

# RPEN News

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Rehabilitation Program Evaluation Network

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## President's Message

The 2019 RPEN Board of Directors is looking forward to providing leadership and serving the membership during the coming year. Our role as evaluators is dynamic and those of you working in the public Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) system understand this well.



Implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA) brought substantial change in program operations and the data and reporting requirements involved.

In the coming months, we will highlight examples of state VR programs who have developed or adopted innovative approaches to program evaluation to address the tenets of WIOA. Additionally, as Evidence-Based Policymaking advances, we want to share resources helpful for you to integrate into practice. The EBP continuum involves emerging, promising, and evidence-based resources and information across all stages can be useful in your evaluation efforts.

We wish you a productive year ahead and look forward to connecting with you again soon!

Best,

**Cayte**

Cayte Anderson, PhD, CRC  
RPEN Board President 2019

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### Upcoming Events

#### Louisiana/Southwest Region Training Conference

February 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>, 2019  
The Tracey Center  
Baton Rouge, LA

#### Disability Employment Summit

March 31<sup>st</sup> – April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2019  
Hilton Old Towne  
Alexandria, Virginia

#### NCRE Spring Conference

April 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>, 2019  
Sheraton San Diego Hotel  
San Diego, CA

#### Summit-PEQA Conference

September 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup>, 2019  
Holiday Inn by the Bay  
Portland, ME

### Editorial Staff

**Editor:** Saara Grizzell, PhD,  
CRC

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Grizzell

## Featured Article

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### **A Decade of Incremental Changes in Conducting Satisfaction Surveys**

*Jeff Stevens, PhD*

When I first started at the NC Division of Vocational Rehabilitation services, a little more than a decade ago, client satisfaction surveys were conducted quarterly. Self-administered written questionnaires were mailed to every former VR consumer whose case had closed, either successfully or unsuccessfully, after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment. We found some issues with this approach. First, that the response rates were very low. In fact, more surveys were returned as undeliverable than completed. And, second, the characteristics of the respondents didn't represent our VR client population very closely. Survey respondents

tended to be older, non-minority females who exited VR with an employment outcome. They also more often had higher levels of educational attainment and physical

***“In fact, more surveys were returned as undeliverable than completed. And, second, the characteristics of the respondents didn't represent our VR client population very closely.”***

impediments to employment. Our client population, in contrast, had higher percentages of transition-age youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities, minorities and males with lower levels of educational attainment, and individuals with

impediments related to mental health and substance use. Respondents who exited VR without an employment outcome were also proportionately underrepresented as many of these cases were lost to follow-up.

Over the next few years we worked with our State Rehabilitation Council on strategies to improve the survey response rate and representativeness of the completers. There were several revisions to the questionnaire that made it simpler, more visually appealing, and easier to complete and return. We also tried sending the surveys sooner after the case had closed, thinking that shortening the time from when the clients last had contact with the program would make a difference. But, despite these efforts the response rate didn't improve. We thought maybe, since our clients were increasingly communicating through cell phones, social media, and text

messaging, an electronic version would help. At that point, we started sending non-responders a link to an online version if we had their email address. This increased the total number of responses, but not by much, and we still had the same issue where the characteristics of the respondents weren't very representative of our client population.

In 2010, we contracted with NC State University to conduct a telephone survey to supplement responses from the mail-out questionnaires. The telephone survey was first piloted for our Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment and had good success. We were able to reach more of our consumers by telephone than by mail or email, and very few refused to participate. To help make the survey respondents' characteristics more closely match our client population, we applied proportion-to-population stratified random sampling across some

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key demographics, and then oversampled for unsuccessful closures and clients with other characteristics that were underrepresented in the pool of mail-out survey respondents.

The addition of the telephone survey helped improve our response rate and increased the representativeness of the respondents. We also found that the telephone surveys were cost-effective enough that we could use this approach to completely replace the written questionnaire. There was an economy of scale to where the cost per completed interview was lowered as we increased our sample size. In 2016, our State Rehabilitation Council agreed to do just

that. The telephone survey has since been administered quarterly to a sample that includes both active and recently closed VR cases. The questionnaire has also since been substantially revised and incorporates skip patterns to tailor the battery of questions to the client's progression in the VR program: There is a core of common questions for all respondents and some that are conditional, depending on whether the client received services, was placed in employment, or is currently employed. We also included a battery of items on barriers to employment and added questions for clients who exited unsuccessfully for inclusion in our Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment. We find that collecting data on VR consumer satisfaction and vocational needs simultaneously is practical and makes the cost of the interview an even better value.

The samples are generated through proportion-to-population

stratified random sampling, which has helped maintain the characteristics of the respondent group similarly proportioned to the larger population of VR clients with regard to geography, race, age, gender, disability type and significance of disability. Although we still oversample on disability and age to increase the proportion of responses from transition age youth and individuals with

intellectual disabilities, it's not done to the extent that it was when the telephone survey was used to supplement the mail-out questionnaires.

Are there further changes ahead? Maybe eventually, but so far this approach has proven cost-effective and is working well for our agency and State Rehabilitation Council. I would recommend this sampling strategy in combination with

telephonic surveys for any state VR program that wants the depth of an interview survey combined with a high response rate and better controlled representativeness in their respondent sample.

**Jeff Stevens is Chief of Planning and Evaluation at the North Carolina Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services.**

## **Nomination and Submission Guidelines**

*Nomination Guidelines: RPEN members are welcome to nominate themselves or other colleagues for the "Featured Program Evaluator." To do so, please send an e-mail to [terry.donovan@wintac.org](mailto:terry.donovan@wintac.org) with the following: the name and place of employment of the person being nominated (nominee) and an explanation as to why the nominee is being nominated. The RPEN board will then evaluate submissions and inform the nominator/nominee of the board's decision. Please note that the nominee must be a member of RPEN.*

*Submission Guidelines: RPEN members are welcome to submit an article for publication in this newsletter. Please submit your article to the following e-mail: [matthew.markve@vr.idaho.gov](mailto:matthew.markve@vr.idaho.gov). Articles are limited to no more than 400 words (including references), and one table, graph, or figure. Please include information about the author (name, place of employment, job title, credentials).*

## What is RPEN?

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Established in March 2011, the Rehabilitation Program Evaluation Network (RPEN) is a division of the National Rehabilitation Association (NRA) that strives to promote, integrate, and elevate the role of program evaluators in the field of vocational rehabilitation through education, training, and collaboration.

## Benefits of RPEN Membership

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RPEN members enjoy a variety of benefits, such as: continuing education program evaluation trainings at discounted rates, opportunities to collaborate and exchange ideas with other program evaluators, attendance at an annual membership meeting, a biannual subscription to the *Journal of Rehabilitation Administration*, and a quarterly subscription to the RPEN newsletter.

## How to Join RPEN

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There are a variety of ways to join RPEN (online, by phone, or by mail):

**Join online:** Visit the NRA website ([www.nationalrehab.org](http://www.nationalrehab.org)), and follow the links to become a member. You will be asked to fill out a membership form. On the membership form check the box for the RPEN after selected your general NRA membership. There are **two** annual RPEN membership levels, namely: student: \$15, and professional: \$30.

**Join by telephone:** Contact the National Rehabilitation Association office at (703) 836-0850.

**Join by mail:** Send a membership application form and check to:

National Rehabilitation Association  
PO Box 150235  
Alexandria, VA 22315

## Summit Navigators

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Steven W. Collins, Ph.D.  
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Idaho Division of Vocational Rehabilitation  
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Buffalo, New York

Michael Shoemaker, M.A., CRC, LVRC, CPM  
Founder of RPEN and Navigators  
Utah State Office of Rehabilitation  
Salt Lake City, Utah

## RPEN Board

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