

**“SRC Partnerships With State Vocational Rehabilitation
Agencies in Monitoring and Other Activities”**

**Fall CSAVR Meeting
November 6, 2005**

This panel represented four states and five VR programs, each State discussed strategies for creating an effective partnership between State Rehabilitation Councils and public Vocational Rehabilitation programs. The SRC and VR agency representatives provided examples of effective partnerships, strategies for developing productive relationships and the political power of working collaboratively. The panel also addressed the strategies that they have used in joint monitoring and how they are addressing the change in monitoring at the federal level.

ALASKA

Gale Sinnott, Director
Alaska Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

Jackie Bisbee, Alaska SRC Chair/ Section 121 Representative
Program Director, Tanana Chiefs Conference Vocational
Rehabilitation

Pam Stratton, Alaska SRC
Director, Alaska Client Assistance Program

MICHIGAN

Jaye Shamsiddeen, State Director, Michigan General

Marlene Malloy, Executive Director, Michigan State Rehabilitation
Council

NEW JERSEY

Tom Jennings, State Director, New Jersey General

Pat Tomlinson, Vice Chair, New Jersey State Rehabilitation Council

OREGON

Linda Mock, Director
Oregon Commission for the Blind

Stephaine Parrish Taylor, Administrator
Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Services
Oregon

Rebecca Woods
Oregon SRC
Coordinator of Disability Services
Chemeketa Community College

Rhoda Hunter
Oregon SRC Coordinator

ALASKA

History: In Alaska, there were several “advisory boards” – SRC, Governor’s Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities and the Assistive Technology Board. Alaska combined these functions into one council – The Governor’s Committee on Employment and Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities.

Train the SRC on the Rehabilitation Act and the VR process.

Develop a connection with the SILC

SRC assist with the development of the State Plan

SRC is involved in the development of VR policies

Goal – knowledgeable and empowered SRC

Provide staff support – 2 staff and a project assistant, as needed

Work to have a mutual understanding of the political climate

DSA is the Dept. of Labor – educate the DSA on the role of the SRC

Staff seeks input from the SRC

Face to face meetings are important

 Provide current overviews of the VR program

 Any public testimony should have follow-up by SRC and VR

AK-VR provides the SRC time with the ADA Coordinator

Schedule regular teleconferences with updates

Tribal VR partners are connected (AK has 11 AIVR programs) they serve joint cases.

Other partners: CAP, CILs

Tribal Consortium meeting – held annually and sponsored by VR.

The, VR, , , CAP, and AIVR programs are involved, others, such as VAVR and the SILC have attended one time but to date have not been formally invited to join.

The meeting focuses on the development of a Collaborative Plan between AIVR, CAP, and DVR.

SILC has cross membership

SRC/SILC/VR provide training to the one-stops

VR has proactively positioned the program within AK DOL, they have defined their differences, unique services and educated the DSA about the Rehabilitation Act

There is political power in the “coalition” of partners in Alaska

SRC and VR do not always agree but they respect each other

SRC – Tribal VR rep is mentoring a new tribal member to prepare for her transition onto the SRC

The SRC Chair and the VR Director work together to ensure transition between leadership

Cross training occurs between tribal VR, State VR and other “rehabilitation” partners.

The VR – AIVR partnership allows for service delivery in the rural and remote areas of Alaska

Partners help bring community members to the public meetings and to recruit new members.

VR Director believes in “hands off” approach with the VR funded support person, that person works for the SRC

MICHIGAN (see PowerPoint presentation)

The relationship is viewed as win-win and built on mutual respect

In the initial development of the SRC, VR and advocacy groups worked together to develop the council based on the concept of autonomy

The staff is contracted through a grant to an outside entity, which manages the payment

Initially the relationship was viewed as adversarial, the change in the '98 amendments and a change in Directors helped move the relationship to a more productive level. The SRC worked

through time to gain independence. There has been an increased level of trust, respect and communication with the current VR Director

The SRC and VR agree upon a Resource Plan. The SRC budget is \$280,000/yr., with three full time staff, the SRC Director clearly works for the SRC, there is active participation on the SRC and they actively use state and federal connections to support VR development.

The SRC faces the challenge of getting new appointments through the Governor's office.

They meet quarterly around the State. They have the support of the district offices in the areas they meet. They bring public to the meetings and have active public participation.

The SRC is part of VR hiring teams, they attend the Executive Strategic Planning sessions, participate in staff conference calls, resource development with the CILs, the equity workgroup, one-stop meetings, student focus groups. The SRC has developed a "stress reduction" workshop that they now provide to staff. The SRC is fully supported by the VR Director.

VR and the SRC have jointly developed the following projects:

Transition

Medicaid buy-in

SILC

CILs

Disability Voice – cross disability support group

Disability Rights

Disability Caucus

Rehabilitation Association

Counseling Association

Customer leadership development

Michigan recognizes the strength in working together between groups and not in competing between groups. They have advocated with the Governor, the legislature, RSA. They developed a one-page support paper signed by all of the groups

VR has the following members on the SRC: Director, Ombudsperson, policy manager and VRC rep.

Orientation Project – in 40 District offices SRC members sat through customer orientation and provided feedback to VR on how to improve the orientation to make it more customer friendly.

Those recommendations were incorporated into the orientation training.

The SRC has provided input into VR policy, most recently on the college training and needs assessment. These were set up for a one-year review but when the SRC started hearing “issues” in the field the policies were reviewed immediately. The SRC provides an external and independent review of the issues.

Project Excellence – VR, SRC and Michigan State University. They are looking at customer satisfaction with consumers and employers, doing a statewide needs assessment and analysis of the RSA 911 data.

Scholarship Project – 30 customers are selected and sponsored to participate in a disability-focused conference with exhibits and sessions on self-employment

Michigan Career and Training Institute – focus groups with students
VR staff cannot lobby so the SRC works with other advocacy groups (e.g. Disability Caucus) to work with the State Legislature, share customer success stories. They have jointly developed a booklet and video on the success of Michigan’s VR programs - both general and blind.

NEW JERSEY

Prior to 1992 New Jersey had a Governor’s Committee which represented the disability community. In 1993, they developed the SRAC and currently have a fully functioning SRC.

Key considerations – “personalities” seem to be important in the development of productive relationships between the SRC and VR as well as within the SRC. If the personalities of members and the VR Director and staff are open and congruent, they expect to work together with mutual respect.

The SRC drives the agenda, VR provides support. The Director provides regular updates. The SRC is involved in the State Plan development and Public Meetings. Other reports are provided as requested by the SRC.

Some SRC members do have personal agendas but there is an understanding that they are there for the greater good and that their agendas are incorporated, as appropriate.

SRC core group of people that remain involved even after their terms have expired. Meetings are open.

New members are mentored. There is an annual retreat for planning. The first ½ day is training for new members with training on The Rehabilitation Act, especially Section 105 and a focus on the VR process.-(NJ agreed to share copies of the PowerPoint and Handbook used for training). They set an agenda at the retreat to develop goals and timelines for the next fiscal year.

There are various joint activities with the SRC and VR throughout the year.

The SRC and VR work collaboratively on the Resource Plan with a budget that is developed by the SRC and runs through a fiscal agent. The SRC develops the budget and negotiate with the VR Director for agreement.

The VR Director supports the autonomy of the SRC.

They work collaboratively on the needs assessment and gathering input during the State Plan development process.

Town Meetings – have a broad focus of community input, a transcript is made available, it is an informal process for providing input so that the public feels welcomed.

VR Statewide Agency meeting – they review performance, goals and priorities with VR staff, the SRC chair presents, several SRC members participate, they give awards and recognition to VR staff.

Consumer satisfaction survey - The SRC recommended an outside agency that is used to conduct the survey, they identify the “red flags” throughout the year and alert the VR Director, he reports back to the SRC.

This year they conducted consumer focus groups – the facilitators received formal training on how to conduct a focus group, they included graduate students in the Rehabilitation Counseling program as part of the team that interviewed consumers along with SRC members.

Exit surveys – mailed monthly to all closures, monthly reports are provided for VR and SRC to review the immediate feedback

VR Director attends the State Workforce Investment Board. SRC members serve on a subcommittee on disability for the SWIB. This subcommittee serves as a steering committee for “Project Access.” which provided sensitivity training to the one-stops, helped bring access (electric door openers) and rehabilitation technology to the one-stops. They have also been involved in training the Navigators.

CSAVR – VR always supports SRC attendance at the CSAVR meetings

OREGON

Oregon supported what the other groups said about the importance of partnership, they emphasized the importance of having the consumer's success as the mutual goal that ties together the SRC and VR, mutual respect and the autonomy of the SRC were key, they also value the connection they had with the Regional RSA office.

Oregon experienced the power of their SRC partnership with the designated state agency (DSA), the umbrella agency that VR is housed in went through a departmental reorganization that was supported by the Legislature as a cost saving and streamlining measure. The SRC spent time with VR and RSA to learn about the requirements of the Rehabilitation Act, especially protecting the integrity of the VR program, which is referred to as the designated State unit (DSU) in the umbrella agency or DSA. The DSA was threatening the VR staff if they spoke out against the dismantling of the program, the VR Director was removed from the cabinet and not informed about the budget of the program, so the SRC stepped in and brought in other disability groups to challenge the DSA and the legislation. Other partners included the Commission for the Blind, the SILC, the Oregon Advocacy Center (CAP and P & A), the Governor's Committee (including the Office of Deaf Services) and other community-based organizations. They established "political clout."

The Chair, Executive Committee and Staff Coordinator were key players. Technical assistance from the RSA regional office was important – who will provide that now?

The personalities and communication on the SRC and between the SRC and VR are key to the success of the partnership. The current VR Director was the past Chair of the Commission for the Blind (SRC).

How do you protect the SRC and proactively institutionalize ideas for the future?

The SRC has a lot of power, which Oregon used with the Governor's Office. The Governor appointed SRC has a role that VR staff can't, they are the voice for disability in the bigger context of the DSA – especially in a large umbrella organization.

The SRC has to educate government officials at all levels about their role as defined in Federal legislation. They must clearly define their role and responsibilities with the DSU and the DSA, this has to be done proactively. There is a movement to consolidate at the Federal and State level – other states will experience what Oregon did and they must be educated and prepared to act as an advocate in protecting the integrity of the VR program.

The coalition of partners – SRC, OCB, SILC, DDPC, Oregon Disabilities Commission, CAP, etc. spent a day together and developed a plan to stand united, they sent a jointly signed letter supporting the integrity of the DSU. In the end, VR was the only program that remained in tact.

The Director of the DSA lost his job, the SRC positioned itself positively with the Governor's Office and has been involved with the appointment of the DSU Director and the redevelopment of the DSA.

The Rehabilitation Act is a powerful piece of legislation, educate the SRC, information is power, create a common

Oregon Commission for the Blind – the Commission is Governor appointed and Senate confirmed, the OCB Director is hired and works at the pleasure of the Commission. The OCB has policy making authority, the majority must be people with disabilities. There are consumer organizations, medical, education and business representatives on the Commission Board.

The Commission is part of the leadership of the agency. There is an annual retreat where the OCB Administrative Staff and the Commission do long range planning for the agency. The Chair signs the budget and the State Plan, they do a joint presentation to the Legislature.

The Commission has challenged decision made by the General Services Administration (Governor's Office), the Commission was able to advocate when the Director could not.

Commissioners act as mentors and instructors with consumers.

There is a diversity of opinion on the Commission Board but they respect each other and focus on productive communication.

In Oregon, the various organizations work together around common issues – VR general, OCB, SRC, SILC, Oregon Disability Commission (Gov. Committee), Oregon Advocacy Center (CAP, P&A), CILs and other organizations. When the VR agency was threatened in reorganization, they spent a day together to learn about the issue, the background and develop a strategy. They agreed to stand united and sent a jointly signed letter to the DSA and Governor’s office to support the integrity of the DSU.

KEY Recommendations – educate people about the Rehabilitation Act and the regulations. Provide training and technical assistance, develop cross organization relationships, have a common vision. Be careful about “consolidation.”

Massachusetts – has a Disability Policy Consortium, a private non-profit advocacy organization, they also work with ARAN and NRA. In adversity, pull together like-minded people and remember that cross organizational advocacy is important.

Allen Harris, the Chair of the Constituent Service Committee, provided an overview of the committee and invited SRC members to attend the committee meeting on Monday. For more information, contact Allen via email at: harris.allen@blind.state.ia.us.

MONITORING

The four states recommended the following, based on their experience and what they see as the future direction of federal monitoring by RSA.

VR and SRC working jointly on the State Plan, identify issues and focus for monitoring; State Plan will be more critical in the future. Prepare the SRC, educate them around the purpose and

development of the State Plan. Work toward joint approval with input from the SRC.

Common measures – what does that mean for VR?

SRC – council members prepared? Time commitments?
Confidentiality around consumer issues.

SRC's role should be in the development of monitoring strategies, understanding the overall performance of the agency, being involved in entrance and exit meetings but not doing case review. People were concerned about the expertise and time needed to do case review as well as the confidentiality issues that are involved in reviewing cases.

Will the CILs be monitored with use of Title I or VII monies? How will that be woven into the state level work?

VR and SRC need to be provided with monitoring guides or any related information in advance.

CSAVR/NCSAB/SRCs/SILCs/CAPs. Etc. need to stick together, the Act was designed to work collaboratively between all partners under all titles of the Act. There seems to be an attempt to divide and conquer.

The group agreed that we need to be proactive about shaping how monitoring will occur.

SRCs confirmed that they want monitoring, they was to be involved in the development of monitoring strategies, and have access to the outcome of monitoring but not necessarily do the monitoring.

FUTURE ACTIVITIES

SRCs want to become a standing committee of CSAVR, they would meet on Sunday as a committee and be available to participate in other committees during the other committee meetings on

Monday. This would maximize the consumer feedback across committees.

Self-monitoring: the SRC recommends developing a self-monitoring process and training others on how to use an in-house tool that is consistent with the State Plan.

Without Regional RSA offices – who is responsible for providing TA?

Is the 107 relevant? If we are reinventing it, is that relevant? Can the SRC be involved in the development?

There should be no monitoring without technical assistance and training to the field, including SRCs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Marlene from the Michigan SRC agreed to develop a listserv for the SRCs. Send your e-mail address to her at:
Marlene@mrccouncil.org.

The SRC members will meet for lunch on Tuesday.

It was recommended that SRC members read the analysis of the GAO report done by Doug Burleigh.

Kathy will transcribe the notes from this meeting and send it to the panel for review. The notes will be posted on the CSAVR website along with the PowerPoint from Michigan and the training handouts from NJ. Panel members will share other resources that they use in their states.