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Sixth General Session
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>> Good morning everyone. Welcome to our next general session. The last day of the CSAVR. If you guys would join me here I want to set the stage here for this morning's session.

One of the things that I wanted to share with you is that the traditional updates that we would otherwise hear from RSA have been shared out in the committees. Some of you that were in the room you heard that this morning. Most of you would have heard it yesterday in the various committees, so when we open up the opportunity for questions, you certainly will be able to ask some RSA colleagues about those questions, any questions you have on that topic.

So I want to first start by acknowledging panel you're going to have up here in a few minutes. We have other colleagues here from RSA, I'll introduce you in a minute and then we certainly have the colleagues from the various work group members that have participated, state directors, CSAVR and other folks.

I think it's important by acknowledging the collective work that has been done to get us here on this conversation on ReThink VR performance.

And it really started quite some time ago. I mentioned yesterday the innovation and opportunity that is called forth in the rehab act, both in its title and in its purpose and findings. And creating the capacity that we talk about in a public VR program really requires they thinking how we're doing the work we're doing. It requires bringing forth that spirit of innovation, that opportunity that we all need to build across all the systems.

And one of the things that I always try to remind myself as a director, that the people that we serve, the consumer that comes to our door for our services, or the business that is looking to hire, really doesn't care about the structure.

And really doesn't care about who has what role. They're interested in two very simple things. Having a better opportunity to go to work and if you're a business, getting that talent that helps you support the services, the businesses that you provide. And I'm a true believer that our future as a public VR program is contingent on our collective work to have a collective impact on the consumers we serve.

This conversation began in January of this year. You'll hear much more from Mark and Carol about the rethink and then the panel of course, but I just want to start by first introducing our commissioner, Mark Schultz, who is not only a friend, but a huge partner in the VR program so Mark, welcome.
>> MARK SCHULTZ: Good morning everyone. Thank you. I want to start off by yesterday or two days ago now hI can't remember, I talked about the fact that I've been waiting for 500 days to be nominated and that process.

Well there are some positives and negative toss that. One of the things that I think is a positive is I was I believe to come into the process around the ReThink VR performance and take a look at it with a fresh set of eyes. I had a different perspective as I looked at that.

As I reviewed it, first of all I was very appreciative of former secretary Collette's program work and looking at the framework that was established prior to coming, and I think he was here actually a year or two ago talking about the framework. And there are three pillars to the framework.

And the first one is support, that OSER S, will support states in their work.

The other is flexibility, they will provide flexibility within the con instruct of the law and third rethinking or partnerships, that they will partner with our stake holders.

And I would like to thank Carol for taking the initiative to begin that work and that we work together with CSAVR and our partners to begin that process. So thank you Carol for beginning that process.

When you came in and took a look at the work that was already established, I thought it was great. I was really excited about it, but I saw it as phase one, because it was really a work plan that was developed to address some of the issue that is had been existing for the last several years.

There were there when I was a VR director and I was excited to see we were going to address those and had a plan and strategy. When I took a look at the framework that was established, I really didn't flow if it was a rethink effort. This looked like a work plan.

I'm thinking as we look at this, we want to ReThink VR in phase two, and work together to establish our goal for -- and I say the next hundred years and people look at me kind of strange, like why should I care about the next hundred years, I'm not going to be here, so perhaps the next five or ten years, but that begins to show us what VR begins to look like in the future. This is our chance to do that, to dream, to envision and I think to anticipate those issues that we're going to start facing in the next five to ten years, the impact of tech knowledge. You think about what artificial intelligence. You look at self driving vehicles, for example. What is the impact on those -- that's going to have on the opportunities for individuals that are looking for employment.

So those are the things as we move forward that I think we need to look at and consider.

This, as I said in my opening remarks is our opportunity to lead. So I look forward to workings with all of you on phase two, and to leading VR into the future. So thank you. I'm going to turn it over to Carol at this point. Am House of Representatives

>> CAROL PANKOW: Thank you Mark. They very much and thank you Joe. I have a three objectives during my remarks this morning. First of all, I want to inform you and update you as to the activities and progress that we have made in our rethinking initiative that began as Joe said last January and moving through the past ten months 'til today.

And then I would like to describe to you what is now RSA's rethinking plan, at least phase one as Mark has described, and alert you to what is in that, some of our goals, some specifics of how we plan to achieve those goals.

And then finally, I will introduce the rest of our panel.

The panel is actually made up of members of our work group from CSAVR and CSAB, and VR agency directors and the WINTAC who served on the rethinking work group and they'll be sharing their perspectives about their engagement in the initiative and how they are rethinking the VR program in their states.

So that's what I will be doing. So I've got a lot to cover. We wanted to of course devote most of our time to allow you to hear from the panel, so I'm going to be going through things rather quickly, but I'm going to start with the origins of the rethinking initiative.

As Mark said, assistant secretary Collette had the rethinking initiative across OSER.

And in conceiving of ways as to how to embrace that framework and the rethinking that was called for in that in RSA, Joe and I think it's appropos, that he is presiding over that session.

He provided us with an opportune moment, probably unbeknownst to him, but it was the catalyst for the beginning of RSA's rethinking initiative last January.

So RSA as we always do is participating in the January quarterly executive call for CSAVR and after going through a number of updates and responding to questions, Joe wraps up, he thinks, by saying could Carol, do you have any other remarks that you would like to provide to us.

And I said well sure, Joe. Be and I described to him some data trends and to everybody else on the executive committee call, some of the trends that we were seeing and explained that RSA had some concerns about some of the data and the downward trend that we were noticing.

And asked what the members of the executive committee thought lay behind that -- those data trends, what reasons were there, what was happening in the VR program that was causing the data to look the way it was.

And we had a fairly energetic discussion, but it was only very brief. It was about ten minutes maybe, people shared their thoughts as best as they can and at the end of that, I promised that had this would be a continuing and a national dialogue in which RSA would engage with our stake holders to look at the performance of the VR program and where we're going to move forward to address improved performance.

That was the catalyst for what became the rethinking initiative. RSA then looked at how we could continue that national dialogue as I had promised and we came up with the idea of forming a work group comprised of CSAVR and CSAB, VR representatives and RSA that would convene twice during fiscal year 2019, and identify strategies that RSA could engage in to support VR agencies and drive continuous improvement in the VR program and as well help agencies to identify ways in which they could engage in certain strategies that would help to improve their programs in their individual states and thus employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

That's where we began. There was a lot of work that the work group engaged in and before I go on to discuss more of the activities that we've engaged in since then, I do want to recognize all the members of this important work group.

These members devoted significant amounts of time to engaging in this effort with RSA on top of all of the work that they've already had to do, leading their states and working in their organizations.

So I'm going to be going in somewhat alphabetical order here so I don't Ms. Anybody.

Rachel Anderson from WINTAC.

Scott Donniss from Maryland.

Cheryl Fuller from Texas and her data guru, John Leonard we have Dacia Johnson. Mandy Johnson from Tennessee. Alan McClain from Arkansas and also representing CSAVR as president of the organization.

We had Sandy Ostendorf from Iowa.

Carol Pankow representing NCSAB, and Minnesota general.

Bill Richard son from Michigan blind.

And Steve Wooderson, of course, representing CSAVR.

RSA's members of the work group included yours truly, as well as the unit chiefs from state monitoring and programming improvement division, Suzanne Mitchell, RoseAnn Ashby, David steel and Chris Pope.

So with that work group being formed, we met several times, developed an agenda for our meeting -- first meeting which took place in June. As I said the initial concept for the work group was to look at data and use data to drive decision making in order to drive continuous improvement.

Over the course of time, as we led up to the June meeting, the rethinking initiative brought in to consider all of the work that RSA was engaged in at the time.

And the -- the activities we were engaging in, as well as plans we had moving forward. So when it came to the June meeting we shared that work with the work group, received their input.

We also engaged in some deep discussions of performance trends and at the end of the June meeting, thanks to the considered thinking of our members of the work group, we identified seven priority areas that we both on the federal and state level could address to rethink the VR program.

And those priority areas were performance data -- excuse me. This -- there we go. Is that better? Okay.

Performance data, flexibilitys and reduction of burden.

Technical assistance, and the knowledge gap.

Monitoring.

VR staffing.

And sharing the story of the VR program. So those were seven priority areas that we thought we could address.

Moving out of the June meeting, then, RSA took considerable time to develop the phase one portion of the rethinking initiative plan.

And that plan was refined as we met and received input on it from other members of the work group in August.

Following the August meeting, he with had identified and refined RSA's plan to address four or five of the original priority areas that came out of the June meeting, as well as an additional priority area that RSA added in thinking about how we were going to move forward.

So those, again, included performance data, flexibilitys and reduction in burden, technical assistance and dissemination, we had monitoring and we also were addressing an area that we called communication.

So what I can share with you now is what RSA's rethinking plan looks like as a result of all of that work. And while I went through it very quickly, I want to emphasize again, this was a very intensive effort, from all members of the work group, CSAVR, NCSRC, WINTAC and all the agencies represented on the work group.

So this is what RSA's plan looks like. And I want to let you all know, in case you haven't discovered it yet, RSA's rethinking plan is available on RSAs web site, so I invite you to take a look for it and review it closely, contact us with any questions you may have about it.

So in looking at performance data, we had several goals in that area. First of all we wanted to support states in their implementation of the RSA 911, particularly the revised form that will be implemented as of July 1, 2020.

So one of the strategies or activities we are engaging in to achieve that goal is the eight-part webinar series you've heard Chris Pope talk about, two of which are available already for your review and use, and the other six portions of that webinar series will be forthcoming.

Another goal we had in the performance data area is of course to support states in their use of data to purposes of performance accountability, and so assist you, provide TA, technical assistance in that effort.

One of the activities that we've engaged in already to assist you in that area was the general session that Chris, Kristin Mackey and John from Wisconsin engaged in yesterday with all of you. That was a very informative session and I hope you find it beneficial as you move forward in considering how all of you might be able to use data in looking at the performance and accountability of your own programs in your states.

Of course we also want to increase data transparency. That was very very important to the work group members and we were doing that by continuing to share our data dashboards and looking at the publishing of other data tables on our web site.

One of the most important activities that relates to performance data that came out of our June and August meetings, in a way, circles back to the original scope and concept for the rethinking VR initiative, and that was the formation of a data work group, performance data work group.

And this work group is charged with identifying data and measures that help to tell the story of the VR program, moving forward in a shared understanding both on the federal and the state level.

And we will be identifying ways to use the measures that are identified by the performance work group as we move forward in our other activities on the federal level and I'm sure you will be able to do as well at the state level.

You'll hear some about how RSA plans to use the results of

the performance work group moving forward in other areas of our plan.

One of the -- I can let you know that this work group has already begun meeting. They met prior to arriving here in -- earlier this month and they also met in person yesterday. I understand it was a very productive and fruitful conversation. They are going to be continuing to meet and we will be hearing more about the progress of this work group and their results come our next CSAVR meeting in April.

So we're excited about that and that's going to be a very labor intensive effort and I'm grateful to all who volunteered to be part of that effort.

Our next area is that we were addressing as I said, was flexibilities and reduction of burden and I am really happy as I know everybody else in RSA and all of you out there are really happy to check one of our activities off of our plan.

And that's prior approval. So we're excited about that. We're moving along, of course, with identifying and considering flexibility in the area of the using the reserved funds for preemployment transition services.

Mark spoke about that on Monday during her remark -- his remarks and we look forward to advise you on our progress in that activity moving forward in the near future.

You know in reducing burden we've taken steps in that area already. David steel is with the fiscal unit, is in the process of getting ready to publish, for 30 day comments, a stream lined RSA two which will incorporate the data and information from the SF425 so there will be only one financial reporting instrument VR agencies will use and we also have eliminated from that instrument the revised RSA two data that -- and information that would be duplicative of what we are now capturing in the RSA911.

While the rethinking initiative is structured primarily around the VR program we don't want to forget that RSA also administers for other grant programs and we're taking steps with these areas with respect to administration of those programs.

So we are looking at reducing burden in the reporting instrument for the OIB programs, RSA70 bform. That form is now out for 30-day public comment.

After receiving comment and input from the field for a 60-day period earlier this year.

So please take a look at that and provide us with any further input you have on that instrument.

Moving forward in the very important area of technical assistance and dissemination of that technical assistance, Mark had mentioned several areas in which we're identifying vehicles for providing technical assistance related to such topics as section 511 and its implementation, post employment services, and a variety of other topics.

And while that, um, technical assistance and how we get that out to you is forthcoming, we also understand that we need it take improved steps at RSA to ensure that the information that is transmitted through those more formal deliveries in writing of our technical assistance that we find

ways to distribute that information more broadly to the field so that everybody is aware of it and understands it. So we're looking to do that through, again, an increased use of webinars, following the release of technical assistance, as well as high lighting of our newly released technical assistance through quarterly teleconferences and other activities.

There is a lot of work we know that all of you are engaging, with, with your core partners and all the assistance to support those efforts, so we of course have identified, with our partners, the need to provide technical assistance both in writing and through training with respect to the requirements to submit those unified and combined state plans and for performance year 2020.

Those efforts have already begun in RSA to provide training and technical assistance both to RSA and state agencies related to submission of the VR services portion as we are looking to issue broader technical assistance related to the common elements of those plans along with our federal partners.

We also, of course, are aware of the need to expand our technical assistance efforts broadly through the use of our discretionary grants, investments and as you all are aware, we will be issuing new proposed prioritys, notice of proposed priorities for technical assistance centers, upcoming this year, 2020. So please look out for those notices and respond with your comments.

And again, we also administer other programs, particularly of interest to many of you is the Randolph shepherd program and we are taking efforts to improve our technical assistance for you. Including looking at our arbitration procedures and how they can be improved and we're also looking at ways to provide TA to the field around what it means to operate a cafeteria or the priority -- how the priority for food services should be implemented.

Moving on to monitoring, our fourth priority area in our plan, again, Mark had briefly described some of those ongoing and future activities for all of you, but I'll high light it again.

We are making significant progress in the issuance of draft reports for 20186789 we have five of those reports left to issue and to be doing that within the very near future.

And we have a goal of issuing all final 2018 reports by the end of January, January 31st, 2020.

With respect to our 2019 monitoring, we did take steps to improve and stream line that monitoring as compared to the 2018 monitoring protocol and we engaged in those visits.

We have a goal of issuing all draft and final reports for 2019 monitoring by the end of March 2020.

And while all of that is going on, we are engaging in a focused monitoring approach for, in 2020, in which we will be monitoring six state agencies, using portions of the existing 2019 monitoring protocol that are identified as addressing the specific needs of those six agencies.

We'll be releasing information about those six agencies to

be reviewed in the near future. I promise that you will not be surprised or taken off guard. You'll be given plenty of time to prepare for those visits.

And again, while all of that is taking place, we will be revising our VR program monitoring with an eye at implementation, a significantly revised monitoring approach in the year 2021.

And we will be using information, again, that comes out of the performance work group around that shared understanding on the federal and state level about what data and measures are important for assessing the performance of the VR program.

We'll be incorporating that, so that's very important work and in some ways I see the activities of that work group sort of bridging the gap between our phase one and our phase two rethinking plans, and initiatives.

And we'll also be gathering input from all of you, we'll be identifying ways to do that as well as our other stake holders, such as SRC's and client assistance programs and taking all that information and coming up with a revised monitoring approach as I said.

So we look forward to informing you all about that moving forward. And again when it comes to the other programs in RSA, we administer, we will be piloting approaches to AIV RS and Randolph shepherd monitoring this year and obtaining feedback through that process from your agencies and RSA staff involved in those processes and again, looking to fully implement approaches, revised approaches in 2021 as a result of those pilots.

And then finally, with respect to our four -- our fifth area of priority, that of communication, we are looking at ways in which we can improve our external communication. One of which is to, once again, revise our RSA's web site, RSA.eddot.GOV so it is a benefit for all of you as you look for information and implement the VR program.

So as we engage in those efforts you'll be hearing more about that. You'll be hearing from us and have opportunities to share your thoughts about how we can best revise the RSA web site.

For the time being, we're just looking to get our RSA web site off of cold fusion and into our new platform and at that point we'll engage in a more significant initiative around actually revising the content of the RSA web site.

We're also looking in ways at improving the timely and consistent delivery of technical assistance to all of you, to the field. And one of the ways we are already achieving that is through a tracking tool which was developed by RoseAnn Ashby and Suzanne Mitchell and we have had been using since the summer to address technical assistance inquiries that come in from individual agencies and we, to date, have used that tracking mechanism and a process to respond to 61 out of 66 current technical assistance inquiries. So I think that has really made significant progress in what was our back log in responding to those inquiries and we hope all the agencies who have received responses to their technical assistance requests are finding them useful and helpful in implementing their

programs.

And finally, we also will be looking at other communication efforts, such as engaging in quarterly teleconferences with VR agencies, apart from our engagement where the quarterly executive calls.

We'll also be asking our state liaisons to engage in regular teleconferences with each of their assigned state agencies so you can receive more timely information and we can also learn from you in a more timely way about your needs.

So that's a lot of what's in our plan. There's also some other more specific information in that plan, such as anticipated completion dates of activities, as well as what we view as the anticipated effect of each of those activities identified in the plan as it benefits the VR program.

So that is it for my remarks about our rethinking initiatives to date and now I'd like to turn over the stage to the panel. Ment panel will be facilitated by Alan McClain and up here we will have various members of our work group, who will, as I said be sharing their perspectives on our activities and those include Cheryl Fuller, Carol Pankow, Steve Wooderson, I believe Kristen Mackey and Mandy Johnson and Dacia Johnson. Have I missed anybody on the panel? Rachel? Okay. No, I'm good? Okay.

So at any rate, before they make their remarks and engage in the discussion with you in which they'll be answering questions as well as the panel will be obtaining some feedback and input from everyone in the audience, I want to thank the rethinking work group.

As I said, this was a very labor intensive effort for the past ten months, both on the part of RSA as well as everybody else on the work group and it was while a challenging effort in many ways, it was a highly collaborative effort, a very open and honest effort and I believe the results of that, including RSA's plan as well as other activities that will be stemming from that effort have been of great use to date and will continue to be, not only for RSA, members of the work group, but for all of you as you strive to improve the VR program and in particular the employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

So thank you all very much.

>> Thank you Carol. And we -- I just can't express enough how important and how engaging this conversation has been with RSA. Those of us who had the chance to go to RSA's offices and spend time with them in a real trans parent way and engaging way that really emphasized and highlighted RSA's desire to really give that technical assistance and to collaborate with us toward all our performance goals and measures that we want to attain in our programs and it really brought home the -- just the real understanding that we're all in this together, so it really was a good experience.

And Mandy Johnson had to leave. She was also part of the panel today but she had a little earlier flight so she's not joining us on the panel today but appreciative of her.

Other panel members and along the lines of my opening comments, just any first impressions any of my panel lists

would like to say about what you enjoyed about the process?

>> I could jump in. And before he does that I will emphasize we want to engage everybody in the audience on some of these priorities as we go through it and there will be some mics available for you

>> I jumped in front of you Carol, is that okay?

>> Yeah

>> I wanted to speak from a national perspective for a moment, because the state panel will have more specifics. But to acknowledge the team, Mark you have come in and led this as part one of two and has been, as you said, a good experience, exceptionally good experience.

As we think about what's happening at the state level I want to mention at the national level the value that this adds to our conversation, as well.

Because as your CSAVR staff are involved in advocating for the value of the public program, this really is an opportunity for us to enhance our awareness, the awareness of those on the hill, by being able to really tell our story, because data drives that story.

And so for us to be able to kind of move from where we have been in telling the story with our data to where we want to be and telling the story, this really is an exceptional opportunity for us to really seize the moment.

So that's really an important aspect for us to consider as we look at what's happening at the state level. It really does help us think about how we share the value of the public VR program on the hill and with our national organizations.

It also helps us, even though it's unlikely that we'll see a reauthorization any time in the near future, maybe we will, maybe we won't, but whenever we do, this helps us prepare for that. And being able to, quite honestly, maybe reshift the way that we're communicating who we are and what we do.

And so there could be no more important time for us to be involved in this activity than where we are right now, so I just want to say thank you to RSA, for -- and former assistant secretary Collette for setting the framework, Carol and team for moving this agenda toward. Joe, thanks, it's all your fault for asking the question in the executive committee meeting and it's just been a really grueling but excited process to be a part of. Thank you.

>> I just wanted to mention that if you look at your e-mail and 8:37 an e-mail popped from the U.S. department of education. RSA issues VR performance plan, so if you are on e-mail that would have popped and it is what Carol was talking about. It will be on the web site.

I just wanted to add to Steve's comments when I first was invited to represent NCSAB on the group, I had a lot of great conversations with people over the summer and their issues and I feel like I was representing you people. So it wasn't just one voice from my perspective being in Minnesota I was. I think the best part of it was having these very honest conversations. And they were sometimes tough. We talked about the good, bad and ugly in the public VR program and there was not one ounce of defensiveness on the part of RSA.

And I think it could have been easy cause some of the things we talked about, they were tough things. Like monitoring, I was a state, I was part of two monitoring systems this summer and we talked about real things happening, like getting your report 18 months later. It's not very value added. And everyone listened, and I felt extremely heard and then you all were heard and I put in a in my remarks I made the very first day

>> Thanks, Carol. Dacia?

>> Ditto what Steve and Carol remarked. One of the pieces that struck me as I was reflecting on commissioner Schultz' comments is leading with value and really, the rethink performance process was embedded and the value is one of the things we uphold, and Rethinking our federal state partnership, which I feel like the time that we spent talking through some of our challenges in that federal state partnership was really foundational for us to reset and rethink how we tell the public VR story. So it really was a new and innovative way to engage with our federal partners.

And I do want to echo Carol's comments and commend Carol and the RSA team. We were not shy in talking about some of the challenges that folks in this room shared with us and we delivered those messages. And the RSA team really did lean into the work, just listened to the comments, asked clarifying questions and when we saw the draft plan, they really heard the value added of timely monitoring reports.

The importance of being able to tell the vocational rehabilitation story in a way that's powerful and we want to address our weaknesses in terms of the data and opportunities that those present, but we also have a powerful story to tell in that our collective communication around that will set the tone for what that public VR system represents now and in the future

>> Thanks. Oh, did you want to go Cheryl

>> I'll say two quick things. One, when we had the opportunity to participate on an effort to rethink the program, focused on performance, we were in, because from our perspective, our state perspective, there's really -- there's nothing more critical we could be doing right now than taking a big look, both from the 30,000-foot perspective and all the way down to the ground level, at how our program is performing and what that means we need to think about to ensure that it's relevant in the future.

So we were really excite today participate and couldn't be more supportive of the continued effort in phase two to truly begin to look at that data to rethink what we're doing.

And the other thing that we were so grateful for is that we all experience this program from a different speaker speculative, the federal perspective, state perspective, the stake holder perspective, and if all of those perspectives aren't heard and valued when it comes to looking if he direction of a program and engaging in a national effort to move it forward, then we've missed something, so we are grateful and appreciative to RSA, because we think that will help us moved forward in a that really does ensure our

relevance and effectiveness in the future

>> Thanks Cheryl. With that let's go to the first priority item and take a look. We're going to go back over each of these five and get some inputs from the panel as to their experiences and, just personally and then as they interact with their teams back in states.

So the first one is the performance data priority area so I was going to ask Cheryl if she will take this first and give us some of her thoughts around how she's using this back in Texas

>> , thank you, this is the area we were most excited about, even though we value all the priorities.

I asked Adam Leonard, some of you know him, for those of you who don't he is just an incredibly valuable member of our team because of the perspective he brings to data around a system.

I'm going to try to channel my inner Adam, but for those of you -- right I'll just give up. But the bottom line is, he said we have our three most important resources, our customers, our people, meaning our staff, and our data. We've always valued the first, depended on the second and not done very much with the third.

I said well wait a second there, when I look at whether we've really used the data in a thoughtful comprehensive way to make decisions about how we're managing our programs, he's more right than wrong so this area is so critical to rethinking the program that it's really hard to over state it, because in all three of those areas we have profound changes happening in the VR program.

With our customers, our customers are changing. If for no other reason, the significant shift in our customer base now represented by students with disabilities due to preemployment transition services, but also perspectives of government are changing.

When you can go on Amazon dot-com in the room and you need to tomorrow and um's have to tomorrow and know you can track it along the way, how happy are you about a process that takes 60 days to determine eligibility and 90 days to get a plan and by the way most of the time you can't see where you are in that process.

So citizen expectation of government, including us, are changing. Our customers are changing, our staff are changing. Generational impacts are a huge driver of change in our program.

The work force that we are gaining, if we are fortunate in the younger generations doesn't work the same way, doesn't think with work the same way and doesn't think about career the same way, so the days where we could expect counselors to stick around for one, two, and three decades are probably gone and when we rely on institutional knowledge to develop good VR and we don't another process or plan in place, we're in trouble.

When it comes to look at data, the systems that are available to us today, the ability to use data without having to have a scientist who can use these systems, it's becoming

more usable, more successful in a way like never before.

So help us really understand what's going on in the program, project where we're going in the program. Unprecedented and so we have to take advantage of those things and that all revolves around performance, but that's why, in a nutshell, it's just so critical to us in Texas and I know to some of you, because I've gotten great ideas from what some of our sister states are doing in the area of data and performance and I plan to steal something from every single one of you that I've talked to are listened to in this conference.

But what are we doing in Texas, I can tell you that when RSA began to share those charts, the scary charts, well at least they were scary to us a little bit because of how we were showing up and you Texas is a big state, so it's hard to miss up, I'm like how about that, that's not what we thought we were doing. Or that just reflects that we have gaps in what we're reporting, it's not making it into this national picture.

We are tracking national trends, so what do we do about that? We continue to study. I started talking with our managers and staff about it and trying to really understand the drivers behind those trends. The changes in citizen expectations, the economy and how robust it is and how that drives what is happening in the program.

As well as you know looking at change, change by WIOA, change by those of us who have moved to new DSA, combined, those are pretty profound drivers of these trends and so we considered what are we going to do about this and we developed an action plan with four overlapping strategies and asked our departments to draft action plans that say who will do what by when, from their group, to further those four strategies.

And right now, we're working on sin they sizing all of that. That's a lot of information when you have 29 management units, six regions and three state office departments, but we're sin they sizing that to build out the action plan that says who will do what by when in these four strategies and how will we know ifer's making a difference.

So that's what we're doing. I could go on about this. If I channeled my inner Adam, we'd stop about three, but I think I better stop

>> Yeah we really appreciate Adam, too, he's contributed so much to.

Thank you Cheryl, let's go to the audience before we go back to the panel. If there's anybody in the audience on this particular priority of performance data, if that has spurred any thoughts from you or questions you would like to ask, now is a good time.

Or say some of our members of the rethinking team that are in the audience, if you want to say anything as well, that's fine well. Anybody? Performance data.

All right. Seeing none at the moment and we can come back to it if any thoughts come back to anybody, so I don't want to cut us short on the other priorities, so I'll move on.

Flexibility and reduction of burden, you've heard that as a

common item on this and I would ask the members of our panel if they want to comment on that

>> I'd love to talk about that. We've been talking about this for several years as WIOA, has been known to us and we've been implementing the new regulations.

That is one of the things that last come up. When I talked to all states all summer, it was like our staff are just dying with having to implement all of these new requirements and all of the data elements and people are feeling overwhelmed and having to split out your time sheet into is a 15 minutes, and this time is taking away from the time they're spending with the customers.

So I know post Steve and I we worked on this really hard on behalf of both the associations to really bring forward collectively what we're here from you all about the flexibility and the burden.

We had some fruits of our labors on that yesterday with the prior approval flexibilitys, but that's been a lodge haul and to really articulate that and bring that forward, I think that will have major impact. We don't know what that will say, but we do know anything we can do to take away that -- just that huge administrative burden and take away from staff really working with the customer is going to give that time back so we can continue doing the good work.

I really appreciated Joe Xavier's presentation on that yesterday and we know there have a profound impact on the program

>> Thanks. Dacia?

>> You know one of the things we've done internally in Oregon is asking the questions around what's value added to the customer and how will we know we're adding to the customer.

And what we do know under WIOA is we didn't get additional resources and with the 15 percent set aside for pre-ETs we have additional challenges to serve all the customers that are coming to us.

So we really are looking at ways to make sure we're focusing to help meet the customers in terms of outcome.

So as we're telling the story, making sure that all of our resources that we can possibly dedicate towards things that make a difference in terms of ultimately delivering outcomes for customers but also being able to reflect the performance that RSA and the government expects.

So this is huge to make sure every aspect of the resources are geared toward those things we're driving for. If it doesn't have value added in terms of the customer and if it doesn't have value in terms of the outcomes we're seeking for individuals with disabilities in this country, answer we need to ask ourselves why are we doing it.

And that really does speak to this burden reduction, and I want to commend RSA for really leaning into that conversation and really looking for way, hopefully now and in the future that they ton drive that.

Because part of that story and we kind of reflect back where we were in the spring conference where we saw some of the data around how applications have gone down and some of

those things. That's part of the story, right? He have we been focusing so much working in the business around the process, that we hadn't had the opportunity yet to reflect back and say, let's look on the business as a global perspective and the outcomes that that's had. So what will be interesting to do so is with these burden reductions if we are able to see that reinvestment back into that direct consumer interventions, if we're able to see those numbers turn around over time, we certainly hope so.

>> I would just add that I appreciate that RSA has taken such a thoughtful approach to looking at how we really can reduce burdens, but it's not a one time thing. Any time we're putting in place stronger systems of internal controls, a greater focus on making sure we're gathering data and reporting data and it's correct, and we're doing things the right way, there is also a corresponding need to look at what we're adding and what we need to stop doing.

And it's a discipline that I often struggle with just at the state level because we're adding controls, adding approvals, addressing this audit addressing what we anticipate coming up in monitoring, we need to fix that, we need to shore up that, oh, we better add another layer there and before you know it, it has really started to cut the oxygen from the program and what you want most to be doing.

So recognizing the value of both of those, it's an ongoing discipline, not only for us collectively as a system in partnership with RSA but at the state level to say, okay, now that we've added all these controls so I feel better, what do we need to stop doing, where did we go too far or where might we look at things differently that we need to address so I so appreciate this is happening at the national level and collectively and I also take that as a charge to continue to do it at the state level

>> I saw some other smiling faces in the audience.

Any comments or questions from the audience around flexibility and reduction of burden? We can get a mic to you. I see a hand.

>> This is Bill from Michigan blind. I thought Joe's presentation the other day was really great. And when you look at flexibility and you heard from the committee on human resource development earlier today, you know, people come to work for various reasons.

And money is important, but they have to have meaning in their job and they have to ultimately enjoy their job. And I think this flexibility area as to Cheryl point, this is something that we continually have to look at. Both from a federal and our own state VR level, as Joe demonstrated, because we have to make sure people enjoy this job and very worthy job of counseling and guidance in getting people placed in high-paying jobs.

If we only focus at the top, and if RSA only looks at the framework of the regulations without understanding what the field has to deal with. And each's not talking about what I have to deal with, I'm talking about is a counselor level. Then we will continue to lose people regardless of how those

jobs are structured or how those individuals are paid.

The other point I want to make is just since Carol Dobak mentioned the formula grants, there's one formula grant I would like to propose as -- to have some more flexibility, and every year we, in our reallocation, give back supported employment funds.

And those funds are very difficult to match because the wage you have to match adult and youth. And I just wonder, since we're in Florida, why we can't look at that as some low hanging fruit because right in and out juice isn't worth the squeeze. So thank you.

>> Thank you Bill, another question over here?

>> Good morning, Shelley Hendron. I'm curious about what the conversation is at the federal level with regard to prior approval and the uniform guidance.

I mean obviously uniform guidance is meant to be uniform and department of labor has not taken the hard stance that department of Ed has with regard to prior approval.

And that's just another layer of administrative burden on VR programs. So I'm curious if there are conversations where we can align and preferably take the position that department of labor has taken on that particular issue.

>> Carol happens to still be up here

>> CAROL PANKOW: I thought this might be a mistake. No I -- I certainly appreciate the question from Nevada. I think as we've explained in the past, the departments of labor and departments of education, differ in their administration of their various grant in many ways because of the differences that actually exist in those programs.

And so that's one reason why you do see a difference in approach. We considered, as fully as we could, the amount of flexibility that we've been able to provide through the recently released prior approval flexibility and FAQs.

We certainly understand there are more questions and comments and as Mark and David steel have made clear, we will be taking comment on the FAQs in the future so you can look forward to the opportunity to do that. When the manner in which we do that will be announced to the field, but thank you in the meantime for your comment

>> Carol, this is Joe Xavier, California. Thank you for, teeing up my question, couldn't have planned this better.

So as we think of flexibilitys, I would challenge all of us and I'm specifically looking right at Mark and Steve here in your respective positions.

When we think of reauthorization, let's be thinking of what needs to be in that statute to address some of the things that Carol has just highlighted and let's think about what needs to be in in a statute to account for a program that is different than what may be taking place in the DOE or any other section and start looking at how do we bring some relieve, lodge term, for this effort that we know is such a problem across the country

>> And this is Steve, dually noted and you handed the mic to the person that's going to be running with that, and that's Rita. So as we look at reauthorization, that's what we're

going to be thinking, rethinking and thinking

>> Let's go into the next priority area. Technical assistance and dissemination.

So obviously an important topic and we've heard it discussed quite a bit here through the conference so far and so I would like to ask the panel, why is this proposed technical assistance important?

>> So one of the things that we talked about this summer was that there really has been a little bit of a cone of silence as far as technical assistance coming from the department.

And it depends on what training you might go to. So today there's about 300 people in here that were able to come to the conference, but there are thousands of people back in their states, they haven't been able to hear the messages that you've been able to hear.

The same with new directors. Steve announced 11 new directors and it's almost like every six months we have 11 new directors. That's a lot going on.

And that's people that have knowledge because they're at a training or conference and some don't. If you're in state that has a travel ban, you may hear through the grapevine or you go to a regional meeting, there gap is widen, so you have the have and the have nots so I think the conversations on technical assistance were really good and really important.

We know new directors need training. There needs to be some really good training back up on RSA's web site around that to help you out. People are walking in going I don't know how to run this and we're run ago big program worth millions of dollars so getting that information in your hands to you need to be successful is really important.

And then just the things like the WIOA, the new plans, the new state plan, all of that. So RSA has been working on this technical assistance that will go go out. I know we've had an absence of technical assistance over the years, but the areas we talked about, Randolph shepherd, all of those pieces were incredibly important

>> Another panel list? Any thoughts?

>> I would just echo what Carol said, particularly on behalf of the new directors that come in from outside of VR.

When you're a new director and you have come up through the program, you have a knowledge base that is envied by those of us who come in as directors and do not have that.

And even then, it's about looking at the program from almost a completely different perspective. So the information to new directors on the web, the opportunities for new directors to learn about the program and the uniqueness of some of the ways in which we must administer that program are so critical.

And I came in from outside of VR. I'm six years in and I'm still learning. And so that technical assistance is the form of easily accessed basic information about what you need to do to oversee this program is invaluable. But I wanted to give a shout out to the technical assistance we've received from the technical assistance centers over the last few years.

I know that RSA has to follow certain protocols with when

issuing anything that's formal and the technical assistance centers for us have really served adds a way to have a dialogue and get some support and feed back about what's going on in other states that has been invaluable to us.

But anything we can do to really support that ongoing exchange of technical assistance directly between RSA and the states we're all for it, because that's so needed as the program tons evolve and move forward

>> Comment? Question?

>> So the other day, Steve was talking about what keeps people awake at night, at three in the morning. I think about just the next generation of leaders. I so appreciate CSAVR and I want to thank you. I mean the value of the leadership forum on Saturday and Sunday, so I'm going to just think out loud now.

So I have -- I'm thinking about people that are going to retire, be retiring. We're an aging state. Alaska aging country. I just hired this new fiscal person, my right hand and she comes with a lot of aptitude and skill set but not in this world.

And she's a baby boomer, by the way so she's working six days a week and I'm a little bit worried about her, you know working on Saturdays at six seven o'clock at night because she wants to make a difference.

The fiscal training that you -- that occurred what, two years ago or so, was I think very valuable from what I'm hearing and I would like to see -- I know that has come up a couple times. I'd like to see if we can get that to happen, if just for one person, it would be my person that I will pay to have her go to wherever. If it's in Hawaii, we'll send her there, as well.

So that's what keeps me awake. Our data person who Steve, when he was in Alaska, last week and she's a pistol and I -- but I like her. I mean she's very passionate. She's retiring in a year. So I'm worried about that. That's what keeps me awake at night, so I understand the import -- and she does a really great job with data because we have initiatives as I mentioned the other day, at risk youth exiting the foster care system, our aging population of seniors with disabilities who want to continue to work and our ability to measure that, so you know creating score cards so we can determine whether or not our initiatives are working.

So I did -- I was asleep at three this morning, it may be, though when I go forward, if I'm not sleeping I'll let you guys know. And we got to continue to work to prepare the next generation of leaders

>> Well said thank you. Joe? Oh, somebody else? Theresa's got somebody back there first, then Joe

>> Hi, this is Michael from Washington blind and technical assistance dissemination, one of the thoughts I had, I heard Carol you said that there are a lot of agencies, a lot of important key players that can't come to conferences and get the information. I -- kind of my experience is that when you're in crisis and you need that technical assistance most, you don't have the band width to take the efforts to ask for

that help.

So I kind of challenge us to be how do we identify those agencies and those programs that are in more of a crisis mode and getting that technical assistance to them in a smoother way.

>> Good point. Thank you

>> This is Joe in California. I would like to add one element to the technical assistance here. John Collette would often speak of, but he would do more so in the special education realm, and he was a strong proponent that the most significantly disabled child have that opportunity to go to work and that if we didn't figure out how to get the systems out of their way or figure out what were the services they needed to get employment. That wasn't their fault, that was our fault.

And I think it's an area we've got to put more attention behind. I'm talking about you think about section 511 or moving people out of sheltered workshops. You think about how do you get them from even believing they can go to work, so a lot of our staff need also the kind of technical assistance and our leaders need to the technical assistance to really embrace those individuals that have been on the fringes of employment or not even considered for employment 6789 because if we believe in leaving no one behind, that means no one. Not -- not no one except for you.

And so as the public VR program, if we don't believe in that, who will? And who will help get those individuals ready for and into the workplace?

>> Well said, Joe. Thank you. Couldn't agree more. Anybody else from the floor? Is there another one?

All right. I guess we'll go on to the next one. So priority four is monitoring. So that's always a popular topic and again it's not a unfamiliar topic for this week so it's a good time to revisit that.

And so the question is how can we engage in RSA monitoring in a way that strengthens the federal state partnership and then any retrospectives on recent monitoring but one of our panel lists want to jump into that one? Y'all fight for it

>> I guess I'll jump first. We had monitoring this summer. I happened to have the privilege of going through it with the blind agency and also as my change in role and went through with the general agency. So it was really timely because we're having conversations then on the federal level and I know some of what we said was, in looking back over time when you have a monitoring report that's coming out 18 months after the monitoring, there really isn't a value add, so we were very insistent that whatever happens with monitoring there needs to be that value add to the state. You don't want to spend that resource, cause ours has limited resources as well, to put that kind of effort into something that you're checking the box that you did these things but you can't get the information back to the state in a timely enough fashion to make a meaningful impact. Cause when it comes back way later, we're on to new things. When we have heard people speak about

that, we're definitely going to see a change with the monitoring in 20. I know for us the monitoring.

What I liked probably best about the process was really talking to the team. And having those moments on break or afterwards really explaining or digging in and being able to, like, I spent the whole time with Craig Mcman news, and pulling out my guidance and tell me what you're talking about so I could get it solidified in my head. I know the team had a lot of input talking about the program pieces and their thoughts, what we were doing, maybe what other states were doing and I found the technical assistance provided on site was really beneficial.

And I liked probably that the best thing was having our counselors involved in the process, because I think counselors often think we made all of this up. They think in Minnesota we're doing crazy things, they think the rest of you are doing very well but we are a just dumb, we're could go stuff in a dumb way.

And I realized -- cause I remember the counselor sit can with the team when they were doing the case review, and they came out of there with their hair standing up and they were like wow you ain't getting, they really want documentation in the case record, yeah they really do.

So it really gave us some credibility and they were able to also talk to the monitoring team in a very real way and explain from being boots on the ground what the administrative burden has meant.

And could see it in the team. They said your staff really let us know. And I thought oh, you know like how was that. And they were like no, they were very respectful but they let us know whether's really happening and how that's impacting them in doing their work.

And that was awesome. Staff really felt heard that and I think that's so vault. So I do like having the team going out and being able to talk to folks.

>> DACIA JOHNSON: So this is occasion I can't again from Oregon and I have lots of comments about monitoring which led me to be appointed to talk about this. I haven't been monitor in a few years, but I feel like I'm on the short list right now.

In thinking about this particular topic, one of the things I was thinking about was weigh spent a lot of time when we work with consumers in developing an individual development plan for employment. And when we look at the monitoring and I'm hopeful as we rethink that process that we can also build in the monitoring process to actually up lift the states based on their strengths resources and priorities.

Because ultimately, we want to create a framework nationally that tells the VR story based on our strengths and our values as commissioner Schultz has challenged us to do.

So really that was the framework of my comments. I also have implemented and outcome based management system within our agency and I'm passionate about outcomes.

And compliance isn't an outcome. Compliance is something

that we need to care about because in part our federal partners are federally law based to care about that topic and we want to meet their needs as a customer but we also want to drive outcomes for individuals with disabilities and so hopefully, we can create a monitoring process moving forward that is built on those values, but built on ultimately outcomes and driving the performance of the VR system and building on the strengths and opportunities in each agency to continue to improve their performance

>> Thank you Dacia, from the audience? Comments question? Gain Dwaine? And then there's one in the back, too.

>> I'm thinking in a former life I did something really bad and I feel like I've been monitored my entire life. When I was the aging and lodge term support services director in Alaska for eight years, we were -- when I showed up, we were out of compliance, at risk for losing about 6-million dollars, so a corrected action plan and then working through this to, you know 12 hour days and from there over to the one and only psychiatric hospital, state run psychiatric hospital out of compliance and walked in that door and then worked on getting out of compliance -- or getting back into compliance.

And so now I'm here and I just got -- we just got our monitoring report last week so I read it on the plane on the way down here. I'm going to read it going back, but the -- I now realize when I think about the value and importance of the director, the director having a seat on the Aweb. You know the power of the director to be able to communicate to whatever department you sit with and with labor. I can see that value and that power, so I'm telling you right now that when I talk to our umbrella agency I'm letting them know that we just got cited for not having a position on the Aweb that I should be there. They're saying oh, no. It's not a problem, Dwaine. We got that waiver, you're okay and as I'm talking -- I'm here talking to everybody and talking to RSA and CSAVR and they're saying no, you need to be on that board, so I'm going to need a little bit of juice so when I go back, as my mother would say, no fear. And I'm going to let them know, I expect to be on that board and they may push back so I'm going to need to you help me, letters, whatever to make that happen, so

>> Good point to stay engaged in every way you canment back in the back?

>> So we're in Hawaii trying -- after monitoring, we are just trying to reinforce that it's a practice, just like brushing our teeth and flossing and white tening is a luxury we'll get to later but just reinforcing that it's really a practice and then as, you know, Dwaine just pointed out, you really have to enforce it as a leader and each day I'm looking at the FAQs and throwing out for example, 22 and 29 today. Tomorrow I'll hit 31 so each day I'm throwing out an FAQ that I want our leadership to look at and respond to

>> Thank you. Let's move on to our final one so we can make sure we get all our priorities in for the discussion, so around communication is priority five. So you can seat

different actions and the things we looked at around communication through dissemination of technical assistance, timely communication, enhanced ex terrible communication, for our panel, how will this improved communication help better tell the VR story, in your states and as you think about it nationally

>> So we talk about communication and what RSA is planning to do to enhance that. I think all of that will definitely add value to the states, but when I think about it, I think mostly about what I'm doing or not doing in my state, to communicate.

Because some of the same challenges we discussed as far as the need for better communication between federal and state partners, I bet my management unit staff would say about their perspective and the state.

And so when it comes to communication one of the challenges we have is that we're so busy doing and implementing that we don't stop and talk about it and explain why, and share frequently information about when's going on, why it's happening and where we need to go together.

So all of the other things we're doing, if we don't infuse the communication in the system as every level, we won't move forward collectively. And so this is one of those areas that I took more as a personal charge than anything else, to do a better job of communicating the change and figuring out how to do that in different ways because my primary method is the seven-page e-mail and the staff will tell you they stopped reading after the third degree paragraph but I get on a roll, so we've got to think about different ways you can communicate with your staff and communicate effectively as a system and go forward together

>> Thank you Cheryl. We have about four minutes left, five minutes left and not to cut our panel short but I think our panel would also agree that it's really important to hear from any audience member who has anything they want to say on communication, you know first of all, since we're on that topic, but we can also revisit any of the other priorities that we've touched on here that you might have some more comments on, or if there's any priorities that are important to you, I know that particularly RSA would love to hear that. That maybe in a course of our discussions in rethinking initiative that might not have surfaced or come out, but we were just a small group there and so we know it was representative of the whole program so any audience feedback would be appreciated.

It may be that you're looking -- oh, those are great priorities, but what happened to this one.

>> Hello, this is Nancy from New Mexico. I want to address the burden of counselor have to do their pre-ETs time reporting separate from general VR and the pre -- as time you also have to divide by different courses, requirement, what is authorized, what is coordinate and it is very very burdensome and I would like figure out a way we can do a -- just straightforward pre-ETs and straight GR. I think that a lot of time we spend on administrative requirements that take us, counselor, away from direct service, that we really want to

do. Thank you.

>> So commissioner do you want to come up and wrap things up?
And.

>> FEMALE SPEAKER: Hold on we have one more comment

>> Oh, one more back there, all right. Going to lose control pretty quickly

>> This is Dave from Iowa and I wanted to make a comment that Iowa was represented by sandy Ostendorf who is one of our boots on the ground person and she felt very well heard and respected and I think it's important for the group to know that we were, I think from her perspective trying to make shyer we represented, not only from the director level, but from the field level, reality and she came back very enthused and continues to share ideas

>> Thank you. I think that's a feeling we all had. It was on honor for me. I'm a parent of a son with significant disability and I live that every day watching him so it's a personal level to a lot of us, I'm not the only one that has that story and to see it get it at the grass roots level to work through some of these things for our clients, it's really a rewarding experience, so commissioner?

>> So I think trulyly, this is an impressive collaboration and a collaborative effort on the part of everyone that was on the work group. Those of you that provided input to everyone in the work group and once again I just want to thank the work group for all the effort that's gone into this.

So as I started out, and Sherry, what I perceived to be the effort and the work and the resulting plan, as you can see, a lot of things we discussed were some a what operational in nature. As I look forward to the future I really think it's important that we start to address all of these operational issues and I think as one of our panel members said, you know dealing with these things in the state. We've been so busy with the administrative burdens and those things that kind ever day-to-day operations, we don't have time to think about what we need do for the future.

So if we can address these issues, that's where we need to be as we look at reauthorization, as we look our work for the next hundred years, we need to be table have that time to get the rest of these operational issues out of the way and start being visionary in terms of what we look to achieve in the future. So that's where I would like to go with in as we begin phase two.

Right now I just wanted to remind you that there are a lot of efforts on the part of the national disability employment awareness month.

If you want to take a look the a those you can go to the OSER blog, I encourage you to take a look at that and once again I'd like to thank our panel for their messages and I think true examples of how that is important at a state level and how we're looking to make changes not only at the federal but within the programs for the states so thank you all very much once again.

>> So we're going to make a quick transition and move into

our final session. I think we'll all be up lifted and encouraged by, so I will begin in just a couple of moments.

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