

An aerial photograph of a scenic landscape. A winding asphalt road with yellow and white lane markings curves along the edge of a calm, turquoise lake. The lake reflects the surrounding green forest and the distant mountains. The right side of the road is bordered by a dense, lush green forest of evergreen trees. In the background, rugged mountains with patches of snow rise above the forest. The sky is clear and bright.

Washington State Rehabilitation Council



Washington State Rehabilitation Council
Building Inroads to Employment and Success

2018 ANNUAL REPORT

Message from the WSRC Chair

Dear Acting Commissioner Dobak and Governor Inslee,

On behalf of the Washington State Rehabilitation Council (WSRC), I am pleased to present the 2018 WSRC Annual Report.

For the Council, 2018 began with the culmination of a long-term goal to adjust the organizational alignment of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) within the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS). On January 1, 2018, DSHS Secretary Cheryl Strange announced that DVR would report directly to the Secretary's Office. This alignment creates more visibility for disability-related services within the department and positions DVR to partner with internal and external partners more effectively.

Unfortunately, 2018 also required DVR to activate Order of Selection due to a growing caseload and rising case service costs that exceeded DVR's resources. As a result, a waiting list has been established that is steadily growing. While none of us want to see a delay in serving individuals who need vocational rehabilitation services to achieve employment, DVR's implementation of the process was well planned and effectively executed.

The WSRC also experienced change in 2018, with the appointment of a new Executive Director. The Executive Director is key to facilitating member engagement and influence with DVR. WSRC members bring voices from recipients of DVR services, their families and loved ones, service providers, educators, advocates and policy makers to our work with the DSHS Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). The WSRC members donate hundreds of hours each year to promote quality services and meaningful jobs for individuals with disabilities in Washington.

We continue with a strong focus on customer relations, administering a Customer Satisfaction Survey and Quarterly Focus Groups. WSRC is in its second year of administering the Customer Satisfaction Survey with a strong focus on developing phase 2, which includes transitioning the survey from paper to an online, web-based application. We adjusted the format of our quarterly customer focus group to enable us to dig deeper into specific issues affecting customer services. This transition has provided increased access and safe space for customers to share their constructive feedback about their customer service experience.

WSRC values the professional and caring staff of Washington DVR, whose primary focus is helping people with disabilities navigate their needs and options on a pathway to independence and self-sufficiency. Each year we are humbled to hear about the life-changing experiences of people who have achieved employment that is not just a 'survival job', but a career. Throughout the year, DVR staff maintained their focus on serving DVR customers and facilitating the employment of 2,750 individuals in competitive, integrated employment. Council members have deep appreciation for DVR's hard work and we genuinely applaud DVR's progress and achievements in 2018.

In the upcoming year, the WSRC will continue to assess and advise DVR in areas of program effectiveness. In this effort, we are mindful to advocate and work for improvements that strengthen DVR's ability to advance equity and achieve meaningful employment outcomes for those they serve.

Respectfully,

Shannon McLain, Chair



Purpose of the Council

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, requires states to establish a State Rehabilitation Council (SRC). At the state level, the Washington State Rehabilitation Council (WSRC) is established by Executive Order 04-04. As established in law and Executive Order, WSRC membership is comprised of a diverse group of volunteers representing pertinent interests and perspectives. WSRC members include previous recipients of DVR services, their family members and loved ones. They are service providers or advocates who work with DVR customers one-on-one to support their success. Members are employers, key agency representatives and others committed to supporting the successful employment of people with disabilities.

Council members work to ensure that the voices and needs of people with disabilities are heard and are reflected in all aspects of DVR program development and service delivery. In addition to the constituencies they represent, Council members engage DVR customers and various partners and stakeholders to understand the collective needs, concerns and priorities related to DVR services. The Council uses this collective input to partner with and advise DVR in shaping new programs, delivering effective services and facilitating meaningful employment outcomes.

The WSRC works in partnership with DVR to review, evaluate, and advise DVR regarding all aspects of service delivery and the outcomes achieved by DVR recipients. The WSRC also partners with DVR to develop, agree to and review goals and priorities related to the delivery of vocational rehabilitation services that are documented in its State Plan.

The WSRC holds public meetings quarterly around the state, including conducting a DVR customer focus group at each quarterly meeting. The Council hears and collects customer feedback for purposes of program improvement. The focus groups also provide an opportunity for customers to connect with VR staff or Client Assistance Program representatives to begin the process of discussion and resolution.

Council members are appointed by the Governor and serve three-year terms. With the exception of permanent representation from the Client Assistance Program and Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation Program representatives, members can serve up to two consecutive terms.





2018 Council Members

Advocacy Representative

Ivanova Smith

Business Representative

Kathy Powers

Kelly Boston

Erin Williams

Client Assistance Program (CAP) Representative

Jerry Johnsen

Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) Representative

Shannon McLain

DVR Field Staff Representative (Ex-Officio)

Josephine Ko

DVR Director (Ex-Officio)

Rob Hines

Labor Representative

Philip Bradford

Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) Representative

Tania May

Parent Training Representative

Rosslyn Bethmann

Recipient of DVR Services Representative

Justin Poole

Deborah Boudreau

Tribal VR Representative

Laurae MacClain

Washington State Independent Living Council (WASILC) Representative

Keith James

Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (WTECB) Representative

Erica Wollen

Customer Satisfaction and Program Evaluation Committee Priorities and Projects

Customer Satisfaction Survey

As noted in our 2017 report, the WSRC began conducting satisfaction surveys for DVR customers in 2016. We have now compiled two years of results.

Summary of Process:

Surveys are sent to customers in four phases of the DVR process: eligibility, plan, closed – employed and closed – other. This helps the Council evaluate the effectiveness of each phase of the rehabilitation process. Surveys are sent by mail and follow-up calls are made by staff to assure enough responses are gathered to reflect a valid, reliable sample.

Survey recipients rate the following statements from poor to excellent on a 5 point scale.

- My counselor does a good job keeping in touch with me.
- My counselor understands what is important to me.
- My counselor understands how my disability affects me.
- My counselor cares about my input.
- DVR moves quickly enough for me.
- Overall, I am satisfied with DVR.

Results:

DVR sets an overall goal to achieve a 90 percent satisfaction rate. Over the last year, monthly satisfaction has ranged from 69 percent to 83 percent.

The strongest overall results are on the statement “My Counselor cares about my input.” The area scoring lowest is “DVR moves quickly enough for me.” The cumulative results on these two statements have been consistent since 2017. While there is always room for improvement, DVR and its staff should be proud of these results.

DVR scores over a 3.5 (70 percent satisfied) on a 5 point scale in all categories.

Based on survey results and customer forums during 2018, the WSRC made formal recommendations to DVR related to program improvements in four areas: Timeliness, Communication, Counselor Reassignment and Training.

Moving Forward:

The WSRC continues to work with DVR to move the survey online. Significant progress has been made to design the online survey, which will broaden the survey reach and scope. The benefits of moving the survey online will be to gather input from a broader audience, to change questions more easily to target specific interests or concerns, and the ability to report at the state, region and office level, and to reduce cost of survey administration.



Focus Group

In June 2018, the WSRC hosted its first Focus Group. In the past, the WSRC hosted a Customer Forum, which involved an open invitation to all current and former DVR customers. The Focus Group has a specific agenda / area of interest and is attended by a smaller group by invitation.

The topic of the first two Focus Groups was related to counselor turnover and its impact on customer progress. The WSRC heard concerns related to counselor turnover through multiple avenues, including Customer Satisfaction Surveys and Management Reports, as well as through qualitative feedback from forums, Client Assistance Program reports, and personal experience of Council members.

Overall, feedback from these groups has helped identify some best practices including:

- Counselors or Supervisors should provide a warm hand-off, assuring that the receiving counselor reaches out to newly-transferred customers in a timely way.
- Communication is a key factor in making sure DVR Customers are aware of changes.
- Transition is easier when DVR assigns a point of contact if a new Counselor is not yet in place.
- Continuation of services without delay, including assessment, IPE and more is important.

The Council has been writing a summary of each forum and focus group and providing that input to the DVR Director and Area Managers.

Legislative Reception

The Washington State Rehabilitation Council (WSRC) joins other disability groups in Washington every year during the legislative session to organize and host a legislative reception. In 2018, the reception was held on January 17th and marked the 37th Annual Legislative Reception.

The legislative reception is held at the State Capitol. It is an informal event attended by more than 300 individuals with disabilities, advocates and representatives of more than 50 organizations concerned with issues faced by people with disabilities and their families in Washington. Individuals have the opportunity to talk directly to their legislators and advocate for legislation of interest to the disability community as a whole and to each individual personally.

The WSRC, Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment and other advocacy organizations collaborate on collective priorities and develop brief talking points to help individuals communicate these priorities to their legislative representatives.





Program Effectiveness

DVR Organizational Placement within DSHS

In its 2017 Annual Report, the WSRC reported efforts under way at the end of the year to advocate for an adjustment to Washington DVR's placement within the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), the designated state agency (DSA).

Previous reorganizations within DSHS had resulted in DVR being placed organizationally with juvenile rehabilitation programs. The WSRC did not believe this placement positioned DVR to leverage the right partnerships or resources to advance employment opportunities for people with disabilities in Washington.

The WSRC engaged representatives throughout the disability community to seek input, explore alternatives and gain support for a recommended resolution. In December 2017, the WSRC forwarded a formal request to the Secretary of DSHS to move DVR under the Secretary's Office. The request included a formal letter of support signed by many partner and stakeholder organizations.

As of January 1, 2018, Secretary Cheryl Strange approved this organizational adjustment and DVR has been reporting to the DSHS Secretary's Office since then. This action improves visibility, clarifies DVR's core mission, and provides greater access to DSHS leadership, partners throughout the Workforce Development system and the disability community. This placement also positions DVR to ensure equal access to all disability groups, without giving preference, or appearing to give preference to any one group.

Policy

Order of Selection

Washington DVR implemented an order of selection effective November 1, 2017. Individuals in the highest priority category for services continued to receive services with no waiting throughout FFY 2018. Individuals with a lower priority category were assigned to a waiting list. Since implementing order of selection, DVR has been unable to serve anyone assigned to the waiting list due to limited resources.

The Washington State Rehabilitation Council's role related to this program decision is to solicit input from recipients of DVR services and identify areas for improvement. The Council has identified gaps related to information and referral services, a mandated activity under an order of selection, as well as the quality of communication from DVR to individuals on the waiting list. The WSRC will seek to better understand and provide recommendations on these areas of concern in the coming year.

While operating under order of selection throughout FFY 2018, The Council noted an increase in the percentage of eligible individuals prioritized in the highest priority category. In addition, the annual expenditure per plan increased approximately 15 percent. While the number of overall open plans has dropped from 8,200 to 6,800, the increases in new eligibility determinations in priority category 1 and the higher annual cost per case continue to impact DVR's service delivery capacity during FFY 2019. At this time, DVR is uncertain whether it will have sufficient funds to serve all individuals in the highest priority category throughout FFY 2019 and evaluating its options and resources.

The Council will use customer surveys and customer forums to assess how DVR can close gaps in service that arise related to operating under an order of selection. It will also continue to monitor performance and outcomes to assess how order of selection is impacting customer services and explore options for expanding services.

Washington Administrative Code Update

In July 2018, DVR adopted revisions to the Washington Administrative Code (WAC) related to vocational rehabilitation services. This major WAC update integrated WIOA-related and other program changes.

The WSRC collaborated with DVR throughout the WAC change process, including serving on the work group responsible for drafting the update. WSRC feedback focused on ensuring that DVR rules do not create unnecessary barriers or customer service delays, and that they retain the greatest flexibility possible to deliver individualized services as outlined in the Rehabilitation Act. WSRC also used its input to ensure rules were clear, understandable and used plain language.

DVR responded positively to the feedback provided by the WSRC and adjusted language in the proposed WAC accordingly. This collaborative and transparent process enabled DVR to fully endorse the final WAC chapter that DVR submitted to complete the formal adoption process.

State Plan Update

Washington DVR completed its State Plan update in early 2018. As in previous years, DVR included the Washington State Rehabilitation Council in this two-year update. In addition to the Council's contribution of Section A – Council recommendations, it collaborated on the section related to progress on the State's Goals and Priorities, as well as updates and revisions to that section. The Council also co-presented the State Plan update in a public forum, collected input from stakeholders, and reviewed comments and input received during the review period. The Washington State Rehabilitation Council reviewed and approved the final State Plan update prior to formal submission.