



VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION NATIONAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT BRIEF

National Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center Survey
of State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies and Partners

Interwork
Institute 2025

Overview

This document summarizes responses to the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) National Needs Assessment (NNA) conducted in the Fall of 2025 by the National Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center (VRTAC). The needs assessment survey was broadly distributed through conference announcements, Listserv distribution, and word of mouth through deep and extensive professional networks. On November 3, 2025, an email was sent to Directors of State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies (SVRAs) introducing the survey and including an electronic survey link. In addition, the survey was announced in a general session at the Fall 2025 CSAVR conference in San Diego, CA and participants were encouraged to respond. The survey ran until November 30th.

Responses varied across the survey. Initial “demographic/sample” questions garnered 700+ responses. Once items to rate for need appeared, many received close to 600 responses, dropping off to around 530 by the very end of the survey. Open-ended responses numbered approximately 150 comments across the two questions.

In this brief, we provide a summary description of the data through tables and qualitative analysis of the open-ended responses. Data tables provide ratings of the level of need identified for key elements of VR financial and resource management, program and performance management, and employment practices and strategies. The comments were coded and summarized to identify system strengths, challenges, and opportunities within the public vocational rehabilitation (VR) system. Findings are analyzed using the framework articulated in America’s Talent Strategy and are intended to inform VRTAC’s technical assistance, policy alignment, and strategic supports.

Summary Tables: Ratings of Need

Respondents were asked to rate their area of need for training and technical assistance across multiple issues, falling into three categories aligned with the focus areas of VRTAC: (1) Quality (Effective and efficient) fiscal and resource management strategies and practices; (2) Quality program and performance management (Effective, improved, efficient) strategies and practices; and Quality (Effective) employment strategies and practices. Responses were classified into groups based on: (a) type of agency, (2) role in the organization, and (3) length of tenure at their organization. Below, tables provide ratings of need, broken out by agency type on a three-point scale of need (1=low need, 2=need, 3=highly need). In the VRTAC Semi-Annual Evaluation Report, additional breakouts and analyses will be provided.

Fiscal and Resource Management TA and Training Categories	Blind	Combined	General	Overall
Strengthening the agency's ability to engage in fiscal forecasting to monitor financial needs, budgeting, resource planning, and return on investment analysis.	1.86	2.12	2.03	2.06
Developing and implementing a consistent system of fiscal internal controls that are monitored, documented, and evaluated for effectiveness.	1.71	2.02	1.94	1.96
Ensuring fiscal processes are aligned between the VR agency, state finance departments, and third-party vendors or partners who manage VR funds.	1.60	1.94	1.82	1.86
Developing and maintaining a comprehensive rate-setting methodology for goods and services that is reviewed and updated regularly.	1.54	1.89	1.86	1.83
Establishing systems that accurately track obligations and expenditures within the correct period of performance.	1.47	1.90	1.79	1.81
Establishing and maintaining written policies, procedures, and internal controls for contracts, agreements, and MOUs that satisfy both state and federal fiscal requirements.	1.59	1.85	1.83	1.81
Strengthening the agency's capacity to track, manage, and document the required non-federal share including identifying, developing, and maintaining new or diversified sources of match to meet annual requirements.	1.46	1.88	1.76	1.80
Correctly allocating direct and indirect costs across programs and maintaining current, approved cost allocation and indirect cost rate plans.	1.40	1.84	1.68	1.74
Developing and implementing a plan for the expenditure of the 15% reserve and a determination of whether the agency will engage in the authorized Pre-ETS activities.	1.43	1.84	1.55	1.71
Accurately accounting for, managing, and reporting program income to ensure compliance with federal requirements.	1.34	1.78	1.66	1.69
Identifying the need for OOS and the requirements for implementation.	1.48	1.64	1.41	1.56

Program and Performance and Human Resource Management TA and Training Categories	Blind	Combined	General	Overall
Developing standards that result in a workforce consisting of qualified personnel, including professionals and paraprofessionals. (This includes recruitment and retention, succession planning, and coordinated training to ensure both pro	2.18	2.28	2.28	2.26
Strategies and systems for formally monitoring and evaluating service provider performance.	1.98	2.16	2.32	2.18
Developing and implementing strategies for Director orientation, managing teams and change, and leadership development.	1.95	2.13	2.05	2.09
Understanding the reasons for unsuccessful closures and identifying and implementing strategies and practices to reduce the rate of individuals exiting the programs unsuccessfully.	2.08	2.05	2.06	2.06
Evaluating the effectiveness and impact of Pre-ETS.	2.02	2.01	2.20	2.06
Identifying, developing, and nurturing relationships with essential community partners (e.g., Workforce, Education, CRPs, and other Federal, State, and local partners).	1.80	2.02	1.97	1.98
Implementing a process for using data to inform decisions.	1.93	1.94	2.05	1.97
Producing effective, efficient, and accessible data reports and/or analytics.	1.83	1.94	2.11	1.97
Developing and implementing policies and/or procedures with internal controls to support quality assurance.	1.83	1.91	2.10	1.95
Providing a continuum of services for students to move through Pre-ETS, VR transition, and VR employment related services.	1.80	1.94	1.83	1.89
Understanding factors affecting an agency's performance on the WIOA Common Performance Measures.	1.80	1.90	1.91	1.89
Strategies and practices that contribute to determining eligibility and priority of service quickly, efficiently, and accurately.	1.56	1.95	1.83	1.87
Completing a thorough comprehensive assessment.	1.67	1.86	1.80	1.82
Developing and implementing strategies for accurate and valid tracking and reporting of RSA-911 data elements.	1.69	1.77	1.87	1.79
Developing a timely and meaningful IPE in partnership with the consumer, based on the consumer's primary employment factors (strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice).	1.61	1.79	1.81	1.77

Employment Practices & Strategies TA and Training Categories	Blind	Combined	General	Overall
Implementing Career Pathways, Internships, Apprenticeships, and Pre-Apprenticeships, OJTs, Customized Training, Credential Programs.	2.18	2.23	2.20	2.21
Utilizing Labor Market Information and Analysis, conducting business engagement, and providing employer supports.	1.95	2.03	1.94	2.00
Developing and implementing programs of Supported Employment, Customized Employment, IPS, or Progressive Employment.	1.88	2.00	1.89	1.95
Supporting Self-Employment, Entrepreneurship, and/or Blind Enterprise Programs.	1.88	1.86	1.83	1.86
The utilization of artificial intelligence and other advanced technology to support the efficient operation of the VR program.	1.91	1.83	1.87	1.85
Providing financial literacy and empowerment services, benefits counseling, and helping consumers develop ABLÉ accounts.	1.88	1.89	1.72	1.84
Implementing Integrated Resource Teams (IRTs), Rapid Engagement, and/or Motivational Interviewing strategies.	1.68	1.84	1.67	1.77




Open-Ended Feedback: VR is Aligned with America's Talent Strategy

Survey respondents—representing state VR agencies, community rehabilitation providers, administrators, counselors, and partners—expressed strong alignment with the pillars of America's Talent Strategy, particularly the importance of preparing a skilled workforce, expanding labor force participation, and aligning systems to support quality employment outcomes. The most frequently cited issues relate to workforce preparation and retention, system modernization, and the alignment of accountability measures with service delivery and labor market outcomes.

Findings





Strengthening Workforce Preparation and Training Pathways

Respondents consistently emphasized the need to strengthen education and training pathways for individuals working in the VR program. Feedback highlighted the importance of:

-  Competency-based, role-specific training aligned with counseling, vocational guidance, job development, and transition services
-  Greater consistency in onboarding and professional development across states and roles
-  Continued support for credentialed preparation and certification pathways to ensure workforce quality





Attracting, Developing, and Retaining a Skilled Workforce

Consistent with an emphasis on workforce sustainability, respondents identified recruitment and retention challenges as a significant constraint on system performance. Common themes included:

-  Workforce shortages and high turnover, particularly among qualified counseling staff
-  Limited access to leadership development and supervisory training
-  A need for clearer career pathways and succession planning
-  Respondents emphasized that workforce stability and professional growth are essential to maintaining service capacity and improving employment outcomes.





Expanding Access to Skill Development and Workforce Participation

Respondents highlighted the importance of ensuring that American jobseekers with disabilities have access to skill development opportunities that lead to meaningful workforce participation. Feedback emphasized:

-  Earlier and more effective transition services
-  Higher expectations for employment outcomes
-  Greater consistency in service delivery across regions and populations
-  Respondents stressed that aligning services with individual strengths and labor market opportunities is central to supporting sustained employment and economic participation.

Engaging Employers and Aligning Services with Labor Market Demand




Respondents underscored the need for stronger employer engagement and improved alignment with labor market demand. Key themes included:


-  Increased emphasis on job development, customized employment, and employer education
-  The importance of building partnerships with businesses to support recruitment, retention, and advancement
-  Greater coordination across workforce systems to support employer-facing strategies
-  Respondents noted that effective employer engagement requires dedicated capacity, specialized skills, and alignment across state and local partners.

Modernizing Systems, Data, and Infrastructure

A significant portion of responses focused on the need to modernize administrative and data systems to support efficient service delivery and informed decision-making.

Respondents cited:





-  Outdated or duplicative data systems that limit time available for direct services
-  Inconsistent reporting requirements and limited interoperability
-  Interest in emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, particularly for reducing administrative burden

-  Respondents emphasized that modernization efforts should support program accountability while remaining practical, efficient, and aligned with service delivery realities.

Cross-Cutting Observations and Conclusions

Across all areas, respondents expressed strong commitment to the mission of vocational rehabilitation and the goals of America’s Talent Strategy. The most consistent message was the need for greater alignment between workforce expectations, system design, and accountability measures, so that staff capacity, training, and infrastructure reinforce—rather than impede—employment outcomes.

Findings suggest several opportunities for federal partners to support state VR systems in advancing America’s Talent Strategy:

-  Aligning technical assistance with workforce preparation, leadership development, and employer engagement
-  Supporting system modernization efforts that reduce administrative burden and improve data use
-  Encouraging consistency and clarity in guidance related to roles, competencies, and accountability
-  Facilitating peer learning and dissemination of effective practices across states which include actionable tools and examples

The survey findings indicate that vocational rehabilitation is well positioned to contribute to expanding labor force participation and connecting American jobseekers with disabilities to quality employment. Realizing this potential will require coordinated efforts to strengthen workforce capacity, modernize systems, and align policy and practice across federal, state, and local partners.