COUNCIL OF STATE ADMINISTRATORS OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

2017 SPRING CONFERENCE

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LISA HINSON-HATZ: Good morning. Hello, CSAVR.

If everybody could come and grab a seat.

Good morning...

Shhh.

We're trying to be good and stay on our timing this morning.

Good morning. What a colorful looking group. Spring is here, right?

I feel like I should stand. This feels very...

Well, good morning, everybody. I'm Lisa Hinson-Hatz, the current President. This chair situation is wonderful.

Hello, Bill.

As my husband would say, he's really happy there's not a podium because I tend to hide behind it and hang on it, like it's a woobie. You know, when you were little.

Good morning. Very happy to be here this spring. Very happy to see tulips and green grass. We don't have that yet in New Hampshire. So really nice.

Happy to be here to share the Vision 2020 initiative we've been working on as well as talk to our legislators on the Hill and hear all the important information regarding the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act regulations and work that we have ahead of us.

So I'm really honored today to be able to introduce the new director for the little RSA, as she says. I came down in the elevator with the big RSA, with the group from RSA, but very happy to introduce Dr. Pamela Downing-Hosten, who is our new director from the little RSA here in D.C.

So if you could welcome us to your beautiful area

[Applause]

PAMELA DOWNING-HOSTEN: Can you all hear me? I believe the lavaliere is working. I can't hear it. Can you hear me?

>> Yes.

PAMELA DOWNING-HOSTEN: Great.

I am Pamela Downing-Hosten, as Lisa said, the new state director for D.C. And I want to tell you a little bit about ourselves, and then we're going to do something fun. Keep in mind I only have about ten minutes, so we're going to talk about who we are. We're all VR, so you know who we are. So I'm going to share with you how we're organized.

I fall under an agency called the Department on Disability Services, and as you know, we provide services for individuals with disabilities to ensure that they go to work.

Within the agency, there's the disability determinations division that focuses on social security claims. So that's just another part of who we are.

There are two administrations within the Department on Disability Services. One is the developmental disabilities association. A good thing about that is, we basically serve persons with intellectual disabilities and developmental disabilities, and in January, does anyone know what happened in January for DDA for us? Say yes. It was a very good thing.

We ended a 40-year lawsuit for individuals with developmental disabilities. What does that mean for us? That we got it right! We serve our clients well, and we're continuing to do so.

I am the director over the Rehabilitation Services Administration, and within that administration, of course I have VR, there are 40 counselors, the business services unit, as well as the Randolph-Sheppard vending facilities program, programs for the blind and older blind, our sensory unit, persons who are deaf, and as well as the transition team.

So RSA basically serves everyone.

Within DDA, we make sure that we collaborate with our community partners as you have. Just as some of you. Within that administration, there is another deputy director as well.

Next slide?

Within RSA, as I stated, we're very excited about our preemployment transition services unit. How many of you have spent all of your money, your 15% or more, for pre-ETS? Now let me tell you how that happened for us. Prior to my arrival in RSA, little RSA, I served as the transition director for the District of Columbia public schools. I went online, pulled up the budget for RSA, and decided, that 15% of the money belongs to us, and DCPS and charter schools.

So I met with RSA, created a series of programs and opportunities for our youth who are in school, created positions, and we spent a little over the 15%, which is good. So if you want to know how to do that, I can help you with that.

Next slide.

Now we're going to do something fun. Five things to do while you're in D.C. The first thing is to visit Mount Vernon by boat. You can cruise down the Potomac. You can actually walk around Mount Vernon, and there's the cruise ship. The waters are a little muddy, but that's okay. Just don't get in it and you'll be all right. And you can even have dinner there. So that's a wonderful thing to do.

The second thing you can do while you're here is to visit the National Harbor. Now, the National Harbor is in Prince George's County, and that's where I live. The District of Columbia was designed because Maryland, Virginia gave up land, and the land they gave up created D.C. So the National Harbor is in Prince George's County, Maryland; however, it's the nation's harbor. So you can go there and there's a casino. Don't go. There are many shops. There's an outlet mall there. Do that. There are lots of restaurants there. Eat a lot. And my grandkids' favorite happens to be a huge Ferris wheel. So go visit the National Harbor.

The next happens to be visiting cherry blossoms. Now, the cherry blossoms reached their peak on the 25th. It's been a little chilly, but that's what they look like. That's your cherry blossoms. Don't let anyone know that you came to D.C. and really didn't see the real cherry blossom. Those are cherry blossoms. So you can say that, yes, I saw cherry blossoms while in D.C.

The next thing, fun thing, is to visit my office while on the Hill. Now, my office is -- do you see where it says Capitol Hill on the map?

STEVE WOODERSON: Sorry about that. I'll get you back to it.

PAMELA DOWNING-HOSTEN: There's a Capitol Hill on the map, if you can point to that. My office is two blocks from Capitol Hill. So you see all these museums? I can walk to them from my office. So if you're on the Hill, stop past my office, and I can either walk to you one of the museums or have someone get you there. There are several metro stops around my office as well. Come and use it for the facilities if you're in the area.

[Laughter]

Computers. Come see what we do. Help us out a little.

And then the number one thing to do is, drum roll, please, celebrate Washington Nats opening day events. Now, they're at 1:00, so you can't go.

[Laughter]

However, in the evening the stadium will be open, and you can have lots of fun in the evening doing things that are allowable while you're here.

I have one tidbit and I have to say this about baseball. I come from a baseball family. Does anyone know who pitched Hank Aaron's 715th homerun? Has nothing to do with VR. Anybody? Who? Yes, Al Downing. Did you notice my name? Pamela Downing? Yes, he did. We're excited. And if you want to talk to him if he's in the area, I can call him for you so you can say hey.

[Laughter]

That's another found thing you can do while you're here.

Okay. If you need to reach me at any time while I'm here, you'll see my email link as well as my telephone number.

Enjoy yourself while you're here. I'm enjoying you and learning so much from you because I've only been in the position for five months. So if I call you and sound panicked, I am. And I look forward to continuing working with you throughout the years.

Thank you, and welcome.

[Applause]

LISA HINSON-HATZ: Thank you. That was great. And I'm glad to actually see real cherry blossoms because normally when we're here it's a little later in the month and we tend to miss them. That was great.

Now it's my honor to introduce -- he calls me his boss, but I call him my boss -- Steve Wooderson, our CEO for CSAVR, and I just want to make a quick thanks to you, to Rita, to Kathy, John, Theresa, and Danielle for getting this conference in ship shape and doing all these renovations. That was also amazing.

STEVE WOODERSON: That's all on us.

LISA HINSON-HATZ: You guy as accomplished that through this last year. That's amazing. We were in a very different place. So thank you.

And I'll turn it over to you.

STEVE WOODERSON: Good morning, everybody. How you all doing? Everybody is happy to be here, right? We're happy to sigh. The room is full. And as Lisa said, and colorful. It's good to see there's bright spring colors, and we're looking forward to having a great conference together.

My objective is in just a few minutes to welcome you, to welcome our new directors, and just kind of set the pace for some of the things we'll be about over the next two and a half days.

There are a couple of announcements on the screen to start off with, and we'll be reminded of those when we wrap up.

There is access in this room for internet. You'll see that on the screen. It's csavr17, the passcode. For those of you interested in CRC credits, we extend our thanks to Washington University for their support. Just check in at the desk and they'll give you instructions for how to get those credits throughout the day.

As you registered, you received a red ticket, that's not a ticket to the Nats game. Sorry about that. It is a ticket for those of you having a regional meeting and ordered lunch, so keep that close to you for when we break for lunch today.

So let's begin by reaching out to those who are our new state directors. We have a few in the crowd.

First of all, Brenda Drummond is acting director for Maine blind. Are you in the crowd?

[Applause]

Thank you, and welcome.

Next we were just introduced to Pamela. We want to say thank you for picking up responsibility for giving us a welcome and for your role.

[Applause]

Jose Ortiz from Puerto Rico.

[Applause]

Rob Hines, where are you?

[Applause]

Cynthia Speight, North Carolina blind. Are you here? Hi!

[Applause]

Every fall and spring we announce those who have been appointed since the previous conference. I also, though, think that this time we have two or three in the crowd that were announced in the fall but this may very well be their first time to attend. So since we had a chance to capture some of you earlier this week, we'll be sure we don't miss anybody.

Shawn, are you here from the great south, Georgia? Shawn Casey? He was here, so believe me or not, he's in the area. I want to make sure that we reach out to him.

Nole, are you here? Oklahoma. You were announced in the fall. This is your first time to attend as a director, correct?

And Mary Jane, are you in the room? West Virginia.

[Applause]

New since our last meeting.

Am I missing any new directors who have never attended prior to this meeting as directors?

All right. Well, our ask of the rest of the group is to reach out to our new directors at the break that's coming up in a few moments, shake their hands, welcome them to the crowd, and get to know them, and we appreciate the input that many of you provided this weekend with the new directors' training as well.

So staff and I sat down a couple nights ago to discuss, okay, so what do we share with you as Washington update, and there's no coincidence that the rest of the slide is blank right now. That may be the Washington update.

[Laughter]

In all seriousness, we really struggle with trying to approach in a sincere and honest way how to give you insights into what we're seeing here in the beltway. And in reality, you probably know as much as we do on move these things because we're really in a position now where we don't have a baseline history with this current administration on really putting into play those priorities that we've all identified or all have seen identified since the seating of the new administration in January.

To some degree, that's not out of the ordinary. It may be a little more pronounced, an administration coming in without really knowing what their past history has been in government, but by the same token, it is an opportunity for us we think to really be looking forward at how we may be able to position ourselves in an environment that lends itself to some creative and innovative kinds of activities.

We mentioned in talking to staff that we're in an era, maybe a new era, of partisan politics, but let's be clear that we understand as we go through the next few days that it's a new era. Partisan politics have been around all along; it's just a new era. There's not any good, bad, or indifferent that is different than the previous administrations; it's just that it's taken on a different life because the new administration has been seated.

So that's stuff that we already know, right? There's no doubt that we're all aware of it. If we have any awareness of what's happening in the public space at this particular point in time, the history of our country, but we do know that we have an administration that is business and results driven oriented. So that is our opportunity to really be looking at how we in the vocational rehabilitation space position ourselves, demonstrate leadership in these areas, and be able to move our agenda forward. So we say to you, this is a time of real opportunity. This is a time for opportunity for us to really show who we are, the work that we do, the impact that we have in the business world, the results that we develop, or the results that we deliver, and how then we may be able to impact our nation's economy, the welfare of our entire country.

We know that at this point in time there's not been anything that we've seen that specifically negatively targets the public vocational rehabilitation program. Specifically. That's a keyword right there. That specifically targets vocational rehabilitation program. We'll be looking at the President's budget. We see language and chatter about the national budget. There's nothing that says specifically that the public vocational rehabilitation program is under attack.

When we look at some of the legislative priorities, again, we don't see anything that specifically targets the vocational rehabilitation program.

However, there are a number of areas that are related, parallel to intersecting the VR program, that can very well have impact upon who we are, our access to resources, and the delivery of services in our space. I was appreciative of some comments made in the SRC Saturday, because the question was asked, what about VR being targeted. And my response was, we haven't been targeted. There are all these other influences around us that could very well impact our ability to access resources and deliver services. Medicaid is an example. Our special education community is an example.

So for those of us in the space of trying to stay on top of what's happening at the national level, that's our job. That's our job as your representatives in D.C. to be looking at how we may need to be prepared and anticipate and responding to some of those challenges.

We do know that IDEA has been a point of conversation, but just a point of conversation. That doesn't mean it's going to be picked up in this Congress or in the next Congress. We just know it's a point of conversation.

So for us, we are in a position of trying to anticipate how we work with our special education colleagues to ensure that language specific to transition is in collaboration or cooperation with what we now have in the Rehabilitation Act as a part of WIOA.

So note that as an example of areas where we really want to anticipate and be prepared. We don't want to wait. We want to be ahead of the game. And to that end, we already are involved in some activities with our brothers and sisters in special education. You'll hear from one of our colleagues later this morning.

Yesterday we did take a few moments with our state directors to identify as a result of the President's executive order to review regulations, to get some feedback from you in the field. Are there areas where we want to focus and try to develop some communique to pass along to our friends in Rehabilitation Services Administration. So we are responding to things like that that we see coming out of the administration.

We also know that as we talked about budgets and other influences on the resources we may need to leverage our dollars, that that is a consideration, how are some of these parallel programs impacting on our ability to deliver with our resources from a fiscal standpoint.

Many of us in this room have been in this program for many years. How many were in the program in the early '90s, just by show of hands? Okay. Remember stuff that happened in the early '90s that just really shook us up? I know for me, I'm looking back at some of my friends from Missouri, Tim and Ron. I remember being in St. Louis standing over a television in one of our supervisor's office in St. Louis around '94 when there was a concern of the VR program being folded into block grant and we saw that as being a demise of the public VR program.

We've seen since then other attempts that would have had major impact on our ability to deliver services, and I think our message at this point in time is that we are strong, we survive because we do good work. Because the work that we do impacts the lives of people with disabilities.

So in light of what many may see as being kind of a confusing and uncertain immediate and near future, we can say that the best thing that we can do today is to do good work today to prepare for tomorrow, and that's what our message is to you, from the staff to you, is we will do our best to work to anticipate and be a part of the national dialogue and be communicating that to the best of our ability, but really we're encouraging folks to do the best work we possibly can, and that's the message we hope you'll carry to the Hill this week while you're here.

We also know that we are focused in on staff on the national agenda, but there are state level issues that you may face that we need to have a better appreciation for. For example, we just talked about the POTUS budget. Some of you may have had your DSA come to you and say, the POTUS budget is this, how will that impact you and how will you be prepared to respond to that.

We need to hear that. Even though we know in reality the POTUS budget is very unlikely to that be the end result because there will be so many iterations between now and then, but there are other things that come up that we know are impacting you at the state level that we would not know unless you make us aware of it.

Let us know. Let us know how that's impacting you, and then we can help you deliver a narrative or have information based upon what we're hearing at the federal level to help support your needs as well. So please keep us posted on those issues.

Since our November meeting in San Diego, things have changed quite a bit. We were together when we heard the national elections outcome. There had been a number of changes as far as obviously who are in decision making roles. We've had a number of changes of who sits on committees that influence the work of the public vocational rehabilitation program. And throughout all of that, we launched an initiative that we'll talk more about in a few moments, Vision 2020, all to say that your CSAVR staff has been pretty involved and engaged at all of these activities. So I need to then say publicly and share with you as well, I am very appreciative of the work that your staff has done because it has been quite a journey over these last six months. Every time we meet, I think I always reflect back on the activities of the last few months, and I always say there's never been a busier time. Guess what? There's never been a busier time than right now.

So thank you, Rita, for keeping us pointed forward.

Kathy, the services you're providing when it comes to business relations, the NET, the TAP, the work done in the states as well.

For John, the work being done working with our technical assistance centers, the collaborative we're part of, our partners. And for accessing all of the resources that come as a result of and then managing of those resources as well.

Theresa, wherever you are, I'm sure she's out flagging traffic in the back somewhere. There she is. Thank you. What can we say? You're getting more emails from her than anybody else because she's the one keeping the ship moving forward.

And then for those of you who weren't here in the fall, I want you to also know that we have multiplied our delivery service system by adding a couple of folks as a result of some contracts that we had. And they may not be as obvious to you the work that they're doing, but they're a part of the team as well. So I want to point out Ron in the back. Raise your hand. He's working with us through the partnership with WINTAC. Most of you know Ron and I go back 2-3 years maybe at the most. Ron was my boss at one time, colleagues for a number of years, and so thankful for the work he's doing. Many of you have seen the value he adds.

Where's Danielle? Really she amplifies the work that Kathy is doing and supports the work that Theresa is doing as well.

So if you would be so kind as to honor them with a round of applause, I would really appreciate it.

[Applause]

Okay. We've got some work to do in the next couple of days so let me give you a little bit of roadmap so we're all on the same sheet of music.

Tomorrow morning, for those who can join us, we're going to be at the Senate Dirksen Office Building Room 106. Everybody will need to get there somewhere or another. A cab will be about $25 or more. Uber or Lyft will be every bit as much as that because of the surge. So have your credit cards ready to go.

If you take the metro, if you don't have a smart card, get one because it's changed maybe since the last time you've been there. You have to have a hard card and you have to pay 10 bucks? Or something for the card or 2 bucks for the card and a minimum of 10 bucks on it. Let's hope and pray red line is running without any problems tomorrow. For those of us in the area, they have this thing they call a surge but it's actually a metro maintenance going on, so our hope is that red line is running without any trouble in the morning.

We suggest that you leave early, 7:15, to be at the Dirksen when it opens at 8:00. You can't get in before that, but if you're on the road by whatever means, if you're out of here by 7:15, no later than 7:15, you should be okay.

Our first speaker is at 8:30 in the morning so we would like you to get there when the doors open, come in, get breakfast, be seated. Our first speaker is Bobby Silverstein, then a number of others from the Hill. Then our NET awards and we'll play that by ear.

If you are going to be coming and leaving, that's okay. We know that happens. We just ask that you give consideration to when you come and when you go. And when you come and when you go, that you're aware that there may be some other activities going on around you.

If you've been to the Hill, this is an idea. The blue star at the top is Union Station. This shows you how you get from there to Dirksen, straight south, up the hill. You get there and probably the best way to get into Dirksen is on the southwest corner, which is at 1st and Constitution. That's your best access.

I believe, help me out, I believe the accessible entrance is on the other side as well. So be there so you're ready when the doors open at 8:00 in the morning.

We talked with the state directors already a little bit about what we hope that you can accomplish while you're in town, but we really want to be clear that the message we're sending, we're demonstrating leadership in response to WIOA. Many of you are having experiences at the state level with your budget. I think it's good and okay for you to communicate how that's impacting your ability to deliver services, even to the point where some of you, where the mandate on preemployment transition services may be really having tremendous impact upon your ability to work. It's okay to communicate that. But be responsive to WIOA. We're here to do our job and deliver these goods, but there are these challenges present at whatever the federal or state level.

We know you will be able to establish a relationship with your contacts in the National Governors Association. Primary issue we would like to talk to them about is what? For states not drawing down their full federal dollar? The state dollars. So if you can communicate with your NGA point of contacts, let us know. They're at hall of states at the base of the hill, easy to access.

Once you have contact, let us know if CSAVR can be in a position to follow up to help reinforce, leverage, follow up on anything that you may have communicated.

For those of you going to the Hill, there are some things we suggest you grab and take with you. One packet per visit. There is our standalone sheet this year that you'll see is a little bit different. It basically says what is VR doing. It has good information about the public vocational rehabilitation at the national level, return on investment, a couple of stories and ideas of how you can communicate to your members and their staff the work that the public VR program is doing across the country.

We have our "investing in America," the typical folder we have you take with. It's a little bit different this year. We have a few stories but we also have a couple of story that are more global and less personal, what's happening in a couple of states in response to WIOA. So it's not individual specific but it's more about the story.

There will also be a talking point sheet, something for you to reflect on, but please don't leave it in the packet. Okay? This is just your guide. Leave it in your pocket or whatever. It's okay. They've seen some along the way I'm sure, but we just want to be sure you know to keep it in your pocket. That's something for you to work with.

Let's have a great spring conference. Looking forward to the engagement and interactions we have, looking forward to talking with you that I've not met before. And before I turn this back over, I will ask Kathy to make her way forward for the next panel.

How many of you are here for the first time? Oh, Shawn, you made it back in. We talked bad about you while you were out of the room.

Special welcome to the first timers. Thank you for being here. Let's have a great conference.

Kathy, if you would make your way up, and we'll have Bill and the rest of your panel join you.

[Applause]

KATHY WEST EVANS: Hello, everyone. Good morning.

We want to get started.

My name is Kathy West Evans, though a lot of people are confused because I have Rita Martin's name tag on.

[Laughter]

So we're just testing you. I think we're going to see who is who.

But it's really great to be here, and thank you so much for all of your ongoing support. I think you're going to really enjoy hearing from this panel. And I want to thank our partners at ODEP for including CSAVR in the task force work for the SEED program. And really including us up front in this, in the discussion. I think we all know that we're better together. So thank you for that, Jennifer.

Before we get started, I keep cutting out when I turn my head away, right? Okay. There we are. Technology is my friend, right?

Okay. So I want to introduce the panel before we get started on this, and then I'm going to turn it over to Jennifer and let her introduce the background on SEED and go from there.

So we're going to start with Bill Frank. Go ahead and wave, Bill. Bill is the Deputy Secretary of the Maryland Department of Disabilities, and he also served for 12 years as a member of the Maryland House of Delegates, where he represented a district in Baltimore County. So it's really great to have you here and I know you do a lot of good work with Sue, so thank you for being here.

Buddy, sitting next to me so that we both stay out of trouble, he spent the better part of his career in higher education before he came to work for Kentucky's education and workforce cabinet, and he is the executive director for the office of vocational rehab now in Kentucky, but he's also a parent. So he has a very personal as well as professional perspective of the work that we do in terms of employment and independence.

Kyle down here is the disability policy specialist for the National Conference of State Legislatures, which is a partner in the SEED program. And he does the research bill tracking and technical assistance to state legislators and SEED program partners.

He worked at a Center for Independent Living before coming to this position and has his master's from the University of Denver and Georgia State. So double degree.

Now, next to me is a woman who probably doesn't need any introduction, because we've seen her in our field for some time. Now I have to move the mic over here to talk to you.

So Jennifer is the deputy assistant Secretary of ODEP. Jennifer has her bachelor's in psychology and English from Cornell, and she has her MBA from Georgetown.

But many of you may have known Jennifer from her previous work in RSA, OSERS, NIDRR. What division were you not in when you worked there in the Department of Ed?

JENNIFER SHEEHY: I think the only one was I didn't work as a TSA agent.

KATHY WEST EVANS: Okay. So you haven't been in TSA or Homeland Security yet. That will be your next venture. They do need some help with accessibility I think. That would be helpful.

[Laughter]

So Jennifer, if you want to take it from here and talk about the SEED program.

Oh, and before we go on, let's say hello to Nadia over here, the staff person working on the SEED program. She is awesome. So stop and say hello.

[Applause]

JENNIFER SHEEHY: Can you hear me now? I think it's just close to my collar.

I am so grateful to be here and be invited. Thank you, Steve, and Rita, and of course my friend and fellow action in crime. I want to thank my former RSA colleagues, Beth, Anthony, and certainly my office of disability employment colleagues and our team that helped us work on SEED, our concepts team. They're all here too.

So we are, if you don't know, a small department or agency in the Department of Labor. We have 50 staff, about $40 million, and because of that we really can't move step one without partners. So this is what we're going to talk about today is an example of those partnerships that hopefully are designed to help you do what you need to do better.

And I particularly want to thank you. My career does go way, way back, because when I had my spinal cord injury in '94, I was in business school at the time, and when I was going through rehab, there were two people that had higher expectations for me than I had of myself. I really didn't know what to expect, what I was doing, what was going to happen. And the two people that pushed me and said I could do more than even I had anticipated were, one, my physical therapist, and of course my vocational rehabilitation counselor, Jo, from D.C. RSA. So Pamela, thank you for what you're doing. Frankly, I thought she was rather delusional back then, but she turned out to be a great person and worked with me to go back to business school and get the equipment that I needed, the computer, the training, even make some adaptations to a van that I needed for transportation, and eventually go back to work, and I ended up having a very, very meaningful career for myself and now I feel very fortunate to be able to work with all of you in a position to hopefully make a difference for millions of people with disabilities.

So one of the things I was telling you about was that we really worked on coordination between partners to leverage resources, experience, and knowledge, and to share information as broadly as possible. I feel like that's a good role for the federal government. So this is a great example of where we've really looked at where states were doing things well and helping those states connect with each other or have access to technical assistance experts like Kathy, for example. And others. So that they could adapt and adopt policies that may work in their own states.

So that's really where SEED comes in. States can be such a model employer themselves. About 19 million people work in state government across the country. That's compared to 17 million in healthcare that we always hear about over and over again. So when states set policies, you're really laying the groundwork for what happens at the front lines, and it's so critically important that you have access to the information and resources to be able to do that.

And some of these are indirectly related to employment, and some of the things that the report that we'll cover is like transportation. There was a survey by the national organization on disability that said people with disabilities use public transportation three times more than people without disabilities. So how important is that for getting to work and doing what you need to maintain a very successful professional career and life?

Really that's where SEED comes in. It was launched by ODEP, but it would not be possible without partners like Kyle at NCSL or the council of state governments. They pulled together this national task force led by Governor Markell of Delaware and the Governor from Nebraska. The Council of State Governments and Kyle really ran it with the federal support, but we stayed out of it, and as much as you needed to do, what worked for you, and the states that became involved became involved with the policies or topic areas that they really wanted to work on and learn about.

So it couldn't have been a better combination of experts and state policy legislators and people who are in state agencies. They work together to pull this report, and each of you has one I think in your packet: "Work Matters." Kyle was one of the lead writers so he knows this report intimately, page by page, and all the wonderful state examples and policy recommendations that are included in it.

But it is a great report. It really skims the surface of all the policy areas and strategies that people might want to adapt or adopt in their own space.

So the five topic areas that the policies are divided among are laying the groundwork, really setting up the infrastructure in your state, the good things to come; preparing for work, getting to and accessing work opportunities, which is where things like transportation comes in, accessible technology for online job recruiting or working in a company or a business; staying at work, so something very high profile right now, maintaining work after an illness or an injury or getting back to work quickly so that you can really divert people from going on to SSDI and making sure that if you you're the state employer or a business employer save some money that you would use in rehiring someone, retraining someone, the disruption to the workforce, and losing someone who is a valuable individual; and finally the last topic area is supporting self-employment and entrepreneurship.

So this really is something we want you to use. And today in our panel, we'll talk about how members of the task force worked, what people were able to get out of the SEED work, and how you can engage going forward. So this is a helpful product for you too.

Again, we have Bill Frank from Maryland Department of Disabilities, who is on the national task force. I should say Kathy was on the national task force too.

Kyle Ingram from the National Conference of State Legislatures.

And of course Buddy, who is the Kentucky executive director of VR.

So we will go ahead and start our questions for our panel, and I'm going to start with Buddy.

Buddy, can you tell us a little bit about how you came to know the SEED team and what you were hoping to get out of it and how the work fits in to your strategic plan?

BUDDY HOSKINSON: Good morning. Thank you.

Happy to do so but I love the introduction. And of course Buddy, that probably says a lot right there and why Kathy is sitting beside me.

Welcome from Kentucky. We're about 30 days from the fastest two minutes in sports history, the Kentucky Derby, so if you want to get on one of those buses with me -- and we'll bring you with us from D.C. because you have a good Miss America wave going on. You'll be great at the derby. Get you a bow tie and a big hat and let's go have a good time.

How Kentucky got started, I'm sure many of you in this room had similar experiences. We got a call from our governor's office and said that they had been introduced to the SEED folks at another conference. And wanted to connect the dots a little bit. So really started off with that basic simple phone call to our workforce department and initiated a phone call where so many of the good folks were around at the conference call and just asking what are some of the things going on in Kentucky, what is the landscape of Kentucky, and honestly, that's where it started, the conversation and dialogue. One of the things that we picked up on right away from our state and with our commissioner is that it is about collaboration and partnership. We know in Kentucky we're in a difficult time. We do not receive our full match. So therefore we're not able to do all the things that we want to do. We're in priority category one serving, trying to upright our budget. We're 17 months into a brand new administration which was completely changed. And trying to breathe and live and educate every day of what that means so we can do the good work that we do.

And we have a big task in front of us with all of the challenges with WIOA. Not only just to implement everything. As we know, we're several years into that, but also getting our staff to have that understanding.

So one of the things that we were tasked with right off the bat was could Kentucky give a white paperback to the SEED group. Just kind of telling what we're doing and what we would hope to do. We did that.

And then I had the great opportunity to come in and meet with the folks face-to-face back in December, and Steve joined me for that meeting. And that probably more so made it home to us that this is a partnership we wanted to go down the road with, that these are good people who want us to do well and help us along the way. So we are a work in progress for SEED because we have another paper to give them of just some of the policy pieces that we really want to articulate. And I wanted to share those.

It's so different from what everybody else knows. Transportation is difficult in Kentucky. It doesn't connect the dots for us. There are programs that offer transportation to folks with disabilities, but then there are simple rules that if they have a car in their household, then they can't get that transportation provided to them. And there's not always bus transportation, public transportation, in some of the rural areas.

While on a map we may look close in eastern Kentucky, we do have a couple mountains in between us that would take you 5-6 hours to get to another office. So that is difficult for our folks. So basic transportation, getting different cabinets within our great commonwealth to talk and understand is one of the areas that we hope to have some good assistance with legislators.

In our cabinet in workforce, we also share that with the Kentucky Department of Education. Again, we are in the same cabinet but oftentimes don't sit around the table and have discussions on what are our needs. So as everybody else knows in this room, we're looking at preemployment transition services and we really want to connect that dot and lay that blueprint at age 14 up in Kentucky.

In the "Work Matters" report, it talks about Kentucky in the family engagement. And it talks about also the IEP process for us. What I will say about this report, it is a good conversation piece. It tells us right off the bat an action we're doing in Kentucky but still have a long way to go.

I think yesterday in our directors’ meetings we made a comment about sometimes we get in our own way with our own regulations. We're doing that in Kentucky because the Department of Education is a little nervous about changing some of the regulations because they don't want to open that Pandora's box, but we also know that when we speak to our transition services in the KRA for us, and I've gotten to know it well, section 72B, it talked about transition and it gives us really the foundation why it doesn't go specifically but gives us a broad statement. As a parent of an autistic son, it was hard to make that transition. And we moved across the state to another part of the state to get to better services. It wasn't about his twin sister who was a great honor student and thank you Lord will graduate from university this spring and come off my payroll very soon --

[Laughter]

She knows it. Don't worry. I've been telling her since eighth grade how many years she has left in my household. But I never had to worry about her. I had to worry about him. My wife is a schoolteacher. I came from education. We really had to fight for services and we did not have that good community family engagement that we want to see.

And what I would like to see in our department and cabinet would like to see is that the five required services of preemployment transition services becomes a part of the IEP. Not that we are demanding or telling the families how you have to implement it, but it a conversation starter so it is consistent in all 120 counties in the Commonwealth of Kentucky or all school districts. That's the opportunity that we face. It's not consistent because it depends on whether it's the teacher, the counselor, or if it is someone in central office in those school districts. So this is good opportunity for SEED to help us with that.

Several years ago we tried to approach legislation for an executive order but it did not happen. I think if ever we're going to do it, it is now for us. We have a commonwealth now with thousands of jobs that go unfilled every day but we don't have a business community that thinks about the total population of people available to be hired.

Always in our discussion, as Steve said, when we go to the Hill, we talk about the good return for investment in Kentucky for every dollar invested. I know that one of you states in here enjoys that because you get some of my money.

[Laughter]

So take this not the wrong way. I will take you to the derby and get you a mint julep, but I want my money and I want to be able to do what I can for the good folks of Kentucky.

That's our landscape. I'll stop there.

JENNIFER SHEEHY: Thank you so much. You can see how Buddy gets things done.

I'm going to move to Bill. We're very grateful that you served on the national task force and workforce development subcommittee.

Bill you had some legislative wins in Maryland. Can you tell us about how you connected with SEED and maybe how that work helped you out?

WILLIAM FRANK: Thank you.

Before I do that, I feel like you should welcome you to Maryland since you are in Maryland right now.

[Applause]

We love the Kentucky Derby, but we have the Preakness two weeks later.

[Laughter]

What Pamela mentioned earlier about all the great things to do in D.C., Annapolis, Maryland, our beautiful state capital, is only 40 minutes away. It has a lot of history, it's where the U.S. Naval Academy is located, it's the old estate house in use in the country right now, it's where George Washington commanded his army. And an hour up the road is the great city of Baltimore with Fort McHenry where the Star Spangled Banner was written and beautiful Camden Yards. We're going to beat the Toronto Blue Jays today.

[Laughter]

And tonight I'll be having dinner with the Governor. All sports fans know our stadium ushered in these beautiful ballparks that have been built since 1992. Camden Yards was the vanguard that brought it all about. So we're flattered that so many states modeled their ballparks after us. So have a great time in D.C., but if you have a little extra time, head up to Baltimore or Annapolis and spend some money while you're here.

[Laughter]

But I would also like to talk about some legislative victories that we had. One was last year. We call the equal employment opportunity act of 2016. This was a bill that was really a big focus of ours at the department of disabilities. Basically what it did was over a 3-year period it will phase out subminimum wage payments in these so-called sheltered workshops and such around the state. These are efforts that are well meaning but over time people with disabilities were not paid what they were worth. So over three years, October 1, 2020, all of the sheltered workshops will be phased out and all these folks making 1 or $2 an hour will be paid at least federal minimum wage.

[Applause]

Those of who have dealt with legislatures know it sometimes takes years to get something passed into law after you initially introduced it, but this was year one. Where I work, we're going to be working with the Developmental Disabilities Administration, the State Department of Education, various stakeholders to make sure this is implemented promptly and done well. October 1, 2017, our first report is due to the governor and the General Assembly, with details about how we're doing and hope to go about doing this. So we're really happy about that. I wanted to share that victory with you.

JENNIFER SHEEHY: That's great. Can you tell us a little bit about how your work with SEED helped with you that?

WILLIAM FRANK: Absolutely. We got so many good ideas from SEED and I was privileged to be part of the task force. It's good to see what other states are doing. I think it was Harry Truman that said that states are the laboratories of democracy. It's so true. States are innovative. I think our subminimum wage appeal, only one state in the country had this, New Hampshire, I believe at the time.

>> Woo!

WILLIAM FRANK: But SEED was instrumental, bouncing ideas off of people, and the expertise in SEED is just tremendous. We couldn't have done it without SEED.

JENNIFER SHEEHY: That's great. I really appreciate your involvement. I'm glad that was helpful too.

I'm going to ask Kyle now to talk a little bit about how he pulled the report together and how state policymakers can really engage with SEED and then take back what they learn to their own states.

KYLE INGRAM: Thank you, Jennifer, and thank you to everyone for being here this morning. Shout out to all of my Mountain Time and Pacific Time people. It's, what, 6:00 or 7:00 in the morning.

[Laughter]

So thank you all for being here bright eyed and bushy tailed.

So my name is Kyle Ingram and I work for the National Conference of State Legislatures. If you're not familiar, we are bipartisan organization providing research, support, technical assistance, and a voice on Capitol Hill to all 50 state legislatures and staff.

I was one of the primary authors of this report, along with Elizabeth Whitehouse and Bobby Silverstein.

So from my perspective, the "Work Matters" report is very unique and it's not just because I happen to be one of the authors. It's unique in the sense that this really is about collaboration, as Buddy mentioned. And it's about breaking down silos. We broke down silos with the Department of Labor and NCSL but also across the aisle and between branches of government. So it really is sort of an effort to put forth something that is imminently usable by all of our stakeholders involved. And so I'm sure everyone has already bought in to the "Work Matters" report, but if you're not, let me talk a little bit about what's in it. And I know that for some of you, you're probably like, great, another strategic plan or policy recommendations report from a group. If I had a dollar for every time I've seen one of these, I could probably pull down my federal match.

[Laughter]

So I know that this might feel like I've seen this, I've done this, but again, this is a highly collaborative effort and I think it's sort of apparent in the report as you read through it.

So as Jennifer mentioned, this was a task force started, driven by NCSL and the council of state governments. And we wanted to maintain its state focused, state driven character. So everything that you see in this report is developed by the state policymakers that we had on the task force and on the task force subcommittees, and obviously they had support from our great subject matter experts like Kathy West Evans that really provided some of that guiding force for them. But this was a state driven and state owned initiative.

So a couple things about the policy options. There are 13 policy options there. Organized into five sort of policy topic areas that Jennifer mentioned earlier.

Now, we don't expect that every state would try to implement all 13 policy options at once. That's just not how we wrote the report. And I also want to stress that this report is not recommendations; these are options. We want states to take ownership of this and play with this and work with it in a way that best suits their own state's needs.

So I want to kind of characterize what you find in the options and give some state examples as I'm going through this. The first is that the "Work Matters" report contains policy options that are actionable. So these are policy options that are grounded. Policy options, not a wish list, not pie in the sky, but realistic things either going on in states right now or based on the expertise of our stakeholders and the subcommittees and subject matter experts, these are feasible things we think can be implemented in the states. Again, this is state driven. We had experienced and committed policymakers in the room. Not just individuals who worked on disability employment as one of their sort of signature issues in the legislature, but people who had expertise in other areas that overlap and sort of play into how we're able to implement these policy options.

And so these recommendations accounted for some of the viability and the feasibility of implementing in the states, and so you may think that there are policy options that are missing and that's in some ways a part of that process of this task force effort. These were policy options that were agreed to by consensus, things that everyone at the table could say yes, we think this is something that we should really consider as a state.

So a couple of examples from the "Work Matters" report about how it is the policy options are actionable. It includes what we would call low hanging fruit policies. So things that could sort of easily be done or wouldn't take a lot of legislative effort or a lot of finagling to try to get included. Things like including people with disabilities in advisory councils. That can just be something that's a quick legislative change to add people to advisory councils, commissions, things like that.

On the other hand, sort of maybe the other side of the spectrum, is you have policies that are a bit more comprehensive, require a bit more work on a systems change level, things like having an employment-first policy or one that includes self-employment and entrepreneurship. That's a policy option that you find in 12, and a number of states, California, Maine, Oklahoma, and Utah, have done this.

The second thing about the "Work Matters" report is that it contains policy options that have broad appeal. These are bipartisan, they were developed by policymakers from both branches. They include public sector, private sector, public-private partnership policy options. So you can see that there really is a sort of effort to speak to people wherever they are in their state on a political continuum or based on whatever their policy priorities are in the administration.

And I think to buddy's point earlier, they can provide a common language to discuss policy issues. You can bring this to your state legislator and say let's have a conversation about this report, what we find in it, and use that sort of as a framework or foundational starting point for your own policy efforts.

So if you're in a blue state, red state, purple state, there's no excuse. Okay? We have really tried to make this appeal to all policymakers and stakeholders.

And so we have lots of examples of policies that are either efforts that happen within sort of state agencies. We also have policy efforts that sort of attempt to bridge the gap between private and public sector and policy option 6 which deals a lot with work-based learning opportunities. We have two policy sub options. The first one is ensuring that there are work-based learning opportunities that do not require you to be part of an educational system at the time. So we want to make sure that businesses are able to start their own work-based learning opportunity to have support from the state or to use something like Project SEARCH as an avenue to do that.

The second one is building in MOUs, agreements, systems that help to bridge transition services or things like that within state agencies. And Kentucky has a really great guide for work-based learning that they use with their schools. That's one of those sorts of examples.

And finally the work matters contains policy options that are intended to be customizable. So because of the two things that I just mentioned, that they're actionable and have broad appeal, we want this document to provide a state with choices.

So in the report I haven't had a chance to mention but they're organized in this fashion. We have policy options, 13 of them. And underneath those policy options, there are a number of sub options. So there are strategies along the wide range of sort of a continuum that you can use to choose among those sub options.

Then we have suggested strategies, which are sort of the next level to say, if you want to choose policy option one sub option B, you could do that in a number of ways.

Finally we have state examples that are sort of concrete demonstrations of how that policy option would be implemented.

So it's sort of like a family tree or a pyramid. As you move down those levels, you see it can get very highly customizable, highly tailorable. So we are able to provide technical assistance once you get down to that suggested strategies, we have those collected that we can bring to bear in conversations with you.

And so we want you to sort of take this on as an effort to tailor this to your state. You know what works best in your state. We went into this with the expectation that states will tailor it, play with it, they might say oh, I think we can do better than the examples even in this and do some innovation. So this "Work Matters" report was built with that expectation in mind.

JENNIFER SHEEHY: Thank you, Kyle.

You can see there's a lot in there. As you're drinking your mint julep tonight at the reception and reading the "Work Matters" report, I hope you think about how this might be applicable to you. I'm going to ask Buddy to talk from his VR perspective how the heads of VR can really engage with SEED and hopefully help you achieve your own goal.

BUDDY HOSKINSON: Sure. For us, again, it is about the collaboration and partnership and it is about the dialogue and conversation about how do we get ourselves one step further than we were yesterday. It's never been about that SEED is taking over or leading or coming in and doing anything; it's about being side by side, sitting at the table, and helping us figure out how do we map and maneuver all the changes in the landscape that are Kentucky. So it's no different than for the other states out there. We're all doing it; it just may look a little different. But we know that, let's just be honest, it's about the personal relationships that we have. In the report there's a representative from Kentucky also on that in putting this together. So having that dialogue and conversation and the awareness piece. Being able to bring it from a national level back to the state level to me is what the value is. And that's what I would encourage for the states.

JENNIFER SHEEHY: That's great. And Bill, you talked about some of your legislative work, but you're also in Maryland considered a model employer of people with disabilities. Can you talk a little bit about some of the policies you have in place to support that?

WILLIAM FRANK: Sure. Thanks, Jennifer.

Before I do that, I would like to also mention that Maryland is the only state in the country that has a cabinet level department of disabilities. We were established in 2004 so we have a seat at the table in highest level of state government. That's important because when the cabinet is meeting, disability issues are always at the forefront because our secretary is always there representing our constituents and those who have disabilities in their state. So that's really important. And as I mentioned, this began in 2004 and we're still the only state. So come on, guys, let's get moving. Get those standalone departments established. It's been a great way for us to get some things done.

We also have collaboration among the various departments, Interagency Disabilities Board, composed of Secretary of Transportation, Health and Human Services, and on down the line. We meet every year and consider disability issues.

But as far as being an employment first state, we run the gamut from A-Z, try to do everything legislatively or by executive action to give preferences to veterans and those with disabilities. We passed a bill last year that gives an extra 5 points on the state exam to someone with a certified disability. Keeping in mind that that person gets an extra boost for having a disability, but he or she would not have gotten a job otherwise without it. It doesn't make someone unqualified someone qualified. They just get an extra boost. So things like that are really important to make sure that people with disabilities have an opportunity to really thrive in the mainstream of society.

There are lots of other things we're doing in the state of Maryland as well, but those are just a couple things.

JENNIFER SHEEHY: That's great. Thank you.

I'll talk one second about a similar success we had in the federal government, and we've learned from state policies and hopefully vice versa. We had an executive order in 2010 that required all federal agencies to step unemployment of people with disabilities and to meet a goal of 100,000 people, new hires, into the federal government. But it really, really took a lot of planning and accountability, data collection, and states working together with subject matter experts and federal agencies working together with subject matter experts. And we did meet that goal in December of 2015, but it was hard work and it doesn't let up. So I know Kyle, going forward, you're still working with SEED and with us. What are you thinking about for the next venture? How can states work with you?

KYLE INGRAM: So we have taken the last year to engage in this task force effort, to draft this report, and we hope it just goes up on a shelf somewhere and never -- no, I'm just kidding.

Now it's time to really engage with the states. Particularly states that weren't part of this effort. We were able to capture around half the country and the stakeholders that we involved, but we also want to expand that and really get into states that were not able to be a part of this effort.

So what we want to do now is offer our services basically. Offer the collaboration and the wide knowledge base and the capacity that we have as NCSL, CSG, the Department of Labor, to leverage all of those perspectives and all of those knowledge bases in the work that we're doing.

So you know, really I think a couple action steps that we're looking for and that maybe you can consider is, one, please I encourage you to look through this report. Familiarize yourself with the contents. See where your state is already highlighted in the report and see also where this report can, as Buddy said, really support or supplement what's already going on in the state. We're not asking you to reinvent the wheel or take on something that is sort of going to totally change your priorities. We want to support what's going on in the state right now.

So one, just familiarize yourself with the report. Two, please share it with your colleagues and other executive agencies and also with your legislators that you work with. I know many of you are in dialogue with your legislators either through a committee, advice you give before an oversight committee or things like that. Please share this. Again, you want this to be sort of an aid to develop a common language and sort of a foundation for policy implementation and development.

And so you know, especially when you're on an advisory council or on a commission, please utilize this report to whatever extent makes sense.

And three, look for opportunities to foster greater collaboration with your stakeholders. Break down silos in your own agency or in your own environment. And part of that is that we work primarily at NCSL with state legislatures, but we know this effort will take everybody. If you're working with a state legislator, especially someone working on a bill before they introduce it to the legislature, or if they're working on it in the interim because it didn't pass that year, please have them get in touch with us. We can provide technical assistance, pull things from the report, do other original research as necessary, to support that effort.

And I think we can offer similar efforts through the work of the SEED team, the collaborative with state teams.

And also please share your efforts with us. When you pass a policy, when you make a new regulation, or when you change a program in your agency, tell us about it. We love bragging about the efforts that are going on in our states, particularly when the feds are in the room too. So we really, really love highlighting the work that states are doing to innovate.

So those are sort of the three things that I want to share. We hope this document is a living document. We will be updating it with new policy efforts as we continue. So we want your efforts to be reflected in this report going forward.

Thanks.

JENNIFER SHEEHY: Well, another good reason to look at the report before tomorrow is there are some excellent state examples of good things going on. And just so you're informed about them. So you can be proud of what you are doing at the state level and knowledgeable about it when you talk to your federal legislators as well.

We just have a couple of minutes left. Buddy and Bill, what do you want to work on next?

BUDDY HOSKINSON: For us in Kentucky, it is about starting to develop some of the policies in future legislation efforts moving forward. We'll be working on our next budget early in the fall. Gives us a little bit of time to start making some headway with some of those that I mentioned this morning.

WILLIAM FRANK: Two things we're working on. One is the disabilities plan, a two-year plan we put together in a three-year period. It's about a 100 page document. It's kind of our roadmap for the next three years.

And secondly, I know a lot of states are doing this and we are as well in Maryland. We're gearing up for the ABLE Act, a federal law that passed in December 2014. It stands for achieving a better life experience, ABLE. An ABLE account when you open one up is intended for people with disabilities and their families to save up money for the future to pay for disability-related expenses and at the same time get a tax benefit at the state level for that thrift, and at the same time, not losing your federal benefits. So it's a great program, passed by a bipartisan vote in Congress, and many states, including Maryland, are implementing that. Our start date is the fall. It's very exciting. Seeing these things give people a real mechanism to save for the future while not being penalized at the same time. It's a rare bipartisan victory in this era of hyper partisanship as Steve mentioned earlier.

JENNIFER SHEEHY: Fantastic. Well, I want to thank Kathy for her ongoing work with our SEED national task force. And thank CSAVR for allowing that partnership. And I think we should give a big hand to our wonderful panel too. Thank you all.

[Applause]

KATHY WEST EVANS: All right. Well, we are on break now. So please meet the new directors.

And the panel will be around if you have questions or want to interact with them one on one.

Thank you.

[Break]

LISA HINSON-HATZ: About five minutes and we'll get started. Grab some coffee and find your seat.

If we could have everyone take their seats so we can get started on time.

This is your two-minute warning. Please find a seat.

Welcome back, everyone. Hey, folks, let's get back and get started. If you could find your seat.

Good morning...

This is what happens when you caffeinate everyone.

Shhh.

Welcome back, everyone. This is what happens when you give us caffeine, right? You get everybody talking and it's great.

Well, welcome back. This is one of the sessions that I was most excited for. When Mark Schultz, the director for Nebraska VR, and myself and Steve and our team started talking about our Vision 2020 initiative, looking at the VR program and its 100th year anniversary, we've done just some tremendous work since we've started those discussions a couple of years ago, and I'm really, really honored to be introducing this panel for our 2020 initiative.

To my left I have Kelly Buckland, the executive director of the National Council on Independent Living.

To his left we have Michael Gamel-McCormick, who is the disability policy director for Senator Bob Casey.

To his left we have Curt Decker, the executive director for the National Disability Rights Network.

We of course have our esteemed CEO.

And then we have his partner in crime with the National Association of State Directors of Special Education, Bill East.

So I want to welcome you all. Thank you for being here to in this discussion with us, and I'm going to turn the conversation over to Steve.

STEVE WOODERSON: Thanks, Lisa.

Good morning once again. I promise after this panel you won't see me for the next couple of days, okay?

[Laughter]

I'll be laying low. I'll be laying low and laying flat.

Is my audio overbearing?

>> No.

STEVE WOODERSON: Well, welcome back, and hopefully you had an opportunity to shake hands with our new state directors and those first time visiting.

On the screen and the banner above our head is a branding of our Vision 2020 initiative. This began as many of you know last year, and this is really the first opportunity for us to speak to the general membership about the activities that we're about.

But let me just speak to the brand itself, because it has a message that we want to be sure is clear and that you are articulating as you go about the business of sharing the good news of the public VR program.

Vision 2020: Leading change. We believe we in the public rehabilitation space are leading change and we also have the opportunity to reevaluate where we can do more in leading change. And it's about what we're doing today. It's about what we're going to do tomorrow. But most importantly for the conversation we're going to have today it's about what we're going to do together, because those that are on the stage with us are our partners, and in many respects, we're going to be successful as a direct result of our relationships and our understanding of our partners' work and how we intersect with one another.

When we look at the charge for Vision 2020, that's where we really came up with the first part of the tag line, leading change, because we truly want to be in that space. The public VR program, demonstrating we're responsive to the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act, and beyond that proactive in the broader space of the disability employment community.

So we are stepping up and saying, hey, we acknowledge that there are opportunities for us to do things in a different way and to make the significant change that we have been charged with doing as we'll talk about here in just a few minutes.

Let's talk about today so that we all have an appreciation of what we can celebrate. We know that in fiscal year 2015, the public vocational rehabilitation program was serving over 325,000 individuals. For those of us that are into the vernacular, we were delivering services to that many individuals, touching more than a million lives across the country, but actually delivering services to over 325,000. We put to work, with our partners, in relationship with our partnership, we were able to put to work over 180,000 individuals in competitive, integrated employment work space.

Please understand that we did this in partnership and with our partners in the core partners, Department of Labor, Health and Human Services, and community partners with business as well. Over 180,000 individuals went to work as a result of the services that we were engaged with.

We have over 83,000 individuals that are uniquely qualified vocational rehabilitation counselors. Add to that the equal number of individuals delivering services in the business relations field, and you can see we have a pretty good space in that disability employment community at large.

And we know that as a country we don't have a national return on investment formula, but we can tease out from a number of different states, such as Virginia, 80% of those touched by VR made more money as a result of the services delivered. In the state of Iowa, nearly a million dollars came back in to the public coffers as a reduction of the public support there.

So today we know we're doing really good stuff, right? We know a lot of good stuff is happening.

We also know today that the disability employment rate has lagged over the past two decades. We also know that according to the BLS, 32% of those of working age with disabilities, that's all that's in the workplace. Only 27% of those are actually working; the rest of them are seeking employment.

So today we know we're doing good stuff. We know there's opportunities for to us grow.

Tomorrow we also know that we have been told clearly that the public vocational rehabilitation program plays a critical role in impacting the workforce participation rate of people with disabilities. That's what's expected of us tomorrow.

We also know that we have been given the message that the public VR program has to step up to deliver the services to make the difference.

So we know what's happening today. We know what's expected of us tomorrow.

We also know that we are not the only thing in that disability employment community, that our partnerships are what's going to be necessary for us to be able to leverage.

So if you look together, our tag line, leading change, today, tomorrow, and together, we have been about gathering input from our stakeholders and partners. And today we have a representation of those partners. There are many others that we have seen, many others that we yet need to see, but this is just a representation of the partnerships critical to us in being able to lead change today, tomorrow, and together.

As Lisa has already indicated, we have a really great panel here. I'm honored to each of you gentleman who send the invitation because every one of you have full-time jobs, right?

CURT DECKER: Today.

STEVE WOODERSON: We know you made a commitment to spend time with us.

There are dozens of others who could be here and should be here, but this is our initial volley into this conversation.

For the next few moments what we hope to do is be focusing -- that was a hard word for me -- focusing on the future because we know that we have shared experiences in the past, but we really want to talk about the future in public vocational rehabilitation programs. But to that end I wanted to begin by asking Michael to just speak to us for a moment because he has a distinct experience and unique experience in his space because of his role previously of the staff of the health education pensions and labor committee.

Michael, I would just like to start off with you and ask you to give us a little insight as far as what was kind of perceived as being VR's role and expectations for what we are to deliver in this world of disability public policy and practice.

MICHAEL GAMEL-McCORMICK: You're just asking a small question.

STEVE WOODERSON: And that's the opening question.

MICHAEL GAMEL-McCORMICK: Let me start off, if I may, just a thank you to you all and a notice of support from Senator Casey. He is extraordinarily supportive of vocational rehabilitation services and the work that you do and just a big thank you for that.

He would like to see the networks expanded and funding increased. He is an enormous supporter. Thank you, as a start.

And I do want to build on one statistic that you provided, Steve. If you look at the Bureau of Labor Statistics over the last year and a half, you'll see that there has been a slow but steady increase in disability employment, and finally coming out of that gulf that was the 2007-2009 dip, and actually that lasted much longer.

So there is a movement moving forward, and hopefully that will continue. We'll get new numbers on Friday and see.

But back to Steve's question, thinking back to 2013-2014, but also what I'm hearing in the halls right now currently, I think I can speak broadly for the HELP committee and certainly for Senator Harkin when we were instructing WIOA. We were really looking toward the VR system to be partners in terms of businesses and what needs are in terms of preparation programs such as community colleges and certificate programs, to all of the community-based partners that are out there, to really enhance competitive integrated employment.

And I can't emphasize enough how much the competitive integrated employment component was critical to discussion in Congress. That was across party lines, across offices. That was the absolute goal, and you know that what had been done so many years ago in terms of regulations got built in to the legislation itself so that competitive integrated employment is the goal and the outcome for people with disabilities.

It was clear that whether it was a republican office or democratic office, whether new senator or long term senator in this sphere, is that there needed to be a partnership with local, state, and business personnel and communities to build on.

And to emphasize the fact that the expectation was is that individuals can be embedded and work in those different settings. The work that Jack Markell did with the National Governors Association, and standing up state government from saying, we're going to be the place to be the example for employment of people with disabilities was part of what was being thought of as well.

And I will be honest with you, and this is a choice. There was a focus on youth. There clearly was a focus on youth and transition, and making sure that individuals who were 14, 15, 16 years old were getting the experiences that would target them toward work.

That was critical in terms of moving forward. It's hard because there's not enough money to serve the 50-year-old who acquires a disability and needs support. There need to be choices, there and we certainly would like to see more dollars moving forward.

But when we were talking WIOA, we were clearly talking about making sure that there was a real focus and effort on making sure that the 18-year-old or the 21-year-old was moving into competitive integrated employment. And hopefully having a career that moved forward for 25, 30, 35, 40 years, etc. And that that was the value system that was embedded in this particular piece of legislation.

If I can go on for one more minute and say what's happening now. I mentioned my boss' support. He is extraordinarily supportive.

I am now also hearing that metrics are going to make a huge difference in terms of budget going forward. And looking at what outcomes are. So 325,000 is great. It's wonderful. I know that some of the offices are going to start digging down as to what those 325,000 are, the types of jobs they are, the longevity of individuals being in those jobs, the career movement happening with individuals as well is going to be important.

So I'm hearing offices beginning to say, what are these jobs, what is the return on investment, and where are people moving once they have these jobs as well. They're bigger questions, systemic questions, but clearly things that are being asked right now. And as we move forward, I'm hoping with the continuing resolution budget, we won't see a whole lot of changes, but I'm anticipating with a new administration those questions will be asked and analyzed in a different way than they have been in the past. So it's going to be important.

And frankly to also offer the stories out that you see every day with individuals and make sure that people are understanding exactly what is happening with the individuals that you're helping, that you're moving forward. Those stories will make a huge difference over the next 18 months or so.

STEVE WOODERSON: You know, Michael, that's something we've already addressed as far as how do we not address, but we've already brought up for awareness, how do we measure our success. It seems as though you're heightening the need for our awareness of assuring that those outcomes are not only tracked but that they're making a difference is what I'm hearing you say.

MICHAEL GAMEL-McCORMICK: And I would say the offices are looking at jobs but they're also looking at additional skill development. I was in Pittsburgh a week and a half ago talking to some chamber people who were saying, there is going to be new manufacturing, new folks in the area, and we need a pipeline of individuals and it means not only a GED or high school diploma; it means certificates, certain 2-year degrees that people are coming out with, means an OSHA certificate. And that's also the type of thing that I think we're going to see people looking for out of the population of people with disabilities, coming out with specific skill sets as well.

STEVE WOODERSON: Thank you. We may come back and visit that more as we wrap things up.

But I think I want to play off a transition piece. You call him our partner in crime? I'll just call him a criminal. But that's beside the point.

[Laughter]

Bill, the director of special education. Obviously with that emphasis in transition, you know, Bill, we've had conversation on and off, but from your perspective, where do you see things going with our connections with special education, where are some of our opportunities to really push forward this agenda of working with youth?

BILL EAST: First of all, thank you for allowing me to come and share with you again. We've had a number of opportunities to do that over the years, both at your conferences and mine. So it's just a pleasure to be here.

I'll say to all of you, it's very important that you include your special education director and others in your states. If you're going to have the very best VR program possible, then public education needs to give you the very best product possible. So working together, we can do a better job doing that.

So what do we need to do to share with each other to make a difference? As I think about that, you know, I wonder what shouldn't we be doing together to make a difference? We both have technical assistance plans. We both have training plans. We both are concerned with preemployment skills. We both have some resources, certainly not what we need to do the job alone. All those kinds of things leads to the real need to work together and share and develop MOUs both at state and community levels that will include both special education and VR.

We both have, as I said, plans. You have your VR plans. We have our special education plans. In fact, today state directors of special education are submitting their state improvement plans, and in that they should be including not only what they're doing academically and behaviorally in schools but what they're doing working with their VR counterparts.

I wouldn't ask for a show of hands because I'm afraid I'll be embarrassed, but I hope that if you're a VR director, that you have had the opportunity to work with the state director of special education to work on that plan. If you haven't, go home, pick up the phone, call them, and ask why. Because at every meeting we've had, and Steve will remember this, I have encouraged state directors to include VR personnel in the development of their plans.

Another area I think we can share is responsibility we have under the IDEA, to have a summary of performance plan ready for students with disabilities with an IEP leaving that program. This includes things like what did the student do academically, behaviorally. What are the students' goals and aspirations for the future. It's just a plan that that student can take to an employer, to higher education, or wherever they want to go and say, this is me, this is what I've accomplished, this is what I can do, this is where I want to go.

Since we work with many of the same families and students, it just makes sense to me that we should be both involved in having some input into that. So that's another area we can share.

In the education side, we are almost inundated, run over with data. We have data about everything. All the way from kindergarten up to grade 12. We don't always use that data to make a difference the way we should, but we have a lot of data.

We can tell you at the elementary level where those students are who are candidates for dropping out along the way. If they are a student with disabilities that have an IEP and have a strong likelihood to drop out, there's a strong likelihood that they'll show up in VR.

So we shouldn't wait for the student to fail and then start worrying about providing services. We need to get into prevention mode.

So what can we do at the national and state level to encourage that? We need to encourage our districts and community leaders in special education and voc education to sit down with that mountain of data that education has amassed and predict those that may need to be considered at some point for VR. And let's see what we can do to prevent it.

I always say the best way to prevent special education, to improve special education, is to prevent as much of it as possible.

So I'll say the same thing to you. Let's prevent as much VR as possible by doing a good job and preparing as many students as we can to leave school with the skills they need to be employed or to go on to higher education or other programs.

And the last thing I think I'll say in this area about sharing and working together is you need to share the stage. By that I mean you need to be caught sitting on the stage with your special ed director, your advocates, all the people who will work with you to make a difference.

Steve and I have tried to demonstrate that. I went to Miami. He came to Baltimore to my conference. We've done some state things together. We try to be seen together, and I think it's made a difference. Our people, both VR and special education, have been quite impressed that we are talking the same talk and walking the same walk. I don't think they were impressed because of our rugged good looks; I think they were impressed because they caught us being together, saying the same thing, talking about the same people and trying to make a difference.

STEVE WOODERSON: Bill, you had mentioned a few things I wanted to highlight, and that is the MOU development at the state level with VR and special ed. And I want to say thanks to OSERS who supported the development of the tool kit that was worked on by our NTAC, so thank you very much.

Are we getting any traction in accessing that tool kit and working with it yet? I don't have an answer from the VR side.

BILL EAST: I haven't heard much from the special ed side either, and we should be, because we've encouraged over and over to work together on those MOUs. In the IDEA, we have very clear requirements for transition. With WIOA, we have the same thing. Some of those requirements are the same. Some are a little bit different. And so to get a plan that we all can work on that will make sense and that will enhance our opportunity for success, we need to develop MOUs so we're not running all over each other, with training, technical assistance, we don't need to be with our very scarce resources, you know, not maximizing the benefit of those. We need to share, not duplicate.

So the MOU is the key.

STEVE WOODERSON: So a specific activity that we could be about is using those tool kits and contacting our state special education directors and having that dialogue. And hopefully we'll be able to see some of those really come into fruition.

The other thing, Bill, that we have been about is we are currently reaching out to you and to your counterparts in special education to see where some of the friction points are in transition specifically IDEA. So we're gathering that information from you and special education directors now and we'll hopefully be able to use that to develop a strategy for the future.

Thanks, Bill.

So Kelly, from the independent living community side, you know, we've been through quite a journey together over the years. The legislation has changed, some of the infrastructure. But let's talk about the future with independent living and vocational rehabilitation. Where do you see the bang for the buck? Where do you see we have the greatest opportunity working together as partners to impact competitive integrated employment outcomes?

KELLY BUCKLAND: I'll start out like everyone else. Thank you all for having me here. I don't think I've addressed a large group of VR directors like this, so it's a privilege for me to be here.

How many of you are familiar with NCIL, what we do.

Quite a few but not as many as I would have guessed. For those of you who don't know, NCIL has never been shy about telling VR what they think we should be doing and we've never been shy about telling them what we don't think they should be doing either.

So I think Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act really did change the relationship in a number of ways. In the law and I think otherwise as well.

An example, there's no longer requirement that VR director serve on the state independent living council or a representative for that matter.

However, in the rehab council, it's still required a CIL representative be on the rehab council. It used to be we have both.

So there's a number of ways like that where the development of state plan changed a great deal. VR doesn't really play a role in that anymore.

So it's really changed the dynamics. I think we're going to have to wait and see how that plays out. States had a chance to change their designated state agencies, and for the most part I think most people stuck with VR so I think that's a good sign that there's a willingness and desire for a lot of the independent living folks around the country to continue the relationship. We know some states that, well, Minnesota and Massachusetts, the two M states that are 723 states where they still chose to have their money flow through VR before it comes in to independent living.

So we know there are states out there where there's a good relationship, people work well together.

I think over the past decade centers dove off into employment services much more than ever before. I think we had a position that was VR's job, but I think there's been a lot of independent living programs that have taken up I think what are really a supportive role. A lot of centers have grants across the country. Several centers operate pretty large employment programs. What used to be ABLE is now Ability 360. They have a large program. They're actually like a Ticket to Work provider. So they actually operate a pretty large program. And so does Independence First in Wisconsin. There's one in Montana. I mean, you can look at both rural and urban centers, and they're all kind of diving off into this.

So I think that really does open up a great opportunity for centers and VR to work more closely together.

We just finished our springboard meeting last week. All of my board members were in town. We had a congressional reception up on the Hill Wednesday night. And so I knew I was coming today so I posed this question to my board and got some feedback. One of them I think is one Michael brought up, and that is working with you. Both VR and independent living got basically a mandate to start working with younger people.

Ours is limited, however, to those who have had an IEP and graduated or moved on. They have to no longer be in education. So they've either dropped out or finished school or what have you, but that's who we're mandated to work with.

However, centers really have a long history of working with people way before that. We are working with people younger than that, but that's what the law says. So I think this is an area where working with youth, we really could combine our efforts and work together and make a big difference in people's lives, actually. Several of my board members said they have received no referrals of youth from VR. So it may just be because we're too new to this thing or whatever, but that's what I would start encouraging you all to talk to your centers, refer youth, especially if they meet that category I've talked about where they've left education. Centers can really help transition people from school to adult life. The employment programs too I think are things like the Ticket to Work, I think those are also places where centers could play a role. I think maybe helping bridge between the one stop centers and the VR program, I think centers can help also bridge that gap.

And then just lastly, what I would say is we are a major employer of people with disabilities. I asked the board members how many have received a referral of a person with a disability to work at a center, and no one had. That includes me from when I was in Idaho. We announced regularly. We are required to have at least 50% of our employees, well, actually, 51%, be people with disabilities. So we're a major employer. There's 700 centers across the country right now. And so we would highly encourage y'all to make referrals to centers. We need good employees and want to get good referrals. So that's another place I think we could really work together.

STEVE WOODERSON: Thank you, Kelly.

Curt, I worked for a fellow once that said one of the best ways to really get a view of what's going on in the field is that reversed angle view. So Curt is with the National Disability Rights Network, and I would like you to take a moment to explain your role, Curt, but really hopefully you can give us your perspective. You know, you hear from all over the country through a different lens that we need to understand and appreciate. Where do you see the things that are going well and where do you see some of the opportunities for the future for us in the public VR space?

CURT DECKER: Thank you for inviting me. And I want to congratulate you on engaging in Vision 2020. I think it's always painful to do an introspective look into your own agency.

I don't know how many people are from Arizona or Mexico, but that's tall cactuses with arms are attacked. And the cactus secretes some kind of resin that surrounds the nest and protects it as goes on as if it was never touched and survives out there in the desert.

That's my analogy of the VR program, always secreting something around attempts to change it but surviving nevertheless.

I think the last time I was here I was one of the youngest people in the room. Now I look around and see I'm one of the oldest people in the room, and that's a good thing, that there are a lot of new people with new ideas coming in to the system so I think that's very helpful.

And as Bill said, no one comes to us to say they're happy with VR. We're the protection and advocacy program and client assistance program. We exist in 57 states and territories. We have very broad legal authority to represent individuals cross disability, and particularly in the VR system but also under jurisdiction from social security. So we have the ability to represent many people and we probably touch over 100,000 people a year who come to us, as I said, probably not with a good experience.

That said, we are seeing I think some really positive improvements in the VR system, doing a better job. I should also say we also are probably the largest enforcer of IDEA through our work in the P&A system around special ed. So we have that crossover between kids in special ed so we harass Bill just as much as we harass you all.

And we are seeing improvement around the country in preemployment services with kids and working on using job centers and looking at experiences as a way to do that.

But I will say in talking about what Michael said, we didn't work very hard to try to close the front door to subminimum wage and segregated employment, and that was the one thing we were able to I think set in motion through the WIOA rule and now it's a question of enforcing that and making sure that it's real.

We do see states, some states, still using community rehab centers, the state spending a third of its budget on a CRC and you have to ask the question, in those kinds of established programs, are we really meeting the needs of young people and tracking the new jobs, the experienced things.

I was recently at a meeting at Department of Labor, talking about the implementation of 501 and federal contractors and the Labor people were saying we're getting calls for employers saying we can't find qualified people with disabilities to meet these goals of 7%.

We talked for an hour and I finally asked, where is VR? Aren't they a major player in this, being able to identify people and making sure they're in that pipeline getting into those kinds of jobs?

In terms of subminimum wage, NDRN has done a fairly large campaign trying to raise attention to this problem. We say to people all the time, we think we're shaking the building, we think the bricks are falling off, but that system also is extremely engrained to survive.

I was told when I spoke to ACCESS about 6-7 years ago that if they had to pay one third of the minimum wage to everybody in their sheltered workshop, they would go out of business.

I thought that was an interesting strategy, actually. If I can get one-third of people paid a third of the minimum wage, that system will collapse of its own weight. Pretty interesting business model.

We need the VR system to really be a partner in that effort.

I think we made a mistake 7 years ago. We said successful closure is not dumping them sheltered workshops. But it didn't happen. I think VR decamped from sheltered workshops saying we can't work there because they're no longer clients of ours and I feel it's the opposite. We need you in there working with those people, getting them skills, getting their productivity up so they make more than a third of the minimum wage.

We've also discovered there is little or no assistive technology in sheltered workshops at all. Again, these are devices and services that would increase the productivity of people and really train them for competitive integrated employment, and that's something working with us and you we could make a big difference.

So we're not out necessarily to close these places. We know there's a lot of fear from families about what the impact would be if sheltered workshops disappeared, but we really think it's time to move people into a much more integrate and competitive process, and that is the major role I think for VR.

STEVE WOODERSON: I want to queue up, if you have a burning question about these folks' view of the future and our partnership with them, you know, raise your hand and we'll get a microphone to you and stop mid-stream here. But we're getting to where I'm afraid if we get to the end, we want to make sure you have an opportunity to ask.

Let me just maybe quickly ask each of you, from your perspective, Kelly, how would you know that occasional rehabilitation has demonstrated leadership in the disability employment policy and procedure arena? What is it that you would like to see as a marker, a benchmark, that identifies that we've really made a difference in the work that we're doing in the independent living community?

KELLY BUCKLAND: Wow, that's a good question.

I think I have to step out of the NCIL role a little. We tried to partner with VR on a number of occasions to do policy change at the Capitol building. Example, Medicaid buy in program. We worked really hard on that for a lot of years to get that through the legislature and get the Governor's office to support and VR would have nothing to do with it. They refused to partner with us. They refused to like do any work around it.

That was bothersome. So I think to answer your question, it would be really good to see partnerships with that kind of stuff that has a direct relationship to how successful VR workers are getting people employed. Medicaid buy in program we thought would make a big difference and I think that's the one piece the Ticket to Work program that's made the biggest difference in employment of people with disabilities.

The other thing was, we also tried to start up a state USBLN, and again, VR would have nothing to do with that, wouldn't help.

I think a lot of it has changed at this point. There's a new VR director and a lot of that partnership I think, so this is more where I'm leading to. I think basically in Idaho right now, it's exactly the on system the new director is like really participating in a major way with independent living folks and for that matter all of the disability advocates and really trying to partner. So that to me is where you can really see a change and you can feel it. I hate to say you know it when you see it, but I think it's true. We know it when we see it when there's really that partnership. I think it exists in a number of states but it could be strengthened.

STEVE WOODERSON: Michael, you have mentioned partnerships in your opening comments and that certainly was clear in the intent of the law.

How do you think policymakers are going to see success in those arenas? Because ultimately they're the ones we have to convince, right?

MICHAEL GAMEL-McCORMICK: I'll give you a micro and a macro and let me preface this by saying I am not representing my boss when I say this at this point.

[Laughter]

STEVE WOODERSON: All recordings are turned off.

MICHAEL GAMEL-McCORMICK: I'll go back to Kelly with the micro one. I'm a little concerned that you have not had a referral either in terms of employment or in terms of preemployment services too.

IL centers are a perfect place to help young people get self-determination skills and some pride in terms of disability type of skills. And I'm seeing some really good examples of that around the country. One of the measures would be an increase in that type of thing, in those type of referrals, and that would be some real leadership I think on the part of VR to do that.

Particularly since the creation of the Administration on Independent Living and then ensconcing that in the Administration for Community Living was really purposeful to make sure it was a life span component and hopefully we would see VR referring to those programs.

The more macro level piece for me is to see VRs in their states reaching out to places like your office and your department of Medicaid services. Medicaid is going to drive a lot of work. It already does. I will be forthright in seeing it drives a lot of bad work at this point. Subminimum wage work. And for you to be working with Medicaid services, leading the way, pointing to where good work can be, and pointing those directors and those providers and saying we need to see real competitive integrated employment and Medicaid services is long term services and supports to get people ready to work, to work, to be at work, and that would be a leadership change that I think would be extraordinarily valuable.

STEVE WOODERSON: Curt, what's evidence of VR stepping up to the plate from your perspective?

CURT DECKER: Well, a couple things. I just would share maybe a commercial if you will. I just want the administrators and counselors not to be fearful of advocacy. As you mentioned earlier with your introduction to me, seeing the role of advocates in this process. I mean, not only do we, as I said, people come to us when they're not happy, but we also advise people that they're not eligible for services. So they can hear it from us sometimes easier than from you, so there is that part. People think it's an ATM machine, and that's not true. I would ask administrators to see that value of making your program as responsive as possible by getting the input of the IL centers and P&A to let you know how that's actually happening out there on the ground.

I would also say use us in your efforts to get the match. In those states having problems getting the legislature to see the value of VR services and letting that money sit on the table, we are often very active in the legislature and could be a voice there. We want to see the money coming in to the state as much as you do.

So making sure you're working with the in-demand jobs, making sure you're fitting the people to the job, not just using your old standard way of doing business, but being creative in working with young people. I agree with all this partnership but making sure these transition services are really working. I don't want to see people saying, we can't put you in a sheltered workshop, but it's the only place so go on over there and try it, in sort of an under the table referral. So I think you have to join in with us to really -- it's amazing to me when I go to larger civil rights groups and they talk about let's raise minimum wage, and we raise our hand and say, do you know there's 500,000 people with disabilities that make subminimum wage?

No, that can't be, not in this country.

It's one of the best kept secrets we have of what we've done to people with disabilities, good intentions gone wrong, as usual, but it's always a great idea 100 years ago and now has turned into something that's a real burden on our folks becoming truly integrated in our society.

STEVE WOODERSON: I just want to emphasize you said we could work together towards those areas such as advocating for that state match.

CURT DECKER: Absolutely.

STEVE WOODERSON: A great advocacy partnership we could tap into.

KELLY BUCKLAND: I ditto that. That's an area where we can be helpful and would like to with IL centers.

CURT DECKER: We also hire people with disabilities as well, so you could send people to the P&A system.

STEVE WOODERSON: Dr. East, what do you see as our markers for success in working together in the future?

BILL EAST: I'll mention one in a minute, but before I forget it, I want to follow up with something Michael said about Medicaid. One of our biggest concerns on the policy side now for state directors is a concern about the loss of Medicaid in schools. We use Medicaid dollars to provide a number of services that many of our students would not have if they did not have the Medicaid money. A lot of their related services, behavioral plans that are out there, the different therapies, and we're just real concerned with current political climate around Medicaid about where we would be without those dollars.

You know, Steve, to get back to your question about what would I like to see that would demonstrate that VR is making a difference, you know, I'm a data person. When we get to the point where the percentage of people with disabilities having jobs, if we look at the data to date and next year, as long as we're seeing upward trajectory, then I'm going to say that VR is doing some good things.

If we do a better job in the public schools, maybe less individuals will need VR in the future, that's good but what does that mean? That means the people coming to VR are those who have the greater needs so it will be very difficult to keep that trajectory.

So I think we just need to make sure as we work with our constituents, that we point out who we are and use the data to show that yeah, we're doing great, or well, we're doing good but we're dealing with students with greater needs.

STEVE WOODERSON: We have a couple of moments. Is there a question in the crowd that someone would like to pose?

There's got to be one.

That being said, how about a closing comment from each of you.

Curt?

CURT DECKER: We are concerned. There are some very troubling political climate going on. We're seeing some pretty scary appointments coming through that will impact on a lot of our ability to enforce the existing statutes. We have this wonderful array of civil rights statutes for people with disabilities, including voc rehab as part of that, and the inability to enforce those aggressively will fall I think to us to still survive and also the states.

So I think this partnership we've been talking about is even more critical because we're not getting the leadership at the national level that we've experienced in the past. So I think it is a question of people hunkering down and coming together and realizing we have these common goals just coming from different aspects that will, in fact, improve the lives of people with disabilities.

We should not recede from this effort just because we're not seeing the same leadership at the national level, with some notable exceptions.

I would say also it's great to have Michael here. We really need to champion disability workers in Congress. We need your help to make sure various delegations understand the needs of people with disabilities, how critical federal support is for all the programs, VR, special ed, or even us pesky little advocates. That's what makes this whole thing work so well when it does work well so it's something we have to be very vigilant, not lose hope, and remember we're all in this for one reason: Improving the lives of people with disabilities.

STEVE WOODERSON: No pressure, Mike, you're the last one. You're going to deliver the benediction.

Bill?

BILL EAST: Yes. Seems like everywhere I go, people ask when is the IDEA going to be reauthorized.

[Laughter]

So we can get the language more consistent with the WIOA around transition?

My answer is, it's not likely to happen anytime soon. Just think about what Congress is dealing with right now. Healthcare, tax reform, infrastructure, Supreme Court this week, FY17-18 budgets, government shut down, the debt ceiling. That's not going to happen anytime soon probably.

So to me it says that if we're waiting on change language in the IDEA, we're going to be waiting a while. So that's more important for us to get those MOUs in our state and local levels in place so we can make sure that we are incorporating and working together to make things happen.

STEVE WOODERSON: Kelly?

KELLY BUCKLAND: Well, I think everybody in Washington, D.C., as Bill said, there's a lot of threats and we all need to hang together or we're going to not make it.

If you saw some of the budget stuff that came out talking about cutting Meals on Wheels because there's no demonstrating results to that program, I think that puts us all in jeopardy.

So I also think the stuff that was just ticked off about the threats, I couldn't agree more. Those are all things that are like immediate crises that we have to deal with, but I think -- I just saw a quote this week that those who predict don't have knowledge and those who have knowledge don't predict.

[Laughter]

So it's really hard to predict about what's going to happen with this Congress. So we all need to be vigilant together.

CURT DECKER: Just one hopeful thing. I did think one of the interesting things that happened during the debate on the replace and repeal the ACA is we ended up doing a pretty good job of educating people about what was Medicaid. I don't think the country really understood what Medicaid was and who it affected and who it impacted on, and somehow that sort of got into the discussion and people walked away thinking, oh, that's my brother's kid or that's my mother in that nursing home, and just wonder if that can't be a template for our programs, to make sure we get out there and educate people about what these programs are, some of these statistics that you have, to just say these are not give away programs or freebies. These are really critical programs for people that you know and you work with and we probably get too much talking to ourselves and need to get out there to make sure the rest of the public understands the value of these programs. And we now have a template for that.

MICHAEL GAMEL-McCORMICK: I could not agree with Curt more. Bill brought up the issue of Medicaid in schools, $4 billion a year. And that cut would have meant an enormous decrease in therapy services, in some transition services, all kinds of things that are important to propelling and launching young people with disabilities into their adult lives.

So that template, Curt, I think is also a way to emphasize that we are interconnected. We are not these individual programs. It's not just VR or Medicaid or IDEA or ILs. These things support one another. They are actually an integrated whole. And when one gets hit, it hurts the others as well. The system may not be like a cactus and not as strong because if you take away Bill's efforts, it hurts the whole rest of the system. So my message overall would be that we really do need to hang together, like others said.

My boss, and I am speaking for him now, clearly thinks that, whether it's schooling or independent living, whether it's vocational rehabilitation services or P&A services, they work as a system and we need to protect that whole system.

So when somebody comes to you and says, we need you to advocate for the IDEA full funding, I want you to be enthusiastic about it and support it. I want you to be enthusiastic and support the P&As, who keep systems strong. And IL centers are great partners. We need to go out there and say people with disabilities need this whole comprehensive system, and you guys are a critical component of it, but other pieces need to be strong as well.

And thank you for the time today.

STEVE WOODERSON: So if you this morning heard something that helps us lead towards tomorrow together, give these guys a big round of applause, would you please?

[Applause]

LISA HINSON-HATZ: Great. We'll take a moment break while we switch our panelists. We'll invite our next folks up. So please stick around and we'll be getting started in about 9 minutes.

[Break]

JOHN CONNELLY: We're going to be starting in about 3 minutes.

We're going to go ahead and get started, so if you would take your seats please and come back into the room.

I want to welcome you all to the third general session of the conference, a briefing on monitoring protocol.

Before we get started, I do want to cover a couple of housekeeping items. First of all, there are CRC credits available. We want to thank our friends at George Washington University for helping us with that, and if you haven't taken care of that already, please go to the registration desk, which is right outside the room here.

Also, a number of the technical assistance centers and also the lead center and the national clearinghouse for rehabilitation training materials have tables set up. I know many of you are working with the technical assistance centers and singing their praises. I know some of you have questions you're still trying to get answers to. So please, if you haven't worked with the technical assistance centers, especially if you have questions or think you might need some help, go and talk to those folks, introduce yourself, and take advantage of those folks being here. We want to thank them for joining us for the conference.

So my name is John Connelly, and I am the director of research and grants for CSAVR. I'm very happy to have the honor of presiding over this particular session.

I want to welcome our presenters. This morning you heard from the small RSA. Today, well, right now, we're going to hear from the big RSA. And so starting from my left, we have Ed Anthony, the acting commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration. Then we have Ruth Ryder. I think you have one of the longest titles on the agenda, the delegated duties of the assistant secretary for special education and rehabilitative services.

And then we have Carol Dobak, the director of the state monitoring and program improvement division at RSA.

And then the person who I think has the voice that projects the most, David Steele, the chief of the fiscal unit of RSA.

Again, thank you for joining us.

Ruth, I'll turn it over to you.

RUTH RYDER: Thank you, John.

Good morning, everyone. I just want to let you know how much I appreciate the opportunity to be here.

What John doesn't know is that in addition to being the delegated the duties person, I'm also the acting director of the Office of Special Education Programs and the deputy director of the Office of Special Education Programs.

[Laughter]

So that's a mouthful.

Just a teeny bit about me. I've been in OSERS for close to 30 years now. All in the Office of Special Education Programs until I had this really great opportunity to function as the assistant secretary during the transition.

And one of the best parts of having this opportunity has been to learn more about the VR program and about all of the really important work that is done in RSA. And I have to say it's been quite a learning curve. I am not yet over the hump of the learning curve. I still have a lot more to learn and it's just been such a great opportunity to work with all of my really terrific colleagues in RSA.

So I'm excited to be here. I had an opportunity to hear the previous panel, and I've been friends with Bill East. We've worked together for years, and I was very interested to hear his comments about the importance of the connections between the two programs which is something that we've been working very hard on in OSERS. Matter of fact, we have one of our organizational performance goals is working across the IDEA and the WIOA in implementing transition services for students and youth with disabilities. So that's been a really great collaborative effort.

I want to recognize the work of CSAVR and the leadership for pulling this meeting together. Steve Wooderson, Lisa Hinson-Hatz, and John Connelly. The agenda is amazing, and I know you guys are really going to come away with a lot of great information.

I also want to acknowledge the efforts that you've made to develop the strategic vision and hearing a little bit about it in the last session was interesting. We know that you really are looking carefully at the work that you're doing to improve results for adults with disabilities, and we really applaud your work in this area.

I also want to acknowledge the state VR agencies that are here for the conference, and thank you for all you're doing in your states to improve the services that you're providing. And I don't even know if my RSA colleagues know this, but I have a nephew who have a recipient of your services. I have a niece who is living in an independent living center. And I have a cousin who is a VR counselor in Pennsylvania. So I have some connections to the programs through my family, and it's been interesting to hear their sides of the story.

In addition, I want to thank the team in OSERS who is here, and I'm not going to name them all, but Ed and Carol and David and Melinda and Rose Ann and many others who have and will be contributing to the agenda and I appreciate all the work that they're doing.

I want to start by talking a little bit about the transition that we are going through in the department. I know it's something that everyone is interested in. I was just saying to Steve, most everything I know about what's going on I read in Politico. I get the morning education brief that comes in midmorning every weekday. This morning I learned that we have a name of someone who is being proposed as our general counsel, and also someone who has said that they are coming to the Office for Civil Rights but the administration is not speaking to. So that was interesting information.

We have been very fortunate to have a great opportunity to spend time with both the landing team, which is the group that came about two weeks after the election and started working with us. We briefed them several times on a number of our issues, and had a very good experience and exchange in working with them. They clearly, some of them are people who had been in the department before in previous administrations, so they were familiar with how things work, but not all of them so we had a great opportunity to educate people on the important work that we do in OSERS.

We now are working with a new team that has some overlap between the landing team. This team is called the Beach Head team, which right now has about 30-35 people on it, and they are most of them right now working out of the secretary's office. There are a few of them working on our communications team and some of them who are working very closely with some of the program offices. OSERS has a person who is assigned as kind of a liaison that is working between us and the main Beach Head team working out of the secretary's office.

We recently, Ed and myself and Kim Ford from the office of career and technical and adult education, had an opportunity to brief the Beach Head team on the work that we are doing in WIOA, and we really during that briefing emphasized the critical nature of the collaboration, both within the department but also with our colleagues in the Department of Labor and HHS.

And it was a decision meeting, and the decision that we were seeking was to have the go ahead to continue with the technical assistance work that we had been doing and are so committed to continuing to do, and we did get the go ahead to continue all of the webinars and the WIOA Wednesdays and coming to events like this and the convenings that are coming up. So we have had really very strong support from the administration, the new administration, to continue that important work.

I also recently had an opportunity to weigh in on some talking points for Secretary DeVos. She was speaking to state legislatures? Legislators?

And one of the things that she wanted to speak to was the underemployment of individuals with disabilities, and we were able to help by providing some statistics about the employment of nondisabled versus adults with disabilities and some of the work that we were doing to improve those statistics.

As far as the transition is concerned, we feel like of other agencies, we have had a better experience with the transition than what we are hearing from some of our colleagues in other agencies. We've had a very strong working relationship. We're meeting with them regularly. In fact, there's a meeting going on right now with the career leads and the Beach Head leads where we are sharing information about what's going on and making sure that we're kind of all on the same page.

Having been through a number of transitions and changes in leadership, not from this position that I'm in now, but I believe that this transition is going much the same as other transitions have gone. We're learning about the different administrative processes, they're learning about our grant programs, learning about the discretionary work that we do, the centers that we fund, the personnel preparation that we're doing and so on.

I think they have been very respectful of us, and I have taken several issues to them and every one I have taken to them they have approved us moving forward on. So I feel like we are moving smoothly. There are bumps in the road with all government agency processes, but I feel like we are working with those very well.

The next thing I wanted to talk about just briefly is the collaboration that is going on, and I mentioned in my very opening that we are doing a lot of collaboration across OSERS, between OSEP and RSA and you heard in the previous panel several of them mentioned the importance of the work and the emphasis on students and making sure that they are having high quality transition services now preemployment transition services as well and looking at that important connection, so we have been doing a lot of work around that.

We also have been doing a lot of work with our partners in other agencies and in other parts of the department. So I'm going to just kind of update you on the ongoing collaboration with our WIOA partners in Ed and DLL and HHS. And as you know, we have all of the scheduled webinars and meetings and other technical assistance activities and we've been really quite busy with those.

I want to thank all of you for taking part in these activities because we know you're very busy as well and we know it takes time to participate in all of these technical assistance events.

Thus far the webinars have been well attended with an average of over 500 participants per session, and the rate of satisfaction of those participating indicating that they would recommend the webinar to a colleague is high. It's at about 93%. So that is extremely high.

Just a reminder, all the webinars are archived on RSA's website as well as on the Ion website for you to access at your convenience.

I can attest to the fact that collaboration is engrained in the way that we conduct our business and I can attest to that because one of the first things that came on to my calendar when I moved into the acting position was three or four meetings a week with our partners in the department and our partners in DLL and HHS, so that is an incredible time commitment from everyone to make sure that that collaboration and coordination is working well.

RSA and OSEP have collaborated to provide technical assistance related to students and youth with disabilities, including the requirements on preemployment transition services which I mentioned earlier.

Following the fall CSAVR training conference in November, RSA and OSEP provided technical assistance to state directors on preemployment transition services. So we have been making sure that we are passing information on to our colleagues in the education arena in states.

One of the goals of that technical assistance was to emphasize the partnership between RSA and OSEP. One of the things that you heard Bill East say was the importance of being on the stage together, and that is something that we have been trying to model from OSERS with RSA and OSEP being on the stage together.

In January OSEP published a comprehensive transition guide to postsecondary education and employment for students and youth with disabilities. That document is designed to advance our efforts ensuring that all students and youth are engaged and equipped with the skills and knowledge to be engaged in the 21st century workforce.

The guide addresses topics including transition planning, transition services authorized by IDEA and the Rehab Act, education and employment options for students and youth with disabilities after leaving secondary school, and supporting decision making by students and youth with disabilities.

RSA and OSEP continue to collaborate through the jointly funded technical assistance center on transition, that's NTAC, to assist local education agencies, state VR agencies, and other VR service providers to implement evidence based and promising practices to ensure that students with disabilities stay in school, progress in school, and graduate with knowledge, skills, and supports needed to succeed in post-secondary education and employment.

RSA continues to collaborate with the WIOA core partners within Ed, DLL, and HHS to provide technical assistance on the joint provisions. I mentioned the WIOA Wednesdays, where departments conduct joint webinars on key provisions including the one stop system, performance, and governance.

In addition, multiple core programs have investments to support new and expanded pathways designed to assist job seekers to acquire marketable skills and recognize postsecondary degrees. Again, sharing best practices among the various career pathway activities expands opportunities for all job seekers and maximizes resources among the core partners.

The departments are currently looking at various mechanisms by which to provide technical assistance besides webinars. Some of these, for example, include podcasts, shorter, more targeted.

If you have recommendations for us on how you would like to see technical assistance delivered, please don't hesitate to let us know. We would appreciate your thoughts. I know there are so many webinars these days, you could spend all of your day listening to webinars. So do let us know if there are other strategies that would be helpful.

In closing, I hope you have a successful training conference this week. We look forward to hearing more from you and learning more about your implementation experiences as well as your implementation challenges.

We want to know how we can be more helpful to you. We are committed to our technical assistance efforts and to ensuring that you have the support that you need to implement the WIOA provisions.

Thank you again for the opportunity to be here, and I want to turn it over now to Ed Anthony.

ED ANTHONY: Thank you, Ruth. Can everyone hear me okay?

Thank you, all, again for being here. I say that every time we meet but I really do mean that. It's a great I know sacrifice to sometimes leave work, leave your office, to come here, but it's really important that you're here. Both the directors and others in the room as well.

I want to thank John and thank Steve and thank Lisa, thank Rita for the great work they do at CSAVR and for one thing to pull this conference together, especially at this time of transition when there's a lot going on.

I want to take a minute to really thank Ruth for her leadership. She mentioned she's wearing three hats now. Every one of those jobs is challenging and difficult and time consuming, and yet Ruth has made a great effort within OSERS and within the department to represent all of our programs and has done a lot of outreach just within the staff. She's absolutely correct when she says she has spent a lot of time learning more about VR, and her learning curve, she is very quick on a lot of these issues, I will tell you, because they're complicated in light of WIOA, yet Ruth has taken a lot of time and made a great effort to be a part of the work that we do in RSA so I really appreciate all that she has done.

And when I spoke with Steve and Rita about a session at this particular conference, we talked about having Ruth as the acting for OSERS want department to come, and when I mentioned this to Ruth, she jumped at the chance to have an opportunity to come here and to meet all of you and to address some of the issues that we're working on, but also to present a little bit of an overview of the transition process and what we're doing with that. We think it's important for do you know a little bit about what's going on and what's happening.

So I really appreciate the work that Ruth has done with us and for us.

I also want to reiterate something Ruth mentioned and that is to thank all of you. We have tried, as you know, not just us but also our partners at DOL and our partners within the department at OCTAE and HHS to try to present and work with you as much as we can and as quickly as we can to present technical assistance, to present information as we work through the implementation of WIOA. And all of you have been very patient. We know it takes time to finalize policies and positions and then to be able to share that information with you. You have all been extremely patient over the last 2 years in working with us and we greatly appreciate that.

That said, we know there's still a long way to go. There's still a lot of things we have to do as things evolve in furthering the implementation of WIOA.

The leadership team and the staff at RSA have been excellent. They've about very committed to this work, spent many hours above and beyond to make sure that we try to provide and give you in the field and parents and the consumers of voc rehab services the information that they need but again we recognize there's a long way to go in doing that.

One of the things we wanted to do today, we realize we don't have a lot of time to cover everything that we're working on, but one of the things that's kind of a critical issue now is for RSA to begin to provide further technical assistance and also to engage in the monitoring process that's required under the law.

So we wanted to take some time to be with you and present what we're going to be doing in the coming weeks and months related to establishing the monitoring protocol and work on the monitoring visits. Some of you I know are really excited about having us --

[Laughter]

-- come to you as late as within the next -- or as early rather as within the next couple of weeks.

So we want to take some time and kind of go through that process with you and maybe have a little bit of time to answer questions about it if you have any.

With that, I'm going to turn it over to Carol.

CAROL DOBAK: Okay. Hello, everyone. Can you all hear me?

>> Yes.

CAROL DOBAK: Okay. Great.

Well, I know it's been quite some time since I've been up here in front of you to talk about our monitoring process and RSA. Certainly well before the enactment of WIOA. And at that time we did temporarily suspend our monitoring efforts and it due to all of the changes that have occurred for the VR's supported employment programs under WIOA, and now since the publication of the regulations and their effectiveness last September, it's time for us to reengage in that process.

Before I go on to describe more about the process, I do want to take the time to thank those states and agencies that are participating in the process as we speak. Those are the states of Maine, Maryland, Florida, Indiana, and Colorado, and I want to thank the seven agencies in those states for all that they're doing to cooperate so well with our review teams.

I had the chance to meet Brenda Drummond for the first time during the break, and she spoke very positively so far of her experience with the teams, and as I said, these visits will occur beginning next week and end on April 28, which magically is the end of the CR. So you may read something into the timing of that for now.

At any rate, consistent with the theme that Ruth and Ed have established here, we view it as key to deliver technical assistance to the VR agencies, and this is critical at the time when you are implementing the changes to the VR's supported employment programs brought about by WIOA.

In an effort to make sure that you have the technical assistance and support that you need through the monitoring process, we have expanded both the number and scope of focus areas that we have included in the monitoring protocol for FY 2017 and which will carry through the monitoring cycle over the next several years.

There are five focus areas. Typically we have maybe three or four. We now have five focus areas. And they include performance of the VR program. Again, we have included a focus area on transition services for students and youth with disabilities. We have actually a new focus area in this protocol, taking a look at the supported employment program. We have one devoted to fiscal accountability of VR and supported employment programs. And also new this year as a result of WIOA, we have included a focus area on the implementation of the joint rules under WIOA and the VR program's role as a core partner in the workforce development system.

So let me now tell you briefly about the content of each of those focus areas, and I can point out for you how through those focus areas we are addressing the changes for the VR's supported employment programs under WIOA.

First of all, we're going to be looking at the performance of the VR agencies. This has typically been a focus area, but it has changed somewhat. We're going to be using 2014-2016 data to look at the progress of individuals with disabilities through the VR program. The services that are provided to individuals with disabilities. The types of individuals who are receiving services or have received services through the VR program during that period. As well as the employment outcomes those individuals have achieved.

That all sounds very similar to what you have seen before. However I do want to tell you that in, you know, conducting the analysis of the data, our review teams are going to work with you to identify trends in performance that may have a bearing on your agency's performance with respect to the common accountability measures established under WIOA. So we can see trends and we'll be discussing those with you.

We also, though, have a new component to this focus area, and that is a look at your internal control procedures with respect to the validity and accuracy of the data you are reporting through the RSA 911 case service report.

The review teams will look not only at the procedures themselves but also will be conducting a service record review, and some of you I know are familiar with the service record reviews that RSA conducted years ago. Those were quite expensive. This will not be that same kind of effort. We'll be looking to review approximately 30 cases to test the validity of your internal control procedures and those service record reviews will include a look at eight key data elements. Only eight. Not your entire reporting system. Okay?

These eight relate to determination of eligibility, development of the IEP, employment outcomes as well as case closure.

And if you really want to know the details of what will be looked at in the service record review and the kind of supporting documentation we'll be looking for to ensure that the data that you report to the 911 is valid and accurate, you can look to guidelines for supporting documentation that we released late on Friday afternoon. Sometimes when, you know, information is released late on Friday, it means that people are trying to soft pedal it or hide it. That was not our intent. It was just the timing. We really invite all of you to take a look at that.

And I want to also let you know that those data elements and the supporting documentation that we identify as examples in those guidelines will be the same guidelines that auditors will be using this year to conduct your A133 audits of the VR program so we're trying to achieve consistency in those efforts across various aspects of review and audit, and we hope that's helpful to all of you.

Moving on to the transition focus area. Of course this is transition services for students and youth with disabilities with a look at preemployment transition services.

Through this focus area, we'll take a look with you at the numerous changes to transitioning brought about by WIOA, including new requirements for your interagency agreements with the state educational agencies, as well as all of the aspects of preemployment transition services.

As typical in the past, this focus area will also include a review of data for youth of transition age. Okay? The data sets that will be used are similar to those that are being used in the general performance focus area that I just talked about.

Again, the supported employment focus area is one in which for the first time in a long time we're taking an in depth look at implementation of the supported employment program on the state level. This is particularly necessary in light of, again, the numerous changes to the supported employment program that have occurred since the enactment of WIOA. Including the extension of the time allowed for the provision of supported employment services as well as the ability to use both VR and supported employment funds to provide extended services.

The supported employment focus area also includes a look at data, similar to that used in the general review of data for the VR program with those data being specific to individuals in supported employment.

So again, how they're moving through the VR processes, the types of services they're receiving, the types of individuals receiving supported employment, and the outcomes they achieve.

There are a number of topics that will be reviewed in the context of the next focus area. They include I think 4-5 topical areas related to prior approval, which is something new for our VR agencies. We're going to be looking at match. We'll be looking at the use of third party cooperative arrangements and establishment projects as they apply to your agencies to the extent you do engage in them, we'll be looking at them. Particularly in light of the fact that a number of agencies now are exploring ways to implement preemployment transition services including third party cooperative arrangements and establishment projects.

And finally, our fifth focus area, having to do with the implementation of the joint rules under WIOA. We'll be looking at, again, 4-5 topical areas including governance, state plans, and performance accountability.

I just want to make a few remarks again about our fiscal focus area. There are a couple things that are not included in this focus area but may be reviewed under other focus areas in the protocol or through other processes that the fiscal unit is developing.

So first of all, the fiscal focus area does not include a look at the prohibition for the use of the reserved funds for preemployment transition services on administrative costs, nor does it include a look at the limitation to 2.5% of supported employment funds for administrative costs.

Those two requirements are incorporated into their respective topical areas under transition and supported employment.

However, the requirements related to the amount of reserved funds that have been expended in the states on preemployment transition services and supported employment services and the technical assistance we want to provide to all of you related to those requirements will be delivered through processes outside of monitoring protocol, and you will be receiving information about those processes shortly.

Now I want to talk a little bit about how we have selected the states and the agencies to be monitored in fiscal year 2017. RSA used an accountability model to identify those states, and David is going to explain to you in more detail the content of that accountability model and how we used it in terming states selected for monitoring. But suffice it to say that all programs in the department must use an accountability model when developing their monitoring schedule, and we have done so.

So in addition to those five states and agencies that I identified and thanked earlier in my remarks, I want to let the states of Massachusetts, Michigan, Ohio, Tennessee, and Georgia, those five states will be reviewed in the second part of our implementation of the monitoring process in 2017, and your agencies will be hearing from RSA review teams later this spring to begin that phase of the monitoring process.

So in terms of what the process looks like, it looks very similar in many respects to the process that we have used to engage in our monitoring with all of you for a number of years now. There's a period of preparation in which the review teams reach out to you, describe the monitoring process, the focus areas included in it, gather information from you, discuss data with you, explore the focus areas, and then develop the agenda for the on-site visits.

That includes the on-site activities. Many sessions devoted to the particular issues that were identified through the preparation in order to enable you to achieve the technical assistance that can support what you really need dedicated to your particular circumstances.

And then follow-up activities to ensure that we at RSA have the sufficient information necessary to develop the draft reports. We endeavor to develop the draft reports within 60 days following the conclusion of the monitoring process, and will issue those draft reports to the state agencies. You will have 21 days, three weeks, to review the reports and provide us comment, either as to any inaccuracies factually that may appear in the report and your comments on information included in it.

We will then review that comment, develop the final reports, incorporating that comment as appropriate, and will issue all monitoring reports for 2017 by the close of the calendar year. That will be in December of this year.

Before I turn this portion of the presentation over to David for his description of the accountability model and other information, I do want to make note about findings.

Findings. This is an aspect of monitoring that provokes some anxiety, some fear within your hearts, and I want to endeavor to alleviate somewhat that fear or anxiety. Though I can't make promises. Okay?

What I can tell you is that RSA must implement its monitoring consistent with guidelines that the department has developed for the monitoring of all formula grant programs, and that included requirements for the making of findings.

However, we will within RSA take a close look at the information that is gathered through the monitoring process in determining how that information will be presented in your agency reports. Whether that be as a finding, an observation, or described as technical assistance provided during the course of the review.

The review of that information will take place within SNPID, within RSA management higher up, and also with our Office of General Counsel as necessary. So that our reports accurately reflect the way in which that information should be presented.

And now, I'm going to turn the presentation over to David, and then we'll have time to take some questions.

DAVID STEELE: Thank you, Carol.

Approximately 2 years ago I was privileged to be asked to serve on the work group that Carol was discussing that at the department level for revising the department's formula award policies and procedures.

As Carol mentioned, part of that spelled out for all the formula awards our responsibilities for monitoring grant award programs and ensuring that there was uniformity in how we were handling certain circumstances across the department in formula awarding.

As Carol mentioned, once that process is finalized and implemented, it required the use of an accountability model with regard to monitoring activities, and the goal of that model was to increase the effective utilization of resources within the department and within programs with regard to monitoring.

For VR for 2017, the state data that we used for this accountability model was based on five programmatic and two fiscal performance indicators, and we used that data to prioritize those states to be monitored in 2017.

All the data were computed on a state basis to align the accountability model with the principles of Title I of WIOA, under the core partners, including VR agencies, are required to develop performance targets and report annual state performance reports.

This method also ensured compatibility between states with one combined agency and states with two VR agencies.

The sum of the scores that were achieved for each state were calculated, and then that accountability score was used to guide the prioritizing of states for monitoring. Details regarding the process, the five performance indicators as well as the calculation methodology and specifics that you can look at are included in appendix A in the 2017 monitoring and technical assistance guide.

Once we had those states, the data sort of calculated, then we took the states and we organized them based upon our state teams within RSA, the five state teams we have, which all states are assigned to one of.

And once we had them organized in that process, we prioritized the states based on the resulting scores. This enables RSA to maximize resources within each state team and across the division when conducting monitoring activities.

Each federal fiscal year prior to announcing the selection of states to be monitored during that year, RSA will review the data elements selected for the prior year, determine if they're still relevant and the best ones that we want to use, and rerun the data for all the states.

I know before in many of the monitoring cycles we've done, we're able to lay out for you a 5-year plan. In the new process, what we'll be doing is those states selected this year will be removed from that pot or set aside. The ones remaining next year, we'll look at data again and reprioritize those. So you can't necessarily tell where you are now what year you'll be monitored in. But we will get to you.

[Laughter]

We'll get there. RSA is going to monitor all states within the current five-year monitoring cycle, and the prioritization again will be on states that have not been monitored. That will occur yearly depending on that accountability model and what states remain within that process.

CAROL DOBAK: I just want to make one more remark before we turn it over for any questions there may be out there in the audience.

I hope what we have described for you emphasizes the fact that the monitoring process is a vehicle for providing the technical assistance and those of you engaging in the process right now or have looked at the monitoring guide will note that in each focus area, at the end there are several standard questions in which we will attempt to gather information about the technical assistance you have received either from RSA or RSA funded technical assistance centers such as the WINTAC.

And also endeavor to identify with you your state-specific technical assistance needs.

As David said, you know, some of you will be further out there in the cycle, but don't worry. We will be using the monitoring process to identify trends in technical assistance that we may deliver from RSA and SNPID to the field in general either through written guidance, webinars, etc. We'll be looking for trends in the technical assistance that agencies are asking for.

So are there any questions?

JOHN CONNELLY: We have a little time before lunch and I certainly want to thank our panel. So this is a great opportunity to ask any questions, especially if you're going to be on the monitoring schedule for this year.

[Laughter]

>> Hello. Thank you for those explanations. The question I have is, in terms of the accountability model and your selection of the states, is it based on the ones that do the best or the ones that maybe don't do the best?

[Laughter]

DAVID STEELE: You know, yes, the most opportunity for improvement. On a positive side.

We did. And you know, depending on those scores on the indicators, I will tell you though that like one of the ones that the department requires of us is the amount of the grant award. A 10%, you know, error in somebody with a very large grant award puts a different level of federal funds at risk than a smaller grantee. So one of the things the department required of us was to look at the size of the grant award amount as one of those performance indicators.

So you know, to that extent, it's not necessarily an indicator of performance, but of the amount of risk associated with the size of the grant award that a state would receive.

And the other one we took into account for fiscal was looking at the match, whether or not the state was actually meeting its match requirements, in drawing down federal funds, because states who aren't able to fully access their funds, the program may be serving less individuals in those states than they could if they were able to maximize those funds.

So those were a couple of the fiscal ones.

But for the performance, the score was a little bit different, but yeah, we did, and based upon those states with the highest scores were how we prioritized them.

CAROL DOBAK: I want to let you all know that the accountability model itself is attachment A to the monitoring and technical assistance guide which you can find on our website. And it will lay out for you in detail how each of the performance indicators, the five programmatic and two fiscal, how they were calculated and then the identification of the levels and scores associated with those levels of performance or risk.

ED ANTHONY: Let me just add a little bit to that. Risk and risk assessment is a big deal. Not only in this department but across the government I think.

And the other thing that Carol talked about a little bit earlier, data validity is also an important thing to look at, and that's one of the reasons why when we look at the data, we want to do some verification of it, which is why we have looked at going back to at least doing some checking of the case service reports, because that's essentially what you as directors and agencies submit to us in the data that you submit.

So those are two really important things that we are looking at and, in fact, it's an area, two areas, of real emphasis across the government.

>> Yes. You mentioned that the guidelines, Carol, for case information and data elements were released on Friday. I just looked up the RSA website and I can't find that.

CAROL DOBAK: Let me let you know that I apologize, they were issued through an email to all of the state directors as an attachment. We will be posting them on our website this week. You should have received that email on Friday afternoon/evening. Check your email.

>> I have a question. I wanted to make sure I was clear. You mentioned that the data that was going to be used in the monitoring for the states that were identified, is that going to be 2014 through 2016?

CAROL DOBAK: Yes, uh-huh.

And as we go through the monitoring cycle of course we'll have additional data including new data that will be captured through the revised RSA 911 which will be implemented beginning this July 1 for program year 2017 under WIOA and we'll be capturing open case data at that time, as well as data quarterly. So the performance focus area and the date that will be looked at that we'll have the opportunity to use with all of you will change over the life of the monitoring protocol. But what we have right now is 2014 through 2016 closed case data.

>> Thank you.

CAROL DOBAK: You're welcome.

JOHN CONNELLY: Do you have any other questions.

Well, seeing none, one thing I did want to mention, hopefully this is still a section in the reports, is I've been working the field since 1980 and one of the things I've always heard and I think it's still the case and that's one of the reasons for Vision 2020, is that VR is one of the best kept secrets. You know, I've looked at the past reports, and the reports are tens of pages and sometimes over 100 pages, and there's a section in those reports that talks about best practices or promising practices, which you all are doing well.

So please, when they come out to visit with you, be prepared to show them all the good things you're doing. You know, I really screwed up because in Ohio I never got mine over a page and a half, but I hope because you know, we hear it here at the conference all the time all the good things you're doing, so please take advantage of that as you prepare and work with our partners at RSA.

So certainly want to thank our panel, and it's time for the lunch break.

[Applause]

And some of you have regional meetings, and the next session will be back in this room at 1:50. So thank you.

[Lunch]

JOE XAVIER: Okay. We're about ready to get started, if you'll come in and find your seats.

All right. If you are outside if the foyer and you would like to be part of this afternoon's session, please come in and find a seat.

Sue, do you want to come up and join us?

KATHY WEST EVANS: Paging Sue Howell, Michigan. Paging Sue Howell.

JOE XAVIER: Okay. Because it's after lunch and you're ready for a nap, I have a trivia question for everybody. You're going to miss the prize if you don't hear the trivia question.

Okay. All baseball fans: Who is the first pitcher in their first game of the season to hit two homeruns? There's a Giants fan in the house!

Okay. So let's get started with this afternoon's session. First of all, good afternoon to all of you. Glad you made it back.

Let me acknowledge the conference organizers. Of course I think I heard the beginnings of an applause over there? So thank you to Steve and Kathy and John and Rita and Danielle and Theresa.

And Sue, my cochair, thank you for all the work you're doing.

Kathy has been our point with the national employment team and the town acquisition portal and all of our business relations, so we really thank her for the work she's doing.

One of the things I'm often reminded by our team in California is that as a director, I need to give as much attention to our business relations as I do to preparing our consumers for employment.

I thought it was something I would share today because when we truly talk about a dual customer, it means that we as a director have to provide that dual emphasis and attention.

So how many of you in the room are hiring managers? It's not a trick question. You can raise your hand. It's okay.

How many of you have applied for a job you did not get?

[Laughter]

So for our consumers, ultimately, at the end of the day, it's about getting a job so they can improve their independence and improve their lives.

That means that we need to have a clear understanding of what our workforce, our business talent needs are, and it means that business needs to view us as a reliable and responsive talent source.

So today to introduce our two presenters is Miss Kathy West Evans. Please take it away.

KATHY WEST EVANS: Hello, everyone. Good afternoon. Thank you for coming back. Before I start, the NET is all about the team, so will our NET members please stand? Ralph just came down from Pennsylvania. Peggy, that's you. Others?

Yea. Okay. Thank you for all your work.

[Applause]

It takes a team, believe me.

So I'm here to introduce our guest speakers today and also if you've looked at the program you'll notice that tomorrow they're also award winners. I'll share a little secret: They're both from Washington State. All three of us graduated from the University of Washington.

Okay. Now that we've got that out of the way. Sorry, North Carolina directors and team.

Today we have joining us Jessica Rafuse. Now, the last time Jessica was here, there was a difference. Jessica was expecting. Her son is now 20 months old, and you'll meet him. She worked at Starbucks. So you think you recognize her, there she is. She now works for Microsoft. So this is a very busy active partner, and she is the program manager at Microsoft in the accessibility area.

So we're so glad to have Jessica.

And we are featuring the program today, how many of you have seen the emails about the program that we're working on with individuals with autism at Microsoft? Have we sent out enough emails yet? If you haven't gotten that email, we'll send it.

It takes a great partner and our partner on that project is here today, PROVAIL with Blake Konrady, and he is the employment services manager for PROVAIL, and his boss Gina is here. Gina, can you stand up and say hello?

There you go. There's Gina.

So these are our community partners, and we all know when we have a good community partner, it begins when we're all at the table, looking at the needs of business and the individuals. And I have to say, Blake has been fabulous, and the program that's there, you're going to hear more about, but it's expanded across the country. So we are now recruiting people across the country that come in to Microsoft for that program, and Blake is their on-site mentor. So it's great to have both of them here today.

We're going to start with Jessica. Did I miss anything?

JESSICA RAFUSE: That was a great introduction. I think many of you may be sick of me because it was two years ago I was here as well but it's great to see lots of friendly faces.

Microsoft was very humbled at the award and very appreciative. Everyone at home wanted me to send you their thank you. Because we're just really trying it, and we may not be certain that we are doing the right thing but it's partners like you all helping us make those decisions so we can hire more people at Microsoft and ultimately to have a positive impact on the epidemic of unemployment for people with disabilities. So thank you for your partnership.

So the first slide is a picture of yours truly. As Kathy mentioned, there is a green mermaid in one of the pictures and there is a Microsoft logo in the other. So I made the transition to Microsoft almost a year ago, and it was the first time in my career that I have not applied for a job but rather I received a phone call from our chief accessibility officer asking if I wanted to come work for her at Microsoft.

And I had been watching as a fan from afar. I had seen the things they were doing and seen the reorganization of Microsoft and an increased focus on people, and I said yes before I asked what the job was. I was so excited.

So I hope that what we're going to talk about today will help you all understand why I made the leap going from an administrative judge to an employment lawyer to a technologist? No, I'm not technical. But I tell people I am.

So I hope that this kind of journey helps you understand why I would make the move over to Microsoft.

So the Microsoft mission is to empower every person and every organization on the planet to achieve more. Two years ago, our new CEO was appointed to his position and he took the reins from a gentleman who had been at the helm for 14 years. If you think about what it takes to have a culture shift like that, it takes a mission people can get behind.

Over the last two years I've watched Microsoft take its passion for technology and apply that to people. This cultural transformation included reinventing of the mission. So our mission in the past was to put a computer in every home and on every desk in the world. And I kind of feel like we accomplished that. So if everybody here has a computer, you know what I mean. So it was time to look at something new.

And the focus was really on people, people and organizations and how can Microsoft make people more productive to achieve more.

And that also includes people with disabilities. So that mission includes creating and delivering technology that is accessible, functional, usable, and I would say the product of choice for people with disabilities. We have a long ways to go until we get there, but as is the aspirational nature of the Microsoft mission and the task, we really aspire to be the product of choice for people with disabilities.

So how are we going to do that? The Microsoft accessibility journey is certainly a journey. What we strive to do is to create and deliver technology that is accessible and functional for all people of all ages. And we will continue to push the boundaries of what technology can do to empower every person on the planet. It's kind of bold, right? So how are we going to accomplish that?

We have three guiding principles. One is transparency. What we learned in the past is that we need to tell people with disabilities all customer what's our plans are, so we're sharing our roadmaps.

The second is to be accountable. We want you, allies of people with disabilities and people with disabilities to hold us accountable so if we don't get it right, we can leverage your feedback to try and try again.

And the final one is inclusive. So this means in all areas of our company culture, the way in which we create our products to be inclusive of all people.

Definitions. Accessibility is really the design and development of technologies that work for everyone. So people of all ages and all abilities.

In terms of disability, we view this very broadly at Microsoft. We want to create a community of people with disabilities so we think of it as a complex phenomenon between the interactions of the human body and the environment beyond them. Sometimes there's a mismatch. That's why we emphasize the principle of inclusive design, which really enables us to create products that speak to a wide range of people.

We construe disabilities so broadly that we use it to our advantage to get more accessible products.

We have a lot of smart people but who may not always focus on other people but rather have a true passion for technology. But what they are passionate about is what their product does at the end of the day, so we are educating our teams internally to look at disability as something that can be permanent. So someone born blind to someone like myself with muscular dystrophy. Could be temporary. Someone with cataracts or someone with a broken arm using a cast or someone using a wheelchair temporarily.

But also we think about situational limitations. When we talk to the designers about designing a product that people can use when there's a glare from the sunshine but also people can use when they are blind and use a screen reader, they really get excited about it and want to create a product that everyone can use.

So I mentioned that it is a journey. Accessibility has always been core to who Microsoft is, but I wouldn't say we always have gotten it right. We're working hard to change that. But how many people are familiar with sticky keys? That was one of the first back in the late '80s, early '90s. We also created products throughout the '90s and were really innovators in this space, really leading. Bill Gates made a commitment in 1997 that our products would be accessible. And we created things like magnifier and speech dictation in the late '90s.

I would say that we kind of lost our way at a point. I think that the company rested on our laurels. We needed to invest more deeply across the entire company, and that's exactly what we started to do with our new CEO a couple of years ago.

So what we really look at is this transformational year is Microsoft shifting to an approach that includes people with disabilities as our subject matter experts. We're investing in accessibility through strong partnerships, which means internally but also externally. So partnerships with the NGOs that know people with disabilities and their preferences and how to make our products better. Subject matter experts in our employee resource groups. We now have 15 across all categories of disability, from Microsoft breathe to parents of children with disabilities, and we really look to them to help us shape our perspectives on people with disabilities as well.

That leads to our FY17 strategy, which is four parts and across all of those parts is readiness. So how do we prepare our teams to execute on this strategy?

First is the area of product websites and services. So this is walking the talk or talking the talk, whatever that cliché is. We want to make sure that our house is in order before we go out and launch products to the world. This means we drive compliance, we drive desirable experiences.

The second is customer voice. So this is our collaborative partnership that really makes us better at what we do.

The third is employment, an area I assume many of you in this room are interested in. We look at this in terms of how can we increase the number of people with disabilities working at Microsoft. So those subject matter experts, we want them to choose Microsoft, and we will work hard to make sure we are the employer of choice for people with disabilities.

We also want to have a positive impact on the unemployment rate for people with disabilities, so we're sharing our learnings. We are very transparent with other employers who come to us, and we are also working closely with our partners like you to help reduce the unemployment rate globally.

Innovation. So if we get everything else right, this is the fun part. This is what we get to do. And the innovation is attractive and fun and really inventing the future of accessibility. And I look at it as my job internally is to harness the brilliance of our engineers and research scientists and funnel that towards good for people with disabilities if I can be a little bit biased.

So we have an event every summer where we pay engineers and designers across the entire company to leave their day job aside and just spend a week focused on something that can make the world a better place.

The first year we had 40 people who were involved in a handful of projects. This year we have 500 employees at Microsoft devoted specifically to hacks, which is a good thing, to make the world a better place for people with disabilities. Some of them were a little out there, in my opinion, solving for a problem that doesn't exist. They're early on their journey of disability inclusion. But I encourage it. The more the merrier. If they think there's a problem, let's put that brilliance towards making the world a better place for people with disabilities.

And lastly is readiness, empowering our employees with training on accessibility and disability inclusion.

So our first is product websites and services. We'll take a deep dive into all four of those priorities.

This one is a video, so I'm going to click it. It's audio described as well as captioned. Cross your fingers it works.

[Video - no captions]

>> When you build features for people with disabilities, you build something that works for everybody.

>> It's how we're inventing new experiences. We focused on those with low vision and no vision at first but decided we really need to focus on performance.

>> Right now we're at about 80% of capacity on there and this is about how I would use my computer. It probably sounds like gibberish, but once you get used to this, it's pretty quick.

>> We spend time looking at how you help a developer be immersed in what it means to be blind. And now you can see we've blanked the screen, so I press H to head to the first header and it would kind of immerse you into what that's like to not see it.

>> Across many applications when you're typing whether news, weather, you're getting search suggestions. It's the first time we're building that level of accessibility into both our screen reader and our applications.

>> I'm going to flag this message.

>> Xbox looked closely at how they can diversify how people represent themselves, and you'll see a new set of avatars so someone can select an avatar that looks more closely to themselves.

>> With Windows 10 the edge team wanted to do our part to make accessibility great.

>> Whether it's a screen reader, high contrast, keyboard only, it's really about making it more usable and more intuitive for all of our users.

>> So in the future, I think the key is really matching the ability of the technology to the ability of the person. So everybody can participate.

JESSICA RAFUSE: So what does that mean? You saw that, in the video, it talks about our improvements to Windows, which include narrator improvements, tools for developers to build on top of our products, and also Braille support which will be coming in the creator's update this spring.

Now I'm going to do something I've never done before, so bear with me. We're going to do a little bit of a demo here because I really want to show you how easy it is to create accessibility content through our new products.

So if I want to do a Power Point presentation, I would recommend you go into Power Point, select new, type in the word "accessible," and this is going to automatically pop up a series of templates that are all accessible.

I like this one about fruit and vegetables. So we know it will be tough to make this inaccessible, and I think that's the point. If we start off with templates that are already accessible, let's make it hard for people to screw it up.

So here I want to insert a picture. I wonder if you can guess which picture I'm going to use. Here's a picture of my little guy. Last time I saw y'all, he was still cooking. He is now 20 months old. And the cool thing about Power Point designer is that it will actually auto populate text. So at the bottom it says "a young boy is smiling." Maybe I want to edit this.

This is artificial intelligence. So we are using our cognitive services to make their best guess at what this picture displays and you can go in and edit. It's not always accurate. This one, for example, is a young boy. We may want to put an adorable young boy instead.

[Laughter]

To make it more accurate.

Another feature I like about Power Point designer is that it takes a lot of the workout of creating a slide that is aesthetically pleasing. So we can auto populate some design ideas, where it will take this picture of Spencer and it will put it in a position that is attractive. And I received a lot of feedback from folks who are blind or low vision who say, yeah, I want to create slides that look good too. So this is something that folks who are blind or low vision can use. I also like it because rather than having to go in and use my manual dexterity to create a slide a certain size, it really just does it for me.

So within Word, I know as a lawyer I love Word, but a lot of folks like Power Point as well.

So I wanted to show you a few things within Word that I think are pretty neat. We've talked already about people who are blind or low vision, but I think an area where there's huge opportunity is within learning disabilities. So I open up my Word document and go to the read mode. And the views that I am able to select from, it could be a column lay out. So for people who have an easier time reading when the sentences are segmented, this is something that folks like a lot, I actually prefer the paper lay out. But I can choose also to change the colors. So the colors can produce high or low contrast.

Here's another one I use a lot and I don't have a learning disability, is the read aloud function.

So I know that got really fast, but I practice this every now and then if I have something to read. And I actually can move up faster and faster with the settings. So that's something that can be done by keyboard commands. I just change the settings by selecting alt arrow right and it can go faster or slower. And I can also pause or stop with function 4.

So I encourage you guys to try that because it does help when you're reading something long and boring.

KATHY WEST EVANS: Regulations.

JESSICA RAFUSE: Yes. You may know a little bit about that.

So let go back. Those are some cool things that I like that are happening within our product space, and I really look at this in terms of course how can Microsoft have a competitive advantage in this field, like that's important to talk about. But I think it's also really speaking to our potential for helping people with disabilities get jobs in any workplace using a Microsoft product.

So first demo out of the way. I'm going to take a deep breath because I got through that.

The second strategy for FY17 is really the customer voice. We have an invite out approach to accessibility at Microsoft where feedback is paramount to the success of our strategy. We need to have people with disabilities, subject matter experts, people like you working closely with them, allies, parents, providing us with feedback. And one of the ways we do that is through our disability answer desk. This is a free service for people can disabilities to call and get free help desk support.

So I encourage you to spread the news. It sounds like Kathy has been cascading some of these offerings to you all already, but we really want to drive traffic, especially within our ASL portion. So we're looking for more people who use American Sign Language to call in and complain about our product and we'll help them to resolve those issues. We don't have as much traffic with ASL and we would like to see, so help me out by spreading the word and we can drive that traffic and I can report back to my leadership that it is something that our consumers are looking for.

So within employment, I think this will be an area of interest for you all. When we think about our strategy in terms of inclusive hiring, it's really systemic integration and programmatic. So I encourage you to check out our inclusive hiring website, which for me being in this field for two companies now, two Fortune 500 companies, I think it's so cool that we have this inclusive hiring website which really calls out all of our positions, it talks about our programs, it gives candidates a preview into what our process is for reasonable accommodations, not in a way that's driven by compliance but in a way that is hoping to rest assured that this is something that's important to us so we want our candidates to know that we take their requests seriously and that there's a process for it.

We direct hire into existing roles. The way we do that is our website. We have a human being who is receiving emails and funneling the résumé in the right direction.

We have the autism hiring program which you have familiarity with. And the email alias is essentially a modified interview process. So we took a critical look at the traditional way in which we interview candidates into technical positions, and it's not very friendly. We're talking interviews that last for eight hours, panel interviews, white boarding. This is not a process good for anyone let alone someone with a disability. And it's pretty consistent across the tech field that there is a very rigorous interview process.

So within the autism hiring program, we've reduced this down to a five-day program that includes things like group dialogue, soft skills building, increasing the comfort level, and we are on our sixth cohort? Seventh is starting soon. We've had a lot of success. I think we've hired around 30 individuals, thank you to the good folks in the room who contributed to that. And 30 is just getting started. I think we have changed the program a lot since we first jumped into this without knowing really what we were doing. It was a two-week program and we decided that we needed to cut it down and to be much more acute in the methods that we were using.

I would say one of our greatest struggles to be completely candid is that we can't find enough candidates with autism who meet the skill bar. I'm as a person with a disability pretty emphatic that we keep that skill bar high and that we are hiring people who do in fact meet the qualifications. Even though I've heard from hiring managers who get that rush from hiring and want to hire someone else and want to hire everyone and I love that it feels good, but in terms of long term sustainment, we have to have the very best candidates. So we're talking about ways to increase the skill set of those candidates coming through.

The second piece of employment in our minds is education. So how do we positively impact the pipeline of people with disabilities coming through to Microsoft? And how do we advance the field of accessibility within computer science? Those are two pieces we're looking at. We have a partnership with an organization called Teach Access, building accessibility curriculum into existing university computer science programs.

The last area of our FY17 strategy is around innovation. And again, this is the fun stuff.

So a few examples are our program with translator, real-time captioning. Several classrooms are using this in order to have an automated approach to real-time captioning. And it's getting better. I would say the more that we use it, the more we are building that cognitive capability within artificial technology, so I will have more confidence in it in the future.

Cities unlocked, which is a navigation program for people who are blind are low vision through audio guidance. We have bone conducting headphones that place objects spatially in the location where they might be so if I'm walking around and I hear "Starbucks," it's going to sound to me as though it were 20 feet in the direction that the actual Starbucks is. This would not work in Seattle though because there's Starbucks on every corner. Spinning around the circle for your coffee.

The next here is a gaze keyboard, which is really a hack that came out of some really brilliant people who wanted to improve the experience for someone with ALS in using technology. It also led to the eye gaze wheelchair so Steve, pictured here, can control his wheelchair with his eyes and play with his son.

And then Xbox. This one is super cool because as a person with a disability, I admit I do not often think about accessibility in terms of my enjoyment of life. I just don't. I think about it in terms of how am I going to get from point A to point B in an inaccessible city? How will I find housing or a job?

But I love where we're getting to a point where I personally am focusing more on how do I have an accessible experience that's fun.

And copilot is a great example of that. It is essentially using the -- it's splitting a controller so that someone with a disability and someone without can play together, and there's a bit of conversation or sharing of the requirements of the video game. Clearly I'm not a gamer. I don't know what I'm talking about. But it would work really well for someone with muscular dystrophy. Maybe I couldn't push the buttons fast enough or in the right combination and I could partner with my husband, who is a gamer, and we would be able to play together.

Lastly is readiness. I talked about this a bit. But we have mandatory training. I mean that just blows my mind. Mandatory training for all employees at Microsoft to learn about accessibility. And it was actually rated the number one module within this training because people are so excited about it.

And then we have some optional training or things that are recommended. Any time someone comes my way, I force them to take this training, Accessibility 101.

And lastly I'm going to finish off with one video and then I'll be out of your hair, but I just wanted to thank everyone for the opportunity, and here's a little bit of a glimpse into our inclusive hiring program before I turn it over to Blake.

[Video - captioned]

BLAKE KONRADY: Well, I wish I would have gone first after that amazing presentation.

[Laughter]

Hello again. My name is Blake Konrady and I'm from Seattle Washington. I work for Microsoft. We're honored to be here with all of you these few next days, and my presentation is apologetically text heavy. I don't have awesome technology at my fingertips like Jessica here, but I will be talking slowly as I go through it.

Today I'm highlighting the Microsoft hiring initiative that we have been on board with since its inception in 2015.

So I wanted to put out there the brief history. We joined on with Microsoft and (inaudible) after it was announced at the United Nations summit. The Danish company talked about enabling a million jobs worldwide for people on the autism spectrum.

In this case, when they came to Seattle, they were looking for an employment vendor and PROVAIL was selected. We have been around for 75 years in the Puget Sound region and right now have an employment team of about 60 people.

Is that echoing? Is everyone hearing okay?

This program became one of our highlighted branch programs that went along with our employment team.

The picture here is from our first round which was all local candidates from the western side of the state of Washington. You'll see me in there with only 7 of the 10 candidates and Stephanie who trained me on the curriculum for this program.

From there, 10 individuals came through, 5 were eventually offered full-time full benefited positions at Microsoft starting off a majority of them on a great note in their young careers.

So from there, as I said earlier to Jessica, we are now about to start our seventh cohort and it's been a journey along the way. I got to talk to a lot of you over the last year and a half as I was at first floundering until I met the right partner to help drive it forward and connect me with VR.

So from the second through the sixth, we've had 60 individuals go through as was pointed out earlier. 29 have gotten full-time hires. 28 in the Redmond area where Microsoft headquarters is at and one hire in the Bay Area, a team heard about the initiative and wanted to take place so they sent a hiring manager up to come be part of our third cohort and hired a young gentleman out of Iowa to move down to the Bay Area and begin his young career down there.

As we go through every candidate, we try to connect with VR. Not everyone who comes through has initial VR connections. Sometimes we have to guide them toward the office, talk about what the eligibility intake looks like, and that can be challenging from my seat in north Seattle when I'm reaching across to Florida or North Carolina, Massachusetts, or Iowa. So I've had to explain the program well over a thousand times which is fine by me because getting the word out is part of the fun part.

Early on we had to -- before I made the connection with Kathy here, I started this from the ground level. I just started calling counselors once I knew the candidates would be invited.

The original program was a four-week program in the model of the original program which was designed as an assessment as well as training. And because Microsoft was not looking to make this a training model, we had to modify it very, very quickly because it wasn't quite noticed early on that it was heavily designed toward that training. Microsoft's goal was to scale this. We wanted to hire as much talent out there and help start ending the epidemic of unemployment and underemployment of people with disabilities, in this case autism spectrum disorder which has a high percentage of unemployment and underemployment for those individuals. Information I'm sure you all are aware of.

After the individuals go through, which was originally a four-week program, down to three weeks, then two weeks, which is now a five-day model, we do try to connect everyone with their local VR agencies. Those that are not offered a position, we guide back and are there to liaise if they are interested in pursuing other careers in the Puget Sound region. Unfortunately, the footprint is not nationwide so I defer to the local expertise of the counselors you all oversee.

Some stats that I wanted to throw out there. All the 29 hired, 100% are still employed at Microsoft in various stages in their career. Part of what PROVAIL offers is assistance and support during that week. We also stay on as the individual's job coaches, not in the technical aspect. They are given technical experts on their team and within Microsoft was part of the program but PROVAIL is there not only for the internal part of working through potential conflict management, anxiety issues, connecting to the right people, making sure that you have a time schedule set up for when you need to take a break. We have many individuals who have come through that this is their dream career. And worry that one misstep, because of experiences with past employers and no accommodation, that one misstep will lead to their firing. We have to let them get over that anxiety. It takes not just me but understanding managers, teammates. We offer training for the teams bringing on the individuals with the caveat of yes we identify this individual to you but please only talk about the program, don't identify the individuals coming through specifically when you are talking about the program to other people within the organization as we are looking for continued head count which is available jobs from various teams.

I do want to point out that although Microsoft right now is our sole clients, we do have attempts out with other organizations. Sorry, Jessica. To try to get other programs up and running. So that way we can share the talent and get a pipeline going. Kathy has connected us to the portal so if they go back without a job offer, they see other companies out there doing great inclusive hiring work.

And I already pointed out that part.

So the next part about the business scalability, I said earlier, four weeks originally, three weeks, two weeks, which is a lot of time for an individual to take away from their family and most likely employment search. If we have an individual coming to us from Indiana and staying with us for two weeks, although it is a great potential, we wanted to make it so it's least amount of time away from their busy schedules, knowing they have lives as well, and at the same time allowing them to feel comfort and knowing that they're at a safe place and getting used to it. As Jess pointed out, tech interviews are not the most accommodating. Going to a place where you're sitting in the same room for 8 hours with different panels and people coming in is overstimulating for those even who are neurotypical. So the ability to have that extended out, get a guaranteed shot to be in front of hiring managers and be in your comfort zone with people around trained to help support and be there for you, we have gotten great feedback. All the candidates gave a thumbs up. I know the overall goal is to have it occur as commonly as possible. This year, the cohort we're about to do will be the fifth one in the fiscal year of 16-17. So the goal, make it happen as often as possible and to make the information known and knowledge share part of just the hiring practices of Microsoft down the line. Again, big picture.

So my next few slides are all kind of just thanks to majority of people in this room as well as the counselors. If you see someone from your states, make sure you give them kudos because there were some people early on that were of great help. Both CSAVR and NET have been there since the beginning. Washington State -- I'll give you a second. The teacher in me doesn't want to read the slides to you. I know that's not exceptionally great. But the ability for people to see the benefit of this early on and be there and take part, VR has been involved since the first one with the pilot program and being Washington only with the support of Esther Bennett as the deputy and saw the potential from right there and pushed it forward and made a directive to make this a priority.

We've been very lucky and fortunate in the fact that because this does happen quickly, sometimes our ask can be overwhelming. So when I do have an email in your inbox, I may come across as pushy. I apologize. I will always be as patient as possible as I wait for responses for the busyness that I know each of you go through.

So my first thank you slide after this, Jessica, is to the Washington State VR. We're also very excited for Mr. Heinz to take over and be a continued great partner. I wanted to shout out to some of your counselors, Rob. Early on these are the ones who helped me craft the language.

I want to give a special shout out to the people on this slide. Theresa from the Flint, Michigan, office. She was actually the first counselor I reached out to with a telephone call who said this sounds great. I just need to reach out to all levels to approve this because PROVAIL is not one of our CRPs. One of the biggest changes, if there's order selection, how to make it work, we always try to understand that there can be hoops to jump through. I've had numerous telephone conferences with heads of 21 different states. I try to make sure I give a thank you to all the ones we've worked with here. But Michigan, Indiana, South Carolina, California will always have a special spot in this program's heart as they were the ones who listened to me from the counselor level and built it up before I was able to meet Jessica and connect me to the level of you.

The next slide talks about I wanted to give a shout out to the states that have worked hard to make it happen. Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Maryland, New York, Missouri, Oregon, Wisconsin, and I will also throw in there Pennsylvania who is working hard for us with that seventh round.

And our hope is to eventually have all 50 states plus as many territories as we can. I can't name them off the top of my head but we want to work with you all at the same time. So continued thanks.

Last slide. Here's how if you want to get ahold of me, this is my cell phone. I do answer it when people call as well as my email address. If you have counselors and talent to put forward, I'm happy to liaison or talk with you all, families, organizations, spreading the word as much as possible. My flexibility has shown no ends as of yet and we can test that as we move forward.

KATHY WEST EVANS: Thank you. So Blake, for the people who don't know about the program, can you talk a little bit about Microsoft's supported program? So they pay for --

BLAKE KONRADY: Yes. That's a good thing to put out there. I appreciate that.

As I talked with you about this, Microsoft does the heavy lifting when it comes to the funding here. They fly out all the candidates and put them up in an extended stay hotel close to main campus and then have daily per diem for food and incidentals.

What we ask, what this partnership is for funding for the assessment piece that PROVAIL does while on site as well as the prework of getting them sometimes into the VR system. We ask for the funding for the assessment piece and then hopefully our hope is that everyone gets offers but as it moves into job placement and retention pieces as well. So I don't want to throw out just random numbers because every state works differently. At this point, Microsoft does the investment in this because they want that talent and will make that happen.

KATHY WEST EVANS: And that does include bringing people in from our territories, to our new director of Puerto Rico.

And in terms of the outcomes, now we're having this interview, right? In terms of the outcomes, can you tell -- 100% retention. That is key.

What are salary ranges and benefits?

BLAKE KONRADY: Benefits are full, full medical, dental, matching 401(k) and 50% up to a certain level.

Salaries have ranged from 83,000 to 115,000 a year.

[Applause]

So I usually try not to make that a selling point, but it is a nice starting career or continuing career for the individuals we have coming in. They have specialized skills that are obviously sought after. That does usually get some eye pops when I tell people that. But it's a career. If you talk to 100% of the people placed, at some point with me or their family they have used the word "dream job."

KATHY WEST EVANS: Many of them have signing bonuses too, correct? I'm just telling ya, who doesn't want an outcome like this? RSA, are you hearing this?

JESSICA RAFUSE: I would also say in terms of retention, we have an extended onboarding process for our autism program specifically including a peer mentor from our employee resource group where they are so enthusiastic and really excited to be mentors and they're answering the questions that the new hire may not feel comfortable asking their boss or perhaps the external supports don't know the answers to. So we have a lot of mentors who have autism and they're very successful at Microsoft.

BLAKE KONRADY: And also the job coaching. They are in a 90-day retention plan. We have a partnership with Microsoft that does allow us indefinite. So anyone who has gone through the cohort, any cohort, they can always reach out to the PROVAIL employment consultants and job coaches that have been working with them since their inception to be able to ask questions.

I know that reaching out is not always the top trait that those on the spectrum have, so I make sure I once a month or every other month, depending on how much support they want and need, and I respect the boundaries they put out there, so as their job coaches get to know them, if it's something they want to continue with, a weekly check in, a monthly email, if they want to go and get coffee at one of the many cafes that Microsoft has to offer.

JESSICA RAFUSE: Coffee is not that great.

[Laughter]

BLAKE KONRADY: Making sure that's a part of it as well as also as career advancement goes, that's our next step is understanding as they move into different points in their career, if they want to become a manager, if that's one of their aspirations, we don't want to make sure there's no holding back. They have all the opportunities that any other new hire would and we're there to make sure they can achieve those and have the support to make that necessary.

KATHY WEST EVANS: Thank you. I just wanted you to add the pieces for the whole picture because I think it's quite incredible.

And I thank PROVAIL, Gina, Blake, as well as our partners at Microsoft. This is what happens when you work together as a team. You truly can move the needle.

[Applause]

JOE XAVIER: So thank you, Blake. Thank you, Jessica.

So we're going to now pick up a little bit of a conversation in the remaining minutes on how we, for those of you who were not at the director's forum yesterday, we'll talk a little bit about how the roundtables have taken place in support of the Vision 2020 effort and then Kathy will set that stage for us and Sue will share some of the key take aways and the lessons learned and I will do the same for both our respective states since we were the two pilots, I mean guineas, to get this started.

Kathy?

KATHY WEST EVANS: Great. So as you heard about the focus on Microsoft's customer service, Steve, do we have that kind of money? I'm just kidding. I know we don't. But we're following the same lead in terms of really understanding our customers and one of those is business.

For those of you who were in the director's forum, you heard this yesterday but we want to hit the high levels for those of you who weren't.

So Vision 2020. You're going to hear about more and Steve will continue focusing on this, including several levels. One is a staff survey about business. And one of the things we noticed in looking at the surveys, and Steve, how many responses?

STEVE WOODERSON: Hundreds.

KATHY WEST EVANS: Hundreds of responses from staff across the country. I would say and I said this to the directors, that we're kind of in an identity crisis in a good way. We are moving in an internal shift to really look at a dual customer focus. We started this in 2004 with our initial work listening to business and now we're doing that again.

We're seeing increased focus with staff on the role of VR with business. Staff preparation for work with business. There was definitely a request and focus on that. It was interesting to see language from these surveys. Part of us we're still talking job placement. Others had moved on to business relations. Part of us are talking about employers and others moved on to business and understanding the bigger picture.

There were comments related to our strategies and working with business, and do we look at ourselves as adding value or are we part of compliance? Okay? So how do we want to present ourselves to business.

Do we look at ourselves as part of this educational piece? Because you heard Microsoft does a lot. Or are we looking at enforcement versus marketing the talent? It's really about marketing talent versus marketing disability and how we continue to focus on that as well as resource our business relation.

So some of our states started out with one person. Some still have one. Others are building large teams so again, continuing to focus on that.

Our next step was the external scan with business and really holding roundtables we've done with individual customers.

The questions we asked business, starting in California and Michigan, and thank you to them, but we're asking the same questions wherever we go to start to get that consistent feedback from business. What support do you need to attract, hire, retain, and promote people with disabilities including veterans? Are you working with the NET and if not why? What other suggestions do you have for the NET and VR?

We posted two of those and hosted our first in San Francisco. Thank you to Microsoft for hosting.

Steve and I were at both of these as well as Joe was at the San Francisco one and his point of contact, Michelle Alford Williams, thank you very much.

The second one was in Detroit at Henry Ford medical center, again, hosted there. Sue was there as well as her point of contact, Jenny Hyatt, back here.

Each of these had 20 businesses if not more. We already had individuals raising their hand for future sessions. Pennsylvania right here. New Hampshire, Lisa and their team are looking at doing a roundtable with small businesses. Alabama, you know, Peggy never loses a beat on anything. Then we have Missouri and Washington State and then we've got a couple of other states that have already said they have interest.

Here's what we saw on those. Marketing VR. This is what business told us. Start branding VR as a national state and local resource and mark it in the language of business.

There is stigma associated with the word "rehabilitation." People from the outside see us as corrections, etc. We've got an issue with that term.

There is strength in a national cross state team and I think you're hearing that from Blake when we're partnering around the business need.

Present a unified message and unified services to business so as you move across their footprint you're using the same language and be consistent in both your language and practice.

All right. Services to business. Business is asking more for strategic planning from us and make it based on the needs of the business. Where are they at, what is their experience, where are they located, how can we support them a plan that moves across the footprint?

How do you support the environmental change within the company? You heard about Microsoft and the use of their strategies.

Offer training on what disability is. People still don't know. And they're surprised by the range.

And offer it in multiple formats so if you have a multistate foot print you may have it available online or in some other format so that multiple people can participate.

Prepare business for interviewing and working with candidates because if they tell us they just don't know what they don't know and they're afraid to ask, interviewing is tough for them. Coach them.

Continue your single points of contact. We don't want to work too hard to figure out how to get to the right person, right, Blake?

Send VR staff with street smarts. Do not use government acronyms and language. Do you know how many definitions there are for some of our acronyms?

Facilitate business strategies. I know that's one Jenny you heard out of the Michigan area where business wants to learn from other business and I think Jenny your request was to hold something regularly where you would host your business partners.

Assist business in marketing to candidates. Jessica has already told you we need to market Microsoft as a company. That's the expectation.

Build talent pipelines and partner with others. But VR, please take a lead role because you're the one national entity that crosses all states, the territories, and D.C.

And last but not least. Okay. Advice from business on how to prepare your candidates. Make sure they have developed hard skills in line with the employment needs of business. Ask business. Okay? They'll tell you if programs are really training people. We had a very interesting dialogue with the HR partner that Jessica works with and learned about how there are just some programs not really preparing people though we may be paying a lot of money and people are spending a lot of time but not coming out with the skill sets they need.

Prepare candidates on expectations. That include what's we call soft skills or survival skills.

Prepare your candidates for interviewing. Market your skills, not your disability.

Prepare candidates on how to answer questions about accommodation needs and requests.

Drug screenings and tests are often required. Let them know.

Have a better training for your candidates and frankly your counselors and staff on how to prepare a cover letter and a résumé.

Here is a big one. VRCs need to believe in the talents of their clients. VRCs need to believe in the talents of their clients. And be sure you prescreen your candidates based on those needs.

That's it. I'm done, Joe.

SUE HOWELL: Good afternoon. In Michigan, we have worked over the last two and a half years to elevate the business customer. Well, we always have believed in the dual customer approach. We recognize as part of our strategic development that we need to make business services a much more intentional focus and we needed to do it in a way that was very assertive. So what we did is we took some of the positions and we strategically realigned them to be solely focused on services. We have 13 business relation specialists who carry a caseload of businesses to serve those regions and work with them and become experts in listening to the business customer in a way that helps that customer to recognize the essential and customized serve Is that VR can provide.

To that end, we also began to reach out and talk with our partners. And we considered the Governor's administration a partner. So as we reached out to our local Chamber of Commerce, my hometown of Flint, Michigan, we always figure, I always figure if I can make something work in Flint, I can make it work anywhere.

So we began to do a local initiative with a partner that wasn't really always viewed as someone that might be interested in getting involved with VR and employment, our Center for Independent Living. They became involved with our chamber. We formed a committee called disability works in Genesee County, and we pulled in the Governor. And we began to talk with them about the fact that we really want to listen to business.

Our governor who comes from private business background was interested in that and formed the business to business summit. From there that grew into such a large activity, we did it over four years, that he finally handed it off to our lieutenant governor who formed a hidden talent tour. And that is still ongoing. We'll have another one May 8 and they will be continuing to provide business with the opportunity to talk to each other while presenting the resources that voc rehab can assist business with.

What we heard also from businesses, you guys are one of the best kept secrets. And that wasn't quite the compliment that we hoped to hear. We wanted to hear more about exactly what we could do.

So we all know and I think Kathy also said, we have to have a brand. And the brand has to be that we're exactly what you need.

So through a variety of activities which I would hardly suggest you look at doing and through innovative partners like our Center for Independent Living, they were able to speak for us with business in the beginning and then we were able to become a really essential partner.

I also want to tell you that when we decided to repurpose some of our positions so they are more in alignment with business service, we knew that we really had to sell that idea because we're all faced with budgets, finite amount of money, and all the stuff we deal with in government.

So I was really shocked that the person who went to the governor and talked with him about those positions was a business partner, who spoke up on our behalf to indicate that he understood for us to reach out to more businesses, we needed staff singularly focused on leaning on the business customer.

No one can speak louder or stronger than your Center for Independent Living and business partner. So we're grateful.

As we continued to move forward, it was our pleasure to participate in the roundtable and have Steve and Kathy there to be in alignment with the national initiatives as well.

But more than that, we have to remember that we have to be collaborative. And that we have to all work from one agenda. We can no longer function I think solely alone. In the past as we have done in government.

And I think it's also important for us to make sure that our business customer is strategically and essentially center focused in everything that we're doing. So the line that I use, as an analogy with my staff, is that business services is the bow of the ship, the first thing people are looking for, the first thing they see, and the first thing that makes a difference as we begin to talk.

That is not to say that all of the other things that happen in VR and our preparation for our customers is not important, but the takeaway that we heard business say loud and clear is, one, we need talent and we need your help, and for that we need you to understand and listen to us consistently and communicate with us regularly.

So take aways for us is that we will build on that program in terms of business services, how we can expand services in a way that makes sense to business, and we're going to let business drive the strategic focus of our program.

Thank you.

JOE XAVIER: Thank you, Sue. So we're running up against the clock here. I wanted to offer up a couple of comments and maybe a question or two.

Blake and Jessica I think will be with us through tomorrow, so there will be an opportunity to engage with them there.

One of the things that I think I would point out here is that we need to acknowledge that while we think we live in interesting and changing times for us, it's not just us. I think we see that, I think businesses are living in those same times and making some of those changes.

So as we make the changes that we're making, we need to recognize that business has also made some changes in how they recruit, screen, and hire. We just heard how processes are modified for people with disabilities and I say that because a lot of times we hear that's an onerous process and after all we are all in civil service here. Who has a more onerous process than civil service? So I think it's important we share that message and help our teams understand that businesses too has the things they need to ensure to make sure they get the right talent.

And I think it's important that we see business not through our lens. Not how we want to see. I think it's important for our teams that are directly engaging with our business partners, they understand how our business partner is looking at it and what they're seeing more than we are looking at it because in the time they're engaging, it's because we have an individual with a disability looking for a job. And that's that final step that needs to take place.

The other key thing that we should really take to heart is that as the roundtables are conducted throughout the states and hearing back from business, it's not okay just to hear back from business.

I had a partner in California say, you've asked me before, I told you. You're asking me again, I'll tell you again. What are you going to do differently tomorrow. Because if you come back to me doing the same thing that you're doing, I'm going to look at you, I'm going to smile, and I'm going to nod politely, and move on.

So it's important that we continue to look at the dual customer of business, that just like it's important for us to hear the feedback from our consumer from the advocacy organization, from the family, from the whomever, about how to improve getting a consumer ready for employment, it's just as important that we give that attention to the feedback from our business partners and that we make the changes that ensures the talent that we're bringing forth meets their needs.

So I will stop there and open this up for any questions that you have before closing.

We got the I need to go look? All right.

There's one in the back. One question and we'll close up so you can move on to our committees.

>> So can y'all hear me? My question is in regards to the Microsoft piece. Are there opportunities or jobs outside of Washington for people in terms of any work at home opportunities or anything like that?

JESSICA RAFUSE: The question was about employment beyond Washington State and work from home opportunities.

Yes. We have a very flexible work from home program at Microsoft. It's actually really well woven into the culture of the company, and secondly, yes, we do have offices outside of Washington State. Globally, in fact, so we can connect.

>> Thank you.

JOE XAVIER: All right. With that, I want just a round of applause for our panel.

[Applause]

And this will conclude this afternoon's session. We're moving on to committees which are all listed in your agenda.

Thank you.

[Break]

Standing Committee Meetings

3:15 - 5:45 p.m.

Deaf and Hard of Hearing Group

Susquehanna Room

ALICE HUNNICUTT: Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you, first of all, to our participants who are dialing in. Because of the last session that went over time, we're starting a little bit late this afternoon. So thank you very much for bearing with us. I'm hearing a lot of participants on the phone.

Do we have any state directors in the room? I was keeping my fingers crossed that we would have a couple. I don't see that we do, but that's okay.

STEVE WOODERSON: We're going to turn your volume down just a little, because we love ya --

ALICE HUNNICUTT: Can you just shut the door? Seriously? Because I have about 20 people on the line.

STEVE WOODERSON: I'll try that.

ALICE HUNNICUTT: For those of you on the line, Steve Wooderson just came in and told me I had a big mouth.

He just came back and said he was nice about it. He really was.

So we will see. I'm hoping I don't have to turn the volume down and this kind of technology is already self-amplified so everybody can hear all right. Otherwise they will ask us to turn it down. The good news is, I'm so technologically challenged that I wouldn't know how to do it.

Welcome. Welcome again.

I think the first thing we want to do as we move forward is to go around the room and ask people to identify themselves. Tell us your name, and I will be passing the microphone around. So please tell us your name and the state you're affiliated with, and I have several partners here too.

Again, I'm Alice Hunnicutt, state director for the New Jersey division of vocational rehabilitation services.

>> Hi, everybody. Good afternoon. This is Mark Sommer. I'm the executive outreach manager for NTID in Rochester.

>> Hi there. I'm Beth Benedict at Gallaudet University for program outreach. Gallaudet is in Washington, D.C., an easy drive for me today.

>> I am Mike Richardson. I'm from Seattle, Washington, and I'm a visitor. Long story short, I'm the coordinator for the ADA national network, so I direct the northwest regional center for the ADA. So I'm visiting and just getting a sense of what goes on in CSAVR, and in the past I worked for VR in Washington State. For several years I was a supervisor and also a counselor. So I have a pretty good sense of the VR system.

>> My name is Curly Wilson, with Gallaudet University financial aid office and I'm just here to support Dr. Benedict.

>> Hi, I'm Mary. I work with the Rehabilitation Services Administration in Washington, D.C., Department of Education. My role is program policy adviser to the commissioner.

>> Hi, I'm Reagan Miller with the Texas Workforce Commission, the new DSA in Texas, and I'm over our vocational rehabilitation divisions and our workforce development division and here to listen and learn.

>> I'm Natasha, a supervisor but previous life I was a deafblind counselor.

ALICE HUNNICUTT: Which state?

>> Minnesota.

>> Bedarius Bell, state services coordinator, Alabama.

>> Hi, everybody. I'm Brianne Burger from the Department of Education. My goal is to be a liaison for special schools or special institutions in education.

ALICE HUNNICUTT: Okay. Thank you. Now I'm going to ask the individuals on the phone. And again, I apologize in advance to say someone else is already on the line.

I heard Mr. Cooper. Do you want to start?

>> Yes. Hi. Good afternoon. I'm Robert Cooper from the Kansas Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and I share the same office with VR.

ALICE HUNNICUTT: Thank you.

Someone else want to jump in?

>> Yes. This is Doug Watson, through an interpreter, at the University of Arkansas National Research Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Hello.

>> This is Shawn Pollock, manager for deaf services in the state of Montana.

>> Hi, this is Glenn Anderson. Can I go ahead?

Hi, this is Glenn Anderson. I'm from the University of Little Rock. I used to work with Doug Watson in the research center. That's who I am.

ALICE HUNNICUTT: Thank you, Glenn.

>> I'm (inaudible) with Arizona Rehabilitation Services Administration.

ALICE HUNNICUTT: And your name one more time?

>> Sue Kay Kneifel.

ALICE HUNNICUTT: People on the phone, we've had to turn down the technology a little bit. Can you all still hear me? This is Alice.

>> Yes.

>> Yes.

>> Yes.

>> Yes.

ALICE HUNNICUTT: Steve has to buy me a beer after this. That's pretty cool. Two beers, and it has to be gluten free, so it's going to be interesting.

Thank you. We've heard on the phone from Robert, Doug, Shawn, Glenn, Sue Kay. And anyone else on the phone?

>> Yes, hi --

ALICE HUNNICUTT: One at a time.

>> Hi, this is Kristen Rhinehart from RSA. I serve as the project officer for our new training grant. Thank you for allowing me to join by phone.

>> Hello. Can I go next?

Hi, everyone. I'm (inaudible), speaking through a sign language interpreter from the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission, the area director for an office in the northwestern part of Massachusetts. This is my first time joining this conference, and I'm looking forward to the discussion.

ALICE HUNNICUTT: Mark, this is Alice. Could I have your last name again? I missed it.

>> Sure. It's Core. It's a French name.

>> This is Molly Sinanan, region VI representative from Helen Keller National Center here in Texas.

ALICE HUNNICUTT: Welcome. Anyone else on the line?

>> Hi. This is (inaudible) Kelly, director for services for the deaf for Tennessee voc rehab.

ALICE HUNNICUTT: Welcome.

Next? Going once? Going twice.

This is wonderful. This marks probably the largest contingency of individuals joining us remotely. Along with that are some challenges. We'll just figure it out and work through it.

This morning I did send out an agenda and minutes from our last meeting, hoping everybody got them. I do have a copy online of the minutes. It's about 4 paragraphs long, so in lieu of not having them, if needed, I can read them because I have copies of the agenda but not the minutes so now they've missed my packet from New Jersey. I don't know how that happened but we're human and sometimes that happens.

So for those of you online, I'm hoping you all got the minutes, and I'm hoping you got the agenda. Our agenda includes the introduction and then our recognition of all our partners here. I heard Gallaudet, I heard Helen Keller, and of course I heard NTID. Are there any other partners other than RSA and Department of Education? This is wonderful. It's a great opportunity. Northeast or northwest representative for center of ADA?

MIKE RICHARDSON: I represent the ADA national network.

ALICE HUNNICUTT: In New Jersey we're part of the northeast regional at Cornell and I'm on that standing committee as well. So I talk with them all the time.

So this is wonderful. This is really an incredible day today. I'm really glad I have my Texas partner. I'm going to include you as a state director. Works for me. You are now. This is really great.

And then I want to go over our agenda and ask if there's any additions. We do want to accept the minutes in lieu of not having them before us we can decide if we have time to perhaps read them toward the end of the meeting, because we have a lot of things to talk about.

And then our agenda includes discussion of the model state plan. One of the reasons I'm very happy that we heard from -- I'm looking up the name. Robert Cooper is because he and Mr. Bradley worked diligently on chapter 3 for the updates and I'm going to put him on the spot in a minute. So this is your cue, Robert, to get ready. Not quite yet but get ready.

And I want to tell you how much I appreciate the efforts and the work that has been done on chapter 3 already.

The next thing we want to do is we want to really establish time lines for the rest of the chapters. For those of you who don't know or are not familiar with the model state plan, there are nine chapters. We are in the process of starting to update those chapters. The model state plan this time will be an electronic version that will include links to other information, and we've discussed what other kinds of information, like the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act might absolutely get a link there. Something tells me that might be important.

And so as we move forward we'll be talking about links and resources to that document.

We will identify other dates for conference calls. Currently we have established that the third Wednesday of every month we have a teleconference that starts at 1:00 eastern daylight savings time, so those of you on the west coast it's not too early in the morning and those of us in the east coast it's not too late and we talk for about a half hour to 45 minutes about different updates.

And finally, if we have time and individuals are interested in specific chapters we might have time for those of us present today to have some conversation about those chapters.

So and then we're going to hear from our community partners because we always like to do that. We enjoy that.

And that's our agenda. So are there any additions to the agenda that anybody would like to discuss this afternoon? Any of our participants on the phone have any suggestions?

BRIANNE BURGER: I just want to make a revision to the minutes. One correction to make. I believe you should be talking about the National Technical Institute for the Deaf as opposed to the nation institute for the deaf.

ALICE HUNNICUTT: I knew that. I do say NTID, so you're absolutely right. So thank you for pointing that out. Thank you.

And Kristen? You had something on the phone?

>> Yes, hi. If I may. And if time permits, I would be happy to provide a brief introduction to our new interpreter training grant that we're recently awarded. Our grantees have an interest in keeping the city apprised of their training effort and we have exciting things happening. So if time permits.

ALICE HUNNICUTT: Thank you, Kristen. I've written it down and when we get to the reports from our community partners, we would love to hear from you.

Robert, if you're on the line, tell us all the title of chapter 3 to help us remember and not necessarily go over each thing individually that was updated but just a general conversation about what kinds of things you did. That would be helpful for us.

>> All righty, then.

Thanks, Alice. I'll be glad to do the update.

First of all, the interpreter is having a little bit of an issue with some technology, so hang tight.

Okay I worked with Bradley for two months now and it was kind of life changing.

Sometimes emergency meetings and things like that and I needed an update from ten years back. 2008. So we talked about -- hold on one second. 1998. Really 1998 the Rehab Act. It's called WIOA. We had to change that. So we're on chapter 3 and professional development and standards. We're just having a little bit of technical issues, so hang tight, people, just a little blurry.

So then we changed it but WIOA and different rules and we changed it and so also some of the technology, we abbreviated it. That made it easier to read. And also we kind of left a -- we added references and stuff for the updates.

So there was a lot of time, we took a lot of time on all that stuff. Also, we -- 2012 we needed to do the -- hold on one second -- pepnet 2 for April 2012. So what would be the best thing, what would be the most successful, professional to have, which one would be the most professional. For example skills of interpreting. Knowledge of deaf, skills of the interpreter, sign language, things like that. So we went through all that stuff and revisited that to make it successful.

That's what we were doing and that's what we were doing to help support the chapter 3 connected with professional development and standards.

That's it in a nutshell.

ALICE HUNNICUTT: Thank you, Robert.

To give synopsis, the chapter was on personnel development and standards, and there was quite a bit of update due to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, WIOA, or I'm calling the opportunity act because we're not supposed to say WIOA, so I'm calling the opportunity act. I don't know if that's politically correct. I'm looking at my RSA partner.

MARY: We say WIOA.

ALICE HUNNICUTT: Okay. You'll hear me say both because that's how I talk about it.

So this is a big change from the earlier version because of what was taken out of WIOA as well as the leverage of the states to determine what personnel standards they could still maintain.

Thank you, Robert. We as a committee have not vetted it. Let me remind people that we have a SharePoint that is the site where if anyone is listening or anyone here is interested in getting access to the SharePoint, you can send me an email. It's through our New Jersey Department of Labor there. They have allowed us to have access to a SharePoint.

And we chose SharePoint in order for us to have that privacy as we look to change and update the document. So you have to get an email from my division of technology within the Department of Labor, and they will give you a password and they will give you a sign on, and they will forward that directly to you, and then you will have access to the site.

The site has chapters listed so you can go into whatever chapter you're interested in looking at, and every month when we have our phone calls, we talk about how best to update the information.

Doug always reminds us that it's not rewriting the information; it's updating the information. So Robert and Cecil have taken a look at the current 2008 version and they've added and taken out different pieces, but significant portion of the document still remains the same because it's still really good information and it doesn't need updating.

So I caution us as we move forward to start updating our parts is that it's not reinventing the wheel; it's providing the updates.

Having said that, at various times since November when we've had our discussions, we've talked about things such as how are we going to make sure deafblindness is included? Does it need its separate chapter or infused throughout?

I've challenged the committee to make recommendations.

I chair the committee but I have never been a deaf language specialist. So I don't have that day-to-day knowledge of counseling and what would be the best. So the state coordinators out there are really my subject matter experts on this, and I want to facilitate and support the decisions in a committee way, not in a top down way. So that was one thing we discussed.

The second thing we discussed was the whole notion of business and business outreach. Does it need a separate chapter to talk about the vocational rehabilitation needs of individuals with any type of hearing loss as we move forward to try to get the connection with businesses. You know, education of businesses and what it's like to support, appropriately support, an individual who works for them who has hearing loss needs.

And then the third thing we talked about was the whole subject of cochlear implants. The 2008 version does not have much information, if any, on the vocational rehabilitation needs of individuals who have chosen to have cochlear implants and what does that mean in the vocational rehabilitation process.

So we have talked about adding chapters, but nothing is set in stone. I am not going to make any final decision based on what Alice thinks. It's always consensus of the committee. I always talk about that because I think it's very, very important.

So thank you again, Robert, you and Cecil, for spending the time you've worked on this document.

Our next step is that I would ask anybody who currently has access to take a look at the document.

I have a copy of the document. I have not put it on a SharePoint yet. I'm waiting for Robert and Cecil to tell me that it's ready to go on SharePoint. So keep checking the document and we will put it under chapter 3 as an edit and you'll be able to go in.

I have 3-4 individuals who worked substantially on the 2008 document who will be the editors for this one. Doug is on the phone now and Dr. Anderson is on the phone and Pat Tomlinson of New Jersey. History and fame and reputation has also agreed to provide some edits which is a really good process for us as well.

So having said that, I need to ask anyone, has there been any other information, any other updating on any of the chapters that I'm not aware of at this point? I'm going to open it up for discussion at this point if anybody has looked at any other chapters. Anyone in the room currently have an opportunity to take a look? I'm giving stern looks to people.

Anyone on the phone --

>> This is Doug here.

ALICE HUNNICUTT: Thanks, Doug.

>> Okay. I would like to ask how does CSAVR organization MSP, the state plan, how do they view the issue that I understand is a new rule from the feds, the reduction or discounted need for MA and MS degrees for rehab counselor training, how will that impact us for the hard of hearing, the deaf, and later we talk about deafblind? For 50 years we've been pushing and pushing the need for highly skilled people to be included in this, like in the MA degree.

So working with people who are deaf, deafblind, hard of hearing, how will that impact the writing team as far as our views and the quality points that we have been emphasizing on the MMP over the years. Because we have politics, new rules coming down, and it seems to have reduced the value of that high level skilled people requirement or request. It seems like just hiring anybody who knows how to do VR. I'm not sure if you've dealt with that issue. I have been thinking about it for a while now.

Input?

ALICE HUNNICUTT: This is Alice. I can only talk about what New Jersey has done in terms of the regulations. And you're right, the regulations have changed the requirement, but it's my understanding that the states can determine their expectation and in New Jersey, the state rehab council as well as our state workforce development board have both supported the notion that we will remain -- our requirements will remain that a person in vocational rehabilitation needs to have a master's degree.

Each state -- and I think the model state plan should reflect on the ability of the states to be able to make that determination. Again, only my opinion but I think the document can certainly talk about a best practice approach in terms of highly qualified, but the regulations have changed and we need to acknowledge that.

I don't want to get us in trouble by determining that this document will determine what states need to do, so we have to be careful, Doug, as we reflect the new changes in the law and the impact, but again, I don't -- I mean, I'll throw it out to the committee. I see no reason not to identify as a best practice what makes a lot of sense to people.

Again, anyone else have an opinion, I'm certainly going to open it up for further discussion at this time. I'm looking at my RSA partners to say, did I say that right? Okay. Bedarius is coming up to the microphone. So I'm going to recognize Bedarius.

BEDARIUS BELL: This is Bedarius. I agree that we need to acknowledge the fact that the rules have changed and each state has the ability to make a determination.

Like New Jersey, Alabama has decided that they will keep the master's degree as the requirement to become a rehab counselor. And I think, you know, like Doug is saying, it has been fought for years to have that high standard and maybe a little even stronger word than best practice should be a recommendation that we keep that counselors for the deaf and hard of hearing and deafblind have a master's degree. My suggestion.

BETH BENEDICT: Hi, this is Beth. I just want to throw out food for thought.

Personally I agree we should have a master's degree requirement, but let's say a person with a master's degree knows nothing about deaf people. On the other hand, you have a person who knows something about deaf people but they don't have a master's degree. So they get the job but they're required to have a master's. How do you measure the differences or the applicability between the two people?

BEDARIUS BELL: Both.

BETH BENEDICT: I agree with you, Bedarius, but what about the pool out there? Do we have enough people in the pool to satisfy this requirement? I'm just wondering.

Sometimes I think that we need to find grants to help people get their master's while they're working. And they'll become, you know, a specialist with some limitations, but I mean what do we do? But I understand the need for both.

>> This is Sue Kay in Arizona. We still prefer a master's degree candidate, but we have a partnership with the U of A, and we hire on those with a bachelor's level degree and two years of human service experience, and then we require them to be eligible to sit for the CRC within six years of hire. And our partnership with U of A allows -- we pay for that master's program.

ALICE HUNNICUTT: So the states are identifying different strategies, I'm hearing, in order to move forward and comply with the new regulations as well as provide the support to individuals to move forward to get that highly qualified.

And again, in New Jersey we have determined that keeping the master's. We are lucky that we have a vocational rehabilitation master's degree program in New Jersey, and it's a small enough state that we get -- and they are very good at getting grants so they're able to help support individuals who are interested, and that particular program also serves Delaware and New York and Pennsylvania and New Jersey, but by far we get so many interns from that program now and we just turn around whenever we're able to hire someone and go, we'll take you because you've already done a great job in our local office. And that's been a good strategy for us.

But again, and to Doug's point, as the model state plan gets updated, we have to be very aware that the regulations have this change in them. We need to reflect that.

I certainly like Bedarius' suggestion that it's a recommendation, you know, slash best practice or whatever, that we put it strongly in the document for all the reasons everybody has talked about to be able to ensure that services provided to deaf individuals and hard of hearing, etc., etc., have vocational rehabilitation quality of services they need in order to move toward competitive integrated employment.

>> This is Doug. I wanted to add something.

ALICE HUNNICUTT: Yes. Go ahead.

>> I'm very happy with what I'm hearing what's going on in Arizona. That help and support of additional training, from a bachelor's degree to working towards that master's degree and whatnot. I appreciate that. That's the kind of opportunity that I guess should be given to people, providing these type of things for their state.

ALICE HUNNICUTT: Thank you. That was a great point, and perhaps again the document under resources can reflect these kinds of strategies in order to ensure. I know again in New Jersey when the rule first came out for a master's degree, the VR program did fund the counselors to move forward toward their master's and we did three series and got up to like 98% of individuals on our staff at that time. And now as we move forward, everyone has that one now.

So it is a difference, and it is what it is. The regulations have not been rolled back. We will update the document.

One of the things about having an electronic document, if and when regulations change, we don't have to go through getting the printed copies; we can continually update the document as we move forward. And that's my hope as we timely get some links in and we get it in an electronic 21st century version we will be able to not only printout when people want to, but also have those interlocking links that we can continually upgrade so people can have access to really pertinent information. That will be exciting for me.

Any other comments?

>> This is Doug --

>> Mark would like to say something as well. This is Mark from Massachusetts. I'm glad to hear that the recommendations have been strong and clear master's degree and we've gotten help with the union in my organization in terms of training and requirements for getting jobs and getting a master's. And now that's changing. But we still really feel that the priority is to keep a master's degree. And we've added that to include any masters in related field and they must have at least two years of employment working with people with disabilities.

The RCDs come in with a bachelor degree, and because of recruitment difficulties, we have an expectation of once they come on board that they do obtain their master's degree either in VR or a related field. So they do have that option. And they have the option to also get their CRC within a certain time. The funding has changed over the years, and now they're on their own if they need to obtain their master's degree, so we're asking for the consideration of getting some funding. Because generally the funding, or the program, excuse me, are online and they're at a distance. The courses are 9 credits in the summertime which is not enough to fulfill a master's requirement. I'm speaking more in terms of new hires on board, new RCDs, and the internship is important for them as well. That helps with the hiring process, if they have their internship and some may have their master's or CRC but some may have the experience of working with deaf and hard of hearing people or maybe they've been a consumer of our services in the past and we should give those individuals the opportunity to obtain employment with our agencies. It's a good incentive.

And we're lucky to have a union with our agency. Some states don't have that. So it's important to have good effective recommendations for the states that do not have unions.

ALICE HUNNICUTT: Thank you. Anyone else before we move forward with our next item which is discussion of the time lines for other chapter revisions?

>> This is Doug.

ALICE HUNNICUTT: Yes, Doug.

>> I wanted to add that the point that Beth just made talking about the deaf individuals, hard of hearing, who themselves may not have a master's degree but given the opportunity, they would be able to have recruitment, hired by VR, bring them in and get them to that point to get their master's or CRC. Instead, having them come in already ready. For deaf individuals who don't have that, they have the sign language ability, maybe they have some experience, but they just don't have that master's degree or that training yet. Maybe there would be a way to open up this in other states for that kind of recruitment for deafblind, hard of hearing, for deaf, to be able to gain access and develop professional development. I just wanted to add that.

ALICE HUNNICUTT: This is Alice. Thank you, Doug, for that.

I would like to talk a little bit about the time lines for the other chapter revisions. I'm asked all the time when will the updates be completed. And my answer has to be, the updates will be completed when people are finished making the updates.

Again, I've worked on some of the preliminary and introduction pieces that I've already posted. I cannot necessarily update all the information because I'm not the subject matter expert.

So I'm looking at the different chapters now and I'm going to be asking, as we move forward and determine our next series of conference calls, because we are -- I have committed to providing that opportunity every month, if we can target different chapters to talk about. And I think maybe that will push a little bit for individuals who have agreed to work on those chapters to perhaps take a look at them and have some kind of conversation.

So again, I think if I had an award, I would be giving them to Cecil and Robert for doing the work on chapter 3 already. Again, it's not finished yet, but at least they've demonstrated that they've really worked hard on the document and there's a lot to think about with personnel development and standards. We just had a full conversation about what other kinds of strategies and what are the kinds ever recommendations might need to go into that. So it's real important that we have the opportunity to think about these things as we provide those updates.

So I'm looking. People were looking at me when I was getting out my little calendar. I was getting it out so I can have access to it so we can talk about our next series of telephone conversations.

Does Wednesday -- Wednesday seems to work for most people. So I'm going to assume that we will continue to have our conversations on Wednesdays. We determined that in November, and it seems to be working well.

Whenever we have a conversation that's very substantive, I try to give an overview and send it out to everybody immediately. To be very honest, sometimes the conversations are just a very quick update and just moving forward. But based on our conversations, we've already had an extra teleconference about how to use SharePoint, and I want to identify Shawn from Montana because he led that conversation and he put together a document that's on the SharePoint that people can access and look at. So thank you, Shawn, for that.

We've just now had a conversation about things to think about under chapter 3.

So we have an April date, April 19th. And again, it's 1:00 p.m. eastern daylight savings time. East coast time.

In May it would be the 17th.

I believe originally we thought about -- we had a June meeting, June 21st, and then I believe we took July and August off, if I recall. Because of summer. That's not to say if we're talking in June and there's enough interest I can absolutely schedule something in July. But at this point, July is not scheduled. August is not scheduled. But our next one after that is September 20.

And then moving forward, we could go into October 18.

November 15, depending on when CSAVR is, that may need to be skipped.

December is kind of iffy because it's December 20, although last year I believe we had a conversation on the 19th and if seemed fine.

So what I will do is I will move forward with scheduling these dates on Wednesdays at 1:00 in order for us to go ahead and continue to talk about this.

But what I would like to do for the May meeting is ask that we focus on chapter 1, which is people with hearing loss. So individuals who are interested in this chapter, this is your heads up that you have two months to take a look at it.

And then in June I would like to spend some time talking about chapter 2, which is the vocational rehabilitation process.

We've already discussed chapter 3. We should be able to put the updates on the SharePoint and at that point it would be ready for the editing crew to take a look at. And that would allow us to really spend several months getting ready to talk about transition services in September. And again, remember, transition, the committee I'm going to be looking to subject matter experts to help us identify whether additional chapters need to be developed on preemployment transition services or whether transition services can include that whole time line and reference and framing. Preemployment transition services is a very new provision in WIOA and it's complicated. There's a lot of effort by all the states being placed on it, and I know our partners last November when they were talking about all the programs they were developing for preemployment transition services, so you may want to decide that it deserves a whole written chapter. I'm not going to make that decision for you. I'm going to let you subject matter experts talk about it and figure it out.

That would give us up to September.

We have several other chapters but I think at this point if we identify going into our meeting in November, then maybe in November we can really have the conversation to talk in a group around chapter 1, 2, and 4. So I'm opening up now for more discussion. I'm happy to change that direction if the committee feels strongly. But otherwise, this would be my recommendation as the facilitator.

So I'm opening up for conversation. Ask.

>> This is Glenn. That's for with me.

BEDARIUS BELL: So this month? What's the goal?

ALICE HUNNICUTT: Meaning April? I did not -- I gave two months because our schedule phone call in April is in a couple weeks and I'm not sure that anybody will be ready if I gave them the assignment today. I mean, you can surprise me, Bedarius, and tell me you're ready to talk about something in two weeks.

I thought we could talk about the acronyms in two weeks. And we need to have a big discussion around the phrase low functioning deaf, because that brings a lot of conversation. And whether or not we need to include it with a disclaimer about why it's included. Again, I'm not going to make that decision but I would like to ask you all to think about that. Is there another term? Should we not include it at all? But that seems to be a focus of concern for I know some of my deaf language specialists when I talk to them in New Jersey, but I don't know how else to identify. Limited English? I don't know the answer.

In April we will look at the acronyms. I've already, if you go into my edits you'll see that I've already taken out WIA and put in WIOA, I've done things like that. But some of those acronyms are some of the ones I'm struggling with because of the whole notion of perception of what the term is. So I would like to have a conversation about that in April.

Any other thoughts.

Okay. Hearing none --

>> This is Doug. I have something I would like to say.

ALICE HUNNICUTT: Sure. Who is this again?

>> This is Doug.

Do we have a writing team? Like a part-time WIOA, from the MSP deaf and hard of hearing perspective? Is there a team of writers? Because I know we all know what VR is for deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind. But still not being fully birthed yet. It's still in the process of becoming what it will be. So I think we should focus on that whole chapter. And write it for that. A writing team for that.

ALICE HUNNICUTT: Thank you, Doug. The conversation or his suggestion is that we include a chapter on WIOA. My thought about that was to at least include it as part of the introduction, which I have taken the lead on. And then perhaps link it to the entire law. But you're absolutely right. I can actually -- at this point I've given lots of presentations about WIOA just in my job. I am not an expert about what it means for vocational rehabilitation of individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, so as far as a team, anyone on the committee who is interested in that, I'm certainly happy to send out some drafts of information and then ask that you would contour it, edit it, to reflect how it will impact the vocational rehabilitation for individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing. Happy to do that.

And if any of you right now would like to be part of the writing team on WIOA, I'm happy to have you join me as well and we'll start going back and forth with our edits the same way that Cecil and Robert did with chapter 3.

>> This is Doug. Thank you.

ALICE HUNNICUTT: Again, I think the links that we can do within the document itself are going to be so new and different and so much more 21st century, if you will, with technology, in order to have the document really become fluid.

The last thing I want is for the document to grow so large it becomes, you know, unwieldy. So for us to provide a good overview of WIOA and move forward to a linkage so a person could read the whole fact itself or at least Title IV we really can link all of them but at least Title IV I think will be significant for us.

And I will work on the introduction as well in the next couple weeks to be able to have some conversation about that in April as well.

MARY: When you mentioned Title IV, I just wanted to let you know that we do have an accessible version of Title IV, which is the Rehabilitation Act, on our website. So that might be a good link.

ALICE HUNNICUTT: Thank you, Mary.

Mary has identified that there's an accessible version of Title IV on the RSA website. So we have our first link. We just have to figure out how to do it, but I know my DIT guys can link it.

So that's great. Again, anything that helps deaf language specialists in the rehabilitation for our consumers is going to be great. Thank you for that, Mary.

So discuss chapter 3. We've looked at the time lines for other chapter revisions. We've added different conference dates.

So at this point, I would like to move -- I have identified possible group work, but I think at this point I would really like to hear from some of our community partners involved in deference to the time here. I think it's always interesting to hear all the great things that our partners are developing. And I report on that at the business meeting. Because I want other states to know of the opportunities, especially last year when you talked about the preemployment transition services and some of the activities you were developing around that.

Kristen, I have not forgotten about you, so we will get to you too. But right now I would like to ask that our partners, Mark is the closest, from National Technical Institute of the Deaf. And I would like to ask him to go ahead and give us an overview.

MARK SOMMER: Hello, everyone. It feels like we just had a meeting in November, and now we're meeting again.

So NTID is doing well. Our President, Dr. Gerald Buckley, asked know tell everyone hello. He wishes he could come down, but he can't. So hello from him.

Spring always seems a lot shorter because we have so much information to share because it follows the beginning of the academic year. So we have like 1,305 students at NTID now. That's a good size class. 39% of those students enroll in the bachelor's degree programs. And that number is climbing.

25% are in associate degree programs.

16% have associates plus the bachelor's. So when they get their two-year associates, they transfer into the four-year program.

10% are in the ASL interpreting program.

Another 10% are in the master's programs.

Our admissions people continue to meet as many students possible to recruit them. There are a lot of comments that we get back from entering students and from the local rehab counselors. You know, they're still learning about WIOA. They're still not sure out there about how to satisfy the requirements in WIOA.

So we've got the MSP. We've got projects collaborations, and that will help clarify some of those expectations for WIOA with the PETs element.

For myself, I've been working very closely with the state VR agency, trying to partner with them to meet those PETs requirements for WIOA. And we have staff at NTID who are not happy about going through the training because when they're off, they want to be off. They don't want to go to the training. But this past summer we sent staff to the state program where they have STEM training. You know, science, technology, and all that. STEM training. And we had some deaf and hard of hearing staff go there for the training. So I'm hoping that meets their requirements.

I think I shared very briefly in November that NTID recently entered a partnership, an understanding with the school for the deaf and blind in Alabama. Alabama School for the Deaf and Blind. They're the southeast STEM project.

So we had this agreement with specifics and there were five areas that were part of that new southeast STEM program or initiative.

Let me go off just a little bit. The STEM program focuses on eight states, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Florida, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Mississippi. So these states follow the SERID conglomeration of states. They provide enhancement training for teachers K-12. Really probably 6-12. They also provide best training practices for interpreters. Employer trainings to help meet section 511. There was something else. Something with students. Bedarius... VR. They work closely with VR. They set up their own activities and their own opportunities to collaborate with one another.

And then they have student classes that focus on STEM activities with the intention of enhancing STEM training and knowledge for those who are deaf and hard of hearing who are interested in majoring in STEM.

Since the fall we've had one new program that we've had accredited. 3D graphics technology. The Bureau of Labor and Statistics predicts a great growth in this field, 3D graphics and printing.

As I was reading it over, I was thinking this could be like with food, you know, the making of food, printing the food. I was trying to think of a 3D cupcake. Beth, you know what I'm talking about? Have you seen these things that are out there right now? Maybe I watch too much "Star Trek" and "Star Wars." Maybe that's what it is.

You know, asking for Earl Grey tea at 85 degrees. This fall, that was one of our projects just initiated.

We have an agreement with the University of Rochester medical center to have more partnerships with students that are in the science and medical fields, and we all know this is one area that is of the fastest growing profession, health related fields. We want to see more individuals going into those professions in the years to come.

I'm also very, very happy to say that on April 11 our first deaf faculty member, Robert Panera, who has taught English, oh, my God, maybe 20, 30 years. He started at Gallaudet University and we stole him and he set up our program at NTID back in 1967-68, somewhere around there. He's going to be honored with a U.S. postal stamp. If you didn't know that. The first day of distribution will be April 11. So we're having a huge celebration in his honor. There's a lot of information at the Facebook page, the U.S. postal service Facebook page. We're very excited about that. It's very exciting, Alice. Yeah, he's still at NTID. And we're going to have it actually at the Panera Theater, which is appropriate. I still have that old I love you stamp that came out in the '80s. So buy them up. Buy them up as soon as you can.

As far as employment is concerned, we're doing quite well in our employment endeavors. We have an average of 94.3% rate of placement, and these past two years, placements have been divided up into three sections: Business and industry, 75% of our students are going off into business and industry; 16% are going off to nonprofit or education; and then 9% are doing something that's governmental related. So that means more tax money is coming back to everybody's state and into VR's pockets.

I think that puts everybody up to speed to where we are. And as always, it's good to see everybody here. Always good to be in partnership with everybody, because our goal as it is to everybody else's is to make a difference to those who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deafblind.

Any questions or comments?

ALICE HUNNICUTT: Are there any questions from our audience participation remotely? Or our remote participants? I should say it a little bit better.

Any questions for Mark?

>> Doug here. Sounds good from this end. Sounds very positive.

MARK SOMMER: Thanks, Doug.

ALICE HUNNICUTT: Okay. Our next partner. Gallaudet.

BETH BENEDICT: Okay. This is Beth Benedict. Hello everyone from Gallaudet. It's nice to have Gallaudet friends here. This is a very exciting time for Gallaudet. We broke records with 358 students coming in this past fall. Our student population is exploding very quickly. But that's a good problem. We have dorms overflowing, we have to get more classrooms set up. I mean, the spirit there is very, very high. Everybody is working together toward the same goal. And we're having a place for everyone to eat and sleep. So that's good.

We have 1,700 students. The graduate programs, like 350 people are enrolled there. That leaves the undergraduate students. You know, at Gallaudet we have pretty much the same three tracks. We have liberal education with technology. Students get the technical skills they need to do whatever they want to do when they get out. And we have content and intellectual literature. We just on Saturday we had a STEM open house. We had about 90 prospective individuals show up for this. Gallaudet spent over $17 million on a science lab, computers, biology, and a medical lab in totem. We have state of the art equipment available here at Gallaudet. Almost up there with the FBI. The FBI actually gave us and trained and used our campus for themselves last summer.

We have provided full access while other universities are providing accommodations. But what I want to say about that is that we do provide adaptation for those students who are emerging signers.

Last fall we started with 34 classes that required CART. Now we're down to 4. So students are really progressing very well with picking up American Sign Language. They're moving along quite nicely.

These past two summers we had 117 students that came for just ASL, Jump Start, an immersion class that happens in the summer.

As of today, we have 116 students that are still there out of 117. One unfortunately had to leave because of a health issue, but they're planning to come back as soon as they can. And they feel at home instead of feeling one man or one woman on the boat. Because you come to Gallaudet and you get all the support you need. There are of course students who are homesick, they feel a little lost or out of their element, they're not used to being away from their home environment. That's very natural.

Our demographics of our new student population these past two years is very consistent. One-third come from a school for the deaf. One-third come from a mainstreaming programs. And one-third of our students are transfer students. Those who are transfers, they're very similar in their stories. One would be often they're not able to initially come to Gallaudet because they don't get any VR support, so they go to a community college, they get good grades, and then they get the VR support so they can enroll at Gallaudet. That's quite common.

The other common scenario from this group is that they want to come to Gallaudet but we didn't accept them due to a low SAT or ACT scores or even just a low GPA. So they too go to a community college, take those required academic courses that they need, which are usually 20-25 credits, to prove themselves and then they transfer to Gallaudet. That's working quite well for that group.

Ironically, the retention rate is quite better, much better for those who are transferring in compared to the new students. And my own personal estimation is it's just based on maturity rate. We noticed with our incoming students, as far as retention rates are concerned and GPA, it's a much better predictor than the ACTs or SATs.

We just had an internship and job fair. We had 55 different employers come out for this. We also have courses for general studies. That all students are required to take. These are focused courses, how to develop a résumé, you know, job seeking skills, interview skills, a whole array of these types of courses and it would be really nice if VR counselors could say to those students, we really think you want to take these courses as a way to enhance your résumé writing and then come back to their VR counselor with a well done résumé. We think internships are quite valuable because not only do you want to be able to show your future employer all the things you accomplished, but the opportunity to have an internship is a great addition to anyone's résumé.

Okay. We have over 45 majors and minors. We also have courses on self-direction that you can design your own major. And we're collaborating with 13 other colleges and universities in Washington, D.C. That is what we're calling the consortium. At the same time, through online practices, with many other universities nationwide, I think it's 700 or 900 courses available currently per semester. So the array of choices is quite broad.

We're going to be starting a new major, risk management, for insurance. So very high field right now. And we're going to be starting a new --

>> (By Phone): This is the interpreter. Can you check your mute, please? I'm sorry. I can hear someone working.

BETH BENEDICT: -- major in the fall, public health, another up and coming career. These are all undergraduate programs.

We also have over 400 job opportunities for students just on Gallaudet's campus itself. So please encourage your clients, your consumers, to get a job at Gallaudet. Because we want them to be leaving with the best résumé they can leave with when they do graduate from us.

We're doing a work recruitment program. We've been really utilizing that a great deal. I mean, just alone here in Washington, D.C., it's a huge bonus, as you can imagine. I mean, D.C. Pathways.

Another exciting event is the 16th Street program. I don't know if you're familiar. Gallaudet is in prime real estate location right now, believe it or not. We own the property, we own the land. There's a lot of companies who want to build on our property. So our MOU with the contractor says that they can build but they have to hire our students for internships. So this is a very exciting time for us.

MARK SOMMER: What kind of companies want to come in?

BETH BENEDICT: We have mixed residents condos, businesses, restaurants. Things are really spreading on the northeast side of town.

There's an accounting firm that wants to move in, a graphics firm, a communications center that wants a piece of the pie also, so it's quite exciting for us at Gallaudet.

And thanks to Curly and his big support and all that you do for VR, FAFSA and all the scholarships. We would be lost without you so it's really a great team effort that we have.

The FAFSA application process, October 1, it used to be, what, January 1, now it's been moved up to October 1. We see an increased number of students who are filling out the forms appropriately and correctly than we ever have been. So we really like that new piece of moving it up to October.

I think our programs are very healthy. We have four tracks happening this summer: ASL, science, theater, and discover your future. As Mark had mentioned, some of VR may not be familiar with WIOA or PETs, so we do encourage all of that to get familiar so you know what's out there for your consumers and clients and you can say yes more than you say no.

So I think -- oh, yes, the academic bowl, Mark is reminding me. Gallaudet is hosting the national academic bowl competition. We have four regions that handle the academic bowl throughout the country. The top five teams compete with one another and they end up at Gallaudet on our campus. Now, starting this weekend. I am here right now with you guys but as soon as I get back this evening, it's focusing on academic bowl 100%.

ALICE HUNNICUTT: Thank you. Are there any questions.

Mike: I have a question. This is Mike from the ADA network in Seattle, Washington. The three groups of students that you were talking about going to Gallaudet, you talked about the transfer students. Just out of curiosity, do you have any transfer students coming to Gallaudet because they're not getting appropriate accommodations, those kinds of reasons?

BETH BENEDICT: Yes, absolutely. Without a doubt. We did I guess what we would call somewhat of a study, where do you come from. We had quite a few transfer students coming from colleges or universities that had just not carried the ball to the goal line to provide services or accommodations to those students. The students might be the only deaf student on campus, they don't have a deaf program per se, you know, they have interpreter services or VRS, they want to go through tutoring and there's a lot of hoops they have to jump through to get reasonable accommodation services, and everything is always done through an interpreter and not one on one.

ALICE HUNNICUTT: Are there any other questions for Beth?

At this point I would like to ask Kristen to talk about the interpreter training grants. Are you still on the line? I hope?

>> I am. Thank you.

Thank you all for the opportunity to share a little bit about our interpreter training grant we were awarded on September 30th of 2016. We officially began in early January of 2017. And these are the grants awarded to individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, individuals who are deafblind programs through OSERS and RSA. I'm serving as the project officer for these grants.

The first was awarded to Saint Catherine University for novice interpreters --

INTERPRETER: Excuse me just for one second. The interpreters here on site are having a little difficulty hearing you. That's probably because we're senior citizens. If you could speak up, that would be helpful for us.

>> I would be happy to. Thanks for letting me know.

The first grant was awarded to Saint Catherine University to develop an experiential learning model demonstration center for novice interpreters, bachelor's degrees, ASL interpretation program.

We are trying to achieve three outcomes through this model demonstration center. The first is to increase the number of certified interpreters. The second is to refuse the average amount of time it takes for novice interpreters to become certificated after graduating.

And third to increase the average number of hours the novice interpreters through the experiential learning program will interact with and learn from the local deaf community.

The second set of grants are four grants that were awarded to support interpreter training in specialty areas. These four grants are designed to provide specialty training to working interpreters with a baccalaureate degree in ASL English, possessing a minimum of 3 years of relevant experience as an interpreter or professional development experience, years of education, that they not equate to a formal degree.

And these projects are expected to achieve two outcomes. The first is to increase the number of interpreters who are trained to work with deaf consumers who require specialized interpreting, and to increase the number of interpreters trained in specialty areas to gain employment in the area for which they are prepared.

The four grantees are University of Northern Colorado, focusing on legal interpreting for minority backgrounds. Their project is called Project CLID, cultivating legal interpreters from minority backgrounds.

There's a project focusing on training interpreting specialists to work in health settings as well.

Third project is Northeastern University, interpreting for consumers with language competencies.

And last but not least Western Oregon University. They are working to enhance access for persons who are deafblind by increasing the number of interpreters able to effectively interpret using tactile strategies.

All of these projects are very interested in connecting with the state coordinators for the deaf, providing updates, when that would be appropriate. They very much want to make sure that they are connected to the local Deaf community, working hard on national projects to make sure that their various advisory boards and curricula planning groups are very inclusive.

And so I wanted to take the opportunity to be able to chat about them. They all have websites in development. And so as a follow-up, Alice, if it's appropriate, I'm happy to send you those web links to connect. Certainly folks could reach out to me if they have questions or want to reach out to any one of these projects and you all can let me know if you would like to have a project described on a call or chat offline.

I just wanted to make sure that in this new grant cycle that I'm connected and sharing what's taking place across the projects and we welcome your input and feedback.

And last but not least, I am working at now the state coordinators for deaf listservs. I'm having technological issues but I think we're back on track with the listserv. Folks inadvertently removed are back on and the folks who wanted to be removed are removed and those who wanted to be added have been added. I believe things are back on track. If not, let me know. Thank you very much for your patience on that.

And I also wanted to acknowledge a number of you responded to the comment periods we had last year when these projects were in development and I want to thank folks for taking the time and effort to provide public comment. We received a number of valuable comments that helped shape both of these grant notices. We took the feedback and ideas very seriously and I want to thank you for contributing.

Also a number of you around the table and online served as peer reviewers for the awards going out and I would like to say thank you for taking the time to do that as well.

ALICE HUNNICUTT: Thank you, Kristen.

As far as sharing information of websites, this is Alice, I'm more than happy to share the information if you want to send it to me and I'm sure it will get on the listserv since you're in charge of it anyway, but happy to share with CSAVR, with other state directors. This is great information. I know, again, in New Jersey, we are continually looking at ways to ensure that our consumers and our deaf language specialists who need interpreters have that quality. So I'm really happy to hear that you're really specializing in certain areas to really raise the bar so we can have access to quality services. So thank you.

Any other questions or comments for Kristen.

I know there's someone from the Helen Keller institute regional office. Is there anyone from national here today or on the line?

I don't want to put anyone on the spot, but if our representative from the regional center, Molly, if you would like to talk a little bit, feel free to or also feel free if you're not wanting to, that's okay too. Just let me know.

Okay. Is there any other comments for the good of the committee?

NATASHA: I have something we're doing at Helen Keller.

ALICE HUNNICUTT: All right.

NATASHA: This is Natasha with Minnesota blind.

We formed a partnership with Helen Keller. There was a need for both with adults and with transition students that our O and M instructors are not trained in deafblind O and M instruction. They are purely blind low vision training.

So Helen Keller came out and did a massive training with our orientation mobility instructors on how to do deafblind orientation and mobility cane skills. And they also partnered with our blind and visually impaired teachers who teach those skills in the schools, so using preemployment transition services, PETs funding. So using that funding we paid for this collaboration so our teachers in the schools have the skills to teach our deafblind students.

So Helen Keller has been great.

ALICE HUNNICUTT: Okay. Thank you.

Any other comments for the good of the order?

I want to thank everyone, in particular our participants via the phone. I know it's sometimes difficult to hang in there but you've done a great job.

Thank you to Robert in particular for identifying and talking about chapter 3. And again, shout out to Shawn from Minnesota for helping everyone figure out access to the SharePoint.

I will be sending out information to everyone that I have for the model state plan about our next teleconference in a couple weeks when we will be looking at acronyms and at the introduction on WIOA.

Without further ado, I would like to ask someone to adjourn. May I have a motion to adjourn?

BEDARIUS BELL: I move that we adjourn.

ALICE HUNNICUTT: Thank you very much, everyone. We'll talk soon.