

Attachment 4.10: Comprehensive System of Personnel Development

Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development

In preparation for its budget request, the Division annually assesses the supply of qualified professionals and paraprofessionals available to the Division to ensure an adequate staffing base.

The Division maintains professional vocational rehabilitation counselors to provide direct client services. These counselors manage individual caseloads of applicants and clients.

The total number of counselors employed has been based on a ratio of approximately one counselor per 30,000 of the general population, the number of positions filled as allowed by the State Personnel Office, and the available budget as approved by the State Legislature and Congress. Under this current methodology with 64 caseloads, the Division has enough counselors to serve a population base of 1,920,000. The State's population in the 2005 American Community Survey U.S. Census Bureau numbered 1,887,200. Ideally, the Division would like to decrease the ratio to one counselor per 25,000 of the general population with prevalence of disability and geographic variables factored into the ratio. Under this current methodology, the Division has determined that 10 new counselor positions will be needed to adequately meet the growing population needs in five years, for a total of 74 counselor positions.

In addition to 64 vocational rehabilitation counselor positions (66 positions effective 07.01.07) for the 64 caseloads (66 caseloads effective 07.01.07) located throughout the state, the Division also employs 32 rehabilitation technicians (34 positions effective 07.01.07) and 22 caseload secretaries providing direct services to DVR clients.¹ The ratio of counselor to rehabilitation technician and caseload secretaries varies throughout the state given the available resources. A typical ratio is one caseload secretary and one rehabilitation technician to two vocational rehabilitation counselors. Obviously, this ratio is not consistent throughout the state.

The American Community Survey of the 2005 reported that 159,242 or 9% of New Mexicans reported having a sensory disability; 188,707 or 11% of New Mexicans reported having a physical disability; and 107,259 or 6% report having a mental disability. Population estimates for men ages 16 – 64 with a disability is 90,933 or 15% of males 16-64 years; and the estimate for women ages 16 – 64 with a disability is 88,308 or 14% of females 16 – 64 years.²

Another study indicates the population size of individuals with disabilities in New Mexico at 150,580, (number of working age civilians (ages 21 – 64) with disabilities, in 2003).³

¹ The 2007 Legislative session resulted in an expansion of four positions for DVR Rehabilitation Services effective July 1, 2007. Two positions are vocational rehabilitation counselors and two positions are rehabilitation technician positions. One of each of these positions will be located in the two fastest growing counties by population in the state: Dona Ana county in southern New Mexico and in Rio Rancho, Sandoval County near Albuquerque.

² 2005 United State Census Estimates of Disability in New Mexico for the civilian noninstitutionalized population 5 years and over.

³ State Template of Effective Use of Disability Statistics, September 2003 – December 2005, Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Employment Policy for Persons with Disabilities, Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Disability Demographics and Statistics, Appendix E, Table 1, Employment and Disability Institute, Cornell University, March 2006.

These disability population statistics do not indicate the number of individuals eligible for, available for, or in need of vocational rehabilitation services. However, the numbers suggest that as disability prevalence increases and as age-disability prevalence increases along with an increasing need for older workers in the workforce, the demand for vocational rehabilitation services will continue to increase in New Mexico.

Budget expansion requests of the New Mexico State Legislature have continued to prioritize counselors, supervisors and support staff. However, the New Mexico State Legislature has granted no budget expansion request for several years. Once again, the 2006 state legislature did not grant any expansion for the Division for the 2006 – 2007 state fiscal year.

Of the people who have Masters Degrees, Certified Rehabilitation Counselors fill 16 counseling positions located throughout the State providing direct services to DVR clients. One Area Manager is registered to take the CRC exam this spring.

The Division also employs 13 other professionals with the Certified Rehabilitation Counselor designation. They are located in the Division as follows:

Field Operations Director	= one position
Program Managers	= four positions
Program Development And Support	= three positions
Assistant Secretary Office	= two positions
Administrative Services Staff Development	= two positions
Rehabilitation Services Unit School-to-Work Transition/ Supported Employment	= one position

The Division is pleased that the total number of individuals with CRC designation increases each year.

Institutions of higher education in New Mexico:

New Mexico Highlands University, Las Vegas, New Mexico currently has 29 students who have declared rehabilitation as their major. The number of recent graduates by semester is as follows:

- Summer 2005 = three graduates
- Summer 2006 = five (*correction*) two graduates

New Mexico Highland University has two graduates scheduled for May 2007 and one graduate during summer 2007. Graduates with a Masters Degree in rehabilitation counseling from New Mexico Highlands University are eligible to apply for licensure in New Mexico, see page 6 of this document, Part B of the Job Related Qualifications Standards for licensure.

Western New Mexico University, Silver City, New Mexico provides the following detail regarding their Rehabilitation Services graduates at the baccalaureate and associate level. The number of students currently enrolled 18 with 25 declared majors (the discrepancy is because some of the students are taking supporting coursework and are not in Rehab Classes).

2006 through August: 4 graduates (*correction*)
2005 7 graduates
2004 4 graduates
2003 2 graduates

The Division was instrumental in developing a vocational rehabilitation counselor education program at New Mexico Highlands University (NMHU). DVR Staff Development personnel sit on NMHU's curriculum advisory council to ensure that coursework is aligned with Agency goals; additionally, agency staff have taught courses in Foundations of Rehabilitation and Job Placement in NMHU's Rehabilitation Counselor Masters program. The first three students graduated from the program in 1999. NMHU adjunct professor in the Rehabilitation Counseling program indicates the intention to grow the program to the point of admitting 12 new students each year.

The Division continues to work with New Mexico Highlands University students to complete their internships with the NMDVR. This enhances opportunities to hire the NMHU graduates.

Plan for Recruitment, Preparation and Retention of Qualified Personnel

The implementation of the required standards to a Masters Degree under the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development initially attributed to the high turnover rates in vocational rehabilitation counselor positions. This rate has been as high as 32%. In response, the Division has implemented strategies to reduce the turnover rate. The Division has begun to realize a significant reduction in the turnover rate. The turnover rate for 2005 18% while the turnover rate in 2006 19%. The Division is pursuing plans to address a five-year cycle of reducing the turnover rate to about 10%, excluding retirement of staff.

Four factors are considered to contribute to reducing counselor turnover:

- 1) the employees of the Division are covered by the State Personnel Act;
- 2) State of New Mexico employees are offered an extremely competitive employee benefits package;
- 3) State Personnel Board Rules allow for VR Counselors to be paid a supervisory differential for assuming supervisory responsibilities inclusive of training staff in effective case management and best practices; and
- 4) the Division offers training opportunities not available with other state agencies.

The Division has been seeking ways of addressing the salary of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors to reduce turnover. The Division continues to work with the State Personnel Office to restructure counselor pay to be in line with licensure, education, and competency standards. One compensation mechanism, In-Pay Band Adjustment, is a mechanism to reach and establish appropriate placement through demonstrated performance for those not already appropriately placed. This is a tool that was utilized to provide pay increases in FY 06, and plans are to use this

again through FY 08 pending approval of Department of Finance and Administration. The agency continues to recruit and hire professional staff at newly established attractive salary levels. The agency is proud that we are very close to having all vocational rehabilitation counselors appropriately placed, in other words, the agency is “almost there.”

One factor, to reduce counselor turnover, is the Division’s established Program Policy Instruction addressing and providing guidelines related to the creation and implementation of the supervising counselor in the Rehabilitation Services Program. The intent of this Program Policy Instruction is to assist in decreasing the workload of current Area Managers, improve training, mentoring, and coaching to staff, and support quality case management; PPI 02-02 dated 04/19/2002. Additionally, as part of its pay plan, vocational rehabilitation counselors and program managers have received pay increased and the agency now offers competitive and attractive entry level salaries.

The Division experiences some barriers in hiring qualified staff due to salary and isolated work locations. The State Personnel Director, pursuant to the direction of the State Personnel Board, establishes, maintains and in conjunction with state agencies, administers a pay plan for all positions throughout the classified service. The State Personnel Director conducts an annual survey of Total Compensation (means of all forms of cash compensation and the dollar value of the employer-sponsored benefit package.) The comparison market is comprised of private and public entities within the state of New Mexico, regional state government employers, and Central, Western, and Southwestern state government employers. The pay plan offers many compensation tools for agencies to utilize to help management attract qualified applicants as well as retain employees who contribute to the overall success of the organization, motivate employees to maintain high standards of productivity and service, and reward employees for their specific contributions to the achievement of the organizational goals and objectives.

Another mechanism which has proven itself beneficial for recruiting qualified applicants to vacant vocational rehabilitation counselor positions is a new practice of Open Recruitment. The Division accepts applications for vocational rehabilitation counselor positions on an on-going basis. This new practice has resulted in a continuous pool of applicants from which to choose from when vacancies do occur. The quality of vocational rehabilitation applicants in terms of the standards now employed by the Division has also become more competitive.

The Division has committed funds for retraining efforts to ensure that all personnel, particularly vocational rehabilitation counselors, meet the highest requirements in the state applicable to that particular profession. In providing for training programs, the Division takes into consideration succession planning and capacity building as well as evolving issues such as amendments to the Rehabilitation Act, the Workforce Investment Act, Ticket-to-Work, consumer informed choice, etc.

The Division has been largely successful in recruiting individuals with disabilities as well as those from minority groups. The Division continues to hire individuals with disabilities whenever those individuals are viable candidates. The one barrier for hiring individuals from minority groups is the fact that it is sometimes difficult to find such individuals with the necessary educational background, particularly among the American Indian population. To address that barrier, the Division contracts for paraprofessional support on the Pueblos as well as Jicarilla and Mescalero Apaches.

Additionally, the Division has worked closely with New Mexico Highlands University (NMHU) to get a counselor training program in place. The Division has hired NMHU graduates. New Mexico Highland University reports having 29 students in the rehabilitation program, demographic as follows: 17 Hispanics, 1 African American and one mixed cultural background, 19 women and 10 men, 15 of these individuals have disabilities. The Division encourages individuals with disabilities and from minority groups along with others to apply for admission to NMHU.

The Division advertises job openings on the Internet at DVRgetsjobs.com, in addition to State Personnel Office listings; both are available nationally to anyone with Internet access.

Additionally, the Division uses the State Personnel automated data system to account for the number of employees, status of individual employees as probationary, permanent, temporary, or term and related information such as salary, earned leave balance, etc. Vacancies are reported on a routine basis and used to monitor hiring activities. All new hires, promotions and transfers require the approval of the Division Director.

New hires are expected to meet academic and experience requirements. New hires must have a master's degree and experience required for licensure.

The Division's strategic planning effort includes a Goal Area of Career Development and Succession Planning for all staff. The Division is well aware of the need to not only hire well qualified staff but also retain well qualified staff. Mechanism such as post retirement re-employment, job sharing, and part-time employment are being considered to offer Division employees opportunities to return to work. The agency is well aware that there will be an increased exodus of senior employees with valuable skills and "agency knowledge" which will be in the agency's best interest to hold on to for as long as possible. As part of the Division's strategic planning efforts, the agency's goals in the area of retention is to provide regular, updated, and current information to all staff about how best to approach retirement with eventual return to work after retirement.

In addition, the Division will continue to provide training and experience to all staff interested in increasing their job skills. The Staff Development Unit financially supports training which offers continuing education credits in a variety of training opportunities to assist all DVR staff meet and maintain the highest qualifications. The Staff Development Unit also supports training programs such as baccalaureate programs for Information Technology and Business.

It is hoped that a well qualified staff will be encouraged to elect to remain employed with the Division beyond retirement eligibility and/or consider post-retirement reemployment to address increased retention during anticipated upcoming shortages of qualified workers.

The Division plans to assess the needs of staff in terms of what they are planning to further their career development then move toward addressing those needs. To this end, the Division is also undertaking a study of the demographics of staff in terms of education background, years of experience, expected time to retirement, expected time to leave the agency before retirement, and any staff with disabling conditions who want to advance their careers over the long-term and/or return to employment after retirement.

Personnel Standards

The Division developed state licensure for vocational rehabilitation counselors through its umbrella organization, the New Mexico Public Education Department in 2001. This licensure, endorsed in rule by the Public Education Department is required of all vocational rehabilitation counselors working for the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and is commensurate with national standards under CSPD.

A policy requiring all VR counselors to apply for state licensure by December 2002 was adopted in January 2002. Counselors who are not eligible for the highest level of state licensure are required to participate in a training plan that will lead to licensure.

As of February 2007, 52 (or 83% of all positions currently filled or vacant) vocational rehabilitation counselors have met the state approved standards for licensure. Other counselor license applications are pending approval or the counselor is working towards licensure under a training plan. Three counselors' licenses lapsed and are in the process of being renewed; one was due to the fact that he is deployed to Kuwait.

In 2001, DVR included the Master's degree as the academic standard for the Job Related Qualifications Standard to meet the requirement of Section 361.18 CSPD of the Rehabilitation Act. Persons seeking licensure in rehabilitation counseling shall meet the requirements of Subsections A, B, C, D, or E:

- A. Valid certification as a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor issued by the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification, 300 N. Martingale Road, Suite 460, Schaumburg, IL 60173. phone: 847.944.1325, www.crc certification.com.
- B. Master's degree in rehabilitation counseling from a regionally accredited college of university. This requirement shall be satisfied by meeting the requirements of Subsection B(1) or B(2) below.
 1. A master's degree awarded by a New Mexico college or university must incorporate the New Mexico Public Education Department's approved competencies in rehabilitation counseling.
 2. A master's degree awarded by a college or university outside of New Mexico must be for a rehabilitation counseling program approved by the New Mexico Public Education Department.

- C. Master's degree in school counseling, vocational counseling or other related field and the provisions of Subsection C(1) or C(2) below.
 - 1. One (1) year of experience in rehabilitation counseling, or
 - 2. Fifteen (15) semester hours of credit in the rehabilitation counseling competency areas of vocational/transition assessment, medical aspects of disability, psychosocial and/or psycho-cultural aspects of disability case management in rehabilitation counseling, issues and practices in rehabilitation counseling, or placement aspects of rehabilitation counseling.
- D. Bachelor's degree in rehabilitation counseling from a regionally accredited college or university and one (1) year of experience in public or private facility in which direct vocational rehabilitation counseling is the primary job responsibility. The degree requirement shall be satisfied by meeting the requirements of Subsection D(1), or D(2) below.
 - 1. A bachelor's degree awarded by a New Mexico college or university must incorporate the New Mexico Public Education Department's approved competencies in rehabilitation counseling.
 - 2. A bachelor's degree awarded by a college or university outside of New Mexico must be for a rehabilitation program approved by the New Mexico Public Education Department.
- E. Bachelor's degree in a related field and the provisions of Subsection E(1) or E(2) below.
 - 1. Two (2) years of experience in a public or private Facility in which direct vocational rehabilitation counseling is the primary job responsibility, or
 - 2. Fifteen (15) semester hours of credit in the rehabilitation counseling competency areas of vocational/transition assessment, medical aspects of disability, psychosocial and/or psycho-cultural aspects of disability, case management in rehabilitation counseling, issues and practices in rehabilitation counseling, or placement aspects of rehabilitation counseling.

Currently, all DVR counselors, with the exception of newly hired counselors, have applied for licensure. It should be noted that new counselors have 90 days to apply for their license. Licensure application includes a criminal background check. Licensure applications are monitored for compliance. If new DVR counselors do not meet the experience requirement for State Licensure, they are directed to re-apply upon gaining the necessary experience.

Also, VR counselors have held licensure long enough to require renewal. VR counselor licenses must be renewed every three years.

Aside from meeting the state standard for vocational rehabilitation counselor, it is also noted that 60 counselors (96%) have a Masters Degree with 29 (or 48.3%) of these having a Masters Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling. Three DVR caseload counselors have doctorate degrees.

State licensure is identified in policy as top priority and required for continued employment. Identified documents to be submitted in the credentials package for licensure include:

- Official college transcripts of all degrees received;
- Copies of Certified Rehabilitation Counselor certification, if applicable;

- Work history in a rehabilitation field;
- Copies of course syllabi from courses related to counseling and guidance; vocational counseling; disability; psycho-social or psycho-cultural aspects of disability; case management in rehabilitation counseling; and placement aspects in rehabilitation counseling.
- Criminal background information
- Fingerprints

Though not required by the Division, four of the seven VR field program managers and one of the three Field Operation Directors have been granted vocational rehabilitation licensure.

It is important to note that most, if not all, new hires for counselor positions have Masters Degrees. However, there may be rare occasions in which someone is hired without a Masters Degree, especially in rural areas of the state. In these scenarios, these new hires are required to immediately begin working toward their Masters Degree to meet the highest standards of the state.

Counselors without advanced degrees are required to enroll in the NMHU program or in another distance learning graduate program available from other institutions outside the state such as Texas Tech or University of North Texas if they do not meet qualification requirements There are currently four counselors enrolled in online master's level programs.

Other service professionals employed by the Division include three Psychologists who meet state licensing requirements. It is anticipated that this staffing level will be adequate for several years and that the current number of psychologists either practicing in the state or graduating from New Mexico universities will be sufficient for potential recruitment purposes. Availability of qualified psychologists is monitored as necessary. There are approximately 643 licensed psychologists in the state.

Vocational evaluations and rehabilitation engineering services are purchased through qualified vendors. Other services purchased through qualified vendors include accessibility studies, job modifications, and identifying essential functions of jobs for employers and employees. The Division also employs some staff capable of performing these services.

Staff Development

Starting October 1, 1997, counselors were encouraged to begin work toward either maintaining their certification or attaining national certification. Counselors are now being required to obtain credentials through the Public Education Department's Rehabilitation Counselor licensure.

Working with the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification, the Division has reviewed credentials of the Division's vocational rehabilitation counselors to assess individual counselor's professional development needs. In addition, the State Rehabilitation Council has had an opportunity to review and comment on the training plan.

The Division worked cooperatively with the Public Education Department to develop State Licensing for rehabilitation counselors. The Division is coordinating with the State Personnel Office to incorporate the qualifications that are required for licensure into the requirements for vocational rehabilitation counselors within the State's new compensation and classification system and develop pay equity to better reflect the qualifications of licensed counselors. Counselors are encouraged to submit credentials and meet the qualification requirements of the Certified Rehabilitation Counselor designation, as this is the highest recognized level of a qualified counselor under the licensure rule.

In-service training grant allows for currently taking graduate courses towards a Masters Degree, in CSPD programs. These counselors should complete their programs within a range of 1.5 – 5 years. Additionally, one area manager is completing his Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling, 9 DVR staff members are in BA programs and 6 total in Master's Programs. The specific time period by which all DVR counselors will meet the standard is January 2010, however, it is noted that this projection is difficult to make because we don't know who will be hired from now until then and what their credentials will be. Given the number of counselors who have acquired their advanced training and have met the personnel standards of CSPD, the number of counselors now pursuing an advanced degree, it is safe to say that the Division has attained its goal of all DVR counselors meeting the standard by January 2010. The exception is the rare possibility of a new hire without an advanced degree.

A recent amendment to our in-service training grant does allow for its use in a different way to help the Division meet CSPD requirements. Although the objectives have not been changed, the activities within the goals have been expanded and will be reflected as part of the agency-wide professional development plan. Before this amendment, the in-service training grant allowed for payments of contractual courses with New Mexico Highlands University (NMHU). NMHU offered some of their courses in an accelerated format on weekends to accommodate staff's work schedules and travel needs as well as to provide courses to staff living in great geographical distance from campus. With the amendment, the Division was able to continue the contractual courses as well as cover staff costs of tuition and books. In-state travel to attend the accelerated weekend classes is also paid for by the in-service grant. That cohort of students has finished their coursework. Several DVR employees have offered their expertise to New Mexico Highlands University, teaching several classes on topics such as Foundations of Rehabilitation and Job Placement, and serving on NMHU Rehabilitation Counseling program curriculum advisory committee.

The Division maintains a Staff Development Unit (SDU) that is designated to provide for professional and paraprofessional development of all staff from various training facilities. All employees are encouraged to continually update their job skills and knowledge by taking advantage of training available to them through the SDU. Training can be internal to the agency, state sponsored training and training external of the agency through institutions of higher education, private vendors, professional training organizations – any training that a staff member would appreciate taking to enhance job performance with particular emphasis with respect to assessment, vocational counseling, job placement, and rehabilitation technology.

SDU offers Rehabilitation Academy to new counselors, rehabilitation technicians (rehabilitation secretaries are highly encouraged to attend). Rehabilitation Academy is taught in a spaced learning manner and focuses on assessment, vocational counseling, job placement and rehabilitation technology. SDU makes good use of technology in offering the training.

The Division uses a customized software application called the Training Administration System (TAS) to track employee training progress and CSPD compliance. This software provides the information necessary to summarize the training requested and completed on an individual basis. It provides the data necessary to analyze overall progress of individuals and groups of employees toward obtaining and retaining required credentials. While this system is not problem free, it offers the agency the ability to track all employees' training and enable employees to request training offered by other vendors.

The SDU routinely acquires and disseminates research and information via electronic mail and Agency Intranet. The SDU maintains a professional library for staff use. A recent agreement has been reached with the Center for Development and Disability which enables DVR staff and consumers to use their library located in Albuquerque.

The SDU conducts annual needs assessments and works with the Division to provide the resources necessary to ensure that all personnel employed by the Division receive appropriate training. SDU offers workshops and seminars in various topics such as "Substance Abuse", "Serving Ex-Offenders", and "Self-Employment", all geared to sharpen counselors' skills and abilities in serving citizens of New Mexico who are disabled. Recently SDU offered seminars such as "the 7 Habits of Highly Successful People" and "ADA and Employment" with Richard Pimentel.

Personnel to Address Individual Communication Needs

In New Mexico, there are large portions of the general population whose first language is Spanish or an American Indian dialect. When necessary, the Division obtains the services of interpreters of Spanish and other languages. However, Division staffing, which is consistent with the percentage of minority population and the general population, includes many individuals who are able to communicate in Spanish and native languages. This is most beneficial to terms of providing services to applicants and eligible individuals with limited English speaking ability.

Although not a requirement, the Division may give preference to individuals who are bilingual or multilingual in applying for Division jobs. Many of the Division's field offices have at least one individual who can speak Spanish or an American Indian dialect. The Division's EEO Plan reflects the State's diversity. The Division successfully recruits graduates of New Mexico Highlands University's Vocational Rehabilitation masters program. Many of these graduates are from various minority groups.

American Indian Rehabilitation Technicians are employed through contractual arrangements to help serve American Indian communities.

In addition, the Division employs several individuals skilled in communicating in American Sign Language.

Telecommunications, sensory and other technological aids and devices may be used to assist individual applicants and clients to participate in and benefit from the rehabilitation program. The Division may purchase, lease, or utilize equipment from loan banks to meet these needs, as appropriate. Division staff may consult experts in rehabilitation technology and assistive devices to address client needs.

Coordination of Personnel Development Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act

The Division is organizationally placed under the Public Education Department, as is the Special Education Unit, which administers state services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. In developing its comprehensive system of personnel development, the Division has and will continue to coordinate with the Special Education Unit and will coordinate its CSPD activities with those provided under IDEA. This activity will be implemented under the auspices of the Secretary of Education.

The licensure rules for Rehabilitation Counselors in New Mexico are in agreement with the Public Education Department requirements and competencies applicable to both the school systems to effect school-to-work transition in the high schools and the Division.

The aforementioned activities for developing a distinct plan and maintaining a comprehensive system of personnel development will incorporate methodology to ensure cooperation and coordination with the personnel development under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.