Employment Rate Tool – Transcript 05/27/2021

**Christopher Pope:** On behalf of the RehabData work group, we'd like to welcome you to our third presentation of one of our data tools -- the Employment Rate at Exit and Post-Exit Data Tool. We're excited to be presenting this tool, which, I mentioned, is our third in a series of tools that the RehabData work group has developed as part of our commitment to help VR agencies and the VR Program collectively analyze, think about, and improve the performance of the VR Program.

My name is Chris Pope. I’m chief of the Data Collection and Analysis Unit at the Rehabilitation Services Administration, and I have the pleasure of serving on the RehabData work group with several of my colleagues across the country and, as a quick reminder about the purpose of the RehabData work group, RSA established this work group a couple of years ago now as a result of our ReThink VR performance initiative and we charged the RehabData work group with analyzing VR data, in the context of its relationship to WIOA performance measures and results, looking at other VR program measures and all of their impact on the VR Program. The work group is also developing tools and metrics that VR agencies may use to gauge their performance, and tools that allow the data to become user-friendly and relevant to all VR professionals from directors and administrators to quality assurance folks to VR counselors. We want these tools to be impactful and actionable for everyone in the VR community. And last, but not least, the RehabData work group has been very helpful in assisting RSA, my team, and me in identifying what data RSA can provide on a regular basis to VR agencies so that they can continue to assess and inform their decisions related to delivering VR services in the performance of the VR Program.

As you know, we have a really great team of people serving on the RehabData workgroup.

This slide list all of the representatives, from Rachel Anderson at the VRTAC-QM at San Diego State University to Bill Colombo with Michigan General, Scott Dennis with Maryland Combined, Natasha Jerde with Minnesota Blind, Adam Leonard at the Texas Workforce Commission, Kristin Mackey at Arizona Combined, along with myself and my colleague Suzanne Mitchell from RSA who represent the Federal agency on the work group. We encourage you to reach out to any or all of us with your feedback, your ideas, your reactions to our tools that we can be better informed about what we do it to help you, so please feel free to email any of us at any time with your ideas.

As I mentioned, I am joined by a couple of other people today and I wanted to send some special thanks, especially to Christopher Smith, with the VRTAC-QM, who built this third tool. Thank you so much for your time and expertise in putting this together. We also wanted to welcome two special guests to today's presentation. Joining Rachel Anderson and I today is Courtney Wanek from Minnesota State Services for the Blind. She's the Quality Assurance Specialist there, and the Director of Policy and Program Administration. Also joining us is Brandi Coffland from Arizona Department of Economic Security, the VR program there, where she serves as a Program Coordinator. Thank you so much, Courtney and Brandi, for joining us and sharing with us your perspectives and how your agencies will use this third tool. I am excited to turn things over to my colleague Rachel Anderson with the VRTAC-QM to introduce the tool and get this presentation rolling. Rachel.

**Rachel Anderson:** Thanks so much, Chris. So, I'm going to first cover what the tool is intended to do and what the tool is *not* intended to do. And then I'm going to actually switch gears and walk through the tool itself, so that you all have a little bit more confidence in understanding how to use it.

So first, what is the tool intended to do? Well, the Employment Rate at Exit and Post-Exit Data Tool includes data that you all or state VR agencies reported across four program years -- so program years 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020. So, what is the tool intended to do? Provide national and state level exit and post-exit employment data to all VR programs. Provide a resource for state VR agencies to analyze their employment data compared to national rates, similar states and agencies, and a variety of additional ways. Something that the RehabData work group strives to do is create tools that can be used by anyone, like Chris mentioned. So, this tool is intended to share a prepopulated tool that any VR program can use, including those who may not have the support of a data or technology expert to build similar tools in-house. It's supposed to provide data to help state VR agencies analyze their employment rates and their baseline post-exit employment rates. And then, lastly, this tool is really centered around the other measures that matter. We are showcasing data from the other measures that matter number one, which is sustaining employment after exit.

So, for those of you that don't remember the value statement that we attached to the sustaining employment after exit is that in VR, we believe that VR program participants should sustain employment after they exit the VR program. Our goal is the individuals with disabilities continue working.

What is the tool not intended to do? So, obviously, like our other tools, it is not intended to replace the WIOA performance accountability provisions, regulations, or sub-regulatory guidance. However, you're going to see that we're talking about your employments at exit, your second quarter after exit, and your fourth quarter after exit. So, we're using the same data that you report for the performance measures but we're looking at it from a different perspective. It does not replace the need for VR programs to analyze their own RSA-911 data using their case management system, other reporting resources, or quality assurance activities. And it certainly does not tell the whole story related to employment outcomes, or employment rates, outcome data, or other agency requirements, so similar things like internal controls, source documentation, policy and procedures, or staff training. Or it doesn't imply quality or maximum potential of the VR program participant. Remember -- the employment rates simply show whether a participant is employed.

So with that being said, I am going to switch over and share our new tool with you. Similar to our other tools, we have a table of contents. We have a glossary, and then we have a bunch of different sheets of data that you can use. So first, this is our table of contents. You're going to notice that it says program year 17 through program year 18 employment data. Now, before, I said that the data for this tool is inclusive of data from 17, 18, 19, and 20 -- and I'm going to show you that in a minute -- but this tool is really talking about participants that exited in program year 17 and program year 18.

So, first we got an introduction. This is where we're reminding you of the intent of the other measures that matter. And then how we define sustaining employment after exit, which is the basis of this tool. So the definition of this is -- this measure is the percentage of the VR program participants who are employed at exit *and* employed in the second *and* fourth quarters after exit. This measure also includes outcomes for students with disabilities who received a pre-employment transition service and then became a VR program participant and also exited with employment. So again, the value statement is, we believe that VR program participants should sustain employment after they exit the VR program, and our goal is that individuals with disabilities continue working.

And normally, when we talk about employment rates, we're talking about the employment rate at exit. So how many of your participants exit the VR program in competitive integrated employment compared to those who exit without competitive integrated employment. This tool is *not* looking at that, so just want to make that clear, and then also we look at employment rates for the second quarter after exit and the fourth quarter after exit. So just to be very clear, this tool is looking at out of the number of individuals who exited successfully in competitive integrated employment, how many of them were also employed in the second and fourth quarters after exit?

When we move on to the glossary, we've got all of our terms and basic definitions for you like we have with all of the other tools. And then, where it's applicable, we do have some of the detailed calculations from the RSA-911, so when you start running some of this data out of your case management system or in your own 911 report, you know what calculations we used. But something I do want to talk about are things that we added for this one that were not in our other tool. We did add the state and territory abbreviations simply because, sometimes, if you don't know what the state abbreviation is -- the one we get questions on a lot is what MP is, and MP is the abbreviation for the Northern Mariana Islands. So there's the state and territory abbreviations for those of you that need that, but the one that's particularly interesting for this tool is our post-exit cohorts.

So, on the screen, hopefully, you can see, this table of the program year 17 exit data and the program year 18 exit data. Because it takes so long to get all of the information for exiters, meaning six quarters after they exit, we were looking -- this tool looks at program year 17 exiters, so July 1 of 2017 through June 30 of 2018. And then also program year 18 exiters, so anyone that exited the program from July 1 of 2018 through June 30 of 2019. So just for example to show you the timeframe of this, if we look at the very last exit quarter program year 18 -- that is April 1 through 2019 through June 30 of 2019. If you go across the table, you'll see the second quarter after exit timeframe, the fourth quarter after exit timeframe and then our sixth quarter after exit, so you'll see that for this one exit cohort, we're crossing from program year 17 to program year 19 and then, finally, you reported on this exit cohort for the last time in program year 20 quarter to report, which was during the time frame of October 1 through 2020 and December 31 of 2020 and the report had to be submitted by February 15 of 2021. So it seems like this data is pretty out of date. However, we just barely a quarter or two ago got the final exit data for these participants.

So that's why it can be a little bit confusing on knowing who we're talking about, but we just wanted to make sure everyone had all of the exit data for this tool. Now keep in mind that we do plan on updating this tool, so as right now, we are collecting data for program year 19 and program year 20. When we get that data, when those six quarters of reporting finish, we will add that to this tool, so you always have the most up-to-date data that we can provide you.

So, moving on to the dashboard. So similar to our MSG and our pre-ETS tool, you can compare yourself to up to four different types of programs, so I already have selected our national, and you can look at national Combined, national General, national total or – what am I missing? Combined, Blind, General total, so you can choose any of those options. And then I prepopulated it with Minnesota Blind because we've got Courtney here talking to us about her data today, Michigan General because Michigan General is one of the members of our work group, and then Arizona Combined because, again, they're members of our work group and Brandi is presenting with us today.

So, if you scroll down a little bit, you'll be able to see all of the comparison for national and then those three programs. You've got your program year 17 numerator. You've got your program year 19 denominator, and then you can see your program year 17 rates, so the employment rate from this tool's perspective. The national rate was 59.7%, so you'll see that the two of the agencies were well above the national rate, and Arizona was just below the national rate. And then when we move on to program year 18, you've got our numerator and program year 18, we've got our denominator, and then at the very end, you can also see your program year 18 rate. So for the whole country nationally --[INDISCRERNIBLE] -- of our participants who were exited in employment were also employed in the second and fourth quarters after exit. And again, you can see where Minnesota Blind, Minnesota General, and Arizona Combined compare to the national rate.

As you scroll down, you'll see the visual of that same data, so hopefully, this tool will work for anybody in whatever format you like to review the data from.

Now next, we've got statewide totals. We've got sheets for -- you can look at statewide totals, so that is Combined agencies. And then totals for if you have a Blind or General agency in your state. We've got a sheet for Combined agency comparisons, Blind agency comparisons, and General agency comparisons.

Now for sake of the screen, so that it's easy for you to all see, I'm just going to show you the Blind agency sheet. They all work the exact same. So what we did is we have another selection box at the top. You can either select your program year 17 data, and it will update. Or you can click -- you can pick your program year 18 data, and it will auto-populate for you again.

This tool, you'll see that in orange, we've got the national weighted average across both program years, and then this gray one is the national weighted average for all other Blind agencies.

So, as you look at your employment rate for sustaining employment for your program, you can see where you can compare nationally against other Blind agencies, nationally against everybody, and then just in comparison to everyone else. Also on this sheet, we've got not only your employment rates, but we did put the raw number for your denominator. So your denominator is the number of participants who exited your program in employment in the program year.

And we've got the rates down here as well. So, hopefully, you can figure out all of your data here, and maybe the employment dashboard will work for some better and then some of these comparison sheets might work better for others. So, hopefully, you find some value in this.

And then, at the very end, we've got our aggregated data for what was used for the tool, for all the sheets I just showed you. And then we also included the raw data set from RSA, so this is going to include, you know, the full number of participants who exited. You know, we didn't showcase that in the tool, and then also the number of participants who exited with an employment. It has it broken down by quarter, so the raw data set have a lot more information that you guys can use to deep dive a little bit further or to look into their pieces that are not showcased in the dashboard itself.

So, I am going to turn it back to the presentation, and I am going to pass things off to Courtney, and Courtney and Brandi, when you get started, if you wouldn't mind also just giving us a little bit of background on your role in the Agency and what you do there, and then share with us what you thought of the tool.

**Courtney Wanek:** Thank you, Rachel, and this is Courtney I am the currently the Quality Assurance Specialist at State Services for the Blind, and soon will be starting in a new role as the Director of Policy and Program Administration, so I am the one person in the Quality Assurance department at this time. And here at State Services for the Blind, we actually plan to use this tool in several ways.

For starters, the tool makes it really easy to see how we're doing with this particular performance measure. And we're really proud of our numbers for Minnesota Blind for these particular cohorts and have actually used that to show staff the success that our customers have had and also encourage them to continue providing quality services for the long-term outcomes for the folks that we serve. If we did find our numbers on the lower end, we would then use that information to motivate our staff to improve our numbers by helping customers pursue longer-term outcomes.

We tend to compare rates to other Blind agencies, as well as our General counterpart in Minnesota. And then we like to reach out to other agencies to get information about how they're doing things differently from us and try to identify ways that we may improve in those areas, so this tool would help us choose agencies to reach out to, specifically those doing better than us on this measure.

Additionally, one of our goals is to really help our staff understand WIOA and the focus on setting people up for long-term success in careers. So, we know it's no longer about just getting someone into any job and closing their case, and this post-exit data helps reinforce the importance of this, and it's really easy for staff to understand.

This data will serve as a tool for determining whether we need to increase training for our staff on the performance measures, as well as identifying areas for improvement within our service provision.

Finally, this information will help us identify questions we may want to find answers to. So we currently review all our exited cases after each quarter for accuracy, but the information from this tool has prompted us to consider using those reviews to look more closely at the reasons people are closing unsuccessfully and whether there are any obvious differences between those cases and the ones that are closed with a successful employment outcome.

We're also considering looking back at the closed cases within the program years shown in the tool to see if there any factors that may contribute to someone still being employed in the second and fourth quarters after exit compared to those who are closed successfully but are no longer employed, as well as looking at whether those who are no longer employed have opened a new case with us. We would also look to see how many were employed in the second quarter after exit but no longer employed in the fourth quarter to try and identify reasons this might be the case.

And lastly, although it's a little more difficult because quality of employment can be subjective, we would want to look at the quality of all of the employment outcomes from that year to see if there's any correlation between how long someone remains employed and the quality of their employment.

Using all this information can then inform decisions we make about current and future service provision and help us help our customers find long-term employment. And now I will pass it over to Brandi, who will be talking about the perspective from Arizona.

**Brandi Coffland:** Thank you, Courtney. So, my name is Brandi Coffland, and I work on special projects as a Program Coordinator with Arizona Rehabilitation Services Administration. So, like every other VR agency, we definitely want to look at how Arizona is doing in comparison with everyone else. So, we definitely plan to use this tool to look at Arizona rates versus the national rates as that will give us a very clear idea of where we need to improve. But as Arizona as a Combined agency, we think that paying close attention to how we are doing a comparison with other Combined agencies and, specifically, Combined agencies with denominators, so the exits with employment that are similar to Arizona will give us a realistic idea of how we are doing in terms of participants who are sustaining employment.

Some things we determine that will be important for us to keep in mind when we're comparing ourselves to other states is that everyone has different case management systems and different policies and guidance related to the collection and entering of data. So, while some states may seem to be doing better or worse than us in terms of the percentage of participants who are sustaining employment, we just need to keep in mind that there may be some behind-the-scenes factors that could be impacting those numbers. So, in Arizona, we currently use the LIBRA System 7 case management system, so we think it may be helpful for us to connect with other states who are utilizing that same system to see what challenges they're encountering as well. We also want to remember that every state's numbers are impacted by their local economies, industries, unemployment challenges, etc., so just reminding ourselves to be cognizant of that information when we're looking at these numbers and comparing ourselves to other states.

We also want to use this tool to look at our own internal program and practices, so after just briefly looking at the Arizona data for the number of participants were dropping off between initial exit with employment quarter two and quarter four, we noticed some consistency with the decline in participants between these quarters. So we think it will be helpful for us to continue looking and tracking those numbers for both Arizona and other states to see if there's any widespread trends going forward. Ideally, like Courtney mentioned, we would like to figure out if there's a reason for the consistent decrease in participants between the quarters and assess if there's a way that we can help more individuals sustain their employment.

We also want to take a closer look at the participants who are sustaining employment through quarter twos and quarter four. So, looking at -- what employers are they working with? What are their wages? Depending on what we find, we may want to ask our staff or our employee relations team to follow up with employers who are retaining workers to see what they're doing to keep their employees, as well as engaging an exploration of, perhaps, some outreach to the employers who are not retaining those employees.

We are also interested in going back to see if there's any particular services that these individuals who have been successful have participated in while they were with the VR Program that could have impacted their ability to sustain their employment. Perhaps, there's particular services or combinations of services that have contributed to their increased success, or perhaps even counselors have served these clients and have best practices that can be shared.

And then, of course, as Courtney mentioned as well, we want to remember that policies and guidance have changed over the years. So, if we notice any significant increase or decrease in our numbers, it would be helpful for us to go back and see if any policy changes were made around that time that could have impacted our outcomes. We want to look at also where we could potentially amend the guidance that is being given to our staff to ensure it supports the provision of high quality, effective services, and long-term success for our clients.

And then -- sorry, this is what Courtney mentioned earlier -- we also want to celebrate our successes that we're having with our staff, our clients, our stakeholders, pretty much everyone who is involved in this process. So, making sure to use this tool and the data it gives us to recognize the good work that everyone is doing, and then also use it to establish goals for continued success going forward.

And I will pass it back to Chris. Thank you.

**Christopher Pope:** Thank you so much, Brandi and Courtney. That was terrific. I -- we really appreciate your thoughtful and meaningful perspectives of this tool, and the one thing that I just want to continue to highlight is, you know, one of the purposes of the RehabData work group was to develop tools to help us share the success of our program and share how it's an effective program and through this data and some of the other data that we're providing, I think we can show that when individuals with disabilities leave the VR program with employment, it's positively correlated to sustaining employment in the second and fourth quarters after exit, and there's a lot of value add to being able to say that, as you work with core programs in your state, as you speak to legislators and other funders about the effectiveness of the program. So, thank you once again for joining us. Great to have you.

As a plug for some of the other tools and things that the RehabData work group has done, this slide has several hyperlinks on it. You can visit the Other Measures that Matter -- all six of them. We've included a link to the PowerPoint in the video presentation of the Other Measures that Matter. RSA is using these measures, a couple of them, in our quarterly data dashboards and through VR Program monitoring starting this fiscal year. The RehabData work group has also built two other data tools, and they are hyperlinked here -- the Measurable Skill Gains Rate Data Tool, along with the PowerPoint presentation, and the Pre-employment Transition Services Data Tool PowerPoint and presentation. All of these resources, including this new tool, can be found on the RehabData work group web page on the RSA website, and that hyperlink is provided here.

In closing, thank you so much for your time and, again, please continue to connect with us and provide us your feedback. Ask us your questions so that we can continue to create tools and products that are useful to the VR Program. Thanks so much.