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of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors**

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**RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF
VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION COUNSELORS**

**REHABILITATION SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
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INTRODUCTION

By Charlene Dwyer

The recruitment and retention of qualified vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselors has been a topic of national attention since the 1992 amendments to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (the Act) required state VR agencies to establish qualified personnel standards for service delivery personnel. These personnel standards must be consistent with national- or state-approved and/or -recognized certification, licensing, or registration.

The regulations of the Act also specify four essential functions of the rehabilitation process that must be performed by a qualified VR counselor (Code of Federal Regulations, 34 CFR §361.42, 361.45, 361.56). These include the determination that an applicant requires VR services to prepare for, secure, retain, or regain employment (eligibility for services); the initial approval of and amendments to the individualized plan for employment; and the determination that the employment outcome is satisfactory and that the individual is performing well in the chosen employment (closure of the plan of service). VR counselors typically provide an array of services, including vocational counseling, in addition to these four core responsibilities.

The U.S. Department of Labor outlined counselors' training and qualifications in its *Occupational Outlook Handbook* (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006):

Eight States and the District of Columbia have some form of counselor licensure that governs the practice of counseling for counselors based outside of schools. State requirements typically include the completion of a master's degree in counseling, the accumulation of 2 years or 3,000 hours of supervised clinical experience beyond the master's degree level, the passage of a State-recognized exam, adherence to ethical codes and standards, and the completion of annual continuing education requirements. While a master's degree is typically required to be licensed as a counselor, a bachelor's degree often qualifies a person to work as a counseling aide, rehabilitation aide, or social service worker. Some States require counselors in public employment to have a master's degree; others accept a bachelor's degree with appropriate counseling courses.

The Department of Labor further noted that the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC) offers voluntary national certification for rehabilitation counselors and that some employers may require rehabilitation counselors to be nationally certified.

Based on a state-by-state review shared with the CRCC, for the rehabilitation counseling profession an estimated 20 states reference rehabilitation counselor in the scope of practice under the state's counselor licensure bill, 13 states include the CRCC exam, 13 states specify rehabilitation counselor training programs accredited by the Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE), and 17 states identify programs accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs (C. Chapman, personal communication, May 25, 2007).

The CRCC has recently commissioned the development of a portal that will provide information about legislative requirements in each state for rehabilitation counseling and general counseling. The information portal is anticipated to be available on the CRCC website in late 2007 (C. Chapman, personal communication, May 25, 2007). The American Counseling Association (2007) published a state-by-state report on professional counselor licensure requirements that is available for purchase on its website.

Regardless of the state or national standard used, each state VR agency must establish and submit to the Rehabilitation Services Administration a Comprehensive System for Personnel Development (CSPD) plan to prepare and maintain a staff of qualified VR counselors in accordance with its personnel standard. The Rehabilitation Services Administration reported that in federal fiscal year (FFY) 2006, of the 80 VR agency CSPD plans, 52 state agencies had CRCC certification or eligibility, and therefore a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling or counseling, as their state standard. The remaining 28 agencies either had a standard below a master's degree or their standard was unclear from their state plan (C. Marschall, personal communication, June 12, 2007).

Figure I-1 illustrates some of the most commonly utilized avenues to hire or develop for hire a qualified VR counselor under an established VR agency personnel standard identified in the CSPD. Whether using a state or national standard, the fully qualified VR counselor is the most sought-after hire. However, the fully qualified VR counselor hiring pool is currently insufficient to meet national VR agency staffing demands.

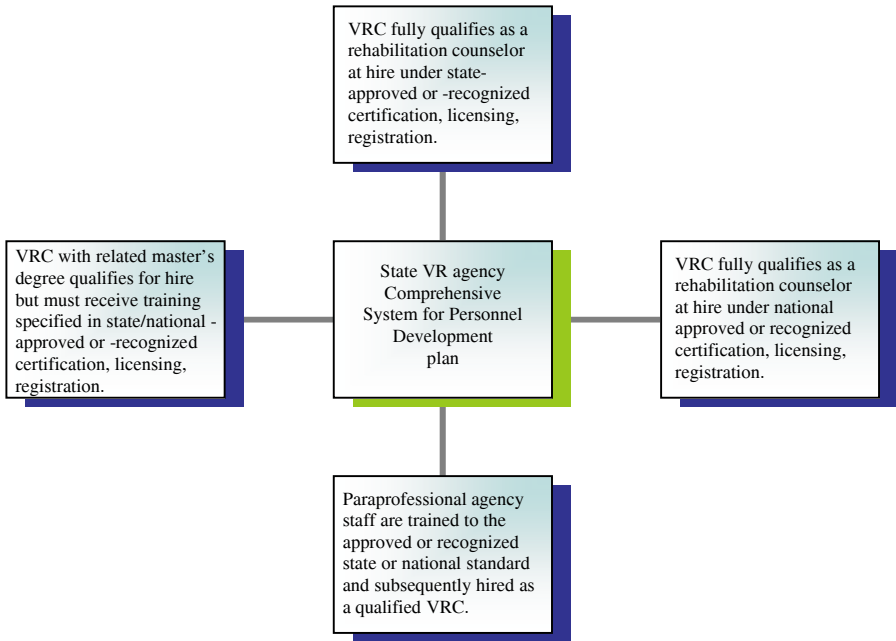


Figure I-1. Avenues for state agencies to meet their personnel standards for VR counselors.

Hiring a VR counselor with a related master’s degree usually requires an additional investment of agency time and training funds to assist the employee in fully satisfying the state or national personnel standard identified in the CSPD. Many state agencies are willing to make this investment, as these employees can typically assume many of the responsibilities of a VR counselor even as they engage in additional training.

The development of a paraprofessional employed by the agency into a fully qualified VR counselor requires an even greater investment of agency time and financial resources. As this investment increases, so does the risk that the individual may choose to leave the agency. While development of paraprofessionals is a potential long-term staffing strategy, it is not a viable short-term strategy for the critical VR counselor capacity challenges that many VR agencies face.

Fifteen years after the passage of the 1992 amendments, VR educators and public agency employers of qualified VR counselors remain highly challenged by the inadequate supply of qualified VR counselor candidates. This monograph is designed to provide insight to those who wish to better understand the current realities of the qualified VR counselor personnel shortages in the public system and provide helpful recommendations for those who must confront those realities with practical short- and long-term strategies.

A thorough review of the underpinnings of the qualified professional personnel recruitment and retention difficulties was provided by the American Institutes on Research (AIR) national study and report findings, *The Demand for and the Supply of Qualified State Rehabilitation Counselors* (Chan & Ruedel, 2005). The national study was commissioned in the fall of 2000 by the Rehabilitation Services Administration. The AIR draft findings (Chan, 2003) and subsequent 2005 report findings are extensive and consider both the problem and research-based solutions.

To provide the briefest illustration of the challenge currently experienced in the state VR system, the following facts, projections, and extrapolations are offered for consideration. In the AIR personnel survey base year of FFY 2001-2002, 9,649 VR counselors and 1,461 supervisors worked in state VR agencies, for a total of 11,110 professional rehabilitation personnel (Chan & Ruedel, 2005). Using projected vacancy rate data collected in their national survey of VR human resource directors, the AIR researchers predicted that during the 5-year period of FFY 2002 to FFY 2007, the replacement need for VR counselors and their supervisors would be 4,624. This is a challenging 42% replacement of the qualified state VR agency professionals employed in the base year, if we assume that many supervisor vacancies are filled from the VR counselor ranks.

The AIR study then examined the number of graduates of CORE-accredited programs as a primary source of qualified VR counselor candidates to meet the replacement need. When the number of anticipated vacancies is compared with the number of CORE training program graduates over the 5-year period, a significant shortfall of candidates is evident (see Table I-1).

**Table I-1
Actual, Estimated, and Projected Numbers of CORE
Graduates by Academic Year**

CORE graduates	Academic year (FFY)					
	2002-03 (2003)	2003-04 (2004)	2004-05 (2005)	2005-06 (2006)	2006-07* (2007)	Estimated 5-year
New graduates (including those employed during the program) employed by state VR	583	436	480	48	512*	2,367
Percentage employed by VR	44.4%	40.6%	39%	42.9%	41.7%*	41.7%
Number needed for replacement in VR (estimate)	437	327	339	382	370	1,855
5-year replacement need (projected)						3,775
5-year unmet need (projected)						1,920

*Estimated using prior 4-year average.

Note: Data from AIR (Chan & Ruedel, 2005).

The bottom line is that if the public system doubled its hiring rate of CORE graduates not already employed by the VR system, the 5-year supply of new graduates would still fall short of the vacancies experienced. Based on the successful fill rate with CORE program master’s degree graduates, the state VR agencies are experiencing a 5-year replacement shortfall of 1,920 qualified hires, or an average of 384 fewer qualified candidates from CORE programs than vacancies per year.

Many VR agencies, especially those in counselor licensure states, rely on CORE-accredited training programs as a CSPD resource for nearly 6,000 currently employed staff as well as for a qualified candidate pool for new hires.

Unfortunately, the VR counselor challenges may be exacerbated in the near future by an anticipated high vacancy rate of VR counselor training program faculty due to retirement rates of professors (Chan & Ruedel, 2005; Smith, Sigman, McCarthy, & Schultz, 2006).

At the fall 2006 meeting of the National Council on Rehabilitation Education and the Council on State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation, Dr. Jared Schultz of Utah State University reported on a study that illustrates the pending shortages within the field of rehabilitation educators (Smith et al., 2006). There are presently 29 doctoral programs in rehabilitation nationally. It is estimated that approximately 186 new doctoral-level educators will enter the field over the next five years. However, based on current and projected attrition rates, there is a need for 252 new educators within the same time period. This leaves a projected shortage of 66 educators. The actual and projected shortfall of both qualified VR counselor graduates and faculty to train the next generation of graduates is a synergistic and systemic dilemma.

The inadequate supply of qualified professional personnel for state VR agencies and for preparation programs is related to challenges in both retention of currently employed personnel and recruitment of new personnel. For the 80 state agencies, the qualified personnel challenge has evolved over time and is multifaceted and experienced in different ways and by varying degrees. For some agencies and educational institutions, the personnel challenge may have crested or had little impact, while for others it is an escalating crisis.

The members of the Primary Study Group of the 33rd Institute on Rehabilitation Issues represent the types of agencies and institutions most affected by the challenges of recruitment and retention of qualified VR counselors. The authors share their experience with the multifaceted realities of the situation. Beyond providing insight, the authors offer pragmatic recommendations and exemplary practices for effectively dealing with recruitment and retention problems and their impact. This document aims to help the reader more fully understand the problem and, most importantly, learn about a variety of short- and long-term strategies.

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Chapter 1

SURVEY RESULTS: RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION COUNSELORS

By Charlene Dwyer, David LaFleur, and Neil McNeil

To assess and validate the vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselor capacity challenges reported by a number of state VR agencies, we conducted a brief survey in December 2006. This survey was an effort to take a snapshot of the capacity of the VR counselor resource pool in the national network of VR agencies. For agencies that identified a VR counselor capacity challenge, we attempted to assess its impact and learn how they were responding to their capacity problem. Finally, we asked agencies about their VR counselor recruiting practices.

Eighty state VR agencies were invited to participate in a web-based survey entitled “Recruitment and Retention of Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors” (see Appendix A). Fifty-six agencies in 44 states and two territories responded, for an overall response rate of 70%. These 56 respondents represented 17 blindness services agencies, 20 combined services agencies, and 19 general services agencies.

Staffing Challenges

The state VR agencies were first asked to share their experience with staffing levels of qualified VR counselors in relation to their VR counseling and case management needs.

Specifically, state VR agencies were asked if, for any reason, they experienced direct service delivery staffing challenges related to VR counselor staffing capacity and whether they were able to post sufficient positions and subsequently recruit a sufficient number of VR counselor staff to meet the agency’s needs. The timeframe for responding to each question was federal fiscal year (FFY) 2005 and FFY 2006. Agencies were also asked if they anticipated these challenges in FFY 2007. In reviewing the results, it is important to note that many states anticipated challenges in more than one year.

The results suggest a pervasive national VR counselor staffing challenge for general and combined agencies. As illustrated in Table 1-1, at least half of the 39 responding combined and general service agencies reported VR counselor staffing challenges in one or more of the three years. For these agencies as a group, challenges escalated markedly between FFY 2005, when slightly more than half of the responding agencies reported a VR counselor staffing capacity challenge, and FFY 2007, when nearly two-thirds of the agencies reported a challenge.

The VR counselor staffing capacity challenge affected less than half of the 17 blindness service agency survey respondents in FFY 2005, and the challenge decreased over the next two years to impact less than one-third of the agencies.

Table 1-1
Agencies Experiencing Service Delivery Challenges Related to Staffing

Question	Response	Combined/general		Blindness	
		Count	%	Count	%
No direct service delivery staffing challenges in FFY 2005	True	19	49%	10	59%
	False	20	51%	7	41%
No direct service delivery staffing challenges in FFY 2006	True	18	46%	12	71%
	False	21	54%	5	29%
No direct service delivery staffing challenges in FFY 2007	True	14	36%	12	71%
	False	25	64%	5	29%

Addressing Staffing Challenges

Information was then sought on how agencies that experienced VR counselor staffing challenges addressed those challenges. The survey asked respondents about two impacts and three strategies that we believed were most related to VR counselor staffing capacity challenges:

- *Impact:* The average VR counselor caseload was allowed to increase.
- *Impact:* An order of selection wait list helped to manage the size of VR counselor caseloads.
- *Strategy:* VR counselor salaries were increased to attract/retain VR counselor staff and increase capacity.
- *Strategy:* Specific case management functions traditionally performed by VR counselors were assigned to other support staff to allow VR counselors to work with more consumers.
- *Strategy:* The state VR agency and/or service delivery system was restructured to allow VR counselors to work with more consumers.

It was evident from the individual FFY results that for some staffing-challenged VR agencies, service delivery impacts were experienced in more than one of the three report years. Likewise, a mitigating strategy was likely to be deployed by a challenged VR agency for more than a year.

The most frequent outcome of VR counselor capacity challenges was to allow the average VR counselor caseload to increase. Nearly two-thirds of 31 challenged agencies reported this impact during the 3-year period (see Table 1-2).

Table 1-2
Impact of VR Counselor Capacity Challenges

Impact	Response	Combined/general		Blindness	
		Count	%	Count	%
Allowed average VR counselor caseloads to increase	Yes	16	62%	3	60%
	No	10	38%	2	40%
If yes, FFYs* this strategy relates to	FFY 2005	9		3	
	FFY 2006	15		3	
	FFY 2007	12		2	
Used order of selection and wait listing of consumers	Yes	9	33%	0	0%
	No	18	67%	6	100%
If yes, FFYs* this strategy relates to	FFY 2005	8		0	
	FFY 2006	8		0	
	FFY 2007	7		0	

*Some states reported strategy impacts across multiple FFYs during the 3-year time period.

Eleven VR agencies that experienced escalating VR counselor caseloads reported on the average caseload size they anticipated in FFY 2007. For this group, the median anticipated VR counselor caseload in FFY 2007 was 140 and the mean was 143. However, the caseload sizes among the reporting agencies varied significantly, with a range of 85 to 205 cases per VR counselor.

One-third of the 27 combined and general respondent agencies in the challenged VR agency group reported that employing an order of selection and wait listing of eligible consumers helped the agency manage the size of VR counselor caseloads. No blindness service agencies responding to this question reported this impact (see Table 1-2). While wait listing eligible applicants in an order of selection is typically a response to insufficient financial resources in the VR agency’s case aids budget, the VR counselor resource limitations may also be a reason to establish an order of selection wait list. While the reason for wait listing was not requested in the survey, it is anticipated that the states that utilized a wait list did so because of financial resource limitations but realized a secondary benefit in relation to lower caseloads, which positively impacted the VR counselor capacity challenge.

As shown in Table 1-3, nearly half of 33 challenged respondents reported increasing VR counselor salaries to attract and retain more VR counselor staff and to increase the overall VR counselor capacity within the agency. In addition, nearly half assigned specific case management functions traditionally performed by VR counselors to other support staff to allow VR counselors time to work with more consumers. This strategy may have been used to mitigate the impact of an increased caseload size. The titles of the key support staff impacted by the realignment of case management functions varied widely, from office specialist II to regional manager (see Appendix B). The most common job titles were VR assistant, provisional rehabilitation counselor, and rehabilitation casework associate.

One-third of 27 challenged combined and general respondent agencies also reported an organization and/or service delivery restructuring effort to allow VR counselors to work with more consumers. One blindness service agency reported deploying this strategy. Several agencies shared brief descriptions of their organizational restructuring efforts (see Appendix B).

**Table 1-3
Strategies Used to Address VR Counselor Capacity Challenges**

Strategy	Response	Combined/general		Blindness	
		Count	%	Count	%
Increased VR counselor salaries	Yes	13	48%	3	50%
	No	14	52%	3	50%
If yes, FFYs* this strategy relates to	FFY 2005	9		2	
	FFY 2006	8		2	
	FFY 2007	7		2	
Reassigned specific case management functions traditionally performed by VR counselors to others	Yes	13	48%	3	50%
	No	14	52%	3	50%
If yes, FFYs* this strategy relates to	FFY 2005	10		1	
	FFY 2006	12		2	
	FFY 2007	12		2	
Restructured organization and/or service delivery system to allow VR counselors to work with more consumers	Yes	9	33%	1	17%
	No	18	67%	5	83%
If yes, FFYs* this strategy relates to	FFY 2005	5		1	
	FFY 2006	7		1	
	FFY 2007	8		1	

Rehabilitation Counselor Recruitment Activities and Strategies

The third and final section of the survey attempted to determine whether state VR agencies were utilizing recommended activities and strategies for recruiting qualified VR counselor staff.

A national study commissioned by the Rehabilitation Services Administration in 2000 and conducted by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) focused in part on the recruitment and retention of qualified VR counselors in state agencies. In their preliminary report findings, the AIR researchers identified several activities that VR agencies could use to improve their efforts to recruit qualified counselors for employment. They suggested that human resource development (HRD) staff in state VR agencies:

- *Recognize internship as a formal channel of recruitment.* HRDs could encourage the exchange of ideas on how the interns are recruited, the kind and amount of responsibilities delegated, and how they should be assessed and offered full-time positions. Practicum could also be recognized as an important recruitment tool to introduce students to the advantages of employment at state VR agencies.
- *Utilize the existing state agency–university partnerships more fully.* HRDs could work to leverage their existing partnerships with university training programs. For example, state VR counselors returning to schools could be encouraged to inform eligible classmates about job openings at their agencies.
- *Expand the potential pool of job candidates.* HRDs could expand recruitment efforts to include other related disciplines. For example, they could recruit staff enrolled in university programs for psychology, sociology, social work, and special education.

- *Highlight state employment benefits.* HRDs could increase their efforts to inform university graduates about the benefits of employment at state VR agencies. Such benefits may include increased job security as well as fringe benefits such as vacation, sick leave, and state retirement plans.

Using the list of recruitment activities identified by AIR researchers (Chan, 2003), we asked the VR agencies to identify how often each strategy was utilized. If they implemented a strategy, the agencies were also asked to rate how effective it was in filling vacancies.

All 56 agencies responded to this portion of the survey and reported on their use of the various recruitment strategies (see Table 1-4). The results are described in the order of frequency with which the recruitment activities were used by state agencies.

Four out of five of the 39 general and combined VR agency respondents said that they regularly moved beyond the posting of job openings and took formal measures to leverage their existing partnerships with university programs to recruit for VR counselor vacancies. This was the most frequently used recruitment strategy for general and combined service agencies. In contrast,

Table 1-4
Use of Recruitment Strategies

Strategy	Response	Combined/general		Blindness	
		Count	%	Count	%
Leverage existing partnerships with university training programs to recruit VR counselor applicants	Used infrequently	7	18%	10	67%
	Used regularly	32	82%	5	33%
Rating of effectiveness among those who used strategy	Ineffective	6	19%	2	33%
	Effective	19	59%	4	67%
	Very effective	7	22%	0	0%
Inform university graduates about the benefits of working in a state agency (such as increased job security and training support)	Used infrequently	12	31%	8	50%
	Used regularly	27	69%	8	50%
Rating of effectiveness among those who used strategy	Ineffective	8	28%	3	38%
	Effective	15	52%	5	63%
	Very effective	6	21%	0	0%
Use practicum and internship experiences as a formal channel of recruitment	Used infrequently	13	33%	12	71%
	Used regularly	26	66%	5	29%
Whether internship was paid (if strategy was used)	Yes	13	50%	3	60%
	No	13	50%	2	40%
Rating of effectiveness among those who used strategy	Ineffective	3	12%	4	66%
	Effective	17	68%	2	33%
	Very effective	5	20%	0	0%
Expand the potential pool of job candidates (e.g., seek applicants from related disciplines)	Used infrequently	20	51%	10	63%
	Used regularly	19	49%	6	38%
Rating of effectiveness among those who used strategy	Ineffective	1	5%	0	0%
	Effective	11	58%	3	50%
	Very effective	7	37%	3	50%
Expedite the hiring process, so that the period from position posting to offer is =60 days	Used infrequently	17	44%	4	25%
	Used regularly	22	56%	12	75%
Rating of effectiveness among those who used strategy	Ineffective	2	10%	2	17%
	Effective	12	57%	10	83%
	Very effective	7	33%	0	0%

Note. “Effective” was defined as using the strategy to fill = 25% of vacancies; “very effective,” as using the strategy to fill = 50% of vacancies.

one-third of the 15 blindness service agencies responding to this question reported regular use of this strategy.

Of the 32 combined and general agencies that reported regularly using this strategy, four out of five said that it was effective or very effective and that they filled 25% or more of their VR counselor vacancies as a result of a strong recruiting relationship with university VR programs. Two-thirds of the blindness service agencies that leveraged existing university program partnerships to recruit for their VR counselor vacancies found the practice to be effective in filling at least 25% of their VR counselor vacancies.

More than two-thirds of the 39 combined and general agency respondents and one-half of 16 blindness service agency respondents reported that their recruitment efforts regularly included focused efforts to inform university graduates about the benefits of employment in the state VR agencies. For blindness service agency respondents, this was the most frequently used recruiting strategy of the four suggested by the AIR report.

Twenty-nine combined and general services agencies and eight blindness service agencies rated the effectiveness of this strategy. Nearly three out of four of the combined and general service agencies said that when they promoted the benefits of state agency employment, this recruitment strategy proved effective or very effective in filling 25% or more of their VR counselor vacancies. Five out of the eight blindness service agencies using the strategy found it to be effective in filling at least 25% of their VR counselor vacancies.

Two-thirds of the 39 general and combined service agency respondents said that they regularly used practicum and internship experiences as a formal channel of recruitment, and of this group, one-half provided paid opportunities. Less than one-third of the 17 blindness service agency respondents reported regular use of practicum or internships as a recruitment strategy. However, when a blindness service agency used this strategy, a practicum or intern student was just as likely to be paid as in a general or combined agency.

Of the 25 combined and general agencies that rated the effectiveness of regular use of graduate student practicum and internships as a formal recruitment method, nine out of ten agencies found the practice was an effective or very effective recruiting tool for filling vacancies. Only one out of three blindness service agency respondents rated this recruitment practice as effective in filling vacancies.

One-half of 39 combined and general VR agencies reported that their agency recruitment efforts regularly included efforts to seek qualified candidates from “related disciplines of study other than rehabilitation counseling or counseling.” Slightly more than one-third of the 16 blindness service agency respondents regularly sought VR counselor candidates from related disciplines.

Expanding the recruitment pool proved an effective or very effective recruiting tool for filling VR counselor vacancies for 95% of the 19 combined and general agencies that regularly sought candidates from related disciplines of study. All six blindness service respondent agencies using an expanded recruitment pool strategy found it to be effective in filling 25% to 50% or more of their vacancies. This was the highest effectiveness rating among all strategies used by blindness service agencies.

In addition to examining the AIR study recommendations, we wanted to assess whether an expedited hiring process affected recruitment success. We believed that expedited hiring processes may decrease the chance that a candidate would be discouraged from applying or would accept another offer during the hiring process.

Slightly more than half of the 39 combined and general agencies reported that they regularly hired VR counselors within 60 days of job posting. Three-fourths of the 16 blindness service agencies reported that they were able to expedite processes so that candidates were hired within 60 days of job posting.

When VR agencies were able to complete the hiring process within 60 days, nearly all (83%-90%) identified this practice as an effective or very effective recruitment and candidate retention tool.

Conclusion

VR counselor staffing capacity within state agencies remains a significant and escalating challenge for general and combined service agencies, with two-thirds of these survey respondents reporting staffing challenges in FFY 2007. The VR counselor staffing capacity challenge is less evident and appears to be deescalating in the blindness service agencies, with less than one-third reporting a direct service delivery challenge related to staffing between FFY 2005 and FFY 2007.

Recruitment of qualified staff is an ongoing effort among VR agencies. Staffing capacity challenges can be satisfied, at least in part, by an agency's ability to fill VR counselor vacancies. In assessing the use of the recommended recruitment activities, we were pleased to see the frequency with which agencies deployed every strategy. General and combined service agencies utilized a wider array of recruitment strategies and reported a positive outcome from the strategies they deployed. Blindness service agencies experienced success when they expanded the candidate pool to related disciplines of study other than rehabilitation counseling or counseling.

References

Chan, T. (2003, October). *Recruiting and retaining professional staff in state VR agencies: Some preliminary findings from the RSA Evaluation Study* [draft report]. Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research. Retrieved April 20, 2007, from http://www.rehabeducators.org/docs/rsa_evaluation_study.doc

Study Questions

1. The survey results point to a pervasive national VR counselor staffing challenge, which was anticipated to peak in FFY 2007 for which of the following VR agencies?
 - a. Combined and general service VR agencies
 - b. Blindness service VR agencies
 - c. Both a and b

2. The most frequent outcome of VR counselor capacity challenges was
 - a. Assigning specific case management functions traditionally performed by VR counselors to other support staff to allow VR counselors to work with more consumers
 - b. Increasing the average VR counselor caseload
 - c. Using an order of selection wait list to help manage the size of VR counselor caseloads
 - d. Increasing VR counselor salaries to attract/retain VR counselor staff and increase capacity
 - e. Restructuring the state VR agency and/or service delivery system to allow VR counselors to work with more consumers

3. The titles of the key support staff positions impacted by the realignment of case management functions varied widely from office specialist II to regional manager. The most common job titles were
 - a. Vocational rehabilitation assistant
 - b. Provisional rehabilitation counselor
 - c. Rehabilitation casework associate
 - d. a and b
 - e. b and c
 - f. a, b, and c

Consider these four recruitment strategies when answering questions 4 through 7:

- a. Use practicum and internship experiences as a formal channel of recruitment
- b. Leverage university relationships to recruit students/graduates
- c. Expand the pool of job candidates by seeking applicants from related disciplines of study other than rehabilitation counseling or counseling
- d. Inform university graduates about the benefit of working in a state agency

4. Choose the recruitment strategy that was used most frequently by general and combined agencies.

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.

5. Choose the two recruitment strategies that, when used, were most effective in filling 50% or more of the VR counselor vacancies for general and combined agencies.

- a. a and b
- b. b and c
- c. c and d
- d. a and d

6. Choose the recruitment strategy that was used most frequently by blindness service agencies.

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.

7. Choose the strategies that, when used, were most effective in filling VR counselor vacancies for blindness service agencies.
 - a. a and b
 - b. b and c
 - c. c and d
 - d. a and d

8. General and combined service agencies were more likely than blindness service agencies to utilize a wider array of recruitment strategies.
 - a. True
 - b. False

9. Which type of agency was most likely to utilize VR counselor vacancy hiring practices that were completed within 60 days from job posting to job offer?
 - a. Combined and general agencies
 - b. Blindness service agencies
 - c. Both types of agencies were equal in their ability to expedite hiring within 60 days

10. VR agencies that were able to complete the hiring process within 60 days found that this was not a very effective recruitment tool.
 - a. True
 - b. False

Chapter 2

REHABILITATION COUNSELING: VALUING THE PROFESSION

By S. Wayne Mulkey, Vicki Draksler, and Linda Winslow

It is often stated that an understanding of history yields the best understanding of the present. Certainly this adage becomes considerably important to an understanding of the value of the rehabilitation profession. No longer does society consider disability “as evidence of deistic displeasure or demonic deception, of sin and lack of grace” (Oberman, 1965, p. 19). Fortunately, work and productive activity have been highly valued by American society, and the individualized contributions of everyone remain characteristic of such a value.

Early history is replete with examples of personal or societal response to disability. Clearly, church and state initiatives provided the guidance and structure for such early attempts to assist people with disabilities. As early as 1916, the National Defense Act provided educational opportunities for military personnel “to return to civil life better equipped for industrial, commercial, and general business occupations” (Oberman, 1965, p. 148). Then, in February 1917, Congress passed the Smith-Hughes Act (Pub. L. 64-347) which provided for vocational education in agriculture, trades, and industries for disabled service personnel and veterans. Finally, the Soldier Rehabilitation Act (Pub. L. 65-178) was passed by Congress on June 25, 1918, absent a defeated amendment to include civilians with disabilities in the legislation (Oberman, 1965, p. 155).

The public vocational rehabilitation (VR) counseling profession began with congressional passage of the Smith-Fess Act of 1920 (Pub. L. 66-236). Primarily, allotted rehabilitation funds were available for vocational training and placement services (Rubin & Roessler, 1995, 2001).

Some 30 years later, the quest for VR counselor competency began showing up in rehabilitation-related literature. Clearly, Patterson (1957) challenged the rehabilitation profession with the counselor/coordinator controversy. Others (Thomason & Barrett, 1959; McGowan, 1960; Muthard & Salomone, 1969) have contributed to the understanding of the complexity of the role and function of the VR counselor. For many years, competency has been linked to the counseling function, and authorities continue to consider counseling the core activity of VR counselors (Riggat & Maki, 1997; Bellini & Rumrill, 2002). Thus, professionalization as defined by Rubin and Roessler (2001) includes various abilities and skills necessary for the unique competency base required for VR counselor functions. Counselors come to a valued VR profession highly trained and highly skilled.

The VR counselor wears many hats. These hats include counseling and guidance as the job title implies, but the counselor also engages in employer contacts, caseload management, career development, job placement assistance, professional presentations, budgeting, planning, forecasting, and other related activities. The responsibilities and job tasks alone are indicative of a profession that has grown and evolved. Jenkins and Strauser (1999) noted that the roles and functions of VR counselors need to be compared with the roles and functions of other professionals outside the field of counseling and social work, such as human resource managers, industrial organizational psychologists, and professional managers who are involved in organizational behavior and job design (p. 8). The VR counselor is a professional who is valued for a set of skills. So, VR should be recognized for the contribution it makes—not only from the standpoint of the VR counselor’s tasks, but also within a realm of contributing to the supply and demand of

the American workforce, directly through employment of rehabilitation professionals and indirectly as those professionals help persons with disabilities become employed. The value of the profession is one that must be recognized by the business world as highly effective and profitable. The credentials a VR counselor holds (e.g., licensure, Certified Rehabilitation Counselor Certification [CRC], education) contribute to that message as well as the successful employment outcomes of the public VR agency, which promotes the viability and diversity of the American workforce. The profession must be held in high regard by those personally engaged in it, for it is those professionals that are closing the gap, widening the loop of esteem, and securing their place among valued professionals.

This chapter focuses on the profession of VR counselor as emerging change creates new needs and environments. Legislative paradigm shifts relative to service delivery issues and increased consumer involvement mandate qualified rehabilitation personnel (valuing the profession) throughout the VR agency. Furthermore, the value of the rehabilitation profession will be determined by the service quality and germane action of organizational personnel (education and practice) on a case-by-case basis. Thus, this chapter considers awareness, prestige, credentialing, career ladder, and leadership issues, along with recommendations to positively influence recruitment and retention.

Public Awareness and Attracting People into the Profession

Sussman (1965) noted some 40 years ago that “the layman is, for the most part, unfamiliar with the field of rehabilitation.” Twenty years later, Jellinek and Lynch (1983) found little change. Patterson (1992) maintained that rehabilitation career opportunities continued to be “the best kept secret around,” noting that most people stumble across rehabilitation before, during, or after undergraduate or graduate training or after they or members of their families became consumers of rehabilitation services. The secret must be released from the box. The professional career challenges and satisfaction known by those already in the field must be illustrated.

Even for those familiar with rehabilitation, the very title of VR counselor denotes a number of roles. Imagine the confusion of the general public when they encounter various terms and competencies that collectively imply the VR function. What does this all mean?

Communicating the attraction of the VR counseling profession—and the contributions that VR counselors make—has been challenged by the profession’s evolution. Not only do VR counselors need to prepare themselves differently than they did five years ago, but the rehabilitation program must evolve to accommodate the changing needs, values, and expectations of legislators, consumers, and rehabilitation professionals. Perhaps an identity crisis exists. In addition, the fact that funding has not always been in line with expected program growth and cost projections has contributed to intrinsic problems not only in the VR program but also in the status and professional identity of the VR counselor (Irons, 1989). Nevertheless, it is clear that the VR counseling profession offers numerous opportunities for careers that allow for variety, mobility, advancement, and self-fulfillment (Patterson, 1992).

Faced with critical shortages (Rehabilitation Services Administration, 1990), increased public awareness of careers in VR counseling is imperative. Professionals already in the field, as well as persons who have been served by VR programs, can be an integral part of those recruitment efforts.

Elementary and secondary school students are often introduced to various career opportunities with field trips to fire stations, police departments, and television stations. While confidentiality considerations may limit the degree of hands-on experience with VR counseling, focused activities through sponsored rehabilitation clubs for middle- and high-school students can offer career exploration opportunities in rehabilitation. Such exploration could expand knowledge of laws and opportunities as well as environmental and societal barriers encountered by people with disabilities. Furthermore, such activities may increase the likelihood that VR counseling would become a career choice.

Rehabilitation clubs sponsored by a local VR office, chapters of the National Rehabilitation Association, or other rehabilitation associations offer an excellent opportunity for mentoring and job shadowing, both tried-and-true means of introducing future VR counselors to career opportunities. Universities with rehabilitation counseling programs could support student chapters of rehabilitation associations. The networking opportunities such associations afford student members enhance their interest and commitment to the field as well as their opportunities for employment. Rehabilitation associations offer opportunities for VR counselors to share best practices, state-of-the-art research, and their passion for the profession. Observing the passion seasoned practitioners have for their profession will encourage student association members to pursue such careers.

Not to be discounted are presentations to students majoring in “the helping professions” such as special education, psychology, education, or sociology in hopes of their considering the possibility of VR counseling as a viable and rewarding career path. In presenting to these groups, it is helpful to draw upon two issues: (1) students’ motivation in seeking employment and (2) job forecasts. Even better would be to emulate the University of Utah by providing a required freshman course entitled Introduction to DisAbility.

Regarding motivation, Thomas and O’Brien (1984) explained that students are drawn to occupations that offer maximum potential to meet their needs. The philosophy of employment has shifted. The “gold watch” phenomenon is gone: 30 years with an employer culminating in a handshake, a certificate of appreciation, and the gift of a gold watch is a thing of the past. Employees no longer look at a job as a means to an end. The Millennials (those born in 1982 or later) seek to be trained, credentialed, and then find job experience. Their goal is to follow employment avenues that will offer not only the intrinsic elements of competitive salary and benefits but also the opportunity to be in control of their destiny. This implies satisfaction through job challenge and reward for their daily “rigors.”

Regarding forecasts, in the year 2002, counselors held about 526,000 jobs, 122,000 of which were VR counselor. Overall, employment of counselors is expected to grow faster than the average for all occupations through 2012 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2004). In addition, Baby Boomers are preparing for retirement. This situation will have a considerable impact on the counseling industry. Moreover, the demand for VR counselors who work primarily for state and local government is expected to continue to grow as current welfare laws require recipients to find jobs. Furthermore, the number of persons who need VR services will continue to grow as advances in medical technology continue to save lives. Legislation requiring equal employment rights for people with disabilities will also enhance demand. Often, there are more job openings within public VR agencies than there are graduates of VR counseling programs willing to accept public employment.

What type of people are being sought by the VR profession? People with passion. Knowledge is power, but it is passion that is the driving force to acquire the requisite knowledge and skill. In fact, passion may be viewed as the characteristic that separates effective VR counselors from less effective ones. Passion is a value necessary for rehabilitation counseling success. Consumers, rehabilitation organizations, and the rehabilitation profession all benefit from individualized passionate work assisting persons with disabilities. The passion is the belief in the tenets of the VR program. The passion becomes the driving force in working with people (consumers as well as rehabilitation organizations) and the pride in accomplishment of successful career outcomes. The passion is based on a value intrinsic to the VR profession—that of making a difference.

Prestige and Societal Value of the Profession

It is necessary to bring prestige to a profession that assists person with disabilities in discovering a path to competitive employment and independence.

The profession is also one that serves at the direction and discretion of both the federal and state government and focuses on the needs of a specifically identified constituency. Further, the VR professional comes highly credentialed and ready with information, skills, and knowledge to begin a career immediately following graduation from a master's degree program. The prestige factor is certainly implied. Why is it not more definite? Perhaps the negative perceptions of lesser salaries, varying state standards, and unequal prestige (when compared to persons in other professions who perform some of the same tasks) contribute to factors that reinforce difficult recruitment and retention.

Chan, Parker, Johnson, Langton, and Corthell (1986) studied the preferences for and prestige of positions among rehabilitation students. They found that undergraduates ranked VR counselor as their first choice of job, while the master's degree group ranked it fourth, behind the rehabilitation psychologist, rehabilitation administrator, and rehabilitation educator positions. The position of the VR counselor at the state agency had a prestige ranking of 11 out of 26 occupations. When compared to other rehabilitation-related occupations, state VR counselor was ranked at 7 out of 12 occupations.

Historically, efforts have been made to increase the recognition and value of the rehabilitation counseling profession. Consider the following:

1. On October 1, 1925, the Constitution of the National Civilian Rehabilitation Conference, later to become the National Rehabilitation Association, was adopted. One of the four purposes of this association was “to further so far as possible and desirable agreement upon principles and practices in the field of civilian rehabilitation and to promote comity between the various agencies” (Minutes, National Civilian Rehabilitation Conference, September 30–October 2, 1925).

2. On August 3, 1954, President Eisenhower signed Public Law 565. This legislation provided grants to colleges and universities for curricula development and traineeships for graduate students to increase the number of trained rehabilitation personnel. At the signing of Public Law 565, President Eisenhower stated that this legislation would “reemphasize to all the world the great value which we in America place upon the dignity and worth of each individual human being” (Obermann, 1965, p. 316).
3. The Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification was formed in the early 1970s. This national action assigned value and recognition to the rehabilitation profession.
4. On March 22, 1983, Dr. Martha Lentz Walker testified before Congress to ensure that the word “qualified” was included in rehabilitation legislation.
5. On July 26, 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act was signed into law by President George Bush and was declared to be the most significant equal opportunity legislation since the Civil Rights Act of 1964.
6. The Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) was first included in the Rehabilitation Act amendments in 1992 and enhanced in the amendments of 1998.
7. On March 22, 2007, Senators Saxby Chambliss, R-GA, and Mary Landrieu, D-LA, introduced a Proclamation before the U.S. Senate to recognize all rehabilitation counselors (see Exhibit).

These steps clearly indicate societal value for the profession of rehabilitation counseling and for people with disabilities. Rehabilitation leadership and rehabilitation-related associations should plan celebration activities each March 22. What will step eight be?

Exhibit A

SRES 120 ATS

**110th CONGRESS
1st Session
S. RES. 120**

Designating March 22, 2007, as National Rehabilitation Counselors Appreciation Day.

**IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES
March 22, 2007**

Mr. CHAMBLISS (for himself and Ms. LANDRIEU) submitted the following resolution; which was considered and agreed to

RESOLUTION

Designating March 22, 2007, as National Rehabilitation Counselors Appreciation Day.

Whereas rehabilitation counselors conduct assessments, provide counseling, support to families, and plan and implement rehabilitation programs for those in need;

Whereas the purpose of the professional organizations in rehabilitation is to promote the improvement of rehabilitation services available to persons with disabilities through quality education and rehabilitation research for counselors;

Whereas the various professional organizations, including the National Rehabilitation Association (NRA), Rehabilitation Counselors and Educators Association (RCEA), the National Council on Rehabilitation Education (NCRE), the National Rehabilitation Counseling Association (NRCA), the American Rehabilitation Counseling Association (ARCA), the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC), the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR), and the Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE) have stood firm to advocate up-to-date education and training and the maintenance of professional standards in the field of rehabilitation counseling and education;

Whereas on March 22, 1983, Martha Walker of Kent State University, who was President of the NCRE, testified before the Subcommittee on Select Education of the House of Representatives, and was instrumental in bringing to the attention of Congress the need for rehabilitation counselors to be qualified; and

Whereas the efforts of Martha Walker led to the enactment of laws that now require rehabilitation counselors to have proper credentials in order to provide a higher level of quality service to those in need: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate—

- (1) designates March 22, 2007, as National Rehabilitation Counselors Appreciation Day; and
- (2) commends all of the hard work and dedication that rehabilitation counselors provide to individuals in need and the numerous efforts that the multiple professional organizations have made to assisting those who require rehabilitation.

Professional Credentialing

From 1920 to 1955, little change occurred regarding either recruitment or retention of rehabilitation counselors within public VR programs. At the risk of oversimplification, rehabilitation counselors were employed in public VR positions because of an interest in the “helping professions,” while educational achievement had minimal impact on the selection of personnel for these positions. Personal characteristics and interest in helping others were likely the major decision factors.

The beginning of change occurred with the 1954 reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act (Pub. L. 565). This legislation provided funds to establish graduate degrees in rehabilitation counseling. Thus, over the next few years, numerous individuals acquired a master’s degree in rehabilitation counseling. Public VR agencies now had trained personnel available for the position of rehabilitation counselor but certainly were not obligated to employ such individuals. Frequently, trained VR counselors were passed over for those with a bachelor’s degree (or a nonspecialized master’s degree) because of personal characteristics or other reasons.

In 1974, the recently established Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification administered a national examination to certify professional rehabilitation counselors. Although a large number of practicing rehabilitation counselors took the examination and became identified as CRCs, certification had limited meaning until rehabilitation legislation included the term qualified in 1992. Thus, public VR agencies could now envision a qualified workforce.

John Lui, executive director of the Stout Vocational Rehabilitation Institute, University of Wisconsin-Stout, posits:

One of the key pieces in the evolution from an occupation to a profession is credentialing. Having a recognized credential distinguishes one profession from another and also tells the public what this profession is all about. Credentialing is more a concept of professionalization of an occupation. As an occupation matures, it must look at itself and look at credentialing. The key issue is protecting the consumer. (Personal communication, February 16, 2007)

Since credentialing is tied to professionalism, it is useful to consider definitive elements of professionalism. John Southwick (1997) defined professionals as follows:

A disciplined group of individuals who adhere to high ethical standards and uphold themselves to, and are accepted by, the public as possessing special knowledge and skills in a widely recognized, organized body of learning derived from education and training at a high level, and who are prepared to exercise this knowledge and these skills in the interest of others. Inherent in this definition is the notion that the responsibility for the welfare, health and safety of the community shall take precedence over other considerations.

Rehabilitation counseling is a unique skill identified by high ethical standards and a body of knowledge that is not found in any other counseling profession.

In support of the education, knowledge, and skills of the VR counselor and the inherent responsibility for the welfare of those served, professional credentialing continues to be an ongoing concern. University programs and state VR agencies must now seek individuals for the profession who can meet specified CSPD requirements or other quality standards (Schroeder, 1998). Federal legislation requires that state VR agencies utilize qualified VR counselors for service provision to organizational consumers. Clearly, the bar has been raised for professional personnel as well as for service-related issues.

CSPD directives have created an environment of doing business differently among public VR agencies and have served to strengthen the professionalism of the job title.

How, then, does credentialing relate to the integrity, retention, and recruiting of the VR professional? The Rehabilitation Counselors and Educators Association, a division of the National Rehabilitation Association, convened a panel discussion on the topic of salary equity for VR counselors at the association's annual conference in 2006. While all the panelists presented valuable information on VR counselor salaries, Norm Hursch (2006) of Boston University reported a "nonscientific" study documenting a significant discrepancy between beginning VR counselors' salaries and salaries of beginning social workers. Chan (2003) noted that although it is perhaps not feasible to increase salary levels, state VR agencies should focus on benefits such as job security, fringe benefits, annual and sick leave, and state retirement plans. Table 1-3 shows that about half of the agencies that reported VR counselor salary information noted an increase in VR counselor salaries.

While strong recruitment efforts are useful, they must be supported by the work that counselors do—for example, by offering a job with a high salary or the chance to serve people (Chan, 2003). The focus must also be on the specified job tasks along with the skills and knowledge that professionals bring in serving individuals with disabilities. VR counseling is a profession that offers credentialing, the provision of services to individuals, a pride in work, and a sense of accomplishment. The importance of professional credentialing among VR counselors is further noted through portability of counseling knowledge and skills from state to state. Specifically, any CRC is assured mobility of credentials when necessary to move to another state rehabilitation agency.

In 2001, 46 states and the District of Columbia had some form of counselor credentialing, licensure, certification, or registry legislation governing practice outside schools (U.S. Department of Labor, 2004).

Credential requirements vary from state to state. In some states, credentialing is mandatory; in others, it is voluntary. Persons seeking a career in VR must be aware of this diversified approach and must look to the individual state requirements and to the university VR preparation programs to meet expected credentialing.

Rehabilitation Career Development and Retention

As we look to the future of VR counseling and the expected critical shortage of VR counselors, we must not only recognize the importance of recruiting individuals to the field, but also develop strategies to keep those counselors already in the field. A plan of action must be developed to retain those individuals already on the employment rolls as well as those who will be entering the VR profession. Mitus (2006) suggested that there is strong evidence linking socialization content and effective commitment. He further noted that learning about the agency is important and that content related to the agency's goals and values seems to be the most important.

Once VR counselors are employed, they want to grow in their positions. Career ladder strategies imbue value in the profession and the professional individual; they provide a path for professional growth and enhance commitment. In addition, career development options can be potent recruitment tools.

Career development options vary significantly from state to state. Variance may also occur within states that have two VR agencies (a general agency and an agency for the blind and visually impaired). However, if a given state agency provides recognition for qualified VR counselors, there likely is greater opportunity for career development. For example, when state VR agency management or supervision recognizes an interested and talented individual who seems to reflect potential for counseling excellence, a specified mentoring program could be developed. Such a program might focus on personal development of knowledge and skills with increased commitment to organizational initiatives. Remember, "valuing the profession" activities improve both recruitment and retention of quality personnel.

It is important to remember that career development dimensions focus on knowledge of rehabilitation counseling as a worthy career goal as well as emphasis on the credentialing process (i.e., “qualified” as supported by the Rehabilitation Act)—factors that lend credibility, credence, and worth to the profession.

Leadership Issues in Recruitment and Retention

It is not always easy to employ qualified rehabilitation counselors with the passion to commit to a career with a specified agency or even to a career as a rehabilitation counselor. Therefore, recruitment and retention issues have moved to center stage for most public VR organizations. This trend extends to other organizations as well. In 2006, 281 fast-growth firms were polled, and 20% believed the single most important challenge of the year was finding and retaining qualified employees (PR Newswire Association, 2006). If this crisis exists in the general workforce, it can be expected to be even more critical in VR counseling, in that the profession has identified not only a shortage but a crisis in recruiting individuals.

Sociology of Workforce Generations

This section considers two issues for leaders: the sociology of workforce generations and the agencies’ personnel recruitment strategies.

There are numerous leadership issues related to recruitment and retention (Mulkey, 2005). Specifically, one general theme that will affect every public and private organization, including VR, is the sociology of workforce generations. There are likely three generational cohorts in the work environment (Strauss & Howe, 1991, p. 297). An understanding of intergenerational loyalties and the potential conflicts inherent in identification of a common destiny is needed.

Generational membership identity occurs through vague assignment to a common cultural experience. There should be no illusion that all generations are the same; they are not. Strauss and Howe (1991) identified 18 generational identifications, starting as early as 1584. Three such groups are in the workforce today (see Table 2-1). Other names have been used for the generational identification, including Generation X (Tulgan, 2001) and Generation Y (Martin & Tulgan, 2001). And, as would be expected, the transition from X to Y provides a mix with additional characteristics (Martin & Tulgan, 2006). (Chapter 5 provides further insight into generational cohorts.)

Table 2-1
Generational Demarcation

Generational cohort	Birth year	Type	2008 age range
Boom	1943-1960	Idealist	48-65
Thirteenth	1961-1981	Reactive	27-47
<i>Millennial</i>	<i>1982-????</i>	<i>Civic</i>	<i>??-26</i>

Note: From Strauss & Howe, 1991.

Briefly, people in the Boom generation are interested in real-world institutions and bottom-line principles, live to work, and have a great need for security and job stability. They generally have a high regard for authority, with an inherent need to be rewarded (Strauss & Howe, 1991).

Tulgan (2001) enumerated characteristics of Generation X that are similar to Strauss and Howe's (1991) description of the Thirteenth generation. These individuals are usually well educated, self-reliant, and good at multitasking. Many have excellent technological skills and often welcome change while seeking experiences and opportunities beyond security or financial gain.

Generation Y (called Millennials by Strauss and Howe) present self-confidence and optimism (Martin & Tulgan, 2001). These individuals remain independent and goal-oriented. They are attracted to work environments promoting communication, flexibility, and personal recognition with immediate interaction and feedback.

Deal (2007) argued that a generation gap exists when younger generations cease to accept the established rules and values of the prior generation. She did not equate values with behavior, nor behavior with values. However, behaviors expected of generational leaders would focus on trust and credibility. Basically, all people, regardless of generation, seek similar learning opportunities and work rewards. Perhaps these external issues remain more germane to retention than recruitment. However, because individuals in each category vary, so must supervision.

In this uncertain economy and highly competitive business environment, companies across North America recognize that the differentiator is their people. Those organizations that emerge as winners in the battle for talent will have their fingers on the pulse of the newest generation label, the Millennials. Such organizations will design specific techniques for recruiting, managing, motivating, and retaining this group (Raines, 2002). Ways that VR can market itself for the Millennial generation are discussed in chapter 5.

Agencies' Recruitment Strategies

To better understand state VR agency initiatives regarding recruitment of professional VR counselors, a survey was submitted to 80 agency directors through the use of Rehabnet. They were asked, "Does your state agency have a full-time person designated solely to recruitment of rehabilitation counselor applicants?" They were then asked for comments.

Of the 47 state VR agencies that responded to the survey, only eight (17%) indicated having a full-time position devoted to recruitment. With the recruitment needs of most state rehabilitation agencies, it is surprising that so few organizations have been able to implement this strategy to meet recruitment needs.

Seventeen comments were given, which provide some insight into recruitment efforts. They are quoted below, listed alphabetically by state.

- *Alabama* (combined): “Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services has a staff person hired to do recruitment, but not just for rehabilitation counselors.”
- *Connecticut* (general): “Our training director . . . work[s] on the issues of recruitment of rehabilitation counselors. We have identified the colleges with rehabilitation counseling and we work on recruiting interns. We have hired at least 80% of our interns from that process.”
- *District of Columbia* (combined): “Currently we do not have a full-time person on staff for recruitment. However, a full-time person for the recruitment of rehabilitation counselors is part of the recruitment plan that has been submitted to the state director for approval.”
- *Florida* (general): “This is a relatively new position [recruiter] within the past year.”
- *Idaho* (general): “Recruitment responsibilities are assigned to the nine regional managers throughout our state. We have assigned duties for them to perform, which consist of regular contact with university professors, intern supervisors, and students. The HR manager is responsible to oversee the recruitment process and also performs recruitment duties.”
- *Illinois* (combined): “DRS is part of an umbrella agency, the Department of Human Services. DHS has a Bureau of Recruitment and Selection that is responsible for those functions for all job titles within the department, including our rehabilitation counselor positions.”
- *Kentucky* (blind): “Kentucky Office for the Blind does not have a full-time person assigned to recruit for rehabilitation counselors. Our managers do recruit from the University of Kentucky graduate program and other graduate programs; however, we usually have to hire with a bachelor’s degree or even an M.A. in a related area with the agreement that they will get their M.A. degree in rehabilitation counseling.”

- *Nevada* (combined): “Nevada does not have a full-time person dedicated to recruiting. Recruiting qualified staff is an ongoing challenge. We have raised salaries and promote internally. Our first preferred candidate is someone who has a master’s in rehabilitation and is eligible to sit for the CRC.”
- *New Mexico* (general): “We have recently hired a retired VR administrator on contract to assist us with the recruitment of rehabilitation counselors.”
- *North Carolina* (general): “We have a full-time staff person who is responsible for three areas: recruitment of counselors, CSPD, and university relations.”
- *Ohio* (general): “The Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission does not have a full-time person designated solely to recruitment of rehabilitation applicants. However, as our agency’s full-time recruiter, I probably spend about 40% of my time engaged in activities related to counselor recruitment.”
- *Oregon* (general): “We do not have a staff person dedicated to VR [recruitment]. A portion of two staff’s time is devoted to recruitment. We have included the departmental recruiter in VR events and trainings. We are asking staff when they go out to national conferences to recruit as well.”
- *Pennsylvania* (combined): “We have had a VR specialist assigned to counselor recruitment since 2002. This was a 50% assignment for a few years and is now her principal assignment. Since we are a combined agency, [this person] also addresses the needs for rehabilitation teachers and orientation/mobility instructors.”
- *Rhode Island* (combined): “[We do] not have a full-time person designated solely to the recruitment of VR counselor applicants. Nonetheless, our HRD person does have links to all of the local graduate schools that award master’s degrees in rehabilitation counseling (which is the entry-level requirement to work in the Rhode Island public VR agency). We also provide internship opportunities as well.”

- *South Carolina* (general): “The South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department does not have one staff member who is tasked solely with recruiting counselors. Such efforts are certainly a focus for [the] recruitment manager [who] works with local supervisors to reach out to colleges and universities as well as other local recruitment efforts related to counselors but does not concentrate solely on counselor recruiting.”
- *Utah* (combined): “While we do not have a full-time person devoted solely to recruitment of VR counselors, we do, however, send local administrative staff to various college and university job fairs with our agency booth to recruit.”
- *Virginia* (general): “We have staff assigned to this task, but not solely.”

Leadership among rehabilitation agencies has varied significantly because of organizational political environments, management styles, and other factors. Traditional recruitment strategies have usually garnered sufficient applicants for rehabilitation counselor positions. It is anticipated that this climate will change. Not only are fewer people entering the profession, but there is an anticipated shortage of professors teaching in the university systems. These issues often lead to problems with retention, which creates enormous financial and programmatic difficulties for organization management and supervision. Seeking solutions to the complexity of service delivery mandates, many rehabilitation agencies have explored different strategies to the problem of recruiting qualified rehabilitation counselors, as reported in the above comments.

You Can Make A Difference: Recruitment Is the Job of Everyone in the Organization

Yes, you can make a difference, whether you are a VR counselor, a professor in a rehabilitation program, or another specialist in rehabilitation. “People influence people” (Mager, 1984, p. 3). This section identifies important ways to influence people and enhance positive outcomes regarding VR counselor recruitment and retention.

The external environment related to rehabilitation advocacy and practice is essentially beyond the control of individuals seeking to make a difference. Often the challenge is sizeable. However, such challenges may also be opportunities waiting for the right person or approach. System change often emerges from a single event or idea supported and maintained over time. Similarly, positive behavior is frequently observed and may be emulated. Clearly, doing business differently implies change.

Recruitment is the job of everyone in the organization.

Rehabilitation agency personnel (specifically counselors) must realize that they have a major role in assuring the future of the organization through personnel replacement. Rehabilitation counselors may view their responsibilities as focused on employment opportunities for consumers, assisting as many as possible within the assigned geographic area. Perhaps, there is a recruitment role for professional VR counselors. For example, consumers may have an interest in becoming VR counselors. Professional VR counselors should guide them toward acquisition of the necessary education to become skilled VR counselors. Former consumers assisting current consumers enriches the rehabilitation experience. Other individuals who interact with the rehabilitation counselor may also become interested in the field of rehabilitation counseling.

University education programs and state rehabilitation agencies could work collaboratively on recruitment issues. Such collaboration exists now with all Rehabilitation Continuing Education Programs and needs to be strengthened. These collaborative efforts should be broadened to incorporate other related areas. Thus, all entities would concentrate on current and future needs relative to program survival.

Now is the time for rehabilitation personnel to be the catalyst for change and, thus, the difference-maker. A proactive approach can serve as a behavior-modeling opportunity; others can observe and hopefully integrate aspects of positive behavior into their actions.

Integrated positive behavior could influence the entire work environment. Consumers or students could benefit from the manifest behavior and develop behavior that would also be replicated.

This chapter has focused on the value of the profession of rehabilitation counseling. Clearly, when reflecting on the historical development of the state-driven, national rehabilitation service program, it is clear how change and innovation have created the existing service delivery system. When projecting future change and innovation, it would seem that the preparation and employment of qualified VR counselors becomes the programmatic and organizational centerpiece. Perhaps it could be assumed that these trained and skilled individuals (“qualified”) would value the profession of rehabilitation and hold a passion for assisting persons with disabilities.

Recommendations

Recommendations are presented for university undergraduate and graduate program recruiters, rehabilitation agency management, and public VR personnel with specified recruitment responsibilities. Clearly, there can and will be some overlap of responsibilities, but perhaps such interactive strategies enhance quality outcomes. It is important to have both a recruitment plan and a retention plan that can maximize desired outcomes.

University Recruiters (Undergraduate and Graduate Programs)

- Develop cooperative strategies with VR agency management and public VR recruiters to recognize Rehabilitation Counselor Appreciation Day each March 22.
- Be an ambassador for the rehabilitation profession. Publish articles, make presentations, and make the local community aware of the opportunities in the field of rehabilitation counseling.

- Develop recruitment programs that reach to the high school level, such as rehabilitation clubs, interactive work groups, counselor involvement in career-day learning, or even coursework about people with disabilities that would offer insight and possible decisions for future employment.
- Help middle school or high school–level students envision VR as a career.
- Develop a targeted student recruitment plan and implement specific marketing strategies to attract those individuals who have an interest in assisting people with disabilities.
- Develop a targeted student recruitment plan to focus on minority candidates who wish to assist people with disabilities to enter competitive employment.

Rehabilitation Agency Management

- Develop cooperative strategies with university recruiters (undergraduate and graduate programs) and public recruiters to recognize Rehabilitation Counselor Appreciation Day each March 22.
- Based on the idea that recruitment is the job of everyone in the field of rehabilitation, develop agency-wide strategies and personal responsibilities for each employee regarding programmatic awareness focused on recruitment of new employees (including rehabilitation counselors).
- Review the 17 quotes from rehabilitation organizations above to seek the most aggressive recruitment strategy possible for your local situation. The best strategy may be a full-time recruiter position.
- Develop mentoring action plans focused on retention of qualified individuals within the rehabilitation organization.

- Offer appropriate education and skill training related to job performance with new and veteran employees to enhance continued belief in the rehabilitation profession.
- Utilize available technology to promote VR as a viable profession. Increase mechanisms for providing information regarding VR to potential consumers, advocates, referral sources, and school personnel.
- Continuously make existing rehabilitation counseling staff aware of their value to people with disabilities, as well as to the rehabilitation organization, as a retention strategy.
- Promote the benefits package with state agency employment as a way to improve retention of qualified state agency rehabilitation counselors.

Public Rehabilitation Recruiters

- Develop cooperative strategies with university recruiters (undergraduate and graduate programs) and public agency management to recognize Rehabilitation Counselor Appreciation Day each March 22.
- Develop a comprehensive marketing plan to generate interest in VR as a career opportunity and provide outreach to potential candidates.
- Plan for future VR needs regarding counseling personnel. Understand the necessary skills and knowledge base and how to acquire them.
- Know that quality recruitment translates into an excellent strategy for retention. Good recruits are more likely to stay with the organization.

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Study Questions

1. The public VR counseling profession began with congressional passage of the Smith-Fess Act (Pub. L. 66-236) of 1920.
 - a. True
 - b. False

2. The rehabilitation counseling profession offers numerous opportunities for challenging careers that allow for
 - a. Variety
 - b. Advancement
 - c. Self-fulfillment
 - d. All of the above
 - e. None of the above

3. When public salary levels cannot be increased, it is appropriate for recruitment and retention discussion to focus on the topics of job security, fringe benefits, leave policy, and state retirement plans.
 - a. True
 - b. False

4. The term “qualified” (with reference to VR counselors) was introduced in Congress in
 - a. 1965
 - b. 1973
 - c. 1983
 - d. 1992
 - e. 1998

5. An article published by C. H. Patterson challenged the thinking of the rehabilitation profession with initiation of the “counselor/ coordinator” controversy in
 - a. 1947
 - b. 1950
 - c. 1954
 - d. 1956
 - e. 1957

6. In 2003, Chan argued that strong recruitment efforts are useful but must be supported by the work that counselors do, for example:
- A job offering
 - A high paid salary
 - The chance to serve people
 - All of the above
 - None of the above
7. Recruitment is the job of everyone.
- True
 - False
8. The whole idea of generations (such as Boom, Thirteenth, and Millennials) tends to focus on
- Generational behavior
 - How generations work
 - Cross-generational relationships
 - All of the above
 - None of the above
9. University training programs and state VR service agencies must now seek individuals for the profession who can meet specific requirements for CSPD. The acronym CSPD means
- Common Structure of Personnel Development
 - Comprehensive System of Personnel Development
 - Completed System of Personal Data
 - All of the above
 - None of the above
10. In 1974 the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor quality Certification administered the first national examination to certify personnel labeled as CRCs.
- True
 - False

Chapter 3

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

By Neil McNeil and David LaFleur

Organizational culture can have an important impact on the state vocational rehabilitation (VR) system's ability to attract and retain qualified rehabilitation counselors. More specifically, state VR leaders at all levels must learn to understand the current culture of the system and how this culture either supports or inhibits the ability to attract and retain the next generation of rehabilitation professionals. Edgar Schein (2004) of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Sloan School of Management has been a prolific author, researcher, and consultant on the subject of organizational culture and leadership. Here is Schein's (2004) definition of the culture of a group or organization:

A pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 17)

Schein thinks of culture as the residue of success of an organization, in that the culture with its visible and not-so-visible levels outlasts products, services, founders, leadership, and any physical attributes of the organization. In his view, the culture of an organization is extremely difficult to change. If Schein's theory of organizational culture is applied to the present-day state VR system, one can begin to understand the impact that culture can have on recruiting and retaining VR counselors.

The Three Levels of Organizational Culture in State VR Agencies

Schein described three levels of organizational culture: artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and underlying goals and assumptions.

Artifacts-Visible organizational structures and processes: At the artifacts level of culture, candidates for a VR counselor position or newly hired VR counselors are exposed to the atmosphere of the field office and the community with its people and systems. There are counselors, clients, vendors, employers, and support personnel engaged in counseling sessions, meetings, and service-related activities. There are caseloads, computers, reports, caseload management systems, procurement and purchasing processes, and referral systems in place in support of service delivery. The interaction among people is constant and happens in person, by telephone, and electronically by e-mail and represents counseling sessions, supervision, information gathering, and decision-making of all manner and complexity. The goal is to plan and provide services while keeping clients moving through the system toward a successful employment outcome.

Espoused beliefs and values: Strategies, goals, and philosophies. At the espoused beliefs and values level of the culture of the state VR system, counselor candidates and the newly hired are exposed to the traditional values that have been the hallmark of the state VR system for so many years: independence and economic self-sufficiency through work and more specifically competitive, integrated employment. Full and equal inclusion and participation in society are important related values, as well as the concept of informed choice.

Underlying goals and assumptions: Unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. According to Schein's (2004) model, basic assumptions and beliefs are present that have been the tried-and-true solutions many times in the life of the organization. He observed that these assumptions are almost always unconscious.

Sometimes these topics are difficult to discuss openly despite being embedded in the belief system of the employees. Some of the more obvious examples for the state VR system may be the following:

- The predominant model of service delivery—in which one counselor manages one caseload—has remained unchanged for decades but has many built-in limitations that affect both quantitative and qualitative results as well as basic customer service.
- The most important measure of the state VR system’s success is the number of successful employment outcomes achieved each year.
- The success of the state VR agency is directly related to the amount of funding received and the number of qualified VR counselors and caseloads that the system can support.
- We value counseling but measure by numbers.

Many newly hired VR counselors gradually become aware of and adopt these and other beliefs that are part of the VR culture. Others may find themselves questioning or challenging these basic assumptions. In Schein’s (2004) view, it is these kinds of assumptions and fixed beliefs that, if unexplored in depth, severely restrict the organization’s ability to adapt and change.

For an organization to learn, grow, and respond to change from whatever source, its leaders must be able to understand all levels of the existing culture and how these levels affect efforts to change the culture. Understanding how new counselors experience the culture of the VR system and how that culture may or may not align with their own beliefs and values is an important area of learning for agency leaders.

By understanding the needs and values of the next generation of VR professionals, it may be possible to not only achieve a better fit between the new counselor and the organization but also simultaneously stimulate innovative improvements in the service delivery system and cultural change within the state VR agency.

Key Challenges

Restructuring Service Delivery Processes and Systems

Over the past decade, the 80 state agencies of the state VR system have developed a range of initiatives, often in collaboration with local Rehabilitation Continuing Education Programs, focusing on such topics as streamlining of service delivery, world-class service, continuous improvement, team building, leadership development, and strategic planning. A decade ago, the University of Arkansas Institute on Rehabilitation Issues convened a Primary Study Group entitled *Assuring an Outstanding Public Vocational Rehabilitation Program for the 21st Century: Eliminating Barriers to Service Delivery* (Miller, 1997).

These efforts to transform cumbersome and sluggish bureaucracies into visionary, highly accountable, and nimble agencies reenergized many VR counselors. Now that the 21st century is here, the challenge is to sustain these efforts against the strong tendencies of the system to maintain the status quo.

The potential critical shortage of qualified VR counselors represents the perfect time to revisit and renew these efforts. There is a body of evidence showing that talented workers are attracted to organizations whose cultures embrace the values embedded in the change initiatives of the past decade (Dychtwald, Erickson, & Morison, 2006).

The book *Workforce Crisis: How to Beat the Coming Shortage of Skills and Talent* (Dychtwald, Erickson, & Morison, 2006) discusses the three basics that new workers insist on:

1. A thoroughly engaging workplace, featuring collegiality, teamwork, fun, and, most fundamentally, democratic participation
2. Ample opportunity to learn and grow, including assignments that expand skills and the leeway and mobility to try one's hand at a variety of activities
3. Attentive management, where the direct manager not only appreciates individual employees' points of view but also attends to employees' needs and progress and explicitly encourages—and is accountable for—retention (p. 117)

These new worker priorities echo the findings of Chan's study (2003) (see Introduction). The study, completed by the American Institutes for Research for the Rehabilitation Services Administration, identifies factors that affect the retention of VR counselors. Office environment, autonomy, and entering state VR agency employment for the *right reasons*—the clients served and the services provided—are specific factors that positively affect retention.

State VR agency leaders need to benchmark the current system against these kinds of new worker priorities in order to recruit and retain the best talent available.

An organizational culture that encourages a continuous and ongoing review of the processes and systems for providing VR services to the client/customer will be a significant factor in attracting and retaining new and experienced VR counselors. Development of teams, creative use of technology, exploration of new job titles and job descriptions, and other activities will communicate a message that imagination, creativity, and innovation are important and essential parts of the work climate.

The results of the recruitment and retention survey indicate that while facing the challenge of insufficient rehabilitation counselor resources, state VR agency attempts at significant organizational restructuring are still quite limited (see Appendix B).

While 23 responding agencies reported a VR counselor staffing challenge in FFY 2007, only seven of them described organizational restructuring efforts that included implementing team approaches, creating new job titles such as caseload assistants, and establishing specialty caseloads. Of particular interest is the fact that one VR agency described an effort to take back certain services that were contracted out to community rehabilitation providers while another described an effort to contract out certain case management services to these providers (see Appendix B).

These results suggest that unexamined cultural barriers such as those described above may continue to limit the ability of the state VR system to transform itself. What seems to be needed is a full and open dialogue focusing on basic beliefs and assumptions about the state VR system combined with a concerted effort to understand and meet the needs of the next generation of VR counselors. The transformative change that can occur will create an organization that attracts and retains a highly qualified workforce while dramatically improving the quality of services and the working lives of people with disabilities.

Establishing a Performance Culture in the State VR System

Most definitions of organizational culture generally accept the notion that attitudes, values, beliefs, norms, and customs are the key ingredients of culture. The flaw in this approach comes from any dissonance in those definitions among the very people comprising the organization. These are, after all, not tangible or measurable concepts. This section elaborates on these core ingredients and the unique way they materialize in the state VR system and focuses on the idea of change—without which the public sector, and possibly the profession, faces potentially insurmountable challenges.

Many VR counselors entered the profession with lofty ideas about helping others to achieve their potential, regardless of the hand that fate or happenstance dealt them.

Money and prestige were not prime motivators, though they certainly would be welcome additives to the humanistic brew. Some had experience in the private, not-for-profit sector; others may have taken a civil service test. That might have been the first warning; the questions often did not reflect the idealistic flavor of the college program. Nonetheless, the lure of helping even more people in a stable, seemingly autonomous environment was hard to resist, especially with better pay and benefits thrown in. So, if we made the cut, we took the leap. Then, our education really began.

We secured an assignment, usually a large caseload, perhaps in a specific geographical area or with a specific disability group. We may have had formal training or had to rely more on learning from the experienced around us. What we learned from the latter could well set the stage for the rest of a career, both good and bad. What if the seer imparting the wisdom started his or her “short-timers” calendar 10 years before retirement? What if he or she just went with the flow, never doing more than was absolutely necessary to get by? Or, if you were lucky, you picked up pointers from the person who was always looking to improve his or her caseload management skills, never accepted the status quo, and welcomed innovation. Few readers in this profession could not relate to both of these types and could undoubtedly classify many others.

Of course, there is the system itself, fraught with policy, procedure, regulations, laws, and a multiplicity of seeming incongruities between them all. In his book, *Getting Things Done*, Edwin Bliss (1976) referenced the noted management consultant, Peter Drucker, who coined the term “management by objective” in the 1950s. Bliss (1976) suggested that civil service was slow to adapt because “management by objectives threatens the three basic underpinnings of a bureaucracy: tradition, centralized control, and red tape” (pp. 85-86). Thirty years after this was written, there are still significant opportunities for improvement in many civil service systems.

Rethinking Reward Structures

In their responses to open-ended questions on successful strategies for recognizing and rewarding VR counselor performance (Section IV of the survey in Appendix A), most respondents said the state civil service system was a primary impediment to any kind of career development based on a merit/reward structure. Frequently it was indicated that career progression was based more on education and experience than performance. However, despite this trend, monetary rewards were indicated as allowable and were effective in several states. One state indicated that after achieving 30 rehabilitations, counselors were paid a \$75 bonus for every additional status 26 closure. If a Social Security Disability Insurance case was successfully closed and resulted in Social Security Administration reimbursement, the bonus was \$150. The annual maximum allowed under this model was \$3,500. Other states predicated bonus payments on annual performance evaluations, with one indicating a “career path matrix” with each upward move accompanied by a 10% salary increase. Reflecting a growing trend in teaming, one state indicated a unit reward system that paid for performance based on specified targets accomplished by the team.

Despite the above examples, many state VR agencies clearly indicated their inability to financially reward excellent performers because of the restrictions inherent in their state merit rules. It is also notable that any development of a reward structure based on performance might well encounter union resistance. What types of rewards characterize the majority of the states that cannot pay? A plethora of local/state efforts were mentioned. These ranged from an acknowledgment letter from either the office or state director to an honorable mention in the organization newsletter to rewards for performance limited to “kudos and work schedule flexibility.”

Measuring Success

As one examines the results of the survey responses regarding the “essential elements of the agency’s performance culture” and how the “agency measures rehabilitation counselor performance against expectations,” what is particularly telling is that the majority of respondents spoke to quantitative and not qualitative measures. Several agencies mentioned Rehabilitation Services Administration standards as the driving force of measurement. The number of eligibilities, plans, and successful closures frequently topped the list of how counselors were measured. One respondent eschewed the quantitative due to the ascendancy of “teaming” and instead measured qualitative aspects such as “communication, flexibility, adaptability/ cooperation, teamwork and collaboration, customer service, job knowledge and productivity.”

If we take this response at face value, then we are talking about an environment wherein people have bought into an assimilation of the beliefs, values, attitudes, norms, and customs defined earlier as essential elements in a performance culture. What was not evident from the survey response in this example, but bears further exploration, is just how these variables were measured.

One New York regional coordinator took the qualitative approach to measurement when he suggested to the commissioner of education in a quarterly meeting that “20,000 rehabilitations is a political goal, not a rehabilitation goal” (personal communication, 2004). In the context of that meeting, such a statement took courage. However, the man speaking had over 30 years of experience in the agency and was deeply aware of how single-minded the pursuit of that “magic” number had been. He was aware of how cynical many of his staff had become over the years as the number quest overshadowed virtually everything about their professional performance. No one could doubt the need for successful outcomes; outcomes are one of the factors in the federal aid formula, after all. However, many times, the cases demanding the most VR counselor time and effort never resulted in a 26, the numerical label for a successful outcome.

A severely disabled individual might get a college degree, a home, or a vehicle modification—or just a much better handle on his place in the world with his unique disability. For any number of reasons, that individual did not go to work when all was said and done. In the quantitative measurement world, that case did not count. Factors such as increased self-esteem and independence that multiplied exponentially as a result of VR involvement got lost in the equation.

So our regional coordinator, brave as he was, succinctly captured the conundrum of state VR service. Work hard for the betterment of your fellow man, but make sure he goes to work so that your efforts count. Perhaps, this same fellow opined later, we need to look at success differently. Should we broaden our definitions by benchmarking various milestones, such as achievement of a high school diploma, trade certificate, or college degree or a driver's license and independent transportation? Arguably, these types of milestones achieved with VR assistance result in significant positive impacts on the person's life, though the individual may elect not to go to work at that time. The state VR agencies focus on the successful employment outcomes. Hence, state VR agency staff see these milestones as successful only if the outcome meets the standard. Over time, this modality takes its toll in the development of cynicism and lack of job satisfaction. Perhaps it is time for the federal/state system to reexamine the milestones for success, so that the dedicated counselor and the system as a whole do not see the “unsuccessful closure after a plan is developed,” or Status 28, as a failure.

Though much is said elsewhere in this publication about how recruitment challenges have increased dramatically, it should be seen that there is a clear link between the quality of professional life in an agency (retention) and the capacity to attract people (recruitment). Existing staff should be the best recruiters by action and example, but if they are no longer invested in their jobs, they will not market a desirable environment.

Promoting Teamwork

Both the survey conducted in December 2006 for this endeavor and the previously mentioned study by the American Institutes for Research (Chan, 2003) identified the proliferation of service delivery teams. Teamwork is seen as meeting several needs. The need for dwindling numbers of VR counselors to handle more cases is predominant. The capacity to remove many of the routine and administrative functions from the counselor's desk and assign them to paraprofessional and support staff is key to this development. These are tangible items. Perhaps less tangible is the saying used often in New York and Wisconsin discussions: "Free counselors up to do what they are trained for; let them be counselors." If they are spending less time in front of the computer generating routine correspondence and plans, the quality of the time and the decision-making process with their consumers has to improve as well. This eventually should feed the production demands but more importantly should result in a much better sense of control and greater job satisfaction for the counselor, as well as better-quality outcomes for the consumer.

Many practitioners in this field would be quick to admit that teaming does not come without a subtle price, in that the historical autonomy of the VR counselor job created its own monster (i.e., VR counselors often have a real problem letting go of any aspect of the case process). So, the dichotomy is that control, in one sense, has to be given up to get control in the larger sense.

If we presume a buy-in of attitudes, beliefs, and values that enable successful teaming, we have, as Stephen Covey suggests, "the combination of the creativity and resourcefulness of proactive individuals to create a proactive culture within the organization" (Covey, 1989, p. 77). In light of all the potential barriers inherent in the civil service system, Covey's further elaboration could serve as a Millennial mission statement: "The organization does not have to be at the mercy of the environment; it can take the initiative to accomplish the shared values and purpose of the individuals involved" (Covey, 1989, p. 77).

Heady stuff for sure, but the state VR system must challenge the underpinnings of tradition, centralized control, and red tape (Bliss, 1976).

Further, we must realize that the very nature of teaming enables furtherance of the idea of growing your own future. As paraprofessional staff are given opportunities to learn from the counselors with whom they work, they are acquiring the knowledge to position themselves for promotional opportunities. They may take concurrent steps to further their education, especially if the agency is able to help with financial assistance or flexible work schedules. We cannot minimize the capacity of paraprofessional staff to grow into professional positions. But, our culture must provide the support and the opportunities to make it viable for them to do so. At the same time, we must recognize the importance of using the most demonstrably proactive individuals as part of our recruitment efforts.

Our people can be our best ambassadors—but they must want to be. We must also enlist the assistance of our consumers. New York is in the process of creating an alumni association of successful VR consumers to assist in marketing. While the primary target will be potential consumers, it can be argued that this tool is essential in demonstrating to the world at large as well as potential employees that “here is what we do and here is why we are a good place to be served, but also to work.” In a recent lecture to staff of the New York Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities, the noted futurist Ed Barlow repeatedly raised the notion of branding. One of the authors who attended took this to mean that there has to be little doubt who we are talking about publicly when we talk about VR. More importantly, our employees have to believe that they are part of a vibrant organization and a dynamic profession.

Offering Competitive Salaries

Earlier, this chapter noted that financial incentives were not a key factor in attracting idealistic people to the profession a generation or two ago. We would be remiss in assuming that that has not changed.

As discussed elsewhere in this monograph, salaries in many state VR agencies simply have not kept pace. There must be a concerted effort across the country to raise the salaries of the professional VR counselor. For example, in New York State, the beginning salary for a fully credentialed counselor is around \$45,000. The reality is, a young person can attend the local community college for 2 years in computer technology and beat that salary. Spend years in college to become a VR counselor? Maybe not! The challenges to the salary status quo are real. Again in New York, an effort to raise the counseling series by two grades was recently denied by state civil service. This result occurred despite a factually compelling demonstration that the responsibilities and authority of the VR counselor series far exceeded those of much higher grades in other agencies. Perhaps partly to blame is the aforementioned lack of branding. In too many situations, VR has hidden its light under the proverbial basket, so who out there knows what we do or can place a relative value on it? In this example, it is disconcerting to walk away from such a process with the idea that the people controlling the system may not know either. That simply must change.

Conclusion

We have talked about the need to have people want to work with us, but also want to stay with us. Clearly, salaries play a role. Making educational opportunities available and convenient might enable us to grow more of our own within, thus keeping the valuable experience they already have. We must continue efforts to provide the tools that enable staff to function as efficiently as possible. In systems that spend hundreds of millions of dollars on consumer services, it is unconscionable that, in some agencies, field-based staff cannot access the Internet to do their jobs or do not have access to a printer to provide their consumer with a plan to sign or even have their consumer electronically sign the plan. Some agencies are certainly making strides to embrace the benefits of technology, but it is clear others have a long way to go. One could go on and on about technology and its relative customer service and cost-effectiveness (Chan, 2003).

Most important are the people we have and our ability to help them want to be the ambassadors for our agencies and field. We have to enlist the consumers whom we serve as ambassadors as well. We must stop relying on late-night public service announcements to market ourselves, both for the sake of our consumers and ourselves. We have to not only put money into publicizing our good works, but also put it into attracting and retaining the people necessary to maintain VR as a viable field.

In essence we must continually strive for a performance culture that embodies excellence as “not settling for less, not stopping too soon, not defending the incomplete and not justifying the inadequate” (Cappannelli & Cappannelli, 2002, p. 52).

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Study Questions

1. In his book *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, Edgar Schein stated that of the three levels of organizational culture, the most difficult to change was
 - a. Artifacts: visible organizational structures and processes
 - b. Espoused beliefs and values: strategies, goals, and philosophies
 - c. Underlying goals and assumptions: unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings
2. Using Schein's theory of organizational culture as applied to the public VR system, which of the following would be an example of underlying goals and assumptions?
 - a. Caseload management systems and procurement processes
 - b. The "one counselor managing one caseload" model of service delivery
 - c. Independence and economic self-sufficiency through work
 - d. All of the above
3. Dychtwald, Erickson, and Morison identified three basics that new workers insist on. Which of the following is not one of these three basic characteristics of a workplace culture?
 - a. A thoroughly engaging workplace
 - b. Attentive management
 - c. Command and control management structure
 - d. Ample opportunity to learn and grow

4. The 33rd IRI survey referred to in this chapter revealed that the least frequent response by VR agencies to the looming shortage of VR counselors was
 - a. Allowing caseloads to grow larger
 - b. Developing stronger relationships with VR counselor training programs at colleges and universities
 - c. Restructuring existing service delivery systems and processes

5. In Schein's view, an organization's ability to adapt and change is most severely restricted when
 - a. New employees do not adopt the current organizational culture
 - b. Leaders do not conduct an in-depth exploration of all three levels of the existing culture
 - c. Members of the organization fail to learn from past mistakes
 - d. The values of the organization do not align with the values of the employees

6. The three basic underpinnings of a bureaucracy according to Edwin Bliss are
 - a. Bricks, mortar, and people
 - b. Chain of command, policy, and federal regulations
 - c. Tradition, centralized control, and red tape
 - d. Civil service, legislative activity, and diffused authority

7. For funding purposes, the primary measure of effectiveness in the state system is
 - a. Number of consumers in a caseload
 - b. Number of eligibility decisions per counselor
 - c. Number of successful employment outcomes
 - d. Ratio of counselors to consumers

8. The survey conducted as part of this monograph and the AIR study of 2005 spoke to the proliferation of _____ as a means of offsetting counselor shortages.
 - a. Teams
 - b. Subcontracting
 - c. Supervisors
 - d. Tax incentives

9. The futurist Ed Barlow, quoted in this chapter, stressed the importance of which concept as a means of telling the VR story?
 - a. Success 101
 - b. The Selling of the Counselor
 - c. Branding

10. A significant impediment to both recruitment and retention can be
 - a. The overemphasis on Status 26 closures
 - b. Structure of the civil service system
 - c. Union resistance to change
 - d. All of the above

Chapter 4

CURRENT AND FUTURE SOURCES OF QUALIFIED VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION COUNSELORS

By Amos Sales and Larry G. Kontosh

As noted in the introduction of this monograph, a majority of state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies utilize the Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) as the national certification standard to determine if their counselors meet Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) standards. For these agencies, counselors must have, at a minimum, a qualifying master's degree. These states may choose to select a higher standard but are not required to do so. For example, some states have chosen the actual CRC credential as their standard. Others have chosen eligibility to sit for the CRC exam as their standard (which includes experiential and other requirements). It must be emphasized that some states have chosen other standards, based upon state licensing, certification, or registration requirements. These standards vary considerably. For example, while some require a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling, others allow for master's degrees in related fields. Some allow for a bachelor's degree. Much of this chapter focuses on states that require at least a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling, as this is the standard for most.

Current and future sources of qualified VR counselors can be easily identified through review of the number of master's-level rehabilitation counseling programs that exist nationally and the number of graduates they produce each year. For various reasons, this number of yearly graduates is inadequate to meet the current and future recruitment and replacement needs of state VR agencies.

This chapter discusses the current challenges in achieving adequate numbers of qualified staff and offers recommendations to resolve them.

The Background of CSPD

The Census Bureau (Waldrop & Stern, 2003) has indicated that 49.7 million people five and older in the United States have a disability. Under the services provided by the Rehabilitation Act, the key to employment for all these individuals is empowerment, informed choice, and the support of a qualified VR counselor. The knowledge, skills, and abilities required of a qualified VR counselor are significant and varied. In addition to excellent personal and counseling skills, the counselor must have expertise in the medical and psychological aspects of disability, comprehensive assessment, career planning, independent living factors, job analysis, accommodation, assistive technology, supported employment, case and caseload management, community resources, and fiscal management. Research, as discussed in the next paragraph, has indicated that this expertise is best attained through a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling.

Demands of consumer groups and advocates for people with disabilities have focused on the qualifications of state VR counselors who provide direct services. Research has also contributed by suggesting that a counselor with a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling obtains a higher number of employment outcomes for consumers with severe disabilities than a VR counselor without a master's degree and provides these outcomes at a lower cost to the state VR agency (Cook & Bolton, 1992; Szymanski, 1991; Szymanski & Danek, 1992; Szymanski & Parker, 1989). Such research has reinforced the fact that master's-level counselors are key to effective services. In order to improve the entire rehabilitation system's capacity to ensure that quality services are provided to consumers, the CSPD was conceived as a state VR system enhancement. It is designed to improve the competency of personnel currently working in the system and to recruit qualified personnel in the future.

The national effort to implement CSPD was first introduced in outline form in the 1992 Rehabilitation Act Amendments (Pub. L. 102-569). The reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act of 1998 (Pub. L. 105-220) then required that CSPD be addressed in each state's plan. A commissioner's policy memorandum (Schroeder, 1998) and Department of Education regulations (34 CFR 361.18) defined the basic requirements as establishing qualified personnel standards for employing rehabilitation personnel, including VR counselors, that are consistent with any national or state-approved or state-recognized certification, licensing, or registration that applies to a particular profession. This requirement affects not only new employees but also current staff, who must be trained to meet the standard.

Status of CSPD Implementation to Date

CSPD was implemented based on the political pressure of many disability advocacy groups, who envisioned that their best support and empowerment could be assured by qualified professionals providing the best quality of service possible. However, this potential may not be realized, and it is important to explain why.

CSPD, among other things, requires that each state VR agency establish standards for professional and paraprofessional staff. Standards for a particular profession must be based on the "highest requirements in the State," which is defined in the regulations as the highest entry-level academic degree needed for any national or state-approved or -recognized certification, licensing, or registration. When such national or state requirements do not exist, personnel standards must be based upon comparable requirements that apply to that profession. Thus, for rehabilitation counselors, if state-approved or -recognized certification, licensing, or registration requirements do exist within the state (such as licensing standards for rehabilitation counselors in other state agencies), then the state VR agency must base its personnel standards for counselors on one of the following:

- The highest entry-level degree needed under the existing state requirements
- A degree that exceeds the degree needed under the existing state requirements
- The degree required for the national CRC requirement: a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling or a closely related field

If there are no state-approved or -recognized certification, licensing, or registration requirements for rehabilitation counselors, the state VR agency must base its personnel standards for counselors on one of two factors:

- The degree needed to meet the national CRC requirements: a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling or a closely related field
- New state certification, licensing, or registration requirements for rehabilitation counselors developed by the appropriate certification, licensing, or registration body of the state

The Commission on Rehabilitation Certification has offered the CRC certification process for master's-degree-trained personnel in rehabilitation counseling since 1976. State VR agencies began to require the master's degree related to such certification with the passage of the 1992 amendments and the implementation of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) regulations in 1997. In most state VR agencies, the resulting minimum academic standard for VR counselors is a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling. Yet, in 1998, only 42% of states had adopted a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling as their standard for VR counselors (Miller, 1999). This percentage was found in informal surveys conducted in 1998 and 1999 by the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) in conjunction with RSA. The survey included all 80 general, blind, and combined agencies in all 50 states.

RSA data (Chan, 2005) indicate that, of the estimated 8,891 VR counselors working in state VR agencies in 2002, only 42% had master's degrees in rehabilitation counseling. This percentage is essentially the same as that of 1998. However, RSA data (C. Marschall, personal communication, February 6, 2007) indicate that in 2007, 67% of VR counselors met the CSPD standard. While 6% to 10% of states have standards below the master's level, it is clear that CSPD has had some impact in terms of percentage of counselors employed who have a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling.

Challenges to Implementing CSPD

As a result of CSPD mandates, state VR agencies are confronted with major recruitment, retraining, and retention challenges in relation to qualified VR counselors. While some states have been very successful in meeting CSPD requirements, many others have not. The RSA national study on rehabilitation counseling (Chan, 2005), the Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE) yearly graduation reports, and the CSAVR Status Survey (Chan, 2004) have highlighted the problems—what Timothy Muzzio (2006) from RSA has called a “crisis” related to recruitment and retention of qualified VR counselors. Specific challenges are discussed in more detail below.

Recruitment Challenges

Given the current number of graduates, it is obvious that VR counselor education programs do not produce enough graduates to meet current recruitment and retention needs of VR agencies. The 25th Institute on Rehabilitation Issues monograph entitled *Employment Outcomes Through VR Counselors Who Meet the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development Requirements* (Miller, 1999) first conveyed this message in 1999.

Projections for supply and demand have been reported elsewhere in this monograph but bear repeating, since the shortfall is a major challenge. The RSA national study on rehabilitation counseling

(Chan, 2005) addressed the resource development issue as follows. CORE-accredited master's degree programs in 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 had a yearly average enrollment of 3,359. The number of yearly graduates averaged 1,262, with an average of 298 of these being state VR agency employees being educated to meet CSPD standards and 964 being new graduates. This overall graduation rate remains quite stable. In 2006, CORE data, as presented in the introduction of this monograph, indicate that state VR agencies were able to recruit less than one-third of the new VR counseling graduates they need to employ. Thus, state agencies that have master's-level requirements may need to continue to hire below the CSPD standard.

The need for new hires comes from two sources, replacements and growth:

- Based on normal attrition rates, including retirements, approximately 25% of staff will need to be replaced by new qualified VR counselors within any 5-year period. This means that approximately 2,000 VR counselors will be needed every 5 years simply to meet the current replacement need. In the short term, this number may be higher. VR experienced tremendous growth immediately after the reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Many states significantly increased their counselor workforce the following year. The employees who were hired, many of whom had some experience in other state agencies, are near retirement.
- Projections also indicate that as the disability rates within our communities grow, additional counselors will be needed to address those needs. A conservative growth rate of 5% indicates that an additional 200 counselors can be expected to be needed.

Retraining Challenges

It is estimated that the total cost to upgrade all existing staff (including counselors and supervisors) to CSPD standards would

be up to \$50.5 million (Chan, 2005). In 2002, state and federal agencies spent \$6.5 million to upgrade credentials of state VR counselors—about one-eighth of the amount needed. State VR agency projections of being able to train current staff to meet CSPD requirements by 2010 simply will not occur.

On a national average, state VR agencies continue to hire about 38% of their counselor replacement needs with counselors who have master's degrees in rehabilitation counseling. The other 62% are employed without the master's degree, most of whom will need to be trained to the CSPD standard. The "to be trained" pool grows much faster than the "already trained" pool (Chan, 2005).

The Challenges of Salary for Recruitment and Retention

The RSA national study on rehabilitation counseling reported that the average salary for beginning counselors with master's degrees within the state VR agencies was \$4,000 to \$6,000 below competitive salaries in other agencies. The small pool of graduates gravitates to better-paying positions (Chan, 2003, 2005).

The salary issue affects not only recruitment but also retention. The study indicated that 26% of VR counselors were planning to leave the agency for voluntary reasons, with the primary reason being pay. Counselors with one to four years of employment in the state VR agency and those under 40 years of age had a higher rate of planned departures (32% and 36%, respectively). This scenario affects the investment in training as well: many of those who receive support to obtain their master's degree leave the state VR agency within two years of graduation, either going to higher-paying positions or being promoted to supervisor positions in the agency.

The problems lower salaries cause in terms of recruitment and retention for the agency are obvious. The need exists to continue to enhance salary levels of VR counselors (Sales, 2006).

Challenges Related to Rehabilitation Education

The CORE website now identifies 102 CORE-accredited rehabilitation counselor education (RCE) programs. Since 1998, state agencies, the RSA, and rehabilitation educators in these programs have made a concentrated effort to provide the opportunity for state VR counselors to pursue a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling through CSPD. There are perceived benefits but several possible risks for rehabilitation educators in responding. This section discusses the RSA grant program and some of its challenges as well as challenges related to distance learning and experiential learning methods.

The CSPD long-term training grant program. In 1999, RSA began a new initiative to help states reach their CSPD requirements by increasing grants to RCE programs. These grants were intended to help state VR agencies retrain VR counselors to required degree standards. Projects were expected to develop innovative approaches (e.g., distance learning, competency-based programs, and other methods) to maximize participation in, and the effectiveness of, project training. Innovative training approaches were defined as those that addressed the unique learning needs of currently employed VR counselors, reflected their learning styles and professional experiences, and were accessible at a time and in a place that would maximize participation. Ten awards were initially funded in 1999, and the total now has increased to 12 RSA-funded programs (C. Marschall, personal communication, February 6, 2007).

While many RCE programs have responded to develop CSPD programs, some faculty in RCE programs do not see preparation of counselors for state VR agencies as their primary educational responsibility. They have chosen not to respond to the need to develop new educational alternatives to meet the needs inherent in CSPD. Two other reasons have been given for why RCE programs have not developed CSPD programs. First, enrolling increased numbers of students within a program of study does not necessarily result in increased funding in that area and may lead only to an

increased workload. Second, incentives for RCE faculty to pursue RSA long-term training grants are minimal except for the ability to provide some students with financial support.

RSA can only fund training grants if 75% of the long-term training grant award is designated to students. After deducting the 8% indirect costs, this leaves only 17% of the grant award available for administrative costs. As an example, then, with an RSA limit of \$150,000 for each long-term training grant award, the remaining \$25,500 does not cover the operational and secretarial support costs incurred by the grant function, nor would it cover the costs to develop, deliver, and evaluate distance learning programs. Major time commitments are required to administer these grants. Pursuit of RSA grant awards is discouraged in many university settings because of the very low fixed indirect cost recovery rate of 8%. This rate is well below the minimum for administering a grant within an institution. To compound this, RSA requires a 10% match to receive a grant award. Given these grant restrictions, incentives for faculty to gain the experience needed and pursue long-term training grants to address CSPD needs are minimal.

Distance learning. The idea of distance education is not new. It is a combination of old teaching practices and new technology. Examples include instruction via the Internet, teleconferencing, videoconferencing, videotape learning, and web-based training. Based on state needs assessments, these types of programs would be in demand from employees of state VR agencies. According to Sue Denys from the Commission on Rehabilitation (personal communication, March 2006), approximately half of CORE master's-level rehabilitation counseling programs now indicate that they offer distance education coursework, and 20% indicate that they offer a distance education degree.

While the need to move quickly to address CSPD needs exists, it is also important to evaluate the effectiveness of alternative methods of delivery of RCE degree programs. Work-study models, videotape and videoconferencing approaches, and Internet delivery strategies need to be evaluated in longitudinal studies. RSA and

rehabilitation educators should consider implementing experimental and innovative funding specific to the challenges inherent in evaluating the wide range of the current rehabilitation educational responses to CSPD.

Experiential programs. Most faculty members involved in CSPD efforts confirm that the vast majority of CSPD students have been well trained by their state VR agency in the problem-solving model of counseling, which can be in conflict with an empowerment perspective (Sales, 2007). They also confirm how difficult it is to change this perspective within a faculty-supervised counseling practicum. Some rehabilitation counseling distance education programs farm out practicum supervision to master's-level counselors employed within the state VR agency, who may themselves follow such a problem-solving approach. This type of supervision may not be emphasizing empowerment concepts. Research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of this supervision approach.

Possible Ways to Increase the Supply

Chan (2005) listed five possible ways to meet the shortage of VR counselors:

1. Increase the number of RSA training programs
2. Increase RSA training grant salary support for faculty
3. Increase the enrollment capacity
4. Increase RSA support of new students versus CSPD students
5. Increase recruitment to state agencies

The study discarded the first option as not possible; saw the second as a possibility; suggested within the third strategy that programs could increase student-to-faculty ratios by 25%, which seemed very optimistic; viewed option four as not viable; and endorsed the fifth strategy. To pursue the fifth strategy, problems related to low salary and high caseloads (an average of 119 cases per counselor, with a range of 25 to 275) need to be resolved and/or the benefits of employment marketed better.

With the challenges and these options in mind, we present our recommendations.

Recommendations for Recruitment and Retention

A variety of specific recruitment and retention recommendations are needed to reduce the demand for master's-level VR counselors by state VR agencies, to increase the supply of master's-level graduates of rehabilitation counseling programs of study, and to retain VR counselors once they are employed. Building a cadre of master's-level VR counselors requires a strategic approach that relies on a variety of retention and recruitment activities. Turnover and the lack of such applicants negatively impact the delivery of quality VR services.

Recruitment Strategies: Increase Supply

RSA, state VR agencies, and rehabilitation educators should collaborate in developing a national recruitment strategy.

For Federal Partners

- Take a leadership role in developing a national recruitment strategy. This would reduce the need for CSPD retraining.
- With state agencies, agree on a new definition for “retraining” to the CSPD standard for VR counselors with some work experience so that such counselors would not be required to obtain the master’s degree in states requiring it in their CSPD standard.
- Provide more flexibility in funding personnel and development for building capacity in RCE programs. RSA long-term training grants now require 75% of the funding for student stipends. In the long run, more graduates would result from a more flexible approach. Clearly, there are not enough faculty or programs to meet current CSPD needs. Resources need to be enhanced.

- Concentrate RSA training resources again on preparing new qualified VR counselors for the field. The current RSA long-term training CSPD funding in support of now 12 programs came about in 1999. After seven years of funding and major efforts on the part of rehabilitation education and state agencies to respond to retraining needs under CSPD, it is time to reconsider whether CSPD funding is appropriately focused.
- Emphasize the need to ensure that all new hires for VR counselors in state-federal VR agencies meet CSPD standards. Exceptions would be related to the need to employ counselors requiring specialized skills to counsel unique populations, such as individuals who are deaf.
- Increase RSA training grant salary support for faculty. Because of the clinical nature of the degree program, student numbers cannot be increased without corresponding increases in faculty numbers.
- Increase RSA training grant allocations to doctoral-level rehabilitation education training grants. Almost half of the current VR counselor faculty are projected to leave over the next 10 years, and current doctoral programs cannot meet the replacement need. The number of master's-level graduates cannot be increased unless faculty numbers are increased.

For State Partners

- Advocate for the establishment of new RCE programs in states where none currently exist. State VR programs that have RCE programs in their state and collaborate with them are more effective in meeting CSPD requirements. With appropriate rationale, this possibility does exist.

- Pursue collaborative arrangements with a university counseling program to deliver a degree. Appropriate rehabilitation courses could be obtained from state RCE programs.
- Recruit counselors from other agencies through marketing of the total benefits package, not just salary.
- Implement joint recruitment efforts at job fairs (local or national), professional conferences, or educational events (e.g., seminars that provide continuing education units [CEUs]) using community links and partnerships with outside agencies. Through joint recruiting efforts, costs are shared, personnel are minimized, and efforts are maximized. The sharing of the efforts and person-power to recruit and the sharing of resources between all VR partners is fertile ground.
- Make use of the human resource development concept of “grow your own.” Identify paraprofessionals or clerical staff who are interested in receiving the training to become a qualified VR counselor. This strategy can provide a new resource of skilled professionals. Paid internships can also be offered to an agency’s own employees.
- Use VR counselors as recruiters in the educational institutions they graduated from. While the role of VR counselor within the state agency is demanding and time intensive, this recruiting activity may be an effective use of professional time. Having alumni relate their fulfilling experiences as VR counselors provides a rich and personal way to recruit new employees.
- Diversify the applicant pools to increase qualified applicants. By expanding applicants to include other types of counseling graduates (e.g., substance abuse counselors and mental health counselors), a significant number of additional applicants becomes available.

- Use specialized caseloads as an inducement to new applicants. For example, when recruiting substance abuse students, the state agency could offer the applicants a caseload of persons with substance abuse problems. Similarly, mental health students may consider agency employment if they would work with persons with mental health problems. By linking the uniqueness of the caseload characteristics to the specialized training in the larger applicant pool, an inducement to apply is created.

For Educational Partners

- Build into other counseling subspecialty programs at the master's-degree level those courses that would allow the student access to the CRC examination as well as licensure examinations in their home states.
- Maintain the highest enrollment possible given resources.
- Maintain a close partnership with the state VR agency and collaborate in career fairs. Additionally, invite VR to make presentations in classes, participate in advisory boards, offer student “supports” (practicum and internship placements), and engage in mutual recruitment efforts.
- Target recruitment at the high school as well as college level.
- Consider utilizing state VR agency staff as instructors for classes to achieve CSPD outcomes. The use of doctoral-level staff is encouraged to ensure that master's -level coursework could apply to a doctoral program of study. Team-teaching, or the pairing of VR staff and university faculty, is a creative way to interest new graduates in state VR programs.
- Utilize adjunct faculty creatively in distance learning. The ability to find and use adjunct faculty should be easily achievable.

Retired state VR agency staff, retired professors, and current staff are all possibilities to consider. Models using adjunct faculty in distance learning include travel to remote areas of states to ensure face-to-face instruction.

- Carefully develop practicum and internship experiences. Internships for current VR counselors should not become redundant or deter their current role or performance. In identifying tasks for practicum, the state VR agencies and RCE programs may want to consider agency-related special projects or surveys. Other areas to consider for practicum projects are in the ever-changing areas of assistive technology, the Americans with Disabilities Act, job coaching, assessment, employment (placement), automation (as it relates to websites), and client service systems.

Recruitment Strategies: Reduce Demand

For State Partners

- Reduce the system's demand for VR counselors by using casework aides as case processors, document gatherers, schedulers, etc. This approach frees up VR counselors to focus on other tasks.
- Utilize VR counselors as team leaders, where the team jointly manages cases and provides the required services on the case. This model may allow for the team to be responsible for larger caseloads and for paraprofessional staff to handle routine processing and caseload management.
- Concurrently with team caseload management, focus VR counselors on the more complex cases or on specialty caseloads. Other routine or simpler cases could be processed by paraprofessional staff. Neither of these options should be construed to suggest that the four core tasks assigned to VR counselors should be reassigned to paraprofessional staff.

- Use VR counselors as primary providers of in-house services (e.g., job club, job search skills training, resume writing). If less of counselors' time is spent on routine processing, their advanced skills set could be better used, and this approach could reduce the need to outsource these services (thus potentially saving money).

Retention Strategies

Retention strategies, if implemented in a long-term plan, can be effective in reducing state agency turnover.

For Federal Partners

- Take a lead in the development of a national retention strategy.
- Allow stipend paybacks only at state-federal agencies.

For State Partners

- Develop and/or expand a career ladder that allows upward mobility for VR counselors within a totally clinical job description. Some states promote VR counselors to local office operational supervisor. Another option would be to institute a progression that is completely clinical: thus, entry-level VR counselor, senior rehabilitation clinical counselor (specialized caseload), specialized clinical unit manager (e.g., transition unit). Such a progression allows for the utilization of VR counselors' advanced clinical skills and interventions. With each level of upward progression comes increased responsibilities and commensurate remuneration.
- Support CRC certification and/or CEU course opportunities. Support in this area includes the reimbursement of application fees or tuition for CEUs, time off to take certification exams or attend CEU events, and courses

given on site. Additionally, college courses for initial master's program work should be considered part of the ongoing development of qualified personnel.

- Offer students with degrees from other disciplines advanced training support. College courses and CEU opportunities (offered on site) that result in CRC certification and/or state licensure could be offered as an employee benefit. Additionally, the agency could become registered as a post-degree internship site so that graduates would have registered supervision at their place of employment for the purposes of achieving a state license.
- Make use of distance learning options, along with an on-site training model. Distance education provides at-work training options that can be utilized for employee advancement and skill building.
- Consider monetary incentives. Salary increases for successful completion of the CRC exam and signing bonuses for promotions concurrent with extended employment guarantees could help keep professionals at the agency.

For Educational Partners

- Emphasize a commitment to lifelong learning among graduates.
- Collaborate with state VR agencies to develop mentoring activities for counselors.
- Collaborate with state VR agencies to develop mentoring self-directed learning, placing more emphasis on evaluating the effectiveness of these strategies.

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Study Questions

1. How many state VR agencies utilize the CRC as the national standard to determine if their counselors meet CSPD standards?
 - a. All
 - b. 40%
 - c. Most
 - d. A few

2. The Census Bureau identified _____ million people aged 5 and older in the United States as having a disability.
 - a. 29.7
 - b. 39.7
 - c. 49.7
 - d. 59.7

3. Research reinforcing the fact that a counselor with a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling has a higher productivity level than those without the degree is associated with
 - a. Szymanski
 - b. Rogers
 - c. Ellis
 - d. Patterson

4. CSPD became a legislated requirement within the Rehabilitation Act of
 - a. 1986
 - b. 1990
 - c. 1992
 - d. 1998

5. When CSPD was implemented through policy and Department of Education regulations, approximately _____ percent of state-federal VR counselors met the standard.
 - a. 40
 - b. 50
 - c. 60
 - d. 70

6. It is suggested that federal partners collaborate with what other partner(s) to form a national recruitment strategy.
 - a. The state agency
 - b. Rehabilitation educators
 - c. Both of the above
 - d. Neither of the above

7. A retention tool suggested for the state agency is
 - a. Expanding the career ladder
 - b. Expanding the scope of practice
 - c. Adding more paraprofessionals
 - d. None of the above

8. A way for the state agency to recruit more applicants to the VR counselor position would be to “grow your own.” This concept means
 - a. Paying for new applicants to go to school
 - b. Identifying paraprofessional employees who are interested in becoming VR counselors and providing a means for these personnel to obtain training
 - c. Sending staff to in-house training
 - d. None of the above

9. Hiring applicants with master's degrees in other counseling disciplines and providing in-house or college-based training to supplement the degree is an example of
- a. A retention strategy
 - b. A recruitment strategy
 - c. Both
 - d. Neither
10. Increasing support for new faculty and thereby increasing enrollment capacity is seen as a strategy for
- a. The federal partner
 - b. The state agency
 - c. The rehabilitation education program
 - d. All of the above

Chapter 5

MEETING THE DEMANDS OF TODAY'S WORKFORCE THROUGH INNOVATIVE MARKETING TECHNIQUES

By Melissa C. Pemberton and Ileen Herberg

One of the toughest challenges that the vocational rehabilitation (VR) profession will need to overcome is improving the marketing techniques and strategies to attract qualified candidates to hire and retain as VR counselors. To initiate an effective strategy for increasing the pool of qualified candidates, it is key to strengthen partnerships with university programs and attract more candidates into the pipeline of university programs in rehabilitation counseling and ultimately into the state VR system.

This chapter focuses on the current issues in marketing to prospective and current counselors, as well as what is being done throughout the country in VR and university programs and partnerships. It also highlights emerging and innovative practices and looks at doing business differently to meet today's workforce demands and market the state VR agencies' assets effectively.

Marketing the State Agency: The Need and the Opportunity

The state VR system is well aware of the need to recruit more graduates and potential and prospective employees into the field. For many state VR agencies, turnover is at an all-time high and recruitment efforts are met with frustration. As outlined elsewhere in this document, a number of challenges are evident:

- VR is one of many industries that will be involved in the brain drain that has begun to occur in fields and other industries around the country. Brain drain is usually understood as the permanent loss of highly skilled and educated people and its detriment on a country's social and economic development (Horvat, 2004). When faculty numbers shrink, the programs can produce fewer graduates. The public VR program then has to compete for a smaller pool of graduates whose employment options are growing.
- Civil service hiring practices can be tedious and long, which ultimately affects the number of hires.
- Is our profession secure? The reauthorization and its effect on their future weighs on the mind of new graduates.
- Salary issues are significant. Employees are looking to areas for economic growth, and employers who compete for rehabilitation professionals have fewer requirements for continuing education. Wages are not commensurate with required experience and education.
- Applicants are savvy about where they work. Prospective employees are exploring the office culture and climate before choosing a workplace.
- Does VR market to what's happening in terms of sustainability and relevance to its customers as well as those it wants to recruit? The current political climate is such that VR must be sure that it is aligning its resources and marketing efforts toward the returning veterans and what the program can do to meet the demand of this growing population as well as prepare its future and current staff. By collaborating and creating partnerships with organizations, agencies, and other groups that are in the spotlight, the public VR program will be able to

demonstrate its value in meeting that group's needs and increase the visibility and the viability of the profession and the program.

The American Institutes for Research study, *The Demand for and the Supply of Qualified State Rehabilitation Counselors* (Chan & Ruedel, 2005), yielded in-depth and illuminating findings. Their preliminary projections through 2007 indicate that about 1,855 of the new graduates in rehabilitation counseling are expected to enter a state VR agency, filling approximately 42% of the expected demand of 3,775 counselor positions (Chan & Ruedel, 2005), leaving quite a shortfall. Their recommendations concur with those of Smith et al. (2006) and their supply and demand theory, in which a larger supply of qualified VR professionals is available when both job attractiveness and quantity increase.

Job attractiveness is a key factor in an effective marketing strategy. When graduate students in rehabilitation counseling were surveyed about their job search and career choices over a year period, beginning a few months prior to graduation, respondents indicated that when they did not apply for state positions they made that decision based not upon what they found but upon what they heard (Chan & Ruedel, 2005). This is further evidence that an effective marketing strategy focused on increasing a positive perception of the state VR system would positively affect the percentage of newly qualified VR counselors who apply.

Marketing VR as a viable, creative, innovative field for counselors is at a critical juncture. Not only are we marketing to fill our university programs, but we are also marketing to entice new professionals into the state VR agencies. Marketing is not a typical activity of social service programs. Times are changing, and the need to look at investing energy and funding into that process has come. It is an opportunity to look to the business community to replicate their exemplary marketing strategies.

When marketing any product, a competitive company looks at what its product does and why consumers would purchase it over the competitor's product. The company defines its target market, the image or perception of itself that it wants to convey to its target market, what will attract buyers, and what those buyers are willing to pay for the product.

Hardcastle and Powers (2004) delineated between markets and marketing, stating that markets are sets of people who have interests in services or products, while marketing is the design and implementation of programs to foster exchanges between those who provide products and services and those who seek them. Similarly, VR needs to identify that its market is the qualified VR counselor and the perception that candidates/applicants and current staff have of the organization. From this, VR can target efforts to the market or those who share similar values or are stakeholders. To attract and retain candidates and staff, VR will need to look at the new workforce and their needs and expectations and adapt the culture and climate of the workplace without compromising the core mission and values. Finally, the state VR system will need to identify and market its assets to align with the target market's workplace needs.

Marketing VR Employment to Millennials

The newest generational cohort to enter the workforce is the Millennials. This generation is typically defined as being born between 1980 and 2000. Although there is no absolute beginning or end to a generational group, each group typically spans 15 to 20 years (Sherman, 2006). Millennials have made us start to acknowledge the importance of marketing to their generation in terms of recruitment and retention because they represent such a large part of the workforce. Demographically, they represent approximately 100 million people, about 33% larger than the Baby Boomer population (Atkinson, 2004).

This group does not expect to have a career with one employer, according to Kirk J. Hulett (2006), senior vice president of practice management for Securities America. Although this generation's loyalty is not inherent to an employer, Hulett (2006) points out that it can be nurtured. Attracting this group will take a nontraditional approach, and employers are encouraged to focus their recruitment efforts on how the job will help Millennials build immediate skills and offer ongoing skill-building opportunities to retain them (Hulett, 2006).

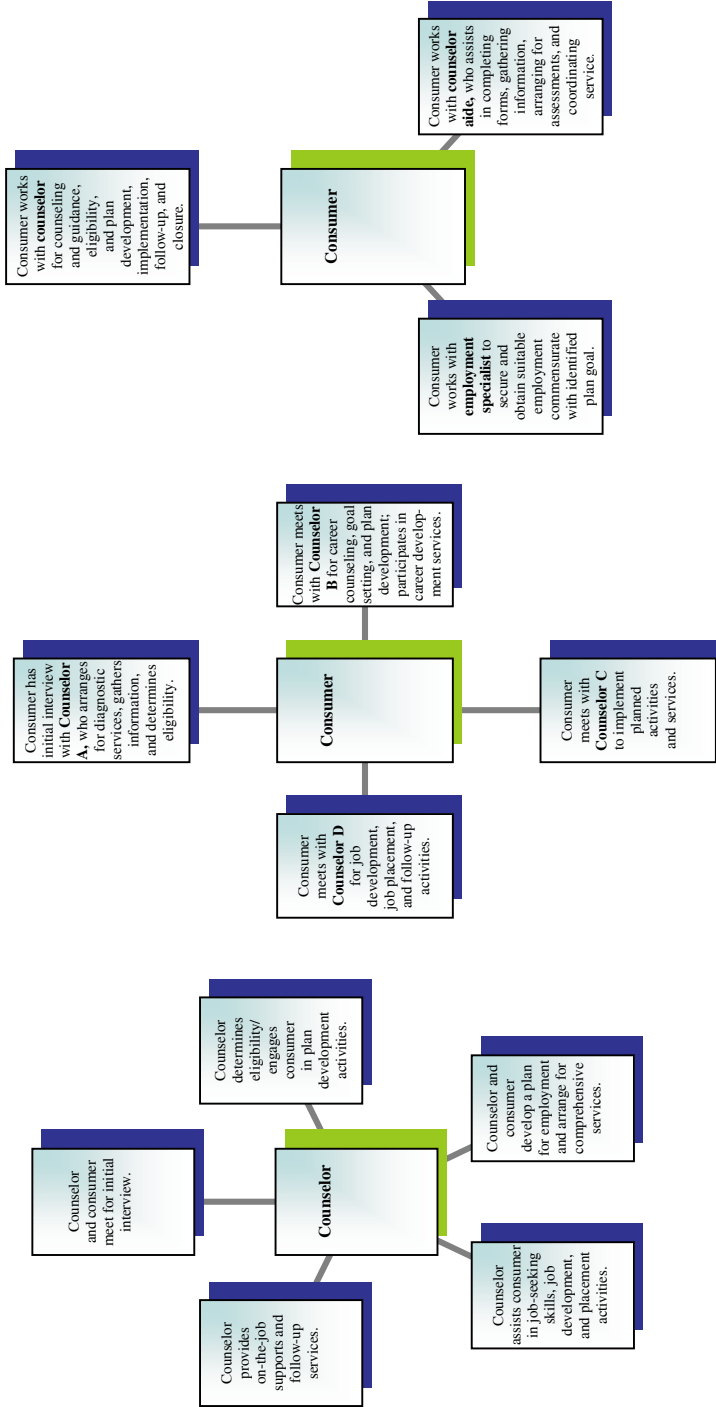
Young people of the Millennial generation grew up with for their insights and understanding of technology and its use (Sherman, 2006). Highlighting the innovative practices and opportunities for Millennials in areas such as rehabilitation technology and building expertise within a targeted disability group will make the state VR agencies more attractive to this generation.

The public VR program must also pay attention to how generational differences have impacted the consumers it serves. Like this new generation of VR counselors, the consumers of Generation X and the Millennials are different than those the program is used to serving. Consumers of this generation are impacted by legislation that affected mainstreaming and integration. They may not be coming to VR first and may come through one of the community partner organizations. They are aware of more resources, and the opportunities for assessment, career training, and employment continue to grow and change with technology and innovation. Their networks in the community are more established, which may in turn affect the referral process to VR. If the public VR program is going to be successful in competing to recruit and retain qualified VR counselors, then it will need to look at supporting the needs of the new consumer and provide the VR counselor with the resources and tools to facilitate successful rehabilitation outcomes.

A teaming approach may also appeal to Millennials. Some states have embraced a collaborative model in an effort to use trainees or staff who have not yet attained their master's degree to provide services such as case documentation, processing, and job search activities. But teaming may also add to VR counselors' job satisfaction, as they focus more on career counseling, planning, and service delivery. The use of aides on a team is one model; another approach would be to have VR counselors combine caseloads, with each counselor specializing in a part of the VR process. In that scenario, rather than developing skills that span the entire VR process and working with consumers at all stages of the process, counselors would be able to develop expertise and provide higher-quality services (see Figure 5-1). As the amendments to the Rehabilitation Act have significantly impacted the provision of services and enhanced consumer choice, empowerment, career development, and planning, the public VR program continues to provide services in its traditional one-counselor-per-consumer approach. This point is further illustrated in chapter 3, under "Restructuring Service Delivery Processes and Systems" and "Promoting Teamwork."

Recruiting Messages

Lynne Lancaster and David Stillman urged employers to market to the unique needs of the generations in their book *When Generations Collide* (2002). They defined the four generations in the workplace today and their motivators and factors of job satisfaction. Interestingly, what motivates the newest generation does not necessarily have to cost the employer. Lancaster and Stillman (2002) stated: "To compete for the most desirable employees, organizations have to stop trying to create a one-size-fits-all recruiting message. Instead companies need to first spend time identifying what they have to offer. Then they need to really understand what appeals to different generations."



Traditional Approach

Teaming Approach with Specialized Functions

Teaming Approach Using Counselor Aides

Figure 5-1. Three approaches to providing VR services. In the traditional approach, the counselor is at the center of the process, providing services to the consumer who in essence is making his or her way around the system. In the two teaming approaches, the consumer is at the center of the service delivery model, and a team of staff supports him or her throughout the process.

The book explored how the Peace Corps has been able to adapt their recruiting efforts: they went from marketing to Baby Boomers with a campaign aimed at adventurous idealists who wanted to change the world to an approach that targeted the skeptical Generation Xers who wanted to make a difference one person at a time (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). The public VR program has been in the business of individualized services and making the difference one consumer at a time from its inception. Using the Peace Corps as a model for a recruitment ad, a similar VR model could have a multigenerational appeal (see Figure 5-2).

When formulating a marketing plan for recruitment and retention, knowledge of what is being marketed is essential. Fortunately, state VR agencies are well aware of the issues impacting recruitment and retention. Perhaps one of their toughest challenges is that the VR profession remains a secret. However, through effective marketing of the profession and the public VR program, the secret can be revealed.

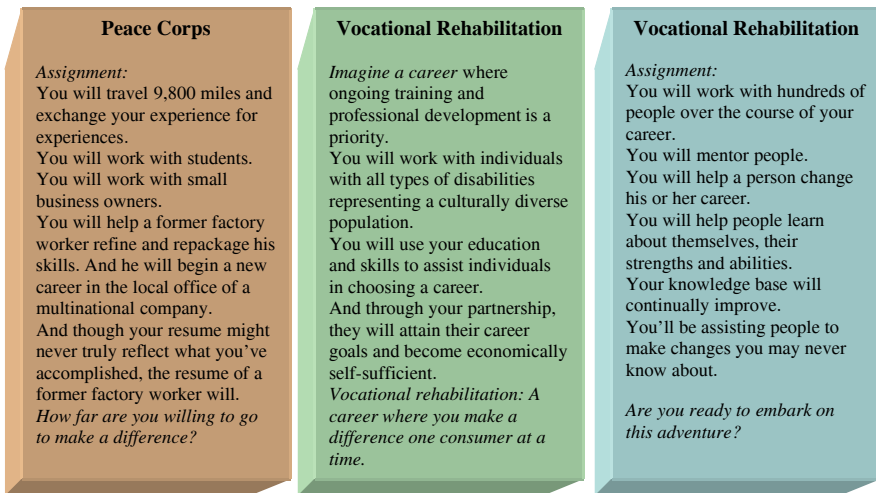


Figure 5-2. A Peace Corps ad compared with examples of VR ads. The ads appeal to candidates' idealism and values.

Letting the Secrets Out of the Box

To be competitive in marketing to the current labor force, some

questions will need to be answered. Is VR marketing to its strengths and highlighting its best qualities to recruit and retain staff? Has VR shown prospective employees what sets the program apart and makes it different? The time has come to give away the secret of VR. Here are some of those elements that highlight VR's assets:

- The state VR agencies offer counselors the opportunity to practice their profession without the concern of billable hours and time constraints, allowing counselors to focus on career guidance and counseling and assisting individuals with disabilities in achieving employment outcomes.
- Counselors are afforded opportunities to see the big picture, influence policy, and participate in decision making through an inclusive management structure.
- VR counselors receive intangible rewards of helping others, personal growth, and opportunities for learning; these were highlighted in the study by Bishop (2001) as areas of motivation for the profession.
- State employment offers a sense of security and an opportunity to obtain benefits and plan for future years. It also offers the opportunity for career growth within departments and collaboration with other agencies and administrations.

Tried-and-True Methodologies: Efforts of State VR Agencies and University Partners

State VR agencies have advantages over private industry in developing and implementing marketing techniques to attract and retain qualified staff. While private industry analyzes what competitors are doing to gain an advantage in the market share, the state VR system can look to colleagues throughout the country for effective marketing approaches to replicate and build on. While we may compete for the same qualified staff, we can share in each other's successes.

Recruitment

The state VR agencies have some unique employment benefits in the rehabilitation sector in terms of recruitment. Effective recruitment tools and marketing tactics highlight elements such as

- Paid internships that lead to employment
- Flexible schedules
- Tuition assistance, ongoing training, and professional development opportunities
- Experience in a wide variety of areas, such as assistive technology, a specialty caseload, and career assessment
- Leadership development and the opportunity to grow and develop within the organization
- State employment benefit packages—including pensions, which are diminishing in the private sector

Retention

Just as important as marketing to potential employees, the state VR agencies must market to their existing staff and demonstrate that they continue to be the employer of choice. What is known about these employees and what strategies will retain them? In surveying students graduating from rehabilitation counseling master's programs, Chan and Ruedel (2005) noted that supervisors that give counselors a higher level of autonomy were more likely to hire an individual with a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling. These results concur with findings from a survey of employees of one of the original demonstration projects that resulted from the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978, which was conducted over five years Schay (1988). This study looked at employee perception and job satisfaction and their link to performance appraisals, which determined employees' pay increase. Schay (1988) noted that although there was no indication of significant change in the area of job satisfaction over time at any of the sites, autonomy and challenging work were more closely associated with job satisfaction than with pay. Likewise, supervision and organizational

climate were more closely linked to job satisfaction than pay satisfaction (Schay, 1988). Based on this information, the author concluded that to retain staff, the primary focus should not be on pay but on creating a work environment that includes intrinsically motivating work and employee control (Schay, 1988). This finding leads us to the question of whether the state VR agencies are doing enough to create a work environment that allows for counselor autonomy and greater satisfaction with supervision.

Another indicator in job satisfaction and retention relates to clients served or services provided: Chan and Ruedel (2005) reported that nearly 50% of state counselors considered those two factors the number one reason for working in state VR agencies. This result relates to the need to focus on the internal perceptions of the employee regarding his or her job or job tasks. Intrinsic motivation refers to activity that is motivated by the satisfaction derived from the activity itself (Eisenberger, Cameron, & Edmonton, 1996). Intrinsic motivation has been shown to be a strong factor in determining job satisfaction (Schay, 1988). Given that employee job satisfaction is tied to employee turnover (Judge, 1993), employee job satisfaction needs closer scrutiny. Chan and Ruedel (2005) suggested that state VR agencies may consider restructuring counselors' role or consider creating a case assistant position filled by interns or individuals with bachelor's degrees to work with qualified VR counselors.

State VR agencies have important retention incentives at their disposal:

- Opportunities to work on local and statewide committees, workgroups, and organizations outside of VR
- Leadership and mentoring activities
- Ongoing education and training opportunities
- Opportunities to move within the organization and expand skill sets
- Career advancement

The ability to work with other agencies, administrations, and departments is an invaluable opportunity. When field staff become involved in these collaborative ventures, they can learn and be exposed to divergent viewpoints and ideas. They then become involved in the process of molding ideas and concepts into reality. This is a critical piece of professional development and retention. If VR is going to be successful in marketing to current staff, then submerging staff in activities within the organization as well as with its stakeholders is critical in fostering a culture of retention.

In addition, as VR looks to the new generation to fill vacancies, it must consider their needs to understand how to retain them. Lancaster and Stillman (2002) described the Millennials—the largest generational group to enter the workforce since the Baby Boomers—in one word: “collaborators.” For this generation, intangible rewards are more important than tangible rewards; thus, Lancaster and Stillman urged employers to make them feel an important part of the organization and show that their job has meaning. These will be the most important factors in retaining Millennials. Whatever generation the workforce is part of, intangible rewards will play a vital role in counselors’ perception of how much the agency values them as employees and team members. One intangible is the perception of success; agencies can create other levels of success for counselors to dispel the underlying message of success or fail within the public VR program. As chapter 3 points out in the section “Measuring Success,” the work that is done with a consumer who may not end up employed at closure often has a profound impact on the quality of life and independence of the individual served. Chapter 3 suggests looking at milestones—such as enhancing education, mobility, independence, and quality of life—to demonstrate the success of the case internally, rather than only looking at the quantitative measure of a successful rehabilitation by definition.

Other intangible rewards for staff could include inviting staff who demonstrate best practices to a high-level meeting, such as a national CSAVR meeting or a state executive planning meeting. States could also collaborate in an exchange program, in which counselors who work with similar populations in different states can spend time with each other as a learning opportunity, to share ideas as well as grow professionally.

Emerging and Innovative Practices

Successful marketing tactics in the business community are often innovative and tend to grab attention through surprise as they convince consumers that they need a product they would otherwise not think to purchase. Likewise, some programs throughout the country are equally savvy at creating and utilizing a variety of tools to recruit and retain qualified VR staff. This section highlights some programs that are doing business differently to recruit and retain qualified rehabilitation counselors.

The Prime Study Group held a breakout session at the fall 2006 national conference of the National Council on Rehabilitation Education inviting participants to discuss recruitment and retention issues. Several promising practices noted during the discussion are highlighted below.

Innovative Recruitment Strategies and Practices

- At the university level, California State University has increased enrollment in its program from 15 to 41 students in three years. Staff attributed the gains to recruiting in the community and collaboration with student support services to develop a relationship with students with disabilities. They hold information meetings with those students, provide a packet that includes recruitment information developed by the National Clearinghouse of Rehabilitation Training Materials, and send follow-up correspondence. Three weeks before school starts, they also offer an orientation for those students with the rehabilitation counseling program.
- Other efforts to recruit students into university rehabilitation counseling programs included marketing to consumer organizations and advocacy groups and marketing to other university programs that share similar values, such as special education.

- Georgia Department of Labor Rehabilitation Services reported a collaborative recruitment initiative between the state VR agency and the surrounding university programs in rehabilitation counseling. They developed a DVD and other materials that combined information about all of the programs so they could all use one tool.
- The Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation has achieved some remarkable successes in recruiting counselors who meet the requirements of the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD). Since October 2002, more than 200 new counselors have been hired, filling retirement vacancies and open positions. Several factors, such as the waiver of residency requirement, have attracted candidates for VR counselor positions. They also enjoy success through their paid internship program, which converts interns into permanent employees if they have a successful internship experience. The office's recruitment specialist, Cindy Mundis, attributes their recruitment success to maintaining personal relationships and proactively marketing state agency employment (Butler, 2006). They use the marketing tools developed by the National Clearinghouse of Rehabilitation Training Materials, maintain a presence at conferences, and market themselves in newsletters of groups and organizations considered stakeholders. Mundis reported that of the 200 new counselors hired since October 2002, 16% were from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds and 25% had disabilities. In addition, 40% of the new VR counselors hired in 2006 relocated to Pennsylvania from other states, bringing a wealth of talent, skill, and experience to the agency.
- In Maryland, Coppin State University has found success with hiring graduates from its Graduate Program for Advancing Undergraduate Students and Graduates from Diverse and Disability Groups (GPA-US/G). Michelle Phillips-Pointer (2006) attributed this preliminary success in part to their mentoring project, which matches graduate students from diverse minority and disability groups with mentors from diverse and disability groups serving in leadership positions in Federal Region III.

Phillips-Pointer (2006) discussed that after one year of successful operation of the rehabilitation mentoring component, three students were hired by state or federal VR agencies. Other gains were noted, in that one state administrator included the project and its subsequent mentoring component as part of his state's diversity plan. 72% of the students have spent more than the required hours in mentoring activities with their mentors, indicating strong support for the students and their interest in the activities (Phillips-Pointer, 2006).

Innovative Retention Strategies and Practices

- The Arizona Rehabilitation Services Administration has developed a counselor advisory committee, which discusses current issues in the agency and makes recommendations for change. The committee is chaired and run by counselors and allows them to have a voice in the development of policy and the way services are delivered.
- The Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation gives each employee a \$750 allowance for professional development that is over and above their staff development activities. The office also reports paying their staff a \$2,000 bonus to become Certified Rehabilitation Counselors (CRCs).
- The Maryland Division of Rehabilitation Services has developed an ACTION Committee designed to foster employee satisfaction and retention. A quarterly newsletter is published that highlights division staff and their accomplishments. Groups are formed based upon staff interest to participate in public service activities as well as sports and recreational activities. They meet after work or during lunch. In addition, twice a year, a luncheon is held to honor staff members who were nominated by their colleagues. They are recognized for their commitment to the state VR agency's mission and vision, customer service

orientation, reliability and dependability in their service to the agency and clients, spirit of cooperation, and role as a team player in the office, agency, and community.

- The Missouri Division of Vocational Rehabilitation reported that it pays for recertification for the CRC to help staff maintain certification.
- The Oregon Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Services hosts a work culture training program. It found a need for self-care and hosted a day retreat throughout the state VR agency focused on rejuvenating activities.

Questions and Answers on Doing Business Differently

It is a very challenging time in the state VR system. To compete for qualified rehabilitation professionals, VR will need to embrace, as well as confront, its challenges and seek to improve recruitment and retention efforts to meet current demands.

Like many businesses today, VR struggles with making the workplace attractive to all generations. The older, more seasoned workers are needed to mentor and guide the newer workers who will replace them. Sherman (2006), the director of the Nursing Leadership Institute at Florida Atlantic University, discussed the use of information about the different generations in the workforce today and encouraged leaders to create a work environment that values generational differences and supports the needs of each individual. While seasoned workers mentor newer workers on the best practices and effective service delivery models, new workers mentor seasoned workers on using new technology in the workplace and using the Internet to glean the most up-to-date information and learn about emerging practices in the field. This cross-mentoring creates an environment where all generations are collaborating, enhancing best practices and adding to their own skill sets.

increasing, there is a critical need to develop innovative options to deal with the demands of the workplace. How can VR be responsive to demand in a different way? Here we offer some common questions and answers.

Can recruitment and retention efforts be enhanced by these marketing practices? Is VR marketing to its biggest stakeholder for recruitment?

Individuals with disabilities are the key stakeholders in the state VR system, as are collaborative partners from councils, professional organizations, and community groups. Focused efforts to recruit individuals with disabilities are critical to the program on several levels. These individuals are our greatest advocates, realizing the value of the public VR program first hand. Councils and advocacy groups have a vested interest in having the program continue to thrive. Invite them to join in recruitment efforts and activities. They should also be recognized as another source of a future workforce for rehabilitation.

Our professional organizations—such as the National Rehabilitation Association, its state chapters, and the student chapters on campuses throughout the country—are a vital network that needs to be utilized for marketing the profession as well as the program. The public VR program as well as the university programs can look to these professional organizations to collaborate on marketing and recruitment initiatives, as well as retention strategies.

What are the workforce expectations? What is the culture of the newest generations?

When we look at what is important to our employees and prospective employees, we need to look at the four generations in the workplace. Each generation has its own characteristics and culture. As we bring in the newest generation, the Millennials or Generation Y's, we need to ask ourselves what is important to them. Howe and Strauss (2000) urged employers to organize this

generation of workers in groups, structure their work, and give them constant feedback. This statement offers credence to the concept of working in teams with counselor aides, as mentioned earlier in the chapter.

Are supervisors becoming leaders in mentoring, coaching, and creating an office climate where counselors want to remain?

Has enough been done to assist supervisors in learning those coaching and mentoring skills that are essential for a successful and cohesive team? Office climate and culture are important factors in a prospective employee's choice of location. There is a need to ensure that administrators are responsive to the training needs of frontline supervisors and that they equip them with the skills needed to successfully lead teams. Continued efforts at developing and refining these skills and offering opportunities for mentoring and coaching for supervisors are essential to their professional development as well as job satisfaction.

Have counselors been given opportunities to participate in big-picture issues and in policy making, and are they able to influence decisions in addition to broader opportunities within their jobs?

Creating opportunities for counselors to be involved at all levels within the agency validates their professionalism, enhances their career growth, and encourages them to learn new skills. In turn, they return to their units with a renewed sense of vigor and purpose, which becomes a catalyst for other staff. Involvement of field staff is an essential ingredient of active retention efforts. This also goes hand in hand with creating opportunities within units for counselors to increase their skills. Encourage people to build on their skills by mentoring new counselors, being lead counselors, and providing office coverage.

Rather than keeping up with demand, how can we be responsive to demand in other ways?

Earlier on, we highlighted states that are teaming with individuals with disabilities. Can VR make these innovative practices the norm? The state VR agency leaders need to begin to think outside of the current structure and work within the state's personnel systems to bring about creative ways of doing business. As mentioned previously in this chapter, one approach to responding to demand in new ways is to change the current model—in which one counselor works with a consumer throughout the entire rehabilitation process—into a teaming approach. The new generation of consumers was discussed earlier as well. VR should consider whether the consumer can take on more responsibility for arranging for services and gathering information. Taking on these tasks would give the consumer more independence in the rehabilitation process and give the counselor more time to do the core functions of his or her job.

How do we reward staff within the confines of state government?

Rewarding staff is a common solution, but so often incentives and rewards last for a short period and then wither away. Professionalism and exemplary work need to be promoted continually. These messages can't get tossed aside when times are hectic. A concerted effort in this area directly relates to making staff practices more attractive. If effort and time are set aside to promote staff accomplishment, a strong message of commitment to the human resources within the organization is sent to staff. Many public agencies struggle with the inability to use monetary rewards when in fact they can use many resources at their disposal, such as a mentoring experience with a leader within the organization of their choice, the option of participating in an agency committee or initiative, or a day of leave. Agencies may want to consider creating a cafeteria-style menu of nonmonetary rewards that staff can select from when recognized. The agency then becomes viewed as a champion in staff recognition and development and an agency where people want to work.

In their book, Lancaster and Stillman (2002) cite Best Buy's ability to adapt to the new workforce and offer educational sabbaticals to employees with 5 years of service. Best Buy's program allows employees to take a 2-week professional sabbatical to study a topic in business, leadership, or technology.

How do we create training opportunities to match the increased knowledge base of our counselors?

In light of CSPD, VR agencies will need to reconsider the courses offered by their training departments. Aside from basic topics, there is a need for more complex and higher-level offerings for VR counselors hired with a master's degree who need the next level of training. Because of Pennsylvania's tremendous success in recruitment as noted earlier in this chapter, it reported being at "the tipping point." This phenomenon was described by Gladwell (2002) as the moment of critical mass, the threshold, the boiling point where essentially every action, however small, causes a chain reaction, whether slow or fast. After Pennsylvania hired 200 new counselors since implementing CSPD, it found it needed more complex training and staff development activities to retain them (Mundis & McKenzie, 2006). By addressing these next-level issues, VR can begin to meet the needs of post-master's-level counselors. These actions not only acknowledge the counselors' level of education and experience but also involve them in opportunities to grow within their profession.

Do supervisors and administrators, at times, short-change staff from training or involvement opportunities in an attempt to not overburden them?

Are managers guilty of denying or discouraging staff from partaking in some of these enhanced training opportunities, workgroups, or task forces because of their heavy workload? This IRI workgroup has dubbed this the "Rapunzel Syndrome," where counselors are expected to remain isolated in their towers to avoid being overburdened.

In reality, the participation on teams and committees infuses the workplace culture in the staff person and can be vital to their remaining in the job. As noted earlier, Schay (1988) pointed out that autonomy and challenging work are more closely tied to job satisfaction than pay. This point is further reinforced in this chapter in the discussion of the generational differences and what motivates each group. Staff training opportunities and activities need to be supported in the workplace so that workers are not overwhelmed upon returning to the office—which may make them feel that the training or other activity is not worth the time spent away. Effective strategies can be developed through office collaborations and caseload management and coverage.

Conclusion

The new workforce has specific needs in terms of retention and job satisfaction. Like some of the businesses and agencies mentioned in this chapter, VR must adapt its recruitment and retention strategy to capture and retain staff. As Lancaster and Stillman (2002) pointed out, the two most recent generations to enter the workforce, the Generation Xers, marked by skepticism, and the Millennials, known as realists, expect to collaborate and contribute in workplace decisions. Bruce Tulgan (2001), author of *Winning the Talent Wars*, suggested that companies should let employees know unequivocally that they are welcome back, noting that many Xers leave companies with no hard feelings, just a desire to gain additional skills. Tulgan pointed out that companies should stop thinking of employees who leave as “turncoats” and think of them as “alumni” or even “boomerangers,” welcoming them back when they’re ready to return (Tulgan, 2001). Looking at previous employees as another talent pool provides an employer with a resource of qualified and experienced workers. Creating an environment where staff feel welcome in returning can only improve the recruitment and retention of qualified VR counselors. An additional advantage of this type of environment is the “retiree boomeranger.” This individual retires from one entity to come back as a part-timer with a specific assignment, go to another agency to work, or work at the university level to educate the next generation, utilizing all of his or her expertise and experience.

While these generations offer challenges to business in recruitment and retention, much can be gained from their workplace needs. Lancaster and Stillman (2002) said that “as Millennials demand to be involved in work that has meaning, and expect to have fun along the way, they may never understand why a person would need to reward, retool, or renew, as they will see it as things you incorporate every day in your lives.” That doesn’t sound like a bad workplace culture to adopt.

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Study Questions

1. Improving marketing techniques and strategies to attract qualified candidates is critical to the state VR system because
 - a. Studies point to the significant number of openings in the next 10 years
 - b. The state VR system is at an all-time high rate of turnover of employees
 - c. The program is not well known among students
 - d. All of the above

2. Brain drain describes the following:
 - a. People decreasing their knowledge as they get older
 - b. Individuals who are constantly questioning and demanding answers where none may be found
 - c. Individuals educated either in their home country or abroad who do not remain or return to work
 - d. The dearth of information on a topic, making it difficult to research

3. Which of the following is not true of those in the Millennial generation?
 - a. The group does not expect to have a career with one employer
 - b. They represent approximately 100 million people, about 33% larger than the Baby Boomer population
 - c. Building immediate skills and offering ongoing skill-building opportunities is important to them
 - d. Working independently as opposed to being in teams is the preferred method of work

4. The following are effective recruitment and retention strategies for counselors:
 - a. Paid internships that lead to employment
 - b. Flexible work schedules
 - c. Leadership and mentoring activities
 - d. All of the above

5. Job satisfaction, a critical factor in retention of VR counselors, includes the
- Ability to serve clients and provide services to them
 - Ability to meet new social acquaintances at work
 - Ability to study for the CRC exam during work time
 - Ability to have student loans forgiven
6. An example of an innovative practice in recruitment and retention of VR counselors is
- Focusing efforts to recruit individuals with disabilities
 - Developing an office climate and culture that is essential for a cohesive team
 - Creating opportunities for counselors to be involved in projects and work groups
 - All of the above
7. Job attractiveness, a key factor in an effective marketing strategy, might include
- Providing lunch during interviews
 - Purchasing new office equipment for new hires
 - Looking at the new workforce and adapting the culture and climate of the workplace without compromising the core mission and values
 - Providing a signing bonus for people who commit to a 3-year contract with the agency
8. Through 2007, approximately 42% of the expected demand of open positions will be filled by new graduates.
- True
 - False
9. Faculty pools continue to shrink, which in turn affects the number of graduates that programs will produce.
- True
 - False
10. Counselors are afforded opportunities to see the big picture and influence policy and decision making through an inclusive management structure.
- True
 - False

APPENDIX A: SURVEY

We are assessing the sufficiency of the rehabilitation counselor (RC) resource pool in the VR national network of agencies and the impacts of the resource challenges faced by many VR agencies. We are also seeking input on useful strategies for responding to the existing challenge and impacts. This survey will require 15-25 minutes of your time. Survey results will be shared in the RSA 33rd Institute on Rehabilitation Issues 2007 publication on “Recruitment and Retention of Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors” as well as by the CSAVR Human Resources Development Committee.

Please respond to the following questions on your experience with RC staffing capacity, and if you have experienced challenges, how your agency has addressed the challenges to meet the needs of VR consumers. The timeframes for your responses are your experience and actions over the past two federal fiscal years (i.e., FFY 2005 and 2006) and your anticipated experience and actions in the current federal fiscal year (FFY 2007).

Please identify your agency.

State: _____ (drop down menu of states)

Select one:

- _____ Combined agency
- _____ General agency
- _____ Blindness service agency

Please identify the individual who is completing this survey

Name	Position	Phone number	E-mail
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Section I. RC Staffing Levels and RC Direct Service Delivery Capacity

For each of the three FFYs, choose the response that best reflects your agency’s experience with staffing levels of qualified rehabilitation counselors (RCs) in relation to your VR counseling and case management needs. Staffing level challenges, if you experienced them, could be for any reason.

_____ Our agency has experienced no direct service delivery staffing challenges during FFY 2005 related to our RC staffing capacity. We have been able to post sufficient positions and subsequently recruit a sufficient number of RC staff to meet our needs.

_____ True

_____ False

_____ Our agency has experienced no direct service delivery staffing challenges during FFY 2006 related to our RC staffing capacity. We have been able to post sufficient positions and subsequently recruit a sufficient number of RC staff to meet our needs.

_____ True

_____ False

_____ Our agency anticipates no direct service delivery staffing challenges during FFY 2007 related to our RC staffing capacity. We believe we will be able to post sufficient positions and subsequently recruit a sufficient number of RC staff to meet our needs.

_____ True

_____ False

If you answered “true” to all of the questions above, please skip to Section III to continue the survey.

If you answered “false” to one or more of the above, please briefly describe the challenge and your agency response by answering the questions in Section II.

Section II. Managing Direct Service Delivery Workloads in a Challenging RC Staffing Environment

If you have experienced, or anticipate experiencing, direct service staffing challenges related to your RC staffing capacity, please choose the responses below that best describe the impacts and strategies you have used or are planning to use to manage RC workloads. **Choose all that apply.**

_____ We allowed average RC caseloads to increase as a result of RC staffing capacity challenges.

Identify which FFYs this strategy and resulting impact relates to—choose all that apply:

- ___ FFY 2005
 ___ FFY 2006
 ___ FFY 2007

What is average caseload for an RC anticipated to be in FFY 2007? _____

_____ Use of the order of selection and wait listing of eligible consumers helped us to manage the size of RC caseloads. The OOS waitlist strategy was deployed as a response to insufficient funding for services and/or positions.

Identify which FFYs this strategy and resulting impact relates to—choose all that apply:

- ___ FFY 2005
 ___ FFY 2006
 ___ FFY 2007

_____ We increased RC salaries to attract and retain more RC staff and to increase our overall RC capacity.

Identify which FFYs this strategy and resulting impact relates to—choose all that apply:

- ___ FFY 2005
 ___ FFY 2006
 ___ FFY 2007

If “Yes”, please provide a short description of the strategy:

Identify which FFYs the strategy and resulting impact relates to—choose all that apply:

- FFY 2005
- FFY 2006
- FFY 2007

Section III. Expanding Recruiting and Hiring Strategies

A recent national study commissioned by the Rehabilitation Services Administration and conducted by the American Institutes for Research focused on the recruitment and retention of qualified rehabilitation counselors in state agencies. The researchers identified several strategies, listed below, that could be used to improve efforts to recruit qualified counselors for state VR agency employment. Please identify how often each strategy is utilized and how effective the strategy has been for your agency.

1. Use of practicum and internship experiences as a formal channel of recruitment.

Choose the answer that best describes your use of this strategy.

- Used infrequently: There is no formal program or university relationship, or sustained effort for utilizing RC practicum students or interns; agency infrequently engages VR counselor students prior to graduation. (Skip to Question 2.)
- Used regularly: A formal program or university relationship for recruiting RC practicum students or interns exists and is utilized on a regular basis.

If you chose “regular” use of RC practicum or intern students, please respond as to whether you offer a paid internship experience.

- _____ Yes, we can offer and frequently pay an RC student during their internship.
- _____ No, we never or very infrequently pay an RC student during their internship.

If you chose “regular” use of RC practicum and intern students, please rate the use of practicums/internships as an effective recruiting tool for filling vacancies. Choose the number that best reflects your experience.

- _____ 1. Ineffective: Almost never hire an RC practicum/intern student.
- _____ 2. Effective: At least 25% of RC vacancies are filled with RC practicum/intern students.
- _____ 3. Very effective: At least 50% of RC vacancies are filled with RC practicum/intern students.

2. Utilize existing state agency–university partnerships by leveraging existing partnerships with university training programs to recruit VR counselor applicants. For example, agency staff regularly visit and/or maintain significant contact with university training programs for the purpose of recruiting applicants, state VR counselors return to school to inform eligible classmates about job openings at their agencies. The partnership efforts are formal and go beyond the posting of job openings at the university. Choose the answer that best describes your use of this strategy.

- _____ Used infrequently: While we may post openings with universities, we do not regularly use other formal efforts to leverage university relationships to recruit students/graduates for RC vacancies. (Skip to Question 3.)
- _____ Used regularly: Beyond posting of openings, we regularly use other formal efforts to leverage university relationships to recruit students/graduates for RC vacancies.

If you chose “regular” use of formal university relationships as a recruiting strategy, please rate the effectiveness of the relationships in filling vacancies. Choose the number that best reflects your experience.

- _____ 1. Ineffective: Almost never hire from a university contact or referral.
- _____ 2. Effective: At least 25% of RC vacancies are filled from university contacts or referrals.
- _____ 3. Very effective: At least 50% of RC vacancies are filled from university contacts or referrals.

3. ***Expand the potential pool of job candidates.*** Expanded recruitment efforts could include seeking applicants from “related disciplines of study other than rehabilitation counseling or counseling.” For example, agencies could recruit staff enrolled in university programs for psychology, sociology, social work, and special education. Choose the answer that best describes your use of this strategy.

- _____ Used infrequently: Agency recruitment efforts do not regularly include seeking qualified candidates from “related disciplines of study” to fill RC vacancies. (Skip to Question 4).
- _____ Used regularly: Agency recruitment efforts regularly include efforts to seek qualified candidates from “related disciplines of study” to fill RC vacancies.

If you chose “regular” recruitment of RC candidates from “related disciplines” of study, please rate this strategy as an effective recruiting tool for filling vacancies. Choose the number that best reflects your experience.

- _____ 1. Ineffective: Almost never hire for an RC vacancy from candidates recruited from a related discipline.
- _____ 2. Effective: At least 25% of RC vacancies are filled from candidates recruited from a related discipline.
- _____ 3. Very effective: At least 50% of RC vacancies are filled from candidates recruited from a related discipline.

4. *Highlight state employment benefits.* Recruitment efforts could focus on informing university graduates about the benefits of working in a state agency. Beyond the base salary, such benefits may include increased job security and training support as well as compensation package fringe benefits, such as vacation, sick leave, and state retirement plans. Choose the answer that best describes your use of this strategy.

- _____ Used infrequently: Agency recruitment efforts do not regularly include focused efforts to inform university graduates about the benefits of employment in the state VR agencies. (Skip to Question 5.)
- _____ Used regularly: Agency recruitment efforts regularly include focused efforts to inform university graduates about the benefits of employment in the state VR agencies.

If you chose “regular” use of informing university graduates of the benefits package of employment at the state VR agency, please rate this strategy as an effective recruiting tool for filling vacancies. Choose the number that best reflects your experience.

- _____ 1. Ineffective: Almost never hire for an RC vacancy from university candidates attracted, in part, by agency benefits.
- _____ 2. Effective: At least 25% of RC vacancies are filled from university candidates attracted, in part, by agency benefits.
- _____ 3. Very effective: At least 50% of RC vacancies are filled from university candidates attracted, in part, by agency benefits.

5. *Expedite the hiring process from application through hire offer, once a position has been posted to the public, to occur within 60 days.* Agencies could focus on expediting the hiring process for available RC positions and applicants to decrease the chance of discouraging a candidate from applying or losing qualified applicants to another employer. Choose the answer that best describes your use of this strategy.

- _____ Used infrequently: Agency job application through job offer processes for VR counselor positions after posting to the public are not regularly completed within 60 days. (Skip to Section IV.)
- _____ Used regularly: Agency job application through job offer hiring processes for VR counselor positions, after posting to the public, are regularly completed within 60 days.

If you chose “regular” completion of hiring processes within 60 days following the public posting of a position, please rate this strategy as an effective recruiting and candidate retention tool for filling vacancies. Choose the number that best reflects your experience.

- _____ 1. Ineffective: Almost never impacts the qualified RC applicant pool.
- _____ 2. Effective: Retains most RC candidates who have applied.
- _____ 3. Very effective: Attracts and retains RC applicants.

Section IV. Establishing and Maintaining a “Performance Culture”

It is widely recognized that an organizational culture that expects, recognizes, and rewards outstanding performance will attract and retain quality employees. In the public VR system this means that the quality of the counselor’s work must be given as much focus and attention as the quantitative aspects. We are interested in learning more about how your agency creates a performance culture.

Please provide a brief description of the “essential elements” of your agency’s performance culture with a focus on how you establish RC quantitative and qualitative expectations and then measure performance against those expectations. Also, please describe your most successful strategies for recognizing and rewarding RC performance.

APPENDIX B: SURVEY RESPONSES FOR SELECTED OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Job Titles Reassigned Case Management Functions

- Administrative aide
- Case consumer coordinator
- Case service coordinator
- Employment coach
- Human service assistant
- Job placement/development specialist/staff (mentioned twice)
- Office secretary
- Office specialist II
- Provisional rehabilitation counselor (mentioned three times)
- Regional manager
- Rehabilitation assistant (mentioned twice)
- Rehabilitation casework associate (mentioned three times)
- Rehabilitation employment specialist
- Rehabilitation technician
- Vocational rehabilitation assistant (mentioned three times)
- Vocational rehabilitation counselor assistant
- Vocational specialist

Organizational or Service Delivery Restructuring

- Established specialized transition caseloads. Automated case management system.
- Divided field services program into three geographic areas, with each area led by an area manager; hired field services administration to oversee entire field program; training staff to provide services that were formerly purchased from community rehabilitation programs; adopting new methods to reduce case cost; revised order of selection criteria.

- We moved to a team approach approximately 7-9 years ago using an integrated service delivery system. This system called for a specialization of staff functions within the service delivery methodology. The goal was to lessen the number of administrative positions and redirect those positions into direct client service delivery positions. Another goal was to ensure that counselors were freed from administrative tasks to concentrate on providing counseling and guidance to clients. We have continued to refine staff roles and gained greater efficiencies through the centralization of procurement and finance functions. Again, this change resulted in freeing up administrative positions, which could be redirected into employment coach positions assisting our counselors with direct client service delivery.
- In April 2006, we added four caseload assistant positions to relieve VR counselors of some of the mundane tasks associated with their work. In November 2006, we posted 12 additional caseload assistant positions throughout our state. These positions will start January 22, 2007.
- We are in the process of creating a system that allows for some of the case management duties to be delegated to the provisional rehabilitation counselor and rehabilitation casework associates. Our CSPD standard for the VR counselor position requires obtainment of the Certified Rehabilitation Counselor credential. The CRC is the only position that can perform the core functions, with the other positions having responsibilities with oversight by the CRC.
- Offices with larger groups of counselors developed team approach in the delivery of VR services. In addition, an option to contract out certain components of case management was developed and piloted.
- We began a transformation from individual VR counselors and program assistants 2 years ago to statewide implementation of a transformational management change incorporating a self-directed team structure of all VR counselors and consumer case coordinators (paraprofessional staff).

- We have increased the number of contracts with outside job placement specialists.
- Front-end teams and back-end service delivery teams.
- The Business and Services Employment Team (BEST Unit) was developed.

Recruitment Strategies

- We have hired bachelor's-level staff in the absence of master's-level staff.
- Allocated one FTE to hire a recruiter.
- In May of 2006, our state agency implemented a new senior vocational rehabilitation counselor, qualified rehabilitation professional classification and during the months of January to April 2006, the director, chief deputy director, deputy directors, and all district administrators visited each CORE-accredited rehabilitation counseling program to maximize recruitment into the public VR program.
- We utilized the flexibility within our enabling legislation to establish a state standard for counselors. While we concentrate on hiring counselors with master's degrees in rehabilitation counseling, counseling, and psychology, we have the flexibility to hire individuals with other master's degrees and then provide them with six core graduate-level courses in rehabilitation counseling to ensure they have the educational requirements to be successful in the counseling role.
- We provide some financial incentives for counselors who complete their master's degree requirements under our CSPD plan. We also pay for the CRC exam fee for those who choose to sit for the CRC.

- We function in work teams. The duties of job placement and job readiness preparation are shared with two other support staff positions. We are continuing to explore other systems changes as we are faced with this ongoing issue.
- The biggest areas of challenge have been finding VR counselors with a specialty emphasis on deafness and in finding VR counselors with master's in rehabilitation in all areas of the state. In some instances we have provided a great deal of in-service training to meet these needs. In some areas we have had to hire VR counselors with a B.A. with the understanding that they will complete their M.S. in rehabilitation counseling to meet CSPD standards.
- Piloted wireless technology in western part of the state to provide staff more of a mobile work environment.
- We have expanded in the recruitment and development of paid internship (LTE) positions for VR counselor trainees at university programs that incorporate VR counselor education.
 1. Increased participation in career fairs, such as the military as well as universities/schools.
 2. Purchased 68 marketing boards and utilized more staff in outreach/marketing.
 3. Established recruitment and retention committee actively . working on these
- Training in how to categorize caseloads to determine which consumers need direct placement strategies and which can place themselves into employment with minimal direct intervention after completing their IPE. Used Santo's model. This helped VC to plan work accordingly and to not get bogged down in placement work for individuals that are extremely hard to place and do not follow through. Learned importance of beginning placement strategies from acceptance status and not wait until plans are complete. For the hard to place, learned new strategies. Planning this training again for 07 as we have had significant turnover of VR counselors due to retirements.

- Our agency has been involved in a strategic design effort called Design Our Future. As part of the above, we are in the process of outsourcing via RFPs related to transition services, fast-track assessment services, fast-track placement services, postsecondary institutions, outreach to postsecondary institutions, and marketing for business development.
- Expanded the use of the Carl Albert Executive Fellowship program.