Call to order-Quorum established

Chair remarks:
Mikey welcomed everyone and addressed housekeeping issues. The Council voted to adopt the agenda with adjustments, as presented.

April 16, 2019
Allison Flanagan-Director’s Report

- **Customer case status:** From July 2018-March 2019, there were a little over 30,000 individuals referred and over 17,000 applicants. This does not include Pre-employment transition students who are potentially eligible.
- **Customer case status:** From July 2018-March 2019, 6,509 cases were closed from status of “plan written” or above; 11,659 IPEs completed
- **Primary and secondary disability groups being served by disability type:** The top group being served were those individuals with a primary mental health diagnosis followed by developmental disabilities.
- **Provider referral data:** There are about 305 employment services providers who provide job placement, job development, vocational evaluation assessments, etc. There are over 8,000 vendors statewide (physicians, psychologists, universities, schools, etc.).
- **Provider referral data:** There were 155 less referrals in 2017-18 than 2016-17. There were over 3,000 Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) referrals that were sent to the providers in 2017-18 than in 2016-17. Because of WIOA, the customer population has shifted. Many of the providers are now providing Pre ETS and they continue to ramp up those services.
- **Informed choice:** Counselors and staff take that very seriously. VR continues the informed choice process even when a person is referred to VR from a provider.
- **Youth and students snapshot:** This percent of the VR caseload continues to increase. In January, this comprised about 40% of the caseloads; now it is at 49.6%. There are over 9,000 individuals who are potentially eligible.
• **Wait List:** Category 3 has been closed for some time now. As of March 31, there were 208 individuals on Category 3 wait list.

• **National level:** Of 78 VR programs across the country, 41 are in an Order of Selection; 8 states have no categories open. It’s a challenge so Florida VR is trying to serve as many as possible with the money available.

• **Expenditures:** For the current state fiscal year, the agency has expended about $127 million so far; last year-$189 million for the year. There are four months left for this state fiscal year.

• **Caseload snapshot:** Currently there are 445 staff (including supervisors) who are carrying caseloads. Because of the vacancy turnover, some supervisors are carrying those caseloads as well. The average caseload is about 94; the median is 96, which is remarkable for a general agency. Allison said that the unspoken rule of thumb from RSA is that 150 is a manageable caseload.

• **Staff vacancies and turn over:** There were 753 vacancies from July 2018-March 2019-25%. The number 1 reason for staff leaving is salary. Allison said they are trying to work on improving salaries because consistent staff is linked to customer service, which is linked to better outcomes.

• **Employment Outcomes:** From July through March, 4,310 individuals were gainfully employed, compared to 4,752 for all of last year. Allison gave kudos to VR staff and providers for the exceptional work they are doing. 61% of the referrals sent to providers have been placed in gainful employment. Mikey recognized Allison and the agency for their hard work.

• **Unsuccessful Closures:** There were 6,509 unsuccessful closures through the third quarter of the state fiscal year. The top two reasons for the closures continue to be no longer interested and unable to locate.

• **911 Data:** There are 393 new data elements to start collecting and reporting on since WIOA was implemented. The agency is on time and submitting everything quarterly. RSA has recently sent out a 60 day notice for comments for new reporting requirements. They are waiting on final guidance from RSA on the new reporting requirements.

• **Provider capacity update:**
  o 122 certified Discovery providers; 54 that are currently in courses
  o 61 certified Project Search providers. Allison said the agency has been recognized by other states, as Florida is the leader in Project Search. The program is for young students who really don't have much work experience and it usually targets those with the most significant disabilities.
  o 61 certified CBTAC (self-employment) providers
  o 21 school districts have applied to provide work-based learning experiences, formally the third party cooperative agreement.
  o The Student Transition Activity Record (STAR) portal is a system that collects the referral information for Pre Employment Transition Services students. 64 school districts are participating in that portal, doing the electronic referrals.
  o 118 agencies are involved in the Youth Peer Mentoring program; 21 mentors have been through the training and are approved.

• **Business Relations:** VR agencies are now required to report on employer engagement. They will start working with RSA on negotiating targets in the fall. Area 7 and Area 1 have been planning and conducting career fairs and Area 3 is coordinating an internship project. A VR Career Fair is scheduled to occur in the spring at the Dept. of Revenue in Tallahassee.

• **Ombudsman Update:** Through quarter 3, there has been a little over 1500 contacts; 54% of those were information and referral requests and 46% were complaints. The Ombudsman’s office helps customers understand the process, possibly why a decision was made and what the policy actually
They have been a good voice for customers who may be concerned about the direction of their cases.

- **Administrative Hearings:** Case closures continues to be the highest reason for requesting administrative hearings, currently at 9 for this fiscal year. 5 requests were in relation to the IPE and 3 for other reasons; 17 total. Michael Wiseman indicated the Council will be asking for more information for future reports to include redacted decisions in order to comply with RSA guidelines.

- **Additional Program/Project Updates:**
  - Allison said that VR Works was implemented a little over a year ago and they are seeing better vocational goals and better salaries as a result.
  - The Service Provider Choice Directory was implemented a few years ago and provides informed choice to customers. Providers are listed and a counselor can go to the website and go over the information with the customer. There has been about 6200 internal page visits for the 1st quarter of 2019 and 1.8 million page visits.
  - The RSA is going to be doing some technical assistance visits related to 911 data in order to establish goals.
  - The rule-making workshop is being rescheduled to better coordinate with the review and approval process in the Department of Education.

- **Case management system:** The agency requested funding of about $9 million for a new case management system. It is in the Governor’s budget but not in the House and Senate versions. They are working with the Department of Education, legal counsel and procurement staff to identify ways to pursue a case management system if they do not get that additional funding.

- **Legislative Agenda:** The only bill they are watching closely is VR’s direct support organization, the Able Trust, which sunsets on September 30, 2019.

- **Other/clarifications:**
  - Allison clarified that the data on the first slide referred to referrals coming into the agency from an individual, a physician, a provider; anybody that’s coming in and asking for services.
  - The 155 less referrals were to providers but they had over 3,000 additional referrals for Pre-ETS services which offset that 155.
  - Data from Florida Association of Rehabilitation Facilities can’t pinpoint the decrease in referrals to one area.
  - Informed choice is provided throughout the whole case process.
  - Information in the Provider Directory is limited to employment service providers only.
  - When asked about how customers make choices for medical practitioners, evaluators, and the other different types of service providers, Allison said counselors have a list of vendor providers for all services. Some counselors print it out and some create their own paper list so that they can provide the list of psychologists, e.g., to the customer with the addresses, phone numbers, and guide them to contact the ones they are considering to find the right fit. From the list, the customer can ask friends and family about recommendations for medical doctors and give them a few days to do their research and get back with the counselor. Some customers say it doesn’t matter and ask the counselor to pick the best one so counselors may show them ones that they’ve had the most success with and encourage the customer to make the decision.

FRC Members thanked Allison for her presentation.

**Evaluation Committee-Donte Mickens, Acting Chair**
Donte opened the committee meeting and established a quorum.
• **Closure letters** - Closure letters are reviewed prior to being sent out unless a counselor is in independent status. Hard copies may or may not be sent out, depending on the counselor and customer’s situation. Encryption is used when emailing closure letters because of the confidential information included. The agency also recommends sending the letters via certified mail. Donte recommended adding a preferred recipient or e-mail address to the closure letters to request an administrative hearing. There was concern that some cases are closed unsuccessfully when the customer is working but no longer communicates with the counselor. Allison assured that more cases in that situation are closed successfully than not. Allison said they have asked RSA for guidance on working a second job. The closure letters do not offer the ability to describe the full reason for closure but that will be addressed with a new case management system. Mikey invited Allison to utilize the resource of the FRC when creating new templates.

• **Financial Participation** - Donte applauded the agency on the Financial Participation form. Allison said the information is protected and never shared. The agency said there has been a lot of effort to exclude people from having to participate financially, including going 285% above the federal poverty level. Megan (CAP) voiced concerns about exceptions being overlooked by not being listed on the form. She also said CAP would like to see an exception where a student can be considered independently from their parent(s). Allison said the policy can be clarified.

• **Vocational Evaluations** - Melinda discussed that a work group was developed to address consistency and getting the information needed in vocational evaluations. A pilot is underway in Area 5 with a new referral form (with a timeline), to determine if the results are better and contain needed information. Mikey discussed the need for best practices with regards to vocational evaluations and evaluators and that many times, evaluations are conducted in public places like libraries, which may not be private or confidential and also, may not set the customer up for success. Melinda said it can be a problem but the agency has to be flexible, particularly in rural areas. Victoria said most customers receive the evaluation but the decision is individualized. Fees paid by other states are being studied. Allison said that September 1 is their goal to have a new rate structure in place to move forward with rules and review by the FRC and all.

• **VR Works** – Melinda said higher level vocational goals and more plans for training are being seen as a result of using the career decision making matrix (with 3 career goals) and the job readiness checklist. The Learning and Development office is developing a Power Point presentation for orientation that can be used statewide. Regarding Pre-ETS in the schools, Melinda said Broward and Miami-Dade are providing the service in the schools and collaboration between VR and the school districts has improved. When asked if there was a trend as to where the CCIR referrals were coming from, Melinda said most of them were coming from the provider where the customer is currently “housed”. There was discussion about removing the language barrier for some clients, i.e., training them in Spanish when the jobs require English to be spoken. Allison said learning English could be written into the plan, if needed.

• **Pre-ETS** – Melinda went over the Pre-ETS Data spreadsheet. During FFY ‘17-’18, 10,017 referrals were received through REBA; $10,743,691 were spent; 17,382 various services were provided. Providers and school districts are being encouraged to add the services to ones they already provide. The Peer Mentoring program has increased from 11 agencies providing the service in ’16-’17 to 118 agencies currently. A Youth Camp program is being initiated in which providers can provide some Pre-ETS services and youth can go to multiple providers to obtain the different services.

**Legislative/Public Awareness Committee-Mikey Wiseman, Acting Chair**
Legislative update – Lucy said the budget conference was set to begin on April 22nd. She and Debbie Hall, her replacement, will continue to work with Roy and Kim to inform the Council of the final budget. Mikey recognized and thanked Lucy for her service in that she will be retiring in May.

Annual Report – The Council voted to keep the same theme as the “17-’18 report, Breaking Barriers, Building Careers. They also voted to approve the recommendations made by VR Leadership for the Program Overview section (focus on Project Search, Pre-ETS Career Camps and Youth Leadership Forum), Job Retention (update), Ombudsman (update) and Abilities Help Desk (change to Business Relations update).

Customer Satisfaction Survey presentation-Brian Robertson, Market Decisions

Brian reported that a smaller number of people reported problems and a much larger % of people reported that their problems were resolved. There’s a slight downward trend in experience with services and communications with VR staff. Brian said that communication is typically the lowest rated across the agencies. Experience with VR staff and counselors is at 90%. Satisfaction with current employment went up; satisfaction with outside vendors remained stable. 17% experienced problems with VR with 40% of those saying the problems revolved around not receiving sufficient help; the counselors weren’t helpful or they didn’t receive job search help. 25% of those reporting problems said changing counselors was the issue. 16% of customers reporting problems indicated that VR worked to resolve their problems. There is an upward trend in understanding the process if in disagreement about services. Only 18% reported a problem with their vendor; 71% said their counselor and vendors kept them informed. Finding a desirable position, transportation and communication were the top three challenges customers faced. 41% are working full or part time; 30% of transition youth are looking for employment. 86% of those working are satisfied with their employment. 40% of those whose cases were closed unsuccessfully asked for their cases to be closed but their reasons mostly had nothing to do with VR, e.g., they may have found the job on their own. Surveying youth in transition has yielded a lower response and cooperation rate with younger youth responding less than 19-21 year olds. For every 4 completed surveys among youth in transition, another 5 indicated that they never received VR services. Changes have been made to the questions to aid in the youth (or parents) understanding the services received. VR is looking into strategies to better communicate with that population but there are limitations due to the case management system.

Area 7 Snapshot-Cindy Gaber, Area 7 Director

Area 7, consisting of Broward and Palm Beach counties, is currently serving 5,485 customers and has 50 service providers. The area has hosted several successful career fairs where employers, counselors, providers and customers attend. Many of the 100 customers attending were invited for interviews and some were placed in employment or OJT opportunities. The model may be replicated around the state. A job board with employment opportunities is posted in all Area 7 offices. There are 2 Project Search programs and a link with a Walgreen’s distribution center who provides a class to understand that program. The area is also piloting a team approach, with each taking on a different part of the rehabilitation process. Cindy serves on the Broward and Palm Beach Career Source Boards, in which the relationship with VR is excellent. Broward schools are a VR provider, offering some Pre-ETS trainings in the schools. Cindy said the area’s biggest challenge is vacancies, with 25 vacancies currently.

Public Forum
• Mikey opened the Public Forum and asked those in attendance to introduce themselves. He then opened the floor for comment.
• Cory Hinds, Executive Director of the CIL of Broward and the Gulf Coast discussed the partnership the CILs have with VR and the services they provide and that it's important for VR to ensure the agency has good connections with the Career Source locations throughout the state.
• A provider discussed her company providing services in the Summer Youth Program in previous years but with the shift to Career Camps, the eligibility requirements have changed and she is no longer eligible. This occurred without warning when they have children ready to go to the summer program. Mikey said he had her contact information for the agency to follow up.
• The Executive Director of a veteran's organization spoke about his business and asked how to get the word out to veteran's about VR. Allison recognized the individual as one she had corresponded with previously and told him to send the referrals.
• An individual was interested in how VR works with post-secondary programs and learning more information about what’s in the Director’s Report. Allison gave him her phone number.

Adjourn

4/17/19

Members present or on conference line:
Michael Wiseman, Ann Robinson, Bob Campbell, Ana Laura dos Santos Lara, Allison Flannigan, Molly Hullinger, Judy White, Victoria Aguilar, Rebecca Witonsky, Janet Severt, Amanda Brown

VR Staff:
Roy Cosgrove, Kim Thomas, Libby Moody, Don Alveshere, Melinda Jordan, Lauren Veit

Guests:
Brian Robertson, David Darm, Megan Collins, Beth Meyers, Chaz Compton, Lisa Mason

The following represents a summary of deliberations, advice, comments and motions that comprise this quarterly meeting.

Call to order

Chair remarks: Mikey welcomed everyone and handed the floor over to Chaz Compton from San Diego State University.

Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment-Chaz Compton:
Chaz gave an overview of the statutory requirement and the purpose of the assessment, to assist VR in developing the State Plan. 2,222 surveys were completed by individuals, businesses, community partners and VR staff. The following are the recommendations of the provider based on the results of the survey.

Recommendations based on areas assessed
1-Overall agency performance:
• VR is encouraged to examine potential ways to increase the salary for their staff.
• VR should consider conducting a training needs analysis of field staff to address competency gaps
• VR should identify ways to streamline processes in order to help people get through the application and eligibility process sooner, as well as reducing time in developing their IPE.
• VR is encouraged to continue efforts in seeking a new case management system that can eliminate the multiple and complicated systems that must be used currently.
• VR should consider increasing efforts to enhance public awareness of the agency and its mission through a formalized marketing campaign.

2-Needs of Individuals with the Most Significant Disabilities, Including their need for Supported Employment:
• VR needs to be able to track the number of individuals that apply for services from subminimum wage environments after receiving career counseling, and information and referral services (CC&I&R) arranged for by VR.
• Consider implementing an inter-disciplinary team approach for SE cases. This will ensure that there is collaboration between agencies and families/care providers, which will contribute to informed choice for the consumer and person-centered planning.
• VR should provide training to staff and partners on the various options available to individuals with disabilities that need to identify and develop extended service providers for supported employment services other than APD.
• Provide training for staff and providers on strategies that contribute to the pursuit of work above the level of SGA, including self-sufficiency.
• VR should continue putting efforts and funding into CE training and development to increase the number of individuals who could benefit in terms of an employment outcome and the number of qualified providers willing to offer customized employment services.
• Provide training to staff and providers on effectively working with individuals with mental health impairments and those in recovery.

3-Needs of Individuals with Disabilities from Different Ethnic Groups, Including Needs of Individuals who may have been Unserved or Underserved by the VR Program:
• VR should maximize the use of distance technologies to reach individuals in rural areas. Utilization of Skype or other videoconferencing technologies can save travel costs and contribute to accessing services for those who feel disconnected or do not know about VR services.
• VR is encouraged to establish a work group of staff and partners that work frequently with consumers that are African-American to identify ways to increase the rate of these individuals accessing postsecondary education training opportunities.
• Partner with APD staff to conduct a series of trainings on how to effectively work with individuals on the Autism Spectrum, and offer the training for staff from each organization, as well as service providers that work with this population.
• Recruit and hire bilingual staff, including those that are fluent in sign language.

4-Needs of Youth with Disabilities in Transition:
• VR should develop a program in partnership with secondary and postsecondary schools throughout Florida that ensures that students with disabilities that will be pursuing postsecondary education get connected to the Disabled Student Services programs at the colleges prior to the first day of college classes.
• VR should recruit pre-employment transition services providers that will provide training in self-advocacy to help address the apparent shortage of these services. In addition, VR should consider partnering with the Centers for Independent Living in Florida as a way to address this service gap.
• VR is encouraged to consult with the Youth Technical Assistance Center (Y-TAC) to develop an intensive technical assistance agreement aimed at improving services to Juvenile Justice and Foster Care Youth.
• VR should work with schools to identify and refer students receiving services under a 504 plan and encourage schools to refer these students to VR earlier than their senior year.
• VR should actively recruit pre-employment transition services providers that can communicate using sign language and that have experience working with deaf individuals. In addition, VR should identify peer mentors for the youth with deafness that will help them develop self-advocacy skills and help them develop high expectations.

5-Needs of Individuals with Disabilities Served through other Components of the Statewide Workforce Development System
• Provide cross-training with VR and CareerSource staff to increase understanding of each agency’s role, responsibilities and services for participants (including those for participants with the most significant disabilities).
• VR should identify examples of effective partnerships with the CareerSource Centers across the State and use these as examples for training and replication in other areas.
• VR should pilot the use of Partnership Plus in a few CareerSource Centers across the State to help ensure that they are positively addressing the Ticket assignment issues in some Areas of the State.
• Given the fact that Apprenticeships are a focus of the CareerSource Centers, VR should partner with select Centers to ensure that individuals with disabilities are included in Apprenticeship programs. These programs hold tremendous potential for youth with disabilities, and can be a source for partnership development between VR and the Title I Youth program across the State.
• VR and their Workforce partners need to develop a method for tracking co-enrollment of consumers and share that information on a regular basis among programs.
• Strengthen the partnership between the Business Relations Representatives (BRR) and the local CareerSource to increase shared employer relationships, job matches with CareerSource and VR participants and increase both agencies ability to meet employer needs in Florida.

6-VR should include CRP staff in training provided for their counseling staff whenever possible
• VR is encouraged to restructure rate payments to CRPs that reward high level and specific skills type employment (not just minimum wage jobs), and bilingual capacity (including sign language).
• Identify regions with few CRPs relative to the client population and prioritize CRP development in those regions.
• Provide training and reinforce the outcome expectations of WIOA for CRPs so they are functioning under current guidance. This may cause amendments to the current benchmark fee schedule.
• VR needs to do a review of the psychological evaluation reports purchased by the organization to ensure that the results of the evaluation are unique to the individual referred.

7-Needs of Business and Effectiveness in Serving Employers
• There is an opportunity for BRRs to expand the partnership with their Title I counterparts to increase the number of employers they can reach. While this partnership was active in some Areas, it was not consistent.
• VR is encouraged to provide trainings for employers on disability awareness. This will serve the dual purpose of educating employers and increasing awareness of VR as a resource for employers.
• As resources allow, VR should increase the number of BRRs throughout the State and ensure the BRR position is permanent in order to increase its potential effectiveness. This position has the ability to greatly impact VR Works and employment outcomes for VR.
Although there were a limited number of employers interviewed for this study, the ones that did participate indicated that they would like to have a long-term relationship with VR and not be simply a source of job referral.

**Questions/comments:**
- Allison discussed that VR has provided the Career Counseling Information and Referral to over 5,000 individuals since WIOA passed. They are working on making sure they are being connected with a counselor.
- Melinda said only 4 people in the state have had their cases closed as “too severe”, which is a huge shift. She also said the performance expectations for staff are being revised to relate to the number of customers helped get credentialing, placed in OJTs, etc.
- Mikey voiced concerns about benefits counseling being geared towards staying below the income level to continue receiving benefits as opposed to working to obtain successful, meaningful employment with benefits. He also asked the conversations about restructuring fee for service contracts to reflect current outcomes measured by VR include service providers, who need to understand the change in perspective.
- Megan suggested educating public schools about VR more in order to increase the awareness of post-secondary options available.
- Chaz discussed that analyses shows that assessments do not significantly alter the way services are delivered. He recommended looking at different ways to assess an individual’s needs, skills and abilities.

**Executive Committee and Council Business-Michael Wiseman, Chair**
- The Council approved the minutes from 3/14/19.
- The Council approved the proposed amendment to the By-Laws regarding attendance.
- The Council approved Becki Forsell to receive the Wise Award, posthumously. Becky’s husband will be contacted to inform him of the award and to invite him to attend the Tampa meeting to receive it.
- The Council approved the draft 2020 calendar with the understanding that there may be some variations due to seasonal prices.
- Ann noted that in some of the correspondence, the Client Assistance Program was not mentioned. Mikey said he would like correspondence to be on the agenda at some point to discuss the use of a standard template for responding immediately.
- Mikey and the Council thanked Bob Campbell and Victoria Aguilar for their service on the Council and presented them with FRC award plaques. He also thanked and presented the award to Stephen Hardy, who was unable to attend the meeting.

**Adjourned**