

## FFY 2010 DVR STATE PLAN WRC RECOMMENDATIONS

Wisconsin Rehabilitation Council recommendations include the impact of state budget decisions on DVR staff and fiscal resources. DVR was not exempt from across the board cuts that were made to state programs.

1. The state budget includes language to honor its commitment (maintenance of effort) to provide a consistent level of funding for DVR services in Wisconsin. We recommend that the DVR Administrator provide updates for our council and the state independent living council so our members can educate the organizations we represent.

**DSU Response:** The biennial budget language instructs the Department of Workforce Development (DWD) to submit a SFY 2011-2013 budget with GPR funding at a level equal to the amount allocated in SFY '09, prior to the current biennial reductions. This will assist in meeting the Division's Maintenance of Effort funding level beginning in SFY '11. The instruction is on page 672 of 2009 Wisconsin Act 28 section 9156 2 (c)(a) and 2(c) (b) nonstatutory provisions; Workforce Development <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/2009/data/acts/09Act28.pdf>. The DVR Administrator will provide updates at the council meetings on the restoration of GPR funding levels.

2. The state budget did not provide all the of match funds necessary to bring our full federal allocation to Wisconsin. Our council recommends that the DVR Administrator provide information to the council on the impact of reduced match on the waiting list. We believe it will be important to revisit the state of the budget prior to the second year of the biennium if the waiting list has not been reduced.

**DSU Response:** GPR budget amounts for DVR will not achieve MOE levels of GPR funding in SFY '10 and '11. DVR will request MOE waivers from the Department of Education for this two year period. The DVR Administrator will provide updates to the SRC on the impact of GPR funding levels on DVR's wait list.

3. Our council has noted a reduction in employment outcomes compared to previous years. We are especially concerned that individuals with the most significant disabilities (Category 1) appear to have a lower success rate than individuals who fall into Category 2. We have several recommendations related to this concern.

3a. Improve access to qualified job developers and supported employment providers. Our council received public comment and staff feedback that many DVR vendors are not prepared to work with individuals with the most significant disabilities. Consumer feedback of job placement vendors was more critical than feedback on other types of service providers.

Our council provided a previous recommendation that DVR should track the outcomes of job placement vendors and make the information available to DVR consumers selecting a vendor. Vendors raised strong objections that this would not be fair to them. Quality employment outcomes should be the performance measure for vendors as well as DVR Counselors.

**DSU Response 3(a):** DVR agrees with the council on their concern with the reduction in employment outcomes compared to previous years. We attribute the decline in part to the nation's economic turndown and significant increases in unemployment rates. We are creating and deploying new initiatives to stimulate employment attachment for job-ready DVR consumers.

While employment outcomes have declined, a 2009 employment success rate review identifies individuals with the most significant disabilities (category I) as having a slightly higher success rate than individuals who fall into OOS category II. DVR will continue to review and report to the council on equity in employment outcomes among individuals classified in OOS categories I and II.

DVR assures the council that job placement vendor performance is tracked and made available to DVR consumers when selecting a vendor.

DVR has made available to all staff a reporting instrument that tracks the number of milestone payments made to job placement vendors. There are two vendor milestone payments that reflect success in employment. The first milestone payment is made after the hire and the consumer is on the job. The second is made when a minimum of 90 days of employment has been achieved and the VR consumer reports they are satisfied with the job.

By reviewing the milestone payment report, DVR staff can clearly see which job placement vendors are achieving employment attachment and retention outcomes. Employment attachment and retention success rate information is then shared with the DVR consumer as part of the informed consumer choice discussion when a job placement vendor selection is being made. By December 1, 2009 DVR will create a public web link so that DVR consumers can directly access the job placement vendor success rate data.

DVR is in the process of modifying the job placement vendor selection process. We are researching a new vendor vetting process aimed at increasing vendor quality and performance. We have collected vendor selection models from other VR programs. These models incorporate objective information regarding vendor competency levels and the quality of the services provided. We are receiving support from the VR Technical Assistance and Continuing Education (TACE) Center in identifying best practices in vendor selection. We will deploy the new DVR vendor selection process in FFY 2010.

3b. Employer relations and job development for Category 1 consumers by DVR staff. If DVR efforts (see recommendation 3a.) are not successful, we recommend that DVR reconsider developing professional positions to work with employers and provide job development and/or monitor DVR vendors providing job placement services.

**DSU Response 3(b):** The DSU agrees that if current efforts, including the new on-the-job training hiring initiative, do not prove sufficient to significantly increase the employment outcomes of job-ready consumers, project position authority will be pursued. As needed, project positions will

be designed to provide strategic staffing capacity to increase employment outcomes.

3c. Continue and emphasize training for DVR staff on the use of Employment Support Planning and the facilitation skills necessary for this planning method.

At our quarterly meetings, we invite feedback from DVR staff on strengths and challenges in their area. Questions about Employment Support Planning are met with some uncertainty. Staff feedback indicates that they view ESP as a funding mechanism for vendors.

**DSU response 3(c):** Employment and support planning (ESP) is intended to increase consumer engagement in the process of a job search. The ESP is written with DVR staff, the job placement vendor and the DVR consumer. The plan is then reviewed by all three parties in a face to face meeting every 60 days. DVR staff received training on the use of ESP in 2008 and the training was reinforced during follow-up quality assurance (QA) visits.

Despite the initial training and QA consultations, we recognize that ESP meetings have not consistently included the three required participants. We addressed this issue in our 2009 statewide vendor training with the requirement that the job-placement vendor invoice can only be submitted and paid if all parties attend the ESP meeting. DVR will continue to focus on ESP staff training and quality oversight to strengthen the purpose and consistency of this service. Updates will be provided to the council.

To further refine the ESP process, DVR is planning a FFY 2010 ESP service innovation pilot in 3 service areas (Madison, Milwaukee and Waukesha). The pilot will focus the use of the ESP process on assessing and developing customized employment placement and on-the-job support services for persons with traumatic brain injury. It is expected that the lessons learned will increase the success in using the ESP process for all consumers. Promising practices from the pilot will be shared in our ESP in-service training and with the council.

3d. Training specific to disability groups with low employment outcomes. A previous recommendation suggested training on specific disabilities, such as traumatic brain injury, autism spectrum disorders, PTSD, and personality disorders.

**DSU response 3(d):** DVR actively distributes information about disability specific trainings to staff and encourages individual participation. Most national trainings are available in an on-line format and are archived so that they remain accessible to staff whenever they may have a need for disability specific information. DVR maintains a list of disability specific training sites.

To further customize our approach to providing disability specific service, we have expanded the scope of the Employment Support Planning (ESP) process to include reviewing information on the person's disability, needed accommodations, and other disability related factors to be addressed in preparation for job development.

A FFY 2010 ESP service innovation pilot focused on customized employment services will incorporate training, on a case-by-case basis, to DVR and job placement vendor staff. The pilot will focus not only on increasing the consumer's acceptance and understanding of the disability factors that impact their employability, but will focus also on increasing the DVR counselor's and job placement vendor's understanding of the barriers to employment, supports and accommodation needs of the individual. These are factors that the ESP process is meant to address and which are crucial to employment success and job retention. DVR anticipates that the disability specific approach can be utilized with other populations in which there are low employment outcomes. The lessons learned and promising practices gained from the pilot will be used to improve outcomes with other hard to place groups such as individuals with autism, personality disorders, and behavior disorders.

3e. Group information sessions. Some DVR offices are offering orientation sessions for individuals who are eligible for DVR services. We recommend that DVR expand this concept to topics of interest for DVR consumers and consider outside presenters to acquaint consumers with community resources.

While the one on one meeting that counselors hold with consumers are a key part of the program, it does not offer the opportunity to interact with others with disabilities facing similar challenges.

Group information sessions for new participants would free up counselor time to focus on individuals in job placement status. Examples might include:

Work Incentive Options – presentation by a benefits specialist that covers the possibilities of working and work incentives.

Managing Disability – presentation by an independent living center staff person on practical problem solving to maintain employment

**DSU response 3(e):** During FFY 2009 many WDA's have incorporated successful group orientation and informational sessions at the general interest and application stages of the DVR process. The DVR consumer has an opportunity to learn about the program in a group environment and is provided an opportunity to speak with a counselor if they have specific issues to address. Best practice elements and group curriculums have been shared and observed by staff from various DVR service areas. DVR recognizes the effectiveness and efficiencies of well designed group information sessions and will continue to support and expand this mode of service delivery.

In FFY 2009, group employment plan development sessions were piloted and this format was found to be of benefit. Consumers can learn about the individualized employment planning (IPE) process in a forum where they gain additional understanding from the array of questions and group dialogue. It is anticipated that the group employment planning sessions will be expanded statewide in FFY 2010.

As caseloads increase during FFY 2010 and efficiencies become increasingly important, opportunities for WDA's to expand group learning options and instructional partners will be encouraged by DVR management. Understanding that we must balance the confidentiality and individual needs of consumers, well-designed group counseling and instruction works well when providing consumers with common information.

DVR management will report regularly to the council on services delivered in a group format.

4. Simplify the Waiting List selection process.

If DVR reaches a point with a small or no waiting list, we recommend revisiting an earlier recommendation to simplify the OOS process. Counting limitations, without an additional step of judging the severity of the limitation, would reduce staff time spent on assignment to a waiting list and reduce the perception that Order of Selection is subjective.

**DSU response:** DVR agrees with the council that anticipated reduction of the wait list presents an opportunity to review the Order of Selection System to consider simplification and other appropriate changes. Discussions will include the WRC recommendation to consider counting limitations as the method of determining OOS category.

At the August 2009 meeting of the Policy Academy, DVR management presented this as an agenda item for consideration and discussion by Policy Academy members. The expectation is that a decision on the OOS changes will be made and a training program developed by the end of calendar year 2009. DVR staff training will be provided during the month prior to implementation of the OOS changes. Implementation of the OOS changes will occur when the wait time for Category 2 consumers on the OOS Wait List is less than 1 month. Council updates will be provided.