



North Carolina
State Rehabilitation Council

REFLECTIONS
on a Mission

2016 ANNUAL REPORT

Table of Contents

Message from the Chair	3
The Mission and Purpose of the Council	4
2016: The Years in Numbers	5
SRC Objectives	6
SRC Standing Committees	7
Executive Committee	7
Consumer Input and Public Outreach Committee	9
Policy and Rules Review Committee	9
Community Outreach, Advocacy, Member Development	10
Liaison Activities	10
Public Forums	11
SRC Member Training	12
Review and Analysis of the Client Satisfaction Survey	14
Survey Process	15
Overview of Survey	16
Council Recommendations	20
2016 Meeting Schedule	21
The Members of the NCSRC Council: 2015-16	22



**U.S. Rehabilitation
Services
Administration**



Self Employment



Job Growth



Public Forums



Customer Feedback



Advocacy



Baldwin "Keith" Renner, Chair
North Carolina State
Rehabilitation Council

Message from the Chair

It is an honor to have served as your North Carolina State Rehabilitation Council Chair for the past year and to present our 2016 Annual Report. The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) partners with North Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation (NCVR) to plan and provide services that help individuals with impairments achieve ambitious employment goals. SRC members identify and advocate for strategies that accomplish this goal in the most efficient and expedient manner within the framework of policy guidelines.

Over the past year, the SRC conducted public forums across the state, inviting consumers, VR staff and local community leaders to voice their opinions about our state vocational rehabilitation programs, to share what's working and to suggest additional program needs. They also allow us to hear success stories and learn about innovative practices on the ground that are key to developing strategies that elevate the morale of staff and advance the provision of quality services to consumers.

The SRC's list of accomplishments is exceptionally long and I find it hard to choose which ones to highlight here. To me, they all are significant. I am very proud of the coordinated and diligent work of our members to develop and complete the updated SRC Strategic Plan. It is the foundation of SRC's focus on the challenges to continually support our mission.

The Mission of the Council

To enhance the employment, independent living and equality of individuals with disabilities in the state of North Carolina.

The Purpose of the Council

To advise and work in partnership with the N.C. Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services.

To assist the division in accomplishing its mission to promote employment and independence for people with disabilities through partnerships and community leadership.

To provide guidance, input and recommendations relative to the development and expansion of vocational rehabilitation services and programs in an effort to maximize employment opportunities and independence for individuals with disabilities.

To advocate for legislation that supports individuals with disabilities in making successful transitions into the workforce and the community.

To provide customers and stakeholders of vocational rehabilitation services with a formal mechanism to influence policy and the direction of the division at the highest administrative level of the state.

2016: The Year in Numbers

NCVR assisted

6,127

North Carolinians
achieve successful
employment
outcomes

NCCAP assisted

1,181 clients

and provided
mediation, negotiation
and advocacy in

91 cases

Independent living
objectives
were achieved by

1,387

program participants

NCATP made

4,102 short-term
device loans

and reached

115,077 people

through awareness and
outreach efforts

Disability
Determination Services
adjudicated

209,239

cases, achieving closure
averages and claim quality at
or above national rates

SRC Objectives

1. To carry out the following, after consulting with the state's Workforce Development Board: review, analyze and advise the Designated State Agency (DSA) regarding the performance of the Designated State Unit (DSU) under Title IV of the Opportunity Act, particularly with responsibilities related to eligibility (including order of selection); extent, scope and effectiveness of the services provided; and functions performed by state agencies that affect the ability of individuals with disabilities in achieving outcomes under this title.
2. To carry out the following in partnership with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DSU): develop, agree to, and review state goals, in accordance with Section 101(a) (15) (C); evaluate the effectiveness of the vocational rehabilitation program; and submit reports of progress to the commissioner in accordance with Section 101(a) (15) (E).
3. To advise the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services (DSA) and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DSU) regarding activities authorized to be carried out under this title and assist in the preparation of the state plan and amendments to the plan, applications, reports, needs assessments and evaluations required by this title.
4. To the extent feasible, conduct a review and analysis of the effectiveness of, and consumer satisfaction with:
 - a) Vocational rehabilitation functions and services provided by the Department of Health and Human Services, other state agencies and public and private entities responsible for providing vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities under the act
 - b) Employment outcomes achieved by eligible individuals receiving services under the act, including the availability of health and other employment benefits in connection with those employment outcomes.
5. Prepare and submit an annual report to the Governor and the Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration on the status of vocational rehabilitation programs operated within the state and make the report available to the public.
6. To avoid duplication of efforts and to enhance the number of individuals served.

7. To coordinate with the activities of other councils within the state, including: the Statewide Independent Living Council; the advisory panel established under Section 612(a) (21) of the Individuals with Disabilities Act Amendments of 1997; the state Council on Developmental Disabilities; the state Mental Health Planning Council; the state Workforce Investment Board; and other public and private organizations, groups, and functions such as the Council of State Administrators for Vocational Rehabilitation, the National Rehabilitation Association, and the N.C. Rehabilitation Association.
8. To provide for coordination and to establish working relationships between the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services and the Statewide Independent Living Council, and the centers for independent living in the state.
9. To perform other functions consistent with the purposes of this title comparable to other functions performed by the council.

SRC Standing Committees

Executive Committee

The Executive Committee acts on behalf of the council, consistent with its purpose as outlined in its bylaws. The committee is responsible for compiling the council's response to the Unified State Plan and triennial Comprehensive Needs Assessment, preparing the annual report, establishing meeting agendas, and setting the general direction of the council and its committees.

To further expand SRC participation in the development and implementation of the Unified State Plan, the council's Executive Committee addresses state plan development, implementation and progress towards plan goals and SRC goals within the "Goals, Priorities and Strategies" section of the plan during meetings with the division director. The Executive Committee, along with the division's Planning and Evaluation Section, reports on the Unified State Plan to the full council at each quarterly meeting for their input and approval. The Executive Committee continues to work with the Planning and Evaluation Section on the development and implementation of the triennial

Comprehensive Needs Assessment. The committee and section staff report back to the full council on the needs assessment during their quarterly meetings to gather feedback and approval. The Executive Committee also maintains responsibility for developing the agendas for the quarterly full council meetings.

In spring 2016, members voted to continue the return-on-investment (ROI) project in its current form. ROI packets include a cover letter to legislators, customized ROI report for each legislative district, and consumer success stories. This project reflects a goal of the SRC's Strategic Plan for 2014-2016 to inform N.C. lawmakers about the positive economic impact of employing people with disabilities.

This year, 18 members of the N.C. Legislature joined members of the N.C. Rehabilitation Association's 22nd C. Odell Tyndall Legislative Breakfast to hear testimonials from citizens who confronted - and overcame - serious obstacles in pursuit of their career goals. The event also featured employers discussing why they value an inclusive workforce, and how employees with disabilities have benefited their business operations and bottom line.

Personal Services Contracts were eliminated on July 1, 2016 by the Office of State Budget Management. As a result, NCVR will no longer hire impartial hearing officers on a contractual basis and will instead recruit and hire through the N.C. state government's temporary staffing agency, Temporary Solutions. However, hearing officers continue to be assigned from a randomized list as required by the Administrative Rules. Committee members are involved in the recruitment efforts and make recommendations based on qualified applicants.

The Executive Committee advocates for strong leadership roles on the council, and carefully reviews the membership terms. The recommendation was made to form a Membership Committee to recruit for new member nominations to the council. New members are encouraged to serve on designated committees to provide a more balanced representation. The Executive Committee produced a print and web-based annual report posted to the public website. The report summarizes the work of the council and highlights essential components of its mission, such as consumer satisfaction.

Consumer Input and Public Outreach Committee

The Consumer Input and Public Outreach Committee reviews, analyzes and makes recommendations to the council regarding the effectiveness of vocational rehabilitation services delivered by the division and other public and private agencies in the state. The committee also gathers information using the consumer satisfaction survey, public forums and feedback from the Client Assistance Program. The committee reviewed the current methods for monitoring consumer input and public outreach.

The committee recommended increasing the sample size of the telephone survey to 1,600. Because data collection for the consumer satisfaction survey coincided with other projects, the survey expansion was carried out without incurring additional costs. Additionally, the feedback mechanism provided better data to track trends and themes. Survey questions were revised and the sampling distribution provided responses that were previously underrated.

The committee, along with full council participation, also gathered input two public forums, held in Wilson (March 17) and Fayetteville (Sept. 22).

Policy and Rules Review Committee

The Policy and Rules Review Committee reviews and makes recommendations relating to division policy and procedures that affect the public, are subject to public rule-making hearings under the state's Administrative Procedures Act, and required for compliance with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

NCVR policy changes included: durable medical equipment convenience contract revisions, voter registration, WIOA changes, revisions to Volume I, IPE Service, comparable benefits, Volume I consent for release of resume electronically, acknowledgment and equipment agreement, internship, self-employment revisions, competitive integrated employment directive, Volume I revisions regarding mopeds, and subpoena policy.

Community Outreach, Advocacy and Member Development

The council's goal is to have greater impact on its mandates in the areas of community outreach, advocacy and member development.

Liaison Activities

The council designates members to serve as SRC representatives to seven liaison groups, as well as a number of special interest groups. To fulfill that mission, the council continues to focus on identifying candidates who can effectively liaise with these groups. Involvement is seen as a critical opportunity to partner with key stakeholders, as well as provide strategic paths for community outreach, advocacy, and member development. The seven groups are:

- ◆ Council on Education Services for Exceptional Children
- ◆ Mental Health Planning Council
- ◆ N.C. Substance Abuse Federation
- ◆ N.C. Council on Developmental Disabilities
- ◆ N.C. Statewide Independent Living Council
- ◆ N.C. Commission on Workforce Development
- ◆ Commission for Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse

The ongoing information exchange between stakeholder groups has helped to educate members within each sector. Members attended various conferences. Members and staff from the N.C. Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) attended the National SILC Legislative and Advocacy Conference in Washington, D.C., meeting with 15 congressional legislators. In November, the N.C. Rehabilitation Association and N.C. Assistive Technology Program co-hosted the G.R.E.A.T. Conference in Asheville, focusing on the theme, "Power of the Past, the Force of the Future." Throughout the year, the N.C. Commission on Workforce Development collaborated with NCVR and other stakeholders through WIOA working groups, local workforce boards and NCWorks offices.

Public Forums

To obtain consumer input beyond the consumer satisfaction survey and via the division's website, the council held forums in the eastern and central regions of the state. During the March 17 forum at Diversified Opportunities, Inc. in Wilson, a participant expressed frustration with the high unemployment rate for members of the deaf community, likely due to communication issues. Council members responded with a suggestion to work with local employers to establish reasonable accommodations by reviewing tasks and safety provisions.

Other participants were concerned about the lack of Spanish-speaking counselors and staff. The issue of transportation was also discussed, and the council urged community stakeholders to explore Department of Transportation grant opportunities to help alleviate rural transportation shortages. Participants also suggested that NCVR expand substance abuse treatment and related services.

On September 22 at the Fayetteville unit office, a participant was concerned that any delay in responding to calls creates an impression of indifference on the part of the division. Responsive communication is essential to effective service delivery; unfortunately, the Fayetteville unit has had difficulty retaining staff. The large number of unfilled positions means that remaining staff have heavy caseloads and little time to respond to calls.

Other issues raised include difficulty in finding employment for older workers who lack high-demand skills, not enough service providers for the mental health population, who struggle with relapse even when they are placed in employment, as well as concerns about the risk that employers perceive in hiring people with a disability, and the need to expand education efforts with N.C. lawmakers.

The forums continue to serve as a valuable way to obtain consumer input, and increase awareness of the SRC's advocacy role in ensuring that the needs of the consumer and agency are met. Members strategized with regional and local staff to find viable solutions that can be implemented statewide.

SRC Member Training

In December, four new council members attended an orientation session to learn about their role on the SRC. Each member received a SRC Reference Manual. During the quarterly full council meetings, members engaged in discussions with regional and local managers, and guest speakers about the challenges of providing services and cultivating partnerships with community organizations and local businesses.

Members were updated on NCVR's proposal to replace the current case management systems Business Electronic Access Maintenance (BEAM). Due to the developer changing business service offerings, the division is actively planning and pursuing the procurement and implementation of a replacement system with a minimal negative impact on the provision of services.

To address new WIOA mandates, additional outreach to school systems is needed. Transitioning youth with disabilities need more information and need it earlier to achieve career goals and self-sufficiency. Individualized Placement and Support services are being delivered in accordance with best practices, using a fidelity-controlled model that emphasizes active intervention and peer mentoring. Project SEARCH was expanded to a hospital facility in Greenville, where interns are getting work skills training in the classroom, and real-world work experiences for roles in housekeeping, the cafeteria and laundry.

Dr. Trudie Hughes with the N.C. Community College System gave a presentation on serving students with disabilities at the community college level. The focus is on literacy, employment skills and economic self-sufficiency. Jim Swain, NCVR Program Specialist, also presented on the status of vocational evaluations and the challenge of staffing qualified vocational evaluators. The division has 43 evaluators statewide and requires that evaluators are trained in appropriate evaluation method to give a useful evaluation. Evaluators need to be creative, innovative, adaptable and have effective communication styles to meet the needs of the counselor and consumer.

Through motivational interviews, the evaluator must be able to draw out and explore an individual's interests and aptitudes. Innovative collaborative practices exist between the counselor, evaluator and the business relations representative to serve individuals with disabilities, including youth with disabilities.

Employers from various professions attended full council meetings. The owner of DM Transportation discussed the nine-year partnership with the division, which provides a pipeline of talented consumers for job openings at his company and helps consumers overcome a common barrier to work by providing short- and long-distance transportation support. Fayetteville Technical Community College has 20 classrooms in which they provide instruction to improve reading, writing and math skills, and prepare students for employment through courses on soft and hard skills for work, resume writing, and career exploration. Millstone Theater in Hope Mills has 10 individuals with disabilities working as ushers, concession workers and in ticket sales. Mutual Distributing Company in Raleigh hires many people with disabilities, including permanent, full-time workers, part-time staff and student employees.

Dorothea Dix Campus in Raleigh hosted the first class of N.C. Department of Health and Human Services Project SEARCH interns this year. The interns rotated through three, 10-week internships, which allowed them to gain work skills and on-the-job experience in several divisions, including Vocational Rehabilitation, Child Support, Property and Construction, Motor Fleet, Print Shop, Child Development and the Office of the Controller. As the first Project SEARCH in the nation to be hosted by a state agency, the program was incredibly successful, with eight interns achieving permanent employment and plans to expand in the coming years.

To improve consumer perception of NCVR services and long-term employment outcomes, the LeanVR team was established and charged with addressing issues that hinder service delivery to consumers. By eliminating or adjusting policies and practices that delay service delivery, the LeanVR team intends to reduce the direct processing and wait time between referral for service and implementation of an individual plan for employment by 10 percent.

The SRC requested a report on the turnovers versus vacancies. This an area the council feels it can help assist agencies through networking partners.

Review and Analysis of the Client Satisfaction Survey

The consumer satisfaction survey is mandated by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (the act), which states that the SRC shall conduct a review and analyze the effectiveness of client satisfaction with:

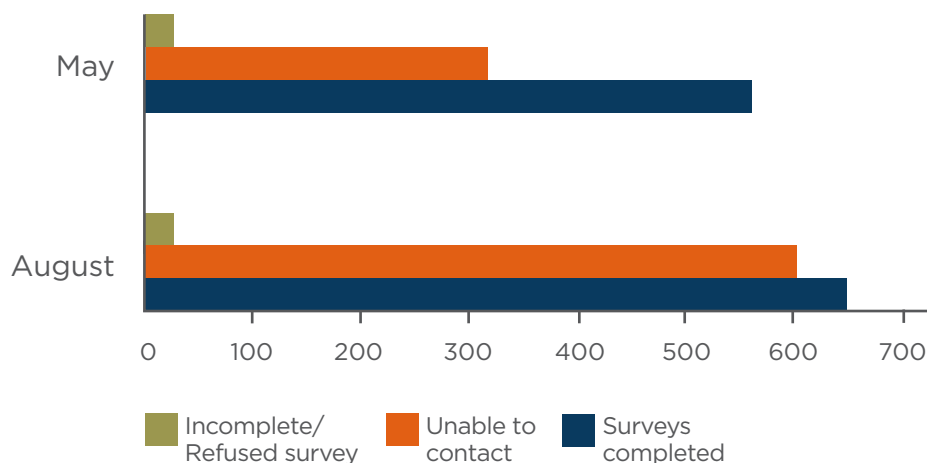
- ◆ The functions performed by the designated state agency
- ◆ Vocational rehabilitation services provided by state agencies, and other public and private entities responsible for providing vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities under the act
- ◆ Employment outcomes achieved by eligible individuals receiving services under Title I of the act including the availability of health and other employment benefits in connection with those employment outcome

Survey Process

The survey is conducted by the SRC in cooperation with division staff. Council and staff share responsibility for analyzing and reporting the results.

The 2016 Client Satisfaction Survey was conducted by telephone in May and August through a contract with the North Carolina State University, Center for Urban Affairs and Community Services. From the random sample of 2,185 clients with open or recently closed cases contacted by telephone, only 2.6 percent of clients refused to complete the interview. After adjusting for clients who could not be contacted after six attempts, the completion rate was 95.6 percent.

Survey Completion Results



Overview of Survey

Measurement scales were revised for 2016 to improve the quality and utility of the survey results. The revised instrument includes four sections:

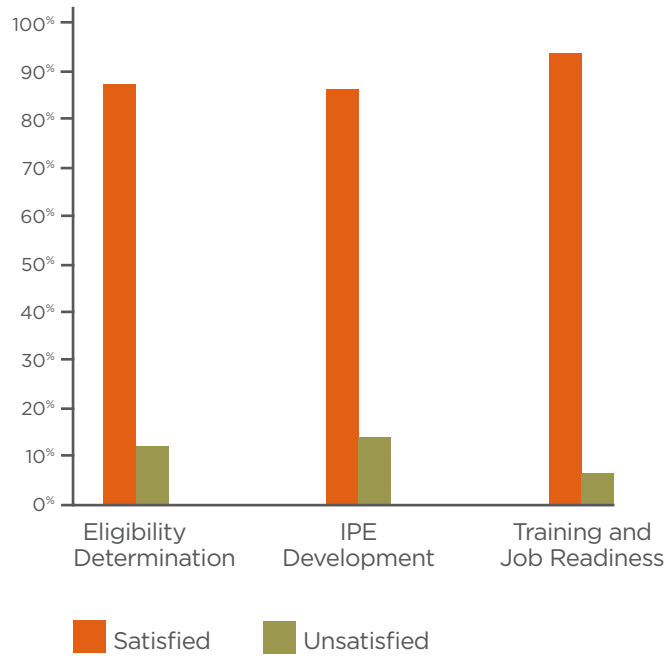
- I. Satisfaction with VR Counselor and Staff
- II. Client Assistance Program (CAP) Information
- III. Barriers to Employment
- IV. Additional Questions

Section I. Satisfaction with Counselor and Staff contained 14 items regarding the client’s experience with NCVR, including their interactions during eligibility determination, IPE development and after achieving employment. Clients indicating dissatisfaction were given the option to explain.

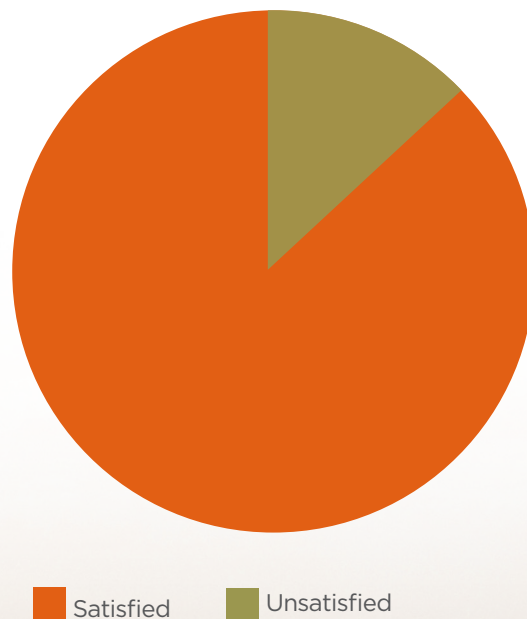
Satisfaction with Counselor and Staff:



Satisfaction with Timeliness of Services:

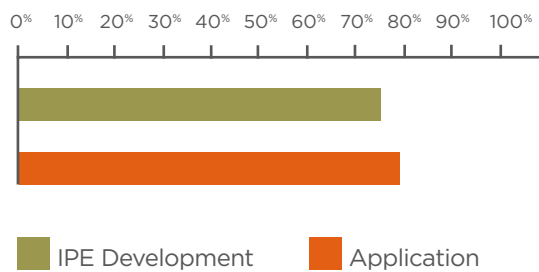


Satisfaction with Overall Experience: More than 87 percent of survey respondents reported being satisfied with their overall experience with NCVR.

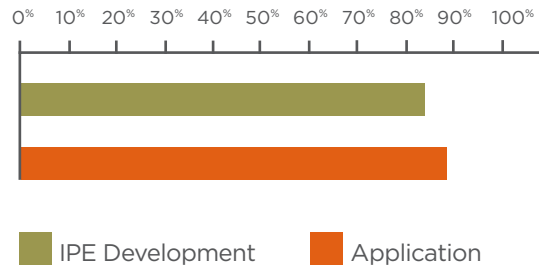


Section II. Client Assistance Program information questions from the previous version of the survey were included, and sub-items were added to determine if clients received information about NCCAP's services (a) when they applied for services and (b) when they were developing an individualized plan for employment (IPE).

Informed about Client Assistance Program at time of:

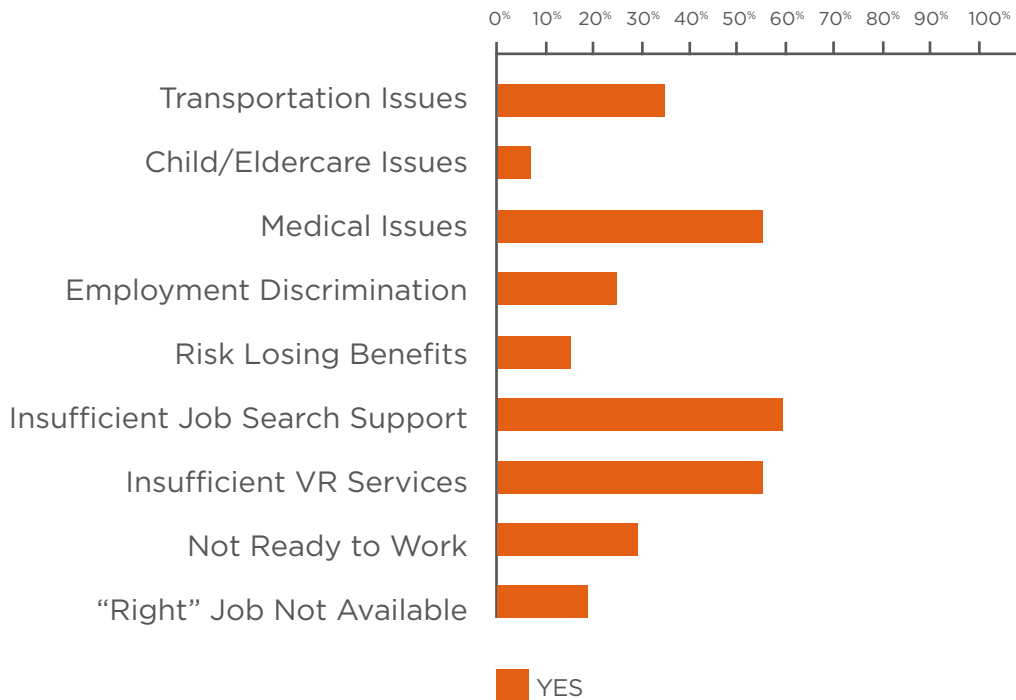


Informed about right to appeal at time of:



Section III. Barriers to Employment contained nine items that were prompted if, at the time the survey was conducted, the client reported they were not working. Some items were revised from the previous version of the survey and an additional response of “N/A” was added.

Barriers to employment for respondents not working at time of survey:



Section IV. Additional Questions included an open-ended question for all clients, which asked what NCVR could do to improve its services, as well as two items prompted for clients who exited the vocational rehabilitation process without a successful employment outcome. These clients were asked (a) why they felt their case was closed before they achieved employment and (b) whether VR could have done more to help them start working.

Council Recommendations

The Executive Committee provided the following recommendations to the division regarding goals, priorities and strategies.

Recommendation 1:

In support of elements of the strategic plan pertaining to advocacy, the council again recommended that the division prepare customized reports for each state legislator featuring the return-on-investment value to the economy of each district within North Carolina.

Recommendation 2:

Whereas the council recognizes that employment options are generally decreasing in rural North Carolina, and since many consumers cannot relocate to more urban areas due to their dependence on natural supports, the division's self-employment option should remain a well-supported service option.

Recommendation 3:

The council recommended that all quarterly meetings contain a standing item for the Client Assistance Program to provide an activity update. Additionally, the council recommended that regional directors and unit managers be provided a standard set of questions and topics to use as framework for reporting on local developments, activities and/or concerns during quarterly council meetings.

Recommendation 4:

The council recommended that the jointly conducted public forums continue to be held twice annually to facilitate stakeholder participation and strongly encouraged NCVR staff attendance at these events when possible. The division will continue to actively support these public forums by canvassing communities across the state to solicit input on how NCVR is addressing consumers' needs through the provision of programs and services.

Recommendation 5:

Whereas the council is concerned about providing responsive services to consumers and realizes the division's abilities in this area are impeded when high vacancy rates occur within the division, the council recommends that NCVR provide regular updates regarding key vacancies, including direct service positions such as counselors, so that the council may advocate appropriately as included within the current 2014-16 strategic plan.

Recommendation 6:

Whereas the council's Consumer Input and Public Outreach Committee acknowledged decreasing response rates on self-administered written questionnaires, the council recommends that NCVR shift half the funds expended on the written questionnaire to expanded use of the telephonic client satisfaction survey. Further, the council recommends extending the survey to clients in active status and employing a weighted sampling method to maintain costs and better ensure representation across disability types, minority status, age, and gender.

2016 Meeting Schedule

March 17-18	Wilson
June 8-9	Raleigh
September 22-23	Fayetteville
December 8-9	Raleigh

The Members of the North Carolina State Rehabilitation Council: 2015-16

Keith Renner, Chair
Representing Labor

Laurie Ray, Vice-Chair
Representing State Education Agency (IDEA)

Lisa Ward-Ross, Past Chair
Representing Community Rehabilitation Service Providers (Termed 6/30/217)

Doreen Byrd
Representing Parent Training and Information Centers (Pending)

Meg Ackley
Representing Regional Rehabilitation Centers for the Physically Disabled

Stephen “Mark” Baker
Representing Disability Advocacy Groups

Quintin Boston
Representing Non-Division Rehabilitation Counselors

Brenda Cogdell
Representing Community Rehabilitation Service Providers

Rene Cummins
Representing Statewide Independent Living Council

Wayne Giese
Representing Disability Advocacy Groups

Robert Gilmore
Representing Consumers

Cindy Harrell
Representing Business and Industry Sector

Jerry Higgins
Representing Disability Advocacy Groups

Celeste Hunt
Representing Directors of Projects Under Section 121

Kimlyn Lambert
Representing Directors of Projects Under Section 121 (Until 8/2017)

Agreta Limerick
Representing N.C. Department of Commerce, Division of Workforce Solutions

John Marens
Representing the N.C. Client Assistance Program (NCCAP)

Ping Miller
Representing N.C. Chamber of Commerce

Vacant
Representing Disability Advocacy Groups (1)

Non-Voting Member

Tara K. Myers, Division Director
North Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation



N.C. STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

c/o North Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Services
2801 Mail Service Center | Raleigh, NC 27699-2801
(919) 855-3500 | 1-800-689-9090 | TTY (919) 855-3579
Fax (919) 733-7968 | www.ncdhhs.gov/dvrs

State of North Carolina | Pat McCrory, Governor
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www.ncdhhs.gov

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