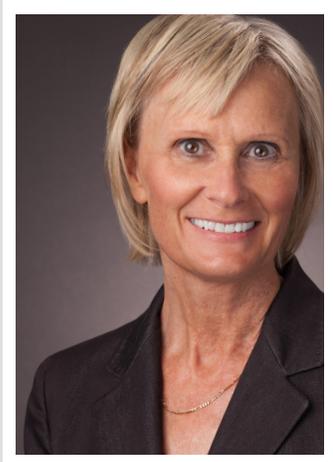




Washington State Rehabilitation Council  
*Building Inroads to Employment and Success*

# Washington State Rehabilitation Council

**2016 ANNUAL REPORT**



# Message from the WSRC Chair

Dear Commissioner LaBreck and Governor Inslee,

On behalf of the Washington State Rehabilitation Council (WSRC), I am pleased to present our 2016 Annual Report.

The WSRC is comprised of a diverse, dedicated group of volunteers with significant personal and professional experience in the field of disability services. Our members bring the voices of 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). Collectively, WSRC members donate hundreds of hours each year to promote quality services and meaningful jobs for individuals with disabilities in Washington.

The passage of the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA) created a number of opportunities to collaborate with DVR in 2016. DVR and the WSRC have examined the opportunities created by WIOA to improve and expand services and outcomes, and examples of our work and collaboration are highlighted throughout this report.

We are inspired by the professional, caring staff of Washington DVR whose life's work is helping people with disabilities navigate their needs and options to gain independence and financial security. We are humbled by the courage and generosity of those individuals with disabilities who share their stories and their struggles to pave the way for the benefit of others who will follow. I am deeply honored to serve at a time when the field of vocational rehabilitation is taking a giant leap forward. It is an important time to ensure that the voices and perspectives of individuals with disabilities continue to be heard and considered in shaping and building the DVR program of the future.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kelly Boston". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kelly Boston  
WSRC Chair

# Looking back at 2016

A key Council priority and success was the implementation of an all-new DVR Customer Satisfaction Survey. With the help of key DVR staff, WSRC sent out the first surveys this summer. By September, we had almost enough responses to begin reporting the results. This effort will provide valuable customer feedback for many years, and we look forward to reporting the initial survey results next year.

The organizational placement of DVR remained a key issue in 2016. DVR's current placement does not align it with other disability and employment programs within our state. The WSRC will continue to advocate and work for a more effective organizational placement for DVR within state government.

The Council experienced substantial turnover among its members in 2016. Jana Finkbonner ended her service after two full terms and serving as Council Chair and Vice Chair. Jana was the Tribal VR Program Director representative. She modeled how to lead with grace and will undoubtedly go on to better the world in other ways. Kelly Boston, business representative, was elected as Chair and Jerry Johnson, Client Assistance Program, was elected Vice Chair. The Tribal position remains vacant, along with positions for an education representative and an advocate. Three other positions had new members appointed. These gaps and transitions left Council membership somewhat lean and our work focused on a few key priorities.

As the year closed, there was a sense of members settling into their roles. We are learning more about each other's strengths and exploring how to leverage our collective resources to make a more meaningful impact. We have strong thinkers and strong fighters, but mostly we have a group of people who truly, deeply, care about all people. We are looking forward to putting our collective strengths to work this year in service to those receiving services from DVR.

My review of the year would not be complete without a HUGE shout out to Teesha, Marie and Ericka, our wonderful Council staff. Teesha Kirschbaum is a determined leader and our beloved Executive Director. She moves the Council forward with heart and a fierce passion for our work. I cannot express my gratitude for Teesha's patience, encouragement, and well-timed humor.

Marie Slusser, WSRC Executive Assistant, produced a masterpiece this year – little Mila, born September 12, 2016. We are thrilled to welcome Mila to the world. Marie's organization and common sense helps keep the Council on track. During Marie's leave, Ericka Malamphy, stepped in to help. Ericka is a delight. She is quick, helpful, and a great addition to the team.

# Purpose of the Council

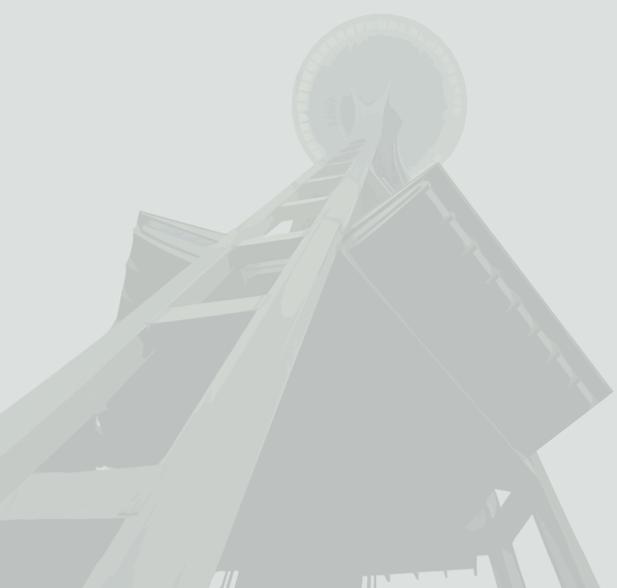


The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, requires the existence of a State Rehabilitation Council (SRC). At the state level, the Washington State Rehabilitation Council (WSRC) is established under Executive Order 04-04. As established in law and Executive Order, WSRC membership is comprised of a diverse 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 reviews, evaluates, and advises 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.

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



# WSRC Key Activities 2016

## Customer Satisfaction Survey

During 2016, the WSRC worked closely with staff within DVR to design and implement a new monthly Customer Satisfaction Survey process. This survey expands the assessment of satisfaction beyond DVR customers whose cases have recently been closed, to customers who are currently receiving services.

Questions include:

- 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.

The first surveys were sent in August with a strong response rate. As results are gathered, they will be utilized to provide DVR feedback on satisfaction in specific services and areas.

## 2017-2020 State Plan

In 2014, the federal government passed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which includes the authorizing laws for State Vocational Rehabilitation programs as Title IV of the Act. WIOA is intended to facilitate easier access to employment, training and support for job seekers (including those with disabilities), and a primary resource for employers to recruit qualified, skilled workers. Agencies authorized under WIOA develop a “combined” State Plan that outlines how the partners will work together to meet the needs of the state’s workforce and its employers.

Under the Code of Federal Regulations (34 CFR 361.17), the State Rehabilitation Council must work in partnership with the vocational rehabilitation agency to develop, agree to, and review DVR state goals and priorities, and assist in the preparation of the VR Section of the Combined State Plan. Along with other programs under WIOA, in 2016 DVR developed and submitted its portion of the Combined State Plan, and the Washington State Rehabilitation Council played a key role in its completion.

In December 2015, the WSRC and DVR co-hosted and co-facilitated three VR State Plan public forums. For the first time, participants had the option to join these forums virtually. A total of 150 people participated in the forums – with more than 100 joining the forum remotely. A VR State Plan email account was also published on the DVR website as a way for stakeholders to submit comments outside of the public forums.

Common areas of concern reported during the forums or by email included:

- The quality of employment outcomes achieved by DVR customers, particularly the wages earned and number of hours worked per week.
- A lack of understanding among VR customers about the DVR process, and a general feeling that case progress and service delivery was too slow.
- The need for more DVR support for people who are underemployed, and who want to advance but face barriers related to their disability.

In addition, the WSRC compiles a summary of input provided to DVR throughout the year, along with DVR’s response to each item. This summary is a required section of the VR State Plan. Key input provided to DVR by the WSRC during the report period included:

- Recommendation for DVR to follow and complete all outstanding compliance issues from the 2013 Rehabilitation Services Administration 107 Review.
- Expand the role of the WSRC in the State Plan development process.

- Redesign internal training, focusing on counseling skills for counselors, clinical skills for supervisors, and customer service training for support staff.
- Transition responsibility for conducting customer satisfaction surveys from DVR to the WSRC.
- DVR address the need for additional resources for benefits planning and assistive technology services required in WIOA.
- DVR review its technology and business infrastructure to better serve customers and provide an efficient and useful platform for staff.

DVR used the forum input, customer forum input, and ongoing program feedback and experience to draft its goals and priorities for the VR State Plan period 2017-2020. The WSRC was involved in all aspects of development, including collecting input, reviewing and influencing the goals and priorities, and finalizing the VR State Plan. Washington DVR conducted an inclusive, transparent process, welcomed input from all parties, and engaged the WSRC in a meaningful way throughout the State Plan process.

**WSRC  
Highlight**

**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 2016, the reception was held on January 20 and marked the 35th 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. 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 talking points to help individuals communicate these priorities to their legislative representatives. In 2016, the event focused on the state budget and policy issues, and the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act.



## WIOA Barriers and Access Solutions Committee

During the past year, the WSRC has increased its involvement with the State Workforce Board. The WSRC is dedicated to amplifying the voice of all VR customers, including those that utilize DVR and other parts of the public workforce development system. Teesha Kirschbaum, the WSRC Executive Director, is co-leading the Barriers and Access Solutions Committee, a permanent standing committee which reports directly to the Workforce Board. This committee's work is devoted to identifying and developing achievable solutions to barriers throughout the State Workforce system for the 14 communities with barriers "called out" in the federal legislation.

## Building Partnerships

The WSRC is committed to being an active member of the disability advocacy community. We have focused considerable energy on strengthening and forming new partnerships with other disability advocacy organizations, especially those programs identified in 34 CFR 361.17 (h)(6). As directed under the Rehabilitation Act, the WSRC coordinates its activities with the following councils:

- State Independent Living Council (SILC)
- Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC)
- State Developmental Disabilities Council (DDC)
- State Behavioral Health Advisory Committee (BHAC)
- State Workforce Board
- Northwest ADA Center.

These partnerships allow the WSRC to gain information that helps the Council support and advocate for DVR customers.

## Customer Forums

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

During 2016, the WSRC hosted four customer forums in Lacey, Spokane, Vancouver and Seattle.

Throughout the year, the format of the forum was enhanced to allow more participation and feedback from DVR customers. Some samples of changes include:

- Advocates are specifically invited to participate alongside DVR customers
- Locations are now at DVR offices instead of hotels
- Light food and beverages are provided
- Partners of DVR are being informed of the forums and are invited to bring DVR customers

# Challenges

## DVR Placement within Rehabilitation Administration

In 2013, the DVR program was moved from the DSHS Secretary's Office to be one of four programs under the DSHS Juvenile Justice and Rehabilitation Administration (subsequently renamed Rehabilitation Administration). The other programs within the Rehabilitation Administration include youth and adult offender programs.

The view of the WSRC is that DVR's placement with offender programs does not position it to lead the way in disability and employment services in our state. Rather, it distances DVR from core partners in DSHS and Workforce Development and diminishes its visibility and the perception of its core mission. For these reasons, the placement of DVR in state government became a key issue for the Council in 2016.

The WSRC began a project to research the best options for DVR placement within state government. The purpose of the project was to identify a placement solution that offered the best opportunity for individuals with disabilities served by DVR to achieve meaningful employment. A WSRC work group studied placement options in three areas – (1) a different organizational placement within DSHS; (2) placement in a different department; and (3) the creation of an independent VR agency. The Committee used a standard interview guide to document and evaluate each option and spoke to a variety of stakeholders, including other agencies within Washington and state VR programs in other states.

By far, establishing DVR as an independent agency offers the greatest opportunities for individuals with disabilities served by DVR. A key advantage of an independent agency is the clarity of mission and purpose. All of the independent VR programs interviewed indicated that their purpose is clear and they focus 100% of their resources on their core mission. Independent programs have the latitude to establish partnerships and collaborations that are most advantageous in advancing their mission and can make financial and program decisions that align solely to their core mission. Independent agencies are more visible within state government, the disability community, and the general public.

The WSRC will continue to advocate and work for a more effective organizational placement for DVR within state government. The next phase of the project will involve educating and enlisting support from champions and stakeholders in our field so that we have solid support from colleagues across the disability services community.

## Council Members and New Appointments

Members of the Washington State Rehabilitation Council (WSRC) are appointed by the Governor based on applications submitted by individuals interested in serving. The Council solicits applicants from throughout the disability community to facilitate diverse representation of disability groups, ethnicity, age, gender, and geographic region of the state.

Membership positions are designated in the Rehabilitation Act, including:

- A member of the State Independent Living Council
- A representative of the state's parent training and information center (PAVE here in Washington)
- Client Assistance Program representative
- A vocational rehabilitation counselor (non-voting)
- A CRP representative
- Four representatives of business, industry, and labor
- Disability groups/advocates
- Individuals with disabilities
- Current or former recipients of DVR services
- At least one American Indian VR Program Director
- Secondary Education (Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction)
- State Workforce Development Board representative
- The DVR Director (non-voting)

A membership term is 3 years; however, if a member representing a specific organization leaves that organization, the term ends and the organization must appoint a new representative so that the Council can maintain the representation required in the law.

As we begin 2017, we have 3 vacancies and 4 brand new members. We continue to work with designated organizations and the Governor's Office to process appointments. Continuing members are gaining knowledge and momentum in their roles and are beginning to increase their subcommittee work, and we're excited to welcome and integrate our new members to the work we do on behalf of DVR customers.

# WSRC Partnership with DVR



## REGS and WAC revision

The Rehabilitation Act requires DVR to regularly consult with the WSRC regarding the development, implementation, and revision of DVR policies and procedures pertaining to VR services. To fulfill this provision, DVR and the WSRC partner closely on activities related to the development and implementation of Washington Administrative Code (DVR policy) and customer service procedures.

In 2016, The U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) adopted revisions to the Code of Federal Regulations (CFRs) related to the VR program. The revisions were necessary to implement the VR portion (Title IV) of the Workforce Innovation and Investment Act (WIOA).

As a policy partner with DVR, WSRC staff and members reviewed, discussed, and analyzed the revised CFRs to understand the changes to the VR program. As DVR moves forward with implementation, it will need to revise the WAC and procedures related to VR services. Council staff and members will review, analyze, and advise DVR from its unique perspective that reflects the broad diversity of its members and the constituencies they represent.

This collaboration between DVR and the WSRC is grounded in the law and is intended to ensure that DVR policies and procedures reflect the input, needs and priorities of individuals with disabilities. Through its input, the Council seeks to ensure that policies and procedures are reasonable, effective, and fair, and are clearly communicated so that VR staff can implement them consistently across the state.

## Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment

Under WIOA, DVR and the WSRC are responsible for jointly developing a State Plan every four years, with an update to the plan after the first two years. The VR portion of the State Plan outlines DVR's goals and priorities related to VR services for the four-year state plan period. These goals and priorities need to reflect the results of a "comprehensive statewide needs assessment" that is also jointly conducted by DVR and the WSRC. The comprehensive statewide needs assessment is conducted once every three years, and its purpose is to collect and compile information about the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities who live in Washington.

The Act outlines a number of specific factors that the comprehensive statewide needs assessment must address, such as the needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities for supported employment services, the needs of youth for pre-employment transition services, the needs of minority populations, and others. To collect information about these needs, DVR will partner with various federal and state partners involved in our work, such as the Center for Change in Transition. DVR and the WSRC will also conduct surveys and/or interview individuals with disabilities and agency representatives. DVR and the WSRC will also look for other sources of data and information about people with disabilities that already exists, such as Census data, DSHS and DVR customer survey results, and research done by others that we can learn from.

The results of the comprehensive statewide needs assessment are then used by DVR and the WSRC to determine the key goals and priorities to include in the State Plan. DVR submits an annual report of progress on these goals and priorities to the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). The progress report must be jointly developed, reviewed, and agreed upon between DVR and the WSRC.

# In Closing



The WSRC looks forward with anticipation as Washington DVR and VR programs across the country implement programs and services in response to WIOA. WIOA offers the opportunity to streamline and improve services by removing barriers between agencies and across geographic areas.

Pre-Employment Transition services will make new services available to begin career planning with youth at younger ages. This will introduce opportunities as well as challenges, particularly as it relates to financing VR services for all eligible individuals.

WIOA emphasizes post-secondary education and vocational training as a foundation for people to build job and financial security. It also adds a new emphasis on improving access to education and training for those who have always faced barriers to accessing these services, including people with disabilities.

WIOA resets the purpose of the workforce system as connecting all Americans to high quality jobs. With businesses playing a larger role in informing and guiding the system, services can be better aligned to industry needs, including the use of apprenticeships and work-based learning. It also ensures that businesses of all sizes can access skilled workers to help grow their business.

As a collective group of citizens committed to the successful employment of individuals with disabilities, we look forward to supporting and advising DVR as it strengthens its staff and programs to meet these challenges. As always, the WSRC is dedicated to ensuring that the needs and priorities of consumers are heard and addressed throughout the process while maintaining a positive, collaborative partnership with DVR.