



GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA DEPARTMENT ON DISABILITY SERVICES

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Department on
Disability Services

Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment

DECEMBER 2020



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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Overview

Purpose of the Needs Assessment

The District of Columbia Department on Disability Services (DDS), Rehabilitation Services Administration contracted with Promesa Consulting Group, Inc. to conduct a Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) of persons with disabilities living in the District of Columbia. In addition, Promesa engaged the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) and Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) to ensure their participation in providing input for the CSNA. The overall objective was to obtain feedback, input and recommendations for programs and services to help prepare persons with disabilities to retain, maintain, regain, or sustain competitive integrated employment that will enable them to lead meaningful and productive lives. This report details findings on the vocational rehabilitation needs of District residents with disabilities and related service implications for DC Rehabilitation Services Administration (DCRSA).

Framework and Limitations

Development of the District of Columbia CSNA followed the standard needs assessment process. Needs assessments are intended to gather expressed and observed needs of stakeholders through collection and analysis of primary and secondary data. Needs assessments are conducted to identify gaps between existing services and needed services; they provide information to guide strategies to reach the desired state of program performance or outcomes. This needs assessment does not evaluate how well program operations or services function. Although the vocational rehabilitation needs assessment collected information on stakeholder perceptions of service and system strengths, it did not evaluate service provision or system infrastructure, it only presents the findings.

The most significant limitation to the 2020 needs assessment was the global health crisis caused by the novel Coronavirus, known as COVID-19. This unprecedented worldwide event affected government and business operations globally. On March 11, 2020, Mayor Muriel Bowser issued a Declaration of Public Emergency: COVID-19¹ that referenced a policy for all District government employees relating to travel, designation of emergency and essential employees, employee responsibilities, and guidance on workplace flexibility, leave options, and workplace protections. A second Mayor's Order went into effect of March 25, 2020, closing non-essential businesses and prohibiting gatherings of ten or more people.²

¹ Mayor's Order 2020-045, Declaration of Public Emergency: COVID-19, issued March 11, 2020, effective date March 16, 2020

² Mayor's Order 2020-053: Closure of Non-Essential Businesses and Prohibition on Large Gatherings During Public Health Emergency for the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

The public health emergency limited the CSNA quantitative data collection effort through surveys to on-line only, limiting participation for many vocational rehabilitation participants without access or ability to use a web-based survey instrument. In addition, the measures taken to slow the spread of COVID-19 made it significantly more difficult to reach DCRSA community partners and government employees at other District agencies for participation.

Methodology

The 2020 CSNA was guided by core research questions that informed data collection and analysis methods. The research questions and the methodology employed for the needs assessment are based on an assessment of best practices in the field, a review of methods employed in past CSNAs, and the contractor’s professional expertise. The research questions and methodology were also reviewed and informed by DCRSA’s leadership team during initial and ongoing project status meetings.

The data collection strategy for the needs assessment utilized the following four (4) methods to answer the research questions posed to people receiving supports, families, advocates, staff, community partners, and other stakeholders: 1) review of existing data; 2) interview of key participants and stakeholders; 3) surveys of clients, stakeholders, staff, community partners, advocacy groups and employers; and 4) focus group discussions with people receiving supports, families, advocates, staff, community partners, and other key stakeholders. Data analysis integrated and compared findings across the four data sources to identify needs, issues, trends, opportunities and recommendations. The comparisons also identified common themes and variations across data sources.

Although COVID-19 was a major impediment to the needs assessment data collection effort, there was an overall total of 320 participants and stakeholders that provided input. Direct community participation was accomplished using the following research methods: 1) stakeholder surveys; 2) interviews; and 3) focus group discussions. A summary of data collection activities is reflected in *Table 1* below:

Table 1 reflects total participants by type and method of data collection activities

Research Method	Research Group and Count				
	Persons with Disabilities	Community Partners	DCRSA Staff	Business Partners	Total
Individual Interviews	14	34	23	7	78
Electronic Surveys	86	26	43	16	171
Focus Groups	40	10	16	5	71
Totals	140	70	82	28	320

Report Navigation

This report includes an Executive Summary and Overview and the sections listed below. It represents qualitative data collected through community and stakeholder interviews and focus group discussions, as well as quantitative data from surveys of people receiving supports, staff, community partners/rehabilitation service providers, advocacy groups and employers/business partners. Described in the following sections of this report is the result of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment.

- DCRSA Context
- Data Collection Highlights
- Barriers to Employment for Persons with Disabilities
- Service Provision for Persons with Disabilities
- Service System Infrastructure
- Recommendations for Strategic Changes to Vocational Rehabilitation Service Provisions

Copies of all data collection instruments are provided in the appendix section of this report.

1.2 DCRSA Context

The District of Columbia Department on Disability Services includes three Administrations that oversee as well as provide direct services to citizens who are eligible for habilitative and/or rehabilitative supports: The Developmental Disabilities Administration (DCDDA), the Rehabilitation Services Administration (DCRSA), and the Disability Determination Division (DCDDD). DCRSA is the focus of this assessment, and its [website](#) explains and describes its function as follows:

The services that DCRSA offers to eligible persons include:

- Supported Employment Services
- Job Placement Services
- Guidance and Counseling
- Job Development
- Job Placement
- Job Coaching
- Assessments and Evaluations
- Physical and Mental restoration Services
- Assistive Aids and Devices
- Interpreter and Reader Services
- Vocational and Other Training Services
- Transportation
- Personal Assistant Services

People seeking services must first go through DCRSA's eligibility process. The requirements for eligibility include a physical or mental impairment that presents a substantial impediment to

employment and the ability to benefit from Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services to prepare for, secure, regain, obtain, retain and sustain employment.³

Key Environmental Factors

DCRSA works within the boundaries of federal and local requirements. Although the District of Columbia is not a state, it does manage state functions as well as local functions. Local laws passed by the DC City Council that govern DCRSA must, as all laws in the District of Columbia, receive final approval by the United States Congress.

In addition to legislative and regulatory oversight, DCRSA has Memoranda of Understanding with several other District of Columbia agencies; adheres to budgetary considerations such as the Anti-Deficiency requirements; and operates using policies that cover the entire Department on Disability Services as well as those that are specific to VR practices.

Employment First

A critical priority for the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), is to invest in systems change efforts that result in increased community-based, integrated employment opportunities for individuals with significant disabilities. This priority reflects growing support for a national movement called Employment First, a framework for systems change that is centered on the premise that all citizens, including individuals with significant disabilities, are capable of full participation in integrated employment and community life.⁴

The District of Columbia is an Employment First jurisdiction. The DDS website states: “On October 8, 2012, DC Mayor Vincent Gray issued a proclamation declaring the District of Columbia an Employment First State—the 20th state to do so nationwide. Former mayor Vincent Gray’s proclamation affirms that “employment is an important part of the lives of all working age adults and people with disabilities are a largely untapped resource with skills and talents who can meet the needs of area business and employers.” Under the Employment First philosophy, competitive, integrated employment is the first and overwhelmingly preferred option for working-age youth and adults with disabilities, regardless of the complexity or severity of their disabilities. The other main tenets of Employment First are that:

Employment services are tailored and customized to a person’s needs, interests, and skill set with the ultimate goal of achieving long-term employment in a competitive business or organization, or self-employment.

Employment is at the prevailing wage, and never less than minimum wage.

³ Department on Disability Services website: <https://dds.dc.gov/service/vocational-rehabilitation-services>

⁴ Federal Website describing Employment First: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/initiatives/employment-first>

The employee has ample opportunities to integrate and interact with his or her coworkers, the public, and/or customers without disabilities.”⁵

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as Amended prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in programs conducted by federal agencies, in programs receiving federal financial assistance, in federal employment and in the employment practices of federal contractors.

The standards for determining employment discrimination under the Rehab Act are the same as those used in Title I of the ADA; it protects “qualified individuals with disabilities.” An “individual with a disability” is a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, has a record of such impairment or is regarded as having such an impairment. “Qualified” means the person satisfies the job-related requirements of the position he or she holds (or is applying for) and can perform its essential functions, with or without a reasonable accommodation.

On July 22, 2014 President Barack Obama signed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) into law. WIOA is a federal law working to increase strategic collaboration across programs investing in skill development that leads to competitive, integrated employment. It is landmark legislation that is designed to strengthen and improve opportunities for people with disabilities who present with significant barriers to employment in the nation’s public workforce system and help Americans, including youth and people with significant barriers to employment, to acquire high-quality jobs and careers and help employers hire and retain skilled workers.

Disability Prevalence

According to the U.S Census Bureau, 11.6 percent of District of Columbia residents of all ages experience disability, which is equivalent to 80,368 residents. Ambulatory difficulty, cognitive difficulty, and independent living difficulty are the most prevalent disabilities in the District.⁶

Vocational Rehabilitation Program Enhancements since the 2017 CSNA

Promesa researchers found several new initiatives, objectives and outcomes implemented since the 2017 CSNA.

- **DSP Academy** - In the past year, DCRSA in collaboration with RCM of Washington, Inc., a DC-based disability services provider, piloted the Direct Support Professional (DSP) Academy, commonly referred to as the ‘DSP Academy’. The DSP Academy provided

⁵ DC Department on Disability Services website: <https://dds.dc.gov/page/employment-first>

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 ACS, American Fact Finder, Table S2301 (1-Year Estimates); <http://factfinder.census.gov>.

participants exposure to a variety of career paths within the Health and Human services sector and offers the option of securing employment as a DSP following graduation.

- **MBSYEP/JumpStart Program** - Managed by the Department of Employment Services (DOES), the Mayor Marion S. Barry Summer Youth Employment Program (MBSYEP), is a locally funded initiative that provides District youth ages 14 to 24 with an enriching summer employment experience through subsidized placements in the public and private sectors. MBSYEP 2020 will serve 10,000 youth through a virtual workforce development experience, or a hybrid model. DCRSA entered an agreement with DOES to fund the wages of DCRSA youth clients participating in MBSYEP 2020 (June – Aug 2020). This agreement supported the wages of over 300 students with disabilities.
- **Expansion of DCRSA Providers and Programming** - Since 2017, DCRSA Transition has welcomed new providers who offer an array of vocational rehabilitation (VR) and pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) to youth clients.
- **DCRSA Learning and Innovations Retreat** - DCRSA has held two annual learning and innovations retreats titled “Evolving the Employment Experience, Building Capacity and Strengthening Connections.” Eighty DCRSA staff attended the retreats.
- **Latinx Conference 2019** - The District of Columbia’s Department on Disability Services (DDS), in collaboration with partner agencies, hosted the first Annual Latinx Conference for people with disabilities and their families. The conference was designed to provide Spanish speaking people with disabilities and their family members with access to information, support, and resources in their native language and assist District agencies to better understand the experiences and needs of Latinos/as within the disability community.
- **National Community of Practice on Cultural and Linguistic Competence** - In its efforts to continue to build capacity in Cultural and Linguistic Competence, DDS and the District applied for and was chosen, along with nine other states, to participate in the National Community of Practice (CoP) for Cultural and Linguistic Competence in Developmental Disabilities through Georgetown University’s National Center for Cultural Competence, with funding from the Administration on Community Living/Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.
- **Streamlined Intake between DCDDA and DCRSA** - The streamlined intake between DCDDA and DCRSA led to a requirement for DCDDA employment providers to become DCRSA providers, so that people eligible for both services can move between funding streams without having to change providers, if they so choose.
- **Online Learning Management System** - During FY20, DCRSA contracted with a vendor to secure an online learning management system (LMS) for professional development to all VR staff. Through this LMS, VR staff is able to take professional development courses related to the VR profession and earn CRCs for recertification as a VR Counselor.
- **Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC) Agreement** - DCRSA has renewed its training and technical assistance agreement with the Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC). WINTAC has supported DCRSA in retreat planning and training modules during the annual DCRSA retreat. Additionally, WINTAC

serves as a resource for DCRSA in the development of policies and procedures related to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

1.3 Key Findings on Barriers to Employment for Persons with Disabilities

A broad range of barriers were cited by stakeholders and many are identified in this section; however, analysis of the feedback revealed consensus around several broader, consistently cited barriers and service needs for persons with disabilities across each stakeholder population. The focus of this section, for the most part, is on barriers to employment. The findings and recommendations outlined throughout this section and the entire report are based on stakeholder feedback, observations and recommendations acquired through interviews, surveys and focus group discussions.

- *Lack of information about available vocational rehabilitation programs and services.* Eighteen percent (18%) of respondents to the individual survey cited lack of information as a barrier to accessing DCRSA services. Also, during stakeholder interviews, community partners and people receiving vocational rehabilitation services cited navigation of DCRSA's vocational rehabilitation system as a barrier.
- *Job development and placement services.* Help finding a job was cited by 59% of respondents to the individual survey as a barrier to obtaining their employment goal.
- *Education or Job Training and Employment preparation services.* Thirty-six percent (36%) of respondents to the individual survey cited lack of "job training" as a barrier. In addition, 33% of respondents to the individual survey also cited the need for job coaching to successfully achieve employment.
- *Employer perceptions.* Stakeholder groups, including 32% of DCRSA staff respondents and 62% of community partner respondents cited employer perceptions as a barrier to employment for persons with disabilities. Qualitative data provided from staff during interviews and focus group discussions said essentially there was no formal program for employers related to employing persons with disabilities and providing necessary accommodations and supports.
- *Insufficient employers.* Fifty-seven percent (57%) of community partner stakeholders indicated insufficient employers were a barrier to employment and employers were unwilling to accept people with the most significant disabilities. Staff respondents in interviews and focus groups cited the "employer base is too small" and "employers don't know how to interact with individuals without job coaches."
- *Confounding barriers.* DCRSA staff, community partners, and vocational rehabilitation clients all identified the need to address confounding service barriers, such as, transportation, housing, childcare and mental health issues in order for VR clients to be successful achieving their employment goals.

1.4 Key Findings on Service Provisions for Persons with Disabilities

The findings and recommendations articulated in this section as well as throughout this report are based on stakeholder interviews, surveys and focus group participation. The general consensus regarding service provision needs for persons with disabilities includes:

- *Office Accessibility.* Individuals receiving vocational rehabilitation services and supports generally *have not* reported the following as significant barriers to service: physical office location of DCRSA or community rehabilitation providers or hours of operations.
- *Employment-related supports.* Vocational training, work experience, and short and long-term job supports, such as job coaching are key services for supporting persons with disabilities on their path to employment. Person-centered planning and support navigating the vocational rehabilitation system were also identified as critical services; individuals had a positive view of their interaction with and support from the majority of the vocational rehabilitation counselors.
- *Service Navigation.* Families of people receiving services and those persons wanting to gain entry to DCRSA for services were often unclear of the cadre of vocational services and supports provided by the administration.
- *Assistive Technology.* Stakeholders expressed a need for assistance with obtaining assistive technology. Technological aids and devices and related training are key to supporting employment for persons with disabilities especially persons with sensory disabilities.
- *Benefits Planning.* Greater access to benefits counseling was expressed by numerous stakeholders. Such information can provide guidance on the impact of employment on wages and support transition to work.
- *Underserved or unserved persons with disabilities.* People with autism and significant cognitive disabilities, those who live in Wards 7 and 8, and those with co-existing behavioral health conditions may be underserved or unserved by vocational rehabilitation services.
- *Customized Employment.* Data indicates there were limited individuals employed through customized employment over the past year. There is a need for extensive training on customized employment for both DCRSA staff and community partners to maximize the opportunities for persons living with the most significant disabilities to gain employment through customized employment.

1.5 Key Findings on Service System Infrastructure

Analysis of the data collected throughout the course of the survey demonstrated a consensus among stakeholders around many areas of the service system infrastructure. Several themes relating to the service system infrastructure were prevalent across all of the data gathering methodologies. The findings and recommendations in this section are the result of feedback received over the course of the assessment activities.

Feedback on Vocational Rehabilitation Administrative Systems

- *Case Management/Administrative Systems* – The case management system needs updating. The existing case management information systems require workarounds for the documentation and monitoring of agency-wide performance. There is a need for a comprehensive information system which facilitates all the data collection necessary to manage the performance of the VR administration including relevant information for general VR clients and youth in transition.
- *Financial System/ Process for Payment* – The Human Care Agreement process, while efforts to restructure it is underway and continuing, there is still a need to incorporate a real-time component that will allow staff and the provider to determine the status of funds. According to DCRSA staff and rehabilitation service providers, under the current process, a service provider may be selected by the client seeking services or being assisted by the VR Counselor, only for both to discover after selection that the particular provider is not among the HCA holders with funds currently allocated to cover the requested service and a different provider must be selected. According to senior DCRSA staff, improvements are underway and continuing to address provider funding concerns that are immediate in nature. According to senior staff, an expedited process has been implemented to address an immediate funding needs that allow a VR Counselor to submit an “immediate requisition” and services can be approved within twenty-four (24) hours.
- *Policy Training Rollout* – The policy and procedure development should be accompanied by rigorous and ongoing training around new policies and procedures to ensure that all staff is consistently following the same processes.

Feedback on Partnership Relationships – Maximizing Collaborations and Cooperation

- *Memoranda of Understanding (MOU), (the only type of document that exchanges money between agencies)* and Memoranda of Agreements (MOAs) – executed by DCRSA to facilitate collaboration with other government agencies should be strengthened to enhance the requirements for data sharing that demonstrate the effectiveness of the relationships as well as provide DCRSA with measures to evaluate outcomes for the persons with disabilities served by both partners.
- *Collaboration* - Alignment of the services and supports of DCRSA and DCDDA to more efficiently coordinate efforts within DDS that will best serve individuals with the most

significant disabilities can lead to more meaningful and successful employment outcomes. In addition, increasing collaboration between DCDDA and DCRSA would improve the continuity of services for people that are eligible for both administrations.

Feedback on Rehabilitation Service Provider Management

- *Provider Data Availability* – Rehabilitation service provider information needs to be updated and maintained, including qualifications, performance history and maintenance of current contact information. DCRSA staff need efficient ways to obtain more timely data on the number and industry types of job placements made by providers and more detailed information on the VR services offered to help clients make more informed decisions.
- *Provider Diversification and Augmentation* – Diversification of the provider pool and increasing the number of providers offering various services is needed to improve informed consent and reduce delays in service provision due to lack of providers. Specifically, bilingual providers, providers that offer benefits counseling, and assistive technology services were said to be in demand and limited.

Feedback on Business or Employer Relations

- *Employer Relations and Engagement* – DCRSA staff, persons with disability served, and community rehabilitation service providers all cite a greater need for more employers to offer job placement opportunities for people receiving vocational rehabilitation supports. According to program staff, there is essentially no formal program for employer education. Under the current process, rehabilitation service providers offer employer education as they perform job development activities. DCRSA staff, including Employment Coordinators, work with VR Counselors to provide job opportunities and provide employer education as they conduct job development activities. However, there is no formal regularly scheduled process for helping employers understand what it means to hire a person with a disability or what accommodations are needed.
- *Limited Existing Employment Opportunities* – Throughout the data collection process and the review of unemployment data revealed the need for more job opportunities for persons with disabilities, including those with specialized skills and education. Survey feedback indicates employers have requested targeted education around making appropriate accommodations and recruitment of persons with disabilities to meet job demand.

Feedback on Student Focused Services

- *The needs of youth in transition differ from General Vocational Rehabilitation needs* – There is a need to provide clarity on the services for youth in transition, especially differences between Pre-ETS and VR services and how the services are implemented to foster better coordination and facilitate successful outcomes.
- *DCRSA/DCPS Partnership* – The roles in the partnership between DCRSA and DCPS are unclear to students and parents. There is confusion about VR services, especially tuition

assistance for eligible or potentially eligible students with disabilities. Better coordination is needed to ensure parents and students are more informed about DCRSA services. According to the MOU between DCRSA and DCPS, there is an estimated population of 4,500 students potentially eligible for DCRSA pre-ETS and VR services. DCRSA also supports students with disabilities in the DC Public Charter Schools and non-public schools, where DC students are placed by Local Education Agencies (LEAs). However, due to COVID-19, the needs assessment team was unable to reach representatives from a public charter school or non-public school to obtain their input.

1.6 Findings and Key Recommendations for Strategic Changes to Vocational Rehabilitation Service Provisions

This CSNA incorporated a broad perspectives of stakeholder input to inform the findings and recommendations found in this section. Stakeholders included persons with disabilities; DCRSA staff; community partners and disability advocacy groups as well as DCRSA business partners and local area employers. The analysis of stakeholder input on barriers and service needs, as well as service system infrastructure issues resulted in recommendations for strategic changes to VR service delivery. Feedback from data collection fell within the following broad categories:

Findings	Recommendations
Barriers to Employment for Persons with Disabilities	
<p>Lack of Information about available VR Programs and Services. Eighteen percent (18%) of respondents to the individual survey cited lack of information as a barrier to accessing DCRSA services. Also, during community and stakeholder interviews, community partners and VR clients cited navigation of DCRSA’s VR system as a barrier.</p>	<p>Recommendation: Consider launching a community-wide initiative aimed at creating a broad awareness of DCRSA programs and processes. Target information to persons with disabilities, and families supporting them including youth in transition and their families, community partners, business partners, advocacy groups and other community-based organizations to inform them about the comprehensive VR services available through DCRSA.</p>
<p>Job Development and Placement Services Help finding a job was cited by 59% of respondents to the individual survey as a barrier to obtaining their employment goal. Greater effort is needed to improve job placement opportunities to help VR clients to reach their employment goal.</p>	<p>Recommendation: DCRSA should consider maintaining a dashboard of persons with disabilities who are ready to work (<i>Status 20</i>) and facilitate access to the dashboard by business and community partners that commit to working with DCRSA to provide placement opportunities. Ensure that</p>

	<p>candidates have properly formatted resumes, qualifications, etc., so that business and community partners have quick access to a qualified pool of potential workers. An additional recommendation is to consider maintaining a centralized database of business partners who are seeking to hire and ensure there is a warm hand-off for people who are supported directly by DCRSA staff and by community rehabilitation service providers.</p>
<p>Education and/or Job Training and Employment preparation services. Thirty-six percent (36%) of respondents to the individual survey cited lack of “job training” as a barrier. In addition, 33% of respondents to the individual survey also cited the need for job coaching to successfully achieve employment.</p>	<p>Recommendation: Consider convening a workgroup to focus on identifying strategies to evaluate VR client employment readiness, including indicators to determine whether extended job coaching and other services and supports are needed. Consider piloting new initiatives to evaluate employment readiness.</p>
<p>Employer perceptions. Stakeholders, including 32% of DCRSA staff respondents and 62% of community partner respondents, cited employer perceptions as a barrier to employment for persons with disabilities. Qualitative data collected from staff during interviews and focus group discussions said essentially there was no formal program for employer education.</p>	<p>Recommendation: Consider as part of a comprehensive employer engagement and job development program, formal trainings on the benefits of hiring and supporting persons with disabilities; and training on understanding reasonable accommodations and how to provide them. An additional recommendation is to consider hosting regular initiatives to promote the skills and abilities of persons with disabilities who successfully complete vocational rehabilitation programs.</p>
<p>Confounding barriers. DCRSA staff, community partners, and VR clients all identified the need to address confounding services such as transportation, housing, childcare and mental health issues as barriers.</p>	<p>Recommendation: Consider using the discovery process to document confounding barriers and make the barriers known to others seeking to assist in the VR process. Also, consider closer coordination and partnerships with advocacy groups to help link VR clients to resources that address confounding barriers. As an alternative, consider compiling reference materials to refer VR clients to other community resources to address documented confounding barriers.</p>

Service Provisions for Persons with Disabilities	
<p>Assistive Technology. Technological aids and information management devices along with related training were cited by families and VR clients as key to supporting their employment goals, and access to these technologies needs to be expanded.</p>	<p>Recommendation: Consider contracting with more community partners who can provide such technological aids and devices, and training or include these services in an MOU with a government agency that can provide devices and training.</p>
<p>Underserved and unserved people with disabilities. According to DCRSA staff during interviews, the number of persons with Autism and significant cognitive disabilities eligible for VR services and those with co-existing behavioral health conditions are underserved or unserved by DCRSA.</p>	<p>Recommendation: Consider implementing additional vocational rehabilitation programs. Also consider partnering with advocacy organizations that offer unique capabilities to support people on the Autism spectrum.</p>
<p>Customized Employment. There were a limited number of people employed through customized employment over the past year. In-depth conversations with providers and employers revealed that there were varied levels of understanding regarding both the meaning of customized employment and strategies to develop these opportunities.</p>	<p>Recommendation: Consider hosting regular training and information exchange sessions with DCRSA-designated staff and provider staff who are responsible for job development or placement. The sessions could address strategies and best practices; tracking provider staff progress in developing employer relationships; and developing effective tools provider staff can use to assist employers to discover opportunities for customization and realization of efficiencies.</p>
Feedback on Vocational Rehabilitation Administrative Systems	
<p>Case Management/Administrative System - The case management system needs updating. Existing case management information systems require workarounds for the documentation and monitoring of overall agency performance for individuals served including youth in transition. There is a need for a comprehensive system, which facilitates all the data collection necessary to manage the performance of the VR administration including relevant information for general VR clients and youth in transition.</p>	<p>Recommendation: DCRSA should consider replacing or revising the existing case management information systems. This action should eliminate the current workaround processes. The replacement or modified system must be able to capture and manage data for the overall performance of VR administration. In addition, the system must be able to provide VR Counselors with timely data on provider qualifications and performance, including the number and types of job placements made by the providers and other relevant information to help VR clients make informed choices.</p>

<p>Financial System/ Process for Payment – The Human Care Agreement process, while efforts to restructure it is underway and continuing, there is still a need to incorporate a real-time component that allows staff and providers to determine the status of funds. According to DCRSA staff and providers, under the current process, a service provider may be selected by the client seeking services or being assisted by the VR Counselor, only for both to discover after selection that the particular service provider is not among the HCA holders with dollars currently allocated to cover the requested service and a different provider must be selected.</p> <p>However, improvements are underway and continuing to address provider selection and allocation concerns that are immediate in nature. According to senior staff, an expedited process has been implemented to address funding needs that allow a VR Counselor to submit an “immediate requisition” and services can be approved within twenty-four (24) hours.</p>	<p>Recommendation: As part of the HCA restructure process, DCRSA should consider how the associated procurement or purchase order procedures can be improved to more efficiently facilitate the availability of real-time funding information. An additional recommendation is to ensure that VR Counselors are trained and utilize the expedited process to address “immediate funding needs” to ensure continuity of services for persons receiving vocational rehabilitation services.</p>
<p>Feedback on Partnership Relationships – Maximizing Collaborations and Cooperation</p>	
<p>Memoranda of Understanding (MOU), <i>(the instrument that exchanges funds between agencies)</i> and Memoranda of Agreements (MOAs) – executed by DCRSA to facilitate collaboration with other government agencies should be strengthened to enhance the requirements for data sharing to demonstrate the effectiveness of the relationships as well as provide DCRSA with measures to determine outcomes for the individuals served by both partners.</p>	<p>Recommendation: Consider revising to strengthen agreements that exchange funding for services and collaboration with other government agencies and community partners. The revised agreements should ensure that the data provided to DCRSA demonstrate the desired outcomes, including the number of persons with disabilities served, types of services provided, the timeframes required to deliver services and the outcomes achieved.</p>
<p>Collaboration - Alignment of services and supports of DCRSA and DCDDA to more efficiently coordinate efforts within DDS that will best facilitate person-centered services that can lead to more widespread and</p>	<p>Recommendation: DCRSA should consider strengthening the current DCDDA/DCRSA Collaboration Policy to improve coordination of services. This would ensure continuity of services by eliminating gaps for clients</p>

<p>meaningful employment opportunities. Increased collaboration between DCDDA and DCRSA would ensure a continuity of services for people who are eligible for both administrations.</p>	<p>served by both administrations. The policy changes should facilitate more efficient linkage to services and supports between administrations.</p>
<p>Feedback on Rehabilitation Service Provider Management</p>	
<p>Provider Data Availability – DCRSA rehabilitation service provider information needs to be updated and maintained, including identification, qualification, communication, and maintenance of current information on performance outcomes about services provided. Provider data that is of specific interest to VR Counselors and clients is information on the number of successful job placements by providers and placement types.</p>	<p>Recommendation: Consider updating how rehabilitation service providers’ information is collected, maintained and utilized to help persons with disabilities make more informed choices. The current DCRSA online service provider directory should contain updated contact information and performance history, including specialty services provided and job placement history. The information should also be easily accessible and provided to VR clients to help facilitate informed choice.</p>
<p>Provider Diversification and Augmentation – Diversification of the provider pool and increasing the number of providers offering various services will improve informed consent and reduce delays in service provision due to lack of providers. Specifically, increase of bilingual providers, providers offering benefits counseling and assistive technology services were said to be in demand and limited.</p>	<p>Recommendation: Consider changing the provider recruitment process to diversify and increase the number of providers offering various services to minimize delays in service provision due to lack of providers and improve informed consent. Specifically, obtain more bilingual service providers that are fluent in a range of languages, obtain more providers of American Sign Language (ASL) services, providers offering benefits counseling, assistive technology services and providers that offer training in a range of technology products, e.g., computers, tablets, smartphones and other technology applications.</p>
<p>Feedback on Business or Employer Relations</p>	
<p>Employer Relations and Engagement – Building stronger relationships with the business community to increase the pool of employer partners is essential. DCRSA staff, VR clients and community rehabilitation partners each cited a greater need for more employers to offer job placement opportunities. However, the current process</p>	<p>Recommendation: Consider establishing a Comprehensive Employer Engagement and Job Development Program. Since employers are critical to successful VR programs to offer competitive integrated employment opportunities, the Program should be a strategic vehicle to help DCRSA achieve its job placement goals. The program should</p>

<p>to build relationships with employers or business partners is fragmented. The DCRSA structure to address this function, including to build employer relationships, perform job development activities and conduct employer trainings is decentralized, limited and needs an overhaul. Further frustrating the achievement of job creation and relationship development is the disparate maintenance of business contacts and information.</p>	<p>include DCRSA staff, rehabilitation service providers and employers. The program components should incorporate a comprehensive employer engagement approach involving VR outreach and promotion, employer education and training services, and coordination of job placement and job opportunity activities. It should include goals and performance measures that directly correlate to DCRSA annual job placement goals.</p>
<p>Limited Existing Employment Opportunities Survey feedback and unemployment data revealed the lack of existing jobs available for persons with disabilities, including those with specialized skills and education. Employers have requested targeted education around making appropriate accommodations and recruitment of persons with disabilities to meet job demand. A concerted effort by DCRSA to make available the skills of VR clients who have successfully completed VR services and are awaiting employment could open up opportunities, especially for highly skilled and educated persons with disabilities that simply need advocacy and education for business partners and employers to create opportunity.</p>	<p>Recommendation: Consider creating a job information/success board to post and promote skills reflective of persons with disabilities who have successfully completed VR training and are seeking job placement. Allow rehabilitation service providers to submit job openings for posting with contact information and post success stories to promote and facilitate interactions with prospective employers to help VR clients achieve their employment goals.</p>
<p>Feedback on Student Focused Services</p>	
<p>DCRSA/School Partnership – The roles in the partnership between DCRSA and DCPS are unclear to students and parents. There is confusion about VR services, especially tuition assistance for eligible or potentially eligible students with disabilities. Better coordination is needed to ensure parents and students are more informed about DCRSA services.</p>	<p>Recommendation: Consider strengthening the terms of the DCRSA/DCPS agreement to provide clarity on the services for youth in transition, especially differences between Pre-ETS and VR services. Also, expand outreach and education about transition services to ensure that parents and students gain a better understanding of Pre-ETS and VR services. In addition, enhance current data sharing to more effectively demonstrate performance outcomes.</p>

2. OVERVIEW

2.1 Purpose of the Needs Assessment

DCRSA contracted with Promesa Consulting Group, Inc. to conduct the CSNA of persons with disabilities living in the District of Columbia. In addition, Promesa engaged the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) and Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) to seek their participation to provide input for the CSNA. The overall objective was to obtain feedback, input and recommendations for programs and services to help prepare people with disabilities to retain, maintain, regain, or sustain competitive integrated employment that will enable them to lead meaningful and productive lives. This report details findings on the vocational rehabilitation needs of District of Columbia residents with disabilities and related service implications for DCRSA.

Federal Standards

The federal standards for conducting the comprehensive needs assessment define minimally expected content. As stated in federal guidelines, the comprehensive statewide assessment must:

- Describe the rehabilitation needs of people with disabilities residing in the jurisdiction, particularly the vocational rehabilitation services need of:
 - People with the most significant disabilities
 - People who are from racial or cultural minority groups
 - People who are unserved or underserved by vocational rehabilitation programs
 - People with disabilities served through other components of the statewide workforce development system, and
 - Youth and students with disabilities including their need for and coordination of pre-employment transition services.
- Provide an assessment of the need to establish, develop or improve community rehabilitation programs with the jurisdiction.⁷

The Promesa worked with DCRSA and leaders of the SRC and SILC, to solicit feedback and assistance related to the data collection process and individual participation in the CSNA.

Needs Assessment Framework and Limitations

Development of the District of Columbia CSNA followed the standard needs assessment process. Needs assessments are intended to gather expressed and observed needs of the community through collection and analysis of primary and secondary data. Needs assessments

⁷ Rehabilitation Act Needs Assessment Requirements, Section 101(a)(15)

are conducted to identify gaps between existing services and needed services; they provide information to guide strategies to reach the desired state of program performance or outcomes. This needs assessment does not evaluate how well program operations or services function. Although the vocational rehabilitation needs assessment collected information on community perceptions of service and system strengths, it did not evaluate service provision or system infrastructure.

In addition, the most significant limitation to the 2020 needs assessment process was the global health crisis caused by the novel Coronavirus, known as COVID-19. This unprecedented worldwide event affected government and business operations globally. Within the District of Columbia, Mayor Muriel Bowser issued a Declaration of Public Emergency: COVID-19⁸ that defined government operations to essential personnel only; instituted social distancing guidelines that limited the number of people able to gather in-person and required face-coverings to reduce the spread of the virus. The government change in operating status amid concerns about the spread of COVID-19 amended operations to include essential personnel in the office and other DC government employees have been virtually working from home. All services continued with DCRSA.

Throughout the CSNA implementation, COVID-19 significantly disrupted efforts to reach communities for participation. This disruption created tremendous limitations on the ability to gather community feedback. Specifically, persons with disabilities may have needed assistance to complete the survey. The change in the operating status limited the CSNA survey data collection efforts to virtual only, limiting participation for many vocational rehabilitation participants without access or ability to use a web-based survey instrument. In addition, the change in operating status made it significantly more difficult to reach DCRSA community partners and government employees at other District agencies for participation.

The needs assessment sought input from diverse data sources, including survey participation for quantitative data collection and interviews and focus groups to obtain qualitative data.

Although quantitative data was limited, extra effort was made to collect qualitative data through interviews and focus groups to obtain an appropriate level of data collection to satisfy the objectives to meet federal needs assessment requirements.

Therefore, feedback raised by one or two individuals is indicated as such in the reporting, while feedback shared by multiple participants and across different participant groups emerged as key findings. When feedback was limited to select participant groups, it is described accordingly. Overall, the response rates provided a basic level of confidence in the survey findings.

⁸ Mayor's Order 2020-045, Declaration of Public Emergency: COVID-19, issued March 11, 2020, effective date March 16, 2020

2.2 Methodology

The DCRSA 2020 CSNA was guided by core research questions that informed data collection and analysis methods. The research questions and the methodology employed for the needs assessment are based on an assessment of best practices in the field, a review of methods employed in past CSNAs and the contractor's professional expertise. The research questions and methodology were also reviewed and informed by DCRSA's leadership team during ongoing project status meetings.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided needs assessment activities and analysis:

1. What does the VR target population look like?
 - a. What is the prevalence of prospective VR clients within the District?
 - b. What is the prevalence of selected VR target populations, including: persons with the most significant disabilities, students transitioning from high school, and persons with disabilities from racial/ethnic minority groups and those with limited-English proficiency?
 - c. What is the distribution of VR services across the various wards within the District?
2. What are the primary barriers to employment for DCRSA's VR clients, and/or what are their service needs?
 - a. What are the primary barriers to employment for VR clients?
 - b. What VR services do clients need to support achievement of employment goals?
 - c. How do barriers to employment vary from selected subgroups, including the selected target population?
 - d. How do barriers affect the service needs of people with disabilities who are underserved or unserved by VR?
3. What was VR clients' experience with DCRSA?
 - a. How did they learn about DCRSA and the VR services available?
 - b. What was their experience with DCRSA community partners?
4. How can VR services best support client efforts to achieve positive employment outcomes?
 - a. What limits the accessibility and availability for prospective and/or current clients?
 - b. What kind of staff support is most important for providing high-quality services?
 - c. What strategic changes to VR service provision, if any, are likely to improve employment outcomes for clients?
 - d. Are people with disabilities served through other components of the statewide workforce system? If so, how are they served?

- e. How are pre-employment or other transition services provided to students, and how are these services coordinated with transition services provided under IDEA for youth and students with disabilities?

Data Collection

The data collection strategy for the needs assessment utilized the following four (4) methods to answer the research questions posed to people receiving supports, families of those receiving supports, advocates, DCRSA staff, community partners, and other stakeholders:

1. Review of existing data;
2. Interview of clients, stakeholders, staff, community partners, advocacy groups and business partners;
3. Surveys of clients, stakeholders, staff, community partners, advocacy groups and business partners; and
4. Focus group discussions with people receiving supports, families, advocates, staff, community partners, and other key stakeholders.

Data analysis integrated and compared findings across the four data sources to identify needs, issues, trends, opportunities and recommendations. The comparisons also identified common themes and variations across data sources. The data collection activities are summarized as following sections: Analysis of Existing Data Sources, Interviews, Surveys, and Focus Group Discussions.

Analysis of Existing Data Sources

To guide the needs assessment approach and formulate questions to inform the assessment's research strategy, Promesa's project team reviewed a range of existing data sources. This included the prevalence of disability, the employment status of people with disabilities, and the characteristics of District residents and VR clients with disabilities. The project team consulted national surveys, program-level administrative data, vocational needs assessments from prior years and relevant national reports.

According to U.S. Census data on the population of people with disability in the District of Columbia within the context of the total District's population, in 2018, the District of Columbia population estimate was 684,498, and the estimated population of persons with disabilities was 80,368 or 11.6%.⁹ A complete list of existing data sources included the following:

- U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 American Community Survey;
- The 2018 Social Security Administration SSI/DI Data;
- Disability Status Report, ©2019 Cornell University, www.disabilitystatistic.org

⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 ACS, American FactFinder, Table S2301 (1-year estimates), <http://factfinder.census.gov>

- U.S. Department of Education
- DCRSA Service Utilization Data, July 2018-June 2019, compiled at the request of the project team
- DDS/DCRSA 2017 CSNA
- DDS/DCRSA 2014 CSNA

Interviews

Instrument - To get a detailed understanding of the strengths and needs associated with vocational rehabilitation service delivery and outcomes, stakeholder interviews provided the opportunity to obtain a direct perspective from VR clients and people working in the field. The instrument used for the interviews (Appendix A) was developed by Promesa’s project team and reviewed and approved by DCRSA’s leadership team.

Interview population – The population of participants included persons and/or family members of people with disabilities, DCRSA staff, community partners and disability advocacy groups and business partners. The project team conducted interviews from May 2020 – August 2020. A total of 78 interviews were conducted. The specific population of participants included:

- Persons with disabilities – fourteen (14)
- DCRSA staff – twenty-three (23)
- Community partners – thirty-four (34)
- Business partners – seven (7)

Data Analysis – Audio recordings were made of each interview and notes were taken as the interview occurred. The notes were analyzed to identify common themes and concerns consistent across data collection.

Surveys

There were four (4) separate surveys administered to each stakeholder group: 1) persons with disabilities; 2) DCRSA Community partners and disability advocacy groups; 3) DCRSA staff; and 4) business partners. The surveys provided quantitative data to supplement the qualitative data from the interviews and focus group discussions. A description of each stakeholder group is defined below.

1. Surveys of Persons with disabilities (Individual Survey)

Instrument – The individual survey was disseminated to VR program participants in both English and Spanish. Each instrument developed by the project team used for the individual survey can be found at (Appendix B). Each survey afforded an opportunity to obtain input from a variety of stakeholders.

Survey population - Total individual survey respondents were eighty-six (86);

- Eighty-two (82) – English Language Respondents
- Four (4) – Spanish Language (Latinx) Respondents

2. Overview

Survey Dissemination – The survey dissemination was accomplished through multiple approaches.

- English-Language Survey Dissemination – The English version link was sent directly to more than 30 vocational rehabilitation program participants by Promesa’s project team; also, an open survey link of the Individual survey was disseminated to the SRC, SILC, disability advocacy groups, and parent advocates.
- Spanish-Language (Latinx) Survey Dissemination – working directly with disability advocacy groups and organization serving Latinx clients, DCRSA Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors with a Latinx caseload, Promesa’s project team provided an open survey link of the Individual Survey to facilitate dissemination.

Data analysis – Data analysis utilized the software computing capabilities for statistical aggregation from survey respondents with fixed response options that provided percentage of participant selection as well as number of respondents. Open-ended questions provided narrative responses and were analyzed for the concepts expressed by respondents.

2. Survey of DCRSA Community Partners

Instrument – The instrument developed by the Promesa project team and reviewed for feedback by DCRSA leadership can be found in Appendix C.

Survey Dissemination - DCRSA gave Promesa’s project team their most recent provider directory, offering over one hundred (100) e-mail addresses for their network of community partners; Promesa added contacts for disability advocacy groups to this list, and sent the Community Partner Survey link directly to each.

Survey Respondents – There were twenty-six (26) community partners and disability advocates that responded to the community partner survey.

Data analysis - Data analysis utilized the software computing capabilities for statistical aggregation from survey respondents with fixed response options that provided percentage of participant selection as well as number of respondents. Open-ended questions provided narrative responses and were analyzed for the concepts expressed by respondents.

3. Survey of DCRSA Staff

Instrument - The instrument developed by Promesa’s project team and feedback was provided by DCRSA leadership and can be found in Appendix D.

Survey Dissemination - DCRSA provided Promesa’s project team with a list of staff e-mail addresses; eighty-two (82) DCRSA staff were sent a direct link to the Staff Survey for participation.

Survey Respondents – A total of forty-three (43) DCRSA staff responded.

Data analysis - Data analysis utilized the software computing capabilities for statistical aggregation from survey respondents with fixed response options that provided percentage of participant selection as well as number of respondents. Open-ended questions provided narrative responses and were analyzed for the concepts expressed by respondents.

4. Survey of Businesses (Employers)

Instrument – The instrument developed by Promesa’s project team and reviewed by DCRSA leadership can be found in Appendix E.

Survey Dissemination - DCRSA assisted the project team by disseminating an open link of the business survey directly to its list of business partner contacts working to provide employment opportunities to persons with disabilities.

Survey Respondents - A total sixteen (16) businesses responded to the business survey.

Data analysis - Data analysis utilized the software computing capabilities for statistical aggregation from survey respondents with fixed response options that provided percentage of participant selection as well as number of respondents. Open-ended questions provided narrative responses and were analyzed for the concepts expressed by respondents.

Focus Group Discussions

A total of eight (8) focus groups were conducted to obtain a broad perspective on VR services and to further explore survey feedback to assess service needs, barriers or variation in access to services. The focus groups provided the opportunity to have further and more specific discussions about VR program strengths and needs with respondents across each of the following four (4) distinct stakeholder groups: 1) Current and former program participants, including students transitioning from high school; 2) Community rehabilitation service providers and advocacy groups; 3) DCRSA VR Counselors; and 4) DCRSA business staff, employment coordinators and business partners in a combined focus group.

Focus Group participation - A total of 71 individuals participated in the focus groups. *Table 2* includes the focus group participation. The focus group protocols are contained in Appendix F.

As a result of COVID-19, and the government change in operating status, all focus groups were conducted virtually. DCRSA supervisors were very instrumental in assisting with recruiting DCRSA VR Counselors and business partners for focus group participation.

There were facilitated discussions following the protocols designed for each stakeholder group. A note-taker recorded the discussions as they occurred. The notes were transcribed and analyzed by the project team. Consistent themes that occurred from each discussion were identified and documented.

The total number of individuals participating in the CSNA by stakeholder group and method is contained below.

Table 2 represents the total participants by type and method of data collection activities

Research Method	Research Group and Count				
	Individuals with Disabilities	Community Partners	DCRSA Staff	Business Partners	Total
Individual Interviews	14	34	23	7	78
Electronic Surveys	86	26	43	16	171
Focus Groups	40	10	16	5	71
Totals	140	70	82	28	320

2.3 Report Navigation

This report includes an executive summary, an overview and the sections listed below. It represents qualitative data collected through interviews and focus group discussions, as well as quantitative data from surveys of clients, staff, community partners, advocacy groups and businesses. The following sections of this report describes the results of the CSNA.

- DCRSA Context
- Data Collection Highlights
- Barriers to Employment for Persons with Disabilities
- Service Provision for Persons with Disabilities
- Service System Infrastructure
- Recommendations for Strategic Changes to Vocational Rehabilitation Service Provisions

In addition, this report also includes appendices that provide copies of the documents used to conduct the 2020 CSNA.

3. DCRSA CONTEXT

3.1 Vocational Rehabilitation Overview

The District of Columbia Department on Disability Services (DDS) includes three Administrations: The Developmental Disabilities Administration (DCDDA), the Rehabilitation Services Administration (DCRSA), and the Disability Determination Division (DCDDD). DCRSA is the focus of this study, and its [website](#) explains and describes its function as follows: “The Vocational Rehabilitation program provides vocational and rehabilitative services to persons with disabilities to help them prepare for, secure, regain or retain employment. Persons with disabilities face some challenges in today’s modern workplace. We believe that people with disabilities, given the right opportunities, can work and be fully integrated into mainstream society and the workplace. Vocational rehabilitation services can reduce or remove barriers to employment.”¹⁰

The services that the DCRSA offers to eligible persons include

- Supported Employment Services, and
- Job Placement Services
- Guidance and Counseling
- Job Development
- Job Coaching
- Assessments and Evaluations
- Physical and Mental restoration Services
- Assistive Aids and Devices
- Interpreter and Reader Services
- Vocational and Other Training Services
- Transportation
- Personal Assistance Services

People seeking services must first demonstrate their eligibility. The requirements include a physical or mental impairment that presents a substantial impediment to employment; ability to benefit from Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services to achieve employment; and require VR supports to prepare for, secure, regain, obtain, retain and sustain employment. Each eligible applicant is provided with assistance and information to make an informed choice with respect to services needed to achieve the employment outcome. The DC DCRSA uses Person-Centered Thinking in its practices to support self-direction for everyone who uses these services.

¹⁰ DC Department on Disability Services website for the Rehabilitation Services Administration: <https://dds.dc.gov/service/vocational-rehabilitation-services>

3.2 Key Environmental Factors

The DCRSA works within the boundaries of federal and local requirements. Although the District of Columbia is not a state it does manage state functions as well as local functions. Local laws passed by the DC City Council that govern the DCRSA must, as all laws in the District of Columbia, receive final approval by the United States Congress. Regulation crafted to implement the laws follows a process that may include inviting stakeholder input to drafts, review for fiscal and legal sufficiency, a period of public comment, and approval by the City Council. In addition to legislation and regulation, the policies seek to ensure that DCRSA is consistently working within best practices.

Employment First

A critical priority for the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), is to invest in systems change efforts that result in increased community-based, integrated employment opportunities for people with significant disabilities. This priority reflects growing support for a national movement called Employment First, a framework for systems change that is centered on the premise that all citizens, including people with significant disabilities, are capable of full participation in integrated employment and community life.¹¹

The District of Columbia is an Employment First jurisdiction. The DDS [website](#) states: “On October 8, 2012, DC Mayor Vincent Gray issued a proclamation declaring the District of Columbia an Employment First State—the 20th state to do so nationwide. Mayor Gray’s proclamation affirms that “employment is an important part of the lives of all working age adults and people with disabilities are a largely untapped resource with skills and talents who can meet the needs of area business and employers.” Under the Employment First philosophy, competitive, integrated employment is the first and overwhelmingly preferred option for working-age youth and adults with disabilities, regardless of the complexity or severity of their disabilities. The other main tenets of Employment First are that:

- Employment services are tailored and customized to a person’s needs, interests, and skill set with the ultimate goal of achieving long-term employment in a competitive business or organization, or self-employment.
- Employment is at the prevailing wage, and never less than minimum wage.
- The employee has ample opportunities to integrate and interact with his or her coworkers, the public, and/or customers without disabilities.”¹²

¹¹ Federal Website describing Employment First: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/initiatives/employment-first>

¹² DC Department on Disability Services website: <https://dds.dc.gov/page/employment-first>

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)

The [Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as Amended](#) prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in programs conducted by federal agencies, in programs receiving federal financial assistance, in federal employment and in the employment practices of federal contractors.

The standards for determining employment discrimination under the Rehab Act are the same as those used in [Title I](#) of the ADA; it protects “qualified individuals with disabilities.” An “individual with a disability” is a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, has a record of such impairment or is regarded as having such an impairment. “Qualified” means the person satisfies the job-related requirements of the position he or she holds (or is applying for) and can perform its essential functions, with or without a reasonable accommodation.

On July 22, 2014, President Barack Obama signed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) into law. WIOA is a federal law working to increase strategic collaboration across programs investing in skill development that leads to competitive, integrated employment. It is landmark legislation that is designed to strengthen and improve opportunities for people with disabilities who present with significant barriers to employment in the nation’s public workforce system and help Americans, including youth and people with significant barriers to employment, to acquire high-quality jobs and careers and help employers hire and retain skilled workers.

WIOA uses strategic coordination to bring together all Department of Labor-funded programs as well as other programs administered by the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services. WIOA also authorizes programs for specific vulnerable populations, including Job Corps, YouthBuild, Indian and Native Americans, and Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker programs.

The WIOA Final Rules that became effective in September 2016 included reforms affecting more than a dozen programs receiving approximately \$10 billion in annual funding, and programs that serve approximately 20 million Americans each year, by:

- **Ensuring Accountability for Employment Results.** All programs will now report employment and earning outcomes and all core programs will report on outcomes using the same definitions so that their results can more easily be compared.
- **Improving Transparency for Job Seekers to Help Them Make Better Choices.** Customers will also have information to better inform their choices when selecting training programs. American workers looking to invest time and money in training can go online and see which programs have the best chance of giving them a leg up.
- **Strengthening employer engagement and service to businesses.** Implementing a new accountability indicator will gauge how effectively businesses are served by the workforce system. The law also will increase opportunities for work-based learning,

including on-the-job training and Registered Apprenticeships, for all Americans, particularly those with barriers to employment.

- **Enhancing Coordination and Collaboration across Programs.** Implementing provisions of the law requires unified State planning across programs and co-location of more programs in American Job Centers. These reforms will result in streamlined access to customer-focused services and improved communication across the workforce system.

WIOA implemented final regulations effective in September 2016 that include broader collaboration in planning and service delivery, increased performance measurement, and additional focus on service provision for youth transitioning to adulthood.¹³

COVID-19 Pandemic of 2020

The worldwide pandemic caused by the novel Coronavirus, known as COVID-19, was first identified in the US in February of 2020. It has forced unprecedented changes in the ways in which all business is conducted. The community spread of the disease and the death toll led Mayor Muriel Bowser of the District of Columbia to closely adhere to guidance issued by the White House’s Coronavirus Task Force and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). On March 11, 2020, Mayor Bowser issued a Declaration of Public Emergency: COVID-19¹⁴ that referenced a policy for all District government employees relating to travel, designation of emergency and essential employees, employee responsibilities, and guidance on workplace flexibility, leave options, and workplace protections. A second Mayor’s Order went into effect of March 25, 2020, closing non-essential businesses and prohibiting gatherings of ten or more people.¹⁵

According to an early April 2020 article in the Washington City Paper, the D.C. government at a press conference estimated that over 93,600 people will become infected with the coronavirus disease over the course of the pandemic. That amounts to about 1 in 7 D.C. residents. This is a cumulative number that runs through the end of the year. The estimate is of overall COVID-19 cases, not just those confirmed through testing.¹⁶

Although the disease can affect anyone in the general population, it is particularly dangerous for people with underlying health conditions. The vulnerable populations seeking supports from DCRSA have had to incorporate significant changes to the ways in which they travel, receive supports, shop, and work. Technology plays a much larger role in everyone’s lives, meaning in-person, face-to-face meetings have been exchanged for virtual settings.

People who require supports have the added challenges of being able to access reliable broadband internet, maneuvering the use of several virtual meeting platforms depending upon

¹³ Federal Website describing WIOA: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/wioa/about>

¹⁴ Mayor’s Order 2020-045, Declaration of Public Emergency: COVID-19, issued March 11, 2020, effective date March 16, 2020

¹⁵ Mayor’s Order 2020-053: Closure of Non-Essential Businesses and Prohibition on Large Gatherings During Public Health Emergency for the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

¹⁶ Washington City Paper: <https://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/news/city-desk/article/21126707/district-line-daily-dc-projects-1-in-7-will-be-infected-by-covid19>

which service or employer with which they are attempting to interact, and using masks. The masks, though effective in reducing infection risk, also reduce the cues that people project and receive during conversation, diminishing people's ability to understand one another, especially in cases where there may already be a language, hearing, or speaking impairment.

The Economy and Availability of Work

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) summarized the ongoing and expected economic impact in a May 2020 report:

- The unemployment rate increased from 3.5% in February to 14.7% in April, representing a decline of more than 25 million people employed, plus another 8 million persons that exited the labor force.
- Job declines were focused on industries that rely on "in-person interactions" such as retail, education, health services, leisure and hospitality. For example, 8 of the 17 million leisure and hospitality jobs were lost in March and April.
- The economic impact was expected to hit smaller and newer businesses harder, as they typically have less financial cushion.
- Real (inflation-adjusted) consumer spending fell 17% from February to April, as social distancing reached its peak. In April, car and light truck sales were 49% below the late 2019 monthly average. Mortgage applications fell 30% in April 2020 versus April 2019.
- Real GDP was forecast to fall at a nearly 38% annual rate in the second quarter, or 11.2% versus the prior quarter, with a return to positive growth of 5.0% in Q3 and 2.5% in Q4 2020. However, real GDP was not expected to regain its Q4 2019 level until 2022 or later.¹⁷

The entire environment for work has changed while the nation seeks to "flatten the curve" of infection through community spread and prepare for what could possibly be a new wave of infections during the fall and winter of 2020. Remote work, much reduced physical presence at work sites, and intensive cleaning protocols have affected how interviewing and hiring take place, and jobs that require higher levels of contact have been reduced and many have been eliminated as small businesses struggle to survive by finding alternative means to keep and serve customers. The US economy came to a near standstill, with more than 20 million jobs lost since mid-March.

The Council of Governments (COG) is a nonprofit association for elected officials from twenty-four local governments, the Maryland and Virginia state legislatures, and the US Congress. The data below comes from their [website](#).

Job Sector Loss

¹⁷ From WIKIPEDIA: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic_impact_of_the_COVID-19_pandemic_in_the_United_States

“Job sector data for the region indicates a near-term job loss of about 6,800 jobs (-0.2 percent) between April and May, but the region lost more than 324,300 jobs (-10.7 percent) between February 2020 and May 2020. Job losses during March and April were a more focused and immediate shock to the local labor market than during prior recessions when job losses were spread over many months. As a point of comparison, during the Great Recession, the region lost 58,000 jobs between December 2007 and June 2009. The job loss during the Great Recession was a more gradual decline over many months compared to the current economic downturn that occurred over several weeks.

“...Nationally, the economy added approximately 2.9 million jobs (2.3 percent) back between April and May, however, the nation lost more than 17.7 million jobs (-13.3 percent) between February 2020 and May 2020.

“...Leisure and Hospitality jobs are largely dependent on travel and tourism to the region, which has long been seen as a destination for business and personal travel, neither of which are showing strong recovery. Retail employment is more dependent on local consumer spending which appears to be increasing as we continue to ‘reopen.’”¹⁸

COVID-19 Employment Barriers Specific to People with Disabilities

Many of the jobs that were traditionally filled by people who come through DCRSA have been affected by the measures required to effectively combat the pandemic, for example, in-store retail, food service, administrative office work, and hospitality. There may be more opportunities for custodial work, as deep cleaning for offices and other spaces is a requirement for reducing the spread of COVID-19.

The current presidential administration is hopeful that most people who either lost or were laid off from work during the pandemic will return once the economy is fully reopened. A research brief published by the Lerner Center at Syracuse University shared recent data from a blog [Maroto, M., & Pettinicchio, D. (2020, May 21). “An unequal labor market means that COVID-19 has been especially harmful for vulnerable groups including people with disabilities.” USAPP – American Politics and Policy at LSE [website](#), reported that employment rates between March and April 2020 decreased 18% for the general population, but 24% for workers with disabilities.

As employers have used innovative strategies to continue operations to the greatest degree possible, virtual work has become normalized. While this has a lifeline for many workers, especially those in white collar or administrative jobs, it has hit people whose work is front line, essential, or public facing in a much more challenging way.

People with disabilities, especially people of color and women with disabilities, are often employed in low status, low-wage, part-time, in-person, non-unionized jobs offering very little (if any) job security. Industries which have traditionally employed many workers with

¹⁸ From the Council on Governments website: <https://www.mwcog.org/about-us/cog-and-our-region/>

disabilities, such as food services, leisure and hospitality, construction, and manufacturing, experienced substantial job losses at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁹ Further complicating the situation, many of the employers who supported office-based jobs are either temporarily or permanently closed. An article by Steve LeVine for Marker titled “Remote Work is Killing the Hidden Trillion Dollar Office Economy” states: “The white-collar office worker ... shopped at small businesses ... like [Silva’s] shoe repair shop: dry cleaners, gyms, food carts, florists, and pharmacies. But they were also among the most vital customers and source of revenue for a slew of larger, less obvious businesses – food delivery companies like Grubhub and Uber Eats, and companies like Xerox.”²⁰

As unemployment reaches historic levels, the supply of people who are available to work has increased. At the same time, social distancing measures limit the number of employees an employer can hire/re-hire. This increase in the supply of workers and low demand for employees will result in a selective hiring process.²¹ A number of people with disabilities worked in jobs that focused on supports for office workers, such as copying and distributing paper documents, filing or shredding documents, cleaning offices and office kitchens, managing errands, and other types of support.

Some people with disabilities will not return to work due to COVID-19 health-related concerns. Recent research indicates that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities are more likely to both contract and experience the most severe symptoms of COVID-19. People with disabilities, especially those with underlying health conditions, could find that returning to work may be a matter of life and death.

Some displaced workers with disabilities have lost the supports and services that allowed them to participate in various aspects of pre-COVID-19 life, including work. These individuals, who once relied on supports to live independently in the community (e.g., personal attendant care (PCA) services, job coaches, etc.), may now be sheltering-in-place with family, partners, and friends for the foreseeable future. Although jobs might become available to these individuals, they will not have the appropriate supports to access these jobs, according to researchers at Syracuse University Lerner Center for Public Health Promotion.

Finally, while people with disabilities are often seen as care receivers, many are also caregivers. Many people with disabilities, especially women with disabilities, have more care giving responsibilities due to stay-at-home orders. Additional tasks, such as homeschooling, cooking, cleaning, 24/7 childcare, and caring for those who are not typically a part of the household, may make returning to work impossible for these individuals.²²

¹⁹ Syracuse University Lerner Center for Public Health Promotion: <https://lernercenter.syr.edu/2020/06/15/ib-30/>

²⁰ <https://marker.medium.com/remote-work-is-killing-the-hidden-trillion-dollar-office-economy-5800af06b007>

²¹ Op. Cit. Syracuse University Lerner Center for Public Health Promotion

²² IBID.

3.3 Disability Prevalence

The United States as a whole has a significant population that identifies as having some form of disability. According to the Cornell University’s Disability Statistics:

“In the year 2018, an estimated 12.6 percent (plus or minus 0.05 percentage points) of non-institutionalized, male or female, all ages, all races, regardless of ethnicity, with all education levels in the United States reported a disability.

“In other words, 40,585,700 out of 323,289,900 non-institutionalized, male or female, all ages, all races, regardless of ethnicity, with all education levels in the United States reported a disability.

“The estimates above are based on a sample of 3,140,203 persons who participated in the 2018 American Community Survey (ACS).”²³

The Centers for Disease Control presents the following on the prevalence of disabilities in Washington DC, with a comparison to the national prevalence:

Types of disabilities comparing U.S. with District of Columbia ²⁴

	U.S.	District of Columbia
Mobility: Serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs.	12.9%	12.1%
Cognition: Serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions.	11.4%	9.9%
Independent living: Difficulty doing errands alone, such as visiting a doctor’s office or shopping.	7.0%	5.0%
Hearing: Deafness or serious difficulty hearing.	5.6%	5.1%
Vision: Blind or serious difficulty seeing, even when wearing glasses.	4.7%	5.2%
Self-care: Difficulty dressing or bathing.	3.8%	3.3%

Target Population for Vocational Rehabilitation Services in The District

The District of Columbia WIOA State Plan lists the following target populations:

- Youth
- Youth in Foster Care
- Long-term unemployed residents and displaced homemakers
- Low-income individuals, including TANF and SNAP Participants

²³ From Cornell University Disability Statistics website:
<https://www.disabilitystatistics.org/reports/acs.cfm?statistic=1#search>

²⁴ Centers for Disease Control website: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/impacts/dc.html>

- Persons with disabilities
- Older individuals
- Returning citizens
- Individuals who are English language learners or facing substantial cultural barriers
- People experiencing or with recent histories of homelessness
- Individuals who have low levels of literacy ²⁵

Table 3 represents the prevalence of disability in the District based on U.S. Census Bureau.²⁶ DCRSA serves members who meet the eligibility criteria among these target populations.

Table 3, Prevalence of Disability in DC

Prevalence of Disability in the District of Columbia		
	Population #	% of Total Population
Total DC Population with a Disability	80,368	11.60%
Male	35,439	10.90%
Female	44,929	12.30%
White - Alone	16,999	5.80%
Black - Not Latino	55,187	17.60%
Asian	1,884	6.90%
Two or more races	2,994	11.90%
Latino - Any race	7,134	9.00%
Some other race alone	3,304	10.70%
Age 5-17	3,673	4.50%
Age 18-34	11,987	5.10%
Age 35-64	33,933	13.70%
Age 65-74	12,240	25.50%
Age 75 plus	17,825	50.40%
Work Force Ages 18-74	45,920	0.1%
Age 14-17	2,700	15.0%

Prevalence of selected Vocational Rehabilitation Target Populations

Table 4 on the following page represents data on types of disabilities that are traditionally eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation Services.

Among those not sorted by a more specific primary diagnosis are people with behavioral/mental health-related disabilities who are also eligible for these services. During the

²⁵ WIOA State Plan for the District of Columbia (2016), p.26 of 288:
<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/rso/wioa/state-plans/2016/dc.pdf>

²⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 American Community Survey, American Fact Finder, Table S2301 (1-Year Estimates);
<http://factfinder.census.gov>

surveys and focus groups conducted for the CSNA, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors often categorize people with these diagnoses as having more intensive needs. The Journal of Urban Design and Mental Health reports that among 15-49 year-olds in the District of Columbia, mental health disorders are the number one cause of Disability Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) in the city.²⁷ The DALYs is the sum of years of potential life lost due to premature mortality and the years of productive life lost due to disability.²⁸ Behavioral and Mental Health have a significant impact on the lives of people living with these diagnoses.

Also not specified by primary diagnosis are people living with Autism. Depending upon where their diagnosis is categorized on the Autism Spectrum, people experiencing Autism are also eligible for services, and some may be perceived as having more intensive needs. The Centers for Disease Control website presents an estimate of 1 in 54 children has been identified with Autism. Among children with Autism who also had IQ scores available, 33% also had intellectual disability. The CDC research indicates that children who are transitioning to adulthood/employment have high rates of unemployment or under-employment; low participation in education beyond high school; the majority continue to live with family members or relatives; and they have limited opportunity for community or social activities, with nearly 40% spending little or no time with friends.²⁹

Both the Mental Health and Autism diagnoses may be captured in the counts within Table 4 and the characteristics of each fit within more than one of the categories listed.

Table 4, Types of disabilities typically eligible for VR services

	Population #	% of Total Population
POPULATION BY DISABILITY		
Hearing Difficulty	13,216	1.9%
Vision Difficulty	19,138	2.8%
Cognitive Difficulty	32,632	5.0%
Ambulatory Difficulty	41,205	6.4%
Self-Care Difficulty	13,027	2.0%
Independent Living Difficulty	27,455	4.9%

A review of the vocational rehabilitation services and supports (utilization) provided by DCRSA to persons with disabilities during the period of July 2018 through June 2019 is demonstrated in the Table 5 below.

²⁷ Journal of Urban Design and Mental Health website: <https://www.urbandesignmentalhealth.com/journal-6-washingtondc.html>

²⁸ World Health Organization (WHO) website: https://www.who.int/mental_health/management/depression/daly/en/

²⁹ Centers for Disease Control website: <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/autism-spectrum-disorder-in-teenagers-adults.html>

Table 5, DCRSA Service Utilization Data (July 2018 - June 2019) by primary disability type

Primary Disability Type	Number of Persons with a Disabilities	Percentage of Persons with a Disability
Hearing Difficulty	82	5%
Vision Difficulty	63	4%
Cognitive Difficulty	1423	78%
Ambulatory Difficulty	79	4%
Self-Care Difficulty and Independent Living	170	9%

Distribution by Wards of Persons Receiving Vocational Rehabilitation Services and Supports in The District of Columbia

Table 6 demonstrates by ward the number of persons who received vocational rehabilitation services during the program year 2018-2019. People who live east of the river (Wards 7 and 8) made up 43% of the population receiving services. The final row in Table 6, reflects thirty-four peoples receiving services who did not have ward information included in the data maintained by DCRSA.

Table 6, DCRSA Service Utilization Date (July 2018-June 2019) by Wards

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA WARDS	COUNT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES
1	102
2	107
3	36
4	281
5	388
6	86
7	332
8	451
(no ward information available)	34
Grand Total	1817

3.4 Vocational Rehabilitation Program Enhancements since 2017 CSNA

The DCRSA follows the federal requirement of completing a triennial Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) that reviews the needs of people who are using, or who are eligible to use, Vocational Rehabilitation Supports. Each CSNA also studies the needs and preferences of the business community regarding employment of people who live with disabilities; the

needs of youth transitioning to adulthood and employment; and community partners who provide contracted supports to people in the DCRSA system.

Each CSNA provides the DCRSA with recommendations and possible strategies to improve services and address needs that the population has indicated that are unmet. This section of the current CSNA provides information on the enhancements that the DC DCRSA has achieved since the study completed in 2017.

Environment, Structure, and Staffing for the DCRSA

The DCRSA offices are located in an accessible building that has ramps and the space for vehicles transporting wheelchairs to allow people to mount/dismount close to the ramp and enter the building. Also, the building is on a bus route, within two blocks of a Metrorail station, and has underground and street parking available. There are private meeting rooms within the building on the first floor where people can consult with VR counselors as needed. There are accessible restrooms readily available, and the building has elevators.

The program and staff structure of the DCRSA is captured on the organization chart found in the APPENDIX G of this report. The DDS Director, Andrew Reese, Esq., has previously served as the Deputy Director for RSA, and has extensive knowledge and insight of vocational rehabilitation. The current Deputy Director, Darryl Evans, has a history working with DC Government. Prior to working as acting deputy director for RSA, he was the division administrator for the Disability Determination Division in DDS. He served as COTAR and supervisor of administrative services for the Disability Determination Division. In May 2018, Darryl was asked to serve as deputy director of DCRSA and in June 2018, he was appointed to serve as the full-time deputy director. He has extensive knowledge and experience for the last nine (9) years in the field of disability services and advocacy. Darryl's extensive experience and insight in systems change, as it relates to supporting persons with disabilities, has made him a strong leader in improving and enhancing systems, policies and procedures for programs and services that support persons with disabilities. The DCRSA has a strong mix of long-term employees and newer hires who have come from other jurisdictions or who have worked in the field in a private capacity and bring different perspectives on best practices. This allows the DCRSA to have both institutional history and innovators collaborating to improve the service outcomes for people seeking support.

New Initiatives, Objectives and Outcomes³⁰

Report of New Initiatives, Objectives and Outcomes implemented since the 2017 CSNA

DSP Academy

In the past year, DCRSA in collaboration with RCM of Washington, Inc., a DC-based community rehabilitation provider, piloted the Direct Support Professional (DSP) Academy, commonly referred to as the 'DSP Academy.' The DSP Academy provided participants exposure to a variety of career paths within the Health and Human services sector and offers the option of securing employment as a DSP following graduation. The DSP Academy was created in response to a national shortage of Direct Support Workers across the nation. With the District of Columbia being an Employment First State, it was a natural extension of efforts to increase employment among transitioning youth and build capacity in the workforce. From April through May 2019, eleven (11) DC transitional youth participated in the pilot. As a result of attending the pilot, nine (9) of eleven (11) original cohort participants completed the training in full and received all required certifications to become Direct Support Professionals in the District of Columbia. Six (6) participants had been accepted into the employment readiness program, 'Project Search' during the academy and completed its twenty-five (25) hours per week requirement. The DSP Academy model holds tremendous possibility for reproduction, as it is a strategy to address the DSP workforce crisis and push forward the mission of the Employment First movement.

MBSYEP/JumpStart Program

Managed by the Department of Employment Services (DOES), the Mayor Marion S. Barry Summer Youth Employment Program (MBSYEP) is a locally funded initiative that provides District youth ages 14 to 24 with an enriching summer employment experience through subsidized placements in the public and private sectors. MBSYEP 2020 will serve 10,000 youth through a virtual workforce development experience, or a hybrid model. DCRSA entered an agreement with DOES to fund the wages of DCRSA youth clients participating in MBSYEP 2020 (June – Aug 2020). This agreement supported the wages of over 300 students with disabilities. Additionally, the JumpStart/SYEP, a program of DCRSA provider SchoolTalk DC, supported 30 students with more significant disabilities through the MBSYEP program. Students in the JumpStart program received 1-to-1 job readiness support and case management during the 6-week program. The JumpStart Program has supported students with significant disabilities since 2015.

Expansion of DCRSA Providers and Programming

Since 2017, DCRSA Transition has welcomed new providers who offer an array of vocational rehabilitation (VR) and pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) to eligible and potentially eligible youth clients. Among the providers offering new work readiness training or work-based learning experiences (WBLE):

³⁰ New Initiatives provided by DCRSA

- BroadFutures – Summer Strengths work readiness training and WBLE program
- CommunityTech – High School Internship Program work-based learning experience
- DC Special Education Cooperative – Career Preparatory Program work readiness training
- Outstanding Possibilities Revealed (OPR) - ASPIRE work readiness training program
- Project ReDirect – Life.Music.Arts (LMA) work readiness training and WBLE program
- SchoolTalk DC – DC Youth Leadership Network self-advocacy and work readiness training
- Time for Change – Certified Nursing Assistant vocational training and job readiness training

DCRSA Learning and Innovations Retreat

DCRSA has held two annual learning and innovations retreats titled “Evolving the Employment Experience, Building Capacity and Strengthening Connections”. The retreats were attended by all DCRSA staff. Attendees: (1) gained knowledge on national best practices in person-centered thinking, WIOA, and Customized Employment to enhance the employment experience for people in need of services and supports; (2) participated in an interactive activity to enhance innovative and collaborative VR practices; and (3) participated in a discussion on the use of technology as a resource for successful employment. Based on the retreat evaluation survey feedback, ninety-three percent (93%) of attendees agreed that the information presented supported the work they do every day.

Latinx Conference 2019

The District of Columbia’s Department on Disability Services (DDS), in collaboration with partner agencies, hosted the first annual Latinx Conference for people with disabilities and their families. The conference was designed to provide Spanish speaking people with disabilities and their family members with access to information, support, and resources in their native language and assist District agencies to better understand the experiences and needs of Latinos/as within the disability community. During the day, conference participants provided feedback as part of a listening session, and attended workshops on the following topics:

- Transition to Employment
- Coordination of Services
- Financial Literacy/Education

At the end of the conference, fifteen (15) District agencies and community service providers hosted a resource fair and provided information and resources to conference participants. DDS hosted virtually the 2nd Annual Latinx Conference with a total of 146 attendees on three platforms.

National Community of Practice on Cultural and Linguistic Competence

In its efforts to continue to build capacity in Cultural and Linguistic Competence, DDS and the District applied for and was chosen, along with nine other states, to participate in the National Community of Practice (CoP) for Cultural and Linguistic Competence in Developmental Disabilities through Georgetown University's National Center for Cultural Competence (NCCC), with funding from the Administration on Community Living/Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. Through DDS participation in the CLC CoP, DDS staff and partners from other agencies have had the opportunity to share information, receive technical assistance, and leverage resources to increase diversity and advance cultural and linguistic competence in service systems. Through the CoP, District partners have hosted various interagency training sessions on Cultural and Linguistic Competence. Most recently, a training session was offered titled, "Cultural and Linguistic Competence for Frontline Staff, I get it! Now what do I do?!" The session was facilitated by Georgetown University's NCCC and included presentations by the Mayor's Office on Latino Affairs, the Mayor's Office on Asian and Pacific Islanders and the Mayor's Office on LGBTQ Affairs.

Streamlined Intake between DCDDA and DCRSA

DDS's Developmental Disability Administration (DDA) introduced a guided conversation to assess a person's interest in employment in their intake process. This has led to conversations with the DCRSA, resulting in the creation of a streamlined intake for DCDDA and DCRSA together, which is used when someone applies to DCDDA for long-term supports and services (LTSS) and expresses an interest in employment or applies to DCRSA and may also be eligible for DDA services.

This streamlined intake between DCDDA and DCRSA led to a requirement for DCDDA employment providers to become DCRSA providers, so that people eligible for both services can move between funding streams without having to change providers, if they so choose.

Online Learning Management System

During FY20, DCRSA contracted with a vendor to secure an online learning management system (LMS) for professional development to all VR staff. Through this LMS, VR staff is able to take professional development courses related to the VR profession and earn CRCs for recertification as a VR Counselor. Courses include topics such as: case management, ethics, vocational rehabilitation basics, working with special populations, trauma-informed case management, development of an individualized plan for employment and many more topics relevant to the VR profession. This online LMS is available to all VR staff and the content is fully accessible to staff with disabilities.

Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC) Agreement

DCRSA has renewed its training and technical assistance agreement with the Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC). WINTAC has supported DCRSA in retreat planning and training modules during the annual DCRSA retreat. Additionally, WINTAC serves as a resource for DCRSA to aid in the development of policies and procedures related to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). DCRSA has also received support from WINTAC for how to effectively implement the new regulations and requirements of WIOA.

Additional Enhancements

A review of the reports regarding budgetary oversight submitted to the District of Columbia City Council for 2017 and 2020 also revealed additional and important enhancements undertaken by the DCRSA. They included:

- A catalog of training that the DDS requires for its staff and supervisors. Although the catalog did not directly address Vocational Rehabilitation courses, it does include introductory and comprehensive Person-Centered Thinking training, goalsetting, communication strategies, and a number of other topics focused on helping supervisors and staff more effectively meet the DCRSA mission.
- A catalog of services and supports, with the steps for access regarding Pre-Employment Training Services (Pre-ETS).
- A requirement for those community-based providers who support people in the DCDDA in employment activities to qualify for and receive a Human Care Agreement to address Vocational Rehabilitation in accordance with the standards of the DCRSA.

The DDS State Office of Policy, Planning and Innovation that is within the Quality Program Management Division, the Deputy Director of which reports to the DDS Director, has put forward a number of training initiatives regarding employment seeking, including a series promoted by Association of Community Rehabilitation Education (ACRE). Each community-based provider that offers employment services through a DCRSA Human Care Agreement is required to have at least one staff person who has certification either in this training or through Certified Employment Support Professional (CESP).

A further development is the requirement for service providers who support people in the DCDDA system to successfully complete a training titled “Ensuring High Quality Positive Personal Profiles and Job Search/Community Participation Plans.” The objective is to have the community provider executives fully grasp and support the initiatives for community inclusion and Employment First principles.

The DDS website (*Figure 3*) includes a suite of “Discovery Tools” to be used when assisting people to identify their skills, talents and preferences for employment opportunities and types.

This set of tools has been provided via in-person training at DDS.

The DDS website (<https://dds.dc.gov/page/discovery-toolkit>) includes a suite of “Discovery Tools” to be used when assisting people to identify their skills, talents and preferences for employment opportunities and types. The set of tools has been provided via in-person training at DDS, and on the website, they are available in both print and fill-in versions. The tools area accompanied by a copy of the training provided by the expert DDS consultants, and the list includes examples, a means of evaluating the quality of plans produced using the tools, and a Self-Guided Discovery Facilitator’s Guide.

4. DATA COLLECTION HIGHLIGHTS

This section includes highlights of needs assessment data. It entails data representing all participants including data from clients, DCRSA staff, community partners, advocacy groups and business partners and the data collection methods used.

4.1 Survey Outcomes

Populations contributing data through survey participation included: 1) persons with disabilities; 2) DCRSA staff; 3) community partners, disability advocacy groups; and 4) business partners. In order to comply with COVID-19 public health guidelines issued by Mayor Bowser requiring social distancing, all surveys were distributed electronically via a web-based survey application. There was a total of 86 valid individual survey responses.

Individual Survey Results

The individual survey was disseminated in two (2) languages, an English version and a Spanish version to ensure participation of non-English speaking persons with disabilities or persons with limited-English proficiency. A total of 82 individuals responded completing the English version survey, and four (4) individuals responded completing the Spanish language survey.

Survey respondents were asked to identify whether they were the person seeking services or receiving DCRSA services or a family member assisting a person seeking services. The results are as follows:

English Language Respondents

Table 7, English language survey respondent status

For the purposes of completing this survey, please indicate whether you are the person seeking or receiving DCRSA services or a family member assisting the person seeking services?	%
Person seeking services	49%
Family Member on behalf of a person receiving services	30%
Other (please specify)	21%

Table 7 suggests that twenty-one percent (21%) of survey respondents cited other and those citing “other” were primarily parents or family members of a person with disabilities, advocates, community partners, or professionals who supported people using DCRSA services.

Spanish Language Respondents

There were four (4) Latinx respondents to the Spanish language survey, one respondent was a person seeking or receiving services and three (3) were family members on behalf of the person receiving services.

Respondent Demographics

To collect data on the gender of survey participants, respondents were asked to self-report their gender identity. *Tables 8 and 9* summarizes the self-reported gender of respondents to the English and Spanish language individual surveys.

English Language Respondents

Table 8, Gender identity of the English language individual survey respondents

English language individual survey respondent	%
Male	51%
Female	46%
Prefer not to answer	4%

As reflected in *Table 8*, the English language respondents self-reported as male was 51% and 46% cited female with 4% that selected “prefer not to answer.”

Spanish Language Respondents

Table 9, Gender Identity of the Spanish language individual survey respondents

Spanish language individual survey respondents	%
Male	33%
Female	67%
Prefer not to answer	0%

Of the four (4) Latinx respondents to the Spanish language survey, one respondent self-identified as male and three self-identified (3) as females.

Age Range of Survey Respondents

To collect data on the age range of survey participants, respondents were asked to self-report their ages according to the ranges provided. *Figures 10* reflects the ages of the English language survey respondents.

English Language Respondents

Table 10 demonstrates the Self-reported age range of English language survey respondents

What is your age range?	%
14-24	38%
25-34	19%
35-44	6%
45-54	15%
55-59	6%
60 and over	17%

As identified in Table 10, the largest number of respondents, roughly thirty-eight percent (38%) are transition age youth between ages 14-24 years old.

Spanish Language Respondents

Consistent with the English language survey age ranges, Spanish language survey participants were asked also asked to self-report their ages according to the same age ranges.

There were only four Latinx respondents to the Spanish language survey, and of the respondents, 100% were transition age youth between 14-24 years old.

Primary Disabilities of Survey Respondents

To collect data on the primary disability of participants in both the English language and Spanish language surveys, respondents were asked to self-report their primary disability. Table 11 reflects the self-reported primary disability of respondents to the English language survey.

English Language Respondents

Table 11, English-language respondents' primary disability

English language respondents primary disability	%
Autism Spectrum Disorder	22%
Physical	7%
Behavioral Health	7%
Intellectual Disability (ID)	18%
Developmental Disability (DD)	10%
Deaf or Hard or Hearing	4%
Mobility	3%
Blindness or visually impaired	10%
Communication	0%
No impairment	4%
Other	15%

Survey respondents indicated a range of primary disabilities when responding to this question, however the majority of respondents, 22% cited Autism Spectrum Disorder as primary disability, and 18% intellectual disability (ID). In addition, fifteen percent (15%) of respondents cited “other” stating the following as a primary disability: dyslexia; TBI; unclear; mental health; reading and writing; takes time to grasp things at a slower rate.

Spanish Language Respondents

When Latinx participants in the Spanish language survey were asked to identify primary disability, of the four (4) respondents, one (1) cited intellectual disability (ID); one (1) cited developmental disability (DD); one (1) cited Autism Spectrum Disorder and one (1) respondent did not answer the question.

To collect data to determine where within the District participants live, survey respondents were asked to identify the ward where they live. *Table 12* shows the ward location of respondents to the English language survey.

English Language Respondents

Table 12, wards within the District that reflect where English language respondents live

In which Ward do you live?	%
Ward 1	3%
Ward 2	4%
Ward 3	3%
Ward 4	15%
Ward 5	22%
Ward 6	15 %
Ward 7	17%
Ward 8	21%

According to English language survey respondents, participants reside in each ward, however, the majority of participants, over 22%, were residents of Ward 5; over 20% were Ward 8 residents; over 16% were residents of Ward 7; and over 15% were both from Wards 4 and 6; with fewer, 4% from Ward 2 and a smaller but equal number from Wards 1 and 3.

Spanish Language Respondents

The data collected to reflect which wards Latinx respondents live cited two (2) in Ward 4 and one (1) respondent cited Ward 8. One (1) participant skipped this question.

Experience, Familiarity or Association with DCRSA

To obtain data on participants’ experience and familiarity with DCRSA, respondents were asked to select among several options about the statement that best describe their experience with DCRSA. *Table 13* reveals the English language survey respondents’ selections.

English Language Respondents

Table 13, English language respondents experience with DCRSA

Experience with DCRSA	%
I have never used DCRSA services	0%
I am a current DCRSA client	72%
I am a previous client of DCRSA; my case has been closed	6%
I am not familiar with DCRSA	13%
Other	10%

Of the English language survey respondents, 72% were current DCRSA clients. However, it should be noted that 13% of respondents indicated not familiar with DCRSA and 10% indicated other and not sure that they still work with DCRSA. Responses not familiar or unsure demonstrate a possible need to ensure clients are aware of their status within the VR process.

To obtain data on the experience of Latinx respondents, participants were also asked to select the statement that best describes their experience with DCRSA. Table 14 reveals Latinx survey responses.

Spanish Language Respondents

Table 14, Latinx respondents experience with DCRSA

EXPERIENCE WITH DCRSA	%
I have never used DCRSA services	66%
I am a current DCRSA client	0%
I am a previous client of DCRSA, my case has been closed	33%
I am not familiar with DCRSA	0%
Other	0%

Of Latinx respondents, 66% cited “I have never used DCRSA services” and 33% cited being a previous client, but their case had been closed. Based on Latinx respondents’ experience with DCRSA, opportunities exist to expand more outreach to the Latinx community to improve awareness of DCRSA services.

DCRSA Staff Survey

The staff survey asked questions related to persons with disabilities receiving VR services, availability of VR service provisions, and staff views on the DCRSA network of community partners. The objective was to capture staff input and collect data on VR service offerings from the agency’s perspective. Table 15 reflects the wards within the District where staff indicated the majority of persons receiving VR services reside.

Wards Where Majority of VR Clients Reside

Table 15 reflect wards staff cited were where the majority clients receiving services resided

What Ward(s) of the District do the majority of your clients reside in? (Please select all that apply)?	%
Ward 1	43%
Ward 2	36%
Ward 3	38%
Ward 4	45%
Ward 5	57%
Ward 6	45%
Ward 7	69%
Ward 8	81%

According to DCRSA staff and noted in *Table 15*, the majority of VR clients, over 80%, reside in Ward 8, and the next largest percentage resides in Ward 7.

Readily Available VR Service Provisions

To collect data on VR service provisions, DCRSA staff were asked to identify a list of service options they felt were readily available to persons with a range of disabilities. Staff were allowed to select all options that apply. *Table 16* reflects staff responses to services they cited that were readily available.

Table 16 identifies DCRSA service provisions staff cited were readily available

Please indicate which of the following services are readily available to DCRSA clients. By “readily available,” we mean that services are available in the area to individuals with a range of disabilities (Please select all that apply).	%
Employment preparation services	79%
Job search services	84%
Job development and placement services	79%
Job training	70%
Post-secondary education and training	70%
Transportation assistance	77%
Vehicle modification assistance	9%
Assistive technology	60%
Income assistance	21%
Housing assistance	19%
Mental health treatment	47%
Substance abuse treatment	30%
Personal care attendants	19%
Health insurance	23%
Benefits planning assistance	58%
Other (please specify)	5%

DCRSA staff cited a significant percentage of service provisions as readily available, *Table 16* reflects that 84% of staff cited job search services as a readily available service provision and

79% cited employment preparation and job development and placement services as readily available services.

Capability of DCRSA Network Providers

Staff were also asked whether the network is able to meet the VR needs of persons with disabilities. *Table 17* reflects the views of DCRSA staff on whether community rehabilitation providers can meet the needs of persons with disabilities who are seeking services.

Table 17 reflects DCRSA staff views of the network of VR service providers

Is DCRSA’s network of rehabilitation service providers able to meet clients’ vocational rehabilitation needs?	%
Yes	74%
No	26%

In response to whether network providers are able to meet DCRSA clients’ VR needs, the majority, 74% of staff, cited “Yes,” the network of rehabilitation service providers is able to meet the VR needs of persons with disabilities.

Changes to Enable Better Assistance to VR Clients

DCRSA staff were asked to identify the top three (3) changes that would enable them to better assist persons with disabilities seeking DCRSA service. *Table 18* reflects their responses.

Table 18 reveals the top three changes that would enable better service for VR clients.

What are the top three changes that would enable you to better assist your DCRSA clients? (Please select a maximum of three changes)	%
Smaller caseload	50%
More streamlined processes	35%
Better data management tools	26%
Better assessment tools	26%
Additional training	12%
More administrative support	21%
More support from supervisors	24%
Improved business partners	32%
Decreased procurement time	15%
More effective community-based service providers	32%
Increased outreach to clients in their communities	18%
Other (please specify)	6%

The top three changes staff cited that would enable them to better assist persons with disabilities were: 1) fifty percent (50%) cited smaller caseload; 2) thirty-five (35%) cited more streamlined processes and 3) tied at 32%, improved business partners and more effective community-based service providers would enable staff to better assist persons with disabilities.

Although smaller a caseload was a change the majority of staff (50%) cited would enable them to better assist clients, it should be noted that DCRSA VR Counselors have smaller caseloads than either of the surrounding Maryland and Virginia jurisdictions.

Reasons Clients Find It Difficult to Access VR Services

To better understand challenges encountered by persons with disabilities when seeking DCRSA services, staff were asked to provide their opinion or reasons they felt persons with disabilities find it difficult to access VR services. Respondents were allowed to select a maximum of three reasons. *Table 19* represents their responses.

Table 19 reveals the top reasons persons with disabilities find it difficult to access VR services

What would you say are the top three reasons that persons with disabilities find it difficult to access DCRSA services (Please select a maximum of three reasons)?	%
Limited accessibility of DCRSA services via public transportation	9%
Other challenges related to the physical location of DCRSA’s office	9%
Limited disability-related accommodations	15%
Difficulties completing the application to obtain services	15%
Difficulties completing the Individualized Plan for Employment	3%
Inadequate assessment of the client’s knowledge, skills, and interests to properly link them to services to meet their job goal	32%
Slow service delivery and clients get frustrated and dropout	53%
Language or communication barriers	15%
Difficulties accessing the proper training or education programs	26%
Because of the client’s disability type, DCRSA does not have sufficient programs and services to meet the client’s needs	32%
DCRSA staff does not meet clients in the communities where they live.	9%
Other (please specify)	26%

According to DCRSA staff, the top three reasons persons with disabilities find it difficult to access services, 53% cite slow service delivery, clients get frustrated and drop out; and tied at 32%, staff cited inadequate assessment of the client’s knowledge, skills and interest to properly link them to services to meet their job goal; and because of the client’s disability type, DCRSA does not have sufficient programs and services to meet the client’s needs. Also, tied at 26%, staff cited difficulties accessing the proper training and education programs and 26% cited “other.” Among staff that cited other as their response, the survey selection options include:

- “No reason, DCRSA is situated on public route accessible location”
- “Client lack of participation”
- “Poor engagement with clients”
- “Clients not fully vested in their own employment search”

- “Client misunderstanding or comprehension of DCRSA process and services overall”
- “Client refusal to provide sufficient and/or required documentation”
- “Lack of available and consistent funding for services”
- “Clients do not understand what DCRSA is for, and do not meet eligibility determination deadlines”

Community Partner Survey

To obtain data from the perspective of DCRSA’s network of service providers, survey questions focused on the type of organizations in the network; perspectives on the availability of VR services and where service provisions are offered; and input on the population of clients served. The objective was to capture input and collect data on VR service offerings from the community partners’ perspective. The following tables reflect survey questions asked of DCRSA community partners and other disability advocate organizations that serve or support persons with disabilities within the District of Columbia.

Table 20 reflect the organization types within the network.

Community Partner Organization Type	%
Community Rehabilitation Program	35%
Secondary school system	0%
Postsecondary school system	4%
Federal agency	0%
Local public agency	0%
Other private organization	27%
Center for Independent Living	0%
Disability advocacy organization	4
Other	31%

The majority, 35% of respondents to the Community Partner Survey, identified their organization type as a “Community Rehabilitation Program,” followed by 27% as “Other private organization.” However, 31% of respondents selected “other” citing organization types as:

- “Community Action Agency”
- “Consultant for DD population”
- “Private Non-profit organization or non-profit” and
- “University”

Wards Where Community Partner VR Services are Offered

Respondents to the Community Partner Survey were also asked to identify the ward within the District where most of their services are offered and were allowed to select all wards that applied. *Table 21* suggests responses from community partners and other disability advocates on the wards where VR services are offered.

Table 21 reflects the wards cited by providers where most of their services are offered

Wards Most Community Partners' VR Services are Offered	%
Ward 1	39%
Ward 2	39%
Ward 3	42%
Ward 4	46%
Ward 5	58%
Ward 6	46%
Ward 7	65%
Ward 8	69%
Not Applicable	27%

According to respondents, 69% offered most of their services in Ward 8, and 65% of respondents offered most of their services in Ward 7 followed by 58% offering most of their services in Ward 5. These locations are significant because they addressed concerns expressed by DCRSA staff as locations where persons with disabilities within the District are thought to be unserved or underserved. According to survey respondents, more of their services are available in the wards of greatest interest to DCRSA staff.

Wards Where Persons with Disabilities served by DCRSA Community Partners Live

Community partners were also asked to identify the wards within the District where most persons with disabilities whom they serve live. *Table 22* reflect the locations community partners cited as where their VR clients live.

Table 22 identifies the wards community partners cited as where clients they serve live

Wards Most Persons With Disability Served by Community Partners Live?	%
Ward 1	23%
Ward 2	19%
Ward 3	31%
Ward 4	31%
Ward 5	42%
Ward 6	31%
Ward 7	58%
Ward 8	58%
Not Applicable	31%

According to Community Partner Survey respondents, 58% of persons with disabilities they serve reside in Wards seven (7) and eight (8). This finding is significant to dissuade stakeholder perceptions that residents in Wards 7 and 8 are underserved and do not have access to VR

services. The findings demonstrate that persons with disabilities that reside east of the river, do indeed have access to VR services and are being served.

4.2 Interview Outcomes

INTERVIEWS – The following section represents recurring themes resulting from participant interviews

Individuals/Families

- *DCRSA Service Provisions* – VR clients and families of youth in transition were unclear of the cadre of services and supports provided by DCRSA. Recurring comments included “DCRSA’s VR process is too difficult for an individual to navigate.” In addition, comments were “where is the transition between pre-ETS and the entry into DCRSA VR services?” Parents suggested a need for clarity as it relates to pre-ETS and VR services and guidance on when their family member with a disability should apply for VR services. Participants also suggested pre-ETS do a better job tracking how services can be individualized to improve outcomes and how students are progressing. In addition, most adult VR clients cited during interviews, that they wanted jobs that fit their skills and interests, and they wanted DCRSA to listen to them and here their interests. Also, many adult VR clients appeared to have unrealistic expectations about how quickly they would receive a job placement. Many interview participants thought the VR process is too long before they received a job.
- *Informed Choice* – VR clients and families reported not receiving enough information to make informed decisions about provider selection. Recurring comments from participants stated that lists of community partners to which VR clients are referred for services is often out of date. Participants were quoted as saying, “we should be given a current list of providers that offer the services we need.” For example, one parent said, “my son was given a list of fifteen (15) providers and only five (5) from the list were accepting new clients.”
- *Autism* – parents said, “Autism is an underserved disability,” citing a lack of systemic support for the specialized needs of people on the Autism Spectrum because they may not technically be eligible for services and those who can demonstrate eligibility do not fit into the traditional programming.
- *Increase employment support* – participants cited a “need for proper training and support on the job to help clients sustain employment.” Several individuals cited that providers need to use person-centered practices in goal setting – citing “one size doesn't fit all,” suggesting the employment support should be based on the person’s skills, support needs and interests.

- *Other General Themes* – respondents suggested DCRSA seek non-traditional work shifts that fit client preferences; seek entrepreneurship opportunities; and partner with other government agencies, like the Small Business Administration (SBA) to teach entrepreneurial strategies and skills.

DCRSA Staff

- *Opportunities to Expand Support* - In addition to challenges, COVID-19 provided opportunities, according to staff, to expand the use of technology, including assistive technologies to better communicate and support persons with disabilities. Staff mentioned being able to continue services using technology supports when most District agencies were unable to continue services consistent with the level of service provided by DCRSA. Staff also suggested a need for more situational programming to assist persons with disabilities to improve opportunities for success in employment. They cited a belief that opportunities to obtain more work situations would improve chances for success.
- *Data Collection* – staff expressed a need for a case management system that better supports their needs and allows them to work more efficiently. Direct staff quotes were “wish we had a case management system that could collect the data and provide the information the agency needs.” Through numerous interviews, concern was expressed about a lack of timely information on whether community partners were accepting new clients. Staff mentioned timely information helps link clients to services more efficiently and would help keep them engaged. Staff also stated, “it would be nice to generate an updated report of community partners accepting new clients and replace the list we use that often includes providers that are no longer accepting new clients or don’t offer the specific service a client might need.”
- *Stigma* – many respondents cited stigma as a major barrier. Staff were quoted as saying “employers and their staff need education” and “employment agencies and employers tend to shy away from hiring persons with disabilities due to stigma and ignorance.” To address the issue of stigma, a consensus of stakeholders agreed that employers need to be educated on the skills and attributes of persons with disabilities. Stakeholders also agreed that employers need to be educated on workplace accommodations and ways to build “natural supports” for employees with disabilities in the workplace. In addition, stakeholders suggested that a comprehensive program to train and engage with employers would help to address a wide range of employer education opportunities.
- *Limited Provider Pool and Challenges to Obtain authorizations for services* – staff cited a need for more providers in certain specialties, especially bilingual, mental health, assistive technologies, and benefits counseling. In addition, staff also cited “navigating a confusing authorization process creates service disruptions.” They also believed

“delayed authorizations and reimbursements were fiscally unsustainable for smaller providers.”

- *Limited Base of Business Partners* – most staff interviewed stated the “base of business partners is too small, and many don’t know how to interface with persons with disabilities without a mediator or a job coach.” According to staff, business partners and most employers in general need more training around employing and retaining persons with disabilities and providing the needed accommodations.
- *Training* – interviews revealed an interest by staff to obtain training to better support persons with disabilities that identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, and asexual or allied (LGBTQIA). Staff cited an interest in understanding terminology, unique supports and service needs as well as cultural characteristics of LGBTQIA.
- *Longer Term Goals* – reassess how youth in transition VR services are measured so the IPE is realistic. Also, staff suggested “goals for youth should have a greater focus on programming in addition to employment because many youths have post-secondary education components to their IPE.” Staff used the term “programming” when referencing the information and preparation students need in order to meet their employment goals. One example provided by staff described a student who wanted to become a Computer Engineer. The staff person and others spent time educating the student regarding the skills and credentials required for that kind of employment. This included helping the student understand related positions and the classes that he/she could and should take in order to gain the necessary skills, as well as knowing when and where such classes are available and to sign up for enrollment. As many students are in Pre-ETS for more than a year, these choices, explanations, and education opportunities need to occur prior to the student selecting and obtaining employment where he/she can develop a career path. Staff also cited the need for more opportunities for work experience for youth in transition to help them select realistic employment goals.

Community Partners and Advocacy Groups

- *Authorization Process* – feedback cited requests for authorizations for services were not obtained in a timely manner. They indicated delays in receiving an authorization disrupt will services. One of the examples provided was related to job coaching services, especially when the client was on the job site and needed extended job coaching. Community partners also stated they may take risks to keep the client employed and may not be reimbursed for the effort. Delays in obtaining authorizations were a repeated comment cited throughout the data collection from a variety of stakeholders.
- *Person-Centered Approach to Engage Community Partners in Development of the IPE* – community partners cited the need to re-emphasize the person-centered approach, so

services are delivered based on the client's needs and interests. Interviews from numerous disability advocates also suggest stronger emphasis on person-centered service delivery, citing "recognize a person's strengths and interests rather than placing them in the next available job." Comments also included engaging the service provider earlier in the process to facilitate understanding of a client's skills and abilities to improve the opportunity for successful job placement. In addition, disability advocates suggested "persons with disabilities may need a little extra assistance because of their special needs," citing, "it may take longer to ensure a person with a disability understands the VR process and what's involved to reach their employment goal."

- *Technology* – community partners and disability advocates both cited "access and ability to navigate technology as barriers to persons with disabilities, especially during COVID-19." A community partner was quoted as saying "it is time for DCRSA to provide clients with the ability to learn about technology or applications training either through DCRSA or community partners because "technology first" is the only way to help improve the lives of people with disabilities and empower them to learn to become more self-sufficient instead of using DCRSA as a revolving door. In addition, several other participants cited the need for greater access and training on the various technologies, especially smartphones, tablets and personal computers to enhance services to persons with disabilities. It was argued that "most job applications are done online, so access to and familiarity with technology is an important job skill." A suggestion, although not new, was to "create a job information/success board that community partners can access and post job openings with contact information....and post success stories which might generate more synergy among community partners to encourage job placements or new partnerships."

Business Partners

- *Qualified Applicants* – the primary interest expressed by business partners was the need for assistance recruiting qualified applicants. Business partners conveyed the desire for a dashboard of people who are deemed "ready to work." They also cited a need for training on how to support persons who have disabilities.
- *Collaborative Relationships* – business partners expressed a desire to work in close coordination with DCRSA for recruitment and training of qualified candidates with disabilities. A business partner cited, "I invite DCRSA staff to visit my organization to observe the type employment opportunities provided and refer qualified persons with disabilities." Other partners suggested their organizations would benefit from DCRSA training on accommodations for persons with disabilities and ways organizations can encourage and support employees with disabilities.

4.3 Focus Group Outcomes

Focus Groups – The following section represent recurring themes and statements from focus group participants

Youth in Transition

- *Skills Development* – focus group discussions with youth in transition recognized the need for counseling and guidance on skills training necessary for employment goal achievement. Youth expressed continued interest in activities like internships. They wanted more job exploration and job coaching. Youth also were very excited about the DC/3C Program and wanted similar program opportunities to continue, suggesting DC/3C programs and internships were great opportunities to build self-confidence and learn from others.
- *Family Participation* - youth in transition and parents of youth in transition expressed the need for more family involvement in developing the IPE.
- *Accommodations* – Youth focus group participants also expressed a need for more assistance specific to their need for accommodations. For example, one individual with a speech impediment was concerned because people often are unable to understand her speech and she wanted consistent accommodations for this challenge. Another participant reported a need for assistive technology to read her mail.

General VR Clients

- *Job Placement* support – recurring themes and statements adult focus group participants cited was to get more help to find a job and a job that better fit their interest that offers a competitive salary that pays them equal to their peers. They also cited the need for more support finding reliable transportation and housing.
- *Communication* – recurring themes from participants with significant disabilities cited the need for better communication and coordination to help them understand the VR process and their responsibility as a client. They also expressed a need for VR Counselors to listen to them and focus more on their interests and needs.
- *Training* – another recurring theme frequently cited by VR clients was the need for more training on how to use technology. They mentioned computers, and smartphones, tablets and especially applications that would improve their job readiness and employability. Participants expressed a sense of isolation caused by COVID-19 and felt access to technology would allow them to maintain a level of connectivity toward achieving their employment goal.

DCRSA Staff

- *Internal Communication* – focus group participants felt communication with colleagues was very good and that supervisors were opened to hearing their concerns. They felt they received opportunities to obtain training when they request it.
- *Authorization Process* – staff reported challenges to generate authorizations and being asked to correct authorizations when they felt they did not have the authority to do so. Activities such as addressing authorization issues, tracking down unresponsive clients, and documenting client activity that could not be tracked by the case management system were among the administrative processes that reduced staff efficiency.
- *Limited Pool of Community Partners or Providers* – numerous statements were made relative to the need for “more providers, including bilingual, mental health, and providers who can train on a range of technologies, including assistive technologies.” Staff also suggested “not enough provider data to adequately counsel clients and suggested it limits informed choice.” Provider data needed by DCRSA staff included type of placements made by the provider; number of successful placements; and specialized services offered in addition to up-to-date contact information. Staff also suggested a “need for more specialized providers with experience working with persons with more significant disabilities.” In addition, staff said they needed measurement tools, that defined successful performance for rehabilitation service providers to help enhance their efforts to counsel clients to better facilitate informed choice.
- *Person-Centered Approach* – participants acknowledged each had person-centered training which was a DCRSA priority.

Community Partners and Advocacy Groups

- *DCRSA Services* – focus group participants stated “DCRSA hasn’t done an effective job of educating the public on the services they provide,” and “no one knows the whole portfolio of services DCRSA offers.” There was a general consensus among stakeholders that they did not fully understand the VR services available or how to navigate the process to fully benefit from VR programs and supports. Many disability advocates cited they never had a formal explanation of VR services available in the District. Most learned of VR services through word of mouth from family members and friends. Many were uncertain about the accuracy of the information they were told. In general, stakeholders suggested that DCRSA embark of a broader effort to educate the public about the agency and VR services.
- *Education and Awareness* – participants felt “stigma was a major barrier.” They cited a lack of community and employer understanding regarding working with persons with disabilities and felt this was a barrier to employment.

- *Discovery* – community partners expressed an interest in involvement earlier in a client’s discovery process. They stated DCRSA conducts discovery prior to referral to the provider and discovery has to be revisited by the provider to get a realistic sense of clients' skills and abilities. In their view, this reduces the time the provider has for job placement.
- *Community Partner Engagement and Training* – Most community partners expressed the need for more provider training that allows them to share information amongst themselves and for DCRSA to use these opportunities to share high level information regarding DCRSA initiatives. All felt they would benefit from customized employment training and suggested a regularly scheduled engagement with the network of community partners would enhance relationships and support improvements in service delivery.
- *Benefits Counseling* – community partners each suggested people and families need more access to benefits counseling. They suggested this was a barrier for persons with disabilities because of misconceptions related to the impact on benefits. This negatively influenced people and families from obtaining or supporting family members to obtain employment.

Business Partners

- *Commitment to Supporting Persons with Disabilities* – business partners participating in focus group discussions expressed a strong interest in DCRSA VR programs, but most felt they did not know enough about available programs and services. Several business partners were pleased with DCRSA referrals and felt they had a good working relationship but said the relationship was primarily applicant referrals.
- *Outreach* – feedback from focus groups encouraged opportunities to improve business partners’ engagement. Most participants were interested in working more closely with DCRSA and learning more about VR programs and services. There was great interest in strengthening opportunities to support persons with disabilities.
- *Incentives* – business partners suggested an incentive program that recognizes the success of businesses in hiring persons with disabilities would encourage greater support and more hires. Several stated that the recognition of employment of persons with disabilities would highlight their community support and serve as a symbol of corporate commitment and leadership in their communities.
- *Quality of Applicants* – business partners stressed the importance of having qualified applicants and to ensure those referred are using the standard format for resume submission specifically for government positions.

5. BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

5.1 Key Findings

The government's change in operating status in March 2020, caused by COVID-19, was a major event and presented a significant set of obstacles for participants across all populations served by the administration and external providers. The pandemic's impact on DCRSA's staff revealed a number of systemic factors that will need to be addressed as DCRSA plans for unintended internal and external environmental factors. Although the agency had an initial brief temporary disruption, unlike many District agencies, most VR services resumed using virtual platforms. However, organizations that advocate for individuals with the most significant disabilities expressed concern about the inability of their members to stay connected because of the lack of access or limited access to technology after COVID-19 forced the suspension of in-person activity. In addition, survey respondents cited being afraid to go to work and concern about not receiving or understanding COVID-19 related information to calm their concerns. Many said they put their job placement on hold. DCRSA should consider future policies that anticipate unforeseen factors to ensure that the needs of VR clients can be met regardless of circumstances. This will require the administration to initiate a dynamic planning process that involves staff, providers and persons served. Lessons learned from this pandemic should serve as a basis for exploring where gaps emerged during this period.

In addition, COVID-19 had a significant impact on the data collection efforts of the needs assessment project team. As a result of changes in the government's operating status, the project team was unable to reach many District agency representatives in DCRSA partner agencies for their input. Also, because of social distancing policies, all needs assessment activities (*interviews, survey participation and focus groups*) has to be conducted using virtual platforms. For many persons with the most significant disabilities, technology access was a barrier. However, regardless of the challenges, the project team was able to communicate with and gather data from a broad segment of the stakeholder community.

A broad range of barriers were cited by stakeholders and many are identified in this section; however, analysis of the feedback revealed consensus around several broader, consistently cited barriers and service needs for persons with disabilities across each stakeholder population. The focus of this section, for the most part, is on barriers to employment. The findings and recommendations outlined throughout this section and the entire report are based on stakeholder feedback and recommendations.

Barriers to Employment for Persons with Disabilities

- **Lack of information about available vocational rehabilitation programs and services.**
Eighteen percent (18%) of respondents to the individual survey cited lack of information

as a barrier to accessing DCRSA Services. Also, during stakeholder interviews, community partners and vocational rehabilitation clients cited navigation of DCRSA's vocational rehabilitation system as a barrier.

- **Job Development and Placement Services.** Help finding a job was cited by 59% of respondents to the individual survey as a barrier to obtaining their employment goal.
- **Education or Job Training & Employment preparation services.** Thirty-six percent (36%) of respondents to the individual survey cited lack of "job training" as a barrier. In addition, 33% of respondents to the individual survey also cited the need for job coaching to successfully achieve employment.
- **Employer perceptions.** Stakeholder groups, including 32% of DCRSA staff respondents and 62% of community partner respondents cited employer perceptions as a barrier to employment for persons with disabilities. Qualitative data provided by staff during interviews and focus group discussions said essentially there was no formal program for employer education.
- **Insufficient employers.** Fifty-seven percent (57%) of community partner stakeholders indicated insufficient employers were a barrier to employment and employers were unwilling to accept people who have significant disabilities. Staff respondents in interviews and focus groups cited the "employer base is too small," or "employers don't know how to interact with individuals without job coaches."
- **Confounding barriers.** DCRSA staff, community partners, and vocational rehabilitation clients all identified the need to address confounding service barriers, such as, transportation, housing, childcare and mental health issues.

5.2 Introduction

DCRSA Staff, persons receiving vocational rehabilitation services and community partner organizations, including disability advocacy groups and employers were asked to provide input on barriers to employment for persons with disabilities.

When asked whether people who receive vocational rehabilitation services achieve their employment goals, 71% of community partners responded citing "no" with only 29% responding "yes." When DCRSA staff respondents were asked whether the network of community partners is able to meet client's vocational rehabilitation needs, 73.8% responded "yes" and only 27% responded "no."

They also were asked whether they felt barriers to employment were different across different subgroups, including persons with the most significant disabilities; youth in transition; LGBTQIA persons with disabilities; and individuals with disabilities from racial, ethnic minority groups or limited English-speaking individuals.

Table 23 below reflects reason staff cited persons with disability might have difficulty obtaining, maintaining, securing, or advancing in employment

Potential reasons that DCRSA clients might find it difficult to achieve their employment goals. For each potential barrier, please indicate whether you believe it is: A Barrier, adequately addressed by DCRSA Services; A Barrier, NOT adequately address by DCRSA Services; Not a Barrier; I Don't know:				
Selection	A Barrier, adequately addressed by DCRSA Services	A Barrier, NOT adequately addressed by DCRSA Services	Not a Barrier	I Don't Know
Education or training	71.79%	10.26%	15.38%	2.56%
Job skills	56.41%	35.90%	2.56%	5.13%
Job search skills	62.50%	27.50%	2.50%	7.50%
Convictions for criminal offenses	25.00%	52.78%	2.78%	19.44%
Language barriers	65.00%	12.50%	10.00%	12.50%
Poor social skills	34.21%	47.37%	2.63%	15.79%
Availability of jobs	48.72%	28.21%	12.82%	10.26%
Employers' perceptions about employing persons with disabilities	51.28%	25.64%	7.69%	15.38%
Availability of disability-related accommodations	57.50%	25.00%	5.00%	12.50%
Availability of help with disability-related personal care	36.84%	21.05%	2.63%	39.47%
Disability-related transportation issues	61.54%	17.95%	7.69%	12.82%
Other Transportation Issues	46.15%	12.82%	10.26%	30.77%
Mental health issues	43.59%	38.46%	0.00%	17.95%
Substance abuse issues	28.21%	48.72%	0.00%	23.08%
Other health issues	28.95%	34.21%	0.00%	36.84%
Childcare issues	23.68%	44.74%	2.63%	28.95%
Housing issues	24.32%	45.95%	5.41%	24.32%
Perceptions regarding the impact of income on Social Security benefits	64.10%	15.38%	7.69%	12.82%
Client satisfaction with job referral based on compatibility, interest, skills and abilities	58.97%	20.51%	12.82%	7.69%
Level of client understanding or knowledge of available services	66.67%	7.69%	15.38%	10.26%
Limited availability of choice for clients among service providers or service type to meet employment goals	39.47%	28.95%	15.79%	15.79%
Ability to opt-out of services and use funding for employment services not offered by DCRSA	21.05%	28.95%	7.89%	42.11%

Availability of self-directed service opportunities	32.43%	21.62%	5.41%	40.54%
Sensory friendliness of DCRSA environment	56.41%	10.26%	12.82%	20.51%
User-friendliness and ease of navigation of intake and employment process	61.54%	10.26%	12.82%	15.38%
Use of client’s existing support networks to achieve employment goals	61.54%	15.38%	10.26%	12.82%

Job development and job placement services, education or job training and employment preparation services, employer perceptions, and insufficient employers were common primary barriers across respondent groups and throughout each method of data collection. These common barriers suggest areas of opportunity to improve VR outcomes. Specifically, areas that were cited by staff as barriers not adequately addressed by VR services, such as poor social skills, substance use issues, criminal convictions, housing issues, etc. It suggests opportunities to either enhance VR services, strengthen community partnerships to address barriers that may not be eligible VR program services, or create reference materials that can address identified barriers or direct persons with disabilities to services to support their needs.

5.3 Barriers to Employment for Persons with Disabilities

The research team collected data designed to identify barriers to achieving employment goals for persons with disabilities, including those with the most significant disabilities, youth in transition and persons from unserved or underserved populations. Survey respondents included vocational rehabilitation participants, staff, community partner organizations, as well as employers, who sought to employ persons with disabilities in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan region. The following section identifies the primary barriers identified across all stakeholder populations, data sources and different subgroups.

Lack of Information about Available Vocational Rehabilitation Services and Supports

The lack of understanding of all available vocational rehabilitation services and supports was a primary barrier cited across all stakeholder groups. Feedback during interviews and focus group discussion from each stakeholder population indicates that respondents were unaware of the full range of VR services available in the District. Each cited vocational training, work experience, and long-term job supports like job coaching as key services for supporting persons with disabilities on their path to employment. However, limited awareness of services and lack of effective person-centered planning and support navigating the VR system were seen as barriers. The needs assessment team observed a need to implement a comprehensive outreach and awareness program to educate the public on VR programs and supports. Also, based on feedback, there is a need to manage expectations around how long it takes to get employment, once approved for VR services. There is a need for the VR counselors to do a better job explaining the VR process and the VR activities that may be needed to prepare clients for successful employment.

Job Development and Job Placement Services

Obtaining self-sufficiency and independence were important goals identified through data collection from people, program staff and community partner stakeholders. Fifty-nine percent (59%) of people responding to the individual survey cited, “Help finding a job,” as what is needed to successfully achieve employment. However, 75% of respondents in the DCRSA staff survey identified “Job development and placement services,” as needs that community partners and rehabilitation service providers were unable to meet. Staff also cited assistance to obtain in-between jobs for clients while working toward a long-term employment plan. They stated, “most clients are in desperate need of income and the time it takes to work toward a long-term goal creates the loss of motivation to maintain the course toward the long-term goal.”

Education or Job Training and Employment Preparation Services

When asked to identify the top barriers to achieving employment goals, 82% of Community Partners cited insufficient education and/or training and insufficient job skills training (both hard and soft skills) as barriers for youth in transition. Thirty-six percent (36%) of persons with disabilities responding to the individual survey cited not having proper job training and 33% cited not having job coaching as a barrier. Fifty-three percent (53%) of DCRSA staff respondents cited education and training and 50% cited job skills as the barriers to clients achieving employment goals.

Employer Perceptions

Employer outreach is considered critical to addressing employer attitudes that hinder employment success for persons with disabilities. Twelve percent (12%) of respondents to the individual survey cited employer bias due to their disability, or lack of responses from employers as a barrier to achieving their employment goals. Twenty-eight percent (28%) of DCRSA staff cited employer perceptions about employing persons with disabilities as a barrier to achieving employment.

Insufficient Employers

Having a sufficient employer base is essential to success if vocational rehabilitation clients are to achieve their employment goal. However, 57% of community partners indicated insufficient employers as a barrier to employment, and that employers were unwilling to accept persons with significant disabilities. Staff respondents in interviews and focus groups indicated that the “employer base is too small” and “employers don’t know how to interact with individuals without job coaches.” Additionally, as previously identified, employer participation was one of the categories explored that was especially low during the data collection effort. While low, this data point may suggest that the base is not substantial enough to meet the pressing and evolving needs of District residents with disabilities.

Confounding Barriers

DCRSA staff, community partners, and clients identified the need to address confounding service barriers. Specifically, 57% of community partners cited predictable transportation; 24% cited childcare; and 33% cited housing. While survey participants identified confounding service barriers, many recognized that some of the barriers were not within the DCRSA program authority to address. However, they expressed a desire for DCRSA to strengthen or engage in partnerships with other District Government agencies or community-based non-profit organizations that may be able to address many of the confounding barriers. Examples put forward by numerous stakeholders included more partnerships with housing organizations, building or creating an initiative to maintain a contact list of community resources that offer a variety of services that can address many of the confounding barriers.

5.4 Barriers to Employment as Related to Key Subgroups

Barriers for Clients with the Most Significant Disabilities

Community Partners

The overwhelming majority, 95% of respondents to the community partner survey indicated there were barriers to achieving employment goals for persons with the most significant disabilities that are different from the overall population. When asked to identify the top three barriers to achieving employment goals for clients with the most significant disabilities, respondents to the community partner survey identified a range of barriers, including insufficient job skills training (both hard and soft skills), poor social skills, insufficient education and/or training and perceptions regarding the impact of income on Social Security benefits. However, the top three barriers cited by respondents are included in *Table 24* below.

In addition, community partner survey respondents also commented that clients' "natural supports wanting more for the person than the person can actually perform" is often a barrier, or the client has unrealistic expectations as an employment goal. Respondents cited as well, that clients might have a behavioral support problem or not be stable with behavioral support and not be work ready as a barrier to achieving their employment goal.

Table 24, Clients with most significant disabilities according to community partners

The top three barriers to achieving employment goals for DCRSA clients with the most significant disabilities	%
Insufficient employers willing to accept persons who are significantly disabled	57%
Employers' perceptions of persons who are significantly disabled	62%
Insufficient employers that can accommodate persons who are significantly disabled	38%

Of the top three barriers, 62% of respondents to the community partners survey indicated that employers' perceptions were the greatest barrier to persons with a significant disability. Throughout the data collection process stakeholders cited with frequency, programs that offer

employer education and training as a strategy to raise awareness about the “abilities” of persons with significant disabilities and the contributions they can offer to the workplace. Stakeholders also suggested that VR clients with the most significant disabilities could benefit from initiatives that highlights their achievements. However, concerns were also expressed by over 33% of community partner respondents that many VR clients with the most significant disabilities had insufficient job skills training (both hard and soft skills) and the lack of job skills training was a barrier to achieving their employment goals.

DCRSA Staff

When asked whether there are barriers to achieving employment goals for clients with the most significant disabilities, 70% of DCRSA staff responding to the survey replied “yes.” Table 25 below identifies barriers that persons with the most significant disabilities face, according to staff survey respondents.

Table 25, Clients with the most significant disabilities according to DCRSA staff

What are the top three barriers to achieving employment goals for clients with the most significant disabilities (select a maximum of 3)	%
Sufficient programs, services or support to accommodate the needs	61%
Sufficient education or training resources to accommodate the needs	54%
Availability of jobs that correlate with a skillset	32%
Employers’ perceptions about employing persons with disabilities	32%

According to DCRSA staff, 61% cited the lack of “sufficient programs, services and/or supports to accommodate the needs” was the greatest barrier for achieving employment goals for persons with the most significant disabilities seeking vocational rehabilitation services. Staff felt DCRSA did not have a sufficient number of programs for clients with the most significant disabilities to participate in, to help them become more competitive when they seek a job. Staff cited the need for more on the job training or work opportunity learning programs and also suggested “situational analysis” as an effort to improve services for clients with the most significant disabilities. An example given was that “some client are not good candidates to take tests, so they need to be put into a situation to make an assessment of their skills.” The situation would provide an opportunity to assess the client’s skills an allow the counselor to sit with the family member and report the outcome and the reason why. Staff suggested this would be the best tool for the population of clients with the most significant disabilities.

Staff also suggested that work experience is limited for persons with the most significant disabilities and suggested they would benefit from having more opportunities to get work experience. There was consensus among staff that more programs and/or supports would improve employment outcomes, especially programs for clients with the most significant disabilities, especially for persons on the autism spectrum.

In addition, 32% of staff also cited the lack of “availability of jobs that correlate with a skillset.” As well, 32% cited “employers’ perceptions about employing persons with disabilities as

barriers. These findings suggest opportunities for DCRSA to enhance or expand programs and/or supports to help improve employment outcomes for persons with the most significant disabilities. Currently, according to staff, the supported employment service model typically is for individuals with the most significant disability. DCRSA does not consider the severity of the disability, rather DCRSA focuses more on whether the person has work experience and knows how to go about finding a job. Those individuals who don't have work experience or know how to find a job are referred for supported employment.

Barriers for Youth in Transition

Community Partners

According to respondents to the community partner survey, 79% of youth in transition face barriers to achieving employment goals different from the overall population of people with disabilities. Also, 91%, of community partners believe youth in transition receiving VR services do not have their employment goals adequately met. *Table 26*, according to community partners reflects barrier to goal achievement for youth in transition.

Table 26, Barriers for youth in transition, cited by community partners

Top 3 barriers to achieving employment goals for Youth in Transition?	%
Insufficient education and/or training	82%
Insufficient Job skills training (both hard and soft skills)	82%
Poor social skills	55%
Lack of job search skills	27%
Mental Health Issues	27%

When asked the primary reasons community partners are generally prevented from meeting the service needs of youth, 82% of respondents cited, "Inadequate assessment of client needs," and 55% cited not enough providers available in the area. Respondents also cited "natural supports are usually still the guardians and it becomes difficult to enact our assessment because guardians want to push the person either too hard or not hard enough." Community partners also felt "parent buy-in and willingness to support student before, during training and after job placement varies tremendously from family to family." Also, respondents felt there is still a gap on "willingness of employers to hire, once the youth is trained."

DCRSA Staff

According to respondents to the staff survey, 63% of youth in transition experience barriers to employment different from the overall population of people with disabilities. *Table 27* below indicated the top barriers for youth in transition as cited by DCRSA staff.

Table 27, Barriers to youth in transition, according to DCRSA Staff

Top 3 barriers to achieving employment goals for youth in transition?	%
Work Experience	83%
Job Skills	50%
Education and Training	46%

In addition to survey responses, during interviews, staff cited barriers like limited types of jobs that are available for transition age youth with inadequate experience. An example cited was “CVS is hiring, but they are seeking employees with multiple skills, the skill to work the cash register, be able to count, to greet customers, stock merchandise, etc. and suggested that might not be the case for persons with perhaps learning disabilities or communication impediments.

In addition, 21% of DCRSA staff also cited “lack of job search skills” and 25% of staff cited “poor social skills” as barriers to achieving employment goals. Staff felt some transition age youth just lacked support, suggesting “some of it is DC culture, sometimes there is no parental involvement, no natural supports, some are homeless or in group homes and some only have a case manager that advocate for them.” Staff felt youth in transition encounter a variety of barriers that contribute to their inability to get and maintain jobs.

In an effort to tackle the barriers, staff said the “DCRSA’s Transition Unit is always coming up with work readiness programs and seeking providers of those services.” Staff as well as youth wanted more opportunities like DC/3C programs and internships, more job exploration and job coaching and mentors to build employment skills.

Barriers to LGBTQIA to Achieving Employment Goals

Community Partners

According to respondents to the community partner survey, a range of barriers was cited that hinder LGBTQIA clients from achieving employment goals. Seventy-four percent (74%) of community partners responded that LGBTQIA persons with disabilities have barriers to achieving employment that are different from the overall population of people with disabilities. The following table reflects the top barriers.

Table 28, Barriers to LGBTQIA achieving employment goals, as cited by Community Partners

Top 3 barriers to achieving employment goals for LGBTQIA	%
Employers' perceptions	43%
Insufficient employers	29%
Insufficient job skills training (both hard and soft skills)	29%

Community partners also cited “discrimination,” employer bias,” and “not enough employment options” as barriers relative to LGBTQIA persons with disabilities achieving their employment goals. Also, when asked to indicate what they felt is the reason for LGBTQIA persons’ goals not being met, 33% of community partners believed there were “insufficient jobs.”

Barriers to Racial and Ethnic Minorities

DCRSA Staff

When asked whether barriers to achieving employment goals for clients who are racial or ethnic minorities are different than those of the overall population of people with disabilities, 54% responded “yes.” However, staff respondents cited 70.0% of clients that are limited-English proficient have barriers that were different from the overall population of people with disabilities.

Table 29, Barriers to achieving employment goals cited by DCRSA Staff

Barriers to achieving employment goals for racial & ethnic minorities	%
Language barriers	55%
Education & Training	30%
Convictions for criminal offenses	35%

For racial and ethnic minorities, 30% of staff survey respondents cited both “work experience” and employer perceptions as barriers to achieving their employment goals. Staff also suggested that for some minority groups the ability to navigate the red tape they encounter mainly when accessing government services are a barrier.

In addition, during staff interviews, many suggested families need greater support and education on the opportunities of VR services for their eligible family member(s) and for some racial and ethnic minorities there is a lack of family support. However, staff also said DCRSA targets extra effort to reach out to racial and ethnic minorities, especially persons with disabilities in Wards 7 and 8. They also felt benefit counseling for racial and ethnic minority families and education on the implications of work on their benefits could encourage more families of persons with disabilities to seek VR program participation for their eligible family members.

Barriers for Limited-English Proficient

Community Partners

According to community partner respondents, 93% of limited-English proficient persons with disabilities encounter barriers to achieving their employment goals different from the overall population of people with disabilities.

Table 30, Barriers to achieving employment goals cited by community partners

Barriers to achieving employment goal for persons with disabilities that are limited-English proficient	%
Language barriers	85%
Insufficient education and/or Training	46%
Insufficient Job skills training (both hard and soft skills)	46%

Eighty-five percent (85%) of community partners cited language barriers as the primary impediment to achieving their employment goal for limited-English proficient persons with disabilities. Community partners also said that “citizenship issues prevent long term services, or at the very least makes it difficult to obtain long-term services,” and “cultural differences in families may limit options for sons and daughters, in addition to language barriers.” These findings suggest opportunities to expand programs and services to address language and cultural differences and minimize barriers for limited-English proficient persons with disabilities. Staff pointed to efforts already in place, like an annual Latinx Conference and the hiring of bilingual staff as an effort to better support VR clients with limited-English proficiency.

5.5 Additional Barriers

Other barriers cited by stakeholders during the data collection effort included, 1). The need for training on how to use the various technologies. Throughout the data collection process, stakeholders cited that barriers clients face due to COVID-19 centered around not being able to access and navigate technologies such as computers, laptops, IPADS, and smartphones. Stakeholders suggested access and use of technologies would improve their opportunities to stay connected to VR services and help prepare them to be more competitive when seeking employment opportunities; 2). Stakeholders also cited a need for better access and training on the use of assistive devices and supports. In conjunction with training on the various technology, the access and use of assistive devices was cited as equally important. During data collection, a number of respondents with sensory impairments, like low vision or blindness provided data for the survey by telephone. These respondents expressed an interest in computer software and hardware supports and to receive documents in alternate formats, like braille (*a visually impaired stakeholder shared that she received mail from DCRSA but was unable to read it due to her disability*). Stakeholders also wanted training on how to read small print braille and a need for other devices and features of devices to help perform tasks such as cooking. Stakeholders also cited the need for a support animal; and 3). Better and more frequent communication with DCRSA. Due to the fear of COVID-19, many stakeholders

expressed concerns about going to work. They cited not receiving sufficient information or understanding the information about COVID-19 to calm their concerns or worries, so some were putting job placement on hold. They suggested addressing these specific barriers would also help them overcome obstacles and allow them to live more self-sufficient and independent.

6. SERVICE PROVISION FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

This section provides an analysis of feedback relative to service provisions. The data collected was gathered from a cross-section of interviews, several focus groups and surveys. Seventy-two percent (72%) of the people who took the survey are currently actively receiving services from DCRSA. Approximately thirteen percent (13%) of the people who participated in the survey were not familiar with DCRSA and ten percent (10%) were past clients who received services, but their cases were currently closed.

6.1 Key Findings

- **Office Accessibility.** Individuals receiving vocational rehabilitation services and supports generally *have not* reported the following as significant barriers to service: physical office location of DCRSA or community rehabilitation providers or hours of operations.
- **Employment-related supports.** Vocational training, work experience, and short and long-term job supports, such as job coaching are key services for supporting persons with disabilities on their path to employment. Person-centered planning and support navigating the vocational rehabilitation system were also identified as critical services; individuals had a positive view of their interaction with and support from the majority of the vocational rehabilitation counselors.
- **Service Navigation.** Families of people receiving services and those persons wanting to gain entry to DCRSA for services were often unclear about the types of the vocational rehabilitation services and supports provided by the administration.
- **Assistive Technology.** Technological aids and devices and related training are key to supporting employment for persons with disabilities especially persons with sensory disabilities.
- **Benefits Planning.** Such information can inform people of the impact of employment on wages and support transition to work. Self-advocacy and peer support groups can improve people's self-perception regarding employment.
- **Underserved or unserved persons with disabilities.** People with autism and significant cognitive disabilities, those who live in Wards 7 and 8, and those with co-existing behavioral health conditions were thought to be underserved or unserved by vocational rehabilitation services.
- **Customized Employment.** Data indicates there were limited persons employed through customized employment over the past year. There is a need for extensive training on customized employment for both DCRSA staff and community partners to maximize the opportunities for persons living with the most significant disabilities to gain employment through customized employment.

6.2 Introduction

DCRSA Service Provision

DCRSA offers a wide range of VR services, but physical accessibility is critical to those needing to gain access to those VR service provisions. Needs assessment participants were asked their perspective on accessibility of DCRSA services as well as their ability to physically access service provider services. Seventy-seven percent (77%) of individual survey participants found VR supports and services easily accessible. Seventy-seven percent (77%) found the VR office accessible, and eighty-one percent (81%) found the community partners' offices to be physically accessible in the District. The majority of individual participants, seventy-one percent (71%) also deemed they had thorough VR assessments to determine their skills and abilities for employment.

Table 31 reflects the response from persons with disabilities participating

Service Provisions Provided	%
Individuals are able to easily access VR supports and services	77%
VR office is physically accessible	77%
Individuals had a thorough VR assessment to determine their skills and abilities for employment	71%
Service Providers offices are physically accessible	81%

Rehabilitation Service Provider Network

In an effort to collect more detailed information on VR program services available to District residents, the project team asked VR clients and families to identify what services they found readily available from network community partners who support persons with disabilities:

- Over half, fifty-one percent (51%) of people surveyed indicated that they found employment services readily available to support persons with disabilities.
- Respondents also cited that they thought supported employment services were readily available. For example, forty-one percent (41%) identified job coaching as available; twenty-four percent (24%) identified disability skills training as being available; twenty-two percent (22%) identified disability-related skills training; and twenty percent (20%) identified job readiness skills training as being readily available to support persons with disabilities.

It is noted that during the interviews and focus group sessions there were areas of service identified that were deemed essential for persons with disabilities in order to maintain meaningful employment; however, those services were not believed to be readily available from DCRSA community partners. Individual respondent data further validated this perception, suggesting the following services were limited and essentially unavailable to most individuals receiving DCRSA services through the community partner network:

- Ten Percent (10%) believed that benefits counseling was available;
- Seven percent (7%) believed that customized employment services were available;
- Five percent (5%) thought that assistive technology was available;
- Two percent (2%) identified interpreter and translator services as available; and
- Two percent (2%) believed that registered apprenticeship training was available.

The perception by stakeholders that 10% or less of services deemed as essential for persons with disabilities was unavailable to most individuals who need them suggest that DCRSA should consider ways to make these services more readily available.

Table 32 reflect percentage of individuals that reported on community provider services they found readily available to support persons with disabilities.

What provider services did you find readily available to support persons with disabilities (Please select all that apply)	%
Employment services	51%
Supported employment services	41%
Pre-employment transition services	12%
On-the-job training	17%
Community college or four-year college or other university resources	12%
Occupational training	7%
Assistive technology	5%
Interpreter and translator services	2%
Benefits counseling	10%
Disability-related skills training	22%
Customized employment services	7%
Transportation support	17%
Reading and literacy services	7%
Personal assistance services	17%
Maintenance or other income assistance	7%
Registered apprenticeship training	2%
Job coaching	24%
Job readiness skills training	20%

Employment-Related Supports

The survey queried individual respondents on what they deemed as most needed services to support them in achieving their employment goals. A significant number of survey respondents identified the following supports to achieve meaningful employment goals:

- vocational counseling (help to find a job)
- educational advancements
- job training
- reasonable accommodations
- reliable transportation; and

- job coaching

The project team noted that the majority of people indicated that they saw these services as important because they had received them, and they had played a major role in ensuring their employment success.

The data reflects that survey participants had a high degree of confidence in the initial interaction with their Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors. This revelation allowed the project team to develop a more nuanced understanding of the significance of this initial interaction between DCRSA and persons with disabilities receiving VR services, which suggests that this initial contact plays a major role in determining the long-term success of people receiving services from DCRSA. *Table 33* below shows that forty-three percent (43%) surveyed believed that they interacted with their counselors “often,” and twenty-eight percent (28%) interacted with their counselors “somewhat frequently.” Taken together these two categories indicate that over seventy percent (71%) of those receiving services thought that the counselor interaction was significant to achieving their employment goal.

This finding supports the notion that the dynamic relationship between the VR Counselor and the person being served is essential. The counselor’s role in helping persons with disabilities gain an understanding and develop a realistic plan that leads to productive, satisfying, employment consistent with the person’s individualized employment goals should not be minimized.

Table 33 reflects percentage of clients indicating the frequency in which they interact with their VR Counselor.

How often did you interact with your DCRSA Counselor?	%
Often	43%
Somewhat frequent	28%
Somewhat infrequent	20%
No communication	3%
Other (please specify)	7%

Vocational Training

Relative to vocational training, survey finding indicate that most people surveyed believe they need some type of vocational service to successfully achieve employment, or at least update to their existing skills. For example, fifty-nine percent (59%) of people surveyed reported they needed DCRSA supports to help find a job. Thirty-six percent (36%) indicated they needed job-training. Additionally, there were auxiliary services relative to vocational training for which people surveyed indicated they needed to successfully achieve meaningful employment. Thirty-two percent (32%) desired job coaching. Thirty percent (30%) needed reliable transportation. Twenty-eight percent (28%) indicated reasonable accommodations; and twenty-six (26%) indicated education was needed to successfully achieve meaningful employment.

Table 34 reflect the percentage of persons with disabilities receiving services who reported on services needed to successfully achieve employment

What service(s) did you need to successfully achieve your employment? (Please select all that apply)	%
Job Training	36%
Help to find a job	59%
Education	26%
Reasonable accommodations	28%
Reliable transportation	30%
Mental health services	16%
Affordable housing	18%
Assistive technology services	8%
Benefits counseling	16%
Job Coaching	33%
Interpreter or translation services	2%
Childcare	5%
Substance use services	3%
Other (please specify)	33%

Table 34 above reflects what persons with disabilities surveyed indicated they needed to achieve their employment goals; certain areas were cited more frequently than others as places where more assistance could have been provided.

Staff, community partners, and individual participants all cited the need for ongoing vocational training to ensure skill maintenance and job advancement. Respondents indicated that although people may have access to training during their tenure with DCRSA, they may require skill refresher courses or more advanced training to retain and advance in their positions. Program staff and community partners described limited options for people to acquire post-employment training or supports beyond the limited duration of vocational rehabilitation post-employment services.

Job Placement

DCRSA staff and community partners indicated few options for people who were in between supported employment and competitive employment. However, people with disabilities and family feedback suggested that opportunities for becoming entrepreneurs and/or having long-term internships would serve as an effective interim step on the path to meaningful competitive employment for people with disabilities in the District of Columbia.

Persons with disabilities who served as interns or in work experiences credited their subsequent employment to the intern experience. Indeed, people receiving services and staff alike noted that work experience or internships were critical to and a positive step toward achieving meaningful employment. People with disabilities and families felt that, internships, paid work experiences, and opportunities for becoming entrepreneurs (apprenticeships) could

be an effective bridge to long term employment—the regular contact between the job developer and the VR program participant helps address any issues as they arise. During this time, the participant gains confidence and feedback on what they can do better.

Program staff and community partners remarked that they would like to be able to offer work experience to all VR clients, such as six to eight weeks of opportunity with no liability or upfront commitment from the employer to fortify the transition to employment. It was suggested that work opportunities would benefit all parties. Providing work experience for VR clients would allow the employer to observe the employee work performance and potentially increase the possibility that the VR client would be offered ongoing paid employment. Similar to the Pre-ETS programs that offers work experience for youth, it was suggested that a comparable “pilot” work program for adult VR clients would increase the probability of employment success. Some stakeholders also proposed enhancing the partnership with the Department of Employment Services (DOES) to integrate goals for adults with disabilities into their programs like their apprenticeship programs.

Stakeholders also suggested that introductory work experience options can also provide an opportunity for staff to help bolster VR program participants’ soft skills. DCRSA staff and community partners both noted lack of soft skills as a key barrier to employment. Increased awareness of expectations around personal hygiene, punctuality, navigating the transportation system, and communication norms could also help clients achieve and retain employment.

Job Coaching

Vocational rehabilitation staff, community partners, and persons with disabilities served noted in the interviews and focus groups that in some instances there was a need for longer term job support (such as extended job coaching) for VR clients to retain positions and advance in careers. Thirty-three percent (33%) of people surveyed said they needed job coaching to successfully achieve employment. However, twenty-one percent (21%) of DCRSA staff surveyed indicated that extended use of job coaching services could possibly be a barrier to people achieving their employment goals. During focus group discussions, DCRSA staff indicated that the duration and intensity of job coaching varied by program participants. As an alternative, staff suggested training for employers to develop natural supports might address the need.

Although during stakeholder interviews and focus group discussions, persons with disabilities and community providers noted the need for longer-term, on the job support such as job coaching. DCRSA staff suggested that administrative restrictions sometimes prohibit long-term provision of services, citing that DCRSA is not a long-term support agency. They also added that vocational rehabilitation post-employment services are currently limited in duration and scope, and not intended to provide ongoing comprehensive services. Under current guidelines, if more comprehensive services are required, a new rehabilitation effort would have to be considered. Within the existing service structure, DCRSA staff and persons with disabilities both agreed that strengthening the relationships between VR counselors and persons served can help maintain communication and voluntary follow-up after placement. This will promote job retention and

advancement. Essentially, each stakeholder group noted a need for a more systematic approach to longer-term job supports.

Although the Workforce and Innovation Opportunity Act necessitates a closer look at longer-term success after job placement, DCRSA staff and community partners suggested insufficient support for follow up services after successful job placement. The reality is very different from the needs and the perception of all stakeholders if short and long-term job retention and success is to be realized.

Additionally, DCRSA staff and community partners shared that although people with intellectual disabilities and mental illness may have access to systematic longer-term job supports; people with other disabilities often require similar assistance to address ongoing modifications for job or task changes, and updated adaptive technology and skills, among other issues. Yet, many people, including those with brain injury, do not have an extended payor identified for supported employment services. Staff respondents noted the constraints of the supported employment grant requirements and that DCRSA is not a long-term supports agency but cited this as an area recommended to be given additional attention to try to address the issue. Discussions across all focus groups was that “Vocational training, work experience, and long-term job supports, such as job coaching are key services for supporting persons with disabilities on their path to employment.”

Assistive Technology

Ten percent (10%) of people receiving DCRSA services identified the need for Assistive Technology (AT) in achieving their employment goals. Sixty-one percent (61%) of DCRSA staff indicated through survey responses that AT was readily available for persons being serviced by DCRSA and twenty-five (25%) percent of community providers’ survey respondents identified Assistive Technology services readily available to people with disabilities. However, only five percent (5%) of VR clients indicated that AT was readily available to them. DCRSA staff indicated through survey responses that assistive technology services are provided, but respondents do not feel it meets their needs or VR clients are not aware of how to access this service. With this disparity, it is suggested that DCRSA take a closer look at developing ways to inform clients of available assistive technology supports and services and make them more accessible. To further emphasize the importance of assistive technology services, community partners suggested in focus group discussions that “technological aids and devices and related training are critical needs to supporting employment.”

Mental Health Access

Forty-seven percent (47%) of program staff and fifty-eight percent (58%) of community partners viewed mental health treatment as a service that was readily available to DCRSA clients. Sixteen percent (16%) of persons with disabilities receiving VR services reported this need. The majority of survey respondents across all stakeholder groups viewed mental health treatment as received by some or most people. Despite general agreement around mental

health service delivery, DCRSA staff and community providers identified a need for further staff training on mental health issues and referral sources.

Social Security Benefits Planning

Fifty-eight percent (58%) of DCRSA staff surveyed and thirty-eight percent (38%) of community partners felt benefits planning were readily available to persons with disabilities served by DCRSA, compared to ten percent (10%) of VR clients themselves. DCRSA staff and partners discussed the need for continued communication regarding the continuum of available benefits as employment status evolves. These stakeholders suggested that this may be particularly important for families, who could have misconceptions about the impact on employment and benefits. Additionally, DCRSA staff, clients served, and community partners observed a need for additional staff training on benefits planning to ensure all people have access to consistent information and referrals as well as universal benefits planning to facilitate access to accurate information. Parents during focus group discussions were concerned about their family member losing their Social Security Insurance (SSI) benefits. Staff mentioned that evening appointments can now be scheduled to obtain benefits counseling and felt continued communication around this issue could address the concerns.

Transportation

All stakeholders agreed that reliable transportation was an essential aspect of successful employment. Seventy-seven percent (77%) of staff and fifty-four percent (54%) of community partners felt that transportation services were readily available to persons with disabilities in the District of Columbia. However, only seventeen percent (17%) of persons with disabilities surveyed felt that transportation services were readily available to them.

Customized Employment

The survey asked community partners, “Does your organization provide Customized Employment opportunities for job seekers?” Of the twenty-three (23) community partners responding, forty-eight percent (48%) indicated “Yes,” they did provide customized employment and fifty-two percent (52%) indicated “No.” For those community partners who offered customized employment, ninety percent (90%) indicated their staff received formal training in designing and negotiating customized job opportunities with employers. Ten percent (10%) of community partners indicated their staff was not adequately trained in customized employment.

Of the community partners who offer customized employment, four (4) community partners cited placing 1-5 people in customized employment within the past year; one (1) community partners cited placing 6-10 people; one (1) placed 11-20 people in customized employment and three (3) community partners cited they placed 21 or more people in customized employment. However, only seven percent (7%) of clients surveyed found customized employment services readily available to support persons with disabilities. In addition, parents further reinforced the need for customized employment during focus group discussions, when they said “DCRSA

needs to create employment options to fit the skills and abilities the client has.” These findings suggest a broader need to expand customized employment services.

Table 35 reflects customized employment placements over the past year according to DCRSA’s network of service providers responding to the community partner survey.

If your organization provides Customized Employment, how many job seekers have you placed in customized positions in the past one year?	%
1-5	44%
6-10	11%
11-20	11%
21 or more	33%

Transition-Aged Youth

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Act), as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) emphasizes the provision of services to students and youth with disabilities to ensure they have opportunities to receive the training and other services necessary to achieve competitive integrated employment. The WIOA requires that efforts be expanded to increase the population of students with disabilities who may receive services, and the kind of services that the VR agency offers to these young persons with disabilities who are transitioning from school to postsecondary education and employment.

Further, WIOA notes that as VR program requirements are enhanced opportunities for youth and emerging young adults with disabilities and must be increased, as practices and strategies to improve workplace skills are enhanced and developed. Opportunities of expanded internships and other work-based learning opportunities, WIOA states, should be improved to meet expanding demands of the workforce.

Under WIOA, VR agencies are to reserve not less than fifteen percent (15%) of the Federal VR allotment provided for pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities transitioning from school to postsecondary education and training programs and employment in competitive integrated settings. These services should be coordinated by the Local Education Agencies (LEAs) according to WIOA.

According to data furnished by the Office of the State Superintendent of Education, there are approximately 4,500 youth between the ages of 14-21 years of age who make-up the population of youth in DC Public Schools, Public Charter Schools and non-public schools, who are receiving special education supports. The data suggest that most of those young people qualify for special supports and services or 504 Plan Accommodations under WIOA cited above. DCRSA has thirteen (13) VR Counselors across two (2) units in DCRSA assigned to work in the DC Public Schools, DC Public Charter Schools, and non-public schools, where DC students are placed by Local Education Agencies. There are two (2) rehabilitation assistants who support the

transition units and two (2) supervisors who oversees these two units. Additionally, there is a program analyst, employment coordinator, community support liaison, project manager, and program manager who assist in the oversight and management of the transition program at DCRSA. DCRSA assumed responsibility for implementing WIOA requirements in 2017 and is still evolving the nature of the work that is required to meet the emerging needs of the population and match them with the changing economies in the District's region.

It is noted that there were limitations imposed on needs assessment initiatives because of the COVID-19 event, which impacted the number of youth and family members to whom the project team had access in completing the needs assessment. Nevertheless, respondents who participated provided invaluable perspectives that were insightful, informative, and supportive of the roles that DCRSA and DC Public Schools, DC Public Charter Schools, and non-public schools play in seeking to meet the evolving needs of youth and young adults with disabilities in the District of Columbia.

In focus group discussions with transition-aged youth, respondents preferred that DCRSA engage families more in discussions about pre-employment transition services. One student indicated that she had difficulty understanding what the VR Counselor was telling her and thought that it would be better if her mother could be more involved in the discussion to help explain the information in a way that she could understand.

In the focus group discussions, there was consensus among family members that better coordination and collaboration between DC Public School and DCRSA and DC Public Charter Schools and DCRSA was necessary so that school age transitioning students would receive the needed pre-employment transition services.

7. SERVICE SYSTEM INFRASTRUCTURE

7.1 Key Findings

Analysis of the data collected throughout the course of the survey demonstrated a consensus among stakeholders around many areas of the service system infrastructure. Several themes relating to the service system infrastructure were prevalent across all of the data gathering methodologies. The findings and recommendations are the result of feedback received over the course of the assessment data collection activities.

Feedback on Vocational Rehabilitation Administrative Systems

- **Case Management/Administrative Systems** – The case management system needs updating. The existing case management data system require workarounds for the documentation and monitoring of agency-wide performance. There is a need for a comprehensive information system which facilitates all the data collection necessary to manage the performance of the VR administration including relevant information for general VR clients and youth in transition.
- **Financial System/ Process for Payment** – The Human Care Agreement process, while recently revamped, still does not incorporate a real-time component that allows staff and providers to determine the status of funds which ultimately translates to referral capacity. The existing method for tracking availability of the provider’s funds via purchase order reports results in delay of services due to lack of real-time data on the availability of funds for the particular provider.
- **Policy Training Rollout** - The policy and procedure development should be accompanied by rigorous and ongoing training to ensure that all staff are consistently following the same processes in daily operations.

Feedback on Partner Relationships – Maximizing Collaborations and Cooperation

- **Memoranda of Understanding (MOU)** *the only type of instrument that exchanges funding between agencies* and **Memoranda of Agreements (MOAs)** – executed by DCRSA to facilitate collaboration with other government agencies should be strengthened to enhance the data sharing requirements that demonstrates the effectiveness of the relationships. Data sharing through the MOU/MOAs are important tools to measure outcomes. These documents should provide DCRSA with measures to evaluate whether outcomes for the persons with disabilities are achieved.
- **Collaboration** – Alignment of the services and supports of both DCRSA and DCDDA administrations to more efficiently coordinate efforts that will best serve people with the most significant disabilities can lead to more meaningful and successful employment opportunities. Strengthening the current DCDDA/DCRSA Collaboration Policy would ensure continuity of services by eliminating gaps for clients served by

both administrations. The policy changes would facilitate more efficient linkage to services and supports between administrations.

Feedback on Rehabilitation Service Provider Management

- **Provider Data Availability** – Community rehabilitation service provider information needs to be updated and better maintained regularly, including identification, qualifications, and maintenance of current information on provider performance outcomes for services provided. Maintaining accurate provider contacts, the type of services provided, and performance history is essential to help clients receiving VR services select the provider that can offer the services needed to achieve their employment goal. VR Counselors should be able to generate as needed, an up-to-date list of rehabilitation service providers with the performance history that will improve the probability that a VR client will achieve their employment goal. Having an effective provider directory can improve the efficiency of VR service delivery, provider management and potentially improve VR client service delivery outcomes.
- **Provider Diversification and Augmentation** – Diversify and increase the number of providers offering various services and minimize delays in service provisions due to lack of specialty providers, and to improve informed consent. Specifically, obtain more bilingual service providers that are fluent in a range of languages, obtain more providers of American Sign Language (ASL) services, providers offering benefits counseling, assistive technology services and providers that offer training in a range of technology products, e.g., computers, tablets, smartphones and other technology applications.

Feedback on Business or Employer Relations

- **Employer Relations Approach** - Information gathered during the research indicated the current process around employer relations is fragmented. Currently, there are decentralized staffing efforts directed at developing employer relationships, job development, and limited structured employer trainings to encourage the hiring of persons with disabilities. Further frustrating the achievement of job creation and relationship development is the disparate maintenance of business contacts and information.
- **Employer Engagement** – DCRSA staff, persons with disabilities and community rehabilitation providers each cite a greater need for more employers to offer job placement opportunities. According to DCRSA staff, essentially there is no formal program for employer education. As cited by staff, community partners do employer education as they engage in job development. DCRSA internal staff, including Employment Coordinators, work with VR Counselors to provide job opportunities and provide employer education as they conduct job development activities. However, there is no formal regularly scheduled process for helping employers understand what it means to hire a person with a disability and how to provide reasonable accommodations.

- **Limited Existing Employment Opportunities** – Throughout the data collection process and the review of unemployment data revealed the need for more job opportunities for persons with disabilities, including those with specialized skills and education. Employers have requested targeted education around making appropriate accommodations and the need for help with recruitment of persons with disabilities to meet job demands. A concerted effort by DCRSA to make available the skills of VR clients who have successfully completed VR program and are awaiting employment could open up opportunities, especially for highly skilled and educated persons with disabilities that simply need advocacy and education for business partners and employers to create opportunity.

Feedback on Student Focused Services

Youth in transition needs differ from general VR needs as youth are more likely to include pursuit of postsecondary education or training as part of their employment goals and therefore require longer periods of system engagement and a different framework for measuring success. Additionally, there are different barriers to service for youth, primarily, according to survey respondents and DCRSA staff, lack of work experience and lack of soft skills development.

- **DCRSA/DCPS Partnership** – The roles in the partnership between DCRSA and DCPS are unclear to students and parents. Students and parents reported a lack of clarity around the difference between Pre-ETS and VR services and when or which services require an application to DCRSA to receive the services. According to the MOU between DCPS and DCRSA, there are four (4) DCPS staff members assigned to support an estimated population of 4,500 potentially eligible students in the provision of Pre-ETS services. DCRSA counselors are also assigned to schools across the city to provide Pre-ETS services to students with disabilities. In addition, DCRSA also supports students with disabilities in DC Public Charter Schools and non-public schools, where DC students are placed by Local Education Agencies. However, due to COVID-19, the needs assessment team was unable to reach representatives from these entities to obtain their input.

7.2 Introduction

As part of DDS's efforts to improve both disability and rehabilitation services to maximize efficiencies and streamline service provision there are opportunities for DCRSA to access a wider provider base and community partners. The successful engagement of these stakeholders could strengthen DCRSA service provision and improve individual outcomes, especially outcomes for people receiving services from both DCDDA and DCRSA.

The feedback obtained during this needs assessment was primarily limited to stakeholders exclusive to DCRSA but as there are many overlaps between DCDDA and DCRSA, community partners (as required by DDS) were affiliated with both administrations. The categories of stakeholders interviewed and surveyed included:

- **DCRSA Staff** – executive staff, Program Managers, VR Counselor Rehabilitation Specialists, Community Liaison Specialists, Employment Coordinators, Intake Specialists, supervisory staff, staff from various divisions and units including transition unit, sensory unit, and the Randolph Sheppard Program.
- **Persons with Disabilities and Their Families** - who receive services from DCRSA and its community partner network who were identified through providers, community partners and advocates, and referred by other persons with disabilities.
- **Community Partners** – providers, advocacy groups, other governmental service agency representatives, DCPS representatives, workforce development partners, Statewide Independent Living Commission representatives, and the State Rehabilitation Council. It should be noted that for the purpose of this needs assessment, due to COVID-19, the project team was unable to obtain input from representatives of any of the DC Public Charter Schools or any of the non-public schools, where DC students have been placed by Local Education Agencies.
- **Business Partners/Employers** – Business partner representatives in the DC metropolitan area including, Maryland, and Virginia that seek to hire people with disabilities including those representing the following industries: retail, hospitality, government, employee recruitment, and custodial services.

To obtain collect additional insight into the DCRSA vocational rehabilitation service delivery, survey respondents were asked their opinion on whether DCRSA's network of rehabilitation service providers were adequate to meet the needs of persons with disabilities seeking services.

Table 36 represent the opinions of the respondents.

Is the network of rehabilitation service providers in the District of Columbia adequate to meet DCRSA’s clients’ vocational rehabilitation service needs?	%
Yes	42%
No	58%

Interesting to note, fifty-eight percent (58%) of rehabilitation service providers felt the network was not adequate to meet the VR client needs. This response is consistent with concerns expressed from other stakeholder feedback, especially provider diversification and augmentation, citing the need for more bilingual and benefit counseling service providers.

7.3 DCRSA Administrative Systems

Case Management System

DCRSA Staff identified opportunities for improvement in many areas of the infrastructure depending on their role within the agency. Executive and upper-level management staff members who were more closely involved with a series of recent administrative changes and policy updates generally had a very positive view of the overall system and the ability of the agency to effectively provide rehabilitation services to people with disabilities.

Observation from the data collected suggests that these perceptions were probably influenced by both realized and anticipated improvements in service delivery based on policy shifts towards a person-centered approach in service delivery and the recent revisions to policies that seek to standardize as much as possible the approach to providing rehabilitation services to persons with varying degrees and types of vocational needs.

Table 37 reflects the top three (3) changes staff cited to better assist clients

What are the top three changes that would enable you to better assist your DCRSA clients? (Please select a maximum of three changes)	%
Smaller caseloads	50%
More streamlined processes	35%
Better data management tools	26%
Better assessment tools	26%
Additional training	12%
More administrative support	21%
More support from supervisors	24%
Improved business partners	32%
Decreased procurement time	15%
More effective community-based service providers	32%

Increased outreach to clients in their communities	18%
Other (please specify)	6%

During each data collection activity, DCRSA staff described challenges with the case management system and their caseload. *Table 37* reflect the responses from staff that identify changes that would enable them to better assist VR clients. The overall change staff surveyed cited that would enable them to better serve their clients was smaller caseloads. However, DCRSA VR Counselors have smaller caseloads than either of the surrounding Maryland and Virginia jurisdictions performing similar duties. Thirty-five percent (35%) of staff cited more streamlined processes, and 26% cited better data management tools and better assessment tools. Based on observations from across stakeholder populations, improvements in administrative procedures could be the most significant change that would facilitate better VR service outcomes.

In addition, depending on the needs of each client, the VR process to achieve successful job placement based on a client’s employment goal can be lengthy. The range of status codes that represent the stage of client readiness and progress towards their employment goal is outlined in a detailed diagram of the process flow and explanations of the status codes that document client progress, can be found in the “Status Codes and Rehabilitation Process Diagram” in Attachment G1.

As outlined throughout the report, staff suggested a range of ideas to address changes that would better serve VR clients, including replacement of the dated case management system, restructuring and strengthening the case management and counseling approach as well as improving communication and client follow-up.

Financial Management System

Although only 15% of DCRSA staff surveyed indicated that decreased procurement time (*See Table 37*) would enable them to better serve clients, community rehabilitation providers also agreed. The primary issue identified by staff members and rehabilitation service providers is the inability to confirm in a timely manner whether funds are available to the selected provider. Staff argued that the Human Care Agreement (HCA), the mechanism for vetting and qualifying vendors to provide rehabilitation services, should not be the mechanism to determine whether funds are available to the provider. Purchase orders are still required to allocate dollars for the services rendered. Apart from reviewing weekly Purchase Order Reports (not real-time data), it is unclear how much funding is available for a particular provider. After a determination of eligibility is confirmed, the VR Counselor works with the client to establish the client’s employment goal. Once the employment goal is established, the client proceeds to select a community rehabilitation service provider to obtain the VR services needed to achieve their employment goal. If the community rehabilitation provider selected does not have a valid and fully funded purchase order, the person seeking services would then have to go through the service provider selection process again which can delay service initiation.

Overall, stakeholders pointed to numerous system infrastructure barriers they felt led to delays in service delivery to persons with disabilities seeking VR services, including the inability to determine in real-time whether funds were available on service providers' HCAs; gaps in the procurement process; a need to restructure the Human Care Agreement process; and provide consistent messaging regarding billing and reporting requirements as well as provide timely technical support for any issues. However, a number of improvements are currently underway and continuing. These improvements included a process where an "immediate requisition" can be made, and services can be approved within twenty-four (24) hours; and the effort to restructure the Human Care Agreement contracts between DCRSA and 3rd party providers was underway.

Operational Infrastructure

Supervisory and front-line staff mostly agreed that while the agency goals and employee efforts were positively impacting the vocational rehabilitation outcomes for persons with disabilities, there were various components of the operational infrastructure that pose challenges to achieving positive outcomes. Some of the components include processes for gathering and reviewing data collected by community rehabilitation providers and holes in the collection of client utilization data.

Another infrastructure issue is the need to improve how DCRSA communicates its services to the public. This was especially true among youth in transition and their families and specifically around the provision of financial assistance to complete post-secondary education as a means to meeting an employment goal. There was considerable confusion and frustration around this issue. Parents sought clarity on when and how to apply for DCRSA tuition assistance. In addition, there was a great sense of frustration that when tuition assistance was denied, parents said oftentimes, the VR Counselor did not provide a timely written notice, which in the parent's opinion, denied them the opportunity to pursue a timely appeal of the decision. Also, there was limited awareness among parents that DCRSA was the payor of last resort for tuition assistance. This suggests an opportunity to enhance efforts to inform transition age youth and their families about the requirements for obtaining tuition assistance through DCRSA and the documentation needed to demonstrate compliance.

Policies, Procedures, and Training

While DCRSA should be commended for implementing numerous positive changes to current operating policies and procedures since the 2017 CSNA, however, it seemed that front line staff and VR clients were not as familiar with the changes. DCRSA should continue to revise policies and operating procedures to address the issues raised regarding the case management, financial management, and other data systems. The development of new or improvements to policies and procedures and the subsequent rollout and training would help to streamline the service delivery process and improve consistency across the agency.

In addition to having effective operating policies and procedures, training was another important priority to promote greater consistency, according to stakeholders. Survey data reflects that 49% of DCRSA staff members have been in their positions for one to five years. See *Table 38* for more details. This further demonstrates the need for a comprehensive rollout of policies, procedures, and training on new policies and procedure to reinforce consistency and uniformity of service delivery. Accounting for the necessary modifications based on the needs of the people accessing the VR services, the use of standard approaches to meeting the needs of VR clients will ultimately result in better outcomes achieving individual employment goals.

Table 38 represents the length of time staff worked in current job.

How long have you worked in the job that you have now?	%
Less than one year	7%
1-5 years	49%
6-10 years	12%
More than 10 years	13%

During interviews and focus group discussions, disability advocates recommended that VR Counselors receive ongoing training on the rights of persons with disabilities seeking VR services to ensure that counselors are not denying VR clients their rights. Advocates also suggested DCRSA staff could be more mindful that persons with disabilities might need a little extra guidance on the type of documents needed to comply with information requests, like the documents needed to obtain certain VR supports and services.

In addition, more training related to customized employment was of interest to both DCRSA staff and community rehabilitation providers. It was suggested that training on implementing an effective customized employment program and a formal roll-out would be an effective strategy to expand the pool of job opportunities for VR clients. However, DCRSA staff cited that training was not incorporated into the agency’s SMART goals.

7.4 Collaboration and Cooperation with Community Partnerships

Community partnerships and relationships with other governmental service agencies are vital connections within the VR framework. DCRSA engages with numerous entities and organizations like DC Public Schools, Public Charter Schools, non-public schools, DC Department of Behavioral Health, (DBH), DCDDA, DOES and other DC agencies as a result of interactions on behalf of persons with disabilities. These relationships are frequently structured through MOUs or MOAs and pursued in the interest of shared responsibilities to groups of people served and outcomes desired to assist persons with disabilities to live their best life by increasing self-reliance, autonomy, productivity, and engagement in the workforce.

Memoranda of Understanding and Memoranda of Agreement

DCRSA enters into a number of MOUs, *(the only instrument that exchanges funds between agencies)*, and MOAs annually to meet the requirements of various functions, some of which are legislative requirements. A review of many of these agreements suggest that some should be strengthened to outline the data or define the requirements necessary to better evaluate whether desired service outcomes are achieved.

DCRSA has a great opportunity to address many of the issues raised in this assessment via the use of its existing agreements. The existing agreement language should be strengthened to better ensure continuity of service delivery. Agreement language should be revised to clearly articulate goals, objectives, and measurable outcomes and the roles assigned to each partner organization should be clearly defined.

Collaboration

The DCRSA and DCDDA were formerly administrations within the DC Department of Human Services (DHS). DCDDA was formerly known as the Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities Administration (MRDDA). In 2005 the Mayor changed the reporting structure of the MRDDA to have its Administrator report directly to the Deputy Mayor for Children, Youth, Families and Elders while remaining within the DHS structure and the DCRSA remained unchanged. Later, in the effort to resolve the Evans class action lawsuit against the city, the MRDDA was made a cabinet-level agency and renamed the Department on Disability Services (DDS), and the DCRSA was moved to the new agency. Further changes included physical moves for both agencies, and an eventual co-location at the current site.

The two administrations, along with other divisions within the newly formed DDS, were required to create operating procedures, policies, functions, and agency-wide strategies to exit the lawsuit and provide high-quality services to the eligible populations.

The coordination within DDS is continually evolving as the two administrations (DCRSA and DCDDA) integrate their missions and approaches to support the entire population served by DDS seamlessly. The effort includes standardizing Quality Management protocols across the administrations, ensuring that specialized training such as Person-Centered Thinking, Community Integration, and Job Search strategies is consistently required for all staff in each administration and at all levels of the agency.

DDS has taken steps to address the coordination gaps by requiring DCDDA community partners who offer employment supports to also become DCRSA providers via the Human Care Agreement.

Throughout the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, the DDS Director has hosted weekly virtual meetings of stakeholders and staff in the DDS system. In order to continue advancing the collaboration and cooperation between DCRSA and DCDDA, and in response to a stakeholder's question regarding improvement in this effort, Director Reese, during the meeting on Friday, August 28, 2020, announced specialized training for the VR Counselors who have caseloads that include people receiving supports from DCDDA.

Interviews and focus groups conducted during the CSNA revealed that coordination between the two administrations has gaps in communication and service provision. Additionally, stakeholders felt that staff in both agencies need to collaborate more with community partners to improve the employment outcomes for people with disabilities. An example raised repeatedly is that people who qualify for both DCDDA and DCRSA job coaching services are currently unable to link the two agencies services together in an efficient and seamless manner so as to ensure continuity of the job coaching. This does not mean that persons with disabilities who are eligible for both DCRSA and DCDDA services and support access them concurrently, rather, those who are dual eligible clients and have exhausted their DCRSA job support should be able to smoothly, and without a break in service, transition to the DCDDA waiver service. Often there are lapses while awaiting an authorization from either DCRSA or DCDDA which results in gaps in the job coaching support that could cause a client to lose the employment opportunity. Stakeholders also suggested that VR counselors need to have more frequent and collaborative relationships with VR rehabilitation service providers and “not take a passive approach to them.” This statement suggests that DCRSA should consider establishing policies to facilitate more frequent contact and follow-up on behalf of VR clients or pursue other strategies, like regular joint policy discussions or trainings to foster better collaboration.

In addition, survey respondents made several suggestions for community rehabilitation provider collaboration, including to “strengthen the collaboration between DCRSA and VR partners thus improving VR service outcomes.” Community partners also proposed a shared database system (maybe with DOES) to identify whether VR clients are employed or whether there are records of employment while non-responsive individuals are being pursued because they are still in an active stage of the rehabilitation process and the client refuses to respond to follow-up requests. Community partners also recommended a link or collaboration between DCDDA and DCRSA rehabilitation service providers.

7.5 Contracted Providers

Provider Engagement Process

The provider engagement process came up repeatedly throughout the course of the assessment. A primary response was that the engagement process was cumbersome; with some would be providers that did not understand where to begin engaging with DCRSA. DCRSA uses a common District vehicle for human care services called the Human Care Agreement which is an overarching agreement between a government entity and a human care provider that is not a funding instrument. The HCA is, in essence, an approval to do business with a provider. The issuance of an HCA requires that the provider be in good standing and have the necessary licenses to do business with the District. This process ensures that no provider with outstanding deficiencies or matters of non-compliance is contracted to do business with the government.

The challenges arise when the government agency may not have the resources to fiscally address all the provision of services desired or requested. No one provider is assured of an

actual award and therefore challenges occur around staffing or organizational decisions. This explains why there is a high rate of provider turnover and an inconsistent level and type of services offered by many providers, especially the smaller providers.

Provider Diversification and Augmentation

Throughout the assessment process every group of stakeholders held very strong opinions regarding the need to increase the pool of providers and the types of services offered. DCRSA maintains a list of community rehabilitation providers on its website but some were found to have out-of-date contact information and limited information with regard to areas of specialization by the provider. People who are being referred to a VR community rehabilitation provider by DCRSA and the VR Counselor who assist them often have a limited selection of community rehabilitation provider for referral. DCRSA staff reported maintaining their own list of provider data for use when making referrals due to the limitations of the list.

Further, parents of family members seeking VR services complained that their family member had insufficient information about the services and supports available from the list of DCRSA's community rehabilitation providers given to them to make an informed choice of a provider that best matched the service and supports they needed to achieve their employment goal. Parents felt the limited information, limited their family member's options for services. Also, stakeholders suggested that DCRSA enhance and better maintain its current online rehabilitation service provider directory and make information about the directory more readily available to families. They suggested that enhancement to the online directory include performance information and if possible, the industries in which providers have had successful job placement experience.

In addition, the project team sought to clarify the issue by asking community partners and advocates what was behind the challenges of providers in delivering services and the reason for the limited pool of community rehabilitation providers, stakeholders said DCRSA had a cumbersome provider qualification process. They suggested the pool of rehabilitation service providers should be more diverse and able to serve individuals with a wider range of disabilities. They also said there was an insufficient number of providers in the area of benefits counseling and providers that offer training on the use of assistive technologies. Due to the inconsistency of referrals, a stakeholder suggested that DCRSA consider pivoting to a grant funded model to fund rehabilitation services, instead of the HCA, to offer rehabilitation service providers greater stability for funding and allow them to plan for longevity.

Table 39 represent reasons VR community rehabilitation providers said they are unable to meet the service needs of persons with disabilities

What are the primary reasons vocational rehabilitation service providers are unable to meet the service needs of persons with disabilities? (Please select all that apply)	%
Not enough providers available in the area	14%
Low quality of provider services	21%
Client barriers prevent successful interactions with providers	43%
Inadequate assessments for people seeking services	29%
People present with emerging issues that occur post-initial assessment	14%
Other (please specify)	64%

Among the sixty-four percent (64%) of survey respondents that cited “other” a recurring theme was “DCRSA was hard to work with or the bureaucracy of the agency was too difficult.” Some suggested the “DCRSA system does not have the ability to support people following through with the recommendations.” Staff also suggested that DCRSA should be more aggressive in expanding the network of community rehabilitation service providers.

Provider Recognition and Training

Another area raised by stakeholders regarding ways to fortify the provider engagement and retention process is for DCRSA to reach out more frequently to community rehabilitation providers to offer routine opportunities for trainings and periodic recognition. Stakeholders felt that a better dialogue between DCRSA and community rehabilitation providers would give opportunities to engage with each other to strengthen collaboration both among DCRSA and community rehabilitation providers and amongst themselves, ultimately benefiting people served.

Stakeholders also said DCRSA previously held a recognition ceremony for its community rehabilitation providers but that this type program was inconsistent. Stakeholders agreed that even small efforts to recognize partners, both providers and employers, would go a long way toward building effective relationships.

7.6 Employers

Employer Relations and Engagement Approach

Business partners are critical to the success of the VR program; therefore, the cultivation of business and employer relationships is an essential function for DCRSA. According to staff, DCRSA has one employee responsible for business relationship management whose efforts are augmented by the Employment Coordinators assigned within various units. The Employment Coordinators initiate and cultivate relationships with business partners similar to the business

relations representative on behalf of persons with disabilities on their caseloads. However, relationships developed by Employment Coordinators are independently maintained and utilized. Information gathered during the data collection indicated the current process around employer relations and employer engagement is fragmented and business contacts information is independently maintained by each staff member. The process also lend itself to ongoing instability in the absence of central coordination.

Feedback from staff gathered during interviews and focus groups suggests that DCRSA should establish a more robust and coordinated employer relations and engagement effort or a comprehensive integrated job development program. Staff were quoted as saying “relationships with businesses are piecemealed,” and staff responsible for building relationship with employers maintain their own contacts. It was noted that sometimes different DCRSA staff contact the same employer without prior knowledge of their colleague’s contact with the same employer. Stakeholder input suggests that DCRSA should establish a formal employer relations and engagement program. Observations suggest the program be driven by agency policy that prescribe objectives and outcomes that reflect a direct correlation to DCRSA’s job placement goals. There should be coordination between DCRSA’s business unit representative, Employment Coordinators and DCRSA rehabilitation service providers that reflects performance goals and measurable outcomes linking directly to successful job placement goals.

To further encourage the establishment of a formal employer relations and engagement program, survey results indicated that there is great interest among business partners to support persons with disabilities and a need for assistance to provide effective support. According to survey data, sixty percent (60%) of business partners surveyed said they needed help recruiting job applicants with disabilities. Thirty-three percent (33%) cited a need for help with appropriate accommodations for persons with disabilities. Sixty-four percent (64%) of business partners surveyed wanted information on training programs for persons with disabilities and 47% of business partners indicated a need to learn how to discuss and identify reasonable job accommodations for persons with disabilities. In addition, 66% of business partners surveyed expressed an interest in working with DCRSA to create customized employment. A survey respondent was quoted as stating “a visible push to businesses is necessary,” encouraging DCRSA to pursue more business partnerships.

Table 40 reflect opportunities for DCRSA to engage business interest.

Which of the following does your business need help with? (Please select all that apply)	%
Understanding the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act	13%
Identifying job accommodations for workers with disabilities	33%
Recruiting job applicants who are persons with disabilities	60%
Helping workers with disabilities to retain employment	33%
Obtaining training on the different types of disabilities	40%

Obtaining training on sensitivity to workers with disabilities	29%
Obtaining incentives for employing workers with disabilities	29%
Obtaining information on training programs available for workers with disabilities	64%
Discussing and identifying reasonable job accommodations with applicants	47%

Survey findings cited in *Table 40* suggests numerous opportunities to create and sustain a robust portfolio of services within an employer relations and engagement program. Such a program would address a range of stakeholder concerns related to job placement opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Limited Existing Employment Opportunities

Another issue raised by survey respondents believed to be a primary factor in the availability of employment opportunities for persons with disabilities is stigma. Survey respondents felt that employers’ misperceptions or ignorance regarding workers with disabilities and their perceived limitations was a major reason why more employers failed to hire or consider persons with disabilities for job opportunities. Focus group respondents suggested “applicants are not well qualified” as a reason for the limited employment opportunities. Other respondents suggested “employers needed incentives to hire persons with disabilities and some felt employers were unaware that DCRSA exist. An interesting stakeholder recommendation to address the need for more employment opportunities, was “It would be great if DCRSA created a job information/success board where employers could post job openings with contact information and post job success stories which might create more synergy and encourage placements and partnerships.”

Stakeholder feedback suggested the creation of a formal employer relations and engagement program or a comprehensive integrated job development program would address a range of concerns related to employment and job placement opportunities for persons with disabilities.

7.7 Student Focused Service Systems

For each student with a disability in the District of Columbia, the DC Public School system is required by both the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA) and the local District of Columbia Municipal Regulations (DCMR) to provide preparation for postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated or supported employment, continuing or adult education, adult services, independent living, and community participation upon completion of their public education.

Approximately 3,600 to 3,700 (EDScape, 2018-2019)³¹ students in grades 9 through 12 with disabilities receive special education services in DC Public Schools and DC Public Charter

³¹ EDScape, Data Publication from DC Deputy Mayor for Education. SY2018-2019 Data <https://edscape.dc.gov/node/1385286>

Schools. Many of these students may be potentially eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation services as they transition to adulthood.

Students receiving accommodations through 504 plans can be found eligible for vocational rehabilitation services as students and as adults. Students who are eligible for 504 plans are those who have a disabling condition that impacts a major life activity and require a modification to support their participation in the education program. The 504 plans are broader than individualized education programs defined by IDEA, as they do not require categories of disability or levels of impairment, and therefore these should capture more students. DCRSA funds and collaborates with programs that support youth with disabilities and are designed to address gaps in service delivery.

Youth Transition Program

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), signed into law in 2014 to reauthorize the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, created new policies and rules about the way that VR operates and places an emphasis on working with transition aged youth. DCRSA is responsible for providing Pre-ETS to age-eligible students (14 to 22 years of age). Under WIOA, five (5) specific (Pre-ETS) are required.

Pre-ETS include the following:

- Job exploration counseling;
- Work-based learning experiences, which may include in-school or after school opportunities to work, or experience outside the traditional school setting (including internships), that is provided in an integrated environment to the maximum extent possible;
- Counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs at institutions of higher learning
- Workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living skills;
- Instruction in self-advocacy or the ability to effectively communicate, convey, negotiate or assert one's own interests and/or desires.³²

DCRSA works collaboratively with the DC Public Schools, DC Public Charter Schools and Non-Public Schools to provide Pre-ETS to students ensuring an uninterrupted plan of services from the secondary education environment to postsecondary employment training and placement.

Additional Transition Services

The DCRSA funds the following activities designed to improve the transition of students from school to postsecondary education or employment:

³² Memorandum of Understanding Between The District of Columbia Department on Disability Services/Rehabilitation Services Administration and The District of Columbia Public Schools pp1-2.

- Implementing effective strategies to increase the likelihood of independent living and inclusion in communities and competitive integrated workplaces;
- Developing and improving strategies for individuals with intellectual disabilities and individuals with significant disabilities to live independently, participate in postsecondary education and training experiences, and obtain/retain competitive integrated employment with opportunities for advancement;
- Providing instruction to vocational rehabilitation counselors, school transition personnel, and other persons supporting students with disabilities;
- Disseminating information about innovative, effective, and efficient approaches to goal achievement;
- Coordinating activities with transition services provided by local educational agencies under IDEA;
- Applying evidence-based findings to improve policy, procedure, practice, and the preparation of personnel, in order to better achieve goals;
- Developing model transition demonstration projects;
- Establishing or supporting multistate or regional partnerships involving States, local educational agencies, Designated State units, developmental disability agencies, private businesses, or other participants to achieve these goals; and
- Disseminating information and strategies to improve the transition to postsecondary activities of individuals who are members of traditionally unserved and underserved populations.

After the required activities have been made available to all Pre-ETS eligible students who need them, DCRSA funds the coordinated activities listed below to improve the transition from school to postsecondary education or employment:

- Attending Individualized Education Program meetings for students with disabilities when invited;
- Developing work opportunities for students with disabilities with local workforce development boards, one-stop centers and employers, including internships, summer employment and other employment opportunities. These may include assistance in developing Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) opportunities, DDS/DCRSA internships for DC Public Schools students and public charter school students, and work experience programming with the Department of Employment Service and other partners;
- Working with schools to coordinate and ensure the provision of Pre-ETS; and
- When invited, attending person-centered planning meetings for students receiving services under Medicaid (Title XIX of the Social Security Act).

The goal of Pre-ETS is to improve post-secondary outcomes for students with disabilities, including improved outcomes in the number of students who participate in training, post-secondary education or employment following exit from secondary education.³³

³³ IBID p.23

Table 41 reflect the view of respondents on barriers for youth in transition

Are the barriers to achieving employment goals for youth in transition different from the overall populations of people with disabilities?	%
Yes	62%
No	37%

A majority of survey respondents, 62% agreed that barriers to achieving employment goals for youth in transition are different from the overall population of people with disability as reflected in *Table 41*.

Survey respondents also provided additional inputs on the unique needs of youth, citing a need for closer coordination between DCRSA and DCPS Employment Coordinator and the Job Placement Specialist. Respondents also suggested services could be more robust to include mentoring or working closer with the counselor to help youth understand what they need to do to succeed. In addition, numerous respondents cited the need for clarity on how to navigate DCRSA’s VR system, specifically a better understanding of the transition from Pre-ETS into VR services. It should also be noted that a “Secondary Transition Community of Practice” made up of a city-wide cross section of stakeholders led by the D.C. Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) meets monthly to discuss and share ongoing strategies to support District youth with disabilities as they transition into self-directed life.

7.8 Citywide Workforce System

Department of Employment Services

The Department of Employment Services (DOES) provides information regarding the American Job Centers (AJCs). According to the DOES website, the American Job Centers are currently closed for in-person service due to the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic. Visit dcnetworks.org for more information. The website lists workshops that are currently offered in both English and Spanish with instructions on how to register and access virtual sessions. However, there are no special instructions provided on access for persons with visual or hearing impairments.

During interviews DCRSA staff suggested that staff at the AJC’s needed more cross-agency training on providing services to people with disabilities. Staff were quoted as saying “AJC staffs are not trained to work with persons with disabilities, so those clients are referred back to us.” These comments suggest an opportunity for more strategic collaboration with DOES.

The Workforce Investment Council (WIC)

According to the WIC [website](#): “The District’s Workforce Investment Council (WIC) is a private sector led board responsible for advising the Mayor, Council, and District government on the development, implementation, and continuous improvement of an integrated and effective workforce investment system. Members of the WIC include representatives from the private

sector, local business representatives, government officials, organized labor, youth community groups, and organizations with workforce investment experience.”³⁴

The WIC Board includes government representatives from the DC Public Schools (DCPS), the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education, the Health Benefit Exchange (HBX), the DC Water and Sewer Authority, the DC City Council, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), the Department of Employment Services (DOES), the Department on Disability Services (DDS), The University of the District of Columbia Community College (UDC-CC), the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development (DMPED) and the Department of Human Services (DHS). The Board membership also includes representatives from the following industries: Private Universities, Construction, Utilities, Health Care, Social Services Foundations; Labor Unions; Hospitality; Communication, Engineering and Technology. The Board membership evidences a potentially highly effective group to manage and support workforce development across all populations of job seekers.

The CSNA team interviewed and/or surveyed representatives from several DC government member agencies with a presence on the WIC Board and discovered that the only agencies that appear to have activity specifically focused on developing the workforce by supporting people with disabilities achieve and maintain employment are DDS and DCPS. Other agency representatives providing input during the needs assessment data collection, stated that they normally routed persons with disabilities directly to DCRSA or the DCRSA VR staff stationed in their locations. Further, they stated that there was no protocol for counting people with disabilities who sought services nor notice provided regarding specialized employment-seeking events. A representative informed the project team that there is a community-based effort to help people seek and obtain employment where DOES sends a mobile unit known as the “Workforce on Wheels” (WOW) to various neighborhoods. When queried about how neighborhoods or special populations were made aware of this service, the representative said that no prior notice is provided to DDS or DCRSA, and no special effort is made to engage persons with disabilities in these opportunities. The DOES website offers a calendar of events and the following list of services provided by the WOW:

- DC Networks Virtual One Stop Registration
- Resume business partners Cover Letter Review
- Tips for Effective Job Searching
- Interview Coaching: Confidence, Clarity, Conversation
- 30-Second Introduction (Elevator Speech)
- Job Leads Assistance
- Prescreening business partners Hiring Events for Employers
- Tools for Employment Success
- Occupational Skills Trainings for DC residents

³⁴ Washington, DC Workforce Investment Council website: <https://dcworks.dc.gov/>

These are important services and opportunities that should be advertised by the DOES and the DCRSA to constituent populations who have disabilities.

The WIC Board appears to be comprised of persons who can provide a wealth of opportunities in the industries demonstrating the highest rate of employment for people with disabilities, thereby meeting the WIOA core program requirement for Vocational Rehabilitation. The Board Members could expand employment opportunities by assigning their appropriate staff to coordinate with the DCRSA Employment Specialists and/or Business Specialist. The DCRSA staff could improve the ability for businesses to successfully hire and retain people with disabilities by providing support and instruction on customized employment and accommodations.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRATEGIC CHANGES TO VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICE PROVISION

This CSNA incorporated a broad perspectives of stakeholder input including persons with disabilities; DCRSA staff; community rehabilitation service providers and other partners and disability advocacy groups as well as DCRSA business partners and local area employers. The analysis of stakeholder input on barriers and service needs, as well as service system infrastructure issues resulted in the following recommendations for strategic changes to VR service provisions. While the needs assessment identified numerous opportunities for enhancements, feedback from data collection fell generally within the following broad categories:

Strategic Key Recommendations
Barriers to Employment for Persons with Disabilities
<p>1. <i>To address the lack of information about available VR Programs and Services</i>, the recommendation is to consider launching a community-wide initiative aimed at creating a broad awareness of DCRSA programs and processes. Target information to persons with disabilities, and families supporting them including youth in transition and their families, community partners, business partners, advocacy groups and other community-based organizations to inform them about the comprehensive VR services available through DCRSA.</p>
<p>2. <i>To address the need to offer VR clients more “job development and placement services,”</i> DCRSA should consider maintaining a dashboard of persons with disabilities who are ready to work (<i>Status 20</i>) and facilitate access to the dashboard by business and community partners that commit to working with DCRSA to provide placement opportunities. Ensure that candidates have properly formatted resumes, qualifications, etc., so that business and community partners have quick access to a qualified pool of potential workers. An additional recommendation is to consider maintaining a centralized a database of business partners who are seeking to hire and ensure there is a warm hand-off for people who are supported directly by DCRSA staff and by community rehabilitation service providers.</p>
<p>3. <i>To address “employer perceptions” about persons with disabilities</i>, the recommendation is to consider as part of a comprehensive employer engagement and job development program, formal trainings on the benefits of hiring and supporting persons with disabilities; training on understanding reasonable</p>

accommodations and how to provide them. An additional recommendation is to consider hosting regular initiatives to promote the skills and abilities of persons with disabilities that successfully complete vocational rehabilitation programs.

4. ***To address “confounding barriers,”*** the recommendation is to consider using the discovery process to document confounding barriers and make the barriers known to others seeking to assist in the VR process. Also, consider closer coordination and partnerships with advocacy groups to help link VR clients to resources to address confounding barrier. As an alternative, consider compiling reference materials to refer VR clients to other community resources to address documented confounding barriers.

Service Provisions for Persons with Disabilities

5. ***To address the need to make “assistive technology” more readily available,*** consider contracting with more community partners who can provide such technological aids and devices, and training or include these services in an MOU with a government agency that can provide devices and training.

6. ***To ensure that the needs of persons with disabilities that are thought to be underserved and unserved especially individuals on the Autism spectrum are addressed,*** consider implementing additional vocational rehabilitation programs. Also consider partnering with advocacy organizations that offer unique capabilities to accommodate individuals on the Autism spectrums.

7. ***To address the need for a broader emphasis and additional training to implement effective customized employment,*** consider requiring providers to send staff who are responsible for job development or placement to a regular training and information exchange session with DCRSA-designated staff. The sessions could address strategies and best practices; tracking provider staff progress in developing employer relationships; and developing effective tools provider staff can use to assist employers to discover opportunities for customization and realization of efficiencies.

Feedback on Vocational Rehabilitation Administrative Systems

8. ***To address the needed changes to the Case Management/Administrative system,*** DCRSA should consider replacing or revising the existing case management information systems. This action should eliminate the current workaround processes. The replacement or modified system must be able to capture and manage data for the overall performance of VR administration. In addition, the system must be able to provide VR Counselors with timely data on provider qualifications and performance,

including the number and types of job placements made by the providers and other relevant information to help VR clients make informed choices.

9. **To address ongoing changes related to the “human care agreement”** process, DCRSA should consider how the associated procurement or purchase order procedures can be improved to more efficiently facilitate the availability of real-time funding information. An additional recommendation is to ensure that VR Counselors are trained and utilize the process established to address “immediate need” to expediate the resolution to an immediate funding need.

Feedback on Partnership – Maximizing Collaborations and Cooperation

10. **To strengthen MOUs/MOAs to better evaluate performance outcomes**, consider revising agreements that exchange funding for services and collaboration with other government agencies and community partners to ensure that the data provided to DCRSA demonstrates the desired outcomes, including the number of persons with disabilities served, types of services provided, the timeframes required to deliver services and the outcomes achieved.

11. **To enhance collaboration between DCRSA and DCDDA**, strengthen the current DCDDA/DCRSA Collaboration Policy to improve coordination of services. This would ensure continuity of care by eliminating gaps for clients served by both administrations. The policy changes should facilitate more efficient linkage to services and supports between administrations.

Feedback on Rehabilitation Service Provider Management

12. **To improve DCRSA rehabilitation service providers’ data availability**, consider updating how rehabilitation service providers’ information is collected, maintained and utilized to help persons with disabilities make more informed choices. Updating the current DCRSA online service provider directory to include updated contact information and performance history, including specialty services provided and job placement history.

13. **To obtain greater provider diversification and augmentation of the provider pool**, consider changing the provider recruitment process to diversify and increase the number of providers offering various services to minimize delays in service provisions due to lack of providers to improve informed consent. Specifically, obtain more bilingual service providers that are fluent in a range of languages, obtain more providers of American Sign Language (ASL) services, providers offering benefits counseling, assistive technology services and providers that offer training in a range of

technology products, e.g., computers, tablets, smartphones and other technology applications.

Feedback on Business or Employer Relations

14. To improve employer/business relations Consider establishing a comprehensive employer engagement and job development program. Since employers are critical to successful VR outcomes, the program should be a strategic vehicle to support achievement of annual job placement goals. The program should include DCRSA staff, rehabilitation services providers and employers. Program components should incorporate an employer engagement approach, involve VR promotion, employer education and training, and coordination of job placement and job opportunity activities. It should include performance measures that directly correlate to DCRSA annual job placement goals.

15. To address the concern expressed about limited employment opportunities, consider creating a job information/success board to post and promote skills reflective of persons with disabilities who have successfully completed VR preparedness and are seeking job placements. Allow rehabilitation service providers to submit job opening for posting with contact information; post success stories to promote and facilitate interactions with prospective employers to help VR clients achieve their employment goals.

Feedback on Student Focused Services

16. To improve the delivery of services available to youth in transition, consider strengthening the terms of the DCRSA/DCPS agreement to enhance current data sharing to more effectively demonstrate performance outcomes. In addition, expand outreach and education about transition services to ensure that parents and students gain a better understanding of Pre-ETS and VR services.

APPENDIX

A. KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

A-1. Persons with a Disability

Introduction/purpose & objective statements

Please state your name: _____

Gender: Male _____ Female _____ LGBTQ _____ Other _____

Race: _____; What ward do you live in? _____

1. Are you a person with a disability ___ Yes ___ No; A family Member ___ Yes ___ No?
 - a. If you are a person with a disability, do you want a job? ___ Yes; ___ No
 - b. Have you ever had a job? ___ Yes ___ No?
 - c. If yes, did DCRSA assist you with finding a job? ___ Yes ___ No
 - d. If yes, how long did it take you?
 - e. If no, why not?
 - f. What are the greatest barriers/challenge(s) you faced toward achieving your job goal?
2. Are you aware of the programs and services offered by DDS/DCRSA to prepare residents with disabilities for employment?
 - a. If yes, how did you learn about DCRSA services?
 - b. How long did it take to connect with DCRSA, once you learned about their services? ___ 1-Wks; ___ 2-Wks; ___ 3-Wks; ___ 1-Mo; ___ Over 30-days
3. What were your expectations, once you were connected to DCRSA?
4. What kind of supports and/or services did you received from DCRSA to prepare for a job?
5. Did you find the support & services helpful in preparing you to meet your job goal?
 - a. If yes, what services were the most helpful?
 - b. Which was less helpful?
 - c. If no, please describe why?
 - d. Did you need any other supports or services, that DCRSA did not offer?
 - i. If yes, what did you need to prepare you for employment that DCRSA did not offer?
6. Was your overall experience with DCRSA helpful to finding a job? ___ Yes ___ No
 - a. If yes, please describe the experience?
 - b. If no, please let us know what could have been better?

7. Would you recommend any improvements to DCRSA programs and services that would be more helpful to achieving your employment goal?
8. When looking for a job, what is the most important help you need to prepare you to meet and maintain your job goal?
9. Any additional comments?

A-2. 2020 CSNA – DCRSA Staff Interview Protocol

Introduction/purpose & objective statements

1. Please provide your name, title, time with DDS/DCRSA, time in your current role?
2. Describe the Agency's Mission?
3. Briefly describe your service area(s) and duties?

Overall Agency Performance

4. How effectively is the organization in fulfilling its mission?
 - a. How would you describe the changes, if any, that have occurred in the agency in the last 3-years?
 - b. What are the major challenges that DCRSA consumer's face in obtaining and retaining employment?
 - c. What are the major challenges that you face that impact your ability to help consumers obtain and retain employment?

Most Severely Disabled and Supported Employment (SE)

5. What are the needs of people with the most significant disabilities in the District and how effectively is DCRSA meeting those needs?
6. What disability types are the most in need and what are the challenges they face in obtaining and retaining employment?
7. What kind of Job Readiness services do you provide (*what are the types of job readiness activities*)?
8. Do you provide SE services? If so, please describe the model of SE services you use.
 - a. How long does job coaching typically last?
 - b. Who provides extended services?
 - c. How many SE providers do you have and how effective are they?
 - d. What populations generally receive SE services?
9. Do you provide customized employment services to persons with disabilities in the District? Please describe this service.
10. What would you recommend to improve services to persons with the most significant disabilities?
11. What would you recommend to improve your SE program?

Unserved/Underserved Populations

12. What geographic areas/wards are underserved and why?
13. Who are the specific racial/ethnic minority groups (*e.g. age, language, gender, etc.*) underserved? & why?
 - a. What is the age range of those being underserved and why?
 - b. Which gender is least being served and why?

14. What is the rehabilitation needs of minority populations that you serve?
15. What disability types are underserved and why?
16. What are the outreach strategies to minority populations?
17. How effective is DCRSA's outreach to underserve/underserved groups/areas and what can be done to improve the outreach?
18. What could be done to improve services to underserved areas or populations?

Transition

19. How does transition services works in the District? Please describe:
 - a. Transition services provided
 - b. Partnerships with schools & universities
 - c. Outreach and intake/referral/plan processes
 - d. How do you evaluate and document/reward progress at the end of each transition phase?
20. What are the greatest needs of transition-aged youth and how well are DCRSA and the schools meeting these needs?
21. Are you involved in pre-employment transition services? If yes, please describe how this works in the District.
22. Do you serve foster care youth or youth involved with the juvenile justice system? Please describe?
 - a. How do you gain access to the youth?
23. What can be done to improve youth and/or transition services in the District?

Community Residential Programs

24. What types services are provided by CRPs?
25. How are CRPs evaluated and how effective are the CRPs in the District?
26. What challenges do CRPs face in providing supportive services?
27. What needs to happen to improve or increase CRPs in the District?
28. Is there a need to develop CRPs to serve any specific population or geographic areas?

Workforce Development System

29. Describe the workforce Development System for people with disabilities in the District?
 - a. Which agencies/organizations are involved? Who leads the system?
 - b. What is the function/services provided by agency and DCRSA's relationship to them?
 - c. How effective is the system in meeting the needs of people with disabilities? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the system?

- d. If you could recommend improvements to the System, what would it be?
- 30. What is the relationship like between DCRSA and America's Job Centers? Are DCRSA staff still out-stationed at the AJCs?
- 31. Do you have recommendations to improve the relationship between the two organizations?

Business Partnerships

- 32. Please describe the ways that DCRSA seek and partner with businesses to promote the employment of people with disabilities.
- 33. Do you offer Training for your business partners? If yes, what topics and how frequent?
 - a. Do you offer customized training?
 - b. Do you solicit input from your business partner to identify the type training desired?
- 34. Are there industry specific programs targeted to promote employment of people with disabilities?
- 35. Are there incentives/preferences for businesses to hire persons with disabilities?
- 36. Are there specific disability types with limited employment placement success? If yes, why?
- 37. What can DCRSA do to improve business partnerships and to engage employers in recruiting and hiring people with disabilities?
- 38. How many qualified persons with disabilities are matched with Job opening in 2019, or the most recent complete year?
 - a. What is the retention percentage?

A-3. 2020 CSNA - Interview Protocols for DCRSA Community Partners

Introduction/purpose & objective statements

Please provide your name & title: _____

Name of your organization: _____

1. Describe your Organization's programs and services?
2. What are the greatest challenges/barriers you face as an DCRSA partner to meeting your employment goals?
3. What are the barriers to a client maintaining employment?
4. Do you provide supported employment services? ____ Yes, ____ No;
 - a. If yes, please describe your services?
 - b. What supported employment services are in the greatest need?
5. Are there supported employment services that your client need that you are unable to provide? ____ Yes, ____ No
 - a. If yes, please provide an example?
 - b. In this instance, how is the client's needs addressed?
6. Do you provide Customized Employment Services? ____ Yes, ____ No
 - a. If yes, please provide an example of your process?
 - b. Do you have data on how long it takes to negotiate with an employer to offer a customized position?
 - c. How many successful placements in customized employment does your organization have in a standard year?
 - d. What would improve the success of customized employments?
7. Describe how customized employment can be used to improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities?
8. What jobs/career paths have your organization had the greatest success with client placement? What contributed to your success?
9. As an DCRSA partner, what can be done to strengthen the DCRSA partnership to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities?
10. From a provider's perspective, what are the most important needs for clients to get and keep a job?
 - a. How successful have your organization been in addressing that need and why?
 - b. How successful has DCRSA been and why?
11. What is your organization's capacity to find employment for people with disabilities?
 - a. Does your organization collaborate with educational institutions?
 - b. Does your organization collaborate with Government agencies other than DCRSA?
 - c. What is your organization's successful placement rate in an average year?

12. Would you like to offer any additional suggestions or recommendations to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities?

A-4. 2020 CSNA – DCRSA Interview Protocol for Business Partners

Introduction/purpose & objective statements

Please provide your name & title: _____

Name of your company: _____

1. Does your company currently employ persons with disabilities?
2. How did you learn about DCRSA programs & services to encourage & support businesses that hire persons with disabilities? Please describe?
3. Which DCRSA program(s) or service(s) has benefitted your organization the most, if any?
4. What assistance would be most helpful to your organization that would encourage you to hire persons with Disabilities? Please be as specific as possible?
5. What can DCRSA do to enhance business partnerships and engage employers to recruit and hire people with disabilities?
6. How prepared are persons with disabilities, who receive DCRSA services to meet your needs as an employer? ___ Well prepared; ___ Adequate; ___ Needs Improvement
7. Have your organization created or been asked to customized employment opportunities for people with a disability or worked with an organization to do so? a
a. If yes, what opportunities?
b. If no, would your organization be willing to do so?
8. As it relates to retaining your employees with Disabilities, how could DCRSA best assist your organization?
9. What is your organization's greatest workplace challenge as it relates to employing persons with disabilities where help from DCRSA would be beneficial?
10. Do you offer training to your workforce on supporting people with disabilities in the workplace? If yes, how frequent? If no, are you interested in DCRSA providing this service? ___ Yes ___ No
11. Do the programs & services DCRSA provide to prepare persons with disabilities for employment meet your needs as an employer?
a. If yes, what is working well?
b. If no, how could DCRSA better engage/support employers to encourage employment of people with disabilities?
12. How frequent do you engage with or encounter DCRSA staff?
13. Any further comments or suggestions?

A-5. 2020 CSNA – DCRSA Interview Protocols for DCPS

Introduction/purpose & objective statements

State your name & title: _____

Your duties: _____

1. What is the total number of transition age youth with disabilities, (youth 14-21) in DCPS and Charter School System?
2. What is the primary disability diagnosis of transition age youth and emerging young adults between the ages of 14-21?
3. Are you aware of DDS/DCRSA Programs & Services? If yes, what orientation do you have, or have you been given on DCRSA programs & services for transition age youth with disabilities?
4. How are transition age youth with disabilities and their parents informed about DCRSA Services? Please describe?
5. What in your opinion, would be the best manner to introduce DCRSA Transition Programs & Services to transition age youth and their parents?
6. Does OSSE (*DCPS and Charter schools*) have a formal working relationship with DDS/DCRSA that is guided by municipal regulations? If yes,
 - a. What do the regulations require?
 - b. Are the rules sufficient to ensure that services are adequately accessed by students and their families, and adequately provided?
7. What rehabilitation programs and services are most beneficial for transition age youth (14-21)?
8. In your view, are the current DCRSA services adequate and diverse enough to support the majority of your youth with disabilities? If no,
 - a. What additional services do you think your students could benefit from?
 - b. Are the services routinely added, or modified because of the changing needs of the student population?
9. How can collaboration between OSSE (*DCPS, Charter Schools*) and DCRSA be improved to facilitate better employment outcomes for transition aged youth?
10. Other comments?

A-6. 2020 CSNA – DCRSA Interview Protocols for Advocacy Groups

Introduction/purpose & objective statements

Please provide your name & Title: _____

Name of your organization: _____

1. What is the mission of your organization?
2. Describe how your organization advocate for people with disabilities, with schools and if you work with businesses to educate, train, or encourage the employment of people with disabilities.
3. What other activities does your organization pursue to advocate for the needs of people with disabilities?
4. Are you or your organization familiar with the programs & services of the DC Department on Disability Services (DDS), Rehabilitation Services Administration (DCRSA)? If yes, how did you become aware?
5. In your opinion, how effective is the DCRSA outreach effort?
6. What DCRSA services are most effective in assisting people with disabilities to obtain and retain good jobs.
7. What DCRSA program(s) and/or service(s) that are least effective? Which program(s) and/or service(s) should cease or be discontinued?
8. What new programs and/or services would you recommend DCRSA implement to improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities?
9. Describe any collaboration with DDS/DCRSA or its providers (*if appropriate*) to educate their staff on best practices, innovation, or capacity building.
10. What would you identify as the greatest challenges to people with disabilities specific to obtaining and maintaining employment?
11. What are some of the interventions or supports you feel would provide the greatest benefit to securing innovative and integrated employment for people with disabilities?
12. What trainings would you recommended for DCRSA staff to help keep them abreast of the most effective methods & models to prepare individuals with disabilities for meaningful employment?
13. Which jobs/career paths in your opinion has had the most success for individuals with disabilities, and what has been the reasons contributing to the success?

A-7. 2020 CSNA – DCRSA Interview Protocols for DC Government Agency Partners

Introduction/purpose & objective statements

Please provide your name & Title: _____

Name of your organization: _____

1. Describe your agency's Mission and how it works with DCRSA?
2. Is there a document (like an MOU) that formalizes the relationship between your organization & DCRSA and outlines roles and responsibilities? If yes, please describe?
3. What are the greatest needs of persons with disabilities utilizing your agency's services and how does it relate to the programs and services provided by DCRSA?
4. How long does the average client receive services from your agency prior to the referral/transition to DCRSA?
5. What is the geographic area most in need of the services provided by your organization in coordination with DCRSA?
6. What are the most important unmet need for people with disabilities receiving your services in coordination with DCRSA?
7. What are the primary types of support and/or services your clients need that are provided in coordination with DCRSA?
8. Are there any services your clients need that DCRSA is unable to provide? If yes, please describe?
9. Does your program serve transition aged youth (14-21)? If yes, how many on average do you serve within a 1-year period? What are the primary services they receive?
10. From your perspective, what are the most important needs for your clients to get and keep a job? How can that best be accomplished?
11. Would you like to offer any additional suggestions or recommendations to improvement employment outcomes for people with disabilities that you serve?

B. PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES SURVEY INSTRUMENTS

B.1 - English Language Individual Survey

District of Columbia Rehabilitation Services Administration (DCRSA) 2020 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA)

Introduction: DCRSA is working with the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC), and Promesa Consulting Group to conduct the 2020 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) of individuals with disabilities who live in the District of Columbia.

The objective is to obtain input and recommendations that identify employment-related needs of persons with disabilities to develop programs and services to help prepared them to obtain, - or sustain competitive integrated employment.

The following survey is prepared for **a person with disabilities** to provide input about their employment-related needs and experience - seeking DCRSA services and support. The survey is organized into four parts:

1. **Demographic Information;**
2. **Client Knowledge and Experience Accessing DCRSA;**
3. **Client Needs and Experience Achieving Employment Goals;** and,
4. **Client Needs and Experience with DCRSA Service Providers.**

We anticipate that it will take 20-30 minutes - to complete the survey.

Your participation is voluntary. If you participate, your responses will be anonymous. You will not be asked for your name anywhere in this survey. If you have any questions about this survey or would like to request the survey in an alternative language or format, please contact the needs assessment team at rsa.vrcsneedsassessment@dc.gov or contact Sharron Harris, Sr. V.P. Promesa Consulting Group at sharris@promesacgi.com.

For the purposes of completing this survey, please indicate whether you are the person seeking or receiving DCRSA services or a family member assisting the person seeking services?

- Person seeking services
- Family Member on behalf of a person receiving services

PART I: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION: The following series of questions asks about the demographic information of the client.

Q1.To which gender identity do you most identify?

- Male
- Female
- Transgender Male
- Transgender Female
- Gender Variant/Non-Conforming
- Not Listed _____
- Prefer not to answer

Q2.What is your age range?

- 14-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-59
- 60 and over

Q3.What is your primary disability? *(Please select only one response)*

- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Physical
- Behavioral Health
- Intellectual Disability (ID)
- Developmental Disability (DD)
- Deaf or Hard of Hearing
- Mobility
- Blindness or visually impaired
- Communication
- No impairment
- Other (please identify) _____

Q4.In which Ward do you live?

- Ward 1
- Ward 2
- Ward 3
- Ward 4
- Ward 5

- Ward 6
- Ward 7
- Ward 8

Q5. What is your race? (Please select only one)

- Black or African American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- White
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- Prefer not to say
- Other: _____

What is your ethnicity?

- Hispanic or Latino or Spanish origin
- Non-Hispanic or Latino of Spanish origin

Q6. Please indicate whether you receive the following Social Security disability benefits?

(Please select all that apply)

- I receive SSI (Supplemental Security Income)
- I receive SSDI (Social Security Disability Insurance)
- I do not receive Social Security disability benefits
- I don't know if I receive Social Security disability benefits

PART II: CLIENT KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE ACCESSING DCRSA: The following series of questions asks survey participants about client knowledge and experience accessing DCRSA supports and services.

Q7. Which statement best describes your experience with DCRSA? *(Please select only one response)*

- I am a current client of DCRSA
- I am a previous client of DCRSA, my case has been closed
- I am not familiar with DCRSA
- Other (please describe) _____

Q7a. If you answered "I am not familiar with DCRSA" to Q7 above, skip to Q32.

Q8.If familiar with DCRSA, how did you learn about the supports and services?

- Family Member
- Information provided during a DCRSA sponsored community outreach event
- DCRSA Website
- School Staff
- Disability Advocacy Group
- Other _____

Q9.In your experience, do you believe that you had a thorough assessment to determine what your existing skills, training, previous experiences, achievements and abilities were?

- Yes
- No

Q9a. If you answered “Yes” to **Q9** above, skip to **Q32**

Q10. If “No,” please identify what you felt was missing? (Please select all that apply)

- Recognizing my personal skills, strengths and abilities
- Understanding my educational achievements and interests
- Understanding the support and services I needed
- Recognizing my employment history
- Other_____

Q11. Are you currently employed as a result of supports and services provided by DCRSA?

- Yes
- No

Q12. Have you had prior employment experience through supports by DCRSA?

- Yes
- No

Q13. How many times did you apply for services at DCRSA to gain employment?

- Only once to gain employment
- Two – Three (2-3) times to gain employment
- Over three (3) times to gain employment
- Other, please specify _____

Q14. **If you have been employed, what do you believe was your most successful employment experience?**

- Working in hospitality services
- Working in healthcare services
- Working in business and information technology services
- Working in security and law enforcement services
- Working in construction or building trades
- Working in transportation or infrastructure services
- Working in customer service or retail
- Working in Office/clerical services
- Working in Janitorial services
- Other _____

Q15. **Was the DCRSA office easy to access?**

- Yes
- Somewhat accessible;
- Somewhat inaccessible
- No, it was not accessible
- Other _____

Q16. **Were DCRSA supports and services easy to access?**

- Yes
- Somewhat accessible
- Somewhat inaccessible
- Not at all accessible
- Other _____

Q17. **How long did it take to begin receiving services after DCRSA found you eligible?**

- Within 30-days
- Between 30-60 days
- Between 60-90 days
- Over 90 days
- Other _____

Q18. **How often did you interact with your DCRSA Counselor?**

- Often
- Somewhat frequent

- Somewhat infrequent
- No communication
- Other _____

Q19. Identify any barriers you faced accessing DCRSA Services? *(Please select all that apply)*

- Lack of information about available services
- Problems - meeting with my DCRSA Counselor
- DCRSA counselor was not effective
- Lack of disability-related accommodations
- Problems completing the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE)
- DCRSA's hours of operation were not convenient
- Communication barriers
- Language barriers
- No barriers
- Other _____

Q20. What location within the District do you receive or have received your services?

- Ward 1
- Ward 2
- Ward 3
- Ward 4
- Ward 5
- Ward 6
- Ward 7
- Ward 8

Q21. What service(s) did you need to successfully achieve your employment? *(Please select all that apply)*

- Job Training
- Help finding a job
- Education
- Reasonable accommodations
- Reliable transportation
- Mental health services
- Affordable housing
- Assistive technology services

- Benefits counseling
- Job Coaching
- Interpreter or translation services
- Childcare
- Substance use services
- Other (please describe) _____

PART III: CLIENT NEEDS AND EXPERIENCES ACHIEVING EMPLOYMENT GOALS: The following series of questions asks survey participants about needs and experiences achieving employment goals.

Q22. Identify any needs you had in achieving your employment goals? *(Please select all that apply)*

- No problems
- Needed job skills
- Needed more frequent communication with my DCRSA counselor
- Help addressing my employer's concerns about my ability to do the job due to my disability
- More education and training
- Better job options
- Help with job search skills
- Reliable transportation support
- Assistive technology services
- Understanding how working might affect my Social Security benefits
- Lack of job coach
- Affordable and or accessible housing
- Options to address my criminal record
- Help to address language skills
- Childcare
- Help to address substance use
- Other barriers _____

Q23. Identify any needs or obstacles you had maintaining employment? *(Please select all that apply)*

- Nothing
- A job that matches my skills, I was referred to a job that did not match my skills and abilities

- My employer was biased about my ability to do the job, -
- Lack of employer knowledge of my support needs
- Lack of reliable transportation
- Lack of assistive technology services
- Concern over loss of Social Security benefits -
- Needed assistance from a job coach for a longer period of time
- Did not have adequate housing
- Convictions for criminal offenses caused me to fail the background check
- I had limited communication skills
- I had limited language proficiency or skills
- A lack of childcare
- I had a problem with substance use or abuse
- Other_____

PART IV: CLIENT NEEDS AND EXPERIENCES WITH DCRSA SERVICE PROVIDERS: The following series of questions asks about your needs and experience with DCRSA Service Provider(s).

Q24. Did you work with a DCRSA Service Provider?

- Yes
- No

Q24a. If you answered “No” to **Q24** above, skip to **Q32**

Q25. If you selected “Yes,” how effective is/was your service provider in helping you get employment?

- Very effective
- Somewhat effective
- Somewhat ineffective
- Not effective

Q25a. If you selected “Not effective,” to **Q25** above, please skip to **Q27**.

Q26. How effective is/was your service provider in helping you keep your job?

- Very effective
- Somewhat effective
- Somewhat ineffective
- Not effective

Q27. Was the service provider's facility physically accessible?

- Yes
- Somewhat accessible
- Somewhat inaccessible
- No, it was not accessible
- Other _____

Q28. How can providers improve their services to best support persons with disabilities? *(Please select all that apply)*

- Partner more effectively with DCRSA
- Train staff on how to work with individuals with disabilities
- Include my support network - to assist with identifying and supporting my employment goals
- Improve the programs and services available to help persons with disabilities
- Improve physical accessibility to their office
- Hire bilingual staff
- Other (please describe) _____

Q29. What provider services did you find readily available to support persons with disabilities? *(Please select all that apply)*

- Employment services
- Supported employment services
- Pre-employment transition services
- On-the-job training
- Community college or four-year college or other university resources
- Occupational training
- Assistive technology
- Interpreter and translator services
- Benefits counseling
- Disability-related skills training
- Customized employment services
- Transportation support
- Reading and literacy services
- Personal assistance services
- Maintenance or other income assistance
- Registered apprenticeship training

- Job coaching
- Job readiness skills training

Q30. How effective is/was DCRSA in helping you keep your job?

- Very effective
- Somewhat effective
- Somewhat ineffective
- Not effective

Q30a. If you selected “very effective, somewhat effective”, on **Q30** above, skip to **Q32**.

Q31. How can DCRSA improve their services to best support persons with disabilities? *(Please select all that apply)*

- Partner or collaborate more effectively with community providers
- Train staff on how to work with individuals with disabilities
- Include my support network - to assist with identifying and supporting my employment goals
- Improve the programs and services available to help persons with disabilities
- Improve physical accessibility to their office
- Hire bilingual staff
- Other (please describe) _____

Please provide any additional comments about your overall experience with DCRSA and its provider organizations.

B.2 - Encuesta individual

Administración de Servicios de Rehabilitación del Distrito de Columbia (DCRSA) Evaluación Integral de Necesidades a Nivel Estatal (CSNA) del 2020

Introducción: DCRSA está trabajando en colaboración con el Consejo Estatal de Rehabilitación (State Rehabilitation Council, SRC), con el Consejo Estatal de Residencia Independiente (Statewide Independent Living Council, SILC) y con Promesa Consulting Group para hacer la Evaluación Integral de Necesidades a Nivel Estatal (Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, CSNA) para el año 2020 de personas con discapacidades que viven en el Distrito de Columbia.

El objetivo de esta evaluación de necesidades es obtener comentarios, información y recomendaciones que permitan identificar las necesidades relacionadas con el empleo de las personas con discapacidades que viven en el Distrito de Columbia. Los resultados permitirán desarrollar programas y servicios que ayuden a mejorar la preparación de las personas con discapacidades para conseguir, mantener o recuperar un empleo que sea de tipo competitivo integrado y que les permita vivir una vida digna y productiva.

Esta encuesta está diseñada para que **una persona con discapacidades** haga comentarios sobre su experiencia y sobre sus necesidades relacionadas con el empleo, para solicitar los servicios y el apoyo de la DCRSA. La encuesta está organizada en cuatro partes:

1. **Información demográfica**
2. **Conocimiento y experiencia del cliente en el acceso a la DCRSA**
3. **Necesidades y experiencia del cliente en el cumplimiento de los objetivos de empleo**
4. **Necesidades y experiencia del cliente con los proveedores de servicios de la DCRSA**

Típicamente le tomará entre 20 y 30 minutos para completar esta encuesta.

Su participación en esta evaluación de necesidades es voluntaria. Si decide participar, su identidad se mantendrá anónima. No le pediremos su nombre en ninguna parte de la encuesta. Si tiene alguna pregunta sobre esta encuesta o si quiere pedir la encuesta en otro formato, comuníquese con el equipo de evaluación de necesidades escribiendo a rsa.vrcsneedsassessment@dc.gov o comuníquese con Sharron Harris, Vice Presidenta de Promesa Consulting Group escribiendo al siguiente correo electrónico sharris@promesacgi.com.

Para completar esta encuesta, indique si usted es la persona que solicita o recibe los servicios de la DCRSA o si es un familiar que está ayudando a la persona que solicita los servicios.

- Persona que solicita los servicios
- Familiar en nombre de la persona que recibe los servicios
- Otra (describa) _____

PARTE I: INFORMACIÓN DEMOGRÁFICA: En esta sección, se pide información demográfica del cliente.

P1. ¿Con qué identidad de género se identifica más?

- Hombre
- Mujer
- Hombre transgénero
- Mujer transgénero
- Género variante/No conforme con el género
- No está en la lista _____
- Prefiero no responder

P2. ¿Cuál es su rango de edad?

- 14-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-59
- 60 o más

P3. ¿Cuál es su discapacidad principal? (*Elija una sola respuesta*)

- Trastorno del espectro del autismo
- Discapacidad física
- Salud conductual
- Discapacidad intelectual (ID)
- Discapacidad del desarrollo (DD)
- Sordera o discapacidad auditiva
- Discapacidad movilidad
- Ceguera o discapacidad visual
- Discapacidad para comunicación
- Sin discapacidad
- Otra (identifique): _____

P4. ¿En qué distrito electoral vive?

- Distrito 1
- Distrito 2
- Distrito 3
- Distrito 4
- Distrito 5

- Distrito 6
- Distrito 7
- Distrito 8

P5. ¿Cuál es su raza? *(Elija una sola respuesta)*

- Negro o afroamericano
- Indio americano o nativo de Alaska
- Asiático
- Blanco
- Nativo de Hawái o de otra isla del Pacífico
- Prefiero no decirlo
- Otra _____

¿Cuál es su etnia?

- Hispano o de origen latino
- No hispano ni de origen latino

P6. Indique si recibe cualquiera de los siguientes beneficios por discapacidad a través del seguro social. *(Elija todas las opciones que correspondan)*

- Recibo la Seguridad de Ingreso Suplementario (SSI)
- Recibo el Seguro Social por Discapacidad (SSDI)
- No recibo beneficios por discapacidad del seguro social
- No sé si recibo beneficios por discapacidad del seguro social

PARTE II: CONOCIMIENTO Y EXPERIENCIA DEL CLIENTE EN EL ACCESO A LA DCRSA: Las siguientes preguntas se enfocan en el conocimiento y la experiencia del cliente en el acceso al apoyo y a los servicios de la DCRSA.

P7. ¿Qué afirmación describe mejor su experiencia con la DCRSA? *(Elija una sola respuesta)*

- Soy actualmente cliente de la DCRSA
- Fui cliente de la DCRSA; mi caso se cerró
- Estoy familiarizado con la DCRSA, pero nunca uso los servicios
- No estoy familiarizado con la DCRSA
- Otra (describa) _____

P7a. Si respondió “No” a la pregunta anterior **(P7)** continúe con la pregunta **P32** “Incluya otros...”. If you responded “No” to the previous question (P7) continue with question P32 “Please Provide any additional...”.

P8. Si está familiarizado con la DCRSA, ¿Cómo se enteró de los servicios de apoyo?

- Por un miembro de mi familia
- Me dieron información durante un evento de participación de la comunidad patrocinado por la DCRSA
- Página web de la DCRSA
- Personal de la escuela
- Grupo promotor de los derechos de los discapacitados
- Otro _____

P9. Según su experiencia, ¿Considera usted que la evaluación que se le hizo fue completa para determinar sus destrezas, capacitación, experiencias, logros, y habilidades?

- Sí
- No

P9a. Si respondió “Sí” a la pregunta anterior (**P9**), continúe con la pregunta **P11** “¿Está actualmente empleado...?”. If you answered “Yes” to the previous question (P9) continue with question P11 “Are you currently employed...?”

P10. Si respondió “No”, identifique lo que considera que faltó. (*Elija todas las opciones que correspondan*)

- Reconocimiento y documentación de mis destrezas, capacitación, experiencias, logros, y habilidades
- Reconocimiento de mis intereses y logros educativos
- Entendimiento de los servicios de apoyo necesarios para alcanzar los objetivos del empleo
- Reconocimiento de mi historial del empleo
- Otro _____

P11. ¿Está actualmente empleado gracias al apoyo y a los servicios de la DCRSA?

- Sí
- No

P12. ¿Ha tenido alguna experiencia de empleo previa mediante el apoyo de la DCRSA?

- Sí
- No

P13. ¿Cuántas veces solicitó servicios en la DCRSA para conseguir empleo?

- Solo una vez
- Dos o tres (2-3) veces
- Más de tres (3) veces

Otro (especifique) _____

P14. ¿Si ha sido empleado cuál considera que fue su experiencia laboral más exitosa?

- Trabajar en servicios de hotelería
- Trabajar en servicios de atención médica
- Trabajar en negocios y en servicios de tecnología de la información
- Trabajar en servicios de seguridad y de la policía
- Trabajar en la industria de la construcción
- Trabajar en servicios de transporte o de infraestructura
- Trabajar en servicios de atención al cliente o de ventas
- Trabajar en servicios de oficina
- Trabajar en servicios de limpieza
- Otro _____

P15. ¿Fue fácil acceder a la oficina de la DCRSA?

- Sí
- Poco accesible
- Poco inaccesible
- No
- Otro _____

P16. ¿Fue fácil acceder al apoyo y a los servicios de la DCRSA?

- Sí
- Poco accesibles
- Poco inaccesibles
- No
- Otro _____

P17. ¿Cuánto tardó en recibir los servicios después de que la DCRSA determinara que usted era elegible?

- Menos de 30 días
- Entre 30 y 60 días
- Entre 60 y 90 días
- Más de 90 días
- Otro _____

P18. ¿Con qué frecuencia interactuó o tuvo contacto con su consejero de la DCRSA?

- Mucho

- Algo
- Poco
- No tuvimos comunicación
- Otro _____

P19. Identifique los obstáculos para acceder a los servicios de la DCRSA. *(Elija todas las opciones que correspondan)*

- Falta de información sobre los servicios disponibles
- Dificultades para programar reuniones con mi consejero de la DCRSA
- Falta de adaptaciones para mi discapacidad
- Dificultades para completar el Plan Individual de Empleo (Individualized Plan for Employment, IPE)
- El horario de atención de la DCRSA no era conveniente
- Obstáculos en la comunicación
- Obstáculos de idioma
- Sin obstáculos
- Otro _____

P20. ¿En qué lugar del distrito recibe o recibió los servicios?

- Distrito 1
- Distrito 2
- Distrito 3
- Distrito 4
- Distrito 5
- Distrito 6
- Distrito 7
- Distrito 8

P21. ¿Qué servicios necesitó para conseguir empleo con éxito? *(Elija todas las opciones que correspondan)*

- Capacitación laboral
- Ayuda para encontrar un empleo
- Educación
- Adaptaciones razonables
- Transporte confiable
- Servicios de salud mental
- Vivienda a costo asequible
- Servicios de tecnología de asistencia

- Consejería sobre beneficios
- Coinstructor de trabajo
- Servicios de traducción y/o de interpretar
- Guardería
- Servicios para el uso de alcohol o sustancias ilegales
- Otro (describa) _____

PARTE III: NECESIDADES Y EXPERIENCIAS DEL CLIENTE EN EL CUMPLIMIENTO DE LOS OBJETIVOS DE EMPLEO: Las siguientes preguntas se enfocan en las necesidades y experiencias de los beneficiarios para el cumplimiento de los objetivos de su trabajo.

P22. Identifique las necesidades que tuvo para lograr sus objetivos de empleo. *(Elija todas las opciones que correspondan)*

- Ningún problema
- Necesité mejorar mis habilidades laborales
- Necesité más comunicación con mi consejero de la DCRSA
- Ayuda para hablar con mi empleador sobre mi capacidad para hacer el trabajo debido a mi discapacidad
- Más educación y capacitación
- Mejores opciones de trabajo
- Ayuda con mis habilidades para buscar trabajo
- Apoyo con un transporte confiable
- Servicios de tecnología de asistencia
- Entender cómo el hecho de trabajar podría afectar mis beneficios del seguro social
- Falta de coinstructor de trabajo
- Vivienda a costo asequible
- Opciones para manejar mis antecedentes penales
- Ayuda para mejorar las habilidades lingüísticas
- Guardería
- Ayuda para tratar el uso de alcohol o sustancias ilegales
- Otros obstáculos _____

P23. Identifique las necesidades o los obstáculos que tuvo para mantener su empleo. *(Elija todas las opciones que correspondan)*

- Ningún problema
- Necesité mejorar mis habilidades laborales
- Necesité más comunicación con mi consejero de la DCRSA
- Ayuda para hablar con mi empleador sobre mi capacidad para hacer el trabajo debido a mi discapacidad
- Más educación y capacitación
- Mejores opciones de trabajo
- Ayuda con mis habilidades para buscar trabajo
- Apoyo con un transporte confiable
- Servicios de tecnología de asistencia
- Entender cómo el hecho de trabajar podría afectar mis beneficios del seguro social

- Falta de coinstructor de trabajo
- Vivienda a costo asequible
- Opciones para manejar mis antecedentes penales
- Ayuda para mejorar las habilidades lingüísticas
- Guardería
- Ayuda para tratar el uso de alcohol o sustancias ilegales
- Otros obstáculos _____

PARTE IV: NECESIDADES Y EXPERIENCIAS DEL CLIENTE CON LOS PROVEEDORES DE SERVICIOS DE LA DCRSA: Las siguientes preguntas se enfocan en sus necesidades y su experiencia con los proveedores de servicios de la DCRSA.

P24. ¿Trabajó con un proveedor de servicios de la DCRSA?

- Sí
- No

P24a. Si respondió “No” a la pregunta anterior (**P24**) continúe con la pregunta **P32** “Incluya otros...”. If you responded “No” to the previous question (P24) continue with question P32 “Please Provide any additional...”.

P25. Si respondió “Sí”, ¿Qué tan eficiente es/fue su proveedor de servicios para ayudarlo a conseguir empleo?

- Eficiente
- Poco eficiente
- Poco ineficiente
- Ineficiente
- Otro (especifique) _____

P25a. Si respondió “Ineficiente” en la pregunta anterior (**P25**), continúe con la pregunta (**P27**), “¿Fueron las instalaciones del proveedor...?”. If you responded “Inefficient” to the previous question (P25) continue with question P27 “Was the provider location...”.

P26. ¿Qué tan eficiente es/fue su proveedor de servicios para ayudarlo a mantener su trabajo?

- Eficiente
- Poco eficiente
- Poco ineficiente
- Ineficiente

- Otro (especifique) _____

P27. ¿Fueron las instalaciones del proveedor de servicios accesible considerando de su discapacidad?

- Sí
- Poco accesibles
- Poco inaccesible
- No
- Otro (especifique) _____

P28. ¿Cómo pueden los proveedores mejorar sus servicios para apoyar mejor a las personas con discapacidades? *(Elija todas las opciones que correspondan)*

- Coordinar eficientemente sus servicios con la DCRSA
- Capacitar al personal sobre cómo trabajar con personas con discapacidades
- Incluir a las redes de apoyo de las personas discapacitadas para ayudarlos a identificar y a apoyar sus objetivos de empleo
- Mejorar los programas y los servicios disponibles para poder ayudar a las personas con discapacidades
- Mejorar la planta física de las oficinas de acuerdo a las discapacidades de los usuarios
- Contratar personal bilingüe
- Otro (describa) _____

P29. ¿Qué servicios de los proveedores considera que estaban fácilmente disponibles para apoyar a las personas con discapacidades? *(Elija todas las opciones que correspondan)*

- Servicios de empleo
- Servicios de apoyo para desempeño en el empleo
- Servicios de transición para prepararse para un empleo
- Capacitación práctica en el trabajo
- College comunitario, college de cuatro años u otros recursos universitarios
- Capacitación ocupacional
- Tecnología de asistencia
- Servicios de interpretación y de traducción
- Consejería sobre beneficios
- Capacitación sobre las destrezas relacionadas con la discapacidad
- Servicios de empleo personalizados
- Apoyo con el transporte
- Servicios de lectura y alfabetización

- Servicios de ayuda personal
- Manutención u otra ayuda financiera
- Programa de aprendizaje registrado
- Entrenamiento laboral u ocupacional
- Capacitación sobre competencias de preparación laboral

P30. ¿Qué tan eficiente es/fue la DCRSA para ayudarlo a mantener su trabajo?

- Eficiente
- Poco eficiente
- Poco ineficiente
- Ineficiente
- Otro (especifique) _____

P30a. Si respondió “Eficiente” o “Poco eficiente” en la pregunta anterior (**P30**) continúe con la pregunta (**P32**) “Incluya otros...”. If you responded “No” to the previous question (P30) continue with question P32 “Please Provide any additional...”.

P31. ¿Cómo puede la DCRSA mejorar sus servicios para apoyar mejor a las personas con discapacidades? (*Elija todas las opciones que correspondan*)

- Coordinar o colaborar de manera más eficaz con los proveedores de la comunidad
- Capacitar al personal sobre cómo trabajar con personas con discapacidades
- Incluir a las redes de apoyo de las personas discapacitadas para ayudarlos a identificar y a apoyar sus objetivos de empleo
- Mejorar los programas y los servicios disponibles para poder ayudar a las personas con discapacidades
- Mejorar la planta física de las oficinas de acuerdo a las discapacidades de los usuarios
- Contratar personal bilingüe
- Otro (describa) _____

P32. Incluya otros comentarios sobre su experiencia general con la DCRSA y con sus organizaciones proveedoras.

C. COMMUNITY PARTNER SURVEY

2020 District of Columbia Rehabilitation Services Administration (DCRSA)

Introduction: DCRSA is working with the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC), and Promesa Consulting Group to conduct the 2020 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) of persons with disabilities who live in the District of Columbia.

The objective is to obtain input and recommendations that identify employment-related needs of persons with disabilities to develop programs and services to help prepared them to obtain, - or sustain competitive integrated employment.

The survey is prepared for DCRSA **service providers and disability advocacy organizations** to obtain information about the unmet needs of persons with disabilities, which may impact their access to employment and ability to maintain employment. We anticipate that it will take between 20-30 minutes to complete.

To help minimize the time needed to respond, the survey is organized into four parts:

1. **Organizational Demographics**
2. **Partner Service Knowledge and Comfortability**
3. **Partner Employment Support and Program Augmentation, and**
4. **Special Populations:**
 - a. **Youth in Transition,**
 - b. **LGBTQIA and**
 - c. **Limited English proficient/Non-English proficient Communities.**

Your participation is voluntary, and your responses will be anonymous. If you have any questions about this survey or would like to request the survey in an alternative format, please contact the needs assessment team at rsa.vrcsneedsassessment@dc.gov or contact Sharron Harris, Sr. V.P. Promesa Consulting Group, Inc. at sharris@promesacgi.com.

PART I: ORGANIZATIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS – The following series of questions asks about your organization, the types of services it provides, its location, and the location of the clients served.

Q1. Which of the following best describes your organization type? *(Please check all that apply)*

- Community Rehabilitation Program
- Secondary school system
- Postsecondary school system
- Federal agency

- Local public agency
- Other private organization
- Center for Independent Living
- Disability advocacy organization
- Other (please describe) _____

Q2. Where is your main office located?

- District of Columbia
- Maryland
- Virginia

Q3. Are all of your services offered in the District of Columbia?

- Yes
- No

Q4. Which Ward(s) within the District do you provide most of the services you offer? (Please check all that apply)

- Ward 1
- Ward 2
- Ward 3
- Ward 4
- Ward 5
- Ward 6
- Ward 7
- Ward 8
- Not applicable

Q5. Which Ward(s) within the District do most persons you serve reside? (*Please check all that apply*)

- Ward 1
- Ward 2
- Ward 3
- Ward 4
- Ward 5
- Ward 6
- Ward 7
- Ward 8
- Not applicable

Q6. What are the age ranges of the populations you serve? *(Please check all that apply)*

- 14-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-59
- 60 and over

Q7. What is the primary gender identification of the population you serve?

- Male
- Female
- Transgender Female
- Transgender Male
- Non-binary/third gender
- Other _____
- All genders

PART II: PARTNER SERVICE KNOWLEDGE AND COMFORTABILITY – The following series of questions asks more specifically about your experience as a community partner and the services available.

Q8. How long have you worked in your current position?

- Less than 1-year
- 1-5 years
- 5-10 years
- More than 10 years

Q9. Please indicate which of the following services you believe are readily available to persons with disabilities in the District of Columbia. (By “readily available,” we mean those services are available in the area to people with a range of disabilities. *(Please check all that apply)*).

- Employment preparation services (These are services that pertain to soft skills, e.g., arriving to work on time; planning for transportation failures; making plans to attend work daily, etc.)
- Job search services
- Placement services
- Job training (This pertains to skills development)
- Postsecondary education training (technical or academic)

- Transportation assistance
- Vehicle modification
- Assistive technology
- Income and Financial Management assistance
- Housing assistance
- Mental Health access
- Substance use/abuse treatment
- Personal care attendants
- Health care (health care coverage and/or access to preventive health care services, e.g., Medicare, Medicaid and/or private health care coverage)
- Benefits planning
- Other (Please describe) _____

Q10. In your experience, is the network of rehabilitation service providers in the District of Columbia adequate to meet DCRSA's clients' vocational rehabilitation service needs?

- Yes
- No

Q11. If you responded "No" please identify what service needs, you believe network partners in the District of Columbia are unable to meet? (Please select all that apply)

- Employment preparation services (These are services that pertain to soft skills, e.g., arriving to work on time; planning for transportation failures; making plans to attend work daily, etc.)
- Job search services
- Placement services
- Job training (This pertains to skills development)
- Postsecondary education training (technical or academic)
- Transportation assistance
- Vehicle modification
- Assistive technology
- Income and Financial Management assistance
- Housing assistance
- Mental Health access
- Substance use/abuse treatment
- Personal care attendants

- Health care (health care coverage and/or access to preventive health care services, e.g., Medicare, Medicaid and/or private health care coverage)
- Benefits planning
- Other (Please describe) _____

Q12. In your view, what are the primary reasons vocational rehabilitation service partners are unable to meet the service needs of persons with disabilities? *(Please select all that apply)*

- Not enough providers available in the area
- Low quality of provider services
- Client barriers prevent successful interactions with providers
- Inadequate assessments for people seeking services
- People present with emerging issues that occur post-initial assessment
- Other _____

Q13. In your opinion, do you believe the majority of people who receive services from DCRSA achieve their employment goals?

- Yes
- No

Q14. Please indicate what you believe are the reasons employment goals not being met.

- Lack of education and training
- Skills level, and unable to conduct an adequate job search
- Language barrier
- Mental Health Issues
- Substance use issues
- Convictions for criminal offences
- Poor social skills
- Insufficient job availability for persons with differing abilities
- Employers with insufficient accommodations for persons who are differently abled
- Persons often in need of personal care assistance, which is unavailable
- Transportation accessibility
- Developmental barrier
- The barrier is beyond DCRSA's ability to adequately address
- Childcare issues
- Housing issues

- Perceptions regarding the impact of income on social security benefits
- Other _____

PART III: PARTNER EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT AND PROGRAM AUGMENTATION – This series of questions asks about customized employment (*the modification of a job or task to meet the needs of both the employee and the employer*).

Q15. Does your organization provide Customized Employment opportunities for job seekers?

- Yes
- No

Q16. If your organization provides Customized Employment, has the appropriate staff received formal training in designing and negotiating customized job opportunities with employers?

- Yes
- No

Q17. If your organization provides Customized Employment, how many job seekers have you placed in customized positions in the past one year?

- 1-5
- 5-10
- 10-20
- More than 20

Q18. If your organization has successfully placed job seekers in Customized Employment, what is the average length of time it takes to develop the customized position and then achieve a successful placement?

- 30-45 Days
- 45-90 Days
- 120-180 Days
- More than 180 days

Q19. As a part of your ongoing annual employee evaluation process, do you survey employees who have been placed in Customized Employment opportunities to determine their satisfaction?

- Yes

- No

Q20. Would your organization benefit from training on providing customized employment?

- Yes
- No

Q21. From your perspective as a provider, what are the most important needs of persons with disabilities to get and keep a job? *(Please select all that apply)*

- Childcare
- Housing
- Predictable transportation
- More on-the-job support
- Employer training
- Counseling for prospective employees
- Other (please describe) _____

Q22. What industries has your organization had the greatest success with placing persons with disabilities in competitive integrated employment? *(Please select all that apply)*

- Hospitality services
- Healthcare services
- Information technology services
- Security services
- Construction or building trades
- Transportation or infrastructure services
- Customer service or retail
- Office/clerical
- Janitorial
- Other (please describe) _____

Q23. What career paths has your organization had the greatest success with client placement?

- Early childhood CDA training and certification
- Food service training and certification
- Technology training and certification
- Technology repair training and certification
- Coding training and certification

Other (please describe) _____

Q24. Do you provide supported employment services?

- Yes
- No

Q25. Are there supported employment services your clients require that your organization is unable to provide?

- Yes
- No

Q26. What are the supported employment services your organization is unable to provide? (please describe) _____

Q27. Do you provide benefits counseling?

- Yes
- No

Q28. In your view, is benefits counseling essential to the persons you serve?

- Yes
- No

PART IV: SPECIAL POPULATIONS – This series of questions will ask about the following populations with a disability:

- Persons with the most significant disabilities
- Youth in transition
- LGBTQIA, and
- Limited English proficient/Non-English proficient persons

Q29. Please indicate which client population(s) you work with on a regular basis.

Please check all that apply.

- Persons with the most significant disabilities
- Persons who need supported employment services
- Persons who are Limited English proficiency/Non-English proficient
- Persons from unserved or underserved populations (definition?)
- Transition-age youth (14-24)

- Persons served by America’s Job Centers or Workforce Investment Act-Investment Act funded programs
- Persons with late onset of disability as a result of an accident or trauma-related incident
- Persons from the LGBTQIA community
- Other_____

PERSONS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES – This section will ask questions that pertains to the population with the most significantly disabilities.

Q30. Are the barriers to achieving employment goals for clients with the most significant disabilities different from the overall population?

- Yes
- No

Q31. What are the top three (3) barriers to achieving employment goals for DCRSA clients with the most significant disabilities? *(Please select a maximum of three (3))*

- Insufficient education and/or training
 - Insufficient job skills training (both hard and soft skills)
 - Lack of job search skills
 - Convictions for criminal offenses
 - Language barriers
 - Poor social skills
 - Insufficient employers willing to accept persons who are significantly disabled
 - Employers’ perceptions of persons who are significantly disabled
 - Insufficient employers that can accommodate persons who are significantly disabled
 - Insufficient assistance with personal care
 - Inaccessible transportation
 - Mental health issues
 - Substance use issues
 - Childcare issues
 - Housing issues
 - Perceptions regarding the impact of income on Social Security benefits
 - Other
-

YOUTH IN TRANSITION: The following questions pertain to Youth in transition (young people, ages 14 up to 24, who are at high risk of not successfully transitioning into independent adulthood due to the complexity of their needs).

Q32. Do you serve youth in transition?

- Yes
- No

Q33. Are the barriers to achieving employment goals for youth in transition different from the overall population of people with disabilities?

- Yes
- No

Q34. What do you believe are the top three (3) barriers to achieving employment goals for youth in transition?

- Insufficient education and/or training
- Insufficient job skills training (both hard and soft skills)
- Lack of job search skills
- Convictions for criminal offenses
- Language barriers
- Poor social skills
- Insufficient employers willing to accept persons who are significantly disabled
- Employers' perceptions of persons who are significantly disabled
- Insufficient employers that can accommodate persons who are significantly disabled
- Insufficient assistance with personal care
- Inaccessible transportation
- Mental health issues
- Substance use issues
- Childcare issues
- Housing issues
- Perceptions regarding the impact of income on Social Security benefits
- Other _____

Q35. What are the primary reasons that prevent vocational rehabilitation service providers that specialize in services to youth in transition from generally meeting the service needs of this population? (Please select all that apply.)

- Not enough providers available in the area

- Low quality of provider services
- Client barriers prevent successful interactions with providers
- Inadequate assessments of service recipients
- Service recipients with emerging issues that occur post-initial assessment
- Language barriers
- The need for Cultural and Linguistic Competency (CLC) training or embedding CLC practices in services
- Other _____

Q36. In your opinion, do you believe that youth in transition receiving services through DCRSA have their employment goals adequately met?

- Yes
- No

Q37. Indicate what you believe the reasons might be for the goals not being met from the following list.

- Skills level, and unable to conduct adequate job search
- Lack of education and training
- Language barriers
- Mental health issues
- Substance abuse/use issues
- Convictions of criminal offences
- Poor social skills
- Insufficient job availability for persons with differing abilities
- Employers with insufficient accommodations for persons who are disabled
- Persons often in need of personal care assistance, which is unavailable
- Transportation accessibility
- Developmental barrier(s)

LGBTQIA: The following questions pertain to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, and asexual or allied (LGBTQIA) populations.

Q38. Do you serve LGBTQIA?

- Yes
- No

Q39. Do you believe the barriers to achieving employment goals for LGBTQIA, are different from the overall population of people with disabilities?

- Yes
- No

Q40. What do you believe are the top three (3) barriers to achieving employment goals for LGBTQIA?

- Insufficient education and/or training
 - Insufficient job skills training (both hard and soft skills)
 - Lack of job search skills
 - Convictions for criminal offenses
 - Language barriers
 - Poor social skills
 - Insufficient employers willing to accept persons who are significantly disabled
 - Employers' perceptions of persons who are significantly disabled
 - Insufficient employers that can accommodate persons who are significantly disabled
 - Insufficient assistance with personal care
 - Inaccessible transportation
 - Mental health issues
 - Substance use issues
 - Childcare issues
 - Housing issues
 - Perceptions regarding the impact of income on Social Security benefits
 - Other
-

Q41. What are the primary reasons that prevent vocational rehabilitation service providers that specialize in services to LGBTQIA from generally meeting the service needs of this population? *(Please select all that apply)*

- Not enough providers available in the area
- Low quality of provider services
- Client barriers prevent successful interactions with providers
- Inadequate assessments of service recipients
- Service recipients with emerging issues that occur post-initial assessment
- Language barriers
- The need for Cultural and Linguistic Competence training or possible the need to embed culturally and linguistically competent practices
- Other _____

Q42. In your opinion, do you believe that LGBTQIA persons receiving services through DCRSA have their employment goals adequately met?

- Yes
- No

Q43. Indicate what you believe the reasons might be for the goals not being met.

- Skills level, and unable to conduct adequate job search
- Lack of education and training
- Language barriers
- Mental health issues
- Substance abuse/use issues
- Convictions of criminal offences
- Poor social skills
- Insufficient job availability for persons with differing abilities
- Employers with insufficient accommodations for persons who are disabled
- Persons often in need of personal care assistance, which is unavailable
- Transportation accessibility
- Developmental barrier(s)

LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY/NON-ENGLISH PROFICIENT: The following questions pertain to Limited English Proficiency/Non-English Proficient populations.

Q44. Do you serve Limited English Proficiency/Non-English Proficient clients?

- Yes
- No

Q45. Are the barriers to achieving employment goals for Limited English Proficiency/Non-English Proficient different from the overall population of people with disabilities?

- Yes
- No

Q46. What do you believe are the top three (3) barriers to achieving employment goals for Limited English Proficiency/Non-English Proficient?

- Insufficient education and/or training
- Insufficient job skills training (both hard and soft skills)
- Lack of job search skills
- Convictions for criminal offenses

- Language barriers
 - Poor social skills
 - Insufficient employers willing to accept persons who are significantly disabled
 - Employers' perceptions of persons who are significantly disabled
 - Insufficient employers that can accommodate persons who are significantly disabled
 - Insufficient assistance with personal care
 - Inaccessible transportation
 - Mental health issues
 - Substance use issues
 - Childcare issues
 - Housing issues
 - Perceptions regarding the impact of income on Social Security benefits
 - Other
-

Q47. What are the primary reasons that prevent vocational rehabilitation service providers that specialize in services to Limited English Proficiency/Non-English Proficient from generally meeting the service needs of this population? *(Please select all that apply)*

- Not enough providers available in the area
 - Low quality of provider services
 - Client barriers prevent successful interactions with providers
 - Inadequate assessments of service recipients
 - Service recipients with emerging issues that occur post-initial assessment
 - Language barriers
 - The need for Cultural and Linguistic Competence training or possible the need to embed culturally and linguistically competent practices
 - Other _____
-

Q48. In your opinion, do you believe that Limited English Proficiency/Non-English Proficient persons receiving services through DCRSA have their employment goals adequately met?

- Yes
- No

Q49. Indicate what you believe the reasons might be for the goals not being met.

- Skills level, and unable to conduct adequate job search

- Lack of education and training
- Language barriers
- Mental health issues
- Substance abuse/use issues
- Convictions of criminal offences
- Poor social skills
- Insufficient job availability for persons with differing abilities
- Employers with insufficient accommodations for persons who are disabled
- Persons often in need of personal care assistance, which is unavailable
- Transportation accessibility
- Developmental barrier(s)

Q50. Please provide any additional comments about your overall experience as a partner with DCRSA and/or an organization supporting persons with disabilities.

Your feedback is valuable to us and we thank you for taking the time to complete the survey!

D. DCRSA STAFF SURVEY

District of Columbia Rehabilitation Services Administration (DCRSA) 2020 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA)

Introduction: DCRSA is working in collaboration with the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) and staff of Promesa Consulting Group, Inc. to conduct the 2020 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA). The objective is to obtain input and recommendations that identify employment-related needs of persons with disabilities who live in the District of Columbia. The results of this assessment will inform the development of programs and services to help enhance the preparedness of people with disabilities to obtain, regain, or sustain competitive integrated employment that will enable them to lead meaningful and productive lives.

The following survey is prepared for **DCRSA Staff** to answer questions about the employment-related needs of persons with disabilities. It is divided into the following three parts:

1. **Part I:** Your role and knowledge of DCRSA services and capabilities of the DCRSA network of service providers;
2. **Part II:** Your knowledge of potential barriers to access DCRSA services for persons with disabilities.
3. **Part III:** Role of the American Job Centers (AJCs) in the District

We anticipate that it will take about 20 minutes of your time to complete the survey. Your responses will be anonymous. You will not be asked for your name anywhere in this survey. If you have any questions regarding this survey or would like to request the survey in an alternative format, please contact the needs assessment team at rsa.vrcsneedsassessment@dc.gov or contact Sharron Harris, Sr. V.P. Promesa Consulting Group, Inc., at sharris@promesacgi.com.

Part I: KNOWLEDGE OF DCRSA SERVICES: This section asks you to describe your role, knowledge of DCRSA services and capabilities of the Network of Service Providers

Q1. What is your job title?

Q2. How long have you worked in the job that you have now?

Q3. Please indicate which client population you work with on a regular basis. *(Please select all that apply).*

- People with most significant disabilities
- People who need supported employment services
- People who are from multi-language communities
- People from unserved or underserved populations
- Transition age youth (14-24)

- People served by America’s Job Centers or Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act funded programs
- People with late onset of disability as a result of an accident or trauma
- People from the LGBTQIA community
- People with mental health needs
- Other

Q4. What Ward(s) of the District do the majority of your clients reside in? *(Please select all that apply)?*

- Ward 1
- Ward 2
- Ward 3
- Ward 4
- Ward 5
- Ward 6
- Ward 7
- Ward 8

Q5. Please indicate which of the following services are readily available to DCRSA clients. By “readily available,” we mean that services are available in the area to persons with a range of disabilities *(Please select all that apply)*.

- Employment preparation services
- Job search services
- Job development and placement services
- Job training
- Postsecondary education and training
- Transportation assistance
- Vehicle modification assistance
- Assistive technology
- Income assistance
- Housing assistance
- Mental health treatment
- Substance abuse treatment
- Personal care attendants
- Health insurance
- Benefits planning assistance
- Other *(Please describe)* _____

Q6. In your experience, is DCRSA's network of rehabilitation service providers able to meet clients' vocational rehabilitation needs?

- Yes
- No

Q7. In your opinion, what service needs are the network of rehabilitation service providers in the District of Columbia unable to meet (*Please select all that apply*)?

- Employment preparation services
- Job search services
- Job development and placement services
- Job training
- Postsecondary education training
- Transportation assistance
- Vehicle modification assistance
- Assistive technology
- Income assistance
- Housing assistance
- Mental health treatment
- Substance abuse treatment
- Personal care attendants
- Health insurance
- Benefits planning assistance
- Other (*Please describe*) _____

Q8. In your experience, what are the primary reasons the network of rehabilitation service providers is generally unable to meet clients' needs?

- Not enough service providers available in the area
- Low quality of services offered by providers
- Low rates paid for services
- Low level of accountability for performance of providers
- Client barriers prevent successful interactions with providers
- Administrative barriers (please explain) _____
- Other (please describe) _____

Q9. In your experience, what services do you feel DCRSA does the best job providing to its clients (either directly or through DCRSA's network of service providers)?

- Assessing clients' strengths, skills and abilities to identify services and supports that will best support their employment goals
- Employment preparation services
- Job search services
- Job development and placement services
- Job training
- Postsecondary education and training
- Transportation assistance
- Vehicle modification assistance
- Assistive technology
- Income assistance
- Housing assistance
- Mental health treatment
- Substance abuse treatment
- Personal care attendants
- Health Insurance
- Benefits planning assistance
- Other (Please describe) _____

Q10. Below is a list of potential reasons that DCRSA clients might find it difficult to achieve their employment goals. For each potential barrier, please indicate whether you believe it is: A Barrier, adequately addressed by DCRSA Services; A Barrier, NOT adequately address by DCRSA Services; Not a Barrier; I Don't know:

	A Barrier, adequately addressed by DCRSA Services	A Barrier, NOT adequately addressed by DCRSA Services	Not a Barrier	I Don't know
Education or training	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Job skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Job search skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Convictions for criminal offenses	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Language barriers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Poor social skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Availability of jobs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Employers' perceptions about employing persons with disabilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Availability of disability-related accommodations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Availability of help with disability-related personal care	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Disability-related transportation issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other Transportation Issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mental health issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Substance abuse issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other health issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Childcare issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Housing issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Perceptions regarding the impact of income on Social Security benefits	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Client satisfaction with job referral based on compatibility with his/her interest, skills and abilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Level of client understanding or knowledge of available services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Limited availability of choice for clients among service providers or service type to meet employment goals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ability to opt out of services and use funding for employment services not offered by DCRSA	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Availability of self-directed service opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sensory friendliness of DCRSA environment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
User friendliness and ease of navigation of	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

intake and employment process				
Use of client's existing support networks to achieve employment goals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other (Please describe) _____

Q11. . What would you say are the top three barriers to achieving employment goals for DCRSA clients (Please select a maximum of three barriers to achieving employment goals)?

- Education or training
- Job skills
- Job search skills
- Convictions for criminal offenses
- Language barriers
- Poor social skills
- Jobs available
- Employers' perceptions about employing persons with disabilities
- Availability of disability-related accommodations
- Availability of help with disability-related personal care
- Disability-related transportation issues
- Other transportation issues
- Mental health issues
- Substance abuse issues
- Other health issues
- Childcare issues
- Housing issues
- Perceptions regarding the impact of income on Social Security benefits
- Other (Please describe) _____

Q12. . Are the barriers to achieving employment goals for clients with the most significant disabilities different from the overall population of persons with disabilities?

- Yes
- No

Q13. In your experience, what would you say are the top three barriers to achieving employment goals for DCRSA clients with the most significant disabilities *(Please select a maximum of three barriers to achieving employment goals)?*

- Sufficient programs, services or support to accommodate the needs of clients with the most significant disabilities
- Sufficient education or training resources to accommodate the needs of clients with the most significant disabilities
- Extended use of job coach services
- Job skills
- Job search skills
- Convictions for criminal offenses
- Language barriers
- Poor social skills
- Availability of jobs that correlate with skill set
- Employers' perceptions about employing persons with disabilities
- Availability of disability-related accommodations
- Availability of help with disability-related personal care
- Disability-related transportation issues
- Other transportation issues
- Mental health issues
- Substance abuse issues
- Other health issues
- Childcare issues
- Housing issues
- Perceptions regarding the impact of income on Social Security benefits
- Other (Please describe) _____

Q14. Are the barriers to achieving employment goals for youth in transition different from the overall populations of people with disabilities?

- Yes
- No

Q15. In your experience, what would you say are the top three (3) barriers do youth in transition face that prohibit them from achieving their employment goals (*please select a maximum of three (3) barriers*)

- Work experience
- Education or training
- Job skills
- Job search skills
- Convictions for criminal offenses
- Language barriers
- Poor social skills
- Availability of jobs that correlate with skill set
- Employers' perceptions about employing people with disabilities
- Availability of disability-related accommodations
- Help with disability-related personal care
- Disability-related transportation issues
- Other transportation issues
- Mental health issues
- Substance abuse issues
- Other health issues
- Childcare issues
- Housing issues
- Perceptions regarding the impact of income on Social Security benefits
- Other (*Please describe*) _____

Q16. Are there barriers to achieving employment goals for clients who are racial or ethnic minorities different from the overall population of people with disabilities?

- Yes
- No

Q17. In your experience, what would you say are the top three barriers to achieving employment goals for clients who are racial or ethnic minorities (*Please select a maximum of three (3) barriers*)?

- Work experience
- Education or training
- Job skills
- Job search skills
- Convictions for criminal offenses

- Language barriers
- Family or community support structure
- Having Poor social skills
- Availability of jobs
- Employers' perceptions about employing people with disabilities
- Availability of disability-related accommodations
- Availability of help with disability-related personal care
- Disability-related transportation issues
- Other transportation issues
- Mental health issues
- Substance abuse issues
- Other health issues
- Childcare issues
- Housing issues
- Perceptions regarding the impact of income on Social Security benefits
- Other (*Please describe*) _____

Q18. Is there anything else we should know about the primary barriers to achieving employment goals for DCRSA clients? _____

Part II: BARRIERS TO ACCESSING DCRSA SERVICES - This section asks about barriers to accessing DCRSA services for persons with disabilities:

Q19. In your experience, what would you say are the top three reasons that persons with disabilities find it difficult to access DCRSA services (*Please select a maximum of three reasons*)?

- Limited accessibility of DCRSA services via public transportation
- Other challenges related to the physical location of DCRSA's office
- Limited disability-related accommodations
- Difficulties completing the application to obtain services
- Difficulties completing the Individualized Plan for Employment
- Inadequate assessment of the client's knowledge, skills and interests to properly link them to services to meet their job goal
- Slow service delivery and clients get frustrated and dropout
- Language or communication barriers
- Difficulties accessing the proper training or education programs
- Because of the client's disability type, DCRSA does not have sufficient programs and services to meet the client's needs

- DCRSA staff do not meet clients in the communities where they live.
- Other (*Please describe*) _____

Q20. In your experience, are there reasons for finding it difficult to access DCRSA services by persons with the most significant disabilities different from the general population of persons with disabilities?

- Yes
- No

Q21. In your experience, what would you say are the top three reasons that persons with the most significant disabilities find it difficult to access DCRSA services (*Please select a maximum of three reasons*)?

- Limited accessibility of DCRSA via public transportation
- Other challenges related to the physical location of DCRSA's office
- Inadequate disability-related accommodations
- Difficulties completing the application to obtain services
- Difficulties completing the Individualized Plan for Employment
- Inadequate assessment of the client's knowledge, skills and interests to properly link them to services to meet their job goal
- Slow service delivery and clients get frustrated and dropout
- Language or communication barriers
- Difficulties accessing the proper training or education programs
- Because of the client's disability type, DCRSA does not have sufficient programs and services to meet the client's needs
- DCRSA staff do not meet clients in the communities where the clients live.
- Other (*Please describe*) _____

Q22. In your experience, are there reasons for finding it difficult to access DCRSA services by youth in transition different from the general population of people with disabilities?

- Yes
- No

Q23. In your experience, what would you say are the top three reasons that youth in transition find it difficult to access DCRSA services (*Please select a maximum of three reasons*)?

- Limited accessibility of DCRSA via public transportation

- Other challenges related to the physical location of DCRSA's office
- Inadequate disability-related accommodations
- Difficulties completing the application to obtain services
- Difficulties completing the Individualized Plan for Employment
- Inadequate assessment of the client's knowledge, skills and interests to properly link them to services to meet their job goal
- Slow service delivery and clients get frustrated and dropout
- Language or communication barriers
- Difficulties accessing the proper training or education programs
- Because of the client's disability type, DCRSA does not have sufficient programs and services to meet the client's needs
- DCRSA staff do not meet clients in the communities where the clients live.
- Other (Please describe) _____

Q24. In your experience, are the reasons for finding it difficult to access DCRSA services by consumers who are racial or ethnic minorities different from the general population of people with disabilities?

- Yes
- No

Q25. What would you say are the top three reasons that clients who are racial or ethnic minorities find it difficult to access DCRSA services (*Please select a maximum of three reasons*)?

- Limited accessibility of DCRSA via public transportation
- Other challenges related to the physical location of DCRSA's office
- Inadequate disability-related accommodations
- Difficulties completing the application to obtain services
- Difficulties completing the Individualized Plan for Employment
- Inadequate assessment of the client's knowledge, skills and interests to properly link them to services to meet their job goal
- Slow service delivery and clients get frustrated and dropout
- Language or communication barriers
- Difficulties accessing the proper training or education programs
- Because of the client's disability type, DCRSA does not have sufficient programs and services to meet the client's needs
- DCRSA staff do not meet clients in the communities where the clients live.
- Historical mistrust of government

Other *(Please describe)* _____

Q26. Is there anything else we should know about why persons with disabilities find it difficult to access DCRSA services? *(Please describe)* _____

Q27. What is the most important change DCRSA could make to support the efforts of persons with disabilities to achieve their employment goals? *(Please select all that you agree with and/or list your own suggestions).*

- Improve navigation of services, flexibility of intake process
- Training on cultural diversity/training in cultural and linguistic competence
- More family/individual engagement
- Coordinating and engaging with broader community resources
- Utilize client's existing support system to improve the probability of successful employment outcomes
- Other _____

Q28. What is the most important change that DCRSA's network of service providers could make to support the efforts of persons with disabilities to achieve their employment goals?

- Improve navigation of services, flexibility of intake process
- Training on cultural diversity/training in cultural and linguistic competence
- More family/individual engagement
- Coordinating and engaging with broader community resources
- Utilize client's existing support system to improve the probability of successful employment outcomes
- Other _____

Q29. What are the top three changes that would enable you to better assist your DCRSA clients? *(Please select a maximum of three changes)*

- Smaller caseload
- More streamlined processes
- Better data management tools
- Better assessment tools
- Additional training
- More administrative support
- More support from supervisors
- Improved business partners
- Decreased procurement time

- More effective community-based service providers
- Increased outreach to clients in their communities
- Other *(please describe)* _____

Part III: COLLABORATION WITH THE AMERICAN JOB CENTERS - This section asks about the American Job Centers (AJCs) in the District (formerly, DC Works!)

Q30. How frequently do you work with the AJCs in the District?

- Very frequently
- Somewhat frequently
- Neither frequently or infrequently
- Somewhat infrequently
- Not at all

Q31. In your opinion, how effective does the AJCs serve persons with disabilities?

- Very frequently
- Somewhat frequently
- Neither frequently or infrequently
- Somewhat infrequently
- Not at all

Q32. What can the AJCs do to improve services to persons with disabilities? *(Please select all that apply)?*

- Improve physical accessibility to the locations
- Improve AJC programs & services to persons with disabilities
- Train their staff on how to work with persons with disabilities
- Ensure the AJC workforce includes more persons with disabilities
- Partner more effectively with DCRSA
- Other *(please describe)* _____

Q33. Is there anything else we should know about AJCs in the District of Columbia?
(Please describe) _____

Your feedback is valuable to us, and we would like to thank you for taking the time to complete the survey! Please select submit your responses.

E. BUSINESS PARTNERS/EMPLOYERS

District of Columbia Rehabilitation Services Administration (DCRSA) 2020 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA)

Introduction: The District of Columbia Rehabilitation Services Administration (DCRSA) is working in collaboration with the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), State Independent Living Council (SILC) and staff of Promesa Consulting Group, Inc. to conduct the 2020 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA).

The objective of this needs assessment is to obtain feedback, input, and recommendations that identify employment-related needs of persons with disabilities who live in the District of Columbia. The results will inform the development of programs and services to help enhance the preparedness of persons with disabilities to obtain, retain, maintain, regain, or sustain competitive integrated employment that will enable them to lead meaningful and productive lives.

The following survey is prepared for **DCRSA Business Partners** to solicit input about the services and support employers need prior to and during the employment of persons with disabilities. It is divided into three parts:

1. **Employer Knowledge; Incentives and Services**
2. **Employer Needs and Interests; and,**
3. **Business Characteristics.**

We anticipate that it will take about 10-12 minutes of your time to complete the survey. Your participation is voluntary, and your responses will be anonymous. You will not be asked for your name anywhere in this survey. If you have any questions regarding this survey or would like to request the survey in an alternative format, please contact the needs assessment team at rsa.vrcsneedsassessment@dc.gov or contact the DCRSA contractor, Sharron Harris, Sr. V.P. Promesa Consulting Group, Inc., at sharris@promesacgi.com.

Part I: EMPLOYER KNOWLEDGE: – This section asks about your knowledge, use and satisfaction with DCRSA services to encourage employers to provide employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Q1. How would you rate your knowledge of DCRSA and the services offered to businesses?

- Very knowledgeable
- Somewhat knowledgeable
- Limited to No knowledge

Q2. If “Limited to No knowledge” is selected for Q1 above, would you be interested in learning more about DCRSA and the services offered to businesses?

- Yes
- No

Q3. Have you utilized any of the services offered to businesses by DCRSA?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

Q4. Which of the following services did DCRSA provide to your business? *(Please select all that apply)*

- Training in understanding the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act?
- Assistance identifying job accommodations for workers with disabilities.
- Recruiting job applicants who are people with disabilities?
- Helping workers with disabilities to retain employment?
- Obtaining training on the different types of disabilities?
- Obtaining training on sensitivity to workers with disabilities?
- Obtaining incentives for employing workers with disabilities?
- Obtaining information on training programs available for workers with disabilities?
- Recruiting applicants who meet the job qualifications?
- Recruiting applicants with good work habits?
- Recruiting applicants with good social/interpersonal skills?
- Assessing Applicants' skills?
- Discussing reasonable job accommodations with applicants?
- Identifying reasonable job accommodations for applicants?

Q5. Did DCRSA provide other services related to applicants or workers with disabilities that are not identified above, if so please describe them in the space provided below?

Q6. How satisfied were you with the services you received from DCRSA?

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat Satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

Part II: EMPLOYER NEEDS AND INTERESTS – This section asks about the needs and interests of businesses in order to encourage and support persons with disabilities in the workplace.

Q7. Does your business need help with:

	Yes	No
Understanding the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Identifying job accommodations for workers with disabilities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Recruiting job applicants who are persons with disabilities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Helping workers with disabilities to retain employment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Obtaining training on the different types of disabilities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Obtaining training on sensitivity to workers with disabilities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Obtaining incentives for employing workers with disabilities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Obtaining information on training programs available for workers with disabilities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q8. If you would like to comment further on any of your answers above, or if you have additional comments or needs regarding disability in the workplace, please describe them in the space below:

Q9. Does your business need help with:

	Yes	No
Recruiting applicants who meet the job qualifications?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Recruiting applicants with good work habits?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Recruiting applicants with good social/interpersonal skills?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Assessing Applicants' skills?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Discussing and identifying reasonable job accommodations with applicants?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q10. If you would like to comment further on any of your answers above, or if you have additional comments or needs regarding applicants with disabilities in the workplace, please describe them in the space below.

Q11.. With respect to employees with disabilities you currently have or have had in the past, what are or were the primary challenges experienced regarding job retention? (Please select a maximum of three items)

- Poor attendance
- Difficulty learning job skills
- Slow work speed
- Poor work stamina
- Poor social skills
- Physical health problems
- Mental health concerns
- Language barriers
- Identifying effective accommodations
- Other (please describe) _____

Q12. Which of the following DCRSA services offered to businesses would you be interested in learning more about? (Please select all that apply)

- Training in understanding the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act?
- Obtaining assistance identifying job accommodations for workers with disabilities?
- Recruiting job applicants who are people with disabilities?
- Helping workers with disabilities to retain employment?
- Obtaining training on the different types of disabilities?
- Obtaining training on sensitivity to workers with disabilities?
- Obtaining incentives for employing workers with disabilities?
- Obtaining information on training programs available for workers with disabilities?
- Recruiting applicants who meet the job qualifications?
- Recruiting applicants with good work habits?
- Recruiting applicants with good social/interpersonal skills?
- Assessing Applicants' skills?

- Discussing reasonable job accommodations with applicants?
- Identifying reasonable job accommodations for applicants?
- Other (please describe) _____

Q13. If your business has any needs related to applicants or workers with disabilities that are not identified in the list in Q12, please describe them in the space provided below:

Q14. Has your business created or been asked to create customized employment opportunities for a person with a disability?

- Yes
- No

Q15. Is your business interested in working with DCRSA or its partner organizations to create customized employment opportunities for people with disabilities?

- Yes
- No

Part III: BUSINESS CHARACTERISTICS - This section asks about the characteristics of and industry of the business you represent

Q16. Which of the following best describes your type of business? (Please select only one response)

- Service /Hospitality
- Retail
- Manufacturing
- Agriculture/Forestry/Fishing
- Construction
- Government
- Education
- Health care
- Banking/Finance
- Other (please describe) _____

Q17. How many people are employed at your business?

- 1 - 15
- 16 - 50

- 51 - 250
- 251 - 999
- 1,000 or more

Q18. In which Ward does your business operate (Please select all that apply)?

- Ward 1
- Ward 2
- Ward 3
- Ward 4
- Ward 5
- Ward 6
- Ward 7
- Ward 8
- Not Applicable

Your feedback is valuable to us, and we would like to thank you for taking the time to complete the survey! Please submit your responses!

F. FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOLS

F-1. Focus Group Protocol – Persons with Disabilities

Introduction/purpose statements

Knowledge of DC Rehabilitation Services Administration (DCRSA)

- Have you heard of RSA? If yes, share your view of what you think it is? What has your experience with DCRSA been like? What have been the positives and negatives?
- What services were helpful to you in preparing for, obtaining, and retaining employment?
- What services did you need that were not available or provided and why weren't you able to get these services?
- What can DCRSA do to help you get and keep good jobs?

Training

- What types of training would you like or need that would help prepare you obtain and keep employment?
- What types of training would you like to see offered by your Provider that would help you obtain and keep employment?

Employment goals

- What challenges do people with disabilities in DC face in getting or keeping a job?

Barriers to accessing services

- What barriers do people with disabilities encounter when trying to receive support from Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) in getting a job?

Community Rehabilitation Programs

- Are you familiar with programs that provide services in the community that you receive support from?
 - Have you received services from these type programs?
 - How effective was it? What can be done to improve the future service delivery?
- What programs or services should be created that focus on enhancing the quality of life for people with disabilities and their families, meeting basic needs and ensuring inclusion and participation? Of these services now in existence, which need to be improved?
- What services need to be offered in new locations to meet people's needs?

What would you like to be better?

- What needs to be done to improve the vocational rehabilitation services that people receive to improve their employment outcome?

F-2. Focus Group Protocol – DCRSA Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors

Introduction/purpose statements

Employment Goal

- Describe the discovery process used to develop client’s employment goals and the development of the individualized plan for employment.
- What is the average time from intake to initial service contact?
- What is the process used to decide if clients will receive employment services from RSA versus a Provider? Is this based on the employment goal or the IPE?
- How is the referral to the Provider accomplished? How much information is given to the client to help make an informed choice?

Barriers

- How would you describe DCRSA’s successes and challenges to fulfilling its mission?
- What barriers do people with disabilities encounter when trying to access rehabilitation services?
- How do internal policies and tools either facilitate or serve as a barrier to improving the access to employment for people with disabilities?
- Discuss how the existing administrative tools impact the ability of DCRSA to achieve its service goals and objectives.
- What is the average caseload? Is this an issue?

Communication

- How would you describe the Communication culture at DCRSA – Both internal and external?
- How well does information flow within the organization? Is there sharing about new efforts, initiatives?
- Are service facing staff members encouraged to share their observations and suggestions with middle and upper management to help in decision making and troubleshooting?
- How would you categorize external dialogues with providers and the business community? Are there coordinated efforts to keep partners abreast with DCRSA efforts, provide training, facilitate collaboration?

Training

- Describe the training environment at DCRSA. Is there an initial comprehensive staff orientation?
- Are all staff members encouraged to seek out and participate in continuing education?
- Are providers convened for training opportunities to better understand the internal processes and how their services complement DCRSA?

Representation and Identification of Populations Served

- What observations can you offer regarding DCRSA's efforts to employ individuals that are representative of the populations served (disability, language, experience). How much of a factor is this in effectively understanding the population and how does this translate into effective development and delivery of services?
- What groups of individuals would you consider unserved or underserved by DRSA? (Prompt for different disability groups, minority status, other characteristics)
- (For each identified group): What unmet needs do they have?
- What can be done to improve services to these groups?

Business Relationships

- What kind of feedback do clients offer staff regarding the quality and breadth of employment options recommended by DCRSA and or its providers?
- To what extent is staff establishing their own relationships with businesses and employers?
- How would you describe the culture at DCRSA regarding employer relationships and cultivation of opportunities with businesses to create future employment options?
- Is there a collective and collaborative effort among DCRSA employees to share this information amongst themselves?

Needs of Individuals with the Most Significant Disabilities

- What is the rehabilitation needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities and how well are these needs being met by DCRSA? By service providers?
- Please describe how effective the supported employment program is in DC?
- What populations are receiving supported employment services?
- Are there supported employment services that are not being met? If yes, what supported employment needs are not being met?
- What do you recommend to improve supported employment services in the District?

Needs of Youth in Transition

- What is the unmet rehabilitation needs of youth with disabilities in transition?
- How well is DCRSA working with Schools, Service providers to meet these needs?
- What other partners and relationships should be cultivated to enhance services to youth in transition?
- What would you recommend to improve transition services in DC?

Workforce Development System

- How effectively does the workforce development system in DC serve individuals with disabilities?
- How effectively is DCRSA working in partnership with the AJCs? Do you have any recommendations about how to improve this partnership if needed?
- What would you recommend to improve the workforce development system's service to people with disabilities in DC?

Need for Establishment, Development or Improvement of CRPs

- In your opinion, how effective is the system of service providers in DC in meeting the needs of individuals with disabilities?
- What community-based rehabilitation programs or services need to be created, expanded or improved?
- What services need to be offered in new locations in order to meet people's needs?
- What community-based rehabilitation services are most successful? How are they most successful or what makes them so?

Need for Improvement of Service or Outcomes

- What needs to be done to improve the vocational rehabilitation services that people receive?
- What can DCRSA do specifically to improve their ability to provide vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities in the District?

F-3. Focus Group Protocol – Community Partners & Disability Advocates

Introduction/purpose statements

Client Demographics

- Please describe your service population.
- Are there needs of minorities and underserved groups with disabilities?
 - What groups of persons would you consider unserved or underserved by DCRSA?
 - (For each identified group): What unmet needs do they have?
 - What can be done to improve services to these groups?

Employment Goals

- What are some of the primary employment goals of clients you serve?
- What barriers (if any) do people with disabilities in DC face in pursuing their employment goal?
- What have you found to be an effective, innovative method to overcome barriers?

Barriers to Accessing Vocational Rehabilitation Services

- What barriers have you observed exist for people with disabilities when they are trying to access rehabilitation services?
- What barriers do you encounter (if any) when attempting to enroll people into your employment/supported employment programs?

Needs of persons with the Most Significant Disabilities

- What do you believe are the most challenging diagnoses that stand in the way of job placement? Why?
- Are people with these needs receiving services from RSA and/or service providers?
- What supports could RSA provide to help you more effectively enable people with these conditions to find and retain work?
- Do you provide or are you familiar with customized employment?
- If you provide customized employment, are your staff adequately trained to negotiate with employers? Are you able to secure customized work for people in supports within 90 days?
- Please describe in general terms how effective the SE program is in DC. What populations are receiving SE services? What SE needs are not being met?
- What do you recommend to improve supported employment services in the District?

Transition-Youth Related Needs

- What is the rehabilitation needs of youth with disabilities in transition?
- What are the education and training needs that youth with disabilities have?
- Are you aware of any available services? (e.g., vocational rehabilitation, benefits denials)
- In your experience, how well are these needs being met by DCRSA? Schools? Service providers?

- What would you recommend to improve transition services in DC?

Needs of Persons served through the Workforce Development System

- Are you familiar with the workforce development system in DC, for example, the Workforce Improvement Committee, the roles of various governmental agencies, and legal protections for persons with disabilities who are seeking work?
- How effectively does the workforce development system in DC serve persons with disabilities?
- How effectively is DCRSA working in partnership with the American Job Centers? Do you have any recommendations about how to improve this partnership if needed?
- What are the education and training need that persons with disabilities have?
- Are you aware of any available services? (e.g. vocational rehabilitation, benefits denials)
- What would you recommend to improve the workforce development system's service to people with disabilities in DC?
- Are you aware of any initiatives that the DDS as well as the RSA have implemented to support people to acquire employment?

Need for Creation, Expansion or Improvement of CRPs

- In your opinion, how effective is the system of service providers in DC at meeting the needs of persons with disabilities?
- What community-based rehabilitation programs or services need to be created, expanded or improved?
- How is the public, or people seeking supports, made aware of the community providers and the services, as well as the quality of services, offered?
- Are people seeking supports able to choose the community provider they prefer?
- What services need to be offered in new locations in order to meet people's needs?
- What community-based rehabilitation services are most successful? How are they most successful or what makes them so?

F-4. Focus Group Protocol – DCRSA Business Staff/Employment Coordinator & Business Partners

Introduction/purpose statements

DCRSA Programs and Services

- *Business Representatives*: Share your awareness of the Programs and Services provided by DCRSA? How did you become aware? Has your organization employed staff through an RSA referral?
- *DCRSA Staff*: What are some of your efforts to raise awareness of DCRSA Programs & Services.....
- Does the Service Providers share their employer information with DCRSA?
- *Follow-on*: What efforts do you believe would improve the business community's awareness of DCRSA's Programs and Services?

Employment Goals

- *Business Representative*: Does your organization set employment goals for hiring people with disabilities? If yes, please share your effort? If no, why not?
- *DCRSA Staff*: What are some of your effort to encourage hiring of people with disabilities?
- *Follow-on*: What are the community engagement processes?
- What strategies would encourage the hiring of people with disabilities?

Barriers/Challenges to Employment of People with Disabilities

- *Business Representative*: Are there challenges within your organization that impact the ability to hire people with disabilities? If no, please share your organization's success. If yes, please share your challenges?
- *DCRSA Staff*: What barriers/challenges have, or do you encounter seeking placement of clients serviced through RSA's programs and services?
- *Follow-on*: What are some mutual benefits that both DCRSA & the Business community could do to assist each other to encourage hiring of people with disabilities?
.....*Accommodations for persons with disabilities, or a warm hand-off for job referrals?*

Training

- *Business Representatives*: Does your organization sponsor training(s) pertaining to supporting people with disabilities in the workplace? Understanding workplace accommodations; Encouraging an Inclusive work environment, etc.?
- *DCRSA Staff*: What services has/do DCRSA offer to assist employers related to training?
- *Follow-on*: What type of mutual collaborations could occur between DCRSA and businesses to assist each other in this effort? Be as specific as possible?
- Are you familiar with Customized Employment? Is this an area of training that would be helpful. Do you need training?

Incentives

- DCRSA Staff: Describe any incentives available to Employers that encourage hiring of people with disabilities?
- Business Representatives: Are you familiar with incentives to encourage hiring of people with disabilities? Has your organization benefitted from incentives or similar?
- Follow-on: What would be an incentive for businesses or organizations that would encourage the hiring of people with disabilities?

G. DCRSA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROCESS FLOW



PURPOSE

This diagram of RSA policy will provide a framework for advancing cases through the vocational rehabilitation (VR) process as described in the Case Management Policy Number 2018-RSA-POL005. (Abbreviated descriptions)

Status 00 – Referral: Status 00 represents a person who has been referred to DCRSA for VR services.

DCRSA staff shall place the person in Status 00 if sufficient demographic information is available. Sufficient demographic information includes name, address, and referral source (See also Referral, Application, and Intake Supplemental Protocols).

Status 02 - Applicant: Status 02 represents a person's entrance into the VR process. When a person signs a document to request VR services, DCRSA staff shall place the person into Status 02.

At that point, the person is considered an applicant.

Status 04 - Service Delayed/Order of Selection: The VR Specialist shall move an applicant's case into Status 04 when the Preliminary Assessment justifies writing a Certificate of Eligibility, but the person cannot receive services because the person does not meet the Order of Selection priorities (See DCRSA Order of Selection Policy). When a person does not meet the Order of Selection priorities, his/her name shall be placed on a waiting list for services. Placing the person's name on the waiting list indicates there will be a delay in initiating services which the person is otherwise eligible to receive.

Status 06 - Trial Work Experience: If a person is identified as being most significantly disabled and there is a question as to whether the person is capable of benefiting from VR services in terms of an employment outcome due to the of the severity of that person's disability, the VR Specialist shall consider the appropriateness of trial work experience to explore the person's abilities, capabilities, and capacity to perform in realistic work situations to determine whether or not there is clear and convincing evidence to support a determination of ineligibility.

Status 08 - Closed from Evaluation: Status 08 identifies all persons not accepted for VR services whether closed from referral status (00), applicant Status (02), or Trial Work Status (06).

Specific criteria

for closure in Status 08 can be found in the Case Closure Policy.

Status 10 - Certification of Eligibility (IPE Development): The VR Specialist shall move an applicant's case into Status 10 when the Preliminary Assessment justifies writing a Certificate of Eligibility and the person meets the Order of Selection priorities indicated in the DCRSA Order of Selection Policy.

Status 12 - Individualized Plan for Employment (Services not initiated): The VR Specialist shall move a person's case into Status 12 after the IPE has been completed. Once planned services begin, the case shall be moved from status 12 and placed in the status indicative of the primary service being rendered.

Status 18 - Initiation of Training Services: The VR Specialist shall move the person's case into this status when one of the following types of training is the major service required to prepare the person for employment: • Training in vocational, technical and business schools • College training • Other academic training • Training in a community rehabilitation program • Daily living skills training • On-the-job training • Work experience training • Work readiness training • Supported employment.

Status 20 - Ready for employment: The VR Specialist shall move the person's case into this status when placement services are the major services required by the person in order to achieve an employment outcome.

Status 22 - Employed: The VR Specialist shall move the person's case into this status when the person begins employment or, in the case of Supported Employment services, when job stabilization is achieved.

Status 24 - Service interrupted: The VR Specialist shall move the person's case into this status when VR services are interrupted while in Status 18, 20, or 22 due to individual circumstances that temporarily prevent the person from participating in VR services.

Status 26 - Closed Rehabilitated: The VR Specialist shall close a person's case in Status 26 when the person has achieved the employment outcome described in the person's IPE and has been maintained for a minimum of 90 days in Status 22.

Status 28 - Closed Not Rehabilitated After Initiation of Planned Services: The VR Specialist shall close a person's case in Status 28, from Statuses 18 through 24, when it has been determined the person does not meet the criteria for Status 26 closure. Specific criteria for closure in Status 28 can be found in the Case Closure Policy.

Status 30 - Closed Prior to Initiation of Planned Services: The VR Specialist shall use Status 31 when a person under the age of 25 is identified as requiring extended services in order to maintain employment and extended services are not available from another source. The purpose of this status is to support youth until they are able to maintain employment through the use of natural supports or another source of extended services, such as Ticket to Work. A case can remain in Status 31 for up to four (4) years or until the person turns 25, whichever comes first.

Status 31- Extended Services for Youth: Status 31 is used when a person under the age of 25 is identified as requiring extended services to maintain employment and extended services are not available from another source. The purpose of this status is to support youth until they can maintain employment using natural supports.

Status 32 - Post-employment services: The VR Specialist shall move a person's case into Status 32 when the need for postemployment services (PES) has been identified and services have been planned to maintain the person's employment. The purpose of PES is to avoid the necessity of reopening a case to provide a relatively minor service.

Status 34 - Closed from Post-Employment Services: The VR Specialist shall use Status 34, when closing a case successfully from Status 32. Specific criteria for closure in Status 34 can be found in the Case Closure Policy.

Status 35 - Closed After Receipt of Extended Services (Youth Only): The VR Specialist shall use Status 35, when closing a case from Status 31.

Status 36 - Closed from Post-Employment Services to be Re-Opened: The VR Specialist shall use Status 36 after determining the need to reopen the person's case in order to provide necessary VR services.

Status 38 - Closed from Service Delayed /Order of Selection List: The VR Specialist shall use Status 38 to identify persons in Status 04 whose names are being removed from the Service Delayed/Order of Selection list.

Status 39 - Closed from Post-Employment Services -Employment Not Maintained: The VR Specialist shall use Status 39 to close a person's case from Status 32 due to reasons other than those captured in other statuses.