



North Carolina  
**State Rehabilitation Council**

**REFLECTIONS**  
on a Mission

2014 ANNUAL REPORT



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**U.S. Rehabilitation  
Services  
Administration**



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**New Data  
Management  
System**



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**Job Growth**



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**Customer Feedback**



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**Advocacy**



Doreen L. Byrd, Chair  
North Carolina State  
Rehabilitation Council

## Message from the Chair

I am pleased to represent the North Carolina State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) as I thank you for your interest in and support of North Carolina's Vocational Rehabilitation Services. The SRC has been very active this year in fulfilling its statutory responsibilities and serving as an advocate for the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities throughout the state.

2014 was a very busy year for both the SRC and the N.C. Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (NCDVRS). North Carolina was visited by representatives of the U.S. Rehabilitation Services Administration. A new data management system was launched, which in turn led to changes in some policies and procedures. Hiring restrictions have begun easing somewhat, allowing managers to fill long-standing staff vacancies.

Throughout the year, the SRC continued to focus on the goals of our strategic plan by conducting public forums in different parts of the state where information was exchanged between a wide variety of stakeholders and SRC members. The council also reviewed information from Consumer Satisfaction Surveys, e-mails and even complaints filed with the Client Assistance Program. This was all in an effort to look for opportunities for improvement. The council advocated for consumers who could have been impacted negatively by certain policy changes. The council also advocated for NCDVRS and its consumers by informing state legislators of the numerous benefits of effective rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities and other taxpayers.

This report offers an overview of the work of the SRC and its committees. I would like to thank each council member for his/her hard work and dedication. I would also like to thank the NCDVRS staff members who support the SRC and its mission in so many ways. As economic conditions improve, I am optimistic that the continued commitment of the SRC and the NCDVRS will lead to even greater success in the future with regard to the employment and independence of North Carolinians who experience a wide range of disability-related challenges.

# The Mission of the Council

To enhance the employment, independent living and equality of individuals with disabilities in the state of North Carolina.

# The Purpose of the Council

To advise and work in partnership with the N.C. Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (NCDVRS).

To assist the division in accomplishing its mission to promote employment and independence for people with disabilities through customer partnerships and community leadership.

To provide guidance, input and recommendations relative to the development and expansion of vocational rehabilitation services and programs in an effort to maximize employment opportunities and independence for individuals with disabilities.

To advocate for legislation that supports individuals with disabilities in making successful transitions into the workforce and the community.

To provide customers and stakeholders of vocational rehabilitation services with a formal mechanism to influence policy and the direction of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services at the highest administrative level of the state.

# The Year by the Numbers

VR assisted  
**6,310**  
North Carolinians  
in achieving  
successful  
employment  
outcomes.

Of these,  
**939**  
**(15%)**  
received supported  
employment in an  
integrated setting.

Independent living  
objectives were  
achieved by  
**1,550**  
Independent  
Living program  
participants.

Assistive  
Technology  
provided  
**6,382**  
individuals with  
equipment loans  
or demonstrations.

Disability  
Determination closed  
**201,388**  
cases involving Social  
Security disability,  
Supplemental Security  
Income and Medicaid  
disability benefits.

# N.C. State Rehabilitation Council Objectives

1. To carry out the following, after consulting with the state's Workforce Development Board: review, analyze and advise the Designated State Agency (DSA) regarding the performance of the Designated State Unit (DSU) under this Title, particularly with responsibilities related to eligibility (including order of selection); extent, scope and effectiveness of the services provided; and functions performed by state agencies that affect the ability of individuals with disabilities in achieving outcomes under this Title.
2. To carry out the following in partnership with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS): develop, agree to, and review state goals, and provide in accordance with Section 101(a) (15) (C); evaluate the effectiveness of the vocational rehabilitation program; and submit reports of progress to the Commissioner in accordance with Section 101(a) (15) (E).
3. To advise the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) regarding activities authorized to be carried out under this Title and assist in the preparation of the State Plan and amendments to the Plan, applications, reports, needs assessments and evaluations required by this Title.
4. To the extent possible, conduct reviews and analysis of the effectiveness of, and consumer satisfaction with, the functions of the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services: the vocational rehabilitation services provided by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services and other public and private entities responsible for providing services to individuals with disabilities under the Act; and the employment outcomes achieved by eligible individuals receiving services under Act, including the availability of health and other employment benefits in connection with such employment outcomes.
5. To prepare and submit an annual report to the Governor and the Commissioner of RSA on the status of the vocational rehabilitation programs operating within the state and to make this report available to the public.
6. To avoid duplication of efforts and to enhance the number of individuals served.

7. To coordinate with the activities of other councils within the state, including: the Statewide Independent Living Council; the advisory panel established under Section 612(a) (21) of the Individuals with Disabilities Act Amendments of 1997; the state Council on Developmental Disabilities; the state Mental Health Planning Council; the state Workforce Investment Board; and other public and private organizations, groups and functions such as the Council of State Administrators for Vocational Rehabilitation, the National Rehabilitation Association, and the N.C. Rehabilitation Association.
8. To provide for coordination and to establish working relationships between the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services and the Statewide Independent Living Council and the centers for independent living in the state.
9. To perform other functions consistent with the purposes of this Title comparable to other functions performed by the council.

## NCSRC Standing Committees

### Executive Committee

The Executive Committee acts on behalf of the council consistent with the council's purpose as outlined in its bylaws. The committee is responsible for compiling the council's response to the State Plan and triennial Comprehensive Needs Assessment, preparing the annual report, establishing meeting agendas and setting the general direction of the council and its committees.

In order to further expand SRC participation in the development and implementation of the State Plan, the council's Executive Committee addresses state plan development, implementation and progress towards plan goals and SRC goals within the "Goals, Priorities and Strategies" section of the plan during meetings with the NCDVRS director. The Executive Committee, along with the division's Planning and Evaluation Section, reports on the State Plan to the full council at each quarterly meeting for their input and approval.

The Executive Committee continues to work with the Planning and Evaluation Section on the development and implementation of the triennial Comprehensive Needs Assessment. The committee and section staff report back to the full council on the needs assessment during their quarterly meetings to gather feedback and approval. The Executive Committee also maintains responsibility for developing the agendas for the quarterly full council meetings.

In the spring of 2014, SRC Vice-Chair John Marens attended the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils Conference in Bethesda, Maryland. Mr. Marens shared with his fellow committee members about the presentations on the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and the concern over the decrease in the level of required experience to become a rehabilitation counselor. He enjoyed attending the conference and networking with other councils. He advises all SRC members to join the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils' list-serve to remain abreast of current issues and topics related to the provision of vocational rehabilitation services.

As part of the SRC's Strategic Plan for 2014-2016, each N.C. legislator was sent consumer return-on-investment information customized for each of their districts along with success stories. During the N.C. Rehabilitation Association's annual legislative breakfast event, legislators heard personal testimonies from individuals with disabilities who have reached their goals through the help of programs such as vocational rehabilitation and independent living services. The North Carolina Assistive Technology Program demonstrated advancements in technology equipment that have improved the lives of people with disabilities by helping them achieve greater independence. Equipment demonstrations were on display in the interior lobby of the General Assembly throughout the day.

Committee members drafted a letter to the N.C. legislative body in response to budget cuts that would hinder the ability for VR to contract with local community agencies to provide services. The letter outlined the unintended and negative consequences these cuts would have on the future of programs designed to help individuals with disabilities.

The Executive Committee advocates for strong leadership roles on the council and carefully reviews the membership terms and examines nominations in the recruitment process of new members. New members are encouraged to serve on designated committees to provide a more balanced representation. In addition to membership recruitment, the Executive Committee produced an electronic annual report to the public website and also posted it on the National Coalition for State Rehabilitation Councils' website. The report summarizes the work of the council and highlights essential components of its mission such as consumer satisfaction.

## Consumer Input and Public Outreach Committee

The Consumer Input and Public Outreach Committee reviews, analyzes and makes recommendations to the council regarding the effectiveness of vocational rehabilitation services delivered by NCDVRS and other public and private agencies in the state.

The committee also gathers information using the consumer satisfaction survey, public forums, and feedback from the Client Assistance Program. The committee reviewed the current methods for monitoring consumer input and public outreach.

At the committee's recommendation, the division continued to expand the use of the electronically accessible consumer satisfaction survey through a website address. Written surveys were also mailed. Approximately 500 individuals who did not respond to the written survey were successfully reached through telephone surveys.

The written survey was examined for content and changes were recommended to design two separate surveys tailored for specialized services. Dr. Jeff Stevens, Chief of Planning and Evaluation, received the support of the full council to proceed with draft outlines for the surveys for later review by the committee.

In addition to the consumer satisfaction survey, along with full council participation, the committee focused on gathering input through public forums. The two public forums held in Rocky Mount and Winston-Salem allowed consumers, family members, providers, employers, stakeholders and staff to express concerns and highlight how services have or have not met existing needs. The committee intends to use the feedback from these forums as a guide in the development of the comprehensive statewide needs assessment, agency policies, procedures, and reviewing goals and strategies for the 2015 State Plan.

## Policy and Rules Review Committee

The Policy and Rules Review Committee reviews and makes recommendations relating to division policy and procedures that affect the public, and are subject to public rule-making hearings under the state's Administrative Procedures Act or both.

In the past year, the committee provided feedback on policy revisions pertaining to the following topics: state audit findings; durable medical equipment procedures;

equipment policy; internship; unemployment insurance exemption form; prosthetics and orthotics; use of on-line verifications; equipment vehicle modification; financial needs statement; BEAM service selection and workarounds; Affordable Care Act and its potential impact; documentation form for payment process; and excess income as it relates to the financial needs survey process.

The Business Electronic Access Management (BEAM) system went into live production on July 1, 2014. A dedicated help desk was formed to ensure a smooth transition as staff members navigated the new system. Due to the magnitude of the project, weekly meetings were held between designated staff from departmental agencies sharing the system at go-live: N.C. Division of Services for the Blind and N.C. Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services.

## Community Outreach, Advocacy, Member Development

The council's goal is to have greater impact on its mandates in the areas of community outreach, advocacy and SRC member development.

### Liaison Activities

The council continues its involvement with seven liaison groups that require SRC involvement as well as special interest groups. There are council members who are designated to serve as council representatives. The council continues to focus on identifying potential members who can effectively liaise with these groups. Involvement is seen as a critical opportunity to partner with key stakeholders, as well as provide strategic paths for community outreach, advocacy, and SRC member development. The seven groups are:

- ◆ Council on Education Services for Exceptional Children
- ◆ Mental Health Planning Council
- ◆ N.C. Substance Abuse Federation
- ◆ N.C. Council on Developmental Disabilities

- ◆ N.C. Statewide Independent Living Council
- ◆ N.C. Commission on Workforce Development
- ◆ Commission for Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse

The ongoing information exchange between stakeholder groups has helped to educate members in each realm. In October “Disability Employment Awareness Month” referred to as DEAM, proved to be a busy time for conferences and other activities. Several SRC members were able to attend these functions across the state. The North Carolina Rehabilitation Association/North Carolina Assistive Technology Program’s G.R.E.A.T. Conference was held in Greenville. The conference embraced the motto of “Follow Your Yellow Brick Road to Endless Possibilities.” In Charlotte the Southeast Regional Institute on Deafness hosted their annual conference. Attendees shared about the advancement in communicative technologies. The conference featured Justin LeBlanc, a clothing designer who is deaf and appeared on the hit TV show Project Runway. Mr. LeBlanc spoke about his personal experiences and advocated for the need for communication in the public school systems in assisting deaf students. The N.C. Workforce Development Partnership Conference in Greensboro introduced workshops on Understanding Employer Needs; Pre-Apprenticeship for Career Path; and Working Smart: Softskills Training. These conferences offered stakeholder groups the ability to network together and learn about the array of programs and resources in the state.

## Public Forums

To obtain consumer input, beyond the consumer satisfaction survey and e-mail links via the division’s website, the council conducted two public forums. The council held forums in the eastern and central regions of the state. During the March 27 forum at the Braswell Memorial Library in Rocky Mount, consumers stated that barriers they had identified included obtaining funding to pay for training, trying to get hired due to age and/or length of time out of work, and lacking a work history. Consumers felt confident that if they were able to get their foot in the door, they could keep a job. Transportation was also mentioned as being too expensive for jobs with limited pay. The division’s Business Relationship Representatives are helping to train counselors to assist consumers with resume writing to enhance their marketability to potential employers. Vacancies have impacted staff by creating larger caseloads, which affected the ability to provide higher-quality services.

On September 23 at the Forsyth Community College West Campus in Winston-Salem, audience members asked about accessing services of benefits counselors. Central Regional Manager Alma Taylor responded that benefits counseling is not an automatic service and must be requested. SRC Vice-Chair John Marens urged people to talk to their legislators to advocate for more funding for this type of service.

One consumer with severe chemical sensitivity who was working towards self-employment wanted more information about small business opportunities. Many online businesses enable consumers to manage the complexities of their disabilities while working. VR has a small business specialist that works closely with counselors and reviews consumers' small business plans that promote a viable market.

The following day, the full council met and discussed ways to address the topics that were generated from the forums. Also, regional division staff was invited to share issues, concerns and accomplishments. The forums continue to serve as a valuable way to obtain consumer input and increase awareness of the SRC's advocacy role in ensuring that the needs of the consumer and agency are met.

## SRC Member Training

New council members attended an orientation session which defined the roles of the State Rehabilitation Council. Members participated in a PowerPoint training, viewed a DVD and received a membership manual.

Further education was provided through special presentations from local and regional staff members on the challenges of providing services and cultivating partnerships with community organizations and businesses. Field Manager Dale Yarborough of NCWorks/apprenticeship met with the council and talked about the benefits of NCWorks for employers and apprenticeships. The program utilizes the elements of "Earn, Learn, Launch a Career." Four components are Standards of Apprenticeships, On the Job Learning, Job Related Education and Progressive Wage Scale. NCWorks is the state's approving agency and oversees training for eligible veterans with GI Bill education benefits.

Director Tammy Koger of the North Carolina Assistive Technology Program (NCATP) spoke to council members about the program. NCATP services are provided to individuals with disabilities from birth to seniors. The headquarters are based in Raleigh and ten centers cover all 100 counties. Free service demonstrations and equipment loans are available through an online service at [www.ncexchange.org](http://www.ncexchange.org), which allows consumers to list or locate assistive technology equipment available

for re-use within the state. Council members viewed a video production of children and adults with disabilities who have achieved independence through assistive technology services and devices. Members also toured the Raleigh lab and tried out equipment.

NCDVRS Small Business Specialist Craig Lawrence presented on VR's Self-Employment Services. The program assists consumers in the Self-Employment Evaluation and Direction Setting (SEEDS) process, which can take six months or longer to complete. The process involves the preliminary Business Assessment; Fit Evaluation (includes Personality, Vocational/Skills and Financial); development of a business plan; evaluation of Feasibility (includes Market, Income and Long-Term Profit). Once the requirements are met, the business proposal is reviewed for approval, and an agreement is reached along with approval for small business start-up purchasing costs. Progress reports are sent to VR and tracked on a monthly basis. Counselors and consultants may continue working with the consumer until a mutual profitability goal is met.

Director of Client Assistance Program John Marens provided an annual update of the types of CAP services offered during the past year. He shared that their consumer evaluations of the programs ranked 91% satisfaction rate and that a majority of cases were handled through negotiation.

SRC Liaison/VR Client Appeals Coordinator Kim Schmidt reported on the annual client appeal/due process cases for FFY14. The number of cases increased from last year; however, many were resolved without a hearing. Costs of services were cited as the primary issue for the bulk of cases. Impartial Hearing Officer Training was conducted, and as a result, a hearing officer was hired and added to the randomized pool of officers.

# Review and Analysis of the Client Satisfaction Survey

The consumer satisfaction survey is mandated by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, which states that the State Rehabilitation Council shall conduct a review and analyze the effectiveness of client satisfaction with:

- ◆ the functions performed by the designated state agency;
- ◆ vocational rehabilitation services provided by state agencies and other public and private entities responsible for providing vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities under the act;
- ◆ and employment outcomes achieved by eligible individuals receiving services under this title, including the availability of health and other employment benefits in connection with such employment outcomes.

## Survey Process

The survey is conducted by the SRC in cooperation with division staff. Council and staff share responsibility for analyzing and reporting the results.

For FFY14, surveys were sent to former division consumers who closed either successfully rehabilitated in employment or, after services were provided, not successfully rehabilitated. Three methods of communication were used to collect survey data: an email invitation with a link to an online version of the survey, a questionnaire with a self-return address and prepaid postage, and random telephone calls.

Of the 10,869 survey forms mailed out, 874 were completed and returned; 142 surveys were completed online; and 514 telephone surveys were completed by the North Carolina State University Center for Urban Affairs and Community Services. The total number of surveys completed for FFY14 was 1,530.

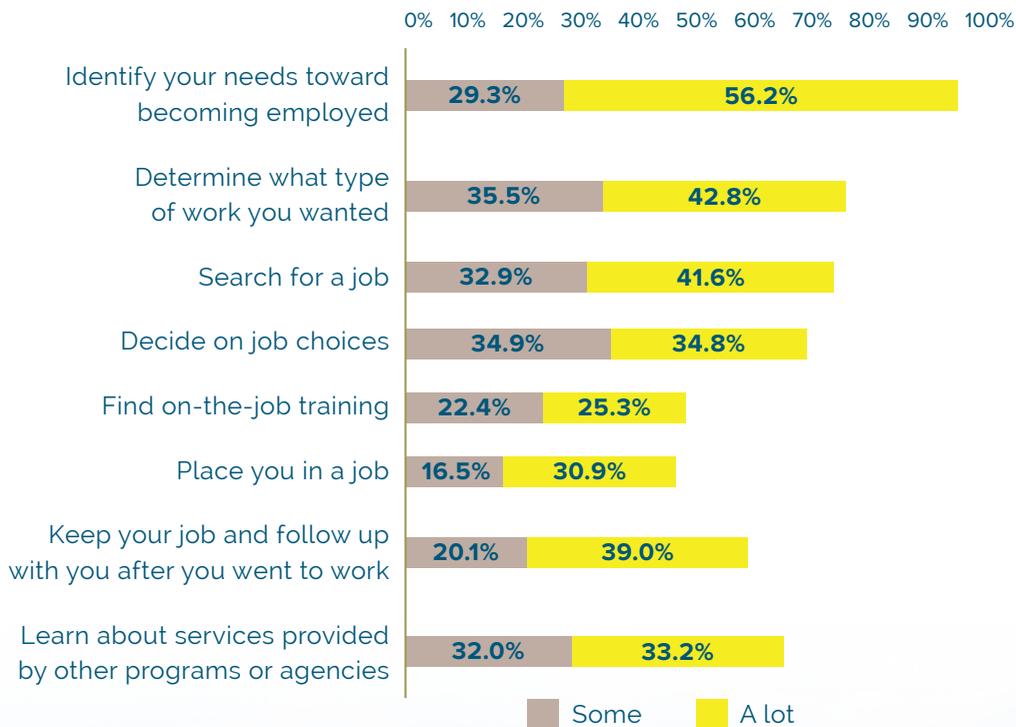
## Overview of Survey

The questionnaire is comprised of seven items designed to: (1) identify who is completing the questionnaire, whether the actual consumer completed it with or without help from a family member or a caregiver; (2) measure the consumer's

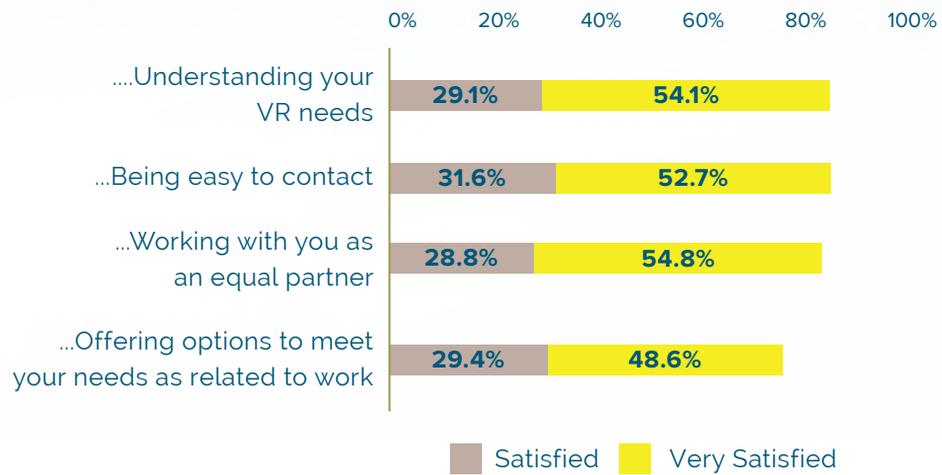
experience with the vocational rehabilitation program; (3) determine whether the consumer had received information about the Client Assistance Program and been informed of his/her right to appeal division decisions; (4) measure consumer satisfaction with his/her rehabilitation counselor; (5) determine his/her level of involvement in their rehabilitation program; (6) determine what factors, if any, prevented the consumer from working; and (7) measure consumer satisfaction with response time and overall satisfaction with the VR program.

The following charts reflect the 2014 survey's measures of consumer satisfaction.

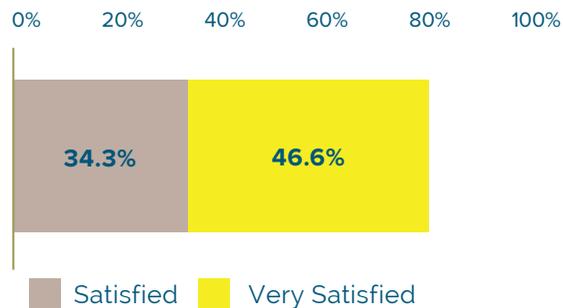
### Did the N.C. Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VR) Help You...



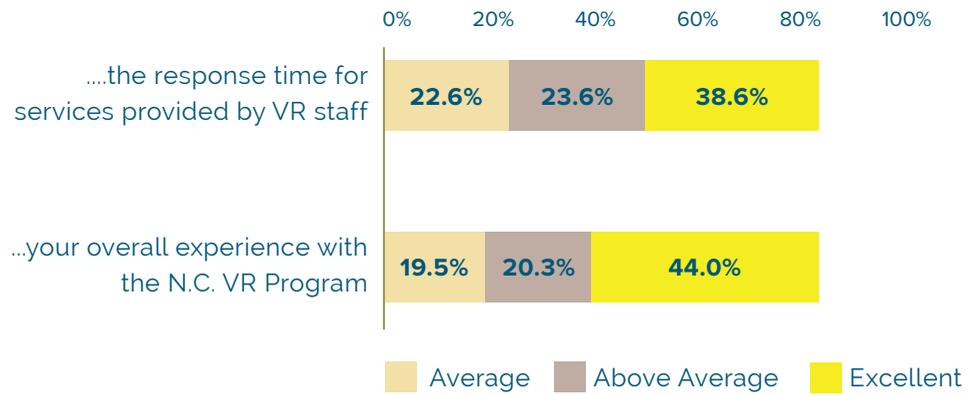
## How satisfied were you with your counselor in terms of...



## How satisfied were you with your level of involvement in your Rehabilitation Program?



## How would you rate...



# Recommendations Related to the 2015 N.C. Vocational Rehabilitation State Plan

The Executive Committee provided input to the division on the progress of the 2014 state plan goals as well as the development of 2015 State Plan. The council recommended the following to the division relating to the identification of goals, priorities or strategies for FFY15:

**Recommendation:** In support of their strategic plan for legislative advocacy, the council recommended again that the division prepare customized reports for each N.C. legislative district reflecting the return on investment that the VR program produces with its consumer expenditures in the districts.

**Division's Response:** The division again produced the reports along with success stories provide that human dimension to the data. The reports were prepared and distributed to all N.C. legislators during the short session.

**Recommendation:** The council recognizes that employment options are generally decreasing in rural NC, and many consumers cannot relocate to more urban areas due to their dependence on natural supports, the division's self-employment option should remain a well-supported service option.

**Division's Response:** The division supports this recommendation and expects to continue refining its current processes, partnerships and policies during FFY15 to maintain this service as a viable option for individuals who are well-matched to this type of employment as determined through its evaluative processes.

**Recommendation:** The council recommended that the division submit a request to the DHHS legislative liaison to advocate for a change to state statute to bring the mileage reimbursement rate in line with the federal IRS standard rate for travel related to meeting attendance and participation in council business.

**Division's Response:** The division submitted the recommended changes and is awaiting action on the proposal.

**Recommendation:** The council recommended that at each of its quarterly full council meetings, the Client Assistance Program present an activity update. Further, the council recommended that a standardized set of questions and topic areas be provided as a guide for regional directors and unit manager reports to provide updates for local office activities, developments and concerns.

**Division's Response:** The division has incorporated the recommendation.

**Recommendation:** The council recommends continuing to conduct two annual consumer input sessions with the division to collect input from communities across the state. Staff attendance is encouraged for each of the sessions.

**Division's Response:** The division supports these sessions as one way to assess how well the division is addressing the state's vocational rehabilitation needs.

**Recommendation:** The council recognized that some consumers had been adversely impacted by a policy change that discontinued division contributions to purchasing the unmodified-vehicle portion of consumers' vehicle modification packages and requested in a letter to the Secretary of Health and Human Services, for individuals for whom a purchase had already been approved, be granted an exception.

**Division's Response:** The division supports the favorable response from DHHS that recommended exceptions for clients in process for the vehicle purchase/ modification prior to July 1, 2013 and who met all previous policy requirements, including viable employment which meets or exceeds expected earnings, Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA). Each case was reviewed and exceptions were granted on a case-by-case basis.

**Recommendation:** The council, concerned with the division's ability to provide services to consumers during high vacancy rates, recommended the division provide regular updates regarding key vacancies, including direct service positions such as counseling positions, so that the council may advocate appropriately as defined in their 2014-16 strategic plan.

**Division's Response:** The division supports this recommendation and will continue to work with council members to provide regular updates through statewide and regional vacancy reports.

## 2014 Meeting Schedule

March 27-28	Rocky Mount
June 10-11	Raleigh
September 23-24	Winston-Salem
December 12-13	Raleigh

## The Members of the North Carolina State Rehabilitation Council: 2013-14

**Doreen Byrd, Chair**

Representing Parent Training  
and Information Centers

**John Marens, Vice-Chair**

Representing Client Assistance Program (CAP)

**Dennis Troy, Past Chair**

Representing Disability Advocacy Groups

**Meg Ackley**

Representing Regional Rehabilitation Centers  
for the Physically Disabled

**Stephen “Mark” Baker**

Representing Disability Advocacy Groups

**Quintin Boston**

Representing Non-Division Rehabilitation  
Counselors

**Cindy (Dixon) Harrell**

Representing Business and Industry Sector

**Wayne Giese**

Representing Disability Advocates

**Robert Gilmore**

Representing NCDVRS Consumers

**Michael Hobbs**

Representing Business and Industry

**Celeste Hunt**

Representing Directors of Projects  
Under Section 121

**Trish Hussey**

Representing Disability Advocacy Groups

**Ping Miller**

Representing N.C. Chamber of Commerce

**Laurie Ray**

Representing State Education Agency (IDEA)

**Keith Renner**

Representing Labor

**Brenda Savage**

Representing N.C. Department of Commerce,  
Division of Workforce Solutions

**Lisa Ward-Ross**

Representing Community Rehabilitation  
Service Providers

**Vacant**

Representing Statewide Independent  
Living Council

### Non-Voting Members

**Elizabeth Bishop, Division Director**

N.C. Division of Vocational Rehabilitation  
Services

### Counselor Advisory Committee

**Kenny Gibbs**    Statewide

**Collis Niro**    Eastern Region

**Vacant**    Central

**Vacant**    Western Region



*Vocational  
Rehabilitation Services*  
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

## **North Carolina State Rehabilitation Council**

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