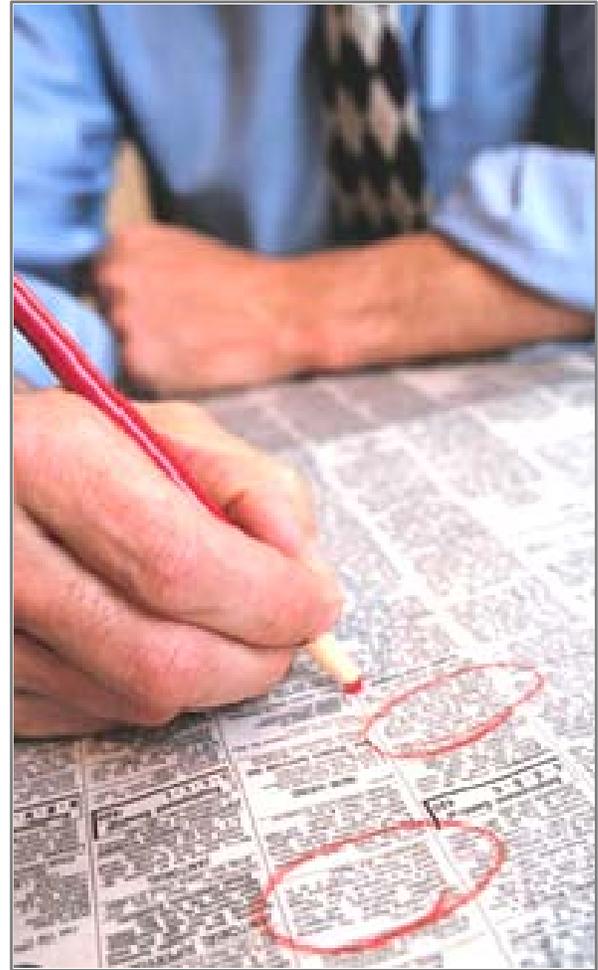


VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION
NEEDS ASSESSMENT

**Opinions of Employers, Staff
and Clients about How to
Improve Vocational Support
Services**

August 2009
REPORT 2.21



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Title: Vocational Rehabilitation Needs Assessment: Opinions of Employers, Staff and Clients about How to Improve Vocational Support Services

Abstract: As part of a comprehensive planning process to improve services, develop a broader employer base, and improve outcomes, surveys were conducted with employers, staff and clients on the practices and efforts that each group identified as most important for improving employment opportunities and ensuring success for DVR clients. Between 50 and 60 percent of the employers who responded said accommodations (tools, technology, and supports) for DVR clients, support from DVR following job placement, and internships and job coaching opportunities for DVR clients would help them hire or retain an employee with a disability. DVR staff felt the services that contribute most to client success are Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) services and benefits planning. DVR staff also emphasized building and improving relationships with local employers, and developing staff and contracting with job developers to make placements in higher wage jobs. Although DVR client satisfaction ratings were high in several areas, including provision of information by DVR staff, over one-third of clients said they did not get DVR services as quickly as they needed them. Clients suggested improvements in timeliness, training and assistance after job placement, and internship and other educational and training opportunities.

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to the decision-making agenda:

- Better work processes
- Better decisions
- Better outcomes

Vocational Rehabilitation Needs Assessment
**Opinions of Employers, Staff and Clients about How to Improve
Vocational Support Services**

Key Findings..... 1

PART I

Employers 3

Key Findings..... 3

Which businesses participated in the employer survey? 4

Survey responses (CHART) 4

Number of employees for all DVR employer respondents (TABLE)..... 4

**How many potential employers think they could benefit from an employee
or intern from DVR? 5**

Employers, Question 1. Do you think your business could benefit from an employee or intern from the
Division of Vocational Rehabilitation?..... 5

Is the size of a business related to perceived benefits of employing DVR clients among potential
employers?..... 5

Potential employers who think they could benefit from a DVR employee or intern by size of firm (TABLE) .. 5

Which DVR services could help employers hire and retain qualified people with disabilities?..... 6

Employers, Question 2. What services offered by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
would help you most to hire and retain a qualified applicant with a disability?..... 7

Employer Question 2, Responses (CHART)..... 7

**Which DVR services would be helpful to potential employers who may be willing
to hire a DVR client? 8**

Potential Employers Responses, Question 2 (CHART) 9

**How many employers from new business sectors think they could benefit from an employee
or intern from DVR compared to employers from other business sectors?..... 10**

Employers by Business Sector, Question 1. Do you think your business could benefit from an employee
or intern from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation? 10

**Do employers from new business sectors rate the potential helpfulness of DVR services
differently than employers from other sectors? 11**

Percent of employers who consider specific DVR services as helpful or very helpful in hiring
or retaining an employee with disabilities (TABLE) 11

**Do employers from the four new business sectors differ in their ratings of the potential
helpfulness of DVR services? 12**

Percent of employers who consider specific DVR services as helpful or very helpful in hiring
or retaining an employee with disabilities..... 12

How best can DVR help employers hire and retain workers with disabilities?..... 13

Themes in Employer Responses, Problems/Constraints (TABLE) 13

Themes in Employer Responses, Employers' Views of Persons with Disabilities (TABLE)..... 14

Themes in Employer Responses, Suggestions for DVR Action (TABLE)..... 15

Themes in Employer Responses, Need for Certain Workers and Other Comments (TABLE)..... 16

PART II

DVR Staff Survey 17

Key Findings..... 17

Which employees participated in the DVR Staff Survey? 18

Types of Employees (CHART) 18

Responses by Work Location (CHART) 18

How much do DVR services contribute to successful customer outcomes? 18

Employees, Question 1. DVR has implemented programs and supports to help individuals move through the Vocational Rehabilitation process and achieve employment goals. In your opinion, how much do the following efforts contribute to successful outcomes for customers?..... 19

Survey Responses Question 1 (CHART) 19

Which services help DVR customers get and keep good jobs the most?..... 20

Employees, Question 2. For DVR, helping customers get and keep jobs with good wages, benefits and promotional opportunities is an important goal. In your opinion, which of the following efforts would help the most to achieve this goal? (TABLE) 20

What do employees suggest to improve DVR services?..... 21

Employees, Question 3. What do you think is most needed to help DVR customers get jobs with good wages and benefits?..... 21

Employees, Question 4. Do you have other comments about DVR's priorities for the future? 21

Themes in Employee Responses, DVR Services (TABLE) 21

Themes in Employee Responses, Staff Issues (TABLE) 21

Themes in Employee Responses, Other Comments (TABLE) 21

PART III

DVR Client Survey 23

Key Findings..... 23

How satisfied are clients with DVR services? 24

Client Satisfaction Rates: Quality and Helpfulness (CHART) 24

Client Satisfaction Rates: DSHS Staff (CHART) 24

Client Satisfaction Rates: Access and Processes (CHART) 25

Client Satisfaction Rates: Information (CHART) 26

Client Satisfaction Rates: Client Involvement (CHART) 26

What do clients think DVR could do to help them get and keep good jobs? 27

DVR Clients, Question 1. What more could DVR do to help you GET and KEEP a job with the wages and benefits you need?..... 27

Client Responses, Process (TABLE) 27

Client Responses, Communication (TABLE) 27

Client Responses, DVR Staff (TABLE) 28

Client Responses, Process (TABLE) 28

TECHNICAL NOTES 29

APPENDICES

Survey Instruments and 2009 Client Survey Satisfaction Rates for DVR..... www.dshs.wa.gov/RDA/



Opinions of Employers, Staff and Clients about How to Improve Vocational Support Services

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THE DIVISION OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (DVR) serves individuals who want to work but have difficulty becoming or staying employed due to physical, sensory, cognitive or mental disabilities. DVR provides vocational assistance and support to eligible individuals to get and keep employment.

As part of a comprehensive planning process to improve their services and to develop a broader employer base, DVR asked the Research and Data Analysis division (RDA) to conduct needs assessment surveys of employers, staff and clients, and to report on what each group identified as most important for improving employment opportunities and ensuring success for DVR clients.

Key Findings | EMPLOYERS

1. Almost half of the employers stated that hiring a DVR client *would* (12 percent) or *may* (36 percent) be of benefit to them.
2. The DVR services that employers tended to rate as most likely to help them hire or retain an employee with a disability were:
 - *Accommodations (tools, technology, and supports) for DVR clients*
 - *Offering support to employers after job placement*
 - *Internships and job coaching opportunities for DVR clients*
3. Between 40 and 54 percent of employers in new business sectors of interest to DVR as potential employers of DVR clients—health and social services; government; education; and professional, science and technology—said that they would or may benefit from hiring a DVR client, with the most favorable response from those in health and social services.

Key Findings | DVR STAFF

1. DVR staff felt the services that contribute most to client success are Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) services and benefits planning. *See Technical Notes for definitions.*
2. DVR staff ranked the following three efforts as most important in helping clients obtain and keep quality jobs with good wages.
 - *Improving or building relationships with local employers*
 - *Developing or hiring staff to make placements in higher wage jobs*
 - *Contracting with job developers who can access higher wage jobs*

Key Findings | DVR CLIENTS

1. Clients rated DVR positively overall and were especially satisfied with the following:
 - *Quality of DVR services and accessibility of DVR offices*
 - *Staff courtesy, attentiveness, clarity and helpfulness*
 - *Opportunity for client involvement in planning and goal setting*
2. While 70 to 80 percent of clients were satisfied with how well DVR provided information and explained things, only 60 percent said they knew what services were available.
3. Although physical access to services received high marks from most, over one-third of clients said they did not get DVR services as quickly as they needed them.
4. DVR clients suggested improvements in the following areas:
 - *Timeliness of services*
 - *Training and assistance after job placement*
 - *Availability of internships, education, and training opportunities*

Background

DVR's interest in obtaining feedback and information from employers, staff and clients stemmed from their goal to broaden the population they are serving, expand their pool of potential employers, and improve client employment outcomes. In particular, DVR has recently emerged from a federally mandated "order of selection" in which they were required to serve the most disabled clients first. The program is now able to serve a more diverse group of clients than they have in previous years.

To meet the employment needs of their clients, particularly under challenging economic conditions, the DVR managers and stakeholders identified the expansion of their employer base as one of their principal goals. Furthermore, they wanted to find job opportunities for DVR clients in particular sectors of the economy that appear to be growing and that offer jobs with rewarding career potential. These include the fields of health care, biotechnology, "green" energy and public administration. DVR and its stakeholders, in consultation with staff from the Research and Data Analysis Division, determined that needs assessment surveys would be an appropriate mechanism for gathering information to assist in their comprehensive planning process. Information was needed from critical players in the DVR vocational assistance program: employers, staff and clients.

The needs assessment surveys were designed to address questions about potential benefits of employing persons with disabilities, services needed to support these individuals in finding and keeping jobs and potential barriers to employment. Surveys gathered information about:

- 1. Which businesses could benefit from hiring persons with disabilities?*
- 2. What services would help most in hiring and retaining DVR clients?*
- 3. What are the barriers to hiring and retaining DVR clients?*

A combination of online, e-mail, phone and paper surveys was used to maximize the response rates for each group—employers, staff and clients. Survey methods were chosen based on experience and availability of contact information. For example, DVR employees were contacted by using direct e-mail, whereas the majority of employers were contacted by a traditional survey mailing. An online survey was used for employers contacted via their professional business associations. DVR clients were contacted by telephone as part of the 2009 DSHS Client Survey and asked about their satisfaction with DVR services. One open-ended question about how DVR might help them get or keep a job was added to the survey to support this needs assessment effort.



PART 1

Employers

Key Findings

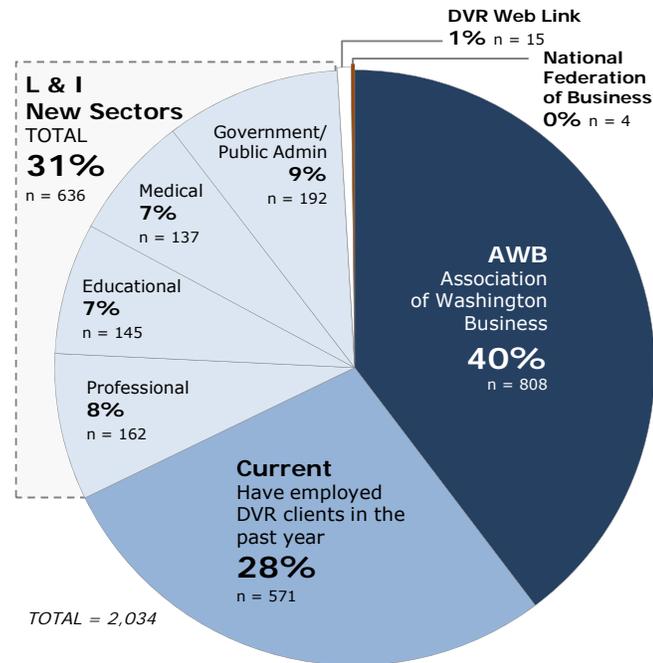
1. Almost half of the employers stated that hiring a DVR client would (12 percent) or may (36 percent) be of benefit to them.
2. The DVR services that employers tended to rate as most likely to help them hire or retain an employee with a disability were:
 - *Accommodations (tools, technology) for DVR clients*
 - *Offering support to employers after job placement*
 - *Internships and job coaching opportunities for DVR clients*
3. Between 40 and 54 percent of employers in new business sectors of interest to DVR as potential employers of DVR clients—health and social services; government; education; and professional, science and technology—said that they would or may benefit from hiring a DVR client, with the most favorable response from those in health and social services.

Which businesses participated in the employer survey?

Employers were drawn from three categories: (1) current and recent employers of DVR clients, (2) businesses in sectors of the economy identified by DVR as priority areas for future employment efforts for their clients (labeled “new sectors” in our analyses) and (3) Washington businesses in general. Using mailed surveys for the first two groups and an email survey distributed by the Association of Washington Businesses for the last group, responses were received from 2,034 businesses across the state with response rates of 27 percent, 30 percent, and 18 percent, respectively. These rates are considered very acceptable for mail and email survey methods within the field of survey research and should permit DVR to use this information for strategic planning.

A total of 2,034 businesses responded to the employer survey:

1. 28 percent were current or recent employers of DVR clients ($n=571$).
2. 40 percent were respondents from the Association of Washington Businesses ($n=808$).
3. 31 percent were from a sample of targeted new sector businesses randomly selected by category from the Washington Labor and Industries (L&I) database ($n=636$).
4. 1 percent were unsolicited responses from the DVR web link ($n=15$).



Firms of all sizes were fairly well represented in the survey, as shown in the table below. Roughly half of the respondents were from businesses with 25 or fewer employees.

Number of employees for all DVR employer respondents

Number of Employees	NUMBER	PERCENT
1 to 5	477	30%
6 to 25	448	29%
26-50	183	12%
51-100	152	9%
101-500	235	15%
More than 500	76	5%

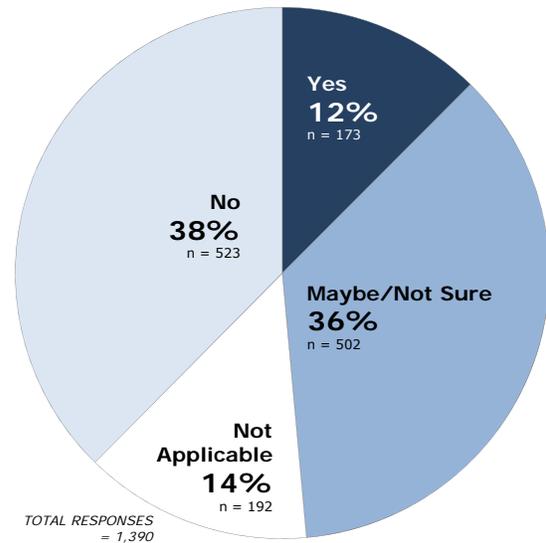
How many potential employers think they could benefit from hiring a client or intern from DVR?

EMPLOYERS | Question 1. Do you think your business could benefit from an employee or intern from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation?

Businesses that had not employed a DVR client within the last year were asked whether they might benefit from hiring a DVR client or intern. Of the 1,390 who replied, 12 percent said “yes” while 36 percent said “maybe or not sure.” Thus, nearly half of potential employers gave positive or noncommittal replies.

The remaining employers indicated that they did not think their business could benefit from hiring a client or intern from DVR (38 percent said “no”) or felt that the question did not apply to them for some reason (14 percent).

The sizeable proportion who were uncertain provides an opportunity for DVR to develop a strategy for communicating the benefits to potential employers who are undecided.



Is the size of a business related to perceived benefits of employing DVR clients among potential employers?

About half of the potential employers who believe that a person with disabilities may be of benefit to their organization are from relatively small businesses with one to five or six to 25 employees. This distribution is quite similar to the overall distribution of employers that took part in this survey, as shown on the previous page.

The likelihood of a business indicating that someone with disabilities may be of benefit to them is actually lowest for small firms (30 percent for those with one to five employees), moderate for middle-sized businesses (between 52 percent and 74 percent for firms between 6-25 and 101-500), and highest for the very large firms (82 percent for firms with more than 500 employees) (see last column in the table below). When taken together, these findings suggest that while large firms may be more willing to consider persons with disabilities as potentially beneficial to their organizations, there are generally fewer large firms available within a community.

When determining whether or not the size of a firm is of importance in seeking potential employers who may be receptive to having an intern or an employee with disabilities, DVR staff may actually find a greater number of opportunities among small or moderate sized firms, but they may need to work with more of these firms to locate the ones who would be most likely to consider a DVR client for an internship or position. While larger firms may be more receptive, there may be fewer of these organizations available to hire persons with disabilities.

Potential employers who think they could benefit from hiring a DVR client or intern by size of firm

Number of Employees	NUMBER Out of 504 Responses	PERCENT Distribution by size of the business	LIKELIHOOD OF INDICATING Hiring a DVR client/intern would be of benefit to them
1 to 5	115	23%	30%
6 to 25	162	32%	53%
26-50	56	11%	52%
51-100	50	10%	63%
101-500	94	19%	78%
More than 500	27	5%	82%

Which DVR services could help employers hire and retain qualified people with disabilities?

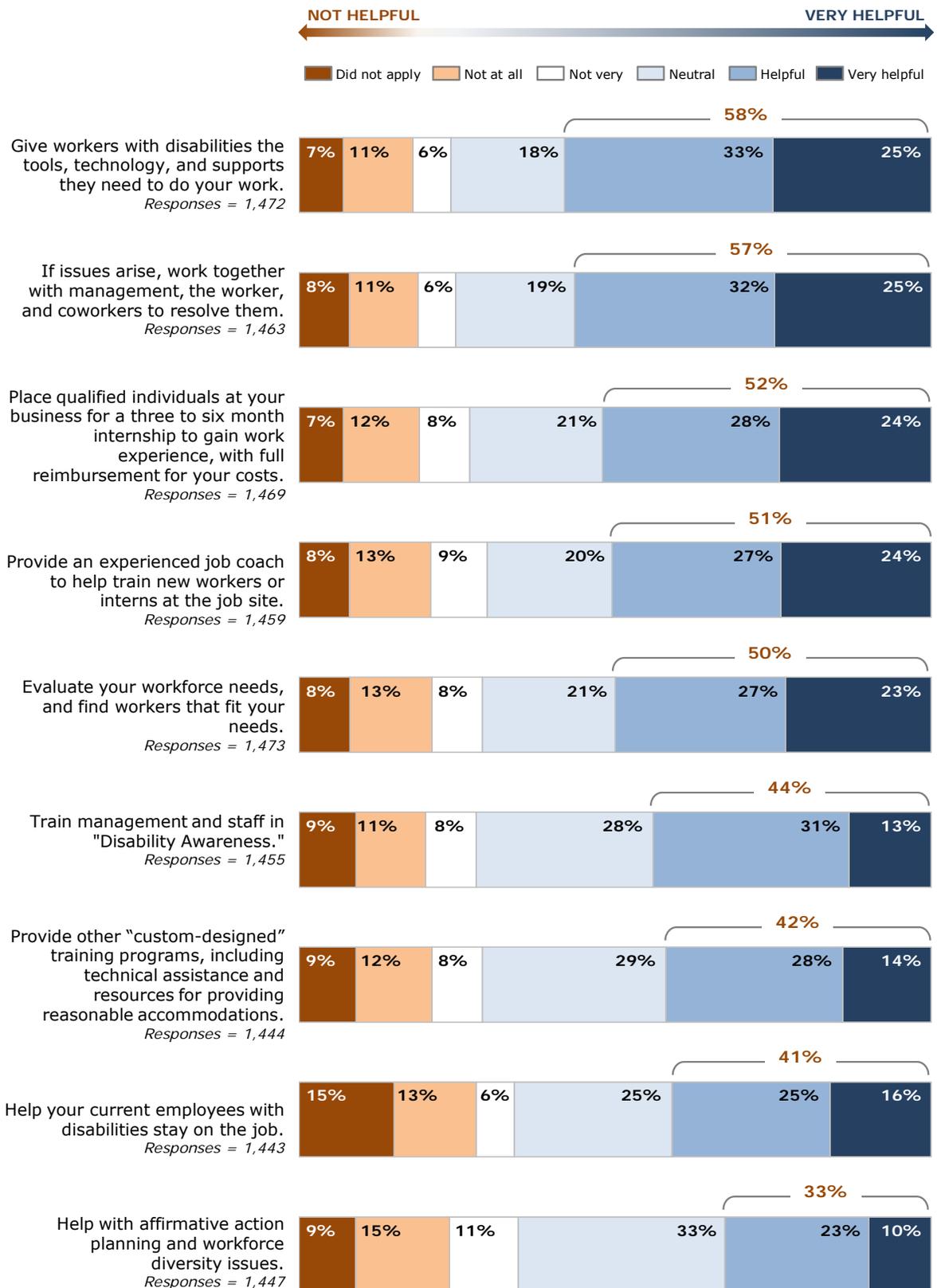
Both current employers of DVR clients and potential employers were asked to rate DVR services that might help them employ and retain people with disabilities. At least 50 percent of the employers rated the following services as “helpful” or “very helpful:”

1. Providing tools, technology and supports needed to do the employer’s type of work (58 percent).
2. Working together to resolve issues as they arise (57 percent).
3. Placing interns to gain work experience (52 percent).
4. Providing experienced job coaches on site (51 percent).
5. Evaluating employer needs and finding workers who fit those needs (50 percent).

While both current and prospective employers tended to identify the same types of DVR services as potentially helpful, the proportion who rated DVR services as “helpful” or “very helpful” tended to be higher among employers who were currently working with DVR than among prospective employers. For example, the highest percentage of both current and prospective employers rated the following service as helpful or very helpful: *“Give workers with disabilities the tools, technology, and supports they need to do your work.”* But the percent of employers who rated this type of service positively was 73 percent among current employers of DVR clients and only 50 percent among prospective employers.

The remaining examples of potential DVR services—providing training on disability awareness, providing training or technical assistance on reasonable accommodations, helping current employees with disabilities stay on the job and helping employers with affirmative action or workforce diversity issues—were rated positively by 33 percent to 44 percent of the employers. Less positive responses for these services were primarily due a higher proportion of “neutral” responses, suggesting that some employers may not have a clear understanding of these DVR services or how such services might be helpful to them.

EMPLOYERS | Question 2. What services offered by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation would help you most to hire and retain a qualified applicant with a disability?¹



¹ Includes responses from ALL employers who rated one or more of the DVR services. Of the 2,034 employers who returned a survey, 561 skipped Question 2 altogether.

Which DVR services would be helpful to potential employers who may be willing to hire a DVR client?

Potential employers who think they could benefit from hiring a DVR client or intern provided some of the most positive ratings of DVR services (see table below and graph on next page). At least 70 percent of these employers rated the following services as “helpful” or “very helpful:”

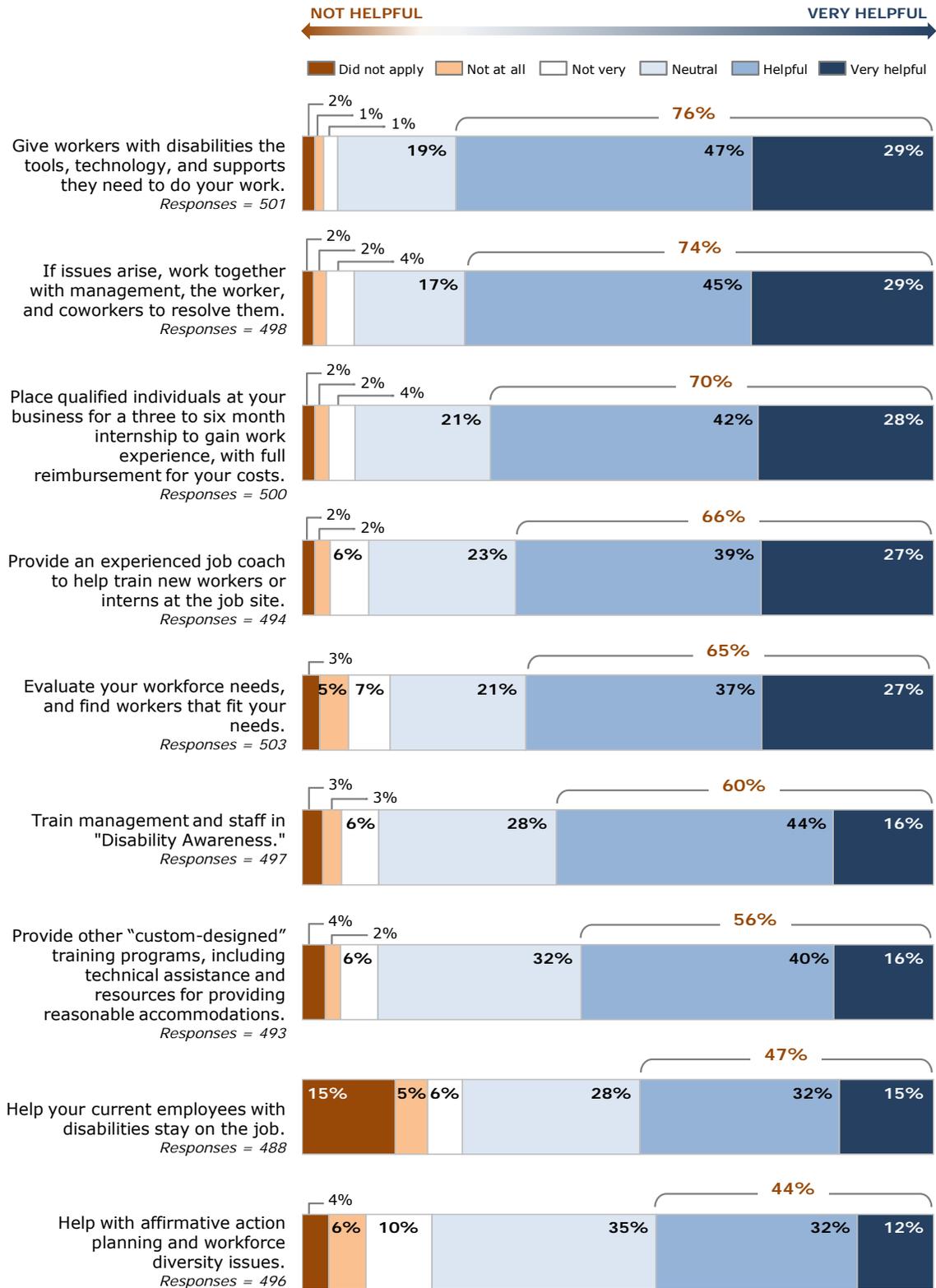
1. Providing tools, technology and supports needed to do the employer’s type of work (76 percent).
2. Working together to resolve issues as they arise (74 percent).
3. Placing interns to gain work experience (70 percent).

Between 56 and 66 percent of potential employers who think they could benefit from hiring a DVR client or intern rated the following services positively:

1. Providing experienced job coaches on site (66 percent).
2. Evaluating employer needs and finding workers who fit those needs (65 percent).
3. Training management and staff in disability awareness (60 percent).
4. Providing technical assistance and resources for reasonable accommodations (56 percent).

Somewhat less than half of the potential employers who expressed an interest in a DVR placement rated the other examples of potential DVR services—helping current employees with disabilities stay on the job and helping employers with affirmative action or workforce diversity issues—positively: 47 percent and 44 percent, respectively, said these types of services would be helpful or very helpful.

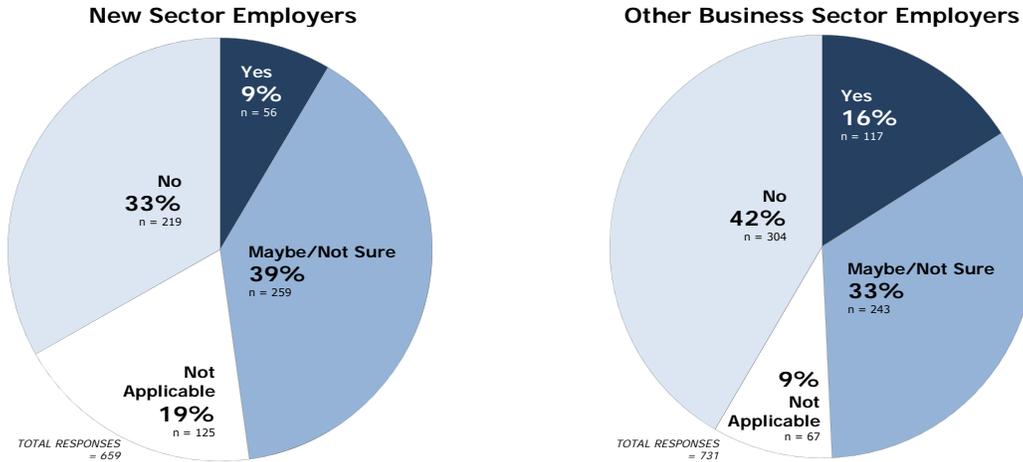
POTENTIAL EMPLOYERS WHO THINK THEY MAY BENEFIT FROM HIRING A DVR CLIENT | Question 2. What services offered by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation would help you most to hire and retain a qualified applicant with a disability?¹



¹ Includes responses from 675 employers who: (1) responded "yes" or "maybe" to question about whether their business could benefit from hiring a DVR client or intern; and (2) responded to Question 2.

How many employers from new business sectors think they could benefit from hiring a client or intern from DVR compared to employers from other business sectors?

EMPLOYERS BY BUSINESS SECTOR | Question 1. Do you think your business could benefit from an employee or intern from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation?



DVR has expressed interest in several business sectors that may be potential future sources of employment with good pay and job opportunities for DVR clients, called “new sectors” in this report. The new business sectors are in the fields of government or public administration; health and social services; education; and professional services, science or technology. The types of businesses in the “other” business sectors, based on responses to the survey of employers from the Association of Washington Business, include such fields as manufacturing, food service, sales, farming, building and grounds maintenance, office support and transportation or material moving.

When asked if hiring a DVR client or intern might be of benefit to them, employers from the new business sectors were significantly less likely than employers from other business sectors to say a definite “yes:” 9 percent compared to 16 percent ($p < .0001$). When the percentage who replied “maybe or not sure” in response to this question was added to those who said yes, the differences between the two groups of potential employers disappeared. The proportion in each group of employers who said hiring a DVR client or intern *would* or *may* be of benefit to them was 48 percent in the new sectors and 49 percent in the other group.

Do employers from new business sectors rate the potential helpfulness of DVR services differently than employers from other sectors?

Percent of employers who consider specific DVR services as helpful or very helpful in hiring or retaining an employee with disabilities

DVR Services	NEW SECTOR EMPLOYERS	OTHER BUSINESS SECTOR EMPLOYERS	P-VALUE ¹
Give workers with disabilities the tools, technology, and supports they need to do your work.	56%	61%	p<.05
If issues arise, work together with management, the worker, and coworkers to resolve them.	55%	59%	
Place qualified individuals at your business for a three to six month internship to gain work experience, with full reimbursement for your costs.	52%	51%	
Provide an experienced job coach to help train new workers or interns at the job site.	45%	56%	p<.0001
Evaluate your workforce needs, and find workers to fit your needs.	47%	53%	p<.01
Train management and staff in "Disability Awareness."	46%	43%	
Provide other "custom-designed" training programs, including technical assistance and resources for providing reasonable accommodations.	42%	42%	
Help your current employees with disabilities stay on the job.	40%	43%	
Help with affirmative action planning and workforce diversity issues.	35%	30%	p<.05

¹ The p-value represents the level of statistical significance of the difference between the responses of employers in the future business sectors and those in the other business sectors. A p-value less than .05 here indicates a statistically significant difference; lower p-values indicate less probability that differences are a result of chance.

In general, the degree to which employers said specific DVR services might help them hire and retain a qualified applicant with a disability was fairly similar for employers from the new business sectors compared to employers in other sectors. We found no difference, using tests of statistical significance, in the percent who rated the service as potentially helpful between employers from the new sectors and those from the other sectors for the following DVR services:

- If issues arise, work together to resolve them (55 percent and 59 percent),
- Place qualified interns with full reimbursement of costs (52 percent and 51 percent),
- Train management and staff in "Disability Awareness" (46 percent and 43 percent),
- Provide custom-designed training programs and assistance (42 percent each), and
- Help current employees with disabilities stay on the job (40 percent and 43 percent).

For the following three service categories, however, employers from the new sectors were somewhat less likely than employers from the other sectors to rate the activity as potentially helpful:

- Give workers the tools, technology or supports needed to do the work (56 percent versus 61 percent, p<.05),
- Provide an experienced job coach to train workers on site (45 percent versus 56 percent, p<.0001), and
- Evaluate your workforce needs and find workers who fit (47 percent versus 53 percent, p<.01).

In only one instance—helping with affirmative action planning and workforce diversity issues—a slightly higher proportion of employers from the new sectors rated the service as potentially helpful (35 percent) compared to employers from other sectors (30 percent, p<.05).

Do employers from the four new business sectors differ in their ratings of the potential helpfulness of DVR services?

Percent of employers who consider specific DVR services as helpful or very helpful in hiring or retaining an employee with disabilities¹

DVR Services	PROFESSIONAL SCIENCE TECHNOLOGY	EDUCATION	HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES	GOVERNMENT
Give workers with disabilities the tools, technology, and supports they need to do your work.	46%	56%	63%	56%
If issues arise, work together with management, the worker, and coworkers to resolve them.	40%	57%	67%	51%
Place qualified individuals at your business for a three to six month internship to gain work experience, with full reimbursement for your costs.	39%	50%	63%	52%
Provide an experienced job coach to help train new workers or interns at the job site.	32%	49%	54%	43%
Evaluate your workforce needs, and find workers to fit your needs.	37%	48%	56%	42%
Train management and staff in "Disability Awareness."	31%	43%	56%	52%
Provide other "custom-designed" training programs, including technical assistance and resources for providing reasonable accommodations.	28%	40%	53%	46%
Help your current employees with disabilities stay on the job.	26%	44%	49%	37%
Help with affirmative action planning and workforce diversity issues.	21%	40%	43%	37%

¹ Portions of this table are shaded in blue when 50 percent or more of the respondents in that business sector rated a given DVR service as "helpful" or "very helpful."

As shown on page 10 of this report, 48 percent of respondents from the new business sectors of particular interest to DVR for future career growth opportunities for their clients indicated that they *would* or *may* benefit from hiring a DVR intern or client. The percent of respondents who expressed this opinion varied by type of business sector: those in the health and social services sector were the most likely to report that they would or may benefit from hiring a DVR client (54 percent) followed by government (51 percent); education (45 percent) and professional services, science or technology (42 percent).

Employers from health and social services tended to be the *most positive* when asked to rate how helpful certain types of DVR services might be in helping them to hire or retain a DVR client. About two-thirds of employers from health and social services and slightly over half of those from education and government said the following services would be helpful: giving DVR clients the necessary tools and supports, working with management to help resolve problems, and using DVR-paid internships to give clients needed experience. Over half of the employers from health and social services also rated several other DVR services as potentially helpful, including providing job coaches, evaluating workforce needs, providing diversity awareness training, and giving other forms of custom-designed support and training.

Employers from the professional services, science or technology sector gave the least positive responses, with less than half of them rating any of the DVR services as potentially helpful.

How best can DVR help employers hire and retain workers with disabilities?

EMPLOYERS | Question 3. How can DVR best help you employ and keep workers with disabilities?

THEMES IN EMPLOYER RESPONSES | Problems/Constraints

	All Employers ¹	Potential Employers who May Benefit ^{1,2}
	357	71
Business Too Small. Unable to make full or effective use of DVR clients.	141	22
Constraints Due to Job Characteristics. Job too complex or stressful for persons with disabilities; physical requirements (including lifting).	87	15
Hiring/Budget Issues (other than bad economy). Not hiring; no positions available.	67	21
DVR Clients a "Poor Fit" with Business. Includes problems placing DVR clients; includes "We hire in-house" and "Space is an issue."	62	9
Safety Concerns. Heavy machinery; chemicals; other workplace dangers; requires quick reaction time.	28	8
Bad Economy.	22	7

¹ The number of businesses who provided at least one comment in this category is shown at the top. This is not a sum since some respondents provided more than one comment that fell into this category.

² Includes potential employers who responded that they would or may benefit from hiring a DVR client or intern. These responses are also counted within the "All Employers" column.

In response to an open-ended question about how DVR could help them employ or retain workers with disabilities, many employers indicated that their business was too small to consider hiring a person with disabilities as a viable option. A fair number of employers also identified constraints in hiring persons with disabilities posed by unique characteristics or demands of the particular types of jobs in their businesses.

The economy and budget issues were mentioned as barriers to hiring DVR clients. Employers cited limits to current hiring, budget constraints and problems associated with the economy as major barriers to employing persons with disabilities.

EMPLOYER COMMENTS

Comments related to problems:

"We are a VERY small company and do not employ very many workers."

Comments related to constraints:

"At this time we are laying off long term employees. It will be some time before we hire anyone."

"We are currently experiencing a work slowdown and have some lay-offs. Cannot accommodate at this time."

THEMES IN EMPLOYER RESPONSES | Employers' Views of Persons with Disabilities

	All Employers ¹	Potential Employers who May Benefit ^{1,2}
	248	77
Business/Individual has Experience Employing Persons with Disabilities. Experience can be good or bad; includes personal or professional familiarity with disability issues, and experiences with interns.	147	36
DVR is a Great Program. Business would like to participate, now or in the future.	81	25
Business Open to Hiring Workers with Disabilities. Interns included.	56	25
People with Disabilities should be in the Workforce. People with disabilities make good employees; mention of specific successful employees; no mention of DVR.	35	6

¹ The number of businesses who provided at least one comment in this category is shown at the top. This is not a sum since some respondents provided more than one comment that fell into this category.

² Includes potential employers who responded that they would or may benefit from hiring a DVR client or intern. These responses are also counted within the "All Employers" column.

Overall opinions about hiring persons with disabilities as employees or interns included both positive and negative reactions. Some were based on actual experiences in working with people with disabilities and some were not. While some employers expressed an openness to making efforts to accommodate DVR clients in the workplace, others felt people with disabilities required too much supervision or were at higher risk for injury due to specific dangers in their workplace. A number of employers who gave positive comments embraced the benefits of a diverse workforce.

EMPLOYER COMMENTS

Comments on positive experiences:

"I think training is definitely something that would be beneficial. We currently employ a few folks with disabilities and would like to continue to recruit for these types of individuals when we have openings available."

"We have a DVR employee who has been with us for 19+ years. It has been a wonderful relationship. Problems do come up—we work through them."

"I own a restaurant. I have simpler tasks that someone with disabilities can do."

"... We are enjoying [name redacted] as an honest and sincere employee for the business. I would like you to keep contacting us once in a while. Thank you."

"We currently embrace the use of a diverse workforce. I believe information/education of employers about the advantages and benefits of hiring workers with disabilities would be a better focus than telling them all they "need to do to accommodate" a "good" worker with a disability. Most employers are afraid because of the "perceived" difficulties of having people with disabilities working for your company..."

Comments on negative experiences:

"We used to participate in this program, but this is a relatively dangerous workplace with moving machinery and it did not work out very well for them or for us—even with training, coaching, etc."

"We have several people with disabilities employed already. We have found it challenging at times and find the help we need from vocational counselors and job coaches to be frustrating."

"We interviewed and hired from DVR, but the applicant cancelled before starting."

"The only problem we had was that our worker needed CONSTANT supervision or he would 'play.' It isn't useful to have extra help if it requires another staff person to be constantly available to supervise. Workers need to be more self-sufficient."

THEMES IN EMPLOYER RESPONSES | Suggestions for DVR Action

	All Employers ¹	Potential Employers who May Benefit ^{1,2}
	177	81
Evaluate Worksites. Assess workforce needs; find workers that fit those needs.	71	44
Support and Mentor Employees. Education and training; on and off the job site; beyond 90 days.	71	22
Educate/Inform Employers. Workers/skills available; how to support workers with disabilities; costs to hire workers with disabilities.	47	23
Fund Internships. Pay other costs of employing workers with disabilities, including tools and devices.	16	6
Other Suggestions. Includes bad experiences with DVR-placed employees (implied suggestions).	15	1

¹ The number of businesses who provided at least one comment in this category is shown at the top. This is not a sum since some respondents provided more than one comment that fell into this category.

² Includes potential employers who responded that they would or may benefit from hiring a DVR client or intern. These responses are also counted within the "All Employers" column.

Employers suggested that DVR could help by providing assessments of workforce needs and finding workers who fit those needs; these services were identified as important ways for DVR to help businesses hire and keep workers with disabilities. Many employers indicated that providing good job coaching, staying on top of issues with the employee, staying in touch with the employer, providing follow-up support from DVR beyond the typical 90 days and providing more training for employers would be especially helpful. See quotes below for recommendations by some of the current or past DVR employers.

A number of employers mentioned educating and informing employers about the potential costs and benefits of hiring employees with disabilities and available support from DVR, as ways that DVR could help them. Internships and other ways to offset costs of hiring DVR clients (e.g., paying for any necessary tools and devices) were also suggested.

EMPLOYER COMMENTS

Comments related to workforce support and mentoring:

"Having accessible job coaching/job coaches during the new employee's first month."

"I want a job coach to be in contact with me on a regular basis, so if I do have issues or questions they can be addressed."

"Provide support to employed workers beyond 90 days."

"Stay on top of issues occurring with employee."

Comments related to educating and informing employers:

"Work with our requirements to find qualified workers, and give us training as needed so we can support them with the best chance of success possible."

"Provide the necessary financial support and resources for employers, as well as the disabled worker."

"An understanding of the skills needed to fulfill the job position. A visit to the site to share some of the background. Providing a proactive job coach for beginning transition. Offering training compensation for extra staff training."

"Educate our staff as to how DVR can help our company..."

"Evaluation and suggestions on work areas which may best employ persons with disabilities."

"Continue to educate me via e-mailings. We are not in a hiring mode at this time."

"By giving us a complete understanding of an individual's strengths and challenges, DVR services can help us better plan for and support employees with disabilities..."

THEMES IN EMPLOYER RESPONSES | Need for Certain Workers and Other Comments

	All Employers ¹	Potential Employers who May Benefit ^{1,2}
Need for Certain Workers	59	21
Business needs workers/interns with certain skills or attributes.	59	21
Other	89	25
Other Comments. Issues outside DVR’s arena; send this survey to another individual/business; this business is no longer operating; neutral comments about employer circumstances.	63	19
Government/Regulatory Comments. Negative comments about government, taxes or regulations; laws, rules or regulations create impediments to hiring workers with disabilities; includes union requirements.	28	8

¹ The number of businesses who provided at least one comment in this category is shown at the top. This is not a sum since some respondents provided more than one comment that fell into this category.

² Includes potential employers who responded that they would or may benefit from hiring a DVR client or intern. These responses are also counted within the “All Employers” column.

Some employers indicated that jobs in their businesses were not a good fit for individuals with disabilities due to complexities, stressfulness or physical demands of jobs. Examples of businesses identifying these barriers included dance schools, farms and small bookkeeping firms that indicated the need for specific skills, physical strength, training or education.

Most other comments addressed issues that were outside the purview of DVR, including some negative comments about government in general. Of particular interest, however, were comments by a few businesses indicating that there are laws or regulations that create impediments to hiring workers with disabilities. These include requirements set by unions.

EMPLOYER COMMENTS

Comments related to need for certain workers:

“I’m not sure there is a place in our business that would fit a worker with disabilities. Most of our jobs are skilled and require planning, lifting, customer relations skills and licensing.”

“This is a farming operation. I don’t see how people with disabilities could perform the physically demanding jobs required here.”

Other comments from employers:

“Because we are a highly regulated industry, I’m not sure how disabled workers would be able to meet gaming commission requirements.”

“...There should be some sort of tax credit.”

“I like to and want to hire people with disabilities, but I simply cannot pay a full wage (\$8.50 - \$10.50) if the workers cannot give me full dollar value...”

“Do not keep increasing the minimum wage—a huge threat to these folks.”

“We are a union contractor and our hiring must be done per collective bargaining agreement.”



PART 2

DVR Staff Survey

Key Findings

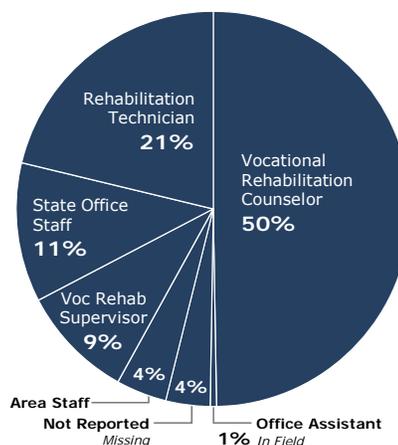
1. DVR staff felt the services that contribute most to client success are Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) services and benefits planning. *(See Technical Notes for definitions).*
2. DVR staff ranked the following three efforts as most important in helping clients obtain and keep quality jobs with good wages:
 - *Improving or building relationships with local employers*
 - *Developing or hiring staff to make placements in higher wage jobs*
 - *Contracting with job developers who can access higher wage jobs*

Which employees participated in the DVR Staff Survey?

Using an on-line survey, DVR employees were asked about current DVR programs and how much they contribute to successful outcomes for their clients. Employees were also asked to rank specific approaches for helping clients obtain and keep appropriate employment. This survey was designed to help DVR in planning and prioritizing services that will best promote and support positive client outcomes.

A total of 192 DVR employees responded to the survey. This represented 56 percent of the 340 employees who were asked to participate.

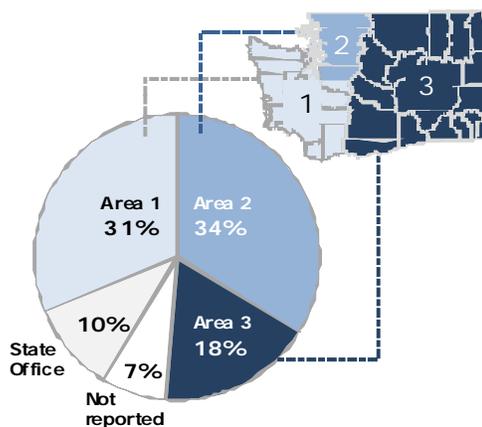
1. Nearly three-quarters of the employees who answered the survey work directly with DVR clients either as Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (50 percent) or as Rehabilitation Technicians (21 percent).
2. Most of the remaining respondents represented more administrative positions as state office staff (11 percent) or supervisors (9 percent).



Work Location

About two-thirds of the respondents were from regional DVR offices in Areas 1 and 2 that comprise the western half of Washington State which encompasses the greatest share of the state's population. Another 18 percent of the respondents represented the eastern half of the state.

The distribution of respondents appears to generally reflect the geographic distribution of the state's population and DVR regional staffing patterns.



How much do DVR services contribute to successful client outcomes?

Over 90 percent of DVR employees rated the following types of services as contributing "very much" or "some" to successful outcomes for their clients:

- Contracted services with a Community Rehabilitation Program (96 percent),
- Benefits planning (93 percent),
- Assistive technology (93 percent),
- Higher education classes or degree programs for clients (92 percent), and
- Community-based assessments (92 percent).

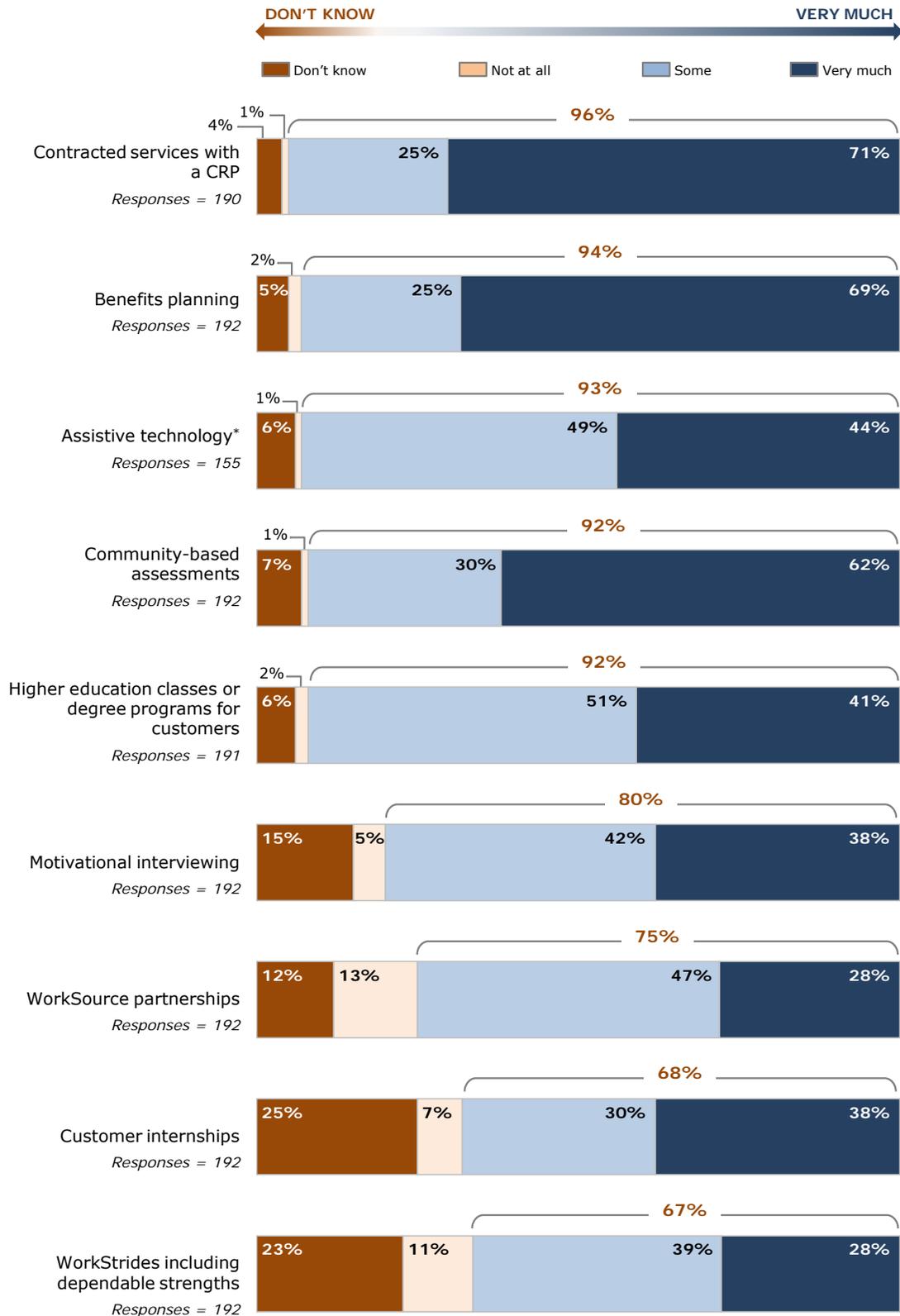
A slightly lower percentage—between 66 percent and 80 percent—rated the other types of services as instrumental to the success of their clients. These included:

- Motivational interviewing (80 percent),
- WorkSource partnerships (75 percent),
- Internships (68 percent), and
- WorkStrides including dependable strengths (66 percent).

The somewhat lower rating of importance for these programs stemmed, in part, from a higher proportion of DVR employees who indicated they did not know how effective these programs may be. Those staff who said "don't know" when rating the usefulness of some DVR programs may be signifying their lack of use of or familiarity with these particular types of programs.

EMPLOYEES | Question 1: DVR has implemented programs and supports to help individuals move through the Vocational Rehabilitation process and achieve employment goals. In your opinion, how much do the following efforts contribute to successful outcomes for customers?

Total responses = 192



*This item was added after 35 surveys had already been distributed.

Which services help DVR clients get and keep good jobs the most?

Working to build or improve relationships with local employers was ranked as the number one activity that helps DVR clients get and keep jobs compared to other types of activities. Over one-third of DVR employees ranked this activity as the most important service that helps their clients.

The next most important activities for securing better paying jobs for their clients involved getting better resources to improve placements. Specifically, developing or hiring staff to make placements in higher wage jobs fell into second place with an average rank of 3.39 and contracting with job developers who are able to access higher paying jobs fell into third place with an average rank of 3.65. The importance DVR employees placed on these activities suggests that current DVR staff may feel that they do not have the necessary expertise or time to seek out employers with better jobs or to help clients find them.

Placing more emphasis on training and formal education for clients and providing support for people who attend such programs were perceived as moderately important with average ranks of 4.14 and 4.33, respectively. Improving relationships with other agencies was ranked next to last with an average rank of 4.47. Seeking a more diversified clientele was ranked as one of the least important activities with an average rank of 5.11. Over one-third of the employees ranked seeking a more diversified clientele as least important in helping clients get and keep good jobs.

EMPLOYEES | **Question 2:** *For DVR, helping customers get and keep jobs with good wages, benefits and promotional opportunities is an important goal. In your opinion, which of the following efforts would help the most to achieve this goal?*

WHAT HELPS ACHIEVE GOALS?	AVERAGE RANKING ¹	RANK ²							NUMBER RESPONSES
		1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	
1. Improve or build relationships with local employers	2.72	35%	17%	15%	15%	11%	4%	2%	179
2. Develop or hire staff to make placements in higher wage jobs	3.39	16%	21%	23%	16%	9%	7%	9%	180
3. Contract with job developers who can access higher wage jobs	3.65	18%	20%	5%	10%	12%	11%	14%	182
4. Increase emphasis on training and post-secondary education for customers, including professional technical certificates and apprenticeships	4.14	13%	11%	10%	19%	20%	19%	9%	178
5. More support for people who attend training and post secondary education, including professional technical certificates and apprenticeships	4.33	7%	13%	14%	16%	21%	15%	14%	181
6. Improve or build relationships with other agencies	4.47	6%	15%	12%	16%	11%	26%	14%	180
7. Diversify the population we serve	5.11	9%	4%	11%	7%	16%	16%	37%	180

¹ The average ranking was calculated on a scale where 1 represents a ranking as most helpful and 7 as least helpful. Thus, the lower an average ranking score indicates that more employees believe this effort would be helpful

² Employees were asked to give a rank of 1 to 7 for each activity and to use each rank only once. The ranking that was given by the highest percentage of employees for each type of activity is shaded in blue.

What do employees suggest to improve DVR services?

EMPLOYEES | Question 3. *What do you think is most needed to help DVR customers get jobs with good wages and benefits?*

EMPLOYEES | Question 4. *Do you have other comments about DVR's priorities for the future?*

THEMES IN EMPLOYEE RESPONSES | DVR Services

	Most Needed	Other
DVR Services	121	61
Employers/Job Development (includes hiring more job developers).	59	22
General or mixed comments about processes and services—not primarily focused on job development, education, or personal benefits assistance.	38	34
Education and training; includes apprenticeship and internships.	38	8
Priorities in customers/Types of customers and relationship to services/Definition of Disability.	10	10
What customers should know/attitude/characteristics/responsibilities.	16	2
Teach Soft Skills/Job Clubs.	12	
Business needs workers/interns with certain skills or attributes.	4	6
Personal benefits specialists/assistance (includes hiring more).	3	4

In response to an open-ended question about what is most needed to help DVR clients get jobs with good wages and benefits, a number of employees said that focusing on relationships with current and potential employers was the key to success. Some staff suggested that DVR invest in external contracts to improve relationships with employers and others felt this work could be accomplished more efficiently with DVR staff.

Employees suggested developing working relationships with employers by getting to know them better during and following job placement. This would allow DVR staff to provide the services and workers to meet employers' needs. One suggestion was to conduct informational interviews with employers and to store and share the information within DVR for follow up and future use.

Some employees identified working more collaboratively with clients as an important strategy for success. They suggested using such tools as assessment, counseling and motivational interviewing to help clients prepare for a job and to provide better support to them once employed.

STAFF COMMENTS

Comments about employers and job development

"Relationships with local employers are critical to the continued success of our customers. Relationships of all kinds should be encouraged and supported—from formal meetings with HR directors and staff to discussions with the managers of small stores and restaurants."

"Be involved with the Chambers of Commerce in our area.... We have liaison, but most don't attend the meetings, functions, and/or share the info if they do go. Also, I think as an agency it won't hurt to be involved (volunteer as a DVR agency) in our community i.e. parades, festivals, craft shows, etc..."

Comments about processes and services

"Stop recycling customers, and do that by insisting that contracted job developers get paid only when they get the employers to agree in writing to provide reasonable accommodations for the new employee."

"Having an Internship Coordinator for our Area would be very useful. It would also be useful if we could use CRPs to help establish internship sites in select cases."

"More emphasis should be placed on building a more collaborative relationship with our customers through assessment and counseling intervention strategies such as motivational interviewing..."

THEMES IN EMPLOYEE RESPONSES | Staff Issues

	Most Needed	Other
Staff Issues	33	48
Staff shortages, need for more staff, salaries; more staff would help with timeliness; need for specific specialties etc. Other personnel issues.	20	35
Training/increased staff knowledge.	9	9
Motivational interviewing /subset of training.	4	7
Other/Mixed comments about staff.	4	4

Employees identified problems associated with staff shortages as well as problems related to their education and training. Overall staffing relative to the DVR caseload was listed as a challenge to serving clients and helping them to get jobs with good wages and benefits. Several employees discussed motivational interviewing as an important skill for VRCs to learn. They were more concerned about the need for greater proficiency and testing of fidelity than about the availability of such training.

STAFF COMMENTS

Comments about staff issues

"... There are not enough VRCs to cover all of the caseloads which results in VRCs being stretched too thin to cover all of the customers needing assistance."

"I have seen case notes that say MI 'guidelines' have been followed, by staff that I know haven't finished the training and that I have never heard demonstrate any MI skills. I would love to see proficiency be an expectation..."

THEMES IN EMPLOYEE RESPONSES | Other Comments

	Most Needed	Other
Other		
Economy	25	8
Talks about Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs)	24	15
Other	1	3

A number of DVR staff mentioned the current economy and concerns about the cost of hiring new employees. The economy was seen as a barrier to both creating and maintaining new jobs for DVR clients. One particular challenge identified by employees is the low wages of positions traditionally allotted to DVR clients. DVR staff noted that the salaries for such jobs do not support a life of independence and high quality. While some staff wanted more CRP services with good marketing skills, some staff preferred more interaction with businesses themselves.

STAFF COMMENTS

Comments about the economy

"The economy is bad and that's hindering things a bit."

"Right now, with the economy, it is becoming increasingly difficult to place customers in jobs with better wages and benefits. I definitely think that if the customer is able to complete a post-secondary degree of some sort, this will make them more marketable and more likely to secure these types of jobs."

"I think the traditionally low wages many of our customers encounter is a real barrier to living their lives in the best quality and most independent way."

Comments about CRPs

"We need professional CRP services with good marketing skills with customers other than DDD participants."

"Rethink the contractual relationship with CRPs, moving away from an outcome based system. A focus on internal staff at the local level interacting with business."



PART 3

DVR Client Survey

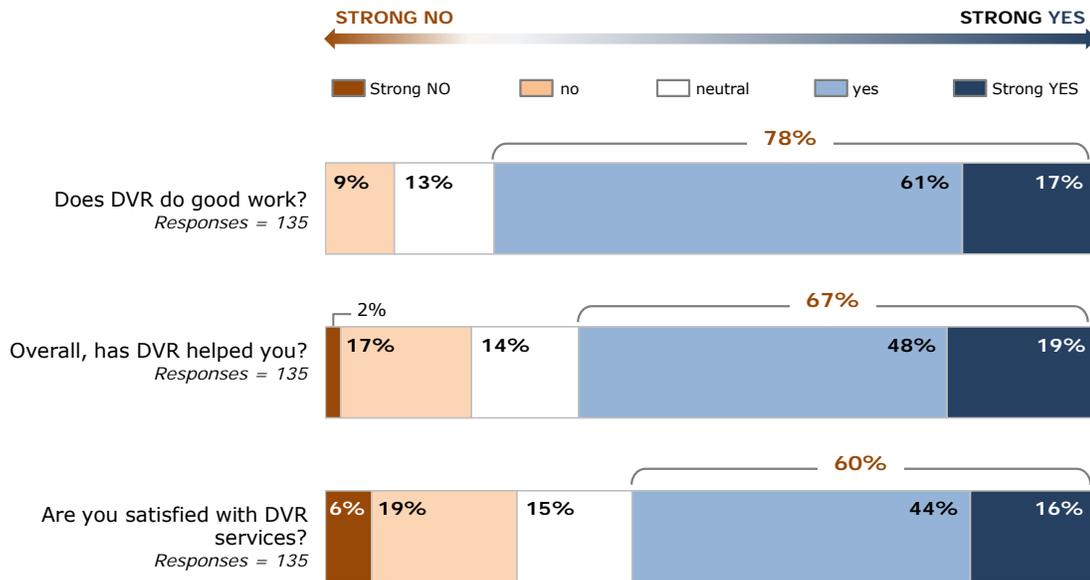
Key Findings

1. Clients rated DVR positively overall and were especially satisfied with the following:
 - *Quality of DVR services and accessibility of DVR offices*
 - *Staff courtesy, attentiveness, clarity and helpfulness*
 - *Opportunity for client involvement in planning and goal setting*
2. While 70 to 80 percent of clients were satisfied with how well DVR provided information and explained things, only 60 percent said they knew what services were available.
3. Although physical access to services received high marks from most, over one-third of clients said they did not get DVR services as quickly as they needed them.
4. DVR clients suggested improvements in the following areas:
 - *Timeliness of services*
 - *Training and assistance after job placement*
 - *Availability of internships, education, and training opportunities*

How satisfied are clients with DVR services?

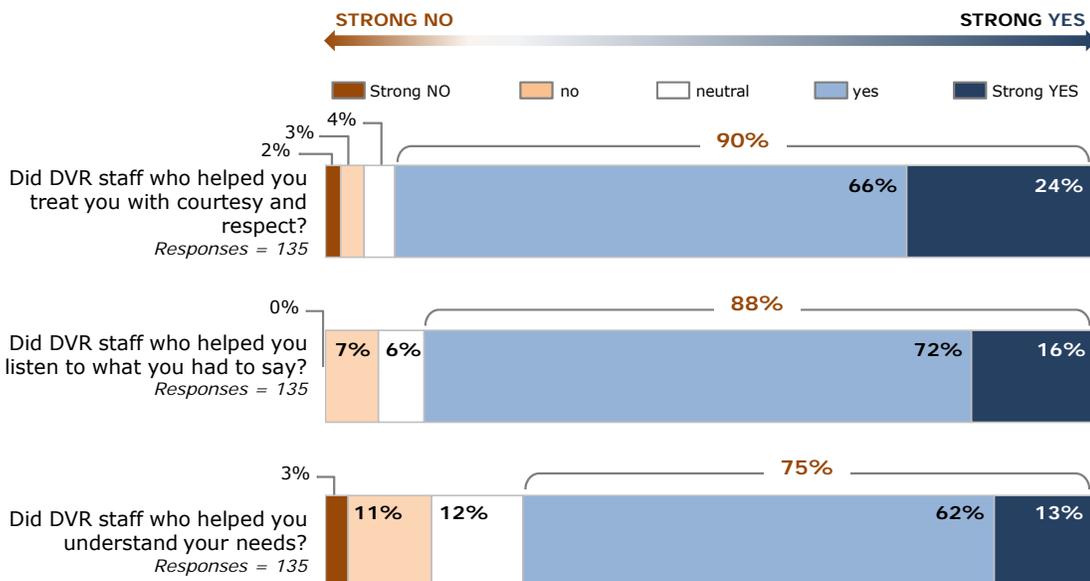
A total of 135 clients served by DVR participated in the 2009 DSHS Client Survey conducted by RDA. They were asked to rate such items as the quality and helpfulness of the program, courtesy of staff, ease of accessing staff and services, and clarity of explanations provided by staff. Clients were also asked to assess how much they were involved in making plans, setting goals or having a say in what services they receive.

Client Satisfaction Rates: Quality and Helpfulness



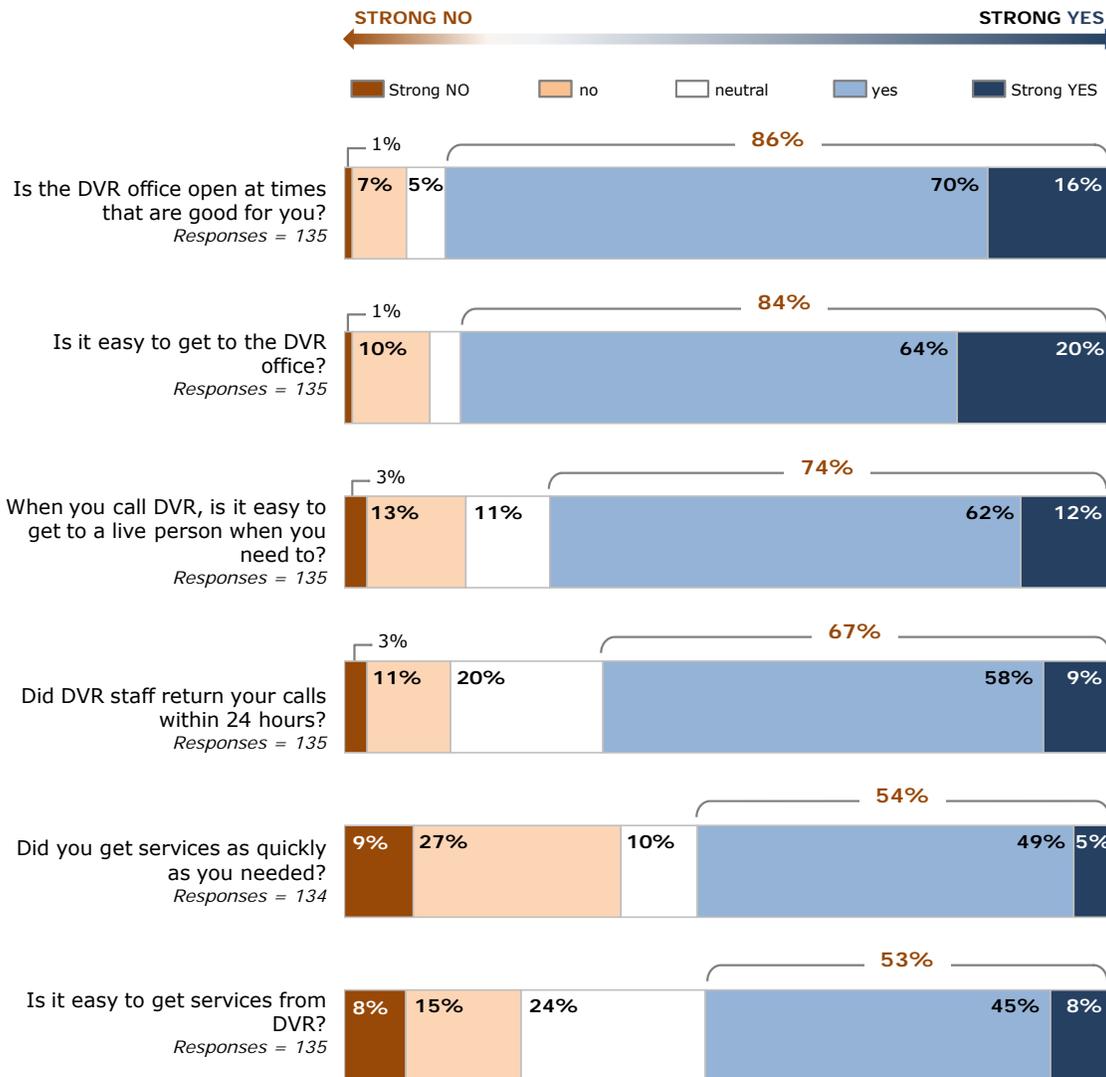
Overall, DVR clients rated the quality and helpfulness of DVR services quite positively. The highest proportion of clients (78 percent) said that DVR does good work. Although 67 percent indicated that DVR has actually helped them, a slightly lower proportion (60 percent) said that they were satisfied with the services.

Client Satisfaction Rates: DSHS Staff



Exceptionally high proportions of clients said that DVR staff treated them with courtesy and respect (90 percent) and listened to what the client had to say (88 percent). In addition, 75 percent of the clients said that the DVR staff who helped them understood their needs.

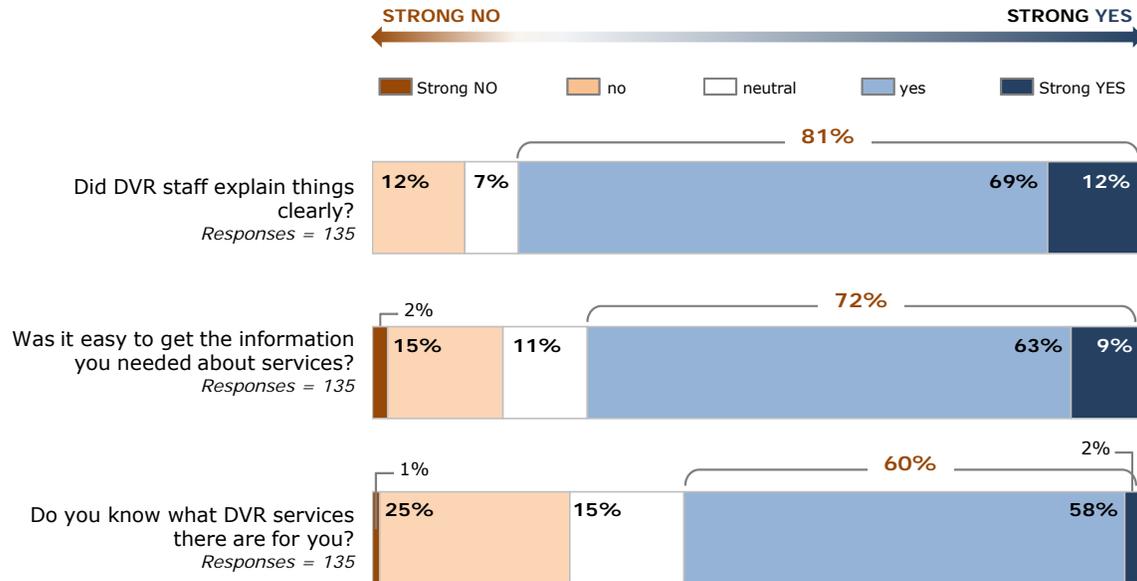
Client Satisfaction Rates: Access and Processes



Physical access to DVR offices—open at good times and easy to get to—received high marks from about 85 percent of DVR clients. Access by telephone—easy to get a live person when you call or getting calls returned within 24 hours—received a positive rating by 74 and 67 percent, respectively, suggesting that there may be room for improvement in this area.

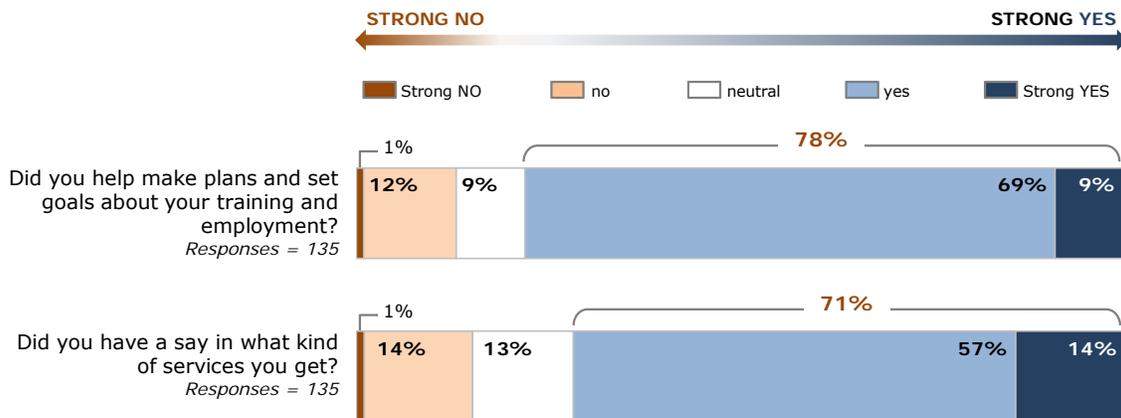
Getting services from DVR—getting them as quickly as needed and ease of getting services overall—received positive ratings from just slightly over half of the DVR clients. Over one-third of clients said that they did NOT get DVR services as quickly as they needed them. About one quarter of DVR clients were neutral about how easy it is to get services from DVR and another one quarter rated said it was NOT easy.

Client Satisfaction Rates: Information



The vast majority of DVR clients (81 percent) were positive about DVR staff’s ability to explain things clearly, but only 60 percent said they knew what services were available to them, suggesting that clients may feel that the information they receive is incomplete. Ease of getting information about needed services was rated positively by 72 percent of the clients, with about 17 percent saying that it was NOT easy.

Client Satisfaction Rates: Client Involvement



Overall, opportunities for client involvement in planning and goal setting were rated very favorably: 78 percent of DVR clients believed that they were involved in making plans and setting goals about their training and employment. A slightly lower proportion (71 percent) indicated that they had a say in the kinds of services they received from DVR.

What do clients think DVR could do to help them get and keep good jobs?

A total of 129 DVR clients answered an open-ended question that was added to the DVR portion of the 2009 DSHS Client Survey conducted by RDA.¹ While the majority of clients rated most DVR services quite favorably, clients offered a number of suggestions to improve DVR services and training.

DVR CLIENTS | Question 1. What more could DVR do to help you GET and KEEP a job with the wages and benefits you need?

THEMES IN CLIENT RESPONSES | PROCESS

	Number of Comments
	76
Service Suggestions. Includes comments about job development, CRPs, job coaching, medical decisions.	17
Training. Internships, training or schooling.	15
Timeliness of Process.	14
Customer-centered Service. Less bureaucracy, more attention to individual needs, fewer administrative errors, suggestions about rules.	11
Jobs. Get clients jobs.	10
Eligibility. Expand service eligibility or service period; make sure I keep the job.	9

A number of DVR clients provided comments about DVR services and processes that might affect their ability to get or keep jobs with the wages and benefits they need. Their comments covered a variety of DVR services like job development and coaching, training, timeliness, and client-centered orientation. Clients suggested that DVR improve services by increasing the length of training, providing more education, giving more assistance in finding appropriate placements and providing more services after job placement. Some clients also identified several barriers to success, including long waiting lists and timeliness of services.

CLIENT COMMENTS

Comments about DVR services

"Provide long-term...three to six months...DVR services."

"I just need assistance in finding a job that doesn't require heavy lifting."

"I don't know if he got a job if there is support from DVR. I hear that he is on his own once he gets a job."

"If they could provide more interim vocational training...during the summers when he is not in school."

Comments about timeliness of processes

"The biggest problem I had with them was their long waiting list..."

"It takes me at least a month to get an appointment at DVR."

THEMES IN CLIENT RESPONSES | COMMUNICATION

	Number of Comments
Communication	14
Information. Need more.	7
General Communication.	4
Telephone Issues. Often tied to timeliness.	3

¹ The 129 DVR clients provided comments which were classified into separate themes. The total number of comments contained in the tables in this section total more than 129 since the comments from some respondents covered more than one theme.

Some clients provided comments related to issues of communication. They identified a need for more information, better listening and more timely communication particularly by telephone. One client suggested specific ways to improve the job listings that DVR provides (see below).

CLIENT COMMENTS

Comments about responsiveness, clarity, communication

"They have not contacted me for a long time. I sent in paper work and I haven't heard a word."

"They should listen better."

"They could provide more information about vocational rehab and the job availability."

"A separation of job listings to show part-time jobs, what days you would work and what times you would work."

THEMES IN CLIENT RESPONSES | DVR STAFF

	Number of Comments
DVR Staff	24
<i>Kudos for staff.</i> Mention staff by name.	8
<i>Staff courtesy.</i>	4
<i>Other comments about staff.</i>	12

Clients described both positive and negative experiences they have had with staff. Some gave kudos to specific staff members and expressed appreciation for being treated with respect. Others recognized that staff shortages may affect the quality of services.

CLIENT COMMENTS

Comments about experiences with staff

"...they do not have enough case workers and too many clients."

"They did not have to treat me like a child."

"They did a great job."

THEMES IN CLIENT RESPONSES | OTHER COMMENTS

	Number of Comments
Miscellaneous Suggestions	
Other —Often stories about the respondent without any suggestions for DVR.	20
Resources —Transportation, clothing, equipment, tools, counseling.	12

Clients provided a number of other comments that did not fall into any of the general themes discussed above. For example, several clients mentioned having problems with accessibility of DVR services and transportation. Some mentioned the lack of assistance available with emerging technology.

CLIENT COMMENTS

General Suggestions

"They could make it more accessible to living situations."

"I would like a one stop office instead of driving from office to office to get help. Gas is too expensive."

"They could provide transportation, like bus passes."

Comments about emergency technology

"One thing that I am looking into seriously now is trying to secure a job at home on my computer using my computer skills in something like data entry or developing a website for my crafts. DVR said they wouldn't be able to help me with this."

SURVEY METHODS

Several survey methods were used to reach the populations of interest in this assessment.

Current and Past Employers of DVR Clients

In early January 2009, a survey was mailed to businesses that employed DVR clients between October 2007 and November 2008, based on a list provided by DVR. Reminder postcards were mailed later in the month. A follow up letter from Lynnae Ruttledge, DVR Director, was sent in February to those who had not responded, along with a new copy of the survey. Surveys were re-sent after they were returned with incorrect addresses if new addresses were located. A total of 2,257 surveys were mailed (2,118 with good addresses). There were 571 returned responses for a total response rate of 27 percent.

Washington Businesses

The Association of Washington Businesses (AWB) provided another source of employer information. AWB agreed to e-mail an online survey (created and administered via Survey Monkey) to their current membership. Surveys were e-mailed to 4,534 AWB members with available electronic contact information. There were 808 responses from the group. Additionally, the National Federation of Independent Businesses (NFIB) placed a link to the electronic survey in their online newsletter, and four online responses were received via this mechanism. A link to the survey was also placed on the DVR website, resulting in 15 unsolicited responses.

New Sector Employers

Employers in specifically targeted "new sectors," were those businesses in technology/business/science, education, health and social services, and government. In order to identify employers in these fields, a list of businesses in these categories was requested from and generated by the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries (L&I). RDA requested a complete list of active State Fund employers, with the two-digit sector codes from the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS; United States, 2002). All of the four-digit subcategories for NAICS codes 54, 61, and 92 were retained. For Health Care and Social Assistance (NAICS Code 62), only select subcategories were requested from L & I.

Based on the list from Labor and Industries, RDA generated a random sample of over 500 employers for each sector for a total of 2164 mailed surveys. Surveys were mailed to potential employers in early January, using essentially the same method and follow up as the DVR employer survey. After those with incorrect addresses were identified and removed, there were 2,087 new sector surveys mailed, and of these, 636 were received for a total response rate of 30.5 percent. Combining L&I and self-reported new sector categories yields a total of about 885 new sector survey respondents.

DVR Staff

An e-mail was sent to all 340 DVR employees asking them to respond to questions via Survey Monkey. DVR sent follow-up reminders to their staff, to encourage participation. Of the 340, 192 employees responded, resulting in a response rate of 56 percent.

DVR Clients

There were 129 DVR clients who responded with comments to the single item added to the bi-annual DSHS client telephone survey carried out by RDA. Additionally, the overall DSHS client satisfaction weighted survey responses were analyzed separately for 135 DVR clients. Detailed information about weighting methodology can be found in Appendices A and E of the 2009 DSHS Client Survey Report.

DEFINITIONS

Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs). DVR enters into job services contracts with programs that provide a variety of services to help DVR clients obtain and keep competitive employment. In addition to placement, these programs provide job coaching, education of employers about client's needs, and assistance in adapting worksites to the client's needs.

Benefits Planning. A DVR Benefits Planning Specialist consults with a client to help that client understand how earnings from employment could impact the benefits the client receives (e.g. Social Security, medical benefits, housing, personal care services, food benefits, etc.).

Community-Based Assessments. Once it has been determined that an individual is eligible for DVR services, a DVR counselor or a CRP creates an opportunity for a client to "try out" a particular job in a real-life setting, and then assesses the client's performance in that setting.

Assistive Technology. Devices or services that improve DVR clients' ability to hear, speak, move around, use a computer, etc. These devices and services are often customized to meet a client's unique needs.

REFERENCE

United States. Executive Office of the President & United States. Office of Management and Budget. (2002). *North American industry classification system: United States, 2002* (Rev. ed.). Washington, D.C.



VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION
NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Opinions of Employers, Staff and Clients about How to Improve Vocational Support Services

Between 50 and 60 percent of employers who responded to a survey administered by DSHS said tools, technology, and supports for Division of Vocational Rehabilitation clients, support following job placement, and internships and job coaching opportunities would help them hire or retain an employee with a disability. DVR staff felt the services that contribute most to client success are Community Rehabilitation Program services and benefits planning. DVR staff also emphasized building and improving relationships with local employers, and developing staff and contracting with job developers to make placements in higher wage jobs. Clients suggested improvements in timeliness, training and assistance after job placement, and internship and other educational and training opportunities.

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REPORT 2.21