

VR Program Evaluators Competencies

In 2010 the question below was sent to 175 members of a community of practice of vocational rehabilitation program evaluation called the Summit Group. "What are the 5 main competencies (knowledge, skills and abilities) that Vocational Rehabilitation Program Evaluators need to be effective?" Below is a list of 6 competencies from these responses in order of most to least important.

1. Knowledge of the State-Federal Vocational Rehabilitation System
2. Analysis & Interpretation of Data
3. Interpersonal Skills, Effective Communication & Translation
4. Judgments and Recommendations
5. Report Writing and Presentation Skills
6. Objectivity

USOR's job position requires these additional skills.

- Understanding of basic statistical methods and evaluation methodology

- Excellent organization and time management skills

Program Evaluation Activities

USOR's Program Planning and Evaluation Specialist assists with the following activities. While this list of activities is not comprehensive it is a good representation of where the evaluator spends most of his time.

1. Client Satisfaction Surveys
 - Coordinates closely with Lynn Nelsen (Office Specialist) to gather, review, and enter survey outcomes
 - Collaborates in the redesign of the satisfaction survey with members of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) as needed
 - Analyzes, interprets and reports on annual outcomes to the SRC and VR administration
 - Makes recommendations for improvements based on the survey outcomes
 - Responds to clients' questions related to the survey
2. Monthly Client Record Reviews
 - At the beginning of each federal fiscal year, adds new or adapted questions into Iris
 - Throughout the year, answers requests from Counseling Supervisors and District Directors to clear or substitute client records
 - Assists District Directors in analyzing and interpreting outcomes from the Monthly Client Record Review Reports as they prepare to create their District Training and Improvement Plans
 - Completes a statewide Monthly Client Review Report, which is sent to VR Administration & District Directors who identify trends and areas for improvement
3. Annual Client Record Review Activities
 - Works with others in developing a review instrument for the annual activity
 - Participates with the training team in creating and presenting the annual training for client record reviews
 - Organizes, schedules and facilitates client record review activities in each of the 10 districts
 - Communicates recommendations for improvement to the client record review instrument or process that comes from reviewers and Counseling Supervisors and District Directors that participate in the activity
4. Triennial Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment
 - Actively partners with the SRC and academic researchers in the planning, design and establishing the contract for the needs assessment
 - Provides existing USOR data with help from Information Technology
 - Cooperates and coordinates with researchers in gathering data from client, community service providers and USOR employees through surveys, focus groups and other methods
5. Annual 10 State Comparison Report
 - After the end of each fiscal year, makes contact with 10 other state Vocational Rehabilitation Programs (including Utah) to request information necessary to bring together or calculate the outcomes of number of clients placed in employment, average number of clients placed in employment per counselor, cost per rehabilitated client, and average client base size.
 - Provides this information quickly enough for it to become part of USOR's Annual Performance Report
6. Economic Impact Studies
 - Supports academic researchers and an economist in obtaining necessary existing USOR data, and works closely with employees of the Department of Workforce Services to gather unemployment earnings data
 - Communicates regularly with researchers to assure that the return on investment equations are appropriate and conservative
 - Coordinates with others so that, upon completion, the researchers can disseminate results nationally through webinars and presentations

Program Evaluation and Quality Assurance

this issue

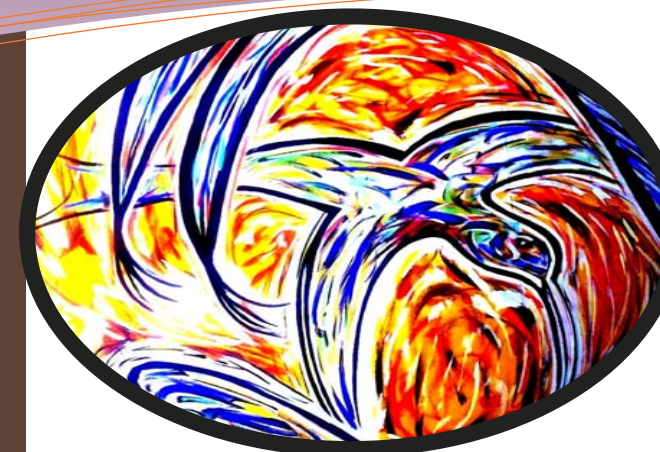
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What is Quality Assurance?

Quality Assurance is when corrective actions are taken based on ongoing information to meet a certain standard.

The archer above is trying to reach a standard—the bulls eye of the target. She aims and shoots her first arrow and sees that she hit the bottom left of the target. She lifts her bow and again takes aim and shoots. This arrow is closer to the target, but not to the bulls eye yet. She continues to follow the same steps to re-aim, shoot and assess how close her next shot is to the target until she hits the bulls eye. (continued on page 2)

Program Evaluation: A Source of Direction

Is the photo of the mural above right side up or upside down? If you guessed upside down you are correct. However, without an object to give you frame of reference such as a tree or cloud it is difficult to tell. Program evaluation is a systematic collecting of information that provide a frame of reference to make decisions and judgments about a program.

Program evaluation is to assess a program's:

- ◆ Worth or merit
- ◆ Value
- ◆ Quality
- ◆ Significance
- ◆ Satisfaction

The following are some of many tools that evaluators use to assess Vocational Rehabilitation agencies.

- Client Satisfaction Surveys
- Statewide Needs Assessments
- Client Record Reviews
- Economic Impact Studies
- Employee Climate Surveys
- Geographic Information Systems

Rehabilitation professionals and administrators use evaluation outcomes to:

- ◆ Plan for improved performance

- ◆ Identify necessary areas for training
- ◆ Change policies and procedures
- ◆ Decide how to best allocate resources
- ◆ Monitor performance to ensure standards are met

The use of program evaluation outcomes can lead to more accurate and informed data driven decisions rather than decisions that are made solely at a gut level. Sometimes gut level decision are necessary in an emergency short term situation, but decision making that includes program evaluation and gut level intuition can work more effectively with medium and long term changes.

For instance, the home office might hear that there is substantial growth in population in Northern Utah. How could the home office determine whether more counselors are needed or not? Through program evaluation we could find out how many people with disabilities live within those zip codes and the projected growth. We can compare and contrast these with other areas of the state and determine not only if new counselors are needed, but also where a new office would be needed for clients to have an office closest to them.



Quality Assurance (cont.)

We follow a similar process. One of our standards or targets is that all clients who have evidence of receiving SSI or SSDI at the time of eligibility are to be presumed eligible. Everyday that a determination of eligibility is made it is like shooting an arrow toward this target. We assess how close we are to that target by our supervisors completing the monthly client record reviews and gathering and analyzing results annually.

During FFY 2008, 66% of those who had evidence of receiving SSI or SSDI from the client records reviewed were presumed eligible. After regular training on this topic and several districts working on this area in the training and improvement plans last year 82% of those who had evidence were presumed eligible. This shows a 16% improvement between these two years. The goal of monitoring and quality assurance is continuous improvement.

What is the impact of quality assurance? In the example above it means that there are more clients being found eligible that are eligible for services. In this way quality assurance has acted as form of client advocacy.

The Free Quality website is a place you can go to learn more about quality assurance and improvement.

<http://www.freequality.org/>



www.vocational-rehab.com

A Community of Practice



The Program Planning and Evaluation Specialist position is the only full-time position devoted to program evaluation and quality assurance in our agency. When I came to this position in 2007 I realized that unlike when I served as a Rehabilitation Counselor or Counseling Supervisor that I would have to communicate with other Vocational Rehabilitation Program Evaluators from out of state to learn better learn how to fulfill my work responsibilities.

Fortunately, I was encouraged by my supervisor, Kyle Walker and Don Uchida to make contact with other states to see what other Vocational Rehabilitation Program Evaluators were doing towards quality improvement. I began making calls to states directly surrounding Utah and learned much about other states practices and activities. One of the standard questions that I would ask each program evaluator during those initial calls would be, "What resources or training do you turn to when you are developing a new or revised tool in quality assurance?" The most common response was that they did what their predecessor did without making changes. Another common response is that they would develop the tool themselves internally with administrators from their agency that had limited knowledge of evaluation practices and methodology.

After speaking with 11 different states, it was clear that few state agency program evaluators had any interstate contact or collaboration. Based on this information, I went back to Kyle and Don and requested permission to host a Summit on Vocational Rehabilitation Program Evaluation and Quality Assurance in September 2008. They gave permission and asked me to contact the 11 state to see who would come. To our surprise, all 11 state agreed to come and did come. The 1st Summit held in Salt Lake City had 47 attendees from 20 different states.

A community of practice is a group of people who share a craft or profession. It evolves naturally based on the common interests of its participants. It is through the process of sharing experiences and information with the group that members learn from one another and develop themselves personally and professionally.

Where is the Summit Group today in its progress?

- The free email listserv has 263 members.
- Summit Reading Groups where 6 members study for ten months a particular book with a professional facilitator are full and have an ongoing wait list.
- The community hosts several free webinars each year.
- In 2010, this group formed the Rehabilitation Program Evaluation Network, a division of the National Rehabilitation Association and continues to grow this division today
- Summit Group members regularly author several journal articles a year in the *Journal of Rehabilitation Administration*
- The Summit Group website has an inquiry function where someone can submit a question and receive responses from the complete group. All responses are archived and searchable by key word
- Communication is beginning to happen through an on-line forum function on the website
- The website has a resource and tool tab where members can look at tools from many different states to see where they can start to develop new instruments

The chart below shows the trend of attendance at the Summit Group's annual event where attendance from 2008 to 2013 has gone from 47 to 253 registered participants.

