



NEW MEXICO  
DIVISION OF  
VOCATIONAL  
REHABILITATION  
Public Education Department

**Mission Statement:** *The mission of the New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation is to encourage and assist the efforts of New Mexicans with disabilities to reach their goals for working and living in their communities.*

**Vision Statement:** *Every New Mexican with a disability has the opportunity to contribute to the quality of life and the economic prosperity of the state.*

## **Attachment 4.2(c): Summary of Input and Recommendations of the State Rehabilitation Council; Response of the Designated State Unit; and Explanations for Rejection of Input or Recommendations**

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) meets quarterly. The SRC reorganized in 2006 to better reflect and meet the requirements of the Rehabilitation Act by focusing on the specifics of SRC responsibilities. The SRC is comprised of three working committees in addition to the Executive Committee. The working committees are: Advocacy, Partnership, and Collaboration Committee (APC), Consumer Satisfaction, Agency Outcomes and Performance Committee (CSAOP), and the State Plan, Report and Outreach Committee (SRO). SRC members represent all geographical regions of the state, ethnicities, and most importantly, individuals with disabilities. The Council also enjoys a strong presence of the American Indian Rehabilitation Programs with four directors of four different American Indian Rehabilitation Programs on the Council. The Council has provided recommendations to the Division based on their most recent annual report for 2008.

### **Regarding Training and Education of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors:**

**COMMENT:** The State Rehabilitation Council continues to support a policy of advanced education and training of vocational rehabilitation counselors now employed by the Division so they can meet the highest requirements in the State applicable to that profession. Currently, the highest requirement is licensure granted by the Public Education Department.

**RESPONSE:** The Division welcomes this support. The Division implemented a Comprehensive System of Personnel Development to meet the license requirements for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors. As of March 2009, 52 counselors have met the state approved standards for licensure. In addition, seven of the nine Field Program Managers and one of the three Field Operations Directors have been granted licensure.

**Regarding Licensing of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors:**

**COMMENT:** The State Rehabilitation Council continues ongoing support of licensing of qualified vocational rehabilitation counselors employed by the Division through authority of the Public Education Department.

**RESPONSE:** As of early 2009, NMDVR has 52 licensed counselors, 10 counselors whose licenses are in progress, and 4 vacancies for a total of 66 counselor positions. All licenses currently in process will be finished by June 2009. The highest licensure requirement is a Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling. All new hires into the counseling ranks are required to have a Master's Degree. Those hired without a Master's Degree or meeting the license requirement are required to complete the necessary post-graduate work for licensure. The Division will assist these employees in meeting the expense of this training.

Of the licensed counselors, the Division employs 29 individuals with Certified Rehabilitation Counselor designation. All have Masters Degrees. Fourteen of these individuals are caseload Rehabilitation Counselors located throughout the State providing direct services to DVR clients. Fifteen individuals occupy other professional positions in the Division such as working in the Director's Office, Program Development and Support, and Administrative Services Unit. Though not a requirement by the Division, seven of the nine Rehabilitation Services Program Managers and one of the Field Operations Directors have earned their Certified Rehabilitation Counselor designation. The Division encourages acquisition of CRC certification and is pleased that each year individuals are added to these ranks. In addition, the Division will help individuals defray the costs of acquiring continuing education credits and renewal fees for CRC. CRC certification meets the highest licensure requirement in New Mexico.

**COMMENT:** In addition to licensing of qualified vocational rehabilitation counselors, the SRC continues to support appropriate salary analysis for continuous update of competitive salary for vocational rehabilitation counselors commensurate with the educational and licensure requirements of the profession. The SRC remains optimistic of the progress the Division continues to make in assuring competitive salaries for vocational rehabilitation counselors.

**RESPONSE:** As a result of the SRC's comments and concerns regarding appropriate, competitive salaries for vocational rehabilitation counselors, the Division continues to seek ways of addressing the salary of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors. The Division works 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 07 and FY 08, and plans are to use this again in FY 09 pending approval of Department of Finance and Administration.

DVR did provide In-Pay Band Adjustments to vocational rehabilitation counselors and program managers coinciding with the agency's pay plan to compensate key positions. 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." In addition, as a result of In-Pay Band Adjustment and open recruitment practices, the Division has experienced a high number of qualified applicants for advertized vacant positions.

Of note, effective November 15, 2008 a hiring freeze was implemented for those agencies under the control of Governor Richardson. All hiring and/or selection transactions for filling vacant positions with an effective date of November 15, 2008 or after must have received an approval of an Exemption to the Hiring Freeze before the transaction is processed. Pay adjustments are also frozen during this period.

**Regarding Counselor Performance Evaluation:**

**COMMENT:** The SRC is optimistic about the Division's approach to evaluate counselor job performance based on objective, measurable criteria.

**RESPONSE:** A program policy instruction (PPI-05-01), Employee Development and Appraisal (EDA's) Plans Standardized Criteria for Rehabilitation Services Staff remains in effect. This PPI provides clear expectations and equitable appraisal of staff job performance, standardized performance for all positions in the Rehabilitation Services Unit that perform essentially the same job functions. Job assignments, based upon the agency's mission and goals, reflect the team approach to case/caseload management and the rehabilitation process. Job assignments focus on completion of the individual job tasks that are essential to the achievement of team and agency objectives. Specific to vocational rehabilitation counselors in the Rehabilitation Services Unit, job performance is rated on four main job assignments:

- 1) to assist participants in achieving a suitable employment outcome;
- 2) provide quality services to participants;
- 3) perform effective case/caseload management through timely service delivery; and
- 4) provide services to participants with significant/most significant disabilities resulting in quality outcomes. Each of the variables has specific criteria.

A fifth job assignment can be added by the Program Manager to address specific caseloads (such as TBI, SDMI, Deaf, etc.) areas of specialty (such as Spanish speaking, transition, etc.), computer liaison responsibilities, Supervising Counselor responsibilities or other activities, which relate to the job and the overall goals and mission of the agency. These measures also align with federal standards and indicators, and state performance measures.

### **Regarding Recruitment and Retention of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors:**

**COMMENT:** The State Rehabilitation Council continues to support ongoing recruitment of graduates from the rehabilitation counseling education program at New Mexico Highlands University. In addition to recruiting local graduates, the SRC also supports ongoing recruitment of qualified vocational rehabilitation counselors from other states.

**RESPONSE:** This is an on-going collaboration between the Division and the SRC. The Division welcomes this support and has successfully recruited a number of graduates from the rehabilitation counseling education program at New Mexico Highlands University. The Division will continue to look forward to recruiting graduates from this program as well as make job offers with appropriate compensation to applicants who qualify from other states. It is noteworthy that the Division has been successful in recruiting qualified counselors with a background in vocational rehabilitation. In addition, the Division has supported individual students by providing opportunities to complete required internships.

### **Regarding Participant Satisfaction Surveying and Statewide Needs Assessments**

**COMMENT:** Some of the respondents to the last two participant satisfaction studies requested follow-up from DVR staff, therefore, DVR will have to determine mechanisms to follow up with client/respondents who have asked to be contacted.

**RESPONSE:** The Division is committed to providing the highest quality rehabilitation services. Specific to this is an ability to respond to client concerns. At the caseload level, the ability to address client concerns is exemplary and supported by the results of the last two Participant Satisfaction surveys. However, the Division will need to consider aligning resources outside of the caseload structure to address the specific nature of following up with survey respondents in a timely fashion.

**COMMENT:** A significant accomplishment has been the collaboration of the CSAOP and SRO committees with DVR staff in the completion of two Participant Satisfaction and Statewide Needs Assessments within the past three years. The collaboration entailed a number of steps inclusive of contract development and implementation, design of the survey instruments, determination of parameters of random sampling, evaluation of findings, followed by publication and dissemination of the studies.

**RESPONSE:** The Division and its participants benefits from positive collaboration with the SRC. The efforts and results of the recent Participant Satisfaction Surveys and Statewide Needs Assessments attest to the good working relationship that exists between DVR staff with the SRC. Recommendations contained in the surveys will result in long-term joint efforts to improve direct services to DVR clients.

**Regarding Other Issues Related to DVR Services:**

**COMMENT:** The State Rehabilitation Council continues to support the appointment of Division representatives to each of the Local Workforce Development Boards.

**RESPONSE:** The Division has appointed a member to each of the Local Workforce Development Boards. A Deputy Director of the Division sits on one local board. Two local boards are represented by Division Field Operation Directors and an Area Program Manager represents one local board. The Division welcomes this support from the State Rehabilitation Council.

**COMMENT:** The SRC continues to support the Native American Liaison Program funded through DVR and administered through New Vistas. The SRC would like to see the NA Liaisons and the DVR Counselors and DVR Technicians interacting more collaborative.

**RESPONSE:** New Vistas in Santa Fe, New Mexico was again awarded the Native American Liaison Program (NALP) contract. Also noted is that all of the Directors of the Section 121 American Indian and Navajo Nation Rehabilitation Programs in New Mexico serve on the State Rehabilitation Council. The Division works closely with New Vistas to assure fulfillment of the contract and the Division works collaboratively with the 121 Programs to align resources, streamline service delivery, and increase employment outcomes. It is important to note that the Pueblo of Jemez has hired a part-time individual who concurrently works part-time for New Vistas as a state liaison. This arrangement is indicative of the strength and collaboration between New Vistas and Section 121 American Indian programs.

**COMMENT:** The SRC expresses interest and concern about forging stronger interagency relationships between the NMDVR and the One-Stop Centers in the 2007 annual report. The SRC desires to be more fully supportive of the Navigator Program and recommends that the Navigator Program be an agenda item for discussion in a future quarterly meeting. The SRC is interested in learning more about the collaborative efforts of working interagency, providing seamless services, and tracking of successful outcomes.

**RESPONSE:** The Division welcomes SRC support of the Navigators working in the Program and Development Support Services. Currently, there are 8 navigators located in various New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions Centers (federal language is One-Stop Centers) throughout the State of New Mexico. Arrangements to have a presentation by the Program Manager supervising and coordinating the navigator services to the SRC will take place in SFY 10.

**COMMENT:** The SRC supports School-to-Work Transition services at the high school level and specifically coordinated efforts between the schools and DVR continue to be lacking resulting in increased difficulties of access for transition services. The SRC recommends

- a) DVR have a team of specialists with responsibility of reaching out to students, schools, and school transition specialists statewide to inform, instruct, and collaborate the coordination of transition services for students covered by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act;
- b) DVR create access to transition services to students 16 years of age.
- c) DVR Transition Coordinator, counselors specializing in transition caseloads, as well as counselors with transition students in their caseloads, collaborate with agencies that provide transition services to enhance and develop comprehensive transition services plans.

**RESPONSE:** Indicated below are strides toward meeting concerns of the SRC:

- a) DVR has counselors assigned to every school district in the state. In most instances, VR counselors enlist the support of rehabilitation technicians to provide outreach and orientation activities. DVR trains counselors and instructs them to contact school districts early in the school year in order to provide information on services and to encourage early application for services by seniors and exiting students. It is important to note that VR staff must rely on public school staff to assist in the coordination of outreach activities. In some instances, this has been problematic. Additionally, Special Education (IDEA) students can be more easily identified as they are receiving services from school staff. This is not always the case with other students with disabilities (Section 504).
- b) Because the Division employs 66 counselors (three of which are transition counselors) to serve in excess 10,000 clients annually, priority is given to serving seniors/exiting students. In many instances particularly with transition counselors, students age 16 and up received consultative services. The Division will continue to strive to serve more transitioning students. The creation of three transition caseloads in Albuquerque, Las Cruces, and Santa Fe is indicative of this effort. Limited resources influence the extent to which the Division can expand service delivery.
- c) The Division will continue to promote greater collaboration with agencies that provide transition services to expand the state's service delivery capacity for transition services and maximize the use of resources. One activity that will promote planning and networking is the annual "Summer Transition Institute" which the Division plays an active role in coordinating.

**COMMENT:** The State Rehabilitation Council continues to welcome Division support for these on-going concerns to the Council, specifically:

- a) Development of a methodology for keeping eligible participants from dropping out of their program before completion to increase the number of participants successfully completing their program;
- b) Streamlining of the procurement process, both for consumer services and for grants to programs;

- c) Methods for improving relations with American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Programs and the updating of the cooperative agreements;
- d) Informed consumer choice, e.g. individual service plans and service providers, including self-employment plans for eligible individuals served by the Division;
- e) Division/State Rehabilitation Council innovation and expansion;
- f) Monitor the potentiality of an Order of Selection Implementation;
- g) Increase the Division's involvement in planning for and providing services to students in transition from school to work or higher education, including Special State Supported Schools; one SRC member suggested that a percentage be identified in this statement to make it more measurable and quantifiable.
- h) Monitor activities related to Ticket to Work, Workforce Investment, Welfare to Work Legislation, and ADA Restoration Act;
- i) Work cooperatively and in partnership with the Division to assist recipients of SSDI/SSI to receive technical assistance for appropriate training and supports to enable these individuals to retain, regain, or maintain employment including healthcare benefits, and other related services.
- j) Timely design, dissemination, review and report of Client Satisfaction Survey and Statewide Needs Assessments.

**RESPONSE:** The Division will continue to work closely with the Council and support the Council in its work on these issues. Strategic planning will drive the allocation of Division resources to addresses these long-term and very complex issues. Additionally, the Division encourages collaboration with the Statewide Independent Living Council and the Centers of Independent Living throughout the state to meet some of these objectives. Another consideration to increase collaboration is to establish a fee for services schedule with Centers of Independent Living. DVR would purchase services from the Centers of Independent Living based on the fee for services schedule for DVR participants to meet the objectives of their Individual Plan for Employment.