



North Carolina  
**State Rehabilitation Council**

**REFLECTIONS**  
on a Mission

2017 ANNUAL REPORT



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**U.S. Rehabilitation  
Services  
Administration**



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**Self Employment**



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**Job Growth**



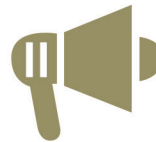
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**Public Forums**



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**Customer Feedback**



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**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 2017 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.

## 2017: The Year in Numbers

NCVR assisted

**5,340**

North Carolinians  
achieve successful  
employment  
outcomes

NCCAP assisted

**1,506** clients

and provided  
mediation, negotiation  
and advocacy in

**101** cases

Independent living  
objectives  
were achieved by

**1,327**

program participants

NCATP made

**1,600** short-term  
device loans

and reached

**12,585** people

through awareness and  
outreach efforts

Disability  
Determination Services  
adjudicated

**154,968**

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 Strategic Plan 2017-2019**

The council met in March 2017 to review and develop a new strategic plan. The plan has five strategic goals and sub-strategies. These goals provide guidance when formulating each SRC meeting agenda and establishing committee priorities. The SRC's commitment to the goals has aided in accomplishing their mission for the period ending in calendar year 2017.

1. To sustain service capacity of the NC Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services
2. To ensure individualized services planning is client driven
3. To improve marketing, communication and outreach
4. To improve the efficiency of the vocational rehabilitation process
5. To improve or create transportation options for vocational rehabilitation consumers

During every quarterly council meeting, the chair reviews the five goals of the SRC Strategic Plan or 2017-2019 and sub-strategies to guarantee the council is meeting their goals.

# 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.

Members reviewed the performance of the VR program by tracking successful closures through the Milestone Incentive Program. For the past few years, the VR program has seen a shift away from physical disabilities for employment outcomes. Stronger emphasis is being placed on the quality of services rather than on numbers. Under WIOA, more information is required for collection and reporting on a quarterly basis. Counselors have gained better knowledge in determining eligibility. Comparatively, the current trend shows fewer students going into four-year post-secondary education and electing to attend community colleges or technical schools. Technical certificates are considered a viable option, a quicker return-on-investment, and the training programs align with the workforces needs of North Carolina's industries.

In spring 2017, members voted to continue the annual 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 2017-2019 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 for impartial hearing officers 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. Hearing Officers continue to be assigned from a randomized list as required by the Administrative Rules. Executive 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 approved the use of telephone surveys which eliminated the need for other survey methods. Data collection for the consumer satisfaction survey coincided with other projects without incurring added costs. Additionally, the feedback mechanism provided better data to track trends and themes.

The committee, along with full council participation, also gathered input two public forums, held in Hickory (March 30) and Greenville (Sept. 21).

## 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).

VR policy changes included the following topics: learning disabilities revision; Functional Electrical Stimulation devices; Hepatitis C; termination of transitional employment; sponsorship of GED testing fees; revision of forms for documentation when the IPE cannot be developed within 90 days; WIOA-related continuing policy development; residence modification types and limits adjustments; Office of State Auditor update; Post-Secondary Academic Supports; major services implementation, and medical consultation requirements.

## 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. In October, the N.C. Rehabilitation Association and N.C. Assistive Technology Program cohosted the G.R.E.A.T. Conference in Wilmington 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 workgroups, local workforce boards and NCWorks offices. The annual NCWorks Partnership Conference was held in Greensboro and entitled, “Back to the Future, The Next 30 Years”. The conference featured keynote speakers, Josh Davies from the Center for Work Ethic Development and Shawn Derik with Dreamsong International.

## Public Forums

To obtain consumer input, beyond the consumer satisfaction survey and via the division’s website, the council held forums in the western and eastern regions of the state. During the March 30th forum at the Public Library in Hickory, the need for more resources was discussed due to the lack of transportation in the area. Individuals are on waiting lists and the only available transportation provided is for medical reasons. Additionally, the issue of the mechanics of agency sponsorship and eligibility criteria for supported employment services was a topic of discussion. There are three phases; the first is very intensive; the next, the job coach works with the client, and the final phase, hours are adjusted if long term supports are required. One provider spoke about the disconnect between supported employment services and long-term services. The agency is working to improve developments in this area.

For psychological evaluations, agency policy does not specify timeframe limits, whereas, Management Care Organizations (MCOs) are three years and may require the agency to sponsor these services depending on the MCO’s eligibility criteria. The lack of transportation in rural areas has prompted teachers on occasion to personally drive students with disabilities to school or activities. Participants inquired about the role of VR in the referral process for Pre-Employment Transitional Services (PETS) program. VR counselors work with students with disabilities starting at age 14 in career exploration

assistance, internships, and work-based experiences with programs, such as Project SEARCH that help youth gain work experience within an employment setting.

The ability to work can be very individualized and there are no limitations for matching the needs of the client and the employer. Services are provided that are directly employment-related. Individuals must have a written Individualized Employment Plan (IEP).

On Sept. 21 at the Pitt County Agricultural Center in Greenville, stakeholders expressed their support in having VR work with youth at an earlier age. It was expressed that high schools are not doing enough to teach youth the skills to be prepared for the future. Graduates are not seeking to further their education or join the workforce. The level of engagement, collaboration and services can vary with each school system. The goal is to obtain access and the uniformity of services throughout the state. Different arrangements are being made with service providers to provide service for this population. Transportation is a barrier for clients, including impeding their ability to meet with their VR counselor and participate in work-experience opportunities.

A parent voiced her anxiety over getting her son into a work program. The supportive response from a counselor staff member in attendance was that the parent is encouraged and has the right to participate in all meetings with her son's counselor. Many positive changes support informing and actively involving the consumer in choices for their future. Action is being taken to move people out of sub-minimum wage jobs and into competitive, integrated employment settings. Other parents wanted to know if their children, who are VR consumers, had options to work at home or for themselves. VR does help with self-employment in partnership with many resources across the state, including Community College Small Business Centers. Services are based on financial need and the ability to be successful in such a setting, with or without appropriate supports.

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, two 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 informed about the unintended outcomes of the Affordable Care Act; its infrastructure and communication issues with people operating within silos. While VR's overall vacancy rates were good, some offices tackled an urgent need to handle service gaps due to inexperienced staff, heavy turnovers, retirements, and retention problems. Staff from neighboring offices covered additional tasks. In the Central Region, a hybrid position was created for a floater counselor to provide coverage between offices. Positions were also reallocated or reclassified.

As part of a joint effort, the N.C. Council on Developmental Disabilities teamed up with VR through a communication campaign called "Everybody Works in NC" to bring awareness about VR and individuals with disabilities. As a component of that effort, the N.C. Department of Commerce partnered with VR by renting a mobile unit for outreach services. In October, staff were at the N.C. State Fair distributing resources and providing access to services.

Upper management so far has visited 12 of 32 unit offices to gather ideas and obtain feedback as to what was working within the field. In concert with the feedback received from the field, the division engaged in a "Lean VR" study to streamline practices, procedures, or adjust policies to assist in more efficient service delivery. System Integration improved collaborations by sharing client data for validation of hiring for tax credit purposes and through the consolidation of offices. Two sites were being piloted across the three regions of the state. Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC) offered technical assistance in the service delivery of Pre-Employment Transition Services for VR and DSB. Additionally, VR plans to replace the current case management system called Business Electronic Access Maintenance (BEAM) with the new system called Electronic Network Centered on Rehabilitation Effectiveness (ENCORE).

Peter Murphy, Mobility Specialist with Delhaize, a partner of the Food Lion Distribution Center in Salisbury gave a presentation on the behind-the-scenes daily operation of running a grocery store and hiring people with disabilities. Peter is the chair of the Disability Resource Group and a person with a disability. Food Lion's human resources department is involved in recruiting, learning and development, diversity and inclusive practices. Food Lion has worked with VR and the Job Accommodation Network (JAN) to provide accommodations for people with disabilities. SRC members were so impressed by Peter's presentation, he was subsequently asked to serve on the SRC and appointed a short time later.

Christian Morris, with Lowe's Home Improvement in Greenville, N.C. presented on hiring people with disabilities at their various locations. Lowe's works with candidates by steering them toward the right job or fit, based on their interests and qualifications. Life experiences are taken into consideration and a college education is not a pre-requisite unless a specific job requires it. Lowes offers job training through demonstrations of different scenarios to provide the person with as much information to assist them in their job.

Debbie Collins, Director of Public Transportation Division with the N.C. Department of Transportation (NCDOT) recently met with the SRC. North Carolina has the fastest growing ridership in the Southeast and the NCDOT supports 10,000 jobs in the state, with about \$481 million in corresponding wages. Employment in the transportation sector will require candidates with experience in data management, automation, and online data tools and resources. NCDOT offers a variety of programs that expose students to careers in the transportation industry, with the goal of developing a talented workforce to meet North Carolina's future transportation demands. For VR consumers, transportation is frequently identified as a top priority in needs assessments. NCDOT's strategic plan seeks to connect all citizens to economic opportunities and highlights the need to provide enhanced access for people with disabilities as a key tactic to achieving their mission of improving quality of life for North Carolinians.



## 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:

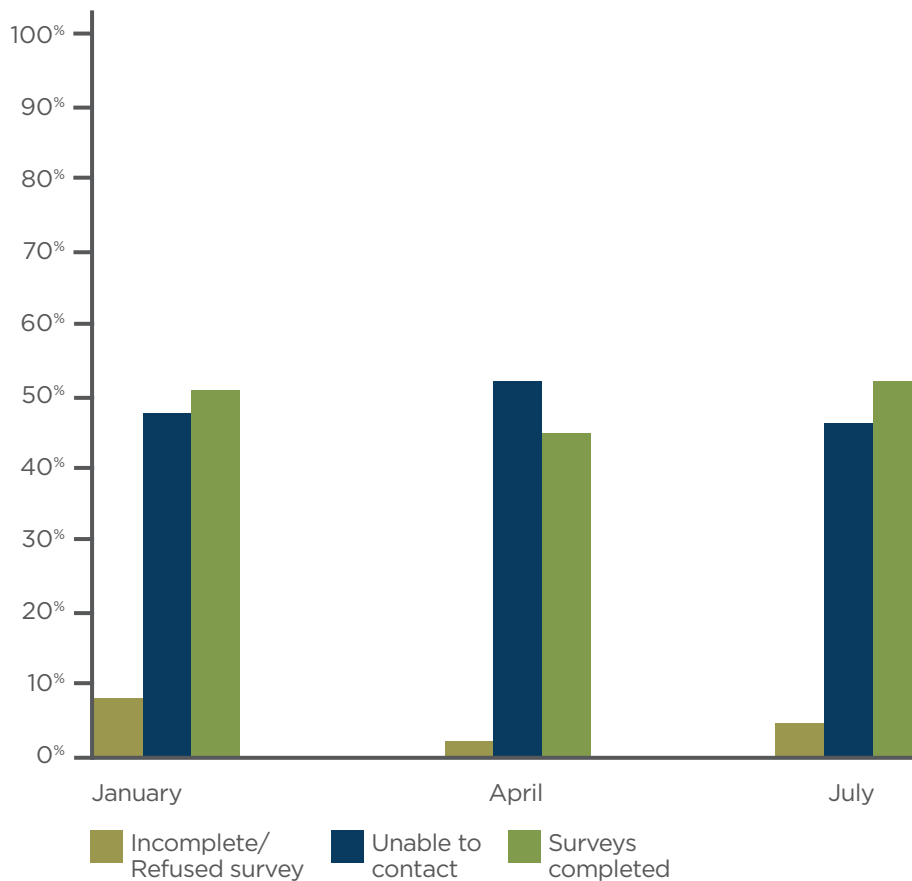
- ◆ The functions performed by the designated state agency
- ◆ Vocational rehabilitation services provided by state agencies, and other public and private entities responsible for providing vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities under the act
- ◆ Employment outcomes achieved 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 was conducted by the SRC in cooperation with division staff. Council and staff share responsibility for analyzing and reporting the results.

The 2017 Client Satisfaction Survey was conducted by telephone in January, April, and July through a contract with the North Carolina State University's Center for Urban Affairs and Community Services. The survey used a weighted sample of 1,895 clients with open or recently closed cases. After adjusting for clients who could not be contacted after six attempts, the completion rate was nearly 99 percent.

## Survey Completion Results



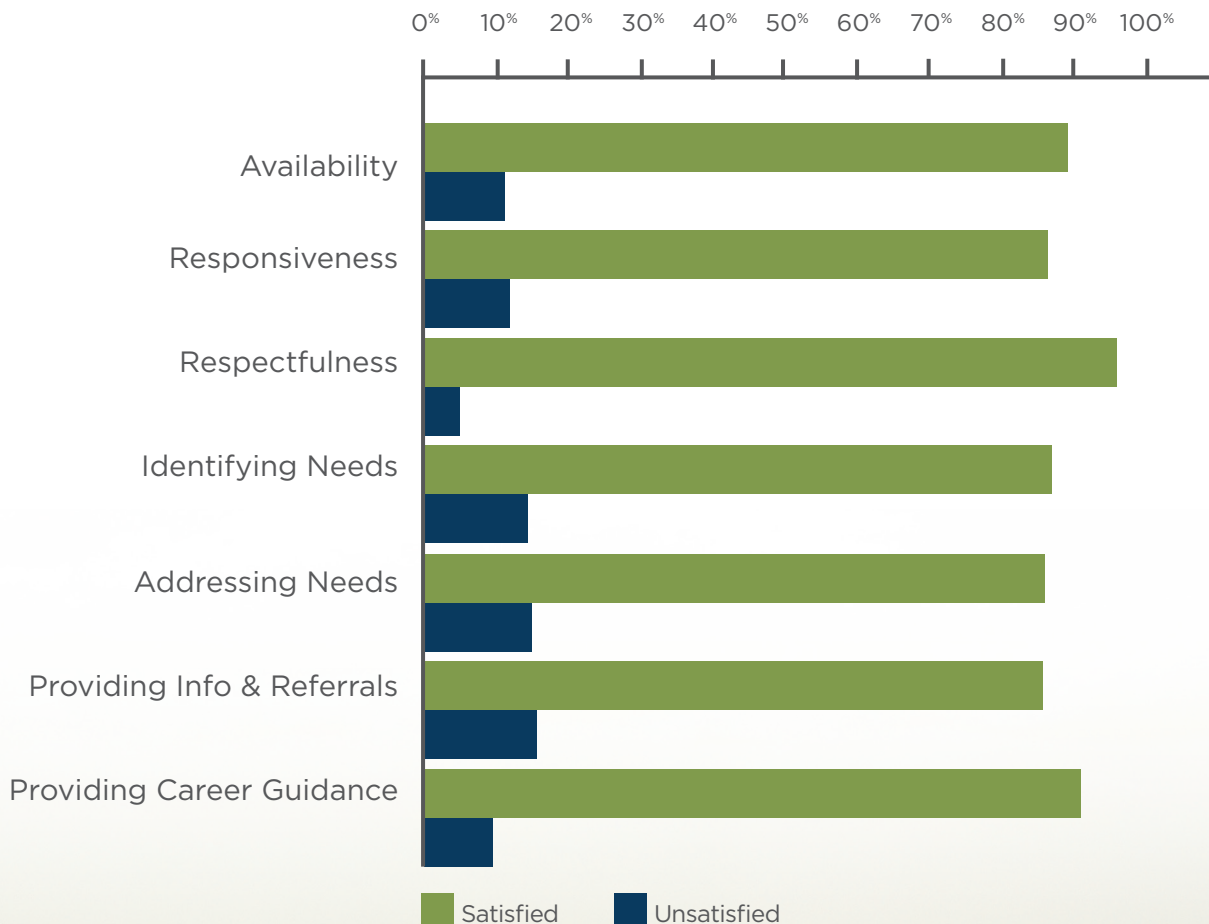
## Overview of Survey

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

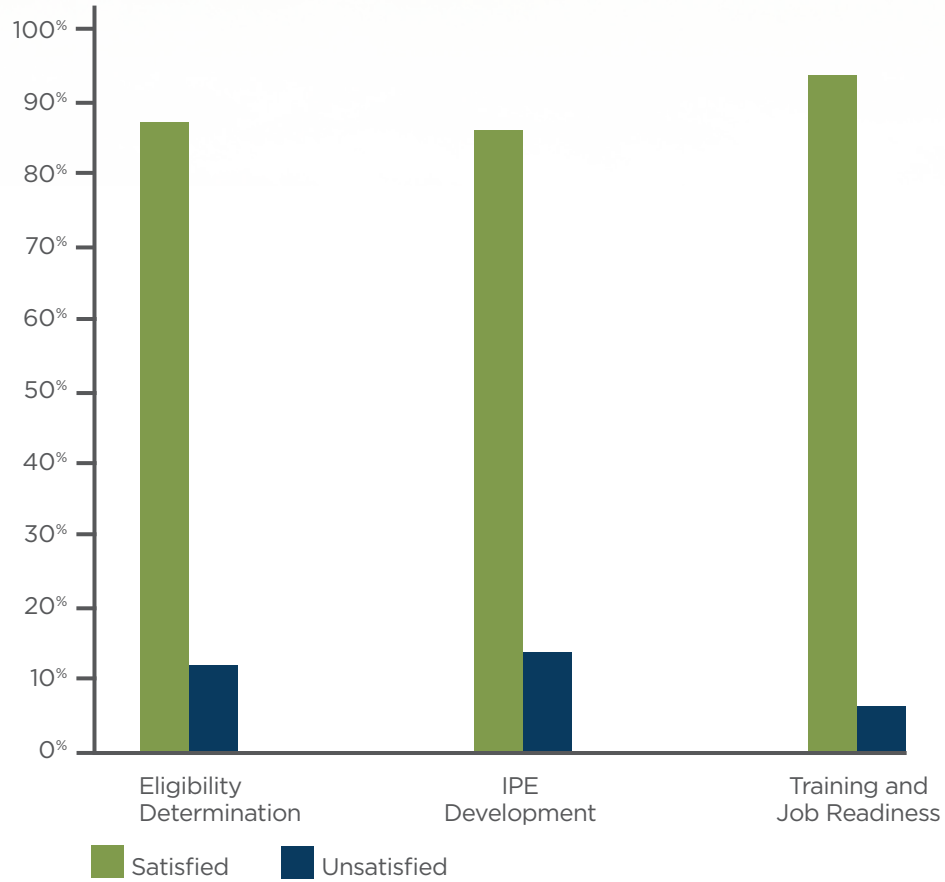
- I. Satisfaction with VR Counselor and Staff
- II. Client Assistance Program (CAP) Information
- III. Barriers to Employment
- IV. Additional Questions

**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.

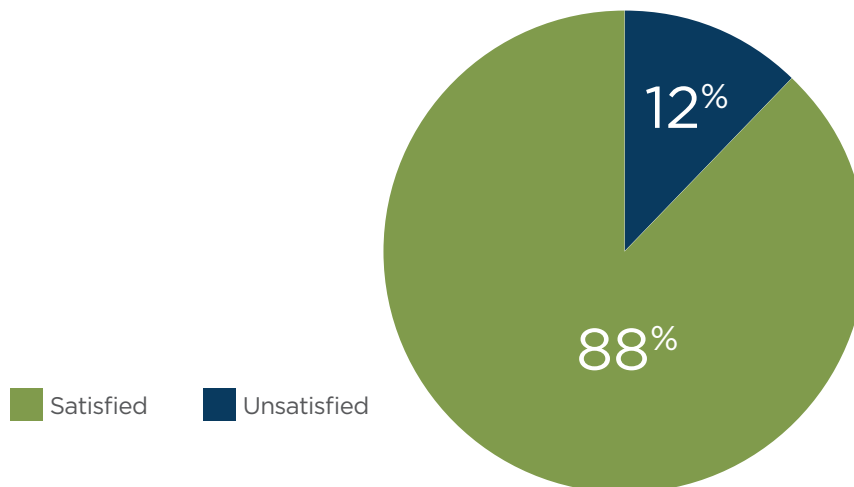
### Satisfaction with Counselor and Staff:



### Satisfaction with Timeliness of Services:

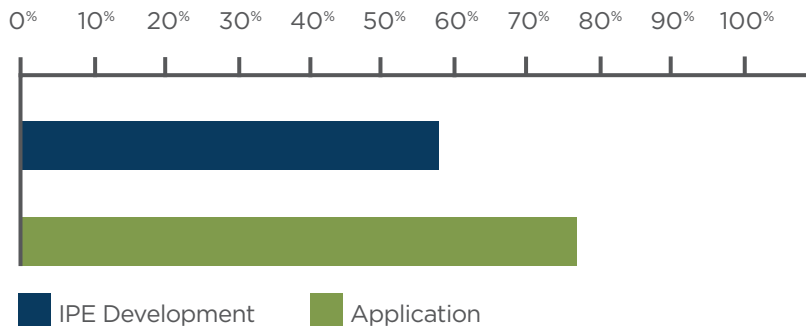


### Satisfaction with Overall Experience:

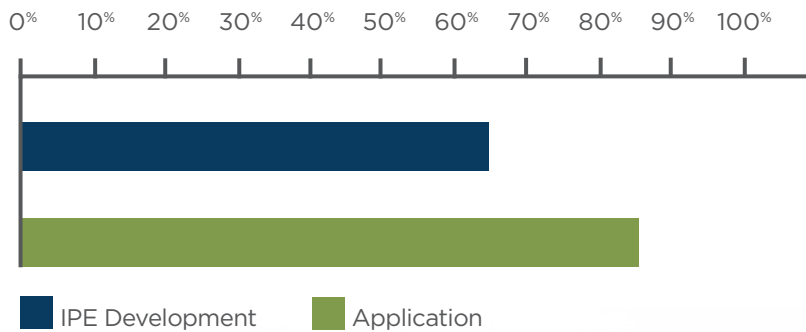


**Section II.** Client Assistance Program information questions from the previous version of the survey were included, and sub-items were added to determine if clients received information about NCCAP’s services (a) when they applied for services and (b) when they were developing an individualized plan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

**Informed about Client Assistance Program at time of:**

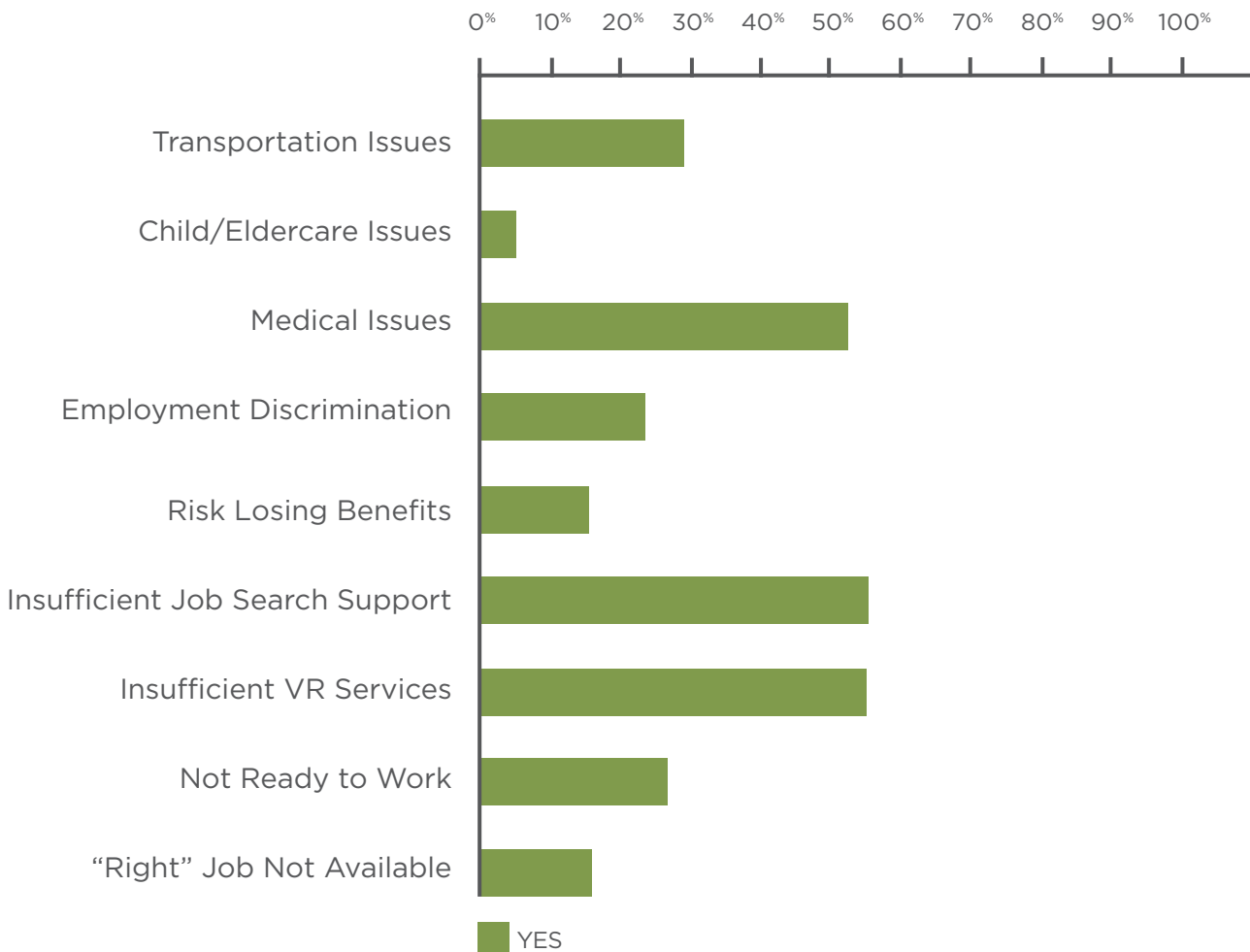


**Informed about right to appeal at time of:**



**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 their strategic plan pertaining to improved marketing, communication, outreach, and advocacy, the council recommended that the division continue to prepare customized reports that highlight the beneficial return-on-investment of VR programs for consumers and the economy of each of the state's legislative districts. The Planning and Evaluation unit will continue to support this request, revising the customized reports based on council feedback and incorporating success stories to illustrate the data presented. The reports will be prepared and distributed to N.C. legislators during the short session.

### **Recommendation 2:**

The council recommended improving the efficiency of the vocational rehabilitation process by exploring ways to expedite the provision of consumer services and client purchases, conducting reviews of processes for increased efficiencies, involving staff in identifying and reducing inefficiencies, and increasing capacity to serve consumers who use English as a second language. The division supports all components of this recommendation and is currently addressing them.

### **Recommendation 3:**

The council recommended that a Client Assistance Program activity update be added as a standing item for quarterly full council meetings; that regional staff be provided standardized questions and topic areas to guide their reports to the Council. The division incorporated the recommended changes and will continue with these standing topics until the Council recommends further adjustments.

#### **Recommendation 4:**

The council recommended continuation of consumer input sessions, held in conjunction with council meetings, to gather input from various communities across the state and strongly encouraged staff attendance at such sessions whenever possible. The division will continue to support these twice-annual sessions and seek input on how the VR program is addressing VR consumers' needs through its service provision.

#### **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, the council recommends that regular updates regarding key vacancies, including direct service positions such as counseling positions, so that the council may advocate appropriately as required by the strategic plan. The division supports this recommendation and will continue to work with council members to regularly provide updates through statewide and regional vacancy reports.

#### **Recommendation 6:**

Acknowledging the decreasing response rates for self-administered, written questionnaires on client satisfaction, the council recommended that the division continue to use the telephonic client satisfaction survey. Further, the council recommended extending the survey to clients in active status and employing a weighted sampling method to maintain costs while ensuring representation across disability types, minority status, age, and gender. The division supports this recommendation and will adjust its sampling practices, contracts, and purchase orders accordingly.



**Recommendation 7:**

In recognition of the importance of reliable transportation solutions for consumers preparing for, obtaining, and maintaining employment, the council recommends the division actively explore partnerships focusing on creative transportation solutions that will better meet the needs of all individuals with disabilities within the state. The division also recognizes the significance of this need and supports this recommendation by working with the N.C. Department of Transportation to address these needs at the systems level, while exploring other solutions and partnerships.

## 2017 Meeting Schedule

March 30-31	Hickory
June 7-8	Raleigh
September 21-22	Greenville
December 7-8	Raleigh

# ~~The Members of the North Carolina State Rehabilitation Council: 2016-17~~

**Baldwin “Keith” Renner**, Chair  
Representing Labor

~~Laurie Ray~~, Vice-Chair  
Representing ~~State Education Agency (IDEA)~~  
(Termed 6/30/2017)

**Margaret “Meg” Ackley**,  
Representing Regional Rehabilitation Centers for the Physically Disabled

**Quintin Boston**  
Representing Non-Division Rehabilitation Counselors

**Doreen Byrd**  
Representing Parent Training and Information Centers

**Brenda Cogdell**  
Representing Community Rehabilitation Service Providers

**Patti Cox**  
Representing State Education Agency (IDEA)

~~Rene Cummins~~  
Representing ~~Statewide Independent Living Council (Until 9/30/17)~~

**Wayne Giese**  
Representing Disability Advocacy Groups

~~Robert Gilmore~~  
Representing ~~VR Consumers~~  
(Termed 9/30/2017)

**James “Jim” Godfrey**  
Representing Business and Industry Sector

**Cindy Harrell**  
Representing Business and Industry Sector

**Gerald “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~~, Vice Chair  
~~Representing the N.C. Client Assistance Program (NCCAP)~~

**Peter Murphy**  
Representing Disability Advocacy Groups

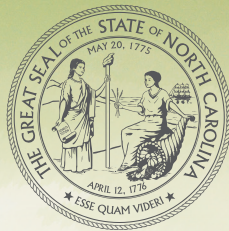
**Vacant**  
1) ~~Disability Advocacy Groups~~  
2) N.C. Chamber of Commerce

## Non-Voting Member

**Tara K. Myers**, ~~Division~~ Director  
~~North Carolina~~  
Vocational Rehabilitation Services







## **N.C. STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL**

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