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## Vocational Rehabilitation Town Hall Meeting Series 2024

The second year of Vocational Rehabilitation's (VR) Town Hall Meeting Series took place on **October 9 and 16, 2024**, offering a platform for meaningful dialogue between stakeholders, including clients, staff, community partners, and the public. These sessions fostered collaboration and provided opportunities for participants to share ideas on enhancing the quality of life for individuals with disabilities.

This report highlights key discussions and feedback from the event, underscoring VR's commitment to transparency and accountability. For any questions or further inquiries, please contact the Rehabilitation Administration.

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### Key Participants

We were pleased to have the following leaders from the VR Administration:

- **Drazen Elez** – Administrator
- **Mechelle Merrill** – Deputy Administrator for Programs
- **Brett Martinez** – Deputy Administrator for Operations
- **Sheena Childers** – Bureau Chief

The event was hosted and facilitated by **Dale McWilliams**, Training Officer II, who guided the discussions and introduced the participants, each of whom shared their personal and professional journeys within VR. They also presented updates on the division's current initiatives aimed at improving services and support for individuals with disabilities.

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This annual event is an important avenue for continuous two-way communication, providing the public with insights into VR's operations while gathering valuable feedback for future improvements.

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## Major Initiatives and Announcements

Throughout the event, the VR team showcased several key efforts, including:

- **Survey Integration:** Surveys are now incorporated into decision-making and program expansion, ensuring that stakeholder input plays a central role in shaping services.
- **Equal Employment Opportunities:** Ongoing initiatives to promote employment access for individuals with disabilities.
- **Audit Recommendations:** Implementation of strategies based on audit findings to enhance VR programs.
- **Collaboration with Counselors:** Joint efforts between counselors and clients to improve satisfaction in reaching Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) goals.
- **Increase in Service Requests:** Applications for services have grown significantly, from **1,802 in 2021 to 4,100 in 2024**.
- **Personnel Recruitment:** The focus remains on hiring compassionate, well-trained professionals aligned with VR's mission.
- **Nevada TRIP (Transitions Roadmap through Innovative Partnerships):** Updates on this initiative, aimed at improving transitions for youth with disabilities.  
<https://nevadatrip.nv.gov/>
- **Website Enhancements:** The **VR Nevada** website now offers a more user-friendly experience, including a "Road to Success" feature detailing the service process.  
<https://vrnevada.nv.gov/job-seekers/>
- **Nevada State Rehabilitation Council (NSRC):** Attendees were informed about public meetings, annual reports, and strategic plans through the NSRC platform.  
<https://vrnevada.nv.gov/nsrc/>

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## Stakeholder Feedback and Public Comments

The Town Hall provided an opportunity for stakeholders to ask questions, share concerns, and offer suggestions. Key areas of discussion included:

- **Response Timeframes:** Clarification on timelines for application processing and eligibility determinations.
- **Follow-up Procedures:** Inquiries about communication from assigned case workers and status updates.
- **IPE Development:** Questions regarding the timelines for creating Individualized Plans for Employment.
- **Client Interview Training:** Requests for training on both traditional and one-way interview techniques.
- **Website Accessibility:** Positive feedback about improvements to the new VR website's usability.
- **Ticket to Work Program:** Inquiries regarding the program and its linkage with the Social Security Administration.
- **Youth Services:** Suggestions for providing interview skills training to youth with disabilities.
- **700-Hour Program:** Interest in the implementation of this initiative to support disabled workers.
- **Employment-First Collaboration:** Public curiosity about how VR is engaging with the employment-first approach.
- **Disability-Friendly Employers:** Recommendations for enhancing communication with disability-friendly employers.
- **Youth Transitions:** Strategies for connecting youth transitioning out of high school with VR services.
- **Inter-Agency Collaboration:** Calls for reviewing strategic plans from other agencies for possible collaboration.
- **Employee Training:** Requests for training on using the new Social Security portal.
- **Work Assessments:** Public interest in more individualized data regarding work assessments across various industries.

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- **Employer Recognition:** Suggestions to formally recognize businesses that excel in disability-friendly practices.
  - **Outreach and Engagement:** Ideas to improve public engagement and outreach efforts.
  - **Veteran Eligibility:** Inquiries about VR services available to veterans with disabilities.
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## Conclusion

The 2024 Town Hall Meetings demonstrated VR's commitment to transparency, collaboration, and ongoing community engagement. These events continue to strengthen relationships between the VR Administration and the public, providing a vital forum for exchanging ideas and experiences that shape the future of vocational rehabilitation services.

All questions and feedback from the Town Hall were addressed to the extent possible during the event. For concerns requiring additional research or action, follow-up steps have been initiated, and these will be considered in the upcoming strategic planning process.

To ensure personalized responses, concerns from clients requiring counselor input have been forwarded to the Division Manager. This commitment to proactive and individualized service reflects VR's ongoing mission to provide meaningful support to those we serve.

We look forward to continuing this dialogue and building on the progress made during this year's Town Hall Series. Thank you to all participants, and we welcome ongoing engagement as we strive to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for individuals with disabilities.



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