



VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION NATIONAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT FULL REPORT

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

Interwork
Institute 2025

Executive Summary

The National Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center (VRTAC) conducted a national needs assessment to better understand the current technical assistance (TA), training, and capacity-building needs of State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies and related stakeholders. The assessment examined needs across three major domains aligned with the Center's focus areas: (1) Fiscal and Resource Management; (2) Program and Performance Management and Human Resources; and (3) Employment Practices and Strategies. Additional information was gathered regarding preferred methods of receiving information and training, as well as through open-ended feedback responses. Findings reflect input from respondents representing primarily Blind, Combined, and General state VR agencies, as well as individuals serving in a range of organizational roles and tenure levels.

Across all three domains, respondents consistently reported moderate-to-high levels of need for training and technical assistance, suggesting broad demand for continued national support and systems development. The highest-rated needs were generally associated with organizational infrastructure, workforce sustainability, leadership capacity, accountability systems, and employment-focused service delivery strategies rather than narrow compliance-oriented activities alone.

Within the Fiscal and Resource Management domain, the strongest needs centered on fiscal forecasting, budgeting, resource planning, fiscal internal controls, and coordination of fiscal processes across agencies and partners. Respondents also identified substantial need related to rate-setting methodologies, fiscal oversight systems, and tracking obligations and expenditures. These findings suggest that agencies are seeking support not only in regulatory compliance, but also in strategic fiscal management and operational sustainability. Variation across agency type and organizational role further indicated that fiscal management challenges may differ depending on agency structure and staff responsibilities.

Within the Program and Performance Management and Human Resources domain, workforce development emerged as the most significant area of need. Respondents consistently prioritized issues related to recruitment and retention, succession planning, leadership development, provider performance monitoring, quality assurance, and evaluation of program effectiveness. Findings suggest substantial concern regarding workforce sustainability and organizational capacity across the VR system. Respondents also emphasized the importance of strengthening data-informed decision-making and improving alignment between program operations, accountability measures, and employment outcomes.

Within the Employment Practices and Strategies domain, respondents strongly prioritized Career Pathways, work-based learning opportunities, employer engagement, and evidence-based employment approaches such as Supported Employment and Customized Employment. Business Relations staff consistently reported among the highest levels of need across employment strategy categories, highlighting the growing importance of employer-facing roles within VR systems. Findings also reflected increasing interest in emerging technologies and artificial intelligence, although respondents expressed both enthusiasm and caution regarding their implementation.

Several important cross-cutting themes emerged across all domains. First, workforce sustainability and professional development represented a dominant concern throughout the survey findings. Respondents repeatedly emphasized the importance of recruitment, retention, onboarding, leadership development, and succession planning. Second, respondents consistently identified the need for improved systems integration, data use, and organizational modernization. Agencies expressed interest in strengthening operational infrastructure while reducing administrative burden and improving efficiency. Third, respondents emphasized the importance of aligning VR services more closely with labor market demand, employer engagement strategies, and pathways to competitive integrated employment.

Open-ended responses reinforced and expanded upon these findings. Approximately 150 substantive comments highlighted needs related to program services and management, employer engagement, fiscal management, workforce preparation, collaboration and partnerships, and technology modernization. Training was the most frequently requested form of assistance when respondents explicitly identified a preferred support strategy. Respondents also emphasized the need for peer learning opportunities, practical implementation tools, and coordinated partnerships across state and local systems.

Findings additionally demonstrated strong alignment between identified VR system needs and the broader goals of America's Talent Strategy. Respondents emphasized the importance of strengthening workforce preparation pathways, improving labor force participation outcomes for individuals with disabilities, modernizing systems and infrastructure, and expanding employer engagement capacity.

Finally, respondents identified clear preferences regarding methods of receiving information and technical assistance. Virtual and hybrid conferences were the most preferred dissemination method, followed by newsletters and podcasts. These findings support the continued use of multiple dissemination channels to ensure broad accessibility and engagement across stakeholder groups.

Overall, the findings indicate that State VR agencies and partners are seeking support that is strategic, systems-oriented, and closely connected to workforce outcomes. Respondents consistently emphasized the need to strengthen organizational capacity, modernize systems, support workforce sustainability, and expand effective employment practices. These findings provide important guidance for shaping future VRTAC training, technical assistance, dissemination, and partnership activities.

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Overview



Scope

This report 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 NNA was comprised of five distinct sections covering:

1. Respondent Characteristics
2. Fiscal and Resource Management Needs
3. Program and Performance Management Needs
4. Employment Practices and Strategies Needs
5. Informational Preferences

The abbreviated section on respondent characteristics included type or nature of agency or organization (e.g., State VR Agency, Workforce Agency, etc.), specific agency if a State VR Agency (list of 78 agencies pre-populated for respondents), organizational role, and organizational tenure). These questions allow us to understand reach across stakeholder groups, as well as separate out needs and priorities of different groups in response to the rest of the survey items identifying need.

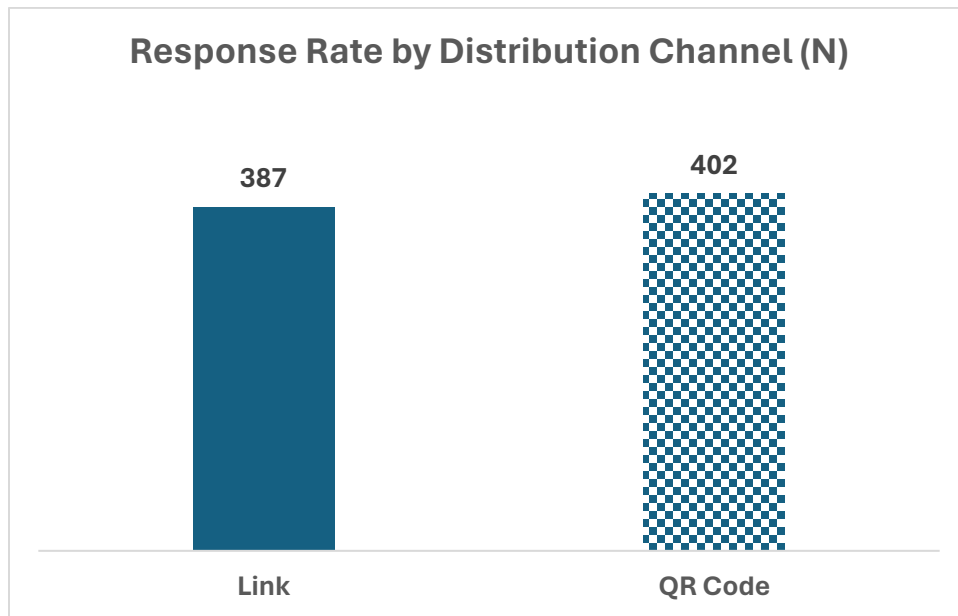
The content for questions on need were drawn from the extensively reviewed and piloted *VR Wellness Check* tool developed by the VR Technical Assistance Center for Quality Management (VRTAC-QM) for the first two need areas of Fiscal and Resource Management and Program and Performance Management, both of which include items related to Pre-Employment Transition Services. The *VR Wellness Check* (VRWC) architecture also forms the backbone of content organization on VRTAC's website, as well as the initial language and options for intensive technical assistance agreements (ITAAAs). Thus, it creates an alignment and linear connection between the identification of an organization's need and the identification and provision of resources and support to an agency. This same alignment exists with the way in which the subject matter of TA and training is identified in VRTAC's TA Tracker systems. Thus, across the continuum of activities and services for VRTAC, a connection and direct through-line can be made in the characterization of: (1) the assessment of need, (2) the nature of services provided, and (3) the outputs created and outcomes achieved. The content for questions on need for the Employment Practices and Strategies were developed using the extensive list of areas of TA and Training identified in the Notice Inviting Applications from RSA. The content was not available from the VRWC as those items are under development in a de novo effort as part of this current grant cycle.

A single-item question identifying preference for information dissemination support awareness of which universal TA strategies, virtual, and in-person outreach and information sharing strategies would reach our stakeholders via channels they use. Finally, two open-ended questions at the end of the survey provided opportunities for respondents to identify needs that were not included in the existing survey items and to share any other comments or feedback.



Recruitment

The needs assessment survey was broadly dispersed 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. Despite the increasing ubiquity of smartphone usage, both the weblink and the QR code garnered close to 400 accesses, demonstrating the ongoing utility and importance of a multi-method approach to distribution and dissemination.



Sample Description



Response Rate and VR Representation

Response rates 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 140 substantive comments across the two questions.

In the modern “Era of National Technical Assistance Centers” that began in 2015 (after passage of WIOA and the shift from regional training and TA Centers such as RRCEPs and TACEs), this needs assessment garnered a larger response from a broader swathe of the stakeholder population than before.

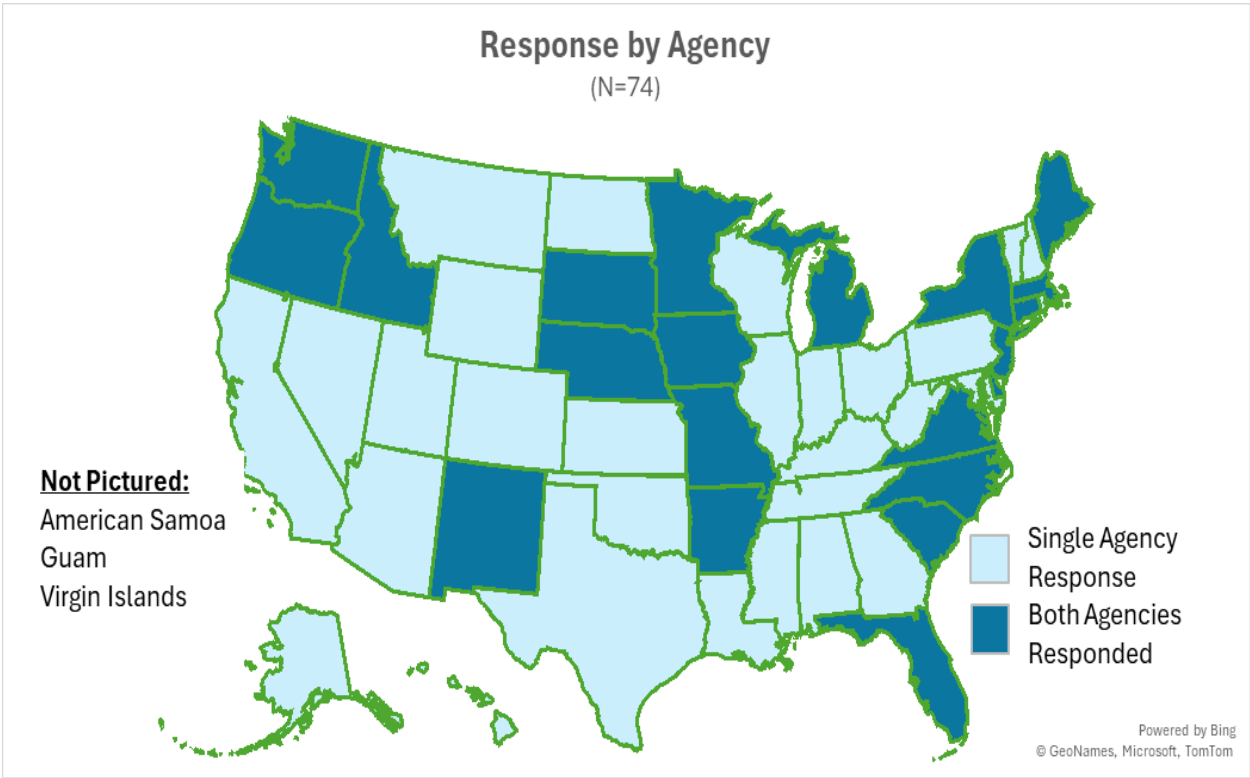
In the prior grant cycle, responses to the NNA resulted in 80 responses across 44 states and territories. There were 57 individual agencies that responded. (*One FL response did not identify agency type.) There were forty-three responses from combined agencies, 24 responses from general agencies, and 12 responses from blind agencies (and one unidentified). In the grant cycle before that, the first post-WIOA, a total of 53 SVRAs provided largely complete responses, representing a 65% response rate across the population of 80 targeted SVRAs, 19 of which were combined agencies (35%), 18 of which were general agencies (33%), and 17 of which were agencies for the blind (32%). A few of the early questions identifying needs for services across the WINTAC’s subject matter areas received a higher 75% response rate (63). Respondents to the survey had been with their agency for an average (mean) of 16.6 years, but with a standard deviation of 10.7 years and a range from 6 months to 37 years, demonstrating a good amount of variability. Fifteen respondents served in a Director position (29%), 31 of them served in a Deputy Director position (60%), and 6 in an “other” position (12%). Thus, 89% of the respondents reflected the highest levels of seniority, which reflected leaders’ perspectives of areas of need and priority for the agency but may have left out the variation in priorities other staff may have identified.

Conversely, in this grant cycle, based on respondents who chose to identify for which State VR Agency they worked, there are 74 of 78 agencies represented, for an overall response rate of 95% in terms of VR. Looking at the question of type of agency, there were 62 responses where the agency was not identified, thus it is possible that the missing four agencies were represented, but simply not identified.

In addition to State VR Agencies, respondents from other agencies and organizations made up approximately 180 responses representing Independent Living Programs, Client Assistance Programs, Consulting Organizations, Rehabilitation Providers and other Non-Profits, Veteran’s Programs, Other Government Agencies, Tribal VR Programs, Departments of Education, Insurance Programs, State Rehabilitation Councils, Parents and Parent Organizations, and Individuals with Disabilities.

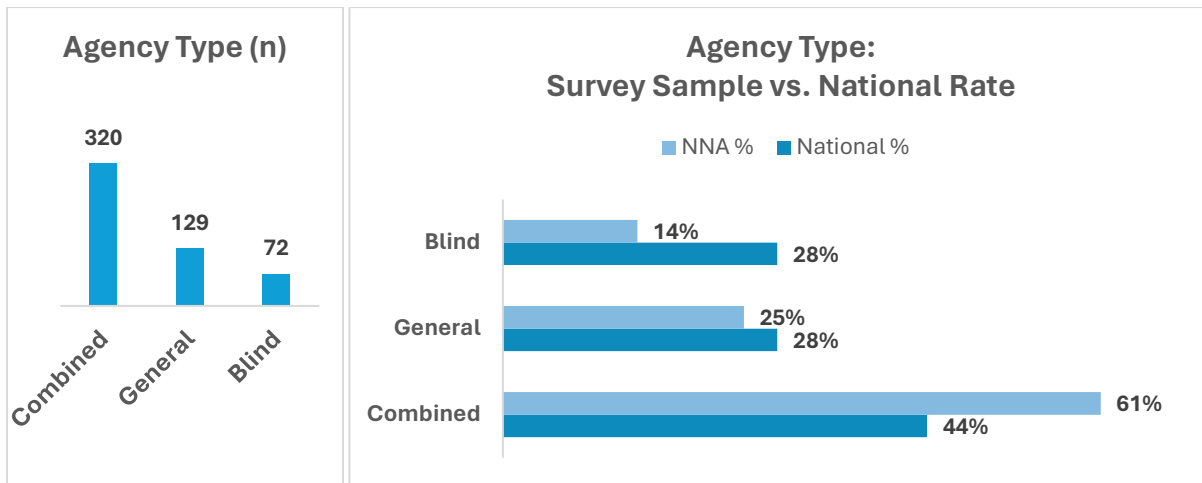


Geographically, this extensive response rate and reach is evident in the map below, which shows either one or both agencies responding from nearly every state and territory.



Agencies can be structured as a single “Combined” agency or as two agencies serving “General” populations of individuals with disabilities separately from those serving individuals with blindness or low vision (“Blind” agencies). Nationally, 3/5 of the agencies are “Combined” and 2/5 of the agencies are structured as “General/Blind.” In terms of raw sample size, the NNA respondents who identified which agency they worked for resulted in 320 responses from Combined agencies, 129 from General agencies, and 72 from Blind agencies. This is shown in the column chart immediately below. Next to it, a bar chart presents that breakdown of responses in terms of percent of the overall sample (who identified agency)

and how that compares to the overall percent of that agency type nationally. There we see that Blind agencies were less represented than they are nationally by half, General agencies by a few percent, and Combined agencies over-represented by 17%.



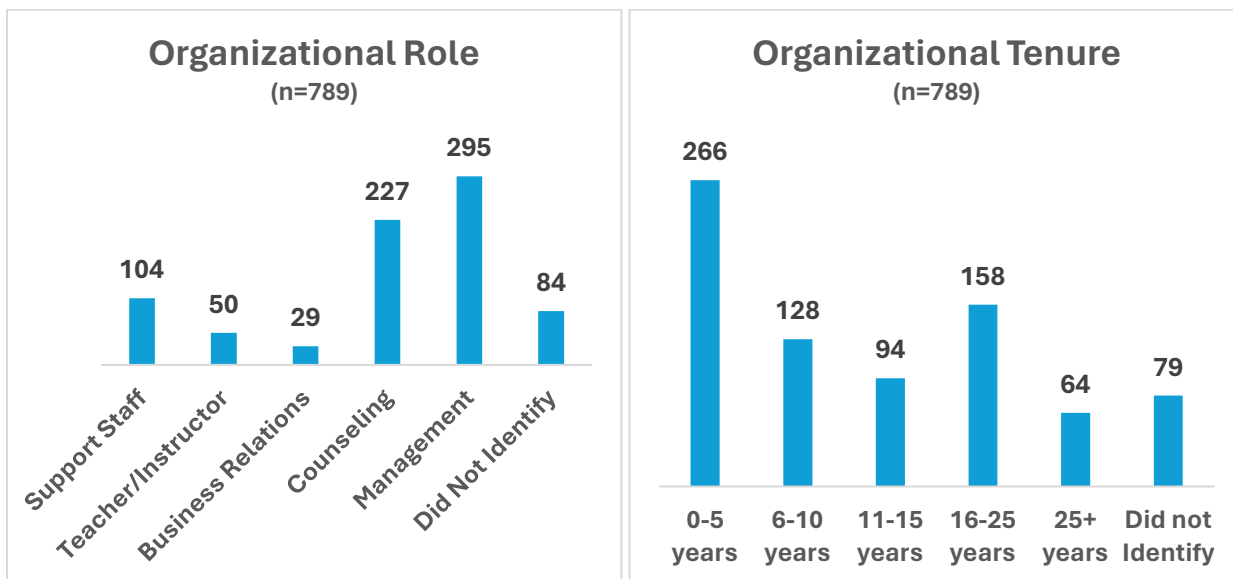
In conclusion, the response rate to the survey was tremendous, with nearly 550 responses at the low end and close to 800 survey accesses and initial engagement. Assuming none of the 62 respondents who did not identify their agency were not from the missing agencies, the NNA garnered a 95% response rate across all State VR Agencies. Additionally, several partner agencies, community organizations, and stakeholder populations were also represented. With one of the broadest scopes of focus areas and targeted stakeholders in the National Technical Assistance era, the VRTAC's understanding of needs and priorities can be more than well-informed by this NNA given the reach it achieved.



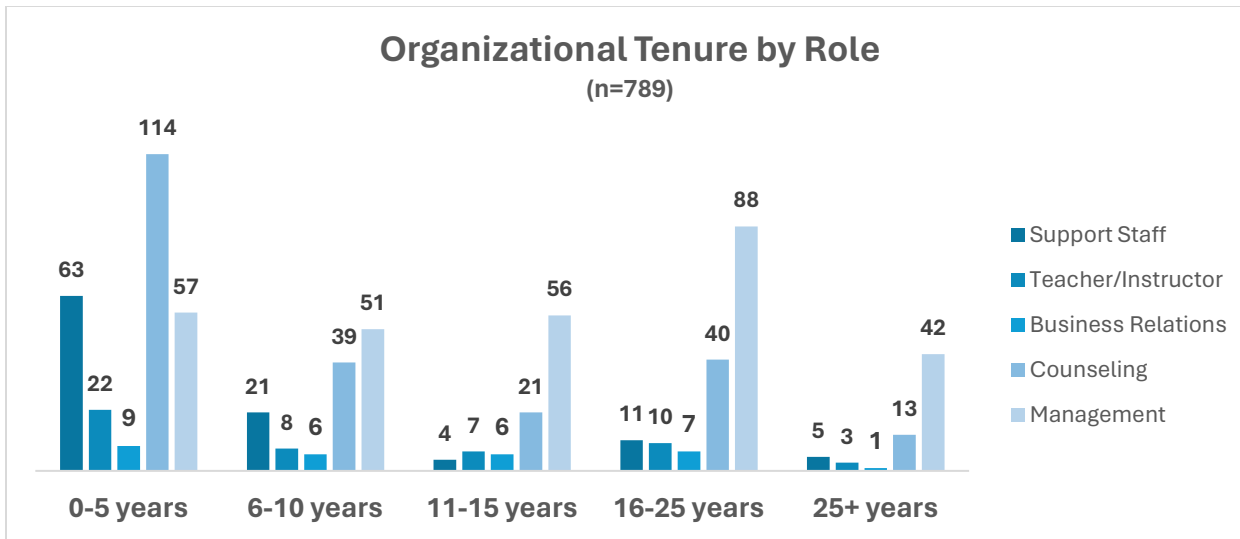
Respondent Characteristics

In addition to identifying agency characteristics (type of agency or organization, specific State VR agency and “type” of State VR agency in structural terms), the NNA also solicited information about respondents’ characteristics via two categorical questions: (1) the respondents’ role in their organization and (2) the respondents’ tenure with their organization. Prior needs assessments and experience from prior cycles of providing technical assistance (TA) have demonstrated that these are key characteristics that relate to need for training and TA.

The three column charts below break down the characteristics for the approximately 700 respondents who provided this information. The majority were management (295) followed closely by counselors (227) – two key groups that have been engaged with National TACs consistently. In terms of tenure, the majority by far (a little over a third) indicated they had been with their organization for 0-5 years. This reflects the high degree of need to address new staff onboarding and capacity-building that has been reflected by those operating in VR agencies.



Having both characteristics identified separately enables a crosswalk between them. This analysis demonstrates that about half of the respondents with less than five years tenure are in Counseling positions and a little over a fifth are in management positions (a little over a fifth are in support positions). A little over 100 respondents identifying as management were in the lowest tenure categories of 0-5 years and 6-10 years, reflecting a fair amount of “newness” at senior levels in organizations. Thus, training and capacity-building resources cannot simply be tailored for recent graduates who may be new to the workforce, but rather they must also address individuals with seniority whose experience has been earned in other systems and positions.



In sum, examining the data on respondent characteristics evinces that a one-size-fits-all approach to training and TA may not meet the needs of significant sub-groups of staff at State VR Agencies. For example, “new staff” resources will need to consider the individuals “in the room” who have workforce experience but may be new to VR or to their specific agency. Across five categories of role and tenure there are varying patterns, suggesting the value of examining both characteristics when considering the varying types of needs and priorities for State VR Agency personnel.

The next section provides the ratings across the three broad focus areas for VRTAC (Fiscal and Resource Management, Program and Performance Management, and Employment Practices and Strategies). These tables of ratings of need are broken up according to (a) agency type, (b) organizational role of respondent, and (c) organizational tenure of respondent across the subject matter areas in to allow for the differentiation of priorities by different subgroups of State VR Agency personnel that can result in tailored technical assistance, training, and resource offerings.

With one of the broadest scopes of focus areas and targeted stakeholders in the National Technical Assistance era, the VRTAC’s understanding of needs and priorities can be more than well-informed by this NNA given the reach it achieved.

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 on a three-point scale of need (1=a little needed, 2=needed, 3=highly needed).



Fiscal and Resource Management Needs

Across all Fiscal and Resource Management training and technical assistance (TA) categories, respondents reported levels of need above the midpoint of the three-point scale, indicating moderate to substantial perceived need across all fiscal domains assessed. Overall ratings ranged from 1.56 to 2.06, suggesting that respondents viewed all fiscal management topics as areas warranting some level of continued support and capacity building.

The highest-rated need concerned strengthening agencies' ability to engage in fiscal forecasting related to budgeting, resource planning, monitoring financial needs, and return-on-investment analysis (M = 2.06). Closely following this were needs related to developing and implementing consistent systems of fiscal internal controls that are monitored and evaluated for effectiveness (M = 1.96), and ensuring alignment of fiscal processes across VR agencies, state finance departments, and third-party vendors or partners involved in managing VR funds (M = 1.86). Collectively, these findings suggest that respondents place highest priority on foundational fiscal infrastructure, including forecasting, accountability, and cross-system coordination.

Additional areas of relatively elevated need included development of comprehensive rate-setting methodologies (M = 1.83), systems for accurately tracking obligations and expenditures within the appropriate period of performance (M = 1.81), and policies and procedures governing contracts, agreements, and memoranda of understanding that satisfy state and federal fiscal requirements (M = 1.81). These findings suggest a broader emphasis on strengthening operational consistency, compliance, and fiscal oversight processes.

The lowest-rated item overall pertained to identifying the need for and implementation requirements associated with Order of Selection (OOS) (M = 1.56). While this item remained above the lower end of the scale, comparatively lower ratings may reflect that many agencies already possess established procedures or prior experience related to OOS implementation or they are underestimating their need.

Fiscal and Resource Management Needs by Agency Type

Variation by agency type revealed several notable patterns. Respondents from Blind agencies consistently reported lower levels of need across many fiscal management topics compared to respondents from Combined and General agencies. In fact, several items rated above the midpoint by Combined and General agencies fell below the midpoint for Blind agencies.

Despite these differences, Blind agencies shared similar priorities with other agency types in several key areas. Fiscal forecasting, fiscal internal controls, and alignment of fiscal processes across agencies and partners emerged as among the highest-rated needs across all agency categories. Blind agencies also aligned with other agency types in identifying rate-setting methodologies as a relatively important area for support.

However, after these shared priorities, the pattern diverged. Whereas Combined and General agencies next emphasized systems for tracking obligations and expenditures within the appropriate period of performance, Blind agencies assigned comparatively lower need to this area and instead placed greater emphasis on policies, procedures, and internal controls governing contracts, agreements, and memoranda of understanding. This distinction may suggest differing operational structures, administrative arrangements, or fiscal management challenges across agency types.

More broadly, the comparatively lower ratings reported by Blind agencies across many fiscal topics may indicate either greater existing capacity in these areas or differing perceptions regarding the immediacy of fiscal management challenges. In contrast, Combined agencies generally reported the highest levels of need across most fiscal domains, suggesting broader demand for TA and training related to fiscal infrastructure and compliance systems.

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

Fiscal and Resource Management Needs by Organizational Role

Patterns across organizational roles were somewhat more variable than those observed by agency type, suggesting that fiscal management priorities may differ according to staff responsibilities and functional perspectives within agencies.

Although fiscal forecasting and internal controls remained among the highest-rated needs across most role categories, some meaningful distinctions emerged. For example, Business Relations staff rated development of comprehensive rate-setting methodologies more highly than alignment of fiscal systems across DSAs, DSUs, and third-party entities, differing somewhat from the overall ranking pattern. This finding may reflect the practical relevance of rate-setting issues to staff engaged with providers, employers, and contracted services.

Support Staff also differed from several other role groups by assigning relatively higher ratings to development and implementation of plans for expenditure of the 15% reserve for Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). This item ranked among the top five needs for Support Staff, whereas it was less highly prioritized among several other organizational roles. Teacher/Instructor staff generally reported lower levels of need across most fiscal management categories, which may reflect less direct involvement in fiscal administration and compliance processes.

Overall, these findings suggest that TA and training needs related to fiscal management are not experienced uniformly across organizational roles. Rather, areas of emphasis appear connected to staff members' functional responsibilities and degree of engagement with fiscal operations.

Fiscal and Resource Management Needs by Organizational Tenure

Analysis by organizational tenure revealed several noteworthy trends. Respondents with 0–5 years of tenure frequently reported among the highest levels of need across fiscal management topics, particularly in areas related to fiscal forecasting, tracking obligations and expenditures, indirect cost allocation, and Pre-ETS reserve expenditure planning. Notably, this group provided the highest rating across all tenure categories for the Pre-ETS reserve expenditure item.

In contrast, respondents with 11–15 years of tenure often reported comparatively lower levels of need across several categories, including program income reporting, indirect cost allocation, and OOS implementation. Respondents with 16–25 years of tenure reported some of the highest ratings overall for fiscal forecasting and internal controls.

Taken together, these patterns may suggest that newer staff experience greater need for foundational fiscal management knowledge and systems navigation, while mid- and late-career staff may identify more specialized or strategic fiscal challenges. The elevated ratings among respondents with 16–25 years of tenure for forecasting and internal controls may also indicate that staff with substantial organizational experience are particularly attuned to systemic fiscal management and accountability concerns.

Fiscal and Resource Management TA and Training Categories	Business Relations	Counseling	Management	Support Staff	Teacher / Instructor	Overall
Strengthening the agency's ability to engage in fiscal forecasting to monitor financial needs, budgeting, resource planning, and return on investment analysis.	1.95	2.09	2.13	2.08	1.89	2.09
Developing and implementing a consistent system of fiscal internal controls that are monitored, documented, and evaluated for effectiveness.	1.90	2.00	2.03	1.94	1.69	1.98
Ensuring fiscal processes are aligned between the VR agency, state finance departments, and third-party vendors or partners who manage VR funds.	2.00	1.97	1.88	1.97	1.89	1.93
Developing and maintaining a comprehensive rate-setting methodology for goods and services that is reviewed and updated regularly.	2.10	1.81	1.99	1.85	1.66	1.89
Establishing systems that accurately track obligations and expenditures within the correct period of performance.	1.90	1.87	1.83	1.92	1.69	1.85
Establishing and maintaining written policies, procedures, and internal controls for contracts, agreements, and MOUs that satisfy both state and federal fiscal requirements.	1.85	1.88	1.86	1.89	1.69	1.86
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.	1.75	1.89	1.85	1.81	1.61	1.84
Correctly allocating direct and indirect costs across programs and maintaining current, approved cost allocation and indirect cost rate plans.	1.74	1.84	1.75	1.86	1.57	1.78
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.	1.63	1.85	1.67	1.90	1.66	1.76
Accurately accounting for, managing, and reporting program income to ensure compliance with federal requirements.	1.79	1.76	1.75	1.85	1.72	1.77
Identifying the need for OOS and the requirements for implementation.	1.67	1.68	1.57	1.71	1.54	1.63

Fiscal and Resource Management TA and Training Categories	0-5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	16-25 years	25+ years	Grand Total
Strengthening the agency's ability to engage in fiscal forecasting to monitor financial needs, budgeting, resource planning, and return on investment analysis.	2.11	2.04	1.95	2.20	2.04	2.09
Developing and implementing a consistent system of fiscal internal controls that are monitored, documented, and evaluated for effectiveness.	1.98	1.99	1.89	2.06	1.93	1.98
Ensuring fiscal processes are aligned between the VR agency, state finance departments, and third-party vendors or partners who manage VR funds.	1.95	2.07	1.86	1.88	1.83	1.93
Developing and maintaining a comprehensive rate-setting methodology for goods and services that is reviewed and updated regularly.	1.83	1.99	2.00	1.92	1.81	1.90
Establishing systems that accurately track obligations and expenditures within the correct period of performance.	1.91	1.82	1.64	1.92	1.80	1.85
Establishing and maintaining written policies, procedures, and internal controls for contracts, agreements, and MOUs that satisfy both state and federal fiscal requirements.	1.83	1.93	1.86	1.92	1.69	1.86
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.	1.88	1.77	1.77	1.90	1.76	1.84
Correctly allocating direct and indirect costs across programs and maintaining current, approved cost allocation and indirect cost rate plans.	1.88	1.71	1.58	1.86	1.65	1.78
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.	1.92	1.76	1.51	1.71	1.65	1.76
Accurately accounting for, managing, and reporting program income to ensure compliance with federal requirements.	1.84	1.76	1.54	1.85	1.65	1.77
Identifying the need for OOS and the requirements for implementation.	1.73	1.67	1.48	1.62	1.40	1.63

Fiscal and Resource Management Needs: Cross-Cutting Observations

Several cross-cutting themes emerge across respondent groups. First, issues associated with strategic fiscal planning, accountability, and oversight consistently emerged as the highest-priority areas for TA and training. Second, substantial variation across agency type, role, and tenure suggests that fiscal management TA may be most effective when differentiated according to organizational context and staff function. Finally, comparatively lower ratings related to OOS implementation may indicate that agencies currently perceive greater need in strengthening everyday fiscal operations and compliance systems than in crisis-response or resource-restriction mechanisms.



Program and Performance Management Needs

Across all Program and Performance Management categories, respondents reported moderate to substantial levels of need for training and technical assistance (TA). Overall ratings ranged from 1.77 to 2.29 on the three-point scale, indicating that all assessed topics were viewed as areas warranting continued support and capacity development.

The highest-rated need concerned development of standards that support a qualified workforce consisting of professionals and paraprofessionals, including issues related to recruitment, retention, succession planning, and coordinated training (M = 2.29). This finding suggests substantial concern regarding workforce sustainability and capacity across VR agencies. Also highly rated were strategies and systems for monitoring and evaluating service provider performance (M = 2.15), leadership development and change management strategies for directors and managers (M = 2.09), understanding unsuccessful case closures and reducing unsuccessful exits (M = 2.06), and evaluating the effectiveness and impact of Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) (M = 2.06).

Collectively, these findings indicate that respondents prioritize strengthening organizational capacity, workforce development, accountability systems, and service effectiveness. In contrast, lower-rated items tended to involve more operational case management processes, such as accurate RSA-911 reporting (M = 1.79) and development of timely and meaningful Individualized Plans for Employment (IPEs) (M = 1.77), although these items still remained above the midpoint of the scale.

Program and Performance Management Needs by Agency Type

Patterns by agency type revealed both substantial agreement and several meaningful distinctions. Across Blind, Combined, and General agencies, workforce development and personnel standards emerged consistently as the highest-rated need area. Likewise, all agency types identified provider monitoring, leadership development, unsuccessful closure reduction, and evaluation of Pre-ETS effectiveness as relatively important priorities.

General agencies frequently reported the highest levels of need across several categories, particularly those involving provider performance monitoring, data reporting and analytics, internal quality assurance controls, and Pre-ETS evaluation. These findings may reflect the greater complexity and scale of administrative and service delivery systems within General agencies.

Blind agencies, while generally reporting somewhat lower levels of need across several operational and reporting categories, reported comparatively elevated need related to unsuccessful closures and workforce development. This pattern may suggest stronger concern with workforce sustainability and consumer outcomes than with administrative reporting or compliance processes.

Notably, all agency types assigned comparatively lower ratings to RSA-911 reporting and IPE development relative to broader organizational and systems-level issues. This pattern may indicate that agencies perceive greater need for strategic organizational improvement than for foundational procedural compliance activities.

Program and Performance 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

Program and Performance Management Needs by Organizational Role

Variation across organizational roles was pronounced and revealed several role-specific priorities. Business Relations staff consistently reported among the highest levels of need across most categories. In particular, they provided the highest ratings for workforce development standards, provider performance monitoring, reducing unsuccessful closures, community partnership development, and data-informed decision-making.

These findings likely reflect the systems-oriented and externally focused responsibilities associated with Business Relations roles, including engagement with employers, providers, workforce partners, and community stakeholders. Business Relations staff may therefore be especially attuned to gaps in workforce readiness, provider quality, and interagency coordination.

Counseling staff generally reported moderate-to-high levels of need across most areas, particularly in workforce development, community partnerships, and Pre-ETS evaluation. Management staff placed relatively greater emphasis on leadership development, data-informed decision-making, and internal quality assurance systems, aligning with their administrative and oversight responsibilities.

Support Staff and Teacher/Instructor staff tended to report somewhat lower levels of need overall, although several notable exceptions emerged. Support Staff rated Pre-ETS continuum development relatively highly, while Teacher/Instructor staff reported elevated need related to workforce standards and leadership development. Across most role groups, RSA-911 reporting remained among the lower-rated need areas.

Overall, the findings suggest that TA priorities vary considerably according to organizational role and functional responsibility. Staff with broader systems engagement or administrative responsibilities appear more likely to prioritize organizational development, accountability systems, and strategic program improvement efforts.

Program and Performance TA and Training Categories	Business Relations	Counseling	Management	Support Staff	Teacher / Instructor	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	2.45	2.30	2.27	2.26	2.35	2.29
Strategies and systems for formally monitoring and evaluating service provider performance.	2.50	2.14	2.17	2.06	2.03	2.15
Developing and implementing strategies for Director orientation, managing teams and change, and leadership development.	2.24	2.10	2.09	2.06	2.08	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.	2.36	2.09	2.15	1.95	2.10	2.11
Evaluating the effectiveness and impact of Pre-ETS.	2.18	2.07	2.12	1.94	2.03	2.08
Identifying, developing, and nurturing relationships with essential community partners (e.g., Workforce, Education, CRPs, and other Federal, State, and local partners).	2.32	2.15	1.93	2.08	2.15	2.05
Implementing a process for using data to inform decisions.	2.14	1.97	2.10	1.87	2.05	2.03
Producing effective, efficient, and accessible data reports and/or analytics.	2.19	1.96	2.10	1.75	1.87	2.00
Developing and implementing policies and/or procedures with internal controls to support quality assurance.	2.05	1.95	2.04	1.88	1.98	1.98
Providing a continuum of services for students to move through Pre-ETS, VR transition, and VR employment related services.	2.09	2.03	1.90	1.95	1.79	1.95
Understanding factors affecting an agency's performance on the WIOA Common Performance Measures.	1.86	1.90	1.97	1.71	1.72	1.89
Strategies and practices that contribute to determining eligibility and priority of service quickly, efficiently, and accurately.	2.05	1.94	1.90	1.96	2.03	1.94
Completing a thorough comprehensive assessment.	1.77	1.96	1.91	1.84	1.75	1.90
Developing and implementing strategies for accurate and valid tracking and reporting of RSA-911 data elements.	1.68	1.80	1.84	1.58	1.79	1.78
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).	2.00	1.80	1.87	1.87	1.83	1.85

Program and Performance Management Needs by Organizational Tenure

Analysis by organizational tenure revealed several important trends. Respondents with 6–10 years and 16–25 years of tenure frequently reported the highest levels of need across many categories, particularly workforce development standards, leadership development, provider monitoring, and data-informed decision-making.

Respondents with 0–5 years of tenure also reported elevated need in several areas, including evaluation of Pre-ETS, development of service continuums for students, and strategies related to eligibility determination. These findings may reflect the challenges newer staff experience in navigating complex programmatic and interagency systems.

In contrast, respondents with 25 or more years of tenure generally reported somewhat lower levels of need across many categories, particularly community partnership development, data reporting, and service continuum implementation. However, even among the most experienced respondents, ratings remained above the midpoint for all items, suggesting continued recognition of the importance of ongoing TA and organizational improvement.

One especially notable pattern was the consistently elevated ratings among respondents with 16–25 years of tenure for leadership development, workforce standards, and quality assurance processes. This may indicate that mid-to-late career professionals, often occupying supervisory or leadership positions, are especially aware of organizational sustainability and systems management challenges.

Program and Performance Management Needs: Cross-Cutting Observations

Several cross-cutting themes emerged across respondent groups. First, workforce sustainability and personnel development clearly emerged as the dominant concern within the Program and Performance Management domain. Second, respondents consistently prioritized systems-level quality assurance, provider oversight, and organizational effectiveness over narrower procedural or reporting functions. Finally, variation across role and tenure categories suggests that TA and training in this area may be most effective when differentiated according to staff responsibilities, leadership roles, and organizational experience.

Program and Performance TA and Training Categories	0-5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	16-25 years	25+ years	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	2.26	2.38	2.21	2.38	2.15	2.29
Strategies and systems for formally monitoring and evaluating service provider performance.	2.11	2.17	2.27	2.19	2.04	2.15
Developing and implementing strategies for Director orientation, managing teams and change, and leadership development.	2.05	2.12	2.00	2.27	1.98	2.10
Understanding the reasons for unsuccessful closures and identifying and implementing strategies and practices to reduce the rate of individuals exiting the programs unsuccessfully.	2.09	2.19	2.01	2.17	2.05	2.11
Evaluating the effectiveness and impact of Pre-ETS.	2.14	2.12	1.92	2.09	2.04	2.09
Identifying, developing, and nurturing relationships with essential community partners (e.g., Workforce, Education, CRPs, and other Federal, State, and local partners).	2.11	2.12	2.03	2.06	1.76	2.06
Implementing a process for using data to inform decisions.	2.00	2.17	1.97	2.10	1.82	2.03
Producing effective, efficient, and accessible data reports and/or analytics.	1.96	2.09	1.97	2.12	1.80	2.01
Developing and implementing policies and/or procedures with internal controls to support quality assurance.	2.01	1.96	1.93	2.08	1.83	1.99
Providing a continuum of services for students to move through Pre-ETS, VR transition, and VR employment related services.	2.06	2.09	1.75	1.89	1.79	1.96
Understanding factors affecting an agency's performance on the WIOA Common Performance Measures.	1.88	1.83	1.91	1.99	1.82	1.90
Strategies and practices that contribute to determining eligibility and priority of service quickly, efficiently, and accurately.	2.06	2.03	1.80	1.86	1.71	1.94
Completing a thorough comprehensive assessment.	1.86	2.00	1.70	1.99	1.93	1.90
Developing and implementing strategies for accurate and valid tracking and reporting of RSA-911 data elements.	1.72	1.79	1.82	1.92	1.65	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).	1.84	1.93	1.77	1.91	1.74	1.85



Employment Practices and Strategies

Respondents reported moderate to substantial levels of need across all Employment Practices and Strategies categories, with overall ratings ranging from 1.82 to 2.23. Compared to several areas within Fiscal and Program Management, ratings within this domain were somewhat more concentrated, suggesting broader agreement regarding priority employment strategy needs.

The highest-rated item focused on implementing Career Pathways, internships, apprenticeships, pre-apprenticeships, on-the-job trainings (OJTs), customized training, and credentialing programs (M = 2.23). This finding suggests strong interest in expanding structured pathways to competitive integrated employment and strengthening employer-connected training models.

Additional highly rated areas included utilization of labor market information and business engagement strategies (M = 2.02), development and implementation of Supported Employment, Customized Employment, Individual Placement and Support (IPS), and Progressive Employment models (M = 2.01), and provision of financial literacy, benefits counseling, and ABLE account supports (M = 1.95).

Lower-rated, though still meaningful, areas included utilization of artificial intelligence and advanced technologies to support VR operations (M = 1.90), self-employment and entrepreneurship strategies (M = 1.86), and implementation of Integrated Resource Teams (IRTs), Rapid Engagement, and Motivational Interviewing approaches (M = 1.82).

Overall, the pattern suggests that respondents prioritize employment strategies that directly connect consumers to workforce participation, employer engagement, and credential attainment, while innovative or emerging practices were viewed as somewhat lower—but still important—areas of need.

Employment Practices and Strategies Needs by Agency Type

Patterns across agency type were relatively consistent, with all agency categories identifying Career Pathways and work-based learning strategies as the highest-priority need area. Blind and Combined agencies reported slightly higher ratings than General agencies on several employment strategy items, including self-employment and financial empowerment services.

Combined agencies generally reported the highest levels of need across most employment strategy categories, particularly Career Pathways, business engagement, Supported Employment models, and Integrated Resource Team strategies. Blind agencies reported comparatively elevated interest in financial literacy supports and technology utilization relative to General agencies.

One especially noteworthy finding is that the use of artificial intelligence and advanced technology received relatively similar ratings across agency types, suggesting widespread recognition that technological innovation may increasingly influence VR operations and service delivery regardless of agency structure.

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 ABLE 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

Employment Practices and Strategies Needs by Organizational Role

Differences by organizational role were substantial and highly informative. Business Relations staff consistently reported the highest levels of need across nearly all employment strategy categories. In particular, they rated Career Pathways and work-based learning strategies extremely highly (M = 2.57), representing one of the highest ratings observed across the entire survey.

Business Relations staff also reported elevated need related to labor market information, business engagement, self-employment strategies, and implementation of Integrated Resource Teams and Motivational Interviewing approaches. These findings likely reflect the direct alignment between these topics and the external partnership, employer engagement, and workforce development responsibilities associated with Business Relations roles.

Counseling staff similarly reported relatively high need across employment strategy categories, particularly Career Pathways, business engagement, and Supported Employment approaches. Management staff generally emphasized technology utilization and strategic employment program implementation, while Support Staff reported comparatively lower ratings in several areas except for financial literacy and empowerment services, which they rated relatively highly.

Teacher/Instructor staff reported lower levels of need across many categories but assigned comparatively elevated ratings to technology utilization and Supported Employment approaches. This pattern may suggest growing awareness of technology-assisted employment supports and evidence-based employment practices within instructional roles.

Employment Practices & Strategies TA and Training Categories	Business Relations	Counseling	Management	Support Staff	Teacher / Instructor	Grand Total
Implementing Career Pathways, Internships, Apprenticeships, and Pre-Apprenticeships, OJTs, Customized Training, Credential Programs.	2.57	2.34	2.17	2.10	2.08	2.23
Utilizing Labor Market Information and Analysis, conducting business engagement, and providing employer supports.	2.14	2.19	1.91	1.93	1.94	2.02
Developing and implementing programs of Supported Employment, Customized Employment, IPS, or Progressive Employment.	2.05	2.08	1.94	2.03	2.06	2.01
Supporting Self-Employment, Entrepreneurship, and/or Blind Enterprise Programs.	2.10	1.93	1.90	1.82	1.81	1.90
The utilization of artificial intelligence and other advanced technology to support the efficient operation of the VR program.	2.10	1.82	2.04	1.45	2.06	1.90
Providing financial literacy and empowerment services, benefits counseling, and helping consumers develop ABLI accounts.	1.90	2.00	1.86	2.15	1.91	1.95
Implementing Integrated Resource Teams (IRTs), Rapid Engagement, and/or Motivational Interviewing strategies.	2.05	1.88	1.75	1.87	1.74	1.82

Employment Practices and Strategies Needs by Organizational Tenure

Analysis by tenure revealed several distinct trends. Respondents with 6–10 years of tenure frequently reported among the highest levels of need across employment strategy categories, including Career Pathways, business engagement, and self-employment strategies. Respondents with 0–5 years of tenure similarly reported elevated need related to Supported Employment approaches and financial literacy services.

In contrast, respondents with 25 or more years of tenure generally reported somewhat lower levels of need across most employment strategy categories, particularly Integrated Resource Team strategies and Supported Employment approaches. However, this same group reported relatively elevated need related to utilization of artificial intelligence and advanced technology, suggesting recognition that emerging technologies may require new learning even among highly experienced personnel.

One particularly notable finding is the strong variation in ratings related to artificial intelligence and advanced technology across tenure groups. Respondents with 16–25 years and 25 or more years of tenure reported substantially higher levels of need than respondents with 0–5 years of tenure. This pattern may reflect differing levels of familiarity and confidence with emerging technologies across generational or career-stage cohorts.

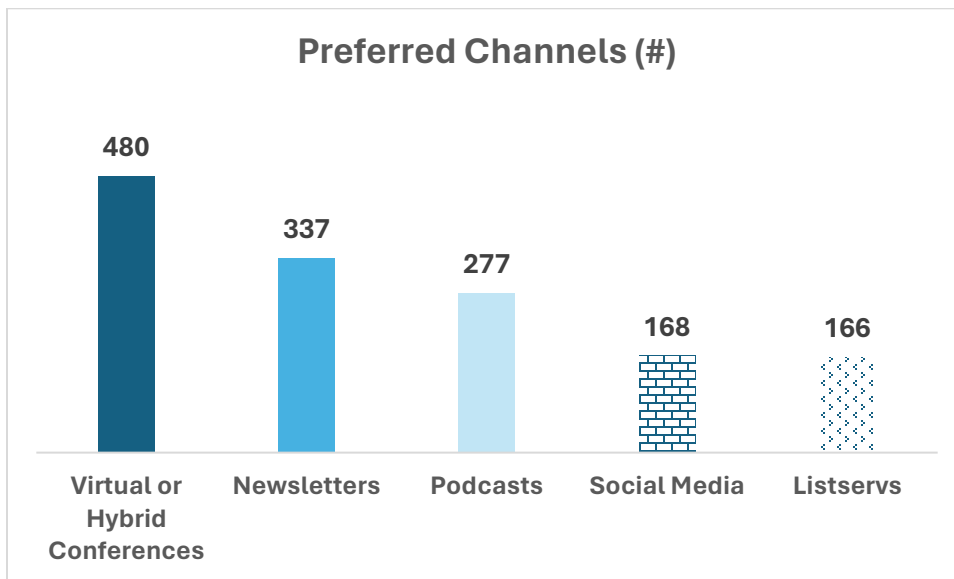
Employment Practices & Strategies TA and Training Categories	0-5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	16-25 years	25+ years	Grand Total
Implementing Career Pathways, Internships, Apprenticeships, and Pre-Apprenticeships, OJTs, Customized Training, Credential Programs.	2.23	2.35	2.05	2.29	2.12	2.23
Utilizing Labor Market Information and Analysis, conducting business engagement, and providing employer supports.	2.02	2.13	1.93	2.03	1.92	2.02
Developing and implementing programs of Supported Employment, Customized Employment, IPS, or Progressive Employment.	2.09	2.05	2.01	1.95	1.81	2.01
Supporting Self-Employment, Entrepreneurship, and/or Blind Enterprise Programs.	1.91	2.01	1.79	1.93	1.77	1.91
The utilization of artificial intelligence and other advanced technology to support the efficient operation of the VR program.	1.66	2.00	1.82	2.11	2.09	1.90
Providing financial literacy and empowerment services, benefits counseling, and helping consumers develop ABLÉ accounts.	2.14	2.01	1.75	1.82	1.77	1.95
Implementing Integrated Resource Teams (IRTs), Rapid Engagement, and/or Motivational Interviewing strategies.	1.90	1.96	1.76	1.74	1.56	1.82

Employment Practices and Strategies Needs: Cross-Cutting Observations

Several themes emerged consistently across respondent groups within the Employment Practices and Strategies domain. First, respondents strongly prioritized employment models emphasizing direct workforce attachment, employer engagement, credential attainment, and structured career pathways. Second, Business Relations staff emerged as a particularly important audience for advanced employment strategy TA and training, given their consistently elevated ratings across categories. Finally, the findings suggest growing interest in emerging technologies and innovative employment models, although traditional workforce development and employer engagement strategies continue to represent the field's most immediate priorities.

Information Preferences

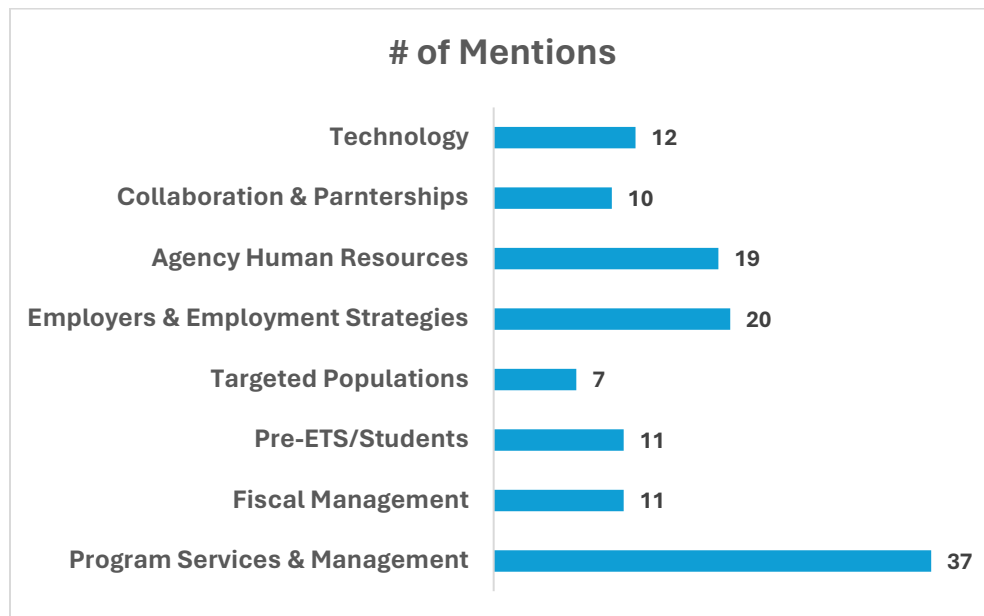
After the topical area ratings, respondents were asked to identify their preferred mode of receiving information. A strong majority (480 respondents) chose virtual or hybrid conferences as an option for receiving information. This was followed by newsletters (337 respondents) and podcasts (277). Social media and Listservs were less often selected (168 and 166 respondents respectively). The VRTAC is a partner to the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR), attending both their Fall and Spring conferences to present national trends, highlight state best practices in partnership with SVRAs, and provide onsite training and TA in real-time. In addition, Listservs have been established, LinkedIn is utilized as a social media channel to tap directly into professional networks, and the successful “Manager Minute” podcast from the VRTAC-QM has been continued, airing its first episode shortly after funding in the Fall. Newsletters are being planned and forthcoming to ensure all stakeholders have an avenue to learn about trends, resources, and opportunities for training and technical assistance.



Open-Ended Feedback: General Analysis

Finally, at the end of the survey, respondents were provided two opportunities through open-ended questions to provide (1) identification of additional needs that were not already covered by the rest of the survey and (2) additional feedback or guidance. These responses were coded in two ways. In this section, an analysis of type of assistance needed (training, resources, or information dissemination) and identified topic is provided. In the next section, comments are analyzed using the framework provided by America's Talent Strategy.

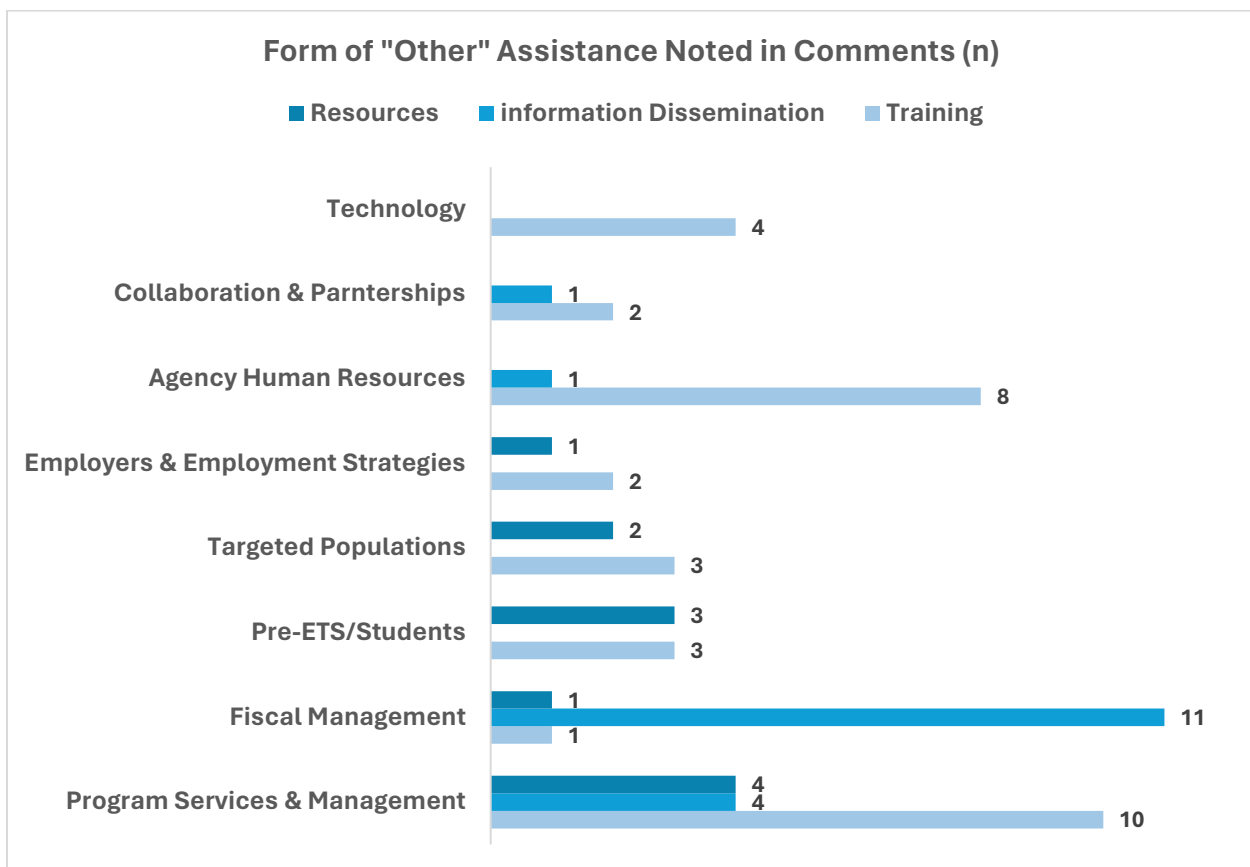
In total, there were approximately 150 substantive comments provided. Many comments referred to areas of need without explicitly identifying the form of assistance. But, when explicitly mentioned, training was requested more often (n=43) than other types of assistance such as information dissemination (n=11) or resources (n=9). Grouping these "other" areas of need identified, resulted in eight categories identified in the column chart below, along with the number of times they are mentioned:



The greatest number of comments referred to issues in program services and management such as staff development, case reviews and program evaluation/quality assurance, client/person-centered and vocational guidance and counseling practices, eligibility and individual plan for employment issues, and data reporting issues.

“As we hire more counselors that do not have a background in counseling due to recruitment challenges and changes in CSPD, we need to ensure counselors are trained in this fundamental knowledge area. Collaboration with graduate programs to offer individual counseling courses would be highly beneficial for staff and participants we serve.”

Closely related, particularly to the area of staff development, was the issue of agency human resources at a leadership level: that of succession planning and leadership development. Commenters noted the need for knowledge transfer and for leaders to increase capacity in advocacy for the program. Both program services and management issues, and agency human resource issues spoke of training most often when the form of assistance was noted. The bar chart below reflects the form of assistance noted in comments when provided broken out by category or topic:



Aligned with VRTAC’s third area of focus, Employment Practices and Strategies, a number of comments discussed the need for assistance with topics such as self-employment,

employer education, Employment First, Medicaid and work, and general capacity with employment practices and strategies. Comments in this area did not reflect a meaningful preference for the form of assistance. Sample comments include:

“The significant difference between supported and customized employment for all VR counselors and supervisors and certification of competencies of providers with payment for milestones/outcomes.”

“More training on working mental health issues and workplace accommodations for individuals with these needs.”

Related to both the previously discussed categories of employment practices and program services and management, the issue of collaboration and partnerships to coordinate or buttress services was raised about 10 times, though again without meaningful reference to training, resources, or information dissemination preferences. These comments reflected the need for better collaboration and partnerships with professionals across industries, State Rehabilitation Councils, between Blind and General agencies within a state when serving customers with blindness or low vision, and with local community resources for support services such as housing, food, and transportation.

Fiscal management was raised about 12 times when using a conservative (more explicit) coding approach and heavily identified training as the form of assistance needed. This directly supports the need for the Fiscal Accelerator training program in development and the ongoing Communities of Practice around fiscal management. Issues raised included the need to understand cost containment strategies, 2 CFR 200, how to develop proper procurement, and support with order of selection.

Demonstrating the diversity of populations served by VR, a not insignificant amount of comments reflected on issues related to students (some relating to Pre-ETS, but others relating to support for students in higher education for example), and other “targeted populations” such as individuals who are Deaf or hard of hearing, “minority” and English-as-a-second language populations, those with mental health needs or substance abuse issues, and Tribal and rural populations. Given the support provided by other organizations for some of these populations and issues, this points again to the need for support in improving collaboration and coordination with various community organizations at local and national levels.

Finally, there were comments about technology that, as expectable, raised the issue of better case management systems and guidance related to those, support with learning about assistive technology for new staff, and of course comments related to artificial intelligence – both with openness and wariness:

“Emphasis on need for AI training and how this [is] changing the labor market.”

“Regarding "AI" - in my opinion, do not believe AI is ready and at its full potential to use widely yet. Too many instances reported in the news of court case documents, medical documents, etc that are wrongly AI generated and causing much chaos. Just do not think this is ready for use yet and should be piloted within a smaller programs for months+ or year+ of testing first.”

While most of these categories were covered by the direct questions soliciting ratings of need on the survey, the open-ended comments reflect the respondents’ need to emphasize their importance and/or elaborate on the topics. Positive feedback was also provided by a number of commenters, reflecting appreciation for both the content of the survey and for the assistance provided by the Center.

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.

Summary and Conclusions

This national needs assessment provides a comprehensive picture of the current priorities, challenges, and emerging opportunities facing State Vocational Rehabilitation agencies and their partners. Across quantitative ratings, subgroup analyses, and open-ended feedback, respondents conveyed a consistent message: the VR system is navigating significant workforce, operational, and service delivery demands while simultaneously adapting to evolving labor market expectations, accountability requirements, and technological change.

Several conclusions emerge clearly from the findings.

First, respondents consistently identified workforce sustainability and organizational capacity as among the most pressing challenges facing the VR system. Across multiple domains, participants emphasized the importance of recruitment, retention, onboarding, leadership development, succession planning, and professional development. The prominence of these themes suggests that agencies view workforce capacity not simply as a human resources issue, but as foundational to program quality, service consistency, and long-term system performance. Concerns regarding workforce shortages, turnover, and preparation of qualified personnel were reinforced throughout both the quantitative and qualitative findings.

Second, findings indicate substantial demand for systems modernization and improved organizational infrastructure. Respondents prioritized needs related to fiscal forecasting, internal controls, data-informed decision-making, provider monitoring, quality assurance, and modernization of administrative systems. These findings suggest that agencies are seeking support in building integrated systems that improve efficiency, accountability, and operational effectiveness while reducing unnecessary administrative burden. Interest in emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, further reflects growing awareness that technology will increasingly shape VR operations, service delivery, and labor market participation. At the same time, respondents also expressed caution regarding implementation and emphasized the need for thoughtful, practical guidance.

Third, respondents consistently emphasized the importance of strengthening employment-focused service strategies and aligning VR services more closely with labor market needs. Career pathways, employer engagement, work-based learning models, Supported Employment, Customized Employment, and credential attainment emerged as major priorities throughout the assessment. These findings suggest continued movement within the VR system toward approaches that emphasize competitive integrated employment, workforce participation, and stronger employer partnerships. Respondents also highlighted

the importance of coordination across workforce systems and community partners to support successful employment outcomes.

Fourth, the assessment revealed meaningful differences across agency type, organizational role, and tenure level. While many priorities were shared broadly, the intensity and focus of needs often varied according to respondents' functional responsibilities and organizational contexts. Business Relations staff, for example, consistently reported particularly high levels of need related to employment strategies and employer engagement. Newer staff frequently reported elevated need for foundational systems knowledge and operational guidance, while more experienced staff often emphasized leadership, modernization, and systems management concerns. These findings suggest that effective technical assistance may require differentiated approaches tailored to role, experience level, and agency structure rather than uniform training models.

The qualitative findings further reinforced these conclusions. Open-ended responses highlighted the importance of practical, implementation-oriented support that helps agencies operationalize policies, strengthen staff competencies, improve coordination, and share effective practices across states. Respondents frequently requested training opportunities, peer learning, actionable tools, and clearer guidance related to both administrative and service delivery functions.

Importantly, the findings also demonstrate strong alignment between the priorities identified by respondents and the broader objectives reflected in America's Talent Strategy. Respondents emphasized preparing a skilled workforce, supporting labor force participation for individuals with disabilities, modernizing systems, improving accountability, and strengthening employer engagement and workforce partnerships. These areas collectively position the VR system as a key contributor to national workforce development goals.

Taken together, the findings suggest several implications for future VRTAC activities and broader federal technical assistance efforts:

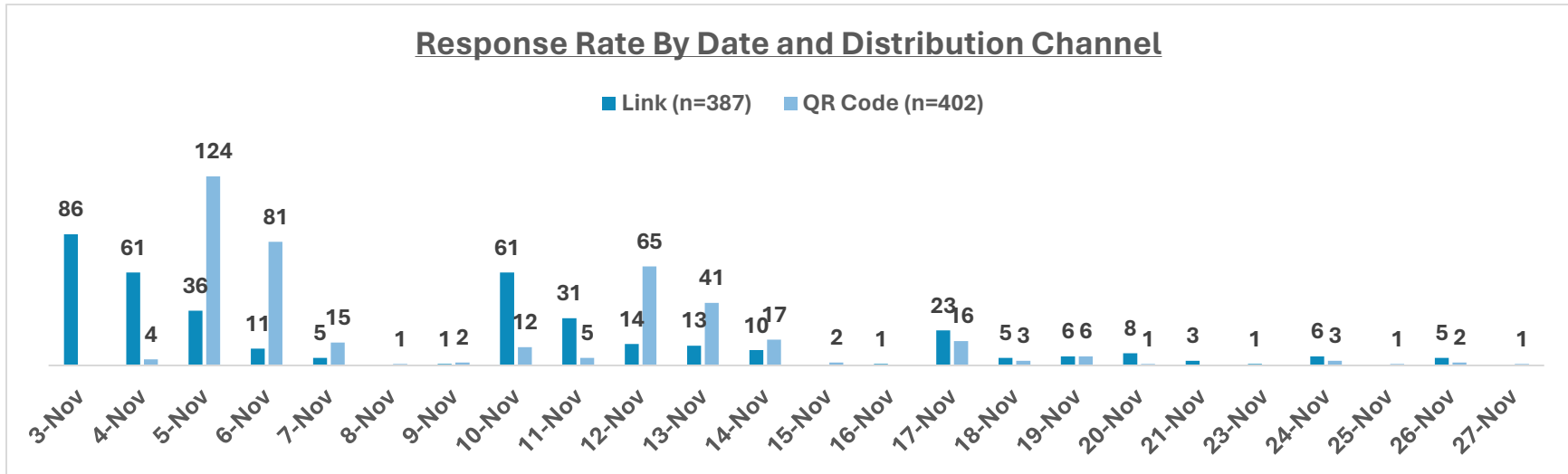
- ☞ Technical assistance should continue emphasizing workforce development, leadership capacity, and succession planning as foundational system priorities.
- ☞ Training and TA activities should support modernization of fiscal, data, and operational systems while balancing accountability and practical implementation realities.
- ☞ Employment-focused strategies should prioritize employer engagement, career pathways, work-based learning, and evidence-based employment models.

TA delivery should remain flexible and multimodal, incorporating virtual and hybrid learning opportunities, peer-to-peer exchange, practical tools, and ongoing dissemination activities.

Future TA initiatives may benefit from differentiated approaches tailored to organizational role, tenure, and agency structure.

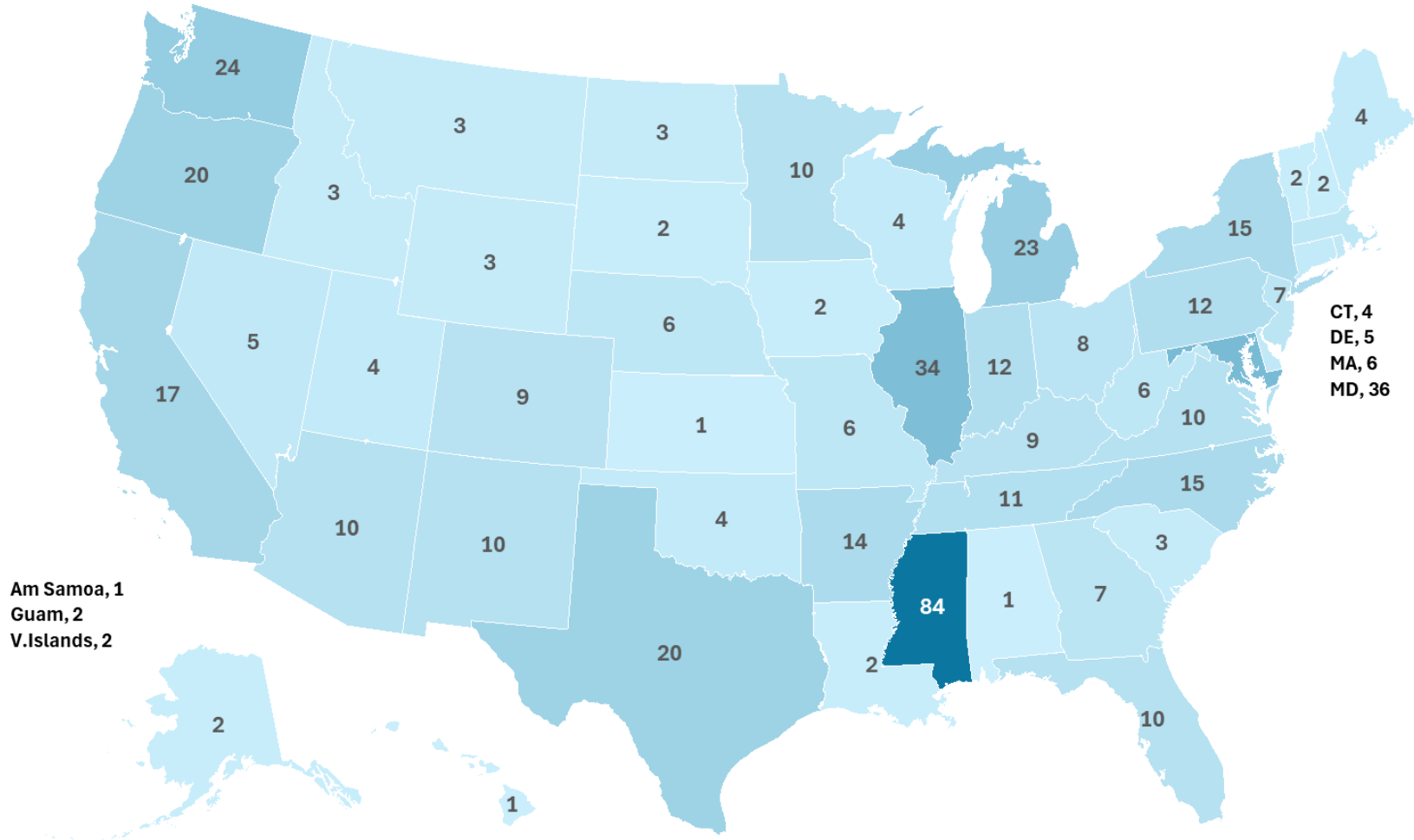
Overall, the findings reflect a VR system that remains strongly committed to its mission and optimistic about its role in advancing competitive integrated employment and workforce participation for individuals with disabilities. At the same time, respondents clearly identified the need for continued investment in workforce capacity, organizational modernization, systems alignment, and practical implementation support. These findings provide an important foundation for guiding the strategic priorities, partnerships, and technical assistance activities of the VRTAC moving forward.

APPENDIX



For the first two weeks, responses were coming in via the link for the first two days, and for the three days after that the QR code outpaced the link significantly. After that, responses dropped off and were generally even with the distribution channels achieving parity overall.

Respondents by State (n)



Am Samoa, 1
Guam, 2
V.Islands, 2

CT, 4
DE, 5
MA, 6
MD, 36