier Fernandez NSRC Liaison called the roll.

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

2. **FIRST PUBLIC COMMENT**

Raquel O’Neill opened floor to public comment.

Lenny DeForge voiced his concerns over a family members experience with VR. Warren Wheatley expressed his concerns as well.

Ms. O’Neill welcomed new council member Robin Kincaid, Director of Educational Services with Nevada Parent Empowering Parent (NVPEB) to the NRSC council.

Stephen Cohen mentioned Assembly Bill 79 implementing changes to the proposed language to the 700 Hour Program. He mentioned the 14c Transition Bill will be coming out in the Legislative Session and that Tax Aide is up and running to people process taxes for individuals with disabilities.

3. **APPROVAL OF THE NOVEMBER 1, 2022, MEETING MINUTES**

Ms. O’Neill asked the council for any modifications, changes, corrections to the November 1, 2022, Meeting Minutes.

Jack Mayes made a motion to approve the minutes as written. Judy Swain seconded. All in favor, none-opposed, none-abstained, motion carried.

4. **PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS OF THE CALENDAR YEAR 2022 CONSUMER SATISFACTION SURVEY, CONDUCTED BY MARKET DECISIONS RESEARCH**

Candace Walsh, Research Manager with Market Decisions Research (MDR), presented the following Consumer Experience Survey 2022 Annual Results, Covering General VR, Youth in Transition and Older Individuals who are Blind.

Sampling – Who We Talked To

- Market Decisions Research (MDR) completed a total of 1,304 surveys in 2022.
 - General VR Consumers: 1,027
 - Youth in Transition Consumers: 200
 - Older Individuals who are Blind Consumers: 77
 - Due to a processing error, MDR did not meet the annual 1,425 survey goal. These 121 surveys will be completed in 2023.
- These surveys were done with consumers with cases open between September 1, 2021, to August 30, 2022, or with cases closed within the 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

Data Collection

- Data Collection was conducted from January to December 2022.
- All data was collected in two different modes.
 - By telephone from MDR's data collection facility, and
 - A new online survey module using email addresses from the sample file.
- The overall response rate was 25.4%.
 - This marks a decline in response rate compared to prior years. Declines in response rate have been common over the past several years, particular for telephone surveys.
 - This response rate remains higher than many other large, high quality telephone surveys.
- Results are weighted to reflect population characteristics (age, gender, etc.).
 - Results accurately reflect the views of your three service populations.

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 compared 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 individual questions.
- Nevada has 11 core metrics.
 - 6 Domains and 5 key questions.

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 would represent an extremely positive experience among VR consumers.
- A score of 0 would imply an extremely negative experience.

What are the VR 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’s 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 Nevada VR/OIB Program.
- **Consumer Control and Involvement:** How consumers perceive their involvement in the process and control over choices and goals.
- **Outcomes and Meeting Goals:** How well consumers perceive the services provided by Nevada VR/OIB Program help them meet their goals.
- The ease of the application process.
- The accessibility of the Nevada VR/OIB Program office for someone with your type of disability.
- Would you tell your friends with disabilities to go to the Nevada VR/OIB Program for help?
- Did you experience any problems with Nevada VR/OIB Program, or the services provided to you?

Nevada VR/OIB Consumer Experience Core Metrics

Domain	Overall	General VR	Youth in Transition	Older Individuals who are Blind
Overall Satisfaction and Expectations	72	71	76	77
Experience with Services Provided by VR	73	72	77	77
Experience with Staff and Counselors	85	85	87	87
Communications with Staff	74	73	77	77
Customer Control and Involvement	77	76	80	80
Outcomes and Meeting Goals	76	75	82	79
Ease of the application process for VR services	77	77	78	70
Accessibility of the VR office for someone with your type of disability	87	87	88	62
Satisfaction with current employment	79	79	80	-
Would you tell your friends with disabilities to go to the VR program for help? (% yes)	87%	87%	86%	85%
Did you experience any problems with VR or the services they have provided to you? (% no)	72%	70%	80%	80%

General VR

Trends to Watch

Positive Aspects of the Consumer Experience

- **VR consumers are positive overall but continue to praise their experience with VR staff and counselors and the accessibility of the program office.**
- The percentage reporting problems dropped in 2023 stable compared to prior years.
- Individuals were generally as likely to recommend the program to their friends in 2022 compared to 2021.
- Those **in-service 18 months or more** were more positive about their communication with staff than other groups, and less likely to report experiencing problems.
- All service groups rated the accessibility of the office highly, an increase over 2020 and 2021, likely due to easing COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.

Less Positive Aspects of the Consumer Experience

- The **least positive** general VR domain is Overall Satisfaction and Expectations and Communications with Staff (71 and 72 respectively). These domains were also the lowest for general VR in 2021.
- Other less positive domains include:
 - Communication with Staff
 - Customer Control and Involvement
 - Outcomes and Meeting Goals
- Those **in-service 6 to 12 months** are less positive about every domain and key outcome except accessibility. While they still report an experience that is positive overall, this group felt challenged by services to a greater extent than any other.
- General VR consumers consistently experience more problems than any other population, as in prior years.

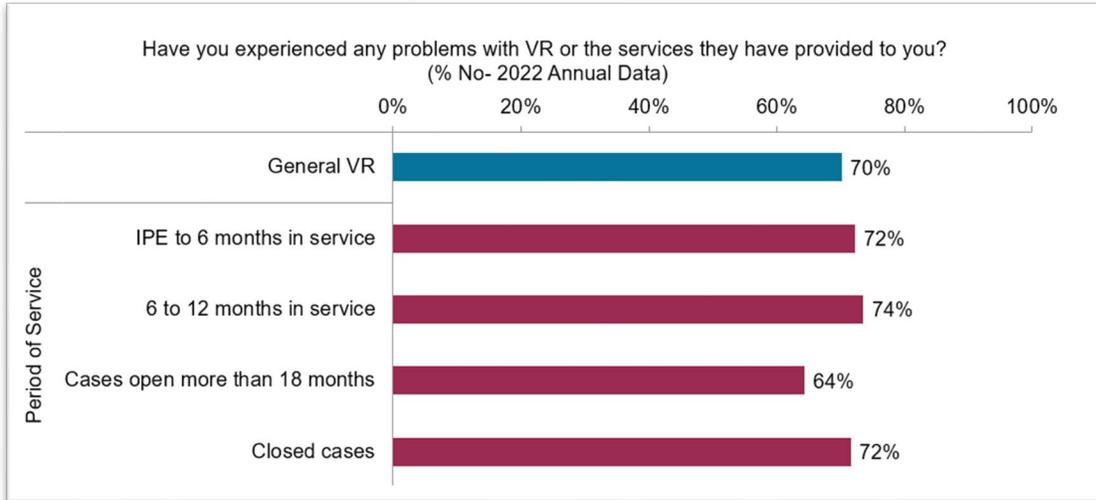
Nevada VR Consumer Experience Core Metrics for General VR - Trends

Domain	2021 T3	2022 T1	2022 T2	2022 T3
Overall Satisfaction and Expectations	74	70	72	71
Experience with Services Provided by VR	74	71	73	72
Experience with Staff and Counselors	86	83	85	86
Communications with Staff	75	73	74	72
Customer Control and Involvement	78	76	77	77
Outcomes and Meeting Goals	80	74	77	75
Ease of the application process for VR services	79	77	79	76
Accessibility of the VR office for someone with your type of disability	88	86	91	86
Satisfaction with current employment	77	82	71	82
Would you tell your friends with disabilities to go to the VR program for help? (% yes)	92	84	88	89
Did you experience any problems with VR or the services they have provided to you? (% no)	74	70	72	68

Problems Experienced

30% of consumers reported experiencing a problem with VR or the services they were provided.

- Of those experiencing problem, 28% indicate that Nevada VR worked to resolve the problem.



Types of Problems Experienced by General VR Consumers

Type of Problem or Issue	%
Counselor did not return calls, emails or follow up	17%
Listen to customer, understand needs, wants, ability	16%
Did not receive employment, VR could not find me a job	14%
Services offered were not effective	13%
Time lags to get into the program	13%
Better communication needed	12%
Counselor was not helpful or supportive	10%

Feedback from General VR Consumers

- Consumers were asked to provide additional feedback when they were not positive in their assessment.
 - Not satisfied with VR.
 - VR did not meet expectations.
 - 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.

- The following table summarizes the most common responses from 850 consumers that provided additional feedback. This is 83% of interviewed general VR consumers.

Consumer Feedback

- Counselor did not return calls, emails or follow up 19%
- Changing counselors, switching too much, causes problems 17%
- Better communication needed 17%
- Unable to meet with counselor, social distancing 16%
- Did not receive employment, VR could not find me a job 15%
- Services offered by VR were not effective 15%
- Need more information about services offered, not enough information provided 14%
- Received no help in reaching plan or goals 14%

Employment and Job Satisfaction

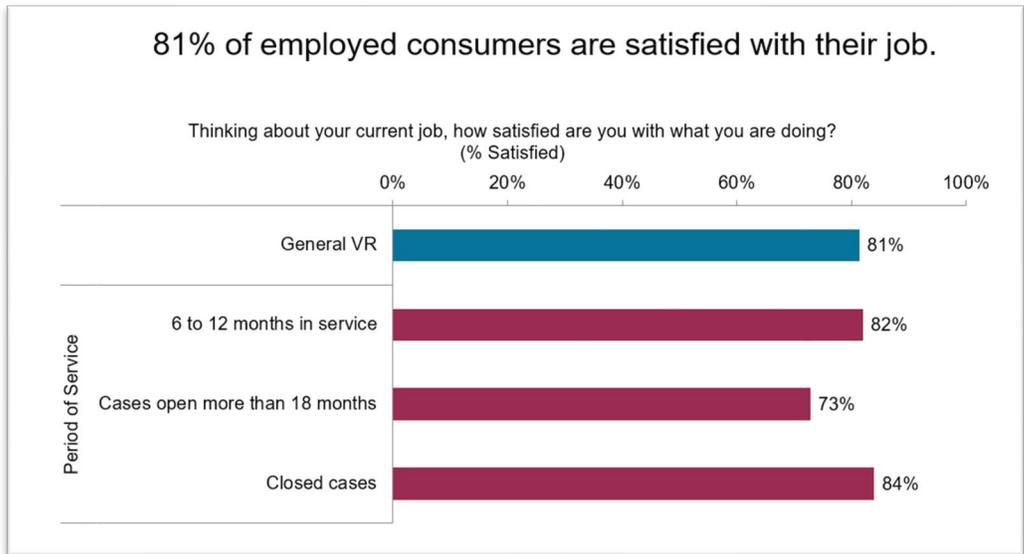
Employment

54% of General VR consumers are working, an increase of 13 percentage points compared to 2021.

**Finally, these last few questions ask about what you are currently doing. Are you currently...?
 (2022 Annual Data)**

	%
Working full time, that is, more than 35 hours per week	30%
Working part time	24%
Currently looking for a job	29%
Keeping house	17%
In school or receiving job training	31%
Currently unable to work	13%
Volunteering your time	11%

Job Satisfaction



Why are you not satisfied with your current job?

**Why are you not satisfied with your current job?
 (2022 Annual Data)**

	%
Bored with job, been at job too long, burnt out, need change	43%
Not a career move, only temporary job	17%
Job is not what I expected	16%
Need a job aligned with skills, training	12%
Better communication needed	11%
Too few hours	9%

Youth In Transition

Trends to Watch

Positive Aspects of the Consumer Experience:

Overall, youth in transition (YIT) consumers report having a very positive experience with VR and the services they receive.

- Accessibility of the VR Office is the most positive aspect of their experience followed by Experience with VR Staff and Counselors.
- Nearly all youth consumers would recommend the VR program to their friends with disabilities.
- Youth in service IPE to 6 months are more positive about the following aspects of their experiences:
 - With the services provided,
 - With staff and counselors,
 - Communication, and
 - Outcomes and meeting goals.

Less Positive Aspects of the Consumer Experience:

- **Least positive** domains are Ease of the Application Process and Communication with Staff.
- Ease of the Application has been trending down throughout the year.
- Declining Domains (two or more consecutive trimesters):
 - Communication with Staff
 - Experience with Services
 - Ease of the Application Process
 - Customer Control and Involvement
 - Recommend VR (90% in T1 dropped to 73% in T2 of 2022).
- Despite the declines in 2022 in some areas, Youth are still very positive overall.

Nevada VR Consumer Experience Core Metrics for Youth in Transition - Trends

Domain	2021 T3	2022 T1	2022 T2	2022 T3
Overall Satisfaction and Expectations	78	79	68	79
Experience with Services Provided by VR	78	81	67	79
Experience with Staff and Counselors	91	91	82	86
Communications with Staff	78	78	61	83
Customer Control and Involvement	80	81	76	81
Outcomes and Meeting Goals	83	81	80	84
Ease of the application process for VR services	78	81	78	75
Accessibility of the VR office for someone with your type of disability	91	89	93	85
Satisfaction with current employment	70	78	81	86
Would you tell your friends with disabilities to go to the VR program for help? (% yes)	92	90	73	90
Did you experience any problems with VR or the services they have provided to you? (% no)	80	82	77	80

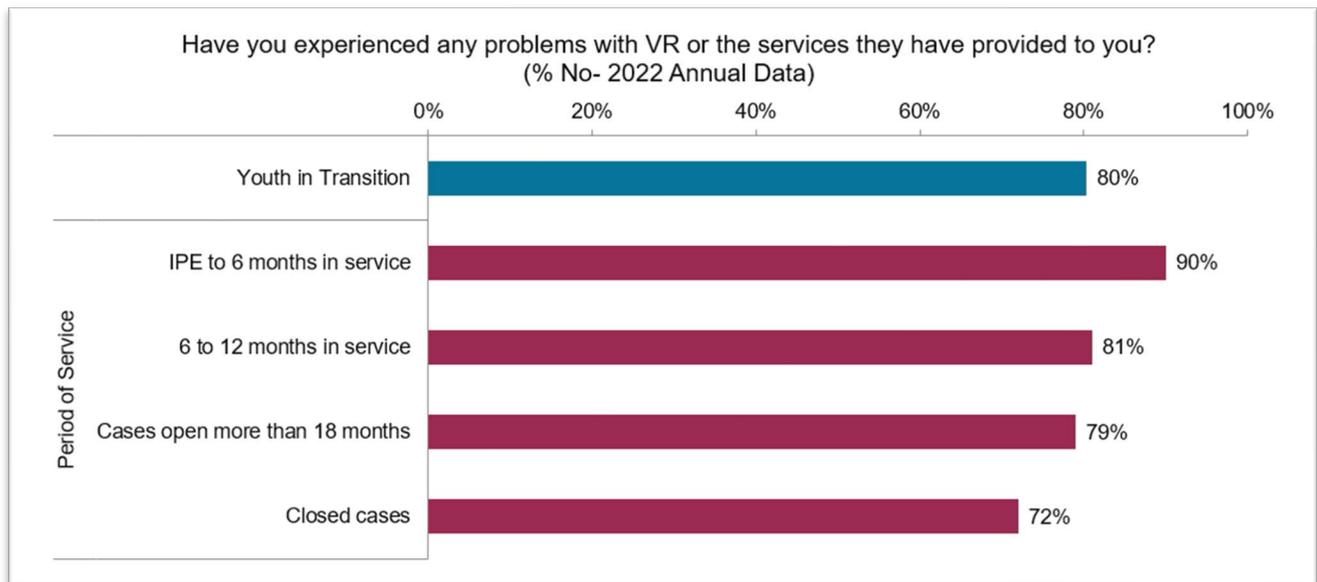
Youth in Transition Services

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

	% Receiving Service	% Finding the Service Valuable
Workplace readiness to help get ready for the challenges of work	58%	95%
Job exploration counseling or career counseling	51%	94%
Counseling on opportunities to attend college, learn a trade, or get a professional certification after high school	46%	96%
Instruction in self-advocacy to help you live the life you want including peer mentoring	45%	96%
Work based learning experiences including a job, internship, or volunteering	43%	97%

Problems Experienced

- 20% of youth consumers reported experiencing a problem with VR or the services they were provided.
 - Of those experiencing a problem, 40% indicate that Nevada VR worked to resolve the problem.



Types of Problems Experience by YIT Consumers

Type of Problem or Issue	%
Did not receive employment, VR could not find me a job	20%
Listen to customer, understand needs, wants, ability	15%
Counselor did not return calls, emails or follow up	15%
Broken promises, no follow through	11%
Follow through on promises made, what staff says they will do	11%
Received no help in reaching plan or goals	11%
Counselor did not listen, dismissed concerns	10%
Better communication needed	8%

Feedback from Youth in Transition

Consumer Feedback

- Consumers were asked to provide additional feedback when they were not positive in their assessment.
 - Not satisfied with VR
 - VR did not meet expectations
 - 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.
- The following table summarizes the most common responses from 155 consumers that provided additional feedback. This is 78% of YIT consumers.

	%
Unable to meet with counselor, social distancing	28%
Better communication needed	14%
Forms and paperwork hard, complicated	12%
Counselor did not return calls, emails or follow up	10%
Never received help, VR offered no help	10%
Need more information about services offered, not enough information provided	10%
Get voicemail, never answer the phone	8%

Older Individuals Who are Blind

Trends to Watch

Positive Aspects of the Consumer Experience

- **OIB program consumers report overall positive experiences, but not as positive as they have been in the past.**

- The **most positive** part of their experience is their experience with staff and counselors at OIB.

Other positive areas include:

- Customer Control and Involvement,
 - Outcomes and Meeting Goals
 - Overall Satisfaction and Expectations
 - Experience with Services provided by VR/OIB, and
 - Communication with Staff.
-
- Several domains declined in 2022 trimester 2 but have since notably improved:
 - Overall Satisfaction and Expectations,
 - Communication with Staff,
 - Outcomes and Meeting Goals, and
 - Customer Control and Involvement.

Less Positive Aspects of the Consumer Experience

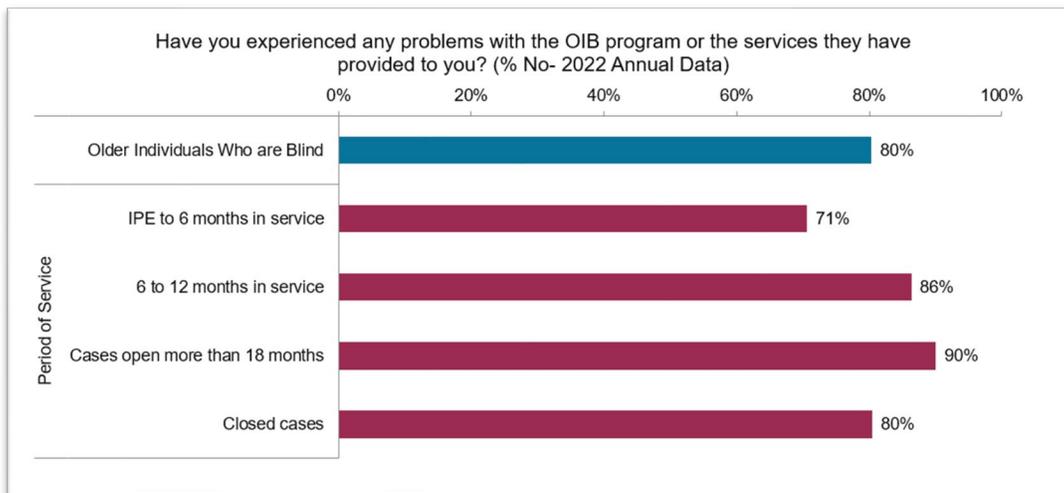
- OIB program consumers report challenges with the application process and rate it more negatively than other populations.
- Slightly fewer OIB program consumers would recommend the program to their friends than other populations.
- Communication with the OIB program has historically been a challenge but improved in 2022.
- OIB program consumers experience issues with office accessibility more than other populations. It is the lowest domain score among this population.

Nevada VR Consumer Experience Core Metrics for Older Individuals Who are Blind - Trends

Domain	2021 T3	2022 T1	2022 T2	2022 T3
Overall Satisfaction and Expectations	78	83	68	79
Experience with Services Provided by the OIB program	82	80	70	79
Experience with Staff and Counselors	87	92	81	86
Communications with Staff	71	77	66	83
Customer Control and Involvement	75	88	71	82
Outcomes and Meeting Goals	87	83	66	83
Ease of the application process for OIB program services	76	74	64	71
Accessibility of the OIB program office for someone with your type of disability	56	68	56	62
Would you tell your friends with disabilities to go to the OIB program for help? (% yes)	91	92	77	83
Did you experience any problems with the OIB program or the services they have provided to you? (% no)	87	85	71	83

Problems Experienced

- **20% of consumers reported experiencing a problem with the services provided by OIB.**



Types of Problems Experienced by OIB Program Consumers

Type of Problem or Issue	%
Counselor did not return calls, emails or follow up	32%
Services offered by VR were not effective	26%
Listen to customer, understand needs, wants, ability	23%
Better communication needed	9%
Did not receive needed transportation	9%
Hire more qualified job coaches, counselors	8%
Broken promises, no follow through	7%
Received no help in reaching plan or goals	7%

Consumer Feedback

- Consumers were asked to provide additional feedback when they were not positive in their assessment.
 - Not satisfied with OIB program
 - The OIB program did not meet expectations
 - Disagreed that VR 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.
- The following table summarizes the most common responses from 69 consumers that provided additional feedback. This is 90% of OIB program consumers.

	%
Better communication needed	22%
Counselor did not return calls, emails or follow up	20%
Received no help in reaching plan or goals	17%
Changing counselors, switching too much, causes problems	16%
Time lag to get services, appointments	16%
Get voicemail, never answers the phone	15%
Need more information about services offered, not enough information provided	13%
Forms and paperwork hard, complicated	12%
Staff did not return calls, emails or follow up	11%

Conclusions

Positive Consumer Experiences

- 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, similar to prior years.
- Those **in-service 18 months or more** among General VR and **Youth in-service IPE to 6 months** are more positive than other service phases.
- By region, **rural consumers** are more positive about their experiences than the North or 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.
 - Still seeing the impact of the pandemic, particularly about not being able to meet with their counselor due to social distancing.
- Consumer feedback focuses on staying connected and the time it takes to contact their counselor:
 - Counselor did not return calls, emails or follow up.
 - Changing counselors, switching too much, causes problems.
 - Better communication needed.
 - Calls, mail not returned for days, weeks, had to wait too long or return call.
- Among suggested improvements:
 - More open communication with client, more follow up.
 - Additional employment services, assistance obtaining employment.
 - More educational or training opportunities.
 - More timely service, decrease wait time to begin services.
- **In addition to basic communication issues, population mentions specific issues about not felt heard or respected.**

N.S.R.C. Meeting Minutes
February 7, 2023

- Common feedback includes:
 - Listen to customer, understand needs, wants, ability
 - Counselor was not helpful or supportive
 - Counselor would not listen, dismissed concerns
 - Take specific interests into account when creating goals.
- **Core areas to monitor and improve:**
 - While still largely positive, more consumers report issues with **staff and counselors**.
 - Domain took a noticeable drop in T2 among General VR, OIB and Youth.
 - **Outcomes and meeting goals** has been declining for both General VR and Youth since 2020, although it remains higher among the OIB population despite a drop in T2 2022.
 - General VR, Youth and OIB are less likely to **recommend VR/OIB program** compared to this time in 2021.
 - The **application process** remains one of the more negative aspects of the experience, particularly among OIB.
 - OIB consumers report considerably more difficulty accessing offices than at any prior point. This domain has been trending downward since the onset of the pandemic and has not rebounded.

Moving Forward

- Data collection 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 provided additional methods by which to complete data collection.
 - Online
 - Mail/Paper
 - We predict online surveys will become more prevalent as the survey and NV DETR data improves.
- 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.
- The survey and its questions are working well.
 - Questions on COVID – 19 and pandemic-related conditions may no longer be necessary or useful. COVID – 19 related comments have reduced notably over 2022.
 - These questions could be replaced with questions related to current concerns, such as timeliness of services and communications.
- Continue to use the online survey.
 - More cost effective, reducing future price increases.
 - More accessible, allowing individuals to choose the format that works best for them at the time that works best for them.
 - More transparent to NV DETR staff.
- Probe the potential benefits of moving to an online-first contact method
 - Counter decreasing – but still above average – response rates. Pre-notification may help boost

telephone response.

- Cost effectiveness

Robin Kincaid asked if a client raises a certain concern how is that addressed? Ms. Walsh indicated that the concern is passed on to VR to address otherwise the responses are categorized in their reports. Mechelle Merrill was surprised with the response from the Old or Blind population that the buildings are less accessible. The offices remain open. In response to Ms. Kincaid's concern with clients voicing concerns to the surveyors. If a client has a personal concern, they need to follow the counselor chain of command so it can be addressed. Ms. Walsh mentioned she could pull the feedback on the responses to see what had changed in Old or Blind population accessibility. Jack Mayes voiced concerns over communication issues for clients. Ms. Walsh mentioned education on expectations towards the clients for the communication and timelines that are acceptable due to caseload size of counselors.

5. **OTHER REPORTS**

Jack Mayes, Executive Director of the Nevada Disability Advocacy and Law Center (NDALC) will report on updates from the Client Assistance Program (CAP). For future discussion he like to go over budget audit results and some new blind videos that have come out. Looking forward to the legislative session with some bills of interest. Communication is the main issue that staff have shared for this quarter.

Dawn Lyons, Executive Director of the Nevada Statewide Independent Living Council (NSILC) reported on updates from their last meeting. Medicaid conducted a rate study on home healthcare workers/providers. The council heard a report about assembly bill AB37 Behavioral Health Workforce Development bill and are looking forward to that and hoping it will make a difference. The council heard from the Steering Committee for the New Aging and Disabilities Olmstead Plan. Administration for Community Living (ACL) is requiring the SILC to extend the current state plan for an additional year. We are waiting for innovation and expansion information from Vocational Rehabilitation on how we are going to receive the funds. Guinn Report from last year report, 26.8% of Nevadans reported having disabilities in 2021. Annual Disability Statics report shows that people ages 18-64 years old in 2021 living in Nevada showed 42.5% were employed, which was a recorded number, but also the report showed that 24.7% were living in poverty out of the whole 26.8% population. Steven Cohen started up an Employment First Committee with several members of the committee wanting Employment First new initiative pushed forward as a model. Progress has halted due to Executive Order for all new regulations from Governor Lombardo. Ms. Lyons asked Steven Cohen to describe what has been going on and for information on committee. Ms. Lyons encouraged people to attend their next meetings on April 5th and 6th from 1pm to 4 pm.

Steven Cohen member of the public mentioned they have an executive order tentatively written and, have a bill an amendment written to potentially go to the 14c bill in Legislation in accordance with the Bylaws written. The amendment would collaborate work with the Rehabilitation Division, Health and Human Services and Dept. of Education. The next meeting will be February 28th at 3:30pm.

David Nuestro, NSRC Council Member reported on what he learned on what other state councils are doing and/or collaborations he's made during his attendance at the CSAVR conference in October 2022. Mr. Nuestro mentioned that the conference is a meeting with councils from different states and learning how to promote Vocational Rehabilitation Services throughout the state in different ways. Some states attended fairs with VR hosting tables to recruit new council members. Processes for reviewing and analyzing of the metrics data and what are the key focus of the programs. Orientation for new council members and annually, council members to understand their roles and functions are while on the council. The follow al the RSA federal laws and State laws. Supporting and assisting Vocational Rehabilitation in their role as council members.

Ms. O'Neill asked if there was anything he saw what would help? Mr. Nuestro responded with the communication with the community of Vocational Rehabilitation needs to be improved and to get information about services out to the community as a council member.

6. **2023 LEGISLATIVE SESSION UPDATE ON GOVERNOR'S RECOMMENDED BUDGET**

Drazen Elez, Rehabilitation Administrator went over state recommended budget beginning with Resources Appropriation Control. General Funds from the State for Rehabilitation Services are formulated from VR Grants for the last 45 to 50 years. The formula is 21.3% Non-Federal Matched Funds and 78.7% Federal Funds Matched. The federal government set aside about 30 million dollars a year, for VR to draw down the federal funds the state must come up with a match for that to happen with the formula. In the 1st year of the Biennium the Agency the Governor recommended the agency be funded by \$3.7 million dollars with general funds and \$3.65 the 2nd year. The expenses are around \$21 million per year, in the previous Biennium we were funded with \$2.4 million. The amount is a significant increase and a huge win for the state. For Nevada VR this is the most funds we have received since 2011 not adjusted for inflation. VR is in a good position to continue services and not at risk of order of selection which the state would move into if there is not enough funds to serve everyone who comes through our doors.

All the enhancements VR requested were accepted by the Governor. One of the enhancements we asked for funding of a Disability Benefits 101 website. Anyone who is receiving social security benefits case use the site to calculate how much they can and earn before their benefits are affected. The user will need to create an account to access the portal, they do not need to be a VR client to access the site. There are currently a few states who utilize this tool like Arizona. VR made a presentation to the Financial Subcommittee for the site, and it was well received. The other enhancement was to add 3 more Program Officer positions to assist the Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) team. These services are conducted with contractor and the limitation is they can only work up to 30 hours per week and receive no benefits. VR has a lot of turnovers in these positions that affects our relationships with the school districts. If these positions are approved, they would provide better assistance to students with disabilities and continue expending the Pre-ETS program. The additional enhancements were for 2 more Job Developers. These positions assist with client services and cuts down on the time clients receive services. We are funded well and the enhancement's we asked for are covered in the budget and positioned well to keep agency going to a higher level of performance.

Mr. Mayes congratulated VR staff on the enhancement's that are in the budget. Mr. Mayes liked the increase of Job Developers. As an advocate he will support the enhancements through the legislature. Mr. Mayes questioned the audit for monies being spent on Transition Aged Youth where VR was to going to cut services from adults to add to youth. Is this reflected in this current budget?

Mr. Elez mentioned the report from the audit was not included in the budget request. 15% of Federal Grants are to be set aside for Pre-ETS services for youth since 2014. The funds are to be used only on direct services to potential clients and not to be used for any Administrative, or outside agency costs. VR can only spend the 15% of funds out of our client service category multiplied by our Federal Funds Grant which is roughly around \$3 million dollars. This is half of our client service dollars for general population. This causes certain logistical challenges for servicing our general population at least ¾ of our clients with job services and employment, as with Pre-ETS focused is mainly focused on career exploration and guidance. We do not have the audit in this budget due to no available line items to add into the budget request. The three new Transition Coordinator positions will help in using these funds more effectively. These positions will continue to build relationships which will lead to more and more students being served by VR. Mechelle Merrill is working with school districts to expand Pre-ETS in schools. VR is mandated top provide services, but schools are not mandated to accept them.

Ms. O'Neill asked about the benefits 101 website and if the site will be monitored and have support person to assist individuals who might have accessibilities issues, and when is it rolling out? Mr. Elez mentioned the roll out will depend on when the budget is passed. If everything goes well, it will start July 1st getting everything up and going, with the request for proposal. We are working with the IT Department on what there needs to be in place for the program to function. Some of the details will need to be worked out with

the vendor for support once the request is submitted. We will have an update in July. Currently, there is one person serving three states for Social Security Benefits information. The website will be a huge benefit for individuals in Nevada.

7. **VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION STRATEGIC PLANNING OVERVIEW FOR CALENDAR YEAR 2023**

Mr. Elez reviewed the process for the upcoming strategic plan for VR for 2023. Last year was our first year of developing the strategic plan and publishing it on our website to show what VR's goals are and where we stand. It helps to prioritize and gives us a good sense of direction of what we need to work on throughout the year. We conduct a statewide survey to all the employees to see what they thought we could improve upon to better serve our clients. Including accessibility and improved communication. In December of 2022 for a week, we met with the leaders of the agency in Las Vegas and reviewed VR's current strategic plan and looked at what we could improve upon.

As the world and the agency came out of the pandemic we felt as an agency we needed to get back to basics. We paired down the programs and services that are not working well for our clients. We are focusing on rebuilding VR staff, like many agencies we are struggling with retention and vacancy rates as staff members have retired, with that we have lost a lot of institutional knowledge that has existed our agency. As we have hired individuals who may not have background in VR services as we have seen historically. VR counselors are different from other social services as they go to college with this major in mind and receive their master's in Vocational Rehabilitation. They are defiantly a different kind of a professional that you would not see in other places. That kind of knowledge and skill is not easy to replace. Nevada does not have any colleges what provide as a career, so it does make it a challenge to attract new staff. One of our goals is to continue to educate and train our staff. Most of our staff do not come from the VR world and to onboard them and buy into the mission of what we do and provide necessary training within the agency.

Priority # 1 Rebuild DETR Staff

1. Develop VR Specific Leadership Training
2. Implementing New Recruitment & Retention Strategies
3. Creating New Recruitment Tools
4. Career Development & Resources for Existing Staff
5. Organize In-Service Conference for all VR Staff

Priority # 2 Modernize and Innovate

1. Reimagining Employer Engagement Team
2. Rethinking Traditional Roles
3. Increasing Visibility of VR
4. Employer Recognition Initiative

Priority # 3 Client Centered Design

1. Optimizing Client Communication
2. Implementing Legislative Gains
3. Streamlining VR Process to Personalize Client Needs
4. Client Centered System Enhancements

Priority # 4 Accountability & Transparency

1. Expand & Optimize Quality Assurance Team
2. Improve reporting platform and active utilization
3. Improved Engagement with Community Stakeholders
4. Continued Transparency of VR Strategic Plan

Priority # 5 Improving Performance Outcomes & Ensuring Compliance

1. LCB Audit Findings – Execute Implementation of Action Items
2. Expand & Increase Pre-ETS Services
3. Improve Tracking & Reporting of VR services
4. Increasing MSGs, Credential Attainment Rate & Successful Outcomes
5. Optimizing VR Fiscal Coding

Our VR Strategic Plans for last year 2022 and this year 2023 are posted on **VRNevada.org** website in the **“About Us”** section under **Strategic Priorities**.

Ms. O’Neill thanked Mr. Elez and indicated she appreciated all the attention to details in trying to make VR better for all consumers, and for employees and she appreciated the efforts. She wanted to share she is willing to help support as a council member. She is grateful for the efforts in communication and the different ways VR is looking to help improve consumer’s experiences. She asked if there were any other ideas to help in the communication for the consumers.

Mr. Elez mentioned at the beginning of the Pandemic the Intake Packet was 13 pages, we recognized that was intimidating for anyone to complete. The process currently is 6 or 7 questions and online to apply for services, from there the individual is contacted and a in person intake is arraigned with a counselor. Other strategies we have it to help train all counselors for a better client experience. The caseload of the counselor’s is 80 to 100 people and contacting each of them every week is not something they can fulfill. Different folks require more frequent communication and others less. We are going to work on having counselors talk to folks and setting the right expectations, and what is their preferred way of communicating and documenting the conversation in their case notes.

Sheena Childers mentioned that we are going to be honoring the preferences of the clients in the way they would like to receive communication, rather than the historical process of sending letters or calling the client. Along with setting up the expectations at the being of the process and reminding them frequently what the expectations are for their communication. Agency practice on returning client correspondence is 2 business days.

Mr. Mayes mentioned his office receives phone calls after a client has applied for services. Mr. Mays believes there is a miss communication on the forms as to who the client should be calling to ask for assistance will applying for services.

8. **DIVISION REPORT**

Mr. Elez provided indicated that RSA will be conducting an audit on fiscal matters for VR on reverting funds from the VR grant back to the Federal Government. Nevada receives about \$30 million in grant funding, but the agency draws down about \$30 million as we don’t have the sufficient match to draw down the entire amount given. Our non-federal funds have increased over the past few years and for the next Biennium. One of the Governor’s executive orders is that the state to return to pre-Covid office hours. VR had returned to regular business hours as of April 2022. This executive order doesn’t impact VR as we had already returned to pre-Covid office hours back in 2022. VR has been impacted by the turn overs, the Older Individuals who are Blind and Visible Impaired have suffered the most. We are in the processes of training a new individual in this position, we are hoping for improvement in this division.

Sheena Childers, VR Bureau Chief reviewed the **vacancies throughout the state**. Currently VR has 16% vacancy rate, 2 positions open in the Administrative unit, 7 open positions in the North, 12 open positions in the South. Since, October 26, 2022, there has been 6 departures and new 14 hires.

Current caseload size in VR and BSBVI we have actively open in the programs are 2930. Average caseload size is 80. Caseloads per VR counselor are 76 and BSBVI case size is 104. Cases are open an average number of 18 ½ months.

Fair Hearing update since the last NSRC Meeting on November 1, 2022, has been zero. The one Fair Hearings request was withdrawn by participant on November 9, 2022, via email. The order granting withdrawal was processed on November 29, 2022.

NSRC Goals and Indicators. Time indicators from October 1, 2022, through December 31, 2022, which is the first quarter of the Federal Fiscal Year.

Goal #1 Increase Number of Successful Employment Outcomes. At the end of the first quarter, we have achieved 139 successful employment outcomes. Our goal is 550 it does look like we will be on track to reach that goal.

Goal #2a Increase Participation for Students with a disability in VR Transition Services. Total Transition Student Applications is 160 our goal is 250 students.

Goal #2b Increase Participation and Increase Successful Outcomes of Students with a disability in VR Transition Services and Post-Secondary Education. Column A Transition Students with an Employment Outcome is 46. Column B Transition Students with Postsecondary Education is 27. Column C Total of Measurable Skill Gains for Open cases is 352. Column D is Total Number of Measurable Skill Gains for Closed cases is 0. Columns added together the total is 425 our goal is 300.

Goal #2c Increase Participation and Ensure Students with a Disability receive Appropriate Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). Column A Potentially Eligible Transition Students that receive Pre-ETS is 127. Column B Transition Students with a VR case that received Pre-ETS is 69. Total to date is 196 with our goal for this year 750 which we will easily meet this goal. Last year's goal was exceeded by 117 cases. We are on target to achieve this year's goal as well.

Goal #3a Increase Participation of Supported Employment Consumers in VR. Column C which is division of Column A Total Open Supported Employment Consumers (468) by Column B Total Open Non-Supported Employment Consumers (1694) equals 28% with our goal of 35%. We are looking at good progress to achieve this goal.

Goal #3b Increase Successful Outcomes of Supported Employment Consumers in a Competitive, Integrated Setting. Column A Supported Employment Consumers Closed with an Employment Outcome of 31 with our goal of 100 clients to be closed successfully.

Goal #3c Increase Successful Outcomes for Students with a Disability Who are also Supported Employment Consumers in Competitive Integrated Setting - Outcomes. We are focusing on Column D Students with a Disability and Who are also Supported Employment Consumers Closed with an Employment Outcome 18. Column E Students with a Disability (Not Supported Employment Consumers) Closed with an Employment Outcome 28. Dividing Column D by Column E we have 64%, are goal is 40%

Goal #4 Collaborate with other Resources to Support Participants with Mental Health Disabilities to Obtain and Maintain Successful Employment. Column A we have 49, Column B we have 28. Are percentage in this goal currently 36% with our goal of 45%. We are making good progress on this goal.

Goal #5 VR Staff Retention Efforts as a Reflection of Employee Satisfaction & Positive Work Culture.

We currently have 45 VR counselors, 31 Rehabilitation Technicians with a total of 76 across the state. 0 retirements, 4 transferred to another agency or resigned. With average tenure of less than 1 year with a negative turnover rate of 5%. Doing well so far this year.

9. **COMMENTS BY THE COUNCIL**

Ms. O'Neill asked for any comments from the council or, future agenda items to be discussed.

Mr. Mayes asked for information on the collaboration of VR and BlindConnect for videos created for blind services.

Ms. O'Neill indicated they were asked by VR to create some blindness basics videos to be used as a public resource for anyone losing their eyesight, or individuals supporting that individual, family friends or medical professionals. It was scripted and written by the blind for the blind and its audio described and can be found on YouTube.

Ms. Merrill shared the link is on Job Seekers tab on VRNevada.org website and it is linked to take you to the videos and YouTube. Ms. O'Neill mentioned VR is like a one stop shop people with disabilities can go to for resources to rebuild their livelihoods and there can some high expectations that comes with that. As a council member I know there are federal mandated roles, and responsibilities VR must maintain. I am here to support that. There is still a lot more to be done with hearing the numbers of Nevadans with disabilities and not taking advantage of services offered. Ms. O'Neill mentioned she urges VR to reach out and expand to other resources and network together to keep moving to the fore front of what Nevada needs to do for those with disabilities to connect to resources offered. VR does a good job of thinking outside the box and keep getting agencies to work together for the common good.

Mr. Mays would like an update on the Audit findings from LCB at next meeting. An agenda item will be added.

Ms. O'Neill would like to go over the accessibility of DocuSign and other accessible forms. How VR can support clients and counselors with the process of signing forms, along with the communicating those documents to clients.

Ms. Kincaid would like to see data for the 14C program for CCI&R, would like to see the data as to how many presentations are being done and how many individuals have become clients. An agenda item will be added.

Mr. Elez commented on the accessibility for clients VR installed the loop system in the office for hard of hearing individuals, also better signate will added to the outside of the building to locate our offices both North and South. VR's website is also having the option for multiple languages for better accessibility.

10. **SECOND PUBLIC COMMENT**

Ms. O'Neill opened floor for a second public comment session.

Mr. DeForge indicated that many people do not know about the services of VR that are available and would like to see more coordination with Clark County School Districts. He would like suggestions for a more open communication with VR when issues arise.

Ms. Emma Schmid questioned the involvement with VR services and the collaboration through the Disabilities Resource Center at UNLV for students with disabilities.

N.S.R.C. Meeting Minutes
February 7, 2023

Ms. Childers mentioned VR is open to more collaboration with UNLV.

Tina Ochoa questioned the legality of a legal signature on DocuSign and how every time she receives a new counselor, she must sign the same documents and the issue of the process to sign being a blind person. Her concern is resigning all new documents when a new counselor is assigned to her case.

Ms. O'Neill thanked her for the concerns and the communication of the signature process.

Mr. Cohen requested that on the Division Report he would like to see a breakdown of the gap quarter of the Federal Fiscal Year and the State Fiscal Year Statics report showing a 31% growth of client closures.

11. **ADJOURNMENT**

Meeting adjourned at 11:21 a.m.

Edited By:

Javier Fernandez

Javier Fernandez, N.S.R.C. Liaison

Approved By:

Raquel O'Neill, Chair